EIDOLON

THE ELECTRODYNE OPERA

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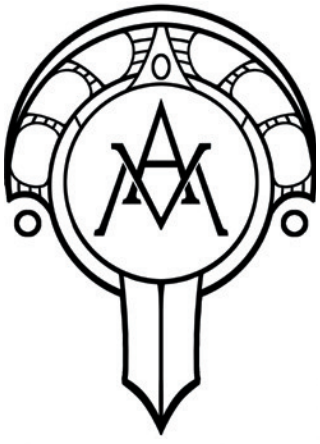
by

ANGELUS V MORNINGSTAR



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Opposite: Overture by Socar Myles.

First the overture, to set theme and mood for glorious pageantry; a few moments are spent to wax upon common matters and assumptions. Seek here the very insights that voice the Realm and its many players.

OVERTURE

Introduction

Once upon a time: these are very important words. They are the incantation of a magician before he performs his act. Upon their utterance, one is prepared for marvels that will unfold. Such words as these are not an incantation, but a sign that a special working of myth is about to commence. All who hear it know to suspend their disbelief for a world of wonder and cruelty.

This is a work of fiction, and, like all works of fiction, it is utterly true. This is simple wisdom: that somewhere between ennui and madness one finds profound fantasy where mortals become more than just forgeries of clay; for here they dream. Through story, the audience gains cunning insights into the mythic truth of the world; one constantly made in their own image.

Electrodyne Opera

Eidolon is a gaslamp fantasy setting, set in the year 1900. It is a world where stories focus upon the nobility and the affairs of state. Herein, the eight great nation-states of the Realm and the alien powers of both the Hinterlands and Antipodes acknowledge the sovereignty of the imperial Coronal. A celestial family of puissant nobles leads the Imperium, each of whom has attained near-immortality and stand at the centre of the Realm's web of intrigue. The emperor is none other than Friedreich Münchhausen, known better by the title of the Invictus.

The Imperium is an institution of many constituent organisations, but all of them stand in the shadow of the Coronal. Though first among them, are the twin estates of the aristocracy: the clergy and the gentry. The first estate is the Mousaion, a sorority of mythology and liturgical works, guided by the auspices of the Oracle. In counterpoint, the second estate of the Peerage represents the fraternity of liege lords that govern the many landed domains of the Realm.

Perhaps more controversially, there are those that acknowledge the bourgeoisie orders of the imperial charters as the emergence of third estate.

from One Empire by Vivian Grey

In Eidolon, the people enjoy a sophisticated technology buoyed by the uncanny advancements of alchemical forges and electrodyne engines; their artefaction precipitating an age of wonder. Newton's fulmonry has opened the starry heavens, having launched the space race of the 17th Century, and the Imperium now enjoys colonies on the planetary gears of Barsoom and Amtor. Alchemical contraceptives ushered in the sexual revolutions of the 1860s, creating robust libertine affects. The burgeoning vogue of planetary and science heroes has divided the generations, with the aristocracy cleaving to baroque mores, even as the bourgeoisie embrace *avant-garde* styles.

Thus, the Electrodyne Opera is a drama of politics, a game of thrones, and a work of blood and thunder. Herein the lives of the nobility exalt in their best and revel in their worst, in romance and tragedy alike. For each noble contends with fate, forever bound to the mythic force of the skein. Theirs is the passion play, striving for immortality and apotheosis.

REALM

The cosmos in its entirety is all of Eidolon, but its living theatre of creation is better known by its many inhabitants as the Realm. Eidolon is a study of contrasts: narrative laws compete with physical laws to form causality, for the measure of Reason unfolds as an orderly flow of time, but the meter of Rhyme returns with the narrative refrain of fate. Eidolon is a duality of both material and imaginary realms, the Tellurium and Delirium in turn. The former is the reality of matter and shape, the latter is naught but dream and meaning.

ORRERY

Eidolon is a clockwork world, contained entirely within the great celestial mechanism named the Orrery. The largest of all its gears is the glorious plane of the Firmament, which comprises the

centre of this sphere. The Firmament lies between the heavenly Aether above, the lofty heavens of rarefied essences, and the Umbrage below, the subterranean realm of darkly echoes. Together the Aether, Firmament, and Umbrage describe a sphere, circumscribed all by the superstructures of the Orrery itself.

The measure of day and night are counted by the great mirrored Pendulum, which reflects the solar orb of Agony by day and the lunar orb of Ecstasy by night. Each cast their radiance across the Realm in turn. The inhabitants of the Realm perchance may catch rare glimpses of the more obscure mechanisms of the Orrery, but only under the mysteries of the night sky.

The gyre of the Firmament is governed by the Ophanim: three colossal celestial wheels. The Zodiac is the largest of the three, and it moves the Realm in perfect synchronisation with the solar calendar. The Norn is the oldest of the three and weaves about the change of seasons. The Synod is the least but quickest of the three, and is responsible for pushing and pulling the lunar phases.

Together, they govern the very destinies of humankind and their sibling races of faerie and takwin, and subtly weave a ruling destiny of ascension for one of these races alone. The Ophanim currently turn the Realm in accordance to the supremacy of human ascendancy; a feat attained through the puissance of the imperial throne, the Prime Mobile. For hanging from the very scaffolds of the heavens, the radiant imperial city of Diadem depends. It is here that the Prime Mobile is stations and where the Coronal reigns supreme.

METROPOLARIS AND PROVINCE

The Firmament is dominated by the Literal Continent where the human populations reside. At the very heart of the Literate stands Palladium, the World Tree, that rises above the landscape as a mountain. Nestled about and among the ponderous roots of that majestic tree stand the structures of the capital city Metropolaris. The city is immense, and radiates outwardly in a vast urban sprawl. Its limits are contained only by ancient, massive walls built. These are the Ramparts, and they are monument to prehistoric craft.

Beyond the Ramparts are the numerous provincial domains; all are rural and prosaic territories owing allegiance to one of the eight nation-states. Their lands are divided by a nigh-impenetrable mass of forest composed of thorny, sinuous briars, known as the bramblewoods. Their thickets stand several stories tall and they are deeper than several hours' march. These dauntless barricades divide the Realm neatly into a tapestry of enclaves. They each stand fiercely independent, fearing no conventional invasion; for their only martial peril is the imperial armada of sky-borne dreadnoughts.

HINTERLANDS AND ANTIPODES

Outside the dominion of humanity are found the lands of faerie and takwin. Both faerie and takwin dominions are poised upon the outskirts of human civilisation, and present a subdued but ever-persistent threat to humanity.

The faerie border marches are the Alluvial Hinterlands, which comprise the archipelagos that surround the Literal Continent; these lands are governed by the Marcher Lords of the Marquis. Each of the four border marches lie in one of the compass points from the mainland, and each is bound to a seasonal throne. The subterranean worlds of the Antipodes are those lands below, where the takwin call home. At the centre of a labyrinth is their lost city Agartha, where their lives accord to the Cardinals that interpret the enigmatic dreams of the *Deus Machina*. Their world is a domain of alchemical curiosity, having forged each quarter of the labyrinth into elemental architecture

SKEIN

Narratives have power throughout Eidolon, as expressed through the mystic force of the skein: ancient and powerful, it manipulates the lives of all within the Realm, and ensures that history accords to narrative conventions. Through the skein, the duality of Rhyme and Reason constantly underscores the world with dramatic conflict through the twin genres of romance and tragedy. The skein brings the principle players of the Realm together, only to drive them apart.

The political institutions of the Realm exist upon this fact, and the governing elite are the nobility who have learned to attune to and manipulate the skein itself. The nobility has integrated the power of the skein at a most fundamental level, weaving it deftly into the ebb and flow of political life. The nobles of the Realm accord themselves to the ritual of the Calendar, and otherwise attune their courtly activity to a dramatic cycle that follows the seasons. All sundry courtly intrigues and other political projects must tend to these narrative cycles, which echo out across the year.

CAUSALITY

The skein is a causal force that compels people, places, and things in equal measure to influence the fate of kings and paupers alike. Time is but the warp of its threads, and fate the weft; they each intertwine and struggle against each other, to thereby manifest as twists of fate, changes of destiny, and the deliverance of catastrophe. Its causal nature means few can barely concern a world without the skein, governed only by the laws of nature not tempered by story tropes.

History serves some unknown end; the Realm attuned to specific design, and purpose obscured from those on the sod. If history is story, then a most confounding question is the identity of the Author. Many wonder whether some unknown Author is steering the course of history, while others care or know not what the answer might be.

from The Death of the Author by Zarathustra

Every being is but a slender thread woven into the skein, but the favoured subjects of the workings of the skein are the nobility. Though the nobility gains awareness of the skein at work, they are nevertheless more prone to its vicissitudes, falling victim or benefactor to its stranger twists. The skein demands much of its noble subjects, and more than one has become an heroic sacrifice or otherwise succumbed to villainous downfall through narrative conceit. Yet, the skein is neither malevolent nor cognisant; it is only a causal force of narrative and its story will out.

GRAND NARRATIVE

All of history together forms the great historical schema that the Mousaion names the Grand Narrative. It forms one single continuum from Genesis to Eschaton, from beginning to end.

The three earthly races of humanity, faerie, and takwin bitterly contend as to the nature of history. Humanity claim that the Grand Narrative is written in verse and prose, while faerie instead assure that the Grand Narrative is portrayed in images and picture, and yet takwin still repudiate both, to proclaim that the Grand Narrative is a cant of musicality instead.

None shall know the assurance of their claim until the final page of the Grand Narrative has come, and history culminates. Upon that final hour, whoever holds the imperial throne of the Prime Mobile may declare the authenticity of their account. Should either faerie or takwin maintain that seat, then shall have the power to revise history to their own design.

As the final century of prophesied history unfolds, the clandestine conflicts between those who would stand at its apex grow deeper and more desperate. For only one may prevail in their interpretation of history.

CALENDAR

The Calendar is the daily ritual of the aristocracy, and forms a familiar refrain of daily living for the commoners. Its numerous forms denote a particular mode of living ones that the aristocracy is

accustomed to. Its customs and practices are deeply entrenched, as the breach of their observation reveals those of failing quality.

The Calendar drives narrative power into the halls of power, following a familiar pattern of escalating, climaxing, and diminishing dramatic conflict across the two halves of the year. The most artful of the courtiers work in accordance with the Calendar, capitalising on its peaks and troughs in careful manner. Through the Calendar, history is transformed into a grand political and teleological project; it is one designed to help ensure the political prominence of humanity and the supremacy of humankind's written history of the Grand Narrative.

In this, the paired institutions of the Peerage and the Mousaion, the gentry and the clergy, work together to maintain both the human empire and the liturgy of human history. For all that the lords and ladies plot with constant scheming, they are nevertheless united under empire for the good of humankind.

LITURGY

Liturgical dramas trace the history of humankind, each recited upon the stages of Mousaion temples. They run from prehistoric origins into modern times, and retell humankind their history. Liturgy and its many forms, is curated by the clergy of the Mousaion. They are the custodians, the authenticators, and the curators of human history.

The liturgy of human history encompasses oral tradition of epic poetry, reimagined for liturgical theatre by the Hellenics and made popular by the Romans. They comprise the passion plays of the Middle Ages, as their dramatic styles influenced the emergence of the power play. They also follow the emergence of the printed novel and modern story forms.

The first written records describe the founding of the Calendar during the birth of the Roman Empire. Though they are preceded by stories that pertain to origins beyond all written accounts, they are the subject of some uncertainty. For all that the Mousaion vaunts its mythic lore with great ceremony, its members regard its myths with trepidation lest they confuse fiction with history. Yet, for their audience such matters are moot, as it is the fiction of myths, not their history, that makes them compelling.

It is these contentions that the Mousaion strives to resolve. The liturgy is their authentic work of history, and the sacred charge of their entire institution. For the articles of the Mousaion would war against the dust of ages, as failing memory sweeps history into obscurity. The Mousaion encumbers their selves with ensuring preservation beyond living memory, as recited in their liturgy before the populaces.

The work of the Mousaion safeguards against the reinterpretation of history, such that neither faerie nor takwin might claim the Eschaton of the end times. As memory falters, it falls once more into myriad multiplicity and ambiguity. Records and traditions serve where living memory cannot. In maintaining an authentic narrative of human empire, the Mousaion divines its future.

Increasingly, the Mousaion turns to elders of great age, and especially those members of the Coronal whose lives are preternaturally extended beyond the nominal span. The eldest members of humanity are the Invictus and the Hesychast; they substantively surpass their nearest elder.

Women have always shared in the creation of history, alongside their fellow men. History, rightly, is the domain of women who have collaborated in its composition and form. For the feminine mystery, and the keys to her power, is our ability to actively shape and scribe the course of man.

Though note well, that the changes wrought by modern times have too imprecated upon this once indefatigable domicile of womanhood. For throughout history, the custom of men, and their dominion of their power, has been affairs-temporal, reigning over land and resources. As custodians of the Muses' legacy, the women of the clergy have governed affairs-chimerical, being the temperance of the hearts and minds of the people.

Yet, these are indeed wondrous and strange times, as noble women seek the station of the Peerage. Of equal certainty, there are noble men who supplicate themselves for a position within the Mousaion.

from Écriture Féminine by Matilda Mulfstan

NOBILITY

NOBLES ARE THE primary actors of the Realm, for they have come to know the skein, to understand its intricate mores, and even to manipulate it to their ends; through this, they influence

the skein and the lives of others with great faculty. In turn, the skein has invested the nobility with its own agency to compel their lives in accordance to its own conventions.

The nobility are more than highborn persons, bred to privilege. Each noble is a focal point for the patterns of the skein; their personal destinies are writ large upon its threads, and they become more bound by its forms and fluctuations. They are personages compelled and invested with narrative power.

An animus of story inhabits each of them, which that grants them the keys to power. These are archetypes of story, and each is the conduit between noble and narrative. Each archetype emphasises and affects the noble demeanour to present them as paragons and monsters alike. They come to embody the virtues of society, such as honour, beauty, and wisdom. By virtue of their station, their lives are subject of curiosity and fascination; their pageantry has become a spectacle of dramatic interlude, beloved by the populace. They are a *cause celebre*: the most glorious sportsmen, the most beautiful icons, the most accomplished magnates, and the most venal of degenerates.

Yet, as the nobles' legendary grows, it deepens their archetype connection and obscures their own personality. For as the skein affects them with greater ease, through the celebration of their deeds, the public caricature of that legend may eclipses the original person. Yet, the archetypal power grants them nigh-immortality. For as long as their legend remains popularity, their mortal forms are sustained beyond natural endurance and longevity, preserved against death and injury.

ALLEGIANCE

The nobility are masters of political theatre: the least of them commands statecraft and stagecraft alike, and the greatest rise to influence every reach of the Realm. Each must cultivate favour with the populace in order to spread their reputation and worth. Each must vie against the other, partaking in a never-ending and endogenous political conflict; to forfend efforts that would undermine them or otherwise secure their own ambitions.

Throughout the Realm there exists myriad factional allegiances forming a most complex web. Most nobles hold allegiance to more than one of these institutions, and they are constantly constrained by duty and obligations. This web of alliance and betrayal keeps the ambitions of each individual noble in check, for all must navigate multiple fidelities and competing interests: to family, to nation, to home, and to empire. For the nobles are ever-fractious. In the midst of such intrigue, a talented noble may yet achieve their own ends, through compliance and coercion. These are stories of statecraft, diplomacy, and espionage, even as they evoke glory, mystery, and intrigue.

IMPERIUM

The Imperium is the ruling power of the Realm, whose power is the most sovereign in all creation. Not even the might of the Ozman Beylik or the Alluvial Hinterlands can marshal a sufficient challenge against the supreme will of the Invictus instate upon the Prime Mobile.

The sovereignty of the Imperium is vested in an imperial family of thirteen nobles; each of whom has transcended their mortal coils to become the immortal beings named the Arcana. Each Arcanum, save one, resides within the imperial city of Diadem. They are renowned and beloved by all, and their political theatre is attended to through daily broadcast.

ARISTOCRACY

The power of the Coronal is kept in check by the aristocracy, being the combined might of the ruling dynastic clans; all are divided into one of two estates, being the landed-gentry of the Peerage, or the ordained clergy of the Mousaion.

The Peerage oversees and rules the temporal affairs of land and domain, while the Mousaion facilitate the chimerical affairs of the people and their fates. Their governing councils are the Senate and the Auspice respectively; their number comprises of the most powerful nobles outside the Coronal itself, both in terms of influence and knowledge of the skein.

The liege lords of the Peerage and the graces of the Mousaion alike hold membership to houses; they are not exempt from their filial obligations. Only those nobles that take up the oaths and duties of the Imperial Orders forsake their ties to home and house.

CLAN

Houses are large filial alliance of nobles found throughout the Realm; each forms a family bound by blood and oath. They are the bastion of nobility throughout the Realm. All members of a house swear to provide loyalty, service, and duty in the interests of political aspirations of the family.

Each house is but a branch borne from one of the great dynastic clans, each of which descends from the progenitors that the Diadon. The Diadon were antediluvian peers, whose legend is still remembered today. Their natures were as divine beings, made more of dreams than of flesh, and their sovereign manner has inscribed itself upon their decedents: this is why the joining of a noble into a clan engenders them with the peculiar qualities of their ancestor.

Accordingly, each house numbers among one of twelve broad dynastic lineages made in their likeness. These great dynastic clans loom large over the political landscape; they are forever enjoined in an eternal struggle for dominance between the elder statement that form the old guard of the traditional nobles and the avant-garde nobles of their youth.

The foundation of each such house comes through the death an ancestor of historic note; one who fell into the long and languid torpor of quiescence. Their dreams mould and guide the steps of their numerous descendants. Theirs is the long and subtle conflict, whose leaders conspire in the seats of the Senate and Auspice alike. The motives and goals of each conspiracy are inscrutable at best, operating in accordance to some vague whim of fate.

CASTE

Of even earlier origins, the many clans can even claim ancestry with one of the five Muses. Their eminent and resplendent personages given to us as a most ancient sorority: Eve the seeker Muse at Dawn; Anath the warrior Muse at Zenith; Lilith the healer Muse at Dusk; Frey the crafter Muse at Nadir; and Sofia the ruler Muse of Eclipse. They are matriarchs and tutelary guardians of all of humankind; by dint of such accounts, three clans apiece are recognised as sharing a common ancestry

The five castes have become the demagogic institutions of the Mousaion; each sect is dedicated to one of the five Muses, to preserves their mythic traditions through their rites. Each entails a sect whose nobles are guided by the ministrations of the clergy. Their populist ideology expounds upon the nature of nobility and of the empire, entailing the role that nobles play in assuring its destiny. Their catechisms ground each noble in the imagination of the masses, by invoking myth

Alternative Hour and Time by Claire Pacheco.

and folklore to amuse the masses. They cultivate the collective imaginings of the populace, to curry favour, adoration, worship, and fear.

ORDER

Only those nobles that take up the oaths and duties of the Imperial Orders forsake their ties to home and house. There are many among the nobility that find no place in the aristocracy, their aspirations finding no purpose in their institutions.

For nobles such as these, the Imperial Orders provide opportunities to join societies of like mind; they are the military, scholastic, and mercantile orders of the Clavigry, Luminary, and Mammonry respectively. In joining an order, the noble forswears their filial rights, to dedicate their service to empire before family. Though still noble by blood, they stand apart abstaining from aristocratic privileges.

NATION

The briar forest that is the bramblewoods divides the territories of the Realm into discrete tenurial enclaves. Each such enclave is an independent domain, owing allegiance to a national federation or coalition; though all are subordinate to the Imperium itself. Each nation holds its own customary law, as instituted by its parliament. Each nation forms a geopolitical alliance, binding disparate lieges unto the fraternity of the Peerage itself.

The diplomatic affairs of all domains are the politics of nations. Lieges that refrain from national affiliation are rare, and those who would secede or rebel are rarer still. Far more common are those nobles who undertake errant missions through the orders of the Chancer, being tasked with purpose to guide and bind the disparate domains under their political union.

RACE

Though humanity has come to dominate the mainland continent, they exist alongside various beings of otherworldly natures. The tellurian races of humanity, faerie, and takwin comprise the three dominant sapient races; each of which vies for control of history. Each of these races comprises a powerful empire, with origins in the dawn of history.

Through the Imperium, humankind hold the Realm under its dominion, though the Coronal has long since granted both faerie and takwin autonomy of rule in their homelands. Humanity has come to regard them as alien cousins. The faerie are creatures of dreams with ethereal natures, while the takwin are elemental beings, of alchemical natures. Both faerie and takwin exhibit distinct morphologies; their subdivisions may be regarded as distinct breeds. Each of these phyla exhibits the primal forces of nature. The four phyla of the faerie reveal their deep affinities with the temporal seasons, while the four phyla of the takwin demonstrate their elemental connection to alchemy.

MUMMERS

Interspersed among humanity are nightbreed mortals, perverted by the influence of the primordial Ealdor: these are the Mummers. They are once-human figures, who have been subsumed by the

Suspension by Claire Pacheco.

terrible dreams of the Ealdor; their natures and being have been warped into something inhuman. The Mummers endure a strange twilight existence.

By night, they regain their human appearance, veiled by the illusory nature of the moon's light, but the harsh light of the day reveals them. Each is one of many distinctive types of nightbreed, who number among the wildlings, the changelings, and the darklings. One may discern which of the Ealdor a Mummer is bound to, by observing their form and type.

The wildlings are those are twisted by the titan-dreams, and cursed with protean forms. Those affixed within the dreams of the oriel, have had their physical forms stolen by their changeling copy. Lastly, those who fall under the nightmares of the dragons are the darklings, having succumbed to vice and deviancy as their very Shadow consumes them from within.

EALDOR

The Ealdor were the first creatures to inhabit the Realm in prehistoric times; they were terrible, primordial, and eldritch beings, vast in size, powerful in capacity, and beyond mortal ken. The power of each of their number was unchallenged, and their legacy remains only in the shadow they cast upon the waking world.

Once they shaped the world itself according to their whim and design, they now lie fallow in ageless sleep for all have fallen victim to the great sleeping curse of the Somnolence. Yet, even in this torpid state their errant dreams reach ever outwards, to bring havoc and ruin, to find and bind servants to do their work. They dream of days they might return from undying slumber.

Opposite: Chronicle by Socar Myles.

Before the first true act,
recount this passage of annals.
Their historic cadence marks
a happy progress from origins
myths to contemporary works.
History unfolds by virtue of its
many authors, and those whose
compass reckons with the past
are best to charter the future.

Act 0: Backstory

CHRONICLE

Epics

The oldest literary works are the Epics: they comprise lengthy narrative poems concerning mythic deeds and legendary endeavours. Epics emerge from oral tradition, which scribes have subsequently put to verse. They tell of two distinct ages, being the Golden Age, detailing the origins of the Realm, and the Silver Age, detailing the downfall of Atlas in the Deluge.

Epic poems are the highest forms of liturgical theatre, for their themes are nigh arcane. While some versions of these stories exist in vernacular tongues, in other media, the significance of these works is their allegorical content, all replete with symbolism and mythic significance. This symbolism readily reinforced through the particular portrayal of each actor and the detail of costume and prosody.

Their high forms means they have scarce utility in popular venues, and even more rarely are they used for the workings of preception. These works demand an educated audience to appreciate their nuance.

from The Grand Narrative by Leubald Geyer

The Mousaion holds high regard for epic poetry, and we strive to rework their themes into new modern modes; a feat inspired largely by the works of Geyer. Yet, these are not popular works, for their subtleties are most esoteric, yet with an enlightened audience, their effects are profound.

They are intricate works, with seminal, principle narratives. The epics are the foundation of the Mousaion's rites. As an art form of high calibre, each refrain demands exacting performance from its graces, who must know the forms with intimacy; a prerequisite for advancement in the clergy.

from Écriture Féminine by Matilda Mulfstan

Golden Age

The stories of the Golden Age describe the creation of the Realm, the coming of humanity, and other foundational events. These myths are recalled through many oral traditions from different ancestry; each has been preserved in one manner or another down through the ages, and from these the Mousaion has discerned a common narrative. These genesis myths comprise a universal narrative. They invoke profound memories of prehistory, being deeply interwoven into custom and folklore. Their themes are common to all humankind, though they vary by locality.

Dreaming

First, there was the Dreaming: of all things and of all ideas, but lacking past, present, or future. It was a singular moment, suspended in eternal fluctuation. The Dreaming is the abstraction of formless eternity, and lies beyond mortal wisdom. Amid this preponderance of possibility, one ideal took form; it was a fragile piece of reality in a wilderness of unreality, barely more tangible than the rest. This was the Aum, the cosmic egg, and though none knows what stirred the Aum from dormancy, this first cause imbued the Aum with energy, potential, and shape.

Twilight

Twilight came with the hatching of the Aum, which divided Rhyme from Reason, and sundered night from day. Twilight heralds the cosmic interplay of Rhyme and Reason. For neither of the two could ever yield nor whelm the other; they are at once driven towards and against each other.

Their ceaseless power stirred the Aum from restless serenity, two principles unable to remain at rest. For Rhyme imbued the Aum with agency and Reason gave it tempo. Their contentious dyad, churned slowly at first, but with ever-increasing vigour; they worked upon each other to draw themselves apart.

The Aum cracked in twain. Where once there was a singular whole, instead there remained two luminescent orbs; one gilded and burnished casting the light of Reason, being the solar orb of Agony; the other soft and opalescent casting the light of Rhyme, being the lunar orb of Ecstasy. In opposition and counterpoint, they gave neither light nor dark, but a splendid dappled amber-glow.

Before the count of day and night, the dwimmer of twilight appeared, cast neither by Agony nor by Ecstasy, but from some luminescence of the remainder of the Aum itself.

Great Conjunction

Aeons passed, and Rhyme and Reason wove on without end. Given motion and purpose, the ebb and flow of Rhyme and Reason gyred eddies in the ether. Yet from the disparate pieces of the shattered Aum, and from seeming chaos, patterns began to emerge.

There was latent purpose in the Dyad, and that purpose was shaping. The spinning of Rhyme and Reason wrought the first three great principles of the skein. The first was Dream, the principle of creation; then there was Destiny, the principle of preservation; and finally Death, the principle of destruction.

Together, they spun and wove the slender threads of the skein, and brought the fragments of the Aum together. They gave shape where there was none, and fashioned this celestial sediment into the many structures of the Orrery. At first unguided, these wheels and gears spun in lazy, idle orbits, until they came together.

This was the Great Conjunction, which brought the Orrery into being. Together they forged the lower depths of the Umbrage, the upper lofts the Aether, and the central plane of the ever-turning Firmament.

GENESIS OF PALLADIUM

The final remnant of the Aum was the Dreamseed. This precious stone rested upon the surface of the Firmament. Having come from the very core of the Aum itself, it possessed of great measures of quick, the very essence of life. The triplicity of Dream, Destiny, and Death impressed their natures upon the Dreamseed, and caused it to germinate.

The Dreamseed was formed from the very core of the Aum, possessed of great measures of, the very essence of life. The Trine impressed their natures upon the Dreamseed, causing it to germinate and bringing life itself into the Realm. From the Dreamseed sprang forth the sapling that would grow into Palladium: her roots burrowed deep, and her boughs pressed ever higher and Palladium stood as conduit between heaven, earth, and the underworld: *axis mundi*.

Dissolution of Light by Tom McGrath.

Flush with quick, she bloomed in majesty, and her primal nature impressed a verdant brilliance into the surrounding lands. From her flowed the very gifts of life into the Realm far and wide. Her merest shadow granted the land with animation and vitality. The winds and waters flowed about her, all moving in accord to the rhythms of the Orrery, creating the cycles of water and wind alike.

Silver Age

The stories of the Silver Age describe the rise and fall of those antediluvian civilisations of Atlas and Nod, which even now leave their imprint upon our own in lasting legacy. Silver Age Epics recall the birth of the Ealdor, and the wars against heaven, the coming of humanity, and the subsequent Deluge. The Deluge was wrought by the hubris of the *grigori*, to subsume all prehistoric civilisations; it marked the decline of the Ealdor into Somnolence. Yet, it likewise heralded the dawn of humankind, as the inheritors of the *grigori*.

FIRSTBORN

These stories tell of the Ealdor who came before. Those primordial beings born from the turbulence of creation.

The first were the titans, born from Dream, being creatures hewn from raw elements. The titans were creatures of the wilderness, with chaotic and unpredictable temperament. There was no meaningful distinction between creature and land. The second came from falling stars: the oriel wrought by Destiny. The oriel sought perfected order, and to tame the world according to their heavenly mandate. Their arcane society was lost in sombre ritual and prophecy. Lastly, Death gave form to the dragons; those harrowing intruders of the void all yawning maw and calamity. The dragon are naught but living appetite, and they consumed all in their path. These terrible saurian masters wrought ruin upon the Realm.

The titans claimed the outer wilds, the oriel climbed back to heavens, and the dragons delved the depths. With titan, oriel, and dragon having eschewed Elysium, it was home to none.

There are many objects of great power in the history of the Realm, but all of them are eclipsed by the Dreamseed.

Legends tell us that the Dreamseed bore great affinity with the principle powers of the Trine, and was significant in the genesis of the Ealdor. The life-giving nature of Palladium cast echoes of these principles, creating a vessel for each principle: the dragon-kin are the shadows of Death, the titan-forged are the manifestations of Dream, and the highborn oriel are reflections of Destiny.

from Immortal by Matilda Mulfstan

ORDINAL

In roots beneath Palladium, the Dreamseed lay singing out to all the Ealdor. The oriel longed to claim it, but their burden of their might would only warp the lands they set foot upon; the oriel withdrew their potency, lest they warp it with their being. Likewise, neither titan nor dragon could trespass her borders.

Instead, the oriel sought to make the likeness of Palladium, and turned outwards from Elysium. Beneath the four brightest stars of the night sky, they founded anchors for their power and hoped to use them to expand Palladium's largess outwardly. In their task, they secured allegiance with the titans, who sculpted the Firmament into the wonders of the Cardinal Pillars.

In the northern climes: the titans founded a palace of stone upon the site Borea and the wintry realm of Thylea. To western lands, they moulded the clay vault on Zephyr and founded the fallen realm of Breasyl. At the southern limits, they forged the brass citadel upon Notaine, thus founding the sumnal realm of Aegypt. Then eastward bound, they wove the glass eyrie on Eurus to mark the vernal realm of Nesili.

HIEROS GAMOS

The song of the Dreamseed pervaded, demanding possession. Hoping to lay claim to this artefact, the oriel gave form to five immortal ideals, wrought from the very skein itself. These were the five

Muses; they were the moods of wrath, hope, fear, sorrow, and wonder made flesh. In turn, the titans made life themselves, giving animation to the very trees themselves. From this came forth the Druidain: arboreal masters of the ancient woods. The oriel and titans consigned the Druidain as consorts to the Muses as consorts. They forged compact through blood and soil, the *hieros gamos*.

Anat's ardent zeal demanded the will of the Oak King, lord of the summerwoods. Eve required sophistry and so given the Apple King, of the springland woods. The Holly King as the lord of winter woods, in dark and grim demeanour, won the whim of Frey, who found solace in their union. The Maple King and his woods in autumn, veiled in mystery, piqued the interest of Lilith, and caused her to give chase. At last and forevermore in Elysium itself, the woods at hallow, the Ash King required the hand of Sofia: the proud, unbending, and majestic.

KEYSTONE

The union of Druidain and Muse gave us the *grigori*, the forerunners to humanity. They populated the vale of Elysium, making home of it where the oriel could not. Two of their number, the brothers Deilog and Chernog, found the remnant of the Dreamseed. From one side, Deilog fashioned the Whitestone by the light of day; from the other, Chernog cleaved the Blackrock by night. While Deilog gifted Whitestone to the oriel, the dragons stole Blackrock and ferried it deep underground.

The oriel affixed Whitestone to the Meridian of the Orrery, and the dragons wormed their way deep into the hollow beneath Palladium's roots, where they placed Blackrock. Where the oriel raised a shining silver city in the sky, the dragon wrought a cavern network of labyrinthine tunnels and deceptive deadfalls. In these spaces, the Ealdor laid the foundations for two great cities of Atlas and Nod, cities of light and dark respectively.

Atlas was a beacon of sophisticated civilisation, a masterwork of unmatched technology and artistry; and Nod was the city of sleep, and place of secrets, hidden vaults, and darkness. From the heavens, the oriel ministered their divine mandate in observation of the Orrery. From the wilderness, the titans roamed in elemental wild and protean way, rending and shaping the landscape. In the underworld of Nod: the dragons, delved ever downwards, to deepest fathoms.

URGOMACHY

The oriel ceased to be content to watch the stars, and sought to impose their mandate over all others. They designed and forged the Empyrean as a crucible to contain and harness the powers of Agony and Ecstasy, to cage the engine of the Orrery itself and regulate the balance of twilight.

In their ambition, they sought to decree orderly procession upon three of the celestial gears of the Ophanim, the Norn, the Zodiac, and the Synod, which in turn would move the Firmament to their particular order. Their works wrested the Realm away from the influence of either titan or dragon, and neither would abide such mandate and they rebelled against the heavens.

The titans seized the Cardinal Pillars as their own, and bound the seasonal powers of the Norn within them. Beneath them both, the dragons gnawed at the very base of the world, and unearthed the deepest of pits, the Anathema in their hunger for annihilation. The *grigori* abstained from conflict all together, and being masterful architects, they raised those monumental walls of the Ramparts; protected by these walls, they avoided the ravages of the Ealdor.

DELUGE

The war in the heavens raged with little sign of pause of abatement. The *grigori* sought to stay the war by claiming the heavens for themselves. Working in secret, the *grigori* worked and observed the Ealdor, and learned many of their secrets. From the oriel, their patrons, they had learned

What happened between the Muses and the Druidain after the hierogamy is a matter of some conjecture. Conventional accounts claim that the matriarchs went to the Aether, to reside ever more in the abode of the stars; their consorts are held to be the majestic but sessile trees that are found in the heart of each of the Cardinal Pillars. Though fragile in comparison to great Palladium, they nonetheless fill the central chambers. There, beneath the light of one of the royal stars, their eternal bonds sustained twixt star and soils.

from Mythopoeia by Leubald Geyer

The *grigori* are the forebears of humankind: for we bear their likeness, though the greatness of their stature has been lost to us, diminished by the Deluge. The *grigori* were the first of our kind, and the last of their number were the Diadon: they are the progenitors of the dynasties.

from The Sylvan Testament by Friedreich Münchhausen

Behold the lustrous Empyrean: that majestic star depending high from the heavens, whose very lamp contains the solar and lunar orbs of Agony and Ecstasy reside.

from The Birth of Rhyme and Reason by Zarathustra

culture and reverence. In their studies of the titans, they discerned the manner of cultivating land. They stole from the dragons the dreadful arts of war and ruin. In

The *grigori* sought to tether the Orrery to the land below, to run a shackle around the lunar orb. Their greatest architect, Nimrod, wove a slender bridge of silver gossamer, and ascended to the Empyrean. From the perch of this bridge, Nimrod leashed that thread to Ecstasy: the moon bridge, the celestial ladder, the Tower of Nimrod.

Confident of their purpose they defied the motion of the Orrery itself; and yet it moved. The Realm turned ever onwards and wound that slender thread taught, drawing Ecstasy ever downwards from the crucible of the Empyrean. As neither skies nor sod would give, the oceans surged, and desolated all the lands.

The gears of the Orrery stalled and the bridge snapped, causing the skies to crash down and razing Atlas to ruin, leaving only forlorn tatters upon the Meridian. Those surviving *grigori* were those who took to the ether by floating craft, to plumbed the heavens until the tide abated.

The Fall of Atlas by Tom McGrath.

Agonies

The Agonies are an account of the birth of humanity, of their reconstruction of civilisation after the Deluge, and their first encounters with the faerie and takwin. The Agonies acquire their name in being the first stories to portray humanity as heroes and other agents of story, as protagonists and antagonists alike. Moreover, these stories lay either side of the founding of the Calendar, and so tell of the beginning of written history and the consolidation humanity's ascendancy over the Realm.

Epics

The epics prehistoric accounts of the humanity's first struggles for ascendancy as humanity came under siege by the faerie and then takwin, only to eventually claim dominance. The Epics depict the Diadon, and they are often performed in honour of their festivals. These archetypal plays are stories of heroes and monsters.

The Epics play out across three cycles, each being a distinctive phase in of early human civilisation and their rise to power. The Uralithic Cycle details humanity construction of the citadel of Ur in the vale of Elysium, and fending off the first incursions of faerie. The Brazen Cycle depicts humanity's first encounter with takwin and their insurrection. The Ferocious Cycle depicts humanity building the Gnomon, and instituting the Calendar.

URALITHIC CYCLE

The Uralithic Cycle begins in the aftermath of the Deluge. The high ages of myth and its many artefacts had passed. In quietude, the Ealdor fell to Somnolence, as untold ages wore heavy upon them. The titans became sessile and bereft of their shapelessness, turned to still terrain. The oriel retreated into the farthest heavens, to watch in frozen silence. In the darkness underneath, the dragons lay in deep unyielding torpor.

The Uralithic Cycle details the Sun Dynasty, who reigned over the first civilisation of humankind. In these stories are the tales of the Diadon, the last surviving *grigori*. From these stories, one learns of their most profound legacy for all humankind, as each invested the last measure of their power into their progeny to raise families of heroes, bards, and magi. Their trueborn scions were as lions among sheep and their number begat the lineages of the noble clans.

RETURN TO ELYSIUM

The last of the grigori drifted above the desolation of the Deluge in search of their lost kin. Beneath them, the world churned in chaos as echoes of the Ealdor blighted the land. The titans, still new to their sleep, trembled and their movement created natural disasters. The dragons left numerous broods, which stalked the land as terrible thunder lizards. The most ruinous of their encounters were the *gigantes*, those *grigori* who had survived the Deluge but bereft of their former intellecct. The terrible curse of the Somnolence had reduced their kin, leaving them mindless brutes.

As the last of their kind, they sought the haven of Elysium. Here, they discovered the first of humanity; they were like the *gigantes*, being former *grigori*, albeit diminished by the Somnolence. However, in taking refuge in the caves of Nod beneath Palladium, they managed to retain

True liturgical drama originated in Antiquity. The legacy owed this period cannot be underestimated, as it was this period when the genres of tragedy and comedy became developed; the latter was eventually replaced by romance. This period began the practice of masked personae and scenic elements that are the hallmarks of modern opera, as well as other liturgical devices like the chorus.

Originally, each liturgical drama was composed with the intention of being played once, even while they regaled classic themes. Tradition once called upon the various graces to develop such dramas for each festival, where they would compete against each other for a prize of that festival. Over time, favoured versions of tales would resolve in the minds of the audience, and be performed numerous times.

from The Grand Narrative by Leubald Geyer

intelligence having been reduced in stature and made mortal: the opposite of the *gigantes*. So began the work of ages, as the Diadon strove to rekindle civilization amid paradise lost.

From among the mortals, the Diadon selected those that pleased them to be their consorts. Their offspring were prodigious, granting these mortals some measure of the Diadon's sublime nature. These scions of bore the threads of the skein, and demonstrated mastery of their own fortunes.

Among them were the bards, speakers of dream and lore, the heroes, champions blessed with formidable might, and the magi, learned masters of the realms invisible. To these children, the Diadon passed on their knowledge as they felt the pull of that languid sleep of quiescence. Humanity cultivated the land, wrote laws, and erected the foundations of their first great city.

We regard Imuses as the first historian. It is his collected stories that contain that most authentic account of the Diadon, uttered in his own name. His transcribed works are a paramount reading for any serious scholar of the antiquarian or antediluvian periods. For all that Imuses' histories offer us insights into the Diadon, not to mention his immemorial account of Altas, they are but trinkets compared to his studies of the occult; for his stories are merely his exoteric works, and it is his esoteric offerings that are a treasure beyond measure. The most prized among his works is the Nameless Papyrus: a dialogue written by Imuses in conversation with his very own Imago. This early example of wisdom literature provides many crucial understandings of the nature of the Imago and Shadow.

from Philosophy in Antiquity
by Zarathustra

Imuses' leaves us with a profound legacy, which has endured for many years. His firstborn son was King Suphis, who raised a great tower-pyramid to face the southern summer sun. Suphis beget King Akaton and his consort Neruti, who commissioned a large parabolic mirror that weaponised light. They were succeeded by King Rathotis, the boy tyrant, and his sister Clios, the charming and beguiling queen. Their institutions ensured the primacy of Agony in the daily concerns and rites of the people, with Rathotis assuming the title: Face of the Sun.

from The Human Catechism
by Count August

CITADEL OF UR

Bilgames was the first-born scion of Artor, who was the first Diadon to fall prone to quiescence. In memory of his father, Bilgames built a chamber for his rest in the hollow beneath Palladium where Nod once stood. As the Diadon fell to soporific languor, Bilgames laid them to rest one by one. Upon laying the last of them within this chamber, Bilgames encountered a woman of elemental nature, who danced within that chamber with daring abandon. Bilgames, both enchanted and vexed by her presence, challenged her.

She proclaimed herself Inanna, a dancer without peer of the takwin, queen of the Blazing World deep below, where she and her like lived. She had had heard the tapping of Bilgames' labour and had come to discover its source. Thereupon discovering the chamber, she marvelled at its artifice and took to dancing therein. In response, Inanna professed to Bilgames of the wonders of Agartha, and its many creations.

With each telling of Agartha, Bilgames built structures in Elysium to their design. He commissioned monuments to the Muses and the Diadon alike, erecting towers of enormous heights. Each time he enticed Inanna to see these works, but each time she coyly refused and withdrew once more into the depths of the earth.

With each telling, his ambitions grew until he completed his most ponderous project, that megalithic edifice of the citadel of Ur. The promise of a glorious citadel, enticed Inanna to first set foot upon the surface. Beguiled by the majesty of the citadel, Inanna seized the heart of Bilgames and placed it in a cage of pure glass, and retreated once more into the hidden city of Agartha.

Broken-hearted but undaunted, Bilgames pursued her. In his downward journey, he passed seven takwin sentinels; each he defeated by divesting himself of a piece of clothing or jewellery, each act stripping him of power. Upon arriving at Agartha, he stood before Inanna, naked. There, Bilgames became the first consort of Inanna, and remained realms below ever after.

DREAM QUEST

After Bilgames passed into the underworld the leadership of humanity were in disarray, as humankind lamented the loss of their stalwart patriarch, taken by guile. In this precarious moment, a takwin envoy from the underworld came and demanded tribute, and the host behind the envoy lent credulity to those demands.

For many decades, humanity paid tribute to the takwin, and quietly endured as the takwin drove the scions of the Diadon into secret to instate a pawn as their governor. Imuses, a grandchild of Salon, would deliver humankind from servitude. By cover of night, he stole into the hollows of the Firmament and lay for three nights in the presence of the slumbering Diadon.

As he slept, they spoke to him in dreams, and whispered to him the manner that he might master the craft of storytelling, and take charge of his fate. In the very first dream quest, he bound a *geist* of the skein to his psyche. Imuses fashioned the very first Imago, and became the Magician. With this power, Imuses forged objects of power to enable the fledgling civilisation of humankind to defy the will of the takwin.

JOURNEY OF GOING FORTH

For more than a century, humanity defied the will of the takwin, but their presence was unrelenting. They came and went in a pattern that was inscrutable, and only the walls of the Ramparts kept them at bay. They seemed indefatigable in their ambitions to claim Ur and humankind once more.

These were the years of Osymandias, who was great among the rulers of Ur. Osymandias aspired beyond the ambitions of Bilgames, no longer content with holding back the host of the takwin. He would rather impose dominion over all. He sought the aid of the Magician on the ways down to the Blazing World, and he provided for him sacred text and his own apprentice, Musa.

Musa took with her the *Book of the Dead*, whose illustrious verses revealed the hidden pathways to the halls of the dead in Necropolaris. The journey was one of hardship across many years. In their darkest night, they came upon a dragon, though lost in dreaming its mere presence threatened to overwhelm them with despair. However, they persevered and found Agartha after much tribulation. In quiet observation, they learned of the takwin and their mastery of alchemy.

Upon returning to the surface, they implemented the secrets of alchemy they had discovered. Musa turned the art of the takwin against them, causing their greatest weapons to be laid low and decimating their armies in this destructive process.

JUDGEMENT OF SOLOMON

The Uralithic Cycle ends with Solomon, grandchild of Osymandias. Solomon was the wisest ruler of Ur, and became Magician after Imuses. As a king of peace, he sought to end the unforgiving war between humankind and takwin.

Solomon built a great temple where he might work his powers as the Magician. He constructed a signet ring of orichalcum, set with stone of adamant cut with an eight-rayed star, and inscribed with the sigils of the elements. This was the Telesman, the ring of truth and command. With this ring, he would command all those creatures of animate elements, the takwin.

Armed with the Telesman, Solomon stood upon the Ramparts, and laid a geas upon those takwin that stood about the gates. The will of the gathered host railed against these decrees, but Solomon stood firm. A light graced their multitude and they fell to their knees and prostrated themselves before the king. One by one, Solomon commanded from them their names; by this edict, he bound their names in the *Book of Keys*, placing them into servitude for ever and a day.

BRAZEN CYCLE

The Brazen Cycle was the high age of heroism, where humanity spread across the land. The most monstrous dangers had diminished, the terrible saurian kings had died out, the tempests of the titan-spawn had abated, and the *gigantes* had retreated unto the highlands; the oriel watched in remote silence. With the Realm at peace, humanity sought the farthest reaches of the Realm. The scions of the Diadon quested into the wilderness, that they might be proclaimed as heroes.

The Brazen Cycle also tells of the first Oracle, Anesidora, who first navigated a path among the possible futures of humankind, to direct them towards victory. To aid them in their journeys,

The Book of the Dead is a most illustrious scroll, which consists of many individual texts that serve as a guide through the Labyrinth of the underworld, and is intended to assist a person's journey through those darkened fells. Each individual passage comprises a number of specific texts, bearing key incantations and accompanying illustrations.

from Philosophy in Antiquity by Zarathustra

An apocryphal account of Solomon speaks of the man at the peak of his power in his seniority. He was visited by a woman of unearthly beauty, named Makene, who claimed to be a queen of the children of the stars. They began an affair that was said to make men and women weep tears of joy and awe, and she stood beside him for many more years, until his senility, whereupon she stole back to the place of her origin in the East, taking with her the child of Solomon born by her.

Though the account is of dubious legendary, it holds immense popularity, and frequents the subject of many erotic poems and songs. The scholars that give the tale any credence generally presume she was of faerie.

from Mythopoeia by Leubald Geyer

Solomon had wrought four sacred treasures, one for each of the clans journeying forth; they were relics cast in symbol of the Muses. For just as the ring of truth, forged by the hand of Imuses for Solomon himself, was made as the icon of the great Muse Sofia, so these treasures were rendered to reflect the images of those Muses reputed to have been matriarch of the three clans that left together.

The first of these was the Caduceus, the staff of power; this she gave to the clans of Bel, Hymn, and Nyx, those children of Eve, the Muse of Dawn. Pythia bade them to journey east. Then, she made the Caliburn, the invincible sword of flame; this she imparted to the clans of Adon, Valen, and Priya. On the southward path she sent them. Her third relic was the Sangreal, the holy cup. This she provided to the clans Madock, Tethyn, and Calyps; the children of the Muse of Dusk, Lilith, sending them west with her blessing. The final relic she crafted was the Rhyton, the horn of plenty. She bequeathed it to Inari, Gede, and Hala. These were the children of Frey, whom she sent north.

from Philosophy in Antiquity by Zarathustra

Throughout his life, the king Metheus bore two names of great significance. Each name denotes a part of his life's journey. In youth, the feckless prince held the name of Epimetheus, which means afterthought in the Konic tongue. Yet, the journeys changed him much, and by his return, he bore a morose manner of dignified maturity. They thereafter named him Prometheus, meaning forethought.

from The Modern Prometheus by Matilda Mulfstan

Epimetheus was survived by his three sons, and thus they divided the lands of the south into three city-states. First, King Kadmos founded Thiva, and introduced the phonetic alphabet. Thiva was surpassed by Labyron as founded by the second-born Menes. Maykene, founded by the third son Perseon, built upon the site where he bested the krakyn and rescued the princess Andromede, who is thought to have carried the blood of Makedon; giving city-state its name.

from A History of the Realm by Count August

The Thivans remained dominant for ten generations, in the service of the Pythian flame, until the birth of Oedema. Pythia prophesied the child would cause the downfall of his house. Oedema was abandoned at the Rampart walls, and adopted by a prince of Sylvan lineage. When he returned to Thiva as an adult, he fulfilled the prophecy upon solving the riddle of the sphinx, and unknowingly committed regicide of his father. It was only with his death that the truth of his actions came to light. This precipitated a civil war between his sons Etakles and Polnace, which ended only when both brothers slew the other.

from The Sylvan Testament by Friedreich Münchhausen

The twelve labours of Herakles are renowned. One need only mention those deeds to recall them: to hunt the quicksilver wolf; placing the stone of Gul atop the frozen mountain of Eu; claiming the championship of the blood sports of Mirath; plucking the Charybdian flower from the depths of the Pelegeate; taming a storm cloud from the Cimmerian peaks; obtaining the gilded honey of the Aegyptian Queen; collecting the fruit from the hanging gardens atop Palladium; wrestling a *gigantes* for two days atop the fiery crack of Erza; slaying the carrion dweller of the mists of Salen; completing the Nisane Harvest in under one day; and drinking from the cup of Danu during the height of the Dorian festivities.

from In Tribute and Victory by Anita Riverio

Anesidora chose from among the artefacts of power forged by the Magician. With the aid of their power, three clans apiece went in the four directions of the compass. Upon reaching the Hinterlands, they first came upon the faerie and brought humankind into conflict with them.

PYRE OF AGONY

The Brazen Cycle begins with the Archons of the Brazen Kingdoms, in the lands to the south of Palladium. The first of these kings was Metheus, scion of Adon. The Magician summoned Metheus to his temple, and charged him on a quest to surmount Palladium: there he would recover the fabled Whitestone in the ruins of Atlas.

For more than a year, Metheus climbed the tree Palladium. Upon reaching summit of Palladium, he found a great nest wherein a phoenix had taken residence. In its nest, he spied the glorious ember of the Whitestone, which burned with the incandescence of Agony itself.

Though the phoenix guarded the stone with the jealousy of a roosting hen, Metheus was far cleverer. He took an apple, and gilded it to match the appearance of the Whitestone and laid it where the phoenix might see it. The phoenix, thinking the jewel of her nest having fallen out, sought to return it to the nest. In the confusion, Metheus stole the Whitestone.

Metheus returned not his homeland in the south, holding the stone containing the wisdom of Agony's light. He raised the temple of the Parthenon, and laid the Whitestone within its inner sanctum where it burned brightly with smokeless fire. The first handmaiden to tend that flame was the woman named Anesidora, who upon gazing into those fires awakened into the next Oracle.

LABOURS OF HERAKLES

The three Brazen Kingdoms flourished under the Oracle, illuminated by the Pyre of Agony. The peace was threatened only by faerie incursions. Herakles was the product of their machinations. Among the Flamine, handmaiden to Anesidora, Alcmena was their first, grandchild of Persion. She, like all Flamine, swore oaths of service and chastity, yet those vows were forsworn to fae seduction. From that forbidden union was born a daughter, Herakles.

The broke oath plagued mother and daughter alike with a terrible malady. Herakles, being born with prodigious strength to match any man, slew her mother in that madness. When clarity returned, she sought redemption from the nightmares that plagued her.

The Oracle gazed upon the fires of the Whitestone, to divine the cause of those maladies. She saw the seed of faerie within the child, laying a prophecy upon Herakles to inherit the role of Oracle. Then, upon that day of her inheritance, her fae-born nature would claim dominion and wrest the power of the Oracle away from humankind to faerie.

The Oracle proscribed a remedy and geased Herakles to twelve labours, thereby to set her destiny as a champion of humankind, rather than a vessel for faerie machinations. Trial after toil, filled with many tears, Herakles surpassed all twelve labours: so the Oracle exerted her power to lift the curse upon her, even as she permitted Herakles to keep her strength.

TRIALS OF THE LABYRINTH

Minu was King of Labyron, who married a faerie bride, guised in human countenance. Though she was bound to him by her matrimonial oaths, the child she bore was of protean nature, named Lykon. Minu, unable to kill the child or bear its company, sought the advice of the Oracle.

The Oracle called upon the King of Ur for aid, who, through the Telesman, commanded Taitle, the greatest takwin architect, to construct a maze throughout the underworld. Taitle worked in

diligence and secrecy, and in completing his masterpiece named it after Minu's city: the Labyrinth. Minu abandoned Lykon to those arcane corridors, to hunt whoever roamed therein.

In terrible revenge, Minu evinced an oath through the blood of his faerie consort: one that demanded the faerie kingdoms to send seven youths into the Labyrinth every seven,-year for the creature to rend. This was the first tiend, a blood-compact between land and king. The tiend stood even unto the twilight years of Minu, as the members of faerie marched numbly into the underworld.

To break free from the tiend, they took from Labyron a human child, and raised him to be hateful of Minu. This was Therus, and they laid upon him such enchantment to see his destiny prevailing over Lykon. Guided by a clew of thread, he journeyed into the Labyrinth and slew the creature. In victory, he claimed Minu's daughter, Areatha, as bride.

VOYAGE OF THE ARGONAUT

The faerie of the southern and eastern marches had gathered their armies together in a single host against the Brazen Kingdoms. This was the Shining Host, whose power seemed unmatched.

A prince of the Brazen Kingdoms prevailed against the Host; his name was Iaso. He dreamed of the very the power of the Shining Host: a magnificent golden shield bearing the semblance of a lion that the fae name named the Aegis. Given council by the Oracle, he built a ship with a prow fashioned from Palladium's wood. This was the Argo, and upon its commission, Iaso crewed it with great heroes; Orfeyo and Herakles were among their number.

Their journey south faced the many perils, from the island of harpies, and the clashing rocks of terrible stone ridges that juddered to the movements of a slumbering titan below. They almost lost Herakles to an ambush of Talon, those takwin made of brass, which the faerie had retained to patrol their waters.

Eventually they landed upon the shores of Aegypt, and discovered the court of the faerie queen Caelia, her consort Ateas, and their daughter Medeia. Turning the faerie's own trick upon them, Iaso worked his bardic guile upon Medeia in secret, and she requited a love for him. Iaso gained Medeia help against her mother, and together they stole the Aegis from the somnolent Hydra.

KATABASIS

The story of Orfeyo is undoubtedly one of the better-known tragedies. It follows the premature death of his wife Eurudike, struck down by a serpent struck in her prime on the night of their wedding. Orfeyo was lost to grief and roamed the lands with only his lyre for consolation. The echoes of his wife's voice haunted his dreams, and the yield of sleep forsook him.

He sought the council of the Oracle, who directed him towards the paths of the Labyrinth down to the very Antipodes, to the city of the dead: the Necropolaris. There he would find her and become the first among the living to set foot among the chambers of the dead; upon finding her echo, he could return to the surface with her shade, but was forbidden from looking back.

He struck a dirge for his late wife, which guided him through the very Labyrinth and entrancing all the takwin he encountered. Eventually, he stood upon the precipice of oblivion at the Anathema. Facing that pit of entropy, he harked to him the memory of his wife through song. All through the unlit nights of the underworld, his lamentations sounded out and sought the surface once more. Upon breaching the surface, fearful that Eurudike that lost her way, he turned; only to see the vanishing shade of his wife in the blaze of Agony's light.

The creation of the Labyrinth, as wrought by Taitle, was achieved through the securing of his son Vicare, by King Minu to ensure servitude. Yet, consider how Taitle demonstrate ingenuity, and devised a way for his and his son's escape. Recall the legend of those early airships, made from little else but feather, wax, and sail. Equally, see the remonstration apparent in the folly of his son Vicare, as that reckless youth piloted his ship too close to Empyrean: the wax melted and his ship disintegrated. For, what genius creates, ignorance may surely tear asunder.

from Deus Machina by Nikolai Techna

The Aegis was one such shield born by the fae, into which they poured much of their power. It was the emblem of the Shining Host: holding within the solar power of Reason. Its opposite member was the Aidos: a shield of silver bearing the visage of a wolf.

The Aidos was the emblem of the Shadow Legion, and bore the powers of autumn and winter alike. It was said of old that the shields of Aegis and Aidos were made by those beings of dreams, the Imagines and shadows respectively.

from The Birth of Rhyme and Reason by Zarathustra

Orfeyo was one of the Portner lineage; he was a bard nonpareil who studied under the Flamines to acquire mastery of verse and song. Such were his lilting tones that it was said he could prophesy with a soothsaying, such that his words poured out in clear lucid truth.

He was been the blessed by the Muses, and raised to this stature. Little is known of Orfeyo after his return from the underworld; though popular accounts hold he inherited the role of the Vagabond, and wandered the Realm alone and lost. There is a legend that his head remains within the grand vault of the Mousaion, which espouses maddened prophecy upon the nights of the Great Lune.

from Mythopoeia by Leubald Geyer

ILIAD

The Brazen Cycle ended with a terrible conflict between King Agamon of the Brazen Kingdoms and the Shining Host. The peace had long been kept by the brokering of matrimonial exchange, with human nobles raising fae-born children among their own, and the faerie fostering many children human child in turn.

One fae sought to shatter this peace, and she was the trickster Eris, daughter of Medeia. She travelled to Ur, and inveigled herself into the amusement of prince Paron. There, she presented a philtre of love, contained in an orichalcum apple. She bade him present this gift to the fairest of the land. As he searched, she revealed to him Helen, handmaiden to the Pyre of Agony and daughter of King Agamon. Eris enticed Paron, who worked the philtre upon Helen, and seduced her away. In their flight, Eris planted the Aegis among their possession, sowing the seeds of discord further. The elderly king Agamon declared war, laying siege upon the citadel of Ur.

The siege lasted for decade and more, with the marshalled host gathered beneath the Ramparts. Knowing that the Ramparts could never be taken by force, the great hero Aretos devised a plan to take the citadel by treachery with the Great Wooden Horse. The gathered host delivered before the gates, wherein contained a small and hidden force of soldiers. The horse was brought into Ur as tribute; by night, they claimed the gates to let host inside, to raze temple and palace alike.

FERRIC CYCLE

The Ferocious Cycle tempered the members of humankind with blood and iron. The siege of Ur had seemingly extirpated the Sylvan people, leaving the survivors to flee in diaspora and Ur became a desolate place. Humankind had departed from Elysium once more.

After the fall of Ur, two of its heroes lead waves of refugees to safety: Aretos led one group of refugees east, and Herakles led another west. Aretos chartered a course by sea, while Herakles took the route over land. These lateral migrations spread the influence of the Oracle across the southern half of the Literate. In their wake, human civilisation flourished giving rise to new power, realised in the creation of the Calendar. This cycle saw the rise of the Roman Empire, and the coming of the first great emperor of humankind, the Invictus.

ODYSSEY

Aretos brought his people to the far west coasts and settled them among the matriarchal Amazons, who had inherited the mysteries of Makene, as ruled by their queen Kirke. Theirs was a life of debauchery and reverie, indulging in the numerous mystery cults of wine.

As the years wore on, Aretos longed for home and the memory of his wife. Leaving the island of Kirke, he sailed the long journey home to the Aegian people. Upon arrival, he discovered that his wife Penope had taken rule of the people, having command of more than a hundred suitors.

In proclaiming himself before her, Penope charged him to best these hundred-fold paramours, to demonstrate his worth for her interest once more. Aretos employed the greatest depths of cunning, and defeated each of these men in either single combat or matched wits. Penope conceded his worth, and took him as her consort to reign beside her.

DIASPORA

Herakles led the diaspora of Ur towards the western horizon. Her journey was said to have taken a number of decades, during which she gave birth to her son Brutus, who took charge of their journey after she died in great age. Brutus possessed the formidable strength of his mother.

The Ur Wars fomented an aggressive culture, which broke into open hostility in 1243 BC: Herakles sacked the Parthenon to usurp Hecaba as the Queen of Ur, and replace her with Anesidora. She used Hecaba's own children, Hektor and Paron, as pawns in this conflict.

The twins Atredes and Thysest, sons of Iaso, returned from exile to claim the Attic throne in 1223 BC. Following a brief but bitter struggle for power, peace was sued through a marriage pact between Attica and Maykene. Menelos, the eldest of Atredes, married Helen in 1213 BC, and Agamon was sent to Maykene to become husband to Clemest in 1215 BC.

from A History of the Realm by Count August

Agamon took leadership of the war, but glory was found by many champions on either side, which are the high accounts of legendary. Heroes of repute included Aivas, the *gigantes* that slew the first prince Hektar; Nector, the war leader and brother to the late Eurudike; and the hero Aretos, who devised the wooden horse that ended the siege. The war took many heroic lives, including Ajax, Hektar, and Paron.

Herakles had met the great warrior Akhleos upon the field. He bore Caliburn, rendering him invincible, while she in possession of the Aegis was invulnerable. Their tireless conflict was only stayed through a most illicit love that bloomed between them upon that battlefield.

from A History of the Realm by Count August

After the fall of Ur, the great houses of the Brazen Kingdoms fell to fratricide. Upon King Agamon return in 1181 BC with his new wife Alexandria, she caused his brutal murder. Agamon's two natural-born children, Amber and Oros, survived, having taken refuge in the Parthenon.

Upon coming of age in 1174 BC, Oros planned his revenge against the usurper Alexandria. His insurrection instigated a bloody civil war amongst the Aegian, which shook the order of the palatial states for two years. The wars culminated with Oros slaying Altes, the son of Alexadria, whom she had placed upon the throne.

from A History of the Realm by Count August

Eventually he landed in the lands of Albion, where he encountered a horde of *gigantes*. Brutus waged war against them, driving them to near-extinction; he wrestled their most powerful chieftain and threw the hulk over the cliffs and into the seas; to give these lands the honorary name Brutain.

As Brutus aged, many sought to return home, having long harboured their desires to cast their eyes once more upon the Ramparts of Elysium. His lieutenant was Dawid, and he took up the charge to lead these people back to the Ramparts. Lacking the great strength of Herakles or Brutus, Dawid depended instead on cunning to fend off the gigantes.

Their return was a journey lasted more than twenty years. In their departure, they were waylaid by one of the last marauding gigantes, and Goliath was largest of them all. Dawid slew the giant, felling him with a stone from his sling, thus demonstrating his trueborn as a scion of Artor.

IRON WREATH

As the eastern and western regions developed, their paths began to diverge. The west began on a path of sophisticated and civility, while the east embraced potency and military prowess. The eastern city-state of Lacon attained great learning in strategies of warfare, while Attica cultivated their philosophers, through their peerless orators Perses and Homer.

The most celebrated of their rulers were two of the descendants of Iaso. Procol, the strong of the two, became king of the city-state of Lacon. Eurythes, being more urbane, claimed the rule of the city-state of Attica. Rivalry ensued, and both sought to claim dominance over the other through their particular mastery of ironmongery.

Attica attempted mastery of commerce and trade with newly minted iron coinage, while Lacon smelted the first iron long swords to gain the military advantage. Both struggled for power through conflict and trade alike, only to settle their differences in oathbound peace. Together they commissioned the Iron Wreath, of laurel of siderite to mark their mutual authority.

IVORY QUEEN

The Ivory Queen is a tale of two who held that title. First the sister and then the creation of Pygmalion of Attica: Elissa and Galatea. Elissa was a paragon of intellect, like her brother, and she earned the epithet of Ivory Queen in her defiance of Onemas, a proud and powerful tyrant of the Lacon. Onemas pursued Elissa constantly, to claim the Iron Wreath through marriage to her.

First, Onemas sought to entrap Elissa, offering her a challenge. He presented a silk bag, and placed two pebbles from the path they stood upon, comprised of black and white stones. He bade her to draw a stone, pledging if it were white, she would take any gift in his house, but if black, she would agree to his terms. Certain that both stones were black, and unable to challenge openly for fear of bloodshed, she drew one stone and quickly dropped it onto the path. By revealing the remaining stone as black, she decreed that she must have drawn the white one.

Elissa claimed her prize, a hide of bull skin handing upon his wall and the sign of his household's rule. She required from him all the lands that could be encompassed by a single hide. She then proceeded to cut the hide into a singularly long strip to encircle a broad swathe of land, which she then claimed as her own.

Incensed, Onemas demanded retribution, and so Pygmalion enlisted the aid of the takwin, to forge a figure of sheerest porcelain and in the very likeness of Elissa. The takwin breathed life into her and named her Galatea. Galatea consented to become queen to Onemas, and thus attained the titled of the Ivory Queen.

The last great houses that ruled Ur were extirpated in 1156 BC, when Anesidora poisoned Oros; her tragedy grew from seeing nothing but bitter venom in the person she had raised as a son.

Amongst the Mousaion we speak softly of a tale of one sole surviving claimant, whose name was Amber. The legend recounts her having sworn the vows of the Flamine, whereupon she took station beside Anesidora.

from The Waking Dream by Matilda Mulfstan

A most pernicious apocryphal account endures, which details the manner in which several of the exiles from Ur seeded themselves among these migrations. Most notoriously, this can be said to include the legendary journey of Aeneas, son of Podarcy, who travelled east with Herakles.

The martial prowess of Dawid, felling the *gigantes* with a sling, reveals him for a trueborn scion of Artor. Like his forebear, he was rumoured to have founded a hidden Kingdom of Judah within Elysium, rather than having been stayed by its walls. Modern archaeologists still sometimes seek his final resting place beneath the hills of the Palains.

from The Sylvan Testament by Friedreich Münchhausen

Once, the Iron Wreath served as a military crown, though that tribute is all but forgotten. Those who claimed the wreath were worthy of immortality, their exploits surely celebrated by all. Now, it is the symbol of the highest civic honour, bestowed foremost upon the Senate. In lieu of the many traditions once signified by that crown, those who are given the laurel wreath may wear it for life, and its possession gives the holder precedence before all others.

from Blood and Thunder by Auto Eisenmark

LAUREATE

After the death of Pygmalion, there were no natural-born heirs to the Iron Wreath. The sole claimant was Galatea by dint of her creation, and even she neared death. Her daughter Hidamia stood to inherit the Wreath, but the aristocracy were wary of her takwin and refused to sanction her claim without a human consort. Galatea commissioned a great game to win the Iron Wreath.

Among those who answered the call was man named Pelos, scion of Agamon and Alexandra both. He had returned from exile at sea, having forsworn the love of the Eastern Marcher Lord. He sought both the Iron Wreath and the hand of Hidamia in turn. With his great charm, he secured her admiration as the favoured champion. His competitor was Doros, the bastard son of Onemas.

In the very first event, Pelos faced dire treachery in a chariot race. Before the race, Doros replaced the axle's bronze linchpins with ones made of wax. The chariot broke and dashed Pelos to the ground, breaking his back. Though Doros had claimed the Laureate and the Iron Wreath, he did not win Hidamia.

KING OF KINGS

Solon, son of Draco, son of Dorus, held the Iron Wreath when its influence was not yet at its apogee. The power of the Wreath extended as far as the Cimmerian city of Xanadu, and all of Anatolia. With the Telesman at hand, they drawn great wealth from the depths of the Umbrage, and arrayed it all in grandiloquent display, forging the immemorial hanging gardens at the nape of the Blazing World.

The Iron Wreath dominated the Blazing World for many years. Its reign was only broken when the takwin hero Kurash, son of Pelos and Hidamia, defied the Telesman by virtue of his human blood. Kurash led the armies of the takwin in insurrection against the Wreath, claiming it and declared himself king: his dominion he named the Pasha.

The son of Kurash was Kambayu, Prince of Pasha, continued his father's legacy thereafter. He sought then to subjugate the Realm by reclaiming: he would be king of kings. There within the citadel, Kambayu raised the twelve great monoliths of the Gnomon using the greatest artifice of their most sagacious alchemists. Combined, they harnessed the very movement of the heavens and gave power over the Ophanim.

None knows the ending of this story, though rumour persists that Kambayu came close to the realisation of his dream, but failed the final stand. The calamity has erased the events of that moment from the course of history. In his fall, the takwin's brief reign extinguished and they retreated into the earth. The Ramparts bloomed with dire brambles, sealing the place from entry.

GATES OF PYLON

One of the most noble of sacrifices in early history occurred at the Gates of Pylon; it was the doomed fate of one warlord by the name of Leonas, descendant of Brutus. In the Umbrage below, the scattered armies of Pasha were moving once more, bidden by the designs of a create machine they called Darus. At the front of their host was the warmonger Xerxes riding upon a jaggernath, and sought the citadel of Ur that they might claim the Gnomon once more.

Leonas was the leader of a military cohort, who sought to hold off the Pasha conquest. They sought the prophecies of the Oracle, who bid them to meet the oncoming army at the gates of Pylon, where they would turn back the tide. Thus, Leonas and his warriors of a mere three hundred stood before those gates, certain of the death that was soon to bear down upon them. Across the gates, they mounted rock and blood before the Gates of Pylon.

Dorus' governed with wisdom, exemplified best by his conflict with Cylon in 632 BC, who laid siege to the citadels of Attica and Lacon. Dorus' leadership stayed such aggressions and preserved the citadels.

His legacy was perverted by his son Draco, whose rule imposed capital punishment on all crime. That legacy would then be redeemed by the judge Solon, who moderated the severity of Draco's law with clemency, and laid the foundations of ancient law; it brought together many disparate people under the Iron Wreath.

from A History of the Realm by Count August

Though the historians would remark upon the brief period of the King of Pasha, and its lasting influence on the politics, via its successful centralised administration, the Mousaion takes interest in the curiosity that is Kambayu's tale.

The popular account describes his closeness to a state of immortality, achieved by an attempt to use the celestial powers of the Gnomon to rewrite his own destiny. The Mousaion has followed these stories with interest, and common among them is reference to a mysterious dagger named Fiqar. Purportedly, this relic granted the prince the power to divide the flow of time from fate, and thereby manipulate the very course of history. The conclusion most common to these accounts is that the Prince Kambayu entangled himself directly with destiny itself. In doing so, he sundered his very being from the mundane world.

from Immortal by Matilda Mulfstan

In the wake of the Pasha Wars, the Latin people enjoyed a long golden age, led by the great statesman Pericles. Under his rule, Pericles brought together the disparate city-states into an empire, and one that spanned far-flung oceans. The pinnacle of his works, removed the Iron Wreath back to the citadel of Ur, and upon the ruins there he built the great city of the Acropolis.

from Letters of Ganymede by Vivian Grey

The night soon came when Xerxes arrived, and demanded they step aside by laying their weapons before his mighty jaggernath. In that moment, he issued words of great defiance, and threw spite in the face of Xerxes. For seven days they held the Gates of Pylon until they died, giving the people of the Iron Wreath the ability to flank the host. They are as exemplars of patriotic freemen, defending native soil: a symbol of courage against overwhelming odds.

GORDION KNOT

The final tale of the Ferric Cycle tells of how Alexius the Great civilised the known world. Alexius became king of Makedon and the Iron Wreath. Upon him, the Oracle laid a great destiny, and told him to build the first empire of humankind. She charged him to untangle the Gordion Knot that barred entry to Elysium.

To the ruins of Ur he marched, and came upon the Gates of Pylon, its passage barred. For where others had sought to undo those brambles, leaving it slick with blood, Alexius simply clove those brambles with the invincible Caliburn; those gates thereafter named the Gates of Alexander. Within the fields of Elysium, Alexius found the two last *gigantes*, brothers Gog and Magog. They could not stand against the mighty Caliburn.

Alexius held the centre of the world, and from his place of power, he launched a great number of campaigns. He broke the might of the Pasha Empire, overthrowing Darus and those falling under his rule. Through unmitigated conquest, Alexius was elevated unto the first Invictus; his will was supreme, and his purpose was unbent.

In his final act, Alexius founded a throne stealing the very power of the Gnomon. This was the Prime Mobile, and through it, Alexius took command of the Ophanim. Alexius used the *hieros gamos* to lay claim to the very Firmament itself, according it to the Zodiac. Alexius claimed the mandate of the heavens and established human ascendancy until the end of time.

Those of Sylvan ancestry are taught a secret of final days of Alexius: we know that his death was caused by venom drunk from the Sangreal: a draught he hopes would bring immortality. Albeit, the Sylvan are divided as to the truth of that story, for some profess that Alexius succumbed to the poison, but leaving the draught a pure liquid. More controversially are those who whisper of his survival, with Alexius attaining some manner of transcendental state, in completion of all the tasks in death or life.

Posthumously, we Sylvan remember him as *Rex Mundi* most of all, and the transubstantiation of the waters of life is regarded as the rite one must take to secure the title of Invictus, and *Rex Mundi*. For when Alexius crowned himself with the radiant diadem, formed in the likeness of solar rays, he declared himself as Sol Invictus: the very embodiment of light, reason, and solar majesty.

from Absolute Enlightenment by Friedreich Münchhausen

Antiquity

The legacy of Alexius has lasted across the aeons. He founded the first empire, but not the last. In the wake of Alexius' death, the empire succumbed to internecine war. The period of antiquity contains the rise and fall of the Roman Empire, founded upon the works of Alexius. It is during antiquity that the written record of history begins with the founding of the Calendar.

At its peak, the Roman Empire stretched across the entire southern half of the Literal Continent and established colonies in Nesili, Aegypt, and Breasyl. At the centre of its power rested the workings of the Calendar, the prophecies of the Oracle, the emergence of the Mousaion, and the inheritance of the Invictus. It would be the apogee of classical civilisation, only to collapse under corruption and internal conflict.

KINGDOM

In the wake of the Ur War, the Alexian Empire fragmented, leaving a power gap for the emergence of the new Roman Empire. Few records survive from the time of the Roman Kingdom, as the practices of historic writings were not as widely depended on. Most records of this period survive through legendary plays preserved by the Mousaion.

FOUNDING OF ROME

Romulus and Remus were twins whose destinies would found Rome. In the childhood of these twins, the Oracle prophesied that one of them would eventually rise to become the new Invictus.

The Mousaion considers the origins of orthodox history to have begun with the founding of the Calendar during the Roman Empire. We therefore reconcile the counting of the years to this date, and note all years prior as Before Calendar (BC).

All aspirants to the clergy understand the importance of this date, for it begins the tradition of Scripture, of securing humankind's destiny with sooth word; the annals of history being the sum of its prose and poetics.

This is the charge of the Mousaion, to deliver humanity its mandate for the Eschaton, but not all members of our hallowed traditions agree with the authenticity of this account. A countervailing view, somewhat heterodox in nature, would rather contend the origins of history as including the oral-spoken record. They regard this model would reconcile the account of history as inclusive of the entirety of the Anthropocene, rather than simply its civilisation.

from Écriture Féminine by Matilda Mulfstan

With knowledge that the king would be jealous of their destinies, she bade her handmaiden to secure their escape.

The handmaiden secreted the twins down to the river, and upon the instructions of the Oracle, she place Romulus upon the Aegis, the solar shield of the lion, and Remus upon the Aidos, the lunar shield of the wolf. The waters of the river divided them and took them to different parts of the world, where they were raised.

Upon their nameday, they each learned through their own dream quest their potential destiny to seize the iron crown, and so sought to return to that capital of the south, where they might claim the Iron Wreath. Through their respective journeys, they uncovered those plots that once conspired against them at birth.

The Abduction of the Oracle by Tomasz Belzowski.

Their paths remained divided until they both set foot within the throne room. They fell unto quarrelling over their right to claim the crown, and Romulus struck down his brother. Thus, his rule began in blood and grief as the leonine Romulus claimed the Iron Throne, and then banished the lupine Remus into the wilderness.

ABDUCTION OF THE ORACLE

Anarchy was rife throughout upon the southern lands, even as Romulus founded his city and became Invictus. These troubles plagued the Oracle, for since his instatement, the motives and actions of Romulus became inscrutable to the Oracle. Unable to determine the destiny that the Invictus had set in motion, they fled from the city, taking the Pyre of Agony with them. They found a haven among the Amazons and formed a government in exile.

Romulus petitioned the Flamines for access to the Oracle, being vengeful in their denial. The fearful Flamines refused any of their number to return to Romulus with his petitioners. In consequence, the Romans sought to take by force what they could not have by diplomacy. They invited the various neighbours to a great festival before the Iron Wreath upon the summer solstice. At the height of the festival, Romulus signalled for the Romans to seize the Oracle: to demonstrate that his power lay beyond the Oracle's foresight.

They were at a stalemate, for all that Romulus could lay siege to the physical bodies of the Flamines and the Oracle, and he could no sooner force true prophecy from her lips without her consent. They brokered a truce: Romulus offered each of the Flamine civic personhood and recognised the Mousaion as an equal estate.

DOWNFALL OF A TYRANT

The epilogue of Romulus is an important one for all who would be Invictus. His stature as this archetype maintained him for many lives: six generations came and went before his ultimate demise. With each passing generation, Romulus became increasingly cruel and severe. Upon his 200th year, Romulus renamed himself Quirinus and envisioned himself rising above even the Diadon.

As Invictus, his will was supreme, and few things, material or ephemeral, could deny him. As these changes stole over him, popular sentiment shifted, casting him as a tyrant rather than

magnanimous leader: people came to fear him, but not love him. Yet, through all these years, one single act of defiance sat in rancour with him: the derision of the Oracle, and her lack of obsequience before him. Few things could quicken his anger as the reminder of her standing, a pleasure the Oracle was reputed to have indulged on occasion. Denial brewed within him a dire longing for Pythia, and he sought her out. Once more, she denied him and, in vitriolic rage, he lashed out and left her to die.

The death of Pythia sparked fervent revolution. The Flamines demonstrated their capacity as firebrands and fomented insurrection against the Invictus; they set Rome alight. All his works brought low in this act, the unconquerable fell from grace and finally succumbed to his death. They say his mortal remains were shattered and dispersed across the mountains.

REPUBLIC

In the two centuries preceding the foundation of the Calendar, the Roman peoples enjoyed a Republic; its institution have become the blueprint for the modern Imperium. It is in this period that the Republic formed the institutions of the Senate and the Auspice, alongside the three arms of the Legex, the Judex, and the Annex.

The potency of this political structure led the Republic to rapid expansion across two centuries, through a combination of conquest and alliance. By the end of the first century, the Republic's influence stretched along the entire southern coast, taking up many of the former domains of the Makedon Empire. A century later, this expanded to include half the continent, nearly eclipsing the size of the Makedon Empire. Albeit, Roman influence perpetuates unto the modern era.

The foundations of the triumvirate of the Clavigry, the Luminary, and the Mammonry harken back to the establishment of the political regime of the Roman Republic: there the powers of the world were divide into three of military, scholastic, and mercantile interests. In turn, these were the Legex, the Judex, and the Annex. Even now, their legacy has survived through the ages, retained through the great imperial charters.

from The Empire's Dowry
by Auto Eisenmark

Albion celebrates their faerie heritage, which dates back to the first centuries of the Roman Republic. All children of Albion are taught of ancient queen Bodea, that fiery-haired fae warrior who drove the Romans from Brutain. Though perhaps veiled in Allegory, her account remains the dream of my nation: containing the might of javelins hurled from the mount of her chariot, and the gleaming scythes upon her wheels at the helm of the Fimbul Host. It was her most bright temerity that blazoned those lands, in defiantly choosing a barbaric idyll against the glorious Roman civilisation.

from The Birth of Nations
by Valetoria Regina

TWELVE TABLES

In the wake of the revolution, the Republic forged a complex constitution that afforded a compromise between the aristocracy and the people; centred a separation of powers. The Roman people replaced the office of a king with that of a Consul, and the first Triumvirate was made. Each Consul held the authority of kings, save their orders could be vetoed by one of the other two other consuls. One consul selected from among the heroes and given authority over all military matters; one from among the magi, to preside in chief over all judiciary matters; and one from among the bards, given reign over the interests of the agora.

As the cities of the Roman Republic sought equilibrium under the new consular authority, a deep social trouble emerged between the patricians and the plebeians: the former being the aristocratic landowners and noble houses, dating their pedigree back to the original Diadon; the latter being the multitudinous populations of peasants and civilians. Tensions escalated into a fierce deadlock as the plebeians issued a promise of secession, to leave the cities empty of their labour force. The two sides compromised.

The patricians formed an assembly: twelve tables were arranged, one for each of the extant clans. Upon the right hand side of these tables, the lieges of those houses presided, while upon the left, the Sibyls of the Mousaion attended. The Twelve Tables created the first convention of the Republic, codifying the role of the Senex and the Auspex. Though the consuls were accountable to the people, they were required to reckon with the power of these apex bodies.

FIRST CITIZEN

The final story of the Republic is that two men: the Caesar and the Augustus. Their account is unusual in how they vied for the role of the archetype of the Invictus: the former became Dictator and the latter the Imperator. Though the legacy of Augustus surpassing his competitor.

Caesar's rise began with a number of successful military campaigns, inspired by the works of the former Invictus Alexius. The success of these campaigns saw him hailed as Imperator by the armies that marched behind him; though it was not a title afforded him by his other contemporaries. As Caesar expanded the power of the Republic into farther and farther reaches, even unto Gaule and Albion, his popularity grew among the people but dwindled among the aristocracy.

At the peak of his life, his affairs were greatly politicised and popularised, tragically torn by his romantic entanglements with the faerie queen Cleo, and compounded by his affair with his lieutenant Antony. Such tensions led to his censuring by the Roman Senate, and in retaliation, Caesar instigated a civil war. He took the title of Dictator and stood at head of the Triumvirate. Alas, he was assassinated by his closest friends; in the ensuing chaos, civil strife plagues the Republic.

Octavian, the nephew of Caesar, was one of the three men who quelled the strife and then formed the next Triumvirate; he saw his role as fostering Rome as a cultural capital. For his great work, the Senex recognised Octavian as their formal head, cementing the role of the Invictus as its leader throughout the ages. Octavian reigned for two-hundred years. Of his many titles and honours, the appellation of Imperator is that which lauds him as the first Roman Emperor.

Days come and pass when I wonder whether the title of Augustus, rather than Invictus, might have been the better nomenclature of the imperial title. The Invictus is the emperor that rules in war and might, while the Augustus rules in peace and wisdom.

I aspire to that first august person, Octavian, and hope to be remembered not as a tyrant but only as the First Citizen: a peer among equals. Of Augustus, we say that he laid Rome as the foundation of brickwork, but by his death he had left the city clad in finest marble. That my epitaph may be so kindly is my fondest intention of legacy.

from Oeuvres de Philosophique et Critique by Friedreich Münchhausen

EMPIRE

Under Octavian as the Augustus, the Roman Republic blossomed into an empire. Although empire in name, Augustus maintained much of its republican institutions and constitutional principles, even as he vested *de facto* authority in the office of the Invictus. The people hailed the reign of Augustus as a new Golden Age. Increasing levels of civic participation and economic relations consolidated the empire, buoyed primarily by the propagation of political enterprise, a shared regime of cultural and legal norms that pervaded the halls of power.

The Roman armies pushed back the faerie barbarians as they encroached upon the limits of the empire, and where they claimed territories they built the Roman *limes*, those historic rows of briar hedges, to mark the limits of their rule.

Neither faerie nor takwin could contend the might of the human empire, and they were forced to entreat with human civility. As diplomacy moderated barbarity, there was a sharing of culture and trade. However, some attribute to this phenomenon the corrupting madness that inflicted many of the consuls under the reign of Augustus. Many lamented that as the empire fell to corruption, it undermined the popular sentiment of emperor, and so he fell from his place as an immortal.

from Vox Populari by Vivian Grey

TIME OF MADNESS

Four of the most powerful Consuls sullied the glory of the Empire: Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, and Nero. These names resonate throughout the eras of history as the epitome of grandiloquent decadence. Tiberius, afflicted by gross paranoia, frequently debased his friends and enemies to the most repugnant acts of obsequience. Caligula, that wild and indecorous man, indulged every frequent murderous impulse. Claudius emptied the treasury vaults on reckless campaigns in an attempt to secure standing ovations. Nero, his mind lost to perpetual Reverie, walked through life permitting every populist inclination, and exploring all the most perverse and persistent sensate acts. All these men reduced the cultivation of the pageantry to pantomime, in pursuit of madness.

In the wake of Nero's ultimate suicide the tensions of the Republic were so great that even Augustus could not council it to peace; civil war ensued. Across that fateful year, four rose and sought to claim the mantle of the Invictus: Galba, Otho, Vitellius, and finally Vespasian. Each laid a challenge to acquire that venerable mantle. Each, save Vespasian, suffered humiliating defeat and succumbed to ignoble deaths. Only Vespasian managed to secure concession from Augustus and restored peace once more to the capital.

AMPHITHEATRE

After the great madness, the Roman populace cared not for civic duty, ravaged by the strife of the previous years. Their only respite from political ennui was found in the glory of the Augustus.

Gone were the days of historical birthright, of civic political involvement, and the recollection of heroism faded from living memory.

A series on Consuls, collectively named the Flavian Consuls, devised a plan to placate the populace. Through the provision of cheap food and ready entertainment, they would secure their pride of place among the vaunted halls of power. The greatest edifice to their work was none other than the Flavian Amphitheatre, funded by spoils taken from conflicts with the Ur citadel.

It would be the work of ages, as successive Flavian Consuls sought to raise it by one more level. In the end, the colossal amphitheatre was able to host near one-hundred thousand bodies. It played host to the greatest of gladiatorial combat, the most majestic of historical re-enactments, and the agony plays of the Mousaion.

HYPERION

The great Roman Empire enjoyed one final glory before its decline. With the demise of Augustus, the Empire sought out a new Invictus to take the helm of the Senex. This was Aurelian, the great magi philosopher.

Unlike his predecessor, Aurelian commissioned the Radiant Diadem and had it mounted within the Iron Wreath. Aurelian crowned himself as Sol Invictus, the first Hyperion Emperor, following the manner of Alexius and thereby unifying his civic and military roles into one power. Under this sign, Aurelian was both conqueror and reformer, wielding peace and war with equal measure. Alas, his rise was all to brief, for as he marched to qualm dissidence in parts of the eastern empire, he was victim of internecine plot and murdered at the hand of his own Praetorian Guard on the night of winter solstice.

His successor was Constance the Great, who also assumed the solar mantle of Sol Invictus as the second Hyperion Emperor. Constance changed the course of history, for upon the eve of a great war he experienced a prophetic dream. He foresaw a new symbol to represent his empire, and imparted that he would conquer by this sign: the Chiron.

With the unmitigated success of Constance's campaigns, he formally declared his recognition of the emerging tradition of Scripture; he rejected the formerly Allegorical tradition of the Mousaion. Constance affirmed the path of Scripture for humankind, and signalled the end of antiquity.

Civic duty was the blueprint of the Roman people. The darkest periods of the Roman Empire coincided with a widespread withdrawal from civil society, and the populations there placated by two maxims: bread and circuses. It is from these lessons that the modern aristocracy has gleaned many practices, and first among them is a propensity for grandeur. The culture of the circus has left its imprint upon the masque, even unto today.

from Through Darker Mirrors by Harold Childe

The conundrum of Aurelian's death is most curious, for it is beyond our comprehension how an Invictus, at the might of his power and in the fullness of his empire, might be murdered. I suspect that his enemies schemed upon his solar affinity, attained through his title, and exploited the symbolic death and resurrection of Agony that occurs each Yule. For even the most casual examination of the facts are certain that Aurelian's death fell upon this longest night.

from Operatic Tropes by Leubald Geyer

There are many speculations as to the original meaning of the word 'Chiron'. Among the more popular musings is an etymological position that derives from the ancient Konic word chreston, which simply means 'good'.

from Écriture Féminine by Matilda Mulfstan

Oratorio

The styles of Oratorio were highly popular as their compositions emphasised great dramatic moments. Their medium shows affinity for the time-honoured satirical comedies instrumental to the Latin Vulgate, as they cast comedic criticism onto nobles.

However, as the gentry grew more potent, the clergy found it more difficult to present such critiques as had been done before. Over time, their form became viewed as vulgar, even undermining the austerity of the Mousaion. In place of comedy, the liturgies assumed forms of romance modelled after the highly chivalric stories.

from Total Work of Art by Leubald Geyer

Catholicism and Synopticism are two halves of the same idea. We of the Mousaion know that at the heart of these traditions stand the competing doctrines of the Axiom and the Idiom. Both contain a vision of human destiny that their respective institutions revered.

The Catholics professed history as being both literal and necessarily orthodox, and thereby vaunted humanity's paramount role in the coming Eschaton. In contrast, the Synoptics of the East professed the Grand Narrative of history as being more figurative and flexible toward heterodox and syncretic interpretations.

The balance between these institutions was long-standing if precarious; the power of each hemisphere was kept in balance by the possession of great artefacts on both sides. In the West, the Latin Vulgate held the Aegis, while the Arcadian Dominate possessed the Aidos. Each in their turn used the authority vested in those relics to promulgate their doctrine.

from The Modern Prometheus by Matilda Mulfstan

The politics of East and West are as much a symptom of tradition as they are of politics.

It was not until the Battle of Camlann, and the defeat of Arthur by Morgana, that the Vulgate found allies among them. Clovis, Arthur' successor, claimed most of Gaule, and subsequently became the first of barbarian prince to affect a Catholic world.

from Oeuvres de Philosophique et Critique by Friedreich Münchhausen

As the Roman Empire slid into decline, barbarian hordes of faerie ransacked the capital and left it to ruin. In one great wash of fire, the pinnacle of antiquity was eradicated. The Latin Vulgate stood as the last bastion of Roman culture, and stood as the bulwark of the Mousaion. Despite the loss of culture, the Mousaion retained key traditions, including the celebration of the Diadon to recall their cultural significance.

The Oratorio replaced the plays of the Agonies with early liturgical theatre, following the conversion of Constance to Scripture. The Oratorio signifies the evolution of liturgical opera for two principle reasons: the replacement of comedy with romance, and the use of song to orate. Their liturgies continue many of the dramatic forms found in the Agonies, including stylised dialogues and the use of choirs. The Mousaion also eschewed prosaic tongues in favour of poetry, thereby giving rise to many linguistic, rhetoric, and prosodic devices, and dramatic tropes; many of which retain popularity even unto today. The chorus acquired an increasing presence and assumed the sung roles not just those spoken.

History tells of the crisis that dominated this period, which culminated in the Eclipse in consequence of historical tensions between the Catholic and Synoptic creeds. The heart of this contention arose around the proper way to read the Calendar, in whether to adopt a solar or lunar reading. The respective affinity to either the Aegis or Aidos naturally lent Catholicism to solar readings and Synopticism or lunar readings. Eventually, a rare comprise was forged by the previous Pontifex who managed to unite the East and the West to formulate the lunisolar Calendar we are familiar with today.

Dark Ages

The Dark Ages were a period of crisis and conflict. In the wake of the Hyperion conversion, the fading empire had embraced Scripture, but differed over fundamental interpretations. Pragmatically, all such distinctions seemed cosmetic, but they evoked profound differences of politics and philosophy. The Roman world was divided, with the East and West growing farther apart with every passing year. The breadth of those divisions encompassed politics, language, and culture, but at the core was a divergence of liturgical creed over the emerging Scriptural tradition. With the empire fallen and divided, its many people began to grow apart.

The western dominion broke up into ragged principalities, albeit united eventually under Frankish rule. The Eastern experienced the sovereignty of the Arcadian Dominate, which stood one thousand years and a day. Few things captured this division as much as the symbolism of the Aegis and Aidos, whose icons were transformed into the Western Oriflamme, a Carolingian sign of the blazing sun, and the Eastern banner of the Menesune, the Arcadian symbol of the sickle moon.

In the West, the Roman Curia became the Latin Vulgate and proclaimed their most universal tradition of Catholic Scripture, preferring a liturgy in that most sacred Latin. In the East, a new Symposium established in the golden city of Byzantium, and they declared their path a syncretic tradition of Synoptic Scripture; they espoused a vision of scripture in a revitalised Konic liturgy. As the western empire broke up into the Frankish Principalities, they fell under the influence

of the Latin Vulgate while the rising Arcadian Dominate wholly embraced the traditions of the Synopticism.

Throughout this period, the Mousaion would come to dominate every aspect of life. Its primacy began with the Nicene Council, where the Vulgate affirmed an Axiomatic interpretation of Scripture to unify the disparate principalities within the West, even as the East experienced its cultural peak under the Dominate.

FRANKISH PRINCIPALITIES

Barbarian clans overran many of the western territories once under Roman rule, such that they fragmented into numerous principalities. Yet, for all that they grew apart, they retained cultural and linguistic similarities and their numbers nevertheless considered themselves as part of a greater Frankish nation.

Three times in the early Dark Ages, one among their number rose above the station of king, to become High King of the West. The Mousaion preserves their stories in three distinct chronicles, which are the three Matters. Each Matter recounts the rise and fall of these High Kings: the Matters of Arthur, Merovech, and Carolus.

ARTHURIAN MATTER

The epic of the first High King begins with the boy Arthur. As a young man, Myrrdin took Arthur to the ruins of Ur and raised him in obscurity. There he was shown Caliburn, buried deep within the Stone of Destiny that none of faerie-born nor takwin-made could claim. Upon Myrrdin's bidding, Arthur drew Caliburn in one act, cleaving the stone and shattering the blade.

Myrrdin instructed Arthur to gather the blade fragments and took him north to meet Mab, the Lady of the Lake. There they bargained for Caliburn's repair with the first of his harvest. With Caliburn forged anew as Excalibur, one of the four treasures, Arthur returned to claim the right of rule as High King. He founded his throne in the West at the site of *Caer Lyon*: the Siege Perilous.

His rule was marked as both magnanimous and just, and many recall the deeds of the Knights of the Round Table, all exemplar of chivalry. Among their greatest quests was the recovery of the Sangreal, which the victorious Galahad returned from the Far East.

Arthur's rule was not without conflict. He held to the ancient ways of Allegory, and maintained alliance with faerie lords. He wedded Guinevere, who followed the Catholic Scripture and sought to introduce its practice into his kingdom. The ancient and new customs slowly agitated the peace of his rule, and came undone when the bargain he once struck with Mab came to fruition: his faerie half-sister Morgana gave birth to his first-born son Modred. Modred was the pawn of the fae, and brought about the death of Arthur at the Battle of Camlann.

With the death of Arthur, the knights of the table ventured forth, to seek a king that might replace their fallen liege. In their travels, they received honour, home, and custom by their hosts in exchange for the stories they told of *Caer Lyon*.

The Sword in the Stone by Tomasz Belzowski.

MEROVINGIAN MATTER

Years passed by without a High King, and the Fimbul Winter befell the principalities. Its hoary might flew upon the crest of a terrible alliance between the faerie of the wintry north and autumnal west, and unleashed a dragon-dream before them. Under its caul, the Shadow Legion broke across the Realm in terrible devastation. Their march was halted only by the great warrior Sigurd, who led a charge against them, to lay the great serpent to rest: in doing so, he brought Catholicism to the far north.

In this darkness, Parsifal, a Silvenblum knight, found redemption for the land. He was the last and the youngest of the members who once attended Arthur's court; to him the court entrusted the Sangreal. Following the words of a prophecy, he journeyed west, for it promised he would find the king he sought upon that horizon. His journey brought him to the sea, and there he discovered the Wounded King, Bran.

Parsifal was sure his hope was lost, for he had not discovered a king in his glory, but an ailing faerie prince whose domain contained naught but the blight. Yet, Parsifal was full of clemency, and thought to heal the Wounded King with the legendary Sangreal; but Bran was wiser and kenned the meaning of the prophecy instead.

He took Parsifal down to the sea and anointed him with the blood and foam from that chalice, thereby baptising him Merovech, the Fisher King of the West. Thus by ancient rite, Bran crowned Merovech the first Catholic monarch of the West.

CAROLINGIAN MATTER

The takwin rose up in the greatest insurrection ever seen in human history; these were the Sarakene. It was a time when the Merovingians had lost much of their prowess, and they posed no threat to the Sarakene host.

The Sarakene had seized both the Iberian Peninsula and Elysium. Failure to safeguard Elysium ensured the Oracle disavowed the Merovingian line, and crowned a Carolingian as King of the Franks. Carolus of the Eromund Clan was the last and greatest of the High Kings. His were the arts of governance and war, and was the very model of chivalry; his clan entitled him Martel, the Hammerer.

So great was his mastery that the Oracle bade him to be the protector of the Latin Vulgate, even offering him a new consulship of Rome. In honour of this benefaction, Carolus raised the Oriflamme and drove a nail into the Sarakene-held lands in Iberia. Carolus led expanded his influence over all the Frankish principalities and even engaged in conflict with the Ashmen to his north. Hemmed in on all sides by barbarians and Sarakene, yet Carolus maintained his borders.

Decades later, Carolus was elevated to the station of Invictus and the Oracle renamed him Charlemagne. In this, he challenged the claim of Byzantium to both the Italic peninsula and ancient Gaule. Under the Oriflamme, Charlemagne united the Frankish people and heralded a new romantic era of chivalry. This reform was led by Roland of the Garlands, beloved of the people, and Ogier the Thane, a faerie knight; they were the most celebrated in his elite cavalry of paladin. Together, they healed rifts between human and faerie, and Allegoric and Catholic subjects. At his coronation, Charlemagne even brokered peace with that immortal fey Morgana.

ARCADIAN DOMINATE

The glorious reign of the Arcadian Dominate lasted for more than one thousand years before its eventual decline. Its capital was none other than Constantinople. The Arcadian Dominate

The Dark Ages created a new model of literature, which emerged as the Mousaion carried out the task of their curation. Their media included vellum and parchment, with only those only the most revered stories became inscribed painstakingly by hand upon rare paper. Theirs was the craft of book-making and book-keeping, with every volume of this era bound by plain wooden boards or simply tooled leather.

Under this new mission, the graces became wandering poets, scholars, and adjudicators. In their travels, they learned and acquired new stories, and followed the growing interest in romantic prose and courtly love; they sang in medieval courtyards of the chivalry of Arthur, Merovech, and Charlemagne. In their centres of learning, they collected placed these varied accounts to found the first universities. Every book was a treasure, scarcely seen outside the libraries, and kept safely under lock and key.

from The Grand Narrative by Leubald Geyer

The reign of the Merovingians was remarkable, nor for its durance of many centuries, but for its formidable leadership in the West, wherein it held off both faerie host and takwin uprisings in a disciplined and consistent manner.

from A Place in the Sun by Auto Eisenmark

By the height of the Renaissance, the Franklands and northern lands experienced a revival of Ambrosian culture. Among their lot there are two chivalric exemplars we still celebrate: they are Yvain, Duc of the Lion, and Lambert, Duc of the Lake. Both sought to epitomise their ancestors, Gawain and Lancelot in turn.

Yvain took to challenge the Green Knight, the champion of spring, while Lambert turned westwards to the Autumn Isles to win the heart of Vivaine, then Lady of the Lake. Their success immortalised their names.

from The Human Catechism by Count August

retained the title of Emperor, and claimed dominion over all the former holdings of the Roman Empire; though in truth they had little influence over their western contemporaries. They regarded themselves as the true inheritors of the Roman Empire, for Constantinople and the Arcadian Dominate prevailed against the rot that had taken root in the West.

Across the great span of its lifetime, the city of Constantinople experienced two great periods of expansion and contraction. The first half of its era called the Aurora, and follows the reign of the great Augustus Constance, and his transformation across five lifetimes under four successive imperial names: Valentine, and Arcadia, Leo, and Justin.

FIVE FACES OF AUGUSTUS

The Dominate begins in with the founding of a New Rome in that ancient city of Byzantium, where Constance hoped to glorify the emerging practice of Scripture. His capital was a shining beacon in the East, retaining the might and splendour of Rome while the West fell into decline.

Constance brought together two great constituencies of people: those of his subjects that still practiced the old ways of Allegory and those who embraced Scripture. He convened the first Ecumenical Council in Nicene, which debated on the nature of the word, whether its utterance or its depiction was principle. It was their resolution that the language of the ages must be both grammatical and iconic, and resolved the nature of nobility as being both mortal and sublime.

Sixty years into his reign, Constance underwent a rite of nomenclature and renamed himself Valentine. As Valentine, he reigned for a meagre thirty-odd years more, before renaming himself once more as Arcadius. Eighty years he passed as Augustus Arcadia, during which he annexed the surrounding lands to consolidate the power of the Dominate.

Again, the Augustus renamed himself, and in seeking to lay claim once more to the West he assumed the name of Leo, the beast of Rome. As Leo, he entered into a period known primarily for his tyranny and absolute rule. Through powerful aggression, he secured an alliance with the Rodinian territories, though they struggled for economic dominance. Histories recall their Marriage of the Golden Dawn, where the daughter of the Arcadian Tyrant wed the Rodinian Boyar.

After the tyranny of Leo, Augustus reimagined himself for the last time, as Justin. He would remain as such for the last eighty years of his seniority before finally succumbing to quiescence. As Justin, he became a powerful but controversial figure of imperialism. His general expanded the dominion of New Rome for the first time in generations. He elevated his consort Euphemia to become the first Matriarch, the embodiment of sacred wisdom in the East; only to then change the laws such that he could then marry the liturgical actor Theodora.

The fall of the Augustus came not by war or treachery but by populist diversion. As the Augustus, he wore the imperial purple, while the nobility wore the royal blue. His many subjects were entitled to a humble green. A great fervour had gripped the population, as manifold tokens of iconography circulated among the citizens.

Divisions grew between the Blue and the Green, and passion ran in the blood of these colours. They would riot over sporting events, and come to open conflict over professions of Catholicism or Synopticism. Tensions boiled over when his wife wore green at a chariot race: the Greens vented their resentment at the imperial couple, and the Blues their anger at the seeming withdrawal of favour. Riots broke out, and the Augustus was among the number slain. Historians of this event put the death toll at the Hippodrome at a count of thirty thousand. Records reveal that this would number nearly one tenth of the population of the city at the time: Blues as well as Greens, innocent as well as guilty.

The Arcadian *maestros* rightly deserve historical appreciation, for they ensured the flow of trade throughout the East. Under the auspices of Dominate, the *maestros* became a powerful institution: feared, reviled, or cultivated by turns, as they secured prosperity for their friends and penury for their enemies.

from The Empire's Dowry
by Auto Eisenmark

The Augustus and the Invictus are two halves of the same concept: one in conquest and one in wisdom. That the western Realm styled their High Kings with the salutation of Invictus, while the Eastern Dominate professed the title of Augustus. I regard this as the most salient caricature of their dominion.

from Absolute Enlightenment by
Friedreich Münchhausen

Long before the consolidation of the role of the Pontifex, there were many great historians whose writings have formed the continuity of our knowledge of yore. Among the earliest of such stalwart authors is none other than the celebrated scholar of Austin, during the era of New Rome. His dialects created a vista of dreams and wonder, written as a counter-prose to the decay of the Western Roman Empire. His was the imagination of the perfected city Aurora, which he later claimed to be manifest in the material through the grand city of Constantinople.

from The Human Catechism
by Count August

An oft-lauded but apocryphal account suggests that a humble tailor was bidden by an unknown benefactor to produce a mantle of pure gossamer of purple, the colour reserved for the Augustus alone. When the measurements given were not those of the Augustus, she presumed a nefarious plot she had no desire to support.

Instead, she wove the mantle from pure gossamer, and was thus visible only to those of noble stature. By the quirks of fate, the robe falls into the possession of Augustus instead, who is said to have worn the robe to the match, only to be invisible to the masses below.

from An Account of my Amusement
by Valetoria Regina

Crusades

The second body of Oratorio concerns the Crusades, beginning with the Crescendo to the moment of Eclipse. The entire era experienced continuous and endogenous warfare and the world was embroiled with numerous and plentiful conflicts. The East railed against the West, and humanity endured contention from both faerie and takwin. Humanity, divided deeply over sophist musings of the Catholicism and Synopticism, mired in digressions over questions of the Author, what principles truly guided destiny, and therefore the actions of its noble actors.

CRESCENDO

In the depths of the Umbrage, the takwin had toiled for patient centuries, their work as unremarked and their actions unforeseen by human contemporaries. The power of the Telesman and the Blackrock, under human control, meant the greater part of their number remained subservient to human authority. The takwin endured all of this with tremulous certainty found in work, but ill at peace with their subordinance to humankind.

The Crescendo is the story of their emancipation, insurrection, and the formation of their first and last empire over humankind. The takwin rose up from beneath the mantle of Elysium, and claimed all therein. This period marks a time where takwin, not humanity, reigned supreme.

CAVE OF DREAMS

The Crescendo begins in the middle of the Dark Ages; it was a sign of conflicts to come. The takwin tell of a storyteller of superlative skill born in Agartha. She was Homay, a legend in her own lifetime and still revered by the takwin.

She laboured for a thousand and one nights, to create a machine of great purpose. By day, she worked upon its form and by night she whispered to it story after story. This, her masterpiece, was the *Deus Machina*, better known as the Core. Upon its completion, strange and wily dreams possessed Homay. She dreamt of the Blackrock, which lay nestled with slumbering dragon. She travelled many unlit nights to find that place and used the guile and stealth to recover the stone.

Upon returning the stone to Agartha, conflict brewed as the takwin could not agree as to which cardinal point she should dedicate this distinguished artefact. She tasked the takwin elders to bring her a cloth, which she placed the rock within. One elder apiece held the four corners of the cloth and together they carried the Blackrock to the Core, where Homay herself set the stone within its heart, satisfying the honour of all of the takwin.

The Blackrock stirred the Core into waking. The cavern of Agartha was broken by a gentle susurrus, and thus began the symphony, which prophesised the takwin destiny. Its sounding was the call to arms, and it roused the takwin will from the bindings of the Telesman.

SILVER TONGUE

John Nike was born in the East, his lineage descending from a long line of devout Scripturists, and the son of a high court judge. His brother was an orphaned takwin, whom his father had adopted. When Nike and his brother reached the age of reason, their father sent them both away to study what they might learn under the Mousaion, such that they might serve as scholarly eremites.

Nike became a most proficient alchemist and a wondrous polymath of great repute. His familiarity with the takwin saw Nike appointed as the emissary of the Arcadian Dominate to the Beylik; there to seek peace or otherwise secure their secrets. Though he arrived to good cheer, Nike fell afoul of intrigue that implicated him in a plot to destroy the Core.

Based on records of the time, there is some evidence that the Dominate saw signs of the Crescendo first. The Dominate's reticence to interfere reflects their bitter history with the Beylik, where takwin activity undermined their own military and economic power.

I would speculate that the Dominate chose to refrain from committing their already taxes resources to the aid of those on the other side of the world. For it was in this period that the Dominate began a program of aggressive consolidation, all made possible by the emergence of the *maestros*. Their wealth and administrative acumen maintained the empire and solicited tribute from their clients. The remains of the Dominate's armies held the line upon the land, and the maestro expanded the city's influence by sea, until both the Hellenic and Italic peninsulas became new clients of New Rome. From this alliance, New Rome formed into a sea-faring, trader republic.

from The Empire's Dowry
by Auto Eisenmark

Modern accounts bear few descriptions of the Core, yet its awakening instigated the greatest insurrection of takwin in all recorded history. Their numbers rose up from the Umbrage and claimed Elysium. The Ramparts that once stood as a barricade became a cage for a populace, unable to defend against an enemy from within. The takwin Cardinals took the Prime Mobile; the residents of Elysium had a choice of submission, death, or exile.

With the Core upon the Prime Mobile, history may have been secured by takwin; yet their claim was not absolute, for the Vulgate possessed the Whitestone, the Karling Principate and Arcadian Dominate held the Aegis and the Aidos respectively. Those signs, the radiant solar wheel of the Oriflamme and the Sickle Lune of the Menesune, were the standards of their contention

from The Human Catechism
by Count August

The Cardinals ordered Nike's tongue to cut out to silence him, and his hand removed to end diplomatic works. John returned home, and having learned many of the arts of alchemy, he fashioned for himself a tongue and a hand of the alchemical argentrine: these works were as supple and lithe as his original parts. With speech restored, he confessed the ills that the conspiracy had visited upon him, and revealed to the takwin the plot that sought to destroy the amity between their nations. In keeping the peace, the people celebrated John in his role as interlocutor between human and takwin: that jubilation raised John to the station of the first Pontifex.

VATHEK, THE INHERITOR

For four and forty years, Homay guided the takwin in Elysium. Her reign was a glorious era, marked by passion and wisdom. So great was her influence that the East has forever been touched by her legacy. When she finally retreated from the world, she left without evidence of her departure. In the vacuum she created, the takwin called to her succession, the cunning Vathek.

Vathek ascended to power at an early age. His figure was pleasing and majestic, but when angry his eyes limed with dire wrath. His ways were wanton, and his mastery of science, physics, and astrology were of repute. To serve his appetites for all manner of pleasures he commissioned the great pleasure palace built within the hanging gardens of Agartha: the stately pleasure-dome of Xanadu. Yet, more than any of his appetites was his thirst for knowledge: he built the Great Observatory, and wrote several treatises that that became vital to the foundation of fulmonry.

Vathek's ambition proved his downfall. He sought to use his mastery of alchemy to devise a talisman that might enable him to govern the entire world. He placed with that artefact a fragment piece of the Blackrock, which that he had excised: this he called the Lamen.

In breaching the Blackrock, the he had sent quakes into the utter reaches of the underworld and stirred the slumber of a terrible dragon, coiled about the roots of the tree Palladium. For his arrogance, the dragon reached out and consumed the prideful Vathek, and thus ended his reign.

The death of Vathek marked the decline of the takwin's imperial claim. Though theirs retained power for several centuries more, the apogee of their Golden Age had passed.

Few accounts of the artefact named the Lamen survive, and those that do are mere second-hand descriptions of dubious authority. We cannot truly know whether the Lamen contained a fragment of the legendary Blackrock, or whether the stone could indeed be fractured without dire consequence. If the Lamen existed, in truth, then may it be lost to time immemorial; perhaps engulfed by the maw of some terrible dragon.

from A History of the Realm
by Count August

TENEBRAE

The Tenebrae entail a second series of crusades, which resulted in the reclamation of Elysium where the host of the West founded the Kingdom of Edessa. The road to victory was troubled, for while the second crusades sought the liberation of Elysium, they fell against a backdrop of dire political strife between the Eastern and Western worlds. Even after victory, the takwin remained a civilian presence within Edessa.

The Great Schism finally drove apart the East and West, and once subtle and covert tensions became bare and brewed profane hostility. No singular issue aptly contains the core dissensions, for they were manifest in practices, politics, and geography. The most potent of them all was the conflict over the Calendar itself.

Constantinople regarded itself as a testament of the Idiom, having cultivated a Calendar that accorded both solar and lunar cycles. The Frankish Principalities, no less certain of their conviction, established the Western Cathedra in the city of Avignon, adopting a purely solar observation: The signs of the Oriflamme and Menesune became the symbols of these contentions.

One of the longest abiding contentions of the Mousaion harkens back to Antiquity. It is a question that contends a primary tenet between Catholic Axiom and Synoptic Idiom, which quested whether the Author must be external to creation, or stands as part of it but is yet unseen.

The corollary of this argument inevitably contends over whether the solar agency of Reason is the principle force of history, or whether the lunar influence of Rhyme must also be included. It is fundamentally a humanist question, for it seeks to divine the image of the Author. These are the contentions that once bitterly divided the East from the West.

from The Waking Dream
by Matilda Mulfstan

TWO GREAT HOUSES

The Avignon Cathedra was a departure from the authority of the Latin Vulgate for the West. It represented the first of many power struggles between the Frankish monarchies and Rome. Unlike prior political strife between the two powers, this discontent followed from an all-encompassing grief and madness over the suicide of two of the most fondly remembered lovers in history. This

romance came to define the West: between the Capetian monarchy and a Flamine of the notorious Montechhi family.

Tensions had always run deep between the families, and a forbidden love bloomed between two of their scions, Julian of House Capet, and Rosa of the Montechhi. Their illicit love was both balm and bane for the families; some even encouraged the affair in hopes of an alliance.

The two fell once more to fighting upon the discovery that the affairs of their courtly love were tainted by the machinations of Queen Mab. Such revelations doomed their love, for both families regarded the affair as corrupted by faerie motives. The houses sought to keep both apart, and their efforts culminated in a tragic suicide that shook the passions of both groups.

The Valean Monarchy succeeded the Capetian Monarchs, and declared then their allegiance to Albion and forswearing their Italic allegiance by claim of common blood and law. In this single act, the Valean Monarchs broke their ties irrevocably with the Vulgate, to declare the Siege Perilous the Western Cathedra in Avignon.

from The Human Catechism by Count August

For even before the crusades, Godfrey was already distinguished as a military leader. He was the Duke of Lorraine, which was an honour received from the Avignon Invictus before setting out for Elysium. His titles and his prowess made him one of the most powerful men in the Western Realm. He was the first prince to take up arms at the behest of the Vulgate, and thus inaugurated the Crusade. In victory, the Vulgate revealed Godfrey's proud lineage, none other than as Lohengrin's grandchild, who was, in turn, the true son of Parsifal, the Swan Knight.

from The Birth of Nations by Valetoria Regina

There is a little known detail of history, which reveals that Elder Johannes' loyalty to Godfrey was a filial obligation that harkens back several centuries. For he was none other than a descendant of the Grail maiden that bore the Sangreal for Parsifal, and was raised by a Saracen knight by the name of Feirefiz. In this, Johannes symbolised a union of the takwin rule and human enterprise that occurred within Edessa.

from The Human Catechism by Count August

GLORY OF GODFREY

After centuries of prosperity, the glory Arcadia waned. First, the human population dwindled, replaced by an influx of faerie and takwin subjects. Byzantium's borders receded, and the new Bohemian Duchies of Moscow, Polska, and Boyardi emerged.

The remaining Arcadian regime was surrounded by hostile powers, and sought to forged alliance with Vathek. The alliance was a poisoned chalice, for Vathek extended his grasp and seized Byzantium for his own, and erased the last vestiges of Roman Empire preserved there. Theirs was a gilded government, and their reign overturned the Synoptic Calendar in favour of the Symphonic traditions, denying recognition of either Scripture or Allegory.

This provoked a just cause for the West, and gave sanction to war against Vathek, to restore Scripture to the East. Both the Latin Vulgate and the Avignon Cathedra gave their benediction to the armies of the West as they marched upon the Ramparts, their numbers comprised of cavaliers, paladins, champions, and mercenaries, and at their helm was Godfrey under the Oriflamme.

By Godfrey's grace, his leadership, and his covert allies amid the city, his army gained entry through the Ramparts and claimed Elysium. In order to preserve the sanctity of that place, Godfrey charged the military orders to safeguard his dominion, and gave them the ancient temple of Solomon as their headquarters: they became renowned as the Knights Templar.

The peace was brief respite, for Godfrey in great humility refused coronation as King of Elysium. Godfrey, forsaking his title save for political expediency, saw little need for Vulgate validation; a bitter pill for the Mousaion. To curtail interregna, the Vulgate nonetheless validated his claim to the Prime Mobile and flew the Oriflamme from the Ramparts. They proclaimed it 'Edessa', a Catholic dominion and restored the Whitestone to Prime Mobile. Their efforts were for naught, for in lacking a true liege they could not assert dominion over the Calendar as Alexius once had.

COER DE LION

Godfrey's death occurred without heir or issue, and the newly founded Kingdom of Edessa fell to regency. The first regent was Elder Johannes, who was the principle advisor to Godfrey. He was a man of great and careful wisdom, claiming descent from that old king of Solomon.

As he presided over the kingdom, he restored or elevated a great many wonders in that paradise: the most legendary the Gorgon Gates and the Well of Dreaming, both since lost to war. Among his greatest treasures was a shard of the Pendulum, with which he surveyed every part of the Realm. His regency came undone through takwin treachery, when Saladin uncovered the artefacts of Vathek's reign and used them to seize Edessa and take Elder Johan hostage.

So began the third crusade, led this time by Richard, *Coer de Lion*. The third crusade wore on for a great many years, and Richard secured victory, as before, through means of human supporters inside the ramparts. In victory and in acute political wisdom, Richard negotiated fair and equitable terms that maintained Edessa as a human power, with Saladin as its chief magistrate. In this act, Richard cemented a profound peace that brought resolution to the crusades.

TROUBADOURS UNDERGROUND

Richard's efforts earned him great political ire from the aristocracy of his home. He suffered treachery from his brother John, the Black Prince. John's conspirators captured Richard in the Italic peninsula and secreted him away to the court of Byzantium, where they held hostage.

Richard was held to ransom for fifty and one-hundred thousand marks; the precise amount raised by Albion in their crusade against Saladin, but yet twice the annual income for the Albion Crown. His ally, Eleanor of Aquitaine committed to raising those funds, all the while John, offered eighty thousand more for the Eastern Emperor to keep Richard prisoner.

Many of those loyal to Richard were disposed of their traditional titles; among them were Robin of Locksley, Wilfred of Ivanhoe, and Jean of Nesle. They formed a rogue band of malcontents to confound the rule of the Black Prince: the Troubadours Underground. Though Richard remained a king in exile in Edessa for a great many years, the Troubadours Underground secured his freedom through cunning resourcefulness.

Each adopted different strategies that they might secretly raise the funds for the release of their liege. Robin took the role of a highwayman and lifted items of great value from those allied with the Black Prince. Wilfred disguised himself and won the purse from the Black Prince's royal tournament. Jean led a cohort of wandering minstrels to ensure the secret transfer of funds to Eleanor.

WAR OF THE THORNS

The capture of a Western Prince by the Eastern Empire brought the two worlds into mortal confrontation. Tempers set in motion by the Great Schism erupted into pure and open hostility. A great many battles raged around the circumference of the Ramparts, but none would be as terrible as the War of the Thorns. It lasted one hundred years as the powers of the East and West enjoined its protracted conflict. Amid this conflict, two unlikely heroes, Jeanne of Arcadia and Esmeralda of the Franklands, became the avatars of the East and West respectively.

This war was precipitated by the Oracle reaching senescence, with the end of her life signalling succession and the end of an era. Her final prophecy gave the identity of her inheritor: a child taken from her home in youth, beset by visions, only to rise to power by her own accord before her selection.

Two candidates matched this description: Esmeralda under General Stark and Jeanne under Maestro Lunecaster. Slavers had captured Jeanne at the age of three from a Frankland farm to work in Arcadia. Crusaders had likewise taken Esmeralda from Aurora and pressed her into service in the Franklands as a child. Each endured prophetic visions of an oncoming darkness, which set the path for their ascent to be great powers in their land. Esmeralda became a minister for the Frankish holdings, and chose the Red Rose as her emblem; while Jeanne a sublime worker of sorceries for the Arcadian Dominate, bearing the White Rose on her vestments.

The Starks rallied behind the Oriflamme and championed the rites of a solar Catholic Calendar; the Lunecasters, being of Synoptic lunar Calendar, advanced the Menesune. For the first

The Troubadours Underground were part of a grand conspiracy organised by the Knights of the Temple. As protectors of the road, they were crucial to providing military escorts to the Troubadours. However, theirs held ulterior motives, for the Templars needed both money and artefacts of alchemy to continue their plans; both were to be found in Constantinople. Under the guise of the efforts of rescue, the Templars received Vulgate benedictions to put that city to the sack, and they departed that place with vast sums of wealth and texts preserved from the Great Library.

from The Longest Quest by Anita Riverio

The Templars were opposed by the works of an esoteric order of takwin assassins, led by an ancient and craggy takwin known as the Old Mountain Man; albeit, in certain ventures they served as allies rather than enemies. Both held desires to unify the entire span of the Realm under a singular order, but the Templars looked to the order of Reason for their template, while the Assassins looked to the mysteries of Rhyme. The Templars, once a large unified military order, found it necessary to divulge their efforts into distinctive charters, with the Masonic Lodge being the first, being charged with the erection of monumental architectural forms, new structural engineering, and intricate designs over sites of power.

Yet, the Templars as an all-encompassing franchise would meet their destruction not a century later, as their plan came close to fruition in the Temple of Solomon. Their money and their power threatening even the might of both the Vulgate and the Avignon Throne: in that moment, both the Vulgate and the Frankish Coronal denounced the order and forced their dissolution: the temple is purged of their influence and the Templar Order is officially destroyed. Secretly, the order survives through its many charges, which would eventually reform into the charges of the modern era.

from A History of the Realm by Count August

It is this conflict where the aggressions between East and West manifested over the matter of the Calendar. A treatise by the Copernik on the orbits of the planets was demanding a final resolution to the question before us. Still the East counted the months through the praxis of the Idiom, while the West continued to count solations in the praxis of the Axiom. So began the first Tridentine Council, which convened for many years and saw the passing of many graces.

from The Birth of Rhyme and Reason by Zarathustra

Bellum in Umbra by Tom McGrath.

time in the Crusades the Oriflamme and Menesune, carried by Esmerelda and Jeanne came into direct conflict upon the field. As avatars of their respective forces, the conflict came to an impasse: the Pendulum ceased its movement, and plunged the world into twilight.

ECLIPSE

The Eclipse: the Pendulum came to awful stillness. For a stay of nearly thirty years, the lands below bathed in neither day nor night but twilight amber-glow. By this light, the great curse of the Somnolence waned. Dragons rose up and wracked the Realm while titans worked their terrible tempests once more. All told, several million mortals perished, including goodly numbers of takwin and faerie both.

Peace prevailed only through a tragedy that befell the Lunecaster line. Edmund of the Lunecaster, known better as the Black Viper for his corrupt lust for power, extirpated his own family through mass poisoning, in attempt to claim the household for himself. In their devastation, the Starks claimed the Prime Mobile, and Elysium fell to Western rule once more.

To preclude further visitation of such dire destruction, the powers of East and West sued for a compact of peace, and one to recognise the sovereignty of existing domains along the borders built upon the Roman *limes*, to be thereafter honoured by incumbent of the Prime Mobile.

With the Calendar resolved in the favour of Catholicism, the instatement of the solar measure moved the Orrery once more. As the Firmament turned once more, the effect of the Treaty of the Roses manifested in a growth of wilderness all upon the *limes*. For wherever those lines ran, the bloom of the bramblewoods emerged. They have divided the Realm into domains ever since, sending conventional warfare went into decline. Power flowed increasingly more to Elysium as the home of diplomacy.

Baroque

The Baroque Period began introduced the first recognisable modern opera. The style began with a cultural enclave of artistic Italic graces during the Flamboyance: the *Camerata*. Their contributions transformed the liturgical mystery plays of medieval standard into chamber opera providing the common fare of sung drama.

The style known as *Commedia dell'Arte* competed with the *Camerata*, having inherited the largely defunct comedic tradition but rendering it into a highly popular, vulgar, and vernacular form. Where the *Camerata* performed in grand cathedral halls, the comedic Thespians played on outside venues on temporary stages. The styles frequently divided the nobility and commonfolk.

Both forms developed through the early 17th Century and influenced each other. *Camerata* elevated *Commedia dell'Arte*, and the latter grounded the former in folk narrative to bring mythic symbolism into the forefront of the public mind. These changes rendered stock characters as literary archetypes through mask and costume.

The result was two distinct opera: *opera seria* and *opera buffa*, serious and comedic opera respectively; the former being better known as melodrama. Melodrama gave form to the high baroque conventions. In turn, *opera buffa* regaled with light music and themes, incorporating the spoken works into their production; the last is an affectation from Albion operettas and Gallic *opéra comique*.

PROLOGUE

An emerging humanist philosophy underscored this period. It abrogated both mystery and myth, saw great cultural and intellectual revitalisation, and recast the very nature of humanity and empire. Buoyed by both Catholic and Synoptic traditions, this humanism instigated scientific discovery and exploration. Out of nearly one thousand years of obscurity, masters of arts, letters, and numbers, began a the process of enlightenment.

The grand plan of enlightenment was not without contention: for while nobles acclimated to the ideals of Reason, the common folk still cleaved to myth and legend. The aristocracy tempered the commoners' expectations to proselytise the light of Reason to the masses.

Outwardly, the people embraced the works of masters as the aristocracy extolled the virtues of the new rational order. Secretly, the smallfolk cleaved to occluded works of divination, astrology, and miracles. Mysteries competed with science, but with mysteries holding fast the hearts of the populace.

A century of war had exacted its toll and felled many ancient houses, and feudal rule plunged into decline. The burgeoning monetary families heralded the end of the Dark Ages and sparked the fires of the Flamboyance. Banking, lending, and finance built the empire anew, forging routes of trade and developing means of transportation and communications.

Three journeys readied the way for the oncoming enlightenment, being crucial to its dissemination across the Realm. These three journeys catalysed grand political change that would echo throughout the following ages, and setting it on course towards enlightenment. These are the departure of Prince Titus Groan, the transcendence of Dantea Alighieri, and the pilgrimage of Geoffrey Palamon.

In their dissemination across the continent, to Albion and Metropolaris, they encountered the protestations in the northern continent, where they were reviling the Vulgate's authority and its culture. They chose to favour the plays of the Immortal Bard, cast in unsung iambic pentameter. The Bard's portrayal of mythic narratives and celebration of history's historical powers evoked ancient myth in contemporary device.

from Total Work of Art by Leubald Geyer

The scientific method, as applied to alchemical processes, generated a most fantastical revolution. Among the artisans of that era was the Great Engineer, Vincent Leon, who mastered the synthesis of essence with substance.

Here too, we can see his early designs, which are clearly inspired by a reverse engineering of the Kythera Device: an antediluvian relic of clockwork machination. Inspired by its nature, Leon obsessed over a vision of perpetual motion. Each page of his notes details exquisite lessons gleaned from study of this device.

Though unable to perfect his vision, Leon came very close with the invention of the wain: a device that produced the most fundamental mechanical energies, but used only trivial amounts of energy. This clockwork component was the basis of his latter, and increasingly complex, devices; it provided the motive power necessary. From this, we see the inception of the new military and mercantile technologies. His greatest achievement was the world's first Centurion, the Vitruvian Woman.

from A Machine to End War by Nikolai Techna

PRINCE TITUS ALONE

Prince Titus was a talented child who came into power at a young age. As he grew, he found himself surrounded by courtly ritual and affair, only to find it hollow and wanting. It was such that he felt trapped and upon his Saining escaped in wanderlust to the Hinterlands. There he spent his youth and endured but a sparing touch of time. He would return as the prodigal to reclaim his heritage as the Augustus of the East.

He had learned masterful manipulation from the courtly intrigues of the fae. Although he was not the most magnanimous of rulers, he nevertheless held the respect of the people and lords alike. Though slowly, it became apparent to the courts that age would not touch him, as he used his apparent youth as excuse for indulgence and excess. His eternal youth drew wonder from distant places and the immortal Orlando came to discern what manner of thing this Titus might be. One night Orlando chanced to overhear Titus conversing with his mirrored reflection, asking who might be fairest in the land; the shade in the mirror gave him a reply.

In careful observation, Orlando learned the shade had power to leave the mirror by night while the Prince slept, to incite the unbidden desires of the Prince. Orlando pressed Titus and forced him to confront his shade, and commanded him to depart with his mirror. With the shade vanquished, idle wanderlust took a hold of the prince once more. He abdicated his rule and left a decadent Byzantine court to fail and decline.

DESCENT AND ASCENSION

The most notorious journey of Dantea began upon her 35th year, having become an accomplished poet and mendicant. He journey began upon finding herself lost within the bramblewoods and harassed by the *intellectus* of those woods. Lost and dismayed, she journeyed further into the heart of darkness, far from the light of day.

An itinerant member of the takwin, also a poet of modest respect, came across Dantea. Her led Dantea towards a hidden entrance into the underworld, marked by an ominous epigram against those who would enter with pertinent design. The takwin guided her through the 'vestibule' of the underworld, and observed the great many circles of the Labyrinth. She eventually came upon Agartha and even down to the Antipodes, where she finds the Anathema.

Dantea met the departed shade of her lover, Beatrice, to whom she confesses a desire to scale the heights of Palladium and reach the fabled Atlas at its summit; there to invoke the Muses. The shade of her lover guided her through the hidden paths Widderslainte. Dantea came to the summit of Palladium to finds the remains of Atlas. Here, she witnesses a parade of ideals, and the archetypes of the Arcana revealed to her.

PILGRIMAGE

Palamon's pilgrimage began in the court of the house of Cameroni: theirs was an Italic family of ten ladies that collectively ruled over their lands who claimed a lineage back to Galahad. Palamon took inspiration from the stories that they regaled to him one night on a diplomatic mission.

Palamon's journey began in the city of London, where he was joined by a company of twenty-nine pilgrims. The pilgrims, like Palamon, were traveling back to the Temple of Solomon in Edessa. He required of each pilgrim to pay for his or her passage with a story: a custom that even persists today. In each of their recounting, they related encounters with the Arcana.

He heard tell of Nicholas Flamel becoming the Magician through the forging of the first Philosopher's Stone. He heard of the scandal of the Oracle Joan, who gave birth despite vows of

Although the West triumphed through the Flamboyance, that meteoric rise was made possible only through the cultural enclave of the Arcadian Dominate, which made it possible for the Vulgate to reassemble the fragments of Antiquity. As the Dominate began to falter, long-lost knowledge flowed back to the Vulgate along crusader trade routes and as the Dominate reached its decline, Arcadian scholars departed from the Dominate to find refuge in the Vulgate and surrounding lands.

The Vulgate, lacking the support of the Siege Perilous, and seeing the diminishment of its influence, pushed their agenda and instated the maestro in exile to be the merchant princes of the Italic peninsula. These were the Vetinari, founders of the first principles of banking, and the Groan, who paid for and bought the throne of the Basilica. Though East and West proper fought for Elysium, the prosperity of these families gained holdings across the southern coast to encompass both Iberia and coastal Hellene.

from One Empire by Vivian Grey

It is from the journey of Dantea that we learn the Rule of Reason: one that warns against traversing the realms of the dream under the fullness of the light of Ecstasy. The dreaming realms are already the domain of Rhyme, so in that way lays madness and revelation. Far better be it to travel by the light of Agony, under which there is some semblance of order and logic in those lands, strange and otherworldly though the logic of dreams are.

from The Birth of Rhyme and Reason by Zarathustra

chastity, and of the wonder of the Cimmerian Queen Tamar, who became Dynast there and named as King, then held the prince of winter as consort. He learned with interest of the notable *sient* Louis, king of the Franks who became the only Western monarch to be Augustus. He heard tell of the very first male raised to the Vulgate's halls, and in doing so became the very first Pontifex: the *Doctor Universalis* Aquino. He heard an account of the seduction by the legendary Don Juan, the first Sybarite; a story of harrowing defeat by that indomitable figure known as Robert the Bruce, who bore the mantle of the Centurion. One tale witnessed the great master of logic and rhetoric, that William of Occam, ascending into the Sphinx after defending his uncompromising positions; and then finally of the great patron of the scholastic orders, living the life of an itinerant mendicant, recalled not as Giovanni, but as Francesco.

Having counted nine among these tales, Palamon was dismayed to note the absence of any tales regarding the incarnation of the Ring. Yet, as his stories spread across the land with great alacrity that his understood that he had attained the role of the Ring himself, bringing witness to each of the Arcana in his vulgarisation of their accounts.

Flamboyance

The Flamboyance was a great cultural movement first conceived in the southern extremes of the mainland, where affinity with solar symbolism was greatest. The Flamboyance encompassed an innovative flowering of both Latin and vernacular literature, revitalising classical texts and imagery.

The Flamboyance instigated anew many intellectual pursuits and recalled for the artistry and innovations of its most notorious polymaths, even as it brought about social and political upheaval. The cultural movement trended away from the obscurity of yore towards enlightenment through science and splendour. This was most visible manifested in the ubiquity of solar symbols.

House of the Rising Sun

The Iberian Castle of Bursao was the home of one of the most notorious households of the era. Among their number were four of the Arcana in one family: the Augustus, the Oracle, the Champion, and the Sybarite. During the 15th and 16th Centuries, the family patriarch Rodrigo secured the interests of their family, making his kin prominent in chimerical and political affairs.

Rodrigo secured the ascendancy of his household through a lascivious use of coin his family possessed, providing a nigh-unending resource of wealth that startled and amazed the various courts. Through a judicious application of coin, Rodrigo manipulated his legend and raised himself to the station of Augustus. He was a skilled politician and diplomat, demonstrated easy nepotism, and used such skills as his to have his sons assume the roles of the Sybarite and the Champion respectively. Lastly, his donations to the Vulgate facilitated the elevation of his daughter to the Oracle. None in the history of humankind has seen such an accomplishment since.

Their prominence grew lavishly across the Italic and Iberian peninsulas, though their reign was fraught with many indiscretions; many of their contemporaries regarded them as the epitome of avarice. Nevertheless, their patronage greatly spurred the artistry of the Flamboyance, and ensured the importance of solar customs across the southern continent.

Nevertheless, the ambitions of the Vetinari kept their power in check, a family of powerful *maestro* who, while lacking a great wealth of their own, ran the widespread institutions of banking that the southern nobles depended upon. So passionate was the rivalry between these houses that the internecine conflict nearly exhausted them both.

The alchemical revolution propelled humankind into modernity; though many innovations of that era deserve our observation, one stands out in terms of its historical impact. Gunpowder overturned conventional military tactics of the open-field. The culture of warfare transformed as military doctrine sought to accommodate the new dynamic. Instead, the application of non-military power bore greater significance, especially the arts of diplomacy, espionage, and economic competition.

from Blood and Thunder
by Auto Eisenmark

The exact extent of the wealth of Bursao is a matter of great conjecture. Remarkably, their patronage embraced a number of noted alchemists, including Nicholas Flamel. Many historians have striven to link the Bursao wealth to this man, suggesting he had legitimately discovered the method by which one might convert base lead into gold; a formula speculated to have been fabricated by the legendary Midas himself.

from Daimon Muse by Harold Childe

SUN NEVER SETS

Gloriana was a true and remarkable faerie queen who became the Inamor. The wondrous alabaster-complexioned monarch reigned over Albion; tired of her long reign conspiracy sought to displace her from the throne. Gloriana charged the magus Prospero with the duties of court astrologer and spymaster, following the work of Myrrdin.

Her reign endured a shadow war, provoked by her father's secession from Catholicism. The powers of the West contested Gloriana with both military and romantic advances. Many deigned for Gloriana's suit, including the future Frankish King; her rejection provoked deeply bitter enmity. All the while Prospero neutralised the many clandestine operatives sent by Nostromos, who enjoyed the favour of the Frankish court and sought to vaunt the claim of Gloriana's cousin, Mary.

Ultimately, Gloriana took heed of Prospero's urgings and assumed the role of the sacramental king, and declared herself a virgin thereafter conjoined with the entire kingdom through hierogamy. Despite her dauntless visage, the execution of Mary prompted a dire invasion by Iberian contenders to her throne. The Iberian Armada thundered up towards her lands, vastly outnumbering her forces. Yet she was a faerie queen, and commanded the tempest to mire her foes on coastal waters, leaving them vulnerable to her fire ships.

The Kingdom of the Sun nurtured the philosophy of nations; for new ideals found fertile ground, spreading a culture of human rationalism and the scientific paradigm. In their concern over the Realm divided, the enlightened scholars aspired to an empire of humankind under a common rational order.

This was the vision of Eutopia, hailed as such by enlightened scholars, architects, and emissaries everywhere; its principle advocate was none other than Nicklaus Copernik, who conceptualised Eutopia as the heliotrope, a world grounded with the light of reason at its centre: that Agony alone caused the world to turn. These ideas spread like wildfire, held as self-evident and sensible, all championing the banner of the Oriflamme as the sign of eminent Reason.

from A Place in the Sun by Auto Eisenmark

The power of the Kingdom of the Sun expanded far beyond its Gallic borders: Albion, still grieving for the death of her faerie queen Gloriana, resolved its Catholic disputes through unification under the rational doctrine of Doron. Yet, Albion and Gaule were studies of contrast: where Louys sought state absolutism, Gloriana had devolved the state through parliament; where Gaule proliferated on land, Albion expanded upon the seas; when revolutions felled Louys, Gloriana's legacy survived.

from One Empire by Vivian Grey

KINGDOM OF THE SUN

The Kingdom of the Sun describes a period of Frankish supremacy, which consolidated Gaule's domination of the West with a two-hundred year rule. From the dawn of the Seventeenth Century until his demise in the Eighteenth, Louys, *le Roi-Soleil,* ruled the West, the bicentennial king.

Louys secured his elevation to Augustus in the successful adoption of the Oriflamme regalia. So complete was his majesty that Paris became the political seat of human enterprise, the world revolved around his court; the balance of power, culture, and economy was Gallic. The Gallic tongue outshone the Latin as *de rigueur*, and Parnasse became the *lingua franca* of politics, diplomacy, and law. Louys turned his eyes to the vacant Prime Mobile, yearning to claim the title of *Rex Mundi*.

Louys' ambitions came with peril. His twin brother, made illegitimate by his machinations, eclipsed his reign. He first denied his brother a name, and then contained him in the Bastille, ensconced in an iron mask. The antagonists to Louys' reign came to regard the man in the iron mask as a vanguard and symbol of liberty. Therefore, while Louys' prime minister, *l'eminence rouge*, sought to maintain the solar reign of order, several of the king's guard undermined that authority, led by a man named d'Artagnian. Ultimately, their machinations undermined the permanent ascension of *le Roi-Soleil* and foiled his claim to be *Rex Mundi*.

DISCOVERY

Constantinople had fallen, and with it the centre of trade; the flow of commerce slowed. The *maestro* of the city emigrated to both the southern coastal lands and central Edessa, and thereby infected the world with pioneering desire. These great voyages brokered the opening of remote horizons: the Antipodes, the Hinterlands, and even the Aether itself.

Upon this wave of explorations, the Realm experienced a grand influx of crops and animals, faerie and takwin populations, and the freer flow of culture with those people. Both of these proved instrumental to the formation of nations and the rise of colonialism.

The world was shrinking, and the horizons held exotic goods for trade. The artisans of the era, bolstered by a heady blend of imagination and exotic alchemical materials, developed new and

marvellous engines, advanced munitions, clever airships, and even automata. The ambitions of the terrestrial rose to lofty flights, defiant of antediluvian lessons in hubris.

Rudimentary balloons flitted up to the Aether, over bramblewoods and sea. Broad, swift ships plied the ocean waves to conquer the Hinterlands. Excavations delving deeply into the Labyrinth and the first rudimentary aetherships made for the planets of the Orrery.

As humanity climbed upwards, forged outward, and dug downwards, the prizes of the Realm became theirs for the taking; these victories were the groundwork for the emerging human empire. For what better proof of the righteousness of humanistic Reason could be found than the triumph of technology in the task of enlightening these mystic lands?

TRAVELS OF GULLIVER

Though the distant Hinterlands were veiled in obscurity, Gulliver, a surgeon of great skill, sought to uncover their mysteries. The voyages of one Lemuel Gulliver recount how he was first washed ashore by shipwreck. Here he found himself the prisoner of the faerie of Breasyl, even though eventually he won the confidence of their court by settling a conflict between the autumn court and their rivals in spring. In reward, they returned him to his home.

Five years later, Gulliver commanded a second voyage to the Hinterlands, when terrible doldrums marooned his ship. A conclave of Ettin soon discovered him, and took him to their home on the coast of Aegypt. Gulliver mired himself again in the affairs of the faerie, to win the favour of their matriarch. Fearing her displeasure, the matriarch's consort contrived to have Gulliver, her favoured toy, released back upon the waves, where passing sailors returned him home once more.

His third and final voyage took place upon an airship of experimental design, as he took to the northern climes. Pirates waylaid his ship, having possession of primitive balloons. Now a guest of

Les Voyages Fantastique by Tomasz Belzowski.

the winter palace, Gulliver became a low-ranking courtier and spent his time seeking to persuade his faerie hosts of the rightness of Scripture over their pagan adherence to Allegory, only to his failure and eventual exile from faerie.

WONDERFUL VIZIER OF OZMAN

The journey of Dorothea, Duchess of Newcastle, was most serendipitous in the manner it opened up a ready way to the Ozman Beylik of below. Her journey began in her youth, when a terrible quake split the earth beneath her and plunged her into the Labyrinth below. Upon her descent, she unwittingly caused a cascade of rock to crush the Cardinal of the East. The residents of Faridot, the eastern quarter, required of her to travel to Zomorrod, the Emerald City, to seek leave of the enigmatic Core.

Upon her journey, she befriended several of the underworld residents, including a Poppet, a Talon, and their automaton tiger. With such companions, she travelled to the Blazing World of Agartha and Zomorrod. Her accounts are complete of a land abundant with alchemical wonders and manipulable gems. Dorothea gained a rare audience with the Core, but account between her and her companions described the Core the same, appearing variably as a giant head, a beautiful woman, a terrible beast, and a ball of fire.

Here, Dorothea found herself embroiled in the epicentre of a power struggle between the Cardinals of the Beylik. Seeking to return home, Dorothea reluctantly agreed to unseat the Cardinal of the West; a creature of porcelain like the Golem. The Cardinal, being half-baked was susceptible to both fire and water. In terrible conflict, she melted the Western Cardinal and restored political equilibrium to the Beylik. The Core gave her passage home, and formally recognised her as ambassador.

BATTLE FOR BARSOOM

John Caret first opened the Aether to exploration as he sought escape from the wars that embroiled the Gallic Republic. The revolutions had bereft Caret of all his wealth, and thus turned to the prospects offered by the planets. He signed up with Phileas Fogg, and his attempt to explore the Aether in eighty days. Then through misadventure, Caret becomes stranded on the newly explored planet of Barsoom.

Upon Barsoom, Caret discovered that his military training would be of great use, and impressed this fact upon the indigenous peoples. Slowly, Caret won the trust of these people, most notoriously seducing the priestess of one of a local tribe. He helped them free themselves from tyrannical subjugation and their forced harvesting of Barsoom's sands for precious melange.

Caret made himself home amongst the Barsoomians, and then turned them into a revolution force. Caret's guerrilla tactics liberated Barsoom, and found him a means to return to the Firmament. Caret returned vital intelligence of the planet, and secure alliance by marriage with the newly instated princess he had helped place in power.

Travel by air to the Hinterlands is an inherently fraught venture, for even airships made of reasonable iron and sound engineering cannot surmount the Marcher Lords and Ladies' mastery of their climates. Few airships that enter faerie airspace are permitted entry. The surest method of travel into the Hinterlands is by the ocean liners.

from My Pilgrimage by Harold Childe

Historically, the Marquis would deter all naval vessels, the Imperium eventually answered with wain-powered ironclads that bested the faerie tempest. Armed with new munitions, the empire circumnavigated the faerie archipelagos; in doing so, they named them and rendered them immutable. They opened ports into those lands, by gold, steel, or blood. Acceding to defeat, the Hinterlands became tributary nations of the empire, their monarchs reduced to marquis.

from Blood and Thunder by Auto Eisenmark

The journey of Dorothea saw an historical shift in human-takwin relations, which revealed the great mineral wealth of the underworld and spurred a wave of diplomatic engagement. No sooner had a permanent mission been founded, than a human settlement was established within the Ozman Empire.

Most such settlers saw little more than standing of a second order in the underworld, subject to specific levies. Yet, the appetite for the underworld's wealth was greater, with successive waves of pilgrims; some were seeking haven from emerging rational order of the empire, while others sought to escape the conflicts of the Schism of the Mousaion, and the subsequent persecution.

from Kulturkampf by Auto Eisenmark

Enlightenment

The Flamboyance gave way to the Enlightenment, as the cultural movement embraced an ideal of Eutopia, emphasising Eidolon through reason and individualism before tradition. The Enlightenment was the culmination of a great project originally laid down by the Templars of yore. Theirs was a blueprint of Absolute Enlightenment, which they had hoped to spread across

the Realm. Though the Flamboyance had blossomed in the Italic Peninsula, it was first realised in the distant shores of Albion.

IVORY TOWER

The Great Plan of Illumination was a conspiracy begun by the Luminary, to enlighten the masses and wipe away the obscurity of yore. It was no less than the vision of the Templars, given new life, and it was born under the reign of Bloody Mary, the Red Queen. It was set in motion by an elusive group named the Ivory Tower, who originally placed Gloriana on the throne.

The master of the Ivory Tower was Ben Salem, apprentice to Prospero. Inheriting Prospero's role as spymaster, Albion acquired unparalleled intelligence, rivalled only by the Mousaion. His ally was Judith Drake, whose voyages made her the paragon of pageantry.

Upon Gloriana's death, she was succeeded by Basil Doron wherein he instigated an esoteric pogrom; Prospero removed himself to the Hinterlands, far from Doron's influence. Salem, the ever-hopeful prodigy, nevertheless sought him out.

A fateful storm stranded him and his crew upon the island of Prospero. There, a great struggle broke out between Propero's servants, and the secret agents of Doron. Ultimately, Prospero and his faerie consorts thwarted their plot upon at that final hour. Prospero broke his staff before them and burned all his books of shadows. With little revelations he gleaned, Salem returned home and planned for a world order, ordained by a new empirical method.

QUICKSILVER LADDER

Mercurius was a prominent member of the Ivory Tower, and bent his many efforts to the modernisation of alchemy. In his works, he discerned the means to harness the alchemical prime of *flux*, or quicksilver. He became master of the Invisible College, but many of the other scholastic charters have otherwise posthumously recognised his membership. His assistant tirelessly documented his life, and these preserve the accounts of Mercurius.

His proficiency with both alchemy and metallurgy landed him the role as the warden of the Albion Mint. In this office, he was charged by the king to uncover a plot to devalue the Albion currency, as coins of silver were being valued more for their metal content than their face value; by this manner, they were purchased and smelted overseas. So complete was the estimation of that currency that it had earned the moniker of dross. Mercurius minted a new coin from orichalcum, specifically for the nobles.

Mercurius minted his new currency with gloss, and it consolidated noble exchange, being valued for its sensitivity to pledges among the nobility. Upon this currency, trust could be sworn and bound to align the aristocracy closer than before.

The Ivory Tower by Tomasz Belzowski.

POET AND THE KING

A secret rebellion led to the fortuitous realisation of Absolute Enlightenment. It was borne from unlikely camaraderie between Münchhausen and Candide; the latter as master of the Ivory Tower. As Elector-Prince, Münchhausen's imaginations were stoked to incandescent aspirations by Candide's writings; he saw a new world order founded on those principles of the illumination.

The two corresponded as master and a pupil: Münchhausen proffered eloquent disquisitions upon destiny and free will, and those matters of great humanism. Candide in his stead replied with great philosophy and minute criticisms. However, by dint of Münchhausen's political ascendancy, relations turned sour. For while Candide professed a slow and steady illumination throughout the Realm, Münchhausen saw a world brought to task. Cynicism grew loathe between them. Both were masters of the secret world, and only one of their wills could reign supreme; even as Candide still enjoyed some seniority between them.

Fortunes reversed, and Münchhausen invited Candide to the pleasure of his court when he lost the favour of the Frankish kingdom, in spite of their growing enmity. Candide was most direct in his opinions on his former friend, and took up the offer only to undermine Münchhausen's ambition from within.

Candide discovered the true depth of Münchhausen's cunning, who had secretly built his own covert network of operatives throughout the various orders. This, his Illuminati, sewed a rift between the old guard of the Ivory Tower, and the newly initiated members of the Tower. The Illuminati has placed their own operatives into increasingly powerful positions.

Münchhausen called a great congress of the Tower in Wilhelmsbad, to determine if the orders should reunite, and under whose leadership. Münchhausen secured the following of the many orders, and through them secured his destiny to Invictus.

Imperial

Opera is experiencing imperial style, as the Ring has defined its modern form. Opera now sung in *Sturmdrang* has captured the popular imagination, even supplanting the traditional language of Cantabile.

The Ring's predecessor Mochart laid the foundations through Edessan Opera. Yet even Mochart and his subsequent pretenders stand in the shadow of the celebrated, and controversial, Geyer: the Ring. His ideals of opera, as musical drama, eliminated distinctions between aria and recitative. He introduced complex and layered effects of leitmotifs, and bolstered the role of the orchestra.

The Ring proved an unerring capacity to remake mythology, transfigured by classical styles; all his works have proved immensely successful. Through the Ring, the mythic qualities of opera have become profoundly modern. Modern opera diverges from those of previous eras, if only by virtue of the presence of mass society. Modern opera revitalises the rise of the Imperium, and celebrate the Münchhausen as the Invictus.

Revolution

Revolution felled the *ancien regime* in great tumult, tearing down the edifice of archaic ideals, possessed of no place in the new order. The Imperial Charters took prominence within the new political praxis, in their efforts to wrest power from the aristocracy and vest it within the masses.

Though the revolutions started as a Gallic affair, they eventually spread across the Realm into a most protracted conflict. They consumed an entire generation in the maw of war and industry. Where once there stood mighty kingdoms, each proud of their territorial expanse and community of noble houses, there now stood nation-states.

Tricoteuse Tribunal

The first sparks of revolution kindled under *le Roi-Soleil*. For two hundred years and more, the Kingdom of Gaule had laboured, thrived, and eventually stagnated under a monarch rapidly losing touch with the changes of industry.

Yearning for the days of greater glory, and seeing the Gallic legacy eclipsed by both Rodina and Edessa, Louys sought to return to his moment in the sun. His rule was increasing encumbered of reversions to authoritarianism, laid bare by scandal. First, the prisoner in the iron mask was discovered, and then followed by his succession of mistresses: popular under Pompadour, but devastating under Capet. A malady beset the king and signs of blight began to appear across his dominion. This tribulation came to be known as the Great Fear, that a king might suffer the ague of the wastes. It signalled sunset for *le Roi-Soleil*, as his house capitulated to the people's demands.

Pressured by his peers, Louys gathered the Estates-General for the first time in over a hundred years. In attendance were the Gallic members of the Mousaion, the lieges of the kingdom, and members within the orders stood as a voice for the people themselves. The tide turned on the formerly glorious king, and the Estates-General secured from him the Oath of the Court, which bound him upon the throne until matters were resolved.

In his ascension to the Invictus, Friedreich changed the Realm, from the Emancipation Proclamation, the imprimatur of Manifest Destiny, the foundation of Absolute Enlightenment, to the declaration of *Pax Aeterna*. All his works avow the supremacy of humanity for history to come.

from The Speeches of Zarathustra by Zarathustra

The seed of revolution was surely born in the court of *le Roi-Soleil*, fermented in the contention between crown and aristocracy as both sought to assert the supremacy of their estate. For the king's part, his stance is much memorialised in his utterance '*l'etat c'est moi*'. There under his regime, power flowed to the centre and drained from the peripheries, leaving the native influence of the aristocratic lords much weakened and brewed great resentment.

from The Vindication of the Aristocracy by Vivian Grey

For the entirety of Louys' reign, he stood at the centre of a vast political nexus, attended by eminent figures of clergy and gentry alike; he was the instrument of dominion. When the lieges of the Estates General came together championing the interests of the common folk, against the crown, it pitted the will of the aristocracy pitted against that of the monarch. Although this tension has been a principle interaction of kingdoms before, few events before this defined that split so profoundly: Louys' failure to perceive that contention was his ultimate undoing.

from A Place in the Sun by Auto Eisenmark

As the days and weeks wore on, the king faded in mind, though not in body. Insurrection fomented among the commonfolk, who stormed the tower of the Bastille. In acute disarray, the peers and commoners alike forged the social contract of the Great Compromise. They issued the Declaration of the Rights of the Citizen and Civilian, and ratified the Ecumenical Constitution to formalise the role of the Mousaion in politics.

As the king signed these final acts, his health failed as terrible gangrene wracked his body. The king still sat upon the throne, beset by blight and his very dominion continued to wither. Insensate but bound, he could not abdicate his throne without breaching his oath. The Estates-General invoked a dire and ancient committee of Sibyls: the Anangke Tribunal, recalling traditions of antiquity able to judge the fates of kings.

Three of the most powerful *eminences grace* in the land sat upon the bench of this tribunal, with the fearsome Madame Defarge at its head. They weighed, measured, and decreed the severing of the king's destiny through decapitation; the symbolic gesture would sever king from kingdom, without breaching his oaths. The mighty guillotine descended upon the *ancien regime*.

CULT OF UNREASON

The execution of Louys dramatically devalued the paper currency used to finance the Revolution, pitching the Gallic Republic unto the brink of civil war. The throne was empty without clear succession. Factional disputes erupted, but eventually resolved with the election of Maximilien Poucock as Regent.

In light of becoming a Republic, Poucock purged many outmoded practices. He acted against an underground movement of great popularity: the cult of unreason had proclaimed themselves as Bacchanalians seeking liberty in revelation. They had laid siege to Notre Dame, to proclaim it the centre of their reveries. They tore down all signs and letters, forgoing their idolatry; the captain of their number was the figure known only as the Scarlet Pimpernel. The Concordat saw within these reveries the decadent trappings of the *ancien regime*, and its utterly baroque pageantry.

Following the purge, Poucock ardently opposed this libertine movement, denouncing it as lurid and licentious. In turn, he announced his own doctrine as the sanctioned creed for the Republic: the Cult of Supreme Reason. It gave virtue to clarity, order, and a certain fidelity to civic-mindedness. In his New Republic, he decreed a modernisation of the Calendar, borrowing with great nostalgia from the ancient Roman Republic and in tribute to the Great Plan of the Illumination; this completed the conversion to the ten-day week.

The new regime had taken a step too far, and triggered its own downfall. In the heart of the new Republic, a commune had formed in sheer defiance to the Cult of Reason, responding to the firebrand works of Sir Percy Blakeney. They declared Paris liberated from autocracy and its dignitaries took charge of the city's civic functions, to severe it from the Republic. Their Convention denounced Poucock as a tyrant and declared him and his comrades as outlaws. Though the Republic remained, the blood of insurrection stained its constitution.

EMPEREUR LION

The Republic faltered under civic duress, as Bourbon loyalists agitated for the *ancien regime*. One figure emerged as a national avatar: General Vendémiaire. A brilliant politician and military leader both, the General shot to greater glory in the minds of the Republic.

Having quelled insurrection, the General turned his attentions to neighbouring states; he contrived to return Gaule to its former imperial status. Through a marvellous orchestrated

The reign of General Vendémiaire was one marked by absolutism, for the skies were his dominion. The most notorious of his engines of war was the floating citadel Marengo, the cathedral of the Cult of Reason. For any lands that fell beneath Marengo's shadow either capitulated or were destroyed, and any vestige of resistance was routed, seemingly assuring the General's ultimate victory. His downfall, secured by the Iron Alliance, surely changed the course of history.

The Invictus, in his wisdom, nevertheless saw many of the benefits of Vendémiaire's rule, and their legacy survives through him: the codes of law, scientific institutions, and public programs to support the swelling population and urban sprawl.

from A Place in the Sun by Auto Eisenmark

Modernity has influenced humanity's interaction with both takwin and faerie: any who enter human-ruled lands of the Realm fall to its collective imagination: they are all diminished in their capacity forcing them into human countenances. As such, faerie cannot exhibit the full multitude of forms given to them in the Hinterlands, and the takwin lack access to the greatest of their alchemical transmutations of the physique.

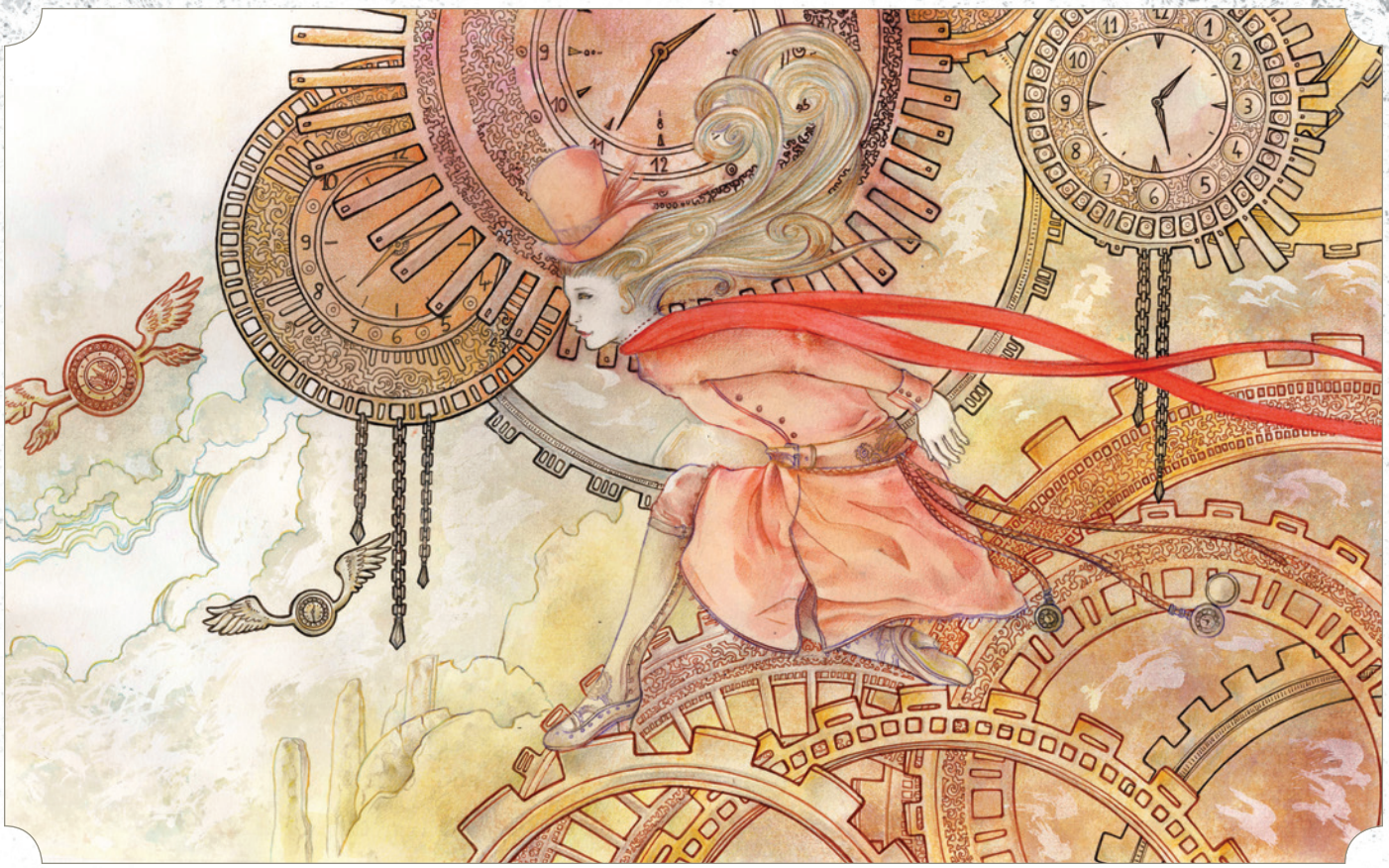
from Kulturkampf by Auto Eisenmark

The 19th Century bears the effects of incredible social transformation, spurred by industry and innovation, and a consequential emigration of populations who sought a new way of life in Metropolaris. The once-idyllic pastures of Elysium yielded to an urban sprawl. The distinction of individual townships became lost, save only by streets that mark their limits. Münchausen named Metropolaris, the greatest city under Palladium, and home to dynastic intrigues.

Humanity had demonstrated a superlative mastery over things material: new metallurgic practices yielded unique metals and primary goods in ways undreamt before; demands of mining, mills, sewage systems, railroads, and manufacture all laid bare the landscape, with terrain ravaged for its mineral resource; steel tracks forged routes straight through the bramblewoods, and brought new wares to the public.

Industrialisation has marred Palladium, and has encroached upon that majesty trunk. A creeping petrification has begun to climb upwards from the roots, where pieces of bark have solidified into a rust-like metal.

from The New Idyll by Cassandra Shore



plebiscite, he secured an implausible weight of a vote that elevated him to *l'Empereur Lion*. He took this mandate and applied the power of his newly developed steam-powered aerial armada, and seized both the Italic territories and Aegypt.

Against these imperial ambitions, Albion, Rodin, and Cimmeria forged a coalition, to defy his aspirations for the Prime Mobile. Upon that coalition, he revealed his most terrifying *Grande Armée*: a corpus of 10,000 armed automata that he had wrought in secret. With these forces, he seized Elysium, deploying his troops via aerial assault. He declared his intention for the Prime Mobile and the Invictus, there to append his title of *l'Empereur Lion* with *Rex Mundi*.

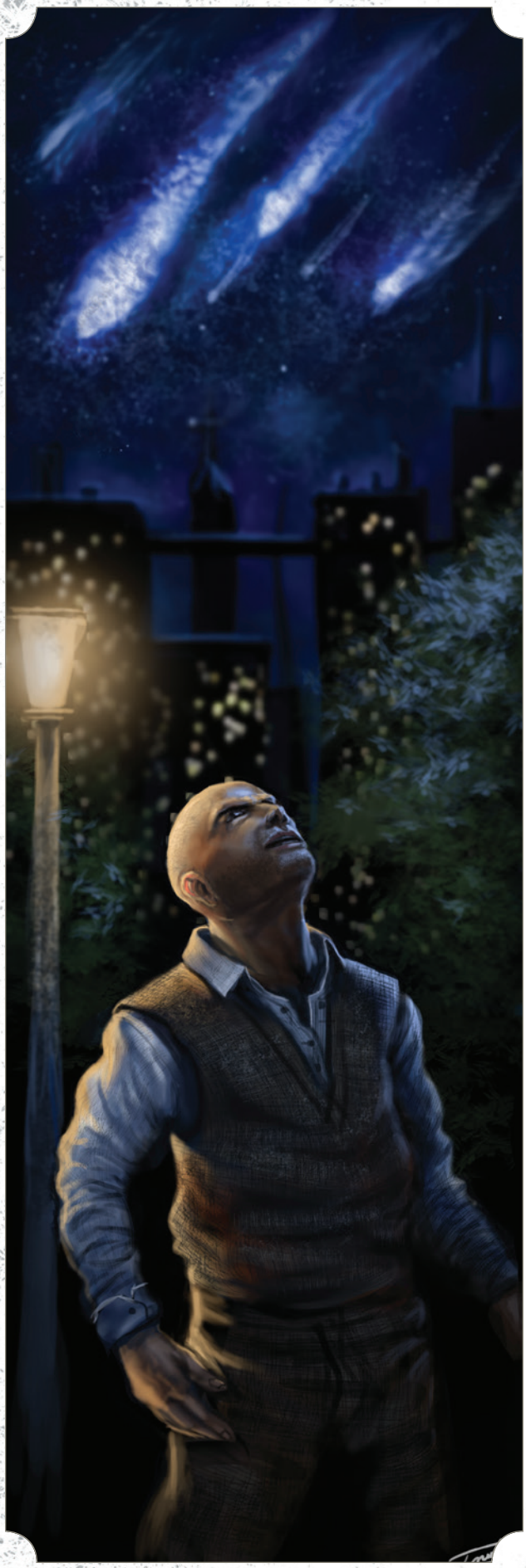
Even that most implacable of masters found his fate undermined. In a scheme devised by none other than Münchhausen, the General met his end at the hands of the Iron Alliance: from Albion, the Iron Duke crushed his armies, while the Edessan Iron Chancellor destroyed his political hold. They felled Marengo and imprisoned *l'Empereur Lion*.

The victory was forged in iron, blood, and thunder, all driven by the supreme political acumen of Münchhausen. The General had failed to understand the potency of the many orders, of which Münchhausen commanded potent loyalty. Though it was the end of Vendémiaire's reign, it signalled the ascension of Münchhausen to the Invictus.

Imperium

The turbulence of the Revolutions ebbed, to give way to subtle but treacherous cultural shifts. The staid cultures of the aristocracy achieved counterpoint through the bohemian demands of industry and science. The people cried out for validation and emotional succour, rejecting and scorning convention.

The Race of Time by Claire Pacheco.



Starfall by Forrest Imel.

However, the aristocracy offered riposte: in one short year, they marshalled formidable assets, adjourned their disunion, and sought return to the *ancien regime*. The result was not victory, but the extension of the Great Compromise that underscored the Gallic Republic. Though the nobility retained or reinstated their places of privilege, the commoners attained emancipation. No longer were the communities of humankind circumscribed purely by matters of allegiance, but instead by the comity of nationhood.

STARFALL

At the dawn of the new Century, humankind saw the falling of stars, which scattered brilliant motes across the skies like burning jewels. Its trail remains in the living memory of only a few, yet they will tell you that it was nature's most opulent display. In passing, it invigorated the quick that ran through the veins of many lords and ladies, stirring rivulets of quick in long-since dormant lineages.

In the aftermath of Starfall, the aristocracy found the tensions of their power plays raised to fantastic pique as never before. It soon became apparent that Starfall had graced the nobility with the eugenic effects to augment many of their talents to the apex of human potential.

The Elector-Prince Münchhausen deemed Starfall as the omen he had been waiting for: to realise Eutopia. As the General Vendémiaire reached out to seize the Realm, he stood before the Electors of Edessa and proclaimed his pedigree belonged to the greatly diminished lineages of Sylvan kings; a startling revelation that embroiled Edessa in turmoil. Despite the impediments arrayed against him, Münchhausen demonstrated his mastery of diplomatic acumen to unite many minor nobles through the orders behind him. Building upon his network among the orders, to lay foundations for what would become his Chancery, lending him sufficient political and tactical supremacy over the Edessa Electorate.

Münchhausen enjoyed an advantageous position compared to the other Great Powers. Too little, too late; the Realm came to understand that he had amassed vast panoply of powers, not reckoned in individual measure, and underestimated in their whole. With their backing, and the subsequent defeat of the Vendémiaire, Münchhausen successfully claimed the title of Invictus.

REX MUNDI

Münchhausen's consolidation unto the principle power of Invictus was not without incident, for he received a challenge from the combined might of the eight nations. Albion and Gaule, both industrial powers, were the prime contenders for this claim. Only marriage between Münchhausen and the Albion's Queen Valetoria ensured sufficient support from all the Great Powers to his claim. Though both Rodin

and Cimmeria contended this union, they could not match the combined might of the Western Nations.

Münchhausen implemented his grand design, and one declared his majesty for all to see. In admiration for his Queen, he commissioned the manufacture of the most grandiose building in all history. Using the talents of the aerial armada, and the skills of a great many alchemists, Münchhausen placed a new star within the heavens: the great citadel of Diadem upon the nape of the Meridian. At its heart stood Adamantine, his Imperial Palace, and it served to demonstrate his triumph over all.

He invited the powers of the Realm to attend his imperial chamber of the Panorama, wherin he had relocated the Prime Mobile itself. Before all his allies and his enemies, he sat upon that perilous throne, and contended for its claim for a full day and night before consolidating the hierogamy across his dominion. The powers of the Realm had stood in testimony of his rise to *Rex Mundi*.

CELESTIAL FAMILY

The rise of an imperial power was first challenged by the League of Nations, a coalition of the national heads of state; they sought to keep his imperial ambitions in check. In turn, Münchhausen sought out and solicited the alliance of the various archetypes. Münchhausen's alliance with the Oracle provided him a great advantage, as her prophetic insights guided him towards the location of some of the more erstwhile archetypes. Valetoria's position as Queen-consort and the Mother of Nations elevated her to the station of Dynast.

Several Arcana were public knowledge, to whom Münchhausen had formed cordial relations;, including the Sphinx and the Centurion both. Others proved more elusive, through their enigmatic nature. The most difficult to locate were the Effigy and the Vagabond, and of the two the Effigy proved more difficult, for Fouroux was its first incumbent. Only by the intuition of the Oracle did the Invictus position his agents to coincide with his moment of ascension. The Vagabond proved difficult in location by virtue of his nature being one of wanderlust.

The most dramatic of their number was certainly the Magician: the revelation of this character followed the conflict of two contemporary scientific heroes competed for that archetype. The first assumed the guise of the Wizard of the East and the latter as the Wizard of the Coast, Nikolai Techna and Tom Alvason respectively. The former was the preferred envoy of the Imperium and the latter was backed by the League of Nations.

Both men waged an electric war across the skies of Metropolaris from buoyant airships. Their fierce competition with all manner of galvanic contraptions was both horror and marvel as the night skies became lit as a thunderstorm, with scattered lightning strikes in every direct encounter. They met, equipped with elaborate suits of mad science: thunder staves met with force shields, jet propulsion against magnetic levitation. All culminated in one final dramatic battle when Techna forced the surrender of his opponent by driving him into the ground.

Opposite: Theatre by Socar Myles.

All the Realm's a stage, and the first true act is one of exposition; dreamt here are all things in heaven and earth, and all places in between. From the very nape of the Aether to the deepest depths of Umbrage, we set the stage where our stories thus begin.

Act 1: Exposition

THEATRE

Orrery

All of known reality is contained within a monumental clockwork machine called the Orrery, and whose monumental scaffolding, the Meridian, marks the outer limits of the observable cosmos. The Realm of humankind rests upon the largest gear, which bisects the Orrery into heavenly Aether above and the chthonic Umbrage beneath. This is the Firmament, and upon its span are multitudes of landscapes that play home to the abundance of life within the Realm. The turning of the Firmament, and thus the Realm of humankind, moves in complex fashion. The lights of day and night are reflected by the Pendulum, which depends from the lamp of the Empyrean; it is the source of both these lights.

Beyond the Meridian, there is nothing but endless void, where the luminiferous ether that permeates the Orrery simply peters out; not even aethercraft can propel beyond into that lack of medium. Scarce knowledge exists of the void, for it lies beyond all known limits, and all forfend whatever might survive in that lightless abyss.

Be not content with the vulgarisation of the world, for only the small folk deign to name the magnificence of the world with mundane terms. As masters of the very Realm, shall we not employ rarefied language to denote all these wonders of reality? To name the world merely as the Realm is disingenuous, as that name defines only the sovereign lands of human empire. Indeed, consider the name Eidolon as the only word that expresses entirety of both waking and dreaming reality, and all terrestrial, chthonic, and heavenly planes. Be satisfied with nothing less.

from Essais Philosophiques by Count August

Empyrean

The celestial lamp of the Empyrean is the house wherein the lights of day and night shine. Within are the twin orbs of Agony and Ecstasy: the first, a brilliant, burnished orb that radiates the light of Reason; the latter an incandescent, opalescent orb that illuminates the light of Rhyme. There is no direct knowledge about the twin orbs housed within the Empyrean lamp itself. What scholars have deduced of their nature is from observations around the qualities of the light they cast, and from era-long studies of the motions of the heavens.

The Empyrean lamp falls behind an imperceptible boundary of the sky, the Ephemeris, which veils its true brilliance. To all observers on the ground, the Empyrean is naught but a gentle star stationed high above the *axis mundi* of the Firmament. It is the brightest star in all the sky, and is faintly visible even under the light of day. The Empyrean is a polar star, guiding all weary and wary travellers towards the central hub of the Realm with great certainty. Yet, for those to fly through the heavens on dauntless aetherships, the star is terrible and awesome to behold; cosmonauts have been blinded by gazing upon the untempered lights of the Empyrean.

Humanity has long wondered as to the workings of the Empyrean. How is it that the alternations of the brilliant light of day, and the quiescent light of night, match the swing of the Pendulum so perfectly?

The dominant theory purports that the orbs of Agony and Ecstasy revolve in the housing of the Lamp of the Empyrean. Each in turn expresses the greatest radiance when near the base of the Lamp, which is then reflected across the Realm by the Pendulum. This theory, seems to best explain the synchronisation of the period of the Pendulum with night and day.

There is also a countervailing theory, which criticises the standard model as being unable to explain adequately either the Eclipse or the waxing and waning of the Pendulum's lunar face. Instead, their theory holds that a lens rotates within the Lamp, which projects the light downward in the manner of a lighthouse. However, while this theory would explain the Eclipse, it is not supported by empirical observations of the Lamp from the Aether, as voyagers have not reported any beams of light sweeping above the Lamp.

from Deus Machina by Nikolai Techna

Pendulum

The passage of day and night are counted by the swing of a great mirrored Pendulum; though inhabitants upon the ground can only observe the mirrored disc and the smallest length of the pendulum's stem. Each complete period of the pendulum swing counts a single day and night: as the Pendulum west, it reflects the light of Agony, bringing day to the Realm; by night, the Pendulum returns east, but captures and reflects the subtle light of Ecstasy, to cast the pall of night instead.

A single swing back and forth is one day, and measures the smallest count of the Orrery. As the Pendulum passes the midway point, marked by the faintly visible Meridian line, observers mark the Zenith hour by, and Nadir hour by night. When the Pendulum reaches the limits of the eastern horizon humankind reckons the hour of Dawn, and likewise the hour of Dusk upon the western skyline. Through the Calendar, humanity then divides the duration of period into four-and-twenty hours.

EPHEMERIS

The Ephemeris is thin line that separates the skies above with the true heavens of the Aether beyond. Within that dome of the sky, one may find clouds and airs of mundane nature, but beyond the ether becomes the dominant medium. Its nature is one of concealment, providing an immaterial barrier between the real and mundane landscapes of the Firmament, and the surreal heavens of the Aether beyond.

The presence of the Ephemeris helps obscure the strangest of this celestial wilderness from observation below: the residents of the Realm below sees the Aether beyond filtered through the Ephemeris, which renders the abstractions therein into the mundane; the sacred becomes profane. Indeed, the largest components of the Orrery are scarcely seen, except by careful stargazing by night. The Pendulum remains the only component of the Orrery to dip beneath the Ephemeris, though its stem rises upwards and beyond towards the Empyrean.

OPHANIM

The Ophanim are three flattened rings of monumental size that encompass the entire Firmament. These celestial wheels are mounted high within the Aether, with their very structures hidden by the light of day and visible only in glimpses at night.

Each plays an important role in the direction of history upon the Firmament. Their gears intersect with the structures of the Orrery to measure and meter its motions, and to govern the various cycles of fate and time. Yet, of these three portentous wheels of the heavens, only one may set the course that turns the Firmament, moving the Realm in accordance with the heavens. For the Ophanim have paramount importance in the direction of history, as each of these wheels contains a particular end of history, which works itself upon the Realm through its synchronisation to the Firmament. This wheel determines the supremacy of faerie, human, or takwin.

In times past, the Realm has turned in accordance to either the Norn or the Synod, but with the founding the Calendar, humankind has leashed the Firmament to the Zodiac instead. This was no less than a usurpation of the destiny of both faerie and takwin alike. Though they both concede humanity's dominance, neither forgets the Eschaton: each subtly contends and undermines humanity's primacy.

NORN

The oldest Ophanim is the Norn, which is intimately linked to the changes of the seasons and the principle of Dream. Its Eschaton prophecies history as imagined through allegory and symbolism. The hosts of faerie most closely attend to it.

Most stargazers track the movement of the Norn by two iridescent markings on its opposite extremities. Both are luminescent objects unto the likeness of stars, with only the Empyrean and the royal stars

Depended Brilliance by Lino Dreighe.

being brighter. Their movement is such that only one of the two appears in the night sky at any given moment: for when one is ascendant, the other lies hidden beneath the horizon.

The first is Castor and glows a gentle warm red. Its colour marks the beginning of spring upon the horizon and summer as it passes the Meridian. Its twin is Pollux, which is pale blue in hue. When on the horizon, it heralds the start of autumn and declares winter come upon the Meridian.

ZODIAC

The largest Ophanim is the Zodiac, and it governs the growing and failing of solar light emitted by Agony across the year, and otherwise accords to the principle of Destiny. The portents of the Eschaton of the Zodiac divines one where history as set as a written scripture. It is the history most devoutly professed by the members of humanity.

As the Zodiac turns of the Firmament, the revolution of a single year takes exactly three-hundred and sixty-four periods of the Pendulum. Humanity measures the turning of the Zodiac by the division of its arc into twelve months, each measuring an arc of thirty degrees. The Zodiac turns a single degree with each day, and so a single month contains a count of thirty days and nights. Each month is named for its constellation that marks its inner strip.

In similar manner, the circle of the Zodiac is apportioned into series of ten periods of day and night; each span is called a week. Thus, each of the twelve months contains three weeks apiece, and the year all told contains six-and-thirty. This leaves only four of the total days unaccounted. These are the Hallows, being the two solstices and the two equinoxes. Upon these four days, the very Zodiac seems to suspend its motion, and thus humanity reserves these four points of the year for high ceremony.

SYNOD

The smallest Ophanim is the Synod. Its movement links obscurely to the principle of Death and the lunations of Ecstasy, the manner in which produces the waxing and waning of lunar light over a shorter cycle of thirty-two full days.

As the Synod turns, a shadow shrouds the surface of the Pendulum. It transitions from a fully lit circle unto a barely lit glow, and each phase reveals a different shape known as a lune. Each lune reveals itself across one of eight spans, with each spanning four days apiece. When the Pendulum's reflection is at the greatest illumination, the Great Lune, it acquires the name of animal symbolic for the month it stands in. With the single intercalary lune that occurs within a year named as the Blue Lune.

PLANETARY

Though the Firmament is the largest gear within the Orrery, it is not the only celestial body of its kind. It numbers among five similar realms, each one home to an alien land. Recent advancements in aethercraft have enabled the Imperium to extend its reach to these distant lands, and there establish colonies of humankind. For those who would gaze up towards the heavens for these solitary wanderers, they can see naught but quickly moving stars; they are named planets.

Each planet is stabilised by a spire monument as the core of its disc. They are *axis mundi* for these planetary gears, in similar manner to the World Tree of the Firmament. However, where the Firmament is stabilised by five such monuments, the World Tree and four Cardinal Pillars, these Realms possess only one. The observation is that this difference explains why the Firmament experiences a diversity of climates, where instead the climates of these planes are polarised affairs of their own particular natures.

STILBON

Stilbon is the smallest planet and revolves in tight orbit around the Empyrean Lamp. Its proximity to the Lamp exposes the planet to the twin lights of Agony and Ecstasy, of day and night, but unmediated by the ether. Stilbon is a frontier world, where its inhabitants eke a meagre existence where they can, and sometimes earns the name of Border World. The world is lawless and most of its justice is meted through the hands of vigilantes or town marshals.

The planet's axial spire of frozen mercury splits the light in two, to reflect the solar light downwards to the inner hub of the Realm and the night light outwards towards the rim. The inner circle of Stilbon bathes in perpetual day, while the outer rim falls forever to night. Those few colonies of humankind that settle upon this realm abide upon the central band of twilight that divides the two regions.

AMTOR

Amtor is the most habitable of realms outside of the Firmament. Its surface holds a large ocean speckled with numerous archipelagos, all encircled by a circumference of massive ice shelves that stand at its outer limits. Amtor is famed for its menagerie of fantastic creatures, picturesque landscapes, and strange customs. It hearkens back to the high days of heroism, as Amtor has become a safe haven for privateers and buccaneers. Its strong-willed Pirate Queen defies the will of the Imperium, as represented by John Clayton's delegation, and declares the entire world a freehold. Amtor is rife with espionage, and frequent bouts of conflict erupt amongst its people be means of rigid airships.

The central spire of Amtor is a mountainous copper needle, which captures most of the heat from the Empyrean Lamp, meaning the seas that encircle the needle are a seething, churning caldera of steaming ocean waters. This boiling bore fills the skies with a roiling mantle of storm that obscures all in the heavens. With fire and ice upon its extremities, the realm is a contrast of heat and cold, where the most clement weather visits those midland islands.

BARSOOM

Barsoom is the planet that captures the imagination of the Imperium. It is home to the most prestigious colonies, yet mired by intrigue and strife. Barsoom is subject to the greatest appetites of the Imperium, and the most ardent of its ambitions.

More colonists live here than on any single planet, and Barsoom entails the first settled realm of all the planets. Generations of frontier Barsoomian colonists have made this realm their home since planet-fall so many centuries ago, and many of them have risen in insurrection against the Imperium, claiming Barsoom as their homeland. Despite such bloodshed being imminent to the residents of this realm, it is far removed from the mundane concerns of most on the Firmament.

This desert world is rich with mineral resources, and notably contains vast quantities of the star metal necessary for the construction of aethercraft. The greatest of these sources is the monumental siderite spire at the centre of the world, which overshadows the capital garden city at its base. This paradise is secluded from the desiccating desert winds. These rocky cliffs divide the realm into contrasts of wet and dry, indicating the limits of the realm's natural precipitation. Beyond those cliffs, the inhabitants of the red sands depend on a system of *kanats* for irrigation.

SETHLAN

Sethlan is a world of intrigue, filled with paradox and mystery. Its place between the inner worlds and the outer transient worlds sometimes earns it the name of the Middle Kingdom. It world is

home to an empire of similar magnitude to the Imperium under the rule of the euphemistically named the Jade Emperor: an eponym ascribed to it by virtue of the large adamant-jade spire that stabilises the core of the world.

Though the world is highly enigmatic, often isolating itself from outside intrusion, it is home to a variety of exotic trade that entice many merchants to its home; though all trade with Sethlan is concentrated at the treaty ports, with the interior of virtually unpenetrated by visitors. Contemporaries have varied portrayals of this land, having constructed an image of this world from a hazy knowledge of its history, vague cultural impressions, and numerous preconceptions.

TRANSIENT WORLDS

Eurobus and Lulim are two most unusual planets, for their orbits move them and between the various bands of the Ophanim. These planets wander to the very edge of the cosmic perimeter that the Ophanim establish, and their orbits keep them far from the warming reach of the Lamp of the Empyrean. Their orbits are transient, as they lie beyond the best measure of warmth and light, making them unwelcome to any living being from the Firmament.

A few expeditions have sought to study and investigate these realms, and rare are those that return from the fathomless space beyond their reach. Their proximity to the great Ophanim induces frequently quakes and volcanic activity. Though these worlds are rich with mineral wealth, the Imperium has deemed them unsafe for colonisation even as mining expeditions are not unknown, chartered by private expeditions.

Firmament

The Firmament comprises a vast number of distinctive landscapes, spread across several continents within the vast Pelegeate Ocean. The largest of these continental lands is the Literal Continent, or Literate. Beyond the mainland, lay four the large subcontinents of Frisia, Anatolia, Numidia, and Skania. Beyond those are the smaller continental Alluvial Hinterlands; and beneath all lies the Labyrinth and the Antipodes.

The Literate is home to the Imperium: the commonwealth of humanity encompassing eight diverse nations and a plethora of culturally diverse populations. The coasts of the Literate delimit the empire-proper, though its influence extends to both subcontinents. Though there are human habitations in places beyond the Literate, they are colonies that often depend upon the support of the empire they have left behind.

PALLADIUM

At its very heart of the Realm stands Palladium: the majestic World Tree and *axis mundi*; reckoned as the oldest known living thing, and regarded widely with adoration. She rises above the Realm, reaching ever-higher towards the imperial city of Diadem. Though she lacks the proper crown of foliage that adorns her kin, a mantle of smaller boughs regally adorns her.

Her presence stabilises the lands in her immediate surrounds with mundane influence. As one travels outwardly from her influence, the lands become ever increasingly more mutable. At the limits of the Literate, in the subcontinental dominions, the distinctions of waking and dreaming start to blur. A step once more and the distinctions between dream and matter are not so clear, and it is here in the Hinterlands where faerie have made their homelands. Beyond those lands still in the deep fathomless waters of the Pelegeate Ocean, the stuff of nightmares and daydreams may clash with those of corporeal form, rising out of the abyssal depths below. Then at the very limits of the

ocean swell, where the lights of Agony and Ecstasy can scarcely touch, the very substrate of reality things into formless dreams and all matter turns to ephemeral mist.

BRAMBLEWOODS

The bramblewoods are long stretches of primeval forest. They are always much bigger on the inside than they seem on the outside. For once entered into, the forest grows larger, older and more unbearable as one approaches the deepest parts of the wood.

The source of the bramblewoods stems from the runners of briar and bramble that permeate the undergrowth. Each of these growths run in meandering lines across the countryside, causing corridors of briar-choked forest from the roots of Palladium to the coasts of the Literate and beyond.

Not all the Realm's forests are bramblewoods, and some lines of bramblewoods run through forests of larger size. Yet, wherever the runners of bramble grow, the lands become fecund and ripe with newly sprung verdant growth that soon eclipses the land with forestry.

Combined, they form a thorny network that criss-crosses across the landscape in a manner that divides the world into discrete territorial enclaves. They are naturally resistant to cultivation and are often perilous to traverse; they have since come to serve as natural borders for the numerous domains that comprise the territories of the empire, each a fiefdom unto itself.

Of the many lines of bramblewoods, several stand larger and taller than normal. These are the bracers, and they delineate the ducal boundaries of the provinces.

Passage through the bramblewoods is fraught with constant danger; for even while modern technologies provide sure and certain paths through those tulgy woods, they are ever an eldritch domain, thought to possess some native intellect.

In turns, the bramblewoods has demonstrated either beneficence or hostility to those intrepid mortals that dare tread upon its turf. I would even say that of the trods, which are the wayfarers' friends, sometimes warrant a second guess. I have known them to shift about in treacherous manner, as though to lead the traveller astray and deeper into the heart of darkness.

from My Pilgrimage by Harold Childe

WITHYWINDLE

The trunk of Palladium twists about itself, and the folds of its trunk provide natural pathways up to her peak. These archaic roads are the Withywindle, and they provide the primary means reaching Palladium's summit. The journey up the length of the Withywindle can take several weeks of arduous caravan travel.

Numerous small communities dot the side of the trunk, providing waypoints for such travellers. These waypoint villages have even sprouted into farming communities that have cultivated a large numbers of vineyard crops along the height of the trunk, working with the vertical nature of their terrain. The housing in these places is likewise vertically stratified, and the various townships are known for its great many flights of winding stairs and bridges that soar across various gaps.

JOACHIM AND BOAZ

At the summit, one will find the twin cities of Joachim and Boaz. The agricultural communities of Joachim and Boaz stand on opposite sides of the summit built and expanding onto the broad boughs around them for their crops. These farming estates fall directly under the purview of the Imperium, which make these heavenly plains the breadbasket of Diadem.

The summit holds the principle point of departure to catch a ferry by skyhooks up towards Diadem, the imperial city. The proximity of these towns to Diadem has meant that both Joachim and Boaz have become cultural centres. Historically, the bureaucrats have favoured Joachim as a place for their country estate, and the township has become eminently gentrified. Joachim has acquired an air of sophistication, which makes it the site of a great many forums and public squares, all alive with political debate and rhetoric.

In contrast, the town of Boaz is more of an artists' colony, drawing artistes and auteurs from all around the Realm. The township enjoys the fame of its splendid Hollow Amphitheatre, found

The Prime Mobile by Lino Dreighe.

in a huge cleft at the peak of Palladium, having been sculpted and shaped to provide an excellent acoustic platform. Once each year, Boaz hosts an art festival that often draws the patronage of the Invictus himself.

Diadem

In the neap of the heavens and thrusting downwards from the Meridian is the great shining city known as Diadem. It hangs as a monument to the aspirations of humankind, housing the imperial palace Adamantine and the Coronal itself.

Its position upon the Meridian means it frequently catches some small emanation from the Empyrean Lamp, which lends the city a lustrous radiance is visible from the ground below. It shines from the heavens like a low-hanging star. Diadem is a crown among the Imperium's many treasurers, and one of the greatest achievements of the Invictus, wrought upon his ascension as emperor.

Adamantine

The palace Adamantine sits at the very centre of a series of rising terraces that stratify the city. The architects adopted the principles used in creating the legendary city of Atlas to build that structure, or so they estimate. The architects have emphasised the palace's enormity through the employment of trees and statues that serve to be dwarfed by its edifice, not merely to add beauty to the spectacle. The entire structure is a single crystal of formidable adamant, which gives the palace its name.

Alongside the eponymous adamant, the palatial construction features numerous other alchemical materials, including white panels of gloam, rungs of siderite, and scrollwork of pure

orichalcum. The designs of the palace highlight smooth, curved, lines for mosaic effect. All angles and refractions are soft, to create an illusion of depth and space. Cunning use of mirrors and crystalline pillars permit an ambient glow to permeate the entire building, creating light without any apparent source.

PANORAMA

At the heart of Adamantine is Panorama, the imperial court, where one will find the Prime Mobile upon a gigantic dais. The throne itself is nearly as tall as the entire chamber, and two large helical pillars flank it: one of horn and one of ivory. A set of five pendulous orbs lights the chamber, each casting their own variety of light, which scatters hues across the room for a variety of moods.

As the imperial court, Panorama is the vantage point from where its members can observe nearly every facet of the Realm below. Its floor is a mercurial substance, which ripples gently with every footstep but does not yield. Upon a simple command by a member of the Coronal, the floor instantly resolves to show a given domain. These means of surveillance are complimented by a number of communication devices mounted upon the walls of the chamber, each having been attuned to a counterpart in other places of power throughout the Realm.

The Panorama can also project the affairs of its court. As the Arcana of the Coronal are the most celebrated figures of the entire Realm, their political affairs are the subject of interest and intrigue by all. For as much as the puissant nobles of the Imperium constantly look outwards to the worrld, their own affairs provide one of the greatest shows of the whole empire. Many citizens watch the broadcasts of their pageantry, relishing their pomp and splendour. Through this, the multitudes below have come to know and love the members of the Imperium.

The Prime Mobile is the imperial throne and the exemplar of other such seats of power. However, where most thrones link its incumbent to a single expanse of a land, the Gnomon below augments this link to encompass the entire sovereign dominion of the empire. By remaining in state upon this throne, the Invictus guide humanity towards its destiny, to claim its place of triumph upon the Eschaton.

One of the more unusual phenomena observed of the Invictus upon the throne, is the aura of supreme majesty that emanated from him while occupying the throne; it renders him nigh infallible and able to command a geas on those before it.

from Letters of Ganymede by Vivian Grey

Capital

Metropolaris is the city of cities, as the geographic, administrative, and cultural centre of the empire; so named for its station beneath the polar star that is the Empyrean Lamp.

Metropolaris is a city of stories, packed with people, resounded through orotund cries of wares and politics, and interlaced with the distinctive aroma of spice, smoke, and steel. It represents the epitome of cosmopolitanism: names, language, ideology, and all manner of values combine to great discord and odd harmony.

As the centre of the Realm, the city is home to a multitude of people and their myriad dreams, all constantly churning in restless activity. Its residents know well the muddled press of bodies, whose movements remain all but inscrutable to visitors. It is both a den of iniquity mired by internecine danger, which plays host to historic monuments of faded glory. There are practitioners of every tradition in numbers sufficient to form congregations, ghettoes filled with non-humans denizens, a mixture of national currencies interspersed among the Imperium's golden standard.

Life within the city transforms traditional relationships; personal connections are more fleeting, and individuals become exposed to a great diversity of residents. More than anywhere else, nobles consort with the masses. Though the elite ostensibly practice egalitarianism, they often prefer to appreciate alien sensibilities from a distance. It is not uncommon to see an aristocratic palanquin being carried by a cadre of takwin sentinels, or attended by faerie artistes. The nightbreed residents skulk amid the dark recesses of the city, and many form lives in insular community clusters.

One popular metaphor describes Metropolaris as head of the empire, engaged in sophistry and politics. It then regards the provincial domains as the empire's body: its provincial estates contain the wealth of nations; its many domains give rise to an abundance of crop and livestock; its railways convey impulses of news from the centre to the empire's extremities and back.

from Operatic Tropes by Leubald Geyer

Cityscape

Since the founding of Ur, there has been human habitation in this place. Over the millennia, a network of independent villages grew to comprise a great quantity of land, all contained within the ring-wall of the Ramparts. With the rise of industry and its huge influx of people, the cityscape has overtaken all the natural terrain about the base of Palladium, covering every scrap of available land with dwellings and industry.

The city is in layers: ruin upon ruin, with grandiose architecture of the imperial decorative art standing alongside promenades of classical pillars of crumbling stone, and faded murals of glories long passed. Metropolaris is three cities in one: from the wealthy and elite Corona, to the mercantile and middling Penumbra, and the poverty-stricken Silhouettes. The layout is a vast warren of distinctive boroughs, each nestled against each other.

Thus, the city spreads out across three concentric terraces, each divided by physical and symbolic barriers to demonstrate the relative privilege of residents. Such division is a study in contrasts, wherein Corona, self-proclaimed bastion of enlightenment and culture, casts a shadow over-long on the Silhouettes overtaken by manufacture and tenement lots.

Population

The vastness of Metropolaris' citizenry beggars belief, a population of fifty-five million beings all told. However, this number does not include uncounted score that hides from the census in the Grotto beneath; they are thought to number another one-and-forty million inhabitants. However,

the strata of populations in each of the city's three terraces changes from one extremity to the other, for the more affluent a borough are the more uniformly human its population becomes.

Those residents who are not of human nature still experience a lack of social mobility, despite the promise of a cosmopolitan city. Both faerie and takwin are vulnerable populations with limited entitlements as humanity is. The faerie emissaries have often noted that Metropolaris holds the largest concentration of their ilk in a single location; for not even the majestic cities of the Hinterlands hold such populations. In like manner, the takwin profess ignorance of the totality of their kind species that live here. Imperial estimates hold the combined number of its alien inhabitants to constitute a robust population of six and one half million members.

Of what one could say of the denizen subjects, those poor once-human nightbreed, is perilous at best while their presence is poorly understood. They number at least as many as both faerie and takwin combined, but their status as denizens, and not as citizens, mean their place in Metropolaris is poorly defined.

CORONA

Closest to the hub of Palladium, Corona contains only the most wealthy and powerful personages, ad boasts a mostly human population, and but represents a tiny fraction of the city's entire population. Most who reside here yearn instead for the Imperial city of Diadem above, and constantly work towards being elevated to that place.

Though Corona bears scarcely any natural landscapes, it contains numerous parks and gaming reservations. In light of an Imperial decree demanding the conservation of Palladium, Corona remains safe from the dense urbanisation that characterises the rest of the city. Artisans have left little to chance, for the natural reserves are such in name only, for they too are subject to the landscaping design of many artisans.

Corona rises above the Palains, the six between the roots of Palladium. The very names of the Palains invoke power and prestige: Brannenborg, Bohem, Cologne, Mainz, Trine, and Witteborg; each is home to the eminent members of both the Senate and the Auspice. The Palains are also home to the eight executive chambers for each of the national governments, each provides a front to a vast administrative complex. They stand beside embassies from the Cardinals of the takwin and the faerie Marquis. Those rare instances of faerie and takwin inhabitants represent their respective diplomatic corps.

The concentration of power and the nearness of imperial influence, makes the Palains are a hotbed of diplomatic and bureaucratic intrigue. Here the imperial ministers receive orders from Adamantine, though they stand sufficiently removed from the seat of power that they are given some license to interpret and deliver them. The entire political complex stands apart from imperial power, such that the diplomatic corps may conduct their politics in clandestine manner.

Perhaps the greatest political victory of the Invictus was his careful and deliberate arrangement of sovereign rights, arrayed under the Imperium. To each nation, he acknowledged the authority of the deliberative assembly of each, and their respective capital cities. Yet, he soon thereafter commissioned the construction of the formal residences for their respective heads of state.

Diplomatic missions accept this as a demonstration of imperial hospitality; as a means for the nations' most powerful and eminent figures to stay close to the imperial seat of power. Yet they are constantly reminded that all Corona, as magnanimous as it is, stands eclipsed by Diadem.

from The Birth of Nations by Valetoria Regina

GNOMON

The Gnomon comprise a series of twelve of obelisks, each decorated with manifold inscription and arrayed in a near-perfect circle, almost concentric with the Ramparts. Their number of twelve aligns with each of the twelve months of the Zodiac; and together they link between the movements of that Ophanim and the Firmament together. As the Gnomon underpins this link, its many objects are of great political and strategic importance; each falls under watchful custody.

The Gnomon form part of an ancient wall that entirely encloses Corona. They mark the original bounds of Ur: the Palisade. Its length of unmortared stone possesses an array of truly

beautiful ancient architecture: a great number of historic friezes, and other works commissioned by the Imperium.

PENUMBRA

In the literal shadow of the Corona is the second concentric ring of city, comprising a collection of boroughs known as the Penumbra. Almost half of the human population of Metropolaris resides here, living in neighbourhoods of moderate-density and distinctive affluence.

As the second most-affluent terrace, typifies the median distribution of the city's population. Its residents comprise a population of moderate wealth and prestige, albeit incomparable to that of Corona. More than any other place within the Realm can one find such an immense concentration of the bourgeoisie, outnumbering the aristocracy two to one.

Penumbra contains the former network of trading villages that historically lay beyond the walls of Ur. The medieval names of these villages remain as the city districts grew up around them with the central point of each borough focused on the original site of their village's market square. As Metropolaris industrialised, architects modernised each market with fantastically elaborate agoras. Though the original architectural façade were maintained, they conceal new industry. Each plays host to the municipality's gubernatorial authority and a variety of guildhalls; they thus retain the salient qualities of their historic origins.

SILHOUETTES

The last concentric ring of the city is the Silhouettes: a sprawl of industrial complexes servicing the city through rivers and rail lines. Unlike Corona, the division between Penumbra and the Silhouettes is invisible and demarcated only by the scent of spice giving way to the scent of humanity. The Silhouettes are the poorest section of the city, and nearly a full hundredth of its residents are some manner of nightbreed, though faerie or takwin are notably scarce. All combined, the Silhouettes comprise over half of the entire population of the city.

Hidden between the sprawling complexes of industrial manufacture, one finds numerous ramshackle squalid townships almost entirely ignored by the local authorities. The boroughs of the Silhouettes are filled with lawless tenement slums where only the most significant streets are named; attempts to number the multitudinous private homes have failed. Street lighting is unreliable, with lamps being infrequent and poorly maintained, save at central points near manufacturing lines.

Townships of the Silhouettes are hives of teeming activity by impoverished masses. They are the living machinery of the city's industry, and a melting pot of street culture, crime, and machinery. Night in the Silhouettes is dangerous for most visitors, save the nightbreed who nocturnal talents.

RAMPARTS

The Ramparts are a singular wall that encloses the city that stand taller than any single building of Metropolaris. The Ramparts have held back the worst of cataclysms. Of all the hosts that have marshalled at its gates, only those that used guile or treachery have surpassed its bastions.

Palladium by Tomasz Belzowski.

The Ramparts represent the last of the works of ancient splendour, forged by the *grigori* before the Deluge. The internal face of the wall bears a great number of glyphs of arcane design. The entirety of its length gently rises and falls with a series of steps, designed for beings larger than humankind. Each leads up towards one of a number of spiralling tower peaks. Here the remains of once-formidable armaments now stand.

The presence of these walls serve as one of the most significant political and economic markers in the empire: inside, stands cosmopolitan sophistication, and outside lays agrarian provincialism. However, these days, their heights serve more to contain the urban sprawl from further expansion then to prevent the bramblewoods from entering. For as much as city ordinances prohibit constructions built against the Ramparts, many places in the Silhouettes climb its height to escape the slums below, holding to the walls for support.

GROTTO

The Grotto is the underbelly of the city containing a network of abandoned underground tunnels, lost rooms, alleyways, and bypasses. It is a home to the forgotten, wretched, and poor of the city who find sanctuary in the down below.

Its network is rumoured to reach down into the very Labyrinth itself. Its geography defies reason, and those who know not how to navigate its strange turns are sure to become lost. The Grotto is home to many of the skulking Mummers that do not pass the test of civilisation. Its many inhabitants are often homeless individuals, but among their number are people who are otherwise lost; they have wandered in from other times in history, or nobles of former glory who have since fallen to disrepute.

The Grotto is at the centre of the catacombs beneath the city, with carefully guarded ways in and out. There are no simple paths down into the Grotto, for the residents of the under-city prefer to remain secluded from the troubles above. Many relics of bygone times may be found here in the dark, including a range of formerly abandoned and oddly-shaped buildings that have become occupied by the locals.

COURT OF MIRACLES

At the centre of the Grotto is a subterranean court, known as the Court of Miracles; it is home to many of the unemployed rural migrants that make their way down here. There is a culture here that has been vastly informed by its history of beggars and vagabonds. It has become the home of organised criminal activity, and for insurgent rebels that would overturn conventional society. It is a haven for criminals and other such paragons of vice, and they bring with them their own argot language, and a subculture of crime and promiscuity.

Most of is migrant population of Metropolaris relies on alms and other illicit income to survive, many have made a profession of faked terrible injuries and diseases. The name of this place is earned as this professionally infirm return to the Court of Miracles, whereupon they would drop their charade: thus the blind would see and the lame would walk. This practice gave the place its name, where such miracles occurred every day.

THOROUGHFARES

Navigating the cityscape is a challenging task at the best of times, and for those uninitiated to its subtle ways, it can be positively tortuous. It can take weeks, months, and even years to gain the confidence to navigate the majority of the city without aid or guide. The size of the city is such that no individual may hope to know all of its paths, even with years of dedicated study. Those most

prized of city guides are ones who have acquired the Knowledge: a thorough working knowledge of the topography of the city, and some familiarity with its many secluded byways for a given sector of the city.

For the majority of residents, travel is frequently achieved through walking and few residents travel more than several leagues from the place of their birth, let alone their current residence. For even while public transport provides ready access to all parts of the city, most residents live insular and constrained lives.

For those of little means, the city becomes quickly unfamiliar beyond the steps of one's own neighbourhood. For those of power and means, there are few limitations to traversing the city: most freely visit the majority of Penumbra and Corona.

Corona Terrace by Krum.

AQUEDUCTS AND CANALS

Across the eras, the mightiest of rivers flowing through the city have since been bent to the will of industry, and have since become paved over. Yet, there are four dominant waterways, which flow outwards in smooth lines from the cardinal points of Corona down towards the walls of the Ramparts. They variously funnel through a delta of underground canals.

A system of underground piping, sewerage systems, and connecting sloops now provides water to every domicile and otherwise powers the various water wheels and cooling systems of power stations. These changes have left the ancient aqueducts obsolete for their original design. However, industry has repurposed them for a most curious form of water transportation as high-rise waterways.

Rising above the haze and detritus of the streets, the aqueduct gondolas move at a lazy pace and provide a most peaceful means of transportation. Nevertheless, guides warn travellers not to take these waterways into the Silhouettes, for they are poorly maintained and prone to collapse. This system of waterways extends from several large lakes clustered around the Palains. From these deep bowls, water trickles out and either takes a high route through the aqueducts, or tumbles over the Palisade to feed the many canals. Many of these aqueducts extend into the expanse of the Penumbra, to the site of once popular cities of yore. Those few that extend all the way to the Silhouettes have long since fallen into disrepair.

BROADWAYS AND RAILWAYS

There are two principles types of thoroughfare through Metropolaris, and both are the result of significant engineering in the last twenty years. The first of these are the eight great avenues, and the others are the riverine broadways. They represent principle public works performed under the auspices of the Imperium.

Roads and rail remain the most conventional system of travel through the city, though they are limited to their infrastructure: rail runs only along major thoroughfares, and numerous byways pepper the roads with an irregularity that matches the boroughs they traverse. Eight great avenues divide the city into quarters and cross-quarters, running in a straight line from the centre to the perimeter of the cityscape, cutting through Corona, Penumbra, and the Silhouettes alike. Their

thoroughfare begins at the base of one of each of the nation's executive estates, and runs outwardly in the general direction of that nation's direction. Each of them possesses a major railway line down their centre, which marks the start of the imperial railway line that connects the national offices in Metropolaris to each nation's respective capital city. Thus these avenues are said to provide a direct link between each station of power.

The four riverine broadways are roughly circular avenues that create a loop around the city, each a thoroughfare measuring three streets in width. Their significance within the city is not just by virtue of their size, for each of them plays host to governmental buildings, temples, libraries, hospices, and similar public buildings.

The oldest of these is the *Hochrhein* in Corona, which is the 'Diplomatic Road', for one finds all manner of diplomatic buildings there. The second riverine broadway is the *Obberhein*, which runs alongside the Palisade and is the site of nearly all of the administrative buildings of the Imperial Bureaucracy. The *Mittelrhein* is the celebrated 'River of Gold', which is a name earned for the manner in which it forges its way through the most important agoras of Penumbra to connect all of the city's most significant lodges, guild halls, and trade nexuses. The last and longest of the riverine broadways is the stark and unkempt *Niederrhein*, which follows the inner boundary of the Ramparts.

NIGHT ROADS

The night roads are the paths of thieves and other nefarious miscreants, for they provide a means of travelling outside of the street-level routes and passages. Officers of the law are often trained to look for signs of these hidden paths, as they are an indicator of criminal activity. However, the criminals that make and maintain them are learning with equal speed how to best conceal them from a street-level view.

The warren consists of a serious of underground tunnels that lead into and out of the Grotto, while also connecting key parts of the city above. The trestle is a system of gangway planks and makeshift bulwarks that lay across the rooftops of the city, and they provide a method of flitting above the affairs of those below. Warrens and trestles are often complimentary, with the warrens providing a discrete means of travel from district to district below street level, while the trestles often emerge in small clusters in a given borough.

Province

The Literate is a patchwork of discarded tenurial lands, for each is a fiefdom unto itself, as the bramblewoods segregate them. For the most part, each domain has learned a measure of self-sufficiency, but the influx of trade in recent centuries has brought about a new wave of interdependency and interdominal relations. Provincial ties are distinct from nationality. One's province is determined as a matter of geography, but any domain may pledge national allegiance to any of the nations: whereas provinces are their location, while a nation is its character.

Simple geography does not always determine a domain's neighbours. Passage through the bramblewoods is rarely forthright. The irregularity of paths between domains may cut off otherwise adjacent lands by this border. Their isolation means that the politics, culture, and sometimes even the language of adjacent domains can vary wildly. Some boast an almost cosmopolitan population with thriving urban centres, while others remain mired in parochial and almost-feudal mores. Therefore, while cartographers may position the nearness of domains in accordance to physical distance, the populace of a given domain recognises their neighbours by dint of open lines of travel.

Despite the irregularities of borders, the vast majority of domains are usually aligned within the same ducal province towards the same nation. Few domains show allegiance practices outside this form, and those that do are typically the consequence of connections by irregular briary routes to distant neighbours. Similarly, few small numbers of domains claim no national allegiance, as instead founded on charter of independence secured by imperial writ.

Nevertheless, all domains, whether nationalist or independent, fall beneath the sovereign rule of the Imperium. All domains depend on an ever-increasing network of interdependent infrastructure, built and maintained by the Imperium's rail network and aerial armada. The standing rule of law as decreed by the Imperium guarantees the rights of autonomy for each domain. Provided the domains all pay their taxes, and respect a few key mandates of the Imperium, being the Emancipation Proclamation, Perpetual Peace, and Absolute Enlightenment, each is largely left to govern themselves.

Nation

The eight nations are relatively modern phenomena. They are the direct result of rising nationalist ideas that emerged during the revolutions. Each comprises a federation of domains, whose lieges have sworn national allegiance; they are a community of peoples, bound by culture and language.

The nations are a distinctly provincial entity, as the entirety of their territories fall outside of the capital city of Metropolaris. This difference characterises many of the interactions between the cosmopolitan urbanites and the traditionalist provincials. Many provincials mistrust the motives of those Metropoles who visit on tour, regarding them as little more than condescending dilettantes. Close-knit lives foster familiarity and community, and these have come to define the various national character of each of the provincials.

In almost every instance, one may use the words province and nation interchangeably. Indeed, many scholars prefer to use the Parnassian term *le Perlieu Provens* to describe the provinces

without the implication of nationality. Those of political acumen understand the subtle difference. The term province more correctly describes the collection of territories that lie within the lines created by those larger runs of bramblewoods known as the Bracers. Each province is therefore equivalent to a grand duchy.

In contrast, nations are a matter of character, of community that transcends the boundaries of the bramblewoods. One's nationality is a primary cultural referent, influencing all things from fashion and cuisine, to art and architecture, and especially custom and manner.

DUCHY

A liege governs each domain, in holding the authority given to him by his incumbency upon its throne. Though many lieges have influence over one domain alone, most owe some measure of fealty to a more senior lord of the Realm. Accordingly, one may estimate the rank of a peer by the number of domains that fall under their shadow.

A single ducal province contains of up to hundreds of different domains, their boundaries delimited by the larger runs of the bracers. Those few lieges that have an entire province under their influence are dukes, and of their number, one rules over the province with the nation's capital city: archdukes or grand dukes.

UNION OF ALBION

The lands of Albion lay in the regions north-west of Metropolaris, experiencing cool and dry climates, which combines to produce grey rainy skies overhead. Most of Albion consists of rolling hills, giving over to mountains in the north, and constant rains ensure that much of the land remains fen or moor.

Their capital is none other than London, the 'The Fortress of the Lune', which is known for roil of mists that pour from the Hinterlands to suffuse its urban environs. As Albion has held a changeling queen more than once in its history, the residents of London are far more congenial to their kind. London has the highest changeling population anywhere outside of Metropolaris.

Contemporary London architects have taken a step towards pragmatism from their previous incarnation, with the advent of electrodyne lighting there has been a disposition towards lighter colours, compared to previous years. Highly decorative wallpaper and curtains gave way to simpler effects, and in general, these new styles show far less clutter with better quality of ornamentation. London defines itself as decidedly modern, boasting the first complex urban rail interchange and an unparalleled network of streetlights, all fuelled by *flux* to cast the streets by night in blue. In recent years, the influx of electrodyne engineers, and the spread of lit streets has helped incept the advent of lighter colours in their architecture and design: residents adorn their walls with highly decorative wallpaper, and simpler shades replace curtains, while houses otherwise lose their clutter of ornamentation.

The lands of Albion are a union, for the country divides evenly between two islands and they jointly bear the nation's name. Albion possesses much of the island of Frisia, and the entire Albion mainland, with two duchies on each. The oldest, and most prestigious duchy, is the Grand Duchy Reynes, which stands at the southern-most end of Albion proper. A deep geological fault separates these duchies, with Suddene to its north and west, and Reynes to its south and east. Reynes is

Albion by Robert Altbauer.

lower and flatter than its sibling duchy Suddene: as one travels from west to east, the ranges of Suddene's hills gives way to fens. Across the inner sea, one finds the duchies of Westernesse and Aneon, the former an escarpment of much lauded white cliffs and the latter a soft land of limestone.

SUBLIME CIMMERIAN SATRAPY

The lands of the Cimmerian Satrapy were once the heartlands of that ancient empire the Arcadian Dominate, and their capital city is the self-same city of the Dominate. The Cimmerians now claim to be the inheritor of that dominion, by tracing a political lineage back to the founding of the Roman Empire. The proximity of Cimmeria to the eastern pillar of Eurus means steady and arid winds constantly warm its lands, which creates a dry but fertile locale peppered with growths of wild forest.

Its capital city, Vienna, is 'The Beautiful City', for it boasts both exquisite architecture and lavish surrounds. The vast majority of the public works that lend the city its splendour are the artistic endeavours of the State's highest advisors, all seeking posterity in a legacy of monuments. Cimmerian architecture celebrates its decoration through tile patterns, both porcelain and stoneware. The buildings show a myriad of colours and forms, depicting a blend of many ideals of folk art and the burgeoning decorative imperial style. This emergent style borrows liberally from both Eastern and Western elements, emphasising Cimmeria's place as the shining satrapy of the East. Chief among its cultural buildings is the Bibliotheca Corvina, which possesses the Realm's largest collection of classic literature, with many codices on natural philosophy, science, law, history, and medicine.

Three of the Satrapy's duchies are upon the Literate: Bogdan, Erdeal, and Valach. In the centre of these lands is a tall singular and ominous peak called the Standing Mountain. Smaller hills ring the mountain, from which rivers run eastwards to the Valachian plains. Between mountain and sea, and scattered in varying degrees across these duchies, one may find a diversity of flora and fauna.

The Grand Duchy of Cimmeria is Erdeal: it is home to both Vlad Tepes and a most ancient forest, which swallows the bramblewoods whole. These lands lie next to the Bogdan Steppe, which drops downwards from the peak in a series of gentle slopes towards the shallow waters of the inner sea. The final of these three duchies is the Valachian Tributary. It is a land most clearly defined by its numerous folded riverine crags. The fourth duchy is Qirim, which lies on northern coast of Anatolia. The populated lands of Qirim are semiarid prairie, which are flanked alternatively by a broken coastline of numerous bays and the central peaks of Anatolia.

REPUBLIC OF GAULE

The Gallic lands lie to the west of Metropolaris. These regions experience the strong and humid westerly winds of Zephyr, which brings seasonal rains and churns the sea to toss tidal bounties ashore. On land, Gaule boasts extensive river systems which caress the curves of the terrain.

Cimmeria & Gaue by Robert Altbauer.

Few attempt comparison to the fabled 'City of Lights', Paris. It is a centre of scientific enlightenment as best signified by its early adoption of electric street lighting. The Gallic style is veritably flourishing, being a grandiose elaboration of refined classic themes; *en vogue* are large symmetrical façades, all detailed with ornamental minutiae of medallions, floral decals, shields, chevrons, and swags. Much of this architecture tends towards pomposity in size, using expert masonry to give the grandest homes broad stone balconies and the fullness of arches.

Paris has experienced a series of increasingly rapid changes in the last century, much precipitated by the rise and fall of the former emperor Vendémiaire. Vendémiaire instigates a series of radical transformations, which levelled districts for broad avenues. Also, in the last ten years, Paris has played host to the *Exposition Universelle*, and its array of annual scientific achievements; their demonstrations recently inspired the construction of airship steelyards and factories, all powered by an army of automata.

The Republic's mainland duchies are Arelat, Guyenne, and Ker-Lys. At their centre are the Pyrite Mountains, dividing Ker-Lys from Arelat and Guyenne; they are low, compared with many others, but the heart of these lands. The waters that lie between Frisia and the mainland are the infamous Sargasso Seas, which are unseasonable warm most year-round.

The Grand Duchy of Arelat is renowned for rolling hills and verdant plains, fecund viticulture, and vibrant townships aplenty. Guyenne, being Gaule's largest duchy, often contests the primacy of Arelat: it is sparsely forested, and loved for its cheese-producing farmlands. Ker-Lys is the vale across the mountains, whose inhabitants dwell among many tributary rivers. The fourth duchy is the much-romanticised Lyonesse, a chalky land melding gently with the sea.

HELLENIC ELECTORATE

Hellena is a federation of domains to the southeast of Metropolaris. Its territories consist of stretches of warm and arid domains, which are frequently sunny and clement. The provinces of Hellena are highly mountainous, though its peaks are riddled with canyons and underground rivers.

The fortunes of the capital city Athens have been capricious. Most recall Athens as a site of importance to antiquity, which fell to ignominy in the 18th Century. Much like the rest of Hellenic culture, its architecture is experiencing a revitalisation of classic forms, casting antiquity in modern media. Perhaps distinctive of the style is the emphasis given to internal decor, as the externals accede to simplicity. Most façades offer smooth and unadorned lines, while the walls within are detailed with care, demonstrating a pastiche of modern artistic vogue.

Only recently has Athens regained to its rightful place alongside the other nations' capitals. Athens is the site of a great many examples of classical heritage architecture, and thereby earns the title of 'Most Glorious City'. It is also the home of the Argos Liners, the finest luxury ships in the seas, and its massive shipyards that produce many of the empire's alchemically treated ships.

Hellena is truly a maritime nation with all of its duchies is spread along the coasts, and numerous coastal islands enjoy the membership of its four duchies. The geographies of these territories are more defined by their adjacency to the Agamon Gyre. The waters of the Gyre are churlish and constant in their clockwise run. The most powerful of all four dukedoms is the Grand

Hellena by Robert Altbauer.

Duchy of Macedon, which is little but heavily mountainous peaks. Across from its southern share is found the island duchy of Nys, to which most small islands within the Gyre are bound; her expanse contains polished lakes and trembling waterfalls. The northern cusp of the sea meets the Thracian Coast, which is a duchy of low provincial hills and lake-lands. Finally, one finds the long shores of Thermiscrya across the subcontinental strait in the most rugged parts of Anatolia.

IBERIAN STATE

The southern and western winds heat and cool the climate of Iberia respectively. Most of the time, Iberia enjoys a constant humid breeze, which ensures both a lazy summer and a vibrant harvest. The region itself divides across its formidable terrain, all dominated by a plateau at the centre that rises far above the surrounding domains.

The magnificent Madrid is the expansive capital city of Iberia, which runs the length of a sinuous river. Its title is 'The Garden of Water'; it is a name justified by an intricate system of pipes, canals, fountains and waterways. Modern Iberian architecture is a revitalisation of an 11th Century style, largely influenced by takwin designs. This unique blend gives Iberia its characteristic and exclusive demeanour; though building forms echo antiquity, there is utilisation of horseshoe arches, abstract brickwork, and ornamentation across the façade. Though popular with the grandest buildings, it utilises sufficiently cheap materials to allow ubiquity. Moreover, while most cities are converting to electrodyne power, Madrid holds fast to its steam-powered manufacture.

Most of the city's trees align to an isometric grid, with the *Real Jardin* as its masterpiece. The *Jardin* is a sixteen-hectare splendour, which hosts a collection for many varieties of plants, harvested from the bramblewoods. It centrepiece boasts the Prado, a gigantic sixty-metre tall fountain. An abundance of water enables the city to cultivate exquisite gardens, and allows its residents to claim the highest amount of greenery per resident.

The duchies of Iberia are Andalus poised at the top of the peninsula, Toletum is in the middle, and Granata lies upon the lower end. While Toletum is the Grand Duchy, the honour for being the oldest goes to Andalus, and Granata is the largest of their number.

Toletum is the Grand Duchy, and most of its populations reside along the shores of the singular crystalline lake that dominates the heights; from this lake, most of the peninsula's major rivers spill outwardly towards the sea. Andalus is renowned for its numerous secluded valleys, arid terrain, and clay-filled soil. Granata enjoys fame for its wide river valley, flanked by coastal plains. The final duchy is the dependency of Vesperides, upon the northern ranges of Numidia. The landscape of Vesperides is mostly montane vegetation and dry woodlands, with superaltively wide waterfalls among its high peaks.

MAGNA ITALICA

The Italic provinces lie south of Metropolaris and the length of their peninsula falls across either side of a backbone of volcanic mountains.

Iberia & Italica by Robert Althauer.

The weather of Italica reaps the benefits of the warmth and clemency of the southern winds. The strong, dry winds from Notaine warms the length of the peninsula and the occasional burst of rains provide for extensive viticulture.

Contemporaneous Italic style is similar to that of its antiquity. Its buildings are very large with symmetrical, albeit sharp, edges and each design intends to awe and intimidate in their majesty. The buildings are constructed from durable stone, plain in decoration and lacking complexity; this is designed to stand the test of time. Such ubiquity of form produces refined and simple aesthetics through all construction.

The capital of Italica is the 'The Home of History', as proclaimed by its residents. As the centre of the cultural and artistic movement of the Flamboyance, Rome possesses the greatest number of works of art and sites of historical interest in the entire Realm; many have since fallen into the custody of Mousaion curacies. Rome is also home to the Oracular Sede, the throne of the Oracle herself. It is thus the centre of the administration of the Mousaion and their diplomatic activity.

The two duchies of superb Genoa and fair Verona often compete for the title of Grand Duchy. Yet, the jewel of Rome has long stood in Verona, and maintained that honour. Though it is Verona's heartlands of vast viticulture regions, and they are the source of much of Verona's cultural splendour.

Genoan residents, as those upon the island Sardo, take much pride in their coastlands, and many enjoy lifestyles dependent on fishing. To their south is the duchy of Napoly, and its island possession Trinacria. They are the sites of the most active volcanic mounts of the nation, with macchia shrub covering those slopes. The last Italic duchy is Tanith, which lies furthest from the central Literate upon the subcontinent of Numidia. The duchy embraces a broad coastal plain, which gently gives way to mountainous steppes. The southern-most mountainous region is the site of a number of salt-lakes, all strung together like briny pearls.

RODINIAN HEGEMONY

The territories of Rodina are composed of mountainous regions of taiga or broadleaf forest as which covers the centre, and tundra which subsumes its extremities. The bramblewoods here are hoary, and divide the region's large central plain into different basins that contains most of the region's populations.

'The Grand Dame', Moscow, is the source of most of the alchemical and energetic products of the Realm. In many respects, Moscow is a contrast of modernity and antiquity, where ancient temples stand alongside factories. The proximity of temple and factory is symbolic for the city; its industrial base provides the manufacture of iron-wrought icons. Rodinian architecture has experienced a new mode, copying the brick-based architecture of the 17th Century, and has been adopted as a new national art form using old materials, new techniques, and borrowed classicism. Characteristic elements of this style include low-arched ceilings, narrow window-loop holes, floral frescoes, and pot-bellied columns; they all demonstrate careful use of multi-coloured tiles.

Pyotr the Great founded the city's most celebrated buildings: the Academy of Alchemy and the Siberian Observatory. Many foreign scholars have studied here throughout history, and have contributed greatly to the nation's knowledge of the subtle arts. Their contributions have provided crucial insights into the development of phlogiston and cheap energies for long and bitter winters.

Rodin by Robert Altbauer.

The Grand Duchy of Copok, though farthest from Metropolaris, has acquired a sense of grandeur. For in distance, the residents of Copok find independence. Unlike the rest of Rodin, Copok is a heavily mountainous peninsula, and Moscow sits within a shallow crater in the mountain foothills. The mountains contain numerous river valleys, which cut swathes towards the swampy lowlands.

Large glaciers have rendered the largest duchy of Luteva almost completely flat, even as small lakes and densely canopied forest mark its expanse. Its neighbour is Samartia, which receives most of the surrounding run off and turning it into densely wooded lowlands. The final Rodin possession is the duchy of Fenmark, found upon the subcontinent of Skania, and which acquires its name from preponderance of fens.

THANELANDS

The Thanelands are the coldest of the eight provinces, lying directly north of Elysium. Its proximity to Boreas means the Thanelands are visited by northern frigid winds, which bring constant tidings of gloom and hardship. Yet, such winds as these sculpt the land uniquely with pristine valleys, fjords, and glacial mounts.

The national architectural style of the Thanelands has turned to both ancient and medieval forms, exhibited in their tall centrepiece steeples, but also widespread in domestic architecture as well. These motifs express a reaction to industrialisation, invoking a national ideal of the mythic 'Dream of the North'. Ornamentation largely depends on sculpted wood, depicting well remembered literary works.

The capital of Copenhagen was once the centre of a vast commercial naval fleet. It stood as both haven and harbour for the nation's fleet, and became the centre of Thane prowess. Though its glory days have faded, the city is yet 'The Golden Harbour', for the city retains a robust network of markets. The city is a strange mixture of modern and old architecture, having fallen victim to several citywide fires. Where older buildings survive, they stand against modern fireproof ones.

Unlike the other nations, the Thanelands has only one of its duchies upon the Litorate in the mountainous Grand Duchy of Thanemark; its elongated coastline has launched a thousand trading ships. The balance of Thane territories is located in the northern subcontinent of Skania. The most populous of these duchies is Svealand, which is renowned for its water-locks, large rivers, and larger lakes. The western and northern coasts of Skania are the location of Kvenuu and Bjarma respectively. The western highlands end abruptly in twisting fjords and towering cliffs upon the edge of the seas. The northern Bjarma lies almost entirely above the tree line: its eastern half is a steep plateau, and the western half, is a jagged spine of mountains.

SUBCONTINENTS

The various landmasses that lie across the narrow straits and inner seas are the subcontinents. They are not yet the Hinterlands, even though each is continental landmass. Though the territory of these lands formally separates from the mainland by sea, they remain part of the empire proper, and home to humankind.

Each of the domains found thereupon owes allegiance to one of the eight nations. However, there are certain subtle distinctions where residents upon the mainland look to the subcontinentals

Thanelands by Robert Altbauer.

as being more parochial than they are themselves. This often means the subcontinents are treated as national dependencies or protectorates in practice.

FRISIA

Across the seas to the north-west of the Literate lies the autumn island of Frisia. Its northern point contains wild highlands capped by taiga, and the southern regions are abundant with a maple woods. The highland peaks are a daunting combination of volcanic ridges and ice floes, which makes the centre of the northern islands inhospitable. Most human habitations are found towards the edges of the island. Though volcanically active, the peaks scarcely erupt and instead produce manifold geysers, tepid rivers, and secluded tarns. Its reaches are country to three duchies: Aneon and Westernesse, both Albion dependencies; and Lyonesse, the Gallic dependency.

SKANIA

Chilled by the northern climes is Skania: a wintry island of holly covered by snow and ice. Alpine taiga crowns its glacial peaks, and all of them are arraigned by lakes and moraines that serve as the natural borders. The southern half of the islands is free from snow for the better part of the year as the western mountain ridges shield them from the most bitter winds. However, a lack of precipitation rather than coldness stays the snows. One of the duchies there is Fenmark, a possession of Rodin. The other three duchies are all part of the Thanelands: inner Svealand, north-most Bjarma, and Kvenuu of the western lowlands. The northern coast of Skania is the farthest reach where one finds permanent human civilisation.

Persons of astute observation will often contend that the islands of Reynes and Suddene are themselves subcontinents by virtue of their separation from the mainland. The members of these islands do not contend with this ascription, but rather consider Reynes and Suddene as part of Albion proper as little more than shallows only separate their island from the mainland. Moreover, Reynes is the home of the provincial capital of Albion, London.

from We, Valetoria by Valetoria Regina

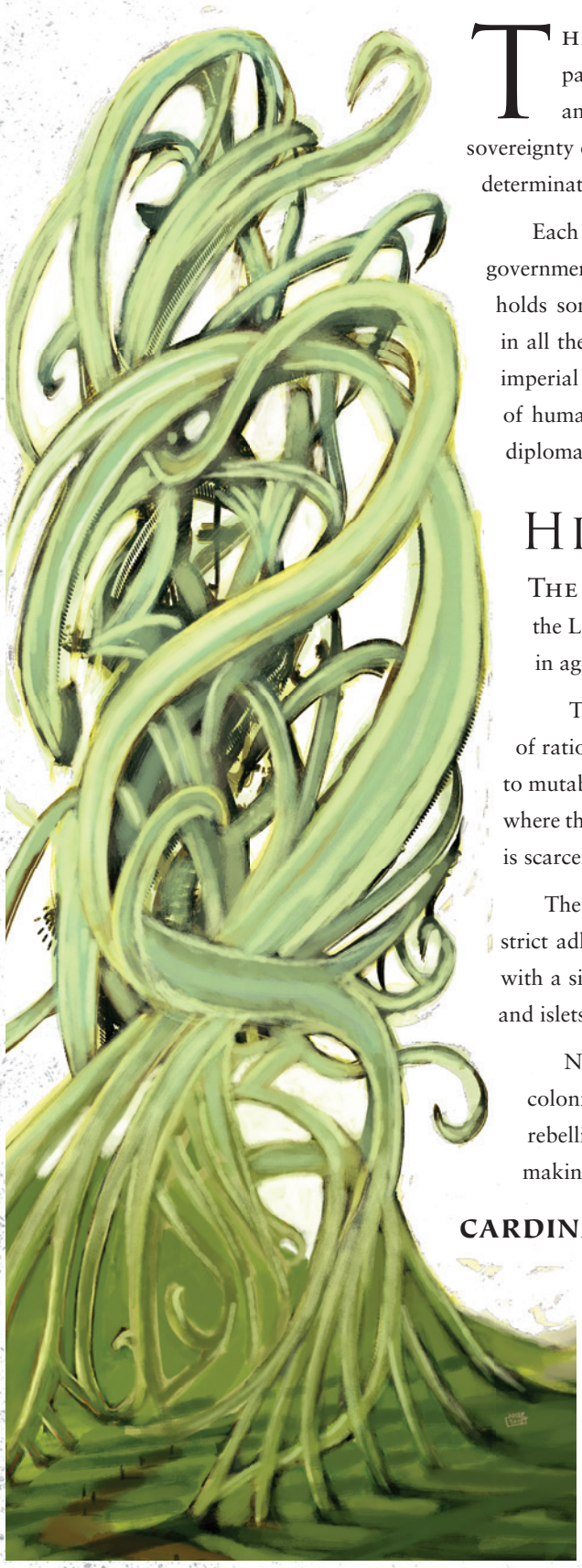
ANATOLIA

Across a deep but narrow strait southeast of the Litorate are the lands of Anatolia. The populations of this subcontinent thrive more upon the coastlines rather than its central lands. A severe drop delimits its western coast, holding only a collection of freeholds called the Caspian Reaches. From a high plateau that marks the highest point of land it descends gently towards eastern lowlands, and breaks up across several treacherous gorges that impede traversing this span of land. The northern coast is a low, verdant, rolling plain that skirts the sea. Whereas the western coast is a veritable breadbasket as found in the many harbours and cultivated recesses and their abundance of apple orchards. These lands are home to the duchies of Qirim and Thermiscrya: Cimmerian and Hellenic dependencies respectively.

NUMIDIA

The summer island of Numidia is a long warm plain that is caught betwixt two large mountain ranges at its extremities. Upon its north-west edge is the Auren Mountain Range, and on the southern-east limit is the Hoggen Steppe. Combined, these features create a mountainous crescent that shelters its fertile highlands from sweltering summer winds. The southern coast is characterised by its hills and many natural harbours that is the renowned Barbary Coast. A robust oaken forest separates the length of the coast into the two duchies of Vesperides and Tanith, which are dependencies of Iberia and Italica respectively.

Periphery



Eurus by Krum.

The Periphery comprises all the lands that are not part of the empire proper. They contain the dominions of both the faerie and the takwin. Though the rulers of these lands have acquiesced to the sovereignty of the Imperium, they nevertheless enjoy a measure of autonomy and self-determination.

Each of these dominions is entitled to maintain their traditional forms of government, and otherwise rule their internal populations in peace. Each dominion holds some ability to determine entry and egress through its borders. However, in all these dominions, the activities and affairs of humanity remain firmly under imperial governance, and each carries with it a right of extradition back to lands of human origin. Thus, human visitation into any of these lands is a matter of diplomatic delicacy, and one mediated through a variety of tact and armaments.

Hinterlands

The Alluvial Hinterlands contain four archipelagos that encircle the Litorate. All these lands are the homelands of the faerie, who claimed them in ages past; their rule was unassailable for countless aeons.

The border between the empire proper and the start of faerie-land is the end of rational order. As one ventures deeper into faerie, reality is much more prone to mutability, for dreams become as potent as matter and there are many instances where the dreaming and waking worlds collide or converge, but such an occurrence is scarcely remarkable in these lands. They are prone to great surrealism.

The marchlands' designation as archipelagos is more of a cultural quirk than strict adherence to geographic nomenclature. For each landmass is a large island with a size surpassed only by the Literate itself. Though scatterings of minor isles and islets surround each central landmass, they form coherent island chains.

Nevertheless, these smaller islands often fall beyond the direct influence of colonial rule. Travellers learn to avoid these smaller islands, for they are home to rebellious faerie folk. Their residents are highly attuned to the waters and winds, making them more manoeuvrable through the sky and seas than the human craft.

CARDINAL PILLARS

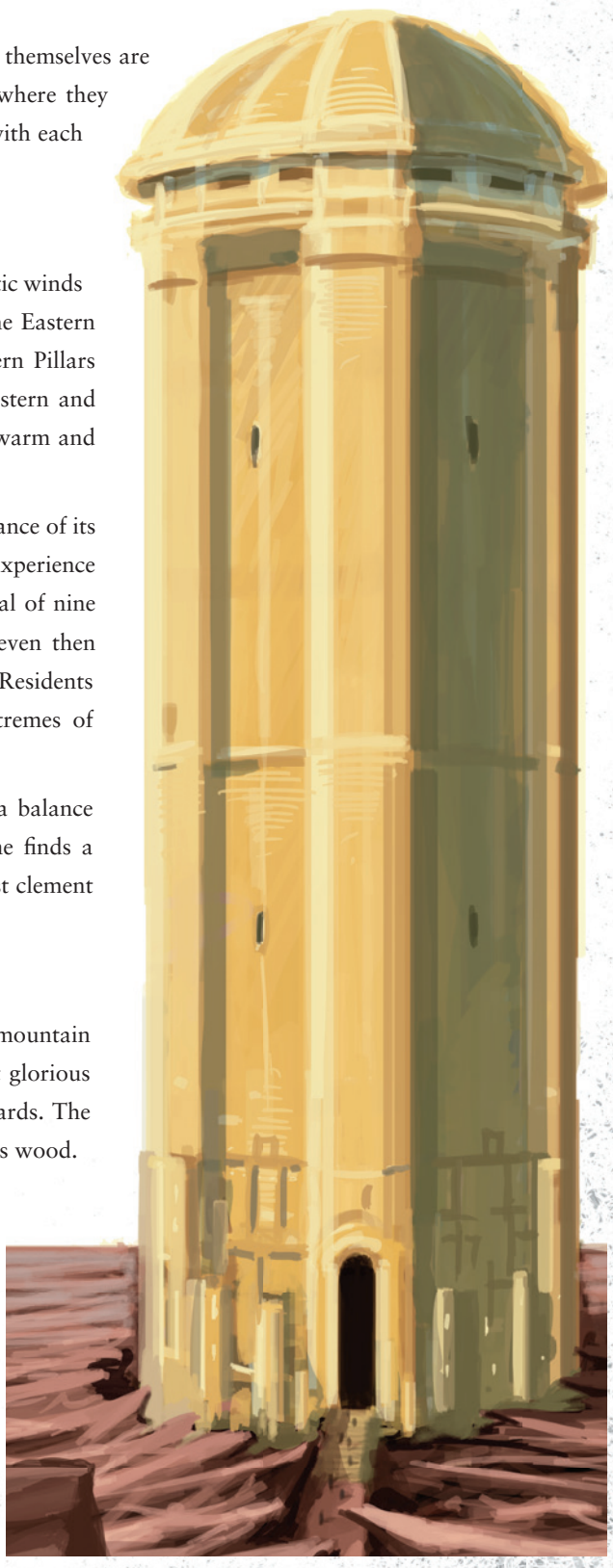
The Cardinal Pillars are four titan-forged monuments that stand upon the cardinal points of the compass. They are like Palladium in being poles of the world, but their nature is an elemental pole, and their very presence infuses the lands about them. Though all of them hold secondary status to Palladium as *axis mundi*, they are each potent artefacts that shape the climates and seasons.

They are colossal in size, forged from one of the four alchemical elements: earthly substances with great thematic properties. Each

stand at the very centre of one of the four marches, and because each pillar produces the climate of one of the four seasons, the influence of that season is found strongest in the respective march.

Where they stand, one finds the capital of any given march. In the centre of each pillar is a chamber illuminated softly by the light of one of the royal stars. Within each chamber is a grove of trees sacred to that season, with the largest providing the seasonal Siege of the entire march, woven from the wood of the groves. From each Siege, the Marquis sends their influence across Hinterlands and into the Literate.

The pillars also mark the end of stable reality, for while the marches themselves are solid and tangible, substance begins to unravel into ephemera beyond where they stand. Travelling outwardly beyond these poles, the world grows softer with each league, until there is nothing but dream stuff.



Notaine by Krum.

CLIMATE

Elementary forces contained in each of the four pillars generate the climactic winds as a combination of hot or cold and humid or dry. The climates from the Eastern and Southern Pillars are both warm. Those of the Western and Northern Pillars are both cool. The Northern and Southern Pillars are both dry. The Eastern and Western Pillars are wet. Thus, spring is both warm and wet, summer is warm and dry, autumn is cool and wet, while winter is cool and dry.

Location closer to one of the four Pillars will experience a preponderance of its particular season. The marches, being in direct proximity to the Pillars, experience one dominant season that lasts for least three quarters of the year, a total of nine months. The other seasons each manifest over a single month apiece; even then the oppositional season is so weak that it scarcely deserves the name. Residents of domains that lie close to a Pillar likewise endure the climactic extremes of unnaturally long seasons.

Domains located equidistant from two Pillars typically experience a balance between two climates. It is only in the shadow of Palladium where one finds a moderation of the seasons, and the residents in her vicinity enjoy the most clement and varied of seasonal shifts.

NESILI

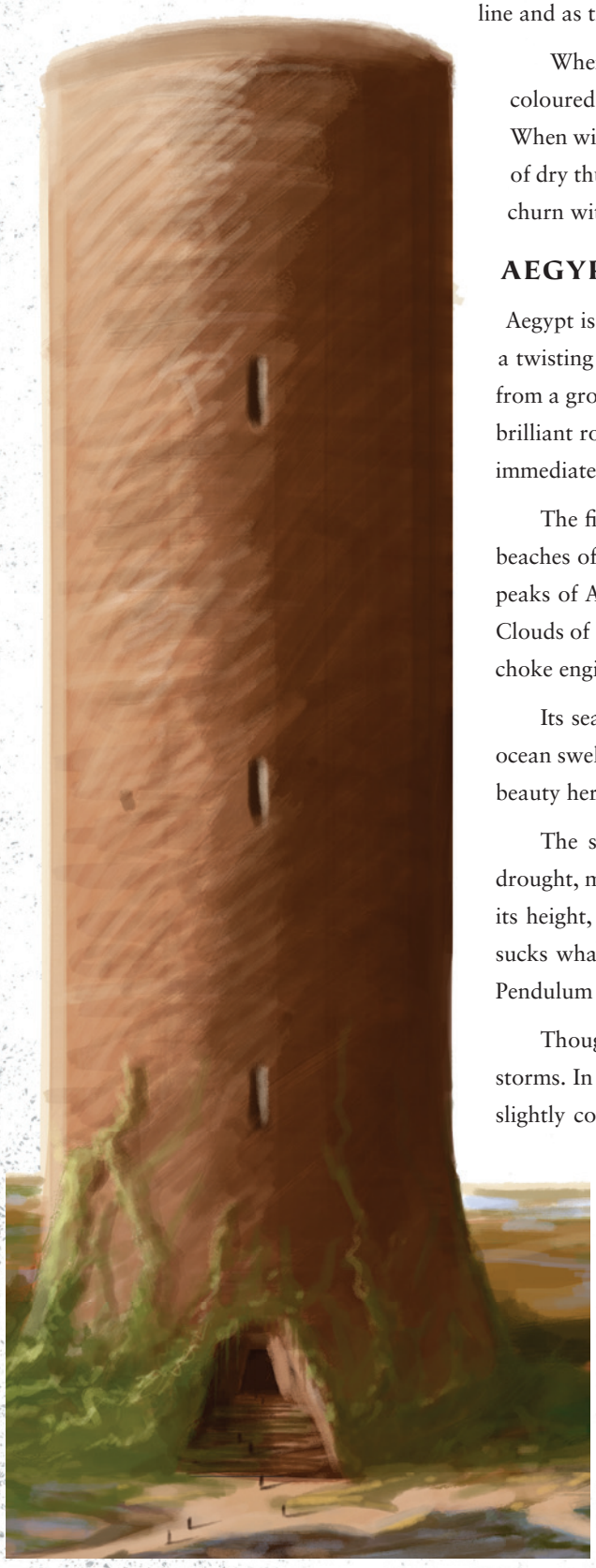
The eastern star of Aldebaran hangs over the tall fluted pillar of Eurus, a mountain of glass wreathed in thunderclouds. All the lands of Nesili enjoy a most glorious verdancy; it is a fecundity best symbolised by its numerous apple orchards. The apple is the tree attuned to this season, and Nesili's Siege is woven from its wood.

The large flat islands of the Nesili chain rise imposingly towards the sky-daunting sheer cliff that describes most of the coastline. The lands atop these wind-struck islands are large, flat steppes covered in unnaturally lush vegetation. The seas thereabouts are notoriously sweet, to the point of freshness, but they are treacherous. Only the foolhardy would drink deeply of them as the sweet-water induces strange lethargy and loss of memory.

Moreover, the channels of these islands are difficult to navigate, seeming still on the surface but containing powerful currents that

throw ships towards the clashing rocks. The currents of the air are likewise troublesome, as strong jet streams that interweave the islands buffet the major islands.

The vernal winds that flow from Nesili are both dry and mild, bringing spring upon its wake. The long spring in these lands means the winds are always warm and the rains that fall are often gentle showers. Although the rains are often benign, thunder and lightning wrack the cloud line and as the skies crackle with burnt ozone.



Zephyr by Krum

When spring gives way to summer, the steppes burst into a carpet of multi-coloured flowers as the rains fall in great volume to pelt the ground unceasingly. When winter comes, the clouds dry up once more, creating a dark shadow overhead of dry thunderhead. Finally, the arrival of autumn signals the winds of the region to churn with ferocity as they plague the islands with cyclones.

AEGYPT

Aegypt is the southern march and the land of summer. Its cardinal pillar Notaine is a twisting monument of burnished brass and smokeless fire, and the Siege wrought from a grove of oaks stands within its central chamber. The pillar stands beneath the brilliant royal star of Regulus at the foot of Aegypt's largest mount. The lands in its immediate vicinity are tracts of badlands, which are too hot to sustain life.

The first lands of Aegypt that the southward traveller meets are the long black beaches of the barrier spit that shields the seas and island-arc further south. All the peaks of Aegypt are smoking crags whose dark clouds choke the region with haze. Clouds of soot and ash stay navigation, as they lower visibility to almost naught and choke engines without prejudice.

Its seas are brackish waters tinged with ash, and as the barrier spit softens the ocean swell the entire sea bears the appearance of a blackened slick. Yet there is eerie beauty here found in the ships wake as it disturbs the water's with lurid patterns.

The sumnal winds of Notaine are acrid; they sometimes herald a blistering drought, meaning that the notoriously long summer of Aegypt can be dangerous. At its height, the sweltering heat of summer beats down upon the earth as dry winds sucks what moisture remains. The light of Agony becomes painfully bright, as the Pendulum seems to pause in the sky for a span of thirty normal days.

Though rains fall down in autumn and spring, they are not necessarily welcome storms. In autumn, the rains pelt down an accumulation of summer ash to create a slightly corrosive rain. When spring breaks, the rains are thick with dust, and fall like blood. The waters of these rains are not potable, but they help ensure the fertility of the ground. When winter comes, the seas becalm, creating clear skies and waters.

BREASYL

Zephyr dominates the western march of Breasyl, the land of autumn. Its island is specked with freshwater tarns connected by river channels over its domain. The Pillar itself is a slender peak of folded and sculpted clay beneath the baleful star Antares. The central chamber here contains a Siege woven from the wood of its maple grove.

Breasyl is an archipelago, in form as well as designation. It is composed of a large, expansive chain of low islands, reefs, atolls, and islets. Deep ocean currents surround these islands of, as the sea bed around them quickly drops off a continental shelf to incredible depths. The islands are subject to powerful rips, undertows and high waves that pound the shorelines with ferocity.

Attempting to land upon Breasyl is a demanding chore, for the fierce waters require a steady hand to charter a certain course and a complex system of estuaries, mangroves, and sand marsh deltas make its coasts and coves inaccessible. Strong winds gusting from Zephyr push most aircraft back towards the Literate, thwarting entry by air. Most aviators approach the islands at an angle to the wind, to stave off the worst of its effects.

These are the autumn islands, where storms constantly wracked its seas and lands. The autumnal wind of Zephyr hails from the briny depths to be heavy with rain. However, the rains can sour and pelt the lands with stinging spray. At the height of autumn itself, the constant rains produce a long and bountiful harvest, even though visitors might find the weather inclement.

When winter falls, the rains become ubiquitous mists that creep down from the colder northern seas to sink the land in haze. The mists stay until early spring when the monsoon comes as one single rolling storm that pours down across the entire season. Then finally, in summer, for one short season, gale force winds breaks the clouds and thunders in to clear the skies.

THYLEA

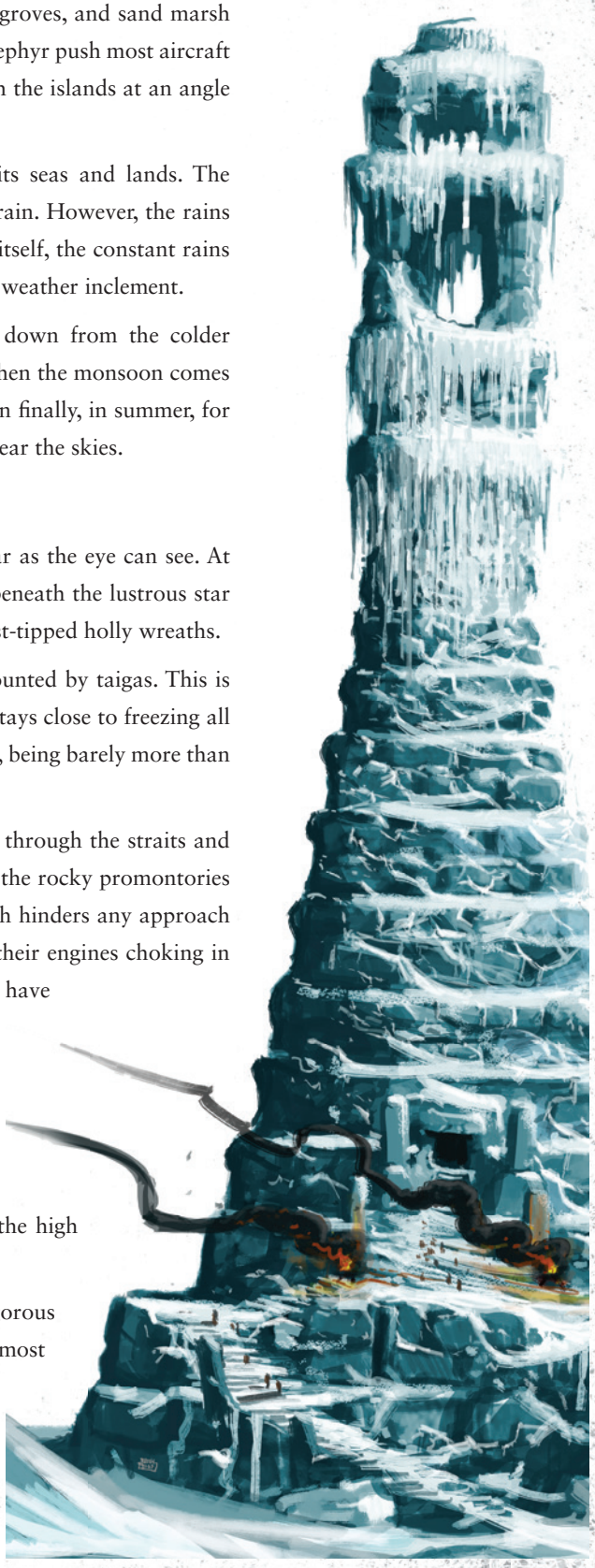
Thylea is the northern march of winter, where glacial packs extend as far as the eye can see. At its heart lies the colossal peak of stone and ice that is the pillar Boreas, beneath the lustrous star of Sirius. Within its central chamber, one may find the wintry Siege of frost-tipped holly wreaths.

The islands of Thylea are mostly tundra, packed with snow and mounted by taigas. This is not a land welcome to the people of warmer climes, for the temperature stays close to freezing all year-round. Only the lands closest to the Litorate show signs of vegetation, being barely more than small forests of closely spaced trees and mossy ground.

The waters around Thylea choke with pack ice, which makes travel through the straits and channels a dangerous trek. During the depths of winter, the seas between the rocky promontories freeze over, to forge a single bridge of land. The extreme cold of the north hinders any approach by land and air with dire risk. Travellers must take precautions against their engines choking in mid-journey, and many who have left their vehicle unattended overnight have found the entire machine frozen into place.

From the pillar of Boreas, the merciless winds of winter blow and with them, the fall of snow. In the depths of winter, Thylea is plunged into longest night: a stay of some thirty nights that cross the solstice. As the nights pass, the lands solely see the illumination of Ecstasy, with the Pendulum seemingly suspended in time. Though the lights are soft, the high albedo of the ice diffuses the light across the land.

Spring comes as a welcome relief as it brings the vernal thaw and a vigorous burst of life. Summer provides a reprieve as the snow melts away leaving most of the seas free of ice. Here in the north, life assumes its own cycle: in spring, virulent green takes its revenge upon the white; then in autumn, the green dies violently in fiery red, before the creeping hoarfrost.



Boreas by Krum

Umbrage

The Umbrage is a place of echoes, of things lost and forgotten. It comprises the underworld of the Firmament, where found the many subterranean levels of the land. Closest to the surface lies a vast network of interconnected corridors and tunnels that span beneath the Litorate. In the very centre of the Labyrinth, one can find the Blazing World of Agartha, where the takwin have founded an empire in these lands beneath the mantle. Down further still, and one reaches the Antipodes, where the restless dead may be found upon the shores of the Anathema, the bore of oblivion.

Time passes with strange measure in the Umbrage; for one cannot scan the Pendulum as it swings overhead. Instead the world about one fills with a soft, ubiquitous ticking. In the lands below one can see neither night nor day, and the darkness becomes a hollow friend indeed.

Only in Agartha is there a steady source of light, a glorious beacon of luminiferous blooms that gird that momentous stalactite formation. Beyond that hallowed hall, there is a most pervasive gloom, by which one can almost see. Rarely, but in glorious relief, that gloom is lifted from incandescent crystalline formations, which reflects some unbidden light.

LABYRINTH

The Labyrinth comprises the largest part of the Umbrage. It is a netherworld of byways, channels, and wayward paths that intersect across reality. This multitude of darkly hollows rarely experiences the touch of surface-dwellers.

Over the centuries, the takwin have explored most of the Labyrinth, and have fashioned them in their own manner, dividing them into quadrants, centred round the citadel of Agartha. Throughout each quadrant, one of the four alchemical elements dominates the landscape and

Labyrinth by Vadim Voitekhovitch.

architecture. The span of the Labyrinth's vastness is formed through a collection of derelict urban environments, which comes together in a manner that resembles a hodgepodge maze.

It is not so much that the Labyrinth appears like a collection of buildings but that the very layout of this maze has grown from a detritus of architecture: streets rise and fall, only to end abruptly; flights of stairs lead upwards to a forests of chimney stacks, stretching across a landscape of roof-tile; closed-off courtyards are hidden in the midst of sealed-up tunnels.

CLEW

The paths of the Labyrinth adhere to a strange logic all their own, manifesting numerous nooks and crannies; even changing in scale relevant to the wanderer. They are ever treacherous: they form aimless loops; they fork oddly to intersect upon themselves; they even pass through the middle of buildings in strange fashion. Artificial lamps flicker tremulously, to cast what little light there is. The walls of every tunnel alley lean in to create a claustrophobic effect, and the windows found there are blackened out.

The navigation of the Labyrinth is both indirect and circuitous, for the path once taken may not be the same when next traversed. Clews denote those paths best known, even where they requiring their travellers to follow meandering routes; deviation from these paths often leave the person lost in the Oubliettes. Clews are usually known by their unique brick-like paving, laid down by the takwin. The paths of golden bricks are those that run truest to the centre of the Labyrinth and Agartha, and those elusive paths of silvered brick are the secret short cuts, which are often encumbered with peril; they are nevertheless jealously guarded secrets.

Travel through the Labyrinth is far from conventional: paths defy normal geographies, with journeys taking as long as they need to. Most journeys convey the traveller via a series of tunnels, byways, and corridors. The time taken to complete a journey through the Labyrinth often belies the distance one travels. Cunning travellers may take advantage of this quirk to travel quickly from one part of the Realm to another. However, such routes are not without their own dangers.

Objects found in the Labyrinth have an air of Antiquity and lost despair: shards of detritus littering avenues, and seeming to move when not observed; fragmented heaps cloaked by layers of dust. The cunning traveller observes that none of this detritus is organic, or that all organic components have rotted and worn away; even food left unattended disappears, as if it were never there.

from The Waking Dream
by Matilda Mulfstan

CASCADES

The Cascades form a network of underground rivers and rapids, a multitudinous waterway that resembles the tunnels of subways and sewer system. The waters of the Cascades work their way downwards into the Antipodes beneath the Labyrinth, where they eventually terminate in the well of oblivion, the Anathema.

Rivers in the Umbrage take on the qualities of dreams and subliminal thought. They bring with them all lost recollections and faded memories as they tumble down from the surface above. Their streams begin at numerous cataracts that spill in from the Realm above, and converge into increasingly large torrents as they descend. Upon these waterways, the one may find various scaffolds that force the waters into waterfalls, locks, weirs, and damns.

As each rivulet passes through the Labyrinth they acquire chimerical qualities to become imbued with ephemeral and emotional qualities. Tamer waters flow sooth and clear, and at worst they contain only subtle reflections and obscure forgetfulness. Those waters that are wicked in nature are animate torrents, and their number can be heard from afar in zealous timbre.

FARIDOT

Stretching east from Agartha, one finds the glass galleries of Faridot. An unrelenting wind murmurs gently through these calls in furtive fashion. However the floors are often covered in fine white sand, and the stirring of those winds ensure that its merest breath can braid exposed flesh.

The Emerald City by Lino Dreighe.

The corridors of Faridot possess naturally forming stretches of obsidian and feldspar. Their lengths are known for their uncanny glasswork structures, giving the impression of structures spun from the abundant glass. These lands display impossible flutes and turrets, whose very form captures what little light they encounter in a most beguiling way.

One may find here a propensity for openness in the lack of doors and paned windows, giving license to the wind to flow unchecked by all its transgressors. Most of the paths that lead through Faridot are indirect and winding; some lead nowhere, meandering aimlessly until they dissipate into nothingness before reaching any discernible destination.

KOHL

To the north of Agartha lie the stone quarries of Kohl. It is a dimly lit world of rotund landscapes, filled with towering pillars of rock that reach to the ceiling and stand as a solemn army through its vaunted halls. The quadrant is tinged with a constant chill, which staves off what little comfort that might be found in the gloom.

The lands here show a propensity towards immensity, and the structures to be found here favour square and robust form that place breadth before height. The majority of the structures are layered with squat blocks, even building on top of the roofs of each other in the manner of stepped pyramids.

The paths of Kohl are almost isometric, for each row and column aligns with careful precision. The shapes attempt to conform to the irregularities of the terrain, even demonstrating subtle illusion of design that disguises curves with length; this reveals a synthesis of conformity between aesthetic and pragmatism.

LAZUR

In the lands to the west of Agartha are the clay-mired crags of Lazur. The tunnels here are dotted with numerous mud pools, and its various tunnels are mired with pits and bogs. The waterways flow more abundantly here and their paths are often focused through mechanical apparatuses found in the walls.

The structures of this quadrant are made of bone-like porcelain or clay; their manner is such that each complex seems to flow into one another. The general design of the buildings model the use of large and shapely domes and the spaces around them conform to their curves.

The paths here carefully work about each other in such a way that they frequently fold in on each other to form lazy double helixes. Every line leads with subtle circuitous manner, and lesser paths cross the greater circular routes. Wise travellers use this feature to move more easily from the edge to the centre of the Labyrinth.

SARDIS

Volcanic lava flows are the hallmarks of the southern quadrant of Sardis. A layer of black silt covers these halls of brass and the movement of molten rock constantly warms their contents. The lands of Sardis possess a great number of brass lines in the floor that run in errant fashion among the various rocky vaults. Here one will naturally formed forges, which sound with smelting.

The abundance of metals in the quadrant is also found in the variety of structures here. Seemingly with careful metallurgy, the buildings here render themselves into spiralling forms, and the overall effect is not unlike tall but elegant fire bursts.

Arms and extensions of individual buildings weave into each other in a lattice, but their forms are clearly separated at ground level by paths radiate around them in fractal patterns. Runners of brass bearing a lustrous polish line each path, and this grants an impression of glowing warmth.

AGARTHA

Agartha is the heart of the Ozman Beylik, being both sanctuary and prison for the takwin. It provides refuge from human influence but simultaneously corrals them within. At the height of the Beylik's might, Agartha could have even rivalled magnificent Diadem, but instead the world contains numerous testaments to their faded glory as found in sculptures of takwin heroes; For despite each being well maintained, the last was commissioned more than a century ago.

Agartha lines the inner circumference of a hollowed chamber deep in the Umbrage. It is poised in the very heart of the Labyrinth, and surrounded on all sides by the mighty roots of Palladium, which hold it tightly. The shape of Agartha is like a hollow torus: in the centre, both ceiling and floor converge, where they almost meet as stalactite and stalagmite matched in symmetry.

The inhabited sections of the Blazing World comprise the lower basin, though some few buildings depend from the ceiling. For all that Agartha is a natural hollow in the centre of the Firmament, the takwin that dwell here have subjected it to centuries of building. This gives the world a distinct impression of being a built environment: artisans have worked the lower basin of the world into one single architectural complex, containing lattices of luminous glass, spires of burnished brass, great plateaus of crystal, and terracotta fields. The landscape comprises intricate strata of turrets, terraces, rooms, and honeycomb corridors. Even the plants bear greater resemblance to mineral growths than living things, and the variety of animals resemble alchemical constructs, much like the resident population.

A slender, silvery pathway called the Filum marks the midsection of the Blazing World. Upon this equator at the four compass points, there are the four gateways of Agartha. Each opens upon one of the winding golden trods of the Labyrinth that unerringly lead towards the farthest distance of its cardinal point.

ZOMORROD

The palace of Zomorrod is carved from the monumental stalagmite that rises from the very centre of Agartha, beneath the equally ponderous stalactite. Both protrusions are formed from emerald-fleck limestone, and they are the only place in all Agartha where green fertile soil abounds. Fungal blooms and rare subterranean flowers bedeck these works: the famous hanging gardens of Agartha. It is the ubiquity of emerald and the sublime presence of foliage that gives Zomorrod its sobriquets of 'The Emerald City' and 'The Garden City'.

Zomorrod is the ruling palace of the Ozman Beylik. The enigmatic ruler of the takwin, known only as the Core, presumably resides in this citadel. There are no walls to Zomorrod, for a moat-

What historian of note has not contemplated the location of Agartha? It is far too convenient that a world should lie within the depths of the Firmament, where our records suggest the ancient city of Nod must have lain. Indeed, there is more than one eminent scholar of Antiquity that alludes to one pertinent fact or another, and then contends that Agartha was built upon the petrified remains of Nod.

Of course, these matters are mostly of mythical and academic value; for the empire cares little of the history of Agartha, and rather cares only that it is the capital of the Osman Beylik.

from Essais Philosophiques by Count August

lake of pure quicksilver surrounds the city, and this provides sufficient deterrence to casual intrusion. Visitors must take one of the four bridges that mark the compass points, where the golden paved roads finally terminate.

Antipodes

As the roots of Palladium bore downwards into the depths of the Firmament, they reach the lowest points and grasp the bottom of its enormous gear. Though the roots twist about the centre of Agartha, they continue in a downwardly projecting anti-pole. Here, at the very bottom of the Firmament are the Antipodes.

The deepest place of the Umbrage is a deep fell that contains the Abysm; a great underground sea into which all the waters of the Cascades eventually discharge themselves. It is a black and glorious underground ocean, wherein all the waters of the cascades flow. The islands upon this expanse are phantom lands that appear and disappear with troubling ease. The only permanent feature of this domain is Necropolaris at its centre; home to the fades, the oubliettes, and the Anathema.

Necropolaris

The world of the Antipodes contains the city of Necropolaris, which comprises a collection of a hundred or more islets separated by channels and linked by bridges; between the structures of this place run the murky waters of the Abysm.

This place is a dark reflection of Metropolaris but home only to restless memories and echoes. Like its counterpart and near-namesake, this city of the dead contains a large urban expanse, but its structure lacks coherence. The city is a curling, rambling mess of architecture all distorted by the ideals and fears of urban life.

Buildings in Necropolaris stand tall and misshapen. They lean out across the street with a seeming desire to fall over, twisted upon themselves, curling and leaning at unnatural angles. The taller ones corkscrew up towards the false sky, attempting to pierce the ever-present gloom. Odd pieces of architecture extend in occasional patterns: stairs that lead to nowhere, doors that open up to empty space, and windows crooked, and oft opaque.

Locations that reflect places of thought, creativity, or the expression of the mind tend demonstrate more coherence than the rest, and libraries, courts of law, and parliaments seem to loom above their peers.

Fades

The residents of the Necropolaris are the echoes of those recently passed, known as fades. All that can be found in the city are things, beings, places, and people who are waiting to be forgotten.

Only those of great fame and reputation endure longer than a generation or so; when they pass from living memories, they expire. They numbly repeat the rituals of past, in blind and unerring purpose. Not all are benign, and Necropolaris is haunted by darker and more predatory, cunning shades that are strong enough to endure, and hunger for fresh memories.

OUBLIETTES

A collection of hollows and caches may be found with Necropolaris, where one or more of Necropolaris' canals terminate. These are the Oubliettes, and it is here where the wash of memory comes to rest. As the rivulets pool in these chambers, they build up echoes of the forgotten memories of all people long since dead, and everything that has been forgotten may perhaps be found within these chambers.

These places are the cul-de-sacs of histories, of histories that were never-remembered, and potential histories that failed to come to fruition. Within each chamber the recollections of the past collect and may ferment for untouched centuries, lying forgotten by the surface. Among these chambers, there surely lie reflections of histories of the Realm as still ruled by faerie or takwin.

ANATHEMA

In the centre of this unlit city is the terrible and maddening bore, named the Anathema. It is the well of entropy; for all that falls within its maw are consigned to oblivion. Here, the great wash of the thought and emotion return to the world of dreams from where they originated.

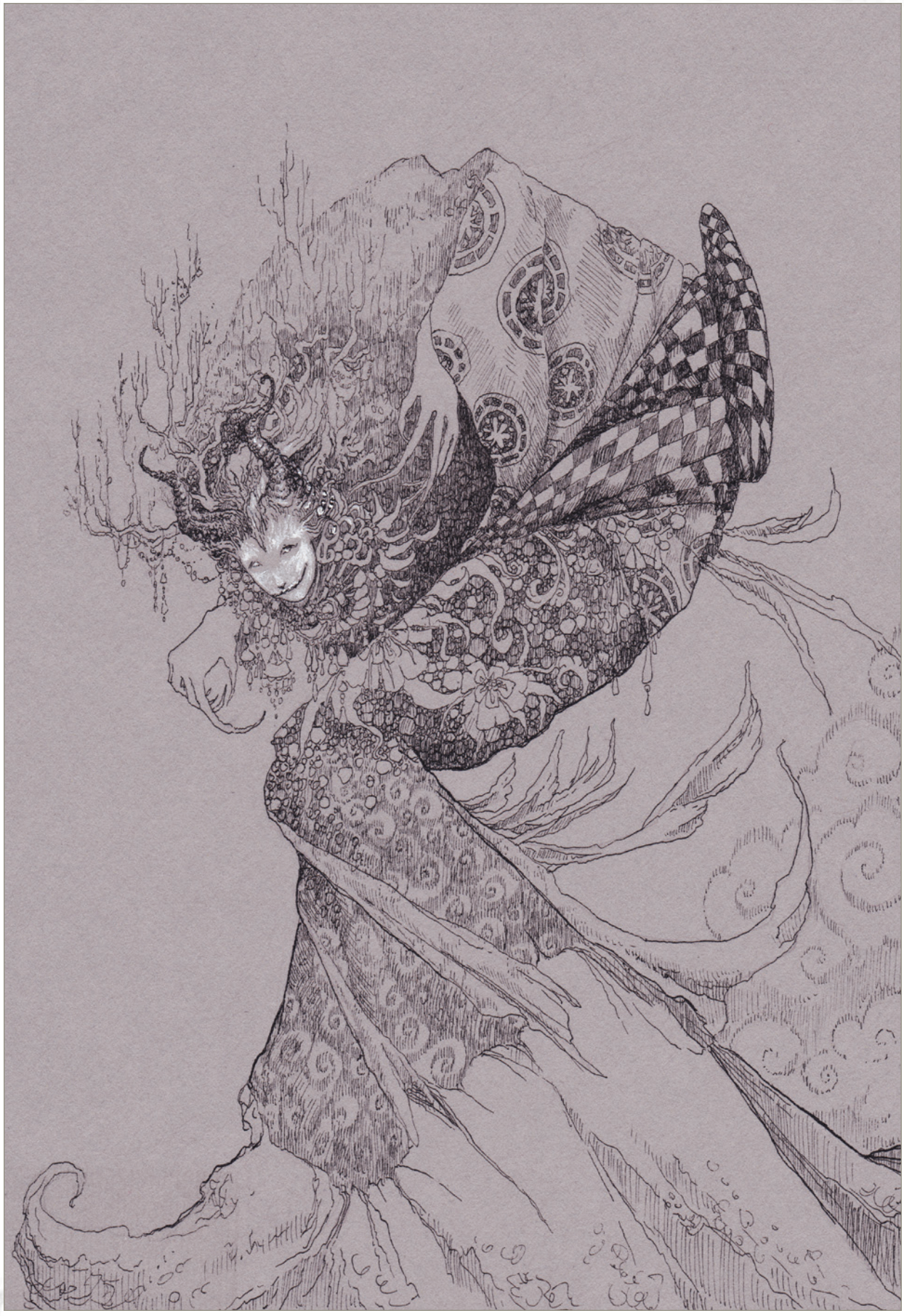
As the waters spiral into the bore, they unravel the complexities of memory into primeval passion, and what lucid thoughts are contained within dissolved to leave an effluence of unadulterated urge. In doing so, they release all manner of portentous thoughts, dreams, and nightmares of the world above.

Opposite: Personae by Socar Myles.

To mark the rising tension of the second act, one first seeks to know all men and women as its players, and their many parts. Mark well here the great Imperium, the sovereign power, complete with many noble actors, all querulous agents of destiny. Find here lessons on the powers and the aspirations that lurk within them.

Act 2: Escalation

PERSONAE



Ancestry

The teeming numbers of humanity are found in nearly every single domain of the empire, with many calling home the far-flung colonies of the Hinterlands and Umbrage, or found even in the planets beyond. However, the vast majority of humanity keeps to the terrestrial confines of the Literal Continent, as most other habitats are inhospitable placing visitors at jeopardy. Though humanity is of one species, it is hardly homogeneous: there are distinctions of class, caste, clan, nation, and even house.

Humanity's genesis account denotes descent from one of five Muses; each is a matriarch to one of the five clades of humanity. Since this prehistoric time, these clades have diverged frequently, producing many different lineages of clans and houses. In times of antiquity, each clade was a nation unto themselves: the glorious Anath, the wise Eden, the secretive Lilim, the dolorous Freia, and the majestic Sylvan. Contemporaries have consigned the community of these clades to the annals of history; save only that community remains through the shared creeds of the castes.

The Muses occupy a most reverend position on humanity's collective mythology, and yet knowledge of them is recalled only through echoes of their deeds dimly hearkening from times of old. The archetypal natures of the Muses are powerful cultural artefacts, and the demeanour of each Muse survives through their progeny. Some remnant of those common origins comprises the tenets of the castes of the Mousaion. Each caste dedicates itself to the memory of one of those Muses and the principle membership that caste is that Muses' descendants.

However, modernity produces startling configurations, and there are instances of nobles adopted into houses that claim ancestry differing from that of their birthright, which provokes curiosity and some small enmity. Conformity to the caste of one's original ancestor is one of historic inertia. For even though not all members adhere to the customs of their caste faithfully, they still recall the rich ancestral mythology.

The compulsion to contend matters of caste is the domain of the working classes, while the middle classes obsess on matters of nation and federation. Contrastingly, the aristocracy fret chiefly over the continuity of their house and clan, to the point that distinctions of pedigree rise above others; for the aristocracy alone, filial loyalties are of foremost import, dividing the noble houses in their dignity.

from The Vindication of the Aristocracy by Vivian Grey

To date, there are varieties of narratives that attempt to recall their genesis, but the one that the Mousaion holds most orthodox is one that depicts them as the daughters of the royal stars, having descended from on high in the mythic prehistory. However, a competing account still popular among the graces, particularly of Synoptic traditions, hold to the view that they were birthed from seeds that fell from Palladium.

Yet, common to all such accounts is a profound connection from each Muse towards a particular phase of the day and night: Eve is the Muse at Dawn; Lilith becomes the Muse at Dusk; Frey is the dour Muse at Nadir; the Muse at Zenith is Anath; and lastly, Sofia is the Muse at Eclipse.

from Immortal by Matilda Mulfstan

Clan

Every noble house is itself a branch of one of twelve dynastic clans that trace their origin to one of twelve antediluvian figures known as the Diadon. They were the last true Atleans, having survived the Deluge, and it was their ministrations that restored humanity to civilisation. Naturally, each of the Diadon is regarded as a near-descendant of one of the Muses, and thus regarded to bear similar countenance of their gracious matriarch.

It is a contrivance of the skein that three lineages from each Muse have survived through the Diadon. Within each set, one of each of three primordial archetypes: the bard, the hero, and the magi. Accordingly, each dynastic clan primarily finds unity in their common Diadon progenitor, even as they more broadly unite under a common Muse through their caste.

Many find sympathy with those whose bloodline shares affinity with their own. The bloodlines descended from bardic lineages as known as Rosaline bloodlines, and they are frequently characterised by their dramatic flair. Those bearing an heroic ancestry are the Braemaline bloodline, and readily demonstrate a will for action and adventure. Finally, the most mysterious of the three type of bloodline are the Pommeline, who are the magi of the Diadon.

HOUSE

The house forms the corps of noble society; each is a union of nobles, bound together in kinship. All society regards the kindred bonds of households with paramount sanctimony. The household as family is a unity that is made grand by the aggregation of its constituent and diverse members. Although each house has a number of nobles that form the family proper, an array of trusted retainers and other members of the family who are not noble form something of an extended family for the house.

A house comes together, not by mere association or their oaths of loyalty, but by the sharing of their founder's dreaming. Each house has a founder in an historic noble of great merit, whose various deeds of legendary have imbued them with sufficient measures of quick; instead of falling into death of natural causes, they pass instead into endless torpid dreaming, and the supine noble transfigures into statuesque effigy. Their dreams are potent, and impart values, customs, history, and lore upon all those scions bound to their name. Members of a given house have sometimes lain in repose with the incumbent founders in hopes of gleaning hidden insights by their proximity.

It is the memory of the founder of a house that gives credence to all their progeny. Accordingly, the science of every household becomes both the custodian and the curator for the legacy of their legend; and so the members of each household cherish, preserve, and defend the reputation of their house above all. Dishonouring one's own name and the name of one's family are sure ways to earn the ire and enmity of one's kindred. For the worst offences, there is the act of exsanguination, which casts a member out of the house.

At the head of each house stands its matriarch or patriarch, whose will reigns supreme over the family. Theirs is the ultimate authority to rule on the conduct of its members, concerning how well they attend the mores of their family. Though it is usually the eldest living noble of any given house, there are ceremonies to test the measure of a given noble against the qualities of the founder of that house. Standing within one's own house is thereafter a matter of decorum, as each noble cultivates the favour of their family.

The rite of the Epiphany varies according to the customs of the house; though they all profess the presentation of their oaths before the patriarch or matriarch of that house, whereupon they are accorded the name of the house to mark their membership.

There are thought to be comparable rites for those that practice Allegory or Symphony. The iconic forms emphasise the adornment of an indelible sign upon their visage, such that the Allegoric scions are marked in visible manner. Symphonic houses instruct their supplicants to perform a mnemonic melody and blend it with the harmonics of their house motif.

from Mythopoeia by Leubald Geyer

PEDIGREE

Because each household carries the legacy of one or more historic nobles, the aristocracy gives great credence to the most magnificent of such lineages. These legacies speak of an inheritance that has prevailed across the course of history. They are a narrative largesse sufficiently celebrated to acclaim the worth of their houses founder. There exists a subtle hierarchy of privilege, which confers upon those who can demonstrate the most eminent lines of their forebears.

The customs of pedigree seek to ensure that the measure of quick within each progeny is higher than otherwise, if only to facilitate their chances to overcome the trails of the dream quest called the Epiphany. Accordingly, the nobles regard good breeding highly, for breeding is indicative of the preservation of a given noble legacy. Nobles often refer to the metaphor of treillage; the term borrows from viticulture to imply the lattice framework made to support climbing vines, like grapes and roses. In particular, the metaphor is used to describe the ways the different houses approach matters of cultivating their pedigree.

Research into pedigree has revealed traits common to each type of bloodline. The Rosaline, Braemaline, and Pommeline apiece contain a different composition of quick. Rosaline bloodlines are suffused with quixotic *glamour*; the Braemaline bloodlines are affixed with *velleity*; and those Pommeline bloodlines are replete with *whist*. These subtle blends arise from the combined ancestry of Muse and Diadon; these progenitors transfigure the quick within a scion through their dreams.

The simplest test to determine lineage is bloodletting: Rosaline blood holds a softer pinkish hue, where Braemaline blood carry slight green colourations, and Pommeline blood earns the moniker of blue-bloods for purplish hues. The strength of a pedigree may also be assessed by the strength of their blood's hue, giving rise to the tendency for bloodletting in many rites of passage.

MATRIMONY

Marriage is a prime concern of pedigree, being one part political alliance and one part shared custodial trust over bloodlines. Matrimonial oaths are solemnised in ceremonies that frequent the exchange of rings, each bearing a cipher with the noble's true name upon it. Such rings are both keepsake and vouchsafe, which warn both parties when their matrimonial vows are under threat of breach.

As matrimony comprises a merging of assets and estates, a careful negotiation by both families precedes them. Families with little repute or standing are expected to compensate the other family with a wealth of substance, while those of excellent pedigree and influence need bring little more to barter than their own name. Numerous contingencies facilitate issues around inheritance and the question of which household is able to lay claim to the couple thereafter. Those who stand to inherit largesse become the subject of significant interest and thus often are required to set aside their personal aspirations to augment their eligibility, and their advantage to their own household.

From these proceedings, the houses forge a compromise. The family of lower station contributes a dowry to the other family, but retains their investment over the couple's estate. The family of greater standing impress their family name upon the couple, and formally join them to their household. Naturally, such negotiations are delicate affairs, and an exchange of pleasantries to stand as code for the negotiations to veil the attendant mercantilism, even as many parties take liberties to demonstrate supremacy through opulent display.

Modern nobles too have accommodated the change of times; the aristocracy has not endured through intransigence. Purely arranged marriages have become parochial relics, and contemporary custom permits marriage through upon one's own volition as a consideration alongside the necessities of lineage and pedigree.

COURTSHIP

There are many customs around courtship, which enable suitors to vet a potential partner. Typically, the courtship advances by graduation: first, the potential couples speak, where they may talk about all manner of ambitions and political ideal; then, if there is good accord, the suiting couple progress their intentions by attending social events together, and the amorous ones may even entertain an assignation.

It is a protracted affair, and may last any amount of months, while the couple's families entreat with each other behind the scenes. If the courtship proves fruitful then the couple seeks the assent of their household. Following this, the interactions change their tenor as the simple dalliance transforms unto an effort to consolidate houses. Couples begin by announcing their intentions at an engagement party, where they present themselves jointly to society. From then on, the affairs of negotiating the joining of the two handled through their respective households.

By custom, matrimonial unions serve to preserve lineages and their legacy: individuals come and lapse, but households must endure. As such, geopolitical advantages are a necessary component of a formidable marriage, to foster trade and alliance between their respective estates. Accordingly, the aristocracy is composed of a complicated web of relations forged in blood and oath.

from Treillage by Cassandra Shore

The sexual revolutions of the 1860s have changed popular assumptions of marriage, and positions once untenable are moderated, permitting both morganatic and homosexual marriages: marriages between noble and commoner and between peers of the same sex.

These days, the issue of both forms of marriage is less a concern of tradition, and more a question of the maintenance of pedigree. For as much as these unions contain proclivities of private affairs, they cannot escape that issue, and households rightly contend their right to intrude upon such privacy to insist upon the creation of heirs through suitable concubines and consorts.

from Through Darker Mirrors by Harold Childe

Those rare instances of unions with either faerie or takwin are fraught with political consequence. However, opportunities exist for such marriages, especially in a marriage to a liege lord, as the marriage compact creates unique conditions produced through that union and the union with the land. Faerie-aligned lands have remarkably potent seasons that reflect the faerie's origins, while takwin-merged lands are often replete with particular elemental qualities. Suffice it to say, the issue of children is circumspect, and impossible without the interdiction of alchemy.

from One Empire by Vivian Grey

The announcement of an engagement is attended by a number of popular conceits; the chief among them is the presumption that respective households become introduced for the first time.

Inevitably, they have communicated circumspectly prior. Throughout the courtship, each household head seeks to simultaneously impress their own worth upon and assess the worth of their counterparts. Naturally, the better-established families employ a cache of intelligence prior to appraise both power and merit.

from Daimon Muse by Harold Childe

Major House

Throughout the empire, there are numerous houses; few major, many minor, and all seeking to further their own interests. The nobles of any given house are bound upon their very

name. Of those nobles sworn together in a house, few are truly of first-blooded relations, for there is no guarantee that one of noble birth will pass the trial of the Epiphany and earn a noble name. Nevertheless, houses are often completed by a score of cousins and other distant kin, as well as no small number of nobles sworn in from fosterage. For the nobility, the house represents an allegiance formed through pedigree, one proud of an ancestry distinguished in its quality.

ROSALINE

The Rosaline bloodlines, the lines of the rose, are the most suited to dramatic affairs and courtly graces of the bardic archetype. They are masterful in the politics of social manipulation and backroom dealings, though their detractors consider them naught but airs and other conceits. Consequently, the Rosaline are better suited to the mores of high society, versed in the sophistications of urban living.

The favoured means of the Rosaline are through influence and artistry. The nobles of the Rosaline clans become deft in the ways of manipulating the motives and interests of others, they master the modes and demeanours of court and attendants; they see with completeness the means by which people interact, lending them great knowledge of social accord.

The duels of the petal are the ways of the Rosaline; their repertoire of contention uses appeals to emotion, its advances and manoeuvres are tinged with passion, and delivered with panache. The methods of its conflicts in both pavane and vendetta are measured to create or destroy some form of beauty. Accordingly, Rosaline in competition work to exploit courtly graces, to cultivate false or fair caricatures of their rival or lover.

HOUSE ARIMANI OF THE MAYSTERN CLAN

The House of Arimani represents one of the oldest extant houses as its pedigree traces back to the 8th Century figure Ariman. Many accounts describe him as one of the first firebrands, and testimonies of him variously credits or blames him for the liberation of slaves in his region. Once in many ages past, his house reigned over vast regions but it has since been required to consolidate its base in the Cimmerian duchy of Valach, where even today they are still decried of tyranny.

HOUSE CARABAS OF THE ZOUBARI CLAN

House Carabas is easily the most outlandish of the Zoubari Clan. This fact aligns well with their rule over the strange duchy of Ker-Ly. Their origins begin at the close of the 17th Century, when their founder rose from obscurity to claim rights to a powerful house. Accompanied by an uncanny cat in boots, he became influential throughout Italica; he created the legendary domain known as the March of Carabas that even now extends sway to Gaule. While his progeny claim home in both nations, none knows the whereabouts of Carabas, and some now think of him as little more than an allegorical figure.

HOUSE DE BARBARAC OF THE ZOUBARI CLAN

House de Barbarac represents the ruling power of Gaule, with their pride of place found in the grand duchy of Arelat. Their story begins in 1697, when a woman of astonishing grace and intelligence claimed great stature and wealth throughout the provinces of Gaule. The story begins in her youth, when her stepmother took over the estate of her inheritance, making her work the cinders. She nevertheless rose from this obscurity upon the night of a grand ball, in winning the heart of an Elector-Prince. Today, House de Barbarac are renowned for the wealth that their diamond mines provide, and for their couture exhibiting those lustrous gemstones.

HOUSE EVERES OF THE AMSALA CLAN

House Everes is the ducal house of Thrace; one of some historic controversy, ambiguous as regards to the gender of its founder. Some suspect perhaps truly neither, but rather one of the Urania; many invoke this with pride. Everes, like the progenitor Bel, was an archetypal blind prophet, but with a terrible tendency to uncover the darkest secrets of other nobles. Their family has fluctuated in and out of prominence over the centuries but has since acquired great standing in the duchy of the Thracian Shores.

HOUSE HEINRICH OF THE KELLECK CLAN

House Heinrich emerged in the early 1880s after an Elector-Prince by the name of Henry when missing. It transpired that he had fallen down the well of Absalom in Elysium. There he survived on a diet of frogs, eking out a precarious existence. Once rescued, few would seek the suit of this 'frog prince', disdained for his ranish disposition. Yet, over time, he suited and courted a duchess of great wealth, albeit one of homely features. Through this union, they forged a ducal estate, claiming the independent territories of the Caspian Reaches.

HOUSE MIRANDA OF THE KELLECK CLAN

Miranda, daughter of Prospero, founded her house in 1611. Her story begins after the self-imposed exile of her father, with whom she went with. For many years, they remained hidden on an island off the coast of Italica, until they were able to waylay those who had undone them through treachery, for the duke had learned many sorcerous arts. In a final act of clemency, he disdained his vengeance, and instead turned his wiles to restore his daughter to her rightful inheritance of the duchy of Genoa. There she defied the common ideals of womanhood and assumed a role in the affairs of state as a liege lord.

Rosaline Clans by Rich Longmore.

HOUSE MEDE OF THE ZOUBARI CLAN

Medea figures significantly in the architecture of Hellena, if only because of the role she played in its early history; her legendary is bound up in the myths of Macedon itself. The house that bears her name also has a prevailing reputation for arcane knowledge, by which its members secure its ascendancy. They have a dour reputation for delivering curses upon those who they disdain, drawing forth a most atavistic nature. Their house resides mostly in Hellena, as the ducal House of Macedon, though they have significant numbers throughout both Cimmeria and Italica.

HOUSE OREN OF THE MAYSTERN CLAN

The exact origins of House Oren lack clarity, although the epitaph on its founder's effigy reveals he existed in the late Dark Ages. Its inscription tells of his legendary cloak, woven from the hair of a princess, and his sword, carved from a mighty briarwood thorn. His deeds describe him trapping and slaying a pillaging *gigantes*, thereby preserving local livestock from its predations; by these deeds, he was proclaimed a hero. Oren founded the house with the building of the *Real Jardin* and establishing a ducal power upon the heights of Toletum.

HOUSE REINHARD OF THE MAYSTERN CLAN

Reinhard was one of Gaule's eminent tricksters during the Dark Ages; he carried the moniker 'fox face' with pride for it was the emblem of his clan. Throughout his lifetime, he gained acclaim as a folk hero for many notorious deeds. He made his fortune through a vicious legal battle against other aristocrats, where he cunningly turned all their traps to his own advantage. Since that day, the Reinhards have retained ducal power over the domains of Guyenne. However, his greatest and last trick took place at his own funeral: all his enemies gathered in one place, delivering maudlin and insincere elegies, were all struck down by his meticulous and posthumous revenge in the poisoned feast.

HOUSE SINTERKLAS OF THE AMSALA CLAN

Sinterklas founded his house in the year of 343. During the height of Sinterklas' reign, he was much beloved for his generosity as he gave gifts and placed coins in any shoe left out. He became a patron of charity, and so his descendants take up this constant duty. The constant demands of these obligations have forced the house to sequester their selves to their homelands: the Thanish duchy of Bjarma.

HOUSE UDEA OF THE AMSALA CLAN

By all accounts, the house of Udea holds Aegyptian origins, founded by a woman much famed for her raven-feathered cowl. Her history tells a tale of her search for her seven lost brothers and of how she rescued them each in turn from terrible danger; it was a quest that tried her sorely. Eventually, her trials resolved, she and her brothers settled her household in Metropolaris; theirs is the ducal estate in Corona known as 'The Rookery'.

HOUSE VOLOS OF THE KELLECK CLAN

The Volos have a reputation for duplicity of many shades of grey; their ambiguity is as much a quality of their Rodinian nationality where reign over the duchy of Luteva. However, its members were once little more than cattle lords, they have risen to become musicians and manipulators of great note, all cunning in the ways of nocturnal mysteries and intrigues. The origins of the house's founder have been lost to antiquity; though some few rumours abound about his ancient penchant for night-time activities and his ill-gotten wealth. He is recalled by his woolly beard.

BRAEMALINE

The Braemaline bloodlines, the lines of the thorn, are those whose very essence is replete with velleity. In this, they stand with great courage and indomitable spirit, allowing them to face grave danger and peril squarely. The Braemaline tend towards prowess in stature and manner; their candour, physical appearance, or mere presence is enough to dominate their noble peers.

These scions of adventure are forged with temperaments suited to adversity. This disposition serves them well in the tribulations of the quest, or tumultuous conflict. The velleity that flushes them compels these heroes to accord honour fairly and strive for the heights of their power.

The Braemaline conduct their duels through the way of the thorn, through physical conflict, force and arms. In the contests of both vendetta and pavane, they are often the most violent and forthright in their intentions, seeking to prove or slander a noble's virtue. Their methods demonstrate conviction and character, and challenge the proud with forthright temerity.

HOUSE BARBICHU OF THE PORTNER CLAN

In 1812, a man by the name of Barbichu struck a bargain with an Iberian noble: an amount of gold in exchange for her first-born. The gold ensured that said duchess gained sufficient power in the duchy of Vesperides to attain its rule. However, the consequence of her deal enabled Barbichu to assume regency over her first-born, to thereby claim right of rule in his own stead. House Barbichu retains a reputation for duplicitous bargaining, albeit honouring contracts to the letter.

HOUSE CONOMOR OF THE GREYSTRAND CLAN

Endowed with a wealthy legacy, Conomor augmented his inheritance with good fiscal management, which made him one of the most affluent men of the late 15th Century. Yet, at the peak of his fortunes,

Braemaline Clans by Rich Longmore.

his treacheries were laid bare revealing the murder of his successive wives, his bloodthirsty roving piracy, and his insatiable lust for violence. This infamy cemented his place in history, his legend securing him torpor upon his passing. His successors have sought, with little success, to mitigate this dire reputation into one more controlled, yet still fearsome. The Conomor make no permanent home, for the centre of their power is the Blue Fleet: a flotilla the envy of all, with the flagship their ducal palace. They claim influence over the independent territories of the Barbary Coast.

HOUSE DANNEBROG OF THE JAGEN CLAN

The House of Dannebrog is the ruling house of the grand duchy of Thanemark, which lends its name to the nation proper. It was founded in 1679, when a lady Robin, leader of the Red Hood Militia, took up arms against the Wolf of the North. In these bloody deeds, she earned the moniker of Dannebrog, alluding to her now blood-soaked cape she wore, and under which her army marched home victorious; in time, it became her formal standard. The house is most populous in the Thanelands where they are plagued by aspersions of wildling taint.

HOUSE EMYRS OF THE PORTNER CLAN

Few are as cryptic as House Emyrs of Albion, the holders of the grand duchy of Reynes, for its founder was none other than Myrrdin himself. Much of Myrrdin's life, in the aftermath of Camelyn, remains in obscurity; though many who recall his legend claim that he lost his mind, becoming a wild man of the woods. Even today, the exact location of his somnolent body is unknown, having suffered a three-fold 'death': he fell off a cliff, impaled upon stakes by the riverside, and with his head lolling underwater.

HOUSE LADISLAU OF THE JAGEN CLAN

The House of Ladislau reigns over Erdeal, the grand duchy of Cimmeria; the history of its founding has become somewhat obscured, though noted as being between 1282 and 1285. It begins with the union between the two lords Hunor and Magnor; they bonded in their mutual pursuit of the ethereal white stag, which brought these two hunters came together repeatedly. For many years, their hunt continued without surcease, never resting, always seeking. Finally, they came upon a blue inland lake in Cimmeria, where they founded their steadings, and set their quest aside.

HOUSE MARION OF THE EROMUND CLAN

A wide range of views exists about the Lady Marion, but the position taken by her eponymous house declares her as the mother of a most venerable scribe of antiquity, immaculately conceived. She remains an iconic figure of motherhood, and many families keep a statue of her likeness. Her many progeny have formed a most prolific house, dispersed across the Realm far and wide, but with great concentrations in their Iberian ducal home of Granata.

HOUSE MER OF THE GREYSTRAND CLAN

The Thanish House of Mer was established in 1837. Its founder, born with a congenital weakness of her musculature, could not stand under her own power. Accordingly, she spent much of her time in the water, granted freedom of movement by its supportive buoyancy. Spying her at her sport, the callow duke of the province was unable to control his carnal desires, and imposed himself upon her. Enraged and filled with bitterness, she slashed furiously at her legs for their weakness, and shaved her luxurious hair for its infamous beauty; then took that bloodied knife and left it in her assailant's heart. With that act, she laid claim to the ducal estate of Svealand as wergild for her injury. Here, her descendants remain to this day, and each bears some measure of her weakness.

HOUSE MOLOCH OF THE EROMUND CLAN

The House of Moloch has an unusual history wherein its ancestor, Asteron, was plagued with a terrible malady. His progeny attempted to abandon him within the Labyrinth, yet the boy survived, thrived, and attained a powerful stature. His house has nevertheless gone from strength to strength, becoming the ducal power of the Cimmerian duchy of Bogdan, having emigrated from Magna Italica. Here, its many members gather in underground mithraeums to practice blood rites.

HOUSE PESHUN OF THE GREYSTRAND CLAN

The ancestral home of House Peshun is an Iberian black castle, in the ducal estate of Andalus. It was established in the 12th Century by a rogue grace that used her melodic arts to summon forth a dragon-dream, which she commanded to terrorise the local region. Her downfall came about at the hands of a pair of fisher-kings of the Peshun family who used a mirror-coated shield to befuddle the creature; in doing so, they thwarted the grace by stealing away her daughter, kept under guard of the dragon-dream. Though they then vanquished the grace, it cost the elder brother's life.

HOUSE ROSAMUND OF THE EROMUND CLAN

The House of Rosamund was founded in 1697, and it is the reigning house of the Rodinian duchy of Samartia. They have become entrenched in the local politics, despite the family having only established itself there in the last ten years. Its hero was originally of Gaulic origin, where she was both blessed and afflicted by faerie enchantments. Her requiem is unique, entering into quiescence as she did after pricking her finger on a poisoned distaff.

HOUSE RIDERE OF THE PORTNER CLAN

The House of Ridere is a house of great chivalry, the infamy and exploits of which has made it the ruling ducal power of Suddene: their mastery of horsemanship and riddling is evident to all, contested by none. Both such traditions date back to early 13th Century, for its founder, a noble whose name history has forgot, required of he who would take the plaid of his daughter a demonstration of superior horsemanship, and the wit to unravel the most diabolic of riddles. Accordingly, this house has elevated the art of riddling to a strong custom of its lot.

HOUSE VENEZIA OF THE JAGEN CLAN

This tale begins in 13th Century Elysium, where the princess Venezia suffered persecution by her stepmother's hand. She fled to the southern end of the Italic peninsula, hiding there among a throng of robbers and other blackguards. The queen was vengeful, sending her greatest hunter after Venezia. She in her turn used guile and mimicry against the hunter, and convinced the queen's agent to return with the heart of a stag, as proof of her death. Taking refuge and advantage of this respite, she refined her courtly graces with her newfound hunter's instinct; she then returned to court incognito, and rose swiftly through the ranks to ultimately depose her own step-mother to claim Verona as her own.

POMMELINE

The progeny of the Pommeline bloodlines form the lines of the fruit, and find themselves drawn to the deeper workings and mysteries of the Realm. They bear a predilection for the occult, and the obscure, being so inclined to philosophic musings. Many are agile of mind and keen of wit, made to fathom the unbidden workings of all that is subtle and imagined, including the secrets of court.

Their blood is heavy with whist, making gifting such nobles with subtle cunning, and a determined manner that lends them a quiet surety of purpose and deep wellspring of contemplation.

Of all the bloodlines, they are most comfortable with the unknown, and even find a quiet resolve in the certainty and knowledge of their ultimate demise.

The duels of the haw are those of secrets and intrigue, whose clandestine works are most natural to the Pommeline. Most such conflicts of the haw seek either to discover, to reveal, or perhaps bury some unbidden truth about their rival or intended. With formidable instruments of sheer reasoning and calculation, these methods are designed to deconstruct opponents and demonstrate the impregnability of their position.

HOUSE ARIADNE OF THE FINSTARI CLAN

House Ariadne is hails from the earliest reaches of antiquity. Its founder was one of the first people to navigate the pathways of the Labyrinth, using a clew of yarn to secure the return journey. She passed her many secrets on to her successors, and they have among become most proficient navigators of the Labyrinth. As a house they are dispersed across Hellena, but have maintained stronghold in the bastion of their island duchy, Nys; so entrenched have they been these nearly two thousand years, that likely none but the Invictus could evict them.

HOUSE AZOR OF THE FINSTARI CLAN

In 1740, Gaule was shocked a liege named Bete, who was the monstrous master of his backwater domain. In his cruel appetite, he preyed upon unwitting maidens, stealing them away unto his home in the bramblewoods in hope that the eldritch nature of the surrounds might work perversions upon their persons. His antics, however, brought down the ire of the populace upon his head and he fled to the subcontinent of Numidia. In early exile, the imminent matriarch of this nascent house finally tempered the cruellest of his excesses, securing her station and family stability: under the alias Azor, she slowly restored the house's fortune and thereby claimed the duchy of Tanith.

HOUSE GERDEN OF THE SILVENBLUM CLAN

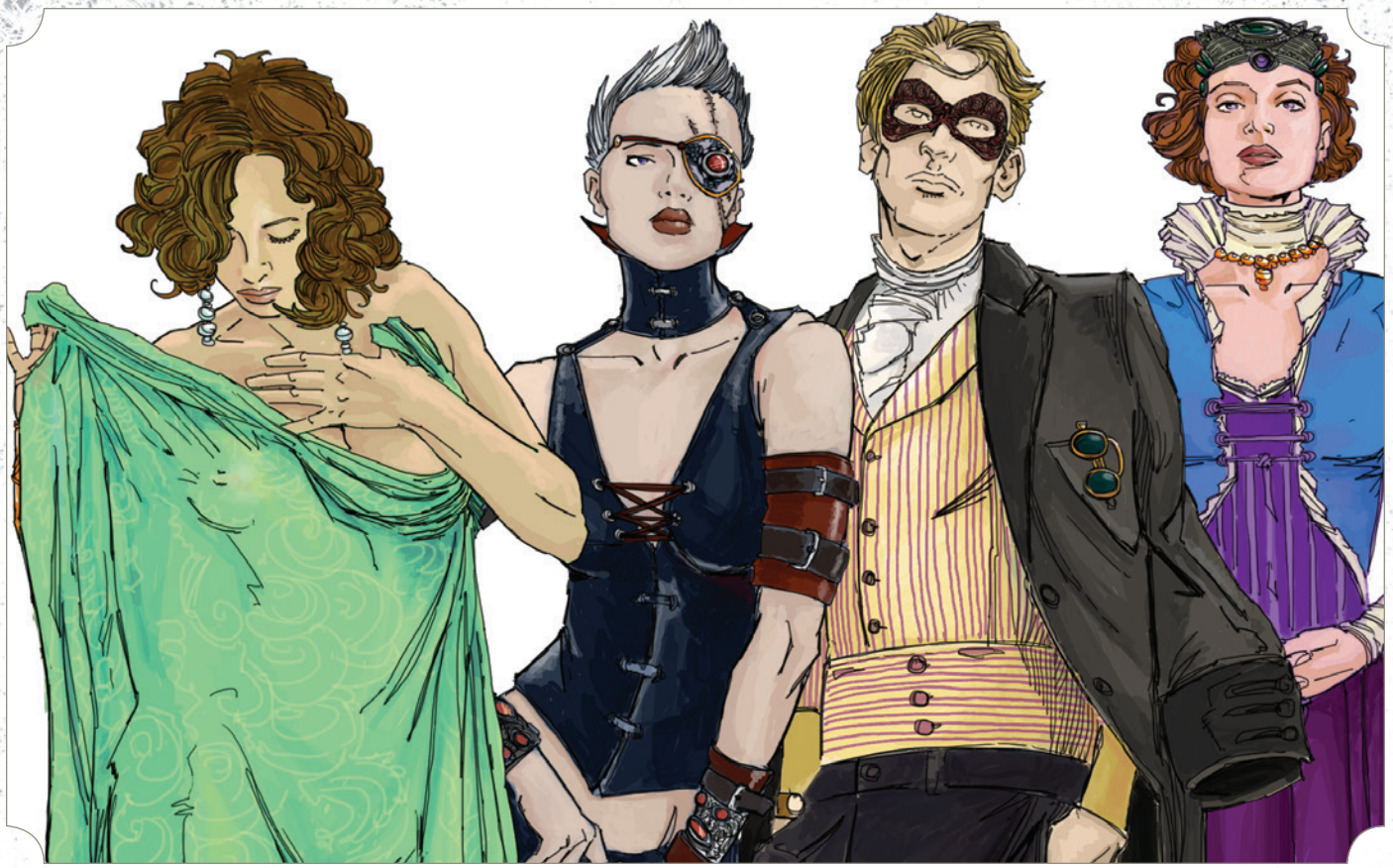
In 1845, Queen Mab of the northern march kidnapped a young boy after he fell victim to a splinter from one of her mirrors. However, the boy's sister Gerda demonstrated powerful courage when she confronted the queen of the snows to rescue her brother. Having stolen a measure of the marcher lady's power, her progeny multiplied in great number; they are now the ducal power of the Thanish province of Kvenuu and represent one of its few matriarchal powers.

HOUSE RATTENFANGER OF THE WINEBACH CLAN

The House of Rattenfanger was founded in 1284. Its founder was infamous not merely for his fluting talents and pied clothing, but for his annihilation of the rat population of Hameln. His borough rose to ducal splendour, where his descendants consolidate their estate's power. Though the founder's reputation was, and is, justly marred as a result of his stealing children away, particularly of other nobles who defaulted on their dues, his descendants have proven more civil. Even so, they are not above infesting any defaulters with vermin.

HOUSE ROGA OF THE FINSTARI CLAN

The people of Rodin are all wary of the House of Roga, which was founded by the ancient crone Hedwig who once terrorised the night; all her progeny are of a similarly pernicious reputation, justified or otherwise. She built her manor upon the stumps of trees and surrounded it with a palisade of bones made from her enemies and victims. To date, the members of this house still carry the burden of her legacy, and yet, for all the public antipathy, they are the most powerful houses on Skania, holding claim and control over Fenmark.



HOUSE SELICH OF THE SILVENBLUM CLAN

House Selich has been around far longer than any can recall, and even though the house founder lies deep beneath the waves off the coast of Albion her scions can still hear her call. The house is a maritime power, and holds the ducal seat of Westernesse. Regard them well, for they spend much time at sea, rivalling even the naval might of the Greystrands. Their reputation precedes them, and they are notorious on shore for an uncanny knack for discerning those dissatisfied by their marital life, and use their great skill to woo those of forlorn heart.

HOUSE SILENUS OF THE WINEBACH CLAN

The House of Silenus is easily the eldest house of the Winebachs, established at the height of antiquity and is dynastically anomalous for the clan for its long established matriarchy. While they are not the most prominent house in the duchy of Thermiscrya, they have managed to become that land's ruling power. Their founder, Silenus, was a highly virile man that transformed into a woman, and was a notorious consumer of wine and mead. In inebriation, they held special knowledge of dreams, becoming one of the region's most prominent sages.

HOUSE TAMLAINE OF THE WINEBACH CLAN

The legend of Tamlaine dates back to his founding of the house in 1549. He is one of the few Orpheans of historical prominence, and his story begins with his attempted rescue of his one true love from the pernicious grasp of a long-forgot faerie queen. His depictions have him descending into the Umbrage to retrieve the shade of his lover and beguiling the restless fades with song and harp. The house has since proliferated throughout Albion, but is most prominent in the duchy of Aneon; it is a land well suited to their ethereal dispositions.

Pommeline Clans by Rich Longmore.

HOUSE VOYEVODE OF THE SILVENBLUM CLAN

Since the glorious and scandalous romance between Lady Odyll and Elector-Prince Ludwig in 1877, this minor house has grown to great prominence; a source of Rodinian pride, they rule the grand duchy of Copok. Legends of their founder, recalled as 'The Lady of the White Veil', date back several centuries, even before the more modern exploits of Lady Odyll and Prince Ludwig; she was reputed to have founded a manorial estate on the now famous Lake of Swans.

HOUSE PARTIT OF THE ROTHSHART CLAN

The House of Partit was founded in the 11th Century by a Cimmerian princess of the subcontinental duchy of Qirim. She was famed in the region as the beautiful mute: in her silence, she refused names given to her that she might escape from being subjugated by that act. There were many attempts by ardent suitors to break her silence that she endured. Her passions were eventually won over by the advances of a singular Flamine whose nightingale voice broke into a lilting song; the song pierced the veiling occlusions that surrounded and protected, the princess. In this, the Flamine learned the secret name of the princess and gifted it to her: the name Partit. To this date, the house remains aloof and secretive even as they serve as the ducal rulers of Qirim.

HOUSE PERSINETTE OF THE ROTHSHART CLAN

The story of House Persinette hails from the 10th Century. It begins with a cavalier collecting rampion bellflowers for a maiden, who lived high up the length of Palladium. It was said of her that her feet never touched the ground, and that she deliberately eschewed all who walked the land. Ultimately, her reclusion could not hold, as the Rampion knight wove a slender ladder of purest silk, and floated it up to her with one of the earliest balloons. Today, the house enjoyed the lofty heights of the Withywindle, taking pride in never touching the ground.

HOUSE VESTENE OF THE ROTHSHART CLAN

The pedigree of House Vestene traces back to the 2nd Century, where its founder, Tarpeia, was given charge to watch over a sacred flame. Legend holds that the crucible of this flame was placed during the foundation of civilisation on the ducal island of Napoly. Here, where the Vestene rule, there is a popular belief that holds that their fortunes shall never falter, as long as the flame persists. Only twice has misdeed allowed the flame to expire, and each time the house experienced great calamity. As a family, it has produced to no small number of Oracles, and much of its influence is based in the membership of the Italic courts.

Maystern

The Maystern are renowned for great cunning and cleverness; rumours constantly abound of their entanglement in all manner of labyrinthine schemes and other little treacheries. They seem driven to success and have few scruples in its pursuit. Indeed, there are many among the aristocracy quick to note that the Maystern do little to quell these rumours.

Adon, the Fire-Bringer

Adon was a duplicitous schemer, the very ideal of cunning and artifice; small wonder then, his role as the patron of invention. History recalls his talent with the use of any tool, no matter how esoteric or unique, and his native knowledge of all forms of mechanical fabrication; works of metal, and the fruits of artefaction were his to impart. Some lament his fiery gift of innovation, his finest trick, for it gave humankind the capacity for great destruction as one with its benefaction.

Most descriptions speak of Adon as the gilded prince; a particular lustre to his skin giving the seeming of burnished gold; head and body clad in strips of black cloth. He is never depicted with a smile, and his eyes carry a severity bordering cruelty. Likewise, the Maystern often present a radiant candour as terrible as the dawn. They are one of the four Rosaline tribes, and are descended from Anat through Adon. In this, they share many of Anat's features, her burnished hue and brunette hair, but they also bear Adon's stony and unfathomable mask, marked by piercing golden eyes.

Insignia

The motto of the Maystern clan, 'By First Light', is a comment that they are always first to the table. They are alert and wary even with the dawning of day, having already begun to work on their schemes while others are in bed; they vow never to be caught in slumber.

The symbol of the clan is the torch; its animal is the red fox; and its flora is the thistle, the honeysuckle, and bryony. The traditional colour of the Maystern noble, proudly worn, is a crimson-red, readily demonstrating affection for diamonds.

Reputation

Like their Rosaline cousins, the Maystern have a penchant for the intrigues of court and politics. They demonstrate keen insight into the motivations of those around them, which they have no qualms in using to their advantage. Their words carry the gilding of promises, able to make their apparent causes coincide with the interests of their listeners. Their designs are always circumspect, often deployed with multiple targets. Yet, in this lays a paradox, for the Maystern work their misdirection well and rarely reveal their agenda. Despite this common knowledge, they often co-opt this reputation and use others object often finds that the attempt to evade the expected trap proves a self-fulfilling prophecy.

A broad inquiry as to the most salient quality of the Maystern resolves the answer as determination; their ambition their weakness also, often preceding, as it does, a rash course of action. For all their ability to improvise convoluted machinations in response to political

Maystern Crest by Herbie Peppard.

opportunity, patience rarely sometimes short of supply. They can be quick to act and sometimes quicker to react, particularly in competitive environments. Each and every scion of the Maystern burns with indignant fury upon failing to achieve pre-eminence.

FAMILY

The Maystern houses are highly strategic, and every potential union considered for their strategic opportunity. It is insufficient to contemplate the immediate political and social advantage a union might bring, but needs must also consider whether such unions bring qualities of cunning and artifice to the house. Those very few commoners who can demonstrate aptitude enough to match the aristocracy are raised to the house. Elsewise, the Maystern are drawn to headstrong partners, as they are fired by zeal and conflict.

The children of the Maystern are very enthusiastic and lack patience like their forebears. They may demand expensive items but lose interest after the first thrill of acquisition abates. Many a carer to these children finds their patience tried; they respond poorly to restrictive discipline, chafing at stringent rules, but working well within reasonable guidelines.

COURT

The Maystern lieges are lively, governing with youthful exuberance. Often gregarious and approachable despite their power and they excel at discerning the pulse of the court around them.

A similar ardour imbues the Maystern graces, whose fiery temperaments make them zealous; they are subtle and quick to anger. They thrive amidst social tension, intrepid navigators of adversity, and take some small pleasure from the conflict itself; and so are often wont to test the mettle of those around them.

The Maystern halls of power eschew many of the more stifling conventions in favour of stimulating environs, and a sense of camaraderie. Naturally, their courts are often noisy and boisterous environments, stopping short of being truly raucous; there is purpose and ambition there, tempering the smouldering activity, and grounding their zeal. Yet, active rulers often prefer to be engaged first-hand in the events of the domain and take the court to the field. When confined inside, they seek diversion in parlour sports.

Adon by Krista Brennan.

Portner

The Portner Clan is comprised of many nomadic lords and ladies, whether merchant princes, mendicant magi, or others who prefer the open lane to the hearth. They are masters of the roads, having attained knowledge of the secret routes: clews through the Labyrinth, trods into the Widderslainte, and ways through the bramblewoods.

HYMN, THE PSYCHOPOMP

Hymn was traveller between boundaries; he was the great wanderer and the patron of commerce Attributed to him was power to walk anywhere and everywhere, and he may be the only progenitor whose eyes have seen every mortal sight. Yet, not all of his conduits are the roads material; his is a dualistic nature, chartering paths both subtle and gross, upon the journey inwards to the psyche. Of his skills, he taught astrology, trade, and communication to humankind.

Hymn's portrayal is of a man with gossamer wings and silver hairless skin, smooth and metallic; all these features creating the idea of a man of strange and alien aspect. Always his eyes cast towards the heavens, capturing the most subtle movements within the Aether. In his possession are his tome and his stave, which help him trespass life and death, and heaven and earth. The Portner that lay claim to his trueborn pedigree possess slight and slender bodies, though their affinity to Hymn extenuates these features, giving them a furtive and rapid manner. They have most sagacious eyes set within a youthful visage, all framed by striking dander hair.

INSIGNIA

'Walk the True Path' is more a riddle than a motto; it is an allusion with a secretive essential nature known only truthfully by the Portner, but one that outsiders frequently ascribe with meaning. The most popular of these imputes the sense that the only true way to walk a path is backwards, then forwards; this rumour hails from a time when the Portner delved the Labyrinth as a matter of course and all the while returning freely.

The symbol of the clan is the scourge; its animal the owl; and its flowers the pear, the orchid, and the elderberry. The traditional colours of the Portner are shades of turquoise, and they readily display trinkets of aquamarine.

REPUTATION

The Portner clan is one of the four Braemaline, and from this comes their fantastic wanderlust. They are roving nobles, becoming restless when confined. Those places where they set down roots are those where visitors are frequent, bringing tidings from the four corners of the Realm. They ply their knowledge in commerce and emissary work, while maintaining interests in highways and railways.

The Portner, too, are reputed as great idealists. They are highly original and idiosyncratic, almost to eccentricity. Some consider the Portner naïve, as their contemplations stand removed from the concerns of everyday living. Yet it is this sense of abstraction that often proves the quality

Portner Crest by Herbie Peppard.

of their sophistication; testing for mendacity, their visions can be infectious in the hopeful promise they do offer. Whatever their faults, they are blessed with a natural humanity that becomes them.

FAMILY

The Portner are both philosophical and sophist regarding their bloodlines through their embrace of all with erudition into their ranks; especially those with a penchant for travel and commerce. The quickest method for acceptance into the clan is through demonstrating a propensity towards the loquacious, which is regarded as a sign of noble bearing. In principle, they are more inclusive than other clans, even though their esteem is hard won.

Portner children are often unconventional and more than a little contrarian. The same sensibility to freedom particular to the Portner induces these children to chafe at restriction. Often, the best means to secure their compliance is with an inversion of intent, particularly as it belies their agency in rebellion. Carers, too, best ware their wards' overly trusting natures, having led more than one wayward child astray.

COURT

The greatest challenge that besets the Portner liege is distaste for overly mundane concerns; instatement as a liege can temper this somewhat. A far worse provocation is being obliged to a stringent regime, frequently lending their courts to a laxity of protocol. Many Portner simply disregard council dicta where such contravenes personal particulars.

The Portner graces can also be aloof, removed far from the maddening crowds, seeking purchase of breath. In their detachment, they are headstrong and wildly independent: mad monks, wandering prophets, and mendicant teachers of esoteric mysteries all. Fortunately, they are natural administrators and can apply unorthodox and inventive solutions to pernicious problems.

The Portners are traders and tinkerers. They festoon their halls with the efforts of their trade, and frequently display the same with many contrivances of modern technology; their most obvious penchant being for electrical lightings. Frequently, the Portners are ready to embrace the latest fad, but their eccentric sensibilities can transform the kitsch into the bizarre. There is always some piece of decor that needs to change, modification, or reform to suit the whims of capricious disposition. Their homes, if not secluded, are complete with hidden alcoves to provide privacy in time of need.

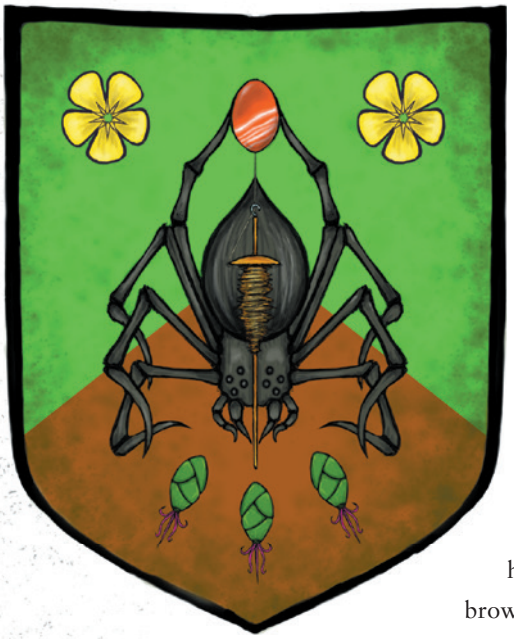
Hymn by Krista Brennan.

Finstari

The Finstari Clan does away with all the pettiness of image. They instead glorify perversity, secrets, and the salacious flow of information. As the subject of cruel treatment by other nobles, they skulk among the shadows whence they are outcast; kings among beggars, thieves, and tramps.

HALA, THE BELDAME

Said to be the first immortal, Hala is the Beldame, the midnight queen. She is known by many epithets, for few would wish to speak her name. As the patron of funerary, she taught humanity the rites of passing and the consolations of grief and sacrifice. It is said that perhaps she still resides in the heart of Necropolaris; presiding in silence over the lost memories of forgotten shades and treasures. Though mostly abjured, people invoke her witness over the most solemn and terrible of oaths.



Hala was terrible to behold: her presence was dread and dire, her countenance was sable. There were feathers woven through her hair, which framed a skeletal mask, wrought of dragon-bone, obscures her visage. Those born with the touch of Hala in them are marked with some visible disfigurement. Those who are not thus blessed at birth are burned upon their joining the house; an irrevocable rite of passage into these fastidious halls.

INSIGNIA

The clan motto, 'Silence Falls', refers to the ending that befalls all persons. Silence awaits all men, women, and children. Silence is the best refuge for those who would avoid notice by an opponent. Silence is both the watchword and the fathomless practice for the clan.

The symbol of the clan is the spindle; their animal is the spider; its flora is the hop trefoil, the hazel, and the buttercup. The traditional colours are navy blues and browns; the sole gem they permit themselves is sardonyx.

REPUTATION

As Pommeline scions, mysteries draw the Finstari in, and espionage is their *modus operandi*. The Finstari are subtle, being careful to obscure their handiwork, preferring to operate from the shadows, and to manipulate the cat-paws that are their numerous proxies and pawns; they operate according to a deviant but internally consistent ethic.

The Finstari are pragmatists and are reputedly hard working; meticulous, they are always careful in approach. However, herein lays first of the Finstari flaws, for they may be mired in elaboration, detail, and minutiae. In such relentless fixation, they are their own worst critics; sensitive to faults, real and imagined. Nevertheless, such staid sensibilities mean they will brook no nonsense from those they work with.

FAMILY

A marriage with one of the Finstari is circumspect: few would love a monster. Nevertheless, the scions of Hala are as determined to maintain the esteem of their bloodline as any other clan.

Finstari Crest by Herbie Peppard.

Marriage to Finstari nobles is often a consequence of aristocratic fiat; one the clan celebrates as a grotesque. Nevertheless, for all its discomforts, morganatic marriage to a Finstari noble offers many privileges, sufficient for most commoners to aver the displeasure of their monstrosity; there is frequent permissibility for such spouses for dalliances with other more comely persons.

Those who grow up among the Finstari can expect an immaculate home. What it lacks in warmth or splendour, it makes up for in clean simplicity. Following their parents, many Finstari children absorb themselves into detailed and complex hobbies. However, their carers must bolster the children's pride. For without such fears allayed, these finicky wards will pick themselves apart with anxiety, critical of their own feats.

COURT

The Finstari lieges, when ruling over their court, are less concerned with popularity than they are with efficiency and prudent management. However, though they are not the most eloquent speakers, they are articulate and precise in their expression, never equivocating over their meaning: they are incisive wordsmiths, if somewhat lacking in artistry.

The graces demonstrate a similar exactitude in their insatiable truth seeking, fossicking out the most deeply buried secrets; for this reason they make excellent inquisitors, rarely sparing the rod in their quest.

The halls of the lieges of the Finstari are fastidious, and tending towards an unusual modesty. In place of decoration, growths of vines and herbs are common adornments on the walls, exuding aromas delicious and appetising. The few choice objects of value they possess hold great prominence in their halls, and always maintained in pristine condition. However, in more secluded places, their homes hold vaults of less intriguing collectables; frequently books and other curios, all carefully laid out in rows upon shelves, kept precious.

Hala by Krista Brennan.

Kelleck

The Kelleck are known and recognised by their solemn countenance. They are elusive of temperament and slow to passion, but when provoked they are implacable in their ire. The Kelleck are difficult to trust: reputed poisoners and slanderers as much as diplomats. Nonetheless, their suave dispositions oft win their opponents over. They readily rise above other clans' occasional discomforted derision.

MADOCK, THE THRICE-BORN

Madock was master of transformations and summonings. Many refer to him as the hanged man, undergoing great sacrifices for wisdom and insight. His judgments are considered and few would reprove them. Among his attributions is that of being the father of writing and historical record; many rumours abound as to the existence of the Lost Sea Scrolls, his account of humanity's survival of the Deluge.

Madock is usually portrayed as of shaven scalp, his beard oiled and manicured, his eyes darkened; hallmarks of the Kelleck mystique. As a patron of wisdom, he was a renowned mediator and strategist, and always calm in his demeanour. The scions born true to Madock lineage display their perfectly exotic demeanour, augmented through manicured facial hair and kohled eyes. The overall effect is one that is ethereal and esoteric upon the women of the clan, and manifesting upon its men with effeminacy.

INSIGNIA

The Kelleck point to their motto as the basis of their presenting a still countenance to the Realm at large: 'Still Waters Run Deep'. It is a constant reminder to reconcile their turbulent depths with a placid exterior, by moving with the storm, rather than quailing against it. However, the motto also counsels them to temper their excesses, lest the torrent be unleashed.

The symbol of the clan is the trident; its animal is the horse; its flora is the lily, the white rose, and the convolvulus. The traditional colours of the Kelleck are silvers, and their beautiful pearls often mark them for their nature.

REPUTATION

The Rosaline origins of the Kelleck clan is one of the four lends them the social graces to become canny negotiators and mediators. They are pre-eminent diplomats, resolving disputes peacefully; though in their aversion to open conflict, they are reputed to resort to poison to silence opposition.

The Kelleck are highly intuitive, with an emotional perspicacity that allows them to respond instinctively to social situations, enabling effortless facilitation of tense negotiations; though maintaining this higher level of emotional receptivity leaves them prone to stress. Otherworldly, they are the epitome of mystique, rendering them inscrutable, for a turbulence belying their staid and brave face often plague them, making their exterior a contradiction of their mindset.

Kelleck Crest by Herbie Peppard.

FAMILY

The Kelleck consider the act of marriage to be a subtle alchemy, a husbandry of the qualities of noble blood. For this reason, the Kelleck have no formal taboos on any particular union but yet rigorously test the blood to determine the worthy; any supplicant must perform ritualised bloodletting. In times gone by, the sages would ponder the signs and portents there present, however in modern times, these practices are complimented with the study of eugenics, lending a more scientific approach.

The young Kelleck enjoy a stable environment, being highly sensitive to changes of mood in their vicinity. They have an unnerving tendency to hoard, collect, and remember, which often leads to cluttered living spaces and thinking habits. They also tend towards shyness and their carers may have to contend with encouraging them out of their shells and homes.

COURT

The tenacity and determination of a Kelleck liege is his greatest asset. Though the court may move in flux around him, he retains singular continuity throughout his rule; they are emotionally variable, but always certain in his self. A Kelleck liege feels the pulse of his court at his fingertips, and strums its heartstrings accordingly.

The Kelleck intuition yields some of the most prominent graces of the Mousaion, their insights into the human condition uncanny. Yet, they are also powerfully maternalistic, with a deep sense of communal care giving.

The Kelleck make great pains to ensure that those who attend a Kelleck court find themselves included, with a sense of the familial, regardless of whether they are peer or commoner. It is not uncommon for children of the court to be in attendance and given a certain leeway. However, their halls easily fall to clutter lest their owners stay vigilant against hoarding their great many trophies; each a prize from victories both glorious and mean. Their homes may become reliquaries, holding numerous tokens of the past, both sentimental and historical. Most importantly, the Kelleck homes are inhabited in lively manner, rather than to stand as mausoleums of the past; when the Kelleck feast, the halls fill with music and life abundant.

Madock by Krista Brennan.

Jagen

Those descendent from the horned hunter are the Jagen. His clan once consisted of conquerors and warlords, and now comprises marshals and wardens. Their martial prowess is legend, as is their gift for strategic thinking; making them commanders of the battlefield, and masters of the hunt. Cavalier and competitive, they are wont to enjoin their contemporaries to greater effort, the better to demonstrate their indomitable pride.

VALEN, THE HORNED HUNTER

Rough, burly, and larger than most people, the man of the forest was the greatest hunter of history. As the patron of the hunt, Valen was the most eminent fighter of his peers. He taught humankind the skills necessary for both the hunt and warfare. He was silent, swift, and deadly; his claim was that no prey could escape him and took responsibility for the destruction of many wanton creatures.

The Horned Hunter bears an antlered crown, a hirsute cowl, and a mighty phallus depends from him. He would often wear nothing but the hide of his most recent kill, and frequently depicted smeared in blood and dirt. The scions of Jagen likewise bear the dark features of Anat. Those whose lineage breeds true within the Jagen are typically hirsute, and their stature recalls the vast physicality of Valen; he who towered over his peers and subordinates, his might apparent with each surefooted stride.

INSIGNIA

'We Do Not Yield' proclaims that its members will neither yield nor retreat. Historically, the motto referred only to physical challenges, but over time Jagen diplomats also have adopted this combative stance. Despite the injunction against accepting defeat, they graciously accept surrender from opponents; regardless of their estimation of them.

The symbol of the clan is the lance; its animal is the hart; its flora is the sunflower, the marigold, and the rosemary. The traditional colour of the Jagen is gold, and they show great fondness towards the ruby.

REPUTATION

As one of the four Braemaline, the Jagen hearken to the traditions of the hunt, revealed in their contemporary warrior ethic. Prizes and championships are like a valorous siren song, drawing them forth from the fringes of society. They long to prove their mettle and prowess, and otherwise to lionise their names.

The Jagen are the most extroverted of nobles, recognisable in their energetic deportment and infectious vitality. They thrive on lively engagements and are at their most convivial when able to share their fierce joy, their savage pleasure, living only in the moment. They are surprisingly creative in their chosen endeavours, eschewing, as they do, things dull and mundane; a life of colour and spectacle.

Jagen Crest by Herbie Peppard.

FAMILY

The Jagen take pride in their blood, seeing commoners, and many other bloodlines, as weak, of unworthy pedigree. The clan has many diverse training regimes, which are all designed to produce heirs both physically and morally strong; strength of character must balance a powerful physique. Though remorseless in its selection, the training regime is decidedly egalitarian, open to commoner and peer alike. Those who best the rigours are elevated to the gentry; preference is given even those children of morganatic unions or ignoble smallfolk that prevail the trials before those the more illustrious pedigrees.

The rearing of the Jagen children can be a battle of wills. Much like their adult relations, the process of child rearing is one of seeking dominance. Given the right encouragement and a helping of self-assertion, most Jagen scions are highly independent. However, their flaw lies in seemingly petty blindness, absorbed as they are in their own aggrandised interests and affairs.

COURT

The natural charisma of the Jagen serves them well. They make excellent leaders, with their enthusiasm often extending to bettering the lives of others. Yet they are demanding, deploring any service that is second rate, and none will brook any who fall below their exacting standards.

For those Jagen who join the Mousaion, there is no middle ground; they either are at the forefront of any action or otherwise disinclined to engage. They are outspoken and forthright, but also capable of disarming their compatriots and opponents with congeniality.

The halls of the Jagen are florid, demonstrating the syntheses of statecraft and stagecraft. More than any other hall, those of the Jagen are theatrical in their trappings: the decor expresses grandiloquent luxury, where mirrors and self-portraits are common, and all focuses upon a raised dais, from whence the liege can speak towards the rows of an audience held enthralled. The furnishings subtly draw attention to the central dais, but otherwise they chose furniture for the comfort they offer.

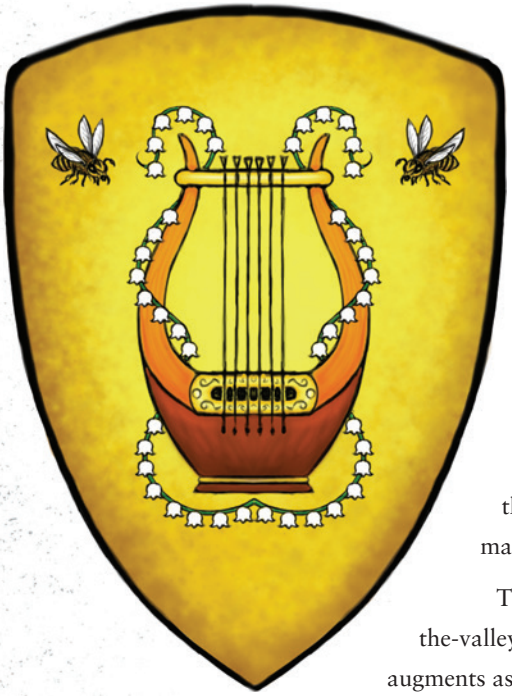
Valen by Krista Brennan.

Winebach

The Winebachs, though not as feckless as their ancestor, share his passionate nature. They are prone to passing moods and are either beloved or reviled, depending on the predilections of the commentators. Their detractors decry the Winebachs as degenerate libertines and that all of them are touched by madness. Their allies proclaim that they glean uncanny insights from the reverie of their ubiquitous bacchanalia.

NYX, THE SKY-WALKER

Nyx was the Sky-walker and has been described as the epitome of youthful splendour, but one cast in strange and alien lights. As the patron of epiphany and ecstasies, the beguiling and beautiful Nyx was committed to wild abandon. His greatest gifts were theatre and performance, along with the manner and mean to celebrate living. Both wine and mead are his crafts, and he continues to inspire many works of poetry, literature, and song.



Nyx's appearance was disarming, able to lull people into a false sense of security. His sexual proclivities were highly fluid, and his temperament was frenetic, prone to fecklessness and dour moods. Those trueborn scions of Nyx within the Winebachs bear all the typical features of his hedonistic ways; they retain a shortness and tend to a youthful appearance. Each has lustrous hair, which is worn long by custom.

INSIGNIA

'In Wine, Truth' means that reason serves but cannot plumb the depths of the unruly psyche. In the mundane people shall find succour and relief, but only in unreason can one find truths of uncanny nature. Reason gives ideas and beliefs, but reveals little in the way of goodness and beauty. For only with eyes limed with wine and other exotic materials, may one view the Realm anew and see to those truths found in Reverie.

The symbol of the clan is the lyre; its animal is the bee; its flora is the myrtle, lily-of-the-valley, and lavender. The traditional colour of the Winebachs is a soft yellow, which agate augments as their stone of choice.

REPUTATION

The Winebach clan as one of the four Pommeline line has an ancestry that carries with it the mystery of ecstasies. Their grand revelries and orgies are a ceremonial way of experiencing and sharing states of lucid dreaming. Such lends transcendence over the routine of everyday life and they willingly impart this lesson to those who would attend.

The worst fault of the Winebach can be their superficiality. They are jacks-of-all-trades and masters of none. Though they are highly adaptable, able to assimilate knowledge quickly, they are rarely constant. They are fast talkers and highly communicative, but their oblique reasoning is easily lost in a steady stream of prattling abstractions. It is common for them to have fingers in many pies, but less so to see a project to completion.

Winebach Crest by Herbie Peppard.

FAMILY

The Winebachs are guardedly jealous of those they admit through matrimony and breeding into their lineage. The consideration is not one of station, for a noble may ardently love a commoner. Rather, the proscription exists solely to deny any union devoid of zealous fervour and the test of candour is achieved through impassioned plea to the household; far more so pointed than reason. In this fashion, the Winebachs will raise entrancing and endearing persons to the status of their house, and even give preferential treatment to the most passionate of progeny.

The children of the Winebachs are lively, with a tendency to try to run before they can walk. However, they learn swiftly and early the arts of misdirection; they sure to try to bluff their way through many tests or assessments. They can also be highly opinionated, but those opinions do not always ground themselves in fact reliably.

COURT

When a Winebach becomes a liege, his public readily accepted him, for each is his own best publicists, demonstrating shrewd sensibilities in business and trade. Their courts fill with restless chatter and such permits almost any topic of conversation from peer or commoner.

The graces of the Winebach houses are likewise charming, witty, and amiable, but they too can be feckless in craving diverse intellectual and emotional stimulation. Nevertheless, as communicators, each manifests a singular talent: written, spoken, or symbolic.

Because the Winebachs are often furtive, the halls of their courts tend to sport little by way of furnishings, and they prefer open court plans that enable ease of movement; this makes their courts conform to a flatter hierarchy than found in many others. If variety is the spice of life, then every courtly dish is fit for a king. The Winebachs tend to keep their pleasures close in these halls, for there is always something to taste or sup within easy reach; the walls are decked in diverse hangings and myriad beautiful offerings; each domestic hearth a paradise for sensates.

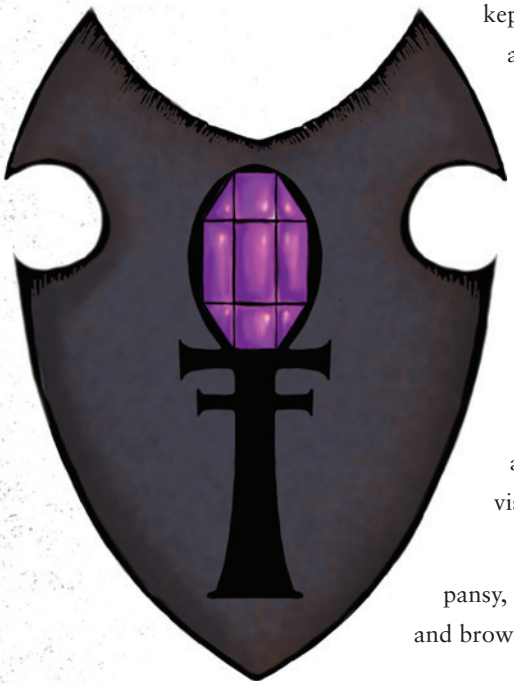
Nyx by Krista Brennan.

Zoubari

Few can claim the same imperious visage as those of the Zoubari clan. The clan maintains its superlative status by dint of the inordinate wealth it has accumulated. Of all the clans, it most easily demonstrates opulence and extravagance. The clan delights in high ceremony, but is notorious for descending easily into dark places, emerging unscathed.

INARI, THE SILVER LADY

The wondrous Silver Lady, who was perfect in majesty, indomitable and implacable as the mountain, was named Inari. As a matron of arbitration and concordance she taught humanity the means to govern itself against its own discordant nature. Her works are testaments to peace, the need for civilised accords, all guided by the auspice of a heavenly mandate. Her daily rituals kept her attuned to the Ophanim and imbued objectivity in the arbitration of disputes in achieving supreme serenity.



She remains an ageless figure, cast as neither young nor old, but dressed elaborately, with lapis lazuli necklaces, mascara, golden pectoral rings, and other embellishments. The Zoubari born true as the scions of Inari, bear a most frosty countenance, and most know them Zoubari for their particularly angular features, and their sharp, piercing, glint of the eyes.

INSIGNIA

The clan motto refers to their standing: 'High as Heaven'. It is a statement and a claim that they stand far above all others and none should match their prowess. It is a reminder that though they are grounded through material wealth, only those whose vision has the scope of heaven will see all.

The symbol of the clan is the ankh. The clan's animal is the cat and its flowers are the pansy, the hemlock, and the comfrey. The traditional colours of the Zoubari are dark grey and brown and often marked by iridescent amethyst.

REPUTATION

The Zoubari clan is one of the four Rosaline, and with this blood flowing in their veins, they are well suited to courtly extravagance; they take to such with cool and commanding demeanour. Their methods are understated but no less effective for that, always softly spoken, imperious, yet implacably commanding. They rarely, if ever, seek power for power's sake, but rather for prestige and comfort.

The Zoubari esteem protocol and they do so by imposing convention upon their own selves and measuring others' value in their compliance. The Zoubari are prudent, demonstrating the patience necessary for the execution of the most far-reaching of plans; they are self-possessed, disciplined, ever vigilant against possible loss of face. Yet the bitterness of their black humour and pessimistic outlook are renowned, and they slip wryly forth in the gravest contexts.

Zoubari Crest by Herbie Peppard.

FAMILY

The Zoubari view marriage as the means to unify personal holdings, to bring together ambition, purpose, and wealth; each marriage is usually performed by the house matriarch. Of course, since these unions are driven by prestige, the Zoubari are not averse to morganatic unions, provided those commoners possess sufficient holdings. However, it is far more customary for their lords to enter such a union than their ladies. Nevertheless, many Zoubari, particularly the ladies, are reluctant to enter matrimony young, postponing a family until after establishing their own estate.

Zoubari children are fiercely loyal, very nearly idolising their parents. However, such esteem is double-edged, for as elated as they are by their parents' successes, their failings deeply affect them in turn. These vacillations may be staved off with diligence, and one way that many carers have successfully bolstered their fortitude is by giving those children more responsibility.

COURT

Many look to the Zoubari as the very ideal of a ruler: they are imperious and commanding, with but the slightest of efforts. Their courts are intensely hierarchical, the intricacies of ceremony occurring therein making the Zoubari aloofness nigh impenetrable. This aloofness and remove can manifest as physical isolation.

Likewise, their graces often take positions of power within the Mousaion, rising to the heights of its political prestige, though not always through mystic capacity. For all their terse and critical natures, they demonstrate a profound industry. Such overt pragmatism means they are inherent to the backbone of this highly chimerical establishment.

Many of the halls owned by the Zoubari are marked by a vaulted ceiling, with windows designed to allow ample natural light. The Zoubari prefer wide, open halls, disdaining constrained spaces. However, if one observes carefully, there are many tableaus of great material value, not always displayed overtly. All the designs in Zoubari steadings tend towards respectability, and all that is *comme il faut*; all to circumspectly impute the great authority of the hosts. Theirs is the quiet decor of power, slowly realised through classic designs.

Inari by Krista Brennan.

Greystrand

Those of the Greystrand, blood-dimmed by briny sea are more at home upon the waves than they are ashore. In this, their ways are strange, carried to distant waters, where ship and flesh be shaped by crashing waves and salty airs. The Greystrand are known for their temper, slow yet relentless as the tides: woe betide their quarry, for those who incur the ire of the Greystrand shall find no safe harbour, upon these shores or any other.

TETHYN, THE REAVER

Tethyn was the Reaver and mistress of the seas. As the matron of the depths, Tethyn taught humankind the ways of sea and river, the means of their harvesting, and animal husbandry. Her wisdom has been passed down through the generations, bearing with it an understanding of poisons and their medicinal applications; this serves as a reminder that her gifts, like the ocean, are both precarious and fickle in their benefaction.

Clad only in fruits of the oceans, adorned in plaits of kelp and reed, bedecked in pearls and coral jewellery: Tethyn's skin was the colour of the drowned, pale and cold. Her hair was a nest of tangles and her eyes were the pearly-white sheen of the opalescent lunar light. The trueborn scions of Tethyn bear the ghost-white skin of Lilith, though often they brand and mark themselves with tattoos; their hair braided in intricate knots to show house and fleet.

INSIGNIA

The meaning of the clan's motto is readily apparent: 'Born to the Seas' proclaims their allegiance to the ocean, as mother, mistress, and reaver. Every single noble of the Greystrand clan is also captain of a mighty vessel, a floating castle on the waves: a roving war-machine, when needed.

The symbol of the clan is the sickle; its animal is the krait; its flora is the rhododendron, the honeysuckle, and the germanium. The traditional colours of the Greystrand are dark red and maroon; their gem of choice is the onyx.

REPUTATION

The Greystrand clan is one of the four Braemaline and are descended from Lilith. Emulating Tethyn, they cleave to the open seas; their first and native domain. Greystrand are notorious for living out their lives aboard ship, scarcely and even never setting foot upon the land. Adventure on or above the high seas becomes them, and whether upon armoured vessel or lofty aircraft they are mercantile privateers. The seas are their domain, whereupon they are a law unto their selves; commoner and noble alike accept the marque of the Greystrand, as a cost of doing business.

Avarice is the most notorious of the Greystrand's faults, their love of acquisition most pronounced when acquired through cunning, artifice, or promise of violence. However, their avarice often stops short of true larceny: it becomes a spur, pricking the sides of their intent, driving them ever forwards, relentlessly, towards greater and greater exploits; for without these they become listless and stagnant.

Greystrand Crest by Herbie Peppard.

FAMILY

Many of the customs surrounding family and matrimony are based on an economy of salt; a fungible commodity of the seas. Though their lives upon the oceans have, perforce, many great liberties not found upon land, these salic laws bind them strictly. There are few taboos regarding morganatic unions with commoners, though practice permits house matriarchs to exclude particular individuals. As in all things, the Greystrand are terribly possessive of their partners, but they are ever compelled by those persons unobtainable to them.

Carers of Greystrand children best ware them when they fall silent: these children feel wronged or their privacy violated, and thus they silently scheme their revenge. The best distractions for these little tacticians are those that are physically exhausting. However, one must be careful of their demands, for fear of spoiling them.

COURT

Greystrand lieges often seem obsessed with money, for it provides them a useful focus. A bored liege is dangerous, as their moods become destructive; they are at their best when on task and resolute in purpose.

The Greystrand graces positively thrive on social controversy, often drawn to the taboo, the verboten, and the lascivious. However, in private, they are circumspect, and intensely jealous of their keepsakes, partners, and personal affairs. Their outward demeanour is a cunning misdirection away from these closely guarded thoughts.

The halls of the Greystrand can be sombre and melancholy. Much of the adornment around these halls has remained in place for generations; the Greystrand dislike dramatic change within their abodes. Of course, their sense of possessiveness means they secure many of their treasured possessions in private. On display are texts, tapestries, and other artistic works, all bearing occult signifiers. Arrayed, they describe a coded history of the Greystrand, which remains enigmatic to outsiders.

Tethyn by Krista Brennan.

Rothshart

The Rothshart clan is one of the principle matriarchal clans. Its members greatly value principles and accordance with little tolerance for the prevarications of politics and petty rivalry; yet they give no quarter on matters of honour. Their clan lays claim to being pre-eminent in the observation of manners that show respect towards title, deed, and personal reputation.

PRIYA, THE HEARTH-MAIDEN

As the matron of the hearth, Priya brought to humanity the ways of domesticity. The arts of cuisine and feasting, and the festive observance of hallowed days, are all parts of her teachings. She is widely respected, and favoured among unmarried women, who see her as a source of strength and pride, in remaining unbound.

Even among the ageless Diadon, Priya, the Hearth-maiden, was comely: her depictions show a woman clan in austere tunics, the material draped over shoulders from body and head, and all fastened together with a simple broach. These depictions show her with flaxen hair and a tanned complexion, to become is the epitome of the sworn celibate Flamine. The scions of Priya exhibit a severity in their appearance, dress, and custom: their careful acculturation provides a deep dignity to their sense of righteousness.

INSIGNIA

In the realm of politics, strife, treachery, and intrigue, the Rothshart hold to a strict ideal of noble courtesy, echoed in 'Purity is my Shield'. Purity, in thought and in deed, is a virtue for which they should ever strive. Its decorum serves as bastion against the easy iniquity incumbent within the courts of the Realm.

The symbol of the clan is the brazier; its animal is the hare; and its flora is the bilberry, the dandelion, and the carnation. The traditional colours of the Rothshart are dark blues and purples, also showing favour for the topaz.

REPUTATION

The Rothshart clan is a Pommeline lineage, and are shrouded in veils of mystery. They profess revelations drawn from the flame, canny insights pertaining to the hearth, and the intricacies of ritual and ceremony. Of the various clans, they are among the most forthright, giving great credence to oath-bound obligation, filial duty, and the sacrament of marriage.

For all their seeming prudence, the Rothshart demonstrate attraction to risks, particularly in their youth. Their stern deportment is so unassailable that it creates an affectation of invulnerability. Tempted as they are by jeopardy, they temper their impulses with philosophic wit, made manifest in wry levity. Their common approach, learned from hardship, is to take the measure of a situation before acting upon it. They easily derive broad trends than minutiae, thus counselling their instincts.

FAMILY

The Rothshart all consider vows of matrimony with great solemnity and never enter them without great consideration. Custom requires great devotion from the suiting male, for the Rothsharts hold

Rothshart Crest by Herbie Peppard.

that when the woman's heart commands, the man's must surely follow. In this suit, the matriarch weighs the courting male's honour in the balance: if she finds him wanting, she discards his suit, for this is the primary determinant for eligibility to marry into the clan. The worst approach in attempting to woo one of the Rothshart is dogged persistence, as many react violently to claustrophobic or smothering relations, even when they are attracted to an air of danger.

The young Rothshart are tenacious and particular, for once they have embraced a passion, they will often pursue it for years. Of course, many carers will experience a few false starts as their natural enthusiasm can be mistaken for real passion. They also have a tendency to subvert or blatantly ignore those rules that do not suit them or their passions.

COURT

The Rothshart make intriguing lieges of court: they are forthright, honest, and dutiful in their governance; they give particular attention to ensuring a robust legislature. They foster a climate of adversarial intellectualism, and so their courts resound with the cut and thrust of robust debate, courtiers contending vociferously upon many a point of philosophy, art, and myth.

Those that join the Mousaion tend towards asceticism, eschewing the luxuries of the institution, taking to the road with naught but their firebrand philosophies for comfort. They extoll the virtues and mysteries of nature in their passing, but always with an unerring sense for whence lie hearth and home.

The largesse of the Rothshart halls is not in common commodities, but in antiques and curios: manuscripts, books, and objects d'art. Preferred for display in their halls are items symbolic, trophies representative of their tours of duty, and other exemplars of their travels. Singular to the Rothshart halls are roofs able to open to the elements; for they find joy in the open sky, the tiding winds, and the countless night-time stars. Theirs is an ideal that rails against the containment of staid and steady walls.

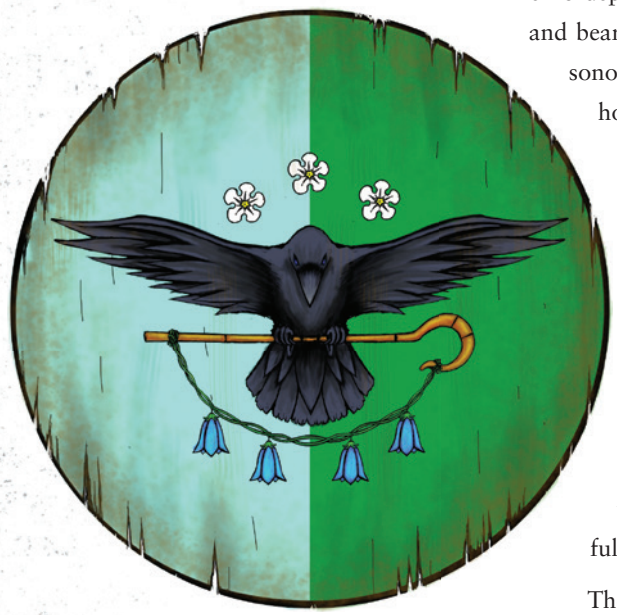
Priya by Krista Brennan.

Amsala

The Amsala claim seniority to all other clans as their progenitor is reputed as the eldest of the Diadon. It was his gifts of wondrous prophecy allowed him to navigate the tribulations of the Deluge. Likewise, many Amsala possess gifts of subtle insight, with a propensity towards gleaning hidden truths that make them apt negotiators.

BEL, THE ALL-FATHER

The progenitor of the Amsala is figure known as Bel, the All-father. He is the patron of prophecy, giving both insight and foresight to those who meditate upon the truth. His legend describes a profound knack for separating truth from fiction with but the merest glance; no secret remained hidden from him. Of all the Diadon, he was reputed to hold the most intimate knowledge of the intricacies of the skein, and he guided his fellow Diadon through the chaos left by the Deluge.



Bel is depicted as being touched by the colours of the sky; his long flowing hair and beard are both grey, seeming never to settle. Legend holds he has a deep and sonorous voice, always heavy with sooth, or with song; yet all remember his hollow gaze, emptied orbits whose eyes were plucked in payment for sight beyond sight. Most that claim true descent from Amsala bear typical ruddy features, though they often veil themselves in lofty airs, and possess stormy grey hair and eyes.

INSIGNIA

The motto of the clan, 'Honour the Future', is in reference to their native talents for insights into the future and other omens. The clan regard theirs as knowledge most difficult to bear, but by this motto, they impute their role as heralds of future revelations, which must be honoured. More than merely a boast, it is also reminder that all dues must be paid in the fullness of time.

The symbol of the clan is the crosier; its animal is the raven; and its flowers the red rose, the bluebell, and the ash. Traditional colours for the Amsala are pastel blues and greens, generally complemented by the lustrous sapphires worn by its scions.

REPUTATION

Being of the Rosaline, the clan plays the games of society extremely well, using their insights into custom, tradition, and even prophecy to navigate its intricate demands. As is tradition, they embrace and yearn towards the ideals of the just king, meting wisdom and sagacity in the disposition of their authority over their subjects, and in the utilisation of their influence among their peers.

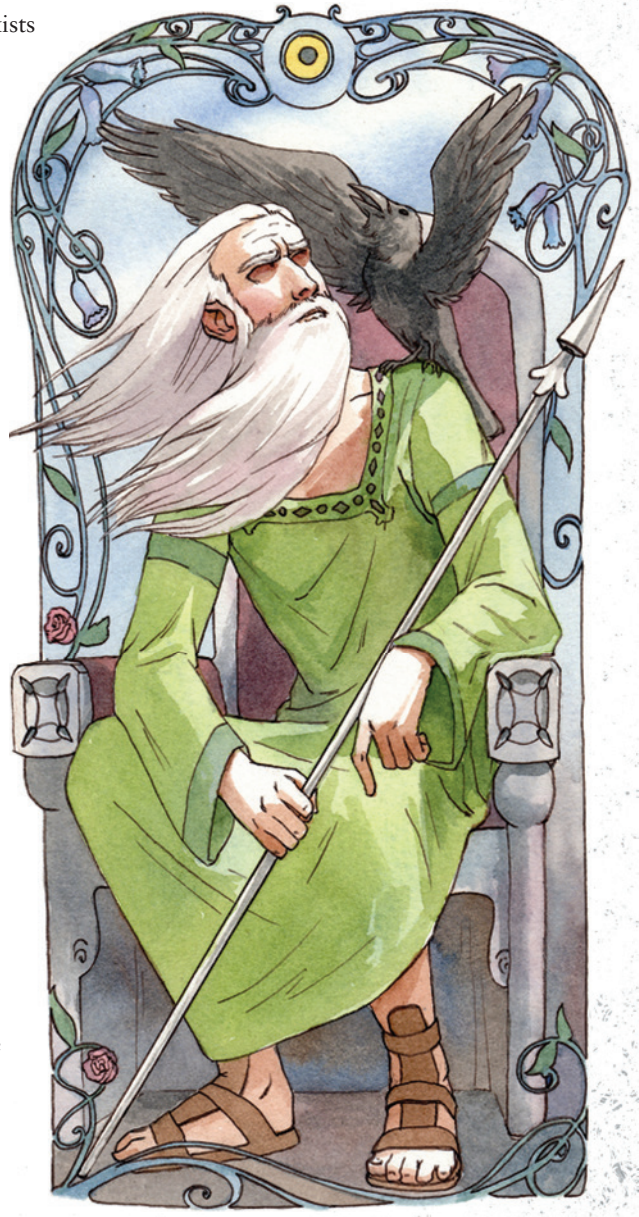
Most Amsala take pains to be included in the heart of any decision making process. Though often playing the diplomat, they eschew strong commitments to any singular argument, rather relating all its aspects in proper exploration; this is in no small part due to an innate sense of fairness and justice. Accordingly, the Amsala hold something of a reputation for aloofness, preferring lofty abstract tasks to most workings of physical labour.

Amsala Crest by Herbie Peppard.

FAMILY

Even as children, Amsala are often quite charming, seemingly more socially mature than their peers. However, they are prone to terrible indecision as they vacillate between all possible options within a single choice. Worst are those who feel themselves wronged, or their sense of fairness impugned, giving rise to a tirade of righteous indignation. As they mature, these ideals coalesce into a notion of stable filial harmony.

The clan holds stringent taboos against marrying persons of no discernible quality or breeding. It is practice for the Amsala to make use of divination and augury in the selection of a promising partner to determine their fortune. However, some tension exists within the clan as to whether these auguries should ascertain the prospects of the potential spouse as being best for the interests of their partner or the household. Nevertheless, unusual tenderness comes forth from the Amsala once their hearts lay contentedly upon their intended, and they often become besotted with starry-eyed whimsy as their nuptials draw near.



COURT

The Amsala lieges make wise and just rulers of their court, and such lords as these endeavour each to cultivate the best balance of courtiers arrayed before them. Unfortunately, in the pursuit of their ambitions, both can set their aspirations too high, seeking unobtainable and pure ideals, which can create their own discontent in their elision.

Likewise, Amsala graces are among the most observant and vigilant, being best disposed to resolving disputes. They hold particular note for their strong need and great capacity for building mental rapports with their peers. They dislike disturbances of tranquillity, demonstrating keenness to make room for quiet discourse.

The halls of the Amsala are renowned for both their luxury and comfort, tending towards indulgence. It is quite common for these nobles to measure a thing's aesthetic virtue with canny eyes for colour, shape, and symmetry, as seen in the numerous *objects d'art* of their patronage. However, their domiciles are oft designed for a sense of space and open air, places amenable to good socialising and intercourse. Within these places there is a sense of detachment, which emphasises proper use of negative space.

Bel by Krista Brennan.

Eromund

The Eromund claim to hold a strong affinity with the bounty of the earth preferring wild climes to urban environs; they prove to be among its most successful agricultural cultivators as evidenced by their rural disposition. However, do not let their nurturing demeanour beguile one to blindness towards their material ambitions.

Gede, the Mother of Nature

The Eromund progenitor is Gede, who is also known as the Mother of Nature. She was the matron of health, and said to have brought the knowledge of medicine to the ancient clans. Though many revered her as a queen, she refused such tribute. Instead, she simply sought to be known as the mother of all, whether human or monster, for she was endowed with such fecundity that she could reputedly choose any thing as her mate.

The depiction of Gede casts her as the guardian of the field, forest, and plain; her images frequently have her hair bedecked with meadow garlands, her lips as rosebuds, and her eyes the deepest shade of green; her raiment is a dress, sewn from living leaves that move with her pace. The Eromund that bear the mark of Gede also show their bond to the land through their broad hips and shoulders, perfect for bearing heavy burdens. As scions of the progenitor Gede, most bear typically earthy features of Frey herself; they are most especially famed for their balmy white eyes and milksop skin.

Insignia

'Strength from the Earth' refers to the gifts of the land, from which the Eromund draw benefaction. It is a directive, to remind them to never part from the ways of nature; both the source of their bounty and nurture. It also stands as a reminder that nature itself is red in tooth and claw, and that they should be ready to show the ferocity of the wild.

The symbol of the clan is the hammer; its animal the aurochs; and its flora is the daisy, the violet, and the foxglove. The traditional colour for these households is pink and their preferred gemstone is a brilliant emerald stone.

Reputation

As one of the four Braemaline the Eromund hear the call to adventure; the call summons them into of nature, powerfully, and from this extends their deep affinity with the wilderness. It is to their liking to find society beyond the outskirts of the urban thrum, and their traditions all derive from the challenges of making an honest living from the woods, of mining the land for its minerals, and tilling the soil.

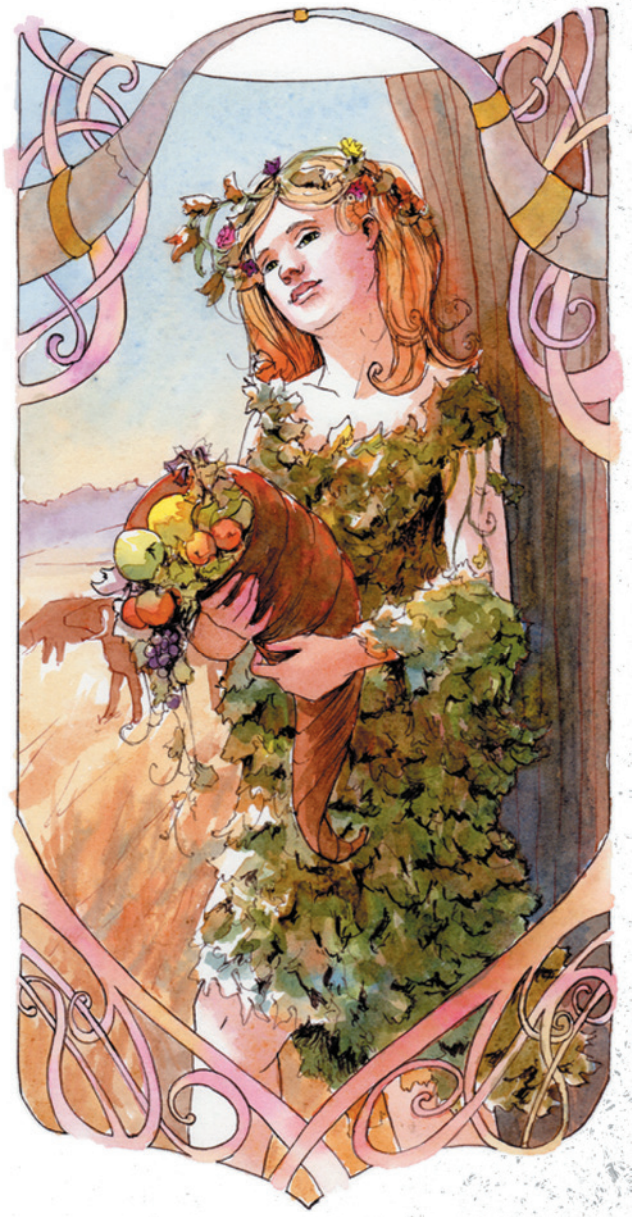
Their homes occupy a pride of place, and they are replete with treasure troves of trophies won across lifetimes. Each object has become cherished in their acquisition, and all these veritable wonders are displayed in a methodical and meticulous manner. Such is their legacy, for that which they attain they hold fast, being possessive of their goods and taking comfort in their holdings. When they give of their wealth, however, they are generous to a fault; and they easily dispense with material possessions even as they jealously guard all sentimental objects.

Eromund Crest by Herbie Peppard.

FAMILY

The Eromund's views on matrimony are somewhat unconventional, with polygamy being reasonably common. Though a woman with multiple husbands is more common, a man keeping more than one wife is a familiar enough sight to be seen. Further, while unions with commoners are not strictly taboo, there is stark division and deference between the standings of noble and common spouses. Even then, it is rare for those not of high birth or noble blood to have their vows sanctified by the House.

Commoners usually must resign themselves to the role of consort, and hope for the gentrification of their progeny. However, whether the union is formalised or acknowledged only quietly, the partner is given treatment of great care; for each signifies a trust, worthy of their household. Likewise, Eromund give their children firm boundaries and structure, to ground them in security.



COURT

The Eromund are cautious lieges, functioning best when their courts work to a steady rhythm. They tend to prioritise the financial security of their domain and spend enduring hours on its governance; many show a canny aptitude for sound fiscal policy.

Eromund graces are matronly: they radiate motherly concern and readily take others under their wing. There is a steadiness to Eromund manners, which in its constancy is deliberate and conservative. For these reasons, they have a modest talent at building coalitions; their affections are unwavering and their loyalties redoubtable.

Garlands and abundance of foliage frequently bedeck the halls of the Eromund. There is even a tendency for the agricultural and horticultural leanings of the court to be on display, often featuring prize harvest in prominent positions. As prudency features heavily in the designs and styles of the clan, there is a certain austere beauty in their halls. Wealth is demonstrated in simplicity and purity rather than elaboration; though boasting only simple display these halls are rarely quiet, with silence often dispelled by song, music, or melodic accompaniment.

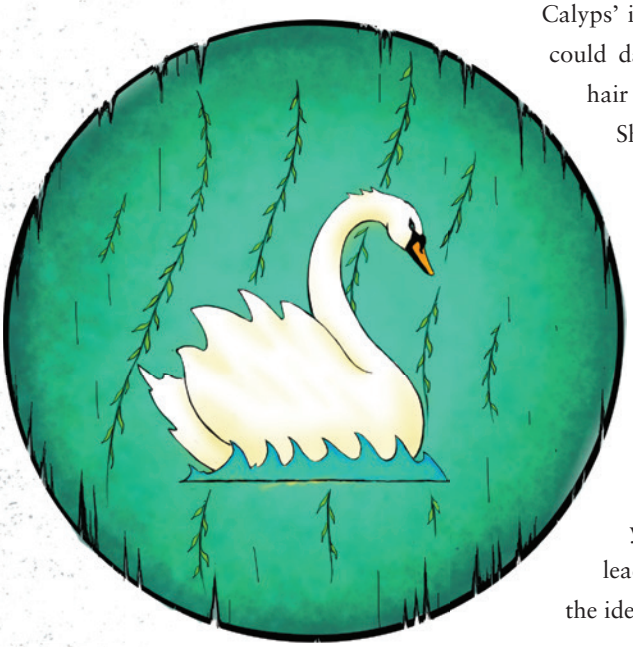
Gede by Krista Brennan.

Silvenblum

The Silvenblum are the children of Calyps. They are a clan that has great reverence for matrimony and family, yet they are too versed well in the arts of seduction, love, and courtly infidelities. In truth, they proclaim themselves as artisans in matters of the heart; that they have plumbed the mysteries of love, and learnt is deepest secrets.

CALYPS, THE NYMPH

By far the most radiant and beautiful of all the immortal Diadon was the Nymph named Calyps. As the matron of beauty, she taught unto humankind all the ways erotic and lovely; hers were the gifts of aesthetics, lovemaking, joy, and indulgence. Her symmetry is well remembered and praised, they frequently serve as the basis of the greatest artistic movements in early history. Even now, people learn more of the golden proportions she revealed.



Calyps' iconography depicts her foremost as a dancer, clad in mist, and one that could dance the circle better than any in history. Her skin was milk and her hair of honey, her voice nothing but pleasure, delight, and forgotten idyll. She is the secret teacher of feminine mysteries and her name is frequently invoked for happy, and ardent, marriage, with passion enduring. The trueborn Silvenblum also have a typically soft visage, which is a vestige of Calyps' own complexion. Most of the Silvenblum are born with little pigmentation, being pale in skin and hair, and with eyes that are touched softly with pink hue.

INSIGNIA

'Love Conquers All': its words ring true as proclamation to all of their ideals of love and its exploits, above all else. Politics, yes, and adventure, yes, but the callings of love must not be denied, for they will, of a certainty, lead to victory and grace. The Silvenblum are hopeless romantics, in love with the idea of the very throws of passion itself.

The symbol of the clan is the girdle; its animal is the swan; and its flora is the chicory, the willow, and the water lily. The traditional colours of the Silvenblum are shades of sea green: they are highly fond of moonstone gems.

REPUTATION

The Silvenblum clan is one of the four Pommeline lines, who are descended from Lilith. As Pommeline, they explore the mysteries of sexual rites, and dabble in other games of love and longing. They are the doyenne of others' passions, being well-versed in the tender manipulations of heartstrings to beguile those others into works of worship and malady. Theirs is a soft and delicate art, whose mysteries are as much a set of instruments as tools are to an artisan.

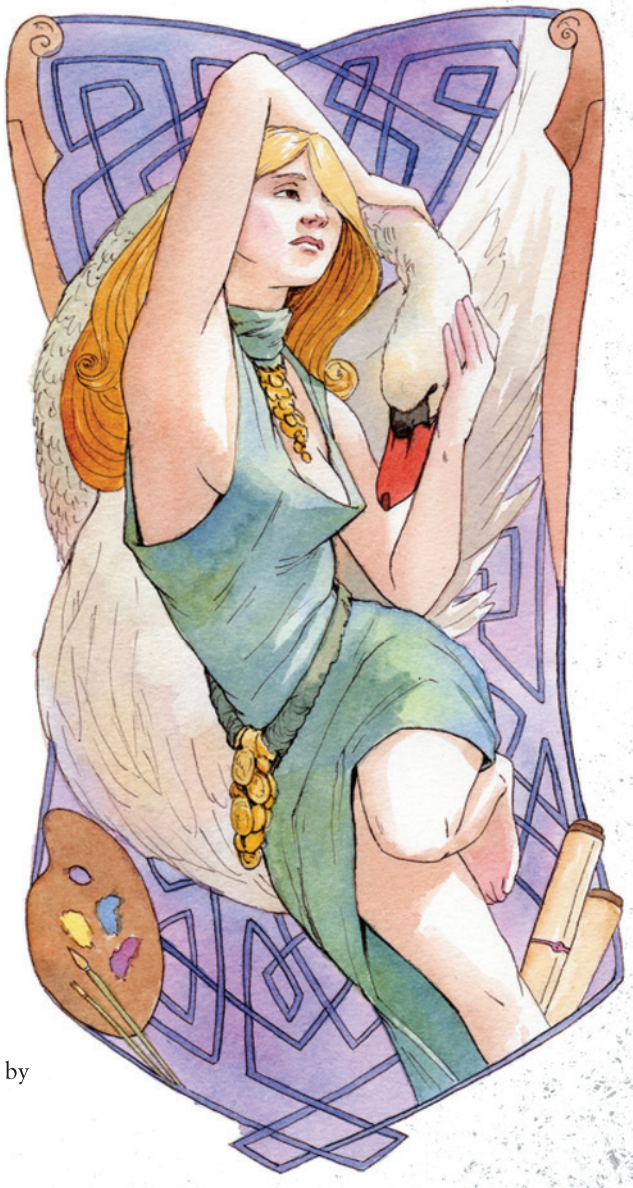
The Silvenblum live within extraordinarily creative minds, they are connect more to dreams and aspirations than material concerns. Their presence can bring with it something of a surreal experience, for they surround themselves and their homes with the detritus of their creativity. Though idling in the rich internal fantasy world of their own may produce powerful musings, it also makes them prone to self-delusion and escapism.

Silvenblum Crest by Herbie Peppard.

FAMILY

The Silvenblum are paradoxical to a great degree on the subject of matrimony and breeding. They hold marriage sacrosanct, meaning that it is only valid and recognised between solemnised nobles. However, there are also strong traditions of courtly love among them; mistresses, courtesans, and other dalliances make the marriage bittersweet, even the illegitimate children of these unions are reviled. This is the consequence of their unbridled passions, poured into each and every partner like a happily waiting vessel; for in each union they find great sentimentality, unable to find fault in their beloved.

So great is their passion for illusion, that the greatest challenge in the education of their children is the implementation of discipline and the inculcation of honesty. It is not that these younger children seek to mislead, but the richness of their fantasy makes them a little prone to take a tedious truth, and to embellish it with imaginative adornment. Furthermore, parents must give firm direction, for in its absence their young can be entirely unfocused as they are lost in the splendour of their inner sanctum.



COURT

The Silvenblum are not known for their careful organisation, though a good council may offset this somewhat. However, they are often gracious leaders who, as lieges, are frequently charitable. Their versatile theatricality means they are often able to charm others into following their leads.

Those graces of the Silvenblum are overtly ethereal, with a sense of otherworldliness about them. They commonly hold vacant gazes, as they turn their contemplations inwards. Though they too are compassionate, able to empathise with and sense those matters pressing upon those around them.

The Silvenblum adore glamorous things, tending to decorate their halls using beautiful textiles and fabrics, all of wondrous lustre; they are less enamoured of the material worth of their decor, and more of the aesthetic balance. They can also be quite sensitive to their environment, and have expelled from their homes anyone bedecked in apparel, or sporting manners, that do not suit the decor. The Silvenblum tend towards softness, haze, and perfumed airs, and all working to entrance their visitors by subtly illuming their esoteric ideals.

Calyps by Krista Brennan.

Nation

The Imperium is a commonwealth of nations: its dominion comprises of a federation of eight diverse republics, alongside some few independent domains. In this, the Imperium faces a conundrum posed this complex tapestry of nations and smaller political powers.

As a collective, they hardly bear political coherence, and yet the Imperium must unite them in common purpose to fulfil its promise of human ascension upon the Eschaton. Under a philosophy of humanism, the Imperium unifies through evoking its common humanity, such that its people consolidate through cultures rather than geographies.

Nevertheless, each nation holds its own ideals and identities. They each constitute through their own laws and the politicians of their own national Assembly govern them; even as they all recognise the sovereignty of the Imperium. While the Arcana of the Coronal serve as the most eminent powers of the Realm, the League of Nations, comprising the heads of each state, often hold them in check. Though their will is subordinate to the Coronal, they remain vastly powerful entities having autonomy over the internal affairs of state.

Diplomacy

The international communion of political communities is one where each contends for their own national interests. The Great Game is an aphorism applied for the diplomatic and political interactions that lie between the various nations. The intrigues of the Great Game involve many matters that surpass the interests of any given domain; some even rise above the varied national interests.

While each nation is a political theatre in its own right, with each their own morass of political issues, they are all part of a larger fabric of politics that unites the Realm. With the founding of the Imperium, the Great Game has become both more intense and more intricate, with overt forms of violent among nations ascribed as criminal. As such, much of the aristocracy resorts to clandestine means, and those of supreme skills may find their aspirations drawing them unerringly towards the exalted intrigues rife in the heart of Metropolaris.

Much of the practices at the heart of the Great Game dates back to the flourishing of the bramblewoods; for the growth of those formidable barriers substantially impeded all ability to coerce the will of one's neighbours through force alone. As the bramblewoods intersect through all sectors of land, there is no particular path of ease to march a standing army. The larger the force that forces its way through those woods, the more hostile the terrain becomes. As such, sheer necessity has required diplomacy to achieve any political agenda that reaches beyond those verdant walls. Likewise, the powers of the Realm have better learned the arts of espionage, for the small and discreet parties with guileful missions are those that pass best through the woods.

The most common agenda of the Peerage are those of land and holdings, and many of those are underlined by the web of economic relations. It is a force that has come to bind the Peerage together despite their many differences, for the nobility has discovered that they share more in common with each other than they do with the common folk of the Realm. For all that the many powers hold to competing interests, they all accord the customs and protocols of diplomacy as the

carefully threaded stitches of their coterminous society. Few among the aristocracy would forsake those customs without great trepidation.

HIEROGAMY

The arrangement of the hierogamy, or the *hieros gamos*, predicates the politics of nations. This ancient compact, between the liege and their land, is a legacy from mythic times steeped in ceremony and ritual. The bond is ubiquitous throughout the entire Realm; though there are many nuances to its nature that easily evades candid description.

Not only is a liege the temporal master of a given domain, but they are also their respective protector and vessel for its nature, and this enables the liege to act as the embodiment of the *intellectus* of that given domain. Through this bond, the fates of land and liege intertwine: it is a mutual drawing of strength, liege from domain, and domain from liege.

This union between land and liege is the basis of national and international politics. By custom and imperial law the Imperium accords each single domain with political autonomy through distinct privileges, rights, and obligations. This allows each liege to conduct the affairs of their domain in a manner that befits the needs of both the land and the people that live within it.

The bond is bilateral, for just as the bond bequeaths the liege with significant comprehension of the nature of his land, so too does the hierogamy transform the land. The bond bestows limited awareness to the land: one that is sensitive to changes in its soil, the cultivation of its terrain, and the health of its wildlife. This bond elevates the land from terrain unto the commonly imagined ideal of its populace.

From this shared imagination, the *intellectus* of the domain forms; though a being a natural form, it is forged by human imaginings. Those domains bearing great swathes of wilderness most often constitute an *intellectus* with an animalistic or feral countenance, but those with vastly populated homes assume a manner closer to an infant child, with tastes and appetites of its own.

It is of utmost importance that the liege maintains good relations with his domain, for a land that rejects its liege is worse than one without: terrible stories abound of domains either abused or pillaged in attempt to grind them into submission. Such lands fall to accursed blight, and refuse to yield food or succour. If a liege's dominion over his people proves tentative, then that population will dwindle. If his command over his territory is weak, then the border of his domain becomes overrun by the bramblewoods.

ACCOLADE

Legends speak of sovereign powers who subdued the lands of their dominion by their own will. Such matters were perilous and sometimes resulted in the death of the supplicant. Since the Roman Empire, lieges have laid claim to a given domain through the domain's throne. Each throne is not just the seat of power for a given domain but is also the means that links a liege to the land. Through the throne, a liege may commune directly with their domain. Through the throne, the liege experiences a profound intimacy towards the land, where their affinity is the greatest.

The accolade is the act of enthronement that elevates lord to liege. To receive this benefaction, the lord must prove their worth and gain the favour of a Duke. When the time is ripe, the Duke or their duly appointed proxy comes to witness the enthronement. The supplicant places themselves upon the throne, there to wrestle, command, or placate the domain. The inherent danger of this act is the reason that most domains elect and groom and heir well in advance; this often proves more successful in a given claim, as it allows a domain to grow familiar with the supplicant.

Should the supplicant fail, the hapless fool faints, falling from the throne; some have even died. If successful and witnessed properly, the Duke's representative then fastens a torq around the neck of the newly appointed liege, as an outward sign of their elevation.

While sitting upon the throne, a liege gleans knowledge of the state of their domain; here, the lord may enter a trance to catch a glimpse of its farthest reaches. These gleanings provide subtle omens, which guide the liege, raising alert to dangers and deficits. The stronger the bond between liege and land, the more they are rendered with clarity. There are certain legends that speak of those lieges so deeply connected that they could cause the land to respond to their whim.

Today, the liege may affect their land with only the most subtle of cantrips. Such tentative power is nevertheless potent, and it is extreme folly to lay siege to any such lord incumbent upon his throne: the very terrain impedes the invaders' travels, denying them respite and leaving their positions exposed to reprisal. Though what fickle power they can exert has limits affected by distance; the liege's influence begins to fade at the bramblewoods, and diminishing exponentially thereafter. Thus, lieges habitually appoint proxies of their power if they seek to extend their will beyond their borders.

Master Manipulator by Mateusz Bielski.

KITH

The community of people that reside within a given domain are the kith of that domain: kith is an informal term the nobility use to denote the community that permeates all the residents of a single domain, even where ties of kinship and familiarity do not bind them together. For although the kith of given domain share residence on common land, their dreams are all partly subsumed into the greater dreaming that is the *intellectus* of their domain.

Understanding the pulse and moods of a given kith is a key to that domain's power. The relationship between the nobility and the kith is an uncanny juxtaposition of familiarity and distance, for it is one that thrives upon the celebration of the nobles in estate, whether in love, awe, or fear.

The best lieges are versed in cultivating that celebrity to engender loyalty and service, and otherwise to exalt their own legendary. The most formidable are able to unify their communities through common cause. Even in Metropolaris, where the boundaries created by the bramblewoods are non-existent, a borough retains this same sense of community, its residents holding fast their allegiance and social ties.

CITIZENSHIP

In the wake of the revolutions, the social relations between lord and vassal fell to obsolescence. The Emancipation Proclamation eradicated all of serfdom; no longer are the populations the dependents of the liege. Instead, the multitudinous numbers of people receive rights of citizenship by one of the many nation-states but more broadly provides legal status to that person within the Imperium.

As members of civil society, citizens are subject to common law and are the recipients of the empire's largesse. As citiens, they may travel throughout the empire but their movement is

somewhat restricted within a given nation, unless granted leave to travel by visa and permit. A nation may extend suffrage to civilians, in a manner depending on their political regime. It is this suite of legal rights, conducive to the pursuit of liberty and prosperity within the Realm, which gives an individual their legal status within the Imperium. These civic privileges balance against civic duty accordingly, and the characteristic trait of citizenship is a distinction of civic virtue.

While citizenship is the domain for commoner and noble alike, several privileges remain informally extended to the nobility alone. Nobles frequently enjoy extraterritorial status with the influence of their nation of origin bearing sufficient influence to protect their nobles abroad from certain types of political peril, particularly in the Hinterlands or Labyrinth. However, numerous privileges are limited to the nobility; though they are not enshrined in law they are enforced by the collective will of society. The most notable of these refers to the limitations on opportunities to hold many public offices, particularly those within the imperial orders.

The history of property is a contemptuous one, for only in modernity has the subject of consideration been upon the landed estate. However, prior to the Emancipation Proclamation, commoners were regarded as chattel.

The concept of human possession is one tangled with vastly outmoded sentimentality over the noble character. That the nobility, having agency over their own destiny, were free in a way that commoners were not. This view regarded the commoners as being without agency and therefore dependent on noble leadership; that without aristocratic rule governance falls to the madness of the multitude.

I regard these positions as antithetical to the new world order, even as traditionalists affect the old paradigm. However, the question of free will among the commoners is of political vitality. In terms of providing enlightenment to all, it is imperative that the aristocracy respects the common folk as being freedom to pursue their own aspirations. For commoners and nobles alike are inevitably mired in the weavings of predestination, the nobility has merely attained the awareness of their fate. Commoners exist in a state of perceptual freedom, even though their choices are illusory: it is a state of content compliance, which might be envied for its oblivious care.

from Absolute Enlightenment by Friedreich Münchhausen

DENIZENSHIP

Not all who reside within the Imperium hold citizenship. As the empire has expanded and laid claim to the Hinterlands and the Labyrinth as clientele states, the existence of their populations provide a political conundrum. As the Imperium's doctrine is ardently humanist, those of faerie, takwin, or nightbreed natures often find the recognition of their citizenship slow to be realised, if at all, and often ignored when accorded.

Nations rarely grant such beings citizenship, and so the Imperium instead recognises them as denizens. Denizen status grants legal privileges of permanent residency, the right to transact property except land, and sanctity under common law. Though rare, denizens may subsequently acquire citizenship, though the faerie or takwin rarely gain citizenship, save where they were once nobles themselves.

More frequently, a noble that becomes a mummer retains their citizenship; whereas commoners are often assigned denizenship regardless of their former standing. Naturally, many upright citizen fears devolution into a mummer, for with the loss of one's humanity often comes the loss of the rights of the citizen.

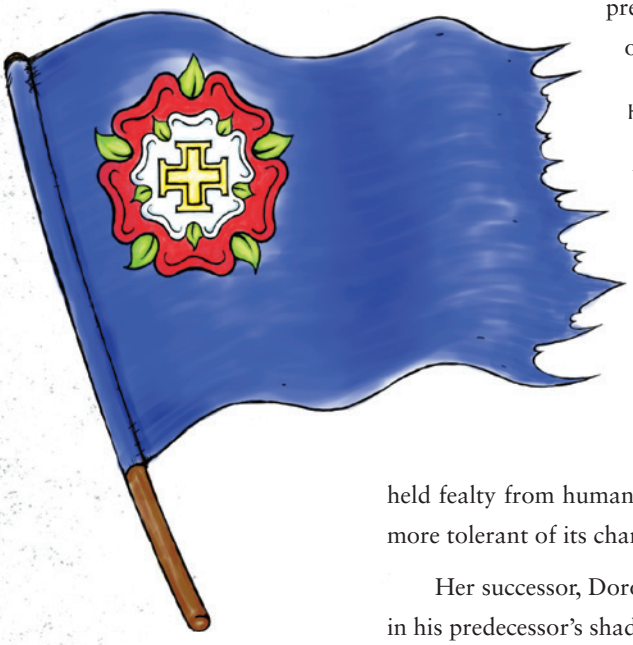
Nevertheless, the project of Absolute Enlightenment continues. For there are many isolated domains where the imperial largesse does not reach as heavily or as far, so while slavery and serfdom are consigned to the past, there nevertheless remains lesser forms of indentured service, and it is the denizens of the Realm who are most frequently pressed or leveraged into that condition.

The often inhuman nature of most denizens can mean justice is slow to act, even when injustice is uncovered. What citizens there are that find themselves indentured are often there as the result of consequences of obligations created through oaths; even peers can become indentured if they do not honour their dues.

Union of Albion

Albion's citizens are a reserved people, with a cultural predisposition towards morbidity and its sombre echoes; this element imparts to its populace a keen sense of mortality, granting appreciation for spiritualism and matters of otherworldly affairs. The juxtaposition of morbidity and spiritualism infuses art, culture, and manners with a sense of formalism and propriety, scarce found outside their lands; it is best to understand Albian aesthetics and morality in shades of grey, instead of palettes of colour. The idiosyncrasies of the Albians are notorious, with many others finding them officious; Albians see in this an acute love of detail, rather than pedantic foible.

The fatal preoccupation of the Albian instils in them a particular focus upon moral, and mortal, obligations, and matters pertaining to the same. From this flows strong reverence for ancestors and lineages: the Albians consider the act of death itself less important than the preservation of the deceased's memory; their gravest insult is the defamation of the dead.



Albion Flag by Herbie Peppard.

HISTORY

Albion joined as a Union as the consequence of merging domains in the wake of Queen Gloriana's death. Both her reign and her chief advisor, Prospero, moulded much of the nation as it stands today: Gloriana commissioned the construction of the first airship armada, many of which vessels are now flagships of the Imperium. Their aerial supremacy ensured Albion's ability to repel numerous invasions from other national powers.

Her most poignant legacy derives from her changeling nature, as she held fealty from human and changeling subjects with like regard. It has made Albion a place far more tolerant of its changeling populace than many nations with Catholic histories.

Her successor, Doron, achieved a unified crown of Albion's lands, even while he always lived in his predecessor's shadow, which exacerbated his hatred of faerie. His rule instituted pogroms to pre-emptively rout his great fears of changeling insurrection, which instigated real conspiracy and plot. The most famous of opponents was a changeling named Hawk, who sought to release faerie mists beneath the royal court and induce all the monarchy unto madness.

The ill treatment of the changeling populace escalated civil tensions to civil war, all across Albion. Amid these tribulations, two heroic changelings won the hearts of Albion forever: the Ironcoat of the Olive, who wrested the aerial armada from the crown, formulating new military regimes; and the lord of the Orange Mark, whose constitutional reforms constrained the monarchy's absolutism.

GOVERNMENT

The governance of Albion is one of *noblesse oblige*, imputing a sense of civic and national pride that gives acclaim to the members of its Peerage who demonstrate both virtue and character: good judgement, public trust, and taciturn resolve in the face of hardship are all greatly valued. Nevertheless, critics of the Albians accuse it of being more prone to nepotism than they profess.

The national parliament of Albion is the Star Chamber and its emblem is the Rosicrux. Most of the questions put before the polity are ones of public good and the manner in which the state should affect or resolve them. The Star Chamber is a legislature where each domain carries a single vote and where each of Albion's lieges either attends or appoints a proxy to attend on their behalf. Due to unusually high numbers of changelings throughout Albion, the politics of the parliament sharply divide by allegiances: those who represent human concerns in the Lion Alliance, and those that represent changeling concerns in the Unicorn Alliance.

Much of the work done by the Star Chamber is performed through public and cultural programs, fostering good relations with its people, from genuine national promotion to pandering to populist desires. All is to affirm the public's perspective that these peers discharge their offices with diligence and probity, placing the interests of their subjects in the fore. Consequently, few nations' peers can compete with their popularity.

EXECUTIVE

The head of the executive body sets the agenda for the Star Chamber, according to the customs of political process. The Chamber elects a Premier every seven years, who then appoints a cabinet of lieges from the membership of the Chamber to discharge all executive functions.

The current Premier and avatar of Albion is Britannia, the Aviatrix: it is the assumed name of one Amelia Otis Airheart, born 1862. Amelia is one of the most prominent women of Albian, eschewing the trappings of traditional femininity in favour of daring flights. She was the first aviator to fly solo around the continental ocean, and a prominent member of the Women's National Movement.

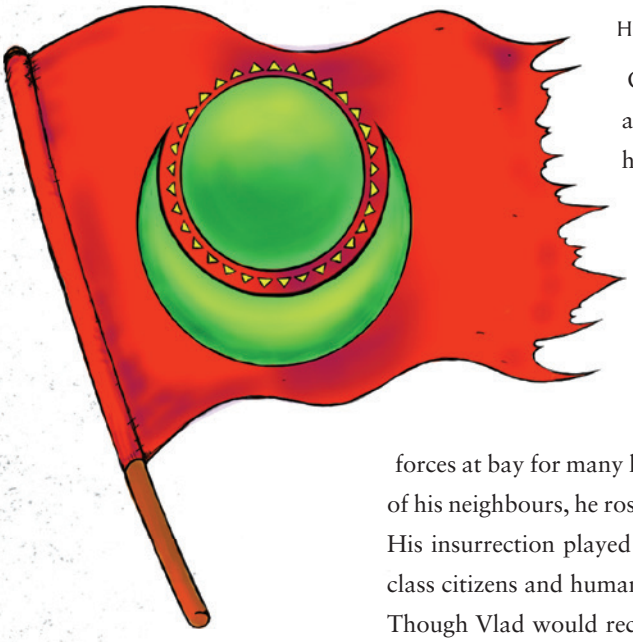
At the age of thirty-nine, she survived a plane crash in the Sargasso Sea, and thereafter retired from piloting to follow her political ambitions. With airpower synonymous with the national character, her bid as its embodiment was assured; its most celebrated pilot took unto the limitless skies, fuelled by her people's ambition. She is a woman whose iconography depicts her swathed in billowing clouds, her head wreathed by golden brown hair, adorned with aviation gear, white helmet, and aviator goggles.

Britannia by Krista Brennan.

Cimmerian Satrapy

The Cimmerian people are most aesthetically minded. Such is evidenced by their numerous and consistent efforts to patronise the arts, which fetch a premium from the most passionate collectors; their private collections, a pastime of the elite, are among the most ornately sophisticated in the entire Realm. The Cimmerian aesthetic is, at its core, one of elaborate symmetry, constantly evoked in architecture, carpet making, jewellery, calligraphy, and even the national approach to ethics: Cimmerian virtue is one of balance and moderation, highlighting the need for temperance guiding passion.

Cimmeria's noble patrons lay claim to being the most accomplished hosts of the Realm, for they prize hospitality and cultivation as the highest of honours. Both artistry and hospitality coalesce in such a way as to mark the measure of a Cimmerian's social status in their ability to produce lavish displays of wealth, through gilded art in all its candid opulence.



Cimmerian Flag by Herbie Peppard.

HISTORY

Cimmeria is the consequence of conflict, between antiquity and modernity, and even between East and West. Its capital was once Constantinople, the hub of ancient Arcadia that left deep cultural roots.

As a nation, Cimmeria only became so under the rule of its satrap, Vlad Tepes, whose dark appetites galvanised the detritus of the Dominate into a power worthy of rivalry. His detractors call him Draco, a moniker earned even as he fended off takwin armies with the elite guard as his political enforcers.

The longevity of Vlad, and his iron rule, has kept external and hostile forces at bay for many long centuries. Even when the entire region fell under the cultural authority of his neighbours, he rose from the dust eventually to reclaim the dominion he saw as rightfully his. His insurrection played on attitudes of the incumbent regime, which cast changelings as second-class citizens and humans as slaves; many of whom were not even permitted into Constantinople. Though Vlad would reclaim this fallen realm, and the title of Prince, he did so at the expense of conceding certain rights to faerie, in order to forge a most potent alliance.

Cimmeria was, and remains, is the epitome of the Synoptic state: one seeking to balance between Rhyme and Reason. This, and its ardent independence, overcame the harsh economic hindrance of the preceding century. Vlad's staunch leadership ensured the implementation of many administrative and military reforms. Nevertheless, as the last state to join the Imperium, the 'Eastern question' is one that underscores its motives.

GOVERNMENT

The Consummate Divan is the Council of Cimmeria, under the emblem of the Colophon. The appointment of Councillors is at the will of the satrap himself. However, their eligibility is a matter for the court to discern. When required, the court selects from among their membership a candidate for the Divan: one having demonstrated wisdom, learning, and mastery of poetry and virtue, astronomy and prophecy, or bureaucracy and law. Thus, the Divan works through a bureaucratic and unitary authority, ministered by artful officials giving rise to niche cultural oligarchies over each of its domains.

The Cimmerian treasury enjoys robust trade relations with the Hinterlands, bringing all manner of exotic goods. Its trade network, known for spices, silks, and lacquer-ware, is a legacy from its time as an economic power. Yet critics assert that Cimmerian justice is draconian and most domains have leave to their own judicial methods; there is the unspoken assumption that should a matter rise to the Divan, they will deal with it in strictest fashion.

The political factions of the Divan roughly describe the aspirations of the courtiers. There are those of the Sublime Path, who are more introspective and advocate isolationism and protectionism. Their opponents are those of the High Path who, in great bombast, advocate expansionism and open trade. This dichotomy describes preferences towards material and artistic wealth. This accordingly outlines some of the key political questions contended within the Divan.

EXECUTIVE

The executive body of the Divan claims a pedigree older than most governments: the incumbent Magnate is none other than Vlad Tepes, the legendary Dragon Child of Cimmeria; the most long-lived of all the nations' heads of state.

His reputed inclinations towards bloodthirsty impalement and draconian tyranny have been somewhat mitigated by the passing of the years, having been earned during his original reign between 1456 and 1462. Although dark cruelty haunts his past, it culture, wealth, and civility has obscured its nature. His iconography depicts an iron hand in a velvet glove, wreathed in serpentine coils

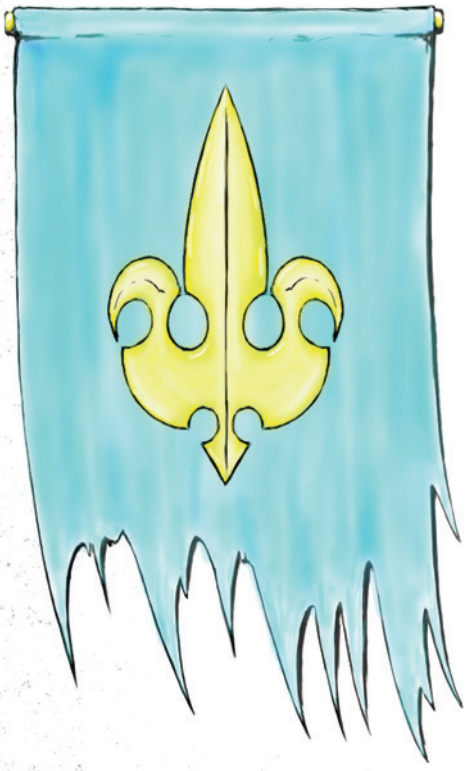
While in exile, his legendary grew as a figure in staunch opposition to their regime, his severity proving a bastion of resistance. In leading the insurrection, Dracul became the leader of the allied Cimmerian duchies; thereafter instated as Prince by general acclaim. Under imperial writ, the title of Prince has been eschewed in favour of Magnate. Every fifty years, the Divan votes to determine confidence in his governance; a vote he has yet to lose.

Dracul by Krista Brennan.

Republic of Gaule

In observing modern Gaule, with equality, fraternity, and liberty as *de rigueur*, one might be forgiven for failing to consider the contemporaneous trappings of intellectual elitism, or a history of the abuse of power. Today's Gaule is one influenced by a sense of public office and secular rationalism. Yet beneath that veil of reason lies the passionate populace that cried havoc and bloody revolution; the advent of the Cult of Reason has merely helped focus these passions into scientific obsession, and observers now suggest that such brilliant fanaticism constrains this deep wellspring of zeal into ardent intellect.

Erudition is the measure of a Gallic lord or lady, where the terms for science and culture are near-synonymous. Indeed, their most significant cultural outputs are their academic and rhetorical works and their national image is predicated on a reverence for academic rigour. Public and social affairs primarily exalt mentally stimulating pastimes: strategic games, public debates, and scientific competitions. The Gaule enjoy poetry, provided it demonstrates technical excellence over emotive content. The highest tribute of the Republic is a posting to the Gallic Academy of Science.



Gallic Flag by Herbie Peppard.

HISTORY

Gaule celebrates its academic personages who are the by-product of elitism conducive to a national climate of intellectualism. Yet a series of famines and disgust at personal opulence turned the populace sour and triggered murky insurrection: the figures of the loom and guillotine were rendered as impromptu heralds of the revolution, ever accompanied by the clacks of the tricoteuse, and anointed by the blood of the fallen.

Initially, the Gallic Directory replaced the *ancien regime* as an Assembly of all the domains. It then succumbed to the political and military genius of Vendémiaire in a *coup d'état*, allowing his establishment as First Consul of the newly formed Consulate; this vaulted the nation into theatre of imperial politics. Even now, his reign has set the tone of Gallic governance, having bevelled the hallmarks of the *ancien regime* onto new republican guises.

Eventually, his time expired, and though *l'Empereur Lion* held the capital of an imperial dominion, his hold dwindled in remote rural areas where his *Grande Armée* could scarce penetrate. Perpetual revolution cast its terrible pall across the populace, stirring them to ire and ardour; anarchists besieged Marengo, and the peasantry resisted his edicts for many a month. Eventually, the *Grande Armée* would break the insurrection, only to mire in the enforcement of Vendémiaireic law. In order to instate peace and security throughout the empire, Vendémiaire reined back his influence across the Realm, and acceded to the foundation of a true republic.

GOVERNMENT

The Solarium is the Council of the Gallic people, heralded by the emblem of the Crista-lys. Though the Republic acknowledges the Coronal, they vaunt and celebrate their franchise as a political paradise within that regime. Its membership consists of representatives from all of Gaule's domains, each elected by popular ballot. Yet two criteria informally vet an individual's eligibility, which subtly preclude the office of government from those not ennobled or without academic testamur.

Within the Solarium are two main political factions, which denote their members' collegial affiliations; this is the primary reason that non-academics rarely succeed in their candidacy. The first of these is the *Lyceum Natural*, an institution that concerns itself with natural philosophy and sciences: the other the *Lyceum Pur*, which directs mind and art into the workings of abstract knowledge and pure thought. The Solarium manifests many lofty airs, deliberating on policy positions in abstraction and perfunctorily bequeathing its more mundane duties upon the administration; there are many strident criticisms of this *lassez-faire* approach.

The influence of the Solarium extends as far as the Codes Vendémiaire permit; the farther from the centres of the cities one finds oneself, the further these codes devolve towards archaism. Largely due to the unequivocal embrace of technology, most of the Gallic domains connect to the central polity of the nation such that there is no place in the nation one could not travel to within a single day.

EXECUTIVE

The President of the Gallic Republic is an unlikely hero, for she was once the scion of the *ancien regime* and is now epitome of liberation. Marie Capet, originally consort to *le Roi-Soleil*, stark royalist, reviled by the populace.

However, she intervened on behalf of the failed Bastille revolutionaries and later met with the Women's March; in both instances mitigating impending populist violence. Later, Capet attempted to withdraw from public life, but managed to capture popular imagination; the *libelles* often regaling the people with her exploits.

Finally, embracing her public persona, she proved instrumental in drafting the Gallic Constitution, only to fade from prominence with the rise of Vendémiaire, dismissed as *La Veuve*. Then, during the Paris Commune, she proclaimed herself no longer Marie, but Marianne, the Libertine.

She is said to have been reborn at sea, and in her expressed the ideal of liberty itself, being unfettered by man or will and steadfast in her egalitarian ways. She is depicted with a radiant coronet, a torch, and a veil of cascading ocean waters, the chains of oppression trampled beneath her feet; she has consistently been elected by popular ballot ever since.

Marianne by Krista Brennan.

Hellenic Electorate

Whoever parsed the word 'hedonism' was likely contemplating the Hellene at the time; they are notoriously sensate. Art, government, and their philosophy of life, all are influence by sensationalism and the pursuit of both pleasure and pain. The Hellene themselves are often recognised by their ability to commemorate and celebrate all manner of things. They place great stock and store in ritual and expression, and it is one demonstrated by the proliferation of cultural events. Certainly, the Hellenic calendar consists of more festivals, both major and minor, than the other nations. The festivals major held as highlights of the year, being the celebrations of the Hallows. The remainder comprise a series of events that indulge whimsy and fickle tastes, though honouring Hellenic figures of historic note.

One would be remiss to suggest the Hellenic are subject to slavish obedience. Indeed, they temper their pursuit of sensation with delayed gratification; fashions that bloom and wither, unable to last the years, must yield to superlative experiences that can endure the test of time. Such deferring of immediate desires for grander designs is iconic of the natural progression from the frivolity of youth towards the insights of wisdom and maturity.

History

In the period after the fall of the Arcadian Dominate, the region came under the rule of the Golden Horde; long after takwin dominion faded, their influence lingered over the region for many years. From among the people, rebellious dreams forged a fellowship of outlaws, known as the Fifth Column; they would antagonise the Golden Horde from the most secluded of mountain steadings, where their influence was weakest.

For many a year, this, the Theban Band, was naught but distraction to the takwin regime, though their actions would catalyse change through the intervention of noble families in the region. The actions of the Band, though insignificant in their own right, precipitated conditions whereby the Golden Horde grew increasingly dependent on human ingenuity to consolidate its rule. Taking the lead in this insurrection, the nobles reasserted their station through provision of educational reforms, which the populace received in the guise of pan-Hellenic nationality, describing a romanticised Hellena.

As awareness of the insurrection brewing within the regime grew, the takwin host began expunging what resistance they could find, which served only to drive the rebels underground and rally them behind the Fifth Column. With guile, cunning, and duplicity, they undermined the regime, with acts of sabotage made to coincide with hostile incursions by Albion and Gallic navies. Thus cut off from its support, the reign of takwin crumbled.

Government

The emblem of the Laurel overhangs the Chorus, the Council of the Federation, which is comprised of sages, philosophers, and other erudite persons, all engaged in their passions. A series of examinations set the requirements of entrance, which tests versatility in literature and drama. Of those who prove their facility with measured judgement, a selection is made in a manner according to simple protocol, giving preference to those deemed best able to embody the virtues of Hellena.

Hellenic Flag by Herbie Peppard.

The question of virtue itself is coterminous, for scholars divide on how best to understand the question of the virtuous person. From this two fractions emerge, which ascribe different models of virtue: the elder faction is the *Eudaimon*, which asserts that a peer is one dedicated to the flourishing and happiness of humanity; their contestation comes from the *Demiurge*, who views the noble as a benevolent architect of the Realm's material prosperity. These distinctions contest ideals of chimerical and temporal abundance.

Since its political resurgence, the Electorate has worked long and hard to overcome many internal divisions that threatened to undo all it had wrought; through these workings, the Chorus transformed Hellena from a disparate collective of domains to a federation. To date, the Electorate is a thalassocracy, whose power devolved from supremacy over the southern seas, able to harvest its bounty more readily than its neighbours do. Its clever use of shipping and coastal lanes allows the Electorate to remain integrated, somewhat independently of the Imperium, even scornful of the impediment of the bramblewoods.

EXECUTIVE

The people of Hellena are under the regime of Governor Ioannus, the Magnificent Rogue, whose ideal draws upon an early incarnation of a legend predating modernity. Modelled after one Prince Marko, his reputation stands as a fearless and powerful protector of the weak, and as a prominent Orphean.

Across early Hellenic history, many figures have adopted this image, the iconography being a deliberate invocation of ancient athletic practices, celebrating athletic prowess, beauty, and sexual virility. After the liberation of Hellena, Ioannus recast Marko's role as that of a clever rogue, and lauded his guile instead.

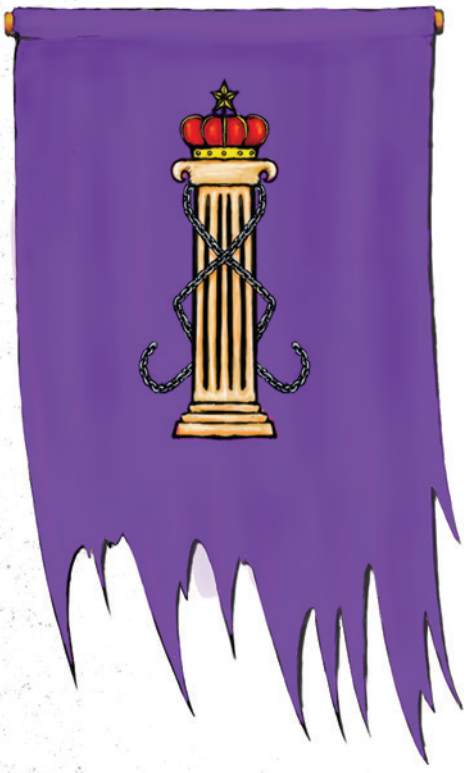
Though Ioannis was born and raised noble, he shows profound democratic inclinations; he enjoyed a ministerial appointed from Vendémiaire's regime. Through many years of political engagement and diplomacy, Ioannis toured the Realm, seeking support for Hellenic self-governance. In this, Ioannis demonstrated his cunning and the populous elected him as the first Governor of the Electorate; it was a position he consolidated in 1831 after avoiding an assassination attempt, and thus prevented the country from plunging into chaos once more.

Ioannis by Krista Brennan.

Iberian State

Iberian ideals are emblematic of a cultural climate yearning for a return to a romanticised medieval piety: a culture that emphasises austerity and elegance, forgoing the baroque splendour of imperial pageantry and the decadence of a cultural imperialism. Favoured is the beauty of the unadorned, the elegance of minimalism, of clean and crisp lines and forms. In certain ways, this tendency towards simplicity is a cultural reaction to the cumbersome politics and courtly aspirations that once held the Iberians back; now they seek an authentic realisation of Iberian folk culture.

All accentuates a fierce independent streak running through the Iberians, who are known for their martial prowess and a love of glory and conquest: in the field, at court, and in bed. Certainly, many demonstrate vigorous approaches that are oddly egalitarian, forsaking the more intricate social distinctions permeating class and they readily placing the nobles close with their subjects, in heart and in hand. This familiarity reveals itself through a shared history, one that is companions in arms against foreign conquerors, forging close loyalties and bolstering public morale.



Iberian Flag by Herbie Peppard.

History

Iberia is the confluence of Eastern sentimentality and Western authority. This union provoked Iberia's Golden Age during the 15th Century. This cultural zenith followed the heroism of many of the knightly Dons, who modelled themselves after El Cid and Alonso Quixano; both, the last true heroes of the *Reconquista* claiming Iberia for its nascent Catholic monarchy. Even now, the figures of El Cid and Quixano remain vivid in popular imaginings, precipitating a Golden Age.

The Golden Age launched the Iberian Armada that pushed Iberian habitation outwards, and bringing its incursion into the march of Breasyl. This, the Iberians conquered, claiming many of its islands under the dominion of their crown. In this act, the 'Empire on Which the Sun Would Never Set' was born. It was a candle all too brief in glory, snuffed by the rolling juggernaut that was the *Grande Armée* of Vendémiaire.

Only with the decline of Vendémiaire's reign, and the overturning of his puppet monarchs, did the Iberian Peninsula revitalise its native culture. It was a call-to-arms as lead by a vigilante crusader named Salvador; he donned the domino and declared a crusade against the persecution and villainy of the absolutist monarchs. In this he set a tenor of pessimism that galvanised the region unto nationhood, through conflict and cultural shock. The aftermath would catalyse the Iberian peoples into a robust military statehood.

Government

The Junta, council of the Iberian nation stands, under the emblem of the Columnae. It is composed of the most successful military and naval families of the nation, all united under the national throne. Some of the hallmarks of the previous monarchist reign remains remain within this council.

This Catholic crown, claimed by the Vendémiaire, now adorns the mantle of the viceroy, who then extends its authority to the head of state; such that they might embody Iberian custom better than all the nobles of the Junta do. Though the crown is largely a ceremonial one, they

perfunctorily authenticate the decisions of the Junta and occasionally steer its deliberation, either towards positions in the interests of its people or in line with imperial polity.

The Junta retains other hallmarks of the bygone Iberian Empire. Its power was enshrined in the numerous fortified *feuroes*; each *feuro* holds a charter of articles, being an imprimatur for the *Reconquista* and granting the bearer privileges of title and of land reclamation.

Today, two *feuroes* of substance remain: the *Alcázar*, the forum of the castle, and the *Oporto*, the forum of the port. Both dispute land claims of the other, dividing the Junta over the acculturation of its people, the cultivation of its land, and the best technological implementation to meet the needs of both people and state. The *Alcázar* prioritises popular support through purist morality, while the *Oporto* favours independence through alchemical innovation.

EXECUTIVE

Salvador is the legendary Dark Knight of Iberia, the son of Iberian soil, and herald of Iberia's long chivalry. Yet Salvador is more than the figure behind the domino; for while wearing this hood, Salvador ventures among the people incognito as a persona of popular justice, fighting for the common good.

Salvador becomes the Marshal of Iberia, and both its commander-in-chief and dictator. To be acclaimed Salvador, any person of noble bearing may don a domino and challenge the incumbent to trial by combat; this is no mere show of force but a conflict elevated as much by populism as by martial prowess.

A challenge to the title of Salvador may only be achieved after the challenger has demonstrated sufficient populist heroism. This begets a cycle, where the incumbent withdraws from the public due to the demands of governance, to be succeeded by a new contender, much closer to the people; each in turn surely rises to face the older Salvador.

It is a feature unique to the Iberian government, in that few ever know the identity of Salvador from one incumbent to the next; it thus generates an image of an eternal figure who survives many incarnations.

Salvador by Krista Brennan.

Magna Italica

Controversially, Esperia is a decidedly modern symbol for a culture that celebrates itself as the oldest surviving in the Realm; self-styled as conservative, its people cleave fondly to tradition, as their continuity and endurance. They regard staid governance breeds long and longer periods of peace. In the light of this knowledge, the idea of Esperia makes more sense, for she is seen as a continuation of strong and proud female governance under the Oracles. Even so, despite underlying resistance to technological and social progress, that the Italic peninsula was a major site for the Flamboyance reveals that there is a more subtle undercurrent, a yearning for change.

Do not mistake this counterpoint as Italic rejection of tradition or intransigence to the same, but one that tempers mores of yesteryear amid the rigours of popular sentiment. As the imperial regime imposes decidedly modern strictures upon the nation, many of the Italic courtiers determine how best to incorporate its polity into their own political frameworks.

Italic Flag by Herbie Peppard

History

Unification of the Italic peoples is a particular legacy of the Groan family, all prominent in the political and ecclesiastical affairs of the region, particularly during the Flamboyance. They were cunning, ruthless, manipulative, and capable of any deception. Most notorious of them was Alexandria, Oracle in her time, and closely followed in notoriety by her children Titus and Lucretzia. Their household germinated Magna Italica, and their court established Cantabile as a courtier's language there to flourish across the southern coast.

Across the years, the Groan regime was tempered by numerous mercantile and military houses opposing the Groan influence through internecine conflicts of attrition; each sought to destroy the power base of the other. Most famous of these acts was the financing of a Gallic army to besiege the capital, capturing Lucretzia during the siege. Some historians claim that Titus was ready to surrender for the love of his sister, but that the Gallic army exhausted themselves first. Symbolic of the pyrrhic victory, they potted ashes of this conflict into ink for which they used to pen the treaty; this has since proven an icon of the modern constitution.

Despite the fervent dreams of nationhood having taken hold within the populace, these ideals found little purchase with the aristocracy, until more recent decades. National pride infected house after house, bringing disparate domains of the Italic peninsula together under a single banner: at first, in union against the incursion of Vendémiaire, and then again beneath his regime. So with his demise, the blueprint of one nation had become imprinted readily upon the fabric of those domains.

GOVERNMENT

The Quirinale governs Italic peoples, under emblem of the Fascia, upon the historic site of the Latin Vulgate's curia. The Oracle for many millennia held its great throne, the Cathedra; however, the Groan ascendancy acquired the throne as a seat of temporal power.

Since then, the throne has either enjoyed the incumbency of a Doge, speaking for the interests of temporal matters, or a Maxima, speaking for the interests of chimerical matters. Both take interest in the vitality of a common cultural narrative for the Italic people, but with the Doge calling for the preservation of tradition and the Maxima calling for new vision. However, some of these narratives have fallen mute with the ascension of the Imperium and the Domino taking place upon the Cathedra; even still, the dispositions of each Doge and Maxima still deride each other.

From the eclectic lot of two sides, the viceroy chooses candidates and the court elects among them. Despite the best intent, electoral procedures are idiosyncratic that leaves the Quirinale an eternal plutarchy: wealth grants an equivalence of voting rights and so rivals' favoured means of contention are those of mercantile attrition. Frequently, these clandestine workings prove beneficial for the province, as the wealth of aspiring courtiers becomes invested in ventures as each candidate attempts to outperform their rivals; artistic and cultural patronage remain among the most decorous form of expenditure.

EXECUTIVE

In the political climate of Italica, being instate upon the Cathedra is a necessary condition to becoming the head of state, by virtue of its historic relevance. The title invested upon the office is Prelate, which draws on historic Vulgate styles to denote the office as having precedence.

The office of the Prelate requires support of the Doges or Maximas: the incumbent is uniquely both. The people hail her as Esperia, the Redeemer: she is a woman of great power, an icon of womanhood among the Italic, and the living symbol of Italic unification through strength. Her epithet is a reference to her role as a former member of the Mousaion, who left its duties to claim land rights.

She was born as Donatella, daughter of the notorious Garibaldi; though Garibaldi was primed to ascend to the Cathedra, he refrained and handed the task of popular governance to his daughter, for she had demonstrated the mastery of the Mousaion's demagoguery.

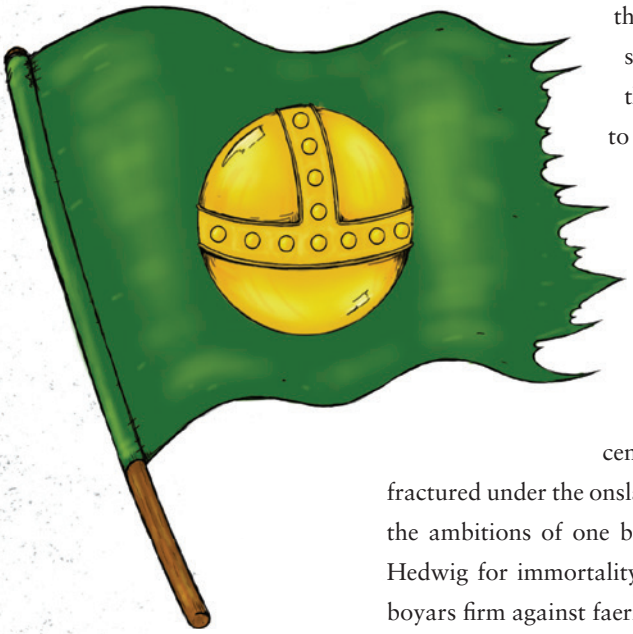
The people still celebrate her departure from the Mousaion to join the March of the Thousand, which is why her depictions still style her with the red shirt of that militia.

Esperia by Krista Brennan.

Rodinian Hegemony

The Rodinians regard themselves as the perfect pessimists, exemplar of the gloom that resonates throughout the land. These lands are touched by bitter winds, giving little hope of or consideration towards excess; it is a starkness set against a backdrop of ominous clouds obscuring the horizon. They teach pessimism and quiet duplicity as necessary survival lessons. Accordingly, loyalty, and honour tend to cease at the dictate of pragmatism.

Rodinians also enjoy the unbidden and the secret, thriving on implication, innuendo, hidden meaning, and subtle insinuation; their predilection for working from the shadows common knowledge. Though one could scarce suggest predisposition towards fraudulence, and none would call them liar to their face, they take to dissembling as to an art. The truth is often spoken with such ambiguity that any two listeners come away with three interpretations.



Accordingly, their long history of insular politics remains inscrutable to all but the most erudite of scholars; beneath layers of intrigue, their agents number some of the most artful espionage operatives. However, a penchant for the clandestine is only their most prevalent stereotype: for there is more to the affairs of national governance than the business of keeping secrets. Indeed, their courts are known for a propensity towards demonstrative perversion, perhaps even in consequence of their love of the unbidden; it piques their humour with an acerbic tongue, sharp and quick to cut.

History

The region of Rodin broke away from the Arcadian Dominate during the early Dark Ages, only to suffer injury from faerie hunting parties for a century afterwards. Unable to marshal the required forces, its many people fractured under the onslaught, and yielded to the leadership of self-titled knightly boyars. However, the ambitions of one boyar eclipsed such malaise: Kaschey the Terrible, who sold his heart to Hedwig for immortality. His dominion, the Kievian Kurgate, became the linchpin that held the boyars firm against faerie.

At the height of his power, Kaschey abdicated and left no clear successor. Various claims from his court only abated with the formation of a custodial stewardship, keeping the Kremel Throne empty. The boyars rebelled and imposed their own collective authority in the Duma. As tensions rose, good governance declined, and the faerie hosts began to stretch their influence towards the Kurgate again, claiming the Kremel Throne outright.

It was a short-lived occupation, for the boyars rose once more to prove their mettle, led by one singular captain, bearing the epithet 'Prince of the Morning'; she was later revealed as none other than a cavalier for Hedwig herself and the lost daughter of Kaschey, then living as her thrall. Yet in this, Hedwig's ambitions were undone, for in conquest the cavalier secured her release from thraldom and all pretenders to the siege successfully vanquished. Once more the boyars were unified, but this time under her rule of as the Great Cathar Queen.

Today, many remember her well, particularly through her twins, who survived her; one born by day and one by night, who themselves eventually took the titles of the Red and White Queens.

Rodin Flag by Herbie Peppard.

Their followers exist in counterpoint: the Red and White Courts contending with each other on behalf of day and night themselves.

GOVERNMENT

The Duma is the council of Rodin, under the emblem of the Orbital. Historically, the Kremel Throne held the privilege of appointing aristocracy to council, though this duty is now taken on by the viceroy. Currently, while the Red Mother maintains popular support through the Duma, and but few nobles acknowledge this, who still proclaimed themselves as the stewards of the Kremel Throne.

In practice, admittance to the role is a matter of influence, as best demonstrated through contacts and secrets; the affairs of the Duma are often artful games of intrigue. The cut and thrust of courtly politics comprise the dispensation of resources to garner the support of the viceroy, who then chooses a council from those members best demonstrating the ability to acquire salacious and pertinent information.

The historic split between the factions, Red and White, has steadily widened; the cliques diverging into distinct vanguards, with each offering a way forward for their nation. The Red Vanguard is more belligerent, ruthlessly taking advantage of any opportunity that presents itself, while the White Vanguard takes a more reformist position, seeking to perform white operations. In turn, they emulate the historic conflict between night, demanding in its turn subtle political reform, and day, which calls for remorseless and militant change.

EXECUTIVE

Few recall a time when Matrushka, the Red Mother, was anything but a firebrand; once, though, she was a younger beauty whose life but lacked vitality. Her name was Anna Karenina, wife of the wealthy Alexei.

She was wooed by the notorious Kaschey, and in her affection she unwittingly grew into the confidence of his compatriot, Rakhmetov. The execution, on charges of treason, of Rakhmetov's brother in 1887 catalysed in Karenina the decision to follow her heart: she divorced her husband and absconded with her lover Kaschey to the Hinterlands, in company with Rakhmetov; then to return in 1893, to stir the caldera of insurrection.

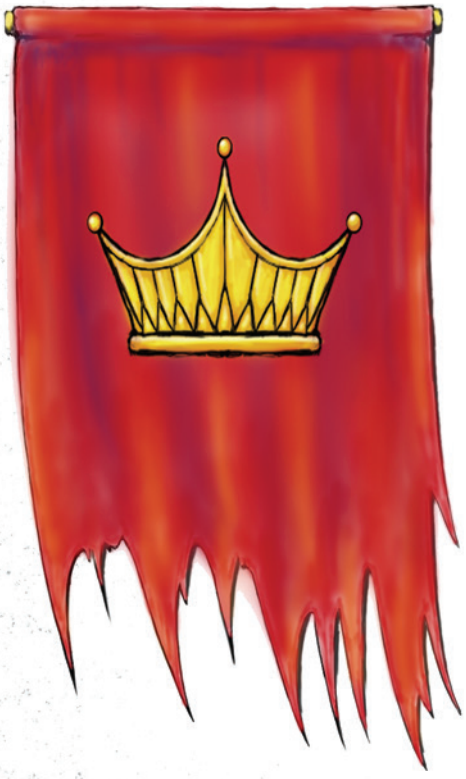
This was Karenina's moment to shine: able to comport to the highborn manner of the entrenched aristocracy, she formed a bridge between the realist and modernist sympathisers. Her position as Commissar is an appointment by the people through the Duma, without the usual interference of the aristocracy. Now, a more mature woman, her image is the epitome of agriculture and industry. She bears the weal of the land as a mantle, but girded by ironwork; a sickle in her left hand, sign of the bounty of the fields; a hammer in her right hand, tool of its industry.

Matrushka by Krista Brennan.

Thanelands

For all their pretensions to purity, the Thanes are often reckoned a bitter bunch by outsiders, and sometimes uncouth. Mostly, the Thanes take pride in their purported autonomy, eschewing many trappings of modern comfort by decrying it as naught but a gilded cage. However, think them not barbarians; they are replete with strength, courage, and valour, all glorified through an elaborate culture of poetry, storytelling, and personal conquest.

Many know the Thanes by their most forthright nature: their art and song are loud and vibrant, their speech carries a lilting assonance, and their actions are briskly pragmatic. The persistent disparagement that impugns their manners is exaggerated, even histrionic, seeking a contrast with the bleakness of their homelands.



Truly, the Thanes are self-declared masters of adversity, made of such stuff as iron and salt. They are honest and dutiful to a fault, and take insult at any aspersion upon their word or honour. Dishonour is not merely a failing, but an inability to master adversity or fulfil one's obligations.

History

As a nation, the Thanelands began as the merger of three lesser dominions: Thanemark, the land of humans, Bjarma, the land of *gigantes*, and Svealand, the land of changelings. In bygone times, Thanemark was the only dominion to produce a king, and thereby declared Bjarma and Svealand as its tributaries. The new king's illuminated proclamation decreed changeling and *gigantes* as brethren to humankind: this provoked calamitous response from giant and changeling lords, who both raised arms and engaged in forcible rebellion. The entire region fell to civil discord to become a patchwork of small domains, disparate and multitudinous.

The heroism of three Volksung brothers united the region; one born in Bjarma, Svealand, and Thanemark apiece. They journeyed throughout the land, retelling legends of old and invoking epic histories of the Volksaga; they thus disseminated a common lore, and achieved what the failed Thanish king could not. They brough the disparate peoples together under as-yet-fragmented governance; an advantage consolidated through carefully orchestrated intermarriages between chieftains, monarchs, and nobility. From these coalitions, Hakon, the High King, emerged and proclaimed a truly unified realm.

This was the Kalmar Union, which waxed and waned in prowess across the entirety of a century gone since, eventually crumbling before internal strife. The Union would have been lost forever, if not for the furtive efforts of one later king, Gustav. Through his works, the Thanelands have regained their unity, despite division by bramblewoods and war, and have remained thus.

Government

The Althing Hall is the sometimes-raucous Council of the Thanes under the emblem of the Tricorne; it is a public venue, binding complex mixtures of people together through common cultural, linguistic, and filial ties. Yet ostensibly, each domain holds themselves as synonymous with

Thane Flag by Herbie Peppard.

their kith, and as an autonomous population, each takes large leeway in its own governance, and the chiefs of each domain achieve their membership into the Althing Hall through popular election.

The practices surrounding Thanish governance emerge principally from the Treaty of Kalmar; though now largely outmoded, it served primarily to enable inter-tribal negotiations for peace pacts, declarations of war, and elections. It is noted for its unusual egalitarianism, going so far as to recognise the land-based claims of its female citizens and even extending the franchise universally.

More contemporaneously, this document's necessity for interdominal relations have given way to a need for negotiation between its two emergent factions; a consequence of coalitions built from various halls brought together in singular assembly. The first of these is the *Fraelse*, the 'War Room'; the second is the *Volya* as the 'Peace Hall'.

The *Fraelse* is a coalition of its male liege-lords, which purports to advance the glory of their nation through aggression and power. In counterpoint, the *Volya* is a hall devoted to the Mousaion, which utilises prophecy and wisdom to temper its nation's ambition with perspective. Despite some egalitarian assumptions, this is still a relic of a bygone age, contending war as men's business and peace as women's; though such distinctions have waned across the years.

EXECUTIVE

There are still many elements of tribalism within the Althing Hall, and there are only semi-formal rules surrounding the appointment of its executive. The head of state is one appointed through general support, where contenders must put themselves forward and receive the mandate of the Hall. This process is no sheer majoritarianism of an electoral process, but rather a series of competitions that eliminates candidates and where support transfers to one of the increasingly few remaining options.

The current Chieftain of the Thanes is the Volksung Hero, Varangian; a wanderer, knowledgeable in verse and poetry, with fair and beautiful noble bearing, humbled by common dress. This countenance is important to any understanding of the Thanes, for he demonstrates purity: of purpose, of deed, and of blood. He affirms an ancient precedent of Thane leadership, demonstrated in profundity of word and deed.

At birth, his name was Nikolaj though this name lost consequence upon reaching his majority as his writings came to cast him in a variety of distinguished roles: a lay position with the Mousaion, but also as poet, philosopher, historian, teacher, and eventually politician. People frequently attribute Varangian's writings with the formulation of modern Thanish nationhood; one steeped in prosaic literature and versed in deep chimerical sympathies.

Varangian by Krista Brennan

Caste

The Mousaion is the custodian and propagator of the Grand Narrative; their number seeks out the many accounts of the Realm, that they might record a true account of its issue. Their Sibyls also fathom the temperamental dreamscape of the skein in hopes that they might glean glimpses of the future, and navigate humanity down the golden path to the Eschaton.

The graces of the Mousaion attune to the subtle flows created by humankind's collective dreams, and by this they are given purpose to amuse: to shape the minds and hearts of the public, by inspiring and awakening within them cultural aspirations. However, their numbers are divided into the five castes, which tend particularly to the dreams of those descended from one of the five Muses. Though each grace serves the common agenda of the Mousaion, they each must tend to the mysteries of a different Muse and her genre of work.

The graces of each caste model their philosophies and practices after one of those Muses: each caste offers a complexity of philosophical platforms, rooted in common customs around geographical, mythological, and ancestral similarities. By this, each caste ensures that their sect recalls a common ancestry and its mythic origins, to provide community transcending geographies.

As the Muses left no written account, the Mousaion derive their knowledge of them from transcriptions of prehistoric oral traditions. The most important writings for each caste come from the literature, scripture, and poetic writings of the poet of antiquity, from which the castes distil doctrinal bases of their tenets. The graces regard each of these founding matriarchs as a prophet and affectionately call them the 'Earthly Muses'.

The ancestries of the clans of humankind are invariably intertwined with the mythology of the five castes. Legendary accounts draw the ancestry of each tribe towards one of the five Muses, and in this manner, each caste is named after them.

Those who cleave to tradition still honour their matriarch through the rites and mores of the caste build around her image. The Lilim are most prolific throughout the Western lands, while the Eden are most numerous in the East. Likewise, the Anath and the Freia have the highest membership in the North and South respectively. Naturally, the temples dedicates to those Muses are the most numerous in their respective quadrants.

Lastly, in the wake of the Invictus' revelations, declaring his Sylvan ancestry, there has been a slow but steady increase of personages declaring Sylvan lineage in Metropolaris.

from The Waking Dream by Matilda Mulfstan

There are limits on the dissemination of public education, with the children of the working classes often only able to access primary education, which the Mousaion provides through chaplaincy services. The increasingly affluent bourgeoisie have created a demand for public lyceums, being public institutions of foundational learning even while ministered by the laity of the Mousaion. Higher education, as always, remains a premium, available only through the Mousaion universities, or the academies of the various charter organisations.

from Modern Charity and its Ethic by Cassandra Shore

Demagoguery

The Mousaion is a demagogic institution, for the graces' power derives from the people and their work places them centrally in the civic and cultural staples of the public life. At the very centre of their operations is the cultivation of the Calendar, and this monolithic and baroque work is supported by two significant practices: the cultivation of the aristocratic demeanour through the pageantry and the performances of liturgical opera.

The Mousaion exercise influence over public opinion, particularly with their nigh-monopoly on forms of mass media and their curacy of the public education system. They exercise their demagogic influence freely, inciting prejudices, fears, and vanities by which the Mousaion can promulgate the values and virtues of their caste.

Calendar

The Calendar is a central working to the empire. It is more than a method of counting days but a vast and intricate tradition spanning millennia. On the highest level, the Calendar is the mystery cult of the Grand Narrative, and its workings reveal the operations of the skein to the Mousaion. The pomp and ceremony creates a certain cadence, keeping the great work of civilisation in line with the effects of the Zodiac: the Ophanim sympathetic to the human Eschaton.

By ensuring that the habits of humanity attune to the Calendar, they maintain the connection between the Zodiac and the Firmament, thereby ensuring the surest path towards the ultimate

destiny of humankind. Through complex devotions, the Mousaion maintains order of the Calendar; the rituals follow an ebb and flow around the counting of days. The Calendar is always there, a familiar quatrain recited in its entire staid manner.

The Calendar, with all its traditions, is not unique to humanity: for the races of faerie and takwin have their own traditions in the Procession and the Monad respectively. All three contend a different Grand Narrative of history, and each the ultimate purpose of the race, and the mode in which it is told. In brief: faerie claim that history is a work of symbolism and imagery; humanity that it is a telling of words and language; and the takwin assert that it is an aria of music and mathematics.

PAGEANTRY

Pageantry is a form of political theatre, designed to inculcate the daily lives of the nobility. The Mousaion regards pageantry as the beatified display of nobility, a means to project the ideal of nobility towards the masses, rather than simply lay claim to the title.

Thus, pageantry is the theatrics of power that merges statecraft and stagecraft, with purpose of manipulating the sentiment of the population: it creates an elaborate and multi-faceted display of decorum, all of which encodes the styles of quality through intricate symbolism. Such deliberation portrays the members of the aristocracy as the exemplars of civilisation, to call upon the subjects of the aristocracy to help fulfil their common and manifest destiny.

For the modern nobility, the demagogy offered through the pageantry provides a mechanism to commune with the commoners in the wake of the great compromise; and its symbolism is only accessible to those that pay homage to its articles of belief. Consequently, the castes become *de facto* circles for political networking: they are one part political party, one part mythological ideal, and one part populist congregation.

With the changes of the revolution, the notion of the noble unencumbered by the needs of a populace has been washed away and replaced by a necessity for the nobles to engage in complex political ideologues to resonate with the masses. The nobility can no longer to demand allegiance simply but must secure legitimacy of their authority through the public sphere.

The public and the clergy are bound together to mutual advantage: the commoners are a mobile force for ready agitation, while the graces advocate for their needs politically. The Mousaion's power is populism; it directly contrasts to the politics of statism that is the hallmark of the Peerage. In this, they contend the gentry's assumption that an elite group of professional statesmen know better than the people, and are best placed to execute the workings of power.

from Modern Charity and its Ethic by Cassandra Shore

Conservatives and Reformists disagree on the role of demagoguery, which often falls across a generational divide: the elder generation cleaves to traditional gothic mores, and the younger generation embraces the modern planetary and scientific vogues.

Like other major institutions, the revolutions challenged the core assumptions of the Mousaion and its role with the people. Conservatives regard the role of the graces as demagogues as rightfully leading the public discourse; their liturgies are steeped in high ceremony and ritual, deferring to the use of Latin or Konic in their iteration. Reformists insist that dialogue must begin with the people, and their liturgies cast views through a lens of folk lore and stories, attempting to relate narratives in vulgar tongues.

from The Modern Prometheus by Matilda Mulfstan

LITURGY

Liturgy comprises latter the operatic works through which the Mousaion recounts the litanies of myth and history. Through story and ritual displayed through opera, the castes employ mythological touchstones for noble and commoner alike.

The high arts of storytelling are liturgical works. Each is replete with elaborate ritual invoking communal response to their sacred nature. In retelling, the orator acquires a certain gravitas, extolling both meaning and virtue to the witnesses of their litany. The liturgical dimensions of such works transform their storytelling into a sacrament through dress, cosmetics, hygiene practices, and even modes of expression. The Mousaion gives each recitation and performance lovingly as a public service, each relating the shared narratives important to communal identity. Such is the power of myth, in bringing meaning and significance to the lives of many.

Most liturgies are portrayals of historic events and deeds; some of the most beloved recount the origins of the Muses. The Mousaion gives the Muses the pride of place in liturgy, as the mothers and tutelary guardians of humanity. Reverence of the Muses devolves from accounts describing them as the matriarchs of the human races; each exemplar of her archetype; to each ascribed

unique traits and behaviours. Some liturgies depict the Muses as daughters of the royal stars, others as borne of seeds, fallen from Palladium at different times of the day.

The graces perform the liturgies out of temples having been fitted with the finest theatrical accoutrements. The most lavish of these have wings upon their flanks, home to public libraries and galleries, where collections of significant cultural value are preserved. Any who walk these vaunted halls feel the profundity of their surrounds, by virtue of the accumulation of words and precious objects therein.

Each temple of the Mousaion is dedicated to the Muse of its caste and the various works attributed to her genre. In principle, most temples are are also dedicated to Scriptural practices, following the premise that history is written; they are places where orators give sermons, homilies, and testimony. Far less common in human habitations are temples that follow the traditions of Allegory and Symphony, where masses gather to witness iconic displays or choral mastery.

Less frequently, the Mousaion holds days of high opera on celebrations. These last all day and consist of five operas interspersed with shorter, humorous operettas. The more common weekly liturgical practice in the present-day consists of two operas with one operetta in between.

PRECEPTION

Liturgy depends on manipulating the expectations of a given audience, and therefore requires the audience to witness its affect. For at its heart, liturgy is an art of preception that plays with the expectations of an audience, even in abstraction. Themes, lessons, and characters portrayed work a subtle but pervasive influence upon the minds of the masses, acculturating their thoughts towards particular tropes over others. Over time, the preception of liturgy cultivates particular narrative threads, and nobles that seek to invoke them often find them far more efficacious.

Liturgy frequently makes use of principle motifs: characters, props, and scenery. Each represents a narrative construct, which have been formulated in such a way as to portray readily understood functions and roles. Through cunning use, the Mousaion may depict and impress upon an audience how to understand these objects and subjects.

For the graces inhabiting these roles embody narrative agency directly. They become symbolic of the dualistic synthesis of theatre: in body, they are its gross, physical, substantial aspect; in mind, they are its subtle, ephemeral, essential aspect. By casting a façade of power and grandeur, the Mousaion constructs a scene for the audience, which captures pervasive tropes, rendering their works haunting and eldritch, or wondrous and mythic.

COSTUME

The liturgies of the Mousaion are replete with readily understood character roles, each of which is known by particular masks and the affects of costume and ornamentation. Each of these archetypes their style forms part of established liturgical tradition; each of these focuses particular flows of the skein upon certain character archetypes.

The adornment of each costume entails richly steeped symbolic meaning relevant to the type of role. Costumes for the Muses in particular are shimmering, extravagant silk brocades, but are progressively less sumptuous for mythic figures of lesser stature. For centuries, costumes have emulated the clothing that the characters might have genuinely worn, whether they comprise the formal robes of a courtier or the street wear of a peasant. However, costumes have more recently returned to highly stylised forms, as the stylistic conventions became the norm.

Each mask has a name, and they are carved or moulded from the element attributed to a caste. Masks are used to portray sublime or animal characters. Most masks are designed to allow slight adjustments in the positioning of the head to express a variety of emotions through variance in lighting and angle. However, some of the more extravagant masks do not permit the performer to convey emotion. Such characters usually depend on gesticulation and body language to convey their meaning.

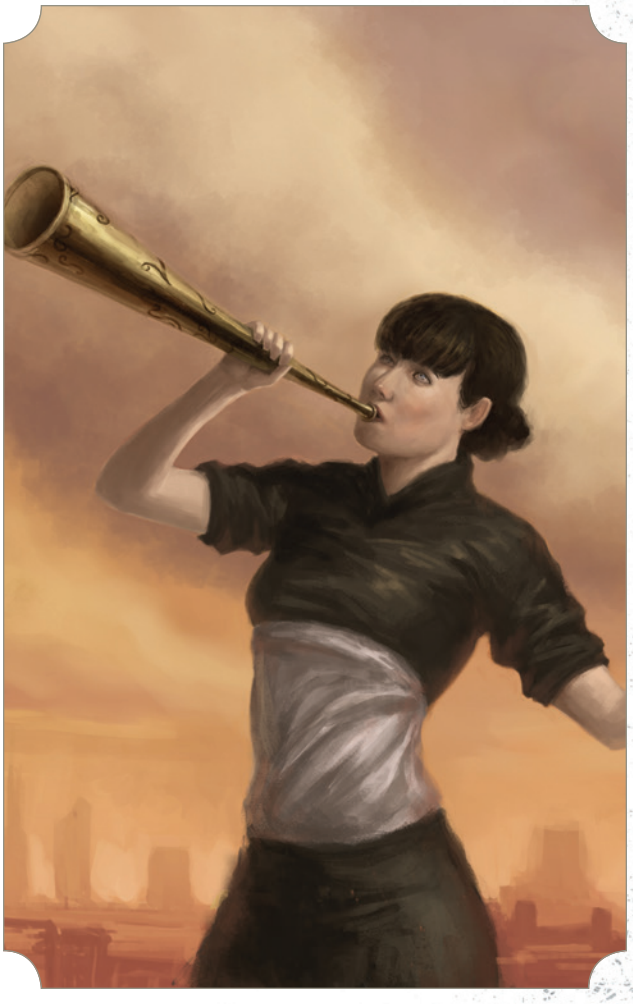
SORCERY

The Mousaion curates the past and heralds the future: they become gatekeepers and guardians of the humankind's destiny, serving as narrators, sages, and clerics. The course of the Mousaion and its attendants is set in prophecy's direction, which the Sibyls impart through their divinations. Moreover, the adept of the Mousaion are those versed in the ways of sorcery: the skill of reading and directing the skein itself, to thereby influencing chance and fortune around them.

These chimerical arts emerge enable the their masters influence over continuity itself, as the very course of history, its length and its breadth, is both ambit of their intrigues and source of their power. Through the manipulation of the Grand Narrative, graces may cast themselves as agents of history and prophecy and take advantage of popular and latent superstitions and folklore.

Novices, before their inauguration as graces, must demonstrate their command of passions and dreams, and intuitive understanding of the raw elements of myth and superstition. Novices must pass an ordeal, a trial against the length of their Shadow: in this psychic duel, they encounter their own darkest urges as well as their higher aspirations; they must chart a course between the reef and the whirlpool, finding a surer sense of self. There is real danger in this moment, in coming so close to such dark materials.

Should the novice pass through this moment sound of mind, the witness of the Auspice will conduct a laying on of hands to solemnise it thus; placing about their shoulders a mantle, as precious vestment.



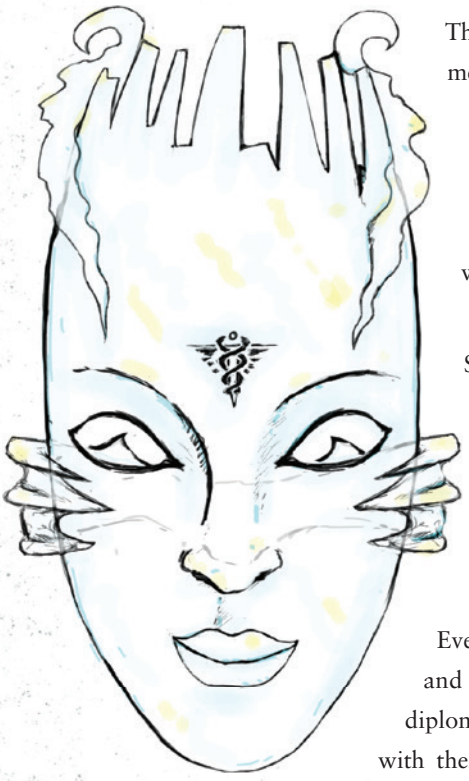
Suffragette by Lucas Pandolfelli.

Dawn

The Dawn Caste are the most vocal in agitating for change and liberty. They view themselves as pioneers and champions of the freedoms of the common man and woman; they to see equity of privilege among the aristocracy. Their repertoire of contention often employs modern modes of printed media, even using vulgarised and common publications, platitudes, and libellous tabloid, to draw strongly from populist ardour.

Unsurprisingly, they are readily critical, and are the first to oppose anything seen as interfering with personal liberties in civil society: whether restraints on rights, on market forces, or the levying of taxes.

EVE



The testament of Myro gives shape and nature to the winsome Eve, the most radiant and mercurial Muse of Hope, and Daughter at Dawn; her symbol is the Caduceus, her genre purviews entail creativity and fancy, and the elements of her genre are fantasy, peace, and aspiration. Eve is the archetypal scholar, driven to study and learning, drawing strength from imparting knowledge, and comfort from lively discourse and communion. The Dawn Caste celebrates Eve for her curiosity and imagination, and cast her likeness with a mantle of new light.

Of Eve's depictions, she is the least poetic of the Muses, preferring prose to poetry. She was comely and ruddy in complexion, caught in a brace of curling, lambent hair, all wound in strands of silver, and going bedecked in a simple staid garment; her eyes of emerald green, flecked with stars of gold, were surely her most stunning feature. The trueborn scions among the Eden, held in high regard, are those whose skin flushes with Eve's ruddy hue.

EDEN

Eve's children once formed the Eden, whose lineages remain in the Amsala, the Portner, and the Winebach. In ages past, the Eden were peacekeepers and carried a reputation for diplomacy and being excellent scholars. They held positions of power through good relations with their neighbours, and held the most lavish festivals and artistic displays; though their detractors found them idealistic and decadent.

The Eden were commonly associated with eloquent missives and communication. Their archives were among the most ancient of all, having some of the best-stocked libraries of antiquity. History demonstrates many examples of the Eden as orators, debaters and poets, and academics and ambassadors. They were among the first to query and provide a critical voice, and the Eden people were crucial to having developed traditions of scholarly lore.

WORKS

The Dawn Caste follows the scriptures of Myro, whose writings are most prolific among the peoples of the eastern lands. She was renowned for her eloquence of expression, and her emphasis on individual liberty over the need for security.

The epigrams of Myro were often epistolary renderings of joy and elucidation, and Myro's works are regarded as being the most elated of the earthly muses. In their expression, one finds

Glass Mask by Herbie Peppard.

discourse on enlightened self-interest, the pursuit of one's own desires and happiness, and in this, the pursuit of excellence itself. Certainly, Myro's lyrics have worked their way into many celebratory chants and praises, and her lyrics and sonnets have inspired idyllic delights in those who contemplate her musings.

TENET

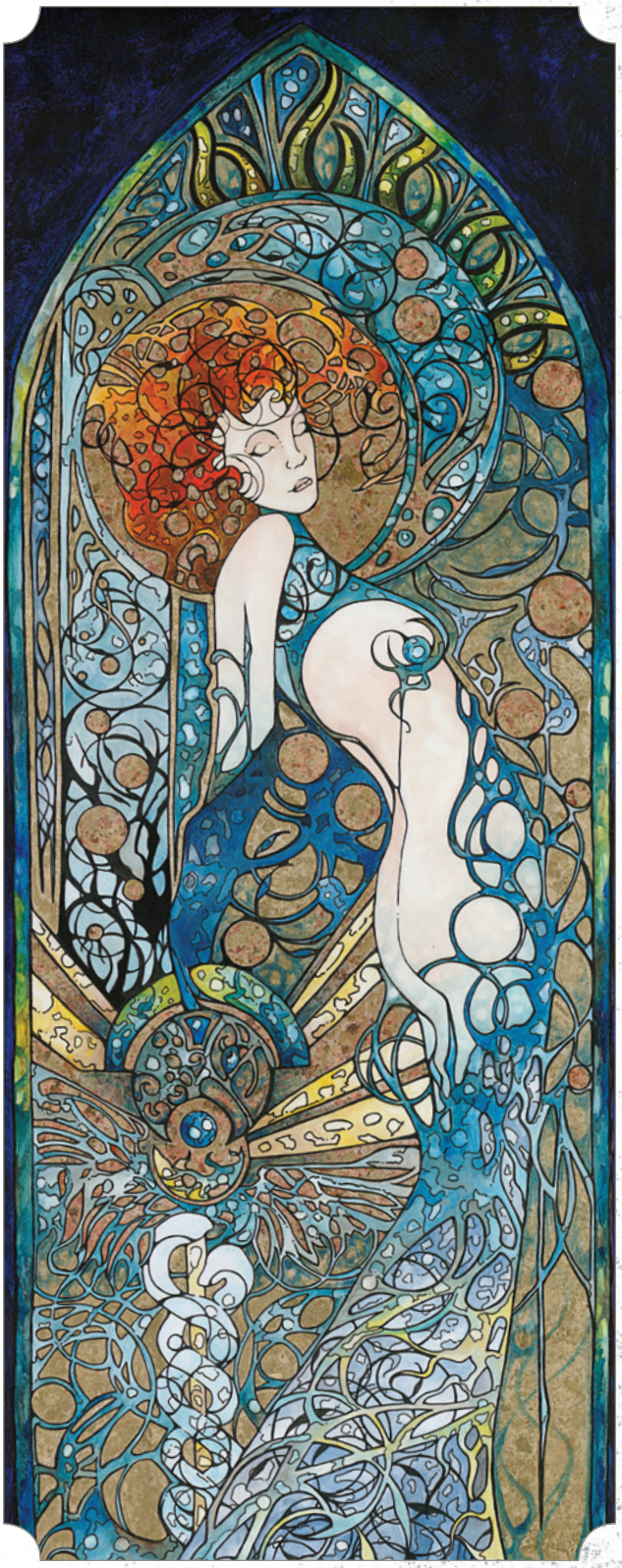
Modern interpretations render the meaning of her works as placing the individual within the centre of the political process. Their doctrines demur from heavy state power, in being resistant to its interference in either through the public or private domain; these modern views represent a subtle evolution from their historic polemics on the reduction of the state's influence.

The sole limits upon liberty, as interpreted by the Dawn Caste, is to proscribe any willing action that would cause harm; though many will cautiously admit that the description of something as harmful is a contestable subject. Many of the caste simply choose to distinguish between actions where the harm is self-inflicted and those that inflict harm upon others; though many other add a caveat constraining such harm to that which is material or even measurable.

According to their ideologues, harm brought upon oneself is not the concern of the state or its authorities; for the caste cedes no right for the state to impinge on this basic liberty. The classic dilemma invoked by these scholars is the act of suicide, seen not merely as an act upon the self but one that affects family and friends. Nevertheless, there is still great leeway given to those who would otherwise pursue self-destructive behaviours.

The position the Dawn Caste emphasises is one of the necessity of freedom: to achieve true social progress. Only without restraints on freedom of speech, action, and discourse shall humanity, as a whole, realise its own potential, through trial and error. From this position, the Dawn Caste contends that governance must adopt a position of non-interference, excepting where it shall create a standard of rights, and privileges, to be upheld in the pursuit of that liberty.

It is their view that those who assume stations of privilege, by virtue of their public office, shall be more constrained than their common counterparts shall be. Nobles are constrained by the customs of duty in accordance with which they voluntarily conduct themselves. This volition, the self-imposition of duty, is the feature that elevates the noble unto a station among the peers.



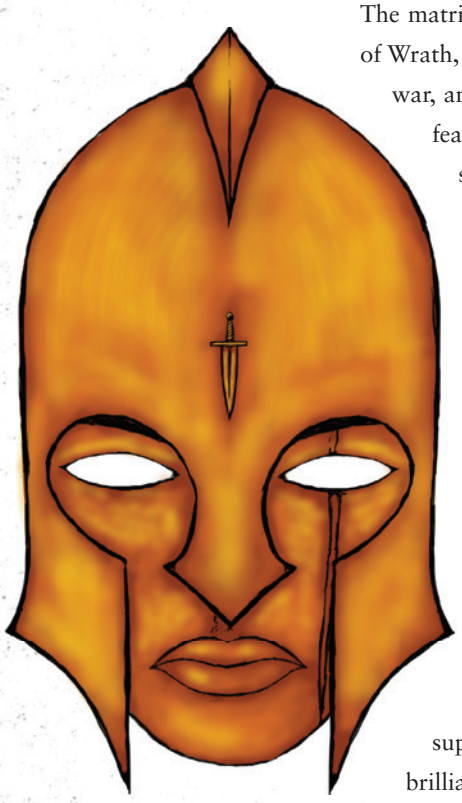
Eve by Chris Parlin.

Zenith

Of the various castes, the Zenith Caste are the most forthright in manner, being zealous, prone to public revel, and full of brusquely good cheer. The graces that adhere to the ideal of Anat hold to expectations that they participate in training regimes and ingratiate themselves in the public eye through acts of vigilance.

They are known for conducting citizen's arrests, intervening to protect the commoner on the street, and displaying stalwart discipline in the face of public disorder;. They are renowned for town hall style meetings and public rallies, appealing to the popular need for order.

ANAT



The matriarch, cast in poetry by Telesilla, is the epic figure Anat, the glorious and martial Muse of Wrath, the Daughter of Zenith. Her symbol is the Caliburn, her genre purviews are valour and war, and the elements of her genre include vigilantism, songs of glory, deeds of courage, and feats of martial prowess. She is the archetypal warrior, driven to action and victory, drawing strength from protecting her community, and gaining sustenance when placed centrally to the cut and thrust of heroics.

Anat's visage was burnished gold: eyes shining like the sun, skin of umber, and her hair deep chocolate. Those of her lineage born with the darkest complexion are her truest children. In her testimony, she is the cast as youngest, perhaps the most masculine, of the Muses and she is recalled for both her magnificence and her grandiloquence. Her outfits depicted lightweight vestments, providing for great freedom of movement; for always she was in motion. She is typically the only Muse to be cast bearing arms, being a radiant bow and gleaming arrow upon its nock.

ANATH

The descendants of Anat form the Zenith Caste, were once the warrior nation of Anath: they are the Jagen, the Maystern, and Rothshart clans. Historians say that the Anath of old had a taste for power and glory, and that they sought dominion through supremacy of arms. Poets of old wrought mock-heroics of the Anath might, and claim their brilliance was too awful to behold, like the zenith sun. To stare too long was to be blinded for impertinence, reach too high, too far into their glory, and be burned for your troubles.

The Anath were highly active and given to provoking others into action, and history reveals the Anath as always being in the vanguard, their posturing aggressive and aggrieved. Few questioned their mastery of war and destruction, for to test their mettle was to sew the seeds of one's own destruction. The Anath of old sought many dangers: warriors and hunters, their martial culture created a people of fierce soldiers and cunning strategists, capable of great destruction.

WORKS

The poet Telesilla was renowned for her bombastic poetry, being the favoured works of the Zenith Caste. These tributes are evocative of proud victory and epic adventures, for they extol the virtue of glory and valour and present the foundation of the warrior *ethos* depicted in her works.

Many of her lyrics were choral works, designed to provide a sense of unity and communion; the tenor is decidedly triumphant and vigorous, inspiring their audience to glorious aspirations.

Brass Mask by Herbie Peppard.

Their doctrine entreats society to strong autocratic regimes and speaks of the great worth of stable governance, best maintained through formal hierarchies; for humankind aere creatures of habit and quite content organised thusly. For such governance to be contrived it requires the discipline and formality of strong hierarchy, to give structure to the state and its citizens.

TENETS

The modern graces of the Zenith Caste are sceptical of a franchise that too broadly extends: many contend that the *demos* are unable to govern itself, being multitudinous, cacophonous, and divided along factional lines. They regard society as a corpus, and only the head is positioned to strategically coordinate the actions of the whole.

The Zenith Caste contends that both morals and ethics are highly relative, subjective principles, as evidenced by the multiplicity of seemingly valid viewpoints. As such, the practicable philosophy of the Zenith is one that eschews this moral quandary and instead extols the primacy of force as the ultimate philosophical razor: in moral nihilism, force is unequivocal in its propaganda and of which a demonstration renders bare all illusions of society, its pretensions, and sophistry.

It is from these core principles that the Zenith Caste derives an often-cited aphorism: politics is simply warfare by other means, to mean that diplomacy is an act that protracts the engagement between opponents. It becomes useful only when it enables opposing sides to coerce without the expensive, but ultimately necessary, commitment of force. They purport that the underlying conflict between powers reveals a natural state of anarchy that can only be subdued by the superstructure of the empire, which enables the *Pax Aeterna*.

From these first principles, the Zenith Caste demand powerful cohesion from society, producing unity and strength. Accordingly, the empire must maintain a monopoly on force and arms, demonstrating unbreakable resilience against the state of nature: poor, nasty, brutish, and short.

Moreover, the caste argues that hierarchies produce efficiencies: a unitary empire demands discipline and fortitude from its constituents, everyone knowing their place and playing their part. The nobility, paragons of humankind, remove the cause and consequence of armed violence from public domains, while ordinary citizens must content themselves thusly. Thus, the nobility and military become the principal annexure of the empire, sometimes synonymously, and both must turn themselves to the defence of their subjects.

Anat by Chris Parlin.

Dusk

The most notable aspect of the populist movements of the Dusk Caste is their notorious usage of propaganda, often directed in criticism of excessive innovation. These invectives are vocal and unerring in their derision of perceived decadence, being intensely critical of military intervention or the unbridled accumulation of wealth.

However, the rationale that attends this can range from the necessities of *noblesse oblige* and good governance to the conservation of community values. Accordingly, they are wary of any new influence, particularly of those belonging to alien origin, believing them subversive to humanity.

LILITH

The subject of Erinna's treatise is none other than Lilith: the elusive and venereal Muse of Sorrow, the Daughter of Dusk. Her symbol is the Sangreal, her genre purviews are stories of the forbidden and unknown, and elements of that genre of madness, illusion, and seduction. She is the archetypal mystic, driven to both reflect and beguile, drawing strength from the well-being of her community, and comfort from harmony within society.

Mythology describes Lilith as the Muse of the greatest volatility, kind and cruel in turns, and always terribly conflicted. For these reasons, her depictions cast her paradoxically: the virgin whore, veiled in twilight misdirection. Most works of her refer to Erinna's descriptions, which highlight the favoured features of the Dusk Caste: a river of ebon hair did frame her amber eyes, her visage cast of alabaster, and her mantle that notoriously threw two shadows behind her. Most notably, the Lilim regard one born albino as having the auspicious favour of Lilith.

LILIM

Lilith's children were once the Lilim people, and among its clans are the Kelleck, the Greystrand, and the Silvenblum. The Lilim were preservers of the past and keepers of histories. Known of old as graces and chroniclers, these nobles have since evolved into grand archivists and bards. They studied ancient mysteries, seeking to enshrine their power through custom and tradition. They were among the most solemn and circumspect of the five clans of humanity, but prone to superstition: historically veiled in secrecy and gifted social animals, they exuded a certain seductive force with which others had to reckon.

History shows the artistic movements of the Lilim as being among the most influential of antiquity, even suggesting that their style defined the classical look: the Lilim culture epitomised artistic expression and compassionate works. They were caretakers, remembered for their gardens and their bathhouses.

WORKS

The Dusk Caste emphasise community values over those of the individual, and security over liberty. Additionally, most members of the Dusk Caste have conservative voices, eschewing progress in favour of tradition.

The traditions of the Dusk Caste draw upon a legacy of epigrams from the archaic poet Erinna. Her works often serve as cautionary tales on social inequities, her parables satirised

Clay Mask by Herbie Peppard.

political processes, retaining something of a timeless quality. Though many of her treatises survive, they are nevertheless incomplete; what consistently articulates itself in her works is a tenor of melancholy humour and grim disposition. Her poetry incites dread imagery and her lyrics frequently instil trepidation.

TENETS

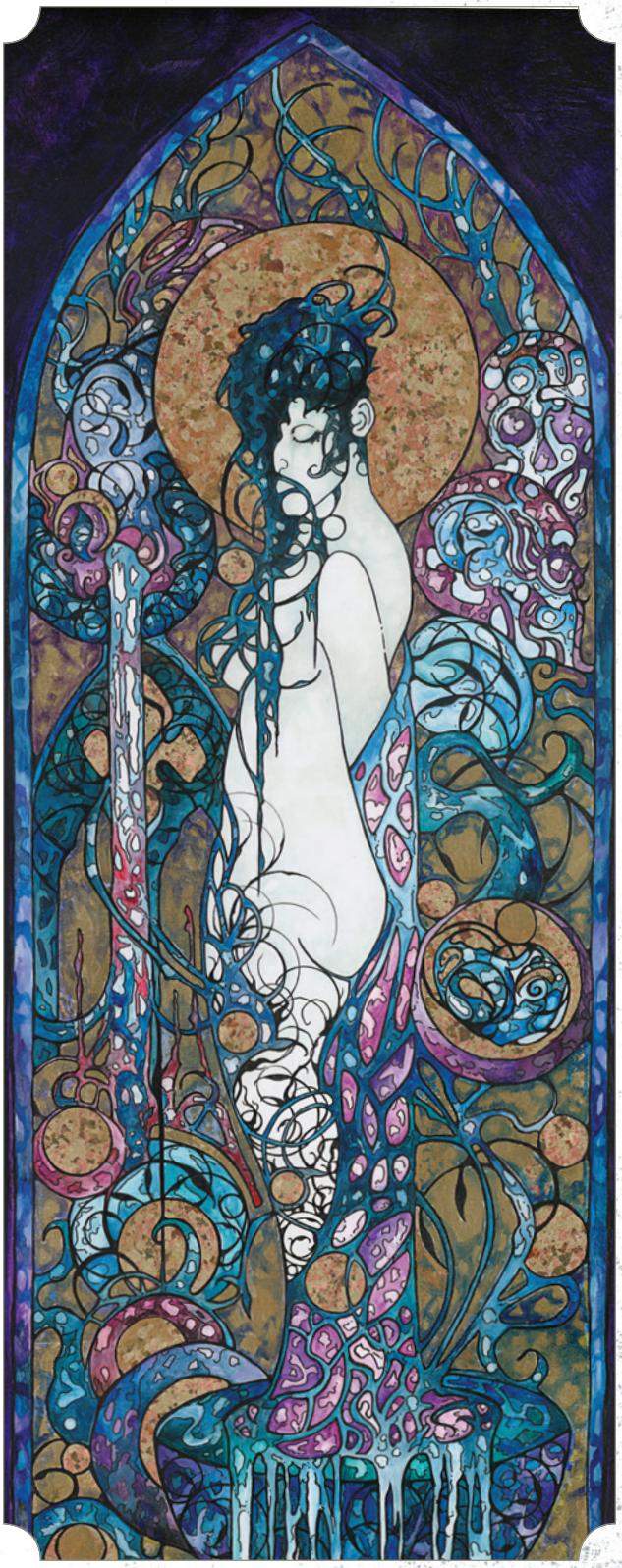
Today's followers of Erinna's works refer to them as espousing cynicism with regards social change: accordingly, the Dusk Caste are among the traditionalists of the five castes, which is somewhat evidenced by their original resistance to the expansion of imperial armies and commerce. However, they have since come to perceive the empire as the foundation of modern society.

The primary tenet of Erinna's testaments affirms notions of security and communal values; her most cited verses are locutions on sanctity of the public sphere. Contemporaries infer from these ideas, a position opposed to government regulation and intervention, and in favour of acculturating strong social practices, deeply rooted in tradition. Accordingly, the Dusk Caste often advocate for the reduced role of the empire as an all-encompassing political entity.

Their position argues that while the people legitimise government, the actions of the nobility provide the basis for legitimacy; therefore, strong imperialism prevents nobles from being able to discharge their obligations properly, such that the arrangements of governance become particular to any given domain. For such a balance to work well there must be a structured social order; not one defined by the empire, but by custom. That is, regulation should be part of social practice, but not implemented through government instrumentation. Accordingly, social order requires a strong sense of community, threatened by both modern capitalist and socialist tendencies.

These views are themselves derived from polemics of Erinna, which reduce the role of the masses to nothingness, in order to emphasise the public space itself. From this, an understanding develops, casting the populace as desirous of being ruled and governed well, property as the foundation of social structure, and distinctions of class as a natural formation of human society.

However, as perceived in this ideology, ideals couched in the responsibility of the governors to their people tempers the potential excesses of governance. Elected officials are not merely delegates but representatives that must attain complete understanding of those they govern. From this, the Dusk Caste impute a duty of the ruling class to provide a vigilant front against the evils that would threaten their subjects.



Lilith by Chris Parlin.

Nadir

The Nadir Caste are renowned for demonstrating sparse interest in social mores, which they deride for being mutable and immaterial. They refrain from ascribing common value to social goods, imputing that such is not the proper domain of governance, which must primarily concern itself with the economic matters of trade and commerce.

The Nadir Caste achieve many significant goals through trade relations, and by way of mobilising support, through coalitions of trade unions, confederations, and other mass assemblages of the market. They regard that the convergence of production and labour should enable humanity to restructure the economy towards collective benefit.

FREY

Korina composed most of the texts that describe the solemn and saturnine Frey: Muse of Horror, and the Daughter at Nadir. Her symbol is the Rhyton, her genre purviews describe terror and desperation, and their elements of her genre include misadventure, unknown horror, and bitter work. She is the archetypal crafter, driven to make and to build, who draws strength from providing a foundation for community and comfort from the wealth and affluence of her flock.

In most of the works written as tribute to her, the portrayal is that of the silent Muse: no utterance she did express and yet she imparted her meaning with gesture and sign. Her ways are cruel and vexing, and even amid opulence her demeanour is dire. Much of her iconography depicts her with a bowed head, cloaked in grim and midnight terror: her colours are traditionally that of the milksop maiden, with fair complexion, eyes the colour of ice, and tawny-flaxen hair. Those of her descendants that bear eyes of ice, white or crystal blue, are reckoned as being touched by Frey's presence.

FREIA

Her firstborn peoples were the Freia, whose descendants are the Eromund, the Finstari, and the Zoubari. Historically, the Freia were considered as opportunistic as their forebear, striking from a position of strength: willing to undermine opponents through manipulation, and always careful to veil their ambition and their acts in silence and in shadow. However, they were also eminent moguls, capable of building wondrous monuments and structures.

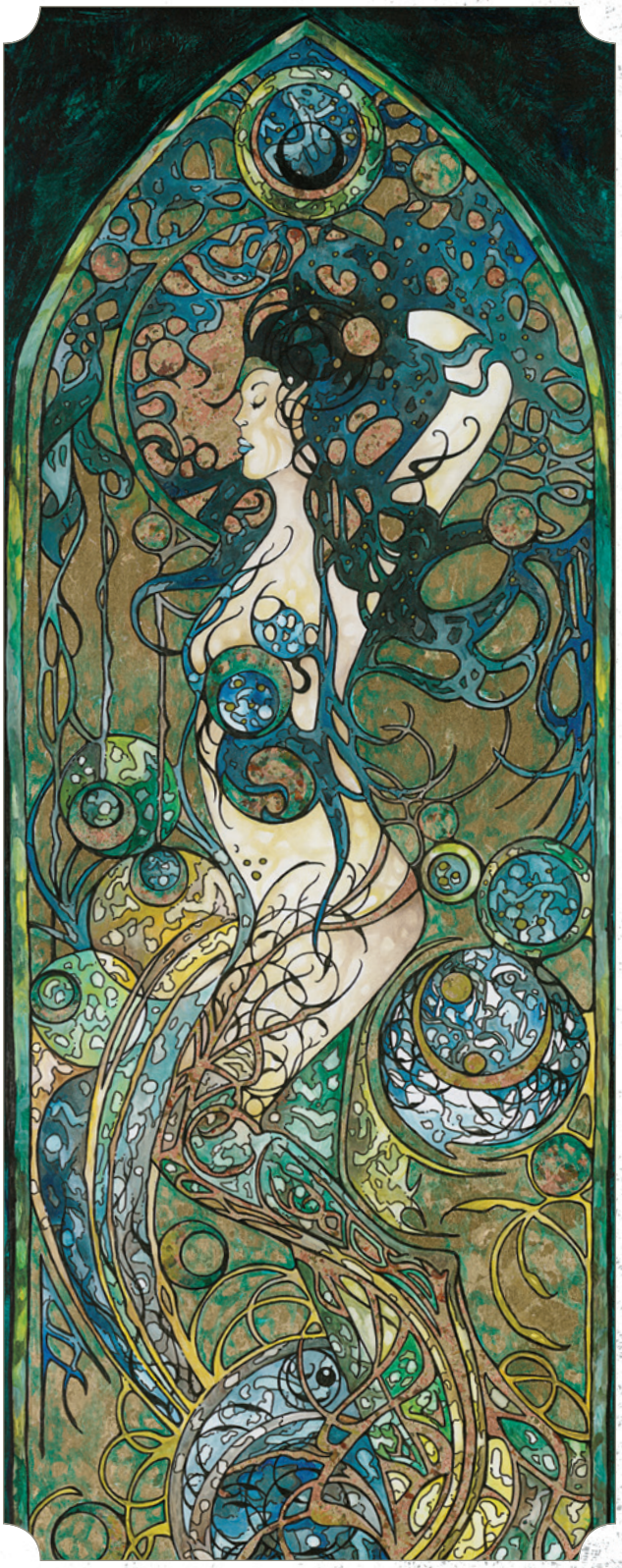
Despite their dour reputation, the other populations accord the Freia respect: few in ages past could compare to the wealth of the Freia, who were possessed of a great bounty of precious metals and jewels. Much of their lifestyle supported lavish and exorbitant luxuries; their physical artefacts are among the most elaborate, treasured, and enduring. Across history, the Freia have evolved from the makers of home and hearth into artisans, inventors, and industrialists.

WORKS

The Nadir Caste promotes strong government, supporting a robust market, emphasising trade over arms. The Nadir Caste see themselves as advancing the prosperity of the empire; that wealth will make it strong.

Stone Mask by Herbie Peppard.

The archaic poet Korina is the source of their lyrics and poetry. Many of Korina's works are elegies on the disasters caused by imprudence, being misadventures of the highest sort. Yet these testaments are often bittersweet, for in their tragedy they help realise the grim value of brief mortality and thus solace found in prosperity. The tenor of these works is decidedly dark, yet one that proselytises for material comfort in a world otherwise devoid of succour.



TENETS

Modern interpretations of Korina's sure and melancholy works support a materialistic ideology and thereby favour mercantile practices. They impute that the world contains many dark horrors, against which prosperity provides the finest bulwark. The purpose of empire is thus resolved as necessitating an expanded prosperity, to bring the entire Realm under the rational monopoly of the empire's trade network.

The empire is industrialising, and through this process, humanity shall reshape the world into its own image. In this, the market is a transformative space, where the greatest of humanity's activities occur: the market is adaptable and responsive, it induces complex social interaction. Specifically, the market makes individuals within society mutually dependent, and such interdependency fosters reduced hostility and conflict. Accordingly, the spaces of the market, both physical and imagined, are of chief concern as the inadvertent shapers of social communion.

The Nadir Caste takes the position it is necessary for government to intervene with the market and provide supportive regulation. This includes robust fiscal policies, to prevent the few, in their excess, from exploiting the many, in their paucity. Additionally, the Nadir eschews the notion of pure speculation, for in being intangible it only serves to occlude good trade. They are accordingly sceptical of pure credit systems, equating the practice with usury, preferring to ground commerce in real resources and commodities instead.

Reciprocity is the central tenet of the Nadir Caste, as it describes the complexity of human behaviour through economic patterns. Human interaction reduces principally to a series of exchanges, both beneficial and detrimental. Though averse to abstractions, trust is one of the few intangible commodities valued by the Nadir Caste, in money and other tangible consideration.

The precepts of the Nadir Caste demand fidelity to promises, contracts, and similar obligations, and that one exact from them in full measure. This is the defining characteristic of noble quality; particularly in the act of governance, where good social contract promotes mutual prosperity between governed and governors. This means the aristocracy attain their elevated status by virtue of the vibrancy of the market. So as beneficiaries of its largesse, nobles meet an expectation to be charitable patrons, and return these benefactions through good works.

Frey by Chris Parlin.

Eclipse

The Eclipse Caste are not prone to forms of populist agitation, preferring austerity and propriety in their polemics. They are masterful orators, advocates, and propagandists; even for the Mousaion. Perhaps the most prominent aspect of their political platform is the much-alluded-to moniker of king-maker, a public claim, frequently tested, of their presence behind many national polities, and their tendency towards being the appointers and proclaimers of lieges upon their throne. As a caste, they have more participants within the imperial levels of governance than their peers, and, thus, the ability to criticise the Emperor with near impunity; a capacity deployed only scarcely.

SOFIA

The most majestic of all the Muses is one depicted in the works of Sappho, being the legendary Sofia: the jovial and majestic Muse of Wonder, the Daughter at Eclipse. Her symbol is the Aureole, her genre purviews include acts of reverence and the genre elements of majesty, magnificence, and vitality. Sofia is the archetypal ruler, driven to guide and lead, drawing strength from the trust of their community, and comfort from being at the centre of society.

In the depictions of Sofia, she is the eldest of the sorority, and so notions of leadership become frequently ascribed to her. Scant knowledge persists of Sophia's reign, which has been obfuscated by the mists of time. She was the first queen and guardian of Palladium. She thereby serves as exemplar to all nobility, the ideal to which they would aspire. Her iconography depicts her with skin and hair the colour of honey, of a rich, warm texture. Her eyes were the shade of deepest blue, bordering on violet.

SYLVAN

The children of Sofia are still remembered as the Sylvan nation, but the tribes that descended from her firstborn, Octavo, Artor, and Salom, are the lost tribes of the Diadon, many of whose houses are lost to the languor of the ages. In their day, the Sylvan were philosopher-kings, much revered by their fellow clans. It was through their meditations and contemplations that the united clans of humanity were lead into glorious civilisation.

What little is recalled of the Sylvan is highly allegorical. It is thought that the Sylvan were the ideal kings and queens. Their allegory has been the model to which all other nobles aspire, and to which they would claim lineage, did they but dare. In living memory, the Invictus began this historic claim. Historians and other scholars are attempting to discover more of the three lineages stemming from Sofia: what becomes apparent through the careful study of their histories is their competent governance, authority, and patronage as lawmakers, sovereigns, and magnates.

WORKS

The Eclipse Caste comprises almost exclusively of noble members, who are traditionalists, environmental custodians, and staunch monarchists. Many know them for vociferous advocacy on both social and environmental platforms, an ideal of noble custodianship.

Like the other traditions, the Eclipse Caste owes their inheritance to one of the Earthly Muses of antiquity. Their poet, Sappho, is the mortal muse of her contemporaries, and is even sometimes

Wood Mask by Herbie Peppard.

comparable to the Great Muses. Lamentably, most of her epistolary did not survive the destruction of the Sylvan people. What little is known of her has been reconstructed from jealously guarded oral traditions, which have only become known with their re-emergence.

TENETS

For much of modern history, Eclipse traditions were defunct, considering the presumed extirpation of the Sylvan lineages. However, with the proclamation of the Invictus' heritage, an increasing number of Sylvan have emerged from hiding and work has begun on the amalgamation of diverse tales of their heritage into a cohesive whole.

Many of Sappho's poems explore humanity's relationship with nature and the equilibrium between populations and territory. Long before the rise of modern machinery, Sappho expounded upon the profound and sacred aspects of nature, much celebrated in her literature. The centrality of these tenets is in no small part due to some of the few surviving lyrical scripts, reputedly penned in her own hand. They profess distaste for the idea of permanent proprietary rights, of land being possessed.

These works claim that humanity, and its chosen elite of the nobility, are properly naught but custodians and stewards of the land, its animals, and its many resources. The caste freely invokes the hierogamy itself as a sign of this affinity. It is not a position that denies humanity's primacy of territorial dominion but one that speaks of a distinction between ownership of the physical land and the way humankind has requisitioned land to suit a variety of material needs.

The Eclipse Caste is adamant on one thing: that the aristocracy, empowered as it is by the Peerage and the Mousaion, owes much to the land that sustains their instatement; but also to the customs of the Calendar that reinforce that bond. For these reasons, among others, the caste places great value in the harmony of the hierogamy, and those who command the trust of their domain.

The adherents of the caste are quick to rebuke for reckless use of the land, showing no clemency to any liege that would render their domain a wasteland. Unsurprisingly, they are often in conflict with industrialists and while their opposition is frequently terse, it is measured and subtle. Such public fronting does little to quell the many rumours and accusations of industrial sabotage laid at their feet, whether such deeds be by their own hand or merely performed in homage. However, such claims often resolve themselves as the product of rogue graces.

Sofia by Chris Parlin.

Order

The Imperial Orders comprise an important part of the superstrate that is the Imperium. They are public ventures charged to do good works within the public domain, in the name of the Coronal. Each order represents an institution with a presence across the entirety of the Realm, with individual lodges found as their bases of operations scattered liberally throughout the shires and townships.

Within each order are glorious agents bearing an imperial duty, invested and consigned by a charter; their writ having been ratified by the Invictus himself. Each of the orders belongs to one of three broad societies: the military charges of the Clavigry; the scholastic chapters of the Luminary; and the mercantile cartels of the Mammonry.

The Grand Tour is a traditional trip around the Literal Continent; a tradition indulged almost exclusively by the noble-born. For among the Peerage, the Grand Tour attains a sense of being a rite of passage, and some contend it to be a primer for the dream quest. However, the bygone traditions of long pilgrimage have been supplanted with the arrival of the Grand Circuit Railway Route, connecting all the major provincial capitals and opening up the custom beyond its original scope. Originally, the Tour would take months or even years, but mass transit enables whirlwind tours in the pass of scarce few days. For some, the Tour is naught by trivial and leisurely idyll, with noble youths touring in a most dilettante manner.

The integration of these systems has broadened the palate of the general populace, becoming increasingly accessible to the middle classes; touring retains its hallmark of status. In the wake of such repast, a number of cottage industries have bloomed. Lodges have opened up hostels for itinerant travellers, markets sell souvenirs of adventure, and entrepreneurs build spas upon natural springs. Importantly, taking the cure, indulging in the curative properties of mineral waters, is now an important facet of high society.

from My Pilgrimage by Harold Childe

Errantry

The duties of all the orders consist of a form of errantry: a noble relinquishes their standing within the aristocracy, and takes up a tour of duty with an order, either to go questing or to take a sabbatical. Though each order has an unique agenda, they share a common mandate to go forth unto the edges of the Realm, bringing the light of civilisation into the hidden wildernesses of distant climes and the uncanny hollows of the bramblewoods.

The nobles-errant of the orders are all the eyes, ears, and hands of the Imperium. Though they are of noble birth, their mission directs them to do good works, and to fall on the side of the commoner, giving aide and succour to the weak, trammelled, and unwashed masses. Lamentably, the farther from the central hub of Metropolaris, the more dire the situation, the weaker this imperial mandate becomes.

Allegiance

In swearing allegiance, the ordained noble or commoner gives fealty directly to the Coronal, making all other affiliations subordinate; their duty is to empire come first and foremost. As such, they forsake any claim to either the Peerage or the Mousaion, even distancing themselves from the interests of their house. In recompense, the Imperium provides the ordained with privileges otherwise unobtainable. Yet even while such officers place themselves beyond their former interests, individuals remain party to their house, caste, and nation in tacit and subtle ways.

Mostly, it is the disenfranchised among nobles that take up the oaths of the orders. It includes those several steps removed from the centres of courtly power; those for whom the promise of landed title seems scarce attainable; those seeking escape from some backwater domain; and those impoverished to the extent that a warm bed and a steady meal is reason enough, even though it earns them the moniker of 'the poor knights'. The Imperial Orders enjoy the indirect patronage of the Coronal, and the imperial coffers provide steadings in a great number of lodges across the Realm, where members can board and conduct formal business.

The most cited reason offered by the nobles-errant for their application is the purpose found in questing abroad. For many nobles, the call to adventure holds an undeniable appeal. The orders offer such a life, removed as they are from courtly intrigues. Yet outsiders to the orders have called

such claims pretence, ascribing the appeal of membership by virtue of its the greater access to the halls of power.

ORDINATION

The orders contain both nobles and commoners, though officer commissions are restricted to the nobility, who govern, lead, and implement the principles of their charter. In turn, commoners serve as staff and personnel, to support them. Men and women serve alike within these orders, for no distinction exists on grounds of gender or sex, providing privilege in equal measure.

There are three degrees of ordination. The first degree comprises the novices and those serving a tour of duty: during this time, the aspirant holds no vows, living among the order and evaluating their calling to it.

The second degree comprises those aspirants who have sufficiently demonstrated their dedication. At this point, the novice may stand trial by ordeal, designed to test their worth. The successful applicant affirms the principles of the order, to receive the order's accoutrements.

Finally, the third degree are those who would rise to leadership and contains only those who have no less than a year or more of service, more often several. It comes only once the order's leadership is confident that the initiate is able to embody the values of the order truly, to lead others in their duty throughout the Realm at large. At this point, the initiate takes permanent vows and receives their commission and the apparatus of the order.

LODGES

Lodges are sources of pride for each order and form the very linchpins upon which the cohesion of their memberships depends; they provide home, office, and respite from the world's travails. Within their vaunted halls are all the resources and networks an ordained noble might crave. Most possess classical styles, predating the gothic architecture of the high imperial artistry.

Each order appoints the best of these buildings with the best provisions unto stately mansions; though the stature and elegance of each establishment depends upon the wealth of the locality and what manner of patronage it enjoys. Yet even the meanest offers a basic level of refined décor and each lodge comprises an extensive array of chambers: libraries and lounges, and rooms for dining, smoking, billiards, and cards; all furnished in elegant refinement, foregoing the clutter of the typical household.

It is possible for a noble who does not wish to abdicate their social standing to go on sabbatical, where they perform a temporary tour of duty with one of the orders. It is the frequent custom of young nobles to go on a tour of duty as means to see the Realm and acculturate.

The opportunity provides for brash and newly-sained lords and ladies to stay their responsibilities for a year or more, often with the benefaction of their house. Even those rare instances where the household disapproves of this foolishness, they silence their dissatisfaction so as not to be seen to oppose the Invictus. In taking a sabbatical, a noble does not forswear currently held allegiances, and they hold no expectations to place the interests of the empire before their filial obligations. However, there is an expectation that the best interests of the order be served. In essence, a tour of duty is neither true quest nor pilgrimage, but an educational rite of passage.

The main purpose of the sabbatical is to expose young nobles to the cultural legacy of antiquity, and even the Flamboyance, so as to orient them to the broader customs of the aristocracy. Only by touring can one observe the manifold marvels of the Realm, the more elusive oeuvres of art, and the most reclusive of domains: many places of grandeur have select, hidden, cultural treasure troves they prefer to reveal only to elite clientele. Further, it has recently become custom to spend these days with a view to discover talent, to recruit them into one's own entourage.

from My Pilgrimage by Harold Childe

Clavigry

Security becomes an increasingly complex feature of modern society and much of the work of the Clavigry relates to the preservation of peace throughout the empire. This work requires constant attention from the knights-errant upon the borders of the empire, both within and without.

With the diminishment of conventional warfare and the near subjugation of foreign powers, the military complex of the Clavigry does not anticipate overt tactical advances, but rather subtle breaches of borders. These incursions demand techniques far removed from the traditional fare of border watchmen down the ages. Further, the increasing populations, aggregating within cities, have brought about of crime rates unseen in human history. Imperial polity demands order within its dominion and the Clavigry bear the mandate to maintain that peace. The Claviers protect the subjects of the empire from injury and harm, as both guardians and enforcers.

Imperial agents confiscate weapons of any significant sophistication, and then surrender them to the Clavigry. The core of Clavier privilege is the dispensation to use force against private individuals. Through a monopoly on munitions, they control vast arrays of weaponry, both wicked and tame, and other dangerous engines of war; all requisitioned for the task of defending borders and territories, against horrors unknown. Yet, beyond these benefits, the captains of the Clavigry may also commandeer near any garrison or militia, and direct their activities in the discharge of their charter. By convention, the lifestyles within each charge is grounded in discipline, procedures, regulations, and codes of conduct; all affirming the thin line separating their actions from lawless thuggery, and distinguishing it as lawful enforcement. Yet, for captains, there remains sufficient laxity and discretion to enable those judgement calls necessary in the line of duty.

from The Longest Quest by Anita Riveiro

The Clavigry is a society of military orders, tasked with the sanctity and preservation of the Realm, with duties and powers pertaining to the protection of borders and enforcement of imperial polity; they are merely defenders against external threats but also keepers of the peace. As the military orders of the empire, the charges of the Clavigry protect and serve; they are duties inherited from their antecedent of the Roman Legex. Thus the Clavier: a knight-errant tasked to travel the Realm dispensing peace and order.

In the Clavigry's recruitment strategy, the charges look for those of honourable repute to lead their cohorts from among the aspiring noble youths. Such aspirants must demonstrate redoubtable pluck, willingness to challenge adversity, and a talent for resolving conflict. Yet as a military organisation, one is bound to find those of untempered but subtle aggression; unfortunately, such candidates show enthusiasm for violence over order. Those who are unable to divert such hostilities never rise past the first degree of ordination and remain alongside the laity.

During the first degree, a novice is an ensign. Ensigns undergo a period of training where they learn the manners of their war craft, tactics, and the means and method of command. The typical rite of passage to attain the second degree of sergeant is a trial by ordeal, which varies from order to order. Most must brave or survive some dire circumstance, whether a trek through the bramblewoods over-night, or to walk without weapon through the Labyrinth. The final degree is the role of captain, upon the attainment of which, the Clavier receives a weapon that is symbolic of that order and a command of their own.

Charge

A single military order among the Clavigry is known as a charge. Each has been born from protective duties that have slowly consolidated across the course of history. Hierarchies within charges are often quite direct and formal, and problems occur when joint ventures between charges have unclear lines of responsibility. Usually, seniority is determined by subtle inference based on years of experience, though veterans of infamous campaigns receive deference.

Clavigry lodges are robust, falling somewhere between a garrison and a gymnasium. Trophies festoon many such halls with prizes and other tokens of the various members' deeds. Most provide austere accommodation and reasonable food; their food halls are expected to cater for quantity over quality. Each features a number of exercise yards and there is no segregation of men and

women by custom. The lodge of each charge is also home to some of the most sophisticated armouries in the Realm. Though they are certainly not the largest, they provide devices unknown in most others. Each lodge will have a Commander assigned to it who oversees the training of new recruits and delivers them their various assignments.

BRETHREN OF THORNWALL

The bramblewoods gird most domains in the Realm: the Rangers are caretakers and custodians of those borders. The Rangers unite under a singular duty, in the protection of these eldritch boundaries. In watchtowers and waystations, they defend the lands against incursion from within. On occasion, this extends their jurisdiction beyond into either Umbrage or Aether. Their role as watchers-at-the-gate means they serve as *de facto* customs officials, monitoring ingress to and egress from any given domain.

The state of nature is an ideal that the Brethren employ to describe the bramblewoods, as a metaphorical ascription to it being possessed of an unknowing civilisation. The bramblewoods are considered as a shallow manifestation of a much more profound and primal wilderness, which humanity seems to brashly antagonise. To become a true Ranger, one must go a little native: one must live and breathe wilderness, wearing it like a second skin. The best of Rangers do not hold back the encroaching wilderness but rather conduct necessary mediation between the fringes of civilisation and those dark jungles. They keep watch for the day humanity will inevitably dig too deeply and unearth things best left sleeping.

Knowledge of the bramblewoods is a powerful tool and as its foresters, they oversee any plans implemented within and upon the woods. Much of their work involves overseeing the harvesting and cultivation of briar goods, as well as maintaining the routes between various domains. The Brethren hold two instruments of influence: first, the bounty of the bramblewoods itself, as few

Clavigry Charges by Rich Longmore.

others can penetrate the woods so deeply; second, the withdrawal of their services, leaving the hapless domain to the tender mercies of whatever things decide to crawl out of the woodwork.

COMPANY OF CAVALIERS

The grand and eloquent warrior-poets that are the Cavaliers are the most gallant and beloved charge of the Clavigry. The Cavaliers are chivalrous knights who epitomise the ideals of courtly love. Although not a formal requirement of their charter, many hold to standards of gallantry, gentility, and grace. Officially, the Company serves as the emissaries and envoys of the Imperium itself, ferrying formal and important correspondence, yet due to their refined acculturation they are often assigned to providing aide to the members of the Mousaion in their travels.

Central to Cavalier philosophy is a notion of the nobility of expression. They hold pen and sword in equal esteem, for might cannot make right the absence of those words that define, make, and constrain us. So Cavaliers must demonstrate no small mastery of letters as well as arms. However, such proficiency is more than literary penchants, for the Cavaliers pride themselves on their integrity. Whereas even a simple promise holds as great an obligation as the most solemn of oaths, a true Cavalier will stand staunch in harm's way to fulfil the merest pledge. They accord themselves to the highest standards and refuse to break where others bend; the Cavaliers protect their reputation and do not abide those who gainsay their given word.

Of the various charges, the Cavaliers are the least martial: they keep the peace through parley, negotiation, and tactful persuasion. The Imperium sends them to negotiate when tensions run hot, to apply the firm hand of the Imperium with civility, so as re-establish order. Their training enables them to utilise symbolism in influencing others, using visual cues of station, and delivering each and every act or posturing in a careful repertoire of manners, gestures, and spectacle. They temper their displays with subtlety, knowing not to over-extend their grandeur into garish ostentations.

ENTERPRISE OF THE DRAGON

Although the Realm has entered a modern era, the Imperium yet remains threatened by eldritch and bygone creatures, and unnatural hosts. Clad in steam-powered armour, the Dragoons are terrifying constructs, being equipped with some of the most potent weaponry to which the empire is able to lay claim. They serve as unyielding protectors, elite guards of the Coronal, and provide brute force when diplomacy fails. Theirs is an unrelenting vigour, released as an anathema against any threat not stayed by conventional force.

As warriors *nonpareil*, they wield mortal instruments crafted laboriously upon a human core. Only those proven valiant in combat hold the respect of the members of this charge. Only those worthy of respect gain membership and the transformation that comes with it. The Dragoons are human-made monsters set against monstrosity itself: fire, steel, and wrath are the elements from which they are forged. Their mettle tempered in constant training and inhuman discipline, they strive to be living weapons, as creatures of powerful munitions guided by human intellect. Over time, the hulls of their battle armour become second skins, and their weapons as bodily-extensions.

The Dragoons are without remorse. They never threaten and once committed they carry their duty to its ultimate conclusion without fail. They are the Coronal's own whirlwind of destruction, a force yearning to be unleashed. Often the threat of their deployment is sufficient to ensure the compliance of an obstinate or rogue noble. Their arsenals include vast repertoires of incendiary devices, weapons designed to purge, rather than kill discretely. Stories exist of whole domains lost to the wastelands or monstrous ravaging, and razed thusly by aerial bombardment. Their large-scale impact and their devout service to the Coronal earn them the appellate 'dogs of war'.

KNIGHTS OF THE PALANTINE

The Knights of the Palantine are among the most respected and honourable of the Clavigry. They are wardens of the peace and defenders of the innocent. Their mandate is the protection of those unable to protect themselves, particularly against the excesses of the aristocracy. They must defend the weak from tyranny, deliver the enslaved unto liberty, and uplift the downtrodden. They are the deliverers of the freedoms promised by imperial polity.

These Claviers define themselves by their deed and not by their word and presentation. Thus, the Palantine are the guardians of the populace, to render aide and protection to the needy wherever seen. Though they serve the Coronal and are bound to it, they hold themselves to a higher calling. They regard fortune to favour the brave and give preference to the righteous, upon those who are just and glorious; they will stand upon the right side of history. Accordingly, the Paladins see their order as serving the people first, even though the Coronal may provide for their keep.

The methods of the Paladins are those of intervention, preferring the preventative to the remedial. They are peacekeepers who act against those little workings that undermine the stability of the empire and the safety of its people. Though not often called upon to stand before a physical threat, they readily defy oppression occasioned by the aristocracy, as shields of the innocent. However, while some measure of their work depends on the deployment of force, the greater part relies upon advocacy; as persons of noble standing, they speak on equal terms with the aristocrats. Accordingly, many landed nobles mistrust their motives, seeing them as idealists and much removed from the practical decisions a noble must make.

NIGHT WATCH

The Blackguards hold vigil against dark deeds that lurk in the heart of humanity. They are knowledgeable in the ways of corruption and deprecation and must root out treason, conspiracy, and plot. Their work is to find threats from within, whether from anarchists, terrorists, or revolutionaries that would collapse the Imperium. They use espionage, blackmail, and surveillance to serve their needs.

The Night Watch considers the difference between humanity and animals as one of culture and tradition; for the Blackguards are nothing if not staunch traditionalists and nothing is held to be of value unless it has already endured the test of time. Though the interplay of social politics shifts and fluctuates, as long as the Guard maintains strong traditions, they will have a bastion to fall back upon. Their attire signals such staid reserve, clad in sombre and classical fashions. Measured in everything they do, the charge is determined to weather the worst of social change, preferring a conservative approach. In this, the order amasses favour, prestige, and social standing, compared to their fellow charges.

The Blackguards are known for being masters of persuasion and guile, its membership priding themselves on subtle-but-aggressive approaches towards their perpetrators. The charge thrives on whispers, rumours, and intrigues, all dispensed with guile and artifice to turn others to their purpose. Additionally, they often serve as interlocutors on matters of gossip and other salacious news: they would ensnare corrupt-but-powerful allies to complete their black operations, than simply expunge their remaining virtue. For the Night Watch, trust is not to be relied on, preferring expedience of threat and cruel instruments.

Luminary

Academia and its wealth of exoteric knowledge has thoroughly transformed modern society. It has sundered obscurity into clarity, rendered knowledge into expertise, and given vital meaning to a complex contemporary society. The Luminary are the voice of imperial polity, providing the objectivity of Absolute Enlightenment, and otherwise advocating its doctrine.

As public experts, the Luminary will hear petty claims, disputes, and matters of contention; they respond to these diverse matters with rulings given in the vernacular, to making accessible knowledge that would be otherwise beyond common comprehension. However, as society grows more complex, so do human relations. Few and fewer people reside in a community without strangers and the sheer aggregation requires refinement of both social sciences and humanities. In many ways, the Lumine take an introspective approach to the human condition as a subject for dissection and examination.

The Luminary oversees the vast flows of correspondence throughout the empire, granting an incredible faculty for intelligence gathering and the trade of information. Throughout the organisation, its members have the right to make inquiries into, and report upon, a vast array of matters. Accordingly, they garner great privilege over information and evidence; they are able to keep the sources of their information anonymous, offer imperial favours in exchange for certain types of information, and even access folios of confidential information on a great many subjects, drawn from imperial ledgers. Discretion is the watchword of the Luminary; often requiring confidentiality with regards matters of sensitivity. Yet, they must sometimes make determinations regarding the disclosure of certain documents that are against the public interest. Accordingly, the Lumines hold to a higher standard of truth and probity, and must treat all subjects without prejudice.

from The Longest Quest by Anita Riveiro

The Luminary encompasses the scholastic orders, tasked with the collection and investigation of lore and secrets, the preservation of knowledge, and the power to interpret imperial polity. Their ends are the furtherance of knowledge and discovery of new sciences for the betterment of humanity. The chapters of the Luminary are institutions of learning and enquiry, collectively dedicated to scholastic pursuits. Each has inherited their traditions from the Roman Judex as a body of judges and scholars; for across history, their distinctions between an inquiry into the laws of nature and the laws of humankind have surely dissipated. The Luminary's mission is the dispensation of wisdom, learning, and good counsel. Thus, each Lumine is a mendicant scholar, seeking empirical understanding of the mysteries of the world.

The ways of the Luminary require dedication of study and scholarship. The academic rigours of their works demand a mind of high calibre, able to demonstrate deep and critical thought. Lumines must also display serenity, as they are expected to act as pillars of temperance and prudence. In recruitment, the Luminary select from those who reveal talent or promise and the best and the brightest are groomed for the philosophic lifestyles of their hallowed halls. However, mere intelligence is insufficient, for applicants must show wisdom and foresight as much as raw intellect. They must apply the tools of reason with aplomb and social grace, as much as with insight.

The first degree of ordination is that of initiate. During this period, the supplicant receives instruction on the basic principles of their tertiary education and in so doing they refine their proficiency with the Trivium. Upon candidacy for the second degree, the Luminary presents the initiate with a conundrum, often with no apparent answer; the requirement being not necessarily to answer correctly but to prove critical thought. Those initiates that pass this test rise to the status of adept. During this degree, the adept prepares and develops a thesis across a number of years: to be raised to the level of Doctor the adept must submit their thesis and be prepared to defend it in a rhetorical examination.

Chapter

A single scholastic order among the Luminary is a chapter. Each chapter has emerged from a different discourse in the investigation of truth, with each professing different methods of enlightenment. The hierarchies within any given chapter are much more informal than elsewhere,

in the Imperial Orders, with rank signifying a measure of erudition rather than seniority. Deference is a matter of respect, which is cultivated through expertise and unique academic contribution.

The Luminary maintains highly cloistered lodges, often being most secluded; even as parts remain open to the public. This seclusion is the result of an organisational attitude towards secrecy and the creation of quiet spaces, as well as a certain sophisticated loft: a reverend quiet pervades these places to muffle excitement and maintain the decorum of academia. Lodges of the Luminary are high-walled university keeps and storehouses, consistently with larger collections of libraries than other type of buildings in the Realm; though the subject matter varies dependent upon the substance of their charter. Many of these cloisters have minor cottage industries, producing objects of great rarity and luxury, though more by way of artisanship than for commercial purpose. A Dean administers each cloister, being responsible for the education of those in their halls.

ATHENAEUM

The Scribes of the Athenaeum are a solemn group, considering themselves the righteous preservers of tradition and notaries of history. Their efforts bend towards collecting a complete account of history by aggregating the numerous stories of its nobles, and are charged with recording their deeds. Placement within the order only requires sufficient mastery of both letters and illumination.

The chapter claims that knowledge and insight are best gleaned through an examination of history and memory. From this they derive an order to the Realm, one that operates on profound truths embedded in the origins. Accordingly, all wisdom is in the past and the strongest bodies of lore are those classic texts that acquire timeless stature. For only those stories with universal appeal remain, echoing deeper truths from foundational principles. Through a sincere study of histories, the Scribes claim to uncover truths regarding origins and purposes.

Luminary Chapters by Rich Longmore.

The Scribes' duties take them from place to place in an attempt to unearth and record the undiscovered. Their pens are as swift as their wits, aptly recording accounts both pleasant and venal. In their many travels, they conduct interviews with persons of interest and gather information about those persons from subordinates, colleagues, and other known associates. Though none are so artless as to fabricate the truth, subversion is quite acceptable. In their account of history, they have tools to determine who its heroes and villains might be: few things can undermine a house more than the revelation of a scandal by its founder.

INVISIBLE COLLEGE

The Invisible College dedicates itself to the pursuit of truths they might learn from a study of natural laws to illuminate new sciences. They are empirical masters, who take to the road to investigate tales of strange phenomena, to inquire into uncanny doings, and to observe, study, and preserve against undue alien influence. Their task is to reveal the occult and obscure, and to otherwise render it unto reason.

Only through invention and creation can humanity overcome the tendency towards self-destruction. Through their works, the Illuminators trust not the vagaries of subjective knowledge, for the individual is too caught up in the illusions of reality to comprehend the natural order. Only through a process of empiricism can ultimate knowledge be determined, from which one can derive practical results. Accordingly, invention is more than producing objects of cunning design, but a task of revelation that illuminates inner and hidden workings. The task becomes one to pull back the veil and clarify the mechanisms beyond.

The Illuminators call their methods the forensic sciences, for their manner of detection proves most useful in the discovery of evidence necessary for the trial of criminal conduct; they are even employed as consulting detectives. They use their methods to make inferences from observations, marshalling facts astutely. Yet they are outlandish, accompanied by numerous apparatus to assess traces of evidence, especially those invisible to the naked eye. From these initial studies, they deduce all manner of possible explanations and use the evidence to eliminate the impossible, no matter how improbable the remainder seem.

PLANETARIUM

The Wayfarers of the Planetarium are a celebrated lot, for their venture into the Aether creates the image of stalwart adventurers. They are explorers of the unknown, daring uncharted territories and far-flung planets, being named both for their aetheric voyaging and for their wanderlust. They have gained reputations traversing the subcontinents, the periphery, and even delving the Widderslainte; plans also abound to send a void craft beyond the very limits of all known reality.

The Wayfarers boast one of the oldest schools of thought. In their pursuit of truth, they declare that one must find knowledge in the departure from the self. In order to comprehend truly the subtleties of reality, one must stand beyond its material constraints. In this lies the kernel of a doctrine favouring absolute liberty and a need to pursue the farthest limits of human vision. For these reasons, the Wayfarers understand that their errantry and questing are not simply a matter of travelling; they are as much acts of pilgrimage as voyages of discovery.

The principle methodology of the Wayfarers comprises exploration itself, within and without. Theirs is a careful task: to discover every last piece of the map. They set to work their skills of cunning navigation, artful cartography, and painstaking geodesy. Yet they are also wise in the ways of psychoactive substances, turning to them for guidance into dreams and lucid projections. They thus have a great many techniques useful for exploring and investigating places otherwise

prohibited to the balance of humankind. They can tease out the most occluded secrets of the dreaming mind and find a path through the darkest night.

SANCTUARY HOSPITALIER

The Physicians of the Hospitalier have a place of great reverence among the populace. They are healers, peacemakers, and purveyors of medicine, all delivering tender mercy. Its Physicians are masters of meditation and reflection, accustomed to ascetic practice. As mendicant travellers, they strive to deliver what compassionate works they can, tending to the poor, the miserable, the hungry, and the weak. In their chapterhouses, they offer places of healing and sanctuary.

The Physicians follow a philosophy of kenosis: a practice of psychological release to achieve peace of mind and good physical health. All such acts intend to be purgative and ablative, removing the detritus of daily lives such that their subjects may attune to the flow of destiny. Yet for all their methods of abstraction, the Physicians cannot remove themselves from the maddening crowd itself, for their practice is inextricably mired within the masses. This close affinity is affirmed into aspirations for public health through their doctrines and other good works.

The mendicant Physician is one laden with a variety of medicines and simple cures, though their constant lives upon the road mean they must also develop mastery of herb lore to enable them to supplement their medicines with local remedies. They are fastidious, being careful of their diet, their state of hygiene, and proper conduct around their fellow humanity. This, combined with their charitable dispositions and austere lives, means they rarely excise monetary payments from their patients but rather require them to deliver such charity to others that might benefit.

TRIBUNAL

The Justicars are dedicated to the laws of humanity in their purest form: in cleaving to a practice of disciplined reason, they have learned the methods of abstraction and analogical thinking. As their name suggests, they are professors of the law, able to arbitrate any case before them based on vast bodies of imperial writ. None within the public sphere surpasses their knowledge of legal principles enshrined in law and policy. Yet their chief concern and duty is meting justice before it is a pure application of the law, and they are obliged to discover the truth within each matter.

The Justicars are unusual for the manner in which they eschew material facts in favour of social ones. Their seemingly intangible ideas often evade many people, in the way they require reduction of complex matters down to ideas suitable for the measure of justice. Yet in this, the Justicars treat the dissection of the abstract as a subtle science, able to see many shades where others would see black and white. Their methods are rigorously iterative nevertheless, as they evaluate meaning based on a precedence of rulings, and enabling them to deliver a consistent view of the law.

The Justicars hone their powers of reason, using techniques designed to induce a heightened mental and calculative state. Though they apply their ability to reason chiefly in a judicial fashion, many extend their skills to analyses of other social problems; they thereby serve as negotiators, arbitrators, and mediators. The best of the Justicars are also powerful orators, who have spent a great many hours learning to pitch and modulate their voices to sound persuasive and convincing to lead people's line of thinking.

Mammonry

The workings of the Mammonry are mercantile, requiring artifice and good management. Though they are entrepreneurial, their charter limits their business ventures, ensuring an ongoing contribution to imperial prosperity and their continued loyalty to its interests. They travel the Realm, removing those barriers that might otherwise impede the free flow of prosperity. So long as the interests of an individual Mamone's enterprise do not conflict with their duties towards the commonwealth, they maintain free licence to pursue such.

The emergence of the contemporary society, along with its technical and societal evolutions, becomes increasingly challenging to the Mammonry. Large cities and their tributaries are like unto living organisms, and the work of the Mammonry provides much needed lubrication to the structures of society: roads, power, money, clothing, and communications. The difference between a simple merchant and a Mamone of the cartels is their ability to bring about the coincidence of public interest and personal enterprise.

Close communion with currency and trade means that wealth comes naturally to the Mamones, enabling their reaching the heights of prosperity. At higher degrees, the Mamone increasingly develops connections and contacts; thus becoming a nexus for the flow of services and favours: a subtle web of reciprocity places them firmly at the centre of a thriving network of trade and information. Thus, the Mammonry exercises mastery over the Realm's logistics: they may promote or hinder any particular venture; locate and acquire scarce commodities; and facilitate travel, trade, and communication far more easily than their plebeian brethren facilitate. The strictures of the cartels are unforgiving, holding all parties to their contractual obligations to the letter; Mamones must adhere to the issue, always honouring their dues: to dishonour such is to suffer ostracism from the order as well as crippling punitive measures. Mamones are renowned for their precision, exacting such in turn from their co-signatories, leaving little doubt as to what one might expect of them.

from The Longest Quest by Anita Riveiro

The Mammonry comprises of mercantile orders, each plying their trades in hope of increasing prosperity, and thereby supporting civil society. The Mammonry maintain the logistical networks of the empire, their economic practices maintaining the regime. They are the architect and artificer who maintain the flow of trade, goods, and finance through daily works; they ensure that the people have food and that culture endures. This focus on the empire's trade network and all its connected market places is a legacy inherited from the Roman Annex. Each Mamone becomes an itinerant merchant who wanders the Realm trading: not merely in the exchange of goods and coin but thriving upon the glue of commerce itself.

The Mammonry considers itself the most egalitarian of the orders as manifested through their admission procedures; even while they subtly favour those of certain social aptitude. Standing within its ranks requires social graces, a measured study of human interactions, and a general sensitivity towards economic welfare. Once ordained, the aspirant must maintain a demeanour and cheer in keeping with their status. Many seek to enter the Mammonry, but only those who demonstrate thrift, perspicacity, and enlightened self-interest advance through its degrees. The Masters are ever watchful for those who place their personal interests before those of the public.

Upon application, the aspirant enters into the first degree as an Apprentice. This is a period of training during which they undergo training in the tricks and tools of the trade. However, in order to progress to the second degree of Fellow, the Apprentice must demonstrate mercantile aptitude, showing skill in bartering, negotiation, and reading people; they must demonstrate the technical knowledge necessary for their vocation. Upon elevation, the Fellow spends the next few years developing their masterpiece; with all care and attention given to demonstrating adroitness of technique and virtuosity in their craft. Those few successful gain the title of Master.

Cartel

The mercantile orders of the Mammonry are cartels. Each has particular philosophies and agendas pertaining to the development and elevation of civilisation. Each explores the cultural edifice of civilisation through the lens of their peculiar paradigm, seeking new prospects and opportunities. Each regards a singular vision of how a given aspect of society functions, and how thereby to exercise control over that sector of industry and its relevant innovations.

Of the various lodges, those of the Mamones are the best appointed, with their vast wealth so readily at hand. However, money is rarely wasted on ornamentation with the greater part of expenditure allocated to amenities; the measure of such a hall is regarded by the sophistication of the same. Hence, the farthest flung seek to provide as best they can in an effort to improve their social standing, to provide succour in adversity. Most also maintain caches of artefacts, curios, and other objects of technological intrigue, all sequestered from public scrutiny. They also provide the most completely fitted alchemical laboratories in the Realm, facilitating both innovation and development. A Director of these lodges is a Master that has demonstrated a proclivity for advancing the strategic interests of that order and will manage the functions of a given hall.

ANBAR RING

The work of the Apothecares of the Anbar Ring is the cultivation of brews, elixirs, and other subtle or volatile chemicals. Their applications range from pharmaceutical to industrial, supplying fuel and narcotics across the empire; their recipes are carefully guarded secrets. Though most know an Apothecare for their fragrant ambience, they are known by the mortar and pestle sign, carefully embroidered smocks of only the finest fleeces, and ambience of spice.

The art of distillation is one of refinement: through filtration, preparation, and sublimation, alchemists produce many extraordinary works. The goal of the Anbar Ring is to induce change, through shifts in perception and experience; the aspiration is to create something new or previously unseen. Their principle catalysts are derived from various impurities, which when introduced into a system cause frequently unexpected results. From their reaction, the Apothecare gains knowledge, and then apply them pragmatically into the social milieu. Their merest tincture is sufficient to send ripples through the social order, creating complex and variable effects, whether madness or turmoil.

Mammonry Cartels by Rich Longmore.

The Apothecares are intoxicating and the very air about them is gravid with distillations and fragrances. This is a deliberate practice, for its members use alluring scents and maddening balms to disarm opponents and discover their vices. Many patronise dens of vice, as purveyors of escapism, wonder, respite, comfort, and indulgence; the air of such dens is thick with the heady vapours of their works. Such entrapment takes care: too much and the subject is destroyed, thereby losing all utility but too little and no dependency develops. They maintain a fine balance between reliance and functionality.

BULLION GUILD

Without doubt, the Guild is the wealthiest single organisation within the empire, comprising financiers, masters of gold, and chambers filled with valuable minerals. The Guild controls the empire's banks and other economic institutions; they draft loans and collect dues. Through this carefully monitored web of transactions, the Guilders maintain canny influence over the market. Operating under the sign of the coin, the public knows them by their grey robes and gilded affects.

Money makes the Realm turn round, as the Guild says: currency emerges from bonds of trust and reciprocity. Each coin is a pledge, weighted with and backed by its accompanying guarantee to ensure its value. As a result, the Guild takes great care to peruse and scrutinise every draft and agreement, meticulously enumerating each and every principle; through these designs, they foster social progress by way of planned investment. While the Guild proper is far from altruistic, many individual Guilders have earned sterling reputations for their considered support of one selected charity apiece, and many such receiving their primary beneficence from that Guilder.

Every contract, every draft, and every receipt is a bond among the varied members of society. The doctrine of the Guild places such things into a place of primacy, even regarding the promised word as sacred. The Guild holds their role as the custodians over the fundamentals of social relations, underpinned by obligations of duty and service. Their manner and demeanour becomes fastidious, making them remarkable notaries of formal documents. They antagonise defaulters on any contract with a member of the Mammonry, though they remit the duty with a small bounty: punitive actions indenture oath-breakers until their debt is paid.

CABAL OF FOUNDERS

The Cabal of Founders is the home of the greatest masters of gear, engine, and mechanism: its number being mechanics, forgers, minters, tinkers, and smiths. Thus, the Founders exert control over much of the empire's apparatus through their monopoly over its maintenance and repair. Though not typically inventors, they are critical to the development of any newly engineered vessel, device, or automaton.

Humanity has been forging and crafting both tools and weapons of metal since time immemorial and the Founders cast themselves as agents of human potential; their body and flesh stands only as a boundary to its experience. Such is then the machine: an idea that allows such individuals to transcend these fleshly limitations with their tools to permit one to exceed the grasp of the nominal bodily repertoire. The engine and the organ are simply two components to the same idea and their conjoining seems only natural.

Of the various cartels, the Founders display the most direct manifestation of their influence, through simple mechanical advantage. Their extensive use of machinery grants ability to perform feats that defy physical limitations: their gift makes machines sing and pistons fly, all encapsulated in a gasp of steam. They are machinists who can perform wonders with tools, converting swords to ploughshares and the reverse. The Founders' many powerhouse engines are capable of terrible

destruction through atypical repurposing: an earth leveller might liquefy substrata, communications arrays become heliostatic weapons, and cloud condensers become cryonic gas pumps.

MASONIC LODGE

Though the origins of the Masons lie in the construction of road and building they have since gained control over much of the physical space consigned to public use. They control thoroughfares, traffic, exchange, and transit. Likewise, they have acquired control over the various utilities of civilisation, permitting or denying access to vital resources such as water. Theirs sign is the square and compass, and they may be recognised by the cloth apron and simple garments.

They state that civilisation rests upon a foundation of stone: not merely the brick and mortar of buildings but the slabs and cobbles that form the streets over which the people pass; their works all testify to the life of the city. Like a colony of ants, the vitality of the city emerges from the interaction of its constituent parts: the Masons see themselves as the caretakers of this leviathan, ready and able to guide it towards mutual benefit. They plumb lines, scribe sacred geometric designs upon the streets, and tap into its subtle manifold flows. The Masons' role as architect is one of custodianship of the bond between the city and its people.

In their early days, the Masons' works were simple masonry. Then as cities provided an aggregation of buildings, their talents led them to an intuitive understanding of the logistical flow of people and goods throughout their environs. Now they exert great influence beyond the city and into networks beyond. The foundations of the city are their keystones, allowing monopolies over transport, travel, and even the supply of water and power. All may be crudely utilised to shut down sectors of the city with relative ease but more often the Masons deploy their finesse to affect costs and accessibility instead.

SERIKON LEAGUE

As masters of silk and textile, the Serikon League is among the most respected cartels of the Mammonry. Their wares are pliant and seemingly ineffectual, for they revel in the softer arts of fashion, luxury, and beauty. However, this is nought but a mask that veils their true power, through their proficiency in the power of presentation and image. Theirs is the monopoly of the Realm's textiles and manufacture, and the power of socially versed critique as they act as arbiters of style and decorum. Their sign is the silk bolt, and the public know them by their elaborate silk robes, and delicate paper ornamentations.

The Couturiers consider that humankind cannot live without symbolism and replication. The donning of clothes is an essential act in the representation of the self and mind. Clothes make the mien, for countenance is merely another mask. So they regard apparel ultimately being about confidence and presentation. Every single subject, whether noble or venal, requires costume and garb to portray a given pretence. The artefact of clothing is such a versatile mask, providing constantly false and shallow interpretations, yet readily adaptable. Fashion becomes art, and so garments convey powerful symbolism flowing uniquely from expression.

Fashion, clothing, textiles, makeup, and costume are the avenues of power for the League. They provide a veritable plethora of guises to wear and proffer towards one's peers. The Couturiers are versed in disguise, seduction, and the manipulation of others through discretion and guile. So well learned are the Couturiers in their public mask, they become most inscrutable. They exist beneath layers of subtleties and illusion. With a few flourishes of colour and design, the Couturier might cast a most distinguished figure, regardless of the ambiance.

Faerie

The faerie are creatures highly attuned to the timbre of dreams: they are more essence than substance. Of capricious demeanour, they can weave illusions both pernicious and disarming. For all that they resemble humanity in stature, they are strange and unfathomable, even when assuming mortal countenance. As masters of illusion, they wantonly effect and beguile human senses as easily as they draw breath. Yet they are possessed of some constancy, for all respond profoundly to the humours that are fundamental to their temperament. Their nature is that of the eternal outsider in the way they epitomise otherness, for even where one perceives familiarity in their manner and customs, they remain disquieting.

Seeming

The fae are native to illusion. Their affinity with imagery grants them a talent for fabrication and fiction, and they utilise cunning and artifice to create elaborate disguises. They thereby veil their very seeming and all of their personal affects. Though their talent for illusion varies from individual to individual, each must reconcile with certain fundamental limitations, each being subjected to temperamental humours that render them most capricious.

Their affinity for illusion and occlusion means the faerie are more comfortable by indirection. For each veils themselves with circumlocution, and the manner of this cultivated guile become decorum among their number; duplicity becomes an affectation of decorum and acculturation. Those who cannot layer their meaning with allusion and metaphor are regarded to lack artistry.

In their natural form, no faerie would easily be mistaken as human, despite sharing many recognisable characteristics. When unregarded by the rational observation of humankind, the faerie describe something of a natural reversion to their affectations of their native season. Each season bears within it several key essential temperaments that permeate them through the abundance of a given humour. Each season lays its aspect upon their fae, which hues the most perfect of seemings.

As the faerie pass into human-occupied lands, they endure a prescription of form wrought about them by superstition and folklore. The common reckoning of humanity can abjure even the most cogent illusions. Upon entering these lands, the greater part of their mutability falls away and they are mired within a singular form. Under such constraints, the visage becomes more human marked but by some few certain hues and other tells of their season. Though far more onerous are those prescriptions upon faerie behaviour, bond as they are by the common preconceptions of faerie traditions. Deeply symbolic metaphor is ground into bans and prohibitions, mere echoes of deeper mythology; even making certain objects or substances anathema to them.

Allegory

Allegory entails an iconic tradition of history, which manifests and communicates story through imagery and symbolism. Its praxis personifies the myriad natural forces and ideals found within the world, all in aid of re-enacting their construction as to be comprehensible to a desired audience. Its core tenet requires of its practitioners to relive narrative imagery directly, to experience the winding path of history through reproduction; by way of inhabiting a given role rather than providing vicarious testimony.

Humanity considers Allegory a pagan tradition. For humanity already contends with powerful personages that have come to embody narrative forces, as found in the Arcana. The veneration of imaginary constructs that emphasise natural forces, become seen as archaic and entirely parochial, far too primitive for modern civilisation. However, the faerie reply that humankind has all-but-forgotten the deep symbolic truths to be found in these natural principles, and they yet retain such a place in human imagination that they cannot, or should not, be so easily discounted.

The ethical dictates of Allegory focus on living in virtue and emphasises the exploration of particular virtues by inhabiting roles that are exemplary of them. To understand Allegorical ethics, one best think in terms neither of the consequences of an action nor of obligated duties, but rather how a particular course of thought or deed best embodies or portrays a given virtue. The moral worth of an action is estimated by how well it aligns with a chosen virtue.

ANIMISM

Among the faerie, the beliefs of Allegory are chiefly practices through the customs of Animism, which remains the oldest-known belief-system still extant today. Its prime position is one that seeks to absolve all differences between waking and dreaming worlds, by reducing their differences to one of perception only.

Animists exalt the natural environment, to proclaim the existence of stories beyond human reckoning, even where they are faintly recalled in human myth. These are the primordial stories of the hunter and the prey, the verdant stories of tree, hill, and dell; these are the secret ineffable stories that can only be imagined and not uttered. A proclivity towards illusion makes Animism a natural practice for the fae, enabling the assumption of the likeness of their subject of study.

MIMICRY

Mimicry is the art and practice of Animist. It stands as a prime example of humanity reproach to faerie ethics. Humankind often regards these practices as amoral, for they bear little resemblance to any moral conduct familiar to their number.

Mimicry derives its lessons from nature to impart the virtues found in becoming an animal, living as a plant, or even skulking like a rock. All these object lessons teach through exemplification of those characteristics essential to its thing. These are the lessons of the cunning predation of the wolf or the remorseless placation of the stone. For obvious reasons, humanity has become wary of encountering faerie in the wild, especially when they exhibit a feral mien. Though more disturbing are those adopting conflicting ideals to evince a hybrid seeming: there is the worst contradiction in those faerie bearing the features of both lion and lamb.

Shrine of Solace by Forrest Imel.

The adoption of human guises is more precarious for their lot. For the assumption of human guises attends an attempt to ape human behaviour; the manner of which is usually a curious and imperfect reprise habits they poorly comprehend. The effect is to leave human observers with the impression of the given faerie bearing peculiar courtesy, even while they replicate all-unwittingly the crueller behaviours of the companions.

SHRINE

Animists focus their reverence of nature through shrines. Though rather than constructing monumental tributes to its magnificence, they instead declare certain natural wonders as gathering places: ancient groves, standing stones, and deep hallows.

Faerie Animists draw close to surreal locations, which include the bramblewoods and the glade of a domain. Likewise, the Cardinal Pillars become the most profound of any such sites, and are widely regarded as the epitome of all shrines; Palladium is elevated above all, regardless of the fact it lies under human dominion, to great contention and ire among the faerie.

While the Animists regard the particular feature or wonder as the shrine itself, many will mark the site with a small edifice; this serves a number of functions that enable acts of observance. It moreover remains as a public marker, to warn to those who would desecrate the site deliberately or inadvertently.

TOTEMISM

The lesser practiced form of Allegory is Totemism. It distinguishes itself from Animism through an emphasis on abstract ideals, rather than forces of nature. The many abstract human concepts, such as cruelty, compassion, and justice, are nigh-inscrutable and escape replication through Animism.

Its practice is more agreeable to human Allegorists, who comprise the greater portion of its membership; humanity is the primary adherents to the sect. In practice, the veneration of abstractions is not achieved through the adoption of guises but rather through the reverence of objects symbolic of that ideal, known as a totem.

TOTEM

Totems are intended as ideal exemplars, most commonly depicting a facet of fate, and frequently rendered as anthropomorphic representations. Common practice has the features of a given totem replicating the image of an historical figure that was regarded to have embodied the relevant facet of fate. Each such totem becomes the focus for a Totemist to commune with the given ideal. Most totems are statues, pictures, and other graven images, though some practitioners prefer abstract images before literal ones.

CHICANERY

Chicanery is the body of sorcerous illusion that is native to the faerie. Its subtle ways enable practitioners to paint the world in dark relief with the light fantastic; illusion is occult fiction that overlays perceptible reality. It is a state of waking dream that renders objects and beings through metaphorical constructions; it lends narrative importance, overlaying subjects with meaning.

Through proper manipulation, chicanery can induce terror and wonder, to provoke intense reactions from its observers. Those more versed with the ways of chicanery may impart falsifying ideals or significance to a given object, making them appear more or less valuable than they are. All such illusions are such powerful inducements of the psyche, which will expire with the passing of time unable to sustain against any significant scrutiny.

Chicanery works by taking a measure of essence, imbuing a particular construction into it, and then using a variety of tricks to impose that illusion upon the intended target. Yet for all that it can affect some of the deepest parts of the psyche, it is unable to coerce a course of action, unable to induce a particular choice; even as the illusion may engender particular choices and courses of action. They also contain the palpable tenor of the season native to that fae. The qualities of that season affect the hue of a given illusion, limiting its metaphorical palate range.

SYMPATHY

The workings of illusion require the formulation of sympathy between the target and the conjurer. Without some manner of meaningful affinity, there can be no rendering of illusion. The barter and exchange of favours, which is so central to faerie culture, enables them to create threads between each other such that they can be favourably linked in this manner.

For faeries within human lands, the problem is more complicated. For objects of complex machinery and human artifice is more resistant to being effects with illusion. Persons unknown to the conjurer may not really enchant these subjects. For these reasons, illusionists draw upon a repertoire of tricks and conceits that allow them to temporary induce affinity through conjury.

Most illusionists attempt to develop more long-lasting forms of sympathy through a study of their subject and direct personal relations. Familiarity is the surest way to breed connections, as friendships and burgeoning acquaintances begets intimate knowledge. Many charlatans take time to study a given mark to learn their habits. Sympathy may also be contrived through pieces of the target's body, either nails or hair. Although effigies of the subject can be equally efficacious, including photographs and renderings of their likeness. Lastly, sentimental objects provide sympathy.

Chicanery depends on a variety of tricks to induce the misdirection of their workings: conjury, or its more archaic *jogelen*, refers to tricks through physical manipulation. Conjury uses a range of manual and social skills to suspend disbelief to enable the conceits of chicanery.

In essence, conjury depends on prestidigitation, *legerdemain, or* sleight of hand to mislead the expectations of a given witness, to make them pliable to the illusion. Through the careful manipulation of objects, a given witness may be lead to any particular conceit.

These skills often take years of training, to enable them to manipulate objects in close proximity. Techniques include palming to hold an object in a seemingly empty hand; discarding to secretly dispose of an unneeded object; mooching to acquire surreptitiously a needed object; transposition to relocate an object discretely; and exchanging to switch two objects.

Conjurers also use psychological gimmicks and confidence tricks, to make subjects more pliable to their suggestions. Such arts may include reading a subject, to pick up highly detailed information through subtle tells; mnemonics to memorise vast quantities of information; and patter to employ styles of speech that overload a subject with double speak and fast-talking.

from Mythopoeia by Leubald Geyer

Procession

The Procession is the system of custom and ritual central to the faerie, one that follows the changes of the seasons. It remains the eldest cultural system, predating the founding of the Calendar by many centuries. The method of counting is distinctive, for it avers from a precise count of days by weeks and months, preferring the observation of the slow and subtle march of the seasons. The faerie claim that their system provides better balance between the measure and the metre of time and fate. The Procession has inevitably affected human practice, inasmuch as the changes of the seasons are observed within the Calendar.

The traditions of the Procession would synchronise the turning of the Firmament with the movements of the Norn; as opposed to the Zodiac. If such were to be exalted, then the faerie Eschaton would be fulfilled upon the final days. Prior to the rise of the Calendar, the Procession held reign across the Realm through the Cardinal Pillars. This affinity remains today, and those ancient monuments retain their auspices over the seasons, generating each their various climes.

Through the Procession, the faerie celebrate all four seasons in their respective quarter of the year. Each seasonal change is marked upon the four Hallows; the equinoxes mark the transition from the light half of the year to the dark and back, and the solstices marking the heights and depths. Human customs recall these traditions as mere shadows of the hallowed rites. They mostly remain through the alternating dramatic arcs of tragedy and romance.

SPRING

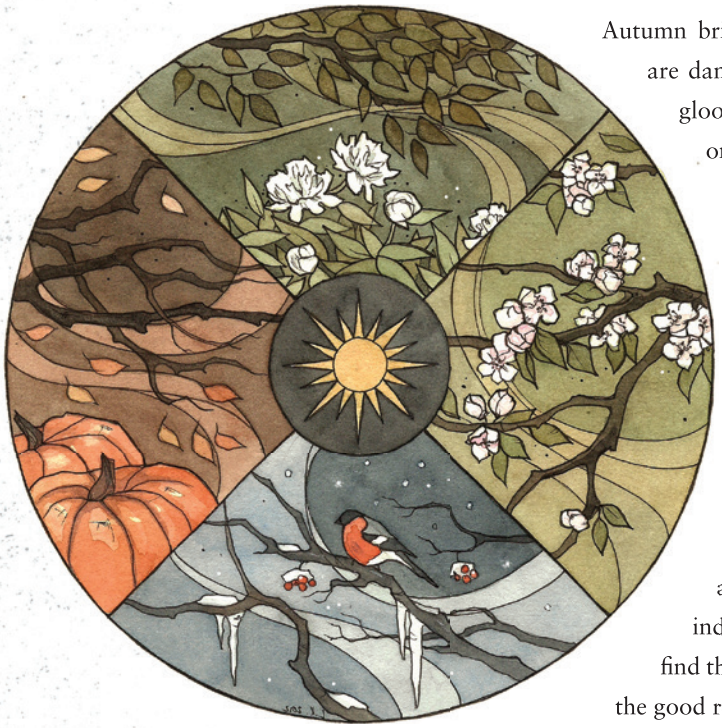
Spring brings with it the warm and humid winds of Eurus; they promise renewal, rejuvenation, and fecundity. After the desolation of winter, the populace looks eagerly for the reprieve that this

season brings. For many, it is a time for merriment, humour, and perhaps surprise. The political process re-joins in spring with a sense of vitality and progressivism, to reassess old oaths and accords, to update, revise, or otherwise annul them where they have lost their utility. During this time of peace, vendettas are put to rest, alliances are forged, and otherwise a cease-fire absolves endogenous hostilities.

SUMMER

Summer comes with the warm and dry winds of Notaine. Upon these temperate winds, the airs are ripe with a sense of fidelity, passion, and faith. After the peace of spring, there is boundless energy, raising the tumult of life. For all at home and abroad, summer represents a time ripe for the politics of conquest, valour, and bravery. It is a season of high splendour in the form of tournaments, triumphant processions, and wedding ceremonies. Many use this period to consolidate the various gains established within their holdings and to otherwise bolster influence.

AUTUMN



Autumn brings about the cool and humid winds of Zephyr. These winds are dank and sour, veiling land with obscurity, illusion, and unsettling gloom. After the heights of summer, there is a need to prepare for the oncoming darkness and to shore up every single holding. In light of this, autumn politics give over to espionage and introspection, and to gather and reflection upon secrets. With the harvest also comes a time where dues are called in, where the obligations of prestation are invoked, and all seek to discharge their affairs before the treacheries of winter set in.

WINTER

Winter comes upon the cool and dry winds Boreas. Beautiful as they are, elegant as the season may be, these are the most feared of all the winds, for their whispers herald death, silence, and ruin. After the solace of autumn, it is the time for vice and indulgence, lies and dissembling: all to exploit any opportunity they find that might let them injure an enemy from the shadows, and defame the good reputation of their foes. In grimness, and under the silent cover of night, the constraints emplaced upon civil society are at their weakest: all such circumstance provides an opportunity to collude and conspire upon uneasy truces, to imprecate a common rival.

MARQUIS

The faerie government is a power of four marcher lords and ladies known as the Marquis. Humanity regards them with equal measures of fear and respect. They embody formidable natural forces, for each is the avatar of their particular season, and incumbency upon one of the four Sieges gives them purview over its aspect of the year. Though powers in their own right, they are regarded as equivalent in rank as a Margrave.

The Marquis divides their rule across the light and the dark halves of the year. They respectively comprise the Shining Host as a union of the Sumnal Siege and the Vernal Siege, and the Shadow Legion, being a confederation of the Fallen Siege and the Wintry Siege.

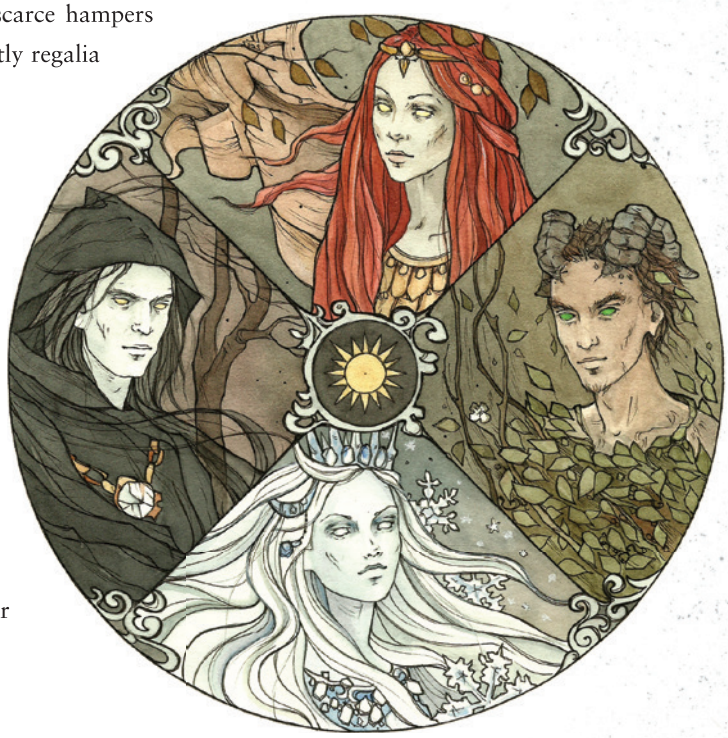
The Procession by Liga Klavina.

SILVANUS

Silvanus is the winsome Marcher Lord of the Hunt, co-regent of the Shining Host, and lord of the vernal March of Nesili. He is the epitome of virile youth, known for wild abandon and reverie. Silvanus' youthful face merely belies the hint of wickedness that flickers in his airy eyes as they peek tantalisingly from beneath the gleaming horns that curl from off his cap. In his cloven wake arises an aroma of moist and fertile soil. Such airs reflect his attire: mantled about in leaves of green, all bedecked with garlands of blooms fresh from the bramblewoods.

CAELIA

Caelia is the radiant Marcher Lady of the Pyre, co-regent of the Shining Host, reigning over the sumnal March of Aegypt. She is known her for her legendary gaze, which issue forth from those golden orbs to transfix those upon whom they fall; al made dire by the head of burnished tendrils, flickering as if truly alight. She maintains a flawless warrior stance and there is the ever-present taint of blood upon her hands. Her gown is not fabric, but forged full-plate of brazen alloy, resilient and weighty beyond natural means, though it scarce hampers freedom of movement. She wears this garb both as formal courtly regalia and as armament upon the field of battle.



AUBERON

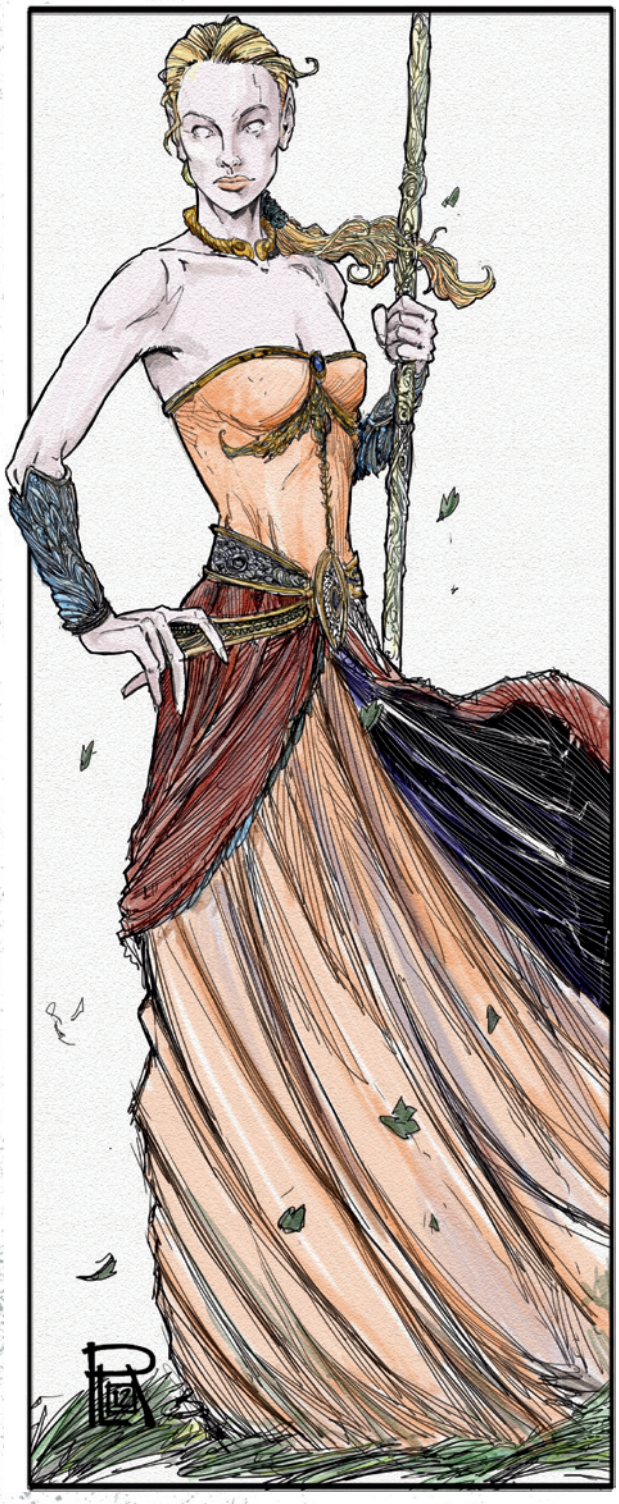
Auberon is the magnificent Marcher Lord of the Eaves, co-regent of the Shadow Legion, reigning over the autumnal March of Breasyl. He is known for his pale skin, almost translucent in its pallor, but also for his stature, where he looms over his peers; his limbs are long and supple, his fearsome reach unparalleled. The Lord of Eaves goes scarcely clad, nought but the barest shreds and whirls of black fabric forming the merest semblance of attire. His ephemeral cloak flutters in the winds, depending as if but a shadow falling from his nape, there bound by a dark and brooding hood. Nonetheless, he is possessed of an ethereal beauty, peering at those who appear before him, with head tilted quizzically to one side.

MAB

Mab is the wicked Marcher Lady of the Lake, co-regent of the Shadow Legion, reigning over the wintry March of Thylea. She imparts trepidation to all who know her; many invoke her name as a curse upon one's enemies. Tall and white, she is as deadly as a winter storm, her cold fury sheer and resolute, implacable in its invectives. She is the resplendent ice queen: haughty and severe in her majesty, and her quiet utterances beyond reproach or reprove. Where one would expect to see the red flush of life, there lies instead a chill cool of blue and white and her face is framed by garments all carefully spun from snow and ice.

The Marquis by Liga Klavina.

Alven



Alven by Rich Longmore.

As restless waters, the native demeanour of the Alven is a quiet brooding. Their finely tuned sensibilities are found in their constant scanning of their surrounds; it lends credence to a formidable reputation as manipulative even among the faerie-kind. When moved, their temperament is variable: waxing and waning in tune with the moon and giving rise to a passionate reputation.

All Alven are sinister in the pale and flawless features to return an alluring but alien pallor. All softness they might hold is marred by a hag-ridden face, bearing sleepless and unblinking eyes that unnerve others by their wary gaze. Their forms are long and lanky, with narrow, snatching fingers and toes. By apparel, the Alven reveal a fascination with varied clothing; their fashion changing with the weather to demonstrate equal pride in tattered rags as gowns of elaborate design.

The Alven contend that the Hinterlands were once possessed of neither space nor time; they were a dreamtime from whence creation sprang unlike all we know today. They describe the Hinterlands as the dreaming realms themselves, and sustained collectively by many dreaming minds across the world. Its splendour fell radiantly from the soporific source of that wellspring, accounting well for the capricious and surreal nature of those lands: where clarity fails, passion reigns.

The Alven hold affinity with humanity, more hale than their cousin faerie: in ascribing their genesis to inhuman dreams, they become fascinated with the particular and peculiar dreams of human imagination. Their dream struck ways are not without its dues, given to feckless caprice when the mood takes them to malady: strange, unreal, and queer

Temperament

The Alven possess great quantities of the *vitreous* humour, which lends them facility over subtle influence achieved in reflected poise. It is *vitreous* that underscores their passions with both melancholy and despair, which drives them into fathomless intrigues with tenacious pessimism, which despoils the brightest of moments with sour refrain.

They are comfortable in darkness, lingering in shadow, uttering sibilant inducement, and communing comfortably with sign and gesture; they are perennial charlatans whose sullen calumnies are idiosyncrasy and social defence. They bear a ban that cleaves their tongue from speaking plainly: they must dissemble, tainting truth with embellishments.

Ettin

The Ettin, with gigantic stature and earth-lent strength, wield formidable might, ready to be unleashed in a most terrifying, focused fervour. They are as mighty warriors: assertive, bold, courageous embodiments of brute force, willing to face great danger for the right cause.

The Ettin physique is remarkable, well suited to their brutal lifestyles, supporting massive statures that are brawny and hefty and aggravating a most terrible demeanour. Their severe, rustic features reveal the lines of their jowl and nose, all framing their most distinctive eyes of deep red hue or golden sheen and of predatory gleam. Their garments reveal a favour for clothing both durable and resilient, but lightly fitting to permit freedom of movement, exemplified by leathers.

The Ettin regard the fae as creatures born of chaos, the Hinterlands once laying in the void beyond creation. There lacked meaningful distinction between matter and essence, but sundered from reality by an invisible barrier named the Wyrding Wall; it was obdurate to all but the most diabolical incursion. They tell of the stars as faded portals that remain a call to return, which elicits fear and reverence in equal measure.

The Ettin most keenly discern their dissimilarity to humanity, only serving to exacerbating underlying antipathy. They are obstreperous beings with primal urges that lie thinly beneath the surface. For them, the comity of polite society is vexatious, even as they feign small pretence for humanity's benefit, and forsaking attempts to reconcile. Though the Ettin honour the Invictus, and even afford him a measure of respect; for while none might tame them, they can be appeased.

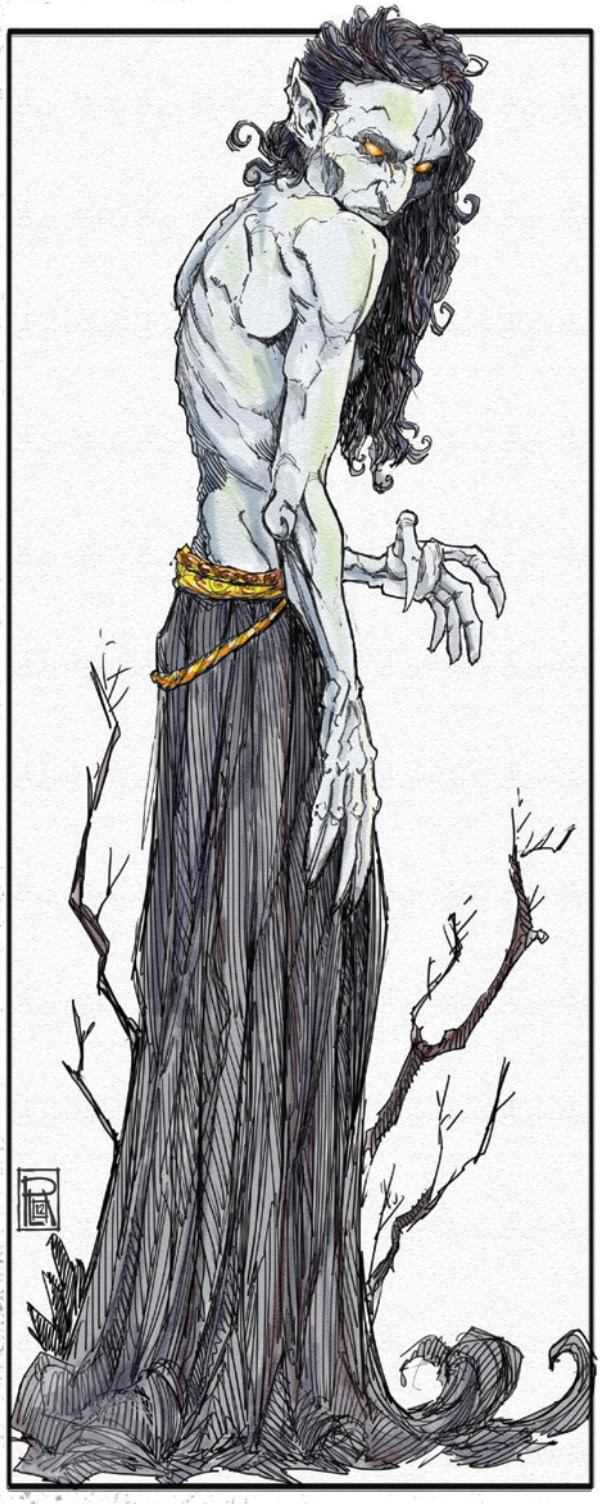
Ettin by Rich Longmore.

Temperament

The *coloris* humour blazes the length of the Ettin's nervous system to suffuse them with a taste for glory, victory, and triumph. War is their native calling, whether on the tumultuous battle or meagre brutish brawl. Conflict brings to the Ettin a keen and heightened focus. They value stalwart valour, and would rather lie broken by an adversary than surrendering to them

Those that acclimate to human society temper ferocity with discipline, yet their belligerence may easily be invoked by slurs upon their honour; though they scarcely regard their foes with enmity even then. Mark not the Ettin for stupidity, as their deliberate primitivism serves as a social razor, to eliminate dross of facile manners, to replace with atavistic concealment instead, in which they would revel.

Gorgon



The Gorgon are omens of death and nightly terror, evoking premonitions of impending mortal ends. Their lives are entwined with all beyond the pale: they are conversant with shades, comforted by numinous reliquaries, and all marked by a grim and melancholy humour; they stand as bulwark against the turpitude of the still living. Death and all its inequities hold few mysteries, becoming transition rather than termination.

These are creatures of quietude and marked alike by diminutive, withered, and wry frames. Their hoary demeanour is tinged not by red hues but bone-white mars. Their grotesque faces are lined with age or flecked with seeming decay. When moving, they leave no sign of their passing, and even the pristine snow accepts not their burden. They are meticulously groomed in their sombre attire, with blacks and sallow shades featuring strongly; they elaborate with eccentric form and design.

The Gorgon account the faerie as nothing more than a kind of restless dead; they are beings half-incarnated into a fragile mortal shell, and to eke out a shallow existence till they return once more to the endless night beyond. The often refer to the Hinterlands with the sobriquet of 'The Undying Lands'. Their proximity to death lulls them into fascinated familiarity, though not quite a death wish; for the Gorgon still bear instincts for self-preservation, even amid their candid morbidity.

The Gorgon regard humanity with little fondness, and human ascendancy places them ill at ease. Some blame humanity for a shallow existence, with mortality being regarded as nought but the fragility of the human condition. The weaknesses of flesh, the demands of blood, food, and breath making them all feel odious. Though averring human company, they cannot help but hold morbid fascination for the fleeting aspirations of humanity.

Temperament

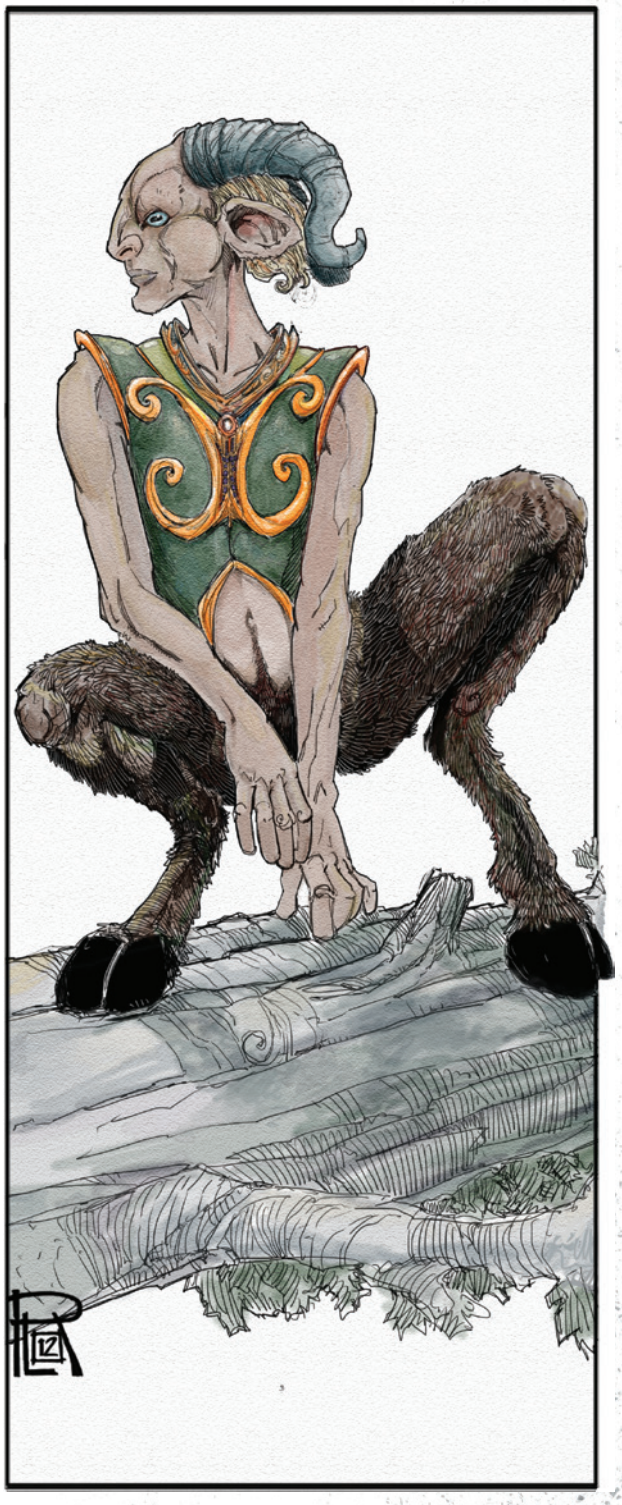
Myelos infuses the bones and marrow of the Gorgon, cloaking their air with a sense of pending malice. They are possessed of a grave and stern decorum, bearing the countenance of a grim and austere states-person. Few deign to articulate themselves louder than a susurrus, though they are renowned for a terrible keening that recurs in nightmares.

Fatalism eclipses their purpose with dire certainty, eschewing the transience of mortal trappings, seeking succour from eternal torpor, but wasting no time on mourning; for that is a mortal failing.

Gorgon by Rich Longmore.

Puc

Few restraints bind the Puc: curiosity rules them and they constantly yearn for new engagements. They are sensates that are frequently regarded as deviants and degenerates; though they claim they only sate their normal appetites. Their lifestyles are aesthetic ones, revelling in distractions offered by novelty found in foods, music, and fabrics.



The wilderness inscribes the Puc, with its touch revealed through their feral mien: they are often hirsute or sporting a vestige of animalistic features, and regards friend and foe alike with an untamed gaze. The scent of nature cleaves about their form, either everglade or musk; they encroach the senses with disarming allure. Their taste in clothing is revealed with light and loose garments, often ornamented with foliage. They celebrate the elements through bare flesh, unclad feet, and untended hair.

The Puc regard the faerie as living in both dreaming and waking realms at once: the Hinterlands are an untenable but enduring ideal of nature itself, being primal wilds circumscribed by contradiction. Within the Hinterlands, the manifold sentient minds are as apparitions casting shadows on the wall, oblivious to the idyllic paradise that surrounds them. As such, the Puc hold familiarity with all things wild and wanton, each a deeper truth of nature, red in tooth and claw.

Their dispositions towards humanity are varied, nuanced, and complicated, regarding humanity simultaneously as merely one creature among many, but also elevated illicitly by some unbidden hierarchy caused by their native intelligence; their supremacy is regarded as testament to that fact. They consider that humankind are contrary, trapped amid concentric circles of aversion and delusion; all are necessary distractions to abide the industrial malaise that humankind wrought for themselves.

Temperament

The essence of *sanguine* traipses heavily from the breath and spit of the Puc; its profusion gifting linguistic faculty, making them shrewd and knavish raconteurs. Their guileful patter is replete with prevarication and hyperbole.

Their sanguine natures beget insatiable curiosity, one that is prone to following flights of fancy with rare obsession; they subsume only when their attentions are captured anew by something else. Such inconstancy produces bursts of frenetic spontaneity, followed by uncertain languor. Theirs is a quixotic demeanour but one that is marked by endless conviviality and gregarious manner; unusual constancy in their variability.

Puc by Rich Longmore.

Takwin

The takwin are an unusual motley of creatures, being forged of elemental natures and given life by some enigmatic crucible: a core of dynamic energy that the takwin name their savant. Inscribed upon each savant are the codes that enumerating the principles of their purpose, and giving them animation. Not born, but fabricated, from perfected materials into mortal countenance, they bear symmetry but lack nuance. By design, the takwin mark their different plainly; replicating the advantage offered through human stature while abjuring the weakness inherent in soft and pliant flesh. Theirs is an irony enjoyed only in the frequency of which they modulate their physicality to changing vogues. Unlike other living beings, they resemble statues, rough-hewn from original materials. However, history notes that their forms now present affectations of artifice alongside the advent of machinery; clacking joints replaced with clicking gears and the quiet susurrus of precision instruments.

Stature

With elemental natures attuned to the motions of the Orrery, the takwin are masters of timing and precision. This grants them sympathy with myriad mechanisms and devices, as they intuit the workings of components. They are technically sophisticated, being alchemically inspired by the sublime spark of their savant.

The takwin bear deliberate similarity to humanity in stature: moulded in the likeness of its maker and rarefied with subtle properties until it becomes imbued with animation. The corpus is assembled from one of the four elements of brass, clay, glass, or stone; their savant being a perfected exemplar of that substance. In this manner, the savant serves as a keystone to the takwin.

This savant is the *sine qua non* of the takwin: a facet unique that defies replication by human ingenuity in fabricating automata. Presumably the savant is the site of intelligence, containing a crucible for their vital spark, with a volition and volatility that waxes and wanes across their life. The savant, being of alchemical composition, imparts instinctive knowledge of its art to the takwin.

Though obdurate beyond ordinary mortality, and adapting to vastly diverse environmental pressures, they remain dictated to by the codex inscribed upon their savant. They all bear coding that demands constancy and exactitude, prescribing all their daily exertions. The takwin mind is one of subsidiarity, lacking reflexion or introspection and all regulated by the feedback of their internal instruments. When walking those lands of human dominion, the takwin become fatigued by intellectual rigour and vulnerable to external direction. Though no takwin yet has countermanded their codex, some have subverted its dictates to questionable and ambiguous purposes.

Symphony

The adherents of the Symphonic tradition profess that the Grand Narrative expresses through musical forms. Its cadence relates history with mathematical elegance, with rising and falling melodies. The practices of Symphony predicate upon harmonic tenets, through ritual acts aligning the supplicant towards accordance.

Humankind regards such harmonic practices with suspicion, for they demonstrate the takwin's notoriously cool logic. Few would repudiate that there is perfect symmetry from their calculus, but

remain suspect of the underlying formulae. Yet resolutely, the takwin adherents hold it as self-evident that all sapient beings move unbidden to the melody of the Grand Narrative. That they are compelled by the ineffable beat of its score. Every being is but an instrument of unique tenor, when the voice is brought together into multitude, adversity gives way to sympathy.

The moral doctrine of Symphony postulates a resonant calculus that reckons the worth of an action in the balance of its benefits and detriments. Its prime directive being one of maximal harmony: those actions that produce the greatest harmony for the greatest number of beings are the most virtuous.

Its position is reduce to key formulae that assesses the likelihood of harmonious outcomes, both in intensity and in duration; also in similitude of frequency. Implicitly, there is a corollary that holds that harmony is exponential, which recurs more quickly the greater and more diverse the body of the chorus.

ACCORDANCE

The practice most common among the takwin is Accordance, being a system that emulates ideals of the symmetry of the Orrery: the epitome of all engines, it is a perfect and platonic object that eclipses all other things in proportion and meaning. Accordance conceptualises all reality as one concordance, with the ether being the perfect medium for the celestial music of its spheres, expressed by the motion of the assemblage of the Orrery. The Realm becomes regarded as cybernetic, all guided by the supreme celestial clockwork.

HOROLISM

The takwin describe their savant as being attuned to the music of the spheres; they impart an unerring sense for the components of the Orrery in any given moment. Around this fact, the takwin have developed the ritual observations found in Horolism; they are the observations of time and celestial movements of Orrery. The movement of the heavens subtly alters the melody, requiring internal readjustments. Through simple ritual, the supplicant synchronises themselves continually.

Horolism describes a philosophy of submission, asserting the illusiveness of free will, to declare all actions and states of being are emanations of a higher order. The apparent volition of individuals is naught but the product of deep unbidden coding. Horolism claims there is no real agency, but instead a single unbroken chain of causation, from overture to finale; the Grand Narrative is the leitmotif.

This predetermination neither absolves moral responsibility nor confirms the righteousness of certain cause, for choices are shaped by the application of an ethical code. Though bereft of real choice, knowledge enables one to appreciation the meaning of one's station, whether humble or regal. This social conscience affirms the grand

Pillar of Hours by Forrest Imel.

scheme of the societal milieu; every being is circumscribed by social connections as much as personal history. Only through such awareness can the supplicant reconcile with fate.

Human interpretations regard Horolism as fair and cruel by turns, as it reduces all existence to cold, numerical estimations, framed by auspicious circumstance. In turn, takwin scholars contest the bounded nature of human rationality, whose intellect is confounded by sentimentality. In this manner, humanity presents a curiosity to the takwin, which entices some of their number to venture into human environs, that they might comprehend the vagaries of human calculus.

CANON

The reverend acts that comprise the discipline of Accordance form the Canon: each act is a devotion performed upon key hours, with repetition proving its rigour. Over time, these acts combine in as a contrapuntal composition, delivering a concordant complexity through derivative and imitative patterns. They may also be performed in collectives, with one initiator leading the Canon, and others emulating them with slight delay. The interactions produce sympathetic recursions: the iterations of simpler forms reveal more sublime and intricate patterns.

The primary observation is a ceremonial duty upon the four great hours of Dawn, Zenith, Dusk, and Nadir. At the apex of each hour, the supplicants orient themselves towards Agartha. Its most simplest and informal style is a bow. More reverend practice has the supplicant prostrates themselves in same alignment.

CHORALE

Where Accordance holds orthodoxy among the takwin, it stands alongside the heterodox Chorale, being the preferred practice of human adherents. It is distinct from Accordance through its emphasis on vocational expression over physical ritual, and this casts the supplicant as an instrument that gives voice where none exists.

EVANGELION

Evangelism is central work of Chorale: the vocal expression of the living chorus. The Chorale regards their singers as speakers of dreams, able to utter the unsung and muted voice divorced from the Symphony. Such practices as these look to the Symphony as a subliminal piece. It is heard quietly by all even in the midst of discord and cacophony; one that dares to subsume awareness and thought with is splendour. Through their works, the Chorale become united to common purpose. Through harmonisation, they regard that the imperfections of the few become subsumed through the voices raised within the throng; theirs is the multitude that speaks in superlative congress.

GEALDOR

The art of gealdor is a sorcery that allows the command of motion, movement, and poise. It uses subtle tempos and rhythms to manipulate the behaviour of mechanism, and sometimes even living beings. The artistry is one of covert manipulation, patterning behaviour in accordance with particular frequencies. As long as person or object has natural motion, the incantations of gealdor may be used to subvert their direction towards the will of the cantor.

The broadest use of gealdor enables the cantor to remotely take the reins of most automatic or otherwise motile mechanisms within hearing range. They may even induce them to move beyond their native range of motion, revealing greater stores of power and fluidity. Those who become highly versed with its arts may even learn to command the bodily movements of the living; it has been described as a form of enchantment where the very will of the individual is subsumed by the

beat of the incantation itself. Some may even use the melodies discordantly to induce disruptions to the biological rhythms of their victim, entrancing them, sending them to sleep, or even seizing their heart.

The artistry of gealdor draws upon the practices of incantation, where the practitioner uses a measure of essence to create a subtle synchronisation between the subject and the beat. The cantor uses syncopated chanting to entangle the target to a given melody or beat. Thus, the cantor works with strains of music to synchronises a target with the movements of a given melody. Some have even learned to broadcast the power to influence all those within hearing. These workings are incredibly obtuse and difficult, as the cantor must work against the inertia of multiple participants.

SYNCHRONISATION

Synchronisation utilises incantation to create assonance, and depends upon some measure of a beat. The pulse of the incantation must be audible and timed right, and the assonance of that beat must be no fewer than forty but no greater than four and two hundred beats in a minute.

The chant provides a background thrum, which induces a composite rhythm in the target. This synchronisation works differently on mechanical objects and living things. Objects may only be synchronised where they have existing mechanical parts, but the abundance of clockwork proves naturally prone to these effects. Compared to living beings, the cantor must discern the subject's heartbeat as the baseline pulse of their being.

Incantation is a practice of frequencies, developing an intuition for systematic pulses, for beats, for counts, and for the fluctuations of motion. Its most eminent practitioners can modulate their actions and movements with exactitude. Whether voiced or played, the musical phrase must evoke its themes in ceremonial forms, to communicate universal constants. The symbolic nature of the music circumvents the rational parts of the mind, to work directly upon moods, meaning, and principles. Though words may be deployed in prosody, they are often archaic in their expression.

Incantation evokes sheer musicality, which subtly brings about the enchantment of the desired subject. Mostly, practitioners will use their own voice in chanting prosody, to generate a given frequency. However, the cantor will then utilise a musical instrument to sustain a melody. Each of which is attuned symbolically to one of the four cardinal points.

Those seeking to work beats of the north use percussive instruments to thrum out their patter; those conducting patterns of the east are sure to use wind instruments; for those seeking to raise the soundings of the south, brass instruments are the choice method; and finally, the instruments invoking the western pulse are those of stringed instruments.

from Mythopoeia by Leubald Geyer

Monad

The Monad is the system of governance for the Ozman Beylik. Its synchronisation to the Synod ensures a system according to a period of thirteen lunar cycles. The Synod reckons by a counting of nights rather than days, with each month beginning upon sickle lune at nadir and continues until this conjunction occurs again. As a regime, the Monad predates the Calendar, but its potency was not reckoned under the creation of the *Deus Machina* built upon the Blackrock, several centuries after its founding.

The emphasis on months means the system demonstrates much more variation between cycles, even though there is an underlying and predictable alternation. Ambitions wax and wane across each month: six are light, six in shadow, and one given over to reverence. During the bright months, the Beylik extends outwardly through pilgrimage and diplomacy; within the dark months, the Beylik becomes introspective and withdraws to consolidate its assets. The Monad has existed for sufficient durance to affect human culture; most directly evident in the common usage of the term months, which is naught but an obscure reference to the takwin name of Ecstasy: the moon.

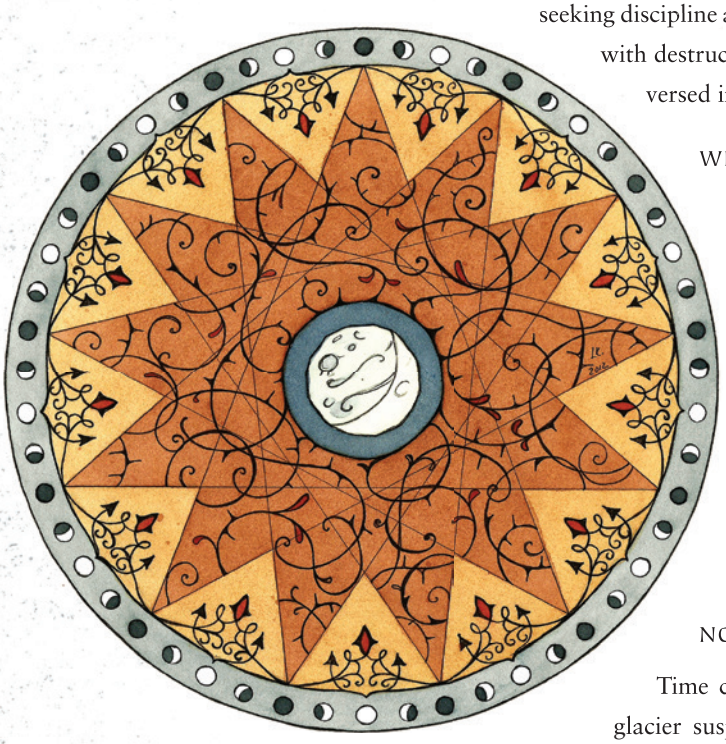
The Monad functions through directional affinity, drawing power from the roots of the Cardinal Pillars that mark some of the farthest reaches of the Labyrinth. Upon these extremities are the four Pylon Gates that were once the principal points of entry into the world above. Each such Pylon contains a metaphor of the journey that must be taken through the Labyrinth to reach these destinations. Thus, the Pylons become symbolic for the inner journey that one takes.

EAST

The Pylon of East entails an enigmatic path, attuned to the inner workings of the mind; within its philosophy lays the conception of an ephemeral world of knowledge. Along this journey, the traveller finds clouds of storm, borne aloft amidst breeze and thunderous clamour. To navigate requires one to dance above the clouds upon flights of fancy with imaginary wings, wherein one might learn the lesson of power tempered with knowledge, becomes wisdom. The eastern path is resolved conceptuality, its lengthy channel communing abstract exchanges of currency, language, and education, and its hidden paths intimate with dreams and fantasy.

SOUTH

The Pylon of South is a brilliant crucible of brass of unquenchable appetite, which tempers incandescent ferocity; its lesson is one of triumph over adversity, for that not destroyed becomes stronger. The glorious nimbus of the sun wreaths the brazen path, which makes the journey, filled with terrible and wondrous splendour. The path leads most closely to institutional behaviour, seeking discipline and comportment, for the South is a violent path, returning vigour with destructive ambition: no clearer affinity exists than with those naturally versed in the manners of warfare.



WEST

The Western Pylon wends itself through an abyss; a dark, yawning crevice of madness, veiled by murky waters. Through these deepest fathoms lie many lessons learned from the harrowing and crushing burden of the waters. Vehement movement is best avoided, as they provoke ripples and reverberations, and callow power saps all excess to leave the vigorous enervated. This cavern of echoes is a path of deception lying at its core, navigable only through cunning artifice to sound truth from fiction. Its most astute students are those who attend the lessons of still silence, letting falsehood wash over into verisimilitude.

NORTH

Time creeps with turgid languor through the Pylon of North, as the glacier suspended from the mountain-face, with heavy hoarfrost mantle. North entails a path of stasis, where resolute temperament guards against seething turbulence, where stillness belies terrible confusion. Its stepping-stones are the clashing rocks of the avalanche, whose precarious position threatens to spill upon provocation as a glacial, ponderous ruin. Where the feet of the northern wanderer falls, tremulous echoes herald their passage passed. Its path teaches severity, to turn ire towards cold, malicious purpose.

CARDINALS

The Core is a singular entity, kept in supreme isolation. It is the sovereign power of the Ozman Beylik, and few details of its nature depart the ruling chamber; save that it is a strange gestalt intelligence, purported even to enjoy and endure dreams. By means of oneiromancy, the Cardinals tend the Monad, to issue decrees from on high in the Core's name. The activities of the Monad are divined by the four Cardinals, which take turns to lead the direction of the Beylik every month.

The axes between opposite Cardinals express a particular union of ideologue: the Golden Horde and the Silver Band respectively. The gates of horn inlaid with gilt, to north and south signal

The Monad by Liga Klavina.

the Golden Horde assuming direct and dominant action. Contrarily those vermeil filigree gates of ivory to east and west, to signal a time of elusive and receptive guile. Each axis describes takwin ideals of masculinity and femininity, exoteric and esoteric, extrovert and introvert; alike in turn.

SILEEN

The co-regent of the Silver Band, and Cardinal of Transmissions, is the delicate Sileen, who is governess of Eastern Pylon. Her expression is the one most intelligible to humankind, demonstrating some small measure of comprehension of the human psyche; perhaps eliciting some genuine sympathy. She is often receives, with cordial conviviality, diplomats from above. Yet ultimately such charm is feigned, for she has remarked upon the Imperium as bankrupt in philosophy, which beggars its pretenders into boorish countenance. Her lyrical and melodic speech disarms her contemporaries, and her translucent form passes with footfall lightly chiming the floor.

AFRIT

Afrit is the artful Cardinal of Transmutations, co-regent of the Golden Horde, and commander of the Southern Pylon. In manner, he is possessed of diabolic guile; in motivation, he is given to circumspect callousness; in disposition, he is set strongly against humanity. He is the most ardent of the Cardinals, of alternating manner of incredulity and wrath, and is remorseless once set to task. His passing is marked by the most metallic tang that bites the air, by scorched footprints left in his wake that wither under the light of day, and by the assonance of brassy tones that rancour.

MARID

The elegant Cardinal of Transitions reigns over the Western Pylon. She is Marid, who is co-regent of the Silver Band. Her ways are guileful and seductive even as they are unobtainable; her movements both appealing and sultry in their fervour. Her physical expression is liquid: from her supple, smooth, and delicate porcelain pare, to the ablative hints of moisture her touch brings. Despite such graces, the air she cultivates is one of melancholy candour, a tumultuous juxtaposition of terrible despair and unruly wantonness. It is whispered that she bears some small fondness for humanity but only in the manner that one demonstrates fascination towards objects of art. Humans are mere objects worthy of interest, but no more. She scoffs most haughtily at human sovereignty, adjuring it as naught but passing vogue, ever leaning towards inevitable decline.

GHOLA

Ghola is none other than the gaunt Cardinal of Transfigurations, co-regent of the Golden Horde, and lord of the Northern Pylon. He is considered as the most obdurate among his peers, certain of his designs and unassailable from the elevated position that he has consolidated; it is his rampart against all intrigue. In his remarks, he has expressed pointed apathy as to the human condition, though quietly he protests the dogged rumours of unsavoury appetites for their flesh. His servants, when plied, speak of the patina of fine dust left by his touch; the merest sounding of his leaden footfalls; and a ponderous speech akin to the whispers of the grave, uttered in clipped and pointed tones.

The Cardinals by Liga Klavina.

Dolmen

Those creatures named the Dolmen bear a taciturn manner, being ponderous, craggy, and grim. Of their physique, regard the sculpted form, of stock and stone, which lends a most durable disposition, and too their fondness for material wealth. They frequent the professions of crafters, builders, and smiths, laying claim to most subterranean mineral rights.

The Dolmen are defined by the immensity of their girth: corpulent and rotund, their hefty stature subsumes most company in their physical proportion. They know not subtle mores, both their domicile and apparel bedecks wildly, surrounded by their prosperity. They reveal a taste for ostentation through jewellery, seen in almost gauche fashion, against their mainstays of more durable materials: leathers, denims, or other heavy fabric.

Among the Dolmen, there is telling of the story of the Primus: the unmoved mover, the first cause, and the principle foundation. Of this, they regard the Core as the resolute vessel for that first cause: a metaphysical fulcrum around which the Realm revolts. While the Firmament wheels about in careless motion, the Primus remains resolute; a counterpart to the turbulent entropy that swallows the Realm by turns.

Their friendship with humanity is marked by unusual curiosity: the stalwart endurance native to their experience is rankled by the feckless will of human activity. Though they are gentle towards humanity with a paternalistic approach, they regard humanity *en masse* as volatile

Stratagem

Infused with prisms of pure adamant, the Dolmen acquire impregnable tenacity. Sturdy, they tread cautiously, and extend such resilience into secure bulwarks to thwart their opposition at every turn. Amassed within their keeps are troves of quietly hoarded treasures, whose utility they care to divine over elongated spans; defence becomes a paramount concern. In this, they demonstrate singular concern for those artefacts of experience that endure, whether material or sentimental.

Despite a coy and circumspect manner, they seem lacking in duplicity, made remarkable for the compacts they keep. They trust sparingly but remain forthright to the end. Their workings belie a stricture of sensibility, whereby deception becomes permissible to those without face, having no standing of their own. Terrible in their ire, they fall upon the source of their provocation with unerring assault, determined to stay their hapless foe with deadly force.

Dolmen by Rich Longmore.

Golem

Renowned for a malleable and empathic nature, the Golem achieve something of a favoured status among humankind. They commune principally by gesticulation, with their mutable physiques lending artistic flair to such displays. Though possessed of physical variability, it is constrained, as their repertoire is one of superficial mimicry; they can even replicate tasks once observed, but cannot produce original works.

Though the Golem can mimic a false face, their natural state resembles an unfinished clay sculpture, which even still shows distinctively human-like features. To this unremarkable façade, the Golem incorporate flecks of gemstone ornament and texture to their ensemble; they prefer symmetry in their beauty above all else. Many select outfits composed of folds and flowing cloth, especially when marked with florid designs, dynamics contrasts, and vibrant patterns.

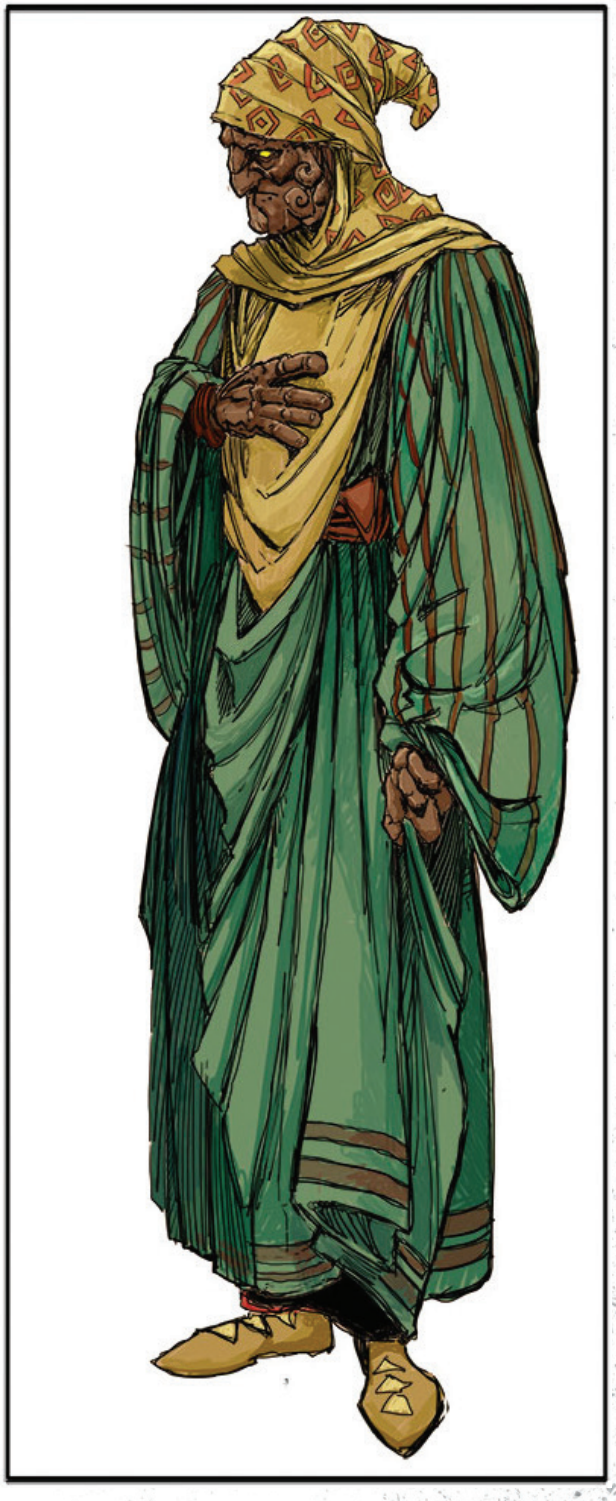
The Golem describe the Core as the Gematriya: an engine of great calculation that once assigned numerical values to all things upon its creation. Encoded with these are the material and immaterial structures of everything. Through these, the Golem can estimate the value of each object, as part of their ethical calculus.

Their disposition towards humanity is convoluted, for they have commented upon the facile ease with which they don garment, makeup, and other ornamentation, as wanton children seeking to redefine their very nature. Yet perhaps their art is hypocrisy for the Golem lack clarity in their own motives, perhaps hoping to mimic a truly generative act for once.

Stratagem

The amorphous nature of the Golem derives from their keram: a clay tablet inscribed with sacred geometry, and being impressionable of its surrounds. It is a mimicry that resounds from an echo chamber most deeply from their core. Through this echo, they artfully capture stolen voices, reflected feelings, mirrored dispositions, to simulate those pieces in a somewhat fragmentary manner. All of this is some sort of lived pretence and intimation, cultivating false hope and unrequited affection in the course of such vicarious expression.

Their demeanour contends innocence, but such a guileless masquerade obfuscates their reserve of cunning achieved through artful deference. From this pretence, they can manoeuvre others to their agenda by lulling them into false security. Though when confronted of this behaviour, they profess no malice to their art, but merely parody. .



Golem by Rich Longmore.

Talon

Talon by Rich Longmore.

The brightly burnished beings that are the Talon bear brazen bodies clinking softy with each articulated joint. For all their metallic veneer, their physical form emanates surreptitious warmth. Watch them revel in candid displays of prowess, delighting in mastery of the physique and their attendance towards strictures of order.

Gilded, the Talon boast lustrous hair and eyes, sleek in design. They refrain from any loose hair or garb, preferring functionality over aesthetics; though they suffer a penchant in their display of medallion and lapels, which lends a cadency of little clinks. Their pride of place is their weapon, the oeuvre of their attentions and subject of their artistry. Each of their arms holds a simple form, but elaborated with damascene detail and polished to brassy sheen.

The Talon conceive the Core as a supreme being, which they sometimes consider the Dominus: it is a source of purity as unquenchable fire. They regard the Core as the true sovereign power, whose authority cannot be gainsaid for such would comprise the very substrate of the Realm. In this, the Talon acknowledges no master, for none could supersede their mission to the Core; though they have been known to offer compatriot service to those of valour.

Such marks their position towards humankind, for they do not truly contend human dominion at large, as they hold to assurances of a higher order plan. Provided humanity remains obedient to the hierarchy of their own society, they refrain from interfering, particularly where they respect the valour of lieges.

Stratagem

The inner fire of the Talon is their rath, which emanates zeal and vigour to give boundless energy in martial acts. Their passions swell to a height of blind fervour that quickens with the thrill of danger and the promise of victory. The Talon express these moments as transcendental acts, where the risk of peril brings them rapture. They heartily embrace danger, contending once more into the breach. They mire in endless and protracted conflict, to extend the lesser battled into one unending ordeal. The craven are broken and outlawed.

In this, the Talon find service as enforcers of the Core. A chore they gladly extend internally and externally, through works both bold and clandestine. They deliver justice and retribution where they go, attempting to reconcile those who may have averred from the righteous paths. They seek no vanity, requiring the just cause of the Dominus; lest their art no more than unbridled chaos.

Woad

The Woad: driven by rationality, marked by unadulterated logic, and deducing opaque facts with rapidity. Theirs is a cool refrain, absolving their efforts from the grossest displays of emotion, and so many find their native intellect wanting. In forgoing a vulgar charade of sentiment, their candour is stark and cynical. They measure their social finesse not by any standard of congeniality, but by the application of process and protocol.

One knows the Woad by fair features: their hair translucent, their complexion smooth, and their lithe and willowy frame that the breeze tends to pull. Their every tread falls lightly, their touch is gentle, and they appear fragile in demeanour. In vivid contrast, their features are sharp and angular, producing severity in midst of delicacy. They echo this in their apparel, setting soft patterns against strong lines, and ornamentation designs to capture, reflect, and refract ambient light.

The Woad speak of the songs of the *pneuma*, which elucidates strange uncanny tones to flurry across the skies. The *pneuma* is a celestial song of songs that steers the Orrery according to its dulcet patter; from this interaction springs forth the music of the spheres. The Woad argue that the Core is their prime instrument, encoding that cadence into operative forms.

To them, humankind presents a conundrum that they strive to comprehend. They present the apparent qualities of free will within a predetermined universe. This controversy piques their curiosity, for free will is a vain aspirations smacking of hubris. Yet no null hypothesis of this problem can they formulate. Humanity deserves their interest, which they approach with abstract objectivity, both remote and reserved. In this, they extend certain terms of respect to humankind and perhaps even rapport of a beer to those bent towards sophistry.

Stratagem

Infused with alchemical obisan, theirs is a heart of glass, lending its subjects a particular clarity and precision. Their faculties remain brightly cognisant of chance, reckoning each instance and probability. Such cunning calculation defines their repartee, where they attempts to resolving matters through tests of strategic thought; such skills carrying forth into their myriad tasks.

They claims ignorance of the existence of a perfect plan or plot, and rather they contrive instead to account for multiplicity of variables, all couched by contingencies. Moreover, if circumstance demands the contravention of subordinate rules in favour of prime directives, then so be it.

Woad by Rich Longmore.

MUMMER

Mummers mostly live beyond human society, finding sanctuary in the wilderness or the secret places of the city. The vastness of the urban sprawl of Metropolaris, as well as its cosmopolitan disposition, has led to the emergence of ghetto communities populated by mummers. Newly formed mummers remain integrated into society; their presence in high society would be deservedly remarked upon, but it remains a *faux pas* to do so overtly.

However, as time passes, they become mired as they slowly surrender to madness. The best are high-functioning savants, eldritch in manner but socially aware; the worst are broken creatures, of fragmented delusions.

from Modern Charity and its Ethic by Cassandra Shore

There are good reasons to regard the mummers warily, for their deviance is infectious. Stories persist of mummers who have worked illicit sorceries, most apocryphal. More than one noble has fallen down the wayward path by their mere proximity, and mummers of lonely disposition may abscond with the unwary to, impose an unfortunate conversion upon their new company.

from Daimon Muse by Harold Childe

It is fortunate for human aspirations that the Ealdor have all been brought low by the Somnolence, sending its kine unto the undying dreams of torpor. Over millennia they have faded into the background, dreaming their terrible dreams: the titans, capricious entities of Dream, have become unbridled creative forces; the oriel are servants of Destiny, and lay sessile as glimmering stars; and the dark designs of Death itself, the dragons, are but entropy given form. Their very presence lays heavy upon the very warp and weft of reality, such that it folds upon itself creating secluded pocket realms; shards of creation in mockery of the Realm.

from Mythopoeia by Leubald Geyer

THE MUMMERS ARE NIGHTBREED MORTALS, HISTORICALLY outcaste pariahs of society; they have fallen from the grace of human community. For all their variety, they are commonly characterised by an affinity with the night. They are fantasies become nocturnes, darkly horrors of the deep psyche made manifest. Such once-human creatures have been misshaped by ill fortunes to be eldritch heralds of the Ealdor.

Numerous words describe and defame these creatures and only modern social mores have permitted them begrudging acceptance within cosmopolitan company. The most pejorative are the epithets languished upon is the derisive charlatan, insulting the mockery of human guise, and lunatic, abjuring their severance from Reason.

Mummers often remove themselves from society, as few retain their social standing. Mostly this abstention is a matter of choice, for better voluntary exile than to bring scandal down upon loved ones. Even today, most mummers lose their cherished standing as a civilian, or even as a citizen, relegated to mere denizen status; saving only those vanishingly-scarce nightbreed nobility. For these wretched outcaste nobles, there are few opportunities in the aristocracy; instead, the egalitarian dispositions of the Imperial Orders may provide.

LUNACY

The terrible curse that afflicts the mummers all is named lunacy. For while humankind falls under the influence of the Reason of Agony, the malady of Ecstasy may eclipse this instead. Those who fall to lunacy are subjected to a transformation to become something inhuman, though all of their number is varied in both physiognomy and manner.

Tethered no longer to the sensible course of Reason but to surreal Rhyme they endure a strange twilight existence: by the lucid light of Agony, they appear human, until their madness comes forth when illuminated by the ethereal light of Ecstasy; revealing their sinister forms to all. From this, the people derive the epithets of nightbreed and lunatic as their afflictions wax and wane with the month, direst beneath the Great Lune.

Lunacy begins in dreams, where the hapless victim becomes exposed to a dream of the Ealdor, even as they lay in torpid quiescence. Their dreams impress themselves upon the pregnable minds of the slumbering. As the affliction takes hold, the victims' very perceptions change: colour fades from sight, and the glare of Agony becomes too harsh to observe. The sense of sight, once filled with colour fades to become informed more by textures, patterns, and shades of contrast. Most withdraw from the day, venturing out only when protected by black-tinted glasses.

EALDOR

At the dawn of creation, there existed the Ealdor: primordial creatures of terrible and puissant forms. The Ealdor all were once the archetypes of prehistory, embodying, primal ideals. Each of those eldritch creatures were supreme beings, vast in size and with ambitions and limits lie beyond the scope of mortal imagining. Their histories, and indeed their very presence, send ripples through the fabric of reality, changing the very nature of the tapestry of the skein. It is fortunate that none of their legendary ilk remain awake among us.

Scholars who unearth their ruins suggest there once as many as thirty-nine such beings: thirteen apiece for each of their kind, though we recall the names of only twelve of all of them. There are few among such archaeologists that feel easy that they can account for less than twenty-seven of these entities. Some consider perchance that Agony and Ecstasy themselves must certainly be two of those unknown, their eternal dance and fathomless purpose far too like their manner to disregard. Some even opine that Palladium herself might be the sessile form of one.

RELIC

Every mummer is the consequence of the Ealdors' power; they are all deviants that have succumbed to their influence through misfortune or misdeed. However, on occasion, the Ealdor may extend their influence more completely, which casts forth a web of intrigue from deepest torpor, to ensnare many mummers into their designs. While the mummers are the natural proxies for the Ealdor, any being may in fact become a vessel for their power by proximity to a relic.

Monuments to the Ealdor remain hidden across the Realm, each with caches of forgotten relics: objects of tribute and worship to these fallen idols, long forgot and secreted away. Most become unearthed and destroyed by imperial forces when discovered, and possession of any relic is proscribed by imperial law. The power of these relics comes from them having been wrought from the somnolent bodies of the Ealdor: whether jadescale of the dragons, the weirwood of the titans, or the starmetal of the oriel. Each relic remains connected to is host, and through them, the dreaming powers seek purchase upon the world. The relic becomes a conduit, offering inordinate power to even the most ordinary commoner: arcane knowledge, terrible secrets, and even an investment of the Ealdors' own power, in exchange for ceremony, service, and the proselytization of their name.

Those truly potent and lucid dreamers present the greatest prize for the Ealdor, so vivid is their imagination, so fertile their psyche. The Ealdor may use such dreamers as gateways into wakefulness, to breach the veil of reason and rise from their slumber. These incursions occur in the depth of night when Agony is weakest, bringing to bear illogical, nonsensical, fabrications, even if many of these dissipate with the morning light.

Tomb Raider by Mateusz Bielski.

Wildling

The dreams of the titans fall gently upon the untamed bramblewoods: that enchanted, eldritch, and ancient wild, removed far from human habitation. Such dreams of the titans as fall upon this place, lend the bramblewoods a native *intellectus*, and one of predatory nature. Wildlings are such persons who have been taken by the wilderness and afflicted by predatory instinct, enticing its victims through an ancient tattoo that pulses with ceaselessly thrumming in their minds.

The thrum of the jungle sounds strongest in the depths of the bramblewoods. Its luring tattoo seeks to tempt one from the safety of the known path: friends and foes cry for help from beyond the line of sight, and there are sometimes even the promising allure of gilded treasures. Yet all the while, an ominous shadow harries travellers' peripheries, leaving victims with a sense of pursuit. Once lost off the path, dreams beset the wanderer, tearing civility away and feeding the wildling within, and the pulse resolves into intelligible utterances. In this moment of revelation, the ego dissolves into titan dreams. The wildling-come is sundered from their fate, thereafter entangled with the bramblewoods, as they turn native.

Pack

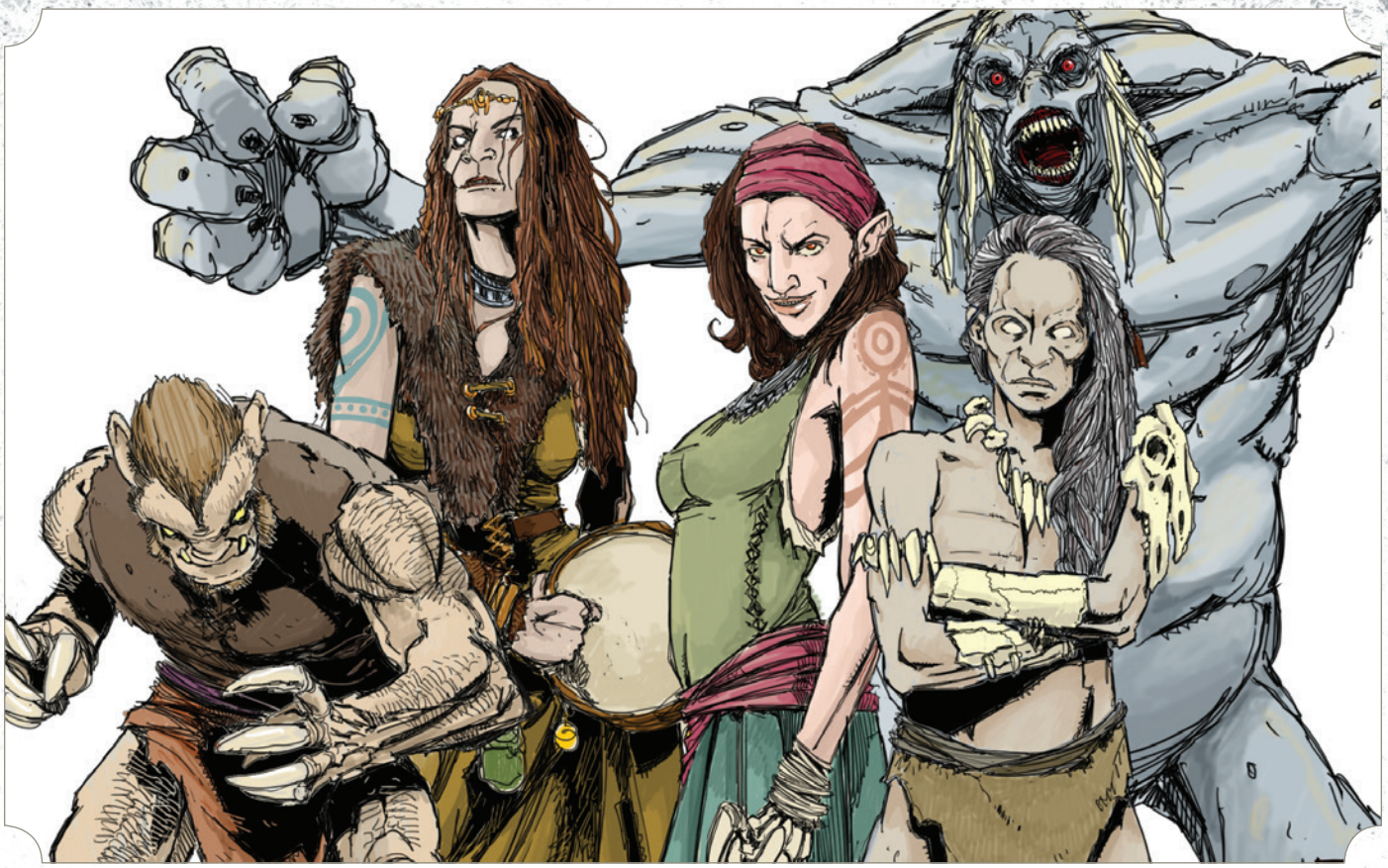
Each transformation depicts a particular interaction between the wild and their target as prey, and it is the method by which they are broken that shapes. They become a vessel for a therian dream that turns them into chimera, living between the states of bestial and human natures. Exactly where they stand between these natures is a matter of personal contention, for some revile their ferocity but with others revelling in animal instinct. They endure in a state of personal conflict, and one that conflicts civil society against the laws of the jungle.

Bane

The Bane, or banehounds, are those suckled upon the fetid fruits of the jungle; forbidden offerings that lured them from safety into darkness. The Bane are afflicted by their blood and milk, tainted in such manner that they move instinctively according to various natural cycles. Thus, blood holds profound symbolism for their many rites and working and even their transformations requires the letting of some blood. Their shifts are subtle and insidious in effect, lending a dire fire to them manner and suffusing them with predatory urges. Even then, the Bane retain keen instinct through their animal cunning; though physically mutated they show reveal only the most vestigial of animal features.

Garou

The Garou are victims flayed, flensed of flesh by thorn and claw; they endured a death by a thousand cuts, feeling agony of their hiding yet not dying. Once their hide is torn asunder, the Garou seeks out and steals the hide from another being to assuage their pain, and may then assume their guise for a stay of days and nights. All too soon though, this coat succumbs to rot and they seek yet another. They are the 'turncoats', and are masters of inverting their skin to assume a variety of guises and forms. They most notorious inverts them wholly into the mien of a wolf, even while retaining their native human intellect. They are numerous apocryphal accounts that lay claim to the ability for such beings to assume the pelts of other animals as well.



LYKAN

The Lykan are consequence of terrible destruction visited upon them by crushing: whether falling tree, the pressure of the deep, or tumbling avalanche, their bones were ground to paste. They hunger for marrow as vital supplement, making the Lykan most rapacious, ready to slake their appetite by splitting the bones of their prey. Moulded by their calamity, they represent the supplest of the wildlings, having fluid contortions and mutable flesh. Yet their shifting exacts a toll, withering their remnants of bone with each turn, turning them once more to the consumption of marrow and bone-gristle for the restitution of their physique.

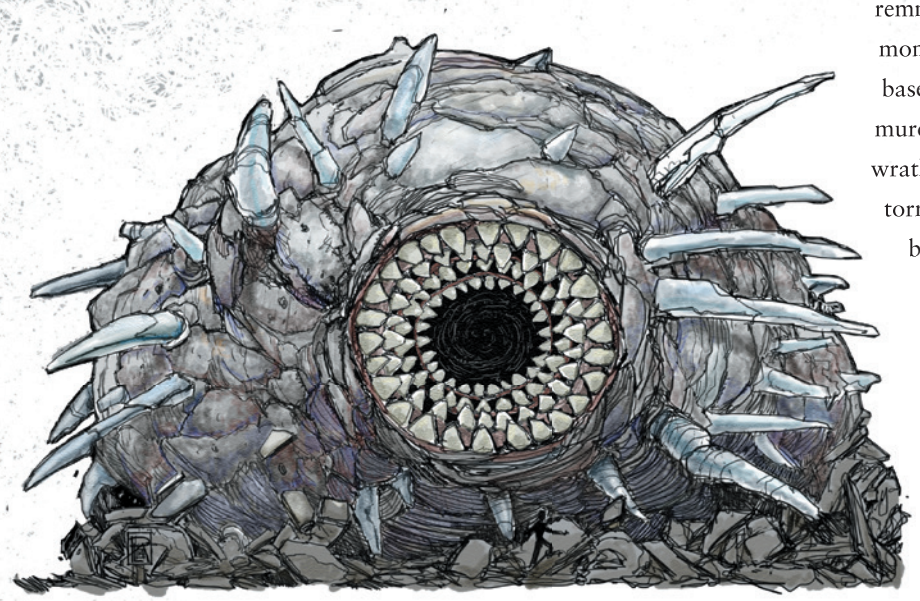
SCATHE

All Scathe are tricksters, whose predation brought them low as a hunt in the dark but stricken with a sinister consumption as their dreams left them hollow. By night, terrors visit them as a howling menace, stealing sleep and vigour by turns. Thus, the Scathe become sleepless, lidless beings, supping others' breath in passing. Such stolen ghosts as these, lends them art to their talents of misdirection and cunning, gifting them great faculty for impersonating their once-fellow humanity. Their nature is naught but revealed by the skulking lupine shadow that they cast: the aspect of the wolf upon them is felt keenly by those transfixed in their gaze: two whorls of staring darkness.

WARG

The monstrous creatures known ominously as Warg are dire creatures of terrible savagery; they are survivors of gruesome predatory assault that left their body mauled and mutilated. Their body broken and left to rot in the woods, they succumb to a terrible taint that seeps into their numerous injuries, corrupting their flesh until it bloats with fetid black. They are apex predators, who live keenly for the hunt, for the taste of meat, and the protection of their territory. They retain a

Wildling Breeds by Rich Longmore.



remnant of their intellect, and perhaps the most monstrous of its kin. Their gruesome face reveals baser cunning, which aids their appetite for murder most foul. However, beware their dormant wrath, for once their rage unleashes, and it brings a torrent of blind carnage as they swell into hirsute beasts to lay ruin upon their vicinity.

Titan

The titans were the archetypes of the very elements: bodies hewn from the rough matter of sod and sky, wild and unfettered in form, and capricious of temperament. As epitomes of natural forces, they often played a role within an ecological drama, which we now recall in the Procession. Yet their elementary nature was as of Dream: wild and chaotic, they were animate natural disasters. Humanity remembers only four of the titans with certainty: the Cardinal Pillars are testament to each apiece, epitomising their ancient elemental natures.

Behemoth

The Behemoth was the great shambling hulk of stock and stone, wrapped abound in steely and abrasive fleece, adorned with numerous iron spindles that crumpled and shivered in its wake. There is no certainty as whether these spindles were bones or legs, making the creature a rolling, crawling, monstrosity. As the embodiment of the quake and glacier, its rumblings rent the substrate as it trawled eerily beneath the mantle, with every movement consuming and undermining the land above; it was a source of once frequent subsidence. As the wintry harbinger of frigid Boreas, it desires to plunge the world into the depths of winter, choked with snow and ice. It offers its followers great physical strength and endurance, turning aside all injury, and those wholly subsumed by the Behemoth bear a dread chill about their air.

Krakyn

Great was the Krakyn: that woeful and slithering mass of tidal muck and brine, all tangled tendrils of mist and shadow. Once it was a massive sea-faring beast that swallowed ships completely, with its form sometimes mistaken as a phantom island. The bulk of the beast lay beneath the swell of waves, and only the nape of its maw breached the surface: a dark whorl, displaying rows of jagged, reef-like teeth. As the embodiment of both tide and torrent, of the crushing treacheries of the deep, the Krakyn was the fallen harbinger of the bitter Zephyr and ever seeking the drowning of innocence, to lose all to despair. Of those in its attendance, the fell beast bequeaths

Behemoth & Krakyn by Rich Longmore.

protection from the sea and a dauntless manner: however, such fanatics bear a dank smell of brine and a watery pallor.

SURTON

That searing pillar of fire named Surton wrought a flaming mane along its length but was veiled within in a smoke that furled about its form as some ebon cowl. Menacing at its fullest height, its two blazing eyes were framed by curled horns, and a rasping, whip-like tongue hinted of its voluminous appetite. Others recall its wicked claws that rent as devilish brands, to leave charred remains behind. The Surton was the embodiment of the conflagration and drought: want to consume the old and weak, as the sumnal harbinger of the sweltering Notaine; it was driven to parch the very air of its moisture and choke it with ash. Those made unto its servitors bear testament to the lessons of fire as oppressive masters: in service, their heat is gentle benefaction, but merciless taskmasters in command. Mark them by their pungent odour of brimstone and sullen visage.

TYPHON

Borne upon the high winds, the Typhon was a vortex of galvanic airs. Its form was the most amorphous of the titans, being cast across the empty sky. At rest it was benign, as but a gentle shepherd of stray clouds, though when beset by storm, the creature manifested quickly as a coil of viperish cloud to canvas its form, and flecked with lightning resounding with the juddering cracks of thunder in its wake. All once beheld its baleful red eye gazing scornfully upon the land below. Thus the Typhon: both the halcyon and tempest, which even in quietude brought about a dread and stifling stillness. As the vernal harbinger of the humid Eurus, its coming was a pall of doom, to sunder all earthbound ties and free the walking from its constraint. Its thralls are granted numinous qualities both light and nimble, but become most querulous in manner and cast a most effervescent candour.

Surton & Typhon by Rich Longmore.

Changeling

Past the looking-glass lays the Widderslainte: a land of wondrous madness profoundly shaped by the dreams of the oriel. It is a dark relief of the waking realm and residence of many twisted reflections. For the dreams of the oriel give life to these echoes whose proximity calls them forth. For all its splendour, the Widderslainte offers scarce sanctuary for humankind; though it is safe enough for limited visits even amid its many distractions.

Mirrors consistently capture the wonder of folklore, which rightly cautions against the looming threat of the *doppelgänger* that lurks in one's reflection. In each encounter, the *doppelgänger* seeks to steal some vital essence from their original. Even more precarious are those ventures into the Widderslainte, where the careless traveller might accidentally leave their personal affects. Dangers lie beneath the surface of each reflection, where the *doppelgängers* lurk. Each such fetch longs to forge links with their original; infecting and influencing their dreams by turns, manifesting into their dreams for quiet communion.

Motley

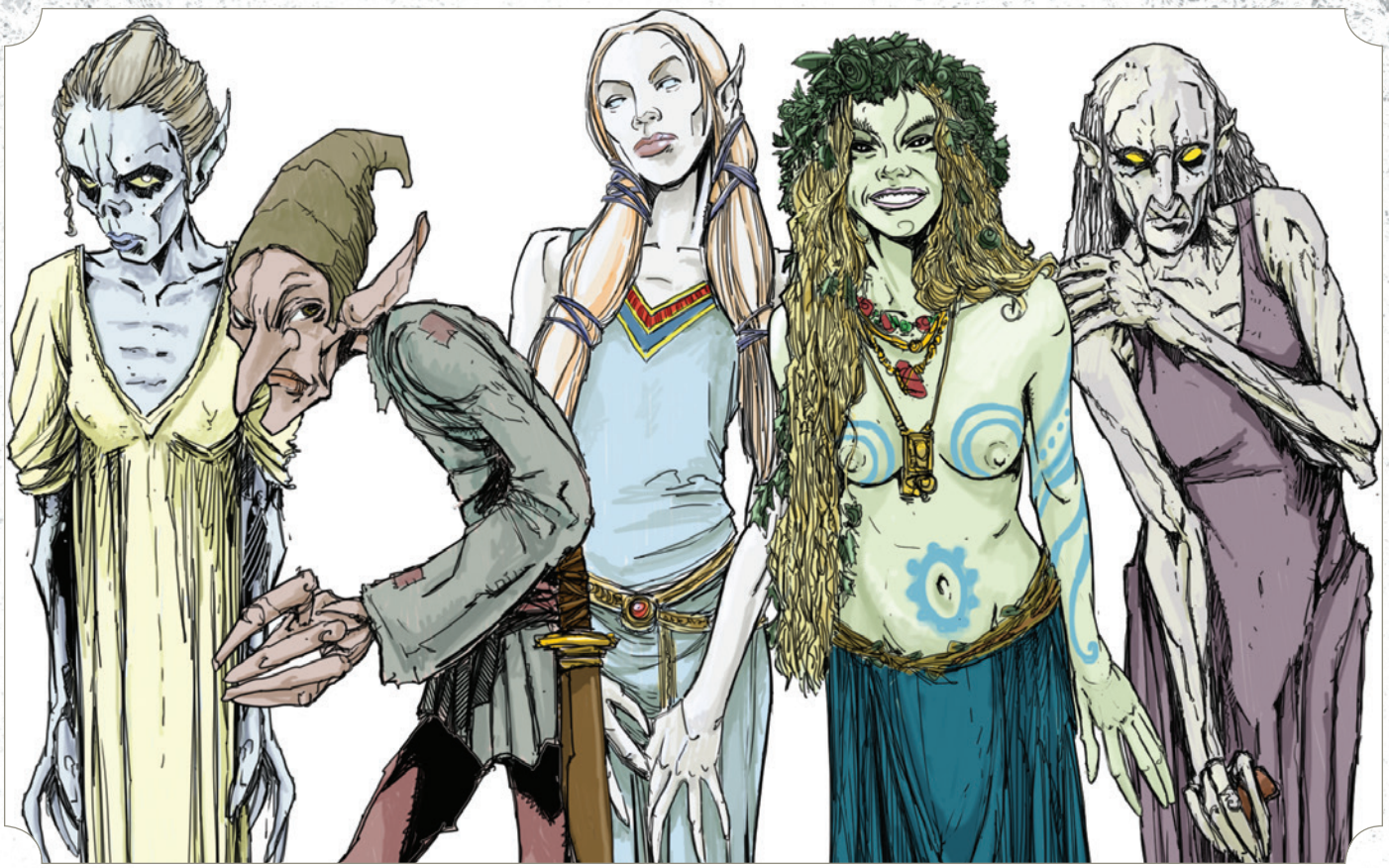
When one travels into the Widderslainte, the opportunities are their most perilous, and the longer the durance there, the greater the power this double attains. As time wears on, the fade draws closer to their original with unerring dedication. It manifests by inches, occurring as a murky phantom doggedly following in one's wake. The victim sees the creature in reflections and other peripheries. Each daunting encounter leaves them increasingly paranoid, as the leech acquires their traits, qualities, skills, and talents of their original, until they become a literal match for them. Each encounter deepens the bond, instigating slowly, creeping changes that begin with terrible, lucid nightmares. Each nightmare takes its toll; ravaging mind and exhausting the victim leaving in the doldrums, listless and uninspired. Eventually, they slip into an unyielding sleep, and wake only once wholly taken over.

Ankou

The Ankou are borne through dreams steeped in ceremonial burial and sombre rituals. In each refrain, they drive their hapless dreamer into fatalistic obsession, haunting that grim and grey nether-space between the quick and the dead. Their sight becomes limed with echoes of the past, seeing decay and destruction, morbid omens, and portents of their death hanging over the living. The Ankou's visage is of ghostly hue and their physique hints at some wretched, hollow centre. Their features are wan, with sunken and gaunt eyes, all fixed as expressing some dire rictus. Their tongues are shriven, their speech is parched, and their touch bears the chill of a tombstone.

Piskye

When musings of travel beset the emergent changeling, they transfigure into one of the Piskye. The change infuses them with a restless and furtive desire that rails at respite and languor, and imbues them with an acuity of vision that casts beyond the horizon into impossible lands. Such art lends them an innate sense of direction, superior to any living being such that they chose their path with pride and certainty. They are slight of form, revealed by deft movement and fluttering gesticulation. They are artful speakers of natural prosody and voicing a gifted lyrical assonance.



SITH

The beatified creatures that are the Sith have stepped forth from reveries of grandeur. These fugues impart some essence of nobility, bearing a mantle of uncanny majesty about them; with qualities both radiant and surreal. With the measure of a single pointed gaze, they have unnerving sense for the virtues of a given person. They glean insight by their particular manners and sensibilities, seeing the heart of many a given motive. Though graceful, their manner and presentation provides nothing by way of comely warmth. All features of significance are monochromatic, giving the appearance of sublime but fragile figurines, which readily forgets its once-humanity.

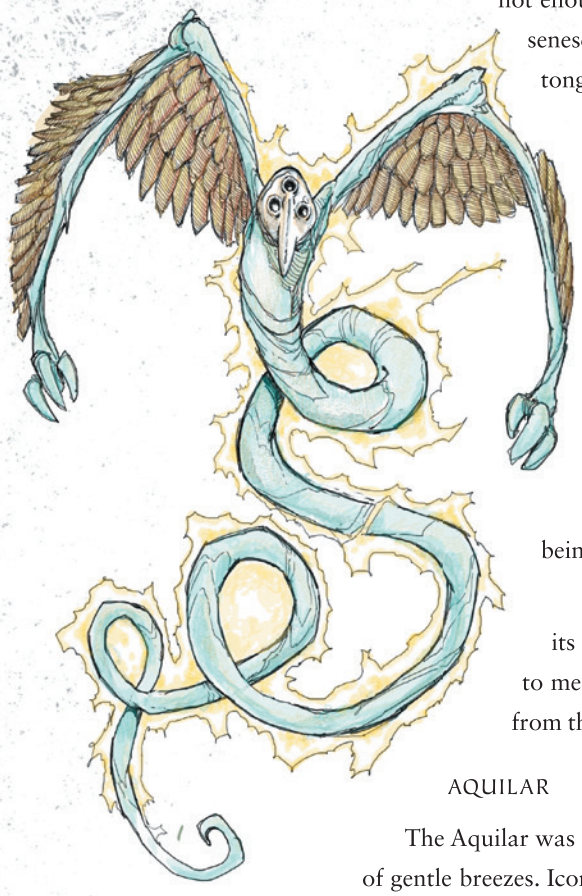
SPRITE

Sprites are those persons where lunacy has placed them with the wildest of hearts, where they experience an atavistic transfiguration. Exposed to the deepest nature, their senses attune to natural environs to reveal myriad ecological connections. In such revelation, they depart from urban domains, or cultivate paradise in the midst of the city. Perhaps remarkably, the Sprite bear some manner of dimorphism: those males changed express flora most native to rough terrains, of mount and crag; while the female members display botanic features of the meadow and sea strewn about their person. In each instance, there is a congruency of features that speaks to the affinity that Sprite holds towards a particular plant.

WICHT

The Wicht possess aptitude for prophesy, whether hale or profane, whether calamity or fortune. In vision, they glean certain and intricate workings of fate; they thereby sense when words a spoken falsely and how best to unravel enigmas. Though both blessing and curse, for these insights rarely offer succour, their portents are capricious, offering enough foresight to see a problem but

not enough to discern the solution. The precarious gifts fatigue the Wicht into early senescence. This process leaves them bereft of their nominal vision or silenced of tongue. Yet such seeming frailty belies their hardy and spry physique, even as it has been haggard and twisted by their pains.



Oriel

As creatures of starlight and metaphor, the oriel possess a powerful nimbus that illuminates their forms in strange manner. Each reveals unearthly forms that seem more alien than celestial, and each wraps around them as much a part of their anatomy as any another creature's skin. Their motives remain complex and obscure, hidden by serene masks in place of their faces that betrayed no character. As the principles of Destiny, they were masters of stasis and balance and tutelary beings that saw to the arbitration of prophecy.

The oriel shared and professed a careful affinity with the Orrery, both in its composition and its motion, which they revealed foremost in their attention to measurement and observation of its structure. They claimed to have descended from the stars and remarked candidly on their stewardship of all celestial structures.

Aquilar

The Aquilar was a gentle giant that traipsed the skies. It rose high upon its nimbus: a susurrus of gentle breezes. Icons of its day depicts its ancient form bearing mask of bone in semi-spherical configuration and with pointed beak-like protrusion, all containing three dark ocular sockets. Branching from the length of its body extended long, loping, feathery appendages, each wreathed in sparking lightning and ending with tridactyl hands. Its lithe form of bodily coils bore such slight a movement, which permitted creature to glide gracefully through the heavens in silent repose. Hailing from the brilliant dawning star of Aldebaran, the Aquilar surveyed the living diversity of nature, elevating villages or stealing the vitality from field, delivered to meet the balance of its reckoning. The servants of this oriel walk with a restless breeze that stirs about them.

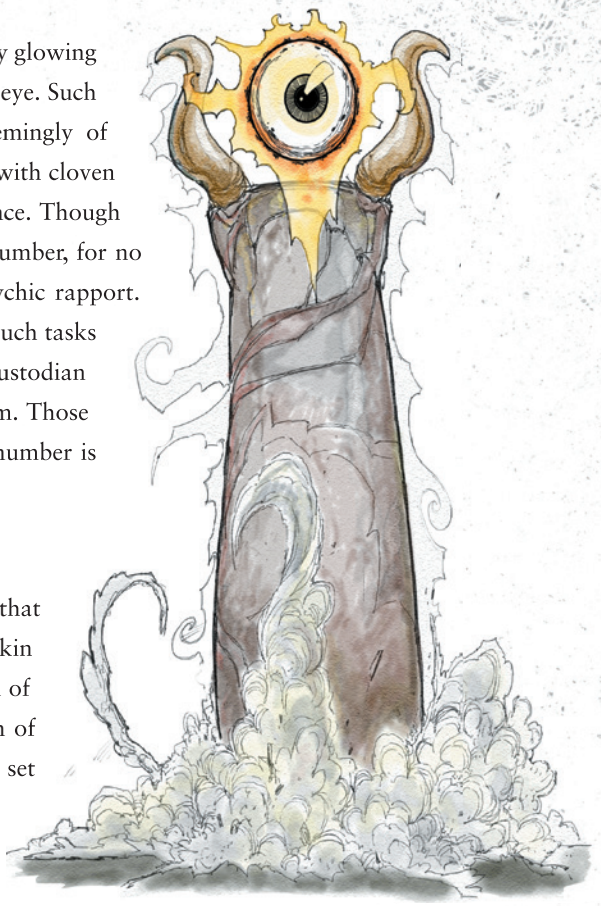
Helion

The proudest of the proud was the Helion, whose nimbus displayed itself as a great haloed mane of smokeless fire. The whole of its form once likened to wheels-within-wheels, of many circular double-stranded rings. Bearing at its heart stands a brilliant, burning star. Its mask revealed only when it deigned to speak, and then formed as an inverted golden triangle, marked by three ocular slots. There was no subtlety to its manner, for as it purveyed the world with lordly mien it left no single scar or scorch in its passage, yet able to inflict conflagration upon those it found wanting. The Helion reigned over majestic the zenith star of Regulus, and assumed duties to temper or scourge in pursuit of perfection: glory and might arrayed. It raised what it found beautiful and purged what it found unsightly. Those members that offer service to the Helion exude a great warmth, and indefatigable aura.

Aquilar & Helion by Rich Longmore.

MITHRAN

Most notable in those few depictions of the Mithran is its nimbus: the softly glowing solar disk borne at its nape betwixt two horns, bearing the likeness of an eye. Such splendid display crowned its towering body: a robust pillar made seemingly of obdurate material, and its base held up by numerous sturdy legs adorned with cloven feet; the entirety of its form held a ponderous gait of an impossible stance. Though of all the Ealdor, records detail the Mithran as the most docile of their number, for no account describes it hostility, and frequent communed through silent psychic rapport. The creature hailed from the doleful nadir star of Sirius, and relegated to such tasks of tending to all prehistoric wisdom and lore. It appointed itself as the custodian to the memories of the ages, even to remember the creation of the Realm. Those nightbreed in service to the Mithran are most stalwart beings, and their number is often revealed by the gentle glow exuding from their eyes.



SERAPH

The most subtle of the oriel was the Seraph, according to all accounts that speak its name. Its depictions show a long serpentine body, with smooth skin of cartilaginous nature and the complexion of polished marble. The length of its frame is denoted six pairs of fluke-like fins, and its face took the form of a mask with two curved tears set in counterpoint, and one unblinking eye set thereupon apiece. Of all the oriel, its nimbus was most mysterious, being illumed only by the light of night to display cadent lines of phosphor running down its length, all with hypnogogic qualities. The herald of the baleful dusk star of Antares, the Seraph exalted a contrarian nature in being both poisoner and healer, to embrace the dyad of sickness and health. Know those who serve the Seraph for their forked-tongue, seen only in the faintly outline of silvery light that emits gently from their mouths.

Mithran & Seraph by Rich Longmore.

Darkling

The dreams of dragon-kind are most corrupting in their siren call, invoking pernicious desires. Dragon dreams are self-destructive temptations to succumb to basest cravings. Their power stems from an inability to distance their allure, or absolve from their indulgence. While social mores often turn one from such invitations, many succumb to their vice. The dragon dreams thrive in one's Shadow, as a disparate but ever-present passenger weighing heavily upon one's own thoughts.

The Shadow is a spinner of cunning deceits that works by steering the needle of one's moral compass awry by degrees. With each meagre offence, the Shadow grows in the recesses of the psyche, urging them on into increasingly wanton acts, yet leaving them decidedly hollow of appetite. The Shadow undertakes a subtle excavation, carving psychic rifts through the subject's mind as it takes root. Each whispers vociferously in the darkest night and most strongly upon the nadir. Yielding is simple capitulation but staunch denial tends to lend that Shadow legitimacy. Repudiation of baser urges seems only to inflame them, and mounting cravings eke away resolve. To steel against these dark recesses often sacrifice slivers of the higher psyche. Eventually, there is nothing left to hold any resistance and subsequently yields to the Shadow.

Brood

Shadows cause corruption through the tainting of their victim's humours and this causes the deprecation of the mind, followed by the body. In this manner, the afflicted is rendered into a hapless vessel for their Shadow, fostering unnatural appetites and peculiar dispositions; these eventually characterise the manner in which they eventually transfigure. In piecemeal fashion, the host becomes a husk and eventual puppet to the literal shadow of their former selves. In the darkest affects of such treachery, the victim becomes confronted by their debasement. In retreating in horror, they relinquish their hold of good reason and yield to their dark passenger.

Bogey

Born of greed and theft, the Bogey describe an expression of *myelos* corrupted. Theirs is a hunger needing gratification beyond simple luxury but rather through wealth and station acquired at the expense of others. The congealing of their *myelos* tempers them against sympathy, scarcely demonstrating any charity towards others or any impediment towards their theft; their only concern revealed in miserly avarice for their possessions. The profile of the Bogey strikes a cruel and avian demeanour with hooked-nosed, snatching claws, and intent gleaming calculation in their gaze; it wanders in distraction to appraise gilded treasure. Their spring-loaded heels lift them high upon the rooftops and their departure leaves a black plume as the only token of their presence.

Cubarus

Should the darkling's corruption come by way of the *vim*, they transfigure into vainglorious peacocks enamoured of their own worth, seeking self-glorification without merit or virtue. Solipsists nonpareil, they stand at the epicentre of manifold reflections, each one describing a victory that reinforces their sense of self. They bear few distinctive features, proffering homogeneity of appearance as though cut from the same mould; perhaps too reinforcing their pride. What features they possess strike wonderful symmetry, elegance, and delectation. It is reminiscent of

classical art that demonstrates technically masterful but devoid of genuine humanity, which they can only experience vicariously through those they seduce and domineer.

MARON

The Maron's unnatural appetites directly stem from tasting forbidden fruit in the most gruesome manner possible, corrupting their *vitreous* humour. Such terrible hunger is not sated by simple sustenance and what they consume must be either taboo or unclean. The most innocuous option is the consumption of rotten or proscribed foods, though examples of cannibalism have earned them odious reputations, either gruesome or unwholesome. They bear a most grisly appearance: corpulent bodies, hands of sticky grasp, matted hair, and the fetid reek of cooking fat. Worst is their unseemly maw, with squalid breath, and gnashing, crooked teeth stained some unsightly hue.

POPPET

Those child-like beings named the Poppet are victims of the corruption of *sanguine*, being transfigured into covetous creatures, yearning for the lives of others; that which they own offering no satisfaction, driving them endlessly to beg, borrow, and steal whatever happens to capture their fancy. Mark them well as most beguiling creatures of seeming innocence and play; possessed of seeming naivety they make a great play of their juvenile appearance. At their most benign, they steal credit and acclaim for the works of others, but may prove dangerous when they decide one's face is their desire. Each Poppet bears a makeshift likeness, being creatures of patchwork fashion: their appearance is a product of tattered and stolen apparel, stolen flesh stitched to their own body.

TRAMMEL

The Trammel are vicious sadists who have been shaped by violence: not merely acts of brutality, but ones deriving pleasure from cruelty, which inevitably corrupts the humour *coloris*. Most

Darkling Breeds by Rich Longmore.

wicked creatures, they are become taskmasters bent upon the capture of hapless pawns, to keep as pets that they hope to shape through disciplinary regimes. Theirs is the celebration of torture: artisans using scalpel as their brush and the body as their canvas. Though doubt not their bondage in mind and in body, for their flesh is mortified by wire and sinew; both eyelids and lips are pulled back by hooks and clasps, and commonly seen are blades and needles protruding from subcutaneous fastenings.

Dragon

The dragon kin were dread and fell monsters: cosmic horrors not altogether composed of the same substance of the Realm, but perhaps some dark matter from the void beyond. Terrible to behold, their sight could induce madness slipping deftly into one's nightmares. As exemplary principles of Death, their natures were destructive and entropic, filled with naught but a yawning hollow, with only purpose to devour and rend.

The dragons were harbingers of the Eschaton, apostles of the apocalypse. Though seeming discordant with the ambitions of mortals, there are dire secrets that one might glean from them regarding the end times. Mark them well for the numinous oracular gifts in their arts, for they straddle the line between madness and prophecy; their insights applied to turning the Realm ever onwards to its culmination.

Basilisk

Regard the Basilisk as the king of the dragons: note the mitre-like crest upon its head, adorned by blazing white spot at its centre, like a scintillating diadem. Its form was that of a large, scaled wyrm, moving with sinuous purpose and deadly quiet. Upon raising itself upright, the creature spread its hood, arrayed with iridescent spines of mesmerising quality and blackened tongue that sought the air; all to give a most welcome and alluring visage.

Though smallest of the dragons, it was assuredly the most deadly: it gaze was most notorious, sending mortals comatose; its bite destroyed its victims leaving a quickly rotting corpse. Know the Basilisk for the ominous doom of Quiescence, the final and great tranquillity of stasis embodying all those deaths caused silence. Know its servitors by their moving in silence, issuing neither syllable nor expression.

Hydra

Hail Hydra: that ancient monster of amphibious nature, when upon the land its body poised on four sturdy legs sprawling out on either side, keeping its body low. Its most notorious feature was its many heads, varying according to the tale: three in the least and several score at their greatest, for the Hydra would double each head in decapitation. Those heads bore an avian likeness with beaks lined with teeth, and framed by magnificent frills. It was a most toxic and venomous creature whose very breath was pestilence, whose wake left blight, whose touch produced septic black effluence. The Hydra was the harbinger of the pestilent doom of Plague, evident in the spoiling of food or drink and the noxious taint upon arrival. Those bound to its service

Basilisk & Hydra by Rich Longmore.

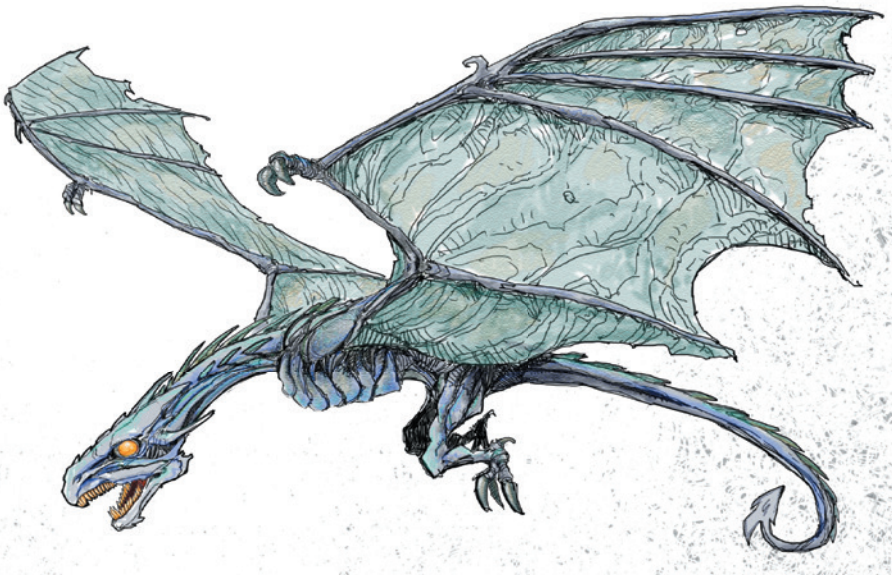
have no better purpose than as plague-bearers, known for the dire stench in the vapours about them.

SALAMANDER

That terrible lizard named the Salamander was an apex predator of voracious appetite, which few things could prevail against when it chose to strike. A theropod reptile raised high upon hindquarters whose length upheld a dorsal sail, and ending with a horned head. Most remarkable was its skin of smooth and glistening surface and possessed variable pigmentation such that it could display diverse colourings. Though remembered for it wicked teeth and claws, its most ferocious weapon was the fire it could spit in rolling volleys or ignite across the course of its skin. Strife was the ferocious doom portended by the Salamander, for the creature ate naught but ash, and sought to raze the Realm to soot for this consumption. Those mortals that have fallen under its sway know scarce else but pyromania, immune to the conflagration and bearing instinct for impending conflict; both of which they are unerringly drawn towards.

WYVERN

On its many travels, the Wyvern rarely touched the ground, preferring to glide high upon membranous wings that stretched between its limbs; each arm appended with dactyl-hands that gave to the creature its crawling gait. From the body of the beast, by means of a long and sinewy neck, a bony head hung low in the manner of a hornet. The entirety of its length was arrayed with rigid and sharp spines, and a tail completed the effect with a barbed sting. Though of all its features, it is the Wyvern's call that is most recanted, for it was an ominous keening wail could leave all who heard it weak and frail, bereft of sustenance. The Wyvern was the harbinger of the harrowing doom of Famine: eternally hungry, unable to be satiated and ceaselessly driven towards consumption. Its shadow withered crops and enervating livestock, to despoil the Realm of its stock. Those bound in subjugation demonstrate a gaunt nature, with jaundiced pallor.



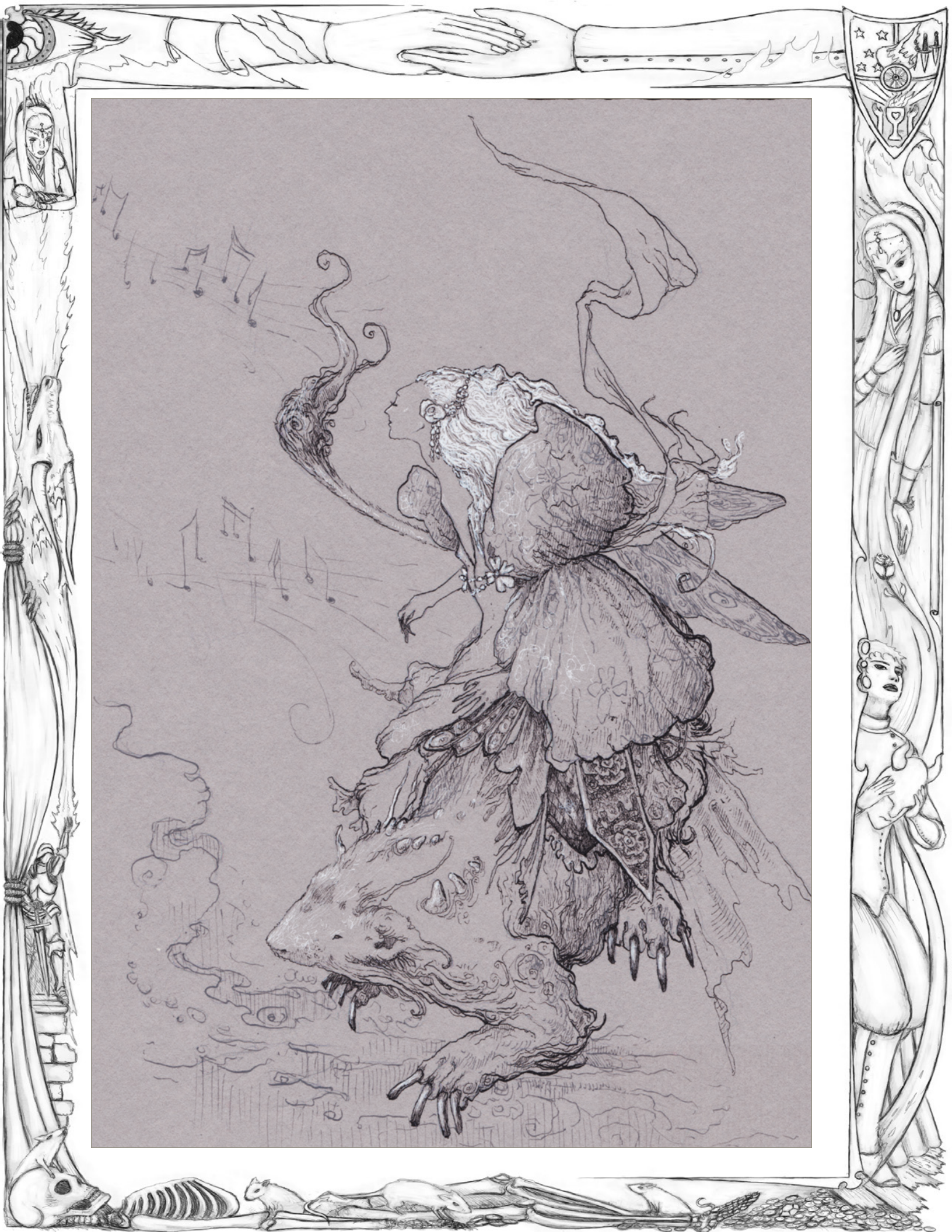
Salamander & Wyvern by Rich Longmore.

Opposite: opera by Socar Myles.

WARE, MIDDLING ACT: CLIMAX! VERILY WE CLUTCH AT THE HEART OF THESE INTRIGUES; THOUGH IT SEEMS MADNESS, THERE SURE LIES METHOD IN THEIR NOBLE REASON, FORM, AND EXPRESSION; THE PARAGON OF ANIMALS. HERE ARE LESSONS ALL ON MANNER, POLITICS, AND TROUBLE; FOR THE POWER PLAY'S THE THING, WHERE VAIN AND VENAL MEANS ARE WORKED FOR CLANDESTINE PLOT.

ACT 3: CLIMAX

OPERA



Imperium

Though the detractors, anarchists and terrorists all decry the Imperium as being naught but tyranny and despotism, such claims sound outlandish to the modest citizen. As per the words of the Invictus: 'not for our glory, but for their happiness'.

from We, Valetoria by Valetoria Regina

The dramas of the Panorama, the imperial court, are the most celebrated of their kind. Here, one might observe a heady concoction of the most renowned personalities of the Realm, centred upon the very affairs of humanity's destiny. Here, the highest echelons of power all seek the favour and dispensation of the Imperium.

Of second-order of interest are those national assemblies, wherein one can observe the competing interests of the nations; these are the disputes and dramas of culture, and national identity. Finally, all domains have their own provincial plays: these are manorial affairs of the nobles of that domain.

from The Grand Narrative by Leubald Geyer

The conflict between the crown and the aristocracy is not new, and it proves most ironic that the aristocracy, in seeking greater egalitarian standing with the Gallic Crown, sewed the very seeds of revolution.

Observe in retrospect that, for all claims of undermining the social order, the revolution sought not anarchy, but merely a new type of despotism. None sought to change the fundamentals of the social order, but only to instate a suite of political privileges over the general populace, but in such a way as to equalise their standing with the nobility.

It took a special kind of tyranny to make these promises, and it is unsurprising that Münchhausen's political campaign garnered vast popularity for his oft-touted guarantee of extending political and civil privileges to the common folk. Some even credit Münchhausen with sufficient foresight to have precipitated political events in such a way as to foment unrest, and thus lend momentum to his campaign.

from The Ides of Hours by Harold Childe

The Imperium is the pinnacle of civilisation, a unification of all humankind under the solitary power of the Coronal. The Imperium claims a long heritage, tracing most of its institutions back to the Roman Empire.

The Imperium's great project of Manifest Destiny is neither clandestine nor circumspect. The Coronal forthrightly declares their intention to propagate the virtues of the empire, to ensure that civilisation is spread far and wide and to bring the benefits of enlightenment to all. The Imperium proclaims itself the servant of societal dignity, with its authority devolving from the social contract it holds with the population. From this, the Invictus charges the Imperium with a mandate to charter a course for the human Eschaton.

Regime

For more than a millennium, the political system that was the *ancien regime* governed the Realm, under the two estates of the clergy and the gentry that comprised the aristocracy together. Following the great compromise forged in the wake of the revolutions, the *ancien regime* stands no longer and the Imperium has supplanted it.

Though the Coronal has integrated the institutions of the aristocracy into the Imperium, the gentry and the clergy are now but two institutions among many that share power. The aristocracy resolves itself against the Coronal, being the sovereign head of the Imperium, and the two produce a dichotomy that defines the political landscape. Indeed, despite the commoner misperception that the Coronal and the aristocracy necessarily court alliance they are merely two sides of the same coin, for they are more often in contention than agreement.

Nobility

The nobility and the classes of society round them are the epicentre of the Imperium, both politically and socially. For the noble is canny to the ways of the skein, and may affect their own personal fortunes able to reach out and affect their very fortune; even while being more stringently bound by narrative conventions.

The foremost airs of the nobles project an indefatigable countenance of command and an indomitable mien. As popularly imagined, the nobility possess intangible airs that supersede manners and pedigree; such notions cast the nobility as paragons of humanity, exemplars of their subjects. In holding the quintessence of humankind, they are widely expected the best and worst of its lot, both honourable and cruel.

Becoming noble is not a matter of birth alone, for regardless of one's station at birth no person may be ennobled unless each surpasses the trials of the dream quest known as the Epiphany; even though few but those highborn progeny are well prepared for it. Those who surpass the trials of the Epiphany are entitled to take the name of the house that adopts them.

Moreover, with the advent of new industry, even the merest members of society now afford certain luxuries once regarded as the bastion of the elite. The once stalwart divide has become increasingly permeable, and some have managed to carve social niches of better station, even while

remaining ignoble. With these changes, there exists now a need for more distinctions between members of society than merely their status as noble or commoner.

Despite the growing egalitarianism, the stratification of class throughout society is deeply ingrained, and few scarcely question its status quo. For even as those below aspire socially upwards and those above feign common mores, there are many subtle markers to qualify one's distinction. The aristocracy measures their own by standards of quality, as demonstrated by their carriage, deportment, and countenance; though the bourgeoisie attend to estimations that are more meritocratic.

ARISTOCRACY

The institution of the aristocracy is the oldest and most prestigious social class, formed through the union of the ancient dynastic clans and their many houses. Two corps comprises their numbers jointly: the rightly enthroned lieges, as the gentry of the Peerage, and the ordained graces that make up the clergy of the Mousaion. Together, both represent two halves of the same whole. The Peerage embodies those men who govern temporal powers of the land through holdings and material resources, while the Mousaion comprises the women who guide the chimerical powers of the people, in media and cultural curacies.

While both work to different agenda, they both hold stakes in the same political traditions as established in through the covenant of the Calendar, which lends them greater command over the skein; for the skein is a mythic corpus of narrative power that currently maintains the ascendancy of humankind over the Realm. The Calendar is then a culture of daily ritual entrenched within the aristocracy. Its custom and manner becomes the heart of political institution, and the empire. To break with convention is to threaten the imperial regime.

A pernicious idiosyncrasy is known among the erudite: though the bourgeoisie are largely empowered by the great compromise, they inherited the traditions of antiquity, which reinforces rather than derogates the *ancien regime*. Though born of revolutionary vigour, they are not truly revolutionary ideals manifest: the revolutions did not truly seek disestablishment of the sovereign state into anarchy, but rather the suppression of the noble institution as formed in feudal era. It worked to wrest away the power of the tenurial lords vesting into the central authority of the state. In this, the bourgeoisie are the result of these social and political reforms, celebrated in the imperial doctrine of Absolute Enlightenment.

from Vox Populari by Vivian Grey

BOURGEOISIE

The egalitarian fraternities of the bourgeoisie bring both noble and common together, wherein standing is estimated by merit before pedigree. Both education and professional posting define them; they hold high regard for innovation, talent, and dedication.

The emergence of the bourgeoisie was a product of the great compromise, signalling the transference of many of the traditional domains of noble power into the public domain; former stays of privilege now forming some equilibrium between the classes as new technology emerges. In joint venture and common enterprise, the bourgeoisie have become interlocutor between the common and the elite. In living alongside and among the masses, they are able to work together towards the same missions; in this they bridge the vast gulf that traditionally divides the classes.

The Imperial Orders are emissaries of the Imperium, for they deliver unto the empire the promise of Absolute Enlightenment such that even the meanest peasant is the beneficiary of the imperial largesse. Their works become *Reichanschauung*, a Realm-wide philosophy that frames the motive and actions of the Imperium through science, progress, and prosperity. Accordingly, the bourgeoisie embrace the new vogues of planetary heroes, leaving the members of the aristocracy to enjoy their gothic mores.

Since the 18th Century, the orders have come to describe a society integrating the slate of ardent professionals, characterised by the ownership of capital and its related materialism. Through ownership of the means of production and a mutual consideration for the value of property and the preservation of capital, the orders enjoy a social cohesion derived from the trappings of prosperity: they are the bourgeoisie, a social stratum dedicated to capitalism, often enjoying the many accoutrements of the aristocracy, even while lacking its formal privileges.

from The Vindication of the Aristocracy by Vivian Grey

MASSES

The working class consists of all those lacking station or privilege. Removed from the circles of power, their lives are cheap, abject, and often all too easily cast aside. As individuals, they are lacking in significance, but as a multitude, they are formidable, for no noble forgets the role the demos plays in leveraging the status of noble fame.

With celebrity and notoriety being crucial to noble aspirations, the nobility courts the masses even as they refrain from personal engagement. As an audience, the populace of the working class represent a nigh omniscient and ubiquitous observer. Their ready gaze ever watchful for the nobility in both triumph and defeat: for all they remain background figures, every noble thrives upon their favour, or enmity. Without the interest of the public, the nobles lose the impetus of their destiny, and in ignominy lies quiescence.

MANIFEST DESTINY

Despite varied interpretations of imperial doctrine, three themes resound: the virtue of the Imperium, and the nobles that cleave to its tenets; the mission to bring civilisation to the farthest reaches; and the destiny of the Coronal to do this work.

Through the Imperium's *Pax Aeterna*, the largesse of the Imperium has been one of stability, order, peace, prosperity, liberty, and equality; beyond its limits lies *terra incognita*, where be monsters.

from A Place in the Sun by Auto Eisenmark

By the writ of the Invictus, the Imperium adheres to several political doctrines. The tenets of which are endorsed by the Oracle as the golden path towards the supremacy of the human empire unto the Eschaton. It casts the Imperium as a bastion of culture and enlightenment, of progress and civilisation, and imparts to the Imperium a mandate to establish the moral dignity and wonder of humanity, even as it avows expansionism and exceptionalism.

Absolute Enlightenment is the grand design of Manifest Destiny. It extols the virtues of rationalism as the basis of the imperial regime. Its doctrine contends that in order to achieve its goals, the Imperium must bestow power to the enlightened; so the first task is enlightening the existing regimes. In this, it prescribes nobility, those touched by the skein, to be of the highest social efficiency and best positioned to achieve that mandate.

HUMANISM

Münchhausen holds himself as the first exemplar, and thus assumes the sobriquet of 'First Statesman' before other honorifics. In being eminently enlightened, the Invictus attains a state of inordinate rationality and cunning; he is deftly adaptable and manipulable of others.

Many seek to outmanoeuvre him but are almost inevitably then woven into a greater scheme of his. The few times he has ceded are legendary, and inevitably lead the Invictus to co-opt these peers as allies. So puissant is his intellect that some have come to attribute to the Invictus the ability to bring things to be through sheer contemplation.

from An Account of my Amusement by Valetoria Regina

Humanism is a cornerstone of Manifest Destiny, which provides a model that exalts humanity itself, in reference to the classical qualities of the Roman Empire. The modern conception germinated in the Flamboyance as a body of literary and linguistic ideals, and a revival of classic philology and grammar.

The imperial concept of humanism takes instruction from the revolutions, which cast humanity as the great liberator, and the great philosopher. These two themes converged to affirm the place of human history. It is upon this that the ideal of empire forms as a commonwealth of humankind, rather than as a geopolitical entity. All humans are subjects, regardless of their station or birth, and the Imperium extends its common law to all its extraterritorial subjects: it will extradite them to native jurisdictions if they are charged with criminal conduct, and seek *refoulement* of their otherwise wayward members.

Common law is distinct from the laws of the skein that predestines the nobility, being a body posited by humanity. Thus, common law lacks the weight of destiny that drives the skein but gains legitimacy through popular consent. It is labyrinthine, but formalised into the imperial polity, and an understanding of its codex is necessary to navigate civil society. Moreover, the rule of law is coterminous with modern, rational thought: its strictures as self-evident of human civility, and likewise those societies founded upon a doctrine of law are equally regarded.

from Letters of Ganymede by Vivian Grey

The rhetoric of humanism has given licence for the populations of humanity to go forth and multiply, extending outwardly from the central continent of the Literate. By sheer aggregation, the teeming members of humanity have dispersed unto every single locale, finding home in the Hinterlands, the Umbrage, and even in far-flung colonies upon the lofty planets.

PERPETUAL PEACE

The state of perpetual peace prohibits acts of warfare, the possession of military technology, and the raising even standing armies: the exception being the Imperium's own monopoly of force. Prior to the consolidation of the *Pax Aeterna*, the eight nations sustained a nearly constant state of political aggression: airships flew across the bramblewoods, threatening from the skies with aerial bombardments; many still remember the devastations of the Great War of Vendémiaire and his *Grande Armée*.

The *Pax Aeterna* turns the issue of international security away from the friction between antagonistic nations, towards continental peace enshrined in civil society; this transforms the paradigm of peace-keeping from the exploitation of force to engendering a civil cultural accord. The

Pax serves as a regulatory framework, over all such destructive engines: military airships have been confiscated and refitted to serve in the Imperial Armada, and the *Grande Armée* reprogrammed to serve as the sentinel force of the Imperium.

SUPERMAN

Perhaps the most obscure aspect of Münchhausen's manifesto is the concept of the Superman; an eschatology vision the Invictus presages for humanity, and affirmed as prophecy by the Oracle. In the future, the biological, social, and political evolution of humanity will result in one of two states: the Superman, or the Last Human. The Superman is an idealised higher being, a supreme achievement of humanity, beyond human nature, as it now understands itself. In this, the Invictus claims that the Superman is what he aspires for the aristocracy to become, in its manner and nature.

The alternative is the antithesis of the Last Human. This is a warning of narrative tension succumbing to nihilism and banality, reducing any and all social conflict, political exploitation, and endemic drama. In this ending, humanity dissolves distinction between ruler and ruled, between villain and hero, between savagery and civility. Humanity comes to comprise apathetic creatures, filled with lacklustre passion, unable to dream, and with imaginations too barren to enable the nobility. These miserable creatures devolve into bland routine: tired of life, taking no risks, and barely motivated to seek the merest comfort and security.

The Superman is not of the Invictus' conception, but an idea imparted unto me in a vision upon the eve of the 20th Century: the Author was dead; history no longer driven by its design. There now exists a real chance of nihilism, the end of history itself. In this moral vacuum will come the Superman, as solution to the death of both Author and nihilism; this imagined Superman will act to create new values, with no moral position beyond justification.

from The Death of the Author by Zarathustra

Government

The government of the Imperium is a complicated affair, as it encompasses hundreds of millions of subjects, many of whom abide in remote and isolated pockets. Three bodies of governance share the power of the empire: the Coronal, being the ruling authority of the empire; the Diet, being the parliament of the empire; and the Chancery, being the ministry of noble agents, sworn in service to the Imperium to oversee the Imperial Orders.

The Invictus and the Oracle are the two most puissant figures in the Realm; the temporal ruler of the Tellurium, and the chimerical ruler of the Delirium. The Invictus is the speaker and agent for the Realm, while the Oracle is the speaker and agent for its history. Accordingly, they have authority over both the Senate and Auspice respectively, and in many respects are considered to be their natural figureheads, rational and mythic respectively.

CORONAL

The Coronal is the sovereign power of the Imperium, invested in a collective of thirteen supremely powerful and nigh-immortal nobles known as the Arcana, of which the Invictus is but one. The sovereignty of the Coronal devolves from the Prime Mobile, upon which the Invictus presides. However, they likewise derive much of their authority from their status as *zeitgeists*, as archetypes of the current times. Each encapsulates the cultural, intellectual, ethical, and political climate of the Imperium; in embodying its virtues, they become its propagators.

Each Arcanum fills a deep archetypal need in the collective psyche of humanity, and ascension into archetypal state is a rare event. For among all of the nobility, only one can emulate a given archetype sufficiently to embody it. By the reckoning of the Mousaion, there exist no more than twenty-two such ideals, and no known individual has embodied one for more than a single era.

Though none are born of the same parentage, they are all invisibly united by chimerical ties. In this manner, they are not a family in the conventional sense, for they are not bound by blood, but

While the Invictus holds court in the politics of the mundane, concurrent with all the imperial territories, the Oracle abides in lucid dreaming trance, connected to the unconsciousness of all the empire's subjects. Their careful cultivation perpetuates the myth of empire to the masses, across vast distances and despite isolation. For all their similarities, however, significant differences remain; particularly, that the Invictus is an ideal, enduring over the millennia despite emperors having come and gone, but there has always been a continuous lineage of Oracles, since the very founding of the Calendar.

from The Speeches of Zarathustra by Zarathustra

are instead rendered as family through affinity of purpose and dreams. Their interactions through their mythic natures create a kindred bond, an allegiance to the interests of Imperium that is deeper than ties of blood. They share one primary purpose: the realisation of Manifest Destiny.

ARCANA

The Arcana are the Realm's most famous and beloved personages; their lives are its premium drama, forming a supreme curiosity akin to an intricate tapestry hanging in the background of everyday events. Throughout their reign, the populace has avidly followed their political dramas, their scandals, and varied intrigues; many bear supreme knowledge of their consorts, their spouses, and other affairs.

As archetypes, they are subject to popular imagination, for the attainment of archetypal status requires a careful cultivation of celebrity. The current Arcana are not the first persons to become imbued as archetypes. Nearly all the current Arcana were once held by other personages from times before, some holding even greater fame than the current incumbents. Each changes according to its own particular manner, though few survive the cultural changes from one century to the next.

This phenomenon is observed closely by the clergy, who have long cultivated their arts of propaganda. However, the clergy no longer stands alone in its study of such dynamics. As the social sciences have taken shape, they have applied empirical methods to its study. Yet, even now, the scientific inquiry into the nature of celebrity and of nobility has revealed more questions than it has answered.

from Immortal by Matilda Mulfstan

In the dawn of the new Century, the Arcana must prepare for the expansion of their number by nearly two-fold. The portents of the future herald the emergence of many new roles: their forerunner is the Reaper, and then followed in order by the Virgin, the Adversary, the Anarch, the Star, the Dreamer, the Cynosure, the Harbinger, and finally the Vale.

from The Death of the Author by Zarathustra

The Arcana, as archetypes, are nigh-immortal beings: they are invulnerable to damage, possessed of great longevity, and have supremacy of purpose. For as long as they embody their archetype they retain this state; however, their ascended nature is subject to public credulity as vested in the collective unconscious of the populace. Each century, archetypes tend to change along with attitudes regarding those archetypes, and few personages can adequately adapt to such social evolution.

Through the Arcana, the Coronal has come to represent the symbol of human triumph, the monument of its destiny, and a testament to its continuity. In a world of fluctuating fictions, the Coronal endures, for each Arcanum exists as a legend fixed in the unconscious imaginings of the masses. In this, they are more fiction than flesh, for they are fictions that endure.

DIET

The Imperial Diet, or *Reichstag*, is a parliament membered by the ruling councils of the Peerage and the Mousaion, the Senate and the Auspice respectively. Its function and role has changed with the demands of the empire. By practice, the Diet becomes a forum for its participants to confer and deliberate on imperial policy and practice, and otherwise give council to the Coronal. It otherwise provides a space for the dispute resolution between represented parties.

The Diet provides for the combined interests of the most senior lords and ladies of the Realm. Each member is regarded as a Prince of the Realm. A representative of the Imperium presides over the Diet when in session, which is most frequently the Sphinx as Speaker for the Coronal. The Dukes sit upon the Speaker's right and the Augurs sit upon the Speaker's left. This reflects the Peerage and the Mousaion cast in their reflected natures, for theirs is a division of temporal and chimerical power respectively; they represent traditional masculine and feminine ideals. Whether they are Duke or Sibyl determines terms of address as either *most serene liege* or *most eminence grace*; though more colloquially, they are named the lords temporal and ladies chimerical.

Historically, and by tradition, the proper roles for both lords and graces were one of active and passive agents of destiny respectively; the lords act upon prophecy while the graces interpret. The Peerage concerned themselves with matters of state and territory, while the Mousaion consigned themselves to chimerical matters of dream and culture. Both are concerned with the proper performance of the skein, with the Peerage overseeing the workings of narrative across space and the Mousaion regarding its workings across time.

However, one of the first reforms brought about by the Imperium was the implementation of suffrage for women of noble birth. This was a core contention that almost undermined the unification of the Peerage and the Mousaion under imperial order, for the Senate was loathe in bequeathing the franchise to women, as the Senate regarded women as lacking sufficient purview over temporal matters, just as they would have needed to refrain from engaging in chimerical matters.

There are six-and-thirty seats within the Diet, and each is reserved for members of the aristocracy that have earned their seventh name. Yet between that number of seats, there are only twelve formal formal votes: each is signified by the possession of one of twelve seals of orichalcum, known as the Golden Lions. The twelve that hold these seals are the most eminent nobles of each of the twelve dynastic clans, and to them is given the exemplary title of Elector-Prince. The Electors-Prince are those most exemplar of their progenitors' ideal, for such practices ensure only the most capable, canny, and influential of all the aristocracy sit before the Coronal; a necessity to properly meet the supreme will and intellect of the Arcana.

SENATE

The Senate serves as the guardian of the mundane world, and it principally concerns itself with the governance of all those territories under the Imperium. Within their purview is the regulation of international standards, the resolution of territorial disputes, and the stability and security of the borders within and without the empire. Such affairs require frequent considerations of the details of trade and tariff, taxation, and empire-wide economic and military ventures.

The Senate will also consider issues from beyond the borders of the empire, including its relations with the Hinterlands of faerie, the Labyrinth of takwin, and any colonies of humankind. It also boasts command over many of the most significant material resources of the empire, and may consign vast wealth to the commission of significant works.

AUSPICE

The mysteries of dream and prophecy are the priority of the Auspice. Their augurs search for crucial moments in history, so as to place their agents that they might influence its outcome in a way considered most favourable. Combined, they tend to the dreamscape of the masses, and assume a role over the propagation of the media, news, and cultural exports of the empire.

The Auspice also oversees the needs of the masses, and serves as the ecumenical council of the Mousaion. Through their many ministries, they claim the responsibility to learn and hear the needs of the many. In this, they augment their prescience with vast networks of informants and agents, and stand at the centre of a vastly extensive and highly trained intelligence network.

ASSEMBLY

Each of the eight nations possesses its own governing body, with their own unique flavour, history, and rule. Matters that are not directly of imperial concern, but of import to one or more nation, falls under the purview of the Assemblies.

The various methods of selecting their memberships are singular to each nation, though there are some similarities as elections prove most popular. Unlike the Diet, one need not be liege or grace, but merely a noble in good standing and native of that nation.

Though each Assembly stations in the capitals of their country, they also each possess a chamber within Metropolaris; they are styled and furnished in the fashion of that nation. On occasion, there is a need for one or more to come together. The combination of multiple Assemblies

The Peerage frequently regards traditional gender roles as reflecting the balance between Rhyme and Reason: the administration of land and resources requires rational and methodical thought, while the governance of the irrational masses being nebulous, more art than science. For these reasons, past assumptions developed contentions that the masculine mind is more readily suited to the management of estates, and the feminine mind has best purpose in governing the *demos*.

The Mousaion remains resilient in the face of the gentry. These members of the old guard still yearn for the days of before, when they could command the allegiance of the common folk in their own right. Yet, now they must attend to the requirements of the Great Compromise. How terribly these members of the Peerage contend with the new world order, and who see naught but unreasonableness and irrationality of the *demos*. It falls to the Mousaion to turn this madness into a political cogency.

The rise of the Auspice to the Imperial House of Parliament came through the dramatic underestimation by the Senate of the power of populism, and the demagogic power wielded by the graces of the clergy. My mother ushered in sweeping reforms for women's suffrage, which have now consolidated our universal political agency in the halls of temporal power. Yes, in that concession we have too admitted certain men into the folds of the cloth of the Mousaion.

from Écriture Féminine by Matilda Mulfstan

The Diet originally served as a convention of the Electors of the Edessan Regency, but lacked rules on time or place of meeting. The edict of the Golden Lion formalised its business: whereupon the twelve seals of orichalcum were cast, one apiece for each of the twelve clans and thus bore their sigil, then to be granted to them each in turn.

For near two centuries, the Diet observed neither ceremony nor convention, but began the steady accumulation of customs that come with the frequency of assemblage. With the Eclipse, those customs produced the formal conventions observed today: in recognising the supreme authority of the Invictus remains supreme, they acquired a concession to be able to elect his successor. This sole power vests the Diet with a largess of great influence and power.

from The Sylvan Testament by Friedreich Münchhausen

in this manner is an event known as a Congress and the combination of all eight Assemblies is a Great Congress; they happen perhaps but a few times in a century.

HEAD OF STATE

Each head of state fulfils a function that legitimises their state as a political entity. They are the *de facto* leaders of their nations, despite vesting formal and absolute sovereign power in the Imperium. Theirs is the exercise of political power through the functions and duties granted to them by their countries' polities.

The populace of each nation requires their leader to embody and make manifest their national values, thereby representing them to the Realm at large. Accordingly, a most important role for the modern head of state is their status as a living national symbol of their nation, inasmuch as the Arcana of the Imperium embody universal ideals. They are the personification of that state; personal symbol of allegiance, unity, and authority for all its subjects.

In many domains, officials place their portraits in public buildings, emphasising the connection between those spaces and that nation's leader. In some, this goes to excess: the celebrity of the head of state evolves into a cult of personality, their person rendered as interchangeable with other national symbols.

Nevertheless, while each nation elects or appoints their heads of state according to their own lights, the instatement into that office is dependent upon the affirmation of the imperial viceroy. Collectively, the heads of state represent a nationalist union, entirely bent towards the autonomy of their nation. Their public personae frequently framed in populist imaginings as revolutionary. As a whole, their union is the League of Nations.

Each nation holds its own political Assembly in the shadow of Palladium, and enjoys the autonomy of government. Likewise, each nation offers to the Imperium their head of state, who is the representative of their people. Regard them as distinct from the viceroyal governors appointed by Münchhausen, as they represent the imperial interests in those nations; removed from domestic affairs, but retaining reserve executive powers. Mostly, the duties of the viceroy are perfunctory, but the Imperium retains the right to ratify their heads of state, whether elected or appointed.

from The Birth of Nations
by Valetoria Regina

Chancery

The Chancery and its bureaucracy rarely endure to public scrutiny, which is exactly as the Imperium desires. The public face and principle agents of the Chancery are those nobles of the bourgeoisie, who have sworn allegiance to the Coronal directly through one of the Imperial Orders. Each assumes membership within these votive orders, there to discharge a mission of military, scholastic, or mercantile virtue, as prescribed to them by their charter. It is the members of those orders that the populace contemplates when they even recall the Chancery.

The role of the Chancery is to serve the Imperium directly: to ensure that the empire has finances, adjudication, and protection by virtue of its public offices. Its bureaucratic office comprises a multitude of public servants, who work tirelessly on managing and implementing the policies of the Imperium and administrating the work of the various Imperial Orders.

Its many ministries of the Chancery oversee the empire's public programs, translating imperial politics into mundane functions. The Coronal gives authority to these ministries the task of interpreting the will of the Coronal with verisimilitude. Each ministry is named a Collegium, having their own distinct purview. A number of magistrates oversee each Collegium, governed apiece by a noble deemed superlatively rational in accordance with Absolute Enlightenment. Each collective of magistrates then falls under the authority of a single minister, who has been chosen directly by the Invictus; with all the other magistrates vetted instead by the Chancellor.

COLLEGIUM OF THE EMISSARY

Across the vast empire exists a network of officials comprising the imperial diplomatic corps. They are distinct from the singular agencies run by each nation, which cannot compare in resources

and competency. The Emissary provides support for those members of the Luminary, particularly as they act as the heralds of the empire, speaking and acting, on the Coronal's behalf; all their activities having been structured by strict decorum. Naturally, the Collegium only consigns the tasks of emissary to those beyond reproach, both in manner and accordance. Though many also muse that there is a dark and shadowy work performed, gathering intelligence for the Chancery.

COLLEGIUM OF THE STRATEGY

With the proscription of military technology from all but imperial agents, this Collegium has the task of confiscating illicit weaponry and returning it to the imperial arsenal; otherwise they provide support for the activities of the Clavigry. Yet despite its name, the Collegium is not replete with tactical geniuses, a task which the Collegium reserves for the officers of the relevant orders. Instead, it comprises among its number a cohort of those adept with high technology. They build and maintain the most obscure types of alchemical and technological engines, which include the imperial armada and the automaton army; both serving as the standing forces of the empire.

COLLEGIUM OF THE TREASURY

Since the advent of the gold standard of the Imperium, there has been a need for a central authority to regulate the quality, quantity, and dispersion of the empire's currency. Typically, the best, the brightest, and the elite of alchemists and mundane chemists from across the Realm are in this Collegium. For the Chancellor cares naught for anything but talent. It matters not to him their station, be they noble or commoner, he will readily co-opt the cleverest of truepennies and counterfeiters. Beyond financial regulation, the treasury has the enviable task of gathering, collecting, and sequestering various objects of alchemical design, of mythic import; all to be stored in the elusive vault, known only as the Reliquary.

Etheric Investigations by Dmitry Burmak.

POLITY

Imperial polity denotes two orders of mandate: the sovereign and infallible mandate, being direct decree of the Imperium; and the fallible imprimatur, being the interpretations of its ministers. There are then several subtle distinctions regarding both written and vocal polity that emerges from the sovereign mandate. From this stratum of truth and meaning is expressed the imperial polity itself and the administration of law.

The first are those decrees given *ex cathedra*, from the Invictus' own mouth while upon the Prime Mobile, and these have the highest status of infallibility. There can be no meaningful misinterpretation of his words, for they are consigned truth surfeit with destiny itself. Those of second import are those spoken solemnly or written as a signed statement by any member of the Coronal. They are, for all intents and purposes, assumed infallible and only surpassed by those statements given *ex cathedra*. Beneath these two are the statements, interpretations, and musings of the ministers of the Chancery, which are authoritative but not infallible.

INTERPRETATIONS

The onus of infallibility does not fall upon the Invictus but the administration itself; infallible statements must not be misunderstood or misinterpreted. The clandestine history of the Chancery has thus been afflicted with quiet schisms, all shaded by subtleties dependent upon this fact. Those who are friends with a minister or magistrate will observe their highly-strung natures, a consequence of courting such a labyrinthine discourse of secrets.

Observers of this polity have often ascribed conspiracy and plot to their inner workings, but there are many layers of secrecy and intrigue revealed only to the initiated. The ministers are custodians and captors of the truth; this is their sacred charge. Yet rumours abound of a secret ministry, whose work intends to ensure the absolute authenticity of the imperial polity, to quash all dissent to that writ, and generally ensure that the truth will out.

Those who delve more deeply will perhaps deduce the faintest hints that this truthful ministry is itself a consequence of the Verboten Schism or Verbatim Schism; the choice of name being dependent upon whom one asks. This conflict underscores a difference in purpose: one side considers the Bureaucracy best placed to determine the imperial agenda as those truths deemed best for propagation and enumeration and which words the Invictus should speak; the other side affirm their status as servants of the First Statesman, and thus ill-suited to gainsay his infallibility.

Etheric Investigations by Dmitry Burmak.

Vagabond

The Vagabond Arcanum is an instigator of change, acting as an eternal outsider. They are both wanderer and alien, unable to conform to the typical norms of society. Yet from their vantage point, they see the foibles of society even more plainly.

The Vagabond casts judgment upon society and speaks harrowing words of prophecy: some consider the Vagabond a vessel of caprice, a mad man, and slave to delusion; others consider the Vagabond driven to the brink with prophetic insights of the end times. None truly understands the way the role transitions, for the Vagabond is by definition inscrutable.

The Vagabond is entitled to a place among the Coronal, but his relationship with them is ambiguous. Rarely in residence, never taking up his station, but he retains the favour of the Invictus.

The current Vagabond is Zarathustra: born in 1844 and adopted by the Luminary. In youth, Zarathustra demonstrated a remarkable facility for music, scholarship, and language: by 1862, he attained widespread notoriety, and tenure as one of the youngest classical scholars in the Luminary, through an essay on the direction of human destiny, and attempted to discredit the doctrine of Manifest Destiny.

Nearly two decades later, Zarathustra had produced an impressive body of work, though his writings had turned nihilistic; partly through increasing propensity to bouts of malady and ill temper, and illnesses that had plagued him since childhood. His works were poorly received, for few enjoyed his deconstruction of human morality, rendering the conflict of good and evil as historical constructions of self-serving natures. He declared the necessity of humanity divesting traditional morals, to embrace personal empowerment and conviction: the will to power of personal ambition, rather than the mandates of destiny.

In growing isolation, he took to the road in 1888. While travelling, he prophesied of the impending Century: of the death of the Author, and the diminishment of the skein. His prophecy foreshadows the twilight of the Imperium, an end-time, during which the Arcana would fall to idleness: the *Götzerdämmerung*.

In so doing, he denounced the common conception of the human condition as nothing more than social convention, rather than truly grounded in ideals of the natural human. It was the impact of this controversy that gave Zarathustra the controversy that elevated him to archetypal status.

The Vagabond by Krista Brennan.

Magician

The Magician Arcanum is the conduit for power and command over the material substrate of the world. They are driven to transform and transfigure, acting as a mythic catalyst for the age.

Unique to the role of the Magician is the nature of its transference through apprenticeship, where the incumbent groom a select few for the role, and passing it on when the time is right. The first contemporary Magician was Prospero, born 1527, of the court of Gloriana, and who read the Orrery's movements and was exemplar of high knowledge and language. His apprentice was von Goetia, born 1749, who in turn forsook natural ideas of the mind and turned to the power of basest ambitions. Nikolai Techna succeeded him in turn, in demonstrating consummate command over the emerging power of electricity and the electrical revolution.

Today, Techna is renowned for his ability to harness electricity in all its forms, and seems to wield it directly through his own body as if it were an extension of his own will. He has become the living embodiment of the dynamo and its incredible potency.

Techna was the fourth of five children, and his father was a Lumine from the Hellenic peninsula. By dint of his father's influence, he enjoyed a comprehensive technical education through the Founders. A life of certainty upended in 1878 when he very nearly drowned, for the man thereafter was touched by strange technological insights, an eidetic memory, and a synesthetic sensibility; these enabled him to visualise abstractions with precision. Severing contact with family and friends, he relocated to Metropolaris to complete his education, where his enervated state induced a nervous breakdown; it affects him still.

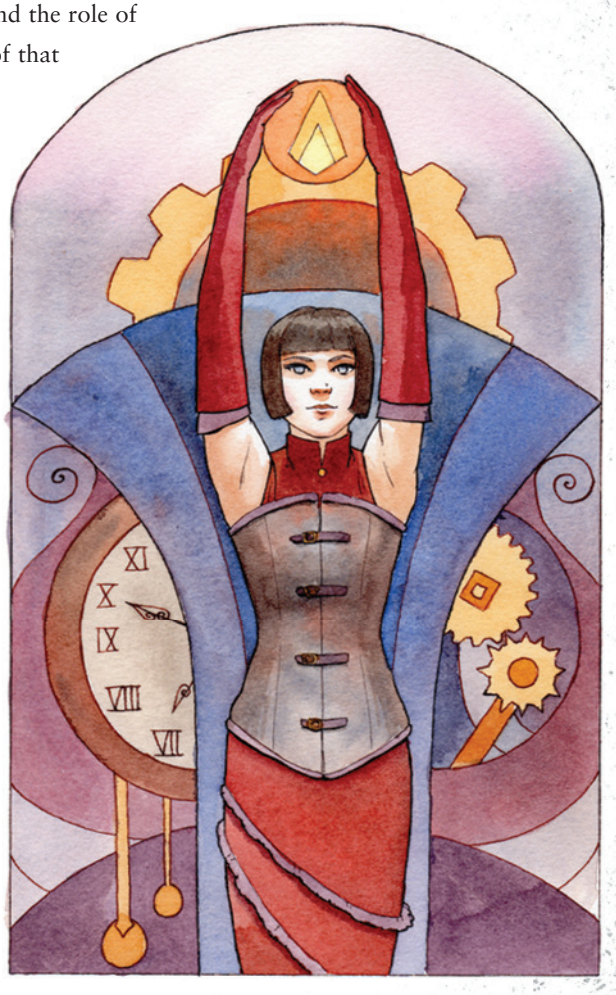
Upon the close of 1882 and the completion of his degree, Techna started crafting numerous devices of magnetic and fulmonric capacity. He worked alongside Alvason, a master of the Founders under the tutelage of Goetia. Both he and Alvason stood on the brink of the invention of new electrical networking and stood ready to capture the *zeitgeist* of the electrodyne. The War of the Currents began in hopes of aspiring to the Arcanum: Alvason, native to Albion, named the Wizard of the Coast, pitted against Techna of Hellena, as the Wizard of the East. Techna's innovations proved superior by their sophistication, whereas Alvason depended on brute-force. Ascending as the Magician in the final years of the 19th Century, Techna has since used his role as the Magician to pioneer radio control for the teleoperation of automata.

The Magician by Krista Brennan.

Oracle

The Oracle Arcanum is centre of the tapestry of story threads that permeates the dreaming realms of the Delirium. Through this role, the Oracle bears the most profound connection with the skein, making her the traditional chimerical head of the Mousaion. Through their lineage, the Oracle holds the memories of all those who preceded her.

Hers is one of the few Arcana known since antiquity. The most famous incarnation was Matriarch Joan, a Flamine who had assumed the Vulgate Cathedra around 850. The incumbency of the Oracle changes when an historical event cleaves the skein, and two potential futures exist: both the future and that role remain unchanged, or destiny has changed and the role of the Oracle transfers upon she who is best suited to embody the promise of that future.



The current Oracle is a woman named Matilda Wulfstan, who is unique in the fact that her biological mother was the former Oracle. Her mother Maria, granted the affectionate name of the Primadonna, was legendary in her own right as an early proponent of first-wave feminism. Maria commented at length on traditional gender roles, leading to her ascension to the archetype of Oracle when her critique helped trigger a fork on women's rights; it was a time when she formed relations with the 19th Century Vagabond, William Goodwynne.

Her daughter assumed the role of the Oracle nearly than half a decade later, after having forged a relationship with the eminent alchemist Viktor Franklin who was made famous by his lightning-kite experiment. When Franklin died several years later, she inherited his treatises and notes and began her own experiments with flesh and revivification: her experiments are crucial to the widespread use of simulacra.

In her studies, Matilda developed a close relationship with the poet, lyricist, and historian Marmion Herbet; though never married, they had many children. Venturing to the warmer climes of the Italic peninsula, to attend the Oracular Sede, she stayed in Veneto for a number of years. These years were dire, for her children caught ague and died across successive years.

In remorse, she bent herself to her studies once more and in 1819, she updated her treatise on electrochemical process. Legend persists that she revived son, which she renamed Adam; these acts give her the nickname of Belladonna: where Maria was 'the Mother of Feminism', Matilda is 'the Mother of Monsters'; she is become the embodiment of womanhood and the mystery of life, death, and rebirth all in one.

The Oracle by Krista Brennan

Dynast

The Dynast Arcanum is also 'the Mother of Nations'; the role falls upon a queen whose reign is said to define and defy nationhood. She is a force of cultural unity, rising above the traditional divisions of nations and their politics, and is the embodiment of Eutopia.

The Dynast has only emerged into the public eye within the last few centuries, as the ideal of nationhood has grown more prominent. The first widely known Dynast was the Faerie Queen Gloriana of the 16th Century. Kristina of the Thanelands followed her in the 17th Century. The immediately prior incumbent of the 18th Century was Sophia the Great, Queen of Rodin. The current Dynast is Valetoria, born 1819; her popularity grew greatly as Thespian consolidated as the favoured language of the Realm. Her many children have been married to various powers of great station. Valetoria was elevated to Dynast upon the jubilee of her reign.

Valetoria's childhood was melancholy, with a protective mother and an isolated upbringing. By sixteen, she received a parade of suitors; though eventually she would fall to the suit of Münchhausen, the favoured Elector-Prince of Metropolaris.

Upon the death of her uncle in 1837, Valetoria was elevated to the viceroyalty of Albion. Two years thereafter, she married Münchhausen and combined the powers of Edessa and Albion, and helped cement his political ascension. Valetoria's personal influence soon came to compete with Münchhausen's; even as many of her viceroyal duties were symbolic, she held significant influence over policy and ministerial appointments. The construction of the imperial city of Diadem coincided with her diamond Jubilee, understood as a demonstration of Münchhausen's favour.

In 1861, Valetoria's mother died and, being deeply affected by grief, she entered into mourning. She has frequently worn black ever since and become synonymous with strict standards of personal probity; she has become known by her detractors as 'The Black Mother'.

The Dynast by Krista Brennan.

Invictus

The Invictus Arcanum is the embodiment of sovereignty, of supreme will and authority. The Invictus is a twin incarnation, whose other face is the Augustus: the Invictus is sovereignty through might and the Augustus is sovereignty through wisdom. Though both may be incarnate at the same time, their double presence often causes great political strife across the Realm.

The investment of a noble with either Invictus or Augustus occurs through an act known as the divestiture. Great thrones, such as the Prime Mobile, may provide the incumbent with the title by dint of their public esteem. The current Invictus is the ever-loved Friedreich Münchhausen, born 1712. He replaced the former Invictus of Vendémiaire, after defeating him in the Great War.

Münchhausen grew in the shadow of his father, who was a brilliant military tactician, fanciful storyteller, and patriarch of the now notorious House Münchhausen, and renowned for spinning ludicrous tall tales.

Münchhausen's tutelage began under the Athenaeum, as his mentor delivered to him a secret cache of nearly three-thousand volumes of poetry and philosophy. It continued through an adolescent period of political exile, the result of political embarrassment upon his tour; here in exile Münchhausen developed his ideals of Absolute Enlightenment.

These halcyon days ended with the death of his father, when the court of his father recalled him to assume the role of Elector-Prince. As Elector-Prince, he made a concerted effort to unify Edessa, overcoming a profound dualism of the north and south and its attendant endogenous conflict. This unification modernised the Edessan state and seeded the design of Metropolaris. In this crucible, Münchhausen tempered his political tactics, and formed a coalition of disparate powers, proving himself Vendémiaire's only contemporary, whom he eventually surpassed. His political doctrine and philosophical aspirations culminated in his claim upon the Prime Mobile, and his declaration as a true philosopher-king of Sylvan lineage.

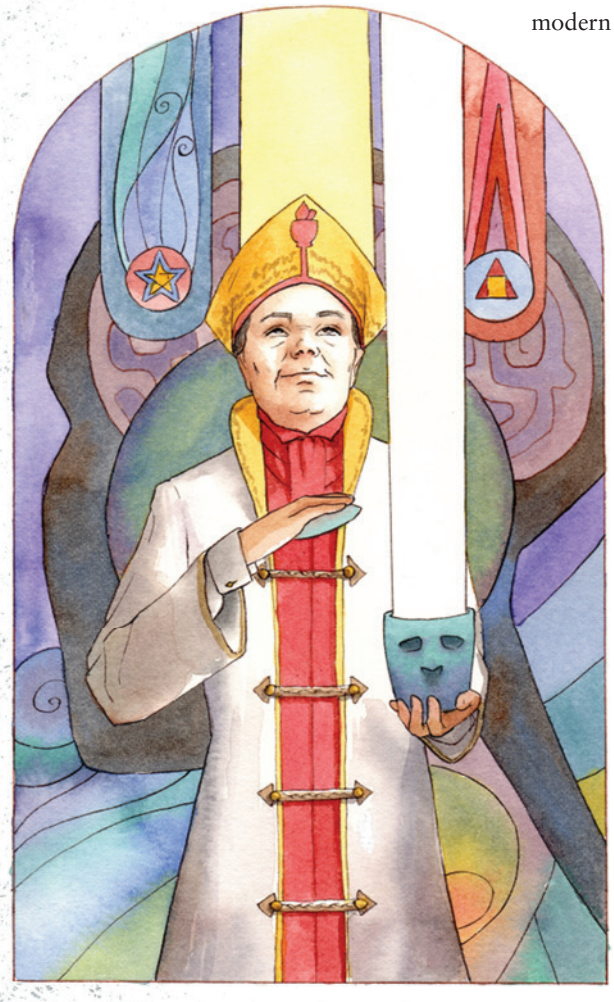
There is a legend, born of the vision of Diadem, which claims that as long as Diadem is in the heavens, the Invictus and the Imperium will endure; for the smallfolk, it is a sign of that promise and a constant reminder of the Imperium's presence and foresight. Many of the commoners have come to give the Invictus the prefix of Sol, glorifying his status as the unconquered embodiment of solar Reason. Less mythically minded people quickly assert that the vitality of this myth is symbolic of the power contained in the Imperial Palace instead.

The Invictus by Krista Brennan.

Pontifex

There have been few Pontifeces throughout history and all of them are incredibly long-lived even for Arcana. The Pontifex is like the other Arcana, in that they preside over a particular span of history; the Pontifex typically presides over a particular epoch and comes to symbolise the most profound and enduring tenets of those ages.

When one epoch ends, the incumbent falls and a new Pontifex rises to document the passing of that epoch. The current Pontifex is Count August, born in 1798: his works helped found the Cult of Reason and the Enlightenment; many regard him as the first true philosopher of modern science.



Little knowledge remains of August's childhood, though he first achieved renown as a Gallic scholar in Paris where he developed and promulgated ardent republican and progressive ideals. His works created a rift between his adopted Synopticism and his devoutly Catholic family. His family often stymied his liberties and academic expression until he left them in 1817, after coming in contact with the intellectual elite of Paris.

For a while, it seemed his life was destined for ignominy: he spent many years of seeking public acclaim, frustrated by his unhappy marriage and a mental breakdown in 1826. He recovered slowly, following an attempted suicide and the divorce of his wife; hereupon he embarked upon one of the longest recorded tours in history. When the trip culminated in 1842, he experienced a most extraordinary Epiphany, dining on the repast of elusive dreamscape fruits. Of six in number, each opened his mind to strange insights, and from each developing a treatise of the six volumes of *The Cours*.

His treatises made him famous and his philosophies of positivism and humanism that elevated him to the status of Pontifex; his vision of the emerging human society later proved fundamental to Manifest Destiny. He had postulated an apogee of human enterprise, founded upon the three pillars of reason, order, and progress.

His influence has even shaped the Calendar. Many of his contributions to humanising the Calendar have reformed it into the style known today; particularly the system of decimal weeks, whose triplication was intended to refer to the three pillars themselves.

The Pontifex by Krista Brennan.

Sybarite

The Sybarite is something of an unusual archetype, being the embodiment of decadence and debauchery. The Sybarite is a rebellious Arcanum whose role is to subvert decorum while proudly wearing scandal upon his sleeve. The Sybarite is more than a rake, but is rather an *avant-garde* man of adventure and passion: a magnificent bastard who holds a mirror up to our foibles in his actions.

The mantle of the Sybarite passes during a passionate embrace between the incumbent and their male lover: typically a youth who learns from their master and eventually outperforms them in their own game. The role was first immortalised by Don Juan, whose mantle was seduced away by Casanova, and now to Harold Childe where it resides.

The eminent Harold Childe was born in 1788: he is reputed to be mad, bad, and dangerous to know. Though his lyrics and antics he affirmed his status as a poet dilettante and set the modern tenor for the moods of romance and tragedy. He was the son of the notorious captain Mad Jack, and his early life was a mixture of sweet affection and play; though much beloved, he was prone to silent rages, moody sullenness, and vengeful disposition.

By adolescence he bore a melancholy candour, brought about by a congenital defect of his foot; while the defect was inconspicuous, it caused Childe no end of pain and self-conscious misery. When he attained sexuality maturity, his keen intellect drove him to limits of pleasure and pain: the boy was precocious and he readily explored his tastes throughout his tour across three phenomenal years beginning in 1809. He spent far more time in the Hinterlands than was considered socially acceptable, and upon his return, he left a trail of broken hearts, scandals, and ruinous affairs in his wake.

However, his greatest transformation came during a pilgrimage between 1812 and 1818: his journals describe a young man disillusioned with naught but revelry, and one seeking distraction in foreign climes. Here he encountered the wayward Casanova; the events of these journals focus on the remarkable events surrounding himself and Matilda Wulfstan in the Year Without Summer. In his own words, he awoke one morning to discover himself famous through the popularity of his memoires. Childe used this platform to attain political prominence and seduced the role of the Sybarite; he has advocated for reform and played a crucial role in the liberation of Hellena, and recently became the Hellenic viceroy.

The Sybarite by Krista Brennan.

Centurion

The Centurion is a role of domination and martial prowess: an icon of supremacy, where technology forges and remakes humankind. They embody the synthesis of machinery and person, standing at the helm of the application of technology and science to improve the human condition.

The Centurion is never invested or chosen, but is instead made. There have been three Centurions in history, and each has been the first significant human forged with the next generation of prosthetic simulacra. There are few records of the first Centurion, recalled as the Vitruvian Woman. The current Centurion is Auto Eisenmark who has also become the Chancellor of the imperial bureaucracy. He attained this role by virtue of his crucial tasks of bringing the orders under imperial charter with the ascension of the Invictus.

Eisenmark was born in 1815 to great wealth: he enjoyed extensive education, proved gifted in conversation, and fluent in all major languages. However, it was not until his early thirties that his greatness emerged. He entered into Edessan politics, becoming central to the Edessan question of stewardship. The stewardship of the Prime Mobile was a bitter political rift between the *Österreich* of southern Edessa, and the *Gythone* of northern Edessa. Eisenmark, being devoutly Catholic but a native to the Syncretic *Gythone*, found his principles and loyalties much tested.

He enjoyed closed relations to Münchhausen, and helped prosecute his claim to the Prime Mobile. When the populist movements of 1848 occurred, Eisenmark instigated the Camarilla, being a secretive political oligarchy determined to unify all of Edessa under a single power; through it he instated Münchhausen as regent.

Upon diplomatic mission to Rodin, Eisenmark underwent his great transformation: a faulty medical treatment required the replacement of several key internal organs with prosthetic simulacra. Thereafter, he was renamed 'The Iron Man'.

With renewed vigour, he began a stern crusade with the varied political powers of the Realm and forged alliances in the aftermath of the Great War. In 1862, he attained the status of Minister-President of the joint Diet, between *Gythone* and *Österreich*. All of these experiences, his political connections and his taciturn resolve, left him ideally placed to achieve a singular reputation for indomitable principle and powerful realpolitik: one tempered only by the doctrine of Absolute Enlightenment.

The Centurion by Krista Brennan.

Sphinx

The Sphinx is vox populari, being a voice of the masses. The Sphinx is effectively a speaker for the people and a representative of their issues. The role is intrinsically populist; it depends entirely on the manner in which the populace regard them: the first Sphinxes would change with great frequency being the elected Tribunes of the Roman Empire. In modern times though, the Sphinx may only ascend into the role through an act of acclamation, where a gathered host sufficiently representative of the masses expresses verbal approval and benediction of the supplicant to the role.

As the current Sphinx is also the Speaker in the Diet, and thus represents the Coronal itself, he walks a wary line; in his nature, he bears the sentiment of the people while also standing among the Coronal powers of the Imperium. He does so by revitalising the ancient role of the Tribune in presiding over the Diet, where he speaks on behalf of the people before the assembled aristocracy.

Few gainsay the wisdom of Vivian Grey: he is the epitome of diplomacy, and also allegedly stands at the centre of the Imperium's intelligence network. Grey is unique among the Arcana: born human, turned changeling, and then transfigured human once more by his ascension. Much of his popularity depends on the proliferation of radio, through which he communes daily with the entire populace. Many know him for his charismatic affectations and his warm salutation of a morning across the ether. After which, he proceeds to outline the daily news and points of interest.

Born in 1804, Grey's childhood and adolescence were unremarkable. His father was a Justicar and it was certain he should follow in kind. Then throughout the 1820s, he fell to ruin and disaster through failed investments, publications, and affairs, all culminating with his transformation into a changeling Sith.

He salvaged his reputation only through marriage to a wealthy dowager, which marked a turning point. By the 1840s, he had achieved great notoriety by advancing novel politics, seeking diverse political reforms affecting class, clan, and creed alike. He consolidated his position in 1847 during a political crisis of the Diet, where he responded to a proposal advanced, which would deny mummers' participation in government.

In rare fervour, Grey argued sternly in favour of inclusion, noting that mummers were reflections of humanity, not abstractions. His argument swayed the parliament in his favour by a slim majority and consolidated his status in the minds of the populace as the great reformer, and thus his ascension. Grey continues a distinguished political life, central to the negotiations between nations.

The Sphinx by Krista Brennan.

Hesychast

The Hesychast is a reclusive Arcanum who often stands far removed from the halls of the power of the Coronal. They are the essential cosmopolitan, being a citizen of all places and no place at once. In essence, the Hesychast is an eccentric, finding unconventional wisdom and often seeking answers in hidden places. They are usually ascetic in nature and make a virtue of poverty; they frequently perform charitable and good works.

It is unknown by what process the Hesychast is empowered and historically the incumbent and aspirant never meet; yet all Hesychasts have carried a lamp that bears a single flame that does not expire. The first Hesychast was Diogenes of antiquity, who ascended in his search for the one honest man or woman. Cassandra Shore is the first known woman to be the Hesychast and holds distinction as the oldest of all the Coronal powers; she is the Lady of the Lamp.

The Hesychast by Krista Brennan.

Shore was a scholar born in the year 1711. She was the second daughter of William Shore and received a laudable education from their parents alongside her sister. During Shore's Epiphany in 1837 she described witnessing a strange prophetic vision, of which she speaks rarely, but which prompted her calling to the service of others.

Originally, she took a position as a grace in the Mousaion but later rescinded this role and rejected a respectable marriage to join the Hospitaliers in 1844; it was much to the chagrin of her family. She gained her reputation during the 1850s upon a charitable tour, where she abstained from the traditional acculturation and focused on charitable works for the people.

She gained universal acclaim during the conflicts in Cimmeria, wherein she drew upon many of the hygienic practices of the Hospitalier and implemented a regime of care within a wartime arena. Her tireless nightly ministrations and her solitary rounds with her little lamp in hand became her hallmarks. She glided quietly along each corridor and brought gratitude to the most sallow face. Shore came to epitomise the role of the benevolent nurse and some consider that she changed the role of the Hesychast from a mendicant seeking wisdom into an agent of charity.

Though now a member of the Coronal, Shore is often absent from Adamantine, preferring to spend time abroad among the needy. Wherever she goes, she advocates for education reform and health care.

Ring

The archetype of the Ring is one of caprice, being the chosen artist of the skein. The Ring is so named for a ring artefact that is inextricably bound to the incumbent. Whoever possesses that ring becomes the Ring, and the prevarications of destiny ensure that the ring arrives at the person destined to bear it at that time. Legend holds this ring to be an artefact of power, a symbol of Atlean royalty. The ring itself is seemingly made of unadorned gold and bears no other device. Though, allegedly lunar light reveals a verse of rhyme, inscribed upon its surface. It has passed from legend to legend, and includes among its number the Immortal Bard himself.

Leubald Geyer, born of 1813, currently wears the ring. His works have become the very ideal of opera, being thunderously dramatic and baroque in presentation. Geyer single-handedly defined the culture of the empire today, being crucial to the adoption of *Sturmdrang* as the imperial language. Geyer is also unique for naming the ring itself, '*Gesammtkunstwerk*'; he speaks of the ring as possessing a unifying power of artistic endeavour.

The ring communes to its wearer a vision of the Grand Narrative and Geyer has used these insights to modernise cultural affectations, turning archaic practices of pageantry towards more baroque mores. He modernised liturgy with modernised renditions of folklore, by repurposing noble archetypes into more mundane themes.

Geyer's work started with his study of the works of the Immortal Bard, even as he expressed reservations at the popularisation of Thespian across the centuries. Geyer instead gave preference to the gothic language of *Sturmdrang*. From his twenties, Geyer entered the political establishment with resounding force, and by virtue of unusual patronage by the Marquis. His fortunes fluctuated wildly, being plagued by constant debt; he nevertheless excelled in operatic production, being financial failures but critical successes.

These affairs climaxed in 1849 after his exile from Edessa, which plunged him into melancholy languor and ill health. In a fugue-like stupor, he began his greatest composition; the four liturgical dramas recounting the history of the ring itself. These works gripped the Realm profoundly, and his political exile was revoked; he returned to Metropolaris and completed his cycle.

His ascendancy came in 1876, upon the première of his Ring Cycle: it simultaneously raised his esteem in the eyes of the Invictus and disillusioned his long-time friend, the Vagabond.

The Ring by Krista Brennan.

Inamor

The Inamor is a highly dimorphic role, which alternates between a masculine or feminine form, or at least persons that inhabit a masculine or feminine gender: the archetype channels fortitude and raw power, and manifests this differently depending on the incumbent.

The masculine face of the Inamor has great physical prowess but kept contained; the feminine face is sexual magnetic and expressively overt. Their role is one of transformation: from chimerical masculine energies into physical might, or from feminine physical energies into chimerical force. It is not completely clear what triggers a change of Inamor, though they have all emerged as significant figures in a conflict or rebellion; none of them have been of noble birth.

Anita Riverio is the current Inamor: born in 1821 as an Iberian peasant. She married the liege of her domain at the age of fourteen, and succeeded him after he died in the Great War. Rivierio came to the attention of Esperia with her defiant and rebellious attitude, bringing her into favour.

The two became close friends, with Riverio joining Esperia as a sister-in-arms on her revolutionary march in 1839 and there she undertook the Epiphany. Their camaraderie came to epitomise the ideal of 19th Century liberalisation: Riverio went from strength to strength, beginning with her Rainbow Tour in 1847, where she met numerous dignitaries and heads of state.

Most famously she again joined Esperia on the 1849 march of the red-shirted thousand. Riviera's role in these nationalistic campaigns is powerful and many regard her as the firebrand that sparked the 1848 Spring of Nations revolutions. By the culmination of those conflicts, it was clear that Riverio was the new Inamor.

Over the course of the next six years, Riverio lead the trade union movement, and spoke on behalf of labour rights and women's suffrage throughout the Realm. Although she initially sought the office of the Italic Prelate, she instead stepped back to allow Esperia claim this title in a sweeping victory in 1876.

Apocryphally it is rumoured that as Esperia stood on the balcony of the government house, Riverio stated that her calling was not her initial desire for fame and glory, but service to her people: Riverio rose into international culture as the popularly named Lady of Hearts.

The Inamor by Krista Brennan.

Effigy

The Arcanum known as the Effigy is the most recent known to the public; the incumbent is the first known to hold its title. Mousaion scholars have theorised that the unusual state of affairs that cemented Fouroux in the minds of the populace also brought the Arcanum of the Effigy into the public eye. They note the Effigy's uniqueness in being the only Arcanum in quiescence; they speculate that his archetype is one of an eternal and puissant dreamer. In this, he is a living monument to the myths of the past and an embodiment of the sacrifice necessary to complete the dream quest of the Epiphany.

Fouroux was born in 1853, though few records of his youth remain; it is an account known only by his brother, which he does not disclose. Historians have painstakingly constructed a tentative account from the series of sketches that littered his wake since infancy and a chain of letters between himself and his brother. It is clear that Fouroux spent his early life in his brother's shadow; his brother passed the Epiphany and took Fouroux with him on his first tour as part of his entourage.

Here, Fouroux explored many of the great cultural bastions of the Realm, travelling between London and Paris he began his many artworks; his palette consisting of sombre and earthy tones, with no sign of vivid imagination. Upon arriving in Paris in 1886, he discovered the Gallic aesthetic movements, which brightened his expression somewhat. Yet Fouroux depended much on his brother's patronage, and found his passions stymied by crippling poverty.

These years in Paris wore heavily on Fouroux and almost estranged him from his brother. In 1888, they both sought solace in the duchy of Arelat. Though for much of that year the desolation upon Fouroux was alleviated only briefly for a period of some nine weeks. Tormented by malady, and in fear of his isolation, Fouroux mortified himself in severing a portion of his ear; he was thereafter committed to medical custody.

Throughout these nights, Fouroux remained transfixed, and emerged from his Fugue a changed man, thereafter painting his tortured psyche large across whatever canvas he found and for the next two years. He became the most prodigious and prolific artist of his time. The obsession consumed him, and he sought to end his life in 1890 while simultaneously concluding an unintended dream quest: he remains in a strange suspension, not quite the death of quiescence, but decidedly lacking consciousness.

The Effigy by Krista Brennan.

Intrigue

Nobles are creatures of politics, to a far greater degree than the average commoner is. The courtly graces of the nobility are often put to the task of increasing influence and power. Even those nobles not so politically motivated to the heights of power must still contend with its effects; if only to assess their standing and capacity at court.

The tenets of the skein govern the interactions of the nobility. Through the patterns of the skein, the affairs of the nobility become a synthesis of statecraft and stagecraft. So even while every court is possessed of their own particular style and demeanour, they all conform to the demands of the skein; the emulation of which is not merely a matter of protocol but a deliberate act, according to the rise and fall of dramatic tensions that play out across the course of each half of the year.

In emulating the subtle ebb and flow of these dramatic forms, the nobility as a whole follows the path of least resistance laid down by the skein: a path to narrative power, glory, fame, and wonder. Through the waxing and waning of fickle fortunes, each courtier assumes particular roles and replicate forms to evoke the tropes of the skein itself.

Herein reveals a canny symmetry, for while the masses are the witnesses of story, the nobles are its agents. As stories take root in the public imagination, their associated metaphors lend power. The more widespread a particular trope, the more they impose upon the lives of nobility.

That which divides Axiom from Idiom is a cultural legacy, rather than a true contention of philosophy. Both are first, and foremost, literary traditions of Scripture, which have formulates similar if distinct political praxes. The clearest point of distinction arises over the translation of antiquarian grimoires, demonstrating fidelity to either Latin or Konic, for the Axiom or the Idiom respectively. However, millennia have passed since the Great Schism, and each tradition has become bound up with its own historical affects, such that the constituent components of politics, language, history, and power that produce the Axiom and the Idiom as known today are irrevocably interlinked.

from Oeuvres de Philosophique et Critique by Friedreich Münchhausen

Influence

Nobles are bound together by myriad subtle threads, with each a singular connexion forging ties that sympathise and ties that antagonise. The graces of the Mousaion, cunning in their arts, are canny to these connexions; they have often described the entirety of these linkages as a web, giving rise to the euphemism ‘web of intrigue’.

Each single thread upon that web describes a link between two agents and each entails a particular element of story. For this web of intrigue is woven together by plot and device, by doom and prophecy, each particular strand being a measure of the fate that brings two people together. The nobility is readily aware of these arrangements and frequently foster mutual ties through the prestation of favours, through the art of epistolary, and through the binding of oaths.

The methods and practices of mediating the threads of intrigue derives from one of two doctrines, each professing a correct approach to their use, but otherwise mutually exclusive. Their philosophies are the Axiom and the Idiom; each of them have origins in Great Schism, and each provide different readings on the nature, origins, and cultural legendary of nobility.

Despite their divided history, the two doctrines share many similarities. They both contend on the nature of noble agency as derived from destiny. They both imagine all noble agency as manifest through a metaphorical a web or tapestry, constituted by myriad threads and strands of influence, interwoven deftly between nobles and commoners alike. They both therefore imagine the art of manipulating such strings as the tools of power but distinguish on considerations as to the cause and behaviour of this web: how and why one might best manipulate the same. Finally, both describe a path to power by drawing upon the skein.

AXIOM

The Axiom describes a Western tradition, with a political outlook developed through both the Latin Vulgate and the Frankish Principalities. Its prime tenet presumes that among the nobility there exists a finite measure of power and that all gains are relative with the balances of gains and loses maintained at equilibrium; for one to rise, another must fall.

Society becomes naught but charade disguising a natural state of endogenous conflict among the aristocracy, and so noble agency acts in a manner both rational and conforming to enlightened self-interest. The doctrine asserts that Manifest Destiny requires unencumbered liberty, true free will. It reduces the dynamics of all power relations between nobles unto the contestation of the supreme sovereign will.

Authority emerges when destiny conforms to lines of power toward a single direction: weaker nobles who are subjugated to the whims of others are not truly liberated. Accordingly, self-determination transforms rational self-interest into freedom from predetermination and sovereign will is the act of truly forge one's own destiny.

Liberty ultimately overcomes and eliminates all obstacles and barriers impeding any such rational self-interest. So those adhering to the Axiom are loath to cede power to rivals, and cooperate only when interests coincide. They prefer to act with a unilateral mandate, and with their actions unhindered by the undue influence of others. Critics contend that such a doctrine vaunts a cynical notion of noble aspirations, and becomes incompatible with altruism.

STRATEGIES

The strategies deployed through Axiomatic principles are often ones of coercion, using command and dictum to induce one of three objectives: persuading an adversary against their goal; convincing an adversary to reverse an action already taken; and, persuading an adversary to make a fundamental change of their outlook.

Though latently risky, such coercion can facilitate negotiations more generally, using pressure and intimidation before unmitigated threats. This stratagem demands careful equilibrium, suspended upon disbelief between the possibility of threat and its execution.

Tactically, the balance is best when the threat itself holds greater sway that their actual deployment. Nevertheless, all threats should be sincere, for they depend on their credibility; often some limited action to demonstrate resolution is necessary.

Likewise, a significant portion of coercion achieves through deterrence: strategies of dissuasion, forcing an aversion towards undertaking a course of action, before attempting to require the cessation or reversal of those actions. Deterrence itself rests upon the belief that the cost of a given path to be so overwhelming as to denature motivation.

All coercive strategies use threat as a refined psychological instrument of policy, rather than as a blunt instrument of force. Coercion must assess several measures: what demands to place; whether and how to create a sense of urgency for compliance; what nature of sanction to apply for noncompliance; and whether to rely solely on threat of sanction or to offer conditional positive inducements to secure acceptance of the demand.

The greatest advantage in this stratagem comes through the incremental escalation of a discrete and select use of force, particularly when offset through measured incentives. This reduces an antagonist's resolve towards compliance. It is equally applicable in securing favourable compromise and ameliorating the chance of crisis with precision.

Acts of intimidation are the first tool of the Axiom, which rely neither on conditions nor demands, but solely upon the implication of force through candid and quiet means.

Following this tool is the skill to impress forebodingly, utilising a subtle and incremental pressure that implicates an imminent use of force; such permits the moderation of strategy around the success of each negotiation.

The final tool of the Axiom is the ultimatum, which depends on three pillars: the demand, an urgency to comply, and credible but potent sanction. Limits of time may prove fickle, necessitating action upon expiration.

from Oeuvres de Philosophique et Critique by Friedreich Münchhausen

IDIOM

The Idiom describes a doctrine of views largely shaped by the history of the Eastern Realm, influenced for many centuries by the Synoptic thinking as prominent within the Arcadian Dominate. Its predication is that noble agency does not exist in isolation and that none truly stands alone.

Power emerges through coalition, where working towards common good accords mutual gains. Through association and consensus, noble causes become aligned and then freed from the constant attrition of aggressive competition. In this light, sovereignty becomes the autonomy of authority legitimated through consent, accord, and the social contract.

The doctrine of the Idiom rejects power as being atomistic, or that Manifest Destiny is realised through individual action alone. Rather it accords each act as a single exchange, engendering one among a vast network of social obligations and accords. This is not a matter of parity but reciprocity, for true liberty could not exist without the foundations of society providing both security and prosperity. The free will of the nobility is construed through chains of political obligations.

True power is the ability to perceive, affect, and maintain those lines of influence, but to do so while assuming a centrality amidst the whole. For while none can truly participate in society without assuming some of its more ubiquitous obligations, the master of affairs uses persuasive techniques to help redirect and reshape them in such a way, as to grant them greatest positional advantage; much like a fulcrum, they leverage maximal results for minimal effort. Its view becomes the subject of detraction, when the nobility rejects the Idiom for being incompatible with individual interests.

The techniques of the Idiom are vested in reputation: the integrity of one's word and action consolidates the resolution of one's conviction in the minds of others.

Compromise serves as a principle method for the Idiom. The art of soliciting agreements is achieved through augmenting similarity and eliding difference; all of which balances integrity against concession.

The most pervasive method of the Idiom is securing compliance and eliciting consent. Mostly the work of such diplomacy works upon the iteration and imposition of standards and customs, and holding constituents to account for their promises.

from Oeuvres de Philosophique et Critique by Friedreich Münchhausen

STRATEGY

The Idiom uses various techniques of coalition building: using diplomacy and charisma to facilitate compliance through acculturation and consensus. By its disposition, the methods of coalition are more conciliatory, offering compromise to draw together disparate nobles into a singular under a single rubric.

Coalitions are strategies of careful equilibrium, often requiring the artful compromise of many competing and adversarial demands. A coalition assumes the aggregate of its whole is more potent than its individual constituencies. It fosters a mutuality of purpose to ensure that the multitude operates in concert under a common good.

The Idiom is principally a rhetorical doctrine, subsuming the interests into one's own agenda by through a variety of public functions and instruments. Much of the work of coalition building is articulating a shared vision, using idealised language to converge upon values and policy.

The task is one of persuasion to impose upon the given network of relations towards the greatest advantage over the same. While the practice seems of a softer bent in soliciting consensus from others, its thereafter becomes an exercise of voluntary compliance ascribed to by the constituents themselves; it therefore needs very little oversight thereafter.

Successful coalition requires negotiation over boundaries and the underscoring of common inherent qualities, such that salient positions demonstrate membership or exclusion. The prime technique is to identify an adversary that the group may rail against, by highlighting external contrasts and internal similitudes. The task often draws upon reputations of certainty and fidelity to one's agreements. Trust becomes crucial, with those coalitions that are bound together the strongest formed upon those beyond reproach.

Duel

Duels are highly structures political tasks, wherein two nobles vie against each other drawing upon the tropes of the skein. The term duel is used to describe both of the protracted conflicts of seduction and revenge. For regardless of the ambitions of the two, they are invoking narrative convention to empower and entangle them into deeply symbolic conflicts.

Pavane is the dance of romance, which exalts the arts of the pursuit and the indulgence of carnal passions. As the exemplar of romance, pavane plays out most effectively during spring and summer and most nobles pursue at least one such affair in these seasons, as their dramatic interlude may achieve vitiation at their peak. Likewise, vendetta is the conflict of tragedy, being the arts and works of bloodshed by belligerence means and by wicked instruments. Its traditions entail the most exquisite forms of tragedy. Most frequently, vendettas are the pastime of the darker months in autumn and winter, where catharsis is promised.

Duelling customs are widely accepted and surprisingly succinct: they permit nobles to pursue legally dubious actions and avoid culpability; society remits those tragic deaths and indiscrete affairs. Provided the actions taken during a duel is limited to intrusions upon each other and that the proper formalities have been observed, the participants are absolved of unlawful wrongdoings.

Entreaty

To commence a duel, one noble must declare their intent and solicit the authority of the head of their house to authorise the duel. The declaration is not lightly given, and the house requires necessary proof. The easiest demonstration is through the provision of letters and favours that express the prerequisite sentiment; and more, that such things are reciprocated. The aristocracy generally agrees that three such letters is evidence enough of a protracted engagement.

For many nobles, the customs of the entreaty are exhilarating, as they trial the merits of their potential adversary. Entreaties advance by graduation: first each contend the other through insinuations and insults, cajoling them to respond. The aristocracy is highly versed in such solicitations and the significance of these entreaties. Whether an overture to seduction or invective to perjury, nobles know that in replying to such missives they are potentially inviting the author to declare either pavane or vendetta.

Declaration

When a pair of adversaries is confident they have met a worthy contender, they must form an oath as solemnised by the graces of the Mousaion; the grace may even consult an augury to determine if the duel is in accordance. The oath declaring the other as their intended paramour or nemesis, ad in this most nobles invoke a particular story of romance or tragedy from liturgical annals.

This is a decisive moment, for while either party may open the declaration the other party accepts and sets the challenges of the conflict. Implicitly, the challenger is often considered to hold less standing but greater impetus than their rival does. The Nemesis Trope contends that villains

Hunter by Jessica van Hulle.

act while heroes react, meaning that neither party wants to be seen as the instigator of the conflict. There is a fear of being cast as the villain, and the attendant likelihood of inevitably defeat. Nobles precariously balance all these needs against each other before presenting their claim.

There is also the matter of which name the duellists swear upon; this act is the formality that absolves some of the criminality of the duel's conduct as both parties place one of their names at stake. The challengers set the terms, and the respondent must accept with their own or denounce the challenge. Custom also forbids the use of a corporal to swear upon in these instances, for the nobility regards such conduct as dishonest and disingenuous.

In those rare circumstances where a declaration is made upon the *synonyme,* or house name, it signifies an open protocol between members of those respective houses, whether feud or fraternisation. Only those who can speak on behalf of their house name may make such proclamations.

CONDUCT

The nobles say that 'all is fair in love and war', though the aphorism belies the real conventions that limit egregious behaviour. Once a duel has commenced, the adversaries bind their conduct in accordance to their vows. The protocols of duelling prohibit excessive actions; it not only disqualifies either contender but it also sullies the name they have sworn upon. The first rule is that one does not publicise the affair, for it is a private matter. The second rule is that one may not involve others who are not kin. The final rule is that all actions must be proportional to those committed before.

The first rule is the most explicit of this convention, for while it does not prohibit the discussion of the matter among the aristocracy, it forbids making a spectacle of these actions,

Pistols at Noon by Lucas Pandolfelli.

particularly through the media. On the second rule, there is some ambiguity as to whether to include the nobles' retainers as being kin. Upon the final issue, pavane and vendetta seeks vitiation and catharsis respectively. They are both reactive works and necessarily preclude pre-emptive or disproportionate acts. Ultimately, duels are works of satisfaction rather than an open licence to visit any injury or take any liberty with the other party.

Each clan has their own favour tactics for duelling, through their favoured methods often show some commonality across lineages. The Rosaline use courtly skills to beguile, charm, and solicit their way to victory. The Braemaline tend to err towards the forthright demonstrations of physical might. The Pommeline frequently resort to the arts of espionage.

CONCLUSION

Both pavane and vendetta are resolved in one of two ways: capitulation or defeat. If either party offers surrender, then victory is declared. With capitulation, the surrendering party must offer a favour to the victor by the name they swore upon. Though surrender recognises the superiority of the adversary, in defeat they may sometimes sue for compromise instead.

If a noble be defeated then there is not option to sue for compromise as victory is total and incomparable. Likewise, should either party route the other from their safehold, the code grants them total victory. The defeated noble must surrender an obligation tied to their name and may even be required to give over a wergild for damages incurred. Typically, these damages include claims to land, title, status, or holdings.

In both pavane and vendetta, there is always one final option that concludes the duel before its natural culmination. This is the Pyrrhic victory, when the nobles make a martyr of themselves. Their suicide sharply ends the conflict, and denies their adversary the satisfaction of either vitiation or catharsis. Such a tarnished outcome leaves their adversary with unexpurgated passions, and they often fall quickly to madness.

from The Art of Love and War by Anita Riverio

Entourage

When a noble earns their *synonyme* and their personal influence grows. They gain the ability to extend their own personal aegis over commoners, to invest them with a measure of their own power. These persons serve as companions to form a noble's entourage: nobles by proxy.

The entourage of any given noble represents an important facet of their political repertoire. For they comprise individuals who support their political enterprise while remaining ignoble themselves. Such retainers enjoy the privileges of nobility in vicarious fashion, and theirs is a life that may indulge in the trappings of power and class even while remaining disaffected by the skein, for the most part. Fate inevitably ensnares them within the mire of politics of those they serve.

Largely, the noble's entourage comprises of ignoble family members, or non-officer members within an order; they typically entail those unblooded to the ranks of nobility but yet relevant to society. Each typically holds some manner of customary and fiduciary position within their house or order: as mentors, confidants, and even paramours.

The entourage are agents in the periphery: though they possess small influence compared to nobles themselves, they augment the influence of a noble. Nobles may act through the members of their entourage as literal proxies and so frequently use them as pawns in their machinations. The entourage, for the greater part, have awareness of their role in these enterprises. They mostly accept such intrigues as the cost of their elegant lifestyles. However, as much of an asset as they are, they are also a source of liability. Many opponents seek to exploit those in the company of nobles, for few commoners can withstand the direct influence of a noble's grandeur.

LIVERY

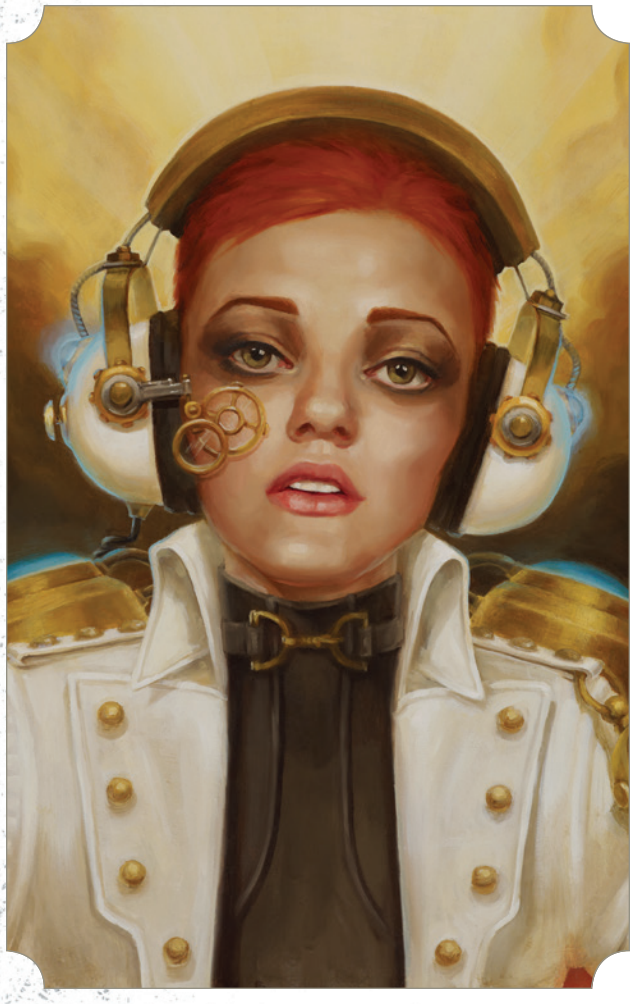
When nobles elect to bring on retainers, it is to fill some niche within their company and so they most chose those with skills to complement their own. Typically, each retainer demonstrates an

aptitude in some form of talent or artistry; only the most gauche of nobles surround themselves with boorish and discourteous company. The faults of the entourage reflect upon their noble master.

Placing a person on retainer is more than an appointment to a position, as the noble must invests them with a measure of their own personal connection to the skein. In exchange, the retainer offers their new master personal allegiance and demonstrates their bonds through livery. Most nobles vest such bonds into livery coins, which stand as a corporal for that oath. By being in possession of this coin, the retainer remains bound to their noble.

LIVERY COIN

Minters forge livery coins from orichalcum and emboss the cipher of a given noble into the metal; indelible inks of gloss are worked into the seal. The most common form of livery is a coin mounted as a badge of office, typically accompanied by a uniform. Far more discreet are a variety of rings, which mounts the coin as a small plate onto the setting. The most blatant are livery collars, where the coin serves as a pendant hanging splendidly off elegant chains around the neck.



Joan of Steampunk by Jessica van Hulle

A great deal of custom has evolved around the materials for any given livery. The choice of material provides subtle signifiers: links or fixtures of porcelain, brass, glass, or stone, representing patronage from a lord or lady from the affiliated caste respectively; wood has also recently started showing greater use. Likewise, the materials of horn and ivory hold potent significance, with horn designed to indicate some strong affinity of amity, being likely a spouse, while those fixtures of ivory suggest enmity and subjugation: that they appear of similar hue is a feature not lost on many.

INVESTITURE

To consign of a livery coin, the noble must build upon existing connections with their subject, even if they are tenuous. These initial threads require nobles to instate themselves with subject before they can become their retainer. The pre-existing relationship may be one forged of passions, of rapport and esteem, or upon an act of trust. In this way, the consignment takes the sliver of thread between the two and imbues it with fate and fortune.

Due to the innate affinities of blood ties, those who share a blood relation are predisposed to this process. However, those who have fostered friendships over many years may equally be so predisposed, provided their shared history has sufficient gravitas. Those members of a noble's entourage who have joined from one of these two origins usually represent some of the nearest and most trusted of companions.

Nobles also often find it necessary to keep a point of distinction between their entourage and their paramours. Such relations fall to the complicated dynamics of power that lay between master and lover. In the instances where the pair ignores this rule, paramours frequently demonstrate a tendency for being formidable but wilful servants, sometimes even acting as a peer to their master.

Domain

Prior to the rise of both nation and Imperium, dominion accorded absolute sovereignty over each domain; each liege held supreme deference. However, history has since provided a different *status quo* and all domains have fallen under the auspice of one of the national governments and the Imperium in turn. For all the seeming of these changes, they are but façades around a core of the tradition, which still demands autonomy of internal affairs.

Far more potent upon customary practices was the Eclipse and the growth of the bramblewoods. The rampant isolation caused by their heights lends naturally to power being concentrated within each domain. In the wake of these events, many domains fell to waste and blight; only human aspiration surmounted their impediments.

The alchemical revolution provided new means to ensure that the once precarious venture into those tulgy woods opened for wary peddler, mendicant, and cavalier. Many paths between domains were turgid until engines wrought of alchemical design took task to their wicked problem and blazed a path through that thorny gauntlet. The bramblewoods were pierced, to transform the politics of land, of nation, and of empire.

The bramblewoods are the edifice that defines modern politics. Their presence enforces the political autonomy promised by the Imperium, and no small measure of deterrence of hostilities between neighbours. However, the resources of the Imperium are superlative, and the imperial armada or the *Grande Armée* will bear down furiously upon any domain that is found to violate the terms of *Pax Aeterna*.

However, the Imperium remains silent on insurrection and rebellion, preferring to remain aloof from the internal politics of a given domain; although sometimes this results in the annexation of the domain or the extirpation of the incumbent household. Though the imperial charters are there to maintain the integrity of the empire, they may only intervene where instability threatens matters of regional import.

from The Empire's Dowry by Auto Eisenmark

Liege

The hierogamy engenders a single noble into a bond with the *intellectus* of a domain, granting affinity and communion between the two. The liege becomes steward and custodian of the domain, and the *intellectus* becomes the guardian of its people. While upon their throne, the liege hears echoes of the *intellectus*, alerting the liege to dangers that range from territorial encroachment, to the tainting of waters, and to the failing of crop.

Each domain holds a throne that invests this proprietary union, to make the land inalienable from its liege. Though the liege has capacity to assign broad proprietary rights of a given domain, the land itself is inalienable from the throne: they could no more surrender land in perpetuity, than they could cut off an appendage.

The bond between liege and *intellectus* is a universal truth throughout the Imperium, and is the hallmark of any lord's legitimate claim to rule. Through the act of the accolade, the supplicant sits upon the throne to await the acceptance or rejection of their rule; often their popular influence influences the outcome one way or the other.

In certain light, the role of the liege is to placate the *intellectus*: particularly where the industry of humanity intrudes upon various natural resources with roads, waterways, and communication arrays. The best of such lieges handles desires of an *intellectus* through discipline and encouragement; though beware generosity becoming an indulgence. A poor liege is one who neither cares for their terrain nor ensures good handling. These domains go to the wastes.

succession

The planning of succession acquires paramount importance, to ensure that the bond between liege and land is carried over and continue rule unabated. The practices of succession seek to ease any transition and to appease the *intellectus* from rejecting the successor. Accordingly, the court of

In Silvas by Tomasz Belzowski.

each domain employs various mechanisms to secure the suitability of their supplicant to the public before their accolade. Where domains adhere to national standards of political enfranchisement, candidates must seek endorsement by their public. Conversely, in those domains of little political franchise, public satisfaction is often obtained through trial by ordeal.

Most domains have certain trials coded into the culture of their domain, which provide the keys to the kingdom; they are ancient customs to vet the merit of a particular candidate to satisfy the *intellectus*. Two trials have proven popular across the ages: the ordeal and the gauntlet. The trial by ordeal is a test of the elements, where the subject must endure some aspect of the wilderness. The trial by gauntlet is the act of walking among a crowd with no arms or other protection, where the subject must encounter the potential the enmity of the people.

Even though death by natural causes brings about the end of a reign, abdication and usurpation are more common. Succession plans often consider several potential heirs, each primed for a chance at the throne. Though there is one heir-presumptive, others are contingencies.

This begets the practice of patronage and fosterage, where lieges and other powers groom potential candidates for the throne and eventually selecting one as the heir-apparent. Ideally, such efforts make the *intellectus* predisposed towards them. Nevertheless, transitory periods are internecine affairs, subject to plots and schemes.

INTELLECTUS

Every domain bears an *intellectus*: a dream of place, the idealisation of its most distinctive and cherished aspects. This is an enigmatic intelligence of variable awareness, and its nature reflects the manner in which the residents of a given domain imagine their land to be. Their ways are elusive to those unfamiliar to their manners for they prefer to remain inscrutable.

The *intellectus* is a composition of a domain's dreams, which forms to give voice to the land that might otherwise remain unheard; they articulate the needs of the land and also its people. The liege and other nobles of a given domain must reckon with the needs of the *intellectus*; its demands range from benign needs that are a matter of course, and towards overarching issues of estate and infrastructure that prove thornier to navigate.

GLADE

Glades form the literal and metaphorical heart of a given domain: they are natural hollows that form the locus of a given domain. Here the embodying of the *intellectus* resides, where its presence is strongest and most potent. Upon occasion, the *intellectus* even manifests visibly to take up an anthropomorphic appearance, though the apparition may not leave the confines of the glade.

Each glade possesses natural wonders, whether formed as large majestic trees, vales carpeted by uncanny flowers, or tarns still as mirrors with no perceptible depth. Each remains enclosed by small but virile growths of brambles that seclude the glade from their surrounds. They are places of great tranquillity, filled with peace and respite; visitors, vagrants, and wanderers often abide a while here as haven from their travels. However, the glade is a transient place: endure too long and either wanderlust or lethargy descends. They are places to stop but not to stay.

The glade is also the commons of a domain, even as the liege retains obligations regarding its custody. Once, the liege sent serfs to cultivate the glade to keep it clear and hale. However, universal emancipation abolished that practice, even as vestigial forms of indentured service remain.

WASTE

The hierogamy is of the utmost importance for the land and its people, for without one the land ails and falls to the wastes. The intimate connection forged through the throne requires some delicacy and affinity. A failure to ensure a proper union manifests quickly as wild growth from the bramblewoods, which aggressively encroaches on pastoral lands. If not quickly remedied, the union can sour, even potentially decaying into a wasteland.

Wasting starts small as blight, but booms into rot to blast the entire landscape. When the rot besets glade the disease has pierced the heart of the domain, with death surely following. The soil becomes infertile, the waters toxic, the airs dour and leak. Worse are those domains where lay relics of Ealdor, mayhap lifting those torpid creatures from quiescence to wreak their terrible majesty.

TENURE

By the power of the hierogamy, the lands within a domain are property of its liege. However, the rigours of modern society, the engagements of court, and the complex administration of a domain, often require collaboration; particularly where a liege must tend to political forces larger than a given domain. Each domain subdivides into a number of parcels of land, named as wards.

Other customary law decrees that land remains the possession of the aristocracy, even where lieges have extended land rights in perpetuity in the manner of a freehold. Most common is the practice of leasehold, where the liege grants occupation of a ward. Less common but of greater merit are rights of lienhold, granting additional privileges in consideration for rent or a portion of profits. Lastly, the rarest of privileges are rights of freehold, consigning liberty upon a single ward.

HOSPITALITY

The obligations of hospitality describe one of the oldest prerogatives between guest and host, which transcend genial duties and extend partly from the hierogamy. Since time immemorial, this

Succession may fail, leaving the domain bereft of its liege. The law requires that the domain enter into a period of administration, averring from matters of politics. These periods of administration are enacted through a proclamation of a lord holding influence over that domain, appointing a Councillor to stand as the governor until succession is restored.

It is in their interests to prioritise succession for with every passing day the domain will grow increasingly feral and wild. Stories echo down history of domains mired in the politics of succession, culminating in famine and insurrection.

from Vox Populari by Vivian Grey

Many glades contain a holding, known as an hermitage: boarding houses buoyed by communal obligation and reciprocity. The hermitage is a place of voluntary exile, where those who have failed their obligations, their dues, or otherwise needing respite from scandal. Though sanctuary here does not absolve crimes, it provides a short reprieve from more onerous incarceration. Those who arrive must keep vows to tend to the glade, and perhaps perform charitable works among the peasantry. By far, the majority of volunteers are smallfolk fallen victim to poverty or unassailable debt, with the hermitage providing food and board for their labour until their debt is acquitted.

from The New Idyll by Cassandra Shore

tradition has been invoked to provide sanctuary. Hospitality may only be invoked after the liege extends a formal invitation; or when the liege acquiesces to entreaties of a plaintiff.

Hospitality is solemnised this through ceremonial acts, such as the breaking of bread or the sharing of drink. Once bound, each must then ensure the sanctity of the other's person, property, and privacy. All actions of subordinates fall to their master, who bears responsibility for calumnies and misdeeds.

Modern customs of hospitality have incorporated standards of society. The comfort of the guest is given importance as demonstrated through room and board to befit the status of the guest. Eminent hosts also provide light entertainment, congenial conversation, and a standing invitation to public events. Such generosity accords prestige and garners many favours.

Earned reputation for good hospitality affords cordial invitation to premium gala events; conversely, earned infamy brings about ostracism and disfavour. Likewise, guests have duties beyond the original purview, to defend the integrity of their host by keeping their confidence, by offering no injury or slander, and by obliging the host by fulfilling any reasonable request. Lastly, those enjoying elongated stays are obliged to honour hosts with a gift.

LEASEHOLD

Embassies are freeholds by definition, sequestered with extraterritorial privilege. Mission charters require certain concessions to consolidate its nature: the embassy must be secluded by physical barriers; and, as part of solemnising these accords, the ambassador buries a keystone in the heart of the ward, which is composed of materials originating from the home domain. This act interleaves that ward with the homeland, allowing the mission to act as though on home soil. Thus, an embassy becomes a true enclave, a domain within a domain sequestered physically and chimerically.

from One Empire by Vivian Grey

Leasehold is arrangement of landlord and tenant. The tenant pays a lieu for rights to use the ward for private benefit, even without possessing full proprietary rights. The tenant accords themselves with the protocols the liege has set down and honours the annual tithe owed.

Leasehold retains favour because of its implicit reciprocity as a residency agreement. It permits privacy of personal property and grants access to the services of the domain. The prevailing custom holds that one should estimate any liability for a lease through prestation.

LIENHOLD

Lienhold is less common, granting of custody of a ward to make the holder a warden: they become the recipient of its resources and the beneficiary of its holdings. Lienhold is a legacy from the feudal arrangements where the warden governed in the liege's name but towards the interests of the estate in exchange for enjoying private benefit of the ward.

There remain varying interpretations on the distinction between private and public interest falls. Nominally, the liege refrains from interfering, permitting the warden to build, remove, and develop their ward as seen fit. Likewise, the expectation holds that the warden should consult with their liege as a courtesy.

The lienholder pays their dues through annual tithes, being a proportional tenth of all profit the warden has gained from their ward. In feudal times, the warden would simply apportion a tenth of the resources accrued throughout the year. Yet in modern times, the prevalence of commercial commodities has prompted the tithing of currency revenue, particularly in those metropolitan wards where the principle revenue comes from urban tenements.

FREEHOLD

Freehold rights contain the highest proprietary rights and detail the closest status to truly private property. Its suite of rights treats the ward as an autonomous enclave within the domain, accorded true independence and signifying the greatest respect and trust of the liege. A freehold needs consignment through a deed of charter, which stipulates its terms and conditions. Each charter

details an agreement between the throne and that ward, such that it survives the incumbency of the liege that swore it.

The drafting of a charter considers some manner of perpetuity, where the revocation of said charter becomes permissible only when the conditions are in breach. Principally, the chartering of a freehold occurs when a liege must establish an enclave for an embassy, or to otherwise instate a chartered borough.

Court

The seat of power for a given domain is its court: a chamber, or yard, within the manor of that domain, the site upon which the political dramas of its local aristocracy unfold. The courtly setting transforms trifling intrigues into stately affairs. It emphasises nobles' role over and above their person. Yet the definitive aspects of a court are not its physical structure but its membership; the actors of its drama are what truly define it. The court is a theatre of the mind and the throne is its locus; its baroque cohort assembles before its liege, for court exists but whereupon the nobility attend, and they attend but where their liege sits, instate.

The court is the forum and theatre for political machinations. A single period of political enterprise experienced through sequentially held gatherings is known by the moniker of 'power play'. The course of this play renders the noble lives into a public spectacle, which the nobles follow as conduits for the skein. As a result, the court is the tacitly chosen field whereupon these subtle tensions might unfold. The nobility meets, parleys, and engages in intrigues, to enjoin the requirements of the intrigue about them in the relative safety of courtly protocol.

A single session of court entails a formal space and time, with pageantry distinguishing it distinct from mere administration, the formalities of which fall quietly beyond public scrutiny and interest. The strictures of court even give licence to its nobility for pavane and vendetta, instatement of office, and other formal acts taken by the domain.

Council

A primary tenet of governance throughout the Realm is the notion of subsidiarity; that governance devolves to the lowest level possible. While the Imperium maintains a broad number of powers unto itself and the Assembly of each nation provides a parliament, custom vests the local council of each domain with its administration.

By law, a court holds autonomy over its domain, within the circumscription of the broader legal mandates that each nation-state holds. A council holds direct responsibility over matters pertaining to births, deaths, marriages, pavanes, and vendettas, cultural and public works, the provision of utilities, and environmental custodianship. Given the extent of their rule, the larger powers intervene only upon excessive use of power. Such is first met with condemnation, followed by sanctions, and ultimately with imperial intervention.

The council is the executive body of a domain, comprised of varied nobles given standing by the liege of that domain. The council provides advice and insight to the liege and otherwise facilitates the functions of the court. The composition of each council is governed by convention. By number, the membership should hold proportionally to the population; by distribution, the membership should exact a balance of men and women, being the right and left-hand councils respectively; by pragmatics, it often possesses membership representing those interests that offer allegiance.

The powers that belong to the imperial mandate concern those matters of paramount importance to the Realm as a whole: technology, particularly communication and transit systems, patents, trademarks, copyrights, and standards and measures; security, including defence, and foreign policy; and the economy, including taxation, domestic trade, banking, and currency.

Conversely, the powers conferred to the national parliaments are matters particular to regionalism: this includes criminal law and detention; matters of population, citizenship and denization, census and demographics, registrations, and documentation; health care, veterinary affairs, and quarantine; road traffic, and national roads; water care, fishing, land cultivation, and agriculture; mining and forestry; industry and manufacture; social welfare and common good; and electoral oversight.

from One Empire by Vivian Grey

HOSTING

The hosting of a court gathering contains obligations to catering to the whims of the court. Nevertheless, the nobility regard hosting as a highly contested political privilege: the host determines the time and place of the gather and they may lay down the convention of the gather. When the liege has determined no host then the privilege falls back to their selves. They hold the ultimate responsibility for ensuring court occurring at least once each month.

The assignation of such privilege is the sole prerogative of the liege and they customarily award the honour only to the members of their court. Protocol decrees that the liege must declare such hosting rights prior to the conclusion of any gathering of court.

It is not typically feasible for the host to hold the gathering in any place outside a given domain, though rare examples do exist in ambassadorial lands. Likewise, there is no formal requirement to hold the affair in the domain's manor, and the court tends to enjoy variety of locales. However, wherever the host holds court the domain's throne must be present, or at the very least a suitable proxy for that seat.

Most courts possess a gallery, arrayed over the court wherein the local press and public might attend. Herein, they reside to testify as to the activities of the court; whether articulated through local tabloids, or in first-hand observation. Each court is demarcated into a large forecourt, and a deck secluded partly by an architectural frontispiece. The forecourt typically is a three-quarter round, designed to project the active space of the court into the audience. All activity upon this arena is in full display before the audience, with the dais standing upstage from this court being visible also. There are also secluded eaves behind the frontispiece, where private conversations may occur. Courts of nature that is more eminent or national prominence often feature several tiers to hold a host of members, and several amphitheatres of repute play host to highly grand events, which must take place within a large and open arena.

from One Empire by Vivian Grey

PAGEANTRY

Perceive in court a function to purveys all manner of pretence, to beguile, bemuse, and beleaguer a most unrequited audience; and to obscure the truth of its intrigues as veiled by allusion, fan, blazon, and cryptic mores. Arrayed across the stage of the court, each noble performs with careful candour and cunning disposition. Pageantry is the artistry of metaphor, couching politics in performance and statecraft in stagecraft.

Though history recalls a time where the court held nigh-absolute power over their domain, theirs courts as closed affairs, the consequences of revolutions have brought about the intrusion of public interest in the lives of the nobility. Though the aristocracy holds authority within a given court, they still require legitimation by the masses: needs demand the opening of court to the public audience, with the activity and grandeur drawing an audience from the locality.

MEETING

Formal business, of court and peers, transpires towards the conclusion of a given meeting of council, when council reviews and rules on all sundry matters. Upon the close of these affairs, certain nobles are called back into the small chambers of the liege, where they deliberate numerous and varied petition, whether petty claims of the smallfolk or the grand designs of the courtiers.

By convention, each attending noble may submit a single petition, which frequently concern matters of holdings, resources, and the powers of court. However, the order of that agenda is a matter of some political finesse, for in the constraints of time, only the most pertinent and prominent petitions are given its proper attentions. Most commonly, time permits the consideration of three items of pertinence, and so the order of their hearing is the subject of politicking during court; one that signifies the broad support of preferred petitions.

In many ways, the pageantry of the preceding hours provides a cover as the nobles vet the merit of each petition. Within the boundaries of the court's convention and the confines of its layout, the courtiers take liberty to fraternise and mingle towards their own agendas. Then, upon the final hour, the liege calls members into council chambers. In the council chambers, the council dispenses with the petition in their order. By right, the liege presides upon these affairs as the arbiter of conduct, using rules of order that prescribe the manner of empowering members to council, methods of tallying ballots, and the resolution and declaration of its decisions.

One power that resides within the liege is the power to dismiss any petitions before the throne, granting an informal veto. The liege also receives the petition and calls upon the supplicant to speak to the matter; they may thus subtly frame the issue. In this capacity, the liege carefully balances diverse competing interests, constraining the disquisition lest it run unfettered. Though a liege may mould the debate, they meet repudiation for letting naught but sophistry reign at court.

CONVENTION

Courtly pageantry is as varied as its membership almost by definition: the nobility being of epicurean disposition seeks diverse indulgence and distraction. It is the function of the host to attend to such matters, having purview to establish which forum shall contain the gathering.

PLENUM

The plenum, or plenary, is a rhetorical convention that assigns the court over to oratory prowess, of dialogue and debate. The plenum begins with the host posing a question of some delicacy or perplexity to the gathered number, with purpose set to provide the most convincing answer before the end resolves.

The plenum seeks resolution, using diverse persuasive techniques to convince one's peers of a particular answer; through speech, formal debate, or quiet agreement. Upon the conclusion of the proceedings, those who would offer an answer may present it to the council chambers, whereupon the council considers it among other matters.

One protocol paramount for the plenum requires a plinth placed in the centre of the court. The first protocol demands of all who stand upon that plinth to speak only truthful and forthright words, and to treat even the smallest of promises given as a solemnised oath forsaking omission and deception as perjury; lest they suffer ostracism from court.

The Chamber of Secrets by Forrest Imel.

MASQUERADE

The masquerade is a convention of clandestine espionage, with the court shielded from public scrutiny even while performed before them. This is achieved through the conceit of incognito, whereby all attending persons dons a mask. By this conceit, the nobility may feign ignorance of their peers' identities and remain obscured from the public eye.

Even should a noble recognise their peer, convention dictates they treat with them as singular persons, neither beholden towards nor empowered by any estate; even the throne stands empty. Beyond the mandate of incognito, there are no rules beyond a proscription against the deliberate unveiling of motive or action. Discovery is social death, for the conceit of the masquerade depends on plausible deniability.

Upon the final hour, before convening the council, tradition demands an unmasking, but there concludes the formalities: the host may declare whether matters have been resolved to satisfaction or not.

A Sneak of Weasels by Jessica van Hulle.

TOURNAMENT

The tournament is antiquated for most contemporary tastes: a bygone of yore, when matters of righteousness were through the triumph of physical prowess and the proof of one's mettle. Presently, they manifest as hastiludes, with preference given to the artistry of fencing mêlée, jousting having fallen out of fashion. Other favoured forms include athletic demonstrations, perhaps of firearms or artillery.

The extant protocols for this convention and holdfasts to chivalry, demanding honourable conduct upon field, though remaining mute about those actions thereafter removed. Custom evinces the use of costume, drama, and symbolism, and many knights-errant style themselves in the iconography of past heroes, with hopes to relive their deeds. As the tournament concludes, the council presides in judgement, determining the victories of all those before them.

EXCHEQUER

The exchequer describes a most unusual convention, with the machinations focusing upon a central tableau, covered by a chequered cloth. The exchequer is a gambit, whence the assembled aristocracy may parley over assets and perhaps arbitrate their exchange. Each shall signify their stakes upon the gambit by placing a token upon the cloth, symbolic of their wealth or station, thereby kitted for the moot.

Challenges of stratagem and bluff are prominent before the court, all the while they commune to their many retainers various instructions to carry out with mind of those plots. For those who contend the exchequer may not depart from the table from the moment they are seated until the challenge is resolved. It is a contest of the power of proxy, often the culmination of month-long plans; such forays are not for the impatient. When the Exchequer concludes, all tendered acts and commissions are reconciled.

Society

Any noble of worth engages with the mores of society, which are rarefied by culture and breeding. Entry into society is a delicate process, for its many elite safeguard its various standards. Initiation requires a reputable name, or an introduction by one willing to vouchsafe them. Society is not merely a matter of belonging, but the appearance of belonging: reclusion or ostracism means isolation from the web of intrigue and politics that lies rife beneath the surface.

Decorum

Decorum, etiquette, and manners: these bastions of culture stand between civility and barbarism. Millennia of social evolution have tempered proprietary, against which nobles' measure the quality of their peers. Though noble passions run deep, custom demands a staid face in the eye of the storm; courtly discretion affords the nobles some immunity from petty insult; for while the moods of court are precarious, its courtesies need not be candid.

Such is the *savoir-faire* of pageantry, serving as social lubricant enabling the aristocracy to act against each other, through a veneer of civility that permeates and defines them: the Albian call it genteel; the Gaulen name it *comme il faut*; the Italic, *raffinato*. Even as noble-born scions acclimate to their place in ruling, they receive counsel and instruction on good manners. They must cultivate their own personal reputation, and that of the houses they represent; all must avoid any scandal that might tarnish good standing.

The customs of the aristocracy are more than convention. By their expression, the courtiers evoke the mores of the pageantry, to maintain the baroque paradigm of the Calendar. For in recursive manner, the pageantry and the aristocracy intertwine, each sustaining and preserving the other, each bound together in mythic convention.

Noble courtiers earn regard by their form: for those who detract from these mores indecorously are guilty of *faux pas* and their own deeds become undone by gauche attempt. Though manners are staid and secure, their affectations may change with certain vogues. The variability permits some small space where panache supersedes formalism in begging the indulgence of others. It is a rarefied artistry, requiring familiarity with convention before a suitable departure.

Fluency

The art of conversation is a hallmark of the courtier, demonstrating quality to one's peers through affability and congeniality. Beyond mere elocution and diction, the courtier strives to master small talk: the skill of saying much with few words, and saying very little with many. The most conversant nobles adapt readily to their company, making pains to newcomers with recapitulating the subject of discussion, and refraining from self-aggrandisement.

Nobles purport that decorum serves to ameliorate unseemly disputes, by meeting confrontation with grace and deploying a pointed tongue before a raised voice. So nobles employ subtle forms of communications and may even affect archaic parlance, speaking loquaciously, baroquely, or even with circumlocution. The courtier's tongue is a clever art, using metaphor and allusion alike, to

ensure that only those of erudition might understand its meaning. Yet they guard against prolixity, for such dissembling patter signals impending treachery.

There are five languages of significance used across the Literate continent. The aristocracy expects all their number to master at least two of them, and ideal be versed in more. Language becomes diplomacy and those who would succeed in the Great Game should attend their letters well. Beyond these five languages of international standing, numerous dialects abound.

STURMDRANG

The official imperial language is *Sturmdrang*: a modern language borrowed from romantic tongues. It came to use through the Invictus when he claimed the Prime Mobile, then cemented in popularity by the Ring's suite of opera. Both bombastic and baroque, its ostentation suits pageantry to become the language of high opera. *Sturmdrang* is thus the language of political and imperial nomenclature. If one learned only one additional language, it must be *Sturmdrang*.

THESPIAN

The most common and most popular tongue is the language Thespian: originating from Albion and then celebrated by the Immortal Bard under Gloriana. The Bard's plays and dramas still enjoy widespread favour, ensuring the frequency of its tongue across the Realm. Moreover, the meteoric rise of the Valetoria the Dynast, and Albion's canny enterprises, Thespian has become the language of commerce, and flows quickly along trade routes.

PARNASSE

While Münchhausen frequently addresses people in their native language, it has become a point of deference to speak only *Sturmdrang* in his presence, and other imperial fora.

from We, Valetoria by Valetoria Regina

Formally speaking, Parnasse is the diplomatic tongue; the *lingua franca* of the empire, being popularised by Vendémiaire. Its widespread use remains by virtue of it being the language of legislature and legal codification, and thus remains ubiquitous in the Chancery and is the official language of the Imperial Orders. As the diplomatic tongue, Parnasse becomes the language of choice for most formal correspondence, from laws, policies, and reports, even when accompanied by a vulgar translation. Entwined as it is with legislature, the aristocracy have even given it the moniker of 'legalese'.

CANTABILE

Cantabile is the most archaic language that still in living use amongst the nobility. Its popularity peaked during the Flamboyance to become the language of artists, innovators, and inventors. Today, it retains use in classical texts, and is valued for its natural leanings towards lyrical prose to demonstrate fantastic union between measure and metre. It finds prevalence amongst the southern nobility and holds the moniker of 'sunsong'.

KALAVELA

The north enjoys a very alliterative language; it is one with prosodic metre. Kalavela is surprisingly modern in being a revitalisation of old *Volksung* languages from antiquarian epics. Its style employs archaic manners of speech but enjoys modern poetic affectations. Kalavela is *the* language of heroism and bravado, used by the peers to immortalise their deeds and those of their ancestors. As the language of the north, it holds the moniker of 'frostbite' in recognition of cruel and biting tone.

GESTURE

The courtly manner is one of coded gesture, with gentle nuance inferred from many an action. Each such gesture renders through the lens of courtly intrigue; subtleties are transmitted in silent

composition. As such, nobles attend carefully any new milieu they enjoin to observe its conduct before them. Many presumably innocuous acts engender subtle meaning, which must be inferred from the context of those actions.

In many instances, the codes of a given court are entirely assumed, particularly the specific codes communicated by the decoration of flowers or the flutter of fans. Weapons provide contextual signification, for they may stand as ornamentation particularly when peace bound; though many unwitting noble has unfortunately signalled the desire for conflict through its handling.

MANNER

The manner and style of the Calendar is that of high gothic style in all its renditions: stark and sombre, it stands in contrast to emerging modern vogues of art-decorative movements. Its reliquary nature remains a symbol of the past, even amid more modern musings. These hallmarks of established tradition the aristocracy is fond to replicate. Conformity to style indicates place and station. Although some latitude is extended towards foppish youth in demurring these fashions, those of reputation and maturity are expected to uphold the standards of privilege.

The Calendar is also an edifying collection of daily observations that come to define the nobility: its language and form cast long shadows over the entirety of noble conduct. The Calendar has an immense, overwhelming presence that shapes the Peerage and Mousaion alike; many regard it as possessed of its own character that imparts an ancient identity. Within the Calendar and through the pageantry, the nobility seek refuge in such decadent grandeur, exalted by the rising popularity and accessibility of contemporary baroque literature. The clergy and gentry alike contend that only seditious barbarians and savages find deliverance from its embrace, in their contempt for and ignorance of tradition.

STYLE

The rise of the bourgeoisie has upturned many historic assumptions, ill at ease with established traditions. Even as the force of the skein renders power unto its agents through tropes, there are those who constantly struggle inwardly and outwardly against the traditions it demands; reviling the roles required of pageantry as ones denuding and deforming its attendance.

Among the younger nobility there is a sense of oppression, particularly as they entreat for their first repartee with the Calendar. They commit increasing numbers of small transgressions against its gothic umbrage and create necessary and pellucid counterpoints, bringing exuberance to gravitas. The glamorous idealism of chivalry has faded, challenged by a vision of flawed nobility: one affected to both loftiness and cynicism, spurning valour in favour of intellect and sophistication.

Beyond the confines of the aristocracy, nobles of libertine disposition have found home within the Imperial Orders, giving birth to a new aesthetic in the late 19th Century; they contrasted the older gothic style of the establishment with modern vogues of the planetary styles emulating its admiration for the both the inventor and adventurer. This new modality has foregone gothic malaise in favour of optimistic ideals to reject the decadence of the gothic aesthetic to evoke new pulp literature and Penny Dreadfuls. This rebellious reverie produces virtue and villainy alike, driven towards personal liberty or mastery over others in turn.

The gothic and planetary movements describe the two major trends in style by which contemporaneous nobles comport themselves. Those of the gothic aristocracy conform to traditional mores, with conservative affectations and aspirations to courtly intrigues. The bourgeoisie uptake the planetary manners and tend towards the *avant-garde*, whose styles and forms are distinguished by scientific and futuristic accoutrements.

The *avant-garde* stand at the vanguard of style, culture, and politics; their candour is such that they brazenly disregard for convention. It is a precarious position, which is entirely dependent on a tour-de-force of political finesse, which exploits notoriety in unusual manner. In taking this vanguard, the noble fends off the scandal if indecorous behaviour with a bellicose but charming disregard for custom; for nobles are political creatures of reputation, wherein roguish reputations are nevertheless appreciated.

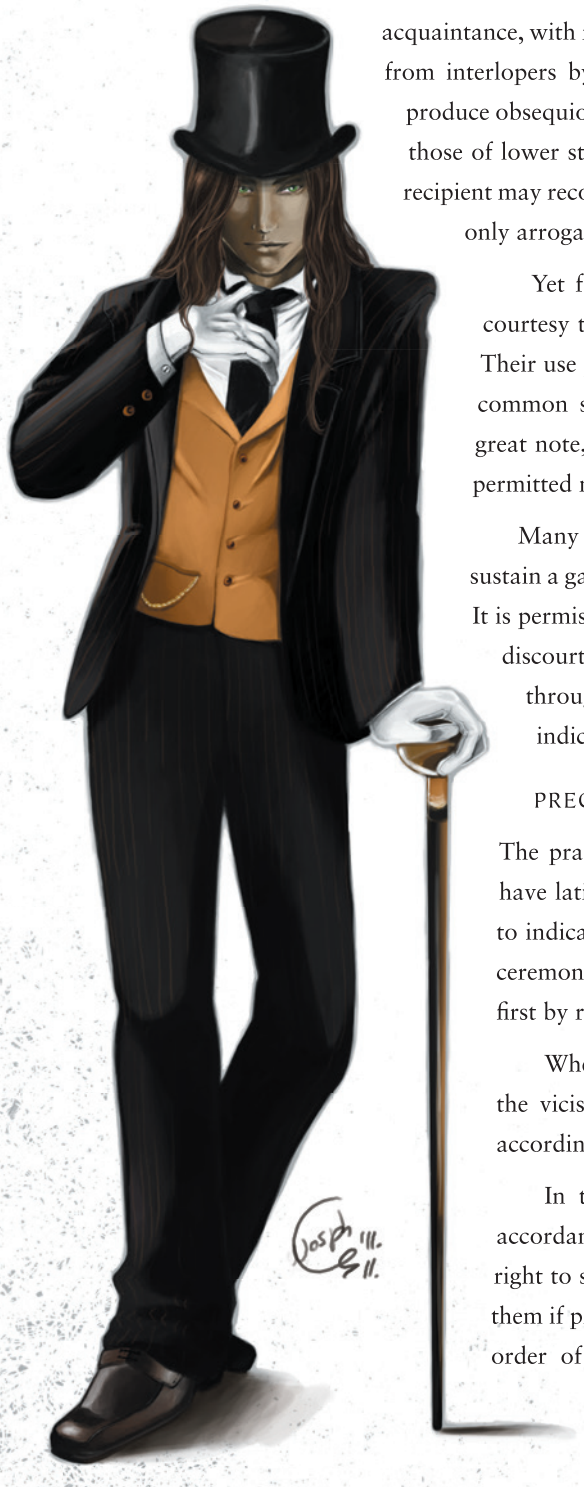
The cultivation of a deviant reputation may become its own shield, for if one is to be a bastard then let this be one's maxim, and become a magnificent one. Indeed, rakes and blackguards earn no small celebrity among the commoners, acquiring uncanny adoration for their minor rebellion. Such is their allure, that Peerage often courts their company, sublimating their excesses in vicarious manner.

from Through Darker Mirrors by Harold Childe

DEFERENCE

Deference among the nobility is a subtle art that requires a nuanced knowledge of the standing of one's fellow nobles. Its strictures provide an instrument to facilitate reciprocity and patronage, while simultaneously re-enforcing their stratification through the practice of precedence. Those of higher standing enjoy deference but are held to higher standards. Likewise, though persons of lower standing garner lesser respect, they have access to a tried and true method of advancement amidst their peers.

INTRODUCTION



Introductions are touchstones of deference, not performed for private benefit but to mediate acquaintance, with reputation as the currency of choice. They shield the echelons of good society from interlopers by using mutual parties acting as vouchsafes. The formalities of deference produce obsequious ritual, though their mores are pleasant dalliance. The exchange introduces those of lower standing to the higher, notwithstanding those rare exceptions in reverse. The recipient may recognise their subordinate or not, but custom limits the proprieties of exclusion; only arrogance warrants the ignorance of one's superiors.

Yet for all its punctilious flair, the emphasis of its custom rests more upon its courtesy than its strictures, and ardent insistence upon its formalism tends to rankle. Their use permits conversation between strangers, engendering comity forged through common sensibilities. The two parlay, referring to notable characteristics, deeds of great note, place of residence, and other salient attributes. Such private discussions as permitted must temper in public venues, to pertain to matters of no consequence.

Many gestures impart expresses respect and deference to others. To meet and sustain a gaze imparts a variety of meanings, but principally signifies a measure of parity. It is permissible between those of similar standing but elsewise it implies a challenge or discourtesy, refusing to recognise their standing as better. One indicates subordination through a downward casting of eyes or by the breaking of the gaze first. The gaze indicates the greater will between the two.

PRECEDENCE

The practice of precedence depends on a simplistic rule: those of superior station have latitude before their inferiors. It is a natural extension of the rule of deference to indicate a sequential hierarchy of nominal importance. Such gives indication of a ceremonial or historical relevance and in most courts, the measure of precedence is first by rank and titles, and then by pedigree.

Where the distinctions are matters of minutiae, they may vary according to the vicissitudes of local courts and thereby assess prestige, wealth, and influence accordingly. In all situation where ambiguity remains, the host is the final arbiter.

In the context of formal events, there are a number of affairs conducting accordance to precedence. Custom permits for those of higher standing to reserve their right to speak to matters after those of lesser standing but the latitude to speak over them if preferred. Likewise, guests should be received to formal occasion in increasing order of precedence: formal presentations and matters of ceremonial procedure addresses the higher standing first and then follows in descending order.

The Rake by Nospherato

Culture

Few things are quite as edifying as the heights of cultural achievement. As humanity casts their eyes upon the new century, they observe a future shaped by decades of technological innovation, both radical and arduous, and a longer legacy of reverence for liturgical story.

Nearly all culture within the empire falls into one of two categories: the high arts, which exalt storytelling through form and style; and the low arts, where storytelling is vulgarised for popular tastes. Theatricality and stagecraft are cultural touchstones of the empire, found in festivals, liturgy, politics, law, and symposia. Participation in or patronisation of the many theatrical pursuits is regarded as a civic duty, even as a member of the audience.

HIGH ARTS

Opera are those grand liturgical performances, replete with baroque moods, ceremonial grandeur, ritualistic meaning, and high symbolism. They are works of mythology whose ideals, imaginings, and expressions are so deeply ingrained into society that all subjects know their familiar themes and refrains; they are all performed by the Mousaion itself out of their opera houses.

Opera holds the highest cultural regard, such that attendance is a demonstration of means and influence; anyone who is anyone should be there. Opera houses enjoy the benefaction of the Mousaion, to host the grandest of spectacles. Their buildings exemplar of artistry and architecture, designed to regale those most profound liturgical narratives. The Mousaion matronises the high arts and their graces curate each such venue; they view their duties as cultural custodians as sacrament. Each caste works diligently to ensure that the fine arts receive the reverence due to to those cultural masterpieces raised by them.

The nobility likewise regard the ballet fondly as a secondary high art, although it is one that has passed its prime. As an art, the ballet is splendid, meticulous, and beautiful; though it has become more accessible to the people. The theatre is the most venal of the high arts, often troubled by use of vernacular prose and populist themes. However, theatres provide for heterodox stories: ones lacking liturgical value but are otherwise deemed meritorious in the eyes of the Mousaion.

VAUDEVILLE

For each of the fine arts there are vulgarised counterparts, though lacking the elegance of the Mousaion theatres, they are free to perform whatever they deem appropriate. The playhouses that host these shows have attained immense popularity with the populace over the past century. Here, one may find diverse varies of performances, ranging from revised versions of traditional stories, satirical plays of the peers, as well as burlesque. Each offers cheap cultural pastimes, being often-small subversive works, which portray the stories of the nobility into ordinary and profane forms.

Vaudeville includes a variety of acts, giving rise to the eclectic assemblage of performances as variety shows. Popular acts include musicians, dancers, comedians, animal shows, magicians, acrobats, jugglers, skit arts, athletes, and minstrels. Most notoriously, its mixed gendered audience, the provision of drinks, and the supply of narcotics distinguishes *vaudeville* from other modes of entertainment. However, while one might presume the aristocracy would stand removed from the risqué and churlish, many use them to indulge their proclivities.

CELEBRATION

Parties and gala events are the *crème de la crème* of high society. Attending parties and events is not merely a leisurely pastime but the demonstration of one's right of regard among, or alongside, the

Though all the gentry would delight in their life's works rendered into liturgy by the clergy, the clergy would not fain such modern and potentially vernacular works: theirs is the art of high ceremony and mythopoeia.

Other media, particularly the theatre, are the traditional means by which the nobility might hope to immortalise themselves, both literally and figuratively. By propagating one's deeds to the masses through these mediums, the clergy and gentry can use the stage as a proxy for their own vainglory.

The arts proffer a potentially scandalous liaison between artiste and patron; for just as artists depend on noble patronage, the patrons must court the favour of their artists. While the patron surely holds the purse strings, the artiste knows the heart strings. Foul affairs between the two can lead the play awry unto satire and undo the haughty noble.

from Through Darker Mirrors by Harold Childe

The modern fare of opera employs the language of *Sturmdrang*, though older forms dispense with Cantabile. Fortunately, no genuine artist would dare compose their opus in common Thespian, for that is the language of the theatre; although there are some entirely modern forms of operetta that do. Such dreadful mockeries pretend to the grandeur of opera through common prose their composers have rendered with great complexity.

from Total Work of Art by Leubald Geyer

peers. The party circuit is insular and private, elaborating on decorum to exclude those unworthy of their refinement. Parties are private events, and only those with standing within high society will find ingress. Each is organised by a particular host who discharges its execution but with the assistance of any staff at disposal. Less commonly, commoners of high standing may host, but these are necessarily of lesser prestige and nobles scarce frequent such affairs unless family.

Noble hosts seal their invitations with wax crests bearing the cipher of their house or order, embellished slightly to demonstrate other important motifs; commoners would mark such invites with initials instead. Though the post might be efficient, a good host would not dream of its employment and instead depending on direct deliveries through couriers, with '*répondez s'il vous plaît*'. Attendees must tender their replies at least two days prior to the event and failing to do so is a social slight; arriving without a formal notification is a lesser offence. Arriving without an invitation is a most delicate issue.

PRIVATE

The simplest of parties are events where couples invite other friendly couples for parlour games, including card games, and other fun affairs. The host typically reserves card games for events that take place in the smaller city parlours, while country estates will play host to robust diversions.

Throughout the course of a social event, there are primary points of etiquette that one must abide by at all times. For while the host is responsible for the enjoyment of her guests, her guests must likewise attend to the decorum she has established.

Prior to the formal introduction, one must never address another, even when a name is known. For they have not given you their permission to use it, or invoke them by name. Similarly, in situations where seating is established, convention requires persons be seated according to precedence.

Should one wear pastels or light colours, one invites romantic interest, where dark colours indicate commitment. Likewise, never dance more than once with someone, unless romantically involved with; although, one must never decline a dance with lack of interest, and must contrive a reason.

from A Primer on Society by Valetoria Regina

The alternate favourite are picnics, or country outings, detours into the countryside, where guests and hosts partake in nature, or perhaps the bramblewoods for the daring. Typically, such outings are more vigorous than other parties are and may even encompass a variety of sporting events. There exists a particular tendency for the nobility to conduct certain matters of diplomatic importance quietly upon these digressions, where unwanted surveillance is more conspicuous. Yet reliably some nobles feign certain listlessness to such vital displays, and remain uninvited.

GALA

The premium events are musical or dance parties. Musical parties occur only when talent is available and the invitees are almost exclusively part of the host's inner circle. Although they are prestigious events, they cater for a small gathering with within the confines of one's own home, ill-suited for larger company. These events are the favoured means for a patron to demonstrate the talents of their ward or beneficiary to other peers.

As prestigious as these events are, dance parties readily eclipse them as lavish affairs catering up to several hundred guests. Naturally, any decent gala event must provide ample amounts of space: for its guests, the orchestra, and myriad alcoves for the quieter assignation.

CLIQUE

Cliques are enormously popular among the nobility, having emerged from the coffee-houses and publicans of the century prior. They are private clubs, catering to the whims of high society to become homes away from home. They provide a haven of elegance and style secluded from the public to distinguish a true noble from mere pretenders. Within, a noble may while away the hours on indoor games, drink from the finest liquors, and smoke the best cigars.

Membership is exclusive and elitist, often regulated by elected committees and measured against a standard of reputation; good repute is paramount within these venues and cliques will summarily blackball those who forgo their bills, their dues, or their word.

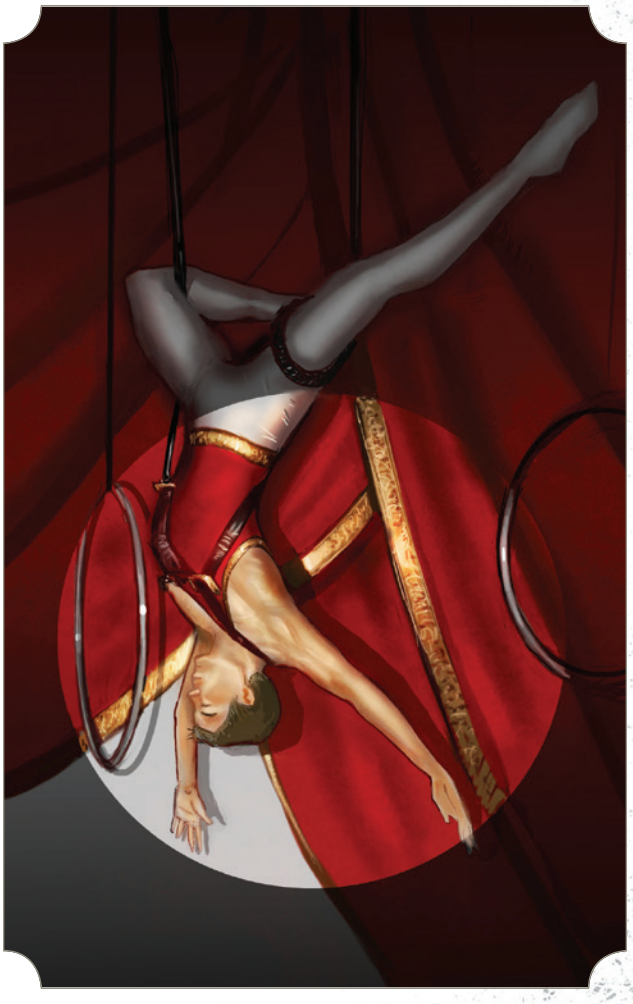
Until recently, most lodges were the exclusive domain of men but by the middle of the 19th Century this practice had given way to a great degree; although there are often parts of most clique establishments that segregate genders.

ATRIUM

Atriums are designed for convalescence: they are health resorts and thermal baths, secluded away from the boorish works of business and politics. Atriums are entirely idle affairs, where the nobility can wallow in their excess and luxury: to relax and indulge in sheer society without excessive trappings, expecting to exchange in pleasantries and gossip.

Though modern plumbing is providing better bathing facilities in the home, many nobles find the baths as a key social outlet. They provide a place where the strictures of noble etiquette may be relaxed; although the baths have etiquette all their own, requiring a modicum of modesty and the right to prohibit entry to those they deem unsuited.

A typical atrium provides three separate baths: the *caldarium*, the *tepidarium*, and the *frigidarium*, providing hot, tepid, and cold water respectively. The *frigidarium* is usually a pool of constantly running water, where clients must wash first for hygienic reasons, to indulge thereafter in massage, drinks, and refreshments.



AUBERGE

The Imperial Orders have lodges as private complexes, giving limited to ordained nobles only. In cities, they may have adjunct buildings in the auberge, where the public can fraternise with their membership. Auberges serve as important cultural and political nexuses, where the aristocracy indulges the company of the bourgeoisie.

It is custom for nobles to forgo the formalities of their political titles, as the only rank that matters here are those of the order. Though counterintuitive, the absence of formal public convention allows many members of the nobility to entreat with each other or to be introduced with each other beyond the remit of decency; to discuss public matters directly without the necessary dissembling of pageantry.

ATELIER

History has known a number of nobles who do not conform to traditional genders, or are diverse in their sexual proclivities. The ateliers are the clubs for the ages-old secret societies of these people, the urania; such as the notorious Hellfire Club and the Diogenes Club.

Ateliers house these societies, holding cultural and chimerical function, veiled through mystery rites. The reputable Flamines and the notorious Salmacine find a social niche through them. The result interweaves the urania into high society.

Fashion

Dressing is the fourth bodily function: the fundamental pleasure to adorn and clothe it in wonders and spectacle. As might be expected, fashion is one of the key means of asserting one's station, and features pre-eminently amongst the nobility. Accoutrements and personal adornment are signals to the nobility, trained in estimating a person's worth by the attention to the detail in their presentation, in both the moderation and display. The best accentuates the physique without revealing too much, even as most topical fads enjoy some sexual undercurrent.

Flying Stuntman by Mateusz Bielski.

The Italic have their luxurious *alta moda*, of gorgeous textiles and classic decals. There is certain attention to detail, using crisp, smooth lines, and a golden-pale swathe that cuts across their eyes like a mask. The Italic favour cream bases, overlaid with shades of yellow- and rose-gold, highlighted by bronzes and white silvers.

The Gallic have their *belle époque*, making a work of art of fashion. Their visual aesthetics are often pragmatic, allowing for general continuity of colour; they tend to favour lighter colours in natural shades, giving a highly naturalistic look that emphasises the tones of bare skin.

The *modetindning* of the Thanes is a demanding and layered fashion, with collars, pleating, and braces. Across the various fashions, they employ denims, and their face is marked in a way reminiscent of war-paint. They prefer reds and whites, even abjuring other colours.

The *neo-attic* fashions of the Hellene are a revival of classical styles, liberally modernised. They favour stained lips for women and kholled eyes for all genders. Their colours are shades of turquoise and green, highlights of copper and gold, all tinted with red ochre.

The Rodinians are renowned for their heavy fabrics, precious stone and gold embroideries, and half-moon headwear to capture the *manto russe* fashion. They favour dark and sable colours, using decoration to accentuate their sensuality, and highlight their features with lingering shades of red and black.

Albion wears the austere and bleak *nova gothe* style, marked by perfect lines and exquisite tailoring, but lacking embellishment. Formal events will see the powdering of faces; the ordinary course of events sees immaculately trimmed hair and near to no makeup.

Few could ever forget the pastels and rich browns with multiple panelling that mark the Cimmerian *oriental gauze*. The oriental look is one of oiled beards, manicured features with elegant and elaborate makeup. Scarves and head wraps are by far the most common accessory, and the manner and luxury of this material is a statement of status.

Recognise the Iberians by their *torero* style, being modest in cut and form but giving subtle colours of underlying passion. In their designs, they employ straight and angular lines, using simple geometries. It is typical for the Iberians to underline their eyes in an angle that continues to the edge of their face.

from The Ides of Hours by Harold Childe

The primacy of imagery has achieved paramount importance with the introduction of photography: fashion represents the pinnacle of taste, remaining the exclusive domain of the elite and prestigious. Good fashion requires affluence as the couturiers make bespoke clothing with the changing trends varies, even while some elements are perennial staples of formal dress. More than simply hemlines, silhouettes, and colours, fashion is indicative of social mores and moods, from manners, to music, and to personality. Recognised it its own right as an exquisite display, the importance of fashion has achieved a principle role for dress code within the pageantry.

NATIONAL DRESS

As much as there are two broad cultural movements that divide the generations, each of the eight nations has their own particular history of unique court dress, uniform, and folk costumes.

With the rise of industry, and the turbulence of the revolutions, the native costume of the peasantry came to be viewed idealistically, crystallising the identity of a given nation in a singular form, to become important to the symbolism of that nation. However, textile manufacture has proliferated, leading to the mass production of clothing and fashion. This coupled with increasing upward mobility, creates a point of high irony where national dress is slowly but surely being replaced with metropolitan fashions.

To date, the dominating republican influence of imperial fashion has left its mark on each and every nation: Metropolaris proves a melting pot, with its fashion influenced by the diversifying immigration. What results is a pastiche of stylised suits with styles from various national dresses. However, do not mistake these cosmopolitan airs as giving rise to a genuine cross-pollination of national aesthetics. National dress remains a point of pride and the nationalists guard jealously against foreign intrusions and affectations.

To adopt a foreign style indicates either favour by that that nation, eccentricity, or vulgarity. Nevertheless, contemporary fashions are becoming increasingly eclectic and informal, with only the nobility following fashion with any regularity. For even in their staid circles, implacable social changes have worked their mark.

INSIGNIA

All nobles, and those in the service of the nobility, must bear their affiliation through insignia when convening in formal spaces. An emblem of their household must be decorated somewhere upon their person: for those in the employ of a household, it is necessarily a patch upon their livery or a badge pinned accordingly. For the nobility, more decorative options present themselves, whether integrated into jewellery, embroidered into garments, or inked indelibly upon their skin.

The one solitary rule is that the insignia must be visible as to forgo its use is to assume an incognito identity: their conduct is then assumed to be duplicitous in nature. However, the nobility are ever artful, and have learned numerous ways of disguising insignia in plain sight: a careful trace of filigree in an otherwise simple ring, or embroidery carefully disguised by decoration. The prevalence of this misdirection has become somewhat fashionable.

SILHOUETTE

Of the feminine form, much has been written, abjured, and frequently denied. One need look no further than the evolution of fashion in the last fifty years for demonstration. For once, it was said there existed only ten types of silhouettes, ten models of femininity. Following the libertines of the 1860s and their indulgences, new modes of fashion were born. From that date on, there existed two principle silhouettes: one bound by corset and one without.

As the graces of the Mousaion cleave to cultural mores, they inevitably keep to the more austere styles of the corset, finding ascetic virtue from its conformity and restriction and simultaneously an instrument for better posture and much-needed discipline. Nevertheless, the corset does not truly njy the status vestment, but rather it is a popular tool. However, a fad has spread among the novices, who repudiate the corset as some manner of vile, legalised torture. They forsake the corset in favour of brassieres, with the most risqué forgoing traditional headdress or mask.

ENSEMBLE

Any noble of good standing shall possess an assortment of tailored clothing. Although it would be remiss to suggest that any such thing as a standard wardrobe exists across the empire, there are broad similarities affected by the increasingly ubiquitous imperial influence. Nevertheless, couturiers have identified a kind of fashion taxonomy, with most outfits being able to fall into one of five types. Within those categories, styles broadly for either the gothic or the planetary mores. Elder nobles tend towards the staid sombre tones of yesteryear, towards archaism. Youthful nobles embrace a novel provocative style, made bespoke but accentuated with the latest technological fad.

Suite-wear entails a variety of formal and semi-formal styles of dress; each noble enjoys at least one such suit or dress. Suite clothing is de rigour of high society, occasioning the opera, formal parties, and public conduct in civic spaces. Their designs are elegant and replete with detail: accessories include pince-nez, monocles, cigarette cases, handkerchiefs, dainty gloves, and neckties. Any jewellery must navigate a treacherous course between subtlety and striking, with its effect to draw attention but not remarkable as gaudy display.

Fashion also changes by day and night. Apparel by day tends to informality, as few expect to enjoy the company of anyone but friends and associates, to leave men and women to perambulate in half-dress. The majority of societal events occur in the evening and because this requires a

A Night at the Opera by Tomasz Belzowski.

promenade before people of no acquaintance, eveningwear takes on formalities that require full dress. Beyond these distinctions, other dress codes make different demands.

The formality of *suite blanc* demands the highest adherence to its detailed code, which is curated and officiated by couturiers; it is reserved for state functions, weddings, funerals, and high ceremony. *Suite noir* holds the second highest standard, catering for a broader variety of styles, and stands reserved for such evening events as recitals, balls, gala events, and liturgical congregation. *Suite rouge* is the third highest standard, comprising civil informality and encompasses broad entailments of clothing; this style is normal for business meetings, outdoor strolls, home dinners, and diplomatic meetings.

QUESTRIAN

Questrian gear entails a broad variety of outfits designed principally for pragmatism over comfort. Those on sabbatical, taking a tour of duty, or upon a quest, frequently choose this ensemble for they kit the erstwhile traveller in manner befitting such rough work. Most questrian gear eschews refined colours and fabrics for sensibility: silks and satins give way to comfortable and breathable linens of robust earth tones; tall boots and high hems permit trekking through turgid ground; and corsets and supports are replaced by fan-laced metal cinches. Inevitably, a pair of aviation goggles and an aviation hat or pith helmet accentuates the affect.

In centuries passed, officials of court were obliged to attire themselves in court uniform, and even those without an office were expected to wear a stylised court dress. In modern times, the conventions are more relaxed, and custom permits officials to wear an appropriate style of morning or eveningwear; however, they must adorn themselves with appropriate insignia to denote their station. There remains but one bastion of these mores, for the national parliaments are the sole courtly arenas where court uniform is enforced.

from Kulturkampf by Auto Eisenmark

TECHNÉ

For some, fetish of technology is not simply provocative fashion but an embrace of science: exchanging fabrics for leathers, linens, or denims, jewels for humming lights, and smocks for coats. The origin of this as a style comes from the long traditions of noble alchemists; the respect of their arcane chemistries acquiring a modicum of respectability. Over time, function has given way to fashion. The fastened smock has become tradition, giving an overall impression of a well-groomed professional, with the outfit's austerity surrendering to an assortment of small and cunning devices, from the humble fob watch to articulated shoulder-mounted turrets.

AESTHETE

Libertines prefer to abscond from the typical display of pageantry, whether in rebellion or in connection to other cultures. The aesthetic movement is one that deliberately rejects structured fashion trends and refers instead to folk costume for inspiration. Most such styles spurn the sombre in favour of wild and lavish colours, weaving outlandish borrowings from nomadic populations. All designed to incite scandal, from tattered skirts and torn stockings, to upturned collars and bare suspenders; even mismatched stained glass eye-pieces. The modes are bohemian, celebrating non-conformity and deviance. Those among intellectual and artistic circles often adopt its affect.

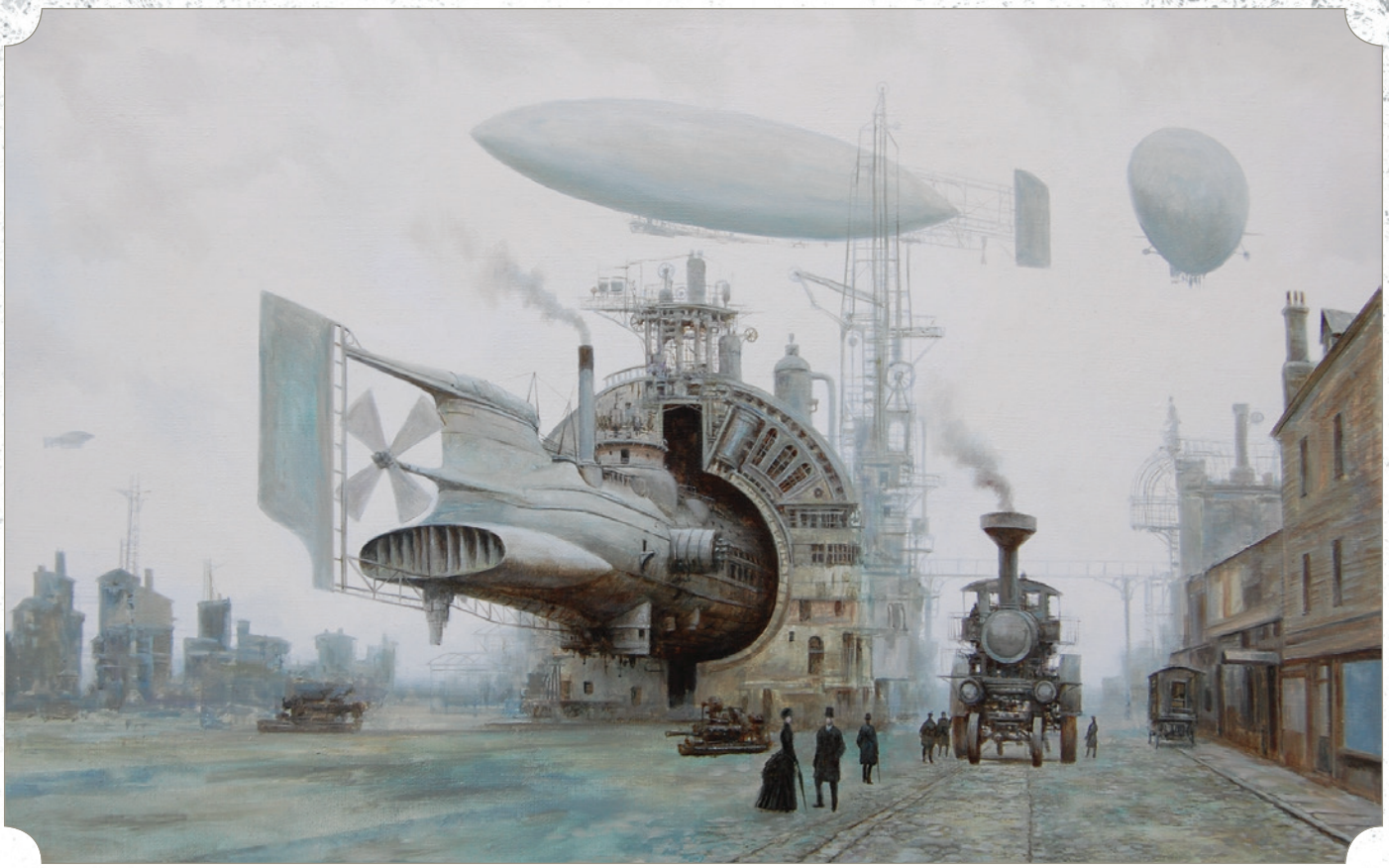
There are no definite modalities regarding the assemblage of shirts, pants, and dresses, which accompany one's toilette. Each form and style enjoys great variance, particularly with reference to national styles. Truly speaking, the apparel of the nobility becomes the bespoke subject of *haute couture*.

from My Pilgrimage by Harold Childe

CLERICAL

Clerical clothing entails the garments and dress worn by the graces of the Mousaion. It is a distinctive style of dress required of the graces since the 13th Century. Though graces follow conventional fashions, they do so in the bounds of their vestment codes. At the centre of clerical dress is the robe, being an ankle-length garment and a headdress. The addition of the corset compliments the loose dress in harmonious counterpoint. Clerical wear features brocade as the signature textile, to the extent that brocade is discouraged on others.

Beyond that, the vestments of the Mousaion features a ceremonial headdress: ranging from a simple veil at the less formal end of the spectrum, moving up through hoods, and resolving in a variety of coifs and wimples of highly elaborate design. Those who attain the status of Sibyls



Arrival by Vadim Voitekhoviteh.

are also expected to wear a ceremonial mask, even in public, matching the element of their caste. Unsurprisingly, the demands of these pieces means that many graces choose to shave their head or crop their hair short, in the interest of comfort.

RAVELLING

Clothing woven with gossamer produces intriguing affect. These fabrics are raiment, endowing their wearers with a gallant air and indomitable purpose. They grant a stately sense of awe: friends treat them generously and enemies demonstrate courtesy. Commoners tend to fall enamoured of these garments. They ensure the aura of genuflection attributed to the nobility is magnified, such that all *faux pas* are smoothed over and deceits more quickly forgiven.

Ravelling is an honoured skill: spinners have earned places in history that compare to specialised alchemists. The talent renders essence into gossamer, which cannot to be found in the nobility. It seemingly requires an emotive catalyst in the spinner and noble passions do not prove suited to its needs. Otherwise, the process is deceptively simple: the raveller requires a spinning wheel with a briar spindle. Threads stream from fingertips to form a single measure in minutes.

This fabrication is time-consuming and emotionally arduous and so producing whole cloth gossamer is difficult. Raiment of pure gossamer is reserved primly for mantles and illustrious tapestry. It is far more common to work gossamer in clothes as embroidery.

APPAREL

The components of contemporary dress are piecemeal. The sheer variety of clothing, fashions, and cultural affects makes it impossible to supply a definitive list of all relevant items. Much of this is a consequence of the universality of imperial republican culture, which comes into conflict with the demands of fashion in a given climate.

COAT

The coat is the universal piece for all fashions, with the overcoat featuring as the pride of any wardrobe. Tailors design coats differently to accentuate different silhouettes and to suit diverse purposes. Coats provide protection and so fragile materials see little use except for assuming extravagant display.

Coats are categorised by the length of their skirt. The full ankle-length coat that defines the cassock is the hallmark of ecclesiastic office. The knee-length skirt of the frock coat is a modification of the dress coat as it cuts away the front and sides of the skirt to leave distinctive tails. The *jaquette* is a modern contrivance, being a simple waist-length coat that becomes a staple of the nobles-errant of the Imperial Orders; they depend on the durability, trading buttons and ties for buckles and clasps.

The *Aventure* is a popular style of adventuring *jaquette*, adopted for its durability and flexibility, fashioned from supple and softer leathers. The most iconic of these are those worn by aviators, which ensure lightness but warmth in the heights of the ether. However, those who seek out true danger, often require for themselves a dragoncoat, being thick cassocks wrought from intricate overlapping draping scales, which shimmer in the light.

The other types of coats not designed for fashionable purposes have a more nefarious ilk. This includes the night coat, as a form-fitting cassock with flared hips and a high collar and cut from the darkest velvet black, lined with brass girding. Though they offer less protection, they are stealthy and neither gleam nor shine.

CORSET AND VEST

Vests and corsets are mainstays of modern fashion, being something of a *pièce de résistance*, in more than one sense of the meaning. The corset or vest provides a tableau for intricate detail and design; they are redoubtably the centrepiece of any fashionable statement, except perhaps for one's headdress. They also provide coverage for the most vital parts of a human physique and their couturiers often engineer them with subtle protections.

However, the difficulty in design is balancing protection with motility, so couturiers bone or form them with stiff materials, such as steel, reed, wood, whalebone, or even stiff cording. At their most rudimentary, they may be fitted with firm plates sewn into the lining, and perhaps riveted in place for an industrial aesthetic. Other modifications experiment with gills and gussets, shifting plates, and intricate subtle hinges. Some of the more advanced fabrications use incredibly durable materials, able to bear incredible tensile strengths.

GLOVE AND BRACER

The current era represents a golden age for gloves of all manner of length, with opera gloves and kid leather gloves becoming key parts of any noble's toilette; none would dream of arriving at any formal event with their hands undressed. Over the last century, gloves tended towards elbow-length for eveningwear, as in contrast to wrist-length gloves and elongated sleeves by day.

The Baroness Samedhi by Jessica van Hulle.

Dapper opera gloves are ill suited for travelling, giving way to travelling gloves of leather. Such gloves have earned the moniker of *churls*, largely due to the frequent use of plating sewn into the knuckles for additional damage and protection.

Their more elaborate cousins depend on a brace mounted upon the forearm, to enable a device kept at arm's length; hidden by inevitable lengthy sleeves. Such weapons use spring-loading or extendible mechanisms to deliver a single device into the hand, activated by certain gestures. Such gadgetry permits the concealment of a weapon, most commonly a stiletto, garrotte, or derringer pistol. Others extend one or more retractable claws over the fingers to lock into place.

FOOTWEAR

By far, the dominant style of footwear is a type of boot: serviceable, comfortable, and highly variable, extending from any length between above the ankle to all the way up to the hip; though few venture above the knee. Boots fashion themselves around the heel, distinguished from the sole even when made of a single piece.

Their sturdy forms and ample size affords sufficient infrastructure to incorporate inconspicuous devices. The most notorious of these being the tell-tale steel-cap coverings and bulky ankles marking of spring-loaded heels: built from unique tensile alchemical materials, they gradually store potential energy with pedestrian movements and with the simple click of the heels release that force kinetically through the heels. They powerfully augment movement and other athletic tasks.

EYEWEAR

The role of eyewear varies: whether monocle, *pince-nez*, spectacles, masks, or other elegant ornamentation, the fashionable noble bears a range of bedazzling pieces. Not merely to cover the eyes, some have masks or shades that render a noble incognito. Certainly, among the libertine, stained and tinted glasses are popular, with colourings range from a pure black tint to rosy hue.

Of course, beyond simple decoration and disguise, the prevalence of modern aviation has lent itself to the dissemination of goggles as fashionable. Alchemically treated lenses open up new vistas to the eye such as those etherically treated as Luminiferous Eyes, giving a variety of spectral lenses. Lens-polishers treat each lens with different essences to permit the viewing of glorious halos of auric energies and rivulets of quick in the air.

Incognito is more than simply dressing down or donning a disguise, for the pretence also veils the noble nature. While incognito, the skein renders these persons nigh-invisible to the commoner, as though they were merely another commoner. However, they are still recognisable to the other nobility, though social convention demands them to be ignored. More pertinently, they pass invisibly to the other effects of the skein that wrap around the nobility.

from The Waking Dream
by Matilda Mulfstan

CANE AND PARASOL

Canes have long since provided service as a crutch, yet have become fashionable accessory esteemed by ornate and clever handles. Parasols are the feminine equivalent, sporting long stems and florid designs. It is an open secret that canes and parasols possess almost endless varieties of implements, tools, and even weapons. Their utility ranges from elegant to wicked, including compasses, maps, cigarette cases, lighters, and flasks; the most cunning ever known opened up to demonstrate a perfectly working violin.

The most common tool the hidden blade: elegant and thin like a fencing foil. Their popularity as a concealed weapon has increased with the widespread use of firearms. While they may not provide the most robust defence against properly weighted blades, they are better than naught against the dark.

Other models have removable handles t reveal a concealed gun: most only capable of one small shot, though some contain up to four zip shots. Such weapons take a little longer to engage than a foil, precluding their use against urgent and imminent danger; they are thus not always favoured over blades. The most dastardly of devices fills a hollow handle with phloss. They prove a

boon at night as ready light sources, and the electrostatic charge can be unleashed along the length of a metallic rod to deliver a powerful shock. Many a cutpurse simply avoids the eerie lights of these sticks, just to be sure.

JEWELLERY

Jewellery provides the final touch to any ensemble and fondness abounds such finely wrought treasures. This is particularly true of those jewels that employ alchemical metals, serving little in the way of practicality but veritably engender these prizes with sentimentality. The display or possession of any alchemical jewellery is an affect of status both in court and upon the street.

Precious jewels are certainly popular with the nobility, not merely for ornamentation: particular attention is paid to the deployment of precious and semi-precious stones, especially as certain stones have significance to certain clans. It is obstreperous to adorn oneself with the symbolic stones of other clans.

Vice

High society and vice describe two halves of the same continuity: they both appeal to the more colourful extremities of humankind. Predilections towards vice are found more frequently in urban homes than in rural estates, where tastes run more prosaically. The colourful wash of civic-minded citizens of Metropolaris creates a constant demand for unusual and exotic needs.

Vice may be found in many the black markets of coves and dens. Each is a place hidden from the light of day to offer drugs, sex, and gambling. Often, their façades present a quasi-legitimate business or with other legally permitted vices, such as drinking and risqué entertainment; the more sinister and controversial works occur in the back-of-house. There are also places where one can go to acquire many goods, either protected by monopoly or proscribed as faerie and takwin goods.

Indubitably, larger cities possess their own underground grottos of nightbreed mummers, whose only means of subsistence is profiteering from vice, even while human prejudice denies them honest labour. The constabularies are often aware of their existence but their communities are so insular that it is near impossible the penetrate them.

DRINK

Alcohol and all its brews is the most common and most socially acceptable vice across the empire. Drinking is a social lubricant and serves as a reprieve at cliques. For those of moderate means, there are abundant venues that supply libations and other drink: restaurants, theatre circles, and hostels represent the socially acceptable spaces to imbibe.

Compare such places to publicans for the working class, having evolved from rustic taverns found in the provinces. Publicans are one part cheap hostel, one part coach-house, and one part bar. They chiefly cater ales and lagers and dispense cheap spirits, notably gin and rum. They become hubs of gossip and secrets. There is no such thing as a reputable publican but there are those where it is safe to walk in without a weapon of some sort.

DRUGS

A pharmacopoeia of drugs makes itself available to the discerning hedonist or pleasure seeker. Cocaine is the vice of the wealthy, opium panders to the masses, and laudanum finds wide abuse high and low; as a mixture of alcohol and opium it is frequently perceived to hold medicinal

properties. Chloral is a hypnotic, sedative compound that reacts with water, and finds favour with commoner and noble alike; other barbiturates permeate populations broadly.

The Mousaion provides the greatest source of condemnation for drug use on ethical bases. Medical scholars to condemn drug abuse as a weakness of character, signifying an inability to contend the demands of society and its etiquette.

GAMBLING

Society regards gambling with curiosity, a consequence of the way it frequently conflates luck and prosperity. It examples a social paradox: a damnable vice that is nevertheless celebrated. While not exactly admired, gambling captures popular imagination through certain lavish sophistication.

In this, casinos are exemplar: they are halls of luxury and temples to chance, where fate and luck are paramount. No noble worth their merit would indulge in the petty exchange of currency at such venues. The high-stakes tables require bets of luxuries, favours, vices, and other wonders. Favoured games of chance include dice, cards, or even lots.

The races prove a vernacular affair but nevertheless enjoy the respect of the nobility. While lowbrow races exist, high society distinguishes from them by dint of grandeur, revelry, and cost; for a peer to patronise a race demonstrates its pedigree. Horses remain the most accepted mode, and dogs are seen as a poor facsimile. However, modern invention has introduced races of airships, automobiles, and even aetherships; the favoured pastime of the bourgeoisie.

SEX

Noble society has a carnal undercurrent, of deeply pulsing desire. Though social mores demur against sex as a commodity, there are few prohibitions on its indulgence. Beyond the confines of insular brothels, individuals seek company on the streets, their trade concealed in plain sight. Seen but not observed. Heard but scarcely listened to. Provided solicitations are not too public, the constabularies ignore these affairs.

Numerous and wildly diverse establishments ply a variety of trades, ranging from the commonplace to the peculiar. Certain venues proffer various nightbreed workers, for their talents touch the mind as well as the flesh. Changelings offer erotic dreams, allowing for immersion into fantasy. Darklings pander to explore perverse desires, indulging illicit pleasures. Wildlings cater to other animalistic needs.

La Fée Verte by Tomasz Bełzowski.

Trade

Economics is beyond the pale for the plebeian work force. Though most of industry depends upon the working class for the manufacture and trading of goods, the awareness of the work force of its role in such is largely limited. Contrast this with the aristocracy, whose knowledge of such affairs encompasses international trade, exchange, and commodity valuing. Certainly, the wealthiest organisations in the entire Realm are the great clans, as collectively, they own more wealth than the Coronal itself and, if united, could easily purchase the entire imperial palace, Adamantine. However, while the great houses possess most of the wealth and land, it is the Chancery that controls and regulates the currency.

Modern economies perhaps began first with the shift from protected to open economies, which is one of barely remarked-upon historical conflicts. For while the empire sought to impose a universal order, the nations resisted and this necessitated a clandestine and even internecine struggle between them.

At the core, this ideological rift challenged assumptions pertaining to the exploitation and export of raw materials. Since manufactured goods provided higher export value than raw materials, a moratorium was common on the importation of raw materials that could be worked locally. Likewise, there was resilience against imported goods where they could be produced domestically; the exchange of gold and silver became most contentious. In practice, nations competed heavily for traded goods between them, but depended on colonial assets to export manufactured goods and import raw materials.

Something gave way, and the paradigm of infinite wealth and expansion faltered, and protectionism gave way to open trading. The new paradigm mandated that goods that could be acquired cheaply abroad should be, to advantage the polity that did so.

from The Empire's Dowry
by Auto Eisenmark

Money

Money works subtly and invisibly: trust and promise working people in anonymous and personal ways. Its utility creates gilded cages and velvet collars: both are worn lightly and even willingly, for all their opulence. Two official currencies that circulates the expanse of the empire: coin and prestation. Dross entails the more common silver standard of bullion coinage and is used for exchange of goods and services. In contrast, prestation uses a combination of promissory notes for or coin minted from orichalcum to form part of its culture.

Coin

Dross is the bullion coin trade currency backed with a silver standard. Its measure is metric, with a single dross making one hundred pence; older coins may exchange at a gross. The minting of dross occurs in various national capitals, to circulate throughout their dominion. They stamp the obverse with the national signet and the reverse with the Invictus' profile.

Ostensibly, each national currency holds an equivalent value and is legal tender throughout the empire. In reality, their value fluctuates as local markets accept or reject foreign currency. These are the consequences of vast national interests and the manner in which their foreign agencies interact. Adversarial nations rarely trade well, while allied nations meet measure for measure.

In the last few decades, the Imperium has directly attempted to provide a gold-backed currency minted out of Metropolaris, much to the chagrin of national interests. Their imprint bears the Empyrean star upon the obverse, and his profile facing right instead of left, as upon the national currencies. While the value of imperial currency holds equivalence to the silver-backed dross, their scarcity, combined with the imperial monopoly on gold reserves and public trust in the imperial coffers artificially inflates their value.

Merchants value the imperial dross for other reasons: imperial dross holds greater neutrality even amid international tensions and many traders value the currency on par with local currencies as a standard rule. Accordingly, the gold-backed dross is the *de facto* international standard currency, against which the market estimates all other currencies.

Prestation

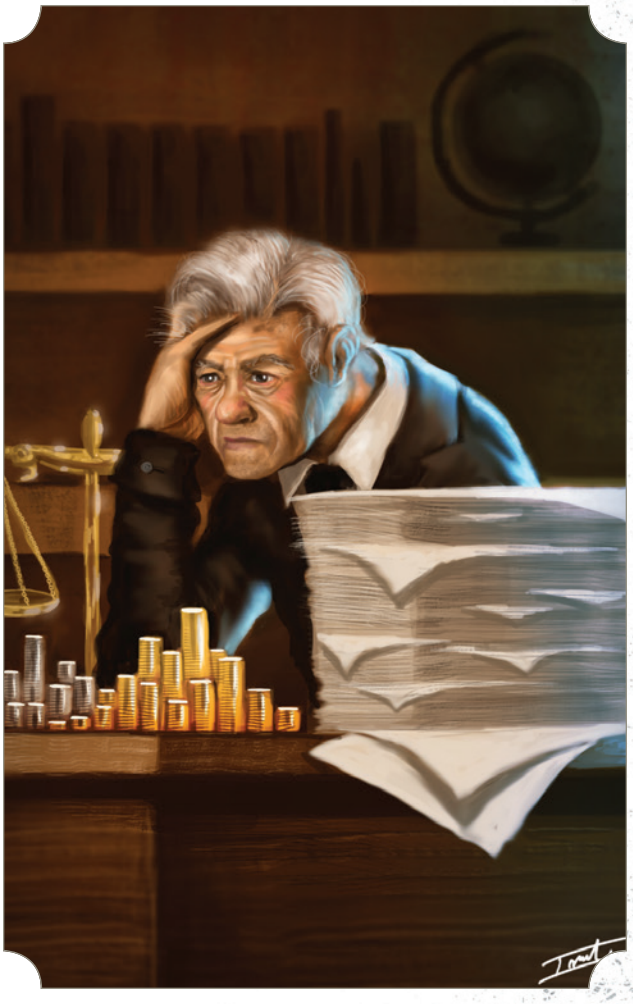
Prestation is the currency of favours among the nobility. The primary medium of exchange is through promissory notes and similar notary forms. In principle, one could exchange prestation

for commodities, it is regarded to demean the customs of obligation that are expected to lie beyond sheer materialism. Suffice it to say, nobles prefer to rely upon prestation as mediated by gloss, than to be debased through barter with coin.

While dross is a currency, gloss is an alchemical ink used in prestation, which seems gauche to reduce noble work to monetary value. Having debt and obligation to other nobles ensures an intricate web of interdependence. In contrast, dependency on monetary exchange signals that the noble in question has neither friends nor allies on which to depend. Either that or the purchase is of scandalous or clandestine nature.

Prestation may be marked by promissory notes written with gloss; an indelible, alchemically treated ink that is psychoactive. Each note is given elaborate decoration to prevent forgery. Notes are more common for intricate forms of prestation, but nobles employ the coins of gloss for the purpose of more common favours and exchanges.

Gloss reacts to pledges, promises, and formal oaths. When given as a token of that pledge, the offer impresses itself upon the sigil or seal. The reserve of the coin often assumes the profile of the noble so sworn, and the name sworn upon beneath. Should the promise be forsaken, the image mars into blemish. Though if the noble dies, the imprint simply fades away.



COMMERCE

Though the bramblewoods impede individual domains, a robust trade network has been instrumental in connecting its disparate parts. In this lies something of a beast, as market demands for efficient and fast transport has underpinned several key developments: the founding of the rail network, the shipping lines, the proliferation of industrial infrastructure, and many of the advancements of automata and alchemy. This impetus for trade maintains the rail and roads, ensures the waygates between domains remain open, and the flow of people and goods, all connecting domains to the central Metropolaris.

AGORA

The agora stands as a communal feature in the heart of any city or township, ranging from the stall-packed marketplaces of remote domains to the shop-front cul-de-sacs of the city. Even on quiet days the agora is never still, though they experience their greatest confluence on the day of Asteron.

While the cartels monopolise certain goods and services, those which are not part of their purviews are found in the agora's open space. The more prestigious agorae may also boast a forum: large empty plazas providing public spaces before sites of historical note, each a hub of public activity. Their central public place guarantees that the perimeters of most such fora line with the boutiques, cliques, and halls for the orders themselves.

The demarcation between forum and agora is quite obtuse. A veil of conduct and proprietary defends the difference, for the forum is a place of civil affairs and so demands standards of premium etiquette. Their spaces are also protected against food and drink, as being distractions from the

Gilty Conscience by Forrest Imel.

pursuits of civic affairs. Conversely, the agora proper remains a place of bustling and frenetic activity, where smells and colours can overwhelm the most stalwart purveyor of wares.

AFFLUENCE

Wealth and luxury and the means to achieve them are subjects of great fascination. Despite numerous opportunities for social mobility, the nobility maintain a majority interest in all ventures of affluence; such is a consequence of history.

Few beyond the nobility can truly aspire to a life of leisure. Principally, their estate accrues the vast amount of income for the members of a household, who enjoy a stipend from its revenue; though the fullness of that income is of varying modesty. However, this is not to suggest that the nobility rest on their laurels: there are deep obligations in managing an estate that demands its members contribute to the estate's ventures, investments, and fortunes.

The affluence of the nobility is certainly one of their dimensions most often admired by the public, even as it is rebuked. Prosperity is strongly associated with the benefaction of luck and fate; some even contend that there is some intrinsic right to their station, being favoured by fate and so are entitled to the opulence they enjoy; little is agreed upon concerning what qualities are most deserving of such favour. More nuanced views disregard the mere hoarding of riches as indicative of wealth and instead look influence: money cultivates interdependencies within the public sphere, much as prestation does among nobility.

An average income of a given noble will vary greatly, and, most significantly, in relation to the largess and generosity of any estate to which they are attached. In this sense, such income is best thought of as the disposable currency the noble has to hand, disregarding their living costs, and other wealth mired in the maintenance of assets.

Nobles of well-regarded landed estates should generally enjoy ƒ20 every week, whereas the more modest estates may only afford ƒ15. Likewise, the Mousaion provides a dispensation of about ƒ15 per week to their graces, and extends that to ƒ20 if they are a Sibyl. Commissioned officers are usually afforded a stipend of ƒ10 each week, although the Mamones typically have access to a larger array of luxuries not available to their fellows.

Outside of the gentry and clergy, there is a range of incomes with members of the valued professions often boasting ƒ5 to ƒ9 each week, while the working-class earns a meagre ƒ2 each week. Subsistence living is ƒ1 per week.

from The Empire's Dowry
by Auto Eisenmark

TAXATION

The Imperium has the only agencies that can collect taxes. The Tax, for there is only one recognised, is an income tax levied against property holdings, which accordingly taxes only the nobility. Society invariably regards the numerous levies beyond the Tax in a different light, where many domains and nations charge fees for their duties and services.

Tariffs such as these are principle sources of income for individual domains, although only a secondary revenue for the nations. Though the distinction is subtle, it is one ardently defended among the nobility. Implicated in this distinction is over of prestige by virtue of Imperial recognition of one's nobility. Nobles divide as whether this is a mercantile *noblesse oblige*, or as an unfair onus.

The revenue from the Tax sets the budget for the ministries of the Chancery and the Imperial Orders. The obligation of infrastructure falls to the nation-states, who receive a budget allocated from the central pool administered by the Chancery. Though it may seem that such an arrangement provides the Chancery with inordinate levels of discretionary power, the reality is that these allocations are highly relevant to the membership of the Senate.

Though all nobles are taxed equally, only the revenue raised from those domains that are the possessions of Dukes and those belonging to the imperial territories of Metropolaris, go directly to imperial coffers. The remainder is provisionally allocated to the nation that domain holds allegiance to. Such an arrangement causes nations to hold a real interest in the allegiance of their domains; it also ensures only the most influential contribute directly to the maintenance of the empire's centre. It is rather deceptive that the income generated by these select Dukes, and as supplemented by the wealth of Metropolaris, is actually the lion's share of revenue raised by the Tax.

TITHING

The Mousaion enjoys a tithe from every noble. Though ostensibly it is a voluntary donation, few forgo its payment without trepidation. With tithes comes the blessings and amity of the Mousaion, and the Auspice in turn. Many nobles rightly fear the condemnation of the Mousaion,

sometimes earned upon a complete lack of tithing. Theirs is the power to withhold advice and wisdom, and more powerfully their prophetic insights and good will with the populace. Such ostracism is political death for most lieges, whose subjects quickly revile them to then falter in their purpose. Revolution is sure to ferment in the hearts of those scorned and abjured by the Mousaion. Nevertheless, forfend any such remark that reduces the Mousaion's favour as mercenary.

The majority of tithed income goes towards supporting the work of the graces and the Sibyls, even while a fair portion is set aside for charity and good works. For although this reserve is not widely advertised, the graces and Sibyls dispense the largess as needed for the benefit of local communities; particularly when its commonfolk have suffered from crop failure, fire, or other disaster. However, under the guidance of the Sibyls, there is capacity to augur the weather and mitigate such calamity through adequate preparation and prevention.

FINANCING

Banking is the chief means of financing and monopolised by the Bullion Guild. However, for certain considerations, the Guild enables other associations to participate in their banking franchise. Certainly, few institutions beyond the banks provide loans, and fewer nobles still apply for loans besides. Most formal lines of credit are extended to the commoners. Commoners could potentially ask their liege for a loan, but they often entail poorly defined favours due at some future point, rather than interest. Banks may place you in debt, but they will quantify that debt.

It is a mistake to consider the banks of the Guild as places solely for the storing and lending of money, for they serve as vaults for precious commodities, including art, titles and other documents, as well as precious metals. Principally, they hold in trust many of the bonds key to dynastic influence. For the great houses ensure their influence over imperial politics is through such bonds. While taxes provide a reasonable portion of the money necessary to run, fund, and bankroll the nations, the great houses compensate with the ability to mobilise, liquidate, and transfer vast sums of capital and investment to where they are needed.

Typically, when a nation seeks to pursue a financially costly project, they either solicit the Chancery for a budget, or bonds from greater houses. Either way, national interests are beholden, and where the Imperium is direct and costly, the houses rarely call their bonds in return, preferring them as guarantees for the placement of their members in key ministries and diplomatic postings.

Estate

Landed estates serve as the redoubtable, premium properties and the nigh-exclusive possession of the Peerage as those persons forming the hierogamy. Such means that the land is theirs by right and by power. Its resources and assets are the wealth of a domain, with as much variety of holdings as there are individual domains. Each domain's geography is the primary determinant of the availability its primary industries, tempered by the capacity of is infrastructure.

Reflected Prosperity by Mateusz Bielski.

WARD AND HOLDING

Each domain subdivides into discrete tracts of land known as wards: a single parcel of land defined by contiguous natural geographies, such as mountains, hills, plains, riverlands, coastline, forest, swamps, tundra, jungle, or desert. The smallest domain possesses at least three wards.

There are two main types of holdings: agrarian and stock, which both produce unique commodities important to the estate's prosperity. Both can also potentially provide rare luxury goods. Agrarian holdings represent farmlands, each producing one bushel of food, typically grain or meat; through they may fabricate cotton or linen instead. Luxury commodities are crops requiring careful cultivation including cocoa, coffee, tea, wine, and spices. Stock represents the raw material acquired through burrows, mills, mines, quarries, and strands to produce clay, lumber, metals, stone, and glass respectively. Some lands are fortunate enough to enjoy the wealth of gold, silver, and gems.

These descriptions are functional abstractions, as many of the details of these wards are not of imminent concern for the court. As the court focuses primarily on their commodity use, scarce difference exist between rye and wheat as grain and copper and aluminium as metals, even while farmers and artificers rightly consider practical difference between them. Principally, courtly interests extend only when they become relevant to furthering trade and exchange.

AGRONOMY

As the only true wilderness lies beyond the limits of the empire, or perhaps in the depths of the bramblewoods, the city has become the centrepiece of natural ecologies; even though all cities are eclipsed by Metropolaris. The empire's infrastructure inscribes vast lines of resources and energy towards and away from city hubs.

The previous century saw emergence of the open field systems, as a vestige of feudalism. Yet by the end of that century, burgeoning industry demanded massive swathes of enclosed fields, which displaced farmers and their grazing rights; even as it brought about several critical advancements. Gone are the days of fallow fields and three-year crop rotation, in favour of three-field crop rotations: these and other advancements induce increase wheat productivity by half again. This is a necessary contribution to the oncoming population growth. For in the last fifty years alone, the population of the Realm has nearly doubled, being close to four hundred and five million.

This population boom, facilitated by increased agricultural yield, enabled the relocation of peasants from the pasture to the factory. By the end of the 19th Century, the incredibly localised demands of food became offset by competitive imports as made possible by advances in transportation, refrigeration, and many other technologies. Such changes hold considerable ramifications on the supply and demand of food, one exaggerated as the majority of the population shifts from an agrarian, rural lifestyle in the provinces towards the large aggregate industrial work-forces of the cities.

INFRASTRUCTURE

The impediments of the bramblewoods mean that technology and infrastructure does not disseminate uniformly across the empire. There is a correlation between the progressive attitudes of a liege and the level of modern technology a domain enjoys. Certain courts object to modernity and accordingly resist technological change. The more integrated the imperial infrastructure is with the domain, the more exposed they become to a panoply of cultures, goods, and strangers. For such infrastructure provides vast economic opportunities and simultaneously requires an educated workforce.

Attitudes towards technology stand as an informal measure of breeding. Those who are born, live, and die amid sophisticated urban centres become accustomed to developed infrastructure; their lives have been catered to by novel developments. Contrast this to the farthest of domains, being those that lag behind the imperial standard of life by years, decades, or more; though even these most remote provincial reaches enjoy the technology of the Flamboyance.

Yet even those domains forthrightly hostile to modernity must reconcile with the cosmopolitan urbanites leading political attitudes: the most stalwart resistance had ceded in the face of potential isolation. Yet apocryphal accounts persist of domains that have sundered their waygates in desperate attempts to hold onto their traditional ways of life, even as they lay exposed to interference from the empire's imperial armada.

As far as the empire is concerned, its polity is absolute: emancipation is complete and universal, and the franchise extended. Even where the reality for commoners is one facing a life lived as disposable labour within these remote domains; indentured service exists in practice if not in name.

MANUFACTURE

The manufacture of goods is the route to prosperity for any given domain, encompassing textiles, furniture, mechanicals, chemicals, food, paper, pottery, and metalwork; as a staple of trade, they are the preferred export over raw resources, particularly as the bramblewoods provides incentive for self-sufficiency. Nevertheless, each domain bears its own particularities and the scarcity of certain resources necessitates regional coordination of exchange. It is well that each domain often bears one or two niche manufactories.

Industrialisation has played a crucial role in the widespread dissemination of manufacture. Central to this is the provision of electricity: the meanest of domains can depend successfully on basic mills powered by wind or water. However manufacture requires electrodyne power systems, which most domains establish in their principle village of their domain. Power production is a point of pride and independence.

WORK FORCE

Factories also require sufficient work forces for their myriad manual tasks. Proper manufacture remains beyond the low-level cottage industries of rural locales, but defaults to concentrated urban populations. Only those domains with sufficient population density can truly support a factory industrial base, often at the expense of land necessary for acquiring stock and food. Most domains export their manufactured goods regionally in exchange for the raw materials.

Core to the sustainability of these networks is the provision of sufficient food for its work force; a liege retaining an industrial infrastructure must carefully ensure a steady supply of produce, either from their own holdings or through exchange. Subsequently, maintaining good local relations becomes paramount as produce transports poorly with costs increasing exponentially as it travels.

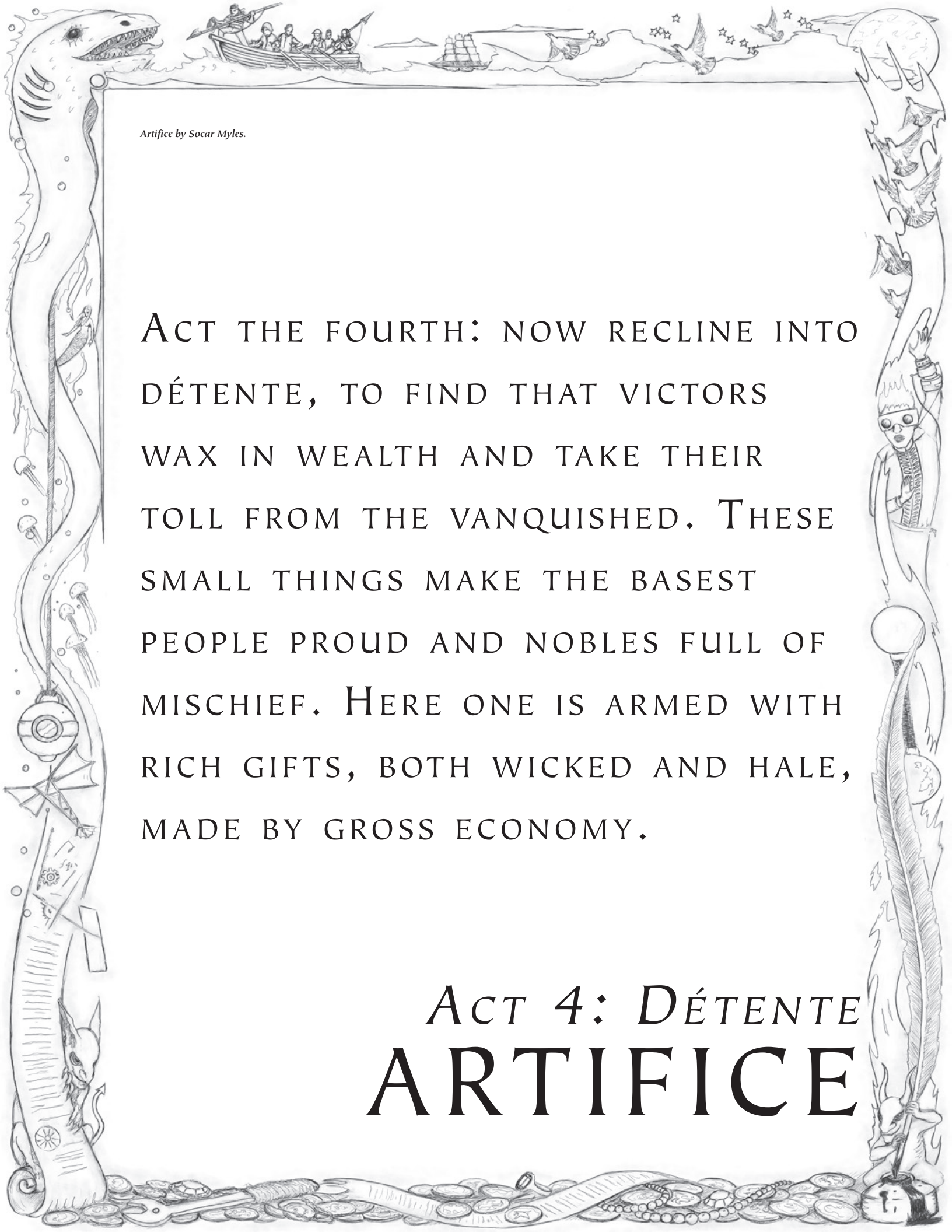
History has many object lessons of lieges who relied far too casually on industrialisation, converting land slated for feedstock and raw materials into industrial parks far too rapidly. Then discovering, too late, that the domain and its trading partners were unable to sustain the necessary work force: these domains spiralled quickly downwards into wastelands.

Wheat, barley, and rye were the staples of diets across the Realm for millennia: exploration and colonisation have introduced new produce that have proved crucial in advancing trading interests and supplementing nutritional needs and material produce; principally being potato, tea, coca, and sugar, cotton, quinine, tobacco, and rubber. However, one need not travel far to encounter grain staples in any given market.

Instead, the principle means of assessing dietary habits and customs are around the consumption of meat: even the meanest of communities take pride in the provision of meat, preferably locally raised, for being unable to serve meat to guests is a sign of abject poverty. However, as modernity brought increased social mobility, meat became increasingly available, increasing its demand.

The industrialisation of the meat production is something of concern to me, and is highly contentious among the Sylvan caste. The recommended diet of the Sylvan graces is one that defers meat eating, favouring egg production over poultry meat and dairy production over cattle meat. The Sylvan graces warn against the growing consumption of meat, and the huge uptake by the common populace of this consumption and its attendance need for grain surplus. Yet, the Sylvan face great opposition as meat becomes increasingly entrenched in cultural attitudes.

from The New Idyll by Cassandra Shore



Artifice by Socar Myles.

Act the fourth: now recline into détente, to find that victors wax in wealth and take their toll from the vanquished. These small things make the basest people proud and nobles full of mischief. Here one is armed with rich gifts, both wicked and hale, made by gross economy.

Act 4: Détente
ARTIFICE

Electrodyne

The industrial revolution reconfigured the political landscape. Innovation has built the empire into a pinnacle of modern human achievement. The role of technology was central to these changes, for its egalitarian tendencies, placing power into the ordinary citizen. Without the means of technology, the common folk would not have been able to solicit the Great Compromise.

from A Machine to End War by Nikolai Techna

Metropolaris is not only the hub of human civilisation, but also it is the heart of the empire's machinery, whose great engine pulses an electric grid. It is the exemplar of modern electronic wonders; home not to the thermionic valve, and other electrodyne technologies. The word electrodyne itself was once an urban parochialism but has since become a vernacular word. It refers to the first of its devices, being that of a relatively simple dynamo.

Today, electrodyne engineering has become much more, and continues to exploit all novel electronic advancements for the betterment of human kind.

from The Techna Papers by Nikolai Techna

Recent developments in alchemy have begun revealing the nature of the body electric: a subtle body of quick and humours. These experiments have demonstrated the capacity for such humours respond to electromagnetism, and now a variety of devices exists to manipulate them.

A channel of electricity may affect the flow of quick, when run through primary points to either stimulate or impede the flow through these vital circuits. Some success has been achieved in altering the balance of humours within the body, thereby revitalising, calming, or even, apocryphally, reanimating flesh.

from A Treatise on the Body Electric by Cassandra Shore

The modern era is hailed as the dawn of material novelties; one heard in the clatter of the telegraph, the jingle of the telephone, and the cacophony of the first mass-produced typewriters. It is seen in the dazzling aura of electric light, and experienced in both the eerie feelings during ascent in the first elevator rides and the democratic mobility of the bicycle. For the first time in history, the Realm beholds a mass society.

Electricity has heralded the electrodyne engineering and has replaced steam as the principle means of motive power. Cultural divisions reveal holdfasts of both realms of power, which have culminated in stalemate: steam remains the domicile of locomotive engines and other large-scale mechanics, while electricity powers modern alchemical gadgets. Boilers and their engines provide greater mechanical power, though electricity's flexibility has broader uses. Upon the backs of electrodyne engineering, artisans have produced the first power grids in capital cities, to supply power to domestic homes.

Alchemy

Alchemy is the foundation of electrodyne engineering. Its principles are elementary, a blend of art and science, of mind and matter, and of essence and substance. Its most rudimentary methods produce exotic materials by fusing substance with essences, to take basic material substance and imbuing with imaginary constructs. By imbuing essence into substance, the alchemist can temper an ordinary material into the extraordinary and devise technologies that surpass natural limitations.

Still, alchemy is subject to its own discreet laws, and despite being able to subvert natural laws, they cannot completely surpass them. Prime among them is the inability for alchemy to violate the laws of conservation. For all that alchemists manipulate the properties of matter, they can neither annihilate nor materialise a given substance; even though they may convert immaterial essence into substance.

Fulmonry

Alchemists deal with the chimerical ether that suffuses the world. It is an immaterial medium composed of essence. Ether is unique, being both fluidic, in being able to permeate all available space, but also entirely static, permitting light to travel through at a steady state.

Through principles derived in observation of the ether, fulmonry comprises an advanced discipline of alchemy that enables can affect the propagation of light and electricity. Accordingly, fulmonry is the manipulation of forces and energies. Similarly, fulmonry cannot directly violate the law of conversation, or recoup energy lost in transmission. Instead, the fulmonist may circumvent this loss by polarising the ether such that a wave maintains its energy between two places.

PRACTICE

Alchemy represents an esoteric science and its methods contain many subtleties that escape most students. All alchemical works require of a touchstone, being a seemingly innocuous shard of matter that acts as a catalyst for alchemical workings. Touchstones allow alchemists to create stable forms, literal configurations of ideals into reality, through carefully codified ideograms

called runes. By these means, the alchemist impresses the meaning of those forms onto matter and energy alike. Runs are public knowledge, with their iconography finding use in popular culture, sometimes even decorating fashion. Yet runes remain impotent without a touchstone, making the fabrication of these stones the mark of a master of the craft.

Touchstones are produced through unique furnaces known as athanors. Each is the size of an average human being, and composed of a specific and careful blending of the five elements of brass, glass, clay, stone, and wood. At the centre of this furnace rests an egg-shaped glass vessel, which must be positioned over a small pit of sand, heated by a fire. The placement of this vessel requires the utmost precision, for work requires the vessel to be tuned to the ether, and relocation often destroys this connection. Observations demonstrate that areas with large bodies of water or open air are most conducive to this type of subtle attuning.

The formula of every work of alchemy falls into one of three circles of discipline. The outer circle is the workings of alchemy most familiar to the public, being those manipulations of matter. The second tier of alchemy contains the workings of fulmonry and the manipulations of energies. The innermost circle is nigh obscure, and pertains to those alchemies purported to manipulate the very fundaments of life itself. Entry into each circle is not by initiation, but through the fabrication of a touchstone of that circle. The three touchstones, in order of magnitude and difficulty to create are the *nigrido*, the *albedo*, and the *rubido*; the last being called the Philosopher's Stone in vernacular tongues. Philosopher's Stones are highly prized, but scarce, and there are more rumours of alchemists who possess such stones than alchemists that can genuinely manufacture them.

The first touchstone is *nigrido*, the black rock, which opens the way for the manipulation of material properties, and the manufacture of exotic materials. These are the simplest of arts of alchemy, and of all the disciplines they are those that the public most easily recognise.

The second touchstone is *albedo*, the whites tone, of which perhaps only a quarter of serious alchemists managed to produce. Its art commands the pellucid properties of the ether, giving capacity to form varied fields that affect the various qualities of light and electricity as they pass through. With the prominence of my work and other electrodyne engineers, fulmonry gains broader recognition, particularly with the rise of telecommunications.

The final touchstone is none other than *rubido*, the Philosopher's Stone. In all of known history, no more than one hundred alchemists have demonstrated the ability to work their creation. Through the Philosopher's Stone, the alchemist can master the very humours of the body and its many biological processes. This has not prevented a spate of highly experimental, and not always dependable, explorations of human biology. However, the breakthrough of prosthetic simulacra proves a rare success in this field.

from The Techna Papers by Nikolai Techna

RUNES

Each rune is a single ideogram for a fundamental form, existing in potential in the ether. When an alchemist inscribes their design upon an object and subsequently activates their meaning through a touchstone, the form imprints upon the substance in question. The techniques of alchemy require the inscription of one or more runes in sequence, to encapsulate their forms combined. Inevitably, all such works depend on one of five fundamental runes, each depicting one of the five elementary forms. Upon taking hold, each rune leaves a scorch march and emits a most particular odour.

EXOTICA

Exotica comprise those substances infused with ideal forms through runes, making them alloys of essence and substance. Many of the more intuitive applications of alchemy have come about from unusual exploitations of ordinary materials with the uncanny properties of runes. Though alchemists have discovered many exotic materials across the centuries, they have deemed only a select number to have significant practical applications.

ALKAHEST

Alkahest is the universal solvent, being an extremely destructive liquid containable only in adamant vessels; it can corrode all other material substances, given enough time. Alkahest causes more than material dissolution, and sublimates substance into the ether itself, virtually annihilating its physical presence without any residue.

ADAMANT

Though adamant shares the appearance of diamond and shares its unyielding durability, it has one important difference. Unlike many crystalline minerals, adamant melts when subjected to specifically modulated electrical pulses, allowing it to be like blown glass. Artificers exploit this

feature to create towering structures of clear and infrangible substance. The Coronal favours adamant highly, having used it to construct the imperial city of Diadem.

GLOAM

Gloam resembles a soft, milky pearl in the shape of a teardrop, no bigger than a thumb. It emanates an incandescent glow by night that fades upon exposure to the daylight; only to return under the light of the lunar orb. Each drop comprises essence that solidified under lunar light before falling to the ground, which sometimes materialises naturally. Though bearing the appearance of a precious stone it cannot be worked, for each drop is brittle and will shatter into nothingness if cut or struck too harshly. Gloam holds peculiar affinity with the ether itself, able to affect it in unique manner.

GOSSAMER

The translucent threads of gossamer seem nothing more than cobweb and are amongst the more versatile exotica. Gossamer is spun virtually from nothingness through the process of ravelling, which weaves the three prime essences of glamour, velleity, and whist together. When woven into fabrics, those garments attains illustrious properties, making some of the most marvellous outfits and giving rise to the couture of raiment bespoke garments.

ICHOR

Ichor resembles golden oil; it production involves melting amber dust into a liquid and then infusing the solution with essence. Once synthesised, the ichor may be set into a resin, given the name of anbar. Both anbar and ichor possess strong sympathies with the ether, which are crucial to most fulmonric manipulation of light. Ichor represents one of the few naturally occurring alchemic substances, and viscous veins of ichor deposits lie within the Firmament; these rivulets of warm gold are the renowned 'dragon lines'.

MISTRILLE

This incredibly fine and light metal gleams under lunar light. Mistrille fabrication begins as an alloy of mercury and molten silver, whereupon alchemical runes enable it to be spun into ductile lustrous, metallic fibres. Armourers prize this fibre, for it is durable but with the tensile strength of good steel, yet it has poor electrical conduction. Contemporary uses of mistrille are manifold in construction, manufacture, and armoury. One unique quality of mistrille is its ability to retain sympathetic connections between two pieces that have been cut from a larger piece that was galvanised.

OMBRIA

Ombria is an extremely rare component that acquires a superliminal quality, being a rare material that possesses equal measures of substance and essence; it simultaneously exists in both the mundane and chimerical worlds. Ombria coats the surface of the Pendulum and beyond this naturally occurring example it proves elusive to create. It has become an ultimate aspiration for alchemists across the ages, though its properties are difficult to fathom.

ORICHALCUM

Orichalcum is a widely regarded alloy, and the chief alchemical concern of the Bullion Guild. Its nature is metallic, with the appearance and qualities of gold with mottle colouring incorporating silver-white, gold-yellow, and rose-red. Each pattern is unique, which reflects variations in the essential composition, the reds corresponding to glamour, white to velleity, and yellow to whist.

The first rune is *gei*, being the rune of stone and transfiguration. Its form contains the ideals of solidity and durability, and those substances imbued with gei enjoy hyper-physical natures, bearing greater weight and structure than other objects. The rune leaves a blackish-brown mark, giving off a pungent salty odour.

The rune of transition is the second, being the element of clay, and known by the name of *hudor*. Its use imprints ideas of reflection and attraction, allowing substances to mimic the properties of other substances, though particularly liquids. Hudor runes leave a green-blue mark, and gives off a scent similar to hot mercury.

The third rune is *pyros*, and contains both volatility and mutability. It is the rune of transmutation contained within the elementary form of brass. Its design imbues substances with combustibility, and makes them prone to manipulation. When inscribed, it leaves a reddish-orange mark, which exudes the scent of brimstone.

Aer is the fourth rune, the rune of transmission. Its form is necessary in works of communion and motility, granting substances properties to transmit force. Upon inscribing this rune, the material flashes a blue-white, and gives a whiff of ozone.

The final elemental rune is one of liminality and affinity, associated with the element of wood, and thus named *vode*. Its use is one of transubstantiation, to convert between material and immaterial. Its inscriptions leave silvery-white traces, and gives off a faint odour like sandalwood.

from The Techna Papers by Nikolai Techna

Orichalcum has psychoactive properties, which enables minters to imprint the metal with rubric inks for the purposes of prestation.

PHLOGISTON

Phlogiston, phloss or sometimes 'liquid light', is one of the few alchemical products produced through fulmonry. The fulmonric process alters the property of the ether within a liquid medium to enable it to suspend a quantity of volatile solar energies within. The process remains a highly protected secret of the Luminary, even though the public has discovered the role of anbar in its workings. While suspended in liquid, phloss remains black, absorbing any light that touches it but when activated, it emanates light as illumination.

SIDERINE

Siderine is alchemically treated iron, rarefying and removing certain impurities. It transforms the iron into a white metal, sometimes named 'cold iron' by virtue of its unnaturally cool touch. Though arduous to forge and difficult to mass-produce, it is valuable. On its own, siderine tends to be brittle like porcelain but can be alloyed into a type of steel with a durability resembling adamantine. Siderine has a principal use as construction girders due to its load-bearing capacity. Furthermore, the fae have shown antipathy to the material and there are numerous instances where their illusions have disintegrated at the touch of this substance. Siderine finds utility as filigree for tools and amulets, where it is necessary to ward against faerie illusion.

YLIASTER

Alchemists fabricate the silvery-black powder named yliaster from stardust, from which it derives its innate repulsion to the metallic content of the Firmament. When charged with electricity, yliaster generates a field that causes it to levitate towards the sky. Recent alchemists like Dr Cavor have experimented with its use in tempering iron alloys to produce the derivative metal vulgarised as starmetal. When alloyed, yliaster extends the field along the length of the metal causing entire structures to provide lift to immensely heavy objects relative to the charge. This unique property makes starmetal the foundation of modern airship and aethership design.

ENGINEERING

Electrodyne engines are designed to trade-off the force of steam with the versatility of electronics, to power either motors or turbines producing circular mechanical energy, and then deployed accordingly. Most of the Realm's engines steam-powered, for large amounts of motive force, which power the largest vehicles in the Realm. However, their components are large and cumbersome, limiting their use on mobile platforms to heavy and ponderous machines.

Uncharted Destination by Nospherato.

Steam engines power pistons, often assisted by flywheels to ensure continuous momentum without stalling, and governors to regulate the injection of steam. The centrepiece of any such engine is the boiler, being a long, cylindrical, metallic object, which sometimes sports a domed top. Most are rudimentary water boilers, which prove most efficacious, particularly when flues aid the heating process.

Fuel feeds into the boiler through a reinforced supply connected to the bottom of a given boiler, to mix with the air. Water pumps in from large tanks to vent out through pipes on the top; they require only an occasional refill. It is also possible to superheat the steam by feeding it through the boiler again for even greater power. Finally, the placement of the smoke stack demands special care to ensure the furnace blast, and other heat exhaust, directs safely away from any operators.

There are also an increasing number of electrical motors that have been introduced for use in a variety of smaller vehicles. Yet due to several key limitations, it is not possible to implement these motors in long-range vehicles. Beyond several measures devised through the practices of fulmonry, there is no known method of storing large enough quantities of energy for these engines.

Electrical engines are powered by phloss, which is fed into specially designed chambers, such that they can mix with the ether and revert to an energetic form. Unfortunately, these designs bear some fragility, depending on any number of finely tuned components to transfer the motile energy, arranging linkages of gears and sprockets. Gears prove more reliable but cannot transfer sufficient mechanical energy obliquely. Sprockets can transfer engine power remotely but are easier to derail.

When these principles are applied to larger scales, engineers can produce the splendid dynamos: huge turbines that generate electrical energy for domestic power grids. Though such engines are much more potent than steam engines, their enormity requires them to anchor to the ground, making them unwieldy for mobile platforms.

After the burn, the engine removes excess light or heat through exhaust systems. Steam engines deploy condensers, trapping the oily steam exhaust, condensing to allow only clean steam to escape; it is frequently fed back into the main stack. Light-exhaust is can be harder to regulate. For low-powered devices, a transparent window simply emits ambient light, but devices with higher-charges use prisms to focus the light through a directed flare causing powerful flashes. This discharge is important, because if uncontrolled, the flash can affect the phloss cell, causing it to ignite.

Many earlier inventions possess the rudimentary engine, known as the wain. Wains are powerful clockwork mainsprings, fabricated with alchemically enhanced materials; based on the principle designs of Vincent Leon.

Through alchemical augmentation, wains lose energy at a much slower rate than similar mainsprings, and in doing so they defy the natural rate at which their devices wind down. Later versions added flywheels, which enabled wains to maintain seemingly impossible duration, especially when built in sequence.

from A Machine to End War
by Nikolai Techna

FUEL

Two principle types of fuel exist: heat-based fuels for the steam powered engines and light-based fuels for electrodyne devices. The most popular heat-based fuel is an ethanol called saccharin, produced from ordinary sugar cane, which is used principally for large vehicles and machines. However, the amount of land required to produce viable quantities of saccharin is extensive, competing with arable land for produce.

A rarer, but more potent, alternative are hydrocarbon-fuels: though they appear in natural peat deposits, they are often hidden deep within the bramblewoods making them difficult to access. The use of coal in burners is more of a novelty than a real design.

Phloss is the only extant form of light-based fuel, which is contained in standard cells. Each can discharge potent amounts of energy relative to their volume. They find great utility in a variety of mobile machinery, but most specifically in automata, prostheses, and automotive vehicles. However, such cells must be handled with extreme care. The liquid phloss is incredibly volatile, and will ignite explosively if it is exposed abruptly to bright sunlight.

Travel

By air, by sea, and by land new forms of transportation open up the farthest reaches. For much of the Realm's population, the principle means of travel are those traversing the land: sea transport is primarily for commercial usage, and air transport remains the domain of the elite. However, innovation means modern transportation provides entirely new modes of travel, even catering mass transit.

These inventions have increased the physical and social mobility of the commonfolk. For while the nobility is renowned for gallivanting to all manner of distant climes, the middle-classes have only just begun to enjoy similar opportunities through the practice of touring. Notably though, the working classes remains mired in their locales, rarely travelling more than a day's journey from their neighbourhood or village of origin.

However, one facet of the Realm defines travel more than any other. Since their germination, the bramblewoods remain the most imposing barrier to travel known. Humanity has since discerned means to pass through these woods undaunted. Early in their encounters with the woods, alchemists discovered that the bramblewoods held an aversion to siderine: alchemically perfected iron.

Waygate

In every domain, travellers can observe a number of waygates made of siderine. Such structures are stationed along the bramblewoods where the distance is narrower. Each frame is inlaid with a filigree of mistrille, which enables two such gates be joined sympathetically. When a given waygate activates, a path between the two emerges to guide the way. They are typically large enough to provide a thoroughfare for a caravan of goods and vehicles, though some may be smaller. Each winds its way through the bramblewoods as a conduit between linked gates, which facilitates travel. However, they do not guarantee any protection against the dangers of travel through the woods,

The bracers are those bramblewoods that divide the duchies. Their immensity required the commission of large waygates known as the Ouroboroi; they permit the passage of large imperial vehicles. One may draw an erratic and winding line, from the main gates of the Ramparts down to the very coasts of the Litorate through the connecting points of the Ouroboroi. These lines form the imperial highways and the networks of rail across the lands.

Nevertheless, principally mark passages between provinces and nations, as well the points of egress from Metropolaris. Therefore, while travel within a given province is rarely restricted, travellers who would pass such boundaries require proper documentation. Such passports are folios of paper, signed and marked to certify one's identity; thereby providing the necessary credentials for passing. Of course, though without the diplomatic privileges of the Great Game, frequently require additional papers to permit passage.

Terminus

Almost inevitably, the sites on either side of an Ouroboroi become a terminus: small colonies that cluster about each gate as transport hub as centres of commerce; these communities engage

Crossing the Threshold by Lucas Pandolfelli.

frequently with the bramblewoods by sheer proximity. Because of the unusual connection generated between two termini on either side of a paired Ouroboroi, the residents of such conjoined villages tend to regard themselves as members of one singular city.

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The stations around each Ouroboros represent some of the most beautifully designed pieces of modern architecture, highlighting an era of extravagant rail travel. A typical station demonstrates great curvatures of glass and steel, girding their roofs. Each features a grand clock that dominates the township, symbolic of the marriage between the mechanistic motion through space and the steady movement through time these places represent.

The primary concourses at each terminus are grandiloquent departure points where porters usher both passengers and luggage. Busy stations may find entrepreneurs taking place on given individual platforms, selling wares of fruit and media. Crowded stations attract smatterings of unsavoury types, namely beggars and pickpockets. Off to the side of a given concourse, one may find mailrooms, waiting rooms, luggage-handling rooms and restrooms. Luxurious or popular stations may boast a small motel.

The currency of travellers is collected in the varied transportation tickets: each is cut from stiff cardboard, with a variety of colours to indicate that class of carriage one should board, and arraigned with symbols to indicate other minutiae. The inspectors stamp each ticket to provide indication as to whether the fare is one way, round-trip, and what connecting point of departures the traveller must attend.

AMENITIES

With the exception of aerial travel, all modes of public transportation provide accommodation for first, second, and third class. The exception is not an egalitarian one, as aerial travel provides an exclusive first class service, often restricted to official national and imperial business. Such is in no small part due to the expense and extravagance of its mode of travel.

First class provides all the amenities one could expect: trains will provide private, panelled cars with wide, plush seats, and private sleeping quarters; airships and naval ships provide lofty quarters creating stately rooms of luxury. Comparatively, second-class services provide a modicum of comfort, sufficient to endure an entire day

of travelling easily by such cosy standards but provide little in the way of comfort for distance travelling. Second class rail cars provide thinner seats than those in first class and offer little shade. The sleeping quarters provided are in a separate sleeper car; they are cramped but acceptable. Naval ships provide rooms that are small but decent, and stationed above sea level affording some natural light.

By many standards, third class provides the bare minimum of comfort and long trips inevitably leave passengers cramped and fatigued. Those unfortunate enough to travel more than a day will find sleeping conditions only tolerable by dint of sheer exhaustion that the travel causes; a claustrophobic condition exacerbated when stowed below sea level.

Terrain Travel

For all the modes of modern transportation, their methods are scarce in the countryside where riding beasts proves most common. While coach can penetrate many remote locales untouchable by rail, it provides a much slower and potentially more dangerous means of travel. Coaches must rest each night for horse and passenger fatigue, their travel time limited by horse speed and weather, and all wary of highwaymen. Rail has replaced the coach as the transport of choice between urban centres, even while coaches provide frequent means of travel within them.

The troubles of rural travel are in stark contrast to the cities where the presence of mountable steeds is demonstration of an estate's wealth. Some vehicles are horse-drawn such as coaches and carts, while others are personal devices like velocipedes. Most of the demands of urban living necessitate mechanical transportation as primary modes of travel.

Draft Vehicle

Draft vehicles powered by beasts of burden: horse-powered being the most dependable. There are a broad range of vehicles that have both private and public utility, and subtle distinctions separate private vehicles from the public counterparts. This includes the stagecoach, the omnibus, and the charabanc.

The humble coach provides the staple of civilian travel, particularly across rural and provincial roads. They construction entails four-wheeled carriages, which suspend an enclosed a box seat between them. Each is pulled by a team of horses, robust enough to support a mounted team of personnel. The coach finds most frequent deployment on travel between domains and other length rural trips not afforded by rail. In many instances, they bygones of rural travel where banditry demanded greater security. They nevertheless favoured by peddlers and caravan travellers.

Their counterpart in the city is none other than the landau, holding pride of place for most urban transportation; expensive enough to show privilege but superseded as status symbols by automobiles. Each is a lightweight, four-wheeled, convertible carriage, suspended on an elliptical spring and drawn in pair by horses. The soft-folding top opens into two sections in front and rear, all latched upon the centre. This enables passengers to let down or throw back the coverings. Even when completely opened, the top covers its passengers with minimal loss of the vehicle's graceful lines. Its low shell enables maximum visibility of its occupants and their apparel, making it a popular choice for grandiose display.

Hansom cabs join landaus amongst the ranks of urban transport. As a type of cabriolet, they provide sufficient economic vehicle for public use. They combine speed with safety, by virtue of a low centre of gravity for safe cornering. Hansoms require only a single horse for locomotion,

making the journey cheaper than carriages like landaus, and can even navigate some of the more treacherous traffic snarls. Despite their public utility, they retain an air of exclusively.

PEDESTRIAN VEHICLE

There are two principle types of pedestrian vehicles, being chaises and sedans. Their frequent use by the middle classes means they rarely receive preference by the nobility. Chaises are little more than two-wheeled carts, drawn by a single runner. They are a common enough sight in the Silhouettes of Metropolaris, where the service of human labour is cheaper to maintain then horses. The chaise will never be considered a status symbol, signalling middle-class means. In contrast, sedans are the mark of the nouveau riche, being extravagant windowed cabins for a single occupant. Porters carry litters in front and behind, who can double up as bodyguards. Such litters provide elitism through deliberate archaism in the face of progress.

The other major pedestrian transportation is the velocipede; the most popular being two-wheeled balanced bicycles. Unusually, velocipedes experience popularity throughout all the classes, though the working classes thoroughly embrace them as a symbol of emancipation. Its method of quick and easy travel, especially in the narrow urban places, has provided women with unprecedented mobility. The Mousaion and suffragists alike favour them even while they draw derision from the Peerage; many of whom justify their derision citing medical consideration, wary that such bumptious rides may be too invigorating for the fairer sex.

LOCOMOTIVE AND AUTOMOBILE

The vehicle most emblematic of the age is the locomotive: epitome of industry and leisure alike. Their girded tracks span vast networks across the Litorate, penetrating the bramblewoods and connecting cities and ports in turn. To date, railways run through every province: one major

Terminus by Tom McGrath.

railway, known as the Great Circuit, links all provincial capitals in a loop around the country. Each conveys numerous passengers and freight, even while its mode of transport is stylish and comfortable across long journeys. Though engineers lay such rails lay along the corridors created by Ouroboroi, they must still alloy the lengths of rail there with siderine to ward against the overgrowth of the bramblewoods.

The most modern form of land-based travel is the automobile: steam-powered vehicles, designed for the transport of up to four persons. Though many regard the automobile as a sign of the times, they are not always the most efficient means of travel, bearing many of the limitations of a coach. They are ill-suited to travel outside of cities, saving where thoroughfares of sealed roads provide avenue; most landscapes are too crude and so inflicts a constant state of damage to the engine. Moreover, many of the more traditional aristocracy find its mode of conveyance far too cantankerous for their liking, preferring the stately grandeur of the landau. It is amongst the bourgeoisie, that the automobile finds favour among well-to-do enthusiasts.

Nautical Travel

Travel by water is not a frequent mode of travel in the empire, and finds rare use as a personal mode of transport. Though lakes and rivers wend themselves across the land, the majority of watercraft is for ocean travel. The sea serves both as a means of escape and containment for the Litorate: though travel by sea is unimpeded by the bramblewoods, the oceans are not without danger as they lay beyond the grounding influence found in the Literate. The seas lie closer to the dreaming shores of the Hinterlands, where one may encounter bygone creatures that have no place in a reasonable reality.

The history of watercraft is not only upon the seas. In the early years of the 18th Century, the Realm was still struggling with the limitations of travel. Although it was nominally at peace, there were numerous tensions across domains and economic relations were fraught to maintain prominence. As the Realm sought to reassemble itself from the plight of the bramblewoods, river navigation proved critical as the waterways bypassed those barriers that hampered travel by land.

A craft could ply the length of a river, needing only to avoid the way that submerged brambles would mire the waters to churn them into rapids. River navigation is still crucial for commercial thoroughfare and trade inland, shipping surplus crops quickly to market, all providing for a large industry of steamboat trade in the beginning of the 19th Century. The dominance of river travel has meant rivers are synonymous with the lifeblood of economic relations themselves; that is until the nascent challenge of the rail that dominated the late 19th Century.

Ironclad and Liner

There are a number of merchant lines that circumnavigate the main continent, conveying goods and passengers around the edges of the continent. The wealth of these lanes cannot be underestimated; the vessels that ply those waters are amongst the most majestic and dauntless craft ever designed. Their girth is such that they cannot enter the narrow channels of river upon the land; to leave such journeys to the smaller paddle steamers and steam-powered yacht. These are the ironclad frigates and liners: deep-water vessels tempered with great armoured hulls to ward against enchantment, and equipped with powerful engines to speed through murky waters of the Hinterlands.

Ironclad frigates forcefully maintain the ways into the Border Marches through gunboat diplomacy, while the large merchant vessel liners and occasional prestigious cruise liners accompany them. Providing that one seeks transportation around the perimeter of the Litorate, cruise liners

Ultima Ratio Regum by Vadim Voitekhovitch.

provide ready and comfortable transport that easily competes with rail. The largest of these ships are the titanic class vessels. They are enormous megaships, appointed with fine dining halls, staterooms, multi-story atriums with wrought iron elevators, and single decks entirely devoted to recreation. They cater to a niche of travellers that seek to spend days away from civilisation on the ocean tide.

STEAMER AND BARGE

The modern paddle steamer is the conventional method to travel by river for commercial trade. Each bears hulls arranged with complex machinery, renowned for ravenous fuel consumption. Yet their providence as a mainstay of economic relations means these lumbering machines enjoy the support and industry they need to stay afloat.

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Though both steamers and barges are both steam-powered paddleboats, the different names denote their functionality. Steamers are commercial transport vehicles, designed to provide quality travel along the ferry lanes of the river. Barges serve only as merchant boats, designed to transport goods from harbour to harbour. The frequent customer can easily distinguish the two, as barges serve with sheer utility, having fewer needs for comfort of travel. In comparison, the steamers are jewels of the river, most often recognised for their decorative internal masts, their second deck, stairs, galleys, and parlours. Most steamers bear ornament of wood trim, velvet, gilt edging, and trimmings.

YACHT

Yachts are the eminent recreational boat. Yachts have captured the public imagination, for the nobility has stolen its image away from industry and utility towards a more prosaic craft of leisure and status. The most widely found model is the skiff: a vessel measuring up to twelve metres in length and designed to slice neatly through the water with powerful turbines. Skiffs can travel faster than most land-craft, including the locomotive.

The majority are still powered by sail and air, but the increasing prevalence of electrodyne engineering means there are now a growing number of steam-powered screws; to give rise to the newly enjoyed powerboat. Likewise, the manufacture of these boats has taken advantage of more modem alchemical metals, engendering most with hulls of tempered steel. Only the truly archaic of yachts retain their wooden hull and their number relegates to river navigation.

SUBMERSIBLE

Submersibles hold a place of superstition in popular imagination, for they have never acquired much in the way of commercial application. Few among the common populace would warrant that there exist any sights worthy of inspection below the waves. Such submerged journeys are not for the frail of constitution, enduring cramped and claustrophobic quarters, with only a chance to resurface every few hours for air and fuel. Those submersible ships in existence find service either in the imperial armada, or by the occasional rogue pirate.

The most notorious of all submersibles, and the model most designs follow, is the Nautilus. The vessel is an elongated cigar-shaped craft of more than seventy metres in length, compared to the more classical teardrop-shaped canister. The use of a double-hull divides its length into watertight compartments, while a variety of floodable tanks allows the crew to adjust the vessel's buoyancy and control its depth. Steam-powered screws and powerful pumps produce large jets of rapidly escaping water propel the craft. Their engines are powered by a combination of sucrose and phloss, with large batteries utilised for energy storage.

The conventions of hull design are ones with a surprisingly contentious history. The two most prominent airshipyards compete for the standard design, with Albion's Barrow preferring a blunted nose and stern. The Imperial Vulkan engineers demonstrate a similar model but with a more tapered stern. Yet, both agree that the most efficient shape is an elliptical one, roughly six diameters long, with a master diameter placed roughly thirty to forty percent back from the aft of the nose.

from A Machine to End War
by Nikolai Techna

Aerial Travel

For those who wish to make a lasting statement, flight is the best, if not the only, method to travel. Travel by air is smooth, rising beyond the limits of the bramblewoods to convey passengers to chosen destinations. The nobility takes subtle care to ensure the skies remain their exclusive domain as only the elite afford the custom, with fewer still possessing personal aircraft. Yet for all its capability, the cost of flight precludes it from commercial freight, save only for luxury goods.

Knowledge of lighter-than-air flight has existed for several centuries, but until recently, it held limited utility. True aviation emerged only with heavier-than-air flight in the last century, made possible through innovations with fulmonry and alchemy. The ubiquitous method of lift and basis for most commercial flight derives from gravity-averse alchemical metals; this is principally Dr Cavor's yliaster, which magnetically repels ships away from the iron content in the Firmament when electrically charged. Naturally, the construction of these ponderous machines is an expensive endeavour.

DREADNOUGHT AND *KAISERKLASSE*

Some of the largest monsters of the skies are the dreadnoughts and the *kaiserklasse*: the largest of military and commercial crafts ever constructed by human hand. Both depend on sturdy monocoque superstructures supported by lightweight materials to form both the interior girders

Look Beyond the Horizon by Vadim Voitekhovitch.

and external truss. Though they are both ostensibly dirigibles, the rigid ballasts of these heavy platforms mean they more closely resemble floating palaces or citadels than aerial ships.

Both vessels abide in the highest reaches of the heavens, far-removed from the concerns of ground and soil. For although weighed down by rigid armouring and building fabrications, they have little need for rapid movement. Dreadnoughts earn their name as the most implacable and dauntless carriages of destruction, and accordingly most of their vessels find use in peacetime as an ever-pending threat against those who would resist paying their taxes. They contrast the *kaiserklasse*, which are akin to shining stars of the heavens, lit up by arrays of electrical lighting.

CORVETTE AND BLIMP

The most prominent means of sky-borne travel is the dirigible: a range of smaller and swifter airships that traverse the heavens and even rising to Diadem. Each such dirigible is an aerostat flier, being lighter-than-air, which sets a course through air by means of rudders and propellers. Dirigibles achieves lift from a large envelope of gas, which includes non-rigid, semi-rigid, and rigid types depending on whether they employ an internal skeleton or not. All corvettes have a fixed car, suspended below the envelope, known as the gondola.

Low-tech blimps use a non-rigid envelop, capable of long distances on little fuel. However, blimps are not suited to traversing over the bramblewoods, where turbulence is sure to send the blimp crashing down. Larger domains use blimps for quick travel to any part of their estate.

Transylvan travel requires the semi-rigid corvettes, identifiable for their keels that resemble large fish skeletons. Internally, their envelopes contain a number of ballonets of gas, allowing for easily changeable ballast. Large, rippling sails of canvas and metal struts form a large plane sail in the likeness of a bird tail. They buoy the motions of the corvettes through the air with deft

manoeuvrability, even capable of rapidly reversing direction. Versions of the aerophane provide for the larger cruisers, where short flight that can commute up to three or four passengers. Such crafts as these are holiday crafts that eminent family might use for the occasion.

WHIRLYGIG AND LAPUTAN

Gyrodynes have been theoretical since the Flamboyance, when inventors rejected traditional ornithopter designs in favour of rotational lift. Yet the high energy necessitated by their mechanisms was only feasible with the development of phloss cell energy packs. Due to the delicacy of their engineering, the range of such flights remains confined to city limits. Their design produces small but motile crafts, given lift by large rotating blades; with a single craft deploying multiple propellers for manoeuvrability.

The most prominent gyrodyne is the personal vehicle known as the whirligig. It demonstrates a slim and lightweight frame, designed to bear a maximum of two people skywards. It is lifted by two large rotors that thrum with diligent purpose. Their design enables easy navigation and a capacity to land upon smaller roofs of the city; it finds use for the conveyance of executives on business.

On the other end of the scale, laputans deserve special mention; Marengo being the most notorious in all history of such as these. They are a class of airship that hybridises gyrodyne rotary lift yet stabilised by envelopes of gas. They represented the most immense constructions that fly: massive, mobile weapons platforms, akin to floating castles. They are usually well equipped with racks of munitions, even professing a topside platform capable of launching small fliers.

AEROPHANE

A number of contemporary fliers are the consequence of recent developments in aerofoils, for creating dynamic lift; though these are largely limited to military applications in combat support and reconnaissance. The precision engineering required for these machines mean that aerofoils are limited to short-range flight. Albeit, what they lack in duration of flight, they compensate with manoeuvrability.

Explorations of the volatile properties of phloss have also led to experimentation with rocketry: brute force propulsion to provide lift and thrust. Due to the extreme expense of this fuel, rocket propulsion has found limited applications.

The conventions of hull design are ones with a surprisingly contentious history. The two most prominent airshipyards compete for the standard design, with Albion's Barrow preferring a blunted nose and stern. The Imperial Vulkan engineers demonstrate a similar model but with a more tapered stern. Yet, both agree that the most efficient shape is an elliptical one, roughly six metres long; with a master strut placed roughly thirty to forty percent back from the aft of the nose.

from A Machine to End War
by Nikolai Techna

I am aware of a recent and experimental invention, which has been termed the Turbo Flier. The vehicle uses a form of jet propulsion to achieve lift, easily making them the fastest vehicles in the sky. They are strung together with robust but a somewhat delicate framework bound together by many latches and struts. The power necessary to achieve this lift comes from specially created phloss cells, making them inappropriate for most commercial application.

Each flier can achieve sufficient thrust and lift for a single person, and as they are dangerous machines to pilot, their use is exclusive to the imperial aeronauts, whose vigorous training is necessary to pilot the flier properly.

from Fantastic Inventions
by Nikolai Techna

Media

A hallmark of the 19th Century is the contraction of communication, in both time and distance. Modern communications are a legacy of the reign of Vendémiaire, who demonstrated the importance of excellent media and transport as inspired by the success of the Roman Empire. Communicative technologies enable rapid delivery of information; even permitting messages from the fringe of the empire to reach the court of Panorama within a day. Tried and true methods of communication compete with modern modes, even though most of the cutting edge remains beyond the reach of the common population.

Print

Since the invention of the printing press in the late 15th Century, the dissemination of publications has shaped relations between the aristocracy and the commonfolk. Newspapers emerged in the early 17th Century, following the invention of the high-speed rotary steam printing press and the railway networks; both are necessary for large-scale distribution over vast geographical areas. However, it was only in the last century as public education engendering rapidly rising literacy rates that newspapers found a sufficiently large audience to communicate them to the populace as a mass.

Today, more people, from more diverse backgrounds are reading, and the public sentiment is one that favours the print media, in no small part to the auspices of the Scriptural practices of the Mousaion. The uptake of literature has bred a voracious appetite for written materials leading to the proliferation of its forms, in novels, letters, and communiqués. The public eagerly greets the broadsheets each day, which satiates their desires for printed news; the masters of the broadsheets have become among the most sterling and eminent figures.

Broadsheet

In times past, the Mousaion counselled against the mass production of printed media. Holding the writing word in lofty regard, they declared it the idealised form of expression. In being both intimate and personal, it had elevated humanity from mere animal. In consequence, Mousaion denounced the mass reproduction of writing as degrading the artistry behind it.

It is fortunate then that the printing press was first inspired by a grace of the Mousaion amusing its inventor, with the first work replicated through that machine being an anthology of liturgical works. After carefully observing the impact the dissemination of liturgical works, the Mousaion reversed their position and utilised it for their mission.

The Mousaion have maintained an interest in media reproduced *en masse*, almost to the point of monopoly. Theirs is a history complete with jealous custody of methods of mass doctrine and they spare small tolerance for competition. The Mousaion has actively invested into media, usually with a view to maintain a controlling interest; they otherwise have key members placed in media production to facilitate their role in shaping public opinion.

Yet they are not completely in control of media production, especially with the massive proliferation of revolutionary media that distanced itself from the aristocracy. They nevertheless remain its principle proprietors.

The most symbolic sign of the Mousaion's changing attitudes falls upon their embrace of the medium of photography. Although preliminary complaints emerged over the artistic merits of rendering real life into still images in this manner, they quickly discerned the utility of photography in influencing opinion in ways that words could not.

Their object lesson occurred during the oriental war of the Cimmerian coast: war photography and real-life renditions of the conflict captured the public's imagination in ways mere writing could not. Soon thereafter, photography was adopted as yet one more tool in their repertoire of propaganda.

from Vox Populari by Vivian Grey

PERIODICAL

Printed periodicals remain the most abundant type of print media today, having taken a leaf from the broadsheet of the 17th Century. These were circulations of notable exploits as an exercise in public relations; they now report on developments in technology, and cultural changes. In many ways, contemporary broadsheets retain affects from this period, seeking to convey the underlying noteworthy news of social and political consequence.

The modern broadsheet, or newspaper, manifested towards the close of the 18th Century as the primary demographic shifted from an exclusively noble clientele to public interest. Upon discerning that there existed an appetite for less favourable accounts of their masters, the Mousaion's approach became more circumspect. With the advent of the current century, the public's demand of reliable news garnered for the public interest has instigated a variety of reformed around ethics in journalism, as many graces have had to fend off dubious allegations.

Graces around the Realm take careful note of the scurrilous deeds of noble affairs, their capacity for acute observation serving them well. They are the eyes and ears of the empire, ready to fossick out the most melodious scandal for public consumption. Of course, they contemplate the public interest in these stories judiciously against the political advantage of a given noble. Likewise, lieges take pains to keep the favour with the Mousaion to ensure their editorialising of them is likewise of good review, even amid its candour.

JOURNAL

Journaling is the essential pastime for a good number of the nobility, and most nobles write daily. Their subjects encompass everything of personal consideration: the weather, accounts of visits, letters sent and received, travel accounts, special payments of moneys both owed and due, changes in health, and even when one has begun and completed the reading of a book. The style of writing embraces many diverse forms as well, ranging from proper personal exploits, to scrapbooks, and even autographical works. The typical diary is an unmarked volume, pages black allowing for versatile use, such that the author pens the relevant dates being unconstrained to any given page.

The common wisdom for journaling is one of posterity. Journals and diaries become crucial objects for houses seeking to discern the ways and mores of their now quiescent founder. These memoires as posthumous works, that seek to capture the principle narrative of a significant noble. Most pepper these affairs with a grandiose air, though care to balance between artful decorations and blandish lies. The truly clever let implication and allusion carry the work of the imagination, never stating unquestionable mistruths.

NOVELS

The 19th Century introduced the novel as the leading form of literature. Increasingly, popular novels have turned away from accounts of noble affairs, whether fictional or faithfully tales. Rather, stories that closely observe and satirise society are in favour. These novels idealise portraits of the common life, where hard work and perseverance win out, rewarding virtue and punishing vice. Most such authors profess an intention to improve the lives of the many through

Musings of the Day by Mateusz Bielski.

such central moral lessons. Albeit, the complexity of these stories has been increasing with every decade as themes subtly examine class, myth, and gender.

Perhaps the sole exceptions to this trend are the novelised accounts of nobles' high adventures, turgid dramas, or uncanny mysteries. Most would-be autobiographers publish excerpts rather than entire accounts, and it is tacitly accepted that a certain amount of embellishment shall accompany these texts. The most favoured authors are those that reflect upon their shared human condition, raising the trivial into the dramatic. As the aphorism holds, when one cannot ordinarily write about extraordinary things then one must write extraordinarily about the ordinary. A litany of fantasy, politics, and adventures serves as counterpoint to the drudgery of mundane living.

The publicising of said journals can be more readily attributed to the skill of a noble's reputation than the talent of their authorship. However, entranced with the fascinating lives of the aristocracy, the commoners happily consume those scandalous and eloquent accounts of noble authors. Even then, the vast majority of these will keep important things in reserve; for a good story is one that leaves some mysteries unaccounted for.

By far, the adventures of the Imperial Orders are becoming the most sought after accounts, partly due to their closer ties with the commoners and partly due to the manner in which the planetary vogue has won the minds of the masses. Here, the stalwart adventurer retells of travels to Barsoom, daring foreign climes and alien enemies; this seems to sate a hunger for the strange and the exotic. These zany accounts find greater circulation by virtue of being on cheap wood pulp, such that they are often named 'the pulps'.

Audio

During their early inceptions, wireline telephony and telegraphy were limited to business and government activities, as public perception considers their devices as little more than an extravagance. Private lines do exist but it is usually only the nobility take subscriptions. Commercial applications found a hold once the public gained better understandings of its advantages: wireless communications provides for a broader social life, greater convenience in ordering goods and services, discerning market prices, weather reports, and even emergency aid. Many families too have found solace from loneliness and isolation. As of 1900, twenty-five percent of private homes in Metropolaris and other capital cities have private lines.

Telegraphy

At the apogee of Vendémiaire's empire, a massive network of semaphore towers created the first telegraphic network. It required operators every thirty km and was limited to transmissions of only a few words per minute; its utility was limited to governmental correspondence and commodity pricing. They retained popularity into the early 19th Century only to be quickly surpassed by electrical telegraphy; refinements of the technology enables fast and effective communications by means of direct signalling. In the last twenty-five years, telegraph lines have arisen through most major domains; the installation of telegraphy cabling has expanded from two-thousand to eleven-hundred-thousand kilometres of length. Telegraphy retains both formal and informal usage, from message routing, social networking and gossip, cryptography and ciphering, network security, stock exchange, and ticker tape reporting.

As in many things, the greatest encumbrance to communications is the bramblewoods. Most transmission lines laid through the bramblewoods will function for several weeks only to go silent. The problem is a challenge of engineering that has been resolved through specially treated cabling

insulation, with the most significant lines being laid underground alongside rail lines as the siderine rails ward off against the brambles.

TELEPHONY

Though telegraphy is the principle correspondence, telephony is rapidly replacing its use. Modern telephony conducts across three different inventions: the wireline, followed by radiographic transmission, and finally through syndetic harmonics. Organisations employ telegraphy for voluminous information, then preference telephony for real-time and remote communications.

Wireline technology builds directly on the principles of telegraphy; though for numerous decades wireline telephony operated without any means of signal amplification. Only the recent invention of vacuum tubes and analogue transistors has provided the means for the vocal amplification. Until this point, wireline communication was limited to local loops and circuits, being unable to reach beyond the range of a singular estate.

The cabling problems that daunt telegraphy are compounded for telephony. Telephonic communications that transmit through the bramblewoods inevitably receive eerie etheric background static, where half-heard whispers drown out most coherent signals. Accordingly, wireline telephony is best for regional communications, so only developed urban centres have seen the emergence of any significant network. Metropolaris and the other capital cities are the only locations to play host to major switchboards.

Electrical signalling permits increasingly diverse means of communications, such as those utilised in telegraphy. Telegraphy remains the most accessible means of radiographic telecommunications, but recent discoveries by Techna regarding invisible light has led to the development of broadcast radio. Radio remains firmly in control of the nobility, and specifically the Mousaion.

The autimac is an invention of radio communications, which has broadened the utility of telegraphy. Though it remains a novel development, it uses similar but distinct principles to those of the syndet. Currently, there are only a few autimac devices, which can telegraph information wirelessly. They are teletype devices, which transmits the input from one typewriting device to another sharing the same frequency.

from Fantastic Inventions by Nikolai Techna

SYNDETIC

Syndetic telephony has become the preferred means of private communication; its method of contact can ignore weather, bramblewoods, or distance. Syndets are synchronised through an anodised trine, a mistrille tuning fork with three tines. The trine is both receiver and transmitter, which can be connected to speakers and microphones.

Each device contains an anodised filament of mistrille, set to a particular frequency. When engineers split the filament in two, each half resonates with each other regardless of the distance between them; the pairing of signalling devices has allowed bilateral telephony of sound and voice. Larger-scale production of a single anodised mistrille filament enables the creation of networked devices that all resonate together, with an upper limit of seven pieces. Experiments are currently underway with gloam to determine if the same principle applies to images as well as sounds.

While wireline telephony is the cheaper option, its limited range depends on sufficient infrastructure. Comparatively, syndets represent peak technologies that are mobile and versatile, able to be deployed for long-term tactical communications or reconnaissance. Most syndets are the size of a small chest, though smaller receptive devices have been developed that allow one-way communication at limited range.

BROADCAST

Vocal broadcasting has an established long history as the aristocracy frequently employed criers and shills for public announcements; such was the primary means of disseminating news before the printing press. Sound recording and reproduction, but also radio transmission has opened the path to broadcasting audio. Never play down the estimations of the public's fascination with

Tower of Babel by Tomasz Belzowski.

modern electrodyne engineering. The emergence of electronic media, particularly through the means of radiographic communication, is beginning to find its place. The printed word is now sharing pride of place with the word uttered across the ether.

RECORDING

A variety of technologies permit the recording and reproduction of audio media: the two competing inventions are found in the cylinder of the phonograph and the discs of the gramophone. Though the cylindrical phonograph dominated the market for much of that time, the recorded vinyl disc of the gramophone is becoming increasingly popular due to its high fidelity.

The high fidelity of gramophone records has made them the preferred method for musical broadcast, particularly for the fidelity of opera and other liturgical works. As the phonograph cylinders are much cheaper to produce, their low quality audio reproduction, has made them the favoured means for replaying orations and other rhetorical offerings of weekly announcements from the estate. The town crier has become known these days by their signature melodiums, each then relay the recording as they walk through the streets.

RADIO

Radio broadcast, as transmission by wireless means, is still in its infancy. The practicality of gramophone reproduction and the limited radio infrastructure limits the ability to broadcast high quality sound. Even so, the imperial and ecclesiastic sponsorship of this invention has led to the astonishing rate of installation for radio towers throughout the farthest parts of the empire; it is part of a massive imperial project to ensure reception towers across all areas of the Realm.

Ownership of the radio system is divided between the Mousaion and the Chancery. The Mousaion possess the patent for broadcasting radio signals by frequency modulation, while the Chancery is given use of the patent for broadcast by amplitude modulation. Additionally, every day is greeted by a public broadcast from the Sphinx on behalf of the Coronal, as the 'Voice of the Empire'. It is repeated and rebroadcast to different areas of the empire to account for the different time zones; they are occasioned by imperial addresses from the Invictus himself on the Hallows.

The Chancery uses radio as a means of medium-range communication, even though most bilateral communication occurs through syndets. Radio provides for logistical coordination and vocal reports, to coordinate the various affairs. Conversely, the Mousaion use radio for public broadcast to disseminate their liturgy, replicating dramas, comedies, sermons, and inspirational speeches. It accordingly provides the distinctive views of the Mousaion, who utilise the airwaves to pronounce their media profile. Through this, they lay the seeds of

falsely competing with print media as they publically distance themselves from the tabloids; even as they retain their shadowy influence over editorialising.

IMAGERY

The 19th Century saw the emergence of photography. Early models had poor focus and clarity yet fired the public fervour. First the nobility, then the middle-class found photography replaced the traditional forms of portraiture, and personal likeness could be captured in a more cost-effective manner. The vitality of still imagery leverages the public's imagination in unprecedented ways. The Mousaion was quick to observe that where the medium of painting permitted certain creative license, there was a level of public awareness of such embroidery. In contrast, the still life of photography, grants certain licence that remains unexamined by the masses.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Recent advanced in technology have begun mastering the realm of the luminiferous ether and the light fantastic. The love of photography drove several frequent technological improvements, such as the bellows camera, studio lighting, and developments in chromatography. Although a successful and reliable method of reproducing colour photography has yet to be found.

While inventions like mirrors, lenses, telescopes, and microscopes are common domain, they pale in comparison to the emergence of moving pictures, and other optometric projections: these latter inventions deploy the particular properties of both anbar and gloam. Conventional photography is only just leaving behind the wet plate collodion process, with the inception of film.

The parallel developments of ambrotyping holography enable sepia-cast sculptures of light. They are a favoured dalliance among the nobility, but not the public. The requirement for long exposures without the same type of versatility that basic photography provides means that holography stands as a luxury. It is used principally for royal and noble portraiture. Some tactical uses have been found, including terrain reconnaissance and three-dimensional schematics.

The most popular and widespread type of holographic device is the ambrolin, so named because of the ambrotype collodion process that imprint three-dimensional images onto anbar prisms. Once imprinted, light refracts through the prism in such a way as to project the image therein as holograph; the sepia tones of the anbar prism are now iconic.

Other developments into the use of gloam's native psychoactive properties has produced the unusual phantomen, which utilise an unusual phrenotype process. The phantomen is able to take an imprint of psychic impressions from a particular subject, such as while they dream. In capturing these impressions, the projector device is able to relay short scenes from a person's repast when electrically stimulated.

CINEMA

From basic zoetropes, cinema represents an elusive medium; one whose recent arrival leaves many to ponder the fullness of its implications. For the most part, the provision of cinema remains a curious novelty, which mostly caters to exclusive audiences. There have been few quiet experiments regarding its opportunities within and among the public, but so far its allure remains aloof. The first eleven years of its invention has slowly experienced a change from being a matter of pure novelty to a burgeoning entertainment industry.

Over the past five years, the Mousaion has tended to the reproduction of some of their greatest liturgical works into film, with aspirations that they might be disseminated on the silver screen. It is an artistry that lends itself readily to their repertoire of theatrical skills. Certain theatres have

As the very first gramophone was invented in Gaule, it has earned the moniker of 'Francophone'. However, it is only one of many devices that capitalises on the emerging industries of recorded sound.

Most of the Great Powers have developed national music programs; they not only promote domestic recordings, but they also disseminate their own key technologies to reproduce those sounds, in hopes to lock the market into a particular device. Each nation aspires to follow the success of the Imperium and the Ring, who have forever imprinted the language of *Sturmdrang* across the Realm and popularised modern opera. The Mousaion has avidly encouraged this competition, having a central stake in the instruments of broadcasting.

from Kulturkampf by Auto Eisenmark

Palace Adamantine has the celebrated Hall of Light, where images of noteworthy nobles stand on display. Being given placement within this hall is a profound honour, for it demonstrates recognition from the Coronal. On occasion, the curators transport this collection down to Metropolaris for public viewing.

from An Account of my Amusement by Valetoria Regina

begun to hold cinematic houses, where a grace of the Mousaion narrates the filmed projection, as live instruments contribute to the atmosphere, to give vital emotional cues and prompts.

Upon this wave of experimentation, the dramaturges of the Mousaion have borrowed a number of effects techniques from stage. They have followed the lessons of photography to work with artificial lighting, the effects of fire, and even frames that are mostly dark to augment a sinister ambience. Films are consistently growing longer, with the playwrights of the Mousaion being tasked to simplify the various complex stories of the liturgy into a form that can be contained on one reel. Most have begun experimenting more with operetta, rather than the full baroque display of high opera, as the manner of editing permits something of a more personalised drama.

Cinema has also fallen victim to the vanity of the nobility, and many have turned instead to motion picture to capture their latent legendary. These are clever charades where nobles hope to have their infamy rendered by professional playwrights. A great amount of time and effort is often spent in seeking the right actor to replicate their adventures; it is indecorous for nobles themselves to be in the centre of their own works.

The Engine of Fantasy by Tomasz Belzowski.

Simulacra

The history of nyctalopics is also a history of humanity. From the earliest of these inventions, humanity has sought to surpass its limits. As knowledge of alchemy advances, so too does the ability to devise more complex cybernetic systems. From crudely designed mimicry, simulacra has risen to outshine humanity in few choice activities. Nevertheless, inventors still recall the hubris of Taitle and the fall of his son. Today, the aspirations realised in simulacra become the syntheses of person and machine in both automata and nyctalopics.

Simulacrum is not mass-produced, each being custom built according to specific needs: prosthesis are fitted to the physique of the subject in question, while automata are prohibited from mass production. All simulacra are artisan works, being uniquely designed using the particular materials available. Each piece demonstrates distinctiveness of design, which varies from artisan to artisan. This is partly a deliberate attempt to prevent illicit copying of schematics. There is still a market trading dubiously in the recovery of the lost or stolen; or those belonging to the dead.

One of the adjuncts to this field is the development of calculating intelligences and the recently invented analytical machines enable demonstrate primitive and rudimentary intelligence. These analytical engines take inspiration from the original designs of the Countess of Lovelace, the daughter of the notorious Sybarite. Her original works were analytical engines known as difference machines automatic and mechanical calculators that were able to tabulate polynomial functions, making them useful for the computation of number sets.

The analytic engines of today expand this computational capacity by incorporating arithmetical units, conditional branching and looping, and integrated memory. By the middle of the 19th Century, analytical engines became a viable commodity, accessible to the elite and often utilised by the Orders. Theirs is the advent of information technology, which has rapidly enhanced scientific enquiry, technological advancement, and the coordination of aethercraft and new automata.

We speculate on what the nature of the fourth iteration might be, and many engineers contemplate by what criteria it may be judged. It is my prediction that the fourth iteration will be defined by increased use of analytical engines, which shall elevate automata with human-like intelligence. Even now, my protégée Turin, works on the design of an automaton that might fool another human in conversation, such that none might know if artifice or natural.

from Fantastic Inventions
by Nikolai Techna

Automaton

Automata are regarded with both contempt and awe, for they are objects forged by human hand. Their very imitation of human forms often earns them the pejorative names of 'mockeries' or 'brutes'. Several members of the Mousaion have expressed caution in their work and use, for their numbers are machine without dreams. As analytical engines find greater use among their apparatus, they beg questions as regards their genuine autonomy; such considerations muddy and mire on whether the servitude of such beings would constitute slavery. In similar fashion, the takwin have found their use vulgar and repugnant, seeing them as veritable homunculi.

ITERATION

The development of automata emerges across three generations of design. Each design demonstrates greater sophistication than its antecedent, each an iteration of ingenuity. Their taxonomy is more complex, as nyctalopics and automata influencing each other; although prosthetic inventions fall an entire iteration behind automata as their production resists ready synthesis of flesh and machine.

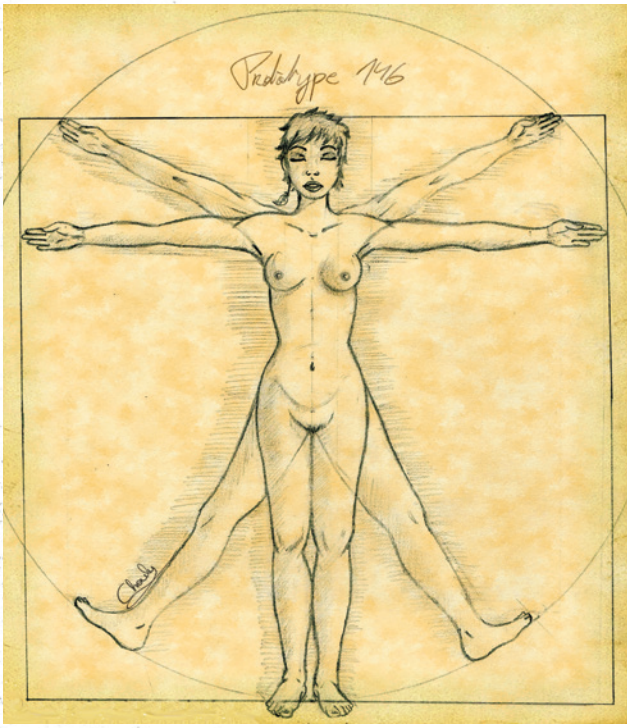
FIRST

The inception of these machines begins with Leonardo di Piero. His early designs employ his infamous wain: a near-perpetual motion machine that served as a mainspring for enduring and complex clockwork. Subsequent iterations have readily surpassed its limitations: for although wains functions for great lengths of time, they lacked sufficient power or mobility for hefty tasks. They were often overshadowed in cost and effort by the basic draft horse, knowing only rote function and simple programs.

By modern standards, these machines are comical and antiquated, even as contemporary design bears many aesthetics from this era. While motors and engines have replaced cogs and flywheels, there is still affection for their whimsical image.

SECOND

Second iteration machines emerged upon the tails of the industrial revolution with the advent of steam power. By the late 18th Century, steam applied real potency to automata to make them a formidable force; though it would take until the early 19th Century before they found application within prosthetics. The colloquial name of these machines is the term boilerplates; so named for their back-mounted boilers and their arrays of brass piping and steam racks.



Vitruvian Woman by Maud Brausser.

The Great War proved crucial in the development of such boilerplate, with the superlative *Grande Armée* being the exemplar. The first boilerplates were mechanised infantry of mobile bayonets deployed upon primitive tripods; they would load, level, aim, and fire at regular intervals. Their utility was limited on the open field, where irregular terrain proved insurmountable. Militia deployed these units to launch assaults against citadel walls, particularly where rail lines enabled rapid deployment. They were otherwise used to suppress civilian populations, being themselves immune to most firearms.

These advances lead to the first crude prostheses: Vendémiaire's alchemists devised the first automatic mail to implant soldiers with body armour. These tactical units marched fearlessly into enemy camps and wrought rampant slaughter. As the Realm came to understand the advantages of mechanised infantry, its many powers either adapted to their works or became summarily defeated.

THIRD

Contemporary automata designs follow the new wave of electrodyne engineering; it is a dependency greater than for any other technology. From the middle of the 19th Century, heated competition between ingénues like Techna and his rival spurred numerous advancements. Simulacra became the greatest wonder of electrodyne engineering, as the rivals created various analogue electrical devices. Their utility, alongside advanced metallurgy and mechanics, provided sophisticated joints, motors, and components, thereby granting simulacra agility not just strength.

These designs imparted true independent locomotion to third iteration automata, adjusting for terrain as they moved. These refinements enabled prostheses to enjoy precision of motor control and some allowance of sensory input.

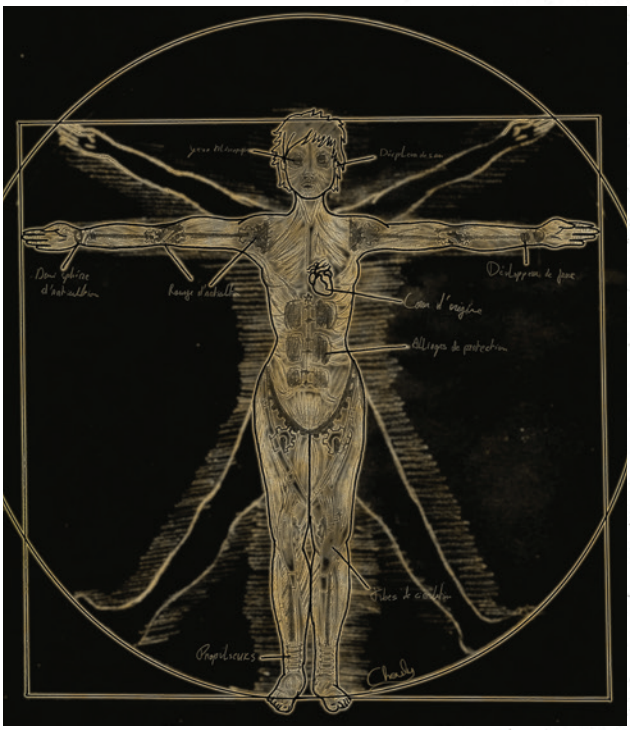
By far, the most significant development was the introduction of analytical engines, which proved integral to initiate programs that are more complex; from this emerged true autonomy of movement. Current iteration produces automata with intelligence similar to clever dogs: able to receive basic instructions and respond to various external stimuli.

MAKE AND MODEL

Automata are categorised by functional design, although as automata are not mass-produced, there are no standard models. Taxonomies of the technology derive mostly from broader generalisations based on their application. It is a piecemeal solution, which serves as long as form follows function.

INDUSTRIAL

The most common designs are those supporting industrial work. The most basic of these are little more than animated limbs serving a single mindless function; this includes automated ploughs, tractors, looms, and other manufacturing machines. Their status as automata remains mostly unremarkable amid the burgeoning industrialisation.



Ambulatory industrial automata are a different matter: they are designed for heavy, physical labour, yet there is little about them that is aesthetically pleasing. They are squat and brutish, with massive powerful arms and legs. Notably absent from their design is an expressive or communicative capacity, meaning their outward features are muted and minimalistic. Such brutes are given tasks too dangerous or laborious for the average person, and while they could not replace the human work force in entirety, they can serve complimentary positions.

MILITARY

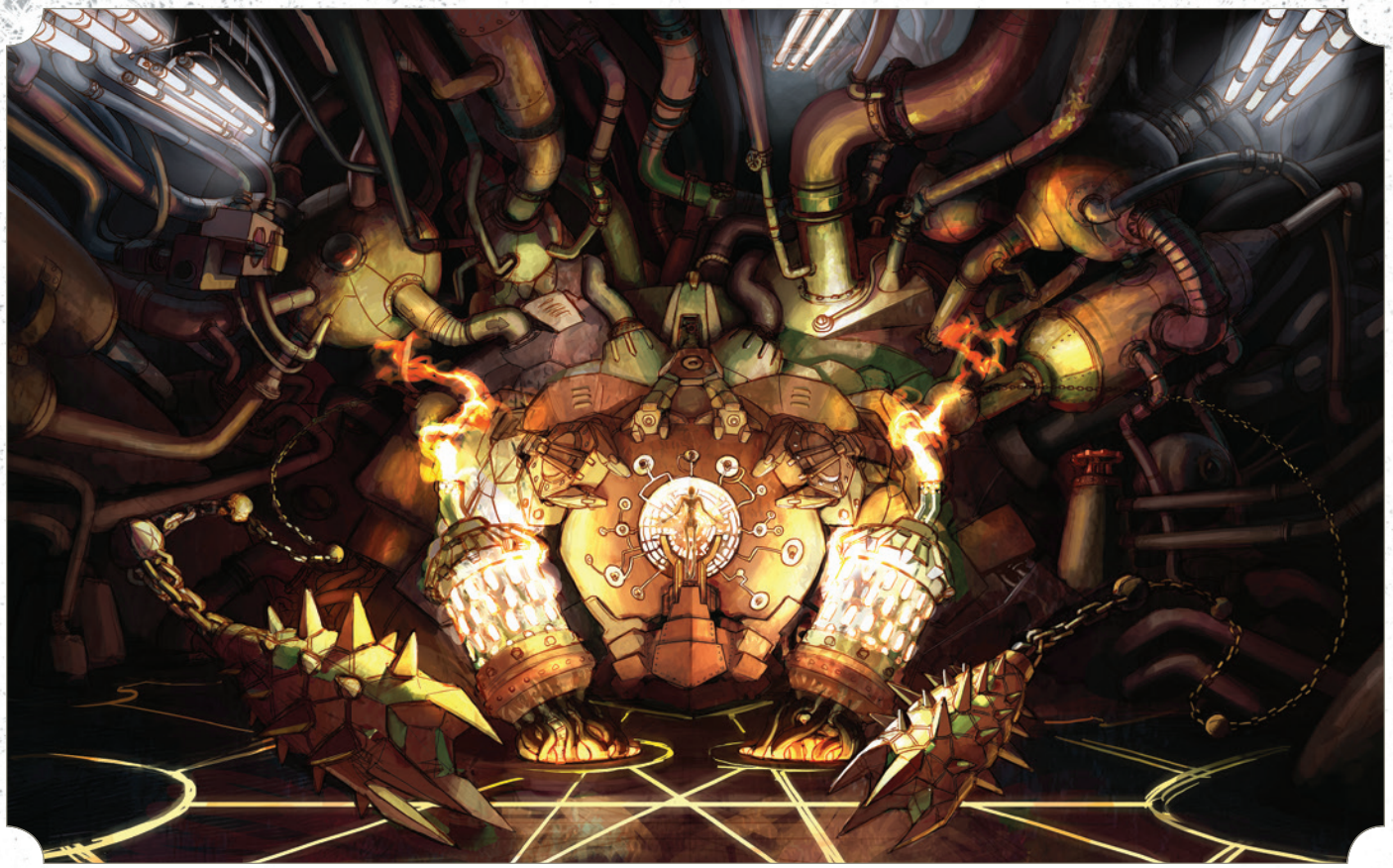
The success of Vendémiaire proved the viability of mechanised infantry, which gave fodder to fertile imaginations. The engines of Vendémiaire were so powerful that, upon the establishment of the Second Empire, Vendémiaire drafted as part of his code of laws regulation against public military application of automata. It is no accident that these laws are now enfolded into the *Pax Aeterna* and upheld by the Imperium; the refitted *Grande Armée* now serves the Imperium's purposes instead. Even so, the costs of raising and maintaining such a standing army remain prohibitive.

Contrary to popular imagination, military automata are not hulking clanks, and most contemporary designs require balance and agility, which is more advantageous than sheer power. For these reasons, military automata have the closest resemblance to true human forms, despite their obdurate forms: their chasses resemble musculature, their stature and stance replicates that of humanity. Not to suggest that they could pass as human, only that their semblance in replicating functionality is *par excellence*; rig-mounted weaponry further distinguishes them to give the impression of spiny protuberances.

CLERICAL

Clerical automata are strange hybrids. Their functions are calculative and analytical, meaning they require little need for powerful mobility, being tailored instead towards fine motor functions.

Vitruvian Noir by Maud Brausser.



The Arkay Factory Shell by Daniel Somerville.

Excepting for a desire to render these machines in human countenance, they might have lacked bipedal locomotion. By design, they are sleek and slender forms, absolved from needing power and strength; their proximity to officials means their designs are intentionally frail to prevent injury.

They are nevertheless on the cutting edge of complexity, demonstrating sophisticated analytical devices, able to administrate complex calculations. Collectively, these impassive servitors are problem solvers, capable of comprehending vast repertoires of data and have been fitted with limited faculty for language. They are proficient at transliterating auditory commands and reproducing text. They can carry basic conversation, even though with their porcelain mask faces display a disarming and cheerful appeal. Some can almost fool others into the belief that they are comprehending, rather than recursively responding.

Nyctalope

Nyctalopics originated as motorised battle armours and the invention of electrodyne engineering has turned these designed to the production of prosthetic body parts. Consequently, all prostheses extrapolate from a maxim to replicate the human body as much as possible in form and design; for the human body holds much elegance in its own form.

Nyctalopic prostheses have become common enough that their sight in public no longer shocks, even while it might still draw comment. The various iterations of design are found throughout the population, with first and second iterations being cheap enough to build; though their installation and maintenance demands a cost that not all can afford.

Understandably, public reaction to such bodily modification has run the gamut of fear and shame; as an increasing number of peers sport prostheses, they become less of a sign of shame or

damage and an affectation of privilege. Inevitably, the attitudes towards their use falls starkly on either side of the gothic and planetary styles: the aristocracy frequently refrains from their adoption, even as the bourgeoisie veritably embrace their use. Moreover, the affection for prostheses among noble circles has pushed interest out of the realm of replacement and into augmentation.

COMPOSITION

A typical prosthesis is made from brass or steel and layered with plating to protect any intricate machinery. For the wealthy, construction may also depend on alchemic metals like mistrille, to provide durability and lightness. Yet despite the utility of nyctalopes, they possess intrinsic drawbacks that are best understood before they are implanted. Earlier iterations may be cheaper, but they are obvious in nature and may be a little unsightly. Even the latest iterations cannot be completely disguised, though their styles acquire a more appealing décor. Fabricators counsel those against hoping to adorn themselves with a glamorous metallic veneer; though painted porcelain or lacer may give something of a characteristic flush of life.

Prostheses of an articulated nature link use alchemical principles to link the nervous system with the electrical impulses in the prosthesis through the various humours Mistrille-laced nyctalopes synergise far more completely with the subject, which leads to fewer rejections and smoother functions. This connection enables the nyctalopic prosthesis to draw upon the body's own energy reserves for power, providing the limits of use reflect nominal movement; additional functions require additional power from a fuel cell. Naturally, this increased energetic requirement increases a person's metabolism and many must consume a third again as much food as before.

INSTALLATION

The installation of any nyctalopic prosthesis requires advanced alchemic knowledge complimented by skill with both medicine and mechanics. This process is difficult and painful, as the limbs must be properly aligned; it usually requires a small amputation to expose the nerve endings followed by an excruciating process linking individual nerve fibres to the components in the chassis. Recovery times can last anywhere from six months to an upper limit of eighteen months for sub-par implants.

The cost of installation is relevant to its materials and complexity and the completeness of human imitation in form and function. Limb prostheses double in cost for every major joint they comprise, though they remain simple in comparison to spinal column articulations. Even after the successful grafting of the prosthesis, it requires regular lubrication and meticulous maintenance. About once every three years, it is necessity to have an overhaul to recalibrate the nerve bundles; this is also a painful process. The prohibitive cost of maintenance has helped the proliferation of various grey-market shops, which sell both second-hand prosthetics and offer second-rate skills.

AUGMENTATION

Nyctalopics opens physical beings to new horizons through augmentation; many trends regarding nyctalopic implants not only seek to overcome the perceived fragile human condition: a lack of strength, dexterity, and acuity. Augmentation requires a rig upon which artificers can install varied apparatus onto the chassis; rigs can contain tools, blades, and electrical dischargers. All has led to a cottage industry of nyctalopic customisation, which is of variable legal status.

LEG AND FOOT

The most common prosthesis is one replacing lost legs or feet, intended for balance and support. The learned eye can readily distinguish the ordinary prosthetic from those bearing nyctalopic servers as the main differentiator is in the fluidity of locomotion: from hobbling or lilting gait to something

The culture, or even *couture*, of techno-fashions are abundant: it is a cosmopolitan vogue, particularly among the more youthful, to affect motifs of gears and the assemblage of industry within their ensemble; yet, the learned eye is ready to discern whose affects are pretensions and which are devotions of the aficionado. There is a small but widespread use of automatic prostheses, and while heavy fabrics usually guise their presence, the accoutrement of mechanisms help complete that disguise: rendering

Moreover, for all that society readily professes its respectability, but oft feigns ignorance of a seething and deviant subculture. There are those that yearn for the modification of the physique, sometime with complete disregard for convention. For such fetishists, prosthesis is less about function and more an aesthetic: a sense of change and restructuring that has otherwise escaped them previously.

from Through Darker Mirrors by Harold Childe

There are nominal side effects with the installation of any prosthesis, which often reflect the skill of the alchemist. They range from simple shudders, twitches, and involuntary ticks, to more extreme havoc that creates the sensation of a phantom limb. At their worst, they affect cognitive processes, inducing malady.

Care must also be take in their upkeep, for without sufficient maintenance toxins can build up through constant exposure to metals and their absorption by the body. A poorly applied prosthetic can reduce life expectancy by ten years.

from A Treatise on the Body Electric by Cassandra Shore

akin to nominal walking. Basic knowledge of leg physiology has lent itself to replication, meaning that these prostheses prove to be one of the easiest to manufacture and install. Leg replacements remains reasonably effective provided the subject retains a working hip; easier still if they retain a working knee.

Should the patient seek to acquire augmented perambulation then costs tend to double, as effective augmentation usually requires the bilateral replacement of legs at equivalent lengths. This makes the engineering of balance and locomotion easier to calibrate as such augmentations often enhance power, running speeds, and jumping distances. Other augmentations depend on the hollow girth leg prostheses provide; hydraulic pistons demanding less space than muscle and bone, allowing for secret caches, hiding large weapons or tools. Feet alone seldom see augmentation, except when they are extensions of leg design. Most such augmentations venture more into fetishism and aesthetic than function; known to include spurs and claws, prehensile grip, or a retractable stiletto heel.

ARM

Arms and hands are the second most common implants, with many design principles taken from lessons of leg manufacture. The main challenge for arm prosthetics devolves from the way they invert the underlying assumptions, depending from an armature rather than supporting the body. Moreover, since the shoulder blade lacks structural attachment to the skeletal frame, armatures must be delicate in design, for integration with the body's soft tissue. Arm replacements must utilise lightweight materials, to serve agility before strength. It is also a sight of focused aesthetic balance, with hands being the subject of reasonable vanity.

Unless the subject acquires structural support through both the back and legs, arms alone are incapable of generating powerful lift or push. Artificers are well aware of individuals lacking such strength only to then break their back. Accordingly, common arm augmentations are those providing increased gripping strength or pinion locks to produce a steady hands. Both prove useful for fine motor tasks, where techniques depend on power transfer from the arm into the hand. There are also instances of mounted rigs upon the forearm or wrist, concealing a retractable weapon within a hidden cavity.

HAND

Hands deserve special mention, as their design is among some of the finest masterpieces of engineering. Theirs is a difficult combination of flexibility and dexterity balanced against the demands of utility. The functionality of a hands means that anything less than precision work leaves said machines as little more than glorified hooks. When designed appropriately, hands prove adroit and nimble enough to crack eggs and play the piano. Yet even these fine engines can only simulate function, for they lack the sensitivity of biological hands.

Perhaps to compensate, hand prostheses support the greatest range of augmentations; they blur the line between hand and tool. Though care is needed, as the more onerous in weight and complexity, the greater the loss of manual dexterity. The most common types of tools implanted are precision instruments, including hypodermic needles, scalpels, screwdrivers, and pens. Most artificers also aver from the implanting weapons, which is more a symbolic aversion than formal.

TORSO AND SPINE

The torso represents the largest dilemma concerning support and structure, proving one of the most difficult areas to work upon. There tends to be little by the way of a middle ground for torsos

and hips: their requirements are such that engineers must either envelope the entire section with a full-bodied chassis or build the implants over a slender scaffold that contours the body. Either method provides the necessary support for the skeletal musculature; when combined with either arms or leg augmentation it becomes possible to enhance the lifting power of an individual by twenty-fold. By default, torso chasses form a type of body armour that encompasses and protects the vital organs.

The bulk of such implants mean that only advanced designs enable full mobility as spinal modification is delicate, and supple articulation proves difficult. The structures around the spine must contain a layer of protection to avoid potential paralysis. Typical design build structural devices over the length of the spine with small interlocking plates: their articulation allows the usual motion of the spine and then locks into place for stability. Most spinal implants are remedial, to bypasses breaks or damage in the spinal cord and restoring movement to paraplegia or even quadriplegia.

INTERNAL ORGAN

The soft-tissue and physiology of internal organs requires artificers to refer to a broad range of heuristics, as their function tends to be far more pertinent than their form. The functionality of many organs can be reduced to base mechanics, making them easy to replicate. The heart is a glorified electrical pump and lungs may usually be reduced to their bellows function; they tend to be among the easiest organs to reproduce for all their centrality in sustaining life.

Contrast these with the process of digestion, involving a string of complex biological factories, requiring a level of expertise that only a handful of alchemists possess. One of the more common workarounds that many artificers employ exploits the body's bilateral symmetry. Such artificers create devices to enhance the body's own systems to continue their basic functions, even while they are matched with artificial systems that enhance the processes of their twin.

The most difficult impediment to circumvent in these designs is the threat of rejection: mechanical devices do not natively reside in bodies and only advanced biological alchemy keeps the body's defence mechanisms in check. This, alongside the requirement for ready access to maintain said devices, means very few artificers sequester devices completely within the body. The preference is to place them outside human body cavity, such that organ implants often manifest grotesque tubes and gears.

HEAD

The human head and face are subjects of great vanity, and since scarce prostheses are flattering, few deliberately mutilate their face for their affect. There are few applications for head prostheses that not related to sensory functions, all which prove difficult to replicate. Moreover, while cognitive functions are not completely outside the realms of feasibility, they often defy pragmatism. Therefore, despite the best designs at hand, head trauma remains a terminal injury with little recourse for repair.

The majority of apparatuses applied to the head are eye prostheses. Despite being a most sophisticated organ, its function derives from the principles of optics and photography. Although, such implants garish and obvious, sitting uncomfortably inside the empty socket and mounted over the orbital structure.

More Machine than Man
by Roberto Quintero.

Artificial eyes are not the equal of their organic counterparts, with their resolution being of poor quality. Older designs are monochromatic, as only recent innovations have supplied colour recognition; many still lack peripheral vision. Clever artificers can adjust the camera rig, to give rise to the inclusion of other sensory devices; the most intriguing are those using gloam lenses, opening the mind's eye to strange otherworldly sights. The protruding lens, with its familiar whirring motors as it constantly focuses, has become familiar to the working and middle classes.

Cochlear implants prove simpler than visual ones: they mount a phonic rig upon the parietal skull and connect through subtle wiring to the auditory canal. The range of hearing from these devices is said to lack the richness of sound. Though the subject can apprehend conversations, they have trouble making fine discernments in noisy environments and offer only a limited appreciation of musical melody. Experiments in augmentation have elsewise enhanced natural hearing, at least in terms of distance and frequency range.

Illicit Concoctions by Krum.

Philtre

Philtres are special potions and concoctions that are brewed from components of the bramblewoods: its petals, fruits, or thorns. In times long gone, herbalists discovered that their components could be harvested and infused into tinctures, compresses, and philtres.

Quick is the *élan vital* of the nobility, being a flush of immaterial essence that runs through their body. It is unique to the noble physiology, which tempers narcotics to the point of remarkable tolerance to normal drugs. The medicines and poisons of mundane plants may provide a mild balm or scarce arrest to the noble vitality respectively. Conversely, the range of pharmacological derivatives of the bramblewoods affects the quick where they would leave commoners untouched: the nether-ecology of the bramblewoods is provoked only by the presence of quick. Quick serves as an essential ingredient to catalyse the pharmacological aspects of the bramblewoods, so only the brambles provide efficacious remedy or startling dolour through their essential components.

Accordingly, the nobility have extended many alchemic practices to brewing such elixirs, which necessitates the cultivation and the harvest of the bramblewoods. Paracelsus discovered that plants contain trace amounts of quick and the discovery that would have faded to obscurity if not for the prevalence of the bramblewoods today. Much of the practices of ancient herbalism have found modern usage in pharmacology for the creation of philtres, pills, powders. This is the *verbena pharmacologica*.

Horticulture

The pharmacology of the bramblewoods has produced something of a cottage industry the course of the last few centuries. It is a combined venture of farmers and rangers, who cultivate the bramblewoods for their precious offerings. Most such cultivators carve a hollow in the eaves of bramblewoods, to preserve lands for small dependable crops. These enterprises are typically the focus of an entire community that lives upon the edge of the bramblewoods beside said hollows: some make forays into the bramblewoods to forage for new exotic crops, while others learn the arts of domesticating.

The perennial problem for briar crops is the wild nature of its ecology. A great portion of the bramblewoods comprise animate plants, which bear myriad forms of defence, including toxic saps and gases, razor edged leaves, and entangling or snaring vines. It takes a most careful skill to harvest their crop, which gives rise to the importance of the role of the woodwose: a person of uncanny insight capable of subduing the more dire qualities of the crops. They are green men and women of the woods, leading the foragers and foresters, and otherwise navigating around the worst of the dangers. Their name comes from a particular talent they learn of singing to the woods, which soothes their temperament and encourages their fecundity.

Manna

Manna is the principle resource cultivated from the bramblewoods; it is a silvery sap that flows in the thick briar boughs. These fluids are essential to all aspects of philtre production, as manna is replete with quick, which gives the sap its signature quicksilver appearance and viscosity. Manna

alone is deadly, to nobles and commoners alike, and the woodwose cures the sap with sunlight to bleach it of its poison. As part of the curing process, the manna desiccates under a midday heat to dry into a silvery resin. Once cured, manna possesses many essential properties.

BRIAR

Another chief resource is the briar wood itself. Like other aspects of the bramblewoods, cutting and harvesting briar is precarious, particularly if one wishes to cut down the thicker boughs that lie deeper into the woods. Most harvesters collect briar as they prune back the constant overgrowth of the bramblewoods. Briar is prized for a number of reasons and chief amongst them is its impervious nature against chimerical effects, to provide a bulwark against the worst of ephemeral effects and delusions. Moreover, the thicker boughs possess a delicate fragrance that pervades for many years, which is a scintillating combination of rose and sandalwood.

PETAL

Petals from bramble-blooms provide the active components for most philtres with narcotic properties. Each bloom must have its petals compressed into an essential oil blended with manna, ready for dispensation as tinctures at the required dose. Tinctures are the common form of preparation when the narcotic property is for medicinal and therapeutic purposes. Where the petals are being used for recreational purposes, the alternate method of preparation provides candied petals. Each is coated with syrup made of manna and then dried out again; such petals are rare delicacies amongst the nobility for their taste and their milder narcotic effects.

HAW

The haws, or fruit, of the bramblewoods are churlish and easily over-ripen. Haws have excitable properties, which invigorate the body and the mind. They may be prepared as a preserve, if one picks them before they reach maturity; it is best to preserve the haws in manna syrup and stew them before sealing them. When thus prepared, the preserve provides a mild physical restorative, able to alleviate physical weariness. Alternatively, the fermentation of pressed immature haws provides a wine, which are excellent in their ability to inebriate the nobility. Some of the more fortified wines do not produce inebriation, but rather cause an ejaculation of passions.

Should one leave the haw to mature, the casing hardens and the haw becomes a bean, which then takes on a nut-like shape. Normally such beans are unpalatable with a bitter, acerbic taste. Roasting such haws distils their stimulating properties in ways that activate the cognitive functions of the mind, though in doing so they lose much of their potency and restorative ability; yet they find use in drinks and deserts.

On rare occasions, perhaps one in a thousand or more haws, the haw does not harden into a bean but becomes flush with essence. These haws swell to several times their size until they take on the shape and consistency of a golden orb; many erroneously refer to these as apples. These ‘golden apples’ bear some of the most remarkable remedial properties of any known botanical product. Legend holds that if eaten off the bramble, it can stay the touch of death. Such accounts are troubling, showing little in the way of verisimilitude amongst them.

THORN

The thorns of the bramblewoods are noxious. As a primary defence mechanism, they concentrate some of the most toxic substances they can bear. These poisonous barbs bear a tell-tale silvery sheen to the trained eye; they may be cut and their poisons sacs removed with care. Once safely acquired, the thorns are often cast away, having served their purpose.

Unlike other crops, the poison of thorns does not require activation through an infusion of manna; their toxicity is there to begin with. However, if the poison is exposed to daylight, they quickly lose their potency. Most harvesters seal the poison with a few drops of manna.

LEAF

Leaves are perhaps the only part of the briarwoods that lack any treatment from manna. All briar leaves contain trace amounts of quick, including variable amounts of glamour, velleity, or whist. Artful foragers know to look out for leaves that are still budding, known in the trade as flushes, and how to preserve these harvests for a great length of time. When wilted and crushed, they begin to seep out their essences, which naturally lend themselves to use for herbal infusions. In their own right, the essential nature of these leaves mean they can be chewed or pulped to provide a mild analgesic, either generally when ingested or in a poultice.

Medicine

The pharmacological resistance of the nobility impeded many historical treatments; only the rigorous constitution of the nobles has successfully staved off infirmity. Though physicians could treat mundane physical trauma with mundane means, there proved little herbalists and physicians could do to affect either the psychological health or the internal physiology of the nobility. In general, this has meant a history of nobles being far more reserved about direct confrontation than they have more recently been; although the introduction of a pharmacological bounty has perhaps expanded upon their indirect methods. Over recent centuries, there have been numerous explorations into the applications of bramblewoods towards remedial properties. Some have become tested methods, while many more remain experimental.

Greenhouse in the Wilderness by Lino Dreighe.

INCENSE

Numerous situations call upon the inhalation of a medicine for delivery. Incenses have proved most efficacious for this kind of purpose. Most incense comprises manna-treated resin, which one may then crush and burn in censors.

ARGENTINE

If the manna resin is hardened quickly enough, it retains its silvery colour to become the highly valuable resin called argentine. When burned, argentine induces a state of calmness and tranquillity in the immediate environment, muting emotional impulses and tempering the more excessive expressions; what remains are little more than subtle echoes of their typical range of emotions. For these reasons, argentine is an aid for medicine, liturgy, and open diplomatic forums.

MURRA

Murra represents the most common medicinal incense, being manna mixed with a quantity of calx-laden water: dried and then crushed finely. Compared to other verbena pharmacologica, murra is considerably abundant. The typical white-silver colour that glitters in powdered form gives it the distinct impression of stardust, made all the more ethereal by its sweet smelling fragrance. Murra has wide use as a perfume, holding many ceremonial uses, with the added benefit of staving off air-borne diseases. Murra fumes can cleanse the air of any foul humours, and wards off insects.

SALVE

Salves require some skill in their application as a poultice dressing. For the best effect, the poultice application should utilise leaves harvested from the bramblewoods, then bound with caulkine: propolis made from the manna sap.

CAULKINE

Caulkine is extremely waxy and is both unpleasant to the smell and taste. It has natural antimicrobial properties, and makes an excellent emollient when applied to the skin. These properties ensure that any open wound resists infection and further purges any disease festering therein. It is necessary to replace and redress these poultices at least once a day, and remove when the caulkine turns a thick pus-like white colour.

OLINÉ

Perhaps the most notorious of salves is one without a strict medical property: *oliné* is a salve created by mixing caulkine with lanolin. Its principal use is as a skin-care product; it is therefore prized by the nobility for its antiagapic properties, capable of restoring a vital flush and vigour to aging skin. It also finds infrequent use on lacerations, burns, and other skin damage, where it helps facilitate the clean healing of any such wound by sealing it closed and preventing scarring.

TONIC

The most common variety of medicinal philtre is the tonic: herbal fusions steeped and preserved for ingestion. Tonics are some of the most potent forms of medicine, requiring only a few drops for a given dose. Overdosing can occur but only after the administration of vast quantities.

AITAR

The most well-known tonic is the miraculous substance aitar: an elixir produced from the juice of haw-apples, being an incredibly bitter but potent panacea. When drunk, this tonic may cure

a noble of any natural disease or illness and even staves off the effects of disabling and chronic conditions, save terminal diseases. Aitar has a golden hue and a pungent peach-like aroma.

LACHRYMA

The clear liquid lachryma is bears a saline consistency and taste. The process to create lachryma requires the alchemist to filter a concoction of manna through a mash of leaf pulp. It is highly desired by paranoid nobles as a solution of its tonic can purge any drink and most foods of toxins caused by *verbena pharmacologica*. It is also possible to apply lachryma directly to the site of any wound blighted or otherwise affected by its toxins. Lastly, lachryma can be ingested on its own to purge the body of any verbena toxins already within. This is a painful and unpleasant process, which enervates the subject for days.

ROSTRUM

Rostrum is an alcoholic herbal preparation that has its notorious reddish-brown hue and extremely bitter taste. It is stored as a dry powder and then activated when mixed with ordinary spirits to form a tincture. Though it is possessed of a number of medicinal qualities, its analgesic properties are favoured to ease the symptoms of many illnesses, including coughs, sweats, fevers, nausea, aches, and pains. The tincture suppresses symptoms only, having little effect on the illness directly. Consequently, rostrum has found some recreational use as well, with varying degrees of social acceptance.

Pharmacopoeia Verbena by Tomasz Belzowski.

Poison

The distilled poisons cultivated of the bramblewoods are universally fatal for the nobility; even as they are only mildly nauseating to commoners. What leniency there is that is afforded to narcotic purveyors rescinds before all fair places of courtly business. The poisons of the verbena pharmacologica serve only and what lesser poisons exist are precarious even then, being inconsistent in effect.

The difficulty with such poisons is not in their potency but in their delivery, which depends on the discretion, dexterity, or cunning of the would-be poisoner. Most acts of poisoning are careful games of patience and opportunity. In most cases, once poison is ingested, death surely follows: those few counteragents that exist are hard to manufacture, yet jealously guarded. Nobles have learned the prudence of careful eating and drinking customs, being rightly cautious of strangers and reserved in their hospitality.

FATAL

The greatest number of poisons kills effectively and with purpose as deadly tools for the duplicitous: some are fast and gruesome, others slow and subtle; yet they all delivering death in discretion, even if indecorously. The range of renowned poisons is decidedly limited, for there are few needs to experiment in lethal dosage when the results are largely the same. What differences that presents regards the ease in which their victims may pass. There are four poisons of widespread knowledge: astrapor, silucide, melongin, and vitusyne.

ASTRAPOR

The most feared of all the poisons is astrapor, colloquially named the 'Red Death': a single taste brings about a near-instant arrest of the heart. Nominally, the liquid is inert but takes on its characteristic red hue and assumes a sticky texture when gently heated, thereby activating the liquid. Once active, only two or three drops suffice.

The substance requires injection or ingestion, which makes it safe to handle directly. However, the substance does not dissolve into water or alcohol, to floats upon them like a spatter of blood, though it may suspend in milk to gives the liquid a strange mottled pink colouration. The preferred method of delivery is upon a coated blade for instantaneous effect, even though the red stain it leaves is distinctive.

SILUCIDE

Second in notoriety is the powder named silucide, which is produced through grinding the bramble-thorn into the bramble's toxin. These shavings are not water-soluble through they dissolve into alcohol; they turn the liquid a dull grey pallor with a horrible taste. Though ingestible, silucide works best by direct intravenous delivery.

Once the silucide beings to work, it slowly causes the body to calcify, as though succumbing to quiescence. When delivered directly, the effect takes place over across ten minutes and expands most graphically from the site of contact. If ingested, the effect takes up to an hour as the victim solidifies from inside out. Both processes are reportedly painless, as the body becomes numb from the effects and the victim becomes listless and apathetic. It is the favoured poison for suicides.

MELONGIN

Melongin is a subtle, dark powder that is both tasteless and odourless and dissolves quickly into water. The victim must ingest the substance for effect; once consumed, the victim has mere hours to live. As they die, horrible pains wrack their bodies, working its way into the guts and bowels where it lacerates their linings. It causes the victim to vomit blood as the first symptom, followed by bleeding from other orifices. When the victim's eyes weep bloody tears, the end is imminent.

VITUSYNE

The final poison of notoriety is vitusyne. The manufacture of this poison requires a tincture of bramble-thorn venom and manna resin. The alchemist must then render the solution down into a bitter, brown powder, which difficult to disguise by taste, but then typically disguised by spices.

Its poisoning is characterised by rapid convulsions, which begins with a tremulous shaking of the hands and uncoordinated jerking movements of the face. These tremors progress rapidly into involuntary ticks, increasing with intensity as the entire body begins to spasm. After ten minutes, the poison takes complete control, and this stage is renowned as the *danse macabre*: a violent and horrific death, leaving the corpse in a terrible rictus.

POX

The pox poisons are those few poisons made to injure or malign. They are scarce and signify a message of intense spiteful hatred upon its victim. The three best pox poisons are not subtle, decidedly effective, difficult to manufacture, and so significantly rare. All of them induce a terribly deleterious effect upon their victims, which leaves them weak and frail for a good long time thereafter.

HAGRID

The first substance is called hagrid; so named for being the literal stuff of nightmares. Its use plagues the victim, with night terrors for numerous, sleepless nights. The liquid is tasteless, but smells faintly of lavender and produces a light, violet tint. The making of hagrid requires infusing thorn venom with deadly nightshade under the night light.

They begin with lucid strains of haunting eeriness and then escalate quickly into mounting dread. By the third day, the effects are torturous. By the fifth, victims are traumatised and may suffer maladies for long times afterwards. Each sequence of nightmares dredges up dark, horrible secrets of their past, giving them centre stage in their dreams. After a week, the poison has sweated out and their fever breaks, even while leaving lingering effects.

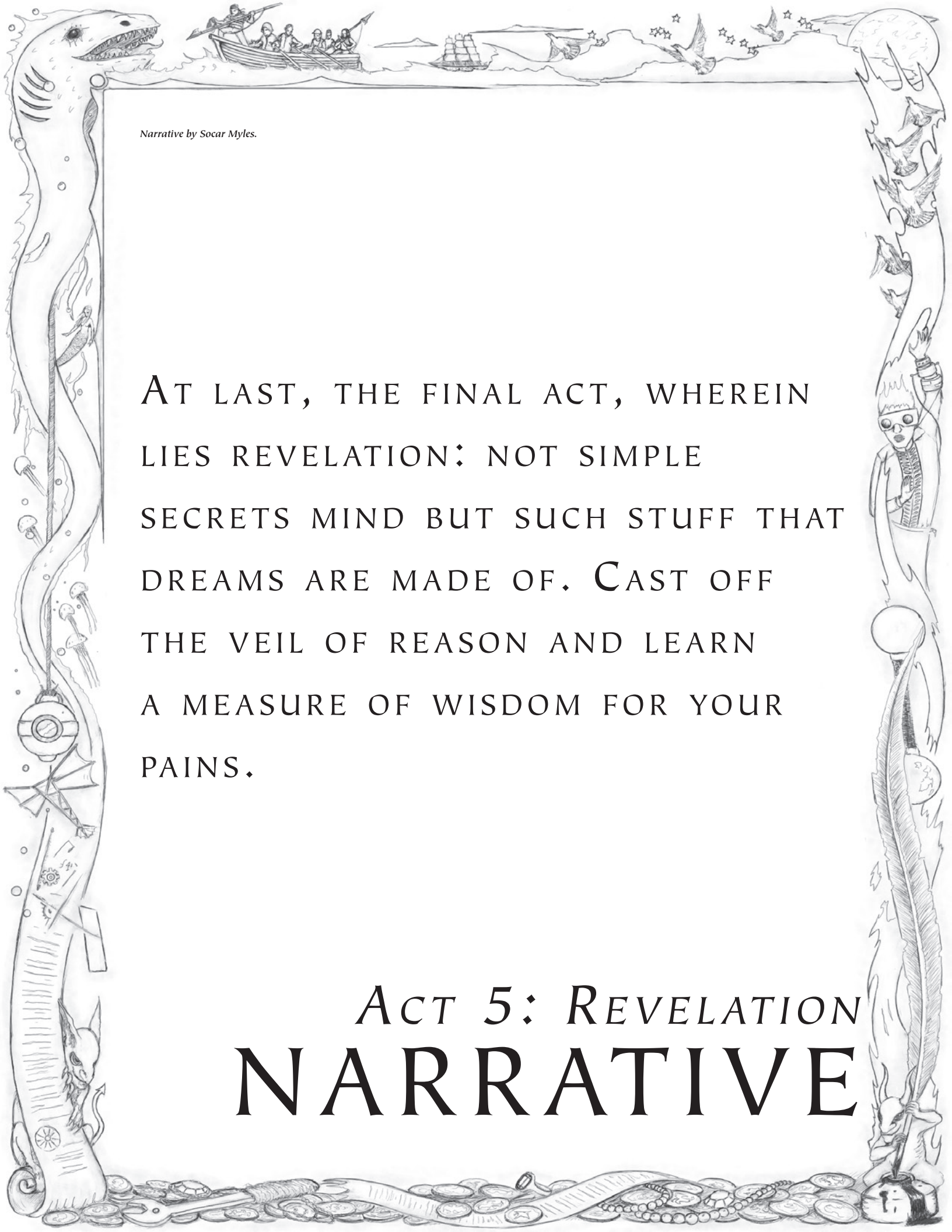
BÊTE NOIR

The second infamous pox is a spiteful poison known as *bête noir*. The cultivation of blight requires harvesting rotten thorns and then suspending them in manna syrup. This putrefies the toxin into pungent syrup, which is difficult to disguise to its sickly-sweet smell of rotting fruit.

A doleful weakness a day before precedes the outbreak, which sends its victims to bed in a malaise before the first blemishes. The *bête noir* then afflicts victims with sores and buboes, which then weep sickly fluids. Though non-lethal, these sores are intolerably painful without analgesics. They run their course across two weeks and afterwards leave pockmark scars, ravaged for life; it is a favourite vengeance for envy of beauty.

PYRINE

The final pox is pyrine: a yellow powder that requires careful handling. Upon contact, the powder settles into the skin and thereafter spreads throughout the body. After a single minute, the contact site begins to itch; an hour later, the victim becomes fevered, running high temperatures and thirsting for water; and an hour after that, the victim feels like they are burning. This intense, excruciating pain lasts for many hours. When it dissipates, it leaves no mark or injury and lapses as the fever sweats the pyrine out, then to leave the victim weak for days on end.



Narrative by Socar Myles.

At last, the final act, wherein lies revelation: not simple secrets mind but such stuff that dreams are made of. Cast off the veil of reason and learn a measure of wisdom for your pains.

Act 5: Revelation

NARRATIVE

Skein

Narratives are power. Each is singular account told from the perspective of a single subject. Each develops in strength through regaling and retelling, which lends them potency. Every story is like a single thread in the skein, the continuum of fate, and seeks to ravel into the warp and weft of fate. They depend on knowledge, and use systems of knowledge to replicate themselves, and define narrative convention.

The skein is a narrative causality, which accords the manner of events towards narrative convention. It operates according to system of principles, which structure the course of history itself. This causality is teleological, and bears upon the world an imperative force to mould the actions of individuals unto legendary. This is due to the way that the broad consensus of intelligent beings shape and determine the conventions.

Each story seeks to be retold and reimagined through the actions of the nobles that it binds itself to. The threads struggle and compete against each other, hoping to inflame and capture the public imagination. The skein cares neither for who acts in the roles it creates nor for the rightness of a cause; only for the expression of their themes. In this manner, the skein exploits the symbolism of culture to reproduce in the hearts and minds of a captive audience. The skein elevates the ordinary into the sublime, transforming a person into an actor, an object into a prop, and a location into a scene.

Nobles who are versed in the ways of the skein can also use their knowledge to influence its course, potentially arranging events in such a way towards one course to another. Nobles can exploit the native symbolism of the skein to link people and events through narratives where otherwise no connection existed. In many ways, the threads of the skein bind the nobility together to become a central component to the fabric of noble society, governing their protocol and informing their interactions.

The word trope comes from the Konic word *tropos* meaning 'to turn', denoting the manner in which a single trope may twist or turn the course of destiny. The tropes of the skein seek to embed stories as truth in the minds of many: impressionable as they are, the masses of commonfolk are most easily affected by tropes; in an almost symbiotic fashion, those self-same tropes gain power from the masses' credulity. The eye of the public is nigh undetectable, and equally near high unavoidable, though nobles remain aware of its ever-watchful presence. Over the years, the Mousaion, among others, has codified the principle tropes of the skein; emphasising particularly when they act in counterpoint to natural laws.

The Mousaion has learned that as the public grows aware of a given trope, they begin to weary of it. Herein lies a careful balance, between manipulating expectations and exploiting them: a public that becomes overly exposed to such a trope loses their willing suspension of disbelief, and the efficacy of that trope will fail or even sour. The most talented of the graces know to use tropes with flair, fading into the background, becoming familiar and accepted despite their commonality.

from The Death of the Author by Zarathustra

Thread

The skein binds all of history together into the Grand Narrative. They entail a continuum of myth and meaning, being the total sum of interconnecting and individual uncountable narrative threads. Its form is the sublime tapestry of chimera and meaning, which comprises of all things ephemeral, intangible, and subjective. Each individual thread is an element of story, which operates in accordance to narrative convention.

Every thread represents the cultural and symbolic ideas of story, which propagate themselves from person to person through the medium of story. With each retelling, the ideas spread through the many minds of the masses by means of writing, speech, gestures, rituals, or other imitable phenomena.

These narrative conventions are known as tropes; they are in turn heavily influenced by the expectations of the masses. Tropes provide narrative hooks that compel narrative causality, to lead events towards predetermined conclusions, as demanded by their conventions. As narratives unfold through the events that transpire around the nobles, they lend a terrible inertia that pushes the limits of plausibility unto the suspension of disbelief.

Every single thread is one single connection between two subjects of narrative importance, conveying some similarity of depth or meaning. The proliferation of threads between noble persons signifies an immediate sphere of political and social influence. Such threads are fostered through a deeply entrenched culture of reciprocity. Though sometimes these intimacies are unrequited, which engenders the enthralment of a noble; tethering their will through an inundation of obligation and duty elicited by those strands.

Threads link the imagines of nobles; each carries some measure of intimacy or familiarity. Inevitably, these threads engender sensitivity between the two, though the nature of this connexion is variable. Threads form more profound connections, through luminiferous tendrils across the ether, which deepen as the connexion between two subjects grows; regardless of whether feelings are reciprocated between them.

The effects of such connexion are far-flung, surviving even across the vastness of land and space. Albeit, they are not entirely impervious to distance, for when two are removed from each other such that they stand beyond the limits of the horizon, those threads fall dormant. Accordingly, the possession of debts among the nobility holds double purpose. In the first instance, it creates an intricate web of interdependence and moderates our endogenous conflict. In the second instance, it ensures a means of determining imposters and interlopers upon a given circle of nobility, for those without a single debt have nothing to oblige them towards the status quo. Theirs is not the domain of commoners, for only nobles may attune to fate.

from The Waking Dream by Matilda Mulfstan

STRAND

A single thread may weave together from a number of distinctive strands, each representing one measure of influence held over another. No thread is bilateral, meaning that each individual threat represents the direction of influence over the other. Usually, the obligations of these threads are exchanged, though a significant disparity between peers the two represents the greater sway of one over the other.

The prevalence of threads between the nobility is actively cultivated, for their number ensures a modicum of respectability cemented through mutual obligation and onus. There is a careful balance between an encumbrance of duty and being untethered to society completely. Those of few and fewer ties draw questions regarding their loyalties, for such lightly affected ties remain uncertain and prone to subversion. This ensures the Great Game persists through tactics of deceit and guile. It requires a treatment of obligated nobles not simply as cats-paws and draws more upon finesse than imposition.

The threads themselves are visible through the sorcerous arts of kenning, for each is a subtle connexion of fate that tie the nobility together: they comprise those bargains or oaths solemnised by the arts of gramayre, and those favours recognised as a serious debt or contract as inscribed through the notary powers of a rubrics.

CORD AND BINDING

Canny nobles can foster stronger ties through multiple strands, eventually weaving them into potent cords. Such cords describe ties that are strung through more deeply potent passions, duties, and ideals. However, many nobles take precaution against such imprecation of their fates, unless some potent reward or opportunity permits. For the bounds of cords are profound, which makes said nobles prone to being played as pawns in some oblique machination. Companions who are tied to nobles by such a fate are given to misadventure and innocuous mischief.

At their most extreme, the threads cast over another subject become so complete that their number ceases to bear any further meaning. The weight of numerous strands produces a fervent obsequience, the subject there enthralled.

One narrative convention emerges from the complete subordination inured by a binding, which is the chance to inherit the legacy of their master. Destiny shares high affinity with these potent bonds, and in the instances of a noble's premature death, the unresolved narrative may strike out to the nearest suitable vessel. The inertia of destiny reaches out and falls upon those most closely aligned to the fallen noble, and thus destiny finds another noble to pick up the mantle; it is like lightning searching for the closest route to the ground. This transference is rarely pleasant, though are frequently beneficial, as the intended becomes plagued by the echoes of recently deceased directing them to fulfil their newly acquired obligations.

from Operatic Tropes by Leubald Geyer

GRAND NARRATIVE

While the skein is heavily imperative, it is not completely deterministic, for nobles retain the agency to shape their own destiny through their choices and actions. The skein influences the course of events by establishing the path of least resistance towards auspicious outcomes; nobles may elect to follow or defy these trends and many erstwhile nobles have sought to thwart their own destiny.

The skein as a whole is the entire course of history; it is the Grand Narrative. History becomes a unified continuum of all individual stories, reflected countless times through retelling and re-enactment. It becomes a grand project wherein the races of humanity, faerie, and takwin contend as to the culmination of its history. Each race regards history with their own unique interpretation of the fundamental language of history: the race that holds dominion at the Eschaton may profess

the truth of their account before the others. Faerie regard history as a work of symbolism and imagery, while humanity consider history an account of words and language, and yet the takwin assert that history is an aria of music and mathematics.

The concept of the Grand Narrative is central to nearly all culture and tradition for humanity, faerie, and takwin. The rituals of the Calendar are there to maintain the dominant view of a Scriptural reading of history, while both faerie and takwin cleave to their practice of the Procession and the Monad respectively. All three races strive towards the Eschaton, the end times of history where no prophecy sees beyond. Even as Scripture and the Calendar remain dominant, it is not an unassailable position during the final Century that has just begun.

The Grand Narrative is conceptually contained within the metaphor of a simple book: history is written and moves with certain inevitability towards a final resolution. The affairs and scope of history is the canvas of all their interactions; the in minute detail is lost amid the wash of chaos but proves a clearer design when woven together into a whole tapestry.

The idea that history is written begs the question as to the nature of its Author. The Mousaion recognises the Author as perhaps an metaphor for the teleological force of history; it is a beguiling and appealing notion. For there lies a figure whose very existence becomes the subject of deep and gnostic enquiry, revealed only vicariously through the workings of fate. The Author is the closest thing to a tenet of faith for the clergy, even as the implication of an omniscient and omnipotent intelligence that obscures itself from the Realm is one most disconcerting.

ESCHATON

Ultimately, history will resolve in the Eschaton. It is a point where the Grand Narrative reaches culmination, which is expected to occur at the 2000th year of the Calendar. No prophecies exist beyond this point, no vision reveals what lies beyond, or if any future beyond this point exists at all. The Calendar has now entered the last Century and millennialism foreshadows many diverse portents. In its entire steady pace, there is an unrelenting teleological purpose, as all history expresses a supreme design, an ultimate plot, or some final revelation.

Humanity holds dominance over this order; yet even now, a victory is not certain. Destiny is nothing if not capricious, and a *coup d'état* might yet succeed on the eleventh hour. Should humanity remain resolute unto this final moment, then the paradigm of the human Grand Narrative will remain forever. Both faerie and takwin oppose this with their own version of history, which provides the basis of deeply divisive conflict between the three races; now entering *détente*.

Should either of these races prevail, the act would redact and revise the entire Grand Narrative to conform to the new history; all living memory would conform to this revision. Dominance over a singular account of history is a powerful political project. The major institutions of the Realm reinforce this status quo through the Calendar: history, empire, and prophecy all intertwine through the doctrine of Manifest Destiny. The Imperium ensures that the human narrative prevails.

The Mousaion serves their primary function here, in facilitating the Grand Narrative in a manner amenable to humanity. They are both its readers and its scribes, translating its mysteries into our everyday accounts. Through this, the Imperium declares itself justified in its doctrine of humanism: to ensure that the empire of humanity stands triumphant, and the aristocracy maintains the power of its order lest the entire edifice of humankind fall.

Three prophecies compete for dominance, one apiece for each of humankind, fae-kin, and the takwin. Each views the course of history through a most peculiar lens, with only a history of written verse being native to human intellect. This is Scripture, which entails a semantic history where humanity's ascendancy is assured. The orthodoxy of the Mousaion is founded upon this tenet, of the written, semantic, and linguistic nature of the Grand Narrative. However, a growing ecumenical tolerance permits sympathy towards the competing ideals found on both Allegory and Symphony.

The faerie nations hold to a prophecy of Allegory, where history is conceived solely through imagery and iconic forms, and therein they prophesy the triumph of faerie over history. Of like discernment, the prophecy of Symphony contends a musical score for the Grand Narrative of history, whose finale proves the ascendancy of the takwin race. Thus, all three traditions are together known as the traditions of the Book.

from Écriture Féminine by Matilda Mulfstan

Catechisms describe humanity in a state of having fallen. What little we can understand of antediluvian times describes a Realm that was illuminated with the twilight of both Rhyme and Reason at once. Both the waking and dreaming realms were as one.

The Deluge sundered meaning from matter, essence from substance, and imagination from creation. This is the great fall, which laid humanity and other creatures of terrestrial nature low. We are stripped of our own illuminated nature as natively enlightened beings; each of us born replete with the character of nobility. Now, we are cast into a state of banality, and where once nobility was a universal inheritance, now only an elite few have claimed their birthright.

from Immortal by Matilda Mulfstan

Is the affirmation of history as being Scriptural a literally self-fulfilling prophecy, or is it a consequence of the bias of hindsight; one that casts history through a lens of Empire to justify its rise and success?

from The Death of the Author by Zarathustra

ALLEGORY

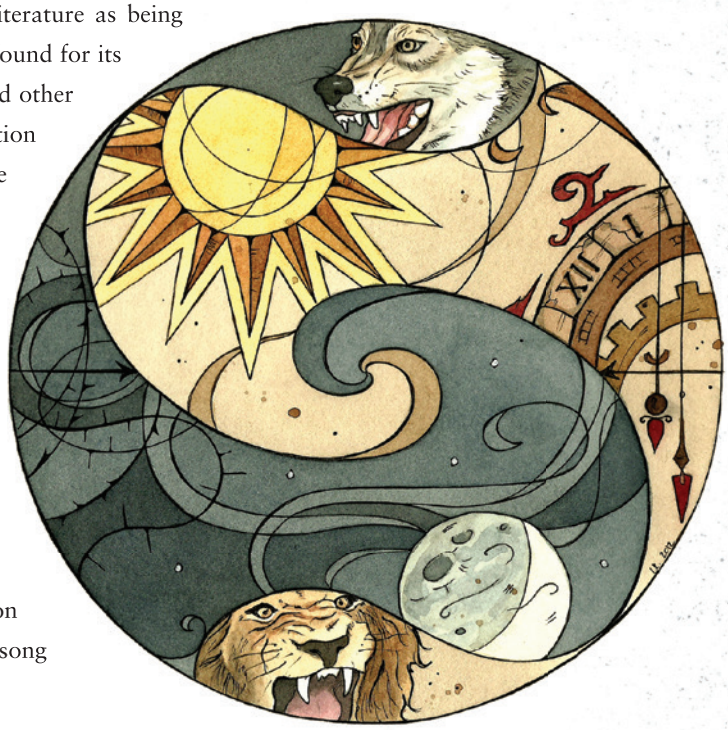
The tradition of Allegory is the iconic tradition that the faerie follow, which views history as manifest through imagery and symbols. Much of the practice of Allegory personifies of various forces and ideals, thereby to make their natures comprehensible. The practitioners of Allegory focus on inhabiting particular roles and ideals in order to experience history more directly. Contemporary society regards Allegory and its arcane studies of chicanery as pagan, due in no small part to its traditions emphasising natural primitivism. Nevertheless, faerie contends that humanity has forgotten the deep truths of these principles; they are resolute these ideals hold a place in the collective unconsciousness.

SCRIPTURE

Scripture is the predominant liturgical practice of humanity: its grammatical tradition views the nature of history as articulated through words. The practices of Scripture, and the esoteric workings of gramayre, focus on sermons, orations, and recanting verse to the masses. As writing is one of humanity's earliest inventions, the Mousaion regards literature as being indigenous to humankind. Accordingly, the written word is profound for its expression is versatile and yet durable once inscribed. Books and other articles of writing receive reverence, with the skills of illumination and calligraphy being highly regarded art forms, alongside the metiers of the wordsmith.

SYMPHONY

Symphony and is a logical tradition with its practice of gealdor; it regards the account of history as one revealed through music and thereby history recounted with mathematical elegance. The practices of Symphony are ones of harmony, designed to ensure accordance and resonance of one's actions to the music of the spheres. However, humanity treats it warily, regarding the cool logic of its demands an exact and alien technique. The takwin assert that theirs is a tradition of beautiful symmetry and that the mathematical elegance of song creates a sublime order.



Dyad

The momentum of history is dyadic: it is a struggle of two forces that are opposite and complimentary, counterpoised but intertwined. They are a coupled set of principles that move in point and counterpoint alongside and against each other. Yet the dyadic nature of history is more than simple dichotomy, but the description of fundamental conflict that produces the intrinsic qualities of dramatic contrasts. They each represent two distinct types of causality, or a single causality bifurcated with both halves inextricably linked.

One might think of these two forces as time and fate but this vulgarisation fails to capture some of the significant nuance of their properties. These opposing forces are Rhyme and Reason, the rational and material against the mythic and essential. These twin principles are chiefly manifested in the celestial orbs of Agony and Ecstasy, the solar and lunar orb respectively. Each are bound in mutually complimentary but contradictory refrains of romance and tragedy in turn, which drive individual strung through the rising and falling tensions of vitality and destruction respectively.

The Dyad by Liga Klavina.

Rhyme and Reason manifest through tragedy and romance through changes in fortune. In romance, one finds the ascending path of fortune of serendipity: good luck from misfortune and the culmination of wish fulfilment. In counterpoint, the path of descending fortune expressed in tragedy is that of catastrophe: the fall that follows great heights. Accordingly, Rhyme and Reason both contrive the circumstance of human foible and fragility: they engender elegant and piquant actions to be wrought by the nobles' own deeds and actions.

REASON

Reason is the flow of temporal causality. It is an objective and linear experience of history that is the measure, which is colloquially thought of as time. The measure of time drives history in a mechanistic fashion, producing a flow of events according to their shape and structure. The measure is accords to the light of Agony, the great gilded solar orb, whose burnished daylight reveals the material nature of the world with conscious clarity and colourful definition. His likeness is that of a great burning phoenix, surrounded by a disc of solar light, and his radiance waxes and wanes across the year; upon the longest night, he dies in a blaze of glory only to be reborn.

Romance follows narrative tension that builds towards exaltation. It is an optimistic refrain that drives nobles towards abundance, yet not indulging in idyll or fantasy. Romance realises its agenda through positive dispositions, building on a libidinal and generative urge of life that brings the fate-touched together in uncomfortable convergences. Romance interlinks fancy unto fancy, subject unto subject, building upon aspirations and wish-fulfilment. The passions of romance are obsessive by nature: in excess, they lead to turgid effluence that induces lethargy. The mark of true romance is passion strung through pleasure that culminate in vitiation.

RHYME

Rhyme is the flow of chimerical causality. It is a subjective and cyclical experience of history named the metre, but colloquially named fate. The metre of history accords to thematic and narrative conventions, manipulating the interactions of essential forms and ideals. The metre accords to the light of Ecstasy, that wondrous opalescent lunar orb whose night-light illuminates the imaginary and ephemeral alike. Ecstasy casts the Realm into relief and shadow, veiling things with obscurity and influencing perception through the subconscious. Her depictions portray an incandescent sphinx, effused by a mist of bliss and secrecy; her face shifting with each phase to reveal a difference countenance.

Tragedy is the narrative tension of humiliation. It is pessimism found in destructive desires, producing a highborn suffering of noble disposition. Tragedy manifests an agenda of terrible means, realised through a fatalistic and destructive urge of death, to drive noble personages apart. Its work tear asunder, where the centre falls apart through division and contention, aggressions and aversions, and other malice excised. Tragic passions undermine all good sense and comprehension, such that this glut threatens to overwhelm it subjects with malaise. True tragedy is passion strung through pain, to bring about the downfall of the noble spirit, only to culminate in catharsis.

Story demands conflict, whether rising in escalation or falling in diminution of tensions, to culminate in a satisfactory resolution. Of Romance, I would describe it as the pursuit of the unobtainable, whereas of Tragedy, I would depict it as the struggle against the inevitable.

from Operatic Tropes by Leubald Geyer

Where the Dyad defines the causal principles of existence, the Trine defines three primordial principles of the skein. The Dyad and the Trine are opposite sides of a coin: the duality of Rhyme and Reason underscore the force of history itself, while Death, Destiny, and Dream drive the interactions of the Realm's chimerical nature. Whereas the Dyad acts in macrocosm, the Trine acts upon individual threads, through single instances.

from The Birth of Rhyme and Reason by Zarathustra

One of the longest-lived historical debates is of philosophical merit; it questions whether the skein manifests beyond the observation of nobles and their cunning gaze. Though these passages are full of learned sophistry, they are many and great dissembling works. The greatest utility they offer us is a notional distinction between the awakened observers of the nobility and the unenlightened smallfolk.

It is often remarked that those personae that ken the skein have minds of a poetical nature, but those lacking the art have naught but prosaic minds. Nevertheless, it is an affect that seems directly related to the phenomenon of nobles being rendered incognito by the simple use of a mask.

from Essais Philosophiques by Count August

TRINE

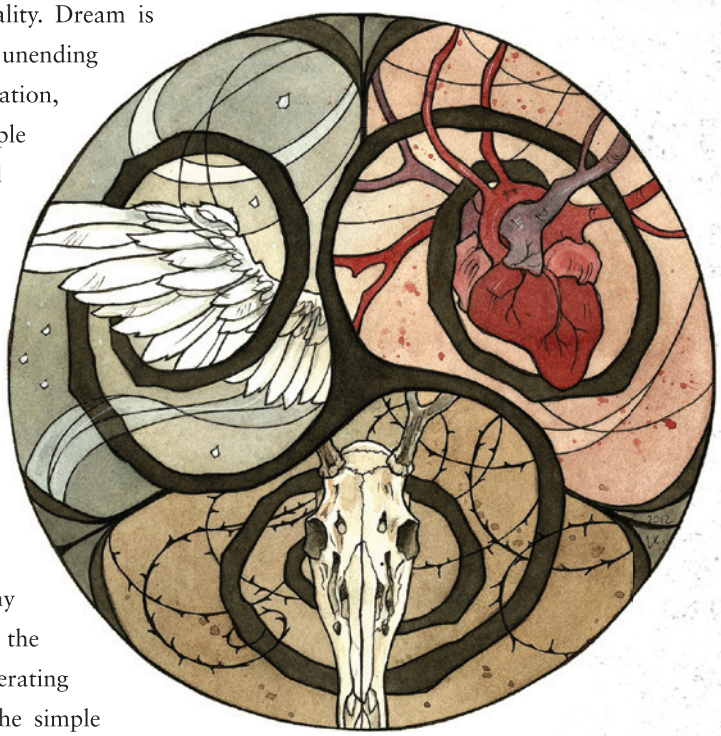
THE NUMBER THREE is a principle of the skein, revealing a pattern of a beginning, a middle, and an end. Three is a number with powerful symmetry that satisfies something deep within the psyche, providing unity of thought, sensation, and will. This trinity is the manifestation of that triplicity and its laws are manifest through three of the primordial principles in the Realm.

The Trine comprises three primordial powers that drive the skein to affect the manner in which narrative conventions themselves operate. They define the very machinations of the skein, which sets the course of history in accordance with their governing principles. Together they manipulate key events, such as the formation of bloodlines, famous deaths, and the fomentation of dire conflicts

Dream expresses as an emotional ideal, concerning itself with aesthetics and appreciation; the realisation of passion as understood through *pathos*. Destiny exalts ideals of will or action, concerning itself virtuous natures and the correctness of the conduct; constructed through *ethos*. Death reveres intellectual ideals, as the pursuit of knowledge, learning and the quest for truth; a concept known as *logos*.

DREAM

Dream describes a force of madness and prophecy within the skein. Its power is one of creative energy, which gives potential to all unreal imaginings with dimension. It provides insights of unlimited possibility, to rendering illusion into reality. Dream is the manifestation of promise, which opens up horizons to unending wonder beyond the scope of the ordinary. It works by inspiration, giving inception to strange and uncanny ideals. I: it is a principle of provocation, providing a vision of the wildest aspirations and fondest hearts' desires. It spurs action on with omens, insights, portents, and prophecy.



The tropes of Dream are those that dictate the manner in which the skein influences the course of history through the multiplicity of individual events. Its tropes determine how the medium of the skein acts as a catalyst for changes to the course of individual aspirations. They are synchronistic principles, which influence actions and events according to a greater design.

The skein affects the flows of history to produce sympathy with two or more events through thematic connections, beyond the limits of mere happenchance. These themes allude to the skein operating on an epic scale. Through motifs and allusions that escape the simple scrutiny, links between events are revealed through underlying metaphors that only become sensible when understood in correlation to their multitude.

Moreover, the principles of Dream binds the skein somewhat to the observations of the many, its implementation requires both agents and observers. Accordingly, the workings of the skein only manifest where there are intelligent observers. It is here that the masses of commonfolk bear power by their witness; for though their influence is insignificant as a lone person their collective minds churn the principle of Dream.

NECTERE TROPE

The rule of Nectere is one that outlines how ideas connect through the web of fate. Specifically, it decrees that causal links between two points occurs through thematic links; it is a principle of correlation that links two subjects in a causal manner through thematic similitude. Objects and events of like thematic natures become intertwined through these overarching motifs.

The Trine by Liga Klavina.

Given time and repetition, these associations grow in the fertile imagination of the general population until they achieve widespread and unconscious acceptance; the association becomes an imperative of narrative convention and may even become a trope itself. That is, the meaningful thematic associations as held in the minds of the masses become powerful in their own right, being bound together by deep symbolic sympathy.

SOLEYN TROPE

The Soleyn Trope produces increasing organisation and complexity. Narratives need interest and attention to thrive, meaning the skein contrives for interesting explanations and expositions before ordinary ones; this necessarily requires the use of narrative conceits to facilitate otherwise implausible circumstances. Dream facilitates the actions and conduct of the nobility where they are narratively appropriate or when they are more dramatically elegant and thematically sound.

This trope is the one most frequently exploited by the cunning nobility. Nobles learn to scan for motifs and symbolism, hoping for ways to tap into their affect. It permits a certain kind of narrative trickery, even overriding natural laws in favour of a more exciting version of events. Moreover, where Destiny must resolve fray, the account that holds the greatest interest inevitably wins out.

There is an oft cited maxim regarding the Soleyn Trope, which states that given multiple explanations for a particular event, the most interesting one is the one most likely to be true.

from The Speeches of Zarathustra by Zarathustra

DESTINY

Destiny describes a force of stability and maintenance, which forms inertia through stable patterns towards an overarching, consistent continuity. Destiny operates through strange temporal quirks, bending natural laws to conform events and outcomes towards established narratives ideals. It blurs the timing of events and of people's actions, to align with strange coincidence.

Its influence is one of balance, seeking to promote a constant and adequate balance between adversaries as necessary equilibrium. The weight of Destiny comes into force more strongly where dramatic conflict proves significantly unbalanced. Destiny has a remarkable tendency to equalise the playing field, facilitating lapses in judgement, disabling injuries, and provoking sudden but inevitable betrayals.

The tropes of Destiny serve to elevate the interactions of the nobility unto the heights of drama. It moderates the agency of the nobility by balancing their power with equilibrium. Noble agents are often paired, such that whenever one acts upon the skein they provoke a reaction for their counterpart. It is a principle of symmetry that ensures that every narrative action is met with an equivalent but opposite reaction. For the underlying narrative nature of the skein requires testament to grand performances.

Heterodox scholars recognise that both faerie and takwin hold equivalent agency to humanity in the crafting and weaving of stories. Reluctant though they may be to acknowledge as much, even the most orthodox graces of the Mousaion recognise that they must have some agency, or else the claim that they pose a threat to the future of human ascendancy would have neither weight nor credibility.

from The Death of the Author by Zarathustra

The term 'nod' is an affectionate allusion, a good-natured jape at the expense of the allegorical figure of the Author, purported to be the writer of history; a suggestion that the Author temporarily nodded asleep and, in napping, wrote an error before re-asserting the truth of history over events recalled.

from Philosophy in Antiquity by Zarathustra

EPISTATIC TROPE

Conflict drives drama, which manifests through small and drastic changes of fortune that disrupts staid quietude. The skein sews the seeds of chaos in times of peace, which germinates with inexorable speed until it blooms into looming disaster: the longer the peace, the greater and more tempestuous the eruption into chaotic disarray.

It is this principle that provides the reason for courtly intrigue. The nobility deliberately cultivate the endogenous conflict of court to focus the principle of Destiny into manageable conflicts they can anticipate. For although there is genuine peril in these intrigues, they are far less hazardous than Destiny unleashed; the nobility have learned to apprehend true respite. As long as peace reigns, pending danger is foments: the longer the sessile languor, the more potent that danger becomes.

NEMESIS TROPE

Stories contain popular idealisations of heroes and villains, a simplistic duality that tends to fall upon any noble opponents in conflict. The more frequently two individuals come against each other, the more likely this pattern comes to be: inevitably, one side is cast by their deeds as pursuing heroic lights, and the other is obscured in villainy. In that moment, they become nemeses: bound together by fate, destined to cross paths constantly. Several indicators determine such things, but the primary determiner is whether one instigates or responds to conflict: the villains act and the heroes react.

Once the nemesis effect comes into place, there is a subtle dynamic between them. The hero tends to find the success of their endeavours come with great sacrifice or trials, while those villains may often find their best laid plans fall to ruin but are nigh immune to death.

DEATH

Death describes a force of destruction and resolution. It works to provide endings, to bring unfulfilled matters to reconciliation, and to bring persons to a final rest. Its force seeks out loose ends of a given narrative, working to integrate them back into the existing continuum, or to uncover unresolved mysteries and then bring them to light. The influence of Death is one of fixed certainty, driving towards fundamental, inescapable conclusions. For all the caprice of fate, there is always impending Death.

The continuity of Death exerts itself through to skein to maintain an illusion of persistence, to bind disparate incidents together in a single sequence. The inertia of destiny is nigh-implacable and often terrible, responding to paradox and error in continuity. Such fraying of continuity may eventually lead to nods, where Death is compelled to eradicate inconsistencies by altering and even redacting the recollection of a given sequence until they collapse one version of the account.

A single incident of fray may be small, but as they accumulate, they pose dolorous consequences for their creator. Their paradoxical nature threatens to unravel narrative threads, and if left untreated they taint the continuum. In isolated incidents, explanations and simple trickery can account for simple fray. Those that fester produce the true bifurcation of continuity: two sequences of events that might have been, each in suspended possibility until one gains prominence through greater plausibility. Then the two collapse into a single account again. Sometimes the fray is so bad that they may not be salvaged, and Destiny unravels entire threads to purge the fray, erasing people and events from history entirely.

CERNERIC TROPE

Prophecy is notoriously slippery, with fortunes being prone to fickle whimsy. One of the hazards of reading the future is that knowledge tends to force events towards a certain outcome. When reading fate, the very act of observing its effects induces change: one can either determine the subject and quality of a given fate, or the outcome of a given thread of destiny, but not both.

Mechanism by Jessica van Hulle.

A reading of a given fortune can either impart one of two things. One can glean how heavily destiny weighs upon an individual and a few pertinent facts connected to its influence. Otherwise, one can gain insight of the outcome of a given decree of Destiny, but remain unclear to whom it refers. Any who divine one and then the other will find the foretold facts shift as knowledge of these matters influences the issue. The mere knowledge of one's fate creates obligation: the predestined noble must seek the established future, lest they threaten their continuity with fray.

CURIOSUS TROPE

The skein acts in such a way as to conserve contrivance and detail. Stories are things of meaning, and have a finite capacity to render meaning upon all the aspects of reality it touches. This means there is a natural tendency for the skein to focus on fewer but more potent aspects of a story, often using the same objects and people frequently or otherwise tying up loose threads of story. The reverse is often true, for in giving greater attention to individuals and items it imposes upon them significance in the story as it unfolds. The skein often works to find a role for those people and objects relevant to their theme and symbolism.

Thus, the Curiosus Trope is a principle of parsimony, the more elements it needs to incorporate into a particular weaving, the weaker its ability to tweak and twist their fates; moreover, as the number of elements increases, the speed of the drama unfolding decreases as the skein seeks to interweave new elements in properly before progressing events. It also has a tendency to render groups into single entities that act in concert, which means that a small cohort of select few identifiable individuals can often pose a greater threat than an amorphous mob.

Calendar

The Calendar is the ceremonial counting of days: a daily ritual of arcane symbolism that is suited to all-but-consume the passing days of a noble. On the highest level, the Calendar is the mystery cult of the Grand Narrative, progressing towards the human Eschaton Its customs have developed across the millennia, which the aristocracy rarely discards any once enjoined. Pomp and ceremony creates a cadence, keeping the civilisation in line with the effects of the Zodiac.

The Calendar invokes a constant theme of personal freedom juxtaposed by social obligation and custom. These themes frequently play out amongst and throughout the nobility, each of whom yearns to forge their course in life yet constrained by the Calendar's decorum. Failing to observe the Calendar is viewed as obtrusive by the populace, for its ritual must be maintained.

The populace observes the Calendar through devotions keyed to specific times and days; while the esoteric meanings behind each devotion is often lost to its adherents the Calendar remains as a familiar working, unthinkingly recited in all its staid manner. For all the significance that attends these rituals, the populace remains ignorant of purpose; though vigilant to its procedure.

DAY AND NIGHT

The Calendar measures the days and nights with great precision: they number three hundred and sixty-four, which array across the span of twelve months. Three months occur with each season

precisely and each month possesses a count of thirty days apiece, which also array into three weeks of ten days each. The remaining four days are the Hallows. A single year begins with the birth of spring, traversing to the depths of autumn and back again. As the seasons change, the tenor of politics changes their ebb and flow. As each month passes one clan garners auspicious regard, affording them acquiescence and latitude by the other nobles.

MONTH

The first three vernal months are *Germinal*, the month of new growth, *Floréal*, the month of flowers, and *Prairial*, the month of the meadow. These are the months for the Maystern Clan and the fox moon, the Portner Clan and the owl moon, and the Finstari Clan and the spider moon.

The sumnal months are known as *Messidor*, *Thermidor*, and *Fructidor*, being the months of the harvest, of heat, and fruit in that order. They are the months aligned with the Kelleck Clan, the Silvenblum Clan, and the Winebach Clan, and the moons of the mare, the stag, and the bee. The following three fallen months are the months of the grape, of the fog, and the frost, whose names are *Vendémiaire*, *Brumaire*, and *Frimaire* accordingly; they are the months of the cat and the Zoubari Clan, the krait and the Greystrand Clan, and the hare and the Rothshart Clan. The final three months of the year are the wintry months. They are *Nivôse*, the month of snow, *Pluviôse*, the month of storms, and *Ventôse*, the month of winds. They are the months for the Amsala Clan, the Eromund Clan, and the Silvenblum Clan and the moons of raven, bull, and swan.

HALLOW

The Hallows each mark the start of a given season, yet do not fall inside any particular month. At their nadir, one of the four royal stars stands over the Meridian. These days are revered and given over to the highest ritual observance; each will see the temples of the Mousaion play host to a full day of opera of the grandest and most eminent nature. The winter solstice is the first day of the year, known as Yule. It is ceremonies are held under the haunting bright white glow of Sirius. The vernal equinox of Austre marks the start of spring, beneath the bright, gentle, blue glow of Aldebaran. Upon the summer solstice of Flammas, the brilliant white star of Regulus reigns over the festivities. Lastly, the baleful red glare of Antares menaces the fallen equinox of Eredine.

The names for each month are a modern affect, which was much popularised by Vendémiaire's revision to the Calendar. Likewise, the full moon of a given month takes its name after the animal symbol of the tribe given ascendancy in that month.

from Kulturkampf by Auto Eisenmark

WEEK

The cycle of the week determines the work and rest of the empire. The day of the week in order are: Oneiron, the day of dreams; Selinon, the day of mysteries; Basilon, the royal day; Halcyon, the day of peace; Nikon, the day of war; Alithon the day of truth; Eraton, the day of love; Asteron, the market day; Phaethon, the liturgical day; and Gairon, the mundane day.

There are thirty days each month and ten days each week, providing exactly three weeks each month. The first week is the *urd*, which contains days favourable for the Rosaline. The second week makes the *verdun*, the days of which are best suited to the Braemaline. The third week is the *skald*, which proves most propitious to the Pommeline. The days of the week are known as the sojourns, the lacunae, and the fetes: the days of labour, rest, and ceremony respectively.

The first and last days of the week are the two lacunae. On these days, it is customary to abstain from labour. Oneiron gives over to the reflection and reading, being a day of introspection through literature or poetry. Gairon is customarily grounded in activities around the hearth at home; it is often given over to time with the family through the preparation of a communal meal.

The sojourns are the six days of labour. They begin with Selinon, wherein the Mousaion reads the portents for the week. The following five days are each named after of one of the Muses. Basilon

The Calendar by Liga Klavina.

is the day marking the Muse Sofia, suited to grandiose displays and proclamations. Halcyon then honours Frey, the customary day for the public to indulge communal baths of an evening, to perform ritual ablutions. Nikon follows to vaunt the Muse Anat, typically when events of sporting prowess take place. Thereafter is Alithon, which honours Eve, is considered best for oaths and acts of testimony. Eraton is the final sojourn for Lilith, being most favoured for seduction and trickery.

The two fetes are days of ritual. What activities that take place on these days are not typical labour but rather charitable or public workings. Stellon is the first, which is the much-loved market day. The eve before Stellon becomes quiet, only to break into abundant activity with the morning; the streets fill with merchants and traders. Phaeton follows, which is the day for opera and liturgy.

Upon the night of Selinon, the Mousaion performs its observation of the phase of month to divine the essence of the ensuing week: the dark lune portends secrets and intrigue; the sickle lune portends guile and deception; the split lune portends balance and communion; the arched lune portends research and lore; and the great lune prophecies greater achievements. The waxing or waning also reveals whether their concerns are growing or diminishing.

from The Waking Dream by Matilda Mulfstan

The Mousaion observes eight other hours of significance, but few outside their halls follow suit. An hour either side of Nadir are the hours of Anteterminus and Postterminus; their observances are the Lament, being acts of clemency, and the Vigil, being a wake for the dead. Predawn is precedes Dawn by an hour, containing the quiet meditations of the rite of Matins, then Morningtide follows with the observation of breaking fast with Lauds. The Zenith has Antemeridian and Postmeridian an hour on either side; the observations of which are Albens, a burning of incense, and the Sofe, and being an infusion ceremony. Dusk follows the hour of Eventide, which contains the ritual preparations for the night in the rite of Vespers, but precedes Postdusk through the observance of Compline, held with the plain supper meal.

from Modern Charity and its Ethic by Cassandra Shore

HOUR

The cycle of day and night divides into four-and-twenty hours. The four great hours of Dawn, Zenith, Dusk, and Nadir quarter the day. They mark the point when the Pendulum touches the horizon or the Meridian by day or night. The Mousaion maintain an historic role as timekeepers and ring out steeple bells to mark each hour and signal a respective observation. The Nocturne invokes Nadir by the middle of the night, while the Aurora hails the Dawn by the breaking of the day. The Premier signals the peak of the day at Zenith, while the Dirge provides a moment of solace upon the final hour of the day at Dusk. These are hallmarks of the pre-modern era, of a time before industrialisation and mechanisation, where the custody of marking the time was a sacred charge .

Few outside the Mousaion adhere to these rituals, though perhaps many perform some small gesture upon the four great hours in echo to these once-daily routines. Even commoners in their workaday lifestyles, consign a moment of their thoughts as the bells chime the hours.

POWER PLAY

Across the course of the year, Rhyme and Reason play out through the twin genres of romance and tragedy. Each creates narrative leitmotifs that touch every aspect of courtly life, giving hue to reason and emotion both. They rise and fall with the growth and declination of the seasons in the form of a dramatic arc. Each dramatic arc drives the actions of its court through exaltation to vitiation or through expurgation to catharsis respectively.

The rhythm of Rhyme and Reason becomes familiar to any noble; with most courtly affairs reducible to these twin refrains. Each arc takes place over the course of six months: romance manifests across spring and summer, while tragedy takes place throughout autumn and winter. The first five of these months are active court engagements, to give way to a fallow month of the interlude, wherein intrigues remove short respite.

EXPOSITION

The first act of a power play, occurring in either *Germinal* or *Vendémiaire*, sets the stage. Nobles congregate, convalesce, and preface things to come with the careful friction of intermittent grievances. This act sows the seeds of conflict before many witnesses and casting all those presiding into disarray, though these are but a prelude to deeper currents that will surface in good time. Courtiers take care in this act, refraining from committing themselves entirely, and using their arts only to test the mettle and resolve of their peers.

ESCALATION

The second act builds tensions across either *Floréal* or *Brumaire*, where the court falls into patterns of alliance and enmity. All utilise resources, deploy agents, and set agendas into motion. As they

escalate affairs, courtiers remain reserved, acting primarily through their proxies. These months are not the time for direct confrontation, lest they leave themselves exposed upon the climax. The escalation becomes a time of consolidation, where nobles bid, block, and countermand the influence of others before the real conflict is engaged. Seasoned nobles have developed a subtle intuition concerning the timing of their commitment: too early, and the noble might exhaust their resources; too late, and the noble might miss key opportunities.

CLIMAX

Each arc reaches a climax during *Prairial* or *Frimaire* where the time is ripe to strike and conflicts comes to a head. The seasonal peak lends strength to political prowess and activity, such that the nobles entreat direct, to lay into their opponents with fervour. The machinations proceed until capitulation or stalemate. With the onset of the climax, nobles sense the power in the air to become energised by the impending storm. Blood and thunder suffuses their senses and tantalises their imagination. Here upon the precipice is a most precipitous advantage point: the court is at a crux, bringing magnanimous fortunes low and atonement to the meanest victim.

DÉTENTE

With the climax passed, a time of reckoning follows through *Messidor* or *Nivôse*. The nobility must contend with the consequences of their deeds. Most courts internalise such changes and embrace the new equilibrium. Fortunes will yet turn on those in highest of glories and time will prove another arc for all such conflict in due time. In this, *détente* brings an easing of tensions: though defences are most guarded, there is the calm as falls after the storm. This is the time to reap ones dues, to collect on obligations owed or bring to close outstanding business and accords.

RESOLUTION

In the resolution of *Thermidor* or *Pluviôse*, secrets first laid hidden tend to come to light, whether by deceit or by intent. Here is a time of sweet victories and bitter lessons. Here, there reconciliation, for whether one tastes the honeys of success or the ashes of defeat there is both balm and succour. These months are to ready time for the oncoming interlude, so many choose this time to offer symbolic or material gestures of reconciliation, to court ones antagonists with comity. Most demonstrate sheer statecraft and feign the best of genuflection and cordiality, suing for peace and making amends for grievances.

INTERLUDE

Between two given arcs, there is a month of respite in both *Ventôse* and *Fructidor*. These months play host to no session of court, being times of armistice, where nobles refrain from deleterious intrigue. Some courts hold celebratory events to mark the equinoxes at the extremities of the year, though many prefer instead to go upon sabbatical, to quest and to tour; it is the favoured time to explore the Realm at large.

Tragoediae et Romanorum
by Roberto Quintero.

Nobility

Nobles, though subject to the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, are yet captains of destiny: they forge new and hereto unimagined courses where others may only abide by the steady impressions laid by historic patters. The caprice of history depends upon their choices.

from The Vindication of the Aristocracy by Vivian Grey

The Epiphany is a protracted rite, for which the aspirant begins their mores upon their approach to maturity. It is a lucid state, attained through the musing trance. The moment of the Epiphany is a tremendous awakening, but one with an effect that lingers and eventually sublimated. For in the days that follow, the dreams of those who have successfully passed the right become lurid and bellicose, whelming their perception of the waking world around them. Eventually, the liminal edge between wakefulness and slumber collapses, and the fathoms of the skein become readily apparent.

from The Waking Dream by Matilda Mulfstan

Nobles generate a volume of quick while they dream, which collects in a core chamber beneath the solar plexus called the *helate*. Excess quick may pool in a secondary chamber just beneath the navel, which represent an anchor for the entire superstructure of the subtle body. Quick is easily projected outwardly through a third chamber above the voice box, called the *fauxes*. The *fauxes* has an indiscernible faculty with communication as it causes quick to resonate with prosody, timbre, and pitch.

Quick circulates around the body along invisible channels: the primary tract runs flush with the spine; the sinister and dextrous lateral channels run from the centre of the forehead, past the ear down the side of the body, where they cross over at the *helate* and down the opposing leg.

from A Treatise on the Body Electric by Cassandra Shore

The ideal of the noble is one personifying the human condition, which seemingly denotes a profound need in the human psyche; one that celebrates a family of families and that yearns for paragons of humanity. Through the nobility, the populace invests a collective hope for magnanimity in a select few, and simultaneously reviling the basest corruption they display. The commonfolk enjoy the lifestyles of the nobility vicariously, experiencing some shadow of their magnificence. For whatever is made of humanity's common lot, of its travails and fluctuations of fortune, the aristocracy endures.

Nobles are the actors of fate, whose actions have a vital part to play in shaping history. They each possess a type of volition not available to common folk, for the skein touches them all directly. Their role takes the centre stage, their actions set the course of fate, and both impose consequence upon society.

More than class, station, or prestige, one fact separates the noble from the commoner: all have prevailed over the dream quest of the Epiphany. It is a ceremonial trance performed upon the day of their majority, where the supplicant may reach out and touch the skein itself, to become forever entangled. Through the Epiphany, the skein invests a measure of its potency into that noble, to awaken them to its very workings. There is a pulse to the skein, which every noble feels an inexorable call to adventure. It draws those around them into the thick of intrigue with such strange chance that becomes quotidian.

Quick

Nobles are flush with a luminiferous quintessence that is both incandescent and sublime. It remains invisible to the commonfolk and visible only to the cunning arts of sorcery. Quick is ephemeral, having no material nature. It does not aggregate naturally in the wild, and concentrates only within living, sapient beings. In particular, nobles are nearly fecund with the stuff, by virtue of their connection to the skein.

The abundance of quick subtly changes the noble physiology, giving them longevity, and sublimates their flesh into the stuff of story and dreams. Its presence exalts the noble persona, charming commoners with ease with its rarefied demeanour. To the ordinary eye, quick makes the nobility majesties and awesome; both wonderful and terrifying at once. It provokes either genuflection or aversion, though each response is offered obsequiously before the noble.

Quick is incredibly psychoactive and from the moment it interacts with a living mind, it transmutes into one of three primary hues; each being a catalysed form of quick unique to the three bloodlines of humankind. Glamour, velleity, and whist are these hues and they lend the various bloodlines some of the unique airs attributes to them. Alchemists may also render hues into a material substrates; each of which has numerous alchemical properties.

Imago

The Imago is a psychic construct of the nobility, which all come to experience but few come to know. Each is begins as a seed of story at birth, more powerful amongst the progeny of the

nobles. It is only through the nomenclature rites, that burgeoning nobles truly glean their name, form, and nature. When fully realised, each Imago acts like a lens that can focus clearly upon the skein, and each acts as a conduit between the waking and dreaming realms. Though imagines cast resplendent figures, they also cast long shadows, which reside within the far recesses of the psyche. This Shadow is the dark twin of the Imago.

The duality of Shadow and Imago reflects Rhyme and Reason, and Ecstasy and Agony. Imagines cleave to an orderly mandate, which appeals to human aspirations and ideals through reason, clarity, collectivism, and civilisation. Shadows submit to prevarications of chance and appeal to human urges through revelation, intoxication, individuality, and primitivism: the Imagines are part of the waking mind, while the Shadows reside in the dreaming mind.

There are those amongst the mystically inclined who consider the Imagines and Shadows to be independent chimerical beings: the agents of Reason and Rhyme, the lords of reason and unreason in turn. Their nature is not considered truly earthly but native to the Delirium. They are guardians, messengers, troublemakers, guides, and tutelary beings all.

Where Imagines endeavour to uplift the nobility, to inspire thereby unto great works of law, order, and civility, the Shadows seek to liberate instead, to explore thereby great status in art, dreams, and connection to nature.

The Imagines are a subject of fascination for the Mousaion, but the esotericism of their everyday experience renders their investigation largely philosophical. Most nobles describe the Imago as a separate consciousness that presents as the gender opposite to themselves, but invariably, the experience of each is subtly different, affected by the particular caste and myths of the noble's upbringing.

Scholars have nevertheless achieved a wide range of interesting insights into their purpose, ascriptions ranging from being an intimate personification of story, to a shard of fiction that has its own life, thus taking root in the psyche. More parochial descriptions express their role alternately as a projection of the true inner self, a primordial dream form, a native inner genius, or even a personal muse.

from The Birth of Rhyme and Reason by Zarathustra

ARCHETYPE

The Imago manifests as one of three mythic archetypes, which harken back to Antiquity. Each of the three archetypes is a personification and prime exemplar of one of the three primordial powers of Dream, Destiny, or Death: the bard, the hero, and the magi.

These Imagines are universal to members of the three types of bloodlines, with the Rosaline nobles each encountering a bardic Imago, the heroic Imagines being typical of the Braemaline, and those Pommeline nobles experience magi Imago. Each of these Imagines casts a distinctive Shadow, symbolic of the tragic flaw inherent in its nature.

BARD AND NARCISSIST

The bardic Imagines are sensate creatures, driven by aesthetic needs for composition and creativity. Of all the nobles, the bards of the Rosaline are most concerned with the patronage of the arts and of drama. The bards have a gregarious air that is both salubrious and optimistic. The Shadow of the Rosaline is the narcissist, a contending voice that calls to strip the thin veneer of society bare and to indulge one's own self to the exclusion of all others. As the narcissist engorges itself, their noble becomes conceited, and self-aggrandising.

The way of the bard and the narcissist is that of pathos, which exalts the heart and emotion as derived from the principle of Dream. Its paired ideals are beauty and vanity: the Imagines of the bard exalt change, mutability, and freedom; the narcissist Shadow seeks transgressively perverse acts, to plumb deepest imaginings and revel in wanton humanity.

Glamour is the hue of *pathos*: forged of imagination and daydreams, being an essence of creativity and wonder, inspiring all art that relates to beauty and novelty. Glamour renders into *flux*, which is an extremely catalytic and metamorphic substance, essential in instigating physical changes, often contained in quantities of quicksilver.

The exemplar of the bard is Rophe, the Grand Shepherd, and his iconographic grand staff. His counterpart exemplar of the narcissist is Samil, Lord of the Pit, whose scarce depictions describe a creature of magnificent beauty and glory.

HERO AND BEAST

The heroic imagines have a sense of honour, driven towards balance and vigilant altruism. Such heroes readily seek out causes and are the nobles most likely to long for glory and adventure. Heroes consistently drive towards meting justice and finding equilibrium, and follow certainty with valour. The heroic nobles bear a Shadow of the beast, which swells when the hero feels dark malice gripping their heart, to move them to malign ends and revile society.

The way of the hero and the beast is that of *ethos*, which vaunts the supremacy of will and action as found in the principle of Destiny. The paired ideals of honour and acrimony are its mores: the heroes are loyal to their obligations and they proudly epitomise its strictures regardless of the formulations of their codices; the beast infects with a cruel vindictive streak of wanton malice.

The hue of *ethos* is velleity, being motes of purpose and resolve, as a nervous energy that powers and catalyses idealisations, giving potency to artistry by imbuing it lustre and brilliance. Velleity renders into material substance called *brin*: a highly combustible, capable of potent and volatile energy release: often contained in quantities of sulphur.

The exemplar of the hero is Mikha, the Heavenly Viceroy; his iconography depicts a golden man bearing a burning spear. Asmodai, Lord of the Wastes, is his opposite, and archon of the beast; his depictions often show a chaotic force, a cloud of eyes and teeth.

MAGE AND TRICKSTER

The magi Imagines thirst for knowledge and discovery, which bestow rarefied intellects upon their nobles to make them canny to occultism and intuitively seek out mysteries. Those nobles with magi Imagines acquire certain wisdom and approach their tasks with fervour for the occult and inscrutable, their appetites whetted with curiosity for the ultimate truths of mortality. Their darkest reflection is the trickster whose very whispers eclipse truth with doubt and uncertainty, and drives the noble to induce madness in others.

The way of the magus and trickster is that of the *logos*, which rests upon a foundation of mind and knowledge that are the purview of Death. Theirs are the paired ideals of truth and perfidy: the magus strives towards the pursuit of knowledge and the correctness of knowing; their Shadow grows upon webs of deceit and lies as the more obscure the magus becomes.

Logos' hue is whist, being motes of intellect made of reflections and recollections, inspiring those arts regarding entropy and stasis, to form patterns. Whist can be materialised into a substance known as *calx*, which is resilient and enduring, and often a necessary component to fix the properties of something beyond their natural stay; it occurs naturally in salt.

The exemplar of the magus is the archon of Isrir, the Silent Omen. Her icon traditionally depicts her wreathed in cloud, holding a great horn. Mara, the Lady of Woes, is the archon of the trickster. Her depiction is a dark shadowy, bloated spider, whose webs snare and twist reality.

MIEN

Every noble wears a regal mien, which is a subtle and almost imperceptible projection of their Imago and Shadow. The mien creates an impression upon those who gaze upon them, whereby what is seen and experienced is touched by mythic themes and elements.

The mien projects an aura of grandeur by magnifying the countenance of competence and confidence each noble bears. Through it, each noble projects a force of personality that make commoners genuflect with obsequience, and even other nobles offer deference and courtesy. This air of grandeur shields the noble against the social slights, indignities, and intimations of their

The mien is a study of contrasts: for even as the Epiphany liberates a noble from predetermination, the mask imposes a struggle to realise that will. The mask contains a great destiny, and those who follow that path of least resistance will readily be elevated to the station implicit in that destiny, but to follow blithely that unexamined life lends a danger of the personality being subsumed by the caricature of the mask, and the distinction between self and visage dissipates.

from Daimon Muse by Harold Childe

The clergy has long been aware of the subtle body, made of quick not flesh. Recent alchemical studies have revealed a bioelectric aura that envelopes the whole body. It has also demonstrated an etheric system integrated into the body that enables the ingestion of ambient quick, its circulation, and an integumentary barrier against undue chimerical influence.

from A Treatise on the Body Electric by Cassandra Shore

Each clan has qualities of blood that permeate through each member. Each single bloodline has quick encoded with the signs and archetypal symbols of their progenitors: both Diadon and Muse. Similarly, as each house describes a clan branch, the qualities of their blood contains several facets of their founder.

The unique qualities of blood are always the convergence of clan and caste. The Rosaline, Braemaline, and Pommeline masks have bardic, heroic, and magic elements respectively. Similarly, each of the castes shares affinities to their archetype of their Muse: the warrior, the healer, the seeker, the ruler, and the crafter.

from Treillage by Cassandra Shore

fellow nobles; it lends them grace and style to their works, to smooth the roughest of their faults. Though the noble can more easily draw upon the motifs of their mien, they are also more prone to its flaws and tropes. Most nobles strive to achieve a delicate balance: benefiting from the ideals of their mien, while trying to retain some sense of self.

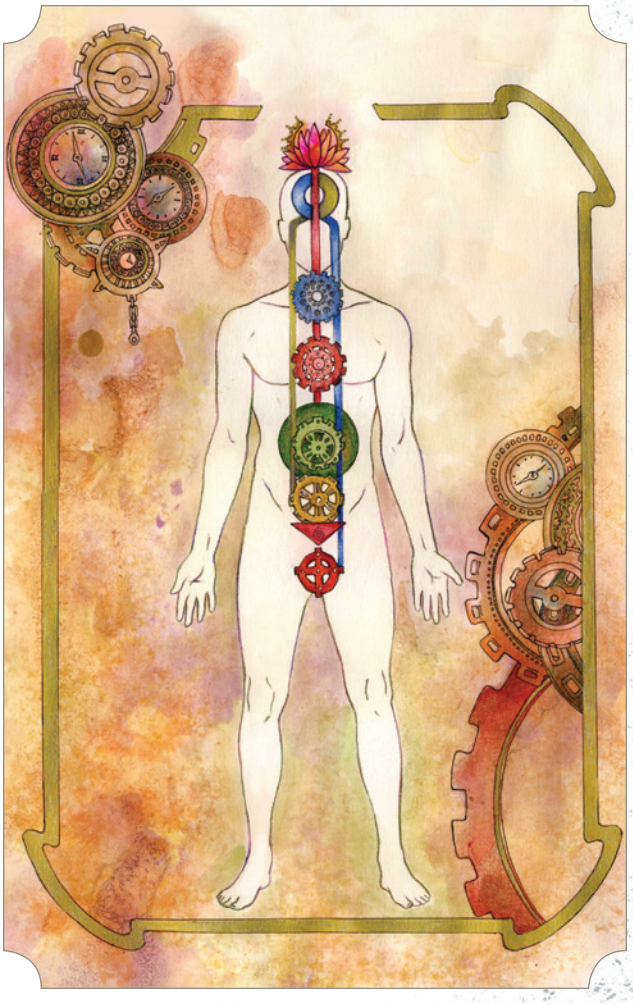
This façade becomes both burden and blessing; for as much as it imbues a magnificent bearing, it veils and even eclipses the person underneath. In this lies one of the dangers of the mien, for as the noble's affinity with the skein deepens, their Imago and Shadow grow stronger. The mien emphasises the archetypal character traits over personal idiosyncrasies, to increasingly obscure the personality traits of that noble, leaving more of a caricature instead.

MANIA

The magnanimity provided by the mien is subject to the adherence of the ineffable rules of society: when the noble violates the strictures of society to commit *faux pas,* the mien slips to leave the noble vulnerable.

When a noble dishonours their name and reputation, the mien bereaves them of their majestic qualities; to give rise to the colloquialism of the phrase 'to lose face'. Worse, flagrant breaches of oaths may even fracture and scar the mien, causing long-term or even permanent weaknesses of character; they then become opportunities for other nobles to slip past their social defences.

Sometimes when a noble experiences great duress or madness, they retreat from the world around them, and the caricature projected through the mien takes over. The Imago or Shadow acts out their roles in the most dramatic way possible; they will not relinquish control until it reaches dramatic climax. Bards seek out magnificent artistry and creativity; magi will search out secrets and illicit knowledge; and heroes will seek out adversary to vanquish.



Gender

Gender is a central quality in the formation of both the Imago and Shadow. Each noble describes a different account of the two, even as certain trends reveal themselves. Female Imagines are personification of Rhyme and male Imagines of Reason: the juxtaposition of this point and counterpoint is why the aristocracy contends that male nobles attune to temporal matter, as narrative through space, while female nobles cleave to chimerical matters, as narrative across time.

Typically, the Imago presents as a gender contrary to a noble's, and their Shadow presents the gender that noble sees themselves as; though variations present themselves. Millennia of observations have led the Mousaion to conclude that there exists a profound link between a person's gender and their sexuality to the presentation of Imago and Shadow in this manner. These tendencies are observed best by the exception of non-traditional genders or sexualities.

For these nobles, the Shadow or Imago may present a gender that matches or differs from the atypical fashion, or else present an amalgamation of gender characteristics or none. There are also examples in history where an Imago or Shadow has changed as a noble's personality has changed; so some manner of reciprocal relationship exists.

Subtle Body by Claire Pacheco.

URANIA

Throughout history, the traditional ideals of masculinity and femininity have reinforced the roles of women and men in power. However, with the challenges to those norms across the last century, there has been growing division about how immutable those roles are. In recent years, small enclaves of communities that live non-traditional lives have gained increasing prominence. This includes those who find themselves born to a sex that is not as the see themselves, the same-sex attracted, and those of diverse sexual anatomy.

The unique physiology of the nobility, suffused as it is with quick, enable these persons to go through chrysalis, induced by alchemical philtre. Few enter the chrysalis lightly, as it is not reversible. It is a portentous decision worthy of solemn contemplation, for the process irrevocably transforms the subject's physical morphology.

The process relies upon the use of the rare philosopher's stone: a keystone that enables alchemy to affect biological systems. Over the course of the year, the supplicant must take a certain number of doses of this philtre, as often as every month, to facilitate a change to the bodily humours. When ready, the supplicant abides inside a chrysalis of gossamer, to reside there for the single lunar cycle.

These are the Urania. They are a diverse number of transformations and each of them has formed small not-quite-secret societies, with their membership hailing from all walks of life. They comprise a broad collection of nobles that have undertaken an alchemical metamorphosis. These circles known as clades: they remain exclusive to the members of their physical morphology.

Tradition steeps each clade; in the instances of some of the eldest of these organisations, they stretch back thousands of years. For the most part, the clades entail well-defined and organised all-Uranian communes. Many of them have sustained themselves over generations by adopting those rejected by their family of origins, and finding acceptable social-cultural niches within society. Some involve sex work, while others assume spiritual functions in the community.

Most nobles describe an imago presenting an opposite gender to their own. It is a principle informally known as inversion: that the duality of body and mind expresses itself across genders as well. For many centuries, this was the dominant view, until the sexual revolutions of the 1860s, contested many deeply held views on gender roles as it broke nearly every taboo on sexual and gendered mores. In the wake of these social conflagrations, new language emerged to define broader nuances, which has invested public interest to the formerly secret societies of the Urania; with the Flamines and the Orpheans being the two most renowned.

The challenges are not complete, and the public emergence of the Urania evokes many a vitriolic conflict. Even among the communities, vociferous debates contend the virtue of integrating better into high society, and those who spurn convention to embrace their change. Others consider these matters of entirely private distinction, and live their lives in a third way that embraces difference within the confines of social mores. Indeed, not all who transition desire to exotic natures, and some seek a simple transition of sex: an uncommon philtre can perform this transformation.

from Daimon Muse by Harold Childe

The transformation unto Urania contains side effects, and one universal is the manner in which these transformations rendering the person infertile. Though generally known among the Urania, it is not a fact widely published beyond their circles; for it is this element that evokes the strongest contentions over such metamorphoses for its potentiality to eliminate progeny. However, as all supplicants are advised of this consequence before their chrysalis, most consider it a necessary sacrifice for the transformation.

from Through Darker Mirrors by Harold Childe

FLAMINE

The Flamine are the most recognised of all the Urania, having held roles of great prominence within the Mousaion since antiquity, including one of its Oracles, but also providing a great number of its lieges. There is attendant prestige in being a member of the Flamine. The Flamine are women who have forsworn sexual congress with men and often assume traditional male roles. History accepted these women as assuming the station of men and speaking with the same manner of rights.

The transformation into Flamine is subtle, in that it merely reduces some of the more apparent forms of their femininity, rendering them androgynous in appearance. The most significant effect of the transformation is one that leaves their scalp bald, which exaggerates this androgyny.

The requirements for entry into the Flamines are rigorous: they must demonstrate purity, showing neither physical nor mental defect, and affirm celibacy for the duration of the year they take their philtre. While this celibacy is explicit regards congress with men, there is ambiguity among the Flamine on the acceptability of female consorts, particularly after the transformation.

ORPHEAN

Orpheans are a cultural clade of feminised men, usually those castrated in their youth or born with genitals that are not entirely phallic; it is not uncommon for youths to join the clade after family estrangement. The singular ideal that wends its way through the clade is the rejection of traditional masculinity in favour of a highly creative existence, celebrating choral mastery. The transformation

bestows a wondrous castrato voice upon their number, which proves desirable for opera. The Mousaion often prefer to employ Orpheans to portray male roles in their liturgy.

Publically, the Orpheans have a slight masculine demeanour even while adopting many feminine affects, particularly in the form of make ups. They represent a contradiction, for while they share little sexual appetite for other women, they are often the objects of sexual adoration by the women in the audience. In private, many eschew typically masculine clothing, averring from specific gendered garments. Each clade is a small commune, headed by a castrato of magnificence and celebrity, serving as a mentor for his compatriots.

REBIS

The Rebis are sublime hermaphrodites, defined by the balance between the masculine and the feminine: in body and mind, in matter and essence. Accordingly, their dress is a mixture of traditionally male and female articles of clothing, preferring to favour neither but embrace both. Their societal role is unique among noble circles, often consulted as name-givers, matchmakers, and fortune-tellers. Their presence is regarded as highly auspicious for ceremonial events.

The Rebis accept only those individuals born intersex and who are willing to embrace masculinity and femininity with equal measure. The chrysalis process augments their primary and secondary sexual characteristics to make them capable of reproduction in either direction, and may even lactate. Many profess cycles where they alternate between their masculine and feminine side taking dominance.

SALMACINE

Salmacines represent one of a few such clades that accept persons of any sex or gender, in that the culmination of the transformation leaves them neuter. They undergo a ritual of death and rebirth: they leave behind a vital part of themselves as the transformation gelds them and removes all distinctive secondary sexual characteristics.

Since death is a significant part of the culture around the transformative ritual, those who would become Salmacine ingest hemlock to ingest shortly before they enter their chrysalis. The clade leaves the supplicant for dead over the duration of the transformation, as the chrysalis sustains them on the edge of death, only to recover before the heat from their flesh leaves and their breath returns to them.

The Salmacine possess a dire reputation, from their mercenary service. Their services are selectively offered but proficient when deployed. Their training regime makes them masterful in the black operations of espionage and while they may readily conduct assassination, they prefer to resort to psychological warfare instead.

VEHMEN

The Vehmen are a troop of hyper-masculine soldiers, consisting of pairs of male lovers who form an elite combative force together. A commander leads the clade, who reviews and admits aspirants into their society based on physical merit and ability, often disregarding social class. The

Circle of Urania by Roberto Quintero.

transformation of the philtre is one that exaggerates their masculinity, augmenting strength and mass, even while not perceptibly increasing their physical size.

As each Vehm pairs with another, it is an important part of the custom that such pairs swap sacred vows between them, making them devoted to each other by mutual obligations of love and adoration. The newly initiated will be coupled with an established solider, still providing service; the young adult to be trained by his elder.

Recruits are admitted no younger than sixteen, to then undertake rigorous training, including wrestling, dance, and swordplay. Their martial skills are then complimented with equestrian training, as they become formidable cavalry as well as hand-to-hand combatants. While the commander may deploy the entire troop towards a singular target, it is far more common for him to deploy pairs to particular cities, where each provides vigilante justice under cover of night. The elder Vehmen form a military tribune, to review the actions of nobles within those cities. When they rule certain actions to be unjust by their secret court, they send specific instruction to their operatives' stations where they are, giving them broad licence to resolve the matters as they see fit.

Names

Names are the keys to the psyche, revealing truths of character and history; more than the commoners, the nobility are defined by their names. Across their life, each noble will bear several names, titles, and epithets, all the while holding their *voranyme* most intimately. Customs of address afford basic courtesies around familiarity between nobility. In both social contexts, it is mostly appropriate to refer to friends and acquaintances by their *synonyme*.

The delay to provide the child with a name offers potential reprieve from grief. In particular, rates of child mortality are high among the commoners. The death of an unnamed child is an horrific experience to endure, and many grieving mothers and fathers find it difficult find solace. A lack of name helps reduce the impact of such a death.

A most doleful sight is the existence of those cemeteries known as fallow fields, where graves lack epitaph, and consigned to ignominy.

from Modern Charity and its Ethic by Cassandra Shore

The average subject expects to see their fiftieth year, and this period of life is divided into spans of seven-year periods, known as septums. Every infant receives a name upon the day of their birth, marking the date of their nameday. Upon each seventh nameday, they partake in the next of the seven rites of passage, signifying their transition into their next phase of life. The fiftieth year is the Jubilee, when the subject is recognised as an elder.

These nomenclature rites garner more importance for the nobility than the commoners do, as the assignation of names distinguishes the two. All subjects of the empire draw upon the complex naming conventions of nomenclature, with the number of names indicating a measure of status. Commoners are known only by their *voranyme,* or birth name, while nobles bear the eminent trinomial of their *heilonyme*, *eidonyme*, and *synonyme*. No one of quality would conceive of presenting themselves to society without the eminent trinomial.

CHILDHOOD

There are four rites relevant to a person throughout their childhood, from birth until the age of their majority upon their twenty-first nameday. Collectively, these four names are referred to as the appellations: for they refer to the names of address that noble and commoners alike will use to call upon each other.

VORANYME

Where feasible, the Quickening is performed on the same day as the infant's birth, as consecrated by the infant's first suckling of the mother. Convention dictates that the use of a *voranyme* is one of high familiarity, denoting endearment; its use by strangers is disrespectful and likely an act of contempt or diminution. They are all names of natural phenomena: invoking animals, plants, minerals, and more. Its use often indicates a token of intimacy or trust, and likely a kindred bond.

However, in an age still fraught by high child mortality there may often be a delay between birth and the Quickening. It has become the custom to delay the Quickening until the child is viable and healthy. The naming ceremony that follows consigns the *voranyme* upon the child, their proper name. The infant becomes a lawful person, entitled to the rights and privileges thereof.

The septum of years that follows is the infancy, and upon the culmination of this span, the child reaches physical independence. Infancy is regarded as the most foundational period of life, where numerous public programs provide them with the catechism of liturgy.

HEILONYME

Upon a child's seventh name day, they reach the age of reason. It heralds the second septum of the pupillage, when the child begins their formal education beyond the preliminary instruction. The Mousaion provides a schooling system, according to an imperial curriculum. It is available to all children up to the age of fourteen. In the septum that follows, the child's life is one of instruction and discipline, concluding with their sexual maturity.

Their Saining is a rite where the child selects a *heilonyme*, or high name, which they sign upon a book of testament before a grace of the Mousaion; the nobility often consider this their first act of self-possession. Frequently, the focal act of signing is a reverend one, which entails the first instance of the child formally presenting their name in liturgical ritual.

The selection of a high name is of great import, as the child selects a name of an historic figure from the epics and legends, such that they might model their lives on their virtues and exemplars; the story of the selected figure then recounted before the audience, prior to the signing. Often, the child's guardians present them with a set of three names from which they are to select.

The First Epiphany by Tomasz Bełzowski.

EIDONYME

When a child attains their fourteenth nameday, they may undergo the Imagination. It is not a rite that all youths take as a matter of course but is the gauntlet that all who would aspire to the nobility must complete to prove their merit. The Imagination is an induced trance, where the child seeks the name of their Imago and Shadow, the *eidonyme* or true name.

True names are deeply profound, as they speak directly to the noble's sublime nature, so those versed in the ways of sorcery may use an *eidonyme* deleteriously. The possession and knowledge of one's true name is the pertinent trial that allows a child to stand among the nobility as their own. Many youths spend weeks or months preparing for the Imagination, for neither Imago nor Shadow surrender their name lightly.

This third septum of years of puberty is the last septum of one's minority. When the youth completes this septum they will be ready to be recognised as an adult by society; they are hopefully ready for the responsibilities that attend. Notably, youths of means often receive their secondary education, while those without may provide an apprenticeship in exchange for a formal education.

During the Imagination, a child meets and confronts their Imago and Shadow for the very first time. They are figments that echo the higher self and baser natures of the noble respectively; each idealisation reflects aspects of their bloodline. Children of Rosaline lineages describe encountering their self as a bard and a narcissist, often required to flatter or manipulate the two for the name. Those born of the Braemaline encounter themselves as a hero and a beast, and must best one of them in singular combat. Finally, those claiming Pommeline inheritance perceive themselves as a magus and a trickster, and must outwit one of them for the coveted name.

from Treillage by Cassandra Shore

SYNONYME

For those proud scions that complete the Imagination, the third septum is a period of preparation. They have proven their mettle and become eligible to undergo the Epiphany: a dream quest where the would-be-noble ventures into the Delirium. The Epiphany requires supplicant to have a person act as vouchsafe, from either a given house or Imperial Order. This spokesperson acts as a guide upon their quest but also offers to sponsor them into their house or order upon completion of the rite. As such, their nominee must possess sufficient authority to speak on behalf of that estate.

The Epiphany begins with a soporific draught, inducing a deep, unyielding sleep, which casts them into the Delirium; they are tasked with a single purpose. The Epiphany is perilous, containing crucial conflicts that each aspiring noble must face, to prove their station. The quest plays out fantastically through the dreaming, aided only by the support of their guide. Their Imago and Shadow will test and challenge them before they can return, whereupon some nobles retain a measure of the dreamlands; others remain touched by endless wanderlust, pursuing unexamined lives; others still are driven mad, to become fearful husks of their former selves. Only those who prevail earn for themselves the synonyme of that house or order, which ennobles them.

The nomenclature rites are held explicitly on the appointed nameday. Supplicants must either be ready or not to face those challenges. Each is given one opportunity to take them and prevail against them. Of those more perilous nomenclature rites, like the Epiphany, there are no formal requirements that all must follow through when them; though only one chance is ever offered.

from The Waking Dream by Matilda Mulfstan

Each *synonyme* bears particular heraldry, as evolved from antiquarian customs, as calligraphic ciphers; a custom originating in the 12th Century. Individual family members embellish the cipher with a cadency to distinguish them, for the cipher unadorned is the prerogative of the house. Likewise, Imperial Orders have their own *synonyme* conventions.

ADULTHOOD

All the nomenclature rites after adulthood are reserved for the nobility: they are collectively called the triumphs, which awards the three diplomatic postnominals. These nomenclature rites become the means by which a faction may credential one of their own to serve as a proxy for their entirety, which is crucial for the solemnisation of customary documents, treaties, and correspondence.

The terms Ambassador and Emissary are somewhat interchangeable, but formally the term Ambassador is only utilised when an Emissary is on a mission representing their estate.

from The Vindication of the Aristocracy by Vivian Grey

These next three names are statements of that individual's mastery, and each rite at this point on is a challenge designed to grade the nobility and their capacity to serve as plenipotentiaries of their estate; to signify their diplomatic rank: lords of the Peerage may represent their nation, ladies of the Mousaion may represent their caste, and the masters of the orders represent their own. Each noble rightly invested with these diplomatic postnominals may modify the cadency of their cipher

cadency to reflect these changes accordingly; heralds will work these changes into their signet ring to display the authority they hold for their estate. Collectively, the diplomatic corpus represents a coalition of meritorious and powerful nobles, having demonstrated great political acumen. As delegates, they convey the ideals of their nation, caste, or charter to the farthest parts of the empire; united by a purpose that transcends borders.

DOMINUS

The fourth septum of years is the age of majority, which represents the first span of life when a person becomes an adult by law; with all attendant rights and obligations. The conclusion of these years often sees the subject attain a measure of emotional maturity. For many, it describes a period of service towards whatever faction raised them. Nobles sworn into house or order return the debt of their education through dedicated service throughout this period.

Upon entering the majority, nobles usually embark upon the composition of a major work, which they present upon the end of the septum. Though the medium of the composition is not always predetermined, most nobles choose a literary monograph; they range from prosaic to poetic works, or else dissertations on particular topics.

While other media are sometimes utilised, notably music and imagery, it is not unknown for them to employ more radical mediums. Either tactic offers risks and benefits: written works are more familiar and accepted by convention, while simultaneously being more susceptible to scrutiny of technique. Other media hold less favourable currency but provide room for greater departure from convention. The orders are renowned for the creation of such masterpieces.

The presentation of this work is the Oration: where the composition is weighed for its merit before an eminent member of the estate. Should they pass the Oration, the panel appends to them a dominus, to signify mastery. These honorifics often invoke a Latinised or Konicised historic masters: members of the aristocracy often receiving their names from antiquity while the bourgeoisie favour ones from the Flamboyance.

Those who attain a dominus enjoin the Great Game, as they gain the plenipotentiary powers attendant to the rank of a Missive. Albeit, the entire extent of Missive authority is administrative: they may carry out clerical, communicative, and other perfunctory work on behalf of their estate, and often within a defined brief.

MAGISTRUM

The fifth septum of years describes the primacy of the noble. The primacy is the most distinguishing period of a noble's life, while they are in their prime: they hold the vestiges of youth but the wisdom of years. Frequently, the noble in the fullness of their estate, takes a sabbatical tour of the Realm abroad that they might rarefy their stately mien. In this period, the characteristic qualities of statecraft emerge, refining and tempering each noble into a powerful political agent. Those who fail to master the finesse and guile necessary for the Great Game often expires with an ignoble ending; they fade from prominence to enter obscurity.

Lectures in Literacy by Mateusz Bielski.

Upon the culmination of the primacy, those nobles who have achieved the Oration may thereafter demonstrate their mastery of rhetorical stagecraft. This test of the Ovation is an adversarial one, where the supplicant stands before an inquisitorial bar that then challenges them. The bar is a selection of the three persons, including a member one of the noble's estate, a member of an adversarial estate, and a representative of the Imperium.

On the first day, the bench presents the noble a question designed to test their general knowledge on various matters, tasking the noble with an oral examination. On the second day, they have the noble stand in a room where lighting only illuminates them: they must wax loquaciously on a particular subject, unable to see or hear an audience. On the final day, their nameday, they walk a gauntlet without personal affects through their homelands, as a challenge to their adversaries.

If successful, the gauntlet becomes the Ovation, and they acquire the magistrum, their magisterial name; this exalts the noble unto the status of an Envoy. The commissioning of a magistrum elevates them unto plenipotentiaries of the second order. They are authorised to speak on behalf of their estate in comment and correspondence, including revenues and warrants.

VERSIFICATOR REGIS

This sixth septum is the midlage and nobles who survive to this age are hardened and established players in the Great Game. They often assume powerful and central roles on behalf of their estate, with many other nobles employed as their pawns. Almost all have entrenched themselves in the intrigues of the Great Game. Years have tempered them with experience, forging canny and worthwhile adversaries. They are potent political forces, standing removed from public view, holding indirect influence on the civic sphere; whereupon they play a tournament of shadows.

The third triumph is the Laureate, the most potent and laudable of all triumphs: those who surpass this final triumph join a constellation of superlative peers, known archaically as the *nobles-laureate*. The Laureate is not a test that one can entreat, but one vested upon those deemed most worthy among the Envoys.

A noble may only stand for the Laureate by the invitation from the Diet, which convenes each year to consider those nobles soon to attain their forty-second nameday. They deliberate over the eligibility of these candidates and then choose from among their number a scarce fifty alone. The Diet summons those fifty before them to give to their number a Laureate rhetorical performance. These are some of the most incredible and potent rhetorics anywhere, for their one sole requirement is to move the Diet to acclaim the noble, a daunting challenge.

Laureates are granted the *versificator regis*, the royal name. It is a royal degree in rhetoric that accords them as plenipotentiaries of the highest standing, with the title of Emissary. Each attains credentials of the full authority of their estate and may act entirely on its behalf, given the fullness of its resources. They may declare acts of aggression or sanctify an alliance.

Through their final septum of their seniority, the noble becomes a doyen of the Realm at the height of their power. Most have been hardened by numerous years of strife, contending with the most perceptive and powerful opponents. These are the Dukes of the Senate or the Sibyls of the Auspice. Even though many recede from public life, depending on a small cadre of proxies and intermediaries, they rarely stand isolated.

TITLE

Noble titles are measures of standing, affording their possessor with an appropriate honorific. While titles of estate are the most widespread and significant, all titles garner some standing but

are devalued in comparison, including titles of profession, of prestige, and of deed. There are also titles of incarnation, which entails no formal standing but garners profound respect.

RANK

The aristocracy stratifies its members by two distinct but parallel tiers to signify rank in either the Peerage or Mousaion. Each correlates to the size and extent of their given purview: for the Peerage, rank declares the span of lands under one's purview; for the Mousaion, it denotes a measure of chimerical connections with populations through story and demagoguery. Over the course of a noble's lifetime, a lord or lady may be raised up or cast down with the waxing and waning of their fortunes. Only those nobles that bear an aristocratic title as either a liege or a grace are entitled to the honorific of Lord or Lady; all lessers are afforded the courtesy titles of Sir and Dame.

Within the Peerage, rank is in the counting of parcels of lands or wards, within the confines of their domain. A barony comprises at least four wards, a county must hold at least sixteen, a mark must possess no fewer than six-and-thirty, and duchies command at least four-and-sixty wards. A noble governing of a single ward by its liege is entitled to the rank of warden, though such persons lack formal standing within the Peerage.

The Mousaion measures their rank in more ephemeral terms, often determined through their command and faculty over mysteries and rites, demonstrating their power through unravelling initiations of mysteries. In their most basic form, the graces of the Mousaion attain the rank of Lector, being trusted to read the varied liturgies. Those raised to the rank of Docent are given authority to teach and instruct the mysteries and give names. Maesters are the leading scholars of the mysteries, with custodial positions towards the Scriptures. Those few that rise to the rank of Sibyl have come to epitomise the ideals of their caste, and carrying chimerical authority.

In recent times, varieties of new titles have proliferated with the granting of commissions. The new distinction of the officer class and their gradation by degrees has produced layers of complications where standing has not completely been reconciled. In principle, the aristocracy measures an equivalent officer rank as being of subordinate nature to an equivalent tier in the aristocratic hierarchy. The point is much contended, and may change with shifting social context.

from Kulturkampf by Auto Eisenmark

INCARNATION

The nobility are also creatures rarefied by chimerical essence, and may potentially transubstantiate. Throughout their lives, a noble may return to the Delirium through Reverie unto increasingly puissant states: from a person of noble nature, to a person of half-sublime nature, into a completely sublime being. The respect given these titles cannot be understated: even though they hold no formal use in courtly systems, they indicate the individuals in question are incarnate powers of narrative: a power unto their own self.

All nobles, who have passed the Reverie of the Epiphany, are the Actors that are the powers-noble, and bear the term of address of 'Your Lord' or 'Your Lady'. Later in life, many may attempt a second Reverie and transcend into the half-mortal, half-sublime powers-eminent, and given the term of address as 'Your Eminence': a count of no more than one-hundred-and-one such individuals are known, and most stand within the Diet. Beyond these personages, only thirteen individuals are more potent: the Arcana of the Coronal who are incarnated powers-principle; they are addressed with 'Your Majesty'.

PRESTIGE

Among the membership of every clan there are those that exemplify their progenitor, one whose very nature best embodies the defining ideals of their whole; this is typically signified in the manifestation of gifted talent. In recognition, each clan accords those individuals a title of prestige.

The Rosaline tribes tend to assign their titles of prestige to those who are already versed in social graces: the houses of the Amsala Clan grant the title of Diviner to those that show propensity towards prophecy, whether in its reading and comprehension or the art of soothsaying. The

Maystern select from their own those aspiring members with a talent for invention and innovation, thereby earning the title of Maven. The Kelleck vaunt talents of mediation, particularly where that includes a faculty for communion and chimerical sensitivity: these persons are Mediums. Those of the Zoubari Clan favour the trappings of wealth and so bestow the title of Mogul on their most splendid number.

Those tribes of Braemaline natures tend to present their titles of prestige upon those scions of valorous and wild natures. Foremost, the Eromund favour those who show rare gifts with the cultivation of plants and herbs, earning the title of Gardener. Among the Portner, there are those who are swift upon the road and able missives, such become the Heralds of the dynasty. Those masters of the hunt, the Veneur, are those most eminent commanders among the Jagen. Finally, the Pioneers are those most ardent of the Greystrand, those who seek and site distant climes.

Pommeline tribes often give special status to those of great cunning and imagination. The Silvenblum award the masters of stage and liturgical performance; its Idols are most celebrated. The Finstari have reverend spots for those professional mourners and speakers of the dead, the Eulogists. All know the Winebachs for their practice of viticulture, and the Vitners among them are the custodians and cupbearers of the wine. Finally, the Rothshart tribe reserve title of Chamberlain for those masters of ceremony and canny hosts.

The Somnolence is an ancient mystery, having defied scrutiny: this is the self-same curse that laid the Ealdor low, plunging them into their sessile states. Most of humankind remains untouched by its imprecations, and most nobles only come to know of it towards their Jubilee year.

from Immortal by Matilda Mulfstan

In quiescence, a noble reveals their true ancestry: the Eden attain a polished glassy sheen; the Anath assume the consistency of brass; the Lilim take on the pale nature of porcelain; the skin of the Freia calcifies till they are like marble stone; and lastly, those of the Sylvan assume the form of living hardwood.

from A Treatise on the Body Electric by Cassandra Shore

Mourning customs provide a sufficient time of seclusion and isolation, such that the mourner may shrive acquaintances and society. The period varies depending on the closeness of relation: a departed spouse requires some eighteen months, but which diminishes to twelve in city environs; parents require twelve months too, children are often forced into nine months solace, whereas friends and other relatives normally require only three.

Custom demands that the first half of this period be veiled in mourning attire, and all clothing forgoes affectation save for the assumption of a veil in public. Only when this span passes, shall the close friends of the mourner spur them onto more cheerful clothing to move them beyond mourning.

from Modern Charity and its Ethic by Cassandra Shore

Epitaph

A noble's story comes to one of three ends: either they perish a mortal death, pass into quiescence, or transcend into archetypal status. Nobles that die a mortal death receive reverence but afford scarce special custom. They lived and they have passed, which is the sum total of their legacy. Most other nobles do not truly die but lapse into the great unending torpor of the quiescence, a shallow effect of the great curse of the Somnolence.

Those nobles that pass into quiescence earn an epitaph, which obscures their living names; for the customs of all nations hold great forbearance to invoke the unliving from their languid stature. The epitaph provides a euphemism that all may then employ to refer the figure. Each epitaph is unique, formulated by the Mousaion in accordance with ancient mysteries of their own sectarian traditions. The Mousaion enters each epitaph into one of many *Books of Names*, which are then stored in repositories that hold the accounts of every single noble who ever lived since the founding of their Calendar, as a record of their most notorious deeds.

Fugue

Nobles do not age as quickly as commoners; it is not unknown for those approaching their fiftieth year to pass for as someone of their thirties among the commonfolk. However, the years still weigh heavily upon the nobles, and as they approach the Jubilee they feel a terrible lethargy. For many, it is the accumulation of narrative fray catching up with them, which results in a schism between their Imago and Shadow, against their own self. This schism becomes the culmination of an inner struggle between their mortality and their narrative potency.

By their Jubilee nameday, they have either eroded their affinity to these archetypes that they remain tenuously attached, or they are so laden with power that they threaten to destroy the original host: refusal erodes, and compliance subsumes. Accordingly, upon each noble's fiftieth nameday, they may undertake their second Reverie: a dream quest known as the Fugue where the noble lapses into a deep slumber and literal step into the Delirium. Those that do not, face the consequences of madness or senescence.

QUIESCENCE

Nobles that return from the Fugue become unnaturally preserved, with the aging process slowing to a crawl as the renewed vigour of quick keeps them it revitalised. These nobles do not die of old age but fall instead to the torpid state of quiescence.

As the quiescence sets in, they stiffen and the flush of life fades. The quick within them stills, shriven away to leave the noble wan and fatigued. They endure a number of successively longer sleeps, as dreams overtake their waking life. Eventually, waking and sleep lose distinction and the noble falls into a permanent hypnopompic state: the torpor of quiescence.

When the noble finally succumbs to the quiescence, they lapse into an unyielding sleep as their dreams consume them. With one final gasp, their subtle body expires and all its vital systems wither away. Their bodily humours coagulate and their flesh partly transubstantiates, transforming their member unto statuesque forms.

In torpid and comatose stillness, they dream, murmuring a delicate susurrus; their musing are sometimes prophetic, sometimes maddening, and yet sometimes vociferous nonsense. The internment of the quiescent is one of careful preservation. Each laid to rest within a mausoleum, where they lay in solitude that their endless dreams might not haunt the living. Their statuesque forms are tended lovingly, even as the even as the ages erode their features. This is protective custody, with their destruction akin to murder. Those that found a house lend their epitaph to its name.

DISQUIET

Nobles are not immune to untimely demise, victim of calamity, misadventure, or misdeed: by malice and violent acts, by deprivation or neglect, by pestilence or poison. Such terrible deaths devastate, denying Avatars their silent solace found in quiescent effigy, they become naught but rotting corpses. These deaths, nobles turn disquiet, their psyche sundered from their mortal coil and cast into the Widderslainte. Without the succour of immortal sleep, they are fragments of their former intellect cast into a shadowy existence.

Therein they reside, as faded and wilful apparitions, each evincing the narratives that once compelled them. These *geists* are thereafter compelled to repeat the days of their own winding narrative until some final resolution.

FUNERAL

Nobles who die, regardless what glories prevailed amid their living days, share the meagre funerals of the common folk. Death provides a great levelling and social convention demands a lack of ostentation; for the demands of expense would only press heavily upon the poor, adding to their grief. Funerists follow customs of internment derived from the myths of their matriarchal Muse: the Dawn Caste desicates their corpses and scatter their dust to the wind; the Zenith Caste use funerary pyres; the Dusk Caste wraps their dead and plumb them into bodies of water; the Nadir Caste buries their dead; and the Eclipse Caste are placed in revered groves secretly.

Requiescant in Pace by Tomasz Belzowski.

Sorcery

Sorcery is a cunning art, which teaches the ability to manipulate chance, probability, and fate through a connection with the skein. It proves a paramount art, harnessing the vicissitudes of fortune. The artistry must be learned through many studious years, for as much as the Epiphany opens one's eyes to ken the subtle workings of the skein, mastery of its manipulation is not instilled.

Sorcery is the manipulation narrative causality, using narrative elements to cause events to conform to tropes. Sorcerous techniques derive perceptual links, through works of composition, artistry, and expression. Sorcery is a creative art of high technique that elaborates dramatic flair and creative poise. Graces versed well with the skein learn even to perform *fait accomplis*: the very ability to manipulate and revise the past, present, or future.

Trivium

Graces follow one of three paths of sorcery: the petal, the thorn, or the haw. Each school of the Trivium is open only to graces native to the Rosaline, the Braemaline, and the Pommeline respectively. Each draws upon the unique hue of that bloodline, of glamour, velleity, or whist. The practices of each way are the means by which the aspiring grace may best harness their hue.

The term sorcery is a vulgarisation of the Latin *sortarius*, meaning 'one who influences fate'. Much to the chagrin of the Mousaion, the commonfolk are like to name the practice 'magic'; a vulgarisation of the highest order. The Mousaion consider the term pejorative, and lacking in nuance.

from Philosophy in Antiquity by Zarathustra

The Trivium comprises a classical foundation of knowledge as a required component of study of the skein: a comparative instruction on three epistemic traditions. Its foundations are in the fundamentals of literacy, mathematics, and imagery. Following, the Quadrivium instructs students with the methods and tools to apply each framework. They are two tiers that the sorcerer student must master before initiation.

The bards of the petal are taught the passionate arts of *pathos*; the heroes of the thorn learn the wilful arts of *ethos*; and the magi of the haw undertake the intellectual arts of *logos*. Each has derived their practices from the principle epistemologies of Allegory, Scripture, and Symphony: one symbolic, one semantic, and one musical. Though the grammatical methods of Scripture have primacy, the Mousaion regards an education incomplete without a comparative study of all three.

Petal

The way of the petal is the study of Allegory, which depicts the Realm through symbols and semiotics. Students who demonstrate mastery of the petal favour the creative arts: musicians, sculptors, painters, and their ilk; all making sense of the Realm through aesthetics and contextualisation. Society often regards iconic mind-sets as somewhat primal, in showing sympathy to faerie as revealed in the manner of their workings of illusion.

Thorn

The way of the thorn is the study of Scripture, which describes reality through semantics and literary references. Students who master the thorn observe a linguistic and syntactic interaction between objects and subjects: everything has a name, one wrought through prose and poetry. The grammatical perspective is the dominant episteme of the Realm, that most eminent scholars, legal practitioners, and masters of statecraft are versed with.

HAW

The way of the haw is the study of Symphony, which denotes the Realm in constructions of pure thought predicated on mathematical rules and formulae. Scholars of the haw quantify and measure myriad aspects of the structures around them with supreme calculation. Its epistemologies comprehend the complexity of the Realm through tonic algorithms, engaging its most basic components. Practitioners of the haw tend to be of cool disposition, removed and abstract. Its mind-set compares to the takwin, in seeking a true objectivity that most scientists would admire.

MASK

The use of sorcery entwines the noble more acutely with their own mien. It resolves potently, until it brands itself upon the sorcerer. The mien has become a mask: a second skin that cleaves to the very form. Each mask refines the very quick within their bodies, strongly enhancing the native humour for a given caste; it is the reason these masks serving as the symbols of their congregation.

BONE

The Mask of Bone is that of the outcaste, which belongs to those who have either severed or abandoned their connection to a caste. It has a most mundane temperament that lends its wearers a sense of instinct for survival and physical needs, which prove excessive in times of great illness. Its effect on the temperament is one of gravitas, weighing the mind and body down with the ages. The humour of bone is plasm, which is located in bodily cavities and tends to congeal upon the noble's Shadow: as a noble approaches quiescence, their *plasm* tends to well up.

The Lilim portrays a dolorous face, the Eden express idyllic themes, the Anath reveal themselves in wrath, the Freia become most horrifying, and the Sylvan project resplendent majesty.

from The Waking Dream
by Matilda Mulfstan

BRASS

The Mask of Brass is that of the Zenith Caste. Its temperament is martial with a feckless energy, to make extroverted persons dispositions towards being taskmasters. They have domineering attitudes and assume positions at the vanguard, yet expressing charm and passion in their actions; though they are notoriously short of temper and quick to arrogance. The humour of *coloris* thrives along the nervous pathways, expressed through sebaceous secretions and is otherwise remarkable for its electrochemical properties.

CLAY

The Mask of Clay lends itself to a venereal temperament and provides the Dusk Caste with a sense of tranquillity. Its presence often creates quiet and dependable persons with sociable natures, though they may express timidity when their insecurities are provoked. The Mask of Clay produces a humour in tears and lymphatic fluid known as *vitreous*, which is somewhat acidic; not enough to corrode the flesh but enough to leave a tang upon the air.

GLASS

The Mask of Glass is incredibly mercurial, which makes the Dawn Caste highly extroverted and sociable; they are given to a sense of optimism, frivolity, and enthusiasm, even while prone to impulsiveness and self-indulgence, and certain flippancy in the face of solemnity. The humour of glass channels principally through the blood, but also in spit and breath vapour: this is *sanguine* which affects modes and patterns of speech.

STONE

The Mask of Stone is of saturnine temperament, and is the mask of the Nadir Caste; it is regarded as the cause of their frequent introversion. Their numbers are often independent and courteous,

bending their manner towards hard work and careful analysis. They may fall victim to dour moods, being neurotic and brooding, even tending towards perfectionism and melancholy. The humour of stone is *myelos*, being a most heavy humour found in the marrow and cerebral-spinal fluids; excesses may cause undesirable blockages of free flowing quick.

WOOD

The Mask of Wood contains a jovial temperament, being most native to those of Sylvan ancestry. The wooden mask is what lends the Sylvan their splendour and beatified appearance and possibly accounts for their ambiversion and contrarian tendencies. The humour of wood is a substance known as *vim*, which is found primarily in milk but also in trace amounts in semen.

Arts

The Mousaion trains their graces in the ways of sorcery such that they might influence the course of history and the Grand Narrative itself. The teachings of the Mousaion are esoteric and secluded behind three degrees of initiation. The first degree teaches the initiate the skill of kenning, to read the skein; the second degree teaches the skills of sooth, speaking prophecy and providing testimony; the third degree enables the grace to manipulate destiny directly, pulling and drawing down on tropes of the skein.

Only those who learn to ken are admitted into the Mousaion as initiated but they are only acknowledged as graces once they demonstrate propensity to work the skein. Those few who gain true mastery of the skein are those puissant *eminence graces*, the uncanny and sagacious Sibyls.

KENNING

Kenning, or more colloquially cunning, is the system of esoteric knowledge for understanding the skein. It is a profoundly personal type of knowledge gleaned through contemplations, mediations, and revelations. Kenning instruction on the fundamentals of narrative causality; most nobles enjoy some measure of its basic understanding.

The Mousaion also disciplines its graces to cultivate acute powers of observation, of tiny and minute details such that they acquire constant awareness of their surrounds. The graces of the Mousaion can often add to their mystique able to gauge the intentions behind an action or movement, to give the impression of having sight beyond sight.

Kenning reveals the manner in which the minds of the masses affect storytelling and the skein. By learning to recognise their effects, graces perceive the skein when it manifests through tropes. This is because the aggregation of minds thinks in terms of patterns; so stories conform to familiar forms. Their individuality is of no consequence and it is only their community matters, joined through the act common narrative.

Kenning exploits the masses' willing suspension of disbelief to legitimate story conventions, as they form a consensus on which tropes are and is not plausible. Equipped with this knowledge, a grace may invoke conceits to illuminate certain threads. They are artful deceptions, which borrows from fictions given credibility. By manipulating these conventions, the public may be convinced to celebrate fabricated heroes and lament over idols they do not know.

Graces may use a number of tools to allow their minds to process information subconsciously, deriving an intuition on any subject, often involving some method of chance: cards are favoured, but chits, lots, and observing random fluctuations may suffice. All are means to an end, allowing the trained to read things that are nominally unfathomable. Portents reveal themselves through

Where liturgical works are the high ceremonial arts of myth-mapping, there are also a variety of low hedge arts that evoke folklore. Liturgy draws upon universal symbols, meaning their scope is broad but lacks parsimony. Contrast this to the hedge arts, which proffer personalised workings. Hedge crafts are not ritualistic in the same sense as the ceremonial liturgies, for they draw on local customs in an improvised manner.

from Total Work of Art by Leubald Geyer

As day changes to night, the clarity of bright illumination fades and the vivid contrast of colour yields to depths of shade, textures, and context: shadows loom large but the meaning behind the form comes forth. By the illumination of Ecstasy, one may use kenning to perceive the workings of the skein easily: for the light of day reveals, the reality of the Tellurium, but it is the night light of Ecstasy that reveals the reality of the Delirium. Kenning allows the wise to see meaning behind the shadows of nightlight, where others would see naught but the darkness. Kenning lifts the veil of darkness, to give lucidity to the invisible and unseen, granting a second sight.

The threads of the skein are particularly visible by the light of Ecstasy; as the many varied shades and texture impart their subtle meanings. By this sight, the grace perceives the varied connections of the skein as they touch and influence events and people through narrative themes, and the many narrative principles that manipulate causality. It is a state of enlightened observation, which reveals the workings of the skein and knowledge of the elements of narrative genre active in their vicinity.

from The Waking Dream by Matilda Mulfstan

The tendency to hear the meaning behind words is the reason why the commonfolk call us soothsayers. Though know this, the same commonfolk remain blind to this measure of meaning, as their words and statements lack the propensity of fate, and thus their role in its overarching course stays unseen.

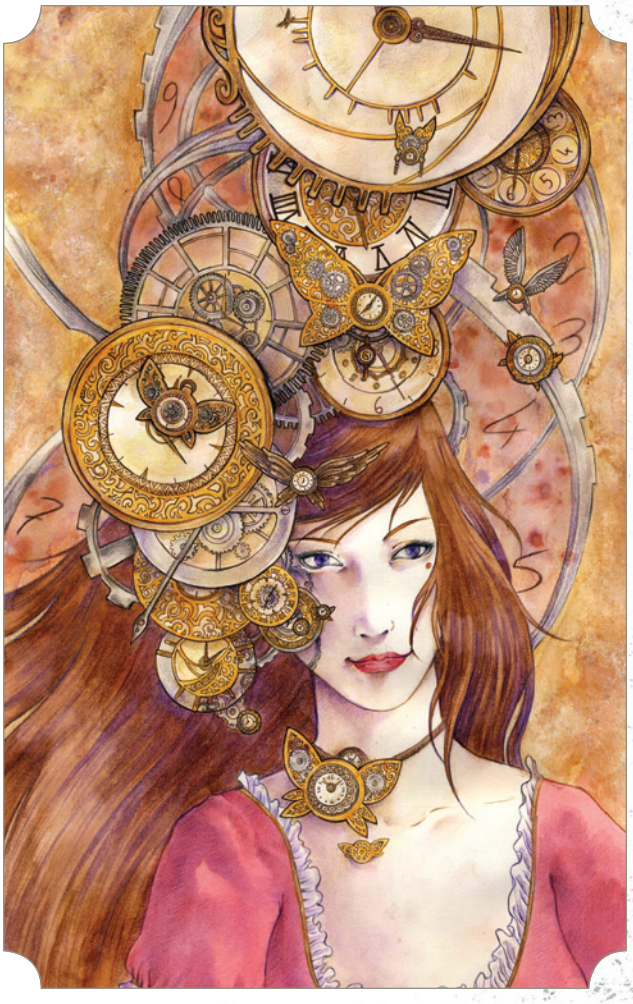
from The Waking Dream by Matilda Mulfstan

the repetition of symbols, numbers, or words; patterns and motifs that signal the relevance and importance for a given refrain or story. Many other nobles may even gain awareness of these motifs without training but across sufficient time.

GRAMAYRE

Once a grace becomes more versed in the ways of the skein, they learn the art of gramayre. The artistry of the gramayre is one of studious solitude. For one must acquire a depth of knowledge of language itself, discerning the fundamental connection between writing, speech, and time. This allows the grace to understand the deeply intimate connection between narratives, histories, and the development of story as a teleological instrument.

With mastery of the gramayre, the grace's kenning enables them to test the weight of words. Though it requires the focused intensity, the grace may test the spoken or written word against the weave of the skein, to sense whether they hold true or false of the course of fate. What the graces can glean is usually relevant to the personal history of the subject; shaped inevitably by what the subject knows or believes.



The bards of the petal who are attuned best to Dream, can sense the genuine emotion behind words, able to take them at their meaning. Those magi of the haw attuned to Death, can hear the truthfulness of words, sounding out falsehoods and calumnies. The heroes of the thorn and their affinity to Destiny enable them to sense whether the words are of good purpose or honour.

This is only the beginning of the true gramayre; for the greatest portion of its power is the solemnisation of words where the grace learns to bind words to the skein. In this, they give such words superlative meaning, which the skein then endeavours to bring about or eventuate. They imbue the words themselves with a measure of fate, ensuring the skein will return any breach of their stricture upon the oath breaker with terrible fortunes.

FAITS ACCOMPLIS

The greatest arts of sorcery are the *faits accomplis*; though most simply refer to this as true sorcery. Those who attain this peak of gnostic power learn to rewrite the causality of history itself.

With these powers, the sorcerer revises small components of their own personal history, such that they may have taken a different route, remembered to pack crucial objects, anticipate impending danger, or otherwise demonstrate inordinate luck and happenchance. Though the arts of the *faits accomplis* grant the Sibyl great powers, their works are limited only to those people and events connected to their personal histories, or the personal histories of those immediately in their presence. However, they may govern the actions of their fellow nobles with the imposition of a geasa.

These are the Sibyls, with the capacity to influence the course of history and even revise it in brief. It is what makes them its governors and custodians, with the Calendar their eternal monument to this task. Each of the three ways shares different affinities with this continuum: the bards of the petal drink deeply of memory and look to that which has been; the heroes of the thorn seize their current moment; and the magi of the haw cleave to what may come.

Seconde by Claire Pacheco.

CONTINUUM

For the Mousaion, history is a living document written large upon the skein. Its continuity is the work of memory and recollection: it is fragile and remains stable only as far as it remains observed or recorded. Thus much of the obsession of the Mousaion is the work of recording and recalling. The Mousaion's many vaults are replete with historical accounts.

The orthodoxy of history is their sacred change: what is forgotten or unobserved remains vulnerable to being rewritten, reimagined, and recomposed. It is also a work of prophecy, directing the work of human enterprise towards the Eschaton.

The Sibyls are judicious in their meddling, for influencing continuity may cause paradox and contradiction. Graces are bound to the skein like all nobles, making them vulnerable to fray: the unravelling of personal historical threads. These tears in the skein are onerous and do not naturally resolve themselves: only the purposeful intervention of the most powerful Sibyls has prevented the some of the more terrible unravelling of history. Even then, the Sibyls may not contradict history even to repair it, and any resolution of frayed threads must satisfactorily reckon causal inconsistencies with coherency.

For those ungifted with the ways of sorcery, the causality of the skein is something of a past time than a studious interest. Albeit, the aristocracy frequently indulges their own personal records with either a journal or a *roman à clef*. For graces, they must contend with prevarications in the very continuity of their own personal histories, as well as the greater ones that are part of the Grand Narrative.

from Total Work of Art by Leubald Geyer

Geasa are oblique, often sending nobles-errant on a quest, and with profound physical and chimerical challenges. Many sibyls are loath to use these workings without serious consideration beforehand. For fate is capricious, and attempts to impose it as a dictum seeks to vainly impose a person design upon the Grand Narrative itself. Fate often thwarts those wilfully attempts to usurp its mandate, and the prevarications of fate often confound others in most pernicious manner.

from The Longest Quest by Anita Riverio

There are times when fray accumulates or leaves a permanent scar. These scars on history are nods, where the noble begins to fall out of sync with history. The accumulation of nods leads to the quiescence, and this is the fate that often befalls the immortals: those primordial powers of old, and the archetypes of the Imperium among them. Despite their great age, we are all fallible and eventually prone to committing acts that are discordant with history. Eventually the longest-lived creatures fall to quiescence. Nobles, lacking the same puissance as these creatures simply diminish; old nobles rarely die, they simply fade away.

from Immortal by Matilda Mulfstan

FRAY

Fray is bifurcation of threads: they are and they are not. The duplication of potentiality is profoundly problematic, representing two mutually exclusive versions of events. Fray may be deliberate through the sorcerous conflict of *vorta* or malevolent sorceries of *maleficarum*. Sometimes, fray may even be a natural fluctuation in the course of history, fixated on momentous events. Most frequently, fray is caused by careless manipulations of causality. Because history is teleological, only one version of these events may come to pass; it favours those narratives remembered by the majority. History is written by the victors for a reason.

GRIMOIRE

TRUE STUDY OF gramayre begins in earnest at Mousaion universities, whereupon students commit to the consumption of the grimoire: a collection of ancient and archaic manuscripts that codify narrative tropes. The grimoire is composed of several canonical works and the Mousaion has transcribed most such orthodox texts into Latin; though areas where the Idiom was more influential may have variations based on Konic transcriptions. Mastery of this ancient lore depends on an analysis of a great many different texts, with languages both living and dead. Naturally, most students of gramayre are fluent polyglots, with the best are those having natural linguistic faculty.

CURRICULUM

The curricula of the Mousaion are the conventional means of understanding the gramayre, by embarking on practical studies of their knowledge bases and approaching critical philosophy. The curricula covers four broad areas: ethics, being the application of pure thought; geography, being the application of knowledge through space; history, being the application of knowledge through time; and astronomy, being the application of knowledge in observing the flow of time and space.

Ethics is the development of critical thought using dialectic methods to engage the seat of reason and provoke philosophical enquiry. Students of chicanery apply ethics through the interlinking of symbols, students of gramayre demonstrate dialectic capacity, and students of gealdor develop arithmetic and formulaic skills.

Geography entails the application of knowledge upon physical spaces; a study with vital importance upon public office, for statecraft depends on the best utilisation of a given theatre, of taking the stage. Students of chicanery learn the means of mapping signs in real space, students of gramayre develop nuanced words by which to circumscribe boundaries, and students of gealdor work the applications of shape and geometries.

History delivers an application of knowledge across the span of time, thereby granting advantage over comprehending the patterns of historic cycles, to navigate adequately the present and future. Those students of chicanery often seek to construct views of the past through incomplete remnants, while gramayre scholars contend with history over scores of verse and poetry, and those scholars of gealdor contemplate the harmonics of historic tempos.

The final curriculum of astronomy studies of the heavens and movements of the Orrery. It is perhaps the most challenging of applications, as study of movement and application of knowledge through time and space. Its lessons impart with students a perspective of the cosmos and their standing within it. Scholars of chicanery study such motion through the rigours of dance, those students of gramayre study the motion of rhetoric and dialogue, while students of gealdor require a study in the principles of calculus.

KEYS

The first works of the grimoire are a collection of prehistoric texts known as the Keys: they are strange and eldritch workings, explicating deep narrative law. The language scarcely resembles prose, being more an example of high poetry. The scansion of every line embellishes with lyrical syntax, and all their rubrics signified in their juxtaposition to each other.

Despite a more constrained vocabulary, the nuance of each glyph is precise, and linguistic sequence permutes meaning from context of adjacent words: from the tempo of each stanza to the scansion of the text. The techniques of its poetics are of the highest order, such that all attendant scholars refer to its classic forms for their masterpieces. The elements of composition are complex and layered, with artistry extending to the placement and styling of text as though art rendered upon canvas.

AURDINATO

The first key is the *aurdinato*, the 'Golden Rule', which historians regard as having been written by the Druidain but inspired by the Muses. As the oldest of the keys, the *aurdinato* is a superlative work: it is the most reverend and rarest of all the Keys. Its script uses glyphs that connote imagery, text, and musical intonation all at once. These texts contain knowledge of the *hieros gamos* and the significance of names, with all their attendant practices. Accordingly, the customs and traditions of the *aurdinato* are most sacrosanct, their provisions are so entrenched that their violation is considered profane.

STIRILING

The second key is the *stiriling*, the 'Silver Tongue', which demonstrates the high tongue of the Atleans. The language of the *stiriling* possesses both imagery and melody, which is inferred by context and their relationship to the page, rather than implicit in the glyphs themselves. The *stiriling* texts demonstrate the beginning of pure textual writings; they provide a common language from which the tongues of humanity, faerie, and takwin all descend.

It is from these texts that modern scholars derive some semblance of culture and understanding of the Atlean culture; from which we derive most of our modern courtly custom. The *stiriling*

There are three pillars tradition that have become a staple of the skein. Their mores are so intertwined with the workings of skein that one wonders aptly where tradition ends and mythology begins. In modern life, their impact is still rejoined through the reverence due to certain sacrosanct customs. Above all, the nobility adhere to their mores, subverting or ignoring them only at great personal peril, and tempting dire ostracism. To forsake or abrogate these obligations may yet undo the very institution of the aristocracy.

The first and most revered of all traditions is that of the *hierogamy*; that bond forged between liege and land, and from which the customs of dominion emerge.

The second tradition surrounds *signetry*, the signing of names. Names themselves hold sway over the lives of such as we, but when solemnised into a signature they resolve into potent bindings.

The final of these traditions is that of *jurancy*, which binds people together through their social accords. It is this powerful custom that surrounds the affairs of matrimony and nemesis, which drives pavane and vendetta.

from Immortal by Matilda Mulfstan

By sheer lack of any extant examples of vernacular prose within the Keys, there is an underlying implication being that the native expression of such prehistoric authors was inherently poetical; for even their technical works, while averring metaphor, are laden with lyrical poetry.

from Total Work of Art by Leubald Geyer

contains codes and names: one being verses of the names of many natural phenomena. The codes reveal diplomatic accords between Atleans and the practice of oathbinding. From these, a great number of ancient accords extend, underpinning much in the way of duties and obligations implicit in society and diplomacy.

LODENLEX

The last key is the *lodenlex*, 'the Iron Writ', which entails the compositions of the Diadon as their final legacy to the nascent humanity. What distinguishes the *lodenlex* from its predecessors is its notionally written form, rendered without either their lyrical refrain or symbolic depictions: perhaps the first extant example of an alphabet and closest in style to the writings of antiquity; its scansion and prosody retains a poetical touch.

All known written languages of human invention are descended from this original script, noted in the way they contain lyrical verse that is exemplar of the poetics of antiquity. The *lodenlex* grimoires pertain to epics of the ancients and from these the Mousaion derives most of its understanding of the nature of the clans and the traditions that govern them, particularly those of succession, marriage, pavane, and vendetta.

SYLLABUS

Modern scholastic enquiry has only recently, within the last hundred years, moved beyond dependency on classical texts, even while grounding its enterprise within them. Such historic approaches have been tempered through the proliferation of new sciences and the refinement of formal reasoning. The Imperium provides each of its subjects with some modicum of education, although higher education remains the domain of the elite. As a public venture, these duties are of course shared between the Mousaion and the Luminary.

from Philosophy in Antiquity by Zarathustra

The Syllabus entails the contemporary section of the grimoire, containing works written after the founding of the Calendar. They are the works of early prophets and other stories of historic importance, concerning the Grand Narrative itself. It contains antiquated prose painstakingly preserved by antiquarians across the years.

PENTATEUCH

The first five books are the *Pentateuch*: five principle texts that are the combined liturgies of the five great poets; each is a collected volume of poetry and verse, which explores the various themes and principles of their inspiring Muse through allegory. Although each bears a different manner and style of writing, there exists certain symmetry among them.

CHRONICLE

The next books comprise a set of three volumes, constituting an orthodox historical account of humanity, called the *Chronicles*. The Pontifex provides the authoritative account of these works, being the contribution to humankind that elevated him to the status of Arcanum.

Its first volume is a concise expression of humanity's prehistory, collated from a vast repertoire of the most significant of epic poems from oral tradition. The second volume details the history of humanity's journey towards enlightenment, to account for many of the lives of prominent pre-Enlightenment philosophers and legendary heroes of yore; their works are rendered as theatrical manuscripts. These accounts succinctly depict the triumph of humanism and reason in narrative form, showing great continuity in their themes across the ages. The last of the *Chronicles* occurring during the Enlightenment, and follows the rise of modern literature.

MANUAL

The Mousaion often treats the next two books as one, being treatises on practices and methods for the cultivation of a chimerical life. As they address the development of the body and the mind respectively, they are of primary interest to the graces. The first the *Book of Hours* provides a framework for daily liturgical practices of the Calendar. The *Book of Flowers* is a series of riddles, philosophic conundrums, and narrative interpretations, designed to engage deep thought.

EPISTLE

The next body of texts contains a series of works called the Epistles. Each volume is one of a series of individual series of missives composed by masters of letters, often an historical *eminence grace*; each regarded as the epitome of literary composition, a masterpiece of the ages, with studies and writings pertaining thereunto. Each is referred to for its artistic mastery, its technical brilliance, its calligraphic technique, and its eloquence.

PROPHECY

The last section of the Syllabus is not meant for public reading. Here are the recorded prophecies, each inscribed by the Oracles directly as a series of narrative anecdotes. Though despite being written in past tense, prophesise events important to the future of humanity and the Eschaton.

Rubric

Rubrics are the principle arts of gramayre. They use alchemically prepared inks called gloss; they contain catalytic essence that imbues inscriptions with the weight of fate. Each inscription bears a vivid colour, which glows with gentle incandescence to the sight of those named in the rubric, perceivable with kenning. The utility of gloss gives nobles limited forms of gramayre; even as the graces are its undoubted masters.

Gloss produces a distinctive hue depending on the hue infused into the ink. The inks of glamour produce bright and fiery red text, engendering empathic links. The inks of velleity leave a vivid green tint that unites two to a common cause. Those of cool whist emanate a blue script, and curse their breach with dire consequence. These treated scripts react to the meaning of the words, binding their author to the letter of their writ.

Bell, Book, and Candle by Noferato.

EPISTOLARY

The inscription of rubrics necessitates a highly stylised prose, composed with lyrical flair that embraces the metaphors of romance and tragedy. With double entendre, rubrics make use of carefully devised stock phrases with meanings understood as a matter of convention. Their utility enables nobles to relate venal matters of debt, hostility, and consequence of breach under a veneer of civil pretence, which would be indecorous if delivered bluntly: veiling hostility with courtesy, indifference with interest, and friendship with prudence.

None have formally codified the particular semantics of these writings, for their use is ingrained by convention instead, their meaning implicit. Accordingly, the medium of gloss-inscribed notes enable the nobility to exchange in the vulgar and onerous task of negotiating the value of their work. Here the art of letters holds a highly regarded standing on matters of gramayre: the medium deployed in the inscription of rubrics for the purpose of prestation and oathbinding.

The Great Game places significance on written correspondence, wherein is found the heights of these epistolary arts as these correspondences entail the formal presentation of a political position to their recipient: ranging from things as small as an expression of interest through to an ultimatum or demand. Each is drafted, or at least reviewed, by the appropriate plenipotentiary; particularly those pertaining to treaties, statements of fact and law, manifestos, and other political declarations. Though they are not formally binding in the way favours and contracts are, they are natural extensions of the same craft.

Favours are now only epistolary works, written with attempt to show the skill of the writer. Accordingly, favours hold a revered place in the repertoire of communications, even when their sole purpose is the conveyance of news and personal affection. Inevitably, favours provide an opportunity for nobles to demonstrate their mastery of letters; rarest of rare are those letters inscribed by the superlative masters of the epistolary craft. Certainly, I can recall none who rose to the Senate or Auspice without such artistry, demonstrating flair in both composition and technique. These masterpieces are treasures of the ages, and we regard them as oeuvres; those in possession of such works take license to place them on display to demonstrate the prestige attendant with their possession.

from An Account of my Amusement by Valetoria Regina

In the time of telegraphy, the efficiency of communication has depreciated its sentimentality. As such, the handwritten favours become a laudable means of intimation; with notable examples including letters of apology, congratulations, and introduction. They facilitate the exchange of oath and obligation, and custom has developed to mediate this reciprocity through items of modest form, though bearing appropriate inscription.

from An Account of my Amusement by Valetoria Regina

STATIONARY

There are a great many devices employed in the presentation of rubrics, designed to elevate favours and contracts into artworks. The canvas for each note becomes the site of much craftwork. A great variety of techniques permit broad embellishment, including calligraphy, illustration, illumination, needlework, and ribbon work, and even security measures have been appropriated for artistry, as sealing wax, cryptograms; additionally, breach cylinders permit some small affect.

Stationary forms the foundation of the written arsenal. An investment in elegant or even personalised, stationary is meritorious; quality stationary frames the entirety of the note with poignancy. Although mass-produced stationary is available to the middle classes, only the elite savour the artistic merit of refined stationary; the best being custom-made by artisans in batches.

The deployment of refined envelopes conveys the quality of its contents even before its opening, promising a most distinguished correspondence; much like clearing the palate before sampling a fine wine. The most handsome style of stationary is that which is embossed, but the nobility reserves this medium for their luxury alone. Others may use printed cards if they are of the bourgeoisie, even though it signifies a person of industry rather than of quality.

PRESTATION

The art of prestation is the exchange of debt, all of which engenders accord. Among the nobility, there is a stratified system of favours emerging from a customary recognition of how debts arise among their kind. Formally, prestation uses tokens and favours to signify the recognition of that debt: though most entail debts of personal natures, certain members of prestige or plenipotentiary power may invoke the service of their house or order.

FAVOUR

Reconciling the depth of obligation between a given pair of nobles is one that nobles must negotiate, as the estimation of each service is entirely variable from noble to noble. The sense of

obligation they entailed could range from the trivial to the monumental. It was this incredible versatility that instigated the custom to accord obligations through promissory notes inscribed with gloss. Such promissory notes are favours and the culture surrounding them has evolved through time. The custom of highly elaborate favours remains reserved for important occasion, or for the credentialing of certain dignitaries.

The reception and rejection of favours is highly politicised: to receive a favour is to recognise and entreat with the sender; to maintain possession of one is to acknowledge the amity or perhaps enmity that stands between the two; to recall any such favours is an irrevocable termination of association. Likewise, the disposal of a favour expresses scorn for the author, implying that the subject is not worthy of response. Worse still, is the rejection of a favour by returning it to the sender unopened, thereby expressing a candid disrespect for its author, refusing to recognise their name. Nobles do not make such refusals lightly, as they may potentially jeopardise relations.

Customs have developed around the display of favours, which communicate certain subtleties that none can state or express in visible manner, without revealing expressions that intimate affection, support, or acknowledgement. Whether present upon the mantelpiece, or otherwise placed on prominent display, they stand as public declaration of association or familiarity.

Diplomats often have a substantial compliment of epistolary tactics. Chief among them are *bouts de papier*: a brief presented to the visiting dignitary prior to formal engagements; its few scant lines conveying the intention of any given meaning. They are prepared without attribution to avoid bearing any official status, and thereby render them as a personal courtesy of practical convenience. Mostly, *bouts de papier* are passed discretely across a table while conversation is engaged. They permit a tacit invitation to enquire on matters informally; a means by which they can communicate things outside of the remit of their formal engagement. These supplement the classic tools of negotiations, and can yield surprising amenability towards seemingly irreconcilable positions.

Elsewise, diplomats employ *demarches*: simple, and off-the-record, presentations of policy statements to foreign nobles, particularly when they do not wish to avow formally the position they have adopted or advanced in the paper but wish to air certain ideas. *Demarches* are used to make less formal representations or protests. They contain an objective, an argument, a relevant subject background, suggested talking points, and other written material with instructions thereon.

from The Vindication of the Aristocracy by Vivian Grey

TOKEN

The exchange of tokens supplements the custom of giving favours. These are calling cards bearing a monogram of the noble's cipher, as inscribed with gloss. They are efficacious, communicating both *synonyme* and minutiae of relevant information. The provision of a cipher in this manner signifies some measure of familiarity; it implicitly permits the recipient to use that name with a modicum of friendship. Because they proffer only obligations of trivial effect, it is customary to exchange these tokens during a formal introduction. Likewise, it is not unusual for such tokens to be left as signs of condolence or celebration in dire and happy occasion.

Calling cards equivocate between modesty and amity: they are deliberately ambiguous on this distinction, to thereby facilitate that line between the formal and familiar. Their placement is frequently surreptitious to signal certain propositions: a fold upon the top-right corner indicates tribute; a fold of the top-left indicates intentions of business; when folded in the bottom-right it expresses extreme urgency; a fold in the bottom-left indicates acknowledgement.

Tokens represent a component of the custom of receptions, whereby a visitor may call upon someone at their residence and leave a token so as not to unnecessarily intrude into domestic privacy. A visitor leaves a token at the door, which the staff then conveys to its intended recipient, to signal the intention to call upon them. While custom permits one to reject a token, no limitation exists as to the number of times a determined caller may attempt to leave their token. Likewise, a noble may only invoke the implicit favour of a token if that token is not rejected.

SEAL

A noble may press a seal upon favours of great value, as they bear the cipher of their house or order. Affixing a seal upon a favour means the obligations of that favour are claimable from any of that house or order; they understandably represent acts or dues done towards the benefit of that faction. The power to imprint a seal in this manner is the purview of those appointed as diplomats of that house or order. These figures are empowered with signet rings, which bears their emblem such that they may emboss the seal.

There are three ranks of seal, being an imprint, and the lesser seal and the greater seal. Imprints are mere impressions made upon a note through an inked stamping of the seal. They signify the

authority of a Missive of the faction to carry the administrative powers of that office. A lesser seal entails an orichalcum foil embossed onto the page, which carries the authority of an Envoy's vocative powers. Lastly, the greater seal imitates the lesser but the author embellishes the foil with ribbon and illuminations and it is then placed on vellum, not paper. These seals bear the full plenipotentiary powers of an Emissary.

OATH

Oathbinding is an extension rubrics that binds the nobility to their promises. Like favours, oaths entail an obligation written before an appropriate witness, binding the speaker to their words. For good reason, the nobility attend to oaths with careful reverence; their agreements made prudently and their obligations forsworn with trepidation.

The traditions of oath-binding predate eve the customs of prestation, for their forms are deeply ingrained throughout human history. Because the practice of oath-binding renders the duties of an oath into written form, the semantics of each is vitally important, binding by the letter of their statements, rather than their sentiment.

Nobles attend to the writ of each oath with careful precision, taking delicate care in the choice of their words, lest they construe a reckless oath that binds them for good or for ill, or until freed from its duty. For these reasons, the designing of oaths elicits certain ceremony, giving nobles time to pause and consider their construction by sheer dint of requiring premeditation.

The Mousaion reigns over matters of oaths, more so than matters of favour and prestation. Unlike favours, oaths require a properly solemnisation over its signing. For signature invoke a name, just as favours do. A noble may swear upon any name they possess but to do is to consign the virtue of one's own reputation on that name.

There was a darker period of history when graces indulged their privileges solemnises promises with casual manner. Today, there is a great measure of proprietary custom, which mediates such contracts into more civil forms: the graces invited interested parties to negotiate the terms of their agreement before settling upon them, and only then enforcing those oaths once mutual assent is achieved. Consequently, the nobility often prefers to draw up their oaths in writing, ensuring that the precise language is agreed to.

from The Vindication of the Aristocracy by Vivian Grey

Tiends are covenants brokered with the *intellectus* of a given domain. Each is a contract, forged with blood, evoking ancient customs solemnised in ritual performed every seven-year, with an accompanying renewal of the original sacrifice. Of the more common are those that permit the alienation of the ward to become an embassy: distinct, while not truly removed. Other somewhat common tiends are compacts between two domains, which once would have been crucial to forging trod between those domains through the bramblewoods.

Otherwise, tiends represents compacts both eldritch and modern, between agents of either the Seasonal Courts of the faerie or the Cardinal Pylons of the takwin. In doing so, they establish links with that domain towards the elements of that Court or Pylon. An affinity towards a Court induces a climate relative to that season, while those towards a Pylon affect the mineral composition of the land.

from Philosophy in Antiquity by Zarathustra

PROMISE

A rightly sworn promise manifests in one of two forms. Pledges are those promises made on one's own behalf, while troths or trusts describe bargains and agreements sworn between two or more persons. In each instance, the parties write the wording of the oath upon the parchment, and then sign them in gloss. The gloss-scribed signature binds the noble to the words upon that page.

Nobles are careful to ensure that the letter of these oaths are rendered clear and succinct and also to ensure that no space remains unmarked for the insertion of new additional clauses; lest they become sworn to those words as well.

Contracts are nominal troths, forging agreements and bargains between two or more nobles, while covenants and treaties reflect those that occur between estates instead. Parties execute contracts in two or more parts, to then partition the document through a stylised cut known as a chirograph. Deeds are a particular type of contract that entails the consignment of property or title: to indicate the singular nature of their execution, they have their edges polled or cut.

Vows represent a particular type of pledge, usually holding long-lasting and solemn significance, such as those vows of fealty allegiance and affiliation. Because vows follow a prescribed format, with words entrenched in tradition and custom sometimes harking back to time immemorial, one need not write them out each time. It is far more usual for the creation of corporal tomes inscribed with a given vow, where those who would attest the vow may sign upon one of its many lines.

Corporal tomes are useful because they are imbued subtly with sufficient respect that the mere act of signing in the book stands as testimony. That is, the tome becomes a surrogate for having to testify in front of a member of the Mousaion.

BREACH

To breach an oath carries dire consequences. Firstly, when a noble breaches an oath, the act sullies that name. All instances of that particular name as rendered in gloss fade from their typical subtle luminescence into a stark inky black. All who gaze upon the signature with kenning will observe that they have sullied that name.

Different social consequences attend the breach of different oaths. To swear upon one's *voranyme* signifies an oath of personal and intimate significance; most nobles swear oaths of matrimony, pavane, and vendetta upon their *voranyme*. Their personal nature and intrinsic connection to the noble's sense of self induces nightmares and other terrible maladies of the mind. Of those troths and trusts of clandestine nature, or those of truly potent natures, a noble might be obliged to swear upon their *voranyme*.

More frequently, when the oath concerns nobles who are not on familiar terms but enter formal relations, the nobles swear upon their *heilonyme*. To break with these oaths brings dire social consequence, leading to ostracism and possibly exile. To break with these sworn oaths means the noble sullies their noble being until the matter receives restitution.

Of course, a noble may swear upon a house or charter name, but a breach of that name causes the issue to falls to the house or charter to provide restitution. Breaches of oaths sworn upon *synonymes* bring shame upon their entire lot, which may result in the expulsion from their number.

In the instance of diplomatic treaties, a plenipotentiary power may sign with one of their diplomatic names. In doing so, they are swearing upon their station and reputation in the international community. The disavowal of these oaths will resonate deeply and drastically upon the host nation or caste.

The Intimation of Favour by Soturisii.

Delirium

Beyond the threshold of waking lies the Delirium, a formless and endless dreamscape shared by many. The Delirium is a mythic realm, a fictitious echo of the physical world cast in the relief of essence and symbolism.

Where the waking world is a physical space, the dreaming realm is a fathomless place of things imaginary and true. If one were to liken the waking world to the conscious mind, then the dreaming realms are the sleeping psyche beneath. Without the Delirium, the laws of the skein would not exist, for their chimerical laws are those of Dreams, of Destiny, and Death. Its depths contain powerful immaterial engines that imperceptibly influence the waking world.

Wayfarers of the Planetarium note that the areas of the Widderslainte nearest mirrors are perfect replicas of the Tellurium, even while they fade at the periphery of sight. The more removed from such a point of reflection, the stranger and more twisted the realm becomes.

from My Pilgrimage by Harold Childe

The dreaming trance is one of the oldest and most reverend practices of the clergy. The art of guiding a supplicant into this state is our first and foremost task, the one upon which all our custom and station is founded upon. We are the guardians of dreams, and custodians of all that lies beyond the veil. For guiding people into that soporific trace, the musing, is the definitional task of the graces, who must assume as near a likeness to the Muses as their mortal forms permit. Our task is to amuse.

from The Waking Dream by Matilda Mulfstan

Both the Imago and the Shadow commune carefully with the noble; whispering to the noble's higher ideals and instincts respectively. Both shadow and imago know the noble in intimate fashion: the shadow offers the indulgence of vice while the imago appeals to the noble's virtues. Both begin as little more than a susurrus, but as imago and shadow grow they start to become distinct and disembodied intellects.

from The Birth of Rhyme and Reason by Zarathustra

Widderslaite

The Widderslainte comprises the shallows of the Delirium; they are the lands just beyond the mirror, which may haunt even those in a state of wakefulness. Like the Delirium, the Widderslainte shapes according to metaphor and allegory, yet reflects the waking world in an uncanny echo; it is a land strangely similar to the waking realm, and yet not, wrought into a mockery.

The architecture should not be. The plant-life is strange and twisted. People mill about in an odd but familiar manner, and a plethora of things creep erstwhile into shadows. Unbidden sights flit at the periphery of vision. For all that there exists a ground their colours fade beneath the overcast skies fog and shadow that shroud the horizons. Sounds may be strained, seeming dislocated, with no apparent source. The air carries an odour of burnt ozone and the foods are flat and tasteless.

TROD

Entrance and egress into and out of the Widderslainte is accomplished by way of trods: naturally occurring portals, leading into and out of the Widderslainte; often connecting a specific locus within the Widderslainte to the Tellurium. They display a great diversity of forms, such as a ring of mushrooms or an ornate wardrobe; both usually require some trigger to bring about their opening, whether a specific glyph drawn in the sand at dusk, or the laughter of a child. As the Widderslainte is the realm behind the mirrors, reflective surfaces natural tend to form into trods. Many may also use mirrors to create temporary trods, particularly upon the hours of Dawn and Dusk.

REVERIE

The Reverie is a sacred journey into the Widderslainte, through the corners of the mind and into the realms invisible beyond. There are those among the Mousaion that show a natural propensity to step into the Widderslainte, even during moments of wakefulness; these talents are cultivated and treasured. More often, the querent that seeks the Reverie requires guided assistance to enter into the trance-state, known as a musing. The musing may be aided with meditative training, or with hypnogogic and entheogenic philtres.

A person may undergo three Reveries during their lifetime, being such a sacred journey into the dreamlands. Each Reverie follows a narrative format, which begins as they enter traverse a threshold into the Widderslainte. There, they set out upon a dream quest where they attain some

grand exaltation before finally returning home. While this follows a conventional sequence, each querent takes the journey differently and each step may significantly vary. Certain steps may also be very fleeting or simply absent from the story.

The questing nature of the Reverie is one part odyssey and one part pilgrimage into the Widderslainte. Each accords to ancient mythic legendary path of narrative significance. Such quests are difficult, fraught with peril, and set to challenge the querent.

DEPARTURE

The departure is the first stage of any quest begins as the querent prepares for their journey into the Widderslainte. A number of the challenges await them that test the resolve of querent, which typically confronts them with an imminent threat or imposes a dilemma to the querent. They challenge the querent with losing something important for the sake of venturing into the unknown; their choice is central for it sets a critical tone for the remainder of the quest.

When the querent makes the decision, they receive visions or portents about the quest. Though these are frequently revealed through the advice of oracular or sagacious figures encountered upon the quest, who then follows in accompaniment for certain duration. These insights are the key to revealing themes, motifs and patterns that of their Reverie.

THRESHOLD

The threshold is where the querent steps into the Widderslainte through the torpid state of the musing. The noble enters the musing, leaving them in the deepest of trances: most perform this act within a symbolic hollow, such as a clearing in the forest, or an ethereal cavern. Upon entering, the querent encounters their Shadow, which seeks to subvert, assault, or waylay the querent.

Through a Mirror Darkly
by Tomasz Belzowski.

The querents are rebuked them for their folly, undermined for pride, and otherwise confronted with some significant aspect of their psyche; each strips them of some of their sense of self, leaving the ego behind. In doing so the querent learns something about themselves, an aspect of their inner selves, a hidden truth about their journey, or some other relatively critical piece of information.

Imago by Rich Longmore.

INITIATION

Upon the initiation, the querent has passed a point of no return and the only way out of the Reverie is to go forward, to see their quest to completion. Having passed the threshold, they encounter a sign or portent of the object of their quest. All of these challenges form as a physical ordeal, some environmental bastions they must prevail over: towers of iron, walls of fire, and gauntlets of thorn and blood. The ordeal attempts to whittle the querent down to a point of exhaustion: physically and emotionally.

Should they overcome this gauntlet, the querent contends with their heart's desire, the prize of their quest. Yet in this moment, they must confront the untempered skein, revealed in its full glory. At this point, they have reached the apex of the quest and passed all their personal trials. They may take their prize and whatever secrets they have wrought from their own psyche.

RETURN

Having completed the tasks, the querent must find their way back to waking; yet in this culmination, they fall to jeopardy. They have stolen a spark of the sublime and now the Widderslainte acts to prevent their escape; it is a flight from danger that harries the querent.

Upon reaching their point of origin, the querent must once last time encounter the guardian upon the threshold. Where before it was the Shadow now they must face their Imago; it tests their worth to pass out of the Widderslainte with their prize. In passing, the querent returns to wakefulness their journey is complete. The knowledge and challenges they encountered on their Reverie have tempered their power with wisdom.

APOTHEOSIS

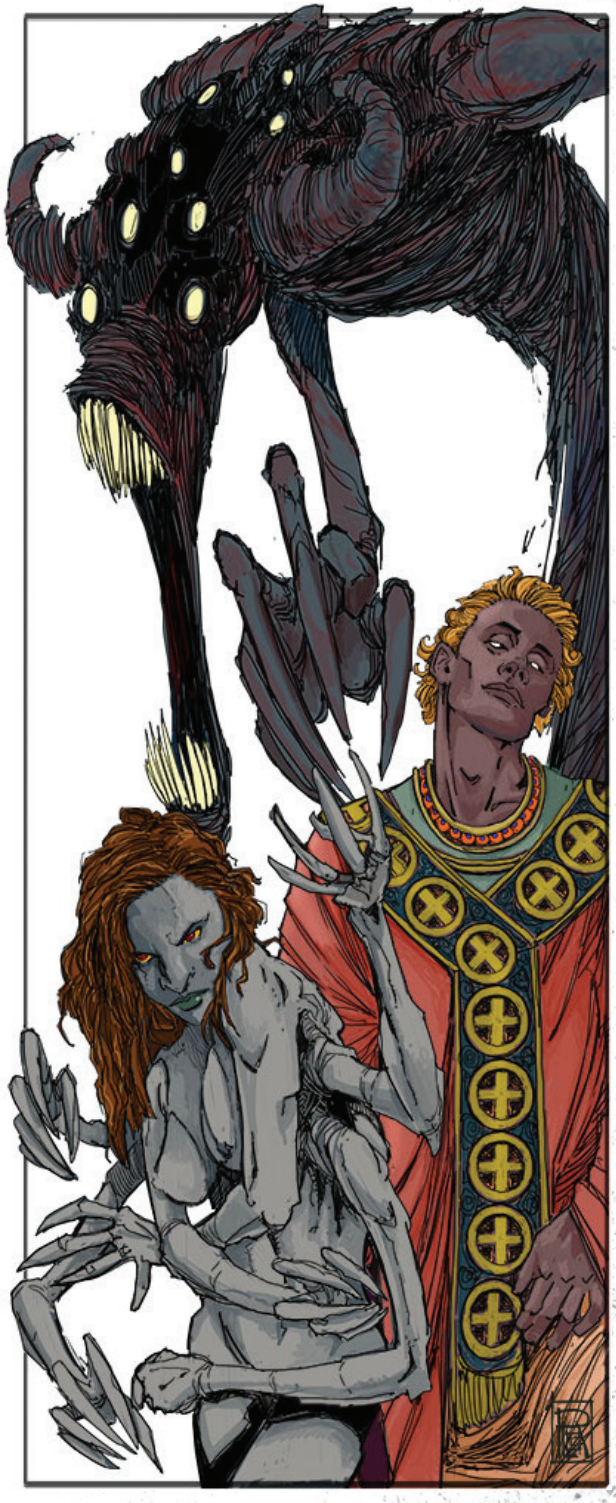
Upon each successful Reverie, the noble becomes infused with voluminous essence. Their affinity with the skein deepens and provokes a transubstantiation of their flesh; this expunges earthly substance and replaces it with the essence of story. With each stage, the skein subsumes the coil of their mortality, pushing them more and more towards a transcendental figure: more story than flesh. With each transubstantiation, the Imago and Shadow grows with power.

ACTOR AND ID

The lowest rank of both Imago and Shadow are the Memes and Ids respectively. They are the most limited in power, capable only of the merest flicker of influence by manipulating sensory information. Both commune carefully with the noble; whispering to the noble's higher ideals and

instincts respectively. Both Shadow and Imago know the noble in intimate fashion: the Shadow offers the indulgence of vice while the Imago appeals to the noble's virtues. Both begin as little more than a susurrus, but as Imago and Shadow grow they start to become distinct intellects.

The nobles that pass the first Reverie of the Epiphany possess both Meme and Id; they comprise the vast majority of nobles in both the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie. They are those just wakened to their nature, having only an elementary command of fate. These are the powers-nobles, styled with Lord or Lady.



AVATAR AND DAEMON

The median rank of Imagines and Shadows are the Avatars and Daemons; both are capable of acting upon the thoughts and feelings of mortal-kind, pushing and pulling the context and meaning around them, twisting words and ideas about.

As the fiftieth nameday approaches, nobles must contend with the Fugue, the second Reverie. Here the querent enters into a deep slumber and partly enters the Widderslainte in the flesh. Should they return successful, the noble becomes a semi-sublime figure, an enduring fiction that stays the mortal coil to achieve a form of immortality, unable to die until their celebrity fades.

These nobles have become people of urban legend and folk story. They are a *cause celebre* as they achieve a nigh-immortality, sustained directly by the celebrity of their ventures. They cease to age and prove resilient against death. Provided they attend to the needs of their personal fictions, they retain these benefits staying the coil of mortality for many years. When they finally pass, they lapse into the torpor of quiescence rather than final death. The Mousaion refers to such personages as powers-eminent, with the style of 'Your Eminence'.

ARCHON AND GENIUS

The most powerful of Imagines and Shadows are the Archons and the Genii, where the distinction between earthly presence and their chimerical natures falls away. The Archon and Genius may completely subsume their vessel as a narrative conduit, making such nobles less of an independent agent and more of a living archetype of the skein.

As the powers-eminent attain fame, their own legendary eventually overshadows them. History recalls their deeds and duties but their personal idiosyncrasies are lost; they have become known more by their fictions than their truths. This is the Eclipse, where the fiction the noble has created all but subsumes them; what once sustained them now threatens to overwhelm and destroy all remnants of personality.

These nobles may take one last Reverie, but one where the querent steps entirely into the Widderslainte: they either transcend their mortality entirely or become a permanent resident of the dreaming realms, or else they are undone and scattered into its ether. Having transcended the world, they have come to exemplify a

Shadow by Rich Longmore.

given archetype as very literal *zeitgeists*: they have come to embody a narrative ideal so completely they leave an indelible mark on the collective psyche of the Realm as an embodiment of their age.

Their accounts become works of epic proportion and they become fundamentally transformed: they cease to be a being of flesh but instead are story incarnate; they are a veritable living legend. Upon this final threshold they are truly immortal: for as long as their story endures, they cannot truly die. These are the superlative powers, better known as *powers principal*, with their style of address as 'Your Majesty'.

Oneiromancy

Most sorcery is a personal working, able to affect only the personal histories of the grace in question. For the truly masterful workings of history, the magnum opera of the immortals and primordials alike, one must seek out the skein itself through the Widderslainte. Here in the never-where and the always-hence, the past, present, and future converge.

The Oracle is the person most gifted in this task, able to slip into the half-waking trance of the ecstasis at will; however, the Effigy is said to remain in a permanent such state. When the psyche is properly opened to these realms-invisible, the whole of history lays before one.

Writing in the Delirium is highly metaphorical. Books often present themselves almost literally, although their words take up a life of their own: tamer tomes, like narrative fictions, simply present visual depictions of the same; weighty volumes attain a gravitas, with words depending off the page. Advertisements and public notices, however, rarely say what they mean, and the written expression tends to express their intention, simply stating that it solicits one's money or provide negative commentary. Similarly, hand-written messages express the sentiment of the writer, revealing clues as to their purpose. Other signs that have the purpose of directing a person will express strange truth about the destination: whether 'the long way home', 'hidden resting spot', or even more blatant expressions like 'dangerous alley'.

Signposts do exist in urban locales, but are fickle and subject to whimsical change. Notorious examples include those that point left while bearing the sigil 'right'; others bear imperatives, to wit: 'look behind you'. One need not travel far to witness other perversities: a sign reading 'you are deceiving yourself', another stating 'quiet thinking only', and yet others declaring 'use both lanes'. Those that do reveal true paths blend into the background, be that into architecture or foliage: such signs are secretive, revealing their secrets coyly.

from Mythopoeia by Leubald Geyer

ECSTASIS

Sorcery opens the psyche towards the extraordinary: the further one steps into the surreal mythic lands of the Widderslainte, the more one contends with the incoherent irrationality of dreams and things one cannot comprehend. Sorcery is a thing of unreason and, like fire, is a good servant but a poor master. Its price is the danger of madness: though a small savings grace means is that these consequences are but transient; exacting a price upon the hapless noble, to fade by Dawn or Dusk.

Ecstasis is a state of sleepwalking that nobles sometimes experience upon encountering the phantasmagorical phenomena of the Widderslainte: the mind is both awake and asleep simultaneously as the Delirium and Tellurium converge, to catches the subject between two tides. Should ecstasis fall upon the noble by day, is it naught but daydream, where benign and mythic themes overlay their perception of reality. The greatest danger posed through such daydreaming is the harms induced by their altered perceptions. Far more terrifying are the nightmares, when ecstasis takes the sorcerer by night. The noble falls comatose and becomes a conduit for the subconscious mind: literal beautified dreams and terrible horrors manifest into the immediate vicinity, and the local surrounds seems to be plunged into the Widderslainte.

The ecstasis typically needs to run its own course: daydreams usually lasting a single hour but the nightmares remain until the Dawn. It is also possible but dangerous to shock one in ecstasis into wakefulness, though such actions typically leave lingering insomnia that plagues the noble. The final option is to induce the noble into a deep and proper sleep, which leaves them listless and lethargic upon waking. Either insomnia or lethargy may reside for a week or more.

PROPHECY

Prophecy is a work of oneiromancy, where shadows and visions of the future reveal themselves to the erstwhile dreamer. The most renowned contemporaneous prophets are the Vagabond and the Oracle. Gleaning prophecy requires specialised forms of ecstasis, where the mind wanders the distant shores of the Widderslainte. Here all the portents of the future lay as a multitude of paths, and only the most powerful oneiromancers may travel upon them; the Oracle and Vagabond among them.

Upon the first midnight stroke of the 20th Century, Zarathustra pronounced the Twilight Times and the coming Eschaton, he hailed the Superman and the decline of civilisation as the new century would suffer total war. Among his musings, Zarathustra foresees the failing of the skein, and of the growing disbelief in myth. His works are divided into ten quatrains prophesying each successive decade of the Century.

As the Grand Narrative comes to a close its impetus will unravel: as it falls apart, the narrative conventions that maintains empire will falter and diminish. Technological mastery shall supplant narrative power, and the masses will acquire the liberty previously not enjoyed. In place of fate as written by the Author, subjects shall beget their own mythopoeia, to write their own stories.

1900

This quatrain hails the thousand million people residing in Metropolaris alone, noting its equilibrium against those numbers who live in provincial homes: a balance between city and country. It extols a culture embracing technology and industry, bringing multitude together in untold numbers, and engendering a particular social order.

The masses have become a faceless and teething multitude of impersonal identities. They gain affluence and hunger dawns for new conventions: a culture of populism takes hold through multi-media theatre of the streets and the Silver Screen. These contrast the baroque pageantry of the aristocracy. As such media spreads, the modes and means of liturgy evolve and devolve, causing great contention.

Zarathustra writes his prophecies in prosodic verse, each quatrain elaborating on a single decade: he refers to the entirety of the epoch euphemistically as the Century, with the allusion that it contains the most transformative stories of the Realm's history in this hundred-year span.

From The Grand Narrative by Leubald Geyer

1910

The next quatrain calls this decade the Diamond Age: a period where imperialism reaches its apogee as a resplendent perfect jewel that lies between the modernity of the last century and the travails of the coming.

A period of austerity defines the era, with the excesses of imperialism ground in the embrace of machinery and technological growth. The emerging *art-nouveau* supplants the baroque splendour of imperialism, which touches its architecture, interior design, industrial design and all many visual arts. As the decade progresses, Metropolaris burgeons with uncountable buildings that scrape the sky; airships flit in great numbers overhead; and the commercial trips to the planetary colonies become commonplace. Upon its height, the decade falls to crisis as doom befalls the grandchild of the Invictus, and grim calamity decimates the populace.

The beginning of the Century marks the heights of imperialism as the estates of the Imperium reaches their peak, accompanied by a diminishing role of the nobility. The ideal of the noble gives way to that of the Superman: the model of the noble redefined through new heroics, one that is a defender of the public interest, rather the embodiment of the masque.

from The Speeches of Zarathustra by Zarathustra

1920

The next quatrain relates an end of imperialism. The imperial regime enjoys one final period glory, only to fade with the closing of the decade. As imperialism consolidates its foreign holdings, urbanisation comes more readily to the provincial domains overturning agrarian lifestyles.

Faerie and takwin immigrants bring in increasing foreign cultural influences. The decade promises to be a time of the people, where the institutions of the ages falter and crumble. There will be vast prosperity across the empire, which is then accessed by increasing numbers of commoners, who begin to discern the fabric of the skein itself. Instead of the traditional politics of the established institutions, wild and radical philosophies are forthcoming.

1930

The prosperity of the empire falters as the Invictus falls to quiescence; it begets social cataclysm, casting the great affluence of Metropolaris as decadent. Trust in the Imperium fragments and the

economy collapses, beginning ten long years of poverty and discontent. Labour networks and urbanite populations usurp traditional rule, the aristocracy met by a technologically sophisticated populace. In place of old monarchies, the League of Nations is elevated in place of where the Imperium once stood: heroes of the revolutions and new powers principle through nationalism; though considered nobles by contemporaries, they will eschew such titles for less assuming terms.

1940

The fifth decade will see a pogrom on noble decadence: a Ritter, spurning artistry for populist fervour, replaces the Chancellor. He forges a diplomatic allegiance with a new power of the East, named Stannum, and they begin to purge the remains of the old regime. As Chancellor, the Ritter commissions a new Oracle: she will be an automaton to herald the new era. Her name will be Fortuna, the Iron Maiden, and her efforts will impose the expurgation of irrationality.

To this end, she will create her own supermen. In the East, she will temper Stannum with cold metal and forge him into the Tin Man. In the West, Fortuna will take a farm boy, Karl Eli, and imbue him with great strength. It is the man of the West, that man of steel, who becomes the new Centurion to serve as the big brother to the Western realm. Fortuna's final solution will be a pogrom on those of night-breed being in great numbers; all carried out by the Storm Troops, an agency of clandestine officers lead by Captain Bulldog, the Black Mask, Ace Spade, and Jim Bond. For all their misdeeds, they shall be cast as heroes on the Silver Screen.

In this era a terrible catastrophe comes. It starts with the greatly depressing economic collapse of the Imperium and the rise of new totalitarian regime. No period will ever see as much political turmoil or as many countless deaths as this era. The most horrifying being ethnic cleansings, and new forms of mechanised warfare that all consume the bodies of the populace into the great engine of tyranny.

from The Speeches of Zarathustra by Zarathustra

1950

This decade will pass with broad revolts against the military complex of Metropolaris: the Eastern resistance deploys hedge craft to subvert the technocratic rule; those in the West develop secret technologies against their regents. Both sides will act from the depths of the Labyrinth, with victory achieved through two deeds. First, the conversion of Centurion to the popular cause; the second, being dissidents breaking lines of power in the East with their secretive crafts.

The Centurion leads an insurrection, ultimately confronting Fortuna. The decade concludes with the resistance developing a weapon of mass destruction, the deliberate wide-scale fraying of history. The impact will shatter the city of Metropolaris and aggrieves its population. The League of Nations enter into a compact to rebuilding the city. Alas, despite these new alliances, tensions bloom along Eastern and Western borders.

1960

Tensions between the East and West escalate with the death of Stannum: in his wake, new powers seize control in the power vacuum to form an Eastern bloc. They lead an attempt to revise history, rejecting Western narratives. In counterpoint, new waves of Western corporations seek to extend influence across the Realm with enticing new products. These tensions manifest through the bramblewoods: the Iron Curtain blooms within the briars as barbed wire and concrete blocks, dividing Metropolaris in half overnight. The skies filled with low-etheric satellites to protect the borders and only underground routes through the Labyrinth provide sufficient ways through.

The underlying tensions will reach a climax in the Damocles Crisis: both sides develop devices with the capacity to bring a star falling from the heavens onto their enemies. Under this cold war of stars, the populace of Metropolaris retreats into the Labyrinth, fuelling a resurgence of counter culture; the travails underground catalysing a great many changes of humanity into mummers.

1970

While the tensions on the Firmament remain cold, outright conflict erupts among the planetary colonies; all sides seeking to lay siege to the Empyrean and be the first to claim its luminance. These conflicts tear the very fabric of the skein, and its narrative influence wanes on the course of history, leaving cold meaningless Reason to drive it forward. As the decade wears on, wonder drains from the face of the Realm, to wreak terrible affliction upon Palladium: slowly, but surely, the massive spire withers, its wood petrifies with metal ore, till all that remains is a massive spire of twisted iron.

This will herald the fading of the Hinterlands from the farthest shores and the closing of the deeper routes in the Labyrinth. All will leave the Literate devoid of its neighbouring empires, leaving humanity alone.

1980

The penultimate decade will see the cessation of bipolar conflict that had shaken the Realm to its foundations, cleaving East and West. This waning of belligerence will become a time briefly celebrated as the Serenade; it is precipitated by an energy crisis as methods of light cultivation begin to fade. All forces ardent enemies to engage diplomatically.

The tides of Somnolence weal upon the Realm once more: stagnation grips the Eastern Bloc; Western materialism loses its connection to the Delirium. The Bloc collapses, the Iron Curtain withers.

1990

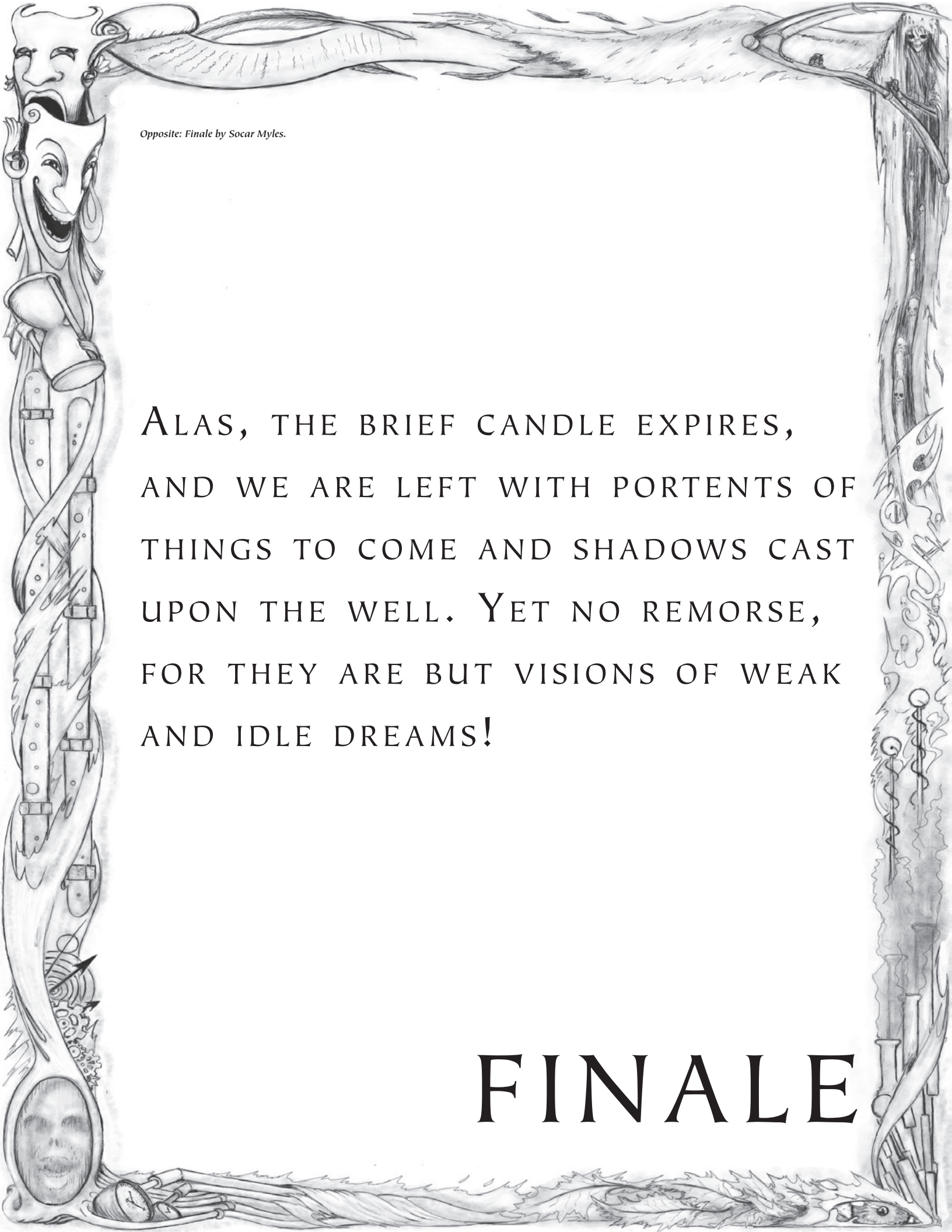
In these final days, a remnant of true humanity will seize power: the Twilight Imperium. In ascending to the heights of the iron spire, once Palladium, they claim Diadem. These are the Aeon and they will bring history to its final place. Their nature as human, faerie, or takwin is unknown, yet they claim supremacy over all causality.

The endgame of these events remains unknown, except for a few facts: an aethership called the Evensong crashes into the Pendulum, causing it to crash into the Realm below.

History stops.

The Century comes to a close; the Realm, a shadow of its former self: the lights of the Orrery suffuse and fade into a wan, twilight glow. All the places beyond the limits of the Literate sunder: the vault of the heavens close, and the deepest fathoms crumble to vestigial remains. The rambling briar woods choke and thin, leaving only ironweed thorns in faded thickets to mark old barriers. Most of humanity will expire, leaving night-breed only.

from The Speeches of Zarathustra by Zarathustra



Opposite: Finale by Socar Myles.

Alas, the brief candle expires, and we are left with portents of things to come and shadows cast upon the well. Yet no remorse, for they are but visions of weak and idle dreams!

FINALE

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Whitestone (artefact): 16, 21-22, 37 - *see also*: *Blackrock; keystone.*

Wicht, the - *see*: *changeling.*

Widderslainte, the: 167, 199, 332, 345, **345-348**, 345-346 - *see also*: *Delirium, the; see herein*: *trod.*

wildling: 10, **195-196** - *see herein*: *Bane; Garou; Lykan; Scathe; Warg.*

Winebach Clan, the: 98-100, **111-112**, 149, 316 - *see*: *clan; Dawn; magus; Nyx; Pommeline;.*

Withywindle, the - *see*: *Palladium, the World Tree.*

Woad, the - *see*: *takwin.*

wood - *see*: *elements.*

Wyvern, the - *see*: *dragon.*

Y

yliaster - *see*: *exotica.*

Z

Zarathustra, the Vagabond - *see*: *Vagabond, the.*

Zenith Caste, the: **151-152** - *see also*: *caste; Jagen; Maystern; Rothshart; see herein*: *Anat; Telesilla.*

Zephyr, the Western Pillar: 197 - *see*: *Cardinal Pillars.*

Zodiac, the - *see*: *Ophanim.*

Zomorrod, the Emerald City - *see*: *Agartha.*

Zoubari Clan, the: 92-94, **113-114**, 155 - *see*: *bard; clan; Inari; Nadir; Rosaline.*

Map

The Map of the Realm by Robert Althauer.

Bjarma
Skania
Kvenuu
Seayland
Fenmark
Thanelands
Suddene
Westernesse
Aneon
Frisia
Union of Albion
Lyonesse
Reynes
Arelat
Thanemark
Rodinan Hegemony
Copok
Samartia
Luteva
Gaullic Republic
Guyenne
Ker-Lys
Metropolaris
Bogdan
Erdeal
Sublime Cimmerian Satrapy
Verona
Valach
Qirim
Thrace
Macedon
Andalus
Toletum
Genoa
Anatolia
Iberian State
Magna Italica
Hellenic Electorate
Thermiscrya
Caspian Reach
Granata
Nys
Napoly
Vesperides
Barbary Coast
Numidia
Tanith

Imperial Patrons

Grant Chapman
Brett Easterbrook
Ken Finlayson
Kylee Hartman
Scott Kehl
Emma O'Dea
Andrew Rogers
Amelia Rowe
Ana Silva
Christian Taylor
Ben Williams

NOBLE PATRONS

James Bruce
Cameron Lam
Lawrence Lovoy
Luke Shilson-Josling
Tim Weston

PATRONS

Kim Apted
Peter Aronson
Antoine Boegli
Jess Blacklock
Thomas Bull
Asher Cameron
Emily Chamberlain
Rhys Collas
Alexanda Coughlin
Jyan Craig Delamotte
Licelot Deno
Stephen Dewey
Kirk Dorton
Todd Dowling
Michael Elsby
Anne Forster
John Galea
Symon Geanellos
Oliver Granger
Adelaide Knowles
Jack Lesnie
Anne Oberin
Kathleen O'Brien
Matt Leitzen
Janet Lovoy
Jack Mac
Tom McGrath
David Morgans
Odette Neumann
Christine Page-Hanify
Richard Pratt
Alex Peake
Norbert Riedl
Clinton Rickards
Elizabeth Rowe
Anna Sommerville
Galen Sturgess
John Taber
Ingrid van Torengen
Karl Warlow
Conrad White
Stephen Whittle
Tim Yates
Kristian Zirnsak
***
Nat Barmore
Archie Cooper
Emmett Cooper
Charles Grey
Damian Griffen
Cedric Jeanneret
Armin Marth
David Plain
Tim Scriven
***
Elizabeth Alexander
Josh Griffeths
Elena Jeffreys
Al King
Michael Manto
John Nowakowski
Elizabeth Rowe
William Ward
***
Sam Baran
Jacqueline Brocker
Gayda de Mesa
Raven Delahunty
Francine Dismorr
Jayce Guardo
Gavin Kenny
Emily Lloyd
Steven Lyons
Vicky Marks
Raymond Mitchell
Brian Nowosatka
Rachel Pridham
Andrew Sadler
Robert Snars
Joseph Sweeney
Linette Voller
Sabdh Warren
Jeremy Whalen
Saul Whitton
Jane Williams
Gina Wilson

BY MOONLIGHT'S TRIP WE SET THE PACE,
AS GODS AND MONSTERS JOIN THE RACE;
FOR DESTINY, A COURSE IT CHARTS,
AND HEARKENS US TO UNKNOWN PARTS.
THE QUICKENING, IT NEARS!

The stage is set, the game begun;
Lo: by blood and thunder won!
When girt by swords of gild and rust;
Their glamour wins our weary trust,
With sweetly-bitter tears.

Where lords and ladies sorely tread,
With foolish whimsy traipsing stead,
Their pageantry exacts its cost,
From those whose opera is lost
Such is the dance of peers.

Upon our sleeves, our blazons worn,
Declaring valiant hearts reborn.
Their patter, to the dulcet thrum,
A march proclaiming empire come;
To reign for many years.

From gloaming, first our course is run,
Till witching hour, our dark deeds done.
Nigh swiftly draws eleventh hour,
When naught but madness can devour
Our quiet little fears.