

WORLD OF DARKNESS

DARK AGES MAGE GRIMOIRE™



A MAGIC RESOURCE FOR DARK AGES

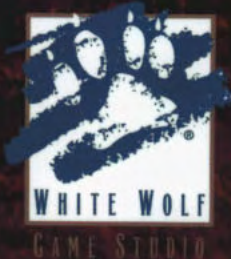
WORLD OF DARKNESS Dark Ages MAGE GRIMOIRE™

LONG AGO IN DAYS UNTOLD...

The Mythic Age wanes, its denizens disappearing into the Otherworld, its Quintessential energies drying up. But some refuse to let it go. These magi dare to tread the barren places and twisted paths that still shimmer with ancient power. These old lands still have guardians, though: spirits and secrets that will sorely test those who try to wrest forth their powers.

WHEN WIZARDS WALKED THE LAND

The Grimoire expands the Dark Ages world, providing insight on the Fellowships in various lands, aids to help players and Storytellers grasp medieval magic and superstition, and hints on maintaining chantries in the tumultuous times of the early 13th century. There's also a look at *certámen* wizards' duels, medieval holy days and the shallows they create, and a host of creatures — including the Fae — that haunt the forlorn frontiers of Dark Medieval Europe.



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ISBN 1-58846-411-3
WW20060 \$21.95 U.S.



WORLD OF DARKNESS Dark Ages MAGETM GRIMOIRETM



by KRAIG BLACKWELDER, BILL BRIDGES,
JOHN CHAMBERS, STEPHEN MICHAEL DIPESA,
LEONARD GENTILE, SAMUEL INABINET,
STEVE KENSON, CARRIE ANN LEWIS

CREDITS

Authors: Kraig Blackwelder, Bill Bridges, John Chambers, Stephen Michael DiPesa, Leonard Gentile, Samuel Inabinet, Steve Kenson, Carrie Ann Lewis. World of Darkness created by Mark Rein•Hagen

Storyteller game system designed by Mark Rein•Hagen.

Development: Bill Bridges

Editing: Ana Balka

Art Direction, Layout and Typesetting: Becky Jollensten

Interior Art: David Day, Jim Di Bartolo, Tom Gianni, Quinton Hoover, Leif Jones, Vince Locke

Cover Art: Michael Wm. Kaluta

Front and Back Cover Design: Becky Jollensten



1554 LITTON DR
STONE MOUNTAIN, GA
30083
USA

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PRINTED IN CANADA.

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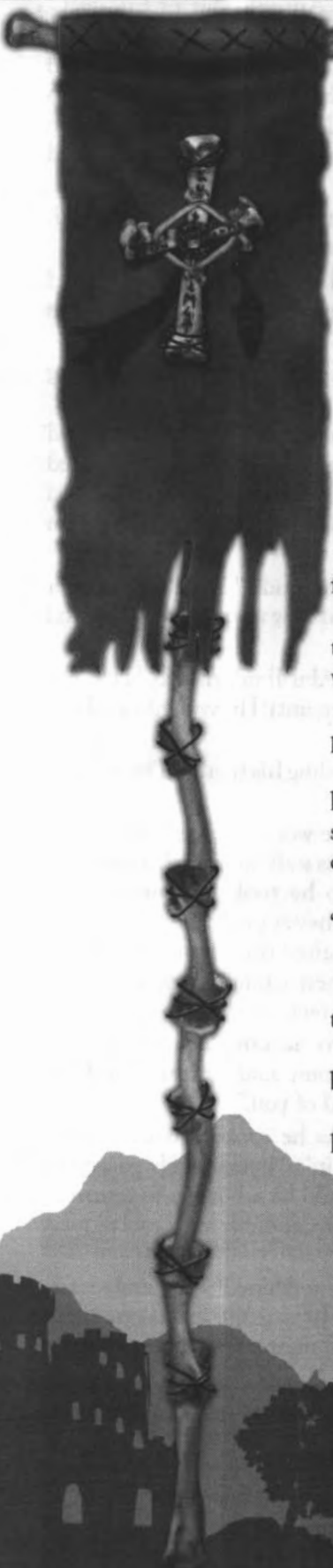
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PRELUDE: THE HAZARDS OF TRAVEL



"Master, please!" Antonio pleaded. "The horses—they cannot go further without rest."

Asar-un-Nefer scowled at his portly servant and motioned to the tree line ahead. "We will stop once we reach the trees! Only a fool would rest horses in the open here."

Antonio nodded and wiped the sweat from his brow, relieved. He patted his horse. "Only a little bit further," he coaxed.

When they reached the cover of the trees, Asar-un-Nefer leapt off his horse and quickly tied its reins to a branch, then stalked off to survey the surroundings, leaving Antonio to feed and water the beasts of burden.

He returned a short while later, in a more even-tempered mood. "All clear. No bandits. We shall wait here for a while."

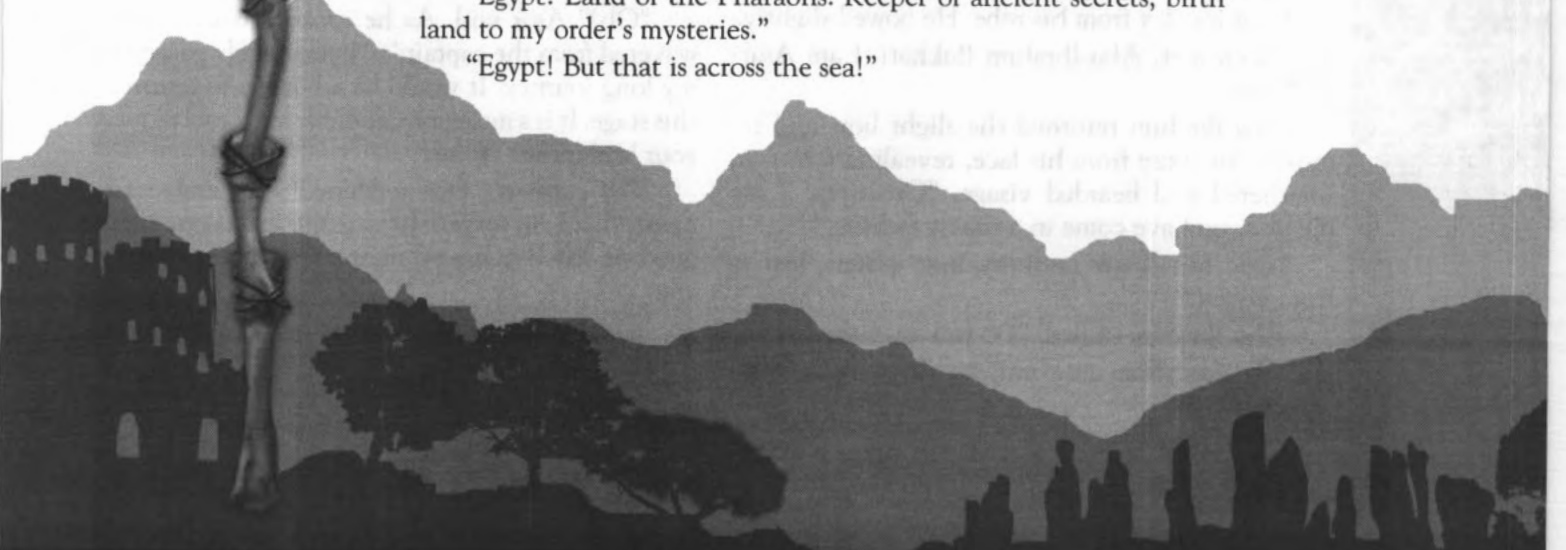
Antonio nodded. "And then to home finally?"

Asar chuckled. "Oh, no. It will be a season or two before we return there."

Antonio's face looked like the tragic mask of the theater. "But... but where do we go then?"

"Egypt! Land of the Pharaohs. Keeper of ancient secrets, birth land to my order's mysteries."

"Egypt! But that is across the sea!"



"Of course it is. Of what matter is that?"

"I am afraid of the sea, master! We shall drown and our souls be taken by monsters from the deep!"

"Fool! Sailors make the trip all the time without woe. Besides, we shall not cross a single drop of water on our journey."

Antonio wrinkled his brow, utterly confused. "I do not understand. How can we reach Egypt without crossing the sea?"

Asar's eyes slitted like a cat's. "There are ways, Antonio, there are ways." He walked to the edge of the woods and stared out across the plain they had just traversed, looking to the distant mountain pass. "We are meeting a new friend here soon. Do not be startled to see him, and do not, under any circumstance, cross yourself when he arrives. Is that clear?" He turned to look Antonio in the eye.

"Yes, master," Antonio said, perplexed. He shrugged his shoulders and held a feedbag out for Asar's horse to eat from.

Asar sat down next to the bole of a great oak and closed his eyes, his staff still clutched tightly in his hand. Antonio went about the task of relieving the horse's discomfort, but he did not take their saddles off. As he fetched water from a nearby stream, he whistled a happy tune. When he came back to offer the water to the horses, a man stood by Asar's tree, looking down at the sleeping mage.

Antonio gasped. The man wore loose, white silk robes, his face concealed by a cloth wrapped around a turban. A Saracen. Antonio yanked his knife from his sheath and pointed it at the stranger.

"Hold!" he yelled. "Stand away from my master!"

The man merely looked at him, his eyes betraying no emotion. Asar, however, started and looked up, seeing the man. He grunted in surprise and stood up, brushing dirt from his robe. He bowed slightly.

"Well met, Abu-Ibrahim Bukhari. I am Asar-un-Nefer."

Abu-Ibrahim returned the slight bow and removed the wrap from his face, revealing a brown, weathered and bearded visage. "Greetings. I am pleased you have come in a timely fashion."

"I do not brook tardiness from others, less so from myself."

Abu-Ibrahim smiled. "Do you have the book?"

"Yes, fresh from the Pontifex's library in Zaragoza. Antonio?"

His query shocked Antonio out of his slack-jawed stare, and the servant quickly ran to the saddlebags of Asar's horse and drew forth an old leatherbound book. He brought it to Asar, who motioned that he should give it to Abu-Ibrahim. He nervously proffered it to the Muslim, who accepted it with a bow.

"I thank you, Asar-un-Nefer," Abu-Ibrahim said. "I have long sought this prize."

"Then we are agreed? The terms as stated before? You shall deliver us to Egypt before the current moon wanes to naught?"

"Indeed. We shall depart after my evening prayer."

Before Asar could respond, a thundering sound came from across the plain. A group of five armored men on horses broke from the pass and rushed toward the woods, where Asar and Abu-Ibrahim stood.

"Damn them!" Asar said. "They are quicker than I thought. I assumed they would be a day behind by now."

"This is not good," Abu-Ibrahim said. "I cannot begin our journey just yet, until I have meditated and prayed."

Asar grimaced, grinding his teeth. "Then I must divert these jackals."

He stepped from the woods, playing the role of an old man, bent over his staff, holding his back as if it hurt with every step he took. He awaited the soldiers, who slowed as they approached, surprised at his appearance. They halted their horse a few yards away from him, and their captain rode forth, approaching within a few feet.

"I must ask you to accompany me back to Zaragoza, sir," the captain said, staring warily at Asar. "My lord has need of you."

"Oh?" Asar said. As he spoke, his eyes never wavered from the captain's. "I am already pained by my long journey. It would be a burden to return at this stage. It is a most unreasonable and cruel request your lord makes of me."

The captain's face reddened with embarrassment. "I... I am sorry to have asked it. You are right, good sir. My lord has no right to ask such a thing of you."

"Please tell him that I will visit again next season. We shall conclude our business then."

The captain nodded. "Of course. I am sorry to have disturbed your rest. I shall return immediately and give him your message."

The captain wheeled his horse around and returned to his soldiers. "We return to Zaragoza," he said.

"He has ensorcelled you, sir!" one of the men cried, pointing at Asar. "And look, he has intercourse with Saracens!" He pointed at Abu-Ibrahim, who stood by the edge of the forest, watching the scene with a sly smile.

The captain drew his sword and pointed it at the man. "You dare accuse this man? I say you, we return now to Zaragoza."

The soldier looked nervously at his captain's sword, and scanned the faces of his comrades, each of whom looked away, too cowardly to take the challenge.

"Yes, my captain," the soldier said, looking down.

The captain sheathed his sword and rode back toward the mountain pass. His men fell in behind him. The lone dissenter looked back over his shoulder at Asar, scowling.

Asar chuckled and walked back to Abu-Ibrahim. "Men are such fools, easily swayed."

"And how long shall they remain swayed?" Abu-Ibrahim asked.

"Long enough. If you would please begin your research...."

"Of course," Abu-Ibrahim said, looking down to where he had placed the book. His eyes widened and darted in all directions. "It's gone!"

"What?!" Asar cried, and looked about. "It has to be here. Those soldiers came nowhere near us!"

"It was not the soldiers..." Abu-Ibrahim said, indicating a patch of dirt with his boot.

Asar bent down to examine the footprint there, made by a bare foot. Both he and Abu-Ibrahim wore boots, and Antonio wore sandals. "Who...?"

"Ali Abdillah. Curse me for a fool!"

"I don't understand. Who is this Ali?"

"A Fellow Batini. He serves the University of Light. He has sought the book for as long as I have. I did not realize that he would follow my trail this far. He is a master of secrecy, and can walk abroad in daylight unseen."

Asar frowned. "This has no bearing on our agreement. I delivered my pledge, now you must deliver yours. I must be in Egypt within three days."

Abu-Ibrahim sighed. "You do not understand. I need the book to be able to take us there."

"The book holds the secret to traveling without motion?"

"Rarely without motion, for even the mind moves," Abu-Ibrahim said calmly, ignoring Asar's rising anger. "But yes. The calligraphy within the book is the key to reaching Egypt without need of boat, for the Nile, like all rivers, flows through the *alam al-mithal*."

Asar fumed. "Where has he taken it?"

"To Cordoba, surely."

"Then we will track him there and take it back. This Ali is a greater fool than that captain if he thinks he can foil Asar-un-Nefer!" He punctuated this statement by slamming the butt of his staff into the ground, creating a brief flash of light.

Antonio groaned and went to tighten the saddles on the horses.



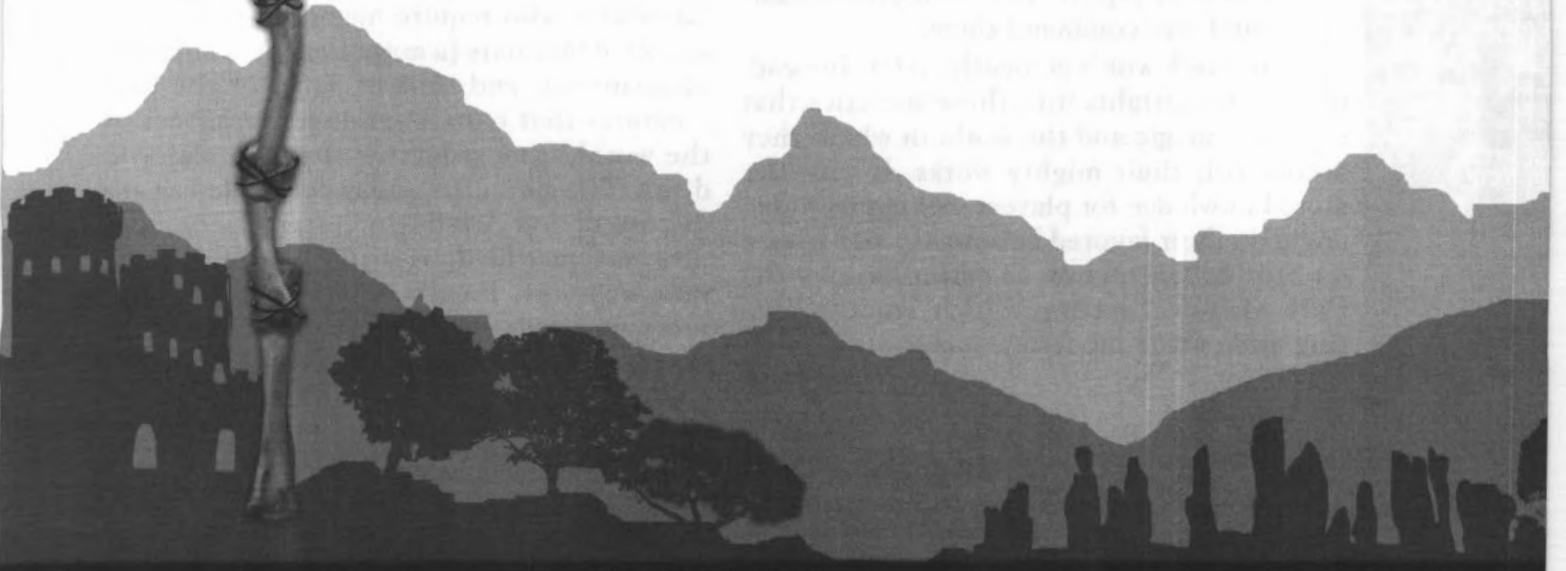


INTRODUCTION



Grimoire is an archaic name for a book of magic. Pronounced “grim-war” (rhymes with guitar, SAMPA [grɪˈmwɑːr]). The word is a corruption of grammar, suggesting an origin in a time of widespread illiteracy, when any book could be suspected of containing instructions for magic.

— Definition of “grimoire” from *Wikipedia*



THE GRAMMAR OF MAGIC

Magic seems to be intimately tied to language. Hence, spells, grimoires/grammars, words of power, True Names, invocations and evocations, chants and rhymes. The art of language and the art of magic seem to go hand in hand. Certainly, a skilled speaker and orator can enchant a crowd with his words. It may not be as coercive as a traditional spell, but it can produce the speaker's desired result nonetheless. Poets in the ancient world had an unassailable aura of power, one that still reverberates among the Old Faith and its bards in the Dark Medieval. Poets will once again rise to prominence in the Renaissance (when Dante forms an entire worldview), but for now, in the largely illiterate times of 1230 AD, poets have less prominence, although their cousins, the troubadours, certainly wield an echo of bardic power.

But there are those who still weave words into works of great power, although they are even less prominent than poets and writers. Their language is not one of mere words or utterances, such that any jester can produce, but that of the universe itself: the secret grammar spoken by the gods — magic.

Even the unlettered can learn magic, but none can do so without learning its laws and rules, for even the most chaotic magic follows some form. It requires power (a magical Foundation) and knowledge (the Pillars) to speak the language of wonder. This knowledge was often codified by mages into spellbooks — *grimoires* — tomes that listed the names of angels, demons, spirits and the means to summon, bind and command them.

This book won't go nearly so far. Instead, it provides insights into those societies that safeguard magic and the world in which they accomplish their mighty works. It provides more knowledge for players seeking a unique angle on their favored Fellowship and advice for Storytellers on how to better imagine the Dark Medieval setting, which requires putting aside many modern assumptions.

Chapter One: The Sons of Solomon — “Civilized” Fellowships elaborates on three Fellowships that share a common heritage or culture, namely the Ahl-i-Batin, the Messianic Voices and the Order of Hermes. The first two are heavily invested in two cultures spun from Abraham's descendents, while the other claims inspiration from the same sources, with the addition of Egypt and certain select mysteries of the East. They thrive within the folds of civilization, the cities and nations that value learning and record keeping, or “The Book.”

Chapter Two: In a Dark Wood — “Heathen” Fellowships examines three Fellowships — the Old Faith, the Spirit-Talkers and the Valdaermen — who hale from less-civilized cultures, frontiers and harsh lands where there is little time for the luxury and decadence of the cities. They are less centrally organized than the Fellowships from Chapter One, but their individual members are freer because of it.

Chapter Three: Superstitions and Magic discusses further the supernatural beliefs that greatly affect the tenure of magic itself, along with the sacred times, festivals and holy days upon which magic may be cast to great or terrible effect. Chantries are discussed in detail, including advice on dealing with neighbors. Finally, the magic rules are elaborated upon, describing various common spells and how to achieve them, and rules for *certámen*, the wizards' duel.

Chapter Four: From the Otherworld reveals the strange ecology of *thaumavores* (creatures who require magic for food), the quirks of familiars (a mage's magical aide and companion), and tells of some of the dire creatures that roam the dangerous places of the world, from seductive sirens to majestic djinn. The mercurial and indefinable Fae are discussed, and details on certain faery creatures are provided, as well of some of their rare treasures. Finally, a few magical treasures are given, for those mages who wish to supplement their personal power with enchanted objects.

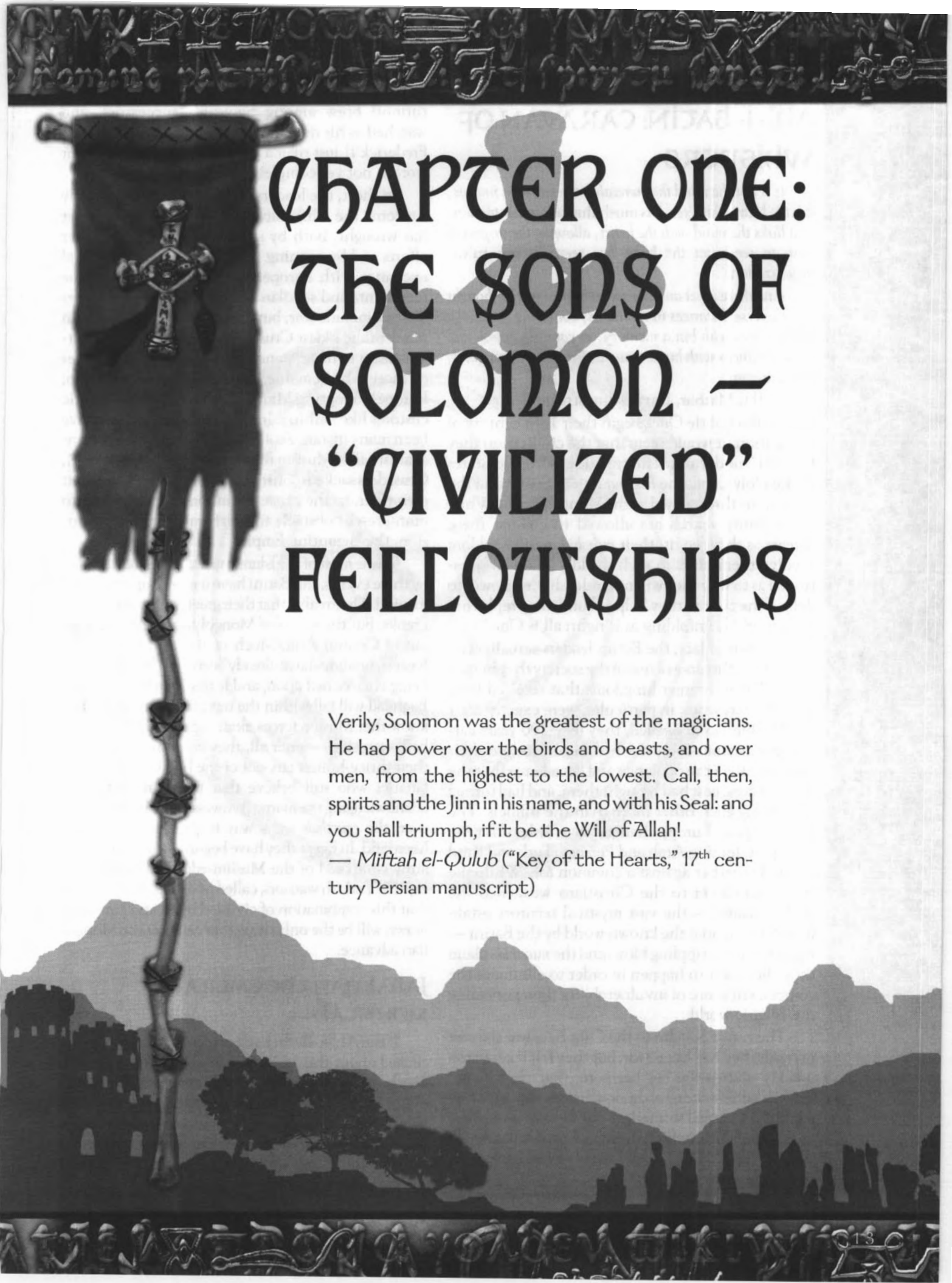
Chapter Five: Worldly Things (Storytelling) breaks down a number of possible Chronicle subjects and gives tips on how to fit mages from any Fellowship into current historical events. The topic of travel is discussed, for it was not as easy as it is today and most people never even did it, living and dying within a few miles of their

birthplace. Those who travel risk encountering physical danger, or worse — foreign and dangerous ideas.

The **Appendix** introduces the Craftmasons, a new Fellowship that, while small and barely known, promises great things in the centuries to come — at the expense of the other Fellowships.







CHAPTER ONE: THE SONS OF SOLOMON — “CIVILIZED” FELLOWSHIPS

Verily, Solomon was the greatest of the magicians. He had power over the birds and beasts, and over men, from the highest to the lowest. Call, then, spirits and the Jinn in his name, and with his Seal: and you shall triumph, if it be the Will of Allah!

— *Miftah el-Qulub* (“Key of the Hearts,” 17th century Persian manuscript)

AHL-i-BATIN: CARAVAN OF WHISPERS

It is not the mind that wreathes the world in images, it is the heart. And yet, it is mushahada, contemplation, that links the mind with the heart, allowing the organs of flesh to see what the heart has seen through ru'ya, visualization.

And there is yet another secret in this: just as thought can traverse distances in moments, conjuring the image of far places with but a memory, so can one step across these distances with but a thought, for space is imaginal, like a dream.

— Ibn Mazhar, Darwushim street beggar

As the Subtle Ones begin their 18th century of unification, it would seem that the civilization they fostered is under attack from all sides: Crusader states in the Holy Land, the *Reconquista* in Spain, and the impending threat posed by the Mongol Horde. While many Batini *murids* are allowed to combat these threats as they see fit, their *murshid* masters seldom involve themselves in such worldly affairs. If questioned as to why they will not unleash their power to defend the culture they helped build, they reply that "The world is unfolding as is right; all is One."

In point of fact, the Batini leaders actually welcome these threats as a test of the society they helped mold. The Outremer kingdoms that resulted from the early Crusades, in particular, were exactly what the Muslim world needed, they feel. 200 years earlier, the Islamic countries had begun to lose their way, drunk on the opulence and decadence that the spoils of conquest had brought them, and had turned to fighting each other more than the infidels. The invasion from Europe changed that, at least for the most part, forcing Arab and Persian, Turk and Kurd to band together against a common foe. While the fall of Jerusalem to the Christians weakened the Web of Faith — the vast mystical territory established throughout the known world by the Batini — it was hardly a crippling blow, and the *murshids* claim they allowed it to happen in order to eliminate the complacent sense of invulnerability then pervading the Islamic world.

The rise of Saladin to the Caliphate was the sort of result they had hoped for, but they felt it came too quickly and easily. Furthermore, that charismatic leader's adherence to orthodox Sunnite Islam, while admirable, tended to alienate Shi'ite mystics and the Sufis, groups from which the majority of *mutasawwifs* were recruited. The Subtle Ones stepped back to let

turmoil brew among Saladin's successors, and watched as his nephew ceded Jerusalem to Emperor Frederick II just over a year ago. "This phase of our work is not yet complete," they said.

In short, the leaders of the Ahl-i-Batin actually welcome the Christian presence for the changes it has wrought, both by stimulating Islam to greater efforts and by opening up more avenues of cultural exchange with Europe. With the Crusaders came merchants and scholars, Europeans whose interests did not include war, but commerce and learning. In many of the oldest Crusader kingdoms, the inhabitants seem to have "gone native" (at least in the eyes of those who remained behind in, or returned to, Europe), adopting Middle Eastern dress and exotic customs like bathing. In the past century there have been many instances of Franks allying with Saracens against other Muslim rulers, and vice versa. In 1204, Crusaders sacked Constantinople and installed their own ruler, in the process eliminating that hitherto omnipresent obstacle to northward Muslim expansion, the Byzantine Empire.

While most of the Islamic world might be horrified by these events, the Batini have a more important end in mind. They realize that their greatest threat is not the Franks, but the waves of Mongol horsemen sweeping out of Central Asia. Much of the Silk Cartel's Far Eastern holdings have already been plundered, Persia is being encroached upon, and it has been foreseen that Baghdad will fall within the next three decades. They know that Muslim forces alone cannot hold back this barbarian tide — after all, they could not even keep their thrice-holiest city out of the hands of unwashed fanatics who still believe that the earth is flat. In acknowledging the martial prowess of the Franks, however, the *murshids* see a way to protect the Muslim heartland. In Egypt they have begun assembling a slave army composed of the Muslim-educated offspring of captive Turkish warriors, called *Mamluks*. It is believed that this combination of civilized brain and barbarian brawn will be the only thing that can halt the Mongolian advance.

JABAL QAF: THE EMERALD MOUNTAIN

If the Ahl-i-Batin leaders seem strangely unconcerned about the forces that menace their lands, it may be because they have a well-established spiritual refuge in the Umbra to which they may retreat. This is Jabal — or Mount — Qaf, which was believed to have once existed in the physical world (perhaps in northeastern Persia) but now resides only in the *alam*

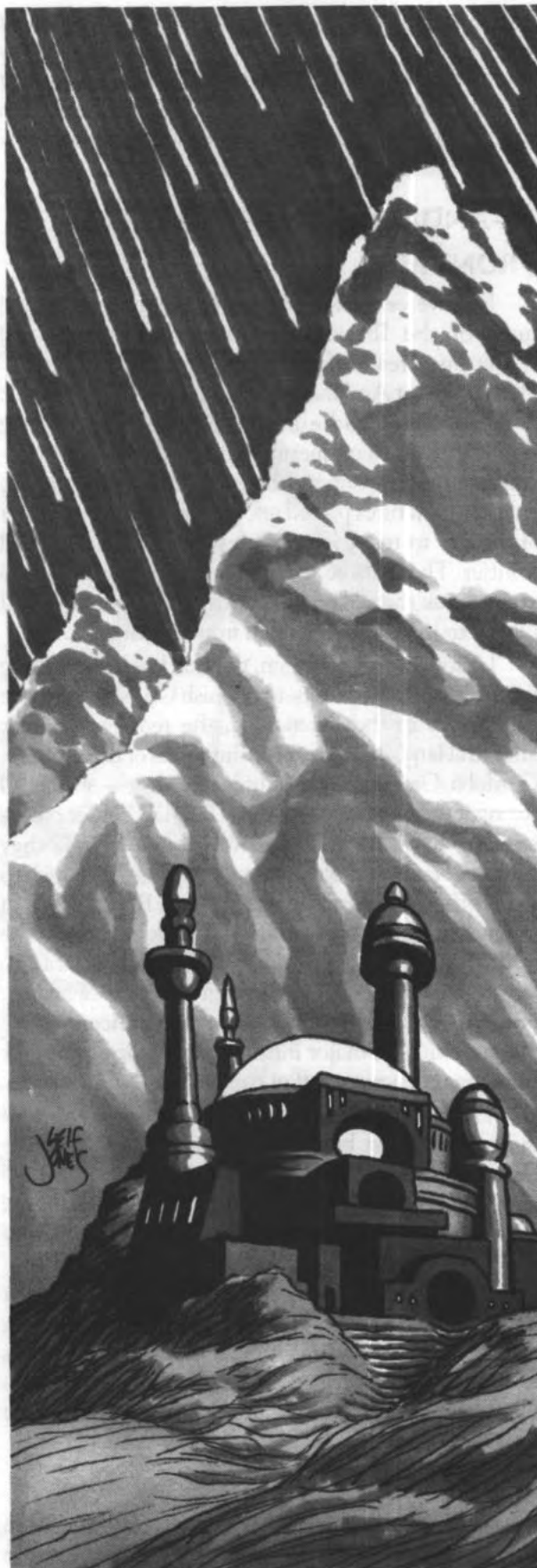
al-mithal, or “realm of similitudes,” the Batini designation for the Umbra. Those of the Ahl-i-Batin who choose to undertake extended Umbral journeys usually embark from this locale and use its peak to maintain their bearings for as long as they can retain sight of it.

“Qaf” is also the name of the 19th letter of the Arabic alphabet, signifying a sound like a more deeply guttural version of the English letter K. Occult lore identifies it with the Throne of God, the One Who Encompasses All, the station at the end of the created world, the *Tabla Smaragdina* (or Emerald Tablet of Hermes Trismegistus) and the assembly of all things in the plan of the Creator. Legend tells that this fabulous mountain both occupies the center of the world — for which it also identified with the north pole and its star Polaris — and surrounds the world. Thus it represents on an allegorical level both metaphysical unity and phenomenal diversity, the infinite variety of worldly forms through which the Unity manifests itself. To see the entire mountain at once, as one may only do from a vantage point at the pinnacle, is to know the workings of the *Kamil*, or Entelechy, to participate in the act of creation and to see the created world reach its ultimate perfected form.

As with all things Umbral, this not simply an idea to be contemplated, but also a state of being to be experienced and a place to be visited, mapped and studied. To climb Mount Qaf is to proceed with enlightened development, to gain wisdom and power. The djinn and other spirits one encounters during such a climb may help or hinder the endeavor, teaching or testing as they deem necessary. Many dangers await the climber, from monsters sleeping in caves and Umbral storms that strip flesh from bone to knife-edge ridges and the yawning chasm that must be crossed before the peak can be reached by those of sufficient faith and wisdom.

Upon the lower slopes of Jabal Qaf, overlooking a hidden valley, stands a large, exquisite palace in the ornate Persian style, named *Sihr Maqamut*, the “secret station of the soul.” This is the Umbral haven of the Batini *murshids*, the non-physical meeting place of the *Qutbs*. Here the greatest of the Batini retreat from the material world to refine their craft and pursue enlightenment free from distraction. When a *Qutb* transmits a telepathic message, his image appears in the recipient’s mind standing upon the terrace of *Sihr Maqamut*, with the green mountain rising behind him.

Although Jabal Qaf looms large in the Middle Eastern Umbra, the existence and exact location of



Sihr Maqamut are among the Ahl-i-Batin's most closely guarded secrets. When the time is right, say the *murshids*, it shall be revealed to those of other Fellowships who are ready to know of it. Until such time, however, the secret station remains the province of the Subtle Ones alone.

AL-ANDALUS: THE VANISHING FRONTIER

For five centuries, Muslim Moors have occupied most of the Iberian Peninsula, building at the westernmost reach of their empire a veritable utopia — al-Andalus, or Andalusia — that exemplifies the fruits of Islamic culture to the unwashed barbarians bordering them. With the conquering Umayyads in the 8th century came many young ambitious Subtle Ones, chafing from the strictures placed upon them by their *murshids* and eager to test their abilities against the untamed frontier. The relative speed with which the Umayyad armies took the unfamiliar territory may be attributed in part to information gained from Batini spies.

Unfortunately for Islam, the tide has been turning for the last hundred years, as Spanish Christians devote themselves to the *Reconquista*, the retaking of their ancestral lands. The great Muslim cities of the south — Cordoba, Granada and Madinat al-Zahra — still stand strong, but every year sees the Christian border creeping ever closer with each Spanish victory. In 1212 they took Las Navas de Tolosa, thus extending their reach to the northern bank of the Guadalquivir River, less than a hundred miles upstream from Cordoba. While the Ahl-i-Batin support the Muslim states and continue to fight against the Spaniards, the gradual loss of Islamic power in Iberia is not ultimately their concern. They plan to remain a major influence in Europe long after Islam has been swept off of the Iberian Peninsula.

The Batini mission in Andalusia was never one of military conquest but of cultural insurgence. Even as the worldly states vied for territory, Batini agents in the guise of scholars, merchants and entertainers infiltrated northern Spain and France, spreading the Doctrine of Unity through allegorical arts and collecting information both earthly and occult to bring back to their masters in Andalusia. Through them the Andalusian *murshids* have learned much about the Messianic Voices and the Order of Hermes, and know that other Fellowships, probably survivals from the pagan era, are at large in northern Europe.

THE GREAT MOSQUE OF CORDOBA

Cordoba has been the seat of Islamic power in Iberia ever since Abd al-Rahman first took Spain in

the early 8th century, though other Andalusian cities rival it in size and splendor. Its markets and schools are renowned throughout both Islam and Christendom, drawing merchants and scholars from the furthest ends of the known world. It is the center of operations for the Ahl-i-Batin in Western Europe and the residence of the Qutb, Muhazzab (*Dark Ages Mage*, p. 234-238).

The Great Mosque of Cordoba is a major crag; Tass may be taken from the fountain in its courtyard (provided one utters a prayer thanking Allah while drawing the water). Furthermore, the Mosque incorporates in its design a number of magical passageways established and maintained by al-Hajj magic, connecting it to other far-flung centers of Batini activity such as Cairo, Jerusalem, Mecca, Baghdad and Isfahan. No magic is needed to traverse these hidden avenues, nor are there secret doors or concealed corridors to be found. All that is necessary is to walk among the multitudinous columns following specific meandering patterns that approximate the walkways in the Paradise Garden and certain paths up Jabal Qaf. To the casual observer, the traveler simply disappears among the veritable forest of elegant pillars that fills the Mosque's spacious interior. Even the Qutb Muhazzab does not know all of these paths by heart; *murshids* may trace the routes by performing gematria upon the Quranic inscriptions inlaid on the columns and applying various geometric formula to the square grid formed by the columns' placement.

GRANADA

Having foreseen the fall of Cordoba to the Christians within the next decade, Muhazzab is taking precautions to move his seat of power further south, out of their reach. He plans to settle among the splendors of Granada, and make them even more splendid in the process. To this end, he has set his eye upon the "Red Castle" of Hisn al-Hamra, making its garden a setting to rival even the Paradise Garden itself, and moving the intersection of magical paths from the Cordoban Mosque to this locale. His elaborate architectural plans already exist within the Astral Umbra, as a realm of spirit entirely of his design and under his control. Over the next hundred years, the physical setting of the Red Castle will be built up into the magnificent palace that succeeding generations will know as the Alhambra.

ZARAGOZA

This small city is situated in the northeastern corner of Iberia, not too far from the French border,

and acts as the Ahl-i-Batin's spiritual gateway to the rest of Europe. While Zaragoza has changed hands many times since the coming of the Moors, it has maintained a degree of autonomy through its importance as a center of learning to both the Christian and Muslim — not to mention Jewish — communities. The University of Light sponsors many schools and libraries here, preserving works from the Hellenic world along with Arabic, Persian and Hebrew literature, and teaching science, medicine, philosophy, law, metaphysics, engineering, architecture, art and literature. Here can be found specialists in the alchemy, astrology, Qabala, Gnosticism, Neoplatonism, Aristotle and even more exotic philosophies.

AGENTS OF UNITY

The Silk Cartel has been in al-Andalus since the beginning, of course. (It is said that when a soldier leaves his footprint in the dust, the wind will not have time to brush it away before a merchant steps into it.) Exporting the luxurious wares and arts of the Umayyads (and the slightly less luxurious wares and arts of their successors) to Christian Europe has been one of the economic mainstays of Moorish Spain. Christian rulers proudly display ceramics, fabrics and architectural ornaments purchased or plundered from Andalusia, little suspecting that the elegant swirling patterns found thereupon are in actuality stylized Arabic script proclaiming the glory of Allah.

The University of Light has been especially active here as well, both pursuing its own studies in an atmosphere of academic and financial support as well as disseminating tidbits of its advanced science and philosophies among the schools of Christendom. Sephardic Jews have long aided the University by showing the unschooled Europeans the benefits of serious scholarship. Academicians in northern Spain, France, Italy and England study their translations of Greek scientific and philosophic works. (Not until the turn of the next century will most European scholars be able to study Aristotle in his original Greek.) Even Qabalistic lore has "somehow found its way" into the hands of Messianic and Hermetic mages; the Order of Hermes eagerly devoured it and currently seeks more, while the Messianic Voices are shocked to see close parallels to their own deeply held theological and metaphysical beliefs. In return, the University of Light fosters the long-held belief among the Sephardim that Iberia is actually the *Sepharad*, the biblical land of refuge for Jews exiled from Jerusalem, as foretold by the prophet Obadiah.

(This belief, however, is starting to wane in the face of the *Reconquista*'s advance. By the 15th century, all Jews will be exiled from then-Christian Spain.)

Between the *Reconquista* and the establishment of Crusader states along the eastern Mediterranean, Batini leaders have increased and refined their program of cultural insurgency. Muhazzab's predecessors foresaw the end of Muslim rule on the Iberian Peninsula, and sought to affect Europe in a way that enriched its spiritual state while diminishing the mounting effectiveness of its military. To this end they unleashed specially trained agents from the Paradise Garden upon the unsuspecting barbarians. These agents, mostly chosen for their fair features, can speak Spanish, French, Italian and even English as fluently as any native, and are thoroughly versed in all forms of poetry, music and other courtly entertainments. Furthermore, each one has been schooled in exotic techniques of sexual ecstasy that the Ahl-i-Batin learned from the Tantrists of distant Hind and Cathay. Armed with these formidable — and subtle — weapons, these agents roam freely across the European countryside, insinuating themselves into noble courts where most of the men have left to join the Crusades. There they entertain those left behind (especially the most powerful noblewomen) with verse, song, dance, music and storytelling, flattering their way into positions of unofficial power and influence by playing upon the emotions and imaginations of their hostesses. Their motto: "Crush the heart of a soldier by stealing the hearts of his women." For the past 50 years, this campaign has enjoyed mounting success, aided by the fact that many young Europeans, especially Frenchmen, have become so enamored of this culture of sensuality that they have taken up musical instruments and joined in the movement, calling themselves *troubadours*.

SHAREEF KHALILEDDIN IBN NUWAZ ABU MUHAMMAD AL-TABRIZI, A.K.A. LUCKY PIERRE, A.K.A. PETER OF THE SLOW HANDS

The exiled bastard of a royal Persian family, Ibn Nuwaz was born with fair skin, blue eyes and blond hair, thanks to an embarrassingly mixed ancestry that included Kurdish, Circassian and captive Frankish bloodlines. His appearance, combined with his refined courtly manners, seductive voice and quick wit, made him a prime candidate for the Paradise Garden's campaign of cultural insurgency. He can speak most Western European languages without an accent and has mastered most local regional forms of music, verse and dance. Currently he is touring the courts of Norman

France, enticing noblewomen — and even some noblemen — young and old into languorous dalliances by sensuously strumming a strange and exotic stringed instrument he calls a “guitar.”

Ibn Nuwaz was initiated into the arts of the troubadour by the *murshid* Abdus-Salaam al-Isfahani, whom he loved as a father. Abdus-Salaam was a troubadour in the court of Eleanor of Aquitaine for many years before the *Qutbs* lost contact with him suddenly. The *Qutbs* and Ibn Nuwaz suspect foul play, believing that Abdus-Salaam was killed when the famous queen learned of his true nature and alignment. Ibn Nuwaz is loyal to the Ahl-i-Batin and follows the troubadour program assiduously, but is planning to make his way to England and exact his vengeance upon the royal family when he gets the chance.

ZINJAN ZAKAAR

Although nominally a Muslim, Zakaar was born to a Berber family deep in the south Tunisian desert, where Islam was still a relatively new and superficial cultural innovation. His grandfather used to commune with the wild spirits of the desert while in an ecstatic trance during local rites more pagan than Islamic. Young Zakaar learned from his elders much of the lore concerning djinn and other spirits, and continued these studies into adulthood. He has journeyed to the lost cities of Ubar, Ishmonia and many-pillared Irem, even traveling beyond substance to visit the fabled City of Brass, and is one of the few living mages who can claim to have escaped the dreaded Oasis of Eternal Bliss. The lore he has accumulated has both helped and hindered his career in the Ahl-i-Batin; the *murshids* who initiated him value his detailed understanding of spiritual matters, but the *Qutbs* fear that such terrible knowledge, coupled with the ruthlessness and ambition Zakaar habitually displays, make for a dangerous combination. They continually watch Zinjan Zakaar for Infernalist tendencies, and have denied him many advancements that he feels he has earned.

Some years ago, Zinjan joined the ranks of the Almohads, ancestral allies of his family, to help them solidify and extend their authority in Andalusia with the aid of his djinn servants. He has appointed himself the enforcer of the austere Almohad moral code, and travels the length and breadth of Andalusia keeping kings and generals in line, simultaneously doing battle with the forces of the *Reconquista*. So feared is he by Muslim and Christian alike that none dare speak his name above a whisper. Even those unaware of his reputation are frightened by his

physical appearance: nearly seven feet tall, with coal-black flesh knotted upon a gaunt but muscular frame, one eyeball of sickly bloodshot yellow without pupil or iris. He never smiles, but when he grimaces in the heat of action his incomplete set of teeth are yellow and chipped; close examination (were such ever to occur) would reveal that many of his missing teeth have been replaced with the knucklebones of his enemies, some still sporting exquisitely crafted rings.

Zinjan Zakaar, even when traveling at the head of an army, always drives a small two-wheeled oxcart, drawn by huge deformed ox with four horns that he himself raised from a calf. The cart's approach is heralded by the tinkling of many hanging amulets (some shattered from when Zinjan overcame their previous owners' magic) and sealed bottles, vases and other containers. Some contain various powders, herbs and oils useful in casting magic. Others contain his djinn servitors.

AL-SAFRADI

Somewhere in the mountainous desert northeast of Cordoba dwells a hermit who has been there for so long that none can remember a time when rumors of his existence did not circulate. The Batini *murshids* know that he is, or was at one time, a member of the *Ikhwan at-Tawhid*, the Brethren of the Unified Soul, and believe that he came to Iberia in the company of Abd al-Rahman I during the early 8th century. Jewish locals believe that he has been here even longer, and hence call him “the Sephardite” (*al-Safradi* in Arabic); some even go so far as to identify him with the prophet Obadiah. Whatever the case, many miracles are attributed to him, and it is said that his magical power is without limit. One current rumor holds that the Muslims would have won the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa had they taken the precaution of approaching al-Safradi beforehand and apologized for interrupting his meditations with the noise of their warfare.

TARIQA: THE INNER LIFE

Those who follow the way of Subtlety may spend much time in monastic seclusion, but are ultimately expected to return to the world and the life of any other mortal until such times as their services are required. The *mutasawwif*, recruited from a school, court or Sufi lodge, may spend from three to seven years cloistered from the world in study and training under close supervision. At this time they receive instruction in meditative technique and mystical

lore that they will use for the rest of their lives. Most *mutasawwifs* are retained as skilled servants, living their lives normally until the Batini call upon them, but those who display magical talent are initiated into the ranks of the *murids*, the true worldly agents of the Subtle Ones.

Life for a *murid* can be widely varied depending upon which *khanaqa* he is associated with. The **University of Light** is wholly scholastic, composed almost entirely of students, teachers, scribes, translators, librarians and the like. (The University has, however, been known to recruit exceptionally dependable couriers and persons of less savory talents to procure manuscripts and other items.) The **Silk Cartel** does business from Cathay to Andalusia, from the Pacific to the Atlantic, and incorporates the entire range of mercantile lifestyles: rich effete traders, experienced sailors, swaggering guards, rough herdsmen, clever crafters and overly gregarious camel-drivers swell its ranks. Their sphere of influence includes most of the known world, and it is not uncommon to find a Silk Cartel party with African, Chinese, Norse and Italian members side by side. The **Paradise Garden** is the most politically powerful of the Batini *khanaqas*, with well-bred nobles and common bureaucratic functionaries, but its direct influence does not extend beyond the Islamic world. This is not to say, though, that emissaries, ambassadors, diplomats and spies from this *khanaqa* cannot be found in the farthest-flung kingdoms of the world — southern European courts in particular are rife with Paradise Garden agents. The **Ikhwan at-Tawhid** is the least worldly *khanaqa*, as its members live apart, practicing extreme asceticism in the deserts of Arabia, the Afghan mountains, the African jungle and any secluded wilderness or cave they can find. When one of the Brethren is seen on the road or in a city, it is sure that she has been called forth on an urgent spiritual matter of life and death. The **Darwushim** live primarily as beggars, such as can be found anywhere in the world, although some travel with musicians and entertainers, or as pilgrims or itinerant wonder-workers. Life as a *darwush* is generally lived on the road, in the streets, beneath God's sky, and requires that the *darwush* give up any regular notion of security and property to exist eternally in the present moment.

The *murid* who shows continued advancement of magical skills and profound inner wisdom may be initiated to the rank of *murshid* and taught all the esoteric interpretations of the Doctrine of Unity. The *murshid* is considered enlightened enough to

direct his own affairs, to recruit *mutasawwif* and initiate *murids*, and to start a *zawiya* offshoot of his *khanaqa*. The *murshids* of a given region, or those who travel along the same routes, choose one of their number — usually the eldest, wisest and most magically adept — to act as *Qutb*, or “axis,” a living medium that telepathically connects them all to the other *Qutbs* in the home *khanaqas* and throughout the world. The *Qutb* spends much of her life in trance, transmitting and receiving messages and information from throughout the Batini intelligence network; often a trance must be followed by several days of transcription as the *Qutb* dictates all that has been poured into her mind.

It must be noted that, while *murshid* and *Qutb* may be exceptional ranks within the Batini organization, those who hold these ranks might not necessarily occupy such an exalted station in the outer life they present to the world at large. Just as the *mutasawwif* may be chosen from any walk of life and the *murid* may practice any profession while learning the Batini way, those with the greatest responsibility tend toward humble callings that leave them free to deal with Batini matters at any given time, while leaving them personally accessible to mage and Commoner alike. When seeking out those who run the affairs of the world, one is as likely to find one's master in a gleaming palace as behind a plow or a mendicant's alms-bowl.

MAGIC: WHISPERING INTO THE EAR OF GOD

Batini magical method can be as precisely formulaic as that of the Order of Hermes, with the clarity of intent and devotion found in the Messianic Voices. Indeed, all three Fellowships share a common wealth of spiritual lore, from the names of the highest angels to the sigils of the celestial intelligences, and more than one overzealously impolitic *murid* has been reprimanded for implying that the Messianics and Hermetics both “stole” much of their lore from “pre-Batini” sources like the University of Light or the *Ikhwan at-Tawhid* (each of which existed centuries before the formation of the Ahl-i-Batin). The *murshids* are intensely interested in learning how the Hermetic and Messianic Pillars work, and command that all observations of their usage be memorized and reported as soon as it is safe to do so.

“Subtlety in all things” describes the Batini approach to casting spells; their foci usually take the form of implements normally associated with their mundane profession, and they strive to make the act

of working magic as unobvious as possible. Workings that involve elaborate ceremonial settings and performances are done in private, except for communal rites like prayer, public feasts and local cultic customs. Recitation of Quranic verse and pages taken from the Quran are regarded as the most potent talismans throughout the Muslim world, said to have curative properties even when used by Commoners. Beduin mages of the deep desert tie knots in a cord twisted from their prospective victim's hair and threads from his clothing, then blow on the knots over an incense-laden fire to cause pain in the victim's bowels, though he may be on the other side of the world. Nomadic and village-dwelling Batini may have methods that resemble those of the Old Faith or Spirit-Talkers, and the Batini are known to recruit from the Middle Eastern versions of those Fellowships by teaching them the Doctrine of Unity.

Batini foci conform largely to the religious symbolism of Islam. Those who learn Al-Anbiya, the Pillar of Prophecy, usually require some kind of rigorous physical and mental exercise to attain a prophetic trance; some pray silently, others chant, fast, recite the Quran or dance themselves into timeless ecstasy, exhausting their bodies and emptying their minds in order that the light of truth may shine through. Students of Al-Fatihah, the Pillar of Thought, rely primarily upon the written word, by which thought is encoded and transmitted, to focus their efforts through complex texts or calligraphic mandalas, with hypnotic gestures and eye contact used to control a target, and gems, lenses and prisms used to peer into his thoughts. Al-Hajj, the Pillar of Distance, has the widest variety of applications, and hence the widest variety of foci, with drawing on paper predominating — architects may build hidden portals through buildings by applying sacred geometry to the blueprint, and navigators can swiftly cross vast stretches of sea by performing the proper operations over an accurate map. Al-Hajj is used to ease travel through sandals and other footwear or the saddle and bridle of a riding-mount. Practitioners of Al-Layl, the Pillar of Night, cultivate stillness and silence in the dark, receding behind smoke and veils, enwrapped in hooded cloaks; many of their foci are not so much things as the absence of things, like light and sound.

For all Pillars, mirrors and still waters are common foci for all forms of scrying and magical sight, gems and crystals for concentrating or storing a spell, weapons and writing implements for directing magical energy, and clothing or jewelry for spells that affect or transform an individual person.

DHIKR (AL-FATIHAH •)

The first and foremost instruction received by a *murid* is memorization; through exercise of faith (*Ubbadan*) one is able to open (*Fatihah*) one's mind like a book, examining in detail every momentary glimpse and fleeting sound of one's life. Batini agents carry a lot of information in their heads, and their masters may ask them at any time to report their experiences in detail, repeating every conversation verbatim, describing a person down to the smallest tick, marking variances of dress and mannerism, noting cartographic distances and strategic emplacements during travel, or even reciting an entire book that they have read. Every Batini has thoroughly memorized the Doctrine of Unity, the Quran and countless other texts.

System: This spell has an active and a passive version. The passive version is used in meditation to examine one's own memories, making it possible to pay attention to details that may have been missed at the time. A faintly overheard conversation can be recalled or a page of dense writing that was originally only glanced at briefly can be read. For each success in casting this spell, the Storyteller must give a complete answer to a question about whatever the player is trying to recall, or suggest some forgotten detail relevant to the player character's current situation.

The active version of Dhikr uses a mantra or written amulet to fix the current scene in memory, including all details that do not immediately register in the conscious attention of the character. One common usage of this is to flip through a book, then mentally study the actual contents at some later time. For each casting success, the caster may memorize: about 15 minutes of action or conversation, about 50 pages of text, an entire panoramic view (i.e., everything seen while turning in a circle), a long speech or piece of music, everything about a specific person, etc. Five successes are needed to fix an entire Scene in memory for later retrieval.

A simple failure for either spell means that no subliminal details can be recalled; the caster is left with the vagaries of his faulty, non-magical memory. A botch means that the recollection is not consciously accessible at all, normally or magically, until the caster gets a full night's sleep — or until the Storyteller says so. It is left to the Storyteller to decide whether other Pillars can be used on recalled memories; e.g., seeing through illusions or across great distances, or psychically reading an object handled long ago.

CLOSET DANCE (AL-HAJJ) ●●●, AL-LAYL ●●●)

The adept of Al-Hajj, or *Hajji*, learns to instinctively “leap” out of small confined spaces and can instantly “land” in another nearly identical space if there is one nearby. Closets, stalls, niches, colonnades, and even baskets or jars large enough to contain the *Hajji* may be employed, provided each is similar in size, shape, general construction and purpose. Teachers stress that the spaces must be similar because the spell uses the harmonic resonance between them as the connection. Moreover, unless the caster has memorized distant but identical locations, the space jumped to must be part of the same group or structure, like closets in the same building or a row of oversized jars along a marketplace wall. “One cannot step from the stable stall to the Sultana’s wardrobe,” say the *Hajjin*.

System: For each success scored on the roll, the caster can “jump” once to the nearest adjacent space: the closets of the rooms next door or directly downstairs or upstairs, the next jar in the row, all those in a pile of baskets that touch the basket containing the caster, the stalls on either side in a stable, etc. Additional successes extend this range by one increment each — the next door down or floor above or below, the second jar or stall along the row, etc. Five successes is generally enough to give a *Hajji* the run of any large building, marketplace or forest. Failure means the caster stays where she is; a botch transports her to the center of the nearest large open area.

Normally the space should enclose the *Hajji* so that others cannot see her, but the addition of Al-Layl to the spell enables her to slip through open, repetitive spaces like trees or columns in such a way that nobody notices her magical locomotion, and anyone attempting to follow her cannot trace or anticipate her movements. If an enclosed destination already contains some mass that would prevent the *Hajji* from occupying it, such as oil in a jar, grain in a basket or clothing in a closet (or another person hiding from whatever the caster is hiding from), Al-Hajj ●●●● must be used to teleport that mass back to the caster’s original space, trading places simultaneously.

Some *Hajji* who keep permanent residences furnish them with closets, jars and large coffer of common make; these are memorized locations to which they may escape if they can find similar objects in their travels to use as portals.

TEARS OF ALLAH (AL-HAJJ) ●●●●, AL-ANBIYA ●)

The Batini loathe vulgar displays of power, but on occasion find them necessary and useful; sometimes, it

seems, Subtle ends must be achieved through unsubtle means. One such means for the well-prepared *Hajji* is to open a small magical conduit to places where the elemental energies of the world exist in their most raw, compressed and volatile state. (Usually a prolonged journey is required to find such a place, although some *murshids* have been known to pass on detailed descriptions and coordinates of elementally charged zones to their students, enabling them to cast this spell without time-consuming preparation on their part. This practice is, however, frowned upon except in times of emergency.) The spell is activated when the *Hajji* opens the conduit on her end and directs it at a target, unleashing freezing mountain winds, pressurized water from the ocean depths or even molten lava.

Hajjin who master this spell do so by keeping the blast to a short burst; once the element has been unleashed, it cannot be controlled save by other magic — which many Batini do not possess. Although the open end of the magical conduit suffers no recoil, the caster may still be subject to whatever extremes of heat or cold she has brought to the scene. “Though we pour molten rock from our empty palm, yet may we burn our fingers,” warn the teachers. Many *Hajjin* prefer to use a physical focus for this spell, even if it is not necessary for casting. Ibn Mansur, a Batini general in the service of Abd al-Rahman I, was known to spew volcanic ejecta at defending Iberian Visigoths from a deep clay crucible mounted like the cannon of later centuries. Yazghuri Shah, the Uighur saint, perished at the height of the Devil-King Wars when she destroyed the dark tower of Mirkuz by climbing up its central spire and releasing a Himalayan avalanche from a tiny wooden box.

System: The Storyteller should not allow a character to use this spell unless he has sufficiently prepared by finding an exact location of concentrated elemental force to use — the peak of a snow-capped mountain, an active volcano, the deepest point on the floor of the Mediterranean, etc. At some point, a physical journey must be made to the location, or to within sight of it, or to a vantage point where the precise coordinates can be calculated — i.e., the base of the volcano or the spot on the sea’s surface directly over the lowest part of its floor, etc. A separate location must be prepared for each different type of element the mage wishes to use. The location must be fixed in the caster’s memory (*Dhikr* may be used), and coordinates from someone else who actually made the journey and prepared the receiving end of the magical conduit can work, but

this is rare. It also leaves the effect of the spell vulnerable to the ravages of time: geologic changes may quell the volcano or raise the ocean floor, and summer can turn freezing mountain winds into cool breezes. The Al-Anbiya Pillar helps compensate for these vagaries, but the mage using an elemental conduit previously established by another may be required by the Storyteller to draw up a horoscope or perform some geomantic calculation to use this spell to its full effect.

For each casting success, the blast does one point of bashing damage and one point of lethal damage due to heat, cold, pressure or foreign matter sucked into the conduit (pebbles, twigs, birds, fish, etc.) The Storyteller must keep in mind that the substance of the blast is common earthly matter that does not disappear or evaporate once the spell is ended. Failure can mean the caster's mistake or some temporary change of condition at the elemental source. A botch can be disastrous: the blast turns upon caster or allies; a radical change in pressure at the source location causes the portal to suck in air, stray matter and characters; the conduit does not close when it is supposed to, resulting in an uncontrolled spew for a duration set by the Storyteller. Care must be taken when using the Tears of Allah in enclosed areas.

THE CLAVICLES OF SULAYMAN: SOLOMONIC MAGIC

500 years before the founding of the Ahl-i-Batin, Sulayman ibn Daud, or Solomon the son of David, ruled as the third King of Israel, performing magical works still known today from such sources as the Torah, the Bible, the Quran and popular legendry. Besides being renowned for his moral wisdom and sense of justice, Sulayman was believed to be able to understand the speech of birds, ants and all varieties of spirits. In combination with his other magical talents, his intimate knowledge of spirits enabled him to divine their individual essences to such a degree that he was able to call, keep and control them at will. A great number of major occult works are attributed to Sulayman, and it is possible that some may actually contain his own words.

One such is *Mafteah Shelomoh*, a catalogue of individual spirits that describes their personalities and functions, along with the names, signs, sigils, incantations and other magic tools used to control them. Scripture tells how Sulayman exercised this control, assembling a vast workforce of jinn, demons and other spirits to erect his legendary temple and perform all manner of wonders for him. The Univer-

sity of Light (which traces its origins back to Sulayman's reign and beyond) claims to have preserved *Mafteah Shelomoh* in its entirety, and incorporated significant passages from it into their own *Sefer Nitsotsoth*, or "Book of Sparks." Although the University has sworn to keep such dangerous knowledge from profane hands, bowdlerized versions have been appearing in Zaragoza and elsewhere for the last few centuries, under the Latin title *Claviculae Salomonis*, "The Keys of Solomon."

While the University tries to learn all that it can about every variety of Umbrood, it deals almost exclusively with the djinn in its workings. Trafficking with nature spirits smacks of paganism, demons corrupt, and only a saint can call upon the angels of Allah with total purity of intent. The djinn, autonomous in thought and will, are more like man in this respect and are thus sometimes willing to strike equitable bargains (although the magic of Solomon gives humans a distinct advantage within the physical world, while djinn try to offset this advantage through dissemblance and deception). In theory, the spells below may be used upon any sort of spirit, but they are especially attuned to the djinn and most Batini seldom have any reason to call upon other types of Umbrood.

The Solomonian method of conjuration is extremely dangerous, as a nearly superhuman degree of concentration, clarity and exactitude is needed, and any mistake could leave the mage trapped in a private chamber with an enraged spirit. The Keys call upon all the magical arts that the conjurer might know, and even more of which he may be unaware. Only the most advanced *murshids* are allowed to attempt these workings, for only they have the capacity to work these spells with certainty. In general, a week of purification before and after the working is standard practice; any one of the spells below require most of a day to cast, and to cast all three in succession takes at least a day and a night.

SUMMONING (AL-FATIHAH ••, AL-HAJJ •••••)

Those who would have truck with the djinn must understand that, as natives of the Astral Umbra, they exist primarily as creatures of thought in an environment of knowledge and information. As long as they abide solely in the Umbra the mage has no particular power over them. Unlike other Umbrood, however, the djinn frequently visit the material world and during these visits are subject to its laws in addition to their own. To Summon a djinn, then, the mage must alter his

surroundings and his thoughts in a way that draws the djinn to him; like most other spirits, each individual djinn has a name both spoken and written, a sigil, an image and a variety of associated occult correspondences like colors, shapes, tones, scents and mathematical formulae. Some djinn are in the service of High Umbrood, and if this condition is known by the mage, he may call upon the power of the greater spirit to direct the lesser. Once all the relevant correspondences have been assembled and arranged, the mage may begin the Summoning. In the material world, no djinn may resist the Summoning; this may be likened to the natural human impulse to turn and look upon hearing one's name called, only far stronger. Summoning a djinn that is currently in the Umbra may attract the djinn's attention in this way, but it is under no compulsion to come or even answer.

System: Al-Fatihah is used to identify and contact the targeted djinn, and Al-Hajj transports it to the caster. Like most Solomonic rituals, Summoning is an extended spell; the caster must accumulate a number of successes equal to the djinn's Gnosis + 1. The base difficulty starts at 10, but may be reduced by one for each major component needed to identify the djinn (spoken name, written name, sigil or an accurate image of how the djinn appears in its natural form in the Umbra) and for every two lesser components (color, shape, tone, scent, formula, etc.). Knowing the name of a High Umbrood lord who holds power over the target djinn reduces the difficulty by two. With the required number of successes, the djinn will appear physically in its natural form before the caster. It will stay in place for one hour per additional success, during which time the caster may question it or cast more spells.

BINDING (AL-FATIHAH ••••, AL-HAJJ ••)

Once the djinn appears before the mage, immediate measures must usually be taken to keep it from wreaking havoc, for the djinn are a proud race and do not care to be ordered around by mere humans. (Some may be on friendly terms with the caster, but, even then, their motives for cooperating may be questionable.) The djinn must be contained so that it does not escape and its actions restrained so that it does not attack the caster or anyone else in reach. Binding forces the djinn to remain in place and keeps it from using its powers on others. Djinn are generally Summoned into a magic circle or other specially prepared space and Bound there as soon as they appear. If the caster wishes to keep the djinn for an indefinite period of time so that its services can be called upon at a later date, the djinn may be Bound into some form of container like a bottle,

box, sack, basket or even a lamp. While the container does not need to be hermetically sealed, there must be no imperfections through which the djinn can escape, like cracks in jars, frayed holes in pouches or baskets, knotholes in wooden boxes or a gap in a magical circle. Binding relies upon the power of the Seal of Sulayman, a complex sigil that holds influence over all djinn. (The Order of Hermes sometimes has less success in dealing with the djinn, perhaps resulting from confusion between Solomon's Seal, which incorporates the figure of the five-pointed pentagram, and the Shield of David, which uses the six-pointed hexagram.)

System: Al-Fatihah is needed to limit the local conceptual environment in which the djinn may act, and Al-Hajj is used to ward the entire space around the djinn so that it may not flee. Completion of a binding requires a number of successes on an extended spell equal to the djinn's Rage + 2; the base difficulty is 10 and may be reduced as with Summoning. As long as at least one success is gained before three turns have passed since the Summoning, the djinn cannot leave the binding object until the spell either succeeds (binding the djinn into the object for the spell's duration) or fails (if the mage fails or botches a roll). Additional successes beyond those required increase the difficulty of any attempt to free the djinn, whether it be by magically negating the Binding or physically opening or destroying the container. All names, sigils, etc. must be inscribed within or upon the circle or container that the caster is using to Bind the djinn. A Bound djinn remains Bound until released (either by the Binder or someone else) and may not be Summoned by another mage; any attempt to do so automatically fails, regardless of how much the would-be Summoner expends in the process.

COMMANDING (AL-ANBIYA •••••, AL-FATIHAH ••••, AL-LAYL •••••)

Only the most accomplished mage can force a djinn to act against its will, for a near-complete mastery of the magical arts is needed. For the Batini, this involves presenting the Seal of Sulayman and using its power to actually shape the djinn's very thoughts and destiny (albeit in a limited way). Even this power is not absolute, for a djinn may yet be free to take any action not specifically forbidden by the exact wording of the caster's Command. Besides exercising some of the most powerful Batini Pillars, the Commander must also be careful not to leave any loopholes in her instructions; a background in contractual law can be most helpful here.

System: Al-Anbiya is needed to constrain the target djinn's future actions, Al-Fatihah is used to implant the Command in its mind, and Al-Layl occludes any thoughts of direct disobedience on the djinn's part. The required number of successes is the djinn's Willpower + 3; the base difficulty is 10 but can be reduced as above. Generally only one specific task may be Commanded per casting, but additional tasks may be added with additional successes. The effective duration of a Command is generally only until the completion of the task(s) — and most djinn can accomplish most tasks very quickly, often within the blink of an eye; additional successes can hold the djinn to prolonged tasks for one time increment per success — an hour, a day, a week, a month, a year, a decade, a century, etc. Unless the Command is prolonged in this way, the spell is effectively negated upon the death of the caster. A djinn acting under a Solomonian Command cannot be Bound by another, and may only answer the Summoning of another as long as doing so does not violate the Command or interfere with the completion of the task at hand.

(Ultimately, the outcome of any Command comes down to a battle of wits between player and Storyteller. The player should be as complete and precise as possible when issuing instructions, while the Storyteller should find any loophole possible to subvert the player character's actual desires. This is not necessary when there is genuine goodwill on the part of the djinn toward the caster, but such cases are extremely rare outside of local djinn cults, or when a Spirit-Talker is also involved and can exercise some diplomacy and finesse in the operation.)



PLAYER'S TOOLBOX

MISSIONARIES, SCHOLARS, ASSASSINS, JESTERS

• Those who have trouble envisioning a Middle Eastern character lasting more than a day in Dark Medieval Europe should consider that most of the Iberian peninsula was occupied by the Moors for a total of nearly 800 years. By the 13th century, the Muslim presence is not as alien as one might think, at least not to anyone who is educated or even slightly well traveled. For over 200 years the steady influx of Arabic texts has revitalized European culture, and many soon-to-be-famous luminaries like Roger Bacon and Ramon Lull not only read Arabic but travel to Andalusia to study under Muslim teachers. Every major court has hosted at least one Saracen emissary, if not several, and Moorish traders are a regular presence in southern European markets. A number of customs that characterize this period, like chivalry and courtly love, can be traced back to Moorish influences.

Amid this environment of cultural mixing, Batini agents can move and act quite freely, even if some are unable to disguise their origins. (The lighter coloring and features that characterize those of European ancestry are not absent in the Middle East; Kurds, Circassians, some Afghan tribes and other highland peoples are known for their blond hair or blue eyes. The modern designation "Caucasian" refers to a Central Asian mountain chain, the Caucasus, between the Caspian and the Black Sea. Even the Mongols claim descent from a blue-eyed ancestral race called the Borjigun.) Many returning Crusaders picked up Saracen customs while in the Orient, and some have even been initiated into mystic lodges, including Batini *zawiya*. Furthermore, internecine rivalries have resulted in a number of alliances between Christian and Muslim kingdoms against their own co-religionists. Such alliances are usually sealed by an exchange of hostages; if the alliance remains amicable and beneficial, a Muslim hostage in Europe may be accorded a great degree of privilege and freedom.

Muslim missionaries both mage and Commoner are at large in Europe; though they are usually dismissed, harassed or attacked outright, some occasionally find small freethinking audiences, though few converts.

For several hundred years now, a number of "scribal spies" disguised as Christian monks have been circulating through Europe's monasteries, copying manuscripts to take back home. At this point in time most standard texts have already been transmitted in this way, and those spies who remain are engaged in seeking out the most rare and obscure books, sometimes stealing them outright if they have no time to copy them.

Assassins, of course, are everywhere, pursuing innumerable agendas.

Besides the troubadour movement (which at this point in time includes many European practitioners who are unaware of its true origins and purpose), another program of cultural insurgency, unofficial and unorganized, is underway. Many Darwushim have wandered into Europe, delighting and fascinating villagers with their carefree dancing, crazy antics and exotic wonderworking. Some have been adopted by local courts and have even risen to the official status of Court Jester. Those who still wander have attracted followers; these wear ragged patchwork clothes and are called *Harlechim*, the root of the later Harlequin.

INHABITANTS OF ZARAGOZA

Islam places great value upon the written word and maintains one of the highest per capita literacy rates of any society in the history of the world. The influx of new texts into Europe via Andalusia has vitalized scholarship with an intellectual flowering that will eventually contribute to the Renaissance. In addition to works of science, medicine and philosophy, there are uncounted scraps of myth, legend, fable and poetry now entering Europe, and more and more European souls are seeing themselves reflected in ink on paper. This flowering of codified thought is, among other things, laying the groundwork for the modern novel.

Characters with the Destiny Background, or those who simply want to place themselves in the context of this new explosion of media, may wish to have some sort of text with which to identify, just as people have always tried to identify with the heroes of myth and song. Books and scrolls are a mainstay of most courses of magical study, but the written word is no longer limited to scripture, gospel or flat explanations of arcane subjects.

A number of options occur:

- You discover a manuscript that addresses you by name, describes your past in detail, and

goes on to delineate your future and ultimate fate. Should you adopt the narrative as a guidepost for living your life? If its outcome is bright, this might lead to prosperity, but if this strange biography takes too many dark turns, can you act against it and change the ending? And how does this affect your interaction with your cabal? Do your companions appear in the story, and if so, do their roles match your relationships with them? Can all the histories of all the people on earth fit together in a single cohesive storyline? How does one read the Book of the World?

- You discover a legendary manuscript of unknown origin in one of Zaragoza's libraries, written in ancient Duraic but partially translated into Arabic, Hebrew and Latin by various hands at various times. The narrative contained within is exceedingly long and tortuous, with an uncountable variety of characters and subplots, containing many tangential allegories and seemingly meaningless digressions. Many of its plot threads take the form of "nested" and "telescoping" stories, wherein one character tells a tale to another, while a character within that tale tells a story of his own, a literary device that anticipates such future works as *The Canterbury Tales*, the *Decameron* and especially the *Arabian Nights*. Many of these nested stories appear to have no ending, often being interrupted by events of the main plotline, and any resolution for them has yet to be found or noted by the unnamed translators. Lore relates that the diligent student may, if he succeeds in deciphering and following the entirety of the narrative, divine many secrets concerning the past, the future and the secrets that men keep hidden in their hearts. Those who attempt this and fail, however, are said to go mad.

STRANGERS IN CORDOBA

The Great Mosque of Cordoba has been in existence for over 400 years and was built up to its current expanse over two centuries ago. Of the magical pathways woven into its plan, those leading to the major *khanaqas* are maintained through constant usage, but many others are still in place. Some were created by the original builders but never used. Others fell into disuse when the locations they connected to were destroyed or forgotten. Most lead to population centers, but some lead to secret places like hidden groves,

mountaintops, windswept deserts or deep caves throughout Eurasia and Africa. Because one need not be a Batini or even a mage to traverse these magic routes, it is in theory possible for anyone to stumble through one. Many strange and outlandish foreigners can be seen in the bustling avenues of Cordoba. Not all arrived by intent, or through normal modes of travel. Both players and Storyteller can take advantage of this situation — consider, for example, the following:

- Kubotai the Spirit-Talker is a scout for Ogadai, the son of Jenghiz and Khakhan of the Mongol Horde. He was sent to Persia in order to assess their army and defenses in preparation for invasion by his people. With the help of some local spirits (unbelieving djinn, who never accepted Islam), he was able to identify some of the local mages as well. Several months ago he managed to track a Batini *murshid* into the Paradise Garden at Isfahan; such is Kubotai's skill at remaining unseen that he was able to tail the mage as he walked the winding paths through the Garden. When the mage finally left the Garden, Kubotai turned to find that he was no longer in Isfahan, but now stood in the Great Mosque at Cordoba. Despite his skills, he was unable to trace his steps back to the Garden, and is now stranded in Andalusia.

Thus far, Kubotai has managed keep his presence secret — at least, he believes that he has. He stole a voluminous robe and a long-tailed Berber turban that he uses to cover his strange clothing and alien features. He lives by petty theft, and by hunting small game outside the city. Besides Mongolian, he speaks only a smattering of Arabic and Persian, but is picking up much of the local dialects. A week ago he had to kill an old man who caught a glimpse of his almond-shaped eyes and started crying out that a demon was in their midst. He has stolen a map from a local school and is trying to figure out the best way to return to his homeland. Traveling through Europe would be too difficult for him, so he plans to cross the Strait of Gibraltar and return through Africa, Arabia and Persia. He is anxious to report back to Ogadai, though he fears the punishment that awaits him for returning late. He is even more anxious to reunite with his horse Kutukti, whom he left grazing in a secluded valley outside Isfahan.

OTHER FELLOWSHIPS

Following are examples of the sort of advice a *murshid* might give to her *murids* concerning relations with other Fellowships.

MESSIANIC VOICES

"Their devotion to the Unity is commendable, and must be respected at all times, but this attachment that they have formed to the Christian faith appears to have blinded them to the diversity inherent in Creation. Furthermore, many make the mistake of fostering fear and hatred in their flock, not only against our people, but also against other enlightened ones in their own lands. While this tactic has gained them a considerable measure of worldly power that we cannot dismiss, it will ultimately prove to be their undoing. Take pains not to reveal your true nature to one until you are absolutely certain of his motives — which should not be difficult, as they tend to be quite transparent socially."

OLD FAITH

"In our own lands, we note the survival of customs and beliefs from the Age of Ignorance, even among tribes that have accepted Islam. Ancient ways die hard, and our missionaries have found it best to accommodate them, at least nominally. Paganism must ultimately be set aside, as with any child's plaything, but even we must never forget the roots from which we spring, and endeavor to attune ourselves to the cycles of the natural world. In this there is much we can yet learn from them, although some of their bloodier practices must be discouraged, of course, as these tend to disfigure the soul. We have learned that paganism is even more widespread in the lands of the Franks, and hope to find allies in its adherents, for we hear that they are actively persecuted by the Christians. This will make them difficult to find, but we may court their favor by aiding them in their struggles against the Church. When dealing with them directly, however, it is best to restrain your natural impulse to deride their primitive beliefs; they are already under siege from another Oriental religion (misguided though it may be), and it is not our intent to drive them away from the realization of Unity."

ORDER OF HERMES

"The Hermetics are our nearest counterpart in the lands of the Franks. We use many of the same techniques — astrology, alchemy, the Qabala —

and we revere many of the same figures — Tahuti (the Egyptian Thoth, whom they equate with the Greek Hermes), Sulayman ibn Daud (whom they call Solomon), and Aflatun (whom they call Plato). We have shared much over the centuries, especially through our numerous points of contact in the Andalus. They have displayed awesome powers to us, so it is wise not to confront them directly. We keep many secrets that they covet, which we dole out in parsimonious doses. Several decades ago, for instance, we allowed them to come into possession of one of our elementary training manuals, that of Rituz al-Ilyi. When dealing with them, share only the most basic knowledge you possess (for many of the simplest matters are beyond their grasp) as enticement, but learn all you can of their powerful methods."

SPIRIT-TALKERS

"There are those who embark upon the path of magic by intent, and then there are those who seem to be chosen by the denizens of the Invisible World to act as mediums between the physical and immaterial. Their lot is seldom an easy one; in Islam, we make allowances for such, saying 'Fools and madmen are touched by Allah, and thus are in His care.' The many djinn-cults that exist among our outlying regions attest to this. Among the Mongol Horde, they are even accorded the status of true holy men. In Frankistan, however, it is another matter, for these ones are often shunned and reviled, dismissed as diseased and damaged persons. Approach them with caution, for their nerves have undoubtedly been rubbed raw by the abuse heaped upon them, but know that the power which the spirits wield through them can be great indeed."

VALDAERMEN

"Some of the most archaic and primordial secrets of creation are best left forgotten by the sons of Adam. Even most of the Franks understand this, but there are those among their northernmost tribes who steadfastly refuse to heed this wisdom. They are necromancers most foul, plying dark paths to ensnare the shades of the departed, warping the souls of those unfortunates to their will, and there is no light or mirth in them. Shun and revile them, but do not incur their wrath, which is legendary. If you are unable to avoid their company, bite your tongue, bide your time, observe and remember that you may report to a Quth at the earliest opportunity, to tell what you have learned and purge your spirit of their unclean taint."

THE MESSIANIC VOICES: MANY FACES OF ONE FAITH

Oh Holy Father, forgive me for what I must now do to save Your faithful from the thorns of heresy. I know the dwelling place of a heretic, a man once blessed by You with great power, but who has fallen into error and espouses the heresy of the Albigenses. I go to him tonight to demand that he repent. If he refuses... the righteous fire of Your Archangel Gabriel shall cleanse him from this earth.

— Brother Johann, itinerant servant of the Messianic Curia

The common image of a Messianic Voice in 1230 is that of a smug, self-assured Catholic heretic, carefully concealing his blasphemous assertions of "direct communion with God" through membership in a holy order. But this only tells half of the story. Voices come in more diverse forms than are readily seen and, indeed, in more forms than the 13th century is truly prepared to accept. The idea of a single, monolithic Creator is found in places and times far removed from Rome; it is a notion that reaches the remotest locales known to the people of Europe and that stretches back to ages long before Romulus and Remus were whelped by a she-wolf, let alone Constantine's conversion of the Empire.

It is worth noting, however, that the Catholic Christian portion of the Fellowship is indisputably the most powerful faction within the Voices. Were the Messianic Voices a single political body (which they are not), the Catholics would, without a doubt, occupy the top tier of the hierarchy. Their membership is the most numerous, their influence amongst Commoners the greatest and their wealth the most expansive. Despite this, though, they are just one branch of a great choir that resounds throughout the known world.

The Messianic Voices Fellowship more accurately represents a single meta-religion, drawing its theology, ideologies and membership from amongst the monotheistic faiths of virtually everyplace north of the Sahara and west of Mongol lands, to the Atlantic Ocean in the West and the most forlorn and isolated frozen lands of the North. Each faction within the Fellowship functions much like a sect within a single overarching religious philosophy (Catholics, Cathars and most Gnostics are Christian, for example, but they do not answer to a single

earthly authority and their views on the nature of the divine and their beliefs on the proper way to live in veneration of the Creator can be radically different). Each sect sees its fellows (those it knows about, anyway) as living in spiritual error. (There is not yet any such concept as cultural relativism, after all.) Most factions within the Voices are content to allow others to believe and worship in their erroneous fashion (mostly because they lack the power to act otherwise), reasoning that it is better to see some of the truth than be entirely blind to it. The Catholic Christian portion of the Fellowship, however, has finally accrued the world-spanning power (and doctrinal precedents from its core "Commoner" faith) needed to begin a concerted effort to stamp out all other forms of Messianic practice.

Hence, most Voices come from the most familiar face of the Fellowship, those mages who hide their works within the auspices of the faith given dominion over the Earth by the decree of Constantine nearly a millennium ago.

SACRED AMBITIONS

While an experienced Batini Subtle One is accorded the respect of her fellows, and Valdaermen who have mastered the letters of the gods are shown esteem and fear, a Messianic Voice who is willing to work within the ecclesiastical hierarchy of his Fellowship will almost inevitably come into a position of true temporal power. With strong ties within the Roman Catholic Church, members of the significant portion of the Messianic Fellowship (just over half) integrated into that Church are given greater and greater leave to call upon its resources as they advance in wisdom (at least, in theory) and experience.

The contemporary Catholic Church is the wealthiest single institution in the world and, while the pope is not truly the most powerful landowner, he does wield influence over kings and princes alike, many of whom fear excommunication (and the associated sentencing to hell's fires) just as much as any common cowherd or fishmonger. Certainly, the average peasant will leap to fulfill a commandment from the Holy See before one given by the throne. A nobleman can only kill a person; a cleric can damn him for eternity. The Messianic Voices within the Catholic Church often like to think of themselves as an organization that, in many ways, functions "above" the normal hierarchy of the faith and, given their miraculous abilities, a network that somewhat justifies this notion has grown up within the faith over the course of centuries.

THE BEGUINES

Being a woman in the Catholic branch of the Messianic Fellowship isn't always altogether terrible, oppressive and misogynistic. For the members of the sisterhood known as the Beguines, a lay order of prayer and service, it is often a much more favorable experience.

The Beguine movement begins in the Netherlands in the 12th century, with a few women living in solitude, swearing no vows and taking no Holy Orders. With the slaughter of the Crusades, however, the numbers of Europe's religious widowed women begin to grow, and soon, in the north, these women band together in their own communes. The members are permitted to hold wealth and even, in many Beguine settlements, to have servants. They are also allowed to leave the group and wed, should they so wish. In some instances, only the destitute or the wealthy can join while, in others, the community is open to any woman who wishes to belong. There is no central authority to the movement and standards within a Beguinage vary somewhat from place to place, though they remain consistent enough that a Beguine community can always be recognized quite readily for what it is. The movement is just now beginning to grow in strength and influence and it will (perhaps surprisingly, given expectations of how the medieval Church might respond to numerous autonomous groups of women acting in Christ's name) continue to endure for many centuries to come, surviving, in some places, to the modern day.

Because Beguines minister to the poor from their settlements (which are always found on the edges of towns or cities), they, along with a few other urban orders, come to shape a good deal of religious thought in Netherlands communities. Like monks, they practice religious mysticism, but their closeness to the people gives them an excellent opportunity to work with and help to mold the perspectives of the common folk. Certainly, Voices are to be found among the Netherlands' Beguinages, now well entrenched in a system in which they are valued and respected, and remain largely free from the persecution of a chauvinist Church.

Of course, not just anyone might easily reap the benefits of this network, equal parts holy order, conspiracy and heresy. Women, for example, are virtually excluded from the circles of power found within the main body of the Fellowship. As learned men of the age "conclusively know," women are cunning, devious, dangerously sexual creatures inherently predisposed to acts of congress (literal or otherwise) with the Devil and his minions. Likewise, the poor and those from other ostracized social groups are usually locked out of this system of rapid ascent. Lepers, recent converts and other such "undesirables" usually find no purchase in their attempts to climb the ranks of the Fellowship. Instead, like almost all of the most powerful religious figures of the age, many of the most influential and well-integrated Catholic Messianics are men born to positions of wealth and power (which, more often than not, means title, though a few heirs to exceptionally successful mercantile houses do occasionally worm their way in); they are granted positions within the Church, whether as bishops (or archbishops), Cardinals, monks or knights, such as the Hospitallers or the Knights Templar.

The Catholic faction of the Messianic Voices offers virtually unlimited opportunities within a secret hierarchy of the faith that, while not as powerful as the Commoner (sometimes known to the Pontifex Maximus and the Curia as "secular") branch of the religion, nonetheless boasts considerable clout over that organization and an obviously far more direct communion with the Creator Himself (as evidenced by the miraculous powers of the Voices).

THE POLITICS OF FAITH

A Messianic Voice from the main body of the Fellowship must, as she grows powerful and connected in both secular and sacred circles, determine whether she wishes to use her clout for personal gain or for the greater good. Sadly, Catholic doctrine of the age does not really discourage the clergy from essentially abusing power for personal gain. Given the examples of one grasping politician of a pope after another, ranking individuals within the Catholic faith often see it as their inalienable right to enjoy the fringe benefits of their station, even as common folk starve and make do with rags on their backs. Ideally, Messianic Voices are made of better stuff than that, but they do not live in an ideal world.

For those who are willing to submit themselves to the lure of worldly profits, there are great riches to be had, indeed. Carefully integrated into the hidden cor-

THE PONTIFEX MAXIMUS

The first thing that strikes most people upon first meeting Desederius of Rome is the decided lack of celestial splendor surrounding him. He is a short man, just barely topping five feet in height, with a lanky, almost wasted build that speaks of poor nutrition as a child. The Pontifex wears his black hair short and, though not a single gray hair is to be found, his hairline is showing some signs of receding. All told, the weathering on his angular face points to a man of perhaps 30 to 40 years of age, a far cry from Desederius' 97 years on Earth.

The Pontifex Maximus is a dangerously cunning political thinker and, from his actions, it is easy to see that he perceives no hypocrisy in the current prevailing attitudes of the Church. He sincerely sees himself and other Messianic Voices as touched by God and exalted above other men. Naturally, as he who was gifted with the insight and the acumen to attain the highest post within the Fellowship, Desederius believes himself the most favored of the people of the world. To his thinking, the Holy See exists to give order and balance to Commoners, while the Messianic Voices exist to attend the Will of God directly (in ways that ordinary clerics lack the perception and the resources to enforce) and to shape the direction of the Church through careful manipulation of the papacy. Thus, Desederius exerts his authority more or less directly over just over half of the membership of the Messianic Voices (mostly in

Western and Central Europe and the Holy Land) and, much more circuitously, over aspects of the decision-making processes at the center of the Catholic faith. As to whether or not he maintains another identity as an archbishop or other highly placed member of the legitimate clergy, Desederius will not say.

It is important to note, however, that Desederius is not a cruel or monstrous man. He is in many ways tyrannical and self-absorbed, but he does what he does to bring the splendors of Paradise (by his own definition) to Earth in what he sees to be the most direct possible fashion. In this world, some people simply *are* better than others; it is an indelible truth etched into the Dark Medieval mind. Desederius is just enjoying the benefits of that truth, as befits a man of his great station.

The Pontifex Maximus is mighty as magi go, but his greatest strengths are his swift wits, his vast intellect and his social graces (or, as some would say, his deviousness). He is constantly protected by an elite bodyguard of at least five powerful Voices, each armed and equipped with the miraculously enhanced gear of a noble knight or (when inconspicuousness is called for) subtler, but no less effective, armaments. In general, it can be assumed that any mystic effect Desederius might require that falls under the purview of the Messianic Voices' magic (and, quite possibly, a few that do not), he can either do himself or have done for him in relatively short order.

ners of the Church, the Pontifex Maximus and the ministers of the Curia (common speculation has at least two of them as archbishops and one as a Cardinal) are capable of heaping great material compensation upon the Voice who is willing to accept the party line and become part of the status quo.

THE CURIA

Currently, the Pontifex Maximus is advised by a council of 17 ministers. Five of these are widely acknowledged as most powerful and, thus, most important (though it is unknown to most as to whether the names they commonly use within the Fellowship are their own given names or simply aliases). Henri d'Anjou speaks for Paris, oversees Italy's affairs, including those of Rome itself (at least, those with which the Pontifex does not deign to

concern himself). Rudolf Kurtz represents several of the wealthiest German city-states and is probably the richest single Voice in Europe. The Crusader knight, Philippe le Blanc, has been put in charge of the Holy Land by Desederius himself and he reaps many of the fruits — sweet and bitter alike — of the conquests in that ancient land. The cleric known as Michael the Bald holds influence in many quarters of the Catholic Church and is known to have informants among the Church's exorcists, allowing him to set Voices upon the trail of demons and other such lapdogs of the Adversary.

The other 12 members of the Curia are spread fairly evenly (as the Fellowship sees matters) between dominion over geographic areas and control of institutions. All of the Scandinavian territories (and their ever-growing Christian populations) are

overseen by a single minister. Likewise, one minister (the only woman to sit on the Curia) is responsible for the affairs of all of the major convents of Europe. In general, these individuals have power bases just as broad as those of the five who have the closest confidence of the Pontifex Maximus, but their spheres of influence are simply regarded as less worthwhile, so their words are accorded less respect and weight than they are probably due.

REJECTING THE SYSTEM

For those Voices who adhere to the tenets of mainstream Catholicism and yet do not wish to become entangled in the convoluted web of power politics propagated by the Pontifex Maximus and his Curia, a long, hard road awaits. Those who fail to submit themselves to the Pontifex's earthly authority (which is considered to be on par with that of Pope Gregory IX and thus, a step beneath that of God Himself) are usually branded "troublemakers" and tend to find doors closing in their faces, no matter which way they turn. The further one gets from Rome (see below), the easier it is to get away with flaunting the dominion of the Pontifex, but *no one who is not longing to be excommunicated from the main body of the Fellowship does so blatantly or when known agents of Rome's saint-mystics are walking the land.*

Nevertheless, despite the hardships inherent in spurning the Pontifex, there are some who choose to do just that. Voices who hail from quarters ignored by Desederius and the powerful core of the Curia and who feel they have no way of making their displeasure known sometimes sever themselves from the auspices of the Messianic See and choose to practice their faith without the "aid" of Rome. Naturally, since no official proclamations are usually made, the Pontifex could care less, at least until his agents come calling on business and find themselves unwelcome. During his tenure as the Pontifex Maximus, Desederius has had to excommunicate 10 members of the Fellowship (at least one or two of these never again heard the Voice of God) on account of such offenses and has had another four put to the sword by the most loyal of his followers. Truly, turning one's back on Rome is a dangerous proposition.

For those who manage to successfully resist the power of Rome (and, despite what Desederius and the Curia would have the Fellowship believe, it *does* occasionally happen), there exists the freedom, for good and for ill, of those who carry none of the expectations of others, who answer to no one and

MY ENEMY'S ENEMY

The Roman Catholic Church in 1230 seems to be fairly riddled with secretive brotherhoods and holy conspiracies. The Messianic Voices within the Church have become quite adept at navigating the hazards posed by these sometimes less-than-benevolent gatherings. Of late, however, a new player has come onto the field. Though this new faction (unofficial word names it the "Shadow Inquisition") has taken pains to maintain utmost secrecy, a few Voices know of it and, of these, a handful has discerned its purpose: the purgation of all manner of "night devils, imps and consorts of Lucifer." Strangely, no Voice, no matter how devout or connected, was offered membership, though no member of the Fellowship was subsequently targeted by the attentions of this "Shadow Inquisition," either. When the Pontifex Maximus was approached with information regarding the organization, his mannerisms and responses seemed to indicate that he was already aware of its existence. His official proclamation was that this faction was to be left to its own devices, doing its own holy work, without any interference whatsoever on the part of the Messianic Voices, on pain of "justice most final."

who have no hierarchy to turn to in time of need. It can be a precarious but rewarding existence and each Voice must weigh for herself whether or not such liberty is worth its potential cost.

GLADIUS CHRISTI: CRUSADERS

In AD 1230, "mage" is not synonymous with "enlightened." Even as Commoner knights and militiamen rally to sack whatever corner of the Holy Land strikes their fancy (or wherever, for those Crusades that missed Outremer entirely), Messianic Voices gird on their armor and don their blades as well. In this age, there is "One True God" and men of whatever means, mystic or mundane, are willing to slaughter "heathens" in order to "reclaim" lands (and treasures) in His name.

USING THE CRUSADES FOR MESSIANIC VOICES

As grim and terrible a time as the Crusades are, they offer many opportunities for a single Messianic Voice or even a whole cabal of them. Ancient and powerful crays are to be found scattered across the

Holy Land. Some of them are even in need of the purification that the crusading Voices clamor for, having been born of evil magic (or turned to dark purposes) in remotest antiquity. Demons and other foul influences *do* (in the Holy Land as everywhere) lurk in the shadows, preying upon mankind, and, should an entire cabal of Messianics never lift a sword against a living Saracen, they will not find themselves wanting for conflict. For those Voices willing to see the hypocrisy of the Church's blatant grab for land and the naked greed gleaming in the eyes of many self-proclaimed "holy knights," there is great good work to be done: protecting the weak and the innocent from the predations of "righteous men," saving the precious knowledge and treasures of the ancient world, and otherwise acting to rebuild the bridges that acquisitiveness and senseless violence have burned in Outremer.

Messianic Voices are men and women who have heard the Voice of God, in one way or another, and are moved by its raw, unadulterated splendor, piercing the veil of the profane world to reveal an image of the sublime. It is easy to become a fanatic, blind to the sins of those who share one's faith, after being

touched by such a display of divinity, but just as many have the scales torn from their eyes by the revelations they experience; both sorts of Voices have a place in the Holy Land during the Crusades. Storytellers should feel free to challenge Catholic Voices with images of atrocity by "upright Christians" and acts of profound faith, humanity and compassion on the part of "infidels," and then see how they react. Likewise, show crusading knights at their best and adherents to other faiths engaging in barbarism and cruelty. Few things serve to showcase the whole of the human experience quite like war and religion. Don't be afraid to illustrate that.

Also remember that the Messianic Voices number many non-Catholics (and even non-Christians) among their ranks. How might a Voice of the Greek Church see the horrors of the Wars of the Cross? A Hebrew Voice, dwelling in Jerusalem, *definitely* has a different perspective on the Crusades than does a French knight who came, following the voices of angels, to bring slaughter to those who would not kneel before the Cross. Mithraic or Atonite Voices (see below) are apt to have their own, entirely unique, perspectives on these conflicts of monothe-



istic conquest (and the not-so-subtle excuses for rape and pillage that accompany them).

SCHISMS WITHIN

In addition to the Heresies targeted by the Pontifex Maximus, such as Catharism or the Eastern Church, there are divisions within the main body of the Messianic Voices (those found within the Western Church). Some of these are subtle and others more obvious, but all who seek to defy the will of the "greatest bridge-builder" must step cautiously; the Fellowship puts its blasphemers and heretics to the torch as surely as does the Church in general. In fact, the members of the Curia often attempt to use their clout within the Church to steer the unfriendly attentions of Commoner clerics toward such types, saving the resources and time of those *truly* touched by the Divine.

A MOST HOLY EMPIRE

While the Pope rules from Rome, the greater part of the Holy Empire that, theoretically, bends knee to him encompasses more northerly lands. Likewise, the vast majority of orthodox Messianic Voices hail from such lands. The inequity of this situation is not lost on the Germanic Voices, who are more often warriors than politicians, and many of them chafe under the dictates of the Pontifex Maximus and the Curia, whose decrees often smack of self-interest and a lack of understanding of the situation to the north. Even the minister from Prague (who speaks for the larger contiguous portion of the empire) has become, to the thinking of his constituents, a puppet of Rome. For the Pontifex's part, he criticizes his Germanic subjects, claiming that they have been spoiled by the throne's habit of granting virtual autonomy to city-states within its dominion and to expect no such treatment from him.

Some of the soldier-saints of the Germanic Voices have begun to look to their neighbors for leadership, rather than Rome. In hushed tones, they discuss the possibility of a democratic council: one Voice, one vote. Others have talked of reorganizing the Fellowship, severing it from Rome's subtle tyranny and establishing a center of governance in Frankfurt or Cologne. These dissenters cannot, however, agree on whether the new order should be a gathering of equals or simply a relocation of the old system of ecclesiastical rule.

The democratic faction takes its cues from the Archangel Gabriel, patron of Reason (a great ideal of the ancient world in which the very idea of

democracy has its origins). Venerating the Archangel's every aspect, they likewise hold up fire as a powerful symbol for knowledge and rebirth and often develop great proficiency in the Gavri-El Pillar. Some have even gone so far as to call themselves "Gabrielites," though this term remains as much a code-word as a distinction, whispered in hushed tones by Voices who long for a more egalitarian brotherhood of earthly saints. These Voices are often poorly organized, though strangely capable of acting in concert when called upon to do so. A cult of personality mentality often pervades this faction and it is usually the most charismatic, rather than the most necessarily capable or wise, who are capable of having their way. On the other hand, those who just wish to usurp the Pontifex's authority are less organized still, with several clergymen insisting on the right to don his mantle when all is said and done. Politics within the usurper faction are often handled through bribes, threats and displays of raw power, both mundane and mystic. These Voices are far less idealistic than the members of the democratic faction and some of the most powerful would-be rulers of the Fellowship have beavies of spies, soldiers and assassins at their beck and call, making them no less a viper's nest than the Curia itself. Each faction is scornful of the other, but both are wise enough to keep their silence when Rome's agents are afoot.

A LAND DRENCHED IN CHRISTIAN BLOOD

France has recently weathered the ugliness of a Crusade within its own borders, a slaughter conducted against the Cathars of Albi. Many Voices in France are now questioning the benevolence of their minister, given his insistence upon the purgation of these largely harmless heretics. (It is one thing to condemn a man for his beliefs and another entirely to put him and his family to the torch over them, an unpleasant truth that some Voices in France are now coming to understand.) Likewise, the Pontifex now becomes suspect, seen by some as a gilded despot mandating life and death from his ivory tower, while "lesser Voices" work at bloody labors. Taking a cue from the Germanic Voices, some of them have begun to demand a more egalitarian system of governance, perhaps electing leaders as several Holy Roman Emperors were elected to their posts. In the north of France, toward Paris, far from Rome, these assertions are sometimes even voiced loudly. Ever fewer Voices warn these sorts to temper their words and it is only a matter of time until Rome either reestablishes its control more forcefully or something gives.

The Roman Catholic Voice

With the largest and most widespread devotees, the Catholic Christian faction of the Messianic Voices offers perhaps the greatest array of options for character creation. Pious village priests, fattened bishops, Crusaders both humble and homicidal, and third-born daughters sentenced to the nunnery are just a handful of the possibilities for Voices who are, one way or another, directly affiliated with the Church. This faction also numbers bakers, farmers, stonemasons, men-at-arms, scribes and perhaps even, after the example of Mary Magdalene, one or two former prostitutes among its ranks. Needless to say, a Roman Catholic Voice's Attributes, Abilities and Backgrounds must be weighed against the circumstances of her life, rather than her faction within the Fellowship, since there is such profound room for variety here.

Church politicians quite naturally tend toward the Social Attributes and Abilities and Backgrounds that take advantage of, and aid in further developing, their natural proficiency with people and bureaucracies. Militant Voices are often inspirational warlords, just as capable of rousing their men to feats of superhuman prowess as they themselves are at wreaking destruction, if not more so. The humble and lowborn Voice probably favors Physical Attributes useful to her trade (a seamstress needs Dexterity, while a farmer benefits by great Stamina) and those who hail from the developing middle class, who are almost always merchants, usually develop their Mental Attributes (since a keen mind is probably the single greatest asset for a businessman). Catholic Christian Voices are more likely than any other members of their Fellowship to possess the Chantry Background (given the Church's innumerable holdings) and many of them have some degree of Influence, whether on the level of a small town or all of Christendom. In addition, given the great success and prolific numbers of Roman Catholic Voices, many of them feel truly favored by Destiny (and carry the Background points to prove it).

heretics of the one voice

The Dark Medieval era sees the practice of Christians slaughtering their own over doctrinal differences rise to its most horrific heights. Consequently, the enmity between Christian sects (especially in western Europe, where the Church's power is essentially supreme) runs at an all-time high. Catharism is the most powerful and prevalent

of these movements, but other branches of Christianity that fail to submit to the rule of the Holy See also continue to persist in the world.

CATHARISM

The presence of religious dualists within the disparate cults that would one day become the Messianic Voices dates back to before the birth of Christ. The idea of eschewing the material world in favor of the world of spirit can be quite appealing to people who have the ability to make contact, in a very real way, with that divine realm. Unfortunately for such sorts, however, the prevailing attitudes of the contemporary Church allow for popes and bishops to amass sickening quantities of wealth and to hold lands and titles. They embrace the crass materialism of the mortal realm with a passion that outstrips all save the most ambitious and driven of kings and generals. Further, those same popes and bishops insist that they alone are the arbiters of salvation and that Christ's forgiveness may only be had through their good graces.

Cathari reject this notion, denying the Church and the hypocrisy they perceive within it. They point to lecher priests, men called "baron" and "bishop" in the same breath, and mountebanks with Holy Orders selling Indulgences to a populace fearful for their souls, and they want no part of it. Indeed, they reject as many of the temptations of the flesh as they may, living in poverty as chaste vegetarians.

Catharism is, sadly, essentially a doctrine doomed from its inception. It rejects earthly sources of authority, earning the enmity of king and Cardinal alike and the fear of common folk who want nothing to do with such dangerous heretics (dangerous because of their failure to adhere to orthodox Catholic teachings and dangerous because of the wrath such attitudes are likely to bring down upon their heads). The Church enjoys its monopoly on salvation and the power to cow the populace through the threat of damnation and such radical ideas about direct communion with God (obviating the need for an elaborate hierarchy of clerics) do not sit well with the Holy See and its agents. Add to this the Cathari aversion to copulation (a temptation of the physical world, one which traps another immortal soul in fetters of flesh and subjects it to the ministrations of evil) and it is easy to see exactly why the religion did not and, indeed, *could* not thrive. It intimidated many people into avoiding it entirely and Cathari simply didn't breed enough new adherents to the faith to keep the movement going.

The Cathar Voice

Cathari come from many walks of life, but, given their attitudes about material wealth, it is exceedingly rare to find a person born to privilege among their ranks. Those who would be leaders within the sect tend toward demagoguery (and, thus, high scores in Charisma and Manipulation, as well as dots in Empathy, Expression and Leadership). Cathars are not generally violent people and, while some might possess a few dots in martial Abilities (especially those who have survived clashes with the Church's soldiery), this is by no means common. Allies, Contacts and Influence are common to Cathari Voices, while Resources should be eschewed entirely under most circumstances. Note, also, that many Catholic characters (of whatever Fellowship) find it harder to deal with members of the (currently quite large) Cathar heresy than they do members of more fully "heathen" faiths, since the movement actively sues for the downfall of the Church's empire and the dissolution of a social system that most Europeans believe to be divinely ordained.

The Eastern Church

The Eastern Voices follow a council of Archbishops, who are viewed as equals, with the Archbishop of Constantinople first among them. The other Archbishops are to be found in Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem. These four form the governing body of the Eastern branch of the Messianic Fellowship, though they do not demand obeisance, in the manner of the Pontifex Maximus, nor do they make his claims to infallibility. In general (though there have been exceptions), they prefer to think of themselves as guides for people of faith, rather than ecclesiastical despots.

Religiously speaking, the great distinction between Eastern Orthodox and Western Catholic stems from the Western belief in the infallibility of the pope and the East's rejection that the Holy Spirit issues from both Son and Father as one. Philosophically, however, Eastern Orthodoxy maintains the eminence of the entire Church (or, more properly, Churches, since there are several branches of this faith, sharing a core set of beliefs and holding themselves to be a single community) as one, rather than exalting individual members above the masses of humanity, in the Roman Catholic fashion.

The Eastern Orthodox Voice

Eastern Church Christians are little different from their Western counterparts, save in a few (admittedly, highly significant) matters of doctrinal

difference. Fundamentally, however, they are apt to share the same kind of cultural and class variety as Catholics in the West. The key distinction in the Eastern Church is that no one really holds "power," per se. It is a more loosely organized and egalitarian organization of like-minded people, subject more to a system of authority based on respect than political hierarchy.

Gnosticism

While Gnosticism harks back to mystic practices that long predate Christianity, the revelations of Christ and the mystery cults that sprung up around the Savior's death and resurrection caused those philosophies to gel into something religiously cohesive. Gnosticism, a branch of Christian faith that propounds the idea of "secret knowledge" (gnosis) necessary to receive salvation (and, in some cases, apotheosis), is widely held to be the innovation of Simon Magus, the sorcerer who was turned away from his wickedness through the intercession and wise revelations of Christ. It is an intellectual Christianity that demands much thought and self-analysis. Perhaps it was this last fact that truly doomed the Gnostic practice from the outset.

There are those who argue for a fully developed pre-Christian Gnostic philosophy, but evidence does not appear to conclusively support this. Proto-Gnosticism (which undoubtedly is lost amongst the tangled roots of early dualistic doctrines, given the shared beliefs of many branches of both of those systems of belief) seems to have grown into a true basis for religion sometime during the first century after the birth of Christ and many sects of Gnosticism were fully developed within a century after that.

Early Gnosticism divides the world into the sublime realm of a God beyond the concerns of the material world and a "demiurge" (whom they typify as the seemingly petulant divinity of the Old Testament), with dominion over the material world. Union with the transcendent Creator is achieved only through contemplation and understanding of one's own spiritual nature, rather than one's morality or works in this world, and then only by uncommon persons who contain within themselves slumbering fragments of divinity. With this world viewed as something of a prison for the ignorant, many Gnostics were, understandably, hesitant to bring children into this world. Conversely, some, believing that their actions in this world were of no moral consequence, engaged in all manner of indulgences, seeing themselves as intellectually "free" of the constraints imposed upon adherents by

more staid and unquestioning faiths. Most, however, lived ascetic lifestyles, seeking spiritual elevation and enlightenment within this lifetime. Most Gnostic doctrines believed in redeemer figures (such as Christ) who were and are sent to guide the spiritually evolved toward the benevolent Creator, allowing them to surrender their souls to Him upon the moment of death, evading the power of the demons who lurk within the hidden layers of the cosmos in their journeys back toward perfection.

In 1230, Gnosticism survives in only two major forms. The first is to be found within the magics practiced by the Order of Hermes and the second among the Mandaean of Persia, who are not yet a truly organized faith with unified religious texts. While other Gnostic and pseudo-Gnostic faiths persist, they do so with only a handful of members or in such radically altered forms to be only superficially Gnostic in their practices at this point. Mandeans are unique amongst Gnostics, however, for the many disparities between their beliefs and those of the more "orthodox" branches of the faith. For one, Mandeans venerate John the Baptist as the redeemer of his generation and see Jesus Christ as a false prophet. Mandeans are also committed to both marriage and childbearing, which is, likewise, uncommon amongst Gnostic believers.

The Gnostic Voice

Gnostics, almost universally, favor Mental Attributes over any other, though those who adhere to variants of Gnosticism that allow for licentiousness and excess may tend toward higher Manipulation and Appearance scores. Academics, Awareness, Cosmology, Enigmas, Occult and Theology rank among the most important Abilities for a Gnostic Messianic to possess. Destiny, Fount and Library are the most common Backgrounds amongst Gnostic Voices. Gavri-El (for his proficiency with the arts of reason and intellection) and Mikha-El (for his identity with the light) are favored Pillars, though most choose to develop their Divinity above their fluency with any Pillar of Messianic magic. Gnostic Voices are also the most likely Messianics to eventually pursue proficiency with the magic practiced by other Fellowships, since their belief in the hidden knowledge of the Universe essentially considers learning to be a practice unfettered by earthly morality, thus removing the sense of sin and wickedness that most Voices ascribe to forms of magic other than their own.

Older voices still

The idea of monotheism, of course, does not begin with the birth of Jesus Christ. Even the most

dogmatic bishop or zealous Crusader-knight knows that much. Though few want to acknowledge it, faiths subscribing to the ideal of a single, all-powerful Creator predate the Savior by millennia. Most of these religions are dead to the Commoner world (and many are dead entirely), but some do manage to persist among secret gatherings and arcane priest-hoods in forgotten quarters of the world. Some few even manage to thrive beneath the gaze of the Church itself.

THE CULT OF ATON

In the hidden corners of Dark Medieval Araby, the worship of a handful of the powers of ancient Egypt continues on, heedless of the ages that have passed since the empire of the pharaohs was buried beneath the sands of time. One such cult, its members claiming themselves to be the children of the first monotheistic faith, is that of Aton, He Who Is the Sun. Worship of Aton flourished only briefly, under the reign of Akhenaton and his wife, Nefertiti,

MANY MONOTHEISMS

Messianic Voices hailing from one of the factions that do not descend from the Judaic religious tradition might call their magical Pillars by different names. Discovering what those names are, however, is not easy. Some of the religions presented here (such as Mithraism and many branches of Gnosticism) are known to the 21st century only through a handful of writings and considerable speculation. Monotheistic Atonism survived for only a single generation's time (the rule of one pharaoh, in fact). How does one approach such remote and, sometimes, little-known faiths?

Unfortunately, the first, best answer is "Make it up." There is information out there, but there are just as many or more facts lost to us about these and many other monotheistic religions of the West and Near and Middle East. If you are looking to play a member of these faiths, you will need to be willing to do a good amount of research and to connect the dots and fill the gaps with deductions and outright fabrications. It might make scholars and theologians cringe, but this need not be a history lesson. When the needs of story and characterization conflict with history (especially vague and spotty history), story and characterization should, generally speaking, win out every time.

before the followers of the predominant, pantheistic Egyptian faith attempted to obliterate Aton and his faithful from history itself through the destruction of their Names and their writings.

Worship of Aton was originally limited to the household of the pharaoh alone (citizens worshipped the pharaoh who, in turn, passed on his prayers to the Divine Sun), but the few Christian Voices who have been fortunate enough to lay eyes upon prayers to Aton have been surprised by how very far ahead of their time in tone they are (by that, of course, they mean how very much they sound like contemporary Christian prayers). Given these similarities (and bolstered by the possibilities suggested by later monotheistic sun-imagery), a handful of Messianic scholars of various persuasions have come to see a kernel of truth in the cult's "primitive vision" and believe that, as the Atonites preach, the Sun, blinding and perfect in its radiance, is a physical reflection of the unknowable majesty that is the One True God.

The Atonite Voice

Worship of Aton is practiced in the Dark Medieval only by a scattered few sorcerer-priests who claim descent from the line of Akhenaton (literally, "He who is useful to Aton"). Charisma and Wits are the favored Attributes of these Voices, and Etiquette, Expression (an especial favorite, given Akhenaton's love of poetry and other artistic endeavors), Leadership and Politics are their favored Abilities. Fount and Servants (in some case, the descendants of Akhenaton's own servants) are their most common Backgrounds. Unsurprisingly, Mikhael is the Pillar most strongly developed by Atonites. It is traditional for Atonite Voices to see themselves as heirs to the pharaohs and, thus, to seek to develop their own inner Divinity, becoming like unto demi-gods upon the Earth.

JUDAISM

The term "Messiah" originates with the Jews. In its original definition, it describes a mortal man who appears to lead the Children of Israel during a time of great pain and peril. Judaic history also has its tales of men, such as Moses and Solomon, touched by the power of God and empowered to work great miracles. Likewise, Judaism may freely take at least half of the credit (splitting it with Egyptian religion) for the Western mystic belief in the power of the word, whether written, spoken or sung. Accordingly, there are Voices to be found among the scattered Children of Israel.

Jewish Voices, unlike their Christian counterparts, often struggle to immerse themselves within the affairs of the community. (Christianity tends to see great holiness as a barrier between normal folk and the one so touched, whereas Judaism stresses greater involvement in the normal lives of one's neighbors for those who are gifted by the Divine.) For them, there is no greater duty than to protect and serve the community.

Judaism, which does not hold to anything like the strictures of guilt and sin endemic to Christianity and is decidedly not a hierarchical faith, is puzzling to Catholic Voices, who are unaccustomed to the idea of mortal men, no matter how blessed, having such freedom of choice in their actions. And, for the most part, they condemn what they do not understand. To such Voices, Judaic Messianics scorn the "simple truths" about Christ and fail to reject their own "archaic faith" which, to the thinking of these Voices, has been fulfilled and transformed by the Lord's life, death and resurrection. Sadly, many of these Voices are willing, like their Commoner kin, to persecute and even kill over differences they see to be irreconcilable.

The Judaic Voice

Given the religion's emphasis on community, the average Judaic Messianic Voice should, ideally, have Traits that help to integrate him into the normal lives of his fellow Jews and that represent his status as a pillar of that community. The Social Attributes and the Mental Attribute of Intelligence are often particularly well represented amongst Judaic Voices, as are Abilities such as Academics, Empathy, Etiquette, Expression, Hearth Wisdom, Leadership, Occult and (naturally) Theology. The Backgrounds of Allies, Contacts, Influence (in the local Jewish Quarter), Library and Sanctum are all particularly appropriate for such a Voice.

MITHRAISM

Messianic Mithraism survives, among mages, in two forms in the Dark Medieval: Roman and Persian. The two variants are largely incompatible, since certain tenets of belief known to inner circles among Messianic worshippers (which are passed on as an oral tradition) are markedly different from one region to the next. Persian tradition sees Mithras as a patron of war and fire and a judge figure whose chariot is the sun, while Roman tradition calls him *Sol Invictus*, the Unconquered Sun, and identifies him as the source of heavenly light.

One Mithras, Many Faiths

It is important to remember that Mithraism is not really one faith. Persian Mithraism may or may not have very much to do with the better-known Roman variant of the faith beyond certain superficial details, such as Mithras' status as a war god. Persian Mithraism, for example, does not include any images of the deity slaying a bull, despite the prominence of that image in the Roman church. Some have said that the Romans simply co-opted the god's name to give their faith an exotic, Eastern-sounding flavor. Sadly, theologians know very little about Roman Mithraism. The religion was a warrior cult that excluded women, was practiced in small chapels and had few written scriptures. It was a faith of action, rather than introspection, and it left us few records by which to understand it. Mithras is also present in Hinduism and Manichaeism, and though his name changes slightly, he is still essentially the same sort of figure in these faiths.

Though there are few religious scholars with the breadth of experience needed to connect these particular dots in the medieval world, this wild proliferation of the Mithraic faith throughout the pre-Christian and early Christian worlds and its continual transformation and reinvention across the boundaries of nations and centuries has, at times, seemed credibly motivated by a presence of high-divine power. Mithraism, in its final incarnation among the Romans, was a powerful faith, stretching from Rome to the Rhine Valley, to what is, in medieval times, the region in and around Transylvania. It stressed civic duty and martial prowess — a masculine, ordered religion. It spoke of the shedding of Mithras' blood (or perhaps his death and resurrection — accounts rarely agree conclusively) bringing salvation to mankind and was, accordingly, a great foe of Christianity. Unfortunately for the Mithraists, the cult of the Risen Christ (which included women and men who were neither soldiers nor prominent civil servants) simply outgrew them in number and, by the time Constantine pronounced Christianity as the One True Faith of the Roman Empire, Mithraism was already all but dead to the world at large.

The Mithraic Voice

Mithraism is a forceful, dynamic faith. Most remaining Mithraics descend from the Roman tradition and so adhere to its form as a male warrior's cult, stressing civic duty and conquest as virtues. The Physical Attributes are almost always primary, though warriors of other battlefields (such as politics, which

INCARNATION?

A disturbing development has recently begun to plague a significant fraction of the few remaining Persian Mithraic Voices. Long ago, in AD 1066, a great warrior among them, Arsalan, followed what he claimed was "a vision". He chased this calling to the uttermost West, to the gray and inhospitable British Isles, along with his acolyte, Soroush. What they discovered there, Arsalan, now preternaturally ancient, will not say, save to reveal that whatever he found *was not* the Lord of the Solar Chariot. Soroush, however, appeared to have believed otherwise, since he did not return at his teacher's side. Little thought was given to the matter until just a few months ago, when Soroush, aged not a day from the radiant young man he had been at the time of his departure over a century-and-a-half ago, returned to his homeland to speak to several young Mithraic Voices about the earthly manifestation of their deity. He appeared to them by night, shining with a presence, as one Voice put it, "like unto the Sun," and he spoke with such conviction and power as no ordinary man, and few magi, might reasonably muster. The homes of some of these young acolytes have been found abruptly abandoned, with only a few personal effects and garments missing. Several of those who remain have confessed to Arsalan a sensation of being "drawn" to the West, to a presence that they somehow feel truly is the Incarnate Mithras. What this bodes, Arsalan will confide in none, but the old warrior has been seen once or twice with his gaunt, trembling hand scarce inches from the razor-edged sliver of solar radiance that once served as his blade, hanging in its sheath in his study.

was likewise considered a respectable arena of struggle within the cult of Mithras) may prioritize their Attributes very much differently. Almost without exception, Mithraic Voices should have some proficiency in at least one or two of the martial Abilities (Archery, Brawl, Dodge and Melee) and many of the most successful have at least a few dots in *all* of them. "Manly" Abilities such as Athletics, Intimidation, Leadership, Politics and Ride can also go a long way toward cementing the Voice's position amongst his brothers. Given the faith's status as a mystery cult, Enigmas and Theology are common Knowledges.



Destiny, Influence, Mentor, Resources and Servants are all Backgrounds commonly possessed by Roman Mithraic Voices. (Also note that there are virtually no Libraries of religious or mystic lore to be found among members of this branch of the faith.)

For other Mithraics, Traits tend to be similar, though Mithras is seen as a judge as much as a warrior and a proponent of civil service. Thus, Etiquette, Expression and Investigation can take greater precedence than perhaps a handful of the other Abilities common to Roman Mithraics. (Other branches of the religion expected a slightly better-rounded person.) In every version of the faith, however, Mikha-El (often called Sol Invictus amongst Roman Mithraic Voices) is the single most favored of the Fellowship's Pillars and it is virtually unheard of for a Mithraic Voice of any religious tradition to develop any other Pillar to a greater level of proficiency than that one.

ZOROASTRIANISM

The prophet, Zarathushtra, received a vision at least six (and some theologians now believe as much

as 12) centuries before the birth of Christ, a vision which told him of a single God who was the truly good and righteous Creator of All. This spirit, known as Ahura Mazda, or Ormuzd, was responsible for the Universe's being and is, Zarathushtra taught, an entity of supreme and transcendent love. On the other hand, the great evil spirit, Angra Mainyu, or Ahriman, is a being of the darkness and one who despises man and seeks to lead him astray and destroy him. Each person, man or woman (without regard for gender, since the religion ascribes the same sacred duties to both sexes equally) is obligated to choose between good and evil, light and darkness.

The prophet believed that the world was a fundamentally good place, but one that was constantly besieged and vandalized by the assaults of evil. He preached that there would come a time of reckoning, in which all the forces of darkness would rise up to do battle with the light and would, once and for all, be defeated and banished, cast out of the purity of Creation, where they would no longer trouble those righteous souls who had chosen wisely and sided with the just and benevolent Ahura Mazda.

The goodly person lives according to the virtues embodied and propounded by the Ameshas Spentas (Bounteous Immortals, beings very much similar to the Christian Archangels, the perceptions of whom it is believed were heavily influenced by these entities), spirits created by Ormuzd to demonstrate the manner of right living to men and to champion their chosen virtues through the cosmos. These virtues are: Good Mind, Righteousness, Devotion, Dominion, Wholeness and Immortality. They serve as archetypes, exemplars and actual sentient beings capable of action within the realm of the spirits.

The religion enjoyed a time of great secular power in Persia, many centuries after the death of the prophet. It rose to such prominence that the high priest of the faith was the king's closest and best-headed advisor (which, of course, was a sentiment supported by the ethic of Dominion). Muslim conquests, however (ironic, considering Islam's indignation over Christianity's relatively recent assaults), decimated the Zoroastrian religion; most of its adherents in the Middle Ages live in effective exile within their own homeland, dwelling in ramshackle settlements in the desert. Despite this persecution (given the religion's nebulous status amongst the "Faiths of the Book"), though, Zoroastrians have proven themselves tenacious and hardy people, willing to struggle against the hardships imposed by the evils of Ahriman and his agents within Ormuzd's creation in order to live lives of righteousness and value. Though they are few and are discriminated against fiercely, Zoroastrians persist in their beliefs and await the time of the final battle, when darkness shall be destroyed forevermore by the light.

The Zoroastrian Voice

Zoroastrians revere the mind, body and spirit as one and do not emphasize the virtues of one facet of the human condition above another. Thus, any category of Attributes may be primary, though many Zoroastrian Voices should probably endeavor to round out their Attributes (whether at character creation or later, with experience), in order to fully honor the resplendent nature with which they have been gifted. Awareness, Cosmology, Occult and Theology are good Abilities for Zoroastrians. Those who have spent any amount of time in Muslim settlements in their native country (where it is often considered acceptable to harass and even assault Zoroastrians on the sly) might want to invest in a few dots of Stealth (for remaining inconspicuous) or Subterfuge (for talking their way out of tight spots). Familiar (a helpful spirit of Ormuzd, sent to

guide and instruct) and Fount are relatively common Backgrounds amongst Zoroastrian Messianics. Most of them are too poor and marginalized in their homeland to have Backgrounds denoting wealth, privilege or station. Like Gnostic Voices, most concentrate on developing their connection to Divinity above their facility with any particular Pillar of Messianic magic.

AND ONE YOUNGER

In the Dark Medieval era, there is only one major monotheistic faith that looms tall in the minds of Europe and that is Islam. Seen by the Church as a dangerously heathen religion (because it is willing to match steel with Rome and many of its adherents are just as fanatical in the preservation of their faith as the Holy See's agents are in its eradication), Islam is a faith that, at its core, promotes education, contemplation and understanding. Naturally, however, human nature being what it is, many of these more charitable precepts of the religion are ignored by the selfish as a matter of course and even by the pious in time of duress.

ISLAM

The only major monotheistic faith to enter and remain on the world stage since the inception of Christianity, Islam means "submission (to the Will of God)". It is, like Christianity, a relatively young and dynamic faith, one that encourages ardent belief and a willingness to fight for its tenets (despite a decided note of pacifism in the religion's core ethics).

Many Muslims who approach Islam as a fluid faith of transcendence and bliss (most notably Sufi Muslims, who are found in both the Sunni and Shi'a branches of the faith) are more readily drawn to the path of the Ahl-i-Batin. Conversely, more orthodox Muslims, who have a more grounded and less ecstatic approach to faith (a majority of both Sunni and Shi'a Muslims), tend to find the Messianic path fulfilling in a way that the beliefs of the Subtle Ones simply cannot address. It is a perspective of union and internal faith versus authority and external (though all-inclusive and all-encompassing) divinity.

Muslim Voices are often among the most dogmatic, literal and militant members of their faith. They see themselves besieged by men who live in spiritual error, driven from their homes by fire and the sword, and the ignorance of these men of "incomplete faith" angers them. Make no mistake, these Voices feel a sense of kinship and responsibility.

ity toward practitioners of the other "Faiths of the Book," but they will not stand idle while the People of Allah endure violence.

Sunni and Shi'a Islam are distinguished from one another by their takes on the issue of leadership and the possibility (or lack thereof) of prophets other than Mohammed. Sunni Islam, the much larger branch of the faith, maintains that Mohammed, as the Prophet, recorded in the Qur'an a perfected

text and testament that there could be no spiritual leader after him. Thus, governance is a matter of civic consensus, carried out through the secular leadership of the caliph. Shi'a Muslims believe in the birth and testaments of subsequent prophets, beginning with 'Ali, kinsman to Mohammed and culminating with the Twelfth Prophet. Imam, heir to 'Ali, leads Shi'a Islam, which has a stronger religious hierarchy than Sunni Islam.

THE VAGARIES OF FAITH

Dualism, in the incarnation known to the Paulicans, Albigenses and Bogomils, descends from the spiritual traditions established by the Manichaeism faith, taught by the Persian prophet, Mani, during his lifetime in the third century. Manichaeism is both a dualistic and a Gnostic faith, which means that it is founded on principles of moral oppositions and secret wisdom that leads to salvation. Mani spread his message throughout Mesopotamia, Persia and as far away as India and his word was translated into numerous languages. Fragments of his teachings have been found in Egypt and Chinese Turkestan. As that sinks in, realize that Mithras was also a figure in Manichaeism, though his role in the faith is somewhat nebulous.

Mani was, in turn, obviously inspired by the teachings of Christ, in their various forms (Judaic heresy and both orthodox and Gnostic teachings), as well as older, dualistic faiths, such as Zoroastrianism. Early Christianity and Roman Mithraism (both religions being offshoots or outgrowths of yet older faiths) obviously borrowed many concepts from one another, since both were essentially mystery cults with a central theme of a savior figure who bleeds or dies and rises again for the sake of humanity. Roman Mithraism, like the short-lived Atonite faith, venerated the sun as the source of all life and divine favor, despite the fact that the two religions likely had absolutely nothing to do with another.

In short, a tangle of faiths, ranging in their points of origin from Asia Minor to the Near and Middle East, to North Africa to southern Europe, seems to have exchanged a great number of ideas and theological precepts over the course of several millennia (with many of the most significant exchanges occurring within a period of about the 1000 years before the birth of Christ to about 300 years afterward).

Most of these doctrines were monotheistic, whether directly or indirectly, and by the Middle Ages, there is really no part of any major world religion, save perhaps for certain sects of Judaism, that is not simply an unimaginably vast collage of the principles established by far older (and, in many cases, now dead) faiths. For instance, there are the final writings of the once-esteemed Christian Messianic scholar, Augustine the Meek (now known by such titles as "the Heretic", "the Blasphemer" and "the Diabolist"), copies of which found their way into the hands of numerous open-minded (and not a few of the most orthodox) theologians of the Fellowship before he went into hiding, 20 years ago:

As the length and breadth of my travels across the world and explorations into the nature of faith continue to reveal unto me difficult and sometimes painful truths, a single, unimaginably vast ideal continues to echo back to me, across gulfs of time and distance. It is a simple notion and yet one that I believe will be met with great scorn, derision and even hatred by those who lack the desire to know God in truth, rather than merely in dogma. What I have learned is this: there is but one faith, one belief, one face of the Creator. So many religions have tried to capture the essence of Him, but none might. He is too magnificent and manifold in His splendors. Each of us sees but a reflection of His grace and glory and calls it "Truth." In reality, all we see is a splinter of Him, the very largest fragment of His being that we might, in safety, gaze upon. Even in writing this, I cannot see it. Instead, I perceive what might yet be seen and know that it is so much more than we, any of us, have yet dared to hope. This revelation merely awaits our willingness, as a people, to grasp it and accept it, to put aside the discord and contradiction born of narcissism, pettiness and fear. One faith, one Truth, one humanity, united beneath a single God whose name we have all always known. All that remains is for all mankind to speak that name together.

The Islamic Voice

Islam is a widespread faith with adherents ranging from the most resplendent rulers to the most destitute street-dwellers. It is a faith that, in its core tenets, promotes universal learning and discussion (a notable departure from its primary rival in the Dark Medieval world, Roman Catholicism, which maintains that only clergy are fit to debate the nuances of the Will of God). Muslim Voices are apt to have good scores in Intelligence and Wits, with an individual's trade and social position determining any other strong Attributes. Academics, Empathy, Etiquette, Politics and Theology are all common Abilities for Muslim Voices to learn and the

Muslim nations are the western world's current leaders in such fields as Crafts (Architecture) and Medicine. Muslim Messianics are likely to develop Influence, Library, Sanctum and Servants as Backgrounds, and many favor the Gavri-El Pillar (as Jebr-il was the messenger who brought Allah's message to the Prophet).

MIRACLES OF FAITH

I AM COME FOR YOUR SOULS
(GAVRI-EL •••, URI-EL •••)

This grim spell evokes the aura of unspeakable terror projected by an angelic messenger of Death.

PLAYER'S TOOLBOX

IN THE SERVICE OF ROME

- You are the hands of a minister of the Curia, carrying out your patron's will with the confidence of one who knows her salvation to be assured. You are a herald, an agent and, when need be, an assassin, maintaining the supremacy of the Cross by whatever means necessary. It is only at night, when you are alone with your thoughts, that the idea ever crosses your mind that, if your patron is indeed a holy man, why does he retain *your* services?

- A poor monk, nun or mendicant, you have denied the worldly temptations to which so many of your Messianic brethren have submitted. You are a person of humble heart, and while you would not presume to lecture your ecclesiastical betters, you are disturbed by the naked greed demonstrated by so many clergy. You would never abandon the Church and its Voices, but you do aim to help reform your wayward compatriots and show them that riches on Earth are as nothing before the bounty of Paradise that is won through a life of simple good works.

AGAINST THE MESSIANIC SEE

- You are somehow in opposition to the Pontifex Maximus and his tyrannical policies. Perhaps you are an Albigensian Cathar, condemning the evils of the selfish and worldly Catholic Church, or maybe the circumstances of your divine revelation have made you believe that the Church is corrupt, and now you want nothing to do with it. Perhaps you're just ambitious and you see the Pontifex and the Curia as obstacles to overcome, rather than allies to cultivate. In any case, great difficulties doubtless await you.

- You are a scholar of the Messianic Fellowship traveling in the footsteps of Augustine the Meek, for you believe that there is great merit in his message of a universal faith. Regardless of your sect within the Voices, you are generally quite accepting of the beliefs of others (though your open-mindedness may only extend to fellow monotheists). You seek the common threads that link the many faiths of Europe and surrounding lands and, perhaps, hope to find Augustine himself (if, indeed, he still lives), in order to hear his counsel.

THE FURY OF THE ONE VOICE

- As a child, you laid eyes upon one of the Adversary's demons, and the circumstances of the event (whether it resulted in the annihilation of your village, the death of your parents or simply the end of your innocence) has made you a grim crusader against an enemy from beyond the Spheres of Creation. Let men believe as they will; you have no time for matters of religious dispute when evil clothed in flesh stalks the world. You deal in faith, not religion, and you will not rest until you have bled Lucifer himself at the end of your blade.

- A Mithraic Voice, you are determined to resurrect the warrior cult of old and you ardently pursue shreds of lore about the *Sol Invictus*, despite the terrible peril it often brings. You are certainly not afraid to get your hands dirty (or bloody, as is sometimes the case) and you know that this quest will surely bring you into conflict with many enemies, not the least of which is the Catholic branch of the Fellowship, who will stop at nothing to see your "outmoded heathen faith" quashed for all time. Let them come, and you will show them how a warrior of the Unconquered Sun meets his enemies!

An evocation of Gavri-El fills the subject's (or subjects') rational mind with the irrefutable belief that an angel of dark purpose here walks the Earth, while supplications to Uri-El incite the primal, instinctual fear of the hare for the wolf. Some Voices claim that such a mantle of dread is hung upon the shoulders of every angel sent down by the Creator for the purpose of taking life.

System: For each success rolled in the casting of this spell, plus one per point of Quintessence spent, the Voice may affect one target within normal casting range. Those subjected to this aura of fear must roll Willpower (difficulty 6, plus one per success rolled by the Voice, to a maximum of nine) and meet or exceed the number of successes rolled by the Voice or else flee in insensate terror for at least one full minute per success scored by the caster (perhaps dropping held items and certainly not paying much heed to the details along the path of flight).

SWORDS INTO PLOWSHARES

(GAVRI-EL ••, REPHA-EL ••••)

With this spell, a Messianic Voice can transform the fury of the mob into feelings of peace, unity and brotherhood, thwarting violence and opening the hearts of men to their fellows. Beseeking the favor of Gavri-El, the Voice fills the minds of others with gentle words and notions of compassion and simple faith. Further, by invoking Repha-El, the mage creates a sense of empathy between conflicting sides (or, in the case of one-sided aggression, in the hearts of the aggressors toward their intended victims). The result is a preternaturally swift and efficient dissipation of anger, leaving only goodwill in its place.

System: All those who would seek to do violence within the Voice's field of vision (out to the normal distance generated by successes scored in the casting) must engage the mage in a contested Willpower roll (each side rolling against a difficulty equal to the other's permanent Willpower). If the Voice wins the roll by one or two, the individual may still feel some aggression, but is unlikely to act without further provocation. If the mage wins the rolls by three or more, the subject will feel his rage leech away, replaced by feelings of friendship and sympathy. Should the subject win the roll against the mage, he is free to do as he wishes (which usually means perpetrating whatever violence was on his mind). Each success beyond the first scored by the Voice in the casting of this spell allows her to roll an additional die in the contested Willpower roll. For very large mobs, it is probably best to roll an estimated average Willpower. In this case, a narrow win on the contested roll for the Voice may mean that a few bull-headed stragglers press

the attack, while a win by a greater margin defeats the crowd's bloodlust entirely.

THE ORDER OF HERMES: MANY HOUSES, ONE LAW

You think yourself one of them? They are Commoners, girl, not fit to meet your gaze, let alone command your labor. Leave them behind; you are exalted above them now — above even the right of kings, some might say, but you did not hear that from me.

Let loose your mother's apron and bury your nose in books. The kitchen is for scullery maids. Your place is in the tower....

—Selena Magistrix, matron of the Many-Pillared Hall chantry of House Bonisagus

STATUS OF THE HERMETIC HOUSES

Currently, the Order of Hermes is embroiled in something of a revolution. With the Fellowship's grudging acknowledgement of other mystics and the fall of the long-standing prohibition against fraternization with "flawed and primitive rival sorcerers," many influential thinkers within the Order are advocating the dissolution of the House system, in favor of presenting a more genuinely unified front to the magical community of Europe, Outremer and elsewhere. Resistance to this notion is passionate, but with the rise of cross-Fellowship cabals and the fall of many staunch traditionalists on the battlefields of the Massasa War, the unifiers currently have the upper hand in this debate.

Thus, many members of the Order currently consider declaration of House to be extraneous, preferring to introduce themselves by their name, followed by "bani Order of Hermes" ("bani" being a term denoting membership and which was, up until just a few years ago, commonly used to indicate House membership within the Order). Of course, some hardliners (particularly the Order's oldest mages: fourth-, third- and even a handful of second- and first-generation Hermetics) continue to embrace the system of Houses and some of these have even been known to issue *certámen* challenges over the matter. It remains to be seen who will emerge victorious in this political debate, but many Hermetic wizards follow the affair closely, knowing that the resolution of the dispute over the Houses will be a telling factor in the course of the Order's future.

The Order of Hermes actually encompasses a huge number of diverse Houses (many of which exist under the umbrella of House Ex Miscellanea), but a

few among these stand tall as the highest of the high, the Great Houses of Hermes. These are the Order's most influential political bodies, the ones that essentially dominate Order policy and represent the Order to the other Fellowships of the Dark Medieval.

HOUSE BONISAGUS

House Bonisagus is responsible for the Order's sorcerous research. These archetypal wizards often while their days away in cluttered laboratory sancta, rife with piled scrolls, towers of books and mystic components of both obvious and dubious purpose. Bonisagi often play the role of statesmen within the Order, given the respect accorded their founder, though many of them have more political ambition than acumen. Of course, there are also many members of the House who balance their academic aspirations with a solid sense for the nuances of temporal power, and these sorts often end up as the scholar-lords of the Order of Hermes, respected for their sagacity and feared for their powerful influence over the Fellowship's affairs.

For the most part, though, Bonisagi (whether they admit it or not) are given to much more flatly academic pursuits. Indeed, several among their number likely rank among the most learned people in the world. There is little worth knowing (by the accounting of the "civilized world," that is) that is not known by at least *someone* within House Bonisagus.

Bonisagus magic is among the most elaborate of sorcery to be found anywhere, involving hours-long chants, precise alignments of stars and planets, alchemical tinctures, circles and pentacles inlaid in precious metals and the like. These wizards are very proud of the glorious pedigree of their mysticism and most consider hurried magics to be base and unworthy (an elitist luxury, it should be noted, that can only truly be afforded by those who spend as little time out in the world as does the average Bonisagus). Bonisagi, as a rule, are among the most scornful of Hermetic mages toward those of other Fellowships and, most especially, hedge mages, likening them to "children with dangerous toys."

Bonisagi do not usually deal well with the average Commoner. Put simply, most people are too ignorant to hold their attention for more than a few moments. Further, members of the House, as heirs to the founder of the Order, carry more than their share of the sense of betrayal that the Order as a whole feels toward Commoners, that tiny sliver of hatred for the people who laid them low in ancient days out of fear and misunderstanding. Indeed, most Bonisagi only

truly feel at home within the Order and most do little — beyond what is absolutely necessary — to conceal that fact from anyone. Some younger members of the House, in the wake of the treachery of the Tremere, have come to question this policy of practiced scorn, citing the need to understand their fellow men, rather than turn their backs on them (lest the pawns of the Tremere be able to easily launch another assault like the one that laid Mistrudge to waste), but most older Bonisagus mages scoff at the notion of another such catastrophe befalling a now-vigilant Order of Hermes, and return to their studies, shuttering the windows of their high towers and losing themselves in centuries-old esoterica.

Common Traits: Bonisagi are virtually always Mental Primary and can easily be physically or socially deficient without raising an eyebrow within the Order. The Academics Ability is a must, and strong scores in Cosmology, Enigmas, Linguistics and Occult certainly don't hurt, either. Bonisagi often invest some of their Background points into Chantry, Cray, Familiar, Library and/or Sanctum, and many develop their proficiency with the Corona and Primus Pillars above the other two.

HOUSE EX MISCELLANEA

When the Order first came together, the original leaders were stunned by the sheer number of divergent paths of Hermeticism that had sprung up in the wake of Rome's collapse. For every eight or 10 bearded and staff-wielding wizards, there was a witch, ecstatic mystic, pseudo-religious magus or other such inexplicable sorcerer. Naturally, these individuals were far-flung and highly disorganized, and no one branch of these practices existed in sufficient numbers to warrant a House of its own, so, as was (and is) its way, the Order of Hermes promptly shuffled these sorts off into a single House and told them to sort out the matters of organization for themselves. Centuries later, the House still has effectively no single leader and continues to be generally regarded as a dumping ground for sloppy Hermetic magi and delivers into bastardized arts. Still, Ex Miscellanea brings a certain dynamic quality to the often staid ritual of High Hermeticism and, by virtue of its diversity, offers a good face to present to other Fellowships in the Dark Medieval. (The Order as a whole views this, essentially, as placating savages with something that comforts them through rough familiarity, but it usually works, so no one complains much about it.)

Membership in House Ex Miscellanea offers little in the way of opportunities for political clout

for a mage and, indeed, is often a sure way to sabotage any such ambitions. The other Great Houses of the Order of Hermes are neither willing to accept what is, to them, a rag-tag band of near-wizards, fortunate enough to benefit from a sense of *noblesse oblige* on the part of their obvious betters, nor are they willing to give them any real say in the affairs of the Fellowship. On the other hand, those who take membership in the House often end up as the most good-natured and least stuffy and severe magi of the Order. Certainly, for those few mages of other Fellowships who know aught of the Order's internal politics, most would surely rather deal with a member of this House than a stoic Quaesitor or an antagonistic Tytalus.

Several magi, under the auspices of Ex Miscellanea, have begotten their own "Lesser Houses," but most of these are scoffed at openly by members of such Great Houses as Flambeau and Tytalus, and proud declarations of membership in these unrecognized entities causes even the Bonisagi to snicker. The wisest members of Ex Miscellanea usually keep their mouths shut and are simply thankful for the resources and protection offered by membership in the Order.

A small number of ex-Tremere wizards continue to exist in the Order, having forsaken their membership in that ill-omened House for inclusion in Ex Miscellanea. It goes without saying that these unfortunates are watched for signs of treachery by the Quaesitori with the same sort of attention that the housecat gives to the field mouse, and most fear that their lives will be forfeit in any case, since the Tremere *Massasa* have demonstrated, time and again, a frightful ingenuity when it comes to striking at magi in even the mightiest of chantries. A few of these rebel Tremere have thrown themselves passionately into the *Massasa* War, figuring that a heroic end is now the only thing they have to look forward to. Those who are captured alive by the vampire sorcerers, of course, are proven very much wrong in this assumption.

Common Traits: In House Ex Miscellanea, there really is no such thing. These mages are diverse enough as to seem virtually incapable of all belonging to a single Fellowship, let alone a sub-faction within a Fellowship. So long as a given mage can demonstrate some proficiency, no matter how frail or diluted, with the *Ars Hermeticae*, she is welcome to join the ranks of Ex Miscellanea and, thereby, add her own strength to that of the Order as a whole.

HOUSE FLAMBEAU

With cleansing fire and an awesome report do the magi of House Flambeau make themselves known upon the many battlefields of the Dark Medieval world. Serving as the torch that drives back the night, this bold, passionate and militant House is at the forefront of all of the Order's conflicts, physical and otherwise.

Flambeau tend to be warriors within whatever fields they choose to pursue. They bring their aggressive, martial attitudes to bear upon everything they do, whether it be battle, politics, scholarship or even romance. They are not always agreeable, even to their close friends, but none can doubt their fervor or sincerity. Their intense natures put many off, but such an unapologetic drive to succeed draws just as many. Whether or not he succeeds in an endeavor, a Flambeau undertakes it with flair and a lust for life unmatched in any other House of Hermes. While his failures become cautionary tales for the ages, his successes become legendary, and as any Flambeau worth his salt will tell you, it is far worthier to be remembered vividly and with great scorn than not at all.

This attitude is not surprising, considering that more Flambeau meet their deaths by violence than in every other way combined. They embrace their fate as doomed men, as lights that burn brightly and are consumed quickly. It is this acceptance of death that gives them the freedom to love life as they do and to never do a thing without acting upon the desire to see it done well and to the fullest. No matter what else may be said of them, most Flambeau spend their lives exactly how they wish to and immerse themselves completely in any task they begin. They laugh at death, because most of them know that one day, Death will have a laugh at their expense in kind. They seek to make him earn that laugh.

Flambeau are surprisingly charitable toward Commoners, perhaps a fortunate side-effect of the *noblesse oblige* that leads them to embrace their own ends. They have nothing to prove to anyone and aren't afraid to say so. Further, the passion and *joi de vivre* espoused by most Flambeau makes them more easily understandable to many Commoners. Though often brilliant beyond the average peasant's means to match, Flambeau are very obviously human in their desires and their endeavors. They are moved by the same sorts of emotions that drive ordinary folk, in sharp contrast to the aloof and inscrutable demeanors that many Hermetic magi of other Houses affect.



Common Traits: Flambeau are often Physical Primary, complemented by a strong base of Mental Attributes. (Those who are not Physical Primary are usually Mental Primary, supported by a good spread of Physical Attributes.) Any, however, who strive with conviction and foolhardy courage, are welcome among the Flambeau. Combat Abilities are highly respected in this House, though projecting a strong, martial ethic upon such fields as Academics, Politics or even Theology, for example, is also to be respected. Destiny and Fount are particularly appropriate Backgrounds to represent the powerfully energetic spirits of Flambeau magi and, almost to a man, they favor the Vires Pillar above all others, especially interested in its most spectacularly destructive applications.

HOUSE QUAESITOR

The Order's conscience, House Quaesitor acts to be certain that the Code of Hermes is maintained at all times. Members of this House are often regarded with suspicion and even dread, seen as cold and dispassionate arbiters of the law and, at times, its executioners. Loneliness and distrust are a Quaesitor's lot, as few Hermetic mages wish for close contact (or

any contact, for that matter, if it can be helped) with members of this House.

Quaesitor training is brutal and unforgiving, but in a very much different way than the education of a Tytalus. Aspiring Quaesitori are taught to divest themselves of the need for human comfort and the desire to belong. One who is within a thing cannot take an objective view of that thing. They learn to become as much strangers to their fellows within the Order as to the rest of the world. Few have the emotional and spiritual resiliency to endure this total denial of the basic need for companionship and most (perhaps four out of five) prospective initiates leave of their own free will within the first year of training. Of those who stay on, less than a third are offered membership within the House. Ultimately, it is a thankless task, but, as the Quaesitori see it, *someone* has to do it.

With the Massasa War raging and the death sentence under which all of House Tremere exists, many Quaesitori are now being asked to become soldiers, in addition to their duties as keepers of the law. With their characteristic stoicism, most members of the House are rushing to fulfill this duty, just one more unpleasant obligation in a long line of them. It is a task that few of

them relish, but squeamishness is one of the first traits flensed away by Quaesitor training, and so they do what they must.

The Hermeticism practiced by House Quaesitor tends to be understated and restrained. Most of their spells are intended to manipulate a foe's spirit into compliance, rather than savaging his body. Quaesitori are masters of quiet control. While some few among their number might think to abuse these subtle magics to assert control over their fellows, most are wise enough, or are made wise enough through an understanding of the consequences of such actions, not to. Of course, Quaesitori are just as capable of blatant sorcery as any other Hermetic wizard, should the situation call for it, and, in such a case, they favor savage efficiency above showmanship, more intent on destroying their enemies than impressing them.

Common Traits: Quaesitori may have any Attribute category as Primary and many do well to invest freebie points to bolster their lesser categories somewhat. Members of this grim House must be learned, cunning, well spoken, perceptive and, more often than they would wish it, skilled in combat. In addition to the Abilities commonly favored by mages of the Order, Law and Subterfuge are indispensable to the capable Quaesitor. Beyond the normal Hermetic Backgrounds, would-be Quaesitori mentors seek out students with strong latent Founts, since the House relies so heavily upon the use of *certámen* (see pp. 119-122) in the pursuit of justice. Quaesitori favors the use of the Corona Pillar, and many seek to develop their Modus above skill with any Pillar.

HOUSE TYTALUS

The generals of the venerable Order of Hermes, the magi of the brutally antagonistic House Tytalus are practitioners of a strict code of discipline and self-betterment through ceaseless challenging of one's own abilities. Perhaps half of the negative attitudes many outsiders have regarding the Order can be squarely (and fairly) placed upon the shoulders of the Tytali, the most conquest-minded of the Hermetic wizards. These mages are not inducted into their House so much as they are scarred into it, by means of a training regimen so unforgiving that perhaps one in six students survives the experience with her sanity fully intact. For every two or three potential Tytali that die during their period of apprenticeship, most other Houses lose one, if that.

The Tytali have been the primary architects of virtually all of the Order's many plans to slowly subvert the wizardly world and to thereby eventually lay claim

to the whole of the Earth, from Britain to Cathay. Conquest is to them like air or water — a necessity for survival. Tytali who are deprived of the opportunity to struggle and contend against others (or even just against themselves and their own limitations) grow sullen, morose and hot-tempered. Something in them craves challenge and they view the world and everything in it as trials to be overcome.

This mindset is established in the nightmarish Tytalus apprenticeship, when the mentor also serves as the student's direst foe, an enemy who must be defeated in order for the would-be mage to take her place. Without such an ethic of relentless conflict, the Tytali maintain, weakness and decadence set in and devour the Order from the inside out. Though that attitude makes them few friends, none in the Order can dispute that many of the Fellowship's greatest successes in expansion and conquest have come from the hearts, minds and hands of the eternally competitive magi of House Tytalus.

Tytalus magic is a constant exercise of the will, pitting the mage against the innumerable challenges of the world and, perhaps most importantly, against herself. Every single mystic working a mage of this House undertakes is an act of defiance, a deliberate attempt to find conflict and contention. Tytali work to expand the limitations of their own magic and, eventually, to defeat those limitations entirely.

Common Traits: Tytali rank among the Hermetic mages most likely to be Physical Primary, though the ability to dominate in any arena is honorable, and a Tytalus had best be prepared for others of her House to test all of her natural capabilities. Martial Abilities are favored just as much as cerebral ones and most members of the House develop their Intimidation, Leadership and Subterfuge Abilities as well. Destiny (for good or ill) and Servants, in addition to the normal Hermetic Backgrounds, are prevalent in House Tytalus. These perfectionist mages do not truly favor any Pillar, or even their Foundation, but instead concentrate on developing and perfecting their magical power, overall. Tytali, despite the scorn they often feel for practitioners of "hopelessly flawed" schools of magical thought, are also apt to eventually seek out the sorcery of other Fellowships, in order to expand upon their own mystic repertoires.

HOUSE VERDITIUS

Mystic craftsman, the artificers and armorers of the Order, the mages of House Verditius create the vast majority of the Fellowship's Talismans. If a

THE HERMETIC PRIMI

The Order of Hermes is ruled by a council of powerful magi known, collectively, as the Primi ("First Ones"). These individuals set policy and oversee the affairs of their respective Houses, as well as those of the Order as a whole. These wizards are among the mightiest in the Fellowship, and most of them marry their expansive knowledge of the secrets of the cosmos with an intimate understanding of politics. Indeed, each Primus is like unto an institution within the Order of Hermes — equal parts prince, bureaucrat and cult of personality. Some eagerly seek the position of House Primus, and some avoid it like the plague. (Sadly, most of those who seek it are probably unworthy of it and many who flee from it would likely serve admirably.) Challenges of *certámen*, backroom dealings, favor-carrying, matters of sorcerous lineage and even blackmail and assassination enter into the stage of politics between the Primi and most only hold their positions for as long as they can decisively defeat all comers, whether mystically, socially or otherwise.

The current House Primi of the Order of Hermes are as follows:

House Bonisagus: Most who meet Maryam of Andalusia for the first time are initially taken aback by her. Beautiful, diminutive and soft-spoken, she in no way seems to embody the characteristics upheld as "necessities" for any would-be House Primus. Truth be told, perhaps the most treacherous and dangerously ambitious mind in the Order belongs to this lovely Moor and she has, through a careful web of betrayal, blackmail, seduction and rarely-demonstrated mystic prowess seized control of House Bonisagus, ruling as a subtle tyrant who gently convinces, rather than forces, others to work her will.

House Ex Miscellanea: Technically speaking, Hugh Chandler is the Primus of House Ex Miscellanea. Of course, this balding, perpetually frazzled-looking older man wields virtually no authority within his own House, let alone the Order of Hermes as a whole. Many members of other Houses joke that he did not win his seat, so much as he was sentenced to it. Secretly, Hugh prefers to be painted the fool and gets a great deal of research and covert politicking done under such a guise. While he entertains no delusions of uniting Ex Miscellanea, he is by no means the clown others believe him to be.

House Flambeau: Javier de León is the Primus of the warlike House Flambeau. Antagonistic, brilliant, dignified and aristocratic, Javier in many ways embodies much of the best and worst in the Order of Hermes. Of all the House Primi, he is the one likeliest to be found at Doissetep, contending with this Master or that over some point of pride, and there are few in the Fellowship, of whatever power or experience, who do not blanch at the thought of standing in opposition to him; Javier has been known to severely injure even those who have faced him in the *certámen* circle.

House Quaesitor: Evelyn du Narbonne is the grim-faced matron of House Quaesitor. Many young mages of the House (in hushed tones, of course) call her "The Old Dragon," testimony to her cold demeanor, great power and vast resources. She is considered to be fair to the point of heartlessness and possesses a wisdom akin to that of Solomon himself, save that her rulings display none of that great king's essential human compassion. Talk within the Order says that she can bring down *anyone* in the Fellowship, no matter how highly placed or well connected, should she find a reason to.

House Tytalus: With his wild mane of black hair, shot through with gray, unkempt beard stubble, dingy black leather armor and the notched old woodsman's axe at his side, many have mistaken Dragomir, Primus of House Tytalus, for a common forester or peasant soldier. Nowadays, with the *Massasa* War well underway, this anonymity serves well one of the eldest and mightiest Hermetic magi yet alive — one who, according to rumor, was present as an apprentice at the Order's founding. In Dragomir is married the tactical mind of Alexander the Great and the individual fighting prowess of Achilles.

House Verditius: Qasim abu Tariq ibn Faruq al-Hamzah controls the affairs of House Verditius from his chantry in Constantinople, is the only Hermetic Primus to enjoy good relations with the Ahl-i-Batin, and has been busily preparing (secretly, of course) for the day when the expansionist policy of the Order inevitably results in dire consequences. He is fascinated by the infinite possibilities of magic and has been known to reward young mages richly for delivering new magic unto him (currently, he is most interested in acquiring one of the strange weapons that destroyed Mistrbridge; see the Appendix).

wizard needs a vicious elf slain, he finds a member of House Flambeau; if he wants a sidhe-slaying sword, he asks a Verditius. Loving the fruits of their craft above their fellow men, most members of this House are thought of as sardonic, tactless and remote.

The House is a venerable one within the Order, though it is not often regarded as one of the Fellowship's powerful political bodies. In truth, most Verditius lack the social graces required to be lords within the Order of Hermes and most, quite frankly, simply do not care. Men are far less predictable than basalt, crystal and steel and are only rarely as easily sculpted into a pleasing shape; so much more so when one is dealing with creatures of such titanic egos as Hermetic magi.

Better, most Verditius reason, to allow the Bonisagi and the Tylali their foolish games of state and to themselves concentrate on the real work of building the things that allow the Order's agendas to stay on track.

Of course, all of the manticore bile and sea serpents' scales that go into the forging of the Verditius' Talismans must come from somewhere and that, predictably, is the lot of the young members of the House. More so than members of any Great House other than perhaps Bonisagus, young Verditius view their time out in the world as more of a trial to be overcome than an opportunity to be embraced. This is unsurprising, as many of them are ill-suited to the road and would much rather be assembling an animated suit of armor before a roaring fire than shivering in the rain and trying to sleep in a ditch. While many Verditius benefit from a great well of inspiration and imagination, few of them have much in the way of a sense of adventure.

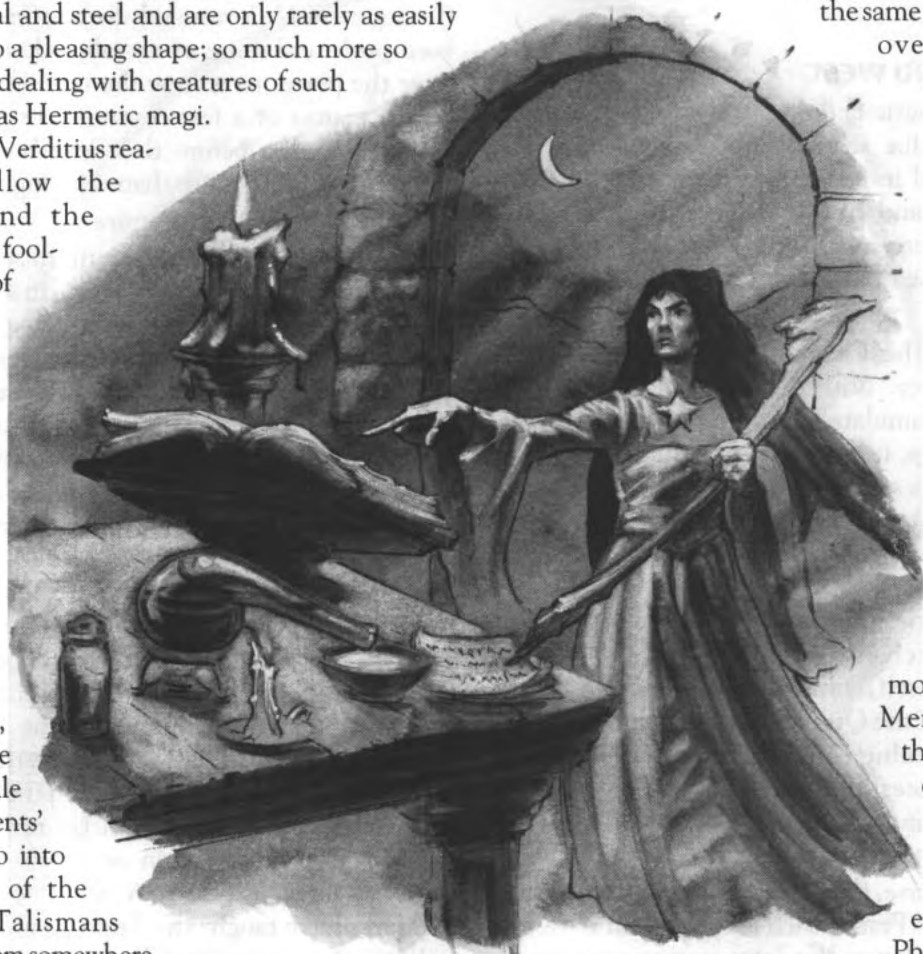
Verditius magic is time consuming and intricate, requiring hours, days or even months of preparation. Each component (of which there are many) has to be just so, and many within the Order believe that magi of this House shun the outside world primarily because of the difficulty in trying to realize new magics (spells that they have not prepared in advance) in the uncontrolled conditions outside of their sancta. Of course, Verditius channel most of their magic through pre-made items, allowing them to reliably perform the same enchantments

over and over again, without much need for preparation time beyond what is needed to forge, sculpt or otherwise create the particular time for a given spell in the first place.

Common Traits:

Verditius are most commonly Mental Primary, though a considerable number (blacksmiths and stonemasons, for example) are Physical Primary

instead. The stereotype of the antisocial and curmudgeonly Verditius has no small amount of validity and almost no members of the House are anything but Social Tertiary (many favor Manipulation above Charisma or Appearance). It goes without saying that Crafts is the single most highly regarded Ability within House Verditius, and in addition to the normal common Hermetic Backgrounds, many Verditius favor Cray, Resources (as both the by-product of their works and the capital on which future creations are built) and, naturally, Talisman. Primus is the single most favored Pillar of Hermetic



magic within the House, invaluable in the fabrication of mystic treasures.

THE ORDER IN THE WORLD

The Order of Hermes, despite setbacks of recent years, is still the mightiest Fellowship of the Dark Medieval. Its influence stretches to the limits of the Roman Empire of old and even beyond. Still, its authority is not regarded with equal deference in all places, and there are some places where its presence is regarded with silent (or, in a few cases, not-so-silent) enmity.

THE CIVILIZED WEST

The Hermetic Fellowship is strongest in those places that value scholarship. Conversely, it also does quite well in countries with systems of caste-based controls and the rule of might. Thus, the urban centers of Western European feudalism serve as more or less the homeland of the Order of Hermes.

France

For now, the Order is mighty indeed in the nation of France. With the intersection of worldly power and accumulated knowledge that is Paris and its surroundings, it is unsurprising that the Order of Hermes invests a lot of its effort, energy and manpower there. Only Doissetep itself looms higher in the Hermetic mind than France's capital. There are likely more Hermetics in the city than in any two or three other cities on Earth, of whatever size. Four great Hermetic chantries (including the one founded by Tytalus himself) stand in and around the capital, and enemies of the Order consider their presence in Paris to be invulnerable. The meteoric rise of the Messianic Voices and that Fellowship's powerful presence in France, however, is swiftly beginning to render that sentiment inaccurate.

It is, of course, the Order's Eurocentric perspective that makes France such an important nation to it, given France's perceived status among the powerful of Europe. Even as great opportunities present themselves elsewhere, members of the Fellowship often overlook them in favor of attempts to reestablish dominion over familiar territory, even when such strategies prove to be untenable. Sadly, this is already taking its toll on the Order of Hermes, with resources that would be better spent expanding into the Holy Land and Eastern Empire being fed into the lost cause of trying to check the growing might of the Messianic Voices in France and the rest of Western Europe. Likewise, the efforts in the Massasa War suffer, with valuable manpower and other assets

diverted to head off "potential vampiric aggression" in and around France, when they would likely be better used to assault the heart of the rogue House Tremere directly.

Still, for the time being, France is a bastion of the Order's power, a slowly fading testament to the authority it once wielded, however covertly, over the thrones of the Earth. For that reason alone, the Fellowship is loath to let its holdings in France slip into disrepair and ignominy or, worse still, to fall before "inferior magi" or even — fates forefend — Commoners. Unfortunately for the Order, this stubborn pride and sense of nostalgia do not appear to have the power to reverse the tide of time and it is only a matter of a few centuries, or perhaps even several decades, before the Order's supremacy in France is nothing more than a fading memory.

The Holy Roman Empire

While the Order does maintain something of a presence on the island of Sicily and in southern Italy, it is in the Germanic city-states that some of the most important and dynamic struggles to ever face the Fellowship are unfolding. Within the past 15 years, every Hermetic chantry within a day's ride of Vienna has fallen to the Tremere, overwhelmed by the dangerously adaptable magic of the vampire-sorcerers and the brute force of their animate gargoyle servitors. While the Carpathian wilds are the most blatantly perilous places for a Hermetic mage to be nowadays, the northern city-states of the Holy Empire are the most *unpredictably* dangerous. When Ceoris crouches on the horizon and the gargoyles take wing, at least a mage has the advantage of knowing who her enemies are, where they're coming from and what they intend to do. In the Holy Roman Empire, the battlefield is often, but not always, more subtle and political, often on levels to which the Order is unaccustomed. A scant few decades as vampires have taught the Tremere much about the politics of genuine treachery, lessons that many within the Order, confident in their power, never had much cause to learn. As a result, Hermetic masters die with poisoned cups in their hands, while valuable trade routes fall out of the hands of the mages' servants and into the grasp of the Tremere, and leaders subtly influenced by wizards are removed and replaced with those more blatantly controlled by vampires.

Still, despite reeling from these blows in the ongoing Massasa War, the Order has taken stock of its losses and has begun to adapt to the tactics of the enemy. As a result, the situation has gone from a

defensive posture on the part of the Order to more of a stalemate with the rogue Tremere. The struggle has, in some ways, reverted to a more "civilized" standard of warfare and some courts in the region host both magus and vampire under the same roof, with each knowingly contending with the other to assert authority over the Commoner rulers of the city-states, whether noblemen or merchants. While more open hostilities would probably be more swift and efficient, this gentlemanly form of aggression seems to suit the temperaments of both sides better, since it allows them to demonstrate not only physical and mystic prowess, but also subtle cunning and social acumen. Thus, the eventual victor (should one emerge) will have the bragging rights to claim all of the virtues of leadership, rather than merely the martial ones.

Currently, Hamburg plays host to the mightiest known (among magi) Order presence in the Holy Roman Empire. A few enterprising Hermetics have gotten their hands into the affairs of the Hanseatic League and are enjoying the benefits of that vast mercantile network, while others are simply indulging in the amazing variety of goods and services moving through the city-state. In light of this advantageous situation, some younger wizards advocate a more complete integration of Order business with Commoner affairs, though this notion is fairly roundly scorned by most elder mages and so remains a contested issue for now.

Somewhere in the Germanic wilds, House Quaesitor is rumored to have its ancestral chantry. What rites are conducted there, no Quaesitor will say, but the House has done a fairly efficient job of expunging most records of the exact location of the chantry, leaving only members of the House and certain old or particularly connected or influential wizards with such knowledge. Of course, most mages of other Houses suspect that this bastion of House Quaesitor is likely where any sentence of *Gilgul* (soul death) within the Order is carried out, so all regard even the rumor of the place with considerable dread and discomfort.

The Iberian Peninsula

Divided between Christian and Moor, Iberia is a land of conflict. The *Reconquista* continues, though it is now regarded much more as a matter of the inevitability of Christian victory than as the heated war it was even a generation ago. The Order of Hermes has members who stand on both sides of the conflict (heavily favoring the Christian side) and many who do not care one way or the other. The

most pragmatic wizards already mourn for the loss of the Moorish empire and the rich intellectual traditions that they consider to go hand-in-hand with Muslim nations.

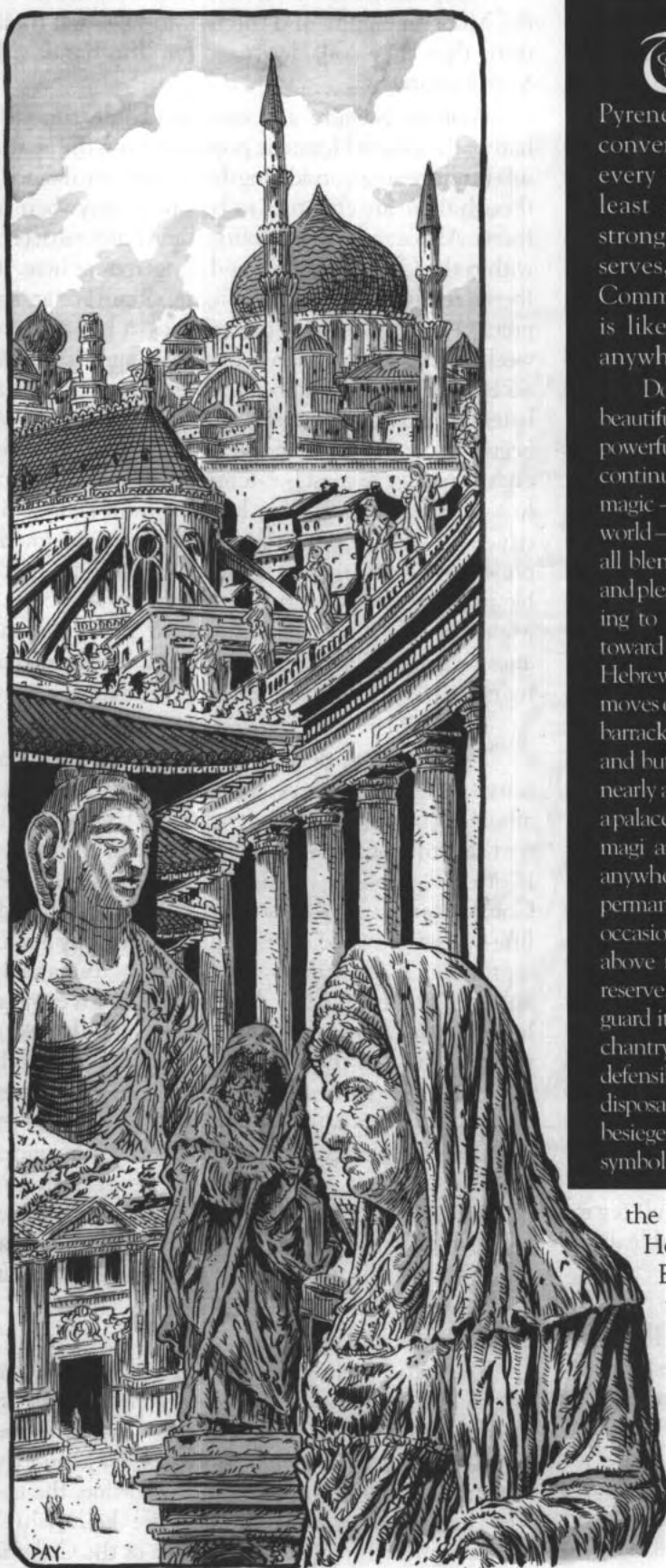
Aragon, Navarre and eastern Castile currently harbor the largest Hermetic populations on the peninsula (unsurprising, considering their closeness to France), though there are chantries to be found everywhere in Iberia. Almost nowhere is political and religious debate within the Order as heated and dangerous as here. In Iberia, *certámen* is considered as important for an apprentice to learn as basic metaphysics. It is rare that a week goes by without such a challenge being issued and accepted. A strong Flambeau presence merely exacerbates the situation. Some few far-thinking Tylali have begun to channel this aggression toward more useful ends, sending the most hot-tempered magi to the front lines of the *Massasa* War, but this intra-Fellowship strife seems to be never ending. Still, the Hermetic presence in Iberia is quite strong, almost incontestable by any other Fellowship (since the Ahl-i-Batin and Messianic Voices have been distracted by war with one another for generations), and looks to be destined to remain that way for the foreseeable future.

Italy

The shifting tides of political alliance and enmity and the treacherous complexion of Commoner affairs in Italy make the region, overall, unfavorable for the Order of Hermes. The Fellowship's influence is often dependent upon strong, dynastic lines of Commoners and the alacrity with which this bloodline or that is ousted or exterminated in Italy makes for too much attention being paid to statesmanship and not enough to the *Ars Arcane*. Universities, however, are relatively commonplace in Italy now, a tempting lure for the Order. Thus, a few completely apolitical chantries thrive among the city-states. Conversely, a small number of *highly* political chantries do likewise, seeking power not in magic or academia, but in assuming positions of authority behind gilded thrones. Unfortunately, the rivalries between chantries of the latter variety are often as fierce and deadly as those between enemy cities in the region.

Britain

The Order claims to have had a presence in the British Isles since before there was truly an Order of Hermes, in the person of Merlinius, magus to the legendary King of Camelot. More pragmatic and less romantic Hermetic wizards point to Diedne, the fae-wise mage who was present at the Fellowship's foundation, as the first representative of the Order in



DOISSETEP

The Order of Hermes' single mightiest chantry, Doissetep, is in the Spanish Pyrenees. The council of the Hermetic Primi convenes there every seven years and virtually every apprentice in the Fellowship spends at least a few months walking the massive stronghold's labyrinthine halls. While Paris serves, in many ways, as the Order's hand in the Commoner world, Doissetep is its heart. There is likely no greater or more potent chantry anywhere in Creation.

Doissetep's core architecture is designed with a beautiful, Eastern flair (having once been the lair of a powerful Turkish necromancer), though it has been continually expanded upon since being moved by magic — very nearly across the entirety of the known world — and it now boasts an amazing variety of styles, all blended together into an inexplicably compelling and pleasing whole. The entire structure is built according to various precepts of sacred geometry (leaning toward Arabic principles in the center and favoring Hebrew and Pythagorean styles more heavily as one moves outward). Doissetep, with its towers, courtyards, barracks and massive walls (30 feet high, 10 feet thick and buttressed every hundred feet) encompasses very nearly a square mile of territory. It is a fortress, a library, a palace and, for all intents and purposes, a capital. More magi are consistently gathered there than probably anywhere else in the world, and Doissetep hosts a permanent staff of over 300 Commoner servants. On occasion, a handful of tamed griffons circle the skies above it and, it is rumored, other things — held in reserve, their wills broken to the service of the Order — guard its depths. Whole generations are born into the chantry's service, and it is doubtful, given its amazingly defensible location and the astounding resources at its disposal, that any army anywhere could successfully besiege it. Like the Order of which it has become a symbol, it is proud, strong and seemingly invincible.

the Isles. Since that time, however, the Order of Hermes has zealously expanded its presence in England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales, mostly via riding the tides of war between the island kingdoms and France.

Few locales in the British Isles are sufficiently civilized, by the Order's standards, to warrant the presence of chantries. London hosts the largest Order population in the area, spread between two rather large chantries, and York, Edinburgh and Dublin each host one chantry apiece (though

Dublin's chantry has been referred to by courteous visitors as "Spartan" or "humble" and by less tactful former guests as a "crumbling, destitute little hovel"). There is also one other chantry alleged to exist in the British Isles. Supposedly on a perpetually mist-shrouded isle among the Orkneys (or perhaps just west of Ireland; accounts never seem to agree), this chantry is believed to hold one of the mightiest Crays possessed by the Order.

THE HOLY LAND

While the Order has not experienced the mass migration to Outremer that, in the wake of numerous Crusades, has befallen the Messianic Voices, it does have an abiding interest in the secrets of those lands. Many Hermetic mages, from bumbling apprentices to the most puissant of masters, are seeking to tap the vast mystic resources of the Holy Land. Of course, the Order has also maintained some holdings in the region since the time of its foundation and many of these are now being expanded upon to accommodate the influx of magi who have come questing for Truth in and around ancient Jerusalem.

Acre, most populous of the so-called "Crusader States," serves as host to the largest Hermetic Chantry in the Holy Land, supplemented by a powerful Gray that was heavily warded against detection, mystically transported to the city from the French countryside and immediately "rewoven" into the Tapestry there. It is quite a nondescript structure as Hermetic holdings go, but the Order has learned (often the hard way) that a measure of subtlety is worth far more than bluster and obvious power in the Holy Land. While blatant use of force seems to win the day among Commoners in Outremer, the mages who have done the best for themselves in this place are somewhat more sly and elusive, after the fashion of the Ahl-i-Batin.

Crossroads of faiths, Jerusalem is many different things to many different people. To the Order of Hermes, it is an opportunity. Within 50 years after the First Crusade, the Order had established a chantry in Jerusalem. Today, that chantry is one of House Ex Miscellanea's greatest strongholds, controlled by the strange wizardly family calling themselves House Castrovinci. Here, far from Doissetep and the center of the Fellowship's power, rituals and studies that would be considered genius in some parts of the Order and blasphemy in others are conducted almost openly, rites and research aimed at perfection and apotheosis.

THE BYZANTINE EMPIRE AND SURROUNDINGS

In every way as much the ideological homeland of the Order as Rome or Egypt, the lands encompassed by the Byzantine Empire, ironically, waned considerably in importance to the Fellowship as the Western Roman Empire fell into the Dark Ages. Despite the fact that it would likely have made much more sense for the Order of Hermes to relocate to Byzantium, most of the magi descending from the Cult of Mercury's traditions were, by then, Europeans. Arrogance and prejudice served to keep the mages of the nascent Order in Europe, even as the glories of Rome crumbled around them, first in decadence and then in flames.

Some, however, *did* possess the foresight and wisdom to undertake the journey to the east, and a minimal Order presence persisted throughout the centuries in Byzantium. Now, with the fall of the Greek Empire, some within the Order have come to question what has already been lost and what more might yet be. At last, the Order of Hermes finds magi, of whatever power, flocking to the Queen of Cities (and rejoining with their brethren whose chantries have stood there since the foundation of the Fellowship), hoping to preserve and protect her esoteric learning and all that she represents and, perhaps, to help her to rise to glory once more as the Crossroads of the Earth.

Much smaller is the Order's presence among the Byzantine Successor States (for the most part, once the outer fringes of the Greek Empire), though it retains a respectable number of chantries in the Despotate of Epirus, the westernmost of those states. Some now see opportunity in expansion into these lands, with their relative political instability (none of them being extant for more than two-and-a-half decades) and corresponding need for a stabilizing presence, a need the Order looks to fulfill. Thus, many young mages of the Order, idealistic and ambitious alike, have struck out to the Successor States in hopes of founding new chantries, free of the convoluted tangles of enmity and allegiance that invariably follow more experienced magi of the Fellowship. Some of these have even (with varying degree of success) made overtures toward the native magi, of whatever Fellowship, in hopes of establishing more diverse and powerful chantries than they might with newly minted Hermetics alone.

THE HINTERLANDS

While venerable Rome once brought a great number of barbarian lands under its sway, it never truly pacified many such primitive nations. After the empire split into East and West, many lands in the nebulous ground between gradually degenerated, forsaking the light of civilization to again embrace their savage roots. Likewise, there are lands now known to Europe that never fell under the tread of the legions' feet. Where others see only savagery and difficulty, however, the Order of Hermes sees the opportunity to expand, assimilate and, ultimately, rule.

Hungary and the Carpathians

The traditional base of operations for House Tremere, these lands are today regarded as a death-trap for all save the most cunning, dedicated and lethal mages of the Order. Only a handful of chantries operate in these lands now, most having been taken by the Tremere after their transformation, conquered since or destroyed in the battles of the *Massasa* War. Those Hermetic wizards who dwell in the region are often embroiled in vast and Byzantine networks of alliances and enmities, forced to break bread with monsters and to stand in deadly combat against noble and courageous souls. House Tytalus, needless to say, thrives in this kill-or-be-killed environment and several powerful magi of the House have specifically brought young apprentices here to receive their training in the harshest possible conditions.

The Warring States of Russia

Only Kiev, once the center of a more-or-less unified Rus, still holds any interest for the Order of Hermes. Despite its recent decline, it is still the only bastion of civilization (by the Order's estimation) to be found in its region. As might be expected, it is largely the magi of House Ex Miscellanea who are obligated to oversee the only chantry located on this obscure edge of the Earth. The Order mages there have managed to open up peaceful dialogues with local members of the Old Faith and with a scant few Spirit-Talkers, most of these also local, but one or two of them being Mongol newcomers.

Scandinavia

While by no means the barren wasteland that the Order would wish to paint it as, Scandinavia has not been particularly friendly of late to the Hermetic Fellowship and so they have come to consider it a barbaric, backward place. Truth be told, the northerly lands are much friendlier and more accepting of the ways of the Valdaermen, the Old Faith, the

Spirit-Talkers and even (with the overwhelming victory of Christianity in the region) the Messianic Voices than they are toward the ancient secrets of Thrice-Great Hermes. Oslo in Norway and Copenhagen in Denmark each host a sizable Hermetic presence, but the chantries in both locations are slipping in membership and influence as the years wear on and the Fellowship draws much of its presence back toward the westernmost expanses of Europe in an attempt to preserve its power.

The Pagan Baltics

Even as the sun sets on the ancient ways of the traditional Baltic peoples, the Order's interest in the region grows. Sword-point conversions are gradually forcing the land and its people into a shape more pleasing to the Fellowship's aesthetic. Still, dangerous things (not the least of which are men) wander these lands still, many of them clinging (violently, when need be) to the Old Ways. The Order seeks to conquer the Baltics and remake them in its own image, sometimes beside Messianic Voices, united in uneasy truce, and sometimes in a race against them. It is slow going and the Messianic Fellowship seems to be enjoying a slightly greater degree of success, but the most disturbing phenomenon that the Order has noticed about this change in the character of the land (one to which the Messianic Voices, in their fervor, are largely blind) is that most of it stems from the actions of Commoners, with precious little interference on the part of magi. Those skilled in the Art seem to be bit-players in this drama, while men of no mystic means decide the fate of the region. It is a most disconcerting state of affairs for the Hermetic wizards, though some few study it with a sort of morbid fascination, even as they lay the groundwork for a network of chantries that will soon, ideally, span the Baltics.

North Africa

Ever since the destruction of the Library of Alexandria, the Order has been wary of Egypt, and truthfully, little else upon the African continent appeals to the Eurocentric Fellowship. Still, in recent decades the Order has made efforts to again reach out to the land of its origin. Most efforts to establish chantries anywhere save within Egypt have encountered antagonism and, frequently, violence. Sometimes, this latter takes the form of Ahl-i-Batin assassinations, and sometimes it comes much more brutally and terribly, leaving only the tattered remains of wizards and their apprentices. The Order has come to understand that Africa is a dangerous place for those who come armed with more ambition than understanding, and its numbers in Egypt are growing strong once more. Some believe that it may

be time to attempt to rebuild a power base in Alexandria and thereby to resurrect the Fellowship's glories of old.

ELSEWHERE

The Order of Hermes takes its power where it may, and slowly works to expand into every place not currently under its sway. Whether this takes the form of caravans to India to establish a chantry there, or expeditions to the African heartland to learn the mystic secrets of its people matters little. One can be certain that the Order will not relent until it claims chantries the world over and the practitioners of all mystic arts everywhere bend knee to the Council of Primi. If the Fellowship does not have magi in a place known to it, rest assured there are plans to have wizards of the Order there within a decade at most.

THE CODE OF HERMES

The law of the Order, the Code of Hermes, was (after great debate over content and not a few *certámen* challenges) ratified into common usage within the Fellowship in 787 A.D. It has stood for just about four-and-a-half centuries now without modification, though its broad and sweeping strictures are further interpreted through a body of ancillary law known as the *Peripheral Corrigenda*. These secondary rules, however, are most often of interest only to members of House Quaesitor (and, of course, to those who stand accused of infractions of Hermetic law).

The tenets of the Code are as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

VI. *Upon reaching the Fifth Degree or higher, I shall*

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

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

Even up until the outbreak of actual violence in the Massasa War, violations of the Code, if discovered, commonly resulted in the execution of the offender. Technically, it is upon the second, third and seventh tenets of the Code of Hermes that the war upon House Tremere is predicated. Of late, though, offenses against the Code have often been casually disregarded, if it proves prudent or even convenient to do so, much to the chagrin of House Quaesitor as a whole. Thus, alliances with the vampiric enemies of the Tremere (who seem to be numerous, indeed), the pillaging of faerie mounds for their rich stores of Quintessence (for use as munitions in the conflict) and casual infringement upon the privacy of other Order wizards (on the suspicion of consorting with the "Devil Tremere"), for example, have all become unfortunately quite commonplace.

Now, only the most blatant or politically unpopular violations of the Code of Hermes seem to get addressed, as the pursuit of the Order's justice is buried under the atrocities of war and the suspension of morals that often accompanies a siege mentality. This varies, however, from place to place; what one can count on getting away with in a war chantry held by House Tytalus in the Carpathians is probably nothing like the leeway (or lack thereof) that one should expect in a great Hermetic library in Paris.

Still, there are some things one will pretty much never get away with in the Order. Diabolism (pacting with Hell) never carries any less a sentence than *Gilgul* (the everlasting destruction of the subject's ability to work magic in any way), while openly spurning the decision of a Tribunal (an inter-House body convened for the purposes of hearing trials within the Order of Hermes) will virtually always be punished in some way. Of course, this doesn't prevent a wizard from yoking a demon to his will (if it can be shown that he has not offered anything to it in exchange for its service) or from covertly undermining a Tribunal's rulings after a verdict has been handed down. Often, the only real law of the Order boils down to, "Thou shalt not get caught."

FIFTH DEGREE?

The Order of Hermes' formalized hierarchy is essentially a meritocracy based upon mystic power. This system is embodied in the Order's system of degrees, which serves to quantify a given mage's magical proficiency. The degrees of the Order are given in brief below (this is a more accurate, detailed list than the shorthand given on p. 37 of the *Dark Ages Mage* rulebook).

First Degree (Neophyte): At this stage, the magus-to-be is essentially an indentured servant, slaving away at a teacher's direction at all manner of drudgery while simultaneously committing the complexities of the mundane root disciplines of the *Ars Hermeticae* (linguistics, mathematics, Hermetic history and lore, literature, philosophy and the like) to memory.

Second Degree (Zelator): The Zelator's studies move out of the mundane and into the fantastic. The apprentice's instruction grows to encompass the practice of basic hedge magics. She is entrusted with important tasks for her mentor and her performance in these duties will help to determine how far she might go within the Order, as well as whether or not she possesses the elusive spark of *real* magic.

Third Degree (Practicus): The Third Degree is the final apprentice degree. At this time, the student chooses her Word (the single word that embodies her mystic identity) and strives to catalyze her understanding of simple enchantments into an awareness of the mechanics of mighty sorcery. This degree culminates with the attainment of a single dot of the Modus Foundation. The majority of Hermetic apprentices (probably six out of every seven) never move beyond this stage, remaining the lesser wizards of the Order for the remainder of their lives.

Fourth Degree (Initiate): By demonstrating the most elementary understanding of one of the Pillars of Hermetic magic, one attains the degree of Initiate within the Order. These wizards are the rank and file of the Order of Hermes and most full mages of the Fellowship are of this degree. Initiates serve as aides for more powerful wizards (in matters that cannot be entrusted to any Commoner), messengers between chantries and coordinators of mundane resources. Though it is unlikely, an Initiate is capable of holding lands (such as a *cray*) or title (like *Master-at-Arms*).

Fifth Degree (Initiate Exemptus): Upon attaining two dots in any Hermetic Pillar, as well as two dots in the Modus Foundation, the mage

graduates to the degree of Initiate Exemptus. To discern the wizard's proficiency with his Foundation—at this and all subsequent degrees—superiors employ careful monitoring, through the use of the Primus Pillar, to detect telltale ripples from the expenditure of Quintessence that a mage with too much power and not enough control will cause. At this point, the Hermetic magus is expected to begin the process of seeking out an apprentice of his own, though most members of the Order take years before settling on an appropriate prospect.

Sixth Degree (Adept): A mage who can demonstrate a rating of three dots in one Hermetic Pillar and the Modus Foundation, as well as the first dot of any other Hermetic Pillar, is accorded the rank of Adept. Few wizards of the Order ever realize within themselves the profound heights of discipline, erudition and understanding required to progress beyond this level of knowledge.

Seventh Degree (Adept Major): One who achieves a rating of four in one Pillar of Hermetic magic as well as in the Modus Foundation, three in another such Pillar and one in yet another, receives the degree of Adept Major. Magi of this level of power enter into the realm of policy-makers and trendsetters for the Order. Adepts Major are on the governing bodies of chantries and serve as some of the most important functionaries of the Fellowship.

Eighth Degree (Magister Scholae): After unlocking the secrets of the fifth rank of a Hermetic Pillar and the Modus Foundation, as well as the third level of proficiency with any two others, the magus is inducted into the degree of Magister Scholae. These wizards are the true leaders of the Order, ruling over lesser mages and determining the course of the Fellowship's future by dint of their great might and (hopefully) profound wisdom.

Ninth Degree (Magister Mundi): The final Hermetic Degree belongs to one who masters (achieves a rank of 5 in) every Hermetic Pillar, as well as in the Modus Foundation. Those who achieve this exalted station are very nearly demigods in terms of their power, and many boast sorceries unknown to lesser magi. Such mages are, however, often old enough to be almost completely out of touch with recent decades, mad with Twilight or arrogant to the point of megalomania. Those who would approach them are best advised to regard these nigh-omnipotent wizards with the same respect, caution and dread as one affords a spirit noble, demon prince or angelic overlord.

WHAT GOES AROUND...

By now, some of you are probably thinking that these Order of Hermes mages are really just selfish assholes with no respect for anyone or anything outside of their Fellowship. Actually, in many cases, that's pretty much spot-on. Of course, the Order isn't really doing anything that virtually *anyone* in the Dark Medieval wouldn't also do if they were in such a position. Acquisitiveness amongst the powerful isn't really seen as a vice, but instead as a basic right. The Order is just attempting to fulfill what it sees as its destiny: uncontested dominion over every mage between Edinburgh and Constantinople and the control over Commoners that goes hand-in-hand with it. The Order's insidious agenda of cultural assimilation is nothing new. After all, Rome, before its fall, used such tactics to profound effect. Ultimately, however, this overwhelming hubris is apt to have grim consequences for the Order of Hermes, even as the Mythic Age shudders, on the verge of surrendering its final breath. Pride, as they say, goeth before a fall...

SPELLS OF THE ORDER

REVOKING THE GIFT OF ADAM (CORONA ●●●)

Speech is what distinguishes men from beasts. Other than the grace of the Creator, it is only the power found in words that gives humanity the means to subjugate the base life of the Earth. All of the learning in the world is contained within language. Well does the Order of Hermes, stewards over the knowledge of the West, understand this. Conversely, to take language from a human being, to steal from them Adam's power to name and thereby control everything in the world, is to render that person subhuman. **Revoking the Gift of Adam** does just that, striking at the heart of what makes an individual human and making him incapable of using speech to express himself.

System: Success in casting this spell renders the chosen subject incapable of vocalizing his thoughts coherently. Somewhere between conceiving of words to speak and forming those words in the mouth, this spell creates interference for a length of time determined by number of successes rolled. Every time the subject wishes to voice a single thought ("We need

to go," rather than, "We need to go to the docks, where my cousin will give us the books we need," for example), he must succeed in a Willpower roll (difficulty of 6, plus one per success rolled in the casting, up to a maximum of 10), or else blurt out an incomprehensible garble of sounds. Telepathic contact, however, can still be conducted with the subject normally. A Corona 5 variant of this spell simply destroys the subject's awareness of language and ability to process it, making telepathic contact as useless as speech. When cast as an Ongoing Spell, this more powerful version of **Revoking the Gift of Adam** renders the subject *permanently* (unless reversed by other magic) incapable of using, comprehending or even learning language in any way, essentially taking away his ability to interact with humanity on any level loftier than that available to trained animals.

UTTERANCE OF THE 72 NAMES

(ANIMA ●●●●, CORONA ●●●●,
PRIMUS ●●●●, VIRES ●●●)

By means of this Kabbalistic ritual, a Hermetic magus is capable of raising a greater golem to his service. The wizard must first purify himself in mind, body and spirit, undertaking a lengthy period of meditation and reflection. During this time, he seeks to divest himself of unworthy influences that can (and will) sully the final product and, perhaps, render it mad or even evil. He then combines rich soil, unworked by human hands before its gathering, and pure, fresh water, to form a stiff mud out of which the body (which should be no less than eight feet in height and many hundreds of pounds in weight) can be sculpted. (Alchemically perfected clay is also suitable for use in crafting the golem's body.) The rite culminates with the invocation of the 72-Part Name of God, the slightest mispronunciation of which can strike the speaker dead instantly. If performed successfully, this spell will grant the mage a faithful and steadfast (if mute) servant possessed of a titan's strength and a pure heart. (Note that this latter means that the golem will often wordlessly refuse to enact cruel or immoral commands.)

System: Naturally, this spell is best undertaken as an Ongoing Spell (and, thus, likely requiring a massive outpouring of Quintessence and a not-inconsiderable investment of Willpower). If successfully cast, the **Utterance of the Seventy-Two Names** animates a free-willed golem of the highest order, with the following stats: Strength 10, Dexterity 2, Stamina 8, Charisma 1, Manipulation 1, Appear-

ance 0 (a massive, blocky, bipedal-yet-completely-inhuman shape), Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 2. The golem has 10 Health Levels: -0 (x4), -1 (x2), -2 (x2), -5, Incapacitated, Destroyed, and has four dice of armor that can soak any kind of damage, and an effective Willpower of 3.

The golem is a thaumavore and must consume a point of Quintessence *per day* or else lapse into a deathlike slumber. The creator may, at his discretion, deactivate the golem at will (incurring no ill will from the creature), reawakening it whenever he chooses by "feeding" it a point of Quintessence (often imbued into a piece of paper, inscribed with one of the Names of God, that is placed in the golem's mouth). The golem may be "healed" of any damage short of its destruction with an Anima 4, Primus 4 spell (one Health Level mended per success). A botch rolled in the casting of this spell is likely to cause Scouring Backlash (see **Dark Ages: Mage**, pg. 139) or to instantly animate the golem with a dark, twisted and brutally destructive spirit.

PLAYER'S TOOLBOX

THE MASSASA WAR

- You served briefly on the front lines of the Massasa War and know, firsthand, what these undead magi are capable of. You have witnessed atrocities no human being should have to see and have come to understand the futility of it all. If the Tremere wish to be vampires, then so be it. You now seek to convince your fellow Hermetic wizards to call an end to these hostilities and to conserve their strength for other, more important conflicts.

- You are from a Transylvanian chantry and were chosen, along with a handful of other apprentices, to enter into talks with what the Order has discerned



to be House Tremere's most brutal and monstrous adversaries in the vampiric world. You alone survived their "hospitality" and, as an emissary to their incomprehensibly cruel and savage courts, have a unique insight into the nature of these fiends.

THE VIPERS' NEST

- You are a proud member of one of the Houses of Hermes, bound and determined to fight against the trend toward homogenization that has swept through the Fellowship in recent years. You are proud of your House's traditions and accomplishments, and don't want to see them reduced to footnotes, with future apprentices noting them only in passing, as the coming centuries unfold for the venerable Order.

- You research the mysteries of *vis* itself and are firmly convinced that the fall of magic is at hand. You now seek to incorporate new secrets into the Hermetic repertoire, hoping that some elusive sorcery you find among other mages will stave off the end. Thus, despite the Herculean task that you know awaits you, you proselytize for the Order, hoping to convince mages of other Fellowships to unite as a single all-powerful mystic Fellowship (the Order of Hermes, of course), capable of surviving any hardship.

- Yours is a rebellious spirit and one ill suited to the decades (or even centuries) of kowtowing to the powers that be within the Order before you receive your "richly deserved due." Thus, you aspire to found a House of your own, bearing your own name, within the Order of Hermes, and thus win the esteem accorded a founding House Primus. Of course, in order to make this dream a reality, you will need allies, both within and without the Order, as well as a strong base of mundane resources and great control over the Pillars of Hermetic magic.

OTHER CONFLICTS

- Born into the Order, you were present, as a young child, at the fall of Mistrudge. You survived that terrible siege (and probably still carry some of the scars, physical or otherwise), and you strongly suspect that the Tremere *Massasa*, contrary to the Order's official position on the affair, were not involved. Now a magus in your own right, you search for the identity of the strange men who coaxed fire from steel and rallied Commoner soldiers to their banner. (See the Craftmasters, in the Appendix.)

- You are a researcher into some mystic phenomenon proscribed by the Order. Whether that means that you are a fae-hunter (for harvesting Quintessence) or a demon-summoner is irrelevant. The heart of the matter is that much of the rest of the Order may well wish to see you hang for your offenses, were they known. Still, you know the value of your studies and can only hope that, by the time you are caught, you will have accrued sufficient results to dissuade any thoughts of punishment.

- As a newly initiated magus, you accompanied your teacher and several of her companions from the chantry on the hunt for a dragon. The battle was terrible and you hid, emerging only after the earthshaking fall of the dragon literally tumbled you from your cubbyhole. You were the only survivor of the conflict and were given the title of dragonslayer, despite your complete lack of participation in the fight. Of course, the attention and accolades were wonderful (you even carry an enchanted blade cut from one of the beast's teeth), and you gladly accepted them. Of course, now a horrible creature of some sort is plaguing the countryside and your fellows in the Order have optimistically turned to you to settle the matter.





CHAPTER TWO: IN A DARK WOOD — “HEATHEN” FELLOWSHIPS

Invoke, People of the Sea, invoke the poet, that he
may compose a spell for you.

For I, the Druid, who set out letters in Ogham,
I, who part combatants,

I will approach the rath of the Sidhe to seek a
cunning poet that together we may concoct incan-
tations.

I am a wind of the sea.

— *The Song of Amergin*

THE OLD FAITH: KEEPERS OF THE FLAME

One petal for love, one for its lack, another for love, another for lack. Love, then lack... no more petals. It is lack then. So be it.

— Esmerelda, village wise-woman in training

Although the Mother Church reigns supreme and boundaries of Christendom extend to the reaches of the known world, the Old Faith is found nearly everywhere, clinging tenaciously to life like grass growing up between the cobblestones of a road. No matter how much the Inquisitors of the Church and the missionaries of the White Christ try to uproot it, the Old Faith endures, although those who believe in it fear that it may not endure forever.

Mages of the Old Faith — witches, druids, wise women, and cunning men — are found anywhere the flame of the Old Ways still burns. They come from many different cultures and lands, and their ways are often foreign, even to each other, but they share certain things that unite them as a Mystic Fellowship, albeit a loose-knit alliance that is as often at odds with itself as it is with outsiders. The pagans share a common heritage, a common enemy (in the form of growing Christian power, which threatens their way of life), and, most importantly, a common set of beliefs. For like all Mystic Fellowships, the heart of the Old Faith is a way of believing, of living, of *being*, that gives some of the faithful the power to work wonders.

THE TRUNK OF THE TREE: WAYS OF THE OLD FAITH

Although pagans come from diverse cultures in places across the known world, there are qualities that connect them, the ties that forged the Old Faith into a Mystic Fellowship in its own right. The expressions of these pagan ways vary from place to place and person to person, but they form the core of the Old Faith in the Dark Medieval world.

PAGAN VIRTUES

Pagans, like other people, hold certain qualities at highest importance. The most important of pagan virtues are vitality, courage, honor, and generosity. The ideal pagan of the Old Faith seeks to cultivate these things and holds them dear.

Vitality: The Old Faith embraces life and all that it has to offer. Therefore the ability to live life to its fullest is among the most important pagan qualities. Pagans are a vibrant, lively, earthy folk. They are given to physical activities and direct participation in the work and cycles of life. Even scholarly Old Faith mages do not shut

themselves away in towers or mosques to study ancient writings or ponder the secrets of the mystic arts. They find their knowledge and wisdom in experience; the world is their laboratory and their library.

Pagans respect vitality and *joi de vivre* in others and place a great deal of emphasis on the quality of life. Unlike the Christian faithful, who struggle and endure misery, secure in the knowledge of their eventual place in Heaven, pagan folk embrace life and make the best of what they have. Life is meant to be lived, not merely endured.

This virtue also means that pagans prefer death to the slow and inexorable loss of their vitality and their ability to enjoy life. While they respect age and wisdom and care for their elders, pagans are also a practical folk, and they do not wish to become burdens on their families and loved ones. Better to receive the coup than live as a cripple following a terrible accident. Better to die with dignity and honor than to waste away. This willingness to embrace death as much as they embrace life is one of the things that makes the pagan folk such fearsome warriors.

Courage: Vitality and the ability to enjoy life are nothing without the courage to do what needs to be done. There are many dangers abroad in the world, particularly for folk of the Old Faith, and those without courage are doomed to live their lives in fear, branded as cowards and cast out of pagan society — assuming they live that long at all. Courage is not necessarily foolhardiness (although some do confuse the two), nor is it necessarily bravery in battle, although that is a part of it. It is the strength of will and character to take action where others may hesitate, to stand on one's convictions and beliefs, and to stand by family and friends in times of need.

It takes a measure of courage to adhere to the Old Faith at all in the Dark Medieval world, where inquisitors burn heretics at the stake, and the mere accusation of pagan practices can mean your doom. Many pagans at least outwardly adopt Christian ways, attending mass and doing as the Church bids them in public. There is no shame in this; it is purely a matter of practicality. In truth, some pagans believe in *both* the old gods and the White Christ, and see no problem with the two coexisting. It is the Church that proclaims the old ways outlawed and heresy.

The opposite of courage is cowardice, perhaps the vilest thing a pagan can be. A coward is nothing — less than nothing — in pagan society. To be branded a coward is a terrible stigma, leading many of the Old Faith to foolhardy acts of bravery to avoid even the possibility of it.

Honor: Pagans value honor, meaning trustworthiness, and dedication to a code of ethics that includes these other virtues. Pagans say that a man's honor is all

that he really has in this life, and a person without honor may as well be dead. In fact, most pagans consider the loss of their personal honor a fate worse than death. Better to die honorably than to live with the shame of dishonor.

Among other things, honor means that a man's word is his bond. Oaths and promises are sacrosanct and a great deal of a person's standing in society is based on the strength of his (or her) sworn word.

Generosity: The Old Faith also values generosity, particularly toward the poor and unfortunate. The community has a duty to help others, and those who have been blessed with prosperity should share their wealth with those less fortunate. Generosity is part of the enjoyment of life. Those who have success should want to share their good fortune with as many as possible. Pagan leaders in particular are often judged by their generosity toward their people and their vassals. A master who sets a fine table and who welcomes guests with all that his home has to offer is a good man, while those who scrimp and hoard their wealth are mean, miserly, and untrustworthy.

An important part of generosity is the emphasis that pagans place on the proper treatment of guests. Many pagan legends tell of the gods taking the forms of poor travelers or beggars and appearing at the door, seeking food and shelter. Those who honor the proper way to treat guests are rewarded, while those who treat visitors poorly suffer the gods' wrath.

the old gods

Pagan folk honor and revere many — often dozens — of gods, including all the various tribal deities, legendary heroes, ancestors, spirits and faerie folk. Since most pagans recognize the existence of many gods, the gods of foreigners are usually just as real and valid to them as their own. Many pagans accepted the worship of Christ, seeing Him as just another god among many. Many were also willing to convert to the Christian Church, since matters of faith were secondary to success in life (which the Church could help assure), one of the reasons so few followers of the Old Faith remain.

Though the ranks of pagan gods seem endless, a few primary figures tend to appear among the various pagan peoples of Europe, and these gods often fill particular roles, or have dominion over things of importance to pagans. Although mages of the Old Faith might consider a particular god or goddess a patron, they generally honor them all, if only to be on the safe side.

Mother: Mother goddesses are quite common for pagans, usually associated with the living Earth and its bountiful growth (since women are the creators of new life). Danu of the Celts gives her name to the Tuatha

de Danaan, or "Children of Danu." Grain goddesses like Demeter, Ceres, and Cybelle are worshipped in Greece and Italy. Zemyna is the Baltic earth goddess (along with a host of agricultural goddesses), while Frigg, the mother-goddess of Scandinavia, is somewhat overshadowed by the goddess Freya, who has strong associations with magic.

Father: The divine father-god is the companion and consort of the mother goddess: the "Good God" Dagda of the Celts, Zeus or Jupiter of the Greeks (or Romans), Zemepatis, the Baltic consort of Zemyna, and the All-Father Odin of the north countries.

Sun: The life-giving sun is often associated with a particular god, such as Apollo of the Greeks and Romans, or Saule, the Baltic sun goddess. Other pagans do not see the sun as a god, but under the watchful dominion of the gods.

Moon: The moon is associated with deities of mystery and magic, particularly dark goddesses, who are honored by the followers of the Old Faith as their patrons and guides. They include the Greek moon goddess Artemis (called Diana by the Romans) and the goddess Hecate, the patron of witchcraft, worshipped by Thessallian and Tuscan witches. Menulis is the Baltic god of the moon, associated with the night and its mysteries, as is Ragana, the witch goddess.

Storm: Storms are a fearsome and powerful force, as are the gods associated with them: Zeus and his thunderbolts, the Scandinavian Thor and his hammer *mjolnir*, the Slavic Perun and his thunderous axe, the Celtic Taranis the Thunderer, or the Finnish Ukko and his lightning. Old Faith mages often call upon the power of the storm to do battle and to strike down their enemies.

Beasts: There are gods of the beasts of the wild, such as the Celtic horned god Cernunnos; the Greek Artemis, who is a huntress; and the Celtic Rhiannon or Epona, who is associated with horses. Various animals are also worshipped as gods, as with the bull cults of Crete and Greece, or serpents (*zaltys*) in Lithuania.

Battle: Many pagan gods are gods of battle. Indeed, one could say of some pagan folk that they do not have a god of battle; all their gods are war gods, if need be. The Celtic Nuada is a great king and leader. The dark Celtic goddess Macha is the scarlet-haired raven of the battlefield, whom all men justly fear. The Baltic god Kovas (for whom the month of March is named in the Lithuanian calendar) is their god of war. Ares and Athena are honored as war gods among the Greeks, called Mars and Minerva by the Romans.

Healing: Deities of healing and medicine are important to pagan folk who rely on the wisdom of herbs and folk remedies. Gods of healing include Diancecht (Celtic), who replaced Nuada's missing hand with one

of silver; Hestia and Aesclepius (Greek), goddess of the hearth and god of medicine; and Ausautas, Prusso-Baltic god of medicine.

Poetry: Poetry and storytelling are vital in a Dark Medieval world with few other forms of entertainment, even more so for pagan folk who often do not record their history in any other way. Gods associated with the spoken word include the Greek Hermes (or the Roman Mercury), the Celtic Ogma, the Scandinavian gods Bragi and Odin (who drank the mead of poetic inspiration), and the Finnish hero Vainamoinen.

Smithwork: Smithwork is seen as a sort of magic itself, and gods of magic are also often smiths, crafters, and shapers of things. The Celtic Bridget and Gobinu are both smiths, as are the Greek Hephaestus (the Roman Vulcan) and the Baltic Kalvelis. The *svartalfen* (dark elves) or dwarf-folk of Scandinavia are also renowned for their smithwork.

Cunning: Sly and cunning gods and goddesses are respected and treated with proper caution by pagan folk. They include Loki (and, to a degree, his blood brother Odin) among the Scandinavians, many Celtic faeries (known for playing tricks on gullible mortals), the Greek Hermes, and other nature spirits that dwell in the wild places of the world.

Love: Love goddesses (and, sometimes, gods), whom one may call upon to find and to keep love, are much honored in the Old Faith, but are also associated with the vengeance of love scorned or turned to bitterness. The Greek Aphrodite (and the Roman Venus), the Norse Freya, the Baltic Milda, and the Celtic Bridget are common goddesses associated with love.

Triple Goddesses and Gods: One quality of pagan gods that often confuses outsiders is that they often have many faces or aspects (usually three). This should not be so strange to the people of Christendom (who recognize the Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), but they sometimes do not understand when someone of the Old Faith refers to one aspect of a deity in one breath, and then another in the next.

PAGAN PRACTICES

Pagans have their own ways about certain things, and some of their traditions remain even in the face of the Church's rule over the civilized world. These practices are often found among keepers of the Old Faith, in one form or another.

Honor Price: When a crime or wrong is done to someone, he may demand an honor price from the perpetrator in recompense for the damage done. This is an important part of preserving the honor of the wronged party and seeing justice done. For some minor slights and crimes, the honor price is small and sets the matter right (since it also suffices as an apology and

admission of responsibility). It may be measured in money, but more likely in goods. For more serious crimes, including rape and murder, the honor price is great, and the victim may choose to set it so high as to ruin the perpetrator (although this is considered harsh unless the deed was truly foul enough that the perpetrator's life should be forfeit).

Storytelling: Many pagan folk are illiterate or make little use of written language. Their lore is most often preserved in the form of stories, epic poems, folk tales, and songs, passed down from one generation to the next. As the mages of the Old Faith are also keepers of its lore, they often learn these tales and songs and become capable performers themselves, either tale-spinners or minstrels. Pagan cultures honor these performers — the Celts in particular considered a bard inviolate. Keeping the old stories alive is one of the most important tasks in tending the flame of the Old Faith.

Sacrifice: The Old Faith recognizes the importance of sacrifice. It is a part of life that things must die or be destroyed to make way for new life. The living feed upon the dead as part of the cycle of renewal. Thus the slaughter of cattle and other livestock is a sacred act, which nourishes the land as well as the people. Pagan mages often read the future in the entrails of a sacrificed beast, with the flesh prepared as a feast for the people, considered blessed by the gods. Sacrificial offerings are made to keep the gods nourished and satisfied as well.

The Church often speaks of heathens practicing human sacrifice, and it is true that some pagan folk do so. Death has tremendous power as part of the cycle of life, so the sacrifice of a human life has great power and significance in comparison to that of a beast. Pagan traditions often tie the health and welfare of the land to that of the sacred king or priest. If the land falters or sickens, then the life of its mortal caretaker must be sacrificed to renew it. Captured enemies and criminals were also sometimes sacrificed so that their deaths would be sanctified and sustain the gods in their work. Human sacrifice is less common in the Old Faith than it once was, but there are some who believe that dire times call for dire measures, that the waning fires of the Old Faith must be renewed with fresh blood, and that not all sacrifices need be willing.

THE WHEEL OF THE YEAR

The cycles of the natural world are at the heart of the Old Faith. Indeed, the seasons of the year are the pillars of the Fellowship's magic. So pagans acknowledge and celebrate the turning of the Wheel of the Year with various festivals. Many of these are tolerated throughout Christendom, usually Christianized as the

HANDLING SACRIFICE

The issue of animal and especially human sacrifice can be a delicate and unpleasant one for modern-day folk playing in a **Dark Ages: Mage** chronicle. The best way to handle it depends entirely on the sensibilities of your group and the dramatic demands of the chronicle.

The truth is that pagan cultures practiced animal sacrifice. They slaughtered animals for food on a regular basis, so sanctifying this routine activity was a part of their spiritual beliefs. It was just one of the many somewhat messy and unpleasant truths of life that the Old Faith acknowledges. Pagans don't see anything wrong with it. It's natural to kill and eat livestock and game, as that is their role in the natural world.

Human sacrifice is a touchier subject. While some pagan cultures did practice human sacrifice, it wasn't common. The sacrificial victims were either prisoners and criminals (who were to be killed anyway), or volunteers who gave up their lives for the renewal of the land and the good of the people.

Such sacrifices were reserved for times of great need and seen as necessary. Keep in mind that in the pagan mindset in the Dark Medieval world, failing to perform the proper sacrifices could lead to terrible disasters. Better a few lives sacrificed for the good of all.

When dealing with sacrifice in your game, it's best not to glorify it or focus on every gory detail. Simply mention that it happens and get on with the results of the sacrifice or ritual. In some cases, you may want to emphasize the visceral nature of pagan ritual to contrast it with other Mystic Fellowships, but keep in mind that this is a sacred practice for pagans, not a sport or something done out of viciousness. Most importantly, don't force players into the role of having to have their characters make sacrifices if the player is not comfortable with the idea. Respect the players' feelings in this matter and try to discuss it with them before springing it on them in the context of the chronicle.

Finally, although it should be needless to say, it's best to leave any and all elements of blood sacrifice out of live roleplaying events altogether.

feast-days of various saints or other holy days, but their pagan roots remain, and followers of the Old Faith still celebrate them in secret. For mages, these festivals are times of power for working magic.

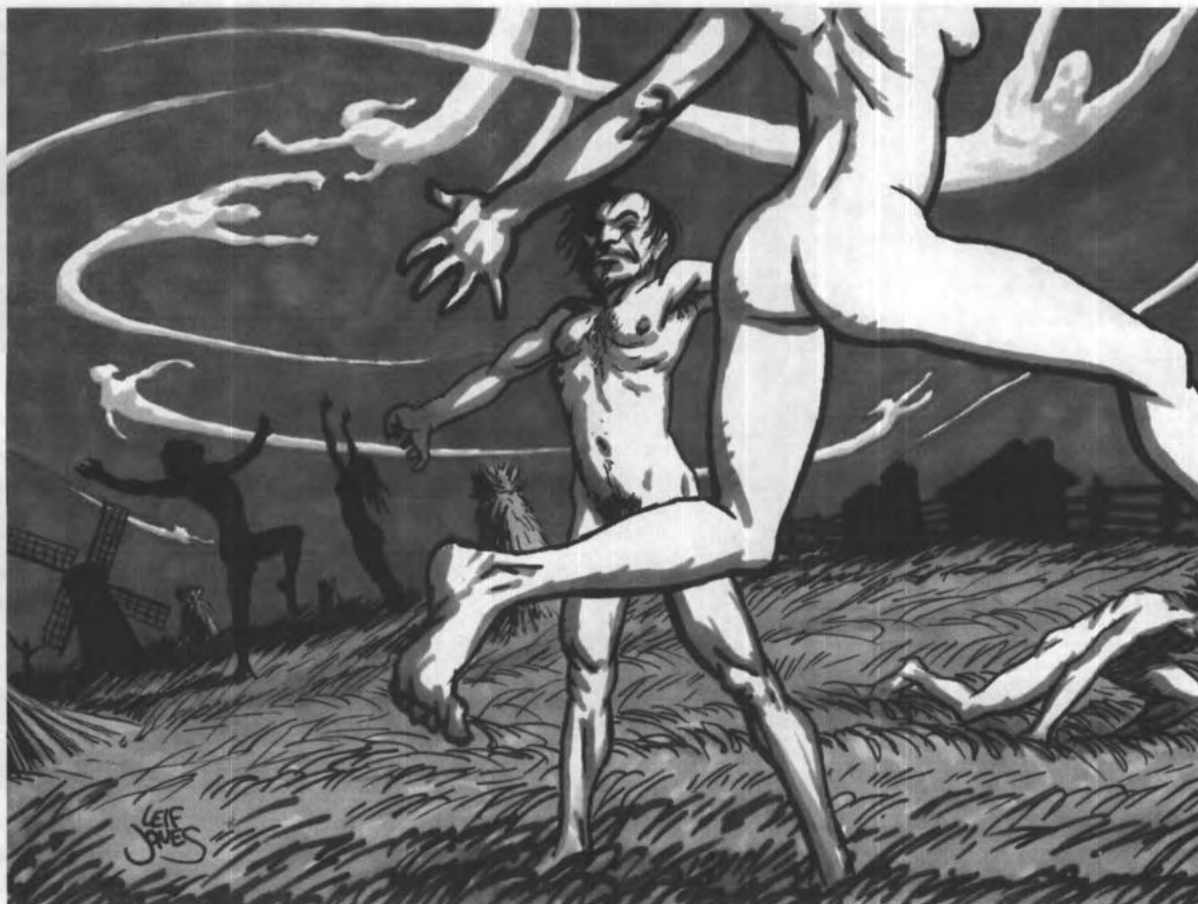
Samhain (Oct 31st): Samhain (pronounced SOW-eeen), also known as All Hallow's Eve or Hallow'een, is when the Celts celebrate the New Year with the transition from summer into winter. Samhain is the time when the herds are slaughtered and the meat cured for the coming winter months and when the final harvests of the year are done. It's the pinnacle of the year's labor, when the leaves fall, and the world turns toward darkness and cold. It's a time associated with death and the dead, when pagan folk honor their ancestors and those who have passed from the world. The veil between worlds is said to be at its thinnest on Samhain night, and ghosts, faeries, and other spirits may roam the world of the living.

Yule (Dec 21st): The Winter Solstice is the longest night of the year, when the cold and darkness of wintertime reaches its peak. Pagan folk gather to encourage the Sun to wax strong once more and to celebrate the power of the light reborn. In many stories the Sun is reborn in the depths of the underworld, although the Earth still slumbers under a blanket of snow and ice. Homes are decorated with evergreens like pine and holly to symbolize the return of life to the world, and a Yule log is burned in the hearth to bring warmth and blessings to the household.

Imbolc (Feb 2nd): Imbolc, also known as Candlemass, honors the re-awakening of the Earth as winter draws to a close. People light candles and fires and sing songs to encourage the Earth goddess to throw off her cold winter blanket and awaken. Dollies made of dried grain are placed in small beds to represent the slumbering Earth.

Ostara (March 21st): Ostara, Ostre, or the Spring Equinox is the transition from the dark half of the year to the light half. It is one of the two days of the year where day and night, light and darkness, are equal and balanced. After Ostara, the days grow longer and warmer as spring blossoms. Cakes and other baked goods are made from stores of winter grain, often with coins or other tokens baked into them. The person who finds them will have good luck in the coming year. Eggs (symbols of new life) are colored and painted and hidden for children to hunt and find, along with small treats and gifts.

Beltane (April 30th): Beltane, or May Eve, is the height of spring and a celebration of its fertility and boundless potential. Bonfires, known as "bale fires," are lit outdoors and the herds are traditionally driven between two such fires to cleanse and purify them, and people pass between the fires as well. The fields are prepared for planting and, on Beltane night, young and unmarried men and women often lie together, encouraging and celebrating the fertility of the earth with



their lovemaking. There is much dancing, singing, feasting, and celebration.

Litha (June 21st): Litha, also known as Midsummer and Sunstead, is the Summer Solstice, the longest day of the year. It honors the power of the sun and the peak of the light half of the year. After Litha, the days begin to grow shorter and the nights longer. Midsummer Night is said to be an especially magical time for faeries and nature spirits of all kinds, who are often abroad at this time.

Lammas (August 1st): Lammas or Lughnassad is the time of the first harvest, of reaping the first grains of the field and celebrating the bounty of nature. The corn or grain god Lammas falls with the grain in sacrifice, and his sacrifice provides the bounty that sustains the people throughout the rest of the year. Lammas is sometimes known as "the funeral games" because of this. A great feast celebrates the bounty of nature, particularly if the harvest is good and food is plentiful.

Mabon (September 21st): Mabon, or the Autumnal Equinox, signifies the beginning of the dark half of the year. On this day, light and darkness, day and night, are equal. After Mabon, night is longer than day and it continues to grow colder and darker as the time of

Samhain comes again. Mabon is the second harvest, when most of the produce — fruits and vegetables of the fields — is brought in. It is a time of drying, preserving, storing and preparing for the coming cold of winter.

THE BRANCHES OF THE TREE: PEOPLES OF THE OLD FAITH

Followers of the Old Faith are scattered across the Dark Medieval world like acorns from an autumn oak, huddled in the shadows against the coming winter. It remains to be seen if any of these seeds will take root and flourish, or if the tree will perish and the seeds find no purchase in the ground frozen hard by civilization. Even now, many of the pagan folk recall their cultures only as folklore and superstition, and carefully hide them from the watchful eyes of the Church.

Pagans are still a diverse lot harkening back to ancient cultures across Europe. Although pagan ways are almost too numerous to count, they still tend to fall into particular distinct groups, bloodlines that link them to their ancestors and the old ways.

CELTIC WAYS

Once, the Celtic peoples were spread across much of western Europe and the whole of the British Isles.

MAGIC AND THE WHEEL

Storytellers may wish to grant mages of the Old Faith a small bonus for performing magic associated with the appropriate Pillar on one of the eight holidays of the Wheel of the Year. Mabon and Samhain are associated with autumn, Yule and Imbolc with winter, Beltane and Ostara with spring, and Litha and Lammas with summer. The bonus might be a -1 reduction in the spell's difficulty, fewer successes required, or a break on the Quintessence required (-1 point). Many Old Faith mages work spells and magic on the holidays and may delay important workings until the appropriate time of the year.

The Wheel of the Year also offers year-round opportunities for stories associated with the different holidays and the challenges that mages might face at each. They might encounter restless ghosts on Samhain Eve or mischievous faeries on Midsummer's Night (encounters suitable for a great play, perhaps?). There may be cause for celebration on the holidays, or there may be need for the kind of help only magi can offer. Pagan folk must also celebrate their festivals with care. Although the Church often turns a blind eye to pagan festivals, they are ever alert for heresy, and may choose to take steps to restrain the excesses of pagan revelry.

Their works — stone circles, hill carvings, and such — can still be seen in many places, and their influence is still felt in many cultures, particularly those of the ancient Celtic nations, what are now the British Isles and parts of France. Now the Celtic tribes are gone but for the memories, tales, and beliefs of the pagan folk of Europe. Scattered survivors hold fast to the old ways, working to keep them alive in the face of the future.

The Druids

The druids were the priests, scholars, philosophers, judges, and mages of the Celtic peoples. They learned and maintained the rituals that connected the people with the sacred land and its cycles. The training of a druid was long, requiring 21 years before it was truly complete, and druids were expected to memorize the vast body of Celtic history and lore in the form of epic songs and poems. They learned astrology, herbalism, law, and secret alphabets based on the elements of nature, particularly trees.

The sacred symbols of the druids are likewise found in nature, particularly mistletoe, holly, and oak. Mistletoe was cut by the light of the moon on Midsummer's

Eve using a golden sickle and caught in a pure white cloth. The druids performed sacrifices to the gods, both animal and human, and read signs and portents from them. The wisest and eldest of the druids learned the secret paths of the Wyck and the hidden ways of the world. They treated with the faerie folk and the powerful spirits of nature.

When the Romans chose to conquer the Celtic lands, they naturally saw the druids as the greatest threat to their rule. Guided by their own magi (including the nascent Cult of Mercury, which would later become the Order of Hermes), the Romans systematically slaughtered the druids, burning their sacred groves, and depriving the Celts of their knowledge and guidance. Some druids fled to the secret places of the world, where they continued to maintain their traditions and pass on their teachings, hidden from both the conquerors and the annals of history.

THE SUPERNATURAL IN THE CELTIC TRADITION

The Celtic lands were once filled with wonders. The Celts believed that the boundary between the mundane world and the Otherworld was as simple as a riverbank or tree, and mages believe that there were once many shallows and passages to the Umbral realms in the Celtic lands. Certainly there are many supernatural forces still associated with them.

A thinning bloodline of vampires called the Lhiannan claims descent from the bloody gods of the Celts and clings to some of the wild places of the British Isles (particularly Ireland). More common are the skin-changers called the Fianna, associated with a fierce band of legendary Celtic warriors. They maintain close ties with their mortal kin and protect many of the old sacred places of the druids, keeping certain crays out of the hands of those who would exploit their power (while sometimes allowing those of the Old Faith access to them).

Finally, the Celtic lands have strong ties with the Fae, who are associated with the Tuatha De Danaan, the gods and heroes of Celtic legend. Once the Fae mingled freely with the Celts, and even now, ancient Celtic lands are often home to faerie mounds and rings of mushrooms, places where hosts of the Good Folk march forth on moonlit nights. The druids treat with the Fae, but even they keep a respectful distance from the mercurial and often mischievous folk. (See Chapter 4 for more on the Fae.)

House Diedne

The Roman conquest decimated the druids, but their greatest betrayal came from their fellow magi. A faction of surviving druids chose to join the nascent Order of Hermes as House Diedne, upholding their traditions and bringing their knowledge to the Order. Unfortunately, their alliance was short lived. Another Hermetic house, the Tremere, accused House Diedne of consorting with demons and pointed to the druids' many bloody-handed practices as proof of this. A wizard-war erupted that resulted in the destruction of House Diedne. Since then, those of the Old Faith have been slow to trust any of the Order of Hermes. Some say that the fate that befell the Tremere was the result of a curse cast by the last Diedne druid to fall, but there is no one alive who can say for certain.

GRECO-ROMAN WAYS

The Mediterranean is the cradle of faiths that date back long before recorded history begins. Mages of the Old Faith in those lands share secrets around their hearth fires that were old before the first stones of Rome were laid, before even the great temples of Athens were built. They are among the most secretive of the Old Faith, and with good reason, since the Eternal City of Rome is now the throne of the Vicar of Christ on Earth, the heart of the Holy Mother Church, which does not care for pagan doings in its own demesne. Still, the ways of the Old Faith remain.

Cult of Hecate

In the northern countries of Greece are witches in the service of the goddess Hecate, the Queen of Witches, and mistress of their craft. She is a dark goddess of the underworld and the crossroads, known for her triple aspect as maiden, mother, and crone. She is associated with the moon goddess Artemis (or Diana) in her maiden aspect, and her followers gather by the light of the moon to worship and call upon her. The Cult is largely made up of women, although there are some men within their ranks.

The Strega

In the states of Italy are the *strega*, those born with the potential for witchcraft and knowledgeable in the ways of herbs, potions, and charms. In particular they are known for the power of the *malocchio* (or evil eye) and the ability to break and banish such curses. Like their cousins in Greece and other lands, the *strega* gather on the nights of the full moon to worship and celebrate. They often perform their rites unclothed in the warm Mediterranean night, a sight that would shock and scandalize the priests of their communities. By day, most *strega* profess to be devout Christians, while practicing and keeping the old ways in secret.

THE SUPERNATURAL IN GREECE AND ROME

The lands of the Mediterranean have ancient magical associations. The mages of the Old Faith (and other Fellowships, like the Order of Hermes and the Messianic Voices) are aware that vampires dwelled among the ancient Greeks and Romans, and that some of these creatures may be there still, resting beneath ruined temples or in crumbling catacombs. Many fierce and ancient monsters exist in legend, including the lupine Black Furies (associated with the Amazons of New Themiskyra), and even worse things that lie in the underworld or within the Umbra, just out of sight and reach of commoners.

In the Italian states there are those folk born under the caul, their faces or heads shrouded when they emerge from the womb. They are known as *benandanti*, the "good walkers," whose spirits can leave their living bodies behind and roam the paths of the Dark Umbra, where they take up arms against malevolent spirits that would harm the living.

BALTIC AND SLAVIC WAYS

The lands between the Baltic and Black Seas are still wild and hold many of the old ways. Lithuania, in particular, remains a pagan fastness on the borders of Christendom. These lands embody the nature of the Old Faith as a Mystic Fellowship in many ways. They are a diverse patchwork of pagan beliefs, traditions, and practices that vary substantially from one village to the next, as well as from country to country.

The pagan mages of these lands are far from united. Indeed, they nurse and cherish ancient grudges and misgivings as much as any of the old ways. Old Faith mages from Baltic lands mix with those from Poland, Hungary, and Transylvania. Offshoots of the Valdaermen come with the Teutonic Knights and peoples of the Holy Roman Empire, and there are Spirit Talkers from Finland and Kiev living in the wild outskirts.

Like the Old Faith as a whole, what unites the disparate Baltic and Slavic mages is their common experience and belief in the natural world, particularly in the face of growing Christian might and influence. To them, the land is both holy and mysterious. The trees, rocks, streams, and very clods of soil have lives and spirits of their own. In particular, those of the Old Faith protect their sacred groves, known as *alka*, crays where the power of nature is felt in the form of Quintessence.

The natural world is a source of wisdom and understanding. The habits of beasts, birds, and flora are all

THE SUPERNATURAL IN THE EASTERN LANDS

Supernatural forces are at work everywhere in the Baltic and Slavic lands, particularly the untamed wilds. The people are well aware of the existence of things that others consider myth (or hope is merely legend) and offer them their respect and their deference. In particular, ancient vampires influence and even rule over parts of the land, overseeing their mortal charges, and those of the Old Faith know not to trifle with them. Werebeasts inhabit the dark forests along with faeries and other strange creatures. They jealously protect their domains, but treat well those who show them the proper respect (though most folk prefer not to meet them at all).

Ghosts abound in the dark and out-of-the-way places. The veil between the worlds of the living and the dead is thin in these lands, and the people are well acquainted with the comings and goings of shades. Ancestors are honored, and the dead are placed on pyres with the possessions they will need in the afterlife, meaning that ghosts here are often far better equipped than those in other lands, and more favorably disposed to their living relations.

omens of the will of the gods. Snakes, in particular, are held sacred, and it is considered bad luck to kill a serpent, since they are bearers of wisdom. Mages in these lands live close to the natural world, usually away from cities or even towns and villages, often existing as hermits. Organizing and rallying these keepers of the Old Faith remains one of the great challenges of the Fellowship.

THE FRUIT OF THE TREE: WISDOM OF THE OLD FAITH

The lore of the Old Faith is not in musty tomes or ancient carvings. It lives in the minds and experiences of those who keep the Faith alive and pass their learning on to new generations of students and apprentices. It is a living knowledge, always growing and changing. Therefore, the rites described here may differ in name and appearance from place to place, and even from mage to witch to druid or strega.

BEWITCHING GLAMOUR (SPRING ●●●, SUMMER ●●)

Witches are well known for their power to enchant and ensnare the hearts of ordinary mortals, and even

other mages. A witch can use magic to appear even more alluring and desirable, more than any mere mortal could be. The witch prepares an infusion of herbs — particularly rose and jasmine — and daubs it on her neck, face, and arms while invoking the powers of beauty and passion. Until the sun rises again, the caster's beauty and allure are enhanced, and few can resist her charms. At least part of the glamour is illusion; those who behold the witch see her as their idealized woman (or man, for male casters).

System: Each success rolled when casting this spell temporarily adds one to the caster's Appearance. Each success also adds an additional die to Subterfuge rolls when the witch attempts to seduce or otherwise influence another using her beauty and charms.

BITTER FRUIT (WINTER ●●●)

The ancient Romans and other people were right to fear poisoning from the *venefica* and other pagan herbalists, particularly since a skilled sorceress of the Old Faith can make even the most harmless foods deadly. When cast over a ripe piece of fruit, this spell renders it poisonous to any who taste even a bite of it, quickly causing sickness and death. The poison causes the fruit to spoil quickly and rot, becoming withered and entirely unappetizing after a day has passed, so the spell cannot be cast very far in advance.

System: Make a Stamina roll (difficulty 7) for the victim who tastes of the **Bitter Fruit**. If it succeeds, the victim is unaffected that round. If it fails, the victim suffers one unsoakable Health Level of lethal damage. This occurs for a number of rounds equal to the successes scored on the spell's casting or until the poison is neutralized magically. Ordinary means cannot save the victim.

CIRCE'S ENCHANTMENT (SPRING ●●●●, SUMMER ●●)

This rote is named for the ancient sorceress Circe, who dwelled alone on an island before the Greek hero Odysseus visited her. Circe used her magic to bring out the inner animal nature of Odysseus' gluttonous crew, transforming them into swine. This potent enchantment brings out the bestial nature of its subject or subjects, turning them into the creature they are most like at that moment. Gluttons become pigs or ravens, for example, while tricksters may become foxes, cowards become jackals or rabbits, the courageous become lions, the loyal and obedient become hounds, and so forth. The caster does not choose the form; the inner nature of each person chooses it, and each may be affected differently, although the witch can certainly arrange circumstances to suit her desires. Laying a feast

in front of starving men is almost certain to get them to become gluttons, for example.

System: One success and a point of Quintessence effects the transformation. The subject becomes a normal member of the particular animal species, with no awareness of previous human existence, only bestial instinct. The subject's clothing and possessions fall to the ground (and may be damaged or destroyed by the transformation). Multiple subjects can be affected at once; this requires Summer 3 and an extra success and point of Quintessence per person affected by the spell. Note that this lasts only as long as the duration allows, unless cast as an ongoing spell, which might be difficult to cast on unwilling subjects.

DOWSING (SPRING •)

In the Dark Medieval world water for drinking, cooking, bathing, and such must come either from a river or stream or from a well dug into the earth. Knowing where to dig can make the difference between endless hours of backbreaking work for nothing, and a well that can supply a village or town for years to come. There are signs for those with the wisdom to read them, but the witches and druids of the Old Faith can read nature like an open book. The caster takes a forked stick, preferably of yew or ash, and peels the bark, creating a "Y" shape. Then she paces off a particular place, feeling for a tugging on the dowsing rod that indicates water is below. Even the most God-fearing of towns may engage the services of a dowser in times of draught, since faith is cold comfort when the throat is too parched to utter a prayer.

System: One success is sufficient for the caster to find a suitable spot for a well, assuming that any water at all is to be found there. This doesn't get the well dug, only indicates the best place to dig. A simple Autumn 3 spell will produce the well, if desired, once the water is found. Alternately, a Winter 3 spell can cause the water to bubble up to the surface, creating a permanent spring on the spot.

ETERNAL SLUMBER (WINTER •••)

Many are the tales of curses cast by vengeful witches, often against beautiful maidens, although the tales rarely mention that the maidens are often the daughters of lords and kings, and the witches were persecuted or wronged by them. This curse, while terrible, is also one of the kindlier ones the followers of the Old Faith may inflict upon those who offend them. The caster prepares a special potion of valerian, rare mushrooms, and poppy. She may give it to the target of the spell in food or drink, or place it upon a blade or a sharp needle, since only the slightest pinprick is required for it to do its work. She can even mix it with

the wax of a candle, affecting the first person to breathe its fumes when it is lit.

The victim falls into a deep, death-like slumber and cannot be awakened. The sleeping victim may be mistaken for dead, and some have been entombed alive by their grieving and well-meaning loved ones. Fortunately, the victim does not age or suffer from deprivation or the elements while in the enchanted sleep. The witch sets one condition that will break the spell and awaken the victim. She may choose to tell the victim's loved ones or withhold the information to ensure their cooperation.

System: This is an extended spell, so 20 successes are required, along with 35 Quintessence and four points of temporary Willpower. When the victim is affected, make a Willpower roll (difficulty 7). Two successes are required to overcome the spell's effects. Otherwise, the victim falls into the slumber described above. A Medicine roll (difficulty 8) is required to determine that the victim is still alive, merely sleeping. **Eternal Slumber** lasts until the condition defined by the caster is fulfilled or until the spell is undone by magical means (which can be difficult, given the number of successes required).

EYE OF THE HUNTER (SUMMER •)

Harmony with the natural world is a part of the Old Faith's credo, and that includes the endless cycle of predator and prey. With a simple spell, a follower of the Old Faith can sharpen the hunter's sense to a fine edge, finding even the most elusive of animals. The caster can sense any nearby beast and its species merely by smelling, hearing, or simply feeling its presence.

System: Each success scored in casting the spell grants an extra die for Survival rolls involving hunting, and the spell's distance (as a hurried spell) is the range at which the caster may sense the presence of any beast (including birds and fish, but not people or unnatural creatures). Shapeshifters in beast form are sensed as beasts, and the caster's player can make a Perception + Awareness roll (difficulty 6) to determine that they are more than what they seem.

FAERIE GATEWAY (SPRING ••••)

The doors to the realm of Faerie open only at the whims of its inhabitants, or sometimes following whims of their own. Wise in knowledge of the Good Folk, the mages of the Old Faith learn how to open the doors to the Faerie Realm. The spell must be performed in a suitable spot, usually far from civilization, in a place that is in between, not fully one thing or another. The most common sites are faerie mounds and faerie rings (rings of mushrooms found in forest glades). Other spots include wooded glades, the shores of lakes, ponds, and rivers, the entrances of caves and caverns, and the

tops of lonely hills. The spell is best performed at dusk, the twilight time between day and night. This lowers the difficulty by one. If performed at night, the difficulty is normal. During the day it is one higher.

A **Faerie Gateway** guarantees neither the hospitality of the faerie folk nor the ability to leave the Faerie Realm (which requires another casting of the spell). Generally, faeries are at least polite to those who show proper respect to them. Travelers visiting Faerie may find that time passes strangely there, and the rules of the mundane world do not apply.

System: One success is enough to open the gate and permit a small number of people to pass through it (a half dozen or so). Each additional success allows twice the number of people to pass, although the Good Folk are not likely to take kindly to an invasion of their territory (nor are most Commoners willing to walk knowingly into the Faerie Realm). Returning to the world requires another casting of the spell.

THE GIANT'S DANCE (AUTUMN ●●●, SPRING ●●●●●)

The legendary Wyck created many of the sacred stone circles found scattered across Europe, particularly in Celtic lands in western Europe and the British Isles. Some say that they made these places by transforming giants or stands of men into stone by the light of the moon. Whether or not it is so, the mightiest magic of the Old Faith

can awaken great stones and even the Earth itself, rousing them to come to the aid and defense of the faithful. Like **Ancient Warder of the Land** (*Dark Ages: Mage*, p. 119), the stones or sods rise up and take on roughly humanoid shape, shrugging off the strikes of mortal-made weapons and swinging fists capable of smashing bone as easily as snapping brittle twigs.

System: The spell must be cast in a place of open ground or near a large area with relatively many stones. Extensively worked stones like castle walls and such are not suitable. The giant typically has the following stats: Strength 8, Dexterity 1, Stamina 8, Wits 1, Brawl 1, Health Levels: -0 (x8), -1, -2, -5, and it may soak any sort of damage that does not directly damage its pattern (including many sorts of aggravated damage). For every three successes, the caster may increase one Attribute by a point or add an additional -0 Health Level. The giant follows simple verbal instructions and commands from its summoner (such as "Attack my enemies" or "Guard this place until sunrise.") If the stone giant is reduced to Incapacitated, it crumbles into a pile of earth and small stones.

HEALER'S SIGHT (SPRING OR WINTER ●)

Healing and treating maladies of all sorts are common tasks for witches and wise folk.

Knowing the source of the problem and the patient's condition are the keys to effective healing, allowing the witch to



dispense the proper medicines, or work the right charm to banish the problem. So this simple spell permits the caster to sense the patient's condition. Casters using the Spring Pillar sense the subject's well-being (or lack thereof) and from that can determine what condition troubles them. Casters using the Winter Pillar sense the malady or affliction itself, its location and severity, and can choose their course of treatment from that.

System: One success reveals the general nature of the malady and the subject's condition (Health Level, etc.). Additional successes provide more detailed information. Each success grants an additional die for Herbalism (see Appendix), Hearth Wisdom, or Medicine rolls to treat the subject.

the hollow hill (spring •••••)

Legends tell of the Hollow Hills of the faerie folk, where simple passages in the earth lead into grand palaces and fantastic lands. There are also stories of faerie palaces beneath lakes or hidden behind veils of illusion. Some of these tales no doubt stem from mortals who have inadvertently stepped into the faerie realm, but others may come from the workings of witches. This enchantment creates a space that is larger on the inside than on the outside. For example, a humble cottage may contain the space of a grand palace. A simple hollow tree trunk may have an entire three-story house within. A small satchel can hold as much as several of its size, and so forth. Old Faith legend and folklore says that this spell was a gift from the Fae, although some Batini scholars believe that it is related to their lore.

System: This is an ongoing spell, requiring a minimum of 10 successes, which doubles the interior size of the object or container. Every additional 10 successes increase the multiplier by one (x3, x4, etc.). Roll once per day, as the caster traces the inside and outside lines of the structure or object with a potion made of spring water and rare herbs and mushrooms from a faerie glen. When enough successes are accumulated, spend five points of Quintessence, plus one per success, and one point of temporary Willpower per 10 total successes to seal the spell.

At the Storyteller's discretion, this spell may be part of a Chantry Background (**Dark Ages: Mage**, pp. 83-84). Background points can be spent to reduce the *apparent* size of the chantry; each point so spent reduces the chantry's exterior size to the next level down on the table, while the interior size remains the same. So four points invested in a chantry's size, with two points invested in reducing its apparent size, results in a farmhouse or barn with the space of a manor house within.

MAGIC MIRROR (AUTUMN ••)

Knowledge is often the greatest power available to mages, and the keepers of the Old Faith can use their lore to pierce the veil of distance and scry other places

and things. Despite its name, this rote doesn't necessarily involve an actual mirror. More often witches and druids use still pools or cauldrons of water, dropping small measures of sacred oils upon them and staring into their depths seeking vision. Others do use actual mirrors: silver, bronze, or sometimes treasured scrying mirrors of black glass or polished stone.

System: The normal casting distance determines how far the caster's perceptions may extend through the **Magic Mirror**: three successes for a matter of miles, four to cross a countryside and five to spy on a distant land. Other mages may sense the caster's scrying and take steps to deal with it in their own fashion. The caster may attempt to use magic on or against things that she sees through the magic mirror, but all such spells require normal (not hurried) casting and must achieve successes sufficient to cover the distance to their target, in addition to those required for the spell's normal effect. This means that long-distance spellcasting is both taxing and dangerous (since there is a greater chance of Backlash).

MERLIN'S RIDE (spring ••••, summer ••)

In legend, Merlin transported mounted knights across the breadth of England in a single night's ride, and followers of the Old Faith claim that it was through knowledge of the secret paths of the Wyck and other hidden places of the world. Skilled druids and witches can still guide travelers swiftly to their destination. When the spell is cast, a fog rises up around the travelers, and the world around them seems to become distant and vague, passing in a blur as they move ever forward, just able to see the road ahead and behind them. When the mist clears, the travelers find that they have reached their destination in a mere fraction of the time that it would normally require.

System: Multiply the normal distance traveled by the number of successes achieved in casting the spell. The spell's effects last for a day's travel (although the subjects may cover two or more times the normal distance); the spell must be renewed if the troupe travels for more than a day. Extensive interaction with outsiders or stopping for more than a brief respite also breaks the spell.

MOTHER'S BOUNTY (AUTUMN ••)

The time of harvest is one of celebration for the bounty of nature and for preserving and storing that bounty for the coming of winter. With their magic, the keepers of the Old Faith encourage crops to be fruitful, livestock to multiply and produce much milk, and generally secure the bounty and the prosperity of nature for their people. For many, this simple blessing is worth more than the mightiest magic. It has its price,

however. The spell requires a sacrifice to ensure the bounty of the land and its creatures. Most often this is a small offering of fruits and grains, and perhaps an animal. But in times of draught, famine, and great need, the sacrifice must be greater, perhaps a human offering to the gods. When the land withers and becomes ill, only the sacrifice of a sacred king will restore its health (which makes many kings in the Dark Medieval world ill at ease regarding the Old Faith).

System: The spell is a simple one. Only one success is needed, but the conditions of the spell may be more difficult. The caster must find and offer the proper sacrifice, or the spell simply fails (although no Backlash results, so long as one success is generated). Divination spells or visions may reveal the proper sacrifice, although some Old Faith communities have been known to err on the side of caution and offer a greater sacrifice anyway, just in case.

If the spell is successful, it ensures that the crops and livestock in an area are free from disease and generally healthy and bountiful. Each additional success can increase their yield by roughly 10% or spread the blessing over a wider area: the whole of a town, an entire county, an entire shire or barony, or the whole of a nation, each requiring one additional success.

ORACULAR HEAD (WINTER •••)

Headhunting is an ancient and honored tradition among many of the pagan peoples of Europe. While it is nowhere near as common as it once was, heads are still sometimes left atop pikes and poles as dire warnings to those who would violate the law or territory of a particular clan or people. The mages of the Old Faith know certain secrets relating to the collection of heads that make such grizzly trophies even more useful to them. A mage can preserve a severed head with a secret recipe of herbs, and animate it with magic, allowing it to speak whatever wisdom it knew in life and whatever insights it may have gained in death. Once, pagan witches and wizards took the heads of enemies as their advisors, and preserved the heads of noted sages and bards so their knowledge would not be lost.

The Valdaermen also know the art of the oracular head (Odin preserved the severed head of the giant Mimir to advise him; see **Mimir's Head**, p. 99). The knowledge may also exist in other lands. There are tales that the oracular head of John the Baptist (with ties to the Messianic Voices) advises the Knights Templar, although some say that the head in question is referred to as "Baphomet" and is far older and more powerful.

System: Cast as an ongoing extended spell, requiring 10 successes, with one roll per day of work. Pay 13 Quintessence points and two Willpower points to fix the spell and bring the severed head to a semblance of

life. Thereafter, the head will answer any and all questions the caster poses to it, to the best of its knowledge and ability. Oracular heads often gain some insights from the realms of the dead, but mostly know what they knew in life. Regardless of the head's original feelings, it is bound to obey the mage.

STORM BREWING (SUMMER ••••)

As they can ensure fair weather and good crops, so too can the witches of the Old Faith brew storms in their iron cauldrons. The cauldron or pot is filled with water and brought to a slow bubble over a fire as the witch mutters incantations and stirs up the waters, sprinkling herbs that give off a sharp, pungent smell. As the cauldron bubbles and the steam rises, dark clouds begin to gather until they cover the sky and the darkness is split by the flash of lightning and the peal of thunder. A witch can send rains to drown crops and fields, or to pour misery down upon those who offend her. Legends tell of weather-witching used to mire armies in mud and smash ships at sea. If the cauldron is emptied out or its fire doused before the spell is done, then it is broken and the weather quickly returns to its normal course.

System: This is an extended spell, requiring a minimum of 20 successes to create a storm sufficient to cover a small village or the like. Thirty successes can affect the weather of an entire country, 40 successes for an entire region for a hundred miles in any direction. Roll once per hour that the cauldron simmers and the caster works. The caster cannot leave the cauldron for more than an hour or so without breaking the spell, and even then a trusted apprentice or helper must attend to it to be sure the fire does not go out. Once the storm comes, it lasts as long as the witch works to maintain it. The storm is powerful enough to inflict minor damage to structures and ships.

STRAY SOD (AUTUMN •••)

Travel in the Dark Medieval world, particularly at night, can be a dangerous affair. There are few road-signs or guideposts except along the most traveled roads, and it is a simple thing for a traveler to become lost, particularly if aided by the enchantments of a witch. Tales tell of the "stray sod," the paths through the hills and deep woods that lead people astray, ending them up in places far from where they began or sending them around in circles endlessly. A rising mist or fog accompanies the magic, making it more difficult to see landmarks. The victim strays, ending up anywhere except where he intends to go.

System: A simple spell, requiring only one success. Each success increases by one the difficulty of the victims' Survival rolls to avoid becoming lost, and the

spell calls for an immediate Survival roll at the increased difficulty. (Keep in mind that if the spell increases the difficulty above 9, it remains at 9, but the victim's requires an additional success per point of increase above 9). A failed Survival roll means the victim is lost. A botch means that he is *hopelessly* lost, and may even stumble into some hazard (including stepping off into a gully or falling into a mire).

WITCH'S WIND (SPRING ••••)

The witches of the Old Faith can whistle up the wind, directing it to blow where and when they wish. Weaving the wind is not so difficult an art as brewing up storms (see **Storm Brewing**), although the effects can still be quite impressive. A skilled and powerful witch can topple over men, or even trees and small buildings, with a powerful gust. Another common use is to fill the sails of ships, or to becalm the waters and leave vessels adrift. By changing the direction of the wind, the caster can even keep ships from moving forward, forcing them to tack against the wind. Clever casters find a myriad of other uses for this spell: fanning flames, blowing away smoke and insects, and so forth.

System: The successes generated on the spellcasting roll become the effective Strength of the wind, which blows in whatever direction the caster wishes, up to 100 yards away. Storytellers can use the **Feats of Strength** table (**Dark Ages: Vampire**, p. 228) as a guideline for what the force of the wind can accomplish. Make Strength + Athletics rolls for characters fighting to move against the wind.

WITHERING CURSE (WINTER ••••)

Among the most dreadful of curses at the witch's command is the ability to cause victims to simply waste away and die. The witch must gather some part of the victim, such as a lock of hair, a few drops of blood, or nail parings, and cast them into a fire with bitter herbs while muttering the fearsome curse that as the fire burns so will the victim be consumed from within. The victim quickly falls ill, struck down by a sudden fever or chills combined with a terrible creeping weakness of the limbs and the breath. As each day passes, the victim grows weaker and weaker, wasting away until there is no strength left, and death comes as a merciful release. The witch may choose to undo the curse before it is too late, or someone may convince her to do so. Slaying the witch puts an end to the curse.

System: Each success generated on the spellcasting roll inflicts one Health Level of lethal damage, which can be soaked with Willpower. The damage is inflicted at the rate of one Health Level per day until the total damage is done or the victim dies. If the caster is not in the target's presence when pronouncing the curse,

then additional successes must be devoted to distance, using the normal casting distance guidelines (**Dark Ages: Mage**, p. 104). Casters with Winter 5 can inflict aggravated damage with a **Withering Curse**.

ELIXIRS

The mages of the Old Faith make use of various items in their magical work. They're particularly known for brewing up different elixirs and potions. Most are humble concoctions of herbs, made according to time-honored recipes and lore. They include healing tinctures and tonics, salves and medicines, as well as love philters and deadly poisons. Some of the preparations that ease pain can also bring the eternal sleep of death if doses are too large. The reputation of witches as poisoners is not entirely untrue.

FLYING OINTMENT

The witches of the Old Faith produce this strong-smelling ointment from among the most magical and deadly of plants: mandrake root, belladonna, and nightshade. Rumors say that they boil it with the fat of unbaptized babies, but simple tallow (or occasionally beeswax) is a far more common base for it.

When rubbed into the skin, flying ointment does not grant the ability to fly through the air like many believe. Instead it grants flights of the spirit, allowing the witch to fall into a trance and loose her spirit from her flesh to roam the world with the swiftness of thought. The liberated spirit can travel far and wide in the course of a single night and can see and grapple with the forces of the Umbra. The witch's spirit possesses all the abilities and magic of her mortal form, but is invisible and ghostly to things of the material world.

Flying ointment requires Autumn 3 to prepare, creating one dose of the ointment per success on the magic roll.

FOUR THIEVES VINEGAR

Legend claims that during the Black Plague, four thieves used a magical elixir that protected them from contagion and allowed them to invisibly plunder the homes and manors of the sick and the dying. The recipe for this potion comes from the wisdom of the Old Faith: a mixture of hot, spicy herbs is soaked in vinegar, then both drunk and rubbed into the skin (leaving a distinctive odor). Anyone protected by a draught and rubbing with Four Thieves Vinegar is rendered immune to disease for a matter of hours. The elixir does not grant the legendary invisibility; that comes from passing unharmed among the sick and dying, who have far more important things on their minds.

The vinegar requires Summer 2 to brew, creating one dose per success on the magic roll.

Love philter

Witches are known for their love charms and spells, and common folk seek them out to win the love of someone they desire. A love philter inspires lust as much as love, but is effective nonetheless. Make a Willpower roll for the drinker (difficulty equal to the caster's Spring or Summer Pillar — whichever is lower — plus four). A failed Willpower roll means that the drinker feels desire for the next suitable person that he or she sees. The desire inspired by the potion is fleeting, but it is usually not difficult to reinforce it so that it becomes genuine, or at least to make it binding so that a night of indiscretion offers a hold over the object of the user's affections.

It takes a total of 10 successes to brew a love philter using Spring 2 and Summer 2.

PLAYER'S TOOLBOX

Players interested in exploring different aspects of the Old Faith and its diverse mages may consider some of the following.

KEEPERS OF THE SACRED FLAME

- You are heir to a truly ancient and proud tradition. While all members of the Old Faith keep the ways of their ancestors alive in their own ways,

yours is a duty that you hold particularly sacred. You might be one of the last of the noble line of druids, or part of a family that counts pagan kings among its ancestors. It is a great honor, but also a heavy responsibility to live up to your potential.

- You are a mere shadow of what your ancestors once were, and you know it. Although you are outwardly proud and confident when dealing with other mages, inwardly you fear that your humble skills and knowledge are no match for theirs. The old ways are passing. You can feel it and you are not certain whether you will choose to remain true, and pass with them, if need be, or turn to one of these new Fellowships, seeking purpose in life.

- Your people have always remained on good terms with the Good Folk, the faeries of the wild, but now few if any honor them as they once did. The Church seeks to drive them out with prayers and relics as they would drive you out. To you, an alliance between the Old Faith and the Fair Folk seems natural, but will you risk entering Faerie to treat with the lords and ladies of the Fae? Moreover, can you trust them to keep to whatever bargain you may strike with them?



A BUNDLE OF STICKS

• Part of the Old Faith's strength has always been its diversity, but that has also been a weakness in recent years. Unlike other Fellowships, the Old Faith is a rudderless ship, without a leader, with each mage doing as he or she sees fit. You believe that if you are all united, the Old Faith would be a power to be reckoned with. It would be a force to rival any Mystic Fellowship, perhaps even to withstand the might of Christendom. But who will try to bring such disparate mystics together? Will it be you?

• The Kingdom of Lithuania stands as the last bastion of pagan strength in Europe, not yet fully converted to Christianity, but Christendom extends even there. The Church is organized and powerful, while the pagan folk are scattered. The king opposes wholesale adoption of Christianity, but common folk often blend Christian and pagan ways. You would not oppose this, were it not for the fact that the Old Ways are fighting for their very existence. How can you sustain them in the face of growing Christian might?

• Some within the Christian Church are not content to let the Old Faith die slowly through baptisms and catechism. Instead they have begun to wield the lash, the sword, and the torch as their weapons against paganism. The greatest tragedy is that many accused of witchery and "pagan ways" are all but innocent, but still it turns people from the Old Faith. You have sworn to oppose the Inquisition and to protect its victims, but will your efforts save lives or simply fan the flames that threaten to engulf all believers of the Old Faith?

SPIRIT-TALKERS: THOSE OUTSIDE

Do you hear? The wind howls. It speaks of a caravan that wends its way along the road. Men with metal. Men with scales. An army comes.

Armies cannot march with burrs in their feet. Go, spirits of thorn and needle, settle yourselves in their boots. Pierce their heels and slow their march....

—Pölkya, hermit and feared mad-man

Not even the Old Faith mages are quite as disparate as the shamans of the Spirit-Talker Fellowship. The Spirit-Talkers come from vastly disparate cultures: they are everything from Mongol shamans to Finnish spirit sorcerers, to Norse mediums. These mages share little except for their sensitivity to the spirit world. In some cases, they may have more in common with the spirits from the other world than they do with each other. But even the most disparate of these Spirit-

Talkers will understand the other's magic, because the language of the spirits is universal.

ANIMISM

The belief that natural phenomena have souls or that people have spirits that can and do exist separately from their bodies is called animism, and animism is the core of all other truths for the Spirit-Talkers.

The strange mages of the spirit world have an awareness of the creatures on the other side of the Gauntlet that others lack; it is the Foundation of all of their magic. They hear the speech of the animals, see the faces of the tree spirits, and watch the weightless antics of the spirits of the breeze. These shamans sense the actions of the spirits that compose the larger world-spirit, and through those acts they feel the slow-beating heart of the world-spirit Herself.

The key roleplaying challenge in portraying a Spirit-Talker is to keep the animistic worldview in mind at all times. A shaman never sees just a boulder; she sees a rock spirit. She doesn't see a mere storm coming; she sees a writhing mass of cackling, crackling, energized spirits of thunder and wind. She doesn't necessarily feel the need to greet every single spirit she encounters (many, if not most of them, are in a light slumber anyway), but at the very least she's likely to be aware of them. And while that kind of sensitivity is, inarguably, a gift, it also has its drawbacks.

SUPERSTITION

Spirit-Talkers may appear to be the quirkiest mages in any cabal. They may seem superstitious in the extreme. Their actions may appear completely random, bizarre and inexplicable, but they are not (generally) mad or delusional. They do what they do for a reason. The laws governing behavior in the spirit world are not the same laws governing behavior in the physical world. There are things that Spirit-Talkers do to propitiate spirits and ghosts that do not make any sense from the standpoint of someone who has no understanding of spirits or the favors they ask of their material allies. Furthermore, no shaman wants to explain everything she's doing in detail to her curious (or befuddled) cabal, so after the twentieth explanation, she's likely to forego any explanation at all and just assume that her colleagues can ascertain at least a portion of what she's doing from context and not jump to the immediate conclusion that she's possessed or insane.

Example: A cabal of young mages may pay a visit to Luojar, a wise old Spirit-Talker. She offers them what hospitality she can, but the young mages (who are not accompanied by a Spirit-Talker of their own) are put off by some of her odd habits. She grabs up a handful of dust

every few minutes and tosses it over her shoulder. She goes out behind her hut and talks with a pile of bones. She rolls her eyes back into her head and laughs from time to time. These things all put the young mages on edge. According to the young Hermetics, she appears to have some sort of brain fever that causes her to do these things, though she doesn't appear to be in distress. When the party leaves, they all feel slightly sad for the old woman, and their discomfort is likely to keep them from seeking out her wisdom again.

If the party knew the reasons behind her behavior (and it never occurred to her to share them), the party's response would have been much different. She tosses the dirt over her shoulder every few minutes to keep the awakened earth spirit beneath her hut happy. The elemental is a powerful one that protects Luojatar, but it also tends to go to sleep unless she takes steps to prevent it from doing so. Furthermore, the words she spoke to the pile of bones behind her hut were words of thanks to the deer spirits that keep sending aging deer to her door to collapse, keeping her from needing to go hunting. And the laughter she evinced was in response to the kind and flirtatious words of her husband's ghost, whom she speaks to regularly. He's waiting on the other side of the Shroud for her, and they both intend to be reborn together as soon as she passes from this world.

As a Spirit-Talker gains more experience, her behavior is likely to appear increasingly odd as her collection of obligations and bans gets larger and more convoluted. By the time a shaman reaches senescence, it's no wonder that others perceive them as mad. While many of these mages could explain themselves (at least to other mages), they generally see their business with the spirits as being private, personal, and none of anyone else's affair, so they're not disposed to explain all their quirks. Others simply deal with the quirks or they leave the shaman alone.

BEAST-MEN

Spirit-Talkers from the north, particularly around Finland, claim that the beast-men, the ones who take on the shapes of wolves and ravens and bears, are creatures of spirit as well as flesh. If anyone is going to know such things, it would be the Finns; not only do they have a long history living in a land that's relatively heavily populated by the beast-men, but that branch of Spirit-Talkers has an impressive collective memory, able as it is to call on information horizontally (collecting information from a large population of modern Spirit-Talkers) and vertically as well (by requesting information from the wise ancestors who have gone on to the spirit world themselves).

Many shamans insist, too, that the magic of the shapeshifters is very similar to the magic of the Spirit-

SPIRIT SPEECH

While some few spirits may be able to speak directly into a shaman's mind, most do not. This is rarely a problem with ancestor spirits (who are likely to speak the same language as the Spirit-Talker) or with astral spirits (who, by their very nature, are attuned to abstract things like speech, thought and language), but the spirits of the natural world are frequently hard to understand. Their grasp on the language of humanity may not be all a mage would hope for. They may inadvertently leave key words out of their sentences or confuse word order or any number of other trying habits of speech. Frequently, spirits may try to convey their meaning through images as a quick means to convey their meaning; the problem with this, however, is that mortal mages will not have any kind of context for the images used by the spirits, which, more than likely, refer to phenomena or events relevant only on the other side of the Gauntlet. The trick is to learn to interpret the spirits' metaphors, which, to the spirit, are literal. In time, all shamans learn patience. Spirits speak as they will and if the mage honestly wants to understand what the spirits are saying, she will listen patiently, with her heart as well as her mind.

Talkers. They, too, receive the blessings of the Chieftain, the Trickster, the Warrior and the Wise One — in their own way, of course. This similarity, they say, is proof of the similarities between the changers and the shamans, but even children of the same parents fight, and fights with the beast-men rarely end well for the mages.

SEEING THE SPIRITS

The world looks very different when one is sensitive to the spirits. The sun is not a big, hot ball — it is the face of a powerful spirit. The wind is not blowing by happenstance, but is rushing through trees trying to scratch an itch on the branches. The ocean is not malevolent and hungry (as many seafarers of the time alleged), but overly emotional and prone to temper tantrums. When one is sensitive to spirits, it is as though one is constantly watching the workings of the underpinnings of the universe. Having such secrets can't help but change the outlook of anyone so burdened. The eerie impression that Spirit-Talkers cast comes, in part, from the distracted look that's often on the faces of those who are tuned in to the events in the shadow world around them. Such mages are in a quandary. On one hand, they can see the true nature of places, and they can also catch impressions of the true

natures of others. Any time they try to share that knowledge, however, their explanation is likely to be seen as odd (at best). And, of course, if the shaman is ever wrong, then she's lost a great deal of credibility, even though, all in all, her insights into the nature of things is quite valuable.

Anyone opting to play a Spirit-Talker character should give some serious consideration to what it means to have a Sensitivity Foundation, and how best to roleplay that experience.

DIFFERENT FACTIONS

While they may use (more or less) the same Pillars, there's very little else that is shared by all factions of the Spirit-Talker Fellowship. That's generally not enough to account for a shared bond between two otherwise disparate mages. On the contrary, when two unaffiliated Spirit-Talkers meet, they may be extremely hostile to each other based on their proprietary approach to spirit magic. Alternatively, hostilities may spring from the mages specializing in antagonistic Pillars (Trickster and Chieftain, for example). Due to these issues, there's really no predicting what might happen when two Spirit-Talkers from different cultures meet. Such a meeting does, however, have a very high likelihood of being interesting.

MONGOLS

While the Mongols hadn't made it to Europe proper by the time of the Dark Ages setting, they are still approaching from the east at a steady pace. In 1230 the sack of Baghdad and the end of the Golden Age of Islam is still years away. The Mongols, however, were an animistic people and their mages would have certainly been Spirit-Talkers, drawing on the power of the spirits to work their magic. For more information on the Mongol hordes, check out **Mongols: Wind from the East**.

FINNS

Finland lies between Sweden and Russia, and frequently got caught up in skirmishes between the two. In the 12th century, Sweden invaded Finland, ostensibly to Christianize the country and set up a bishopric. They had a great deal of work to do. The animistic bent of the Finns was deeply entrenched, and the lore of the spirits never was entirely eradicated from the hearts of the common folk. The mythology of the Finns (later compiled into an enormous national epic called the *Kalevala*) is unusually intricate and includes mention of (and prayers to) any number of disparate spirits, from moon spirits to the more mundane spirits of fabric or farm implements.

The Finnish sub-faction of the Spirit-Talkers is not consigned only to Finland (Sweden and Letts in the Dark Medieval period), but can be found in the

INCLUDING MONGOLS

If you're running a game that's high in historical accuracy, you won't be including Mongols in a chronicle set in Europe in 1230. The vast Mongol army of Batu Khan, called the Golden Horde, didn't make it into Europe until a decade later. That said, this is a game, and how much historical accuracy can you really have when the focus of play is on magic use?

There are two ways of incorporating Tartars (the European term for Mongols) into your chronicle. If you only need a single Mongol character (if, for example, a character wants to play one), that's easy enough to arrange without breaking history. The Mongol Empire was vast. A lone Mongol Spirit-Talker could have lingered in Samarkand after the Golden Horde invaded, and then traveled to Scandinavia with a returning Norse trader. That's certainly the easiest way, and you don't even need to tweak history to get there. (Another way is through a mishap with Batini magic — see the tale of poor Kubotai, pp. 26.)

The other way involves invoking Storyteller fiat: Just say that the Golden Horde arrived 10 years earlier in the World of Darkness than it did in the real world. The Mongols' invasion of Eastern Europe was an interesting historical development, albeit a brief one. An encounter or two with the Golden Horde could be a very interesting event in your game. Coming as they do from so far away, there's no telling what kinds of odd magic the Mongols might wield or what kind of totally alien Fellowships, entirely unknown to Europe, their mages may belong to.

Ultimately, it's up to the Storyteller. The intensity of the game and the enjoyment of the group are the top priorities to which historical accuracy is appropriately subordinate.

northern reaches of Scandinavia, Novgorod, northwestern Russia and Siberia. These people of the midnight sun, stuck in endless day in the summer and endless night in the winter, have a long-standing reputation as bizarre and dangerous spell chanters, wizards and peasant shamans. The magic of the Finns is rooted in shamanism. These shamans of the north undertake visionary journeys into the darkness and the cold using the reindeer and the great white bear as their totem animals. They worship nature and believe that everything contains a secret soul that can only be seen by those with the gift of magic. They also worship the deceased and visit graves to commune with the ghosts of the departed.

FINNISH SPIRITS

The Finns were arguably the most animistic people in all of Dark Medieval Europe. Everything had a spirit, and many natural phenomena had representatives in the physical world. Below is a list of names for some of the spirits known to the Finnish Spirit-Talkers. While this list is by no means comprehensive, it shows just how attentive the Finns were to the subtle differences between spirits. A mage would call on a different spirit depending on whether he wanted a spirit of air, a spirit of wind or a spirit of gusting wind. Likewise, every type of tree has its own distinct spirit.

Aallotar — Wave spirit
Hongatar — Evergreen spirit
Ilmatar — Air spirit
Kalma — Grave spirit
Kankahatar — Fabric spirit
Katajatar — Juniper spirit
Kivutar — Pain spirit
Kuutar — Moon spirit
Melatar — Steering oar spirit
Otavatar — Lord of the bear spirits
Pakkanen — Lord of frost
Pihlajatar — Rowan spirit
Puhuri — Spirit of gusting wind
Päivätär — Sun spirit
Sinetär — Woad spirit
Suvetar — Summer spirit
Terhenetär — Fog spirit
Tuometar — Chokecherry spirit
Tuulikki — Wind spirit
Tähetär — Star spirit
U'utar — Mist spirit
Vammatar — Injury spirit

Even with Sweden's aggressive proselytizing, Spirit-Talkers still hold positions of honor and authority throughout the Finnish countryside. They ally themselves predominantly with the spirits of the animals, of the earth, of weather, of fire and water and, of course, of the ancestors.

NORSE

The Valdaermen are not the only practitioners of magic in the northland. Norse magic also includes a form of shamanism that is practiced almost exclusively by women. This kind of magic is called *seithr*. A woman who practices this brand of magic is called either a *völva* (seeress) or *seithkona* (a female shaman). A male mage who practices Norse Spirit-Talker magic is called a *seithmathr*, which basically means shaman.



In the far northern wastelands, occupied only by arctic animals and giants, *seithr* and the Finnish forms of shamanism blend into one another, and the myths of the Norse and Finnish cultures intermingle promiscuously. Farther south, however, the two take on more distinct personae.

Norse Spirit-Talkers attend largely to the spirits of the dead. They commune with ghosts and seek answers from the shades of those who have passed from the world. While not as flashy as the necromancy of the Valdaermen *svalaholldr*, the insights of the *völva* are remarkable.

Those *seithkona* more attuned to nature spirits often make extensive use of the spirits of the elements, summoning and speaking with spirits of ice, snow, wind and, as their powers grow, even glaciers and volcanoes.

OTHER SPIRIT-TALKERS AROUND EUROPE

Those who have the required Sensitivity to spirits don't necessarily come from a long lineage of seers. The spirits bless whom they will with the Sight (a way of referring to the Sensitivity Foundation of the Spirit-Talkers), and there's little the common folk can do to close their eyes once they've been opened.

It is not a blessing to be able to see spirits, particularly if one does not have a mystically inclined family or culture to provide a framework for the visions one is burdened with. If two young girls are both born with the Sight and one of them is born in the Republic of Novgorod and one of them is born in the Holy Roman Empire, their experiences will not be the same. The former will be viewed as gifted while the latter will be assumed by Christian zealots to be crazy, if not heretical or possessed outright.

While it's technically possible for a Spirit-Talker character to come from anywhere, such a character is likely to have experienced a great deal of harassment and suffering if she did not grow up in one of the three main cultures (Mongol, Finn or Norse) that recognizes the Sight for what it is.

There remain in Celtic England more than a few "madmen" and "madwomen" who have the Sight. They typically live outside their villages and suffer the status of an outcast until someone in the village needs their abilities. More than most, the form of the Sight known throughout England is heritable (often with red hair and generally from the mother). Even those trying to break from their families' legacies of involvement with spirits may find themselves challenged to do so. Some with the Sight have been called to the Church to be monks or nuns, but they frequently find that they're not welcome unless they're capable of expertly ignoring the spirit world. Such "mad" monks and nuns (and even priests, on occasion) are among the few literate Spirit-Talkers in Europe.

specialties

The core of the Spirit-Talker Fellowship is animism — the awareness of, and interaction with, spirits. What kind of spirits the shaman deals with is likely to determine what her magic is like and what kinds of *rotes* she's likely to use. It has no effect on what *Pillars* she uses; it simply affects what the mage thinks she's doing when she casts a *rote* using a particular *Pillar*. A Spirit-Talker who gets information from a wise ghost, savvy to the ways of the dead, may not speak with the spirit of Owl, but both are accessing the knowledge of the Wise One.

INITIATION

The Norse, Finns and Mongol Spirit-Talkers have one great advantage over the random disparate shamans of Europe: They've had the benefit of being initiated into the mysteries of the spirits by others who have experience with such matters. They have the luxury of knowing that the visions before their eyes do not indicate that they're mad, but that they are blessed. Even if there is no other Sighted person in the shaman's family, there is likely to be another in the village, or close enough that the young person's family can send him away to study the secrets of magic.

In the absence of a mentor to initiate them into a coherent Fellowship, many young European Spirit-Talkers perceive their shamanic talents as a burden, a curse or an illness. None near them will likely dispel that belief and will, more likely, support it. Even friends and allies may counsel the nascent mage to ignore the visions that vex them. No matter how wrong the young shaman may think it is, however, there comes a point where he needs to initiate himself — to accept that what he sees is real and, while admitting such a thing might well mean the loss of his family, his friends, his church and his village, the only alternative is to slowly, horribly go mad as he denies the existence of truths he is confronted with every day.

On the other hand, being mad in some small communities brings a certain benefit: everyone fears to anger or lay a hand upon the mage, because God or the gods bless the mad now and then. Hence, some Spirit-Talkers might benefit from such a reputation, even though their "madness" is simply the animistic way of communicating with the unseen world. It's a benefit, that is, until the Inquisition comes to town — but that's unlikely in certain rural hamlets.

ghosts

The dead may give up their physical presence in the world, but that does not necessarily mean that they have left the world or that they are powerless in it. The Norse sagas are filled with stories of eerie *völvas* going to the graves of their ancestors to seek guidance from the wise dead.

While Valdaermen may animate bodies to do their bidding in the physical world, the *seithkonas* of the north practice their own version of necromancy, one that grants them insight and wisdom instead of raw power. There is virtually nowhere that ghosts cannot go and little that the uncountable legions of the dead do not know (or cannot find out).

While all Spirit-Talkers have a certain eerie presence to them due to their connection to the world of spirits, those mages who focus their knowledge and abilities on the dead often have such a gaunt and detached view of the world that it can make even other Spirit-Talkers shiver.

A Spirit-Talker trafficking heavily with the spirits of the dead is likely able to learn many secrets and use the Wise One Pillar a great deal. She may cause her neighbors to be haunted or she may grant them surcease from their conflicts with the troubled dead. In time, such a mage may enter the lands of the dead while still alive and return with tales that inspire terror in all but the bravest of men.

ANCESTOR SPIRITS

Ancestor spirits began as ghosts. Most ancestor spirits were legendary in their great accomplishments, and may have become local gods in their native villages long after their deaths. This kind of worship often has an impact on the spirits of the dead revered in this way, and a ghost subjected to the heavy pressures of memory and expectation is likely to change into something different over time. An ancestor spirit is a ghost who has, with time, lost his individual identity and merged in some way with an idea or a symbol to become something greater.

A great warrior killed in battle will first be mourned, and then remembered as a great warrior. As the deeds of the warrior are retold, they grow larger and the details shift until the tale is based more on what resonates with the teller's heart than on any actual deed the warrior may have performed.

This same process affects the ghosts of those known for their wisdom, for their cleverness or for their great leadership. These spirits, more than any others, are the representatives of the Chieftain, the Trickster, the Warrior and the Wise One.

A Spirit-Talker who worships ancestor spirits is likely to see the four Pillars of her Fellowship simply as

the reflection of the power of the ancestors of her village or her people.

NATURE SPIRITS

Animism ascribes a soul to everything, including boulders, trees and animals. The difference between calling on the gods of nature and the spirits of nature is almost non-existent, and the Spirit-Talker who communes with the spirits of nature might easily blur the boundaries between Spirit-Talkers and Old Faith mages.

A Spirit-Talker who focuses on the spirits of nature is likely seeing the Pillars of her Fellowship a little differently than one who ascribes her power to her ancestors. Instead of receiving the gifts of Chieftain, Trickster, Warrior and Wise One, a shaman who focuses on the natural world is more likely to feel she is drawing on the power of Sun (or Eagle), Ferret (or Wind), Storm (or Wolf) and Owl (or Oak). That doesn't change the underlying effects of the magic, but it will have an impact on the foci the shaman uses and possibly the appearance of the magic as well. Spirits reveal themselves through many physical masks. No Spirit-Talker is going to claim that Lion is the only real manifestation of Chieftain, or that Sun is, or that the great ruling ancestor Mirko Kainolainen is. The spirit's mask is not the spirit itself. Part of the Sensitivity Foundation of the Spirit-Talker Fellowship is indeed the understanding that the spirit of a thing is distinct from its physical appearance.

DAY-TO-DAY LIFE

The Spirit-Talkers (or spirit-touched, as they're sometimes called) do not have an easy time of it in the Dark Medieval period. Conformity is the best way to avoid calling attention to one's self, and calling attention to one's self is the surest way of finding trouble. Those who see spirits have, perhaps, the hardest time ignoring the existence of magic. Their eyes always have a certain haunted appearance, the toll for seeing things that others cannot. Worse, 99 out of 100 Europeans of the time would assume that seeing spirits is the same as seeing devils, and seeing a devil, in the public imagination, is indistinguishable from bargaining with one.

The exceptions to this rule take place in the rural hamlets of Ireland, Scotland and Wales, which are predominantly Christian but believe that God blesses the mad. For that reason, they may be inclined to tolerate the lunatic's behavior, so long as it doesn't become offensive and so long as he's not part of a *band* of lunatics, which is likely to make even the most compassionate villagers nervous.

Finland is the notable exception to this rule. Spirit-Talkers there are seen, accurately, as speakers with the spirit world, and they are frequently given

places of honor within their communities. A shaman going from Finland to anyplace else in Europe is in for a rude awakening.

Europeans consider those who see spirits as disturbing and vaguely diabolical. At best, those who see spirits are consigned to the outskirts of the villages in which they live. This is not to say that those living in the village do not consult them when they need answers to questions about the mysteries of love and death, just that those villagers are very stealthy about making their way out to the shaman's dwelling lest others see her visiting the heretic, the madwoman, or the strange old hermit out on the edge of town.

the pillars

Each of the Spirit-Talker's Pillars represents a powerful brood of spirits. They may or may not be ancestor spirits, but they all swear fealty to the same basic concept, and they all have a particular affinity for helping out Spirit-Talkers who give them the acknowledgement and reverence they expect.

The spirits represented by the Pillars come from all levels of the spirit world. Some are barely formed concepts, weak and ephemeral, while others are nigh unto gods. The archetypes of the four Spirit-Talker Pillars are ancient, and more vague and powerful than gods as they are typically conceived during the Dark Medieval. Obviously, as a Spirit-Talker becomes more sensitive to the nuances and variations of a given Pillar, she'll become better at detecting the handiwork of spirits. Better yet, as she becomes more aware of the spirit world, she will understand the way of increasingly more spirits, and they, by extension, will be more likely to acknowledge her power and respect her requests, allowing the shaman to become an ever more formidable mage.

There is no need to cause the guardians of the Pillars to manifest in the game unless the Storyteller and player both want to do so and there's a good reason for it. The Chieftain, Trickster, Warrior and Wise One are numinous entities that can fulfill their cosmological duties just fine through subtlety, coincidence and inspiration. Physical manifestation by such rarified entities is entirely unnecessary and best avoided.

That said, players may want to parlay with a representative of one of the four archetypes; what follows are descriptions of the physical agents of those disembodied principles.

chieftain

Authority and the forceful use of the will are the key elements in the Chieftain Pillar. The spirits representing Chieftain often manifest as patriarchs or father figures. In addition to the more obvious types of magic under his control, Chieftain also presides over matters

DREAM MAGIC

Dreams are one of the key entry points to the world of spirits. Many shamans think of dreams as temporary, internal shallows, a relatively quick and easy way to gain access to spirits when no other way will do.

There are some rites that can be done more easily through dreams than in waking life. The **Animal Speech** rote (below) can be done much more easily if the Spirit-Talker simply sleeps near the animal he's trying to understand. The mage's spirit can rise while he's dreaming and speak directly to the animal's spirit. When the dream is over, the mage's spirit returns to his body and slips back in. When he wakes in the morning, if he's disciplined enough, he'll be able to remember the conversation and make use of the information he gleaned.

Many rites that affect thoughts, dreams, perceiving and communication can be done with dream magic (at the Storyteller's discretion) at one level of proficiency less than it would take otherwise (i.e., a rote normally requiring Wise One 3 requires only Wise One 2 if done through dreams). Dream magic techniques cannot be used with rites that bring about any direct change in the physical world.

Dream magic can't be hurried. The shaman can't take a quick catnap and get this benefit. The shaman must meditate (or chant, or dance or spin, or whatever she does to get into a meditative state) on his goal before going to sleep. She must then get a full night of undisturbed rest. Some shamans may brew up certain concoctions that help with dream magic. These potions may put the mage into an extended dreaming state or allow the mage to dream while awake, but the dream magic techniques still require a full eight hours of dreaming (of whatever sort).

To use dream magic, however, the mage must remain lucid (aware and in control of what he's doing). Using dream magic requires a Wits + Enigmas roll to remain lucid enough to cast magic. Failure indicates that the mage sleeps normally and forgets to perform magic while a botch indicates that the mage is holding onto consciousness so tightly that he can't get to sleep to dream in the first place and suffers the effects of insomnia the next day.

of legalities, organization and order, granting and rescinding privilege, judgment, and, under certain conditions, punishment. The Chieftain's element is earth. Its totem animals are (among others) the eagle, the lion and the bear.

TRICKSTER

In sharp contrast to Chieftain, Trickster is about undermining authority, exposing hypocrisy and causing dogma to collapse under its own bloated, ossified bulk. The Trickster's brood includes a range of hyperflexible, cunning, clever and deceitful spirits. The children of Trickster take on many forms, so they are not always easy to identify. Some of them wear the shapes of animals, and others look like children. The Trickster's sphere of influence is large; it covers all forms of deception, illusion, madness, chaos, thievery, stealth and escape from consequences. This last aspect makes those Trickster favors difficult to find, capture or hold in any way. Trickster's element is water, and its totem animals are the ferret and the magpie.

WARRIOR

The Dark Medieval world has no shortage of spirits of violence. The Warrior represents conflict, violence, valor, strategy and anger. Warrior's children commonly take the guise of legendary war heroes or dangerous animals. Warrior presides over the obvious spheres of armed combat including armor, weapons and luck in battle, but also over strategy, brawling, lightning and other violent weather, fear and fearlessness and, ironically, dance. The Warrior's element is fire, and its totem animals are the wolf and the falcon.

WISE ONE

The Wise One presides over the hidden knowledge of crones and hermits, those secrets reserved for the aged, enlightened and perceptive. The Wise One represents the wisdom of the spirits, healing and sensitivity to the flow of mystical energies. The Wise One can manifest as either sex, and appears most often as a wise elder — a teacher, a grandmother, or perhaps a respected healer. Occult knowledge, the mysteries of death, lost secrets and spiritual enlightenment are all the purview of the Wise One, as are knowledge of baleful curses and the way of poisons. Wise One's element is air and its totem animals are the snake and the owl.

PLAYER'S TOOLBOX

Spirit-Talkers often seem the least common of all the Mystical Fellowships, but the fact remains that almost every large village has its crazy lore wife or enlightened hermit. While not all of these are Spirit-Talkers, there's more than a handful, ranging the length and breadth of Europe

THE CHRISTIAN ONSLAUGHT

- In Finland, the Balkans, and even certain regions of Cymru and Eire, the Christians have yet to

completely take over the land. You may be one of those magi trying to remain beneath the Christians' awareness. It's easier if you live in the wilderness, but it's harder if your family resides in town and has a reputation for dealing with spirits. Or, it may be time to flee your homeland. The Christianization of your world has poisoned everything. The hearts of those who were once your neighbors are no longer as sympathetic as they once were, and even the children are beginning to show more fear than wonder at your talents. What direction might you want to go to escape the Christians, and who will go with you?

CAGE OF MADNESS

- You know you're not mad. You see the spirits, and you talk to them every day just as you talk to your neighbors in your village every day. Those neighbors, however, are not so sure. They're inclined to say that you're mad, and possibly a threat. How do you deal with such attitudes? Is it better to remain in the village, or venture on, perhaps to find others who also see the world as you do?

CALL TO ACTION

- Something has happened in either the physical world or the spiritual world that is causing the spirits a great deal of trouble. They contact you to take care of the problem, but if you do as they ask, you may get yourself in a great deal of trouble. On the other hand, spirits have been known to cause a great deal of pain for those who offend or disappoint them.

ROTES

ANIMAL SPEECH (WISE ONE •• OR WISE ONE •••, CHIEFTAIN •••)

Animals are everywhere in the Dark Medieval period: There are rats in the larders, horses in the stables, birds in the sky and wolves (and other things) in the forests. Many mages learn to use the ubiquity of animals to their advantage by parlaying with them to learn what they know. Powerful mages even learn to have the animals do their bidding.

System: Communicating with animals requires only Wise One 2. To have the target animal(s) carry out the mage's orders also requires Chieftain 1. A single success allows a mage to speak with one animal during a given scene. A mage who gets two successes can speak with a bat and a dog in the same scene, for example. The number of successes the mage gets also determines how complex the instructions can be. One success allows for simple commands (e.g., "Don't bark" or "Throw your rider.") while five successes lets the mage convey even very complex orders (e.g., "Wait until the moon rises, then scurry down into the prison. Find where they're keeping the man with

one eye. If he's healthy, find the key to his cell and take it in to him. If he's injured or dead, come back and tell me by the time the sun again rises."").

Note: if the mage uses dream magic and simply sleeps a few hours near the animal he wants to communicate with, this rote requires only Wise One 1.

BANISH THE SPIRITS OF WAR

(CHIEFTAIN •••, WARRIOR ••, WISE ONE ••••)

The spirits can incite conflict where it did not exist previously, but they can also banish conflict from a place. With this rote, the mage clears the area around him, in line of sight, of any and all spirits affiliated with the forces of war, conflict, malice and violence. The result is that battles come to an immediate halt as participants all lose their urge to hurt each other. The spell lasts for one scene, but that is often enough time for the combatants to patch things up of their own accord.

A powerful side effect of this rote is that the Changing Breeds in the area of effect cannot regain Rage. They may leave the area of effect or they must wait for the next scene.

System: When the mage casts this spell, it drains the hostility from those around her. Those in the area of effect must make a Willpower roll against difficulty 7 in order to continue behaving in an aggressive manner. For every success the mage gains on a Sensitivity + Chieftain roll, the difficulty of the Willpower roll goes up by one. As per the usual rules, with a difficulty over 9 for the Willpower roll, more than one success is required. People can defend themselves with no roll required, but must make a roll to fight back.

BIND SPIRIT

(CHIEFTAIN •••, WISE ONE ••••)

When a shaman desires to create a magical fetish, he may bind a spirit into a specially prepared item in order to get the benefit of the spirit's services on demand. Binding a storm spirit into a staff, for example, would provide the mage with a staff that could cause dark clouds to gather, cause the wind to gust and send forth thunderbolts to smite his enemies. A cloak with a Trickster spirit bound into it might allow the wearer to look like someone else. The power of the item will, ultimately, depend on the kind of spirit the Spirit-Talker binds into the vessel. This rote does not help the mage locate or subdue the appropriate type of spirit, but simply binds the essence of the spirit into the vessel made by the mage.

System: The mage first needs to specially prepare a vessel of the highest quality for the spirit. If the vessel is to be a walking staff, then it must be made of sturdy wood of an appropriate type for the inhabiting spirit and it must be intricately carved with designs that please the chosen spirit.

Once the vessel is complete, the shaman begins a long period of fasting and chanting to coax the spirit into

the vessel. This part must be done as an extended spell. The mage may make one roll for every hour of in-game time spent on the ritual. The mage must get one success for every point of the spirit's Essence. After 24 hours, the mage needs to make a Stamina roll before each magic roll. The difficulty of the Stamina roll starts at 5 but goes up by one every six hours.

CURSE SHIFTING (WISE ONE •••••)

Inexperienced shamans may not be able to break curses, especially powerful ones, but they may still transfer the curse from one target to another. A witch's curse that causes terrible bad luck, for example, can be shifted from its original recipient to someone or even something else. This rote can redirect a curse onto another person, an animal, a plant, or in the case of particularly onerous curses, even a place. It can shift curses away from similar targets as well. If a particular locale, for instance, has been cursed so that anyone who stays there too long dies heartbroken, this rote could be used to shift the curse onto a goat. If the goat is then killed, the curse is effectively destroyed.

System: The effects of this rote depend on the number of successes attained on a Sensitivity + Wise One roll. Small curses (like those bestowed by old women with the evil eye) can be redirected with but a single success. All but the most powerful curses can be removed with five successes or so. An ancient and powerful curse enacted by a talented mage, on the other hand, could take 20 or more successes. With the numbers given here as guidelines, the Storyteller is free to determine how many successes are necessary to remove a given curse.

DEAD WORDS

(WISE ONE ••, •••• OR •••••)

The dead are not entirely lost to the living — not to those wielding magic, in any case. A Spirit-Talker using this rote can communicate, briefly, with any ghost within line of sight. Some shamans may need to touch the dead person's things while others may need to visit the deceased's grave in order to commune with her spirit. The seer-women of the north frequently visit the graves of their predecessors asking for knowledge that those old crones took with them to the other side. The wisdom of several generations of wise women can provide a lot of answers, after all.

System: Roll Sensitivity + Wise One. Each success allows the shaman to speak with the ghost for one turn. She must be at the grave of the deceased or someplace important to the person in life. With Wise One 3 she can summon the shade from anywhere, while Wise One 4 can cause it to manifest. The mage can hear the ghost normally and sees it as it remembers or imagines itself. Others cannot see the ghost and those who don't understand what the mage is doing may think she's mad. If the mage



Sensitivity + Chieftain roll. For example, if the mage rolled three successes, he is immune to

wants an extended audience with a ghost, she may want to perform this rote as an extended ritual.

Note: Sleeping on the grave of the person whose spirit the mage wants to speak with, and performing this rote through dream magic, allows the Spirit-Talker to perform this rote with only Wise One 1.

DENY THE CHARM OF DEATH (CHIEFTAIN ••)

The Chieftain spirit attunes mages to authority and clarifies for the mage who should and should not be wielding such authority. The dead do not properly have any say in the world after their death. This rote renders the mage immune to all supernatural charm and manipulation tactics used by the dead or the undead.

System: The mage is immune to a number of Dominate or Presence attempts equal to his successes on a

the next three attempts to use these vampiric Disciplines on him.

EXORCISM (WISE ONE •••• OR CHIEFTAIN ••••)

Christians are by no means the only people bedeviled by malevolent spirits possessing innocents for their own sinister purposes. Whether they are called demons, spirits, dybbuks or Banes, there is no question that the spirit world contains many types of creatures that can take control of the bodies of even good folk. Spirit-Talkers, knowing spirits as they do, are well suited to drive such spirits from the mortal vessels they have invaded. By sheer force of will the mage compels a spirit out of a person, place or thing.

System: If using Wise One to coax the demon out of its host, the mage makes a contested Willpower roll

SPIRIT TRAITS: ESSENCE

The Power spirit Trait listed in *Dark Ages: Mage* is the same as the Essence Trait in *Dark Ages: Werewolf*. This book uses the term Essence, interchangeable with Power. However, the Power ratings provided for the sample spirits in Chapter Six of *Dark Ages: Mage* should be halved to more properly balance with spirits listed in *Dark Ages: Werewolf*.

with the spirit, adding one additional die to his Willpower pool for every success on his Sensitivity + Wise One roll. The Chieftain variant doesn't even allow the invading spirit a roll, but it requires the shaman to roll one success for every 10 Essence the invading spirit possesses. A single success, then, will allow the mage to drive out any minor spirit with Essence of 10 or lower, while two successes allow her to drive out spirits of Essence ratings of 20 or lower and so on.

HORSE BRINGER (CHIEFTAIN •• OR CHIEFTAIN •••, WISE ONE ••••)

The Mongols use horses extensively, and being caught without a mount in the deserts and barrens they inhabit is often tantamount to death. At the very least, being without a horse is an almost certain wellspring of humiliation. Horses are a key manifestation of wealth among the Mongols, and those who have them benefit from an elevated social standing. The mages of the Mongols can summon horses, not just for themselves, but for their retainers and acolytes as well and may use horses as gifts or bribes.

System: For each success on a Sensitivity + Chieftain roll, the mage summons one wild horse for her or her allies to use. Animals so summoned may take up to a full day to arrive but they are completely obedient to the mage. This rote can be used to summon other animals as well (deer for food, for example). The more complex variant summons rare magical animals like gryphons, although it is rare even in the Dark Medieval for there to be many such creatures in the material world. Most such creatures must come through a shallowing, and this spell is best cast at such a place if the mage hopes for it to work. When affecting Bygones, the rote lasts only for one day per success due to the difficulty of commanding such powerful and willful creatures.

IRON GLARE (CHIEFTAIN •, WARRIOR •)

Terrible is the wrath of an angry sorcerer. Even those who don't know the shaman in question know intuitively that he is a formidable opponent. This rote enhances the mage's frightening appearance immensely, exaggerating every odd, disturbing or scary thing about him. He seems

bigger, crueler and more dangerous. The very shadows seem to menace those who would cross him.

System: Roll Sensitivity + Chieftain (or Warrior). The mage immediately seems more menacing, and for the rest of the scene, add his successes on that roll to his successes on any Intimidation roll. Everyone around the mage will feel the effects of this rote, but those the mage turns his full displeasure on suffer the effects the most. One success causes most enemies (those with a Willpower rating of 6 or lower) to back down. Two successes cause even high-Willpower opponents to back down. Three successes cause the target to become apologetic and submissive. Four successes cause the target to flee as quickly as possible. With five or more successes, the target of the mage's full displeasure completely loses it, curling up in a ball and possibly losing control of bodily functions. The Spirit-Talker's Eerie aura rating adds to this effect.

IRRESISTIBLE SUMMONS (CHIEFTAIN •••••)

The Chieftain spirit can grant the shaman the ability to call to him any one person the mage has ever met before. The individual so summoned immediately feels that getting to the spell caster is the most important thing in the world, though he can't explain why. The summoned individual is not in any way obligated to come alone. A king summoned this way, for example, would be free to bring a small army with him. Once the individual has come within 10 feet of the mage and greeted him, the rote has run its course and anything else that develops depends on the shaman and the summoned character.

System: Roll Sensitivity + Chieftain. Each success causes the target to do his best, for one full day, to get to the shaman. If the target hasn't made his way to the mage by the time the spell expires, it wears off and the target is left wondering what he was doing. The target does not remember where he was going or why. Performing this rote as an extended spell helps get enough successes to give even distant targets time to get to the shaman. The target does not get a roll to resist this rote if he is within a mile of the mage. If he is more than a mile away, he and the mage make a contested Willpower roll (difficulty 6).

LORDS' BANE (TRICKSTER ••)

The Trickster's relationship to authority is difficult at best. The shaman calling on the Trickster's power can counter the sway and charm of even the most charismatic and authoritative speaker, making even a wise and respected king's words sound like utter nonsense.

System: Roll Sensitivity + Trickster. Every success cancels out a success on any Charisma roll made by the target. If the mage gets more successes than the

targeted speaker, treat it as if the target botched his Charisma roll and misspoke or did something else to make himself look like an utter and complete fool.

OTHERSKIN (TRICKSTER ●●●)

The Trickster enjoys causing confusion of all sorts. By granting the mage the ability to change sexes, the Trickster spirit enables the mage to cause all manner of shocking mischief.

System: The mage changes sex. The effect lasts until the dawn of the next day. Two successes are required to complete this metamorphosis. If the shaman has extra successes beyond these two, they can be added to Charisma, Appearance, Leadership or Subterfuge on a one-for-one basis for the duration of the rote.

SACRED ANTICS (TRICKSTER ●●●)

Trickster smiles on fools and madmen — and, from time to time, on those who act like fools and madmen. This rote gives the mage the wherewithal to perform all manner of outrageous stunts and daredevil maneuvers, from standing one-legged on the back of a galloping horse to performing cartwheels across a battlefield to jumping from one boat to another in stormy seas. Actions that are bizarre or humorous are easier than those that are simply pragmatic or necessary. This is not a combat rote and can't be used as such.

System: This rote lasts for two turns per success on a Sensitivity + Trickster roll. For the duration of the rote, all Athletics roll difficulties for outrageous physical actions (like those listed above) drop to 5. If the activity is also humorous, whimsical or playful, the difficulty drops to 4. A character under the protection of this rote can't botch. For the purposes of botching, all ones are treated as twos.

SELF POSSESSION (CHIEFTAIN ●)

The Chieftain spirit instructs his children that self-control is fundamental to controlling any other thing. She who cannot maintain proper control of herself has no business attempting to control anything or anyone else. This rote grants the mage mastery of his own mind, preventing others from possessing him or controlling his behavior.

System: Roll Sensitivity + Chieftain. For the rest of the scene, subtract the shaman's successes from all attempts to possess or mentally control him.

SHELTERING WINDS

(CHIEFTAIN ●●, WARRIOR ●●)

Mongol shamans are reputed to walk through storms of arrows without ever even being nicked; this rote is responsible for those tales. The mage using this rote speaks with the wind and asks it to steer arrows

away from her. For the duration of the battle, the winds whirl around the shaman and blow incoming arrows off target, keeping the mage safe from harm.

System: For every success on the magic roll, one success is taken away from the archers' successes for the rest of the scene. This rote only protects against missile weapons; handheld melee weapons hit normally.

SLIP THE SHADOW (TRICKSTER ●●● OR TRICKSTER ●●●, WISE ONE ●●●)

Some Spirit-Talkers know how to split their shadow off from their body and send it to perform tasks of some sort. Some shadows simply act as distractions, while others are spies, relaying everything they see or hear back to their material self (the shaman). While the shadow is off pursuing the mage's agenda, however, he casts no shadow, a sign many in the Dark Medieval world interpret as a mark of diabolical affiliation.

System: The two versions of this rote grant the shadow different abilities. With Trickster 3, the shadow can simply roam away from the mage, possibly scaring superstitious folk or misleading an adversary. With the addition of Wise One 3, the shadow also relays back everything it sees and hears. The shadow is under the complete control of the mage. The shaman rolls Sensitivity + Trickster. Each success allows the mage's shadow to roam free for one scene. A botch on this roll indicates that the shadow has rebelled and gone off to pursue its own unfathomable agenda. Should that happen, the mage instantly loses half his permanent Willpower (rounded down). Willpower lost in this way returns at a rate of one point per day. Rogue shadows do not relay sensory information back to their material selves. When the mage's Willpower has returned to normal, he has grown a new shadow as well. His former shadow, meanwhile, is still out in the world, probably causing mischief, and could come back to cause trouble for the mage later on.

SLOW DREAM CURSE

(TRICKSTER ●●●, WARRIOR ●●)

The shaman who follows Trickster can play some lethal jokes on those who would war upon him. This rote slows targets down, causing them to move at the pace of a lazy half-speed dream. The shaman's enemy can feel himself slowing down and simultaneously sees the rest of the world speeding up (relative to him), but there's nothing he can do about it.

System: Roll Sensitivity + Trickster. Each success slows one target, giving him an initiative of one for the duration of the scene and reducing by one the difficulty to hit him. Movement rate drops to one quarter normal.

Vampires with the Celerity Discipline find that they lose one additional action per turn per success

gained by the mage. Thus, if the mage got three successes against a vampire with Celerity 4, the vampire would only have one extra action per turn. If a mage got five successes against a vampire with Celerity 4, the vampire is treated as any other target and his initiative number becomes one for the rest of the scene.

SPIRIT ARMY (CHIEFTAIN ••, WARRIOR •••••, WISE ONE •••)

Powerful mages do not need to sway the hearts or minds of men to create armies. A mage using this rote creates an army out of any plentiful appropriate items by forcing spirits into the items to inhabit them. The items affected by a single casting of this rote must all be similar: trees, corpses, suits of armor, even stones or sand. The mage may prepare these vessels beforehand (statues of clay or stone, for example, or man-shaped constructs of wood, rope and tar) or he may rely on whatever is handy (trees, corpses). Castle walls rip themselves apart to become stone minions of the mage and whole forests will uproot themselves to fight for him. Most mages prefer to prepare their army ahead of time, but some have been known to make do with whatever materials are on hand.

System: The shaman rolls Sensitivity + Warrior. The rote creates two "soldiers" per success on this roll, provided there are enough of the same kinds of vessels. The Mental and Social Attributes of these warriors are all 1. The particular physical Attributes of these soldiers varies depending on the substance from which the vessel was made.

Skeletons (Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Brawl 2, Melee 4)

Stone Elementals (Strength 5, Dexterity 2, Stamina 6, Brawl 4, Melee 1)

Oak Warriors (Strength 4, Dexterity 2, Stamina 5, Brawl 3, Melee 2)

Willow Warriors (Strength 3, Dexterity 5, Stamina 3, Brawl 3, Melee 3)

Animated Armor (Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 6, Brawl 2, Melee 4)

The spirits inhabiting the vessels are intelligent entities. They obey the mage who summoned them with a slavish devotion and depart the vessel they inhabit when the duration ends or when the mage drops the spell. Obviously, this exceedingly powerful rote is best performed as an extended spell.

SPIRIT-GUIDED ARROW (WARRIOR ••)

The Mongols are known for being terrifying warriors and exceptional archers. At least part of their reputation for archery stems from the common use of this rote by the Mongols' shamans. By calling on the spirits to direct their arrows, Spirit-Talkers can hit

their targets with extreme accuracy, in some cases even finding the one weak link in a coat of armor or other unexpected strategic vulnerable point.

System: For every success on a Sensitivity + Warrior roll, the shaman adds one success to his next Archery roll. Extra successes, as usual, roll over into the damage roll.

WELCOMING WATERS (CHIEFTAIN •••, WARRIOR •••, WISE ONE •••)

By commanding the spirits of the water to take action, the shaman causes any body of water larger than a pond to grow arms that pull people or even small boats down to the bottom. The water's arms are quick and strong and few who are caught unawares escape.

System: Roll Sensitivity + Wise One. The water puts forth as many arms as the shaman's successes. These arms have Strength and Dexterity ratings equal to the number of successes rolled by the shaman. Non-magical weapons, and even magical bladed weapons, do no damage to these arms. Pulling down even a small boat requires a minimum of five arms. The Spirit-Talker can be as specific as she wants when giving the watery arms direction. "Do not drown the girl, just hold her at the edge but drag down her companions," is acceptable as an order, as is "Let the small white boats pass, but pull down the black ship if it tries to pass through this river."

WIELD THE DREAMBLADE (WARRIOR •••••)

Those who revere the spirits of war are never helpless. Even when she has no weapon, the shaman can dream a deadly weapon into being. Though called a dreamblade, this "imaginary" weapon can just as easily be a dreamspear, a dream axe or any other melee weapon the mage is familiar with. The mage simply takes time to talk with the spirits, to imagine the texture of the weapon in her hand, to smell the metal of the blade and the heft of it and when she swings her dreamblade, it draws blood. Others cannot see the shaman's weapon, but they suffer its effects nonetheless.

System: It takes three turns of intense waking dreaming to call the dreamblade into existence. Mages may chant or growl or perform breathing rituals during this time. On the fourth turn, the mage is ready for battle. Regardless of the type of weapon the mage is wielding, damage is dependent upon the successes gained on a Sensitivity + Warrior roll. Since it is invisible, attempts to dodge the dreamblade are made at +1 difficulty. The dreamblade does [Strength + successes] dice of aggravated damage. Since it is partly a product of her will, the dreamblade remains in exist-

ence for one turn per point of permanent Willpower possessed by the mage. For the rest of the scene the shaman can re-conjure the blade by spending only a single turn remembering how the dreamblade felt in her hand.

WILLOW BODY (TRICKSTER •••)

The Trickster is, in part, a clown, and it just happens that some of the skills that he grants to evoke laughter also have other, very practical uses. The Willow Body rote renders the mage's body (including his bones) as soft and flexible as a willow switch and even allows him to stretch or compress his bones a bit if necessary. There are very few restraining devices or jail cells that can hold a shaman who knows this rote.

System: This rote lasts one turn per success on a Sensitivity + Trickster roll. The uses of this spell are legion. The mage can bend long bones 120 degrees, and while it feels odd, it does not hurt or cause any damage. Furthermore, the mage can stretch his limbs up to six inches per success — very handy when trying to grab something that's just out of reach. With some effort, the mage can squeeze his entire body through a square hole just three inches to a side. If the rote expires before the mage is through such an aperture, however, the mage may expire along with it, as he takes up to four dice of aggravated damage (determined by the Storyteller based on how much of the mage was still stuck when he reverted back to his rigid form). Needless to say, the pain that goes along with such a mishap is excruciating.

VALDAERMEN: BLEAK SECRETS

You would bribe me with spiced meats and barrels of mead? My cost is high, Jarl. I have lived many months in the ice and snow, eating bark and berry, with cold stones for my bed. Hardship is nothing to Odin's own man.

A hall of my own, then? With a bed and a wife? I scorn these things, the soft treasures of soft men. If you would have me as your liegeman, then you must offer a greater prize: A sacrifice to the gods and an oath to serve them, spurning the caskocked thralls of the White God from the desert.

— Urki Holgarsson, Godi and keeper of the runes

Life in the north is harsh. For many it is best described as solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short. Valdaermen (and their female equivalents, more properly called *Valdaerkona*, "women of power") utilize tools beyond those wielded by Commoners to delve into the mysteries and underpinnings of life and power.

Children of the snow and ice, in the high crags, icy fjords and lonely woods, Valdaermen possess the grimdest outlook of any of the magical Fellowships in Dark Medieval Europe. Their entire style of magic is founded

RUNE MAGIC

The futhark, the Norse rune alphabet (whose name is derived from the first six runes) is an actual working alphabet. Many Medieval Norse villages had rune stones at the center of town containing rune poems for the dead or the like. Runes were more than just letters, however, because each rune was also assumed to have a secret magical correspondence as well, and it was the magical correspondences that Odin revealed to those who hearkened to his wisdom.

Depending on how accurately you're wanting to portray rune magic in your chronicle, either the player or the Storyteller may want to learn about the runes and their magical or conceptual correspondences. Those interested in doing this may want to check out the section on rune magic in the Norse Magic chapter of *Dead Magic 2: Secrets and Survivors for Mage: The Ascension*.

on gaining knowledge through sacrifice. They know the stories of Ragnarok — the death of the gods and the fiery end of the world — by heart. They see how short life is and how little it can mean when it is spent idly, pursuing empty pastimes. To a Valdaerman, it is knowledge, preferably secrets — and especially magical secrets — that give life its meaning. Many of those secrets are found in the greatest gift of Odin the All-Father: the runes.

DAY-TO-DAY LIFE

Life in Scandinavia is changing rapidly in the Dark Medieval. The days of the Vikings, the glory days of the Norsemen, are long over, and those old ways are fading rapidly. The followers of Asatru, the old Norse religion, are becoming fewer as the Christian church schemes its way into the cities and from the cities into the towns. It convinces the kings of Scandinavia that a unified religion will help consolidate their power over the country, and so they encourage abandonment of the old ways as quickly as possible.

The Valdaermen maintain their faith in Odin and use the magic of the runes to hold onto those few areas that have not yet been completely lost. It is, in fact, due in large part to the older Valdaermen that the Christians haven't made faster inroads into Scandinavia. A master of even a single Valdaerman Pillar can make life for an invader very difficult.

Most rune-singers are farmers or sailors who study Odin's gift in whatever spare time they have. The long winter nights are perfect for meditating on the rune lore — one reason that Valdaermen often think of fall and winter as the most magically charged seasons.



Many residents of Scandinavia in the Dark Medieval, including those who study magic, are farmers, growing grains or raising cattle. While some Valdaermen may be able to nudge the strings of fate to bring themselves a life of wealth and ease, that's not the approach followed by most rune-singers.]

TROLLDOMR

The Norse word best expressing the whole of what we think of as magic is *Trolldomr*. It covers all manner of supernatural phenomena from magic use to mystical places and creatures. *Trolldomr* comprises the two main magical traditions of the Norse: *spae-craft* (rune magic) and *seithr* (the divinatory spirit magic practiced almost exclusively by women). Runes, which Odin provided to the world, are the purview of the Valdaermen, while *seithr* is the magic of the Spirit-Talkers, and according to legend, came to women from Freyja. This section pertains solely to those Norsemen who make use of the magic of

the runes. Those wanting more information on *seithr* and the magic used by the female seers of the northland are directed to the section on the Spirit-Talkers.

While they aren't as tied into the rest of the culture as the two Fellowships listed above, mages of the Old Faith are also well represented in the northlands. Frequently it is difficult to tell the difference between the blood runes of the Valdaermen and some of the blood-spilling magic of the followers of the Old Faith.

FATE AND FATALISM

The everyday perspective of the Norse people was that Fate was predetermined and that there was very little one could do to struggle against it. The three Norns spin the thread of men's lives, measure it out according to some formula known only to them, and then cut it when the individual's time is done. Why some live to hoary old age and others die in childhood is a secret unknown even to the wisest. Even the fate of Odin and Thor, the mightiest

PATRONAGE

One way Valdaermen attempt to provide for themselves is to seek out a wealthy patron and act as something of a "court wizard" in exchange for room and board. Even factoring in the potential danger of becoming a permanent vassal and giving short shrift to one's own magical insight and interests, there are many advantages to the patronage system for rune-singers, particularly young ones still finding their way in the world.

First and foremost, being a vassal to a jarl, a nobleman or even a king gives the mage a degree of security and a quality of life that are rare in the Dark Medieval. In a world where more people sleep in drafty huts on lice-infested blankets or straw, there's a lot to be said for sleeping in an actual bed in a room with a fireplace. Furthermore, a rune-singer in a court scenario is more likely than his more reclusive brethren to find himself in interesting company and to be presented with more opportunities to see the world — and to practice his magic upon it in a meaningful way.

Vassalage generally also comes with a degree of physical and political safety. The noble's guards and walls become the mage's guards and walls. Such a luxury can be very tempting to a mage, especially if he has made powerful enemies somewhere along the way.

Furthermore, being associated with a politically powerful figure, especially serving in the role of his mystic, advisor and miracle worker comes with a certain degree of prestige. If the mage is prone to getting in trouble, being associated with the noble may grant

him at least a modicum of protection from the law should others take offense at his behavior.

The patronage system is not without its drawbacks. Some patrons are only too eager to take advantage of a rune-singer's magic at every opportunity. These patrons will insist that the mage use magic for every little thing, preventing the Valdearman from doing anything to further his understanding of magic and the runes and also draining his reserves of Quintessence.

Another difficult kind of patron consistently asks the mage to perform magic that is beyond his capabilities. If the mage admits that he is unable to work a certain spell, his patron may complain, criticize the mage's ineptitude and threaten to terminate patronage.

While the advantages of patronage outweigh the disadvantages, in the end, the greatest potential threat of a life of patronage is complacency. Comfort is at odds with the sacrifice and hollowness that are at the core of the Valdaerman's Fellowship. It has happened before that a rune-singer has become so comfortable that he loses sight of the realities of sacrifice so much that he begins forgetting the most fundamental truths of his magic (in game terms: losing points from Blôt).

Dangers aside, however, many rune-singers may opt for a period of vassalage from time to time, if for no other reason than to get a taste of a life that they can never fully take part in.

of the gods, is already determined: they will die in the cataclysmic battles of Ragnarok. If the gods themselves were bound by Fate, then the common man had no hope of escaping his destiny.

In **Dark Ages: Mage**, the Valdaermen have an entire Pillar dedicated to manipulating Fate and softening its otherwise hard grip on those stuck in the day-to-day struggles of life. Whether magic manipulates Fate or is just the tool a mage receives to allow him to live out his predetermined fate is a mystery even to Odin himself. What the Valdaermen know is that the fates of those who wield *Trolldomr* are invariably more interesting than those who do not.

SACRIFICE

Many of the old sagas of the Norsemen speak of the power of sacrifice. Sacrifice of the self is portrayed as ennobling and empowering, while the mass sacrifice of animals is seen to strengthen the god to whom they were sacrificed. Odin in particular is seen as benefiting from the power of sacrifices made to him, and criminals were routinely sacrificed in Odin's name, an act that simultaneously (and very pragmatically) dealt with the outlaw and strengthened the All-Father. It is for this reason that Odin is referred to as the Gallows God.

Such acts, however, shed little light on the mysteries of Blôt, the Valdaerman Foundation. Blôt reflects the wisdom gained through giving of the self, the awareness that loss of vitality, ability or wholeness brings. The aura of emptiness that clings to the Valdaermen comes from this profound understanding of loss. The unfolding of any life is the slow sacrifice of everything to the forces of suffering, age, loss and death. In understanding that mystery, the Valdaerman learns how to sacrifice consciously and to knowingly give up what fate simply takes from others. By mastering that mystery, the rune-singer becomes capable of strategically giving of himself in such a way that it results in the carrying out of his will and larger goals or the empowerment of his heirs.

The final sacrifice made by Odin and the other gods was their sacrifice in Ragnarok, the last battle. In order to keep the giants at bay and prevent them from destroying the entirety of Yggdrasil, the world tree, the gods of the Norse sacrifice themselves to destroy the massed giants and monsters led by the traitorous Loki.

The Valdaerman Foundation, Blôt, represents a mage's power and ability to give of himself. Sacrificing livestock or prisoners to the gods may be fine for the gods, but it is not sacrifice in the sense that is intended by the term Blôt. Certainly, giving up those things —



GODS OF THE VALDAERMEN

The gods worshipped by the Norsemen are not the powerful, immortal gods of the Greeks. The Norse gods can fail, suffer and die. Significant portions of the religion of the Valdaermen pertain to Ragnarok, the twilight of the gods, when the world falls and the mortal gods of the North with it.

Most Valdaermen place the bulk of their respect with Odin All-Father, the one-eyed gallows god. It was he, after all, who hung for nine days on the side of an ash tree to gain the power of the runes; it was he who gave his eye that he might gaze into Mimir's well and know the future. And while all Valdaermen acknowledge his sacrifice, not all feel that he deserves their worship. Which of the gods a particular Valdaerman gives his highest respect to depends a great deal on his temperament.

Odin

Easily the most revered god among the rune-singers, Odin is a complex god who appeals to something in the nature of all Valdaermen. He embodies sacrifice — Blót, the Foundation of Valdaermen magic — as no other god does, and as such his place among the Valdaermen is secure. Odin is a god of extremes, a god of endings, a god of cunning and curiosity; when he has a goal, there is nothing he will not do to reach that goal. The All-Father is a role model to all Valdaermen in that way. Odin's deeds illuminate the path of knowledge for all the rune-singers who follow him. True magical knowledge is worth almost any sacrifice, and it is through sacrifice that knowledge of magic is obtained. Sometimes being cunning is enough to get the answers he needs, but on those occasions when cunning alone isn't enough, he has the dedication and fortitude to get his knowledge the hard way. He expects all Valdaermen to do likewise.

Odin is an enigma. He is a god of strategy in a land of warriors, a god of cunning where cunning folk (men in particular) are suspect and a god of death in a land where death is easy to come by. Like the All-Father, Valdaermen are inclined to be enigmatic, grim and cunning folk, and in the Dark Medieval, it is for this as much as for their magic that they are known.

Any Valdaerman using the Galdrar Pillar extensively is dealing with the power of the All-Father. Odin's sacrifice won the Pillar of Secrets for mankind, and those who use it owe him at least respect if not fealty. As Odin is also the great wayfarer of the Norse, those using the Fara Pillar in their magic are also likely to be invoking the Gallows God.

Loki

All cunning folk are not cut from the same cloth. While Odin is cunning in a clever, stealthy way, Loki beats him hands down when it comes to sheer deceit and pitting enemies against each other. A small minority of Valdaermen pay fealty to Loki. While rune-singers who revere Odin see sacrifice as empowering and ennobling, those who worship Loki see it as more of a necessary evil. If, through a small sacrifice, they can incite others to sacrifice themselves en masse, the followers of Loki will happily do so and account for

it later by pointing to the thorough results they obtained, even if those results include wholesale carnage. Many of the rites popular with followers of Loki use the Hjalдар Pillar. Loki's worshipers prize highly any spell that pits two enemies against each other, leaving the mage to walk through and gather up the loot afterwards. Some such mages sow dissent and trouble in their wake out of sheer habit. After all, if the conflicts they incite draw attention away from their thievery and lies, so much the better.

Any mage using the dissension-producing spells of the Hjalдар Pillar is likely invoking Loki when he does so, perhaps even writing his name in runes as a focus for the rite.

One problem with playing a worshiper of Loki in a game, however, is that they are exceedingly self-centered. Consequently, they have very little motivation to remain with a group for any length of time (assuming they don't get found out and whacked before they even have a chance to leave). If you can come up with a reason for such a mage to commit to such a group, the roleplaying challenge can be intense.

Thor

The Norse god of thunder is not a god given much credence by the Valdaermen. Thor is not a god of thought, magic or cunning. On the contrary, he is seen as a mighty, if somewhat dense, warrior — the attack dog of Asgard. Valdaermen may pay the storm god lip service from time to time, but most consider Thor a buffoon and a dupe of the real power players. A Valdaerman may write Thor's name in runes for certain Hjalдар spells, particularly storm-summoning or lightning attacks, but for the most part, the thunder god doesn't do much for the rune-singers.

The Norns

Urda, Skuld and Verdandi are the three women who spin, measure and cut the strands of men's lives. It is they, not the gods, who have the most say in the unfolding of the world. They know all secrets. Odin himself has gone to them on occasion to learn what the future holds. For that reason, some Valdaermen or Valdaerkona hold the Norns in highest reverence. Even if a particular rune-singer doesn't feel the need to worship the Norns on a regular basis, those using the Forlog Pillar are still frequently calling on the powers of the Norns and would do well to honor them appropriately.

Freyja

Valdaermen do not pay any particular homage to Freyja, although the *völva*, the Norse Spirit-Talkers, revere her as the mother of all *seithkona* (seer-women).

Tyr

Far more than Thor, Tyr is the god that most Valdaermen are likely to invoke when using the Hjalдар Pillar. As the god of battle, the more standard forms of battle magic — those dealing with strategy, weapons and armor, in particular — are likely to involve a Valdaerman's invocation of Tyr. It is worth noting that Tyr is the only god who has a rune named after him.

especially if the livestock are your last or if the victim hanged in honor of Odin is your only son — may make one feel the sting of sacrifice, but it is not the same as giving of one's own blood or losing an eye in the pursuit of greater understanding.

Characters who claim that sacrificing others is in keeping with the principle of Blót are mistaken. Not only is volunteering the death of another (human or otherwise) neither ennobling nor empowering, it reveals the individual as a coward who knows nothing of the true power of self-sacrifice.

THE *ARGR* STIGMA

The Norse adjective *argr* means “weak,” or “effeminate,” and Norse men who studied magic were constantly being accused of being *argr*. Magic, the argument went, was for those who had no other means of inflicting their will on the world; women, therefore, used magic because it was all they had, while a man was better off using his skills in battle to do the same thing. For a man to use magic was considered sneaky, unethical and questionable at best. In *Lokasenna* 24 in the *Elder Edda*, Loki dares to question even the manhood of Odin himself for using the magic of the runes. If even the Gallows God can be given flack for using magic, it's a certainty that a male mage in Norse society is going to take constant grief and be the subject of every possible slur to his manhood — at least until he is able to prove himself indispensable, either on the field of battle or some other way.

What that means is that being a Valdaerman is easier for men functioning outside of the Norse world or for women, though very few women feel compelled to become Valdaerkona. A woman with magical talent is much more likely to become a *seithkona* (a female seer) than a Valdaerkona (or *spækona* “rune woman”), and the eerie magic used by *seithkona* is that of the otherworldly Spirit-Talkers and not the rune-based magic of the Valdaermen.

DIFFERENT FACTIONS

Most European mages have a very particular notion of what Valdaermen are and what they look like, and that stereotype is accurate about 10 percent of the time. In truth, Valdaerman magical praxis is quite varied depending on a given mage's interests and place of origin.

Asatru Mystics: Galdrar

Among those Valdaermen who remain in their homelands, most maintain a reasonable balance in the Pillars they study. Galdrar, being Odin's own Pillar, is the most widely studied, and any rune-singer without any driving interest in specializing in a particular Pillar will likely be more versant in Galdrar than any other.

OUTLAWRY IN NORSE CULTURE

In the small villages of the northland, social order was crucial. When a village only comprised five large families, even moderate disruption in the depths of winter could spell disaster for the whole village. For that reason, all serious crimes were punished with outlawry. The term outlaw did not have the same romantic connotations that it sometimes has in modern English. An outlaw was someone who had imperiled the functioning of a community and who had therefore been forced from the safety of the village to wander the wilds with the animals. Few outlaws survived even the first night of their sentence. In essence, a sentence of outlawry was the death penalty. No one was allowed to give an outlaw food, clothing or shelter, and anyone who killed an outlaw was considered guilt-free and above reproach, free even from making monetary compensation to the outlaw's family. In effect, the only difference between a sentence of execution and a sentence of outlawry is that the latter gave the troublemaker a few minutes head start.

Larger villages often had a Valdaerman perform a rote (see **Banishment** in the rotes section below) to enforce the outlaw's sentence, making sure that no one gave any solace to those who had turned their backs on society and its rules.

These mages seek solitude. To their way of thinking, wisdom is not found on paths walked by a hundred others, but along the stranger ways of life: in the forests, in the shadow world, or in the deep halls of the mountain kings. Secrets call to these mages like lovers, and they take mystery to bed. Though these Valdaermen may seem grim and lonely to those who do not know them, such mystics commonly find that their secrets make better company than most people.

Pleasure Jarls: Forlog

Pleasure-loving, decadent or soft Valdaermen are likely to use their knowledge of the Forlog Pillar to assure themselves of a comfortable life, using magic to provide themselves with comforts that they could not get through sheer work alone. These mages are stuck with a double stigma: Not only is their masculinity called into question to begin with because of their use of magic, but they compound the sin with (what appears to be) laziness (though Valdaerkona following this path don't suffer from the *argr* stigma, they may encounter some problems from men who envy and covet their wealth). The truth is somewhat different. Learning magic is far harder work than crafting helms, building longboats or pillaging towns, and those who benefit from their studies in a physical or monetary way

are, in their own minds at least, entitled to whatever comfort they have forged for themselves.

Such mages often build enormous mead halls for themselves and retain vassals to guard them and their riches though, truth be told, any Valdaerman with enough mastery of Forlog to attain such a hall has ample magical skill to thwart the plans of any common brigand, thug or thief. Not infrequently, hamlets may grow up on the outskirts of such a mead hall, with the Valdaerman taking on the role of the local jarl.

Comfort and riches are the hallmarks of these mages. They wrap themselves in the finest furs and provide their retainers with plentiful food, good weapons and gold. In such circumstances, many Valdaermen find that they're willing to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous accusations for the comfort their magic provides them.

Wayfarers: Fara

The bored, the eager and the doomed all hunger to visit places that are strange to them. Valdaermen wayfarers specialize in the magic of navigation, travel and bypassing distance, use their knowledge of rune magic to satisfy that hunger. By the time of the Dark Medieval, Norsemen have visited cities as distant as Samarkand, Baghdad and Tangier. Their longboats have landed on the shores of Vinland (America), Iceland and Greece, and their best explorers have returned with items of sheer exoticism from India and even farther east than that. Much of this far exploration is directly due to the use of the Fara Pillar. Wayfarers slice distance to a fraction of itself, propel boats to speeds several times their usual, and cause skis to propel themselves up mountains.

While some Wayfarers are lone, wandering sorts, making their solitary ways through the snow and mists of Norway, Sweden and Denmark (not unlike the All-Father Himself), Wayfarers tend to be the least isolated of all the Valdaermen. They may linger in the larger coastal cities — Uppsala, Oslo, Lund — and offer their navigation skills for a fee.

SVALAHDÖR (NECROMANCERS): FORLOG AND GALDRAR

One specialty adopted by many Valdaermen is necromancy. The Winter Men of Kaldheim (see *Dark Ages: Mage*, pp. 153-155) are the foremost practitioners of Norse necromancy, and almost all of its techniques trickle out from that odd village.

There is no single Pillar of Valdaerman magic that grants control of the dead, but those specializing in necromancy combine Galdrar's connection to Fate and secrets with other Pillars to achieve certain necromantic spells. Combining Galdrar with Hjaldrar, for example, results in a spell to animate a corpse killed in

combat for the purposes of more violence. Combining Galdrar with Forlog results in necromantic techniques that manipulate death and the dead in ways that redound to the mage's benefit — using corpses to increase wealth or knowledge, for example. Combining Galdrar with Fara is more likely to result in pulling a particular ghost from the lands of the dead to question it; alternatively, it might allow the Valdaerman to make the journey to the Afterworld and deal with the dead on their territory.

Those Valdaermen who do not learn the Winter Men's techniques are left with only extremely difficult and inelegant rites that require a great deal of mastery for a modest effect. The *Unsleeping Swords* rite from *Dark Ages: Mage*, for example, requires the mage to pull a corpse's spirit all the way from its place in the Afterworld to replace it in the same body it occupied in life. By using a conjunctural Galdrar 3, Hjaldrar 3 spell, the mage can animate a corpse with any random violent spirit.

BATTLE-MAGES: HJALDRAR

It should come as no surprise that there are many Valdaermen who focus almost entirely on the magic of war. War was key to the Norsemen, and it was one of the things they were known for. The Byzantine Emperors long used Norsemen as their personal guards. Called the Varangian Guard, they were considered to be among the fiercest and most loyal warriors of the time. That many were Valdaermen wishing to escape the constant slurs of *argr* is quite likely.

A mage who specializes in battle magic is likely to put himself to the test physically at all times, preferring to train and study in the harshest conditions possible. Those who devote themselves to the exclusive study of Blót and Hjaldrar are likely to learn the ways of battle magic quickly and efficiently, though some find that they've specialized so much that their magic is good only in times of conflict and worthless in any other circumstance. Many of these rune-singers are fine with that trade-off, coming to believe (as other Norsemen do) that magic for purposes other than making war is somehow ethically suspect.

HAMRAMMUR (SHAPE SHIFTERS): HJALDRAR

Not all types of shape shifting are for purposes of war, but study of the Hjaldrar Pillar grants the ability to slip from human shape to the shape of an animal. The easiest animals to take the shape of are ravens, bears and wolves, but a Valdaerman is not constrained to just those shapes. At earlier levels, a *hamrammur* might be able to understand the logic of a predator's mind, while later on it allows the rune-singer to take on the full shape of such a creature while later still it allows him to assume the shape of an unnaturally large or powerful version of a given animal (a wolf the size of a large

BERSERKERS

Without a doubt, warrior cultures respect those who can both take and dish out damage on the battlefield, but any warrior expecting to last through more than one conflict recognizes the advantage of using strategy and intellect in combat.

Berserkers were warriors who deliberately worked themselves into an animalistic frenzy to gain strength and immunity to pain in battle. Berserker literally means "bearshirt," and some berserkers had particular items of clothing — a bearskin shirt, a wolf pelt, a helmet in the shape of a raven's head — that helped them complete their mental transformation. Some of these items were Talismans (also called Wonders) in their own right, bringing on the berserker's frenzy as easily as changing clothes.

Those who tried to rely on sheer fury to carry them through battles, however, were not seen as powerful warriors, but as fools. Warriors who relied on the berserker's frenzy in every battle were considered the idiots and clowns of the battlefield, and while other Europeans have conflated the notions of Norse warriors and berserkers, it is inaccurate and, to the real Norse warriors, offensive.

Rune-singers familiar with any of the many berserker rites (one of which is presented in the rites section below) may use them in combat, but they are not considered the be-all and end-all of battle rites, but, rather, a last-ditch approach in the face of unfavorable odds. As with any strategy, there are appropriate and inappropriate times and places for going berserk. A Valdaerman had best think out the consequences of berserking beforehand, because he certainly won't give them any thought once the feral rage takes over.

horse, a falcon with enough speed to snatch arrows from flight, etc.). When using a shape shifting Hjaldr specialty, you can re-roll any die that comes up 10, thereby possibly gaining even more successes. Specializing in one predatory animal alone allows the standard specialty feature and -1 difficulty for that shape.

PLAYER'S TOOLBOX

Valdaermen travel throughout Europe and can be found nearly anywhere. There are many hooks a player can use to get her Valdaerman character into the action of a **Dark Ages: Mage** game.

THE SCOURGE OF CHRISTIANITY

- By 1230 almost all of the Norse lands have been Christianized. Only pockets of those revering

the Asatru (the old Odin-worshipping Norse religion) remain in existence, and they're becoming increasingly rare as the Christians use means both martial and mercantile to push their god on other lands. It's possible that a Valdaerman character might decide to use his power to counteract the influence of the Christians in his homeland and possibly even abroad.

THE LURE OF KNOWLEDGE

- Valdaermen are known for the lengths they'll go to in obtaining knowledge of all sorts. A Valdaerman character may risk a great deal to find a great Wonder, study with a new teacher or venture to a new land. This might entail travel to the strange distant regions of the world: Vinland, Novgorod, Africa, India or farther. The question ultimately becomes, how far from safety is the character willing to go to get what he wants?

DARK PILGRIMAGE

- The *Svalaholdr* of Kaldheim are absolute masters of necromancy. If a Valdaerman character were inclined to learn such dark secrets, it would involve a long winter trek and deals with cunning and powerful old men. What might he learn and what might they ask in return for their tutelage?

DWARF MAGIC

- The Norse sagas contain numerous mentions of the forge-magic of the dwarves and the Wonders they create. If your character wants a Wonder beyond others, it might be possible for him to get one from the dwarves. There are a few obstacles, however: The kingdom of the dwarves can only be entered through the lands of spirit, and knowledgeable guides are hard to come by. Worse, dwarves are hard bargainers and greedy; what they'll likely want in exchange for the kind of Wonder the character might be looking for could be hard to obtain. What's it worth to you?

THE MAGIC OF THE NORTH

- Valdaerman magic is inherently performative. Norsemen see the act of carving runes for magical effect as the sort of thing that the whole community should see, and for that reason it should be moderately entertaining as well as effective. Performing magic in front of a crowd is considered auspicious and helpful, while magic performed alone is automatically morally suspect, presumed to be mischievous at best and malevolent at worst. While this is a fine approach in Scandinavia, a mage trying to perform magic the same way in a village in, say, England or Prague is likely going to find that magical praxis is different away from home.

ROTES

BALDUR'S BLESSING (FORLOG ••••, HJALDAR ••••)

Baldur the Brave was the fairest and most beloved of all the Norse gods. Everything in the world (except mistletoe) vowed that it would never let Baldur come to harm, and he was invulnerable to all weapons. This rote confers Baldur's invulnerability to damage to one target both by enhancing the target's good fortune and by making weapons shy away from hitting him. Only weapons of mistletoe (weak and accordingly rare) can damage the character normally while this rote is in effect. The Valdaerman must write (or carve) the names of all the substances that agreed not to harm Baldur on the target's naked body. Given how small the writing has to be, this takes nearly an entire day and covers essentially every square inch of the target's skin.

System: Roll Blôt + Forlog. Each success subtracts one success (not die) from all rolls to damage the target of the rote for the rest of the scene. Weapons made of mistletoe are immune to this spell.

DIRECT STRIKE

(FARA ••••, HJALDAR ••••)

This rote is one of the deadliest in the Valdaermen's repertoire. It allows the rune-singer to swing his weapon and hit an enemy regardless of the enemy's location. A mage might swing his axe in his own tower and wound or kill an enemy on a battlefield a mile distant. If the enemy is not in line of sight, the mage will need to use a Fara or Galdrar rote to locate the enemy, but once he has, he need do nothing more than swing his blade. The mage must etch his enemy's name into his weapon in runes. If he does not know the target's name, then he must etch a clear description of the enemy (which takes much longer). Once that given enemy is dead, the weapon used to kill him cannot be used again for purposes of this rote (or at least not until the old etched name has been hammered and buffed out of the blade). It is rites like this one that are responsible for the Valdaermen's bad name among their own people. Any rune-singer who gets a reputation for using this rote too often will likely be branded a coward, even by other Valdaermen.

System: Fara eliminates any distance between the mage's weapon and his opponent while Hjalдар helps the weapon's damage cross the distance. The mage gets two attacks for every success on a Blôt + Fara roll. He rolls his normal Attribute + Ability for that attack, and each attack takes one turn, unless he attempts multiple actions in one turn (see *Multiple Actions* in the **Dark Ages: Vampire** rulebook, p. 116). The target cannot see the blow coming and hence cannot dodge it. Under some circumstances (i.e., if the mage is wielding a blunt

weapon or if the target is a vampire or a werewolf) the target may be able to soak the damage. If this rote runs out before the target is dead, the mage can cast it again and need not use another rote to locate the enemy again (unless the enemy has somehow changed locations entirely in the intervening moments).

BATTLE SMITE

(FORLOG ••••, HJALDAR ••••)

The battle magic of the Valdaermen is legendary; this rote is one reason why. Battle Smite blinds and deafens the rune-singer's enemies on the battlefield, leaving them all but defenseless and makes them easy pickings for the mage and his allies. To cast this rote, the mage carves runes into a spear spelling out why the enemy must be defeated. This is fairly detailed work, as there is not much room on a spear shaft. Once the spear is finished, the mage jams it into the ground on the field of battle and the magic strikes his foes.

System: Roll Blôt + Forlog. The mage must be able to see the battlefield (either through sight or scrying) and score enough distance successes to reach it; he can use Fara 4 to cast upon an unseen battlefield. One enemy is blinded and deafened for each success on the roll. Mass melee combat, like that seen with the clashing of armies, is likely to require a seriously extended action (one turn per roll, but if the mage stops to defend himself or is forced to stop, all accumulated successes are lost). The mage can choose which enemies take priority, however, so if a mage is facing a force of a hundred men and gets only 10 successes, he can still target the leaders of the opposing army. A blind and deaf enemy has an effective Perception rating of 0, a Dexterity of 1, loses five dice from her roll to hit and cannot dodge attacks.

BERSERK GANGR (HJALDAR ••)

To the Valdaermen's dismay, the legend of the Norse berserker is one of the most widespread throughout Europe. Berserkers are not thought of as great warriors, but, rather, as fools and blade fodder (albeit reasonably useful fools and blade fodder). This rote, a simple predecessor to shape-shifting magic, instills those affected with a spirit of rage and bloodlust that lets them tear into their enemies with impunity — until the spell wears off. While the warrior is berserk, he does not take damage nor accrue wound penalties. He is violent, inspired and completely lacking in all higher faculties.

System: Roll Blôt + Hjalдар. The number of successes equals the number of turns that the rote is in effect. For the duration of the rote, the target's Dexterity drops by one and his Strength goes up by two; Charisma, Manipulation and Intelligence all drop to one. Furthermore, any

damage he may take while in his berserker state is deferred until the spell ends, at which point the target takes all of the damage at once, minus one Health Level for each success the mage got in casting the rote. The mage can cast this rote as easily on another as on himself, although the target must be more than willing — he must be enthusiastic about the battle he is about to enter.

BORROWING GUNGNIR (HJALDAR ●●●)

Odin's legendary spear Gungnir is among the most lethal weapons known to the Valdaermen. By scratching its name in runes on the shaft of any well-crafted spear, that spear takes on some of the Gallows God's power.

System: Roll Blôt + Hjalдар. For the rest of the scene, every time the spear strikes its target it does the number of successes as additional dice of aggravated damage to the target on top of the spear's normal damage. The spear may not be broken while it is the reflection of Gungnir. No human-forged spear may reflect the glory of Gungnir for long, however, and the weapon splinters at the end of the scene.

Example: Lodur Ironeye is facing a terrifying and supernaturally hardy vampire in battle. His spear's normal damage (Strength +3 Lethal) isn't having much effect. While the vampire ravages one of the mage's companions, Lodur takes a moment to etch the name of Odin's spear into the shaft of his spear. Lodur's player rolls Blôt + Hjalдар and gets four successes. For the rest of the scene, the spear will do (Strength +3 Lethal +4 Aggravated) dice of damage, and at the end of the scene, the spear falls to splinters.

BRIDGE OF WILL (FARA ●●●)

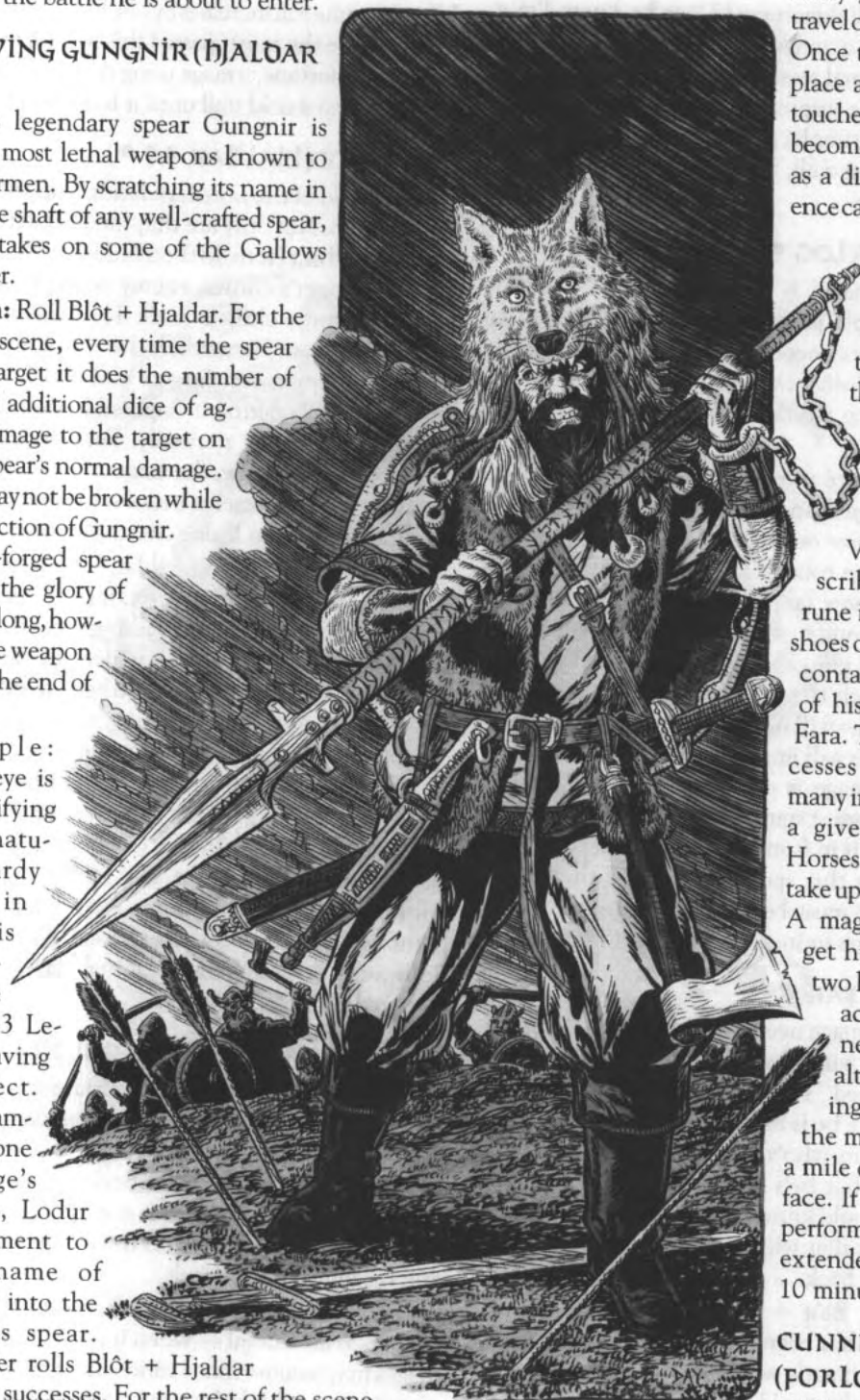
Rivers, fjords and seas are constant obstacles in the northlands, but it isn't always practical to carry small boats everywhere in case one comes upon a waterway. The Wayfarers of the Valdaermen have long used a rote that

easily grants the ability to travel over water as overland. Once this rote is cast, any place a foot, hoof or wheel touches water, the surface becomes as solid and stable as a dirt path. The experience can be a bit disorienting for those who see the water rushing by beneath their safely planted feet, but there is no question that this is one of the most valuable rites for wandering Valdaermen.

System: The Valdaerman must inscribe an appropriate rune in blood on all feet, shoes or wheels to come in contact with the bridge of his will. Roll Blôt + Fara. The number of successes determines how many individuals can cross a given body of water. Horses and wagons both take up two successes each. A mage who wanted to get himself, two others, two horses and a wagon across a fjord would need nine successes altogether. One casting of this will allow the mage to cover up to a mile on the water's surface. If the rune-singer is performing this spell as an extended action, it takes 10 minutes per roll.

CUNNING SIGHT (FORLOG ●, GÁLDRAR ●)

The Valdaerman is likely to come into contact with strangers somewhat more regularly than most other inhabitants of the Dark Medieval world, and it be-



hooves him to be able to read people clearly. This rote grants the rune-singer the ability to discern the answers to general questions about a stranger just by looking at him and putting all the pieces together.

System: Each success lets the Valdaerman answer one of the following questions about the person he's looking at: Is he a Valdaerman? Does he know I'm a Valdaerman? Is he a mage? Does he have abilities beyond those of normal men? Is he friendly? Is he rich? Is he dangerous? Is he suspicious? Is he from the area? If the player has other simple, general questions, this rote might answer them as well, but it will not give answers other than yes or no.

FIRE KILLER (FORLOG ••, HJALDAR ••)

Not all rune magic is destructive and dramatic. Sometimes it's simply practical. This rote allows the Valdaerman to instantaneously and completely quench a fire. A skilled rune-singer can snuff even an enormous conflagration, saving whole villages or forests with a single rote.

System: This rote uses Hjalдар to create a damp chill that is the equal and opposite of the fire to be snuffed. The fire goes out immediately and even the coals are cool to the touch. The number of successes rolled determines how large a fire can be affected. A single success will snuff a small fire (the size of a fist or less); two successes put out a standard camp fire; four successes will quench the fire in a forge or a moderate bonfire, five successes will stop a house from blazing, and six or more successes will immediately snuff even a large forest fire. If the mage is performing this spell as an extended effect, he must stand in place while tracing the rune-poem in the air in front of him. Leaving the place where he's casting this spell will disrupt the magic. Obviously, the fire must be within the mage's line of sight unless he wants to incorporate Fara into his spell.

FINDING HERE (FARA •)

The traveling mage needs to know where he is at all times, especially if winds have blown him off course or he's been kidnapped. This simple rote lets the mage know exactly where he is based on his inner map of the world. A Norseman who's been blown far off course might not know that he's been blown all the way to Vinland, but he would know that he is far to the west of the world he is familiar with, and he might have some idea about getting back.

System: Roll Blôt + Fara. One success reveals whether the mage has been here before. Two successes will let him know exactly where he is with regard to his personal model of the world. Three successes grant him knowledge of how to get from where he is to where he wants to be.

FLAWLESS TRACKING (FARA •)

Fara, being the Pillar of wayfaring, can not only facilitate the mage's travels, it can also let the mage track a target unerringly across a natural landscape.

System: Roll Blôt + Fara. Each success allows the mage to track one target successfully for one day. The difficulty of the roll increases by one for every week that has gone by since the target passed this way. With magic and a little good fortune, a mage using this rote should be able to follow even a cold trail until it leads him to his quarry.

FROSTBITE (HJALDAR •••)

The cold of the northern lands is no stranger to the Valdaermen. Not only are they familiar with it, but also they can channel it to do their bidding. This rote afflicts the rune-singer's chosen enemy not just with frostbite but with intense chills as well. The frostbite will affect the mage's enemy in any but the very hottest weather, freezing his nose, ears fingers and toes literally to the very bone and making it impossible for him to use his hands or even walk normally. Furthermore, once the frostbitten digits thaw, the target is likely to suffer from gangrene, which presents a new set of problems and may result in the victim losing his fingers or even dying.

System: Roll Blôt + Hjalдар. Each success subtracts one from the target's Dexterity. If the target's Dexterity is brought down to zero, remaining successes are applied as levels of bashing damage (which the target can soak normally). Once the digits have been frostbitten (if the target takes any damage), the target must roll his Stamina against a difficulty equal to the number of successes the Valdaerman got on his magic roll. If he succeeds, his fingers heal (taking twice the normal healing time to do so); if he fails, the fingers (or toes or nose) become gangrenous and must be cut off to avoid gangrene poisoning, and if he botches, he permanently loses a point of Stamina. If he doesn't cut all of the affected flesh away within [new Stamina] days, the gangrene overcomes him and he dies.

FYLGJA (FORLOG ••••, GALDRAR •••)

Certain Valdaermen can conjure an accompanying spirit to protect and warn them from danger. A fylgia is not simply a spirit that has been pressed into service on the mage's behalf (which can be done much more simply with Galdrar 3); the fylgia is a spirit tied to the mage's soul, with a deep concern for the well-being of the mage and his family and friends.

A fylgia can look human, but more often than not appears as an animal — when it can be seen at all. Many mages may assume that a rune-singer's fylgia is a familiar of some sort, which isn't quite the case; a fylgia is much more a creature of spirit than most familiars.

A *fylgja* provides the Valdaerman with several benefits. A *fylgja* is almost always invisible unless the mage is in trouble. The closer the *fylgja* stays to the mage, the more imminent the threat is. A mage can therefore use his *fylgja* to determine in which direction safety (or challenge) lies. Furthermore, any time the mage is about to take a blow that would place him at Wounded (or worse), the *fylgja* interposes itself between the mage and the source of danger. How frequently it can do this depends on the power of the initial spell. *Fylgjas* have also been known to perform any number of other helpful duties for the mage they are bound to: *Fylgjas* have been known to lead lost mages to safety, guide mages to shelter when they're caught in bad weather, and wake sleeping mages when danger has approached.

Fylgjas are entirely mute, but they can make noise in other ways.

System: The Valdaerman's successes on a Blôt + Forlog roll determine the strength and durability of the *fylgja*. The more successes the mage accrues, the more powerful and more active the *fylgja* will be. A weak *fylgja* will manifest only when the character is in extreme danger, while a powerful *fylgja* will work actively to increase the rune-singer's safety and quality of life. Most Valdaermen won't bother casting this rote without making it an ongoing spell (see *Dark Ages: Mage*, p. 100).

The following table indicates minimum successes needed to summon a temporary *fylgja*. For a proper spirit companion that will remain with the mage his whole life, multiply the numbers below by 10.

Successes	Result
1-2	No effect
3-5	Weak <i>fylgja</i> . Almost never seen except in extreme circumstances.
6-8	Moderately powerful <i>fylgja</i> . Occasionally seen in character's proximity.
8-9	Strong <i>fylgja</i> . Seen frequently in the character's vicinity.
10+	Very strong <i>fylgja</i> . Always visible and very active in furthering the Valdaerman's well-being.

LOVE MAGIC (FORLOG ••, GALDRAR ••)

In the *Havamal*, Odin himself brags about the magic he can perform with the runes. One of the forms of magic he speaks of is the ability to cause one individual to fall in love with another. While some Valdaermen use this rote wisely, to promote sensible matchmaking and harmonious marriages, troublemakers frequently use it to sow woe and dissent. Some say that Odin provided the rune lore for the former application while it was Loki who introduced the latter.

System: The Valdaerman rolls Blôt + Forlog. Each success fans the degree of emotion to the next level. One

success causes the target to enjoy the company of the beloved-to-be a bit more, while five or more successes result in fiery, passionate longing and an almost palpable need to be in the arms of the beloved. Duration is whatever is rolled for a presumably normal (not hurried) casting, unless the mage makes it ongoing.

MIMIR'S HEAD (GALDRAR ••• OR FORLOG •••, GALDRAR •••)

Just as Odin conversed with the severed head of Mimir to gain wisdom, so too can the Valdaerman gain wisdom and understanding from conversing with a specially prepared severed head. Depending on what magic the mage uses, the head might share only what it knew in life, or the mage might use the head as a divination tool by making it prophesy. A head that is simply going to be used for postmortem questioning need only have a rune carved on its tongue and forehead. A head that is going to be used for divination must have complex patterns of runes carved across its forehead, on its teeth and tongue, and then it must be immersed in a potion made of mead and special herbs for a week before it can speak the future. Oddly, neither form of this rote works if the head is left on the body. Rotted heads will not work; the mage must gather his heads within one day of death.

System: Roll Blôt + Galdrar. Each success allows the Valdaerman to ask one question of the head. In the case of the simpler Galdrar spell, the memories within the head are activated and the mage has access to anything the individual may have known, including information that the individual would not have shared when he was alive. In the case of the conjunctive spell using both Galdrar and Forlog, the head becomes a mouthpiece for Fate, as though the mouth were speaking for the Norns. Heads enchanted with this rote cannot lie, but more often than not this information is cloaked in riddles and mystery. Sometimes, however, direct, simple questions receive direct, simple answers.

PERCHING ATOP HLIDSKIALF (FARA •••, GALDRAR ••)

All Valdaermen know of Odin's legendary throne Hlidskialf. All of Midgard is visible to those sitting in its seat, and there is very little that cannot be seen from that lofty perch. By briefly turning any seat into a reasonable facsimile of Hlidskialf — by etching the name of Odin's seat across the back — the mage can learn the whereabouts of virtually anything that he seeks. Those things that are in plain sight — travelers on a road, a specific lake, a village or the like — will be visible almost immediately. Items that are inside a building but not hidden — a king somewhere in his castle, a particular book on a table — may be a little harder to find, but not especially difficult. Items that are particularly distant (a particular mosque in far Araby) or hidden (a

vial of poison hidden in the catacombs beneath a great monastery) will be noticeably more difficult to see from the Great Seat, but not impossible. Most difficult of all to see from the mage's version of Hlidskialf are those things that have been hidden with great care (a copper flask buried two feet deep somewhere in the white sands of the Aegean) or through the use of illusion or occultation magic.

System: Roll Blôt + Fara. For each success, the mage gets one turn to look for the item he's searching for. Each turn the spell is in effect, the mage rolls his Perception. The difficulty to find the item the mage is looking for depends on how hidden the item is.

How Hidden	Difficulty
Outside, not hidden	3
Inside, not hidden	5
Distant, hard to find	7
Carefully hidden	9

SCORN POLE (FORLOG •••, GALDAR •••)

The scorn pole is essentially an extreme magical insult against someone who has really angered the Valdaerman. On a long pole of ash wood, the mage writes out, in runes, in the most offensive and obnoxious language possible, exactly what her target did to warrant such an attack. Thievery, lying, cowardice and wife-stealing are common causes for scorn poles. Once the runes have been inscribed, the mage secures the pole in the ground, cuts off the head of a horse and tops the pole with the horse's head, making sure to work the horse's blood into the runes. For as long as the scorn pole is in place (or until the horse head rots away), the scorn pole's target will suffer from overwhelming bad luck. Everything will seem incredibly difficult, and none of the target's Wonders will work. Worse, if the target had a familiar, the familiar leaves for so long as the scorn pole remains in place. A scorn pole can only be taken down by the mage who put it in place, although it can be read by anyone literate in the Valdaerman's runic language.

System: Roll Blôt + Forlog. The scorn pole's effects remain in place for one day per success. Really pissed off Valdaermen have been known to spend a very long time choosing exactly the right words for the pole and carving it with extreme care, resulting in a much worse, and more prolonged, experience for the target. (However, this rote cannot be cast as ongoing — it lasts until the horse head rots, although an entirely new Scorn Pole rote can be cast on the same target thereafter.)

On a supernatural level, what the scorn pole does is ward off all spirits protecting or aiding the target, including familiars as well as those in fetishes and Wonders. The target's difficulty on *everything* goes up by two, quickly leading to frustration and a powerful sense of helplessness.

SKALD'S CURSE/BLESSING (FORLOG •••••)

The Valdaermen are privy to the knowledge of the skalds, the great bards of the north. A rune-singer may shape the fate of another with the power of words. The mage composes a poem about his target and etches it in runes on a large wooden or stone surface in the center of the village. The runic inscription may not be about the mage himself. The poem will emphasize one particular characteristic of the subject of the poem — his valor in combat, his incompetence with weapons, his attractiveness or the like. Thereafter, the attributes (and Attributes) of the subject of the poem will begin to resemble what is said about him in the poem. A skaldic poem praising the toughness of Lothar, for example, will result in Lothar's Stamina going up, while a poem mocking Ingvar's clumsiness will result in Ingvar's Dexterity dropping.

System: The Valdaerman composes the poem (the player should actually write the exact text of the poem and read it to the group when he casts the rote) and carves it on a large stone that he deposits in the center of town. Roll Blôt + Forlog; subtract one from the target's selected Attribute per three successes gained on the roll. Composing and etching the poem in stone, obviously, make for a good excuse to perform this rote as an ongoing spell (assume one day of in-game time per roll). If the stone is destroyed, the Attribute modifiers begin to fade away as memory of the poem slips from the minds of those who had heard or read it.

Example: The Norse warrior Gorm insults the Valdaerman Magnus Erlingsson. Magnus writes a scornful, eight-line slander-poem (called a *nid* or *nith* in Old Norse) describing what a tender and delicate little flower Gorm is on the battlefield. Ideally, the poem should cast aspersions not just on Gorm's toughness, but also on his masculinity in general. Over the three nights that Magnus works on inscribing the rune-poem in the stone, his player makes three Blôt + Forlog rolls and accumulates 10 successes. Magnus hauls the big stone to the center of town. After assembling as much of the population as possible, he reads the poem aloud. Word of Gorm's delicate constitution spreads, and the rote's effects kick in. Gorm's Stamina was four before the Skald's curse, but Magnus' magic lowered it by three points (-1 Attribute dot per three successes on the rote roll). If Gorm goes into battle before the rune poem is destroyed, he's going to be in a world of hurt.

SKOGARMATHUR (BANISHMENT) (FORLOG •••, HJALDAR ••)

Skogarmathur literally means "forest man," but it refers to someone who has been sentenced to full outlawry, being banished from the village for life. Declaring someone an outlaw in the cold lands of the north is tantamount to execution, and it was considered the worst punishment that could be meted out. Those declared outlaws are forced from the village and others are forbidden to give them food or

interact with them in any way. The ritual of outlawry requires the mage to speak aloud the charges against the outlaw and loudly declare the judgment. An outlaw could be killed, and his killers would neither be considered criminals, nor have to pay any reparations to the outlaw's kin. The ritual of banishment (or outlawry) reinforces the community's verdict with magic. The banished outlaw appears shifty, malevolent and diseased to all who see him and none will give him food or aid. Frequently, the mage performing the banishment ritual will cast his spell such that those who encounter the outlaw will see, in their mind's eye, portions of the crime that the outlaw is being punished for.

System: Roll Blôt + Forlog. The ritual carving required by this spell takes three hours per roll. For every success, the target is marked as an outlaw for one full week (in the north, even one success is more than enough to amount to a de facto death penalty). The Valdaerman carves, on a wooden tablet, the crimes that the criminal is being punished for. At the actual banishment, the mage reads the charges aloud and then lets the tablet drop to the floor. The moment the tablet hits the ground, the rote takes effect. The outlaw immediately has functional Appearance and Charisma ratings of 1, not because he has grown hideous, but because there is something foul and wrong with him that others take an instant dislike to. All social rolls for a banished outlaw are made at +3 to difficulty. For the duration of the banishment, no one will provide the outlaw with food, money, shelter or resources of any kind. If the Valdaerman has a particular antipathy for the individual he is banishing, he is likely to perform this rote as an ongoing effect.

SNOW GLIDE (FARA ••)

Even in the Dark Medieval, long narrow boards attached to the feet have long been used in Finland and Scandinavia to cross wide expanses of snow. The Wayfarers of the Valdaermen have improved on that method of travel by incorporating rune-craft. By inscribing the rune for speed on both skis, the rune-singer can make the skis propel themselves across snow and up even the steepest mountains, provided they're running on snow. A variant uses skates of bone inscribed with the same rune word to cross large expanses of ice. The mage must have a Dexterity of 3 to make use of this mode of travel.

System: Roll Blôt + Fara. Travel speed is multiplied by the number of successes achieved on the roll. Example: Two successes doubles travel speed across snow while five successes quintuple it.

SUMMON THE PACK (HJALÐAR •••)

Nature itself is a weapon for the Valdaerman wishing for allies in the wild. By etching the runic word for wolf into a piece of wood and then tracing over the word in his own blood, the mage summons a pack of large wild wolves to his side. The wolves don't just appear magically, but if the

rune-singer is in any wild, deserted place, the wolves will not take long to appear.

System: Roll Blôt + Hjalðar. The pack summoned by the mage contains one wolf for each success. The wolves that appear with this rote are slightly larger than average:

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4, Perception 6, Wits 5

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Dodge 2, Empathy 1, Stealth 3, Survival (tracking) 5

Willpower: 3

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

Attack: Bite and claw for four dice (lethal)

This rote will not work if the mage is not in the wild, as wolves, even at this time, are skittish of human settlements.

SWITCH (FARA •••, FORLOG •••)

Those who would bind a Valdaerman would do well to find some other goal. Sometimes it comes to pass that those who seek to imprison others become imprisoned themselves. This rote, for instance, requires the mage only to speak a word and the moment another imprisons the mage in any way — including placing him in shackles, tossing him in an oubliette, or locking him in a cell — the two switch places at the exact moment of imprisonment. If the guard slapped shackles on the mage, it is now the guard wearing the shackles; if the jailer slammed the cell door shut on the mage, suddenly he finds himself stuck in the cell with the mage outside holding the keys.

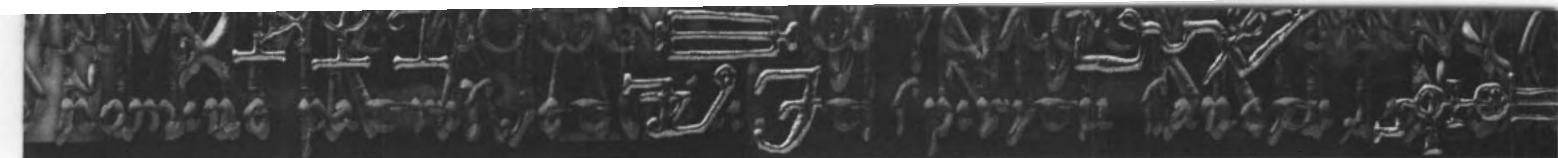
System: The mage performs this rote in advance. He etches a rune (generally tyr) into a small stone or a large silver bead and swallows it. The mage must have one success per dot of Willpower possessed by the person he is swapping places with. If he doesn't have enough successes on his prepared roll, he cannot switch with that individual. Performed as an extended effect, the mage may make one roll every hour while carving the rune he'll be swallowing. The next time the mage is imprisoned in any way he will change places with whoever placed him in that position, provided he gained enough successes to match or exceed his jailor's Willpower rating. A mage cannot have more than one such spell in effect at a time.

WAVE CALMER (FARA •••)

The Viking ancestors of the Valdaermen were among the best seafarers of their time, in part due to the ocean-calming assistance of their rune-wizards. The mage carves the appropriate rune on a light piece of wood and hangs it from the prow of the ship so that it dangles in the water. Waves of calm radiate out from the rune-inscribed wood and calm waters ring the ship for a radius of 30 feet.

System: Roll Blôt + Fara. Provided the mage gets two or more successes, the seas grow instantly calm, with only the gentlest rounded waves remaining. Furthermore, the seas stay calm for one hour per success.

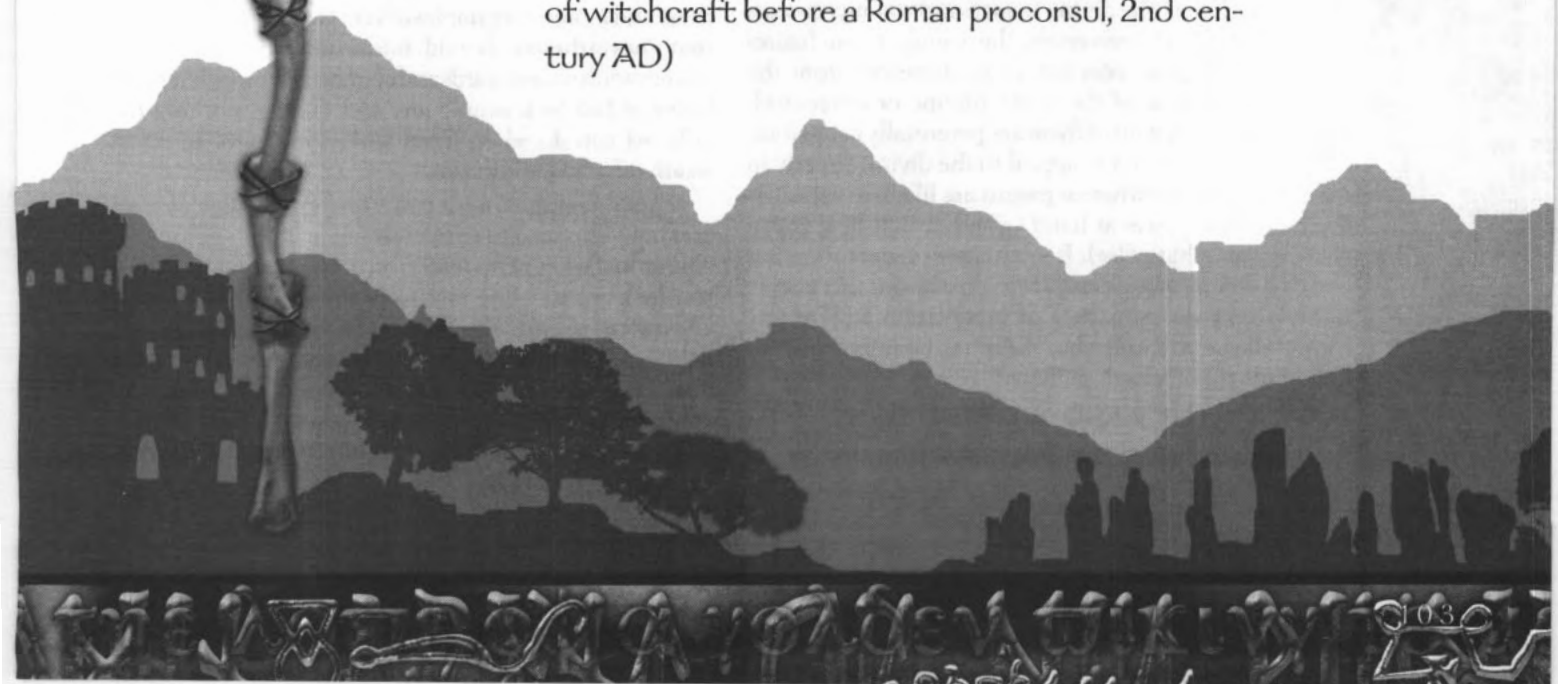




CHAPTER THREE: SUPERSTITIONS AND MAGIC

Aemilianus' slander was focused on one point: that I am a sorcerer. So let me ask his most learned advocates: What is a sorcerer? I have read in many books that magus is the same thing in Persian as priest in our language. What crime is there in being a priest and in having accurate knowledge, a science, technique of traditional ritual, sacred rites and traditional law, if magic consists of what Plato interprets as the "cult of the gods" when he talks of the disciplines taught to the crown prince in Persia?

— Apuleius, *Apology* (his defense for being accused of witchcraft before a Roman proconsul, 2nd century AD)



BELIEF AND POWER

Some astute theoreticians among the Ahl-i-Batin and the Order of Hermes posit that there is a power inherent in human belief (though none can agree on the means by which these beliefs are empowered), an ephemeral *something* that can grant inertia to or withhold it from mystic workings. The most basic of these assumptions are shared in common by all people everywhere (a stone released from the hand of a Tuscan farmer drops to the ground as surely as it does from the hand of a Mongol horseman or an Arab merchant), but many beliefs are native to a given area or group of people and no other.

FAITH AND CULTURE

Most superstitions of the Dark Medieval are conventions of faith, rather than simple products of culture. For many people, their faith is their culture and most people in Europe are quick to claim (whether they believe it or not) that they are Christians before they are Frenchmen, Italians or whatever. Jews, Muslims and pagans likewise find that many of their cultural traditions are inextricably tied up in religious belief.

MONOTHEISM VERSUS PAGANISM

For most monotheistic faiths (including even dualistic Christian traditions such as Catharism), the divine is a bulwark against the evils of the world, both natural and supernatural. The supplicant's superstitions reflect a desire to be protected through intercession on the part of the divine against the sinister forces of Creation (such as a Christian crossing herself when a black cat cuts across her path). Pagans (who are, in the Dark Medieval, almost universally polytheists or animists) tend to view the deleterious forces of nature as being extensions of the divine, the physical manifestation of more primal and less flatly beneficent deities. In this case, superstitions are used as a means of placation, to ward the individual against the ill favor of the divine, or as a shield against the divine itself (turning one's clothing inside-out, for example, to disrupt faerie enchantments). Monotheists wish to be close to the divine (equating proximity to such power with safety); conversely, the average pagan figures that it is a slightly safer bet to be distanced from the supernatural forces of the world (divine or otherwise), understanding that all of them are potentially dangerous. Monotheists also tend to appeal to the divine directly in their superstitions, whereas pagans are likely to appeal to the individual power at hand (whether that be a god, a ghost or something else). It is a matter of semantics, but one that factors prominently into the reasons *why* people react as they do in matters of superstition and, as any canny magus will tell you, "why" is certainly no less important than "what" or "how."

IRRATIONALITY AND SUPERSTITION

It is important to note that most superstitions are so removed from their nebulous origins by the time they are

commonly practiced as to seem completely nonsensical to an outsider (and, indeed, to many insiders who take the time to ponder them). After all, the custom of saying, "God bless you" after a sneeze is to keep the individual's soul from escaping, yet there is no one who can remember seeing someone's soul actually fly out of his mouth when an onlooker failed to say it. Likewise, throwing a pinch of spilled salt over the shoulder to ward off bad luck doesn't seem to have any appreciable effect on the way in which a given person's day actually unfolds. The important part, for mages, is that people *believe*, however subconsciously, that these small actions and taboos have relevance. Many people practice superstitions without even knowing why they do so. Nevertheless, their actions feed the belief that empowers these little axioms, regardless of whether or not the causes behind them are fully known.

USING BELIEF

Unfortunately, folklore can vary wildly from place to place in the Dark Medieval world. What is considered great good luck in an isolated farming village in Denmark may be an omen of darkest misfortune in Baghdad. An enterprising mage who wishes to take advantage of prevailing superstitions wherever she happens to be looks for a few simple things.

First, many superstitions are intended to bring about good luck ("Find a penny, pick it up," for example) or to ward off bad luck (the aforementioned pinch of salt over the shoulder). Many people in the Dark Medieval are positively terrified by the idea of bedevilment by ill fortune (since most people of the age don't carry so many of the modern illusions about life's "certainties" and understand just how much of their lives are subject to the whims of powers they cannot control) and are always eager to find ways to increase their odds of being smiled upon by fate. Superstitions pertaining to luck are some of the most pervasive and deeply ingrained in almost any given culture.

Conversely, bad omens are also powerful symbols in most collections of cultural superstitions. Breaking a mirror, seeing a black cat, "red sky in morning" — all of these and more are examples of very common occurrences that, nevertheless, herald misfortune. Some of these circumstances carry wards and countermeasures, but many forms of bad luck simply *are*, and there is nothing the afflicted can do when faced with them, save to try to weather his impending fate.

Also among the most powerful forms of superstitions are those intended to either ward off evil (as a conscious, almost always supernatural, force, as opposed to simple bad luck) or to bring evil to bear on another. Among Christians, making the Sign of the Cross and imploring divine, angelic or saintly intercession are some of the most common and surest (to the minds of Christians, anyway) methods of dispelling the powers of the Adversary, though there are also, naturally, pagan holdovers to be found everywhere. Thus, the Irish, Christian or no,

know enough never to disrupt a faerie mound — after all, “warding off evil” is sometimes no more complicated a matter than failing to arouse its ire. Actually sending evil another’s way begins to delve into the realm of what is commonly considered witchcraft (a supposition that some members of the Old Faith are quick to embrace and others quicker to deny). Sometimes, this active beseeching of deleterious forces is conditional (“If she is lying, then...”), other times not.

The last major variety of superstition is that intended to bring about a desired outcome. Placing a man’s shoes under the bed so as to keep him coming home (and to prevent him from wandering) is one form of this type of superstition. Picking the petals from a flower while repeating, “He loves me. He loves me not,” is another. These are often elementary sympathetic magics (flowers being associated with love in the case of the latter example, while the former is fairly self-explanatory).

While other sorts of superstitions exist, these are probably the most widespread of the varieties of such beliefs and, thus, prove the most useful and universally exploitable for the mage looking to add a bit of local folk wisdom (and, consequently, ease) to her spells. An observant wizard need only sit in a tavern for an hour or so and watch closely, in many instances, to watch any number of superstitions practiced. Provided the settlement is friendly or the mage in question personable (or versed in the art of reading minds), then the question of, “Why did she do that?” is easy enough to answer. In this manner do clever and wise magi learn to use the beliefs of Commoners to their advantage, winning by subtlety and conformity what might not be had through blatant use of mystic force.

Of course few people, mage or Commoner, in the Dark Medieval have the benefit of the perspective required to take advantage of such beliefs. Indeed, for every mage who sees the possibilities inherent in this loophole, there are five or 10 who become even more deeply ingrained in the prevailing superstitions of the lands of their birth or upbringing (since they can now, concretely, sense the degree to which those superstitions are real).

SUPERSTITION AND FOLK MAGIC

Some superstitions actually go so far as to tread the line between simple beliefs and mystic will. Many of these delve into the domain of “folk” or “hedge” magic. While the eerie old widow on the outskirts of town may not actually possess any magical powers to speak of, her belief in her own “Evil Eye” and the belief attributed to it by other superstitious villagers can bestow a limited mystical power upon her. The effects will be subtle and can be easily written off by the skeptical as happenstance or self-fulfilling prophecy (a carpenter stared at, for example, becomes nervous and later accidentally smashes his hand with his hammer). Likewise, a witch hunter who enters the village (and expects a flame to burn blue in the presence of a witch) may in fact find that fire seems to

carry a bluish tinge in the presence of the old woman, if a majority of the villagers also subscribed to that superstition and few or none actively disbelieved it.

No one fully understands why this is, though some eccentric scholars among the Order of Hermes and the Ahl-i-Batin have their theories. The most common of these is that “snags” in the Tapestry are created through the intervention of powerful entities (such as angels, demons, local spirits and gods and the like), which subtly alter the basic axioms of Creation in very small ways. Just as a person carries some small bit of her faith with her, so too might she carry a minute fragment of the spiritual essence of the being or beings that empower her beliefs. Thus, the many conflicting energies found in a place such as Constantinople (where representatives of countless nations and systems of belief gather) cause the Tapestry to revert to its “basic” template, while, in more insular or isolated locales, this energy can more easily sway the laws of Creation somewhat away from center.

A rare few particularly remote Subtle Ones and powerful Hermetic masters skilled in both the Corona and Primus Pillars have put forth the notion that it is the beliefs of men which create these divergent possibilities, rather than the possibilities creating the beliefs of men. These scholars, however, are often looked upon at best as crackpots and at worst as lunatics lost to elaborate twilights that exalt the human ego above the power and eminence of the Creator. Needless to say, no magus who would be taken seriously by her peers endorses such foolish and potentially blasphemous notions.

THE MAGICAL COMMUNITY

The Dark Medieval is dominated by an uneasy mix of religious canon and superstitious folklore. For many, particularly in the lower classes, prospects are bleak and life difficult, and as a result, peasants look for meaning and protection in all things. In a constant struggle for survival, they need every advantage. When confronted with problems, the time of day and phase of the moon often impact their final decisions. Holy grounds or places of power afford protection. Although mages often enjoy easier lifestyles and healthier lives than the poor, they are just as influenced by issues of time and place. When a mage develops a magical community, wise selection and careful cultivation of a location for a chantry are vital to the success of that community. Once the community has been developed, dates and times can be important considerations for each individual mage who is casting a spell. The following section looks at these issues and how they might influence a **Dark Ages: Mage** chronicle.

CREATING A CHANTRY

The chantry often serves as the heart of a mage’s existence. It is a place for study, companionship, and often doubles as living quarters. Mages, as a whole, find it

difficult to mesh with Commoner society. It is not uncommon for them to develop a reputation among their neighbors, and peasants generally view even the most helpful of mages with a mixture of caution and awe. As a result, it is very important for most mages to socialize with others who share their interests and quite simply aren't intimidated by them. Although hermit mages do exist, the majority of mages drift into cabals and other loose-knit groups, and those groups need a place from which to work. That place is the chantry. The following section discusses the formation and use of chantries. For a more detailed explanation of the game mechanics involved in the development and protection of chantries, see *The Right of Princes*.

BUT IT COSTS SO MUCH!

Chantries can get expensive. A well-situated and well-protected chantry can cost a lot of Background points, not to mention the time and energy it takes for the players and/or Storyteller to develop the location. Chantries with sanctums, crays, or living quarters add more fuel to the fire, and on the surface it is easy to wonder if all of that time and energy is really worth it. After all, the players could simply put a few of their Background points into Resources and gather at someone's house. While the amount of space at their disposal may be comparable if they choose to go that route, a chantry offers some advantages that even a castle doesn't have. Chantries are specifically designed for mages, and they are much more private than a house in the middle of the village. Certainly, people will begin talking when their neighbor Jonah has strange visitors at his house at all hours with multi-colored lights flickering in the windows. What happens if Jonah is in the middle of a complicated ritual, and someone comes to pay a social visit or collect the taxes?

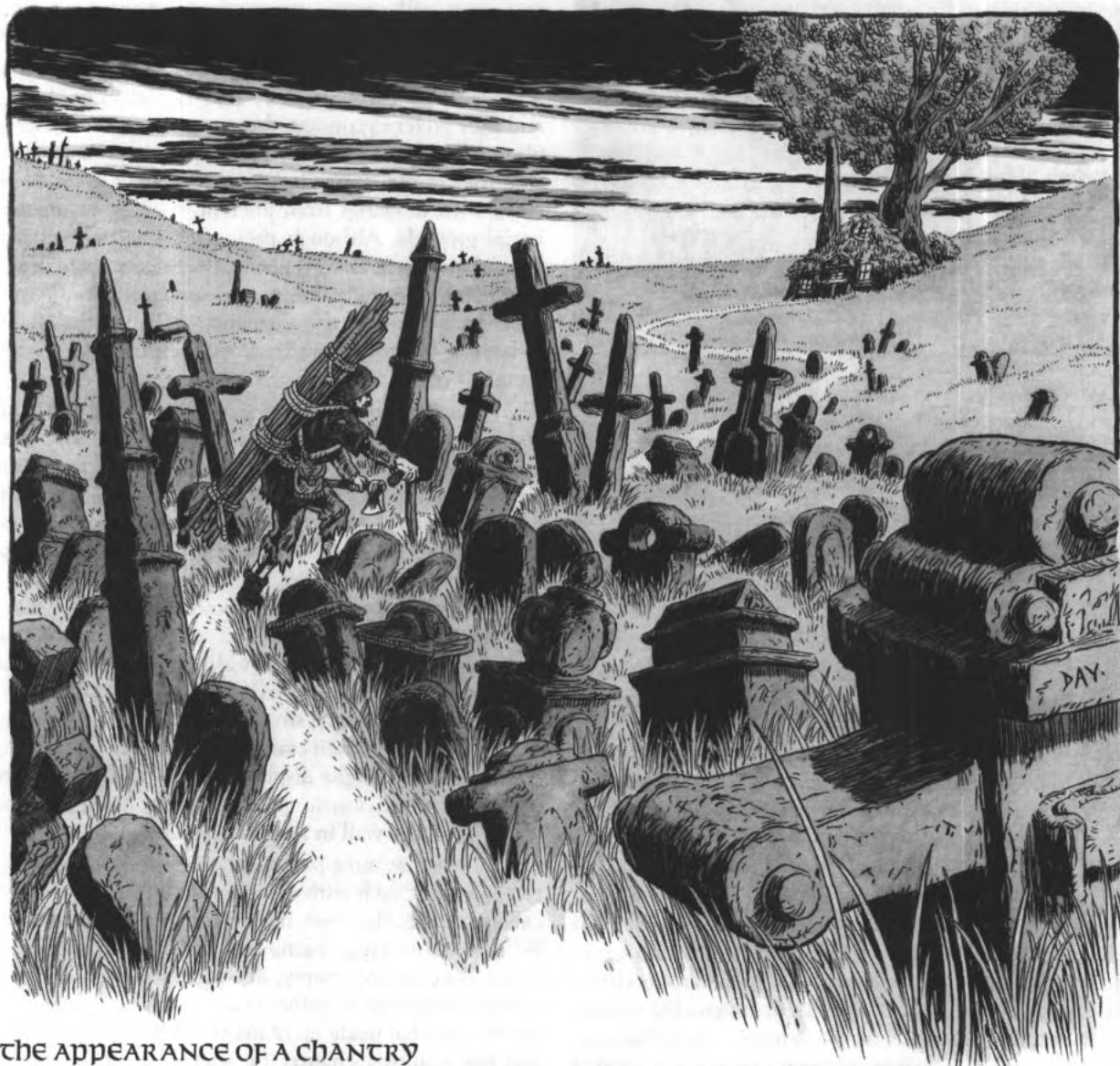
Chantries keep people away through a mix of two factors: fear and harmony. Many chantries develop a reputation that keeps people away. Commoners whisper about the haunted glade or the sacred caverns under the hill, and by and large, they stay away because they believe that evil things will befall them if they set foot there. Other chantries go the opposite route and explain themselves away as something common. These chantries are housed in common buildings, and they blend in to their surroundings. They are universities or libraries in large towns, or churches and inns in smaller villages. Although these chantries tend to be less obtrusive, their cabals usually have to deal with more interaction with the outside world. Either way, the chantry provides security and privacy in a way that a common house cannot, and that makes it well worth spending those points.

CHANTRY DESIGN

Designing a chantry can take minutes or it can take hours. The amount of time that the Storyteller or players put into the chantry design should reflect the use of the chantry in the chronicle. If a good majority of the story will take place in the chantry, it may be useful to describe the chantry in great detail. However, if it is only going to serve as a basis for operation or a safe place to go home at night, then a less detailed description will probably suffice. At the least, it is important to know the approximate layout of the chantry and any security measures present. In the event of an attack on the chantry, this helps all of the players work to efficiently protect a structure that is very important to their characters.

For chantries that include sancta or crays, layout becomes even more important. After all, it would be difficult to house two 3-point sancta and a 4-point cray in a chantry the size of a small home. The only options here would be to enlarge the chantry, or to house the sancta and cray offsite. There are advantages and disadvantages to each option: housing them onsite allows the characters to benefit from the privacy and protection afforded by the chantry, but on the other hand, putting all of them under one roof provides a single target for those who wish to do harm to the cabal. Another option might be to house some onsite while others are offsite.

While some chantries have sleeping quarters for one or more of the mages in the cabal, this is not always the case. Some cabals may have no choice but to sleep elsewhere given space limitations; however, it is advisable for most chantries to have a mage in residence for security purposes. At the very least, the mage can intercept people who wander too close to the sacred pool, fountain, or grove of trees. They are also available to sound the alarm in the event of an attack. Although it is advisable to do so, some chantries may not provide suitable living conditions, and security is particularly vital to these chantries. One example is the Hieropompos, a powerful chantry located in the wilderness outside of Carcassonne. This hilltop, open-air chantry is held by an elderly group of Hermetics, all of who were disgusted by the political maneuvering of many of their fellow mages. As a result, they formed a cabal and moved to the French wilderness where they intended to focus on their studies without the added distractions of city life and its politics. Unfortunately for them, they eventually found themselves in the middle of the Albigensian Crusade. The Hieropompos is one of the few locations that escaped the bloodshed and violence of the crusade, largely due to the mages' careful selection of their site. They chose a steep, rocky hill on which to locate their chantry, and there is only one pathway to the top. Although the Hieropompos cabal is highly distrustful of outsiders, they found themselves the unofficial protectors of a number of families fleeing from the massacre. The fact that they could keep secret the location of their chantry as well as provide protection to a small group of villagers only goes to prove that, if the security is strong enough, permanent residence by a mage is not absolutely necessary.



THE APPEARANCE OF A CHANTRY

Each chantry has a different feel and appearance to it depending on the types of mages who work or live there. Although the chantry should resemble just an average building from the outside, the resident mages often let their interests and imaginations run wild on the inside. (Although depending on the type of building and the likelihood of visitors, many chantries have a receiving room or set of rooms designed in a mundane fashion in which to receive Commoner guests.) Each magical Fellowship has its own tendencies in terms of design and location for a chantry. The following are some ideas to get you started.

Ahl-i-Batin tend to be highly concerned with order, and their chantries often reflect this tendency. Ahl-i-Batin chantries are often clean to the point of obsession, with a place for everything and everything in its place. Because many of the Batini use sacred shapes or geometry in their magics, their chantries are often laid out in simple geometric shapes such as squares, crescents, triangles, and circles. These shapes are also represented in the decoration of the

chantry. In many Batini chantries, elaborate geometric designs hang on the walls. Usually, they are in the form of tapestries, although less wealthy cabals have resorted to painting the designs on the walls themselves. These decorations not only serve to enhance the appearance of the chantry, but also can be used as foci for the resident mages. The artists and weavers who create such designs are highly respected among the Ahl-i-Batin.

The Messianic Voices often make their chantries in or near holy ground such as churches and monasteries. Some have gone so far as to live in or near graveyards, since this is the only consecrated ground that they can safely access without attracting the notice of the Inquisition or the Church. Even if the chantry cannot be located on or near holy ground, its decoration definitely has a religious bent. Depending on the Voices in question, this may be reflected as an austere, spare, monastic-looking chantry. Others work to reflect the splendor of the church, and their chantries are elaborate and luxurious, sparing no

THE CHANTRY FROM THE OUTSIDE

Outward appearance is particularly important for chantries located in populated areas. Wilderness chantries, although they can be housed in buildings, are not subject to the scrutiny of chantries located in villages or cities. Chantries located in populated areas are often safer than living out in the middle of nowhere. Clearly, it is important to pick a location that not only reflects the mages' philosophy, but also blends in well with the environment. The following is a list of possible locations for a chantry to get you started:

- A workshop.
- A wooded glade.
- A church or monastery.
- A manor house.
- A university.
- A library.
- An underground cavern.
- A small island surrounded by marsh.
- A run-of-the-mill barn.
- A circle of stones.

expense in their decoration. These chantries in particular need to be private and secure, given that the presence of that level of wealth tends to attract unwanted attention.

Members of the Old Faith often locate their chantries out in the wilderness. Regardless of the location, most focus on a particular natural element or phenomenon, depending on the gods of the mages in question. For example, members of the Old Faith who worship a rain god would likely have a chantry that is open to catch the rain, possibly with an urn or fountain designed to capture and funnel the rainwater for use in magical undertakings. On the contrary, a chantry whose mages worship a god of fire would likely have a chantry made of non-flammable materials with a central fire pit. Perhaps they are required to keep the fire burning at all times, lest their god be angered and withdraw his support. Quite clearly, chantries run by mages of the Old Faith tend to show the greatest variety of all of the different Fellowships.

The Order of Hermes places a high value on learning and scholarship, and their chantries often reflect that outlook. Hermetic chantries closely resemble the traditional wizard's laboratory, full of arcane objects and ancient tomes full of forgotten lore. Their libraries and other mystical objects are usually prominently displayed and easy to reach, since the Hermetics so often use them, and they certainly don't mind impressing their guests with their knowledge and possessions. However, these objects tend to be displayed in the private areas of the chantry, and privacy is highly prized given that the average Commoner knows the tools of the wizard's trade

and most will report any suspicious sightings to the Church if possible.

The overriding trait of a Spirit-Talker chantry is that it is quiet. Spirit-Talkers place a high priority on solitude, and they prefer to conduct their magics in the old sacred places if at all possible. Thus, many of them make their chantries in old stone circles, underground caves decorated with drawings from ancient peoples, or ancient burial grounds. Although they often choose to locate their chantries in natural places, they select these places based on the solitude they provide and not because they want to be out in the elements. (This is the major difference between chantries for the Spirit-Talkers and members of the Old Faith.)

As a result of years of persecution and mistrust, Valdaermen rarely locate their chantries in populated areas. However, they do not cultivate natural locations, either. Instead, they often choose remote locations upon which they build their chantries. A Valdaerman chantry tends to be very utilitarian in nature, and in fact the Valdaermen are the most likely of all of the mystical Fellowships to live in their chantries. They are often decorated with runes and rune markings, most often etched or painted into the walls or furnishings. The additional decorations reflect the type of Valdaermen residing in the chantry, since their only decorations are usually the tools of their craft. Therefore, a cabal made up of wise women might display garlands of drying herbs whereas a witch warrior might display his shield and spears upon the wall in a place of honor.

Given that most of the Fellowships mistrust or actively work at odds with one another, mixed Fellowship cabals are rare. However, in a crisis, members of different Fellowships may find themselves forced to work together to defeat a common enemy, and oftentimes they find that working together is better than perishing alone. The result is a cabal made up of many different Fellowships, and the resulting chantry for such a group is often a conglomeration of different styles. Remember that the goal of the chantry is that it is a place for the cabal to study, discuss, and conduct magic in a safe and private environment. Although the chantry does not have to be attuned to the mage's aura in the same way that a sanctum does, it should not work at odds with the mage's philosophy. After all, it would be difficult to call upon a pagan earth god in a room full of crosses and other Christian paraphernalia. Even if the magic is successful, surely the god in question won't look too favorably on his disciple's choice of surroundings.

As a result, chantries with a mix of Fellowships tend to be more generic in appearance. Common areas are free of overtly religious or Fellowship-oriented material (unless the Fellowships in question work well together, such as the Spirit-Talkers and the Old Faith). For mixed Fellowship cabals, space is more of an issue than for single-Fellowship cabals, given that each member should

ideally have a place where they can store and use their personal magical paraphernalia without disturbing the rest of the cabal, who may not agree with their personal method of approaching magic. Certainly, additional space in these chantries helps to keep the peace, so it is in the players' best interest to spend the points for it.

SANCTA AND CRAYS

The addition of a sanctum or a cray into a chantry presents a unique design challenge. The two are at opposite ends of the spectrum: the sanctum is attuned to one mage's aura in particular, and it therefore reflects her personality and belief system. The cray, however, is a well of unformed energy, and therefore it has no mark or signature that identifies it with one Fellowship or another. Because the two are so widely different, a different design approach is appropriate for each.

In terms of the sanctum, a player should have the opportunity to design and decorate the area. Not only should it reflect the general philosophy of the mage's Fellowship, but it should also reflect the personal approach that the mage in question takes to her magics. A Messianic who specializes in the healing magics of Repha-El would have a much different sanctum than one who specializes in the blessings of the Angel of War, Mikha-El. The sanctum also offers the player the opportunity to examine how foci fit into her character's life. A Spirit-Talker who uses crystals to contact the spirits of the Wise Ones might hang various crystals around the room for protection. By taking the time to design a sanctum, a player gains additional insight into the personality and magical philosophy of her character.

The Storyteller, however, should design the cray. Remember that crays are naturally occurring fonts of mystical energy, and their location and appearance are not always ideal. How will the players react when the powerful cray they have discovered is located in the stream directly outside the blacksmith's forge? Or in the middle of a bog? Or right in the town square? In these cases, it may be impossible to build a chantry around the cray, and that presents the characters with a unique set of problems to deal with.

KEEPING THE PEACE

Once the chantry has been designed, the characters have a new problem. Although their magical artifacts might be securely locked away from prying eyes, it is still important for them to make friends among the surrounding populace and avoid persecution by the Church or other institutions. The fact is that a mage's aura often instantly makes him the subject of speculation and mistrust, so it is important for mages new to a community to immediately contradict that reputation as much as possible. Of course, the quickest way to make friends is to do a service for one of the members of the community. This could be anything from helping heal a sick child to assisting at a birth to protecting a villager from bandits. The goal is to win the trust of at least one person who can

warn the cabal of threats or village sentiments. Of course, if the mage resorts to blatant magic to accomplish this feat, the Commoner in question will probably still fear the characters, but it is certainly better to be viewed as a good witch than a bad one.

Popular sentiment goes a long way towards determining whether or not the chantry will face an investigation or persecution by the Church. Villagers who are positive about the chantry and its residents because of past services performed are much more likely to protect the cabal, or at least will not eagerly offer up every last scrap of information they know to the first passing inquisitor. Alternately, by angering the villagers with a spell gone wrong, the cabal almost insures that they will soon receive a visit from the Inquisition. Their only options at that moment are to run (leaving behind the chantry and cray, if such exists), play innocent, distract the inquisitors with news of a bigger and better adversary, or bring the fight to the Inquisition before it comes to the chantry. All of the above choices have their benefits and drawbacks, and it will be up to the players to decide what to do.

SACRED DATES AND TIMES

The influence of numerology is widespread in the Dark Medieval. Numbers form a cornerstone of many religious practices, superstitions, and sciences such as astrology. Belief in the power of numbers is of such strength that few major decisions are made without considering the numbers involved. The birth of a new baby might require consideration of the baby's birth date, numerological significance of possible names, and consultation of the baby's astrological charts. The resulting judgments often influence the child's entire life, such as in the fabled tales of the seventh son of the seventh son, which is said to be a mark of great things and the luck of the faerie folk. Other children who are born under an unlucky sign might find themselves ostracized or even outright abandoned by fearful parents.

These beliefs vary slightly depending on locale and religious upbringing, but there are many similarities between differing beliefs. The number three, for example, is considered to be a number of great power in many different religious teachings (see *The Power of Three* sidebar). Other numerological practices, such as astrology and the use of lunar calendars, are widespread and not tied to any particular religion or location. Particular dates and times of day became influential for religious reasons or because of their numerological meaning. These times of power are of particular interest to mages given their direct influence on shallowings and other magical phenomena. The following are some examples of numerological beliefs and dates and times of power that can have direct impact on mages and their abilities. These beliefs are organized into systems for ease of use; however, it is important to remember that they are not limited to the group mentioned. For example, pagans and druids often used lunar calendars. However, uneducated peasants often had superstitions

regarding the phases of the moon. These may be related to the pagan beliefs (perhaps they were introduced to the village by a passing druid), but they might have some notable differences due to their independent evolution.

SACRED TIMES OF THE PAGANS

Pagans based much of their faith on the natural world, so it is no surprise that their celebrations center around natural phenomenon like the phases of the moon, times of the day, and passing of the seasons. The movements of the sun and moon held particular interest, and they believed that each celestial body had its own energy that influenced the world and therefore the magics worked within it. They constructed elaborate clocks, using stone or carefully planted trees to mark the rising and setting of the sun. One of the

most sacred clocks, Stonehenge, contained a special Heel stone that marked the rising of the sun on Midsummer's Day, one of the most sacred dates on their calendar. These clocks are particularly useful to mages of the Old Faith, who use them to time their magics to gain the greatest effects. (See *The Wheel of the Year*, pp. 64-66, for more details on sacred times for the Old Faith Fellowship.)

The Seasons

Most pagan faiths celebrate the passing of the seasons, and the solstices and equinoxes are often the subject of much celebration. Although the customs for each date differ greatly depending on the faith in question, nearly all pagan groups attribute the same meaning to the seasons. For mages, the seasons themselves have little direct effect on magic. Instead, their influence is strongly felt in the day-to-day life and intent of the mages. Pagan mages (who are most likely to be members of the Old Faith, Spirit-Talkers, or Valdaermen) believe that, because the energies of winter are more dormant and internal, winter is clearly meant to be a time for reflection. Similarly, spring, summer, and autumn also have their own energies, and in order to be in tune with the natural world, a mage must work in conjunction with them. In the winter, a mage could still perform active, external feats of magic, but many believe that working in constant opposition to the natural forces can result in problems for the mage in question.

The first day of each season is a time of great power and possibility. These days show a great increase in energy, and mages find it easier to perform magics that are suited to the new season. The following list provides the approximate date for each seasonal change as well as the types of magic that are suited to these dates. Mages who cast these types of magic do so at a -3 difficulty, whereas all other magical attempts are at a +3 difficulty. Storytellers may wish to make the effects for members of the Old Faith even more severe, and completely prohibit the use of the other seasonal Pillars on these dates.

- **Spring Equinox (March 21)** — Spring is a time of fertility, and mages find it easier to work with growing things on this date. All magics that work to create or nurture are easier to conduct, and destructive magics are more difficult to work.

- **Summer Solstice (June 21)** — Summer is associated with energy and strength; it is a social time and a time for action. Mages find it easier to work aggressive and overt magics, and passive, subtle magics are more difficult on the Summer Solstice.

- **Autumn Equinox (September 21)** — The harvest comes in the autumn, and the Autumn Equinox is a celebration of the sustenance it brings. This date is ideal for magics of the earth and earthly possessions. Any magics not dealing with these subjects are more difficult.

- **Winter Solstice (December 21)** — Winter is often associated with solitude, introspection, and death. Mages find it easier to work with more introspective and spiritual

THE POWER OF THREE

Although there are many diverse and seemingly unconnected numerological beliefs in the Dark Medieval, a small group of mages called the Collegiatus Abnumero believe that there is a universal numerological system from which all of the current systems derived. They argue that, if numerological systems evolved independently, then each number would have a completely different symbolism depending on the system used. However, this is not often the case. The number three in particular shows a great deal of consistency in its meanings across many different systems. For example, three is often used to represent a universal power, whether it is the Trinity, the world (heaven, earth, and waters), or the cycle (birth, life, and death). Druids look to the three phases of the moon, Celts to the three aspects of the Fates, and early Muslims to the three Virgins (sometimes depicted as pillars or stones). In the sciences, Pythagorean theory equates the number three with completion. Three is only one example that remains consistent across seemingly unrelated belief systems.

By searching for the consistencies between numerological systems past and present, the members of the Collegiatus say that they can reconstruct the universal system. Not only would the knowledge of the universal system aid in understanding of the workings of the universe, but it would also be a useful tool for nomadic mages. Because each locality has its own beliefs about numerology (with the aforementioned consistencies), these mages are forced to constantly rethink aspects of their magics depending on the beliefs of the locals. However, the Collegiatus believes that the universal system would be usable worldwide, given that it is the forerunner of all current beliefs, and therefore would be compatible with all of them. The Collegiatus members primarily come from the Hermetics and the Batini, although some other Fellowships also have a few members.

magics, but it is more difficult to directly affect the physical world on the Winter Solstice.

The Phases of the Moon

Most pagan groups believe that each phase of the moon has its own energy. The changing of the moon is not celebrated as much or as extensively as the changing of the seasons. However, the new and full moons in particular are often observed and acknowledged, and they are the source of many superstitions among peasants and the uneducated. Many fear the new moon because of its association with darkness, but the full moon is no better. The full moon is believed to be a time when werewolves and other supernatural creatures walk the lands. As a result, Commoners are often very cautious during the full moon, and most hide behind locked doors until the shape of the moon changes once more.

Although the moon only affects magic that is performed during the nighttime hours, its influences are much more direct and constant than the passing of the seasons. The moon is a source of energy that those who honor her in their rituals can tap. Mages who make an offering to the Moon as a part of their casting can call upon her for energy. The amount gained depends on the offering given, but is usually between one and three points of Quintessence. An offering of prayers traced in one's own blood might provide one point, while the ritual slaughtering of a calf might provide three points, and the sacrifice of a person might provide even more (Storyteller's discretion). Although blood offerings are the most common, precious stones or sacred objects are also commonly used. The Quintessence gained from this offering must be used immediately, and any unused Quintessence will fade at the rate of one point per every five minutes.

Quintessence from the moon only works for magic that is compatible with the current phase, regardless of the offering. The following list describes each phase of the moon and the appropriate types of magic needed to gain the moon's Quintessence.

- **New moon** — Magics that bring new beginnings and blessings.
- **Waxing moon** — Health and growth magics.
- **Full moon** — A time of great power. All magics gain the extra point.
- **Waning moon** — Banishing magics.

Holy Days of the Christians

The Christian faith has many holy days, and in fact, Christianity's adoption of the Julian calendar had widespread influence. Before the Julian calendar's acceptance, most people used local, unstandardized calendars or depended solely on observations of the sun and moon. However, the Roman Catholic Church used the Julian calendar for official purposes, and its use spread through the realm in the hands of the priests. It is quite possible that another standardized calendar would have been adopted if not for the influence of the Church.

The Days of the Week

Among Christians, Sunday is considered the most sacred day of the week, as the day that Jesus was circumcised, was given His name and also the day that He rose from the grave. On Sundays, Christians gather to celebrate the Eucharist. Because Sunday is traditionally held to be a day of prayer and reflection, the Messianic Voices find their magic (or theurgy, as they prefer to call it) easier to conduct. Sundays are designated for God's work, and as long as they approach their tasks with a pure heart and good intentions, the Messianic Voices perform their magics at a -1 difficulty on this day. However, because Sunday has been set aside as a day of rest and prayer, this advantage only applies to instantaneous spells. Extended or ongoing spells do not receive the bonus, and some Storytellers may wish to penalize these magics.

Truly devout members of the Christian faith attend church or engage in prayer every day of the week, ensuring that God is truly a part of their lives. Each day has its own meaning and symbolism; for example, Thursday was the day of the Last Supper, and therefore it is the day for the faithful to work toward emulating the apostles. However, the observation of these traditions is less widespread and does not have any influence on Christian-based magics. If the Storyteller wishes, Messianic Voices or other devoutly Christian mages who pray at a church or altar every day for a full week have their Aura modifier increased by one. This effect lasts until the mage misses a day of prayer.

Holy Days and Holidays

Christian holy days center around the birth and rebirth of Jesus Christ. Holidays such as Christmas, Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, and Easter all commemorate specific occurrences in the life of Jesus. All Messianic Voices are expected to celebrate these holidays, as are all Christians, and they do not receive any special benefits for doing so. However, failure to celebrate these holy days appropriately can lead to a temporary loss of magical ability. Depending on the level of transgression, this could be an inability to use a particular Pillar or a complete lack of magical power. This is the price that the Messianic Voices pay for neglecting their god. The method for regaining magics is fairly simple: The mage must atone for the sin of neglect. Some examples of appropriate tasks for atonement are fasting, making a pilgrimage, or taking a temporary vow of silence.

Some Christian holy days, such as Christmas (the 25th of December), Good Friday (the Friday before Easter), and Easter (the Sunday after the first full moon of spring) are celebrated throughout the Christian world. However, there are some other holidays that may or may not be observed, depending on the locale. These include Advent (the four Sundays preceding Christmas), Epiphany (January 6th), and Maundy Thursday (the Thursday before Easter).

CHRONICLE IDEAS

This talk of numerology and holy days is all well and good, but what use is it to Storytellers and players? The ideas presented here are just a sample of the beliefs of the time, and there is plenty more information available about other numerological systems and religious beliefs. Players can use them to create realistic magical foci for their characters. A Hermetic might use Pythagorean number theory to fuel her magics, whereas a pagan member of the Old Faith might practice moon magic. The trick is to find the numerological system that best fits with the character's worldview. Additionally, Storytellers can use numerology to drive plots. Shallowings tend to occur at sacred times, and are often the source of many unexplained phenomena. Perhaps the players' characters find themselves tracking down a creature from the Umbra let loose during a solstice celebration. Unexplained eclipses or a peasant who exhibits the stigmata on Easter Sunday are just a few examples of the different types of phenomena that could add flavor and interest to a chronicle.

GEMATRIA

Knowledge of Kabbalah, the sacred Hebrew alphabet, is believed to have come to believers of the Jewish faith through the mind and soul rather than through a physical teacher. Gematria is a related numerological system in which each number or letter of the Hebrew alphabet has a particular vibration or energy, also associated with the Kabbalistic Sephiroth. Gematria gained such widespread acceptance that it was adapted for not only the Hebrew alphabet, but also for the Greek and Roman alphabet as well. Gematria can be used to determine the vibration of a particular day, a name, or a place by assigning the appropriate numbers to the letters in the name. The following is a list of numbers and the meaning of each:

- **One:** Initiative and leadership.
- **Two:** Cooperation and adaptability.
- **Three:** Expression and artistry.
- **Four:** Foundation and growth.
- **Five:** Freedom and adventure.
- **Six:** Protection and nurturing.
- **Seven:** Understanding and knowledge.
- **Eight:** Material and practical matters.
- **Nine:** Humanitarianism and selflessness.

How to Use Gematria

For the purposes of this game, a simple method for using Gematria is as follows. For our example, we will calculate the resonance of the following date: December 25, 1215.

First, convert the date into numbers: 12/25/1215.

Then, add up all of the numbers: $1+2+2+5+1+2+1+5=19$.

If the answer has more than one digit, add up the digits: $1+9=10=1+0=1$.

Continue this process until there is only one digit left. In our example, Christmas of 1215 has an enterprising and commanding resonance. Once again, this is a very simplistic view of Gematria for the purposes of playing **Dark Ages: Mage**.

USING THE ART

It is well and good to know that your character possesses her Fellowship's Foundation at 4, three Pillars at 3 and one at 5, but *what does that actually enable her to do?* The magic rules in **Dark Ages: Mage** presented some example rites for characters to use, but space constraints simply didn't allow for as exhaustive a study in the practical applications of the Pillars as you might have liked. What follows here, then, is a breakdown of many of the magical actions that characters might wish to take and analyses, by Fellowship, of what would be necessary to bring those effects about. Hopefully, the information presented here will answer most of your questions and help to give you a concrete handle on the nature and capabilities of the Pillars, making creation of your own custom rites a cinch.

In the case that a given mystic Fellowship's capabilities within a certain scenario have been more or less plainly laid out (such as the various ways in which the Order of Hermes can directly inflict damage with magic), that Fellowship will not be covered under that scenario. Odds are, however, that you will, through play and

FOUNDATION AND PILLAR SPECIALTIES

As some of you have, no doubt, noticed, nothing is mentioned in **Dark Ages: Mage** about what exactly a specialization in a Foundation or Pillar actually gives you. So, without further ado, here it is. When using a Foundation with a specialty, you roll an extra die in any casting pertaining to that specialty. When using a Pillar with a specialty, you reroll any "10s" rolled in the casting of a spell involving that specialty and can add any successes that come up on those dice as additional successes for the effect. *Mages are limited to a single Foundation specialty and one per Pillar.* It is simply not possible for a mage to develop that kind of personal touch on multiple levels. A Foundation specialty costs five experience points to learn, and a Pillar specialty costs three points (the mage must have achieved a rating of 4 or 5 in her Foundation or a given Pillar before spending these experience points). Note also that a mage can never learn specialties for Foundations or Pillars that fall outside the purview of her own mystic Fellowship.

experience, also think of other ways to accomplish these ends. If that's the case, great. Go with what works.

mystic perception

Enlightened souls often have cause to bear witness to phenomena imperceptible to less elevated minds. The powers of the Pillars of magic enable them to see, hear and otherwise detect occurrences, places and, sometimes, creatures that are saturated with mystic energies.

Detect the presence of magic. Ahl-i-Batin use Al-Layl 1 to detect the presence of magic that has recently been worked or is currently being worked. Al-Anbiya 2 allows a Subtle One to discern the telltale echoes of a spell worked even ages ago (though it often does not allow the Batini to learn what kind of magic, specifically, was used).

Messianic Voices use Repha-El 1 to detect the presence of recent or current sources of that single greatest act of human creativity: magic. Uri-El 3 picks up on the faded shadows of long-ago spells.

Priestesses of the Old Faith use Autumn 1 to sense magics currently being cast, as well as those recently transpired, and call upon a simple Autumn 3 spell to learn of ancient magics.

For Hermetic wizards, for whom the pursuit of magic is dearer than life itself, Primus 1 allows detection of current, recent or ancient magic with equal proficiency.

For the Spirit-Talkers, Wise One 1 allows for the perception of new spells, while Wise One 2 speaks of older sorceries.

Valdaermen, whose Galdrar Rune is tied to the closely related forces of magic and secrets, use that Pillar at 1 to detect magics of whatever newness or antiquity.

Detect the presence of supernatural creatures. Sometimes, it is helpful for a mage to be able to learn when other denizens of the supernatural are about (vampires, werewolves, etc.). Unless otherwise noted, these

spells pick up on the presence of supernatural beings, but do not reveal any more specific information (such as type), though clever mages can sometimes, using various clues, put such information together for themselves after knowing of such a being in the area.

Ahl-i-Batin use Al-Layl 2 to discern the presence of supernatural creatures in their immediate vicinity. By adding Al-Hajj 2 to the casting, the Subtle One is capable of detecting such creatures at great distances. With Al-Layl 4, a Batini can more concretely discern a creature's rough "type": undead, shapeshifter, etc.

For Messianic Voices, the light of Gavri-El disperses darkness and, with a Pillar spell of 2, reveals the presence of "unnatural" creatures. By adding Uri-El 1 to the casting, the Voice may detect corporeal walking dead for what they are.

The magics of the Old Faith use different Seasons to detect different kinds of beings. Autumn 1 detects wizards and mages of various sorts (Fellowship mage and hedge wizard alike). Spring 1 reveals the presence of the Fair Folk. Summer 1 allows for the perception of shapechangers.

Winter 1, as specified in the Pillar description, shows the presence of "vampires and other walking dead."

Hermetic wizards discern the telling nuances that give away supernatural beings with a simple Primus 2 spell.

Spirit-Talkers beseech the sagacity of the Wise One (and call upon the second level of that Pillar) to sense supernatural beings. By adding Trickster 5 to the casting, a shaman may learn exactly what a given creature is (even if the revelation, given her experiences, makes no sense to her).

The Valdaermen use Galdrar 2 to learn when inhuman beings are out and about and can, with Galdrar 4,



gain even more specific information about what sort of creature a given individual is.

SOCIAL SITUATIONS

Magic is about more than dusty tomes and lightning bolts slung upon the battlefield. The enterprising witch or wizard is certainly most capable of using subtle (or not-so-subtle, as the situation warrants) spells to twist the thoughts and opinions of others, whether in the high courts of Paris or the back alleys of Constantinople. In this manner have some few mages become advisors to kings or like unto kings themselves.

Convince another of something. Provided that what is being said is not so blatant a falsehood that the village idiot would scarce believe it ("The sky is golden yellow," for example), most Batini with a single dot in the Al-Layl can scare up enough Subterfuge to convince most listeners. If the Subtle One wants to foist an obvious lie upon another, however, an Al-Layl 4 simple spell will enable him to give someone a firm conviction in even the most indelicate of deceptions.

A Messianic Voice with Mikha-El 4 can convince almost anyone of almost anything and, with Mikha-El 5, can sway others to believe in the few things that she could not get away with at the previous level.

By using Autumn 4, a witch of the Old Faith can convince another of a wise course of action, while Summer 4 will sell him on a more brash or foolish one.

Hermetic wizards use Corona 2 to impress simple precepts and small falsehoods upon others, while Corona 3 can be used to temporarily convince another of even an idea completely antithetical to her own beliefs, and Corona 4 can make such changes long lasting or even permanent.

By using Trickster 2, many Spirit-Talkers can speak with such guile as to be able to talk King Solomon himself into a fool's bargain (or so they claim), while increasing levels of the Pillar make it possible to convince others of increasingly grandiose fabrications or distasteful premises more completely and for longer periods of time.

Valdaermen use Forlog 3 to convince others of reasonable things and Forlog 4 when dealing with less reasonable subjects.

Speak another's language or otherwise communicate verbally. Ahl-i-Batin use a simple Al-Fatihah 2 spell to speak with those with whom they share no common language.

Just as Gavri-El 3 gives a Messianic Voice the power to commune directly with the mind of another, it can also grant the ability to speak words that are understood in another tongue, even one with which the Voice himself is not familiar.

Members of the Old Faith use an Autumn 3, Spring 1 rote to discern the bonds of the spoken word and to send their own intent traveling upon those strands.

Hermetic magi use a Corona 3 spell to overcome the fumbings of mundane languages.

Spirit-Talkers implore the aid of sagacious spirits through the use of Wise One 3 in order to communicate with foreigners.

Galdrar 3 enables the Valdaermen to know the tongues of outsiders and to convey concepts in languages not their own.

Compel friendship or respect. Ahl-i-Batin use Al-Fatihah 4 to cause others, even new acquaintances, to regard them as esteemed and valued companions.

Messianic Voices implore the aid of Mikha-El 3 to garner respect, while beseeching the favor of Repha-El 3 to fabricate bonds of friendship.

Practitioners of the Old Faith use Spring 3 to cause others to regard them as friends and allies.

Mages of the Order of Hermes use Corona 2 to impress notions of friendship or respect in another (notions that must be enforced through the wizard's actions in order to take root) or Corona 3 to simply batter down a subject's resistance and forge artificial bonds of this nature.

Spirit-Talkers with Trickster 2 or 3 can often coax the spirits into giving them the guile necessary to quickly gain the trust of others.

Valdaermen become valued compatriots to others through the use of Forlog at either 2 (requiring mundane reinforcement) or 3 (compelling allegiance).

CRY HAVOC

There are times when conflict cannot be avoided (just as there are times when even the most enlightened soul has need of or desire for bloodletting). Magic is one of the surest advantages on any battlefield, for it can be a weapon, armor, surgeon, soldier or even general, if the need and the power of the mage in question are great.

Inflict harm directly with magic. Every Fellowship but the Ahl-i-Batin has been more or less covered in this regard. Unfortunately, the Subtle Ones do not use their magic in such a crude and unimaginative fashion. The unobtrusive powers of these Arab sorcerers are not well suited to gesturing at a foe and blasting his frame with the raw power of magic. In general, should a Batini need to inflict harm upon another, he uses his magic to augment more mundane capabilities to the point that he can kill with them silently and at great distance, preferably without ever lifting a finger where anyone can bear witness to it. For an example of how a Subtle One may do something like this, you can refer to page 17 of **Dark Ages: Mage**. Such an attack uses a simple Al-Hajj 3 spell and inflicts normal weapon damage (ignoring armor, but subject to the normal casting distance restrictions, based upon number of successes), plus one Health Level of damage per success scored in the casting. With Al-Hajj 4, a Batini may momentarily reflect a weapon's edge to occupy multiple locations in space, no more than a few inches apart, at once (for an example of this, see the section on *Countermagic*, below). Successes scored in casting such a spell automatically subtract successes, on a one-for-one

basis, rolled to parry or dodge an attack and add dice (one per success) to the Batini's Melee Ability and damage dice pools for the duration of a single strike.

Heal wounds. Again, the Ahl-i-Batin are seemingly alone, this time in their apparent inability to mend hurts. In truth, the Subtle Ones seem a bit hamstrung in this regard, but, as with all things regarding the Ahl-i-Batin, what is readily perceived is only the barest fraction of what is possible. For a Batini, the art of healing is a circuitous one. First, the mage uses Al-Hajj 3 to latch onto all the disparate pieces of an injury (every drop of spattered blood, shred of flesh and chip of bone), and then, with Al-Layl 4, she "convinces" these scattered fragments that they are all in exactly the proper place, causing the injury to knit. The Ahl-i-Batin may heal any source of bashing or lethal damage, whether to herself or to another, in this fashion and, by increasing the necessary Al-Layl Pillar rating to 5, may do so for sources of aggravated damage (deceiving the body into believing that annihilated tissues still exist and are where they should be).

Soak aggravated damage. Unless otherwise noted in the individual descriptions, all of the spells below soak aggravated damage with successes, creating a soak pool for a scene on a one-for-one basis, at the cost of a point of Quintessence. (Multiple castings and/or points of Quintessence are not cumulative.)

Ahl-i-Batin soak aggravated damage using successes on a simple Al-Hajj 4 spell. The mage literally disperses the impact from the source of harm into surrounding space. (A Batini using Al-Hajj at 3 can use a similar spell to soak bashing or lethal damage.)

Messianic Voices soak aggravated damage by using a Gavri-El 3, Repha-El 3 spell that effectively closes a wound instantaneously as it is inflicted and removes any sensation of physical trauma.

Witches and druids of the Old Faith use Autumn 4 to bolster their patterns against such potent sources of harm, weathering the assault directly by fortifying flesh and bone.

Hermetic wizards often enchant garments or armor to protect against aggravated damage with Primus 2 (using the item's normal soak pool and without the cost of a point of Quintessence). If caught without this protection, the magus may use Anima 3, Primus 3 to soak such damage, subject to the normal rules outlined above.

As stated in the **Dark Ages: Mage** rulebook, Spirit-Talkers using Warrior 3 can shrug off aggravated damage.

Valdaermen use Hjaldr 4 to soak sources of aggravated damage, imbuing their bodies with the resiliency of steel and stone.

ASH, OAK, WOLF AND OWL

Certain Fellowships thrive upon constant interaction with nature and mages of any stripe might be called upon to trek overland or to hide themselves away for a time in the trackless expanses of Dark Medieval forests or mountains.

Win an animal's friendship. Ahl-i-Batin may use a simple Al-Fatihah 3 spell to win the trust and allegiance of a normal beast and may, with Al-Fatihah 4, win over even a normal creature trained to be hostile.

With Mikha-El 3, a Messianic Voice may assert authority over a beast or, with Repha-El 3, have its loyalty. With both, the Voice can make of it an obedient, loving pet.

A priest of the Old Faith uses Spring 3 to befriend even the most savage natural beast.

The Order of Hermes uses Corona 2 to win over a domesticated or docile animal and Corona 4 to dominate a hostile or enraged animal.

Chieftain 3 enables a Spirit-Talker to create a bond between herself and an animal.

Valdaermen use Fara 4 to win over wild beasts (those likely to be encountered by travelers upon the road), while Forlog 3 allows for empathy with a trained beast.

Survive in harsh natural conditions. Other than an excellent score in Survival, mages with the right sorts of aptitudes do have means of weathering the fiercest conditions in the wilds of the world.

An Ahl-i-Batin with Al-Fatihah 5, Al-Layl 4 can easily adopt the mannerisms and habits of a master forester or nomad, even if he himself does not normally possess such knowledge. (In effect, he would not always comprehend why he was doing what he was doing, but his actions would serve to keep him alive. His magic draws out of the well of universal understanding and gives him a bank of wisdom to call upon.)

By using Mikha-El 4, a Messianic Voice can rather unobtrusively bend the phenomena of the natural world to his behest, locally mitigating inclement weather (by adding Repha-El 4, he can fully suppress the local effects of even a blizzard or torrential downpour) and commanding beasts to lie down before him and give up their lives that he might live. Gavri-El 2 (and the gift of fire) keeps him warm in even the coldest wasteland and Repha-El 2 brings sweet water to quench his direst thirst.

Spring 3 guards a witch of the Old Faith against strong gales and preserves her body in even the most terrible conditions, mending the hurts inflicted by killing frost and deathly heat alike. With Autumn 4, she can feed on the energies of the land itself, obviating her need for mortal sustenance.

A wizard of the Order of Hermes uses her Anima Pillar 4 to simply shield her body against the vicissitudes of the natural world and weather conditions. If she must have dominion over animals, she uses Corona 4 to draw them to her and to compel them to placidly accept death.

A Spirit-Talker, knowledgeable in the many secrets of the natural world, uses Wise One 2 to summon up the understanding necessary to thrive in the most hostile of natural environments not completely inimical to humanity.

With Fara 5, a Valdaerman is so favored by the road that he is always at home when out in the elements. One who knows Forlog 3, however, can attempt to luck her way through an extended journey into the wild places of the world (though often with less success).

Weather magic. Some means of calling fogs, storms and winds are given in the section on Travel Magic (p. 153) in Chapter Five: Storytelling.

THE INVISIBLE WORLD

Mages are often called upon to have dealings with the denizens of the unseen worlds and must sometimes even visit the realms those creatures call home. Magi of the Order of Hermes seek out the beings of the Astral Reaches, while Spirit-Talkers enter into the uncharted Spirit Wilds without fear, and the Valdaermen sing to the forlorn spirits of the lands of the dead. Rare indeed is the wizard who never needs to seek out the peoples or places beyond the Gauntlet.

Traffic with spirits. The Ahl-i-Batin and the Order of Hermes, unlike every other Fellowship, would seem to possess no ready ways to interact with the denizens of the Realms Invisible and, indeed, have few ready resources on hand for dealings with the Middle and Dark Umbrae, but those are not the Umbrood that concern these magi. Instead, Hermetics use Corona 4, Primus 2 to compel an astral being (such as an angel) to manifest as a partially physical construct (one that might be acted upon by other magics, at the very least) and mightiest Subtle Ones call to the djinn (powerful astral elementals) with Al-Fatihah 2, Al-Hajj 4, compelling or inviting those already manifest in the physical world to appear before them (see *The Clavicles of Sulayman: Solomon Magic*, pp. 22-24).

Enter the Umbra. Only the Order of Hermes seems to lack means of entering Umbrae other than the Astral Reaches, but they may (against the better judgment of the Fellowship as a whole, which essentially sees little of value in other layers of the spirits worlds) penetrate the Gauntlet using Primus 4 to rudely and blatantly rend it asunder for an instant, allowing transit through before the threads of the Tapestry rush to mend the tear. At this point, the Hermetic mage is within the Penumbra and may, through the normal means, seek out other layers of the Umbrae by her wits and her knowledge of the Spheres of Creation.

Enter Arcadia. The domain of the Fair Folk is not properly a level of the Umbra, but nor is it specifically a place within the physical plane. It is, instead, a spiritual realm all its own, subject to different laws and peopled by folk who are (usually) flesh and blood, like ordinary men, but truly inhuman in their shapes and their desires.

In the unlikely event that a Subtle One needed to tread the paths of Arcadia, he would use Al-Hajj 5 to stride into that realm or Al-Layl 5 at a known point of crossing to circumvent the wards and barriers locking mortal men out.

Should a Messianic Voice be able to swallow her pride and put aside her thoughts of how blasphemous

truck with the Fair Folk is, then she would use Gavri-El 5 at a crossroads, a faerie mound or other such means of entrance into that other world.

As specified in the section on their magic in the **Dark Ages: Mage** book, druids, priests and witches of the Old Faith use Spring 4 to enter Arcadia.

The Order of Hermes' libraries contain references to a handful of spells designed to beseech the Fair Folk directly, all of them either using Corona 4, Primus 4 to form a Quintessential shell (using the mage's own normal Attributes) capable of traversing the barriers that sever Arcadia from the world of men, or Primus 5 at a place of crossing to force the gateways wide.

Spirit-Talkers, depending upon their individual proclivities, use Trickster 5 or Wise One 5 to either beguile their way into Arcadia or seek admission by dint of ancient pacts and the esteem of the Fair Folk.

Valdaermen use Galdrar 5 to tread the unknown roads to Arcadia or Fara 4 at a place of crossing.

NECROMANCY

Part of the lure of wizardry, deny it though many mages may, is the power over death itself. Many wise spirits feel compelled to seek out answers to the riddle of mortality and the secrets that come after the final breath. Ghosts know things lost to the world of the living, and the walking dead are often far more loyal and steadfast servants (if usually less capable) than the living. Further, for those mages who shun the notion of the "inevitability" of death, there may well be something to be learned of immortality in the study of endings.

Summon a ghost. Ahl-i-Batin *do not* summon the spirits of the dead. It is blasphemous and their magic, therefore, does not allow for it.

Messianic Voices use Uri-El 4 to summon a willing shade and, by adding Mikha-El 2 to the casting, are capable of summoning a ghost against its will (those who wish to do so, however, are advised to note the bit on pg. 113 of **Dark Ages: Mage** about "pious souls" and "corruption").

Members of the Old Faith simply use Winter 3 to compel the dead to appear.

Hermetic wizards are virtually without recourse in this matter (remember Bonisagus' prohibitions against acts that defy God's will), though Primus 5 will allow a magus to wrench a restless soul from whence it dwells to come before him. This process, however, is messy and unpleasant and almost always results in the immediate enmity of the spirit. (For those keeping track, this is also another way for a Hermetic mage to summon, say, a demon. And, yes, it is just as painful an experience for fallen angels as it is for the dead.)

Spirit-Talkers can call a ghost (or, indeed, any spirit known) with Wise One 3 and, with Wise One 4, can give physical shape to such a shade.

Valdaermen use Fara 2, Galdrar 4 to demand audience with the spirits of the dead.

Animate a corpse. Just as the Subtle Ones do not compel the dead to manifest before them, they do not defile the bodies of the slain with necromancy.

Messianic Voices may use Gavri-El 3, Uri-El 4 to create walking corpses (one per success, costing a point of Quintessence apiece) capable of performing mundane tasks. By adding Mikha-El 3 to the mix, the corpses can be empowered to fight.

Members of the Old Faith use Spring 4, Winter 3 to give a semblance of life to the dead (with costs identical to those incurred by the Messianic Voices) and may add Summer 3 to the casting in order to give martial prowess to the walking dead.

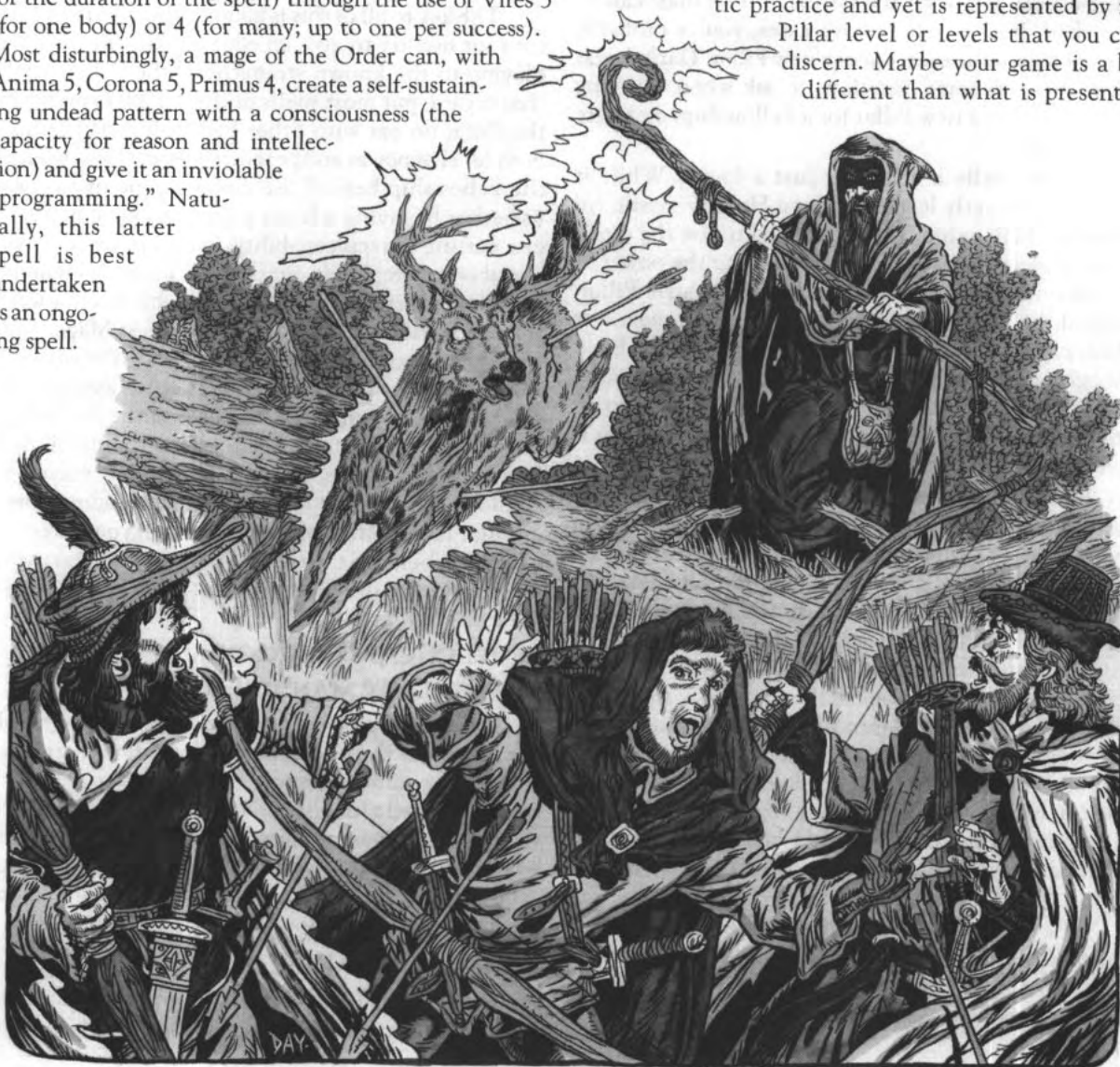
The Order of Hermes has a few options in this regard. Simple walking dead (of the variety described above and costing the same in both successes and Quintessence) requires Anima 5, Primus 3. Conversely, the process may be performed without Quintessence cost (but much more crudely, requiring total concentration on the mage's part for the duration of the spell) through the use of Vires 3 (for one body) or 4 (for many; up to one per success). Most disturbingly, a mage of the Order can, with Anima 5, Corona 5, Primus 4, create a self-sustaining undead pattern with a consciousness (the capacity for reason and intellection) and give it an inviolable "programming." Naturally, this latter spell is best undertaken as an ongoing spell.

Spirit-Talkers may command the dead to walk with Chieftain 4, Wise One 3 (in a manner identical to that of the Messianic Voices), and may give them a will to fight with Warrior 3. By using Chieftain 4, Wise One 4, shamans may invite spirits to inhabit their bodies (allowing them to fight if they choose to without the need for Warrior 3, and granting them access to any Charms that the spirits would normally possess while physically manifested).

Valdaermen use Fara 3, Galdrar 4 to give motion to the dead (as with the basic Messianic rote) and their own **Unsleeping Swords** (*Dark Ages: Mage* rulebook, p. 135) rote to create animated corpses for battle. Other methods are listed for the *Svalaholmr* on p. 94.

CREATING NEW PILLARS

It may be that you feel a particular Fellowship's options for magic are somewhat limited, or perhaps you've just come up with a great new idea for a spell that legitimately fits within a given Fellowship's mystic practice and yet is represented by no Pillar level or levels that you can discern. Maybe your game is a bit different than what is presented



LEARNING THE MAGICS OF OTHER FELLOWSHIPS

Dark Ages: Mage states that a character may acquire magic practiced by another Fellowship, but doesn't offer any experience point cost for purchasing the first dot of a Foundation or provide any special rules for what one should expect to pay for such alien magics. Consider the following an addendum to the experience costs chart:

Trait	Cost
New Foundation	25
Other Fellowship's Foundation	current rating x 10
New Pillar (other Fellowship)	15
Other Fellowship's Pillar	current rating x 8

in **Dark Ages: Mage**, and you just want to try your hand at seeing how far the system of the Pillars can be stretched. In any of the above cases, you've probably contemplated the creation of a new Pillar. **Dark Ages: Mage** presents some questions to ask when thinking about creating a new Pillar for a Fellowship, and here are two more:

Is this really a Pillar, or just a focus? While it would be perfectly legitimate for a Hebrew mystic (of whatever Fellowship, within reason) to use the discipline of gematria as a means of touching the power of the Divine, he really doesn't need a Gematria Pillar. Instead, he can use this field of study as a means of channeling the spells already known to him. Even though such a discipline *could* have a Pillar associated with it (since there are defined mystic attributes attributed to the practice of gematria), everything it does is essentially covered by the purview of other Pillars.

Should this be a school of mysticism all its own? While both the Order of Hermes and the Ahl-i-Batin use alchemy in their sorcerous practices, creating an Alchemy Pillar for either is simply too all-inclusive. Certainly, as stated above, the use of alchemy as a focus for magical spells practiced by either (or any, in the guise of herbalism, transubstantiation or the like) Fellowship makes sense, but alchemy is also a distinct school of mystic study unto itself and one that strives to encompass every aspect of the world in the same way that any Fellowship's system of Foundation and Pillars does. In other words, if one were to give alchemy a set of systems all its own, it should be on the level of a Fellowship's entire practice, not a single discipline within that Fellowship's school of thought.

One example of a new Pillar that is warranted, for it produces effects that are not currently simulated well with existing Pillars, is the Materia Pillar of the Craftmasons Fellowship. (See pp. 159-160.)

THE MECHANICS

Now that you've put behind you any doubts that this Pillar is a legitimate idea, you need to actually mechanically construct it, assigning distinct capabilities to each level of the Pillar. The system for doing so is, in essence, simple, but complexities can and do creep in. Magic, after all, is always at least a little difficult to quantify. The important thing to keep in mind is that the outline below is just that, an outline. This is not a comprehensive Be-All, End-All, Infalible Guide to the Rules of Magic. You will find, in creating Pillars of your own, that some effects just don't fit gracefully into this curve exactly as it is presented. In that case, don't attempt to mash the square peg into the round hole, but instead be willing to be flexible. Is a certain Basic Alteration too weak or limited in scope to warrant fitting under the third level of a Pillar? Make it a second level spell. No muss, no fuss, no Pillar Police kicking in your door.

The key to all of this is balance. In creating a Pillar for your use, try to give an edge in one or two places, playing to the known strengths of the Fellowship in that regard, put most spells of the nature expressed by the Pillar on par with other Fellowships (in terms of both level of power and potency of effect) and then put the Fellowship behind the curve in one or two ways (whether by giving a lesser power at a higher level or else cutting a given capability, even a potentially very useful one, completely out of the equation). Generally speaking, a new Pillar should never be more powerful than the Pillars presented in **Dark Ages: Mage**, and it would not be out-of-keeping for a new Pillar within an extant Fellowship to actually be a little weaker (considering that the magical strengths of the Fellowships have been pretty fully summarized there). This is, however, your game, and if you and your players are comfortable with the notion of world-rending powers at Pillar level 3, then who are we to tell you otherwise? That said, below is the rough guideline that was used in the creation of the Pillars of the mystic Fellowships of the Dark Medieval.

LEVEL ONE: PERCEPTION AND ELEMENTARY MANIPULATION

At this level of power, the Pillar allows for the perception of the phenomena to which it is attached. It may also allow for some basic warding against assaults directed along those lines or might enable the mage to call upon a marginally superhuman identity with that concept (manipulation) to boost a single Ability's dice pool by one per success on a simple spell.

LEVEL TWO: BASIC MANIPULATION AND ELEMENTARY ALTERATION

At this level, the Pillar may grant the ability to sculpt its phenomena, either precisely and on a fine

scale, or crudely and on a larger scale. Very small transmutations pertaining to the Pillar's associated phenomena may be worked (alteration) as well. At this level, the Pillar may allow for the bolstering of a handful of Abilities, the lowering of difficulties for one or two Abilities or the infliction of one or two Health Levels of damage (bashing or lethal). Small quantities of the element or concept may be summoned to the mage's location. Truly superhuman mundane applications of the Pillar's associated phenomena are also common at this level.

LEVEL THREE: ADVANCED MANIPULATION, BASIC ALTERATION AND ELEMENTARY CREATION

At this level of mastery, the mage demonstrates clearly the supernatural nature of her craft. From this point onward, the Pillar's capabilities become strongly influenced by the individual "flavor" of a given mystic practice. Assume that feats a given Fellowship is renowned for (such as the Subtle Ones' mastery of space or the Order of Hermes' control over the fabric of magic itself) allow for a mage with a Pillar at this level to accomplish one or two exceptional effects at this level (such as the Batini's ability to teleport, or the Hermetic's ability to create Tass and otherwise manipulate Quintessence directly). Provided the material (physical, ephemeral or philosophical) being created is not excessive in its potency (such as the Wrath of God) or impossible to truly fabricate at any level of power (such as Quintessence, which exists in a finite quantity within Creation), such a material may be given genesis — often a small, but noticeable, form.

LEVEL FOUR: ADVANCED ALTERATION AND BASIC CREATION

At this level, the Pillar allows for amazing transformations (such as shapechanging or rearranging the Quintessential threads of the ongoing spell in an item so as to disenchant it) and can form decent-sized quantities of any normal, creatable physical substance or greater quantities of a fully ephemeral concept. Again, however, this Pillar level is, of necessity, heavily influenced by the individual capabilities and philosophies of a given Fellowship. Almost any lesser effects pertaining to the Pillar's area of influence, however, that have been deliberately left off of lower Pillar levels (to reflect a Fellowship's lack of aptitude at a particular endeavor) can probably be safely added in at this point, giving the mage the necessary aptitude to achieve the mastery encompassed by the final Pillar level.

LEVEL FIVE: ADVANCED CREATION

At this level, vast amounts of the item or concept in question may be generated out of nowhere and in complex and far-reaching forms. Such is the power of this level of mastery that self-perpetuating ephemeral ideas may be made more or less permanent without the

need for the creation of an ongoing spell. (This is accomplished by creating an idea so compelling that it roots in the minds of others of its own accord, given momentum by their will, added to the caster's own.)

CERTAMEN: THE DUEL ARCANE

"Stand aside, woman, and I shall allow you to depart unscathed, for I require the Cauldron," Asar-un-Nefer asserted, raising his staff, which began gathering its power. The air grew thick with the smell of a fresh stroke of lightning.

"I will do no such thing, arrogant wizard," Morvyth purred, twisting her crooked wand of yew in both hands. Carefully, she put her profile to the Hermetic magus, narrowing his target, and raised the wand in her right hand, pointing it at his chest.

For his own part, Asar-un-Nefer stood firm, facing the witch-woman full on. He laughed aloud, "I did not imagine that, in coming here, I would have cause to educate an unlettered country girl, but I am more than prepared to do so. One last time, Morvyth; step aside and quit this place."

Her only response was to curl her lips in a snarl, as cold winds swirled about her, whipping mercilessly at her long hair and tunic. Ice crystals began to condense on nearby surfaces. Lightning radiated from the head of Asar-un-Nefer's staff, wreathing his frame in deadly illumination. He smiled grimly.

"As you wish..."

The tradition of a wizard's duel stretches back, some scholars say, to the day when Moses' serpent consumed those of the Pharaoh's magicians. Some claim it goes back to times before that, to the primordial past of humanity. What is concretely known is that the practice of the duel was officially codified in the years just prior to the formation of the Order of Hermes, in a system known as *certámen*. While few outside of the Order would refer to this system of formalized dueling by its Hermetic name, many wizards across Europe and beyond understand the fundamentals of it, since the founders of the Order, Bonisagus and Trianoma, took especial care to spread knowledge of *certámen* to as many mystics as cared to listen — knowledge that, in time, was passed on to successive generations of apprentices.

Nowadays, *certámen* (whether called by that name or not) is used to resolve disputes between magi when something significant is at stake, neither party wishes to back down or otherwise compromise, and no one really wants to see anybody dead over it. The formalized battle of sorcery itself is merely one step in the process. In order to adhere to proper practice (which is, sadly, just as often as not, observed in the breach), *certámen* follows this set progression of events:

Declaration of Contention

Naturally, there can be no duel without a challenge. The challenging mage declares her intent to the challenged (whether that be the usurpation of a cray, the claiming of a mystic treasure or whatever), clearly and without guile. The challenged wizard then accepts the duel or cedes the point of contention, ending hostilities (open hostilities, at any rate). If the challenged will not back down, the duel progresses to the next stage.

Contest of Wills

Provided that both magi wish to pursue this conflict (or, in other words, neither is willing to stand down), it is customary for both mages to exchange a round of taunts, threats, recitations of lineage, (harmless) displays of mystic martial prowess and the like. Each does this in order to unnerve the other and, thereby, to gain an advantage in the impending duel. Either party may choose to step down at this point, ceding the point of contention to the other.

This exchange is handled through a Manipulation + Intimidation (or Subterfuge) roll, with each mage rolling against a difficulty equal to the other's permanent Willpower. Though the interplay between mages may go back and forth for some time, the mechanics are still handled by a single roll for each participant. The mage who accrues more successes in this exchange gains a single bonus die in the following stage of the duel. If either participant botches, he is disheartened and suffers a -1 die penalty in the next stage. It is possible to tie in this contest. In such a case, neither participant gains or loses dice. (Should both participants botch this roll, they are simply treated as though simply failing; the loss of face is mitigated by the opponent's similarly pathetic display.)

Should both participants still wish to pursue hostilities, the duel progresses to the preliminary stages of the battle of mystic wills.

Building a Locus

Certámen requires a *locus*, or a source of mystic energy that serves as the opponent's target for the duel. In order to construct a locus, each participating mage rolls Foundation + Pillar (player's choice as to which), at a difficulty of 6. Each success allows the mage to invest a single point of Quintessence into the locus (up to the amount of available Quintessence the mage has at hand, and without regard for how much Quintessence the mage can normally channel at once). If either participant *cannot* roll any dice or simply fails to construct a locus, she loses automatically. (Likewise, if either participant has no free Quintessence available and was simply attempting to bluff through the contest, she will lose at this point, as well.) If both participants, for whatever reason, fail to construct loci, then the roll is repeated, at a difficulty 7. Should both parties fail this second roll, they both roll again, this

time at difficulty 8. Should this third roll fail, etiquette dictates that the duel is off and that the aggressor must cede to the defender.

If both participants manage to create loci, then the duel continues on to the next stage.

Selecting Aegis and Gladius

Each mage chooses one of her Pillars to serve as her *aegis* (the defense for her locus) and one to act as her *gladius* (her weapon against the other mage's locus). While engaged in the duel, each mage uses her gladius Pillar to attack and her aegis Pillar to deflect. A mage must choose, from turn to turn, how she will conduct her offense and her defense. If she chooses to fight in a balanced manner, committing fully to neither offense nor defense, she rolls against a difficulty of 7 both when attacking and in attempting to deflect successful attacks. If she wishes to fight offensively, she reduces her attack difficulty to 6, but raises her deflection difficulty to 8. If she fights defensively, her attack difficulty is 8, but her deflection difficulty is only a 6. While a mage may choose to use the same Pillar to generate an aegis and/or gladius that she used to create her locus, doing so is difficult, requiring a great deal of concentration, and results in a +1 cumulative difficulty to all rolls per extra category used by that Pillar (thus, using the same Pillar as an aegis or gladius as was used to create a locus increases difficulties during *certámen* by 1, while using the same Pillar for all three raises all difficulties during the duel by 2).

After both mages select an aegis and a gladius, the battle begins.

The Duel

Both mages involved in the duel roll initiative as normal; the mage who wins initiative has the opportunity to attack first. Conversely, he may also require his opponent to strike first. Each mage gets precisely one attack action and one deflection action every turn. The attacking mage rolls his gladius Pillar (without adding his Foundation) against the difficulty chosen (in the previous stage), while the defender attempts to shield her locus with her aegis Pillar (rolling against her chosen defensive difficulty). If an attack successfully overcomes the number of successes rolled by the defender to deflect, the attacker rolls dice of "damage" (equal to her Foundation rating, plus one per success by which she superceded the other mage's deflection roll) against the defender's locus. At this point, the defender rolls his Foundation rating to "soak" the damage. Successes rolled by the attacker in excess of those rolled by the defender to "soak" a breach of the aegis cause points of Quintessence to disperse from the defender's locus, on a one-for-one basis. These points are unavailable for use in any way until the *certámen* is over.

When one mage's locus is finally exhausted (after any number of turns of dueling; fights between Masters have been known to last hours and some say that the

THE DEVIL IN THE DETAILS

There is more to *certámen* than what you've seen here, of course. Any enterprising magus can find ways to twist the rules (or break them entirely) to his advantage. Likewise, any formalized institution eventually develops its own systems of permutations.

WHO PRACTICES IT?

Not all mages in the Dark Medieval are equally likely to honor a challenge of *certámen*. Hermetic mages will almost never turn down such a challenge, and Valdaermen and members of the Old Faith will usually stand up to defend their honor when it is called into question in such a manner. Some Spirit-Talkers and Messianic Voices are conversant in the practice of *certámen* and will accept such a challenge in the accepted fashion, though one should not make any assumptions about these Fellowships when it comes to respect for the tenets of the duel arcane. Ahl-i-Batin almost never engage in this sort of narcissistic foolishness, preferring to settle disputes with the subtlety for which they are infamous, rather than bowing to some crude rule of might. Other mystic societies in the Dark Medieval have their own responses to a challenge of *certámen*, and the only wise counsel concerning them might be to be prepared for anything and to expect nothing.

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

Certámen is not just a series of dice rolls; it is a work of the grandest sort of high magic. Remember to be descriptive: *this* is where mages really get to cut loose and display the earthshaking powers for which they are renowned. Attacks with your druid's Summer Pillar might take the form of a dragon of flame, clawing and snapping at your opponent's locus. Conversely, your Messianic Voice's Uri-El aegis could appear as a misty, sword-wielding figure in black that expertly parries your foe's assaults. Strokes of lightning, jagged shards of stone, walls of iron and bronze — feel free to be grand in scope and lavish

with your details. In this fashion, even a duel between two relatively weak and inexperienced magi can seem like something magnificent.

CHEATING

In a perfect world, *certámen* would be an inviolate practice, completely free from the taint of duplicity. Of course, in a perfect world, the practice of *certámen* would be wholly unnecessary. That being the case, it is not particularly easy to cheat in the wizard's duel and it is equally difficult to actually get away with it. The Order of Hermes has (unsurprisingly) catalogued the most successful methods of cheating in the duel, most of which involve the use of the Primus Pillar. The most successfully used of these methods co-opts one of the mage's attack actions and rolls Foundation + Primus (as a level two simple spell), with each success allowing the mage to freely channel a point of Quintessence out of her Fount (whether or not she possesses the Background) and into her locus (subject to the normal rules for how much Quintessence a given mage can channel in a single turn). If she wishes for this effect to take place subtly, the mage must subtract two dice from her Foundation + Primus pool, in order to divert enough concentration to create a suitable show of attacking (essentially an automatically harmless attack). This penalty is lessened by one die if Primus is the Pillar used to create the mage's locus.

SPECIALTIES

It is possible to buy a "*Certámen*" specialty for a mage's Foundation, just as one can buy a specialty in "Aegis" or "Gladius" for a Pillar. The mages who most often do so hail from the Houses of Hermes, given the Order's propensity for solving most disputes through the use of the wizard's duel. Such a mage is, quite obviously, apt to be a dangerous opponent.

mightiest of magi, now lost to antiquity, sometimes battled for *days* before one emerged triumphant), she loses the *certámen* and must cede the point of contention to the victor.

Resolution

When the duel ends, the victor, in addition to having rights to the point of contention, also recoups all of the Quintessence that went into his locus, as well as *half* (rounding down) of the Quintessence that went into the loser's locus. The loser recoups the remainder. It is customary (and considered both polite and honorable) for the defeated mage to praise

the skill of the victor and to yield up the prize to him gracefully and without complaint. (In practice, it sometimes even happens.) The victor should then heap praise upon the bravery and resolve of the loser, unless, of course, the loser was defeated swiftly and decisively. In such a case, the praise, so obviously forced, is likely to seem like a poorly veiled insult. Instead, the victor should simply graciously accept his prize. Etiquette dictates that the mages should then avoid challenges of *certámen* toward one another for at least a year and a day (to prevent never-ending strings of challenges over a particularly desirable



prize). Unfortunately, many of the pleasantries of the resolution stage of the duel are foregone due to the prodigious number of arrogant, impolite or egocentric magi contending for power in the Dark Medieval.

COUNTERMAGIC

Abu-Ibrahim Bukhari faced the Crusader without fear, without hesitation. The warrior was one of the Franj, and he carried a greatsword of burning white light. Come to slay another infidel in the name of the Cross, more than likely.

The pale-skinned invader spoke and his magic warped the words as they traveled the space between his lips and Abu-Ibrahim's ears, translating them not into language, but instead universal meaning: "Heathen, you are unfit to tread upon the land where the Risen Christ walked. I am come to reclaim that land in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit."

"Of course," Abu-Ibrahim added, in the man's own language, "you have seen fit to honor the message of your prophet through theft and murder. I am sure he would be proud."

The Crusader roared a battle cry, lunging at the Subtle One with his blazing brand poised to cleave his enemy in

half. Abu-Ibrahim stepped inside the other's guard, thrusting with one dagger that suddenly became as 10. As the Batini's strike drew close, Abu-Ibrahim saw a shield of power raised before the Frenchman, woven tightly like a mandala. But a pace separated the two combatants when the Batini tore apart the Crusader's enchantments. Likewise, the Frenchman's power unmade Abu-Ibrahim's magics. As the white light of the greatsword went dim, the only sound was that of a single, ragged breath. The Crusader slumped to the floor with a great clatter. The Batini shook his head as he wiped his dripping blade on a cloth.

"He who comes with recourse only to sorcery is a fool."

Each mystic Fellowship has its own means of using the magic of its Pillars to unweave other kinds of sorcery. What follows here, for the sake of convenience, is a rough summary of those means. Unless otherwise specified, these spells cancel successes on a one-for-one basis, require a point of Quintessence to cast and can be performed as reflexive actions (in other words, they do not require a turn of preparation). Note that some Fellowships have multiple distinct types of countermagic and that some are simply better (or worse) at it than others.

Ahl-i-Batin can use Al-Hajj 4 to disperse undesirable magics, piece by piece, into distant reaches of space. Subtle Ones can also, with Al-Layl 5, simply go "unnoticed" by the spells of others (creating a bank of personal countermagic that benefits no one else, in the case of spells with, for example, a radius of effect) and can, with Al-Anbiya 5, artificially fulfill the destiny of all but the most powerful lasting conditional enchantments (such as "Let this wall of fire fall only when the fifth daughter of a fifth daughter, a virgin with red hair, passes by in her hour of greatest need").

Messianic Voices use Uri-El 4 to slay the spells of others, imploring the Archangel to bring death to those magics they find unseemly before the sight of the Creator.

A druid of the Old Faith uses Winter 4 to temporarily suppress the power of ongoing magics and Winter 5 to brutally and completely dissolve any kind of spell desired.

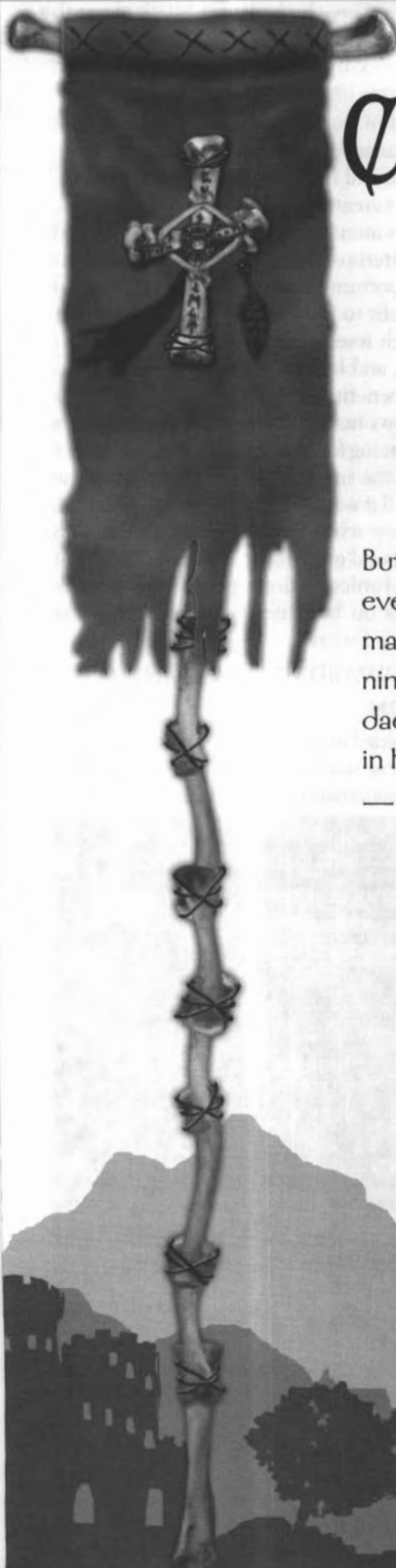
The Order of Hermes uses Primus 3 (the **Aegis Magicus**) to enact ordinary countermagic and Primus 5 to destroy even the mightiest and most permanent enchantments.

A shaman of the Spirit-Talkers uses Wise One 5 to unmake any manner of enchantment or Trickster 5 to evade the magics of another (in the same way as a Batini with Al-Layl 5).

Valdaermen use Galdrar 4 to unweave and dispel the magics of others.







CHAPTER FOUR: FROM THE OTHERWORLD

But I urge you who use this exorcism not to eat any pork, and every spirit and daemon will be subject unto you, whoever he may be. As you exorcise, breathe once [at the patient], beginning at the toes, blowing all the way up to his face, and he [the daemon] will be arrested. Be pure and keep this. For the spell is in Hebrew, and it is kept among pure men.

— *The Great Magical Papyrus in Paris*

THE CARE AND FEEDING OF THAUMAVORES

Though by no means as common to the wilds of Dark Medieval Europe as once they were, thaumavores may still be found prowling near wherever shallows rend a hole through the Gauntlet separating the world of form and flesh from the Other World wherein these fantastic creatures now dwell — or elsewhere when astrological conjunctions, ancient holidays or other factors conspire to bring down the Gauntlet in usually stable areas (see *Sacred Dates and Times* in Chapter Three, pp. 109-111). The members of the various Mystic Fellowships remain ever vigilant for signs of these creatures, for the Tass that rests within their flesh is worth a king's ransom to the mages

of the Dark Medieval period. Though Tass can universally be rendered down into Quintessence (reward enough for many mages), the raw Tass of many thaumavores has peculiar properties that make it even more valuable, from the strength that can be gleaned from the blood of the vampire to the benefits to extended castings to be gained from a troll's tail.

THE HUNT

There are typically three mundane ways of tracking down magical creatures. If one knows of an area where the Gauntlet is weak and shallows are common, one may hunt within that area in hopes of running across a unicorn or a monoceros or its tracks. Of course, one never knows what one will actually come across using such a scattershot approach. If the tracks one believes to be of a monoceros lead instead to a leucrota, the hunter can quickly turn into the hunted.

Another, more reliable method of hunting thaumavores is to keep one's ears open and wait to hear multiple tales of attacks by a supernatural creature in one locale. A one-time attack means nothing, as a shallowing might unexpectedly dump a hungry thaumavore onto the farmland of an unsuspecting serf, or might allow that serf to cross the Gauntlet into that creature's hunting ground, only to later dump his remains back into the mundane world. But if a magical carnivore has begun to feed regularly on the local peasantry, you can be sure that it has been cut off from the Other World and forced to find its sustenance where it can. Given their druthers, predatory thaumavores would much prefer to dine on their natural prey, the wild game of the Other World. Such prey is both more filling, in that the spiritual prey's form generally offers a predator more Quintessence than a simple Commoner (though not necessarily a mage), and more appetizing, as the bodies of the prey animals of the Other World are made entirely of Tass instead of base matter (again, mages' bodies typically store greater amounts of Quintessence within their flesh, making them more palatable).

There are a number of things to recommend this type of hunt to mages eager to harvest Tass. Typically, predatory thaumavores possess greater amounts of Tass than their less-dangerous counterparts, offering those mages willing to hunt down such dangerous beasts correspondingly greater rewards. Also, by questioning survivors of attacks by a beast and/or by examining the scenes or the victims of its attacks, a wily mage can discover exactly what sort of beast perpetrated those attacks and research its weaknesses, if any. Most mages would prefer sure knowledge of their potential quarry to the hit-or-miss hunting technique outlined above. However, there are a couple of drawbacks to the practice. For one, hunting a manticores or a peryton is orders of magnitude more dangerous than hunting a relatively benign magical creature such as a white stag. Another is that, to a hungry thaumavore that's had nothing to slake its hunger but the banal victuals of peasant meat, a mage is like manna from God, while an entire cabal is a veritable smorgasbord of

refined Quintessence upon which to dine. Much like with the prior method, such hunts have a way of turning to the predator's favor, especially if that wyvern you've been tracking for hours turns out to be one of a mated pair.

A third method of hunting involves learning what sorts of Tass a particular type of thaumavore feeds upon, finding such a source and then staking out that location and waiting for such a creature to show up in order to feed. Though the peasants mentioned in the previous method technically fit the criteria of this method, these are targets of desperation or opportunity, not such creatures' natural prey. The main benefit to this method of hunting is that a mage doing enough research can often find the exact type of thaumavore, and by extension Tass, that he's in search of. Another benefit, as in the previous method, is that the hunter knows her quarry and can play upon its weaknesses while bracing for its strengths. This method of hunting is probably the smartest and safest by far of the three types, but it still poses its share of hazards. After all, just because you know white unicorns feed on the Tass grasses that can be found growing on Salisbury Hill, that doesn't mean that red unicorns don't as well—or that the manticores that feeds on both types won't be prowling Salisbury Hill looking for prey.

REAPING THE REWARDS OF THE HUNT, OR TASS COLLECTION

So, you've succeeded at your hunt, and now, in classic European tradition, your wondering how to render an awe-inspiring example of supernature down to its base elements

FAVORED PREY

Most thaumavores only attack human beings because they are starving for Quintessence. In comparison to their usual prey, mortal manflesh yields very little Tass when devoured by these creatures (mages being an obvious exception thanks to their ability to store Quintessence within their own bodies). However, there are quite a few thaumavores that hunt certain specific types of human prey because they provide the creatures with larger amounts of Quintessence than the average mortal man would. Dragons, for instance, find virgins to be a delicacy not because of the huge stores of Tass within their slight frames, but because the beasts are able to more efficiently digest them, thereby making better use of the Quintessence they do possess. Dragons aren't the only thaumavores with a favored human prey type, either. Fallen clergymen, for instance, offer greater rewards to demonic beings, and monarchs are of greater benefit to blood-thirsty elder oaks that once enjoyed such fare every seven years. Storytellers should feel free to design other carnivorous thaumavores with their particular chronicles in mind.

in order to enrich yourself. Well, the answer boils down to one thing — research. Lots and lots of research.

This is where a mage's (or a cabal of mages') Backgrounds come into play. Obviously, Library lends itself to such activity, and the collection of any Hermetic mage or Batini worth his salt will certainly contain a bestiary outlining the uses of the Tass that one may gather from the thaumavores described within, as well as the methods with which one may harvest that Tass. However, those Fellowships that lack a strong grounding in "book learning" still possess strong oral traditions easily represented by such Backgrounds as Mentor or Allies, which might share tales of various beasts and the use of their remains. Even mages' familiars — thaumavores themselves — might be able to shed light on how to extract Tass from the carcasses of supernatural creatures. Of course, given the nature they share with such creatures, many familiars, whether they possess such knowledge or not, are understandably reticent about sharing such information with their mages.

FAMILIARS

The thaumavores that the majority of mages of the Dark Medieval period are most likely to deal with are their various familiars. An integral part of many a mage's magical repertoire, the familiar frequently proves to be a source of consternation for both player and Storyteller. This section contains advice designed to help players avoid some of the pitfalls that can turn a potentially interesting character Background into a twinkish nightmare for players and Storytellers alike.

The main mistake players make when designing familiars for their characters is that they tend to make them too outlandish, so much so that they overshadow the characters they are meant to complement. There is an old show business maxim that goes "Never work with animals or children." There are two main reasons for that saying. The first is that both children and animals are difficult to work with. The second, and the one that applies with familiars in **Dark Ages: Mage**, is that they tend to overshadow the star in any scene in which both appear. A similar phenomenon sometimes occurs with familiars in **Mage** games. A given player may spend a great deal of time making sure that her character fits seamlessly into her fellow players' cabal and her Storyteller's chronicle only to then design an over-the-top familiar that sticks out like a sore thumb.

If you've just got to have an outlandish familiar, at least concoct an interesting origin for the familiar,



and strive to tie that origin inexorably to the mage's own background. A familiar should say something about the character it's tied to. For example, if you're playing a Batini mage, and you're just dying to have a minor djinn that your character has freed from the centuries of confinement in a lamp, then find a hook to tie the familiar's extravagant backstory to the mage's own. Perhaps the mage is a direct descendant of Solomon himself — the djinn's original binder — and therefore, the two sign their Pact out of a sense of mutual debt — the mage owes the djinn for his ancestor's (at least perceived) misdeeds, and the djinn owes the mage for his freedom. Thereby, the familiar's backstory doesn't overshadow the mage's, but instead, complements it.

Remember, a familiar is not supposed to be a zany animal companion a l every Disney film produced since *The Little Mermaid*. Nor is it some sort of deus ex machina there to pull a mage's fat out of the fire every game session. A familiar is an ancient spirit being of great wisdom who has entered into a Pact with a mage for their *mutual* benefit — it may look like, and even to a certain extent behave like, a macaque, but it isn't one. A familiar may be a mage's friend or mentor, but he will not be his whipping boy. The mage owes as much to her familiar as the familiar does to her and, as such, should only expect the familiar to be willing to go out on a limb as far as she's willing to go for it. Mage-familiar relationships built on mutual trust

THE PACT

In game terms, gaining a familiar involves purchasing the Familiar Background (*Dark Ages: Mage*, pp. 85-86). However, there is actual magic involved, even if it's not played out in a story or even cast by the mage himself (many familiars are provided by mages' Masters or mentors as gifts upon their graduations).

Most often, a spirit is contacted and convinced to join a Pact. It then Materializes (using the Charm from *Dark Ages: Mage*, pp. 199-200) into the form in which it will serve. (Spirits without that Charm must be given a body through magical means, which differ by Fellowship; the Spirit-Talkers, for instance, use *Wise One 4*.) The most important part, however, is the actual Pact, an ongoing spell that not only makes the Materialization permanent, but also connects the mage and familiar on a spiritual level.

Different Fellowships use different Pillars to seal the mage/familiar Pact:

- **Ahl-i-Batin:** *Al-Anbiya 4*
- **Messianic Voices:** *Repha-El 3*
- **Old Faith:** *Autumn 3*
- **Order of Hermes:** *Primus 4*
- **Spirit-Talkers:** *Wise One 3*
- **Valdaermen:** *Forlog 3* or *Galdrar 4*

and esteem are infinitely preferable to the alternative. A familiar who's treated more like a servant than an equal is going to harbor strong feelings of resentment toward its mage, and when the chips are down and there's no one left to turn to for help, it's entirely possible the familiar won't be forthcoming with that help.

Another problem that often comes up when designing a familiar for a **Dark Ages: Mage** chronicle is deciding on what sort of creature is an appropriate type for a Dark Medieval familiar. What familiars are appropriate for what Fellowships? Do members of each of the Fellowships commonly keep familiars?

The best way to answer these questions and to design a familiar appropriate to the idiom of your character is to go straight to the source material for that character's Mystic Fellowship (*The Arabian Nights* for the Batini, for instance, or the *Elder Edda* for the Valdaermen), or to go online to one of the many comprehensive mythology sites that are there, and work from that groundwork. Of course, it's often impossible to put that kind of work into character design, much less familiar design. So, for simplicity's sake, what follows are some basic guidelines for players and Storytellers to use when designing familiars for their characters, organized by Fellowship.

The Ahl-i-Batin are least likely of all the Fellowships to possess familiars. Of those few Ahl-i-Batin who do possess them, however, most favor fabulous creatures of Arabian legend. While there are a certain number of horses, camels, monkeys and other common beasts among the ranks of Ahl-i-Batin familiars, the majority are Bygones such as phoenixes, minor djinn and even mechanical constructs.

Familiars are also rare among the Messianic Voices. Though there are biblical precedents and the example of Saint Francis of Assisi with which to justify the Fellowship's connection to certain animals deemed "sacred" by Christendom, the Messianic Voices as a whole finds the idea of entering into a Pact with spirit entities who take incarnate form to whisper advice into the ears of those mages foolish enough to listen as spiritually dangerous — if not outright demonic. But as with all the Mystic Fellowships, there are those within the Messianic Voices who defy convention and keep familiars. Typically, familiars for the Messianic Voices appear as mundane animals such as white doves, lambs or even lions or fish. Familiars of Messianic Voices mages are seldom Bygones. Most Bygones would be viewed as Satan-spawn by such mages, so the likelihood of a Pact being forged is quite low.

Practitioners of the Old Faith are those mages most likely to have familiars; in fact, there is a long tradition of such beings aiding and tutoring those of the Old Faith. In the past, one might have found any number of fantastic creatures acting as familiars to Old Faith mages. However, the members of this Fellowship have learned through bitter experience how dangerous it is to possess Bygone familiars in the Dark Medieval period, so Old Faith

familiars are now almost invariably mundane creatures. Even the once-ubiquitous black cat has faded in popularity since current folklore has linked the animal to Devil worship. Now, familiars of this Fellowship commonly appear in the forms of (non-black) cats, toads, non-venomous snakes, rabbits and ravens.

The mages of the Order of Hermes are those most likely to pass familiars down lines of magicians from master to apprentice. Also, of all the Mystic Fellowships, the Order's familiars are the most evenly divided between the fantastic and the mundane, and therefore, a given Hermetic mage is as likely to possess a Bygone familiar as he is a seemingly ordinary animal. Common animals that often act as Hermetic familiars include owls, snakes and ferrets. The Order of Hermes mages also keep a dizzying array of oddball creatures as familiars, from homunculi to golems — even tiny dragons are not uncommon Hermetic familiars. The Order of Hermes' hubris is such that its members make few attempts to hide such outlandish creatures from prying eyes, a practice that's bound to cause problems for the Order in the future if left unchecked.

Some Spirit-Talkers, despite their understanding of the Spirit World and its inhabitants, refuse to keep incarnate familiars. In fact, it is these Spirit-Talkers' deep and abiding respect for the myriad spirits of the Earth and their ability to readily communicate with these spirits that make the practice of binding such entities into restrictive material Pacts so uncommon. Why bind a spirit to a crude material existence when it is a simple matter to talk with it in its sublimely beautiful, immaterial form and garner the same information and/or tutelage? A much more common practice among members of this Fellowship involves entering into Pacts with immaterial spirit familiars, or fetches

THE FETCH

A common practice among Spirit-Talkers involves entering into a Pact with a spirit being who thereafter becomes that mage's otherworldly, immaterial familiar, or more properly, fetch. Spirit-Talkers communicate and interact with these fetches through their Sensitivity Foundation, making the Spirit-Talkers the only Mystic Fellowship capable of having fetches rather than the standard sorts of familiars. Spirit-Talkers often send their fetches on missions into the Otherworld or to snoop on people and gather gossip in the material world. Except for their immaterial nature, fetches are in most ways identical to real-world familiars. The main differences are that a fetch costs an extra dot of the Familiar Background to create because it is both invisible and immaterial, allowing it to go almost anywhere unnoticed, and as a result of its spirit state, the fetch can appear as outlandish as the player wants and still not attract undue attention.

(see sidebar). In the few instances where Spirit-Talkers have bound spirits into Pacts to become material familiars, those familiars have most often taken forms mirroring those of the familiars of the Old Faith — toads, cats, snakes, ravens and rabbits.

The Valdaermen are often wont to keep familiars. Most of the creatures that are Valdaermen familiars play prominent roles in Norse myth. However, unlike in other mythologies of the world, the legends of the Norsemen are replete with intelligent animals that impart wisdom even to the gods. As a result, the familiars of the Valdaermen appear most frequently as common animals, with the occasional golden boar or eight-legged horse thrown in for good measure. Common animal types for Valdaermen familiars are right out of Norse legend, including squirrels, ravens, wolves, bears and even goats.

Another group of mages that frequently keeps familiars is the Infernalists. In fact, the practice is so common among Infernalists that both the Church and laymen recognize it as a sign of Devil worship. The reason for familiars' popularity with Infernalists is twofold. First, the reason Infernalists turn to the Dark Arts in the first place is to gain power, and it is often through the conspiratorial whisperings of the familiar that the secrets of power are revealed to them. Second, the Infernalists' dark masters are always concerned that their mortal servants might try to renege on their bargains and save their souls from eternal damnation. Better, then, to have a demonic servant on hand to watch for any sign of redemptive behavior, so that it might nip such disobedience in the bud before it gets out of hand — or if worse comes to worse, so the familiar might do in the defiant Infernalist prior to his reconciliation with the Creator. Common types of Infernal familiars include black cats, venomous snakes, bats, rats and even the occasional imp.

Unlike other familiars who enjoy a plethora of ways of feeding on their mages' Quintessence, Infernal familiars invariably feed on their mages' blood. In addition to losing Quintessence to her familiar, the Infernalist loses one lethal Health Level per two points of Quintessence she feeds to the familiar. In fact, to facilitate this process, an Infernalist who possesses a familiar always has a superfluous nipple located somewhere on her body by which the creature feeds. Unfortunately for the women of Europe, this Devil's mark becomes common knowledge to the Church's inquisitors, but its exact appearance remains recognizable only to the most highly trained of the Inquisition's witch-hunters. Therefore, thousands of innocents would be put to death by ill-trained inquisitors on the basis of their having simple moles and birthmarks.

CREATURES

Many dangerous beings haunt the roadways and sea lanes of the Dark Medieval. Here are a few such creatures, dreaded by Commoners and any sane man.

SAMPLE FAMILIAR — PITCH

To all outward appearances, Pitch is an ordinary black housecat kept by the elderly Widow Cartwright to control the rodent problem on her property. In actuality, however there is much more to Pitch and her relationship with Mrs. Cartwright than meets the eye.

Over 30 years ago, the Widow Cartwright was a raven-tressed beauty named Gwendolyn Pierce, the object of many a village youth's adolescent desire — and, secretly, a keeper of the Old Faith, like her aunt before her. Under the tutelage of her aunt, young Gwendolyn was quickly becoming adept at witchcraft, but the elder mage understood that there is always a price to be paid for knowledge of the old ways — a price in blood. By the time agents of the Inquisition arrived to deal with the "pagan witch" exerting an "evil influence" over Gwendolyn's village, her aunt had foreseen their coming for more than a season and had prepared for her own inevitable demise.

Months earlier, Gwendolyn had traveled with her aunt to the great stone circle of Salisbury Plain to celebrate Samhain. The two women painted themselves with woad, imbibed a potion of ergot and nightshade and danced naked beneath the moon's silvery light, anxiously awaiting midnight, when the Spirit World and the earthly one would unite until sunrise.

There, the two danced with the spirits until the women finally collapsed from exhaustion. While Gwendolyn slept the remainder of the night away, her aunt stayed awake to commune with the spirits. The woman knew she was destined to die at the hands of the Christian god's enforcers — of that there was no doubt. However, she did not want the traditions of the Old Faith to die with her. Gwendolyn's training was incomplete, and the girl would never be able to progress into the realm of true magic without aid.

The spirits listened to the woman's plight and wished to help her in her time of need, for the elder mage had never forgotten the old ways and had always given the spirits the worship they were due. One of the gathered spirits offered a possible solution. That spirit, one of wisdom and guile, would become young Gwendolyn's familiar and would succeed Gwendolyn's aunt as the young mage's guide to the ways of the Old Faith.

After stirring young Gwendolyn from her sleep, a Pact was struck between mage and spirit. Gwendolyn promised to care for the spirit, to heed its advice and to provide it with sustenance. The spirit, in turn, offered to instruct the young woman in magic to the best of its ability.

The deal struck, the spirit used its powers to materialize in the innocuous form of a small tomcat, "black as pitch" as Gwendolyn described him. The name appealed to the spirit, who took it as his own.

For more than 30 years, the two, mage and familiar, have been inseparable. Gwendolyn Cartwright, nee Pierce, has become wise in the ways of the Old Faith and uses that knowledge, like her aunt and untold generations before her had, to keep the people and livestock of her village healthy and to protect the village from those who would do it harm. Pitch, in turn, has come to love his life of simple pleasures — a warm fire to curl up near and plump mice to eat — but he knows change, like the turning of the seasons, is inevitable.

The Widow Cartwright's cough has been getting worse, despite her broths and potions. It is only a matter of time now. However, Darci, the widow's young daughter, has shown an aptitude for healing and foresight, and Pitch believes it won't be long before his mage suggests he enter into a Pact with the girl. Truth be told, that would suit him just fine. He'll always love his sweet Gwendolyn and will miss her terribly, but one human lifetime is hardly long enough to enjoy all the sunbeams, ear scratches and table scraps afforded to a cat of his pedigree.

Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 4, Manipulation 3, Appearance 1, Perception 4, Intelligence 2, Wits 4

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Climbing 3, Dodge 3, Empathy 2, Enigmas 3, Intimidation 2, Stealth 4, Subterfuge 2

Willpower: 3

Health Levels: OK, -1, -2, -5, Incapacitated

Armor: 0

Attacks: Claw or bite for one die of lethal damage

Powers: Backlash Negation (twice per story), Protection (one dot)

Weaknesses: None

Tass: None

THE BLACK DOG OF THE CROSSROADS (NIGHT HOUND)

A myth surrounding this dire dog in Britain states that his coming heralds death. People are told to avoid the crossroads at night for fear they may meet the Black Dog. Other stories, however, tell of the Black Dog appearing like an angel of mercy to children dying of disease. Its motives and master are unknown, but it sends fright into travelers across the entire continent of Britain and keeps them home at night with their doors locked.

Willpower 8, **Rage** 3, **Gnosis** 8, **Essence** 20

Charms: Airt Sense, Appear, Death Fertility, Dream Journey, Ease Pain, Flee, Iron Will, Reform, Track

Image: This spirit always takes the form of a tall black dog that only appears at night. It has been seen as a mastiff with fur like black velvet, an Irish wolfhound with wiry fur the color of night, and a great dane running through the darkness. It is only seen at major crossroads, staring at midnight travelers with ghostly yellow eyes.

SIREN

Longhaired temptresses of the sea, Sirens lure sailors to watery graves on unseen reefs or in dangerous straights. They are generally found in warmer coastal regions, far from the habitations of men, and they appear to be normal — although stunningly beautiful — women, with hair the color of spun gold, eyes a startling blue, skin more pale than the finest cream, and always naked. They tend to sun themselves on rocks within view of the coast and watch whatever activities occur there.

If spotted by a female, the Sirens will turn tail and run, slipping into the sea to disappear from sight. If they spy a male, however, they immediately begin singing out to him, their voices ringing across the open water. Most males are hard pressed to resist the lure of their beautiful song. Those who fail to withstand its call will try to swim out to the Sirens, no matter how far they may be, or attempt to steer their vessel toward them, regardless of dangerous waters.

Sirens do not actually allow men to reach them, however, and will retreat, leading their would-be paramours into ever-more dangerous waters until they drown. However, if a man can actually reach them and grab hold of one, it will surrender and beg to be let go. It can be forced into revealing the location of its undersea lair, where the Sirens collect the belongings of all their previous victims.

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3, Charisma 4, Manipulation 4, Appearance 5, Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 4, Brawl 1, Dodge 2, Expression 5, Subterfuge 4, Animal Ken 2, Stealth 3, Survival 3, Linguistics 2

Willpower: 5

Health Levels: OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5, Incapacitated

Armor: 0

Attacks: Fist

Powers: Siren Song (by spending one Willpower point, the Siren can sing out to males, tempting them to come to its current position, no matter the danger. A man can resist with a Willpower roll, difficulty 9. This difficulty can be lowered by two if the ears are completely covered, and by one more if loud noise plays to drown out the song)

Weakness: Sirens cannot easily defend themselves, and will give up rather than fight.

Tass: The hair of a Siren carries with it some of the beauty of the Siren herself. If collected while the Siren is still living, the hair can be woven into bracelets, rings, or into another's hair. Each lock of hair, in whatever form, contains the power to make its bearer more beautiful or tempting, lowering by one the difficulty of any rolls associated with seduction. Each lock of hair contains two points of Quintessence.

DEMONS

Beings of demonic origin have been known to appear throughout history. They seem to have some limitations, such as having to be brought to this world by a magician of some type, but once let loose upon the earth they have complete freedom to wreak havoc with human lives. Needing no food, water, or air to breathe, they foment evil until put down by some force. Not all are of the same strength or even of the same form, but they all seem to have but one purpose: to destroy what is good.

IMP

Minor servants of evil, Imps could be almost comical in nature were it not for their vile behavior. Some young mages summon such beings to serve as familiars. Imps, however, despise such servitude, even though they profess to love it to their master's face. They want nothing more than to break the familiar/mage bond and run freely through the world, causing trouble. Sneaking into bedrooms and stinging people in the night is one of their favorite tactics. They also tend to collect anything and everything that might be of a magical nature, and gather the flotsam of the magical world into their hidey-holes in the hopes of finding an object of genuine power.

Those wishing to gain an Imp for a familiar need only spend one Background point. Additional points can be spent to gain the familiar abilities listed on p. 86 of the **Dark Ages: Mage** rulebook. Anyone who sees a mage with an Imp familiar will surely assume the worst and call in the Inquisition. For this reason, it is best for the mage to bid his Imp to remain invisible and out of the way at all times.

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Charisma 1, Manipulation 2, Appearance 0, Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

Abilities: Alertness 1, Athletics 1, Awareness 1, Brawl 1, Dodge 1, Subterfuge 4, Stealth 5, Occult 3

Willpower: 3

Health Levels: OK x 2, -1, -2, -5, Destroyed.

Armor: 0

Attacks: Tail stinger (Str + 1L plus possible poison)
Powers: Flight (the Imp can fly five yards per turn)
 Hide (when hiding behind cover, the difficulties for search rolls to spot or find the Imp are raised by three)
 Invisibility (the Imp can make itself invisible to normal sight; sounds and touch impressions, such as footprints, still remain. If the Imp spends one Willpower point, it remains invisible for a scene, but if it interacts physically or socially with another being besides a mage bonded to it in a familiar Pact, it becomes visible. If two Willpower points are spent, the invisibility lasts for one scene and the Imp need not worry about bumping into other beings)
 Poison (by spending one Willpower point, the Imp can impregnate its tail stinger with a deadly poison. Each hour that a victim remains untreated (i.e., does not receive a successful Medicine skill roll or magical healing), he loses a point of Stamina. If the victim is reduced to Stamina 0, he dies)

Weakness: An Imp cannot resist the call of its True Name, and must hurry to any who speak it. It cannot enter holy ground or stand in the presence of holy relics. Weapons blessed by a true priest deliver aggravated damage to the demon.

Tass: The dried tail of an Imp, when used as a wand, makes it easier to cast spells of evil intent. Spells designed to destroy or defile have their difficulties lowered by one. The tail is extremely fragile, however; it can only be used three times for this purpose, after which it crumbles to dust.

INCUBUS/SUCCUBUS

The Incubus is the male form and the Succubus the female form of this demon of temptation and lust, known to nearly all cultures (although by different names). Its form is that of an incredibly attractive person, and it is most often summoned and bound to this world by a mage who seeks a comely and skilled bed partner (see *Traffic with Spirits*, pp. 116, for some ideas on commanding summoned spirits). There is great danger in this, however, for the demon gains its sustenance from the life force of its sexual partners, devoured when the victim is at the height of ecstasy. Over a period of a few weeks, an Incubus/Succubus's nightly visits can slowly enervate a mortal unto death.

A powerful mage, however, can turn the tables and instead draw Tass from the demon by casting an extended spell over the course of a sexual coupling session. The mage rolls only her Foundation, with no Pillar. She must withhold her climax until she achieves five successes, after which she can withdraw one point of Tass from the demon, who loses a Willpower point and one Health Level. If climax comes before the spell is successful, the reverse happens: the demon takes the mage's own essence, and the mage loses the Willpower point and the Health Level. Climax can be avoided without a roll for one turn per Willpower dot the mage possesses, after which she must roll Willpower against difficulty 8 (the demon is well skilled).

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4, Charisma 5, Manipulation 5, Appearance 6, Perception 2, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Awareness 2, Brawl 1, Dodge 2, Empathy 4, Expression 4, Subterfuge 5, Etiquette 2, Melee 1, Performance 3, Stealth 3, Enigmas 1, Linguistics 2, Occult 2

Willpower: 7

Health Levels: OK x 4, -1 x 4, -2 x 2, -3 x 2, -5, Incapacitated

Armor: 0

Attacks: Claw +1L, Bite +1L

Powers: Temptation (by spending one Willpower point, an Incubus/Succubus can make itself irresistible to those attracted to its sex. The demon must make eye contact with the target, who may resist with a Willpower roll, difficulty 8)

Incorporeal (by spending one Willpower point, an Incubus/Succubus may turn itself into a fine mist for one scene, immune to physical weapons and capable of slipping through cracks)

Weakness: The Incubus/Succubus cannot resist the call of its True Name, and must hurry to any who speak it. It cannot enter holy ground or stand in the presence of holy relics. Weapons blessed by a true priest deliver aggravated damage to the demon.

Tass: In addition to the means of harvesting demon Tass listed above, the breath of a living Incubus/Succubus, when caught in a bottle, can be inhaled to make someone truly attractive. The gas only lasts for one evening, but lowers by two the difficulty for social rolls.

DJINN

So the hairless apes would set themselves above us in the hierarchy of creation? Do Adam's breed boast of summoning, binding and commanding us at will? Ha! I fart a typhoon upon the collarbones of Sulayman! Can we not summon a man by taking on the voice of his friend or lover? Can we not bind him with manacles of iron and walls of stone? Can we not command him when wearing the face of his liege? When Iblis refused to prostrate himself before Adam along with the other angels, he was adhering most piously to the first divine commandment — Thou shalt worship no god but God!

— Biwarasp the Wise, King Heroic of Balasaghun, the Isle of the Djinn in the Green Sea

So much is said of the djinn. So little can be confirmed....

The Quran and other sources declare that God created the race of djinn from "smokeless fire." Nobody has ever determined just what "smokeless fire" is, but the notion of fire without physical byproduct or residue suggests that some sort of Umbral substance or process is involved. The Invisible World of the djinn is certainly part of the Umbra, but many djinn have stated that they lived in the material world long before the creation of man, and point to various ancient megalithic ruins as

evidence. Furthermore, the djinn have always said that they "come from Jabal Qaf." This is generally taken to mean that Mount Qaf was where their species originated, as many other realms and kingdoms within the Invisible World are known (at least by name, such as the island of Balasaghun mentioned above), but the context of the djinn's words seems to imply that Mount Qaf is their current home. Now, djinn have been encountered on the green mountain since time immemorial, but the Batini of Sihr Maqamut have no record or evidence of a large djinn community anywhere on its face. This is not to say, however, that Jabal Qaf may not have slopes that are invisible to mortal eyes....

(Of all this the sage Abu Tufayl commented that many mystical teachings hint that the physical world and spiritual world were once one and the same; perhaps the separation of the two coincided with the rise of mankind, and the djinn were relegated to the realm of spirit. If similar displacement occurred — or is still occurring — on Jabal Qaf, this would certainly explain the contempt which most djinn hold toward humanity.)

Nor is it known how many varieties of djinn there are. Some sources indicate many distinct subspecies, while others attest that any given djinn can assume a number of forms, from natural phenomena like sandstorms to the appearance of a normal-looking human being. One type is the *silaah*, who always appear in the forms of animals, although plant and mineral djinn may also exist. Abu Tufayl recounts how, on his pilgrimage to Mecca, he accidentally trod upon the head of a small sand-snake, crushing it. Inexplicably saddened, he stopped and gave the poor creature a proper burial by the roadside, amid much derision from his fellow pilgrims. That night, as he slept in a caravanserai, a regal host of mighty djinn confronted him in his dreams. They explained that the sand-snake had been in actuality a beloved saint among their people, that he had been present at the Night of Fana and was counted among the favored companions of the Khwaja al-Akbar. Had Abu Tufayl not amended his deed by respectfully burying the *silaah*, the djinn lords went on, they would surely have taken his soul from his body and subjected it to an eternity of torment in retribution.

Two other types are known, though these appear to be social designations rather than races. The *ifrit* is a wild, unruly and destructive sort that assumes a large and monstrous aspect. The term is generally applied to those djinn who sided with the Devil Kings in ancient times, although the djinn themselves seem to use it for any violent, malicious or stupid member of their race. The most powerful among the djinn is called a *marid*; thought to be the oldest of their kind, the *marid* is an awesome entity of near godlike proportions and facilities. Note that none of the terms given here are mutually exclusive; a djinn may be *silaah*, *ifrit* and *marid* all at once.

ZINJAN ZAKAAR'S MENAGERIE OF GENII

All of Zinjan Zakaar's (see p. 18) djinn save for Kabir are being held against their wishes, constrained by his

magic and fearful of his dominating will and searing wrath. His mastery of the Keys of Sulayman forces them to execute all his commands to the letter, but if he ever leaves them a loophole in the exact wording of his instructions, they will attempt to enlist the service of any mage who seems strong enough to kill Zinjan or clever enough to somehow free them from his control.

KABIR

Kabir is Zinjan's most frequently used captive spirit, an *ifrit* of great size, strength and destructive potential, kept in a heavily padlocked iron casket. He speaks only Turkish, with a very limited vocabulary. Kabir is not very intelligent, and sometimes has trouble in distinguishing friend from foe during battle.

Willpower 4, Rage 8, Gnosis 1, Essence 13

Charms: Armor, Blast, Quake

Image: Kabir appears as a hairy, ape-like ogre almost 10 feet tall, with curving tusks, broken fangs and tiny, stupid eyes, brandishing a spiked club of knotted wood.

Abu Harim

Abu Harim sleeps coiled in a round clay jug. Zinjan employs him to track down and retrieve stolen objects, or to find items that Zinjan seeks. Abu Harim (literally, "Father of Thieves") cannot speak, but unbeknownst to Zinjan, he can read and write Arabic and is quickly learning Latin.

Willpower 5, Rage 4, Gnosis 7, Essence 16

Charms: Airt Sense, Cling, Flee, Track

Magic: Al-Ikhlās 2, Al-Anbiya 2, Al-Hajj 3

Image: This small, reddish-brown, ferret-like *silaah* has very keen senses and eight tiny legs, and can flatten or stretch his elongated body to slip through narrow spaces, like under doors or through gratings.

BULBUL

Bulbul is Zinjan's spy, flying far and wide to eavesdrop on distant conversations, then relaying them to his master upon his return. Bulbul is a perfect mimic with an amazing memory, and can replay any discourse, complete with all inflections, nuances and even background sounds, as precisely as any modern tape recorder. He only understands Arabic, however, and can speak for himself only in birdsong.

Willpower 6, Rage 2, Gnosis 5, Essence 13

Charms: Airt Sense, Call for Aid, Flee, Track

Magic: Al-Ikhlās 2, Al-Fatihah 1

Image: Bulbul is another *silaah*, and takes the form of a brightly plumed songbird when released from his fancy crystal bottle.

SHAMS-I-PASHA

Shams-i-Pasha can learn any spoken language after hearing it continuously for more than a few minutes, and can see into the hearts of men to know whether or not they believe the words that they are saying. When Zinjan is being lied to, she alerts him to the fact by whispering it in his ear.

Willpower 5, Rage 3, Gnosis 7, Essence 15

Charms: Disable, Insight, Mind Speech

Magic: Al-Ikhlās 2, Al-Fatihah 2, Al-Layl 1

Image: Shams-i-Pasha appears as shimmering, varicolored ribbon swimming in her stoppered glass tube; when released she takes the form of a translucent, rainbow-streaked serpent over two feet long and no larger around than a child's little finger. Zinjan usually drapes the serpentine Shams-i-Pasha around his shoulder with her neck looped over his ear, concealed under the train of his turban.

AYISHA QANDISHA

The driver's seat of Zinjan's oxcart is a heavy oaken box reinforced with iron bands and many heavy locks of various sorts. Within is a squat, three-legged covered cauldron, some three feet in diameter, fashioned of red Cathayan jade carved with binding glyphs; its lid is sealed with molten lead and bears the great Seal of Sulayman. In this is kept the most potent force in Zinjan Zakaar's menagerie, the *marid* called Ayisha Qandisha. The North African equivalent of the ancient Mesopotamian demoness Lilith, Ayisha Qandisha can incite lust in the heart of man or woman to the point where they are driven mad by their passions. (In modern psychological terms, she might be said to embody the wrath of women scorned or abused.) She hates all dominating men and loves to eat them, although she prefers the taste of babies. Zinjan never allows her to leave the cauldron or sends her on missions, because he knows that even he cannot control her once she is freed. Given proper time and space to work the great binding rituals, however, he may open the cauldron for the purpose of lowering a particularly recalcitrant enemy into it. In his idle moments, Zinjan speculates on the mayhem that would result were he to release her in Rome, the seat of Christian religious authority. (That is the Western Rome in Italia, not to be confused with Constantinople, which Muslims call *Rum*, or Rome.)

Willpower 7, Rage 9, Gnosis 4, Essence 25

Charms: Armor, Blast, Blighted Touch, Call for Aid, Corruption, Influence, Iron Will, Mind Speech, Possession, Shapeshift, Umbral Storm

Magic: Al-Ikhlās 4, all Ubbadan Pillars at 4

Image: Ayisha Qandisha can take any form, preferring that of a darkly seductive young woman. Her natural form is also roughly female, but gigantic and malformed, standing over 15 feet tall, emaciated and skeletal but with pendulous, low-slung breasts and buttocks. Her long, matted, black hair, writhing like tentacles, frames a skull-like face with jagged brown teeth, a four-foot long tongue with the texture of a wood rasp and glowing red eyes burning in their deep sockets. Her broad, fan-like ears are pierced with many copper hoops, from which dangle shriveled male members. Numerous similar piercings adorn her body, along with tattoos that coil across her scabrous and pustulant flesh. She devours her foes using the many-fanged jaws that open between her legs.



Jim Di Bartolo

THE FAE

My Dearest Madame Borovzny,

I hope that this letter finds you well and that your studies are progressing satisfactorily. I read with interest your letter to your brother, and I fervently hope to read your treatise on the nature of Goetian magical tools sometime soon. Although I would greatly enjoy speculating about your findings, I have business of a much more pressing and dark nature to discuss with you.

As you are well aware, your brother, Disciple Vbn Klatka, has been progressing quite well in his studies, and his aptitude for the Primus Forma is quite impressive. A few weeks ago, we began receiving letters here at the university, all unsigned, all addressed to your brother. He and I spent long hours attempting to determine the nature of their sender but were unable to make any definitive determinations. The letters purported to be from a member of our Order, but the sender persistently refused to identify himself, and the couriers knew nothing of him. Whoever he is, he has filled your brother's head with tales of the little people and their wealth beneath the ground, and I shall take him to task for it once I determine his identity.

The letter writer purports to know the location of a legendary sword of Fae make, one that draws Tass from the core of the earth itself. If such a thing were true (which I gravely doubt), then this sword would indeed be the penultimate Talisman. Although the idea of such a treasure excites me, I am certain that you agree with me in saying that such a thing cannot exist. If it were possible, surely a member of our Order would have developed or located it by now.

The letter-writer asked for your brother's assistance in procuring the sword. He says that the Primus Forma in particular is useful against the fair folk, and this is his justification for seeking out your brother in particular. I have sent a letter to another of our brethren in an attempt to verify this assertion. I do not know if it is indeed true or blatant falsehood. The fact that the writer fails to sign his name suggests to me that there is trouble regardless.

My dearest Elizabete, you know quite well where this story is going. Your brother left despite my counsels, and he has been gone for over a fortnight, well past his promised date of return. We cannot locate him. Although I know little about the Fae, I know enough to judge their nature to be perverse and aggressive. I expect that they do not look favorably upon potential thieves, even if said thieves chase a dream that does not exist. As a result, we regretfully count your brother among the dead. If he is indeed still alive, I am certain that there is naught we can do to secure his return.

I am greatly sorry to bring such sad news to your attention, Madame. Know that my heart shudders at the thought of losing him and of hurting you. I take the responsibility for this, for I well remember promising you that I would take care of him. Perhaps you were right to refuse me, all those years ago. I shall not blame you if you cannot forgive me for my faults in this matter, but know that I will always feel for you as I did then.

Regretfully,

Adept Bartolomejs

Every village tells tales of the faerie folk, how they steal babies at night, poke sleeping children with pins, and abduct lovers that wander too far into the forest. Of course, the stories can be positive as well as negative: tales of brownies who clean house when no one is looking, or fairy hags who cure the illnesses of travelers kind enough to stop and share a crust of bread. For most mages, these tales form the bulk of their knowledge about the Fae.

While they listen quite intently to these stories (in order to use them as justifications for their magic), many dismiss the tales as simple superstition. In general, mages who do believe in faeries have little justification for their beliefs beyond what the common villager has to say. But still they believe, evidence that some mages are no more immune to superstition than Commoners, although they would certainly claim otherwise.

Then there are those who have stumbled upon some scrap of evidence to fuel their belief. These mages tend to belong to the Old Faith, whose druidic members have had dealings with the Fae in the past, or the Order of Hermes, who record every last detail of any supernatural occurrence. However, this does not mean that mages from other Fellowships cannot also have had some personal experience or have access to some document that leads them to believe that those old wives' tales might indeed be true.

STUDY OF THE FAE

Thus I begin my exploration of the nature and capabilities of the fair folk. This work is the culmination of twenty years of continuous study as well as interviews with the Fae-touched, although their ramblings are often difficult to translate into rational thought.

—Joaia of Tours, *Explication of the Nature and Society of Faerie*

Storytellers who wish to incorporate the Fae into their **Dark Ages: Mage** games should first consider how much the characters know about them. Even the Fae "expert" of the group draws information from diverse sources, both informed and uninformed. Joaia of Tours, who wrote what is considered by many mages to be the foremost study of the Fae, gained much of her information from village tales and word of mouth. This work is filled with inconsistency and hearsay, and the author quite honestly admits this in her introduction. Furthermore, the work itself is incomplete, missing full chapters from the few copies in existence. Clearly, this is no coincidence, given that all of the copies are missing the same chapters. Furthermore, Joaia herself has disappeared and has proven impossible to locate.

While the nature and history of the Fae is still a matter of speculation, there are some "facts" that are supported by Joaia of Tours' *Explication of the Nature and Society of Faerie* as well as other Fae-related research and writings. Most mages hold these to be true, although it is up to the Storyteller to decide what is truth and what is falsehood. The following are samples of some of the working theories and observations that mages have made about the Fae.

- Faerie folk do not like to be seen. They appear to have supernatural powers of stealth or possibly the ability to remain invisible, even to those with the Sight. However, infants and animals have been observed to act strangely in houses believed to be inhabited by the Fae, and it is theorized that they may have some ability to see through these powers.
- The Fae also possess magical powers, known in folklore as Glamours. The nature of these Glamours is highly debated, and many mages have devoted their lives to learning how Glamours work and whether mages might be able to learn them as well. Given that the Fae are not forthcoming with this information, these mages study Faerie artifacts and folklore. Joaia of Tours is rumored to

have developed a classification system for Faerie powers, but sadly, that information has been lost.

- Fae use a substance similar to Quintessence to create their Glamours and treasures. It has been widely documented that Fae treasures can be broken down into pure Quintessence, although this process destroys the treasure in question. It is rumored that some less scrupulous mages have managed to distill Fae creatures into Tass as well. However, this process will certainly gain the enmity of the Fae, and they have an instinctive sense of who has employed such measures. The method for obtaining such Tass varies from creature to creature, but it usually involves preparing and consuming a specific part of the Fae in question, such as hair, teeth, or claws. It is exceedingly rare to find any records of this process, so most mages who attempt to harvest Tass in this manner do so through trial and error.

- Cold iron is the one most powerful weapon against the Fae, and most weapons are made of this substance. Worked iron is less effective. Still, the practice of hanging iron horseshoes over doorframes is believed to offer some protection. Folktales also recommend the following methods of protection, although they are not generally accepted among the mages: religious artifacts or implements, wearing articles of clothing backwards, throwing salt over one's shoulder, and leaving food and drink on the doorstep to satisfy the faeries of the night. Storytellers are also encouraged to develop local superstitions of their own.

FAERIE CREATURES

Given that the Fae prefer to remain hidden from sight, it is logical that mages would have limited contact with them. Most Fae scholars have never seen one of the fair folk up close. There are, however, plenty of sightings

FAERIE TASS

One optional rule that Storytellers may wish to use is that Quintessence gained from Fae artifacts or blood retains a signature that affects the mage who uses it, making them more like the creature or object that produced the Quintessence. For instance, the blood of a faerie queen might make the user more regal in demeanor, or might make it easier for that mage to cast magics that intimidate or charm her opponents. Storytellers who wish to use this option in their chronicles should decide whether Fae Quintessence affects the user's personality, magic, or both. Modifiers would be applied according to the strength of the source. A legendary artifact or blood from a faerie queen might have a modifier of -3 difficulty, whereas a common Broach of Srying or blood from a household brownie might have a modifier of -1 difficulty. These effects last until the Quintessence gained from the Fae or treasure is spent.

of faerie creatures by mages, and it is on the strength of these sightings that most of the theories and summaries have been based.

Although some mages refer to them as spirits, this name is not entirely appropriate. Certainly, they are not spirits or ghosts, since they do not inhabit the Underworld as those unfortunate souls do. But they are similar to spirits in that they have the ability to remain unseen if they wish to do so and some can make their presence felt by making noises or moving objects in a manner similar to a poltergeist. In addition, some mages believe that Fae creatures are easier to find by the light of the full moon, and mages with interest in faerie doings often conduct their business on these nights.

Every mage who has seen a Fae creature tells tales of creatures of otherworldly demeanor, whose very shape is inhuman. Certainly, no one would ever mistake one of these creatures for a human being, for they are too oddly shaped to pass for one. This has led some mages to conclude that the fair folk themselves are similar in appearance, and the tales of beautiful faerie queens are completely untrue. Others, including Joaia of Tours, argue that the servitor creatures are obviously lesser folk, and that there is perhaps a society of Fae, where the true Fae remain hidden and the creatures do all of the work with mortals.

The following are a few examples of Fae creatures. One hallmark of the faerie folk is that they tend to be tied to particular cultures or locales. There are Fae creatures that live inside the home, those that skulk in the wooded shadows, and others that prowl the seashores. It is very rare that they leave their preferred habitat, and in fact they become progressively weaker and weaker the longer they spend away from their sphere of influence. Given this, Storytellers are encouraged to develop additional creatures based on the chronicle's setting and local legend.

NUCKELAVEE

The Nuckelavee is so feared by the local inhabitants that most are loath to speak of it. Eventually, after much persuasion, Kirstaine MacGregor, a young housewife from a long line of fishermen, was persuaded to tell me about the creature. She sobbed in fear as she spoke, having had a nighttime encounter with one of them when she was trying to tie down a boat that had come unlashed in a heavy storm. The poor girl still has nightmares about the event, and I have undertaken to provide her with a black cohosh tea to ease the pain of her memory.

—Joaia of Tours, *Explication of the Nature and Society of Faerie*

The Nuckelavee is a sea-creature that is human from the waist up, but horse-like from the waist down. Although the idea of a seafaring centaur may strike some as laughable, this creature is anything but. Nuckelavee have the ability to frighten all but the most stout of heart for one simple reason: the creatures have no skin. Instead, they are a mess of pulsing organs and throbbing blood, and the sight of such a creature rising up out of the surf quite understandably terrifies anyone

unfortunate enough to witness it. In fact, some of the finest fishing coves are now deserted in favor of less productive waters on the account that the Nuckelavee have chased all of the fishermen away.

The Nuckelavee are blamed for any ill happenings in the sea and on the beach. They are blamed for boats coming loose in the water as well as for poor fishing days. Farmers curse them for cattle and sheep that fall to their death from cliffs at the water's edge, claiming that the Nuckelavee have an enticing power that draws the animals to them. They are also known for sending ill sea winds to destroy crops and bring illness to villagers who live too close to their beaches.

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3, Charisma 3, Manipulation 1, Appearance 0, Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Abilities: Animal Ken 3, Athletics (swimming) 5, Brawl 3, Intimidation 4, Stealth 4

Willpower: 4

Health Levels: OK, -1 x 3, -2 x 2, -3, -5, Incapacitated
Armor: 0

Attacks: Fear is the Nuckelavee's primary weapon. However, they have been known to grapple with their victims and drown them.

Powers: Voice of the Sea (by spending a point of Willpower, the Nuckelavee can alter the waters within 10 yards, such as creating waves to capsize boats, frightening away fish, or calling predatory and very hungry sea creatures)

Weaknesses: The Nuckelavee is repelled by fresh water, and the creature never appears during the rainy season. Many fishermen carry small vials of fresh spring water to protect themselves when they fish.

Tass: The blood of the Nuckelavee, when left to dry in the sun for a fortnight, turns into a coarse reddish powder. This powder can be used to decorate a mage's face and head in a manner similar to war paint, providing two Quintessence points. If the Storyteller wishes, the application of Nuckelavee blood may also give the mage a disquieting aura. This reduces the difficulty of Intimidation rolls by one and increases the difficulty of Empathy rolls by one.

DUERGAR

The Duergar are capricious little folk, and wise travelers will carry with them some small gift to bestow upon any Duergar they might meet. This is often enough to satisfy the creature and insure the safety of the traveler. However, no gift is great enough to justify trespassing in the Duergar's home, and those who enter those homes do not live to tell the tale.

—Joaia of Tours, *Explication of the Nature and Society of Faerie*

The Duergar are hill-dwellers. They stand approximately one or two feet tall, but otherwise resemble human men with long beards and piercing eyes. In later years, the Duergar will be known as the dwarves, a kindly and gentle folk. But at this time, they are capricious and dangerous

creatures. Despite their small stature, the Duergar have the strength of the strongest man and a fiery temper to match it. They are fiercely territorial, and will strike out at anyone who trespasses on their lands. The only defense against their ire is to beg for their hospitality and offer a gift in exchange.

Although it is not widely known, these creatures prefer to dwell in barrows or burial mounds. They have a great love for riches and relics and will protect them to the death. Needless to say, they do not look upon grave robbers favorably, and there is no gift in all of the land that will redeem a robber in their eyes.

Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 3, Stamina 5, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 4

Abilities: Athletics 2, Brawl 4, Dodge 3, Melee 3, Stealth 5, Survival 4

Willpower: 6

Health Levels: OK x 3, -1 x 2, -2 x 2, -3, -5, Incapacitated
Armor: 0

Attacks: Duergar are hand-to-hand brawlers. When faced with an armed opponent, they rely on their small size to hide and then attack from an unseen location. They also carry small knives (Str +1L).

Weaknesses: Duergar are intensely proud of their territory and find it difficult to harm those who show the proper respect for it.

Tass: The Duergar themselves are not a source of Tass. Instead, their power resides in their hordes. Therefore, the greater the treasure is, the more powerful the Duergar who guards it. In most cases, the treasure in question does not have any magical powers, making it a rare source of raw, unaltered Quintessence. Unfortunately, the treasures must be utterly destroyed to release it. Duergar hordes offer one to four points of Quintessence, depending on their contents.

SKOGGRA (WOOD-WIFE)

Pether i Barckarlaby, an adherent to the Old Faith, tells this story from his boyhood. A young woodcutter was once accused of breaking his marriage vows. His bride claimed that he left their bed late every night and did not return until the break of dawn, and her brothers followed him one night, intent on exacting revenge for their sister's broken heart and tainted honor. They found him with a creature that was covered in bark from the waist down. Strangely, he appeared to be quite happy and refused to return to his home. The brothers tried to make him return to the village. The creature, which they call a Skoggra, was so enraged that she pierced them with her fingers, which were pointed sharp like thorns, and took out their eyes.

—Joaia of Tours, *Explication of the Nature and Society of Faerie*

The Skoggra, or Wood-Wives, can actually be quite friendly with humans. They are all female and quite pretty, although they appear wild. Their lower torso is

covered in bark, as well as leaves and flowers in the spring. But their faces are beautiful, with eyes green as moss and brown hair that twines wildly over their shoulders. Given their appearance, it is not surprising that human men might fall in love after simply sighting one of them.

It is surprising, however, that the Skoggra seem to return the sentiment. If the suitor strikes their fancy, they will make arrangements to meet with him in the woods, usually after dark. The suitor grows progressively more haggard looking, although this is largely due to the fact that he gets no sleep at night, and has nothing to do with the attentions of the Skoggra herself. In fact, she desires nothing more than to protect him and keep him for herself. However, she is almost always blamed for her suitor's illness, and Skoggra are incredibly sensitive to betrayal. She will resist anything and anyone who tries to separate her from her love, going so far as to kill him rather than letting him go.

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 4, Manipulation 4, Appearance 5, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Abilities: Brawl 1, Crafts 2, Expression 4, Seduction 5, Stealth 3

Willpower: 8

Health Levels: OK, -1 x 2, -2, -3, -5, Incapacitated

Armor: The Skoggra's bark provides +1B/+1L protection to her lower torso.

Attacks: Thorny claws (Str +2L)

Powers: Allure (by spending a Willpower point, the Skoggra can call a human to her, provided that she has seen his face and heard his voice. The human must be able to hear her voice for this power to work, and can resist with a Willpower roll, difficulty 8)

Weaknesses: Skoggra are creatures of the forest, and are sensitive to any worked metals. Although only cold iron causes harm, as with other Fae creatures, other metals such as steel or worked iron make them uncomfortable and eager to retreat.

Tass: Steeping the bark of a Skoggra in a cup of clear spring water results in a tea that, when consumed, provides two Quintessence points. This tea may have the optional effect of making the mage in question wild and jealous in demeanor, reflecting the Skoggra's need for complete and utter devotion. However, this is balanced by the mage's increased facility in the wilderness, reducing the difficulty of all Survival rolls by two.

OVINNİK

Although many household spirits are benign, provided that they are given the proper respect, others are ill tempered and hurtful. There is one species of faerie that lives in barns and stables. It has been known to lure owners inside the barn and then burn it down. These creatures are impossible to reason with, and the only recourse is to call upon a priest to have them driven out.

—Joaia of Tours, *Explication of the Nature and Society of Faerie*

The Ovinniks, on first glance, appear to be very similar to the Brownies (**Dark Ages: Mage**, p. 194). They live in barns or stables and are particularly fond of animals. In fact, they are believed to have the ability to converse with them in their own language. However, the resemblance ends there. While the Brownies are generally helpful and become angry only when they feel they are not appreciated, the Ovinniks are malicious creatures through and through. While they will never do anything to hurt an animal, humans are fair game.

Ovinniks tend to seek out men who mistreat their animals, although they have been known to torment good-hearted farmers just for the fun of it. At first, the mishaps are mild and serve as warnings: bales of hay are ripped apart and thrown about the barn, lanterns refuse to light inside the barn but work fine outside, and gates refuse to stay shut. If the warnings are not heeded, the pranks quickly turn deadly.

In appearance, the Ovinnik is covered in fur and looks like a stray cat or dog. This, of course, can lead to quite a lot of trouble when one of the family members tries to pet the doggy or feed it.

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 1, Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 5

Abilities: Animal Ken 4, Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Stealth 4
Willpower: 5

Health Levels: OK x 2, -1 x 2, -3, -5, Incapacitated

Armor: 0

Attacks: Like the Brownies, Ovinniks attack with animated or controlled household objects. They also have claws (Str +2L).

Powers: Animate Objects (as the Brownie power; by spending a Willpower point, the Ovinnik can telekinetically control a number of objects equal to his Wits rating)

Weaknesses: Ovinniks cannot tolerate harm coming to any animal. If they become aware of any animal in trouble, they will immediately stop what they are doing and go to its rescue.

Tass: The teeth of the Ovinnik, when ground by hand into a powder and inhaled, bestow three points of Quintessence. The optional effect is quite extreme. Mages who gain Quintessence from this method become quite bestial, losing the ability to speak or to walk upright. However, their intelligence levels are not altered. Furthermore, they acquire the ability to communicate with animals in their own tongues.

FAERIE TREASURE

Most often, when the fair folk and mages come into contact with each other, it is in a struggle over a powerful faerie treasure. These objects are not only sources of power and Quintessence for the mages, but are also objects for study and learning. Thus, they are valuable indeed, particularly for the Order of Hermes, who place

great value on such things. Of course, the Fae are not inclined to simply hand over such objects to the mages, and bartering is rarely an option, since the Fae do not appear to be interested in what the mages have to offer. This is a generality, of course. Legend does tell of a mage of the Old Faith who gave a faerie queen possession of a powerful cray. In exchange, the faerie gave the mage a Fae treasure that healed the broken mind of the mage's daughter. Obviously, situations such as this are relatively uncommon.

The following items are some treasures that mages have sought or heard rumor of in tales about the Fae.

THE SWORD OF THE TRUE KING

There is some argument over the existence of this sword, known as Calad-Bog by some, Caliburn by others, and Excalibur by most. Some mages say that the sword does not exist at all; others say that there are two different swords, Caliburn and Excalibur. Regardless, the sword has been attributed all manner of powers and abilities. It is said that the bearer of the sword is unbeatable in battle, that the sword offers its bearer powers of regeneration, and that it strikes of its own accord. If that is not enough, tales also say that the sword gives its bearer the ability to detect lies or falsehoods, to inspire men more than the tales of the greatest bard, and to call down lightning from the skies.

Regardless of the true abilities of this treasure, it is obviously highly sought by the mages. Rumor says that the sword is in the hands of the great Fae sorceress known as the Lady in the Lake, and the mage who finds her will also find the sword.

THE CAULDRON OF ANNWN

One of the most coveted faerie treasures is the Cauldron of Annwn. Once located in the Underworld beneath Glastonbury Tor, the Fae king Avallach hid it from mortal sight after Morgan le Fey went against his wishes and attempted to use the Cauldron on King Arthur. According to rumor amongst the mages, the Cauldron has the power to heal the sickness of any mortal submerged in water within it. Many mages have dedicated their entire lives to the search for the Cauldron. Evidently, some of them got a little too close; there are tales of quite a few mages who went looking for the Cauldron of Annwn and never came back.

Recently, Master Theuderic of the Hermetic Order claimed to have seen the Cauldron of Annwn. He had just returned to his home in Constantinople after a year of travel and study, and his fellow mages were very excited to hear his claims until they realized that Theuderic's mind had slipped. He said many preposterous things, asserting that Avallach himself had extended the olive branch of peace to the mages through Theuderic and made him the new ambassador from the Fae. Theuderic also believes that he has a host of Fae guards, and he speaks to thin air as if addressing the Fae. Most of his cabmates dismiss Theuderic as a madman, although his

young apprentice Merovech has begun to record the old man's ramblings in the hopes of making sense of them.

THE RED AND WHITE APPLES OF AVALON

Upon the pinnacle of Glastonbury Tor are two springs, the White and the Red, representing the forces of life and death. Near the two springs is a small apple tree that bears apples year round, whether it is winter, summer or spring. Half of the apples are red, but the other half have skins as white as snow. Legend says that a visitor to the springs can pick one apple, and they can never pick another apple from this tree again, even if they return to the tor on another occasion. Although it is not known what befalls the greedy visitor who tries to pick an additional apple from the tree, it is certain that no one has ever tried to do so and survived.

The red-skinned apples, having grown from the waters of the Red Spring, are poisonous. They are certainly beautiful to look upon, being a bright and glistening red in color, but one bite causes intense pain and hallucinations. Although the apples are not deadly of themselves, many who have taken a bite of the red apples have perished, running off of cliffs or mistaking friend for foe and forcing their loved ones to fight them or die.

The white apples, on the other hand, have the power to heal the mind. They can remove night terrors, cure insanity, or restore the power of speech to the mute. Note that they cannot remedy physical ailments, only those illnesses that take root in the mind.

THE CHALICE OF RAIN

The Chalice of Rain is one of the few faerie treasures that is widely known to be in the hands of mages. The Cabal of the Chalice, a group of mages belonging to the Old Faith who reside in Cornwall, made an ancient pact with the Fae to help guard the legendary islands of Lyonesse from those who sought to plunder its legendary wealth. In exchange for their assistance, the Fae entrusted the mages with the Chalice. It is said to be wondrous to behold, cast in a bluish silver with ancient runes encircling the lip of the cup. If the cup is filled, and the water spilled on the ground as offering to the fair folk, the chalice will bring rain before the next moon rises. This helps the mages and their kin to eke out a living on the rugged land, and insures their prosperity.

BROACH OF SCRYING

This is a fairly common Fae treasure and is one of the treasures most commonly possessed by mages. Although the Fae are intensely possessive of any of their creations, these simple broaches sometimes slip beneath their notice. It is not entirely uncommon to meet a member of the Old Faith who is in possession of such a trinket.

In appearance, the treasure is not particularly impressive looking; it is a small broach that a lady might wear for adornment on a day-to-day basis. It is not set with jewels, nor gilded in precious metals. Instead, it is set with a simple white stone that is smooth and cool to the touch. The broach itself is copper colored and is often worked in flower or fleur-de-lis shapes.

The broach is designed to assist its bearer in making simple decisions. The bearer asks a simple yes-or-no question about a problem he is facing or task he wishes to undertake. Then, he breaks the broach open by smashing it upon a stone or crushing it underfoot. The stone that tumbles out will remain white or will turn black as night. The white stone indicates that the answer to the question is affirmative, whereas the black stone indicates that the answer is negative.

MAGICAL TREASURES

In **Dark Ages: Mage**, there are more treasures than mere gold and gems. Treasures in this world are more than just objects that can make a mage look impressive when slaying monsters; they are designed to help a mage continue his pursuit of knowledge in a world all the more hostile to him for the magic he wields.

BRAZIER OF SUMMONING

Desert nomads often use special braziers to light fires safely in flammable tents. They suspend these brass bowls from finely crafted tripods. This particular bowl, however, differs in that it is ornately carved with leering, twisted faces that seem to laugh and jeer at whomever is near. Sanskrit script is carved around the interior of the bowl, spiraling to the center.

For any Solomonian mage (Ahl-i-Batin, Messianic Voice or Order of Hermes) who can read Sanskrit, the words spell out magical instructions for summoning certain classes of spirits. The outermost script lists items needed to use the brazier: charcoal, incense, animal dung, snake oil; the ingredients vary depending on what class spirit one wishes to summon (demon, elemental or djinn). The inner script lists references from various unknown books and the Kabbalah.

To use the item, a mage places charcoal into the bowl and then lights it. By carefully following the instructions carved on the inside, the mage then sprinkles the incense and oils in the bowl and says the key listed phrases. He repeats this operation until he succeeds or fails. (The mage rolls his Foundation plus a spirit-oriented Pillar [Al-Hajj, Uri-El or Primus] in an extended spell; once he achieves 10 successes, the spell activates. Note that the Brazier of Summoning provides the proper magical ability; the mage need possess only one dot in the listed Pillars.)

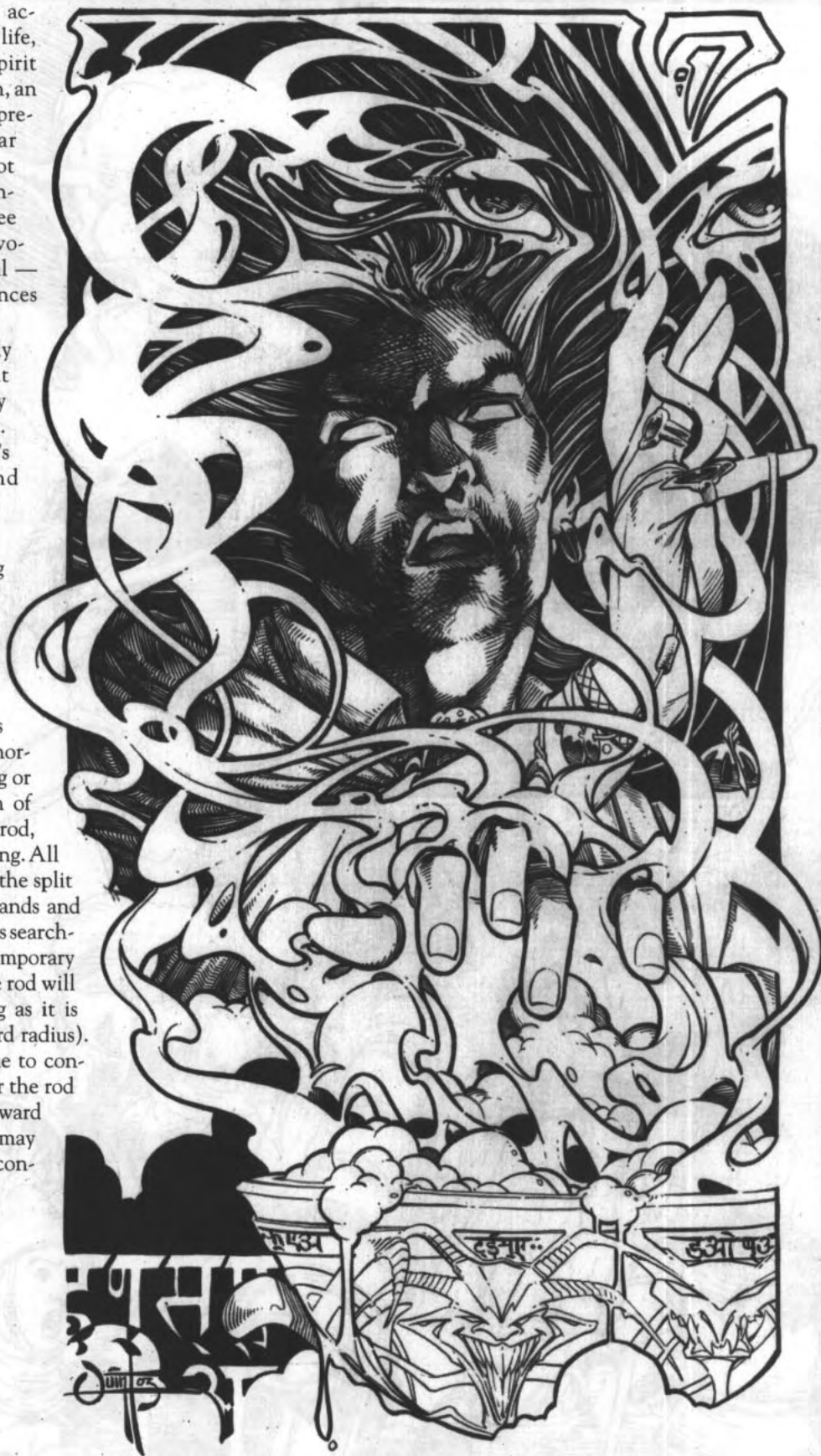
Once the spell is active, the bowl flares into life, and the desired type of spirit (which must be a demon, an elemental or a djinn) presents itself. Particular individual spirits cannot be summoned, only a general spirit from the three classes. It could be malevolent, friendly or neutral — the mage takes his chances with what he gets.

The brazier merely summons the being; it does not provide any protections against it. That requires the mage's personal power and knowledge.

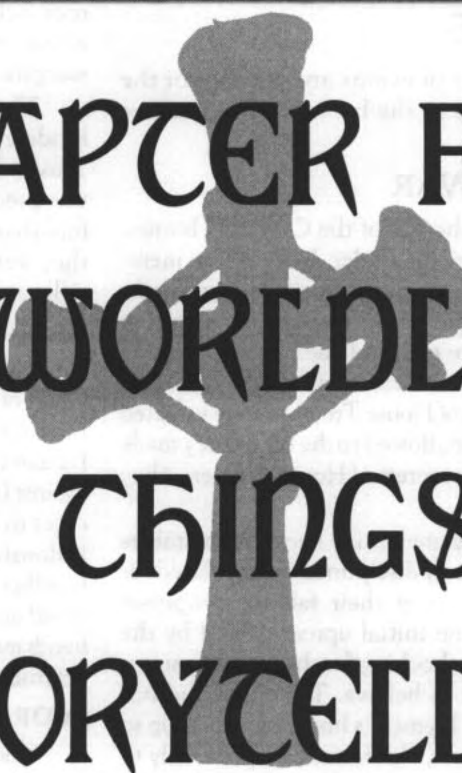
DOWSING ROD

This two-foot long yew rod, stripped of bark, has been polished to a shine by years of use. The end of the rod is split and forms a Y.

When this rod is used, it functions like a normal dowsing rod, tugging or pulling in the direction of water. This particular rod, however, can find anything. All a mage needs do is hold the split ends of the rod in his hands and concentrate on what he is searching for (spending one temporary point of Willpower); the rod will guide him to it, as long as it is within the area (200 yard radius). The mage must continue to concentrate on the object or the rod will deviate, heading toward whatever mental objects may intrude on the mage's concentration.







CHAPTER FIVE: WORLDLY THINGS (STORYTELLING)

Beyond, in many parts, the sea is spread
So shallow that it scarce conceals the sands
Lying beneath; and clustering growth of weed
O'ertops the sea and checks its flood with wrack,
While crowds of sea-beasts swim athwart the Main
And monstrous terror holds the straits in fear.
— Avienus, *Ora Maritima*

The information presented in this chapter is largely for Storyteller use. It clarifies some of the historically important events taking place in the early 13th century to make them more accessible for a Storyteller's chronicles. For more information on the geopolitical status quo in 1230, check out **Dark Ages: Europe**.

CHRONICLES

There are a number of events and settings of the era a Storyteller can use as the basis of a chronicle or series of stories.

THE MASSASA WAR

In 1022, one of the houses of the Order of Hermes, House Tremere, betrayed the Order, betrayed its members and betrayed its own magical practice by turning its back on the ways of magic and embarking on a path of study that resulted in the elders of the house becoming vampires. The information was slow to get out. The remaining human mages of House Tremere were infected with the vampire curse or allowed to die off. If they made any attempt to betray the secrets of House Tremere, they were killed.

Secrets this damning are hard to keep, but members of House Tremere, intensely disciplined (and isolated) as they were, managed to keep their fall to vampirism hidden for 177 years. The initial uproar caused by the discovery was almost too shocking for the haughty mages of the Order of Hermes to believe. The shock did not come from the fact that Tremere's house would stoop so low in its pursuit of power (which was a surprise only to those who didn't know Tremere and his so-called "inner circle"), but that he could accomplish such a complete betrayal of the Order without any of the Order's much vaunted wizards figuring out what had transpired. None of the Hermetics' seers, sryers, or angel-binders had caught so much as a suggestive rumor of the fall of the House of Tremere, and their embarrassment was unbounded, their shock paralyzing. It took two years for the shock to coalesce into outrage.

In 1201 the entire Order of Hermes tried House Tremere in *absentia* and declared a Wizard March, an extraordinarily rare joint martial effort by Hermetic mages of all houses, with the intended outcome to be the utter destruction of the perfidious House Tremere. As with so many things, the Hermetic mages launched into the attack with full certainty that, vampiric power or not, there would be no standing before the might of the arrayed Houses of Hermes.

They were wrong.

The expected quick crumbling of House Tremere never came to pass, for a variety of reasons. From their extended researches on a few captured Tremere vampires, the Hermetics had ascertained full well that the process that turns a mage into a vampire denies him access to either the *Modus* or the *Forma* of true Hermetic magic. What they were yet to learn, however, is that Tremere and his cronies had turned the power of their undead blood to devastating effect. In addition to this "thaumaturgy," the Tremere also protected Ceoris, their Transylvanian stronghold, with terrifying gargoyles, an array of undead allies and potent thaumaturgical wards. The first wave of the Wizard March, full of its own righteous rage and hubris, crashed upon Ceoris like the surf

upon a cliff face. For every vampire killed by Hermetic spells, at least one mage fell to the fangs, claws or "magic" of their vampiric enemies.

The cause of the Hermetic Order was effectively hindered by the location of House Tremere's stronghold. Travel over the mountainous Transylvanian landscape was precarious, even with magic, and there were more foes than just the foul Tremere stalking those lands, and they were happy to turn the mages' prideful strike into a rich source of food, wealth and treasures.

AS THINGS STAND

In 1230, the *Massasa War* is still a hot conflict for the Order of Hermes. The wizards' rage and sense of betrayal is little cooled after 29 years. Not only do many Hermetic Houses have factions devoted to carrying out the sentence against House Tremere, but also the Fellowship is unusually eager to pull in the assistance of other mages, regardless of Fellowship. It is not unheard of for whole war cabals to come together to strike against the vampires, though even talented mixed cabals have their hands full when dealing with fiends marshalling such a wide range of magical and strategic defenses.

CEORIS

Once the grandest chantry of Tremere's House, Ceoris now sits on the eastern edge of the known world like a festering wen. Its location is suspiciously hard to remember; its defenders are violent and, literally, bloodthirsty beyond comprehension, and its magical defenses are formidable. The vast majority of those who take their fight to the enemy's territory are doomed to failure.

Storytellers wishing to send their players against such enemies are advised to pick up a copy of **House of Tremere** for the complete history, layout and horror of the vampires' stronghold.

VIENNA

Once the site of a powerful chantry of the Houses of Hermes, Vienna has become anathema to Hermetic mages and only slightly less daunting to mages from the other Mystic Fellowships.

The vampire curse fell most heavily on the Hermetic magi of Vienna when Etrius, one of the ranking corrupted members of House Tremere, saw fit to kill, and subsequently make into vampires, all of the magi in the Vienna chantry.

From that day forward, the city became particularly lethal to mages when the sun went down. The Tremere vampires know well how to recognize a mage, even one from a different Fellowship. Owing to the very real threat they pose even to the powerful vampire thaumaturgists, mages are considered particularly dangerous enemies and marked for death the moment they're spotted by the Tremere or their allies.

OTHER CITIES

The Wizard March was called against House Tremere in its entirety. Any Tremere chantry in any city is considered fair game. Those compromised by vampirism (or in any other way) are disbanded and all members of that

chantry are interrogated and, if found to be in league with the vampires in any way, executed. Innocent members of the chantry are transferred to other Hermetic Houses and scrutinized (often with Ars Corona) until they are gauged to be truly free of the Tremere taint.

THE FALL OF MISTRIDGE AND THE RISE OF THE CRAFTMASONS

Whether they know it or not, the lives of every mage in Europe (and the rest of the known world) changed drastically 20 years ago with the fall of what has generally been thought to be a minor chantry house (or covenant).

A group of mages using powerful Talismans and magic only vaguely resembling that of the Houses of Hermes stormed the Mistridge Covenant and slew (depending on who you listen to) all or most of the magi there.

That one shocking event, as well as its history and its consequences, will have consequences for every mage in Europe for centuries to come.

THE PAST

A group of strange “rationalist” magi called the Craftmasons appeared seemingly out of the blue and led a force of mercenaries and Commoners against the powerful Mistridge Covenant. Using odd new forms of magic (often compared to alchemy), the Craftmasons brought down the tower and killed the arrogant masters of Mistridge.

THE PRESENT

Presenting themselves as allies of the common people, the Craftmasons have made themselves a *cause célèbre* of sorts. They claim that magi are all potentially dangerous so long as magic is outside the hands of the Commoners. They point out examples of magical depredation and, at times, take steps to stop it. Craftmasonry is a highly dangerous affiliation. Their opinions are perhaps overly strong given the newness of their position in the world (not to mention the early stage they’re in with regard to their strange new approach to magic).



For the moment it's possible, though not entirely likely, that a cabal of magi may run into a cabal of Craftsmasons going about on crusade. Depending on the cabal's behavior and approach to magic, the encounter might even be pleasant. Then again, the list of magical praxes to which the Craftsmasons take exception seems to get a little longer with every passing year....

For more on the Craftsmasons and their approach to magic, see the Appendix.

INFERNALISTS AND NEFANDI

The Dark Medieval was a time of great despair and horror. Plague, famine and war were constant companions to the common folk, while comfort and contentment were strangers to all but royalty and the thickly clotted top strata of the Church. While many poor folk turned to the Church to look away from the ubiquitous suffering of life, there are a few who look in other, darker directions.

In the year 1230, making pacts with demons is a practice that has yet to reach the heights of popularity that it will reach in the following three centuries. The lore of demons, Banes and other twisted spirits is not as widespread as it will become.

But there are those who know and spread it and those who benefit from the favors of demons and the forces of darkness. In times as pious as these, obviously, one cannot simply announce one's preference for dark masters and expect to be ignored (such a speaker would need to wait seven centuries for that degree of openness). It is true that there are those forces that make bargains with mortals — and lay claim to immortal souls — in exchange for power, but they are hardly exclusive to the Christian (or even monotheistic) world.

Demons have their own foul agendas, and they're happy to parlay with anyone of consequence. Those who are willing to serve a foul, dark master are rewarded, but demons are relatively picky about whose services they engage. (See *Those Who Would Make Bargains, Dark Ages: Mage*, p. 177.)

Demons prey on the weak-willed and power-hungry by offering them demonic investments (the twisted abilities of the infernal granted by the will of a demon in order to lure more converts to the war against humanity) to those talented Commoner folk who serve them well (and who promise to serve them even better).

Demonic investments are hardly a match for the real dynamic power of a well-trained mage, but they do impress the common man quite handily. The truly devoted servant of Hell can accumulate enough investments from one or more infernal masters that she actually becomes a threat to a true mage. Such adherents of damnation are rare, but they make themselves even more dangerous by surrounding themselves with dupes and cat's-paws.

While Hell's servants (typically called infernalists) will make use of Commoner thralls, their true delight comes in twisting the souls of mages.

NEFANDI

The souls of mages, it would seem, are particularly delightful to twist and corrupt. They obviously make better servitors than does a Commoner. That goes a long way to explaining why there is a cult intent on corrupting mages. This cult worships the Infernal, the absence of all divinity. What little is known about them was compiled by the Ahl-i-Batin in a text called *Sebil-el-Mafouh Whash*, "Path of the Voracious Beast." It was later translated into Latin as the *Malleus Nefandorum*, a text familiar to most Hermetics and some of the better-educated Messianic Voices. Members of the cult described in this book are called "Nefandi."

By infernal temptation, the cult works together to bring new blood into the fold by, essentially, turning a mage's soul inside out, and marking him forever as one who has turned from the ways of humanity.

None of the six Mystic Fellowships are immune to temptation or malice. Like any tool, magic can be wielded for weal or woe. At various times throughout history, members of all six Fellowships have been lured into aligning themselves with the forces of hatred, horror and Hell, and some have bargained away their free will or their immortal souls to get a firm grip on power that otherwise would not have been theirs. Below is a brief explication of the corrupted paths of each of the Fellowships.

Ahl-i-Batin: There was a time when the mages of the Ahl-i-Batin believed themselves to be so pure as to be incorruptible. Most now know that the first of the terrible Devil Kings of Araby was an Ahl-i-Batin who went willingly — arrogantly — into the hands of his corruptors. Fallen Batini believe that there can be no Unity until the world has run its course: Once the sun goes out and the ocean stills and all that is living dies, then and only then can there be true Unity, and the few malevolent Ahl-i-Batin *barabbi* do what they can to hasten the coming of that day.

Messianic Voices: There are those holy magi who fall prey to the baser, more judgmental nature of their religion. Members of the priesthood, in particular, are granted insight into the often-arbitrary policies of the Church, even of the pope himself. Such knowledge can render even some of the pious cynical and call into question the true noble ends of the Church. Taking in such confusion can cause a priest to ask dangerous questions. Who's to say which angels truly have our best interests in mind? Did not Lucifer, after all, help mankind get knowledge that had previously been withheld? Are not Sammael, Azrael, Abaddon and Apollyon just as much archangels as Gavri-el or Mikha-el? Once a Voice's faith in the Church and knowledge of theology of the Church are shaken, it's very easy for his faith to be shaken and for fallen angels to worm their way into his good graces.

Old Faith: The virtues of the Old Faith can be turned on their heads just as the virtues of the Messianic Voices. An old witch who places more emphasis on stretching her already expanded life out another 20 years by sacrificing the young betrays all four of the pagan virtues — vitality,

courage, honor and generosity — in one fell swoop. Such deeds can come from simple weakness of character, but there are those foul spirits who would be all too happy to lure a powerful old witch down the Path of Screams until she became one of the Old Faith's few *barabbi*.

Order of Hermes: The wily old Hermetics value knowledge — and sometimes power — over almost everything else. That, by itself, is weakness enough that a sufficiently beguiling demon, offering knowledge that is rare, forbidden or “secret,” can get many Hermetics — especially the very political ones — to agree to just about any form of treachery or debasement. The pursuit of knowledge, after all, is entirely amoral, and only the timid sheep of the Church waste their breath talking about such quaint notions as “good” and “evil.” Three centuries will yet pass before the best known thrall to knowledge — Dr. Johannes Faust — imperils his soul by bargaining with demons, and while he was neither the first nor the last Hermetic to attempt such a bargain, it was his ill fortune to have nosy friends who wrote books.

Spirit-Talkers: All Spirit-Talkers deal with the ephemeral, and many are often accused of dealing with foul spirits. In truth, very few Spirit-Talkers deal much with malevolent spirits, but there are definitely times when it happens. These twisted shamans, called Vision Mockers, deal exclusively with the spirits of madness,

blight, disease and death. They send spirits to vex and possess their enemies. Their touch is blighted and their once-sacred chants fester with disease and devastation.

Valdaermen: There is no Valdaerman who doesn't know how the reign of Odin comes to its end. The coming of Ragnarok is accepted as inevitable. In the Norse view, even the gods are subject to the whims of fate. Consequently, there are some Valdaermen who take exception to serving on what they see as the losing side. They bargain with entities they identify as agents of Loki, the cunning god — giants or *svartalfs*. Such behavior embodies the very worst stereotypes of mages held by Norse culture. Consequently, any Valdaerman found to bargain with such entities is immediately declared *Skogarmathr* and sentenced to full outlawry. No Norseman or Valdaerman of any standing will associate with such a perfidious cur, and any who do are liable to receive the same sentence.

THE CRUSADES AND THEIR AFTERMATH

By 1230, the Crusades were largely over. The Fourth Crusade, which ended in 1204 with the fall of Constantinople, had changed the nature of the movement. Public sentiment for the Crusades wavered. Thereafter, the driving force



behind most forays was state or Church politics, not popular zeal. The sheer numbers of men killed in failed attempts to defend or regain the Holy Land left many Christian countries short on manpower. While the 13th century sees more expeditions into the Holy Lands, they are much smaller campaigns. While the disastrous Children's Crusade (1212), the Fifth Crusade (1218-21) and the Sixth Crusade (1246-54), as well as numerous smaller military forays still took place over the 13th century, there were no more multinational Crusades directed at dominating the Holy Land. Egypt was deemed the center of Muslim power and the many small military expeditions of the 13th century were largely directed there. These expeditions were the last gasp of the crusading fervor. That fervor would be put to rest entirely with the advent of the Mongols and Mamelukes, whose armies were so vast that they dwarfed the small Western units entirely.

In 1230, the most recent expedition against the Holy Land is Frederick II's foray into Jerusalem in 1229. His letter to Henry III of England makes clear the results of that expedition. What the letter did not show was that his success did not come from military action, but from diplomacy with al-Kamil. After Frederick's win, Jerusalem would remain in Christian hands until it was again taken by the Saracens in 1244.

holy lands

In 1230, the Holy Lands are under the control of Christian Europe. Frederick's negotiations with the Saracens granted Europe control of the key spiritual cities of Jerusalem, Nazareth and Bethlehem, as well as a handful of other sites important for the Christians. Some Messianic Voices are there seeking relics or making pilgrimages, but for the most part, the Holy Lands appeal most strongly to the Church's more dogmatic and less contemplative members. Many mage members of the Knights Templar are there, as are a great many Inquisitors (for more information on what kind of threat they might pose to a cabal of mages, see **Dark Ages: Inquisitor**).

The Holy Lands might be a particularly wild place to set a chronicle of **Dark Ages: Mage** because of the mix of people. While Europe controls these sites at this time, Saracens who wish to visit for their own spiritual reasons are allowed. Ironically, the Holy Lands are some of the few places in the Dark Medieval where Messianic Voices and Ahl-i-Batin might be found interacting peacefully.

CRUSADE CONSEQUENCES

The Crusades had serious repercussions back in the lands that sent soldiers. With the God-fearing Christians marching hundreds of miles to war with the Saracens, men whose piety moved them to throw away everything abandoned wives, families and entire estates. Not infrequently during the age of Crusades, kings would leave their lands behind, "safe" in the hands of regents.

The net result of these behaviors is that the God-fearing men from much of Europe marched off and left their families and property in the hands of old, weak or unchristian men.

The departure of so many Christian men eased some of the pressure felt by many non-Christians, of whatever stripe, mages included. In some places, the relative paucity of Christians made it easier for non-Christian mages to find each other and interact with less fear of reprisal from the Christian majority.

Not all of the Crusades' ramifications were so convenient. Criminals took to the roads, and brigands often took control of small territories that could not be properly policed — particularly those that passed through dense woods. Any group proceeding through such terrain was fair game for thugs (although in many of the forests of the Dark Medieval, thugs would be the least of a party's worries).

iberian reconquista

Not only in the Holy Lands were Christians warring with the Saracens. The Christians in northern Iberia were constantly seeking to oust the Moorish invaders to the south. The cities of Moorish Iberia were among the few rare gems of the medieval world. Granada, Seville and Toledo were cultured cities and centers of learning and medicine. In 1230, the Moors are not feeling especially hard pressed by the Christian north. Christians in the 13th century also referred to the Moors as "Moriscos" and "Mudejares." They are not recent immigrants to Iberia. The Moors first took the southern coast of Spain in 711, and they spent many subsequent decades extending their territory north. This didn't sit well with the various small Christian kingdoms to the north, but there was little they could do to repel the Moors once they became entrenched. In 1230, the Moors are relatively comfortable and control a fair amount of Iberian territory, although less than they once held. Not for centuries will the Christians make much progress, but in the interim, there is no shortage of hot-blooded conflict between the two groups.

the silk road

At its greatest extent, the Silk Road ran from Xi'an in China to Rome (via such cities as Damask, Baghdad and Ankara). It was, for centuries, the main route by which ideas, philosophy and, of course, merchandise passed between the East and the West.

In 1230, the Silk Road is not particularly well established in Europe yet, but with the rise of the Mongol empire (subsequent to the **Dark Ages** time frame by a few decades), the demand for exotic substances from the far east, especially silk and spices, increase dramatically.

That said, allowing the Silk Road to reach Europe earlier than it actually did could have some pronounced benefits for a chronicle. Characters following the Silk Road could encounter a range of peoples like they've never seen. European mages still find the subtle Ahl-i-Batin exotic; the weird and hedonistic magic of the Dionysian mages of Greece and the blatant displays favored by the Taftani (the extraordinarily bellicose desert magi of far Araby) would expose the travelers to more aspects of their world than they could otherwise have imagined.

Even if the Storyteller opts to take liberties with medieval history, however, travel anywhere is not the light undertaking it would become centuries later.

TRAVEL

In the Dark Medieval, very few people have traveled more than a few miles from the village in which they were born. The lives the people of the time led were incredibly truncated by our standards. Calling them provincial only begins to hint at the degree of ignorance and xenophobia prevalent at the time.

Travel was considered a privilege of noblemen and bishops; the common man did not do it and was not educated in such a way that he would even be inclined to try.

That said, magi travel a great deal more than Commoners, for reasons both in and out of their control.

Some magi are driven from the villages of their birth when their magical abilities show themselves. This is the lot of many Spirit-Talkers. The increasing strength of Christianity drives others from their homes in their region. Again, Spirit-Talkers are the primary victims of this phenomenon, but many followers of the Old Faith and many Valdaermen must leave their homes for similar reasons. While many find the new faith to be comforting, it is not an option for those whose very souls are tied to the old ways.

Magi travel for happier reasons too, of course. Many realize that their gifts far exceed the options their tiny village can afford them and make their ways to cities or to the courts of kings where they may catch the eye of some noble with their skills at magic. Others go in search of lore that they need to increase their understanding... or their power. A solitary mage may also go in search for others of his kind in order to learn more about himself. If one has only learned from an aged mentor, one may not have the full story behind his own Fellowship. Alternatively, a more established mage may go in search of a worthy apprentice, in order to pass down the wisdom she has acquired in her years of magical study.

Magi also travel in search of great magical treasure. Wonders abound in the world, but they're not likely to find their way into the mage's possession if he's content to sit at home growing turnips. Great books filled with magical lore, enchanted spears, divine armor, magical crays, faerie portals and the like all exist just out of sight of the average Commoner, but a mage can find them, provided he makes the effort to seek them out.

In the Dark Medieval, gaining magical power is easily as much about seizing it from its hidden coves as it is about contemplating arcane formulae in a warded sanctum. Travel, then, is unavoidable for most magi. Luckily for them, their magic grants them certain advantages that Commoners don't have.

BY LAND

Dark Ages modes of travel were very basic. Walking was the prevalent mode of getting from one place to another, and for the areas around a particular village, this was generally all that was necessary.

There were horses, of course, and wagons. Horses were the mounts of knights and the right of a privileged few. Those using horses as transportation need to be able to afford both the purchase price of the animal and the cost of its upkeep, which can be expensive, particularly in the city, where the horse requires stabling. As a general rule, it takes one dot in the Resources Background to buy a horse or stable one in the city. Buying a wagon, on the other hand, requires three dots of Resources. The wagons of the day did not have any means of suppressing bumps, and the roads of the time were not smooth. Not infrequently, in lieu of an expensive wagon, a traveler would devise a travois to drag behind his mount. Many wounded knights found their way back from the Crusades on such devices.

Navigation was another impediment to travel. Sailors and some few traders knew how to navigate using the stars, but that was a rare skill in the Dark Medieval. The compass was not widely known in Europe, although it is in widespread use by the Arabs (thanks, perhaps, to the Ahl-i-Batin).

The common man didn't travel, and those who did travel were considered suspicious. Villagers were accustomed to knowing those they dealt with for decades; consequently, the arrival of someone they'd never met could unnerve an entire town. That went double if the individual was in any way remarkable in appearance or mannerisms.

One's reception at a destination was often not so great a problem as navigating the way there in the first place. While those who traveled regularly had the opportunity to memorize roads, it was hard for others to get around, due in large part to the scarcity of maps.

THE RARITY OF MAPS

In the Dark Medieval, the Arabs had been making maps and improving the art of cartography for over four centuries. Using the knowledge inherited from the ancient Greeks, Arabic cartographers had discerned that the world was round and, furthermore, had discovered the concept of laying out lines of latitude and longitude to help make sense of the big picture. The greatest centers of Islamic learning even had atlases of the known world that intrepid and highly trained travelers had painstakingly compiled. This great wealth of learning was not available to Europe.

Cartography, the creation of maps, was almost unheard of in Dark Medieval Europe. While a handful of people traveled, and a handful of people could draw, the intersection of those two small groups contained, perhaps, one or two people, and they were doing their work for powerful and prestigious patrons — kings, generals and the occasional bishop — who could pay them to create such a wonder.

Merchants had not yet come into power, and trade was not yet a real competitor to royal power throughout most of Europe, which remained largely feudal.

Maps, therefore, fell into three categories: insanely expensive, shockingly bad and completely wrong.

The insanely expensive maps were surprisingly accurate, at least in a general way. Even the best maps were drawn as circles, and the concept of drawing a map to scale was still unknown. The best maps of the time were made by Arabic cartographers, and generally showed small regions of the world and did so with a vague nod toward the most general sense of the relationship between the main cities of a region.

Shockingly bad maps were somewhat more available, being done more often by (and for) educated Europeans. These maps weren't necessarily inaccurate in the more densely populated regions of the map, and they could therefore get one from Paris to Toulouse, for example, or from Rome to Salzburg. Such maps are more likely to be wrong the farther the land they represent is from the beaten track. In 1230 there are relatively good maps of England showing, in very general terms, the lay of the land and the roads connecting the major towns and cities. While still not easy to navigate from, these maps are at least moderately useful. On the other hand, a map of the northern expanses of the Holy Roman Empire will be extraordinarily hard to come by and enragingly inaccurate.

Maps falling in the third category, completely wrong, were generally not even meant to be maps in the first place, but were symbolic diagrams illustrating how to get from one state to another. Many were based on biblical passages ("maps" charting out the relative placement of Heaven, Hell and the world in between were not all that uncommon), while others were complex representations of the alchemists' states of being as represented pseudogeographically. A rare few of these completely wrong maps weren't completely wrong at all, but mapped a non-physical geography that a Commoner couldn't

comprehend. The Ahl-i-Batin were the masters of such things, mapping out the way to such spiritual destinations as Mt. Qaf, the mountain at the center of the world. Ironically, mages may have more use for these "wrong" maps than for the expensive (and only vaguely helpful) maps made by the European cartographers of the time.

FOOD, WATER AND SHELTER

Provided a traveler is willing to accept what she gets, she should be able to find the bare necessities one way or the other. In civilized areas, it's generally possible to find at least one home that will give shelter to the traveler. In places with large churches or monasteries, the Church is often the best bet for hungry strangers still on the road as the sun begins to slip behind the horizon. These churches, many times, will require the traveler to speak the Lord's Prayer before granting hospitality as a means of discerning Christian from heathen.

Travelers in the wild won't find hospitality or food and drink quite so readily available, although those with a few dots of the Survival Ability will have no problem finding something to eat, though whether it's appealing or not remains questionable. In one area, there may be enough fat hares or squirrels that a traveler can feast, while elsewhere he may subsist on fare not only less savory, but rotten or moldy. Denizens of Dark Medieval Europe were more accustomed than we to eating whatever was around. We might toss a loaf of bread that has one small patch of mold on it, while a hungry peasant in Medieval France would be much less picky.

Characters with two or more dots of Herbalism, Survival or Hearth Wisdom can also safely tell wholesome mushrooms from poisonous toadstools. If characters eat mushrooms without being certain of their safety, the Storyteller should at least make a roll to see if the character inadvertently consumed poisonous toadstools. A character consuming such foul delicacies takes [10 - Stamina] Health Levels of bashing damage.

Traveling without a clear knowledge of where one can obtain shelter is tricky business, although anyone savvy enough to know even a small amount of magic should have some means of creating at least a lean-to. This may keep out the elements, although it won't do much against wolves, bears or armed opponents (unless augmented with magic).

For longer stays in the wild, the traveler will want to build a small cabin of some sort, requiring either Survival 3 or some other means of understanding the basics of building such a structure (Crafts for carpentry, or Academics for architecture).

For magical methods of staying alive in the wilderness, see pp. 115-116.

Hospitality

Luckily for travelers in civilized regions, the tradition of hospitality makes it likely that a traveler will be able to find food and lodging of some sort. Despite the general suspicion of strangers, there was a tradition of hospitality

PAPER

We are surrounded by paper and books. The denizens of the Dark Medieval were not. Paper, made not from wood but from pulped fabric, was known in the Arabic world in 1230, but throughout Europe it remained a rare and precious luxury. To have enough for a book was the right of kings and bishops, and it was unknown to the common man. The Moors built the first paper mills in Spain in the 11th century; they appeared up in Italy somewhat later.

Church and court scribes wrote on specially prepared calfskin (vellum) and sheepskin (parchment).

Not until 1455, with the invention of moveable type and the printing press, did paper become common across Europe, and not for another five centuries after that was paper made from wood pulp, not discarded fabric.

even in the Dark Medieval that most travelers could rely on were they far from home. This tradition was passed on, in part, through stories. The Old Faith, Valdaermen and many Spirit-Talkers know the tales of various gods, from Odin to Zeus, walking the world in mortal guise and rewarding those who show hospitality and punishing those who do not. The traditions of hospitality varied a bit, but the basic core of the practices were in place all across Europe.

The rules of hospitality applied both to guests as well as to hosts, and a guest who stays too long is just as much in breach of the traditions as the host who lets his guest go hungry.

Despite the old tales and the cultural expectations, a traveler in the Dark Medieval might find it difficult to find a place willing to offer hospitality, particularly to an entire cabal of odd-looking mages. A village on a main thoroughfare is likely to have an inn of some sort that provides hospitality to guests for a fee. Smaller towns, however, are less likely to have an inn and characters will need to go door-to-door asking for hospitality. Individual villages will vary a great deal with regard to how hospitable the natives are. Those who live in areas infested with vampires, for example, are very unlikely to grant shelter to a traveler, especially if he shows up after sundown or carries any sort of box large enough to hold a body.

For the host, the tradition of hospitality means:

- A guest, once taken in, must be given food and water
- The host is responsible for the guest's safety. Not only is it the lowest and most vile form of perfidy for a host to harm his guest, he is also obligated to see to it that no harm befalls the guest from any source.
- The host is obligated to give aid to the sick or injured, and provide some manner of clothing to the naked.
- Hospitality need not be extended to known criminals, the excommunicated or those who have taken unfair advantage of a host's hospitality before. Depending on the particular region of Europe, runaway wives (or slaves), a son who fails to look after his father, and anyone who steals from his family may also be refused hospitality.

For his part, the guest has obligations of his own when accepting the hospitality of another.

- Never consume so much that your host is left hungry or thirsty.
- Safeguard your host's well-being as diligently as he safeguards yours.
- If sick or injured, make yourself as light a burden as possible, and once you are recovered, reward your host's care generously and with gratitude.
- Do not stay beyond the initial period of offered hospitality. If you are imposing on a host, stay no more than one night unless asked to stay longer. If invited to stay on beyond the initial terms of the agreement, offer to help the host with work or with money in exchange for the extended welcome.

SUPERSTITIONS ABOUT STRANGERS

The Dark Medieval world was scary. Ignorance makes people fearful of everything—and everyone—that is not familiar. Strange customs, strange appearance and accented speech are each enough, by themselves, to scare inhabitants of all but the most cosmopolitan cities. The more landlocked a place, the more insular and provincial it was likely to be. Any port city was likely to accept any stranger with good coin, while a hamlet reachable only by a narrow road, populated solely by 10 extended families, is likely to have a large folklore pertaining to superstitions about strangers, including, but not limited to:

- Anyone whose eyebrows meet in the center is a werewolf.
- A man with long fingernails is probably an agent of the devil.
- Vampires (and sometimes werewolves) have pentagrams on the palms of their hands.
- Place salt on the threshold of a home to prevent evil from entering.
- If you want a witch to leave your house and never come back, throw salt at her as she's leaving.
- Cross yourself to prevent a witch from harming you.
- A witch will never come under a door where a horseshoe has been nailed.
- If you want a stranger to leave town, drive an iron nail into his footprint and he'll leave and will never be able to make himself come back.
- He who carries the tooth of a harrow found on the street will always recognize a witch.
- A hagstone is a stone with a hole in it hung in stables and homes to keep away witches or hags at night. If hung on the bedpost, it protects the sleeper from having a hag ride one's chest and causing a nightmare. Hung in the stable, it prevents witches from riding horses all night to exhaustion.

While these folk beliefs are little more than superstitions and lesser hearth wisdom, your Storyteller may decide that some of them are completely real. Even if they're not real, they may be reflections of actual hedge magic rites that have somehow been discovered by the common folk of an area, and it might be in the mage's best interest to experiment with them.

BY WATERWAYS

Water-based travel was common in 1230. Warfare and trade were both carried out on the waterways of Europe on a variety of vessels. Rivers and lakes were comfortable territory for boats, relatively speaking, but ocean travel was a much more daunting proposition. High seas, inescapable storms and the weird and dangerous creatures of the oceans rendered them terrifying to all but the bravest (or most foolhardy) souls. Ships rarely went much beyond sight of the coast (though once use of the compass becomes more common in later decades, ships will be less dependent on visual navigation). A cabal needing to make swift passage from one coastal area

to another might be inclined to save themselves the bumps of land travel, provided they can pay the fee and stand the cramped quarters of the small ships.

In the south, particularly in the Mediterranean, the waterways are largely controlled by the Saracens, whose greater mastery of the compass and sail technology grants them superiority in speed, maneuverability and navigation.

The culture of traders and sailors might be more amenable to odd types like mages. Sailors are accustomed to a wide range of cultures and lack the xenophobic and provincial attitudes of their landlocked brethren. While sight of a Norseman, a Saracen and a man of the cloth traveling together might unnerve the inland yokels, it wouldn't even cause a sailor to raise an eyebrow. On the contrary, some of the sailors' customs might make the cabal a little nervous.

ships

Ships across Europe varied a great deal depending on the region they served. The Norse used longships based on designs invented by their Viking ancestors. For trade on most European riverways, the straight-sterned cog was the more common ship and could carry a respectable amount of merchandise for trading in its large hull. Further south, in the Mediterranean, the galley, an updated version of an old Roman design, was the chief water-faring vessel, although some based on Byzantine ships were also relatively common.

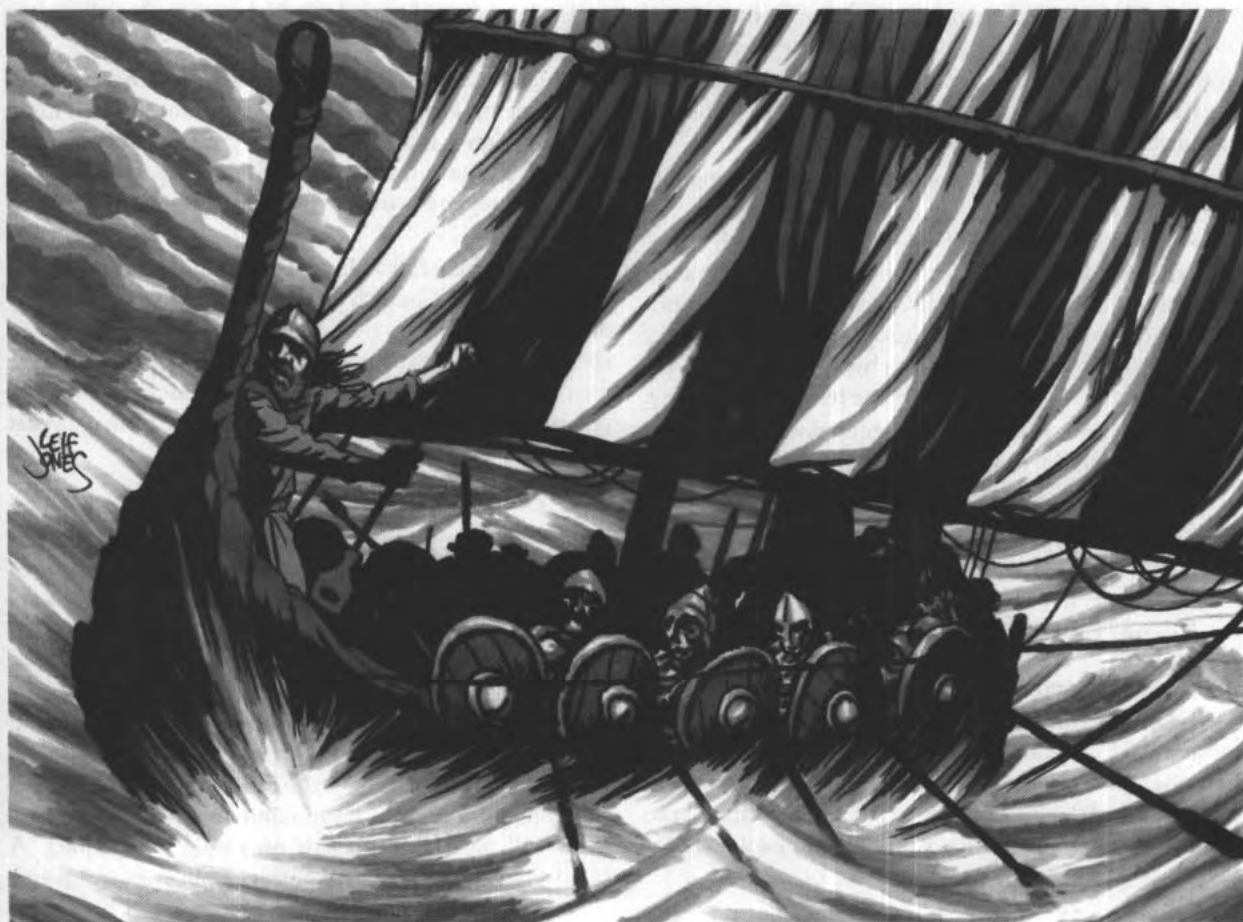
Many ships were propelled by long oars, although the Norse and, in particular, the Arabs, had learned to use sails with some precision. A cabal of mages needing to make a cheap water voyage could do so by signing on as oarsmen (although those with Stamina ratings under 4 may have problems).

A Storyteller running a ship-based chronicle might want to do some research to determine what kind of vessel the characters are on. Is the cabal sailing on a nef? A cog? A Romanesque galley? A Byzantine dromon? Attention to this degree of detail isn't necessary, but it can add some interesting verisimilitude to a chronicle.

Norse and English ships, crafted to withstand the rigors of the North Sea, were exceptionally sturdy. They could survive a hard beaching. The galleys of the Mediterranean, on the other hand, were rounder and less solidly constructed, but more maneuverable due to the shape of their hulls.

Ships made in the north had one block sail, while Mediterranean ships, even in 1230, had as many as three masts full of smaller sails (again, for increased maneuverability).

While the specifics varied a great deal, most medieval trading ships had one level below deck where either cargo or passengers were stored. On the more primitive galleys, there would also need to be oarsmen.



TRAVEL AND MONEY

Just what kind of travel a mage can arrange has a great deal to do with how much money he has. The more gold the mage has, the farther she can go and the greater the degree of her comfort in getting there.

With no dots in Resources, a mage will need to charm or enchant his way in to travels if he wants to travel via any means besides walking.

One dot of Resources will allow the mage to buy and maintain a horse at a basic level. It may also let him buy fare between two close cities, though it will be the least comfortable way of making that voyage.

Two dots in Resources allow the mage to buy a higher quality horse or afford a more luxurious journey between two nearby cities or more basic travel between two more distant cities.

Three dots in Resources allow the mage to travel between two relatively distant cities with a basic degree of comfort and safety. An ocean voyage between London and Portugal fits this description, as would a land voyage between Paris and Rome.

With four dots in Resources, the mage can travel anywhere in Europe in relative comfort, whether by sea or over land.

Five dots in Resources allow the mage to travel in most luxurious comfort anywhere he is inclined to go. He may buy a barge and hire a crew to take him where he wants to go; alternatively he might arrange to buy several wagons and a selection of men-at-arms to form a caravan to take him anywhere he wants to go in luxurious comfort (or what passed for it in the Dark Medieval), whether it be from Toulouse to Rome or from Uppsala to Jerusalem.

TRAVEL MAGIC

Different Mystic Fellowships can expedite their own travel or inhibit their opponent's using a variety of different spells. Below are a number of different meteorological effects a mage might want to conjure up while at sea.

Create Fog

An Ahl-i-Batin mage can create fog using Al-Layl 3.

Messianic Voices magi can bring up a fog using a conjunctive spell using Repha-el 2 and Uri-el 2.

The weather witches of the Old Faith have perhaps the easiest time of creating a fog. They need use nothing more than Winter 2.

Order of Hermes wizards can bring fog using Vires 3.

Spirit-Talkers use Trickster 3 (to create a fog in the mind of the target) or Wise One 3 to call the spirits of fog.

Valdaermen may summon a fog using a conjunctive effect with Fara 3 and Forlog 3.

Summon Storm

The Ahl-i-Batin can pull the threads of fate to bring up a storm (or other similar event) using Al-Anbiya 4.

Messianic Voices magi can bring up a storm using Mikha-el 4.

The Old Faith storm witches can generate a storm using the power of Winter 3.

Order of Hermes wizards can whip the elements into a frenzy through the power of Vires 4.

Spirit-Talkers can't really control the weather directly to summon storms, but by using Chieftain 3 and Wise One 3 they can order the storm spirits to bedevil an enemy craft.

Valdaermen are also at a disadvantage at summoning storms directly, but Hjaldr 3 allows the mage to channel the elements for war, and that includes summoning storms. The alternative method that a Norse mage might employ is Fara 5, but that's a much more complex way of obtaining the same result.

Call Wind

These spells aren't necessarily to call a literal wind, but to speed a mage's boat while it's at sea. Some of these spells may call a wind, while others simply urge the mage's vessel on more directly.

The Ahl-i-Batin can call upon Al-Anbiya 4 to have fate favor them with strong winds and calm seas. Alternatively, the mage can simply create a large portal through space using Al-Hajj 4, although such an approach takes a great many more successes.

Messianic Voices can speed their travel by appealing to Gavri-el, the angel of motion, to push the boat toward its goal.

Magi of the Old Faith can use Spring 3 to call a wind to propel them through water. In conjunction with a Winter 2 spell to calm waves, the mage is able to make particularly good time.

Order of Hermes magi can summon a wind using Vires 3.

Spirit-Talkers are again at the mercy of the spirits. A shaman on good terms with the local wind spirits can simply use Wise One 3, otherwise he'll need to use a conjunctive spell making use of Chieftain 3 and Wise One 3.

Valdaermen are perhaps the best off when it comes to speeding travel since they have an entire Pillar dedicated to it. With Fara 2 the rune-singer can increase the speed of his vessel directly. Better yet, Swift Passage is a specialty for Valdaermen magi, so they're likely to get better results with such spells than many of their brethren magi.

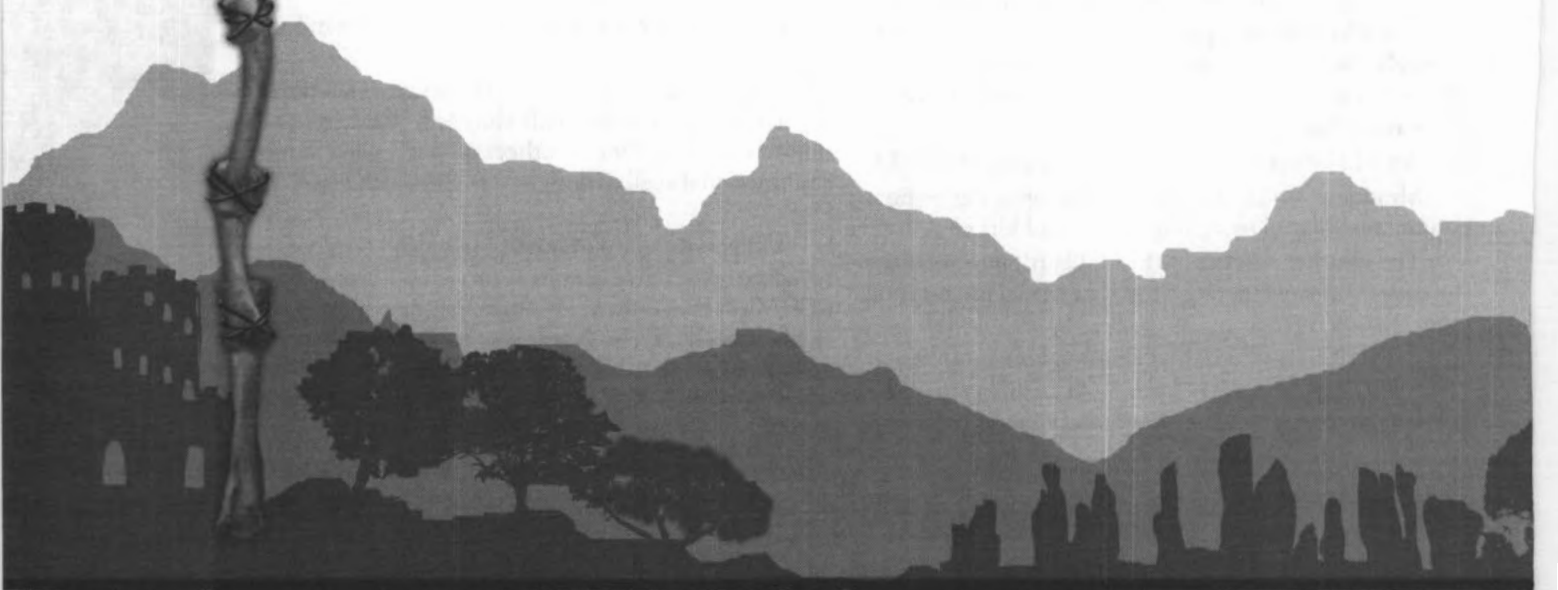


APPENDIX: THE CRAFTMASON\$



The superstitious terrorize us with their petty, pagan fears. Oh that our princes would cease to lend ear to such prattle and instead commission the work of Man, who is verily the model of the Universe.

— Josephus Valentio, architect and mason



The so-called “rationalist” mages of the Craftmasons, once a group of disaffected magi from Hermetic House Ex Miscellanea, have dissolved their ties with their former brethren in magic and struck out in a bold new direction. No longer satisfied with magic for wonder’s sake, the Craftmasons now insist that magic be used in such a way that the common man can understand it. If magic is not made accessible and understandable to Commoners, they claim, then the world is doomed to forever suffer the depredations of malicious magi like those of Mistridge (see below). Insisting that magic should be crafted and engineered instead of simply cast, the Craftmasons shake their fingers at all traditional mages, and the common folk reward them for it. They’ve been around for scant decades, but already they teach their strange natural philosophers’ magic to initiates around Europe. The other Mystic Fellowships, the Order of Hermes in particular, think very little of this new faction, but they’re content to let it bloom and wither at whatever pace it sets for itself.

BACKGROUND

A Hermetic Covenant called Mistridge was founded near the village of Montauban in 1067 just

north of the French Pyrenees. To its shame, the cabal of Hermetic mages there, all relatively powerful, shared a disdain for Commoners. In time, the magi of Mistridge gained a reputation for being magical despots and tyrants of the surrounding lands. The village of Montauban suffered the worst, with the Mistridge cabal occasionally raiding the village for subjects for Hermetic experiments in *Ars Anima*, or using the village itself as a target for *Ars Vires*. Mages throughout the south of France gained a bad name due to the actions of the Mistridge cabal, but a powerful *laissez faire* tradition among the Awakened prevented other cabals from taking action. For over a century, Montauban was subject to magical depredations, but after subjecting the population to a particularly vile magical plague, attitudes among the mages in the area changed.

In the spring of 1210, a band of “rationalist” mages from House Ex Miscellanea seceded from the Houses of Hermes after failing to move the Order to take action against the Mistridge cabal. Calling themselves the Craftmasons, they met with neighboring trade and artisan guilds to discuss magical and non-magical means of ridding the area of the marauding Mistridge cabal.

CANNON MAGIC

For their assault on the Mistridge tower, the Craftmasons knew well that they had to have powerful magic. They also knew that the magi of Mistridge were much more skilled than they, and so they were in a bit of a situation.

Then one of the Artisans pointed something out: Alchemists performed their magic *during* the creation of their potions and concoctions, not later when it was actually used. As crafts magi, there was nothing to stop them from crafting their magic into items as well, reducing the need for lengthy incantations while in the heat of battle.

The Craftmasons came up with many, many plans for achieving their objective. Many schematics were drawn up for methods of destroying Mistridge: enchanted catapults, metal golems, monstrous stone-devouring snakes, and more. But the device that the Craftmasons finally decided upon was the cannon, a metal tube that propelled enormous iron projectiles through the air with fire. Its like had never been seen, but the Craftmasons were able to ready and test the devices for weeks beforehand, learning just what the weapon’s strengths and weaknesses were.

And when the time came, the cannons brought down Mistridge.

The cannon itself is a mundane — although brilliantly conceived — forged metal tube that is usually mounted on wheels. The magic is in a special substance created through alchemical means, known in later years as “gunpowder.” This explosive powder is created with an ongoing *Ars Vires* 1 and *Materia* 3 spell. When contacted with open flame or extreme heat, it explodes. Carefully packed into a cannon with a fuse, it can propel large iron balls through the air over great distances to devastating effect.

The cannon operator rolls Intelligence + Awareness against difficulty 8 to properly aim the cannon. Damage is 20 dice, and the range is 400 feet.

Very few of the original cannons that brought down Mistridge remain intact, although the Craftmasons do have a small keep that acts as an armory, forge and laboratory for the more research-oriented among their number. What manner of devices might come from such a place is beyond anyone’s guess.

Seven months later, in the dead of winter, the Craftsmasons, leading a band of angry villagers and mercenaries, attacked Mistridge with enormous martial Talismans that they called "cannons."

The magical barriers around the Covenant held until Grimgoth, Hermetic *bani* Tremere, pulled all Quintessence from the barriers (allegedly out of spite stemming from a political feud with another Mistridge mage), allowing the invading force inside. The seven mages inside rained fire and curses on the invading force, causing horrible casualties, but to no avail. The Craftsmasons' weapons brought down the tower around the Hermetics' heads. While the Craftsmasons (and their followers) were decimated, no resident of Mistridge survived the attack.

In the weeks that followed, the Craftsmasons became a *cause célèbre* among the Commoners of southern France. They accrued followers, funding and respect from even unexpected sources (including many members of the Order of Hermes), and they vowed to protect humanity from the depredations of unethical mages.

THE FULL IRONY

After all the design, the ritual and the planning, the cannon was chosen to be the weapon to bring down Mistridge.

The irony of the whole situation is that that it didn't.

The Craftmason blasted Mistridge with scores of cannon balls, but to no avail. Until Grimgoth, in a fit of pique, siphoned every last bit of Quintessence from the wards and shield spells surrounding Mistridge. Then, and only then, the cannonballs were capable of smashing through the tower itself. It was lucky for the Craftsmasons that he acted when he did, because they had already gone through three quarters of their cannonballs.

The story spread throughout the land that it was the Craftmason's magic that had beaten the Mistridge Covenant, but the reality of the situation was very, very different. Were it not for the treachery of Grimgoth, Mistridge wouldn't even have been chipped, much less toppled, and the Craftsmasons would have been annihilated, not hailed as deliverers and heroes.



the present

Twenty years later, the Craftmasons continue to pursue the same agenda. They are becoming somewhat dogmatic, however, about what kinds of magic they feel it is proper for *any* mage to use. There are even arguments within the order that the use of magic, in and of itself, is a questionable practice. Certain members with strong religious leanings support this view wholeheartedly.

Throughout the kingdoms of Aquitaine, France, Aragon, Castile and much of the Holy Roman Empire, the Craftmason ethic is meeting with surprising approval — both from the Commoners and a surprising number of mages (particularly among the Gabrielites, a reactionary faction of Messianic Voices, and those mage Knights Templar who saw with their own eyes the kind of damage that the Saracen mages could cause with unchecked use of magic).

It's entirely possible that characters could run into a Craftmason cabal, particularly if they have a tendency to use violent, flashy or even unnecessary magic. While Craftmason magic still bears a strong resemblance to alchemy and the more focus-based magic of the Hermetics, the Storyteller is free to determine how much it has changed from the main Hermetic Pillars in **Dark Ages: Mage**.

ORGANIZATION

The Craftmason's organization still bears a strong resemblance to its original organizational model developed a thousand years prior when they were a small sect of geomancers and philosopher-architects in Rome. Their long history as part of Hermetic House Ex Miscellanea rendered their hierarchy a bit more rigid than it was in centuries past, but the truth is that the organization is and has always been patterned after the shape of the pyramids of Egypt.

The Craftmasons have 33 degrees of initiation in their order. There is, at the apex of the hierarchy, one 33rd degree Craftmason, who is a mage of no small power. The young organization has many members in its lower 12 degrees — those who've joined the Craftmasons since its success at Mistrbridge — but the upper echelons of the organization remain sparsely populated. Because the group is trying to maintain its pyramidal structure, the group's leadership is currently allowing talented and driven candidates to advance through degrees much faster than it would really like. This is only one of the subtle strains on the nascent Craftmasons.

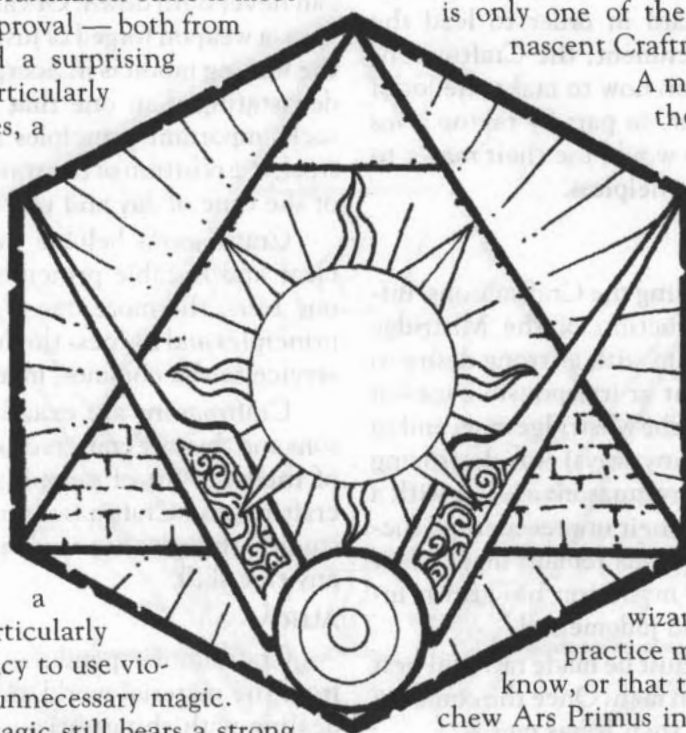
A more problematic split in the organization comes from the pronounced schism in the organization between those who were part of Hermetic House Ex Miscellanea and those who were not. The fact remains that all of the members of the Craftmasons of the 25th degree and higher are, for all intents and purposes, fairly adept Hermetic wizards. That they refuse to

practice many of the magics they know, or that they enthusiastically eschew *Ars Primus* in favor of the relatively recently devised *Ars Materia* matters very little to many of the new members who view any formal magical training with suspicion.

philosophy

Although the Craftmason philosophy and approach to magic continues to have a great deal in common with the Hermetics, every year that passes sees the Hermetic heritage of the Craftmasons fade away, replaced with entirely different views as the Fellowship sets itself in increasing opposition to the Order (and all other Fellowships, for that matter).

The Craftmasons believe in binding magic into practical creations — buildings, devices, tools and the like — as a way of sanctifying them as well



as improving the lot of the common man. Magic that is cast with a wave of the hand or a briefly spoken incantation (instead of being built or constructed) does not sit well with the Craftmasons. It reeks to them of arrogance, and they believe it has a dangerous, potentially corrupting influence on magi who use it. Magical objects that are forged or handcrafted have a utility and a soul that keeps the mage from growing too arrogant or out of touch with the necessarily practical nature of magic.

While the official Hermetic view is that magi must be on the vanguard in order to lead the Commoners to enlightenment, the Craftmasons believe that it is their job now to make the lot of the common man better, in part by taking arms against those magi who would use their magic to prey upon the magically helpless.

FAILINGS

The events surrounding the Craftmasons' initial strike — the destruction of the Mistrudge covenant — has left them with a strong desire to strike out against blatant or irresponsible uses of magic. So despised were the Mistrudge magi and so rewarding (in many, many ways) was destroying the covenant that the Craftmasons are left with a profound urge to repeat their unprecedented success. While the Craftmasons remain magi, their approach to magic and mysticism has grown increasingly suspicious and judgmental.

Magic, they insist, must be made rational or it cannot help the common man. Once the common man can understand it, then it has merit.

Nearly every other mage on the planet, however, takes exception to this. If magic has to wait until every Commoner can understand it, then the world will never have access to magic and the wonders it provides.

The Craftmasons remain firm in their convictions (or, their narrow-minded, dogmatic beliefs, as some put it), however, and while they fail to balance magic and rationality (always erring on the side of rationality), they feel themselves to be on moral high ground with their position and they have no interest in debating or discussing their approach, especially not with acknowledged magi.

THEORIES AND PRACTICE

Stemming from their philosophies, the magic of the Craftmasons is based on being able to create an item in accord with the highest principles of ancient knowledge. A building, for example, can be built in such a way — in just the right location relative to its environment, using just the right kind of stone, facing a particular auspicious direction, inscribed with just the right symbols, etc. — that it harnesses the power of the sun and the moon to bring health to those residing in it. Or can never burn down. Or can repel enemies. Likewise, a weapon forged of just the right metal when the waxing moon is in Scorpio will be much more devastating than one that pays no attention to such important principles as the formula of the steel, the position of the stars at the time of forging or the time of day and year.

Craftmasons believe that the world runs on clear and testable principles and that the more one tests, the more one is able to discern these principles and harness them to the magical will in service to the common man.

Craftmasons are exactly that: They are masons and they are crafters of amazing items. Outside of their pursuit of sacred geometry and magical crafting, the Craftmasons are fond of alchemical studies, though they study it with more zeal than any true skill.

AURA

Craftmasons spend their time coaxing secrets from the material world around them. They like dealing with things because things do not have rebellious natures like human beings. Craftmasons, consequently, have a Controlling Aura. They may add their Aura modifier to any roll where a sense of order or control benefits them, but they subtract it if they are dealing with anyone who reads their Aura as domineering (i.e., most magi).

SUGGESTED TRAITS

Attributes: Intelligence, Manipulation, Stamina

Abilities: Academics, Crafts, Linguistics, Medicine

Backgrounds: Allies, Library, Sanctum

Foundation: Hermetic Modus

Pillars: Materia and any Hermetic Forma except Primus.

MATERIA

Command of material substances

Materia is the art of alchemical and philosophical (i.e., scientific) shaping, and forging. With the Craftmason's dedication to the world of matter eclipsing their dedication to the subtle magical workings of magic, they gave up the study of *Ars Primus* in favor of *Ars Materia*, the control of material substances.

Most applications of Materia beyond the perceptual (i.e., discerning the properties of matter) require extended spells. Rarely is matter easily changed with but the wave of a wand. This is not to say that Materia cannot be worked in the field, just that it is most appropriate in a laboratory. In general, the Storyteller should assume that any of the spell effects listed below require more than one success, and might need 10 or more.

At the Storyteller's discretion, certain mages of the Order of Hermes can also learn this Pillar, such as the magical smiths of House Verditius.

- The mage can sense integrity and weakness in objects and structures. Even the smallest flaw in a tapestry, the merest imperfection in a crystal, or the thinnest crack in a wall can be discerned with but a glance. At this level the Craftmason can also discern the balance of the four classical elements (Earth, Air, Fire, Water) in all non-living things.

- Now the mage can tamper with items in the material world. Substances can be nudged toward or away from the direction of their true nature: The mage may make liquids more or less viscous, metals harder or softer and mineral spirits more or less flammable. One substance can be transmuted into another, similar substance: copper into bronze, for example, or urine into water. He may nudge the elemental balance of a substance with his will, turning stone to clay (by making the stone more malleable, like water) or

air into a thick black smoke (by making it darker and heavier, like earth). The mage can make powerful poisons at this level as well.

- This is the beginning of true understanding of the nature of matter for the Craftmason. He can make substances that perform in a wondrous variety of ways: powders that flash like lightning or explode. Oils that burn even under water. He can melt stone, cause glass to burn and still water into a beautiful blue crystal at room temperature. He can make opaque substances transparent and vice versa. These changes aren't permanent (unless made so with an ongoing spell), but they might be permanent enough.

- High manifestations of alchemical science are possible now; the Craftmason may distill Orichalum (True Gold) and Lunargent (True Silver) from such common elements as lead and dirt. He may forge highly precise and tiny objects, allowing him to create scale and chain mail as fine and smooth as velvet but as hard as adamantium. He can make oils that nourish, potions that dissolve metal, poisons that cause flesh to evaporate, and beautiful liquid gems that bead and roll like quicksilver. He can make whole walls evaporate. He can animate matter to create strange golems of clay or wood. With the proper formulae and practice, the Craftmason can transform base elements like dirt and stone into leather, wood, milk, food or nearly anything else he may need.

- At this level of understanding, the Craftmason, having mastered all the rules of matter's working, can now, with enough preparation, break all of those rules at will. With enough experimentation, he can subvert any natural law pertaining to the material world. The mage may alter the density, volume and weight of a substance at will. He can make two items exist in the same space without interfering with one another. He can give matter any property he can imagine — buoyancy, viscosity, impermeability, conductivity, etc. — or he can unmake it entirely.