

T R A D I T I O N B O O K :

VERBENA™



The Empress.

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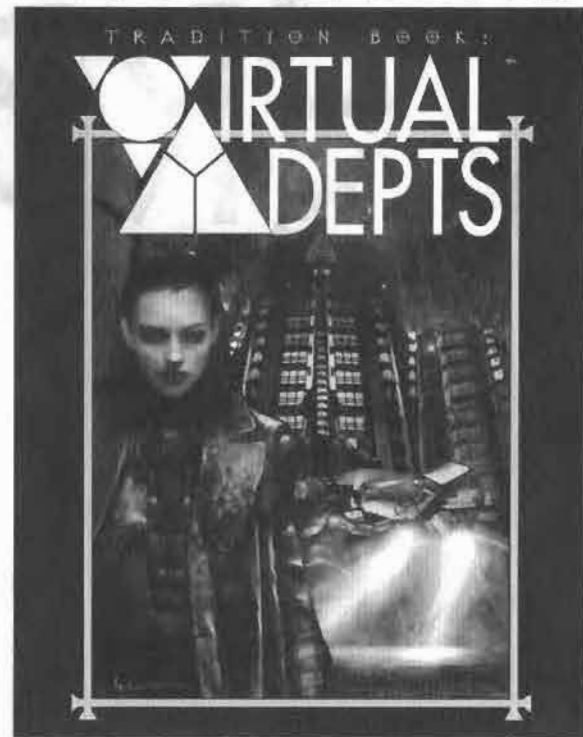
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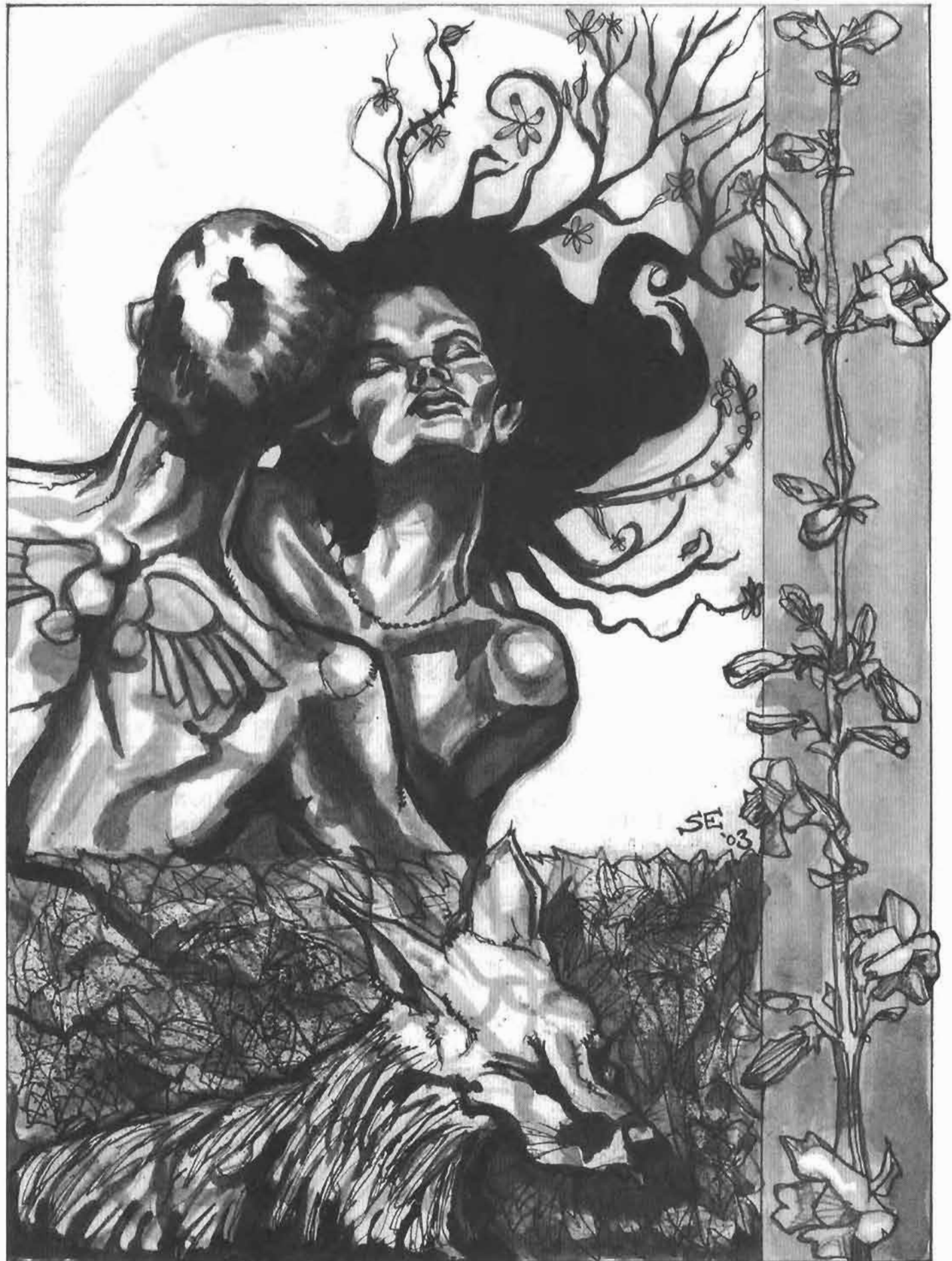
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VERBENA TM Δ



C O N T E N T S

PROLOGUE: BELTANE EVE	4
INTRODUCTION: ROOTS OF THE TREE	8
CHAPTER ONE: A TIME OF WITCHES	12
CHAPTER TWO: BLESSINGS OF THE MOON	36
CHAPTER THREE: CHILDREN OF THE WYCK	72
EPILOGUE: CIRCLE UNBROKEN	99



PROLOGUE: BELTANE EVE



They made love in the open field out behind the farmstead by the light of the waxing moon and the glow of the twin balefires in the distance. The earth was rich, black and cool, and the air was pleasantly warm, filled with the smell of new grass, freshly turned earth, the first flowers of springtime and the powerful musk of sweat and sex.

They moved slowly at first, tender and gentle, almost shy although this was by no means their first coupling. Then they moved together in unison, their need, their intensity building, until they were focused solely on the pleasure of the act. They were no longer just any couple, but the Young God and the Maiden Goddess, lying together upon the Earth that was her body, planting his seed in her fertile depths, dancing the ancient dance of life renewed after the long cold of winter. Others coupled around them nearby, but they paid no heed. There was nothing more than the two of them, moving together as one, they were the sum of all things. Then they cried out their passion to the starry sky, and it was done.

They lay together for some time afterward, Kameria resting her head upon her husband's chest, feeling it rise and fall slowly with his breath, her body curled against his for his warmth and closeness. His arm encircled her and she felt so very peaceful, but she didn't sense the same tranquility from Jon. There was a tension in his body and in the way he held her.

"What is it?" she asked, running a hand along his warm chest.

He sighed, thinking for a moment about what he wanted to say, how much he could tell her about what he'd been thinking about. "I was remembering our first Beltane together," he said, looking up at the stars overhead. He smiled wistfully and glanced over at Kameria, squeezing her closer. "Remember?"

"Of course," she said. "How could I forget it? You were my champion, fighting to claim me for your own." Kameria remembered how she felt then, her crippled body nothing

but a source of shame and discomfort for her. She settled languidly into her husband's embrace, feeling so comfortable, at home in her own skin the way she never had then. How things had changed.

"You didn't even try to claim me when you won," she said with a smile.

"Well, technically, I didn't win the challenge on my own," Jon began.

"You did," she replied, "even if Deb did... intervene a bit. It's your bravery that counted." Jon's chest shook with a chuckle. Shrieking like a banshee, Deb had attacked Jon's opponent with a butcher knife — intervening a little more than "a bit" in his opinion.

"It's not just the past you're thinking about," Kameria said, lifting herself up on one elbow to look him in the face. "Is it?"

Jon looked at her for a long moment before turning his eyes back to the sky.

"No," he said. "It's not."

"What do you see?"

"Death."

A shiver went down Kameria's spine as their sweat cooled in the night air.

"The death of the Old Ways," Jon said softly, "the death of magic. The land is smothering, dying, losing its soul." He pushed himself up and grasped a handful of the freshly turned soil, letting it run through his fingers.

"I can feel it in the earth, Kam," he whispered. "I can smell it in the air. I see it in the stars. The War is over."

"It's not over," she said, grasping his arm. He turned to look at her with a desolate expression.

"It is," he said. "You've heard the same news, the same gossip and rumors that I have. Horizon has fallen. The masters are either dead or totally cut off in the depths of the Umbra. The Fae Folk are at war, and the Sleepers don't know and don't care about any of it. The Technocracy has finally gotten what they wanted, an end to magic."

"No!" Kameria whispered harshly, trying not to disturb any of the other revelers. "There are still so many chantries, Jon. Look at all that we've accomplished here! Look at this land! Look at the good people we've drawn to the land." She took in the fields and farmstead with a sweep of her hand. "The Old Ways are alive as long as we keep them alive — and what about this Rogue Council? I've heard—"

"They're just clinging to the belief that we can still win this war."

Fear clutched Kameria's heart. She had never seen Jon like this before. He was always the optimist of the group, full of hope and ideas. It frightened her to see him giving in to whatever despair had come over him.

Taking his hand in hers, she kissed it gently and held it to her breast. "It's not over so long as we hold on to that belief," she said to him.

Before he could reply, a shadowy figure silhouetted against the light of the balefires caught their attention, striding across the field toward them. Jon and Kameria rose as Teague, one of their circle-mates, approached. He was wearing only a plaid kilt and a pair of sandals, and his long brown hair hung loose around his shoulders. Teague had been playing all during the Beltane dancing and festivities, but now his ever-present harp was conspicuously absent. There was a look of concern on his usually carefree face.

"I'm sorry to intrude," he said, oblivious to the couple's nudity, "but we've got a problem." Jon and Kameria quickly gathered up their robes and quietly followed Teague as he led them away from the fields and the farmhouse, toward the stand of oaks surrounding the farm. He didn't offer a word of explanation, and they walked in silence with only the sound of the night insects and birds. Kameria felt the spring air grow a bit chill and hugged her thin robe around her.

Just within the stand of trees they spied a faint, silvery light. As they approached, they could see the other members of the circle standing there in their robes: Deborah and Aileen, contrasting dark and light, crouching close together. Takoda, head bowed, looked profoundly sad. Kameria followed their gaze to the open ground between them.

"Great Goddess..." she breathed.

It lay on its side on the blanket of damp and composting leaves beneath the trees, the faint and fading light showing its shaggy green fur as its sides laboriously and irregularly rose and fell. It let out a faint whimper that made Kameria's heart ache and it tried to raise its head, but couldn't. It looked for all the world like a big hairy dog that someone had dyed green for St. Patrick's day except for its long, cat-like tail that lay limp on the ground and the unusual intelligence that gleamed in its dark eyes.

"What in the world..." Kameria began.

Jon appeared mesmerized. He approached the creature slowly, ready to spring back. He wasn't afraid of it. On the contrary, he felt drawn to the beast. Its need, its despair was almost palpable, but he wasn't sure what it needed from him. When he was certain that the beast wasn't dangerous, Jon crouched down by the animal.

"It's a *cu sith*," Teague said, rolling the Gaelic perfectly around his tongue, so that it came out "coo-shee" with a foreign lilt. "A faerie hound."

"What's it doing here?" Jon asked. Gently stroking the hound's matted green fur. "It looks like it's been starved."

"And hunted," Takoda said, pointing to the dark stains on the hound's flanks. "We've tried to communicate with it, but we weren't very successful. We think it came here looking for shelter."

"It's dying," Jon said, his eyes closing as he extended his other senses around the faerie hound.

"Yes," Takoda said. "But its wounds don't seem that serious, and I don't sense poison or infection. With all of us here, can't we tend to its wounds? Bring it back? I can run and get some herbs from the healing garden..."

"It's not that," Jon replied. "It's starving."

"It needs food?" Aileen asked.

Jon ran his fingers through the creature's soft green fur. He read its body — emaciated and bleeding — and then extended his awareness into the beast's childlike mind. The images he found there were jumbled, confused. He caught images of some vividly bright and colorful place, but those were distant memories, presumably of the place it came from. More recent, and much more potent, were images of cold city streets and hollow, empty places where life and magic once — and still should have — prevailed. The creature didn't know how it had gotten where it was, but it had come looking for sustenance that was nowhere to be found. Anywhere. The overwhelming sensation that Jon got from the beast was that of starving, of fading away and of being completely helpless to do anything about it.

"It's not starving for food. It's magic that she needs. The magic here, even on the farm, has faded too much. It's like a fish out of water that can't breathe. It's suffocating, drowning in banality." He pressed his hands over the hound's heart and hummed in a singsong. Jon felt the creature's spirit start to disengage. There were things he wanted it to know before it died, and he thought to the creature, *It won't always be like this, I promise you. A flicker of silvery light seemed to pass from him to the beast, which managed to lift its head to look Jon in the eyes. You're slipping away. You must remember now, as your great change begins, that you can choose what happens next. Go where love,*

strength and magic are the strongest. And please forgive me for not making this place what it needs to be. Something passed between them for a moment, then the hound lay its head back on the ground and sighed contentedly.

Takoda stepped forward and placed his hands on the *cu sith's* neck and chest. He turned to Jon, who had tears streaming down his cheeks.

"She's dead," he told him, and Jon nodded dumbly. He placed a gentle hand on the faerie hound's head.

"Does anyone else know about this?" Jon asked. Suddenly, the melancholy that seemed to afflict him was gone, leaving the confident leader they all knew in its place.

Teague shook his head. "Just us."

"Good, let's keep it that way. There's no point in letting the initiates see this. We need to return her properly

to the earth," he said. "Aileen, can you get what we'll need from the house quietly?" She looked up from the dead hound, tears streaking her face, then swallowed and nodded, heading off into the shadows.

"She came here looking for magic," he said, almost to himself, looking back down at the poor creature. "But there wasn't enough. We've hoarded too much of what's left."

Kameria came up behind Jon and laid a hand on his shoulder. The sight and nearness of the dead faerie hound filled her with a terrible sense of grief, like she'd felt when her mother had passed away. Jon looked up at her, his eyes filled with grim determination.

"You're right," he said. "It's not over. Not by a long shot."



INTRODUCTION: ROOTS OF THE TREE

Life is a banquet and most poor bastards are starving to death!
—Rosalind Russell in *Auntie Mame*



Pagans and witches, dancing naked around a fire by the light of the moon, spilling blood to nourish the dry soil — that's what most folks think of when they consider the Verbena, followers of ancient, outdated ways rendered barbaric by the standards of modern society. They're either atavisms clinging to a mythic past they can never recapture or Renaissance Faire wannabes wearing cloaks and waving crystals around. That's all most outsiders ever really see of the Verbena and their ancient Craft.

The Verbena are the proud inheritors of a mystic lineage that stretches back to the dawn of time, when they mingled blood with the gods themselves. They're keepers of ancient wisdom, which so many people in the modern world have chosen to ignore because it doesn't fit easily or comfortably into their chosen way of life. They champion the cause of life and of living, seeking to plant the seeds of a new consciousness and become midwives to a new, healthier and saner world. They're idealists, healers and questors after truth.

They cannot, however, be pigeonholed as mere "tree huggers." The Verbena take their cues from nature and follow a common sense code of morality. They are not squeamish about facts of life. They recognize and revere the power of sex. They do not fear death, because they recognize that death is simply a part of a great cycle. In comparison to the uptight prevailing Judeo-Christian standards, the Verbena appear wholly amoral (though they are not). That troubles them not a whit. Nature herself is amoral. There are days when she is cruel and days when she is beneficent. The Verbena see that as their right as well. That's not to say that they screw over their neighbors and get away with what they can, though. On the contrary, community means a great deal to the witches. While a Verbena mage does not feel bound by old, outmoded laws, she still realizes that she does not have the right to further her own ends at her neighbors' expense. The holistic view espoused by the Verbena asserts that while you're free to act in any way you see fit, you are not acting in a vacuum. Any act you take will have repercussions, and the witch should be ready to accept responsibility

for the consequences of her deeds (or spells, for that matter). In that way, the Verbena remain in balance with their neighbors as well as the world around them.

Are they barbarians? Oh, yes, in many ways. They scoff at the squeamishness of a modern society that can't bear to get its hands dirty, that does its killing by remote control, that splashes sex across TV screens and billboards, but that can't have an honest conversation about it. The Verbena *are* barbarians in many ways, and they're proud of it. They say they would much rather be barbarians who dig in the dirt, cut the throats of sacrificial rams and couple in the newly sown fields than "civilized" folk who tear down the forests, poison the Earth and make war on distant nations they've never seen.

The Verbena shelter the flickering flame of the Old Ways, but it remains to be seen if they will fan that flame into a light to guide the world into a new age, or if they are deluding themselves as their own fire begins to die out. Do the Old Ways still have a place in the world? The Verbena hope and pray and believe that they do.

THEMIE: LIVING LIFE TO THE FULLEST

The Verbena concern themselves with life in all its many facets and dimensions, not just life in a biological sense, but the act of *living*. For the Verbena, life is the greatest gift and the greatest responsibility, to live to the fullest of your potential and to drink deeply of the experience, to the bitter dregs, if need be. They're not necessarily just about the pleasures of life (although they maintain that they make life worth living). Verbena believe in experiencing all that life has to offer, without shying away or trying to deny any part of it. Life is not all pleasure. Life is often painful and difficult. Life is often work and mundane tasks that have to be performed, day in, and day out. Most importantly, life is fleeting, and all things die in their time. If not for these things, then the pleasures of life would be lessened, without contrast to give them shape and meaning.

Life is about balance, between pleasure and pain, joy and sorrow, life and death. It's also about living in balance and harmony with the environment, because the Verbena believe that they are a part of the world they live in, an extension of it, not separate from it. What affects them affects the world, and vice versa, so life must be mindful and aware, guided by wisdom and experience.

MOOD: HOPE AND FEAR IN THE DARK

The Verbena hold true to ancient traditions and ways of living that seem outdated in the modern world.

They've been called "savages," "barbarians" and "relics" of a bygone age, with no place in the world any longer. The mood surrounding the Verbena is one of hope and wonder mixed with fear and despair.

On one hand, the Verbena are full of life and hope. They hold on to the belief that humanity can live in harmony with the Earth and each other. They believe in seizing life and living it for all it's worth. Their fervor and their vitality can be infectious, and there is a primal appeal to them.

On the other hand, there is an edge of fear to the Verbena. They embrace many of the things that "polite" society does its best to conceal, such as open sexuality, bloodletting and the primitive and primal side of life. The Verbena are savage and alien in some ways. There is also a measure of fear among the Verbena themselves that the Old Ways really are no longer suited to what the world has become, that they are the anachronisms and relics that others believe them to be and that they cannot win against the rising tide. But to be true to their beliefs and their traditions, the Verbena must continue onward, no matter what.

CONTENTS

The Verbena have a rich and lengthy history, stretching back to the dawn of time and the earliest mages. They also compose a diverse Tradition, made up of many different cultural threads coming together to form a single strong cord that extends back into the mists of time.

Chapter One: A Time of Witches looks at the history of the Verbena and their mystic ancestors, beginning with the primordial Wyck and progressing through the ancient world, the Middle Ages and the modern world. It also discusses the Verbena point of view on magic, religion, technology and the other Mystic Traditions and supernatural inhabitants of the World of Darkness.

Chapter Two: Blessings of the Moon describes the organization of the Verbena Tradition, its various factions, its sacred sites and how its members gather in circles and covens. It looks at Verbena magic in depth, including the Spheres, sacred times of the year, sorcery, rites, foci and Wonders.

Chapter Three: Children of the Wyck provides profiles of several prominent Verbena both past and present, discusses all-Verbena chronicles and adventures, offers a sample Verbena cabal suitable for dropping into a chronicle and concludes with a selection of Verbena character templates ready for play.

LEXICON

Aeduna: The ancestors of the Verbena, a loose alliance of pagans, wise ones, herbalists and such who were influential in Europe (particularly around the Mediterranean) in the ancient world.

Airts: The four directions (north, south, east and west). An old form not in common use among modern Verbena.

Burning Times: Verbena reference to the period of time following the rise of the Order of Reason, when pagan traditions were persecuted and followers of the Old Ways were hunted, tortured or killed. The witch-hunts of the mortal Inquisition were often cover for the true purpose of the Burning Times: the elimination of pagan mages.

Craft, the: The Verbena Tradition, although some Verbena use "the Craft" to refer to specifically to the practice of magic, while others use it to refer to the Tradition as a whole (including its spiritual and cultural practices).

deosil: (JESS-il) "Sun-wise" or in the direction of the sun. In Verbena ritual, deosil means moving in a clockwise direction.

fam-trad: Short for "family tradition," a Verbena who was initiated by a family member and who comes from a family line of Verbena.

Gardeners of the Tree: A faction of the Verbena devoted to maintaining the traditional ways and beliefs of their ancestors.

Great Rite: The union of opposites, embodying the divine masculine and feminine, performed in Verbena ritual. The Great Rite can involve sex magic, but it is often performed symbolically.

Great Wheel: A pagan symbol of life's cycles, which progress perpetually around and around in ever-changing cycles.

Lifeweavers: A faction of the Verbena that explores the limits of magic to transform both themselves and others, often disregarding the rituals and rites of the Tradition.

Moon-Seekers: A forward-looking faction of the Verbena that seeks to incorporate diverse styles and cultures into the Tradition and learn from them.

Old Faith: The worship of the old gods in general, also referred to as the Old Ways. The Old Faith was the name of a loose alliance of pagan

magicians, witches, druids and other mages that predated the Verbena.

Old Gods: The many deities that predate Christianity, which are often worshipped by the Verbena.

Old Ways: A general Verbena term for the teachings, beliefs and way of life of their Tradition, stretching back to the most ancient times.

pagan: From the Latin *paganus* or "country-dweller." Verbena generally use "pagan" to mean any follower of the Old Faith, in one form or another.

Paths of the Wyck: Pathways through the Umbra, supposedly created by the Wyck long ago, their secrets entrusted to the Aeduna and, later, to their descendants, the Verbena.

Rede: Also known as the Verbena Rede or the Great Rede: "An it harm none, do what thou wilt." It is a guiding principle of Verbena belief.

Twisters of Fate: A Verbena faction in touch with ancient and primordial magic that works to reclaim and maintain the root paradigms of the Tradition.

Valdaermen: An alliance of mostly Scandinavian mages in the Dark Ages. Many Valdaermen joined the Verbena at the Tradition's founding.

Verbenae: The plural form of Verbena and the original, formal, name of the Tradition. It quickly fell out of use among all but the most scholarly outside of the Tradition itself, and most now use "Verbena" as both a singular and a plural term (as this book does).

widdershins: Moving in a counter-clockwise or "anti-sun-wise" direction. Generally avoided in Verbena ritual except for rites of banishing or destruction.

widderslainte: Old term referring to a mage gone over to the Nephandi. Fallen out of use in favor of the more common *barrabi*.

World Tree: A Verbena metaphor for the structure of the Tellurian and of their Tradition. The World Tree's roots reach deep into the Underworld, while its branches spread out among all the worlds of the Deep Umbra. Its trunk runs through the center of reality and is the axis around which it turns.

Wyck: The Primordial Ones, the first mages. The Wyck are the ultimate ancestors of the Verbena (and all mages). They are often associated with the great gods and heroes of pagan myth.



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CHAPTER ①: A TIME ② OF WITCHES

*Knowing trees, I understand the meaning of patience.
Knowing grass, I can appreciate persistence.*
—Hal Borland



They gathered in a circle in the depth of the woods, as they had so many times before, holding hands with heads bowed and eyes closed for a moment, each feeling the pulse of the person on either side, each listening to the regular breaths of the others, to the rustle of the wind through the leaves.

"So, are we ready to do this?" Deborah asked.

"As we're likely to be," Teague replied dryly and everyone, even Deborah, smiled.

"So be it," she said, squeezing Aileen's and Teague's hands.

"So be it," they all replied quietly in unison, raising their hands to the sky then letting them drop. It was time.

The new initiates were sitting in a semicircle when the members of the coven entered the grove. The looks on their faces mixed equal measures of anticipation and nervousness.

Gods, Jon thought, were we ever so young? The funny thing was, it hadn't been that long ago since he and the others had sat in a place not unlike this one, wondering why they were there and what would happen next. Only a few short years, but sometimes it seemed like a lifetime ago. In many ways, it was.

It was when their old lives had ended and their new lives, their real lives, began. He glanced over at Kamera and smiled as his wife settled with grace onto the ground, despite the fact that she was just beginning to show the swelling of her belly. She glanced up and smiled back at him, her teeth white against her velvety brown face, then she turned to the gathered students.

"Welcome," she said. "You're here to listen and to learn, but we also know that you have questions, and we'll do our best to answer them. We decided it was best if you first learned a little something about where we've come from before we talk about where we are and where you are going. As you get to know us better, you'll find that we have a great deal of respect for the older ways of doing things, even if it doesn't always show." She paused for a moment to glance around the circle, and everyone's face was rapt with attention. She took particular note of the young man slouched in the wheelchair. He looked at her with dark eyes that glittered with intelligence and a measure of hope. Kamera remembered that feeling as if it had been yesterday.

"Well, then," she said, spreading her hands, "let's begin, at the beginning."

REMEMBERING THE OLD WAYS: HISTORY



"In the beginning," Kamera said with a sly smile, "there was sex." Don't get your hopes up that this is going to get kinky, kids, she thought, catching the expressions on some of their faces. She folded her hands over her belly, as if for emphasis.

"Oh, not sex like we think of it, but still the primal act of mating and creation. Here's how it was told to me..."

In the beginning was the One, which was everything, complete and perfect unto itself. Then the One became Two, the Two Who Move Together in Love. The Goddess and her consort the God, Night and Day, Moon and Sun, Yin and Yang. They came together and made something that was greater than either of them, and from their union the Tellurian was born. I guess you could say it *came* into existence.

So the cycle of life began and the Great Wheel turned. The Wheel turned for time beyond time, and the wonders of the Tellurian multiplied until life appeared. The endless cycle of birth, growth, conception and death, over and over again. Then life developed the ability to look back at creation and wonder at its existence. The Tellurian gained the ability to see, to feel and to know through us, through humanity. It loved us, and loves us still, and through that love, the Pure Ones, parts of the One, descended and became one with us. From the union of life and primal creation came the Wyck, the First Ones.

THE WYCK: THE FIRST ONES

The Wyck were the first true mages, born of mortal flesh and primal spirit. They were the first ones to reach out with their hands and their wills to shape the world to suit their needs and their wishes. Their power was like nothing we, their descendents of blood and spirit, now possess. For them magic was almost effortless, a part of their very being. They didn't require tools and rituals to work their wills, making them the equal of the greatest masters our Tradition has ever known — greater even.

Some say that the Wyck were not just mages, but gods, that they were the tribes other men worshipped for their power and insight: the Aesir, the Vanir, the Olympians, the Tuatha De Danaan, the Orishas and the other gods and heroes of myth. Others believe that the ideas of the Old Gods are only based on what the Wyck were really like, or that the Wyck weren't the gods, but their half-mortal children, part human and part divine like the great heroes. Maybe they were all of

those things. We don't really know for certain. We only know that the Wyck were the first, and that we, the Verbena, are their most direct descendants.

DEEDS OF THE WYCK

The Wyck performed great deeds in their time. Their world was not like the world we live in now. Magic was everywhere, and so was mystery and danger. The Wise Ones were the heroes and leaders of their people, so they had the duty of walking between the worlds. They stood as guardians between their people and the dangers of the world, and they ventured out to explore and discover its mysteries, bringing that knowledge back with them. Protection, healing, knowledge and guidance were the gifts and responsibilities of the Wyck to their people.

They were beast-tamers, learning the speech of all the creatures of the earth. Wise Ones studied all forms of life and even took on different shapes to understand them. They learned to hunt as wolves, bears and lions. They ran as deer, panthers and horses. They swam as fish, dolphins and sharks. They flew as ravens, hawks and eagles. This gave them the insight to help others to hunt and fish, to know and honor their prey as they knew themselves.

They were monster-slayers. With magic they fought against the terrible denizens of the wild places of the world. When their people were threatened, they wielded fire and lightning. They slew dragons and giants and creatures too terrible and powerful to imagine. Some they did not slay but bound in places beyond the Earth away from the sight of humanity, away from the light of the sun, chained in enchantment, held captive for all time. Or so they thought.

The Wyck were healers. They learned all the secrets of plants: herbs, roots, flowers and seeds. They learned of other creatures and used them to promote health, fight off disease and heal injury. Their magic tapped the primal essence of life, giving them the power to mend any hurt, cure any ill and even to restore life to the dead.

The Wyck were scholars, called the Wise Ones. They could hear the secrets of nature in the sound of wind through the leaves, in the calls of birds and in the bubbling waters of a stream. They read the future in the stars, in the moon and in the tides of the Tellurian. They sought out knowledge and understanding in all of its forms, and they put it to use for the benefit of their people. Legend says that the Wyck gave us letters and language and the lore of animals, plants, metals, crystals and all the other things of the Earth.

The Wyck were builders and makers. They carved wood and stone. They wove cloth and cured hides. They even smelted and forged metal. Their magic was the power of change, taking the raw stuff of the world and shaping it, making it into tools, weapons and things of great beauty. They passed the knowledge of these crafts and many others onto their people, planting the seeds for some of what would later come into being.

Last, and perhaps most important, the Wyck were explorers. They were made from the wonder of Creation reflecting upon itself, and they had an insatiable curiosity for the world around them. They flew on eagle's wings to the far corners of the world, delved into the depths of the sea and visited many places and many peoples. They walked between the worlds of spirit and matter, blazing trails through the misty otherworld of the Umbra, the shadow of creation. The Paths of the Wyck were roads to other places, even other worlds, they discovered in their time. They connected the Wise Ones and permitted them to travel far and wide as easily as we cross a room.

DEPARTURE OF THE WYCK

Even with all their achievements, the Wyck knew that they were not forever. They were born of both spirit and mortality, and their time eventually passed from the world. They accomplished great deeds and achieved great things, then they passed on what they had learned. The Wyck had children of their own, inheritors of the blood and the power of their forebears. They taught their children their secrets and their lore, then the Wyck departed.

Where did they go? We don't really know. While there are some stories that say their children overthrew them and either banished them from the world or killed them, most tales say only that the Wyck departed. They entered their hidden paths and secret places and were seen no more. Occasionally there are tales of one of the Wise Ones appearing to offer a bit of help or a cryptic word of guidance, but no one can say for sure whether or not it was truly they.

Why did they go? We don't really know that, either, but I believe it was because they needed to. They didn't want people to be dependent on them forever. Despite what some people think, I don't believe that they really wanted worship. They wanted to inspire us to learn how to be like them, not just to worship and trust in them. Just like there comes a time when parents have to let go and allow their children go out into the world on their own, the Wyck needed to step aside and let their children, and their children's children, have their time.

LILITH

Some Verbena speak of Lilith, Adam's first wife in the Garden of Eden, as one of the Wyck, sometimes even the first of the Wyck. Other Verbena do not acknowledge Lilith at all. Supporters of the Lilith story say that there are always dark goddesses among the scattered roots of the Tradition, some of which may be recollections of Lilith.

Verbena who believe in her say that Lilith proved the purpose of the Garden of Eden in a most direct way. The Garden tested the power of free will (when God forbade Adam and his wife to eat of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge). Lilith exercised her free will by having no part in God's design. Having done so, her will was freed from all bonds, making her formidably Awakened. They say the Dark Mother taught the secrets of magic to those who would listen, and she particularly empowered women so that they would not have to be subservient to men.

Tales speak of Lilith copulating with demons in the wilds and birthing monsters. She is also credited with teaching Caine to harness the power within his accursed blood and with being the great mother to the Changing Breeds. For most Verbena, these tales are apocryphal at best. They say that Lilith is merely a symbol for the dark, feminine, generative forces of the world, an embodiment of the Goddess in her darkest aspects. Nonetheless, the Verbena themselves are proof that many myths are all too real.

Kameria ran a hand over her belly and looked down for a moment. "We do the best we can for our children, but there comes a time when it's all up to them, and we just hope that the world we leave them is a little better than what we started with."

THE ANCIENT WORLD: THE AEDUNA

As Kameria moved to rest against the bole of a great tree, Teague came forward and sat in the midst of his covenmates, facing the initiates. With his long brown hair worn loose and the intertwined torc of silver and gold gleaming at his throat, he looked every inch the bard that he was. His rich and pure tenor voice was soft, but it seemed to fill the grove.

The children of the Wyck were called the Aeduna. Where their forebears had been wanderers who walked the outside of the circle of the people, the Aeduna walked the inner paths. They were more a part of their

communities than the Wyck, born into them and raised in them. They became the priestesses and priests, healers, midwives, scholars, wise counselors, record-keepers and philosophers of their societies. They held the power and the knowledge of the Wise Ones and the responsibility to use it well.

In those days, the Aeduna were the descendants of the Wyck both literally and figuratively. They were the spiritual children of the Wise Ones, inheritors of their magic, that essence of creation that fired their spirits. They also had the blood of the Wyck in their veins and were the first to understand the passing of power, and other qualities, through bloodlines, from parent to child. They kept the histories of their family lines, tracing their ancestry back to the First Ones. So the trunk of the Great Tree began to sprout from its primordial roots.

THE FIRST SEED: THE CALL OF THE DREAMING

The first seeding of the tree of the Aeduna came early, when some of the children of the Wyck felt the call of the world outside the circle of their communities, outside the circle of the material world, from the misty places where the Wyck had gone. They were guided by dreams and visions, and they heard the voices of spirits. Rather than remaining a part of their communities, they went beyond them to stand on the boundary between the material world and the spirit world. They spoke of the visions they received in their dreams, and so became known as the Speakers-in-Dreams, the Dreamspeakers.

The Dreamspeakers were the first Tradition to split off from the Aeduna, the first of the seeds from their tree to sprout and grow on their own. Where the Aeduna focused their attention on matters of life, the Dreamspeakers valued all things of spirit and explored the depths of the spirit world and its inhabitants. In some lands, the Dreamspeakers and spirit-talkers were only a scattered few who passed their lore on from generation to generation, living as hermits or spiritual seekers in the wilds. In other places, the seed of the Dreamspeakers took root and grew strong, its shade covering the Great Tree of the Aeduna and eventually eclipsing it.

Our Dreamspeaker brothers and sisters are our allies still on the Council of Nine Traditions. The branches that diverged so long ago remain intertwined, and there is a great deal you can learn from the shamans and spirit-talkers, but our story follows the path of the Aeduna. While the Dreamspeakers thrived in the Americas and Africa, the roots of the Aeduna settled deep into Europe and parts of Asia, and they spread out across those lands.

GREECE

The Aeduna took root in the fertile lands of the Mediterranean, particularly Greece. There they worshipped the goddesses of the earth and moon and the gods of the sun, the growing things and the sea. For generations, they were the priests and priestesses of the temples, groves and sacred hills. They were healers and interpreters of the will of the gods, made manifest in the omens of nature.

THE SECOND SEED: THE CULT OF DIONYSUS

The Aeduna were earthy people. They celebrated the turning cycles of the year as their ancestors had done, much as we do now. Those celebrations often involved a lot of partying, drinking, feasting and wild orgies. The Aeduna believed in living for the moment and enjoying life to the fullest.

In those revels, some found themselves transported, taken beyond ordinary time as we know it and into the timeless moment. It was something the Aeduna understood and valued. Some inheritors of the Dionysian traditions of Thrace embrace ecstasy. They celebrate intoxication and the insight that it can bring, both the joy and madness of the fruit of the vine, the dark wine.

By the light of the moon, maenads, the mad women of Dionysus, ran through the wilds drunk on the god's distilled essence. They surrendered entirely to passion, be it lust or rage. Myths tell us that they encountered the poet Orpheus after his failed return from the Underworld. When he refused to join in their revels and orgies, they turned on him in their rage and tore him limb from limb, because that is the power of uncontrolled passion. To some, it is also a cautionary tale of what happens to those who try to thwart death's designs.

Those who surrendered to passion and ecstasy became the seed for a new split in the Aeduna, one of the roots of the modern Cult of Ecstasy.

THE THIRD SEED: THE CÆSIAN CIRCLE

The next seed to sprout from the Aeduna was quite different from the separation of the Dreamspeakers and the Ecstatics. It was the seed of one of the greatest threats our Tradition now faces, one planted with the best of intentions but twisted by its unchecked growth. It was the seed of medicine.

The ancient Greek word *pharmakis* was used to refer to herbalists and physicks, the root word of modern terms like pharmacy and pharmacist. The *pharmakis* were both common folk with knowledge of healing and Aeduna trained in the lore of plants.

In ancient Greece, about 400 years before the Common Era, Hippocrates founded the Cosian Circle. Now considered the father of modern medicine, Hippocrates studied the secrets of life, passed down from the Wyck to the Aeduna. He sought to organize this body of knowledge, to expand it and to use it to educate healers and aid the sick and infirm. Hippocrates' school of medicine drew students from far and wide, including many Aeduna. It was a grand endeavor, worthy of the inheritors of the Wyck, but it was destined for a very different end.

The Cosian Circle gathered and discovered much about the secrets of life. As their knowledge grew, so did their ambition. They sought to learn the secrets possessed by the fabled healer Asclepius, son of Apollo and god of medicine: the secrets of raising the dead, creating life and immortality. Hippocrates reminded his students and peers that such secrets led Zeus to strike Asclepius down with a thunderbolt for his hubris, but

they ignored his warnings and began secret experiments. They vivisected creatures for study, both animals and humans. They infused them with strange potions and bred them to study their offspring. They violated the first precept of Hippocrates, drawn from the Rede of the Aeduna: "First, do no harm." Hidden chambers beneath the *lyceum* of the Circle were places of torture and mutilation in the name of healing.

When word of these experiments began to spread, a rift formed between the Cosians and the Aeduna, which quickly grew into a chasm. The Cosian Circle rejected the "simple" traditional methods of the Aeduna, while the inheritors of the Wyck condemned the work of the Cosians as unnatural. Not long after Hippocrates' death, members of the inner circle of the Cosians severed all ties with their former associates and renounced the name Aeduna to pursue their own studies. Remember them, because they will re-enter our story soon enough.

THE GODS OF ANCIENT GREECE

Although the Aeduna honored all of the Greek gods to one degree or another, they took particular Olympians as their patrons, those who embodied their ways and beliefs.

Artemis: The moon goddess and maiden huntress, Artemis was considered the patron of many Aeduna, the maidenly aspect of the Great Goddess. She is known for cursing any man unfortunate enough to catch her bathing in an isolated pool by the light of the moon. Some she struck blind, others she made mad, while some were transformed into stags, to be hunted by Artemis and her maidens or even torn apart by their own hunting hounds. Artemis' twin brother Apollo was also honored by the Aeduna as the patron of medicine and prophecy, though his worship declined following the defecation of the Cosian Circle.

Demeter: The goddess of the earth and growing things represented the motherly aspect of the Great Goddess to the Aeduna. Demeter mourned the loss of her daughter Persephone (another of the maiden goddesses), abducted by Hades to be his bride in the Underworld for half of the year. So for half the year, the world lies in cold and darkness and the other half in warmth and light. Demeter is associated with other primordial earth goddesses, such as Cybelle.

Hecate: The third, and perhaps most prominent, goddess honored by the Aeduna was Hecate, the crone aspect of the Great Goddess and the patron of witchcraft. Hecate ruled the crossroads and the night, and the dark of the moon was hers. Aeduna were often priestesses and priests of Hecate, and the modern Daughters of Hecate (p. 39) carry on their traditions.

Dionysus: Dionysus was one of the Greek gods particularly sacred to the Aeduna. His wild rites and celebrations led to the creation of a splinter cult of the Aeduna that later intertwined with the Chakravanti from the east, becoming a part of the root culture of the Euthanatos Tradition. (See **Tradition Book: Euthanatos** for details.)

Gaia: The great earth mother and progenitor of the titans and their offspring, the gods, Gaia was honored by the ancient Aeduna, although not to the degree that she is now in modern times. Gaia embodies the spirit of the Earth herself, so she is vast and powerful in comparison to the gods. The Aeduna considered Gaia impersonal by comparison to the more human-like gods, and they understood that Gaia was capable of both great benevolence and terrible cruelty.

THE AEDUNA OF ANCIENT GREECE

The Aeduna can be found throughout the myths as well as the history of ancient Greece. Very often they were described as the children of the gods or titans (if not gods themselves) and renowned for their wisdom and magical powers. Some modern Verbena claim far more personalities among their ancestors than those listed here. These are merely the most famous (or infamous) Aeduna of their time.

Chiron: Perhaps the most unusual figure claimed by the Aeduna is Chiron, a centaur said to be of divine heritage. Stories conflict as to whether Chiron was born half-man, half-horse or if he later assumed that form through Life magic. Some modern Verbena suggest that his birth (or later transformation) was the result of some unusual Paradox, but no one can say for certain. Chiron was renowned as a scholar and healer, as well as a teacher of many of ancient Greece's greatest mythic heroes, including Herakles and Jason (of the Argonauts). In fact, given his mentoring of so many of the future Argonauts, some have suggested signs of either cooperation or rivalry between Chiron and Medea. Chiron was accidentally slain by an arrow from the bow of Herakles, poisoned with the blood of the hydra.

Circe: An enchantress who was the daughter of a titan, Circe lived on an isolated island. The Greek hero Odysseus and some of his crew found their way to her home, and Circe used her magic to transform Odysseus' crewmen into swine (said by many to be a reflection of their boorish behavior). Odysseus used the sacred herb moly, given to him by Hermes, to

thwart Circe's magic, but he spent a year with the sorceress before returning to his home in Ithaca. Said to be immortal, Circe vanished from the ken of the mortal world long ago. Some mages claim to have met her, but none have been able to offer any proof that the enchantress still lives.

Hippocrates: Some Verbena consider Hippocrates a traitor for his founding of the Cosian Circle, but most see him as merely misguided and acting with the best of intentions. A student of herbalism and medicine, Hippocrates dedicated his life to their study and to the promotion of health and well-being. Those who came to his school began studying forbidden arts, however, and Hippocrates' dream became something else altogether. In the end, he chose not to extend his own life through their discoveries. The Progenitors still honor Hippocrates as one of their founders.

Medea: The sorceress Medea was born of royal blood, and thereby inherited the blood of the Aeduna. She awakened to a gift for magic at a young age, and she became a priestess of Hecate and mastered the arts of potion making and enchantment. When the Greek hero Jason came to her father's country seeking the legendary Golden Fleece, Medea fell in love with him. She used her magic to help Jason overcome the dragon that guarded the fleece, then she helped him escape. She even killed her own brother and dismembered his body, throwing the parts overboard so that her father's ships would be forced to stop and collect them for a proper burial. (For more of Medea, see pp. 76-77.)

ROME

The rise of Rome was not the work of the Aeduna, as they had little interest in the creation of cities. Our Aeduna ancestors dwelled mostly in the north of the Italian peninsula, in areas like Tuscany. They were rural folk unlike the city-dwelling Romans, who called them *paganus* or "country-dwellers," from which we derive the modern word "pagan." They particularly referred to those who were wise in herb-lore and charms as *venefica*, who had little influence in Roman society, but the Romans had mystics among them, as the Aeduna would soon discover.

THE CULT OF MERCURY

Whether they sprang from the roots of the Wyck no one can say for certain, but the Roman magi combined the learning of the Greeks with the ancient lore of the Egyptians, and perhaps the secrets of the Hebrews who

lived in captivity in that land. They were truly Roman in character: orderly, curious, willing to borrow liberally from other cultures and with an eye for conquest. They descended from the tradition of Thoth-Hermes or Hermes Trismegistus (the "Thrice-Great Hermes") although they were most commonly known as the Cult of Mercury in the Eternal City of Rome.

The magi of the Cult of Mercury were well aware of the existence of other mystics and willworkers, particularly among the *pagani* and barbarians on the frontiers of the growing Roman Empire. They both desired the mystical secrets these pagan witches and wizards possessed and feared those pagans' power, since they were foreigners with strange and frightening ways. No doubt they saw the Aeduna, who claimed a lineage from the First Ones themselves, as a threat.

So the magi first limited the influence of the *venefica* within the empire. Poison was one of the favored weapons of the assassin in Rome, as everywhere, and the *venefica* knew which plants could heal and which could kill, if used properly. Herbalists were often labeled poisoners and treated with suspicion. The wise folk of the *pagani* began to conceal their knowledge and their affiliations from the watchful eyes of the authorities. So began the time when many Aeduna were forced to conceal who and what they were from the world.

THE ROMAN CONQUEST

The Romans expanded outward, conquering the surrounding lands. At first, the *pagani* offered little challenge to the well-trained and well-equipped Roman legions, backed by the lore and influence of the Cult of Mercury. Aeduna in Italy and Greece concealed themselves behind the guise of simple country folk and passed on their lore in secret. They met in glades by the light of the moon to worship and to honor the Old Ways, believing that the Romans were but a passing thing.

The barbarians of the northern lands of Gaul and the inhabitants of Britannia, on the other hand, were not so willing to bend to Roman rule. The legions invaded their lands, and they fought back with courage and ferocity, but they were not enough. They turned to the Aeduna among them, the druids and wise keepers of lore, but their powers were matched by the magi of the Cult of Mercury, who blunted mystic assaults against the legions, turned back curses and hurled spells of their own to break the druids' power.

The scattered Celts were unable to withstand the organized onslaught of the Romans and their magi. The legions reached Britain and conquered the Celtic tribes. They put druids to the sword and torched their sacred groves, forcing the survivors to abandon their holy places and retreat into the wilderness, using their skills and their knowledge to survive as best they could.



THE LIGHTNING SCOURGE

After several generations in hiding, passing on their traditions in secret, the druids of Britain organized. The scattered Celts united to rebel against the Roman occupation of their land. Though battles were fought between Celt warriors and Roman soldiers, the struggle behind the scenes was between the remaining druids and the magi of the Cult of Mercury, some of whom now lived in Britain with their Roman countrymen. Many were even of mixed Celtic and Roman blood.

At first, both the Romans and their magi were caught off guard by the suddenness and savagery of the Celtic uprising. The magi later rallied against the druids, and so began the "Lightning Scourge." Roman magus Marcus Fulgurator took command of the offensive in Britain against the druids and their followers. Both a skilled military tactician and a master wizard, Fulgurator wielded bolts of lightning as his primary weapons, hence the name of his famous crusade.

For three years, magus and druid struggled against each other across Britain and northern France. Dragons, unicorns, elementals and faerie creatures were slain on both sides of the battle, along with many mages. The druids called upon all the powers at their command, but the superior numbers of their Roman enemies overwhelmed them. Finally, the last remnants of the druids chose to retreat north into Scotland as Emperor Hadrian built his wall to keep the pagan folk away from Roman Britain.

THE FALL OF THE EMPIRE

The coming of Christianity split the mages of the Roman Empire between the Cult of Mercury and the Messianic Voices, mages devoted to the worship of the White Christ. Infighting between the two provided a respite for the remaining Aeduna in the outlying parts of the empire. Many chose to aid their people in turning on the weakening Romans, and they eventually gained their revenge when their people stormed the Eternal City itself. The Hermetic *collegeum* was demolished, the Hermetic and Christian mages were scattered into small groups, fleeing either east toward Byzantium or north toward outposts and strongholds in central Europe or Britain.

The rise and fall of Rome was the way of the world, and the way of mages, for a long time. The Hermetic magi attacked the Aeduna, the Aeduna struck back at the magi, and the Messianic Voices struck at both the pagans and the Hermetics. The Aeduna aided their people in destroying Rome in return. So the wheel turned, and the world went on.

THE PENDRAGON

In Britain, not long after the fall of Rome, came a new hope for the Aeduna and the Old Ways, in the face of growing Christian power in Europe. A child was born to a Celtic princess, and he was named Myrrdin. We now know his name as Merlin. Merlin was the most gifted mage of his time, because his father was one of the legendary Wyck, making him the equal of the greatest of the Aeduna from the ancient world. Perhaps the Wyck sired him in an effort to give hope back to a world in great need of it. We like to think so.

Merlin had a vision of making Britain a strong and just kingdom, founded on the Old Ways, but open to the new ways brought by the followers of the White Christ. It would be a kingdom to rival the glory of Rome and to unite the world under a new civilization. Toward that end, Merlin traveled far and wide, seeking out the greatest teachers and masters in Britain and even in faraway lands, traveling the paths of the Wyck. He astounded his teachers and mentors with his gifts. Merlin learned from many, not just the druids and elders of the Old Faith, but from Hermetic magi who fled to Britain after the fall of Rome, Messianic Voices preaching the word of God, and from other Mystical Fellowships as well. This is why some other Traditions claim Merlin was one of their own, but his blood was the blood of the Wyck, of the Wise-Ones.

Merlin's dream came into being as another child, named Arthur, the son of Uther. In Arthur was a child born of two worlds, Christian and pagan, who Merlin hoped could rule wisely over them both. He taught and guided Arthur to claim the title of Pendragon (Chief Dragon or High King), and gave him the skills and the advice he needed to hold it. He also forged an alliance with the fae, who granted Arthur his legendary sword, Caliburnus or Excalibur.

For a time, the dream of Camelot was a success. Arthur became king over both pagans and Christians in Britain. Although a Christian himself, Arthur considered himself a champion of both peoples, and he upheld the right for folk to worship as they chose. The remnants of the druids and priestesses of the earth hoped to rebuild and pass on their teachings, to practice their ways openly once more. Camelot became a symbol of righteousness and greatness throughout Britain and much of the world.

But it was not to be. Arthur's kingdom didn't last more than a generation, and Arthur didn't have the opportunity to pass what he'd built on to his son. The dream of Camelot was torn apart by Arthur's devotion to the laws he swore to uphold and by the hatred of his own son, which culminated on the fields of Camlan, with Mordred dead by his father's hand and Arthur

mortally wounded. The passing of the Pendragon signaled the end of the mythic age for the Old Ways and the start of a long descent into darkness.

THE DARK AGES

As Teague's voice fell silent, several of the initiates shook themselves for a moment, breaking the trance his words wove over them. A few were teary-eyed for the passing of an age they had never known, but perhaps hoped to find, in their heart of hearts.

Deborah looked them over and bit down the surge of cynical bitterness that welled up inside of her. They were naïve. That was only to be expected. Teague was a bard. It was his job to be a dreamer, to weave fanciful tales of faraway places and times.

You've showed them the dream, Teague, she thought, now it's time for a dose of reality.

Teague rose and Deborah, a wraith in black, glided into his place in the midst of the circle. She insisted in telling this

part of the tale. After all, she remembered it better than any of them did, and she would be damned if she let those memories rule her in this life. She stood, and her voice was steady as she looked over the faces of the initiates.

After the fall of Rome and of Camelot, darkness spread over the land like a shadow. The Hermetic magi were scattered by the fall of Rome, and so were the Choristers — the Messianic Voices, as they were called. All that was left of the Aeduna, the once-proud inheritors of the Wyck, were scattered to the four winds.

Both the Aeduna and the Messianic Voices recovered fairly quickly. They both held to their faith, but where the Christian Church gathered new followers almost daily, the Old Ways began to fade. When the Christian priests came, they tried to drive out the Old Gods, calling them demons. They baptized and preached to save souls, and when that didn't work, they used torture and fire.

But the worst of the conflict between the Church and the Old Ways didn't come for quite a while.

MERLIN AND MORGAN LE FEY

Two of the most famous of the Aeduna in the history of the line were bound to the fate of Arthur and Camelot, and they ultimately suffered for it.

Merlin was said to be the son of one of the Wyck and a Celtic princess (some say a Christian nun). He was the scion of a mighty bloodline, with power to rival that of the most legendary Aeduna. Even as a child, Merlin was renowned for his talent for prophecy. When King Vortigern sought the blood of a boy with no father to strengthen the mortar and foundation of his new castle, he had Merlin brought before him. He prophesied a battle between two dragons: one white the other red, representing the future of Britain. He became an advisor to British kings, including Uther Pendragon, Arthur's father. Merlin engineered (or perhaps foresaw) Arthur's birth, and arranged to have him raised and trained as the future king. After Arthur claimed the throne, Merlin served as his advisor.

Arthur and Camelot were undone by the betrayal of his queen and his closest friend. Merlin was also undone by love, that of the beautiful Nimue. She became his lover and apprentice, and later she magically sealed Merlin within a stone or tree (the stories vary as to which). Though some say that Nimue deceived and betrayed Merlin, many Verbena see her actions as noble and suggest that perhaps Merlin asked his apprentice to seal him away from the world, knowing what was to come. They believe that Merlin

might wait still, perhaps deep in the Umbra, for when the time is right for him to return, although the Avatar Storm would have complicated matters.

The other great mage of Camelot was Morgan Le Fey, a true believer in the Old Faith and the Old Gods. She was Arthur's half-sister, born of Igraine and, it is believed, a Faerie Lord (from which she derived her name). Being part of a noble line stretching back to the Wyck, mixed with the glamour of fae blood, made Morgan a formidable sorceress. She had visions and prophetic dreams as a child, and as a young woman, she dedicated herself to the service of the Old Gods as their priestess.

Although she is often painted as a villain, the Verbena claim that Morgan was a true heroine. Her dalliance with Arthur was not of her own doing, but came about during a Beltane fertility rite. Their son Mordred was supposed to embody the great rite carried out that night: a mix of pagan and Christian, fae and mortal, mystic and mundane, who could bring balance and peace. Instead, Mordred was poisoned against a father who could neither acknowledge nor love him, taken away from the mother who did love him. Morgan felt betrayed by Arthur's devotion to Christian ways and by the Aeduna elders who manipulated her. In the end, she came to bear Arthur's body off to Avalon, and, it is said, retired into seclusion for the remainder of her days.

For hundred of years, the Old Faith existed in secret, right under the noses of the priests and their churches. Even in old Rome there were witches who gathered by the light of the moon to honor the gods and ask their blessings. Descendents of the Aeduna were scattered all across Europe, from the Iberian Peninsula to the steppes of Russia, and from the frozen lands of Scandinavia to the warmth of the Mediterranean. We were called many names then, not all of them kind. Even "wytch," descended from the Wyck, started to become more of a curse than a title of honor. We were scattered like seeds on the cold earth, trying our best to take root and grow. What organization we had was gone, until a new opportunity came along.

HOUSE DIEDNE AND THE HERMETIC SCHISMI

Hundreds of years after the fall of Camelot, the Order of Hermes — which descended from the Roman Cult of Mercury — was the most powerful mystic order in Europe. The Celestial Chorus might argue otherwise, but the Messianic Voices didn't really wield that much influence within the Church, while the Hermetics were strong and independent. They didn't bow to the Church or anyone else, not even the gods themselves, which ultimately proved their undoing. Still, at the time, they were a power in the world, which made their offer tempting.

Diedne, one of the surviving druid priestesses of Britain gathered around her an alliance of followers and fellow druids. She then approached the Order of Hermes with a petition to join them, offering loyalty and accumulated knowledge to the Order. The Primi of the Houses of Hermes met and debated, and ultimately the opportunity to learn more about the mysterious magic of the druids — none of which was written down for the Hermetics to study — won out. House Diedne was created as a part of the Order of Hermes.

Of course, when the mages of the new House were slow in sharing their sacred wisdom and unwilling to bend to all of the rules of the Order, talk began circulating that allowing the pagans to band together as a House was a mistake. Then came darker rumors that the Diedne practiced "forbidden rites," including human sacrifice. The proud druids felt no need to defend their traditions to outsiders, and the arrogant magi felt no need to ask since the evidence was increasingly clear to them. House Flambeau, descended from the same sorcerers who led the Lightning Scourge, and House Tremere led the pack in accusing House Diedne of infernalism or demon-worship. The Diedne denied the charges, but it was too late. The rest of the Order was already poisoned against them.

So the Flambeau and the Tremere led the charge in what the Order of Hermes calls the Schism War, which

turned House against House. In a re-enactment of the Lightning Scourge, the members of House Diedne were systematically hunted and killed, until the entire House was wiped out. Legend has it that Diedne herself was among the last to die, and that she cursed the mages for their blindness and arrogance. Some believe her curse brought about the Order's downfall when the Order of Reason brought down the walls of Mistridge and signaled the beginning of the end for the Mythic Ages, but that's yet to come.

THE DRAGON EXODUS

The Schism War spelled the end of the druids in Britain and elsewhere. There were a few survivors who never chose to join House Diedne, keeping to their hidden groves and isolated caves, but they were a pitiful few. It became painfully clear that they could no longer

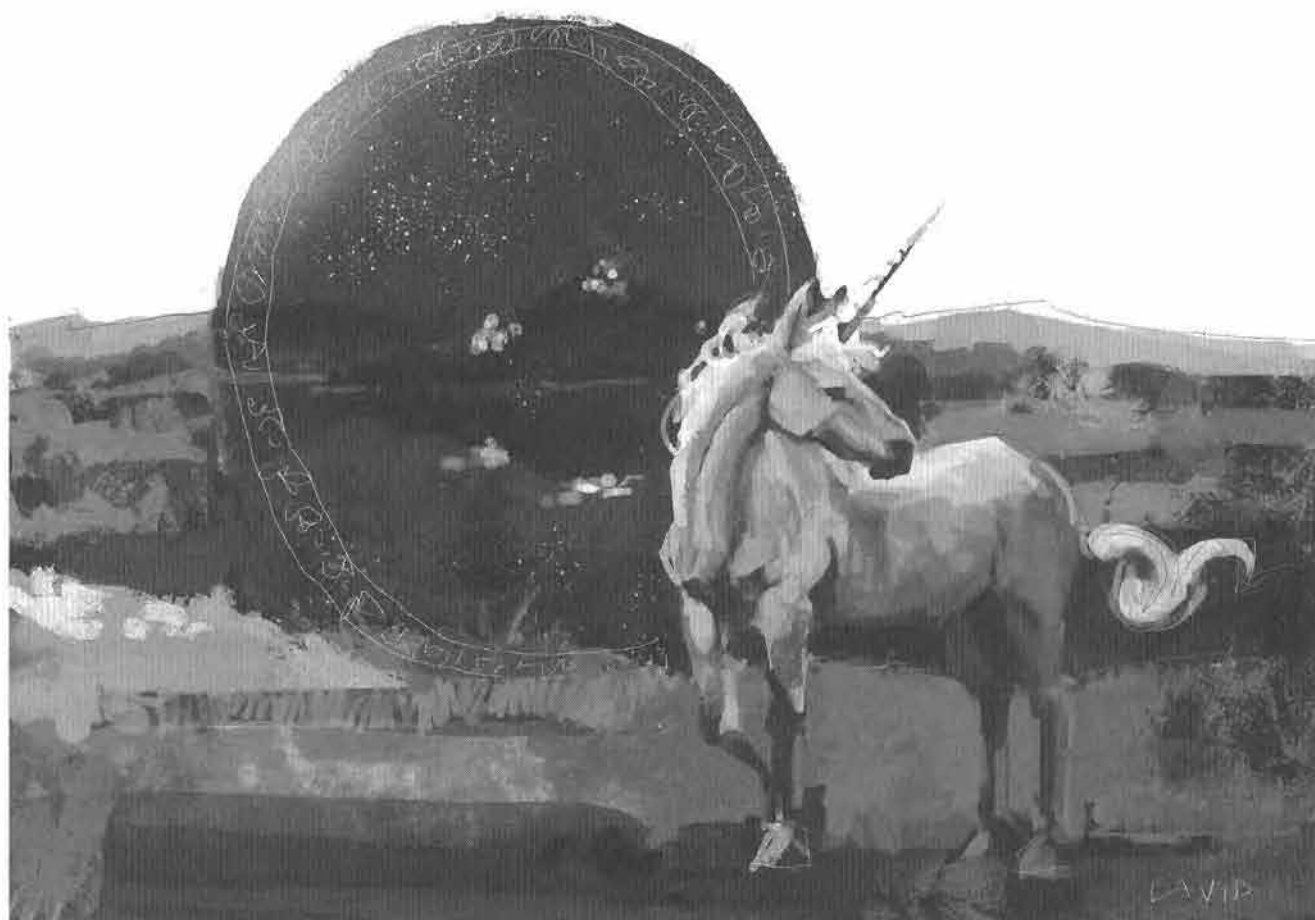
THE OLD WAYS IN THE DARK AGES

The Old Faith Fellowship (described in **Dark Ages: Mage**) is the direct ancestor of the modern Verbena. The Fellowship was, in fact, the first stirring of cooperation and unity that led to the founding of the Verbena when the pagan mages realized that they had to unite or be destroyed. Still, the Old Faith differed in many ways from the modern Verbena.

Primary among these differences is the magic of Old Faith mages, which was based on ancient traditions before the Council of Nine created the terminology of the mystic Spheres and greater similarities between practicing mystics were recognized. The Old Faith also lacked the factions of the modern Verbena, replacing them with divisions along cultural and geographic lines.

The Old Faith also held strongly to ideas of bloodline and inheritance now found among the modern Gardeners of the Tree. They believed that the power of magic came from direct descent from the Aeduna, and therefore the Wyck. Those not of the proper bloodline could not wield the power of magic, and those pagan folk who Awakened unexpectedly were considered "of the blood." They merely assumed that their proper ancestry was forgotten or lost in the mists of time. The idea of accepting apprentices from outside their culture and line was foreign to those of the Old Faith, one of the things that kept the fellowship small during the Dark Ages.

For more about the Old Faith as a Mystic Fellowship and its beliefs, organization and relations with other Fellowships, see **Dark Ages: Mage**.



safeguard the land or its creatures from the march of Christendom or from the power of mages like the Order of Hermes or the Messianic Voices.

So, nearly 200 years after the Schism War, the remaining druids of Britain led the Dragon Exodus. They gathered and used their knowledge to open the Paths of the Wyck to the magical creatures of the land and guide them to safety. The unicorns, pixies, hobgoblins, wyverns and dragons departed through the gates, into the Umbra and away from the iron and fire of men. For three years, the British Isles and much of Europe emptied of the magical and the wondrous, leaving the mundane world behind. I think the Exodus marked the decline of the Old Faith and handed victory to our enemies because much of the magic that once sustained our people was gone.

Some of the last great inheritors of the Aeduna left to guide the Bygones into the Umbra and chose not to return. They left behind some students who held on to the ways that they learned from their elders as best they could.

THE OLD FAITH FELLOWSHIP

The remaining pagan druids, witches and mages of Europe joined together in a loose alliance known as the Old Faith. It was an informal alliance at best, brought

about by a common enemy and a common threat, the danger posed by the Christian Church and the slow death of the Old Ways. Pagan mages held fast to their beliefs and kept them alive in secret.

THE BURNING TIMES

The Burning Times are a myth. The Burning Times were real. Like most things about the Verbena, both of those statements bear some truth, but neither tells the whole tale. The modern myth of the Burning Times isn't what most people think, but they did happen. I know. I was there, and perhaps some of you were as well, in other lives before this one. It is a time in our history that we should never forget, because it will happen again if we allow it to.

In the early 13th century, forces and factions within the Christian Church became more and more aware of the continued existence of the Old Faith, although they attributed our rites and beliefs to demons and wanted to "purify" our souls, with fire, if necessary. The work of the Inquisition began small, with an awareness of the corruption within the ranks of the Church, but rather than look inward for the source of their problems, the Inquisitors looked outward. They laid the

blame upon demons, monsters and those who succumbed to their "temptations" and practiced the Craft.

Some of the work of the Inquisition was conducted secretly, to keep the truth about the Church's own involvement in the occult from the common folk. These secret Inquisitors, sometimes backed by Christian mages, were the greatest threat to our people. Most of the so-called witches who were tried and executed by the Inquisition knew almost nothing of real magic. They may have possessed a few charms, some herb-lore and knowledge of midwifery, but sometimes the mere accusation of witchcraft or heresy was sufficient.

Compared to the thousands or even millions of victims proclaimed by some, the actual number of us who died during the Burning Times seems small, little more than a handful, but how many of us were there to begin with? Does the sheer number of deaths matter in the end, if even one of us died at the stake or the hangman's noose, at the hands of fanatics? Each death diminished the Old Faith and threatened the whole of the Tree of Life, and that mattered.

THE KINGDOM OF BAERWALD

We had our victories, even in the Burning Times, though they were too few and too far apart to make a difference. Perhaps one of the greatest came with the founding of Baerwald.

Sir Garland of Laramay was a Templar, sworn champion of the Church and crusader against heathens. He fought in the Crusades and was initiated into the Messianic Voices. In his travels in the Holy Land and elsewhere, Sir Garland studied the traditions of other Mystic Fellowships, including the Subtle Ones, branches of the Order of Hermes and the runes of the Valdaermen. He was a scholar as well as a warrior, and he came to appreciate the wisdom of these other teachings.

In the early 14th century, the Knights Templar were betrayed and outlawed. The Church proclaimed them heretics, and many Templars suffered the same fate as pagans during the Burning Times: torture and execution. Some of the survivors joined with the Cabal of Pure Thought or the Messianic Voices, or they concealed themselves in distant lands. Sir Garland, his faith shattered by the betrayal of his order, forswore Christianity and fled with a small group of men into the depths of the Black Forest.

With the aid of the local people and some Old Faith mages, Sir Garland founded the Kingdom of Baerwald, a pagan fiefdom in the depths of the Holy Roman Empire, surrounded on all sides by the wilderness and the power of Christendom. The people of Baerwald represented true cooperation between pagans and Chris-

tians (since not all of Sir Garland's men renounced their former faith), and their community was a stronghold of the Old Faith for more than a century.

WYNGARDE'S MARCH

Though the Burning Times simmered and smoldered all through the 13th and 14th centuries, the flames didn't reach their peak until the 15th. In 1435, General Christopher Wyngarde of the True Cross took up a crusade against the "pagan wytches, warlocks, faeries, fell beasts and heretics of these British Isles." Wyngarde gathered a small army of followers and began systematically hunting down followers of the Old Faith in Britain.

Wyngarde and his followers struck a pagan ritual on Midsummer's Eve outside Harrowgate, England. The crusaders attacked without warning and systematically slaughtered everyone attending the rite, well over a hundred men, women and children. The sole survivor of the massacre was a priestess later known as Nightshade, who learned that night what the future of the Old Faith would be if its adherents chose to do nothing.

For five years, Wyngarde and his army traveled the length of England and Scotland, purging the land of any remainder of the Old Faith. Any Bygones or fae folk that did not flee during the Dragon Exodus, they slew with fire and cold iron. Any pagan folk they chanced upon were tortured and killed, and sacred groves were raided and put to the torch. The first pagan communities they found were massacred, while later ones learned enough to flee into the wilderness in hopes of escape. Some were run down like animals while others managed to find safety by leaving behind all they had.

Following close behind Wyngarde, Nightshade did what she could to warn his victims and to offer aid and shelter. She worked to rally the followers of the Old Faith to band together and resist, but many were too afraid to fight Wyngarde's army. They wanted to find shelter for themselves and their families instead.

THE FALL OF BAERWALD

Emboldened by Wyngarde's success in Britain, the Gabrielites launched an assault on Baerwald in the Black Forest. The kingdom's pagan defenders fought bravely, but they were overwhelmed by the sheer numbers of the Gabrielites and their superior armor and weapons. The Christian forces swore to finish the task of exterminating the renegade Templars who found shelter in the pagan kingdom. Eventually, despite their best efforts, the people of Baerwald were forced to flee and surrender their homes to the invading Gabrielites.

The invaders burned Baerwald (and parts of the surrounding forest) to the ground and killed anyone who

got in their way. One of the survivors of that tragedy was William Groth, a mage descended from the mingling of the mystic secrets of the Templars with those of the Valdaermen and other Germanic rune-magicians. Like the other survivors of Baerwald, he swore vengeance against the Gabrielites and their Order of Pure Thought — vengeance for all the lives lost in the name of their ideal of “purity.” He was only one of the many who saw the horrors of the Burning Times and said, “Never again!”

THE GREAT RITE: THE BIRTH OF THE VERBENA

There was a moment of stunned silence as Takoda stood at the edge of the circle. His broad-shouldered frame cast a shadow from the setting sun that passed over Deborah as she stepped from the center of the circle back to her place. Takoda walked silently into the center and sat down on the grass, looking the initiates over before he spoke.

The Burning Times were nearly the end for the line of the Wyck and the Aeduna, but the survivors weren't willing to give up. They had a chance, even if it was a small one.

The Ecstatic prophet Sh'zar contacted Nightshade after the massacre at Harrowgate. He told her about a vision he had, of a world without magic, without wonder, suffocated under the grip of men like Christopher Wyngarde. He told her that the only hope of avoiding this fate was for mages of all Traditions and paths to unite.

So Nightshade put aside her vengeance for the time being and agreed to a meeting.

In 1440, four mages gathered at the ruins of the Hermetic covenant of Mistridge: Nightshade, Sh'zar, Valoran of the Celestial Chorus, and Baldric LaSalle of the Order of Hermes. There they discussed the idea of a Council of Mystic Traditions, an alliance to stand against the Order of Reason. Nightshade was understandably suspicious. Both the Celestial Chorus and the Order of Hermes had persecuted the Old Faith in the past, but Valoran and LaSalle treated her as an equal, so she was willing to put aside her doubts.

The mages of the convocation agreed to travel and seek out allies, other Traditions to join their new council. Nightshade's first task was to gain the cooperation of her own people, since the Old Faith was made up of many traditions, many different threads all woven loosely together. If they were to have a strong presence on this new council, they required unity, or else Nightshade knew that they risked betrayal at the hands of the Chorus, the Hermetics or some other Tradition.

So it was that she sought out William Groth — the leader of the refugees of Baerwald and a strong representative of his people and their ways. She told him about

the convocation and its plan, and Groth agreed to help. Nightshade gathered the support of the survivors of the Old Faith, the few remaining covens and circles, while Groth convinced many of the Valdaermen and rune-workers that their best hope lay with the new council, although not all were willing.

On Beltane of that year, Nightshade and Groth met with their followers in an isolated glade. Nightshade drew down the moon and took on the aspect of the Celtic goddess Brigid (or Brid), patron of smiths, poets and healers. Groth called upon the storm and thunder and took on the aspect of Thunor (or Thor), the Norse god of thunder. Together they consummated their alliance with the Great Rite, bringing together the pagan folk of Europe and conceiving the Tradition that would take its rightful place among the council: the Verbena.

WHY VERBENA?

The Verbena could have been called any number of things. Over the centuries, they were known by many names: Aeduna, Wise Ones, Wyckae, the Old Faith, pagans and a number of other less polite names. None of these choices was entirely right for the new alliance that Nightshade proposed. She suggested a new name to represent a new beginning for the people of the Old Faith, but one with ties to the past that honored where they had come from.

“Verbena” is the Latin name for vervain, a common herb with a number of uses. Among other things, vervain was used for protection, purification and healing, an all-purpose herbal remedy. It was a common remedy of the Aeduna and their descendents for centuries, and some other mages — particularly the nascent Order of Hermes — referred to the witches and cunning men who employed herbalism as “Verbenae.”

When Nightshade and Groth needed a name for their new alliance of diverse pagan folk, Nightshade offered Verbena as a means of taking what had been a term of derision and turning it into a badge of pride. It would remind the others on the Council of Mystic Traditions who the Verbena were and where they came from. Nightshade and Groth might have also hoped that the name would keep their new Tradition humble and in touch with its roots rather than putting on airs as they saw other mystics doing. In that, it might have been only partially successful.

Technically, “Verbena” is the singular form, and the Tradition as a whole is properly referred to as “Verbenae.” It fell out of use long ago, however, and Verbena is used for both individuals and the Tradition as a whole. The usage bothers only those Latin scholars among the Order of Hermes (which could be one other reason why the Verbena did it).

THE JOURNEYS OF NIGHTSHADE AND GROTH

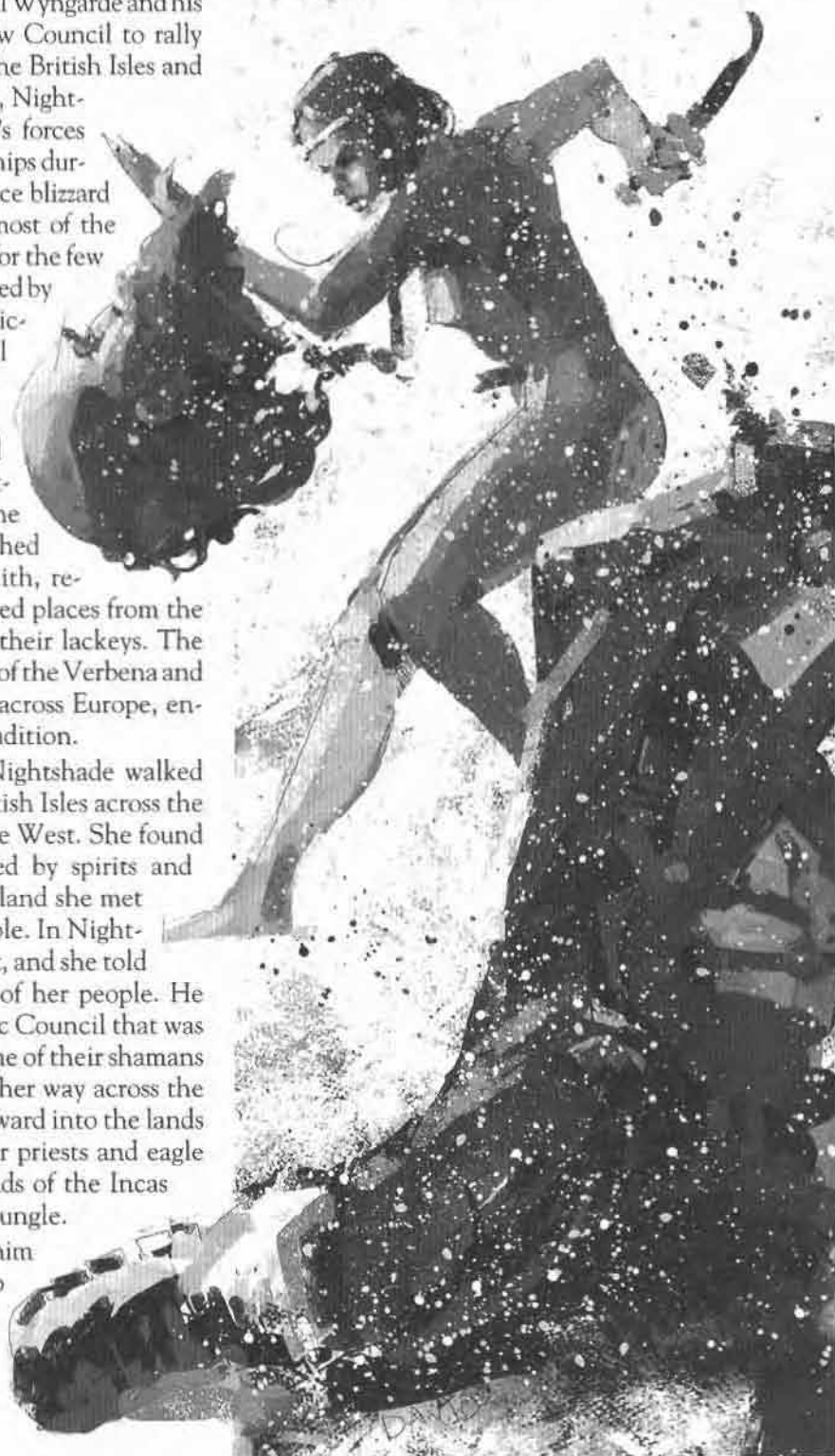
After the formal creation of the Verbena, Nightshade and Groth separated. They walked the Paths of the Wyck, with Nightshade traveling westward and Groth eastward.

Nightshade's first order of business was to pick up where she left off dealing with General Wyngarde and his army. She used the news of the new Council to rally support among the pagan mages of the British Isles and even the Faerie Folk. With their aid, Nightshade was able to harry Wyngarde's forces across Scotland. Foul weather sank ships during the crossing to Ireland, and a fierce blizzard struck near Newry, Ireland. It left most of the Army of the True Cross frozen, save for the few who died at the hands of the warriors led by Nightshade herself, who gave the victims of Harrowgate justice and General Wyngarde exactly what he deserved.

For 10 years after Wyngarde's death, pagans and fae allies stalked the survivors of his army across Britain, in what we call the Decade of the Hunt. The Wyld Hunt was unleashed against the enemies of the Old Faith, reclaiming many of our ancestral sacred places from the hands of the Order of Reason and their lackeys. The Hunt also strengthened the alliance of the Verbena and drew the attention of pagans from across Europe, encouraging them to join the new Tradition.

After the Blizzard of Newry, Nightshade walked the Paths of the Wyck from the British Isles across the vast sea toward the Fair Lands of the West. She found her way to North America, guided by spirits and visions from the gods. Here in this land she met Star-of-Eagles, a shaman of his people. In Nightshade, he recognized a kindred spirit, and she told him of her land and the struggles of her people. He helped her spread word of the Mystic Council that was forming among other tribes, and some of their shamans heard Nightshade's call. She made her way across the land to its distant shore, then southward into the lands of the Aztecs, where she met jaguar priests and eagle warriors, further south into the lands of the Incas and the vast green of the Amazon Jungle.

William Groth's journey took him through the wild lands that held fast to pagan ways. Among the vitki, spæcrafters and seith-workers he scattered the news of the Verbena and encouraged them to lend their support to the



new Tradition, to take their place among the new Council. Some heard his pleas, while others turned a deaf ear, preferring to maintain their independence and isolation. Further he went into the wilds of Russia, evading the attention of the blood lords of the mountainous lands and the rusalka and the leshy of the forest. He made his way into the frozen steppes and taiga, where he met with shamans of the Siberian and Mongolian peoples.

In China, Groth met with mages of the Akashic Brotherhood who fought at his side against demon-spirits of the mountains. Whether or not the "demon-spirits" were part of the conflict going on between the Akashics and the Hindu Chakravanti we might never know, but Groth impressed the Akashics with his courage and magical skill. Bloodied with a dozen wounds, he wielded his blade and his spells against them, striking with the fury of the storm. His final invocation brought a mountain peak crashing down to bury both himself and his foes, entombing them together for all time. The Eastern mages decided to honor the heroic Groth by attending the Convocation, bringing the news of his valiant death. Since they didn't bring his body back, some Verbena even now say that Groth didn't die, or at least not the way the Akashic Brotherhood says he did. Still, we know what he accomplished, and that's enough.

FOUNDING OF THE COUNCIL OF NINE

Representatives from mystic Traditions all across the world converged on Mistridge for the Second Convocation, which was attacked by the forces of the Order of Reason. The gathered mystics won the battle with heavy losses, proving better than any debate that the alliance of Traditions could stand against the power of the Order of Reason. The mystics worked together to create Horizon, a place of safety in the Otherworld beyond the reach of their enemies. They debated and built alliances and accords.

During this time, many more followers of the Old Faith came under the banner of the Verbena, though some stubbornly refused and insisted on going it alone. There are stories of witch-wars and conflicts between sects of pagan folk over joining the Verbena, which some saw as betraying their traditional ways rather than maintaining them. Eventually, most of the surviving pagan mages of Europe and parts of Asia came under the Verbena's guidance and that of the Council.

ELOINE OF THE FIRST CABAL

After the founding of the Council of Nine, the First Cabal took form, made up of one member from each of the Nine Traditions. The representative of the Verbena was Eloine, one of the most famous and tragic figures in our history.

Eloine was born in Ireland in the 15th century, the child of a bloodline that traced back to the primordial Wyck. Her potential for magic was strong and encouraged by her parents, who were also Verbena. By the time she entered womanhood, she was already a formidable sorceress, and her powers only grew with time and experience. Eloine was a beautiful woman, with fiery red hair and bewitching green eyes, descended from Irish kings. Despite her youth, she was considered a worthy member of the First Cabal.

Eloine fell in love with Heylel Teomim, the hermaphrodite alchemist, and representative of the Solificati. Their union was much spoken of in the Traditions at the time, although they were discreet and private with their affairs. Eloine became pregnant by Heylel and was delivered of twins: a boy and a girl. Heylel chose to betray the First Cabal to the Order of Reason not long thereafter. Several members died fighting, while the others, including Eloine, were taken prisoner. Eloine's children were taken from her and their fate remains unknown. Eloine was tortured to confess her "sins" before she was to be executed. Tradition mages rescued the surviving members of the cabal, including Eloine, and captured the traitor Heylel, who was sentenced to Gilgul and death.

Eloine was never the same after the loss of her children and the betrayal and death of her beloved. Her spirit was broken, and she largely forsook her Craft. Although she was always welcome within the circles and groves of the Verbena, she chose a simple and isolated way of life. Years later, she aided those accused of witchcraft in escaping from the wrath of the Inquisition, but was herself arrested and tried as a heretic. She went to the stake steadfast in her belief in the Old Faith, and she has been honored as a heroine by generations of Verbena since.

THE SHADOW YEARS

The betrayal of the First Cabal seemed to cast a shadow over the achievements of the Traditions, and the centuries following, it saw the slow and gradual decline of magic in the world and the rise of the Order of Reason to greater and greater power. The fires of the Burning Times smoldered across Europe before slowly dying out and taking the lives of many mystics with them. The religious fervor of the Order of Reason cooled until they eventually chose to betray and oust the zealots among them and devote themselves to pure science rather than faith, becoming the Technocratic Union.

During the Shadow Years, the Verbena endured, practicing our ways in secret, hiding them beneath a cloak of normalcy that the other Traditions learned over time. In Europe, witches passed their lore from one

generation to the next in books of shadows disguised as "recipe books" or "family bibles." The old bloodlines endured and incorporated trusted newcomers into their families. Occasionally they were exposed and rooted out by witch-finders and inquisitors of the Order of Reason.

In the New World, the Verbena set down roots, but struggled to survive. The witch-hunts and persecutions of Europe followed them to the European colonies, while the Verbena descended from the Wyck of Africa hid their ways beneath a veneer of Christianity, seeding the growth of many African traditions that honored the ancestors and the Old Ways. The seeds of the Verbena were scattered across this new land, where they took root and waited for the coming of spring.

THE OLD WAYS IN THE NEW AGE

Takoda rose quietly from his place in the center of the circle and Aileen stepped forward, smoothing the front of her flower-print dress and casually brushing a lock of golden hair away from her face before sitting down in the center of the circle.

As the Verbena came into the 20th century, we had become little more than a legend among the Sleepers. Although the Old Ways were maintained by secret covens and circles, they were like seeds or acorns sleeping in the frozen ground, hidden by a blanket of snow and waiting for the coming of spring.

It would take a sacrifice to awaken those seeds and nourish them — a sacrifice of blood.

THE RUNE WAR

The number of disparate, followers of the Old Ways outside of the Verbena, grew smaller and smaller over the years, but they didn't vanish entirely. There were also those within the Verbena who were never entirely content with how the Tradition came to be and where it was going. Some factions felt forced into joining, either due to circumstances or pressure from the Council. Others felt that their Traditions and practices were being ignored or marginalized within the Verbena, slowly smothered as surely as if they'd faced the Technocracy alone.

One of those factions was made up of descendants of the Valdaermen, the rune-crafters of Norse and Germanic background. Once they'd been a proud Tradition that stood apart from the Old Faith in the Dark Ages, the equal of any mystic fellowship. But their ways were dying out in comparison to those of other cultures within the Verbena, too often "polluted" (or so they thought) with ideas and traditions from other cultures blending together. When the Verbena in the British Isles began a revival of their ways among the Sleepers,

increasing interest in druidry and witchcraft, the rune-crafters saw the opportunity to do the same.

We don't know for sure how it all went wrong. The factions of the Valdaermen were secretive at best. Radical elements might have taken over and pushed them. The Nephandi were certainly involved, although we don't know exactly when or how they came into the picture. All we know is that the rune-crafters gathered around a faction called the Iron Circle, which either saw or inspired an interest in an Aryan root culture. It sparked in a Germany battered and defeated after the First World War and ignited a fire that gave rise to one of the most infamous forces in our history: the Nazi Party of the Third Reich.

Rune-magicians of the Iron Circle secretly backed the Nazi rise to power, encouraging interest in the occult and in the creation of a "pure" Aryan mythology. They formed secret cabals to recruit and train the newly Awakened, and they began waging war against the other Traditions behind the scenes of the German war on Europe. Gypsy fortune-tellers, Jewish (and Hermetic) kabbalists, Christian and Chorus mystics, were all targets, to be driven out or killed so their mystic libraries and wonders could be seized or destroyed. The first targets of the Iron Circle's wrath, however, were their fellows, those who chose not to support their cause. The survivors scattered, some allying themselves with the Circle's enemies, the rest going into hiding.

Many among the Traditions found it difficult to separate the renegade Verbena of the Iron Circle from the Tradition as a whole, although the other factions and circles of the Verbena quickly denounced the Iron Circle and declared them *barrabi*. The Tradition was divided as some defected to join the rune-workers while others sided with homelands in the British Isles, Greece, Italy or Eastern Europe. A magical war was fought behind the scenes of the Second World War, and even the Technocracy was split between supporting the Allies and the Axis. The Nazi fascination with eugenics drew the Iron Circle into a loose alliance with a faction of the Progenitors, descendants of Hippocrates' renegade Cosian Circle.

Some say that the Nazis never invaded England because of the efforts of British covens and associated mages, who cast spells of warding to keep them at bay. By the war's end, many members of the Iron Circle were dead, some captured and sentenced to Gilgul and death, and a few escaped, taking with them many of the artifacts and secrets they plundered. The remaining rune-crafters among the Verbena have operated under the dark cloud of the Iron Circle's betrayal ever since, and they still face mistrust within the Tradition. They struggle to reclaim a Tradition tainted by association with one of the greatest evils the world has ever known.



THE AGE OF AQUARIUS

From the ashes of the war came the potential for new growth for the Verbena and the Traditions. The Gardeners of the Tree and others had planted the seeds of a witchcraft revival in England even before the war began and interest in the Craft and its history began spreading after the war. It blossomed in the 1960s with a general interest in the occult and magic. We found many new initiates from the flower-power generation, just like the Cult of Ecstasy and the Dreamspeakers did. The ranks of the Moon-Seekers grew from their willingness to show these new Verbena the way, much to the dismay of some traditionalists, but it helped to ensure the Tradition's survival.

The later half of the 20th century was a real Awakening for the Verbena as well. The Moon-Seekers found new truths and old traditions in every new culture they encountered and every new Verbena they initiated. The Twisters of Fate recovered ancient and ancestral memories that showed the common roots of these many branches while the Lifeweavers were always out on the edge experimenting with new things. The Gardeners of the Tree formed the strong trunk that held it all to-

gether. Over the decades, the Verbena incorporated a wider range of paths and cultures. African-descended ways, including Voudoun and Santeria, gained influence and strength. Paganism came out of the shadows and spread to new generations of spiritual seekers.

The Technocracy tried to stem the tide by commercializing the Old Ways, like they do everything else, but for every 10 witch-wannabes who got misinformation from a Syndicate-inspired book, there was one Sleeper who was willing to dig down and find the truth. Not all Awakened, but the more who believe in the power of the Old Faith, the easier it is for us to move among them, unnoticed by the Technocracy.

THE WHEEL TURNS

Aileen stood slowly. "That's how you, and we, got to be here today. The fact that we've even having this talk is because countless people have been willing to sacrifice everything for what they believe in. The fact that you're here means that the Technocracy hasn't won yet, but we'd be lying to you if we said that things are going to be easy, because they're not, and they never have been."

One particular development of the middle to late 20th century was the recognition of sexual minorities among the Verbena. Although gender variances in the Verbena Tradition date back to the time of the ancient Wyck, the open recognition of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people was not a widely accepted part of the Tradition.

Some members of the Lifeweavers experimented with sex-changing and shapeshifting to explore the bounds of gender identity, and some Twisters of Fate embodied primal states beyond masculine or feminine, but they were the fringe exceptions, not spoken of in most circles. Although the Verbena were uninhibited with regard to sex and sexuality, many still held taboos about same-sex relationships and sexual changes. Traditionalists held that only male-female relations were "balanced" and therefore "natural."

"Even after hundreds of years of trying, the Technocracy hasn't been able to wipe us out. We're survivors, we Verbena, and we don't give up easily. If you ask me, the real threat of the Technocracy is not to us, it's to our way of life, our way of thinking and being. They wanted to make life safe and orderly and rational, but it's not always. It's ironic, because in trying to make the world safe for the Sleepers, the Technocracy has taken away their ability to believe in anything, even their rational Utopia of Science.

"But life endures, and life adapts, and so do we."

This changed in the 1950s and '60s as an increasing number of young Verbena identified themselves with the growing gay rights movement and pioneers like Harry Hay. These "Queerbena" or "Fairy Folk" (as they are still sometimes known) associated themselves with the gender-variant shamans at the roots of the Tradition and pressed for greater acceptance and understanding of sexual differences among their Tradition (particularly among the Gardeners of the Tree). They found supporters in the other factions of the Tradition, especially the Moon-Seekers and Lifeweavers.

By the late 20th century, sexual minorities were generally well accepted among the Verbena, perhaps more than any other Tradition, and the Verbena have generally remained at the forefront of equal rights for all.

As Aileen moved off to the side of the circle, Jon stood.

"I think we've given you all enough to think about for one day," he said, looking over the faces of the gathered initiates. "We'll talk some more tomorrow."

They all stood and held hands as Jon recited a prayer of thanks to the gods, then they made their way off to the main house to start preparing supper. Jon and Kameraia stayed behind, speaking quietly, and he held her close. Teague glanced back, and stood watching them for a moment, before biting his lip sadly and turning to go join the others.

HANGING FROM THE WORLD TREE: THE VERBENA WAY



The circle gathered again the following afternoon. This time Jon sat in the middle of the circle with the initiates watching and waiting.

"Yesterday we talked about our history as a Tradition," he said. "Today, you're going to learn about what it means to be Verbena, what our Tradition is about." He paused for a moment, as if collecting his thoughts, and then began.

LIVING

Being Verbena is more than just learning to wave a wand or pick herbs or worship particular gods. It's a way of being, most importantly a way of living. That's what it comes down to, living. We're about living life, not just sitting around and talking about it like we're doing now, but also getting out there and being a part of it. So here are a few simple truths that the Verbena believe about life.

First off, life is messy. Despite the best efforts to hide the fact, it's still true. We come into the world screaming and bloody. We eat, we crap, and we sweat. We need to fuck. We're filled with primal drives and emotions, an inheritance from animal ancestors we're not as far from as we'd like to think. In the end, we rot and provide food for the worms, the bugs and the plants.

That's the way it is. It doesn't mean we have to live like animals — we have intelligence to help us understand things like right and wrong — but it also doesn't mean our animal side is evil or sinful, like you've probably been told. Nature isn't good or evil. It simply is. Sometimes it's cruel and merciless, other times it's endlessly giving, but it's all part of the same world, part of us.

Life is precious, but life is often also cheap. Life feeds on itself, in one way or another. Animals eat plants and

each other. Animals die, and bacteria and smaller animals feed on them, turning them into nutrients for plants, and so on. There may be some mages out there who think we're all going to Ascend and live on air or light or something like that, but that's not who and what we are. Life feeds on death, because without it, life has little meaning.

DYING

What happens to us when we die? That's the age-old question. A lot of Verbena believe that we reincarnate, that our souls (or portions of them) move on to other bodies and we're born again into the cycle of life. Other Verbena I know believe lots of different things: that our souls go on to some sort of afterlife (call it the Summerlands, Heaven or whatever); that we merge back into the great cosmic Lifeweb, losing our identities in the process; or even that we just vanish into nothingness. Where we go doesn't matter as much as the fact that we all die and we don't really know what happens after that.

You've all heard the saying, "Live this day as if it were your last." The reason for that is because death is what gives life meaning. Among Verbena who believe in reincarnation there's a similar saying: "Live this life as if it were your only one, because it may well be." Far too many people postpone their living waiting for death to come. "Maybe in my next life," someone says. "Suffering in this life isn't important, because you'll be rewarded for it in the afterlife." Only a religion could be based on that premise, because it takes a lot of faith to follow it. What if you suffer your whole life and find out there is no heaven or hell? What if you expect cosmic justice to give you a better life in your next go-round, and it doesn't come? Personally, I prefer to take my chances in this life.

Life without death eventually becomes meaningless. We all want to live a long time, but how long? A century, two, a millennium? More? How long would you live, if you could? That's not an academic question, as you will learn. Mages have been dealing with it for a long time. The credo of many is, "I'm going to live forever, or die trying." But consider this: If we are the sum of our experiences and memories, how long before you have so many of them that you can't recall them all? How long before memories fade or, if they don't, before it feels like you've seen and done it all? Sooner or later, an immortal is either going to find that life has no meaning because there's no new experience to be had, or creeping amnesia sets in, and what's the point of an immortal existence you can't remember?

Death is the best reason there is for living, because it tells us all that we only get so much time, and what we choose to do with it is up to us. We can live fully and well, or we can spend life whiling away the time waiting

for something to happen, until it's over and we realize we wasted it. Death is a great teacher, because it shows us how to value life. We don't get all hot for death the way some mages do, but we respect and honor it.

Dying is as much a right as living. We believe in life, but only when that life is worth living. We don't seek death, but we don't turn away from it when it comes, either. Better to die honorably in a cause you believe in, for your death to be quick and meaningful, than to slowly wither away. The Progenitors have discovered a hundred ways to prolong life, but what kind of life is it, wired to machines and lying in bed, trapped in a useless, decaying body? Better for death to come quickly and with some dignity than to suffer a fate like that.

RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

Do you believe in the gods? They believe in us. We're among the last to follow the Old Gods and honor them as they were in times past. You don't have to worship the Old Gods — or any gods — to be Verbena, but sooner or later you have to acknowledge that the gods are real in one form or another. I know. I've not only met some of them, I've *been* some of them. I've felt the power of the young god of the green within me, and it was something other than just me. It was a power as old as time itself.

We can go on and on about who or what exactly the gods are. Are they facets of a greater divinity? Are they just masks worn by greater Incarna, that pose as different deities? Did they arise out of our belief, or do we believe in them because they've always been there? Folks have been talking about those things for a long, long time, and it doesn't seem to me like there are going to be any definitive answers anytime soon. That's probably just as it should be, because if you could fully explain exactly what the gods were, then they wouldn't really be gods anymore, would they? It's enough for now to know that the gods exist.

A lot of Verbena are pagan polytheists, which means that we worship many different gods. Some stay true to a particular pantheon or family of gods, like the ones honored by their ancestors. Others are more eclectic, worshiping gods from different pantheons and cultures. Then there are the gods that don't belong to any particular culture, but are so ancient that they don't even have proper names, like the Green Man, the Horned Hunter, the Moon Goddess, the Earth Mother and all the other primal representations of the divine.

Some Verbena are actually monotheists of a sort, meaning that they believe in the existence of one divine being. For some that divinity is the One that the Choristers talk about, though it may appear in many different forms and guises. Some think that the gods are

lesser spirits compared to the One, or they may just be facets of it, seen by different people at different times. There are those who see the divine as inherent in all things, so everything is sacred, a part of the One (or God, if you like). I kind of like that idea, myself.

TECHNOLOGY

So naturally the Verbena are a group of Luddites who want to see technology rolled back to around the Renaissance and never improved any further, right? Well there are some Verbena like that (and some of them *remember* the Renaissance) but most of us were raised in the modern world, just like you. We grew up with technology and its various benefits. Now, I like to think that we're a good deal better educated about the drawbacks and consequences that come with those benefits, but we're not necessarily against technology.

I think the way most Verbena feel about technology and science shows up in the ancient split between the Aeduna and the Cosian Circle, the mages who became the Progenitors. The Cosians were interested in science and medicine solely for their own sake. Not necessarily to improve life, although that was one of their stated goals, but just to know how it all works and to have the ability to tinker with it. It shows an incredible shortsightedness on their part. It isn't that the Aeduna didn't want better ways of understanding health and healing, they just weren't willing to vivisect people in order to get it. I guess that does make a lot of Verbena seem conservative when it comes to "progress." We've never trusted progress because it has a tendency to get out of control and roll right over things, places and people far too often.

Still, there are plenty of Verbena who make use of modern technology and techniques. You can see examples of them here on the farm, although we make an effort to have only the minimum for our needs and make sure that we provide our own power and that we're not using technology wastefully or harmfully. A lot of people are surprised to find out that there are Verbena with a lot of technical know-how. I know Verbena computer programmers, engineers, ecologists and doctors.

MEDICINE

Speaking of doctors, what about medicine? Like technology, a lot of people think Verbena are opposed to scientific medicine. Again that is something of a stereotype. There are those Verbena who think that all modern medicine is tainted by the betrayal of the Cosian Circle and ultimately controlled by the Progenitors, but most of us are more moderate on the topic. It's not the science of medicine, but how it's used that can be the problem.

Western medicine, descended from the work of Hippocrates and the Cosian Circle, tends to treat the body as a kind of biological machine. If you understand all of the little parts and how they fit together, then you should be able to diagnose and treat disease and injury like fixing a broken machine. The patient's thoughts and feelings are just a distraction — one the doctor is better off not getting involved in if he wants to do his job.

But we're not machines. Life is more complicated than that. We've slowly shown modern medicine that the mind and even the spirit are factors in the healing process, and sometimes the root cause of illness, too. The patient's attitude and quality of life are factors. We've also begun to spread the idea that there are amazing medicines to be found in the natural world, known to our ancestors for centuries, and that every problem doesn't have to be cured by either popping a pill or cutting someone open.

The worst excess of medicine encouraged by the Progenitors is the tendency to play god with people's lives because you can. The power of life and death is one of the greatest powers there is, and it puts a lot of temptation into the hands of healers and physicians. The Progenitors see nothing wrong with prolonging life long past the point where it's worth living, or creating new forms of life that were never meant to be and that never asked to be born. They think life is like a curiosity for them to play with, but it's not, and they're going to realize it sooner or later. I just hope that their hubris isn't the downfall of us all.

OUTSIDE RELATIONS

Some say that the Verbena aren't the friendliest of folks, but that just means they don't know us very well. It's true that we're not quick to trust outsiders, but after hearing our history, can you blame us? The truth is that we've gotten screwed over by just about everybody at one point or another, so we're not eager to get burned again, but we're also the ones who set aside our differences to join the Traditions. Verbena like Nightshade and Groth traveled the world to find others to join up. Would we have done that if we weren't capable of trust? If we lost the ability to trust anyone, wouldn't we have lost to all those who tried to destroy us?

Still, the Verbena are independent sorts. We prefer it that way. We don't like to depend too much on anyone else, but we also recognize that we're all part of the greater whole. We work together in small groups — circles and covens — and we don't go in for much in the way of ranks and titles, as you've already seen.

The way we relate to everyone else is summed up in the Rede: "An it harm none, do what thou wilt." As

long as you're not hurting anyone, you're okay. As long as you don't have a problem with us, we don't have a problem with you. Unfortunately, there are more than a few people who *do* have a problem with us, like it or not, and more than a few who are doing harm, and it's up to us to do something about it.

THE TRADITIONS

In many ways, the followers of the Old Faith recognized the need for something like the Council of Traditions before there ever was one. Pagans from different lands and cultures banded together because of the mutual threat to their way of life. Of course, it wasn't nearly so formal as the Council, but the followers of the Old Faith had a lot more in common. Still, it showed that mages of different paths could work together. I suspect that the Celestial Chorus and the Order of Hermes were a little surprised that the Verbena even decided to join the Traditions, given our history, but leaders like Nightshade encouraged it for the same reasons as before. Namely, we needed allies and had a common enemy. Since then, we've learned a few things from the other Traditions, and I like to think that they've learned a few from us.

The thing that most of the other Traditions seem to have the hardest time with is the way we embrace all aspects of life, even the ones that aren't particularly pleasant. The Ecstatics are all about embracing the pleasures of life, but they're not so crazy about the downside of things. When the party's over and there's cleaning up and work to be done, the Cultists split for the next party. A lot of other Traditions wish we were more "respectable," saying that the Verbena give everyone else a bad name by perpetuating the Old Ways. The truth is they're just as uncomfortable about aspects of our traditions as the Sleepers can be.

I'd say our closest allies among the Traditions are the Dreamspeakers. We have a lot in common, but some fundamental differences, too. The Dreamspeakers feel the call of the spirit world strongly. They live between the worlds of spirit and matter, outside the village where they can watch over people and deal with the spirits without being too distracted by mundane things. We're more grounded in the world of matter. Sure, Verbena visit the Umbra and deal with spirits, but not as often as the Dreamspeakers do. We complement each other in that way, one Tradition looking to the spirit world the other looking to the physical world.

THE TECHNOCRACY

Since the Technocracy has tried to wipe us out ever since it came into being it's no surprise that we're not exactly friends.

Most of us reserve a particular dislike for the Progenitors — the Convention of the Technocracy associated with medicine and the life sciences — because, more than any of the others, we share a common ancestry. We both sprang from the herbalists and *pharmakis* of the ancient world, but the founding of the Cosian Circle in ancient Greece split that branch of the Great Tree. When the Cosians divorced themselves from the Aeduna, they devoted their efforts to the scientific study of life, ignoring their founder's admonishment to do no harm in their obsessive quest for knowledge.

The Cosians — and their descendants, the Hippocratic Circle and the Progenitors — promoted the idea of living things as complex bio-chemical machines. They reduced all life to simple mechanisms. Spirituality and belief are psychology. Psychology is biochemistry, the synapses of the brain and the hormones of the body. Chemistry is physics, dictated by the simple laws of non-living matter. Herbalism was associated with witchcraft. Midwives and healers were a threat to scientific medicine.

Now the Progenitors have become the sort of soulless machines they advocated. They consider themselves masters of life and death, creating new forms of life and twisting it with designer drugs and DNA sequencing, turning it sterile and cold. In place of a mother's womb they have cloning tanks. In place of her milk, they have nutrient broth. The natural order and balance mean nothing to them. They're a twisted reflection of what we could become, if we lose sight of the wisdom of our ancestors and of the balance and harmony of all the spheres within the Self.

The Progenitors' allies in the Technocracy are just as dangerous in their own ways. The New World Order has worked to make religion and spirituality the domain of a selected few, who dictate to everyone else what to believe, think and feel. We don't need intermediaries between us and the gods, and we don't need Big Brother to tell us how to live our lives. They make people fear their own power and choosing to give it up in exchange for security and the comfort of knowing that things will always be the same.

The Syndicate has taken the Technocratic idea that the world exists to serve humanity, and it's run with it. They've addicted entire cultures to materialism, willing to destroy the world in exchange for short-term material comforts. I know some Verbena, especially Lifeweavers, who radically reject materialism because it's tainted with the stink of the Syndicate. Other Verbena just try to live simply in harmony with

the environment, rather than feeding the vast Syndicate machine that's eating the Earth alive.

Iteration X frankly scares the crap out of me. If the Progenitors have made life cold and sterile, then Iteration X has taken it a step further. They want to make us into actual machines, just cogs in a giant mechanism. They long ago abandoned life with all of its messiness and "weakness" for the purity of cold numbers, metal and plastic. Many Iteration X cyborgs are more machine than living creature, and their ideal is to become a disembodied digital intellect with a million camera eyes and endless tentacles. They made the machines, and now the machines have become them.

The Void Engineers might be the most idealistic of the Technocrats, but they long ago abandoned any interest in life here on Earth with the rest of us. They want to go out there to see what lies beyond, and they're willing to let the rest of the Technocracy do whatever it wants with the world they're leaving behind. Even if they do find new worlds out there, odds are that they'll try and do the same thing that they're doing to this one, slowly smother them, then rape and poison them before moving on.

MARAUDERS

I actually heard someone say once that the Marauders seemed like natural allies for the Verbena. After all, don't many Marauders want to restore the Mythic Age and bring magic back to the world? Isn't that what we want? Putting aside the fact that most Verbena don't want a return to the Mythic Age as it once was, how can

you be allied with a hungry tiger, or with a hurricane? You'd have an easier time of it than becoming friends with a Marauder.

The Mad Ones are just that, mad, and their madness can be contagious. If anyone suggests to you that the Marauders are potential allies, run, don't walk, away from there. The Marauders are actually the exact opposite of our Tradition. There are stories of the Wyck fighting such creatures of chaos in the ancient times, before the world was laid out as it is now. The Wyck tamed chaos and helped bring order out of madness. They protected and nurtured the people.

Some believe that it might be possible to heal the Marauders, to bring them out of their Quiet and restore a semblance of sanity. It's a noble goal, but I'll admit that I'm glad I'm not the one trying to do it.

NEPHANDI

If the Marauders are chaotic forces deserving of our respect and perhaps our pity, then the Nephandi are enemies truly worthy of nothing more than destruction. They serve forces of corruption, like a disease infecting the Tellurian, and just like a disease, they're willing to destroy the body that they live in. In fact, most Nephandi are eager to do just that.

The Fallen Ones have used our love of life and all its pleasures against us in the past. They're tempters, which is why I say that it's better to be satisfied with life than to try to "purify" yourself with denial. It's in that denial that the Nephandi creep in, whispering promises about the things that you want but think you shouldn't have.

INTERLUDE: MIDSUMMERTIME'S EVE



The initiates gathered for the celebration of the longest day of the year and the recognition of passing the mid-point in their year-and-a-day journey, from Samhain to Samhain. They waited somewhat nervously in their robes, not having been told exactly what to expect.

They stood arrayed in a circle around the Life-Tree, a gnarled old oak that grew in the midst of the farm's land. It had long since cleared the space around it of other trees, and stood along, tall and proud, its branches reaching up to the sky, crowned with a full spray of leaves that whispered in the breeze. Its trunk was thick and strong, its roots digging deep down into the earth. The circle cultivated mistletoe, which grew along some of the Life-Tree's branches, and the initiates knew that tonight would be the night to harvest that most sacred of herbs. Already the white cloth and the small sickle were laid out near the base of the tree.

As the sun sank down below the horizon, painting the clouds gold, pink and purple, the gentle strains of Teague's harp could be heard, and the New Hope Circle approached. They entered the circle one by one, with Jon leading the way as always and Teague following last, four of them taking up places at the quarters while Jon and Kamera moved to the center of the circle as the last notes of the harp died away.

Following Jon's guidance, they cast the sacred circle and invoked the power of the four directions, the four elements. Kamera invoked the power of the Goddess, and Jon called upon the power of the God. Then they summoned the quarters to join them, as Takoda lifted Aileen up to cut the first sprigs of mistletoe from the branches of the tree, while Teague led the circle in song. Kamera caught the sprigs in the white cloth before taking one and dipping it into a goblet, which she offered to Jon. Then Deborah presented him with a small cake, which he took and ate. Then he addressed the gathered circle.

"Tonight," he said, "is the shortest night of the year. It is the peak of the sun's power, but also when the wheel turns into a growing darkness. We recognize and honor the coming darkness as a part of the cycle, but we acknowledge that we will come through it into the light again. All things pass in their time, and the wheel turns and they come again."

Jon untied his robe and let it slip from his shoulders, standing unclad before the Life-Tree. The sun painted the clouds orange and bloody. Jon spread his arms, as if to gather up the last rays of light into them as Kamera moved behind him.

Her hand brushed across his back and he shivered.

"I'm ready," he said softly.

"I can't," she whispered. "Jon, I can't..."

"You can," he said, without turning to look at her. "You have to."

"I love you," she sobbed, tears streaming down her face.

"I know. I love you, too. I always have, and I always will, no matter what."

The sun sank, and there was a cry, torn from the depths of two souls, mingled together in the shadows. It was a primal wail, like the first breath of a newborn, calling out to the Great Mother.

None of the initiates could say that they saw the strike, only a flash of the sickle and the gushing of lifeblood onto the ground and the roots of the great tree, Jon's body sinking to the earth, held in Kamera's arms, her robe dark crimson in the fading light. They heard only the echoes of the fading cry and Kamera's sobs, followed by Teague's voice raised in song, and they all felt something, a stirring deep in the earth beneath their feet, a groaning from the trees and from the Life-Tree itself.

The light faded and the darkness came as they stood, entranced, feeling the pulse of life growing stronger, feeling the land and the sky open their arms to receive their children and welcome them home. It was ancient. It was primal. It was power beyond words.

It was magic, and it was returning.





CHAPTER TWO ⊕: BLESSINGS ⊕ OF THE ∏ ⊕ ⊕ ⊕

Eye of newt, toe of frog, wool of bat and tongue of dog...

—William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*



Many different threads make up the tapestry that is the Verbena. While all of the Traditions incorporate different cultures and factions, the Verbena have somehow managed to remain distinct while also remaining clear on their overall Tradition. The mixing and matching of different cultures has also led to the rise of new colors and offshoots within the Verbena,

carrying many of the qualities of those who came before them, but still their style is uniquely their own.

The colorful history of the Tradition forms a rich compost of decaying beliefs, ideas and techniques (and some modern Verbena would say that “compost” is an apt metaphor for the discarded elements of their Tradition). In that soil, cultures cross-pollinate, the seeds of new ideas germinate, and young shoots spring up around the base of the great World Tree, stretching up to the light. Still the great tree that is the Verbena still stands, shedding its leaves and scattering its seeds with the seasons, growing more gnarled with age and wisdom with the passing of generations, but still deeply rooted in the earth and reaching its branches up toward the sky.

THE TRUNK ⊕ OF THE TREE: CIRCLES WITHIN CIRCLES



To outsiders the “organization” of the Verbena is something of an oxymoron. While it’s true that the Verbena value their independence and individuality, their Tradition is not the complete anarchy that others believe it is. There is structure to the Verbena, though it’s not necessarily a structure others recognize. It’s made up of structures found in nature, like a many-branching tree with a vast number of leaves.

CIRCLES

The basic organization of the Verbena is the circle, also known as a grove, coven, covenant or cabal. It is a group of Verbena gathered in common purpose. Traditionally, a circle has three, five, seven, nine or 13 members and never more than that, though modern Verbena are not always so concerned with a circle’s exact numbers. A part of the limit is practical. Circles of larger than 13 are difficult to manage, and they have a tendency to break up into smaller groups anyway.

A circle can be formal or informal depending on the desires and designs of its members. More traditional Verbena circles tend to have rituals of initiation and oaths of loyalty, harking back to the Burning Times when secrecy was vital to ensure their survival. These circles are also more likely to have formal ranks and degrees of achievement. Other Verbena circles are less formal, ranging from spiritual groups and serious scholars to discussion and casual social gatherings.

Each circle has its own rules, guidelines and traditions, as agreed upon by its members. Some circles have many, most often written down in a communal book of shadows, some of which date back to the Burning Times. Other circles have few, if any, formal rules, but they do their best to achieve understanding and consensus among their members. Despite the best of intentions, Verbena circles can occasionally be as rife with intrigue and tension as any other cabal.

Circles often form along cultural or factional lines. Like anyone else, the Verbena often gather out of common backgrounds and interests, so most circles tend to have something more in common than just being members of the Verbena. Many circles represent certain “special interests” within the Tradition, including groves of druids (traditional, reconstructionist, neo-pagan, etc.), covens of witches, circles of techno-

pagans, Gardener traditionalists, New Agers, rune-casters, eco-activists and many diverse other interests.

Verbena circles are not even required to be entirely Verbena, and many include mages belonging to other Traditions. Like many cabals, circles can consist of a diverse group of mages with a common interest. Dreamspeakers and Ecstatics are the most common, but Verbena belong to circles and cabals that include members of every one of the nine Traditions (and even some Hollow Ones). Conservative Verbena barely acknowledge these “bastardized” cabals, but more liberal Verbena generally see them as a good thing.

A circle might have a chantry or even a Node in its care. Generally the older, more powerful and more influential the circle is, the greater its resources are. The majority of Verbena circles do not have access to Nodes (other than what is provided by their elders) and many have fairly limited chantries. This has changed somewhat as younger Verbena have occupied the chantries and Nodes of elders who are trapped beyond the Gauntlet in the Umbra or lost to the Avatar Storm, but there are still relatively few Nodes to go around.

RANKS AND RÔLES

The Verbena generally tend to shy away from a formal system of ranks. Even Verbena conservatives use only a loose ranking based on experience and mastery of the Spheres, similar to the ranks used throughout the Traditions. (Indeed, their use within the Verbena dates back to the founding of the Tradition and the Council of Nine.) The only common ranks or titles in use within the Verbena are novice (or apprentice), initiate and elder. An initiate is any fully initiated member of the Verbena, though that status is often somewhat vague, since no accepted standards for initiation exist. Elder is likewise a broad term. For some, it refers to true Verbena masters, many of whom are now lost beyond the Gauntlet. For others, it is merely a token of respect to the more experienced members of the Tradition. Elders wield no formal power other than the respect they command.

Some particular roles have developed within the Tradition, though not all Verbena circles observe them and many Verbena shift from one role to another. The most common role is that of high priestess or priest, who functions as the leader in ritual matters. Traditional circles usually have both a high priestess and a high priest who are considered the co-leaders of the circle

NOTEWORTHY CIRCLES

There are numerous Verbena (or mostly Verbena) circles around the world. A few of the better-known ones include the following:

The Bardic College: Devoted to keeping the ancient bardic traditions alive, the Bardic College is a loose circle of Verbena who both maintain and perform ancient songs, epic poems and chants. They also seek out and teach potential future bards. The master-bards of the College operate fairly independently for the most part, occasionally gathering for grand circles where they perform their arts and demonstrate the abilities of their apprentices and students. Although it was originally Celtic in background, the College has adapted to the times and now includes members of Finnish, Russian, Germanic, Mediterranean, Native American and African heritage. It now encompasses the collected lore of many cultures.

Circle of the Crossroads: A Verbena circle dedicated to the worship of the Loas of Voudoun, which grew out of contact between the Verbena and the Bata'a in the Mississippi Delta region around New Orleans. The circle works to preserve Voudoun traditions and rites while studying much of the African root culture. Members of the Circle of the Crossroads are known for their knowledge of spirits and the Umbra, and for their ability to navigate the hazards of the Avatar Storm. They have helped lay many ghosts and other spirits stirred up by the storm to rest. The Circle of the Crossroads frequently works in tandem with mages of the Dreamspeaker and Hollow One Traditions as well.

The Daughters of Hecate: An all-female circle of Verbena in Greece, dedicated to the service of the goddess Hecate, the "witch queen of the crossroads." The Daughters each come from a background where they have suffered their own personal tragedies, but they find strength and healing through their faith and devotion to the goddess. Seekings in the Dark Umbra have placed them in touch with the power of their own righteous anger, which they have actively turned toward constructive ends. Although the Daughters of Hecate are ultimately devoted to healing, they are also not to be trifled with, and have been known to act as instruments of justice as well.

The Glastonbury Circle: In England lies Glastonbury Tor, an important sacred site to the Verbena. The Glastonbury Circle is devoted to maintaining and protect-

ing the site and the Node there from exploitation and destruction. They also teach seekers who come to them to learn about the Old Ways, and many of them follow a Celtic tradition strongly based on the legends of King Arthur, who is associated with the Tor. Some members of the Glastonbury Circle believe that they are the keepers of Arthur's mythic thread, and that the legend that he will return when England needs him most is true. Or it will be as long as they continue to believe.

New Hope Farm: A circle of relatively young Verbena who run an organic cooperative farm that doubles as a place of learning and apprenticeship for new Verbena initiates. New Hope Farm is described in detail in Chapter Three.

The Ring of Asatru: One of many Verbena circles dedicated to the Aesir (the gods of the old Norse pantheon), the Ring of Asatru is based in Scandinavia with a particularly large presence in Iceland, the lands of its ancestors, near the roots of the World Tree. The members of the Ring, both men and women, are dedicated to maintaining the worship of the Old Gods. They are also active with ecological concerns, and they try to protect unspoiled areas from exploitation. They work hard to overcome the stigma of groups like the Iron Circle, and they work against the prejudice toward the Asatru faith and their Valdaermen ancestors. They wish to overcome stereotypes and heal old wounds, but they are also proud, so change has come slowly.

The Iron Circle: The Iron Circle is not a part of the Verbena Tradition, but it was once, much to the shame of all Verbena, particularly the inheritors of the Germanic and Scandinavian traditions (e.g., the Ring of Asatru). Radical conservative rune-workers broke away from the body of the Verbena in the 1920s and '30s, leading to the formation of the Iron Circle, one of several cabals that supported the supremacy of the Aryan race and the rise of the Nazi party in Germany. Although most of the rogue Verbena died during and shortly after World War II, some survived and groups like the Iron Circle still exist. They remain fanatically devoted to fascist and neo-Nazi causes and dream of regaining a measure of their former power and influence. Many of them are ardent fans of death metal or black metal music, and some of their mystical praxis resembles that of Nephandic magi.

(though one or the other might have a superior position in some circles). Feminist circles have only a high priestess, while rare male-dominated circles have only a high priest. Many circles rotate the duties of leadership (ritual and otherwise) among their members or choose as the situation demands.

Verbena often honor the four quarters or directions in their rituals, and circle members might be assigned to the quarters for a particular time. In some circles, this includes handling other matters associated with that quarter's aspect or element. For example, the north is associated with the element of earth, so that circle member might also be responsible for the earthy, practical matter of the circle like

the care of the chantry, supplies and such. The western quarter (associated with water) might be responsible for the health and well-being of the circle, and so forth. Other circles choose quarters as needed for their rituals and have no assigned duties for them.

Finally, some Verbena circles have a warder or guardian who is responsible for the safety and security of the circle. This practice dates back to the Burning Times, when Verbena circles required a watcher or lookout to be on guard and to warn the circle of imminent dangers of all kinds. In modern times, the warder is often on guard against threats like Technocratic agents or even mundane problems that threaten the circle.

GRAND CIRCLES

Individual circles are often the largest structures within the Verbena Tradition. When there is a need, a group of circles gathers together to form a "grand circle" (also known as a "grand coven" or "convocation"), a larger organization made up of smaller parts to work together toward a common cause. Grand circles rarely convene for long, usually for just enough time to deal with whatever concern brought them into being, then they go their separate ways. Some of the most notable grand circles in Verbena history include the first grand circle that created the Tradition and the grand circle convened in England to foil the Nazi invasion.

Grand circles are not convened solely to deal with problems. Some parts of the world, particularly Europe and North America, play host to regular grand circles, where Verbena gather to celebrate the turning of the Wheel of the Year and their great seasonal festivals. The joining of these circles is also a time for exchanging news, gossip, mystical insights and other information, as well as renewing ties between the diverse members of the Tradition. Grand circles are also often occasions for initiating new members of the Verbena or introducing apprentices to a wider view of their Tradition, beyond the bounds of their own mentor or circle.

STONES AND GROVES: SACRED SITES

The land is sacred to the Verbena, so it is no surprise that they hold many places dear to their Tradition and their history. Unfortunately, their efforts to protect these sacred places have sometimes failed over the years, leading to the destruction or neutralization of many Verbena Nodes. They fiercely defend those they have left, though how long they can do so remains to be seen.

One tactic the Verbena adopted to save their sacred sites was to raise public awareness of them, creating an

outcry among the Sleepers and a groundswell of support when Technocratic puppets attempted to destroy or sanitize them. Unfortunately, this trick backfired on the Verbena when increased public awareness led to tourism and Sleepers treading carelessly on their once-sacred ground. In the end, this destroyed or polluted some sites as surely as the Technocracy would have. Now the Verbena tend to keep their remaining Nodes and sacred sites secret, even from their fellow Traditionalists.

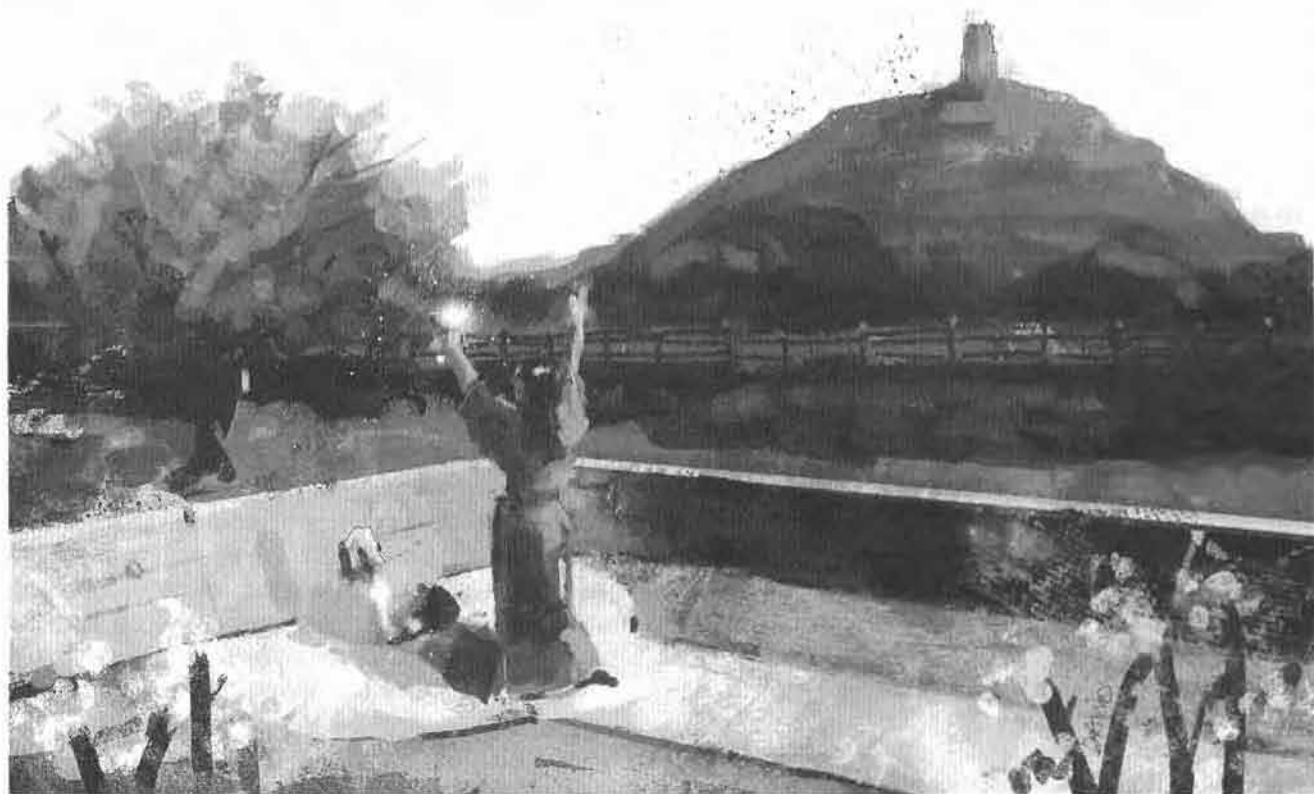
According to the Verbena, their greatest sacred sites are creations of the Wyck surviving from the ancient mythic age. These sites often feature standing stones, arranged to tap and channel the power of the Nodes there.

Europe: The cradle of the Verbena Tradition, Europe remains the home of many of its sacred places and most important sites, though some have been lost and others are threatened by the expanding influence of the modern world.

The most famous sacred site of the Verbena is **Stonehenge** in England, also known as "the Giant's Dance." Verbena tales say that the Wyck created Stonehenge by petrifying ancient giants they warred with in the mythic age or that they transported the stones to their current site by powerful magic. Certainly great monoliths of Stonehenge are not native to the area, and they must have been transported from at least 200 miles away. Modern scholars believe Stonehenge was a kind of calendar, but the truth is more than just that. Stonehenge was perfectly aligned with the turning of the Great Wheel, tapping the Quintessence of a powerful Node. Standing in the midst of the great stones, the Wyck could see the whole of the Tellurian spread out before them, in perfect balance. They could see the past, present and future written in the stars.

Modern Verbena make little use of Stonehenge for two reasons. First, it is so well known that it is difficult to access and use in secret for their rituals, though the Tradition does still have enough influence to close off Stonehenge for its use if need be. Second, the circle has deteriorated greatly over the years, throwing off its delicate balance. The perfect window that Stonehenge once offered on the Tellurian is now so cracked and warped that it is of little use. Perhaps this is why a recent Verbena rite at the circle showed a red star looming overhead and tremendous uncertainty in the future.

Perhaps the greatest Verbena sacred site in Europe is **Glastonbury Tor**, the legendary isle of Avalon in western England. Centuries ago, floodwaters and a deep marsh surrounded the Tor (a steep, rounded hill), making it an island that was known as Avalon or the "Isle of Apples," associated with the otherworld. A profound shallowing existed there, granting passage into the Umbra, as well as



both the Underworld and the Fae Realms. In King Arthur's time, Avalon was one of the last strongholds of the Old Faith, and it held the Cauldron of Ceridwen, which could heal and restore life. Arthur was taken there after falling in battle with Mordred, and some believe that he sleeps in the otherworld, awaiting his time to return.

Although the Tor has been in Christian hands for centuries and a church has been built atop it, it remains firmly in the hands of the Verbena. It is the site of regular pagan gatherings in England and a place of pilgrimage for Celtic pagans around the world. The shallowing is not as deep as it once was, but the hill is still connected to the Umbra and the fae, though it now takes magic to access those places, where once it did not.

Other Verbena sites in Europe include the standing stones of Avebury, the burial mounds of Newgrange in England and the megaliths of Carnac in Brittany. The Externsteine in Germany is a towering collection of limestone pillars known as "the German Stonehenge." The shrines of the Earth Mother in Malta and the mazes and temples of Crete are held sacred by the Verbena, along with some old temples in Greece. Dozens of other ancient sites lie scattered across Europe, protected and preserved as bastions of the Old Ways.

North America: The Verbena share many of their sacred sites in North America with the Dreamspeakers

and with the various other Traditions that have claimed Nodes over the years. The major sacred sites of the Verbena are primarily along the west coast of North America, stretching from Santa Cruz up to Vancouver, BC. The central east coast of America also holds many such sacred sites. Most of the sites in the desert southwest and Midwest are claimed by the Dreamspeakers, though they sometimes permit the Verbena access to them.

Mystery Hill in New Hampshire, the megalithic site known as America's Stonehenge, is attributed to the Wyck and is situated over a moderately powerful Node. Its relative isolation allows the Verbena more regular use of it, though it remains a tourist attraction and historical monument, requiring them to moderate their use to times when the site is closed to outsiders.

South along the coast is the city of **Salem**, Massachusetts, perhaps most publicly associated with witches and witchcraft of any place in the world. Although the famous Salem Witch Trials did not actually involve the Verbena directly, the city has become a strong anchor for their mythic threads and a center where pagan folk gather. Many Verbena find the "Salem scene" painfully trendy and pretentious, filled with wannabes and the "nouveau witch," but it cannot be denied that it is both a haven for members of the Tradition and a useful smokescreen, allowing them to hide true magic amidst the gross commercialism.

Gallows Hill, where those accused of witchcraft were hanged, is a place of power for the Tradition. The frequent public rituals performed there provide ideal cover for the occasional genuine rites of the Verbena.

Other Verbena sites in North America include Nodes in the Berkshires and Ozark Mountains, sacred groves scattered in forests across the continent and the great redwoods and rainforests of the Pacific Northwest. Western Washington, Oregon and northern California still possess several moderately powerful Nodes that have survived the age unscathed, including several sacred springs, particularly Breitenbush and Cougar hot springs. New Orleans and its surrounding bayous draw Verbena with ties to Voudoun, and Mardi Gras is a magical time for mages of several Traditions, including the Verbena and the Cult of Ecstasy.

South America: The vast Amazon Basin is held sacred by the Verbena as a cradle of life, supporting a diverse range of species and many Nodes known to the native peoples there. Verbena eco-activists struggle against the ongoing destruction of the rainforest under the guidance of the Syndicate and the rest of the Technocracy. They find allies among the Dreamspeakers and scattered sorcerers, but their efforts have only managed to slow the devastation slightly thus far.

South American Verbena help safeguard the Mayan and Aztec ruins in Central America. The Incan ruins of Peru are largely under the aegis of the region's Dreamspeakers, though the Verbena come to their aid when they can. The Verbena in South America spring largely from the African branches of the Tradition including Brujeria, Santeria and Candomble, along with a few scattered priests of old Aztec, Mayan and Toltec ways.

Africa: The roots of the African traditions like Voudoun and Santeria reach back into the depths of the continent. War and political upheaval has destroyed some sacred sites and left others all but useless to the Traditions or the Technocracy. Still the Verbena call some places in Africa their own.

In Nigeria, to the west of the rain forests and the Niger River, lie the remains of **Ife**, the first Yoruban capital. The Verbena believe that the Wyck (or their immediate Aeduna descendents) established the city, which became the heart of an African Empire for a time. The gods and spirits worshipped by the Yorubans now wear the masks of the Loas and Orishas of other traditions.

Mount Kilimanjaro in central Africa is also considered a sacred place by many, and Verbena and Dreamspeakers (along with members of other Traditions) visit and speak with the spirits there. Shallowings along the slopes of the mountain lead into the fabled Paths of the Wyck.

THE UMBRA: THE PATHS OF WYCK

In the Mythic Age, the Wyck traveled the world along paths blazed through the Umbra, connecting many of the sacred sites they built over Nodes to harness their power. The Quintessence of the Nodes sustained the Paths of the Wyck long after their creators had passed into memory, and their secrets were entrusted to their descendents — first the Aeduna and, in time, the Verbena.

Over the centuries, the paths have been both a sanctuary and a means of connecting the scattered followers of the Old Ways. They allowed the Verbena to escape from their enemies and flee into the Umbra. They helped ensure the survival of many Bygones and mythic beasts when the Verbena opened the paths to them in the Dragon Exodus, allowing them to seek shelter in the Umbra, away from the fire and steel of those who hunted them.

The paths wind through the Umbra like a vast interconnected spider web stretching around the world. Travelers enter and exit them through particular sites scattered across the world. Many of the portals into the Paths of the Wyck have been forgotten or lost with the Nodes that supported them, creating dangerous gaps along the paths and roads that trail off into the Umbra in places, making their navigation more difficult. The loss of some of the Nodes that once maintained them, and the effects of the Avatar Storm, have caused the Paths of the Wyck to deteriorate in places. Yet the paths are generally safe from some of the dangers of the Umbra (including one in particular).

The Paths of the Wyck have become an additional advantage for the Verbena who know how to find and use them because they are safe from the effects of the Avatar Storm. The Quintessence that sustains the paths also helps shield them from the Storm, allowing travelers to walk the Paths of the Wyck safely without the guidance of a Stormwarden. Travelers must stay on the paths to retain their protection, however, meaning they cannot wander in simply any direction they wish. Furthermore, the paths are limited to the Penumbra between various points on the Earth. Although legends exist of paths that extend into the Deep Umbra or the Dark Umbra, such paths are lost to the Verbena (if they ever truly existed). It is impossible to use the paths to reach the Horizon Realms or beyond, and those mages trapped in the Umbra by the Avatar Storm cannot use them to return.

Due to the decay of time, some paths simply end, leaving travelers exposed to the Avatar Storm and permitting spirits from the Penumbra to slip in. This means that travelers may encounter the occasional Umbrood along the paths, which might not take kindly to visitors. Generally, Nodes that have been sanitized by the Tech-

nocracy, and even some that have been in the hands of other Traditions for a long time, do not connect to the paths, and the Wyck never connected all the world's Nodes in the first place — just sites they deemed important. Whether or not two particular points are connected by the Paths of the Wyck is up to the Storyteller.

THE PATHS

The Paths of the Wyck once passed between nearly every Node and sacred spot on the planet. When they did, the mages of the Old Faith (ancestors of the Verbena) had nearly as much access to the Umbra as the Spirit Talkers do. That, however, was millennia ago. The paths still pass between many of the major Nodes, but many are no longer usable. In the modern era, the Verbena are limited to a fraction of the paths that once extended through the Umbra, and the Avatar Storm only complicated matters further.

The Paths of the Wyck allow for travel mostly throughout the Penumbra, though there are rumors of paths that enter the various levels of the Umbra. Whether those rumors are true, and what effect the Avatar Storm has had on those paths, is left up to the Storyteller.

A Verbena may use either Correspondence 1 or Spirit 1 to find and enter the paths at a Node or sacred spot. He needs one additional success for each person entering the path with him, and each additional success beyond that cuts down travel time to the destination by a factor of 2.

Example: *Oak Merrywether and his companion Baxter are in rural Ireland and need to get to a stone circle in northern England. They travel to a sacred spring where Merrywether knows the entrance to a path is. He slowly and carefully casts the appropriate rote to find the entrance and enters the path. Since he performed the rote as an extended Effect, he is able to accrue four successes above what the simple spell needs. Oak takes in one*

The Verbena have kept the properties of the Paths of the Wyck largely secret, and they rarely entrust their knowledge to others. Verbena skilled in navigating the paths are important as messengers and guides for the Traditions when there is a need to traverse the Umbra safely in the absence of a Stormwarden.

additional person, using up one of his extra successes, and he uses the other three successes toward travel time: Three successes times the factor of two means that travel time is one sixth what it would have been otherwise.

The next day, Oak and his companion pop out at the stone circle in England, only slightly the worse for wear and having made remarkable time, particularly in light of the fact that they had to cross the ocean.

Obviously, a given Node might not be an entrance to the Paths of the Wyck. If there is no entry to the paths, the Effect will make that clear. Alternatively, there might be an entry into the paths, but the path could extend five feet and disappear. The Verbena mage must be prepared for anything when trying a new entrance to the paths.

MET: Traveling the Paths of the Wyck requires a rote of the same name, requiring either Apprentice Correspondence or Spirit magic as well as access to a suitable Node to travel from. A successful casting allows the Verbena to travel to a destination along the path in one-half the normal amount of time. The Storyteller may adjust this time depending on the needs of the story and the distance between the two points. Damage from the Avatar Storm is suffered normally unless sufficient precautions are taken. Each additional grade of success allows the mage to take one additional passenger, or to reduce travel time by an additional increment (1/2 to 1/3, 1/3 to 1/4, etc.).

BRANCHES OF THE TREE: FACTIONS



The Verbena Tradition arose from diverse cultures, united in the common cause of survival in the face of the growing power of the Order of Reason and its crusade against pagan folk in Europe. Later additions to the Tradition joined for much the same reason: survival in the face of the growing power of the Technocracy and the goals it supported.

Despite (or perhaps because of) their diversity, the Verbena did not divide among cultural lines. Instead, the major factions of the Tradition are divided by their views on the Verbena's proper role — and by extension the proper role of all mages — in the scheme of things. This four-fold division corresponds to many such divisions noted by followers of the Old Ways: the four directions, four winds, four elements, four seasons and so forth. Modern mages tied them to the four recognized aspects or essences of their Avatars.

GARDENERS OF THE TREE

The Gardeners are Verbena traditionalists, inheritors of a line that stretches back to the Aeduna and the fabled Wyck themselves, the very first of their kind.

The history of the Gardeners is the accepted history of the Verbena, though the faction itself only came into being with the formation of the modern Tradition. There have always been keepers of the Old Ways, honoring the rites handed down from their ancestors. When the Verbena gathered to join the Council of Nine Mystic Traditions, many of them feared the loss of their ways in the face of the growing power of Christendom and the Science championed by the Order of Reason.

In truth, some of the early Gardeners also feared the contamination and dilution of their Tradition. Their ways were not for everyone, but secrets passed along family lines. Becoming a mage was not just a matter of interest and talent, it was something in the blood. The Gardeners felt the Tradition should be exclusive; they did not want to see the Verbena adopting any random waif or Orphan who came to them. They did not want to see the secrets of their ancestors passed to the unworthy.

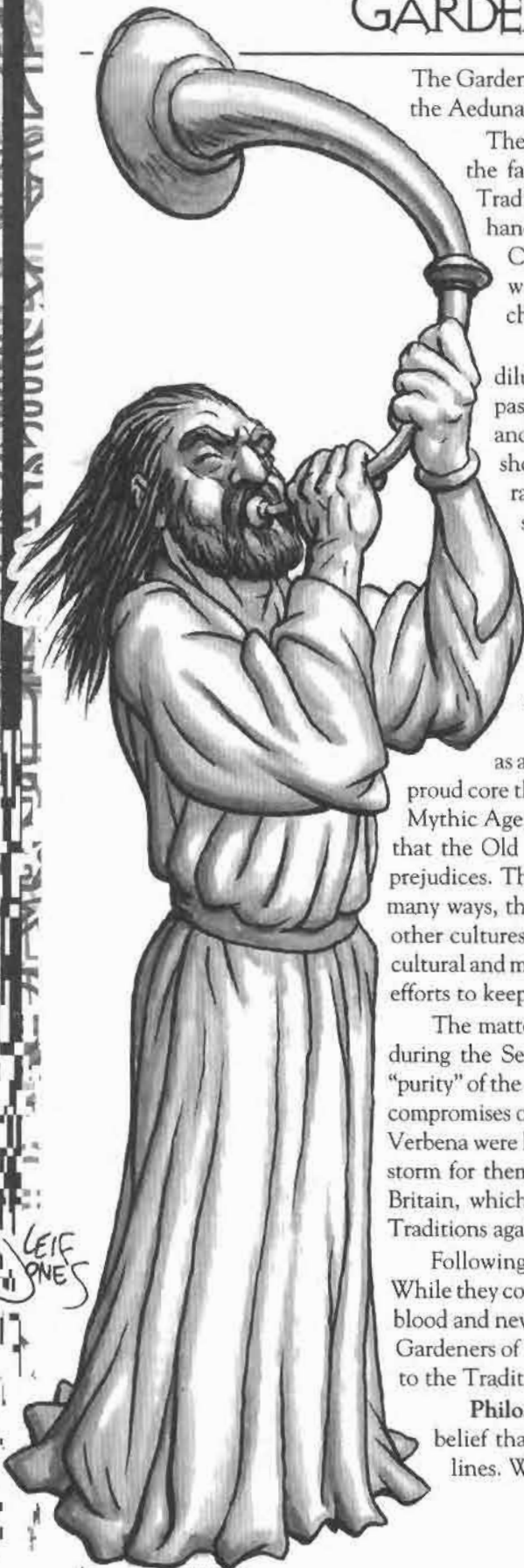
Of course, the Verbena still needed new blood to revitalize the old families and carry on their traditions. The Gardeners recognized this and permitted carefully chosen outsiders to join their ranks, but the path was not an easy one. Even to this day, the rites to join the Verbena are demanding and not for the faint of heart. The Gardeners saw this as safeguarding their ways, sheltering the roots of the Great Tree.

For a long time, the Gardeners of the Tree held sway over the Verbena as a whole, keeping the Tradition both united and distinct. They formed the proud core that carried the Wise Ones through the Burning Times and the end of the Mythic Age, allowing them to weather the Order of Reason's crusade. They ensured that the Old Ways survived, but the traditionalists also clung to old divisions and prejudices. They recalled the times before the Verbena were forced to unite, and in many ways, they longed for those bygone days when they did not need to depend on other cultures and peoples. They discouraged the mixing of the Tradition's different cultural and mythic threads, though it happened anyway, in spite of the Gardeners' best efforts to keep them wholly separate and pure.

The matter came to a head when a Verbena splinter faction allied with the Nazis during the Second World War. Extremist rune-workers, they wanted to ensure the "purity" of the Aryan race and tradition. No longer would they tolerate the mongrels and compromises of the Verbena. They would reclaim their ways and their power. The other Verbena were horrified, but many chose to abstain from the conflict, seeing it as another storm for them to survive. Some Verbena chose to support the Allies, particularly in Britain, which was long a Verbena stronghold. They worked to unite the apathetic Traditions against a common foe and to balance the workings of their rogue brethren.

Following the war's end, the Gardeners softened their view on traditionalism. While they continued to maintain the Old Ways, most came to accept the need for new blood and new ways in the Tradition, if it was to remain healthy and strong. Still, the Gardeners of the Tree remain responsible for keeping the Old Ways alive and tending to the Tradition's roots so that the Verbena do not forget where they came from.

Philosophy: "The blood will tell," say the Gardeners, and they hold to the belief that power and prestige among the Verbena is passed down along family lines. While they are no longer quite as aristocratic and exclusive as they once



were, many Gardeners still take great pride in their ability to trace their lineage back hundreds of years (if not longer), to some of the greatest names in Verbena history.

Their sense of history gives the Gardeners a great deal of patience, and stubbornness, as the other factions point out. They are as patient and enduring as the oak, but sometimes just as slow to take action. For the Gardeners, living in the moment does not mean acting in haste, but being aware that the future will come in its own time, and the best one can do is live in the present.

Style: As might be expected, the Gardeners of the Tree adhere to a rigorously traditional style of magic based on their cultural lineage. They are the few examples of relatively pure druidic, Nordic, Tuscan and Thessalian magic left among the Verbena. Their magic is often some of the most primal and visceral, just as their ancestors performed it before them for untold generations. Gardeners tend to rely on tried-and-true methods and traditional formulas. Rotes are especially common in their mystical repertoires, and new ways of doing things are suspect. To their way of thinking, it's quite presumptuous to claim to have improved upon millennia of traditional technique and understanding.

In addition to the Verbena's specialization in Life magic, the Gardeners of the Tree also possess a notable talent with the Sphere of Matter. Potion brewing and object enchantment are important parts of this faction's magic.

Organization: The Gardeners are the most organized of the Verbena's factions. Although individual Gardeners hold to the traditions they were taught, many different threads run through the faction, each distinct and separate, and the Gardeners prefer to keep it that way. While Gardeners of different lineages respect one another and work together when necessary, they otherwise prefer to go their separate ways.

Gardeners maintain the cohesiveness of the Verbena by organizing covens and circles, and the grand covens where groups of Verbena gather to discuss matters and work magic together. They maintain that the disparate and scattered nature of the Verbena is actually one of the Tradition's strengths. Their small covens often react to changes more quickly than the larger gatherings and chantries of other Traditions do. As with cells of the body, the death or sickness of a few does not immediately condemn the rest, allowing them to fight off threats to the health of the Tradition as a whole.

Gardeners recognize few ranks. Elders are respected, honored and deferred to in most cases, but all members are considered equals and treated as such.

Family and lineage are immensely important to the Gardeners. Many of the great Gardener families claim pedigrees extending back to the Wyck themselves (some with more credibility than others). With the aid of magic, witch families tend to be remarkably fecund, not to mention strangely lucky. In certain regions, their extended families are powerful politically as well as mystically. Certain small towns throughout Europe and America are even controlled by tightly knit families of witches, though mystical talent no longer follows the lines of heredity as predictably as it once did.

Initiation: Once a supplicant joined the ranks of the Gardeners of the Tree only by proving a lineage that was worthy. The scions of pagan families and clans stretching back to the earliest days dominated the faction. While the faction has loosened up, a degree of respect and prestige is accorded to those of a great and honored lineage.

Even the best lineage is not enough, however, if it goes untapped. Acceptance into the ranks of the Gardeners requires dedication and hard work. There are tests and trials of the supplicant's knowledge, scholarship, persistence, patience, will and spirit. The druids of the faction, for example, emphasize that the training of one of their number traditionally takes 21 years. Would-be Gardeners are expected to learn vast bodies of lore and to be well versed in the history and ways of their Tradition.

Cultures: The Gardeners make up the most Eurocentric faction of the Verbena. They recognize that other cultures have traditions that reach back to the same Wyck roots, but those cultures weren't *there* when the Verbena came into being, so they are by definition "newcomers," even if they have been part of the Verbena for over a century.

Therefore, many of the most conservative Gardeners have Celtic or Germanic roots, maintaining the traditions of the druids and the rune-magicians of old. The Germanic Gardeners have worked hard to overcome the taint of Nazism while maintaining their Aryan pride and traditions. There are known to be some neo-Nazis still within the Verbena, but they are at the fringes of the Tradition, and they have no real influence.

Ironically, the Gardeners also attract many new cultures into the Verbena simply because they wish to protect and maintain their own distinct identity rather than being subsumed into a "generic" Verbena Tradition. Thus Gardeners from African, Hispanic and Native American cultures have helped add to the diversity of the Verbena as a whole.

Associations: The element of earth, the north direction, the season of winter, the colors green and brown and the pentacle.

TWISTERS OF FATE

Verbena scholars believe that the name of the legendary Wyck means "wise" but also "to twist, bend or shape" — fitting since the Wise Ones twisted reality in accordance with their wills. The Twisters of Fate hark back to that primal essence of the Verbena's distant ancestors, the power to shape the world. The existence of the Twisters (or Spinners) of Fate as a faction of the Verbena can be traced back to the earliest days, before recorded history.

The Twisters maintain that the first of their kind were the primal shamans, wise women, healers and willworkers of humanity. Invested with shards of the Pure Ones, they held the insight and the power to shape reality to their liking and to suit the needs of their people. These shamans had a keen understanding of life, intimately associated with its cycles, in tune with its pulse and rhythm.

These willworkers became associated with the Aeduna, the inheritors of the secrets of the Wyck, ancient healers. In time, they were incorporated into the Aeduna, blending into the tapestry of the Old Faith throughout the ancient world. For a long time, they were all but indistinguishable from any other Aeduna or Old Faith mage, since they did not divide themselves into factions in the same way in those times. Still the Avatars of those first shamans continued to incarnate in new forms, over and over again.

Once the Tradition was founded and became a part of the Council of Nine, some Verbena experienced a stirring within their Avatars. Newly Awakened members of the Tradition had dreams and visions of previous lives when they were the first to tame the storm, to speak with the spirits of the plants and the beasts, to treat the sick and the injured. At the same time, the traditionalists of the Verbena stressed the maintenance of the Old Ways, and rituals became increasingly complex and intertwined. Some of the Twisters of Fate likened it to a garden being choked by weeds. They needed to clear away the undergrowth, they said, so the Verbena could breathe. It is good for a forest to burn from time to time so new growth can arise from the ashes.

So the Twisters of Fate began to break away from the traditions of the Gardeners. In retrospect, some believe that the separation drove the Gardeners deeper into their conservative ways, leading to the schism between their Germanic and Celtic cultures before and during World War II. There are those who claim that the break came with the guidance of one of the Wyck, who appeared to the primordial Verbena and re-awakened in them memories of the distant past. Whatever the case, the Twisters of Fate were no longer content to work changes within the structure set forth by the Gardeners and the elders of the Tradition. Instead, they sought out their visions and past-life memories and worked to re-capture the primal essence of their Tradition, stripped of all the various beliefs and practices that had accreted over the centuries.

The Twisters of Fate have never composed a large faction, and they remain the smallest within the Verbena, but they have grown since their early days. Even more than most Verbena, the Twisters are solitary, each seeking an understanding of the Old Ways, and occasionally passing the knowledge on to those who will listen. Their involvement in the politics of the Tradition (such as they are) is limited. Generally they are supporters of simplicity and recapturing the fundamental essence of the Wyck, the primal, mythic qualities of their Tradition.

Philosophy: The Twisters of Fate are interested in the bare essentials of both life and magic. "Live simply, so others may simply live," is a part of their credo, but more than that, they desire to recapture some of the power and wonder that the first Wise Ones, the legendary Wyck, wielded in their time. They delve into the past, seeking to learn how all the diverse cultures and paths of the Verbena (and all mages) came into being, a kind of grand-unified theory of magic and creation.

Along the way, the Twisters feel it is their duty to use their power and insight for the good of all. Of course, what constitutes "good" is something of a matter for debate, but it generally involves using magic to ease the sufferings of life for others, whether through blessings, healing, insight or simple good advice.

As their name implies, the Twisters of Fate are not above tugging on the strands of destiny to help things to come out differently. They are profoundly dedicated to the idea that people can and should make a difference, even if (*especially* if) it involves a measure of personal risk. Twisters feel that too many people, even mages, give away their power, surrendering to the demands of tradition, the expectations of society and those looking to take their power from them.

Style: "Primal" best describes the magical style of the Twisters of Fate. They manipulate the stuff of reality with little more than their bare hands, their indomitable will and whatever tools are close at hand. Their foci are either those things found easily in nature — fresh herbs, sticks, game animals, scattered stones — or their own bodies. Twisters of Fate use every part of themselves as their magical instruments. They dance and sing. They spit and bleed. They weave the threads of fate from their own hair, and they have sex beneath the open sky to raise power. Their words and actions come from their hearts and from the visions they have received. What rites they know and practice are very old, indeed.

The primal nature of their magic makes even some Verbena uncomfortable with the Twisters of Fate, and mages of other Traditions often consider them "savage" or "un-schooled" when they are actually in touch with considerable inner wisdom. Some Dreamspeakers have found similarities between the primal Verbena and themselves, and the two share a mutual respect.

The Twisters of Fate, as their name might imply, have a pronounced facility with the Sphere of Entropy as well as the Verbena's traditional Life Sphere.

Organization: The Twisters of Fate are united solely through their vision of what they once were and can be again. They have no leaders or ranks, and they have few covens or circles entirely dedicated to their faction. They honor their elders but recognize that all Avatars come from the same source and are equally as old. The vision of a young mage is no less valuable or insightful than the memories of an elder.

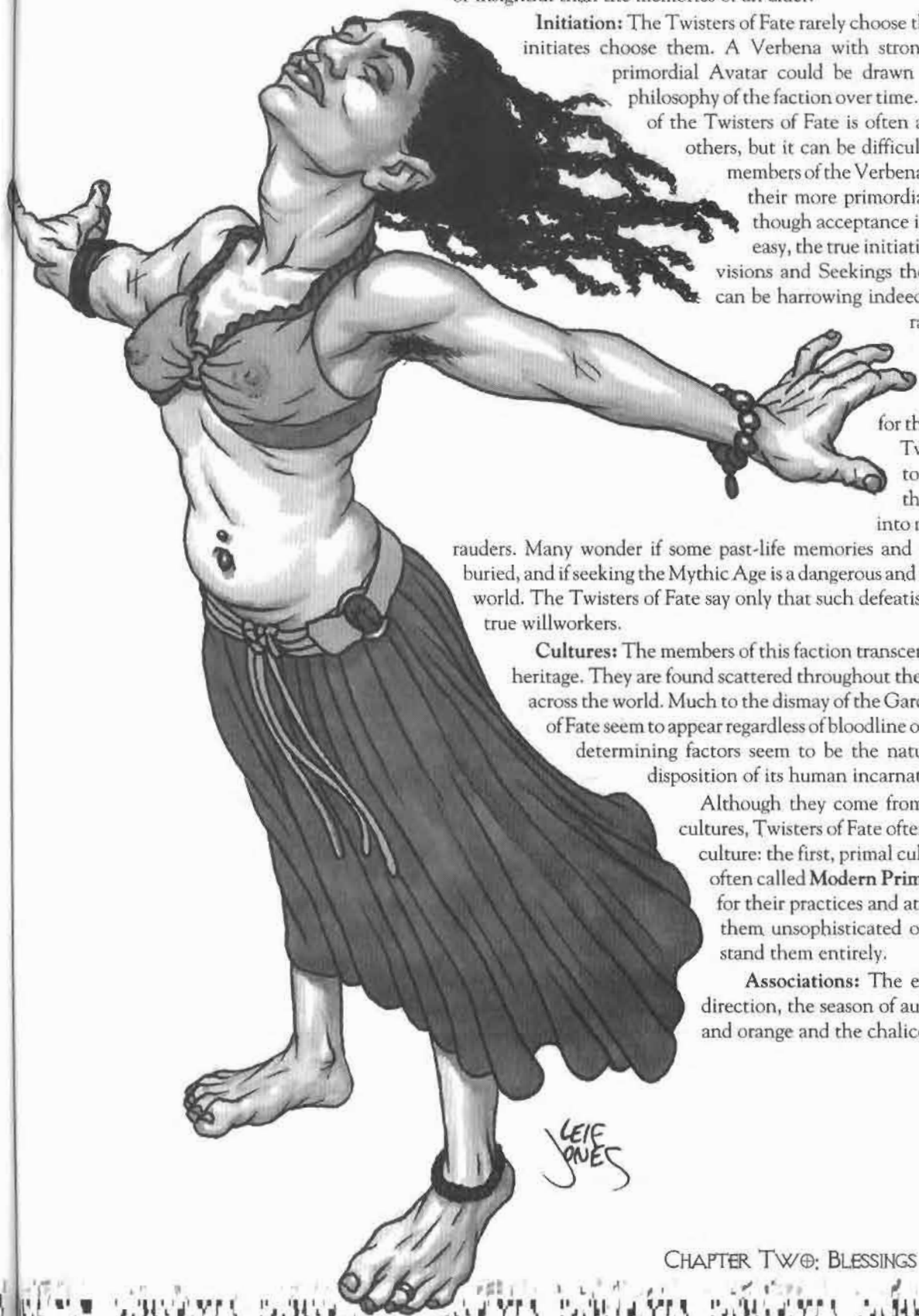
Initiation: The Twisters of Fate rarely choose their initiates. Instead, their initiates choose them. A Verbena with strong past-life memories or a primordial Avatar could be drawn to the guidance and the philosophy of the faction over time. Becoming a part of the web of the Twisters of Fate is often as simple as declaring it to others, but it can be difficult because of the way other members of the Verbena sometimes look askance at their more primordial brothers and sisters. Although acceptance into the faction is relatively easy, the true initiation comes in the form of the visions and Seekings the initiate undergoes. They can be harrowing indeed, particularly for the more rational mind caught up in the modern viewpoint and ways of doing things.

A particular concern for the Verbena is the number of Twisters of Fate who fall prey to their powerful visions, either entering Quiet or slipping into madness and becoming Marauders. Many wonder if some past-life memories and experiences are better left buried, and if seeking the Mythic Age is a dangerous and wasted effort in the modern world. The Twisters of Fate say only that such defeatist attitudes are unworthy of true willworkers.

Cultures: The members of this faction transcend cultural background and heritage. They are found scattered throughout the Verbena Tradition and all across the world. Much to the dismay of the Gardeners of the Tree, Twisters of Fate seem to appear regardless of bloodline or magical heritage. The sole determining factors seem to be the nature of the Avatar and the disposition of its human incarnation.

Although they come from diverse backgrounds and cultures, Twisters of Fate often seem to belong to a single culture: the first, primal culture of humanity. They are often called **Modern Primitives** (or **Neo-Primitives**) for their practices and attitudes, though to consider them unsophisticated or ignorant is to misunderstand them entirely.

Associations: The element of water, the west direction, the season of autumn, the colors deep blue and orange and the chalice or cauldron.



MOON-SEEKERS

If the Gardeners of the Tree are its strong trunk and the Twisters of Fate are its deep and gnarled roots, then the Moon-Seekers are the Tree of Life's many leaves (though some have likened them to the tree's "fruits and nuts" instead). Certainly, the Moon-Seekers are among the most diverse and eclectic members of a profoundly diverse and eclectic tradition.

While the Verbena have always had their traditionalists and staunch conservatives of the Old Ways, they have also had those able to look beyond the bounds of their own ways and see similarities in the ways of others, and find potential in the differences. Indeed, it is unlikely the Verbena would even exist if not for those pagans, wise ones, druids, rune-carvers and others who were able to see that the Old Faiths of Europe had a common cause and a common foe in the Order of Reason. If such pagan visionaries had not united their peoples, then the Old Faith might have died in the fires of the Burning Times.

Since the creation of the Verbena as a Tradition, the Moon-Seekers have always sought out new ways to understand the wonders of life and new things to add to the Tradition's diversity, mulch and fertilizer for the soil of the Great Tree, as it were. Wandering Moon-Seekers have found wisdom in places and people all across the world. Some of it has become part of the Verbena Tradition as a whole, while some has appealed only to small groups of Verbena, or to none other than the individual who discovered it. The Moon-Seekers don't force their approach to magic on others, but they are willing to share what they have learned. What everyone else chooses to do with it is up to them.

Moon-Seekers have been at the forefront of incorporating new crafts and mystic paths into the Verbena Tradition. To them, the work begun with the Great Rite that unified the Old Faiths of Europe continues on. In their view, the pagan peoples of the world, followers of the ways of their ancestors, those who feel the pulse of life and the dance of nature, are brothers and sisters to the Verbena. The efforts of Moon-Seeker visionaries led to the incorporation of Native American, African and some Asian crafts and

ideas into the patchwork fabric of the Verbena. In this, the Moon-Seekers have existed in balance with the Gardeners of the Great Tree, who counsel caution and promote conservatism where the Seekers forge ahead and promote change.

The occult revival in the late 19th and early 20th century was a boon to Moon-Seekers, opening up many new opportunities. The forward-thinking elements of the Gardeners disseminated and promoted the Old Ways among the Sleepers, leading to a rise in modern witchcraft and neo-paganism. The Moon-Seekers found fertile ground there for new ideas to take root and grow. While conservative Verbena were dismayed at the ways in which pop culture and the New Age movement twisted, mangled and transformed the Old Ways, the Moon-Seekers were delighted, sampling from the vast offerings of the New Age.

Many modern Moon-Seekers sprang from the seeds sown during that time, heirs of the Age of Aquarius and the Summer of Love. The faction has grown tremendously with the influx of new initiates and the new ideas they bring with them. It has led to the popular image among the Verbena of Moon-Seekers as the "nouveau witch." Conservatives and traditionalists deride them as "crystal wavers" and "New Agers" (or worse terms), but the Moon-Seekers faction is a force to be reckoned with in the Tradition, particularly since the Avatar Storm. With the Verbena's ancient masters closed off in the Seasonal Realms and other regions of the Umbra, youngsters like the Moon-Seekers have taken on the care of the Tradition and have taken on the challenge of guiding the Verbena into the future. They're intent on bringing the Tradition into the 21st century—kicking and screaming if need be.

Philosophy: "Honor the Old Ways, but live in the present," is the Moon-Seekers' credo. They firmly believe in the way of life the Verbena espouse, but they think that clinging



to ancient traditions and outmoded ways of thinking will mean stagnation and eventual death for their Tradition. Growth and change are vital elements of life — some say its very essence. For the Verbena to embody life, they must also grow and change. While there is much wisdom to be found in the ways of their ancestors, there is also just as much to be found in the ways of other people and cultures, and in the ideas of the young. The Moon-Seekers do not reject any idea out of hand, and most are willing to try anything once.

Moon-Seekers often find themselves struggling for acceptance and acknowledgment from more conservative factions such as the Gardeners and the Twisters of Fate. They consider their ways just as valid as the ancient bloodlines and the primal workings of the Wyck, but other Verbena do not always agree. Many Moon-Seekers don't particularly care what others think. Some even actively rebel against the traditionalists within the Verbena, claiming that their views are outdated and only hold the Tradition back from achieving its true potential.

Style: Always willing to try new things, Moon-Seeker magic is eclectic, to say the least. It typically blends more traditional elements with the latest New Age trends or discoveries in a patchwork that yields some surprising results. Much as the traditionalists among the Verbena look down their noses at the magic of the Moon-Seekers, they are forced to admit that it is effective.

The Moon-Seekers are the most likely to borrow foci and mystic elements from other Traditions, and most cross-Tradition mixing found within the Verbena comes from the Moon-Seekers (along with some Lifeweavers and Fate-Twisters looking for common elements in the roots of various Traditions). Factions like Clan Impossible, the Neo-Tradition Reformation Front and Voudoun draw some Moon-Seekers (see **Guide to the Traditions**, pp. 197-201 for details).

In addition to their ability with the Life Sphere, Moon-Seekers often have a relatively easy time with the Sphere of Mind as well.

Organization: More than any other faction, the Moon-Seekers are given to organizing themselves into groups, based on their common interests. Often when a particular trend or idea takes hold within the Verbena, Moon-Seekers and some few others will cluster around it, either forming a coven or a less formal group to explore it further. Most of these groups are fairly short-lived. Either interest in the idea plays itself out, or personality conflicts break the group up. Some more enduring groups have arisen from such mystical experiments, however, and they still pursue their own particular ends.

Initiation: A common expression among the Moon-Seekers is, "Initiation is an ongoing process." In practice,

initiation into the Moon-Seekers is relatively easy — it's life as a Moon-Seeker that can sometimes be difficult. They often find their challenges in gaining acceptance and respect from other members of their own Tradition, as well as in building bridges between the Verbena and other Traditions and crafts. Members of the faction rarely perform their Seekings in solitude. Instead, they find enlightenment and understanding by working with others.

Cultures: If the Moon-Seekers partake of a particular culture, then it is modern culture, that is to say every culture that they come into contact with. There are Moon-Seekers from all walks of life and most nations and cultures around the world. They also do not limit themselves to the culture of their birth. There are European Moon-Seekers drawn to Native American practices, South American Moon-Seekers working with Aborigine ways, and Asian Moon-Seekers who practice Celtic druidry. There are a number of sub-cultures within the Moon-Seekers as well.

Techno-pagans are those Verbena who embrace technology while holding true to the beliefs of the Tradition. They see no inherent conflict between the tools of science and the ways of magic, and they often form covens with like-minded Verbena or chantries with Virtual Adepts, Sons of Ether, Hermetics of House Verditius, Dreamspeaker technoshamans and so forth.

A variety of **New Age** factions, such as the Society of the Inner Light and the Children of Aquarius, espouse the cause of peace, love and understanding. They are often pacifistic and uninterested in any talk of the Ascension War. Ascension is not a war, in their view, but will only come through enlightenment and love. Cross-cultural Verbena like the Hearth-fire Circle, the World Tribe and members of the Neo-Tradition Reformation Front work to promote understanding among diverse cultures and belief systems, seeking common ground between them.

Moon-Seekers reject any notion that the unity of opposites endorses the superiority of male-female couplings. The so-called **Fairy Folk** of the faction (also known tongue-in-cheek as the "Queerbena") include many gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people. They explore notions of identity and the balance of masculine and feminine within themselves. They have likened their experiences with straight society to the sort of acceptance the Moon-Seekers look for within the Verbena as a whole, and with the struggle of the Traditions against the apathy of the Sleepers.

Associations: The element of air, the east direction, the season of spring, the blade the colors yellow, pale blue and pale green.

LIFEWEAVERS

There have always been Verbena who felt the lure of the wild strongly in their hearts, and who understood that the ways of life are neither good nor evil — they simply *are*. The strongest survive, and those who have Awakened to their power are among the strongest of all, provided they do not falter. The Lifeweavers make up the faction that most strongly identifies with the predators of the natural world. In a world of predators and prey, they know which role they'd rather take.

The Lifeweavers faction of the Verbena was in many ways created by the other factions (particularly the Gardeners of the Tree) so they could put a label on those Verbena who did not fit into any other faction or sect. Although they have adopted the name as their own, the Lifeweavers still remain more of a scattered group of individuals than any sort of organized faction. They recognize each other and their common beliefs, but otherwise mind their own business, which is just as they would have others do.

Lifeweavers have always existed on the fringe of the

Tradition. In the Mythic Ages they were hermits, wanderers and strange folk living out in the wilds. They had few dealings with civilization and little interest in their fellow mages.

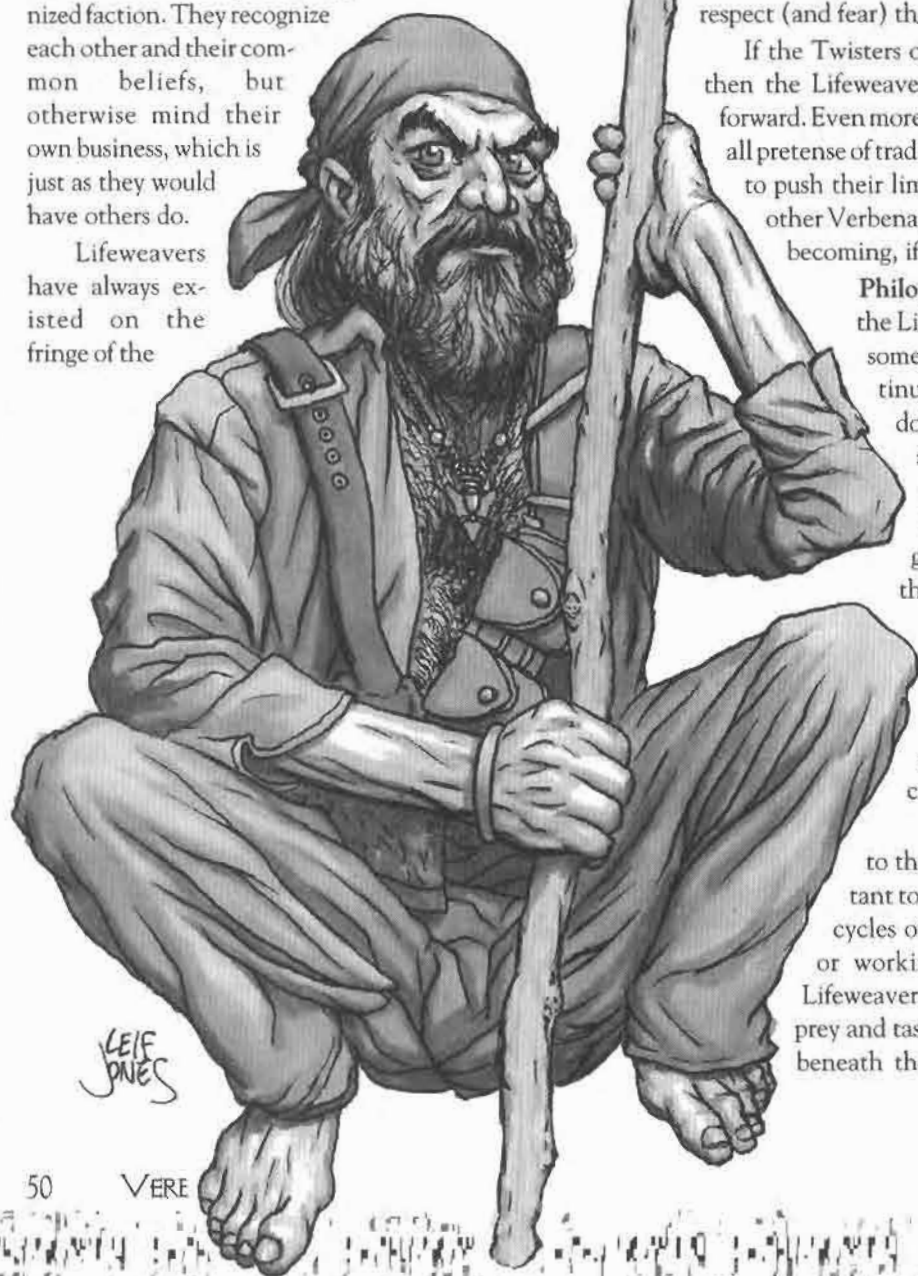
Even another follower of the Old Ways was like a wolf entering the hunting grounds of a potential rival — treated with respect, but also warned off in no uncertain terms. It was only when the noose of the Order of Reason grew tighter that these scattered mages came into the fold of the Verbena (and a few other Traditions, like the Dreamspeakers).

Since then, Lifeweavers have regularly flouted or ignored the conventions of their Tradition, while more “respectable” Verbena have spent time apologizing for them or trying to correct the impressions they give others of the Tradition. Still, the Lifeweavers have provided the Verbena with an often-needed push and have given others reasons to respect (and fear) them.

If the Twisters of Fate are the Tradition's primal past, then the Lifeweavers are the force driving the Verbena forward. Even more than the Moon-Seekers, they abandon all pretense of tradition and embrace the moment, seeking to push their limits and transcend them. They remind other Verbena just what they are capable of doing, and becoming, if they so choose.

Philosophy: Body and mind are like clay to the Lifeweavers, the media they use to create something new and wondrous. They continually re-invent themselves and, in so doing, come to better understand who and what they are. They experiment with shape, form and capabilities, trying to improve upon what nature has given them, but they do not forget that they are a part of nature. While many Verbena talk about empathy for the natural world, the Lifeweavers find it by wearing the skin of a wolf or the feathers of an eagle. They even experience life as trees, insects and other creatures that can only be imagined.

Ritual and tradition are unimportant to the Lifeweavers. Living is what is important to them. Other Verbena touch the sacred cycles of nature through seasonal celebrations or working with their hands in the Earth. Lifeweavers find the sacred in chasing down their prey and tasting its blood, in running or flying free beneath the open sky, in coupling in the night



under a full moon. The greatest sacrament is living life to its fullest and experiencing all that it has to offer.

While they believe in living in the moment, most Lifeweavers do not suggest abandoning reason altogether and living solely as beasts. They recognize the ability to think, question, understand and express new ideas as vital. Magic, after all, comes from enlightenment, not regression. Just because they can become other things does not mean they should abandon being human. Instead they have the opportunity to expand the definition of "human" and therefore extend the boundaries of their experience.

Style: Lifeweaver magic is as primal and dynamic as they are, visceral and disturbing to outsiders. The Sphere of Life is their primary focus, just like other Verbena, but Lifeweavers tend to focus their Life magic inward, on transforming themselves. They're often skilled shapeshifters, capable of taking on a diverse range of forms, and as comfortable in a beast's skin as they are in their own. They use Mind magic both to understand the speech of beasts and to test the limits of their own minds and perceptions.

Lifeweaver foci most often come from nature or from their own bodies. They use blood (and other bodily fluids), and many carry animal hides that they wear as part of their transformations. Herbs and mushrooms fuel their Mind magic and many of their spells of healing, transformation and occasionally cursing. A Lifeweaver rite might consist of stripping naked, pissing in a circle on the ground and cutting bloody runes into his flesh to bring on a desired transformation.

There is concern among both the Verbena and the Traditions about the number of Lifeweavers who skirt perilously close to abandoning their own human nature entirely. Certainly, some Lifeweavers do not care for human company, and rarely for human form, but surprisingly few of them have gone over the edge into madness.

Organization: The Lifeweavers have no organization, nor do they feel the need for any. Each is independent, and they all fiercely resist efforts to get them to conform to anyone else's way of doing things. They participate in the seasonal rites and celebrations of their Tradition when it suits them, but no one can predict their comings and goings. They do join covens and cabals from time to time, but rarely for very long before they decide to move on to something else. Some Lifeweavers gather in groups likened to packs of wolves or flocks of wild birds, remaining together for a while, then either going their separate ways or breaking apart due to conflicts within the group. Some few circles of Lifeweavers, however, formed young and have stayed together for decades. In such cases, the members of these cabals are tied so closely to the other members that they are more like close siblings or soulmates than anything else. The downside to such cabals, however, is that the death of one member frequently destabi-

lizes the survivors to such a degree that they're likely to go slightly (or dramatically) mad from the grief of losing so intimate a companion.

There are some telling reasons for the intensity of interpersonal connections among Lifeweaver circles. When form and appearance are so easily varied, beauty becomes moot and character assumes a key position above all other elements. Lifeweavers, therefore, choose their associates very carefully, judging their companions' behavior over time more than any other factor. The stability provided by intimates also takes on great importance for these mages. When even one's own shape can vary so wildly, the assurance and reliability of true friends is invaluable.

Lifeweavers are not necessarily anti-social, just independent. They don't make friends easily, but they're staunch friends to those they choose. Likewise, they do join groups, but only because they choose to do so, not because of the expectations of others. Lifeweavers are known to associate with other independent mages, particularly Dreamspeakers, and also with skin-changers.

Initiation: Lifeweavers choose whom they will as their apprentices, and they don't choose often. A potential apprentice has to have some talent or spark that impresses the mage, from a fierce and independent spirit to a hint of great mystic potential to a deeply noble character that the Lifeweaver respects. Would-be apprentices must be willing to cut ties with their former lives, because it's unlikely a Lifeweaver mentor will remain in one place for very long.

The initiation and instruction of a Lifeweaver apprentice is often direct and quite harsh, a "sink or swim" approach. Such experiences serve to weed out those who don't have what it takes. Common initiation ordeals include teaching apprentices to survive in the wild with little or nothing in the way of tools, stripping away the veneer of civilization to show them their true selves or changing them into a bestial form to appreciate the world from a new perspective.

Cultures: Whatever their origins, civilized culture holds little interest for Lifeweavers. They are most often associated with primitive cultures that understand and appreciate their way of life. Ironically, many Lifeweavers appear to come from comfortable, civilized backgrounds and revel in the act of casting away civilization and its discontents.

Some Lifeweavers are drifters or social chameleons, adopting different forms and attitudes as easily as other people change clothes. They move through the "wilderness" of modern civilization, often choosing to experience what it's like to be a different race, sex or age — no experience is forbidden.

Associations: The element of fire, the south direction, the season of summer, the colors red and black and the wand or staff.

THE CRAFT OF THE WISE: MAGIC



Among the Verbena magic is often known as "the Craft" or the "Craft of the Wise" because magic is the first craft, the ultimate craft, learned by humanity. Their knowledge of magic allowed the Wyck to plant the seeds of all other crafts in humanity: fire-making, metalworking, building, weaving, brewing, cooking and many others. Therefore, the Verbena see

their worldview resting on the existence of a magical universe in many ways, rather than the other way around. Mages who build up complex theories about the origin and nature of magic often mistake the simplicity of the Verbena for a lack of sophistication, when instead it is an understanding of magic's primal and immanent nature. Magic is everywhere and a part of everything; it's just a matter of Awakening to see it.

THE SPARK OF LIFE

The driving force of magic is life, the vital essence that makes living creatures what they are. This is Quintessence for the Verbena. It's not some disembodied essence or Platonic ideal, but the pulse of life that flows through all things, the echoes of the great surge that brought the Tellurian into being, like a heartbeat that sends blood roaring through the veins.

The spark of life is also what gives mages the power to reshape reality. Matter and energy are passive, even at the most dynamic they are unfeeling and uncaring. It is that primal essence of life, the deep down instinct to survive and exert control over one's environment, that allowed the Wyck to reach out, take hold of the fabric of reality, and reweave it into something more to their liking. It is that primal need that empowers the children of the Wyck, the Verbena.

THE WORLD TREE

A common Verbena metaphor for the Tellurian is the World Tree, also known as the Great Tree or the Tree of Life. It stands at the center of everything, the *axis mundi*, the point around which the world turns. The World Tree's roots deep in the earth represent the past and the foundations of the world. They reach into the Underworld, the land of the dead, where death literally fuels new life by composting into the earth. They are the dark recesses of the mind, the shadow side of creation, home to chthonian gods and goddesses.

The World Tree's trunk supports the cosmos, which turns around it. It connects the earth and the sky, serving as a bridge between the worlds. The trunk

represents the present, the strength of the moment that the Verbena embrace. The spreading branches, each reaching out to touch different worlds, represent the future, the many different choices and roads that lie before us. To the Verbena the many worlds of the Deep Umbra lie among the branches of the World Tree, as well as the many possible worlds of the future.

The fruit and seeds of the World Tree represent potential waiting to bloom into being. Even if the tree itself dies, it does not mean the end, because new life will grow in its place. The World Tree, the Tellurian, holds the seeds of its own death and its own renewal.

THE TWO WHO MOVE AS ONE: THE GREAT RITE

The Tellurian was born out of the union of opposites, the Goddess and the God, the Two Who Move as One. Ever since the primordial chaos split to form the Two, the Tellurian has been made up of opposite forces existing in a dynamic balance: matter and energy, light and darkness, heat and cold, masculine and feminine and on and on throughout creation. The Verbena believe that this balance of opposites is what drives the great wheel of life and keeps it turning. Sometimes one principle is dominant over the other — as when the heat of summer is at its apex or when the darkness of night is at its most absolute — but such conditions are only temporary states of being that eventually give way to a shift toward balance. (Some mathematicians call this principle "regression toward the mean.") Then the wheel turns again and the balance shifts the opposite way, over and over.

Understanding the polarities of creation allows the Verbena to influence them. Changing them too much one way or the other, however, can create imbalance. When the Tellurian tries to right itself after magic has shifted it too far out of balance, the result is Paradox. That is why it is easiest and best to work with the flow and balance of creation.

CRAFT VS. ART

The Verbena call magic a "craft" whereas other mages, such as the Order of Hermes, refer to it as an "art." The difference for the Verbena is that a craft is eminently practical and useful. Crafts make things that are a part of life and they help sustain it. Art creates things of beauty and things to refine the mind, the soul and the senses, but art is not necessarily useful on a practical day-to-day basis.

While the Verbena have a respect for art and artistry, they are ultimately pragmatic. They haven't time for the ivory-tower theory and arcana of the Order of Hermes, the baroque scientific invention of the Sons of Ether or the cutting-edge programming of the Virtual Adepts. The Verbena's craft is a simple and effective one that cuts directly to the heart of the matter (sometimes literally), rather than couching it in a great deal of theory and artistry.

To outsiders, the Verbena might seem crude and unsophisticated, even savage, but their craft has always accepted every part of life, not just the clean and pleasant ones. Their power comes from living life to the fullest in any given moment.

THE EIGHT-SPOKED WHEEL: SPHERES

For the Verbena, magic is a cycle, an endless circle that can be likened to the turning of the Wheel of the Year, the cycle of life and death and rebirth. The Spheres embody different crafts associated with particular parts of the cycle. The exact interpretations vary somewhat from one culture to the next within the Tradition, but since the Verbena all draw from primal associations with nature and her cycles, there are more similarities than there are differences. Feel free to vary these interpretations as needed to suit the paradigm of an individual Verbena or group.

Note that although the Verbena specialize in the Life Sphere, they do not ignore the importance of the other eight. They are all part of the greater whole and necessary to the turning of the wheel. Life simply best represents what the Verbena are all about.

PRIME: THE HUB OF THE WHEEL, THE WORLD TREE

Prime sits at the center of the wheel, the center of creation, embodied as the World Tree, the life that sustains the Tellurian and extends its branches and roots everywhere. For the Verbena, Prime is the union of opposites: the meeting of earth and sky, day and night, masculine and feminine, summer and winter, life and death. From that dynamic balance springs all creation. It is the union of the Goddess and God in the Great Rite, the moment of conception. Some Verbena equate the Sphere of Prime with the godhead or Great Spirit, which is to the gods as the gods are to mortals, the sun-source of divinity and life.

Prime magic for the Verbena is mainly creative, the power to bring new things, particularly new life, into being. It is a power that the Verbena believe should not

be used lightly. This is especially true with Prime's destructive aspects. It is one thing to kill a creature or destroy an object and quite another to unmake them. Tampering with the threads of the Tapestry can cause parts of it to unravel, if the weaving is not exactly right. Many Lifeweavers work for years to master the art.

The stuff of life is the main Prime focus for the Verbena. The ecstatic union of sex captures the divine spark of creation. Blood and breath carry the Quintessence for infusing power into the unliving, from anointing runes to breathing life into statues. Clay, earth and soil are the source for growing things.

SPIRIT: THE BLOOD HARVEST

Samhain (pronounced SOW-*een*) falls on or about the end of October. In some pagan traditions, it is the start of the year, the beginning of the dark half of the year and the descent into winter. It also marks the last harvest of the year: the blood harvest. In times of old, the herds were slaughtered and the meat cured for the coming winter. It is a time associated with death and mortality but, more importantly, with the connection between the spirit world and world of the living. It is a time when the veil between the worlds grows thin, a time for honoring those who have passed beyond, and an opportunity to speak with and learn from them.

Spirit magic, like many things, is dual-aspected for the Verbena. On one hand, it is associated with the spirits of the dead who have passed beyond the veil. Because of their association with life, the Verbena do not believe that death or the dead should be feared, but honored, making them reluctant to disturb those who have passed on. Some Verbena keep altars devoted to the spirits of their ancestors. Spirit magic associated with the dead is primarily for speaking with them and seeking wisdom. The raising and binding of ghosts is an unnatural and suspect practice *at best*.

The spirits the Verbena deal with most are the spirits of nature, the elements and growing things. Their magic allows them to see and speak with the elementals and primal beings of creation, appeasing them and seeking favors from them. They manifest in all the myriad forms described in the old tales and songs, including the little folk of the earth and the beautiful and terrible kings and queens of nature.

Spirit foci include the blade or athame, which should not cut anything material, but can sever spiritual bonds and direct the wielder's will. The Verbena offer spirits sacrifices great and small to help sustain them and engender their goodwill. They draw or build circles to hedge out unwanted spirits and to invite others in. Candle flame and incense smoke serve as media for the

denizens of the spirit world, and crystals, mirrors and still pools serve as windows into the Umbra (and sometimes doorways between the two worlds). Herbal potions or Verbena "flying ointment" helps loose the caster's spirit and strengthen contact with the spirit world.

MATTER: THE LONGEST NIGHT

Yule or the Winter Solstice (on or around December 21st) is the Longest Night, the peak of the power of darkness over the land. It is also the turning point, after which the nights grow shorter and the days longer as the light is reborn into the world. In Verbena traditions, the light is often seen as a child, newly born in the Underworld from the womb of the Goddess. It is a time of spirit descending into the form and solidity of matter, represented by the stillness of the cold and frozen earth. It is also a time for crafting and repairing, working indoors to make and fix the tools needed for the coming year.

So the Craft of Matter for the Verbena involves infusing cold and unliving substance with spirit and life. The ability to take and shape the raw stuff of the world into tools and things of beauty has always been a magical art, and the Verbena hold to the view of smiths, weavers, carpenters and other crafters as practicing a sort of magic of their own. By understanding how Prime has passed through Spirit to become Matter, the witch can see the essence or Pattern of matter and alter it to suit her will.

The foci of Matter magic are the tools of crafters and makers, from simple kitchen utensils like knives, spoons and bubbling cauldrons to the hammer, the chisel and the anvil. Fire is a focus of the Matter Sphere, transforming like the heat of the hearth, the oven and the forge. Verbena are known for "firing" or "forging" matter into new forms, as one might fire newly molded clay to set its shape or beat red-hot metal into a new form.

MIND: THE AWAKENING

The festival of Imbolc or Candlemass in the first days of February is a festival of light. Although the light has been reborn into the world at Yuletide, the Earth still slumbers and must be awakened. It is the time to begin stirring and throwing off the lethargy of winter, to awaken the Earth and call her back to her children. Candles are lit to light the way, and an image of the Goddess — woven of dried stalks — is placed in a bed so she may be awakened. Imbolc is also when the Sun Child, the young God, begins to awaken to the world around him, the first sparks of insight and awareness. The light represents the light of the mind, of sight and of understanding.

Mind magic is a matter of sight for the Verbena. Indeed it is often referred to as "the Sight" or "Second Sight." It is the ability to see into the minds of others,

to know truth, to see auras and to fool the senses. Glamour, illusion and enchantment are also workings of the mind, just as the play of shadows and light can sometimes fool the eyes into seeing things that aren't there. The Mind magic of the Verbena tends to be primal: dealing with passions, emotions and the senses rather than the subtle depths of the intellect.

The candle flame serves as a focus for Mind, as do the shadows it casts. Crystals and gems that combine the glimmer of light with the shadows of their depths can offer insight or ensnare the mind and heart. The mind is associated with dreams, so the Verbena seek visions in theirs. They can also affect the dreams of others, either to send messages or portents or to cause nightmares and foreboding. The influence of the mind is associated with the voice, so singing, chanting, speaking or music is used as a focus to influence the minds of others, harking back to the ancient bards.

LIFE: THE GREENING EARTH

The vernal equinox, also known as Ostara (a variant of the name of the goddess Ishtar), is a time of balance and special significance for the Verbena, because it is the time of the year associated with Life, which comes bursting forth from the fertile earth in tender green shoots, budding from the branches of the trees, and squalling from the wombs of beasts and women. It is a celebration of the enduring power of life after the long time of darkness. On the equinox, light and dark, day and night, are equal and the light triumphs over the darkness and grows stronger, bringing life back to the earth. Eggs, symbols of life's potential, are particularly associated with this festival, often decorated and hidden for children to find.

Life magic is the Verbena's specialty, their most beloved Sphere, since Life is at the heart of their beliefs and their ways. They explore and wield the full range of Life's power, from the ability to nurture it to the secrets of its transformation and changing it to suit their wishes. Among the Verbena specialties in Life magic are the arts of healing (and harming) and their expertise in shapeshifting and transformations.

In all cases, the Verbena stress both the sacredness of life and the importance of maintaining balance between all living things. Theirs is a holistic view of life. Just as the parts of the body must work together in harmony for complete health and well-being, so must the different creatures in an environment co-exist in balance for the environment to remain healthy. Life cannot be subdivided and treated separately from its other parts without creating imbalance. Though the greatest masters of the Verbena can create life, they exercise that power with great care and treat the act with great reverence.

Verbena use the stuff of life as foci for their Life magic. Blood is one of the most common elements, whether the caster's own or that of the subject or a sacrifice. Semen and menstrual blood are considered particularly powerful foci. Herbs and elixirs brewed from them are also potent Life foci. Verbena medicine is backed by the power of their magic, allowing them to effect "miracle" cures with simple herb-craft. Pure water is also a focus for Life, associated with the birth of all life in the seas, the feminine principle and the qualities of mutability and change. Indeed, Life foci tend to be liquids for those reasons.

TIME: THE ETERNAL MOMENT

Just as the seeds are sources of new growth, so is the moment the seed of the future, of what is yet to come. In the eternal moment is conceived and born all that is and will be. That time which is not a time is Beltane, on or about the first of May, when the seeds of the future are sown in hope of a prosperous harvest. Beltane is a festival of purification, planting, fertility and most of all the promise of renewal.

Great fires are lit and livestock driven between them to purify them. The people also pass between the bonfires and in the planting and seeding there is also much celebration and merriment, since the Verbena have long held the seeding of life as one of the greatest pleasures. The celebrants might stimulate and honor the fertility of the Earth by coupling in the fields, a rite that the Verbena have shared in the past with the Cult of Ecstasy (assisted by their understanding of the Eternal Moment).

The Verbena also share Beltane with the fae. Just as Samhain is a time when the veil between the world of the dead and the world of the living grows thin, Beltane is the timeless time when the world is close to the eternal Springtime of Faerie. The fae are often about on Beltane Eve, and the Verbena use their magic both to welcome the Good Folk and to ward off any mischief they might intend.

Time magic for the Verbena is a matter of spontaneity, of finding and living in the moment. When the initiate understands that all moments are truly one, then time can be transcended. Verbena Time magic involves things like sensing when the time is right to act (and when it is best to wait), foretelling the future through divination and altering the flow of time. With the power of Time, a night of revelry might take years or a perfect summer day might seem to stretch on for ages. Time magic is also used for setting the "seeds" of other spells, ready to blossom at a particular time.

Foci associated with Time magic tend to be tools that help the Verbena capture the elusive moment and live in it. They include things like dance, music and sex,

as well as alcohol and certain herbs or mushrooms that alter the sense of time. For visionary Time magic, the Verbena may gaze into crystals, scrying mirrors or pools, cast runes or Tarot cards or enter trance states using one of these methods until a vision comes to them.

FORCES: THE LONGEST DAY

The summer solstice, also known as Midsummer or Litha, occurs around June 21st. It is the height of the sun's power, the longest day of the year, and the peak of the light before it begins the long, slow journey into darkness. It is a time of power and potency, of growth and expansion, but it is also one of balance and change, as the Sun King gives way to the power of the Dark Lord. Midsummer is a time for harvesting herbs at their greatest potency. The druids harvested mistletoe on Midsummer Night, and their modern Verbena continue to do so.

Midsummer's Eve, the shortest night of the year, is a time of magic and the unleashed forces of nature. The rules of the ordinary world do not always apply on this night. Elementals and faeries are active, and Verbena often gather to work their spells and enchantments. It is a time associated with dreams and illusions, where forces break their usual bounds.

For the Verbena, Forces have always meant the forces of nature: the heat and light of the sun, the winter's chill, the fury of a storm, the rushing river — the power of nature unleashed. Most Verbena Forces magic involves shaping and directing these natural forces. Weather magic and wind-witching in particular have long been crafts practiced by the Verbena's ancestors.

Forces are often manipulated through sympathetic magic: a candle flame to create an inferno, a whistled tune to summon a wind and a scattering of water or simmering cauldron to call forth a storm. The wand or staff — an extension of the caster's will — is the most common tool for directing the forces of nature.

CORRESPONDENCE: THE GRAIN HARVEST

The festival of Lammas on the first of August honors the first harvest and the sacrifice of the corn god. This is when the grains of the fields are brought in and the god in the form of the vegetation dies so that his people may eat. Therefore, Lammas is sometimes known as the "funeral games" of the god, who descends into the dark of the Underworld.

Verbena lore speaks of the Paths of the Wyck, their primordial ancestors. It says that the Wise Ones walked the hidden paths between the places of the world, crossing great distances as easily as crossing a room. Therefore, the craft of Correspondence (or Connection in the old reckoning) has always been the craft of

roads, paths and scrying for the Verbenas. Like the God walking the path to the Underworld, like the Wyck walking the secret paths, the Verbenas step between places. They cast their vision out across great distances, understanding that distance is ultimately an illusion.

Correspondence foci tend to involve places and things that are in-between: crossroads, gates, doorways, wells, caves, and beaches. Mirrors and pools are windows (and sometimes doorways) between places. Verbenas walking into the mist or fog can leave one place and emerge in another far away or step through a doorway and exit another elsewhere.

ENTROPY: THE WINE HARVEST

The final point of the year before the wheel turns back to Samhain again is Mabon, the autumnal equinox (around September 21st). It is the time when day and night are once again in balance, except that night now overtakes the day and the darkness grows longer while the light fades.

Having been sacrificed at Lammass, the God has descended into the Underworld. Now the Goddess goes there seeking her beloved. She leaves the sunlit world behind and willingly walks into darkness. Along the way she must shed her accoutrements, leaving everything behind. She and her beloved are united once more on Samhain when the worlds of the living and the dead touch. Through their union, the god of light is reborn on Yuletide, and the cycle continues on. But for now Mabon is a time of darkness and seeking, of stripping away everything except the bare essentials.

Mabon is the fruit or wine harvest, when the last produce of the fields is taken in and dried, preserved or fermented. It is a time of drying and of dying as the fields wither. Death takes its hold on the land and the darkness grows, but it is not a time of despair. The dying of the land is part of the cycle, and the quest of the goddess will bring forth new life in time.

Entropy is the natural counterpart of Life for the Verbenas. As each strand of fate is measured, it must also be cut. As the flower blossoms, it must inevitably wither. As a man is born of woman, so must he one day die. Decay provides the soil in which life grows. These things cannot change, but with knowledge and insight they can be influenced. The Verbenas know how to tug at the strands of fate, how to offer both blessings of good fortune and curses of ill luck. More than most other Spheres, the Verbenas tread carefully when dealing with the craft of fate-weaving and death-dealing. Too much can easily upset the delicate balance and have terrible consequences for the mage and perhaps others. Life and death exist in balance, and the wise ones must not tip the scales too far either way.

The tools of Entropy are those of fate and death. Runes, cards and stones are cast to read the whims of fortune, while other Verbenas see them written in the stars or in the entrails of a sacred sacrifice. Cords represent the strands of fate that can be pulled or even broken, while sacrifices, blood and weapons (including plants such as hemlock and deadly nightshade) are instruments of the forces of death and decay.

SELF: AS ABOVE, SO BELOW.
AS WITHIN, SO WITHOUT.

The 10th Sphere for the Verbenas is the unification of all the others in the Divine Self, just as the Verbenas and other mages embody all the different Spheres of magic. The Self refers to the unity of mind, body and spirit. It is the microcosm, a reflection of the Tellurian in miniature. The Verbenas see themselves (and all intelligent creatures) as the awareness of the cosmos, the Tellurian looking back at itself in an effort to understand its own being. From the moment that the One became Two, Creation has reflected upon itself and grown more complex in its understanding.

Therefore, the perfection and understanding of the Self is the Verbenas path to Ascension. It is recognizing the immanence of divine nature within each of us, that unity of the Self with the All. It is not merely self-glorification, but recognition of the Self as a divine part of creation. Unlike some Traditions that seek to transcend or abandon the body, the Verbenas consider the physical a vital element of the Self and its experiences. Perfecting the Self means embracing the body as well as the mind and spirit and all the experiences they have to offer.

TOOLS OF THE WISE — FOCI

The Verbenas have used a variety of tools, potions, talismans and symbols in their magic since the earliest days. Although stories say that the Wyck once worked magic with nothing more than the power of their wills, Verbenas since the ancient times have required and used tools to focus their wills and weave their spells.

Blades, ranging in size from daggers to swords, are used in Verbenas rites and rituals. The blade traditionally represents the masculine energy and is associated with the element of air for its clarity and ability to cut to the heart of a matter. Some Verbenas also associate blades with the element of fire for its martial qualities and their role as a focus for the wielder's will. Two blades are used in traditional witchcraft. The athame is double-edged, with a black handle. It is a symbol of the witch's will, used to direct power in ritual and to "cut" connections or bindings, but not anything material. The white-handled boline is typically single-edged and used

THE COMITATION CRAFT: VERBENA SORCERY

The Verbena have always had sorcerers, hedge-magicians, country witches and the like among their ranks. Indeed, there were so many when the Tradition was founded that some believed that the Verbena should not even be recognized as an enlightened Mystic Tradition at all. Only the presence of powerful mages like Nightshade and William Groth (and their predecessors known to other members of the Council of Nine) convinced them otherwise.

The Verbena make little distinction between sorcery and Sphere magic. For some, Sphere magic is the power wielded by the Wyck (though at a truly enlightened level), and Verbena who possess it are considered to partake of the essence of the First Ones. More status-oriented Verbena like the Gardeners see this as a sign of a strong bloodline and heritage, but the truth is that magical power often pays no heed to lineage or background. Some raised in the Old Ways never truly Awaken, while others whose only knowledge of the Old Ways is what they've read in some fantasy novels or seen on television are Awakened and called to become Verbena.

Sorcerers among the Verbena follow the same paradigm and generally use the same tools and rituals. While not quite as spectacular as Sphere magic, the power of their paths and spells is subtle and often far-reaching. A coven of Verbena hedge-witches is still a power to be reckoned with, all the more because their magic does not incur the risk of Paradox. Ironically, Verbena sorcerers can be some of the most Tradition-bound, dedicated to the rites and rituals they learn as the source of their power. Therefore, they're most common among the Gardeners of the Tree and the Twisters of Fate, though there are a fair number of Moon-Seeker sorcerers as well.

Verbena sorcerers most commonly use the paths of Cursing, Divination, Herbalism and Shapeshifting. For more information see *Sorcerer, Revised*. For MET, see *Laws of the Hunt*

for such things as cutting herbs (or flesh...) and other practical tasks. Some "kitchen witches" conceal their magical knives among common household utensils, as their ancestors did to hide them from prying eyes. For larger and more formal rituals, some Verbena are known to wield swords, and larger blades are particularly common among the northern paths of the Tradition.

Books: The "book of shadows" is a traditional Verbena grimoire, a repository of spells, recipes and secrets

gathered over the years. Some truly ancient books of shadows have been handed down from one generation to another, with others kept by covens over the years, containing their collected wisdom. Books of shadows are often written in code, mystic secrets concealed in seemingly innocuous recipes and journals. Some modern Verbena write their books in ancient languages of their ancestors, and some even keep a book of shadows on a computer.

The **Broom** has long been associated with witches and witchcraft. Although few Verbena actually fly on broomsticks, they do use brooms as foci for their magic. Most often brooms are used to sweep away energies and influences, to cleanse a space both physically and spiritually. A broom laid across a doorway can be part of a powerful Verbena ward, and the use of a broomstick to swat unruly spirits should not be underestimated.

Cauldrons and Chalices are symbols of the divine feminine, the generative principle and the source of life. Verbena use cauldrons — iron pots, often suspended from a tripod — to brew up a variety of potions or elixirs. They range in size from less than a gallon in capacity to 20 times that volume. Chalices contain potions and other sacred fluids. One particular use of the chalice is in the Great Rite ritual, where a blade is immersed in the liquid in a chalice, representing the union of the god and goddess and infusing the liquid with their essence. Some Northern European sects of the Verbena substitute drinking horns for chalices in their rituals.

Charms of various sorts, typically little cloth bags, carved tokens, feathers, candles and items of jewelry, appear in Verbena magic. Typically a charm carries the power of a spell to grant it to the charm's owner or to place the spell upon whomever takes the charm. Charms are sometimes known as "amulets" or "talismans" (though such terms are in more common use among the more ritualized factions of the Verbena).

Circles are symbols of eternity, perfect and unbroken. Verbena rituals are often conducted within the bounds of a "magic circle" which defines the boundaries of the ritual space. This serves to both keep the mystic forces contained and to protect against outside interference and influences. Movement within such a circle is traditionally deosil or "sun-wise" (clockwise), except when banishing or negating, when movement is widdershins or counter-clockwise. Circles and spirals are also common Verbena symbols.

Cords of various sorts play roles in Verbena rites. The weaving and knotting of a cord represents the weaving and fixing of a spell, while other cords store spells that are released when their knots are untied. Some covens and circles "take the measure" of each new initiate with a white, black or red cord, which the

mage wears thereafter as a belt in ritual. Threads or cords represent the strands of fate that the Verbena can manipulate, and cat's cradle arrangements may be used in spells of fate-working. They also symbolically bind the subjects of a witch's spell.

The **Elements** play a major role in Verbena magic. Earth, air, fire and water are the fundamental essences of creation (with Quintessence as the literal "fifth essence"). Verbena use the elements as both symbols of the literal forces they embody for sympathetic magic and of the various spiritual qualities associated with them. The flame of a candle can be fanned into an inferno and water sprinkled on the ground can become a deluge. Among the Verbena, the elements are associated with the four directions, typically earth in the north, air in the east, fire in the south and water in the west, though some are known to reverse air and fire, or to assign completely different directions.

Fluids of different sorts, especially the fluids of life, feature prominently in Verbena magic. Blood is a powerful Verbena focus, particularly the blood of the mage or of a sacrifice. Female Verbena use the blood of their moon-cycle in their magic. Blood carries the essence of life, nourishing and supporting the body. Blood is a powerful connection to its source, and a few drops of the target's blood added to a potion or talisman can make it that much more effective. Blood sprinkled on an inanimate object can impart to it a kind of pseudo-life. Runes and other sacred writing are sometimes empowered with the blood of their maker. The Verbena also use other bodily fluids, such as spitting on the ground to seal a spell. Seminal fluid is a powerful carrier of life energy, and the act of release raises power. The sap of various plants is analogous to blood, and the two mixed together represent the union of the two sides of nature, animal and vegetable.

Herbs and Potions are among the Verbena's most common tools. Since time immemorial, they have been the keepers of the lore of plants and their various uses. Mundane herbal lore has many applications, even more when backed by the power of Verbena magic. There are herbs for healing and harming, blessing and cursing, drawing or warding off certain influences. There are also herbs that can cause intoxication or states of ecstasy or heightened awareness. For the Verbena it is not just the chemical or medicinal properties of herbs and plants, but their spiritual significance and symbolism. Whereas the Progenitors and their fellow technomancers focus on designer drugs and biochemistry, the Verbena see herb lore as a combination of the medicinal and the spiritual.

Language: Many cultures come together to make up the Verbena Tradition, and respect for the past and one's ancestors is important among them. Therefore, the Ver-

vena often study and use the ancient languages of their ancestors in their magic. Common tongues include Gaelic, Old English, Scandinavian, Finnish, Greek, various Slavic tongues and the tribal languages of Africa. Some Verbena preserve the languages of tribes and peoples long since forgotten by the modern world.

Mirrors, ranging from silvered glass to still pools, are instruments of seeing and reflection for the Verbena. They are used for scrying and as gateways or windows between the worlds of matter and spirit. Crystals fill a similar role.

Performance: Singing, chanting, dancing and playing music — all the various performance arts are sacred to the Verbena, harking back to the performances and dramas of their ancestors. In pre-literate cultures, all knowledge was preserved through chants, songs, and epic poems, and Verbena bards, skalds and singers learn and maintain these traditions. Verbena rituals often feature chanting and dancing to raise the energy of the participants to a frenetic level, focusing the will on the magical work. Ancient folk dances and melodies are common, though some Verbena fuse them with modern musical styles and techniques. Norse Verbena chant the ancient *eddas*, the sagas of their people. Bards entrance and enchant with song.

Runes are symbols that make up words but, more than that, they are ancient magic, the ability to capture the essence of things in abstract, the origin of the term "spell" in the times when witches and magicians truly spelled out their magic using runes. Various ancient alphabets and symbol systems are in use among the Verbena. The Norse *Futhark* is the most common (with its elder and younger versions), along with the *ogham* alphabets of the Celts, ancient Greek and some African languages. Runes may be carved into wood, stone, metal or even flesh. They are sometimes drawn in the air or upon the ground or simply chanted to invoke their power. In the Northern paths, runes are often empowered with the blood of their maker.

Sacrifice: One of the most powerful tools of the Verbena is their willingness to sacrifice, their understanding that life feeds on death as part of the natural cycle. The release of life force through the sacrifice lends power and potency to their magic. Sacrifice is not something the Verbena do lightly. In the ancient days, even the sacrifice of a beast to the gods was a momentous thing, because it meant one less animal to support the community. Sometimes the flesh of the sacrifice went to feed the people, made sacred by its dedication to the gods. Mages read the future in the blood and entrails. Sacrifice also includes self-sacrifice, either denial through fasting and abstaining from worldly needs or enduring ordeals of pain.

The greatest of all sacrifices is that of a human life. The Verbena hold that the best human sacrifice is a willing one, but they acknowledge that their ancestors did sacrifice the unwilling, and that such sacrifices still hold power. The more radical elements of the Tradition would gladly see the blood of technomancers and other foes feed the living Earth, but most Verbena believe that human sacrifice must be used sparingly, or else it loses its potency.

Sex is a power the Verbena understand and embrace, where other Traditions (save for the Ecstatics) may shy away from it. The union of lovemaking is a uniting of opposites, regardless of the couple. It is a powerful generative force, associated with the forces that brought the Tellurian into existence. Sex magic creates a change in consciousness, away from the mundane, and focuses the will. Even solitary acts of pleasuring can grant the Verbena the power that they need for their magic. The fact that such sexual rites dismay and horrify more conservative Traditions is merely a fringe benefit for the Verbena, who take a certain delight in shocking their fellow mages.

Symbols: The Verbena use many symbols of their craft. Among the most prominent is the pentacle, a five-pointed star enclosed in a circle. It represents both the human figure embodied as the universe and the balance of the elements (earth, air, fire, water and spirit or Quintessence). Other symbols include sun and moon symbols, particularly the crescent moon or the triple-moon (waxing, full and waning). Spirals, particularly the *triskelion* or triple-spiral are well known, and abstract patterns of lines, spirals and dots appear among

more tribal cultures. Symbols can be drawn, painted, made into jewelry or even tattooed.

The **Wand** or **Staff** is a common symbol of Verbena power and authority. Wands are associated with the element of fire and with the will of the wielder. They are most often carved from wood (particular the wood of sacred trees like the oak, ash, apple, willow or yew), but wands are also made from bone, ivory, metal and even crystal. A wand may be decorated or plain, elaborate or simple. For some Verbena it is little more than a carved stick. Among the elders, a walking stick may serve as a wand or staff. Some wands are ancient heirlooms, passed from one generation to the next, from as far back as the Burning Times, or even beyond.

LIFE MAGIC

Verbena specialize in the Sphere of Life, the study and understanding of life in all its many forms, and the ability to shape and control it as they will. This gives them many and far-reaching powers. The most basic applications of the Life Sphere are discussed on pp. 168-171 of **Mage: The Ascension**. This section looks at the Verbena uses of the Sphere in more depth.

HEALING

The most common Verbena uses of Life magic include healing injury, eliminating disease or poison and promoting health. The Verbena are the most renowned healers of the Traditions, and their ancestors have been the wise women and medicine men of their people for millennia.

LIFE RATING EFFECTS

- **Healer's Sight:** A simple spell allows the Verbena to know the general health and physical condition of any living creature. Additional successes provide information about the subject's condition, any maladies or imperfections present, and the source of any disease, infection, or toxicity. Although this level does not allow the Verbena to heal directly, it can aid Medicine rolls, reducing their difficulty by one per success to a minimum set by the Storyteller, based on the severity of the problem. Sometimes knowing the problem is only so much help.
- **Self-Healing:** The Verbena follow the motto, "Physician, heal thyself." The first sort of healing a student of Life learns is self-healing. Each success on a healing spell restores two levels of damage (bashing or lethal). Successes do not need to be allocated to duration, since the healing occurs instantly and is sustained by the mage's own natural life Pattern.
- **Heal Simple Life:** The mage can heal simple Life Patterns (plants and small animals), as well as bashing damage on a human target.
- **Heal Complex Life:** The mage can heal any manner of damage to any Life Pattern, including aggravated damage inflicted on other humans, as with **Self-Healing**. Healing aggravated damage is, of course, vulgar.
- **Restore Life:** Verbena at this level of mastery can even restore life to the recently dead, provided there is still some spark of life left in the subject's Pattern and it has not reverted entirely to Matter. Generally, the subject cannot have been dead for longer than a number of hours equal to the caster's *Arete*, though the time may vary depending on the conditions.

Healing Effects, like other Life Effects, can be applied to a target only once per scene. The target's living Pattern must undergo some natural change before the mage can attempt to repair or reshape it again.

Healing Aggravated Damage: Healing aggravated damage is always vulgar magic and only half as effective as other forms of healing (restoring one health level per success rather than two).

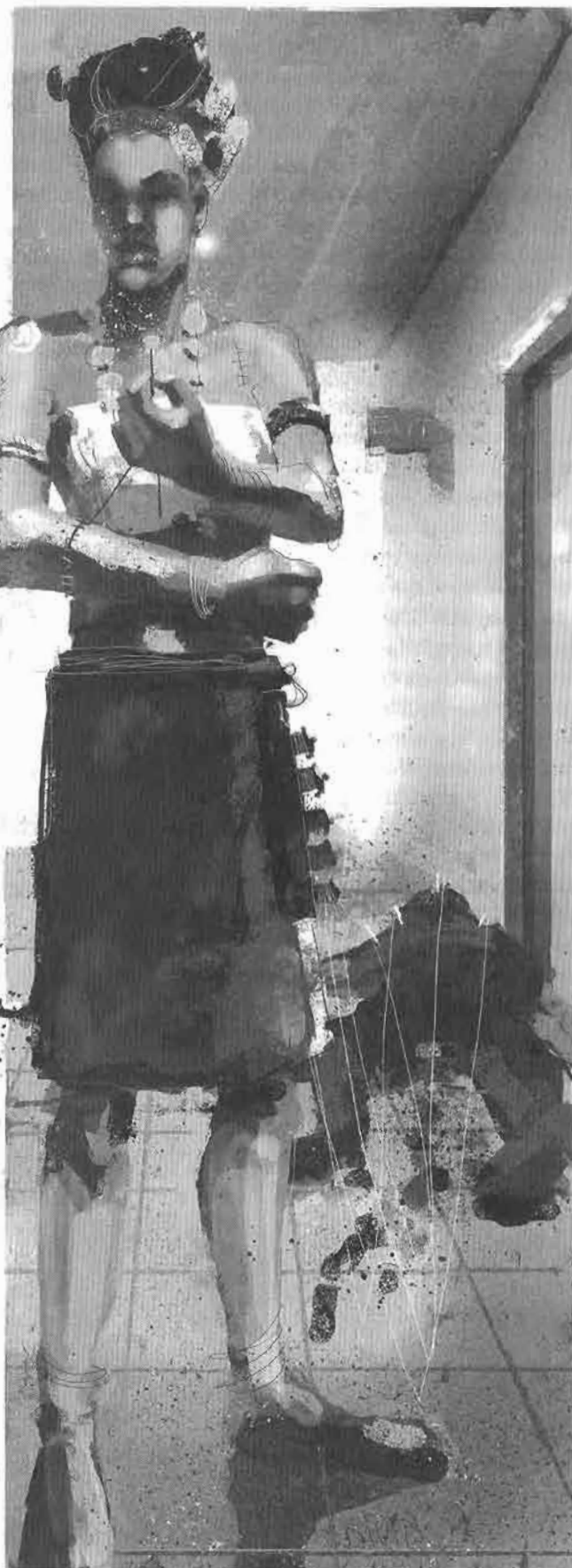
Healing Defects and Deformity: The healing arts are capable of overcoming almost any sort of injury or malady. Repairing or correcting things like congenital defects is more difficult than healing a cut or a broken bone. Still, Verbena adepts of Life can reshape the Patterns of other creatures to eliminate everything from multiple sclerosis to Down syndrome, even restoring or replacing deformed or missing limbs. This requires a permanent Pattern alteration, as described under "Enhancement." Verbena can also perform a simple Life 2 Effect on an unborn fetus to eliminate such defects and ensure that the child grows "tall, straight of limb, and well-favored" (a common blessing on the unborn).

HARITING

Knowledge of how to repair life Patterns also brings a balancing knowledge of how to damage or destroy them. The Verbena can use their magic to virtually snuff out the life force of another creature, though their workings are often more subtle. They can interfere with the body's vital systems, inflict disease and other maladies, and generally destroy the delicate balance needed to sustain life.

Harmful Life Effects require at least the third dot in the Sphere, and inflict the standard amount of damage (two health levels per success). They cannot be dodged and do not require an attack roll. If the spell is successful, then the target suffers the damage. Bashing damage from Life Effects can be soaked with Stamina (representing the body's inherent resistance to injury), but lethal and aggravated damage cannot. Only countermagic can protect against it. In either case, physical armor and similar forms of protection provide no soak bonus against Life Effects, which work directly on the subject's body.

A bashing Life Effect may be a build-up of fatigue toxins, bruising and bursting of capillaries, the exhaustion of the target's stored cellular fuel (a kind of rapid starvation), or temporary restriction of breathing or blood-flow. Lethal Life Effects involve direct damage to organs, muscles and bone, as well as heart attacks and similar damage. These Effects can be coincidental or vulgar depending on when and how they are cast. Aggravated Life Effects are *always* vulgar, and inflict damage directly to the target's Pattern, ripping away its life force.



If a caster chooses, a harmful Life Effect need not inflict all of its potential damage at once. Instead, the target may suffer damage over a period of time, suffering progressively from a disease, slow toxin, internal bleeding and so forth. The caster sets the time interval, ranging from one round to a year or more, and the target suffers one health level of damage for each interval that passes (or two per interval, or however else the caster wants to divide it). Once the interval is set and the spell cast, it cannot be changed. The caster can choose to end the spell before it has run its course, and Verbena have been known to use death curses as a means of coercion.

ENHANCEMENT

An understanding of Life often springs from a desire for self-improvement, or improvement of the human species in general. The Verbena are capable of using Life magic to reshape and improve their own bodies in diverse ways. They tend to do so with care, however, since such magic is both difficult and dangerous in the long term. Enhancement Effects require Life 3 when used on the caster, Life 4 for enhancing others.

Pattern Bleeding: Short-term enhancements — those lasting for less than a day or so — are relatively harmless, though they can cause the caster to accumulate Paradox, depending on their nature. Longer-term enhancements, those lasting for more than a day, place a tremendous strain on the subject's living Pattern. In essence, the Pattern is forced into a difference shape and kept there against its nature. This causes the Pattern to begin to break down, literally unraveling and feeding on the Quintessence within it to sustain itself, a process known as "Pattern bleeding" or "unraveling."

Pattern bleeding causes the subject of an enhancement to suffer an unsoakable level of lethal damage per day. This damage cannot be healed until the subject's Pattern is restored to its natural state. A mage — either the caster or the subject — can spend a point of Quintessence to offset this damage, feeding energy into the life Pattern to maintain it. This sometimes leads radically enhanced or transformed creatures to become thaumivores, parasites with a constant hunger for Quintessence to sustain them.

Pattern Alteration: It is possible to avoid Pattern bleeding by creating a permanent alteration to the subject's life Pattern, reshaping it into a new "natural" form so that it doesn't suffer from any strain. This requires a vulgar Life 4 Effect with a minimum of five successes, and the caster must spend half the normal amount of experience points needed to raise the affected Abilities naturally, even if he's not casting the Effect on himself. For modifications other than Abilities, the subject suffers Paradox.

Embodied Paradox: Although it is possible to transform a normal human being into a virtual super-human using magic, such things are not a part of accepted reality. Life magic that enhances a subject beyond the normal limits of its species is always vulgar. Permanently enhanced creatures engender Paradox by their very existence. For each dot of an Ability above 5, and for each additional permanent enhancement, the subject gains a permanent point of Paradox, causing Paradox effects to be that much more severe for the subject. This is one of the reasons many powerful Verbena masters lived in Horizon, the Seasonal Realms or other places in the Umbra. Their super-human levels of perfection could barely exist on Earth.

Enhancements and Modifications: The following are guidelines for the sorts of enhancements and modifications a mage can create using Life magic. Note that at least a scene (perhaps longer) must pass before the mage can cast another enhancement spell on the same subject. The effects of multiple enhancement spells are cumulative (and can result in some startling transformations), but keep close track of successes assigned to the spells' duration and the effects of Pattern bleeding for long-term enhancements.

- **Abilities:** A one-dot increase to an Ability requires one success.

MET: The target receives a free level of a single Ability for the duration of the magic, which can be spent and regained normally. *Grades of Success:* No effect.

- **Health Levels:** A success can grant an additional Bruised health level or two additional Maimed health levels. Note that if or when these additional health levels lapse, the subject's condition might worsen to Incapacitated or even Dead as a result of accumulated damage.

MET: One additional Bruised health level is granted, which can be lost and regained normally. *Grades of Success:* Each additional grade allows for an extra Wounded health level, up to a maximum of two additional Wounded levels.

- **Natural Weapons:** One success can grant claws, sharp teeth or similar natural weapons that inflict Strength + 1 lethal damage. Each additional success can increase the natural weapon's base damage by one, up to a maximum of Strength + 3.

MET: The target gains a natural attack that delivers one level of lethal damage. *Grades of Success:* Each additional grade adds one level of lethal damage to this attack, to a maximum of three levels of damage.

- **Natural Armor:** One success can grant the subject an additional die of armor against bashing and lethal damage.

MET: One level of natural armor (that is, a health level with no wound penalties) may be added with a successful casting. *Grades of Success:* No effect.

- **Adaptations:** Adaptations generally allow the subject to better operate in a particular environment, they include things like gills (for breathing underwater), a coat of fur (protection from the cold), sunburn-resistant skin and so forth. Each adaptation requires one success.

MET: Largely narrative, though Trait modifiers may be assigned in particularly appropriate (or adverse) conditions for the modified organism.

- **Modifications:** These changes in the subject's appearance are largely cosmetic. Modifying minor qualities such as eye, hair and skin color, or even major ones like gender, height or weight, generally requires only one success (two or three for really extensive modifications). Unlike enhancements, modifications do not cause permanent Paradox if made a part of the subject's Pattern.

MET: Again, largely narrative, though any such changes should be indicated with costuming or description cards when necessary. *Grades of Success:* No effect.

SHAPESHIFTING

Shapeshifting is one of the best-known powers of the Verbena, who consider themselves kin to bird, beast, fish and all the other creatures of nature. For those skilled in the Sphere of Life, the body is like clay, to shape as they wish. Shapeshifting requires Life 4

Identity Loss: One of the hazards of shapeshifting is that the mage truly becomes the assumed form. Those who have not yet mastered the art may lose their own identity, becoming the new form in mind as well as body. Mages with Life 4 who shapeshift must spend a point of temporary Willpower each day they remain in an altered form. Otherwise, their true personality is subsumed beneath the nature of their new form. With forms like animals or trees, the mage forgets her former life and loses the ability to return to her normal shape. Masters of Life are not affected by identity loss. They can transform into any creature while retaining their normal identity.

Size: Mages using Life 4 can assume only those shapes of roughly the same mass as their own. Masters of Life can assume the shape of any living creature, as small as an insect or as massive as a whale or even a dinosaur (or a dragon, for that matter).

Accoutrements: Life magic has the power to reshape only living tissue, not inanimate matter. So a shapeshifting mage must either discard clothing and other accoutrements or take them into account as part of the transformational spell. Verbena often favor loose,

AGE AND MORTALITY

Verbena Masters (or even Adepts) of Life magic are free of disease and largely immune to any poison that does not immediately kill or incapacitate them. They can heal almost any injury, stave off the effects of aging, eliminate congenital defects and grant themselves complete and total health. It would seem that the Verbena Masters are capable of living forever, but that is not so and, in truth, the Verbena are grateful for it.

Although Life magic is capable of vastly prolonging life, and many elder Verbena are more than a century old, it cannot grant true immortality in that its subjects will not live *forever*. The impulse to die is built into all living Patterns, and no magic known is able to eliminate it entirely. Even the Masters of Entropy can only reduce the risks, not remove them. Sooner or later, the body begins to give out and die, and no magic can prevent it. The end might not come for centuries, perhaps even longer, but mages do die sooner or later.

The Verbena have no objections to prolonging life. After all, they love life and understand the desire to continue to enjoy it. They do so, however, with the knowledge that their lives will end at some point, passing their Avatars on to others as part of the turning of the Wheel of Life.

What the Verbena fear most is prolonging life long after it has ceased to be worth living. This is the work of the Progenitors, and it's an abomination against everything the Verbena believe. This is why even the eldest Verbena are so vital and vibrant, because those who lose their vitality and zest for life know it is their time to die. Of course, it is not always so easy to let go of life, especially when there are other options. The Verbena tell cautionary tales of those who grew too attached to their supposed immortality, to the point where they willingly sold themselves to the Nephandi so they could continue to live.

easily discarded clothing like robes (or going skyclad) for this reason. If the mage shapeshifts while wearing clothing, it will most likely be shredded if the new form is significantly different, and it can entangle the mage if the new form is smaller (like a crow, cat or mouse).

Verbena can use Prime 1 to magically attune certain possessions; effectively making them a part of the mage's own Pattern. These items then change form along with the mage, melding into the new form and reappearing when the mage assumes her normal shape. Verbena



attune important items, but they do so sparingly, since those items become a part of them, and can potentially be used against them magically, just like a lock of hair or a few drops of blood. Wonders belonging to the mage are already attuned as part of their magical nature.

A conjunctive Matter 3 Effect allows any matter on the mage's person (clothing, jewelry and other accoutrements) to vanish when the mage changes shape and reappear when she returns to her normal form.

Familiarity: Moving around as a wolf, dolphin or falcon is considerably different from walking on two legs as a human, and it takes some getting used to. At the Storyteller's discretion, Adepts of Life might suffer a slight increase in difficulty for physical actions (+1 or +2) while in another form. Masters of Life are comfortable in any form and do not suffer this penalty unless the new form is particularly unusual.

MET: Those suffering unfamiliarity in their new form incur a one-Trait penalty to all Physical Tests until they have had sufficient time to master their new shape (Storyteller's discretion).

Bygone Beasts: Verbena are not limited to transforming into earthly animals. They can also become mythic beasts such as unicorns, dragons, griffins or even flying monkeys, if they like. These transformations are always

considered "vulgar with witnesses," even if no one sees the mage transform, simply because reality is hardened against such creatures

even existing. This is why Verbena tend to assume animal forms more often than those of Bygones. Mages also do not acquire the innate magic of any form they assume, though they can use conjunctive Effects with other Spheres to grant the new form similar powers, such as a Forces 3 Effect so a dragon form can also breathe fire.

Multiple Forms: With Correspondence 4 and Mind 2, an Adept of Life can even split into *multiple* creatures, each a separate living entity, but possessing a common mind and spirit (that of the original mage). Verbena Masters have the power to transform into a flock of ravens, a school of fish, or even a cloud of stinging insects. Individual members of the group can even be killed, but as long as one survives, the mage's life force endures. Any surviving creature can transform back into the original form; the other remaining forms disappear. If the group suffered losses, then the mage suffers from commensurate injuries in normal form. Some Verbena speak highly of the experience of existing as a flock of birds, for example, though some find the experience difficult to assimilate.

MET: With an appropriate conjunctive rote (made possible only if the optional rules for conjunctive magic are in play), the mage can split into several common creatures. Needless to say, several props and possibly a few Narrators might be required to avoid confusion in this situation. Damage taken in this form is up to the Narrator to adjudicate, but as a rule of thumb, the destruction of every 10% of the group past the first 30% equals one health level lost. *Grades of Success:* Each additional grade of success allows for a longer time spent in "swarm" form, or further division into a larger number of animals.

Transformation: The guidelines presented here also apply to uses of Life magic to transform other creatures into different shapes. Identity loss is a particular threat for creatures transformed into another shape, since they will eventually forget their original identity. The Verbena are well known for turning those who offend them into frogs, dogs and pigs (see *Circe's Enchantment*, p. 66). They can also transform beasts into humans, giving them human-level intelligence (although not necessarily experience). Such former beasts can even become fully human after a time, and they might not want to return to their former lives.

THE BOOK OF SHADOWS: VERBENA ROTES

The following rites are well known among the Verbena, many of them dating back to the Mythic Age, passed down through covens and books of shadows over the centuries.

ADDER'S TONGUE (MIND ••)

The Verbena have long been known for their ability to understand the natural world, in particular the speech of beasts and birds, and to speak to them in return. The language of animals is not overly complex (though some creatures have very refined understanding of certain concepts). Animals are generally well disposed to Verbena who choose to speak to them, provided they're not hungry or threatened in any way. Even then, the beast may speak, if only to communicate those feelings. The creature is under no compulsion to obey the caster, but it could be persuaded to help, particularly if offered something it wants.

System: A single success is enough to allow the mage to speak with and understand any creature within earshot. The animal's vocalizations don't change, the mage simply understands their meaning.

MET: Initiate *Mind*. Generally speaking, this rote is largely a roleplaying exercise, though the Narrator may rule that it allows for a free retest of certain *Animal Ken* or *Survival* tests as well. *Grades of Success:* No effect.

LIFE MAGIC AND SHAPESHIFTERS

Without adding Spirit magic to the mix, transformational Life magic has less of an effect on natural shapeshifters like the Fera. Anything less than a complete and permanent re-weaving of the subject's Pattern does not take hold. The mercurial nature of the Fera asserts itself, and they can instantly shift back into one of their natural forms. Therefore, casting a spell to turn a werewolf into a toad is ultimately ineffective. It takes considerable time and effort to effect changes in a shapeshifter's form and spirit, and it's not likely the Fera will sit still for it.

A mage using Life 4 can cast a spell to lock a shapeshifter into its current form and prevent it from changing shape for the spell's duration, or force a shapeshifter into one of its other natural forms and keep it there. Needless to say, Fera do not care to be manipulated in this way, and most will savagely attack any mage who does so.

SHAPESHIFTING AND IDENTITY

Verbena who master the art of shapeshifting often develop very fluid ideas about identity. Having existed as beast and bird, able to take on the shapes of other people (including the opposite sex), they tend not to associate identity with physical form, but with spirit, personality and sense of self. They alter their physical appearance at will, much like others change clothes, and they often have a broad range of experiences, making them exceptionally open-minded and empathic. They have literally walked (and run and flown and swam) in others' shoes.

Dark Ages: Witches of the Old Faith cast this spell using Spring ••.

ARREST THE FLIGHT OF ARROWS (FORCES ••)

In the Norse *Hávamál*, the god Odin proclaims, "If I see hurled arrows hard at my horde; though rapid their flight I arrest them in air." Since ancient times, rune-workers have known charms for warding off the flight of arrows and similar such weapons, and they have passed this knowledge on to the Verbena. The spell creates a ward that robs all sorts of missile weapons of their motive force, causing them to hang suspended in mid-air for a moment before dropping harmlessly to the ground. A mage protected by this enchantment is shielded not only against hurled spears and arrows, but modern ballistic weapons as well.

System: Successes scored from the spellcasting are subtracted from successes rolled to hit the subject with a missile weapon, from a thrown rock to an arrow or even a bullet. If the attack roll is reduced to zero or fewer successes, then the missile drops harmlessly to the ground a short distance away from the target, robbed of its momentum. Even if the attack still has one or more successes, the hit is somewhat blunted by the spell (since fewer successes mean fewer damage dice). The caster must allocate successes to duration to maintain the spell, and he can protect multiple targets by assigning successes to increase the Effect's area.

MET: Initiate *Forces*. A successful casting allows one ranged attack to be negated without apparent effect, as the bullets or arrows fall harmlessly to the ground shortly before they would have struck the target. *Grades of Success:* No effect.

BANISHING BLESSING (ENTROPY ••, MIND ••, POSSIBLY WITH CORRESPONDENCE •••)

Verbena who hold to the tenet of "harm none" find other means to deal with problem people in their lives. One such is to "release with love" as some Moon-Seekers say. Using some connection to the target (such as a photo or a lock of hair), the Verbena sends good fortune, along with the subtle mental suggestion to seize the opportunity, with the intention that the subject's blessings will take him away (preferably far, far away) for some time. For example, the subject might get a new job opportunity on the other side of the continent (or even the other side of the world), win a trip or vacation, hear for distant relatives she didn't even know she had and so forth.

System: At least three successes are needed to send the target away for at least a day, with additional successes extending the duration of the subject's absence once the blessing has taken hold. Four successes suffice for a month or so, five successes for six months, and six or more successes can cause the subject to be gone for a year or more (perhaps even permanently, at the Storyteller's discretion).

MET: Initiate *Entropy*, Initiate *Mind*, optional *Disciple Correspondence*. Success indicates that the target receives some stroke of good fortune, which in order to properly obtain requires her to leave the area for the rest of the next scene/hour (whichever is longer). The subject is inclined to follow up this good luck unless pressing business comes up. The nature of this blessing is up to the Storyteller to determine, but it should be genuine. Awakened targets may spend a Willpower Trait to ignore this rote, though their good luck is likewise lost. *Grades of Success:* One additional hour/scene per success.

Dark Ages: Rarely used before modern times, this spell required Autumn ••, Summer ••. Most practitioners of the Old Ways preferred more forceful means of eliminating those they disliked, however.

BLOOD OF THE SACRED KING (PRITIE •••)

Verbena understand well the power of sacrifice, the energy bound up in living Patterns, that is released at the moment of death, merging back into the weave of the Tapestry. That power can be captured and channeled toward magical ends, particularly if the sacrifice is willing (and even if he is not). The emotional resonance of a willing sacrifice works in harmony with the magic, whereas the emotions of an unwilling sacrifice may taint the spell with an unexpected or unwanted resonance (of death, fear, pain or vengeance).

Among the Verbena, the most common sacrifice (apart from *Self Sacrifice*) is that of the Sacred King, who gives his life for the land, or the May Queen, who does the same. The health of the land is the duty of its ruler. When the land falters, the ruler must perish to make it grow strong again.

A Sleeper sacrificing himself can release a remarkable amount of Quintessence. A mage who willingly gives up his own life, however, can achieve truly remarkable things through his sacrifice.

System: For each of the Sleeper sacrifice's health levels (bashing and lethal) the caster gains one point of Quintessence, so a human sacrifice yields 14 points of Quintessence, which the mage may use as desired. If the subject possesses any innate Quintessence, it is added to the above total. The subject's state of mind at the time of death applies a strong Resonance to the harvested Quintessence, which the Storyteller should take into account when it is used.

An Awakened mage who sacrifices himself (or allows himself to be sacrificed), on the other hand, provides the vital Quintessence, but does *far* more in addition — he can renew a dying Node by sacrificing his life and his Avatar to open up the Node. If the mage channels his death to this purpose, he increases the rating of the Node by one dot per every two dots of his Arete rating (rounded up if the player rolls any 10s; rounded down otherwise).

This rote cannot be fast cast. Furthermore, if more than one mage performs such a sacrifice at a Node in the space of one year, the Node may become unstable and begin behaving erratically (varying drastically in its Quintessence output, for example, or by becoming a shallowing or the like).

A mage who sacrifices herself in this way cannot be brought back by any means. She does not become a

ghost of any sort, nor can she be contacted in any way. Her Avatar and spirit are both invested entirely into the Node she is rekindling. Nothing remains of the mage's personality, except possibly some tendency of the land to manifest her personality traits in some vague, symbolic way.

MET: Disciple *Prime*. Due to its potentially disturbing nature in live-action play, it is recommended that this rote be kept entirely descriptive and used only at suitably dramatic moments or in order to further the chronicle's overall plot.

Dark Ages: The practice of sacrifice was well known among the followers of the Old Faith and the Valdaermen, who used Autumn •••, Summer •••, and Forlog •••, Galdrar •••, respectively, to gather its power to them.

CIRCE'S ENCHANTMENT (LIFE •••••)

The legendary sorceress Circe used her magic to transform men into beasts. The Verbena have long practiced the art of transformation, though it is a difficult one to master. The mage must touch the subject or subjects of the spell with a wand or sprinkle them with an elixir of distilled herbs to begin the process of transforming them into whatever sort of beast is desired. Some particularly infamous uses of this enchantment include turning some targets into predators and others into prey, restoring the former only after they have hunted, killed and eaten the latter. Another is transforming some subjects into male animals and others into females, allowing them to experience mating and childbirth before they are restored.

Verbena do also use this spell as a blessing of sorts, allowing others to experience life in beast form; soaring as an eagle or swimming as a dolphin, for example. It is a rare gift, and not one given lightly.

System: Five successes are required to transform the target completely. Fewer successes might result in only a partial transformation (such as giving the target the head of a donkey or the lower body of a horse). Each additional target requires another success, and at least one success must be assigned to duration (for the spell to last more than a moment). This makes *Circe's Enchantment* a taxing spell for even a skilled mage.

MET: Master *Life*. A successful casting transforms the target into a normal beast of the caster's choosing for one turn/minute. Targets accepting this rote of their own free (including the caster) will may spend a Willpower Trait to enhance this duration to 10 minutes. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows for an additional target to be transformed, or an additional minute added to the duration.

Dark Ages: Spring •• and Summer •••• are required for mages of the Old Faith to cast this spell. Valdaermen cast a similar spell using Galdrar •• and Hjaldrar ••••.

CURSE OF MACHA (LIFE ••)

In ancient Ireland, the goddess Macha was forced, while pregnant, to run a footrace against the swiftest horse in the kingdom to prove her prowess. She won and immediately went into labor thereafter, to be delivered of her child. She laid a curse upon the men of Ulster that when they were in need of their strength, they would feel the pangs of labor upon them, just as she suffered them. This curse allows a Verbena to cause the victim, male or female, to feel labor pains clutching at them. Verbena women most often use it to teach men a lesson about "the weaker sex."

System: Each success on the spell is treated as two levels of bashing damage for purposes of determining dice pool penalties due to the terrible pain. Targets Incapacitated by the spell are incapable of doing anything other than moaning and writhing in agony. Successes must be assigned to duration as normal, though the mage can also choose to consciously maintain the spell.

MET: Initiate *Life*. The targets suffer wound penalties as though they suffered two levels of bashing damage, though no actual damage is inflicted. This pain lasts for 10 minutes or until the caster wills it to stop. Targets Incapacitated by this pain are helpless to do anything but writhe in agony, and those pushed beyond that limit pass out for the duration. *Grades of Success:* No effect.

Dark Ages: This curse was known to women of the Old Faith, who cast it using Autumn •••.

LAY OF THE LAND (CORRESPONDENCE ••, LIFE ••)

Oneness with nature has long been a deeply held Verbena belief, one that this magic makes a reality. The caster weaves a web of enchantment that connects her to all life within a particular area, both plants and animals, allowing the mage to become aware of the nature of a place and everything that is happening there. Generally, the more sophisticated and plentiful the life in an area is, the more the Verbena learns. This spell is more effective in an old-growth forest or a jungle filled with numerous creatures, less effective in a barren desert, and all but useless in a blasted and barren landscape. Information comes filtered through the life of the land, so it might be somewhat distorted by the different perspectives.

System: One success is needed to create the connection between the caster and the life of the land. Additional successes expand the range of the caster's senses as follows: an area 100 yards in radius with one

additional success, up to a mile with two, 10 miles with three, 100 miles with four, and 500 miles with five. At greater distances, the information the mage receives becomes increasingly vague simply because there is so much. The Storyteller may require a Perception + Awareness roll (difficulty 1 + total spell successes) to sort out specific information.

MET: Initiate *Correspondence*, Initiate *Life*. For the rest of the scene, the mage receives a free retest on all *Awareness* tests related to the surrounding area, and may receive flashes of information gleaned from the local flora and fauna at the Storyteller's discretion. This rote does not function in areas without plentiful natural surroundings. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success adds another scene to the duration.

Dark Ages: Witches and druids of the Old Faith cast this spell using Autumn ••, Spring •••.

MAGIC CIRCLE (PRITIE ••, SPIRIT ••)

Verbena often perform their rites within the bounds of a circle that is warded to protect them against all unwanted influences and spirits, intended to keep in the power that they raise until the time is right to release it. Traditionally, they create the circle by walking or tracing its bounds with wand, staff or blade three times. The spirits of the four elements and the four directions are then called upon to consecrate and enforce the circle's boundaries until the Verbena release them.

System: A *Magic Circle* can have a radius up to the caster's *Arete* in yards; each success allocated to the radius increases it by a yard. A circle cast for a specific ritual lasts until that ritual is complete. A circle cast for general purposes must have successes allocated to its duration. The remaining successes from the casting provide dice for countermagic. These dice are rolled automatically against any spell cast on a subject within the bounds of the circle. Make a *Willpower* roll (difficulty 6) for any spirit attempting to cross the boundaries of the circle. A number of successes equal to the spell's casting are necessary for it to do so. Spirits cannot affect those inside the boundary with their powers.

MET: Initiate *Prime*, Initiate *Spirit*. Spirits attempting to cross the boundaries of the circle must first best the caster in a *Willpower* Test, with the caster adding her *Arete* rating to her *Willpower* for the purposes of ties and overbidding. Additionally, spirits cannot target those within such a circle with their powers unless they break through, and mages receive a free retest on all countermagic tests while standing inside the circle. *Grades of Success:* No effect.

Dark Ages: This spell originated in the rituals of the Old Faith, which used Autumn •• to cast it.

SELF SACRIFICE (PRITIE •)

The Norse god Odin hung himself from the branches of the World Tree to gain knowledge of the runes. So must the Verbena sometimes sacrifice for their magic. Rituals of pain and endurance — as simple as cutting runes into flesh or scourging or as complex as hanging in imitation of Odin's sacrifice or the Native American Sun Dance — fuel Verbena magic. Other mages consider such primitive and painful rituals unnecessary, but the Verbena understand that sometimes pain is the best way to know that you are alive, and the willingness to sacrifice is one of the greatest strengths.

System: For each level of bashing damage that she suffers, the mage gains a point of *Quintessence* she can use for a particular spell. For each level of lethal damage, the mage gains an additional point of *Quintessence*. This damage is done directly to the mage's *Pattern*, so it cannot be healed using magic, only time and rest. In essence, the Verbena is drawing upon her own life force, breaking down the *Quintessence* of her own being, to fuel her magic.

MET: Apprentice *Prime*. Each health level of bashing damage suffered adds a *Quintessence* Trait that can only be used for a single rote named when this rote is cast. Lethal health levels add *Quintessence* Traits at the same rate, but they can be used for any rote. No form of magical healing can repair damage done by this rote, only natural rest. *Grades of Success:* No effect.

Dark Ages: Old Faith mages cast this spell using Autumn •, while the Valdaermen cast it using Galdrar •.

STRAINS OF LAUGHTER, SLEEP AND SORROW (MIND ••)

The Celtic god Dagda was said to possess a magical harp that played certain songs that could enchant all those who heard them. These haunting melodies caused uncontrollable laughter or weeping, or they sent listeners into a deep and peaceful sleep. The bards and skalds of the Verbena have long practiced the art of influencing and enchanting listeners with their music and can produce similar effects. Traditionally it is the melody of a harp, pipe or flute that produces the magic, but some Verbena accompany the instrument with a song or even sing unaccompanied. Some casters have been known to achieve the same effects with modern instruments.

System: The caster weaves a powerful strain of emotion with his music. The successes from casting the spell determine the strength of the emotion. Two or three successes are enough for the listeners to feel whatever emotion the caster projects. Four or more cause the subject to feel it intensely, and even act upon

it. At this level of success, subjects laugh or weep openly or drop off into a deep and peaceful slumber. A target can spend a point of temporary Willpower to shake off the Effect briefly, but as long as the caster plays, it will return. The effects of the spell end within a minute after the caster stops playing or singing, though listeners who have fallen asleep will remain so for at least an hour or two, unless they are awakened before then.

MET: Initiate *Mind*. After casting this rote, the mage must defeat his target in a Social test of either the *Performance* or *Expression* Ability, as suits his chosen medium. If successful, the target immediately begins feeling the specified emotion for the rest of the scene. Those sent to sleep do so peacefully, though they are instantly roused if attacked. The performance also must continue, or the effect fades a minute later. *Grades of Success:* Each additional target requires another grade of success.

Dark Ages: The Pillar required for this spell depended on the emotion the caster wished to provoke: Summer •• for laughter, Winter •• for sleep and sorrow.

STRENGTH OF THE EARTH (LIFE •••)

For the Verbena, the living Earth is a source of great strength, spiritually and magically. Using this spell, it is also a great source of *physical* strength, investing the caster with the power that raises mountains and directs the course of mighty rivers. To cast the spell, the Verbena must be in contact with bare rock, soil, sand or dirt. Pavement and wooden floors will not do, though solid stone floors set firmly into the ground might, at the Storyteller's discretion. The caster needn't be barefoot, though some Verbena prefer it when using this magic. The spell also ends if the caster loses touch with the earth for any reason.

System: Each success on the spell's casting adds a dot to the mage's Strength. The caster must also assign successes to duration for the spell to last for more than a moment. The spell is coincidental as long as the mage's Strength remains within human bounds (five or fewer dots). Greater levels of strength require vulgar magic to achieve. A similar rote exists that uses oak trees to augment the mage's Stamina.

MET: Disciple *Life*. This rote grants the mage the following Physical Traits: *Brawny* and *Ferocious*. This rote is coincidental if these Traits do not boost the mage over normal Trait maximums, but it is vulgar if they do. Otherwise, these Traits can be bid and lost normally. *Grades of Success:* No effect.

Dark Ages: Mages of the Old Faith cast this spell using Summer •••, while Valdaermen cast something similar using Hjalдар •••.

THREEFOLD RETURN (ENTROPY ••••, TIME ••••)

Many Verbena believe in the Law of Threefold Return, which says that what you do returns to you threefold in the fullness of time. Some Verbena are not willing to wait for the fullness of time, so they choose to help things along a bit, providing a touch of "instant karma" where others get exactly what they deserve.

The Verbena prepares a suitable charm as a focus for the spell, which must be worn or carried. The most common charm is a small mirror or other reflective item, though metal rings (representing the circular nature of the Law of Three), symbols connected with fate and woven or knotted cords (particularly of three colors) are also common. The Verbena chooses when to activate the charm, releasing the power of the spell.

System: The caster must achieve at least one success to prepare the charm. When the spell is released, the total number of successes determines its effectiveness. It magnifies the actions of the subject performed for or against the caster and returns that fortune (good or ill). So someone who did the caster a good turn might gain some small benefit (for one success) to a great windfall (for four or more successes). Someone who did the caster harm might suffer a similar harm (for one success) to a terrible series of misfortunes (for four or more successes).

MET: Adept *Entropy*, Adept *Time*. This rote relies largely on the Storyteller to adjudicate, but they are encouraged to make the results suitably dramatic, for better or worse — after all, the target is only getting what's coming to him. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows for a longer length of punishment (or reward), or a more severe result.

Dark Ages: Masters of manipulating fate, the Valdaermen cast this spell using Forlog ••••.

WATERS OF THE WELL OF LIFE (LIFE •••••)

Although the masters of the Verbena can create life, it is a power they rarely employ. The same is true for the power to restore life to the dead. Therein lay the hubris of Asclepius and Hippocrates, they say, which led to the creation of the Cosian Circle and their modern heirs, the Progenitors. Such power over life and death is necessarily limited, because without death, life has no meaning.

The Verbena do possess mystic secrets for holding death at bay for a time, however. This enchantment has been found (in one form or another) among many different branches of the Old Faith, from the druids to the witches of Thessaly to the spae-wives of the North. The caster infuses a bath — often in a great cauldron —

with sacred herbs and magical power, transforming it into the waters of the Well of Life, which can restore life to the recently deceased.

System: A minimum of four successes are needed to effect the spell, which is only possible if the subject has been dead no more than a number of hours equal to the caster's Arete. The deceased is restored to life with a single health level, and she must recover normally from that point (though magical healing can assist in this as well). This spell is *always* vulgar, since tampering with the forces of life and death in this way is no small thing.

MET: Master *Life*. Success restores a corpse to life as described already, and subject to the same limits. At the Storyteller's discretion, this rote may become more difficult or even outright impossible depending on the condition of the corpse and the nature of their death. This effect is always *massively* vulgar, and even successful castings frequently result in visits from Paradox spirits. Worse still, the mage might be taken on a harrowing trip to the Underworld to learn the value of life and death. *Grades of Success:* No effect.

Dark Ages: The mages of the Old Faith once cast this spell using Spring •••••.

WILLFUL BINDING (MIND •••••)

Although they are believers in the tenet, "An it harm none, do what thou wilt," the Verbena also believe that using magic to enjoin others from doing harm (essentially binding them to the same credo) is entirely fair and just. Sometime rather than calling down a curse upon a wrongdoer (which could invite similar harm to return to them), Verbena use this spell to bind that person's will and prevent any further transgressions.

The spell requires that the caster be in the presence of the subject and pronounce the binding upon him, or else have some personal connection to the subject to cast the binding from afar. The subject is thereafter unable to violate the commands that the caster has specified — be it as broad as "do no harm" or as specific as troubling a specific person no more.

System: The caster requires Correspondence 2 and a personal item (picture, lock of hair, etc.) to cast this spell on a target she cannot see. Otherwise the binding must be done in the target's presence. Successes determine how long the binding lasts (as given on p. 209 of *Mage*). While under the effects of the **Willful Binding**, the subject cannot take any action contrary to the mage's prohibitions, though the Storyteller may permit the subject to spend a point of Willpower to momentarily overcome the binding for a round. Countermagic can also undo a **Willful Binding**.



MET: Adept *Mind*. Targets affected by this rote are incapable of aggressively harming others in any way, including ordering allies or underlings to harm their enemies, though they may defend themselves normally if need be. This rote lasts for the remainder of the session. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows for an additional target to be so influenced.

Dark Ages: Although less common in the past, this spell could be cast using Winter ••••.

FAMILIARS

Witches of legend are well known for their familiars: spirits (or demons) in animal form that do the witch's bidding and serve as her eyes and ears. Although the legends are as distorted as any about the Verbena,

familiars are common among members of the Tradition, more than in most others.

Verbena familiars normally appear as fairly mundane animals, but they possess powerful, mystical spirits that make them more than just beasts. Most Verbena prefer familiars that inhabit a living form rather than disembodied spirits. Familiars are, in essence, living Fetishes, forms for powerful spirits that serve the Verbena as allies (see the **Forged by Dragon's Fire** for more information about familiars).

Common animal forms for Verbena familiars include crows, ravens and cats (perhaps the most common) along with dogs, wolves, toads, snakes, ferrets and even more exotic animals such as owls, swans or cranes.

MARKS OF THE CRAFT: MERITS AND FLAWS



The following Merits and Flaws from **Mage: the Ascension** are common among the Verbena and particularly appropriate for Verbena characters:

Merits: Green Thumb, Unaging, Oracular Ability, Cyclic Magic (particularly tied to the cycles of the moon or the seasons), Fae Blood, Shapechanger Kin, Sphere Natural (Life) and True Faith (the Old Gods)

Flaws: Primal Marks, Berserker, The Bard's Tongue, Devil's Mark and Geasa

Physical Flaws like Disfigured, Deformity, Defective Sense and Lamé are fairly uncommon among the Verbena, given their expertise in using Life magic to correct them. Verbena who have such Flaws are either inexperienced, ill-favored, cursed or have chosen to retain their physical imperfections for whatever reason (which might offer a potential story hook for the character).

LONG-LIVED (1-PT. MERIT)

Whether through heredity, the blessings of the gods or just good, clean living, you are especially long-lived. You age, but gracefully, retaining both your vitality and your faculties. You can easily expect to live to see your first century, and possibly another beyond that. Note that adepts of the Life Sphere can achieve this Effect through magic. This Merit grants it naturally (and does not incur the possibility of Paradox).

HONORED LINEAGE (2-PT. MERIT)

Your bloodline is descended from one of the oldest and most respected families among the Verbena, and you can trace your ancestry back to the Burning Times, if not farther. You are a true scion of the legendary

Wyck, the First Ones. Among mages (particularly Verbena) who care about matters of lineage, reduce the difficulty of your Social rolls by two (but not to less than 2). You're also likely to receive a measure of deference and respect from these people, though others will also expect great things of you and could be disappointed if you don't live up to your heritage.

CLOAK OF THE SEASONS (3-PT. MERIT)

You are magically protected from the effects of the weather and the natural environment. You are perfectly comfortable in winter's chill or summer's blazing heat regardless of your clothing (or lack thereof). You do not suffer from sunstroke or exposure. You're not even bitten by insects or other vermin. Your senses are still limited by the elements (including fog, rain and snow), and you're not protected from either hunger or thirst.

NATURAL SHAPESHIFTER (3-PT. MERIT)

You are a natural and talented shapeshifter when using Life magic (not necessarily related to the Fera, though you may also have the Shapechanger Kin Merit). You are never in danger of losing yourself to the identity of your beast-form, and any new shape you adopt is as comfortable to you as your own. Moreover, the difficulty of Arete rolls to change your own shape is two less than normal.

MET: You are two Traits up on all tests involving changing your own shape, and you need not worry about ever losing your identity while in another form.

TOUCH OF LIFE (3-PT. MERIT)

Your Avatar and your Pattern are filled to overflowing with the energies of life. You are especially vital and vivacious, and others find your presence uplifting

and energizing (and possibly annoying, for those who don't care for such things). You recover from injury as if your condition was one health level less serious. (A Wounded character recovers as if he is only Injured, taking a week rather than a month.) Reduce the difficulty of your Stamina rolls to fight off diseases and poisons by one. More importantly, your liveliness tends to rub off on others. Plants thrive under your care (much like the Green Thumb Merit, p. 294 of *Mage*). Injured people under your direct care recover as quickly as you do (treating their condition as one health level less serious for purposes of recovery).

The downside of this Merit is that your blood is particularly rich in life force, meaning vampires gain twice the normal amount of blood points when drinking from you. This might make you a target of bloodsuckers and similar life-draining creatures.

WITCH'S BANE (3- TO 5-PT. FLAW)

The touch of cold iron is anathema to both you and your magic, or both. This may be due to some faerie heritage or the like (and is most common among Verbena with the Fae Blood Merit). As a 3-pt Flaw, the touch of cold iron either provides three dice of countermagic against your spells or inflicts a health level of bashing damage per turn it's in contact with you. As a 4-pt. Flaw it does both, or inflicts lethal damage. As a 5-pt. Flaw, it provides both three dice of countermagic and inflicts a health level of lethal damage each round it is in contact with you.

MET: For the three-Trait Flaw, opponents holding cold iron receive a free retest against your magic, or iron inflicts one level of bashing damage per turn of contact to your skin. For four Traits, it does both, or weapons of cold iron inflict lethal damage regardless of type. For five Traits, it grants foes a free retest, and you suffer a level of lethal damage per turn of contact.

BOUND BY THE LAW OF THREE (5-PT. FLAW)

For whatever reason, you are more than just a believer in the Verbena ideal of the Law of Threefold Return, you are a living embodiment of it, in that whatever harm you do to others using magic eventually returns to plague you.

The exact definition of "harm" is up to you and the Storyteller to decide, but it definitely includes inflicting injury, pain, illness and bad luck, as well as influencing others against their will. Using magic to achieve any of these ends is always considered "vulgar with witnesses" for you (you and the gods are witness to it, if no one else). This means you accumulate more Paradox for it (possibly *much* more), and you're more likely to suffer Paradox Backlashes because of it.

You can still use magic on others against their will, as long as doing so does not cause harm. Examples include binding someone to prevent them from doing harm to themselves or others, and using rites like **Banishing Blessing** (p. 65) to gently guide unwanted people out of your life for a while.



SE '03

CHAPTER THREE: CHILDREN OF THE WYCK

Solitary trees, if they grow at all, grow strong.

—Winston Churchill



The devastation caused by the Avatar Storm and the consequences of the Ascension War have had their impact on the Traditions, barring many elder mages from the world and leaving a younger generation without guidance. Where some Traditions have foundered, the Verbena have blossomed under these hardships, like a sudden frost causes a tree to flower in an effort to scatter its seeds and ensure the survival of its kind.

The ranks of the Verbena have increased considerably over the past few decades, and the younger generation has taken up the cause of the Old Ways from their elders, hardly missing a step. They know that life endures and that the Verbena have seen such dark times before. As long as they remain true to their beliefs and live their lives to the fullest, then hope is not yet lost. The one Divine Self that awakens to its own nature might yet secure Ascension for all. The Ascension War is not over. It's merely being fought on a different plane than before.

This is fortunate, because the Traditions are sorely in need of the vitality that the Verbena represent. The others see darkness all around, despair and those who have lost hope, clinging to memories of past glories or railing uselessly at the cruel whims of fate. To the Verbena, far too many of their fellow mages have forgotten how to live and that life itself is the greatest mystery and the greatest gift.

Even though winter lies deep upon the world and all magic is falling into its chill embrace, the Verbena know that such cold and darkness is always followed by a new spring and the return of life and light. Seeds wait in the frozen ground for the first warming rays of the sun, and the keepers of the Old Ways are the gardeners who tend to them. It's not over, the Verbena say — it can't be. If it is, then all their efforts won't matter one way or another, but it's not just the result that matters, it's the effort and the effects of a life lived true to what you believe. Even if that is all the Verbena achieve — to remain true to the Old Ways and the legacy of the Wyck until the end — then it is enough.

NOTABLE VERBENA



The Verbena are a diverse crop, sprung from the scattered seeds of the oldest mystical heritages. Their tremendous diversity is both their greatest asset and their greatest potential weakness, since the Verbena lack unity and are in greater need of it. Verbena belonging to different factions and different cultures are respectful of each other, but only as respectful as they are of

related Traditions such as the Dreamspeakers or the Cult of Ecstasy. Deep divisions still cut through the Verbena, between traditionalists and New Agers, between the Old and New World, between factions, covens and cultures. At their best, the Verbena represent the ideal of diverse mages working together toward Ascension, a microcosm of the Traditions. At their worst, they are a squabbling, barely united group suffering the effects of infighting and arguing over semantics.

The following are a few Verbena who have made names for themselves through their heroism, skill or otherwise exemplary behavior.

HECTOR DE XANGÔ

Background: Born in poverty in Rio De Janeiro, Hector grew up in a shantytown, learning how to pick pockets and bilk tourists out of their money so that he might have enough to eat. He was barely 12 years old when an *ialorixá*, a Candomble priestess, recognized a spark of magic in him. She encouraged the boy to come and talk with her and eventually told him that the *Orixá* had chosen him and that Xangô, the *Orixá* of thunder and lightning, ruled his head. Hector became her apprentice, and the first time he attended a ritual of her *santo* (house), Xangô entered into him to dance. Hector felt truly alive for the first time in his young life, and he Awakened.

Hector quickly outstripped his teacher, becoming a *babalorixá*, or priest of the *Orixá*, before he turned 16. Respected throughout the community for his strong connection with the spirit world, his good advice and his gifts for healing, Hector spent a fair portion of his time interceding with the *Orixá* on behalf of the people. Many came to him for advice and blessings, and word of him eventually reached other ears.

When Hector was 18, a Verbena Santeria master contacted him and recognized his potential. She offered to teach Hector about the true nature of reality, but he had to come and join her house in Miami. He agreed and found his new apprenticeship a humbling experience. Although he was a talented mage, most of

what Hector knew of magic was self-taught. He had to start out at the bottom again, and there was a lot to learn. He spent several years learning all that his master had to teach him before he was ready to return home as a man and a true priest of the *Orixá*.

In his mid-20s, Hector went back to Rio, where he became a *pai de santo*, head of a house, with students of his own. It didn't take long for the community to welcome him back or for Hector to feel at home again among them. For the past 10 years, he has divided his time between Rio and Miami, working with his fellow Verbena and their allies to further the cause of the poor communities in those areas. He has also made several trips to Africa to meet and study with masters of the *Ifa* tradition that is the root of Santeria and Voodoo, deepening his experience with the *Orixá*. Now in his mid-30s, Hector is recognized as a talented and capable adept and a teacher in his own right.

Image: Hector de Xangô is a dark-skinned Brazilian man in his mid-30s with an intense glare that seems to extend right into the soul. He has a broad nose, sharp cheekbones and somewhat wild hair with a short beard. He tends to dress simply in a short-sleeved button-down shirt, a T-shirt or a tank top and a pair of loose-fitting drawstring pants. He often goes barefoot (preferring to feel the earth under him), but he wears sandals on occasion. He dislikes wearing shoes. He typically wears a necklace of cowry shells and a beaded bracelet or anklet.

The foci for Hector's magic are primarily the trappings of the *Ifa* tradition, including rum and cigars



(favored by Xangô), drums, knives and cowry shells or kola nuts for divinations. Important rituals call for a blood sacrifice, usually of a rooster or goat, which Hector offers up to the *Orixá* to call on their aid.

Roleplaying Hints: You are a fierce advocate of the good of your people, whom you consider to be all those in need of spiritual guidance. You do not believe material success is the key to happiness. A full belly is meaningless with an empty spirit. The poor don't need money, they need something to believe in and hold on to. If they have that, then the rest will come. If they don't, then all the charity in the world won't make a difference. You believe that people should make it on their own, but that there's nothing wrong with offering guidance along the way.

You are a man of deep and abiding faith in the *Orixá*, and you accept their guidance. Unlike many Verbena *santeros*, you do not see a need to purge the Christianized elements from the Way of the Saints. They are a part of your tradition and your beliefs, and they show that all faith springs from the same root source. Although you have your beliefs, they don't invalidate anyone else's, and you're not threatened that others believe differently from you.

You're an earthy and practical man. You have slaughtered chickens and goats as offerings to the *Orixá* since you were a boy, and you wield a butcher knife without squeamishness. Consequently, you have little patience for squeamishness in others. Your hands are always dirty or bloody — callused hands that have done hard work and never shy away from it.

Faction: Twisters of Fate

Essence: Primordial

Nature: Caregiver

Demeanor: Traditionalist

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina (Tireless) 4, Charisma (Primal) 4, Manipulation 2, Appearance 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits (Visionary) 5

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Awareness 4, Cosmology 2, Dodge 2, Leadership 3, Linguistics 2, Medicine 2, Occult 4, Performance 2, Stealth 3, Streetwise 3, Survival 2

Backgrounds: Avatar 4, Dream 3, Mentor 2, Node 2

Arete: 4

Spheres: Entropy 3, Life 4, Matter 2, Mind 1, Spirit 4

Willpower: 8

Quintessence: 6

Paradox: 0

Resonance: (Dynamic) Vital, (Dynamic) Energetic, (Static) Spiritual, (Entropic) Visceral

HESHA MORNINGSHADE

Background: Heshia Morningshade was destined to be one of the great teachers and leaders of the Verbena, though not even she expected that her time would come so soon. The Verbena Primus and master Nightshade recognized Heshia's potential, however, and took her as her student and apprentice. This choice stirred up considerable speculation and jealousy, particularly since Heshia was not from a known bloodline or sympathetic to the Gardeners of the Tree. She was a simple country girl who first learned the Old Ways at her grandmother's knee and made no claims of any ties with the ancient Wyck. Her interests lay much more with the Moon-Seekers, and she looked forward to the future rather than back toward the past.

Heshia proved herself a capable student. She was also a talented teacher and quickly became a high priestess and mentor in her own right, seeking out and guiding potential initiates onto the paths of the Verbena, all the while showing them how to find their own way in the world. Heshia has always believed that teachers only plant the seeds of knowledge into their students — the students must grow and mature in their own way. They should take care to weed their gardens, but not to prune their charges overly much. Each must take her destined shape and path. This made her a sought-after teacher among the Moon-Seekers and many modern Verbena, and it only brought her more into question as far as the traditionalists were concerned.

She lived simply, traveling the world to share her knowledge and insight with other circles, seeking out potential students. This meant that she was on Earth when



the Avatar Storm closed off the spirit realms to the masters of the Traditions and when Horizon fell. Although she was saddened by those events, Heshu believes that they showed a deep flaw in the Traditions' thinking that the Ascension somehow lay beyond Earth and humanity. Since the Avatar Storm, she has found herself in a leadership role even more, now one of the eldest and most respected Verbena still accessible to the Tradition's initiates.

Image: Heshu Morningshade is truly handsome woman, classically beautiful and a serene mother figure. She has straight, flaming red hair that falls to her waist, usually tied back with a colorful ribbon (a silver diadem or crown of flowers in ritual). Her eyes are deep blue, reflecting a youthful passion and vigor. Although she's in her 40s, she has an ageless quality about her.

Roleplaying Hints: You disdain any sort of formal leadership position, and you are not a member of any one circle. Instead, you continue to travel the world, seeking out potential students, teaching and maintaining contact with the many "gardens" of Verbena you have helped to plant. More than ever, you are convinced that the hope and future of the Tradition (and perhaps all humanity) lies with these young initiates who are still filled with wonder, life and vigor, and not yet bowed by age and cynicism. They may try your patience sometimes, but they also help keep you young and honest about yourself and your path. You learn at least as much from them as you teach them in return, and that has become your own personal path toward Ascension.

Faction: Moon-Seekers

Essence: Questing

Nature: Visionary

Demeanor: Pedagogue

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina (Vigorous) 4, Charisma (Passionate) 4, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3, Perception (Insightful) 4, Intelligence (Knowledgeable) 4, Wits 3

Abilities: Academics 3, Alertness 2, Awareness 3, Cosmology 4, Enigmas 3, Etiquette 2, Expression 3, Leadership 4, Linguistics 3, Medicine 2, Meditation 3, Occult (Verbena Lore) 5

Backgrounds: Avatar 3, Destiny 3, Dream 2

Arete: 5

Spheres: Correspondence 2, Entropy 1, Life 5, Matter 2, Mind 3, Spirit 2, Time 1

Willpower: 8

Quintessence: 10

Paradox: 0

Resonance: (Dynamic) Bountiful, (Dynamic) Vigorous, (Static) Cyclical

OTHER VERBENA

The Verbena (like most Traditions) claim many noteworthy mages among their number, stretching back to the Aeduna and the legendary Wyck. To the Verbena all primordial mages are ultimately a part of their lineage.

MEDEA

The witch Medea is one of the most infamous ancestors of the Verbena. Born to a royal family, Medea possessed the blood of the Wyck and a strong talent for magic. As a girl she studied the craft. By the time she was a young woman, she was already a formidable sorceress. Then she met the dashing Jason, a prince from Thessaly, who came to her land with a crew of heroes known as the Argonauts, searching for the legendary Golden Fleece. Medea fell in love with Jason immediately and offered to help him claim the Fleece if he took her and her younger brother with him back to his homeland.

Jason agreed, and Medea prepared the sleeping draught that lulled the dragon guarding the Golden Fleece. When the *Argo* was unable to escape her father's ships, Medea killed her brother, cut his body into pieces, and scattered them behind, forcing her father to stop to collect his son's body for a proper burial. Medea continued to aid Jason with her magic after his return home. She went to Jason's usurping uncle in disguise, claiming she could restore his youth and vigor. To prove it, she cut up a sheep, then boiled the pieces in a pot with magical herbs. A young lamb sprang from the pot. When the King's daughters attempted the same on him, they got nothing but a cauldron of boiled flesh.

Jason assumed the throne, and Medea gave him two sons. Eventually, however, the king's eye wandered. He



became enamored of a princess of a nearby country and offered to take her as his wife, cementing an alliance between the two lands. Furious at being set aside, Medea arranged to send the new queen the gift of a fine cloak. When this queen clasped it around her, it burst into flames and burned her to death. Medea then murdered her own children as a final strike against Jason before fleeing Thessaly in a chariot drawn by dragons.

Medea fled into the Umbra, where she sought to create the life that eluded her in the mundane world. She refined her mastery of Life magic to a tremendous degree, creating new lovers, new children and a new family to replace those that she had destroyed. Some Verbena elders were able to treat with her from time to time, but she was well known as a dangerous ally and an even more dangerous enemy. Still, she was recognized as one of the greatest masters of the Verbena and eventually considered an Oracle for her vast powers. There was a time when Medea ruled as a queen over worlds of her own making, and she sought to be a benevolent ruler — though a jealous one.

As Medea's world became more and more expansive, she sank deeper and deeper into her own creation and into the depths of Quiet, becoming a Marauder. In recent years, the Verbena grapevine has been full of talk of Medea. Some have said that the Avatar Storm shocked her out of her Quiet and into an awareness of the modern world and the grim condition it's in. While a handful of Verbena elders have tried to corroborate these tales, none have been able to do so. But if they *are* true, it remains to be seen what role so powerful an Oracle of Life might play in the Ascension War — even assuming that she can reach Earth or that other mages can find her.

MERLIN

Legends say that Myrrdin, or Merlin as he is known in the modern world, was born the child of a mortal woman and a spirit or devil. The Verbena maintain that Merlin's father was one of the legendary Wyck and Merlin's extraordinary power was a result of the blood of the First Ones running so strongly in his veins. Certainly, Merlin was extraordinarily gifted, able to foretell the future even as a boy. The Verbena claim that he was trained and initiated into the Old Ways by one of the surviving Aeduna, and that he performed many of the great feats of magic attributed to him (although not the building of Stonehenge, which the Verbena attribute to the Wyck themselves).

Perhaps Merlin's greatest deed was arranging the birth of Arthur, the young chieftain-king who served as a leader to unite the pagan and Christian peoples of Britain under one rule. Merlin educated Arthur and



supported his dream of Camelot, serving as his advisor and counselor. Unfortunately, the dream of Camelot failed, betrayed by love and trapped by its own ideals.

Even before Arthur fell at the hand of his son Mordred, Merlin left the world behind. Legend has it that he was sealed within a tree or stone by his student and lover Nimue, although there is some question whether or not she betrayed Merlin or did this at his request. Some Verbena maintain that Merlin foresaw the end of Camelot and, powerless to prevent it, chose to sleep away the ages until the time of Arthur's return, so that he could once again advise and aid his protégé.

NIGHTSHADE

The woman known only by her craft-name of Nightshade was the co-founder and first Primus of the Verbena Tradition. Without her efforts, it is quite possible that the Old Ways of the Verbena would never have survived the struggle against the Order of Reason (and its misbegotten child, the Technocracy). They would now be as dead as the unicorns and other By-gones they once protected.

Nightshade was born in England in the late 14th or early 15th century (history is unclear as to her exact birth date). Her parents were pagans, keepers of the Old Faith, and Nightshade was raised to honor the old gods and their ways. She was a natural priestess and leader, and she trained with a coven. In adulthood, she was a prominent member of the pagan community in England.

Nightshade was the sole survivor of the massacre at Harrowgate, when the forces of General Wyngarde



descended upon the pagan celebrants at a Midsummer ritual. The cruelty and the sheer hatred she witnessed that night marked Nightshade for the rest of her days. It became quite clear to her that there would be no accord between the Old Ways and the Order of Reason, that the Burning Times would consume all pagan folk unless something was done.

So Nightshade supported the formation of the Council of Mystic Traditions. Moreover, she sought to unite the diverse pagan paths of Europe into an alliance. Such an alliance could not only withstand the onslaught of the Order of Reason, but it could also take a position of strength on the new Council without having to answer to the whims of the Order of Hermes or the Celestial Chorus. Her efforts led to the creation of the Verbena, and she is honored as the mother of the modern Tradition.

Nightshade walked the Paths of the Wyck and traveled the world gathering allies for the new Tradition. She also avenged her family and friends by burying Wyngarde's army in a blizzard and slaying the general with her own hands. She was recognized as one of the most formidable members of the Council of Nine, although she exercised her power carefully.

As the centuries passed, Nightshade spent increasingly more time in Horizon, although she visited the earthly realm on occasion and even continued to teach students and attend seasonal rituals. After the fall of Horizon and the Avatar Storm, Verbena circles and covens lost contact with their Primus, and some fear that Nightshade is dead, either at the hands of the Technocracy or torn apart by the Avatar Storm. Still, those who knew her point out that she has literally walked through fire and death many times before and survived.

ALL-VERBENA CHRONICLES



The Verbena are a diverse lot, but they have certain things in common that bind them together as a Tradition, not the least of which are their love of life and their respect for the Old Ways. Since the founding of the Council of Nine, Verbena have often been suspicious of outsiders. In the past they suffered at the hands of the ancestors of the Celestial Chorus and the Order of Hermes as well as the Technocracy. They understand the need for unity within the Traditions, but such old grudges are not so easily set aside. Moreover, mages of other Traditions often find Verbena ways and rites disturbing, even barbaric, making them less likely to work with the followers of the Old Ways unless the Verbena are willing to modify and tone-down their traditional practices. Some Verbena are willing to do so, but others aren't. Therefore, Verbena circles and covens often consist solely of initiates of their Tradition, perhaps with an ally or two from a sympathetic path such as the Dreamspeakers.

All-Verbena chronicles still offer plenty of opportunities for variety. No two followers of the Old Ways are

entirely the same, and the Verbena wouldn't have it any other way. In addition to the four major factions within the Tradition (described in Chapter Two), the Verbena enjoy a diverse range of cultural and mythic backgrounds. A circle might consist solely of Celtic descendants of the ancient druids and bards, but it is just as likely to include a druid, a rune-worker, a New Age "kitchen witch," a ceremonial Wiccan and a priestess of Santeria. Storytellers can make Verbena chronicles as focused or as broad and diverse as they wish, since the Tradition is one of the most inclusive of all.

THEMES

A number of themes common to the Verbena can show up in an all-Verbena chronicle to enhance the story. Chronicles can include some or all of these themes. Although they might not necessarily be in the forefront of every story, these basic themes underlie much of the Verbena Tradition, and they tend to show up in one form or another.

VITALITY

The Verbena believe in living life to the fullest by embracing all the many joys and experiences that it has to offer. They are not ascetic mystics who lock them-

selves up in their ivory towers to contemplate the nature of reality. They're all about getting out into the world to *experience* reality firsthand. Their emphasis on doing rather than just being makes the Verbena appealing to young mages, who might find the philosophies of the Akashic Brotherhood, the Celestial Chorus or the Order of Hermes too dry or austere.

Their vitality also makes the Verbena an active part of the world, which can be a boon for a chronicle since there isn't likely to be as much "downtime" with the mages off on their own performing experiments or research. While the Verbena do feel the need for solitude, they're more likely to do things that are easier to incorporate into the cooperative storytelling of the game rather than solo activities that require little narration and don't involve the other characters.

In addition to their *joie de vivre*, the theme of vitality can also show up in Verbena stories by confronting the characters with challenges to their liveliness. The World of Darkness is often not a vital place, and it can be difficult for even the Verbena to maintain their sense of life and hope in the face of so much despair and apathy. It also offers opportunities to raise issues about the quality of life. For the Verbena it's not just enough to be alive; they also want to *feel* alive. That colors their reactions to lingering illness and infirmity.

TRADITION

For centuries, the Verbena and their ancestors have held fast to cultural beliefs (and even cultures), keeping them alive in a world that increasingly doesn't care about the Old Ways of thinking, believing or doing things. They've suffered and been persecuted for their beliefs, but they have remained faithful despite it all. They are strong believers in tradition, though exactly which tradition can be a matter for debate (or even heated argument).

The Verbena Tradition consists of a diverse number of pagan traditions and beliefs, and it is balanced between dedication to those ways and the need to accept others and forge ahead into the future. Conservative elements of the Verbena fight to maintain tradition and to keep the Old Ways pure as their ancestors knew them. More progressive elements try different combinations of the Old Ways and are always looking for new innovations, which the Tradition as a whole might be slow to adopt.

The Technocracy promotes a kind of homogenous culture that is anathema to the Verbena, who struggle against the loss of their individual cultural identities. At the same time, they are aware that theirs is a *living* Tradition, which changes and develops over time. How the Verbena are changing, and how parts of the Tradition react to such changes, can be an important theme in a chronicle.

CYCLES

The Verbena recognize cycles in all aspects of creation: life and death, the beating of a heart, the rhythm of sex, the seasons, the tides, the sun and the moon. Everything has its cycle, and all things change while ultimately remaining in a state of dynamic balance. These cycles can express themselves in a Verbena chronicle in various ways.

One way is to base the narrative arc of the chronicle on the progression of cycles, such as the seasons or the Wheel of the Year. A chronicle can start out with the circle in spring, representing new relationships and opportunities. The world is fresh and the mages are newly Awakened to their potential. In the summer of the chronicle, the mages grow into their power and place within the Tradition. They achieve great things and pursue their own passions. In the autumn of the chronicle things stabilize, mature and perhaps become somewhat routine. The characters might have achieved many of their goals and passed on their knowledge and experience. In the winter of the chronicle, things decline. The mages lose some of the vitality they once had. Perhaps they've become set in their ways. The world is darker, colder and less filled with opportunities than before. The chronicle might end with a slow decline, or perhaps the cycle comes around again and there is a renewal of hope with the coming of spring.

Cycles can also appear in an extended chronicle through history. For example, a historical chronicle that progresses through different eras (see pp. 81-82) can highlight both the small cycles found within individual characters' lifetimes and the much larger cycle of the rise and decline of magic that can be seen only over a long period of time.

TRANSFORMATION

Although they are devoted to the Old Ways, there is a strong strain of transhumanism among the Verbena, an interest in becoming *more* than they already are. Many Verbena rituals are rites of passage, and there is an underlying theme of transformation in their Tradition and their magic.

The progression from birth to youth to maturity to old age and finally death is one of the prime transformations and cycles among the Verbena. It is found in many of their gods, who are dual- or triple-aspected to reflect the different stages of life. The Awakening and initiation of a mage is a prime transformation, as are the Seekings a mage embarks upon to gain greater enlightenment and understanding.

The Verbena also experience literal transformations. With Life magic, they can become entirely

different creatures, experiencing what it's like to be a tree, fish or bird. They can also re-invent themselves, shaping their bodies to suit them and even creating permanent changes in their Patterns over time. Exploring the uses (and shortcomings) of this power can become a theme in the chronicle.

Finally, the Verbena are transforming as a Tradition by incorporating new ideas and new initiates, adapting the Old Ways to serve the needs of the modern world. This ongoing evolution and development can become a part of the chronicle as the Verbena struggle to continuously redefine their identity and place in the world.

SACRIFICE

The Verbena believe strongly in sacrifice — not just bloody-handed animal sacrifices, but deep personal sacrifices as well. While it is a theme that should be explored with care, it can create powerful stories as well.

Sacrifice is the willingness to give up something (or to give up everything) for a particular cause. The sacrifice of produce and livestock among the pagan traditions represented a true gift from the people to their gods, since they were so dependent upon the land and its bounty. The Verbena also sacrifice their time, their security and even their lives to safeguard their beliefs and their traditions. They have willingly suffered condemnation, imprisonment and death for what they hold sacred.

In many ways, sacrifice is the ultimate expression of Verbena vitality, because it represents a willingness to give one's self over to a cause or belief completely. The sacred priest-king gives his life willingly to restore the land because it is his duty and responsibility to do so. The Verbena give of themselves to maintain the cycle of life and to preserve the Old Ways because they see themselves as the chosen guardians. The realization of the importance of sacrifice can make a fitting climax to a story or even an entire chronicle.

INCLUDING NON-VERBENA CHARACTERS

It's fairly easy to include mages from other Traditions in a mostly Verbena chronicle or as part of a Verbena circle. The Verbena Tradition is a diverse group with respect for many other mystic Traditions. Some Verbena view the other Traditions as offshoots of their own, although some apples have fallen farther from the tree than others. Verbena factions such as the Moon-Seekers look for things they can learn from other Traditions and are the most likely to work with them.

The Dreamspeakers and the Cult of Ecstasy are the Traditions most likely to be found working side-by-side with the Verbena, particularly among characters who come from a similar cultural background. Hermetics of

SEX AND SEXUALITY

The Verbena try to have very few hang-ups when it comes to sex and sexuality. For most members of the Tradition there is nothing wrong with recreational sex (simply for pleasure and enjoyment) and any sexual expression involving consenting adults is fair game (including homosexuality, bisexuality and various polyamorous arrangements).

Of course, most Verbena live and were raised in the real world, so they bring with them whatever sexual mores their society and upbringing instilled in them. Some Verbena believe that sex is a sacred act that should be kept within the bounds of a handfasted or monogamous relationship. Some Verbena think that anything other than free and open sexuality is hypocrisy, or at least self-imposed oppression. A handful of stodgy traditionalists insist that the "polarity" between male and female makes heterosexual couplings the only "natural" ones.

Just as the Verbena have a broad range of sexual mores, so do people in the real world, and the Storyteller and players should be aware of that when dealing with sexual issues in the context of a Mage chronicle. Some players might find it fun and interesting to deal with the sexuality of their characters in the game, while others might be uncomfortable with some issues (or any talk of sex within the context of the game). The Storyteller should make an effort to find out what the players are comfortable with and respect their boundaries, and ask the other players to do the same.

While a Mage chronicle can serve as a safe place for players to explore topics of sexuality and identity, be aware that these topics can stir up very powerful emotions that can be uncomfortable for some players. Decide in advance what is an acceptable level of talk and portrayal of sexuality in the chronicle and enforce it during the game. It's still quite possible to deal with sexual issues without becoming overly explicit.

House Ex Miscellanea have also been known to join Verbena covens, and the might even trace their lineage back to common ancestors in the Dark Ages. Those members of the Euthanatos and Celestial Chorus who are pagans worshipping old gods might actually find themselves more comfortable among the Verbena than they are among members of their own Traditions.

Technomancers such as the Virtual Adepts and Sons of Ether are relatively infrequent associates of the Verbena,

but a circle of "techno-pagans" might welcome them, particularly if they have the Dual Traditions Merit (Mage, p. 298) or if they trained as Verbena (before or after deciding to become technomancers). The same is true of the Akashic Brotherhood, though there are Moon-Seekers who find wisdom in Eastern philosophy. They note that Taoism, in particular, has a great deal in common with the Verbena concept of the Goddess and the God.

VERBENA AROUND THE WORLD

As befits one of the oldest Traditions, Verbena are found nearly everywhere, and their love for the living world has kept many of them close to Earth when other mages departed for the depths of the Umbral Realms and Horizon. The shrinking of the wilderness and the loss of old cultures and ways have had their impact on the Verbena, however, forcing them to adapt to the modern world as they have for centuries. They blend in among the people they live with, sometimes adopting their ways outwardly while keeping their own traditions in secret.

Europe: The Old Country is still the heartland for many Verbena. There they can feel the spirits of their ancestors among the rocks and the trees. They feel the power flowing through the land, the waters and the sky, and they can almost touch the lives they once knew as sacred guardians of these places. Although the Burning Times decimated the Verbena in Europe, they have since sprung back, like new growth from the remains of a forest fire. Europe is now one of the strongholds of the Tradition and home to the greatest number of Verbena-controlled Nodes, some of them ancient and truly powerful.

The Verbena in Europe tend to be secretive, hiding in plain sight. While many people know of a local wise woman or man with the Second Sight, they think fairly little of it, and the Verbena go about their business quietly. Old habits instilled by the Burning Times have been slow to change, and the practitioners of the Craft in the Old Country keep a low profile for the most part. This is at least partly because Europe is also strongly influenced by the Gardeners of the Tree, who hold to the Old Ways of the Craft. Many of the secrets of the traditions are passed down along family lines, though even the Gardeners have begun adopting initiates from outside their bloodlines.

North America: North America has proven fertile ground for the Verbena to put down new roots. From Colonial New England, the Tradition spread slowly out across the continent, meeting and mingling with practitioners of other similar paths such as the ways of the Native Americans, the Voudoun of New Orleans and the Santeria of the South and Southwest.

The Gardeners of the Tree were most common in and around New England for some time, with the

Twisters of Fate along the East Coast and the deep South, the Moon-Seekers spread out across the Midwest and up and down the West Coast and the Lifeweavers pretty much wherever they damn well pleased. In modern times, the factions are not so geographically divided, though they remain slightly more common in those regions favored by their elders.

Areas like the Pacific Northwest (stretching from Santa Cruz to Vancouver, BC), New England, the Northern Plains states and the Mississippi Delta in particular are home to Verbena circles and Nodes in North America.

South America: South America's vibrant magical styles, derived from African traditions blended with native beliefs and Spanish and Portuguese Catholicism, are among the newest additions to the Verbena. Moon-Seekers and Lifeweavers are among the most common here. A number of Twisters of Fate also recall the earliest and most primal ways of their ancestors, as do some Gardeners who fiercely resist any effort to homogenize their culture or ways for the comfort of others in the Tradition.

Africa: The mother continent of the Ifa tradition that is the root of Voudoun and Santeria, Africa has become a home for Verbena who have returned seeking their roots and an understanding of those primal Wyck who once walked the jungles, hills and grasslands of this place. These seekers have met and shared with Dreamspeakers and disparates in Africa and have brought some of them into the Verbena in turn.

Asia: The Verbena don't have much of a presence in Asia, apart from a few individuals and isolated covens here and there. The majority of Asian Verbena are found in and around Russia and the Balkans, following the ancient traditions of their ancestors. Russian Verbena have long lived in the shadow of the hag-witch Baba Yaga, but recently tales of the "little grandmother's" demise have come from Mother Russia, leaving some of Baba Yaga's followers in a struggle with the Verbena guardians of the land.

Australia: Verbena presence in Australia tends to be limited to the cities and outlying farms, though some Verbena do seek out the Dreamspeakers of the Outback as allies and teachers. Verbena have supported efforts to protect the environment and the sacred places of Australia and the surrounding region.

HISTORICAL CHRONICLES

One option for a Verbena chronicle is to make use of some of the material from Chapter One to set the game sometimes in the Tradition's long history, perhaps even before the founding of the modern Verbena Tradition in the 15th century.

A chronicle set in the Mythic Age could focus on the deeds of the legendary Wyck or the Aeduna, interacting with figures and creatures and legend. Players can experience the split between the Greek Aeduna and the Cosian Circle or the Lighting Scourge of the Roman magi against the Celtic druids and fae. Storytellers might want to either use the rules and systems from *Dark Ages: Mage* for such chronicles or adapt the modern-day *Mage* rules as needed.

For chronicles set during the Renaissance, *Mage: The Sorcerers Crusade* is an invaluable resource, allowing players to experience the early years of the Tradition. Perhaps starting with the founding of the Verbena and struggling to incorporate many diverse paths and cultures under a single aegis represented on the Council of Nine.

Finally, the schism between the Iron Circle and the Verbena during World War II and the turbulence and new hope of the 1960s make interesting settings for Verbena-centered *Mage* chronicles.

A historical chronicle may take place entirely in a particular era, or it may progress through several different eras, possibly culminating in the modern day. Since the Avatars of mages reincarnate from one life to the next, the characters in each different era might be linked by possessing the Avatars of their "ancestors," giving them past-life memories and karmic ties to other characters in the group.

Such a chronicle can serve as an in-depth prelude to a modern Verbena chronicle, giving the players a strong sense of the Tradition's history, since they have been a part of it. It can also provide ready-made plot hooks for the characters, since their Avatars might have connections with certain past events and other characters in the setting. Perhaps the ancient rivalry between an Aeduna mage and a Cosian physician is played out again between a modern Verbena and her Progenitor counterpart. (Or perhaps it is the Cosian Avatar that has incarnated as Verbena in this lifetime and the former Aeduna who is now a Progenitor!)

CABAL: NEW HOPE FARM



In a rural area not far from a major city is one of many cooperative organic farms found throughout North America. This particular farm is distinctive because it is the home of a circle of Verbena dedicated not only to properly harvesting the bounty of the land while living in harmony with it, but also finding and teaching potential new members of the Tradition. They do what they can to help protect the environment while keeping the Old Ways alive in the face of the growing power of the Technocracy.

HISTORY

The seeds of New Hope Farm were planted when six potential initiates were gathered and trained by the Verbena, initiated into the Tradition after their Awakening. Although they came from diverse backgrounds, they all became friends during the trials of their initiation and their experience as new members of the Tradition. Two of them became particularly close.

Jon Fairmont and Kamera Shula became lovers at the first Beltane ceremony they attended together, embodying the young God and Goddess in their union of the Great Rite. Their relationship blossomed into love, and they were handfasted a year later in a ceremony conducted by their friends and chantry-mates. Jon, a student of ecology, suggested the idea of starting a new Verbena chantry based around an organic farm co-op, something he'd often thought about doing. The couple gathered the

support of their friends and, with a little magical help, found the ideal location for New Hope Farm.

The loss of many of the Traditions' Masters and the ultimate end of the Ascension War spelled trouble for New Hope Farm. The farm became a haven for Tradition mages in need of shelter, but that also endangered the farm's safety. Magic was fading from the world, smothered by the apathy of the Sleepers. So Jon Fairmont made a decision to preserve his dream and that of his friends and family, at the cost of his own life. His sacrifice dramatically rekindled the Node beneath the land, and since then, New Hope Farm has been not only a bastion of magic in an increasingly mundane world, but also truly sacred to the other members of the New Hope Circle, who honor Jon's sacrifice by carrying on his dream.

MISSION

New Hope Farm's purpose is manifold. It is a successful organic farming co-op that uses modern and ancient ecological techniques in harmony with the land and nature. It helps provide an example to others of a more ecologically sound way of living in addition to supporting the community of people who live there. The farm also serves as a home base for the New Hope Circle, a training ground for Verbena initiates, and a safe haven for Verbena (and, to an extent, any Tradition mage) in need of shelter. The circle wants the farm to serve as a symbol of hope to their fellow mages and a place where the Old Ways are still practiced and honored.

The practical day-to-day work of the farm takes up much of the New Hope Circle's time. Everyone living on the land, including the circle members, students and consors, works to support the farm by performing various tasks. Those tasks range from cultivating and weeding to mulching, harvesting, food preparation, cleaning and other routine chores. The farm sells produce and herbs in excess of its subsistence needs to local markets and restaurants. The farm uses organic growing techniques and no chemical pesticides or fertilizers. Fairly little actual magic is used in the growing process, other than the simple magic of hard work and care.

Everyone living full-time at the farm is aware of the existence of the New Hope Circle and the fact that they are mages, though they know little else about the Traditions or even the Verbena as a whole. They're aware of the Ascension War but, fortunately, haven't been overly affected by it. The farm is too far out of the way to be much concern to the Technocracy, particularly since the start of the Avatar Storm. The circle is careful to maintain the security of the farm; its existence as a Verbena chantry is not widely circulated.

The New Hope Circle takes on a small number of apprentices each year, but it rarely has more than nine of them on the farm at any one time. These potential mages are taught how to work the land, and they study with the members of the circle in their particular areas of expertise. Some of them Awaken and are initiated as Verbena, but others do not. They either find their path elsewhere or remain as consors of the farm. Some new students are already Awakened, in which case the circle takes great care to see that they get training in how to deal with their newfound awareness and ability.

The Verbena of the New Hope Circle are relatively young and inexperienced themselves (compared to masters who have practiced the Craft for decades, even centuries). They're also well aware that most of those experienced teachers are no longer available and that it's up to them to carry on the Verbena's traditions. They do the best they can with the time and resources available to them, but there is some concern whether they're doing neophyte mages a disservice by training them. Thus far, none of the circle's students have complained that their education is lacking. (They complain freely about many other things, but not that.)

New Hope Farm also serves as a "safe house" of sorts for Tradition mages in need of a haven or simply a place to get away from the outside world for a while, provided they're willing to do their fair share of the work. The circle is careful about who it allows to stay, since maintaining the secrecy of the farm and the safety of the students and consors is the primary concern. Nobody wants some rogue

Ascension warrior leading a squad of HIT Marks to their doorstep. By the same token, the circle tries not to turn away allies in need. A measure of discretion and a willingness to follow the rules is usually enough to gain the New Hope Farm's hospitality, at least for a short while.

ORGANIZATION AND POLITICS

New Hope Farm is a cooperative, meaning that it is jointly owned and operated by the members of the New Hope Circle (who are full members of the cooperative), and by their students and consors (who also have a voice in how the cooperative is run), though only full members of the circle have a vote.

The New Hope community gathers at least once a week to discuss business on the farm and handle any issues that arise. These meetings generally go smoothly, though they have been broken up by personal conflicts in the past. Community members are allowed and expected to speak their minds at meetings and gatherings, so things can sometimes get a bit heated.

The tasks on the farm are regularly divided up among the members of the community, including the circle, which is not exempt from performing chores. The circle members tend to have more fixed roles and tasks, but they pitch-in wherever and whenever they are needed.

The farm's by-laws say that most decisions can be passed with a simple majority vote of the members of the circle, but adding a new member to the circle requires a unanimous vote, as does removing a member from it and making any significant changes to the by-laws themselves.

THE CIRCLE

The core of the New Hope Circle consists of the five remaining Verbena founders, who were initiated and studied together. They're all considered equals in running the co-op, though each has a particular role within the organization and the circle. Debates among the circle members can sometimes get heated, but they are close friends first and foremost, and their bonds run deeper than simple friendship or partnership.

Kameria Fairmont: Born a hunchback with a malformed spine, Kameria was taken from her home village in Africa when she was six years old. Missionaries cared for her and eventually placed her in an adoptive home, but Kameria never felt at home with her new family. She always felt out of place, a freak, self-conscious about her deformity. Her training as a Verbena truly transformed her. It awakened primordial past-life memories and a talent for shapeshifting in Kameria, and anyone who saw her today would never recognize her as the shy,

awkward girl she once was. Now through Life magic she stands straight and tall, a stunning African woman with long black hair usually worn in beaded cornrows, with a passionate fire smoldering in her dark eyes. Kamera has changed in spirit as well, with the passing of her husband and the birth of their child, she has gone from the passionate and innocent maiden to the fierce and powerful mother-figure of the New Hope Circle.

Teague O'Connel: Teague was another wounded soul healed by the Verbena. Teague always felt that he'd been born centuries too late. He dreamed of being an Irish bard in the days when such poets were sacred keepers of lore, yet he had to settle for being a harpist at various Renaissance Faires. He was estranged from his family for being gay, so his Ren-Faire friends became

Teague's new family. In the mid-'90s, Teague contracted HIV and developed AIDS, not long before the Verbena found him. His training as a mage has allowed him not only to heal himself completely of his infection but also to fulfill his lifelong dream. Teague is New Hope's resident bard and keeper of lore. He's a tall, willowy man with long, straight brown hair that falls past his shoulders. He's fond of wearing a cloak out of doors rather than a jacket or coat whenever he can, and he's rarely far from his hand-made Celtic harp.

Takoda Walking-Bear: Takoda's grandfather Kohana was Verbena, and he hoped to teach his grandson to follow in his footsteps, sensing the potential within him. But Kohana passed on before he was able to teach Takoda, so he arranged for a friend to initiate him in the

USING NEW HOPE FARM

Storytellers can use the New Hope Farm in a number of ways, as suits the needs of the chronicle. The farm can be a home base for different sorts of **Mage** games, a place of refuge or just somewhere for the characters to visit from time to time.

An all- or mostly Verbena chronicle can be set at the New Hope Farm quite easily. The players can take on the roles of members of the New Hope Circle, either using the existing characters or replacing or supplementing them with new characters. Any relatively young and largely Verbena circle could run the farm, and the Storyteller can allow the characters to control a Node located on the property as a resource.

Alternatively, the players could portray students at New Hope Farm, allowing the Storyteller to introduce them to the Verbena and the world of **Mage** as their characters learn from their mentors and teachers. The students might be adults from various walks of life brought together to learn, or they might be youngsters (teenagers or even younger), allowing for a different sort of chronicle. For example, the farm might offer a "summer apprenticeship program" for high school and college-age students aimed at particularly "gifted" youngsters. This allows the Verbena the opportunity to mentor them and possibly guide them toward Awakening, as well as aiding those who have already Awakened.

Tradition mages friendly to the Verbena might know about the existence of New Hope Farm and use it as a refuge if things get too hot in the characters' usual stomping grounds. It makes a good place for Tradition mages on the run to hide, rest and recover their strength (particularly with Takoda's healing ministrations). The New Hope Circle will be cautious to make sure the characters don't lead anyone to

the farm, but they won't turn away those in need. If the characters' enemies *do* follow them to the farm, then the mages should feel honor-bound to help defend the farm — at the very least.

Finally, New Hope Farm can simply be a place the characters visit for any number of reasons. Perhaps they are acquainted with one or more of the New Hope Circle and show up for a visit. They might need the advice or insight of one of the Verbena at the farm, or they might be asked in to "guest lecture" on a particular topic for the circle's students. If the circle encounters trouble (magical or otherwise) beyond its ability to handle, it might call on the characters for aid, especially if it did them a good turn in the past.

The farm exists to safeguard a particular way of life, and Jon Fairmont's sacrifice has made it a profoundly magical place. The farm's land offers the Storyteller the opportunity to introduce various wondrous or magical things into the chronicle for the characters to encounter. A shallowing into the Umbra could form somewhere on the farm, allowing the unaware to step into the spirit world. (Perhaps some mundane trespassers or visitors to the farm do so, and the mages have to rescue them.) Likewise, Bygones might appear on the farm's land from time to time, and it could attract faeries or other spirits, both benevolent and mischievous.

Note that the farm's exact location has been left deliberately vague, allowing the Storyteller to place it wherever is needed to suit the chronicle. Ideally, it should be in a rural area some distance from any large cities, but it can easily be set anywhere, including a location outside North America (though some adjustment might be necessary in that case).

Old Ways. Takoda's inability to experience visions led him to perform the Native American Sun Dance, where he saw a vision of his grandfather. Thereafter, he was initiated as a Verbena and has become a skilled healer. Takoda is in charge of the farm's medicinal plants and herbs, and he regularly communes with their spirits. He's also the chief healer of the circle, adept at treating many ills with herbalism, homeopathic remedies and magic. Takoda is a tall, broad-shouldered Native American with long black hair. He usually dresses in comfortable work clothes like jeans and a flannel shirt.

Deborah Gray: Deborah ("Deb" only to her close friends) admits that she came to the Craft seeking power and that it is still important to her. Deborah always felt powerless, angry at the world, so when an acquaintance offered her a chance at power, she took it. Deborah's initiation into the Verbena was not easy, and she soon unearthed past-life memories of being burned at the stake, which haunted her visions and dreams. Her Avatar was deeply scarred by the experience, but Deborah claimed her power and has healed many of those scars (though it's doubtful they will ever entirely

fade). Her anger has been transformed into confidence, though she still has a caustic wit and a vengeful streak. She's not squeamish about doing what needs to be done to protect herself and her circle, and she doesn't apologize for it to anyone. Deborah is a thin, somewhat pale woman with a pinched look to her face and straight black hair that she usually wears back in a ponytail.

Aileen Wilkinson: Aileen grew up in a strict middle class Protestant family. When her twin sister, Kathy, was raped and murdered, Aileen found no sympathy from her stern father. (He blamed Kathy for going out alone and dressing in a "provocative" manner.) Alone and filled with grief, Aileen stumbled upon a pagan celebration and took some comfort in it. Later the man who killed her sister stalked and attacked her, but she fought him off. When her father's sole concern was how it would all look, Aileen decided to leave home and seek out the pagans who had helped her. They introduced her into the Verbena, where she sought to claim her own power and become a role model for women, young and old, who felt powerless.

LEGENDS ⊕ OF THE ⊕ OLD FAITH



The roots of the Verbena are ancient indeed, and many stories have been handed down from generation to generation of the Old Faith, existing throughout history to the modern day. Some Verbena believe that these tales are the literal truth, while others consider them either metaphors for a deeper truth or simple folk tales that offer wisdom and insight. Whether the events and people they describe really existed isn't as important to those Verbena.

LILITH

Some Verbena consider the Witch Mother Lilith one of the Wyck, the First Ones. Certainly, Lilith is an embodiment of dark feminine energies that the Verbena honor, a paragon of empowered womanhood, which the Verbena claim is why she has been maligned so often by history. Possessing enlightened free will, Lilith chose not to remain servile to Adam in the Garden of Eden, striking out on her own instead. Deprived of paradise, Lilith had to create her own, working her will upon the world. Among other things, Lilith carved out realms within the Umbra, some of which are still known to the Verbena today.

Various stories associate Lilith with the spawning of monsters, though these tales might be misunderstood. (Then again, they might not, as some Verbena point out.) Lilith might have ties with the ancient ancestors of the Fera, the changing folk, and with the creation of vampires. Legend has it that she took pity on Caine and taught him to survive and use the power inherent in his blood, granting modern vampires their powers. Verbena often honor Lilith as a dark aspect of the Goddess, associating her with Hecate, Kali, Macha and other Dark Mothers who are honored for their strength and feared for their power.

Moreover, some Verbena believe that Lilith is immortal and that she dwells still in the dark reaches of the Umbra, where she watches over and guides her many children. The Dark Mother is certainly a power to be reckoned with, although her purpose may not necessarily be universal Ascension. Some believe the Nephandi have corrupted Lilith (or perhaps vice versa), while others say she is beyond good and evil as most understand it. Although some claim to have encountered the Dark Lady, or her works, no one can say for sure if she still walks among the living. If she exists, and if she is a mage, Lilith is surely one of the most powerful of the Oracles by this point.



LEAVES FROM THE WORLD TREE



The Verbena are among the most diverse of a diverse lot. Despite the best efforts of traditionalists, the Verbena have included a variety of people and magical paths over the centuries since the Tradition's own formation from the diverse pagan faiths of

Europe. The Verbena's diversity is a source of both strength and tension within the Tradition, and the following pages offer only a small sample of the many different willworkers who follow the Old Ways, in one form or another.



STORM WITCH

Quote: *Weather's lookin' a mite ugly tonight. You better go before it gets much worse.*

Prelude: You grew up in the Catskills in rural New York. You don't remember a day in your life when you didn't know magic was real. When you were a child, your parents used it regularly. It was never in question if you were going to become

a mage, but *when*. Your family — a rambling extended mob — is descended from a long line of witches, and they practically owned the town. That's why it, out of all the towns around it, is the only one not to show the tell-tale signs of a rust-

belt decay and degeneration. Your ancestors made sure that the "wonders of industry" never got a foothold, regardless of the money that was being waved in their direction. Now, some 70 years later, your family might not be wealthy, but neither does your town suffer from the birth defects, the liver and kidney failure

and the long litany of cancers that other towns around you are dealing with. Thanks to foresight and just a little spellwork, the apples from your family orchards are the tastiest and healthiest fruit in the state of New York.

Your Awakening took place when you were just 17. Some kids from a neighboring town had driven in to cause trouble. They'd heard that your family was a little weird and maybe had some self-professed witches among its number. When they found out who you were, they were only too eager to show you what good upstanding Christians did to witches. You, in turn were only too happy to show them what good, sensible witches did to lowlife hypocrites like them.

The coroner (your second cousin once removed) and the editor of the town paper (your great uncle) reported the two fatalities as death by natural causes. "Those freak spring thunderstorms, after all, can sneak up on you pretty suddenly, and the kids must have had something on 'em made of metal..." And that was the end of it.

Your initiation into the family craft took place the very next week.

Concept: You are a storm witch from a long and illustrious line of Verbena witches. Your family made you the guardian of the orchards. It's your duty to see that the rains are plentiful and the frost is not. You stir the clouds when you need to and nudge the winds in the right direction for pollination. You feel your place in the great cycles, and it is good.

Roleplaying Tips: You're all about having a good time, living life to the fullest and showing other people how to do the same. You don't believe in moderation, but you do believe in quality of life, and you know from bitter experience that overindulging can sometimes diminish that. You use your abilities to know what other people want, discover what makes them tick and to influence them subtly.

Magic: Your magic is largely made of rituals to affect the weather. You whistle for winds, spit three times for rain and hiss for snow. Your entire family is lining up to teach you more rites, but so far your interest is solely in feeling, shaping and causing the weather.

Equipment: pruning shears, small iron cauldron, a fresh apple (or two)

VERBENA

NATURE: Architect
 PLAYER: Primordial
 CHRONICLE: Loner

NATURE: Architect
 ESSENCE: Primordial
 DESIGNER: Loner

FACTION: Gardeners of the Tree
 CONCEPT: Storm Witch
 CABAL:

ATTRIBUTES

PHYSICAL Strength: ●●○○○ Dexterity: ●●○○○ Stamina: ●●○○○	SOCIAL Charisma: ●●○○○ Manipulation: ●●○○○ Appearance: ●●○○○	MENTAL Perception: ●●○○○ Intelligence: ●●○○○ Wits: ●●○○○
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ABILITIES

TALENTS Alertness: ●●○○○ Athletics: ●○○○○ Awareness: ●●○○○ Brawl: ●○○○○ Dodge: ●●○○○ Expression: ●○○○○ Intimidation: ●○○○○ Leadership: ●○○○○ Streetwise: ●●○○○ Subterfuge: ●●○○○	SKILLS Crafts: ●○○○○ Drive: ●○○○○ Etiquette: ●○○○○ Firearms: ●○○○○ Meditation: ●○○○○ Melee: ●○○○○ Performance: ●○○○○ Stealth: ●○○○○ Survival: ●○○○○ Technology: ●○○○○	KNOWLEDGES Academics: ●○○○○ Computers: ●○○○○ Cosmology: ●○○○○ Esoterica: ●○○○○ Investigation: ●○○○○ Law: ●○○○○ Linguistics: ●○○○○ Medicine: ●○○○○ Occult: ●○○○○ Science: ●○○○○
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SPHERES

Correspondence: ●○○○○ Entropy: ●○○○○ Focus: ●●○○○	Life: ●○○○○ Matter: ●○○○○ Mind: ●○○○○	Prime: ●○○○○ Spirit: ●○○○○ Time: ●○○○○
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ADVANTAGES

BACKGROUNDS Avatar: ●●○○○ Contacts: ●○○○○ Dream: ●○○○○ Resources: ●○○○○ _____: ●○○○○ _____: ●○○○○	ARETE ●●●○○○○○ WILLPOWER ●●●○○○○○ QUINTESSENCE ●●●○○○○○ PARADISE ●●●○○○○○	HEALTH Bruised: 0 □ Hurt: 1 □ Injured: 1 □ Wounded: 2 □ Mauled: 2 □ Stripped: 3 □ Incapacitated: 3 □ RESONANCE Dynamic: ●○○○○ Stormy: ●○○○○ Energetic: ●○○○○ Static: ●○○○○ EXPERIENCE _____: _____
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OTHER TRAITS
 _____: ●○○○○
 _____: ●○○○○
 _____: ●○○○○
 _____: ●○○○○



Voodoo Priestess

Quote: *Hate to ruin your day, child, but the Loas are about to kick your ass.*

Prelude: Your grandmother used to spend hours telling you stories about the Voodoo queen Marie Laveau. Your mind was so full of Marie Laveau that you used to beg your mother to take you in to New Orleans, but your mother, despite her own occasional dabbling with magic, considered it best to keep you as far from "that crazy horse shit" as possible.

It did no good. Grandmama would take you in to New Orleans during the day when your mother was working.

She felt it very important to keep the family's magical talents honed. You went to every lame Voodoo shop in the French Quarter and then a few. You saw every single tomb reputed to be Marie

Laveau's and then saw the one that nobody knew about that was the real thing. You saw an old friend of Grandmama's raise a zombie in the full light of day.

And you knew what you wanted to be when you grew up.

In time, your mother found out what had been going on (as she couldn't help but do), and she decided that the only way to protect you from your grandmother's influence was to move. And move you did. To Seattle.

Grandmama still sends you letters from time to time, and she visits you in dreams, but you haven't seen her in years.

Your Awakening was particularly traumatic. You were about to be the victim of a rape, but instead of being there in your body as it happened, you invited the Loas to take your body instead. And they did. The Loas, it seemed, had a reach well beyond the outskirts of New Orleans. You were kicked out of your body, and Loa of vengeance, Erzulie Toho took over your body. When it did, your attacker began suffering from terrible, wracking convulsions. His back muscles clenched up until his spine snapped, and when the Loa departed, you were left to call the ambulance.

Concept: You are Seattle's only Voodoo priestess. It's fate as much as anything that makes you Verbena. In slightly different circumstances, the Bata'a would certainly have claimed you as one of their own. You have studied Afro-Caribbean witchcraft since you could read. Your grandmother trained you as best she could, and you've educated yourself since then on the Loas. You've even let the Loas ride you as a horse from time to time.

Roleplaying Tips: You have inherited your magic through your grandmother. The ways of Voodoo stretch back to Africa, and you are the student of these ways. Soon, you even hope to be the teacher of these ways. While you are easygoing most of the time, you take your role as guardian of the knowledge of Voodoo very seriously.

Magic: You see spirits. Moreover, you see how the spirits work through people and animals, and to some small degree you have learned to channel the spirits. You can see how the spirit world works and how spirit affects the flesh. And when you need to, you can summon the Loas to make things happen.

Equipment: Bowie knife, cigar, bottle of rum, live chicken



VERBENA

NAME: NATURE: Perfectionist FACTOR: Gardeners of the Tree
 PLAYER: ESSENCE: Queesting CONCEPT: Voodoo Priestess
 CHARACTER: DETERMINER: Bon Vivant CABAL:

ATTRIBUTES		
PHYSICAL	SOCIAL	MENTAL
Strength: ●●●●	Charisma: ●●●●	Perception: ●●●●
Dexterity: ●●●●	Manipulation: ●●●●	Intelligence: ●●●●
Stamina: ●●●●	Appearance: ●●●●	Wits: ●●●●
ABILITIES		
TALENTS	SKILLS	KNOWLEDGES
Almsmen: ●●●●	Crabs: ●●●●	Academics: ●●●●
Athletics: ●●●●	Drive: ●●●●	Computer: ●●●●
Awareness: ●●●●	Etiquette: ●●●●	Crimology: ●●●●
Brawl: ●●●●	Finances: ●●●●	Enigmas: ●●●●
Dodge: ●●●●	Medicine: ●●●●	Investigation: ●●●●
Explosion: ●●●●	Mix: ●●●●	Law: ●●●●
Intimidation: ●●●●	Performance: ●●●●	Language: ●●●●
Leadership: ●●●●	Stealth: ●●●●	Medicine: ●●●●
Streetwise: ●●●●	Survival: ●●●●	Occult: ●●●●
Subterfuge: ●●●●	Technology: ●●●●	Science: ●●●●
SPHERES		
Correspondence: ●●●●	Life: ●●●●	Prime: ●●●●
Entropy: ●●●●	Matter: ●●●●	Spirit: ●●●●
Force: ●●●●	Mind: ●●●●	Time: ●●●●
ADVANTAGES		
BACKGROUNDS	ARETE	HEALTH
Avatar: ●●●●	●●●●●●●●	Bruised: 0 □
Mentor: ●●●●	WILLPOWER	Blind: 1 □
Resources: ●●●●	●●●●●●●●	Injured: -1 □
●●●●	●●●●●●●●	Wounded: -2 □
●●●●	●●●●●●●●	Maddled: -2 □
●●●●	●●●●●●●●	Winged: 1 □
●●●●	●●●●●●●●	Incapacitated: 1 □
OTHER TRAITS	QUINTESSENCE	RESONANCE
●●●●	●●●●●●●●	Dynamic: ●●●●
●●●●	●●●●●●●●	Entropic: Haunted ●●●●
●●●●	●●●●●●●●	Static: ●●●●
●●●●	●●●●●●●●	EXPERIENCE
●●●●	●●●●●●●●	●●●●

VERBENA™

NAME: _____

CHARACTER: Voodoo Priestess

CHRONICLE: _____

FACTION: Gardeners of the Tree

ESSENCE: Questing

CABAL: _____

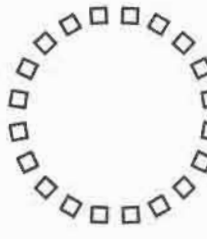
NATURE: Perfectionist

DETEANOR: Bon Vivant

ARETE

WILLPOWER

⊕QUINTESSENCE/PARADOX



RESONANCE

DYNAMIC _____

ENTROPIC _____

STATIC Soothing

VERBENA™

NAME: _____

CHARACTER: New Age Witch

CHRONICLE: _____

FACTION: Moon-Seekers

ESSENCE: Dynamic

CABAL: _____

NATURE: Celebrant

DETEANOR: Deviant

PHYSICAL

Dextrous

Lithe

Steady

Graceful

SOCIAL

Empathetic

Gorgeous x2

Expressive

Friendly

MENTAL

Clever x2

Observant

Creative

Resourceful

Intuitive x2

ABILITIES

Academics x3

Alertness

Awareness x2

Cosmology

Enigmas x2

Meditation

Occult x3

BACKGROUND

Avatar x2

Contacts x2

Dream x3

Resources x2

SPHERES

Initiate of Correspondence

Initiate of Life

Initiate of Time

NOTES

PHYSICAL

Brutal

Lithe

Quick

Tireless

Tough

SOCIAL

Alluring

Charismatic x2

Friendly

Commanding

Gorgeous

MENTAL

Attentive

Observant

Creative

Vigilant

Knowledgeable

ABILITIES

Alertness

Awareness

Cosmology

Etiquette

Firearms

Meditation

Occult

Streetwise x2

BACKGROUND

Avatar x3

Mentor x3

Resources x2

SPHERES

Initiate of Entropy

Disciple of Life

Apprentice of Spirit

NOTES

VERBENA™

NAME: _____

CHARACTER: Voodoo Priestess

CHRONICLE: _____

FACTION: Gardeners of the Tree

ESSENCE: Questing

CABAL: _____

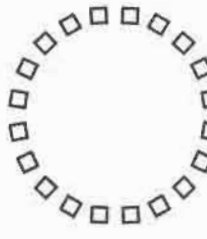
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DETEANOR: Bon Vivant

ARETE

WILLPOWER

⊕QUINTESSENCE/PARADOX



RESONANCE

DYNAMIC _____

ENTROPIC _____

STATIC Soothing

VERBENA™

NAME: _____

CHARACTER: Voodoo Priestess

CHRONICLE: _____

FACTION: Gardeners of the Tree

ESSENCE: Questing

CABAL: _____

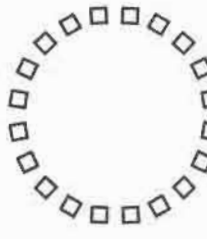
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WILLPOWER

⊕QUINTESSENCE/PARADOX



RESONANCE

DYNAMIC _____

ENTROPIC _____

STATIC Soothing

VERBENA™

NAME: _____

CHARACTER: Voodoo Priestess

CHRONICLE: _____

FACTION: Gardeners of the Tree

ESSENCE: Questing

CABAL: _____

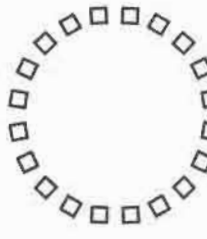
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WILLPOWER

⊕QUINTESSENCE/PARADOX



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ENTROPIC _____

STATIC Soothing

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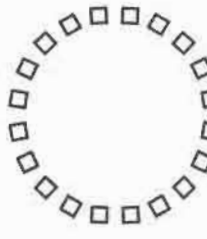
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WILLPOWER

⊕QUINTESSENCE/PARADOX



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DYNAMIC _____

ENTROPIC _____

STATIC Soothing

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CHARACTER: Voodoo Priestess

CHRONICLE: _____

FACTION: Gardeners of the Tree

ESSENCE: Questing

CABAL: _____

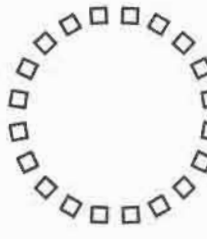
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DETEANOR: Bon Vivant

ARETE

WILLPOWER

⊕QUINTESSENCE/PARADOX



RESONANCE

DYNAMIC _____

ENTROPIC _____

STATIC Soothing

VERBENA™

NAME: _____

CHARACTER: Voodoo Priestess

CHRONICLE: _____

FACTION: Gardeners of the Tree

ESSENCE: Questing

CABAL: _____

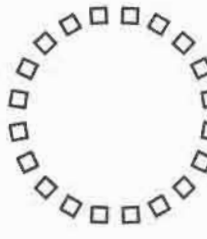
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WILLPOWER

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RESONANCE

DYNAMIC _____

ENTROPIC _____

STATIC Soothing

VERBENA™

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CHARACTER: Voodoo Priestess

CHRONICLE: _____

FACTION: Gardeners of the Tree

ESSENCE: Questing

CABAL: _____

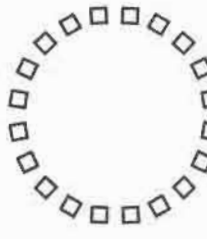
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WILLPOWER

⊕QUINTESSENCE/PARADOX



RESONANCE

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ENTROPIC _____

STATIC Soothing

VERBENA™

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CHARACTER: Voodoo Priestess

CHRONICLE: _____

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ESSENCE: Questing

CABAL: _____

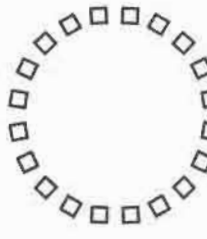
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DETEANOR: Bon Vivant

ARETE

WILLPOWER

⊕QUINTESSENCE/PARADOX



RESONANCE

DYNAMIC _____

ENTROPIC _____

STATIC Soothing

VERBENA™

NAME: _____

CHARACTER: Voodoo Priestess

CHRONICLE: _____

FACTION: Gardeners of the Tree

ESSENCE: Questing

CABAL: _____

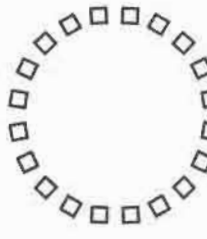
NATURE: Perfectionist

DETEANOR: Bon Vivant

ARETE

WILLPOWER

⊕QUINTESSENCE/PARADOX



RESONANCE

DYNAMIC _____

ENTROPIC _____

STATIC Soothing

VERBENA™

NAME: _____

CHARACTER: Voodoo Priestess

CHRONICLE: _____

FACTION: Gardeners of the Tree

ESSENCE: Questing

CABAL: _____

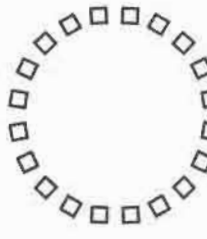
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DETEANOR: Bon Vivant

ARETE

WILLPOWER

⊕QUINTESSENCE/PARADOX



RESONANCE

DYNAMIC _____

ENTROPIC _____

STATIC Soothing

VERBENA™

NAME: _____

CHARACTER: Voodoo Priestess

CHRONICLE: _____

FACTION: Gardeners of the Tree

ESSENCE: Questing

CABAL: _____

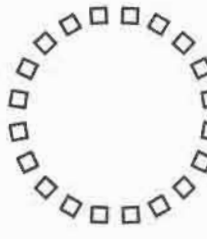
NATURE: Perfectionist

DETEANOR: Bon Vivant

ARETE

WILLPOWER

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RESONANCE

DYNAMIC _____

ENTROPIC _____

STATIC Soothing

VERBENA™

NAME: _____

CHARACTER: Voodoo Priestess

CHRONICLE: _____

FACTION: Gardeners of the Tree

ESSENCE: Questing

CABAL: _____

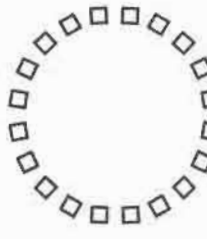
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DETEANOR: Bon Vivant

ARETE

WILLPOWER

⊕QUINTESSENCE/PARADOX



RESONANCE

DYNAMIC _____

ENTROPIC _____

STATIC Soothing

VERBENA™

NAME: _____

CHARACTER: Voodoo Priestess

CHRONICLE: _____

FACTION: Gardeners of the Tree

ESSENCE:

NEW AGE WITCH

Quote: My Goddess gave birth to your upright little God.

Prelude: When you were a kid, you believed in things like Santa Claus, the Tooth Fairy and magical fantasy worlds. By the time you were an adult, you didn't believe in anything, least of all yourself. A friend invited you to attend a pagan festival, and you felt something there. It was a real connection, like something you didn't even know was missing until you had it back. You talked to some of the people at the festival, and they pointed you toward some books to learn more. You devoured the information and quickly discovered that only some of what the books had to say worked for you. (The rest of it was crap.) You were particularly drawn to the idea of Goddess-worship, of honoring the divine as feminine as well as masculine.

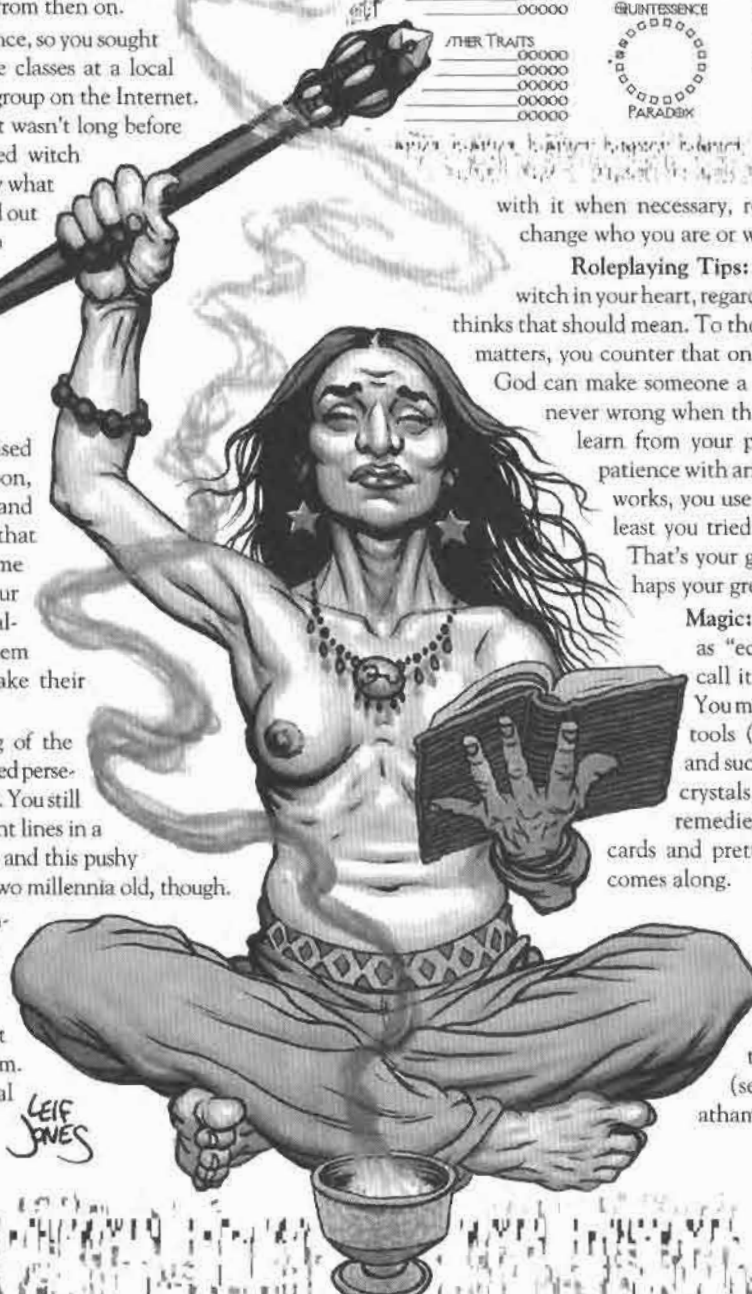
When some Christian acquaintances of yours found out, they felt the need to "rescue" you. Their ignorance seemed to know no bounds, but neither did their excessive zeal. Not only did they pray for you, they pushed tracts into your hands and tricked you into going to church. When those tactics didn't work, they began actively harassing you. Eventually they gave up, but their response left you with a strong dislike of Christians from then on.

You wanted some more guidance, so you sought out a real teacher. You took some classes at a local bookstore and joined a discussion group on the Internet. You attended more festivals, and it wasn't long before you declared yourself a full-fledged witch even though you didn't really know what it was to be a witch then. You found out when you joined a coven, only to discover that it was full of pettiness, big egos and catty bitching. Disillusioned, you quit the group, resolving to pursue your path alone.

Then, one night, as you praised the Goddess beneath the full moon, the Goddess actually spoke to you and told you that you were *not* alone, that you were never truly alone. For some time after that, you reveled in your new power. You sought out overzealous Christians and argued with them and, sometimes, did things to make their lives just a little more miserable.

Eventually, the real meaning of the Wiccan Rede sank in, and you stopped persecuting Christians (for the most part). You still think of yourself as being on the front lines in a great battle between the Old Ways and this pushy new religion that's not even a full two millennia old, though.

Concept: After your Awakening you discovered that there were others like you and that they were a diverse group, even if the pettiness you encountered in your first coven was still there in some of them. You learned to overlook it and deal



LEIF JONES

VERBENA

NAME:		NATURE: Celebrant		FACTION: Moon-Seekers	
PLAYER:		ESSENCE: Dynamic		CONCEPT: New Age Witch	
CHRONICLE:		DETRAINER: Deviant		CABAL:	
PHYSICAL		ATTRIBUTES		MENTAL	
Strength: ●●●●●	Charisma: ●●●●●	Perception: ●●●●●			
Dexterity: ●●●●●	Manipulation: ●●●●●	Intelligence: ●●●●●			
Stamina: ●●●●●	Appearance: ●●●●●	Wit: ●●●●●			
TALENTS		ABILITIES		KNOWLEDGES	
Alertness: ●●●●●	Crafts: ●●●●●	Academics: ●●●●●			
Athletics: ●●●●●	Drive: ●●●●●	Computer: ●●●●●			
Awareness: ●●●●●	Etiquette: ●●●●●	Contology: ●●●●●			
Base: ●●●●●	Firearm: ●●●●●	Ecognos: ●●●●●			
Dodge: ●●●●●	Mediation: ●●●●●	Investigation: ●●●●●			
Expulsion: ●●●●●	Melior: ●●●●●	Law: ●●●●●			
Intimidation: ●●●●●	Permissioe: ●●●●●	Linguistics: ●●●●●			
Leadership: ●●●●●	Swath: ●●●●●	Medicine: ●●●●●			
Screening: ●●●●●	Survival: ●●●●●	Occult: ●●●●●			
Subterfuge: ●●●●●	Technology: ●●●●●	Science: ●●●●●			
CORRESPONDENCE		SPHERES		HEALTH	
Correspondence: ●●●●●	Life: ●●●●●	Prime: ●●●●●			
Entropy: ●●●●●	Matter: ●●●●●	Spirit: ●●●●●			
Force: ●●●●●	Mind: ●●●●●	Time: ●●●●●			
BACKGROUNDS		ADVANTAGES		RESONANCE	
Avatar: ●●●●●	ARETE		Dynamic: ●●●●●		
Contacts: ●●●●●	●●●●●●●●●●		Entropy: ●●●●●		
Dream: ●●●●●	WILLPOWER		Static: ●●●●●		
Resources: ●●●●●	●●●●●●●●●●		Soothing: ●●●●●		
●●●●●	QUINTESSENCE		EXPERIENCE		
●●●●●	●●●●●●●●●●				
●●●●●	PARADIGM				
●●●●●					
●●●●●					
●●●●●					

with it when necessary, realizing that it doesn't change who you are or what you believe.

Roleplaying Tips: You strive to be a true witch in your heart, regardless of what anyone else thinks that should mean. To those who say that lineage matters, you counter that only the Goddess and the God can make someone a true witch, and they're never wrong when they choose. You want to learn from your peers, but you have no patience with arrogance or pretense. If it works, you use it, if it doesn't, then at least you tried it with an open mind. That's your greatest virtue, and perhaps your greatest flaw.

Magic: You describe your style as "eclectic" (though others call it "flaky" or "scattered"). You make use of the traditional tools (wand, athame, chalice and such) but also your share of crystals, essential oils, herbal remedies, teas, chimes, Tarot cards and pretty much whatever else comes along.

Equipment: long, sweeping dresses and casual clothes, ceremonial cloak, wand (decorated with crystals), Tarot decks (several different styles), athame (ceremonial dagger)

RUNE-CRAFTER

Quote: *The runes show me the shape of the future. There's not much left to yours.*

Prelude: When you were a child, the One-Eyed Man came to you in a dream and taught you how to tie a proper hangman's noose from a length of rope. He whispered certain ancient names in your ear and said they were important, though you didn't know why or how. He taught you how to spell those names, in a crude, angular alphabet that no one else recognized — the runes. You knew certain things by listening to the squawking of crows. You

knew what they were saying to each other, and your insights disturbed people, including you. You learned not to talk about your dreams or the things you knew. You did your best to ignore them, but they just wouldn't go away. You were diagnosed as schizophrenic, and doctors prescribed anti-psychotic medication for you that dulled your brain but made getting along with others a little easier. If you still had the dreams, you didn't remember them.

One night, you ran out of Clozaril, the medication you were told to take, and you went to the all-night pharmacy to get more. You picked the night that it was held up. Four people were shot that night. You lost your right eye in a bright, explosive moment of pain, and as you lay on the floor watching your blood spread out around you with your remaining eye, the One-Eyed man was with you again. He looked down at you from the shadows under his broad-brimmed hat and said, "It's time." Suddenly, in the spilled boxes, floor tiles and smears of blood, you saw things — meanings, patterns, connections — that you had never seen before. You smeared bloody rune words across the floor tiles — old words of great power. Words of healing. Words of vengeance. The paramedic said it was a miracle that you survived. He thought it was pretty funny that you lived while the robber who shot you only made it two blocks before losing control of his car and burning to death in the resulting explosion. You both had a good laugh over the irony of it all.

You stopped taking your Clozaril — or any medication — after that. You didn't need it because you weren't crazy. Then someone came to your door and showed you the runes he'd carved into his chest, telling you that he'd had a vision, too.

Concept: Since your Awakening, you've learned the secrets of the runes. You know how to draw forth their power by carving them or chanting their names. You've learned the history and lore of the great rune-crafters, and you have embraced what others call madness (which you call understanding).

Roleplaying Tips: You are a product of a bygone age and tradition. Some call you mad, but you have merely seen a greater truth, and you embrace life with the fierceness and dedication of one who has spent too long in the waking death of mood-stabilizers and antipsychotic drugs. Your experience has filled you with newfound conviction and unshakable confidence. You are fierce and forceful. While you are truly kind and generous to your friends, you are *terrible* to your enemies. You fear nothing, except perhaps the sort of slow suffocation you endured before your Awakening.

Magic: The runes are your source of magic. You chant their names. You carve them into wood, stone or even flesh. You draw them in ink, paint or blood. You use stones carved with their images. You have only begun to explore their depths, and you intend to master all of their secrets.

Equipment: long coat, broad-brimmed hat, pouch of runestones, Bowie knife, glass eye (subtly etched with rune words)

VERBENA

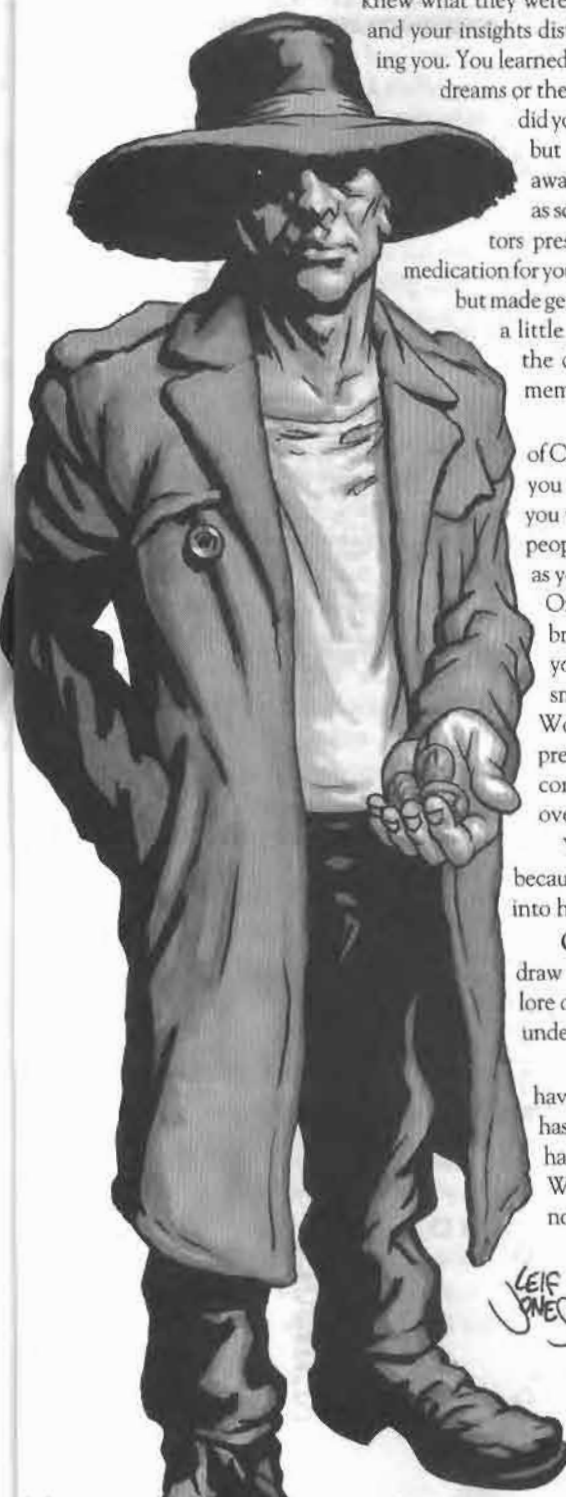
NAME:	NATURE: Survivor	FACTORY: Twisters of Fate
PLAYER:	ESSENCE: Primalordial	CONCEPT: Rune-Crafter
CHARACTER:	DETIENNER, Masochist	CASAL:

ATTRIBUTES		
PHYSICAL	SOCIAL	MENTAL
Strength: ●●●●	Charisma: ●●●●	Perception: ●●●●
Dexterity: ●●●●	Manipulation: ●●●●	Intelligence: ●●●●
Stamina: ●●●●	Appearance: ●●●●	Wis: ●●●●

ABILITIES		
TALENTS	SKILLS	KNOWLEDGES
Alertness: ●●●●	Crafts: ●●●●	Academics: ●●●●
Athletics: ●●●●	Drive: ●●●●	Computer: ●●●●
Awareness: ●●●●	Etiquette: ●●●●	Cosmology: ●●●●
Beast: ●●●●	Firearms: ●●●●	Enigma: ●●●●
Bridge: ●●●●	Meditation: ●●●●	Investigation: ●●●●
Expression: ●●●●	Melee: ●●●●	Law: ●●●●
Intimidation: ●●●●	Performance: ●●●●	Linguistics: <u>Base</u> ●●●●
Leadership: ●●●●	Strength: ●●●●	Medicine: ●●●●
Streetwise: ●●●●	Survival: ●●●●	Occult: ●●●●
Subterfuge: ●●●●	Technology: ●●●●	Science: ●●●●

SPHERES		
Correspondence: ●●●●	Life: ●●●●	Prime: ●●●●
Entropy: ●●●●	Master: ●●●●	Spirit: ●●●●
Force: ●●●●	Mind: ●●●●	Time: ●●●●

ADVANTAGES		
BACKGROUNDS Avatar: ●●●● Destiny: ●●●● Dream: ●●●● Resources: ●●●● _____: ●●●● _____: ●●●●	ARETE ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● WILLPOWER ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● QUINTESSENCE ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● PARADOX ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	HEALTH Bruised: -0 □ Hair: -1 □ Injured: -1 □ Mangled: -2 □ Mauled: -2 □ Sprained: -1 □ Incapacitated: □ RESONANCE Dynamic: ●●●● Entropic: <u>Empty</u> ●●●● Static: ●●●● EXPERIENCE _____



SCION OF THE WYCK

Quote: *I am descended from the Wise Ones. Their blood and power flows through me.*

Prelude: Other Verbena, other mages, Awakened to their power and learned of magic and Ascension after living mundane lives, but not you. Your bloodline stretches back to the dawn of Verbena history with the legendary Aeduna and Wyck of the ancient world. Your family has followed the Old Faith and maintained the Old Ways for centuries, through the rise and fall of empires and the dangers of the Burning Times. Many of them suffered for their beliefs, and many of them died. You were taught all of this when you were only a child, and your parents showed you many wonders. When other kids took vacations in Disneyland, you visited the Horizon Realms and saw *real* faeries and unicorns.

Your family always expected great things from you. After all, you had a noble heritage to live up to. More than anything else, you wanted to make them proud of you, so you worked hard to study magic and learn all that you could about the Old Ways. There was a time when you feared you would never truly understand, that you would be consigned to the life of a humble sorcerer, but your blood was true. You Awakened to your power in the middle of an otherwise unremarkable family argument. Your use of magic was considered such an excellent omen that the fight stopped and a celebration began.

The loss of Horizon and many of the great masters of the Traditions makes it all the more important that people like you remain true to their heritage. The Verbena have seen times like this before and survived, and so will you survive. Your heritage and all the sacrifices of your ancestors depend on it.

Concept: You are a true Verbena, born and bred. Magic is your birthright but also a great responsibility. It is your duty to uphold the Old Ways and to teach others about them; to nourish the roots of the World Tree to keep it strong and vital. It is a heavy responsibility, but you know that you are capable of shouldering it for as long as necessary. You are proud to do so.

Roleplaying Tips: You never miss an opportunity to educate, since it is through teaching that the Old Ways survive. If others

VERBENA

NAME:	NATURE: Traditionalist	FACTORY: Gardeners of the Tree
PLAYER:	ESSENCE: Pattern	CONCEPT: Scion of the Wyck
CHARISMA:	DEFINER: Pedagogue	CABAL:

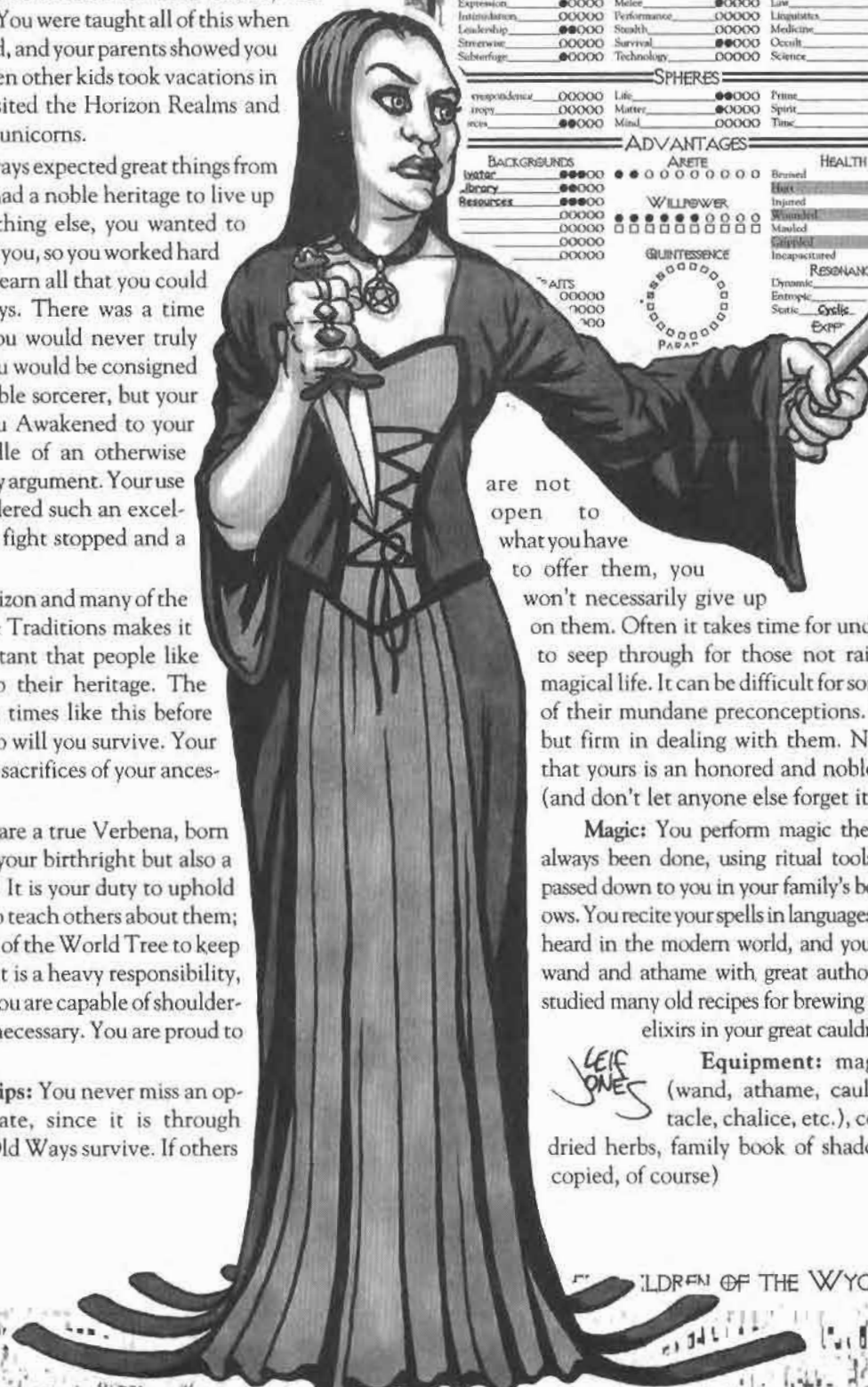
ATTRIBUTES		
PHYSICAL	SOCIAL	MENTAL
Strength: ●●●●●	Charisma: ●●●●●	Perception: ●●●●●
Dexterity: ●●●●●	Manipulation: ●●●●●	Intelligence: ●●●●●
Stamina: ●●●●●	Appearance: ●●●●●	Wits: ●●●●●

ABILITIES		
TALENTS	SKILLS	KNOWLEDGES
Alertness: ●●●●●	Oris: ●●●●●	Academics: ●●●●●
Athletics: ●●●●●	Drive: ●●●●●	Computer: ●●●●●
Awareness: ●●●●●	Empathy: ●●●●●	Cosmology: ●●●●●
Brawl: ●●●●●	Fiery: ●●●●●	Enigma: ●●●●●
Dodge: ●●●●●	Meditation: ●●●●●	Investigation: ●●●●●
Expression: ●●●●●	Melce: ●●●●●	Law: ●●●●●
Intimidation: ●●●●●	Performance: ●●●●●	Linguistics: ●●●●●
Leadership: ●●●●●	Swath: ●●●●●	Medicine: ●●●●●
Stealth: ●●●●●	Survival: ●●●●●	Occult: ●●●●●
Subterfuge: ●●●●●	Technology: ●●●●●	Science: ●●●●●

SPHERES		
Responsibility: ●●●●●	Life: ●●●●●	Prime: ●●●●●
Trust: ●●●●●	Matter: ●●●●●	Spirit: ●●●●●
Wisdom: ●●●●●	Mind: ●●●●●	Time: ●●●●●

ADVANTAGES		
BACKGROUNDS	ARETE	HEALTH
Avatar: ●●●●●	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Burned: 0 □
Library: ●●●●●	WILLPOWER	Blind: 1 □
Resources: ●●●●●	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Injured: -1 □
●●●●●	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Wounded: 2 □
●●●●●	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Mauled: -2 □
●●●●●	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Starved: -3 □
●●●●●	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Imprisoned: -4 □
●●●●●	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Incubated: -5 □

TALENTS	RESONANCE	EXPERIENCE
●●●●●	Dynamic: 0	●●●●●
●●●●●	Entropy: 0	●●●●●
●●●●●	Static: 0	●●●●●
●●●●●	Cyclic: 0	●●●●●



are not open to what you have to offer them, you won't necessarily give up on them. Often it takes time for understanding to seep through for those not raised in the magical life. It can be difficult for some to let go of their mundane preconceptions. Be patient but firm in dealing with them. Never forget that yours is an honored and noble bloodline (and don't let anyone else forget it, either).

Magic: You perform magic the way it has always been done, using ritual tools and spells passed down to you in your family's book of shadows. You recite your spells in languages hardly ever heard in the modern world, and you wield your wand and athame with great authority. You've studied many old recipes for brewing potions and elixirs in your great cauldron.

Equipment: magical tools (wand, athame, cauldron, pentacle, chalice, etc.), collection of dried herbs, family book of shadows (hand-copied, of course)

LEIF JONES

SHAPESHIFTER

Quote: *There's more to all of us than meets the eye.*

Prelude: You grew up in an upper-class suburb on Chicago's North Shore. Your parents had very high expectations of you. You were to be cultured, educated and, of course, pretty.

You never felt you quite managed that last one.

Even as you studied, even as you attended dance classes three times a week, you wanted to cut loose. You wanted to be someone else — someone less staid and more vital — but you were stuck.

You graduated from your boring and prestigious high school and went to a boring and prestigious university, and from there you entered the work force as one more yuppie drone. You tried dating, but the guys you met were all dull and things never quite worked out. You feared you simply weren't pretty enough ever to meet a man who would turn you around or really love you.

One night, you went down into Chicago to explore the neighborhood around the corner of Belmont and Clark. That's where the wild kids hung out. The ones with tattoos and piercings. The ones who wore leather jackets that said things like "Gutter Girl" or "Pain Is Just Weakness Leaving The Body."

You met a guy who had to be in his early 30s, and you liked him a lot. He was radically different from anyone you'd ever met, and you were enthralled. There was something magnetic about him. Maybe it was his long eyelashes or his big brown eyes or the taut musculature that showed through his clothes. He took you to dinner at an Ethiopian restaurant (you'd never had Ethiopian before) and told you stories of hiking through Nova Scotia as the leaves were turning fiery orange and about bathing in hot springs in Oregon while snowflakes drifted lazily out of the sky and dissolved as they hit the rising steam.

You began driving down into the city more regularly. He never quite seemed to look the same when you saw him, but you knew who he was. You felt you knew his soul. When you rebuffed his sexual advances, you thought you'd never see him again, but you were wrong.

He told you he was leaving soon to go west. He asked if you wanted to go.

A month later, you were camping in the desert outside Santa Fe and he said he had some things to show you. You thought he meant sexual things, but instead he turned into a wolf. Then an eagle. Then he turned into you.

"You can do this too," your double said to you.

He became himself again, and he was on you like an animal in human form. The whole time he was undressing you, he was whispering strange, exciting things in your ear. The moment he took your virginity, you felt something in you change, and not just in a symbolic way. Your body became fluid and moved with his body, and you made love as panthers, as minks, as foxes.

And nothing about you would ever be the same again.

Concept: Like a house pet gone feral, you appreciate freedom like few others. There is nothing in life that you won't play with, including your own form. You've learned to take your own Pattern and reshape it in nearly any way you wish. Now you understand what the word "wild" really means. You're constantly

VERBENA

NAME: PLAYER: CHARACTER	NATURE: Loner ESSENCE: Dynamic DESIRE: Thrill-Seeker	FACTION: Lifecovers CONCEPT: Shapeshifter CABAL:
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ATTRIBUTES		
PHYSICAL	SOCIAL	MENTAL
Strength: ●●●●	Charisma: ●●●●	Perception: ●●●●
Dexterity: ●●●●	Manipulation: ●●●●	Intelligence: ●●●●
Stamina: ●●●●	Appearance: ●●●●	Wisdom: ●●●●

ABILITIES		
TALENTS	SKILLS	KNOWLEDGES
Alertness: ●●●●	Crafts: ●●●●	Academics: ●●●●
Athletics: ●●●●	Drive: ●●●●	Computer: ●●●●
Awareness: ●●●●	Etiquette: ●●●●	Cosmology: ●●●●
Brawl: ●●●●	Finesse: ●●●●	Enigma: ●●●●
Dodge: ●●●●	Meditation: ●●●●	Investigation: ●●●●
Expression: ●●●●	Melee: ●●●●	Law: ●●●●
Intimidation: ●●●●	Performance: ●●●●	Linguistics: ●●●●
Leadership: ●●●●	Stealth: ●●●●	Medicine: ●●●●
Streetwise: ●●●●	Survival: ●●●●	Occult: ●●●●
Subterfuge: ●●●●	Technology: ●●●●	Science: ●●●●

SPHERES		
Correspondence: ●●●●	Life: ●●●●	Prime: ●●●●
Entropy: ●●●●	Matter: ●●●●	Spun: ●●●●
Forces: ●●●●	Mind: ●●●●	Time: ●●●●

ADVANTAGES		
BACKGROUNDS	ARETE	HEA
Avatar: ●●●●	●●●●●●●●	Injured: ●
Contacts: ●●●●	Willpower: ●●●●●●●●	Mauled: ●
Resources: ●●●●	Quintessence: ●●●●●●●●	Resilient: ●
●●●●	Other Traits: ●●●●	Dynamic Wild: ●
●●●●	●●●●	Enigmatic: ●
●●●●	●●●●	Static: ●
●●●●	Paradox: ●●●●●●●●	Experienced: ●

trying out new shapes and identities, and you've started working on permanently modifying your Pattern in different ways to suit you better.

Roleplaying Tips: You blend in anywhere. You can be the strikingly beautiful culture maven, or you can be so feral that you scare even brave men. You find joy in your freedom as in nothing else. There may be a day when you settle down into a routine, but for now, you're happy sinking your teeth into life and taking all it has to offer.

Magic: Your magic is focused on shaping and molding the Patterns of life. You use various Talismans, articles of clothing, even totems like feathers or animal hides, to transform yourself into different shapes. Mirrors, once your bane, have become your windows of insight, and things like dance and movement — once a duty done to please others — are now a pleasure and source of power for you.

Equipment: leather jacket, wide variety of clothing and accessories



WISE HEALER

Quote: Relax, it looks a lot worse than it really is.

Prelude: You always had a knack for taking care of things, from the first time you found a wounded bird and nursed it back to health. When you were a kid, you always knew that you wanted to be a doctor and help people get well. You worked hard for the opportunity, too, since college and medical school were expensive. Unfortunately, you found that the reality of becoming a doctor didn't match up to your expectations. There were so few doctors or even med-students really interested in helping heal people. They were all more interested in how much money they would make and how to protect themselves against potential legal liabilities. Medical school seemed designed to take the humanity out of the process of treating patients, and you got sick and tired of hearing about how you had to be objective where your patients were concerned.

You also didn't care for the restrictions placed on you, so you decided to run a little free clinic on the side for people who needed your help but couldn't afford it. You even recruited a few fellow students to help out there. When the school administration found out, you were expelled and charged with practicing medicine without a license. The charges were eventually dropped, but you were blackballed from attending medical school. Your dream of becoming a doctor was over, or so you thought.

You began looking into alternative forms of healing: herbalism, holistic healing, acupressure, aromatherapy and others. Among them you found what you were looking for, an approach that focused on compassion and treating the patient as a whole person. You also found a connection to ancient and honored healing techniques and folk remedies that went back centuries. Through your studies, you encountered someone who said that you had a great deal of potential. You would make an excellent healer, if you were up to the challenge, but your results were still mixed.

One night, you were opening your own doors of perception (with the help of psilocybin mushrooms), when two young parents brought in their kid, who'd been hit by a car. You recognized severe shock when you saw it, and you didn't think the kid had much of a chance. Worse, you were just about peaking on the 'shrooms and not in any state of mind to be dealing with any kind of healing work (or so you thought). Then all of a sudden, all of the theories — the spiritual healing techniques and the like that you'd been reading up on — fell into place. The necessary course of action was suddenly clear as good air. A few herbs and some carefully channeled energy later, the kid was sitting up and laughing.

In time, the effects of the psilocybin passed, but the *understanding* you arrived at that night did not. Now you're becoming the healer you've wanted to be since the very start.

KEIF JONES



VERBENA

NAME: _____		NATURE: Caregiver		FACTION: Twisters of Fate	
PLAYER: _____		ESSENCE: Pattern		CONCEPT: Wise Healer	
CHRONICLE: _____		DETERMINER: Martyr		CASAL: _____	
ATTRIBUTES					
PHYSICAL		SOCIAL		MENTAL	
Strength: ●●●●	Charisma: ●●●●	Perception: ●●●●			
Dexterity: ●●●●	Manipulation: ●●●●	Intelligence: ●●●●			
Stamina: ●●●●	Appearance: ●●●●	Wis: ●●●●			
ABILITIES					
TALENTS		SKILLS		KNOWLEDGES	
Alertness: ●●●●	Crafts: ●●●●	Academics: ●●●●			
Athletics: ●●●●	Drive: ●●●●	Computer: ●●●●			
Awareness: ●●●●	Etiquette: ●●●●	Cosmology: ●●●●			
Brawl: ●●●●	Ferocity: ●●●●	Etiquette: ●●●●			
Dodge: ●●●●	Mediation: ●●●●	Investigation: ●●●●			
Expression: ●●●●	Melee: ●●●●	Law: ●●●●			
Intrigue: ●●●●	Performance: ●●●●	Linguistics: ●●●●			
Leadership: ●●●●	Stealth: ●●●●	Medicine: ●●●●			
Streetwise: ●●●●	Survival: ●●●●	Occult: ●●●●			
Subterfuge: ●●●●	Technology: ●●●●	Science: ●●●●			
SPHERES					
Correspondence: ●●●●	Life: ●●●●	Prime: ●●●●			
Entropy: ●●●●	Matter: ●●●●	Spirit: ●●●●			
Fates: ●●●●	Mind: ●●●●	Time: ●●●●			
ADVANTAGES					
BACKGROUNDS		ARETE		HEALTH	
Avatar: ●●●●	●●●●○○○○○○	Beated	-0		<input type="checkbox"/>
Contacts: ●●●●	●●●●○○○○○○	Hurt	-1		<input type="checkbox"/>
Dream: ●●●●	●●●●○○○○○○	Injured	-1		<input type="checkbox"/>
Resources: ●●●●	●●●●○○○○○○	Wounded	-2		<input type="checkbox"/>
_____	●●●●○○○○○○	Mangled	-3		<input type="checkbox"/>
_____	●●●●○○○○○○	Crushed	-4		<input type="checkbox"/>
_____	●●●●○○○○○○	Incapacitated	-		<input type="checkbox"/>
OTHER TRAITS		WILLPOWER		RESONANCE	
_____	●●●●○○○○○○	●●●●○○○○○○	Dynamic Vital: ●●●●		
_____	●●●●○○○○○○	●●●●○○○○○○	Entropy: ●●●●		
_____	●●●●○○○○○○	●●●●○○○○○○	Static: ●●●●		
_____	●●●●○○○○○○	●●●●○○○○○○	EXPERIENCE		
_____	●●●●○○○○○○	●●●●○○○○○○	PARADOX		

Concept: You're not a doctor, yours is a sacred calling. You're part physician, part counselor and part therapist — whatever your clients need to help them on the road to recovery. You've learned a great deal about how the mind and spirit influence the body and vice versa, as well as how to use simple and time-honored methods for bringing them all into alignment and harmony to treat disease and maladies on a deeper level.

Roleplaying Tips: You're compassionate and caring, with a need to help others who are suffering. You're disdainful of Western medicine for what you see as its shortcomings and blind spots. Helping people become truly healthy in body, mind and spirit is your calling in life, and you attend to it with considerable zeal and pleasure.

Magic: Herbal mixtures, teas, infusions and similar brews are a primary focus of your magic. You also use sound, meditation, scent and massage to stimulate the body's many hidden properties.

Equipment: medicine bag (containing herbs, salves and other remedies), research notebook

EPILOGUE: CIRCLE UNBROKEN



Tom was packing when Kameraia came into the room, so wrapped up in his thoughts that she simply stood and watched him for a moment before he realized she was there. He paused in the midst of putting some folded clothes into a duffel bag, like a child caught doing something he shouldn't be.

"I hear that you're leaving," Kameraia said. It wasn't a question.

"I can't stay," Tom said, shoving the clothes into the bag and looking idly around for anything else he needed to take with him, anything not to have to meet Kameraia's dark-eyed gaze, to have to think about...

"If there's something we can do to help..." she offered, but Tom just shook his head.

"No, that's fine. It's just... I... I just can't deal with this."

"With what?" she asked innocently.

"With what? Kameraia, he's dead! Jon's dead, and you..."

Tom bit his lip as tears welled up in his eyes and he twisted an old T-shirt in his hands.

"And I killed him," Kameraia said. "Is that what you were going to say?"

"How could you do that?" Tom whimpered, sinking down on the edge of his bunk, looking up at Kameraia looking very much like a sad and lost little boy rather than a recent college graduate. "You were his friends. He was your husband."

"That's why it had to be me."

"How can you be so calm about it?"

"I've known this would happen for some time," Kameraia replied, "and I've had the chance to make my peace with it, like you will." She blinked back tears of her own and smiled. "It's what Jon had to do."

"But why?" he pleaded.

"For us, for the farm, the circle, the Verbena... For you."

Tom jumped to his feet, throwing the T-shirt aside. "Don't even try to tell me he died for our sins."

"No," Kameraia said. "Jon's not a martyr, Tom. He didn't die to redeem anyone. He died for what he believed in. He died to give this place and us a chance. He did what true Verbena have always done, sacrificed for the good of his people and for life!"

Tom started to say something but Kameraia cut him off, taking a step closer until she was almost face to face with him, looking up at the taller young man.

"And I'll tell you this: If you can't handle it, if this life isn't for you, then you should go and find whatever it is that you need, but don't blame Jon's sacrifice for that. Don't casually throw away what he's given you. If you really cared about him and his sacrifice really matters to you, then honor it by helping us carry on his work!"

"I... I don't know if I can," Tom said quietly. Kameraia laid a gentle hand on his arm.

"If he didn't think you could, Jon wouldn't have invited you to join us."

"I'm afraid," he said, beginning to tremble under her touch. She took his face in her hands, forcing him to look deep into her eyes.

"Life is scary, Tom," she said. "Life is risk. Don't run away from your feelings, don't live your whole life being afraid. Jon is gone, but that doesn't mean you can't live."

Sobs wracked the young man's body, and his knees buckled. Kamera guided him gently to the floor, holding him in her arms and letting him cry, like a mother holds her child. She thought of the child, hers and Jon's, growing within her, and she stroked Tom's hair. She felt the tears wash his eyes, and his spirit stretched its wings. She felt him Awaken, and she smiled as her own tears came. The "waters of life," Jon had called them.

"It's not over, my love," she whispered. "It's only beginning again."

Paganism is alive and well and thriving in the modern world. Real covens of real witches meet in small towns in every state in the US, in England, New Zealand and places even farther flung. Like the bumper sticker says: The Goddess is alive and magic is afoot.

Obviously, the Verbena Tradition is based on the practices and traditions of modern pagans. Those practices and traditions, however, are enhanced with fictions for your gaming pleasure. Those seeking an alternative to the patriarchal — some might say authoritarian — religions of the West might want to look into paganism in more depth. While reading a game book won't make a witch of you, some of the following titles might.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

Storytellers and players will find the following resources useful in providing information and inspiration for Verbena characters and chronicles in a **Mage: The Ascension** game. Note that there are many, many additional resources out there for those looking to find out more about paganism, witchcraft and related topics. A visit to your local witch shop or New Age store will expose you to more books than you would ever need to read on the subject. For clarity and directness, however, we recommend the non-fiction titles we've listed.

FICTION

Bradley, Marion Zimmer, *Mists of Avalon*. A lengthy novel that offers a sympathetic view of Morgan Le Fay ("Morgaine" here) as a pagan priestess struggling with the rise of Christianity (represented and championed by King Arthur). The television movie adaptation (starring Julianna Margulies as Morgaine) is also worth watching.

Kurtz, Katherine, *Lammas Night*. A novel about a coven of English witches in the 1940s, working to coordinate a grand coven and ritual to keep the Nazis (backed by their own rune-mystics) from invading England. Useful for insights into the Gardeners of the Tree, the idea of sacrifice and as inspiration for a World War II-era Verbena chronicle.

Lackey, Mercedes. The *Diana Tregarde Mysteries*. The main character of these occult detective stories could easily be Verbena. The three books in the series are *Children of the Night*, *Burning Water* and *Jinx High*.

Starhawk, *The Fifth Sacred Thing*. This novel features a totalitarian government versus a neo-pagan ecotopia. Good inspiration for the Technocracy/Traditions conflict, particularly where the Verbena are concerned.

NON-FICTION

Adler, Margot, *Drawing Down the Moon*. A survey of paganism in America, covering many different traditions and backgrounds. Although it's a bit dated, it provides a good idea of the kind of diversity the Verbena Tradition includes.

Cunningham, Scott. *The Truth About Witchcraft Today*. Probably the simplest and most accessible guide to the Craft available for non-pagans.

Frazer, James, *The Golden Bough*. If you like your pagan history a little on the mytho-poetic side, this is the book for you. Frazer wrote the book (initially spanning 13 volumes) in 1922, intending it to be a historical study of the myths and folklore of pre-Christian Europe, and he inadvertently wound up promulgating the notion of a continent-spanning witchcult. The Verbena as presented in **Mage** have far more to do with Frazer's view of witchcraft than, say, Cunningham's.

Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*. One of the best-selling books on paganism, Starhawk's perennial classic, now in print for almost 25 years, has been an introduction to Wicca for many people. She covers the history, deities and festivals of paganism and makes some very sensible recommendations for incorporating witchcraft into daily life.

FILM

The Wicker Man. This brilliant 1973 film is the remarkable tale of a police officer who finds himself on an island off the English coast that turns out to be controlled entirely by pagans. The people of Summerisle represent the Gardeners of the Tree well and the film as a whole gives a great feel for what an all-pagan town might be like. And Christopher Lee does an excellent job portraying the island's high priest. The ending is pretty cool, too.

ONLINE

The Witches' Voice (www.witchvox.com) is one of the largest pagan and Wiccan websites and online resources.

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