An Ars Magica™ Saga

WW0502

A WINTER'S TALE

The Saga of a Covenant's Journey from Autumn to Winter

by Ken Cliffe

Credits:

Written by: Ken Cliffe

Edited by: Ken Cliffe, Beverly Ann Marshall, Lisa Stevens, Stewart Wieck

Development: Stewart Wieck

Production: Nicole Lindroos, Sam Chupp

Cover Art: Jeff Menges

Title Logo: Richard Thomas

Interior Art: Dave Miller, Richard Thomas, Josh Timbrook

Back Cover Design: Chris McDonough

Cartography: Eric Hotz

Devil's Advocate: By Mark Rein•Hagen and Jonathan Tweet

Ars Magica was created by Jonathan Tweet and Mark Rein•Hagen

This book is dedicated to Kelly, who lost much sleep during the creative process.

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Stewart "Boost this and he'll just decimate the characters!" **Wieck**, for knowing how to scare the crap out of players.

Andrew "If you don't thank me in yours, I won't thank you in mine!" **Greenburg**, for not going through the ceiling on this one.

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A Winter's Tale

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Winter's Tale is Volume Three in the Tetraology called "The Four Seasons." We have already printed Volume Two — titled "The Tempest" and will be releasing Volumes One and Four in the future. Volume One, "A Midsummer's Night Dream," will be released in September 1992. Volume One will chart a covenant's progress from Spring to Summer.

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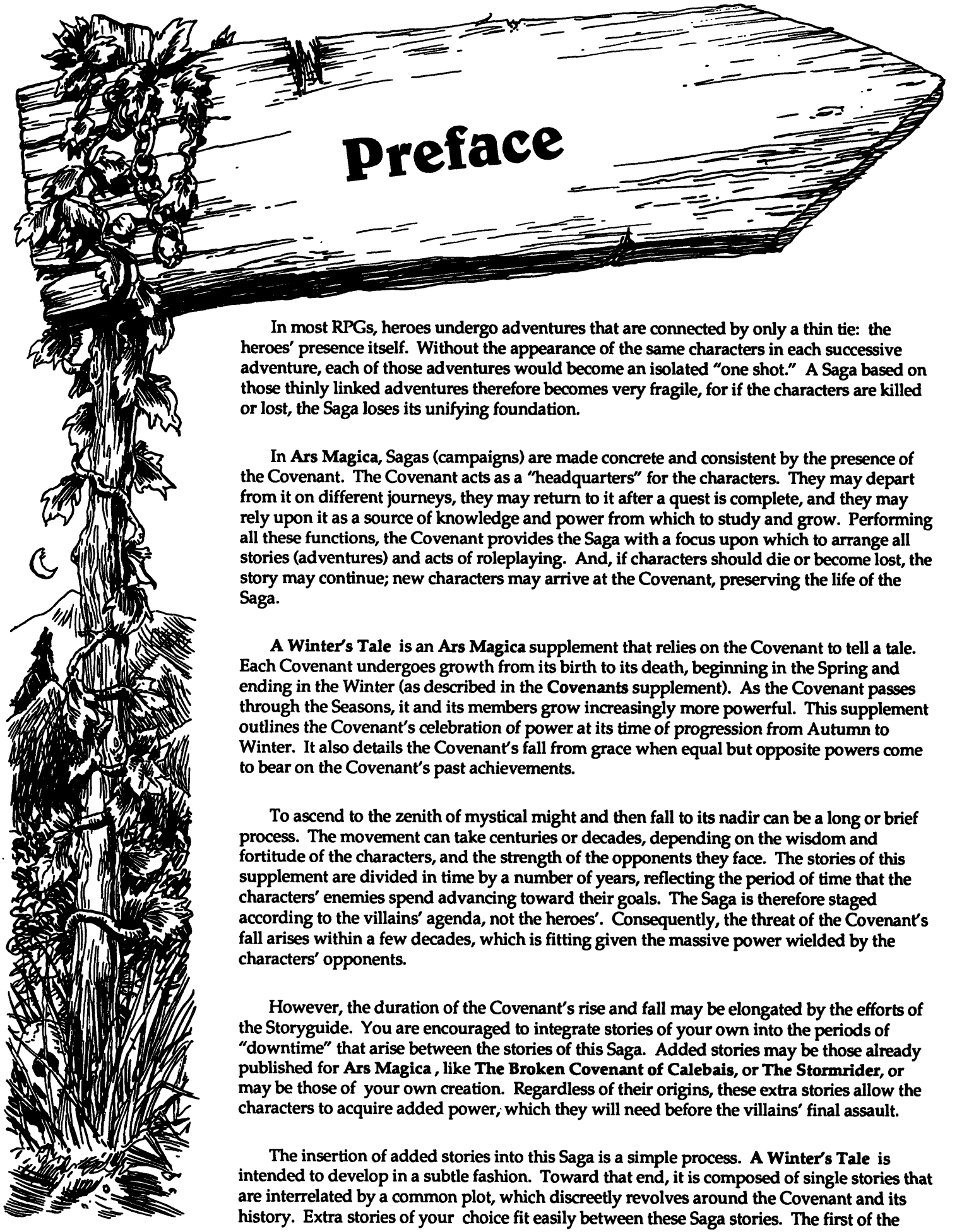
We were as twinn'd lambs that did
Frisk i' the sun
And bleat the one at the other. What we
chang'd
Was innocence for innocence; we knew not
The doctrine of ill-doing, nor dream'd
That any did. Had we pursu'd that life,
And our weak spirits ne'er been higher rear'd
With stronger blood, we should have answer'd
Heaven
Boldly, not guilty; the imposition clear'd
Hereditary ours.

William Shakespeare's
"The Winter's Tale" I.ii.



Preface

In most RPGs, heroes undergo adventures that are connected by only a thin tie: the heroes' presence itself. Without the appearance of the same characters in each successive adventure, each of those adventures would become an isolated "one shot." A Saga based on those thinly linked adventures therefore becomes very fragile, for if the characters are killed or lost, the Saga loses its unifying foundation.

In **Ars Magica**, Sagas (campaigns) are made concrete and consistent by the presence of the Covenant. The Covenant acts as a "headquarters" for the characters. They may depart from it on different journeys, they may return to it after a quest is complete, and they may rely upon it as a source of knowledge and power from which to study and grow. Performing all these functions, the Covenant provides the Saga with a focus upon which to arrange all stories (adventures) and acts of roleplaying. And, if characters should die or become lost, the story may continue; new characters may arrive at the Covenant, preserving the life of the Saga.

A Winter's Tale is an **Ars Magica** supplement that relies on the Covenant to tell a tale. Each Covenant undergoes growth from its birth to its death, beginning in the Spring and ending in the Winter (as described in the **Covenants** supplement). As the Covenant passes through the Seasons, it and its members grow increasingly more powerful. This supplement outlines the Covenant's celebration of power at its time of progression from Autumn to Winter. It also details the Covenant's fall from grace when equal but opposite powers come to bear on the Covenant's past achievements.

To ascend to the zenith of mystical might and then fall to its nadir can be a long or brief process. The movement can take centuries or decades, depending on the wisdom and fortitude of the characters, and the strength of the opponents they face. The stories of this supplement are divided in time by a number of years, reflecting the period of time that the characters' enemies spend advancing toward their goals. The Saga is therefore staged according to the villains' agenda, not the heroes'. Consequently, the threat of the Covenant's fall arises within a few decades, which is fitting given the massive power wielded by the characters' opponents.

However, the duration of the Covenant's rise and fall may be elongated by the efforts of the Storyguide. You are encouraged to integrate stories of your own into the periods of "downtime" that arise between the stories of this Saga. Added stories may be those already published for **Ars Magica**, like **The Broken Covenant of Calebais**, or **The Stormrider**, or may be those of your own creation. Regardless of their origins, these extra stories allow the characters to acquire added power, which they will need before the villains' final assault.

The insertion of added stories into this Saga is a simple process. **A Winter's Tale** is intended to develop in a subtle fashion. Toward that end, it is composed of single stories that are interrelated by a common plot, which discreetly revolves around the Covenant and its history. Extra stories of your choice fit easily between these Saga stories. The first of the

Saga stories introduces the characters to their foes, but does not allow the characters sufficient insight to discern the villains' true intent. In fact, the characters do not immediately recognize the villains as such.

As time passes and more stories are told, the characters learn who their opponents are and discover the horrible truth of their antagonists' plan. By that time, the Covenant has attained the power of Autumn, but has also begun the inconspicuous descent into death that Winter inevitably brings. However, regardless of their characters' fates, the players will grow increasingly fascinated by the game as their characters learn more about the diabolists, and strive to put an end to the villains' evil machinations.

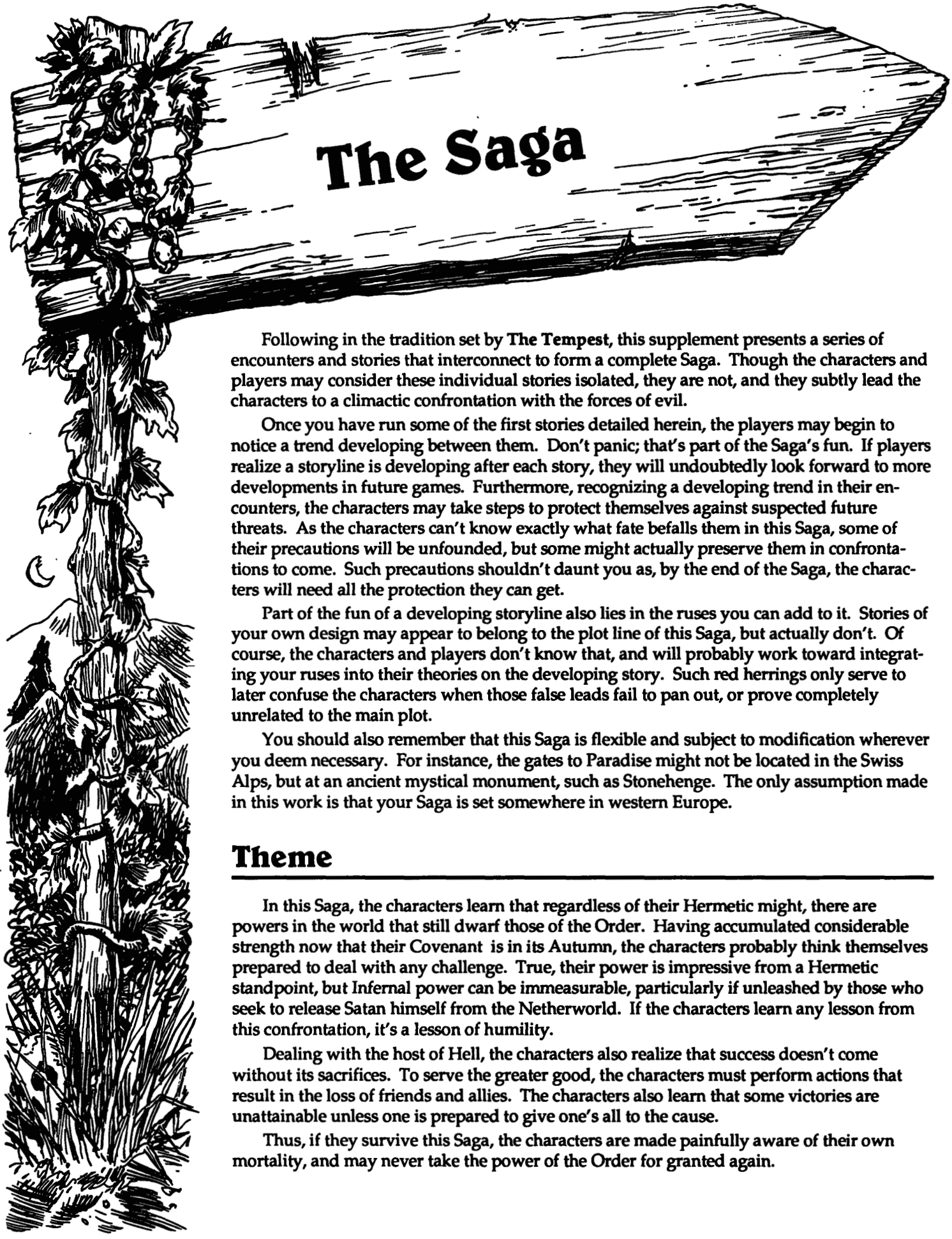
Why create a Saga that leads a Covenant from Autumn to Winter? There are a couple of reasons. First, this supplement follows the precedent set by **The Tempest**, which traces a Covenant's rise from Summer to Autumn. After telling that story and telling a number of stories in between, you may run this supplement and continue the course of the Saga. Combined, **The Tempest** and **A Winter's Tale** outline half a Covenant's lifetime. Or, **A Winter's Tale** may be played without its predecessor and still suit the development of the Saga that the Storyguide has created. This supplement may be applied to any Covenant, in any Saga, that has reached its Autumn.

Second, the rise from Autumn to Winter is fun to play because characters reach the height of their potency. Magi are now able to cast spells that shake the mantle of existence. The Covenant has also acquired so much knowledge that it is an invaluable foundation to the Order as a whole. The Covenant is a force to be reckoned with all over the world.

However, with time, the Covenant also begins to decay. Older magi grow set in their ways and begin to rely on younger magi to perform menial tasks. Before long powerful magi grow reclusive and forget the ways of the world, having lost themselves in passions beyond this world. Younger magi recognize this decay, but are frustrated in their efforts to keep up with the times, so established are Covenant precepts and traditions. Turning inward in this way, the Covenant either dies out slowly, or is taken unawares by powers growing in the world to which the magi are blind.

Who knows what lies beyond the death of a Covenant? The Covenant could disappear forever, or could be reborn and resume growth from the Spring. We only learn by being there.

Ken Cliffe
April 1991



The Saga

Following in the tradition set by **The Tempest**, this supplement presents a series of encounters and stories that interconnect to form a complete Saga. Though the characters and players may consider these individual stories isolated, they are not, and they subtly lead the characters to a climactic confrontation with the forces of evil.

Once you have run some of the first stories detailed herein, the players may begin to notice a trend developing between them. Don't panic; that's part of the Saga's fun. If players realize a storyline is developing after each story, they will undoubtedly look forward to more developments in future games. Furthermore, recognizing a developing trend in their encounters, the characters may take steps to protect themselves against suspected future threats. As the characters can't know exactly what fate befalls them in this Saga, some of their precautions will be unfounded, but some might actually preserve them in confrontations to come. Such precautions shouldn't daunt you as, by the end of the Saga, the characters will need all the protection they can get.

Part of the fun of a developing storyline also lies in the ruses you can add to it. Stories of your own design may appear to belong to the plot line of this Saga, but actually don't. Of course, the characters and players don't know that, and will probably work toward integrating your ruses into their theories on the developing story. Such red herrings only serve to later confuse the characters when those false leads fail to pan out, or prove completely unrelated to the main plot.

You should also remember that this Saga is flexible and subject to modification wherever you deem necessary. For instance, the gates to Paradise might not be located in the Swiss Alps, but at an ancient mystical monument, such as Stonehenge. The only assumption made in this work is that your Saga is set somewhere in western Europe.

Theme

In this Saga, the characters learn that regardless of their Hermetic might, there are powers in the world that still dwarf those of the Order. Having accumulated considerable strength now that their Covenant is in its Autumn, the characters probably think themselves prepared to deal with any challenge. True, their power is impressive from a Hermetic standpoint, but Infernal power can be immeasurable, particularly if unleashed by those who seek to release Satan himself from the Netherworld. If the characters learn any lesson from this confrontation, it's a lesson of humility.

Dealing with the host of Hell, the characters also realize that success doesn't come without its sacrifices. To serve the greater good, the characters must perform actions that result in the loss of friends and allies. The characters also learn that some victories are unattainable unless one is prepared to give one's all to the cause.

Thus, if they survive this Saga, the characters are made painfully aware of their own mortality, and may never take the power of the Order for granted again.

The Course of the Saga

The story behind the Saga begins back in the history of the world, as told in the Scriptures. Under the direction of the Prince of Darkness, the Apple from which Adam and Eve ate is turned to stone and broken into pieces. These Shards of solid evil are scattered across the world, spreading their corruptive influence.

Centuries later, a coven of diabolists learns about the Shards and sets out across the world to recover them. Planning to restore the Shards to their original whole, the diabolists plot to summon the Prince of Darkness into this realm, bringing about the end of the world. The Saga itself begins gently enough, when characters pay their Covenant's respects at the grave site of one of the Covenant's founders, the Magus Balaerus. Visiting the village of Wickam, located near the grave site, the characters are confronted with anti-Covenant sentiment. The villagers blame the Covenant for strife that has afflicted the region for years. This suffering is the product of a Shard that's buried with Balaerus. The characters also encounter their future foes, the diabolists, who pose as traveling gypsy performers. After dealing with the villagers, the characters also apprehend apparent grave robbers who desecrate Balaerus's grave. At the grave site, the characters find the Shard, the intended prize of the grave robbers, and take it back to the Covenant with them. However, the characters forget they have this stone as its deceptive evil takes hold of the Covenant. Over the years the Covenant falls victim to the Shard's curse, causing the fortress' gradual decline.

In the meantime, the characters encounter the diabolists' work again, this time in the town of Woodbridge. The diabolists came to town and stole the town's Shard, but left behind a rat plague as their calling card. The townsfolk blame the plague on the Covenant; a fortune teller said the plague would arrive and she fingered the Covenant's "evil" as its source. This fortune teller was Lucinda, one of the diabolists.

Arriving in town to clear their name, the characters must contend with the plague, but must also solve the mystery of a walking statue. In their investigation, the characters find evidence to suggest a Shard was in town, but so far lack the knowledge to recognize a Shard's work for what it is. Years after they acquired it, the Covenant's Shard is stolen by the diabolists. The characters find positive proof of the diabolists' involvement, and realize that they are subject to some terrible plot.

The characters finally learn the whole truth about the Shards and the Apple when a divine messenger visits the Covenant. It warns them of the world's danger and commands them to set out to stop the diabolists. The characters' time is limited though, as the Scriptural Seven Signs soon begin to unfold, and the last of these marks the Devil's arrival in the world and the world's end.

Striving to stop the diabolists, the characters pursue the last of the Apple's Shards, located within the mountain mines of faerie Dwarves. Both heroes and villains are so focused on their race for the Shard that they are caught unawares when the Dwarves stage an assault of their own, having turned to evil under their Shard's influence. It's this faerie intervention that inhibits the characters from reaching the last Shard. The diabolists escape with it, while the characters are forced to contend with the Dwarven King and his selfish demands.

As the Apple is now complete, the diabolists commence their summons. With time, the Seven Signs begin. In the meantime, the characters must locate Paradise, where the Apple originated and where the Devil is being summoned. The characters' investigation is not easy though, as it is hampered by the rise of the Four Riders of the Apocalypse, whose number arise from the Covenfolk and other associates. The characters are therefore forced to battle their own friends and loved ones.

With the Fifth Sign, which marks the rise of the dead, the characters get the break they need in locating Paradise. The spirit of Balaerus, the original possessor of the Covenant's old Shard, visits the Covenant and points the way to the diabolists. However, the characters' research tells them that the Fifth Sign will also raise an army of undead. If the characters are willing to take the chance of losing their Covenant, they may set out for Paradise before the army attacks the fortress. Wise characters remain behind long enough to defend the Covenant.

Journeying to Paradise, the characters receive aid from the Dwarves they encountered and helped before. With faerie aid, the characters arrive at the gates of Paradise just as the Sixth Sign strikes: the sun turns to sackcloth and the earth trembles. If the characters make it to the gates of Paradise, they are granted entrance to pursue their Divine task. Once inside Paradise, the characters discover the diabolists on the verge of completing the Devil's summons. There are many ways to interrupt the summoning ritual, but the characters still have to defeat the diabolists, who are not happy with the characters' intrusion.

Seeing that her plans are jeopardized, the leader of the diabolists, Carmella, sacrifices herself to bring what she believes is the Devil into the world. The diabolists have been misled, though, and release only a Demon who posed as the Prince of Darkness. The characters clearly have a new threat to deal with, especially now that the diabolists are taking flight from Paradise. The characters may have the magical faculties to banish the

Demon back to Hell, but the creature is immensely powerful. The only certain way of defeating the Demon is with a character's own sacrifice. By giving him or herself to the Tree of Knowledge, from which the Apple originally came, a character can make the sacrifice that restores the Tree. As a result, the diabolists' Apple is ruined and the Demon is banished. Now complete again, Paradise seals itself up, depositing the characters in the mountains where they originally passed through the gates.

Returning to their Covenant, the characters find that their protracted conflict with the diabolists has left the fortress in ruins. Robbed of their former power, any surviving characters may try to rebuild the Covenant. They must first gather the strength to do so, and their Covenant may be reborn in a state of spring.

The decline of the Covenant is a story of inevitable death that comes with the passage of the Seasons—a Winter's tale.

The Origins of The Shard

The impetus of this Saga is the existence of objects of Scriptural evil. These objects are actually Shards broken from the Apple of Paradise from which Adam and Eve ate. The Shards are sought by a band of diabolists who seek to unite the Shards into their original form. The diabolists intend to use their newfound power to summon Demonic power into the world. In their pursuit of the Shards, the diabolists come into direct conflict with the characters and their Covenant. Once the characters realize the threat posed by the diabolists and their plot, the characters must confront the power of the combined Shards.

Together the Shards comprise the Apple from which Adam and Eve ate in the Garden of Paradise. After Adam was tempted by evil through Eve and ate from the Apple, the Apple turned to stone. Recognizing his nakedness and guilt, Adam dropped the petrified Apple, causing it to shatter on the ground.

After Adam and Eve were driven from Paradise, the Divinities expelled the Shards of the Apple from Paradise as well. Once on the earth, the Shards began the spread of experience and corruption. Cain was the first to fall victim to their taint. When Cain was forced to wander the world after the murder of Abel, he unwittingly carried the Shards with him. The Shards were therefore scattered about the world.

Composed of concentrated evil, the Shards brought decay and destruction wherever they went. One was even located beneath the site of Job's home, deposited there under the direction of the Evil One. Touched by the influence of the Evil One, the Shards' power for corruption was subtle and deceitful. Those who came under the Shards' spell therefore had no notion of the source of their affliction. The same is true of those who are cursed by the stones today.

The paradigm presented in all Ars Magica supplements includes many aspects of the medieval world, including the historical influences of the Church, as well as White Wolf's own fabricated version of the Infernal, Faerie, and Hermetic influences. The powers and effects of the Dominion as shown in this supplement are intended to be an extension of this fictional paradigm. The use of familiar elements found in Christianity and other religions should not be construed as an effort to accurately portray these religions as they are practiced in the modern world.

For centuries the Shards have remained scattered. However, if they are reunited, reconstructing the Apple that they once formed, the collected Shards have immense Infernal power, or so the diabolists postulate. If returned to Paradise, the Shards could be used to return the Prince of Darkness to the world. After all, Paradise is the place where the Apple originated, and is where the Prince of Darkness first touched humanity.

As fate would have it, a founding Magus of the characters' Covenant came into possession of a Shard in the distant past. Other Shards are also located in the vicinity of the Covenant. The characters are therefore destined to become involved in the diabolists' plot, and must stop the diabolists before the world is destroyed.

The Diabolists

At the root of the evil that the characters must face are the diabolists. They are a coven of devil worshippers with spirits of pure evil (though those spirits are now in Hell, having been sold to the Devil in return for arcane power). Though each diabolist wants to see the Devil summoned, each has his or her own motivations.

Note that the diabloists' disguise will not work from a purely historical point of view if your Covenant is established in western Europe. Gypsies did not complete their migration to this area until the early 1400s, and as your Saga is likely to be set before this time, such people should not be found. In this case, simply convert their disguise to that of a traveling troupe of musicians and performers. The gypsy disguise is much more romantic and offers a vast amount of roleplaying potential, but simply may not work in an historically accurate Saga.

Carmella

Characteristics

Int +4	Str -1	Prs +3	Dex +2
Per +4	Stm 0	Com +3	Qik +1

Magical Techniques

Creo	15
Intéllego	21
Muto	19
Perdo	23
Rego	20

Magical Forms

Animál	10	Aquam	15
Auram	16	Córporem	18
Herbam	13	Ignem	15
Imágonem	15	Mentem	17
Terram	19	Vim	25

Virtues and Flaws

Clear Thinker, +1
Well-Traveled, +1
Self-Confident, +1
Destiny, +4 (whatever works best in your Saga)
Minor Magic Deficiency, -1 (Animál)
Obsessed, -1 (summoning "Princess of Darkness")
Hatred, -1 (men)
Susceptibility to Divine Power, -4 (attacks).

Personal Characteristics

Confidence: 6
Age: appears in mid-30s
Reputation: None

Personality Traits

Feminist	+4
Vindictive	+3
Patient	+3

Important Skills

Finesse (precision) 4
Penetration (Mentem) 6
Alertness (danger) 5
Search (concealed objects) 3
Sense Holiness & Unholiness (people) 5
Subterfuge (cajole) 5
Charm (stunning looks) 3
Concentration (long periods) 4
Acting (gypsy) 4
Intimidation (subtle) 4
Leadership (loyalty) 5
Dodge (missiles) 5
Staff (attacks) 2
Parma Magica (Vim) 6

Spell Suggestions

Aquam: Footsteps of Slippery Oil (Lv 15), Mighty Torrent of Water (Lv 25).

Auram: Stench of the Twenty Corpses (Lv 10), Wreaths of Foul Smoke (Lv 15), The Incantation of Lightning (Lv 35), Thief of the Stolen Breath (Lv 10), Quiet of the Raging Winds (Lv 25).

Córporem: Sight of True Form (Lv 10), Whispers Through the Black Gate (Lv 15), The Inexorable Search (Lv 20), The Eye of the Sage (Lv 30), Grip of the Choking Hand (Lv 10), The Kiss of Death (Lv 35), The Walking Corpse (Lv 25).

Mentem: Panic of the Trembling Heart (Lv 15), Weight of a Thousand Hells (Lv 25), Recollection of Memories Never Quite Lived (Lv 20), Black Whisper (Lv 30).

Vim: The Invisible Eye Revealed (Lv 15), Disenchant (Gen), Shroud Magic (Gen).

Carmella as an NPC

Carmella is the slinky, voluptuous leader of the diabolist coven. She is inherently cruel and vicious, but has learned to temper her anger.

Carmella seeks to summon the Dark One into the world for reasons of personal revenge. She is a fanatical

man-hater who believes that all the world's failings may be blamed upon the men who claim to be in control of it. Believing herself the reincarnation of Eve, Carmella seeks to bring the Dark One into the world to avenge man's treatment of woman since Eve bit into the Apple, and feels her cause just, being convinced that the Devil is actually female. It's only fitting, then, that the weapon she uses to summon the "Princess of Darkness" is the one she bit into in her former life.

Carmella recognizes the characters as a threat to her plans. Though fully confident in her powers to bring the Princess into the world, Carmella rarely underestimates the characters' potential.

Catch Phrase

"You dare pursue us on our sacred quest?! You will die, male, for challenging Her power. You will die, but not yet. I leave you in these mountains to die on your own. However, I hope you survive to witness Her coming. The Princess of Darkness shall consume you and all males. I, Eve's daughter, have spoken!"

(Stated as the diabolists abandon the Covenant prisoners outside the Dwarven mines).

Appearance

Carmella is fantastically gorgeous. No wencher of reputable name can resist exercising his charms on her. Her skin is tan and clear. Her eyes are a piercing green, and shining long hair lingers about her shoulders and back. She is always dressed in a red garment of some kind.

Gypsy Role

Carmella is the host of her band of performers. She moves about the crowd that watches the show, introducing herself and the entertainers, generally making the audience feel welcome. She is not opposed to stopping and talking with a member of the audience. In this role Carmella is charming, witty, and alluring.

Emil

Characteristics

Int +4	Str +1	Prs +2	Dex +1
Per -1	Stm +1	Com 0	Qik +1

Magical Techniques

Creo	12
Intéllego	14
Muto	15
Perdo	22
Rego	15

Magical Forms

Animál	12	Auram	13
Aquam	10	Córporem	15
Herbam	12	Ignem	22
Imágonem	10	Mentem	15
Terram	15	Vim	17

Virtues and Flaws

Self-Confident, +1
Piercing Gaze, +2
Light Touch, +2
Compulsion, -1 (confrontations)
Susceptibility to Divine Power, -4 (attacks)

Personal Characteristics

Confidence: 5
Age: appears in mid-20s
Reputation: None

Personality Traits

Ambitious	+3
Reckless	+3
Hotheaded	+3
Impatient	+2

Important Skills

Acting (gypsy) 3
Sword (attacks) 3
Scan (being followed) 4
Mimicry (voices) 3
Brawl (punching) 2
Guile (quick lies) 4
Intimidation (threats) 5
Leadership (inspiring bravery) 4
Intrigue (plotting) 5
Penetration (Ignem) 5
Certámen (Ingnem) 5
Dodge (thrusting) 3

Spell Suggestions

Córporem: Invocation of Weariness (Lv 5), The Wound That Weeps (Lv 15), Bane of the Decrepit Body (Lv 25), Spasms of the Uncontrollable Hands (Lv 5), Lifting the Dangling Puppet (Lv 20).

Ignem: Soothe the Raging Flames (Lv 15), Well Without Light (Lv 25), Tremulant of the Torch's Flame (Lv 5), Ward Against Heat and Flames (Lv 25), Pilum of Fire (Lv 20), Blade of the Virulent Flame (Lv 30).

Terram: Wielding the Invisible Sling (Lv 10), The Earth's Carbuncle (Lv 15).

Emil as an NPC

Emil is untrustworthy, even by the diabolists' standards. He's completely vile and rotten, but is even more ambitious and conniving. Emil secretly covets the leadership of the coven, believing his powers superior to Carmella's simply because he's a man. Though impetuous and unruly, Emil has learned not to confront Carmella directly, particularly on issues of gender superiority.

Emil considers all normal people to be simple cattle, available for his consumption or entertainment. As far as he is concerned, the characters are an idle threat to his Devil-given powers. To prove his superiority, Emil is willing to enter *Certámen* with any member of the Order at any time, and cannot resist a challenge. If it's apparent that he is going to lose the duel, Emil cheats, even going so far as to have a henchman attack his magus opponent from behind.

Emil wants to summon the Devil into the world to collect a reward, which he believes will be Infernal magic, but might actually be his death.

Catch Phrase

"You say you wield great power. Why don't you test that power against mine?"

Appearance

Emil is swarthy, with olive skin and black, greased-back hair. He also oils his mustache until it's literally dripping. He prefers to wear dark, polished leathers, and is partial to those that are formfitting.

Gypsy Role

Emil plays a sword-swallower and is quite adept at his act. His favorite part of the act involves lighting and swallowing a blade. While performing, Emil enjoys rebuking hecklers with his Mimicry skill, attempting to provoke a fight. If no one heckles him, he discreetly mimics the voice of a person nearby, hoping to dupe others into initiating a fight.

Lucinda

Characteristics

Int +3	Str -1	Prs +5	Dex +2
Per +5	Stm -1	Com +2	Qik +1

Magical Techniques

Creo	12
Intéllego	23
Muto	14
Perdo	14
Rego	18

Magical Forms

Animál	14	Aquam	12
Auram	16	Córporem	14
Herbam	13	Ignem	10
Imágonem	20	Mentem	21
Terram	14	Vim	18

Virtues and Flaws

Keen Vision, +1 ("all-around")
Free Expression, +1 (prophecies)
Well-Known, +2 (Woodbridge)
Exceptional Talent, +2 (Visions)
Special ("mind's eye" sight), +4
Disfigurement, -1 (blank eyes)
Susceptibility to Divine Power, -4 (attacks)
Blind, -5

Personal Characteristics

Confidence: 2

Age: appears in 40s
Reputation: Prophetic/Woodbridge 2

Personality Traits

Patient+3
Secretive +2
Ambitious +2
Distracted +3

Important Skills

Acting (gypsy) 3
Alertness ("mind's eye") 6
Empathy (client) 3
Second Sight (Demons) 5
Visions (future) 6
Dodge (missiles) 5
Athletics (jumps) 3
Folk Ken (peasants) 4
Pretend (premonitions) 5
Sword (parry) 4
Sword (attacks) 4
Premonitions (bad tidings) 6

Spell Suggestions

Auram: True Sight of the Air (Lv 15), Eyes of the Bat (Lv 25), Wind at the Back (Lv 5), Broom of the Winds (Lv 15).

Imágonem: Restoration of the Lost Image (Gen), Fragile Image of the Painted Statue (Lv 5), Eyes of the Past (Lv 25), Summoning of the Distant Images (Lv 35), Invisibility of the Standing Wizard (Lv 15), Silence of the Smothered Sounds (Lv 25), Wizard's Sidestep (Lv 20).

Mentem: Posing the Silent Question (Lv 25), Trust of Childlike Faith (Lv 10), Confusion of the Numbed Will (Lv 15), The Call to Slumber (Lv 15).

Lucinda as an NPC

Lucinda is a prophet and poses as such when performing as a gypsy. Though she is physically blind, Lucinda has a second sight that allows her to see with her mind's eye, so her eyesight may be considered normal. As a prophet Lucinda is constantly preoccupied with the future, and her mind is always racing with thoughts of what yet may come.

Lucinda has had a vision of the "Devil's" summoning and knows that a Demon is tricking the other diabolists. She keeps this knowledge to herself, though. As soon as the Demon is released in Paradise, Lucinda sneaks off, hoping that Carmella and Emil will be killed by the creature. Lucinda plans to survive the summoning to later rebuild and command the coven.

Though she has magical prowess, Lucinda refrains from demonstrating it until locked in deadly combat with a foe. Otherwise, she poses as a companion of the coven, and can be seen carrying and brandishing a sword, regardless of her apparent blindness. Tricking the characters into thinking she is a companion, Lucinda springs her magic on an opponent when he or she least expects it. (In the Dwarven mines she tries to lead a companion away from the heart of the battle and springs her trap then.)

Lucinda respects the martial and magical capacities of the characters. She perceives them as worthy adversaries against whom she can hone her skills for future use.

Catch Phrase

"The future holds many things: our lives, our dreams, our destinies! Those who harness the future's telling become like unto the Mighty One himself!"

Appearance

Lucinda appears to be middle-aged. Ordinarily she would be physically uninteresting, except that her blind eyes stare wide and blank, sending chills down the spine of anyone who looks into them. About her body, which is remarkably thin, Lucinda wears a gray robe and cloak which bears an eye insignia.

Gypsy Role

Lucinda doesn't waste her true prophetic skills in her act. Rather, she makes simple guesses at a person's state of mind, using her Empathy ability, and creates a suitably cryptic, ambiguous forecast into a person's future. Whether any characters want to believe their fortunes is up to them, though Lucinda's prophesies could be interpreted to apply to anything the characters do (something like the horoscopes of today).

Mab

Characteristics

Int +3	Str +1	Prs -1	Dex +3
Per +4	Stm +3	Com -1	Qik 0

Magical Techniques

Creo	17
Intéllego	12
Muto	18
Perdo	15
Rego	17

Magical Forms

Animál	23	Aquam	17
Auram	15	Córporem	22
Herbam	20	Ignem	12
Imágonem	15	Mentem	14
Terram	19	Vim	12

Virtues and Flaws

Strong-willed, +1 (stubborn)
Magical Affinity, +2 (forests and forest animals)
Way of the Woods, +4
Compulsion, -1 (causing mutations)
Offensive to Animals, -1
Poor Hearing, -1
Susceptibility to Divine Power, -4 (attacks)

Personal Characteristics

Confidence: 1
Age: appears in mid-50s
Reputation: None

Personality Traits

Perverse	+3
Cruel	+3
Cowardly	+1
Self-Centered	+2

Important Skills

Acting (gypsy) 1

Finesse (Córporem) 5
Animál Ken (vermin) 3
Hex (disease) 5
Weather Sense (foul weather) 3
Athletics (run) 2
Survival (forests) 4
Stealth (forests) 5
Healer (disease) 4
Staff (parry) 3

Spell Suggestions

Animál: Weaver's Trap of Webs (Lv 20), Growth of the Creeping Things (Lv 10), Transformation of the Ravenous Beast to the Torpid Toad (Lv 20).

Córporem: Evil Eye (Lv 5), Arm of the Infant (Lv 20), Curse of Circe (Lv 30), Gift of the Bear's Fortitude (Lv 30), Cloak of Black Feathers (Lv 35), Incantation of the Milky Eyes (Lv 20), Twist of the Tongue (Lv 20).

Herbam: Curse of the Rotted Wood (Lv 10), Wizard's Autumn (Lv 15), Lord of Trees (Lv 25).

Terram: The Crystal Dart (Lv 15), Rusted Decay of Ten Score Years (Lv 15), Stone to Falling Dust (Lv 30).

Mab as an NPC

Mab has lived most of her life as an evil, fairy-tale style witch, residing in a forest. There she could perform the mutational spells that she enjoys so much, and revel in afflicting the landscape and wildlife with various diseases and blights. She joined the diabolists when they came to her neck of the woods in search of a Shard and she learned of the Apple and its corruptive power by spying on them. Personally, Mab doesn't believe that the Devil's arrival in the world will cause its destruction. Rather, she looks forward to a world in which the Devil's power will mutate everything, making the earth beautiful in Mab's eyes.

Mab also hopes to acquire the Apple, whether it summons the Devil or not, so that she may use it to her own perverse ends of causing plague and distortion. Something of a coward, Mab may not have the spirit to collect the Apple when the opportunity arises.

Mab perceives the characters as simple subjects on which to practice her mutational arts. Instead of killing a character, she prefers to see what can be made out of his or her body.

Catch Phrase

"Candies! Treats for the sweet tooth! Ah, here you are, children, have a sweet. There you go, something to get fat and juicy on."

Appearance

Mab is a grisly, stooping old woman with numerous missing teeth. Those teeth she retains are filed to a point. Her skin is covered with scabs and scars and she has a long, pointed nose. Mab always wears tattered rags, and has long, stringy hair with straw tangled in it.

Gypsy Role

Mab moves about the audience selling candies, fruits, and treats. These foods seem appetizing on appearance, but taste sour and foul. Mab secretly likes to mutate the food, making it inedible. Mab also professes to have once been a great acrobat, but now claims to be too old to perform.

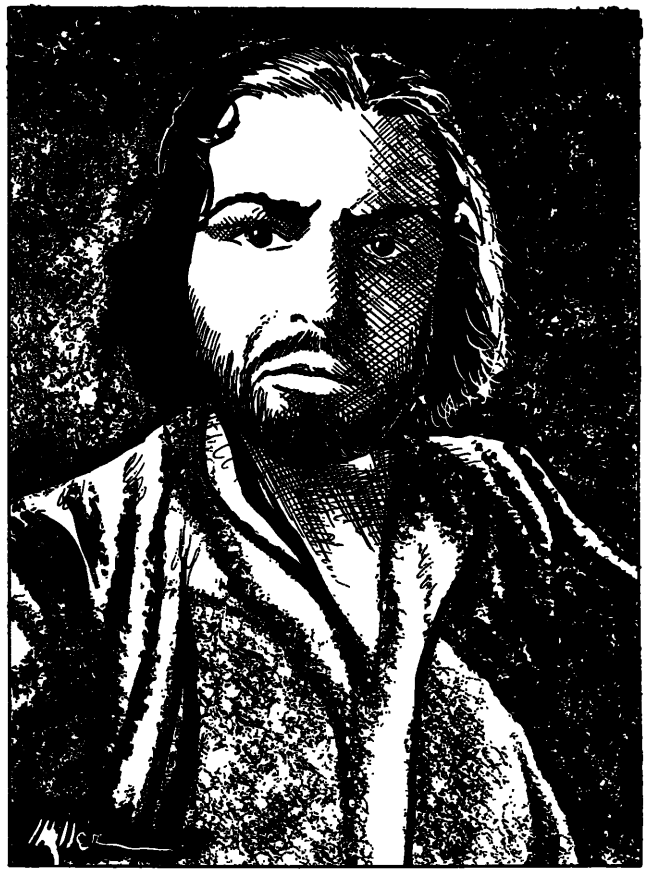
Honerius

Characteristics

Int +1	Str +2	Prs +2	Dex +1
Per +3	Stm +1	Com +1	Qik +2

Confidence: 4 (normally) or 1 (when in need of a fix)
Age: appears in 40s
Reputation: None

Personality Traits



Suave	+3
Melodramatic	+4
Groveling	+5 (in need of fix)

Virtues and Flaws

Well-Traveled, +1
Jack-Of-All-Trades, +3
Fragile Constitution, -1 (results from potion abuse)
Addiction, -3 (craves longevity potions).

Important Skills

Scan (keeping watch) 4
Search (in dark) 3
Direction Sense (all purpose) 5
Magic Sensitivity (objects sensed over a remarkable distance) 8
Athletics (long distance run) 4
Climb (cliffs) 3
Dodge (melee) 5
Acting (all purpose) 7
Survival (outdoors) 5
Track (all purpose) 5
Storytelling (fables) 3
Hand Axe (parry) 5
Hand Axe (attack) 6
Evaluate (distance) 6

Honerius as an NPC

Honerius is one of the coven's companions. He has an incredible sense for objects of magical power and can track them down from miles away. Carmella met Honerius hundreds of years ago and keeps him alive with longevity potions so that he may continue ferreting out the Shards of the Apple.

To ensure Honerius's loyalty, Carmella has caused Honerius to become addicted to her longevity potions. Honerius realizes what the woman has done to him, but doesn't care now, and cannot take revenge for fear that his potion supply will be cut off. His addiction has reached such a height, though, that he craves the potions all the time, even when he does not physically need them. His constant cringing and begging is beginning to annoy Carmella, so she may not keep him around long after the Shards are collected.

When he has had a recent fix (he gets one before the characters meet him in Wickam), Honerius is dignified and of noble demeanor. At these times his mind turns to his great passion, drama, to which he has had wide exposure, having lived for hundreds of years and traveled to many lands in search of the Shards. Honerius doesn't care either way about the characters. He's willing to kill them with a single word from Carmella, but lets them live if they pose no threat and if he has the freedom to make that choice. However, if anyone taunts him about his addiction, he seeks to harm that person permanently. In combat, Honerius protects Carmella at all times. Hell forbid that his potion supplier should be killed.

Catch Phrase

"There's a line from a play I once saw during the Bacchus Festival, a line that's been plaguing my mind. How does it go again?...'And lo, the Muse drew his sword, and smote Father Time!'"

(Spoken as he closes for combat with the characters.)

Appearance

Honerius is clearly a man of distinction, maintaining proper poise and manner. His hair, mustache, and short beard are always neatly trimmed. At each temple is a tuft of gray that complements his regal look.

Honerius prefers clothes that have billows and tufts, like those worn on the stage. His favorite color is green.

Gypsy Role

While playing the part of a gyspy entertainer (a part that lacks angst, to his mind), Honerius moves about the audience enacting plays. Sometimes he quotes the lines of up to seven or eight characters, creating a new voice and demeanor for each. He also welcomes the audience to request plays, and knows any play with a Int roll of 6+. To the audience it seems that Honerius has a fantastic memory. In reality, his life has been long enough to allow him to see and memorize countless dramas.

If any character demonstrates the calling of the Muse, Honerius invites him to private conversation where the two may share their stage experiences.

Gizzleren

Characteristics

Int -2	Str +6	Prs +2/+4*	Dex -1
Per -1	Stm +5	Com -1	Qik +2

Infernal Points: 10
Size -1*
Confidence: 4
Age: n/a (looks 20 in human form)
Reputation: None
*when in Demonic form

Personality Traits

Impressionable	+3
Gullible	+2
Angry	+2

Flaws and Virtues

Berserk, +1 (if in human form when goes berserk, he transforms to Demon form)
Reserves of Strength, +2
Dark Secret, -1 (the unknown reason behind his expulsion from Hell)
Disfigured, -1 (his Demonic nature makes Gizzleren look distorted when in human form)
Magic Susceptibility, -1 (Divine magic only)

Important Skills

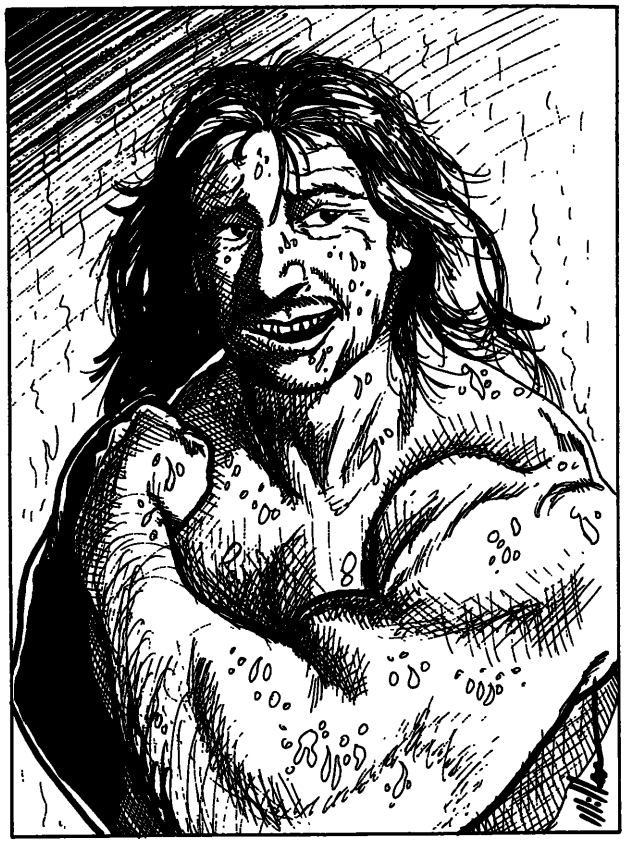
Acting (gypsy) 1
Perfect Balance*(ledges) 4
Dodge (unarmed combat) 5
Brawl (pinning and holding) 5
Drinking (guzzle) 7
Speak Language (that of Saga setting) 1

Powers

None. They were stripped from him when he was expelled from Hell. When using his claws to attack while in Demon form, +10 damage is done.

Gizzleren as an NPC

Gizzleren is a minor Demon who was thrown out of the Netherworld for failing in some unspecified task.



None of the diabolists is foolish enough to ask what that failure was.

Gizzleren sought out the diabolists when he sensed their formation of the Apple. He joined hoping to help summon the Devil into the world and therefore get back into the good graces of Hell. Although a Demon, Gizzleren is too stupid to sense that the diabolists are going to summon another Demon, not the Devil himself. Though Carmella holds sway over Gizzleren's actions, the Demon admires Emil and constantly seeks to impress the diabolist upstart. Carmella therefore fears she will one day lose power over Gizzleren, and Emil will have the Demon turn on her; Gizzleren is barely above animal intelligence and follows orders to the letter, without consideration. When Carmella does command Gizzleren, she usually has him attack enemies while the diabolist magi prepare their magic.

Catch Phrase

"Gizzleren stronger. Stronger than puny human like you. Gizzleren crush you now (looking for Emil's approval)*? Gizzleren crush you now!"*

Appearance

In Demonic form, Gizzleren stands 4 feet tall, and has a large, round, warty head and torso which seem to flow into each other without distinction. His arms are long, dragging on the ground behind him, and emaciated. His legs are short and spindly. Though a half-wit, he is still physically powerful.

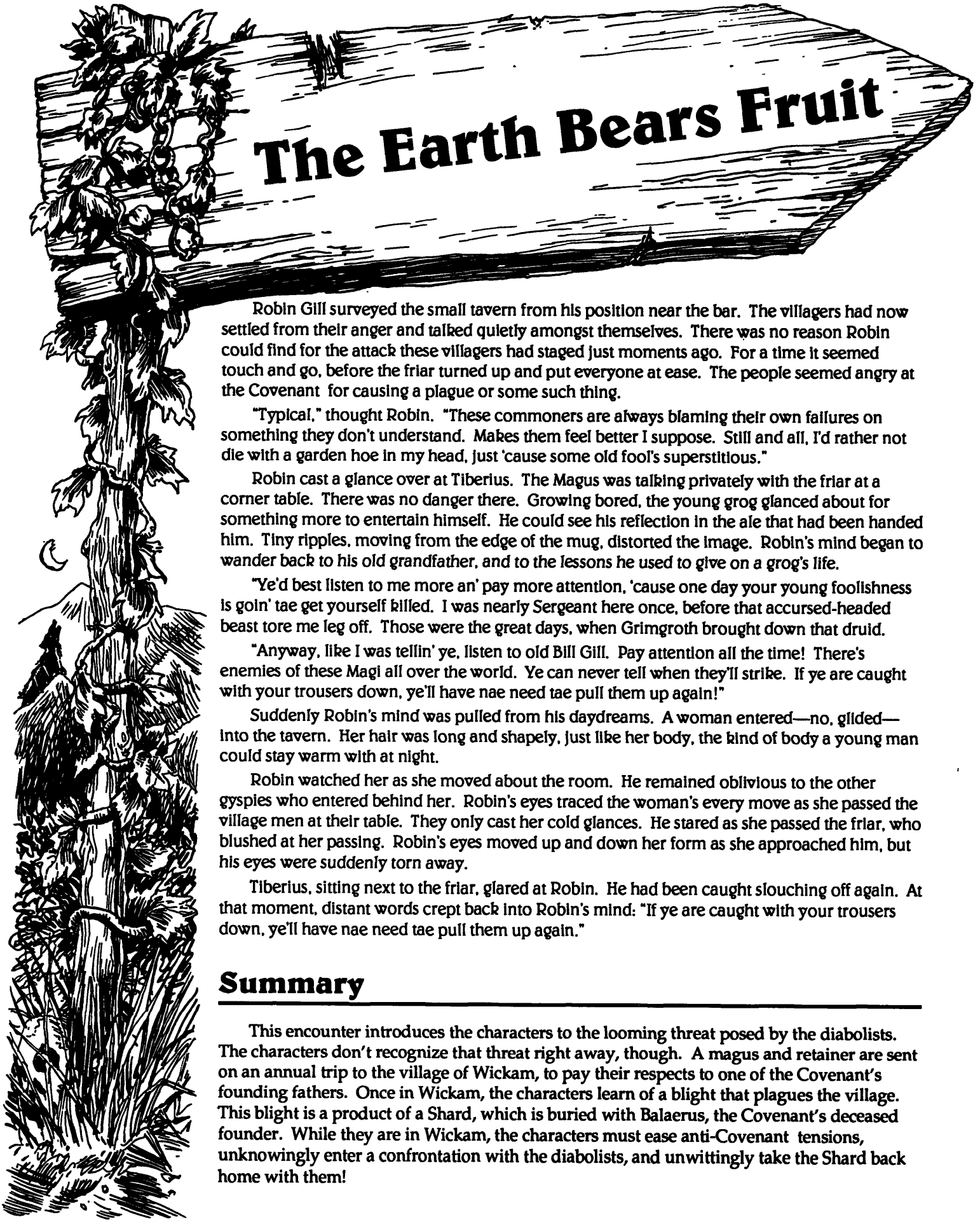
Gizzleren can also assume human form. He only takes that form when the diabolists assume their gypsy roles. Otherwise he's in Demonic form. In human form Gizzleren is a giant of a man, with an enormous torso, bulbous head, muscular arms, and legs like tree trunks. The only clothes he wears are a pair of shoes and raggedy pants, even when not performing, and even when in the coldest of climes. As a human, Gizzleren also sweats profusely and constantly smells of smoke, a characteristic deriving from his Infernal origins, but not evidence of them. Gizzleren is clearly a half-wit, staring with wild, confused eyes. His spotty, stringy beard also suggests limited hygiene. When in human form, Gizzleren attacks with his bare hands, as he does when in Demonic form.

As long as Gizzleren remains with the diabolists, in the vicinity of their collected Shards, characters cannot sense that Gizzleren is actually a Demon. The deceitful power of the Shards hides his true nature.

Gizzleren's muscles are worth 5 Vim *vis*.

Gypsy Role

Gizzleren plays the part of a strongman. For the audience's entertainment, he bends iron and lifts anvils one per hand! Gizzleren also likes to prove his strength against "tiny humans," so he accepts any challenge to a wrestling match or arm wrestle.



The Earth Bears Fruit

Robin Gill surveyed the small tavern from his position near the bar. The villagers had now settled from their anger and talked quietly amongst themselves. There was no reason Robin could find for the attack these villagers had staged just moments ago. For a time it seemed touch and go, before the friar turned up and put everyone at ease. The people seemed angry at the Covenant for causing a plague or some such thing.

"Typical," thought Robin. "These commoners are always blaming their own failures on something they don't understand. Makes them feel better I suppose. Still and all, I'd rather not die with a garden hoe in my head, just 'cause some old fool's superstitious."

Robin cast a glance over at Tiberius. The Magus was talking privately with the friar at a corner table. There was no danger there. Growing bored, the young grog glanced about for something more to entertain himself. He could see his reflection in the ale that had been handed him. Tiny ripples, moving from the edge of the mug, distorted the image. Robin's mind began to wander back to his old grandfather, and to the lessons he used to give on a grog's life.

"Ye'd best listen to me more an' pay more attention, 'cause one day your young foolishness is goin' tae get yourself killed. I was nearly Sergeant here once, before that accursed-headed beast tore me leg off. Those were the great days, when Grimgroth brought down that druid.

"Anyway, like I was tellin' ye, listen to old Bill Gill. Pay attention all the time! There's enemies of these Magi all over the world. Ye can never tell when they'll strike. If ye are caught with your trousers down, ye'll have nae need tae pull them up again!"

Suddenly Robin's mind was pulled from his daydreams. A woman entered—no, glided—into the tavern. Her hair was long and shapely, just like her body, the kind of body a young man could stay warm with at night.

Robin watched her as she moved about the room. He remained oblivious to the other gyspies who entered behind her. Robin's eyes traced the woman's every move as she passed the village men at their table. They only cast her cold glances. He stared as she passed the friar, who blushed at her passing. Robin's eyes moved up and down her form as she approached him, but his eyes were suddenly torn away.

Tiberius, sitting next to the friar, glared at Robin. He had been caught slouching off again. At that moment, distant words crept back into Robin's mind: "If ye are caught with your trousers down, ye'll have nae need tae pull them up again."

Summary

This encounter introduces the characters to the looming threat posed by the diabolists. The characters don't recognize that threat right away, though. A magus and retainer are sent on an annual trip to the village of Wickam, to pay their respects to one of the Covenant's founding fathers. Once in Wickam, the characters learn of a blight that plagues the village. This blight is a product of a Shard, which is buried with Balaerus, the Covenant's deceased founder. While they are in Wickam, the characters must ease anti-Covenant tensions, unknowingly enter a confrontation with the diabolists, and unwittingly take the Shard back home with them!

Storytelling Instructions

This short story should be told during a larger story, as the characters make their way to some other destination. The group makes a short detour at Wickam to carry out their Covenant business. They arrive in the village at night, plan to pay their respects at the Magus's grave, and carry on the following morning. The story should also take place in the summer.

At this point in the Saga we don't want the characters to become alert to the threat the diabolists pose. So, when roleplaying the diabolists, who pose as gypsies, don't give them any more emphasis than other villagers receive.

Past Touches Present

One of the founding magi of the characters' Covenant, named Balaerus (or any other taken from your Covenant's history), was a Seeker. He studied the sources of Divine power and sought out the root of its miraculous magic. While Christian forces occupied Jerusalem during the Crusades, Balaerus posed as a pilgrim and journeyed to the Holy Land to research (or plunder, really) religious records and secrets.

During his illicit studies, Balaerus came across one of the Apple Shards. Recognizing it as a magical oddity, he pocketed it for later inspection. But, true to the Shard's deceptive magic, the Shard touched Balaerus's mind, causing the Magus to forget the "trinket." He therefore carried it with him always, but never remembered he had it.

By the time he returned to the Covenant , Balaerus was already on the verges of madness. Needless to say, the Shard also wiped Balaerus's memory of most of what he had learned in the Holy Land, purging him of his Divine knowledge. The other magi had chosen not to join Balaerus on his "pilgrimage," as they respected the Dominion's magical potential. Accordingly, the Covenant assumed Balaerus's mind had been destroyed in an act of Divine revenge for his blasphemy.

As he kept the Shard in his possession, Balaerus eventually went completely mad. The Covenant cared for him in his deranged state until the Magus's body eventually decayed as well, leading to his death. The Shard affected Balaerus alone, as he was its current vessel on the Earth.

Of particular surprise to the Covenant, during Balaerus's mental decline, was the Magus's conversion to Christianity. The remaining vestige of Balaerus's spirit recognized the Shard for its true Demonic power. As his mind was incapable of fighting that power through magic, or of even warning the others of the Shard's threat, Balaerus turned to his last refuge against evil. On his deathbed, Balaerus pleaded for services of the local priest. When a grog was sent out after the priest, the priest was initially hesitant. But, realizing that one of the abominable wizards might be saved and made into an example, he ultimately agreed to go to the Covenant . Before he died Balaerus confessed his sins, saving his soul from the Shard's eternal damnation. Made a Christian, Balaerus was buried as such, in a Christian cemetery near the priest's parish, at the village of Wickam.

As he bore the Shard at his death, Balaerus was buried with it. Since the cemetery became the Shard's new vessel, the cemetery and surrounding lands suffered the Shard's curse. The village and its fields have been blighted for generations, leaving the villagers and their lord to eke out the barest of existences. The cemetery itself is gray and decrepit; the soil is dry, brambles grow haphazardly and defy care, and tombstones are crumbled.

To this day, on the yearly anniversary of Balaerus's death, the Covenant sends out a magus and retainer to visit the ancient Magus's grave site. This ceremony is performed for two reasons: to show respect for one of the Covenant's founders, and to cover up any ugly rumors that one of the Convent's most respected magus went insane. By appearing to honor Balaerus's conversion to Christianity, the Covenant makes Balaerus's decision seem to have been a sane one.

It's no surprise that the Covenant's yearly visits to the cemetery have created a stir there. The devoutly religious villagers accuse the magi of bringing evil upon the cemetery and the surrounding lands. And, according to legend, the land's decline began only a short time after Balaerus's burial. Balaerus's presence is responsible for the blight. But, regardless of what the local peasants feel, the parish priests have always maintained that Balaerus, as a Christian, has a right to be buried in the cemetery. The Church also protects the Magus's grave because the Covenant makes a healthy annual donation to the parish.

Wickam Today

With the diabolists' recent assembly of the Apple Shards, the hardships of Wickam have mounted since the power of the remaining Shards grows as the Apple is reconstructed. At present, Wickam is virtually dead. The crops are withering in the fields and the animals are dying where they stand. Unless the curse is lifted soon, the village will die with the coming winter. The villagers are understandably distressed.

As the villagers look for the cause of the blight, increasing blame is being directed at the grave site of Balaerus, and the Covenant from which he came.

Though the present parish priest, Father Miller, tries to avert village anger from the cemetery, his is a losing battle. The cemetery's desecration seems imminent as the villagers want Balaerus's body removed. The only thing stopping them at this point is fear of evil spirits, but that fear will soon be surmounted by aching bellies.

As if village spirits aren't low enough, it is currently time for the annual Wickam festival (held on any major day of the summer, like the solstice or at the time of any new moon). This festival is supposed to be in honor of improved fertility, but with the village's present condition and lack of food, festivities are grim.

The Traveling Gypsies

Residing on the fringes of town is a band of what appears to be traveling gypsy performers. Their group includes a number of artists: jugglers, clowns, fire eaters, actors and a fortune teller. The entourage as a whole also includes a number of laborers, a couple of beasts of burden, some wagons, and a scattering of small animals (pigs, goats, and chickens, used as food stock). The gypsies are at Wickam to entertain during the festival. Given the collapse of the festival, though, the gypsies' presence is only a painful reminder of the villagers' suffering. Thus, out of distaste and distrust for the gypsies (the villagers are wary of such swarthy foreigners), the villagers make the entourage camp outside the village proper. Performers still enter the village, though, to perform and collect what money they can.

Actually, the gypsies are diabolists, traveling under the guise of entertainers. In this role they are able to freely interact with others and can inconspicuously move from place to place in search of the Apple Shards they pursue. They've really come to Wickam to steal the Shard buried with Balaerus, and are pleased to find that local tensions against Balaerus and the Covenant are high. This gives the diabolists an opportunity to rob the grave of its Shard and make the desecration look like the work of a local.

The arrival of the characters does put a crimp in the diabolists' plan. The "entertainers" immediately work to learn the nature of the group's visit, and want to know when the characters plan to leave. The gypsies therefore linger around the village tavern, or wherever the characters frequent, appearing to perform for or beg from the locals and the characters. The gypsies actually hope to overhear some mention of the group's agenda. If nothing is said that the gypsies might overhear, the leader of the gypsies, Carmella, approaches a character, preferably a male, who seems to be the weakest link in the group (the character with the biggest mouth, or the one with the greatest appetite for alcohol). This character is probably be a grog. Carmella wins the favor of the character and tries to get him speaking freely.

Carmella is very charming and endearing: "It is rare that we have the pleasure to perform for such reputable persons such as yourself. I find your work most fascinating! I'm sure the powers you must witness every day would cause every person here to swoon, including myself, don't you think?"

"Well, I'll bet you're actually in charge of a lot that goes on. I can tell just by looking at that pensive brow and your oh-so-senstive eyes. I'll wager you're even the real one in charge here among your friends. The burden of your task here must be a heavy one. Would you like another drink?"

As soon as the diabolists learn that the characters plan to visit Balaerus's grave, the diabolists decide to act. Carmella takes no chances in acquiring the Shard. She moves to desecrate Balaerus's grave before the characters visit it, in case the group intends to take away the body as the villagers request. A character might even admit that the group is only there to pay respects to Balaerus, but Carmella still wants to act first. She fears that the "weak" character might be stronger than appearances suggest, or fears that the "weak" character doesn't know the true intentions of the group leader. Either way, a thief is sent to exhume Balaerus's corpse and rob it of the Shard.

The Characters Arrive

The characters only intend to spend the night in Wickam, but local anti-Covenant tensions and strange events may keep them longer. Even at evening the characters recognize the signs of decay festering in Wickam. The fields are withered for up to a mile outside the village. The only people the group sees outside the village are a band of gypsies. The band is making arrangements for dinner. Only a couple of gypsies notice the passing characters, unless the characters are making an inordinate amount of noise. The gyspies glance over at the characters, look away and suddenly take an astonished double take. A successful Perception + Alertness roll of 12+ allows a character to notice a quiet murmur pass among the gypsies, but its content cannot be heard.

Few villagers are away from the comfort of their homes at this hour. When the characters arrive at the village, the few people out-of-doors stand to the side and stare, or rush inside, closing doors and shutters.

The Wickam Tavern

Wickam is only a small village, populated by about thirty people. Accordingly, lodging is scarce. However, the village does have a small tavern that sells a palatable ale. The group can bed down there.

The tavern is stocked and paid for by the local lord, who is very good to his serfs. He believes that by granting the peasants this luxury, they will work harder for him, and they do. Of course, the lord is careful not to overstock the tavern, fearing his people will be drunk too much of the time. As it is, supplies have been endangered on numerous occasions by grieving blight victims. Still, the villagers are frugal with the drink, making some money selling it to travelers and saving some for special occasions. The characters can drink at the tavern, but there's no food to be eaten. Sleeping accommodations are arranged on the very floor on which the characters stand. Patrons of the tavern are flabbergasted by the group's entrance. Once they collect their wits, the patrons leave the inn, cutting a wide berth around the characters.

The tavern keeper is immediately unfriendly: *"What in the Laird God's name do ye want here? Haven't ye caused enough trouble without eatin' an' drinkin' us all out o' house an' home?"*

The tavern keeper does the minimum expected of his occupation, regardless of the amount of money flashed in his face. After a few minutes in the tavern, alert characters (those who make a successful Per + Scan check of 10+) notice the tavern keeper as he looks out a window and casually walks to and slips through a back door. Another successful Per + Alertness check of 10+ allows a character to hear a crowd forming outside the tavern. Whether they prepare for trouble or not, the group is interrupted by a mob of eight villagers who barge through the tavern door. Each carries a domestic tool (such as a pitchfork) used as a weapon. The mob is led by the village Elder, Wilf Shepherd, who is unarmed.

Wilf addresses the characters with determined expression and voice:

"We dinna want your kind here! Ye've done enow harm here with all your evil magics and Devil doin's. We want ye gone from here, helpers o' Satan. Dinna defy us—we're hardy enow for a scrabble!"

The remaining mob moves forward to reinforce Wilf's words. The characters have no need to fight here, only to defend themselves. Any demonstration of magic or martial prowess is enough to make the villagers back off until Father Miller arrives (see below). If the characters openly assault the villagers, it's probably time to reevaluate the values of your troupe.

Wilf Shepherd, Village Elder

Int +1	Str +2	Prs +1	Dex +1
Per -1	Stm +2	Com 0	Qik -1

Confidence: 4
Age: 37
Reputation: Bully/villagers 2, Coward/Father Miller 2, Imbecile/gypsies 1.

Personality Traits

Proud +3
Jealous +1
Brave -1

Important Skills

Area Lore (Wickam) 3, Drinking (duration) 3, Folk Ken (peasants) 1, Intimidate (threats) 3, Weather Sense (rain) 2.

Wilf as an NPC

Wilf became the village Elder when he accurately predicted a single, large rainfall last year. The villagers were so joyous they appointed him to the position, though he was previously just a bully and a drunk.

Wilf has let power go to his head and often oversteps his bounds. He likes to order people around, but backs down when threatened or confronted. He dislikes Father Miller, believing the priest meddles too much in village politics.

The Villagers

The following is the profile of an average, male villager.

Int 0	Str +1	Prs 0	Dex 0
Per +1	Stm +2	Com -1	Qik 0

Weapons: farm tools (pitchfork, hoe) 1st +10, Atk +5, Dam +14

Father Miller Arrives

Before a fight can commence, or after one has begun if the group is not levelheaded, Father Miller rushes into the tavern with a young initiate. Miller inserts himself between the glaring factions or shouts from a table until any fight stops. Either way, Miller mediates the dispute. He asks the mob to calm itself. The mob is skeptical at first, but Miller reminds the people that his is God's will:

Father Miller: *"My good people, there is no need for bloodshed here. We are all men of God and can resolve this dispute as such."*

Villager: *"They airna His followers; they pray to Lucifer!"*

Father Miller, Priest of Wickam

Int +2	Str +1	Prs +3	Dex 0
Per +1	Stm +1	Com +3	Qik 0

Confidence: 3
Age: 44
Reputation: Knowledgeable/Wickam 3, Helpful/Villagers 3, Meddling/Wilf 2

Personality Traits
Religious +3
Diplomatic +2
Influential +2

Important Skills
Alertness (local disturbances) 3
Area Lore (Wickam) 3
Chirurgy (bind wounds) 3
Church Knowledge (faith doctrine) 5
Church Lore (gospel) 5
Diplomacy (village disputes) 5
Leadership (commanding) 4

Father Miller as an NPC
Father Miller humbly accepts the position he holds in Wickam and does his best to be helpful to any God-fearing Christian, or any other polite visitor, who seeks his aid. As the local priest he has many responsibilities, and as a respected member of the village, he makes it his duty to get involved in any village business (sometimes to the anger of Wilf, the village Elder).
Although a man of God, Miller is highly tolerant of other faiths and lines of thought. However, he feels sorry for those who do not belong to the Church, believing God's to be the most rewarding way.

Father Miller: *"If that is so, I will deal with them! My word is inspired by God. By fighting, you people defy His command!"*

At that the mob quiets and sits. Miller then commands the initiate to collect the gypsies from outside the village to entertain here and keep tensions low.

Once in control, Father Miller explains the villagers' hostility to the characters. In a very composed but compassionate tone, he recounts the village's hardships as of late and explains that the locals blame the Covenant for their bad luck. Miller is very diplomatic in his account, careful not to anger the villagers or raise the ire of the characters. The gypsies arrive in short order, breaking the tension with their amusements. This is when the diabolists try to overhear any word of the characters' intentions in Wickam.

Their entrance also offers an ideal opportunity to introduce the personalities of the diabolists to the characters. Emil moves about, subtly insulting characters with witty riddles. Gizzleren tries to provoke a muscular character into a contest of strength. Mab sells foul foods and seems to laugh about it under her breath. Lucinda reads palms. And Honerius quotes dramatic lines of seduction to attractive females.

Once things have settled and laughter abounds, Father Miller takes aside the apparent leader of the group. He explains that the people mainly blame Balaerus for their ill fortune. He also details how Balaerus's grave might be in jeopardy. He's seen someone skulking around the cemetery the past couple of nights, but hasn't been able to make out who it is. This is actually Honerius, searching for Balaerus's grave. If the players don't think of it, Miller suggests that while in the village, the characters post a guard near the cemetery. Of course, he doesn't want the guards in the cemetery itself, nor does he allow the group to take Balaerus's body: *"That God-fearing man died a Christian and will be respected as one, or Higher Powers will be displeased!"*

Once all the characters' questions are answered, Miller announces to the village mob that everything is under control. The villagers leave impolitely, feeling disgruntled.

The Villagers' Plot

The characters may post guards at the cemetery, and those guards see action there (see *At The Cemetery*, p. 23). However, other characters still find things to do in Wickam. Some may drink and sleep at the tavern, others may enter a dialogue with Father Miller about the intricacies of faith versus reason. And those who are wary of the villagers' intentions may keep an eye on local activities.

Shortly after the villagers leave the tavern, Wilf Shepherd is seen roving from house to shack, organizing a meeting in his home later that night. Thus, before conflict begins at the cemetery, the local men gather at Wilf's place. The meeting goes on for some time, lasting at least until the end of the conflict at the cemetery. Villagers argue about what to do with Balaerus's grave. It's clear to them that the Magus's body must be removed to end the local curse. However, the village leaders are also clearly afraid to approach the grave:

Jamie the Miller: *"The old Bastard's corpse must be moved! We'll all be doomed elsewise!"*

Jocko the Farmer: *"Aye. An' 'twas your idea Jem, so ye can do it!"*

Jamie: *"What?! Not me, by God! I'm the one had tae hunt that bear last year, remember? Me duty's been done. It's Will's affair; he's done nary a thing all season!"*

Will the Tavern Keeper: *"Me! Why, ye ungrateful . . . If it was nae for me, who'd be pourin' beer down your wretched gullets?!"*

Characters can listen in on the conversation by positioning themselves outside a convenient window, or they can sneak into the small house to spy. This encounter is meant to entertain the characters and offers unlimited roleplaying opportunities. A character who has the Mimicry talent could create absolute chaos, or a magus with an invisibility spell could make objects seem to float around at the mention of Balaerus's name, instantly clearing the room.

At The Cemetery

The characters know where Balaerus's grave lies from previous trips to Wickam, or from reports from other magi. Balaerus's tombstone is clearly labeled with his familial mark (a hammer emblazoned with an "X" insignia, set before a shield), which you should describe to the troupe. That mark becomes important later in the Saga.

Any guards posted at the cemetery that night come in conflict with the diabolists. Now that the diabolists know where Balaerus's grave is, they send some henchmen to exhume the body and take the Shard. Henchmen are sent as they won't compromise the diabolists' cover if captured; the thieves seem simple grave robbers. There's one diabolist henchman for every guard on duty, plus one extra. Masked to hide their identities, the thieves create a diversion, making a lot of noise elsewhere in the cemetery, trying to draw the guards away from Balaerus's grave. (The diabolists keep close tabs on the characters as soon as the characters enter the village, so they know guards are at the graveyard.) If any guards remain at the gravesite, a henchman tries to sneak up on them and take them from behind. While the guards and henchmen fight, the remaining henchman digs up Balaerus. Or the digger at least breaks the earth with his shovel, exhuming the Shard, which has moved toward the surface so its seductive powers will not be blocked. If allowed to do this, the henchman then picks up the Shard.

It's imperative that the characters get ahold of the Shard at this time. One of the characters could see the digger pick something up from the grave, and may pursue him. The digger might also be killed before picking up the Shard, letting one of the characters find it.

At some point during the conflict, a henchman will undoubtedly be unmasked. Recognizing the thieves as gypsies, not villagers as the characters might expect, the characters can pursue justice at the gypsy camp.

If any henchmen are taken captive, they attempt suicide before being made to talk. This is performed in the most available fashion (such as throwing themselves on the characters' swords). Those who escape the characters return to the gypsy camp and may be tracked there. There's no evidence to suggest that the henchmen are more than grave robbers.

Carmella explains: *"Being travelers, our people live off the land. When these fools heard about the wizard's grave, they thought there would be riches to gain. I apologize for their insult. If you wish, I will turn them over to the lord of these lands. A shame, though, that they should die for such a small crime."*

Carmella means what she says. She will sacrifice her henchmen to the local lord to preserve the group's gypsy image. Remember, the gypsies aren't supposed to seem villains yet. Loyal to Carmella, the thieves have vowed to die on her command.

After the Theft

Discovering that the gypsies have desecrated the graveyard, Wilf Shepherd commands the gypsies to

leave the village. Wilf also makes use of this opportunity: *"Seein' as how the grave's already been dug up, why dinna we move the old Wizard's body? Wouldn't be causin' any harm now."*

This suggestion offers any Christian character a chance to step up on his soapbox. A speech about the sanctity of a Christian's grave makes Wilf blush, and a warning that the Wrath of God might be delivered upon the village shuts him up entirely. If none of the characters makes this speech, Father Miller does. Father Miller also restores the grave.

The Shard

The characters will want to inspect the Shard that the diabolists exhume. It looks like a simple piece of stone, colored blood red. The apparent inner surface of it is jagged, while the outer is smooth and polished. The piece looks as if it has broken off something that was handcrafted.

Now that the Shard has been removed from Wickam, the village's curse is lifted. Within a year, life is restored, and crops and cattle return to health. The villagers believe that the gypsies released Balaerus's evil spirit by penetrating the grave. The villagers therefore venerate the gypsies as saints! Unless the troupe mentions the Shard again, don't bring it up. The characters forget they have the Shard, its evil acting upon them, and they take it back to the Covenant with them. Once there, it ends up in a study lab where it is again forgotten, this time for years. The characters may want to return the Shard to Balaerus's grave, but forget to. Even if a player says the Shard's returned, it's not. The characters really forget they have it and return home with it. Players might pursue an investigation into the Shard if you aren't careful to allow the troupe to forget about the piece. There are many ways to allow players to forget, time being the best means of memory loss. Try to embroil the characters in the story that you are otherwise telling at this time. If preoccupied by that story, the troupe will forget the Shard. Should a player have noted his possession of the Shard, try to secretly erase that note. If all else fails, you can complain that this book doesn't offer information on the Shard, leaving you to research it yourself. Alternately, if you do not wish to reveal that the Shard is an object found in the story told in this supplement, simply comment that you have not created the object yet. If inquiries about the Shard persist in the future, just say you still haven't gotten around to working on it. You'd be surprised at how easily players can be duped.

The Diabolists' New Plan

Denied Balaerus's Shard, the diabolists let the Covenant keep it for the time being. Carmella knows that the Shard will be forgotten by the magi, given the Shard's deceptive power. Thus, it will only cause problems for the Covenant in the future. The diabolists track down some other remaining Shards, leaving the Covenant's Shard till later. Once its evil has influenced the Covenant , the Shard's extraction will be made easier.

Contingency Plans

It is also possible that the characters are traveling incognito. If this is the case, they are not met with such anger by the villagers, nor do the gypsies pay the group any attention outside the village. The characters learn of the town's misery by talking with inn patrons. It is also learned that Balaerus and the Covenant are blamed for these evils. Balaerus's grave is clearly in peril.

Father Miller is known by the Covenant as a man of strong reason, even though he is a man of God. The characters can approach him for help and may reveal their true identities to him without being compromised. He advises the characters to post a guard near the grave to be sure the villagers don't strike.

The diabolists still learn that the characters belong to the Covenant. Carmella might seduce a grog as described above, extracting the information with her feminine wiles. Or a gypsy trails the characters to Father

Miller's, wanting to know their intentions in the village. He or she overhears the strangers' true identity and reports to the others.

The Curse of The Shard

While the characters are in possession of Balaerus's Shard, the Covenant falls victim to the Shard's evil influence. The Covenant has the Shard for fifteen years, without even knowing it. On the fifteenth year of its possession, the Shard is stolen from the Covenant by the diabolists. For the first four years of its possession, the Shard sits tucked away in a Covenant laboratory. Its corruption doesn't set in yet, ensuring that the characters have completely forgotten it. Then, on the fifth year, the Shard's evil sets to work.

As four years of game time have passed, the troupe will undoubtedly have forgotten about the Shard too. Four years of game time can amount to a good measure of real time. Since the Shard spent four years in stasis, it has eleven more in which to enact its curse. The curse begins innocently enough, but by the time of the Shard's theft, the characters are fully aware that they're under some kind of attack or curse. After the Shard is taken, the curse is lifted from the Covenant, and no new ill effects afflict the characters. By that time, though, the damage has been done.

The effects of the curse demonstrate themselves on the fifth year of the Shard's possession, and then on every other year after that (the 7th, 9th, 11th, 13th and 15th). You may choose the time of year at which each new affliction arises. As the curse lasts eleven years, the Covenant suffers "waves" of evil. The curses described here are those that have a direct effect on the Covenant and the characters. These effects are permanent and cumulative over time. Anyone who joins the Covenant after the curse sets in is only affected by those parts of the curse that have yet to develop. The Shard also effects the lands surrounding the Covenant, but those effects are discussed separately.

Note that characters with the talent Sense Holiness and Unholiness may detect the source of the Covenant's suffering as an evil curse on a roll of 20+. Each time another wave of the curse strikes after the first (there are 5 more waves), another roll is allowed with a cumulative +1 bonus (for a total of +5 on the last wave of curse effects). Though the character with this talent realizes that a curse is at work, he or she cannot locate the source of that curse.

On top of the mysteries/penalties discussed below, the Covenant's Magical Aura is radically altered during the fifteen year period. Though the Apple was once a powerful force of the Dominion, it is now a focus of Infernal activity. Therefore, with the coming of each wave after the first, an Infernal Aura eats away at the Magical Aura of the Covenant. Along with the specific penalty that affects the Covenant with each wave, deduct one point from the Covenant's Magical Aura. Soon, the Magical Aura rating will equal zero and an Infernal Aura will begin to develop. When the next wave comes, the rating will become Infernal 1. If there is another wave, then the rating will be Infernal 2, and so on.

The Effects of the Curse

On the first wave of the curse, the characters suffer a -1 penalty to their Perception scores. The Shard discreetly dulls the characters' awareness and wits. To notice this change, a Per test of 20+ is required, based on new Per scores. You should modify the troupe's rolls, without telling the group that their characters are less alert. Once the characters discover their curse, the players can be officially informed of the Per penalty, which should be recorded on their character sheets.

On the second wave of the curse, which is now three years into the curse's activity, characters' Charm scores suffer a -1 penalty. The characters are physically changed by the Shard, making them look drained and pallid. To recognize this very gradual change, each character must make a Per test of 17+, rolled by you. If an acquaintance visits the Covenant after having been away for some time, he or she spots the change on a Per test of 15+. If the change is pointed out to the characters, they receive another Per roll, this time against a value of 15+.

The Covenant is also affected in this stage of the curse. The fortress starts looking run-down and its grounds become weed-infested and unkept. This change is noticed with the same Per tests as described above.

In the third wave of the curse, the Covenant library is affected. All rolls in Library Arts (see **Covenants**, p.33) are reduced by 1. This part of the curse causes the physical deterioration of the library's books, turning some of their pages yellow and marring the print of others. To notice this change, the characters must make a Per + Scribe roll of 10+. Ruined books and scrolls cannot be restored. Alternately, you may choose specific texts that are destroyed. Cumulative damage is sustained by the library for each future wave of the curse. So, by the fifth wave, the Library Score is three less than normal.

In the fourth wave of the curse, now 7 years into its evil, the Covenant's laboratory suffers. The Laboratory Score (see **Covenants**, p.33) suffers a -1 penalty, and incurs another such penalty on each future wave. This penalty is a reflection on the general decay of the lab, causing elements and compounds to go foul and causing

lab tools to become lost or broken. Characters notice this change on a Per + Magic Theory test of 10+.

On the fifth wave of the curse, the characters suddenly discover that 20% of their current *vis* total is gone! The characters might be taking stock of the Covenant's supplies or looking for *vis* for research. There's no telling where the *vis* went. These events prove that some evil force is acting against the Covenant. A magus who creates an InVi spell of Level 20+ may sense that a curse is behind recent developments. The characters may research the source of the curse, but none is to be found, thanks to the deceitful evil of the Shard.

In the final wave, year eleven, the curse has its most devastating effects. The Covenant's Magical Artifact score (see **Covenants**, p.34) is reduced to zero. All magical artifacts possessed by the characters or stored within the Covenant are rendered useless unless the item is fueled by Infernal powers. With this effect you have the option of slowly destroying artifacts over a period of years. This gives the magi a chance to save their most potent items by moving them away from the Covenant. Of course, such a solution denies the magi use of the items at the Covenant. Minor artifacts may become useless when the Covenant's Magical Aura is halved. Moderate items could be destroyed when the rating equals zero, and all items, no matter how powerful, would be neutralized in this eleventh year.

The characters can't miss these disasters. If they haven't figured it out by now, the magi intuitively realize they're under a curse of some kind. Still, the characters cannot determine the origins of this curse. The above outline is just a sample of what effects the curse can have. You may alter these effects as you please to better suit the strength and personality of the Covenant.

If you like, you can keep the characters guessing about the nature of their affliction. Some signs of recent disaster might suggest the work of known Covenant enemies, turning the characters' investigation into a story. A malicious faerie, for example, might have threatened the characters with the robbery of their magic when the characters last foiled the faerie's nasty plans. Pursuing the faerie to end "his" curse, they may interrupt other plans of revenge that he has, but do not put an end to the curse already in effect.

As previously stated, when the Shard is stolen by the diabolists, the curse is lifted from the Covenant. Characters with Sense Holiness and Unholiness realize this on a roll of 10+. Another InVi spell, this time of Level 10+, also informs the characters that the curse has been lifted. The idea for such a spell must come from the characters themselves. Since they are unaware of the Shard's presence and theft, the characters might not think to check up on the status of the curse.

The results of the curse are permanent. Various scores that are reduced can only be raised through normal stories, experience, and plot devices, or through magical efforts to restore characters and Covenant. Remember, though, that characters' Characteristics, like Perception and Charm, cannot be raised, but scores based on them can be.

The Curse and the Land

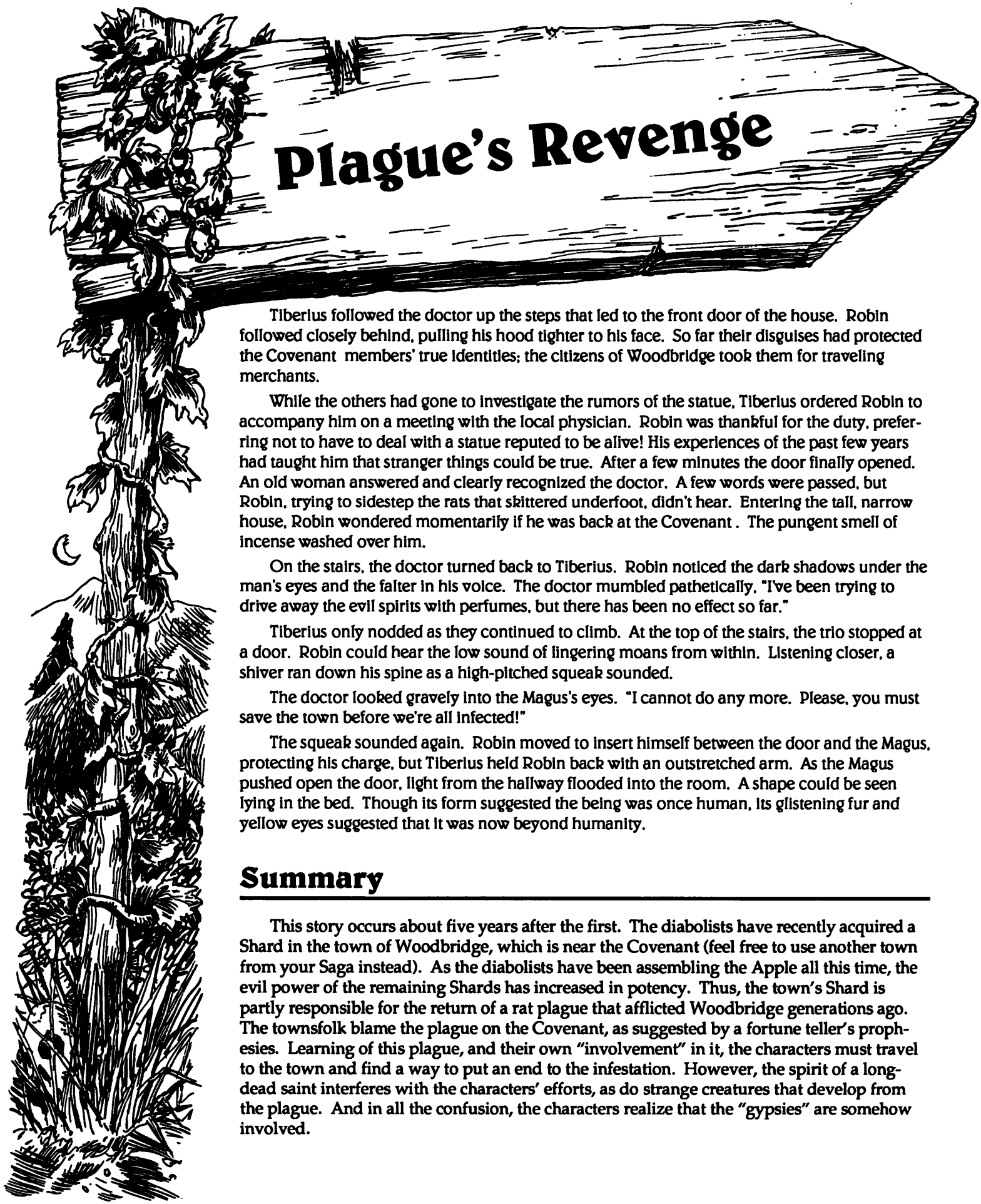
The Shard is within the Covenant, but its curse affects all the lands within a 5- to 10-mile radius of the fortress. Fortunately, the effects of the curse aren't as potent on the land as they are on the Covenant.

The curse builds slowly on the lands, as it does on the Covenant. At first, crops contract a mild ailment which limits villagers' food supply for the coming winter. In the next year, a local source of water is fouled, causing the people to contract an illness. After that, livestock begin to die, and then a dry summer burns out all the crops. These disasters mount until the eleventh year of the curse, when the people are virtually starving and plague-ridden.

By about the seventh year, the locals hold the Covenant to blame for their hardships. Though the locals are generally too frightened to act against the Covenant, they do demonstrate anti-Covenant sentiment. Traveling characters are received with disdain in villages and towns. The odd brave commoner even approaches the characters and tells them to leave or do something to alleviate the terrible weather. All in all, the Covenant's Reputation drops by 2 points in the surrounding lands.

Encounters written into this Saga function to express the locals' anger for the Covenant. You are advised to incorporate this local Covenant hatred into those stories that you interject into this Saga. That way, narrative continuity is preserved.

The characters can still raise their local public standing, though. As the Shard's curse is weaker over a distance, magi can use their magic to restore afflicted fields, cattle, and commoners. Furthermore, if the characters perform some heroic local event, or are acclaimed as heroes by a respected commoner, the characters are seen in a new light. But, locals tend to have short memories, so if the Covenant "does something good for a change," its Reputation may rise a point or two for only a short time. If bad tidings ever return to the area, the Covenant is quickly blamed. If a terrible evil afflicts the lands, such as the emergence of the Scriptural Seven Signs, the Covenant's local Reputation may drop by as many as three points.



Plague's Revenge

Tiberius followed the doctor up the steps that led to the front door of the house. Robin followed closely behind, pulling his hood tighter to his face. So far their disguises had protected the Covenant members' true identities; the citizens of Woodbridge took them for traveling merchants.

While the others had gone to investigate the rumors of the statue, Tiberius ordered Robin to accompany him on a meeting with the local physician. Robin was thankful for the duty, preferring not to have to deal with a statue reputed to be alive! His experiences of the past few years had taught him that stranger things could be true. After a few minutes the door finally opened. An old woman answered and clearly recognized the doctor. A few words were passed, but Robin, trying to sidestep the rats that skittered underfoot, didn't hear. Entering the tall, narrow house, Robin wondered momentarily if he was back at the Covenant. The pungent smell of incense washed over him.

On the stairs, the doctor turned back to Tiberius. Robin noticed the dark shadows under the man's eyes and the falter in his voice. The doctor mumbled pathetically, "I've been trying to drive away the evil spirits with perfumes, but there has been no effect so far."

Tiberius only nodded as they continued to climb. At the top of the stairs, the trio stopped at a door. Robin could hear the low sound of lingering moans from within. Listening closer, a shiver ran down his spine as a high-pitched squeak sounded.

The doctor looked gravely into the Magus's eyes. "I cannot do any more. Please, you must save the town before we're all infected!"

The squeak sounded again. Robin moved to insert himself between the door and the Magus, protecting his charge, but Tiberius held Robin back with an outstretched arm. As the Magus pushed open the door, light from the hallway flooded into the room. A shape could be seen lying in the bed. Though its form suggested the being was once human, its glistening fur and yellow eyes suggested that it was now beyond humanity.

Summary

This story occurs about five years after the first. The diabolists have recently acquired a Shard in the town of Woodbridge, which is near the Covenant (feel free to use another town from your Saga instead). As the diabolists have been assembling the Apple all this time, the evil power of the remaining Shards has increased in potency. Thus, the town's Shard is partly responsible for the return of a rat plague that afflicted Woodbridge generations ago. The townsfolk blame the plague on the Covenant, as suggested by a fortune teller's prophesies. Learning of this plague, and their own "involvement" in it, the characters must travel to the town and find a way to put an end to the infestation. However, the spirit of a long-dead saint interferes with the characters' efforts, as do strange creatures that develop from the plague. And in all the confusion, the characters realize that the "gypsies" are somehow involved.

The Peddler

The characters first learn of Woodbridge's predicament when a traveling peddler comes to the Covenant. Octavius, "Peddler of the World's Treasures," as he calls himself, arrives at the Covenant's front door. He was recently in Woodbridge, where he witnessed the rat infestation and learned of the townsfolk's blame for the Covenant. Octavius's news is important to the characters:

"I was just travelin' through Woodbridge, a town a little ways from here. When I got there, I couldnae believe me eyes. There was little rats runnin' all over. The place was infested with them! The folks there told me they'd been plagued by ye people. A fortune teller is supposed tae hae been in town an' said the plague would return an' ye, pardon me words, 'were the evil ones tae blame.'

"Seems the town had a plague some years back just like this one. Back then, though, some Saint took care o' the little vermin. Wiped them all out! They even have a statue commemoratin' him. I says, 'No, not those good Wizard folks,' but they says, 'Yes, they'll be the ones!' O' course I thought ye'd wantae know right off, 'cause the townsfolk are talking about gettin' the militia up an' about here.

"So I'll be thinkin', here's somethin' ye'd be wanting, so there's got tae be somethin' good old Octavius can get in return!"

Regardless of whether the magi treat Octavius fairly or throw him out after hearing what he has to say (and if they do, Octavius spreads rumors confirming the Covenant's cursing of Woodbridge in his travels, reducing the Covenant's Reputation by 1 point), the Covenant clearly has some business to attend to. Someone has been discrediting the Covenant, and people's lives are in jeopardy at the hands of some evil power. All this calls for a little visit to Woodbridge.

The History of Woodbridge

Nearly a hundred and thirty years ago, the village of Woodbridge endured a rat plague that nearly killed everyone for miles around. No conventional means of extermination could eliminate the rats, and the local lord was at a loss for a way to save his lands and serfs, though he did manage to keep it from spreading by quarantining the area and burning bodies and buildings. (Of course, the plague wouldn't have spread anyway since the Shard caused only a local effect.) He called upon every priest and knight he knew, and even approached the Covenant , but none could lift the village's plague.

What the villagers and their would-be saviors didn't know is that the village was located on the site of a buried Shard. The Shard brought the plague and would have caused the complete destruction of the village. However, an initiate of the clergy, known today only as Francis, heard of the village's situation. He was an ambitious novice who sought the Church's favor to be ordained quickly and to acquire a parish and flock of his own. Toward that end Francis visited Woodbridge and researched the Scriptures and Church writings to find an end to the plague.

In his studies, Francis discovered the Shards, and realized that the plague might be the result of one. Francis never learned that the Shards composed the Apple, though. Searching Woodbridge, Francis discovered a Shard buried beneath the village. However, he did not bring his findings to his superiors. Instead, Francis disposed of the Shard in the cellar of the Woodbridge parish church, shutting it up in a box sealed with holy water. Isolated from the world, the Shard's power faded, putting an end to Woodbridge's plague.

Publicly, Francis claimed that he realized the villagers' sins had brought about the plague. In order to save the people, he therefore asked for Divine forgiveness on their behalf, and offered himself as a sacrifice for the villagers' sins. He further claimed that his sacrifice was the required cure for the plague—one man willing to assume the crimes of his fellows.

With this "miracle" came the power and influence that Francis hoped for. He was made the priest of Woodbridge. The village also grew into a town as peasants flocked to the parish of this savior. Of course, this was all a sham since Francis had already ended the curse.

The Woodbridge of today is a larger version of that developing town. Francis is now dead, but years after his death he was venerated as a Saint and a statue of him was erected in his honor. His former parish church also still stands, but is no longer used since the old structure has been added onto by the building of a new and bigger church.

The Diabolists in Woodbridge

Two weeks ago the town held its annual festival in memory of Francis's achievement. Performers from all around came to the festival to entertain and make money. Among those players was the "gypsy" band. The diabolists knew Woodbridge housed a Shard, as Honerius had scouted it out some time earlier. They therefore came to town in order to take the Shard. Throughout the festival the diabolists combed the town for their prize. They eventually found it in the cellar of the old parish church. Breaking into the new church

(not knowing of the old way into the parish church, as discussed below), the diabolists stole the Shard. They initially intended to slip out of Woodbridge with their prize, but when they heard the legend of the town's historical plague they wondered if it should be recreated. Fearing that the influence of the Shard had been cut short, most of the diabolists felt that a reoccurrence and completion of the plague would release any negative energy that could inhibit the Shard in their future summoning ceremony. Carmella did not agree, but the members of the band decided to do it anyway, under the direction of Emil. As her followers' decision to recreate the plague was unanimous, Carmella could do little to stop them.

So, before leaving Woodbridge at the end of the festival, Lucinda made a prophecy. She was in a performance talking with a client's deceased loved one when she suddenly "lost control." The other gypsies said a powerful force, a force of evil—the Covenant—had taken control of Lucinda's mind. Lucinda then warned of a return of the famous plague and fingered the magi as its source. The magi, she said, wanted to destroy the town out of hatred for its devoutly religious citizens.

Most people scoffed, but two days later, the rats returned. By that time the gypsies and other performers had left. Even though the Shard has been taken from Woodbridge, the plague persists as its evil has already commenced. The townsfolk are now enraged at the Covenant, and want to send out their militia against the magi.

Woodbridge Today

If the characters intend to visit Woodbridge and investigate its problems, they'd better go incognito. If Covenant members are seen in Woodbridge, the citizens raise a hue and cry, bringing the watch down on the characters. It shouldn't be difficult for the characters to escape the watch, but any further attempts to enter the town must clearly be made in disguise. As the characters are going to be interacting with people in town, they need disguises that possess some kind of authoratative power. Citizens simply don't open their door to strangers who want to search the basement. However, citizens might invite in "Jesuits" who are in search of infidels. The trick is not to get caught by the authorities being impersonated.

It's easy to discover the anti-Covenant sentiment welling in Woodbridge. All the group need do is send ahead a grog or companion who will not be recognized. That character hears all manner of criticism of the Covenant and can report same to his or her fellows. This anti-Covenant feeling is similar to that expressed by the villagers of Wickam. The characters might recall a similar atmosphere from that earlier story, which would help them recall the involvement of "gypsies" then as well. Thus, they may connect the events of the village and town.

The Investigation

The characters have no allies in town, save the spirit of Saint Francis (see *The Statue*, below), so they are forced to investigate the plague under the power of their own legwork. There are numerous mysteries and sources of information into which the characters may delve.

Town Rumors

Living in despair with the current plague, the citizens of Woodbridge are all angry at the Covenant. They therefore express any of their anti-Covenant beliefs to a disguised character, wanting to vent their anger, and wanting to share the weight of their sorrow for just a moment. The following are rumors the characters can hear in town. Some are accurate, leading the characters to new areas of investigation. Some rumors are based on truth while some are downright red herrings, and following them up simply wastes characters' time.

Mack the ratcatcher: *"I tried tae get the filthy bastards when they first . . . started turnin' up, but there was . . . so many of them. They just kept comin' an' comin'. No one could hae stopped 'em! I held me ground . . . but then the big ones showed! Big! Big as a . . . horse!"* (His head falls to the table in a drunken haze.)

Gwynith the prostitute: *"I was comin' back from a . . . job. I was passin' through the square when I passed him. First it looked like he was watching me, starin' at me like he knew somethin' about me. I stopped an' stared back . . . an' then the statue moved!"*

Fergus the baker: *"Folks hae been accusin' me of bakin' rats into me loaves! Well, I swear by God's name it's nae true. If any rats hae gotten into the bread it's 'cause they crawl in there after I put it for sale! I cannae help what folks will be buyin'! Even the guild backs me! So what if some people took ill after eatin' me bread? It's nae me who'll be turnin' them tae rats!"*

Thomas the physician: *"I've treated four cases already this week! Most horrible thing I ever saw, people turning all mangy right before my eyes. Some even have pointed ears now and are getting claws. Certainly I can tell you where they live."*

Pegeen the herbalist: *"It's those witch folks, ye know. They'll be the ones causin' all the rats, ye know. Well, here now, I was out picking plants yesterday. Nary a good bunch left for all the nibblin' goin' on! An' then when I'm walking in the wood lot I nearly break me neck, ye know. There's all kinds o' holes out there, bein' dug by rats!"* (These holes are actually old gopher holes, having nothing to do with the rats.)

Devlin the town watchman: *"I was on duty at the festival site when the fortune teller went wild. I saw her jumpin' about on the ground. Another bloke* (Emil) *says she was possessed* (crosses himself) *by those witch folk a ways away. Then the woman stopped an' says in a peculiar voice that the rats was comin' back. I laughed 'cause me dad used to keep me scared by stories of the old plague when I was but a wee bairn. I thought he was foolin' me till now."* (Daniel refers to Lucinda in this account. This rumor should definitely be told to the characters, giving them evidence to conclude that the "gypsies" were in town during the recent festival.)

The Church

The town church began as Francis's parish church, but the parish church is now old and dilapidated. It is no longer used, in favor of a new, larger church that's been built onto it, so the old parish church's secrets have long been forgotten. However, there is still an old, dusty door within the new church that leads into the parish church. The door hasn't been used in years, at least not by the clergy.

When the gypsies were in town for the festival, they tracked the Shard down to the church, but weren't sure where within the church it was. So they broke into the church late at night (Gizzleren forced the door) and eventually found the Shard hidden in the old parish church's cellar. As the Shard's box was sealed with holy water, none of the diabolist leaders could open or even touch the box, so they had one of their henchmen do it for them. Needless to say, the henchman burned up in a blue flame, but he did open the box, giving his comrades access to the Stone.

As far as Father Delson, the church priest, knows, the break-in is a mystery. On the morning after the theft he found the main doors forced open, but found nothing disturbed within. Father Delson never even considered checking the old parish church door, within the church. His life revolves around the new church, so the old virtually doesn't exist for him. On inspection (a successful Perception + Scan check against a value of 10), the interior door that leads into the parish church proves recently scratched, as if by an animal's nails (Mab helped push the door open). A fair amount of dust is also piled at the bottom of the door, having fallen from the door when it was moved. Characters can spot this dust with another Perception + Scan check.

The old parish church may be entered from the main church, or from an old entrance that the statue of Saint Francis takes the characters through (see *The Statue*, below). Either way, the characters walk into a one-story, small, dark, dusty, crypt-like parish church. Its walls are made of heavy stone. Its windows are small, offering little light. These elements combine to create the impression that the parish church is a simple lump of rock jutting from the ground. Characters need a light source to get around, whether it's night or day.

On first inspection, the parish church seems innocent enough. There are no signs of trouble here. However, dust on the floor is unsettled, suggesting that a significant amount of traffic has been through. Father Delson assures the characters that, to his knowledge, no one's been through here for ages. The dust has actually been disturbed by the diabolists and by the statue, as it enters the parish church in search of the Shard.

In a back room of the parish church, under the floor, is a set of stairs that lead to the cellar. Unless the statue takes the characters to the staircase, they can only find the stairs by chance. A stone slab rises to allow admittance to the stairs, but the latch used to raise the stone is only found with a successful Perception + Scan check against a value of 12. It's more likely that the characters enter the basement when accompanied by the statue.

The stairs lead to a small cellar. The ceiling of the cellar is only six feet high, so tall characters have to watch their heads. When the parish church was in use, the cellar was used as a storeroom. It is largely occupied by ancient furniture. There are a few books present, but they crumble to the touch. On a successful Perception + Scan check against a value of 10, the group discovers three bottles of very old and very good wine tucked away in a corner—the private stash of a former priest.

There are more obvious things to see in the cellar, though. The dust on the floor has also been disturbed recently. Furthermore, a brick has been taken out of a wall and left on the floor, revealing a tiny alcove within the wall. On the floor before the alcove is an old silver box with gold trim that may fetch as much as 100 pieces of silver from a reputable trader. There is also a large scorch mark on the floor. Aside from these things, there is no conclusive evidence to suggest what happened here.

The box was the one that held the Shard. The alcove is where Francis hid the shard long ago, behind a loose brick. The scorch mark was left by the diabolist henchman when he burned up on contact with the box. The box has no detrimental effect on evil characters—its seal has already been broken.

What the characters make of all these signs is up to them, but without the statue's input, evidence found at the parish church tells nothing of how the plague started, or who is really behind it.

The Statue

Located in the center of the town square is a statue in the likeness of Saint Francis, dedicated to him for rescuing the town long ago. The statue depicts a middle-aged, fat, short, balding man. Francis raises his hands in the air, suggesting his divine fury, while rats at his feet cower and flee. The statue is covered with bird droppings.

Rumors around town state that Francis's spirit has risen again out of anger toward the characters' Covenant. People claim to have seen the statue move and descend from its pedestal. No one knows what the statue does or where it goes after becoming animate, but people claim to have seen it at various places around town, sometimes simultaneously! The characters may not believe these rumors, but they are worth checking out.

The statue is "alive." It is the vessel of the spirit of Saint Francis. After Francis died his spirit was made to wander the earth instead of finding peace in the Promised Land. The Powers That Be denied Francis eternal rest as punishment for his lies about his "miracles" of long ago. They also punish him for hiding the Shard instead of destroying its evil might.

Now that the plague has returned, the Powers That Be offer Francis another chance. If he can put an end to the latest plague, his soul will be put to eternal rest. With his body long ago turned to dust, Francis's spirit uses the next best earthly vessel available to him: his own statue. When he enters the statue every night at sunset, the statue he becomes animate. Within the statue, Francis searches for the Shard he once hid in the basement of the parish church. With his stony might, he intends to crush the Shard, squeezing its evil out of this world.

However, the Shard is nowhere to be found. Every night Francis goes back to the parish church, but fails to find the Shard. Francis's capacity to think is severely limited while he is incased in stone, so he cannot imagine where else to look for the piece. After failing to find the Shard in the parish church night after night, Francis returns to his pedestal and resumes an inanimate state. In the meantime, his spirit goes into stasis until the next search commences the following night. Francis has been doing this for about two weeks now.

Naturally, the townsfolk are terrified. As if the rats aren't enough to frighten them, this walking monolith has come along. The people believe the statue's intent is to raise the town curse, but they dare not get in its way

should the Lord's wrath come upon them. Thus, the townsfolk take shelter in homes or inns at night, not even looking out for fear that they should see something Divine and go mad. As the streets are empty at night, the characters are free to abandon any disguises they use during the day.

The characters may realize the statue is alive in a couple of ways. They may pay heed to local rumors and post a guard at the statue, or might be out investigating under the cover of darkness and meet the statue in the streets. The statue always heads directly to the parish church and back again.

The characters may follow the statue. Francis pays no heed to those who trail him, determined in his quest (he's also hard of hearing). Rather than enter the front doors of the new church, the statue goes around the building to the old parish church. Pulling back some overgrown shrubs, the statue reveals on old, forgotten door, opens it, and enters. The characters may also enter this door, finding it slightly stiff and squeaky. Francis then descends the cellar stairs, which the characters now find if they haven't already. In the cellar, Francis moves over to the silver box and looks inside. Finding it empty, he dashes it to the ground and emits a low, angry, rumbling sound. As the Shard is still not present, Francis exits the parish church and returns to the pedestal.

Francis is extremely single-minded in his search. He allows no one to get in his way. Any character who tries

to stand in his way is smashed aside with a marble arm. The characters may also surmise, though wrongly, that the statue forced the church door. The statue certainly has the strength to do so. The characters may also assume that the statue is responsible for the plague. This is certainly plausible as the "real" Saint Francis originally put an end to the plague (as a plaque adorning the statue's pedestal states). Maybe this statue is a product of evil, or is being controlled by the villains trying to discredit the Covenant. Convinced that the statue is somehow evil, the characters may attack it. Saint Francis defends his stony body, believing any attackers to be allied with evil and therefore responsible for the plague. The statue remains frighteningly mute throughout any conflict. That is, unless characters refer to the plague, say they are present to stop the plague, or accuse the statue of being at the root of the plague. To any such statement, the statue responds in a deep, slow, gravelly voice:

"I am here to put an end to the plague! I am charged by God's will! If you resist me you will die as infidels!"

or,

"Mortals, why do you accost me? I am here to end this plague. We have the same quest. Let me pass and I will do God's bidding."

At that the characters can cease the fight and try to gain Francis's aid.

The characters may not attack the statue, but attempt to parley with it from the outset. Francis ignores any attempts at communication until he hears the characters refer to the plague. It never occurs to Francis that the characters might actually help him. He sees his task as his alone, given to him by God. So if the characters want to cooperate with the statue, they have to make the suggestion.

Working with the characters, Francis leads them to the parish church if he hasn't already been there. Along the way he tells the tale of his rescue of old Woodbridge. He adds, in a sad voice, an account of his ambition and sin:

"I discovered an object was causing the plague, summoning the rats to the village. I found it and hid it away in a holy box. That was my mistake. I left a great Evil on the earth and was proud enough to claim I had performed a miracle. That is why I am chained to the earth now. The plague must end if I am to find peace."

Once he's been to the parish church with the characters and has found the Shard missing, Francis sets back out to his pedestal. The characters must intervene or the statue will return to an inanimate form. Francis explains that he has to return to the pedestal because: *"It is not here. I will look again tomorrow. Maybe it will be back then. Out of my way, please."*

If the characters ask what *"it"* is, Francis answers: *"A piece of the Prince of Darkness himself! The vomit of evil! The serpent's eye!"*

He continues to describe the Shard this way, incapable of being more specific. He cannot even describe what the Shard looks like. Under the sway of Divinity, Francis cannot bring himself to directly describe or name such an evil item as the Shard. It's also important that the characters not connect this *"Vomit of Evil"* with the Shard they discovered in the last story. Such a connection would make the characters wary of the Shard's growing threat before we want them to be. If any character still remembers the first Shard and describes it to Francis, Francis just stares blankly and gives the stone another grandiose title.

Although Francis can't think of another place to look for this *"Piece of the Prince of Darkness,"* the characters might. On their request, Francis forgoes his return to the pedestal. He joins the characters wherever they go, and follows orders like a lost puppy. The characters may investigate anywhere else they like at night. Francis's strength might be invaluable to their investigation. However, as dawn approaches, the statue turns from whatever task he's performing (maybe dropping a heavy weight on a character's toes in the process) and sets back out for the pedestal. He explains:

"I must return to the pedestal. My search may only last a single night at a time, by His decree. If I am caught from the pedestal when the sun rises, this statue will crumble to dust. I will have no new vessel to assume on the earth and my soul will be trapped here until Judgement Day!"

Getting Francis back to the pedestal might be a small story in itself as the characters help him race back to his resting place before the sun shows its face. Although he returns to dormancy every sunrise, Francis rises again the following sunset. The characters may greet the statue as it awakens. The characters may be frightened at first when Francis doesn't recognize them, but he eventually clues in:

"Who are you? No doubt you've come to interfere in the Lord's work, plague spreaders! I will dispatch you, then (raising a fist) . . . Oh, it's you. Pardon me, please."

Once the plague is put to an end, the statue returns to his pedestal, thanking the characters for their help and his spiritual salvation. If the characters end the plague during the daytime, when the statue is inanimate, Francis's spirit is set free, but he remains in the statue long enough to wink at a character as the group passes him on its way from town.

Saint Francis, the Statue

Magic Might 30*

Str +5	Size+1	Brave+6
Cun-1	Per-1	Stm-1

Fist: 1st +2,	Atk +4,	Dam +15
Fat n/a	Def+1	Soak+30

Body Levels: OK/OK, 0/0, -1/-1, -2, -3, -5, Crushed

*Double Magic Resistance against spells that alter stone

Description
The statue is made of marble. It depicts an old man. Passing any reflective surface, Francis becomes transfixed with his reflection. After a long silent pause, he goes into a tirade: *"Why am I so old?! I was a young man when I saved this village. By God, I never looked like this, and what are all these stains on my head?"*

The Statue as an NPC
Francis is remarkably personable for a statue. He's very eloquent, if you don't mind his slow, methodical manner, and is extremely polite to his friends. He can be frustrating, though, as he moves painstakingly slow (about a foot every second), and tends to crumble a little whenever he moves, making noise and leaving a pebble trail. Encased in stone, Francis isn't as sharp as he could be, and is actually somewhat slow and dimwitted. As he moves about Woodbridge, Francis marvels at its growth and is generally flabbergasted by anything newfangled.

The Disease

At some point in their investigation, the characters learn that numerous townsfolk have fallen sick with some strange ailment. Some of the disease's earliest victims have even gone missing, having fled their beds in the night, never to be seen again. Thus, no one has been known to die of the ailment. The disease surfaced shortly after the rat plague began, so is also blamed on the Covenant and its evil.

The disease was created by Mab, as an entertaining twist on the plague. The disease causes people to slowly transform into rats, but ones of about human size! Once the transformation is complete, the victims feel the call of their kind and escape human existence to live in dark places.

At the present time there are four victims undergoing a mutation. Three others have already been lost and have disappeared. The town physician, Doctor Thomas Milton (see *Town Rumors*, above) tried to cure all the victims, but his attempts have failed. Milton is desperate to find a cure and will even allow the characters, if still in disguise, to try any remedies they offer. The doctor directs the characters to a diseased person's home and arranges for the characters to be allowed in. He is even willing to leave the room, allowing magi to use magic, while the characters work their healing art. And, he asks no questions if their cure is successful. Milton's only request is that:

"You tell the people here that it was I who cured the sick. The town's been talking of lynching me because I've been failing them. Please, for the sake of an old man's life, do me this favor."

Magi can attempt to reverse Mab's disease. Only the CrCo spell Restoration of the Defiled Body, or one that otherwise affects a spell of the Muto Technique, has any effect on the disease. Conventional methods of healing are ineffectual.

Curing the diseased makes the characters town heroes and allows them enough credibility and public support to remove their disguise. The townsfolk are initially shocked and some claim the characters are playing a trick on the town. However, if the characters make a major public speech, expounding on their good intentions and their true nobility, the people largely respect the group. Absolute proof of the characters' good intentions comes in ridding the town of its plague. Until then, though, groups of townsfolk might still attack the characters in the night or generally make their continued stay in town uncomfortable.

Victims of the disease who have completed the transformation into rats and have run away can be magically saved as well. Their condition can also be reversed if the plague is lifted from town. There are three such disease victims in town. Fortunately, they come to the characters, saving the group the time and energy of a search, but maybe costing the characters their lives.

The Rat Attack

Whenever you think the troupe is getting tired of their characters' investigation, rats attack the characters. This attack occurs when the group is out at night with Francis, or when the group is spending some quiet time, preferably in a secluded spot. The rats are led by the three victims of the plague disease. The three have the

combined bodies of rat and human, standing slouched but with arms free. The disease victims also retain something of their human intelligence, consisting of a form of cunning rather than a form of rational thought.

As victims of the plague disease, the giant rats are attuned to the progress of the plague and sense that the characters are a threat to the plague's continued spread. Thus, commanding a swarm of rats, the giant rats attempt to kill the characters.

Characters may attack the swarm of normal rats, but the effort has little effect on the swarm's number. Only a spell with a large area of effect reduces the size of the swarm, halting normal rat attacks for one round. After that, other rats flood in to attack, replacing the dead or indisposed. In all rounds where normal rats swarm the characters, the characters are automatically bitten (Defense rolls are ignored). The rats' Damage Modifier is zero, but a character's armor does not afford any protection as the rats find gaps and exploit them. Only Stm may be used to soak this damage. Characters who are incapacitated at any time are still bitten by the horde. It soon becomes clear to the characters that the giant rats must be disposed of to put an end to the attack. If the characters intend to cure the giant rats, the creatures must be kept alive. The giant rats attack until killed or subdued, driven by the corruption of their disease. Once the giant rats are killed, incapacitated, or subdued, the normal rats flee back into their holes.

It's unlikely, but if the characters lose this battle, they are rescued by Francis in his statue form (assuming the rat attack occurs at night). If the characters have not yet met Francis, they do so now. He comes to their aid, recognizing them as allies for fighting the rats. Francis is unharmed by any of the rat attacks since he is made of stone, so he wades into battle, swinging and stomping.

The Gypsy Medallion

When the town had its festival some weeks ago, the diabolists were there and posed as performers. Although Honerius doesn't know it, he accidentally lost a medallion. As the town square was filled with performers, the characters may search the area for clues pertaining to the gypsies. They might also stumble across the medallion while on other business. With a Per + Scan check of 10+, the medallion is found imbedded in the dirt of the square, apparently trodden on by many passing feet. A character with Magic Sensitivity might also detect the medallion.

The medallion has a hole drilled through it where a broken and frayed leather strap is attached. The medallion was worn as a necklace, and the fray was the means of the medallion's loss. On one face of the medallion is a odd insignia. The other face is blank.

The insignia is a sign carried by gypsies to recognize each other. All such signs possess folk magic that denies

The Giant Rats

Magic Might 10

Size 0	Cun+4	Impulsive+2

Claws: 1st +3, Atk +6, Dam +10
Bite: 1st +3, Atk +8, Dam +14
Fat n/a Def+8 Soak+7

Body Levels: OK, 0, -1, -3, -5, Incapacitated

Description
The giant rats are human-sized and move bipedally, but with a pronounced stoop, leaving their hands/claws free to attack. Their preferred method of attack is by bite, though. The body of a giant rat is covered with coarse grey fur. Their faces are ratlike, but still possess some human qualities.

Ordinary Rats

Size-3	Cun 0	Per+2	Stm 0

Hungry +4
Fat 0 Def+4 Soak-1
Body Levels: OK, -3, Incapacitated

gypsy enemies permanent possession of such a medallion, hence the frayed strap. Honerius "acquired" the medallion on his many travels. As long as the characters maintain good relations with any genuine gypsies they meet, the characters retain the medallion. If the characters ever fight or cross genuine gypsies, the medallion disengages itself from its possessor. While in possession of the medallion, the characters are warmly greeted by all gypsies they meet, and receive abundant hospitality from them. Plus, gypsy thieves do not rob the characters.

A character with a Knowledge skill in Gypsy Lore or Occult Lore may recognize the significance of the medallion on a roll of 10+. Others have to research the medallion's meaning back at the Covenant (Int + Scribe roll of 12+). Regardless of how the characters learn of the medallion's significance, it tells them something important. On a successful Int check of 9+, the characters connect the medallion with the gypsies they met in Wickam, maybe having seen the medallion then. Alternatively, you may make the players responsible for remembering this sort of information. Generally, the medallion suggests that the diabolists were in town. The medallion, added to reports of the fortune teller who predicted the plague, affirms any suspicions that the diabolists were here. Of course, the characters have no incriminating charges to bring against the "gypsies," but the gypsy band seems to be assuming some significance in the Covenant's Saga.

Banishing the Rats

Although the characters have been searching for the source of the plague, they cannot find it. The plague's source seems to have been stolen from the parish church. This turn of events leaves the characters to create their own means of ending the plague. The best way is with a spell.

Any magus who makes a successful Intelligence + Concentration test against a value of 12 recalls having seen an unfinished spell in the Covenant library. As far as the magus can remember, the spell had something to do with eliminating vermin. To use the spell, the magus must return to the Covenant while the remainder of the group stays in town, or the magus may communicate with other magi at the Covenant and have them find the spell for him or her. There is such a spell in the Covenant library. When the spell is found, on a successful Intelligence check of 9+, records are also found that tell the spell's history. It was the project of an older, now dead magus named Grenaran. He was the magus who was originally approached by a local lord, over a hundred years ago, to save the then-village of Woodbridge from its first plague. Grenaran had almost finished his task when the plague was abruptly ended by an initiate of the clergy, the young Francis. As his spell was no longer needed, Grenaran left it unfinished, but stored it in the library.

Once in possession of Grenaran's spell, all a magus need do is complete it. As the spell is nearly finished, that's not a great task. The spell, called *Note of the Piper's Flute*, is AnRe and Level 20. Compare the magus's Lab Total (see **Ars Magica**, p.102-103) to the spell's Level. For each point the magus has less than 20, one week is needed to complete the spell. If the magus's Lab Total equals or exceeds the spell's Level, one week must still be spent to perfect the spell.

After the spell is complete, the magi of the Covenant may continue to use it. Here are the spell's specifics:

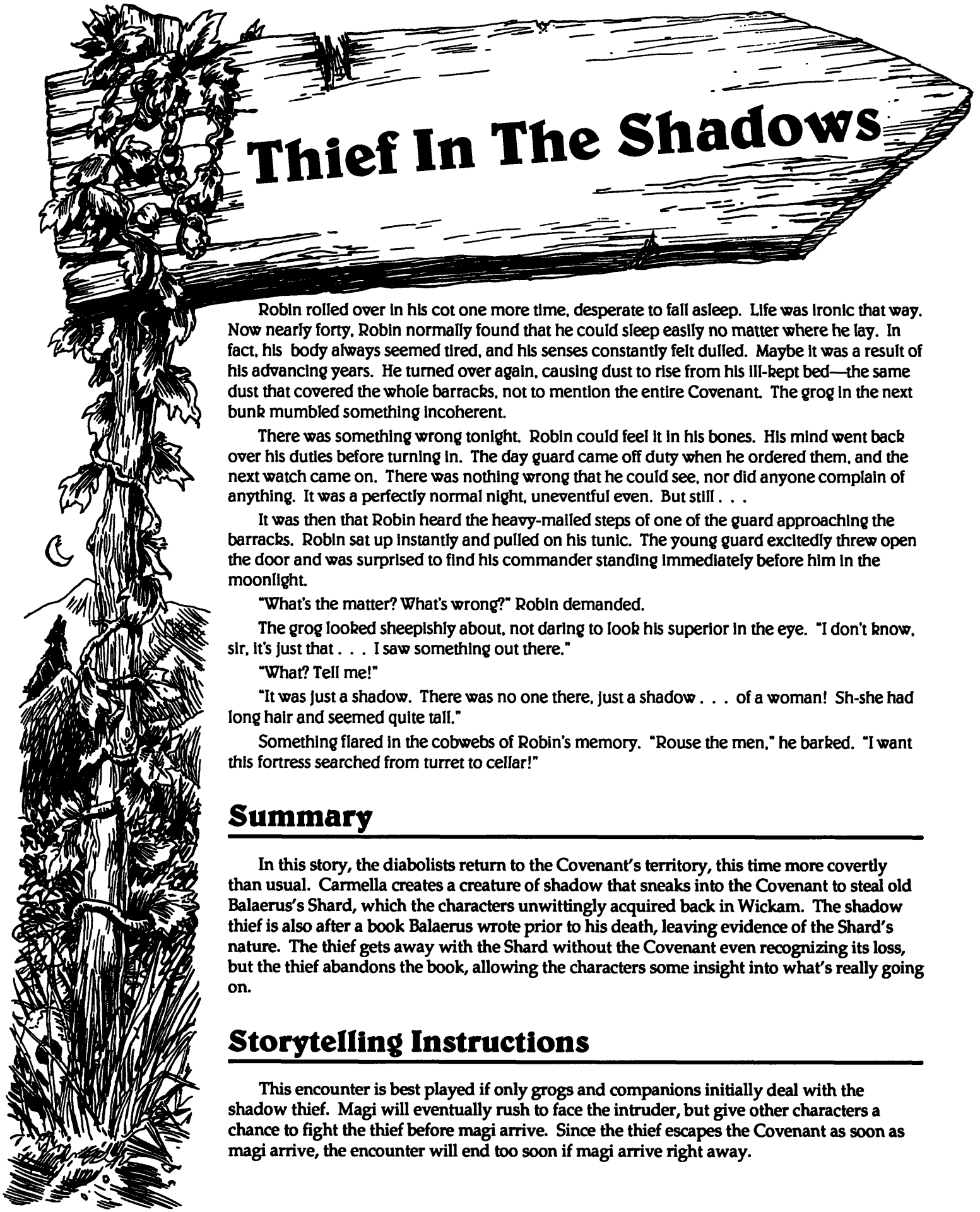
Note of the Piper's Flute: ReAn 20
Spec., Spec.
The spell causes all rodents, including rats, mice, gophers, squirrels, and groundhogs to flee an area of up to two miles encircling the caster. The spell has immediate effect. Once out of the designated area, some rodents may return, but most move to new locales, following their instincts.

Concluding the Story

After the characters have wiped out the plague and cured the town's citizens, they may unmask themselves if they haven't already. As described in *The Disease*, the townsfolk are initially surprised by the characters' true identity. Some still accuse the Covenant of evil intent, but the characters' several good deeds are evidence that they may not be evil as everyone has been led to believe. Thomas, the town physician, also comes to the characters' defense, indicating how the characters were instrumental to the end of the plague (but only as assistants to his ingenious work).

If the characters defend their name at the end of this story, the Covenant's local Reputation does not fall. If the characters do not unmask and defend their honor, the Covenant's Reputation among the locals falls by 1 point. In this case, the townsfolk still blame the plague on the Covenant, even after the plague is lifted.

This story also serves to teach the characters that the "gypsies" were not a one-time-only encounter, suggesting that the band may someday return and be cause for more trouble.



Thief In The Shadows

Robin rolled over in his cot one more time, desperate to fall asleep. Life was ironic that way. Now nearly forty, Robin normally found that he could sleep easily no matter where he lay. In fact, his body always seemed tired, and his senses constantly felt dulled. Maybe it was a result of his advancing years. He turned over again, causing dust to rise from his ill-kept bed—the same dust that covered the whole barracks, not to mention the entire Covenant. The grog in the next bunk mumbled something incoherent.

There was something wrong tonight. Robin could feel it in his bones. His mind went back over his duties before turning in. The day guard came off duty when he ordered them, and the next watch came on. There was nothing wrong that he could see, nor did anyone complain of anything. It was a perfectly normal night, uneventful even. But still . . .

It was then that Robin heard the heavy-mailed steps of one of the guard approaching the barracks. Robin sat up instantly and pulled on his tunic. The young guard excitedly threw open the door and was surprised to find his commander standing immediately before him in the moonlight.

"What's the matter? What's wrong?" Robin demanded.

The grog looked sheepishly about, not daring to look his superior in the eye. "I don't know, sir, it's just that . . . I saw something out there."

"What? Tell me!"

"It was just a shadow. There was no one there, just a shadow . . . of a woman! Sh-she had long hair and seemed quite tall."

Something flared in the cobwebs of Robin's memory. "Rouse the men," he barked. "I want this fortress searched from turret to cellar!"

Summary

In this story, the diabolists return to the Covenant's territory, this time more covertly than usual. Carmella creates a creature of shadow that sneaks into the Covenant to steal old Balaerus's Shard, which the characters unwittingly acquired back in Wickam. The shadow thief is also after a book Balaerus wrote prior to his death, leaving evidence of the Shard's nature. The thief gets away with the Shard without the Covenant even recognizing its loss, but the thief abandons the book, allowing the characters some insight into what's really going on.

Storytelling Instructions

This encounter is best played if only grogs and companions initially deal with the shadow thief. Magi will eventually rush to face the intruder, but give other characters a chance to fight the thief before magi arrive. Since the thief escapes the Covenant as soon as magi arrive, the encounter will end too soon if magi arrive right away.

The Diabolists Return

This short story occurs around ten years after *Plague's Revenge*. Carmella waits this long to claim the Covenant's Shard for two reasons: 1) she allows the Shard's evil to fully corrupt the Covenant before stealing the stone, making that theft easier, and 2) she hopes the magi will let their guard down over time, thinking they've seen the last of the "gypsies."

Until now the characters have encountered the diabolists at, or have learned they've been in the vicinity of, different festivals. Respecting the magi's intelligence, Carmella ends the diabolists' masquerade before it is seen through. Thus, to get the Covenant's Shard, only she and Honerius approach the Covenant. From a safe distance, Carmella generates her shadow thief, and Honerius guides it to the Shard with his sense for the Shard's location. He also knows of the existence of Balaerus's writings on the Shards, being so closely attuned to the Stones.

As Carmella and Honerius act covertly, and are careful to cover their trail, the characters fail to find the "gypsies". However, Carmella leaves a hint to suggest that she is behind the break-in. She can't resist letting the Covenant's inhabitants know that their destruction is imminent.

Thief as of Ink

This is the spell Carmella uses to generate the shadow thief. The spell was originally created by gypsies centuries ago and has been passed down among their kind for generations. It is chiefly used for the purpose of thieving, allowing the caster to "enter" a place and rob it of its valuables without even entering the structure. Carmella somehow "acquired" it from true gypsies.

A character with the Knowledge skill Occult Lore, or a Knowledge skill like Gypsy Lore, may recognize the nature of the spell. By seeing or hearing about the shadow thief, or by learning of the ingredients used in the spell (described below), this character makes a roll against a value of 12. If successful, he or she recognizes the spell as that used by gypsies. In this case, though, Carmella added a mandrake root, a diabolical ingredient, to the spell. A second Occult Lore roll or a Magic Theory roll of 8+ informs the character that diabolism has been incorporated into the old gypsy spell. The combination of these elements, and the characters' previous encounters with the "gypsies," suggest to the characters that their old enemies are back and are dealing with the Devil.

Thief as of Ink: CrCo 25
Self, Conc.

The caster takes command of his or her own shadow and may animate it. For the duration of the spell, the caster has no normal shadow. To cast the spell, there must be sufficient light for the caster to have a shadow in the first place. This light also creates a liability for the spell, though, as others may see the shadow moving about in the moon-, sun-, or torchlight.

The caster sees through his or her shadow's "eyes", and controls the actions of the shadow from up to one mile away. Composed of darkness alone, the shadow is insubstantial and may move in any area that has shadows, even faint ones. Not even magical wards can keep the thief out, as long as there are shadows to enter beyond those wards. Bright light is the only barrier that inhibits the shadow's movement. The shadow cannot pass areas that are brightly lit or devoid of shadow.

Although made of shadow, the thief can still be seen. In areas of moderate light, a successful Perception test is needed, rolled against a value of 12. In areas of darkness, the thief is effectively invisible.

Although insubstantial, the shadow can assume solid form, and has to in order to steal items. In this form the shadow looks like a walking silhouette. If the shadow becomes insubstantial again, carried items are dropped. The whole "body" of the shadow must turn solid, not just parts of it. While solid, the shadow has the characteristics (Per, Str) of its caster, but cannot communicate, so has no Prs or Com scores. It also has the normal Soak, Body Levels, and combat abilities of the caster. If the caster carries a weapon while taking control of his shadow, the shadow may use that weapon at the caster's skill level. Note that the shadow cannot cast spells. While in solid form, the shadow can be seen as if in insubstantial form.

The shadow can only be "harmed" when in sold form. Only magical weapons and those made of iron cause it damage. Only spells that work with light (not fire) affect the shadow. The shadow is reduced in Body Levels when attacked, as normal. When it reaches Incapacitated, the shadow dissipates and ceases to exist. The caster's normal shadow then returns.

Regardless of the shadow's form, the caster cannot hear, taste or feel through the shadow. He or she can only see. If, at any time, the caster releases or loses control over the shadow, the shadow dissipates into nothingness.

The Break-in

The shadow thief strikes at night. Composed of shadow, it remains insubstantial until it locates the Covenant library, where Balaerus's journal is kept, and the Covenant laboratory where the Shard is kept. As shadows undoubtedly exist within the library and lab, the thief can slip in regardless of magical wards and defenses.

A random guard on duty, preferably one of the troupe's grogs, receives a check of Perception + Scan versus a value of 12 to notice the thief's passing as it enters the Covenant. This roll is made by you. If the check is made, the grog senses a presence in his or her vicinity and may feel a chill. Or, the grog might spot the shadow of a human female on the ground, near his or her own. Looking around, the grog sees no one, and there's nowhere to hide for yards around. If the character makes another check, once more Perception + Scan against a value of 12, the grog again spots the woman's shadow as it disappears into an archway that leads into the Covenant proper. Still, there is no one around to cast the shadow. Pursuing the shadow, the grog fails to find it again.

Aside from this encounter with the guard, the thief isn't spotted until after stealing the Shard and Balaerus's journal. The shadow intends to leave the Covenant with the two items. This means assuming and maintaining solid form until returning to Carmella. If it can get out of the Covenant, the shadow hides in the darkness of night until it loses any pursuers, and then makes its way to Carmella's position. If the shadow runs into grogs and companions, it fights its way through. However, if the shadow is losing Body Levels, or a magus arrives on the scene, the shadow aborts its mission. If the thief is destroyed or if the magi can contain the thief with light spells, Carmella would lose the Shard entirely. Thus, she is willing to sacrifice the book to get the Shard.

Abandoning the book for the Shard, the thief turns insubstantial again, dropping Balaerus's journal to the floor. The Shard remains in the shadow's possession, though, since the Shard lends itself to the shadow's state; it adapts itself to Carmella's purposes of evil. The Covenant therefore loses the Shard.

The guard on duty might pass the shadow off as a trick of the night, continue to search for the shadow, or raise the alarm. In the first case, another grog or companion traveling the halls suddenly runs into the shadow, which is in solid form. The two collide at an intersection. The shadow carries Balaerus's book under one arm and in its hand is the Shard. In its other hand is a shadow sword (Carmella borrowed Honerius's sword to cast the spell). The character can see the book the shadow carries, but cannot see the Shard in its hand. The shadow fights the character with its sword. The sounds of battle bring other characters running. As soon as a magus appears, the shadow turns insubstantial.

If the guard continues to search for the shadow, he or she finds it after it has plundered the Covenant , as described in the above account. A fight undoubtedly ensues. If the guard raises the alarm, the shadow does not hear it. Carmella soon becomes aware of the alarm, though, as she sees guards hurrying about the Covenant in search of an intruder. By this time the shadow has already robbed the Covenant and is making its way out. Any conflict is resolved as previously described.

Taking Stock

As the strange thief probably drops Balaerus's journal, the characters realize that it wanted the book. The shadow thief also took the Shard, but as the characters don't remember having the Shard to begin with, the characters don't know the Shard is gone. Magi in the Covenant may sense that something has been taken from them, though. They cannot pinpoint what is gone, and searching the Covenant turns up nothing out of its place. All the same, something powerful and dangerous has clearly been stolen. You may have players of magi roll Intelligence + Magic Sensitivity against a value of 12 to realize that something is missing.

Balaerus's Journal

Investigating the book, the characters immediately spot a mark on its binding. This is the familial mark of Balaerus and was previously seen by the group back in Wickam, on Balaerus's tombstone. To remember where they saw this mark, the characters must make a successful Intelligence check against a value of 8. Otherwise, the leatherbound book has no distinguishing marks or titles. The book is actually the family journal of Balaerus, and had been passed down for generations. He had no children in life, so the book remained in the Covenant library after his death. Every member of Balaerus's family had, when approaching death, recorded the major events of his or her life in the book with the intent to pass down this wisdom to any descendants. Balaerus did the same near his own death, but by that time he was thoroughly mad, having been corrupted by the Shard he carried in his pocket. Thus, his entry in the book is largely gibberish. However, part of his message was Divinely inspired, a result of Balaerus's resistance to the Shard's evil, and of his desperate attempt to save his soul before death.

In the midst of the gibberish there's a passage written in ancient Hebrew. If the characters fail an Intelligence + Scan check versus a value of 6, they misinterpret the message as more gibberish. To read the

passage, the characters must know ancient Hebrew, and must translate Balaerus's message. An Int + Scribe roll of 14+ is required to do so. If the characters don't know ancient Hebrew, they can refer to magi from other Covenants , or to a Jewish scholar. In any case, the message reads as follows:

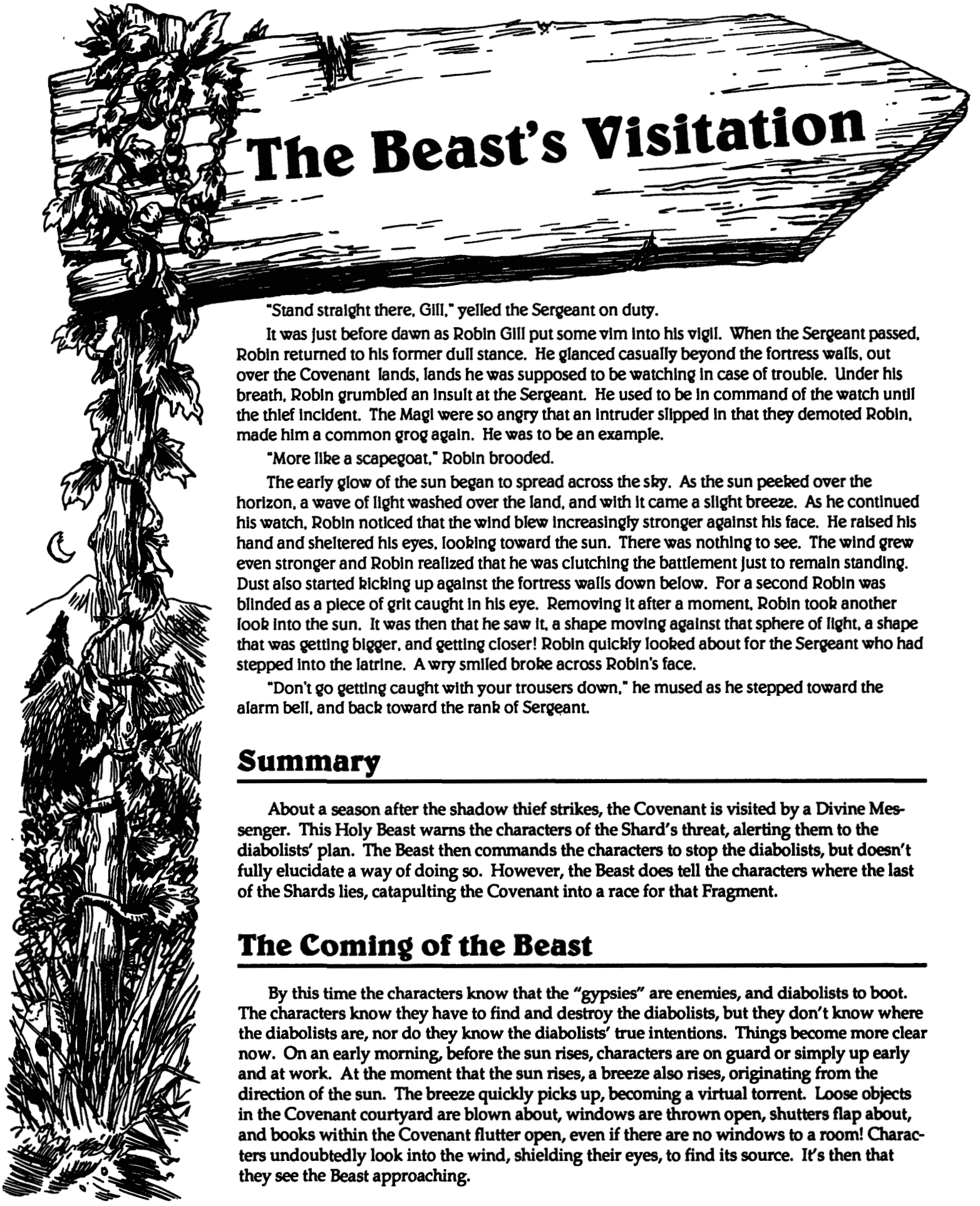
"The forces of Evil do feast upon my mind and body. I fear I am lost and will be eternally consumed by them lest I act to save myself (this explains why Balaerus turned to Christianity). I know not the source of my most terrible affliction, though I know a force for good strives to save me for I sit here writing in a language I do not know, when just this day I was too mad to even communicate with my brothers of the Order. I hope that this message reaches the eyes of someone who can put an end to this Evil. I sense it is most powerful. It is born from the Fallen One and springs from they very origins of humanity in Paradise. The signs of Evil are hidden, for the Evil hides itself and works in devious ways, just as it has slowly destroyed me. If the Evil were to touch the lands, they would surely wither and die, so I tell you wise reader, to look for plague, famine, war, and death where the Evil lies. Its presence will surely be there. In my studies in Jerusalem I learned that Cain roamed these lands and scattered the pieces of Evil here. So, wise reader, I beseech you to find the scatterlings of Evil and return them to Paradise before the Prince finds the power to return to this world."

This message serves to warn the characters of a dire threat, but offers them little to act on. The characters may do some research into Balaerus's references to *"scatterlings of Evil."* They might also investigate Balaerus's references to the Scriptures. You might let the characters gain some knowledge of the Shards and their origins, but this information should largely be inconsequential. Only after being visited by the Divine Messenger (see *The Beast's Visitation*, p. 40) are the characters able to gain any headway into researching the Shards, since the messenger tells them what to look for. Also in the pages of Balaerus's entry is a map that he drew. It is poorly drawn but appears to depict eastern Europe, including the Swiss Alps. There is nothing distinguishing about the map, though, so the characters find no immediate significance in it. Actually, the map is extremely important as Balaerus has secretly labeled the location of Paradise, as referred to in his entry, on it. The characters discover this hidden label later on (see *The Seven Signs*, below).

After the Theft

After the shadow thief robs the Covenant , the characters may search the lands surrounding the Covenant for signs of the true thieves. Two days after the search begins, someone finds a sign of the diabolists' presence. On the other hand, the characters might not order the surrounding lands to be searched. In this case, about a week after the robbery, a grog on guard duty or a character who's out and about stumbles upon the diabolists' "campsite." In a wooded ravine, a character finds a scorch mark on the ground. Globs of black ink are scattered about the ground around the burn mark, and a piece of black velvet has blown a few feet from the scene. A Magic Theory or Alchemy skill check, made against a value of 9, proves that the burned substance that caused the scorch mark was mandrake. The other ingredients indicate that the spell is of gypsy origins (determined as described under *Thief as of Ink*). The mandrake indicates that diabolism has been incorporated into the spell (also as indicated under *Thief as of Ink*).

Remembering that they've dealt with gypsies before, the characters may realize that those gypsies are back. Recognizing the evil suggested by the mandrake root, the characters may also realize that those gypsies are involved with the Devil! Honerius wiped away all other markings that would indicate how many diabolists were on the scene. He also wiped away the duo's trail, so characters cannot track them down. When the characters find the spell ingredients, a few days have passed since Carmella and Honernius left, so the characters cannot run across them. The duo has returned to their diabolist coven. The diabolists now only need one more Shard, but before they get it, the characters learn of the diabolists' plan.



The Beast's Visitation

"Stand straight there, Gill," yelled the Sergeant on duty.

It was just before dawn as Robin Gill put some vim into his vigil. When the Sergeant passed, Robin returned to his former dull stance. He glanced casually beyond the fortress walls, out over the Covenant lands, lands he was supposed to be watching in case of trouble. Under his breath, Robin grumbled an insult at the Sergeant. He used to be in command of the watch until the thief incident. The Magi were so angry that an intruder slipped in that they demoted Robin, made him a common grog again. He was to be an example.

"More like a scapegoat," Robin brooded.

The early glow of the sun began to spread across the sky. As the sun peeked over the horizon, a wave of light washed over the land, and with it came a slight breeze. As he continued his watch, Robin noticed that the wind blew increasingly stronger against his face. He raised his hand and sheltered his eyes, looking toward the sun. There was nothing to see. The wind grew even stronger and Robin realized that he was clutching the battlement just to remain standing. Dust also started kicking up against the fortress walls down below. For a second Robin was blinded as a piece of grit caught in his eye. Removing it after a moment, Robin took another look into the sun. It was then that he saw it, a shape moving against that sphere of light, a shape that was getting bigger, and getting closer! Robin quickly looked about for the Sergeant who had stepped into the latrine. A wry smiled broke across Robin's face.

"Don't go getting caught with your trousers down," he mused as he stepped toward the alarm bell, and back toward the rank of Sergeant.

Summary

About a season after the shadow thief strikes, the Covenant is visited by a Divine Messenger. This Holy Beast warns the characters of the Shard's threat, alerting them to the diabolists' plan. The Beast then commands the characters to stop the diabolists, but doesn't fully elucidate a way of doing so. However, the Beast does tell the characters where the last of the Shards lies, catapulting the Covenant into a race for that Fragment.

The Coming of the Beast

By this time the characters know that the "gypsies" are enemies, and diabolists to boot. The characters know they have to find and destroy the diabolists, but they don't know where the diabolists are, nor do they know the diabolists' true intentions. Things become more clear now. On an early morning, before the sun rises, characters are on guard or simply up early and at work. At the moment that the sun rises, a breeze also rises, originating from the direction of the sun. The breeze quickly picks up, becoming a virtual torrent. Loose objects in the Covenant courtyard are blown about, windows are thrown open, shutters flap about, and books within the Covenant flutter open, even if there are no windows to a room! Characters undoubtedly look into the wind, shielding their eyes, to find its source. It's then that they see the Beast approaching.

The Beast is a Messenger sent to the Covenant by Divine Powers. It is the size of a couple of elephants, with the body and tail of a lion, three heads, and wings. The center head is also that of a lion, but it has a human face. The other heads, extending from the Beast's shoulders on either side of the lion head, are those of an eagle and a bull. The Beast's wings are those of an eagle; these wings generate the great wind. In the distance, the Beast is merely a tiny dot suspended before the blaze of the sun. As it hurtles toward the Covenant, the Beast's true size becomes apparent. And it's clear that the creature is on its way to the Covenant.

Once this is made certain, a grog or companion probably raises the alarm. Allow the characters a few minutes to arrange their positions in the Covenant. Most probably assume defensive positions. Characters are absolutely foolish if they attack the Beast, and realize as much when they take in the Beast's true size. Anything that size could easily level the entire Covenant. Furthermore, conventional weapons are useless against the Beast; arrows and other missiles are simply blown away by the power of the creature's wings. Magic also fails to affect the Beast. The immensity of Divine Power inherent in it counteracts any Hermetic magic thrown against it.

If the characters remain calm, they soon learn that there's no reason to defend against the Beast. The creature swoops in at the Covenant and soars to a halt, hanging over the Covenant's highest turret. At the Beast's arrival, the wind it creates achieves hurricane force. Characters who have not taken shelter must make a Dex test against a value of 11 to avoid being bowled over. As soon as the Beast stops to loom over the Covenant, the wind reduces to a constant breeze as the Beast's wings gently flap, maintaining altitude.

After arriving, the Beast makes its intentions known. It has come to warn the characters of the world's imminent destruction. The Beast stares down at the Covenant, looking over all there. As it passes over the characters, they feel an alarming chill, as if the Beast looks straight to their souls. Then, in an earthshaking bellow, the Beast calls out the name of the Covenant's leader, or calls the name of the leader of the characters, whichever you prefer. Everyone hearing the name must cover their ears against the stone-splitting volume. The Beast continues to call upon that character until he or she appears. The most dramatic place to appear would be on the highest turret of the Covenant fortress, that being close to the Beast. If the lead character asks how

the Beast knows his or her name, the Beast responds: *"I am His servant and know all!"*

After the lead character initiates conversation with the Beast, the Beast delivers its message of doom. It speaks in that same booming voice, and uses Scriptural terms and forms of speech:

"The time of Judgement is nigh, and the Signs of destruction approacheth. The horns shalt call forth the dead to the Pearled Gates, but lo, this is not the time He ordaineth. The Children of Satan doth plot to restore the Fallen One to this world, and with his coming cometh Eden's end. These children hath found the Shards of the Apple and doth mean to restore that which was not to be eaten. With the Shards they gaineth power, and with that power cometh the rise of the Prince of Darkness. I deliver this message unto thee as thou hast been chosen to lead this company of saviors. Thou knowst of the Devil's servants and hast the power to defeat them. They are thine to dispatch. Shouldst thou fail, the Evil One shalt destroy the world and all on it. The burden lieth upon thee to forestall the Apple's rebirth.

"As I speak to thee now, Satan's Children are in pursuit of the last of the Apple's Shards. Thou must deny it them, for if thou shouldst fail, the only way for salvation would be through thine own sacrifice. I tell thee to follow the brightest star in the heavens. There thou shalt find the resting place of the final Shard, amongst the burrows of Faerie Folk. Know thou that if the Evil One's Children sealeth the Apple, they wilt go to the Garden of Paradise. Thou must arrive there before the Seventh Sign is complete, and thou shouldst know that from thence thou mayst never return."

In its own cryptic fashion, the Beast warns the characters of the approach of Satan, who is being brought into the world by the diabolists. The Beast also refers to the Shards as the means by which the diabolists intend to summon the Devil. Finally, the Beast instructs the characters to get the last Shard before the diabolists do, and indicates how that Shard can be found. However, should they fail to get the Shard, the characters have to go to Paradise and sacrifice themselves to defeat the diabolists, as the Beast suggests.

The leader of the characters may ask the Beast questions, and it answers, but only responds to questions concerned with the characters' duty to save the world. The Beast does not answer questions, for example, about the nature of Divinity. Nor does the Beast go into exact detail on the nature of the Apple, the Shards, Paradise, the Devil's summoning, or the "sacrifice" the characters must make. These are details that the characters must uncover on their own. Once the Beast has completed its sermon, and the lead character has asked all the questions that the Beast will answer, the Beast terminates its Divine Message. It turns in the direction from which it came, raising another wind, and suddenly disappears in a flash of light.

Researching

Given the Beast's insight into the diabolists' plot, the characters now solve some of the mysteries that have been plaguing them for years. The characters realize that they brought Balaerus's Shard back to the Covenant years ago. Thus, it's clear that the Shard caused the corruption that afflicted the Covenant. The characters also realize that the Shards can be reconstructed into the Apple and can be used to summon the Devil into the world. This is clearly what the "gypsies" intend to do, and they have been acquiring the Shards for years, right under the Covenant's nose. To fully unravel the mysteries of the Beast's sermon, the characters must research its references. This research is made easier as the Beast's message is branded into the characters' minds; they don't forget a word. Accordingly, you are advised to make a copy of the above sermon to hand to the troupe so they may refer to it as needed.

Any research is conducted for about a season. Completing their research, the characters achieve the same understanding of the nature and history of the Shards that you, the Storyguide, have. Characters can research the Shards and the Apple in many different ways. An Intelligence + Scribe test of 10+ provides general information on the topic a character studies. A check of 15+ offers concrete information, and some clues to topics a character is not specifically researching. The Covenant's libraries may contain some information, and the libraries of other Covenants may also offer some insight. An ideal source of information is a Church library or monastery in which religious records and Scriptures are kept. A religious institution has numerous tomes that tell the story of Original Sin, the eating of the Apple, the Apple's shattering, the scattering of the resulting pieces by Cain, and the corruption of lands where the Shards lie.

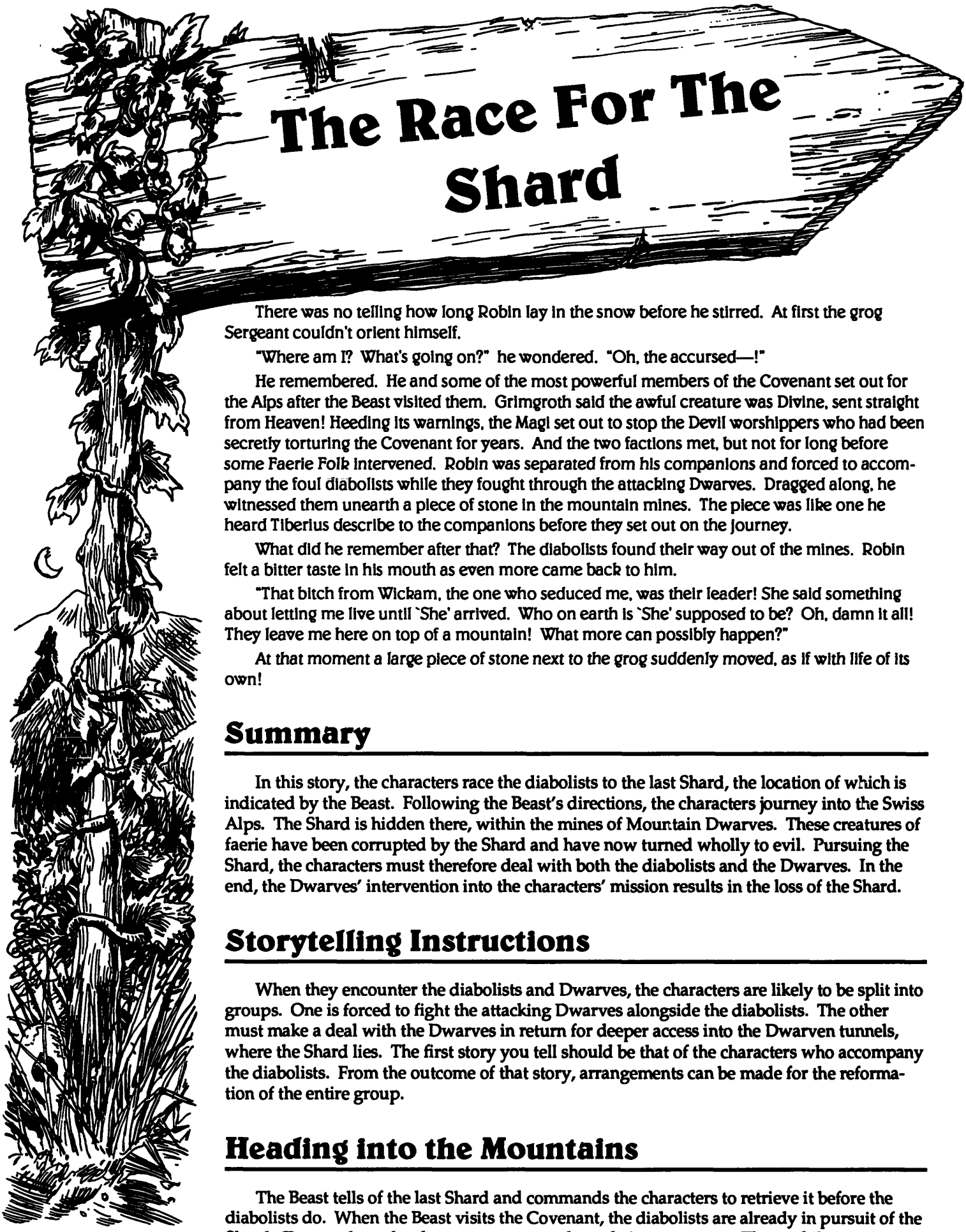
From this last bit of knowledge, the characters also realize that Wickam and Woodbridge housed Shards, and that the Shards were the reason for the gypsies' presence at those places. In terms of their mission to save the world, the characters learn much that the Beast only alludes to. If they cannot beat the diabolists to the last Shard, which the Beast commands them to pursue, the characters must find the Garden of Paradise. It was there that the Apple was originally picked and tasted. That tasting passed experience from the Tree of Knowledge down to innocent humanity. To rob the Apple of its power, the characters must somehow sacrifice themselves to the Tree of Knowledge, though how is not clear at this point. Their sacrifice would reverse the movement from innocence to experience caused by the

first tasting of the Apple. As the sacrifice returns experience to the Tree, the Tree is returned to its original state of wholeness. Consequently, the Devil is banished back to Hell.

The characters also learn that the diabolists must summon Satan from the Garden of Paradise. Since Paradise is the site of humanity's first victimization by evil, it's only fitting that the Devil be summoned there. Before the characters can even think about defeating the Devil, they have to find Paradise. Their research sources fail to locate that place, but the characters later locate Paradise when Balaerus returns (see *The Seven Signs*, below). The characters' research does tell them that they have to find and travel to Paradise before the Seven Signs are complete. These Signs mark the end of the world, and are also referred to by the Beast. The Signs are a direct result of the diabolists' progress toward releasing the Demon they believe to be Satan. The last Sign signifies the destruction of the world and is a metaphor for the Devil's arrival on earth. If the characters don't stop the diabolists by then, the world is doomed.

The characters' research need not be a dull affair. Journeys to distant libraries and repositories of knowledge might become stories in themselves. For example, en route to a library, characters pass through a village where they occasionally conduct business. A villager accuses a companion or grog of having fathered his grandson on a previous visit, claiming that the child subsequently died. The child was actually the product of a coupling of the man's daughter and a satyr. Having found his grandchild was half beast, the old man abandoned the babe in the forest, where it was found by its true father. The characters are put on trial for afflicting the mother's body with evil. To prove their innocence, the characters must retrieve the child from its faerie father.

After learning of the threat posed by the diabolists and the Shards, the characters may try to solicit the aid of other Covenants and magi. As the Shard's evil is subtle and deceitful, and only these characters' aid is sought by the Divinities, the characters' Covenant is the only one aware of the world's danger. Other magi and Covenants can't perceive a force of evil behind the world's collapse. Even after the Four Riders strike, the outside world fails to recognize its own imminent demise. Only those in the vicinity of the Covenant realize that evil forces are at work. Thus, if the characters try to solicit the aid of outside magi, they are scoffed at. Other magi are convinced that if such a threat existed, *"the Order would have known of it long before the Dominion."* The characters are left to save the world on their own.



The Race For The Shard

There was no telling how long Robin lay in the snow before he stirred. At first the grog Sergeant couldn't orient himself.

"Where am I? What's going on?" he wondered. "Oh, the accursed—!"

He remembered. He and some of the most powerful members of the Covenant set out for the Alps after the Beast visited them. Grimgroth said the awful creature was Divine, sent straight from Heaven! Heeding its warnings, the Magi set out to stop the Devil worshippers who had been secretly torturing the Covenant for years. And the two factions met, but not for long before some Faerie Folk intervened. Robin was separated from his companions and forced to accompany the foul diabolists while they fought through the attacking Dwarves. Dragged along, he witnessed them unearth a piece of stone in the mountain mines. The piece was like one he heard Tiberius describe to the companions before they set out on the journey.

What did he remember after that? The diabolists found their way out of the mines. Robin felt a bitter taste in his mouth as even more came back to him.

"That bitch from Wickam, the one who seduced me, was their leader! She said something about letting me live until 'She' arrived. Who on earth is 'She' supposed to be? Oh, damn it all! They leave me here on top of a mountain! What more can possibly happen?"

At that moment a large piece of stone next to the grog suddenly moved, as if with life of its own!

Summary

In this story, the characters race the diabolists to the last Shard, the location of which is indicated by the Beast. Following the Beast's directions, the characters journey into the Swiss Alps. The Shard is hidden there, within the mines of Mountain Dwarves. These creatures of faerie have been corrupted by the Shard and have now turned wholly to evil. Pursuing the Shard, the characters must therefore deal with both the diabolists and the Dwarves. In the end, the Dwarves' intervention into the characters' mission results in the loss of the Shard.

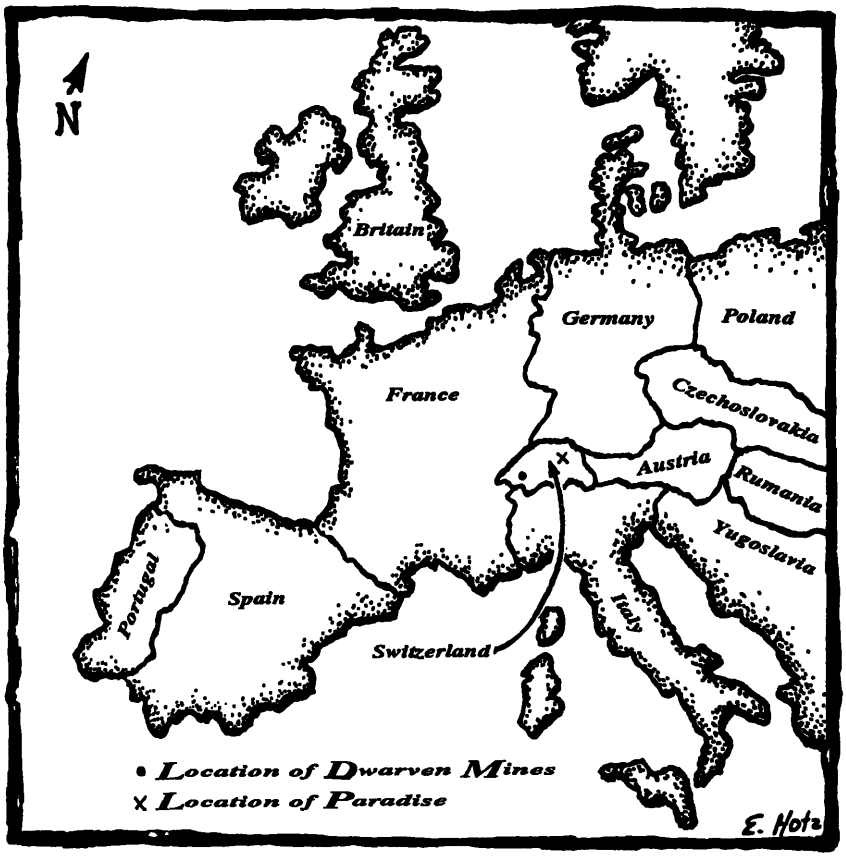
Storytelling Instructions

When they encounter the diabolists and Dwarves, the characters are likely to be split into groups. One is forced to fight the attacking Dwarves alongside the diabolists. The other must make a deal with the Dwarves in return for deeper access into the Dwarven tunnels, where the Shard lies. The first story you tell should be that of the characters who accompany the diabolists. From the outcome of that story, arrangements can be made for the reformation of the entire group.

Heading into the Mountains

The Beast tells of the last Shard and commands the characters to retrieve it before the diabolists do. When the Beast visits the Covenant, the diabolists are already in pursuit of the Shard. To stop them the characters must send out their own group. Thus, while some

European Map:
Dwarven Mines & Paradise



Covenant members research the nature and origins of the Shards, others must set out to deal with the enemy.

The Beast tells the characters to follow the brightest star in the heavens, adding that it will lead them to the domain of Dwarves, who reside in the mountains. On the night following the Beast's visitation, a bright star is seen in the eastern sky, assuming that the Saga is set in western Europe (such as France, England, or Spain). Characters don't need the astronomy skill to notice this star, and it remains the brightest star in the sky throughout the characters' pursuit of the diabolists. The star can even be seen during the day. Following the star, the characters are led into the Swiss Alps. If this mountain range doesn't suit your needs, switch it to the Pyrenees or any other suitable range. Assuming conventional travel (such as by horse or similar mount), it should take the characters about two weeks to arrive at the foot of the Alps. Of course, magi may employ magic to reduce traveling time. Once in the mountains, the characters have to abandon any horses. The entrance to the Dwarven mines is located about four days travel into the Alps. Refer to the map of Europe for the location of the Dwarven mine entrance.

The journey to the Alps should certainly be eventful. Traveling through foreign territories, the characters are bound to run into trouble with local lords and may be received with hostility by commoners who aren't tolerant of pagans. You are encouraged to generate any encounters and stories you like for this journey.

If the characters inquire after the diabolists, they learn that a group of gypsies recently passed through various villages and towns a couple of days ahead of the characters. The characters don't catch up with the diabolists until both are in the Dwarven mines, though, so any accelerated form of travel used by the characters fails to allow them to intercept the diabolists before the mines are reached.

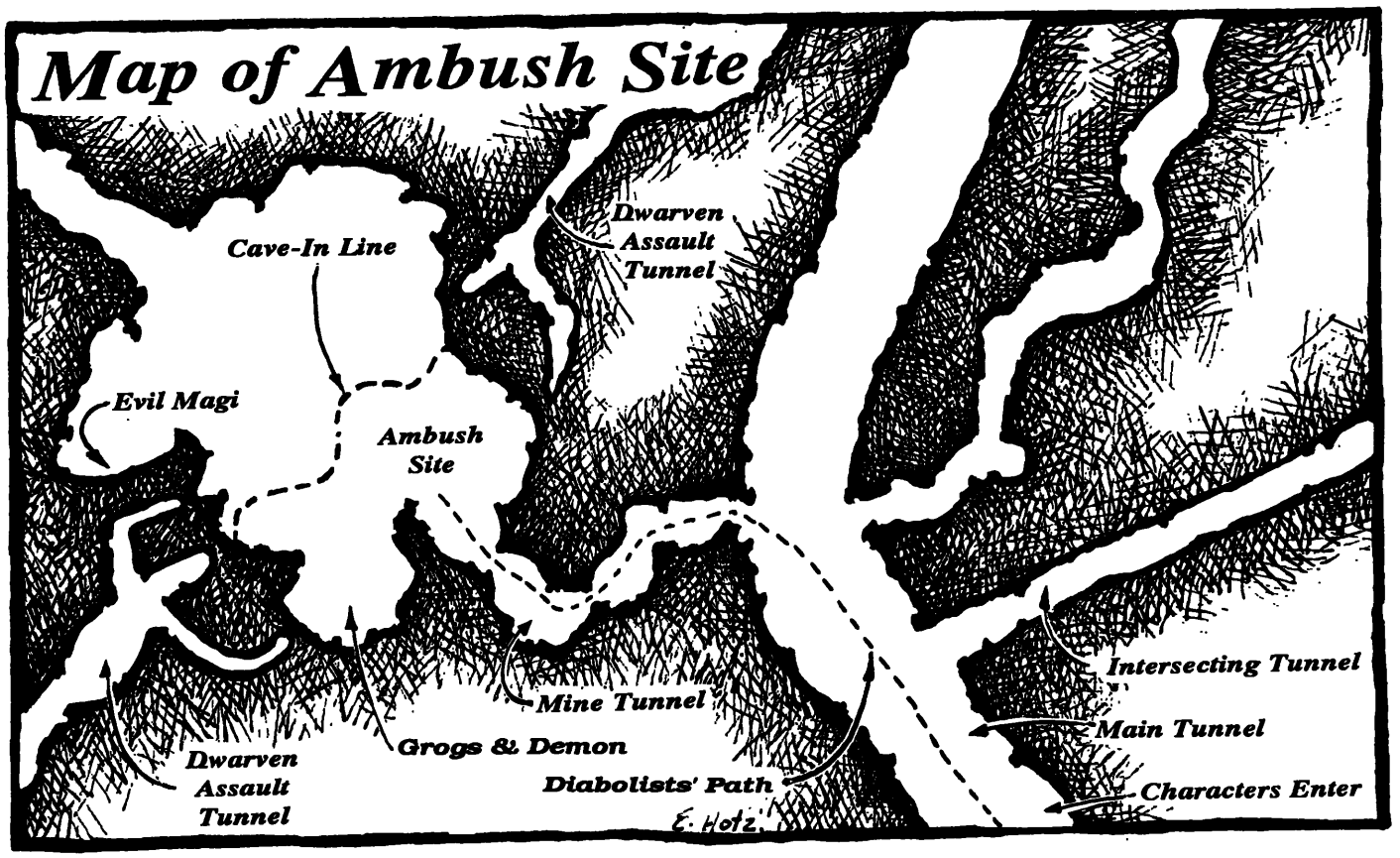
The Diabolists' Actions

The diabolists have known about the Shard in the Dwarven mines for some time. A year ago, Honerius journeyed to the mines. The Dwarves, turned evil by their Shard, initially sought to trap him. But, knowing of the Dwarves' penchant for deals, Honerius convinced the faeries to take him to the Dwarven King, Grimbeard. In his audience with the King, Honerius offered Grimbeard a magical hammer in exchange for later passage through the Dwarven mines. He convinced the Dwarves that companions of his wanted to travel to lands beyond the Alps in a year or so, and that they wanted to travel under the mountains rather than risk the journey over them. Captivated by the magical hammer, Grimbeard enthusiastically agreed.

After striking the deal, Honerius returned to his coven. Later, the diabolists continued to search for other Shards, including the one at the Covenant, and are now prepared to collect the last Shard from the Dwarven mines. Their true intentions are not to travel under the mountains, but to search the mines for the Shard. With his attunement for magical items, Honerius is able to sniff out the Shard.

What Grimbeard didn't know is that the hammer given him was cursed. Over the past year it has caused his gradual physical decline. The diabolists gave it to him in full knowledge of the curse. They hoped the curse would kill Grimbeard before the year was out. With Grimbeard dead, their search through the Dwarven mines would be easier.

Unfortunately for the diabolists, Grimbeard's constitution has proven stronger than anticipated. The



King still lives and wants revenge on the "gypsies"; he's realized that the source of his decline is the hammer. To avenge himself, Grimbeard plans to let the diabolists into the mines and then ambush and destroy them. Grimbeard only knows Honerius, though, not the rest of the "gypsies", nor the characters. He therefore mistakes the characters for diabolists, attacking both parties.

Approaching the Mines

Entering the Alps, the characters find signs of the diabolists' passage. These signs are found and followed with a successful Track or Scan test (whichever is higher) against a value of 9, rolled once a day. Campsites and trails indicate that a large number of people are among the diabolists. The exact number is determined by you based on how powerful the characters are. The number of henchmen in the diabolist coven may be kept low if the characters will have trouble dealing with the evil magi and companions alone. The diabolists do not cover their trail because they're unaware of the characters' pursuit; they don't know the Covenant is getting Divine aid. The trail may be followed directly to the Dwarven mines. If the characters do not find the diabolists' trail (such as if the characters are flying to the mines), they may still follow the eastern star to the mines.

The characters finally spot the diabolists when the characters are still about a day from the mines. The characters are in a valley and see a flash of light on higher ground ahead. Keen Vision or a spell of vision enhancement reveals the flash as light reflecting off some equipment carried by a diabolist. What the characters don't know is that they are also detected by the diabolists. If the characters are somehow hiding their approach, they are still detected by Honerius. His sense for magical items is triggered by anything magical carried by the characters.

As soon as the parties detect each other, the diabolists duck out of sight; their path leads them behind an outcropping of rock. Just beyond this rock is the mouth to the Dwarven mines. Once the characters arrive at the outcropping, they realize the diabolists have disappeared into the mines. Since the characters are a day's travel behind the diabolists and the diabolists are aware of their pursuers, the coven prepares an ambush. The ambush occurs within the mines (see the map of the ambush site).

The Dwarven Mines

The cave mouth consists of a large hole in the side of a rock wall. Within is a catacomb of tunnels and mines that reach deep into the mountains. Without knowledge of their direction, characters quickly become lost within. A successful Int + Direction Sense check against a value of 10 is required per hour of travel to avoid becoming

lost. Another such roll, made every hour thereafter, is required to regain one's bearings. For every failed attempt to regain bearings after the first, a cumulative -1 modifier applies to all checks. This penalty reflects the characters' increasing disorientation and confusion.

The mines consist of two types of tunnels and rooms. The main tunnel of the mines, which begins at the mine entrance, has smooth, solid walls. The tunnel is exactly twenty feet wide and has a ten-foot ceiling. More narrow tunnels and rooms intersect the main tunnel at innumerable points. Such narrow tunnels are ten feet wide and high, with the same smooth walls as the main tunnel. The narrow tunnels lead to various areas throughout the mines, including residential and storage areas. These tunnels also lead deeper into the mountains to areas where new mines are being excavated.

New tunnels are rough-hewn and irregularly shaped. They are currently being mined for precious metals and stones. Rail tracks along which carts may be wheeled have been laid upon their floors.

Rooms and chambers throughout the mines range in size from small to enormous. Heavily frequented, important, and older chambers tend to have smooth walls like the main tunnel. These chambers are largely found in the vicinity of the mine entrance, and are found in the Dwarves' living quarters. Only the more important of these chambers, like the king's throne room, have doors, and these doors are made of stone.

Newer chambers are rough-hewn like the mines. These chambers are usually used to store mining gear, and offer the Dwarves maneuverability in the mines. None of these chambers have doors.

The characters may enter the mine entrance without hindrance. If the mouth is surveyed for a while, no signs of Dwarven life are apparent. This is certainly odd, but given that the characters are dealing with faeries, they must realize that the odd is commonplace. Within the tunnels, Dwarves are still absent. There aren't even signs that life goes on, like an untouched plate of food left at a table. All the Dwarves are tucked away in hiding, some in tunnels they are currently digging, planning to ambush the diabolists and characters.

The characters continue to find traces of the diabolists' passage with a successful Track or Scan check made against a value of 9, rolled every ten minutes. The diabolists await the characters' arrival at the mapped ambush site, located about half an hour's walk into the Dwarven tunnels. What the diabolists don't know is that the Dwarves are tunneling toward that same spot, intent on bursting through the walls to surprise the intruders. So, before the characters are jumped by the diabolists, the characters receive a Per + Alertness check against a value of 12 to hear the faint sounds of tunneling within the walls up ahead. If this check fails, the characters are not only taken by surprise by the diabolists, but by the Dwarves as well.

Ambushes All 'Round

If the characters have a scout up ahead as the group proceeds through the mines, that scout may detect the diabolists. The scout receives a Perception + Alertness check against a value of 12, modified by -1 if the remaining characters behind the scout are making a lot of noise. If the check is successful, the scout hears the sound of metal clanking up ahead as a coven henchman shifts position. If the characters have no scout, they may still detect the ambush if a character with the talent Premonitions makes a check of 12+. Otherwise, the characters are caught by surprise when the diabolists strike.

As of yet the diabolists have never actually faced the characters in battle. Carmella therefore arranges her followers in such a way as to test the characters' strength in the ambush. Her henchmen and Gizzleren are located to the left of the cave entrance, the designated ambush site. Gizzleren is initially in human form, but after he and the henchmen leap out at the characters, he assumes Demon form.

Honerius and the evil magi are located within the rock alcove, set further back into the cave. Only Emil leaps out from the alcove when the ambush is staged. Carmella wants all her Magi to remain under cover until she sees how the characters fare against Gizzleren and the men. Emil is itching for a fight, though, and defies Carmella's orders.

If the characters detect the ambush, they may lead the diabolists out from the cave. Carmella is willing to throw her henchmen and Gizzleren out at the group, who may fall into an ambush staged by the characters. However, Carmella delays sending her Magi out into the tunnels. Still the hothead, Emil rushes out after the men, hurling spells at the characters without regard for his henchmen's safety.

Carmella isn't upset by Emil's foolhardiness, and allows him to fight alone for three rounds. On the fourth round of any combat, Carmella orders her other magi into the fray. They are sent out sooner if the characters discover the magi's hiding spot. Carmella and Honerius join the fight as well, but sit behind their own lines. Honerius stands ready to attack anyone who threatens Carmella. By the fourth round of combat, heroes and villains should be thoroughly scattered about the cave or tunnel in which the fight occurs. Just as the remaining evil magi join the fray, the Dwarves stage their own ambush.

The Dwarves first cause a cave-in at the center of the cave or tunnel in which the fight occurs. To determine where characters and diabolists stand in relation to the cave-in, it's suggested that you use miniatures or other

markers to symbolize the fight. The cave-in occurs along the line located on the mine map. If the fight occurs somewhere else on the map, you must draw your own cave-in line. That line should separate at least some of the characters from the main body of their fellows.

Characters and diabolists located along the cave-in line may be hurt or trapped by falling stone. To avoid damage, each character along the line must first make a Perception + Alertness check of 10+ to notice the stone overhead as it crumbles. Each character along the line must then make a Quickness + Dodge or Athletics (whichever is higher) check of 14+. This roll is modified by +2 if the previous detection check succeeded. Those who make dodging checks of 14+ are able to escape harm from falling debris, and may choose the direction they move within the cave, either back toward the entrance or ahead where the diabolist magi are positioned. Characters who make checks of 11-13 are unhurt, but are trapped by falling rock. They must be dug out. It takes five rounds to exhume a trapped character. Characters who make a dodge check of 10 or less are hurt and trapped by the rock. These characters suffer +15 damage, with only the characters' Soak Total and head and shoulder armor protecting them. Trapped, they cannot move and must be dug out, which takes eight rounds. Characters who are Incapacitated by the cave-in suffocate in a number of rounds equal to the total of a Stress roll + Stm. Anyone who botches is trapped by falling rock and suffers +20 damage.

Of course, diabolists located on the cave-in line are also vulnerable to falling debris, so must also make these checks. Don't worry about important diabolist magi being trapped and captured by the characters. Carmella rescues them later, so they may face the characters again at this Saga's climax. Of course, Gizzleren, Honerius, or any of the henchmen may also be caught in the avalanche. They too are later rescued. If you absolutely have to have one evil magus on the line of danger, that magus would likely be Emil.

As a result of the cave-in, a barrier forms along the cave-in line. The barrier extends from the cave floor to the ceiling, falling exactly to the Dwarves' specifications. Depending on their location in the room prior to the cave-in, some characters may be trapped on the diabolists' side, and vice versa. If the fight occurred somewhere other than the mapped cave, you must determine who ends up on what side of the barrier.

After the cave-in ends and the barrier is formed, characters and diabolists are blinded by dust for a round. In this round, the Dwarves burst from their tunnels, assaulting the intruders. If the cave-in occurs somewhere other than the cave, the Dwarves adjust their attack tunnels. They surround both parties of intruders on their respective sides of the barrier. You must decide on the number of Dwarven attackers, based on the strength of the characters and diabolists.

Trapped With the Diabolists

Characters trapped with the diabolists may continue to fight the diabolists, or may fight the Dwarves alongside the evil coven. If the characters continue to fight the diabolists, the diabolists fight back until the characters are Incapacitated, killed, or somehow rendered docile. After that, the diabolists beat back the Dwarves and escape the cave through the exit on their side of the barrier.

Carmella doesn't want to have to fight both the Dwarves and refugee characters, so gives any refugees an ultimatum when the Dwarves attack:

"You may accompany us out of here. As long as you prove useful and help fight these accursed Dwarves, you will be allowed to live. You have my word. But, if you insist on being a hindrance, you will be killed outright. The choice is yours."

A weak or wise character will accept Carmella's offer. Separated from their comrades, it's clear to such characters that they cannot survive the Dwarven attack on their own. If the stranded characters agree to Carmella's terms, they may accompany the diabolists through the tunnels. However, Carmella is sure to post at least one magus guard to each refugee character.

Characters who continue to fight the diabolists and are defeated may be found by their comrades later in the story, through various means. Refugee characters who are disposed of by the diabolists are left for dead. Those characters may remain in the cave until dug out by the other Covenant members. This may be right away, or some days later, depending on what kind of deal the remaining characters make with the Dwarves (see *Dealing With the Dwarven King*, below).

Refugee characters may also go in search of their friends, pursue the diabolists, or may look for another way out of the mines. In the first and last cases, refugee characters must roam the mines with no knowledge of their direction. Assuming that the other characters make a deal with the Dwarves, refugee characters are sought after and held hostage by Dwarven patrols. So, as separated characters travel the mines, you can have patrols encounter them. These patrols consist of three Dwarves each. The characters may elude the Dwarves, and eventually find their way out of the mines. In this case, allow the Mountain Giant (see *Tharuum the Mountain Giant*, below) to discover the refugees, as well as any other characters abandoned by the diabolists.

Refugee characters may also attempt to pursue the diabolists in the tunnels. The diabolists have a good start, though, so it's unlikely that pursuers can catch

them. Furthermore, the diabolists are covering their tracks, so it's unlikely that the characters ever find their foes. However, such refugees do come across an old, remote, rough-hewn tunnel that has seen some very recent excavation. Someone has dug a large hole in a wall. The diabolists did so, exhuming the Shard that was buried there. Once it was in their possession, the diabolists left the mines. Pursuing the diabolists, refugee characters must also avoid Dwarven patrols that roam the tunnels, as previously described.

Characters who are willing join the diabolists may also try to leave a trail for their comrades to follow. Assuming the diabolists don't discover the characters' deceit and punish them for it, the core group of characters may find this trail and follow the route taken by the diabolists. However, the diabolists will have plenty of time to find and remove the Shard and leave the mines before the core characters can find them.

Refugee characters may also join the diabolists temporarily, attempting an escape later. To escape the diabolists, characters must first elude or defeat their guards. Managing this, they must then survive the Dwarven patrols, or avoid capture by them. Escaped characters are free to do as they please, but will undoubtedly get lost in the mines for hours if not days. If they still remain free, the characters may eventually be recovered by their companions who are now on Dwarven business in the mines (see *Dealing With the Dwarven King*, below). Or, the free characters could find a mountain exit from the mines. Alone in the mountains, they are eventually discovered and helped by a friendly Mountain Giant (see *Tharuum the Mountain Giant*, below).

If refugee characters accompany the diabolists throughout the mines without obviously hindering the diabolists, Carmella keeps her word. She lets the characters live. The diabolists therefore take the characters with them to the site of the buried Shard, which Honerius sniffs out. It takes about a day to find the Shard. Once it is in her possession, Carmella attaches the Shard to the Apple and completes it. As soon as the Apple is whole, the earth shakes throughout the mountains and energy crackles about Carmella's body. Carmella is clearly intoxicated by the Apple's might, and bellows: *"I have your prize, my Mistress! Your gateway to this world will soon gape wide and you may claim what is rightfully yours!"*

Brave or foolhardy characters may try to take the Apple or act against Carmella, but the Apple makes her immediately aware of any aggression. She strikes down

any offending characters with the Apple's magical power. The characters are completely immobilized. Their characteristics and state of health remain unchanged; they are simply artificially Incapacitated, and awaken some hours later. On awakening, such characters remember Carmella's final words:

"I let you live now simply so you may witness your ultimate destruction at the hands of the Princess of Darkness! She may not be as compassionate with you as I."

Once the Shard is in the diabolists' possession, they make their way out of the mines within a matter of hours. The route to the mine exit isn't an easy one, though. Repeated Dwarven attacks debilitate the diabolists. Refugee characters are also attacked by the Dwarves, so such characters are forced to defend themselves. When the diabolists finally make their way out of the mines, they emerge from a tunnel in the midst of the mountains. With the completed Apple in her possession, Carmella immobilizes any remaining refugee characters in the same manner as described above. If she has not already done so, she also makes the same speech as above, explaining why she doesn't presently kill the characters.

Carmella's final act with the Apple enables the diabolists' escape from the mountains. The remaining diabolists simply disappear as a black, swirling cloud encircles them. Any diabolist magi, companions or henchmen taken captive by the characters back at the Dwarven attack are also transported away, before the characters can halt their escape. If any evil magi, companions or henchmen are incapacitated or dead, their bodies are retrieved by Carmella's use of the Apple. The diabolists are transported back to their own coven to prepare for the Devil's summons, which takes place in Paradise.

Roleplaying the Diabolists

While characters are traveling with the diabolists, you have an ideal opportunity to roleplay the villains, demonstrating their varied personalities. Of course, some of the diabolists may also become the hostages of the characters. In that case, characters back at the ambush site can roleplay with them instead.

Carmella proves to have some control over the diabolists, but clearly has limited sway over Emil and therefore Gizzleren. Carmella and Emil get into heated debates over what direction the diabolists should take in finding their way out of the Dwarven mines. Ultimately, Carmella's word stands. Carmella also demonstrates her sexist animosity toward male characters:

"You are actually very lucky that I let you live. You men are always responsible for the world's hardships when we women are clearly superior. Of course, you will realize that ours is the superior gender when She is released upon the world, creating a new order, destroying what men have made!"

It quickly becomes clear that Carmella believes the Devil is actually female.

Emil obviously hates Carmella and wants control of the coven himself. He also demonstrates his maliciousness, eagerly attacking Dwarven patrols, and spouting insults:

"You filthy little cretins, how dare you resist us like this!" (He flings a Dwarf against a wall.) "I shall crush you all!" (He kicks the carcass of that same Dwarf.)

He also doesn't like bringing the characters with the coven, and constantly threatens the characters, trying to goad them into combat.

Lucinda is likely to be made a guard of one of the characters. She holds a sword near the character at all times and avoids using spells against the Dwarves. She prefers to remain silent, keeping characters on their toes in her presence. If she says anything, it's rather menacing and cryptic:

"Do not try my hand by attempting escape. I have read your fate and it tells of steel, blood, and decay in the darkness of this earthy tomb."

Mab may also guard a character. She cannot resist pinching and prodding the character as if sizing him up for a meal. She enjoys flashing her pointed teeth and often laughs like some feral creature. When she speaks to the characters, she seems to regard them as little more than lab subjects:

"My but you would look unique as a rat. I could make you change, you know, just as I caused the people of Woodbridge to turn to vermin. Yes, I did that! Does it anger you?" (She drools.)

Honerius cares little for the characters and isn't concerned by their presence on the diabolists' journey. He constantly lingers around Carmella and can be heard to pester her for something:

"When we return home from this place you will give it to me, won't you? I have served you well here. I have led you to the last Shard and now you can summon the Princess of Darkness. Please, if you have any, give it to me now!"

Although he normally seems composed and dignified, Honerius becomes cringing and pathetic when begging Carmella for this unspecified substance. Carmella also seems irritated by Honerius's blathering and often shoves him away, after which he quietly skulks by her side.

If bothered enough about it, Honerius admits to the characters, *"I need it! I must live forever!"* From this statement the characters can surmise that Carmella has Honerius addicted to longevity potions.

Gizzleren may also be posted as a guard on a character, but only on a grog or companion. Carmella doesn't trust Gizzleren's limited intelligence with a magus prisoner. Gizzleren wanders inattentively behind his prisoner and often wants to have *"I'm stronger than you are"* contests, which consist of bicep comparisons and other feats of strength. Wily characters might trick Gizzleren into attempting a foolish test of strength, giving the character a chance to escape the diabolists.

Ultimately, when characters travel with the diabolists, the characters learn who their enemies really are. Watching the diabolists use spells against the Dwarves, characters may take stock of the diabolists' strength. With the knowledge they gain, characters can organize strategies of attack against the villains when they finally come face to face in battle.

Tharuum the Mountain Giant

Characters who are left at the mine exit awaken some hours later. Abandoned in the cold and with limited supplies, it's apparent that the characters will die of exposure. In short order, however, the characters realize that all is not lost. Tharuum, a friendly Mountain Giant, comes to their rescue, but the Giant's intentions may not be all too clear at first.

Tharuum is the self-appointed guardian of the Swiss Alps. He wanders the range searching for signs of trouble, weeding out forces of evil from its stony face. He is able to talk with the mountains, and they tell him where evil lurks. Tharuum and the mountains have a very intimate relationship. Tharuum knows of the Dwarves' recent corruption and turn to evil. He doesn't know why they've turned to evil, but strives to stop the spread of the Dwarven tunnels. The mountains tell him where new mining is taking place. Tharuum searches for the piece of earth above that new mine and stomps on the ground until the tunnel collapses. The Dwarves have learned to flee their tunnels when the pounding begins.

Tharuum learned of the characters' and diabolists' presence in the mountains as soon as the groups entered the range, even before the groups entered the Dwarven mines. After the mountains told him of this intrusion, Tharuum immediately set out for the groups' destination, the Dwarven mines. By the time he arrives the diabolists have already escaped with their Shard.

However, when refugee characters awaken at the tunnel exit, after being knocked out by the Apple, Tharuum has arrived on the scene. He has again consulted the mountains, so knows that these little humans are good, not like the evil ones who got away. As he stands against the mountain face, Tharuum is largely invisible to the awakening characters (they need to make a Per + Alertness check of 15+, rolled by you, to spot him). Otherwise, Tharuum is mistaken for a large piece of rock. To the characters' chagrin, that rock suddenly moves and speaks:

"Hello little ones. A long way from home, aren't you? Don't worry, I mean you no harm. I am known as Tharuum and am guardian of these mountains. They whispered to me of your plight, so I've come to help you."

Tharuum further inquires as to the characters' reasons for being in the mountains, and wants to know who the *"evil ones were, the ones who escaped. And don't try to mislead me now, I can tell these things!"*

The characters can explain everything they've been through. Tharuum is very attentive and grows extremely concerned if told of the Shard in the mountains. Its deceitful evil kept it hidden from Tharuum and the mountains. Though he cannot account for the Shard's presence in the mountains, Tharuum explains that he noticed the effects of the Shard:

"The mountain spoke of the Dwarves' evil, and I have been hounding them ever since they turned from good. Perhaps I was too hasty to assault them so. If what you say is true, their evil is not of their own doing. Hmmmm. I will have to amend my errors. But that is a matter for later concern. At the moment we need to deal with your problem."

Tharuum offers the characters two alternative ways in which he may be of service. He can carry the abandoned characters out of the mountains and back to the road they used to enter the Alps. Once there, the abandoned characters are free to await the return of their comrades. Or, more likely, Tharuum can help the refugees relocate their lost friends. He explains:

"The mountains tell me your friends have formed a pact with the Dwarven King. They promise to retrieve him a sip of

water from the Well of Life, at the heart of the mountains. The Well is the world's very source of water. If your friends succeed, apparently they will lift a curse that your evil enemies have laid upon the king. I cannot blame them. From what I am told, some of your friends are also being held prisoner until the others return with the drink. If the drink is not brought forth, the prisoners shall be killed. I can tell what you are considering, and I advise against it. Any attempt to rescue the prisoners would bring the whole Dwarven host down upon you. You are wiser to locate and help your friends who retrieve the drink. The Dwarves may be a fallen people now, but their old traditions remain. They never break their word once it is given."

All of these plot turns are fully explained under *Dealing With the Dwarven King*.

Tharuum cannot simply split open the mountain and let the characters rejoin their comrades, *"for that would do much harm to my beloved."* He does, however, pick up a pointed rock and hand it to one of the characters. For humor he might initially hand over a rock that's too large for the characters to bear, and then apologizes for his error.

The rock the characters receive is pointed at one end. Tharuum explains that the mountains will guide the characters to their companions through the Dwarven mines. All the characters need do is hold the stone before them and the pointed end will indicate the direction to travel. He adds:

"The stone will also alert you to danger. It will begin to quiver in your little hands when an enemy approaches. May the mountains bless you with the resolve to defeat those who would stop you."

If the characters have any more questions, Tharuum answers them and wishes the characters well. He also wishes them luck in locating such a powerful source of evil as *"this Apple."*

Returning to the mines, the characters find that the stone performs just as promised. It leads them through many twists and turns in the tunnels, and quivers at the approach of any Dwarven patrols. Avoiding or ambushing the patrols, the characters avoid capture. In a matter of hours the refugees are reunited with their companions who search for the Well of Life. The refugees locate their friends wherever you like. Ideally, the refugees turn up just when the remaining characters are in heated battle with some fearsome creature. Once the refugee characters are reunited with their companions, Tharuum's stone ceases to function.

Tharuum, Guardian of the Alps

Magic Might: 40

Size +5 Int +1
Benevolent +3
Vengeful +2

Giant Club 1st+ 15, Atk +11, Dam +30
Fat+5 Def+2 Soak+35

Body Levels: OK/OK, 0, 0, -1, -1, -3, -5, Incapacitated

Powers

Skin of Stone, MuCo 20, self, perm., 0 points
Tharuum's body and clothing (tattered furs) have the appearance and texture of weathered stone. Standing before a background of mountainous stone, Tharuum appears to be part of that stone. A Per + Alertness or Scan test of 15+ is needed to spot him.

Commune with Mountains, InTe 30, self, perm., 0 points
Tharuum, as guardian of the Alps, can communicate freely with the mountains. He speaks his words aloud, but only he hears those of the mountains. With this power, Tharuum learns everything that occurs in the mountains.

Description

Tharuum is simply enormous, standing about 25 feet tall. He has a great shaggy beard that hangs down to the ground, and has long, matted hair that he keeps uncovered. His skin is dull gray, as is his hair, both of which look like stone. Bits of fur do for his clothing, consisting of numerous pelts sewn together. Since they are close to Tharuum's body, even these pelts have turned gray and stone-like. In Tharuum's brawny hands is a massive club of stone.

Anyone foolish enough to fight Tharuum is probably killed, but his heart is worth 30 Terram *vis* to the character who can extract it.

Tharuum as an NPC

Tharuum believes in the protection of benevolent and innocent life. He protects the Alps as his home, but also as a haven from evil. Accordingly, he has little tolerance for evil, and exacts a terrible justice on anything corrupt that he finds in the mountains. Tharuum is actually in love with the mountains and personifies them as a woman.

At his immense size, Tharuum easily forgets how small other creatures can be. For this reason characters have to be alert around Tharuum, lest he should accidentally crush them, especially if he crouches in and around Dwarven tunnels.

Dealing With the Dwarven King

When the Dwarves stage their cave-in, the main body of the characters is cut off from the diabolists and any of their comrades that are near the diabolists. For a round the characters are blinded by and choke on dust that rises from the falling stone. When the dust settles and vision returns, the characters are faced with a sobering sight. A horde of Dwarves has entered the chamber (clearly more than the characters can hope to defeat). At their head stands Grimbeard, whose regal clothes, large hammer, and crown, albeit tarnished, indicate that he is the Dwarves' King. Characters who make a Per check of 10+ hear the sounds of battle on the other side of the rock barrier. The diabolists and lost comrades clearly face the same dangers the characters do. Rather than combat, the characters' best chance for survival lies in parley.

Before Grimbeard orders the decimation of the *"untrustworthy, agreement-breaking human-things,"* he announces what he considers his revenge, letting the characters know why they are about to die:

"Did you truly think me foolish enough not to realize what you have done to me? My people have dealt with the magics of the earth since time began. We have found out your little ruse. This hammer, given unto me in return for your passage through my mountains, is cursed and causes the demise of the form that you see before you. I am offended that you would come here now, no doubt expecting me dead from your trickery. Well I am not! Mine is the will of the earth, and that will cannot be vanquished! So now, to avenge myself and our solemn agreement, which you have broken, I sentence you to death! So be as it was, so be as it will be!"

While Grimbeard talks, characters have an opportunity to exhume any buried allies. If they choose to, characters can also exhume any buried diabolists. On Grimbeard's final words, the Dwarven force begins to move toward the characters.

Sharp-minded characters may take this opportunity to illustrate their innocence and talk their way out of death. Grimbeard hears what they have to say, but isn't entirely convinced that the characters aren't those who cursed him. Any character who makes a Faerie Lore check of 6+, or those who have the Virtues Faerie Upbringing or Faerie Blood, know that Dwarves have an irrestible penchant for making deals. Even though these Dwarves have turned to evil, parts of their original nature remain true, including their love of bargains. Thus, if a character offers to make a deal with Grimbeard, he halts the approach of the Dwarven forces. Grimbeard is wary, but can't help but hear the terms of this deal: *"Just what do you have in mind this time? And mind you, here is a host of my best warriors about to fall upon you, so do not try to deceive me again!"*

The players may ask for a reprieve from death, and permission to travel the mines in search of the diabolists, who are the true source of Grimbeard's curse. In return, Grimbeard demands that his curse be lifted. He knows of a means to remove it:

"There is a spring at the heart of the mountain, The Well of Life. It is the source of all the world's water. At one time my people drank from it freely, but now we mysteriously cannot even approach the well. The very mists rising from it burn our skin. I know that the cool waters of the well could lift this curse, but none of the Dwarven kind can retrieve even a drop. So, I make you this offer: go forth unto the well and bring me back its waters. If you return within five days, you shall be let free. The well only allows the true of heart to draw from it, so it will be the judge of your guilt concerning my curse. I shall send a guide to accompany you on the journey to the Well. But, one of you shall remain behind as my prisoner, ensuring that the others return."

Corrupted by the Shard, the Dwarves cannot approach the Well; they are no longer pure of heart. Under the Shard's influence, the Dwarves don't even realize that they've fallen, and they resent any such implication, so their inability to approach the Well mystifies them.

Grimbeard chooses the character who will remain the Dwarves' prisoner; the characters cannot. For the story's sake he chooses a grog (as more capable characters are needed to make the journey to the Well of Life), and does not choose any diabolists who are trapped with the characters by the cave-in.

Any diabolist trapped with the characters, including Gizzleren, is not foolish enough to attack the Dwarven horde. They claim to be good like the characters and deny any accusations that they are responsible for Grimbeard's curse. These evil characters accompany the protagonists on the trip to the Well. If the characters try to disarm the diabolists, the villains point out that the characters will need extra swords in the depths of the mountains. The presence of these diabolists offers the characters an opportunity to roleplay with their enemies (refer to roleplaying notes offered in *Trapped With the Diabolists*).

At some point in the journey, the diabolists try to make a break for it. Evil henchmen and companions simply run off while the characters are indisposed. Emil, on the other hand, attacks the characters before he flees, hoping to kill one or two of them. Any diabolist who gets away tries to return to his allies. Ultimately, any remaining diabolists disappear when Carmella uses

the Apple to escape the mountains, as under *Trapped With the Diabolists*. The diabolists' disappearance has full dramatic effect if the villains are about to be executed by the Dwarves or killed by the characters.

Traveling to the Well

The journey to the heart of the mountain takes two days. As the characters have five days to work with, Grimbeard allows them a considerable margin of error (he is desperate to have his curse lifted).

Long ago, the Dwarves dug a tunnel that led to the Well of Life. That tunnel hasn't been used in some time as the Dwarves' corruption denies them approach to the Well. In that time, the rough-hewn tunnel and its many chambers have become infested by numerous strange and fell beasts. You are welcome to create as many encounters along the trail as you like. For example, evil Faerie Goblins, the age-old rivals of the Dwarves, have discovered the abandoned tunnel and have moved in. The characters must run the gauntlet of the Goblins' tunnels, fighting some of the creatures, while also dodging their traps. On their return trip, the characters are unmolested by the Goblins as the dark Faerie Folk are repulsed by the water the characters carry.

Or a Worm that slithered up from the bowels of the earth now resides in a cavern that intersects the Well tunnel. To get to the Well, the characters must pass the Worm, but she demands a contest of riddles first. If the characters solve the worm's riddle, she lets them pass. But, if the characters fail to solve the Worm's riddle, she demands one of their number for lunch. Of course, the characters will defend themselves from such an attack. If the characters tell a truly perplexing riddle, the Worm becomes so preoccupied with it that she fails to notice them sneak past. On their return trip, the characters find the Worm still lost in contemplation over the riddle.

The Dwarves' Hostage

The character that the Dwarves hold hostage is kept in Grimbeard's throne room. The character is bound and shackled with chains connected to spikes imbedded in a wall. Grimbeard sits on his throne, defended by a guard on either side, throughout the character's imprisonment.

Even if the prisoner could escape, he or she has no chance to. Grimbeard sits brooding on his throne night and day. In that time he constantly grumbles about his cruel fate and about the suffering his people have endured in the past decades (after their turn to evil):

Glorin, Dwarven Guide

Size -1 Str +2 Stm +4

Faerie Might 5
Benevolent/Malevolent +2
Bargaining +6
Pick: 1st +6, Atk +4, Dam +11
Fat+2 Def+3 Soak+6*
*Earth-related attacks do half damage.

Body Levels: OK, -1, -3, -5, Incapacitated

Abilities: Craft—Mining 3
Direction Sense (underground) 5
Drinking (large quantities) 2
Pick (attacks) 4

Powers

Tunnel of the Mole, MuTe 15, self, perm., 0 points
Glorin, like all Dwarves, can tunnel through the earth at incredible speed. For every round of tunneling, he travels 5 feet. Mining tools are needed to do so.

Glorin as an NPC

The characters' guide is named Glorin. He is exceptionally aged, so knows the path to the Well, and still remembers a time when the Dwarves were good. He retains some measure of his former goodness, but undergoes violent mood swings from benevolence to malevolence as the two conflicting forces vie to control him. When the group is endangered, Glorin fights alongside the characters. His benevolent side tells him the characters are to be trusted. However, when his malevolent side takes command, he can turn on the group and be exceptionally cruel, maybe leading them into a Goblin snare. These turns of nature occur every couple of hours and come over him without warning.

When Glorin is exposed to the mists of the Well of Life, the evil is driven from him. The expulsion causes him much pain, but he recovers to recognize the characters as his allies and any diabolists as his enemies.

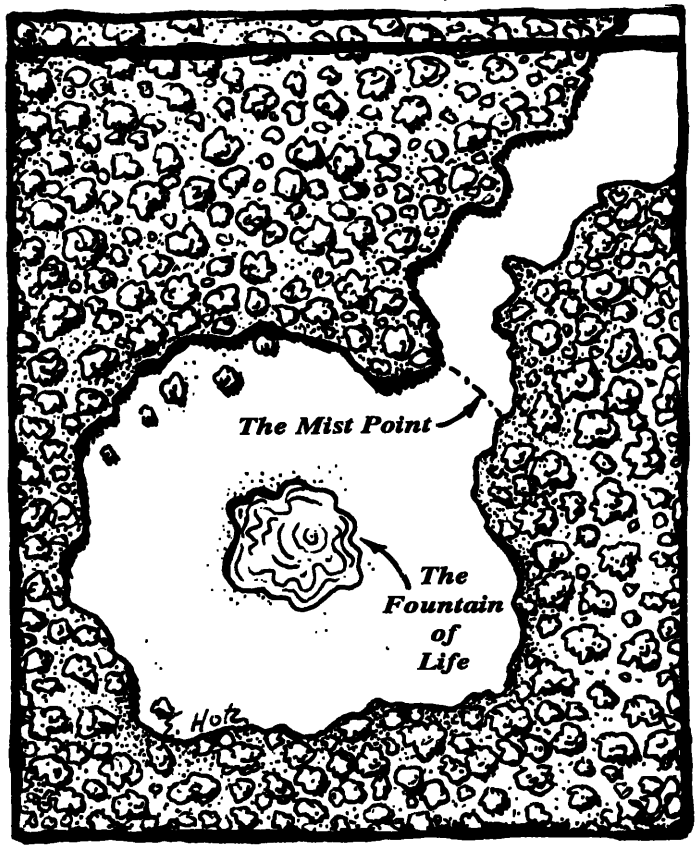
If Glorin is ever killed during the trip to the Well, the characters have to find their own way there and back. The route to the Well isn't terribly confusing, as long as the characters don't deviate far from the main tunnel. Grimbeard is angered at Glorin's death, but is more concerned with drinking the Well's water than punishing the characters. After he drinks, the characters need not fear reprisal.

Also note that Glorin could be a replacement character for a player who does not have a character among those journeying to the Well.

"I did nothing to deserve this fate. My people keep to themselves and mine the earth. Your friend Honerius was very sly, offering me this accursed hammer a year ago. He knew I could not resist it, and now I am under its power. I know not why you have done this to me. I was willing to keep my end of our bargain: to let your people have passage through my mines. But you broke your word and cheated me. I doubt you even intended to pass through these mines to the lands beyond, as Honerius claimed. And, to add to my insult, that foul giant Tharuum has been stomping out our new tunnels. I'll bet you are in league with him, too. Well, now you are paying the price. Now you are serving me."

The prisoner's time with Grimbeard offers a player an opportunity to roleplay with the Dwarven King. The character in question also learns about the diabolists' previous actions, which resulted in Grimbeard's curse. And the character hears of Tharuum. If no other characters ever meet Tharuum, the prisoner knows of the giant when the characters meet him later (see *The Journey To Paradise*, below). Furthermore, while the prisoner talks with Grimbeard, the player is given something to do while others are embroiled in problems of their own.

The Fountain of Life



The Well of Life

Before the characters finally arrive at the Well of Life, they hear the sound of its rushing water. Coming closer to the cavern that houses the Well, the characters spot a wall of mist that fills the tunnel up ahead. This mist is created by the Well. Characters of evil nature who come in contact with the mist are burned by the water's Faerie Benevolence, causing them +15 damage. Immersion in the mist or water kills any evil characters who do not have some sort of protective spell.

Glorin explains the nature of the mist, adding, *"Only the true of heart may pass the wall of mist and survive."*

Since he has passed through the wall himself in the past, Glorin stares at the mist as if preoccupied with it. Then, before a character can enter, he reaches out and touches the mist. Glorin falls to the ground screaming, but within a matter of moments, a black cloud is seen emerging from his body and dissipates in the air. This is Glorin's evil side, driven from him by the mist. After the cloud is gone, Glorin slowly rises and is wholly good again. Restored to good, he may proceed through the mist with the characters.

Characters who are not evil may touch the mist without harm and may proceed into the chamber beyond. Almost none of the diabolists are foolish enough to touch the mist. Only Gizzleren is stupid enough to try, if he is with the characters. He suffers +40 damage on contact, given his Demonic nature, and emits frighteningly Hellish screams which reveal his true origins (if the characters have yet to realize that he is a Demon). As none of the diabolists enters the mist, if they are still around, they must be guarded outside the mist wall. This offers them a chance to escape. The characters may also think to push the diabolists into the mist, killing the villains. Before they are thrown in, though, the diabolists disappear as Carmella rescues them with the Apple.

The Well of Life is situated within a huge cavern. The cavern is filled with mist, limiting visibility to five feet. In the center of the cavern, a twenty-foot wide tower of water rushes from floor to ceiling, defying gravity. This water originates from deeper in the earth and flows upward to provide the world with water.

Under Glorin's direction, the characters may reach a canteen into the tower of water. Held upside down, the canteen is filled within moments. However, the character holding the canteen is startled to find a watery hand reach out of the column and grab his or her own. A human-like face then emerges from the water at the character's facial level. The face stares into the character's.

Glorin announces, *"Wait! Do not fight it! That is the Faerie of the Well; it judges your spirit. Had you been evil and passed through the wall of mist, the spirit would destroy*

you. As it lets you partake of the Well, it recognizes you as good."

When the canteen is full, the face in the water smiles. The Faerie releases its grip on the character and disappears back into the water. Any evil character who makes it to the Well and reaches in is dragged into the flow by the Faerie. That person is assured a quick death, and his or her body washes up on a shore somewhere on the surface.

For the purposes of this story, the exact statistics of the Faerie are unnecessary. As the Faerie is composed of the Well as a whole and draws its life force from the Well, the faerie is indestructible and immortal. The only way to defeat the Faerie is to freeze or dry up the well, which requires a MuAq or MuIg spell of Level 80. The destruction of the Well also threatens the destruction of the world as lakes, rivers, and oceans freeze or dry up with the Well. Thus, there's a lot of story potential to be had in the Well should the forces of evil take control of it.

After the characters have the water, they can return to Grimbeard and lift his curse. The return trip through the tunnels is largely uneventful; the water the characters carry frightens the evil forces within the tunnels.

Returning to Grimbeard

If the characters return with the water in time, they may hand it over to Grimbeard. If the characters exceed their five-day deadline, they return just as the Dwarves are about to execute the hostage.

As soon as he gets the water, Grimbeard quickly gulps it down. An immediate change comes over him. His body's decay reverses itself, returning him to health and vigor. For the first time in over a year, the cursed hammer falls from his grasp. The darkness about his demeanor also lifts; his skin turns from pale and dry to pink and vibrant as a dark mist evaporates from his body. The Well water not only relieves Grimbeard of the hammer's curse, but also purges him of the Shard's corruption. As Grimbeard looks upon his subjects, the evil appears to lift from them as well; the rejuvenation of the King is passed down to his people. Not only have the characters saved Grimbeard, but they have saved all the Dwarves!

Grimbeard heartily thanks the characters for their help. He recalls his turn to evil and regrets all the evil acts he has committed since. On the characters' request, Grimbeard personally leads the group through the tunnels after the diabolists. The characters locate the remote tunnel where the Shard was unearthed, but the diabolists are long gone. If any stray characters are still roaming the tunnels, they are found now.

In celebration of the characters' actions, a week-long festival is held in their honor. In it the characters are provided with ample servings of excellent food and drink. The Dwarves are eternally thankful to the characters and cannot stop expressing their gratitude. Before the characters return to their Covenant, Grimbeard bestows upon them a large gem that contains 20 Terram *vis*. And, if they want it, the characters can collect Grimbeard's cursed hammer. The curse has no effect upon the characters, and is a source of 5 points of Perdo *vis*. Grimbeard also promises his services and those of all his people, even those of the yet unborn, to the characters. The characters' Covenant earns an eternal ally in the Dwarves. This might be an ally the Covenant will need if the players hope to rebuild after this Saga.

Grimbeard, King of the Dwarves

Size 0 Int +2 Str +1 Stm +3

Faerie Might: 20
Bargaining +8
Brooding +3
Self-Involved +2
Malicious +2
Strong-willed +5
Cursed Hammer (1h): 1st +4, Atk +5, Dam +9
Full Chainmail Prot 14
Fat-2 Def 0 Soak+3*

*Earth-related attacks do half damage.

Body Levels: OK/OK, -1, -3, -5, Incapacitated

Abilities

Craft—Mining 5
Direction Sense (underground) 3
Drinking (vast quantities) 3
Intimidation (threats) 4
Leadership (loyalty) 5
Hammer (attacks and parries) 5

Powers

The Earth's Carbuncle, ReTe 15, 5 points.
Earth Shock, ReTe 30, 10 points.
Tunnel of the Mole, MuTe 15, 0 points.

Description

Grimbeard is large for his kind, standing as tall as a human. He is also very stocky, over four feet wide. He wears a long, braided beard that he keeps tucked into his belt. Finely wrought chainmail covers him from head to toe. On his head, Grimbeard wears a tarnished crown that sits askew. In his hand is a large hammer that has various runes carved into its head. Under the hammer's curse, Grimbeard cannot release the weapon.

Affected by the hammer's curse, Grimbeard looks old and tired. The curse causes him to slowly decay toward death. Under the affects of the Shard, Grimbeard's evil assumes physical form. His skin is dull and shadowed and his eyes are sunken into his head, giving them a beady appearance.

Grimbeard as an NPC

Grimbeard has grown sad and pathetic under the hammer's curse. He's morose and constantly feels sorry for himself in his declining state. He wants to exact his revenge on the diabolists for cursing him, but wants to be restored to health even more.

A Common Dwarf

Size -1 Int 0 Str +2 Stm +4

Faerie Might: 5
Industrious +4
Malicious +2
Bargaining +6

Pick (2h): 1st+6 Atk+4 Dam+11
Battle Axe (2h): 1st+4 Atk+2 Dam+12
Club (1h): 1st+2 Atk+3 Dam+2
Short Spear (2h): 1st+6 Atk+3 Dam+5
Hauberk Chainmail Prot 12
Round Shield: 1st+2 Atk+2 Dam-1 ParB+3

Fat+2 Def+3 Soak+6*
*Earth-related attacks do half damage.

Body Levels: 0, -1, -3, -5, Incapacitated

Abilities

Craft—Mining 3
Direction Sense (underground) 2
Drinking (vast quantities) 3
Weapon (attacks) 4

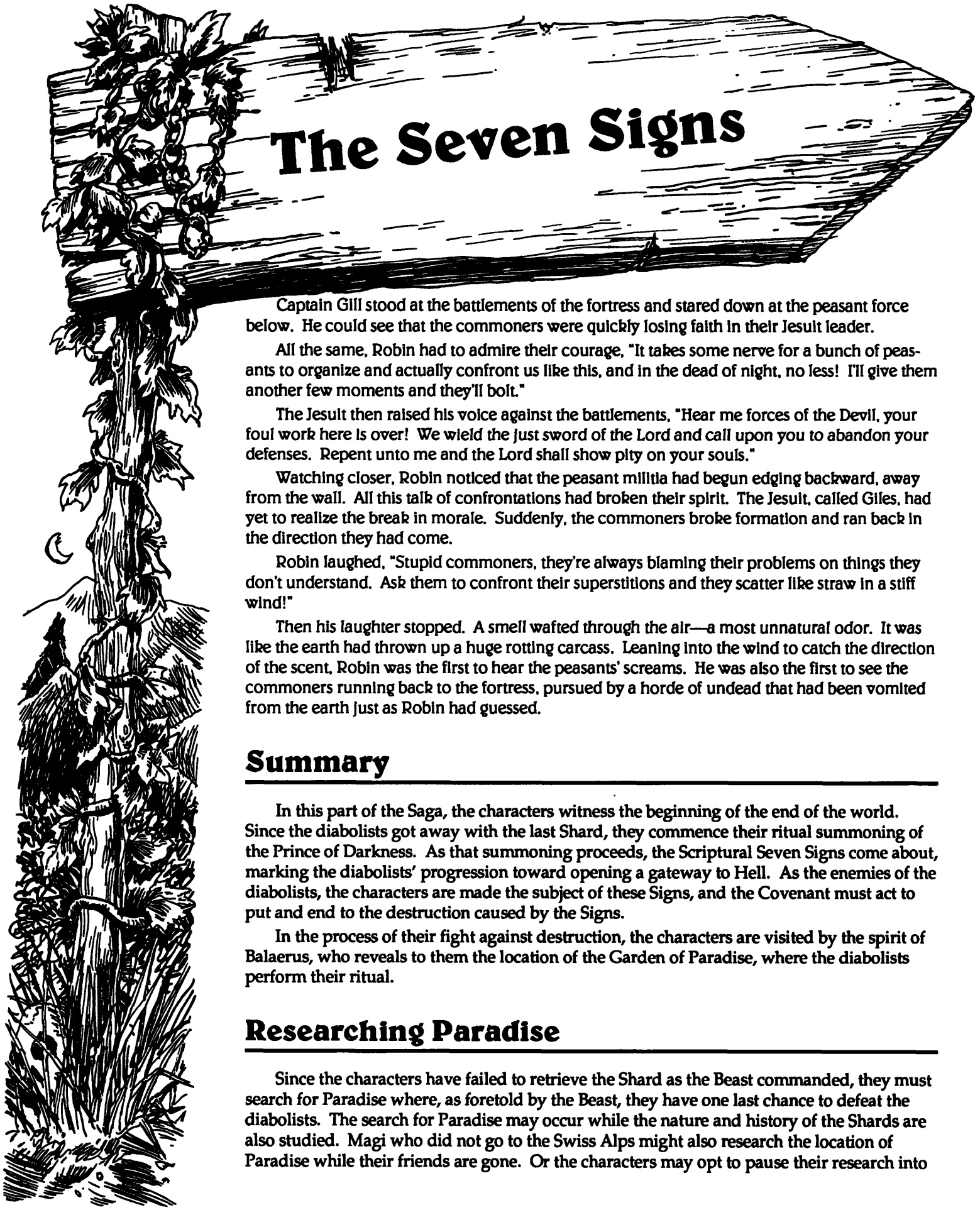
Powers

Tunnel of the Mole, MuTe 15, self, perm., 0 points
The Dwarves can tunnel through the earth at incredible speed. For every round of tunneling, 5 feet is traveled. Mining tools are needed to do so.

Description

Dwarves stand about four to five feet tall, and are wide and brawny. They sport long, heavy beards that are status symbols among their kind. Their facial features tend to be large and exaggerated, making their heads seem too small for their bodies. A Dwarf cannot resist a bargain, and once they have given their word, they'll die before breaking it. They expect the same from other races and are vengeful against those who break agreements.

A Dwarf's beard is worth 5 Terram *vis*.



The Seven Signs

Captain Gill stood at the battlements of the fortress and stared down at the peasant force below. He could see that the commoners were quickly losing faith in their Jesuit leader.

All the same, Robin had to admire their courage. "It takes some nerve for a bunch of peasants to organize and actually confront us like this, and in the dead of night, no less! I'll give them another few moments and they'll bolt."

The Jesuit then raised his voice against the battlements. "Hear me forces of the Devil, your foul work here is over! We wield the just sword of the Lord and call upon you to abandon your defenses. Repent unto me and the Lord shall show pity on your souls."

Watching closer, Robin noticed that the peasant militia had begun edging backward, away from the wall. All this talk of confrontations had broken their spirit. The Jesuit, called Giles, had yet to realize the break in morale. Suddenly, the commoners broke formation and ran back in the direction they had come.

Robin laughed. "Stupid commoners, they're always blaming their problems on things they don't understand. Ask them to confront their superstitions and they scatter like straw in a stiff wind!"

Then his laughter stopped. A smell wafted through the air—a most unnatural odor. It was like the earth had thrown up a huge rotting carcass. Leaning into the wind to catch the direction of the scent, Robin was the first to hear the peasants' screams. He was also the first to see the commoners running back to the fortress, pursued by a horde of undead that had been vomited from the earth just as Robin had guessed.

Summary

In this part of the Saga, the characters witness the beginning of the end of the world. Since the diabolists got away with the last Shard, they commence their ritual summoning of the Prince of Darkness. As that summoning proceeds, the Scriptural Seven Signs come about, marking the diabolists' progression toward opening a gateway to Hell. As the enemies of the diabolists, the characters are made the subject of these Signs, and the Covenant must act to put and end to the destruction caused by the Signs.

In the process of their fight against destruction, the characters are visited by the spirit of Balaerus, who reveals to them the location of the Garden of Paradise, where the diabolists perform their ritual.

Researching Paradise

Since the characters have failed to retrieve the Shard as the Beast commanded, they must search for Paradise where, as foretold by the Beast, they have one last chance to defeat the diabolists. The search for Paradise may occur while the nature and history of the Shards are also studied. Magi who did not go to the Swiss Alps might also research the location of Paradise while their friends are gone. Or the characters may opt to pause their research into

Paradise until the outcome of the race for the last Shard is made clear. Since the last Shard is lost, it's obviously time to pick up that search.

The same sources used during research on the Apple can be referred to again now. The magi devote a season to their search, and learn much, but do not learn the precise location of Paradise. On an Int + Scribe check of 10+, the characters do learn that Paradise is located somewhere in a mountain range, though which range is unspecified. On a roll of 12+, the characters gain insight into the "sacrifice" to which the Beast refers. They learn that the Apple can only be stopped by the restoration of the Tree of Knowledge. As the first tasting of the Apple from the Tree caused a movement from innocence to experience within those who ate, that movement must be reversed to make the Tree whole again. This reverse movement can only be caused by the self-sacrifice of a worldly person to the Tree, transferring that person's experience to the Tree and thereby restoring the Apple to a state of innocence.

Once the Tree is restored, the Apple loses its powers for experience and evil. Though they may search, the characters fail to find more explicit information on the nature of this sacrifice (such as how it's performed). Furthermore, they find nothing more to indicate what this state of innocence is that accompanies the sacrifice. These are things the characters have to piece together and realize once they themselves are in Paradise.

As the characters cannot locate the precise position of Paradise (and any spell used to locate it fails due to Paradise's Divine might), they have little choice but to await the coming of the Signs. The characters know of the coming of the Signs through the Beast's sermon. The Signs themselves can be researched, so the characters may recognize their arrival on earth. On another Int + Scribe test of 10+, the characters learn the following:

The first four Signs mark the spread of war, death, disease, and famine as the Four Riders of the Apocalypse are unleashed on the land. The fifth Sign is marked by the rise of the dead. The sixth Sign is marked by a quaking of the earth and the darkening of the sun. And, the seventh Sign marks the end of the world, which presumably is the Devil's arrival on earth. By studying the Signs, the characters can at least prepare a defense against them, and may marshal their strength in appropriate directions (such as in the study of spells that destroy undead).

The characters probably hope that their efforts to minimize the Signs' destruction will defer the world's end. Time saved by stalling the world's end might also give the characters a chance to find Paradise in a new way (which is exactly what happens). Before the Signs appear, though, you are encouraged to tell other stories. These stories continue to build the Covenant's strength in preparation for the tasks that await them.

The characters might also try to locate the diabolists, but the coven cannot be found. Shortly after they escaped from the Alps, the diabolists were transported by Carmella to Paradise. Using the completed Apple, she had no trouble locating Paradise since that is where the Apple originated. So, while the characters are researching the Seven Signs and the location of Paradise, the diabolists are already at work bringing the Devil into the world.

The Nature of the Signs

While performing their summoning ritual, the diabolists are occupied in Paradise and cannot leave. They therefore fail to realize that the Signs do not function as they expect. The diabolists don't know it, but they are summoning a Demon who has been posing as the Prince of Darkness (for full details on this deception, see *Giving the Devil His Due*, page 78). Since a Demon is summoned and not the real Devil, the Signs do not affect the world at maximum potential. The Seven Signs are brought about as the summoning process proceeds, but those Signs only affect a limited area, not the whole world as the Scriptures state. Interpreting the Covenant and its members as the diabolists' greatest threat, the Apple only enacts the Signs on the characters, the Covenant, and lands surrounding the Covenant.

The characters may interpret this limited effect in any number of ways. They might, for example, be arrogant enough to assume that the diabolists want to destroy them before moving on to the world. You are advised to let the troupe make whatever assumptions it pleases. This strange turn of events should only confuse and fluster the characters.

Although the Signs are limited to the Covenant and its surrounding lands, the characters are in no less danger. The Seven Signs still strike, and have the power to destroy the Covenant. Frightened characters might seek help from the magi of other Covenants. But as previously discussed, other magi do not recognize the threat. As the Seven Signs fail to affect the lands of other Covenants, distant magi simply laugh at the characters. After all, the Scriptures tell of total world annihilation, and *"What makes you think the Devil himself, if he even exists, would bother with your Covenant alone?"*

No one is even interested in traveling to the characters' Covenant to confirm or refute the characters' worries. The completed Apple is largely responsible for this. Its deceitful evil is now more powerful than ever, and has a subtle affect over all those who hear about it. As far as those people are concerned, the Apple is just a fable or a symbolic metaphor; it poses no actual threat.

The Riders Arrive

About five years after the diabolists claim the last Shard, the Seven Signs begin. The first four Signs are encompassed by the arrival of the Four Riders of the Apocalypse: Plague, War, Death, and Famine, each of whom embodies a Sign. Each of the Riders appears individually to wreak havoc on the Covenant over a period of three years. The Riders are chosen from among residents of the Covenant and its lands; these people are transformed into the Scriptural destroyers.

Plague

The first Rider to appear is Plague. The following account of Plague's arrival is a model for the arrival of the other Riders. They each transform from normal people into Infernal monstrosities. The change occurs over a matter of days, so there is little warning before each Rider's arrival.

Plague arrives from within the very walls of the Covenant fortress. Its appearance gives the characters an indication of how the Riders operate, and proves how horrific those beings can be. Initially, the characters may not recognize the jeopardy they are in. A Covenant resident falls ill to some strange disease. That resident should be a nonessential person, like a cook, maid, stable hand, or blacksmith, but should be a resident that the characters have known for years. You are wise to set up some relationships between this person and the characters, if the characters otherwise have no close ties to him or her. Ideally, a character's close companion, like a grog's spouse, falls ill. You can also take this opportunity to eliminate an annoying character from the Saga; a person who falls ill to the disease turns into a Rider irrecoverably, and will probably be killed by the troupe's characters.

The victim's "disease" takes affect in a conventional manner. The victim falls ill after having been exposed to some contaminant. For example, a laborer might have to be lowered down the Covenant well because something has plugged it. He finds therein the carcass of a strange bird that was clearly diseased, its feathers moulted and its body decayed. Within the day the laborer falls ill. Of course, the bird is just a ruse. The characters undoubtedly attribute the person's disease to the bird, but the bird is really not responsible. The disease is a product of Infernal powers.

Characters may study the corpse of the bird. An Int + Scribe, Animal Ken, or Fantastic Beast Lore (whichever is higher) test of 9+ reveals the bird is an albatross—a bad omen. Appropriate InAn spells indicate that the bird died of a conventional disease .

Ordinary humans who inhabit the Covenant attribute the albatross to evil spirits, as a sign of bad tidings. The commoners soon become convinced that evil will befall the Covenant. An evil fate does befall the Covenant when a Rider emerges, so the commoners aren't far off. Making a Folk Lore check of 8+, the characters themselves learn that an albatross is the sign of a curse. Another such check lets the characters realize that any curse brought on by the albatross can be alleviated by hanging its corpse from the nearest tree for a fortnight. The tree then absorbs the evil spirits brought on by the bird. Of course, this "cure" has no effect in this case. Thus, if the bird plays any role, it serves to warn the characters of their impending danger.

Characters with the Alchemy skill, or suitable InAq spells of level 10+, can inspect the well water for contaminants. On a skill test of 10+, or with a spell, the characters find traces of the albatross's disease in the water, but certainly not enough to cause the illness of those drinking from it; the well is safe.

Characters may also try and cure the disease afflicting the Covenant inhabitant. A suitable InCo spell of level 20+ indicates that the victim isn't simply diseased, but is mutating. Try as they might, the characters cannot stem the tide of that mutation. None of their spells stops the change, and conventional methods of healing are completely ineffectual. Of course, this doesn't mean the characters must stop searching for a cure. It takes some time to drum up various curing spells, and by the time the albatross has been identified and diagnosed, and the well water tested, the "diseased" victim seems to be on death's door. This development arises three days after the victim falls ill.

Only a character with the talent Sense Holiness and Unholiness can recognize the Infernal origins of the disease. It takes a roll of 12+ to sense this Infernal presence, while a roll of 20+ causes the character to become petrified with fear at its realization.

Throughout the illness, the victim is awake and aware of his or her condition, but is weak and quickly becomes bedridden. The victim is in extreme pain and is terrified, not knowing what has come over him or her. Seeing the victim in such pain, the characters receive added impetus to save their suffering friend.

Toward the end of the transformation, the disease victim's new form becomes apparent. His or her body becomes infested with maggots. If the characters have done any investigation into the Four Riders of the Apocalypse, they recognize the mutation victim as a Rider on an Int check of 12+. Of course, members of the troupe may make the connection on their own.

If, before Plague completes its transformation, the characters recognize the disease victim's Infernal nature, the characters may try to dispose of the victim. The characters may try anything to halt the Rider from

arising. The disease victim can be killed, but the body continues to mutate after death, and still rises as a Rider. If the body is dismembered and the parts scattered, those parts crawl back to each other, reforming Plague's body. A priest might also be called to put a blessing on the victim. The priest, even Father Miller from Wickam, disbelieves the characters' story, though. The clergy are also subject to the Apple's deceptive power. The clergy believe that if the end of the world was truly nigh, they, not pagans, would be the first to know of it. Ultimately, Plague comes into being and the characters cannot stop its arrival. Also remember that if the characters suggest desperate solutions to the victim's mutation, such as dismemberment, you can remind the troupe that the victim is the characters' friend.

If the characters fail to recognize the victim as one of the Four Riders, the victim undergoes his or her final transformation on the third night of the disease. If any guards are posted on the victim, the guards are suddenly attacked while they doze. It takes a Per + Awareness check of 10+ to recognize danger before Plague strikes. At the moment, the Rider is more concerned with escaping the fortress than destroying its inhabitants (it intends to do that after assaulting the surrounding lands). Accordingly, guards are disposed of quickly (they are Incapacitated and lucky for it), and only some are infested with maggots. Once free, Plague sneaks through the Covenant and steals a horse. Plague's intent is to get away from the Covenant and cause as much destruction as possible. Any grogs that get in the Rider's way are disposed of quickly as well. If the alarm is raised, the Covenant may set out after Plague, which is fine by Plague as long as it gets to spread its destruction in the process.

Once free, Plague heads to the nearest inhabited lands to wreak havoc. If the characters don't learn of the Rider's escape in the night, they learn of it the next morning when grogs don't report for duty, when the disease victim is discovered missing, or when a local villager staggers to the Covenant. His village, which might even be Wickam, was slaughtered by Plague. He survives long enough to tell the characters what has happened: *"A Rider swept down . . . on the village . . . at night. Father Miller . . . said Judgement Day was . . . upon us, just as . . . the Rider . . . sucked the life from him."*

The villager then dies as maggots break through his skin and feast upon him.

Regardless of when the characters set out to confront Plague, the conflict takes place in an open field, like a wheat field. In the field, Plague has complete maneuverability on its mount.

War

The second Rider to emerge is War. His arrival is intrinsic to events that occur around the Covenant. His influence ignites an old land feud between two local lords. Though this mundane conflict does not initially seem to involve the Covenant, the characters get involved when Covenant lands become the issue between the lords, and those lands become the battlefield on which the knights wage their conflict.

Seventy years ago a short-lived attempt was made by some barons and lords to subject various Covenants, and their mystical inhabitants, to feudal subservience under local authorities. Those lords sought to control the Covenant, believing such unchecked power to be a looming threat. However, as the lords' crusade lacked royal backing (the King knew better than to add his name to those of Covenant enemies), the movement lost impetus.

Lords to the west and northeast of the characters' Covenant were part of such an annexation attempt. The families of Gisborne and Maston (or any others that better suit your Saga) became so embroiled in their struggle for Covenant lands that they entered a feud over them. A few minor skirmishes were staged before the king's forces restored order and put an end to the land-grab. In the years that have passed, the old feud has been all but forgotten. The two families now live in peace with each other and the Covenant. The characters may even know the families. With the arrival of War, however, the old feud is revitalized.

Sir Grahame of the House of Maston, third son of Lord Vesron of Maston, falls victim to the Rider transformation. His change is slightly different from that suffered by the Covenant inhabitant. He becomes more and more hotheaded, demanding that his family restore its lost honor. In his eyes, the only way to do so is to defeat the Gisbornes once and for all. As Grahame's transformation into War advances, others of his family rally to his cause, their blood boiling inexplicably. Once the challenge is made known, the Gisbornes also become ready for battle. War's influence also rekindles their long-dead desire for revenge.

The characters first hear the drums of war when visiting the peasants of either family. Even the peasants feel the old enmity within them, and become unusually hostile toward the characters. The peasants don't take up arms against the Covenant , but warn the characters:

"Ye had best soon be ready for battle. Your lands air tae be our Laird's, an' part o' the House o' Maston. The old feud is fought again, an' this time we'll be beatin' ye!"

A roll of 10+ in Int + Hermes History, Area Lore, or Scribe (whichever is higher) reminds the characters of this "old feud." Rumors of the feud are made official when a messenger from the House of Maston arrives at the Covenant with a proclamation. He reads:

"Those of the Covenant (insert name) *are hereby informed of the appropriation of all lands and properties of said Covenant by the House of Maston, on the defeat of the House of Gisborne, vile suitors of these lands against our Lord God. By decree of His Lordship Vesron of the House of Maston, all inhabitants herein are to prepare their vow of fealty to our Lord, and become subjects of the King."*

The characters can question the crier, who belongs to the Mastons. He informs them of a battle to be fought within a fortnight, on the Covenant's very lands. The victor is to claim rights to those lands.

As the Covenant operates outside the established feudal system, the characters receive no help from outside sources of temporal authority. Only after the feudal battle is waged can royal forces be mustered, but by then they will be too late. People will already be dead and one family will have laid claim to the Covenant. Given these conditions, the characters must strive to put an end to the feud themselves.

The characters can try to reason with the two houses, but Infernal influence has too much sway over them. Neither Vesron nor Christian, Lord of the House of Gisborne, is willing to forfeit his claim to the Covenant. Neither can explain why he wants the lands, and both admit that there's no cause for their sudden resurgence of hatred toward the other. Each Lord is consumed by a lust for battle, as are all their vassals.

By questioning the families and investigating the feud, the characters do learn that its renewal was inspired by Grahame Maston. He has mysteriously disappeared since rekindling the old flame, having completely transformed into War. As War, he has left his family and currently resides in a wood that lies between the lands of the two houses. From that point his evil influence further drives both families toward war. Until battle breaks out, War remains in hiding and cannot be traced by the characters. His infernal nature defies the scrying of Hermetic magic. To recognize War's involvement in this conflict, characters with the talent Sense Holiness & Unholiness must make a roll of 12+. Those with an appropriate InVi spell of Level 10+ may also sense the Infernal powers at work behind the feud.

Thus far the Mastons fail to recognize that Sir Grahame is missing. Their minds are so filled with thoughts of war that they can no longer think rationally. If the characters inquire after Grahame, the family realizes that its son is missing. After making this discovery, Vesron immediately assumes that the Gisbornes have kidnapped Grahame. With this conclusion made, war becomes inevitable.

If the characters are clever, they can claim allegiance with either or both sides of the feud. In doing so, they are made privy to every event of the developing drama. They can also use the confidence invested in them to find a means of avoiding war. Despite any efforts they make, though, battle is assured.

After about two weeks, the two families advance upon Covenant lands and prepare for battle. Each family camps along its border to the Covenant. Any final attempts made by the characters to avert the conflict may be made by visiting these camps. It's highly unlikely that the families can be dissuaded, though.

On the morrow, the battle is fought on a stretch of open Covenant land. The characters may observe the battle. It may even be visible from the fortress walls. As soon as the battle begins, characters are entitled to a Per + Scan test. If the rolls are 10+, the characters spy a lone horseman standing upon a nearby hill. He watches the battle, raising his armed hands into the air as if orchestrating the battle. This is War. If the characters have any knowledge of the Four Riders, they recognize War on an Int roll of 8+. As War controls the battle, it's made clear that he is responsible for the feud's development. If the feud is to be put to an end, the characters must defeat War in a battle of their own.

War lets opponents approach his hilltop. When they are within a hundred yards, War charges to the attack, howling manic war cries. As the battle between War and the characters continues, so does the battle between the families. While he fights the group, Sir Grahame pleads with the characters to put an end to the families' battle. He realizes that he caused it, and that he has unwittingly been the minion of evil. At the same time, he cannot control his body—now that of War—so he must be destroyed to stop these evil developments.

If War is destroyed, the feuding families put an end to their conflict. Confused and distraught, they realize that their actions have been madness. The damage is done, though. Many are dead, including Vesron Maston. In sorrow, the families can do nothing more than apologize to the Covenant for their inexplicable actions, and return to their respective lands. The characters may explain the evil that brought about the battle, but that knowledge does little to put anyone's mind at rest. In fact, if characters explain that evil forces are at work against the Covenant, and that those forces have drawn the families into the fray, the families blame the Covenant for their hardships. So, the characters must be careful about what they admit to the Houses. Left in the dark about their apparent madness, the Houses assume that the divinities are punishing them for the sins of their feuding past.

If War cannot be defeated, one House vanquishes the other and claims right to the Covenant lands. The King's forces arrive too late, and to avoid further conflict within the Kingdom, the victor is allowed to retain the Covenant and its territories. The characters therefore become subject to outside control, so they have added impetus to defeat War. War himself simply disappears, having done his share of harm to the Covenant. Sir Grahame then reappears as mysteriously as he disappeared.

Death

The third Rider to emerge is Death. Though the characters now undoubtedly expect the arrival of a third Rider, there is no way they can prepare for Death's emergence—it appears with little warning.

Death arises through the body of Vesron Maston, Lord of the House of Maston, who was killed in the feud that War rejuvenated. Found dead with his horse after the battle, Vesron was returned to his lands and buried in the cemetery of his local parish. The cemetery at Wickam could be used. The Lord's steed was buried on the battlefield where it fell, on Covenant lands. Brought back to "life" as the embodiment of Death, Vesron begins a reign of terror in the area of an oft-used road near the Covenant. Before more peasants are robbed of their lives, the characters must deal with this new threat.

The first signs of trouble arise on Covenant lands, though the characters may not initially recognize the significance of those events. A few months after the feud battle, a character is out and about on the battlefield and discovers a large hole in the ground. Inspection proves (with an Int test of 8+) that something has burrowed up from beneath the soil—displaced earth is cast in all directions. There are no signs of human presence. Furthermore, there are no tracks on the ground to indicate what has risen. Another Int test, this time of 12+, reminds characters that this spot is the site of Vesron's death, and that his horse was buried here. It's apparent, then, that the beast is no longer at rest. The horse left no tracks since it has sprouted a pair of bat-like wings, a product of unnatural corruption brought about by the Apple.

Quick-witted characters journey to the Wickam cemetery as quickly as possible. Sure enough, Vesron's grave has been disturbed as well. A Track roll of 9+ turns up a set of standing hoof prints, but none lead to the grave site, and none leave it. The inhabitant of the grave also seems to have exhumed itself as no signs of disturbance show around the site. A few nights ago, Vesron did rise from the grave, now in the form of Death, and mounted its undead horse, which had come to collect it. Flying off, the pair left no trail.

If the characters are in relatively good standing with the villagers, or are incognito, they may question the people of Wickam. No one knows anything of substance about the mystery, though some mention recent, strange events:

"A few nights ago there was a most deathly cold wind blowin' through. Had me window open tae all the summer heat when the chill o' winter flew in. Felt as though someone'd stepped on me grave."

Father Miller's replacement adds:

"There was a terrible sound blowing in that wind. To me it sounded like the tortured wailings of the cemetery's dead. Ordinarily I wouldn't be so superstitious, but I heard the sound of hoof beats upon my roof, and then they were gone, the wind with them."

Both of these stories are villagers' accounts of Death's rise.

For a few days after these hints of danger, no more incidents occur. That is, until a few Covenant inhabitants go out for supplies. These inhabitants, who should be commoners, don't return after what should be a simple two-day journey. Suspicious, characters may go in search of their servants. They find the commoners on the road, only a few miles from the Covenant. All are dead, their bodies stripped down to the bleached bone, though all clothes and possessions are still intact. It's as though the people simply dropped dead and decayed at an extremely accelerated rate. If the characters don't go in search of their people, they find the bodies later, when investigating other reports of death on the roads.

Furthermore, if any characters are ever within the manor of the House of Maston, they hear rumors that Vesron has risen again. He has been seen on the road, riding a great, gaunt horse. Curiously enough, no one knows how the rumors began, and no one admits to having seen Vesron.

If the characters still aren't inspired to go out investigating, the Covenant receives unexpected guests. A group of three road wardens approaches the Covenant fortress. The wardens are mounted and are spotted by grogs well in advance of their arrival. The wardens represent the King and dispense his laws in areas where local lords have little authority. Since they're not from the area, the wardens lack the local enmity that the Apple has aroused against the Covenant. Accordingly, the wardens approach the characters with fairly open minds.

The wardens visit because peasants have been reported missing. A search located the missing locals dead on various roads. The wardens also heard the rumor of Vesron's return, and have heard yet another rumor:

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You should mix lies with truth, of course, and make some of the things the Demon tells the characters very valuable (e.g. information about an enemy of the characters, or the location of something they are looking for). You can really stir up trouble by having the Demon tell truth and lies about the different character to one another — "Denzion plots against you, and has written a letter to the Bishop denouncing you.")

Demons as Corruptors of Will: One's free will can be a powerful force for good, so Demons strive to corrupt that will and make it evil and weak. Characters faced with such Demons have to keep themselves from being subtly manipulated or tempted into giving up their freedom to choose.

These Demons have the power to tempt people to give up their freedom in return for some more tangible reward. Spells and such that completely dominate a character are not necessarily part of this Demon's repertoire. Overthrowing the will of the victim and substituting it with evil might gain immediate victories, but in the long run these Demons want people to hand over their wills freely. (A soul must willingly give itself to the Devil and can not be forced.) Usually these Demons win victories in stages, and eventually they get a complete commitment from their victims. ("Please sign on the dotted line . . . in blood.")

Demons as Weakeners: Human strength is virtue, and these Demons drain that strength away. Perhaps they provide sensual entertainments to let people relax and become complacent. Perhaps they rule people so firmly and subtly that they no longer need to think for themselves. In one way or another, these evil spirits gently let people give up their need to stay strong.

Individual Demons of this type are mostly able to tempt through offers of luxury and such. They do not fight physically because that encourages their opponents to be strong, though they might have magical powers to drain physical strength. Gifts are often excellent ways to weaken someone — the Demon could give a very powerful magic item to someone, because that could cause them to let their other powers and skills decay. You could simply force the victim to learn a new skill to use the magic item. The more experience he puts on that skill, the less he has to put elsewhere — and when the Demon takes the magic item away, the skill becomes worthless. To keep the magic item, all the character has to do is a "little favor" for the Demon.

Demonic Powers

To make Demons fit the role described herein, you probably have to scrap or heavily revise the Demons in you current rules systems. Chances are that you won't have to worry much about the specific statistics of Demons, as most conflicts with them are indirect. Demons might manipulate events behind the scenes and accomplish their goals without ever meeting their victims. The true value of Demons in a game involves their roleplaying value, not their combat value, so players can struggle with a Demon without ever having to draw a sword or cast a combat spell. (Look in the Bestiary for examples of what kind of statistics Demons should have; Sainela is a particularly good example.)

To make Demons formidable, many game designers have given them great magical and physical powers. Demons are very formidable opponents, and even when they are vanquished, they do not die but simply return to Hell for a certain length of time. Often, however, the best Demons exert very little direct force. If its eventual goal is corruption of the human spirit, the Demon must persuade that spirit to corrupt itself. To kill a person or even to kill a friend through a charm spell is no big accomplishment, but a Demon who can get a character to kill a friend through subtle lies and by playing on the target's vices is an effective Demon. And the one who is most damaged by the deceit is not the one who is merely slain, but the one who has become evil and slain a friend.

Demons have certain magical powers to use in emergencies, but for the most part they work subtly. When they do use their magic, usually it is to manipulate a situation, not to affect the intended target directly. For instance, suppose the Demon's target is planning to meet a wise friend to get advice about problems the Demon is stirring up. The Demon might cause the friend to fall asleep and miss the meeting so that the Demon's victim does not have the benefit of the friend's advice. It is a challenge to play subtle Demons, but it is also a challenge for the players to thwart them. Additionally, the activity of Demons creates a mood of fear and paranoia, which can be so conducive to an exciting roleplaying session.

Here are some powers attributed to Demons in a variety of legends:

To Take and Change Physical Forms: That nice old lady that sold the characters some apples might be a Demon in disguise. Different forms are also useful for several direct, physical goals, such as killing someone who is interfering with diabolic plans.

To Take Spiritual Form: The spiritual form is actually the normal form for an evil spirit; physical forms are only temporary manifestations. In spiritual form, they can spy on mortals and move about freely.

To Offer Wealth: Demons have access to treasures of all variety, which they can use to tempt mortals. They

can also offer other rewards, such as fame, sensual pleasures, and vengeance.

To Possess: Evil spirits can enter a human body and either take it over completely or just interfere with it. Possessed bodies may have great strength or other supernatural abilities.

To Work Illusions: Demons can make things appear as other than they truly are. Illusion spells in your favorite magic system can provide examples for these powers.

To Frighten: Fear can weaken all human faculties and is therefore a potent weapon of Demons. Demons can either produce a general fear of bodily harm or exploit and enhance a specific, personal fear, such as the fear of failure.

To Control Nature: Demons can control some aspects of nature, especially those associated with darkness and evil, such as storms, rats, wolves, serpents, and disease.

To Know Secrets: Demons have many unknown ways to learn secrets. Invisible spies report on significant events, and magic can let Demons see what is happening in distant places. They use this knowledge to craft better traps for their victims.

To Provoke Evil Emotions: Many Demons can "push" a person's baser emotions further in a direction they are already going. Each Demon often represents a particular emotion, and is able to push that single emotion in any individual he or she meets. In **Ars Magica** this ability allows the Demon to add 3 - 7 to any Personality roll a character makes. How these rolls may affect the story is completely up to you, but you can imagine some of the possibilities.

Demon Weaknesses

Many different things have proven effective against Demons in a variety of legends and stories. Depending on your world, any of these things could serve to destroy Demons, break their spells, free souls from diabolic oaths, or hold Demons at bay. Some, on the other hand, would have no effect at all. In the end, it is only strength of character that can save one from a Demon's powers. Example banes of Demons: Holy people, holy relics, church bells, a song from the heart, true love, true faith, selfless sacrifice, prayers, spells of protections, and heartfelt repentance.

Demons can sometimes be identified for what they are by tell-tale signs, such as hostility of animals, failure to cast a reflection in a mirror, or a cloven hoof.

Demons are usually restricted from entering holy places. They prefer to appear in desolate areas, places of evil and destruction, and at night. When you set up an encounter with a Demon, don't forget the impact of a setting on the player's mood.

Connecting a Demon's weaknesses and strengths to its nature makes those strengths and weaknesses especially meaningful. For instance, a Demon that exploits greed might be driven away by a selfless act of generosity.

Demon Motivations

In order to properly roleplay a Demon, you need to know what it desires — why does it interact with the characters in the ways it does, what are its true motivations? You should never reveal your Demon's motivations to the players, they should always remain a mystery, something to moulder in the subconsciousness of the players, all the better to later terrify them with. While each Demon has its own unique motivations (for indeed they do continually struggle with one another) there are some things which motivate them all in common.

Demons, above all else, seek souls. In the end nothing else matters, it is the basic desire of every Demon to discover and subvert souls so that when mortals die their souls are sent to Hell rather than to Heaven. Thus Demons travel the world attempting to subvert and denigrate those who are good so they become evil. The more wrong and evil an individual becomes, the more he comes under the sway of the Demon who created the evil in the first place.

Each Demon has control over one region of the Infernal realm, and all sinners who display certain characteristics are sent to that realm. For instance, all Spouse Murderers are sent to the realm of Askatangasay and are therefore under his control. Accordingly, that is the sort of evil he hopes to provoke, and that is the sort of individual he wishes to keep from returning to the fold of goodness.

Once a Demon has captured a soul, the Demon may torture its victim at its leisure, for all of eternity, and may employ the soul in its wars against neighboring Demon Lords. Each Demon has some sort of fiefdom, but all owe fealty to a Demon above him in one way or another (except for Satan himself). Therefore for each Demon you employ in a story you must decide what type of realm it rules, and what sort of souls it wishes to capture.

Roleplaying Demons

Roleplaying a Demon is a challenge because Demons are cunning and devious. You have to put a good deal of thought into a Demon's plans to do the Demon justice.

One major goal of the Demon is not to give away its motives. Once the motives are out in the open, the weapon of surprise is lost and the spirit of the intended victim is bolstered.

Here are five suggestions to consider when roleplaying a Demon:

1. **Friendly Appearance.** A Demon appears friendly, helpful, self-deprecatory, witty, learned, reasonable, sexy, generous, sympathetic, pitiful, or whatever it takes to win its victim's trust and admiration.

2. **Being Clever and Sly.** Demons have been tempting mortals for millennia; they're not stupid about it. Have plans within schemes within plans. If a plan goes wrong, you can even "go back in time" as Storyguide and alter the plan so that it at least turns out OK for the Demon. This fudging represents a Demon's cunning because a truly clever Demon might have been able to concoct a better plan than you actually did. A clever Demon is fun for players to face; it is an opponent they can fear and respect at the same time.

3. **Be Patient.** Corruption can take a long time, and Demons have learned to wait. Trying too hard may reveal the scheme and probably spoil it. The characters should interact with the Demon over a number of different stories, and each encounter should build on the last. Demons live forever, they have a lifetime to corrupt a person's soul, so play it slow. Don't even let the characters know who they are dealing with at the start. Only halfway through could they learn it is a Demon.

4. **Have a Flaw.** No embodiment of evil is going to have a perfect character. A personal flaw is especially effective if it shows the Demon's true nature. For instance, a Demon might be unable to take altruism into account in its plans. It might set up a situation in which friends could save the victim by being self-sacrificial, something that a black-hearted Demon might not expect from them. Or the Demon might be too haughty to keep its machinations secret. Often the flaw of a Demon is related to the vice or weakness it tries to take advantage of in its victims.

5. **Choose a Target.** A Demon is more successful if it is focused on one target, or perhaps a few at once. A victim's friends and relatives naturally get caught up in the Demon's diabolic plans, and it should not be obvious who the target is even when the characters discover there's a Demon out to get them. Pick on only one character, presumably a central one to the Saga, and focus your attention on him or her.

Remember, Demons are the embodiment of evil. They are not to be allies, servants, or masters of characters unless you have decided to play out evil and to make corruption part of your story. In such a case, the players should keep clearly in mind that the corruption of the character involved with the Demon is a story about human weakness, not simply an expedient way for the character to gain more power

Demons can be exciting parts of roleplaying because, essentially, they strive against what is most human: creative strength, free will, wisdom, and honor. To pit your players against such foes is to put them into a tangible representation of the conflicts we all face every day — conflicts between complacency and action, between courage and cowardice, and between truth and comfortable lies. Such a rich background can only guarantee you engaging stories about what every good story is about: being human and becoming a better human being.

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