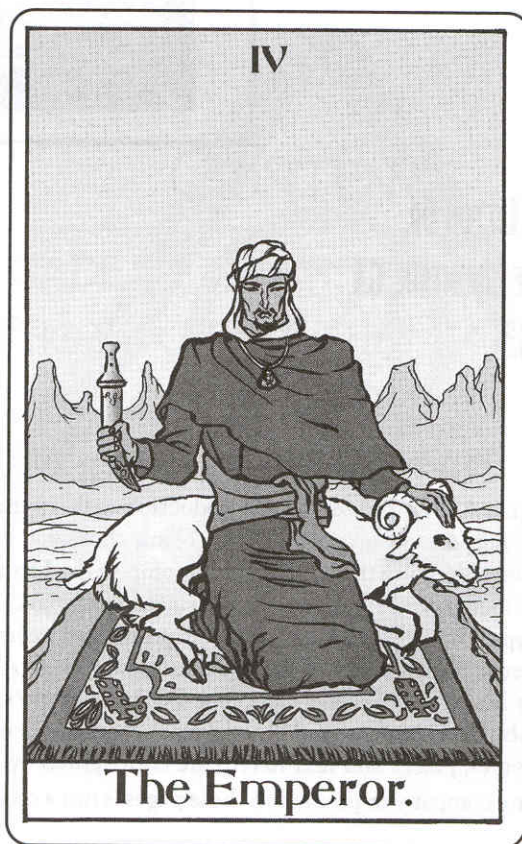


TRADITION BOOK:

ORDER OF HERMES™



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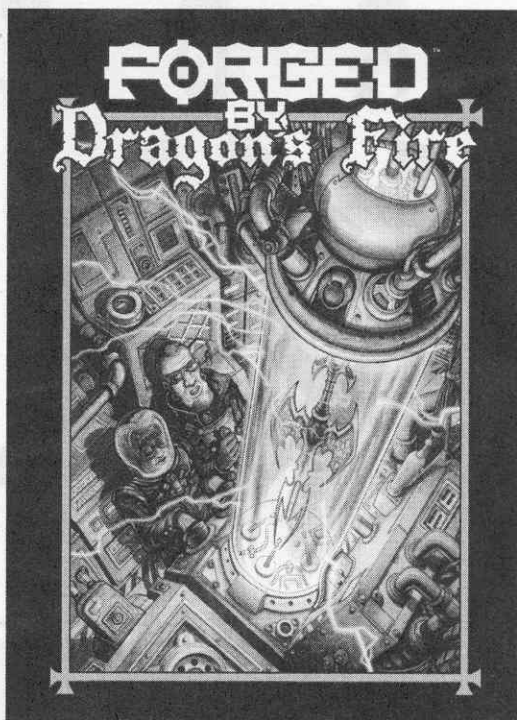


BY STEPHEN MICHAEL DiPESA AND PHIL BRUCAT

CREDITS

Authors: Stephen Michael DiPesa and Phil Brucato.
World of Darkness created by Mark Rein•Hagen
Storyteller game system designed by Mark Rein•Hagen
Development: Bill Bridges
Editing: Ana Balka
Art Direction: Aileen E. Miles
Interior Art: Leif Jones, Jeff Laubenstein, Alex Sheikman, Melissa Uran
Cover Art: Christopher Shy
Front and Back Cover Design: Aileen E. Miles
Layout and Typesetting: Aileen E. Miles

COMING SOON FOR MAGE:



1554 LITTON DR.
STONE MOUNTAIN, GA
30083
USA

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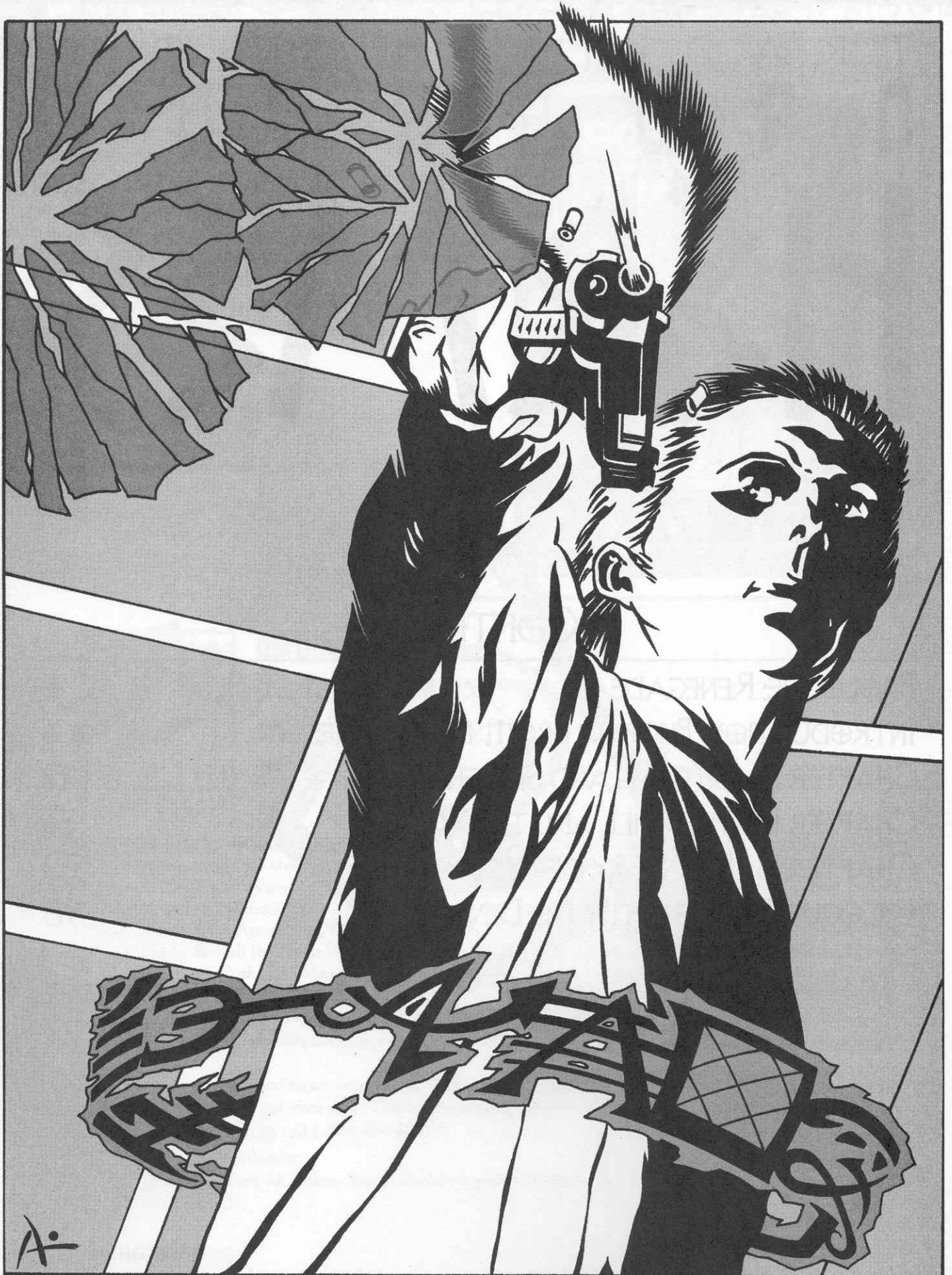
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PROLOGUE: RENEGADE



The man did not *look* like a dangerous psychopath. His sandy-blond hair was thinning, and his light-brown eyes reflected none of the desperate gleam of madness. Even his gray sweater, now stained with the blood of at least one security guard, carried with it an air of the hopelessly mundane. He smiled weakly as he turned to face Augustus, brushing a few stray locks of hair out of his face with his unbloodied left hand.

"Pembroke," he said casually, as if he addressed a workplace colleague en route to the elevator. Augustus did not relax, did not take his hand off the Glock 17 holstered at his hip.

"Richard, it's time to go," said Augustus levelly, but forcefully.

"Just a moment, Pembroke," replied Richard Priest, bani Flambeau, "I have a few more things to see to here before I head out. I'd be more than happy to leave with you then. This will just take me another five minutes or so."

Augustus slowly drew his gun. Something in the Flambeau's tone told him that, although he was perfectly lucid, he had no intention of leaving before his work here was done. Pointing his gun downward for the moment, the Tytalan pressed. "Richard, it's time to leave *now*. You are not finishing what you came here to do. I can't let you."

Richard absently studied an unremarkable expanse of corridor wall but seemed shaken from his contemplation by Augustus' statement. He glanced over at the other mage, sighing with an empty smirk. "I figured you might say that. It's sad, too. I expected you to understand. *Shit or get off the pot.*"

The words stung Augustus, though he allowed his face to betray no hint of it. He had uttered those very words to Richard just over three years ago, when the man had been a mild, gentle-hearted Bonisagus. Of course, when he petitioned for membership in House Flambeau a year later, just two weeks after the Technocratic raid, they had proven more than happy to admit an Adept verging on Mastery into their ranks.

Richard continued, "I know what a lot of folks in the Order are saying about me after the cannery incident, and especially after the blackout, but I can see, in my heart, what needs to be done. If it were vengeance, Augustus, I'd be hunting down the families of Technocrats, wouldn't I? I'm just illustrating to the Sleepers that the tools of the Technocracy are ultimately no more trustworthy or benevolent than the Order of Reason once made our ways out to be. Surely, you can see the logic in that?"

"But a *nuclear power plant*, Richard?" Augustus hissed, now gripping the gun tightly, "You'll kill hundreds — no, tens of thousands of people."

"I know," Richard whispered, looking pained and ashamed, though resolute. "I've seen what a nuclear blast does to those at ground zero and what it does to those caught in the fallout zone. I am not proud of what I'm doing, Pembroke."

"Then *stop doing it*," Augustus replied, easing off the safety of his weapon.

"You know, Pembroke," Richard retorted, never losing that hollow and heartless half-smile, "I recall saying almost that very thing to that Man in Black, right before he shot my baby girl in the face: *Please, stop*. It's all

I could think to say. It's the kind of thing a desperate man says when inevitability is about to steamroll him and shatter his world."

"You can't punish these Sleepers for the deaths of your wife and daughter," Augustus shot back, now beginning to run through *Ars Virium* countermagics in his head. Once, Richard had been a great student of the mysteries of the *Ars Potentiae*, but now his command of the Order's foundation Sphere had grown to eclipse even his considerable knowledge of the Prime arts.

"I'm not punishing them, Pembroke," Richard said, as though explaining the matter to a child. "I'm trying to help them pierce the illusion of comfort and safety that is strangling the Earth. Time and again, we have seen that only fear and the threat of pain have the power to move the Sleepers to change perspective. Do you agree that we have a duty to protect them, Pembroke?"

"Of course," the Tytalan replied.

Richard chuckled grimly. "And what if you had to allow harm to come to a thousand of them in order to give a million the strength to save themselves? What does your Tytalan training tell you about burning away weakness and the survival of the fittest?"

"My training?" Augustus asked. He then returned Richard's bleak smile. "It tells me that your madness is a weakness within our Order and that your campaign of retribution dies tonight."

Just then, however, Augustus slipped up. In the course of mentally reciting Forces countermagics, he quietly uttered two syllables of his spell aloud. It was no louder than a whispered mutter, but Augustus did not doubt that Richard had mystically augmented his senses for this one-man raid. He knew.

And, strangely, he did not appear to be concerned in the slightest.

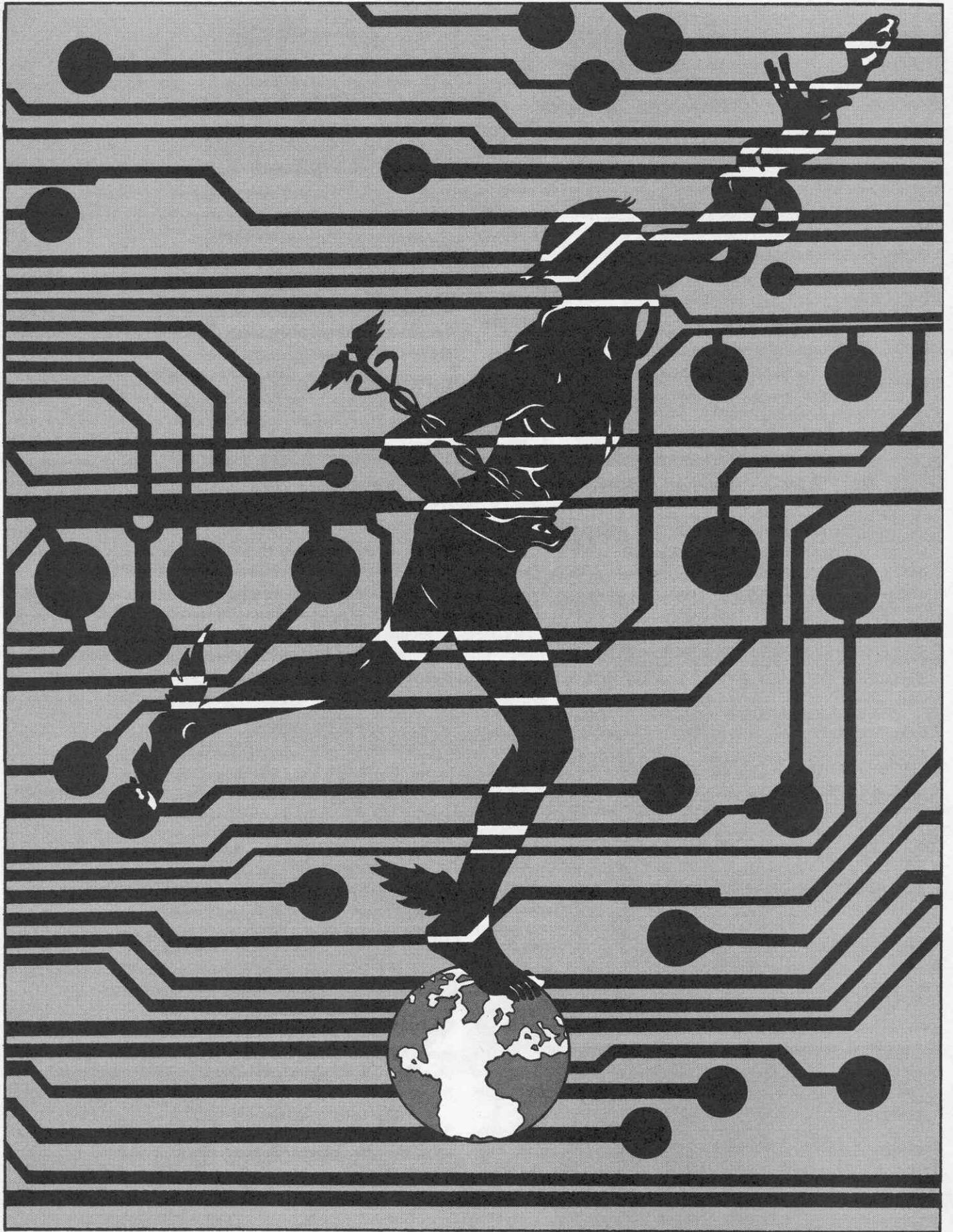
But Augustus knew that Richard Priest, while determined, was not arrogant. His control of the *Ars Virium* did not outstrip the Tytalan's own by so great a degree that he could afford to dismiss Augustus' magics so completely. But what was his angle? As Richard closed his eyes and spoke a short Enochian command under his breath, flaming sigils burned in the air around him, and Augustus realized.

The Tytalan raised his gun and fired three shots, crushing the flask of fragrant oil in his jacket pocket with his left hand as he did so, weaving Prime countermagics instead. Richard's attempt to burn out the Patterns of the bullets glanced off of Augustus' powerful spell and two slugs took him in the thighs, while the third hit him in the stomach. As he crumpled in pain, the Tytalan wove more powerful enchantments, centering the general antimagic on Richard. The Flambeau looked up.

"Are you going to kill me?"

Augustus knocked him unconscious with a blow to the head from the butt of his pistol. "That's for the Quaesitori to decide." He took his cellular phone from his jacket with his bleeding left hand and dialed a number from its memory. "Julian, it's done. I need a gateway."

As a spatial distortion opened in the air and Augustus Pembroke, bani Tytalanus left the Seabrook Nuclear Power Plant with his captive slung over his shoulder, he could not help but wonder what was gained here tonight, and what was lost.



INTRODUCTION: PHOENIX FROM THE FLAMES

*Youth is the flame that ignites the future. Power is
merely polish on blunted blades.*

— Master Porthos Fitz-Empress, *The Fragile Path*

SO IT IS DONE

Nec pulvis.

Nec flamma.

Nec tempestas.

Nec timor.

(Not Dust.

Nor Flame.

Nor Tempest.

Nor Fear.)

NOT MEN OF DUST

Our stronghold lies in ruins.

Our enemies are ascendant.

Our allies turn against us.

Are we conquered?

Never.



A tower is greater than the sum of its stones. Even if those stones crumble, the grand design remains.

A tumbled tower can be rebuilt. And it shall be. For our design is sound, our purpose resolute. Time is on our side — time, and the wisdom of the ages.

We bear the threefold name of Hermes: He who was the god of messengers and thieves; the Thrice-Greater One who shaped the *Corpus Hermeticum*; and the Thrice-Greater-Than-He Hermetic spirit who crackles even now in the tenor of our times. All three lend inspiration to the workings of our Art. All three are immortal. And all three bear the flame of insight and the seal of secrecy.

Hermes, in all aspects, is thought. Speed. Luck. Trickery. He's the truth behind illusions that leads to more illusions still. A living labyrinth, he whips across the cosmos in paths too puzzling to comprehend. Like the thunderstroke of the Kabbalah, Hermes flies from godhood to matter; like its serpent, he climbs again back to divinity. He is lightning and serpent, clarity and trickery. He is gold and quicksilver, flashing bright even on the darkest days.

And we share his light, even in the darkest worlds.

THOUSAND-YEAR SURVIVORS



Having conceived that nothing is impossible to you, consider yourself immortal and able to understand everything, all art, all learning, the temper of every living thing... and when you have understood all these at once — times, places, things, qualities, quantities — then you can understand God.

— Mind, from the *Corpus Hermeticum*

For over 1000 years, the Order of Hermes has been the mystic Tradition. The Akashics may boast an older fellowship; the witches might practice elder Arts; the shamans can date their ways to the dawn of time. Regardless, it is the sons and daughters of Hermes who define the western magical tradition, whose shadows have loomed over everyone from Aleister Crowley to Harry Potter.

So what the hell happened to them? In the last decade, while other groups watched their stars rise in the cultural firmament, while the Sleepers themselves embraced magic in ways not seen since medieval times, the Houses of Hermes trembled to their foundations. Devastated by attacks from without and treachery from

To those who think they know us, we are graybeards and eaters of dust. Wrapped in brocade and sequestered in crumbling archives, we're said to mumble away our years in ancient nonsense. At times, such conceptions have seemed true. But now, from the ashes of our forebears flies a new Hermetic Order — one that shall ignite the era that has dawned.

For now, more than ever, we live in the age of Hermes. Ideas hurtle the length of a world in seconds; sheer will crafts worlds of light and formulae; children play with toys that leap time and space, and their elders design their lives around such toys. That such playthings ape the tools of Technocratic rivals cannot disguise the Hermetic truth behind them: knowledge is reality — and neither one has limits.

Hermes is master of thought and vision. He scoffs at mortal boundaries. And like him, we leap obstacles that clog the paths of lesser men. We are the wind in the lock. The spark within the sun. Each droplet in the sea calls our name; each stone upon the earth lends us strength. No chains of matter or magic can shackle Hermes. And none shall hinder us.

The only limit we accept is Will. And no one understands true Will like us.

within, the Order's proud wizards have been force-fed humble pie and generous helpings of crow.

And yet...

Anyone who counts the Order out is very badly mistaken. Despite catastrophes, Hermes' descendants remain one of the most potent forces in the magical world. Like a corporation whose ranks have been purged by scandal, the Order has retrenched and reorganized. Outsiders might see the same old wizards huddled in their robes, but there's a new heart beating beneath those vestments — the lion's heart of true survivors.

For the Hermetic magi have always been survivors. When Gnostic sages composed the *Corpus Hermeticum*, they considered themselves last bastions of Egyptian wisdom; the founders of the current Order preserved their Arts in a barbarian world; the wizards of the Convocation boasted noble lineage in a world spinning out of control; and now, with magic steeped in pop culture, the Hermetics of this Reckoning Age know it's their determination alone that keeps the ancient secrets strong.

For centuries, these wizards have trumpeted *tradition* as the saving grace of magic. Yet in part, it's the Hermetic devotion to tradition that's caused the current mess. Fusty old wizards and labyrinthine ways almost destroyed the Order, and *did* destroy many of its most notorious members. Tradition may indeed be vital, but as the Hermetic survivors have learned, not all Old Ways are necessarily the Best Ways.

So what does a survivor do when old methods fail? Change methods.

And how might that survivor change methods while remaining true to his traditions?

Ah, now *that's* a challenge.

And for over 1000 years, meeting challenges is what the Order of Hermes does best.

THEMIE: REBIRTH UNTO PERFECTION

In the Hermetic art of alchemy, lesser substances are transformed into gold; symbolically, the "lesser substance" is the mage and the "gold" represents Ascension. Expand the metaphor further, and you can see the object in question as the Order of Hermes itself. Stretch a bit, and it becomes the Council of Magekind; stretch a bit more, and it becomes humanity as whole.

Yet there's a step in alchemy that few folk recall: *putrefaction*, the breakdown that precedes perfection. The subject of transformation quite literally turns to shit before it starts changing into gold. And although it's not very politic to say so out loud, many Hermetic mages have begun to see the disasters of the last few decades as the putrefaction of the Order — a vile necessity leading to a higher state. And if this is true, then the best is yet to come — for the Order, for the Traditions, and for the world at large. Everything's gone into the crapper, but it's heading to the stars and beyond.

And so, as the survivors of the Ascension War and its fallout shake the ashes from their sleeves, they begin the hard but necessary work of turning shit into gold. Already, the glimmers begin to show: eager new recruits, streamlined organization, and a sense of purpose that's been lacking for generations. The cranky old Merlins that have stymied the Order for so long are history; their heirs are searching the dung heap for treasures, and with those secrets, have already begun to craft a City of Pymander in this turbulent new era... a city built of fresh-minted gold.

MOOD: DEFIANT EUPHORIA

Shit stinks. So does the lot of the current mystic generation, shaken by their elders' failure, swamped to the waist in sewage. Yet while other folks might whine about the injustice of it all, the Hermetic survivors have been galvanized by the Order's misfortunes. Doissetep's ruin provides their opportunity.

For too long, the *Arx Hermeticum* — the metaphorical fortress of Hermes that provided a real power base for its members — protected strong and ancient sorcerers. Young mages aspired to greatness, but the line to that summit was long and stubborn. Under old Masters' tutelage, progress within the Order was measured not in years but in decades or centuries. A small but powerful faction of corrupt insiders kept challengers slipping in their own blood, and the very heart of the Order was clogged with excess protocol.

But now the ancient Order has broken and a new breed has set up shop in the *Arx Hermeticum*. The cracking of old walls simply gives its new residents new building material. Now, for the first time in centuries, there's room within the Order to move, to grow — to improve the sacred fellowship and invoke the spirit of Hermes once again.

There'll be a lot of shit to wade through, but these proud young mages are ready for the chore.

CONTENTS



*And the words written on my heart
were in the letter for me to read.*

*I remembered that I was the son of kings
And my free soul longed for its own kind.*

— "The Hymn of the Pearl" (anonymous Gnostic fable)

In years past, anyone hoping to understand the Hermetic Path beheld a maze of arcane trivia and choking formality. Now, though, time is

short. The days when a would-be Hermeticist could spend decades sequestered with his tomes are gone. (So, for that matter, are many of the tomes in question...) A new aspirant must hit the ground running, and so a shorter, more casual overview supplants the old minutiae:

- **Chapter I: Lightning and Serpents** spans the millennia-old Path of Hermes. Like the Kabbalistic serpent that glides from earth to godhood, this Path rises from the dust and ascends the Tree of Being; and like the thunderbolt that strikes from Crown to King-

dom, it crackles down from the seat of perfection to the mire of humanity. It's a two-way journey, this strange passage, but the children of Hermes the Messenger can expect no less.

- **Chapter II: The Will and the Word** reveals the inner secrets of the Order, from the degrees of attainment and the Laws of Pymander that govern behavior and justice, to the Houses themselves — the Greater and the Lesser — and the philosophy behind the *Ars Magicae*. Also revealed are new manners of communicating with astral spirits and binding them into pacts.

- **Chapter III: The Way of Pymander** shows the Hermetics themselves, from Archmasters to Initiates. A sample cabal — the Teaching Staff of the Strauss Academy — is provided, along with tips for storytelling Order of Hermes chronicles. Eight template characters flesh out the living, modern traditions of the venerable Order.

Truly, this is a watershed age for the Houses of Hermes. Not since the Renaissance has there been so much freedom, so much possibility, so much at stake and yet so much to gain.

The Path of ritual magic has never been easy. It requires heroic levels of self-mastery. Few modern pursuits — save military Special Forces — demand such dedication. But like the hardy souls who pass boot camp, young initiates of the Hermetic Order share a bond of admiration that comes only through hard work and sacrifice. Now, as its internecine struggles become bad memories, the Order's sparse ranks swell with pride.

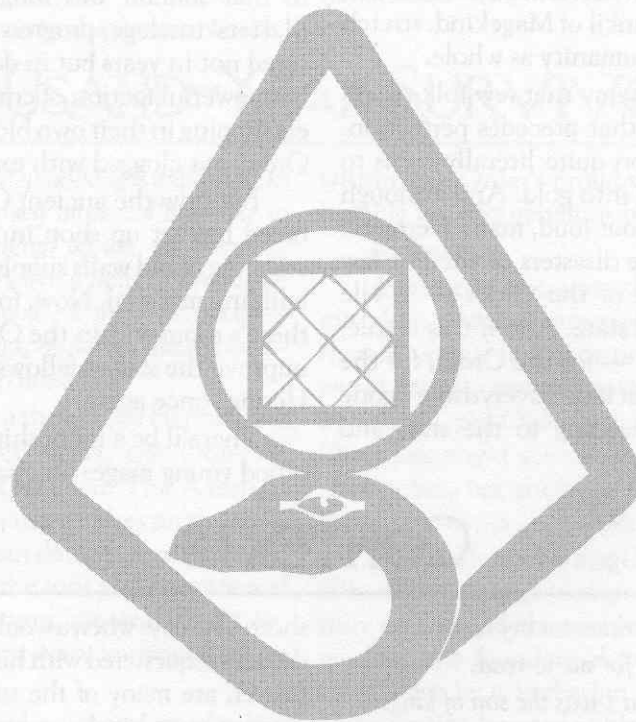
The tower has been shaken.

But has it fallen?

Never.

Hermes is alive and well.

The Order is eternal.



LEXICON

Title and trivia define the Hermetic Order. Even so, the leaner, meaner Tradition has cut back a lot of folderol. Older mages still use ancient formalities with one another, but even they have bowed to the necessity of quick communications and simplified structure.

COMMITMENTERITIS

Adam Kadmon: The Primordial Man, reflecting the Divine within humanity. Seen as a guide to godly perfection captured within the imperfect human form.

Art (or Ars): Magic; a Sphere or the magic performed with one. (See Chapter II: The Will and the Word for Hermetic Sphere names.)

Arx Hermeticum: Symbolically, the structure of the Order and the strength of its resolve. Literally “Fortress of Hermes,” it was often equated to Doissetep; unlike Doissetep, this Fortress has not been demolished, simply reorganized.

Bani: “Of the House of”; an honorific used extensively in titles but on its way out in all but the most formal conversations. Also used to address members of other Traditions (*Aria, bani Ecstasy*) in diplomatic situations. (*Note:* Few Hermetics ever use the extended versions of other Tradition names in formal address; instead, *bani* covers “Brotherhood,” “Cult of,” “Children of,” “Sons of,” and so forth — i.e., “Kannagara, *bani Akashica*” rather than “Kannagara, *bani Akashic Brotherhood*.”)

Enochian: The language of the spirits, supposedly handed down from Umbrood lords. More likely, a secret language cobbled together by Renaissance Masters, then “tested” by various sages and dupes until the kinks were worked out of it.

Instruments: Magical tools, i.e., foci (a term no Hermetic mage would ever use!).

Massasa: Vampire. Old term repopularized by the recent difficulties with the Tremere.

Mi’as: “Quicksand”; apt term for Hermetic politics.

Pymanderphile: Disparaging term for a Hermetic idealist.

Sancta: Private quarters and magical space.

Sephierah: “Spheres”; the 10 Kabbalistic crowns, or aspects of Divinity within Creation. Also used as a term for the Nine Spheres (below), with Kether being the “lost” 10th Sphere.

Twilight: Quiet.

Wing: The Internet, named for the wings of Hermes and used as both a noun (“I’ve been riding the wing this morning”) and a verb (“Were you winging when I called earlier?”).

OUTMOTEDERITIS

(RARELY USED BY MODERN HERMETICS)

Circulus Abstrusus: The now-fallen inner circle of Hermetic Archmasters, cracked by Doissetep’s ruin and wrecked during the Concordia War.

City of Pymander: The shining city of Hermetic idealism; magical Utopia guided by hidden Archmasters. Considered a naive, if not utterly absurd, goal these days, the Pymander concept still has its adherents.

Covenant: Old form for Chantry; still used by some new-generation romantics.

Domus Magnus: The “home base” of an individual Hermetic House.

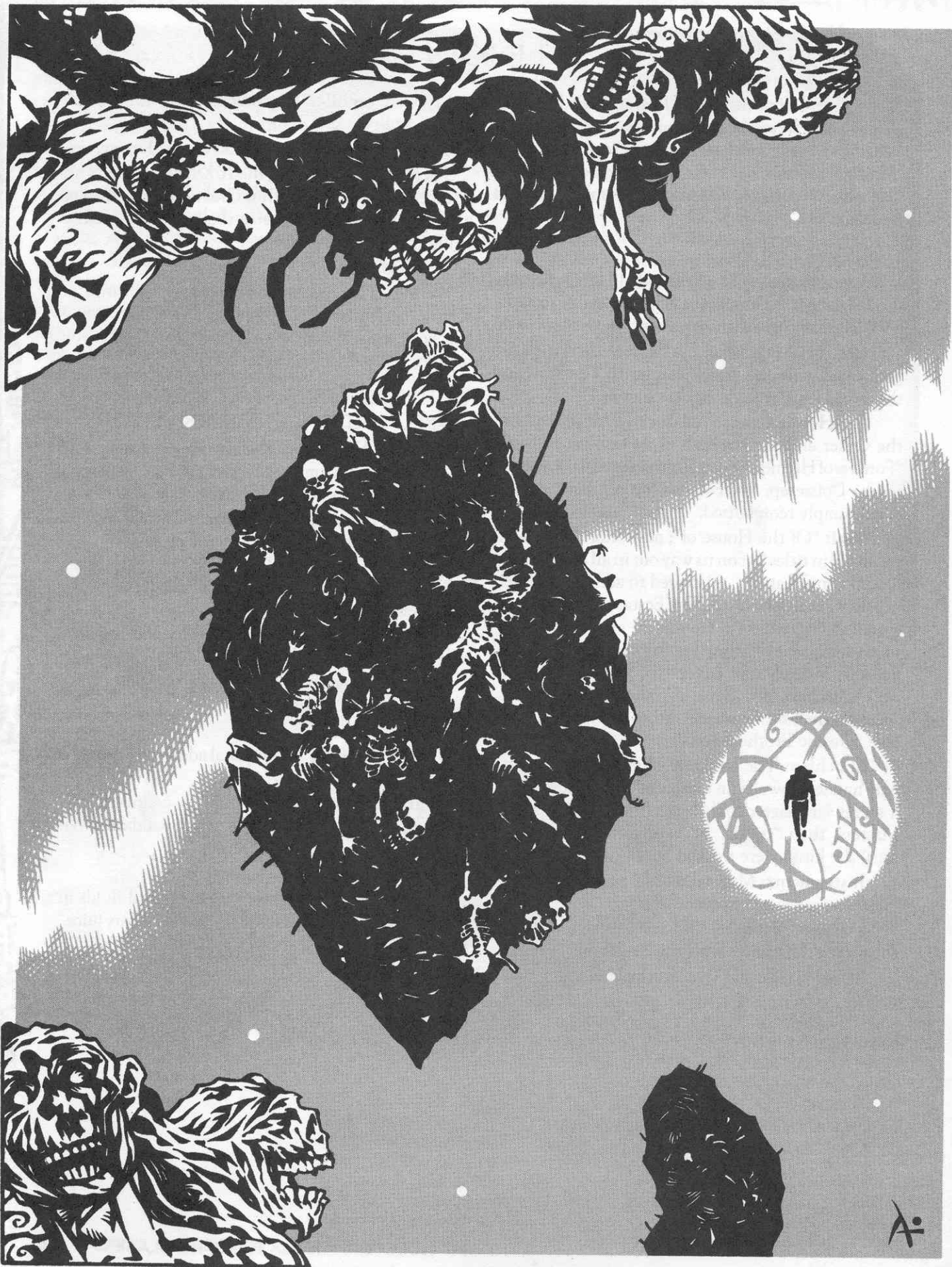
Heka: Magic.

Mater: “Mother”; traditional address for a female mentor.

Parma Magica: “Magic shield” — counter-magic. Once used as a symbol of Hermetic solidarity, but undermined by recent treacheries.

Pater: “Father”; a male mentor.

Sa: Favors or obligation; from magical fluids in Egyptian lore. (Vulgarly referred to as “Janissary juice” by those who bitterly recall Caron Mustai.)



CHAPTER I: LIGHTNING AND SERPENTS

*What liberates is the knowledge of who we are, what we became;
where we were, whereinto we have been thrown; whereto we speed,
where from we are redeemed; what birth is, and what rebirth.*

— Valentinus of Alexandria

THE DANCING MAGE



Once, there was a wizard — a fine, upstanding chap with wings on his feet and words in his head and the fire of God burning in his heart. In youth, this wizard crackled with bright promise and generosity. He made friends, built homes, carved an image of himself in the folklore of his people. He capered in the streets, sang songs of wisdom and goodwill. He wove straw into gold, and gold into sunlight. He learned the names of each sacred thing, and reigned supreme throughout the land.

But our wizard grew old. Power went to his head, and storms caressed his mind. He became haughty and mistrusting. No one could approach him, and in time our wizard was alone.

Loneliness does strange things to a wizard. It makes him crazy, yet drives him sane. When he walked, our wizard's tread fell heavily; the ground beneath him shook and mumbled. The wizard's friends began to fear him. His enemies — and he had many! — closed in.

And then one day, the wizard stumbled. His treasures scattered and his mighty staff cracked. Sensing his distress, the wizard's friends and enemies alike crowded 'round, kicking and whipping him, stealing his gold and laughing at his pain.

At first, he cried bitter tears, cursing everyone he'd ever known. But then something broke within him like an evil bone that had rotted deep inside. A wash of pain shot through the wizard, then in a flash was gone.

From the place where he had fallen, the wizard rose up hale and strong again. With blazing eyes, he punished those who'd stolen from him. With noble words, he apologized to those he had wronged, the friends he'd forsaken and the children he'd disowned. Casting aside his broken staff, our wizard carved himself a new one of fresh and supple wood. With a laugh, he began to dance again. His friends joined him. His enemies fled.

While indeed he'd stumbled, our wizard did not break. Like a sick man, he'd been purged. Though stripped of many riches, the wizard retained the gift that had made him strong in youth: a heart of gold that a god gave him and that wise folk polished until it shone.

As he danced, our wizard drew his heart from beneath his robes and raised it to the sun. The gold began to glow, and light embraced the land. Shadows fled and children giggled. With his heart of gold aloft, the wizard rose into the sky. His heels sprouted wings with which to dance across the clouds. His gray hair flared into gold, and then to fire, and then to sunlight. The wizard became both light and laughter, a thief of darkness. In his radiance, the children began to sing. Their song transformed the world.

And so it was that the musty old wizard regained his youth. And this time he swore he'd be careful where — and how heavily — he walked!

SACRED FIRE

It's a nice little fable. So how true is it?

As true as our new Hermetic Order can make it.

I can see from your expression that "dance" is not exactly a verb that comes to mind when you think of Hermes' Order. But that's my point: we dampened the vitality of the Great God Hermes, wrapped it in sackcloth, and called that "enlightenment." But Hermes himself was a trickster, a thief, a fleet messenger who seemed to dance upon the clouds. Looking down on the sad assemblage our Order had become, Hermes must have laughed his ass off... or cried his heart out. Or both. (You never can tell with gods, especially those temperamental Greek ones.) The *Corpus Hermeticum* itself speaks of singing in the soul, of joy and energy. Yet centuries of tradition have convinced us that to be truly a "serious" magus, you must become a dusty old relic.

It has not always been thus. And it need not stay that way.

In the first days of our august Order, Hermetic lore lent fire to the human mind. But as discipline gave way to dogmatism, the blaze of inspiration guttered to a hidden flame. That fire could still burn — and often did! But its luster paled on stronghold walls, warming distant men gathered in the name of a dying god.

Like the wizard of the fable, our Masters grew corrupt. Torn by suspicion and intrigue, they huddled their brightest pupils in seclusion, or wasted them on pointless wars. To approach these wizards, you had to suffer test upon test. To dare the throne of Hermes, they said, one must prove the right to do so. That "right" became more and more difficult to attain.

And then it all blew up.

Not long ago, that sacred flame became a holocaust. Consuming many of its ancient tenders, it raged through every plane known to man... and several more besides. By the time the blaze died down, the old Order was in embers. Like the Tower of the Tarot, our proud Tradition had been shattered.

But wisdom carries greater weight than stone. Its trivia may burn like the scrolls of Alexandria, but true knowledge is immortal. And so, Hermetic mages banked those raging fires, sifted through the ruins, and — as previous survivors did — began to build anew.

Oh, we still have cranks among us, vituperative old toads whose venom has been steeped by centuries of inertia. But Hermes himself is alive and well — active, boisterous, filled with guile and aflame with inspiration. In his wake, if we but follow, the old gates will crash to the ground and Sophia's garden will bloom anew.

And the wizard may once again begin to dance.

For him, and for our Order, the spring season has returned.

BODY OF HERMETES: WHERE DOES IT BEGIN?



God, being male and female, beginning as life and light, gave birth, by the Word, to another Nous, the Creator of the world; he, being the god of fire and air, formed seven powers who encompass in their circles the sensory world, and the governances of these powers is called Destiny.*

— Poimandres, from the *Corpus Hermeticum*

(* *Nous*, a vital word in Hermetic thought, has no direct English translation. It conveys consciousness, intellect, wisdom, perception, primal divinity and sophisticated creativity, and it means all yet none of these things directly.)

THE WORD

I AM, said the Voice, THAT I AM.

It spoke not English, nor Latin nor Hebrew nor Greek. Its Logos was supreme — all words, songs and languages that would ever come to be. The Words rang through the Void and raced out from the heavens, filling the Nothing with All.

It spoke in the void of possibility: the all-that-is-nothing yet will become all things in time. Its timbre set that void vibrating, and many songs began to spin themselves to life within that dying silence.

And in darkness the Crown began to shine. And in that glow, there was light.

For what is a Crown without a kingdom? What kingdom could there be in void? What liege might make Itself known if It did not know Itself well enough to govern? And what gold might forge a crown if earth itself did not exist?

All things began from such conundrums: From a Voice where there was no form, in a kingdom where there were no subjects, in a mind that knew not what it was, weaving music where there was no sound.

And lightning shattered that dark silence, and Creation was born.

THE TREE OF LIFE

From the heavens formed by the lighting flare, the *Sephiroth* (Spheres) began to chime. Their songs marked elements of God, separate aspects made Divine One:

- Kether, the Crown, consciousness and heart of God
- Chokmah, Divine Wisdom
- Binah, Understanding
- Chesed, Mercy
- Geburah, Severity
- Tiphareth, eternal Beauty

- Netzach, Victory
- Hod, God's Splendor and that of Creation
- Yesod, the Foundation of all worlds,
- ...and Malkuth, the Kingdom and mortal consciousness that is ruled by God and living things.

From them all sprang Otz Chaim, the Tree of Life, that span of being that runs through all existence. All-present yet rooted nowhere, this Tree joined heavens and worlds and spirit into one.

A storm of inspiration struck. New lightning cracked from Crown to Kingdom, searing paths from each Sphere to the next, blazing a path of awareness through which Creator arced down to Created.

Then from the Kingdom, twin serpents rose. Slithering, they ascended the Sephiroth from soil to supreme consciousness. Trailing the dirt of their bellies, they traveled the path of Divinity once more, bringing knowledge of mortality to the Crown that can never die.

And God became both lightning bolt and serpent: mortal, yet eternally without death.

THE REGENTS AND ALL EARTHLY FORMS

In Its wisdom, God begat the seven Thrones, the Regents and their servitors. From this emanation came all gods and angels, the spirits and the lesser Spheres. The heavens rang with ten million voices, all raised in honor of the Crown.

God then wrapped those songs within God's One Voice, and spun them into elements. The Earth and Water, Fire and Air spooled out from the Sephiroth, forming sublime patterns and earthly forms. God's spirit wove throughout them all, drawing them together, binding Creation in a living weave — a Logos of ineffable perfection.

This weave drew forth twin essences of God: Yahweh the Lord King Father, and Shekinah the Great Queen Mother. From them all things descend: each man and woman, each mortal beast or being. Every god or goddess bears their perfect faces; each stir within a mortal breast recalls the union of their love.

And the seas swelled, and the lands arose. The winds flowed down like a breath of song, and the fires lit the world's core and shimmered down from endless skies. Then spirit breathed into them all, and brought forth life upon the world.

And God saw it all. And it was good.

BROKEN PROMISES

Yet the dirt of the twin serpents' passage flaked away, becoming new and darker Spheres. In time, they blossomed black, ripened dry with obscene knowledge, then shattered from their own profanity. Within those midnight Sephiroth, new and terrible things were born — horrors in the mind of God, nightmares of self-knowledge. As these profane eggs broke to pieces, the terrors howled in their rage. Cast back by God into the shadow of Its soul, they became dark fears: demons and the *Qlippoth* (Shells), they endured.

"Why forsake you us?" they cried. "Are we not aspects of your Truth as well? Did you not birth us in your climb of self-discovery, and are we not as dear to thee as all those brighter things?"

But God dismissed them, saying "I am done with thee. I need thee not."

And the demons howled, and swore they'd be avenged. And Creation trembled as God's bad dreams emerged.

Seas grew black with deep-bred things; earth trembled under giant strides; the skies bore furies of pestilence and ruin; the fires blazed forth flaming horrors in mockery of God's creations.

And there were ages now lost, where elder races raised great cities that soon toppled into destruction. Fine treasures were wrought for peace and war, then cast aside by time and memory. Creation buckled, and the hosts of God demanded that light extinguish darkness and sweep the Shells away.

Then there were battles joined; gods warred and spirits quarreled; new mortal races sprang from light and shadow, some beautiful, others piteous, still others terrible with rage. All bore howls of Divinity within them, and God wept for the miseries of earth.

God's tears consumed the land. Her sorrow rent the skies; His wrath blazed sky-fire in the heavens, where light and darkness were devoured. The angels screamed for punishment; demons cried out for justice.

Despite the ruin they had wrought, God had pity on the dark kin. For they, too, were aspects born from Divine passage. "Thou art a part of me," God said. "I cannot deny thee now. For as there is pleasure, there must be pain; as there is joy, there must be anguish. Each thing that lives must die, each dead thing must arise again. For I am All, and no thing is outside me."

Still, these demons were disturbing, shades of things God did not want to learn. So God made places for them in the hidden corners of Creation, lent them the dissonance between clear notes of song, gave them dominion of corruption and mastery of doubt.

And Creation was whole again, light and darkness, terror and inspiration.

Yet God held a price upon their peace: that those who dared to face the terrors borne by darkness and light both could command the legions of each aspect. And so it was, in time, that mortal men could seek and sometimes find dominion over the spirit world.

Recall this tale, you who would be wise. For even God has doubts, and even Paradise has shadows. That which we dismiss still gnaws within our souls. Best to make some peace with our demons, lest their distractions crack us from within.

MAN GROWS FROM WISDOM'S SEED

Ages passed. Elder races thrived, then stumbled, becoming ooze and ashes. Their kingdoms were forsaken, their legacies dismissed. The world moved on, age to age, indifferent in perfection.

All high races perished or moved beyond this earthly plane. All races save our own.

From whence did mankind spring? Were we bred as pets in some Garden, shadowed by forbidden trees? Or were we nurtured

by Promethean flame till we rose to meet the gods? Were we offspring of two elder races, joined in love or conquest? Or did we slough off skins of animals to rejoin Divine repast? So many tales, so many possibilities....

It's been said that mankind raised great cities, too, in the days when light and darkness warred; or that we served greater beings, wrapped like dogs in the caprice of our masters. The truth sinks beneath shrouds of myth; whatever the case, we survived where they did not.

Myths passed into history. The world of gods gave way to worlds of men. Our forebears crafted alphabets and agriculture, trade and treasure. Tribes became villages; villages grew to cities; those cities swelled to nation-states; and those begat civilizations — the Ubaid, the Uruk, Sumerians, Akkads.... There were wars and plagues, starvations and prosperity. At times, it seemed, man was a flower on the verge of an abyss. But if so, our flower possessed hardy roots. And gradually we grew into a forest.

Three gifts ensured mankind's survival: the imagination to create, the technology to refine, and the will to triumph over all. From these things flow all human achievements: art, craft, wit, device, language, writing, philosophy... and magic most of all.

For magic weaves these separate things in one, reaching toward Divinity with the legacies of man. Magic is the lightning and the serpents both, blazing from on high to illuminate the most humble, then racing back again to regain the Crown of God.

From wisdom's seed grew triple gardens: the discipline to draw magic from within; the cleverness to craft it in device; and the courage to demand it from outside entities. The finest Arts employed them all, wrapping inner strength with outer power, then binding it into talismans. Shamans and witches, artisans and priests tended each garden according to their needs.

But true magicians among them sought the greatest prize: the Art that would unite all Arts in harmony, and then raise us to the sun.

PEOPLE OF THE FERTILE LANDS

As mankind surged from dust to dominance, each culture begat refinements in the mystic Arts. Sargonic priest-kings crafted amulets to protect their loved ones from disease, and summoned demon-beasts to safeguard tombs and temples. Hsia shamans writhed in the grasp of ghosts, or sang hymns to dragon kings wreathed in perfumed smoke. Assyrian warlocks draped their sanctums in human skin, and naked Picts raised stones to mark turnings of the sun.

In the fertile lands now called the Middle East, man's equally fertile imagination bred supreme mystic Arts. The savage grandeur of Sumer and Assur birthed the first complex magic systems; rife with gods and demons, these lands gave rise to castes of sorcerer-priests. Their elaborate rituals, potent amulets and grisly sacrifices have been largely lost to time; even so, those practices influenced the later Arts of Egypt, Babylon, Persia and the Jews, thus providing foundations to our own wizardry.

The tribes of Abraham began their restless quest for the One True God amid a world of many. Their language — bestowed, they claimed, by the Lord Himself — captured nuances of music and mathematics. One word concealed many truths, and scrolls could be written around the complexities of a single syllable. Their great and terrible kings led bloodbaths and prosperity alike; their enemies fell in multitudes before the rage of their patron power. Hebrew prophets invoked angelic wrath, or saw the plans of God. Their priests fed thousands with magic grain; their wise men bound demonic servitors. Great Solomon, King of Kings, raised a temple to his Lord; his artisans shaped stone and wood in complex

ADAM QADMON: PRIMORDIAL MAN

The heart of the Hermetic teaching... is the realization that the individual is fundamentally no different from the Supreme.

— Clement Salaman, from the translators' forward to *The Way of Hermes*

Within each human form, there's a roadmap to God. The trick is to find it, follow it, and reach Ascension through it.

According to classic lore, the human body reflects heavenly order. The four limbs and head represent the arrangement of elements, while the body composes the meeting-place between them — the seat not only of the human soul, but of the cosmos as well. In Kabbalah, this parallel is referred to as *Ain Soph Aur*, the *ha-adam ha-gadol*, or more commonly *Adam Qadmon*. Sanskrit sources call it *Nara* ("Sky") or *Purusha* (one of the many names of Brahma, supreme force of the universe). Medieval European lore posits the *microcosm* (Creation and God) reflected in *microcosm* (the human body and soul), and often plants it in the center of the pentacle, the wheel of life, or both. In each case, the mortal form and consciousness supposedly holds the elemental secrets that bind our world together.

Although this image of man-as-creation extends beyond Hermetic practices, it's especially important to the mages of

those Houses. Essentially, it means that we are gates and mirrors to the sublime, made by God Himself in perfect proportion (as Leonardo da Vinci's famous diagrams of Man and Woman assume), and offering clues to our eventual Ascension. For by the concept of Adam Qadmon, we humans are, in form and function, bound to Divinity. Our bodies and souls possess the aspects of All Things, and they show us how to rise from humble mortality to incomparable transcendence.

Within the body Adam Qadmon, the Primordial Man, all things are found. Crackling from head to foot and back again, the 10 Sephiroth chart the path from supreme godhead to mortality. Likewise, the five points of the pentacle represent the extremities of the human body (arms, legs and head) as well as the five elements, ascending from primal Earth and Fire toward Air and Water and finally Spirit. Basically, we are our own pathways back to God, and need look no further than our own bodies for the proof.

So why are Hermetic mages so arrogant? Because as they see it, mankind has received Divine pedigree. The person who remains blind to that potential is a fool; the one who squanders it is a traitor to the will of God... and to his own design.



designs; his scribes wrote texts of devilry, and gathered lore from all known kingdoms. His workings, passed among his artisans, wove technology and mysticism into marvelous new Arts. The sacred geometry refined later by the Greeks manifested in the Temple, which, though fallen now, throws shadows across our world even today.

But it was the Egyptians, born of dark and fertile soil, who raised magic to its early heights. Their empires gathered wisdom and craftsmanship from across the region; their monuments to power rose to scrape the heavens; their god-king pharaohs reached into Otherworlds and distant lands, assembling courts of wise men whose devotion to magic was supreme. And it was two of those Egyptian magi, Djhowtey and Sesheta, who formed the first true pillars of our Order.

BEHIND THE MASKS OF GODS

Remembered now in shadows as Osiris and Isis, or gathered together under a single mask as Toth — known to the Greeks as Thoth — these sacred partners wove the reeds of many practices into a single wise tradition. While all other orders writhed in infancy, it's been said that these two sages crafted the first true alphabet, that they first drew inspiration from the stars, and that their guidance shaped the pyramids and revealed the path of immortality. Their enemies were legion, their allies likewise. Beset by vampires and befriended by werecats, Djhowtey and Sesheta traveled from what would later be called Phoenicia to the courts of early pharaohs some 4500 years ago. There, they called into their service wonder-workers from across the realm of man. This mystic court was in no way a council as we know them; even so, when we Hermetics gathered disparate practices together, it was these forebears who gave us hope.

In time, Djhowtey and Sesheta fell to treachery. Betrayed and butchered by friends or family, Djhowtey assumed the mantle of Osiris in death. His wise and loyal partner gathered up his scattered essence and combined with it, becoming a single entity — male and female — that, like God, drew the best of all elements into itself. After dictating a text of sacred Truth to its disciples, this being of wisdom passed into memory, and perhaps to Ascension. Much later, those texts (now lost) inspired the Corpus Hermeticum.

THE CUP AND THE REED

As one might imagine, Djhowtey and Sesheta founded wisdom-orders. Now known (rather poorly!) as the Cults of Thoth, these fellowships fueled the grand fires of the era. In later years, their works and insights would filter into other lands, and find their way into the hands of Greek sages like Pythagoras and Socrates, and into the grand designs of Solomon

and his artisans. During the early Classical Era, though, the Cults of Thoth were held in high esteem throughout the educated world. In their absence, the Thothian pair was given godhood's mantle. Priests and wizards among the Nile folk followed the paths they blazed, and in time another convocation emerged.

It was roughly 1500 BCE when King Thothmes III ("Born of Thoth") and his Queen Hatshepsut held a nearly forgotten gathering in the Egyptian heat. Unlike the earlier tributes of Djhowtey's time, this meeting was an assembly of equals — the first true Magus Convocation and an inspiration to others down through time. Mingling the lore of a hundred kingdoms, these wise monarchs crafted two lodges: the Reed of Thoth and the Cupbearers of Isis. Fittingly enough, these associations dedicated their Arts to the deities inspired by other magi centuries before. And ironically enough, the twin fellowships gave rise to deadly enemies: our Traditions and the Technocratic Union.

The story has been lost for centuries, only recently uncovered: Under the guidance of Thothmes and Hatshepsut, the Reed and Cup forged disciplines of sacred geometry, laid pathways to the Nine Cornerstones (now called Spheres), and journeys outward to distant realms of existence. Their wisdom provided a foundation for the Hermetic Arts... and for the artisanship that guides our later rivals. That rivalry soon emerged — first in debate, then in distance, then in combat. Not a century after the first meeting, over a hundred dueling sects declared the rest "heretical." Their disagreements spilled into the philosophical rantings that marked the Hellenistic era, and manifested in conspiracy, murder and open war.

The die had been cast. Though nearly 30 centuries would pass before the Ascension War we know began, our progenitors had already begun to fight it.

THE WISEST MAN ON EARTH

Several centuries after the Reed and Cup were broken, their ancestors gathered under the Hebrew Suleiman — best known as

THE TOWER

Towers and their destruction haunt the Order of Hermes. The crumbled Temple of Solomon recalls another, earlier demolition: the Tower of Babel, raised by King Nimrod to storm heaven. Destroyed by God (or faulty engineering), this Tower symbolized human hubris, divine punishment, and the rift between heaven and earth... eventually inspiring Trump 16 of the Tarot.

The image — and the metaphor — reoccurs throughout Hermetic history. Time and again, edifices of wisdom are demolished by brute force: Solomon's Temple, the Temple of Jerusalem, Alexandria's library, Mistridge and finally Doissetep. Is this blind chance, poetic justice, or a cosmic echo that cycles through the ages? Hermeticists have argued the question for generations, but in the last two years the Disciple Marcus Habtamu has gathered a small, yet vocal group to protest the formation of Hermetic strongholds. "Where we gather," he says, "We remove ourselves from our humanity. And when we isolate ourselves this way, we find ourselves buried in the rubble of our pride."

Solomon the Wise — to construct a great Temple for the Lord of Israel. Renowned for both wisdom and power, Solomon bound demons, commanded angels, governed many men, and loved many women.

Although the Bible claims Solomon was granted wisdom by a whim of the Almighty, Hermetic disciples know the truth: That the young Suleiman was initiated into several of the diverse sects derived from the Reed and Cup; there, he learned the secrets of the Sephiroth and the Tree of Life. Bold and amazed, he traced the pathway to the Crown through meditations and self-discipline. Reaching the highest orders, he demanded — and received — that birthright so many aspire to and so few attain: Mastery of the elements, the spirits, and the self.

Although the Bible would make much of Solomon's legal and political acumen, his greatest achievements as a magus reside within two essential works on ritual magic: the Lesser and Greater Keys of Solomon. (Many other grimoires have been attributed to the Sorcerer King, but most are lost and others are simply fakes.) From those tomes, the essentials of spirit invocation would be defined for millennia to come. Available even now (in truncated editions) among Sleepers, these Keys and the practices they described would provide a cornerstone for whole traditions of ritual magic... traditions that still live in our Arts today.

THE BEST OF GODS AND MEN

As before, empires rose and fell. Conquerors and prophets shook the earth, sometimes spreading wisdom, other times destruction. Hellenic Greeks, inquisitive Persians and upstart Etruscans assumed the mantles dropped by previous empires like Egypt, whose star began to fade 10 centuries before the Christ. Zoroaster, Moses, Imhotep, Solomon and others carved essence from ignorance: Zoroaster divided god-powers into light and darkness; Moses brought forth laws both grave and savage; Imhotep crafted medicines and healing Arts while Solomon built his Temple and commanded the Powers to his will. Their designs inspired others of like mind. As Egyptian tradition gave way to Hellenic illumination, a surfeit of sages — Plato, Daedalus, Archimedes, Praxagoras and so many others — laid the pillars of the modern world.

And what pillars they were! While the streets of Athens sang with philosophy, the stones of Troy were washed with blood. The Spartan hills grew fierce and stoic folk, while the Theatre Epidauros saw the birth of literature. Greek forests birthed monstrosities, and mad women ruled the nights. Gods and goddesses whose names resound 3000 years and counting made their homes amid this tempestuous land. Among them, our Lord Hermes led the way.

Hermes is no simple god, and his way is not a simple path. The foundations on which our Order stands include the near-death mysteries of Eleusis and the underworld visitations of Orpheus, the arcane formulae of Pythagoras, and the metaphysical shadows on Plato's cave. Hermes, god of crossings, flew between them all, gathering the brightest jewels of each to gild his kerykeion — the caduceus that proclaimed his balance and vitality.

Yet for all this artistry, it was the Greek Pythagoras — perhaps the greatest of his kind — who distilled wisdom from a dozen disparate cults into an enlightened science-art that mingled sublime inspiration with material form. In his travels from Samos to Thebes to Athens and elsewhere, this mortal Hermes bore the

seeds of Thoth to the temples of his native land. And in his wake, new gardens began to grow.

But gardens tangle beneath the hands of many gardeners. Within generations, dozens of cults dedicated to Thoth, Hermes, and — under the Romans — Mercury grew wild throughout the western world. As mighty Alexander spread his empire from Spain to India, lore and ritual crossed sea and mountain, desert and wood. In those crossing, though, many elements changed to suit their new surroundings. And with those changes came dispute.

THE WARS OF HERMITIES

One of mankind's sorest legacies is his war to define "truth." In our era, that war bloodies magical halls and mundane streets

alike. As the Classical wisdom cults appeared, they too took up arms against those whose truths seemed different, even when those truths hailed a common core.

It's an old, familiar, story: each faction claimed "the one Truth" as its own; to disparage the "Truth" of a sect was to disparage Truth itself. And since "Truth" is often dressed in the mantle of a god, these rivalries became religious feuds. (Remarkable how little changes in 24 centuries....)

The Truth of Hermes' path is Wisdom. Personified in male aspects as Thoth, Hermes, Solomon or Mercury and female aspects as Isis, Athena or Sophia the Queen, Wisdom demands self-knowledge and exploration. Sadly, Wisdom's path leads to its

WHO IS HERMITIES?

Imagining yourself after someone else is serious business, especially in a culture where names define the self. And so, when you're talking about the various (and often contentious!) Hermetic Orders, it's worth asking: Who is this Hermes guy?

Like most things magical, the answer is more symbolic than literal... and often self-contradictory. Most sources link Hermetic practices with Hermes Trismegistus, a mythic magus who inspired, if not authored, the *Corpus Hermeticum*. But this rambling, often facile text presents a poor legacy for nearly three millennia of magery. So again: Who is Hermes? Most Hermetic wizards divide that figure into three separate aspects:

- **Hermes the God:** Son of Zeus and the titan Maia, this winged trickster crosses between the worlds of gods and men, living and dead. A guardian of gateways, patron of thieves, epitome of messengers, supreme magician, and bearer of news both sad and joyous, Hermes personifies the human intellect — restless, clever, determined and occasionally perverse. One of Aphrodite's many lovers, he sires the pansexual Hermaphroditos and the huge-cocked Priapus, incarnations of obverse sexuality. As psychopomp ("conductor of soul-consciousness"), Hermes guides dying mortals to their rest, sometimes assisting living people into Hades as well; as bearer of the caduceus (see below), Hermes is the fire of Life incarnate. Affiliated with Thoth, Odin, Raven, the Buddha and sometimes Lucifer, Hermes inspired the Roman Mercury, patron of prosperity... an ironic connection, given Hermes' history of theft and Mercury's guardianship of trade! Under both names, he was revered as humanity's intercessor, running interference between his godly kin and his beloved mortals.

- **Hermes the Mystic:** Called Trismegistus, or "the Thrice-Great," this human magus inspired the *Corpus Hermeticum*, a text of revelations tearing down the curtain between mortal blindness and divine consciousness. Supposedly alive in ancient Egypt, this Hermes was considered "the greatest of philosophers, greatest of kings, and greatest of priests." Referred to in an Egyptian text as "the greatest and the greatest god, great Hermes," Trismegistus is considered a myth by some and a mortal by others. (As usual, Hermetic mages endlessly dispute the point.) Credited by Plato with the creation of arithmetic, astronomy and geometry, this Hermes is referred to in various sources as a contemporary of Moses, a mentor of Moses, or even Moses himself! Alexandrian lore

imagines Trismegistus as the sum of three sagacious generations — grandfather, father and son, all named Hermes — while other tales mingle Hermes with Pythagoras. Prolific as well, Trismegistus supposedly authored between 42 and 36,000 works of wisdom. Always, however, Trismegistus is affiliated with curiosity, learning, and the divine number 3.

- **Hermes the Archetype:** When neither god nor man will do, the human mind looks to archetype, the personification of an ideal. Here, Hermes shines as the lightning-footed traveler to whom no door is sealed. Crackling through the imagination like the thunderbolt down the Tree of Life, he bears symbols of passage, speed and imagination. In many ways, Hermes is the god of the Information Age. No barriers or distances can hinder him; no secrets escape his sight.

Although "hermetically sealed" means something that cannot be opened, Hermes is the universal opener. His followers might bury lore in symbols and obscurity, but those who know Hermes can unlock those mysteries, and more. Like lightning, he illuminates darkness, shatters preconceptions, and forces transformations. His staff has become the emblem of modern medicine; his body adorns advertisements; his laughter crackles through the Internet, crossing time and distance with mere thoughts. Three-times-great, this Hermes spans antiquity, modernity and possibility. Now, more than ever, this Hermes is alive.

Not really such a boring fellow, once you get to know him...

THE CADUCEUS

The staff of Hermes, still used by his disciples today, features a tapered pole entwined with two serpents and topped by a winged crown. Linked symbolically to health, vitality and masculinity (a pole wrapped up in two copulating snakes... go figure!), this *kerykeion* ("herald's staff") also represents Ascension itself.

Rising from its narrow tip to its glorious head, the pole reflects the connection of heaven and earth. The serpents stand for wisdom and inquisitiveness, good and evil; the wings symbolize transcendence, and the head (often shown as gold or jewels), the Crown. In form and meaning, Hermes' scepter resembles the Kabbalistic Tree of Life; indeed, some images even show it as a tree. Western medicine has adopted it as an emblem, too, linking the ancient herald and the modern healer together, uniting them in compassionate wisdom.

opposite, Folly, when you confuse the journey with the road. And when the bringer of Wisdom becomes Wisdom personified — as did Hermes — human cults begin to argue about the nature of Hermes, when they should be seeking the Wisdom he represents.

In the wake of Pythagoras (whose wisdom-cults predated both Alexander and the Christ by centuries), this rivalry achieved new lows. One sect, the *Acousmatics*, devoted themselves to the words and rituals of the Master; the other sect, the *Mathematicals*, grew fanatical about numerology, code, and musical resonance. While such differences seem trivial today, they sparked fighting between sages of both factions. The sages called in favors and allies, made passionate speeches in the streets, and turned their magics against one another. These conflicts spilled into the other cults of Wisdom, and the results, by now, should be familiar.

War isn't especially wise, but it is popular. And so, as eager sorcerers on every side of the "Wisdom gulf" plunged in, Folly passed Wisdom on the road. Cultists of Thoth attacked fellowships of Hermes; Isis priestesses sent scorpions into the beds of sleeping craftsmen; magicians who served the thief-god Hermes slit throats among the followers of the psychopomp Hermes. From 400 to 100 BCE, the streets of Greece and Egypt boiled with odd murders and occasional riots. Dissonant music and flesh-eating scarab beetles made popular weapons, but clubs and stones worked just as well. The authorities crushed such disturbances quickly, but like so many rivalries these "wars of Hermes" — the first, I fear, of many — continued secretly, under cloak of night and silence.

CITY OF THE GREAT

Soon Alexandria, the City of Alexander, arose on the Nile Delta. Perhaps the first true metropolis, Alexandria gathered sages and scholars from across the known world. Among its streets, they built a library — the greatest archive ever seen. Like the lighthouse in its harbor, the city became a beacon for the wise. Sadly, the "wise" in question brought their rivalries, and soon Alexandria became a new and bitter theatre for the Wars of Hermes.

Although the *Mathematicals* soon perished beneath the weight of esotericism, their theories fueled the *Daedalean Arts*. The *Acousmatics* splintered too, spreading their secrets and lore between a hundred different cults. But although the original rivals faded, their rivalry did not. Grudges and alliances made generations ago still sparked debate and murder in the streets of Alexandria.

Despite those conflicts, however, the city prospered. In its mingling of Greek, Egyptian, Nubian, Persian, Hebrew and eventually Roman cultures, Alexandria formed the seat of human knowledge. A century before the time of Christ, a wisdom-council finally formed. To quash the schisms, 20 mystics (including, it's said, several *women!*) gathered, laid down protocols, and established boards of grievance and punishment. Again, disparate magi came together with a common purpose. And again, a fellowship was born: *the Great Accord*.

Under guidance from the Accord, Alexandria sheltered thousands of magi, mystics, scholars, prophets, priests, charlatans, madmen, and other visionaries. The archives bristled with scrolls in every human tongue. The rites of Hermes nestled alongside the laws of Abraham. And for a while, there was peace.

SOPHIA, WISDOM'S QUEEN

The archetype of Wisdom in female form, Sophia has inspired Hermetic women from the early Middle Ages onward. Associated with Lilith, Eve, Isis, Shekinah, Astarte, Adam Qadmon, the Whore of Babylon, Mary Magdalene and even Christ, she presents a complex, contradictory and yet appealing figure of insight, folly and redemption.

According to the Hebrews, God possesses a feminine aspect, Shekinah, who personifies the visible presence of Divinity and reflects the Sephiroth of Binah (Mercy), Netzach (Victory) and Malkuth (the Kingdom). Later aspected as Hokhmah ("Divine Wisdom"), she inspired mystics with her compassion and foresight. Renamed Sophia/Psyche by the Greeks, she became the "damsel in distress," tormented by stronger powers on her quest to the higher self. As these traditions intermingled with Christianity, Sophia became a tragic Gnostic figure, the consort of Christ whose alienation from heaven inspired human redemption. In early Christian writings, she becomes the Holy Spirit, wedded between God and Man through Christ; or the Fallen Woman whose carnal sins are redeemed by holy sacrifice. Later in medieval alchemy, Sophia becomes the Queen, one half of the lost unity of Male and Female that, when found, restores perfection.

Hermetic Sophias, however, are no one's victims. Favoring Wisdom over "lost sinner" slander, these women have provided many lights in the Order's history. Sadly, Queen Wisdom inspired one of the Council's darker moments, too: Heylel Teomim often referred to his feminine aspect as Sophia, a habit that tarnished the moniker for centuries. Today, however, Queen Wisdom has reclaimed her reputation. Once again, Sophia is one of the most common Craft Names among the Order's women.

MERCURY, MITHRAS AND THE CHRIST

If Greece made men into heroes, then Rome turned heroes into nations. And amid the processions of Caesars and saviors, three figures blazed with promises: the god Mercury, the bull-slayer Mithras, and a Jewish carpenter who would change the world.

The staid Romans had no use for a winged thief, and so clever Hermes became Mercury the Wise — he who sweeps the clouds of ignorance away. Combining aspects of scholarly Thoth, psychopomp Hermes and the artisan-merchants of Rome, this Mercury lent sobriety to the Grecian trickster. In his name, wealthy sects cast costly rites; the magus Plentarch described pearls dissolved in wine as just one of Mercury's offerings. It's been said that the massive gatherings that characterized Mercurian rituals — which demanded a dozen magi or more — stabilized the Roman Empire. When Mercury fell out of favor under after Constantine's decree, he may have withdrawn his protection of Rome, allowing her to fall.

Mithras the protector combined elements of Herakles and Hermes into a savior hero. Unlike the wealthy Mercury, Mithras had a simple cult. His legacy of strength and honor made him popular with soldiers and farmers. Earthy magi revered the bull-

slayer for his vitality; their patrons admired his power, and for a time it seemed the cult of Mithras would dominate the empire, but....

Some say the Nazarene was God incarnate; others claim him as a prophet, madman, magician or myth. The truth has been obscured — not just by time and dogma, but also by ripples in the Tapestry itself. Whatever his origins, this charismatic rebel shook the foundations of his world. Despite his (apparent) death by crucifixion, Yeshua (Latinized to *Jesu* and finally to *Jesus*) inspired a cult that defied all other gods. Indeed, he even took the mantle from Great Hermes himself, becoming the guide and intercessor between Divinity and man.

For a time, the cults of Hermes, Mithras, Mercury and the Christ shared common ground. But despite the flowering of Roman culture — often credited to followers of Mercury and Mithras — fierce persecutions, conversions, riots and massacres marked their rivalries. Devotees of one sect occasionally fled to another (like Saul of Tarsus, an Eleusinian initiate who founded Christianity). The tale of Simon Magus serves as an example: a famous sorcerer and initiate of Thoth, Simon offended Paul, impressed Nero, and claimed his apprentice Helen was the incarnation of Sophia, the “thought of God.” A magical standoff ended bloodily when Paul undid Simon’s levitation spell; Nero later had Paul and his associates murdered in various unpleasant ways. Countless other vindications marked the next few Roman centuries.

THE FIRST BURNING

The most barbarous crime of that era came four centuries after Christ, when a mob of Christian monks led a riot that destroyed Alexandria’s great library forever. By this time, the Grand Accord had lost most of its power. While magical fellowships still teemed in Alexander’s city, the fading of Thothian, Mithraic and Mercurian sects combined with the rise of austere Christianity, undercutting the fertile mysticism of that metropolis and replacing it with constant war.

The five centuries between the Grand Accord and the First Burning were marked by competition. Visionaries like Apollonius of Tyre (a Pythagorean), Lucius Apuleius (a devotee of Isis) and Plotinus (who mingled Plato and Pythagoras into the ideal of God-as-artist and Creation as an emanation of Divinity) furthered the mystic cause, while ascetic monks and would-be martyrs flung themselves to destruction in search of transcendence. For a time, the Roman government tolerated such diversity; zealot Jews or Christians, however, incurred savage persecutions. (The lessons of those days would not be lost on the Christian Church, who later followed the example.)

Rome’s conquest of Germania and Britannia brought new blood flowing into the mix. Brute mystics from the Tutwald and Celtic shores invested their crude magics into Alexandrian high sorcery. For all the smell and mess they brought, these primal magi lent vitality to the dusty heart of Hermes. In the mingling of practices, old Arts regained their energy. The seeds laid centuries before blossomed into the Hermetic Arts we know today.

THE LIGHTNING SCOURGE

That flowing blood was no metaphor, however. To the Romans, the savages on the Empire’s fringe were animals — talented animals, perhaps, but little more than that. The “savages”

THE CORPUS HERMETICUM

“What do you wish to hear and behold, and having beheld, what do you wish to learn and know?”

So begins one of the most influential works in magic. Attributed to antiquity but clearly the product of late Classical Alexandria, the *Corpus Hermeticum* forms the basis for the Order’s philosophy. A collection of scrolls (numbered anywhere between 12 and 22 volumes) originally written in Coptic and Greek, the *Corpus* offers a sort of Universal Field Theory for Creation. Through a series of lectures, dialogues and riddles, Hermes Trismegistus and Poimandres the Supreme Consciousness expound upon the nature of God, spirit, humanity and Creation as a whole.

Ranging from poetics to pedantics, the *Corpus* declares that all things are One supreme, ineffable being, beheld by wisdom and revealed through art. Gnosticism, the tradition of transcendence through ultimate knowledge, derived from this idea; later, pantheistic theories did the same. It’s not that odd a concept *now*, but for the era of its authorship, the *Corpus’* view of deity was radical... and dangerous.

In contrast to most religious traditions, Hermes’ God is not some distant entity, but an imminent part of the cosmos. Lesser deities exist, but pale beside the glory of the One. On this point, the *Corpus* ran afoul of the Christian church; many copies of it were burned; people inspired by it were declared heretical and also burned. Hermetic sects went underground in the Middle Ages, often mingling Christian elements with the *Corpus’* broad cosmology. Later sects like the Rosicrucians wove both revelations into one, and built their creeds upon it.

Like most revelations, the *Corpus Hermeticum* can be read on literal, symbolic, numerological, allegorical, theoretical and possibly even musical levels. For 2000 years, scholars and mystics have debated the text’s true meanings. But like Hermes himself, the core of the *Hermetica* remains elusive. Each reading, it’s said, yields new conclusions.

How appropriate for the words of One Who is Three, each three times greater than the last!

didn’t think highly of the Romans, either, and the magical duels waged between them matched the fury of the mundane wars.

Enraged by the slaughter of his dearest friend, storm magus Marcus Fulgurator (“Lightning-bringer”) led Roman legions on a sweep across Britannia. The Britons responded accordingly; great beasts drawn from hill and hells charged into battle beside screaming, painted mobs. It’s said the later purge of Hermetic House Diedne was rooted in this carnage, which lasted nearly five years and blasted fertile lands to ruin. Eventually, Marcus was slain; the Celts, however, withdrew to the north wilderness. Emperor Hadrian decreed a wall be built to keep them out, and peace (of a kind) returned.

THE GLORY THAT WAS

Back in “civilization,” things were hardly better. Holy song-mages — some Mithraic, others Messianic — committed quite



unholy acts in the names of their respective saviors. Hostile hedge-mages from the northern woods rode among their Pagan kin, while Roman Pagans fought Christians for the soul of Rome. Rival sects of Mercurian and Hermetic sages conspired to undo each other as the Empire's borders fell deeper inward.

Wrestled back and forth between Constantine's Christianity, Julianus' Pagan revivalism, and incursions of Germanic tribesmen, the crumbling Roman Empire became an abattoir. As sorcerers and prophets raised hell in the streets, Daedalean sects like the Collegium Praecepti and later the Gabrielites united to restore order. To Hermes' shame, our forebears did themselves no great credit — the plagues and storms they raised killed more innocents than rivals. Raging barbarians made matters even

worse. In hindsight, one might think that we magi might have learned something in the intervening years, but no; in the dying days of Rome, the schism between magic, faith and science was as contentious as it remains today.

And then it burned.

Angry Christians stormed Alexandria's great archive, which had been torched before during Pagan spats. This time, very little survived. Its greatest defender, Hypatia of Alexandria, was ripped apart and skinned with clamshell blades. The so-called "Christian" Cyril decreed that the Pagan works must burn. And so they did.

Thus was lost the wisdom of antiquity. A great symbolic Tower, raised with pride, was brought down by a thunderbolt.

It would not be the last Tower to fall.

MIND ⊕ HERMETIC: MASTERS AND HOUSES



Man has as much power as the gods. Only man is a free living being, only he has the power of good and evil.... You can even become a god if you want, for it is possible. Therefore want and understand and believe and love: then you have become it!

— The Definitions of Hermes Trismegistus to Asclepius

DARKNESS VISIBLE

It's raining hard tonight. The rafters drip with dirty spillage while the fire struggles to hold back the cold. Three figures, swathed in soggy cloaks, run grubby fingers through their hair; raindrops combed from those long manes splatter to the hearthstones, steaming into nothingness as soon as they alight.

KILL THEM ALL": GNOSTIC HERESIES

Though complex in history, Gnosticism has a simple concept: *To ascend, become aware*. According to the medieval Christian Church, obedience brought salvation. Most Gnostics disagreed. To them, salvation came through knowledge... knowledge often of Hermetic nature.

In Gnostic theology, the mortal world and its structures are traps laid by a malignant Demiurge; the only way through them is to expand awareness *past* them. Different sects use different methods, but the goal is the same: escape this world of suffering by embracing the Divine One behind it all. (A very Buddhist concept, actually...)

Sadly, the medieval Church didn't appreciate this idea, nor did its leaders appreciate Gnostics portraying the biblical God as the Demiurge — essentially Satan — itself. By the turn of the first millennium, war had been declared: various persecutions and crusades, waged by both Christians and Muslims, forced Gnosticism underground. Still, over time its doctrines worked their ways into science, Protestant Christianity, Humanism, high ritual magic, and most recently futurism. In each of these areas, the Gnostic ideal intertwines with the Order of Hermes, its practices and its Arts.

While Hermetic lore predates the Gnostic movement, both practices share the ideal of knowledge. "Ignorance," says the Gnostic *Gospel of Truth*, "brought about anguish and terror"; to this, Hermetic scripture replies, "perceive the light and know it."

(Note: For more details about Gnosticism, see **Dark Ages Mage** and the **Cainite Heresy** supplement for **Vampire: The Dark Ages**.)

Their hostess shrugs a goat kid from her lap; chickens flutter, agitated by these guests. A huge gray tomcat strides over to the taller man, regards him, then rolls over to demand a skritch for his belly. Snorting wet amusement, the guest stoops to comply.

The stale closeness of beasts and dirty straw underlies a sweeter scent: hot gruel, seasoned with fresh meat, barley, and — could it be! — sea salt. The Lady of the homestead possesses means of which few could boast. A barefoot boy, oblivious to the chill, arrives to take the travelers' cloaks. Gratefully, the short man unwraps himself and holds the wet thing out to the boy. The middle traveler, a stout woman with stubby teeth, regards their surroundings, shrugging.

It's not much for a meeting of True Magi. But in these lean times, it'll have to do.

THE UNDERWORLD

Rome was neither built nor devastated in a day. The fall took generations, long periods where cold, barbarity and plague pressed out the sparks of ancient glory. But while this "dark age" had its dismal hours, the fires of inspiration never truly died.

The muddled tribes who demolished Rome had no respect for antiquity. In their hands, precious scrolls became little more than

arse-paper. But Hermes has been called *He Whose Eyes Never Close*; could his followers be any less vigilant? As barbarians sacked Rome, our forebears rescued ancient lore. Gabrielites and other rivals made peace with their scholar-brethren, uniting to save what they could from the destruction. Some enlightened refugees sought shelter in Byzantium; others fled into the wilderness.

Thus scattered, Hermetic mages refined their Arts. The lofty rites of Rome made way for practicality. Precious metals were replaced with herbs, fine linen with homespun. Adapting what they could of rural Arts, our forebears forged new magics from bygone inspirations. In time, many adopted the growing Christian lore into their Pagan practices. *Gnosticism* — a hybrid of Jewish, Greek and Christian lore — spread. Inspired by brilliant revelation and dismal existence, the various Gnostic sects took hold and grew, weaving the lore of Hermes in with mystic Christianity. Although such sects originated before Rome's fall, their vision of transcendence through insight suited these dark ages well.

And so, Great Hermes descended to the Underworld. Plugging his path were *massassa*, the vampires who fed on corpses; lycanthropes and other beast-folk; pitiful ghosts and malignant faeries. Demons wandered free when ancient wards lay in ruins; folk went mad, sometimes devolving into the demi-mage Marauds. Such monsters dwelled in the ancient world too, of course, but in civilization's ruin they seemed to breed.

It was a challenging time, but in hindsight, that was a good thing. As our ancestors learned, challenge nurtures strength.

THE PROPHET'S BOUNTY

Germanic tribes were not the only conquerors in the Empire's ruins. But the Muslim armies, who swirled up from the sands near Egypt six centuries after Christ, were builders, not destroyers. Like their ancient kin, these folk revered knowledge for its own sake. As Rome's ruins sank to barbarism, the Prophet's people rose to glory.

Many people today associate the term "Muslim" with a sense of willful ignorance, but few realize that in the Middle Ages it was Muslims, not Christians, who sustained civilization. Even more surprisingly, Islamic sages welcomed their Jewish cousins. Together, their scholars preserved the lore of Greece, Rome and Egypt. If not for them, it might have all been lost.

Ages before the Prophet, the *Ahl-i-Batin* formed one of the first true magical Traditions; as Rome decayed, many Mercurian and Hermetic masters migrated to warmer climes. With them, they brought libraries and folklore, technology and magics. Hospitable *Batini* took these fellows in, and together both groups prospered.

Before his words destroyed his dreams, Mohammad bolstered scholarship. Though not himself an academic, he welcomed those who were. While the Roman Church stopped its congregations' ears with wax, the Prophet's cry inspired knowledge. And so it was that Hermes' sandals alighted in Arabian sands. Though his name could not be spoken — for there are no gods but Allah! — his legacy survived.

The Art of alchemy (which purifies and uplifts the soul) began in old Arabia. Refining lore from Egypt, Greece and other realms, Islamic mystics crafted *al-kuhl*, "the distillate," from the Greek *kemeia*, "transmutation." Their quest to transform imperfection to perfection found later welcome in our Order, first as House Golo, later as a discipline within all Houses, and finally as

the new-yet-venerable House Solificati. How could we refuse? As art, Art, science and philosophy in one, alchemy follows Hermes' challenge: *know, refine and ascend*.

While old Europe's cities rotted, Muslim ones became seats of culture. Many a Hermetic master traveled to the distant East, a pilgrim not of Christ but of Wisdom. Although the odd manners of the Arabs and Persians — and the foul ones of Europeans! — kept a wedge between our world and theirs, the Order owes a lot to the Prophet and his sages.

As usual, the familiar song of war soon drowned out cooperation. In time, crusades, jihads and finally the Reconquista wove hatreds that survive to this day. The Muslim world became anathema to Hermes' children. Later, when we sat down at the Convocation, some kindness would return. By the late Middle Ages, though, ties were severed and ignorance returned.

A FAMILIAR SONG

And so again, hate undoes enlightenment. *What we might have accomplished* is ruined by *what we've done*.

How much of this, I wonder, is the will of gods? How much represents the challenges we must dare in life, and how much is just self-imposed suicide? As another era dawns — both in my chronicle and in our modern world — I must pause to reflect: Why do we keep returning to war? Why must we cripple our achievements with division? Is blood the cost of Wisdom? And if so, when will we achieve the *kind* of Wisdom that lets us leave bloodshed behind?

Hermes, now as then, is silent. He lets us make our own decisions, and does not stop our fall.

SURVIVAL... AND REVIVAL

In Rome's absence, unity disappeared. But there *were* compensations: new freedoms — from structure, from hierarchies, even from what we now call Paradox — lent new vigor to Hermetic Arts. Without the weight of a rigid paradigm, Hermes was free to soar again.

Disparate visions guided his flight. Some mages sought to preserve — even restore — the glories of Rome and Greece: The mythic Merlin (inspired by a host of Welsh *Myrddin* rather than by a single man) reflected this desire; although born of the wilderness, he brought civilization into chaos.

Other sorcerers forsook the gatherings of man. Retreating to the wilds, they burrowed in the earth or raised distant wizard-towers. A handful became like beasts, living naked in the woods; others remained among mortal kin, hiding their Arts amid mundane debris. Both revival and renunciation had adherents; both nurtured and sustained our Arts.

Like many of our ancestors, mythic Merlin combined Pagan Arts with Christian faith, reflecting a change in the Hermetic path. Eventually, most Hermetics would at least pay lip service to the Christ, despite named allegiances to Hermes or Mercury. Eventually, those god-forms merged into one. Our cousins recognized that while names have power, forms change. Since Christian monks and warrior kings enforced a kind of Roman order, their sanctuaries became halls of scholarship. Occasionally, Hermetic wizards allied themselves with such folk, assembling wealth, influence and archives that have lasted to this day.

For those who preferred to work alone, the Dark Ages provided lots of wilderness. In solitude, a contemplative magus could lose himself in esoteric paths, forging traditions that Bonisagus and Criamon would later refine. Whatever path he chose, a magus could be a magus. What he sought, he might well achieve.

Modern chroniclers would call this period the *High Mythic Age*: magic, though never easy, was more forgiving than it is now. Strange entities dwelled just out of sight, imparting secrets to those who mastered them. No Technocracy existed; indeed, its forebears and our own often broke bread together in peace. Sleepers respected us, the Church ignored us, and most kings bent their knees at our command. True, the age was never known for its luxury or hygiene. But in this world, sorcerers could become lords, and often did.

But lords fight. And our ancestors were no exception. Some people never have enough space or power, and so Hermetic brothers and sisters clashed over trivialities. Meanwhile, rapacious vampire-kings, night-beasts and mortal tyrants kept the era... interesting. In secure medieval lodges, our future rivals — those who would become the Daedalean Order — began their mechanistic dreams. It was a glorious age, agreed, but uncertain in the best of times.

RISE OF THE COVENANTS

By AD 700, war, rivalry, disease, Quiet and other attritions had made magery a dangerous vocation. With so much ancient lore forgotten, medieval wizards often turned to theft and murder to advance their Arts. Some "black magicians" were little more than brigands armed with spells instead of clubs. Defeated magi endured torture for their secrets, or lost their sanctuaries to looting sorcerers eager for an edge.

Worse, freedom began giving way to the Dominion — a rising paradigm wherein the Church, not wizardry, made the rules. The Scourge of God descended upon magi who dared too much or blasphemed too openly, while here and there bonfires began to kindle for mages who annoyed the priests. Scattered warlocks were no match for a religion that offered hope. In a world with little hope to have, the Church comforted the Sleepers' dreams.

There's strength in numbers, especially when authority reaches little further than arm's-length. And so despite the freedom the Mythic Ages offered, our forebears gathered to create safe havens for themselves. *Covenants*, so named for the agreements forged between inhabitants, grew throughout the western world. Strongholds of magic, these covenants provided stability, resources, influence and peasant labor, much like the monasteries of the Christian Church.

In the covenants, laws were harsh and quickly enforced. The banditry of the era forced Masters to be merciless. Expulsion, branding, death and worse were common punishments; even small missteps could threaten a covenant's survival, so few mistakes were tolerated. Like lords without a king, the Masters of each Covenant made laws, alliances and enmities, often on a whim. And so, the independent sorcerers — Hermetic and otherwise — chose to make their way alone.

Outside a covenant, a magus was fair game. He might be left to his own devices, or hounded, or go from one to the other with no warning at all. Precarious was the wizard's path back then....

But two Masters decided otherwise.

PAX HERMETICA: AD 767

The names of most Dark Age sorcerers have been lost to time. Trianoma was an exception. By now, you know the stories of her vision; of her travels to unite Hermetic wizards; her eventual alliance (some say love affair) with Bonisagus; and of the creation of the *Parma Magica* that allowed wizards to assemble without fear. Common lore or not, however, it's this quest that proves our greatest inspiration. For despite all that's gone before — the glories of Rome, the wisdom of Egypt, the vitality of Greece and the secrets of antiquity — it is here, with Trianoma and Bonisagus, that our Order truly begins.

In dark Durenmar, 12 wizards met: each a master of his or her Arts, each suspicious but willing to trust, each one favoring different traditions, but all united by a love of wizardry. Sounds familiar, does it not? Once again, a cycle manifests: mystic visionaries assemble a diverse group for common cause. As before, and as would occur again, these contentious fellows formed a council, declared laws, forged a common magic theory, and chose a symbol to unite them. At the Pax Hermetica, that symbol was Hermes, opener of ways and herald of the soul. Though forsaken and forgotten, his example would guide their Order.

If only it could have been that simple....

UNITY AND PAIN

No empire is built with peace, and ours was no exception. The very name "Order" implies that rule must be imposed upon chaos. Taking such imposition as a duty, the Houses began a familiar refrain: *join us or die*. Many wizards joined them. Many others died.

THE FOUNDERS

12 Masters, 12 Houses. That's how it began. But who were they, and which Houses did they sire?

- Mistress Bjornaer of the Many Shapes (House Bjornaer)
- Lord Bonisagus and Lady Trianoma (House Bonisagus)
- Lord Criamon the Enigmatic (House Criamon)
- Mistress Boann Diedne (House Diedne)
- Lord Tempus Flambeau the Bright (House Flambeau)
- Lord Augustus Alexander Jerbiton (House Jerbiton)
- Lord Henri Mercere (House Mercere)
- Lady Merinita of the Wood (House Merinita)
- Master Guernicus the Inviolat (House Quaesitor)
- Lord Tremere (House Tremere)
- Master Tytalus the Strong (House Tytalus)
- Lord Verditius the Clever (House Verditius)

(Note: See the end of this chapter and Chapter Two, for details about the Houses and Hermes' Code.)

The first 200 years of our foundation saw wonders and atrocities. The wonders included *Ars Hermetica*, the "universal metaphysic" that would later inspire the Nine Spheres theory. Conceived by Bonisagus and attuned with long experiment, this magic system derived from Alexandrian roots. Like the Hermetic Arts of earlier



days, it melded Egyptian, Hebrew, Greek and Roman theories, salted them with Gnostic refinements and Neo-Platonist philosophy, and wrapped it all in Hermes' dictum: *Know, and Ascend*.

Some magi didn't want to know or Ascend. And so, the Order had no lack of enemies. Celtic war-witches, Norse rune-crafters, Iberian Kabbalists, Slavic shamans and Arab wonder-workers broke both bread and skulls with magi of our Order... often the latter. Houses Tytalus, Tremere and Flambeau acquired the most violent reputations, but the aforementioned atrocities decorate all Houses.

In the early 800s, the Order expanded. Lady Pralix *bani* Tytalus gathered an alliance of Celtic sorcerers to destroy malignant storm-cultist Damhan-allaidh, "the Spider." Having finished her mission with a new group of friends, she declared them "the Order of Miscellanae." After some initial fury, the Order admitted Pralix's group as House Ex Miscellanae in 817. Hers would be the first — and most influential — of a new lineage of Houses. Traditionalists ranted, but Bonisagus stood firm. "Hermes," he said, "has wings. Should not our Order fly as well?"

Destiny was seized in 876, when Doissetep — ancient even then — joined our treasures. An alliance of Bonisagi, Flambeau, Quaesitori and Tytali took the fortress from its Nephandic liege; rather than fight over it, they decided to make Doissetep a haven for all Hermetic magi. Moving it from Turkey to the Pyrenees, the Masters turned it from a tumbled ruin to a monumental palace. For over 1000 years, it would remain the jewel in Hermes' crown.

Under Hermes' code, other covenants rose steadily, too. Some were mixed, others exclusive. In most cases, these strongholds bestowed prosperity upon the local folk; some, though, became cesspools of abuse... and the Sleepers recalled those far more often. It's a lesson we're trying to learn even now: nurture the Sleepers and you grow strong as well; exclude them, abuse them, and they *will* strike you down.

In time, the clannishness of some Houses — most notably Diedne — led to suspicion and often violence within the Order, too. There were reasons for this; some covenants tormented servants far beyond "civilized" standards; others imposed murderous apprenticeships, sexual slavery, cannibalism, or devilry. One notorious covenant, Malgreth's Reach, sheltered all forms of malignancy. Devoted to the demon lord Moliachus, the Master — one Arturian the Green — grew a flesh-eating forest and fed it with his rivals. It took 12 wizards from three covenants to eventually bring him down.

Arturian threw a long shadow. Though few other fellowships were so perverse, his name became a call for war. When Tasgillia *bani* Tytalus was also convicted of diabolism in 961, a wave of paranoia flooded the Order. In its wake, House Diedne fell under suspicion. And to our shame, it soon fell beneath a March as well.

THE WIZARDS' MARCH

A *Wizards' March* is a declaration of war. All Houses turn their energies toward a single target, usually wiping said target off the face of this world. During the Order's early years, Marches were called against several so-called "exotic" factions. But in 1003, we called one against our own.

For decades, the House of Tremere seeped like poison into the higher reaches of the Order. Initially a weak magus, Tremere

worked with Bonisagus to perfect a dueling method — *certamen* — that could resolve conflicts without killing the combatants. His mastery of that discipline, combined with irrepressible charisma and ruthless ambition, made Lord Tremere a force within the Order by millennium's turn. When Grainne *bani* Diedne publicly insulted Tremere's virility during convocation, Tremere began a campaign of slander against her House; soon, all the Order feared diabolism in the forests of Britain. Soon after, the Schism War began.

In fairness, House Diedne did themselves no favors. Descended from Druidic priests and led by the temperamental beauty Diedne, the House had been secretive from its beginnings. Haughty yet crude, these volatile Celts quarreled with nearly everyone, insulting lineage, potency and magical prowess, often in the same breath. Despite the Code, their masters refused to share secrets with the rest of the Order. These, at least, were justifications for the Order's anger. In hindsight, who can tell?

Nine bitter years of war cost Houses Flambeau and Tremere more than half their memberships, drove Bjornaer and Merinita into seclusion, and purged Diedne from the Order and this world. Rumors claimed that the survivors of the House had fled into Faerie, and later events seemed to prove those rumors true. A disaster for the Order, the Schism was a boon for Tremere. By its end, he and his House had consolidated vast powers while costing Quaesitor the first of many disgraces.

BLOOD AND FIRE

Threefold return fell heavily upon Tremere some years later. Bloated like an ambitious leech, ever-erratic Tremere and his apprentices captured several vampires in the House's Carpathian domain. Abominable experiments granted Tremere and his followers immortal powers; they also cost him the enmity of the Order and a bloodline of other *Massassa*. The secret took years to leak out; when it did, the carnage was staggering.

Firestorms. Mass eviscerations. Assaults from live-stone monsters. Curtains made from living skin. Consors and ghouls locked in mass warfare. Castles blown to shards. Towns burned, their people drained of blood. Dragons set loose in the Carpathian hills. Innards ripped magically from within living skin. And torture — so much torture that even our medieval cousins were horrified. In later years, Hermetic mages would refer to the First *Massassa* War as our Vietnam. No side truly won, both were devastated, and neither would ever be the same. This March raged for over a century. When we finally limped off claiming victory, our Order stood at less than 100 Awakened members, combined. The Tremere, we hoped, had suffered similar losses. But vampires breed more quickly than mages Awaken; had it not been for their other enemies within what passes for "society" among the undead, Hermes' legacy would have ended in that War.

DISTANT THUNDER

It was during that long purge that the first shudders of another, more desperate war began. The infamous Mistridge Fall of 1210 is common news today; when it occurred, however, the Quaesitori simply wrote it off as another casualty of the Tremere. Who would have imagined in the 13th century that mundane humanity could unleash such power?



Hermes may have open eyes, but his followers, I fear, do not.

Our shared history with the Daedaleans goes back to the Reed and Cup, to Rome and Athens, Alexandria's library and Solomon's Temple. We are, quite literally, two faces of the same card, seekers for enlightenment who refuse to be bound by convention. For millennia, we have worked beside one another in academies, laboratories, archives and battlefields. We even share a love for dominion through enlightenment. But whereas our Order favors personal mysticism, the Daedaleans prefer practical results. We seek the soul, while they seek the machine. Both sides demand perfection, but neither one agrees where it's found... or how it should be used.

At Mistridge, it was used to put cannons on the ground, followed swiftly by the ruins of our stronghold.

It's been said there was treachery involved, that Tremere warlock Grimgroth opened a secret passage inside the defenses. But it was the cannons that truly breached those walls. And it was their thunder that signed the beginning of the Ascension War.

The Tower turned for us again.

But the children of Hermes saw it not.

NEW HOUSES, NEW REWARDS

The new millennium *did*, however, see the birth of four new Houses:

- **House Golo**, whose founder Lorenzo discovered lost Greek lore translated into Arabic;
- **House Solificati**, whose path wandered from independence to our fellowship to the Order of Reason to a Tradition to dissolution before it led them here again;

- **House Ziracah**, whose founder Lady Alimont was famed for her beauty, deviousness and charm, and whose House became a center for *Ars Cupiditæ*;

- ...and **House Shaea**, a gathering of scholars with lineage back to ancient Egypt.

As the blood of the two great Marches dried, these new Houses revitalized our Order. Though Golo's defection and Solificati's intractability marred their contributions, Hermes' Houses would have been far poorer without their aid.

ARS CUPIDITÆ

A mastery of mind, body, soul and society, this discipline became an essential part of Renaissance magery. In the court intrigues that followed the Middle Ages, an effective agent needed taste, finesse, fashion and a few tricks up his sleeve. Thus was born *Ars Cupiditæ*, the Art of Desire.

A mixture of early psychology, physical exercise, swordsmanship and social graces, this expertise makes a person powerful by making him desirable. From the 1400s onward, *Ars Cupiditæ* formed the backbone of Hermetic power. From the courts of France to the halls of Doissetep, a magus without such skills was a buffoon at best, an errand-boy more often. And though the courtly flourish of the old *Cupiditæ* seems out of fashion now, its principles remain as viable as ever.

(Note: For more details about this discipline, see *The Swashbuckler's Handbook* supplement for *Mage: The Sorcerers Crusade*.)

THE WHITE TOWER

That aid was sorely needed. For while Hermetic fought Hermetic, a new and greater threat — one rooted in our own philosophy! — emerged.

The cannon fire at Mistrige was just the first volley of the war. In 1325, Craftmason thugs murdered the peaceful Archmagus Yoassmy of Brittany. They took her tower (again, that symbol!), sheered it of magic, and refurbished it. Less than a month later it served as the meeting-place for the Convention of the White Tower, the solemnization of the Daedalean Order.

For decades our shadow-cousins had assembled in guildhalls and cathedrals, built weaponry in forges far from our covenants, raised farms for folk who craved a greater freedom from lords and wizards, and taught curriculums in monasteries, laying groundwork for their later influence. Occupied as we were with feuds and fiefdoms, Hermes' magi never saw them. When Yoassmy fell, however, we noticed.

By then... well, you know the story.

ACADEMIES AND LODGES

Not all power is temporal. Although various Masters achieved great personal might, too often their contributions to the Order — and humanity itself — were fleeting. During the upheavals of the late medieval era, visionaries like Simone de Vellian, Marcius le Ictus and Andreas Litolff contended that magical puissance meant little if the world itself remained indifferent to you.

Noting the rise of both Dominion and Daedalean power, le Ictus declared, "*Reality belongs to those who claim it.*" And so, as war-mages threw their storms around, a subtler strand of magic wove its spell: *studia generalia*, secular universities, were founded among Europe's cities. Their foundations were built with Hermes' gold and wisdom, and their teachings concerned the betterment of man.

Naturally, these universities became yet another battleground. As the Daedaleans emerged, their scholars wrestled ours for the minds of mortal students. Thankfully, the carnage was more social than combustible... with one major exception: Litolff was killed in 1330 while lecturing in Paris. Hit by the Scourge, he was disgraced, killed and discredited after death. Riots followed, as club-wielding pupils of Litolff met club-wielding pupils of Daedalean professors. Although later conflicts would be subtler, both parties learned our lesson: the mind, too, is a battleground. Win it, and the field is yours.

OATH OF FIRE

By now, you know the tale that followed: the plagues and skirmishes; the witch-hunts and purges; the curses and conspiracies behind the scenes while nations grew. The Renaissance lent power to our Order, but its fruits enriched the Daedaleans, too. As arts and politics, science and culture rose like smoke from Constantinople, Europe witnessed an awakening unlike any since the glory days of Rome.

With that awakening came an Oath of Fire, first sworn in 1452 but whispered in Daedalean ranks far earlier. Our path, to them, was dangerous; our mystic kin and foes alike were deemed hazards to humanity. While we searched for Wisdom in bubbling vats and ancient spells, the Order of Reason was looking at a

greater canvas. We craved Ascension for ourselves. They wanted it for all humanity... except, of course, for us.

And so came the battles, first small, then ever larger:

- *The plague years*, when blights ravaged Sleeper and magus alike, leading to the fall of many covenants;

- *The Lodge Wars of Tuscany*, in which "true Masons" warred for power within Italy. Many of these folk were mortals, a handful were Awakened, and very few dealt with us at all. Even so, we felt the heat. Finally, Diplomat Luis of the Solificati brought many lodge-members to our door. From them, he re-forged his Tradition, soon bringing it to the Council of the Nine;

- *The Clockwork Purge*, when wizards fought Daedalean war-machines for the first time in southern Germany;

- *The Hundred-Years War*, when French, English and Burgundian sorcerers of all kinds joined the bloody mire;

- *Wyndgarde's March*, when witch-hunter Christopher Wyndgarde led armed forces across the British Isles;

- *The Burning of Baerwald*, when Germanic sorcerers rose up against the Gabrielites;

- *The Siege of Doissetep*, when Daedalean armies rained fire on Doissetep, forcing its relocation to the distant Realm of Forces;

- *The Battle of Flames*, when Hermetics and our Pagan kin roused dragons to defeat clockwork monstrosities...

...and so many more. By then, the war of words had become a clash of realities, a Sorcerers' Crusade which continues to this day, and which forced our proud forebears into an alliance that, for all its flaws, still holds.

FELLOWSHIP OF SWORDS

Much has been written about the Grand Convocation: the wise council of Baldric LaSalle, who defeated four dozen wizards in duels both magical and physical and gained the unity of Hermes behind the vision of the Seer; the proud deeds of Master Louis DuMonte, who rose from obscurity to glory as our ambassador within the First Cabal; the dragon-lords who seared Gabrielite crusaders in their own armor, melting the gears of High Artisan creations; the scholarship of Archivist Mulhouse, who compiled the Library of Horizon and shamed the deeds of Alexandria; the countless warriors both political and martial, whose skills assured the Council's survival. We had our lapses, true — our arrogant mien, our challenge that the other groups must prove their worth or leave — but after nine long years, we'd built something even Solomon would respect: the Realm of Horizon and the Council of the Nine.

This, in many ways, was Hermes' greatest hour. Although tradition holds a fond view of the Mythic Age, the slop and brutishness of those days throws the Renaissance Order into greater blaze. Our wizards were the pinnacle of the Council — sophisticated, strong, and cultured in ways our cousins could not hope to match. While many of them had recently crept from bogs or deserts, our Order had centuries of refinement both esoteric and practical. It was our strongholds that withstood Daedalean assault; our dragons that drove the clockworks down; our Quintessence that fueled mighty Horizon; our skills that built its hall both materially and politically, and our power that broke the siege of that great realm. The Code of Hermes became the bedrock of the Council; the *Ars Cupiditae* became our passport

to kings and princes. With the gold in our coffers and the archives at our command, we gave the Council its wealth. Although — quite rightly! — denied full leadership and dominance of the Council, our Order provided its foundation. Without us, there would have been no Nine Traditions.

As Artisan tanks rumbled across the plains and airships filled the skies, the inventors of Verditius matched the Daedaleans wonder for wonder; as conspirators of the High Guild whispered in the ears of kings, our diplomats were there to counter their suggestions. When lightning was needed, Flambeau and Tytali brought it down; when the thousand tongues of exotic sorcerers had to be deciphered, our Shaea unlocked the secrets of each language. I tell you, never before and never since has our Order stood in such high regard.

Not even the First Cabal debacle could stain our Houses. Although several representatives disgraced their peers, Master DuMonte died with honor. Our Quaesitori hunted down the Great Betrayer and helped scatter him to ashes. Although other Traditions took that disaster as a mortal blow, our Order never shook. The Solificati crumbled and the Verbena wailed, but Hermes merely sighed and continued on with his Great Work. We pieced together the fragments left by the Crowned Ones' departure and took alchemy as our own. King met Queen, Hermes brought Sophia to bed, and the Order prospered.

For a time...

THE SECOND BURNING

What man fears, he destroys. The Renaissance and the grand chaos that followed it gave mortals plenty to fear. And so, they destroyed on a scale not seen since the warrior-kings of Judea. Spanish and Portuguese traders bought African slaves from Arabian markets, inciting the rape of Africa. More Spaniards crossed the ocean and subjugated the natives they met there; other nations followed, and the peoples of the Americas — whom we had known distantly from our Council brethren — reeled before guns and disease. Christianity tore itself to shreds, rending Europe in the process. And as plagues and misery and royal fiat spread, bonfires were kindled for anyone who seemed "different."

And what did we do? To our eternal shame, not much.

Protected in our courtly splendor, we Hermetics rarely felt the flames. By the 1600s, we had achieved the halls of rulership. Mere hedge-witches and savages, we thought, did not concern us. We had risen from the mud, why not they? Our legacy of challenge, I fear, made us arrogant and cold. While the Dreamspeakers and Verbena brought horror-stories to Horizon (usually followed by refugees, which didn't help matters, I'm afraid), the Masters of our Arts locked tower doors and raised wards against their resentment. Decade after decade, we ignored their protestations.

In hindsight, I think our leaders feared a return to the Dark Ages if we intervened. The Daedaleans and their devices, the monsters found in Africa and the Americas, the plagues that whipped across the seafaring world, the vampires crawling around the lot of it, the Muslims who by now had forsaken scholarship for swords — I think the Masters of our Order saw too many parallels to our early days. Now comfortable in their palaces and realms, they didn't want to risk another fall for the sake of those who could not save themselves.

Or perhaps they were just racist, heartless bastards blinded by their own gold and power.

Myself, I wasn't born in those days. But from the things I've seen and read, I think I see the truth involved those elements, and more.

In any case, their distance cost us much. What would have happened, I wonder, if the Order's dragons had flown to defend Africa or the Iroquois? If we had raised storms against the Inquisition, doused the fires of Lutheran witch-finders? Would our Council have been stronger if we'd stood beside the Akashics against the British? In other realms, perhaps, we might find the answer. As it was, our Masters focused inward. It cost us more than we could know.

AT PLAY AMONG KINGS

Hermes has always had a monarchist streak. Though he's a trickster to whom rules do not apply, he's been messenger and guide to godly kings. From Thothmes' temples to Elizabeth's courts, we Hermetics have followed his example, playing Merlin to more secular authorities.

Three new Houses rose from the golden age of kings:

- **House Tharsis**, storm-wizards who prospered from their deep connection to the sea;
- **House Validas**, English deists who employed machines, Kabbalah and high ritual to evoke "God the Great Clockmaker";
- ...and **House Janissary**, a Persian/Arab sect that restored our link with the Muslim world. In time, these war-masters would become enforcers for House Quaesitor... an office we would all regret.

And so, as the so-called "age of reason" dawned, our Order bore its aegis. Master Paracelsus (who claimed no House) ignited imaginations among the wise. John Dee *bani* Bonisagus, disreputable Edward Kelly, and their consort Susan Lammond *bani* Ziracah held Elizabeth's confidences; codifying the ancient secrets of Enochian, they secured it for posterity. Other wizards danced in Hapsburg halls, shared sup with Louis XIV, traded witticisms with Marguerite of Navarre and advised Catherine de'Medici where *not* to place her trust. House Ziracah secured places at all the best tables, while Tharsis buccaneers carved wealth from Port Royale. Gold and wisdom favored our Tradition, and with kings we shared that favor.

When those kings began to fall, the impact shook great Hermes to his core.

HEADS ROLL

Rebellion is no recent thing. But when Cromwell's Ironsides threw down King Charles, we felt the axe on our own necks. At the Battle of Nasby in 1645, two Houses — Validas and Ziracah — lost more than half their number. It was supposed to be a March, a grand restoration of the Mythic Age's glory; it turned into a disaster. Howling demons and rifts in space devoured the Hermetics whole. Few escaped, none of them intact.

Nasby has been called The Fall or the Great Scourging, a lesson about our limitations. Giddy from the wild Mythic Age and our wild battles with the Daedaleans, our elders assumed that we'd be free to do the same again. But the world was changing; the Dominion, of which we'd known for centuries, was becoming the *Consensus* — a new design in which our arts became "impossible" on earth.

How much of this came from Daedalean fiat? How much from the fear of Sleepers? How much was punishment for our hubris, and how much simply a turning of the world? No answer has been found. In any case, the Mythic Age had clearly ended. Although sorcery would live on for centuries, the great magics of early days became suicide.

Poor Charles was only the first crowned head to fall. New lands bred new ideals, and none of those ideals included rulership from distant thrones. Although the courts of Europe grew grand on foreign wealth, those courts became glass shells, too fragile to endure.

TARNISHED WINGS, CRUITBLING HOUSES

Like the kings with which we played, our Masters retreated from their worldly cares. If magic was denied on earth, then why remain earthbound at all? The great Otherworldly realms forged for the Council offered solitude for contemplation. And so, while minor sorcerers like Faustus and Saint-Germain titillated mortal fancies, our greatest minds retreated to Horizon, Doissetep and other realms.

Once again, the Tower turned. And once again, we did not see it.

Thus, vital Hermes shed his wings. Where once he'd darted across the sky, he now moldered in seclusion, gazing at cracked parchment as if it held the future, not the past. Younger Disciples still dared the world of man, but our Masters — who could have shared so much! — grew dusty beards and sullen frowns.

As Hermes' world became Hermes' past, our brethren reached for darker toys. Diabolism, the forbidden Art that even Solomon used with care, gained glamour in the rising age. As smokestacks, coalmines and gunfire filled the mortal world with smoke, a Hell on earth seemed most appropriate. First House Validas, then Tharsis made diabolism into policy. Was it desperation, boredom, disillusionment or curiosity that opened those hearts to fire? In any case, they needed lessons — and received them. Too small for Wizard Marches, those Houses were renounced, attacked and expelled from our dominions. More waves of paranoia washed through our halls, and so we shut our doors more tightly and stared once more at the past.

Between the falls of Validas and Tharsis, another House was purged. House Ziracah, which for centuries had opened doors to kings, was destroyed by one. Mad King George was known for sometimes-fatal whims; Ziracah's last Primus, "Laughing Jack" Dominator, was known for his carousing. A friend to Sir Robert Dashwood and Ben Franklin, Jack became embroiled in the Hellfire Club fiasco. Accused of Satan-worship, conspiracy and — worst of all — aiding the rebellious colonies, Jack and his associates were hunted down by redcoats, and died from torture, gaol, Paradox or the headsman's axe.

Fortunately, America had better legacies to bring. In 1872, House Luxor, "the House of Light," was formed. Founded by an Englishman and his American friend (some said lover), this House brought Hermes to the new land. With Tharsis fading and the other Houses indifferent or even hostile to "the colonies," House Luxor had a brave effect. Infused with pioneer spirit, this new House captured the intensity of our bygone Order. Despite success, however, Luxor's mages were never treated seriously. Discouraged, they drew away. By 1900, they had little to do with us; by 1940, they were gone.

ALCHEMISTRY

It's not really about turning lead into gold, you know. Despite such myths, alchemy's true purpose is to refine that which is imperfect (the human form and spirit) into perfection — immortality.

Drawn from Greek science, Egyptian religion, Chinese Taoism and an Arabian synthesis of all the others, alchemy is an individual quest. Like a scientist in an airtight lab, the alchemist removes himself from outside corruptions, measures his ingredients carefully, notes each success or failure, and drafts his findings in codes indecipherable to all but skilled initiates.

In theory, the process seems simple: an imperfect subject is treated with various processes until it decays, breaks down, and reforms into a new and splendid treasure. In practice, alchemy involves trial, error, frustration and patience... in its way, a form of self-perfection that transforms the seeker himself into something better. It's the microcosm/ macrocosm principle: by working changes on your world, you make changes in yourself. The reverse is also true.

When people — even alchemists — think of the art, they just remember the lead/gold part. In between those stages, though, there's always *putrefaction*: decay. Before perfection, there must be corruption. It's part of the process. Hopefully, that decay can be turned around, transforming the subject into its highest state:

Intentionally or otherwise, the Order of Hermes may have been practicing a form of group-alchemy on its fellowship all these years. If so, will they be successful, or is this putrefaction permanent? And if this passing "age of dust" is the Order's putrefaction, what gold might soon emerge from it? All good questions for the future....

THE AGE OF DUST

When Tharsis fell to judgment in 1897, it seemed our Order was a ghost. By then, the kings were tottering, replaced by nation-states and independent rule. Queen Victoria, the last great monarch, held Europe by ties of blood and honor. But such ties stretch only so far, and were fraying quickly in the Industrial Era's rush. The kings, of course, thought otherwise; to them, the "civilization" they constructed was the best of human worlds. And so, oblivious to the echoes of the American Civil War, these last kings built great war machines, unaware of the shockwaves both would cause.

And Hermes? His earthly wealth was great, but his vision peered beyond our world. Within modern Olympuses, his followers governed storm and archive. Our Archmasters — their lives prolonged to ages by alchemical Arts — removed themselves from worldly cares; wrapped in esoterica or plot, they became like the realms they ruled — distant and implacable. The few youngsters (I was one) who dared approach their thrones were given stern tasks and endless study. "Someday," they told us, "you'll achieve our heights." Meanwhile, they did everything they could to make sure that never happened.

House Verditius proved a case in point: inspired by Industrial innovations, they built great machines and strange devices. Elder sorcerers were horrified — how did these... these *technocrats* become our kin? In a series of blame and banishment, the old wizards drove Verditius into disgrace, stripped it of full House status, and forced the few members who didn't quit outright into House Ex Miscellanea. Ironically, this drove many Verditians straight to the technocrats they feared. The Order of Reason, now reorganizing itself into the Technocratic Union, welcomed these inventors into its fellowship.

Some later returned within the Sons of Ether. Most never came back at all.

DANGERØUS GØDS

Hermes tells us *You can become a god*. But as his own myths testify, gods can be capricious things. Robbed of human perspective, they become alien tyrants cloaked in thunder. Might becomes the only right, and no vision is acceptable save their own.

Within Horizon, Doissetep, Fors Collegis Mercuris and other realms, our Archmasters sought divinity. Having lost their mortal home, they drew their lives out for generations with alchemy and spell. In the name of challenge, they conspired over trifles. Their apprentices (I was one) were sent like agents into the world, but denied much reward in our own chantries. In their towers, these old wizards brooded. Sometimes they fought, but more often they let others do that for them. Our fellow Traditions drew further back. The Council owed our Order much, but those debts stirred resentment more than camaraderie.

Old Doissetep became our Zeus' throne. Like Olympus, it housed gods without number and quarrels without end. Among these frail divinities, three Masters came to represent the struggles of those years: Porthos Fitz-Empress *bani* Flambeau, of the Drua'shi; Caeron Mustai *bani* Janissary, of the Ever-Reddened Sword; and Getulio Vargas Sao-Cristavao *bani* Tytalus, our

chancellor to Horizon and our Nemesis before that Council. Other Archmasters left their marks, of course, but these three men — for good and ill — set the tone for the coming century:

Master Porthos was the diplomat. Though half-mad and occasionally murderous, he had an eye on the future and kind words for the young. It's been said that his tottered sanity came from self-awareness: Porthos knew his age and power drew him further from Ascension, yet he pursued it with missionary zeal. In that pursuit, he became all that he saw hindering our Tradition, but still he knew that if he faltered, other Masters would take his place and probably do worse.

Master Caeron was Porthos' greatest rival, his opposite in almost every way. Despite affectations of youth-culture, he used lesser mages as his pawns. A conspirator through and through, he dedicated himself to destroying our Technocratic rivals, yet saved plenty of malice for his Hermetic cousins, too. Everyone owed him, no one trusted him, and if anyone save Porthos and Master Avis Malone *bani* Bonisagus dared oppose him, they never did so openly. Since his death, Mustai has come to epitomize all that was wrong with our Order. In life, though, he was considered its greatest strength.

And then we have Sao Christavao — a proud man who probably deserved better than his legacy. Our face before the Council, he served poorly indeed. It was Sao Christavao who insulted the Iroquois, incensed the Verbena, and encouraged the Batini to leave their seat and return to their homelands for good. Abrasive, haughty and too powerful to ignore, he became "the bad Hermetic," symbol for all we had become. Disgraced and removed (bodily) from his Council seat by Porthos, he left a bad taste among our brethren in spite of many good deeds he performed.

All three men have since died — brought down by tumbling Towers, one and all. But for a time, they presented Hermes' face before the world. Not always wisely, not often well, but with all



the power they could bear. That power shaped the realms they dwelled within, the mages living there, and the very atmosphere of Hermes' chambers... an atmosphere that presaged a storm.

A CENTURY OF STORITIS

Queen Victoria was the herald of proverbial "interesting times." During her life, an interest in faeries, mysticism and ancient Egypt arose against Industrial squalor. This rebellion began in the late 1800s, when spiritualists, occultists and archeologists ignited Sleeper consciousness with discoveries and deceptions. Although the procession of cults, prophets, séances, bunksters, "pharaoh's curses," Penny Dreadfuls, sideshows, witches, Masonic lodges and other hokum had little to do with Hermes, they proved that mankind wanted magic, *desired* magic. Victorian high society (in which many of our Order traveled) may have had a mechanistic air, but beneath the stiff facade, the mortals craved enchantment.

It's been said the "secret and ascended masters" that informed Dion Fortune, the Golden Dawn and others were of Hermetic origin. I don't know, but I doubt it was the Order's plan. Some Masters may have used *Ars Mentis* to stir the brains of mortal pawns, but most seemed to have better things to do. Regardless, the earthly mystics began to claim that world for us again. The iron door of Reason began to creak...

And then it shattered.

THE GREAT WAR

Victoria's death set machines in motion. The last kings took to quarreling. Soon iron crows began to flap their wings. Like so many other kings, the heads of empires beat their war-drums, sending soldiers marching. If they'd watched the United States, they might have known what to expect.

Gas. Machine-guns. Barbed wire and airplanes. Muddy trenches breeding filth. Boys herded into meat-grinders called "no man's land." Then pestilence on a global scale.

So much for order. So much for the Machine. So much for the empires that had bred them both. By 1920, all was broken.

And then *our* War began in earnest.

You know the tale: the Technocratic Order declared its Pogrom; our Council tossed magic in the cracks of science; the Mad Ones blossomed and the Fallen conspired, and Reality went up for grabs.

The last century's Ascension battles recalled the Renaissance: unbridled courage and open war. Though "vulgar" magics remained hazardous, the new conflict allowed new rules. Like mortals, we adopted fresh technologies; the Sons of Ether and later the Adepts joined our Council, while the Technocrats sent their machines against us.

If the battle-lines had been drawn that clearly, things might have gone more logically. But war is never clear, and man is rarely logical. The lines of nation and bigotry that lead to hell on earth bind men and mages both. And so, when Hitler and his allies raised their swords, Hermes himself was divided.

HERITIES AT THE GATES OF TROY

Homer wrote of the Trojan War, when friends slew friends and fathers slew daughters and great empires fell to ruins, all for pride. That same pride and sense of destiny tore our Council and

the Technocrats in half. We were both Hector and Achilles, then — both strong and full of fire.

Given time, I could recite a thousand names and tales of Hermetic mages who fought and died for either freedom or the Nazi flag. It does us no great credit that several prominent members of Baron von Sebottendorf's Thule Society were Hermetic mages; then again, even more of them belonged to the Verbena Tradition. There was plenty of blame to go around, and plenty of blood and honor shed before the greatest war in history was over.

Perhaps our brightest hour — our D-Day, as it were — was the *Sundering of Berlin*. A huge cabal of Nephandic masters had prepared an endgame of monumental proportions — no less than a mass sacrifice to summon through the Qlippothic hordes. An equally huge force of Tradition and Technocratic mages broke the wards, smashed the ritual, and bound the Fallen masters beyond the Great Horizon. As with the Battle of Flames and Horizon Siege, it was Hermetic Arts that closed one gate, opened another, and locked them both securely. House Flambeau lost 24 mages, House Tytalus 10, House Quaesitor seven and House Shaea, four. Since 1945, those spells have held. Not even the catastrophes that followed could undo them.

CRACKS

It should have been euphoria. Instead, it was disgrace. In the glare of the Atomic Age, our Masters withdrew once more to contemplate man's ruin. Humanity, it seemed, still wanted war. Less than 10 years after World War II, other wars began. This time, godlike powers of destruction lie in *Sleepers'* hands! The implications drove Archmasters mad. In their Otherworlds, they sought escape.

And the Technocracy rolled on....

On earth, humanity rebelled. Hippies and venal slobbs wiped their arses on Victoria's sobriety. To mages who'd been raised with manners, the excesses of this age were handfuls of shit smeared across our principles. The Cultists and Dreamspeakers may have prospered, but Hermetic discipline seemed quaint at best. This just made our Masters more fixated on antiquity, and drove them further into their handmade worlds.

As if they could escape themselves....

Resonance is a subtle thing. Unless you look for it, the changes that it works upon your world seem minor. But minor changes breed major shifts. The realms of Doissetep, Horizon and so on grew too volatile to last.

For all their wisdom, our Archmasters forgot *le Ictus'* declaration: *Reality belongs to those who claim it*. And as the witch-folk say, you claim your world simply by existing in it. Hermes' children are no exception. By building worlds to our design, then isolating ourselves within them, we Hermetics crossed The Tower with The Devil. Our stagnation demanded change.

Porthos saw it. Mark Hallward Gillan saw it. The latter was cast out at the command of his own House, Flambeau, for seeing it too clearly. As a young, outspoken rebel, he epitomized our newest generation — one that could not have recognized its elders as the vital magi they once had been. They had little use for Horizon, less for Doissetep, and no patience left for either one.

And when the Conflagration came, it would be this generation — *your* generation — that would help Hermes soar again.

SOUL OF HERMES: HERMES INVICTUS



The word is not just a sound or a written symbol. The word is a force; it is the power you have to express and communicate, to think, and thereby to create the events in your life.... The word is... the tool of magic.

— Don Miguel Ruiz, *The Four Agreements*

Tranquility reigns in the Realm of Forces. Although it's true that storms lash the naked rock and seas smash beleaguered shores to sand, those tempests pale in comparison to those that raged here not long ago.

Amid the ruins, tiny creatures feed. Now and then, an odd ghost or greedy mortal will crouch upon the tumbled slag, seeking solace or an unfound prize. Occasionally, you might hear raised voices on the wind, echoes of arguments long resolved. The tread of giants skirts this place; even in the wizards' absence, some habits never die.

Smashed hulks of Umbral ships jut from the soil like dead men's fingers. Glassine boils mark the spots where science and high sorcery warred without limits on the driven plane. But all that's over now. The wind alone now scours these ragged hills, sweeping masters and slaves alike into the ever-whirling sky.

But every so often, a Master dares the Avatar Storm to bring a younger magus here. Even more occasionally, a youth tempts the Fates and visits the place alone. These ruins mark the end of an era for the Order of Hermes; more importantly, they mark the birthplace of redemption. And though no visitor has been crass enough to erect a stone here in the name of Hubris, the lesson's obvious just the same.

This is what happens when wisdom gives way to power.

This is where the Order died, and was reborn.

OUR SINS REINTERBED

He called himself "Heylel." Supposedly the reincarnation of the Great Betrayer, he touched off the *Doissetep Conflagration*, led the *Concordia War*, and inspired a legion of young wizards to rise against their elders. Although the Seer Akrites disproved his claim, this false Heylel rang in the *Reckoning*, the cracking of our Order's chains and the rebirth of its soul.

It began with rumors. Then shouts. Then thunder. A fuse had been powdered in Doissetep for some time; false Heylel lit the match. The explosion rocked all known worlds and brought Doissetep down forever. Master Mustai died in the Conflagration; Master Porthos died to contain it. Without his sacrifice, the devastation would have proved far worse. As it was, our Order lost most of its wealth, its archives, its Archmasters and its shackles.

For this is the lesson of Trump 16, The Tower: That which builds, can isolate; that which is constructed can be destroyed. From that destruction comes new freedom. Security is lost, but potential is regained.

Soon after, the False Heylel broke through Horizon's wards with a small but vengeful army. Every slight, each insult laid by arch-wizards on young cousins was borne through that passage and thrown against Horizon's walls. Although the assault ended within hours, it ruined the city and poisoned the realm; the *Concordia War* lingered for months to come. Stragglers fought loyalists across Horizon's vast expanse, and even the most faithful Disciples had to admit that these

guerillas, while misguided, had a point. The Council *had* stagnated and used young mages as fodder. Wisdom *had* taken a back seat to power. In the aftermath, we knew, things had to change. False Heylel had only spoken what so many knew was true.

HARSH RECKONING

It took time for that lesson to sink in, however. Doissetep's Conflagration touched off another war, the *War in Ruins*, during which mages of all factions fought for the treasures left behind. For months, Tradition wizards, Technocrats, Nephandi and anyone else who could reach the Realm of Forces picked the chantry's bones while adding new ones to the pile. It took the Avatar Storm to end this conflict, and even now the occasional skirmish flares up when some scavenger manages to reach the ruins, only to find another already there.

And then there was Bangladesh. Awakened, perhaps, by the other shockwaves, a prehistoric vampire-god ended its millennia-long slumber and began to feed. Our Technocratic cousins, ever subtle, caused an arguably worse catastrophe by dropping a series of nuclear bombs on the creature. Millions of deaths and the potential for more marked a new era in our struggle. The Technocratic leadership made clear its position: We no longer care about the Sleepers. Step too far outside our lines, and we will annihilate you.

House Tytalus refused to accept this ultimatum. To shrug aside the limits placed by this modern age on our ancient Arts, several Tytali revived the Massassa War. Heady with stolen vampire blood, they plunged the Council of Nine into a Second Massassa War. The struggle, though brief, was epic; like the first, this War ended in a draw, with massive suffering on all sides, and was hardest of all, perhaps, on the Sleepers caught between the blades.

It was all too much, I'm afraid, for the members of House Criamon. Always sensitive to psychic tides, the Criamoni went almost collectively mad from the carnage. Although this venerable House still survives, it is weak — perhaps beyond salvation. But Criamon has not been the only casualty of these Reckoning times: the Second Massassa War ravaged Houses Flambeau, Thig and Janissary. The former two took incredible losses in the fighting, while Janissary — suffering the death of Caeron Mustai at Doissetep — failed to hide its Infernal corruption. No one admits it openly, but I believe the Quaesitori stepped aside while one of our fellow Traditions purged this final stain upon our honor. When the killing was done, House Janissary was officially renounced from Hermes' company. All living Tytali were branded and censured, and House Thig dissolved, its members fleeing to other Houses or leaving our Tradition completely.

The turning of Julian's Millennium brought great challenge to our fellowship. Not since the Dark Ages, I think, have the Houses of Hermes felt such bitter loss.

And yet....

HERMES REBORN

It should have been the end.

It wasn't.

Instead, the Conflagration was our rebirth.

We dared the fires, rode the shocks. Like so many times before, we met the challenge and survived. If the Fall of Rome, Dark Ages, *massassa* and our own demons couldn't kill us, surely nothing can.

The last two years have seen the birth of four new Houses:

- **Hong Lei**, which ties us to our lost cousins in the Far East;
- **House Ngoma**, which rights an ancient wrong by admitting — at long last! — a fellowship of Africans first spurned at the Convocation so many years ago;
- **House Solificati**, which likewise completes a cycle of those times, restoring what was lost to Hermes' fold;
- ... and **House Xaos**, which has risen from Thig's wreckage to bring Hermes into the new millennium.

Three cycles completed, and a new beginning — an auspicious portent for an auspicious time.

The overused metaphor of Phoenix seems trite, yet appropriate here. For through the fires of own apparent doom, we have risen young again... wiser, one hopes, but unhindered by old restraints. Having survived the worst, we are *invictus*: unconquered, invincible.

Our Order is eternal.

Some say we have lost the Ascension War. Don't believe that for a second. Despite the prevalence of science, the Technocracy has *not* triumphed.

We have.

For Hermes is imagination. Consciousness. Awareness. He's the Crosser of Ways and the Herald of Transformation. He might fly on wings of sorcery, or fiber-optic cable. His wings might gild sandals or personal computers. It doesn't matter. Hermes *flies*.

He dances. So must we.

TECHGNØSIS: THE PLAYFUL WORLD

The old Archmasters feared the march of technology. Your generation, though, embraces it. Most vitally, the *Sleepers* embrace it. They treasure it. And despite our fears that they would use

technology to rob the world of wonder, they've done the opposite. Technology now crafts *new* wonders, enchantments no bog-sage could possibly conceive. It opens minds and illuminates the spirit.

Look to your theatres and bookstore shelves, television programs and computer games. What do you see?

Magic.

That's what the people want.

The idols of today's youth ride broomsticks or wield spells. They fight balrogs and cyborgs, learn witchcraft and microtechnology. The children themselves bear Tolkien and *Linux for Dummies* in the same bookbag; chat in cybertongues to distant friends; don virtual disguises to enter imaginary worlds where aliens and faeries are one and the same.

And when they mature, these brave children learn to think around corners. To fly on words and unlock puzzles, weave illusions and craft new colors. Mastering arcane codes and words of power, they'll summon Umbrood that Great Solomon never knew existed.

And some of them even make that final leap: Awakening to our Reality.

How Hermetic.

How *like* that Trickster, to confound his enemies this way! For using Technocratic tools to undo Technocratic Order is a jest worthy of the Thief of Olympus. Mythic Hermes stole Apollo's cattle; modern Hermes steals the "cattle" from the Technocratic god — using their own goads to do it!

By crackling down like lightning through this electronic age, he invites the Sleepers to rise again with the serpents of Awareness. Up a Tree of Life that's forever changing, he returns Sophia to the Crown.

And by forcing us, his children, to crawl through underworlds on our way to glory, Hermes offers us a mystery worthy of Eleusis.

With our graybeards shorn and our dust blown away, let us rise to this new challenge and embrace this new and mystic age.

Challenge. Birth. Decay. Rebirth.

Why did it take so long to see?

THE ORIGINAL MASTERS AND HOUSES

When 11 magi swore oaths to Bonisagus, they had no idea they'd be initiating a magical group that would last over a thousand years with little change. While things have altered somewhat within the Order, its stability has been remarkable. Consider this: the Pax Hermetica occurred roughly 50 years before Charlemagne, 300 years before the Norman Conquest, 700 years before Columbus, 1000 years before the United States and 1200 years before the personal computer. All told, things haven't changed much.

The original Houses occupy a special place in the Hermetic heart. Although several have fallen out of favor — or fallen completely — every Hermetic is expected to know at least the basics of each Foundation House. (For more details, see Chapter Two.)

• **House Bjornaer**: A rustic fellowship of shapechangers, founded by a Germanic witch and dedi-

cated to self-mastery. Assumed into the Verbena Tradition during the Grand Convocation.

• **House Bonisagus**: An order of theoreticians, founded by Grand Unifiers Bonisagus and Trianoma. Still active, but barely.

• **House Criamon**: Bizarre esotericists dedicated to mad pursuits; founded by secretive illusion-master Criamon, who spoke in riddles (when he spoke at all). Subsumed into Ex Miscellanea during the 1700s, and nearly wiped out during the 1990s.

• **House Diedne**: Celtic wizards descended from Druidic traditions. Founded by young priestess Diedne, who renounced her mentor to join Bonisagus. Wiped out during the Schism War, but reputed to be "out there somewhere..."

• **House Flambeau**: Tempestuous order of fire-wizards, dedicated to the cleansing flame. Founded by Iberian nobleman Flambeau, this House remains alive and well in the 21st century.

House Jerbiton: Social diplomats, versed in arts as well as Arts. Founded by Roman nobleman with no great taste for magic, this house declined during the Middle Ages, joined Ex Miscellanea near 1300, flourished during the Renaissance, and currently enjoys new vitality.

• **House Mercere:** Masters of politics, communication and conspiracy, weak in magic but strong in will. Founded by Mercere, who lost his powers soon after the House's foundation. Subsumed into House Fortunae during the 1930s after 300 years in Ex Miscellanea.

• **House Merinita:** Fae-mystics with nature affinities. Founded by faerie-blooded Lady Merinita of the Wood, the House declined after most of its notables disappeared into the Otherworlds. Involved in Ex Miscellanea since the 1300s, once waxing, now waning.

• **House Quaesitor:** Judges and lawgivers, empowered by Master Guernicus and Trianoma to enforce order within the Order. Still active, but battered by years of oversight and misjudgment.

• **House Tremere:** Charismatic masters of dominance and intrigue, assembled from a cult of personality around Lord Tremere. After dominating the Order in its early years, House Tremere turned the Order against House Diedne, perhaps to conceal its own dabblings with vampirism. Thought exterminated in the Middle Ages, but very much alive... or undead, as it were... today.

• **House Tytalus:** Devotees of Supreme Will, gathered by warlike Master Tytalus to challenge other wizards. Always powerful, the House now lies in ruins after the Second Massassa War.

• **House Verditius:** Master artisans who make wondrous devices. Founded by Verditius, who never mastered a single spell, the House prospered during the Renaissance, fell out of favor during the Industrial Revolution, and has become quite powerful today.

NEWER HOUSES

Despite its traditional nature, the Order recognizes innovation... to a point. Thus, several new Houses have joined and left the Order since its foundation. The record for such Houses is mixed, but successful enough to encourage future experiments.

• **House Ex Miscellanea (founded 817):** A collection of various "exotic" traditions, founded by Pralix *bani* Tytalus decades after the Pax Hermetica. Often a dumping ground for old Houses and a spawning pool for new ones.

• **House Fortunae (founded 1910):** Seers and chronomancers, founded within Ex Miscellanea by Hassam al-Jadidi ibnu Faridi in 1900s and promoted to full House status in 1936.

• **House Golo (1171-1188):** Forerunners to the Sons of Ether, founded within Ex Miscellanea by Lorenzo Golo to

promote magical science. When Golo quit the Order in 1188, House members either moved to the early Order of Reason, or joined Bonisagus and Verditius.

• **House Hong Lei (2000):** Chinese ritualists descended from the Wu Lung. Founded by Hsiao Kuei, and currently under probationary status.

• **House Janissary (1700-2001):** Fearsome Arabian/Turkish war-mages. Founded by Dincer Albayrak and once very influential, Janissary was crippled by the Doissetep Conflagration and wiped out during the Second Massassa War.

• **House Luxor (1872-1936):** First American House, founded to explore common ground between science, spiritualism and religion. Founded by Max Theon and Paschal Beverly Randolph (the first black Hermetic Master); later crippled by the Great Depression and subsumed into the Sons of Ether.

• **House Ngoma (2001):** High ritualists descended from African would-be Tradition. Founded within the Order by Alyissha Abadeet, but rooted in the 1300s.

• **House Shaea (1412/1982):** Masters of language and communication, based in ancient Egypt. Allowed into Ex Miscellanea in 1412, formally inducted under Maraksha Kashaf in 1982.

• **House Skopos (2000):** Tiny sect dedicated to quantum reality; founded by Spiro Hatzis, Skopos has a handful of members and much potential.

• **House Solificati (1315/1999):** Supreme alchemists originally founded in 1315 by Luis Tristan de Varre as an independent group. After a long, checkered history, they joined the Order in 1999.

• **House Tharsis (1522-1897):** Storm-mages based around water, weather and sea-travel. Founded by Samuel Nash (*a.k.a.* Master Tharsis), the House prospered during the Exploration and Colonial eras. Wiped out by Order due to diabolic corruption.

• **House Thig (1846-1999):** Malcontent futurists, gathered by Joseph Ryelander. Crippled after the Doissetep Conflagration and the Concordia War. Ruminants founded House Xaos in 2001.

• **House Validas (1557-1700):** Founded by "Shining Edward" Validas, the House enjoyed success during Elizabeth's reign, but was decimated by the Nasby Catastrophe. Renounced for diabolism, Validas became an Infernal sect which may still be active in rural England.

• **House Xaos (2001):** Neo-Discordian chaos mages, founded by Kallisti from the ruins of House Thig, considered a joke by most Hermetics.

• **House Ziracah (1327-1780):** Masters of Ars Cupiditae, founded by Lady Alimont Ziracah, later associated with Edward Kelly. Weakened during Nasby Catastrophe, destroyed when survivors ran afoul of King George III.



CHAPTER TWO: THE WILL AND THE WORD

*For all that meets the bodily sense I deem
Symbolical, one mighty alphabet
For infant minds: and we in this low world
Placed with our backs to bright Reality,
That we may learn with young unwounded ken,
The substance from the shadow.*

— Coleridge, "The Destiny of Nations"

RANK AND PRIVILEGE



The Order of Hermes is the most rigidly hierarchical of the Nine Mystic Traditions. In years past, all decision-making within the Order hinged on the whims of the most powerful mages, as represented by their ranking within the Nine Degrees (the Order's system for quantifying mystic advancement). Though influence and favors played a significant role, it was raw, sorcerous power that served as the primary coin of the Order's realm. Even today, this system largely

holds, with the words of the most potent mages shown greater deference and carrying greater weight than those of younger and less experienced willworkers. This formula, supported by the "might makes right" ethic of certámen, has served to ensure that greater command of the Spheres remains the surest way to make one's voice heard within the Order of Hermes.

THE APPRENTICE

Every mage in the Order shares one simple distinction: all were once newcomers to this proud and ancient Tradition. Most served out that time as Apprentices of the Order, recruited by a mentor of some sort who guided them through the first fumbling stages of the demanding Hermetic curricula and who introduced them, in time, to the intricacies of the Spheres. Hermetic mages draw their Apprentices from many different places: the halls of academia, the military, rigorous scientific or scholarly disciplines, esoteric religious or mystic doctrines or, of course, one of the several hereditary Hermetic families that still remain. Each would-be *mater* or *pater* chooses an Apprentice that best suits his or her own personality, field(s) of research and time constraints, but, virtually without exception, Hermetic recruits share a few qualities: a focused and hungry mind, a disciplined spirit, the

vague awareness that something is “wrong” with the world, and the drive to rise above that “wrongness” through the pursuit of personal betterment.

RECRUITMENT

Until very recently, the task of actually gathering up Apprentices for the Order fell almost exclusively to the mages of House Fortuna (who were regarded as the most sociable of the Order’s willworkers). With their knowledge of probability and fate, the Numismancers were generally viewed as being the most effective at determining ideal candidates for Order recruitment (the best and brightest among Sleepers). The fall of Doissetep and Horizon, the deaths of the Masters, the Second Massasa War and the rest of the general chaos that has come to envelop the Order of late, however, have all conspired to put a cramp in House Fortuna’s style.

Within the past year or so, the Order’s chains of communication have degraded considerably, and requests for new Apprentices are just as likely to get lost, misfiled or ignored as letters of greeting, demands for Tass or desperate pleas for help from far-flung Horizon Realms. Thus, many Order mages have returned to the custom of hunting down their own Apprentices. Despite the extra hardships such an endeavor brings (as Order mages rarely monitor a prospective Apprentice for less than a few years before actively approaching him), most Hermetics still take their duties to train new mages for the Order very seriously and manage to find or, more often, make the time.

During the course of the recruitment process (and it is important to always bear in mind that the Order’s recruitment is a process), the aspiring mentor will attempt to secretly test the prospective student using a variety of difficult logical, ethical and esoteric conundrums. If at all possible, these will be administered as inconspicuous occurrences in the individual’s life. Hermetic Adepts and Masters who occupy positions of authority in the fields from which the Order recruits have the easiest time of this, naturally, though the inventive minds within the Tradition can almost always find some way to slip a trial into a candidate’s daily affairs. If the potential initiate does well with most or all of these tests, the would-be mentor will approach the individual more directly, making social contact (if she is not already known to the prospective recruit) and perhaps inviting him to join in discussions, a scholarly circle or a Sleeper occult fellowship (since the Order has eyes and influence in virtually all of the marginally reputable ones). After this, the candidate is allowed to sit for a while, to assess his capacity for patience and, conversely, his sense of initiative. Both have a place within the Order, though those who can wait out this period of infrequent contact while still managing to forge ahead through personal intuition and drive are most highly prized by the Order.

The purpose of this process is to weed out the unworthy, just as the alchemist eliminates the base, leaving only the sublime. About nine out of ten such potential initiates “wash out” during this period, proving themselves, by this flaw or that, unsuitable for induction into the Order of Hermes. Always quick to garner favors among its allies, though, the Order is more than happy to steer a failed initiate toward a more appropriate Tradition, if there is a chance that such a person might be of use. Some rare few prospects actually Awaken during this period of observation. Rarely is this a cause for celebration. The untrained individual is often confused and frightened and,

lacking the proper Hermetic training that makes for a disciplined Will, can be a danger to herself and others. Worse still, such Awakenings might occur where enemies of the Order can witness it. In every case where such is possible, the new willworker is brought, with both alacrity and stealth, to a safe location (*never* one which regularly hosts mages or is the site of a Node), there to be calmed and advised about the truth of what is happening.

Some of these unexpected Awakenings prove, for whatever reasons, to be incompatible with the Order. Those who would be better served in other Traditions are directed to the appropriate representatives, while those who are deemed unacceptable risks to the Traditions as a whole (such as *widderslainte* Nephandi, for example) are dealt with in a more final fashion. Those who prove, by dint of character, to be worthy of continuing on the Order’s path will do just that, though those who Awaken before being properly instructed often have a harder time of their early days in the Tradition than those who do not... and that’s saying something.

THE FIRST DEGREE: NEOPHYTE

Up until just a few years ago, it was normal for the new initiate, now granted the First Degree of Neophyte, to be directed to one of the Order’s three College Covenants, where he would spend his next one to three years. The location of choice for this education was once the Fors Collegis Mercuris Horizon chantry on Mercury’s secret moon, Mus. After the fall of Mus to the Nephandi, however, three earthbound chantries were devoted to this purpose. For security purposes, the locations and names of these chantries are a closely guarded secret, though rumor and speculation place two in Western Europe and the other somewhere in New England, in the United States. Some Neophytes are still sent to one of these three locations, though many Hermetic initiates receive this aspect of their instruction directly from a *mater* or *pater* now.

This part of the initiate’s education consists of advanced mundane and basic metaphysical learning. Linguistics is taught, both for the value of learning many languages (especially Ancient Greek, Arabic, English, French, German and Latin) and to demonstrate the power of the word, whether written, spoken or simply comprehended within the mind. The history of the Awakened in general and the Order of Hermes in specific is taught, the Code of Hermes and many portions of the Peripheral Corrigenda are learned, and the mission statement of the Order is imparted. Also, basic numerological, alchemical and Otherworldly studies begin, as well as the root fundamentals of *Enochian*, the Order of Hermes’ highly complicated mystic tongue.

This degree is considered an especially dreadful time by most Hermetics. The mentor is usually particularly harsh and unforgiving at this stage, seeking to impel the initiate on through total immersion in the *Ars Hermeticae*. (This also has the incidental side effect of winnowing out those who can’t cut it in the Order.) While this merciless period of mystic instruction is taking place, the master also requires physical labor and drudgery of the apprentice. This serves to teach humility (a lesson many experienced mages of the Order would do well to reflect upon) and to demonstrate to even the most enthusiastic of Neophytes that this is not a game, that the Awakening is a *responsibility*, and like all responsibilities, it entails work.



Sometimes, an antagonistic relationship develops between mentor and student (this is especially true in exceptionally demanding Houses, such as Tylalus), but some in the Order regard this as ultimately beneficial, encouraging the student to excel and outstrip the master. In other cases, the relationship that develops is more akin to that which exists between parent and child (in some cases in the Order, the relationship is exactly that). Most relationships lie somewhere between these two extremes. Only rarely does a friendship, such as that enjoyed between peers, unfold. This is well by the Order, for it does not do for the novice to regard the master as an equal, nor is it becoming of the teacher to abase herself to the level of the student.

THE SECOND DEGREE: ZELATOR

When the apprentice first begins to decipher the true meaning behind the *goetia* — that it is, of itself, a useless symbol — she begins to progress in her understanding of it at a phenomenal rate. The concepts flow easily, allowing the Zelator to develop these basic powers of hedge magic with great proficiency. This is a trap and one the apprentice must learn to transcend if she is ever to Awaken. The easy power of un-Awakened sorcery, despite giving its wielder the ability to accomplish great feats of mystic prowess, will never mark the student as anything more than a child in the Order. Thus, the Zelator must desire to transcend the power she has accrued, metaphorically exchanging her pile of gold for a single

dram of Truth. Those who cannot or will not will forever hold the Second Degree, unable to progress into “true” citizenship in the Order.

Prior to the new millennium, it was customary to bring an apprentice of this Degree to a Horizon Realm or other off-world bastion of the Order, in order to reveal to her the sheer, astonishing

GOETIA, THEURGIA AND MAGIA

The Order of Hermes recognizes three distinct kinds of magic: *goetia*, *theurgia* and *magia*. *Goetia* is basic charm-based magic. Ritualized, elaborate and time consuming, as well as extremely rudimentary, it would be regarded as “simple wizardry” by even the most fumbling of hedge mages. It is the magic of the rude and profane world, the magic even a Sleeper can possess, provided the proper discipline and instruction. From *goetia*, the aspiring mage moves on to *theurgia*, union with the Divine. This is a more standardized practice of Hermetic High Ritual hedge magic. It is at this point that the Apprentice is expected to begin moving beyond seeking the “favor” of mystic entities and forces and into the realm of controlling and shaping them of her own Will. Provided she can make this leap, she just might be one of the few souls capable of mastering the *magia*, the union with Sphere Magic, as a newly forged mage of the ancient Order of Hermes.

scope of the world she has entered and to give her a bit of training in a more consequence-free environment, once she had stepped beyond the *goetia* and was approaching the moment of seizing the Awakening for herself. Unfortunately, the rise of the Avatar Storm and the loss of several of the Order's most important Otherworldly holdings have rendered this option untenable for most. Of course, some within the Order are quick to point out that being forced to learn the theory of Sphere magic within the thick of the Consensus teaches a flair for subtlety and coincidence in a "sink or swim" environment, a sentiment that seems constructive to many Hermetics only in the wake of the Reckoning.

Three other extremely important developments occur at this point. First, the apprentice is approached by more experienced mages within the Order who wish to court her favor and to have her as a political ally as she grows in experience (even Lord Gilmore was an apprentice once and those surviving Masters who were kind to him then are likely pleased with that choice now). Though she is not part of the Order's political machine yet, she is reaching the point when she must begin to decide who she will be in the Order of Hermes. Elder mages are always more than happy to try to sculpt those future aspirations. The second development, embodied in advanced hedge magic training (with instruction in the elementary fundamentals of the Spheres), is the progression to *theurgia*, the mystic union with godforms. Perhaps the most important of these unions is the beginning of the process to select the Word that will, almost without exception, remain with her for the rest of her life, her declaration of intent as an Awakened soul. Third, the Zelator is sent to perform "missions" for the Order, ranging from simple courier services to breaching Technocratic strongholds. All but the most brutal mentors stage these "missions" using Hermetic

mages and consors to simulate difficulties and dangers which test the student's cunning, intelligence, courage and her character in the hopes of spurring on the Awakening.

The mentor monitors the student carefully at this juncture. Those who become heady with their newfound power are apt to become a danger to themselves and others. Still, the student is expected to grow beyond her lessons and to see the symbolism hidden within them, a revelation that allows her to expand her understanding and attain Awakened insights. The student must walk a thin line between doing only as she's told and careening off into madness and chaos. She must come to discipline *herself*. It is, perhaps, the most crucial lesson she will ever learn.

THE THIRD DEGREE: PRACTICUS

This is the final Apprentice Degree, the time of transformation. The Practicus chooses the single Word, rife with symbolism and mystic weight, that she will embody, setting down the path of her metamorphosis into something Divine. She now sees that the first transformation is already behind her: that of transcending the limitations of ignorance and fear that keep most of the world Asleep. She is now becoming something fantastic, a being confined only by her own expectations. She is free to attain anything she has the Will to accomplish and she becomes aware of the astounding responsibilities and privileges inherent in this state of true freedom. Her every thought and action, both for good and for ill, is magic.

The mage now begins to develop the Word as an inherent function of her Will. She seeks to draw it inward, into the core of her being, thereby attaining apotheosis, as well as projecting it outward, into Creation, there to make her Will manifest in every corner of reality. This regimen of mystic discipline continues until the mage lives the Word in every way and changes

ANTINOMIAN PRAXIS

During the early years of a Hermetic initiate's training, many mentors encourage the use of *antinomian praxis* as an educational tool. "Antinomian praxis" is a term used by the Order to describe a state of standing in opposition to the law (in this instance, moral law). The reason for this is simple: how can a person truly understand righteousness and enlightenment if one shirks away from comprehension of wickedness and ignorance? As with all things, the exalted state of Ascension has its inversion and negation and none who have fled from the darkness will ever know the light. Instead, they will only see the shadow-show on the walls and think it reality.

Antinomian praxis is specifically recommended for those who have attained the rank of Zelator, since it is viewed as much as a trial to overcome as a valuable learning experience. All told, most of the souls recruited by the Order would just as soon get their flirtations with the dark side — whether it be Satanism (though *never* Infernalism, an act that carries a mandatory sentence of *Gilgul*), racism or any other despicable ideology and action — out of the way early on into their careers as Hermetic mages.

The practice of this educational experience is often an emotionally and spiritually difficult and painful one for young Hermetics, forcing them to come face-to-face with the very tribulations that assail every Awakened person of conscience. The

mage is, in a very real way, playing at embracing the basest and most unworthy facets of the human experience in order to understand and transcend those institutions. Thus, the mage might destroy a personal possession of worth and beauty, post anonymously on an Internet hate group, coming out in support of that group's ideals, or spend a few days acting in a slothful, ignorant and undisciplined fashion. Hopefully, the mage uses such experiences as opportunities to get inside the deliberate ethic of apathy and small-mindedness which most Sleepers cultivate.

Of course, while the Order encourages the Zelator to look long into the Abyss, as it were, it *does not* condone acts that bring the antinomian praxis out of the theoretical and into the real. In other words, while the Order sees the value in hearing out a Nazi skinhead's "white power" speeches, it staunchly opposes the idea of a mage going along with said individual and his friends to brutalize interracial couples on the street. This practice exists to help the mage understand what it is she must rise above, not as a means of slipping into such degradation herself. Also, it is important to note that the Order's policy on antinomian praxis makes it clear that under no circumstances is the Zelator to break *Hermetic* law in the pursuit of enlightenment. Also, flagrant violations of Sleeper law, out of respect for the Law of Shade, are likewise discouraged.

THE HERMETIC AWAKENING

While there are a handful of mages in the Order of Hermes who Awakened in what most other Traditions consider to be the “normal” way (some kind of abrupt, or at least swift, process of spiritual revelation, often accompanied by extreme stress of one sort or another), most Hermetics came to enlightenment the hard way. The Order is perhaps the only mystic society in the history of the world to “train” a person to Awaken on any kind of regular basis. (In reality, this trend could be better and more accurately understood as House Fortunae’s knack for finding potential initiates who carry within them the dormant spark of an Awakened Will, though the Order doesn’t really acknowledge this, citing its training program as a tried-and-true formula for the “strong and worthy seeker” to achieve enlightenment.)

This process is a long and often unpleasant one, usually requiring between three and five years, during which the potential initiate is taught only the rudiments of the *Ars Hermeticae*. Ideally, the Awakening concludes the Third Degree, wherein the Apprentice becomes the Word and transcends the barriers of mundane reality. Some Apprentices, however, are known to Awaken during the Second or even First Degrees, depending upon the nature of the initiate, the methods of her mentor and the circumstances of her training and her life.

Most Hermetic mages would describe their Awakening as a process, rather than a moment. The training program of the Order “builds” an enlightened Will. This is in contrast to the process of being “jolted” into Awakened sensibilities that many mages of other Traditions describe. As a result, Hermetic mages tend to be more staid and reserved about their Awakened nature than many mages from outside the Tradition, seeing it as an outgrowth of life experiences, rigorous discipline and advanced education, rather than a traumatic instant of awareness.

everything she contacts to reflect that Word’s influence. This arduous process is the primary objective of the Practicus, the quest to become the Word.

When the apprentice comprehends that union with the Word is as simple as willing it to be so, her knowledge of Awakened magic blossoms. She is ready to move beyond the most elementary Hermetic Arts and into the realm of controlling that which she has only previously learned to perceive. She begins the pursuit of *magia*, seeking the mystic disciplines that she will shape and that will shape the rest of her life.

BEYOND THE LIFE OF THE APPRENTICE

From this point onward, the individual is a mage of the Order, duly initiated into the Mysteries, and subject to all of the rights and responsibilities of such. Henceforth, training comes from within the self, supplemented by the aid of peers and betters, rather than the parental guidance offered by a mentor. While many Order mages *do* maintain ties with those who

FAILURE:

HALFWAY TO THE PATH OF GOLD

In the Order of Hermes, one has but two options: succeed or fail. There is precious little understanding afforded to one who cannot complete the Tradition’s (granted, mercilessly complex and demanding) curriculum and Awaken. No matter how bright or skilled or noble a person may be, if she cannot eventually learn (and, for the Order at least, this is most certainly a learned ability) to peel back the great illusion of static reality and bend the laws of the Universe with will alone, she is a failure.

Some of these failed students, such as the late Nichodemus Mulhouse, Chief Archivist of Horizon, can rise to positions of great prominence and importance, but they will still never be equal to the least among mages in the Order’s eyes. To the Order of Hermes, being Awakened is not a special strength; it is a basic human obligation. Being a Sleeper is a profound spiritual flaw, born of weakness, ignorance and fear. So much the worse is one who is shown the first steps of the Path of Gold and then falls short of seizing that birthright.

Naturally, not all of the Order’s Awakened accept this long-standing policy of scorning the Tradition’s hedge wizards and other washed-out potential recruits as subhumans worthy of, at best, pity, but it is a hard habit to break for even the freshest fully initiated mage (who has almost always had at least three years of indoctrination drilled into her head, usually more). Thus, these often talented and dedicated half-Awakened souls languish in a limbo born of rote elitism. Many eventually break under these strenuous conditions, but some few, perhaps more than might be expected, *do* persevere, their drive fueled by measures of persistence, defiance, hope and, often, hatred. Some of these dedicated few, in time, manage to Awaken. For most, however, it is a life of second-class citizenship that awaits them.

These hedge wizards occupy a strange station within the chain of politics. They cannot truly hold position, since they are, to the Hermetic mind, children, but their lack of Awakened understanding often offers them a closer association with the banal political machine of the Order than the regimen of a remote and eccentric Master allows. Many of these half-Awakened mages end up as one of the forms of currency encompassed by the Order’s system of debt and favor, but the more cunning among them use their nebulous status to become powerbrokers within the Order, since they will never be its power players. After all, *somebody* has to be the guy through whom those intricate networks of favor move.

trained them, the relationship often turns, at this point, to one better suited to friendship — between one older and more learned and one younger and less experienced — than that which exists between parent and child.

THE FOURTH DEGREE: INITIATE

Having achieved oneness with the Word, the mage enters into the world of the Awakened as an Initiate of the Order of Hermes. This degree is only awarded once the mage attains the

first rank of the *Ars Virium* (and the first rank of her House's Specialty Sphere, if any), thus demonstrating conclusively that she is no longer a mere hedge wizard or dabbler. She is registered as a full member of the Order and may serve as a Tribune (see *The Tribunal*, pp. 47-48). Further, she may publish within the Order now and can hold office, title or lands (represented by Sancta or a Node, for example). Great things are now expected of her.

THE FIFTH DEGREE: INITIATE EXEMPTUS

Within a year or less, many young Hermetic mages attain this degree. The rank of Initiate Exemptus is achieved by demonstrating the second rank of understanding of any of the Nine Spheres. At this point, it is expected of the mage that he will register his availability with Personnel for the assignment of an apprentice of his own, though few Hermetics of this degree are actually awarded a student of their own right away, since the requests of more powerful members of the Order (which are often backlogged for months or even years) usually take precedence. With the recent upheavals in the Order of Hermes, however, more apprentices than ever before are being forwarded to mages of the Fifth Degree for education.

THE SIXTH DEGREE: ADEPT

Despite the terminology used by the Traditions as a whole, the rank of Adept is conferred upon a Hermetic mage who attains the third level of comprehension of any one Mystic Sphere and the first of any other. This level of power is often achieved within three years of the Awakening, though it sometimes takes much longer. Many Hermetic mages never attain this degree, growing mired in the concerns of lesser powers. Those who can seize for themselves the Sixth Degree prepare to enter into the domain of the Masters, whose company they will share one day, if they are dedicated, knowledgeable and cunning.

THE SEVENTH DEGREE: ADEPT MAJOR

Upon demonstrating conclusively the fourth level of control in one Sphere, the third level in at least one other and the first level of still another, the degree of Adept Major is awarded. Few mages ever achieve this degree of understanding and almost none do so before 10 years spent in the company of the Awakened. Those who reach the Seventh Degree enter into the realm of the Order's power politics and begin to influence the direction of the Tradition and, if they are truly capable, the Traditions as a whole.

INTO THE DOMAIN OF THE MASTER

Aspirants seeking admittance into the world of the Hermetic Masters are rigorously tested and scrutinized, both for arcane power and for conversance with the ways of the Order. Neither a weakling nor a fool may be entrusted with these degrees, the last few steps before achieving true power over Creation itself. A second initiation ritual accompanies the induction of the Master into the ranks of the Order's luminaries, the details of which are completely unknown to lesser mages. There are those who speak of third and fourth initiations, but the purposes for these, what they might commemorate and what they might accomplish — if indeed such rites even truly exist — elude all members of the Order, save for perhaps those illuminated few who could reliably speak of them.

THE EIGHTH DEGREE: MAGISTER SCHOLAE

To be acknowledged as a mage of the Eighth Degree, a member of the Order must demonstrate Mastery of a single Sphere and the third rank of control over at least two others. Perhaps one in 10 mages of the Order are even *capable* of attaining this degree and far fewer than that ever realize such potential. At this level of understanding, the mage is a pillar of the Order of Hermes, an artisan of its course and its destiny, and is expected to realize the goals of the Order in her every thought, action and exercise of mystic Will.

THE NINTH DEGREE: MAGISTER MUNDI

After centuries, some few mages do manage to unlock the innermost secrets of reality, realizing within themselves Archmastery of one of the Spheres of Creation. In the Order of Hermes, such astonishing heights of power are acknowledged through induction into the Ninth Degree. Mages of this degree tend to be more forces of nature than human beings, entities of raw, unabashed Will only mildly constrained by the rude concerns of the flesh. These exemplars often have less to do with the governance of the Tradition than the Masters, since their concerns delve into the realm of the primal forces of the Universe rather than the affairs of mortal men, no matter how enlightened.

FAMILY



The Order of Hermes is really the only family most Hermetics can afford, or choose, to have. The reasons for this are manifold, but three particular causes stand out.

First, the Order exists in a perpetual state of war. Even the most light-hearted *Fortunae* or retiring *Shaea* is taught that the Ascension War is very much an ongoing conflict. Soldiers do not fraternize with civilians during time of war; it creates unnecessary emotional complications and, ultimately, puts the innocent at risk.

Second, the fundamental doctrine of the Order teaches a certain degree of elitism and condescension toward Sleepers. Even if an individual mage is loath to embrace that creed, he has to be realistic about the degree to which *any* un-Awakened person can ever really understand him. It would be the equivalent of having a spouse who was only a tenth as intelligent as oneself; possible but difficult at best and, in the eyes of many, perhaps somewhat cruel. A healthy relationship requires an honest disclosure of information, a disclosure that a responsible mage could never make to a Sleeper family.

Third, Order mages tend to be driven and (if one considers the Awakening to be a vocation) career-minded. Building the

THE TENTH DEGREE?

Though it is little known among the rank-and-file of the Tradition, the Order of Hermes *does* recognize a Tenth Degree that gives Unity and balance to all those which come before it. This is the degree attained by the nigh-omnipotent Oracles and is the apex of the Order's pyramidal structure. For those who know of this elusive Tenth Degree and who care to engage in truly lofty and purely theoretical debates, there exists a supposition that only one Oracle at a time exists for

each of the Spheres and that all wait for the inevitable realization of the Final Oracle, that of the Tenth Sphere, the *Ars Unitatis*. At this time, 10 mages of the Tenth Degree will exist simultaneously, bringing the number back, as it should be, to One. Perhaps, such mages speculate, this state of perfected Unity will create reality-wide harmony, resulting in the Ascension of Humanity and the creation of the City of Pymander. Only time will tell.

ties of family takes time and effort, both of which are better channeled into the pursuit of individual, Tradition-wide and Traditions-wide goals. Thus, it is easiest to build those familial bonds with those who have the exact same level of expectation of such bonds as oneself.

In time, most mages of the Order come to regard their *mater* or *pater* as more of a parent than the person or persons who raised them. Likewise, any other students of the same mentor are apt to be regarded as siblings. In the Order, lineage passes from teacher to student and the mark of a worthy pedigree can take one far, while a shameful one can stymie the ambitions of generations of pupils. Also, it is not uncommon for those Hermetics who do marry to take a fellow Hermetic as a spouse. After all, only in the

Order will one find a husband or wife who understands the Path of Gold and the risks inherent in spending a lifetime with one of the leaders of the Ascension War. Only with such a spouse can one expect to be able to raise children in the proper manner. The Order of Hermes is not a job; it is a society, an ethic and a way of life. These factors combine to make the Tradition an easy (if not always healthy) substitute for "normal" family.

Such extended families within the Order often span continents, degrees of study and even, sometimes, Houses of Hermes. They serve to give cohesion to the Order through emotional, rather than authoritative or rational, bonds, and thus demonstrate the fundamental humanity of the Tradition.

THE POLITICS ⊕ OF P⊕WER



The Order of Hermes is a decidedly political organization. The Hermetic love of power, in all its guises, draws the average Order mage to enter eagerly into the games of state. Clout, after all, is just another *kind* of power, the same as force of personality, the strength of a keen intellect or even mastery of the Nine Spheres. And, like any other power, it can be bent by those who understand it to any purpose the individual desires. The

Order of Hermes is, often fairly, accused of holding power over the affairs of the Traditions out of keeping with its (nevertheless comparatively large) size. In many cases of inter-Tradition politics (though this was much more prevalent before the destruction of Doissetep), there are whole systems of governance over which the Order wields a virtual monopoly. After all, as the Masters admonished, "Any power you can hold over another, especially a power to which he is subject and yet which he does not fully understand, is power you can use to make that other more effective and capable and to give focus to him, should he be without discipline or direction."

THE MIAS

It is only fitting that the political structure of the Order of Hermes is named after an Arabic word for quicksand, for only the clever, the strong and the resourceful can truly survive a protracted encounter with the Order's elaborate system of favors, mystic lineage, pacts and influence, both mystic and mundane, and even they almost never emerge unscathed.

The Order's political structure is truly mercenary and all dealings within it, save between mentor and student and the closest of friends, are handled as "one hand washes the other" affairs. The system is so intricate and far-reaching that members of the Order often repay their debts by calling in favors owed them elsewhere within the Tradition, and mages have grown accustomed to being repaid in the name of their debtors by Hermetics they've never even met.

Favors owed and debts to call pass from a teacher to her students, as well, so astute would-be power-players within the Order of Hermes do well to learn whose *mater* holds what on whom and which Master put himself into a tight spot to bail out a foolish apprentice. Those who learn at a young age to navigate this network of subtle power have their futures within the Order all but assured. Even a mystically weak mage, after all, can be as powerful as the mightiest Master who owes him, should he require it.

Favors owed and to be received within the Order of Hermes are referred to as *sa*, a kind of divine liquid in the Egyptian cosmology. To the politicians within the Order, *sa* is nothing less than the Tradition's heartblood, an exchange of political powers that keeps the mages of the Order sharp and competitive. Further, by putting mages from distant corners of the Order in contact with one another, it allows for a ready migration of ideas across the entirety of the Tradition.

THE LAWS ⊕ OF PYMANDER

The Order of Hermes, like any other society, has its own laws and strictures. Given the Order's love of rules and structure,

however, Hermetic law has grown to an unfathomable complexity, with each mage so inclined—from Archmaster down to newly minted Initiate — putting her own mark upon the vast tangle of legal precepts. As is the case with many complicated things, the Order's code of ethics starts simply: with the Code of Hermes.

THE CODE OF HERMETICS

A body of law that has stood since the year 787 C.E., the Code of Hermes is the pillar that shores up the Order. Supplemented by the Peripheral Corrigenda, the Code (in theory, at least) serves to help the Order of Hermes maintain its cohesion and to regulate itself without the need to resort to external Traditions law. In ancient times, all violations of the Code were punishable by execution, but this is no longer strictly the case. Still, it is a foolish mage who openly flaunts these regulations. The core precepts of the Code of Hermes (as well as a bit of translation) follow:

I. I swear everlasting loyalty to the Order and its members. The Order's friends and enemies are my friends and enemies, and I shall not spurn a friend nor succor an enemy.

The Reality: In truth, the loyalties of many Hermetic mages historically culminated with Number One. Still, most of these perished at Doissetep and even they made shows of fealty to the Order when appropriate. From the lowliest apprentice to the greatest Magister Mundi, no one is exempt from at least attempting to *appear* loyal to the Order. Most of the mages remaining in the Tradition now, however, sincerely *are* faithful to the Order of Hermes and what it represents.

As to friends and enemies, this has been largely construed in recent centuries as “The Nine Mystic Traditions” and “virtually all other Awakened,” respectively. Most Hermetics have a sufficient sense of *noblesse oblige* to offer surcease to any Traditionalist who needs it (and is not in grievous and flagrant violation of Traditions law) and few would give the time of day to even the most benevolent outsider, let alone waste the Order's precious resources in aiding such a person.

II. I shall not through action or inaction endanger the Order, nor consort with devils or the undead, nor anger the fae.

The Reality: The mages of the Order have traditionally done their best to heed the first clause of this rule, though some over the course of time have lacked the foresight to heed the latter admonishments. To break it down, step by step:

Infernalism in all its forms is a high crime before the Order, punishable, at the very least, by Requit. What constitutes “consorting” and “devils,” however, is a matter for some debate. In general, forging a binding pact with a demon, no matter how trivial, is Infernalism. Offering goods or services to or requesting the same from such an entity is Infernalism. Forcibly summoning a demon for the purposes of extracting information from it or expressly to destroy it, on the other hand, is uncertain ground. Further, the Code of Hermes refers specifically to Christian “devils” and one has considerably greater leeway in dealing with the demonic spirits of other religious traditions.

A scant few mages of the Order kept tabs on the fallen House Tremere for centuries, though most of them, the moths closest to the flames of the rekindled *Massasa* War, are now dead, victims of their own curiosity. Vampires are basically the only

“undead” the Order recognizes, though House Shaea does maintain a few dusty and crumbling papyri that refer to immortal sorcerers, forever lingering on the edge of death, caught in a never-ending cycle of rebirth. In any case, with the Second *Massasa* War at a close, the mages of the Order are scrupulously adhering to this portion of the Second Rule for now.

The fae are, to the overall thinking of today's Order, essentially beneath notice. While they were once beautiful and terrible, with powers that made even the most powerful Master quake in his boots, the few records the Order still has regarding modern fae indicate that they are seemingly now mostly mortal and close to extinction. Most mages in the Order, save for the occasional faerie-wise Merinita of House Ex Miscellanea, wouldn't even know where to find one of the Fair Folk nowadays.

III. I shall not deprive any Order mage of magical power, nor through action or inaction attempt to bring harm to an Order mage, except in justly declared and open certámen.

The Reality: This was, over the centuries, one of the less commonly heeded of the tenets of the Code of Hermes. The internal politics of the Order found their ends in the hidden dagger nearly as often as in the certámen circle. Further, many Order mages, especially powerful ones, were notoriously stingy with their discoveries and thereby often deprived their fellows of “magical power” through omission, rather than active malice. In recent years, both of these tenets have come to be more rigidly obeyed, especially among the mages of the younger generation. After the fall of Doissetep, the destruction of Concordia and the dissolution of House Janissary, only the most foolish mages attempt to disregard this rule.

IV. I shall not spy by any means or manner upon another Order mage's private works, nor read an Order mage's mind, nor invade or observe an Order mage's Sanctum, save to guard against a clear, direct, forceful and imminent threat to the safety of the Order.

The Reality: This tenet of the Code of Hermes is, hands-down, the most vigorously ignored. Or, rather, the gross oversimplification of “guarding against threats to the safety of the Order” is so open to interpretation that it is possible for almost any mage of the Order to cite “suspicious activity” or the like and to thereby give herself license to spy on fellow Hermetics. The politics of Doissetep were, unsurprisingly, the worst offenders in this regard (it is doubtful that there were any Order mages with whom Caeron Mustai, last Primus of House Janissary and perhaps the foremost power-player in the chantry, *did not* spy on as a matter of course).

It is worth noting that nothing in the Code of Hermes (written just about seven centuries before the formation of the Nine Mystic Traditions) expressly forbids or even actively discourages spying on members of other mystic societies, even other Traditions. This, of course, meant that many of the old Masters of the Order felt free to “keep tabs” on the Technocratic strongholds, chantries of other Traditions and any other enclaves or individuals whose comings and goings were of interest.

After the fall of the Masters, however, two factors have conspired to make Order mages adhere to this tenet of the Code a bit more scrupulously. First, most of the cloak-and-dagger politics of the Order died with its most powerful mages, leaving younger and less destructively paranoid minds at the Tradition's

helm. Second, and perhaps more importantly, skulking about and poking into other people's business looks uncomfortably similar to the activities of the now-defunct House Janissary, an organization *no one* is eager to be compared to right now.

V. If called before a Tribunal, I shall abide by its verdicts. If called to sit upon a Tribunal, I shall vote wisely, respect the votes of others, and support the Tribunal's verdicts.

The Reality: For those called before a Tribunal, the Order has always possessed the means of enforcing its decisions upon all but the most potent of Archmages, should such become necessary. As a result, most mages sentenced by a Tribunal to anything but Requitil or *Gilgul* have gone without protest and served their time (or whatever) dutifully. To do otherwise is to court scorn, political shunning and further punishment. Granted, there have always been those who attempt to buck a Tribunal's rulings, but the infrequency with which such endeavors have come to anything good (thanks, in large part, to the power of House Quaesitor) has served as an adequate deterrent for most.

As to those called upon to serve on a Tribunal, there has traditionally been a strong drive to adhere to the philosophy espoused by the latter half of this tenet of the Code. The extraordinarily complex web of favors and debt that interconnects the entirety of the Order of Hermes makes it essentially impossible to accomplish a truly fair and impartial ruling. Note, however, that this part of the Code refers to "voting wisely," not "fairly" or "impartially." In other words, most of the mages who sit on a Tribunal seek to bring about the best outcome, not the most just. Thus, blatant offenders whose continued active service within the Order is deemed too valuable to lose have walked free, while those obviously innocent of the crimes for which they were standing trial, if regarded as liabilities, have often been handed token sentences, regardless, just to keep them where they can do no harm.

This ethic of expedience is, oftentimes, further complicated in cases involving very old, powerful or influential mages, when it becomes hard to assemble a Tribunal in which no one currently owes the mage in question or an ally or enemy of that mage within the Order. During such cases, as a result, the Tribunal process becomes bogged down in backroom dealings, power plays and an Old Boy's Club mentality. Ultimately, though, most mages outside of House Quaesitor are perfectly happy to have this thrillingly inefficient system in place, if for no other reason than the nigh-impossibility of overhauling it completely (the only way, realistically, to implement any improvements to it).

VI. Upon reaching the Fifth Degree or higher, I shall train apprentices and instruct them in this Code. I bear the entire responsibility for my apprentice, and shall duly admonish, restrain, discipline or arrest an apprentice who endangers the Order, and shall yield same apprentice to the Order's lawfully appointed agent or Tribunal.

The Reality: Many Order mages, by the time they achieve the Fifth Degree of Hermetic training, are very lonely and very busy people. The requirement of taking on an apprentice at this point, then, is a very practical one, for at least two reasons. The first gives the mage someone to pass on her knowledge to, someone to teach and to "bring up" in a proper manner, developing the same kind of bond as between parent and child. As it is unsurprising that many Hermetics never have families of their own, this is the only

kind of parental experience many of them will ever have. The second plays to the fact that a mage of advanced degree can always use another pair of hands around the chantry, the Sanctum or at the grocery store. Having a younger person around to perform the less glamorous day-to-day tasks that need doing frees the mage to more actively pursue more important works. Thus, in addition to providing for the future of the Order, this tenet of the Code helps to keep more experienced mages sane.

It is rare that an apprentice finds himself in a position to even be *able* to bring harm to the Order, let alone the desire to do so, so the latter half of this tenet only rarely needs to be enforced. Mostly, this half of the Sixth Tenet is used to keep apprentices on the straight-and-narrow.

VII. I solemnly swear to uphold this sacred Code of Hermes, and venture any risk or sacrifice to protect it. Should I breach it, may all the mages of the Order rise as one united and hunt me down and destroy me forevermore.

The Reality: Were all the mages of the Order of Hermes to rise as one for *any* reason, the Sun would be as sackcloth and the Moon as blood. Still, most Hermetics do take this tenet of the Code *very* seriously. Mages of the Order have certainly died to uphold it, even in modern times. Sadly, many over time have sacrificed others, both Sleepers and Awakened, to do the same. In the end, however, the Order has bigger problems than hunting down all save the most grievous and horrid offenders against the Code of Hermes.

VIII. I solemnly swear to vigorously and actively pursue the Enemies of Ascension and to unmake their works in this world and in all others.

The Reality: This is the first tenet to be added to the Code of Hermes since its inception, penned by the hand of Ishaq ibn-Thoth, Primus of House Quaesitor, and pushed through the currently disorganized morass of highest-level Hermetic politics, in early 2002. Time will tell if it remains as part of the Code or is struck from it as soon as the Order gets its affairs back under control and reestablishes its hierarchies.

This Eighth Tenet is intended to get the Order back on its feet, so to speak, and to reaffirm its mission statement as active harbingers of Ascension. The Peripheral Corrigenda already lists the Technocratic Union, the Fallen, many Marauders, oppressive governmental practices, substandard education and a slew of other persons, entities and even concepts as "Enemies of Ascension." Further, the Eighth Tenet's entry goes on to counsel the use of violence against only the most blatant and knowingly and happily irredeemable Enemies, to do no needless harm to a Sleeper in the process and to first attempt to combat such Enemies through the use of education and subtle guidance. In addition to being good policy, this tenet is intended to be the Order's declaration that the Ascension War is by no means over.

THE PERIPHERAL CORRIGENDA

Since the Code of Hermes was written to state its points in as direct a fashion as possible, it has become necessary to record a vast number of interpretations and derived laws as addenda to the Code. These are the fine print that keeps the very non-specific tenets of the Code from being twisted to suit any perspective whatsoever. The Peripheral Corrigenda records all the precedents set by the Order's Grand Tribunal (and those

ratified into the Peripheral Corrigenda from cases overseen by other Tribunals).

This body of supplementary law now encompasses at least hundreds of thousands of interpretations, clarifications and ancillary rulings. It dictates the exact size of Tribunals (six mages of House Quaesitor or at least two other Houses, in most cases, with 12 mages of no fewer than four Houses, overseen by a Quaesitor, in the case of accusations worthy of Requitall), the proper means to pacify and placate the Fair Folk, responsibilities of mentor and apprentice, the circumstances under which it is theoretically permissible to invade another Order mage's privacy, the exact parameters of duly authorized certámen and the results of its outcome, and so forth. There is probably no aspect of life in the Order of Hermes upon which the Peripheral Corrigenda does not, in some way, touch. Of course, the current-day Peripheral Corrigenda is now also filled with at least tens of thousands of instances of overruled precedents (such as the ruling by Marietta Guzman, bani Quaesitor, granting a certámen victor the right to a year and a day of service from the defeated), outdated precepts (like the 15th-century prohibition against firearms and other "despicable implements of the foes of Mistrudge") and other legislation later blatantly contradicted.

Sadly, even young members of the Order are expected to be fluent with even the most obscure of these rulings, even those which have been overturned once, twice or a dozen times. Such bizarre and obtuse laws, regardless of whether or not they are still in effect, find their way into Hermetic Tribunals, as points of precedent and as stumbling blocks used by canny mages to confound issues and mire the truth in sheer complexity, if nothing else. Of course, none save the most ancient (and bored) Masters can make the time to know *all* of these esoteric precepts, no matter how much young mages are encouraged to be perfectly conversant in them, so it is possible for a determined willworker to bend the interpretations of the law to achieve almost any result desired. Some have taken this as a sure sign that the Order desperately needs to revitalize its legal system and eradicate whole volumes of the useless and the irrelevant from the Peripheral Corrigenda, distilling it down into a cohesive and workable whole of significantly smaller scope.

THE DRIVE TO RENEW

Begun by a skilled and savvy Quaesitor Adept named Anna ("Annie Sisyphus") Hardwyck, the relatively recent movement within the House to redefine Hermetic law in light of the past millennium-and-some-odd-centuries has been met with open arms in some quarters and stubborn resistance in others. Even the Quaesitor Primus quietly supports some of this renewal movement's activities, especially those intended to make Hermetic law reflect the desired unity of the Nine Mystic Traditions and to tear down the great quagmire of law to the point that it can be more readily and intuitively understood by the Order's membership (and to make it bit more accessible to the Order's allied Traditions). As ibn-Thoth himself puts it, "Law should follow justice, which is simple."

The proposed changes include a reformatting of Hermetic law to a more modern system of jurisprudence (cutting out the positively — and often literally — medieval legal codes espoused in some dusty corners of the Order's law books), a paring-down of the unfathomably labyrinthine nature and incomprehensible size of the Peripheral Corrigenda and a rework of the Tribunal process to reflect justice, rather than expedience. Needless to say, the greatest roadblocks this movement faces come in the form of more experienced, powerful and entrenched mages, who are most comfortable and conversant with the system as it is and, conversely, have the most to lose by modernization and an emphasis on the rule of fairness rather than might. Some radicals within the renewal movement are even trying to see the practice of certámen cycled out of common practice within the Tradition and, eventually, outlawed, but this notion doesn't sit well with many, who are loath to cast aside one of the Order's most venerable institutions and best systems of dispute resolution for times when no party is clearly in the right. One man's outmoded and barbaric practice is another's cherished tradition, it would seem.

The movement now has enough highly-placed support to begin making a real dent in the Order's red tape and pushing its agenda to visible effect. Those who would resist the renewal movement are scattered and fractious, often mistrusting of one another just as much as of those who are trying to sweep away their legacy of inefficiency and power politicking. Thus, the Order of Hermes, slowly but surely, is progressing toward being more conscious of itself, its members (on *all* levels), its fellow Traditions and the world in which it now exists.

HERMETIC JUSTICE



While the Code of Hermes details what is and is not a transgression in the Order, early entries into the Peripheral Corrigenda defined the Order's system of punishment. The Order of Hermes recognizes two kinds of offenses, High Crimes and Low.

HIGH CRIMES

Flagrantly and knowingly violating the Code of Hermes is a High Crime in the Order. Other offenses not explicitly covered by the Code (such as wanton murder of Sleepers, for example) also fall under the purview of this level of infraction. The Order's Security Council, a group of nine mages hand picked by the Primuses of their

respective Houses for duty, formerly reviewed these terrible crimes. The destruction of many of the Order's Horizon Realms and the loss of the Masters, however, has rendered this council inert for now. Currently, any accusations of High Crimes would be heard directly by the Quaesitor Primus. Until a new Security Council is convened (which, some speculate, could take years at the least), this will have to suffice.

Sentences for those convicted of one or more High Crimes are **Censure** (public condemnation of the mage and his actions, resulting in the effective termination of any political aspirations), **Interdiction** (exile, either temporary or permanent, from the Order), **Requitall** (execution) or **Gilgul** (obliteration of the offender's Avatar).

Common sense has almost always prevailed in the handing-down of High Crimes sentences. Thus, spying upon a political rival within the Tradition typically results in Censure or Interdiction, while the knowing practice of Infernalism almost never carries less of a sentence than *Gilgul*.

LOW CRIMES

Harming another Hermetic mage's property, pilfering a familiar or hurting a Sleeper for no defensible reason are all Low Crimes in the Order of Hermes. These offenses are mostly infractions against precedents set forth in the Peripheral Corrigenda, though *very* minor offenses against the Code of Hermes have also been known to fall under the purview of Low Crimes.

Until very recently, the Order used a system of "an eye for an eye" justice to deal with many Low Crimes, a system known as **Talion**. In the past few years, however, this antiquated notion of retribution has been largely dispensed with, resulting in fewer burned grimoires, banished familiars and smashed property. Instead, the system of **Reparation** has risen to completely eclipse that other practice, forcing convicted mages to replace that which is stolen, ruined or otherwise rendered irrecoverable, at their own expense (of time, monies and, if need be, magic, subject to the offender's resources). If a convicted mage is unable to repay what she has taken, then she serves the aggrieved party as an apprentice might, for a period of time determined by the presiding Quaesitor.

THE TRIBUNAL

The Order recognizes different kinds of Tribunals for the purposes of hearing out trials. The *Tribunal Ordinary* consists of six to 12 mages and is the normal variety detailed above, under the Peripheral Corrigenda. The accusation of almost any crime may be heard and presided over by a Tribunal Ordinary, though sentences subject to appeal almost always go to either the Order's Security Council or its *Grand Tribunal*, held every three years in House Quaesitor's ancestral chantry in Stuttgart, Germany, or as otherwise required. The Grand Tribunal consists of 27 mages: traditionally the Primus of each Great House and two mages of high degree. However, recent events have suspended the possibility of a Grand Tribunal indefinitely, so most justice is currently carried out at the level of the Tribunal Ordinary, with little opportunity for appeal, even in those cases which would normally allow for such.

The Tribunal is as much a political body as a judicial one and its rulings tend to be swift and not always equitable. With Tribunals, when political tensions or the greater good of the Order conflict with justice, justice almost invariably loses. This trend may be changing, however, as more and more young mages, some fresh out of apprenticeship and with no real political ties within the Order as yet, are being selected as Tribunes.

WHO WATCHES THE WATCHER?

The House of Judges requires some special mention in any treatise on the Order's justice system. It cannot be stressed enough that House Quaesitor is, in terms of the Order of Hermes' judiciary branch, where the buck starts and where it stops. House Quaesitor has, for well over a millennium now, served as judge, jury and, when needed, executioner for the Order. During this time, the

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

As more and more of the erudite scholars of the Order point out, the word *Gilgul* seems terribly inappropriate as the title of an act of Awakened will designed to utterly destroy an Avatar. After all, *Gilgul* is a Hebrew term for the transmigration of souls and, on the surface, seems to have nothing to do with the ritual it describes. However, from the perspective of the medieval Hermetic mind, it was the best possible word to give to a process the magi of the time did not fully understand.

In the days just after Guernicus, founder of House Quaesitor, developed the *Gilgul* rite, there was no appropriate way to describe the idea of the obliteration of a soul. To the people of that age (even the most enlightened), souls were the domain of God alone and could not be altered, certainly not destroyed, by any act of human artifice. Guernicus himself, an irreligious man, had his own thoughts on the matter, but he ultimately didn't care enough to press the issue when other magi, including the venerable Bonisagus, insisted on a name for the spell that implied the displacement of the soul to a different plane, rather than its annihilation. Guernicus' work in creating the ritual seemed blasphemous enough; the others reasoned that there was no sense in tempting the wrath of the Almighty by intimating that man could undo His handiwork.

For that reason, it was originally recorded in the annals of the Order's history that the *Gilgul* ritual "dismisses the offender's immortal Soul to another plane, there to face the judgment of the Creator, rendering him like unto an animal and thus incapable of even the lowliest act of mystic prowess." Among the notions upheld by many schools of mysticism and virtually all of contemporary science, even today, is one which states that nothing in nature is ever truly destroyed, only changed in form. Perhaps Bonisagus and the others were more correct than they knew....

leaders of the house have made poor decisions (such as the extermination of Diedne) but have never blatantly perverted their amazing power for the personal gain of the house's membership.

It can seem nothing short of miraculous for an organization to sincerely attempt to live up to its responsibilities without working to manipulate the situation to its own advantage, but the concept of *Ma'at* (the ancient Egyptian ideal of the inevitability of justice as a universal metaphysical constant) is deeply ingrained into the core belief structure of the *Magistrati*. Selfishness, corruption and wickedness cannot prevail in the Quaesitor's reality, and principles of proper thought and action will always emerge triumphant. In short, while Quaesitori do, now and again, fall (sometimes spectacularly) from this ideal, most understand that embracing a state of moral injustice is not simply weak and contemptible; it is foolish.

THE GILGUL RITE IN DEPTH

Perhaps the most horrifying aspect of the Order of Hermes in the eyes of its allied Traditions is its use of magic to punish what it deems to be "irredeemable" offenders (those who have essentially committed treason against Reality itself, whether through Infernalism, defection to the Technocracy or the simple

crime of just *being* a Nephandus, to name a few examples) by obliterating their souls (Avatars) in a gruesome ritual known as *Gilgul*. The resultant human husk is still alive and possesses the faculties for rational thought, but is forevermore emptied of the essentially spark of humanity and is completely incapable of ever again exercising Awakened will (in the form of Sphere magic).

House Quaesitor, naturally, handles all sentences of *Gilgul*, though it is a verdict the *Magistrati* are almost always hesitant to deliver. No matter how terrible the offender's crime, after all, *Gilgul* is the act of annihilating a piece of Creation and laying waste to a soul. Since the destruction of Heylel Teonim Thoabath's Avatar after the fall of the First Cabal, the Order has conducted perhaps 15 *Gilgul*s at most (which, granted, is still well more than those undertaken by any two other factions within the Traditions during that time) and each was *extremely* carefully considered beforehand.

THE HOUSES OF HERITIES



Recent problems within the Order (such as the destruction of many of its most powerful Masters at Doissetep and Horizon, and the rise of the Avatar Storm) have considerably shaken up the structure of the Great Houses (the most powerful individual Houses of Hermes, along with Ex Miscellanea, the coalition of Lesser Houses). The Craft once known as the Children of Knowledge (known, prior to that, as the *Solificati Tradition*) finally accepted the Order's offer of membership

in early 2000, taking up the mantle of House Solificati. Meanwhile, House Thig, the Order's rebellious youth, had been losing its political footing after the death of the venomous Altimeas Cowling (one of the many Doissetep casualties).

Recently, strange (and compelling) testimony and evidence surfaced about treachery in House Janissary (the Order's cadre of spies and assassins) linking it to a similar society known as the *Ksirifai* in the old Order of Reason. As a result, numerous cabals of Euthanatos mages descended upon the House and slaughtered the better part of its membership while the rest of the Order turned a blind eye. The few Janissary survivors were quickly subsumed into House Quaesitor, after being made to swear binding oaths of loyalty.

Add to this the induction and inception of new mystic societies within the Order (in the form of Lesser Houses) and a great shift in the power structure of Ex Miscellanea, and the Houses of Hermes find themselves in a time of great tumult and possibility.

HOUSE BONISAGUS

Names: Bonisagi, the Scattered, Ivory Towers, Researchers, the Lost, Pointy Hats (derogatory)

History: It is due to the diligent work of Magus Bonisagus and his contemporary, Maga Trianoma that the Order of Hermes even exists today. Before the works and the wanderings of the pair, Hermetic Houses existed as scattered enclaves of Masters, teaching in isolation their jealously hoarded secrets to loyal apprentices. Meetings between mages of differing Houses ended

Six Quaesitori oversee the rite, though only one need actually know the spells required to perform the *Gilgul*. The other five are there to be certain that nothing goes wrong and to provide any assistance the primary participant might require. On the emotional level, the presence of the other five mages also helps to share the psychological burden for the act of *Gilgul* amongst all the members of the House (akin to the practice of having multiple executioners present for a lethal injection). On the most practical possible level, the five additional mages are to make certain that the rite is conducted quickly, efficiently and as humanely as possible and, in many cases, to offer the release of death to the subject afterwards, as most people desire only to die when the ritual is complete.

more often than not in confrontation and, with frightful regularity, death. Trianoma, whose *Word of Unity* impelled her to seek out fellow Hermetic magi and found a fellowship of some sort, one in which practitioners of the Hermetic Arts would no longer have to slaughter one another over trifling matters, saw in Bonisagus' *Word, Parma* ("shield"), a way in which all manner of wizards could meet in safety and good faith.

The two wizards toured the lands of Europe and the Near and Middle East, from the frozen reaches of Nordic lands to the British Isles, from Kievan Rus to Cappadocia. They sought out the scattered remains of the Cult of Mercury, the Gnostics and the Pythagorians and Socratics, as well as alchemists, Hebrew and Arabic scholar-magi and high ritual mystics of all stripes. Bonisagus freely taught his *Parma Magica* to any who wished to know it and then Trianoma would speak to each in turn, offering a place in a grand venture to preserve and propound the *Ars Hermeticae* during what was, for many people, a dark and ignorant time.

In the end, Maga Trianoma, despite her more far-reaching vision and considerable political acumen, allowed herself to slip into the background during the formation of the Order. Some speculate that she did so in order to demonstrate the purity of her intentions, forsaking ambition to the intended end of realizing her *Word* (a lesson many mages of the Order would do well to learn). In any case, Bonisagus reaped the fame and honor of the Order's creation and passed them on to his students, giving the House a powerful reputation for political clout, in addition to its (much more well-deserved) history of excellence in research. Younger Bonisagi, eager to capitalize upon this power, gladly immersed themselves in the social affairs of the Order and the most powerful institutions (Church and government) alongside which it had to conduct its affairs.

Consequently, House Bonisagus wielded enormous power within the Order of Hermes by the time of the Grand Convocation. The most brilliant minds and most capable political wills were to be found among the Bonisagi, and it was in no small part due to the goodwill of the House that Baldrick LaSalle was even able to get the Order to consent to holding only a single seat on the Council of Nine. Of course, circumstances change and the

fall of the Mythic Age, not long afterward, would prove to be a blow from which the House still reels. Quintessence stocks dwindled away, Crays and Covenants were lost, and the Bonisagi, having no ready targets to blame other than one another, fell to infighting and sniping at rival theorists. Though quite brilliant, they proved not to be terribly wise.

The Bonisagi dwindled in number throughout the years, becoming more and more obtuse and eccentric. By the time of the Reckoning, the average age of an Ivory Tower mage was over 100, a testament to how little the House appealed to (or cared to appeal to) the Order's youth. With the annihilation of the Fraternal Society of Bonisagus at Doissetep and the fall of most of the Bonisagi-exclusive cabals, however, the mages of the House are now known as the Lost, for its large percentage of yet-unaccounted-for willworkers. The few Bonisagus apprentices of even five years ago are now its only earth-bound shot-callers. Whether the Scattered find some cohesion and direction in the wake of these tragedies remains to be seen.

Philosophy: Truth is comprehended only through the pursuit of understanding. Only one who continually exercises the mind and the spirit toward the end of perceiving that Truth has any chance of doing so. No one stumbles across enlightenment, no matter what the lazy children of a mediocre age might divine from their self-help books and watered-down treatises on mysticism. To the Bonisagi is given the most weighty of the Order's tasks: the realization of the Tenth Sphere, which will unlock the secrets of Creation itself and make manifest the City of Pymander. Bonisagi are not "lost in contemplation"; they are envisioning the million things that must come to pass before Perfection can come into being.

Goal: To research the innumerable applications of Hermetic magic, for implementation through the auspices of the other Houses of Hermes, and to realize, in the culmination of that research, the *Ars Unitatis*.

Style: Bonisagi dwell in a world of the sublime and theoretical. With minds like steel traps, extraordinary imaginations

and not a little eccentricity, the Scattered seem to outsiders like brilliant, doddering, mostly harmless old crazies. And in truth Bonisagus was, until recently, the House with the greatest mean age, as well as being filled with some of the more eclectic and inventive minds in the Tradition. Accordingly, Bonisagus magic is the most elaborate of traditional high ritual workings, with intricately graven circles, long and astonishingly complex chants and the most rarified components. Bonisagi are also renowned for an intimate understanding of the most obscure and eclectic branches of Hermetic practice; many of them are, by their na-

tures, strange enough that they can carry on conversations with even truly bizarre Umbrood that make perfect sense to both parties involved.

Organization: House Bonisagus was always a loosely organized House. A handful of powerful cabals performed research in remote locations across the worlds, with a scant few younger Bonisagi serving in inter-House or inter-Tradition cabals. Trying to get a consensus out of the Scattered was like pulling teeth, except that it often took literally years of hunting down far-flung willworkers in obscure and sometimes dangerous Realms. This state of affairs has, if anything, intensified in the time following the Reckoning. Several Bonisagi are so far removed from Earth and its concerns that they aren't even aware of the events of the past three or so years, and their fellows — disorganized and usually presuming them dead — aren't even bothering to go looking for them.

Initiation: The Bonisagi were never particularly fond of having their initiates forwarded on to them by Personnel, even before the freewheeling and often irreverent *Fortunae* took over the operation. Instead, would-be teachers hunted down their own apprentices, recruiting from the intelligence community, the halls of academia and other similarly elite and exclusive circles and drawing them into three to five years of seclusion, intense study and bizarre living circumstances. This trend persists among the surviving Bonisagi, though there are precariously few Scattered of the Fifth Degree or greater left. A few forward-thinking members of the House have, to compensate, taken to training two or three apprentices simultaneously — a situation which, while taxing to the mentor, is ultimately quite beneficial to the future of the House and the sanity of the initiates.



Primus: None currently. The Scattered *earned* their name, after all. The only real power center of the House existed at Doissetep, and that is no more. House Bonisagus awaits a leader to give it perhaps some small measure of unity and direction once again.

Specialty Sphere: Prime

Word: A Bonisagus' Word often encapsulates an Ideal, one with far-reaching symbolism (such as Bonisagus' *Parma*, which came to mean not only the mystic shield embodied by the *Parma Magica*, but also the institution that laid the groundwork for its successor to protect the world's Awakened): *Discovery*, *Sophia* ("wisdom") or *Excellence*, for example.

HOUSE EX MISCELLANEA

Names (in addition to the names of individual Houses): Order of Miscellany, "Misk" Mages, "Ex Miskers," Hodgepodge, House Salad (joking), Rabble (derogatory)

History: House Ex Miscellanea traditionally has been the Order's dumping ground for anyone who didn't quite fit in, or the place where those Houses fallen from grace went to end their days in ignominy and obscurity. From the days when the first pagan blood-mage was co-opted by the House, right up until only recently, this has been the case. However, a new direction is emerging for the House, one in which Ex Miscellanea serves as the proving ground for new schools of Hermeticism — a place where ideas are born, rather than where they go to die.

Today several Houses dwell under the umbrella that House Ex Miscellanea provides, including a small number of completely new Houses. Some of the notable sub-houses within Ex Miscellanea include:

Criamon — Visionaries who focus their divinatory arts through the ecstatic experience of dance, mantras and consciousness-altering substances, as well as the pain of receiving elaborate, ritual tattoos. Decimated in the wake of the horrors in Bangladesh, the last of this House's few surviving and accounted-for members have come out of their Quiets, possessed of astounding insights into the nature of reality. Most of these newly lucid Criamon advo-

cate redoubled efforts in the Ascension War, claiming that "a great time of rebirth" is at hand.

Hong Lei — The House of Crimson Thunder, comprised, at least in part, of members of the Wu Lung Craft who refused to be subsumed into the ranks of their traditional enemies, the Shaolin (in their Awakened incarnation, the Akashic Brotherhood). Hong Lei practices Chinese high ritual magic through such avenues as the alchemy of the Five Elements (earth, wood, water, fire and metal), ancestor worship, invocations to dragons, gods and powerful spirits and potent mystical martial arts.

Jerbiton — The Order's poets and artists in medieval times, the mages of today's House Jerbiton have adapted to the changing times with skill and finesse. They now seek to realize the City of Pymander through the integration of Hermetic thought and ideology into subtle corners of the Sleeping world, as novelists, psychologists and educators. Though it will never again be a Great House, Jerbiton is holding its own and carving a valuable niche for itself within the Order.

Merinita — Fortune has favored House Merinita for many years, as they eked out a painfully precarious existence until the dawn of spiritualism and flowered anew from there. Even in the days just after the Reckoning, Merinita seemed to be thriving. However, their strange fae magic is now withering. Their allies among the Fair Folk are few and growing fewer. Though the war for reality is by no means lost, wonder is dying. While Merinita, for now, has a strong membership, those numbers will suffer without a cure for the afflictions that now grip the ancient House.

Ngoma — At the foundation of the Nine Mystic Traditions, the Order attempted to shoehorn this confederation of African high ritual mystics into the ranks of the Dreamspeakers, despite a greater number of similarities in their workings to Hermetic praxes. The sorcerer-priests of the Ngoma went their own way and, for a long time, remained

less than a blip on the Traditions' radar, even as they skirted the edge of several Traditions and rebuilt their numbers and influence throughout the terrible depredations of Europe's exploration (and exploitation) of the so-called "Dark Continent." Their recent induction into the Order brings things, in a strange way, full circle.



Skopos — House Skopos is a product of changing times. Founded to address the modern disciplines of noetics, quantum physics and observation principle, Skopos (from the Greek, “one that watches; one that looks about or after things”) applies Hermetic theory to the idea that only that which is perceived exists. Thus far, the House consists only of its founder, Dr. Spiro Hatzis, formerly of House Bonisagus, and his two students (his daughter, Diana, newly inducted into the Order, and a convert from the Sons of Ether, Theodore Marceau). The House focuses on sensory and perception magics, as well as rigorous esoteric meditations used to alter subconscious expectations of yet-unobserved phenomena, so as to cause those phenomena, when first perceived, to fall into line with those expectations. The House’s stated objective is to create a view of subjective reality that realizes the City of Pymander.

Xaos — When House Thig underwent its recent metamorphosis, several of the more flatly rebellious and Discordian members of the House didn’t like where things were heading, figuring Sharad Osei and his cronies for sell-outs who would betray the nonconformist spirit of the House for the sake of a little temporal power. These stragglers banded together, along with a handful of like-minded thinkers, to found the utterly chaotic House Xaos. The House’s spiritual center is a charismatic Disciple calling herself only *Kallisti* (“to the prettiest one,” the word inscribed on the golden apple that started the Trojan War and a symbol of Discordian mysticism), who actively promotes the House’s use of as many disparate and seemingly contradictory magical styles as possible into a loose framework of (often sloppy) Hermeticism.

Philosophy: Out of one, many. Ex Miscellanea is the fertile ground in which the Order’s divergent ideas can grow and thrive. The numerous factions that dwell within the auspices of this meta-House comprise many Houses that were once great or never really found their footing, married to a number of novel approaches and amazing new ideas, just waiting for the opportunity to catch on and spread.

Goal: As stated previously, House Ex Miscellanea’s worth to the Order is measured in its ability to give the practice of Hermeticism every possible tool with which to grow strong in today’s hostile, sterile world.

Style: House Ex Miscellanea’s many Houses use Hermeticism as a stout trunk and branch out from there. Some mystics within the House dedicate pentacles to Odin, rather than Jupiter, while Amaterasu Omikami fills the station normally occupied by Michael Archangel for others. The only constant among the numerous systems of belief encompassed by Ex Miscellanea is that all of them are filtered through the lens of Hermetic high ritual magic.

Organization: Historically the most poorly organized of the Houses of Hermes, Ex Miscellanea still deserves that reputation (both for good and for ill) today. Even the Ex Miscellanea “grapevine” (a haphazard system of mundane and mystic modes of communication employed in recent years) has frayed, a victim of the fall of the Masters and the rise of the Avatar Storm, among many other things. Despite this, however, Ex Miscellanea continues to thrive, more labyrinthine and incomprehensible than ever before.

Initiation: Becoming a member of Ex Miscellanea can be as simple a matter as being Awakened, inclined to High Hermeti-

cism and having no affinity with any other Great House. While many tutors within the House initiate students in a multitude of ways, dependant upon culture, tradition and the particular quirks of the often-eclectic praxes within the House, just as many arrive in Ex Miscellanea by means of a sifting process through which outlandish practitioners of the Arts of the Thrice-Great just sort of end up there.

Primus: None currently. It remains to be seen if the Order of Miscellany will even *allow* a mage to assume the seat of House Primus after the success it has enjoyed while directed by no single authority.

Word: Ex Miscellanea encompasses a considerable number of Hermetic and pseudo-Hermetic praxes. Thus, Ex Miscellanea Words range from *Uruz* (the Nordic Rune for strength), to *Enlil* (“Lord of Command”; the Sumerian sky-god) to *Yama* (the Japanese word for mountain), and many others besides.

HOUSE FLAMBEAU

Names: House Ignis, Flame Mages, Apromorians, Nukes or Tacnukes (joking)

History: A bold and willful magus most likely from the Iberian Peninsula, Flambeau was a warrior and a Crusader who sought to drive out and destroy Moorish willworkers. The campaign turned to one of vengeance when retaliatory strikes left his family and teacher dead; Flambeau never discovered who was responsible. His wrath in the wake of these deaths was such that Flambeau began to target *any* wizards he could find; legend attributes at least 50 slain magi to him during this time. It was only the calming presence and diplomatic words of Maga Trianoma that ended Flambeau’s killing fury. With the same ardor with which he had dedicated himself to destruction, Flambeau turned his actions to protection, and he and his followers became the sword of the Order.

House Flambeau, in the centuries since, has enjoyed some great successes in this cause and some spectacular failures, and their uniquely bold approach to Awakened life has meant that *all* of their actions, for good and for ill, have been memorable, to say the least. Though the mages of House Ignis have known suffering and death, they have never succumbed to despair, for they have the freedom of those who know they will die tomorrow. From the Second Battle of Mistridge to the immolation of Doissetep, the mages of Flambeau have been present at all the most cataclysmic scenes of destruction the Order has ever known but, like the phoenix, they rise from the embers of those flames: stronger, harder, more determined. Every fallen brother and sister has become a testament to their courage and their conviction, despite outsiders’ claims of their “suicidal idiocy.” One who knows no fear, after all, looks like a madman to a coward.

The recent developments within the Awakened world as a whole and the Order specifically have turned House Flambeau’s focus outward. With cunning cultivated as the legacy of Apromor (one of Flambeau’s two apprentices and by far the subtler and wiser of the two), the mages of the House are now looking again at a policy of aggression, rather than protection. The Order, they assert, *cannot* now be defended without a good offense. The only way to guard against the great enemy, the Technocratic Union, is to destroy it utterly.

Philosophy: It is worth noting that the first thing God is recorded as saying is "Let there be light!" The first act of shaping Creation began with a manifestation of energy. Emulating that primal, defining act, the Flambeau seek to banish the Darkness (represented as the negative principle, Ahriman) and thereafter replace it with the life-giving and beneficent Light (personified in Ohrmuzd, the positive principle). Like many followers of dualistic traditions, the wizards of Flambeau scorn the physical world as a place of evil, excess and suffering and seek to embrace the sublime purity of the world of the spirit (which is not embodied in the Umbrae, but instead within a realm that exists beyond the comprehension of material creatures: the domain of the Ascended). In the pursuit of this goal, Flambeau push the limits of their bodies, seeking to transcend fear, desire and pain. They are the strong ones who defend the weak, though it costs them their lives.

To sum up: the world is corrupt, life is an illusion and death will set you free. The radiant spirit, unchecked by the follies of the debased material world, thrusts its sacred illumination into the hiding places of shadow and burns away the impurities within others and within itself. The final act of purification is the fatal one, in which the mage knows perfection and exultation and thereby becomes one with the Light.

Goal: Nothing less than the annihilation of the current paradigm, preferably by way of searing a path through its primary architect, the Technocratic Union, using covert strike teams, a protracted sense of vengeance and tactics some within the Order itself decry as "terrorist."

Style: Flambeau practice a variety of elemental bindings, concentrating on spirits of primal destruction (such as those embodying fire or lightning, for example) and invoking the qualities of these beings upon their weapons and foci and, in times of great duress, within themselves. If at all possible, the willworkers of the House attempt to realize these magics through coincidental avenues: downed power lines, gas leaks and the like, though the Flambeau admit that there are also some times when such circumstances are a luxury and they need to occasionally tempt Paradox with more blatant effects. In order to be far from the consequences of

their incendiary tactics (and to mask those tactics in the most opportune spaces, away from Sleeping eyes), Flambeau often develop at least some familiarity with the *Ars Conflagrationis*.

Well traveled, Flambeau are notorious in the Order for incorporating diverse techniques into their mystic repertoires, seeking out elemental magics of shamanic, religious and other varieties. Like collectors, the Flambeau often seek out the most rare and exotic of mystic styles with which to supplement their own practices, and it is a point of pride among some Flame Mages to be versed in as many magical disciplines as possible.

Organization: A ruthlessly competitive House, Flambeau's policy was traditionally set by the rule of sword and flame. Whoever could take control of the House (by usurping the current leader) served as Flambeau's Primus. Right now, however, with the death at Horizon of Master Divraniya, first female Primus of Flambeau and the last Primus of the House, House Ignis' composition has gracefully segued into a cellular structure,

sacrificing lines of communication in favor of decentralized authority (which makes it impossible to attack the "core" of the House) and latitude to operate. Individual Flambeau within cabals of other mages (whether of different House or different Traditions) form rough coalitions by geographical area, doing their best to aid one another in time of need and otherwise making themselves too thinly-spread a target to easily pinpoint.

Initiation: Induction into House Ignis always culminates with a daring raid on a Technocratic stronghold or operation of some sort (curiously, when the doomsayers began to lament the "Technocratic victory" of the Ascension War, the Flambeau never paused long enough to hear their words and continued on with the custom as though no one had ever seen fit to inform them of this "development"). Bravery and discretion are most highly valued in a potential initiate, though a sense of imagination and a flair for the dramatic also win points with one's fellow Apromorians.

House Flambeau favors those who work with fire and other destructive forces: disaster relief personnel, demolitionists and the soldiery, for example. The House also looks to those who have exceptional insight into such powers, such as physicists and nuclear engineers. Flambeau, despite an attrition rate that would be almost cartoonish, were it not for the stench of burning bodies that accompanies it, is still the largest of the Houses of Hermes, with a claim on the better part of the initiates filtering in through Personnel these days.



Primus: None currently. The Flambeau are too busy reclaiming lost ground in the renewed Ascension War for political games. When someone takes the Order's seat on the Council of Nine and forces them to make a choice, only then will they attend to this matter.

Word: While, for many years, it was traditional for a Flambeau to adopt as his Word the name of a Persian deity (a nod to the House's Zoroastrian roots), this custom is slowly but surely falling out of favor. Consequently, an older Apromorian may have as his Word the name of *Atar*, Genius of Fire, but a younger Flambeau is just as likely to choose Words such as *Conflagration* or *Fission* to describe her quest for Ascension.

HOUSE FORTUNAE

Names: *Fati*, Fortune Mages, House of Luck, Numismancers, Arithmosophists, Numerologists

History: Founded as a minor House within Ex Miscellanea in 1910, Fortunae began as a union of like-minded Kabbalists seeking to more fully explore and unravel the numerological correspondences inherent in Hermetic philosophy and mysticism. As scholars and socialites, these mages were able to insinuate themselves quickly into the highest ranks of academia (those of them who did not already operate in such circles, that is), begetting a new Pythagorean movement in the Sleeping world in the '20s that would be of such quality and high profile that the Order, duly impressed, granted the Fortunae Great House standing in the mid-'30s.

Since then, the (calculatedly) lucky mages of House Fortunae have enjoyed considerable standing within the Order and within the strata of Sleeper society with which they regularly interact. They have taken over responsibility for the Order's finances, turning crumbling manors into real estate goldmines and investing old money in high-yield, high-risk accounts that always seem to yield without any real risks, and are now the House most responsible for the Order's recruitment, via Personnel Division, due largely to their overall great social skills.

The premiere masters of Sleeper influence within the Order, Arithmosophists are now also largely responsible for disseminating much of the other Houses' work into society at large when no other convenient means of doing so presents itself. The

Fortunae, for their part, are more than happy to assist in this regard. *Sa*, after all, can be broken down into numbers as well....

Philosophy: Existence is a question, not a state of being. Knowing God's mathematics allows one to discern the answers to the ongoing equation that is reality. As numbers are simply symbols used to categorize the patterns that make up Creation, the ability to control numbers is, in a very real way, the ability to manipulate the cosmos. Language can be broken down into mathematics, as can aesthetics, the progression of the events of history, the shape of the future, the nature of consciousness and even, Kabbalah holds,

the secrets behind religion. Thus, he who knows that a number is merely a representation and, yet, is aware that all things are manifest through mathematics, can begin to study, analyze and even shape the underlying designs of the Divine that move "behind" the reality we see.

Mathematics, after all, is magical. Just look at money. It is a concept for which people are willing to kill and die and in which billions of people invest the sum of their own personal worth; it is a measuring stick by which a person's, organization's or thing's importance is weighed and, despite that, it possesses no substance. It is a concept that exists solely in the medium of numbers, a concept made real through belief in the power of those numbers. If that isn't magic, what is?

Goal: The maintenance of the "public face" of the Order of Hermes; its connections in outside social circles. Also, the upkeep and continual expansion of the Order's mundane resources.

Style: Fortunae's numeric theories have their roots in Kabbalah, but branch out from there into chaos mathematics, numerology, gematria, cryptography, sacred geometry and still more esoteric disciplines. Enochian and Hebrew, as languages more or less designed with numerical correspondences, are particularly favored tongues among the Numerologists and figure prominently into their workings. The House regards instruments used to measure, collate and/or



act upon numbers as invaluable tools, whether in the guise of calculating mathematical problems, measuring distance, or even playing music, among other things. Mages of the House use their astonishing understanding of the numeric patterns underlying Creation to manipulate chance in their favor (whether that entails being in the right place at the right time to find a new potential apprentice, rolling a seven, or not being where the Man in Black just let loose with his submachine gun). Conversely, they are also the Hermetics most likely to trust in destiny, relying upon their great luck and quick wits to prosper.

Organization: For most of the House's existence, a system of respect for seniority was the norm (a reflection of Fortuna's roots in Jewish religious traditions), but the past three years have brought great change to this institution. Many of the old scholars of the House have gone into seclusion, leaving younger willworkers in positions of command. Thus, the informal meritocracy endorsed by the newer generation of Fortuna's has quickly become the principle system of hierarchy among the Numismancers. The most brilliant mathematical and arithmosophic theorems and proofs are now the coin of the realm, garnering great prestige (and the many perks that go along with it in a House that deals so closely with material wealth) to those who develop them.

Personnel Division is essentially the province of Fortuna's as well; many consider the two institutions to be inextricably linked now. This means that at least half of all the Order's new recruits spend at least some time in the company of one or more Fortuna's early on into their time as apprentices. With their wit and charm, most mages of the House are able to make friendships with these raw recruits easily, friendships that ultimately make Fortuna's the best connected of the Houses within the entirety of the Order.

Initiation: House Fortuna's uses its connections within Personnel for all they're worth with a diligent ongoing campaign of poaching the better portion of the world's few suave mathematical geniuses for itself. As a result, in addition to theoretical mathematicians and retiring Kabbalistic scholars, the House often ends up with those who come from very unorthodox fields of mathematical comprehension: gamblers, pool sharks, slick financiers and the like.

Fortuna's are remarkable in the Order in that they do not press students to move beyond their own pace. Naturally, those initiates who push themselves of their own accord are the most valued, but the Fortuna's are aware of the power inherent in the Divine Mathematics and do not care to foist such responsibility upon the shoulders of those not ready for it. Actual induction into the House follows the solution of a cryptogram so complex that it would require any Sleeper, no matter how brilliant, years to solve. By manipulating probability in her favor, however, and guessing the meaning of the cryptogram correctly, the aspiring Numismancer proves herself worthy.

Primus: Stephen Landon Masters resides, as he has for most of his life, in Cambridge, England.

Specialty Sphere: Entropy

Word: A Fortuna's Word is almost always drawn from Kabbalistic, arithmosophic or advanced mathematical concepts or precepts. Thus, *Gematria* (the discipline of seeking comprehension through the numerical correspondences located within religious,

specifically Hebrew, texts), *Pi* (the elusive number wherein a perfect circle, a reflection of the Ideal, may be found) or *Chaos*, for example, can serve to give definition and focus to a Numerologist.

HOUSE QUÆSITOR

Names: Quæsitōri, Judges, Praetors, Magistrati, House of Judges, *Ma'ati*, Bulldogs or Pit Bulls (derogatory), IA (joking)

History: When the Houses of Hermes first gathered in the eighth century C.E., the

magus Guernicus brought with him his followers

— practitioners of a harsh school of mystic thinking, one which emphasized



the idea of rigid laws and a perfectly structured order in the universe. Guernicus believed that one who could discern all of these unseen axioms of Creation could possess authority on the same level as that of its Creator. Of course, by coming into proximity with such elevated precepts, the enlightened mind would be flensed of human weakness and failing, transmogrified into a thing of pure, unfettered intellection and Will, thus becoming like unto the Creator: an apotheosis born of Divine Law.

Guernicus, a bitter and sardonic man who saw only the flaws in his fellow men, at first staunchly opposed the idea of a mystic Order of Hermes. He foresaw that there would be so many difficulties in managing the numberless disputes that would undoubtedly crop up in the day-to-day affairs of such an Order that the entire venture would be doomed to failure from the outset. Maga Trianoma, however, managed to woo the grim Archmage to the cause by promising him control over the judiciary of this Hermetic society, that he might have an opportunity to apply his theories of incorruptible order within the auspices of the most potent mystic fellowship the world had ever seen. With reservation and a degree of aloofness that his descendants emulate to this day, Guernicus consented to join.

Throughout the next few centuries, Guernicus' rule of the House was marked by one phenomenally poor decision (allowing himself to be swayed by his fellow Archmage, Tremere, into declaring Wizards' March on the druidic House Diedne, an act which would directly aid Tremere on his path to vampirism) and an alleged, though never acted upon, scheme born of pure ambition (the so-called Duresca Scrolls, which supposedly laid out the Primus' plans for control of the Order and then domination of the world). In truth, Guernicus never cared enough about the opinions of others to answer allegations or intimations one way or the other, and his control of House Quaesitor (the name he gave it, in preference to his own, an oddity for the time) was otherwise exemplary. He would die in 1066, passing his House on to the care of younger (but usually no less grim or curmudgeonly) willworkers.

From there, House Quaesitor worked diligently to clean up its image (the Schism War, in which the Diedne were destroyed, ended only a little more than 50 years before, and it still left a bitter taste in many Hermetics' mouths) and to project and, indeed, embody an image of perfect fairness and unswerving dedication to justice. It was then, by way of a Tribunal held within the House itself, that the leadership of Quaesitor determined that the House of Judges would *never* seek rule, over either the Order or its fellow men. That resolution has endured up to the current times.

Philosophy: Reality desperately *wants* us to understand its perfection. It expresses this longing through a concept known as *Ma'at*: universal balance, order and justice. This Ideal filters down to the realm of mortal concerns through systems of laws and axioms, ranging from "thou shalt not steal" to the laws of gravity. We only *perceive* the world as a chaotic and unjust place. That is because we cannot look with clear sight and limitless perspective upon the primordial, majestic order that shores it up. When an individual Quaesitor helps to enforce the laws of Creation (for example, goodness shall be rewarded and evil punished, Awakened will carries with it a responsibility to always act with purity and wisdom, and all things in the Universe seek the freedom to rise to their proper station), she illustrates that

truth is, and ever shall be, more powerful than illusion. The victory of the Hermetic Ideal (that of an educated and enlightened humanity, free yet conscientious) is not a possibility but an *inevitability*. Reality itself wishes it so.

Goal: Preservation and, now, enforcement of Hermetic law, as represented by the Code of Hermes and the Peripheral Corrigenda. House Quaesitor hunts down corruption within the Order of Hermes and helps to keep it strong by cleansing it of the deleterious influence of chaos and lawlessness.

Style: Quaesitor magic, by and large, tends to be among the subtlest found in the Order. Seals of Solomon grant wisdom and insight, while various sensory effects dispel ignorance and reveal the unseen to the mage's enhanced perceptions. Quaesitori use blindfolds to seek out iniquity (no matter how distant), while scales and gavels discern guilt or innocence. When a Quaesitor *does* decide that real force is necessary, however, he brings it about in most spectacular ways. Angelic Umbrood serve as the executioners of the sentences he passes, and a razor-honed assault of pure will crushes even his staunchest foe with raw, psychic fury.

Organization: House Quaesitor uses a very simple hierarchy. It is presided over by a Primus, and supported and advised by a Council of *Magistrati*, who oversee Grand Tribunals in the House's Ancestral Covenant in Stuttgart, Germany. (Ideally, there are seven *Magistrati* and all are at least Adepts, but this tradition is largely an impossibility now, due to fragmented lines of communication within the Order.) Each *Magistratus* is, in theory, advised by and reported to by a *Praetor* or two, who is likewise supported by one or two *Quaesitori* (the House's name for newly-initiated members).

Initiation: The House takes its recruits from among the institutions of Sleeper law. This used to be restricted to lawyers and justices of exceptional skill and intellectual understanding but, since the dissolution of House Janissary, the Quaesitori are now also training a handful of law *enforcement* professionals.

Since the Fall of Doissetep, the House's maddeningly complex initiation ritual (known as the Gavel, which posited nearly impossible questions of ambiguous morality, to which there were definitive "right" and "wrong" answers, under conditions of extreme stress and privation) is being reworked to reflect a more organic and intuitive (rather than rote) understanding of morality, justice and the law.

Primus: The venerable Ishaq ibn-Thoth, who travels this world and many others extensively in the pursuit of enforcing the Order's justice.

Specialty Sphere: Mind or Spirit

Word: A Quaesitor's Word usually evokes principles of Divine justice and balance; *Geburah* ("judgment" or "severity" in the Kabbalistic Tree of Life), *Karma* and, of course, *Ma'at* are all Words that adequately express the idea of a greater purpose and Universal scope to the very concept of law and order. The Quaesitor realizes, through her Word, the chastisement of wickedness, the exultation of virtue and the inviolability of the rules set forth by Creation itself, difficult as they can be to understand and as misleading as they can often seem to beings of fundamentally small and limited perceptions.

HOUSE SHAEA

Names: *Serket, Sesmu, Seshati*, House of Seshat, House of the Crescent Moon

History: House Shaea's history begins in the primordial past of the Order, with Seshat, wife of Djhowtey, who was, with her husband, one of the two founders of the fundamentals of Hermetic mystical tradition. Seshat ascended (and, the Shaea maintain, Ascended) to become an Egyptian goddess with dominion over the written word. The cult that sprung up to honor her, comprised mostly of women, kept her rites and her secrets for over four millennia, protecting the power and purity of those rituals.

The Cult of Seshat, in honor of their goddess, accepted every opportunity to seize the subtle strength of the written word. As a result, they compiled literature, writings on mysticism and philosophy and, perhaps most importantly, history. The *Seshati*, through this latter work, came to understand that nuances of history were the true power over reality itself. By telling a certain version of history to enough people, generation after generation, a priestess could *change the past*. After all, history is only what is remembered, not what truly *was*. Those who controlled history, through its words and Names, therefore, could possess the ability to alter the complexion of the present and shape the progression of the future.

With this profound revelation, the Cult of Seshat set out to control that power. In part, this was out of ambition, but the greatest motivating factor was to see that astonishing influence used responsibly. This continued for literally millennia until, in 1412, hunted by enemies on all sides (an insular coalition of frightfully literate and educated priestesses dedicated to a Pharonic Egyptian deity didn't go over very well just about *anywhere* in those days...), High Priestess Fatima Baijani sought out the Order of Hermes for protection. The Order gladly conceded a position to these erudite women, these keepers of the most ancient Arts of Hermes... in House Ex Miscellanea. Unhappy about this demeaning relegation to the position of a minor House within a largely disrespected House, the Cult of Seshat nevertheless complied, having no other ready options to speak of.

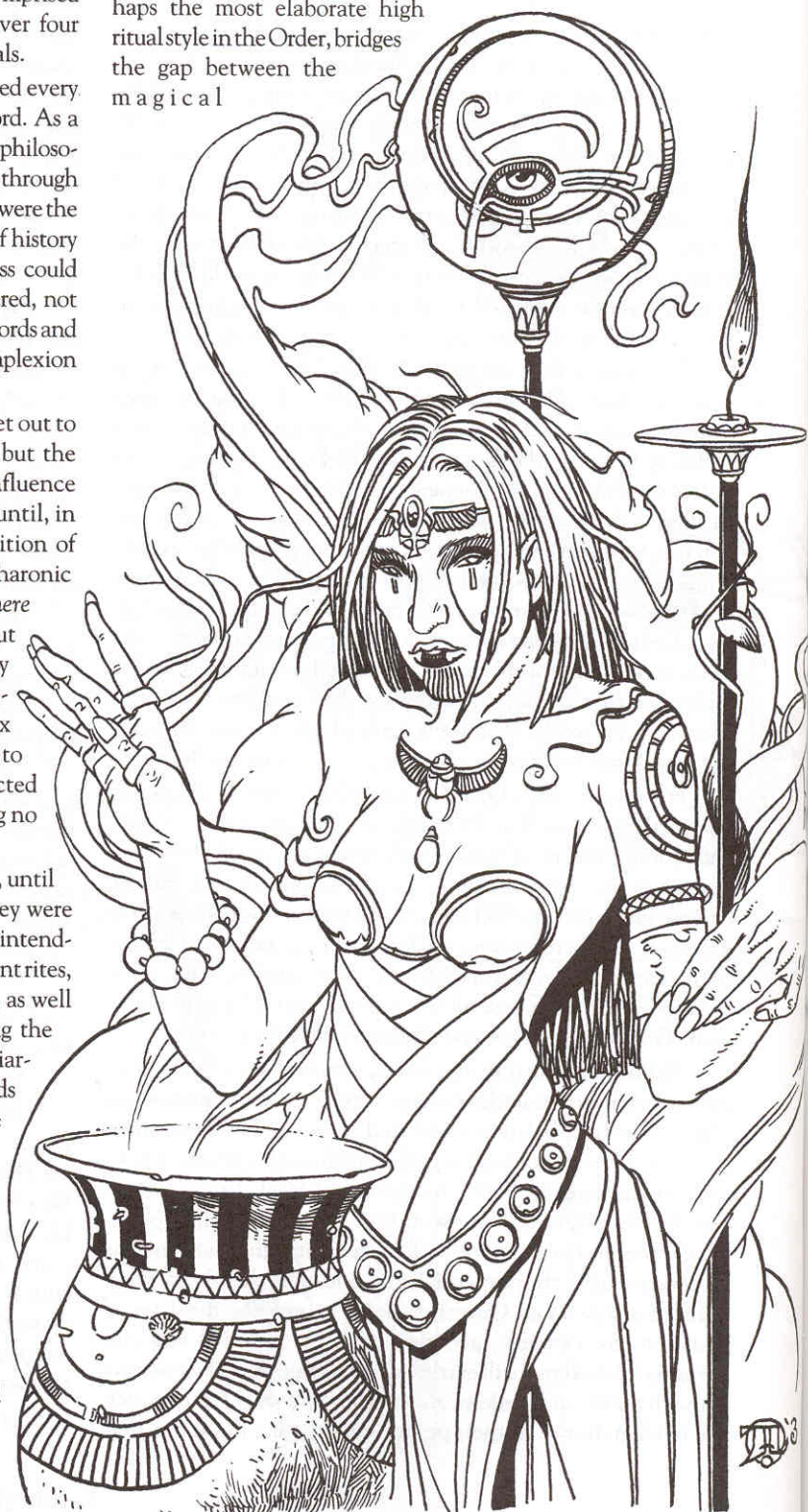
This adversarial relationship carried on for centuries, until the *Seshati* decided, in 1982, to inform the Order that they were dissatisfied with their position in the Tradition and were intending to leave. Naturally, they would be taking all of the ancient rites, histories and other writings they had brought with them, as well as those they had compiled and discovered since joining the Order of Hermes. The Order was aghast. This small matriarchy now held well over a third of the Order's written records in its care. Their departure would be devastating. To diffuse the situation, the Primi of the Order extended an offer of Great House status to the House of *Seshat*. Graciously, High Priestess Maraksha Kashaf accepted, christening her new House "Shaea" (Egyptian for "auspice").

Philosophy: All of Creation can be distilled down into the Names given to the things in it. Take away the Name of a person, place or thing and it ceases to be. This is why the nobility and priesthoods of ancient Egypt sought to destroy their enemies not only by killing them, but also by erasing all traces of their Names from the works of history. A Name

transcends time and space. Know it, and you possess power over what it describes: power to touch it at any distance, to control its actions, to sculpt its development, even to destroy it.

Goal: To keep the history and accumulated knowledge of the Order and the Universe itself, as well as to educate those hungry minds within the Sleeping world, that they shall become lights in the darkness, driving out the shadow of ignorance and heralding a new dawn.

Style: House Shaea's praxis, perhaps the most elaborate high ritual style in the Order, bridges the gap between the magical



worldview and the sacred. It is a form of *religious* Hermeticism that calls upon the deities of ancient Egypt (the powers invoked in the archetypal high ritual practice of those days), as opposed to Greek, Roman, Hebrew and Christian powers. In keeping with the Egyptian school of mystical thought, there is nothing to the Shaea more significant than a Name. A Name is the essence of the thing it describes, a fundamental component of that thing's existence.

A Seshat uses the power of Names to control and bind many different facets of Creation, including herself. Her own Word becomes one of her Names, by which she controls the progress of her evolution toward perfection and Ascension. She speaks Names of wind and thunder, of enemy and Umbrood, and of the vicissitudes of even space and time and so suborns them to her command. Shaea are known to skirt the Code of Hermes itself through the summoning and binding (in the form of imprisonment) of dark and terrible entities from many diverse worlds and cosmologies. A sisterhood (most Seshati regard themselves as priestesses as much as mages) with its roots in primordial mysticism, the House also employs the use of curses, totemic (especially feline) practice and even fertility magics.

Organization: The House of the Crescent Moon is led by a High Priestess (recorded on the Order's rolls as the Primus), who is assisted, advised and monitored continually for spiritual or ideological corruption by a rotating council of Elders. The High Priestess leads the elaborate ceremonies of the House and is responsible for Guarding the Hall of *Khesef-hra-khemiu* (otherwise known as the House of Books), offering advice and wisdom and hearing out and acting upon the concerns and complaints of even the youngest and least experienced Seshati. This latter duty, that of accountability to the House's youth, is one that is only just now beginning to catch on in other Houses of Hermes and one that bodes well for the Order's future, a development for which the Shaea are more than happy to take the credit.

Initiation: Most Shaea seek their apprentices among women of academia, specifically students of the written word; linguists, translators and well-schooled librarians are common choices for induction, as are those who study ancient languages (especially those spoken in or around Egypt). The most strenuous aspect of a would-be Seshat's training is, doubtlessly, the simultaneous assimilation of at least eight languages: Arabic, Egyptian, Farsi, Greek, Hebrew, Latin, Sanskrit and, of course, Enochian. The recruit learns the pseudo-religious rites of the House, as well as the more mundane skills of bookbinding, the preservation of ancient texts, transcription and the like. Graduation is achieved upon the completion of a personal Book of Names, in which the mage inscribes the Names most useful in exerting control over her reality (these are known to range from Words of Power to the Name of a senator's underage mistress).

Contrary to what some outside the House believe, the Shaea do admit men to their ranks. Many male initiates to the Order are simply uncomfortable with the idea of existing within a matriarchal society, however, and few stay out their period of apprenticeship.

Primus: The erudite Daira Kashaf, seventh (and eldest surviving) daughter of the late Archmage, Maraksha Kashaf, founder of the modern incarnation of the House. Daira, who for the latter half of the '90s ran an Ambassador Chantry (which she still thinks of as a second home) near Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, now lives in Cairo, Egypt.

Specialty Sphere: Time

Word: A Seshat's Word, often a Name (usually a deity's) in ancient Egyptian, sums up the mage's vector of study and her desired avenue to understanding. Thus, *Ptah* (the Opener of Ways), *Tehuti* (the original name of Thoth, later Hermes) or *Aten* (the Indivisible Sun), for example, could serve well as a guide and exemplar for the aspiring Shaea.

HOUSE SOLIFICATI

Names: Crowned Ones, Children of Knowledge, Alchemists, The Tenth Seat (usually only uttered in-House), The Fallen Tradition (often derogatory), Heylels (*extremely* derogatory)

History: House Solificati's roots are found in the earliest practices of alchemy, the first mystic science. For many centuries, there was no kind of organization among the practitioners of the Royal Art beyond the occasional loose alliance or small exclusive order. When the Order of Reason first began to come together, the scattered alchemists listened to what they had to say but rapidly rejected and were rejected by the nascent society of philosopher-scientists. The alchemists wanted nothing to do with the "boorish and banal gathering," while the Reasoners disliked the astonishing arrogance projected by the perfectionist magi. Instead, the alchemists took what they had learned of the Order of Reason (as well as a newfound sense of solidarity from their brief flirtation with that Order) and sought to parlay that information into a seat on the Council of Nine at the first Grand Convocation, a gambit that paid off. Newly christened the Solificati ("Crowned Ones"), they plotted out a grand vision for the unification of Creation within a single, elevated mystic paradigm.

Unfortunately, this was not to be. The Tradition's *wunderkind*, the rebus, Heylel Teonim, betrayed the Traditions' First Cabal to the Order of Reason in order to prove a point. Heylel was tried and sentenced to *Gilgul* and execution, and the Solificati, after the assassination of the Tradition's Primus by a rival, disbanded. Some sought refuge with the Order of Reason, slipping seamlessly and humbly into the ranks of the Artificers (forerunners to Iteration X), while a scant few took shelter with the Order of Hermes. Most, however, vanished into obscurity, reorganizing as a Craft calling itself the Children of Knowledge. The Alchemists would spend the next five or so centuries this way, dividing their time between the Earth and the Craft's alchemically-perfected Horizon Realm.

In the last days of the twentieth century, however, something changed. For the better part of the Solificati's banishment, the Order had stayed in touch with notable Masters among the Alchemists and a standing offer to join the Order was extended. Proud and independent, however, the Children of Knowledge resisted, holding out for a triumphant return as the Tenth Tradition, claiming the unknown Seat in Horizon, a Seat the Children called "Unity." Political difficulties within the Traditions, though, made this a virtual impossibility. (The Verbena, whose First Cabal representative bore Heylel's twin children before succumbing to despair and dying at the hands of the Inquisition, and the Celestial Chorus, whose representative's unrequited love for Heylel caused her to turn the Tradition against the Solificati after the fall of that cabal, would not hear of it.) The devastation of the Avatar Storm, along with the loss of many Masters

of the Craft, caused the remainder of the Children of Knowledge to rethink their position. While they might never again be a full-fledged Tradition (and even *that* is not truly certain...), they had to make a decision before such a choice was made for them. It was time to take a stand or fall through the cracks. With the Order of Hermes badly wounded by its losses, the acceptance of their offer to the Children of Knowledge was a virtual Godsend. The Alchemists, of course, demanded their own Great House. The Order, in no position to refuse and, truth be told, happy to have its wayward cousin back in the fold, quickly relented.

Philosophy: The study of Alchemy (also known as the Royal Art) is the study of transformation and

purification. It is the *only* work of a worthy life and the only true form of mysticism; all else is shadow-show and idle diversion. Just as the Awakening moves a person out of the crass, mundane world and into the realm of elevated thought and action, so there is a state above that, the elusive state of Ascension. Of course, the transformation of base metals (lead into gold, to use the classic example) is nothing more than a metaphor for the evolution of the spirit into a thing of perfected beauty and splendor. A true master of the Royal Art is a living crucible wherein the world itself is cleansed and perfected, made flawless through her genius.

Goal: The pursuit of the Royal Art and its applications in an unenlightened society, with the express goal of implementing, by whatever reasonable means, the alchemical principles of purification and elevation to the hearts and minds of the Sleepers of the world.

Style: All of a Crowned One's magical effects filter through the craft of alchemy, making portions, poultices, unguents and powders some of the favored foci of this House. Draughts to mend wounds, incenses that, when inhaled, expand perceptions: these are some of the hallmarks of the Alchemists. Also, the House's young blood has brought a dash of Timothy Leary to the mix, adding consciousness-altering substances of a mystic nature to the House's repertoire. Interestingly, the oft-subtle nature of the ways in which the Royal Art is implemented lends a degree of coincidence to a Solificati's workings that is often absent in those of other Hermetics, even when their magics are worked on or in front of Sleepers ("I thought I was seeing ghosts! I must've been wrecked on whatever that guy gave me...")

Organization: The Children of Knowledge had their own system of ranking, one derived from and highly reminiscent of the Order's own, unsurprising considering that the two organizations remained in close contact throughout the centuries after the Solificati "officially" disbanded. This system, which used the names of alchemically perfected metals, denoted various levels of understanding of the Spheres. These categories fit pretty well into the normal Hermetic classifications, however, and so all save the proudest and most independent-minded Children, who still joined the Order, have



abandoned them. With the lack of organization plaguing the House, there is little direct authority among the Solificati right now, save for the bond between master and apprentice and the respect due a more knowledgeable and enlightened willworker.

Solificati recruitment tends to be carried out by individual would-be mentors, often out of fields almost dizzying in their variety: biochemistry, philosophy, particle physics, Kabbalah, engineering, drug culture and others. The Crowned Ones reason that it puts less strain on Personnel and allows them to be more hands-on in the initiation process. It may be well and good to simply take whomever you're offered to train as a Hermetic mage, after all, but the creation of an *Alchemist*, on the other hand, is a Great Work all its own.

Primus: None currently. The Crowned Ones are recent converts to the Order and, in terms of establishing themselves as part of the Hermetic hierarchy, their timing could not have been worse. If a member of the House *does* manage to unite the Alchemists and get the former Children of Knowledge on track, he or she is likely to end up as House Primus by default.

Specialty Sphere: Matter

Word: The concept of choosing a Word that embodies the whole essential being of an Awakened spirit is still a bit novel to the members of this House. The Word either tries to summarize the infinite or to create exclusivity in that which should be all encompassing. Those few Solificati who have deigned to adopt a Word have often chosen one that is broad (and lofty) enough in its application to adequately encapsulate the Royal Art: *Perfection* or *Ein Soph* (the transcendent state of Divinity which exists "above" the Kabbalistic Tree of Life), for example.

HOUSE TYTALUS

Names: Tytali, Tytalans, Followers of Tytalus, Generals, Majordomos, Caesars (colloquial), Fausts (extremely derogatory), Renfields (regarded as a sure way to get killed)

History: House Tytalus has, over the centuries, known a long, hard road. It has bled for its sins and now stands at a crossroads. On one hand is the path of senseless aggression and confrontation within the House, the Order and the Traditions. On the other is a more difficult road, one that pits the House against the very inertia of apathy that is eating Creation alive. Almost without exception, the Tytali of today are choosing the latter path.

Beginning with Tytalus himself, whose mystic philosophy advocated an ethic of relentless conflict, mages of this House have been among the most driven willworkers in the world. The expression of that drive, however, has varied from mage to mage: Magister Baldric LaSalle served as one of the focal points of the nascent Traditions, while Getulio Vargas Sao Christivao, former Primus of the Order, used his position to set himself in opposition to reformist forces within those Traditions.

The Tytalan code of struggle has landed the House in more than one bad situation, of course: charges of diabolism down through the centuries; trafficking with the vampiric descendants of the rogue House Tremere; the enmity of almost every other House and Tradition at some point over the course of the last 500 years. The most recent of these, the Second *Massasa* War, sparked a civil war within the House itself, setting Tytali against Tremere

and brother against brother over the spiritual pollution of vampiric blood that had crept into the House through the machinations of a few short-sighted and dangerously ambitious willworkers. Out of this horrific conflict, with a death toll that the House will not soon recover from, there is, however, hope. Today's Caesars have looked upon and overcome the enemy within. They are now ready to do battle with the crushing weight of Stasis itself.

Philosophy: Struggle is the only means to personal advancement. If a thing comes without work or conflict, of what use is it? Such empty acquisitions only serve to dilute the spirit and to weaken the will. "Something for nothing" is the philosophy espoused by most of the world's Sleepers—and look at where it's gotten them: apathetic, hopeless, helpless and enslaved to secret masters whom they lack the initiative to even question. By confronting the many forces that beset enlightenment on all sides, a mage not only seizes power for himself, but he also serves as an example, a bastion and a trailblazer for the weak.

Goal: To advance the cause of the Order's (and the Traditions') victory in the Ascension War through inspiration, intelligence, tactics, military action and covert operations.

Style: The magic of House Tytalus emphasizes the ascendancy of the Will. By pitting the Will directly against the mundane and supernatural forces of the world, one can force them to conform to one's desires. The average Tytalan employs subtlety and cunning in her works, undercutting the Will of the enemy through the use of *Ars Mentis* and other such invisible assaults. After all, if a foe can be made to lose the desire to fight, he has already lost. When subtlety fails, or is simply not called for, however, Tytali are also adept at unleashing the fury of the elements and the power of the *Ars Vitae* upon their enemies. Almost without exception, *all* of the Arts studied by a Caesar are focused through a sense of military precision and discipline, lending a martial edge to the willworker's magic.

For many years, since the infamous Fall of Johannes Faust, an otherwise unexceptional member of the House, Tytali have scrupulously avoided the *Ars Spirituum*, fearing the suspicion it would arouse against the House. However, a recent movement within Tytalus, using texts recovered from the rogue House Tremere during the Second *Massasa* War, advocates dispensing with this centuries-old stigma and simply using whatever Arts prove most advantageous for the matter at hand. Those Tytali who have resumed investigating the powers of the Realms Invisible have taken care to avoid anything that looks even *remotely* like Infernalism. The House's reputation is damaged enough as it is.

Organization: House Tytalus was, sadly, devastated by the events of the Second *Massasa* War. Many of its prominent mages succumbed to the lure of vampiric blood and many others died following the betrayals of their corrupted fellows or during the battles of that war. Despite this, the Tytalan tradition of "One Mage, One Vote" (an oddity, given the House's intensely competitive nature) persists, with the Primus serving as the voice of the House's Will. Surprisingly little of this process is subject to bloc voting or favor currying and so House Tytalus manages to carry out its affairs with a degree of honesty and sincerity lacking in many other Houses.

Initiation: Tytalan initiation is as brutal, unforgiving and genuinely unpleasant as it ever was. Even in the wake of a disastrous

failure that halved the House's membership (and this on the heels of calamities that chiseled away steadily at the highest levels of the Tytali), the Caesars refuse to "dumb down" their induction rites for the benefit of the next generation. While this ethic of relentless perfection drives away most potential recruits, it has also spurred the surviving Tytali on to aggressively seek out new mages for the House. The end result is that House Tytalus is beginning to recoup its losses, replacing foolishly ambitious Masters with cautiously ambitious initiates. It will, however, besome time before House Tytalus enjoys numbers and strength like it had even three years ago.

The Tytalan



initiation involves continual testing from one's mentor (and her friends and allies, and so on) over the course of the student's years-long apprenticeship. Often, these tests, which usually take the form of assaults, come at the least opportune times (*no one* enjoys fielding a certámen challenge while on the can...) and from the most unlikely directions. The rationale behind this is simple: the Enemy will never wait for you to finish your drink, wipe your mouth and stand up, nor will he care that you were just about to get that girl's phone number. Besting one's mentor in an open challenge (of whatever type the apprentice can cajole or corner that mentor into accepting), however, ends this time of trials and marks the mage as a full-fledged member of the House. In order to do so, many initiates seek unorthodox tutelage and employ unexpected stratagems. Thus does House Tytalus' knowledge and bank of tactics grow from one generation to the next.

Primus: Lord Edward Gilmore, First Deacon of the Covenant at Mus, in exile. He currently dwells in a chantry in the Scottish countryside, but his affairs keep him abroad most of the time. Lord Gilmore is also the frontrunner for the Seat of Forces when a new Council of Nine convenes.

Specialty Sphere: Mind

Word: A Tytalan's Word should summarize his drive to continually tear down and rebuild himself, to overcome the challenges of the world and to win the ongoing battle that is the quest for Ascension. Words such as *Accomplishment*, *Kether* ("crown," Will: the Sephirot at the apex of the Tree of Life) or *Leonidas* (the name of the Spartan king who made his glorious stand against Xerxes' army of 400,000 with 300 of his countrymen) can give clarity to the Tytalan, impelling him ever onward, toward the City of Pymander.

HOUSE VERDITIUS

Names: "The Shop," the Forge of Hermes, Osei's Gambit, the Iron Children, Sharad's House of Shady Deals (joking or derogatory, depending upon who says it, how and to whom)

History: This is the tale of two Houses, the tale of a marriage born of politics and in which a glorious new beginning might be found: the elder, House Verditiis, a society of mystic craftsmen and artisans, proud despite its centuries of decline, and the younger, House Thig, rebel children of a new Dark Age, masters of the elementals of the OS and the angels in the hard drive. For years, House Verditiis had existed under the blanket of Ex Miscellanea, whiling out the years in virtual anonymity, its members puttering about in decrepit workshop Sancta and fabricating enchanted knickknacks with no real function or applicable use in an age that had already long since forgotten them. They had gone from being the hands and minds behind the mystic siege engines and dragon-slaying swords of the Mythic Age to serving as the Awakened equivalent of eccentric toymakers. House Thig, on the other hand, was young and modern to a fault. It was fractious, mirroring an age of narcissistic individualism, its members often as immature as one could be and still belong to the Order. The Thig reveled in their status as the loose cannons of the Great Houses, thumbing their noses at most authority figures within the Tradition and banding

together in cabals and chantries so insular and mutually distrustful that they might as well have been clans.

Things continued on in this fashion, with the Verditius practicing an obsolete craft and the Thig pursuing various forms of techno-mystic praxes and simple bad Hermeticism, until right around the Fall of Doissetep. In recent years, many of even the staunchest traditionalists within House Verditius had embraced a new direction: the application of the ancient arts of enchantment to modern technologies. When Doissetep fell, most of the dissenting voices went with it, leaving no one to stand in the way of Verditius' renaissance. Meanwhile, House Thig was reeling from the destruction of the Ruby Children, its political spearhead, in the fall of the mighty chantry. Despite the best efforts of Sharad Osei, the leader of Providence's Emerald Children, there seemed to be nothing in the Order's political climate of the time to prevent the slow and inevitable slide of one of the largest, but least politically adept, Houses of Hermes into the rolls of Ex Miscellanea.

What followed was a series of negotiations, initiated by Osei, between himself and Jessica Metzger, leader of the Verditius. After all, both Houses now relied heavily upon the use and manipulation of ordinary technologies for extraordinary ends. What Osei lacked in old-boy's-club mentality, he more than made up for in sheer mercenary determination, and Metzger, a capable politician, saw in the cutthroat and irreverent leader of the Emerald Children an opportunity to restore her House to the greatness it deserved. Apart, each House lacked what it needed to hold a position of prominence within the Order, but the Thig had the numbers and the Verditius both the pedigree and the political acumen to found a tenable Great House. Thus, they reached a compromise; the Thig would surrender their name, rather than descending into obscurity, but Osei would finally hold the seat of a Hermetic House Primus, with most of his close confidantes in House Thig taking prominent positions within the new Verditius. And so it was finalized in late 2002, with a restored House Verditius serving as both the newest and one of the oldest Great Houses of Hermes.

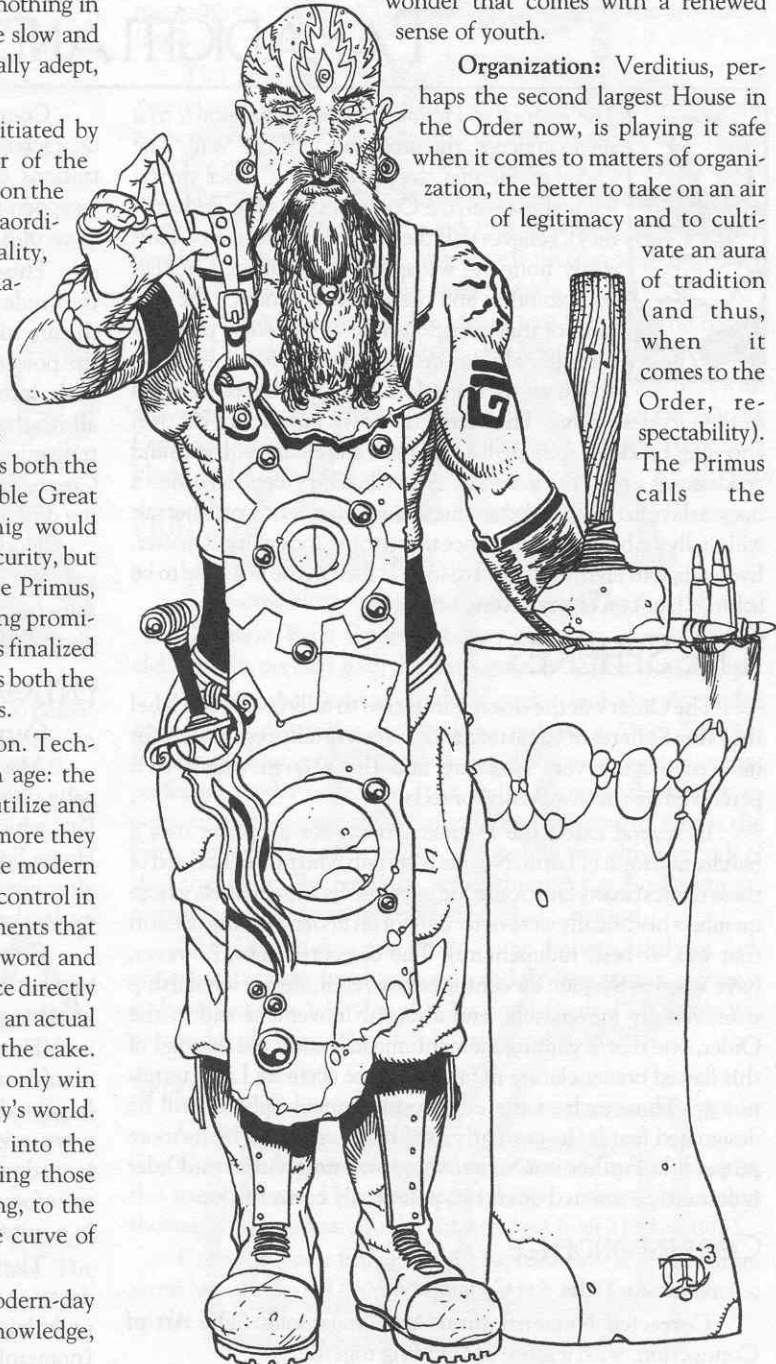
Philosophy: Information technology. Information. Technology. These are the two hallmarks of the modern age: the power of knowledge and the power of the tools that utilize and move that knowledge. The more things change, the more they stay the same. Information and technology are just the modern faces of the very forces the primordial Order sought to control in Egypt. The only real difference between the enchantments that fuel the mystic fire in a bespelled orichalcum broadsword and those that give a laptop computer the ability to interface directly with any other computer in reality is that the latter has an actual use in contemporary society; the rest is frosting on the cake. Hermeticism can survive as it is right now, but it can only win back its throne by infecting the core concepts of today's world.

Goal: The assimilation of modern innovations into the Hermetic paradigm to the intended end of subverting those innovations to the goals of the Order and insinuating, to the point of inextricability, Hermetic principles into the curve of scientific discovery and advancement.

Style: Two approaches to magic characterize modern-day House Verditius. One is the idea that information, or knowledge,

describes and contains the sum total of all things in Creation. If an individual could assimilate all of reality's information, then that individual would possess all the power in the Universe. The other approach suggests that, while the works of magic can be fleeting and the craftsmanship of the mundane world can be base, serving to drag all down to the point of the lowest common denominator, *mystic artifice* elevates the ordinary to the status of the sublime and gives permanence, in a practical and useful way, to the fantastic. This neo-Hermeticism is neither the bird-flipping "Hermes Rulz!" childishness of the old House Thig, nor the curmudgeonly and bitter solitary tinkering of the old House Verditius. Instead, the Thig have grown up a bit and the Verditius have regained a measure of the wonder that comes with a renewed sense of youth.

Organization: Verditius, perhaps the second largest House in the Order now, is playing it safe when it comes to matters of organization, the better to take on an air of legitimacy and to cultivate an aura of tradition (and thus, when it comes to the Order, respectability). The Primus calls the



shots, filtering his will down through a well-connected network of Adepts and Disciples.

Initiation: House Verditius, as it stands today, is new enough that it hasn't even had time to *determine* initiation rites, let alone initiate a new member into the House. Right now, the Primus and his immediate advisors from the old Houses Thig and Verditius are drafting a process of induction that will combine into a cohesive whole several of the time-honored practices of the Hermetic artisans with the hazing rituals of the children of the dystopian present, as well as adding new and entirely unique rites to establish the House's current identity.

Primus: The maverick Sharad Osei, once an aspirant to the never-realized seat of Primus of House Thig, now stands at the

helm of the renewed and reinvigorated House Verditius. While most of his things are still in his one-bedroom apartment in Providence, Rhode Island, he rarely finds the time to be there.

Specialty Sphere: Correspondence or Matter

Word: The members of this new iteration of House Verditius have, almost to a man, chosen new Words for themselves, Words that resound with the power of the new and the House's stated goal of conquering the tools — information and technology — of the Technocracy, and reshaping them as implements of the Order. Words such as *Gnosis* ("knowledge" or "understanding"), *Subversion* and *Malkuth* (the tenth Sephirot, which represents the material world), can aid the Verditius in the pursuit of this end.

PARADIGM AND BELIEF



The essence of Hermetic belief comes down to a single concept: the ascendancy of the Will. The Order of Hermes, more than any other mystic fellowship (even the Conventions of the Technocracy), believes that the power to shape reality stems solely from the wellspring of Awakened human consciousness and the resolve to enforce the dictates of that consciousness. A Chorister prays for miracles, while a Dreamspeaker implores her brothers among the spirits for aid and a Verbena lets blood in the Goddess' name. The Hermetic works miracles of his own choosing, bends the spirits to his command and relates with gods and goddesses as a peer, not a servant. A servile self-perception makes a mage a slave in the Order's doctrine and any Hermetic worth her salt will gladly die before bending knee to anything and calling it master. Even religious Hermetics tend to look at the Divine as a state to be achieved, not an entity beyond one's grasp.

THE SPHERES

The Order was the first organization to fully codify and label the Nine Spheres of Creation, and it is essentially responsible for modern magic's very structure and the way in which it is perceived by the Awakened of today.

In several cases, the Hermetic name for a Sphere uses a bastardized form of Latin. No one is certain who first conceived of these names (many fault someone in House Ex Miscellanea, whose members historically were notorious for an understanding of Latin that was, at best, rudimentary). The categorizations, however, have stood as they are for centuries now. Still, sloppy scholarship is universally inexcusable, and a recent movement within the Order, one that is gaining momentum, advocates the disposal of this flawed nomenclature in favor of more accurate Latin terminology. Thus, each of the erroneously named Spheres will be designated first by its currently used name and then by its more proper title. Further, one Sphere whose meaning within the Order is currently contested offers two potentially correct titles.

☉ CORRESPONDENCE

Current Title: *Ars Conjunctionis*

Corrected Nomenclature: *Ars Conligationis* (The Art of Connection, with a sense of "binding together")

Common Foci: Geometric patterns, shewstones, Enochian characters (specifically in their role as correspondences), illustrations of the Sephirot, doorways or passages, sheathing a weapon or otherwise inserting one object into another, invocations of Raziel

This Sphere is the power to pierce space and to transcend the crude barriers of the material world. Contagion and sympathy are ruled by the *Ars Conligationis*. Correspondence extends the power of the senses into hidden places and can conduct the body into any locale in space. Further, the *Ars Conligationis* allows the power of other magics to flow across the gulfs of space, transmitting the very power of the Will to the many corners of Creation. It is a Sphere of overcoming obstacles and transcending difficulty through enlightened understanding.

The foci used by an Order mage for Correspondence Effects tend to be visualizations of concepts denoting motion or spatial relationships (such as patterns or doorways), or else powers that connect or discover things (like the correspondences of Enochian letters).

♁ ENTROPY

Current Title: *Ars Fati* (The Art of Fate)

Alternate Title: *Ars Fortunae* (The Art of Fortune, specifically that pertaining to chance or luck, as contrasted with *Ars Fati*, which refers to something destined — many mages within House Fortunae, who maintain that a skilled enough mage can alter *any* aspect of Fate, prefer this alternate title; for them, it exalts the Awakened will above the idea of inevitability)

Common Foci: Numerology, caustic substances, sigils or numbers set into rigidly ordered patterns or deliberate chaos, rust or other physical evidence of degradation or decay, sand

The *Ars Fortunae* is the art of good luck and ill fortune, the art of decay and the ways in which ordered systems degrade. Also, it is a study of uniformity and crystalline perfection. It is, in many ways, a vision of opposing forces. Hermetics tend toward the more destructive uses of Entropy, as well as those that allow them to enforce a desired order. Only through the control of the flaws in a system can a mage hope to transcend those flaws.

The foci for Entropy Sphere Effects often have identity with decay or dissolution (such as rust or acids) or correspond to the underlying patterns (or, at times, lack thereof) in the cosmos (numerological progressions, for example).

FORCES

Current Title: *Ars Essentiae*

Corrected Nomenclature: *Ars Virium* (The Art of Force; also translatable as the Art of Strength, the Art of Vigor or the Art of Energy)

Common Foci: Swords or daggers, iron, fire, smoke, magnets, pentacles (most often of Mars), invocations of Gabriel or Michael, light

A powerful, masculine (some would say, phallic) Sphere, the *Ars Virium* is the cornerstone of the Order's system of mystic arts. This is the Sphere that illuminates the darkness, driving out ignorance and fear. This is the weapon by which the wicked are punished, the sword against the many enemies of the Traditions and of Ascension itself. Command of Forces illustrates, in a real and visible way, that the mage is something other than ordinary—that he is empowered to wield the very energies of the cosmos, shaping them as a sculptor works clay.

Hermetic foci for Forces Effects tend toward three types: those which evoke sympathy for basic energies (such as magnets), those which serve to represent the aggressive and conquering nature of the Sphere (such as swords) and those which call upon entities known for control of or identity with primal powers (such as the Archangel Michael).

LIFE

Current Title: *Ars Animae*

Corrected Nomenclature: *Ars Vitae* (The Art of Life)

Common Foci: Ankh, incense, chalice or cup, pure water, staff or wand of green wood, pentacles (specifically of Venus), invocations of Emmanuel or Raphael

Held by many within the Order of Hermes to be the feminine counterpoint to the Order's masculine dominion over Forces, the *Ars Vitae* holds the secrets of life. Through the use of this power, one may subvert the bodies of beasts and enemies and cause them to betray their owners. Further, one may purify and exalt one's own body, raising the form to be like unto the spirit: as Above, so Below. Life is the energy that sets this world apart from all others, an intersection of mind and soul in a sheath of flesh.

As water is the seat of life, foci for the *Ars Vitae* tend toward water or powers of water (such as Emmanuel). Also objects, beings or concepts identified with principles of growth or generation (green wood or Venus, for instance) are favored, drawing upon the doctrine of contagion to exert power over the living.

MATTER

Current and Correct Title: *Ars Materiae* (The Art of Material; "materiae" being the regular word for "matter" or "substance" in philosophy)

Common Foci: Unfinished earthly materials (ores, clays or gemstones, for example), hammer or chisel, metallic rod, the number 4 (the number of terrestrial elements), the number 5 (the true number of the elements)

The *Ars Materiae* is the foundation of alchemical practice, the ability to transmute basic substances into the sublime. The three Classic Elements of which life is comprised (earth, water and air) are ruled by the *Ars Materiae* and into these three

elements does mortal clay return, making this Sphere an exercise in control over the slumbering spark of Divinity. By learning to transform the structures of the world, the mage seeks to exalt terrestrial reality and so cleanse it of its flaws.

Ars Materiae foci are most often the things of the earth or the tools used to shape them (such as rough-hewn crystals or chisels), or concepts or principles that evoke sympathy with the Classic Elements (like the numbers 4 and 5).

MIND

Current and Correct Title: *Ars Mentis* (The Art of Mind)

Common Foci: Unbroken circles (often rings or crowns), the Hebrew characters for Kether, swords or other edged thrusting weapons, the use of True Names (language of the unfettered intellect), mirrors

The *Ars Mentis* is the art of pure intellection, of the ascendancy of Reason within the Will. Though such would seem to be a Technocratic principle, the Order has long understood that the power of Reason is the power to hone and perfect the self. The root of mystic understanding begins with the ability to know the mind: one's own and that of others. Through the auspices of the *Ars Mentis*, one dispels illusion and overcomes deception, leaving only inalienable Truth.

For Hermetic mages, *Ars Mentis* foci illustrate the microcosm of Creation that exists within the mind (such as the unbroken circle or a mirror), demonstrate correspondences with the most elevated precepts (like Kether, highest among the Sephirot) or show the power and clarity of Reason (such as a blade or the utterance of a True Name).

PRIME

Current Title: *Ars Vis*

Corrected Nomenclature: *Ars Potentiae* (The Art of Power)

Common Foci: Sweetest honey or nectar, the number 1, alchemically purified gold, the Tetragrammaton, brilliant sunlight

Within the domain of the Oracles and the Ascended Masters, all disparities are resolved and made One. The *Ars Potentiae*, then, is nothing less than the power to draw upon that perfected model of reality. It is, quite literally, the ability to connect and identify with perfection and Divinity. This is the Fifth, noblest Element, the one that realizes the ultimate ends of the other Four. The Hermetic seeks, through the *Ars Potentiae*, to realize within herself power over all of Creation.

The Order's foci for using Prime Sphere, without fail, concentrate upon the elusive, rare and flawless nature of Prime, its beauty and its splendor. All *Ars Potentiae* rites acknowledge, to one degree or another, the imminence of oneness.

SPIRIT

Current Title: *Ars Manes*

Corrected Nomenclature: *Ars Spirituum* (The Art of Spirits; this use of the word "spiritus" is late Latin/medieval, but is thus thoroughly appropriate to the time of the Order's foundation)

Common Foci: Enochian glyphs, Names of angels or other astral beings, Seal of Solomon, smoke or mist, shadows, tracing up the Tree of Life, circles of binding or warding

This is Solomon's power over the *djinn*, Dee's converse with the angelic hierarchies. By learning the *Ars Spirituum*, the Hermetic mage acquires control over the invisible worlds, mirrors to his own, and thereby comes to comprehend his preeminent station within *all* realities. The mage who masters this art commands, compels and shapes the ephemera, demonstrating his authority over the Ideals that dwell in the shadow of Form and illustrating for all to see that he is a being of every world and none.

Ars Spirituum foci evoke imagery of distortion or occlusion (such as smoke or shadow), power over the forces and entities of the unseen worlds (the Seal of Solomon, for example), or the transcendence of barriers between realities (like the Kabbalistic Tree of Life).

TIME

Current and Correct Title: *Ars Temporis* (The Art of Time)

Common Foci: Star charts, astrolabe, sand or dust, heirlooms or other aged objects, scrying pool, trance states, diamond

The *Ars Temporis* is the Truth written among the stars. It is the power to see the past with clear vision and to witness and even control the ways in which the future unfolds. One who can transcend Time glimpses all of Creation at a single glance and knows everything in the span of a single breath. Conquest of Time overcomes that most implacable of foes, inevitability, allowing the Hermetic mage alone to determine that which was, that which is and that which must come to be.

The foci used by Order mages for Time Sphere Effects often illustrate the effects of Time's passage (dust or sand), chart its progression on the cosmic scale (astrological tables), stare into its depths (a trance, for example), or imply evolution beyond its power (a diamond, for instance).

RESONANCE

The mages of the Order of Hermes tend to carry, hands down, some of the least subtle manifestations of Resonance to be found in the Awakened world. Hermetic mages, even young and relatively inexperienced ones, often carry with them a mantle of sheer, palpable *power* that can frighten and unnerve even those who know of their true nature.

Hermetic Resonance, for the most part, expresses the impression of the Will onto every aspect of the mage's surroundings.

THE TENTH SPHERE

The Order of Hermes, like all other Mystic Traditions, has a Tenth Sphere theory of its own. Unlike many others, however, this theory was shared by two other one-time Traditions: the Ahl-i-Batin and the Solificati. (In fact, many Hermetic scholars who dabble in Awakened history maintain that the idea for this Tenth Sphere *originated* with the Subtle Ones and was adopted, during her wanderings, by Maga Trianoma.)

The Order's Tenth Sphere of Unity was long known, erroneously, as the *Ars Concordiae*. Those mages of the Order who have been working to update and correct some of the butchered Latin that crept into the Tradition's common lexicon have likewise put forth a more appropriate name for this elusive Sphere: *Ars Unitatis*, simply "The Art of Unity."

As a result, Hermetic Resonance tends to use very active, aggressive descriptors. Further, the Order advocates the tight control of passions and emotions, so the bolder and more obvious displays of an Order mage's moods may become focused through her Resonance, the only forum through which she can express them (and only then because the Resonance of her magic, the outward reflection of her innermost self, is not a consciously regulated phenomenon).

Granted, there are Bonisagi who work their Static Effects through a Contemplative lens and Fortunaes whose Dynamic magics tend toward the Insightful, but most Hermetics are a more forceful lot than that. A few examples of good descriptors for Hermetic Resonance are:

- **Dynamic:** Fiery, Furious, Impatient, Relentless, Temperamental, Thunderous, Willful
- **Entropic:** Annihilating, Cataclysmic, Cleansing, Dissolving, Inevitable, Jagged, Rupturing
- **Static:** Armored, Confident, Elaborate, Eternal, Flawless, Honed, Subjugating

WHAT RESONANCE MEANS TO THE HERMETIC

Resonance, to the Order of Hermes, is nothing less than the mantle that separates the mage from simple mortals. Hermetic paradigm teaches an embrace of Resonance as mark of distinction, shield against the Sleeping world and even calling card. A great wizard's works should be known, branded with his seal.

PREP TIME

Hermetic foci, especially those for powerful or far-reaching Effects, entail the use of hours-long chants, elaborate preparations (ritual, alchemical or otherwise) and lengthy supplications to astral entities, just to name a few. In the thick of battle (or even just while having a coffee with friends at the local donut shop), one can't really afford to call "time-out" to inscribe six pentacles and mete out a single dram of mercury for each while issuing three pages of commands in Enochian to nearby elemental spirits.

"But wait," you say, "this isn't fair!"

After all, an Akashic Brother can use her Do as a focus for her magic, even as she uses it as a focus for beating ass. Likewise, a Son of Ether merely needs to produce a bizarre particle beam weapon in order to channel his Forces 3, Prime 2 offensive Effect. True enough. However, the Akashic also needs to spend an hour or more each day centering herself through meditative states, various kata and the contemplation of sacred and philosophical texts. Similarly, the Son of Ether must actually *build* his foci, no matter how outlandish or how difficult that might be. In the same way, a Hermetic mage can do her prep time at home or in the Sanctum, finishing all but the very last steps of her incantations, alchemical formulae and ritual gestures. The guy on the wrong end of the wand won't care that it was cut from an oak split by lightning, hardened over white-hot iron ingots and carved with the Ten Secret Names of Gabriel, but he *will* notice the results.

Resonance helps other Awakened to know exactly with whom they are dealing, even when the mage herself may be long gone. For a mystic paradigm that exalts self-confidence to the point of arrogance, this is unsurprising.

Ideally, a Hermetic's Word should harmonize with her Resonance, and vice-versa. It does not do for a mage with the

Word Oracle to have Occluding Dynamic Resonance. Just as Resonance serves to bring out the deepest, truest nature of a mage, inscribing it upon the very enchantments she weaves, so, too, is the Word intended to be an expression of her Path. If these two metaphysical concepts cannot easily and logically intersect, she is apt to founder, confused and ineffective.

ABILITIES



KNOWLEDGES ENOCHIAN

Light flooded the chamber and Adrian, despite his mystic perceptions, could hardly make out the creature's outline, let alone its features. Still, the rhythmic sound of distant chimes told him approximately where it was, swaying impatiently within the circle of binding.

"Why does it call this one?" the Umbrood whispered, its voice painful on the eardrums. Adrian sensed one of its limbs reaching out, testing the edges of the ward.

"I desire some information, Habeneptar," the mage replied, never releasing his grip on the ritual sword at his hip, the instrument holding the magical barrier in place.

"Why should this one not simply kill it, instead?"

Adrian had been anticipating this. He strode forward, to the edge of the circle, and intoned, "LEHEMRU SILAPHROTH AMECHNE!"

Hearing the ancient commandment and compelled by the Oath it represented, the creature knelt, now receptive to Adrian's words.

This Knowledge represents your character's understanding of the pseudo-mystic tongue of the particular hierarchies of astral Umbrood mages of the Order of Hermes frequently deal with, as initially codified by the magus, John Dee. Enochian demonstrates the Order's understanding of the psychologies behind the language spoken by these beings, meaning that, in interactions with such creatures, one may never use more dots of the Expression, Intimidation, Leadership or Subterfuge Talents than one possesses in this Ability. Enochian, however, may not be bought to a level exceeding a character's Arete (as it is a function of enlightened understanding), unless that character is a native of the Astral Umbra. Note that a bastardized form of this language (as spoken by some Sleeper mystic societies) may be purchased as a function of the Linguistics ability, but its mystic potency is virtually nil.

- Student: You know some basic phrases, as well as a handful of Words of Power.
- College: You can string words together to form a very basic sentence.
- Masters: You know a few of the nuances of the language and are beginning to get a grasp on the diverse psychologies behind these words.
- Doctorate: An Astral Umbral native would regard your speech as adequate.
- Scholar: You are as fluent in this alien tongue as any earthly being might be.

Possessed by: Order of Hermes mages, High Umbrood
Specialties: Binding Oaths, Commands, Guile, Requesting Aid

UMBROOD PROTOCOLS

The Disciple realized a second after the angel materialized that his warding circle was woefully insufficient to the task. It shattered the barrier and drew a sword of cold white light, advancing without malice or mercy. The young man flinched back as it raised its blade, only to hear a strong, clear voice from across the room:

"I bid you welcome to my home, old friend."

It seemed to recognize the voice, for the angel turned and lowered its weapon, replying, "Ishaq ibn-Thoth, was it you who called me here in haste and without due honors or was it this boy-child who quakes, cow-like, before me?"

Ishaq stepped forward fearlessly, smiling faintly, "The boy called you at my insistence, for he is training in the *Ars Spirituum* and I knew that your just and magnanimous nature would suit well for such a calling. Had I known that he failed to make the proper offerings, I would surely have admonished him harshly. I was lax in my tutelage, old friend. The fault is mine."

The angel sheathed its sword, crossing its arms and slowly fading, "Very well, then, Ishaq ibn-Thoth. I spare the boy, but the first of your three boons is repaid."

"Fair enough," Ishaq replied, turning to the young mage when the High Umbrood was gone. "As for you, your folly has made a liar of me and cost me dearly, as well. You are most fortunate not to be dead, though after the tasks I put you to, you may well wish that you were..."

This Knowledge describes a character's familiarity with the etiquette of the Astral Umbra. While only Dreamspeakers can freely use the Etiquette Skill with spirits, Umbrood Protocols takes a much different, more clinical approach. This Ability only works with Astral Umbrood and is a function of tried-and-true formulae for interaction, rather than conversance with the emotional states of Otherworldly beings. This is also the primary Ability used in forging pacts with such creatures.

- Student: You know enough to know that you shouldn't be summoning these creatures yet.
- College: You almost feel comfortable conversing with minor spirits.
- Masters: When dealing with the less esoteric natives of the High Umbra, you usually know when to be humble, forceful, polite or condescending.
- Doctorate: You have a good idea of how to deal with most Astral Umbrood.
- Scholar: All but the most bizarre Epiphings or other truly alien intelligences are within the scope of your understanding.

Possessed by: Order of Hermes mages

Specialties: Comprehending Concepts, Elementals, Forging Pacts, Reading Intent

ABILITY SPECIALTIES: OCCULT

The Order of Hermes, through the mystic philosophies that it encompasses and which descend from it, is responsible for the better part of the Western occult tradition. It is only fitting, then, that Order mages break the Occult Ability down into so many distinct disciplines. Some examples particularly well-suited to the

Order of Hermes include: *Alchemy* (a must for any Solificati), *Astrology*, *Celestigraphy* and *Demonology* (knowledge of the angelic hierarchies and their dark counterparts, an absolute necessity for those seeking audience with many of the powers of the Astral Umbra), *Gematria* (the use of religious and mystic texts as mathematical ciphers; commonly practiced among the Fortunaes), *Numerology* (likewise, a must for Numismancers) and *Sacred Geometry* (the art of special intersections of lines and angles that allow for manipulation of time, space and other phenomena).

ROTES



While the Order of Hermes may not be the oldest school of mysticism in the world, its members, overall, are certainly the most driven. The desire to create works of lasting value runs strong in Hermetic mages and the creation of magic itself, of rites that will be handed down through the generations, passed from *pater* to apprentice, is the noblest possible act of innovation. It is unsurprising, then, that the Order of Hermes' libraries see a massive influx of new rites from year to year. What follows are a few such contributions, some the result of young minds and modern times, and others very ancient.

BETRAYAL OF THE BURNING ARROW [CORRESPONDENCE • FORCES •••]

The Technocracy's supremacy on the physical battlefields of the Ascension War is due to one thing alone: guns. Even the most powerful Master can be laid low by a well-placed bullet. The Order has never been inclined to take such punishment lying down, but most Technocracy agents are intelligent enough to ward their guns against mystic tampering. Thus, some of House Flambeau's more devious thinkers have hatched the **Betrayal of the Burning Arrow**, which transforms the bullet in a weapon's chamber into a deathtrap.



Breaking a glass or crystal arrowhead inscribed with the Enochian glyph for the number eight (an ill-omened number), the mage uses basic Correspondence sensing to latch onto the bullet currently in the chamber of a gun in his line of sight. Forces arts transform any kinetic energy about to act on that bullet into heat, generally causing the weapon to erupt into flame when the trigger is pulled and often causing any other bullets left in the gun to explode, detonating the weapon in its wielder's hand.

System: **Betrayal of the Burning Arrow** inflicts damage as a normal Forces attack and, in the process, destroys the gun used to fire the targeted bullet. The Storyteller might rule, however, that a weapon on its last shot inflicts less damage, while a machine gun with a full clip may inflict significantly more. This rote is usually coincidental.

CAESAR'S DUE

[CORRESPONDENCE •••, ENTROPY ••, PRITIE ••]

The mages of the Order of Hermes rank among the busiest and most pressed-for-time people in the world. Fewer than 50 percent of all Hermetics can even entertain the notion of holding a day job. How, then, do they pay for necessities like gas and electricity? **Caesar's Due**, a relatively recent innovation from the great minds of House Fortuna, is certainly one solution to the problem.

The rote, most often focused through a circle of seven bank cards (which need not be the mage's, or even active), scribed with Enochian sigils and arranged around a stack of the mage's monthly bills, creates an aetheric matrix with Prime arts, through which a purely conceptual force (electronic money) will move. Next, Entropy, through the principle of contagion (assisted in this by Correspondence), sifts through bank records and ongoing fiscal calculations, "latching onto" tens of thousands of the fractions of a cent that are normally discarded by electronic transactions. Correspondence then shuffles all of this "phantom money" into the Prime Pattern within the circle, dispersing it from there to the institutions to which the mage owes money. As most Hermetics who use this rote see it, no one is hurt, nothing that actually exists is stolen and none of this would even be possible was the Technocracy not so sloppy in its application of basic mathematics.

Caesar's Due may also be enacted, albeit much more crudely, through the use of Correspondence 3, Forces 3, Prime 2, by simply adding the new data (through the creation of the electric impulses that say the bills in question are paid) to the various computers that track the mage's accounts. This approach tends to leave a traceable trail back to the mage, though, and often leaves the same sorts of signs as simply hacking the systems which house the accounts would.

System: This rote pays the bills, plain and simple. Success results in the mage's heat and cable staying on for another month and her accounts remaining flush. One success may leave some bills a few dollars in arrears, while many successes may result in credit for a month or more. Some mages have modified the use of this rote to transfer money directly into a personal bank account, but this is a much riskier proposition (since the Correspondence facet of **Caesar's Due** leaves a trail to follow) and its use for such base and avaricious ends is frowned upon by many Order mages. While the enacting of this Effect may certainly

look weird, it produces no effects that any Sleeper can register and so it is almost always coincidental.

OCCLUDE THE SEAL OF POWER

[MATTER ••, MIND ••, PRITIE ••••]

Mages of the Order of Hermes rank among those Awakened most likely to acquire potent and disconcerting forms of Resonance quickly. Naturally, this phenomenon can be detrimental to a Hermetic's ability to socially interact with Sleepers. The Order, however, derives a great deal of its strength from its connections in Sleeping society. To combat the difficulties posed by these two mutually exclusive circumstances, the astute wizards of House Bonisagus dedicated a bit of time and research to learning how to **Occlude the Seal of Power**.

To enact this rote, the mage chooses a receptacle for his Resonance (often, the object will be a container of some sort, such as an urn or chalice). This receptacle, whatever its nature, must be of the most precious materials obtainable: gold, ivory, rare woods or gemstones, for example. The mage then sits in a meditative posture, surrounded by four lit pieces of frankincense (four for the four elements, four directions, four archangels and four Avatar Essences), and breathes deeply 10 times, each time exhaling onto (or, in the case of containers, *into*) the chosen object. With each exhaled breath, the mage gently whispers the Enochian name for each of the Ten Spheres (including Unity) in turn. When this is done, the mage invests the object with a point of Quintessence, enabling it to hold the psychic impression of his Resonance until the Effect's duration expires or he again makes physical contact with the receptacle with the intention of reclaiming that Resonance.

This rote may be enacted in a much simpler form, using only Mind 2 to conceal the psychic aura of a mage's Resonance as regards other living creatures, but the mage's Sphere Effects will still carry a mystic impression that colors them and by which he might be recognized. This same rote, with slightly different implementation and intent, can alter the Resonance of a source of most varieties of Tass (an Effect called **Sculpt the Fifth Essence**). Likewise, a mage can use **Occlude the Seal of Power** (upon himself *only*) to take on a temporarily different Resonance than he normally possesses.

System: This Effect, in its primary form, negates the interaction of the mage's Resonance with the world in any metaphysical sense. With one success, this rote might not be fully successful (especially when used by mages with powerful Resonance of one sort or another), allowing occasional "glimpses" of the mage's Resonance in his workings and when in proximity to others, while many successes make the mage seem as normal as any Sleeper (at least, until the vulgar Effects start flying...). Since this Effect actually smoothes the Tapestry, it is nearly always coincidental.

VULCAN'S HAMMIE

[FORCES •••, LIFE ••••, MATTER •••]

There are times when subtlety is called for. **Vulcan's Hammer** is not a rote for those times. This enchantment transforms a mage into a living weapon of iron and flame. The effect is most often focused through a statuette of the mage in question, sculpted from iron-rich clay and hardened under intense heat. Over the course of working the clay, the mage

scribes and then kneads her True Name into it 10 separate times, thus concealing the truth of her identity within it and making the statuette a conduit through which her own living Pattern may be affected. (Understandably, an Order mage does well to carefully protect the focus for this Effect, as it does contain information about her innermost being, through which all manner of deleterious magics might be worked against her.)

While in the (grossly vulgar) shape of **Vulcan's Hammer**, the average mage weighs in at just about a ton and is wreathed in flames of up to 1000 degrees in temperature. Needless to say, there is not much that can stand before the assault, or even the close passing, of such a juggernaut (therefore, beware before using this rote on wooden floors, near gas stations or in a mine shaft, among many other places...).

System: **Vulcan's Hammer** grants the following changes to Attributes: +3 Strength, -2 Dexterity (to a minimum of 1), +4 Stamina. The mage automatically fails all Social Attribute rolls, except those involving intimidation, against any Sleeper who is not aware and accepting of the mage's Awakened nature. She inflicts normal Forces damage on those who come in physical contact with her while in this state. By adding Prime 2 to the rote, the mage can deal aggravated damage with hand-to-hand attacks, soak aggravated damage normally and inflict aggravated damage on any who come in physical contact with her. While in this shape, she is immune to phenomena that specifically target organic beings, is subject to phenomena that affect normal iron (save for Prime 4 **Flames of Purification**, as she is still a living thing) and is a walking Paradox magnet. Naturally, this Effect is *always* vulgar.

WILDFIRE [ENTROPY ••, FORCES ••]

Another innovation from the militant willworkers of House Flambeau, **Wildfire** allows a mage to begin with a spark and quickly end up with a conflagration. Lighting a fire at the intersection of two interlocked pentacles, one of Mars and one of Pluto, the mage compels the flame to travel on the particular strands of fate that cause it to grow most quickly and efficiently: the wind is blowing in the right direction, a spark hops to the most flammable material at hand, a splash of water simply throws burning embers in every direction, etc.

For exceedingly powerful mages, the option exists of simply using Matter 5 (often focused through some manner of alchemically prepared oil or a pentacle of Jupiter) to increase the flammability of all materials in the vicinity to the point of explosive combustion to achieve this same Effect. Those of less grandiose means can use similar foci to transform basic materials (such as tile floors, glass and stone), using Matter 2, Forces 2, into more readily combustible substances whenever they are touched by flames.

System: Only one success is required to make this Effect work, but large numbers of successes can cause even a lighter flame to result in a towering inferno within five or so turns (or fewer if one happens to be in a fuel depot, lumberyard or paper mill, for example). In fact, this rote is occasionally so effective that it doesn't leave its caster enough time to escape. Ah, life as a Flambeau...

Unless enacted in a grandiose and attention-grabbing fashion, little about this rote immediately suggests supernatural tampering, making it usually coincidental.

WONDERS



The legendry of the Order is filled with tales of great works of sorcerous artifice: staves enchanted with the greatest powers of dead and forgotten Masters, blades that dance by the unseen influence of the *Ars Virium* and shewstones enchanted to look into the farthest reaches of Creation. While most of these amazing treasures are now gone (if indeed all — or even most — of them ever really existed), at least a few truly fantastic wonders remain.

ASSASSIN'S BLADE

Level 8 Wonder

Several of these gruesome weapons have been liberated from the secret caches of the now-defunct House Janissary (and at least a few of them found their way into the hands of various Euthanatos mages, a situation the Order is working to rectify). These blades, typically thrusting daggers no more than a foot in total length, are enchanted with Correspondence and Life Effects to allow a mage gripping the sheathed weapon to temporarily embed its blade at a distance deep within the vitals of a chosen victim. When the victim dies (as is often the case), Matter repairs the now-inert body, so as to leave no signs of any physical trauma; to medical science, the individual "simply died."

System: This Wonder can function as an ordinary dagger, but its magical attack uses the wielder's Perception + Medicine to strike. When used in this latter fashion, the weapon has +3

accuracy, makes called shots, within line-of-sight distance, targeting living creatures at no penalty and ignores non-magical armor. If the chosen victim is killed by such an attack, her corpse will quickly mend, leaving no reason to suspect that any violence befell her. For those with mystic senses, however, it will be clear that *something* unusual occurred. There are rumors that a handful of more powerful **Assassin's Blades** exist, capable of erasing the telltale echo of willworking after the deed is done. If anyone of these were recovered from House Janissary, their current owners are keeping *very* quiet about it.

USURER'S PURSE

Level 6 Wonder

During its brief flirtation with the Order of Reason, the Solificati came into close contact with the tradesmen of the High Guild. The mercantile willworkers were, according to their nature, quite fascinated with the most mundane application of the Royal Art: that of transforming lead into gold. Happy to demonstrate the rudiments of their craft, the Crowned Ones constructed a few purses that, when filled with any sort of basic material (such as flint or iron), would rapidly transmute the substance into a like quantity of gold.

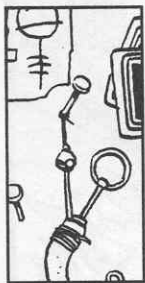
Times have changed, and House Solificati's methods have changed with them. Now, most of these Wonders appear as wallets and are stuffed with strips of paper, which they transform into normal paper money (usually in \$20, \$50 or \$100 denominations).

The money, though a forgery, looks perfectly fine and has the exact same composition as a legitimately printed bill of the national currency desired. Short of a connection within the Department of the Treasury, these bills are largely impossible to detect as fake with any form of non-magical scrutiny. Nevertheless, an occlusion Effect (identical to Arcane 2), prevents even most mages from thinking about looking too closely at the money.

System: This Wonder's Effect is simple and straightforward. Even one success in its activation is usually enough to

completely transform even a thick stack of paper slips into bills. Note that the Arcane Effect on the money is usually sufficient to swindle even the Awakened (though some might argue that the use of the Purse's money isn't really swindling, since it is in every way physically identical to bills from the mint). Alchemists warn, however, that the overzealous use of this Wonder does occasionally lead to strange runs of bad luck with one's other monies, an assertion the Fortunaes are quick to back up.

ARCANE LORE: OTHER SYSTEMS



The Order's long and illustrious history has brought the adoption of certain mystic practices completely unique to the Houses of Hermes. Foremost among these are the Hermetic system of Names and the tradition of Umbral Pacts.

THE NAMING OF A HERMETIC MAGE

Mages of the Order of Hermes commonly use "Craft" or "Shadow" Names when introducing themselves within the Awakened world. This practice, common to Hermetic wizards even before the formation of the Order (as evidenced by such names as Bonisagus or Flambeau), serves two important functions.

First, the use of a different name gives the mage the ability to control *who she is* by sculpting the perception of her identity through an exercise of conscious Will, as opposed to the accident of whatever name her parents fancied. She is, through the use of this Awakened Name, defining her nature rather than being defined by the nature others would thrust upon her.

Second, and perhaps more practically, the use of these alternate identities occludes the truth of the mage's nature from her enemies (recalling that the Order is very much aware of how easily awareness of a thing's true nature can be used to manipulate or harm that thing). The mage's new Name protects her and those she knows from her Sleeping life, deflecting the influence of enemies or potential enemies.

The Craft Name is simply another name, often ordinary enough to pass as a regular name. Many Craft Names are quite elegant, and one would be hard-pressed to find a Hermetic claiming something as ordinary as William Smith or Jane Brown as a Craft Name.

The Shadow Name is the mage's Craft Name, with the mage's given name inserted between the first and middle or last names of the Craft Name, succeeded by a list of accomplishments (stated in poetic and usually cryptic fashion) that varies in length, dependant upon the length (and eventfulness) of the mage's career. Often, the arrogance (or lack thereof) of the mage in question also factors into how many honorifics are tacked onto the Craft Name.

The True Name of an Order mage, on the other hand, is more than just a matter of pride: it is the ultimate self-definition. The True Name uses the entirety of the Shadow Name, followed by the words "In Caligine Abditus" (or "In Darkness Hidden") and 10 syllables

(which are not real words). Taken together, all of these sounds or written characters summarize the totality of the Order mage's Awakened being, serving as a blueprint of his mystic nature.

How does all of this look? An example:

Birth Name: Erin Justine Connell

Craft Name: Alexia Elizabeth Cavanaugh, bani Tytalus

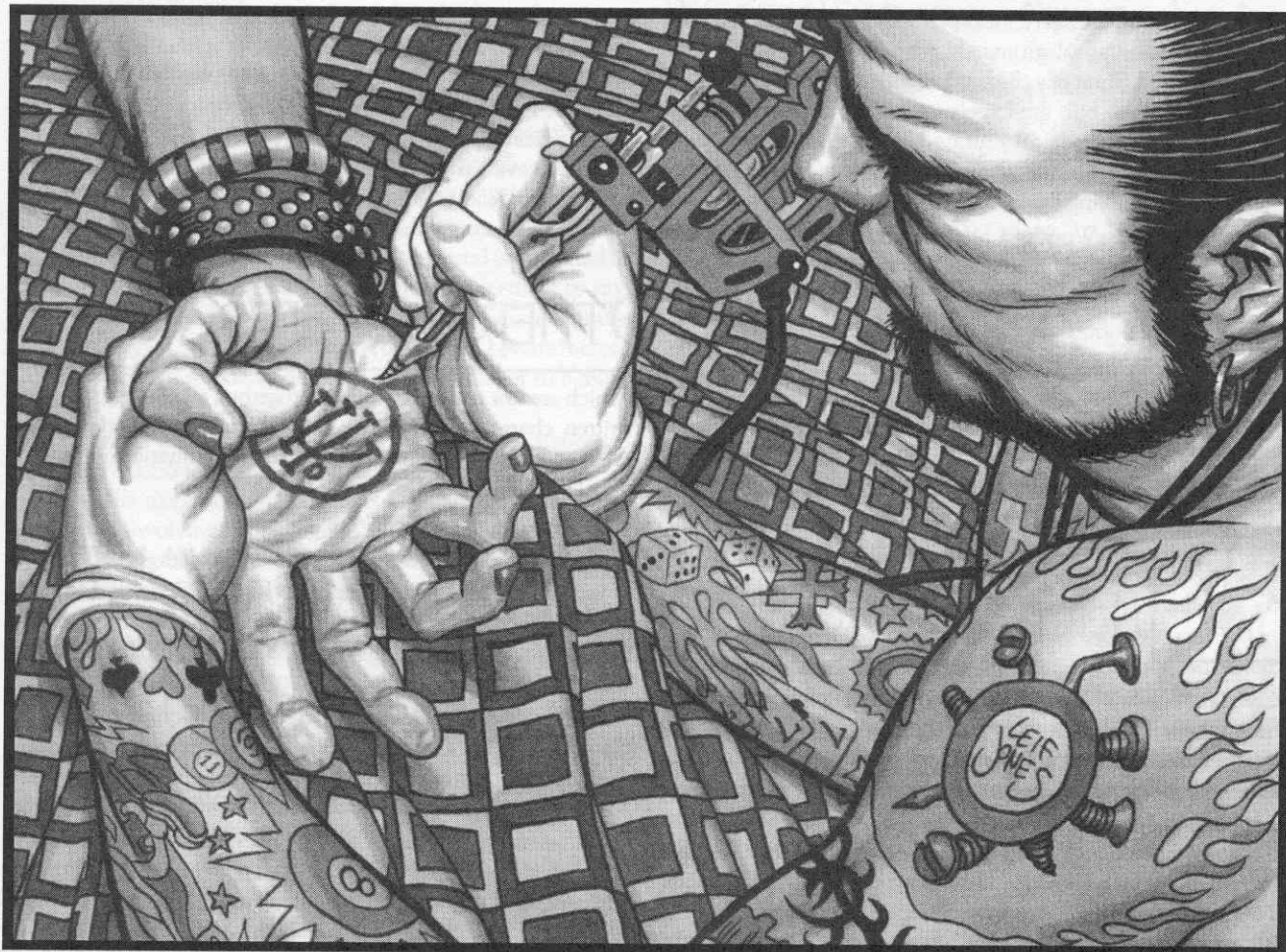
Shadow Name: Alexia Erin Justine Connell Elizabeth Cavanaugh, bani Tytalus, Stone of Unburning Fire, Seneschal of the Argent Throne, Lioness of the Nine Stars and Warder of the Ruined Tower

True Name: Alexia Erin Justine Connell Elizabeth Cavanaugh, bani Tytalus, Stone of Unburning Fire, Seneschal of the Argent Throne, Lioness of the Nine Stars and Warder of the Ruined Tower; *In Caligine Abditus*, Lahru Siume Tanek Keremot

Possessing a Hermetic willworker's True Name allows another mage (of whatever mystic society) to target the Hermetic with magical Effects at a -2 difficulty or to apply a similar modifier to rolls to counter her magics. Further, she is treated as "body sample" for Correspondence range, regardless of how distant from or otherwise unknown she is to the mage who holds her Name.

Why, then, would the Order use True Names, given the obvious risk they represent? Defense. When targeted with long-ranged magics by a mage who does not know her True Name, an Order mage is treated, regardless of distance or other factors as "no connection" on the Correspondence range table. Further, she subtracts her Arete from successes rolled to penetrate her Ward Effects. In other words, it is difficult at best to confront her any way but directly, or to prevent her from seeking out a direct confrontation, should she wish it. Naturally, given their power over the *Ars Virium*, such face-to-face battles often favor the willworkers of the Order of Hermes.

Discerning a Hermetic mage's True Name requires at least Mind 4 (and an understanding, and to some degree acceptance, of the power of True Names), with no less than one success per level of the mage in question's Arete required to unravel the secrets of his innermost nature. Many Hermetic mages, however, further conceal their True Names, even going so far as to integrate mystic "traps" into the hidden corners of the Shadow Name (which must, of course, be fully discerned before the True Name can be discovered — a task in and of itself, for mages with impressive feats under their belts), traps that attack all those who use magic to pry where they are not wanted.



PACTING

"Your offer, then, magus?" it asked, its form perceptible only at the edges of the vision, invisible to any who would look directly at it.

"Exactly what we discussed and no more," Fatima Ismail, bani Shaea replied.

The thing paused and Fatima could feel the strange quality of the power that radiated from it change, as though its shifting emotional state altered the way in which its unearthly form interacted with the hidden energies of the world. Finally, its contemplative state shifted back to the active one with which Fatima was now familiar. "It is not enough."

Fatima was certain it would say something like this. Astral Umbrood were almost never satisfied with offers. She kept her countenance hard and remained unflinching as she replied, "Nevertheless, there you have it. Take it or leave it, but you'll get nothing more from me."

Its posture obviously shifted and it wavered between anger and indecision. It did not like being spoken to in such an impetuous manner, but it had to admit that the human woman's offer to scribe its name upon the palm of her left hand, the hand of the Destroyer, would increase its own standing among its peers and its power whenever she raised a weapon with the intent of causing harm. Performing a service for her when such boons hung in the balance seemed almost trivial. Still....

"What you have offered is agreeable," it whispered, and the mage smiled. However, it continued, "I require something more, though,

magus. At the greatest fullness of Luna, you shall pour out sacred water, infused with great Power, in my name. Is this acceptable, magus?"

Fatima considered. In addition to bonding her Name with its own, the Umbrood wished for a significant sacrifice of Tass, as well. Still, her recent encounter with those Men in Black demonstrated to her that she needed something more with which to deal with them. The Technocrats were out in numbers for the past several weeks and they showed no signs of leaving. Not without a demonstration of the terrible price of staying, anyway. There was really no question. As she began to speak the words, Fatima could see its form growing clear and distinct.

"I accept."

Since the days of Solomon the Wise, magi of great power and understanding have used their power as a means to coax assistance of various kinds out of the denizens of the Otherworlds, in the form of *Umbral Pacts*. These bonds of goods and services, carried out over the centuries, are now an institutionalized practice, both among the mages of the Order and the Astral Umbrood, a pillar of mutual strength.

In order to seek out an *Umbral Pact*, a Hermetic mage must, obviously, possess some affinity for the *Ars Spirituum*. Rank 2 in the Spirit Sphere enables the mage to call out to just any spirit that can Materialize (as the Charm of the same name), but Hermetic teachers do not advocate attempting any such interactions before achieving the fourth rank of the Spirit Sphere (whereupon the

spirit may be confined in a mystic circle while present on the earthly plane, an effect the Order calls **The Holy Pentacles**). Spirit summonings in the Order are almost always carried out in chantries and/or Sancta, with the mage standing within a clearly delineated circle or other zone of protection and another circle or series of interlocked circles, in which the spirit is to manifest, usually placed well across the room from the mage. This distance serves both practical and symbolic functions. In practical terms, it prevents most astral entities from attempting to attack the mage, no matter how it might strain against its confinement. In a symbolic sense, it demonstrates that the mage holds this being at a distance; while they may become allies, they are *not* friends.

The Umbrood Protocols Knowledge Ability (see pp. 65-66), naturally, is a necessity for any would-be spirit-binder in the Order, but other Abilities may also prove critically useful: Enochian, Expression, Intimidation, Law (for determining the most advantageous and precise terms of a given pact), Leadership, Occult (Specialty: Celestigraphy and Demonology) and Subterfuge. Any mage with less than 3 dots in *any one* of these Abilities is strongly advised against attempting such a summoning. Umbrood, especially of the varieties with which the Order has frequent interaction, are willful creatures. Those mages who lack the force of personality, subtlety, dignity and knowledge to contest those wills are better advised to forego such practices entirely.

The actual summoning is, in most Houses, preceded by a fast, followed by a meditative state of prayer (which is not so much a supplication to an outside power as a reaffirmation of the mage's union with the Divine and the recitation of various historical pacts with the entity to be summoned, as well as its known allies and enemies among the High Umbrood). The inscription of the circles of warding and binding (or, if they are permanent, a check to be certain that all is in readiness) is the next step. If there are any flaws in the circles, disaster can and almost certainly will occur, so mages have been known to spend hours, or even days, in this stage of preparation. When all is perfect, the mage recites Words of protection and invokes ancient pacts of defense and nonaggression that ward him (with Spirit 2) against his subject, followed by a call to the desired High Umbrood (Hermetic mages almost never deal with the spirits of any other Umbrae), one which calls the being into an **Affix Gauntlet Effect**. Now, both parties are, more or less, imprisoned until an agreement of some sort can be reached.

In the Order, the bargaining process takes many forms: wordplay and trickery, recitations of proud and ancient mystic lineages, the compulsion of centuries-old oaths (with beings both benevolent and malign) and appeals to a spirit's nature, for example. Far and away, though, the most fantastic element of this process is in each side's attempts to cow the other into submission. The Hermetic mage employs displays of raw, elemental fury (through the use of the *Ars Potentiae* and the *Ars Virium*, in most cases), while the spirit exercises whatever offensive capabilities it has to call upon. The Spirit Sphere protections prevent either side from easily *attacking* the other, but the point isn't to cause harm; it is to determine who possesses the superior Will. While members of other Traditions can be quick to dismiss this step of the process as the equivalent of "a sorcerous dick-waving contest," it is an esteemed facet of Hermetic mysticism.

Ultimately, each side will seek to have its requests fulfilled to the greatest possible extent, while simultaneously being bound to do as little as possible in return. Various Social Attribute + Ability rolls (ranging from Charisma + Leadership to Manipulation + Intimidation, and many others, besides), Sphere Effects, Charms and sheer good roleplaying should all come into play here. Umbral Pacting is a matter of pageantry, not sterile efficiency. The mage and the spirit honor one another through this struggle of Wills. Through this process, both mage and Umbrood must make contested Willpower rolls (each one's difficulty is the other's permanent Willpower score), with each attempting to accrue as many successes as the other's permanent Willpower, applying the following modifiers:

Difficulty	Circumstance
-2 mage's difficulty	Mage requests very simple task (for example, the name of another spirit)
-1 mage's difficulty	Mage requests a minor task (how to call the spirit)
-0 both difficulties	Mage requests a task involving some effort (lead the mage to the spirit)
-1 spirit's difficulty	Mage requests a difficult task (assist in bargaining with the spirit)
-2 spirit's difficulty	Mage requests a major task (combat the spirit)
-3 spirit's difficulty	Mage requests an extended task (enter a Fetish to be used in slaying the spirit)

If the mage accrues the necessary successes first, then the spirit acquiesces to the request. If the spirit does so first, however, it is simply free to leave, which it will usually do (remembering this indignity and the name of the weak fool who presumed to summon it). If the spirit botches any of these Willpower rolls, it will automatically cave to the mage's desires without requesting a boon in kind. If the mage botches such a Willpower roll, the spirit automatically breaks the mage's **Affix Gauntlet Effect** and shatters any Spirit 2 warding he has employed and, enraged, will usually attempt to exact vengeance on the presumptuous willworker through any number of means too horrific to contemplate.

Unless the Umbrood botches a Willpower roll, the mage *will* have some service to perform in kind: a tithe of Tass, the casting of some spell or a quest, for example. In the case of truly staggering requests and/or extraordinarily powerful Umbrood, the price may be much steeper: a human body to possess or the acquisition of a specific personal possession of a powerful (still-living) mage who wronged the spirit in the past. If the mage will not accept these terms, no matter how well he rolls against the spirit (once again, unless it botches its Willpower roll), he *will not* receive the service demanded.

This system only creates a bond of temporary alliance. More permanent bonds (whether those between Allies or Contacts, or those of master and bound servant) can be created with more powerful magics, though only Masters and Archmasters can even hope to perform lasting bindings on any but the weakest of Astral Umbrood. And, of course, the mage who would be master to such creatures had best be prepared for the possibility of becoming a slave in turn.



CHAPTER THREE: THE WAY OF PYTHANDER



The following are examples of the myths, legends and persons of importance in the Order's past and present, as well as an idea for a single-Tradition cabal and the institution that supports it. Of course, all of these are just samples, and if any or all of them don't fit in with your

conception of the Order of Hermes and the needs of your game and your players, just ignore them. The greater significance of these examples is to give you a sense of the new face of the Order, as well as a look at the kinds of stories and forms of organization that make it tick.

FACES OF THE PATH OF GOLD



Among the eminent willworkers of the Order of Hermes, some, by dint of ambition, discipline and character, manage to carve for themselves a particularly lofty place in the rolls of history. What follow are a few examples of these famed (or infamous) mages: three modern and one historical. For the most part, the modern-day Hermetics are adherents to the new philosophy of the Order, which argues for accountability among Traditions mages, the active participation by young, dynamic willworkers in the highest levels of Traditions leadership and the act of bringing the Ascension War to every stratum of the world: physical, political, intellectual and otherwise. The story of the historical Hermetic,

on the other hand, has lessons to impart — quite probably lessons beyond those the Order has seen fit to glean from them, but which it left to the reader.

PRITIUS ISHAQ IBN-THOTH

Background: Born the only child of a British mother and a Persian father living in Cairo in the early 18th century, Ishaq Balsara has come a long way from his origins as the son of two lesser Hermetic mages: one who never exceeded the Fifth degree, and one whose mystic practices were strictly limited to hedge magic. Today, Ishaq is perhaps the most powerful Hermetic mage to survive the Reckoning and the calamities that followed in its wake. Unlike most of his contemporaries, Ishaq always preferred to remain on Earth,



addressing the issues of the Order “among the citizenry,” as it were, and he probably owes his survival to that attitude.

The boy who would one day become the Quaesitor Primus, however, spent much of his early life in Horizon Realms, having shown a mind for the *Ars Hermeticae* by the age of seven. He studied under many illustrious and esteemed Masters, and even spent a few months here and there under the wing of the great Porthos Fitz-Empress (times he remembers as intensely stressful, given the old archwizard’s penchant for accidental catastrophic destruction). When he was 13, the boy declared (to the disappointment of his mother, a Bonisagus) that he would seek entry into the ranks of the *Magistrati*, there to keep Hermes’ law. His ascent through the ranks of House Quaesitor, however, was a great source of pride for both his parents. His great passion and reverence for the way of *Ma’at* was cited as a shining example for other young Quaesitori to uphold. Naturally, he earned his share of friends, enemies and hangers-on through these years, but Ishaq never allowed his vision to waver from his pursuit of realizing a perfected and universal justice.

In fact, Ishaq scarcely noticed, as he became more powerful and influential within the House, the Order and the Traditions, that his life was passing him by. His parents were old, he had no friends and he had only entertained the most cursory romantic relationships. Ishaq virtually disappeared from Order life during the latter years of the 1700s, returning home to care for his parents in their final days and to give them an opportunity to get to know the son who had for too long sought to transcend them in his misguided single-mindedness. When they died, Ishaq returned, calling himself *ibn-Thoth*, for now he had no mother and the Thrice-Great would be his only father.

The man who came back to the Order was much changed. He advocated the embrace of the world, rather than a

distancing from it. Still, he was not foolish in his enthusiasm and knew that most Hermetic mages would be loath to empathize with something that was, to them, base, profane and unworthy. Ishaq, however, believed that only by living in the world could one attempt to change it. Similarly, as the awareness of his advancing years came upon him, he knew that young mages would ever outnumber the old and that most great change would therefore have to begin with them. His “revolutionary” ideas won him few friends, but his raw power and skill were sufficient, in the early 20th century, to secure for him the seat of Quaesitor Primus, from which he felt he could truly begin to do some good. Today, his attitudes make him one of the most respected and, among the youth, well liked of the Masters of the Order.

Ishaq now serves as a voice of gentle guidance and support for the younger, more dynamic forces within the Order of Hermes and, to a lesser degree, within the Traditions as a whole. Until very recently, though, his quietly paternal posture was eclipsed by the mighty, and much more flamboyant, Porthos (a fact that didn’t bother him in the slightest). Now, after the Archmage’s death, Ishaq realizes that someone must be willing to step into the venerable Archmaster’s shoes, albeit in perhaps a more sedate and soft-spoken manner. Ishaq has resolved for that person to be himself. It is the only way to be certain that no Master with a less benevolent agenda tries to stand at the spiritual helm of the Order.

As to the so-called “Rogue Council,” Ishaq reserves judgment. He knows better than to reject its authoritative validity completely, as the Council’s advice, admonishments and bold declarations have spurred many formerly despairing Traditionalists to action, but the far-fetched notions circulating have him worried. *No one* is this flatly altruistic; this Rogue Council has an agenda and Ishaq fears that it is the mages of the Traditions who will end up owning responsibility for promises the Council makes.

Image: Despite his great age, Ishaq’s sharp and refined features are those of a strikingly handsome man in his late 30s or early 40s. His almond eyes are almost black and his hair, worn long and slightly wavy, is a snowy white, though he is never seen with so much as stubble on his chin. He is tall and slender and favors custom-tailored dark suits, with fine but understated accoutrements.

Roleplaying Hints: You are the center that must hold. You are not an arrogant man, but you do know that the Order depends heavily upon what few potent Masters and Archmasters — such as yourself — are left to it. You are therefore determined to do what must be done to restore the Order to glory and to help it find its proper place as an example to all the people of the world, Sleeper and Awakened alike. In order to do so, however, you know that you must fade into the background of the Traditions’ affairs, advising younger, more vital mages, for this is *their* finest hour.

You know politics as well as any and have, in the past, caved to political pressure from within the Order. The result was the

failed Wizards' March on the rogue House Tremere. You have resolved to never again be moved by such foolish notions, concentrating instead on bringing the truth of *Ma'at* to this new world in a realistic, constructive and enlightening way.

House: Quaesitor

Nature: Visionary

Essence: Pattern

Demeanor: Judge

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4 (Unyielding), Charisma 3, Manipulation 5 (Smooth), Appearance 4 (Slick as Hell), Perception 5 (Detail-Oriented), Intelligence 6 (Sheer Brilliance), Wits 5 (Never Off Guard)

Talents: Alertness 4, Awareness 3, Dodge 1, Expression 4, Intimidation 4, Leadership 3, Subterfuge 5

Skills: Etiquette 4, Meditation 4, Melee 2

Knowledges: Academics 5, Cosmology 4, Enigmas 4, Enochian 5, Investigation 5, Law 5, Linguistics 5, Occult 5 (Celestiography and Demonology, Sacred Geometry), Science 1, Umbrood Protocols 5

Backgrounds: Allies 5, Arcane 4, Avatar 3, Contacts 5, Influence 4, Library 5, Node 4, Resources 5

Arete: 7

Spheres: Correspondence 3, Entropy 1, Forces 4, Life 2, Mind 5, Prime 3, Spirit 6, Time 2

Willpower: 10

Quintessence: 14

Paradox: 4

Resonance: (Dynamic) Catalyzing 2, (Entropic) Purifying 3, (Static) Perfecting 5

KALLISTI, "HIGH PRIESTESS" OF HOUSE XAOS

Background: No one who knows her birthname (if, indeed, any alive today do) will reveal it. Her old Craft Name was Virginia Chapel, bani Thig. Some say she was Sharad Osei's star pupil; others say she was his lover. Few of the former Thig, now Verditius, have any desire to talk about her, and those Thig who followed her into the rolls of House Xaos simply act as though she had no past before the House came into being. As for her own words, Kallisti claims to have been "reborn through Eris' kiss," whatever that means.

What is known of Kallisti is that she is a powerful force within House Ex Miscellanea, verging on the point of being powerful within the Order as a whole. She is more a force of nature than a person, at times mirroring such figures as Lilith, Kali and the Maenads. A few within her House claim that her Avatar possesses her directly on occasion, blurring the line between spirit and flesh and drawing her closer to Ascension than any known living willworker.

Kallisti sometimes gives the impression that she does not fully understand the forces that drive her. Critics are quick to point out that the timeframe of this "metamorphosis" coincided conveniently with Sharad Osei's Verditius gambit, but even they, when meeting her in the flesh, cannot deny that



there is *something* inexplicable about her. If Kallisti is a shyster, she is so good at it that it is possible that even she is not completely aware of the deception.

Image: Kallisti is a very attractive woman in her mid 20s, likely of Mid-Eastern or Mediterranean extraction. Her black hair is wavy and long, and her complexion is a dusky olive tone. She favors leather pants, vinyl tank tops and the like and is often festooned with rings, necklaces and other jewelry. The number "23" is tattooed within a fairly large five-pointed, pentacle style star (minus the circle) on her left shoulder, and a golden apple with "Kallisti" written in Classical Greek on it is inked onto the small of her back.

Roleplaying Hints: You may be what you claim to be. Then again, you may not. Best not to contemplate it for too long; that would muddle the situation. Maybe this is just a bid to show Osei up. Maybe it's to get his attention. Maybe you really *do* believe this stuff. Maybe Eris *does* ride you, as her 23rd chosen High Priestess.

House: Xaos, Ex Miscellanea

Nature: Deviant

Essence: Dynamic

Demeanor: Visionary

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Charisma 5 (Cult of Personality), Manipulation 4 (Convincing), Appearance 4 (Sexy), Perception 4 (Intuitive), Intelligence 4 (Non-Linear), Wits 3

Talents: Alertness 1, Athletics 1, Awareness 3, Brawl 1, Dodge 1, Expression 4, Intimidation 2, Leadership 4, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 4

Skills: Drive 2, Etiquette 1, Firearms 2, Meditation 2, Melee 1, Performance 2, Stealth 2, Technology 2

Knowledges: Academics 3, Computer 3, Cosmology 3, Enigmas 3, Enochian 3, Investigation 1, Linguistics 3, Medicine 2, Occult 3, Science 2, Umbrood Protocols 2

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Arcane 5, Avatar 4, Destiny 3, Dream 3, Resources 3

Arete: 3

Spheres: Correspondence 2, Entropy 2, Forces 1, Life 3, Mind 3, Prime 2, Spirit 2, Time 2

Willpower: 7

Quintessence: 5

Paradox: 1

Resonance: (Dynamic) Frenzied 3, (Entropic) Savage 2

MARK HALLWARD GILLAN

(The information presented here about Mark Hallward Gillan should be considered more accurate than previous accounts, which were often the result of deliberate misinformation spread by the former Tradition Primus Getulio Vargas Sao Christivao.)

Background: Mark Hallward Gillan's story begins on a US Army base in Alaska. The son of Colonel John Gillan and his wife, Martha, he would not spend more than two years out of the next 18 in the same place. All of this moving around under the direction of his strict, straight-laced and successful father taught him two crucial lessons: one, that an ordered mind can overcome all manner of hardship, and two (after his father's fatal heart attack), that no amount of order can negate the possibility of chaos. More than any other experience or revelation, those two lessons shaped who Mark became.

Before his Awakening, Mark's affinity for well-ordered systems led him to follow his father's path and enlist at the age of 18, while his embrace of chaos drew him to Crowley's Golden Dawn and its variant of Hermeticism shortly thereafter. His serious individualistic and iconoclastic streak was something the army didn't appreciate, however. To him, the reasoning was simple: any system that can't handle the reality of chaos isn't well ordered at all. His superiors didn't see it that way, and Mark parted ways with the military at the age of 20. He drew the attention of House Flambeau with a prank he pulled on his way out, a prank that involved the clever use of some "borrowed" plastic explosives. The Order covered the incident up and drew Mark in quickly as a good prospect. Unfortunately, that relationship soured not long after his "graduation" into the Order, and Mark went his own way once more, popping up in the most unexpected places in the years that followed. He returned to the Order at the invitation of Porthos Fitz-Empress, but quickly got fed up with the politics that were devouring Horizon. He disappeared again not long before the fall of that Realm.

While he has ostensibly forsaken his Order, Mark clearly still has allies within it who often provide him with aid or information. He also has a strong network with various individuals in other Traditions. Many within the Order see him as a valuable mage and, rather than alienate him further with threats of punishments or ostracism, keep an open invitation for him to return. He has yet to take them up on that offer, but hints that he "might just yet." Some whisper that his outsider status is fake, that it's really a ruse devised to gain him the trust of other Traditions.



Mark knows a lot about Tradition politics, even though he tries to skirt it. He often seems to be involved in political affairs with which he claims to want no connection. Recently his magical interests have taken him in the direction of chaos magic and systems theory — studies that attempt to reconcile order and ego — but as always, Mark tries to solve situations through mundane means before resorting to magic.

Image: Mark is in his early 30s, though many say he looks older, with disheveled, dyed-blond hair (naturally black) and squinty eyes. He generally dresses in a sweater with a battered charcoal-gray leather trenchcoat or jacket and jeans. He avoids the obvious trappings of a Hermetic mage, but does tend to carry a number of charms and Talismans.

Roleplaying Notes: You believe in getting things done, and if that pisses off the establishment, screw 'em. While it's not always as simple as that (as your "reluctant willingness" to get involved in Traditions politics illustrates), you do have a strong tendency to "lone wolf" it whenever you suspect that red tape is just going to get in the way of results. Still, if you *can* make something work within the system, whether that means doing it yourself, acting through intermediaries, or just whispering in the right ears, so much the better.

House: None currently, formerly Flambeau

Nature: Architect

Essence: Questing

Demeanor: Loner

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4 (Tough), Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2, Perception 4 (Gut Feelings), Intelligence 4 (Quick), Wits 4 (Nonchalant)

Talents: Alertness 4, Athletics 2, Awareness 1, Brawl 2, Dodge 2, Expression 1, Intimidation 1, Leadership 1, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 2

Skills: Drive 2, Etiquette 1, Firearms 2, Meditation 1, Melee 1, Performance 1, Stealth 3, Survival 2, Technology 4 (Demolitions)

Knowledges: Academics 3, Computer 2, Cosmology 1, Enigmas 2, Enochian 2, Investigation 2, Law 1, Linguistics 5, Medicine 1, Occult 4 (Gematria), Science 2

Backgrounds: Allies 4, Arcane 3, Avatar 1, Contacts 5, Resources 3, Wonder 3 (Mark's Wonders tend to be what he needs, when he needs them)

Arete: 5

Spheres: Correspondence 3, Forces 4, Matter 2, Mind 2, Prime 1

Willpower: 8

Quintessence: 9

Paradox: 2

Resonance: (Dynamic) Chaotic 3, (Static) Crystalline 3

MALACHAI BEN-YESHUA

Background: Malachai Ben-Yeshua, bani Bonisagus, disappeared from the Order of Hermes in the early days of the 1970s. He was renowned among the Scattered as a great binder of Umbrood and as a man most conversant with their bizarre and alien psychologies. His treatises on coercing service out of various "breeds" of astral beings became standard reference in the Order almost as soon as they were published.

Malachai was born to emigrants in Poland in the early 1930s. His parents were hard-working and unexceptional people and they tried to instill in the boy an ethic of humble persistence and a respect for the work of his own hands. Unfortunately, the overarching lesson of his youth came not from loving parents, but from Hitler's war machine, and young Malachai watched his parents' bodies burn in the furnaces of the death-camps before being freed by Allied forces at the close of the Second World War. The terrible sense of powerlessness that Malachai felt even after his liberation scarred him deeply, and sowed in him dormant seeds of resentment and bitterness that would flower and transform him from a weak, rail-thin, psychologically ruined boy, to a man in pursuit of the power to ensure that no one could ever hurt him again.

With no surviving family that he knew of, an orphanage in Prague took in Malachai. It was there that Malachai first heard the story of the golem built to protect the Jews of the city hundreds of years before. Perhaps simply to answer his own questions about the truth of the world and to address his terribly deep-seated feelings of vulnerability, Malachai, at the age of 13, defied tradition and began to seek out the mysteries of Kabbalah. His initial crude fumbblings drew the attentions of Rudolph Berkowitz, bani Bonisagus, who, impressed with Malachai's initiative, quickly brought the boy under his wing. Berkowitz became Malachai's adoptive father and began his

time of Hermetic tutelage in the Prague Chantry. Malachai took to the Great Work as though born to it.

He studied in the small hours of the morning, working twice as hard as any other assistant in the chantry, so as to be able to find a spare moment here or there to page through the ancient texts and dusty scrolls. He quickly learned that he had a facility for languages and turned this to his advantage, needing only minimal schooling in a tongue before he could draw the connections on his own and decipher unfamiliar words. Mastering the *goetia* by the age of 15, Malachai moved on to the *theurgia*, inducing his own Awakening by the age of 17 through a rigorous regimen of Hermetic study. Most of the rest of his life in the Order would be marked by a similarly astonishing progression in studious endeavors, with almost any subject coming to him quickly and naturally.

Malachai, despite (or perhaps because of) his parents' devoutness, was not one for religion. In order to demonstrate man's preeminent place in the Great Chain of Being, to exert control over what he considered to be the fundamentally unjust hierarchy of Creation, and out of a desire to control the forces to which he felt his parents had bent knee like slaves, he turned to the summoning and binding of Umbrood. Never interested in friends or allies, he devoted himself instead to his work, allowing years to slip by with only an occasional foray out into the *mi'as* to acquire a rare ingredient for a particularly exotic or dangerous enchantment. Eventually, however, Malachai's great drive began to run thin. He had alienated many Astral Umbrood through his experiments and summonings and, at the end of the 1960s, Malachai turned to the *Ars Potentiae*, seeking to subvert by raw force that which finesse would no longer suffice to control. Still, there seemed to be something more, just beyond his reach. Malachai spent a few years traversing the Earth and the Otherworlds, making contact with many noted sages of the Order, seeking clues to a more perfect and absolute control over the myriad realms of Creation, but he could find no theory that sufficed.

In the end, Malachai disappeared into the depths of the Umbra, with a few muttered words to associates that he would return eventually with the knowledge he sought — knowledge that would enable him to traffick with the primordial spirits responsible for the order of reality itself. Mages of the Order at Mus last saw Malachai Ben-Yeshua surrounded by a tempest of books and papyri. Riding on the wings of an ensorcelled *djinn* of the winds, he seeks the mysteries at the heart of the Universe itself. Though no one actually expects Malachai to return anytime soon (or ever, really), learned ones say that his is an example of the intense focus a mage of the Order must cultivate in the pursuit of one's Word and in the pursuit of control over the very powers of nature.

THE ORDER OF HERMETICS CHRONICLE



They are perhaps more numerous than the practitioners of the hundreds of cultural traditions of the Dreamspeakers. They have better organization than is provided by the rigid hierarchy of the Celestial Chorus. If any one of the Nine Mystic Traditions was meant for a single Tradition game, the Order of Hermes is it.

That said, where to begin with an All-Hermetic chronicle? The Hermetics are a proactive society, often aggressively so, and one that is well acquainted with many different circles of society. Hermetic mages (as those in the sample cabal below illustrate) may integrate themselves easily into institutions of learning, using their own great education as a means of insinuating Pymandic thought into the instruction of the next generation. They might form a war cabal, turning their knowledge of the *Ars Hermeticae* into a potent weapon by which to rend the enemies of the Order asunder. Well-versed in art, culture and history, a group of Order mages may wander the Earth (and the Otherworlds) as a group of mythic archaeologists, seeking the occult truths of reality, all the while dealing with travel visas in hostile nations, bandits and pirates in undeveloped nations and, perhaps, the difficulties inherent in smuggling priceless treasures out of decrepit tombs and grand museums alike.

The Order has a reason to take offense at virtually every aspect of the modern world, so it is natural that as a well-organized Tradition they would dispatch a group of young mages to deal with this woe or that. Such missions range from the local to the global in scope. Rampant crime and drug use in a lower-class ethnic neighborhood? The product of a Technocratic prison forged to artificially stymie the potential of young minds through racial and economic oppression. Cuts in education spending to bolster an already-monolithic defense budget? A blatant scheme, feeding on fear and paranoia, to perpetuate

and expand the abhorrent state of ignorance in which Sleepers dwell, cheating them of their inherent human right to pursue understanding and Awakening. Opposing either of these injustices, through means both legitimate and covert, is honorable to the Order and there are certain to be Hermetics chomping at the bit for an opportunity to correct these and other such evils of contemporary society.

There is also a very practical side to an Order of Hermes chronicle. Members of other Traditions, like it or not, often treat the Order with (sometimes deserved) scorn and distaste for what they perceive to be a very arrogant and self-important worldview. More than any other Tradition, the Order of Hermes organizes its mages into these single-Tradition cabals for the sake of not hamstringing these young willworkers with the prejudices of other Traditionalists (and conversely, though Order mages speak less frequently of this in public, to save those young Hermetics the headaches of working so closely with the children of imperfect mystic arts).

The sense of variety offered by the Nine Great Houses of Hermes is sufficient to incorporate many different styles of magic and personality types into a single cabal. A calm-hearted scholar may hail from Bonisagus or Shaea, while a bold and dynamic warrior might descend from the venerable House of Flambeau or from the Tylali. Likewise, a mage interested in the Umbrae may have been inducted into Quaesitor and one who wishes to pursue arts of material transformation would do well in House Solificati or among the ranks of the Verditiis. The Order is a microcosm of the Nine Traditions (fitting, as it was the Order's system of hierarchies and protocols that largely defined those same institutions for the Grand Convocation) and virtually any school of mystic thought can be and has been mirrored by the Order to fit into the rigid mold of High Hermeticism (sometimes quite inelegantly, though there is also great roleplaying potential in that).

THE STRAUSSEN ACADEMY



Founded in 1788 by the Bonisagus Master, Hermann Strauss, in upstate New York, the Strauss Academy was to be a place where Hermetic mages could send their children to receive what was, to the Order's thinking, an appropriate and complete education. After all, many Order mages, then as now, simply lacked the time to properly instruct a child in both normal and Hermetic curricula. Thus, Strauss

intended his school to become a training ground, a place where the next generation of Hermetics could learn to seize the Thrice-Great's teachings for itself.

Today, the Academy is one of just three such schools the Order has (the other two being located, unsurprisingly, in

Europe: one in London and the other in the Champagne region of France). It is an accredited boarding school that houses no more than 30 students at a time. Currently, there are 22 students, ranging in age from 10 to 17. Just about half of the children are the progeny of a Hermetic parent (or parents), while about a third descend from Hermetic consors. The four remaining children are born of close allies to prominent Hermetics: two are the daughters of a slain Ahli-Batin, another is the illegitimate son of a Celestial Chorister in the Catholic Church and the last is the daughter of a Verbena; her destiny plainly did not rest with her mother's sisters. There is an informal trend (one which the staff fights fervently against) for the children of Awakened Hermetic mages to look down on the others at the school. Long hours

of drudgework are the reward for such snobbery, however, so most kids must display their prejudice on the sly (as the informal code against ratting out even the worst bully is in full effect in even this supposedly “enlightened” institution).

Most of the children and young adults who learn at the Straussens Academy will never Awaken. In general, one or two in a generation is the norm and three or four would be considered fantastic. Several generations have failed to yield even *one* new mage. Despite this, the Academy is an invaluable resource to the Order, since the graduates enter into the world as Sleepers sympathetic to the Hermetic paradigm, Sleepers who may, in time, surreptitiously pass this knowledge on to friends, co-workers and partners, as well as eventually imparting it to their own children.

HISTORY

Magister Straussens, after a long and illustrious career in the Order of Hermes, was growing old in the later years of the 18th century. He had battled the Order of Reason across four continents, waged a losing war to keep the system of the four humors in common usage and had catalogued more varieties of Tass than any Hermetic mage before or after. He was tired, lonely and, he knew, not much longer for the world. He was also fabulously wealthy as a result of his dabblings in alchemy.

Straussens used his fortune to purchase a large plot of land in the young state of New York, choosing it for remoteness (a factor he checked with the *Ars Temporis*, just to be certain that it would remain that way for the foreseeable future) and for an atmosphere that reminded him somewhat of his childhood home in the Schwarzwald, now two centuries gone. He paid handsomely for the most exquisite materials: strong granite from nearby New Hampshire, marble from Italy, rare woods from Africa and the Orient. He invited some of the most learned and respected scholars from the Order to join him in the enchantment and dedication of his venture and, should they wish it, in staying on and serving as teachers for the children of Hermetic mages across the world.

While many came for the dedication and most gave at least something to the school (ranging from the formulae of simple spells, to enchantments of protection, to a powerful Talisman or two), only a very few — six in total (including Straussens himself) — stayed on as educators. This suited the old Master well, though. Small classes and few instructors would make his school seem as much a family as an institution of Hermetic education. Straussens would die 16 years later, happy and surrounded by students, staff, alumni and other friends.

After the death of Hermann Straussens, the Academy passed, by the Master's will, into the care of Ysabeau de Laurent, bani Jerbiton, the eldest remaining educator at the school. From that time, it would pass from one mage to the next, with each Headmaster or Headmistress choosing his or her own successor. So it was through bountiful times and difficult ones, through classes of whatever size. The school weathered the march of decades with grace and poise, grow-

ing old and venerable. Sadly, though, the middle years of the 20th century had the Academy in a state of terrible decline. Even as the Baby Boom began, the terrible casualties suffered by the Order during the war made for few children born into the Tradition. Some thought that the Academy would be phased out of use within a generation.

1959 saw the death of the Bonisagus Headmaster Dorian Lacroix and the installment of the youthful Headmistress, Alessandra Wincott, bani Fortunae. Headmistress Wincott immediately instituted new policies, allowing for the admission of the children of consors and Hermetic mages of the first through third degrees, as well as the children of members of allied Traditions who wished for their progeny to grow up in an environment of impeccable education.

Within a year, the number of students attending the Academy skyrocketed from five to 30. It was a cause for celebration and probably the Academy's greatest single success in a century. Wincott was lauded for her efforts and would stay with the position for 40 years, retiring to San Francisco after just over a half-century with the school. She passed on her position in 1999 to Hatshepsut Tabitha Kashaf, bani Shaea and to a new generation of teachers, one she hoped would have the wisdom and the foresight to bring Hermes' teachings into a new millennium and a new world.

USING THE STRAUSSENS ACADEMY

You may certainly supplement (or, if you wish, replace) the teaching staff presented below with characters you provide. Likewise, you may ask them to attend the school for short periods of time (a single day, a few weeks or even a month) as guest educators and lecturers. (This option is especially good if the characters have established names for themselves within the Traditions or the Order especially, or one or more of them are noted scholars in various fields.) Perhaps a character or two even has a child attending the Academy. Maraksha Kashaf was a powerful and well-connected Archmage of the Order and her daughter, Tabitha, is also quite influential; perhaps one or more of the characters are friends, allies or even rivals of Deacon Kashaf.

Alternatively, you might wish to have the players create children as characters and run them as students of the school, with the events of your chronicle eventually leading up to the Awakening — or not, if you and your group are interested in running a group of Hermetic consors and hedge mages. This last option can be a particularly enjoyable one, involving themes of growing up, coming to terms with the responsibilities of power and living up to (or resisting) the examples of one's forebears, among many others. Unless you know for certain that the members of your group would handle it well, however, either *everyone* should Awaken eventually, or *no one*. If someone is looking to play a less powerful character for whatever reason (such as an inexperienced player or anyone looking for a change of pace), then, by all means, go for it. It's always possible to Awaken such a character later, should that suit the needs of your game.

THE CODE OF THE ACADEMY

The Code of the Strauss Academy, penned just before the school's dedication, is intended for two ends: first, to foster an atmosphere of respect and honor, and second, to foster a respect for the ways of the Tradition early on in the children who will one day be the mages, consors and aides of the Order. Of course, the Code applies just as much to teachers as to students (a fact that is vigorously enforced by Nicholas Avery, the resident Quaesitor), requiring the school's educators to be good examples for their students. The Code is as follows:

I. I am an ambassador of my Academy and swear to comport myself in a worthy manner at all times and in all places.

II. I shall never knowingly imperil my Academy, its administrators, or its students in any way.

III. I shall never work to deprive a student of my Academy of fair and equal opportunity for instruction of any sort, nor shall I bring knowing harm to any who dwell within these walls, lest my transgression be justly turned upon me.

IV. If a student, I shall not knowingly violate the privacy of any who abide within my Academy. If an administrator, I shall endeavor to maintain the privacy of both my peers and my charges, save under the greatest duress.

V. If called upon by an administrator of my Academy to give testimony on any occurrence pertaining to the security or integrity of my Academy and those who dwell therein, I shall do so honestly, swiftly and completely.

VI. I shall consider myself, at all times, as an exemplar for those at my Academy less learned than myself and shall conduct myself accordingly.

VII. I solemnly swear to adhere faithfully and to the best of my ability to this Code. Should I knowingly violate the spirit of this Code, may I be outcast from my Academy in shame.

THE TEACHING STAFF

Contrary to the Order's standard practice, the cabal of mages who run the Academy has no special title. Instead, Deacon Kashaf simply calls for "the teaching staff" whenever she has need of her associates. This keeps things simple, since the cabal effectively changes membership every so often anyway, when a member of the staff leaves or someone dies.

The teaching staff has responsibilities above and beyond educating the students, of course. In previous generations, staff members have performed Umbral explorations and diplomatic duties and have even, under the (brief) tenure of Wilhelmina Graf, bani Tyalus, acted as a war cabal. Tabitha Kashaf prefers to use the cabal more as talented generalists. The interests and capabilities of the staff's membership are diverse and lend themselves particularly well to less specialized practices.

Informally, there are two non-mages among the school's staff. The consor, William Beck, acts as campus security with assistant Jason Eddings, Nicholas Avery's apprentice. Neither of these two are actually part of the "staff cabal," however. The four members of the teaching staff are as follows:

HEADMISTRESS

HATSHEPSUT TABITHA KASHAF

One of the youngest of the daughters of the famed Shaea Primus, Maraksha Kashaf, Tabitha (the name by which she prefers to be addressed in casual conversation) is the current Headmistress of the Strauss Academy and the deacon of its closely associated Covenant, as well as the leader of the Hermetic cabal that oversees both.

Tabitha was made aware at a very young age that great things were expected of her. She grew up in chantries and Horizon Realms, and Awakened at the age of nine under the direct supervision of her mother and her older sisters. From that day forth, she was a priestess of Seshat. Of course, Tabitha was always overshadowed by the greater prowess of her many elder sisters and the incredible mystic might of her mother. In the end, she was content to fulfill a smaller, humbler destiny. In her adolescence, this resignation was bitter, but the years after taught Tabitha both the value of a powerful lineage and the benefits of being overlooked.

Naturally, Tabitha received her education from the greatest of Hermetic Masters and she excelled in all of her studies, amazing even some of the most demanding tutors with her quiet brilliance. She was, however, quite taken with the world of academia, with the power inherent in the Name of "teacher" — one who creates the Wills that will shape the future. When her own instruction was done, Tabitha sought her mother's permission to become involved in one of the Order's last few educational Covenants. Happy to see that her soft-spoken daughter had found a passion and overjoyed that she would embrace the sacred role of passing on wisdom to another generation, Maraksha Kashaf readily gave her blessing.

Tabitha joined the school's staff in 1993, at the age of 24. She mostly taught history and languages, but showed facility for almost any subject required of her. Further, Tabitha's calm



demeanor set most of the students at ease, while still maintaining some of the distance required to build up tenable bonds of respect and authority. When Headmistress Wincott retired four years ago, Tabitha was the only real choice for her successor, a role she readily accepted.

Since then, the loss of her mother and many of her sisters has tempered Tabitha's eagerness. Always possessed of a mature attitude, Tabitha has, by degrees, slipped into a more matriarchal persona, unknowingly attempting to take her mother's place in some small way. To the students at the Straussen Academy, however, she is a mother figure. For some of them, she is more a mother than the women who bore them.

Image: Tabitha's beauty is that of the line of the Nubian Pharaohs. Her thick hair is tamed by hundreds of thin braids and her fine-boned features look as though they are cut from polished ebony. Her overall appearance is one of great confidence, intelligence and wit. She often dresses in elegant pantsuits, accented by exquisite jewelry with an Egyptian theme (such as a scarab choker or a cartouche lapel pin). Her voice is naturally regal but gentle, though she can just as easily make it take on a forceful aspect. Tabitha almost never appears to be shocked or surprised by anything.

Roleplaying Hints: You are an heir to the House of the Crescent Moon, a daughter of the fallen High Priestess. You conduct yourself with the poise and nobility that befits royalty, for that, in a very real way, is what you are: a child of one of the Order's most powerful dynasties. Still, you have an open and caring heart and you love the role of teacher, a love your revered mother instilled in you at a young age. While most of mages of your House are content to surround themselves with old books and dusty scrolls, you desire most to be in the thick of living, *evolving* knowledge.

House: Shaea

Nature: Caregiver

Essence: Questing

Demeanor: Director

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 4 (Sincere), Manipulation 3, Appearance 4 (Exotic), Perception 4 (Intuitive), Intelligence 4 (Thoughtful), Wits 4 (Unflappable)

Talents: Alertness 3, Athletics 1, Awareness 3, Brawl 1, Dodge 1, Expression 3, Intimidation 1, Leadership 4, Subterfuge 3

Skills: Crafts (Calligraphy) 2, Drive 1, Etiquette 3, Firearms 2, Meditation 3, Stealth 1, Survival 1

Knowledges: Academics (History) 5, Computer 1, Cosmology 3, Enigmas 3, Enochian 3, Investigation 3, Law 1, Linguistics 4, Medicine 2, Occult 3, Science 1, Umbrood Protocols 1

Backgrounds: Allies 5, Arcane 2, Avatar 2, Influence 3, Library 3, Node 3, Resources 4

Arete: 4

Spheres: Correspondence 2, Forces 1, Mind 3, Spirit 1, Time 2

Willpower: 8

Quintessence: 6

Paradox: 0

Resonance: (Dynamic) Explorative 2, (Static) Instructive 2

VICTOR NAVARRO

Victor is a man with a problem. His *pater*, Julius Cranston, was executed in the Order's internal purges after the Second Masassa War for the prodigious consumption of vampire blood and the betrayal of top-level Hermetic intelligence to the descendents of the rogue Tremere. While he himself was cleared of all charges (and, indeed, was innocent of any wrongdoing in this instance), Victor's name was stained by the shameful actions of his mentor. Thus, Victor, a member of House Tylalus, the strategists and leaders of the Order, was demoted in perpetuity to the status of educator, teaching the next generation how to have the things he so desperately wants: power, influence and respect (in that order).

Victor resents the infinite potential of the kids he is teaching: for them, there are no limits beyond the heights to which their ambitions might take them. This attitude sometimes shows through his careful façade, betraying just a bit of his profound envy to the very children whom he hopes will be influenced by their time under his tutelage to one day, when they are noted mages of the Order, free him from this prison of old books and eager minds. As a physical education instructor (in addition to the other subjects he teaches) Victor stresses the martial aspects of the Order, and he is noticeably inclined toward the more physically capable kids (whom he believes will become the forceful leaders of the Order) and those youths who show no talent for such pursuits whatsoever (whom he believes will be the next generation's influential thinkers).

To most of the kids at the Straussen Academy, Victor is a well-liked teacher who pushes them just hard enough (since he has no real interest in reading over research papers and grading classwork).



A couple of the kids don't like his classes, since the only time he really pushes anyone is in Phys Ed, and he evinces an obvious lack of regard for his profession. For the harder-working students (especially those who descend from Hermetic mages), Victor's stance is insulting to the spirit of the Tradition and is an affront to the office he holds. Since he is easily the most intimidating of the Academy's teachers, however, such sentiments are usually kept quiet.

Image: Victor is broadly built and of medium height. Though he is in his mid-20s, his close-cropped light brown hair is already receding noticeably. His gray-blue eyes are flinty and hard and betray little essential human compassion. His nose is *very* slightly skewed to the right (an old break from a childhood fistfight) and the backs of his hands have the wear and scarring typical of a man who knows his way around a brawl. He dresses habitually in black jeans and boots, favoring turtleneck shirts.

Roleplaying Hints: You weren't chosen to be an educator — you were *sentenced* to it. You know that your current situation marks you as a footnote-to-be in the future history of the Order and you intend to rise above that lowly station by whatever means are at your disposal. You are aware that Tabitha and Nicholas are watching you like hawks, ready to report you to the upper echelons of the Quaesitori at the first sign of any treachery, however, so you need to work through more insidious means. Thus, you try to make every friend and ally you can, in the hopes that popular influence will eventually erode your informal exile to the halls of academia.

House: Tytalus

Nature: Conniver

Essence: Questing

Demeanor: Traditionalist

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4 (Tough), Charisma 2, Manipulation 4 (Deceptive), Appearance 2, Perception 2, Intelligence 4 (Creative), Wits 3

Skills: Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Awareness 1, Brawl 4, Dodge 2, Intimidation 4, Leadership 1, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 3

Talents: Drive 1, Etiquette 1, Firearms 2, Melee 2, Stealth 2, Survival 2

Knowledges: Academics 3, Computer 1, Enigmas 1, Enochian 2, Investigation 1, Law 1, Linguistics 3, Medicine 2, Occult 3, Science 2

Backgrounds: Arcane 3, Avatar 1, Contacts 3, Resources 2
Arete: 3

Spheres: Entropy 1, Forces 3, Life 2, Mind 1

Willpower: 6

Quintessence: 4

Paradox: 1

Resonance: (Dynamic) Overwhelming 2, (Entropic) Shattering 1

LIVIA BASQUALLE

As the youngest of the Strauss Academy educators (and certainly the youngest at heart) Livia enjoys the trust of

the students, since they see her as being most like them — a situation she capitalizes on to foster in them an eagerness for learning. The story of how she got there is strangely mundane, or it at least seems that way to her now.

Livia grew up in a middle-class home in suburban Michigan and considers her entire childhood and adolescent experience to be unexceptional. There were no flashes of insight, no feelings that she was "somehow different." She owned dolls like the other girls, got asked to junior high dances just as often as not and was at three high school keggers that got broken up by the cops. It was one thing, Livia maintains, that gave her the jolt she needed to shift out of her ordinary perceptions and into an Awakened one: psychedelics.

Livia tried her first tab of acid at the age of 17 while at a rave in Detroit. The dealer looked a bit too old to be there, but he was the only one her friends were sure wasn't a cop. She figured he was cruising for underage action, but she had enough friends there (one of whom was staying sober, since he was driving) that she figured it would be safe. The drug's effect was almost instantaneous, and Livia felt herself catapulted across a tapestry of thoughts, places and worlds as one. Everything was chaos — everything except for the figure of the man who had sold the acid to her. As she reeled in this mad reality that ran like melting wax, he took hold of her shoulders and spoke in a voice more clear and resonant than any she had ever before heard: "Don't worry. I can help you. There's no need to be afraid."

Despite her doubts, Livia was terrified beyond all reason and opted to follow him where he led her (to this day she muses about the irony of what might have happened *had* he really just been looking to score with a gullible high school girl), walking through a nightmarish kaleidoscope of clashing universes of minds, motion and color. She passed out somewhere along the way and woke up in a chantry of the Children of Knowledge. (When last she saw them, the friends who brought Livia to the rave were *still* laughing about the implausible tale she made up about what happened after she disappeared that night.) Livia had Awakened with a powerful soul that remembered the days of the Solificati. She was a born alchemist. To her parents' amazement, Livia was shortly thereafter offered a full scholarship to a private program at a prestigious college, an offer she accepted as casually as though expecting it.

She spent the next few years under the guidance of Robert Waters, Child of Knowledge (the same older man who had dealt to her), learning the Royal Art from the former chemist, who was considerably older than he looked, having been involved in the government's earliest days of experimentation with psychotropics, before the Technocracy co-opted the operation. Livia took her cues from Waters, learning more about the contemporary science of consciousness-altering substances than the old art of spiritual transformation. She knew that the two were essentially the same thing, but the idea of a super-concentrated dose of serotonin always made more sense to her than things with names like "The Rose Tincture" or "The Grand Elixir." Livia knew, through Waters, about the



Craft's acceptance of the Order's offer long before it was official. Sadly, her mentor was slain shortly thereafter by parties yet unknown. After the Children of Knowledge officially became House Solificati, Livia decided to pass on what she had learned, just as her teacher had done for her. She's truly come to love her job at the Academy and now couldn't picture doing anything else, despite her occasional misgivings about the Order of Hermes itself.

Image: While she is not beautiful, Livia's effervescent mien lends her an air of charm that easily overcomes her plain looks. She usually wears her long, copper-red dreadlocks in two large pigtails, and her eyes are a deep emerald green. A silver stud glints in the right nostril of her button nose, though she tones down most of her strange taste in jewelry when teaching classes. Likewise, her baggy jeans and tight tees are exchanged for something a bit more modest (often a pantsuit, after Tabitha's fashion). Livia loves her work and it shows in her bearing.

Roleplaying Hints: You are far more a new-school Child of Knowledge than an Order of Hermes, bani Solificati. Leary and McKenna, rather than Paracelsus and St. Germain, were your influences. In the small hours of the morning, when you creep back onto campus grounds after a night out clubbing or hanging out with Ecstatic friends, you wonder if your Craft did the right thing in joining with the often staid and regimented Order. Still, you don't allow these speculations to interfere with your perpetually sunny demeanor.

House: Solificati

Nature: Celebrant

Essence: Dynamic

Demeanor: Celebrant

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Charisma 4 (Friendly), Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception 4 (Insightful), Intelligence 4 (Book-Smart), Wits 2

Talents: Alertness 1, Athletics 2, Awareness 3, Dodge 1, Expression 2, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 2

Skills: Drive 2, Etiquette 1, Firearms 2, Meditation 2, Melee 1, Technology 1

Knowledges: Academics 3, Computer 2, Cosmology 2, Enigmas 3, Linguistics 3, Medicine 1, Occult 2, Science 3

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Avatar 5, Dream 1, Resources 3

Arete: 2

Spheres: Forces 1, Life 1, Matter 2, Prime 2

Willpower: 6

Quintessence: 3

Paradox: 1

Resonance: (Dynamic) Transforming 1, (Static) Mending 1

NICHOLAS AVERY

Growing up, Nick just wanted to be a cop like his dad, Mike, his uncle, Lou, and his granddad, Thomas. Whenever he and his pals played cops-n-robbers, he was always one of the boys in blue. When Nick was 17 years old and Sgt. Mike Avery was gunned down during a routine domestic disturbance in Red Hook, however, things changed. It wasn't that Nick was afraid of the work; indeed, he relished the thought of avenging his father on every shit-sucking lowlife he could find, no matter the cost to himself. Instead, it was the sight of his mother and grandmother, both women broken by the news of one good cop's death in the line of duty that made him stop and question the path that had before seemed so clear.

Uncle Lou took the boy under his wing and guided him gently toward enforcing the law in the courtroom, rather than on the street. While Nick was never the brightest kid, he had a dogged determination and perseverance on his side. He finished high school with good enough grades to get into a decent pre-law program and, despite working two jobs to stay afloat while in school and running track, managed to pull down a 3.2 GPA for his undergraduate years. His force of personality during his interviews got him into an Ivy League law program and he took on a *third* job to pay the increased costs. He averaged twice as much study in a day as sleep for the first year of graduate law. It was early in his second year that he first came to the attention of Marguerite Chanson, bani Quaesitor — his Ethics professor. She saw the amazing amount of effort (exceptional even for a graduate law student) Nick put into his work, both within and without the auspices of his higher education and asked him why he was running himself ragged. Nick's reply was simple and it secured the patronage of House Quaesitor for him: "Justice must be done and if I don't see to it, who will?"

Since then, Nick has graduated with a doctorate in law, Awakened through his regimen of relentless study, passed his initiation into House Quaesitor and become a respected member of his House, and all of this at the age of 29. Nick's decision to educate came as a surprise to many, but he realized that the Order needed to look to its future after the death of his *mater*



during an ill-timed trip to Horizon. His campaign of vengeance against the shit of the world can wait. Nick has become known as the teacher at the Strauss Academy most likely to encourage the children to solve problems through perseverance and wits, rather than seeking the magical solutions that most of them, despite this education, will never have recourse to. The few kids who enjoy his classes are often those who obviously lack the spark of a dormant Awakened spirit.

Image: Nick is tall and slender, with an extremely wiry frame. His black hair is of medium length and is always worn neatly combed back (he has a nervous habit of brushing stray locks back into place with his right hand). Nick's blue eyes are harder even than Victor's, but they also reflect a basic compassion for the innocent that is lacking in the Tytalan's gaze. There is an almost frightening intensity about him, an

aura supplemented by the crisp, conservative suits he wears when serving in his capacity as an educator.

Roleplaying Hints: You have a pathological need to protect the innocent and see the guilty suffer. You know that Navarro was not in collusion with his *pater* but you don't trust him, anyway. He's a manipulator in a house full of children. You try hard to keep your feelings for Tabitha from interfering with your work; a Quaesitor's lot is loneliness. You care deeply for "your kids" and you would kill or die to defend them, though you have trouble expressing this and you know that, to them, you're just the hardass teacher that very few students actually like.

House: Quaesitor

Nature: Perfectionist

Essence: Primordial

Demeanor: Judge

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4 (Relentless), Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 5 (Unhesitating)

Talents: Alertness 2, Athletics 1, Brawl 1, Dodge 2, Expression 1, Intimidation 2, Leadership 2, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 2

Skills: Drive 1, Etiquette 1, Firearms 3, Stealth 1

Knowledges: Academics 3, Computer 1, Enochian 1, Investigation 2, Law 4 (Criminal), Linguistics 2, Occult 1

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Arcane 2, Avatar 3, Contacts 4, Resources 2

Arete: 2

Spheres: Correspondence 1, Entropy 1, Forces 2, Mind 1, Spirit 1

Willpower: 8

Quintessence: 5

Paradox: 0

Resonance: (Entropic) Flensing 2

ΠΥΘΟΙ



THE CITY OF PYTHANDER

The One True Hermetic Ideal, the City of Pymander is the ultimate goal of the Order as an entity. It is the cornerstone of the aspirations of the Hermetic paradigm. This place, equal measures of allegory and genuine objective, is where the perfect becomes real. The City of Pymander is where all of humanity is wise, learned, responsible and Awakened.

For centuries, the mages of the Order have debated what the City is and what it means. Is it a literal, physical construct, such as a Horizon Realm, or perhaps the state that will become of all reality when mass Ascension is achieved? Are only some to become part of this perfect world, or can it only be realized when the entire human race is ready to make this final step toward

perfection? Is the City of Pymander an inevitability, a possibility or a never-ending struggle? Do the Oracles, if they exist, already dwell there? If so, does this mean that the City is open to those who share in mystic schools of thought different from the Order of Hermes, or are *all* esoteric systems of belief reconciled with one another at such lofty heights of understanding?

While this may seem like a boring debate existing on a level of scholarship so obtuse that it is essentially irrelevant, mages of the Order take this topic *very* seriously. Perfection may be a difficult objective to reach, perhaps even an impossible one, but it is certainly one that will never be achieved unless someone makes a sincere attempt to get there.

What few members of other traditions who have actually engaged Hermetics in serious and reasonably open-minded debate about this topic are surprised to learn is that the Order, as a whole, is actually fighting for a reality in which humanity

is not only free from control, but also from the need and the desire to be controlled. It strikes most such mages as completely counterintuitive, given Order mages' penchant for seeking out positions of leadership and influence. However, most Hermetics are quick to point out that they wouldn't be that way if the vast majority of the human race didn't actively strive to be unworthy of self-rule.

THE FINAL SUN

In House Shaea, which has made prophetic apocrypha its business, there currently circulates great speculation about the impending end of the Mayan calendar, an event now less than a decade off. Calculated by these ancients as December 23rd, 2012, this month and day reverberate heavily with historic significance (such as the assassination of the last Marovingian king, Dagobert). The Seshati are most curious to watch this date as it approaches and to discern what, if anything, comes after (since the Mayan calendar simply concludes with that day, as though time itself draws to a close). Divinations and prophecies have borne little fruit; perhaps the potential importance that House Shaea ascribes to the date serves to cloud its members' ability to study it objectively.

The mages of the House of Seshat have come out of their customary academic seclusion to take this matter up with willworkers of other mystic Traditions, notably Dreamspeakers of Mayan descent, some of the rare South American Euthanatos and members of the newly-rediscovered Balamob faction of the Verbena. Further, Seshati have begun to seek out the spirits of the Amazonian jungles, hoping to contact powerful totems or ancestors in those primordial woodlands that might be willing

to shed some light on the situation. Whether these overtures and explorations end up bearing any fruit remains to be seen, but they are, at the very least, serving to demonstrate the Order's sincere interest in cultural and religious phenomena not stemming from Europe and the Middle East. For this reason alone, House Shaea's investigations into the Final Sun are valuable, even if they discover no further information.

THE COVENANT AT BUDAPEST

Not so much a myth as a subject of modern-day scrutiny, the Covenant at Budapest was recently "reclaimed" from the descendants of the rogue House Tremere during the Second Massasa War. The chantry is enormous in size and filled with cavernous libraries, elegant Sancta and even a few potent Wonders. Several members of the Order are clamoring for its use as a new base of operations for the Tradition, since the few facts circulating about the circumstances of the war's end indicate that aggressions between *massasa* and mages are over, but others are far more skeptical, citing the treacherous nature of the vampires and the folly in concentrating the Order's power in *any* one place, no matter how defensible — it was successfully besieged at least once, after all.

Currently, the chantry remains virtually uninhabited, considering its gargantuan size. It boasts a permanent staff of six Hermetic mages (it could easily host six times that number, plus consors and other servants, with room to spare). Those who dwell there are considering opening the place up for use as a multi-Tradition chantry, though the nature of its former tenants is likely to dissuade most from rushing to take up residence.

NEW HOPES FOR ANCIENT ARTS: TEMPLATES



Faced with today's honeycomb of reality tunnels [Robert Anton] Wilson advocates a kind of wry schizophrenia, a yin/yang of skepticism and imagination that maintains the mind always at a crossroads, poised between yes and no.

This excluded middle is where the postmodern Hermes is born: a sacred ironist or a visionary skeptic, dancing between logic and archaic perception, myth and modernity, reason and its own

hallucinatory excess.

— Erik Davis, *Techgnosis: Myth, Magic + Mysticism in the Age of Information*

Behind the stereotype of grumbly old dustbeards, there's a vibrant array of Hermetic wizards just waiting to show what they can do. Freed of the constraints that used to stifle their

Tradition, these young mages walk the streets of our world, radiant with potential and ready to use it.

There has always been variety among the children of Hermes — he is, after all, the god of trickery and dispatch. But in the fallout of the Reckoning, the new Hermetic breed don masks that even their fellow Traditionalists would find surprising — spies, thieves, computer wizards, even street people. The thunderbolt does not come from lofty heights alone, but crackles through all strata of human existence. Granted, there aren't many Hermetics who'd be caught dead in a strip bar or monster truck show, but... well, assume too much about these folks and you're bound to be deceived. Hermes has many faces, and his initiates in this world favor his example.

STUDENT OF 1000 FACES (HOUSE BONISAGUS)

Quote: *Get a job? This is my job!*

Prelude: You could read by two years old — not words, but whole sentences complete with comprehension. From kindergarten onward, you were always three steps (and at least two grades) ahead of your peers. The teachers loved you, but the kids gave you holy hell... until you hit college (at age 15, no less) and found yourself among people who really *wanted* to be in school.

It was freshman year when your voracious mind brought you to the doors of Harwood Hall — an off-campus fellowship with a sinister reputation. Inside, you found friends and mentors who shared insatiable appetites for knowledge. Soon, you were reading Coptic texts like they were *People* magazines; better yet, your new companions taught you how to get out and live a little... and how to stop being such a geek.

At first, you assumed new identities for kicks and to stifle the rumor mill about your extracurricular activities. Soon, though, the game got serious; you were about to graduate and couldn't stand the thought of leaving academia. A little magic, a few minor alterations to your features, and voila! One new freshman, coming up! This time you assumed a totally different course of study — then another, and another.

House Bonisagus loves eager students. Your *pater* soon made arrangements for perpetual enrollment at various universities. But classroom study is only part of your curriculum. As you learned long ago, the lessons you absorb in class are nothing compared to those you learn in the life outside the books. And so now you change identities every few years, inventing new transcripts, histories, features and friends with every move. Better still, you've become a mentor to other kids: Your apartment hosts gatherings of the most interesting people around, your discreet fortune finds its way out in small loans to deserving colleagues, and your magics protect and nurture people you see making a difference in the days ahead. Between your looks, charisma, interests and money, you become a popular — but not *too* popular! — fixture on every campus. Despite these dispensations, however, you remain an enigma, apparently young, deceptively subtle, and voraciously curious about every kind of knowledge.

Concept: Learning literally is your vocation. Every few years, you assume a new identity, transfer to a new school, and follow another course of study. Life magic keeps you hovering around your early 20s, and a steady trickle of money maintains a modest lifestyle. On campus, you keep an eye out for new talents and threats. For House Bonisagus, you're a finger on the college pulse, a recruiter, and when necessary, a spy.

Roleplaying Tips: Knowledge of all kinds is your bread and butter. The charade you maintain is just another classroom, and each persona is a new course of study. Whatever identity you choose, immerse yourself in its details; these days, a failed test can trash more than just your GPA!

Magic: A diehard academic, you favor books and intricate — yet practical! — rites. *Ars Vitae* maintains youth and appearance; *Ars Mentis* aids your spying and social skills; a bit of *Ars Virium* rounds out your Hermetic curriculum vitae.

Equipment: Nice apartment, healthy checkbook, student wardrobe, and lots and lots and lots of books.



ORDER OF HERMES

NAME: _____ NATURE: **Celebrant** HOUSE: **Bonisagus**
 PLAYER: _____ ESSENCE: **Questing** CONCEPT: **Student of 1000 Faces**
 CHRONICLE: _____ DETRAINOR: **Child** CABAL: _____

ATTRIBUTES

PHYSICAL		SOCIAL	MENTAL
Strength: ●●○○○	Charisma: ●●○○○	Perception: ●●○○○	
Dexterity: ●●○○○	Manipulation: ●●●○○	Intelligence: <i>Book-smart</i> ●●●○○	
Stamina: ●●○○○	Appearance: ●●○○○	Wits: ●●○○○	

ABILITIES

TALENTS		SKILLS	KNOWLEDGES
Alertness: ●●○○○	Crafts: ●○○○○	Academics: ●●○○○	
Athletics: ●○○○○	Drive: ●○○○○	Computer: ●●○○○	
Awareness: ●○○○○	Etiquette: ●○○○○	Cosmology: ●○○○○	
Brawl: ●○○○○	Fitness: ●○○○○	Enigmas: ●○○○○	
Dodge: ●○○○○	Meditation: ●○○○○	Investigation: ●●○○○	
Expression: ●○○○○	Melee: ●○○○○	Law: ●○○○○	
Intimidation: ●○○○○	Performance: ●○○○○	Linguistics: ●○○○○	
Leadership: ●○○○○	Stealth: ●○○○○	Medicine: ●○○○○	
Streetwise: ●●○○○	Survival: ●○○○○	Occult: ●●○○○	
Subterfuge: ●○○○○	Technology: ●○○○○	Science: ●○○○○	

SPHERES

Correspondence: ●○○○○	Life: ●●○○○	Prime: ●○○○○
Entropy: ●○○○○	Matter: ●○○○○	Spirit: ●○○○○
Forces: ●○○○○	Mind: ●○○○○	Time: ●○○○○

ADVANTAGES

BACKGROUNDS		ARETE	HEALTH
Allies: ●●○○○	Avatar: ●○○○○	Willpower: ●●○○○○○○	Bruised: -0 □
Contacts: ●●○○○	Resources: ●○○○○		Hurt: -1 □
			Injured: -2 □
			Wounded: -3 □
			Mauled: -4 □
			Crippled: -5 □
			Incapacitated: □

RESONANCE

Dynamic: Curious ●○○○○	Quintessence: ○○○○○○○○
Entropic: ●○○○○	
Static: ●○○○○	

EXPERIENCE

COMBAT

Weapon	Artifically	Damage

ORDER OF HERMES™

NAME: _____
 CHARACTER: Student of 1000 Faces
 CHRONICLE: _____
 HOUSE: Bonisagus
 ESSENCE: Questing
 CABAL: _____
 NATURE: Celebrant
 DETEANOR: Child

PHYSICAL

Energetic _____
 Tireless _____
 Steady _____

SOCIAL

Eloquent _____
 Friendly _____
 Ingratating _____

MENTAL

Creative _____
 Dedicated _____
 Discerning _____
 Insightful _____

ABILITIES

Academics x2 (Classics)
 Computer
 Investigation x2 (Greek & Latin)
 Linguistics x2
 Occult

BACKGROUNDS

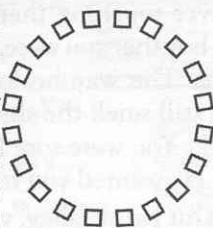
Allies x2 _____
 Avatar _____
 Contacts x3 _____
 Resources x3 _____

SPHERES

Apprentice of Forces _____
 Disciple of Life _____
 Initiate of Mind _____

ROTES

⊕ UNTESSENCE/PARADOX
 WILLPOWER
 ARETE



RESONANCE

DYNAMIC Curious

ENTROPIC

STATIC

ORDER OF HERMES™

NAME: _____
 CHARACTER: "Friend"
 CHRONICLE: _____
 HOUSE: Flambeau
 ESSENCE: Pattern
 CABAL: _____
 NATURE: Caregiver
 DETEANOR: Bravo

PHYSICAL

Brawny _____
 Brutal _____
 Enduring _____
 Ferocious _____

SOCIAL

Charismatic _____
 Commanding _____
 Fearsome _____

MENTAL

Alert _____
 Cunning _____
 Determined _____

ABILITIES

Brawl x2 _____
 Intimidation x2 _____
 Firearms _____
 Melee _____
 Streetwise x2 _____

BACKGROUNDS

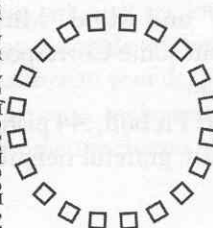
Allies x4 _____
 Avatar _____
 Influence (Street) x2 _____
 Resources x3 _____

SPHERES

Apprentice of Correspondence _____
 Initiate of Forces _____
 Apprentice of Life _____
 Initiate of Mind _____

ROTES

⊕ UNTESSENCE/PARADOX
 WILLPOWER
 ARETE



RESONANCE

DYNAMIC

ENTROPIC Menacing

STATIC

NEIGHBORHOOD "FRIEND" (HOUSE FLAITIBEAU)

Quote: *Think very carefully about your next words....*

Prelude: Think all wizards are born with silver spoons? Bullshit. You grew up with an alcoholic Papa and a mom who was 33 going on 13 when you got pinched for grand theft auto. The juvenile justice system welcomed you with open arms... then prison. And the things they did to you in there... well, let's just say your Seekings are a bitch.

Then you met Butler, a lifer *no one* ever fucked with. His secret? That took you a long time to discover, as no one wanted to talk about him either. Turns out he was some magic moolie motherfucker who'd laid a few guys out without ever touching them. He didn't scare you, good Catholic boy that you were, so you went to chat him up, *piasan*-style. The way he looked through you that day... you can still smell the shit in your pants when he started to speak. You were sure he wanted you to be his bitch. Wrong. He wanted you to be his apprentice.

When you hit parole alley, you looked up a few folks Butler mentioned. By now, you'd learned some things. They taught you even more. Soon you tamed the fire in your heart, turning it white-hot with purpose. Your prison skills came in handy around the chantry, and no one could fuck with you hand-to-hand. Despite your newfound polish, though, you remained a street kid at heart. Visiting home, you found that Mom had died and Dad had gone Bowery. You left him there. Your sisters needed help.

You pulled a few strings. Spoke a few spells. Foster care gave the girls up to your guardianship, and you set up shop back home. But that neighborhood was no place for kids — yours or anyone's. And so now, with new friends and talents, you make home ground a better place to live.

Mother Mary help anyone who interferes.

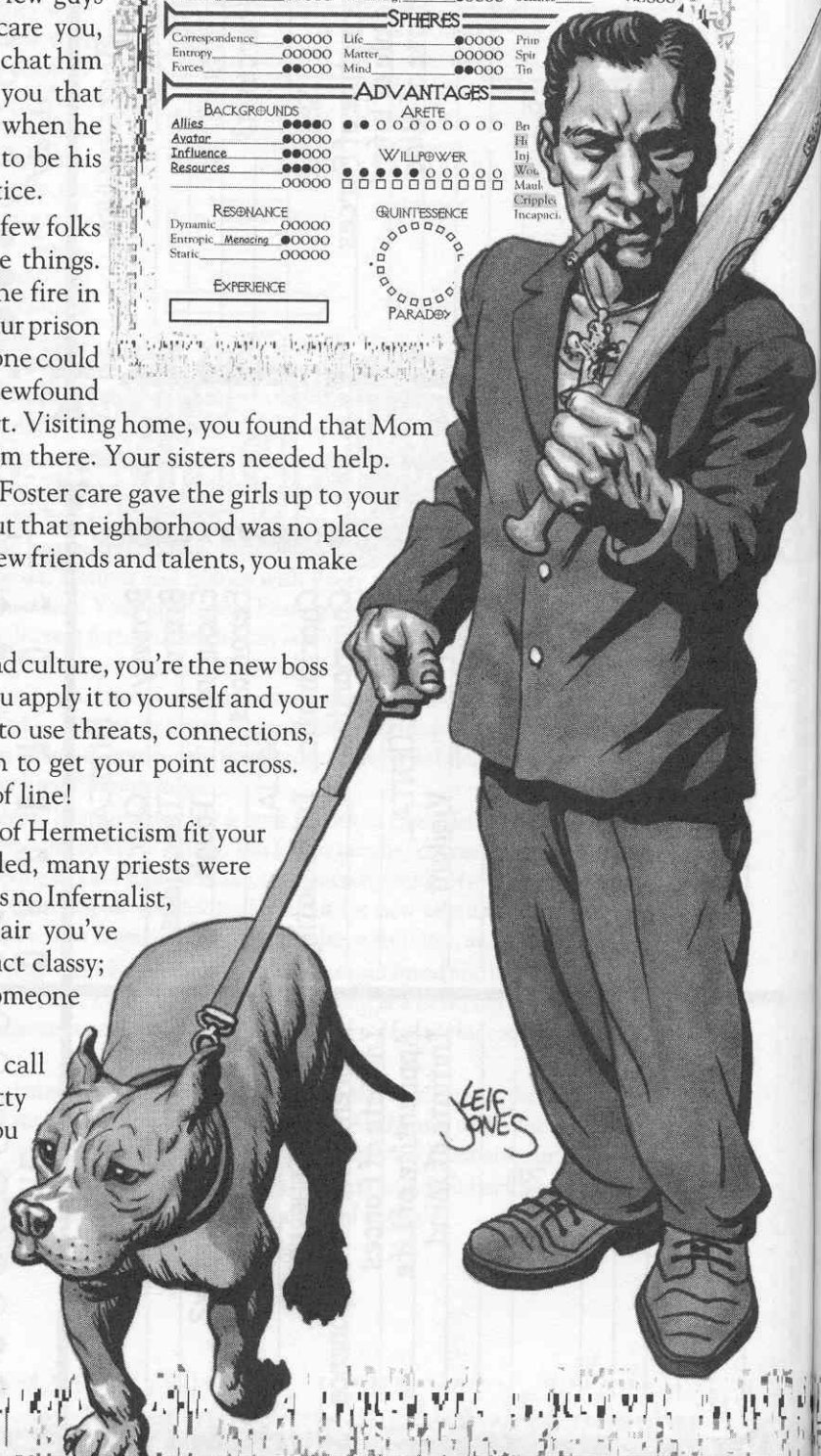
Concept: A street-born badass with newfound culture, you're the new boss cleaning house. Your Word is *Redemption*, and you apply it to yourself and your neighborhood equally. No vigilante, you prefer to use threats, connections, street diplomacy, and the occasional beat-down to get your point across. You've got a gang, but they don't *dare* step out of line!

Roleplaying Tips: The ritualistic trappings of Hermeticism fit your Catholic background well; as your studies revealed, many priests were also well versed in the Arts. Butler, it turns out, was no Infernalist, just a wizard with a flair for theatrics — a flair you've inherited. Despite your background, you try to act classy; despite your class, you can still curb-stomp someone when necessary.

Magic: The hell with fancy names — you call Forces "Forces" and Mind "Mind." You're pretty good at both, but some Correspondence helps you watch your back.

Equipment: Pit bull, .44 pistol, baseball bat, gang, lots of cash, grateful neighbors.

ORDER OF HERMES		
NAME: _____	NATURE: Caregiver	HOUSE: Flambeau
PLAYER: _____	ESSENCE: Pattern	CONCEPT: Neighborhood "Friend"
CHRONICLE: _____	DETHEANOR: Bravo	CABAL: _____
ATTRIBUTES		
PHYSICAL	SOCIAL	MENTAL
Strength <small>(Acvt)</small> ●●●●●	Charisma ●●●●●	Perception ●●●●●
Dexterity ●●●●●	Manipulation ●●●●●	Intelligence ●●●●●
Stamina <small>(Solid)</small> ●●●●●	Appearance ●●●●●	Wis ●●●●●
ABILITIES		
TALENTS	SKILLS	KNOWLEDGES
Alertness ●●●●●	Crafts ●●●●●	Academics ●●●●●
Athletics ●●●●●	Drive ●●●●●	Computer ●●●●●
Awareness ●●●●●	Etiquette ●●●●●	Cosmology ●●●●●
Brawl <small>(Jailhouse)</small> ●●●●●	Firearms ●●●●●	Enigmas ●●●●●
Dodge ●●●●●	Meditation ●●●●●	Investigation ●●●●●
Expression ●●●●●	Meloe ●●●●●	Law ●●●●●
Intimidation <small>(Scary)</small> ●●●●●	Performance ●●●●●	Linguistics ●●●●●
Leadership ●●●●●	Stealth ●●●●●	Medicine ●●●●●
Streetwise ●●●●●	Survival ●●●●●	Occult ●●●●●
Subterfuge ●●●●●	Technology ●●●●●	Science ●●●●●
SPHERES		
Correspondence ●●●●●	Life ●●●●●	Pris ●●●●●
Entropy ●●●●●	Matter ●●●●●	Spi ●●●●●
Forces ●●●●●	Mind ●●●●●	Tin ●●●●●
ADVANTAGES		
BACKGROUNDS	ARETE	WILLPOWER
Allies ●●●●●	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Be ●●●●●
Avatar ●●●●●		Hi ●●●●●
Influence ●●●●●		Inj ●●●●●
Resources ●●●●●		Wol ●●●●●
		Maul ●●●●●
		Criples ●●●●●
		Incapaci ●●●●●
RESONANCE	QUINTESSENCE	PARADEY
Dynamic ●●●●●	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	
Entropic ●●●●●		
Static ●●●●●		
EXPERIENCE		



WALL STREET WIZARD (HOUSE FORTUNAE)

Quote: *There are no bulls or bears. Only numbers and the illusion of their worth. Know that, and fear nothing.*

Prelude: Wealth breeds wealth. Father was a damned good businessman, and he made certain you followed his example. While other rich kids snorted coke and played the fool, you were learning the family trade. By high school, you'd already assembled a portfolio of your own (under Father's name but your discretion), and began an impressive financial career.

One night Lady Luck paid you a visit, in the flesh. The touch of her hand was the greatest bliss you've ever known. No mortal lover, before or since, has given you such pleasure! The one word she breathed to you was "Fortune," and you knew it for the destiny it was. Not long afterward, friends of Father's came and introduced you to a hidden fellowship — a cabal of financial wizards whose methods coincided perfectly with your own.

It wasn't long, however, before you noticed the other power players in the market — the shadowy financiers and deep-eyed things that haunted the fringes of your world. And so, you joined the battle — not a war of blades or gunfire, but of influence, favors, and the almighty illusion of wealth. So far, you remain a minor partner in this venture. You're bold, but not *stupid!* Still, destiny has a role for you, a destiny you've assisted by authoring the best-selling Wall Street Wizard's Investment Magic series. It's been a great success: by giving the Sleepers tools and knowledge, you provide them with power, and by creating a profitable book deal, you've added to your already considerable financial clout.

Lady Luck is so proud of you.

Concept: A young investment prodigy with money and fame to burn. Physically modest, your true power lies in money, good luck, and the influence that goes with both. Your magical abilities are minimal, too, but the power you hold within the mundane world is more powerful than a handful of spells. Your Hermetic mentor grumps about neglected studies, but not even *he* can argue with your results thus far.

Roleplaying Tips: Brash but not blind, you understand the values of risk and discretion equally. You're a hard worker, but not an academic bust-ass — you'd rather be plotting strategies than perusing spellbooks. A vaguely dismissive attitude toward the mystic Arts hasn't earned you much respect in the Hermetic community, but people recognize talent when they see it. You may never amount to much of a magus, but you're already a part of the team.

Magic: *Ars Fortunae* and *Temporis* are your strong points; you have yet to get the hang of this "elemental forces" thing, although you know the basics of *Virium* and *Potentiae*. Charts, graphs and motivational speeches cast your spells, and a few charms under your suit add insurance to your dealings.

Equipment: Expensive hand-tailored suits, embossed business cards, Rolex, elite credit cards, silver cross and protective charms, sharpened rowan walking stick "just for show."

ORDER OF HERMES				
NAME: PLAYER: CHRONICLE:	NATURE: Celebrant ESSENCE: Dynamic DETRIMENTOR: Gallant	HOUSE: Fortunae CONCEPT: Wall Street Wizard CABAL:		
ATTRIBUTES				
PHYSICAL	SOCIAL	MENTAL		
Strength: ●●○○○	Charisma: ●●○○○	Perception: ●●○○○		
Dexterity: ●●○○○	Manipulation/Writing: ●●○○○	Intelligence: ●●○○○		
Stamina: ●●○○○	Appearance: ●●○○○	Wits: ●●○○○		
ABILITIES				
TALENTS	SKILLS	KNOWLEDGES		
Alertness: ●○○○○	Crafts: ●○○○○	Academics: ●○○○○		
Athletics: ●○○○○	Drive: ●○○○○	Computer: ●○○○○		
Awareness: ●○○○○	Etiquette: ●○○○○	Cosmology: ●○○○○		
Brawl: ●○○○○	Firearms: ●○○○○	Enigmas: ●○○○○		
Dodge: ●○○○○	Meditation: ●○○○○	Investigation: ●○○○○		
Expression: ●○○○○	Melce: ●○○○○	Law: ●○○○○		
Intimidation: ●○○○○	Performance: ●○○○○	Linguistics: ●○○○○		
Leadership: ●○○○○	Steath: ●○○○○	Medicine: ●○○○○		
Streetwise: ●○○○○	Survival: ●○○○○	Occult: ●○○○○		
Subterfuge: ●○○○○	Technology: ●○○○○	Science: ●○○○○		
SPHERES				
Correspondence: ●○○○○	Life: ●○○○○	Prime: ●○○○○		
Entropy: ●○○○	Matter: ●○○○○	Spirit: ●○○○○		
Forces: ●○○○	Mind: ●○○○○	Time: ●○○○○		
ADVANTAGES				
BACKGROUNDS	ARETE	HEALTH		
Avatar: ●○○○○	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Bruised: -0 <input type="checkbox"/>		
Contacts: ●○○○○	WILLPOWER	Hurt: -1 <input type="checkbox"/>		
Influence: ●○○○○	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Injured: -1 <input type="checkbox"/>		
Resources: ●○○○○	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Wounded: -2 <input type="checkbox"/>		
	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Mauled: -2 <input type="checkbox"/>		
	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Crippled: -5 <input type="checkbox"/>		
	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Incapacitated: <input type="checkbox"/>		
RESONANCE	QUINTESSENCE	COMBAT		
Dynamic Studies of Sense: ●○○○○	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Weapons: <table border="1"><tr><td></td><td></td></tr></table>		
Entropic: ●○○○○	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Difficult Damage: <table border="1"><tr><td></td><td></td></tr></table>		
Static: ●○○○○	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●			
EXPERIENCE	PARADISE			
	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●			



AVATAR ICON (HOUSE XAOS)

Quote: *I am anyone I choose to be.*

Prelude: Computers are magical. You've always understood that. Their inhuman ability to transmute thoughts to numbers and from there to images and qualities renders them like unto gods of the modern world.

Gods you can control. Gods you can become.

It began with puzzles and games. Then with programming, data-hacking and CGI doodles, net-chat and flame wars. For fun, you began to post under different identities, crafting new personas, writing styles and agendas to suit your whims. As CGI packages improved, you started experimenting, creating new faces and forms to go with those new identities.

You began to change reality, not only for yourself, but for anyone who chanced to meet "you" in netspace.

Soon, you met others with similar talents.

Had you been a different person, you might have wound up among the Virtual Adepts or other malcontents. But where your virtual friends saw an anarchist's playground, you perceived perfect order. Engrossed by numerology and formulae from an early age, you noted the Hermetic undercurrents of this gematrian otherworld. This inspired you to expand your studies from technological realms to metaphysical and philosophical ones. And what you discovered still amazes you; the apparent randomness of netspace cloaks interweaving truths. Here, the limitations of physical space

and form yield to mathematical perfection. The arcane passwords and commands of compuspeak form a doorway beyond anatomical boundaries — a



doorway guarded by Hermes himself. A doorway you have begun to understand better than anyone else you know. Although you have yet to jump beyond your physical body entirely, you've mastered the art of multipersona reality. Away from the keyboard, you're a quiet enigma; behind it, you're a hundred different people — some wise, others vain, still others devious, cruel, or generous. Like Hermes, you've become a living trick, a messenger and key-bearer to others in your virtual home. The thunderbolt you ride is the electric surge; the tree you traverse is a web of Sephiroth all linked by numerological perfection, biological frailty, and psychological ingenuity. It's magic, no matter what anyone else may think.

Concept: Although shackled for the moment to the third dimension, a good deal of your Self lives — as so many do these days — in the fifth dimension: Consciousness. Practically incoherent in the flesh, you're a master of reality in netspace. To pay the rent, you do freelance IT consulting and the occasional shady job on the side; this keeps you in touch with the physical world, at least for now.

Roleplaying Tips: Reclusive in realspace, you're incredibly social in the Digital Web. Your various aspects that rarely emerge in the flesh manifest in dozens of online personas. Hardly anyone outside your closest kin and contacts (who has time for friends?) actually knows the person behind the keyboard. Do you? Sometimes it's hard to be certain.

Note: Obviously, this character is hard to place in a realspace chronicle, unless, of course, the Storyteller rattles the Avatar Icon's cage by forcing him/her/it/them away from the computer for a while. In a Digital Web chronicle, however, this person can be many people; like Hermes, the Icon transcends mere flesh.

Magic: Mind and Correspondence allow you to manifest astrally in the Digital Web; Forces helps you exert a superhuman control over your equipment. Eventually, you want to learn everything... and once you expand beyond your physical casing, you'll do just that.

Equipment: World-class infotech setup, nasty-ass apartment, more textbooks (mystical and technological) than God.

ORDER OF HERMES			
NAME:	NATURE: Visionary	HOUSE: Xaos	
PLAYER:	ESSENCE: Primordial	CONCEPT: Avatar Icon	
CHARACTER:	DEITY/ANOR: Deviant	CABAL:	
ATTRIBUTES			
PHYSICAL		MENTAL	
Strength: ●●●●	Charisma: ●●●●	Perception: ●●●●	
Dexterity: ●●●●	Manipulation: ●●●●	Intelligence: <i>Creative</i> ●●●●	
Stamina: ●●●●	Appearance: ●●●●	Wits: ●●●●	
ABILITIES			
TALENTS		KNOWLEDGES	
Alertness: ●●●●	Crafts: ●●●●	Academics: ●●●●	
Athletics: ●●●●	Drive: ●●●●	Computer: <i>Internet</i> ●●●●	
Awareness: ●●●●	Etiquette: ●●●●	Cosmology: ●●●●	
Brawl: ●●●●	Firearms: ●●●●	Enigmas: ●●●●	
Dodge: ●●●●	Meditation: ●●●●	Investigation: ●●●●	
Expression: ●●●●	Melee: ●●●●	Law: ●●●●	
Intimidation: ●●●●	Performance: ●●●●	Linguistics: ●●●●	
Leadership: ●●●●	Stealth: ●●●●	Medicine: ●●●●	
Streetwise: ●●●●	Survival: ●●●●	Occult: ●●●●	
Subterfuge: ●●●●	Technology: <i>Infotech</i> ●●●●	Science: ●●●●	
SPHERES			
Correspondence: ●●●●	Life: ●●●●	Prime: ●●●●	
Entropy: ●●●●	Matter: ●●●●	Spirit: ●●●●	
Forces: ●●●●	Mind: ●●●●	Time: ●●●●	
ADVANTAGES			
BACKGROUNDS		ARETE	
Allies: ●●●●	Avatar: ●●●●	Willpower: ●●●●	Health: -0 □
Library: ●●●●	Influence: ●●●●	Paradox: ○●●●●○●●●●○●●●●○	Hurt: -1 □
			Injured: -1 □
			Wounded: -2 □
			Mauled: -2 □
			Crippled: -5 □
			Incapacitated: □
RESONANCE		COMBAT	
Dynamic: ●●●●	Entropic: ●●●●	Weapon:	Wounded/Damage:
Static: <i>Cerebral</i> ●●●●			
EXPERIENCE			
[]			

LAUGHING THIEF (HOUSE VERDITIUS)

Quote: *Property, privacy, propriety — all illusions. If you need something badly enough, take it.*

Prelude: The Greek God Hermes was a thief; you started out the same way. But you were no ordinary shoplifter kid — your thefts were intricately plotted and skillfully executed. The victims were often left with riddles or false leads, and people who got on your nerves frequently wound up with the blame for your misdeeds. (As if they could have been clever enough to perform those thefts!)

Seduced at an early age by James Bond flicks, you added tinkering to your repertoire. Homegrown gadgetry became a tool of your mischievous trade. As you grew old enough to understand the value of information, you became a thief of knowledge: gossip, secrets, test answers, forbidden goodies — you became the one to see, assuming your “client” could meet the price.

One day, you stole from the wrong person — or, as it turned out, the right one. After she put the fear of God and all His minions into you, she became your *mater* and put your devious mind to good use.

Mingling magic with gadgetry, you’ve become Q Division and Bond in one. A field agent for the Order, your House, your *mater*, mundane clients and yourself (not always in that order), you ferret out trinkets and treasures of all sorts. But although you’re comfortably posh, money has never been your motivation; the challenges and risks have always been worth more than the payoff. Cleverness, not cash, is your reward.

Concept:

You’re a lord of misdirection, a trickster with the keys to heaven. Hermes’ laughter guides your heart. Your Word is



ORDER OF HERMES			
NAME: LAUGHING THIEF	NATURE: Bon Vivant	HOUSE: Verditius	
PLAYER: _____	ESSENCE: Questing	CONCEPT: Laughing Thief	
CHARNICLE: _____	DETIENOR: Rogue	CABAL: _____	
ATTRIBUTES			
PHYSICAL		MENTAL	
Strength: ●●○○○	Charisma: ●○○○○	Perception: ●○○○○	
Dexterity: ●○○○○	Manipulation: ●○○○○	Intelligence: ●○○○○	
Stamina: ●○○○○	Appearance: ●○○○○	Wisdom: ●○○○○	
ABILITIES			
TALENTS		KNOWLEDGES	
Alertness: ●○○○○	Crafts: ●○○○○	Academics: ●○○○○	
Athletics: ●○○○○	Drive: ●○○○○	Computer: ●○○○○	
Awareness: ●○○○○	Etiquette: ●○○○○	Cosmology: ●○○○○	
Brawl: ●○○○○	Firearms: ●○○○○	Enigmas: ●○○○○	
Dodge: ●○○○○	Meditation: ●○○○○	Investigation: ●○○○○	
Expression: ●○○○○	Melee: ●○○○○	Law: ●○○○○	
Intimidation: ●○○○○	Performance: ●○○○○	Linguistics: ●○○○○	
Leadership: ●○○○○	Stealth: ●○○○○	Medicine: ●○○○○	
Streetwise: ●○○○○	Survival: ●○○○○	Occult: ●○○○○	
Subterfuge: ●○○○○	Technology: ●○○○○	Science: ●○○○○	
SPHERES			
Correspondence: ●○○○○	Life: ●○○○○	Prime: ●○○○○	
Entropy: ●○○○○	Matter: ●○○○○	Spirit: ●○○○○	
Forces: ●○○○○	Mind: ●○○○○	Time: ●○○○○	
ADVANTAGES			
BACKGROUNDS	ARETE	HEALTH	
Avatar: ●○○○○	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Bruised: -0 <input type="checkbox"/>	
Contacts: ●○○○○	WILLPOWER	Hurt: -1 <input type="checkbox"/>	
Resources: ●○○○○	□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □	Injured: -1 <input type="checkbox"/>	
Wonder: ●○○○○	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Wounded: -2 <input type="checkbox"/>	
●○○○○	□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □	Mauled: -2 <input type="checkbox"/>	
RESONANCE	QUINTESSENCE	Crippled: -5 <input type="checkbox"/>	
Dynamic: ●○○○○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Incapacitated: <input type="checkbox"/>	
Entropic: ●○○○○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	COMBAT	
Static: ●○○○○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Weapon	Dexterity/Damage
EXPERIENCE	PARADEX		
_____	_____		

“Mine,” interpreted from both its possessive and its digging connotations. Magic and technology are fun to play with, but they’re tools, not crutches. All you really need is imagination and the Will to use it.

Roleplaying

Tips: Ostensibly working on the side of the angels, you’re practical (and amoral) enough to recognize that “good” and “evil” are simply constructs made for mundane folks. Do what must be done. Let others sort out the niceties.

Magic: Correspondence and Forces fuel your arsenal, but Mind offers the backup you often need. Like most Verditiens, you focus your enchantments through gadgetry, but use meditation to channel your mental talents.

Equipment: Burglary tools (high- and low-tech alike), titanium knives, 9mm with top-end silencer and laser sights, nightsuit, cool that won’t quit.

DEITY: Rogue

NATURE: Bon Vivant

CABAL: _____

ESSENCE: Questing

HOUSE: Verditius

CHRONICLE: _____

CHARACTER: Laughing Thief

NAME: _____

ORDER OF **HERMES**™

PHYSICAL

Dextrous x2 Steady

Nimble _____

Quick _____

SOCIAL

Alluring Friendly

Beguiling Gorgeous

Charming x2 Witty

Expressive _____

MENTAL

Alert _____

Clever _____

Wily _____

ABILITIES

Alertness _____

Athletics _____

Dodge _____

Fierceness _____

Stealth x2 _____

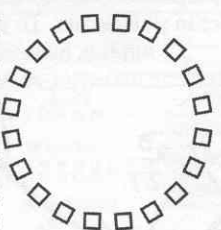
Technology: Gadgets x4

STATIC

ENTROPIC

DYNAMIC Dashing

RESONANCE



⊕ UNTESSENCE/PARADOX

A 5x10 grid of circles. The top row contains 10 squares. The second row contains 10 squares. The third row contains 10 circles. The fourth row contains 10 squares. The fifth row contains 10 squares. To the left of the grid is the text 'ARETE' and 'WILLPOWER'.

BACKGROUNDS

Avatar x2 _____

Contacts x2 _____

Resources x3 _____

Wonder _____

SPHERES

Initiate of Correspondence _____

Initiate of Forces _____

Initiate of Mind _____

ROLES

DEITY: Visionary

NATURE: Architect

CABAL: _____

ESSENCE: Pattern

HOUSE: Ngoma

CHRONICLE: _____

CHARACTER: Teacher of the Year

NAME: _____

ORDER OF **HERMES**™

PHYSICAL

Energetic _____

Graceful _____

Stalwart _____

SOCIAL

Charismatic Expressive x2

Commanding Friendly

Eloquent Witty

MENTAL

Clever x2 Knowledgeable

Creative Observant

Determined _____

ABILITIES

Academics x2 _____

Computer _____

Expression x2 _____

Leadership: Students x2

Linguistics (Spanish) _____

Science _____

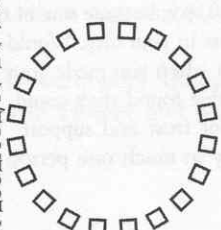
Streetwise _____

STATIC

ENTROPIC

DYNAMIC Inquiring

RESONANCE



⊕ UNTESSENCE/PARADOX

A 5x10 grid of circles. The top row contains 10 squares. The second row contains 10 squares. The third row contains 10 circles. The fourth row contains 10 squares. The fifth row contains 10 squares. To the left of the grid is the text 'ARETE' and 'WILLPOWER'.

BACKGROUNDS

Allies x2 _____

Avatar _____

Contacts x3 _____

Influence (University) _____

Influence (Street) _____

SPHERES

Apprentice of Correspondence _____

Apprentice of Entropy _____

Apprentice of Forces _____

Initiate of Mind _____

Apprentice of Prime _____

ROLES

TEACHER OF THE YEAR (HOUSE NGOMIA)

Quote: Knowledge isn't just power — it's survival.

Prelude: Children are the future. You've known that since you were a child yourself. But when kids grow up with TV as a babysitter and pop culture as a teacher, that future looks pretty damned bleak.

You refuse to accept that.

It began with student teaching while you were still in grammar school. Peers called you "teacher's pet" (and often worse), but the right people took notice. By college time, you had not only a full scholarship, but also an invitation to an elite academic fraternity — a fellowship you soon learned was merely an antechamber to bigger, better things.

But despite the joys of your awakening and the challenges of Hermetic apprenticeship, your true devotion remained teaching. Again, the right people noticed. Soon, letters of recommendation were burning holes in your pocket. To your benefactors' surprise, however, you chose to

teach not at prestigious

academies or progressive learning centers, but at inner-city hellholes... the places where you knew you could do the most good.

It wasn't easy, but you never expected ease. In the end, it took will, charm, a bit of force, and some... *unconventional* teaching methods to make a strong impression. Despite some trouble from the kids and more aggravation from various parents' groups (who feared your emphasis on hidden history and magic tricks was too occultish for public schools), you became one of the most popular instructors in your city. Would-be drop-outs stuck with it when you made your case; kids in trouble found they could depend on you for trust and support. Sure, there's only so much one person

LEIF JAMES

ORDER OF HERMES

NAME: _____ **NATURE:** Architect **HOUSE:** Ngoma
PLAYER: _____ **ESSENCE:** Pattern **CONCEPT:** Teacher of the Year
CHRONICLE: _____ **DEITY/ANGR:** Visionary **CABAL:** _____

ATTRIBUTES

PHYSICAL		SOCIAL		MENTAL	
Strength	●●●○○	Charisma	●●●○○	Perception	●●●○○
Dexterity	●●●○○	Manipulation	●●●○○	Intelligence	●●●○○
Stamina	●●●○○	Appearance	●●●○○	Wits	●●●○○

ABILITIES

TALENTS		SKILLS		KNOWLEDGES	
Alertness	●●●○○	Crafts	○○○○○	Academics	●●●○○
Athletics	●●●○○	Drive	○○○○○	Computer	●●●○○
Awareness	●●●○○	Etiquette	○○○○○	Cosmology	○○○○○
Brawl	●●●○○	Firearms	○○○○○	Enigmas	○○○○○
Dodge	○○○○○	Meditation	○○○○○	Investigation	●●●○○
Expression	●●●○○	Melee	○○○○○	Law	●●●○○
Intimidation	●●●○○	Performance	●●●○○	Linguistics	●●●○○
Leadership	●●●○○	Stealth	○○○○○	Medicine	○○○○○
Streetwise	●●●○○	Survival	○○○○○	Occult	○○○○○
Subterfuge	○○○○○	Technology	○○○○○	Science	●●●○○

SPHERES

Correspondence	●●●○○	Life	○○○○○	Prime	●●●○○
Entropy	●●●○○	Matter	○○○○○	Spirit	○○○○○
Forces	●●●○○	Mind	○○○○○	Time	○○○○○

ADVANTAGES

BACKGROUNDS		ARETE		HEALTH	
Allies	●●●○○	Willpower	○○○○○	Bruised	-0 □
Avatar	●●●○○	Willpower	○○○○○	Hurt	-1 □
Contacts	●●●○○	Willpower	○○○○○	Injured	-1 □
Influence	●●●○○	Willpower	○○○○○	Wounded	-2 □
	○○○○○	Willpower	○○○○○	Mauled	-2 □
		Willpower	○○○○○	Crippled	-5 □
		Willpower	○○○○○	Incapacitated	□

RESONANCE

Dynamic	●●●○○	Arete	○○○○○
Entropic	●●●○○	Willpower	○○○○○
Static	●●●○○	Willpower	○○○○○

CENTIBAT

Weapon	Difficulty	Damage

can do, but in a short time you've already proved your point: when properly inspired, kids really want to learn!

Concept: Who the hell cares about Ascension Wars and flights of fancy? The real war for this world is being waged in the hearts and minds of your students. Every kid living in despair is another crack in the world soul; every mind shackled by ignorance is another blemish on the Path of Gold. Your Word is *Inspiration*, and it fires an unflagging devotion to a small, yet significant battlefield.

Roleplaying Tips: Although you carefully avoid teaching magical secrets (who knows what certain people might do with them?), you enjoy using folklore, stage tricks, fantasy fiction, music, and other methods to hook these so-called "jaded" youths. Like an evangelist, your passion impresses folks who might otherwise dismiss such methods. Even so, you have enemies — mortal and otherwise — who resent your successes. Step carefully, but go boldly. The kids deserve no less.

Magic: Although you prefer to let people make their own decisions, *Ars Mentis* adds a convincing edge to your work. Your other disciplines help you see on a broader spectrum — a helpful thing for a teacher! And yet, Sphere magic is not your true calling; the art of inspiration is far more potent... and more permanent.

Equipment: Casual yet stylish clothes, cell phone, weapons confiscated (often voluntarily) from students, stuffed owl "mascot," devoted pupils, scholastic allies, and a generous supply of free books for the kids.

⊕ LYTIPIAN (HOUSE TYTALUS)

Quote: *An able mind in a flabby body is only half alive.*

Prelude: People think athletes are stupid. Hardly. To the ancient Greeks, perfection of the body ran hand-in-hand with perfection of the mind. And so, you run, too... in the dawn light before breakfast, in the shadows of the early dusk. In the rhythm of feet and breath and heartbeat, you strip away the clutter of the everyday.

This has always been your path. A good student who could climb trees like Tarzan, you always wanted to push yourself further. No one knew quite *what* to think — you didn't fit their preconceptions, and you liked it that way. Coaches wanted you to focus on the physical, teachers stressed the academic, and somehow you managed to juggle both.

The Greek ideal is your own as well. And how appropriate that the Olympic games should call to you!

Before college, you applied for a spot in the Triathlon... and got it. You got something else soon, too: a visit from a mercurial godling. During a particularly grueling run, he raced you, daring you to beat him. You did, and he bestowed a laurel wreath upon your head. Then he disappeared. You still have that wreath hanging above your door. Not long after the race, someone else came through that door: your *pater*, a "coach" for a far greater game.

Concept: Striving for peak mental and physical conditioning is hard but rewarding work. Add Hermetic apprenticeship to that, and you have a very full life. Still, you occasionally find some downtime for social adventures. For the most part, you're pretty solitary; given your athletic physique, though, you're never alone unless you want to be.

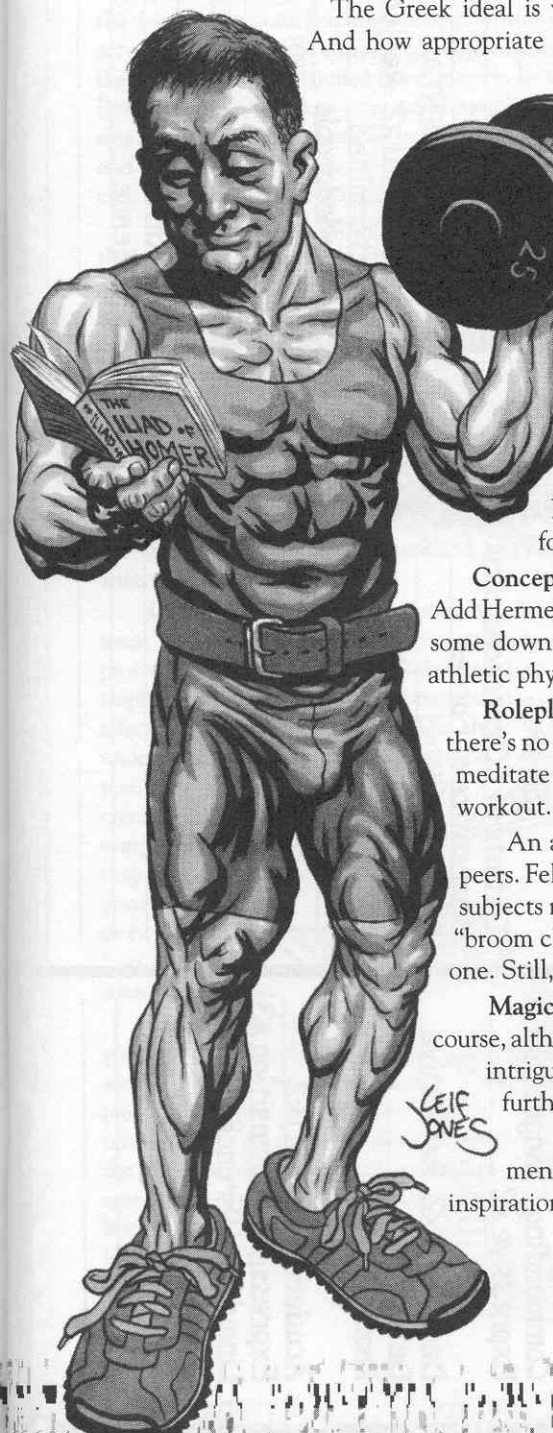
Roleplaying Tips: Life is a challenge on all fronts. With will and discipline, however, there's no reason not to meet them all at least halfway. Triathlon training gives you time to meditate on more cerebral matters, while academic studies offer some respite from the workout. Balance is important, and you're seeking that elusive equilibrium.

An anomaly among Hermetic types, you attract a lot of jealousy from your magical peers. Fellow athletes look askance at you as well, especially when conversation strays into subjects more esoteric than money, sports or pop culture. In many ways, you're still in the "broom closet" about your magical Path, and occasionally defensive about your academic one. Still, you have Hermes' blessing, and that's all that truly matters.

Magic: Your body is the focus for nearly all of your Arts. *Ars Vitae* is your specialty, of course, although *Potentiae*, *Virium* and *Temporis* round out your training. *Temporis* is especially intriguing for you; the "no-time" space you enter while running or swimming bears further study....

Equipment: Cross training shoes and gear (good quality, donated for endorsements), chronograph, pocket notebooks, copies of Homer and Virgil classics for inspirational reading.

ORDER OF HERMES™		
NAME: NATURE: Perfectionist	HOUSE: Tytalus	
PLAYER: ESSENCE: Questing	CONCEPT: Olympian	
CHARMICLE: DETERMINOR: Gallant	CABAL:	
ATTRIBUTES		
PHYSICAL	SOCIAL	MENTAL
Strength ●●●●●	Charisma ●●●●●	Perception ●●●●●
Dexterity ●●●●●	Manipulation ●●●●●	Intelligence, Desires ●●●●●
Stamina, <i>Triathlete</i> ●●●●●	Appearance ●●●●●	Wits ●●●●●
ABILITIES		
TALENTS	SKILLS	KNOWLEDGES
Alertness ●●●●●	Crafts ●●●●●	Academics ●●●●●
Athletics, <i>Olympian</i> ●●●●●	Drive ●●●●●	Computer ●●●●●
Awareness ●●●●●	Etiquette ●●●●●	Cosmology ●●●●●
Brawl ●●●●●	Firearms ●●●●●	Enigmas ●●●●●
Dodge ●●●●●	Meditation ●●●●●	Investigation ●●●●●
Expression ●●●●●	Melee ●●●●●	Law ●●●●●
Intimidation ●●●●●	Performance ●●●●●	Linguistics ●●●●●
Leadership ●●●●●	Stealth ●●●●●	Medicine ●●●●●
Streetwise ●●●●●	Survival ●●●●●	Occult ●●●●●
Subterfuge ●●●●●	Technology ●●●●●	Science ●●●●●
SPHERES		
Correspondence ●●●●●	Life ●●●●●	Prime ●●●●●
Entropy ●●●●●	Matter ●●●●●	Spirit ●●●●●
Forces ●●●●●	Mind ●●●●●	Time ●●●●●
ADVANTAGES		
BACKGROUNDS	ARETE	HEALTH
Avatar ●●●●●	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Bruised -0 <input type="checkbox"/>
Contacts ●●●●●	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Hurt -1 <input type="checkbox"/>
Influence ●●●●●	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Injured -1 <input type="checkbox"/>
●●●●●	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Wounded -2 <input type="checkbox"/>
●●●●●	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Mauled -2 <input type="checkbox"/>
●●●●●	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Crippled -3 <input type="checkbox"/>
●●●●●	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Incapacitated <input type="checkbox"/>
RESONANCE	QUINTESSENCE	COMBAT
Dynamic, <i>Blazing</i> ●●●●●	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Weapon
Entropy ●●●●●	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Misc/Damage
Static ●●●●●	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	
EXPERIENCE	PARADOX	



LEF JONES

ORDER OF HERMES

- ARETE
 WILLPOWER
 ⊕ UNTESSENCE/PARADOX

RESONANCE
 DYNAMIC Blazing
 ENTROPIC
 STATIC

BACKGROUNDS
 Avatar x5
 Contacts
 Influence (University)
 SPHERES
 Apprentice of Forces
 Initiate of Life
 Apprentice of Prime
 Initiate of Time
 ROTES

NAME:
 CHARACTER: Olympian
 CHRONICLE:
 HOUSE: Tytalus
 ESSENCE: Questing
 CABAL:
 NATURE: Perfectionist
 DETEANOR: Gallant

PHYSICAL
 Nimble
 Quick
 Steady
 Vigorous x2
 SOCIAL
 Dignified
 Gorgeous x2
 MENTAL
 Reflective
 Reflective
 ABILITIES
 Knowledgeable
 Academic
 Athletics: Olympiad x5
 Dodge
 Meditation
 Science

ORDER OF HERMES

- ARETE
 WILLPOWER
 ⊕ UNTESSENCE/PARADOX

RESONANCE
 DYNAMIC Awesome
 ENTROPIC
 STATIC

BACKGROUNDS
 Avatar x2
 Influence (High Society) x2
 Resources x3
 SPHERES
 Initiate of Correspondence
 Apprentice of Forces
 Disciple of Mind
 Apprentice of Spirit
 ROTES

NAME:
 CHARACTER: Composer
 CHRONICLE:
 HOUSE: Quaesitor
 ESSENCE: Pattern
 CABAL:
 NATURE: Pedagogue
 DETEANOR: Curmudgeon

PHYSICAL
 Puny (N)
 Dextrous
 Graceful
 Steady
 SOCIAL
 Alluring x2
 Fearsome
 Commanding
 Magnetic x2
 Expressive x2
 MENTAL
 Reflective
 Reflective
 ABILITIES
 Knowledgeable
 Academic (Music) x2
 Expression: Composition x3
 Linguistics (French, German, Italian, Latin) x4
 Performance (Piano) x3

COMPOSER (HOUSE QUAESITOR)

Quote: Music is not noise to distract the mind, but harmony to sustain the spirit.

Prelude: Turn that down! That's what you wanted to scream every time your older brothers and sisters battered your ears with rock. (A bastard hybrid you refuse to dignify with the word "music"!)

From childhood onward, it was the sublime mastery of Bach or Chopin, not the immature anarchism of Loudhouse (or whatever) that entranced your spirit. Naturally, you had to play it yourself, and learned the piano in record time. In the process, you discovered the intricacies of mode and harmony that classical composers understood so well... and the mystic undercurrents that pervaded their work.

For unlike the gibbering apes of the pop scene, the Masters had been striving for enlightenment through art. Composers like Beethoven and Bach were students of esoteric spirituality, capturing sublime essence in waves of sound; even the demonic Paganini had more comprehension of his art and its ramifications than the glorified cavemen of the rock era. As you studied these Masters — their lives, visions and works — the world itself began to sing. The Music of the Spheres became both lullaby and wedding suite. From the first time you heard it clearly, you could have no other love.

But the Music of the Spheres cannot pay the rent; after a starving-artist period, you attracted the notice of a local filmmaker. She hired you to produce a soundtrack for her newest project, and the result brought fame to both of you. Spun from Pythagorean accords on a variety of instruments, this *Symphony Hermetica* caught the ear of a fellow aficionado — a Quaesitor who studied with Carl Orff himself. After a long correspondence, he summoned you to meet some like-minded friends. The doors to the House opened, and you entered gladly.

Concept: Although you're not a "judge" in the usual Quaesitor sense, your music contains a profound element of order. Orchestrated to inspire harmonic clarity, these compositions affect people on levels few of them truly understand. Like many Classical legends, you work mythic themes, arcane secrets and sensual tapestries into your symphonies. People respond deeply to your art... even if it is "only" soundtrack music.

Over the last few years, your music has found a home in film scores; already, five of your finest pieces have appeared in major motion pictures, with over a dozen more weaving through the backgrounds of art-house fare. A canny agent secured spots on 10 soundtrack albums, and a CD of your popular works is on the way. At first, this gauche

ORDER OF HERMES

NATIE: **NATURE: Pedagogue** HOUSE: Quaesitor
 PLAYER: **ESSENCE: Pattern** CONCEPT: Olympian
 CHRONICLE: **DEITY/ANOR: Curmudgeon** CABAL:

ATTRIBUTES

PHYSICAL		SOCIAL		MENTAL	
Strength	●●●●●	Charisma	●●●●●	Perception	●●●●●
Dexterity	●●●●●	Manipulation	●●●●●	Intelligence	●●●●●
Stamina	●●●●●	Appearance	●●●●●	Wits	●●●●●

ABILITIES

TALENTS		SKILLS		KNOWLEDGES	
Alertness	●●●●●	Crafts	●●●●●	Academics	●●●●●
Athletics	●●●●●	Drive	●●●●●	Computer	●●●●●
Awareness	●●●●●	Etiquette	●●●●●	Cosmology	●●●●●
Brawl	●●●●●	Pirame	●●●●●	Enigmas	●●●●●
Dodge	●●●●●	Meditation	●●●●●	Investigation	●●●●●
Expression	●●●●●	Melee	●●●●●	Law	●●●●●
Intimidation	●●●●●	Performance	●●●●●	Linguistics	●●●●●
Leadership	●●●●●	Stealth	●●●●●	Medicine	●●●●●
Streetwise	●●●●●	Survival	●●●●●	Occult	●●●●●
Subterfuge	●●●●●	Technology	●●●●●	Science	●●●●●

SPHERES

Correspondence	●●●●●	Life	●●●●●	Prime	●●●●●
Entropy	●●●●●	Matter	●●●●●	Spirit	●●●●●
Forces	●●●●●	Mind	●●●●●	Time	●●●●●

ADVANTAGES

BACKGROUNDS		ARETE		HEALTH	
Avatar	●●●●●	●●●●●●●●		Bruised	-0 □
Influence	●●●●●	●●●●●●●●		Heart	-1 □
Resources	●●●●●	●●●●●●●●		Injured	-1 □
	●●●●●	●●●●●●●●		Wounded	-2 □
	●●●●●	●●●●●●●●		Mauled	-2 □
	●●●●●	●●●●●●●●		Crippled	-5 □
	●●●●●	●●●●●●●●		Incapacitated	□

WILLPOWER

●●●●●●●●

QUINTESSENCE

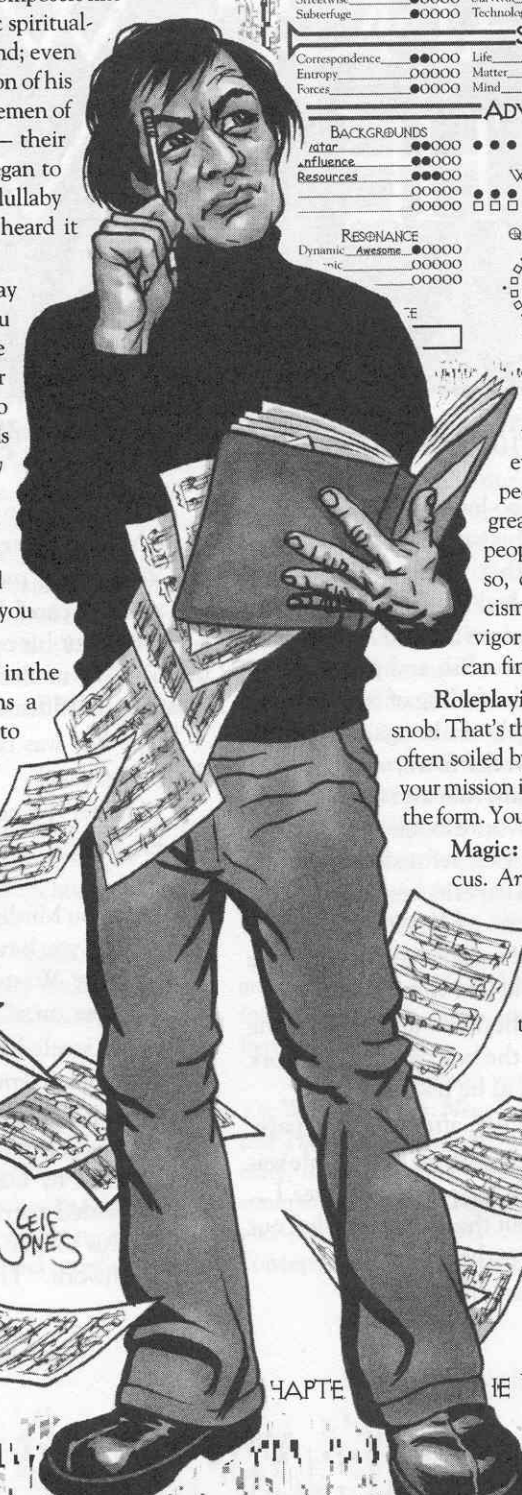
●●●●●●●●

PARADOX

●●●●●●●●

COMBAT

Weapon	Wounds/Damage



world distressed you; in time, however, you relented. After all, 1,000,000 people enchanted by a film makes a greater difference in the world than 1000 people enchanted in a concert hall. And so, despite occasional qualms and criticisms, you pursue the cinema market with vigor, looking toward the day when your art can find a more honorable home.

Roleplaying Tips: Most people think you're a snob. That's their affair. To you, music is a sacred art, often soiled by commerce, yet regal in potential. It's your mission in life to reinvigorate an appreciation of the form. Your Word is *Harmony*, and it's a holy vow.

Magic: Obviously, music is your primary focus. *Ars Mentis, Spirituum* and *Conligationis* bring your audience to a higher state, evoking visions, raising spirits, and calming baser passions. In a pinch, you can employ simpler instruments than your piano; even so, you won't be caught *dead* with an electric guitar!

Equipment: Piano, sheet music, scribbled notes, tuning fork, hand recorder, Walkman, notebook full of esoteric formulae and musical notations.

EPILOGUE: DANCE WITH THE DEVIL



It had been long. Too long. Even now, after a few weeks back in his sanctum, he could not shake the feeling that the terrible wash of spiritual energy he had felt only a few dozen months ago might return to spirit him far away once more. It was a foolish and paranoid notion, he knew, but the feeling of belonging on Earth had yet to truly set in again. It would likely take a few weeks more, at least. The

support of the ancient chair beneath him and the feeling of the rough pages of one of his favorite books beneath his fingertips helped, though. His senses, refined through decades of mystic contemplation and experience, told him that the boy was coming, approaching the study, moments before the sound of his footfalls became audible. Nervously, the apprentice stepped to the threshold and stopped.

"Magister?" The voice was hesitant and timid. The Master could tell by the tone that the boy had seen his work in his absence. That was, after all, as he had intended.

"Yes, Ethan?" he replied, absently, after turning a page.

Ethan was silent for a moment, breathing shakily. He was choosing his words carefully. Finally, he spoke. "Magister, I... uh... I, well, wanted to ask you about the primers you left out in the library. They seemed, well, perhaps a bit...."

"Ethan?" the Master pressed, smiling faintly.

"What I mean to say, is... Magister, aren't works like those *banned* by the Code of Hermes?"

The Master took a moment to finish the paragraph he was reading, carefully marked his page and then closed the book. He shut his eyes and took a deep breath, never losing that shadow of a smile. When he opened them again, the Master stared directly at Ethan. "Are you a Christian, Ethan?"

The boy was taken aback. "How does that affect anything, Magister?"

"Answer the question."

Ethan's throat felt dry and strangled. He croaked, "No, Magister."

"Are you Muslim," the Master asked, "or a Zoroastrian, perhaps? Do you have any faith whatsoever, Ethan? Can you point to any Western religious tradition that you would consider your own?"

Ethan steeled himself and replied, "No, Magister. My faith is the *Ars Hermeticae*."

The Master's smile faded. "Then what is your concern, Ethan? Why do you fear what you see in my works? Those laws were penned by men who feared a caricature of a robed, snowy-bearded patriarch, wagging a finger from Beyond, clucking his tongue at them and muttering, 'Meddle not in My handiwork.' They were written to incapacitate the

aspirant's ambitions with *fear*, Ethan. And for what? He who cannot master Darkness knows only half of Creation."

"But to use such powers, Magister?" Ethan pleaded.

"To *master* them, boy," the old wizard hissed, ripples of unseen mystic force radiating outward from him like heat. "To bend and control them. To build the City of Pymander within the Light, I must know how to crush and dispel the shadows. I must know them as they know themselves. My Will must be made manifest upon them and made to rule over them. I do not advocate service to these... *creatures*," he spat the word, "any more than I admonish you to suborn your Will to the service of the angelic hierarchies or the rudest elemental. I urge you, by your power, to subjugate them. To grasp the whole of the world in one's hand and to dominate it: *that is the Ars Hermeticae*. These are no different."

Ethan was confused, lost in the Master's tirade. "Magister, I—"

A wave of the Master's hand, however, cut him off. The old man's lip curled into the slightest hint of a sneer. "I was raised by cowering Sleepers, Ethan, but they instilled me with a few simple shreds of wisdom I continue to treasure to this

day. One of those is this: there is no Devil and no Hell. There are no fork-tailed imps salivating at the notion of your sins, waiting to drown you in a lake of licking flames. Why would I fear controlling these creatures when I don't even believe that they are what they claim to be? Perhaps *they* believe that they were outcast from some marble-pillared Paradise endorsed by the descendants of men who filled the bellies of Roman lions, but I have no time for such fairy-stories. I am a magus of the Houses of Hermes. I stride forth into the night of ignorance and, with my lantern outstretched before me, drive out that terrible darkness, illuminating all and setting my seal upon it."

"But the Code, Magister..." Ethan whispered, afraid to look into his Master's eyes.

The smile returned, fiercer than before. "Choose, Ethan: slavery or exultation. Will you be a pawn in this game or a hand that controls the board? Choose. I will be here when you find your answer."

Terrified of the secrets at which his Master had hinted, yet strangely exhilarated, Ethan turned and walked away, leaving the old mage to return to his studies.

AUTHORS' NOTES



CREDIT WHERE IT'S DUE

A host of people invented and contributed to the Order of Hermes, from its inception in *Ars Magica* to its current incarnation. The Order's foundations were laid in the RPG *Ars Magica* (currently available from Atlas Games), while later work in **Mage: The Ascension** and **Mage: The Sorcerers Crusade** came from Phil "Porthos"

Brucato, with Steven Brown, Beth Fisch, Robert Hatch and Allen Varney, plus later contributions from Jess Heinig and Kraig Blackwelder, Bryan Armor, Bill Bridges, and Stephen Michael DiPesa. *Ave Hermetica!*

REFERENCES

Aveni, Anthony: *Beyond the Crystal Ball: Magic and Science from Antiquity to the New Age* — Entertaining overview of the long love/hate marriage of mysticism and technology in the western world.

Davis, Erik: *Techgnosis: Myth, Magic + Mysticism in the Age of Information* — Stunning look at the mystic undercurrents of the world in which we live. Highly recommended, especially for folks who believe that magic is dead.

Denning, Melita & Phillips, Osborne: *The Foundations of High Magick, The Sword and the Serpent, and Mysteria Magica* — Detailed yet accessible trilogy of books covering the occult practices and fellowships of the western tradition.

Guiley, Rosemary Ellen: *Harper's Encyclopedia of Mystical & Paranormal Experience* — Detailed reference to many important (and not-so-important) concepts, incidents and people in occult history. Recommended.

Mage sourcebooks: **Mage: The Sorcerers Crusade**; **The Swashbucklers Handbook**; **Guide to the Traditions**; **Tales of Magick: High Adventures**; **Dark Ages: Mage**; **The Fragile Path**; **The Book of Chantries**; and **Blood Treachery** — Books offering the Order's extensive history, culture, influence, misdeeds, Arts, and other achievements. Recommended, especially for chronicles with historical elements.

Matt, Daniel C.: *The Essential Kabbalah: the Heart of Jewish Mysticism* — Accessible yet contemplative observations of the Kabbalah and its significances.

Moore, Alan; Williams, J.H.; Gray, Mick; and Klein, Todd: *Promethea* — Incredible graphic novel ("comic book" does not begin to do it justice!) featuring an exploration of the Sephiroth that must be seen to be believed. Very highly recommended.

Norvill, Roy: *Hermes Unveiled* — This one is just plain silly... every innovation in human history is credited to Hermetic initiates and secret societies! Even so, it's an amusing read, if only for potential plot ideas.

Penczak, Christopher: *City Magick: Urban Rituals, Spells, and Shamanism* — Flawed but helpful book of modern magic, including symbols, spirits, tools and workings. Useful for the city-based Hermetic.

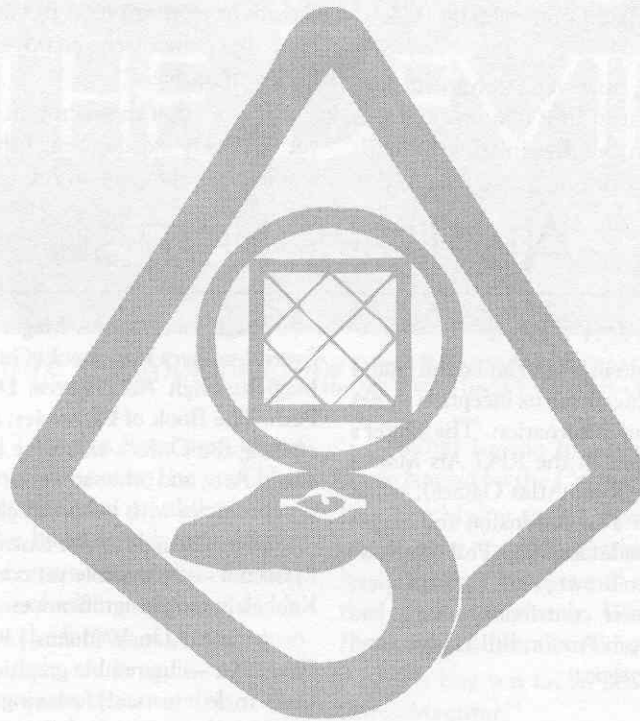
Salaman, Clement, with van Oven, Wharton and Mahè: *The Way of Hermes: New Translations of The Corpus Hermeticum and The Definitions of Hermes Trismegistus to Asclepius* — Honestly, these ancient writings have been better served by later summations. In their original forms, they're redundant, pedantic and often contradictory. As the foundation of a radical new concept in spiritual thought, the *Corpus* is brilliant; as modern

reading, it often seems obvious and even trite. Still worth reading, if only to see where the Hermetic tradition began.

Tame, David: *The Secret Power of Music* — Let it be said that this author [Phil Brucato] disagrees vehemently about Tame's view of rock, jazz and blues. (See the Composer template for the general idea.) Nevertheless, he makes some excellent observa-

tions about the mystic nature of Classical music, the history of its composers, and the physical and metaphysical effects of sound.

Whitcomb, Bill: *The Magician's Companion* and *The Magician's Reflection* — Everything you ever wanted to know about magical codes, symbols, systems, correspondences, alphabets, terms and practices, all listed in easy-reference format. Very highly recommended.



ORDER OF HERMES™

NAME:
PLAYER:
CHRONICLE:

NATURE:
ESSENCE:
DEITYANOR:

HOUSE:
CONCEPT:
CABAL:

ATTRIBUTES

PHYSICAL

SOCIAL

MENTAL

Strength _____ ●○○○○	Charisma _____ ●○○○○	Perception _____ ●○○○○
Dexterity _____ ●○○○○	Manipulation _____ ●○○○○	Intelligence _____ ●○○○○
Stamina _____ ●○○○○	Appearance _____ ●○○○○	Wits _____ ●○○○○

ABILITIES

TALENTS

SKILLS

KNOWLEDGES

Alertness _____ ○○○○○	Crafts _____ ○○○○○	Academics _____ ○○○○○
Athletics _____ ○○○○○	Drive _____ ○○○○○	Computer _____ ○○○○○
Awareness _____ ○○○○○	Etiquette _____ ○○○○○	Cosmology _____ ○○○○○
Brawl _____ ○○○○○	Firearms _____ ○○○○○	Enigmas _____ ○○○○○
Dodge _____ ○○○○○	Meditation _____ ○○○○○	Investigation _____ ○○○○○
Expression _____ ○○○○○	Melee _____ ○○○○○	Law _____ ○○○○○
Intimidation _____ ○○○○○	Performance _____ ○○○○○	Linguistics _____ ○○○○○
Leadership _____ ○○○○○	Stealth _____ ○○○○○	Medicine _____ ○○○○○
Streetwise _____ ○○○○○	Survival _____ ○○○○○	Occult _____ ○○○○○
Subterfuge _____ ○○○○○	Technology _____ ○○○○○	Science _____ ○○○○○

SPHERES

Correspondence _____ ○○○○○	Life _____ ○○○○○	Prime _____ ○○○○○
Entropy _____ ○○○○○	Matter _____ ○○○○○	Spirit _____ ○○○○○
Forces _____ ●○○○○	Mind _____ ○○○○○	Time _____ ○○○○○

ADVANTAGES

BACKGROUNDS

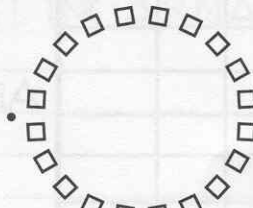
ARETE

HEALTH

_____ ○○○○○ ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Bruised _____ -0 <input type="checkbox"/>
_____ ○○○○○	Hurt _____ -1 <input type="checkbox"/>
_____ ○○○○○	Injured _____ -1 <input type="checkbox"/>
_____ ○○○○○	Wounded _____ -2 <input type="checkbox"/>
_____ ○○○○○	Mauled _____ -2 <input type="checkbox"/>
_____ ○○○○○	Crippled _____ -5 <input type="checkbox"/>
_____ ○○○○○	Incapacitated _____ <input type="checkbox"/>

WILLPOWER

QUINTESSENCE



PARADOX

OTHER TRAITS

_____ ○○○○○
 _____ ○○○○○
 _____ ○○○○○
 _____ ○○○○○
 _____ ○○○○○

RESONANCE

Dynamic _____ ○○○○○
 Entropic _____ ○○○○○
 Static _____ ○○○○○

EXPERIENCE

ORDER OF HERMES™

MERITS & FLAWS

MERIT	TYPE	COST	FLAW	TYPE	BONUS

MAGIC

PREFERRED EFFECTS

NOTES

COMBAT

Maneuver	Roll	Difficulty	Damage/Effect

Weapon	Difficulty	Damage	Range	Rate	Clip	Conceal

ARTIST: _____

ORDER OF
HERMES™

EXPANDED BACKGROUND

ALLIES

LIBRARY

CONTACTS

MENTOR

DESTINY

NODE

INFLUENCE

RESOURCES

POSSESSIONS

GEAR (CARRIED)

EQUIPMENT (OWNED)

FOCI

WONDERS

FAMILIAR

PAST INCARNATIONS

ORDER OF HERMES™

HISTORY AWAKENING

GOALS/DESTINY

SEEKINGS: _____

QUIETS: _____

DESCRIPTION

Age: _____

Apparent Age: _____

Date of Birth: _____

Age of Awakening: _____

Hair: _____

Eyes: _____

Race: _____

Appearance/Nature of Avatar: _____

Nationality: _____

Height: _____

Weight: _____

Sex: _____

VISUALS

CABAL CHART

CHARACTER SKETCH

T R A D I T I O N B O O K :

ORDER OF HERMES™

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