Dark Ages Mages



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Dark ages MAGES™



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PROLOGUE: MORTALIS VITIUM

I hated this lord with all my being. So arrogant. So righteous. What a waste of noble station. He was the local ruler of this region, a baron, whose father had been baron before him. One would think that such lineage would breed true. Instead, under the influence of Christianity, that curse on us left by Rome, he used his power to oppress us. And so, we hid our true beliefs from him, pretending to pray to his hundred saints by day, but remembering the moon at night.

His religion had not yet gained full sway. Besides our own secret practices, there was one in the town who had come among us a few years ago. A man of true power. A mage from the continent, one who delved into forgotten wisdom and lore and could bend the world to his will. He claimed to be a member of an ancient order, whose roots stretched back to fabled Egypt, far to the south. He fascinated me.

I watched him as he went about his journeys, gathering plants and minerals for his alchemy. These he took back to the old fort he now inhabited, abandoned long ago by the Romans and shunned by the locals. He seemed perfectly happy living in a place long thought haunted.

I eventually gained the courage to approach him, and begged him to allow me to serve him in any way possible. I was hungry to witness his secrets, to watch as he transmuted the

world to his very whim with whispered word and ritual gesture. He scoffed and told me to go home, saying I was too old to learn from him. "A man of 20 years? Too old to learn anew. Go away!"

I kept coming back. Then one day, he wandered too far afield in his search for materials. I followed him, watching from the trees. The night came on, and he, alone, trundled up the road, leaning heavily on his staff.

Bandits appeared. He spoke a strange word in a deep voice that seemed not his own, and three of them fled. One, though, remained. This one raised his sword to strike, but I struck first. My cudgel cracked his skull and left him toppled in the muddy lane. Only then did Fornax truly see me, and recognize my worth. He nodded and grasped my shoulder, pulling me along with him as he hurried to get home. From that time forth, I served him, acting as bodyguard and herb-gatherer whenever he was too tired to fetch his simples himself. I learned much from these trips, and from watching him, but I still hungered to know more. Although his manner was gruff, and he still refused to share fully his knowledge with me, I came to love him as a grandfather.

And so I could not abide what this petty, prideful lord asked of him. Lord Selwyn came with his train of guards and his oily seneschal, claiming to deliver their respects to the great Fornax, whose legend they had heard even here, in the north of England. But they really wanted his power. The lord, it seemed, had a vision from God. He is to go to the Holy Land and win Jerusalem for Christianity. In his vision, he wielded a sword, a mighty thing of power, capable of cleaving steel as easily as flesh. With this sword, he could fulfill his destiny and bring the One True God back to the Holy Land, driving out the heathens and Saracens.

And so he came to Fornax, the only man who could give him this sword. He requested that the magus forge this thing for him, and claimed in return he will pay a fortune in gold. His "request," though, was clearly a demand. With his ring of armed guardsmen about him, hands on their hilts, the price of refusal was clear.

Fornax agreed, although I could see the anger he hid behind his eyes. He told the lord that the forging would take a full lunar month. Such weapons of majesty are not wrought at a whim, and the casting of this spell will cost him greatly in strength, and even endanger his health. Yet, Fornax said he will do this thing for the baron on the promise that the nobleman take the sword to the Holy Land and there wage his wars.

After the lord left, Fornax called for me. "Ah, Math, we are cursed," he said, looking out the window at some distant specter in the air which only he could see. "But it must be done. No turning back. Go and find a blacksmith, the best in the area. One who does not fear to forge such a sword with me."

"That will not be easy, sir," I said. "Few such men wish anything to do with your craft. Nevertheless, I shall search, and, I shall bring back whomever I find."

"Good, good. And there is another whose aid we will need. Do you know of Old Sylvie?"

"The madwoman? Who does not? But what use is she to you?"

"Her herb-lore is greater than mine. And she knows where veins of the Earth's scarcest minerals lie exposed, where stones can be chipped to grind into fine powders of potent intent. Go, find her, and bring her to me."

I did so. I went first to Johann Kerr, a blacksmith two towns over. I knew his family, and he knew mine. It was my mam, as midwife, who helped his mam bring him into this world and strengthened him as he grew by giving his own mother recipes to make a young man strong.

"No," he said, "I will not do this thing. This Fornax, he is a strange man, and there is no telling what wrongs he can commit with such a task. It is not for us to make magical swords, Math; that is the lost power of the gods alone."

"If you do not help him, the baron will kill him," I said. "Besides, the baron does you and all your family wrong, making you hide your devotions in the name of his tyrannous Christ. If he gets this sword, he will depart for lands far away and perhaps never return. Is this not excuse enough?"

Johann shook his head, doubtful, but the prospect of ridding us all of this petty noble was good enough argument for him. He agreed.

Next, I searched for Old Sylvie. It took two days, for she is not easy to find. She is always around when one does not want her company, but elusive when needed. Eventually, I heard her craggy voice in a semblance of song echo from some distant glade. I came upon her slowly.

"Sylvie? Mistress Sylvie? " I called. She stopped her singing and stared at me as if I might be a bandit. "You know me, Sylvie. Young Math, from the village. You helped me mam once, when she almost lost

a child she midwifed. Your herbs helped the babe cling to life."

She smiled and laughed, tossing her tangled head of hair to and fro. "Young Math, young Math. The wizard's man. Why do you steal his power when you have your own?"

"Steal? I serve Fornax, not thieve from him. He asks that you serve him also, for he knows you to be wise in the ways of plants and minerals."

For a brief moment, I could swear that her eyes looked upon me with a cunning intelligence the likes of which I'd never seen. But then it passed and her unfocused gaze returned, like a cloud across the sun.

"I will, I will, I will!" she said, dancing in a circle. "I will help Fornax again, and he will give me a treat!"

I guided her back to the fort, and she and Fornax talked for many hours in his study. He closed the door, and I could not hear through the thick oak. I could not imagine what wisdom he perceived in her babbling.

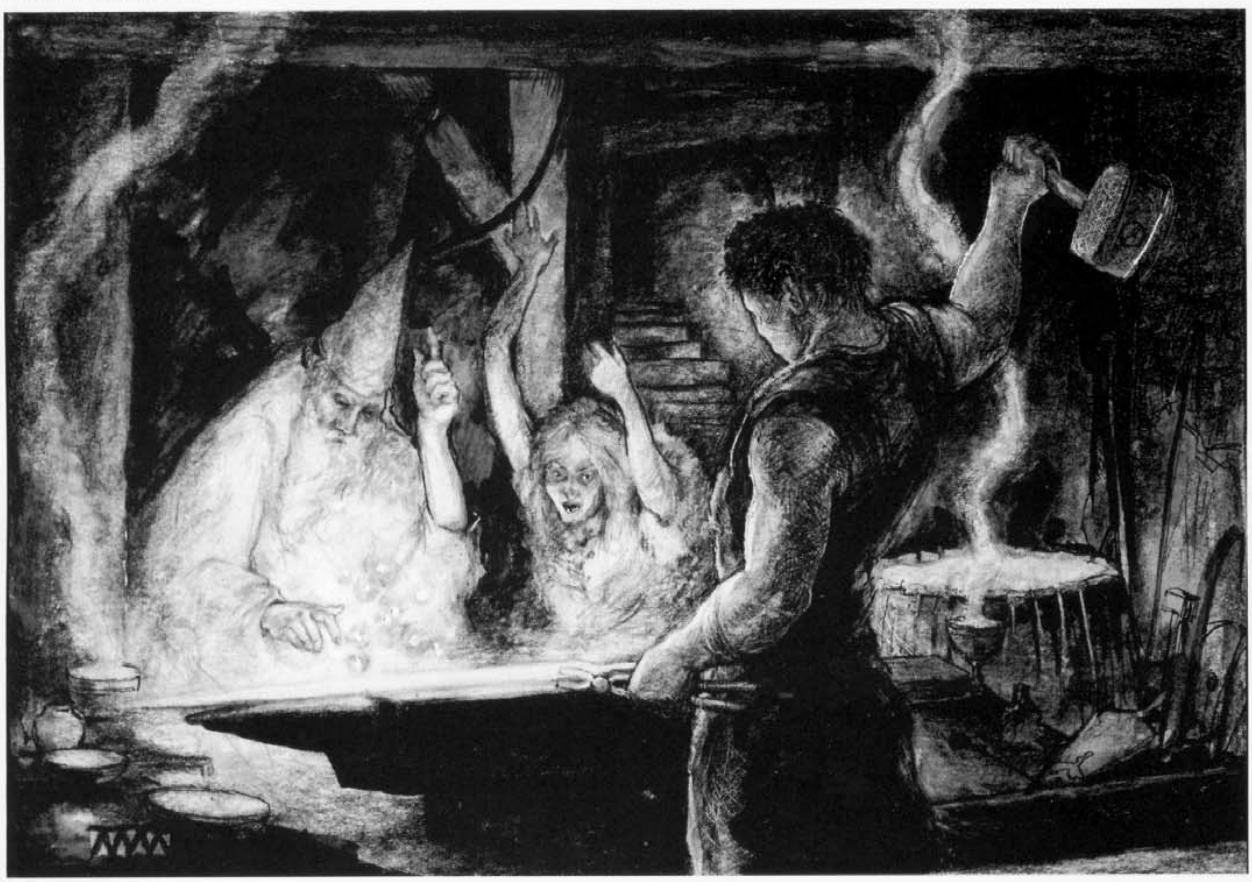
Soon enough, the forging began. Lord Selwyn demanded to be present at the start of the working, and Fornax reluctantly agreed. He brought with him, though, a priest, a man who had traveled far from the Holy Land itself. This man of the Church was the cause of the baron's desire to go there, we learned, reinforced now by his vision. The priest dressed simply enough, with none of the ostentation common among others of his order, but he paced about the fort with a look of undisguised disgust.

"My lord, I beseech you," he said, just as Johann began to work the fires in the fort's old forge, which I had painstakingly prepared. "This thing they do is not meet. If the Lord God gave you a vision of such a sword, surely he means to deliver it to you by other means. You cannot seriously believe that this… this *sorcerer*… can provide anything but a cursed weapon!"

"Hush, Father Gálen," the baron said, staring in fascination at the flames. "I know what I am doing. If you do not wish to witness its making, leave. But know that, with this blade, I shall win the world for God."

This last statement seemed to dismay the priest even more, but he spoke not again, and instead only paced, always watching.

Amid Johann's hammering and Sylvie's cackling, I strained to make out the words Fornax muttered as he evoked his power. I could feel the hairs on my arms and neck rise as he charged the very air with storm-potential, and it felt like lightning could strike



from nowhere at any moment. As instructed prior to the forging, I set about lighting certain kinds of incense as needed and bringing bowls of powder Fornax had ground earlier from rare minerals. These he sprinkled on the raw, molten metal at certain times during its forming, strengthening its power with their own.

It was hot work, and long. Even with all the windows opened, soon we all were bathed in sweat. Eventually, the baron took his leave, and his priest went with him. His seneschal, though, stayed to watch the whole rite intently.

As the full moon rose that evening, Johann quenched the blade's fire in a vat of water. Steam erupted but soon dispersed. The blade was the finest I have ever seen. Worked into its flat length were tiny glyphs and marks of power. These were not carved by Johann, but had seemingly grown on the metal with each application of powder and a chant from Fornax.

Once Johann had attached the handle and pommel, and wrapped it in wire, he hefted it and smiled. "Never have I made a sword so finely balanced," he said. "It is a shame to send it on such a mission."

The seneschal glowered at him and put forth his hand. "Give it to me, and I shall deliver it to our lord."

"It is not done," Fornax said, taking the sword and sheathing it in the scabbard I had made for it earlier. "I have another task to complete first. Alone." He pulled on his cloak, picked up his staff and headed out the door, up the thin, winding path and into the woods.

The seneschal moved to follow, but I bid him stay, telling him that the task must be completed in privacy. He dealt me an evil glance and departed, but heading toward town, away from the woods. I grew concerned nonetheless and followed Fornax's trail into the woods. I soon heard the sound of someone else following me. Hiding within the shadows by the edge of the path, I watched two men in dark cloaks pass: the baron and his seneschal. Did they fear that Fornax would betray them? I fell in behind them and sneaked from tree to tree to see their purpose.

Soon, the path opened up into a glade, within full sight of the moon. The two men halted and bent down within the bushes as they watched something in the clearing.

Fornax had placed the sword on a flat rock, and now muttered over it. Moonlight gleamed down—and suddenly brightened. A glistening ray, so bright I could not look directly at it, shot down from the moon and straight into the sword. In a moment, it was over. Voices began to filter into the clearing then, and I could see movement in the air. Tiny, winged beings danced in the breeze and floated over the sword, prancing on its naked blade, their laughter like tinkling bells. I thought I heard Sylvie's voice acackle among theirs, but I could not see her anywhere.

Fornax watched this spectacle for a time, then raised his staff and tapped it against the ground three times. The small dancers disappeared. The night was still and quiet.

The two men stood and marched into the glade. Fornax turned to watch them. He was not surprised.

"I will have that sword now," the baron said.

"Take it," Fornax said. "I am too weak to deny you even had I intended to. But know that it has a name."

The lord ignored him and snatched the sword from the rock, hefting it with respect, and then sweeping it about to test its weight. I heard him suck his breath in with awe. "It is... majestic. With this, I shall reap glory for all Christendom." Suddenly, he swung the sword down against the rock. The stone shattered as if it were rotten wood. He laughed exultantly and turned to Fornax, leveling the sword at him. "Now, old man, your reward." He raised the sword, ready to bring it down upon Fornax.

"So predictable," Fornax said. "I had hoped Math was wrong about you. I see now he was not. Do your worst."

This last command was spoken not to Lord Selwyn but to me. I raised my right arm and spoke the words my da had taught me, words of power given him by the gods, handed down to him by his mother before him. The air crackled and the wind rose, rushing fiercely at the lord and his seneschal. Twigs and grass flew in the whirlwind, blinding them. I raised my left arm and a wall of brambles grew up between Selwyn and Fornax.

Selwyn cried out in anger and slashed about blindly with his sword. I cursed that blade then, and Fornax for having made it. It tore through the thick brambles as if they were mere air and nicked Fornax across the cheek. He cried out and bent low to avoid another bite from the blade.

I moved forward, my cudgel raised. If magic could not stop this lord, perhaps brute force could. Even through the wind-blown weeds, he saw me come and turned to meet me with the damned blade.

Before he could fully draw it back to strike, he burst into flames. I stumbled back in astonishment at the horror of his burning body and the heat it gave

forth. He flailed about to extinguish the fire but could not. He slumped to the ground and collapsed, his upper body a mass of blackened ash.

The seneschal quickly recovered his own demeanor and snatched the fallen blade from the ground, ignoring the dark ashes that fluttered from it. He ran down the path from which he had come and was soon gone.

I rushed to Fornax and helped him to stand. "Even after spending so much of yourself in the forging, you still had the power to ignite him!"

"No," Fornax said, looking around the clearing. "It was not I. There is another magus near."

We both saw him then as he walked slowly up the path from his hiding place among the trees. The priest Galen looked up at us, tears streaming down his face. "I could not let him commit such perfidy. He… he was unfit to carry God's banner in the Crusades. May the Lord forgive me for what I have done."

"He may or he may not," I said. "But none of us can stay here any longer. The seneschal will bring men to see us dead."

"Only so long as he can resist the sword's curse," Fornax said. "But I expect that to be long enough. We must leave now."

"Curse?" Galen said. "So you did intend evil with that sword!"

"Evil?" Fornax said. "By no means. I enchanted it such that whosoever wields it will receive tenfold what he delivers unto others. If it is wielded righteously, then so will be the rewards it reaps. If wielded in anger or greed, however, wrath and poverty will be its gift to the wielder. And so its name is Mortalis Vitium, the 'Mortal Flaw.'"

Galen did not respond; he only nodded.

"You had best come with us," I said, although I hated to do so. "He will surely come to blame you for this, soon enough."

"Yes," Fornax said. "Surely there is providence in the four of us meeting?" I wondered at his words, for I counted only three of us.

"I… Yes, I will come," Galen said. "Long my travels have been till now, and long will they be hereafter. I have judged you wrongly, and I wish to make amends."

Fornax nodded and then cried out: "Sylvie? Did you bring my things?"

Sylvie came dancing from the woods, leading a pony that bore travel bags stuffed to bursting. "I did, I did, I did. Winnie carries them for you, she does. Thank her kindly, won't you?"

Fornax smiled and shook his head. "Thank you, noble mount, for bearing the valuables of my craft." He then looked at us all. "So. Shall we go? You know these woods best, Sylvie. Would you lead the way?"

"Aye, aye, aye!" she said, turning in a circle and heading down a small path, across the clearing from the one we had entered by. "To hill and dale, to feast with friendly beasts. This is our lot!"

Fornax grasped me by the shoulder, for I stood with jaw agape, wondering at Sylvie. She clearly was far more than I ever suspected. Fornax, though, had known her secret all along. Once again, I admired his wisdom and knew why I sought to learn it. My own ways were strong enough, and I would always practice them, and one day hand them to my own son or daughter. But I also wished to know more of Fornax's own secrets, for they surprised me ceaselessly.

Fornax guided me down the path as he followed Sylvie's hiccuping laugh, and Galen fell in behind us.





"Here!" Asar-un-Nefer said, tapping his staff against the thick roots of an ancient yew tree. "Begin digging here, Antonio. Our search has borne fruit."

Antonio put down his pack and examined the spot. He saw nothing remarkable, except a nigh-impenetrable mass of roots. He looked at his master but the man had already moved away, scanning the ground for something.

"Master," Antonio said. "I have no tool that will allow me to penetrate these roots."

"Dig around them," Asar-un-Nefer said. "You need not dig deep. The gold coins of the Fae are close to the surface."

Antonio shrugged and pulled a farmer's pick from his pack. He began to sift the dirt around the roots and found it surprisingly loose. After a few moments, he caught a yellow gleam.

"Master!" he cried. "I've found something!"

The middle-aged man in resplendent robes pushed him aside and knelt by the roots. He stirred the dirt with the butt of his staff. He uncovered a single gold coin, huge and detailed with strange markings. "Ah, yes. I guessed correctly. We are near to the hoard. And once we've found it, we'll find the Cauldron."

"So that is what you seek!" a female voice said from above their heads.

Startled, Asar-un-Nefer and Antonio jumped back and looked up. A woman sat in the tree branches. She wore a long, green tunic and clutched a thin, gnarled yew branch in her hand. Antonio looked around, fearful that there would be others hidden overhead. He saw no one else and could not understand how he had not seen her when they first arrived.

"Who are you to stride so boldly through my woods?" she said, staring down at them with contempt.

"Your woods?" Asar-un-Nefer said. "I had thought them the king's."

"In name, yes, but not in truth. He does not tread here," she said. She dropped down with effortless grace from the tree to stand before the men. "He knows better."

"Then know that I am Asar-un-Nefer, adept of the Order of Hermes. I go where knowledge draws me, and none can stand in the way of my Great Work."

"Oh?" the woman said, cocking an eyebrow. "And I, oh ostentatious one, am Morvyth, priestess of gods who were old before your father's seed spilt upon your mother's thigh. These woods are Theirs. Come not here without bowing down before Them."

"I bow before none," Asar-un-Nefer said. "Neither god nor demon. I am my own master and go where I will."

"Then be prepared to pay for your folly," Morvyth said, raising up her wand.

Antonio ran. He broke through the thick brush they had passed when entering the grove and stumbled over rocks on the other side. He slid to the ground and covered his head, whimpering as he heard the sound of lightning crackle from his master's staff....



INTRODUCTION: MYSTERIOUS SIGNS

The theurgist, by virtue of mysterious signs, controls the powers of nature. Not as a mere human being, or as possesses a human soul, but as one of a higher rank of gods, he gives orders that are not appropriate to the condition of man.

— Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries of Egypt*

Ah, to wield the Unseen Powers with one's very will. Is this not what every man wants? Since time immemorial, men have always yearned to possess abilities beyond the ordinary, to bend the seemingly unbendable natural laws that govern our lives, and to win the respect, admiration or awe of others. In short, everyone wants to be a wizard.

Of course, few ever want the consequences that come with that desire, nearly as well known in myth and legend as the powers themselves: The long years of study and toil, the dangerous evocation of immaterial beings, the rivalry with other wizards, the tragedy of a misspoken word or an

unwittingly broken pact — these things prove that, to wield great power, one must first possess iron will and fearless resolve. Lesser men quail at the thought of such punishments for spells gone awry; true mages stride onwards where these others dare not tread.

The desire of magical power aside, not everyone can become a mage. Only a few are born with or develop the Gift, the knack to work magic, to weave spells from the universe's Tapestry. Perhaps this, more than any other reason credited to magic gone terribly wrong, is why most men distrust mages: They envy them. They want to be them, but they cannot. No amount of willpower can give them the Gift; they either have it or they don't. Whether it is inborn or granted by angels is up for debate, but it is either completely present or completely lacking. Mages who use their Gift for the benefit of those who do not have it often become revered as saints or gods by later generations, however. Compassion or generosity may not be rewarded within the mage's lifetime, but history usually recognizes it. Who can say how many of the favored gods or saints of old were once mages?

In medieval times, the prospect of a mage living down the road or chanting in midnight groves was still believed possible, even if few people ever actually could prove such an assertion. In later years, the belief in wizards and warlocks takes on a fairy tale quality, a relic of a bygone age. In the year of Our Lord 1230, it is no fairy tale, but a reality. Mages do stride the earth, calling down the will of Heaven or raising up the vengeance of the Earth for reasons all their own. In a world ruled by hierarchy — kings and Popes — mages break all the rules. No wonder they are both feared and envied.

In **Dark Ages: Mage**, it's your turn to play one of those to whom the rules do not apply.

Theme and Mood

There are numerous themes from throughout myth and legend associated with the ancient worker of wills: the dangers of great power, hubris before the gods, the double-edged sword of wisdom that cuts through falsehood but also cuts its wielder. On the flip side of the coin, however, there is the sheer wonder of magic, its liberating joy, the amazing insights it delivers, the oneness with the universe it gives its wielder. In **Dark Ages: Mage**, magic is this very duplicity — something that brings great power and evokes wonder, but also strikes down or curses those who misuse it. It is a fickle thing, never serving its wielder fully, but often introducing chaos. He who would reap the whirlwind is sometimes torn to pieces by it.

This creates a somber mood, an atmosphere charged with unpredictability and danger, although always tinged with the sweet rewards of magical success: the amazing things brought forth into the world by thought and ritual alone. Working magic is a gamble, just as likely to deliver its user into danger as to protect her from it. In the end, however, magic is worth all the troubles it causes, for its rewards are greater than any the mundane world can possibly deliver.

Dark Ages: Vampire

Dark Ages: Mage is set in the same Dark Medieval world of **Dark Ages: Vampire**. Mages dwell in the same places where undead things lurk and hunt blood, trying to secretly rule the fates of humankind. This does not mean that all mages are necessarily aware of vampires; some of them probably believe vampires don't exist, that they are bogeymen invented by scared peasants to keep their children from sneaking outdoors at night. Those who do believe the legends know next to nothing about true vampire society, nor even suspect that the undead have infiltrated human society with their thralls and so steer the course of civilizations.

Even should a mage discover some of the secrets of the Cainites, they can do precious little about it. The Order of Hermes has come to understand some of what the vampires are up to, due to the terrible defection of one of their Houses (the Tremere). However, even this mighty order of mages has made little progress against their former Tremere fellows, let alone the greater world of the vampire clans. Hence, Storytellers are under no compunction to ever have the two games meet. While the **Dark Ages: Vampire** rulebook is a necessary prerequisite to this one (including all the basic rules of the Storyteller system), mages can exist in the same wide world for centuries without ever meeting a vampire.

How to Use This Book

You will find these chapters herein....

• **Prologue: Mortalis Vitium** — A short prose piece illustrating the coming together of a number of mages, perhaps even the beginning of a new cabal.

• **Introduction** — What you're reading right now.

• **Chapter One: Magic and the Medieval** — A look at the superstitious worldview of the average person in A.D. 1230. Many medieval superstitions are detailed, all of which support a belief in magic, aiding mages to cast their spells with impunity. Only in later ages does the support of belief turn against the mage.

• **Chapter Two: Mystic Fellowships** — While many mages are solitary, preferring to work alone and undisturbed by others, almost all of them are heirs to the teachings of a magical order or society, a Fellowship whose magical worldview determines the manner in which the mage casts his spells. Indeed, it colors his very ideas on magic itself. Whether his connection to his tradition comes only through the master to whom he apprenticed, or through regular meetings with his order, his Fellowship says much about who that mage is.

• **Chapter Three: Characters** — All the necessary details for building a mage character in the Dark Medieval. Again, as stated before, this book assumes you already have access to the **Dark Ages: Vampire** rulebook, where many of the basic rules for running storytelling games are given.

• **Chapter Four: Magic** — The heart of the matter. How to learn the laws of magic (different for each Fellowship) and cast spells. A Dark Medieval mage possesses vastly broad and mutable powers, making her more formidable than mere hedge magicians with their books of formulaic chants.

• **Chapter Five: Magical Lands** — What would a world with mages be without magical places to attract them? From the mystical Isle of Avalon to the torturous Underworld realm of Infernis, a host of strange places are detailed.

• **Chapter Six: Creatures and Talismans** — Living in the forsaken places of the world — which are many and large in these times — are legions of magical creatures, from dragons to kobolds. Hidden in their treasure troves are legendary magical items.

• **Chapter Seven: Storytelling** — Advice on telling stories set in the Dark Medieval era of magic and witchcraft, including a sample story.

Lexicon

You'll find some strange words throughout this book. The following list should help clear things up....

Backlash: The terrible cost of magic gone awry. When a mage attempts to change the universe, sometimes it changes him instead. Backlash is the result of a botched spellcasting, and it can take many forms, from Brandings (physical signs of a curse, such as a hand turning into a cat's paw or an eye becoming that of a lizard), Scourging (the mage is damaged by the raw power of his own working), Manifestations (something enters the world and dogs the mage's footsteps), and Twilight (a gradual descent into madness).

Commoner: A non-mage. This term was introduced by the Order of Hermes, whose methodical study of magic set the standard for many terms now used by mages of other Fellowships.

Fellowship: A magical order or society. Some Fellowships, also called Mystic Fellowships, are highly organized (such as the Order of Hermes) while others share only vague beliefs in common, such as a style of magical practice (the Spirit-Talkers).

Foci: Mages need mental or physical keys to unlock the powers of Nature or the Invisible World with their spells. These foci can take the form or short rituals or mantric chants, or physical objects, such as a wizard's staff or sword. Different Pillars call for different foci. As a mage grows in power, she becomes less dependent on these keys.

Foundation: The basic philosophy behind a Fellowship's magical practice, the power or intent that fuels its spells. Foundations are embellished by Pillars.

Hedge Magician: A person who has a certain knack for wielding highly formulaic magic, such as the casting of rituals or spells laid out in a book or handed down exactly as given by a family tradition. Hedge magicians cannot work the broad and mutable magic of a mage, for they lack the proper Foundation to work true magic. In later years, this magic is labeled static, as opposed to the dynamic magic of a true mage.

Mage: One who can work magic through a Foundation and its Pillars.

Pillar: A particular aspect of a Fellowship's magical practice, the form its magic takes. It is fueled by a Foundation. Each Fellowship usually has four different Pillars of magical practice. Not all mages of a given Fellowship study all four Pillars; they most often specialize in one or two of them.

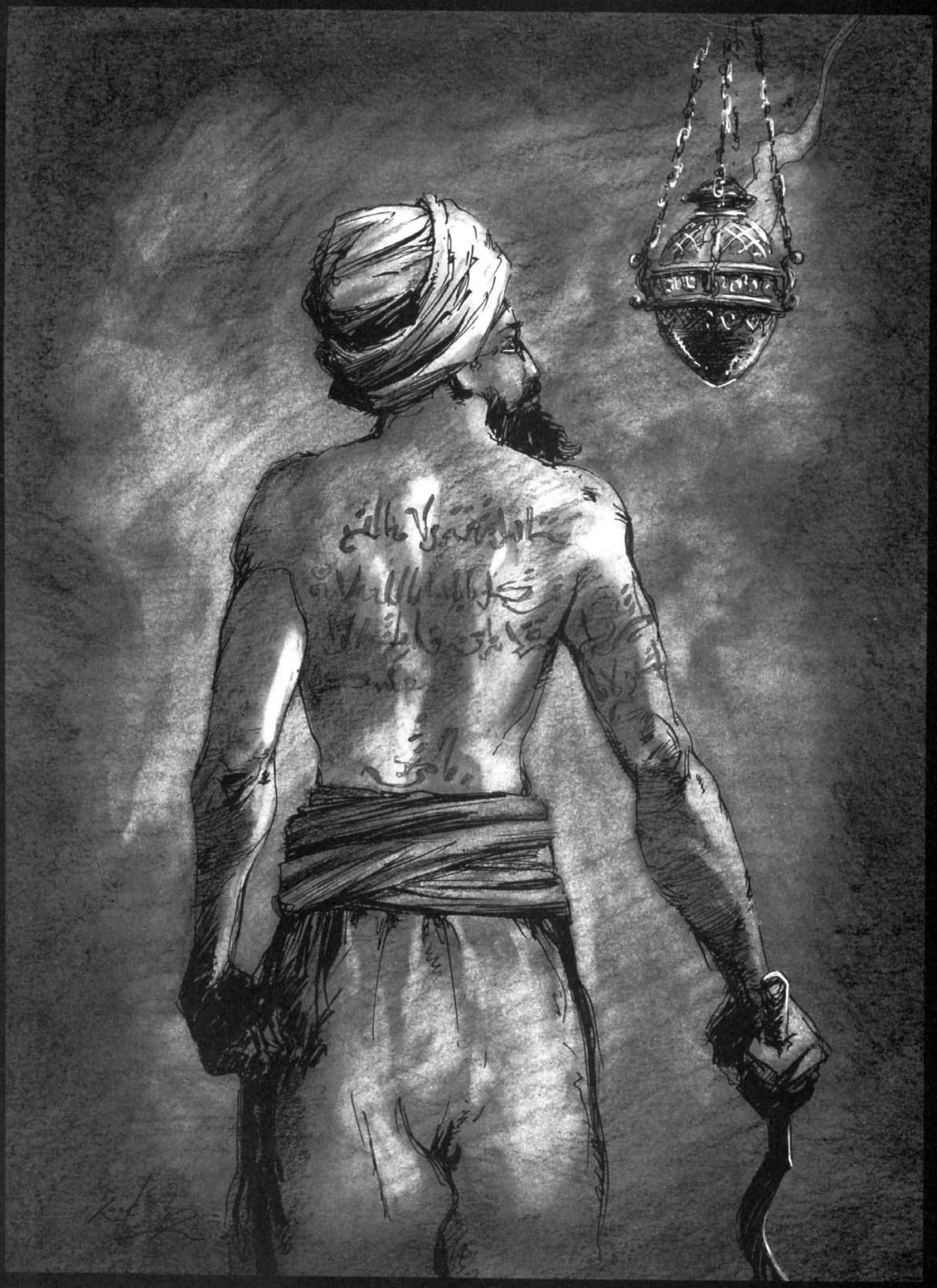
Quintessence: The raw stuff of which the universe is made — magic itself. Behind the materiality of the world is the Fifth Essence, uniting all the other elements. Quintessence exists as a sort of energy, which mages can store within themselves and expend to empower spells. It also comes in the form of Tass, a material condensation of Quintessence, such as potions, vapors, sacred plants or minerals, etc.

Spell: A magical effect wrought by a mage. Spells made through the use of Foundation and Pillar magic are so varied as to be uncountable; whatever a mage can imagine, she can bring about, as long as she has the requisite degree of magical knowledge and power (represented by the Pillars and Foundation).

Talisman: A magical item, such as an enchanted sword or ring. While some talismans can be used by Commoners, most require a mage to activate their powers.

Tass: Embodied Quintessence.





Abu-Ibrahim Bukhari stepped onto the cool flagstones, unraveling himself from the tapestry on the wall. If there had been an observer to see him, it would have appeared that the large-framed Arab had stepped forth from the very tapestry itself, as if he were one of its complex geometric squares taking on the shape and form of a man. Abu-Ibrahim, however, knew that it only *seemed* that he even moved at all. Motion was illusory, as was space itself. Knowing this, he could travel the Path of 50 Paces from Baghdad to Cordova on foot in but two day's time. He could lift a foot from the sandy desert and place it down again elsewhere — such as here, in this infidel's castle.

The sacred geometries woven into the tapestry had been prepared by one of his order long ago, for just such a use. That it now hung in a Christian lord's castle was partly the reason for Abu-Ibrahim's journey: to restore such treasures to their proper Muslim owners and ensure that the man who had stolen them by force would no longer harass the faithful of Allah.

The missive that had come from Ibn Zuhr spoke of the lord and his bandits. They had long harassed Muslim merchants and stole their goods. Of late, however, they had become more bold, going so far as to raid Ibn Zuhr's very home and taking from it treasures of the Ahl-i-Batin. That they had done so was no surprise — that they had done so knowingly was. They knew well what they took, for there was a man among them who coordinated their pillaging, and he guided their hands to the enchanted goods.

And so Abu-Ibrahim had come. Not merely to rescue the treasures — any of Ibn Zuhr's men could accomplish such a deed. He came to see that this knowing thief would no longer trouble the order.

Standing in the dark corridor, faint rays of moonlight slipping in through the small windows, Abu-Ibrahim tossed his robe over his shoulder and slowly and quietly drew his scimitar. He hardly felt the cold on his bare chest and arms. He was unused to such a climate, but his training and discipline allowed him to ignore the mild discomfort.

He padded to the end of the corridor, to the large door leading to the thief's sleeping chambers — or so Ibn Zuhr's servants had ascertained. They had bribed the lord's own servants to ensure that the tapestry was hung just so, outside the man's chambers.

He passed his hand over the lock and whispered a prayer. He then slowly twisted the handle and pulled open the door. It made not a sound, muffled by the power of that prayer. Lights spread out into the hallway from within. The thief stood before a table piled high with books, lit by guttering candles. He looked up at Abu-Ibrahim, smiling.

"So, you have come. I wondered when the heathens would try to fetch their wares. I think I shall keep them, however. They do more good in my hands than wasting away unused in some heathen palace."

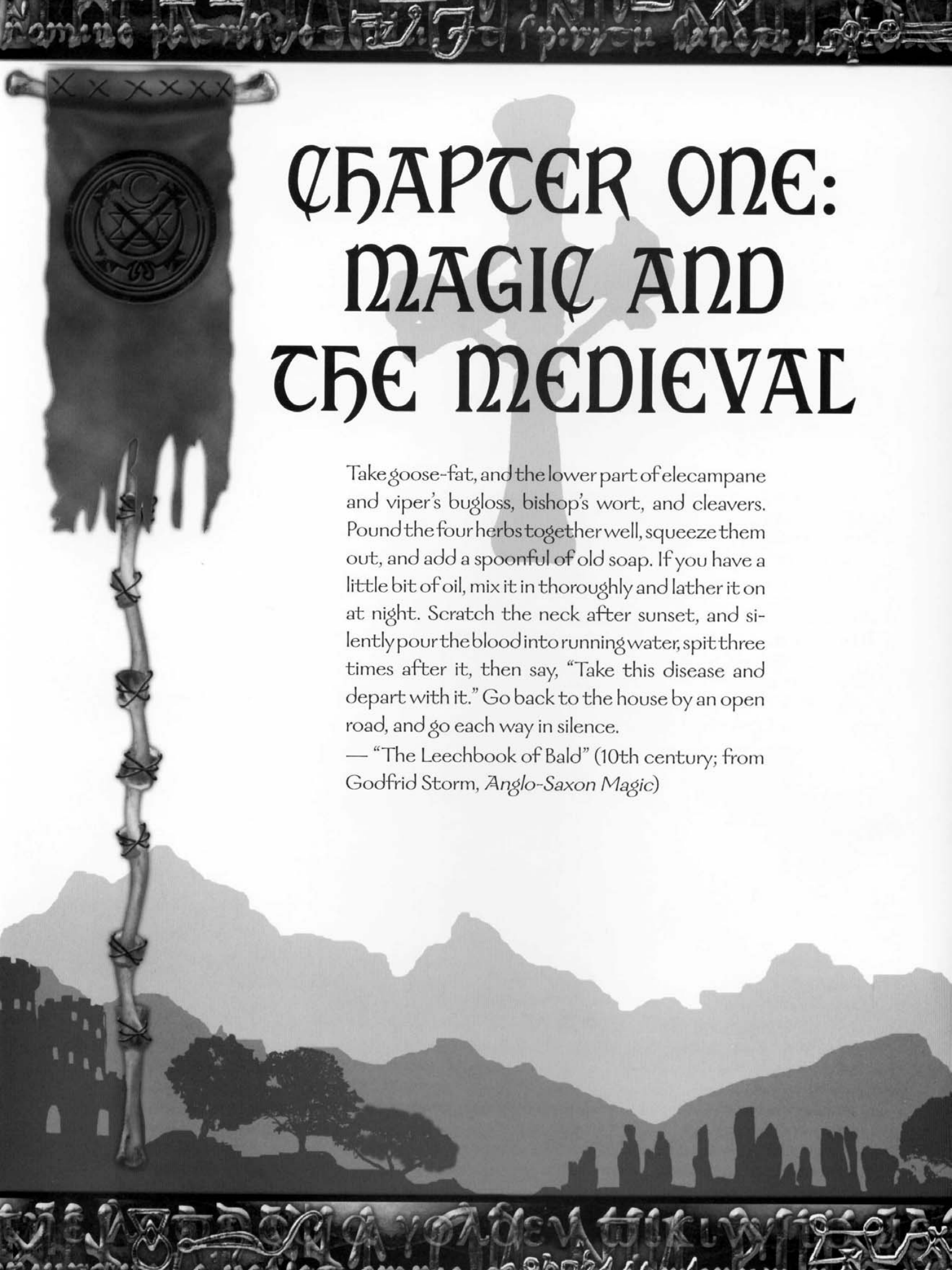
"Truly I am sorry to hear you say that," Abu-Ibrahim said, raising his curved sword. He still stood ten paces from the man, but when he brought the blade down, the distance was as nothing. The thief's flesh opened and spilled forth his guts. He stared at Abu-Ibrahim with shock and confusion, utter incomprehension on his face, and then toppled to the floor, his blood pooling on the cool flagstones.

Abu-Ibrahim sheathed his clean blade and turned to go. Others would fetch the treasures. His duty was complete. He heard a low, whispering croak, and turned to witness the man's last words.

"How... how?" the man said, his eyes looking at Abu-Ibrahim, his lids growing heavy.

"If you intend to steal from those versed in mysteries," Abu-Ibrahim said, "learn first what mysteries they know. In a few moments, you will travel far without taking a single step. Think on this and you will begin to understand."

The man's eyes widened and then went blank. Abu-Ibrahim said a prayer and left the place by his own paths.



CHAPTER ONE: MAGIC AND THE MEDIEVAL

Take goose-fat, and the lower part of elecampane and viper's bugloss, bishop's wort, and cleavers. Pound the four herbs together well, squeeze them out, and add a spoonful of old soap. If you have a little bit of oil, mix it in thoroughly and lather it on at night. Scratch the neck after sunset, and silently pour the blood into running water, spit three times after it, then say, "Take this disease and depart with it." Go back to the house by an open road, and go each way in silence.

— "The Leechbook of Bald" (10th century; from Godfrid Storm, *Anglo-Saxon Magic*)

The medieval world is a place full of mystery and magic. It is a darker world than ours, with only flame to light the blackness of night. Many monsters and strange beliefs fit into the larger shadows of this age. Without science and reason, magic and superstitions often provide an explanation for the way the world works and give people a greater sense of control and understanding. In the Dark Medieval age, many of these beliefs are based in or influence reality, and few such things are deemed "mere superstition."

Most superstitions are based on warding off evil or protection from harm. Other beliefs are practiced in order to provide good luck or good harvests. Community and Church alike condemn the practice of curses or baneful magics, and those who would try these dark arts often find themselves ostracized or even burning at the stake.

Such ideas vary from place to place and person to person. Some are invented on the fly to account for local happenings, and some date back to pagan or Roman traditions. Some are sincerely held beliefs that are well accepted. Others may be practiced as tradition even when people are somewhat skeptical of their origins. Certainly, there are individuals who scoff at superstition in general and try to view the world in a more rational way, but even for them, the world is a dark place with many unexplained mysteries and fearful dangers. Superstitions can be a great comfort and source of empowerment in such a world.

In the Dark Medieval age, many of these superstitions actually seem true, especially in the hands of a mage. Most people believe that such things exist or can happen, and this conviction is far stronger in this era than "rational" thoughts. The average peasant may lack the Gift to sprout wings and fly or turn base metals into gold, but his beliefs may actually be strong enough to affect his luck or his crops.

This chapter introduces many medieval superstitious beliefs. They are but a small sampling of the vast array of folklore from many regions. Indeed, such beliefs often varied greatly from place to place, such that a newt's eye might be considered efficacious for curses in one hamlet but believed to be a prime ingredient in love potions in another. In the mind of the common man, untrained in magical lore, these things are but hearsay. "I heard tell that Matilda, the old hag who lives at the edge of town, collects dew from the caps of mushrooms to put into her stews, all in hopes of winning a man." Mages, however, recognize that folklore holds vital clues to magical power, ancient secrets whose truth is ungraspable by most men but capable of shaping spells in the hands of one with the Gift.

The Principle of Sympathy

The superstitions in this chapter can actually aid a mage to cast her spells. If she performs her magic in accordance with local beliefs — by using the typical, although usually exotic, materials and uttering the proper chants — her spells are less likely to evoke a Backlash, the terrible cost of a botched casting. Rules for this appear in Chapter Four.

In later, post-Renaissance times, mages will formulate theories about the effect the conscious and unconscious beliefs of the masses have upon reality. They believe that humanity's paradigms or worldviews greatly determine the limits of magic. In other words, it seems that the collective weight of many minds — even those of non-mages — can actually affect the laws of physics. Only mages are enlightened enough to consciously change reality to their will, however.

In the Dark Medieval age, such beliefs are far in the future. Mages in this time believe that superstitions aid magic because they are based in some hidden, occult truth or natural law as yet unrevealed by the philosophers. In other words, proper magic is performed in *sympathy* with these laws, no matter how bizarre they may seem. For instance, it is believed that a gem, one of the most pure of substances, will crack when touched to a toad, one of the most impure of creatures. This is because the two extremes are in *antipathy* to one another.

Magic performed without the proper procedures or components, though possible through force of will or sheer magical power, goes against the grain of the universe — it is not in sympathy with the secret powers of the universe. A mage's path to power involves delving into superstition and lore to discover as many occult secrets as possible, to better twist the skein of reality to his ends. By performing his spells as folklore dictates, he can better avoid the terrible price of working in antipathy with the universe.

The beliefs and folklore presented here are also meant to add richness and color to a chronicle. This chapter comes first in the book because it helps set the tone of the Dark Medieval world, illustrating just how different the mindset of the average person was from our more modern, science-oriented paradigm. Remember, in a world where certain powerful individuals can wield the forces of Nature with their own will (or by calling upon the will of God), these beliefs are not so far-fetched. Although they might not

work without actual magic to back them up (a cross by itself does not turn the undead, unless its holder uses it as a focus for magic), one cannot know this for sure. In certain rare places, at certain sacred times, even non-mages may be able to work wonders simply by following the provisions set out in old wives' tales. Knowing these superstitions not only helps to enhance the roleplaying environment but can also spur many a story wherein mages search for the secrets to unlock even more power.

Whether these superstitions are actually effective or not, many people do believe they are and behave accordingly. The types of superstitions practiced in the medieval world are divided into several categories; the Storyteller is encouraged to make use of these as he sees fit.

Numbers

Certain numbers are believed to have mystical significance, and should be considered in any effort of charm, spell or luck. Many beliefs about the power of numbers come from Egyptian mysticism, from the Greek philosopher Pythagoras and from Biblical sources, but the average person may hold these beliefs without any specific knowledge of their origins. The more educated mystical practitioner will probably study ideas about the power of numbers, along with astrology, alchemy and magic words, as a sort of science.

To the Pythagoreans, one represented unity, two diversity, and three combined one and two in harmony. Three is the number of the holy trinity and has many powerful mystical aspects involving completion and spiritual balance. Four symbolizes the cardinal directions and the four corners of the earth, and is therefore associated with travel, honesty and solid foundations. Also, the body is made healthy or sick by the balance of four humors. Five is a number of dignity, and the five-pointed star has a history ranging from Pythagoras' expression of geometric perfection to the "wizard's star" or pentacle used in occult ritual. The star is also seen as a representation of the human form, with the head and four limbs at the points.

People whose birthday occurs on the sixth day of the month are thought to have the gift of prophecy.

A great many beliefs are associated with the number seven. It is a number of completion, combining three and four (the spiritual and the real) as well as a wealth of traditional associations dating back to the Babylonians, Egyptians and Romans. There are seven seas, seven ages in the life of man and seven substances (bone, flesh, fat, blood, semen, marrow, and chyle), each under the influence of the seven planets, which for the ancients comprised Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, the Sun and the Moon. The Bible supports the importance of this number, with seven days of creation, seven trumpets, seven plagues and the lamb with seven eyes. Church teachings also include the seven virtues, seven deadly sins and seven gifts of the spirit. The seventh child born in a family, and particularly the seventh son of a seventh son, is believed to have supernatural powers, or at least good fortune.

Eight, along with three and four, is believed to instill perfection when used as a ratio in construction and carpentry. Nine is the number of wisdom and harmony. Thirteen is viewed as unlucky by most Europeans, though older Egyptian traditions counted it as a good number.

Magical Substances and Symbols

Ores and gems drawn from the earth are believed to have supernatural abilities. Certain stones are good for luck. Other stones give good health and clear minds. Metals can be valuable for supernatural properties as well as their material worth. Those who regularly practice the study and use of magical metals are called alchemists. One of the greatest goals of any alchemist is to make a philosopher's stone, which can turn base metals into gold and grant eternal life.

Seven metals are associated with heavenly bodies:

Metal	Planet
Gold	Sun
Silver	Moon
Quicksilver	Mercury
Copper	Venus
Iron	Mars
Tin	Jupiter
Lead	Saturn

Magical items and armor are often said to be crafted of silver, the metal of the moon. It is said that the faeries clothed themselves in silver and wield silver swords, and silver is believed to harm werewolves. The connection of silver to the moon also makes it a bane to evil supernatural creatures: The moon casts light at night that banishes the darkness, and thus silver can banish evil. Individuals may keep a silver coin for luck or have a small silver cross to keep them safe from supernatural harm.

Gold is the metal of the sun. It is seen as the purest and most valuable of metals. Gold is not attributed with many supernatural properties; it is instead the ultimate combination of those properties. Unfortunately, gold created by magic tends to be impermanent. Many tales tell of gold coins, given by faeries or wizards, that vanish with the rising sun or transform into leaves or some other worthless item.

Iron is the bane of all things magical. Iron is the weapon of choice when dealing with the fair folk because no Fae enchantments are believed to affect it. More powerful than iron is so-called cold iron which has never been forged in fire. Cold iron is beaten into shape with nothing but raw strength. Often, iron nails are put into the soles of boots to prevent enchantment. Iron nails arranged in the shape of crosses are put up in houses to ward off evil.

Certain gems and stones have mystical properties as well. A necklace of coral beads is protective of mothers and infants, aids teething and may cure epilepsy and fevers as well. Diamonds, if set in pairs with the correct conditions, may actually propagate and produce more diamonds. A belief originating in Hebrew and Egyptian tradition is that a gem can be associated with each of the twelve months and in turn with the twelve tribes of Israel, twelve apostles, twelve angels and twelve traits or blessings. These may vary, but the most common assignments follow.

MYSTICAL PROPERTIES OF GEMS

Gem	Month	Trait
Garnet	January	Constancy
Amethyst	February	Sincerity
Bloodstone	March	Courage
Diamond	April	Innocence
Emerald	May	Hope, Success
Moonstone	June	Health, Longevity
Ruby	July	Passion
Sardonyx	August	Happy Marriage
Sapphire	September	Repentance
Opal or Amber	October	Cheerfulness
Turquoise	December	Unselfishness, Prosperity

Herbs and other plant materials are used in a variety of ways, ranging from the medicinal to the ritual. Mistletoe is sacred to the druids and continues to be hung over doorways to promote good health and fertility and to allow only positive influences to pass into the home. Holly and ivy are male and female symbols, respectively, and their evergreen quality also associates them with immortality. Acorns are phallic symbols and also grant good luck. The wood of certain trees, such as rowan or willow, is best for occult purposes.

Amulets

The use of amulets and talismans to grant benefit or protection is a common practice across almost every culture. Religious amulets and icons are used in every nation, but older practices often go on alongside the ecclesiastical. Such a device may be meant to protect against some negative force or to grant the wearer a specific benefit.

In Europe and the Holy Land alike the horseshoe is used to ward off faeries, ghosts, nightmares, witches, the devil and simple bad luck. Placed over a doorframe or in a chimney it will prevent the creature from entering by that passage. A horseshoe with the ends pointed up is believed to hold in good luck, whereas an inverted one will ward off evil. Once placed, a horseshoe should never be removed or its effect will be lost.

In the Eastern Lands, amulets might contain a pinch of dust from a tomb or a scrap of paper inscribed with a prayer. Crescent moons and bells will ward off the evil eye and evil spirits. European amulet practices vary widely from place to place, but the purposes are similar.

Prayers or protective phrases may be written on paper to carry or be inscribed on items with which their luck or protection will be associated. The Church blesses many protective items, such as rosaries and holy relics.

Domestic animals are also sometimes given amulets to prevent their being interfered with by faeries or evil spirits. Items wound into a horse's mane may prevent it from being stolen, and similar protections on a cow may assure good milking and health.

Common agricultural rituals involve an effigy such as a wicker man or corn dolly made from the last sheaf of the harvest. The doll may be saved to ensure a bountiful crop or burned in a harvest fire. Its destruction represents a sacrifice of the green, the seed that dies in the harvest only to be reborn with spring planting. It becomes a messenger to the spirits and forces of nature that might aid in bountiful harvest. This and other planting and harvest traditions have their roots in pre-Christian religions and beliefs and are often practiced alongside Church-sanctioned rituals in the guise of festivals and crafts.

Many superstitions are based on the concept that similar items will produce similar benefits. The chest-

nut is a long-lived tree, so carrying a chestnut in your pocket will promote longevity and stave off rheumatism. Foods whose shapes resemble sexual organs are eaten to grant fertility and as aphrodisiacs. The shape of a shoe is believed to resemble female sexual organs, and shoes are often used in fertility rituals, such as throwing them after a newly married couple.

Numerous devices are used to assure lasting love and friendship or to attract a lover. Knot-tying is highly symbolic of love, loyalty and friendship, and various types of knots are used as charms related to love and marriage. A swan's feather, sewn into a husband's pillow, will ensure fidelity.

The caul, a membrane that sometimes covers the head of a child at birth, is believed to have many uses in both witchcraft and protective magic. Simply being born with a caul may be an omen of later power or fortune; if the caul is saved, it may be used as a charm against drowning or for a variety of other protections. Even a baby's first lock of hair, if cut off and kept safe by his mother, will afford him special protection from harm.

A hag stone is a stone with a hole in it, preferably found that way in nature. A variety of beliefs exist about the uses of this amulet. It can ward off the dead or repel hags who steal horses and children; it may ward off the evil eye or prevent bad dreams. In Italy, it may be called a holy stone and is sometimes believed to serve as a doorway or key to the lands of the fair folk, or as a device to bind a faerie into service.

Amulets based on magical words and numbers are also popular, as well as those containing written prayers and the names of God from ancient sources. The word *abracadabra* was originally believed to have power to ward off disease and afflictions; over the years it has become associated with all sorts of spells and charms.

More powerful talismans are believed to exist as well, created by witches, alchemists or by gods or forces of nature. These are not common everyday items but rare devices, often the subject of legend and folklore. A hero may be described as carrying a magical sword, or the Church may possess holy relics that can cause miraculous healing. Other items may be created to grant the bearer supernatural powers.

Tales of more sinister talismans are told as well, such as the Hand of Glory — the severed hand of a hanged murderer taken at the gallows under a new moon, then elaborately prepared either by drying or pickling. Such a thing could be used with black magic to aid thieves in breaking into a house, and a popular tale tells of thieves who set candles in the fingers as a spell to paralyze everyone sleeping within a house. One or more of the candles would refuse to light if there were someone within who was immune to the charm, but once lit, the candles could be extinguished only with milk.

Charms

Regarding fingernails:

Cut them on Monday, you cut them for news
Cut them on Tuesday, a new pair of shoes
Cut them on Wednesday, you cut them for health
Cut them on Thursday, you cut them for wealth
Cut them on Friday, a sweetheart you'll know
Cut them on Saturday, a journey you'll go
Cut them on Sunday, you'll cut them for evil
For all the next week you'll be ruled by the devil.

Other protective charms involve practices rather than items. The most common is the recitation of prayers, rhymes or chants. Spoken or acted charms may be used to achieve a specific goal,



such as to win a lover or attract wealth, to ward off sickness or counter a curse, to ward off vermin or perform simple divinations. Many of these charms are accompanied by short, recited rhymes that either help the charm to work or remind the person to perform them.

Spitting is believed to ward off curses, and when encountering something suspicious many people will spit three times on the ground to avert misfortune. Spitting on the hands is believed to imbue strength in battle. Licking a child's forehead may dispel enchantments, and the taste of salt will prove that the child has been ensorcelled. Because animals are observed to lick their wounds, it is known that saliva has powers to heal and transfer vitality, and it is often used in rituals meant for such purpose.

Many events that bring bad luck should be followed immediately with a counter-charm. Knocking on wood when something evil has been spoken of may prevent it from coming to pass. If salt is spilled, a pinch should be thrown over the left shoulder. The evil eye can sometimes be averted by out-staring the one casting it. A sudden lull in a previously lively conversation suggests that ill fortune or even death will soon come to one of those present, and everyone there should immediately cross himself or make some other charm for luck to counter to cold silence.

Other events, if followed by the proper charm, will bring good luck. If, by coincidence, two people speak the same word at once they should immediately perform a rhyme or clasping of fingers and they will be granted a wish (the specifics of the charm vary widely by region). If bread is dropped on the floor, the one who picks it up will have good luck.

A bird's wishbone or collarbone can be used to gain luck or grant a wish. A pair of people take hold of the wishbone, one side each, and break it. The one with the larger portion may make a wish. The bone may also be used in more complex rituals. Wishbone practices predate even the Romans and are widely popular in Europe.

See a pin and pick it up
All the day ye'll have good luck
See a pin an let it lie
Ye'll need a pin before ye die.

Crossing the fingers is believed to hold in good fortune and ward off evil, and a wish can be held between the crossed fingers so that it will not slip away before it becomes true. In some cases two people cross their respective index fingers, or a single person might cross his index and middle finger.

Upon waking, a person should shoe the right foot first (even though shoes are interchangeable at this time) and sometimes spit into the right shoe before donning it. This will set his day off on the proverbial right foot and attract good luck. Practices involving the right side of the body can be traced back to the ancient Romans, who also believed that one should always cross a threshold or step onto a boat with the right foot leading.

A garment worn inside out will repel faeries and may represent a protective disguise to ward off curses or evil intent. Turning one's hat or apron backwards after some event of bad luck may serve to reverse the misfortune.

Beware an oak —
It draws the stroke
Avoid an ash,
It courts the flash;
Creep under a thorn —
It'll keep you from harm.
— Rhyme to escape lightning

An elaborate Hungarian practice known as taking up the black fast involves fasting for nine days while keeping a black hen nearby. It is believed that, at the end of this time, an unknown thief who robbed the fasting person will be revealed.

Some things are warned against lest they bring bad luck. Bragging of good fortune is a common mistake, because evil forces may become jealous or the world itself may somehow balance things by bringing misfortune in turn. A Hebrew tradition says that if someone compliments a new baby, his mother or grandmother should spit on the ground to dispel bad luck. If a person's clothing is torn, he should remove it to mend it, rather than sewing it in place, as only a shroud should be sewn while on the body. This omen can be countered, however, by holding a bit of thread between the teeth while sewing. If two people each mention something bad that might happen, great care must be taken that it not be uttered a third time by a third person at the same conversation, for three is a number of power and may cause the misfortune to come true.

Marry in the month of May, and you'll live to rue the day.
Marry in Lent, you'll live to repent.
Monday for health, Tuesday for wealth,
Wednesday best of all,
Thursday for losses, Friday for crosses,
Saturday for no luck at all.

Weddings are occasions for taking great care not to arouse bad luck and to send the new couple off with provident omens. The day of the week and the month are chosen carefully, and the details of the

ceremony, food, attire and preparations are prescribed by a great number of traditions that vary from one place to another. Even those who scoff at most superstitions will not often take chances with something as important as a wedding.

Divinations and Omens

Divinations are common, ranging from determining the gender of an unborn child or the name of the one you will someday marry to deciding the guilt or innocence of an accused criminal.

A Magpie for sorrow
And two for mirth
Three for a wedding
Four for a birth

The behavior of animals and natural elements is often observed to interpret weather, luck or other future events. A bird tapping at the window or entering the house foretells death, as the bird may actually be a spirit in disguise inviting another spirit to join it. The time of day at which certain bird songs are heard, or the location of their nests or perches, can predict fortune, weather or even the nature of a future marriage. To meet a flock of sheep on the road predicts good luck for the journey. The list of animal-related divinations is long. The color of the sky, appearance of the moon and the direction of the wind can also reveal information about the future.

Red sky at night, Shepherd's delight
Red sky at morning, Shepherd take warning

One's own body can be a source of divination as well. A ringing or burning sensation in the ears indicates that someone is talking about you — if it is the right ear, they are speaking evil, but the left ear indicates something positive being said. An itching nose foretells company coming soon. The shape of a child's ear, skull, hands, feet, mouth and the color of her eyes or hair have all been said to predict personality traits. The best known form of body-divination is palmistry, in which the lines and wrinkles of the hand are interpreted to reveal personality as well as past and future events. Professional palm-readers, most often gypsies or other travelers, can make a living at it as long as they avoid areas where fortune-telling is illegal.

Specks on the fingers, fortune lingers
Specks on the thumbs, fortune surely comes

Crystals, sometimes called the witch's mirror, can be used by a gifted fortuneteller to see visions of the future, the past, or of distant events. This form of divination is rare and it is often suspect as deviltry, but it is considered quite powerful. Smooth water and other reflecting surfaces may also be used.

Cursed bread is a small barley loaf with a spell put on it so that, if it is eaten by a suspected person (often unawares), he will choke if he is guilty.

Dowsing is an ancient practice of using a rod, pendulum or Y-shaped stick to locate sources of water or metals underground. The branch of the hazel, rowan, or willow tree is said to be best for dowsing, though whalebone or other materials may occasionally be used. The dowser attunes himself and his device to the thing being sought, then holds the rod out as he walks, waiting for the telltale downward pull that indicates success.

Strange lights seen over marshes or graveyards are believed to predict death. These may be called corpse candles, fetchlights or will-o-wisps. In the marshes, they are also believed to lead travelers to their deaths by drowning.

Curses

Rowan tree and reddest threed
Put the witches to their speed.

It is commonly believed that witches, faeries or unlucky events can bring about curses, causing illness, harm or death. Curses are also blamed for poor harvests, sick livestock and bad weather.

A witch may be able to use hair, fingernail trimmings or personal items to focus curses against someone, so such things should be watched carefully. A witch may also use an effigy of her victim, commonly made of wax or clay, to convey the curse. The representative item is often burned, pierced or otherwise destroyed. Some curses require that an item representing the victim be buried or kept; the victim sickens as the object decomposes.

Squinting or strange gazes are believed to convey an evil omen or curse, and such a look must often be countered with a protective charm. People with unusual eyes, a disturbing gaze or with some cast or injury in their eyes are generally mistrusted and sometimes made unwelcome.

Some items may carry curses and bring misfortune to whoever possesses them. Gems and weapons are the most commonly cursed items.

Superstitions of the Christian Church

The Church is the single most powerful institution in the Dark Ages. It has a presence in every nation in Europe and many in North Africa. Monks

and missionaries are sent into Asia throughout the Crusades. The faith of a pious Christian can work powerful miracles, and the collective belief of all Christendom has a powerful effect on reality. The Church propagates itself through the power of faith and miracle. It is perceived to be powerful, and therefore its influence grows. This faith works profoundly on the minds of the people and shapes the way they live their lives. It is seen as the bulwark against evil and superstition, yet it creates its own superstitions in the name of goodness and holiness.

The Powers of the Priesthood

The easiest example of superstition in the Church is the priest himself. It is necessarily *him*self, because Pope Gelasius decreed about six hundred years earlier that women could no longer be ordained to the priesthood. The priest must be a celibate man as well, as ordained by Pope Gregory VII, history's most powerful pope, in 1074. This sets the priest on a sort of pedestal. He is seen as something extraordinary. His vows lend him a sense of authority that the common man must respect. Pope Gregory VII also made a priest inviolable; he cannot be tried by local authorities but must be tried in Church court. This inviolability is believed to extend to the supernatural. Priests are given the power to drive out demons. The Eucharist, sacred bread consecrated by priests, is believed to act as a ward against evil spirits and vampires. The priest may condemn a man to hell through excommunication or grant a man salvation through confession. His prayers are believed to be heard by God before those of the common man. A prayer by the parish priest is often expected to be more effective than the combined prayers of the entire parish. Much of the power of the Church is invested in these holy men, for good or for ill, and it is up to the Storyteller to determine how these beliefs hold true.

Saints and Visionaries

The Church does not put its power in the hands of its priests alone. Saints, mystics and other visionaries can come from among layfolk.

There are no living saints. Saints are people whose lives have been judged by the Church to be holy and exemplary. They can have committed no serious sins, or perhaps they atoned for their sins in a particularly spectacular way. Most importantly, three miracles they performed in life must be attributed to them after death. A person may have called upon the saint for intercession and had his request granted, or some other physical sign of his holiness might have occurred, such as the saint's body remaining incorruptible after death.

Many saints are patrons of a particular cause. If a person wants a prayer granted on a matter associated with a particular saint, he will invoke the name of that saint and ask for that saint's prayers and assistance. It is important to understand that the petitioner is not praying to the saint, but asking the saint to pray to God in behalf of the petitioner. The Patron Saints sidebar lists those saints relevant to the Dark Medieval era.

Visionaries and other mystical religious people abound during the middle ages. They claim to see visions of God and other events. Some are taken quite seriously. Visionaries often practice unusual habits that range from the bizarre to the quite dangerous. Many practice fasting for extreme periods of time. Some avoid bathing. Eating dirt or even pottery is not uncommon, nor is self-flagellation. It is believed that these physical deprivations or extremes separate the person from the mundane and propel him into the realm of the spiritual.

Many mystics have special powers attributed to them. Some are believed to levitate or fly. Another common trait that proves a mystic to be true is stigmata. The mystic bleeds from the hands or sides in imitation of the wounds of Christ. Some mystics evince healing powers. Others have the ability to drive out demons or calm animals. Francis of Assisi, a famous monk who went to Jerusalem during the Crusades, is believed to have the power to call birds out of the air and calm wolves in the fields.

Christian Holy Items

In addition to mystical people, there are items and equipment believed to have mystical or supernatural powers. The cross itself is said to be a ward against evil. Christians make the sign of the cross (using their right hand to touch forehead, chest, then the left, then the right side of their bodies) to ward off evil news, or as an introduction to prayer. Vampires and demons are said to recoil at the sight of a cross. Even a crossroads is prevention against evil. People believed to be vampires are buried at crossroads to prevent their rising again. The Eucharist, bread blessed by priests, is also believed to hold similar powers.

Items once held by saints and the bones or blood of saints are often associated with mystical power. The blood of a saint, kept in a vial, is believed to remain liquefied for centuries. Certain items believed to hold particular significance include the

PATRON SAINTS

Topic	Saint(s)
Abandoned children	Ivo of Kermartin
Actors	Genesius, Vitus
Apothecaries	Cosmas and Damian
Artists	Luke
Astronomers	Dominic
Asylums	Dymphna
Babies	The Holy Innocents, Maximus, Philip of Zell
Bakers	Nicholas of Myra, Honoratus
Bankers	Matthew
Barren women	Felicity
Beggars	Alexius, Martin of Tours
Blacksmiths	Dunstan, Eligius (Eloi)
Blind people	Raphael the Archangel, Thomas the Apostle, Cosmas and Damian, Lucy
Brigands (danger from)	Leonard of Noblac
Cemetery caretakers	Joseph of Arimathea
Children	Nicholas of Myra (this man later becomes "St. Nick")
Church	Joseph
Cobblers	Crispin and Crispinian
Condemned criminals	Dismas (one of the thieves crucified next to Christ)
Death	Michael the Archangel, Margaret (or Marina) of Antioch
Desperate situations	Jude, Gregory
Diabolical possession	Cyriacus, Dymphna
Diseases	Roch, Sebastian
Europe	Benedict, Abbot, Cyril and Methodius
Fire (danger from)	Agatha, Nicholas of Tolentino
Hunters	Hubert, Eustachius
Journeys (safe)	Christopher, Joseph, Nicholas of Myra, Raphael the Archangel
Lawyers	Yves, Raymond of Peñafort, Ivo of Kermartin
Lightning (protection against)	Magnus of Fussen, Vitus
Masons	Thomas, Apostle, Four crowned martyrs, Louis
Mothers	Monica
Pestilence (relief from)	Roch
Physicians	Cosmas and Damian, Luke, Pantaleon
Poets	David, Columba
Poison sufferers	Benedict, Abbot, John, Apostle and Evangelist, Pirminus
Rain	Genevieve (Genofeva)
Sailors	Brendan, Erasmus (Elmo), Nicholas of Myra
Servants	Martha, Notbunga
Swordsmiths	Maurice
Theft, thieves	Dismas
Veneral disease	Fiacre

Spear of Longinus, the spear believed to have pierced the side of Christ at the crucifixion. The Holy Grail, a cup alternately believed to have been used at the last supper or to catch the blood of Christ at the crucifixion, has healing powers associated with it. Wood from the True Cross of Jesus is believed to do everything from curing sickness to improving finances. Armies going to the Crusades bring relics along with them to assure their victory in battle. Churches inter the bodies of saints in their altars in order to sanctify a church.

Naturally, a great deal of charlatanry is involved in the relic business. People produce fake relics and sell them to gullible peasants and nobles alike. The Church actually allowed a belief that stated any piece of wood that comes into contact with the True Cross also has the properties of the True Cross. Many skulls of various saints turned out to be monkey skulls. Interestingly, many of these fake relics often prove as powerful as the original items; actual cures are associated with items that later prove to be imitation relics. It is up to the Storyteller to determine whether the item or the faith behind the item has any real power.

Superstitions of the Jewish Faith

The Jewish people have a rich mystical tradition. Much of the magic of the Order of Hermes is based in part on the beliefs of the Jewish people. The Talmud, Jewish scriptures and holy books, contain many stories of great supernatural occurrences. Many stories of angels and demons appear in the Talmud, though they were removed from the Christian Bible. Jewish Rabbis are said to hold secret knowledge and wisdom that enables them to perform all manner of mystical acts. From King Solomon to the more modern Eleazar of Worms, the Jewish people ascribe great feats to their scholars.

The Golem

One of the most common Jewish supernatural stories involves making golems. The first golem stories began over one thousand years ago. Rabbi Abba ben Rav Hamma used the power of Jehovah to imbue a clay statue with life. Another Rabbi, upon seeing the golem, returned it to dust. Both feats are listed in the Talmud, the holy scriptures of the Jewish People, as almost trivial acts. The method used to create the golem is a magical use of the name of Jehovah. This form of Jewish magic is called Kabbalism.



Kabbalism

Kabbalah (also Cabala) is system of thought that was originally included in Jewish theosophy, philosophy, science, magic and mysticism. "Kabbalah" is Hebrew for "that which is received," and refers to a secret oral tradition of teaching that extends from teacher to pupil. The term "Kabbalah" itself was first applied to secret mystical teachings in the 11th century by Iba Gabriol, a Spanish philosopher

Kabbalah is founded on the Torah, the Jewish scriptures and other sacred writings. It is an intellectual discipline, and the mystic is not supposed to practice it in solitude, but employ it to enlighten humanity. The Kabbalist seeks two things: union with God while maintaining a social, family, and communal life within the framework of traditional Judaism. Some who have adopted the Kabbalistic teachings have modified these latter aims.

In legend, God taught Kabbalah to some angels, who in turn after the Fall taught it to Adam. Kabbalah was to help humankind to return to God. It then passed to Noah, to Abraham and Moses. Moses included the first four books of the Pentateuch, leaving out Deuteronomy, in Kabbalah before he initiated seventy Elders into it. The Elders initiated others into it. Some believe that David and Solomon were Kabbalistic adepts. Eventually, the oral tradition ended and the knowledge was written down.

Kabbalah teaches that every idea contains its own contradiction, and God, who is the sum of all ideas, contains all contradictions. Therefore, God is both good and evil, just and unjust, merciful and cruel, limitless and limited, unknowable and knowable. All things, all of which contain their contradictions or opposites, unite to form a greater whole that is God.

God is seen as a mirror from which shines a brilliant light. This brilliant light is then reflected onto a second mirror, then onto a third, then to a fourth, and so on. With each succeeding reflection the light loses some of its brilliancy until, when it finally reaches the finite world, it shines very dimly.

Within this concept of the reflection of light lies the Kabbalist's theory for the creation of the world. In the beginning there was just God, and from himself he sent an emanation, often described as light. From this first emanation evolved nine more, 10 in all, called the sephiroth. The ancient Kabbalists taught that the brilliant lights of the sephiroth constitute the sacred name of God. Their reasoning was that the sephiroth was the world, or universe, and God is the world. Therefore, the sephiroth are the facets or parts of God, and they also are facets of the universe.

The origin of Kabbalah centers on a short book titled *Sefer Yetzirah* (Book of Creation). The book tells that God created the world by the means of 32 secret paths of knowledge, which are the 10 sephiroth and the 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet. It is believed the 10 sephiroth were originally thought to refer to numbers but later represented emanations from which the cosmos was formed.

Each of the 10 emanations within the sephiroth is called a sephira, and together they form what is called the Tree of Life. This Tree is the central image of Kabbalistic meditation. Again, each sephira describes a certain aspect of God, and taken together as the sephiroth, they form the sacred name of God. The Tree also describes the path by which the divine spirit descended into the material world, and the path humankind must take to ascend to God.

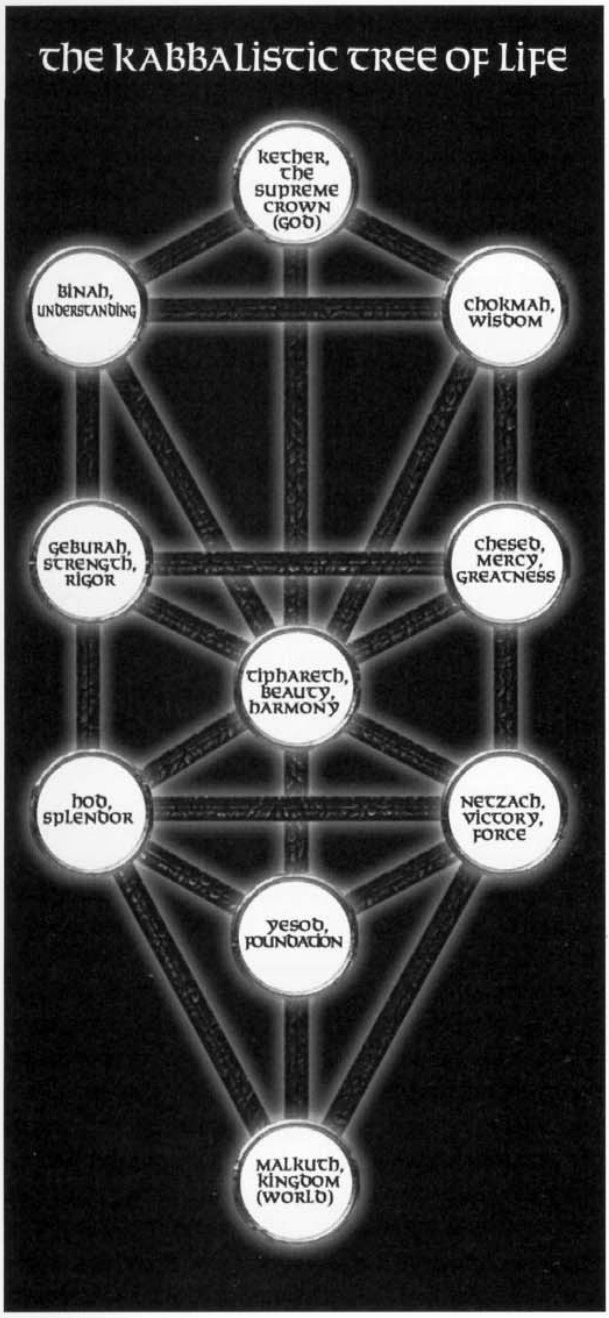
The first nine sephiroth form three triangles, with the 10th sephira forming the foundation or base. When meditating upon the sephiroth, the Kabbalist can concentrate upon any one of the three images which the triangles are said to represent. The images are analogous to God's relationship to humankind and the world. The first triangle represents impregnation of the female by the male, thus creating the world and child; the second triangle represents the development of the world and child; and the third triangle is the adult person or the finished product of the world.

The triangles also depict the human body: the first triangle is the head, the second is the trunk and arms, the third is the legs and reproductive organs, based on the analogy of the relation between man and God.

The sephiroth and their formation in the Tree of Life is depicted in a sidebar.

With the help of the sephiroth, humankind ascends to God by gaining the meaning of each sephira, one at a time. The accomplishment of ascending from one sephira to the next is an attainment of knowledge.

Making one's way through the sephiroth is exceedingly difficult, because each sephira is said to be divided into four sections, representing the Four Worlds that compose the cosmos. They are Aziluth, the world of archetypes, from which come all manifestations of forms; Briah, the world of creation, where the archetypal ideas become patterns; Yetzirah, the world of form, where the patterns are expressed; and Assirah, the material world.



Also within the sephiroth is the sacred, unknowable and unspeakable name of God: YHVH (Yahweh), or the Tetragrammaton. The Tetragrammaton is so sacred that other names pertaining to God, such as Elohim, Adonai and Jehovah, are substituted in scripture for it. The letters YHVH correspond to the Four Worlds.

The second description of the sephiroth pictures the world or universe made up of layers, or outer skins such as surround an onion. This was generally how the world was viewed from ancient times until the 16th century. God was thought to reside in the outer layer, and things closely related to God were within the next outer layers. The most inner layer of this configuration contained the material world. The spiritual soul of humankind descended from the outer layer, or God, to the inner layer, or the material world.

That Kabbalah, based on the theory of the soul's descent from and ascent to God, is made up of 10 sephiroth instead of nine is due to the influence of the Pythagorean theory. Earth has a separate sphere to itself. Above this, the next seven sephiroth correspond to the planets, with the top two corresponding to the stars and the Prime Mover, or God.

Angels guard each sephira, determinedly trying to turn back climbers from their ascent to God. On the bottom sephiroth, there are sinister intelligences aplenty who can easily trap a soul in ignorance. The Kabbalists hold that some persons can achieve a union with God even before death.

Gematria

The notion that the name of Jehovah holds mystical power extended ultimately to the belief that words themselves hold power. In the Jewish language, each letter is also a number. The numbers in a word can be totaled, and those totals hold mystical significance. In many cases, words with the same number totals are believed to be connected in some sort of magical way. If you wanted to make a strong house, you would use the same number of bricks as the number of your name, or make it that many square feet. If you dream of a horse, you would find other words with the same number as the word horse and your dream may concern that. The most famous example of gematria exists in the Name of the Beast, which is six-hundred and sixty six. The number corresponds with the name "Augustus," the Roman emperor who persecuted the Jewish people.

Some Kabbalists of this time seriously believe that the Old Testament was written in a hidden code inspired by God. They used gematria as one of the chief means with which to decipher this code. An example of this is shown in the interpretation of Jeremiah 9:9, "From the fowl of the heavens until the beasts are fled and gone." This is interpreted as meaning that no traveler passed through Judea for 52 years, because the Hebrew word for beast, *behemah*, has the numerical value of 52.

Magic Squares

Another Jewish magic related to numbers and letters is the magic square. Magic squares are squares that are divided into parts, with each part becoming

a square within the larger square. A number or letter, supposedly having magical properties, is assigned to each square within the square. When read horizontally, vertically or diagonally, they produce the same sums or words. These items are worn around the neck as an amulet of protection.

A Numeral Square

4	9	2
3	5	7
8	1	6

The SATOR Square

S	A	T	O	R
A	R	E	P	O
T	E	N	E	T
O	P	E	R	A
R	O	T	A	S

Foreign Superstitions

Although **Dark Ages: Mage** concentrates on Europe, mages are capable of ranging far from their own homes. Likewise, mages from foreign lands can certainly come to Europe for their own mysterious purposes.

It is important to note that during this period of time, people are very hostile to foreigners and foreign ways. Only the most enlightened person would not view someone from outside his culture with mistrust and suspicion. Certainly, only the most educated would be aware of the superstitions of lands not their own.

Below are a few of the places a mage might travel. Just as with the European superstitions, these foreign superstitions are painted with a broad brush so that players and Storytellers can put their own interpretations on them.

Arabic Superstitions

The Middle East is one of the closest and most easily accessible land outside of Europe. In fact, the Crusades are seemingly endless, so it likely for a mage to find herself in Muslim territory. This does not mean she would be liked or accepted; quite the opposite would probably be true. On the other side of the coin, the faith of Muhammad is under great assault, and so a Moorish or Arabic magician would be the subject of great suspicion among Europeans.

The Evil Eye

The Middle East is where the superstition of the Evil Eye originates. It is believed that if you show yourself to be too rich or proud, you will attract the attention of the Evil Eye. Strangers are believed to possess the Evil Eye, and hunchbacks and other deformities are often believed to be marks showing those who possess the Eye. For this reason, Arabs are often overly polite and generous to the deformed and insane, to ward off the cursed glance.

Arabs believe that the color blue protects men and animals from the Evil Eye, and amulets and gold coins are also used as safeguards.

Sharing Salt

One of the true marks of hospitality in the Arabic world involves the sharing of salt. Salt is rare and precious, so it is only be shared with one greatly trusted, loved or during times of great occasion. It is believed that salt will remain in the body for three days, during which time one is bound to act honorably and faithfully with the person who bestowed it. Some stories carry the bond of salt so far as to suggest that a robber tasting a bowl of what he thought was sugar, upon discovering salt, returned everything he stole and left the house with apologies.

When a marriage or some great financial partnership is contracted, all the parties involved will eat heavily salted food. Often, the salt is so strong that people throw up. This in no way diminishes the bond, and in fact strengthens the person's memory of that bond.

Protection for Children

In Arabic culture, you do not praise children for fear of inviting unclean spirits, or the Evil Eye. Should an individual praise a child, it is customary to spit three times and utter the ritual statement, "Ptumashala," which means: "behold the work of God."

African Superstitions

Europeans in the Dark Medieval period have little reason to go to Africa. Explorers will not traverse the Nile for about three hundred years. A magician, however, may have reasons of his own to travel here. There is knowledge hidden here not found in any other part of Europe, and creatures exist that can be found nowhere else.

Africa is a continent of many tribes. It is difficult to say what traditions are specific to any particular tribe. There are, however, several themes that seem to resonate throughout the African world.

Charms

Many African peoples place great reverence upon idols and charms. They call the charms *gree-grees*, and people who make their charms a gree-gree man. Some call them fetish doctors or witch doctors. They make charms from clay to represent certain gods or animals they wish to associate with, and feel that those charms grant them special abilities. Charms are made for every occupation and desire in life — loving, hating, buying, selling, fishing, planting, traveling, hunting: whatever the individual needs.

A love charm is made from the water the lover has washed in, mingled with the drink of the loved one.

Just as the Europeans find power in gems and stones, the coastal Africans find power in shells. Cowrie shells in particular are thought to enhance fertility and purity.

Animals

The Hemmerkop, a small black African bird, called *i-Tekwane* by the Zulu and *Uthekwane* by the Xhosa, is believed to be a very bad omen when seen. Some Africans will tear down their hut if this bird flies over it.

The spider is given special place in African stories. Known as *Ananci*, the spider is a figure of wisdom and trickery. He was known for tricking lions, wolves and God himself, although he was tricked himself by the chameleon.

The jackal is often considered a harbinger of death or a bringer of bad fortune. In Egypt, the jackal was associated with Anubis, the god of the Dead.

Spirits

The African religion is also rich in its belief of spirits. Animals have spirits. The spirits of the dead continue to have an effect on the living. African religion spends a lot of energy appeasing or supplicating the spirits. The spirits can be summoned and given favor by the use of drumming, chanting and animal sacrifice. Blood itself is believed to have potency or spiritual power. A person's spirit resides in his blood, and the spirits of animals exist in theirs.

The spirits, once summoned, will often possess a person and then make its demands known, so that it can be entreated for favors.



ARTEMIDORUS STOOD SURROUNDED BY CORPSES.

The stink of the room nearly sent him to his knees, but he held his scarf to his mouth and forced his mind to the Word of God. He breathed easily again.

The old church — indeed, the entire town — was dead and rotted. Whatever plague had occurred here, the devastation had been complete. *God's righteous judgment?* wondered Artemidorus. *Somehow, I think not.* He drew his sword cautiously and stepped farther into the moldering chapel.

As if in response, the festering bodies of the dead stood and shuffled towards him, some of them brandishing weapons of their own. At the back of the church, the altar let loose a horrifying creak, and a pale woman clad in decaying black robes rose up from it. "You are a trespasser here and have intruded upon my work," she said, and her tone was so conversational that it chilled Artemidorus to the roots of his soul. "I shall examine your organs with great interest, Father."

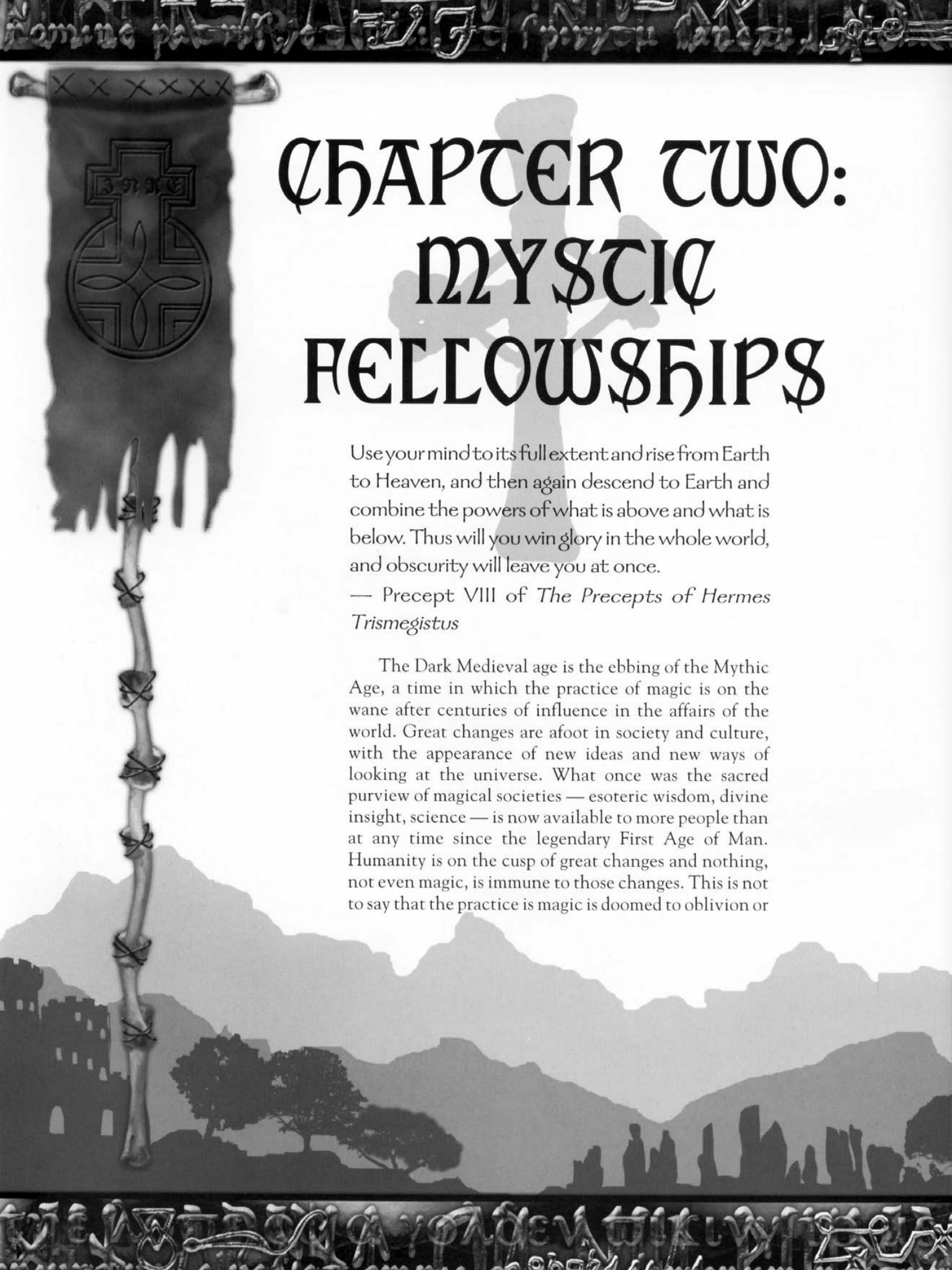
Artemidorus ignored the woman for the moment. He steeled himself and planted his sword in the ground, asking Uri-El to give rest to the dead all the while. He heard the shambling feet of the defiled corpses nearing him, heard the whisper of a sword being drawn. Still, he did not falter. *Dear God, look down upon your child and pity him, and grant him the strength to end this evil in your Holy Name. Blessed Uri-El, come on swift wings and deliver the souls of these unhallowed dead to their final reward.*

He heard a rush of air and a soft voice, singing words he knew he was not worthy to understand. He opened his eyes and saw that all of the bodies had fallen to the ground. Their incredible stench seemed to have vanished along with their unnatural animation.

The pale woman had climbed down from the altar and now drew a sword of her own. She bared hideous fangs, and Artemidorus saw that they were coated with a viscous black liquid.

The young Messianic felt no fear, but he called upon the angel Gavri-El to empower his blade once again. The pale woman lunged, and Artemidorus braced for her attack. *Truly, as Your Evangelist said, O my Savior, 'Blessed are the dead from now on who die in the Lord.'*

"I am not the trespasser here, demon," Artemidorus said. "You defile this house of God." The demon's eyes widened as his sword burst into glorious flame. "But by His Grace, it shall be cleansed."



Chapter Two: Mystic Fellowships

Use your mind to its full extent and rise from Earth to Heaven, and then again descend to Earth and combine the powers of what is above and what is below. Thus will you win glory in the whole world, and obscurity will leave you at once.

— Precept VIII of *The Precepts of Hermes Trismegistus*

The Dark Medieval age is the ebbing of the Mythic Age, a time in which the practice of magic is on the wane after centuries of influence in the affairs of the world. Great changes are afoot in society and culture, with the appearance of new ideas and new ways of looking at the universe. What once was the sacred purview of magical societies — esoteric wisdom, divine insight, science — is now available to more people than at any time since the legendary First Age of Man. Humanity is on the cusp of great changes and nothing, not even magic, is immune to those changes. This is not to say that the practice is magic is doomed to oblivion or

— almost as dire — irrelevant. Yet it does mean that the tried and true methods of the past may no longer be applicable. Just as the common man has opened himself to innovation and creativity, so too must the mage.

It has been untold millennia since mages were anything close to commonplace. From the point of view of the magical groups that remain active — the Mystic Fellowships — the Dark Medieval age represents the nadir of their power. Although some of them still wield considerable might within their domains, they rarely do so openly. The time when mages could proudly display their puissance is past, replaced by a time when other forces are ascendant: faith, money, military might. The days when mages acted as the advisors (and even puppet-masters) to kings are gone. Consequently, the mages of the Fellowships must often work in secret or on the fringes of society, far from the centers of power and influence — hardly a prescription for regaining what they once possessed.

Cabals

As the power of the Mystic Fellowships waned, so did their numbers. Some Fellowships still retain overarching organizations that (in principle) direct the actions of their members, but even they must do so with some care. No Mystic Fellowship, whatever its ties to the mundane world, can act with total abandon, for the Dark Medieval age grows increasingly hostile to what they represent. Instead, mages have little choice but to band together in small groups — called cabals — to ensure their safety and survival.

Cabals typically number no more than a dozen members at any given time, although most are far smaller than that. Only the largest population centers (such as Rome and Paris, for example) can support cabals of such a size. That's because the activities of mages, even extraordinarily careful ones, frequently draw undue attention. Without a sizable Commoner population into which to blend, it's only a matter of time before a curious peasant or overzealous cleric, never mind an Inquisitor, realizes just who — and what — the cabal really is.

Until recently, cabals almost always consisted of members of a single Mystic Fellowship. Several reasons accounted for this. The most obvious is that most mages are extremely hidebound and dogmatic, at least as far as their social interactions go. By this, one should understand that wielding magic is an extremely difficult and time-consuming endeavor. A mage attains any facility in it only through years of study and practice, according to tried and true methods passed down from previous generations of mages. Even if an apprentice is temperamentally inclined to be open-minded and innovative, doing so is frowned upon by his superiors, at least until he has mastered the traditional methods, at which point he has most likely accepted those traditional methods as the only way to wield magic. It's a rare mage who can see beyond what he was taught as an apprentice and look at the world afresh.

Similarly, one cannot overlook the fact that mages are human beings. Like Commoners, they are products of their environment and upbringing. If the Order of Hermes has a long-standing dislike of the Messianic Voices, that dislike is often perpetuated by individual mages. Mages identify with their Mystic Fellowships in ways similar to Commoners' identification with hometown or family. Feuds, grudges and prejudices are just as common among mages as they are among their nonmagical brethren. With the waning of magic, the stakes are very high and even small differences are exaggerated or used as excuses to fight over the scraps of magical power that remain in the Dark Medieval age. Like men trapped in a burning house with their rivals, many members of cabals would rather die than cooperate with a mage they believe to be their enemy.

Fortunately, these attitudes are beginning to change. Some cabals now realize that the fates of all mages are intertwined. If one Fellowship suffers serious setbacks, it bodes ill for all Fellowships. In the end, the forces that oppose magic will not stop when they have destroyed a single cabal or a single Fellowship. They will not rest until they believe they have made the world "safe" and eliminated the last vestiges of "superstition" that threaten the dawning new order.

This means that mages must begin to recognize points of mutual interest with their fellow mages, whatever their allegiances. To that end, multi-Fellowship cabals have begun to arise throughout Europe and the Middle East. They are most common in places such as the Holy Land, Sicily, the Balkans and Iberia, where different cultures interact on a more regular basis, but they can be found in other areas as well. Indeed, the phenomenon is also present in university towns such as Paris, Padua and Oxford as well. In all these cases, mages belonging to different and sometimes antagonistic Fellowships have begun to cooperate and pool their

resources. These are the first of a new type of cabal — and probably not the last.

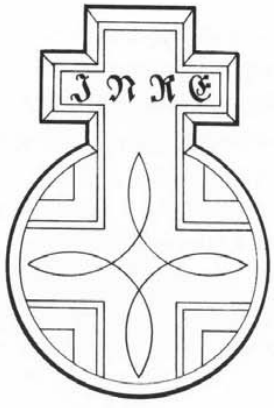
Multi-Fellowship cabals are not without difficulties. Although they have many advantages in the current climate of the Dark Medieval age, they also come with many pitfalls. The rivalries and prejudices that prevented their formation in the past still exist. If anything, these problems are sometimes stronger, as mages become resentful that they must cooperate with previously hated enemies in order to survive. In addition, the practice of magic varies greatly from Fellowship to Fellowship. There is no universally accepted theory of magic, despite the best efforts of the Order of Hermes to foist one on all the Fellowships — their own, of course. This means that cooperation is sometimes not merely quarrelsome but impossible as mages of different Fellowships have little common ground on which to build joint endeavors.

Nevertheless, there are genuine successes. Encouraged by the actions of enlightened and open-minded scholars and rulers, some multi-Fellowship cabals have shown that diversity is in fact a strength. Although there remain difficulties to overcome, these pale in comparison to the victories won through cooperation. Slowly, the Mystic Fellowships are beginning to realize that they may have a common destiny. However much they might wish to deny it, however much they may fight against it, the Dark Medieval age may plant the seeds for a transformation the likes of which none can yet guess. For although the Mythic Age is ending and can never be restored, nothing says that the future need be bleak. If even these competing groups can find a way to cooperate and derive tangible benefits for doing so, there may yet be hope for the practice of magic. Instead of being the end, the Dark Medieval age may only be the birth pangs of a new — and better — order.

The Fellowships

In the 13th century, there are six major Mystic Fellowships of mages, divided according to the type of magic they practice, as well as the theoretical underpinnings of that practice. Of these, only half are identifiable groups with anything like an organization or leadership. The others are more loosely defined, united only in certain common beliefs and practices. In addition, there are many commonalities between some groups who may







DEGREES OF ATTAINMENT

Ahl-i-Batin	Messianic Voices	Old Faith*	Order of Hermes	Spirit-Talker	Valdaermen
Mutasawwif	Catechumen	Initiate	Apprentice	Apprentice	Thane
Murid	Disciple	Mystes (pl., Mystai)	Disciple	Shaman	Karl
Murshid	Presbyter	Hierophant	Adept		
Qutb	Exarch or Curia Minister	Epoptes ("beholder")	Master	Master	Konungr

* These ranks are used only by those mages who participate in an organized group, such as a secret mystery cult or circle.

borrow ideas and practices from other Fellowships. This is becoming more widespread as multi-Fellowship cabals become less rare in the Dark Medieval age.

Nevertheless, the Mystic Fellowships described below do represent distinct ways of looking at the universe and practicing magic. Although a mage's Fellowship is not the final word on his beliefs or ways of wielding magic, it does provide an important insight into his history and perspective. Mages are individuals, not stereotypes. The information presented below is thus intended as a guideline rather than a final word on how any particular mage will act or what he will believe. Like any organization, there's a lot of variation within the ranks of the Mystic Fellowships. Storytellers and players alike should bear this in mind when using this chapter to create characters for their chronicles.

Degrees of Attainment

Each Fellowship has its own system for ranking a mage's progression to wisdom or power. Some Fellowships, such as the Order of Hermes and the Messianic Voices, are more hierarchical than others, insisting on such titles, while others use them only as loose labels by which to recognize a mage's individual achievement.

In addition, numerous functional roles with accompanying titles that a mage can assume within a Fellowship; these are mentioned in the Fellowship descriptions.







Ahl-i-Batin

The Ahl-i-Batin, or Subtle Ones, are living embodiments of the highest accomplishments of Muslim culture — philosopher-naturalists who seek the hidden Unity that underlies all things. Masters of the intricate patterns that make up God's creation, the Ahl-i-Batin fulfill a variety of functions in their native lands: scientists, explorers, diplomats and even assassins when necessary. The Subtle Ones use their remarkable understanding of connections to move about as few mages can, seeing and doing things that others cannot. Possessing knowledge of interest to all who have magical power, the Ahl-i-Batin are nevertheless shunned and viewed with suspicion, sometimes even among their own peoples. Their vision, which transcends the here and now and seeks to find commonality in all things, sparks the very divisiveness the Subtle Ones strive to overcome.



Background

No one — not even the wisest sages of the Ahl-i-Batin — knows how old the sect truly is. Tradition among the Batini holds that their history stretches back untold thousands of years into the past. There is no proof of such vintage, but it is held nonetheless for the Subtle Ones believe that the current incarnation of the sect is the re-founding of a much older one that died out millennia before.

The greatest of the Batini sacred texts, the *Mushaf al-Isra* (or "Great Book of Passage Through Night") claims that the Subtle Ones are fragments of a powerful entity known as the *Kamil*, or "Perfected One." For reasons that are unclear, the Kamil had no contact with the world for thousands of years. It was during this time that the original Ahl-i-Batin ceased to be. Then, one night in 514 B.C. — known as the Night of Fana — the Kamil returned to the world and the Batini along with it.

Of course, the sect didn't spring into being immediately. Rather, it was the result of a combination of factors that, according to the Batini, reveal their Doctrine of Unity in action. On the Night of Fana, there was a great conflict. Adherents of two warring magical traditions fought against one another, with one group pursuing the other into a vast, green meadow where the others expected to destroy their foes. The hunted mages found that the meadow was already inhabited by another group of adepts, whom the Batini call the Darwushim. While waiting for their pursuers to arrive, the hunted mages joined the Darwushim in a magical ritual of dance and motion, one that summoned an entity which would become known as the Khwaja al-Akbar.

The Khwaja al-Akbar was the fusion of two men, one from each magical group involved in the ritual. Suffused with power, the Khwaja al-Akbar spoke and affected the world around itself. For a few moments, all of space became one and Unity was achieved among all the men and women present at this event. Space broke down and became one in a moment of ecstatic union that has never been repeated since. During the event, the Kamil, freed once more, manifested itself in everyone present. Then, the Khwaja al-Akbar disappeared and the men who composed it returned to their former selves. Yet they, like everyone else present, were changed forever. Their original affiliations meant nothing compared to the greater Unity they had experienced. The Ahl-i-Batin were born.

The newly formed "Interior Ones" spent the next few hundred years establishing themselves throughout the lands of China, India and Persia, although they proved most successful in Persia. There, they established six distinct schools, called *khanaqas*, each of which taught its students a different aspect of the Unity the sect hoped to achieve. These early Batini became deeply involved in many aspects of Persian life. In particular, they were revered as masters of self-discipline and sought out as teachers of both etiquette and diplomacy. The Batini also became involved in politics and attempted to institute reforms within the Parthian administration that would lead to greater unity. These reforms were partly successful and culminated in the formation of the Neo-Persian, or Sassanid, Empire in the third century A.D.

In its efforts to achieve Unity, some Ahl-i-Batin looked in unusual places. One such Batini was Ishaq al-Jannani who, around A.D. 100, began to cooperate with the Nif'ur en' Daah, an Infernalist sect of mages. Unfortunately, Ishaq becomes so enamored of the Infernalists' ways that he adopted them, renaming himself Ishaq al-Iblis. He became the first Devil King and turned against the Subtle Ones — violently. In the process of his own corruption, he did the same to the khanaqa he led, which soon ceased to be part of the Ahl-i-Batin forever.

In order to defend themselves against this new threat from within, the Batini leadership created the *Qutbs*, who

used their powerful mind-reading magic to monitor the thoughts of Batini. The Qutbs rose to prominence as the sect grew and eventually became judges within it. A few decades later, the Ahl-i-Batin authorize the training of assassins to be used against their corrupt brethren. So successful are these assassins that their abilities enter legend — and sully the good name of the sect in the eyes of some outsiders.

The Ahl-i-Batin nevertheless soldiered on in their quest to influence cultures and societies toward Unity. According to Batini tales, a Qutb encountered a certain man and saw in him a great destiny, although he possessed no magical ability. This man, who would become known to history as the Prophet Muhammad, wrote a holy book, the *Qur'an*, after receiving its words from God through the agency of the angel Gabriel. The religion he founded — Islam — had many beliefs in common with the Doctrine of Unity and in fact spread those beliefs throughout the world far better than the Ahl-i-Batin ever had.

Some Batini would later claim that no unenlightened merchant could have founded Islam without magical assistance. Stung by the realization that the Prophet had succeeded in preaching Divine Unity better than they, these reactionary mages simply refused to accept that their Fellowship did not have some hand in the foundation of Islam. The current majority, however, accept what seems obvious to them — that God Himself chose an ordinary man to spread the Doctrine of Unity not through the esoteric learning of the Ahl-i-Batin but through the simple beauty of a new religion. Instead of claiming credit for the intervention of the godhead in bringing a new revelation to mortals, most Batini mages did what they could to encourage Islam's spread.

And spread it did. Within a couple of centuries of its birth, Islam was knocking on the doors of Europe and would likely have made even greater inroads had it not been opposed by mages of other sects, particularly the Messianic Voices. Even so, the Batini could take pride in what the new faith had achieved in so short a time — in particular, the development of a rational and scholarly culture that preserved and passed on ancient wisdom. Under Islam, the cause of Unity was advanced through scholarship. Many important elements of the Doctrine of Unity passed into other cultures — including Christian Europe — through the medium of philosophical and theological texts. So powerful were the ideas contained in these texts that the Messianic Voices could not censor them, try as they might. In this way, European civilization benefited from the fruits of the Batini influence on Islam, even as it opposed the religion that had nurtured them.

The Ahl-i-Batin likewise influenced the cause of Unity through their unceasing efforts to fight against the Devil Kings. The Subtle Ones recognized early that Infernalism was a path to be avoided and that it offered mages nothing except corruption and death. In this effort, they made common cause with other magical traditions — yet another part of their plan for Unity. Batini texts on combating evil also found their way into European hands, although, ironically, Commoners and mages alike turned some of these against the Subtle Ones.

Despite such setbacks, the Batini remain convinced that the cause of Unity is worth pursuing. The 13th century has so far proven uneven in following through with its promise. The *Reconquista* in Iberia has grown more intense, as Christian forces make a final push toward eliminating Islam from the Peninsula. In a similar vein, the

KAMIL OR ENTELECHY?

In later ages, this entity is known as the Entelechy, a Greek term coined by Aristotle to describe the perfection of any being's form. When Aristotle's works made their way into Muslim civilization, the Arabic word used to translate entelechy was *kamil* — the same word the *Mushaf al-Isra* uses to describe the entity of which the Batini believe themselves to be fragments.

These mages saw this commonality of names as more than mere coincidence and pointed to Aristotle as proof of the universality of the Doctrine of Unity. Although a Greek born hundreds of years after the Night of Fana, he somehow understood at least a small part of its significance. Even so, not all members of the Fellowship are Aristotelian philosophers. Indeed, some Batini reject Aristotelianism as a distraction from the Doctrine of Unity rather than an aid to it.

In the end, the supporters of Aristotelianism hold the day. Their term, the Entelechy, becomes more or less standard throughout the entire Fellowship. In the Dark Medieval age, however, this debate is still ongoing. Most Batini in this age use the original Arabic term — Kamil — instead of Entelechy.

Crusades have turned against Christianity and Muslim forces are whittling away at the remaining European states in Outremer. Politically and philosophically, there is very little chance of true Unity in the sense that the Batini seek it. Yet, there's also no question that the world is becoming smaller and that exchanges between societies and cultures are growing in occurrence and magnitude. Could it be then that the turmoil of the present age is but the birth pangs of a more unified one to come? The Ahl-i-Batin certainly hope so and endeavor to ensure that hope is not misplaced.

ORGANIZATION

The Ahl-i-Batin have a formal structure, as they consider structures to be an important means to understanding the Unity they seek. Their structure serves two purposes: instructing new initiates (called *mutasawwif*) and instituting a system of government for the entire sect. Broadly speaking, the Ahl-i-Batin are divided into five khanaqas or lodges. Each lodge teaches a slightly different interpretation of the Doctrine of Unity, but all endorse the overall mission of the sect without the infighting that's typical in the Order of Hermes, for example. The khanaqas instruct initiates in the ways of the Ahl-i-Batin (called *tariqa*) and its purpose in the world.

Initiates who complete their training are known as *murids* and are instructed in the deeper teachings of the sect. In particular, murids are taught the magical incantations that allow the warping of space and distance to the will of the mage. Once these incantations have been mastered, the murid is tested by a judge (called a Qutb) who is a master Batini and possesses the ability to read the minds of others. A murid is judged favorably by a Qutb if he shows an understanding of sacred geometry and mathematics, two disciplines considered to be essential to understanding the nature of Unity.

The next rank in the hierarchy of the Ahl-i-Batin is *murshid*, which can be attained only after years of study and perseverance. In the meantime, new murids leave the khanaqas and join a smaller type of lodge known as a *zawiya*. Zawiyas typically consist of three to eight mages who work together in the pursuit of common goals. These Batini function somewhat like a monastic group, sharing household and scholarly duties. Occasionally, a zawiya admits non-mages into its membership to serve as assistants to the mages, but this is not the norm, particularly in the Dark Medieval age.

Individual zawiyas act according to their own interests, which may mirror those of the sect as a whole but do not have to do so. Indeed, there is very little coordination between zawiyas, and this is by design. According to traditional practice, Batini do not know one another outside their own zawiyas. This helps to strengthen the relationship between members living in a particular zawiya. It also helps to preserve the secrecy of the Ahl-i-Batin, who find themselves beset by enemies on multiple fronts. Unfortunately, this structure has the unintended side effect of making it easier for Infernalists and other dark mages to infiltrate a zawiya without notice.

Despite their unusual organization, the Ahl-i-Batin function reasonably cohesively, much more so than outsiders might suspect. Disputes between khanaqas are rare. When they do occur, they are largely resolved in a reasoned, logical fashion. Batini treat such disputes not as evidence of disunity but as an occasion to explore the limits of diversity within Unity. Particularly acrimonious disputes (which do occur from time to time) are adjudicated by Qutbs, whose decisions draw on the interplay of tradition and innovation to come to a just solution. Consequently, the Ahl-i-Batin have shown a remarkable ability to adapt and survive, even in the face of determined opposition.

PHILOSOPHY

The Ahl-i-Batin adhere to a collection of beliefs usually referred to simply as the Doctrine of Unity, as if that rubric somehow explains the sum total of their ideals. In fact, term presents only a caricature of the Subtle Ones' philosophy, emphasizing certain elements and downplaying others. Admittedly, the Batini also do this themselves, but a fuller understanding of their philosophy requires more than a short summation.

The Doctrine of Unity has its ultimate basis in the absolute monotheism of the Ahl-i-Batin. This belief, of course, sees a public manifestation in Islam, which rejects even Christian Trinitarianism as incompatible with a belief in only one God. The Batini, of course, have no real interest in sectarian disputes, as they believe that all religions are but pale reflections of the Unity they see in God. Nevertheless, there is a marked preference for the unadulterated monotheism of Islam. Most Batini argue that Muslim monotheistic doctrine provides a simpler base on which to build than more baroque theological

structures, such as those found in Christianity and Judaism. It is thus the perfect vehicle to advance their cause.

Not surprisingly, the Batini have a rather heterodox relationship with religion of any sort, including Islam. Many Subtle Ones are Muslims, but not all are. Even those who do adhere to the faith do so in a fashion that would probably elicit condemnations from many devout believers. This is especially explicit in their understanding of God and His connection to the Kamil. Although God is the supreme principle of the cosmos and the creator of the Kamil, He is separated from His creation, whether by choice or by the nature of the cosmos He created (this is a point of contention within the Ahl-i-Batin). That's why the Kamil is necessary; it is a conduit through which the divine can approach creation, as there is no other means to do so.

The Kamil thus functions as a repository of all knowledge and divine enlightenment. Human beings, whether mages or otherwise, are manifestations or extensions of the Kamil. They are physical entities that, through experience, may gain access to the wisdom contained within the Kamil. Only that part of the human soul that has contact with the Kamil has any sort of divine spark or hope for immortality. The rest is simply a shell, a material vessel, that passes away with the body at death. This vessel includes such things as memories and emotions, meaning that they are perishable and do not transcend the higher soul's return to God.

Needless to say, this is an unusual view, one that is condemned by most believers in Islam and other monotheistic faiths as incompatible with their deepest tenets. The Batini, for their part, hold that this view does not threaten personal immortality in the least, only the unsophisticated version of it that is held by unlettered believers. Moreover, they point to the writings of many natural philosophers as proof of their position, citing no less an authority than Aristotle (the Master of Those Who Know) in their defense.

The Batini hold that the purpose of human life and the Unity they seek can be achieved only through the absorption of the higher soul into the Kamil, which is itself a part of God. True enlightenment is the return of all things to the Creator through a process of systematically forgetting that there is a difference between individual souls and the Kamil through which they acquire their knowledge of higher things. The renowned subtlety of the Ahl-i-Batin is, in fact, a consequence of their quest for Unity. The Batini look for wisdom wherever it can be found, seeking a means to further erase the distinctions that prevent human beings from recognizing their fundamental connection to the Kamil.

At the same time, the sect realizes that it's impossible for any single individual to acquire the knowledge necessary to complete the path of return to the Creator. To do this, one must rely on the aid of others. The Ahl-i-Batin encourage cooperation between members of their sect, as well as between other groups, some of which might even be opposed to one another. The process of sharing information aids in overcoming the artificial boundaries that separate individuals from the Kamil. Only by transcending these boundaries does it become possible to achieve true enlightenment.

Paradoxically, Batini philosophy also stresses the importance of self-knowledge, which is to say that, in the end, others can aid one's quest for return to the Creator only so far. Without the proper mastery of oneself no amount of assistance will bring about the level of knowledge necessary to dissolve the separation between the self and the Kamil. Consequently, asceticism is an integral component of the Batini philosophy. The belief is that the denial of one's physical desires leads to an understanding of where the self truly lies and what it consists of. This in turn leads to an understanding of the self's relationship to the Kamil and thus to God.

The Doctrine of Unity is a hard path to follow, for it simultaneously urges the abandonment of prejudices and the self. It is predicated upon the belief that all human beings are children of God and should return to him through intellectual pursuits that encourage recognition of this fact. In both the Muslim and Christian worlds, these two beliefs are not typically conjoined. The denial

THE FIVE KHANAQAS

The following is a brief summary of the five existing khanaqas and their unique method of viewing the Doctrine of Unity.

- **The University of Light:** Based in Jerusalem, this khanaqa has accepted many esoteric teachings from Judaism, in particular those relating to the commanding of spirits. Consequently, it's the most likely to possess Jews among its members. This khanaqa has a sizable presence among the taifa kingdoms of Iberia, which gives it significant contacts with Christendom.
- **The Silk Cartel:** This khanaqa concerns itself with alchemy and conjuration, as well as sacred geometry. Although small, the Silk Cartel has great influence due to its command of mathematics. Nominally based in the Arabian Desert, its members are itinerant and can be found throughout the civilized world, including Europe, where they labor for the few Christian princes who recognize their wisdom.
- **The Paradise Garden:** Based in Isfahan, Persia, this khanaqa concerns itself with rulership and diplomacy. Its members frequently serve as viziers and advisors, hoping to nudge sultans and caliphs subtly toward the fulfillment of the Doctrine of Unity.
- **The Brethren of the Unified Soul:** Based in the middle of the Arabian desert, this khanaqa is composed of ascetics and sacred assassins, whose vocation is to neutralize threats to the achievement of Unity.
- **The Darwushim:** Related to the whirling dervishes whose exploits are legendary, the Darwushim are ecstatics whose khanaqa is based in Baghdad. Their wild movements are an attempt to achieve communion with the divine Unity.

of one's physical desires is a common element to both, but that does not lead to a denial of the self. The Batini, of course, reject this characterization as missing the central point of Unity: that it denies only that which is not truly the self. Man's true nature is found in his higher soul, not in those things that prevent him from seeing the essential unity and connectedness of all things. Nevertheless, this belief is a difficult one for many to accept, which has contributed to the Ahl-i-Batin's limited success of late.

Failings

The weakness of the Ahl-i-Batin is twofold. The first is not so much a weakness as an accident of history and geography. Being strongly associated with the world of Islam, outsiders often do not trust the Subtle Ones. This is particularly true in Christian Europe and the Middle East, where Moors are considered the enemy. In places such as the Iberian Peninsula, for example, there is very little room for compromise with anyone who might undermine (or be seen to undermine) the progress of Christian supremacy. That a few outspoken Ahl-i-Batin claim to have inspired the creation and development of Islam only makes this suspicion more acute.

Consequently, the Batini have few allies outside their own culture. Even within it, there are those who question the motives and allegiance of the sect. Interestingly, both extremely devout Muslims and more radical thinkers alike have a dislike for the Ahl-i-Batin. Some conservatives, such as the great thinker Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, attacked elements of Batini philosophy as incompatible with Islam. Meanwhile, more secular thinkers dismissed the sect as a relic of a bygone age, before true reason and learning took hold in the Middle East.

Another element of this distrust is the role the Ahl-i-Batin have played in espionage and diplomacy. The Subtle Ones didn't acquire their name solely on the basis of their debating style. It's also a reflection of their careful — even secretive — involvement in behind-the-scenes dealings throughout the Middle East. These dealings (particularly assassinations) are exaggerated by detractors to serve their own ends, but the truth is now so muddied that few outsiders realize the true nature of the Batini. Again, this is another contributing factor to the distrust that the sect occasions in others.

The second failing of the Ahl-i-Batin is more endemic and stems directly from their philosophy and practices. The mastery of the self, for example, is a noble and worthy pursuit, one that is held in common with most other magical traditions, even those that oppose the Batini. The sect takes it to such great extremes that they distance themselves from the society and culture of which they are a part, however. Unlike, for example, the Messianic Voices, the Ahl-i-Batin's quest for self-mastery seems entirely divorced from a wider interest in communal growth. This fact feeds into the distrust already directed toward the sect.

Moreover, the Doctrine of Unity contains other elements that run counter to everyday experience and beliefs. Chief among these is the notion of Unity itself. The idea that individual human beings are, in fact, manifestations of a greater Intelligence of which all partake, is anathema to many, particularly those for whom the immortality of the individual soul is important. Admittedly, such a belief is no more removed from common experience than those taught by many other Mystic Fellowships. What differentiates the Ahl-i-Batin is their social milieu. Whereas the Order of Hermes exist within a largely illiterate and parochial society, the Batini are at the center of a more sophisticated culture, where philosophical and religious debates filter down even into the lower ranks. Thus, when respected scholars teach a doctrine that undermines religious belief and tradition, it attracts attention and can have dangerous repercussions.

In the end, the Ahl-i-Batin suffer most from their isolation and the distrust it engenders. Although they strive toward Unity in all things, their actions and beliefs — or at least their perceived actions and beliefs — separate them from others. Although the Subtle Ones recognize these facts, they do not see them as cause for concern, but as confirmation that their mission is all the more needed. Unfortunately, that reaction only continues the cycle again and prevents the Batini from achieving the very Unity they seek.

Theories and Practice

The Ahl-i-Batin employ a variety of different methods in practicing their arts. Many are fairly traditional, such as ascetic discipline, meditation, chanting and the use of incense. Others are more unusual, such as alchemy, sacred geometry and psychology. All are low-key. That is, the Batini rarely employ methods that might draw attention to themselves or their mission. They prefer to work quietly and behind the scenes, as it is more likely that they will succeed through this approach. Consequently, the Subtle Ones are often no match for flamboyant Hermetics or Valdaermen who are willing to act openly without fear of the repercussions.

The Batini are most well known for their command of space and their relationship to it. This mastery stems from their Doctrine of Unity, which teaches that all points are, in fact, one point — if viewed from the proper perspective. To work magic that utilizes this command of space, the Subtle Ones employ meditation, shadows, and — especially — mirrors. Mirrors play a very important role in Batini practice, because the sect holds that they reflect more than the person or thing that gazes into them — they reflect the entire universe!

More accurately, the Ahl-i-Batin believe, much like the Order of Hermes, that an individual person or object is a microcosm of the universe. We often fail to see this microcosm or its relationship to the macrocosm because we are too close to the person or object in question, however. This is particularly true of ourselves, whom we often overlook as an object of study, even when involved in deep meditation. The self is the thinking subject. It is the basis for all other thoughts, including thoughts of the self. Mirrors provide a useful tool for stepping outside oneself — objectifying it in a way that makes it a viable object of study. In doing so, the Batini can work wonders

AHL-I-BATIN IN CHRISTENDOM

Believe it or not, such rare beings do exist. Although the Subtle Ones are largely unwelcome in Christian Europe, the Doctrine of Unity has gained many adherents, especially in institutions of learning, such as the University of Paris. Cloaked within Aristotelian scholarship (which is now sweeping European universities despite the Church's efforts to contain it), the Ahl-i-Batin are winning converts to their cause. These mages are typically younger learned men, who are willing to challenge the authority of the ancient Fathers of the Church in their quest for truths they believe are found within the pages of Aristotle, whom they deem "Master of Those Who Know." Even more conservative theologians cannot fail to acknowledge the wisdom within Aristotelian scholarship (much of it derived from the Muslim world), providing yet another opening for the Ahl-i-Batin. The Subtle Ones hope this will give their Doctrine of Unity a wider hearing than might it otherwise receive.

The Ahl-i-Batin are also renowned as travelers and itinerant sages. Accompanying Muslim trading missions throughout the Mediterranean, Batini can be found even in regions where the locals might otherwise be hostile to their presence. Muslims have long held an ambiguous place in European culture, both as enemies and unexpected allies. Sir Palamedes the Saracen was one of the noblest Knights of the Round Table, despite his alien culture and religion. Likewise, the open-minded ruler Frederick II welcomed Muslim scientists, poets and philosophers into his court in Sicily, while Richard the Lionhearted was renowned for his friendship with Saladin. Although far from common, these cross-cultural connections are not so unheard of that a Batini mage couldn't find a place within a European Dark Ages chronicle if the players and Storytellers are willing to be imaginative.

that warp and expand upon the self's relationship to the world at large.

Alchemy plays an important part in Batini magical practice. There are several reasons for this. The first is that alchemy is a subtle art, one that can operate under the cloak of science in those lands that have a suspicion of magic. It allows the sect to operate semi-openly without drawing undue attention from those it would rather avoid. More importantly, alchemy is the Doctrine of Unity in practice. Many alchemical formulae involve the changing of base elements into higher ones, and not merely lead into gold.

The Subtle Ones achieve these changes by exploiting the fundamental connectedness of all things within the Unity. By making slight alterations to the substance of a thing here or tweaking its accidents there, a mage can effect magnificent transformations. Indeed, the goal of alchemy is the understanding of how all things relate to one another. That too is the goal of the Ahl-i-Batin as a whole. In addition, alchemy is a metaphor for the transformation that all Batini seek to undergo — the change from one type of understanding to a higher one that recognizes the essential Unity of creation.

Another element of the Batini's subtlety is their proficiency in espionage and diplomacy. This is achieved partially through mundane skills like psychology and stealth and partially through magic. Like alchemy, psychology and stealth are attempts to use the nature of the world to change one thing into another. That is, a skilled diplomat uses a person's preconceptions and prejudices to produce a desired effect, while a spy does the same to conceal himself, knowing, for example, that a servant isn't considered worthy of notice and is thus an ideal subject for impersonation.

The Ahl-i-Batin are masters of recognizing the characteristics of others' mental lives and using them to achieve their desired ends. By the careful use of words and body language, a Subtle One can evoke a response that he desires. This recognition stems from the Batini's keen mental powers and heightened senses, all of which they train for through physical and spiritual discipline. Sometimes, these mages augment their abilities through alchemical or pharmacological means — another example of using the Unity of all to achieve a desired end.

AURA

The Batini's focus on the self makes them appear Aloof. Ahl-i-Batin mages radiate a detached aura, and can even appear haughty in some cases. Batini receive the Aura modifier to any roll that would be affected by such an attitude. This Aura can manifest in a feeling of distance, literal or figurative, between the mage and anyone nearby, or by a constant feeling (albeit false, typically) that the mage is not paying attention.

SUGGESTED TRAITS

Attributes: Manipulation, Perception, Intelligence

Abilities: Academics (specialty: Behavioralism), Empathy, Etiquette, Politics, Subterfuge

Backgrounds: Chantry, Mentor, Servants

STEREOTYPES

Messianic Voices: They destroy what they do not understand, and it is clear that they do not understand us.

Old Faith: They are relics of a bygone age who cling to a faith that has been superseded and fulfilled. Would that they recognized this and used their powers for higher purposes.

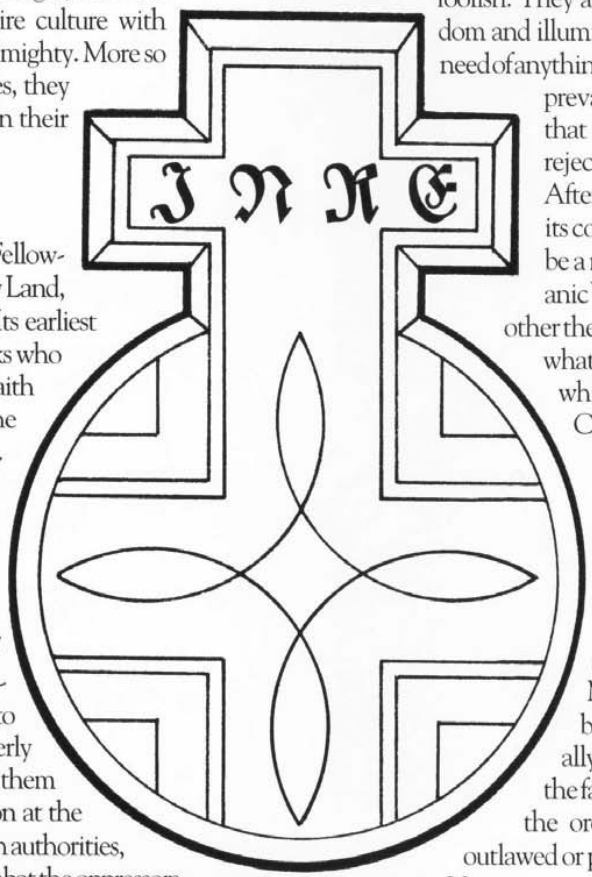
Order of Hermes: We could be allies if their pride did not blind them to the very secrets they seek.

Spirit-Talkers: They hear the call of the spirits but too often prefer to be servants than to be masters.

Valdaermen: There is a taint of evil about these infidels, which is why it is wisest to avoid them if possible and, if not, to best them at their own games.

Messianic Voices

Time stands still for no one. The oppressed of one age may become the mighty of another. So it was with the Messianic Voices. Once they were but one small note within a much larger chorus. Yet, their persistence and their faith in the Son of God proved capable of moving mountains. Whereas more respectable religious mages were consumed with their own private struggles, the Messianics grew stronger and their zeal spread like wildfire, winning an empire to the cause of Christ. Oppressed no longer, the Messianic Voices shaped an entire culture with their songs of praise to God Almighty. More so than any other group of mages, they hold the Dark Medieval age in their hands — for good or for ill.



Background

The Messianic Voices Fellowship owes its origin to the Holy Land, much like Christianity itself. Its earliest members were Jews and Greeks who had converted to the new faith after it was preached by the Apostles and their disciples. These early members of the Messianics possessed a zeal that few could match, along with a special connection to the divine. Many of these men and women received visions of angels and even of Christ himself, as had St. Paul on the road to Damascus. These visions utterly changed their lives, granting them the strength to face persecution at the hands of the Roman and Jewish authorities, as well as hidden powers to combat the oppressors. These earliest members of the order could perform miracles and other wonders — all because of the power of their faith in the Gospel.

The earliest members of the Messianic Voices soon realized that they were not the only men and women to work wonders through their faith. Others mages from a variety of other religions surrounded them, some of whom expressed interest (or dismay) at the appearance of the Messianic Voices. Initially, the faithful made few attempts at rapprochement with these other mages, believing them corrupted by evil and drawn to sin. In time, though, they acquiesced, much as Christianity did, realizing that they had to engage the world in order to win souls for Christ and his Church. As much as they feared the taint they might acquire as a result of entering the world that surrounded them, they also knew it was necessary to ensure the ultimate conclusion of God's plan for mankind.

In doing so, the faithful gained some converts, including influential individuals who opened up a new world to them, one in which other theists — from Jews to Egyptians to Greeks, among others — worked loosely in search of wisdom and illumination. The Messianic Voices saw this project as foolish. They already possessed the supreme wisdom and illumination in the Gospel and had no need of anything more. Nevertheless, cooler heads prevailed and re-emphasized the fact that the faithful could not continue to reject everything the world had to offer. After all, if God made the world and all its contents, rejecting it outright would be a rejection of God. Thus, the Messianic Voices slowly interacted with these other theistic mages and attempted to learn what they could from them, all the while attempting to win their souls for Christ.

As time passed, the Messianic Voices succeeded in their purpose. They both gained converts among the other theists — who called themselves by a variety of names, including the Singers — and among the general population. More and more influential people became Christians, until eventually even the emperor of Rome joined the faith. With this event, the history of the order changed forever. No longer outlawed or persecuted for their faith, the Messianic Voices enjoyed influence in even the highest places. It was thus only a matter of time before that influence translated into power within the theist community.

And so it did. Despite resistance from mages belonging to certain faiths (most notably the cult of Mithras), the order soon used its power to usurp control of the theists' loose organization, welding it into a more centralized body on the model of the Christian Church. The faithful swelled the ranks of the Curia and eventually even the office of the Pontifex Maximus. Within two hundred years of Constantine's conversion to the faith, the Messianic Voices became the dominant faction within the ranks of the Singers, effectively shutting their rivals out of power for the next millennium.

One of the great ironies of history is that, just as the Messianics achieved their greatest power and influence, they had already distanced themselves from the faith that had given them that power and influence. Contact with Roman civilization opened the faithful up to the philosophies current at the time, especially Stoicism and Neoplatonism. Encountering both provided the Messianic Voices with the vocabulary to codify their beliefs for the first time. Previously, they had lacked the sophistication to express their unique viewpoint, except through allusions to Scripture and tradition, both of which were unknown to outsiders. To engage the world, the order adopted its vocabulary and, in the process, a somewhat worldly outlook.

Doing so ultimately resulted in the heterodoxy to which the order now adheres. While the mundane Church moved on, jettisoning much of the baggage associated with Greco-Roman philosophy and warping its terminology to suit its needs, the Messianics did not follow suit. In men such as Origen, Tertullian and Clement, they found a philosophy that matched their deepest beliefs and they adopted it without hesitation. By this time, the faithful mages had become so certain of their own righteousness that they didn't question why the Church did not follow the same path as they. Supremely confident, the Messianics simply assumed the Church would one day correct its "errors" and return to the fold. They began to identify themselves and their beliefs with "true Christianity" — the pinnacle of arrogance.

The collapse of Rome helped to throw these concerns to the sidelines. With Europe in shambles, the Church was the only organization capable of holding civilization together. It needed all its sons and daughters to prevent an even darker age, including those prodigals whose views differed somewhat from official doctrine. The rise of feudal lords muddied the waters further. These potentates meddled in ecclesiastical affairs to serve their own ends, sometimes by sponsoring and protecting heterodox theologians whose opinions supported their policies. The Messianic Voices fell prey to such tendencies as well, particularly in Germany and France.

During this time, divisions grew within the order over numerous matters, including theology. A minority opposed the heterodoxy of the Messianic Voices, arguing that its effectiveness in bringing about God's plan would be hampered if it did not adhere to the one, holy, catholic and apostolic faith the mundane Church preached. This group, called the Inner Doctrine (later to be known as the Cabal of Pure Thought), believed in uniting all of humanity within one Church. Although the Messianics never formally adopted its views, it held great influence at various times in history, such as the Crusades, while at other times its sway receded.

The tension between these factions continues well into the 13th century, as the question of the order's relationship to the mundane Church becomes more acute. For too long, the Pontifex and the Curia have pushed aside these questions, hoping they would either disappear or resolve themselves peacefully. This does not look likely to happen. The mundane world is rocked with calls for ecclesiastical reform in both theology and praxis. In turn, counter-reform movements call for a return to orthodoxy, fearing the withdrawal of God's favor if "innovations" are introduced into the uncorrupted faith. Coupled with increasing centralization and the resurgence of long-suppressed theistic movements, it's a recipe for disaster.

The Messianic Voices remain powerful and influential, but that may not last for long. Its once-proud edifice is riddled with cracks and fissures.

Any one of them could become a fault line that destroys the entire order or diminishes its dominion. Thus, the next few years may well prove decisive. Can the Messianic Voices retain their position or will the 13th century see them fall from grace once and for all?

ORGANIZATION

Being a Christian order, the Messianic Voices derive their organizational structure from the Catholic Church and — ultimately — the long-dead Roman Empire. This fact makes the Messianics the most highly structured of the Dark Medieval age, with the possible exception of the Order of Hermes. In any event, this level of organization is essential, given the large number of mages within its fold. The Dark Medieval age is a time of great growth and power for the Messianic Voices, and this is reflected in the way it organizes itself and in the activities of its initiates.

The highest level of authority within the Messianic Voices is the Pontifex Maximus. As its name suggests, the title of "greatest bridge-builder" owes its existence to Roman times, when pagans dominated the order and molded it according to their own customs and traditions. Once Christian mages achieved ascendancy, they saw no need to rename the office, preferring instead to imbue it with a different meaning, according to the dictates of their own religion. This was to be the way of Christianity (and thus the Messianics): adopting pagan terms, offices and even festivals, and "baptizing" them in the name of God.

The Pontifex Maximus is the head of the Messianic Voices, a role that has existed for well over a millennium. He oversees the administration of the order as a whole, setting policy and conducting negotiation and diplomacy when necessary. The Pontifex is also the court of final appeal in disputes between individual Messianics. From his adytum in Rome, he handles the most important and pressing matters relating to the order and its members. Although not an absolute monarch in principle, the Pontifex often rules as such, taking a cue from the Church, whose Pope has slowly acquired ever-greater powers since the beginning of the Dark Medieval age. Consequently, the Pontifex is not a man to be trifled with and brooks little open dissent against his orders and dictates. There are some Messianics, particularly in southern France and Germany, who would prefer a less monarchical arrangement, but they hold their tongues for the time being.

Advising the Pontifex is the Curia, another holdover from Roman times. The Curia functions both as an administrative body and as a council from which the Pontifex draws his courtiers. Members of the Curia — called ministers — serve a variety of purposes within the Messianic Voices. The majority represents factions and geographical regions within the order, with the intention of giving the Pontifex a clearer understanding of the lower levels of hierarchy. Thus, a minister from Provence might advise the Pontifex on the situation in southern France, pointing out the repercussions of the order's not becoming involved in the Albigensian Crusade, for example.

Of course, it would be a mistake to assume that this concept of representation the ministers embody is the least bit democratic. For one, the Pontifex need not heed the advice he's given. If he chooses to devote the order's energies to defending Cathar mages in France against the recommendation of his Provençal minister, he can certainly do so. Moreover, ministers hold their positions at the leisure of the Pontifex, who chooses them from among the faithful of the Messianic Voices. He can dismiss them at any time and frequently does so if they displease or offend him. Consequently, the Pontifex is often surrounded by handpicked yes-men who give a skewed impression of the wider world — a recipe for disaster.

A minority of Curial ministers serve in more overt roles. These ministers head up one of the permanent "offices" of the order. These offices are bureaucracies that oversee an area of the order's work. For example, the Office of the Academy handles the induction and instruction of new faithful into the order, while the Office of the Inquisition looks into crimes committed by members of the Messianic Voices. Other offices exist as well. Most wield considerable influence within the Curia and among the rank and file of the order, which is why the positions are so coveted. Like other Curia ministers, heads of offices are chosen by the Pontifex and often warp their agendas to suit his wishes.

Beneath the Curia are the exarchs, sometimes called "bishops," especially in areas such as Italy and Iberia, where the Church is strong. The term derives from Byzantium, whose military governors, or exarchs, once ruled over large swaths of territory and ruled with an iron fist. Messianic exarchs follow in that tradition in more ways than one. Most exarchs are tied a territory, their primary sanctuary being housed in a major city within it. In his realm, the exarch is supreme ruler, answering only to the Curia and the Pontifex, from whom he derives his power. Like the Pontifex, exarchs sit in judgment over lower-ranking mages and implement policy.

The lowest level of the true hierarchy consists of Presbyters, sometimes called priests or elders (the latter term being especially popular in places where heretical movements are strong). Presbyters act as agents of the exarchs and are typically the mages on the scene in most regions. They act as the visible face of the order and tend to the needs of the faithful as best they can. Often, this means traveling to an exarch's sanctuary to plead for assistance or funds or to seek intervention in local affairs. In general, though, Presbyters function as local leaders and organize the order's activities on a small scale.

Rank and file members of the Messianic Voices are either Catechumens (if new to the order) or Disciples. A

Catechumen is usually apprenticed to a more experienced mage (called a Praecept), who instructs him in the ways of the order and prepares him for his eventual initiation, after which the Catechumen is considered a full member of the faithful. Praecepts often develop close relationships with their Catechumens, not unlike that of godparents with their charges. These relationships can sometimes last for many years. The ranks of the exarchs and the Curia are replete with examples former Catechumens whose Praecepts have granted them sinecures within the order.

Disciples constitute the bulk of the faithful. Among them are ordinary mages who simply wish to pursue their own interests, as well as those who lack the skills or ambition necessary to become Presbyters. There's a subtle elitism within the Messianic Voices — or its upper echelons anyway — that looks upon "mere Disciples" as laggards whose devotion is somehow wanting. So far, this elitism hasn't harmed the workings of the order, but there are voices being raised against it, voices that may one day bring about a rebellion against the hierarchy.

philosophy

The Messianic Voices owe their current strength and influence to the power of the Christian faith, whose teachings they have adopted as their own philosophy. The irony in their doing so is that the order's brand of Christianity is at odds with that espoused by the Catholic Church of the West, as well as the Orthodox churches of the East. If anything, the Messianics owe more to early Fathers of the Church, such as Origen and Clement of Alexandria, than to later thinkers — evidence that it hasn't fully shaken its pre-Christian origins.

These early ecclesiastical writers were deeply influenced by Neoplatonic philosophy, particularly in the area of the perfectibility of mankind. The Alexandrian theologian Origen, for example, believed that humanity could, by a life of grace and virtue, participate in God's divinity to such an extent as to become deified. If the model of human perfection is Jesus Christ — God becoming man — then does it not follow that man must in some fashion become God in order to achieve his ultimate end?

The Messianics certainly believe so, although many are at great pains to point out that Origen — branded a heretic by later generations — is not the only Church Father to hold such a view. Eastern Christians, including St. Gregory of Nyssa for example, adopted similar views and did so without the opprobrium of ecclesiastical officials. The order thus believes that it's possible to hold the view that mankind can be perfected and become godlike without necessarily falling prey to heresy. That the mundane Church, especially in the 13th century, disagrees is of little concern to them. Their own experiences suggest that it is they, not the Church, who recognize the truth, a truth they hope the Church will one day share.

At the same time, the Messianic Voices espouse many other beliefs that run counter to the mundane Church. The perfectibility of man, for example, is of a piece with a belief in the general restoration of all things to the original favor of God — even sinful creatures, such as Satan and his demons. This belief, called *apokatastasis*, was condemned by the Council of Constantinople during the reign of Justinian I. The condemnation has been upheld ever since in both the East and the West. The order argues that the condemnation is based on a misunderstanding of the belief, one they would like to rectify if given the opportunity. Unfortunately, mages who preach a "proper form" of the teaching are just as likely to arouse the attention of Commoner bishops and inquisitors as are heretics who preach the supposedly "debased form" that brought about ecclesiastical censure seven hundred years earlier.

Both of these characteristic beliefs give the Messianic Voices a distinctly optimistic outlook. They firmly believe that, whatever humanity's present difficulties and tribulations, all is as it should be according to the plan of divine providence — including their own participation in its resolution. By and large, the faithful believe that they are living in a world carefully constructed by God to serve His own inscrutable purposes. At the end of time, God will be all in all, and the Messianics see it as their duty to participate in the unique role the Almighty has given them in this plan.

In principle, this belief means that the Messianic Voices recognize the world and everything in it as inherently good, even if some creatures have fallen from their original goodness through perverse action. In practice, though, the faithful mages are often decidedly anti-materialistic, in the sense that they view matter as an impediment to spiritual development of the sort they see as mankind's highest goal. Taking a cue from Christian ascetics, some mages reject the physical world as the realm of Satan and avoid succumbing to its temptations. The Pontifex and Curia oppose these extremists, arguing that it is possible to live in the world without becoming of the world. That the Pontifex and Curia live within splendorous adytums and sanctuaries makes this a hard position to preach.

FAILINGS

The Messianic Voices possess all the faults and weaknesses of the mundane Church and more. The Messianics' most pressing problem is the conflict that exists between its powerful Christian majority and the minority that still hold true to old ways. These foot-draggers, many of them adherents to Roman or older religions, argue that the order's goal of unifying humanity within the glory of the divine should not be subordinated to the beliefs of any single faith. Rather, the Messianics should seek the underlying unity that exists

beneath all religions, as the ancient philosophers did, and use that as the basis for unifying mankind.

The majority cares little for such criticisms. After all, did not these pagans once foist their religions upon the entire order? Did they not seek to identify unity with adherence to their own faiths? One need only look at the terminology and traditions of the order to see the influence Roman religious practices had in past centuries. Moreover, the majority points to Christianity as a unifying force the likes of which the order has never seen. Neither Egyptian polytheism nor Greco-Roman philosophy ever succeeded in bringing the whole of humanity closer to the divine than Christianity has done in just a few short centuries. To suggest otherwise reveals a dangerous sort of elitism that the order rejects.

Of course, elitism is precisely one of the order's other failings. The speed with which the Christian faction dominated the Messianic Voices has put more than a little swagger in its step. Many look with derision upon the older faiths within the order, such as Mithraism or even Judaism, seeing them as relics from a bygone age whose adherents are unwilling to accept change. In addition, the power and influence the order has gained since the ascendancy of the Church is readily apparent in the Pontifex and Curia. They frequently rule without consultation and have little time for those they consider beneath them — including the Commoner faithful. This tendency has brought about a call for reforms within the order, leading to clashes between the *ancien regime* and idealistic mages who yearn for a return to the "original simplicity" of the Messianic Voices.

The calls for reform have, in turn, only encouraged a further centralization of power in the hands of the Pontifex, Curia and exarchs. If they had little patience for dissent previously, the situation has grown even more dire in recent years. The Office of the Inquisition was originally created to look into genuine abuses of authority on the part of members of the order. Now, it is the Office that abuses its power, as it harasses and investigates reformers and their allies. Anyone who too publicly questions the actions of the hierarchy may draw the attention of the Inquisition and the penalties that come with it. Needless to say, this situation makes it even less likely that the Messianic Voices will look favorably upon entreaties from non-Christian mages who wish to avoid its censure even if they share some of its goals.

Theories and Practices

The Messianic Voices see themselves not so much as powerful individuals so much as blessed ones. That is, the faithful don't see themselves as the originators of the wonders done in their presence. Rather, they are simply the agents of God and His saints and angels, who act through them. This is very much in keeping with Christian belief, in that God alone is the source of all power and goodness in the universe and that no effort on the part of His creatures can achieve either without His cooperation. Thus, the wonders the faithful achieve occur because God wills them to occur through the medium of the mage, not because God is in any way bound to fulfill the prayers of those who make them.

This distinction is occasionally lost on outsiders and even many members of the order, who do not grasp its full meaning. Practices such as the invoking of the saints or angels, for example, only cloud the situation even further. When a mage calls upon St. Luke (patron saint of doctors) to aid him as he attempts to heal the grievous wounds of a comrade, an outside observer may well think that the mage has compelled St. Luke to act according to his wishes. From their perspective, the order of events is as follows: the comrade is injured, the mage calls upon St. Luke, the comrade is healed. That certainly looks as if the saints are nothing more than magical beings who, when propitiated with the proper phrases and sacrifices, do the bidding of the invoker.

The error in this perspective is that it's temporally out of order. The Messianic Voices believe that God is both omnipotent and omniscient. That means that nothing in the universe happens without either His action or His knowledge. God created and arranged the universe, including all of the events that occur within it. Yet, He also gave

MAGICAL SAINTS

Neither orthodox Christianity nor the Messianic Voices consider the miracles wrought by saints and mages to be magic. In their view, magic is explicitly forbidden by Scripture and tradition, and magic is also an example of demonic influence in the world. Nevertheless, there's no question that many saints have reputations as thaumaturges or wonder workers. Chief among them is St. Nicholas of Myra (or of Bari), a fourth-century bishop renowned for the unusual miracles wrought during his time on earth.

These saints, who include other luminaries such as St. Gregory of Neocaesarea (who was converted to Christianity by Origen, ironically enough) and the recently deceased St. Francis of Assisi, performed miracles like other holy men and women (and mages), but do so in unusual ways that seemingly serve no purpose in the divine plan they supposedly represent. Examples include talking to animals and the invocation of natural disasters just to prove a point of debate. Unlike more traditional healers or prophets, thaumaturges come close to the unpredictable image of magicians, using their God-given powers in strange and sometimes whimsical fashions. Even so, both the Church and the Messianic Voices insist that all these actions are part of God's plan — whether we understand it or not.

his highest creatures — man and the angels — free will. These concepts may appear incompatible, but they are not, at least as far as the order is concerned. It's in resolving the apparent conflict between God's omnipotence and omniscience and free will that one can understand the Messianic Voices' understanding of magic.

In arranging the world (and knowing it), God allows for free will. That is, He has created opportunities for creatures either to accept or to reject His aid. Whatever decision they make, they do so freely and without His compulsion, even if He knows beforehand what choice they will make. Thus, mages are men and women who play a special role in God's plan for the universe. They are extraordinary individuals who choose, at the appropriate moments, to act with God's assistance (or the assistance of His angels and saints, who are just another conduit to God's own power). Thus, a healer who asks for St. Luke's assistance in healing a comrade isn't compelling the patron of doctors to give him magical powers. Rather, he is acting, at the appropriate time, in a manner God has foreordained as a means by which He will allow a portion of His power to affect His creation.

The question then arises: if God knows beforehand whether someone will choose or reject His aid, why did God create a world in which any given individual rejects it rather than accepts it? Doesn't this make God culpable in the damnation of those souls who consistently reject him? Although this is a bigger problem for the mundane Church, the Messianic Voices point to their belief in *apokatastasis* as an escape clause. Because all creatures will eventually, after an appropriate period of purification, be returned to the bosom of the Almighty, this isn't a major issue for them. That *apokatastasis* still doesn't explain why any creature should suffer torment, even for a short while, when God could have willed it otherwise, is a matter few mages take up.

Another common misunderstanding revolves around why many faithful prefer to invoke the saints and angels rather than God himself, especially in light of the preceding explanation. The fact is that, like mages themselves, saints and angels are just another means by which God works through the world. St. Stephen is, in fact, no more capable of working wonders than a member of the Messianic Voices, despite his vaunted position within the hierarchy of Heaven. However, St. Stephen is certainly better known, particularly among those over whom he has patronage, such as deacons and stonemasons. Consequently, they are more apt to call upon his assistance, as he has a connection to the matter at hand. Even more importantly, a saint is a glorified human being and thus more accessible to entreaties than the Almighty — at least from a human point of view. The society of the Dark Medieval age is a hierarchical one, as is Heaven. Just as the faithful would rarely go directly to the king to ask for assistance in their own affairs, many would not go directly to God. It's a question of hierarchy and one's place within it, something that should never be overlooked in the Dark Medieval age.

The Messianic Voices rarely speak of their actions as "magic," preferring instead the term "theurgy," which means "the action of God." That term more accurately sums up what they believe they are doing—providing God the means to act directly in his creation. Interestingly, theurgy is a term with an ancient pedigree, going all the way back to the days of Neoplatonists such as Proclus, Apuleius, and even Plotinus. The Greco-Roman thinkers exerted great influence over the pagan precursors of the Messianic Voices and continue to do so even now. Early Christians condemned theurgy as traffic with demonic powers and that attitude remains extant in the 13th century, adding further to the ironies surrounding the order's relationship with Christianity.

AURA

The Messianic Voices shine with Glory. The light of the divine radiates from their very eyes, and their devotion is obvious. Messianic Voices receive their Aura modifier to any roll that would be affected by appearing faithful or devout. This Aura often manifests as a disturbingly eager demeanor or a scent of incense.

SUGGESTED TRAITS

Attributes: Charisma, Wits
Abilities: Awareness, Empathy, Expression, Theology
Backgrounds: Allies, Chantry, Destiny, Influence

STEREOTYPES

Ahl-i-Batin: The Moor is not to be trusted, however much he may claim to worship the same God — doubly so if he is a Subtle One.

Old Faith: Blasphemous pagans! They recognize God's immanence but not His transcendence and mistake Creation for the Creator.

Order of Hermes: Scripture says that "pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before the fall." No truer words have ever been written about the Hermetics, whose arrogance blinds them to their proper place in God's plan.

Spirit-Talkers: Crude and barbarous, their actions nevertheless reveal God's presence even in heathen lands. If only they could learn the ways of civilization and true religion!

Valdaermen: "From the fury of the Northmen, O Lord, deliver us."

The Old Faith

The Dark Medieval age may be a time of Christian ascendancy, but that ascendancy isn't total. Even in the 13th century, there are nations in Europe that have not yet succumbed to the power of the Church, such as Lithuania and its Baltic neighbors. Despite the determined efforts of priests and kings, paganism remains a vital part of human society, providing what Christianity cannot: comfort, tangible benefits and a connection to the past. Where there is paganism, there is the Old Faith, a loose collection of mages who cling to their ancestral magical traditions in the face of growing Christian might. Part freedom fighters and part stewards of the past, mages of the Old Faith fight a losing battle against those who can see nothing of value in the beliefs and rites that have sustained rural folk for thousands of years. For them, the end of the world is now.



Background

As a coalition of pagan groups, the Old Faith is not very old. The magical traditions that form its backbone are ancient indeed, though going back thousands of years, perhaps to the time before the rise of civilization as it is known today. The Old Faith's constituent groups all share legends of how a god or gods granted them their unique vision and gifted them with the ability to shape the world according to their wishes. Although the details differ from group to group, a common thread among them is that the gift of magical ability is conditional on its practitioner using it to bring humanity closer to the rhythms and pulse of life itself, the highest achievement of the divine. This belief forms the basis on which later groups — and the Old Faith itself — were formed.

With the rise of civilization, the pagan precursors of the Old Faith found their assigned task ever more difficult. Before cities and permanent settlements arose, humanity could more easily remain in touch with the natural order. Entire societies were built around the development and change of the seasons. Human beings were attuned to the natural cycles, as the gods had wished. But, the inexorable rise of civilization — though a profound testament to the divinity within mankind — inadvertently divorced humanity from the very things that the gods wished them to remember and learn from.

Thus did the work of pagan mages become more difficult. Men felt less attachment to the land and did not heed its wisdom. Instead of recognizing that nature is a great cycle, one in which life and death, pleasure and pain are but two sides of the same coin, human beings came to embrace one and fear the other. The insight that comes from this recognition would have been lost forever had it not been for a group of brave mystics and seers who preserved the old ways. Known to history as the Aeduna, these men and women were throwbacks to prehistoric times when humanity's confidence in its own abilities did not preclude humility before the awesome power of nature.

The Aeduna became the living repository of the wisdom of the past. Some pagan mages who see themselves as continuing that same mission in the Dark Medieval age thus prefer the name "Living Faith" for their tradition. In any event, the Aeduna were moderately successful in their intentions. They succeeded in preserving the old ways so that civilization's advance could not cause humanity to completely forget them. Yet, it was clear that the Aeduna were fighting a rear-guard action. They were unable to restore the ancient beliefs to the pride of place they once held. Therefore, they retreated into the shadows of the new, civilized religions that grew with the rise of cities and empires. The old ways survived, viewed under the guise of superstitions and folk wisdom, and preserved a part of human heritage that might otherwise have been forgotten.

Over time, the Aeduna proved somewhat more successful. Their infiltration of new religions influenced the latecomers' growth and development so that the old ways

became even more secure. This was particularly true in Greece, Rome and Britain. Britain proved very important, for its geographical isolation made it an excellent place in which to create a large-scale repository, in case other efforts failed. Britain was intended as a backup for the more ambitious endeavors centered in Greece and Rome. The Aeduna felt that, as cultures, the Greeks and Romans stood good chances of growing and spreading their influence throughout the world. Using their religions as a cloak, the Aeduna might take part in that growth and influence, bringing their ancient ways to the forefront once more.

The Aeduna worked in a variety of guises, primarily through chthonic deities including Hestia/Vesta, Artemis/Diana and Demeter/Ceres. These mages saw their goals within reach as first the Greeks and then the Romans came to dominate the lands around the Mediterranean Sea and then into Asia. Unfortunately, the Greeks proved too philosophical a culture, and the strength of their belief in the gods waned with the centuries. The Romans were a pragmatic and practical people, more given to superstition than the Greeks, but whose pragmatism manifested in religious eclecticism. They abandoned and adopted deities with astounding regularity, making it difficult for the Aeduna to exert any concerted control over the culture as a whole — that is, until Christianity made its appearance.



At first a persecuted religion from an unimportant province, Christianity rapidly gained strength and influence throughout the Roman Empire. Within 300 years of its founder's demise, the faith claimed the emperor of Rome as an adherent. Although a serious blow by itself to the Aeduna's efforts, worse still was the fact that the Christians had their own mages — the Messianic Voices — who slowly asserted themselves. In time, Christian mages used their influence to suppress paganism by closing temples and academies that promoted "heathen beliefs." When Messianic Voices learned of the Aeduna, they did their best to suppress them as well, seeing them as a fifth column that weakened the Empire at the time when it most needed strength. This position became more pronounced as Rome was beset by enemies on all sides; it became fashionable to blame pagans for the Empire's growing weakness.

This scapegoating cost the Aeduna many of its members and shattered their already tenuous influence. Nevertheless, Rome fell and the remnants of the Aeduna retreated into the wilds of the world to escape further persecution. The grand experiment that the Aeduna had undertaken had failed — except in Britain. There, the grasp of Rome had always been light. The old ways remained integral to the lives of many prominent citizens, even after Christianity had appeared on the scene. Pagan mages frequently served as advisors to kings and chieftains and continued to do so well into the era of Christian ascendancy. When the island was invaded by fierce barbarians from the north, pagans and

Christians made common cause to defend Britain — a rare instance of cooperation.

Unfortunately, this model was never emulated elsewhere. Christianity remained suspicious of paganism, confusing it with Infernalism and similar dark arts. Even in Britain, cooperation proved fleeting and practitioners of the Old Faith retreated into the wilderness once more. This process was repeated over and over again throughout Europe and Asia. The ancient traditions survived because of the dedication of a few loyal mages and their allies, but, except in rare instances, they never achieved the prominence they had once held in the past.

Only recently have the fortunes of the Old Faith begun to rise. As heresy and rebellion become more commonplace, Christendom has become extremely inward looking. Inquisitors are more concerned with heterodox co-religionists than they are with wise women and bearded sages preaching the old ways — not to say that paganism is safe from persecution, but it is no longer a central focus of its foes. This has given the Old Faith a much needed respite and the opportunity to regroup. Contacts between disparate pagan groups are becoming more common and the dream of stepping out into the light draws closer with each year. The day when the Old Faith might reassert itself, although perhaps decades or even centuries in the future, is nevertheless coming. When that day finally arrives, the Old Faith mages hope that mankind will once more rediscover a wisdom it has denied for too long.

ORGANIZATION

The Old Faith is loosely organized and necessarily so. For one, its membership has dwindled in most European lands to such an extent that a more rigid hierarchy — even if it were desired — would be impossible. More importantly, the Old Faith is a collection of many different magical traditions and belief systems, not all of whom agree on the best way to order their affairs. Despite their shared opposition to the Church and persecution by it, a Gallic druid and a Russian devotee of Perun don't always see eye to eye. Consequently, the Old Faith is one of the most chaotic of the Mystic Fellowships, at least when considered on the grand scale.

Compared to the Messianic Voices or the Order of Hermes, the Old Faith looks like anarchy. There is no central authority of any sort, and individual groups of mages are pretty much free to act as they see fit, according to their own wishes and the strictures of their particular pagan faiths. National rivalries and prejudices also hamper greater coordination. Memories are long among these mages and slights incurred hundreds (or even thousands) of years ago are not easily forgotten. For example, surviving Roman pagans may find themselves distrusted or even reviled by their Germanic counterparts, who view the Romans as the destroyers of their civilization. The situation is even more charged in the Baltic region, where rivalries between various local ethnicities adds to the turmoil caused by Polish and German colonists who've come to the area. It's enough to make an outsider question whether the Old Faith has any hope for the future at all.

Such a view would be shortsighted, however. The Old Faith has not survived into the Dark Medieval age simply because its enemies have been incompetent. What the Old Faith lacks in central authority, it more than makes up for in depth of penetration. That is, paganism is deeply ingrained in rural culture. Even those farmers and other peasants who consider themselves devout Christians, attend Mass daily and venerate the saints, are not averse to turning to wise women and men for charms and herbal remedies. It simply never occurs to these folk that what they are doing is in any way opposed to the Christian faith they profess in church. This gives the Old Faith an important base in which to survive and prosper, as its mages — most of them anyway — need not draw the attention of their enemies unless they act rashly or in a way that concerns the peasants who accept their services.

At the same time, the Old Faith is aided by a core of believers who recognize the full extent of the tradition they serve. These are the men and women from whom the wise people arise in the first place. Consisting mostly of closely knit families and clans, these people hold on to their ancestral beliefs. They may adopt a veneer of Christianity to hide their true natures, or they may exist in a locale so far removed from European civilization that this is unnecessary. Whatever the case, these individuals are the standard bearers of the Old Faith, who have kept alive its flame for centuries. They are the ones who look to the faith as more than a means of blessing crops and keeping away evil spirits. For them, it is a way of life intimately tied to the proper ordering of the world and its various elements.

Within these families, authority is primarily constituted in elders, with men and women typically sharing it. Of course, this a broad generalization and the exact details differ from family to family and tradition to tradition. In general, though, Old Faith communities tend to be less authoritarian and patriarchal than most medieval European ones, but that's not always the case. Many pagan faiths have clear lines of authority in which members of a particular class (such as the druids, for example) exercise great control. Others relegate men and women to very different spheres on the belief that each manifests unique gifts that should not be unduly mixed for fear of upsetting the natural order.

In the end, the primary constant between the different pagan groups within the Old Faith is the importance of *blood*, which is to say family ties. As Christianity grew more powerful, the Old Faith survived only in a few clans for whom tradition was more

important than political influence. These families kept the flame of the old ways alive, sometimes at great cost to themselves. Not surprisingly, they are the backbone of the Old Faith in the Dark Medieval age and exercise tremendous authority within their regions. This is the tradition's greatest strength and weakness.

philosophy

Despite its disunity of organization and diffusion through several cultures, the Old Faith does possess something approaching a coherent philosophy. That's not to say that every member will espouse the same beliefs in precisely the same terms — far from it — but there are sufficient commonalities to allow for some generalizations.

Broadly speaking, all mages of the Old Faith revere life in all its forms. Of course, reverence takes many forms and does not necessarily mean pacifism or an unwillingness to use other living things for one's own ends (although it can in some cases). Rather, reverence means that these mages view life as a great mystery, one worthy of meditation and investigation. The magic of the Old Faith derives its power from living things and they are source of great wonder to its adherents.

Furthermore, the Old Faith believes that nature is replete with symbols and signs that teach humanity about valuable truths. The ordering of the seasons, the patterns of weather and the growth of animals and plants all contain within them seeds of the divine. If one only takes the time to see these things and meditate upon them, it's possible to participate in a wisdom that has been forgotten — or at least unseen — for generations. This is why the Old Faith holds the wilderness in such high regard (and why its adherents are called pagans, from the Latin for "rural folk"), as it is a wellspring of knowledge free from civilization's distractions.

It would be a mistake, though, to think the Old Faith is opposed to civilization in any absolute sense. Its believers do not see any incongruity between city life and the tenets of their faith. Rather, they believe that civilization dulls the senses and clouds the mind to prevent them from seeing and hearing the lessons that the natural world — of which humanity is an important part — teaches. It is harder to live a good pagan life in a city than it is in the woodlands, but it is not impossible. After all, the skills men use in building cities are not unknown in the natural world, for many beasts act in similar manners.

The Old Faith's primary concern is that man has divorced himself from nature — from Life itself — in a way that is harmful to his spiritual growth and well-being. Nature is a coincidence of opposites and includes many things — such as death, pain and even cruelty — that humanity would prefer not to acknowledge. Civilization makes it easier to do so, and herein lies the problem. Unless people accept the true nature of life and all that it contains, they will forever remain unbalanced and out of synch with its rhythms. This situation has dire repercussions not merely for mankind, but for all of nature, which is why the Old Faith works to change it.

The Old Faith keeps a very open mind about the outward forms of worship and magic. That is, its mages don't take a great deal of interest in how one acknowledges the passage of the seasons, for example. That an adherent acknowledges them and learns from them is more important than how one does so. Similarly, there's a fair bit of ecumenism even about doctrinal matters, as might be expected in a Fellowship that's actually a coalition of many smaller groups. Some mages are, of course, quite dogmatic and will assert the primacy of their own particular interpretation of the old ways over another, but that's not the norm in the Dark Medieval age. The situation is still too precarious for such stances to be commonplace. Indeed, there are some adherents who recognize truth even in Christianity and Islam, based on the fact that each of these faiths possesses pagan elements that have been recast according to a new understanding. Although such a position isn't popular in the Old Faith (never mind Christianity or Islam), it's proof that conflict isn't the only possible conclusion to the thorny issues confronting pagan mages.

failings

As already noted, the Old Faith is a fractious and disunited grouping of related magical traditions. Although this makes it difficult for church or state authorities to stamp it out completely, it also makes it difficult for the group to act in a concerted fashion. The Old Faith rarely does anything as a whole; only the most dire threats could overcome its systemic disunity. More so than most Fellowships, the Old Faith is torn by local and national rivalries, as well as age-old grudges whose origins are unknown except to the eldest of the group — and perhaps not even to them. This prevents the Old Faith from achieving anything close to large-scale success. Instead, it must be content with its influence in small rural areas where its mages can act with greater impunity. Only in the Baltic lands does the Old Faith come close to widespread influence and power.

Related to this failing is the primacy of family-based authority. Although it's perfectly understandable that such a power structure would arise in the disparate and persecuted Old Faith, it's not immediately conducive to inclusion of outsiders. More so than the Messianic Voices or the Order of Hermes (which are frequently branded "authoritarian"), it's very hard for newcomers to assume positions of influence within the Old Faith if they're not already part of the families and clans that determine its destiny. In principle, any man can become a priest and gain influence within the Messianic Voices, but a similar avenue does not exist within many Old Faith groups. Instead, a mage is

either born into the right family or he isn't. If he's not, he must be content with dutifully following the orders of the family elders like everyone else. Such a mage may have some input into the decisions of the group, of course. It'll simply carry less weight than members of these pagan "royal" families.

Not surprisingly, this situation has created rifts within the Old Faith, between diehard traditionalists and younger members who wish to accommodate the current state of affairs in the world. The young mages argue that the old families have simply aped the forms of Christian society, producing a social order in which there are nobles and commoners and never the twain shall meet. They further charge that the Old Faith must grow and prosper, as all living things do. The old families and elders respond that the situation is still too dangerous to consider unproven courses of action. The Old Faith would never have survived the fall of Rome and the rise of the Church if it had entrusted its fate to untested newcomers. This dispute threatens to boil over into a full-blown revolt, which is a source of consternation for the elders.

The nature of the Old Faith's rituals is another source of difficulty. Although there's no doubting their efficacy and antiquity, they are clearly from another age. The use of blood, scarification and other seemingly brutal methods are out of step with the rest of European society. In itself, that's not a real problem. It becomes such when outsiders learn of their practice, however. Most peasants are quite content to accept potions and charms from a wise woman without question. Few, however, would turn a blind eye to human sacrifice or dancing naked around a bonfire. As cities and civilization expand, the Old Faith must increasingly go underground to avoid attracting the attention of inquisitors and witch-hunters. Some elders see this as a concession to Christianity, a gradual admission that the Old Faith is doomed, whereas others view it in pragmatic terms alone. Whatever the case, it's another source of turmoil among the already troubled pagan religions that make up this tradition.

Theories and Practice

Like the traditions that make it up, the Old Faith is diverse when it comes to the magical rituals and practices it employs. To some degree, how an Old Faith mage performs his magic is a function of his culture and upbringing rather than a devotion to some abstract principle shared by all members of the Fellowship. Thus, a devotee of the Cybele in southern Italy will practice magic very differently than would a worshipper of Cernunnos in France, even if each holds to certain beliefs in common about the sacredness of nature and humanity's relation to it.

That is, of course, why the Old Faith can be considered a single magical tradition at all. Its external practices differ from group to group and sometimes even from mage to mage, each one acting according to his own understanding of the tradition's beliefs. The underlying beliefs that animate these actions are much more unified, however, at least on the theoretical level. To understand the various rituals that the Old Faith uses, it's important to look at the beliefs that transcend particular traditions and that can be found throughout its membership.

Old Faith beliefs run in two related strands. The less important of the two is the recognition of the past as a Golden Age. To pagans, the rise of Christianity has been a turn for the worse. In their view, history has taken a wrong path, one that has resulted in much suffering and destruction. It's also brought about the downfall of mankind from the higher state that it once possessed, when heroes and magicians were more

Pagan Traditions

The Storyteller may find it useful to know some of the more important pagan traditions extant in the Dark Medieval age. Although far from exhaustive, the following list is a good starting point for chronicles in which the Old Faith figures prominently. Other groups may, of course, be added to suit the needs of the chronicle and the wishes of the Storyteller.

Greco-Roman: Extant primarily in the Italian peninsula and in cities old enough to have existed in Roman times, Greco-Roman branches of the Old Faith center around deities of hearth, home and hunting. Some have adopted elements of mystery cults, whereas others eschew such admixtures as having polluted the purity of the ancient ways.

Celtic: Druidism and related pagan traditions remain powerful in the British Isles and in parts of France (such as Brittany). This tradition acknowledges many gods of the natural world and has a strong hierarchy of priests and lore masters. Blood sacrifice, including humans, is an important part of its rites.

Baltic: A holdout in the face of Christianity, Baltic paganism remains strong and vital in the Dark Medieval age. Its adherents worship many nature gods and recognize the importance of intermediary spirits as their servitors. The Teutonic Knights of Germany have launched a northern crusade against the Balts, and many Old Faith mages fight in this conflict.

Slavic: Primitive and brutal by comparison to Greco-Roman or even Celtic paganism, the Slavic tradition is powerful among the peasantry of Russia and the Balkans. Deeply tied to the earth and its cycles, it acknowledges several powerful gods and has a decidedly dark cast to it. Outsiders frequently view it as a gloomy faith that's almost incompatible with the zest for life at the core of its beliefs.

commonplace and human beings set their eyes on great deeds and affirmations of life.

Consequently, the Old Faith views the past with feelings that mix nostalgia with deep longing. For them, it's not simply a question of paganism's position within the Dark Medieval age that's frustrating (although it is). It's also a matter of the general state of mankind. The Old Faith sees the world as less magical than it once was, in both literal and figurative terms. Where once men contended with gods and heroic actions were the letter of the day, there is now nothing but squalor and degradation. Even the Old Faith itself has fallen from its previous heights to producing love potions and fertility charms — instead of forging powerful witch-swords in dragon's fire.

The Old Faith's magic is diverse, given the large number of traditions and cultures that make it up. There are numerous elements common to all of them and that serve as the basis for what cohesiveness the Mystic Fellowship possesses, however. Foremost among them is the acknowledgement of the primacy of life. Old Faith mages harness this primacy through fertility rites, dances and other acts to tie themselves and their followers into the great cycle of which they are all a part. Similarly, they use anything else that affirms life's primacy — the seasons, the weather, sexuality, health, emotion — as the basis for their rituals and magic working. The key to each is the acknowledgement that these things are a part of mankind, just as mankind is a part of them. Life is a circle that folds in on itself, and everything is contained within its wheel.

A corollary to this idea is that life isn't always pleasant or joyous. Sometimes, it is downright unsavory. Yet, human beings cannot simply walk away from this unpleasantness or turn their backs on it. That's what civilization teaches and is its fundamental flaw. Just as no one questions why nature should provide us with food to eat, neither should they wonder why we should die or suffer pain. These elements are all part of life and that cannot be changed. To acknowledge one without the other is to hold an immature view of life, one that believes you can get something for nothing.

The Old Faith also holds that human beings cannot run from their true natures. To deny what one really is can result only in bad things. So much of what human beings are has been branded "base" and considered taboo by civilization. Old Faith mages believe that man's failure to give vent to his instinctual drives has divorced him from nature and created an imbalance that echoes throughout the universe. Only by embracing passion, emotion and animal drives can the balance be restored and humanity given access to the power that exists within itself. The Old Faith does not believe in limiting the behavior of mankind if it also means limiting his potential as well. This is why so many outsiders fear and hate the old ways and do whatever they can to destroy them.

When performing magical rites, mages of the Old Faith use anything that connects them to the natural world as their tools. Because they believe in the connectedness of all things, they employ tools that bear some relationship to the effect they hope to achieve. Consequently, blood — even sacrifices — is a powerful tool for affecting living things. Blood is the basis of animal and human life, which is why it should be used with great care; it has much potential for misuse. Similarly, herbal mixtures and potions are common as well. The Old Faith preserves generations of hearth wisdom about the powers of plants and how they can be used to achieve certain ends. Bodily movements, such as dances, are also common tools, as they allow the mage to physically imitate the rhythms and motions of the universe he hopes to harness. In the end, the key is to find the means to connect oneself with the natural world and use sympathy to draw forth the power that comes from that connection.

AURA

Members of the Old Faith are uncompromising. They are taught that life is harsh and that one must be prepared to struggle, and this Brutality is reflected in their Auras. Old Faith mages receive their Aura modifier to any roll that would be affected by appearing threatening and unwilling to back down. This Aura of Brutality might manifest as a scent of blood or the feeling that the mage is looming threateningly, not matter what her body language suggests.

SUGGESTED TRAITS

Attributes: Stamina, Charisma, Wits

Abilities: Awareness, Athletics, Crafts, Hearth Wisdom, Herbalism

Backgrounds: Cray, Familiar

STEREOTYPES

Ahl-i-Batin: They, too, face persecution because their beliefs do not match those of the powerful, but we have nothing else in common. Their Creator is as alien to us as that of the Christians.

Messianic Voices: How quickly the persecuted become the persecutor!

Order of Hermes: Fools! They misunderstand their relationship to the world, thinking they can command it as if that were truly within their power.

Spirit-Talkers: They know more than we'd like to give them credit for, but there remains something frightening about them and we dare not approach too closely.

Valdaermen: We have much in common with them; they are our northern brothers and sisters. I only wish I could explain the darkness I feel surrounding them.

ORDER OF HERMES

The Order of Hermes is a powerful and ancient tradition of mages. Indeed, its members claim it to be *the* most ancient of all such traditions (or even the only such tradition — all others being mere illusionists and charlatans). Although such claims can be taken merely as prideful boasts, they do not change the fact that the Order has accumulated a larger and more systematic collection of magical knowledge than any competing group in Europe, Africa, and Asia Minor. None can compare to the depth and breadth of the Order's knowledge, nor to its hallowed traditions. Yet, for the first time in its existence, the Order of Hermes knows true rivals, and resting on its laurels will not ensure its survival beyond the Dark Medieval age.



Background

The Order of Hermes holds that its ancient lineage began in Egypt over 2000 years before the birth of Christ. In the Kingdom of the Nile, priests and pharaohs had access to learning and knowledge that few others possessed, including written language. From among these priests arose two learned individuals, Djhowtey and Sesheti, the first forebears of the Order. This unique, married couple developed the beginnings of Hermetic magic. Djhowtey was later revered as a deity — Thoth — whom the Greeks would one day identify with their own god Hermes. This is the true origin of the Order of Hermes.

The cult of Thoth grew powerful in Egypt, transmitting the learning of earlier times to a new generation. Each era featured its own notables, each of whom added to the growing corpus of knowledge about the universe and man's place within it. So great was this corpus that it spread beyond the borders of Egypt, coming into the possession of learned men elsewhere who shared the cult's vision of enlightenment. Among its most illustrious users was Solomon, king of Israel, who became the first great master of theurgia and whose methods were added to the growing corpus of the cult (even as he is also claimed by the Spirit-Talker Fellowship).

During the reign of Gyges, king of Lydia in Asia Minor, Greek culture first entered Egypt and exerted an influence over the cult of Thoth. Over the next two centuries, Greek ideas become more and more common in Egypt and Egyptian ideas in Greece. This exchange of ideas reached its zenith in the person of Pythagoras, an initiate in the cult, who carried its teachings back to Greece, where they become thoroughly entrenched. They influenced both Socrates and Plato, whose own teachings become widely known and respected. The Greek cult of Hermes eventually spread to Rome, where the Romans identify the deity with their own Mercury.

When Alexander the Great conquered most of the known world in the fourth century before Christ, he inadvertently laid the groundwork for the modern Order of Hermes. By bringing together so many disparate cultures, Alexander created a situation in which adepts from a variety of traditions could interact and exchange ideas. This led to an unparalleled fusion of magical knowledge and its dissemination into lands where it was previously unknown. For this reason, the Order viewed Alexander thereafter as a hero and an example of how one man's bettering of himself can lead to the bettering of the entire world.

The universal state established by the Romans further enhanced the cult's ability to grow and develop. Numerous noteworthy mages appeared over the centuries, with Plotinus, founder of Neoplatonism being the most significant to the Order. Through Plotinus' teachings, the Order assimilated even more Greek philosophy and learning, including secret doctrines of Pythagoras and Plato long thought lost to history. The cult also adopted elements of Jewish theology and esoteric teachings, the basis for the later Kabbalistic system that would become an important element of the Order's theories. Thus, even at this early stage, the Order of Hermes was notable in seeking wisdom wherever it can be found and welcoming true seekers of that wisdom, whatever their origins.

Under Roman rule, the cult of Thoth prospered for a time. The culmination of this prosperity was the creation of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, a compendium of

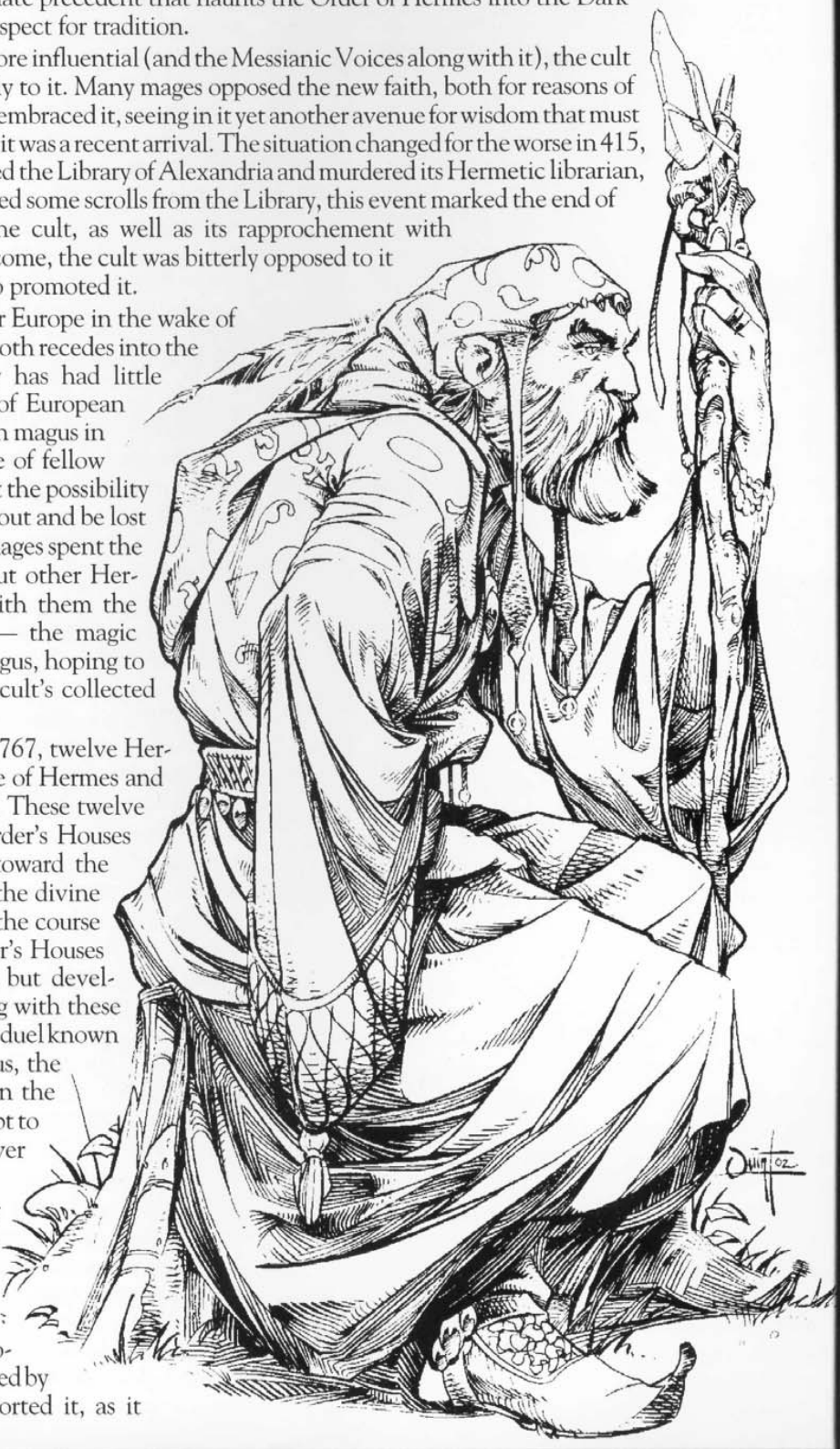
the cult's beliefs. Consisting of 17 scrolls, the *Corpus* is attributed to Hermes Trismegistus himself and passed among the various cells of the cult throughout the Mediterranean world. Ironically, the creation of the *Corpus* marked the high-water mark for the cult. After its distribution, devotees became more content to rest on their laurels and refer to it rather than seek out new knowledge for themselves. The *Corpus* became the sum total of Hermetic wisdom and many mages saw no need to add to it, treating it as if it contained Truth trapped forever in amber. This tendency led to a decline that saw the Roman branch of the cult, the Cult of Mercury, disbanded in 412. It also laid an unfortunate precedent that haunts the Order of Hermes into the Dark Medieval age — too great a respect for tradition.

As Christianity became more influential (and the Messianic Voices along with it), the cult of Thoth reacted inconsistently to it. Many mages opposed the new faith, both for reasons of ideology and tradition. Others embraced it, seeing in it yet another avenue for wisdom that must not be shunned simply because it was a recent arrival. The situation changed for the worse in 415, when a Christian mob destroyed the Library of Alexandria and murdered its Hermetic librarian, Hypatia. Although cultists saved some scrolls from the Library, this event marked the end of Alexandria as a center for the cult, as well as its rapprochement with Christianity. For centuries to come, the cult was bitterly opposed to it and the Messianic Voices who promoted it.

As the Dark Ages fall over Europe in the wake of Rome's collapse, the cult of Thoth recedes into the shadows. The Hermetic way has had little impact on the development of European society. This led a Westphalian magus in 731 to seek out the assistance of fellow magus Bonisagus — to prevent the possibility that Hermetic ways might die out and be lost forever. Together, these two mages spent the next three decades seeking out other Hermetic masters and sharing with them the secret of the *parma magica* — the magic shield — developed by Bonisagus, hoping to enlist their aid in saving the cult's collected wisdom.

On Midwinter's Night in 767, twelve Hermetic masters accept the Code of Hermes and founded the Order of Hermes. These twelve become the leaders of the Order's Houses and agree to work together toward the Hermetic ideal of awakening the divine spark within humanity. Over the course of the next century, the Order's Houses squabbled among themselves but developed a fixed method of dealing with these disputes, including the magical duel known as *certámen*. Although fractious, the Houses remain united, even in the face of House Tremere's attempt to establish itself as supreme over the others in 848.

The Houses then used their influence to remake European society. They subtly aided rulers and movements that served the cause of Hermetic enlightenment. The feudal social structure, though not created by the Order, nevertheless supported it, as it



created a more stable environment for the Order's own development. In addition, a coalition of Houses destroyed the lair of a powerful necromancer in Turkey in 876, and seized his stronghold. Realizing the usefulness of this magical citadel, the Order moved it to the Spanish Pyrenees in 891, where it became an important headquarters for Hermetic mages. In fact, apprentices are frequently brought to this citadel, called Doissetep, in order to see Hermetic philosophy put into practice.

Unfortunately, the Order's history of internal conflict resumes at the turn of the first millennium, as House Tremere's lust for power results in the destruction of another house — this time with the sanction of House Quaesitor, the Order's judicial watchdog. Flush with victory, the Tremere seek ever-greater power. In 1022, Tremere himself and his adepts capture and kill a vampire, upon whom they perform a variety of experiments. Tremere becomes convinced that vampires hold the key to eternal life beyond the immortality available through magic alone. This conviction leads to Tremere's becoming one of the undead, along with most members of his House, a secret the other Houses do not learn until the late 12th century. Although unlife gives the Tremere undreamed of powers, it also strips them of their ability to work Hermetic magic — a price too high for most Hermetic mages.

Throughout the 11th and 12th centuries, the Order continued to involve itself in European affairs. As the Crusades broke out, the Hermetics went with them, plundering Middle Eastern sites for hidden knowledge. This earns them the enmity of the Ahl-i-Batin and other Arabic magical groups, but it also gives them access to great learning. A good example is the renowned *Kitab al Alacir* discovered by Lorenzo Golo of Florence in 1188. Working with a Templar named Simon de Laurent, Golo forms the Natural Philosophers' Guild to advance the cause of learning among both Hermetics and Commoners. Other mages follow suit and become involved in the growing universities of Europe, where they seek out new apprentices and continue the quest for enlightenment.

The advances made in influencing European society were shattered when Tremere's crime was uncovered in 1199. Two years later, the Order of Hermes pronounced sentence on the renegade House, which mandated that all Hermetic mages work to bring down the undead traitors. Unfortunately, the Tremere learned of this pronouncement and acted quickly enough to evacuate their sanctums and disappear into hiding. Even so, battles between Hermetic mages and Tremere vampires occur with increasing regularity. This conflict becomes known as the *Massasa War*.

Almost as troubling is the destruction of the Hermetic sanctum at Mistridge in 1210. Mortals, led by a group calling themselves the Craftmasons, precipitate this event. The Order believes the Craftmasons to be catspaws of the Tremere, as it's implausible to imagine that Commoners could succeed in destroying a Hermetic stronghold so easily. The leaders of the Houses thus began to consider the possibility that the *Massasa War* might have long-term consequences for the future of the Order. Thus, they authorized the increased use of magical force to destroy the Tremere once and for all. Unfortunately, this decree had the unintended side effect of drawing the attention of Commoners, including inquisitors, who view Hermetics with the same disdain they do genuine servants of dark powers.

The result of these recent events is that the Order of Hermes is now on the defensive and beset by enemies on many fronts. Although magically potent and influential in the mundane world, it cannot use the full force of its powers lest it show its hand and incur the wrath of the very enemies it seeks to destroy. Thus, Hermetic mages engage in a shadow war and try desperately to avoid a fate far worse than the neglect that the founders sought to prevent when they created the Order of Hermes in the first place.

ORGANIZATION

The Order of Hermes is as rigidly organized as any Mystic Fellowship in the Dark Medieval age, maybe more so. Even the Messianic Voices do not possess the same degree of centuries-old tradition and etiquette regarding the proper ordering of their affairs. This level of organization — and devotion to a "right" way of doing things — has served the Order well over the years and allowed it to survive changing circumstances and even to flourish in the midst of adversity. It has also held the Order back, preventing it from becoming as influential as it might otherwise have.

The Order has two levels of organization. On the one hand, there are the Houses, magical schools within the Order, each characterized by its own style of spellcraft, as well as its relations with the outside world. On the other hand, there are the levels of initiation, which all Houses share. The levels, in order from lowest to highest, are Apprentice, Disciple, Adept and Master. The Order has established very specific entry qualifications for each level of initiation, both to prevent unworthy candidates from acquiring knowledge beyond their capabilities and to strengthen the Order as a whole. Although renowned as fractious — which they are — Hermetic mages nevertheless possess a high degree of loyalty to their fellows, even those of other Houses.

Very few apprentices enter the Order of Hermes of their own accord. That is, they do not seek out membership, as the Order keeps a low profile, especially since the ascendancy of the Messianic Voices. Consequently, Hermetic mages seek out those whom they believe to possess the requisite intelligence and wherewithal to master the elements of the Art (as the Order calls magic). Because the Order has well-established contacts in universities and other places of learning, many

new apprentices come from such backgrounds. Of course, that's far from a universal statement. Hermetic mages have occasionally drawn their apprentices from rural backgrounds, although the likelihood is much smaller.

An apprentice is placed under the care of the mage who inducted him. Called a *pater* or *mater*, this mage acts as the apprentice's teacher, advocate, and foster parent. The mentor is also the apprentice's harshest critic. Throughout the three levels of apprenticeship, the Order enjoins the mentor to be merciless in the trials through which he puts the would-be mage. The Order takes seriously its belief in the relationship between the microcosm — humanity — and the macrocosm — the universe — which it sees as a key to the Art. By perfecting the self through trials, the Hermetic mage is also contributing to the perfection of the universe.

Apprentices who survive the trials (and "survive" is the right word — Hermetic apprenticeships sometimes end in death) are initiated as Disciples of the Order. They are now free to enter the *mi'as*, an Arabic term meaning quicksand, which is how Hermetic mages refer to the world of politics and infighting that characterizes the Order. Disciples form the bulk of the Order and perform most of its routine endeavors. Those who excel in their duties accumulate *sa*, or "lifeblood," a term borrowed from Egyptian theology to denote favors. Through the accumulation of sufficient *sa*, a mage can become an Adept, which is the highest regular level of the Order.

Beyond the Adepts are the Masters, whose powers and influence are immense. Masters are recognized as such by a second initiation, which gives them access to even greater secrets and magical lore. Masters are expected to train apprentices and continue the work of the Order and the House with which they are affiliated. Rumors persist of third and fourth initiations that denote greater advancement in the Order, but, if they exist at all, they are unknown to all but a select number of ancient Hermetic Masters.

The *Primi* (literally, first ones) are the leaders of the Houses that make up the Order of Hermes. Each House bears the name of its founder, one of the twelve mages whose collective action established the Order. Houses serve two purposes. First, they provide a structure into which apprentices can be assimilated. They function as colleges that teach, in addition to magical theory, the rules and etiquette of the Order as a whole. They also provide a community for new mages, who may find their sudden change of circumstances quite unsettling. Second, Houses preserve and disseminate the interests, wisdom and style of their founders, each of whom differed from his fellows in some way. The Houses are thus living embodiments of their founders' ideals, whose diversity the Order recognizes as a source of dynamism and strength.

philosophy

The philosophy of the Order of Hermes stems from its ancient heritage, being an amalgam of Egyptian and Greek ideas, with several other strains of magical thought (primarily Arabic) thrown in for good measure. It is this heritage that both defines and lends it vocabulary to the way the Order looks at the world and how it views magic. Hermetic philosophy is notable for several elements, but its comprehensive nature stands out most of all. True to its Greek ancestry, the Order has an answer for almost any question an Apprentice (or even Adept) might ask about the true nature of reality and humanity's relationship to it. A complex and all-encompassing metaphysics underpins Hermetic magic that puts all rivals — even that of the Messianic Voices — to shame.

Based broadly on a triad established by Plato and developed more fully by the Neoplatonists who came after him, Hermetic philosophy divides the universe into three realms: *faith*, *reason*, and *noesis*. The realm of faith (also called the realm of emotion) is the ordinary reality in which the vast majority of humanity exists. It's the realm of the senses, where men rarely consider questions beyond what they can see or touch or what authority figures tell them. Because both the senses and mundane authorities can be deceived — and often are — the realm of faith provides only an approximation of knowledge rather than the real thing.

The realm of reason is the rarefied domain of philosophers, scientists and other deep thinkers. It's here that men and women like the Hermetic mages do much of their work. Only by recognizing the patterns that lie beneath sensory apprehension can one enter the realm of reason. This realm concerns itself with the grand unities that lie both within and beyond everyday reality. Reason is also the foundation of progress, as it is through reason that men transcend what authority tells them and come to greater conclusions about the nature of reality. The Order places great stock in reason's ability to improve the human condition.

The realm of noesis exists beyond reason. It is the domain of the *Above*, according to Hermes Trismegistus. Here a mage can experience unadulterated truth and pure thought, freed from the confines of human weakness and frailty. It is the domain of the philosopher-king, where one who has undergone the proper initiation can view reality as it truly is — beyond even the capacity of thought to comprehend. Few Hermetic mages admit to understanding the realm of noesis fully, but all ardently seek it as the final goal of their lifetime of study and hardship.

The Order of Hermes believes that humanity has the capacity to improve itself, to progress and reach a higher level of existence. At that level, humanity will see reality as it is and learn to manipulate it to its own benefit. Progress cannot be achieved through mere instruction, however. This is why only a select few can

make the journey now. This elite — the Hermetic mages — must achieve the promise that is the inheritance of all mankind. Once there, they may learn to bring it to the masses, as Prometheus brought fire to mortals from the empyrean realm of the gods.

Hermetics thus see themselves as the vanguard of a new age that will eventually be available to all. Because only they possess the strength and dedication necessary to lay the foundation for that new age, they must cloak their knowledge in mystery and hide it from the masses. Until the Commoners are ready to receive this hidden wisdom, the Order serves as a repository for lore that will one day enlighten humanity and bring it to the knowledge of its true birthright — mastery of the cosmos.

Failings

Although ancient and powerful, the Order of Hermes has two primary failings that prevent its attaining anything but a small fraction of its goals. The first is the oft-mentioned fractiousness of the Order. The very structure of the Order, with its competing Houses possessed of their own interpretation of the Great Art and its proper use, seems ready-made for disaster. The treacherous actions of House Tremere, for example, have thrown this structure into disarray and disrepute, with some prominent mages from several Houses advocating the unthinkable — the abolition of the House structure and its replacement with a more unified organization.

Naturally, there is great resistance to this suggestion. Many Hermetic mages hold that the House system is, in fact, a strength of their Order rather than a failing. They argue (and not without some cause) that it has made the interplay of ideas and the questioning of assumptions an essential element of the Order. There's also the fact that the tradition is sacrosanct among the Hermetics, many of whom resist change even when, as in this case, there is a solid argument in favor of doing so. Consequently, the 13th century is a time of tumult, as some Primi seek to downplay the power of the Houses and establish a new regime, even as other oppose such innovations.

The opponents argue forcefully that the Order of Hermes has made many remarkable advances in the development of magical theory and practice over the centuries, many of them attributable to the rivalries imbedded in the House system. Their antagonists reply that other developments have been retarded or even prevented due to infighting and petty jealousies, as concern for honor and position became more important than the growth of the Art. Moreover, House secrecy makes it possible for mages to undertake dubious enterprises without the notice of their colleagues. Within recent memory, two Houses have fallen, one to vampirism, one to Infernalism — results that might have been prevented had the House system not existed. For now, critics of the system have the upper hand, with the *Massasa War* a pointed reminder of how the old ways sometimes serve the Order poorly.

Even more troubling is the overweening pride of the Order and its mages. With a few exceptions, most Hermetic mages look with disdain upon non-mages (whom they derisively term "Commoners"). Indeed, this disdain is so great that it has blinded the Order to the potential destruction that Commoners can wreak if given the opportunity. The fall of the Mistridge chantry in 1210, for example, is a perfect example of this attitude in action. Although led by renegades from the Order, Mistridge fell largely due to the efforts of ordinary peasants and mercenary soldiers, who used nonmagical weapons and tools to destroy what had once been a proud Hermetic sanctum. Most Hermetics still have not recognized the significance of this attack, preferring to see it as another skirmish in the ongoing *Massasa War* rather than as a challenge to their hidebound devotion to the past.

The Order's disdain for Commoners has another unintended consequence: Commoner backlash against magic. As Hermetic mages fight against one another and the undead sorcerers of House Tremere, they draw undue attention to themselves. Peasants have become more acquainted with the actions of Hermetics and report these incidents to local authorities, some of whom are more skeptical about their verity than the Inquisition. Even so, it's only a matter of time before the unenlightened Commoners of the Dark Medieval age succeed in destroying another sanctum — and perhaps the Order of Hermes along with it.

Theories and Practice

The practice of magic in the Order follows closely from its philosophical view of the world. To begin with, Hermetic mages recognize three distinct types of magic, each one associated with one of the realms of reality. The lowest level, associated with the realm of faith, is called *goetia*. Goetia involves the use of incantations as well as foci of various sorts — chalices, bells, knives, etc. It's the type of magic the Commoners would recognize as such, at least to the extent that they can recognize magic at all. Goetia involves the manipulation of substances in the world, making it quite useful in relating to that world, but of limited value in the mage's ascent to a higher understanding.

The second level of magic, associated with the realm of reason, is *theurgia*. Unlike the Messianic Voices' theurgy, theurgia has much more in common with its Neoplatonic forebears, being rituals that compel spirits and gods to do the mage's bidding. The Order admits that there are spiritual beings in the cosmos, many of whom possess powers and abilities far beyond those of mortal men. Yet, Hermetic mages refuse to grovel at the proverbial feet of such entities and beg them insouci-

antly for their favors. Instead, theurgia teaches mages to enforce their own will upon these spirits and to exert their own desires upon the cosmos. Mastery of theurgia is thus an important step on the road toward awakening the divine spark that lies within each man.

The third and highest level of magic, associated with the realm of noesis, is magia or "true magic." Hermetics do not believe that anyone other than themselves practices true magic — another cause of their arrogance. Unlike goetia or even theurgia, magia largely dispenses with the need for foci and other material elements. Instead, it emphasizes mastery of Words, primordial connections to the cosmos that allow a mage to manipulate reality with a thought. By gaining a greater understanding of Words, a Hermetic mage may even transcend the need for language in his magic, working its wonders through the exertion of will alone. Such mastery is exceedingly rare in the Order, but it is sought with great fervor, as Hermetics believe it represents the final stages before a mortal may enter into his divine birthright.

Despite the Neoplatonic roots they share with the Messianic Voices, the Order of Hermes differs from the faithful in a significant way: they believe the world of matter is good and even worthy of attention. Like the Stoics and Epicureans from whom they derived this doctrine, Hermetics hold that matter is a source of both pleasure and power. It is only through matter, for example, that one can come to understand spirit as its opposite. Without that understanding, magic is impossible. Thus, matter is a necessary (though not sufficient) condition for the initiation that will one day lead to the mastery of the cosmos.

At the same time, the Order does not promote the elevation of matter above all other things. Matter is a component of the universal order; it is not the only component. Spending too much time and energy studying it is a perversity that speaks of one's immaturity and lack of spiritual development. Although pleasure, even bodily pleasure, is indeed a genuine good and one that naturally follows from man's bifurcated nature, it must not become an end in itself. True pleasure transcends both body and spirit, just as noesis transcends both faith and reason. Anything less is base stimulation, more worthy of animals than the potential gods that mankind may become with effort and learning.

Learning is clearly a key element to Hermetic practice, as evidenced by their interest in and study of the natural world. The Order possesses some of the Dark Medieval age's most sagacious natural philosophers and physicians. These men and women study the world around them in order to accumulate additional insight into the connections that underpin reality.

The Order takes a similar attitude toward the spirit world, which it catalogs and commands in much the same manner. Hermetic mages take a great interest in the creatures that dwell in supra-lunar spheres beyond earth — an interest that frequently brands them as Infernalists in the eyes of the faithful. The Order's secret language, Enochian, derives from its frequent congress with spirit creatures, who reputedly taught this esoteric tongue to certain Hermetic mages, including Hypatia, the last librarian of Alexandria. Now, the Order uses it for many other purposes, including rituals having little to do with spirits. It is yet another way these mages hide their lore from those unprepared to learn its mysteries.

Aura

Mages of the Order radiate Power. Their Auras crackle almost noticeably with the arcane energies they command. Hermetic mages add their Aura modifier to any rolls affected by this sense of raw power. This often manifests as a scent of brimstone or ozone, or a spark of electricity when the mage touches someone.

Suggested Traits

Attributes: Stamina, Manipulation, Intelligence

Abilities: Academics, Awareness, Cosmology, Linguistics (Latin), Occult

Backgrounds: Chantry, Library, Mentor, Sanctum

Stereotypes

Ahl-i-Batin: There is much to be learned from the Subtle Ones — if only they would accept our offers of collaboration.

Messianic Voices: Superstitious fools. They do an injustice to their ancient heritage by sullying it with mumbled prayers and groveling before statues of the saints.

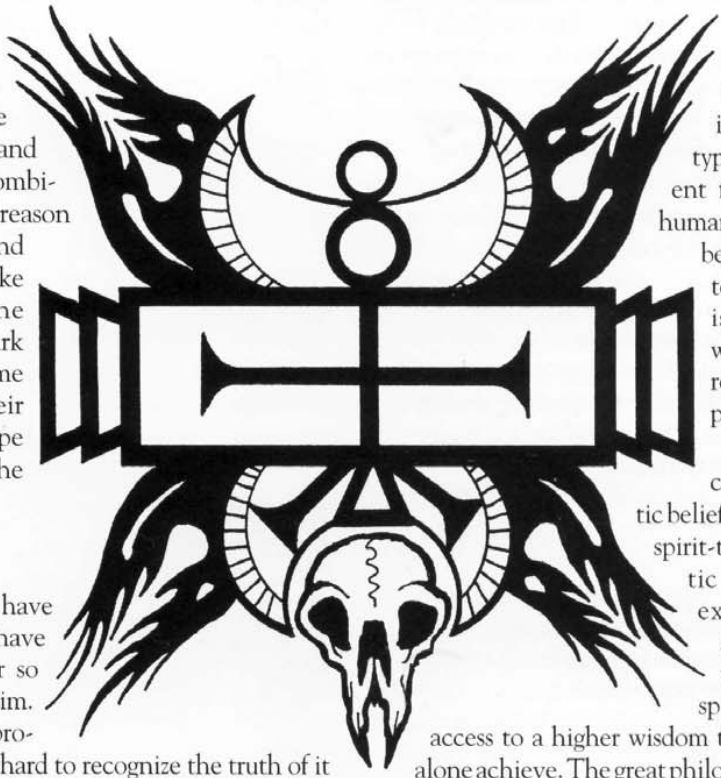
Old Faith: These pagans are even worse than the Messianic Voices, cavorting in oak groves and worshipping deities abandoned centuries ago.

Spirit-Talkers: Why waste time parleying with spirits when you can command them?

Valdaermen: It would be wise to avoid these barbarians and their strange ways, even if the powers they command are intriguing.

Spirit-Talkers

The Dark Medieval age is a haunted one. Supernatural beings both malevolent and benign interact with the world on a regular basis. This is an accepted fact of life. Both the Church and natural philosophers acknowledge the existence and power of incorporeal beings, as do innumerable "primitive" cultures, whose beliefs survive throughout Europe despite the rise of Christianity. Little wonder then that a Mystic Fellowship has arisen that seeks to communicate with and learn from these spiritual entities. Coming from many lands and societies, the Spirit-Talkers attempt to bridge the gap between the mortal and spirit worlds. At once feared and respected, these mages are becoming more and more uncommon, as a combination of civilization and reason denigrates their craft and weakens their numbers. Like many other mages, the Spirit-Talkers find the Dark Medieval age a trying time that will determine their mettle and possibly wipe them from the face of the Earth.



Background

For as long as there have been mortal men, there have been Spirit-Talkers — or so this Fellowship likes to claim. It's probably not an inappropriate boast. For while it's hard to recognize the truth of it in the Dark Medieval age, there's plenty of evidence to support its having been true in the past. Even the most heavily Christianized cultures of Europe show evidence of spirit-talking in the past, in some form, if not in the full-blown shamanism that civilized mages tend to associate with this tradition. Thus, the order survives even now, although its influence is perhaps not as great as it once was.

Spirit-talking has an ancient pedigree. There have always been mortal men and women who have possessed unique abilities: seeing between the worlds and conversing with the inhabitants of the Other World. Tribal cultures were among the first to see these abilities as the gifts they were. It's easy to see why this should be so. These cultures recognized that the universe around them was much larger than could be seen with the eyes. Too many events occurred that could not be explained by reference to the mundane world. Consequently, the notion of a Spirit World beyond the senses made great sense and they sought out the services of those who possessed the ability to interact with that world, for it provided them with protection and assistance.

Not surprisingly, more advanced cultures dismiss such beliefs as nonsense. They hold that, although the world is indeed a bigger place than one can see, that doesn't mean one must postulate a Spirit World to explain its phenomena. Even those who recognize an incorporeal element to the world often see it as nothing more than an extension of everyday reality rather than as something separate from it. For them, spirits are nothing more than a different type of creature, as different from human beings as human beings are from lesser beasts. If there is no need to assume that insects exist within their own world, there is equally no reason to assume spirits possess one either.

Despite this, most cultures retain an atavistic belief in the Spirit World and spirit-talking. The rationalistic ancient Greeks, for example, placed great stock in their oracles, who communed with spirits and gods to gain access to a higher wisdom than mortal man could alone achieve. The great philosopher Socrates himself visited the oracle at Delphi for this purpose and taught that every mortal possesses a companion spirit — a daemon — that speaks to him and grants him access to a more elevated form of knowledge than the crude senses can provide. The practical Romans also revered oracles, with the Sibyl playing an important role in the development of their religious thinking for centuries. Even the devoutly monotheistic Jews recognized the value in communicating with angels and other spirits. The great king Solomon, for example, was renowned for his abilities as a summoner and binder of spirits. His treatises on the subject, the so-called *Lesser Key of Solomon* and *Greater Key of Solomon*, are studied assiduously for their insights even by the haughty Order of Hermes.

The rise of Christianity would seem to have marked the death knell for this Mystic Fellowship, but it did not. Although many unlettered believers saw belief in the Spirit World as contrary to the Word of God, not all did so. The details may have changed but the underlying truths remain the same. After all, if the angels are the messengers of God Almighty, why would it be wrong to speak with them to gain access to the Lord's wisdom? Indeed, the Church considers communing with the saints praiseworthy. How does this differ from spirit-talking, except in the words one uses? Did not the prophets of old hear the voice of God? Is this too not a form of spirit-talking?

Admittedly, Christendom has not treated this Mystic Fellowship well. Yet, it survives, even flourishes in some places. Mystics and heterodox believers of many faiths — including Jews, Christians and Muslims — continue to speak with the angels and saints, djinn and spirits, gleaning what wisdom they can from those who marvel in the Beatific Vision of heaven. Similarly, the less civilized cultures of the far north and desolate east hold true to their recognition of the Spirit World and its inhabitants. As Europeans expand into Outremer and Asia, they find themselves once more confronted with these beliefs — and the magic it engenders. Although it might be simpler to dismiss spirit-talking as superstition and heresy, only a fool could fail to see its power among the diverse peoples of the earth.



ORGANIZATION

The Spirit-Talkers possess no over-arching organization. In this respect, they are very similar to the Old Faith, with whom they share many similarities. Indeed, these similarities lead many outsiders to confuse the two Mystic Fellowships, even though their natures and approach to magic are quite different. This lack of a unified structure on the model of the Order of Hermes or Messianic Voices does not mean that the Spirit-Talkers lack unity on the smaller scale, however. In many areas, even within Christendom, these mages wield considerable influence and are an integral part of society. It would thus be a mistake to dismiss them as mere "barbarian rabble," as more than one Hermetic mage has done over the centuries.

Spirit-Talkers are divided into two broad groups. The first — and more common — are those that exist within so-called civilized lands. These mages possess the same abilities and magic as any other Spirit-Talkers, but they exist in isolation from most of their kind. These individuals may well be respected within their own communities. Yet, they are nev-

ertheless viewed as *different*, as possessing a gift or a curse that sets them apart from the other members of the community.

These Spirit-Talkers may face persecution for their powers and abilities, especially by the Church and even other mages. Their ability to see and converse with spirits is tantamount to Infernalism in the eyes of many who cannot conceive of congress with anything other than diabolical spirits. Even those who admit that it might be possible to engage even the angels in conversation look on the Spirit-Talkers with fear, for it is a common belief that conversations such as these inevitably lead to madness and death. Others condemn the Spirit-Talkers as false prophets, who claim to understand the words of Heaven — a claim no one can make without suffering the judgment of the Church.

If they are lucky, these solitary Spirit-Talkers may learn to use their abilities with the aid of a mentor, another member of the community who also can see and converse with spirits. Such people are rare within Christendom, but they do exist, hidden in the wild places that the twin forces of civilization and the Church have not touched as strongly. In such cases, the mage learns how to use his powers to aid himself and the community of which he is a part.

When a mentor is unavailable, the situation can be quite different. The mage may find the call of the spirits deafening. He may find his newfound abilities beyond his comprehension. He may begin to doubt his very sanity. Even in these cases, rural communities (and even many more urban ones) preserve folk wisdom about those touched by the spirits. Legends and superstitions speak of babies born with teeth or a full head of red hair; these gifted ones are believed to have a special ability to bridge the gap between the worlds of men and spirits. Spirit-Talkers in these environments may find their awakening difficult, but it need not be permanently traumatic, particularly when it becomes clear that their magic is as beneficial as baleful.

The second group of Spirit-Talkers can be found in those lands the Christian and Muslim worlds consider "uncivilized." Throughout Eastern Europe, Scandinavia and Central Asia, there are many ancient cultures that have long understood and respected this Fellowship. In these lands, Spirit-Talkers are an integral part of their societies, playing a role not unlike priests or imams. They are intercessors between the worlds and offer wisdom that might otherwise go unnoticed. They heal the sick and tend to the afflicted, using their magic and command of spirits to give aid to their peoples. They even maintain temples and shrines, just as would any other religious leaders.

Ironically, it's this second group that faces the greatest dangers in the Dark Medieval age. For unlike the solitary Spirit-Talkers, who are often dismissed as eccentric peasants, the settled mages are seen as pagan witches and servants of the Devil. In the Baltic lands, for example, Spirit-Talkers face the same fate as members of the Old Faith at the hands of the Teutonic Knights. The distinction between the two beliefs isn't recognized, as neither is Christian and both challenge the authority of the Church.

At the same time, all is not bleak. Some cultures, such as the Mongols and other nomadic tribes of Central Asia, treat Spirit-Talkers with respect and even reverence. After all, these mages go where no normal man can go for the sake of their people. They have access to knowledge and power that even the proud horsemen of the steppes cannot muster. As the Dark Medieval age drags on, the Spirit-Talkers will prove surprisingly influential yet. Like the Mongols themselves, their voices will be heard, whether Europe wishes to listen or not.

philosophy

Spirit-Talkers begin with the belief that there is more to reality than what can be seen by one's gross physical senses. In that respect, they're not much different than almost any religious or magical belief system. Where Spirit-Talkers differ is in their conception of the reality beyond the mundane. For these mages, the world beyond is a very real, almost physical place, one that mortals can enter and explore if only they know the way. Unlike a Christian's conception of Heaven as something extra-physical and achievable only upon death, a Spirit-Talker views the spirit world as merely a different type of world — in its composition, texture and inhabitants — but nevertheless one into which a trained seer can journey and from which he can gain wisdom.

Spirit-Talkers see the Spirit World (as some call it, although it is known by many names in many traditions) as separate from, but nevertheless related to the mundane world in which mortals spend most of their lives. It's this relationship with the Other World that defines this Mystic Fellowship. By and large, its members see themselves as

THE MONGOLS

As of 1230, the Mongol horde, under the leadership of Ogedai Khan, has conquered China and is turning its attention westward toward Russia and, ultimately, Europe itself. Within a decade, Mongol armies will besiege Hungary, Poland and Austria. They bring with them many Spirit-Talkers, as well as other supernatural creatures. Storytellers wishing to incorporate these elements into their chronicles should consult the **Dark Ages: Vampire** supplements **Wind from the East** and **Blood and Silk** for additional information on the Mongols, their culture and their perspectives on magic and the supernatural.

bridges between the two worlds. They go where others cannot and serve as conduits for the wisdom and knowledge that can be gained by visiting the Spirit World and conversing with its inhabitants.

Naturally, conversing with spirits occupies a far more important role in Spirit-Talker philosophy than does traveling to the Other World. Indeed, many traditions within the Fellowship eschew such journeys as unnecessary and even fraught with peril — unnecessary because the spirits can be contacted in the mundane world and perilous because not all spirits view mortals with pleasure. Spirit-Talkers accept these realities without question; they are the core of their beliefs. The cosmos consists of more than the eyes can see or the ears can hear. Humanity's perspective in the cosmos is certainly a unique one, but it is not the only one. Spirits are everywhere and, if one possesses the gift of communicating with them, one might take advantage of their unique perspectives as well.

Spirit-Talkers thus have what might be called a holistic view of the cosmos, one in which all things are numinous and possessed of spiritual qualities. For many of these mages, there are no inanimate objects. Even rocks and trees have their own spirits and it would be foolish to neglect them. Although the spirits of rocks might not have access to the greatest secrets of existence, they nevertheless have knowledge that no mortal possesses. For that matter, many spirits lack this knowledge as well, even spirits of putatively loftier things such as plants or animals. This is because each and every thing in existence has its proper place and role. Some of these roles may seem of more importance at certain times, such as when a Spirit-Talker needs to learn the secrets of healing from an animal spirit to aid her fallen comrade, for example. Yet, that in no way denigrates the place of any other thing or its attendant spirit, for there may be times when a mage may learn from lowly insect spirits or the entities that watch over grains of sand on a beach.

Because of this philosophy, Spirit-Talkers are often dismissed as superstitious by more cultured mages, particularly those in the Order of Hermes and Messianic Voices. Spirit-Talkers listen to the call of the spirits at all times — or at least they should. They endeavor to balance the demands placed on them by their dual natures, on the one hand being mindful of their duty to their community and on the other heeding their obligations to the Other World.

The mundane and spirit worlds exist in symbiosis with one another. Each requires the other and what occurs in one has an effect on the other. This is an ironclad law of reality and no amount of wishing it were otherwise will change it. Consequently, Spirit-Talkers are always outsiders of a sort. They understand more of the wider cosmos than do those not gifted with their unique vision, yet they are mortals themselves and can never be one with the Spirit World as many devoutly wish. At the same time, they're plainly touched by their dealings with the Other Side and never truly fit into mortal society. While some communities view their Spirit-Talkers with trepidation, some see them as useful tools that provide valuable services and nothing more.

Understandably, many of these mages laud solitude as an important element of their outlook. There's no doubt that solitude does quiet a Spirit-Talker's mind and make him more receptive to the voices of the spirits, but it need not be so. A well-trained mage of this order can hear the spirits even in the midst of the din of civilization. Indeed, some Spirit-Talkers would argue that solitude is an unnatural attempt to escape the mundane world and, therefore, antithetical to their philosophy. Although communication with the Spirit World is an important part of the Spirit-Talker way, it's only one side of existence. A mage should never forget that it is equally wrong to neglect the mundane world in favor of the Other Side. To act otherwise would be to make a mockery of the notion of balance that animates so much of this Mystic Fellowship's viewpoint.

Failings

In the Dark Medieval age, the Spirit-Talkers suffer from a number of failings that make them less powerful than many other Mystic Fellowships. It could be argued that they are the weakest of the orders, because they lack the cohesion that even the Old Faith possesses. There is a certain truth to this charge. By their very nature, Spirit-Talkers are solitary people. Their means of working magic is extremely personal and does not lend itself well to institutionalization. Even in lands where the order is strong, such as Central Asia and Eastern Europe, they often exist side by side with other magicians who are better able to tend to the everyday spiritual needs of their community.

This is a generalization, of course, and doesn't apply equally to all realms where the Spirit-Talkers exist. It would be an error to claim a lack of cohesion in Mongol-dominated Russia, for example, where these mages enjoy considerable influence and power. Yet, "civilized" Spirit-Talkers are rarer than their "barbarian" cousins. They are even more rare (in raw numbers) than their solitary counterparts in other lands. This geographic diffusion adds to the appearance of weakness and, to some extent, contributes to the decline of Spirit-Talker ways. Without the unity that the Church or Order of Hermes can offer, it's little wonder that shamanism is becoming increasingly uncommon in the Dark Medieval age.

A related problem has little to do with the Mystic Fellowship itself. Rather, it has to do with the advance of civilization. As more and more of Europe and Asia become settled and as their populations grow, larger institutions — the Church, the Crown, etc. — are growing along with them. These institutions have their own traditions and

ways of looking at the world that are becoming more and more widely accepted, leaving little place for the quaint ideas of the Spirit-Talkers. In many areas, Spirit-Talkers are not so much persecuted as ignored. They appear to be relics of a bygone age. That they are so deeply associated with nomadic tribal groups, such as the Mongols or Laplanders, only makes this appearance even stronger.

Solitary Spirit-Talkers face equally strong difficulties. Many have grown so used to their isolation and separation from civilization that they revel in it. They find seclusion to be essential to the practice of their magic. Indeed, more than a few Spirit-Talkers see it as part and parcel of the way they do things and cannot conceive of how they might do otherwise. This has led to a hardening of the order, making it less adaptable and increasingly bound to particular times and places. As these special conditions become more uncommon, so too does the practice of shamanism. It's a perfect example of how mages can sometimes become so strongly associated with a way of doing things that they undercut their own ability to act. At the same time, a few enterprising Spirit-Talkers have recognized this fact and begun to prepare for the future. Unfortunately, their numbers are small and their influence limited in the Dark Medieval age. If that doesn't change, it's possible spirit-talking could disappear entirely.

Unlike the Old Faith, the Spirit-Talkers don't have the same level of animosity toward these growing institutions. They lack the martyr complex that could give the Fellowship a unity of purpose and a grim determination to fight on in the face of so-called progress. Instead, they face benign neglect more often than crusades (though the latter still occurs in the Baltic regions and elsewhere). The spirits are as active as ever — perhaps more so — but fewer and fewer mortal men seem interested in what they have to say.

Theories and Practice

Because Spirit-Talkers are widely dispersed, both geographically and culturally, it is sometimes difficult to recognize the essential unity that underlies their practice of magic. Superficially, there is much variation between Spirit-Talker mages, owing to how they conceive the inhabitants of the Other Side and the relationship between the worlds. On a more fundamental level, though, generalizations are quite possible. It is this fact that has allowed these mages to cooperate with one another as their numbers and influence dwindle in the Dark Medieval age.

All of this Mystic Fellowship's theories and practice revolve around two elements of their philosophy. First, the mundane world that one sees around oneself is not the only world and certainly not the highest world. While Spirit-Talkers may disagree as to whether mundane reality is inferior to the Spirit World (with mages taking several positions on the matter) or not, they are all united in agreeing that another world exists and that, through the practice of magic, mortals may gain access to it. Second, the inhabitants of this Other World (again, there is great disagreement as to their nature) possess the ability to move between the worlds and may be summoned into the mundane one.

Combined, these two elements form the basis for Spirit-Talker magical practices. All of these mages believe that the inhabitants of the Spirit World — be they gods, totem animals, angels — possess knowledge that is either difficult or inaccessible to mortals. Consequently, great wisdom might be gleaned by commanding these creatures to enter the mundane world. Note the word *might*. Spirit-Talkers differ from the mages of the Order of Hermes, for example, in recognizing that spirits are not

Spirit-Talkers and the Dark Arts

Spirit-Talkers are often accused of consorting with evil spirits, a charge that has gone far in making it difficult for these mages to operate openly in Christian and Muslim societies. Unfortunately for this Mystic Fellowship, the charge isn't entirely unfounded. For one, many spirits aren't entirely friendly toward the human race and would dearly love to wreak death and destruction upon it if given the chance. The only reason these malevolent entities cooperate with Spirit-Talkers is because they believe they can use their temporary alliance with a human mage to further their own diabolical goals. In some cases, a Spirit-Talker might even share these goals, having been corrupted by the lure of power and glory.

Also, some Spirit-Talkers speak with the spirits of the dead to achieve their ends. To Christians, Muslims and Jews, such acts — even when done for meritorious reasons — are tantamount to necromancy and strictly forbidden. On the other hand, many philosophers and theologians argue that no mortal can speak with the deceased and that any attempts to do so attract the attentions of demons, who masquerade as human souls to ensnare the unwary. In any event, doing so is hardly praiseworthy and exposes the mage to supernatural danger like no other.

Although this does not represent the sum total of the Spirit-Talker tradition, Storytellers are reminded that the censure of this Fellowship isn't mere prejudice, but often the result of a very real concern about the morality of its practices. Similarly, not every Spirit-Talker is an enlightened practitioner of spiritual wisdom; some are downright dubious characters who use their abilities to enter into genuine devil's bargains.

mere means to an end. They are not simply minions whose services can (or even should) be compelled without effort. As their name suggests, the Spirit-Talkers believe that the essence of magic comes from speaking and negotiating with spirits in order to gain access to the knowledge they possess. Indeed, these mages abhor the binding of any spiritual creature to make it act against its wishes.

This unwillingness to bind spirits might be seen as a weakness. The Order of Hermes certainly sees it that way, which is why they disdainfully look down their noses at Spirit-Talkers and brand them "hedge magicians," the standard insult Hermetics apply to mages whose workings differ from their own. Naturally, the Spirit-Talkers do not view this as a weakness at all. Rather, they see it as a natural consequence of their own humility and a recognition that the Spirit World is just as real as their own. Binding spirits to do one's bidding is the height of hubris and threatens the balance between the two worlds. Only by establishing an equitable relationship with spirits can a mage hope not only to achieve his desired ends but also to avoid the ill consequences that might otherwise occur.

Summoning is an important part of Spirit-Talker magic. The nature and extent of any summoning varies from mage to mage, depending upon a variety of factors. In general, it involves the mage's peering into the Other World and calling the name of the spirit he seeks. The name need not be a specific one, although such knowledge does make the summoning easier. Thus, if a Spirit-Talker establishes a good rapport with a specific spiritual being, it becomes easier in the future to summon it again. The spirit will travel to the summoner, which means that it might not appear before him instantaneously. Instead, it travels as quickly as possible from its current location to the Spirit-Talker. In most cases, this does not take long from a mortal perspective, but it may, depending on the spirit's present activities and circumstances.

Once summoned, the Spirit-Talker bargains and negotiates with the spirit to convince it to assist him in the manner he desires. Even if treated well, not all spirits are willing to aid mortals without cause. The Spirit-Talker must provide the spirit with a compelling reason to lend the desired assistance. In some cases, this can be as simple as appealing to the spirit's self-interest, such as pointing out to a disease spirit how its power would be increased by afflicting a certain individual with disease. In others, it's even more straightforward, such as when a ghost is asked to aid its living descendants.

In the vast majority of cases, though, the Spirit-Talker must use a combination of negotiation, cajolery and offers of reciprocal assistance to gain the aid he seeks. Once a spirit enters into a deal with a mage, it is bound by its letter and will do as the summoner asks to the best of its ability. Naturally, malevolent spirits, such as demons, will use all of their wiles to pervert the spirit of the bargain, which is why most Spirit-Talkers avoid entering into pacts with such creatures. Reciprocal assistance can take many forms and mages should take their completion very seriously. Failure to return the favor of a summoned spirit can have dire consequences, not least of all because they upset the equitable relationship that is at the heart of this Mystic Fellowship's practice of magic. Not surprisingly, Spirit-Talkers are usually fastidious when it comes to keeping their word, as it is in many ways the secret of their strength of magic.

Because summoning and negotiation can often be a long and drawn out process, Spirit-Talkers sometimes enter into pacts with spirits in advance of their needing assistance. These pacts operate more or less identically to more typical ritual summonings, except that they are sealed with some sort of physical object, be it a fetish or talisman or relic of some sort. Thus, when the mage later wishes to obtain the services of the spirit with whom he has successfully bargained, he simply employs the object and the spirit works its effect. Although doing so lessens time constraints, it does not eliminate them. Only the most powerful spirits can work their magic from great distances. Consequently, there may be a delay between the use of an object and the effect sealed by it. Spirit-Talkers recognize this limitation on all their magic and prefer to avoid situations where they do not have time to act.

AURA

Spirit-Talkers are never alone. Their invisible companions are constantly in motion, and being in proximity to a Spirit-Talker is Eerie. The mage receives the Aura modifier on any roll affected by this Aura of general spookiness. It might manifest as disembodied whispers or a feeling of fingers across the back of one's neck.

SUGGESTED TRAITS

Attributes: Stamina, Charisma, Wits

Abilities: Animal Ken, Awareness, Enigmas, Hearth Wisdom, Subterfuge

Backgrounds: Contacts, Familiar, Mentor, Talisman

STEREOTYPES

Ahl-i-Batin: They, too, suffer at the hands of Christendom, but their ways are alien to us.

Messianic Voices: Their vision is narrow. If only they realized that the world was larger than they imagine....

Old Faith: If they could overcome their anger and despair, we could call them friends.

Order of Hermes: There is much to admire in them, but they see the Spirit World only as a means and not as an end in itself.

Valdaermen: They prove that there is a difference between hearing the call of the spirits and listening to them.

VALDAERMEN

The Norsemen were once feared and respected in the Dark Medieval world. Viking warriors traveled all over Europe, North Africa, the Middle East — even North America — in search of lands to conquer and booty to seize. They became well known explorers and traders and their prowess in battle was so great that the emperor of Byzantium himself obtained their services as his personal bodyguards. With the Vikings came their mages, the Valdaermen (singular: Valdaerman). Devoted to Odin, Lord of the Gallows, they practiced magic considered dark by outsiders but integral to their own beliefs. Now, with Christianity on the rise and Viking ways on the wane, the Valdaermen are a dying breed whose future is uncertain, though their strength remain unbroken.



BACKGROUND

The history of the Valdaermen ("Men of Power") is something of a mystery, even to members of this Mystic Fellowship. Its earliest beginnings are known only through oral records and sagas, written down hundreds of years after the events they purport to chronicle had taken place. Like the history of the Norsemen as a whole, the story of the Valdaermen is a jumble of myth, history and outright lies, the truth of which is known only to the gods themselves. This chaotic situation is only made worse by the fact that the recent (and rapid) Christianization of Scandinavia has resulted in the destruction of even many of the sources of legendary information about the order's origins. Even so, there is a strong oral tradition within the Valdaermen and its members pass down this lore to their thanes as they instruct them in the ways of magic.

Their practice of magic is deeply tied to the use of runes, and is sometime known as runecraft or spaecraft, the latter deriving its name from the art of seeing what others cannot and using that knowledge to predict the future (in Old Norse, *spá*). The earliest practitioners of the craft were thus wise men and wise women, half-mediums and half-seers. Indeed, it's in these beginnings that runecraft has a great deal in common with the shamanic traditions that the Spirit-Talkers preserve even now. In their role as seers and prophets, the earliest Valdaermen were more often women than men. Many of the ancient sagas tell of how spae-wives provided wise counsel to the war chiefs of the people, as they battled other tribes and civilized invaders such as the Romans.

Over time, the prophetic element of the order became less important, but never fully disappeared. Consequently, Valdaermen served as seers for many generations and many of these mages do so even in the Dark Medieval age. Despite the declining emphasis on prophecy, runecrafting remained associated with the female nature — one of many reasons that it is deemed unmanly or unbecoming of a warrior. Men might consult or enlist the aid of Valdaermen. After all, it would be foolish to deny their powers. Yet, men did not willingly become mages. Such was the lot of weaklings and cowards, not true men.

Yet, Valdaermen consider their order to derive its power from Odin himself, ruler of the Aesir and Vanir. These mages saw Odin's self-sacrifice to gain magical knowledge as the basis for their own actions. For them, the practice of magic is in fact an imitation of the All-Father, rather than something cowardly as claimed by Norse warriors. Many *godhi*, Norse priests of the *asatru* religion, took up the practice of runecraft, seeing it as yet another way to serve the gods. These magic-wielding priests, also called *erilaz*, used their abilities to bless crops, bring about a good hunt and keep the worst extremes of the natural world (particularly weather) at bay.

Alas, the Norsemen were a harsh people, who paid their gods almost as little heed as they did other breeds of men. The association of runecrafting with the work of the gods added little to reputation of these mages, who were still regarded with a combina-



tion of fear, hostility and contempt. Their magic might be useful as tools when cold steel was ineffective, but it was nevertheless considered women's work rather than the path to glory. Valdaermen continued to exist on the edges of Norse society rather than stepping to its forefront. This makes them unusual among the Mystic Fellowships of the Dark Medieval age; only the Order of Hermes remain as marginalized and secretive as the Valdaermen do within their society.

It is thus ironic that the Valdaermen came into their own with Christianity's arrival in Scandinavia in the early 9th century. The Frankish emperor Louis the Pious sent missionaries, such as the monk St. Ansgar, to convert the Norsemen to the worship of Christ. Although Ansgar was successful in founding churches in Denmark and Sweden with the permission of the local rulers, he did not have an immediate impact. That took time, as more and more Scandinavians came to see Christianity as the key to integration with the rich and powerful civilization to their south. By the early 11th century, this resulted in many more conversions — and the end of the old ways.

Those who valued the ancient traditions looked around for allies and found only the Valdaermen. Once viewed as less than men, the mages were now the only hope for a revival of Norse ways in the face of the Christian onslaught. The Valdaermen relished this turnabout and used to it to launch a pagan counteroffensive against the inroads made by the Church. This revival occurred in the mid-11th century and was briefly successful, as Scandinavian lords and common people rallied to the cause of the old ways. In the end, though, the victory was fleeting. Scandinavia had already changed too much and the appetite for the ancient traditions of glory and sacrifice had diminished. There would never be a pagan revival, at least not in the short term.

Since then, the Valdaermen have retreated into the solitary ways for which they are well known. It is a rare mage of this Fellowship who publicly works magic or whose services are called upon in the light of day. Instead, they exist on the fringes of Scandinavian society, shunned and feared as they were even during the height of the Viking world. In many ways, this suits the Valdaermen just fine. Fate favors the strong, and it takes a strong person to cling to the old ways in the midst of the Dark Medieval age. Perhaps one day that strength can be harnessed to lead a true revival — and Christendom will once more know the fury of the Northmen.

ORGANIZATION

In keeping with their rather chaotic natures, Valdaermen do not have a single organizational structure. Broadly speaking, however, these mages organize themselves in two ways. The first is the more common, both historically and especially in the Dark Medieval age. In this largely solitary existence, the mage lives far away from human settlements and goes about his business unmolested by the affairs that typically concern Commoner society.

It was this sort of behavior that led to the hostility and suspicion that the gregarious Norsemen showed toward the Valdaermen. To voluntarily live away from human society, to eschew the comforts of home and hearth — not to mention the glories of battle — was not fitting behavior for a mortal man. This is why so many legends and superstitions arose regarding the Valdaermen, which called into question their manhood and masculinity. Only a woman or one who chose to play the part of one would act as these mages did. Not surprisingly, many women did (and do) choose to become Valdaermen; the prejudice against their doing so is less than that for men. They must still possess the inborn talent for magic, of course, but this path is a more acceptable (if not respected) path for women to follow.

Solitary traditions of magic do not survive long without some mechanism for passing on knowledge to the next generation. Thus, even this sort of Valdaerman needs apprentices, who are sometimes called thanes after the fashion of Norse bondsmen. Thanes come to be in the service of a Valdaerman in a variety of ways. One of the more common is for a child to be given to the mage as payment for services rendered. Although many Norsemen deemed the practice of magic questionable, its power could not be denied, which is why they called upon Valdaermen for aid on occasion. A mage often demands a heavy price for his services and a child offered as a thane is such a price. He would then raise the child as his own, instructing him in the ways of runecrafting. At other times, individuals become thanes by offering themselves freely to the mage. This is especially common for women and thralls who wish to better themselves through magic.

In all cases, would-be thanes must possess the innate skills and gifts of the gods to become a Valdaerman. Not everyone has these abilities, but experienced mages can usually recognize them in others. That's why not everyone who offers themselves (or is offered) as a thane is accepted. The process of learning runecraft is a long and painful one. There is little point in even beginning that process if one lacks the necessary abilities to succeed. During one's time as a thane, the apprentice is expected to obey his master in everything and to treat him as his lord and master. Frequently, this means degradation and misery but the potential rewards are great, which is why it remains a viable option for those who possess the necessary skills. Upon the death of one's master, an apprentice can take up his mantle.

Of course, not all Valdaermen adopt the solitary role. Although uncommon in the Dark Medieval age (and only slightly less so during the Viking heyday), these mages occasionally assume a more public position. Defying tradition, they set themselves up as jarls, complete with their own group of huskarls. In cases like this, the Valdaerman uses his magical abilities openly and engages in deeds of great heroism and bravery. In most respects, he conforms to the expectations of Norse society, only substituting magical abilities for — or adding it to — strength at arms.

Valdaermen who succeed in such public deeds certainly draw the attention of their fellows, for both good and ill. The prejudice against magical study, especially for men, remains strong. When these dark arts are brought out into the public eye, some traditionalists will balk, viewing it as a perversion. Others, however, will see only the potential for glory. Serving as a boon companion to a runecrafting jarl offers the opportunity for much glory — and thus immortality. After all, is not Odin the All-Father the most glorious of the gods of Asgard? And is he not also the master of runecrafting?

The logic isn't hard to see, which is why more Valdaermen see a public role as potentially more viable now than in the past. Moreover, these mages are among the only men and women who hold true

to the old ways. Whereas kings and lords adapt to the customs of Christian civilization, the Valdaermen still honor the gods and seek a glorious afterlife in Valhalla. As this Mystic Fellowship makes its final stand against the new ways, it wouldn't be surprising to see greater numbers of Valdaermen acting publicly and attracting to themselves the last adherents traditional Norse beliefs.

philosophy

Like Norse society as a whole, the Valdaermen philosophy is a harsh and unforgiving one. At its base, it is predicated upon the simple fact that no one — whether mortal or divine — is exempt from the dictates of fate, which they call *weird*. Weird is an ironclad law that governs everything and can easily turn a bad situation into a good one and vice versa. Consequently, it is best to develop a certain stoicism in the face of such matters, for one can rarely predict what fate has in store. Even if one can predict it (as in the case of the Valdaerman), there's often nothing one can do to avoid it. The best one can hope for is to ride it out until events make a turn for the better. Fatalism thus goes hand in hand with this philosophy.

Given the unpredictable nature of life, it's advisable to do whatever one can to enjoy life while it's possible to do so. Glory, wealth and honor are but a few of the things worth having in life and all can be easily taken away through the vagaries of fate. Yet, magic is a powerful means to gain as much of life's treasures as possible. Magic cannot prevent their being taken away, for if that is the will of fate, no one can act against it. Magic gives a Valdaerman the ability to gain more of these things than a Commoner, however.

Through the use magic, a mage can seize glory and wealth greater than that of any jarl or huskarl. He can make himself an object of envy and lead a life worthy of many sagas. That's because magic not only allows a Valdaerman to seize more of what ordinary warriors can gain for themselves but also things that no warrior could ever achieve, such as knowledge. For this Mystic Fellowship, the hidden knowledge of runes, for example, is powerful magic that is unlike any other. Runes provide a way to name and to know objects. They are the means of transmitting knowledge by means other than speech, and runecrafters guard their secrets from those who cannot understand them. There can be little that is more powerful — or glorious — than this, which is why Valdaermen philosophy places great importance in runes.

Runes are the special province of Odin the All-Father, for he wrested their secrets through the sacrifice of himself to himself. This act is significant to Valdaermen on a variety of levels. First of all, it establishes the necessity of sacrifice in the process of gaining magical knowledge and power. Nothing in life is gained without difficulty. Fate is a harsh mistress and does not give its boons lightly or without effort. Yet, fate does bestow them to individuals who struggle and are willing to sacrifice part of themselves to gain such benefits. Valdaermen see this as an important truth that is often forgotten, especially by the Christian civilization that is slowly destroying its ways. It's especially ironic that this is so, given that it's also a core truth of the Christian faith, whose founder gave His life to redeem the human race.

On another level, the story of Odin reveals another important truth: power lies within oneself. Odin's sacrifice of himself was *to himself* and to no other. He did not bow down before some higher power — certainly not to fate. It was only through sacrificing himself to himself, through all the pain and suffering that came with that act, that he was able to understand the runes and the power they represent. Valdaermen recognize this fact too, which is why they see themselves as the founts of their own power. They rely on no one but themselves to work magic.

In this respect, they view themselves as akin to the gods. Rather than being blasphemous, this viewpoint is thoroughly in keeping with Norse beliefs. The gods are not beings to be worshipped or groveled before. One should fear the gods, along with their awesome power and capricious ways, but worship as a Christian understands it is unfitting for a Valdaerman. Instead, one should emulate the gods by doing glorious deeds and seizing life's treasures while one can, for at any moment fate may decide to take one's gains away. This leads to the joyously chaotic philosophy for which the Mystic Fellowship is known — and feared.

failings

Like most Mystic Fellowships that exist on the fringes of Christendom, the Valdaermen have several significant failings that limit their influence in the Dark Medieval age. The first, and most obvious, is that their numbers are small. The Scandinavian kingdoms do not possess the teeming populations of better-developed lands such as France, Italy or even the Byzantine successor states. Of these, only a small

fraction still adheres to the old religion and even fewer possess the dedication and ability necessary to become a Valdaerman. This is a recipe for irrelevance, which these mages might realize if they possessed the organization necessary to look at the larger picture of events in Scandinavia. Unless the situation changes greatly, the Valdaermen could die out as a living Fellowship. At the very least, they will pass from the front ranks of magic workers.

Unfortunately, one of the order's other significant failings is that it lacks the organization and vision possessed by the Order of Hermes or Messianic Voices. In this respect, it's not all that different from the Old Faith or the Spirit-Talkers. Its membership is fractious and does not have a unified leadership. It differs from other pagan magical traditions by being geographically isolated. Certainly, there are individual Valdaermen here and there across the length and breadth of Europe — from Lapland in the north to Sicily in the south, from Iceland in the west to Russia in the east — these are exceptions rather than rules. The vast majority of Valdaermen live within a relatively small geographical area, a fact that's unlikely to change anytime soon. With the rise of Christianity, Scandinavians aren't the adventurous sorts they once were during the heyday of the Vikings. They no longer ply the waterways of Europe and Asia in search of plunder and trade. Consequently, the runecrafters are clearly a regional Fellowship, more so even than the Ahl-i-Batin, a fact that angers many younger mages and frustrates their elders.

Of course, geography isn't the only thing holding back the growth of the Valdaermen. Their very philosophy is now anathema to many Scandinavians, who have embraced Christianity — or at least abandoned the old ways. Runecraft is built around the idea of the power (and necessity) of sacrifice, oftentimes of one's own sweat and blood, in order to achieve great things. Odin himself had to hang impaled upon a tree for nine days and nights to learn the secret of the runes. If even the All-Father must make such a sacrifice, how can a mere mortal expect to work magic without doing so? Instead of these words being inspirational, they are an excuse for Scandinavians to abandon magic entirely. The spread of Christian civilization has brought many boons they would not willingly give up for the harsh promise that runecrafting holds.

Theories and Practice

As noted elsewhere, Valdaerman magic is based upon the story of Odin's discovery of the runes. Because the All-Father learned their secrets through self-sacrifice, all Valdaermen see sacrifice as essential to their own practice of magic. Consequently, the first sacrifice these mages often make is an imitation of Odin's own: hanging for nine days and nights from an ash tree. This ordeal is painful and extremely dangerous. Most of the Valdaermen who undertake it wind up dead rather than magically enlightened. To these mages, however, that's exactly the point. Nothing — certainly not magic — can be gained without genuine struggle and it is through pain and sacrifice that mankind comes to true knowledge.

As if that weren't bad enough, many Valdaermen go even further in their imitation of Odin. They pierce themselves with a spear before hanging on the ash tree, believing it intensifies the experience and thus grants them even greater mystical insights. There's some support for this belief, even if it is rarely practiced in the Dark Medieval age. Other Valdaermen pluck out one eye in imitation of the All-Father's sacrifice of an eye to gain access to the Norns' knowledge of the future. Like adherents of the Old Faith, many Valdaermen also practice blood rites and scarification as a means to work magic, seeing these practices as additional means to gain insight through personal sacrifice.

Of course, not all Valdaermen practices are so painful. After all, sacrifice for its own sake is weakness, more in keeping with the teachings of Christianity than with the old Norse ways. Odin didn't hang from a tree for nine days for nothing; he did it to gain the runes. Consequently, runes play a very significant role in Valdaermen magic. They are, for example, cast by the mage to make prognostications about the future. Yet, they also serve many other purposes, one of the most significant being their placement on persons and objects — as tattoos and other markings — so as to confer some of their power on to that thing. For example, the *Hagalaz* rune represents protection and might be placed on a person or object to fortify them against attack.

All the runes have a meaning and Valdaermen believe that the power of that meaning can be transferred to person or object by inscribing the rune upon them. Names hold similar power, as they are

collections of runes. Giving an object, such as a sword, a name allows the wielder to understand and control it to a degree that would be impossible if it lacked a name. Thus, Norse warriors frequently named their weapons and shields as a way of awakening the object's inner strength. Valdaermen believe this too, and their command of the runes gives them an even greater ability to awaken the magic that's found in all things.

Through the use of sacrifice and runes, Valdaermen work a wide variety of magic. In addition to divination, these mages are masters of scrying. They use natural pools to view events far away and impart this knowledge to their servants to give them an advantage in battle. Similarly, Valdaermen are adept at weathercraft, both in predicting weather (another form of divination), but also in summoning and controlling it. Mages who devote themselves to weathercraft typically view the god Thor as their patron, even as they revere Odin as the source of all magic.

There remain two more magical disciplines that are associated with the Valdaermen. Indeed, these two are perhaps the most characteristic of the Mystic Fellowship and are the arts for which they are most well known — and feared. The first is cursing. The Norsemen believed strongly in the power of curses and recognized that others could adversely affect one's fate through their use. To do so was dishonorable, of course, but that didn't stop many warriors from enlisting the aid of Valdaermen in their blood feuds with others. Moreover, these mages' regular interaction with dark creatures has given them keen insights into the matter. Valdaermen curses are frightful matters spoken of in sagas in the most unpleasant of terms. It's little wonder that the Fellowship gained such a black reputation even among their own people.

The second characteristic art is shapeshifting. A wild and barbarous people, the Norsemen were very much aware of the awesome power of wild beasts. Most Norse deities are associated with an animal or animals, creatures whose natural abilities somehow reflect the god's powers. Valdaermen have the ability to change their form to those of animals, thereby gaining their powers and the favor of the gods with whom they are associated. These mages sometimes grant this blessing upon warriors as well, such as the famed berserkers, special servants of Odin who could change into the form of giant bears and wreak untold havoc upon their enemies. Although wolves and ravens are among the most common animals, others are possible too, including small creatures such as mice and spiders that might be used to spy on enemies or enter into their halls unaware.

STEREOTYPES

Ahl-i-Batin: We respect their power and covet their wealth, but there is nothing they can teach us.

Messianic Voices: Weakling fools! Their philosophy has no place in our world.

Old Faith: They prattle on about accepting all of nature's lessons, yet they recoil from the lessons we have learned. Hypocrites.

Order of Hermes: We have no use for these effeminate snobs. Let their vaunted Order stand before our might and see how well they fare.

Spirit-Talkers: They go where even we dare not — whether this is praiseworthy or not, only the gods can say.

AURA

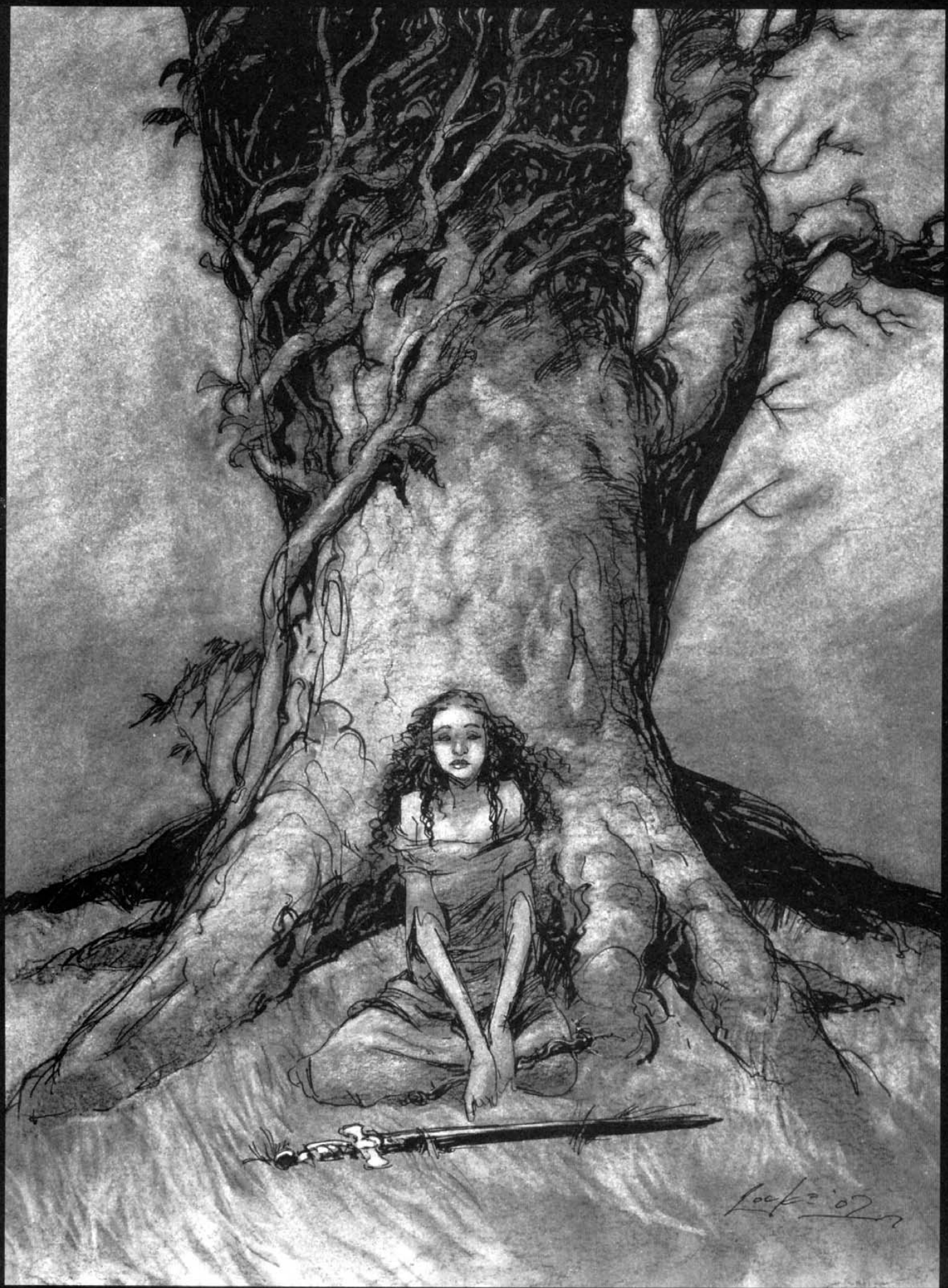
The long, dark Scandinavian nights infuse the Valdaermen with an Aura of Emptiness. They often appear forlorn, cold, or lonely, even when celebrating. Valdaermen receive their Aura modifier on any roll affected by this disconcerting feeling. The Aura might manifest as light dimming around the mage ever so slightly, or a faint sound of howling wolves about her.

SUGGESTED TRAITS

Attributes: Strength, Stamina, Wits

Abilities: Awareness, Athletics, Enigmas, Hearth Wisdom, Intimidation, Survival

Backgrounds: Fount, Mentor



MORVYTH CROUCHED BEHIND THE GREAT OAK.

The approaching carriage held a man of some importance — a bishop, perhaps. Only a man who believed he had nothing to fear would travel by night in these parts, for the hills of Wales were protected. Morvyth knew the protectors and knew to keep safe in the light of the fire when the wolf tracks drew near to her village. This "man of God" did not.

In the distance, she heard the howls. Her incantations and the herbs she chewed would keep her safe and undetected, but the bishop would not be so lucky. *And so what if he dies,* the witch thought. *No doubt, he is here to convert us, to show us the lie of the White Christ. I have no need of such revelations.*

The carriage stopped, and the coachman climbed down to confer with one of the men on horseback who guarded the bishop. They spoke in a strange language that Morvyth did not understand, but she understood the fear on their faces and the harsh tones they used. They were lost. The witch sat back on her haunches and thought. If the procession continued in their present direction, they would reach her village before the moon began its descent. But then, she didn't know what they might do to her people. If they turned east, they would blunder into a bog and either drown or attract the notice of the land's savage defenders. If they went west, they would find the wellspring — and that was Morvyth's secret, one that she could not allow them to find.

Must the lives of these men be lost to protect my people and my power? If that is the choice set before me, can I truly doom them to death in the bog or at the claws of the wolf-skins? Morvyth opened a pouch on her hip and took a tiny pinch of a dried herb between her fingers. *Great Mother, give me wisdom. Help me see the worth of these men and your plan for them.* She tucked the herbs under her tongue and waited. The voices of the men faded away and were replaced by the sounds of fire and swords, of demands for confessions, of agonized screams.

"I see," whispered Morvyth. She streaked from her hiding place, pausing long enough to catch the men's attention, and then ran east. She whispered a request to the summer night, and the night heard. The men followed her, for no matter their faith, they were still men. She would lose them in the bog. Perhaps these men meant no wrong, but the Great Mother had still found them wanting.

Morvyth did not fear them or what they might bring to the village. But she did fear the Great Mother.

Chapter Three: Characters

Building a character in **Dark Ages: Mage** is similar to the process described in **Dark Ages: Vampire**. In fact, the most important component of the process — the concept — doesn't change a bit. The player still needs a solid idea of who she wants her character to be before assigning any dots to the character sheet.

However, the player should consider different sorts of ideas when designing a mage versus designing a vampire. This chapter provides the player with the tools she needs to create a character for **Dark Ages: Mage**, from the initial concept down the last bonus point.

Genesis

The initial stages of creating a **Dark Ages: Mage** character rely on having a firm grasp of the character's concept. Suggestions for detailing this concept can be found below, both for the mage individually and as part of a cabal.

The Mage Herself

Pages 124-125 of **Dark Ages: Vampire** ask the player to consider who the Cainite was in life, why she was chosen for the Embrace, and so forth. As mages are still alive and come to their supernatural state more slowly and with more volition than vampires, creating them as characters necessitates a new framework for the player.

Before I Learned the Truth I Was...

What are the character's origins? Where did she spend her young life? A mage who grew up in the French countryside, marred by the Albigensian Crusade will approach magic and faith very differently than one who spent her formative years in a sleepy hamlet in Ireland. Likewise, if the mage hails from one of the Italian city-states, family (and family name) is probably very important to her. How will her family react if she joins the Order of Hermes?

Consider, too, the character's station in life. Is she a noble or a poor peasant? Is she literate? Is she Christian? If so, does she have difficulty reconciling her life as a mage with God's divine plan? If not, does she take pains to hide herself from the Church or does she flaunt her power? In the Dark Medieval, everyone has a place in the world and most consider it a sin against God to step out of that place. Mages, by their very nature, change the world (which is one reason that non-mages find them so threatening).

I Learned the Truth By...

Was there one particular event that opened the character's eyes? Was she chosen at birth to apprentice under a healer or wise woman? Did she have a religious epiphany that led to the Messianic Voices?

Of course, it's entirely possible that no one event brought the character to power. Perhaps she studied the mystic arts over a period of years, and even now sees her mystic path as an ongoing accumulation of knowledge rather than a series of plateaus. Consider, in fact, what the character's goals are, magically speaking. What motivates her to continue the arduous and often dangerous task of mysticism? Does she wish to unify the fractious lands of Europe? Defeat the forces of Hell? Or perhaps her goals are more personal — maybe the mage wishes to bring a lover back from the dead or simply contact the spirit of an ancestor from long ago. Studying magic for its own sake is possible, but most mages are highly focused people. What drives your character to delve into the realms of forbidden knowledge?

Now I Spend My Days...

Having considered your character's early origins and mystic roots, think now about the present. What does a routine day consist of for your character? How does she obtain food and shelter? When does she make time to practice her magics? Like vampires, mages may step out of mundane existence altogether, but unlike vampires, mages are still very much human. They require food, lodging, some degree of comfort, and companionship. A mage who completely removes himself from normal existence, expecting to live by magic alone, can expect madness and Backlash to follow.

So what do mages do? What kinds of daily routines do they follow? Refer back to the goals your character has set for herself. For example, if she has dedicated her life to bringing her lover back from the grave, her time will likely be spent in pursuit of that goal. But not all mages are so focused. What if the character's mystical studies are not the center of her life, but something that she looks at as work or a trade? Does the mage pursue a profession completely unrelated to her magic? Is there any conflict? Does the mage have family of her own?

Aside from simply getting a better grip on the character, thinking about this sort of thing will help you determine what kind of Traits to purchase for your character. If in your mind's eye, the mage spends his time toiling as a smith and studies only in the evenings with a mentor in secret, obviously you'll want to purchase the Mentor Background and the Crafts Skill. On the other hand, if you'd rather play a nobleman who joined the Order of Hermes and spends most of his days poring over musty old tomes, you'll obviously want to purchase Library — but you should probably consider the Resources Background as well.

The Cabal

Mages recognize that they are much safer in groups. While the Church may search for heretics rather than witches, the lines can blur, particularly if a scapegoat is suddenly required. Besides, mages make mundane folk uncomfortable simply by dint of their mystic prowess, and so often band together for sake of companionship.

The same sorts of issues raised on pp. 125-126 of **Dark Ages: Vampire** with regards to the coterie also apply here when considering the cabal. Are any of the characters acquainted? Do they all share the same Fellowship, or even the same mentor? What is their stated purpose for being together. (Some suggestions for this can be found below.)

Some things to consider when designing the cabal:

- **Location:** Just as an individual character's national origins play a strong role in who she is and how she thinks, the country or region in which the cabal dwells helps to flesh out their methods and capabilities. The players (and Storyteller) may find **Dark Ages Europe** to be a helpful resource in deciding on a location for the chronicle and home base for the cabal, although a historical atlas would work as well.

Considering more than just region, though, what kind of structure do the mages inhabit? If one

of the mages is a noble or is otherwise wealthy, perhaps he can provide a home for the group. Perhaps the mages are members of a monastery or all dwell in the same Crusader encampment. If the players have pooled Background points and bought a Chantry (see below) they should consider what the grounds encompass, what kind of security it incorporates, and any other details they or the Storyteller thinks relevant.

• **Neighbors and roommates:** Does the cabal have servants, magical or otherwise? If so, do they sleep in the same building or chantry as the cabal, or have their own lodgings? Is the chantry isolated, or actually in a city? If so, what sorts of buildings are nearby? What district or neighborhood is it in? Is there a magistrate or local ruler who looks warily at the chantry and its inhabitants? Do any of the characters' mentors reside with them?

• **A Place for Everyone:** When creating characters, think in terms of the group. What niches need to be filled? This doesn't mean that every cabal needs to have a warrior, a sneaky thief character, and so forth. It simply means that if all of the characters have the same capabilities to varying degrees, several characters are going to be made redundant and the cabal isn't going to be very viable. Work with the other players and figure out what roles need to be filled. If the characters are from various parts of Europe, maybe the group needs an interpreter. If the Church is particularly active in the area, perhaps one of the mages should have Contacts within the Church to give some early warning, in case the Inquisition arrives.

The Cabal's Function

The mages need a reason not just to know one another, but to remain together. The players should work with the Storyteller to create a convincing and viable starting point for the cabal. Of course, it's possible to begin the game with only a collection of lone mages and let the Storyteller work the players together in many subtle ways, but this can be time-consuming and often a bit contrived. The bonds between the characters mean more if the players develop them themselves.

Some possible reasons for a cabal to exist are given below.

• **The Pursuit of Knowledge:** The cabal has come together to increase their mystic understanding. The mages will likely be of the same or similar Fellowships (Old Faith and Spirit-Talkers could easily work together, for example), although if the cabal is made up of extremely progressive mages, more dramatic "cross-pollination" might be possible.

The pursuit of mystic knowledge in and of itself is an acceptable starting motivation for the cabal, but each player should consider *why* her character wishes to be part of it. What are the character's plans and how do the others in the cabal fit in? Is she merely using them as cover or a source of protection? Will she betray them? Does she simply regard them as co-workers or fellow students, but nothing more?

This sort of cabal would work well in a city that houses a university (such as Salerno or Paris) or in a more remote locale where the mages can study in peace.

• **Protégés:** The mages are all students of the same mentor. This all but requires them to be of the same Fellowship, which some players might find rather limiting. On the other hand, it forces them to find the differences in their characters' outlooks, rather than simply letting them play to their Fellowship's stereotype, and can therefore be an interesting roleplaying challenge.

Any Fellowship could theoretically work for this type of cabal; an Order of Hermes master might decide to take on a number of promising students, or perhaps all of the children born in one season in a village are apprenticed to a Spirit-Talker wise woman when they come of age.

• **Survival:** The characters are all threatened by some outside source and have banded together for mutual protection. Fellowship doesn't matter so much, as long as the characters recognize that threat and are willing to work together. The danger here is the questions of what happens to the cabal once the threat has passed— do they go their separate ways, or use what they've learned about each other to mutual advantage?

Many places in the Dark Medieval are in conflict; Lithuania and Prussia are especially appropriate for this type of cabal as the Order of the Sword Brothers wars on the native pagans.

• **Worldly Matters:** Players can pool their characters' Backgrounds in **Dark Ages: Mage** just as in **Dark Ages: Vampire** (see below for more information) and the cabal might simply center on "business." If the cabal's Anchor Background is Resources, the cabal needs to devote considerable energy into maintaining that source of funds. Likewise, if the cabal wields Influence, they will be able to keep hold of that power much more effectively if they work together.

Again, any Fellowship could conceivably form this kind of cabal. Old Faith mages might not wield Influence in the Church (for example) but could easily add Allies to the pool.

Character Creation

The system for character creation is similar to the one found in **Dark Ages: Vampire**. This system is examined in detail below.

Step One: Concept

Refer to the three key questions above (Before I Learned the Truth I Was, etc). Consider those questions as well as the character's place within the chronicle. This brainstorming can take place with only the Storyteller or with the rest of the troupe, but if the players create characters separately it is incumbent on the Storyteller to make sure that the cabal is capable of functioning together in the chronicle before play actually begins.

Fellowship

Whereas **Dark Ages: Vampire** characters have no control over which clan they were Embraced into, mages gravitate towards their Fellowships by inclination. While it's possible for a particular family to have a history in the Order of Hermes, and therefore for a promising scion of that family to be expected to take up the mantle of power, it is just as likely that the character has never heard of magic until a mentor approaches, perhaps sensing great mystic potential in the character.

Remember, too, that not all of the Fellowships are equally organized. The Order of Hermes, the Ahl-i-Batin, and (to some degree) the Messianic Voices are actually established groups, but the other three "Fellowships" are really more like magical philosophies. A member of the Old Faith, for example, would never identify herself as such, while a Hermetic mage is very much aware where he stands in relation to his fellow magi. All that this means is that some Fellowships have more of a support system than others do, and that should play a role in your choice and perhaps your goals. Maybe your character is a Spirit-Talker who wishes to unite the pagan mystics against the Christian aggressors. Maybe you wish to play a Batini mage trying to integrate Jewish and Christian magics into the Al-Ikhlas. Your choice of Fellowship should reflect your character's mystical beliefs, her outlook and her goals, not just which set of Pillars you find to be the most appealing.

Nature and Demeanor

Any of the Natures and Demeanors found in **Dark Ages: Vampire** are appropriate for **Dark Ages: Mage** characters. Characters regain Willpower from their Natures as usual.

Step Two: Attributes

The distribution of Attribute points is the same for **Dark Ages: Mage** as for **Dark Ages: Vampire**.

Step Three: Abilities

The distribution of Abilities and specialties is the same for **Dark Ages: Mage** as for **Dark Ages: Vampire**. Remember that at this stage, no Ability can be rated higher than 3 dots.

Step Four: Advantages

Like vampires, mages get 5 Background points to start. However, they do not learn Disciplines and, being human, do not have Road ratings or Virtues. Their defining Advantages are the Foundations and Pillars by which they perform magic (which are discussed in detail in Chapter Four).

Backgrounds

Mages have access to several Backgrounds that vampires do not, which are described below. However, mages cannot purchase such vampire-specific Backgrounds as Generation and Status. The Backgrounds listed in **Dark Ages: Vampire** that are acceptable for **Dark Ages: Mage** characters are Allies, Contacts, Influence, Mentor, and Resources.

The player should consider where and how the character came by her Backgrounds. Some, like Fount and Destiny, are inborn, whereas Sanctum and Familiar will need some explaining. Backgrounds should be an extension of the character's concept, not a cheap way to become all-powerful.

The players may pool Backgrounds as described on pp. 157-158 of **Dark Ages: Vampire**. The most common Anchor Background for mages is probably Chantry, although Cray, Mentor, Sanctum, or Library could also serve in this capacity (as could any of the available Backgrounds listed in **Dark Ages: Vampire**, of course). Destiny, Fount, and Familiar are too personal to serve as pooled Backgrounds. The pooling process works no differently than in **Dark Ages: Vampire**; the player simply decide how much of each Background to contribute to the pool. See the individual listings for the Backgrounds, below, for specific notes on how they might fit into a Background pool.

Foundation and Pillars

Each Fellowship has a specific Foundation that provides the base for their magical understanding and power, and also four Pillars that allow for specific applications of that power. Chap-

CHARACTER CREATION SUMMARY

- **Step One: Concept**

Choose concept, Fellowship, Nature, and Demeanor.

- **Step Two: Attributes**

Choose primary, secondary and tertiary categories of Attributes. Start with one dot in each Attribute. Divide 7 additional dots among primary Attributes, 5 dots among secondary Attributes, 3 dots among tertiary Attributes.

Physical Attributes: Strength, Dexterity, Stamina

Social Attributes: Charisma, Manipulation, Appearance

Mental Attributes: Perception, Intelligence, Wits

- **Step Three: Abilities**

Choose primary, secondary and tertiary categories of Abilities. No automatic Ability dots. Divide 13 dots among primary Abilities, 9 dots among secondary Abilities, 5 dots among tertiary Abilities.

No Ability can have more than three dots at this stage.

- **Step Four: Advantages**

Divide 5 dots among Backgrounds. Record starting Foundation Score (1) and divide three dots among Pillars.

- **Step Five: Finishing Touches**

Record starting Willpower rating (5), Aura modifier (if any), and starting Quintessence rating (equal to Cray + Fount Backgrounds or 5, whichever is higher).

Spend 15 bonus points (see chart below).

The Fellowships

- **Ahl-i-Batin:** Arabic masters of space, time, and the Foundation of Al-Ikhlas.
- **Messianic Voices:** The heralds of God's will and the Angels. Their Foundation is Divinity.
- **Old Faith:** Mages who follow the pagan gods of the land and the Foundation of Spontaneity.
- **Order of Hermes:** Well-organized and powerful, yet arrogant and fractious mages who strive to refine their Foundation of Modus.
- **Spirit-Talkers:** Mystics who speak with the invisible spirits of animals and ancestors; their Foundation is Sensitivity.
- **Valdaermen:** The mystics of the North who still keep the traditions of their Viking forefathers and their Foundation of Sacrifice.

Pillars

Ahl-i-Batin — Ubbadan (Faith)

- **Al-Anbiya:** The powers of perception and time.
- **Al-Fatihah:** The understanding of mental contact and communication.
- **Al-Hajj:** The powers of scrying and travel.
- **Al-Layl:** The powers of illusion and stealth.

Messianic Voices — Archangels

- **Gavri-El:** The gifts of the messenger Angel of Fire.
- **Mikha-El:** The blessings of the Angel of War.
- **Repha-El:** The healing powers of the Angel of the Creative Spirit.
- **Uri-El:** The grim lessons of the Angel of Death.

Old Faith — The Seasons

- **Autumn:** The powers of Earth and the Harvest.
- **Spring:** The blessings of Air and Rebirth.
- **Summer:** The magic of Fire and Vitality.
- **Winter:** The gifts of Death and Water.

Order of Hermes — Forma ("Forms")

- **Anima:** The ability to command and even create life itself.
- **Corona:** The insidious powers of manipulation and the intellect.
- **Primus:** The skill to manipulate Quintessence and magic.
- **Vires:** The power to command the heavens and the elements.

Spirit-Talkers — Totems

- **Chieftain:** The voices of leaders grant you wisdom.
- **Trickster:** The lessons of the thief, the lover, and the fool.
- **Warrior:** The brutal teachings of the brave fighter.
- **Wise One:** The venerable lessons of the ages.

Valdaermen — The Runes

- **Fara:** Runes of wanderlust and conveyance.
- **Forlog:** The runes of wealth and good fortune.
- **Galdrar:** Runes of all that is hidden or forbidden
- **Hjaldar:** Runes to empower or control those who make war.

Backgrounds

Dark Ages: Mage players may purchase the following Backgrounds from **Dark Ages: Vampire** for their characters: Allies, Contacts, Influence, Mentor, and Resources. In addition, some new Backgrounds are detailed in this chapter and listed here.

- **Chantry:** A home and place of study.
- **Cray:** A place where Quintessence wells up from the very Earth.
- **Familiar:** A spirit or magical beast that acts as a friend and companion to the mage.
- **Fount:** The power to hold Quintessence within oneself.
- **Destiny:** Great things will befall the mage.
- **Library:** A collection of magical tomes or resources.
- **Sanctum:** The mage's true home, where his will is law.
- **Servants:** Arcane minions or able Commoners who do the mage's bidding.
- **Talisman:** Your own power is augmented by a magical item.

Bonus Point Costs

- **Attributes:** 5 points per dot.
- **Abilities:** 2 points per dot.
- **Ability Specialty:** 1 point each (maximum 3 per Ability)
- **Backgrounds:** 1 point per dot.
- **Foundation:** 5 points per dot.
- **Pillar:** 3-points per dot.
- **Willpower:** 1 point per dot.

ter Four goes into detail about each of these magical abilities and what a given mage can accomplish by applying her eldritch might.

Characters begin with one dot in their Foundation and three to divide between the Pillars. Players may purchase more dots in their Foundation or Pillars with bonus points, but characters may not begin play with a rating higher than 3 in any Foundation or Pillar. Foundation does *not* have to equal or exceed Pillars, but casting spells that require great control without the requisite power behind them (that is, a Pillar higher than one's Foundation) carries costs of its own (see Chapter Four).

When choosing magical abilities, consider the character's magical beliefs and goals. If she is looking for power for an immediate goal, and consequences be damned, her Foundation will probably go neglected as she strives for greater understanding of a specific Pillar. If, however, she is a devout believer in a spiritual Fellowship or sees her magic as a responsibility, rather than as simply strength, she may focus on her Foundation instead.

Step Five: Finishing Touches

At this stage, the player spends 15 bonus points and records any other details, including Willpower, starting Quintessence, and (if her Storyteller allows them and she wishes to purchase them) Merits and Flaws. Also, she makes any other decisions about the character and her concept that might have arisen during the character creation process. The Storyteller and the player should also take time to play out a prelude for the character.

Willpower

Dark Ages: Mage characters begin with a permanent Willpower rating of 5, which can be raised by spending bonus points.

Quintessence

Whether the mage calls it "mana," "vis," or any other mystical term, Quintessence is the *essentia* of the universe, the very lifeblood of magic. Many spells require Quintessence, and any mage can expend this energy in order to exert more control over her magic. Characters begin with 5 points of Quintessence or their Fount + Cray Background ratings, whichever is *higher*. See Chapter Four for more details on Quintessence in play.

Bonus Points

Costs for purchasing Traits with bonus points are listed in the Character Creation Summary chart above. **Dark Ages: Mage** characters begin with 15 bonus points, though the player may purchase Flaws to gain more if the Storyteller allows it.

The Prelude

The prelude is just as important for mage characters as for vampires. It serves many of the same functions — defining the character's mundane life, helping to highlight any "holes" in his Traits (if he spent time on Crusade, he should have at least a dot in Melee), and working the character into the lives of the other mages. The questions presented on pp. 277-278 of **Dark Ages: Vampire** are good starting points, but are geared towards the undead. Below are some questions that the prelude should answer.

• **What was life like as a Commoner?** Very few people know about magic from their early lives. In the Dark Medieval, people may believe in magic, but they probably don't actually see it. The prelude should establish what your character's life was like before she knew — really *knew* — that magic was real. Also, this is a good time to think about your character's attitudes on faith and the Divine (by whatever name she knows it). In this time, atheism is unknown. Everyone *knows* that God exists and punishes sinners, or that the fields will go fallow without the proper rituals being performed each season, or that Allah promises Paradise to those who die in His service. Did your character believe whatever she was told to believe without doubt, or did she question the unquestionable?

• **When did you become aware of magic?** Many mages have aptitudes for magic even before they are trained in its use. The prelude should establish whether your character became aware of the mystical world after long months of study, or all at once in response to a threat. Also, if your character studied under a mentor (and most mages do), the prelude should develop that relationship. Is the mentor still alive and teaching the character, or have they parted ways for whatever reason?

• **How do you feel about Commoners?** Are they merely potential servants, hopelessly unaware of the scope of the world? Or does your character see a difference at all? The prelude might contain a scene with a Commoner reacting to the character's Aura for the first time — how does the mage respond? Likewise, the wars in Europe are fought by Commoners with swords, not by mages with spells. How does the mage see such strife? As futile attempts to conquer a world that will not submit? Or does she wish to aid her nation or faith in its attempts at conquest?

• **How did you meet the rest of your cabal?** This is an important point, as has been discussed. Each character's prelude might contain a chance meeting with another character, or the characters might all meet up suddenly (see Group Preludes on p. 278 of **Dark Ages: Vampire**). Define the relationships between the characters — are any of them close friends? Blood relations? Lovers? Are there points of tension between them? How do the characters reconcile these issues?

• **Where is your chantry?** If the characters do not share a chantry, of course, this does not apply. However, take some time to define and describe any chantries, crays, sanctums, and so forth that your character might own or tend. The prelude should explain how the character(s) came into possession of these resources, and what they intend to do with them.

New Traits

Dark Ages: Mage presents several new Abilities and Backgrounds for players to purchase for their characters. These Traits are detailed below.

Abilities

Two new Knowledges (Cosmology and Enigmas) and one new Talent (Awareness) are presented for mages. While these Abilities appear on the character sheet (and thus replace Abilities found in **Dark Ages: Vampire**) this is only because they are more common for mages than the Abilities they replace. Mages can learn any of the Abilities listed in **Dark Ages: Vampire**.

In addition, Ahl-i-Batin mages often study the lore of the human mind, represented by the Academics Knowledge with a Specialty in Behavioralism.

New Talent: Awareness

Whereas the Alertness Talent (p. 143 of **Dark Ages: Vampire**) allows the character to notice mundane events and details, Awareness measures a character's ability to sense the unnatural. The presence of ghosts or strong magic may trigger an Awareness roll (usually paired with Perception). Ordinarily, only mages exhibit this Talent, although other mystically sensitive beings might possess it at the Storyteller's discretion. Characters notice the supernatural in various ways. Sometimes the hair on a mage's neck will stand on end, sometimes she will grow cold suddenly or see a flicker of light. The player and the Storyteller are free to personalize this Ability as much as they wish.

Successful use of this Talent indicates that a character senses magic (or spirits, or whatever is triggering the feeling) but it does not mean that she understands what exactly the sensation means. However, over time a character might learn to recognize the chill she gets when ghosts are present and differentiate it from other strange sensations.

- • Novice: You sometimes get shivers when walking through a graveyard.
- •• Practiced: Strong magic rarely escapes you, and you can "feel" sources of magic such as crays from a considerable distance.
- ••• Competent: You can concentrate and discern whether a given individual or place is touched by magic.
- •••• Expert: You feel comfortable talking with spirits; even if you cannot see them, you know that they are always present.
- ••••• Master: The world around you pulses with magic, and you are completely in tune with

it. You can differentiate between two mages' spells simply by the magical "thumbprint" they leave behind.

Possessed by: Mages, Spirits, Madmen, Fortune-Tellers

Specialties: Mystical Places, Ghosts, Talismans, Mage Auras

New Knowledge: Cosmology

Other worlds beyond the physical exist, but they can never be mapped. However, mages write books and tell stories of these strange places, and the truly skilled can even travel to such exotic locales. This Knowledge indicates that the mage is learned about the Umbrae and what she might encounter there.

Of course, the Umbrae are diverse and each of the Fellowships has its own ideas about what they might contain. The Messianics speak of Heavens and Hells whereas the Order of Hermes talks of the courts of the Umbrood. The pagan mages of the Old Faith, Spirit-Talkers and Valdaermen have their own legends and caveats about the lands of the dead or the strange realms where every spirit has its purpose and its own life. The Umbrae are unpredictable in the extreme, and Cosmology is much less useful if the mage is dealing with phenomena that his Fellowship does not acknowledge or cannot explain. For example, a Messianic might look at anything non-Christian as demonic in origin, but that attitude, while it might help her in navigating Hell (or a realm that resembles it) will not guide her through Asgard.

- • Dabbler: You have heard that spirits have worlds of their own.
- •• Student: You have glimpsed the other worlds and know the names of some of their inhabitants.
- ••• Learned: You have visited the Umbra at least once, or sat at the feet of a world-walker and listened well.
- •••• Scholar: You could attend an Umbral court without making a fatal error, provided you said little.
- ••••• Master: You are a recognized expert on the spirit realms and other mages approach you to guide and advise them.

Possessed by: Mages, Werewolves, Heretical Theologians

Specialties: Spirit Names, Realms, The Gauntlet

New Knowledge: Enigmas

Masters of magic do not present their instruction in clear, easily understood lessons. They couch the greatest secrets in riddles and allegory, to ensure that only the brightest and most capable students ascend to true mastery. Likewise, paper is rare in the Dark Medieval and the Church destroys any writings that smack of heretical or demonic dogma, so those few mages that write down their knowledge often do so in codes or hidden behind fables. This Knowledge measures a character's mastery of understanding riddles, puzzles, and cryptic hints. It is also useful for speaking with spirits (whose alien mindset makes them difficult conversationalists).

- • Dabbler: You played at riddles with your siblings.
- •• Student: You never had to ask your village priest what the meaning behind Christ's parables was.
- ••• Learned: Talking with the mad or possessed is not difficult for you, and you can even understand spirits given a bit of time.
- •••• Scholar: You can puzzle out languages from exotic lands simply by looking for the patterns therein.
- ••••• Master: The only way to keep something secret from you it to lock it up.

Possessed by: Priests, Jesters, Wise Men and Women, Inquisitors

Specialties: Spirits, Riddles, Deduction, Quick Solutions

Backgrounds

The Backgrounds presented here are meant for **Dark Ages: Mage** characters only. While it's not inconceivable for a Tremere to have a magical Servant or a mortal to own land that houses a Cray, these Backgrounds are designed with mages in mind and are most applicable to them.

Chantry

A chantry is a place of magical learning, where mages join together to study and practice the mystic arts. A solitary mage may maintain a chantry, but more commonly, a cabal shares in the duties and rewards that such a place brings.

A cabal's chantry can take nearly any form. It can be a noble's ancestral home or a small mud building in a village. A chantry need not even be a building per se; any space in which the cabal can safely work their spells qualifies. A cave on a rocky coastline serves as well as a hidden oasis in the desert.

Building a chantry is similar to building a Domain (see **Dark Ages: Vampire**, page 154-155). Points spent on the Background can either make the chantry larger or more secure, but can have other effects as well. Each point of Chantry in a pool does one of the following:

OPTIONAL RULE: CHANTRY FLAWS

Just as the players may spend points to improve areas of their characters' chantry, they may make one area deficient in order to improve another. For example, the players may decide that the chantry isn't a building at all, but a clearing in a nearby forest. The chantry has little in the way of security; anyone could just walk right in. However, the players also want it to include a cray. The Storyteller allows the players to take "negative security" points and spend them on the Cray Background. The players could also have decided to spend these points to make the chantry dampen their Auras or even to expand the chantry so that it encompasses more territory.

How many points the players can accrue in this manner and what they may be spent them on is solely up to the Storyteller.

- Increases the size of the chantry, as indicated below.
- Makes the chantry more secure, increasing the difficulty to break in by 1 per point spent.
- Diminishes the Aura of any cabal member on the grounds. For each point thus spent, the cabal member's Aura diminishes as if she had one less dot in her Foundation (so, if a mage has a Foundation of 3 but two points have been spent to diminish Auras, the mage's Aura is only as strong as if she had a Foundation of 1 while she is on the chantry grounds). Mages who are not members of the cabal do not receive this benefit.
- Makes the chantry a part of the surrounding "community." If no points are spent in this way, the Commoners in the area trade stories and rumors about what goes on in that strange workshop (or whatever the chantry happens to resemble). The more point spent to "normalize" the chantry, the more accepted the place is and the less damaging the gossip that flies about it.

Although many chantries house crays from which the mages may draw energies and sanctums where they can safely practice their arts, these things are not automatically granted by purchasing the Chantry Background. All this Background grants the mage(s) is the physical space to use for magical study.

- A small home and perhaps a farm. It's not much, but it's yours. Enough room for 1-2 characters to live comfortably.
- •• A relatively spacious building; a larger farmhouse and barn or a workshop in a city. Enough space for 3-4 characters.
- ••• A noble's cottage or country home, or several smaller buildings clustered together. Enough room for 5-7 characters.
- •••• A building roughly the size of a church. Enough space for 8-10 people.
- ••••• A castle with room enough for a score of mages to study.

As with Domain, Chantry ratings of over 5 are possible. If the players wish to own a chantry larger than what five dots would buy them, the Storyteller should work with them to decide what kind of accommodations their characters have.

CRAY

Quintessence flows through the world like the humors through a human being, bubbling to the surface in certain places. These places are called crays. Mages seek out these rare sites jealously, as they provide plentiful energy for mystical endeavors. Such places aren't often left unattended; the werewolves revere them as holy sites (though the brutal beasts probably have no idea of the cray's potential) and other, stranger beings such as spirits and Fae also haunt them.

This Background assumes that the mage has exclusive access to a cray, either because he owns and can defend the land it is on or because no one else has discovered it yet. Players can pool their ratings in this Background to indicate particularly powerful cray or a number of smaller ones.

A mage may draw Quintessence from a cray as often as she wishes. To accomplish this, the character must "harvest" the Quintessence and prepare it in a particular way. A cray located deep in a forest might take the form of a fairy ring, requiring the mage to pick and boil the mushrooms that grow there in order to make use of its energies. The harvesting method is rarely difficult and allows the mage to control how much energy he takes from the cray, but it can be time consuming. In dire straits, the mage can attempt to absorb Quintessence from the site directly. The player simply rolls Wits + Foundation (difficulty of 10 minus the cray's rating). The mage absorbs one point of Quintessence per success. This method is dangerous, though, as the mage *must* absorb the Quintessence she draws, and so make inadvertently take too much (see below).

Crays have only a finite amount of energy. A cray holds a number of Quintessence points equal to five times its rating. The cray replenishes its Quintessence at a rate of one point per day, regardless of how powerful it is, but only if the cray goes untapped (it does not regenerate a point on any day during which it is tapped).

If a mage ever attempts to draw so much Quintessence from a cray that it would have no points left, she runs the risk of depleting it completely. After a cray is drained of its usual (rating x 5) of Quintessence, a greedy mage can drain an additional number of points equal to the cray's rating. Doing do, however, automatically drops the rating of the cray by one level. In addition, the player must immediately roll the cray's adjusted rating (difficulty 8). If the roll succeeds, the cray is depleted but will begin replenishing itself at its normal rate. If the roll fails, the cray becomes "dormant" and replenishes itself at a rate of one point of Quintessence per year. If the roll botches, the cray "dies" and will never again generate Quintessence. Keep in mind that mages do not know how many "dots" their crays are worth, and therefore often have difficulty gauging how much power a cray holds. The Awareness Talent, as well as certain magics (notably the Order of Hermes Primus Pillar) can help the mage determine more accurately how much Quintessence a cray holds and how long it will take to regenerate.

If a cabal's members' players pools their Cray rating, points may be spent to increase the cray's potency or to make it more difficult to detect magically. Each point spent in this way raises the difficulties of any magical attempts to find or sense the cray by one.

- • A minor cray; five Quintessence maximum
- •• A small cray; 10 Quintessence maximum
- ••• A notable cray; 15 Quintessence maximum
- •••• A major cray; 20 Quintessence maximum
- ••••• A legendary cray; 25 Quintessence maximum

Destiny

Some mages are simply fated for great things — or horrible tragedy. The star-crossed mage often has some inkling of what Dame Fortune has in store for her, however, and can call upon that knowledge to avoid more mundane or ignominious perils. The greater a mage's Destiny rating, the more important and impressive her fate.

The Storyteller should work with the player and decide — loosely — what the character's eventually destiny will be. Conversely, if the player is willing to trust the Storyteller (and she should be able to) she may decide to simply allow the Storyteller control of this Background — what the Destiny is, when it is invoked, etc.

In game terms, the player may roll her character's Destiny rating once per story in response to danger that threatens to let her lot in life go unfulfilled (difficulty 7). The character regains one point of spent Willpower per success. These Willpower points can then be used to help the mage escape her current dangers and survive to face her destiny someday.

The character can (and should) fulfill her destiny at some point in the chronicle. If this happens before the chronicle ends, the Background and its benefit disappear (Storytellers can opt to award the character one permanent Willpower point if this happens). Likewise, characters can actually accrue this Background as a result of chronicle events, at the Storyteller's discretion.

- • A minor destiny; you might be a soldier in a great war. Roll one die.
- •• A notable destiny; you may command troops in this war. Roll two dice.
- ••• A crucial destiny; you could win (or lose) a decisive battle. Roll three dice.
- •••• A world-changing destiny; your actions might dictate the outcome of the war. Roll four dice.
- ••••• A Heaven-shaking destiny; the war is fought over you. Roll five dice.

Familiar

Many mages have Familiars, spirits in material bodies that have bonded themselves to the individuals they find promising, polite, or merely amusing. Sometimes Familiars follow a "line" of mages, moving from mentor to student when the older mage is ready to retire. Sometimes they simply follow the mage home from an Umbral sojourn, and sometimes they are bound into service against their will. It all depends on the Familiar in question.

A Familiar can take nearly any shape, but most are no bigger than a large dog. Mages of all Fellowships keep and treasure Familiars, from the cats and ravens of the Old Faith to the white doves of the Messianic Voices.

Each Familiar is bonded to its mage by a *Pact*. The player should detail exactly what the Pact states — length of time it is in effect, what the Familiar is obligated to do for the mage (and vice versa) and what both are prohibited from doing. Some Familiars genuinely like their mages, but some only want to be free and work to find loopholes in their contracts.

Familiars are thaumivores; that is, they feed on Quintessence. In general, a Familiar must consume a number of Quintessence points per week equal to its rating or it starts weakening and will eventually die. Some Familiars can draw power from other sources; gold, human flesh, goat's hair, or any number of other exotic and bizarre foodstuffs. Generally, a mage must provide for his Familiar (and this is usually part of the Pact).

A Familiar can be a lot of work, but they have their benefits. When creating a Familiar, a mage must spend points on these various boons. They include:

• **Backlash Negation:** Once per dot per story, the Familiar can negate one Backlash (particularly nasty Backlashes may count as two).

• **Communication:** For one dot, the Familiar can speak any language the mage knows. For two, it can communicate mentally with anyone in line of sight. (The mage and the Familiar can always communicate telepathically, no matter their distance.)

• **Knowledge:** For each dot spent, the Familiar has three dots in a Knowledge that the mage doesn't possess (Cosmology and Enigmas are common choices). This allows the Familiar to act as a mentor to the mage. Alternatively, the Familiar might simply have connections to very knowledgeable spirits; this allows the Familiar to answer one question per dot spent per story (especially tough or specialized questions may count as two, and the Storyteller can always rule that no spirit who knows the answer can be found).

• **Protection:** The Familiar can lend its mage aid in dire situations. For one dot, the Familiar can grant the mage an extra die to soak, dodge, or cast any spell that would take him out of harm's way. For two dots, the Familiar grants the mage an extra action in combat, provided it is used for self-protection only (putting distance between the mage and an attacker, parrying and dodging, etc). For three dots, the Familiar can, once per story, transport the mage to safety provided that they are in physical contact and that the mage spends a point of Quintessence.

Familiars may have other powers and benefits as well, at the Storyteller's discretion. Some Familiars have magic of their own, and are even willing to use it on their mages' behalf.

- • A minor and moderately useful Familiar.
- •• A notable magical creature.
- ••• An impressive and somewhat loyal companion.
- •••• A being who undoubtedly has its own reasons for associating with the mage.
- ••••• Who's *really* the Familiar, anyway?

Fount

All mages can hold Quintessence, but some can hold more than others. No one is really sure why this is — lineage seems to play a part, but is hardly the only determinant. Some people simply seem to have a greater facility for storing magical energy. Likewise, not all mages can channel Quintessence equally well, but some can let the energies of the universe flow through them without ever breaking a sweat.



The Fount Background represents this affinity. Without it, the mage can hold only ten points of Quintessence and may spend only two per turn, which means that some effects must be built up over time. A rating in this Background allows much greater control over Quintessence and capacity for it, however. Mages with very high Fount ratings sometimes report strange whispers and urgings when they channel large amounts of Quintessence. Of course, each Fellowship has its own explanation for this phenomenon — divine messages, advice from spirits, and so on — but no mage really knows what these voices truly portend.

- • Store 12 points of Quintessence, spend two per turn.
- •• Store 14 points of Quintessence, spend three per turn.
- ••• Store 16 points of Quintessence, spend four per turn.
- •••• Store 18 points of Quintessence, spend five per turn.
- ••••• Store 20 points of Quintessence, spend six per turn.

Library

This extremely rare Background grants a mage a number of physical sources of knowledge from which to learn. Typically, this means books or scrolls, but some Spirit-Talkers learn from art on cave walls and carvings their ancestors left for them to find. Paper is rare in the Dark Medieval age, and many of the ancient drawings have faded or been destroyed, so Library is expensive; *each dot of Library costs two Background points or two bonus points.*

Libraries have their advantages, however. A player may roll Intelligence + Library against a varying difficulty to find occult knowledge or magical secrets. The player and the Storyteller should work together before play begins and determine what sort of information a given Library contains (a book pilfered from the Papal library is unlikely to contain information on summoning demons, although one never knows...). Also, a mage can increase her own mystical understanding with a Library. When the player wishes to spend experience to increase a Pillar, she may roll Library (difficulty 8); each success reduces the experience cost by one.

- • An incomplete book or a partially burned scroll.
- •• A book handwritten by a knowledgeable source... you hope.
- ••• An inscribed cave wall, left undisturbed for centuries.
- •••• A collection of illuminated manuscripts, in fairly good condition.
- ••••• A truly impressive library; any topic you wish to research is probably at least mentioned.

Sanctum

By a mage's will, amazing things can happen, but every spellcaster is subject to Backlash — except in her sanctum. Sancta are special places where the mage's Aura and the mystical energies of the area mesh, making the mage even more powerful.

Sancta can be naturally occurring places or can be meticulously enchanted over a number of years (the rule of thumb is one year per dot of Sanctum) to conform to the mage's Aura. Some sancta are large enough to contain crays; most are not. Messianic sancta may even be considered Holy Ground (see p. 289 of **Dark Ages: Vampire**) at the Storyteller's discretion (this should probably require the expenditure of additional points on the Background).

The rating of the sanctum determines not only the physical size but also what magical benefits the character receives while therein. These benefits are cumulative; that is, a three-dot Sanctum confers the benefits of levels one and two of the Background. However, no matter what the rating, while in the sanctum the mage is immune to Backlash.

- • A tiny sanctum the size of a pantry or a small clearing; no special benefits.
- •• A small room or copse of trees; –1 difficulty on all magic rolls while in your sanctum.
- ••• A workshop and perhaps an adjoining bedroom or closet; – 2 on all magic rolls while in your sanctum.
- •••• A small house or cottage or a suite of rooms in a larger building; regain one point of Quintessence by sleeping for eight hours in your sanctum.
- ••••• An entire mansion or a large wing of a castle, or perhaps a forest. You immediately know of any incursion onto your lands; add one die to Foundation while in the sanctum.

Servants

Similar to the Retainers Background in **Dark Ages: Vampire**, Servants are either Commoners or magical beings that do your bidding. Servants are most often used for menial tasks — cleaning a chantry, fetching water, cooking, and so forth. Like Retainers, a high rating in this Background can indicate that your character employs or commands many Servants or a few highly competent ones.

The player should consider strongly whether she wants her character to be served by Commoners or

magical beings. Commoners are human beings, and as such, need to eat, sleep, and so forth. They suffer from all the usual human frailties and are not perfectly loyal; they can be bribed, threatened, or even supernaturally coerced into betrayal. They are also capable of a much wider range of tasks, however, and — most importantly — can learn new skills.

Magical constructs come in a variety of forms. Hermetic mages summon up golems from rock or metal to take on heavy lifting. Spirit-Talkers conjure elementals whereas the Ahl-i-Batin call up djinn and afrits. Dark legends of the North speak of Valdaermen necromancers who reanimate the bodies of dead foes to serve as their footmen. These magical Servants share some common characteristics, however. First, they can perform only specific tasks. A golem created to lug heavy items can do only that, and cannot be taught to guard a door. A zombie created for the purpose of chopping wood will never learn to boil water. If the player decides that a high Servant rating indicates a more competent magical creature, that creature has a *small* measure of independence and can perform tasks related to the job for which it was created or summoned. Learning new skills is still largely out of their purview, though. At their chosen tasks, however, these beings excel, and can complete them in much shorter times than human servitors can. Also, they do not tire, get sick, complain, or betray their masters (not without powerful magical intervention, anyway).

The player should decide upon purchasing this Background whether the Servants are human or not. If she wishes for her character to have both types, she should purchase two separate ratings in this Background. Like Retainers, Servants can die or be destroyed, and are not easily replaced.

The player should also consider where the Servants came from and why they stay (if they are Commoners). Most likely, she employs them, but that either means that she is a noble or that she has a high Resources rating. Or, perhaps the Servant is actually an apprentice, doing menial labor and studying on his own time until he understands enough about magic to begin true schooling — what might he do to hasten the process?

- • One rather mediocre servant.
- •• Two servants, both of whom do their jobs well enough, or one exceptional servant.
- ••• Three average servants or one remarkable servant.
- •••• Four average, two impressive, or one truly stellar servant (or some combination thereof).
- ••••• Five average, three exceptional, or one servant that one barely notices (or some combination thereof).

Talisman

Mages often create magical items to aid them, either by providing some sort of protection from harm or simply by granting convenient niceties. Sometimes, mentors also pass along potent magical artifacts to their students. The Talisman Background indicates that the character owns and knows how to use such an item.

The character probably doesn't know how to create more items of the same kind; perhaps the one he has was the result of magical fluke or a celestial conjunction that happens once in a century, or perhaps (as suggested) the Talisman was a gift. All magical items are special, however, and simply churning them out robs them of their dramatic impact.

Chapter Six has examples of various kinds of Talismans. The Storyteller should use those items as measuring sticks for any that the players may wish their characters to own. The highest Pillar level used to make a Talisman (no matter how many Pillars are used) determines the Talisman's level.

- • A minor Talisman; an attuned focus or a one-use only item (such as a potion).
- •• An impressive Talisman; a Hermetic Tome with the secrets of Corona Forma ••.
- ••• A true wonder; enchanted armor (+3B/+3L).
- •••• An awe-inspiring Talisman; a flying carpet.
- ••••• The stuff of legends; Excalibur.

Quintessence

The mystical energy behind all creation, Quintessence is what allows mages to perform their spells. While minor castings can be completed easily with no investment of this energy, really impressive workings can require a great deal of Quintessence. Several of the Backgrounds above help in storing and regaining Quintessence. Below is a discussion of what Quintessence truly does for a mage and how she can regain it once it is spent.

Spending Quintessence

• Quintessence can be spent to lower the difficulty of magic rolls (see Chapter Four for more details).

• Quintessence *must* be spent if the mage is attempting a spell involving a Pillar higher than her Foundation. In this case, the mage has the expertise to cast the spell but not the raw power and must compensate by giving of her own stores of mystic energy. Some other spells also require Quintessence expenditure (again, see Chapter Four).

• A player can spend an extra point of Quintessence on a spell to make it more impressive. For example, a spell allowing a mage to mentally contact another character is normally invisible, but by investing a point of Quintessence the player might state that

the character's eyes glow or that whispered snatches of thought fill the air while the telepathy takes place. Such cosmetic effects have no bearing on the game mechanics of a spell, although they might well subtract from Intimidation difficulties. The mage need not be actually casting a spell to use this effect; the player can simply spend a point of Quintessence and cause a small show of magical power. This cannot be used as a weapon (no blinding flashes of light or deafening booms) nor does it have any long-lasting utility (the mage might create enough light to read by, but the effect requires a point of Quintessence per turn — or an actual spell — to maintain).

• A player may only spend three points of Quintessence per turn unless she possesses the Fount Background (see above). Spells that require more energy than that must be built over time (see *Extended Spells*, in Chapter Four).

Regaining Quintessence

• A mage may regain Quintessence by taking it from a cray, either by harvesting the physical manifestation of the energy (called Tass) or by absorbing it directly from the area. See the Cray Background, above.

• A mage with the Fount Background replenishes her Background rating in Quintessence each month. Most mages have a special ritual associated with this replenishment, be it exaltation of the full moon or a long prayer vigil. A mage without the Fount Background regains no Quintessence on her own.

• Some magical creatures can be harvested for Quintessence. A vampire's blood, for example, is considered Tass (one blood point translates to one point of Quintessence) but very few mages know that, and even fewer know how to prepare the blood safely to avoid the blood oath. The creatures listed in Chapter Six include a note dictating how many points of Quintessence can be harvested from their bodies. Note, however, that few mages are willing to risk the ire of such beings unless they are truly desperate.

• While in the Umbra, a mage replenishes one point of Quintessence per day.

Aura

Just as vampires induce feelings in others based on their roads, mages give off strange sensations based on their Foundations. The system is similar to the one for vampiric Auras (found on p. 161 of **Dark Ages: Vampire**) except that mage Auras are much stronger.

Each of the Fellowship descriptions in Chapter Two lists that Fellowship's Aura. The game mechanics are the same regardless of Fellowship.

Foundation Rating	Aura Modifier
1	0
2	+/-1
3	+/-1
4	+/-2
5	+/-3

Character Development

Characters are not static. As the chronicle progresses, they should learn, develop, and change in response to the events around them. This is simulated by experience points, just as in **Dark Ages: Vampire**. Mage characters earn experience points in the manner described on pp. 165-167 of that book, but the costs for raising and purchasing Traits are different (because the Traits themselves are different).

Maturation points do not apply to mages, as they age and die over time, unlike vampires (unless they manage to make themselves immortal through magic, in which case the Maturation systems from **Dark Ages: Vampire** might well apply).

Increasing Magical Abilities

Whereas raising the ratings of Attributes and Abilities is largely a matter of study or practice, becoming more adept at magic requires special consideration here. Mages who wish to increase their mystical prowess (which is most of them) need to spend much of their time honing their skills.

Improving Foundation

Foundation is the very backbone of a mage's power. It is the Foundation that allows the mage to alter the world around her and in many ways defines her view of Creation. Improving it requires a combination of intellectual learning and

Trait	Cost
Attribute	current rating x 4
Existing Ability	current rating x 2
New Specialty or Expertise	current rating
New Ability	3
Foundation	current rating x 8
New Pillar	10
Existing Pillar	current rating x 6
Willpower	current rating

spiritual insight, not too dissimilar to a *moment of truth* for a Cainite. Raising a character's Foundation rating isn't just a matter of having the (admittedly high) amounts of experience points on hand. The Storyteller should judge whether or not the character is ready for such a breakthrough.

When making this evaluation, the Storyteller should consider the character's actions. Does she act with her Foundation in mind often, if not constantly? Does it shape her view of the world? An Ahl-i-Batin mage who breaks the precepts of Islam in casting his magic and dominates the wills of others might be able to increase a Pillar, but is *not* acting in concert with Al-Ikhlas and is not ready to raise his Foundation. Likewise, a Valdaerman who instinctively steps in front of a comrade, ready to give of himself to protect a friend is demonstrating understanding of Sacrifice and can probably be allowed to increase his Foundation.

Along with this conceptual understanding of magic, however, comes an intellectual understanding. Sometimes this takes the form of actual knowledge, sometimes it is more of an intuitive comprehension of the world and how it ties it with the mage's Foundation. There is no specific game mechanic for this, but the Storyteller might require the player to buy higher ratings in certain Abilities (Occult, Cosmology, Enigmas, Theology and Awareness are all common choices) before allowing an increase in Foundation.

Remember, too, that Foundation makes the mage more powerful in *all* of her mystical workings, and that the Trait only goes to five dots. Allowing players to raise this Trait too quickly can make for overwhelmingly powerful characters in a short span of time. If this is what the Storyteller wants, of course, that's fine, but be aware that characters with the powers of the gods require different kinds of stories than less potent ones.

Pillars

Learning a new Pillar can take months or even years of casual study, or can be done in weeks if the mage devotes all his time to it. Although it doesn't require the deeper level of spiritual understanding that raising the Foundation does, learning or improving a Pillar does necessitate looking at the world in a new way and seeing a heretofore unnoticed facet thereof. A mage of the Old Faith, for example, who has never demonstrated any facility for the Winter Pillar, might witness the effects of famine or plague and be struck by the power of death to fell even entire civilizations, and thereby come to understand and control that force to some degree.

Merits and Flaws

Merits and Flaws are, as stated on p. 302 of **Dark Ages: Vampire**, entirely optional Traits. They can be superb story tools, however, and one Merit or Flaw can act as a springboard for an entire character concept. Below are new Merits and Flaws designed especially for **Dark Ages: Mage**.

Many of the Merits and Flaws listed in **Dark Ages: Vampire** are acceptable for mage characters, of course. The "Disallowed" sidebar lists the ones that are *not* allowable for mages.

Physical

Elderly (4-pt. Flaw)

Perhaps you didn't begin studying the arcane arts until later in life, or perhaps a spell gone awry aged you prematurely. In either case, your body is frail. All difficulties on physical rolls are increase by one, and if you ever botch such a roll, you must immediately roll the appropriate Attribute at difficulty 6. If that roll botches, you lose a dot from the Attribute. Dropping to zero in a Physical Attribute may cripple or kill, at the Storyteller's discretion.

Hale (2-pt. Merit)

You are in good health and rarely if ever take ill. Subtract two from all difficulties to resist disease, whether natural or supernatural in nature.

Pain Resistant (2-pt. Merit)

Whether through mental discipline or simply deadened feeling, you suffer only slightly from pain and discomfort. All wound penalties are reduced by one (so at the Wounded health level you lose one die, not two).

Weak Lungs (2-pt. Flaw)

Whether because of a birth defect or a condition such as asthma, you become winded easily. Increase the difficulties of all sustained physical activity (running, prolonged combat, climbing, etc.) by one.

Mental

Devotion (1 to 3-pt. Merit)

You are devoted to service to or reverence of a higher power, be it Christ, Allah, Odin, or some other deity. Once per game session, you may pray to your divine patron for aid and guidance. In game terms, your character receives one to three points of temporary Willpower (depending on the

MORE THAN FOUR?

Players being the clever scamps that they are, your troupe probably won't be too far into a **Dark Ages: Mage** chronicle when one of them comes up with a great idea for a new Pillar. After all, there are more Archangels than the four listed for the Messianic Voices. A player enamored of Arabic culture could easily design something new for the Batini, and the Spirit-Talkers' totems surely have much more diversity than presented in this book.

As the Storyteller, you are free to allow or disallow any new Pillar. Ask the following questions when confronted with new ones:

• **Is it *really* new, or just highly specialized?** A player might design a "Flames of God" Pillar for her Messianic character, but that sort of thing is largely covered under the Gavri-El Pillar. The Pillars are meant to be comprehensive to illustrate the powerful and broad nature of magic in the Dark Medieval, especially in comparison to the static and limited Disciplines of vampires.

• **Does it fit with the Foundation?** Valdaermen don't call on the power of Christ. Hermetics don't give of their own blood to cast magic. Ahl-i-Batin don't use magics to raise the dead. And so on. Make sure that the proposed Pillar fits with the Fellowship's view of the world.

• **Is it too powerful?** Mages can do some impressive things as written. Don't allow a power-hungry player to create the World Beating Pillar just because he can't figure out how to accomplish his ends with the Pillars presented.

value of the Merit) for the scene, even if this takes her over her usual maximum. If these points are spent in a way that is frivolous or antithetical to the character's belief, this Merit may be rescinded until she can make amends.

Faint of Heart (2-pt. Flaw)

You are easily sickened by the sight of blood. Whenever you witness a gory scene, you must roll Willpower (difficulty 6). If the roll fails, you are overcome with nausea for the next few minutes. While this doesn't mean you spend the time vomiting (unless the roll botches) it does mean that all difficulties increase by one during that time.

Indomitable (3-pt. Merit)

Your will is nearly unshakeable — after all, you can command the very elements with it! You are not easily coerced or intimidated, and any attempts to do so receive a +2 difficulty. Supernatural attempts to break your will, including the Mikha-El Pillar and such Disciplines as Dominate and some applications of Presence, receive a +1 to their difficulties. Powers that do not attempt to dominate so much as confuse or alter your mind, however, function normally (including Dementation and Chimerstry).

Social

Arcane Heritage (1-pt. Merit or Flaw)

Your family has a history of magic, and that reputation colors you as well. If taken as a Merit, Arcane Heritage reflects that your family has traditionally been adept at their craft — perhaps you come from a long line of healers or shamans. If taken as a Flaw, however, your family might have a habit of selling their souls in order to gain power. In any case, you receive a -2 to Social difficulties when interacting with other members of your Fellowship or anyone else who would be impressed by your lineage (if Arcane Heritage is a Merit) or a +2 difficulty on such rolls (if a Flaw).

DISALLOWED

Players may not take the following Merits and Flaws for **Dark Ages: Mage** characters:

Physical: Eat Food, Blush of Health, Efficient Digestion, Smell of the Grave, 13th Generation, Ragged Bite, Permanent Wound, Flesh of the Corpse

Mental: Prey Exclusion, Religious Prohibition, Flesh Eater

Social: Apostate (Note: Merits and Flaws referring to a character's sire, such as Infamous Sire or Prestigious Sire, are allowable, except that they refer to a mage's mentor)

Supernatural: Inoffensive to Animals, Medium, Arcane Resistance, Oracular Ability, Initiate to the Road, Cannot Embrace, Blood Madness, Grip of the Damned, Light Sensitive, Weak Blood (Note: Merits and Flaws based on superstition, such as Cast No Reflection, might be applicable to mages as well as vampires. The Storyteller has final say over this.)

Apprentice (3-pt. Merit or Flaw)

You have agreed to take on a student. He isn't a mage yet and is still learning the basic precepts of Foundation and the Pillars, but someday he will rise to heights of power and bring you glory — or fail horribly and drag you down with him.

If Apprentice is taken as a Merit, the student is intelligent and progressing well, and is obedient and loyal. While he probably won't risk his life for you, he acts as a very competent Servant and will do your bidding as part of his training. He will someday become a mage in his own right (the Storyteller decides when this happens, based on how much time you spend training him).

If taken as a Flaw, the Apprentice is an embarrassment that you just can't get away from. He's incompetent, lazy, and petulant, and he doesn't even earn his keep by doing chores. Yet, you can't send him off or kill him, perhaps because of an oath you swore or perhaps because you actually like the little scoundrel. He takes up your time and occasionally manages to make a mess of things in the process, however.

In either case, the Apprentice requires training. The Storyteller should take care to ensure that the character is not reaping the benefits of the Apprentice (in the form of bonus points or a Servant) without acting as a mentor.

Repulsive Practice (3-pt. Flaw)

Your magic is not clean, nor is it harmless. Your spells require bloodletting, pain, odd or unsettling components (such as rotting flesh) or other unpleasant conditions. Although you aren't required to hurt others to cast magic, you should work to figure out what exactly your spells do entail and let the Storyteller judge whether they are nasty enough to justify this Flaw. If your methods are ever discovered, you can expect the Church to take a very dim view.

Supernatural

Arcane Madness (3-pt. Flaw)

You have great power at your fingertips, but at what cost? Your mind, for whatever reason, is ill-equipped to handle the rigors of magic and you are going steadily mad. You may only cast a number of spells per story equal to your permanent Willpower rating. Thereafter, each spell or magical effect requires a Willpower roll (difficulty 7). Success on this roll indicates that nothing special occurs, but failure indicates that madness takes you. Typically, this takes the form of visions and maniacal voices screaming in your head. These torments last for one hour, though you may end them sooner by spending a point of temporary Willpower. While the madness grips you, however, you suffer a +1 difficulty on all rolls. If the Willpower roll botches, this penalty is increased to +2 and you can only drive the torments off for a single turn by spending Willpower.

Chicanery (3-pt. Merit)

Although all mages can create small, cosmetic effects by spending Quintessence, you are skilled enough that you do not need to make that expenditure. As long as you have one point of Quintessence remaining in your body, you may create the effects described on p. 88-89 at will. Sustaining a given effect still requires effort, but much less than for other mages; you may maintain these effects for three turns by spending a single point of Quintessence.

Inept Channeler (4-pt. Flaw)

You can store Quintessence as well as any other mage, but have great difficulty using it. If you spend a number of Quintessence greater than your permanent Willpower score in one scene or on one spell, you must roll Willpower (difficulty 6) for each expenditure. If the roll succeeds, nothing happens. If the roll fails, you must immediately receive one health level of bashing damage (which may be soaked normally). On a botch, the damage is lethal and cannot be soaked. For example, a Hermetic with a permanent Willpower rating of 7 is attempting to bring a stone statue to life using an extended spell. He can only spend seven points of Quintessence on the spell freely. When he attempts to spend the eighth point, his player must roll Willpower and must continue doing so for every point of Quintessence he attempts to spend on that spell.

Living Fount (2-pt. Merit)

The Quintessence that wells up within you seems to stem from a living source. Perhaps you have a direct connection to God, or perhaps the spirits speak to you. In any case, once per story you may roll your Fount rating (difficulty 6). If successful, you receive cryptic hints on a matter at hand (the Storyteller may elect literally to give you a hint, or may simply reduce the difficulty of an appropriate roll, such as Enigmas or Occult).

Only characters with the Fount Background may take this Merit.

Pillar Natural (5-pt. Merit)

One of your Pillars comes very easily to you. Perhaps one of the Archangels watches over you, or

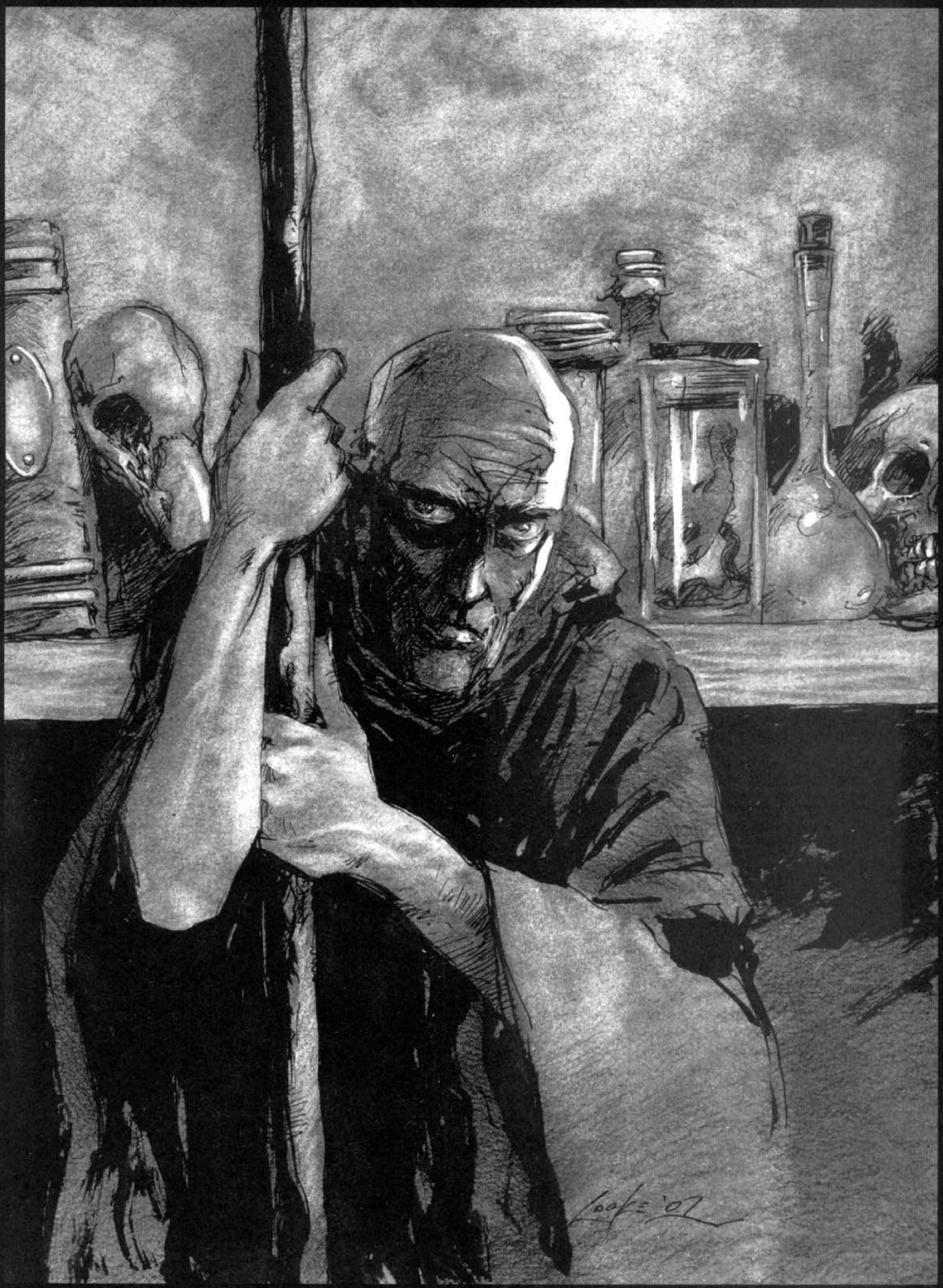


perhaps you were born under an eclipse in a given Season. Whatever the cause, the experience cost for your chosen Pillar is (current rating x 5). You need not begin with any dots in your chosen Pillar; if you choose not to, the cost to buy the first dot is eight experience points.

Witchwalk (1 to 5-pt. Flaw)

You suffer from a magical prohibition of sorts. The exact nature varies; perhaps salt burns your skin, or perhaps a sprig of mistletoe drives you away. See Chapter One for a discussion of the superstitions of the Dark Medieval; many of the notions found there would be appropriate for a witchwalk. The severity of the witchwalk is determined by the number of bonus points granted.

Point value	Example
1	Your skin is unnaturally pale (a sign of heresy in many places).
2	A slight breeze follows you wherever you go.
3	Consecrated ground burns your feet (you take no actual damage but remain in great pain as long as you walk on hallowed ground).
4	You cast no shadow.
5	Throwing salt over the shoulder wards a person from your magic for a full day, and if salt touches your skin you suffer an unsoakable health level of lethal damage.



Asar-un-Nefer looked to the darkening horizon

and cursed the sloth of his servants.

"Faster, damn you! Faster!" he yelled, goading his own horse up the rise. The three men grumbled and pulled harder on the reins of their mules, which were heavily laden with chests and bags.

"It's no good, master," Antonio cried. "They are tired and carry too much weight. We go as fast as we can."

"We must reach the stronghold by nightfall," Asar-un-Nefer said. "The bandits won't be so bold as to try us before then."

As if to prove him wrong, an arrow whistled from the nearby trees, barely missing his nose. A voice cried out from another grove behind them: "Be still and don't resist! You'll live if you give up your goods without a fight!"

Asar-un-Nefer cursed to himself. He had done a terrible job planning the trip back from the cave. He should have purchased more mules. That, or been content to take less goods. That simply had not been possible, however. The entrance to the place only opened once every solstice. He couldn't possibly have waited for another; he'd needed the magical materials too much for his alchemical experiments. They should have been home by now, free of the infamous Captain Ferrari's thieving patrols.

"I warn you, Ferrari," Asar-un-Nefer said, "do not make an enemy of me. You have heard what they say about me in town."

"Oh, yes," the voice answered, this time somewhat more to the left of its original source, "I hear them whisper of sorcery. But I don't believe such lies. I think you spread them yourself to scare others away. And now you come, carrying fine chests filled with... what? Crusader gold?"

"No gold you could possibly use," Asar-un-Nefer said. "I warn you once more: leave me be and let me pass."

The trees rustled and the soldiers appeared. A poor, bedraggled band of cowards. They'd come to the region following a crusader train, eager to fight in the Holy Land. They'd lost their nerve, however, and lagged behind. They subsisted on banditry now. Their swords were sharp, though, and their eyes full of desperation.

Their leader, Captain Ferrari, came forth on a horse. He smirked at Asar-un-Nefer. "Maybe I'll kill you, anyway. You are an arrogant one, and I don't like your tone."

Asar-un-Nefer raised his fine, smoothly polished staff, pointing its crystalline tip at Ferrari. "I think instead that you should smolder painfully, thinking on your folly as you writhe." He then spoke a guttural incantation in a language never designed for human tongues. A bolt of lightning shot forth from the staff and into Ferrari's chest. The man was blown off his horse and into the bushes.

He screamed in pain and fumbled with the straps of his breastplate. The smoking hole in his chest burned and kept on burning. Once he had the armor off, he gasped for breath and bit his cheek for focus.

"Kill him," he said. "Kill that devil!"

The soldiers hefted their swords but refused to move forward, staring at Asar-un-Nefer with a mixture of fear and hate. Asar-un-Nefer snorted and nudged his horse onwards. His servants, silent all the while, pulled their mules after him, staring back at the soldiers, fearful they might suddenly find their courage.

Asar-un-Nefer never looked back. He knew he had unmanned them with his display of power. They wouldn't attack. Not that evening, anyway. Their shame would fester, however, and they would eventually work up the courage to assault his stronghold. He would have to prepare for that. He cursed again. More time away from his studies....

Chapter Four: Magic

Dearer to the wizard, the witch and the shaman alike than life itself is the practice of magic. That elusive Gift suffuses their very being. Embodying every fantastic ability that sets the mage apart from the mundane and the ordinary, magic is both the most potent implement and greatest responsibility given to those souls touched by it. While magic exalts its wielder, it is never a thing to be taken lightly; the consequences of doing so are the very stuff of direst legend. When brought to bear on a just and worthy purpose, however, the effects of magic can be nothing short of miraculous.

What is magic? It is, simply put, the ability to remake the nature of the world to one's liking, whether in great ways or small — in this age, wizards traffic in powers unfathomable to frail-minded ordinary mortals. In these dark years, those with the Gift bestride the Earth like titans, blessed with fantastic abilities, abilities honed through sacrifice, dedication and focus. In exchange for these astonishing powers, those touched with sorcery are, in many ways, set eternally apart from normal men and women. Mages are feared, revered, adored and even worshipped at times, but they can never be just like everyone else. The Gift forbids it. As the Mythic Age wanes, mundane institutions like the

Church gain increasing power, and they are not kind to mages. For this reason, mages who once strode fearlessly before the masses must now hide their lights under bushels, lest they risk the ire of the greater populace, whose awe can quickly turn to hate following the orations of the Church.

Magic can be accurately described as a well that all people can draw from. For some, the well is exceedingly shallow, such as for a farmer whose charms against the evil eye sometimes ward off ill fortune. For others, the well is quite deep, such as for a great sorcerer hurling enchantments from her high tower. In most cases, the capacity for magic seems random. For example, the fisherman's daughter slowly discovers she can talk to plants and animals and is unfazed by the driving snows of winter, while the local alchemist's son has no skill for his father's craft. Some groups, most notably the Order of Hermes, are either able to discern this elusive spark in others or else induce it through a strict regimen of training and discipline, but most come across their newfound abilities without warning, training or a mentor to ease their first few steps into this strange world. That said, magic is many different things to many different people. To a Christian mystic, the miracles she sings down from Heaven are in no way similar, in practice or metaphysic, to the rites of a Slavic warrior-priest, those of an Arab sorcerer or, possibly, even those of a member of a different sect of her own faith. Magic is, to each and every mage, exactly what he or she makes of it.

In most societies in this age, supernatural phenomena are held to have an external origin. That is to say, all manifestations of mystic power come from sources outside the individual. In the overwhelming majority of cases, magic is considered to stem from sacred sources: deities, spirits, the dead, and so on. Hermetic doctrine appeals to the power of the self, but magic, for all save the most erudite of even their mages, is a *force that is controlled* rather than an expression of inner strength. The mage is not trying to evolve or expand his mind, but instead to grow in his power and his ability to harness, shape and control the energy of magic. The Gift is the ability to draw upon that energy; nothing more, nothing less.

NOTHING IS RELATIVE

Readers familiar with **Mage: The Ascension** and **Mage: The Sorcerer's Crusade** are no doubt aware even this early into the description of Dark Ages magic that things are significantly different. So it should be. Freedom to believe as you will is a modern conceit and the presiding social conventions of this era held that those who didn't think like you did were *wrong*. Not "misguided," not "led astray," but *wrong*. That being the case, what did a wizard in rural France have to learn from a savage, spirit-wise Teuton or a miracle worker dwelling in the Papal city? The interconnectedness of ideas and concepts that crops up in the wake of the first gatherings of the Nine Mystic Traditions will eventually lead to a much more encompassing philosophy, one that sees the similarities in what traditional wizards, woodland druids and ancestral shamans do, rather than the differences. But for now, those are gulfs that can be traversed by only a handful of exceptional people. Among other things, the result of this is that essentially no consensus exists beyond certain fundamental precepts (things fall down, the sun rises in the east and sets in the west, etc.) Although this means that the broad spectrum of ideas necessary to beget thoughts of Ascension is virtually unheard of, it also means that each mage is ultimately bound only by the limits of her own ambition and ability to achieve. To put it another way: The magic of the Dark Ages is dynamic, within a certain set of static frameworks that are so (and will remain thus for a while yet) by convention, not nature.

Of course, if you've come to **Dark Ages: Mage** by other avenues, and this aside makes no sense to you whatsoever, don't worry about it. The metaphysics above are centuries in coming and don't need to have any appreciable effect on your chronicle at all.

How Magic Works

Magic, contrary to the beliefs of the uninitiated, is more than just a procedure and its result. Time, effort, understanding and willpower go into every casting, great or small, and are as important and integral as each drop of mercury, ancient Name or supplication to the Crone.

The first step in creating a spell, perhaps not surprisingly, is to conceptualize *what is desired*. A love potion? A blade that never dulls? An animated corpse? Without this clarity and focus, the mage will be unable to direct her sorcerous might toward any one end and will waste her power in crude and inaccurate fumblings. Fortunately, from the most rigid of Hermetic curricula to the wildest and most unbridled druidic lessons, one of the first things taught to students of almost any established mystic fellowship is a sense of precision in visualizing spells. Anything less would be the height of irresponsibility and disrespect toward one's Gift.

The next step is to check the desired effect against the mage's belief structure. *Is it something that this particular school of mystic thought encompasses?* A Messi-

anic Voice can no more reincarnate a fallen comrade than a practitioner of the Old Faith could disrupt the flow of the seasons. Those particular effects are alien to the magical teachings of those societies. On the other hand, it is entirely appropriate for a Spirit-Talker to call upon his dead grandmother's shade for wisdom or for a Hermetic adept to assail a weaker mind with the razor-honed edge of her will. Remember, during this stage, that those of a given mystic practice don't think to look for loopholes in their beliefs that allow for violations of that practice's fundamental tenets. Such an idea is preposterous, even blasphemous. The Order of Hermes teaches that travel beyond the Lunar Sphere is *impossible*, not merely unlikely, and the Ahl-i-Batin know that *nothing* that exists in this world is truly severed from anything else, no matter how convenient it might be for that to be the case. Always keep such restrictions in mind when envisioning spells within a given paradigm.

Now, provided the desired spell fits within the mage's belief structure, *what is needed to bring it about?* Each magical fellowship has a *Foundation* of mystic practice, demonstrating the means by which that group harnesses its magic, and four *Pillars*, which delineate the capabilities of that particular school of thought. Any spell that a practitioner of a given sorcerous society wishes to create must fall under the purview of one or more of the Pillars she knows (and within her degree of mastery of said Pillar or Pillars) or else she will find herself unable to create it. Thus, it is not merely enough that a shaman wishes to awaken the spirit within his blade (despite the fact that such a spell is perfectly within the bounds of his magical belief system) — he must also know the mystic rites and secrets that allow him to do so.

At this point, provided all of the above conditions have been satisfied, the magic is ready to be brought into being. To create a simple spell (one that utilizes only one Pillar), the caster rolls a number of dice equal to her Foundation plus Pillar against a difficulty equal to 4 plus the level of the Pillar required to create that spell. Note that the caster may have a Pillar significantly higher than the level required to create a given spell without increasing the difficulty in any way; a difficulty 5 simple spell has a difficulty of 5 whether the caster is rolling two dice, six dice or ten dice.

Sometimes, however, a single Pillar is insufficient to create a particular spell. If a Hermetic mage wishes to create a flame that both sears his enemy's flesh and burns away his stored Quintessence, neither his control of the elements nor his mastery of the fabric of magic alone will achieve his desired end. He must incorporate *both* sets of teachings into a single enchantment. In order to create a complex spell (one that makes use of two or more Pillars in the casting), the caster rolls dice equal to Foundation plus her score in the highest Pillar required to create the spell, plus one die per additional Pillar involved in the casting. In the event that the highest Pillar score required to create the spell is equal for two or more Pillars, then the caster may choose which Pillar score she adds to the roll. The difficulty for this casting is equal to 5, plus the highest Pillar score required, plus one per additional Pillar involved in the spell.

In the event that circumstances would normally push a difficulty for a simple or complex spell over 9, the difficulty instead remains at 9 and additional successes equal to the additional levels of difficulty are added to the base number of successes required to achieve the spell. Likewise, circumstances that would reduce the difficulty of a spell will reduce the additional number of

SPELLCASTING SUMMARY

Simple Spell

Roll: Foundation + one Pillar

If the Pillar's required level is higher than the caster's Foundation, the caster must spend a point of Quintessence.

Difficulty: 4 + Pillar's required level (-1 per extra Quintessence pt., up to -3 max)

If the difficulty exceeds 9, then the difficulty remains at 9 but one extra success must be achieved per excess point.

Complex Spell

Roll: Foundation + primary Pillar + 1 die per additional Pillar involved in casting

If the primary Pillar's required level is higher than the caster's Foundation, the caster must spend a point of Quintessence.

Difficulty: 5 + Pillar's required level + 1 per additional Pillar involved in casting (-1 per extra Quintessence pt. spent, up to -3 max)

Extended Spell

As a simple or complex spell, except that successes are accrued over a series of rolls until the spell is achieved, time runs out, or a roll botches. The time between rolls varies with the task. Quintessence may be spent per roll to lower the difficulty (-1 per pt., -3 max).

Ongoing Spell

As an extended spell, but ten times the usual successes must be achieved. Quintessence costs: 1 pt. per success, plus 5 pts. per level of the highest Pillar involved. Willpower cost: 1 pt. per 10 Quintessence pts. spent.

successes required to create the spell by a like amount (down to one success at difficulty 9) before reducing the spell's difficulty below 9. In any case, whenever a caster is creating a spell and any of her Pillars involved in the casting are higher than her Foundation, she must expend a point of Quintessence. This is a case of too much precision and not enough power. The Quintessence is required to stabilize the spell and give it momentum and cohesion. Assuming a caster can spend up to three points of Quintessence per turn, he may do so on a single casting to lower the difficulty of a given spell by one per point expended, to a minimum of difficulty 4. (Spending more than two Quintessence points per turn requires the Fount Background; see pp. 86-87)

If the caster rolls the number of successes required to create the spell, then its consequences are resolved (Health Levels of damage are inflicted, distance is traveled, etc.) and the process of casting is typically over. (Sometimes, this is not the case, but these instances are discussed below.)

If the caster does not roll the required number of successes, but rolls no 1s, then the casting simply fails without effect. If, however, the caster attempts the same enchantment again within the same scene, then her overall difficulty is raised by one for each previous unsuccessful casting of the same spell within the scene.

If the caster falls short of the required number of successes to create the spell *and* rolls one or more 1s, then she incurs a *Backlash* of some sort (systems for this eventuality are covered later in this chapter) and the desired spell utterly fails. If the caster wishes (and is in any condition) to attempt the same spell again within the same scene, then she incurs an added overall difficulty of two per failed or botched prior attempt during the scene.

There are two special circumstances wherein magic may need to be successfully cast on more than just one turn. These are *extended spells* and *ongoing spells*.

Extended Spells

An extended spell is one that accrues successes with multiple rolls made over time and typically requires large numbers of successes to function properly (far more than almost any wizard could conceivably garner with a single die roll). For example, a Hermetic mage seeking to divert a tiny trickle of water from the Danube up a riverbank and to his location could easily make such a roll in one turn. If, however, he wished to reverse the river's flow, he would need to perform a far more complicated and time-consuming ritual, with many intricate steps, all of which must succeed lest the whole spell be wasted.

In order to roll for an extended spell, the Storyteller must first decide upon the number of successes required to bring about the spell, above and beyond the normal sum required (whether the spell is simple or complex is irrelevant) and the time period that elapses between magic rolls (seconds, hours, days, etc.). Bear in mind that bigger effects usually require great amounts of time (though this is not always the case; sometimes a mage may only have a short period in which to complete a complicated rite, in which case very little time might elapse between rolls). The caster then rolls using a normal die pool for the given spell (and he may expend up to three points of Quintessence, as normal, to lower his difficulty), recording the number of successes accrued. When the next time period comes to pass (during which time the caster has often been casting

Casting Made Simple: An Example

Ladislav, a Spirit-Talker from the Balkans, is a skilled mystic (Foundation of Sensitivity at 3 and the following Pillars: Chieftain 2, Trickster 4, Warrior 4, Wise One 3). If Ladislav wishes to pass invisibly and without a trace through an area bustling with activity, he would make a simple spell roll, using Sensitivity + Trickster, at a difficulty of 8 (as such a spell seems well suited to a Trickster score of 4). Note, though, that Ladislav would have to spend a point of Quintessence in the casting, as his expertise (Trickster) outstrips his raw power (Sensitivity) and he needs to supplement the spell with a bit of extra magic to stabilize it. If, however, Ladislav simply wished to become inconspicuous as he passed by the crowd, he would roll Sensitivity + Trickster against a difficulty of 6 (as his desired spell is possible with Trickster 2) and he need not spend any Quintessence to bolster his casting.

If Ladislav is leading a band of his fellows into battle against a band of terrible *upyri* and wishes to implore the spirits of the land for a battle-fury that he might share in and bestow upon his companions, then he would roll eight dice (Sensitivity + Warrior + 1 die for adding the Chieftain Pillar into the spell) against a difficulty of 9, with two successes required (as Ladislav's desired spell requires both Chieftain 2 and Warrior 4). Ladislav needs to expend one point of Quintessence in the casting and chooses to spend two points above and beyond that required expenditure, to lower his difficulty twice (the first point reduces it to difficulty 9, one success required, and the second reduces it once more to a difficulty of 8).

continually and without respite), the caster rolls his die pool again (and may again expend Quintessence, if he has any to spare). The process repeats at regular intervals, until such time as the spell is successfully completed or the caster botches one of his rolls (each roll is treated as a separate spell roll for the purposes of determining a botch). In the event of a botch, Backlash is determined according to the roll currently being resolved, and all previous successes are lost. In the case of a simple failure, no successes are accrued during that time period, though the difficulty does not change for subsequent rolls.

Ongoing Spells

An ongoing spell is one that lasts far longer than normal castings — perhaps indefinitely, or until canceled by another spell. Whether simple of complex, an ongoing spell begins as an extended spell, subject to all the rules of such spells. In order to create an ongoing spell, the caster requires *ten times* as many successes as would normally be necessary to beget the desired spell. Further, the mage must spend a point of Quintessence *per success*, in order to fuel the spell and to establish permanence in its pattern. Lastly, the spell must be sealed with an expenditure of five points of Quintessence per level of the highest Pillar involved in the spell and one point of Willpower for every ten Quintessence points in this final expenditure, rounding up, as the mage impresses the spell onto the Tapestry in perpetuity. While this may seem like quite a high price to pay, the potential benefits of everlasting spells usually far outstrip the cost.

Casting Ongoing and Extended Spells

Brigid, wise woman of the Old Faith, wishes to whip up a storm in her cauldron. This is an extended spell (she is trying for a prolonged downpour). The Storyteller rules that Brigid's player, Jane, will need 20 successes to create this enchantment, with a period of one hour between each roll. The effect will be a Summer 4 simple spell (thus, it will use Brigid's Spontaneity + Summer with a difficulty of 8). Brigid's Spontaneity Foundation and Summer Pillar are both 4, which gives Jane eight dice to roll. Her first roll yields a 9, two 8s, a 6, two 5s, a 3 and a 2, for a total of three successes. An hour of game time passes, and Jane rolls again, this time netting an impressive four successes. In the next hour, Jane gets two successes, but rolls no successes the hour after that, as her two 1s cancel out both of her 9s. Afraid of botching this far into the spell, Jane opts to spend three Quintessence on her next roll, lowering its difficulty to 5. With that roll, she gets six successes, taking her to a running total of fifteen. An hour after that, Jane rolls again (her difficulty is once more an 8, as any Quintessence expenditure in an extended spell lasts only for the duration of a single roll), getting two successes. Following each of the next three hours of game time, Jane nets a single success, finishing out her extended spell with exactly 20 successes. This corresponds to eight hours of Brigid's stirring, chanting and adding mystic components to her brew. Collapsing with exhaustion, Brigid laughs aloud as she hears the roar of thunder outside and the patter of rain on her rooftop from the darkening sky above.

Later, Brigid finds her heart going out to a blacksmith in a village across the valley who often does work for her for little or no compensation (to honor her craft) and whose wife has recently died in childbirth. She decides to ensorcel an anvil such that every item forged upon it will be flawless and of exceeding quality, in order to guarantee him success in his profession, that he might find time and opportunity to tend to his newborn daughter.

The Storyteller rules that this is an Autumn 3, Spring 2 complex spell. Brigid's Autumn Pillar is 4 and her Spring 3. Thus, Jane rolls nine dice (Brigid's Spontaneity + Autumn, the higher of her Pillars involved in the spell, plus one die for the other Pillar involved in the casting) against a difficulty of 9. This spell would normally require only one success to achieve its effects, so ten will be called for in order to establish permanence. Naturally, this will also require it to be an extended spell (the difficulty in creating ongoing spells essentially necessitates that all such spells also be extended), with two hours of game time passing between each roll as Brigid lays blessings upon the anvil and draws upon the power of the Living Earth to infuse it. In all, the casting takes ten hours and requires the expenditure of ten points of Quintessence. To seal the spell, Jane must spend an additional fifteen points of Quintessence and two points of Willpower. Although the cost is steep, Brigid now has a gift of exceeding splendor to offer, one that will make horseshoes that never slip, utensils that never rust and blades that cannot be broken without Herculean effort. Now, to carry it across the valley...

Mystic Foci

Those who would practice the Art must first learn to use the Artist's tools. These can range from the harmless (clover harvested beneath a new moon) to the strange (bat's dung) to the despicable (the fat of an unbaptized boy-child). In the beginning of a mage's practice of the Art, each focus is an integral part of a given enchantment. When a mage evolves beyond the focus, it is because her growing strength has enabled her to internalize that aspect of her magic. Putting aside such a tool, then, is not a product of enlightenment, but of power.

The most important facet of the focus is as a symbol pertinent to the mystic practice of the user. They can be very simple, such as pure water or a single phrase, or they can be something as elaborate as the forging of a weapon, the recitation of an entire tome or walking twenty leagues in a perfect circle. Most foci, however, lie between these extremes of complexity. As a general rule of thumb, more powerful conjurations commonly require more intricate and time-consuming foci, while common tricks known to nearly any apprentice might call for nothing more complicated than a single word. The Valdaermen, naturally, channel almost all of their magic directly through the conduits of the Runes. The Order of Hermes, on the other hand, has a nigh-infinite number of rites, incantations, potions and implements of every sort to call upon.

The use of a focus begins as a necessity for each given sort of enchantment and is overcome as the mage grows in power and understanding. Thus, a mage requires a focus for all four Pillars before attaining a Foundation of two. Upon acquiring the second point of Foundation, the wizard may choose to abandon the need for one Pillar focus and can cast normally from that Pillar as though she were using that focus (it is in this fashion that powerful users of the Art can conjure up mighty spells out of thin air, fueled purely by their arcane mastery).

Still, even truly potent devotees of the hidden ways are often more comfortable with a favorite staff in hand or a pinch of sulfur when calling up a salamander, and so, instead of being required, the use of an unnecessary focus eases the casting of a given magic. When using an unnecessary focus in creating a spell, the caster subtracts one from the difficulty of the casting (to the normal minimum difficulty of 4) *or* may forgo the expenditure of Quintessence required for a casting in which the mage's highest Pillar used in the spell is higher than his Foundation. Note that a complex spell requires a focus for *each* Pillar used in the casting, though experienced mages may find some, or even all, of these foci unnecessary, due to a



powerful Foundation. If this is the case, the use of an unnecessary focus only applies *once*, no matter how many Pillars are used in the casting.

Lastly, a caster who uses spells learned from different mystical fellowships must *always* use foci for his spells, no matter how high his Foundation in that arcane practice gets. No one can internalize the teachings of multiple mystic schools of thought, save perhaps by the most ancient and powerful (or mad) wizards yet living upon the Earth.

The Power of Belief

Closely related to the reasoning behind foci is the idea that belief shapes the nature of the world, a concept the Order of Hermes came to understand some time ago and which is beginning to catch on among mages of other fellowships. The Dark Medieval world is one in which superstitions, folk-enchantments and other little facets of mysticism abound; so much so, in fact, that people are apt to recoil in fear when a woman with a black cat glares at someone in the marketplace or to feel safe when the village priest produces a saint's relic to ward off evil. By playing to superstition, a mage can circumvent the inertia of disbelief that often assails more blatant feats of sorcerous might.

As a rule, enchantments that function within a given area's prevailing superstitions (such as using an iron nail to ward off bedevilment by fairies in the British Isles or imploring the intercession of Archangel Michael to protect an abbey) negate a single 1 rolled for the casting. In these instances, the power of belief works not to erode the spell but, indeed, to support and enhance it. Granted, no mystic school of thought offers the possibility of playing to *all* superstitions but, when such resources are available and agreeable to the mage, they can mean the difference between success and failure.

Details on typical medieval superstitions can be found in **Chapter One: Magic and the Medieval**.

Foundation

A Foundation is the fundamental building block of a mystic fellowship's arcane practices. It is well and good to say that a Hermetic mage hurls fire and bends minds with his power, but it is his Modus that is the means by which these results are achieved. In effect, the Foundation is the ground on which the sorcerous spells outlined by the Pillars are built.

Once an apprentice has achieved the first level in his Fellowship's Foundation, he is officially initiated into that mystical body at the lowest-level rank. Because there is no traumatic instant of mystic revelation in most cases, the process of creating a sorcerous will is more of a gradual process of education. Whether that education is at the hands of Masters, wise-women or spirits is irrelevant. With a new awareness, the individual is now ready to become something more than human.

As the individual grows in her mastery of her group's Foundation, she projects aspects of her own personality into it. A member of the Old Faith with a penchant for spells dealing with life and growth and a powerful Spontaneity will find that plants bloom wildly and suddenly in her presence, people suffering from chills feel better and her own cuts and bruises naturally heal just a bit more quickly than those of others. Likewise, a Batini mystic who concentrates on magics of movement and travel will find that his road is often clear and swift, his footfalls cover more ground than those of others, regardless of his pace, and that his travels always bring him to where he needs to be.

Likewise, just as the magic is changed by the wizard, so too is the wizard changed by the magic. Older Hermetic mages tend to be beings of great precision, focus and discipline, and dislike those things that deviate from the ways to which they are accustomed. Similarly, elder shamans of the Spirit-Talkers simply cannot shut out the myriad voices of the Invisible World, but are instead counseled by them at all times; such spirit-touched folk sometime lose track of where the physical ends and the ephemeral begins. Such is the price of the Art. To become more than mortal, the mage must be willing to leave behind some of his humanity. Just as he is an artisan working in his medium, so must he embrace the knowledge that his magic sculpts him as well. Only the strongest dare undertake the journey into mastery, for it is more than any ordinary human — and many extraordinary ones besides — can withstand.

Pillar

Building upon the ground set by the Foundation, the Pillar gives shape to the raw ideal represented by the Foundation. Although the Foundation demonstrates *how* a mage creates a spell, the theory under which the act of magic is undertaken, it does not describe *what* is actually done. That is the function of the Pillar.

The Pillars of a given fellowship are as fundamental to that society's magic as the Foundation, but they are more an embodiment than an ideal. Thus, the Valdaermen utilize and revere Blot in their castings, but perform those castings through the auspices of their sacred Runes. Likewise, the spirits of individual Messianic Voices flower with Divinity, but it is the intercession of the Archangels that gives them leave to work miracles upon the Earth. To put it another way, if the mage is a painter, then the Foundation is the brush, the Pillar the paints and the Tapestry the canvas. Just as a great artist might not paint without his brush, neither may he mark the canvas in any way without his paints.

Just as the cardinal directions form the four pillars on which the whole of the world rests, so too do four Pillars aid in mapping out the nature of a given fellowship's magic. Each Pillar represents an essential aspect of a mystic group's teachings; the Ahl-i-Batin have one for travel and motion and the Messianic Voices one pertaining to light, the sky, elemental air and rulership, as personified by the Archangel, Mikha-El. In many ways, these four Pillars grant insight into the thought process behind a particular faction's magical beliefs and values. It is one thing to say that the Order of Hermes focuses its enchantments through Modus and uses Forma to give structure to them, and another entirely to learn that the Order's four Pillars focus on natural forces, life, the mind and the very fabric of magic itself. In this fashion, one can see how an ethic of self-control and self-perfection turns outward to encompass control over fate and others and a drive to purify and perfect the external world.

More so than the Foundation, the Pillars grant an insight into the character of the mage wielding them. The kinds of magics a given mystic concentrates on learning speak volumes about what manner of person such a mystic might be. A witch who focuses on Spring enchantments is probably a far different sort of person than one who develops her affinity to Winter to the exclusion of all else. Still, one would do well to judge a wizard by more than his choice of Arts. After all, a Hermetic who devotes his energies to magics of the mind might be a driven sage, a keen tactician, an avid courtier, or a measure of all three. As in all things pertaining to the Gift, what is seen is often only the barest fraction of what might be known.

Magic Duration

Not all enchantments last quite so long as their caster would wish. The number of successes scored in a given casting determines (unless superceded by a spell that specifically contradicts what is said here) how long a particular spell lasts. There are two tables for magic duration: one for "normal" casting (undertaken in a relaxed fashion, under circumstances conducive to the exercise of the Gift) and one for "hurried" casting, such as one encounters in the heat of battle or when weaving spells in response to a surprise. Note that hurried castings take effect on the turn *after* they are cast, unless the duration is meant to be instant and immediate, such as a bolt of lightning shot forth from the fingers at a foe; these effects are resolved immediately after casting, within the same turn.

Normal Casting Duration

One success: One turn
Two successes: One scene
Three successes: One day
Four successes: One month
Five successes: Six months
Six or more successes: Storyteller's discretion

Hurried Casting Duration

One success: One turn
Two successes: Three turns
Three successes: Five turns
Four successes: Ten turns
Five successes: Twenty turns

In the latter case, successes beyond five bestow an additional duration equal to that allowed with five successes (thus, six successes on a hurried casting can last for forty turns, and seven for sixty turns, etc.)

Magic and Distance

Almost as important as what manner of sorcery a mage weaves is *where* it goes. A spell intended to heal a friend in battle is useless if it cannot reach her,

YE OLDE TWINKERY

The magic system for **Dark Ages: Mage** is in many ways a very open-ended and mechanically fast and loose one, and thus subject to all manner of abuse by those who wish to hoist blazing swords in the name of Almighty Slaughter. **Dark Ages: Mage** is not a game about *+2 Longswords of Hideous Demises* or slaying trolls for their gold pieces. This game is one about people gifted with fantastic powers that set them apart from their fellows and the amazing privileges and responsibilities that come with those powers. While there is nothing inherently wrong with making characters who are likelier to score "critical damage" with every strike, this is perhaps not the best place to go about such business, especially when those sorts of characters are often forged in fires that burn away all "impurities," such as weaknesses, character empathy and roleplaying potential.

Now, hopefully, no one takes this as an indulgence in elitist roleplaying snobbery, as it isn't meant to be. Nevertheless, this is a *storytelling* game that focuses, first and foremost, on the person of each character. Characters in **Dark Ages: Mage** are meant to have vulnerabilities, feelings and other sorts of emotional, physical and spiritual states that real people experience, set in a world of high magic. In Real Life™, people who aim to maximize their potential for lethality are called "dangerous psychotics" and are typically avoided by everyone who isn't forced to endure their company until someone has the opportunity to put them away or else put them down. No one likes that guy. Don't play that guy. Rant concluded.

nor is a mystic missive of any value if it falls short of its intended destination. Just as with duration, there are tables of normal casting distance and hurried casting distance. As with duration, specific rules for distance presented under a given spell supercede those found here.

Many spells affect areas by their very nature, such as fiery explosions, flooding rivers, etc.; anyone within the spell's area is affected. Other spells, such as a lightning bolt or word of divine command (specific examples are provided in the Pillar descriptions), are aimed at a single target. A mage, of course, may rework a spell to affect others also. The general rule is that one extra success must be scored per extra target affected. The Storyteller may suspend this rule or alter it if he deems a spell's description best affects more than one target, or an area.

Normal Casting Distance

One success: Self or up to twenty feet distant

Two successes: Up to a hundred yards distant

Three successes: Up to ten miles distant

Four successes: Up to five hundred miles distant

Five successes: From Constantinople to Iceland, if need be

Six or more successes: Storyteller's discretion

Hurried Casting Distance

One success: Self or up to three feet distant

Two successes: Up to twenty feet distant

Three successes: Up to one hundred feet distant

Four successes: Up to two hundred yards distant

Five successes: Up to a mile distant

In the case of hurried casting, each success over five increases the distance by multiples of five (five miles at six successes, twenty-five at seven, etc.). For normal casting, there isn't much point in going further than five successes will allow, as most characters will have little reason to go to, send anything or anyone to, or scry upon anyplace more distant than five successes worth of distance allows for. Still, a few ancient runecasters may still recall distant Vinland and a handful of Batini have likely been to places most Europeans could scarcely dream of.

Resisting Magic

Physical spells (lightning bolts, fiery missiles, rains of stones, etc.) may be dodged by their targets. The target must be aware of the spell attack and make a Dexterity + Dodge roll (difficulty 6), just as if he were dodging any other form of attack (each success subtracts one from the spell's successes).

Spells that coerce or confuse a person's mind or shackle his will can be resisted with a Willpower roll. The target must be aware of the spell to make this roll, and he must spend one temporary Willpower point.

Mages can reflexively detect magic cast upon them just before the casting takes effect, allowing them a chance to dodge or resist the spell. To detect incoming spells requires a successful Perception + Awareness roll (difficulty 8).

A damage-inflicting spell may be soaked normally if it delivers physical bashing, lethal or aggravated damage (the type of damage inflicted is included in the Pillar level descriptions). Damage to one's spirit, soul or mind cannot be soaked by normal means.

Canceling Spells

A mage may cancel her own simple, complex or extended spell at will anytime before its duration runs out (after which time it ends whether she wants it to or not). This takes a moment of concentration (one turn, or one die from the mage's die pool if he performs other actions in the same turn). Depending on the spell, its effect will either end immediately (in the case of things like psychic possession or enchanted weapons) or take some time to subside (a swollen river will gradually dry up over a number of turns or minutes). The time it takes for a cancelled spell's effects to disappear is at the Storyteller's discretion.

She may also cancel her own ongoing spell in the same manner, but must spend one Quintessence point for every 10 points (or fraction thereof) spent to create it. A sword that cost 25 Quintessence to enchant permanently costs 3 Quintessence to disenchant. Beware loosing permanent magic into the world — it can often be turned against its own caster.

Rotes

At the end of each section dedicated to a given fellowship's magic is a short list of sample spells, listing the Pillar ratings necessary to cast them and the mechanics of each spell's outcome. These rotes are taught by every mystic society. They are tried-and-true formulae that yield useful or desirable results when performed. Naturally, each mage develops a suite of such spells that best suits his temperament and capabilities and, in time, passes them on to colleagues, allies and apprentices. By no means should you feel constrained by the spells presented below. Your Hermetic wizard's **Wrath of Apollo** may use lightning instead of fire and might be called **Jupiter's Fury**. Likewise, you will certainly think up all manner of spells not covered by the rotes given in this chapter. So long as your character's mystic training, her Foundation and Pillars, your chronicle and your Storyteller support a given spell, don't let anything you see here hold you back.

Ahl-i-Batin

Batini mysticism is based upon a single fundamental precept: the Oneness of all things. Unified in the Most Merciful, all things in reality only *seem* to be separate and fragmented. Whereas mages of many other practices gain increasing discernment of the distinction between things as their perceptions grow, the Ahl-i-Batin hones his senses by shedding the illusion of distance. Trance states, religious ecstasy and complex geometry all aid the pilgrim on her Path. The way of Oneness is also a way of love and charity, making acts that draw men together and bridge the spaces between souls likewise sanctified in Allah's sight.

Foundation: Al-Ikhlas

Awareness of Unity

All things begin and end with *Al-Ikhlas* ("Sincerity" or "the Oneness of Allah"). To the Ahl-i-Batin, there is no true distance, no true distinction in the world. All things find their origin in Allah and are one in Him. The path of Unity is revealed to one who has the courage to be humble, the strength to do what is right and the conviction to be merciful. Small minds and empty hearts are not found upon this road. Such malevolence toward one's fellows is anathema in the sight of the Most Merciful and is bane to those who would undertake this journey of revelation. He who is not open to all that he finds in this world will find all doors closed to him in time.

• With this, the first step, the Subtle One opens his eyes to the truth of Unity. At first, he is able to use this newfound sight only to perceive phenomena, rather than to cause and act upon them, but he knows that his ability will grow with experience and progress toward union with Allah.

•• The mystic now knows that the only barriers and borders in the world are those we create through flawed perception. A feeling of sagacity and enlightened tranquility often accompanies the Batini who attains this level of understanding.

••• The Batini now comes to understand that a soul filled with clarity and a heart brimming with compassion and kindness is the key to reality. Nevertheless, many interpret her far-seeing gaze and calm demeanor as distance or arrogance, for her love grows to encompass the world and is not readily perceived on the individual level.

•••• Now, the mystic feels the pervasive Oneness of Allah at all times and in all things. Her mundane perceptions are permanently colored by these astonishing revelations (-1 to all Alertness difficulties) and she truly comes to know that nothing in Creation is apart from the plan of the Most Merciful.

••••• It is in this that the illusion is truly penetrated and the splendor of *Al-Ikhlas* becomes an exercise of instinct (the mage receives an *additional* -1 to all Alertness difficulties and can no longer botch Perception or Alertness rolls; if a roll would normally botch, it simply fails instead). The enlightened soul is devoid of hubris or prejudice, though most people misunderstand the detached beneficence of a spirit that dwells in such a rarified state, confusing a balanced spirit for a cold and self-righteous one.

Specialties: Communication, Comprehension, Movement, Perception, Stealth

Pillars - Ubbadan

The Pillars of Batini mysticism represent aspects of *Ubbadan* (faith). All things open to humanity begin with faith in the Most Merciful. The way of the faithful opens the mystic to the arts of sacred geometry, elevated thought and true subtlety. Only belief in Allah enables a man to accomplish anything good, and it is His will that makes all things to be. By growing in comprehension of this divine beneficence, the Batini learns to embrace the sciences of the encompassing mind and enlightened spirit. Faith is nothing if not a mystery, a riddle solved only by way of itself. It is the contemplation and understanding of the answer to this riddle that expands the consciousness to the point where it can sustain Truth.

Sample Foci: Chants, prayer, the Qur'an

Al-Anbiya

Mastery of fate

Long have the Batini been considered visionaries and holy men, seers among their people. *Al-Anbiya* (literally, "The Prophets") bestows superhuman perceptions upon the mystic, allowing him to see what ordinary men might not, the better to discern the path of Truth from the perils of deception that beset the righteous on all sides and, betimes, to control that path, as well. While Al-Hajj allows the Ahl-i-Batin to see what is not before their eyes, Al-Anbiya reveals not fact, but *significance*. It is one thing to know what reason dictates and another entirely to know *that which is*. Vision often comes in the form of riddle and mystery, however, so it is not a path for the weak-willed or the feeble-minded.

• The first power granted by Al-Anbiya is the ability to sense fate and destiny. Whenever a prophecy is truthfully uttered or fulfilled, whenever calamity or great good fortune is at hand, whenever the future is about to be changed in some appreciable way, the Batini can detect it. For the most part, these

perceptions come only when the mystic reaches out with his arcane senses, but some moments, events or persons are so heavy with the weight of fortune — or its opposite — that such knowledge comes to him unbidden.

•• Now, the mystic can detect the significance of an object or person by touch or a place by abiding in it. Although he does not necessarily watch images as they happened (he might see that a king was murdered by someone in the shadows directly at his back, for example), he almost always learns something of importance (the shadowed figure was someone close to the king or trusted by him). When used in conjunction with Al-Hajj, this ability can be exercised over great distances.

••• Visions of the future can be summoned by the Batini now, for just as space is a lie, so too is time. These visions are cloaked in symbol and metaphor (a wise man drinks from a poisoned cup, falls dead and flowers sprout from his body), leaving the truth of the matter to be deciphered. The mystic's senses can now be attuned to pierce any form of illusion, whether mundane or supernatural. Further, she can trace the lines of fate as readily as her eyes follow the lines of a mandala, and she can determine the outcome of any minor event based on probability (such as a game of chance or selecting the right key from a ring of keys).

•••• The Batini learns to manipulate the threads of fate's tapestry in larger and more powerful ways. These alterations must still be subtle, however. "By day's end, I will overthrow Christendom," isn't acceptable, whereas "The bandits lying in wait for Tariq will go to the wrong place and he will pass unharmed," is. As a rule of thumb, the changes may affect the actions of others, but only in ways normally subject to chance; thus a journey can be stalled by a wagon breaking an axle, but not by misdirection when the driver knows exactly where he's going.

••••• At the final level of mastery, the student of Al-Anbiya is capable of setting events with far-flung consequences into motion. She can arrange for the births of children with powerful Destinies or the beginnings of schools of thought from words spoken into the right ears at the right times, for example, or can bring even supernatural coercion to bear on the normal course of fate (such as a lightning bolt striking a brilliant general dead upon the battlefield). Certain events, however, "must come to pass" and these sacrosanct happenings are also known to the mystic.

Specialties: Altering Fate, Destiny, Prophecy, Psychometry

Sample Foci: Ecstatic or trance states, incense, mantras, meditations upon the Qur'an, prayer and supplications, water

Al-Fatihah

Mastery over minds

It is by way of *Al-Fatihah* ("Opening" or "Preface," a gateway to understanding) that one can transcend crude tongues of flesh and speak within a blessed communion of souls. Named for the opening passage of the Holy Qur'an, it serves as a reminder that the mind is the place wherein the understanding of Unity begins and it is the interconnectivity of spirits within the mind that gives the Ahl-i-Batin a single purpose and, indeed, the identity of their mystic practice. Through openness, all Batini know that they are never farther from their brothers than they are from their own thoughts, unified upon a single path of wisdom in the Most Merciful.

• The Batini is able to detect the presence of thought (sentient or otherwise) and can use his awareness of his own inner self to ward against mental intrusion (a simple spell; any telepathic intruder must overcome its successes before mental manipulations of any sort can commence against the mystic). The mystic also may sense the presence of other Ahl-i-Batin within several hours of travel and can discern more ephemeral qualities, such as generosity, freedom and openness.

•• The Batini can discern emotions in those nearby and can sense the overall impression of the surface thoughts of others, as well as projecting an empathic sense of a desired emotion upon subjects in the immediate vicinity. He can transcend the barriers of language with a simple spell, communicating with any willing subject that has or understands language, and can feel the presence of other Ahl-i-Batin up to a day's travel distant and freely communicate mind-to-mind with them if they are willing.

••• At this point in her growing understanding of Al-Fatihah, the mage is able to project her own thoughts into the minds of others, effecting telepathic contact, and can also subtly enter a subject's consciousness, plumbing recent memories, offering new vectors of thought (in the guise of the subject's own stream of consciousness) and implanting compelling suggestions, ideas that the subject ponders and, possibly, acts upon. Further, the Batini may share thoughts and images with others of her fellowship who may be up to a week's journey away.

•••• With this level of power, the mystic becomes one of the Qutb ("poles"), the beacons by which other Batini navigate the Unity. He may mesh his own consciousness seamlessly into that of another (possession); create, destroy or alter madness or memories; and radically influence the concepts of inclusivity, generosity and compassion in an individual, group or idea in the immediate vicinity. Also, he is of one mind, whenever he wishes, with all willing Ahl-i-Batin within a month's travel.

••••• The Master of Al-Fatihah can eradicate miscommunication and misunderstanding at will and can create group consciousnesses out of many, allowing perfect communication without compromising individuality. The mage may create amazing vicissitudes of consciousness, completely changing a subject's beliefs, memories or Nature, for example, and can amplify Intelligence or Wits, even to superhuman levels (one dot of either attribute per success scored), as well as engage in psychic travel in the Astral Umbra. Lastly, the mystic shares a flawless psychic link, at will, with all willing Ahl-i-Batin everywhere.

Specialties: Augmenting Consciousness, Changing Others' Minds, Contacting Batini, Telepathy

Sample Foci: Books, eye contact, facing Mecca, gestures of friendship, goodwill or charity, reflection upon a mandala or other complex geometric form, scrolls

Al-ḥajj

Mastery of space

The Arabic word for a pilgrimage, *Al-Hajj* is the road that leads out of disparity and into Unity. It is the journey that takes one to a favorable and joyous place, a religious migration. This is the Secret Way, the design of which is scribed onto the Vault of Heaven. Considered by some Ahl-i-Batin the purest of the sacred arts, Al-Hajj pierces the veil of space and thereby demonstrates that he who moves, moves only within his own mind.

• The Batini first learns to sense the nature of movement. She knows when magic involving motion has been worked (whether such is great speed, flight, instantaneous co-location or something else) and can quickly become aware of paths and means of entry and egress, even those hidden from view. Further, she develops an astounding direction-sense and only rarely becomes lost even in places unfamiliar to her.

•• At this point, the mystic learns the most elementary ways by which the deception of space might be pierced. She may pass through recent spatial warps (though she may go only where the warp leads) or ward a location or willing (or inanimate) subject against scrying or spatial manipulations (adding one to the difficulty per success of all spells to view, transport to or move such objects, places or persons). She is also able to cast her perceptions out to great distances and can "mark" a subject (living or otherwise), enabling her to track its progress across the illusion of space.

••• Now, there is no distance. The mage is capable of traversing the Unity and seems, to the uninitiated, to vanish from one point and reappear at another (use the standard magical distances guidelines, p. 104, to determine how far he may go with a casting). The Batini's knowledge is sufficient only to make the journey alone. He can also perceive multiple locations simultaneously (up to a limit of Perception or Wits, whichever is less) and can "sift" space for any known object, person or place, though places are often quite time-consuming if few details are known and can be dangerous, given the possibility of wards and guardians.

•••• The Batini learns how to extend to others the powers of motion she previously learned to work upon herself, allowing for the teleportation of numerous people or things (one person, or number of things equal in mass to a person, per dot of Wits, plus one per point of Quintessence spent). She may also create or destroy long-lasting (or even permanent) gateways from one place to another (including a physical doorway in a wall where there was none before, or a portal to a place far away). She can perceive in all directions at once and out to great distances and may also disappear within the Unity, vanishing into a featureless non-realm devoid of distance and dimensions; while there she cannot be detected by any magics whatsoever.

••••• With the final secret of Al-Hajj, the Batini learns to tread all Umbrae save the Astral Umbra and may bring as many people and as much inanimate material as his Wits and/or Quintessence allows for. He may alter distance and spatial axes, transforming a dagger into a sword or creating hidden oases accessible only to those who know and walk secret paths, for example. He can appear in many places at once (though the other selves will act exactly as he does and be devoid of thought, unless they are strengthened with other magic). Lastly, he may bolster his natural Perception, adding one dot per success on a simple spell.

Specialties: Co-location, Scrying, Teleportation, Warding

Sample Foci: Meditative states, mirrors, physical motion, reflection upon the all-encompassing love of Allah, sacred geometry and mathematics

Al-Layl

Mastery of secrecy

One of the most important axioms of Batini mysticism is the way of *Al-Layl* ("Night"). One who cannot mask his intention and movements cannot be entrusted with the secrets of the Subtle Ones. The arts of the Ahl-i-Batin are dangerous in the hands of the unprepared, and those arts must remain hidden from minds not yet open to the truth and responsibilities of their potential. Al-Layl occludes the mind and the body, but it is not the path of deception. Rather, it is a means of misdirection that turns the erroneous perceptions of those who cannot see the Unity back upon them, allowing the Batini to move undetected and unmolested in times of peril.

• The Batini first learns to discern sources of subtlety, for one cannot practice a thing before understanding it. Hiding places, lies spoken, disguises and

secret codes can be detected with a simple spell. Also, he sees the means by which his own thoughts can be veiled and perceptions of them misdirected (allowing his player to add successes to Subterfuge die pools).

•• The mage can now displace attention from herself and blend into crowds. With sufficient effort, she simply is not noticed, even if she stands out from those around her (successes on a simple spell add to Stealth die pools and, should her Stealth successes total more than an onlooker's Perception + Alertness, he will not notice her at all unless she acts directly upon him). She can also pass through snow or mud without leaving a trace and can set in motion spells that prevent others from registering her in their memories once she leaves their presence.

••• At will, the Batini may vanish from sight, invisible as the wind. Those who seek to follow her watch her turn a corner, only to find her gone when they go after her. She can tap into the very nature of Al-Layl as well, giving her unique insights into the nature of secrecy (add successes from a simple spell to Alertness, Investigation and Occult die pools) and moves with such refined motions that she is scarcely noticed at all (add successes to any sleight of hand or misdirection die pools).

•••• When he wishes it, the mystic may become someone else, adopting the mannerisms and bearing of another person, real or imagined. Those who wish to find the Batini against his wishes make contested rolls of Alertness or Investigation against the mystic's Al-Ikhlas + Al-Layl (even if the Batini does not know he is being sought out); failure means he simply cannot be located. He may remove the indicators of actions while leaving their consequences (causing the bloodstains from a fatal blow, as well as the physical trauma itself, to vanish from a corpse, or erasing all physical evidence that the mage ever stayed at a given inn, for example).

••••• If she wishes anonymity, the Batini's parents recall no daughter by her name. She can adopt identities at will, becoming sibling to a king (and be remembered by that king and his household as such). She may occlude thoughts, even if such seems to make no sense (for example, a fanatic will still struggle fervently in the name of his cause but will not remember what it is or why he does what he does). The Batini learns to walk through warding as though it did not exist, unnoticed by the very fabric of magic itself, and can evade enchantments directed at her, unmaking them by meeting or exceeding the casting successes garnered by the other mage. Locations, objects and even groups of people can vanish from sight, senses and memory and be made to be ignored, even if looked upon directly.

Specialties: Alter Memories, Disguise, Invisibility, Physical Misdirection, Sleight of Hand

Sample Foci: Camouflage or darkness, hoods or veils, silence, smoke, whispered mantras

Sample Rotes

Swift Road of the Faithful (Al-Hajj ••, Al-Layl ••)

It is often said that the faithful are shielded against harm in their travels. Never does that sentiment ring truer than when it is applied to a mystic who has learned the secrets of this enchantment. Each step taken seems to cover two or three, while the wanderer's journey is concealed from all but the most perceptive eyes. Indeed, the Batini who walks the **Swift Road** may as well set his feet upon the wind itself, so quickly and invisibly does he travel.

System: Each success scored on the roll to create this spell lessens by one-fifth the amount of time required to make an overland journey. This total is recalculated for each success. For example, scoring two successes on a journey that takes about thirty hours reduces it to just over nineteen hours (one-fifth of 30 minus 30 is 24; a fifth of 24 minus 24 is 19 hours and 12 minutes). Also, each success adds one to the difficulty of any rolls made by folk passed along the way to notice the traveler, beginning at difficulty 5 with one success. By increasing the levels of both Pillars in this effect by one, the Batini can increase the scope of the **Swift Road** to encompass one additional person per success, plus one per point of Quintessence spent. Note that, for journeys lasting longer than the duration allowed by the number of successes initially rolled, the Batini must cast this as an extended spell.

Gaze of Suleiman (Al-Anbiya •••, Al-Fatihah •••, Al-Layl •)

As well as being a great king and a powerful binder of djinn, Suleiman was renowned for his astonishing wisdom and perceptive powers. A Batini who emulates the example of this holy man can sample a measure of his mental prowess and pierce all manner of occlusion with his senses. Not only does the mystic know when a lie is spoken, but he also hears the truth it was spoken to conceal and that truth's greater significance (thus, "I am unarmed," becomes to the Batini's ears, "I carry a knife with which to kill Ishaq ibn-Yusuf, as a warning to his father."). Further, the Batini knows a lie when he hears it, even if the speaker does not know that what she is saying is untrue. The mage sees concealed passageways and whither they culminate, looks through disguises and knows why they are affected, and he penetrates illusions with understanding of their reasons for being.

System: Each success rolled when creating this spell automatically subtracts one success from any rolls made to conceal, disguise, deceive or misdirect the Batini. Any such roll reduced to zero successes is automatically seen through by the mystic's profound wisdom. If a Batini exceeds the successes needed to look through a subter-

fuge, she immediately applies the successes on her roll against any mental defenses that a person deceiving her might have (this applies to Willpower just as much as any magical warding, bearing in mind the normal rules for magical difficulties). If the targeted deception is not being actively performed by a person (as with a hidden passageway) or is performed by a person who does not know he is lying (a guard who is unwittingly bringing a poisoned cup to his master, for example), the Batini automatically knows its greater significance. (In the case of the hidden passage, she might see that it leads to a door behind the prince's bed and is used by his mistress, whereas the poisoned cup might yield up that it is being sent to sicken the guard's master, rather than killing him, so that the guard will be punished. Note that, unless the deceiver is actually present, usually no specific information about him will be learned.) This spell applies its successes to magic die pools in exactly the same fashion as it does to nonmagical ones.

One Fights as Many
(Al-Fatihah ••••, Al-Hajj •••••)

Although the name of this rote is decidedly martial, many peaceful purposes have been found for it. The Batini who casts this magic exists as many selves at once, with each capable of thinking and acting independently of the others. It is, literally, as though the Batini is many persons simultaneously, each with the same knowledge, experience and abilities and each able to act in perfect concert, or not, as the situation demands.

System: Each success rolled in creating this spell costs a single point of Quintessence (the mystic may spend fewer points of Quintessence than successes if he wishes fewer duplicates) and creates a single duplicate of the Batini for the standard duration for the number of successes rolled. All of these duplicates are identical to the Batini (and may exist anywhere up to the normal distance for the number of successes rolled from the actual Batini and still continue to act as one when desired), save for one exception: Only one of the individuals (caster or duplicate) may use the Batini's magic or spend Willpower in a turn. All Quintessence and Willpower used by any one draws from the Batini's normal total and affects all selves simultaneously. In short, all draw upon the same store of Quintessence and reserves of inner strength. When the duration ends or the spell is willed to end, the Batini may exist in the space previously occupied by any of his duplicates, should he so wish. The Batini suffers damage according to a simple formula that applies no matter how many duplicates of himself he might be employing at any given time. The mystic sustains only the highest damage in a single combat round.

Messianic Voices

Heeding the call of the Divine, the Messianic Voices are given leave to hear the elusive strains of the very Song of Creation. Strictest devotion and piety are required in all things and at all times in



order to focus and direct this profound power and live up to such astonishing responsibility. Likewise, sacred writings and stories can serve as a channel for the will of the Creator, a testimony to the holy magnificence of the Word, whether written or spoken. Further, tools of one's own faith are often utilized in Messianic practice, the symbols that extend the touch of the Divine directly, removing the need for flawed mortal hands. Of course, the considerable schisms between the so-called faiths of the Book (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) make more specific categorization of Messianic foci a matter of personal belief.

Foundation: Divinity

Relationship to the Divine

As the means by which Messianic practitioners request intercession, Divinity represents a connection to the holy power that is the origin of Creation, both the Artisan and the artwork, whether the individual Messianic calls that being I Am That I Am, the Holy Trinity, Jehovah or some other name. Those who grow powerful in this link to the Creator radiate a palpable aura of otherworldly grace, though this need not necessarily translate to a sense of beatific pleasantry. All Messianics carry in them the grace of the Divine, whether that grace shines forth like a comforting halo, a mantle of universal friendship and goodwill or a cold sheath of the inevitability and justification of the Celestial Will.

• The first strains of the Celestial Harmony are apparent now. The Voice learns to hear the information that is encoded in those sounds, the mystic resonance that vibrates behind the reality she has always known. Although she has a Voice, the Messianic knows that she is not yet ready to speak.

•• At this level, the Messianic has discovered the rudiments of making his own words heard in the great harmony. His connection the Divine grows stronger and he begins to realize some small measure of his transformation into a truly sacred being out of profane and simple earthly matter.

••• Even those who do not know the mystic can feel that she is a person blessed and favored with holiness. Her words, her deeds and her thoughts exist in harmonious synchronicity with the motions of the wider Universe. She is beginning to see the Divine Plan and is learning her place within it.

•••• The faithful often claim to see halos and other palpable signs of Divine favor upon the Messianic and the mysteries of belief that confound others are simple fact to him. He now knows that he does not "work magic" or "perform miracles"; he simply makes manifest the Plan by living in oneness with it. Also, his earthly voice becomes a mirror to his celestial one and the Divine is heard in his words (-1 to all Expression difficulties).

••••• The Messianic Voice's connection to the Divine is so powerful and compelling that many are wont to consider her a saint upon the Earth. Some fear her holy radiance and others adore it, but none is so foolish as to deny it. Wherever she goes, the Divine Harmony grows in complexity and magnificence, reaffirming for all those sensitive to mystic forces the profound wonder of the One Voice with which the Messianic now speaks (the Messianic *permanently* subtracts one from the difficulty of all rolls made with one Social Attribute of her choosing).

Specialties: Communing with Angels, Healing, Obvious Intercessions, Overcoming Dissonance

Pillars: Archangels

The Pillars of the Messianic Voices are the Archangels, who carry on their backs the Four Elements. Although referred to here by their ancient Hebrew names, these entities are typically addressed by an individual Voice in a manner appropriate to his upbringing (thus, a Muslim knows Gavri-El as Jebr-il and a Christian Mikha-El as Michael). These four beings are the chief executors of the Divine Plan, and in them might all goodly ends be found.

Sample Foci: Holy symbol (Crucifix, Menorah, etc.), prayer, religious writings or songs

Gavri-El

Dominion over fire, healing, motion and reason

Tied inextricably to the element of Fire, Gavri-El is a maker and a destroyer. As a messenger on swift wings, he bears tidings from Heaven and inspires with the bright blaze of creativity. Intellect and reason are his, and he drives back the darkness with the gift of enlightened thought. He keeps the secrets of motion and travel, and he purges with the conflagration anything that is offensive to Divine sight, so that something good and worthy should grow up from the ashes. He is the Trumpeter and the Scholar, sage-militant of the Archangels.

• The first thing the Messianic learns is to sense the presence of Gavri-El. Sources of light and inspiration, as well as powerful destructive forces, can be discerned. Further, the presence of creative energies (especially those that draw life out of death) is revealed to the student of Gavri-El's lessons. Lastly, disturbances in space and motion are made plain, such as mystic effects that alter speed or movement.

•• The Messianic Voice learns to draw upon the restorative energies of Gavri-El, healing himself of one Health Level of lethal damage or two of bashing damage per success on a simple spell. Likewise, he can

summon up a fragment of the Archangel's radiance in the form of fire (delivering no more than one or two Health Levels of damage at this level). She can send and receive spoken words over great distances or transmit simple empathic and telepathic messages. Also, she may draw upon Gavri-El's inspiration, adding successes to Enigmas die pools.

••• The Messianic is capable of flight and true telepathic contact. He may implore the Archangel to intercede on his behalf and guide him to truth, lowering difficulties on Knowledge rolls by one per two successes scored on a simple spell (to a minimum of 4). He may stoke, extinguish or create flames (martial applications of this effect cause one Health Level of lethal damage per success) and can stride through the Gauntlet into the Penumbra. Lastly, the Messianic can heal himself or another of aggravated damage.

•••• Now, the Messianic discovers how to travel with the speed of the seraphim, disappearing from one locale and reappearing in another. She may pass out of the Penumbra and into the near or far Umbrae. By meditating upon Gavri-El's lessons, she can increase her own intellect and her logic becomes superhumanly compelling, adding one dot to Intelligence per success on a simple spell. She can also destroy wicked intent in any being not wholly given over to monstrousness and evil, replacing such intent with a desire to do good.

••••• The Messianic may travel, physically or spiritually, into the dreams of thinking creatures and can navigate the Gateway to Heaven (the Astral Umbra). His words can cause Ideals to spring into being (creating purely ephemeral patterns out of free Quintessence that may be perceived and acted upon by those with mystic senses). With great effort, this Quintessence may be directed to the ends of creating a new crays or holy ground. He may restore the recently dead to their bodies (only those who died within one minute per level of the Messianic's Divinity score; the arisen person has one Health Level and is barely conscious) or sear from the Tapestry that which is offensive to his eyes (inflicting one Health Level of aggravated damage per success).

Specialties: Creation out of Destruction, Fire, Flight, Interplanar Travel, Unassailable Logic

Sample Foci: Candles or incense, scrolls and texts or other means of keeping or heralding information or tidings, trumpets or other wind instruments, voice and speech

Mikha-El

Dominion over leadership, light and war

This is the power of the Sun, of Divine retribution, the authority of the general of God's army. Mikha-El's instrument is the sword and it is he who lays low the foes of Creation itself. He is the patron of strength, leadership, light, righteous fury and holy vengeance. Mikha-El is an angel of war, the fist that strikes the Enemy, be he named Lucifer, Shaitan or Iblis. The Messianic Voices call upon Mikha-El for inspiration in battle or for matters pertaining to nobility or illumination. Also, it is he who intercedes when directly opposing evil, in any of its numberless forms.

• This level of power enables the Messianic Voice to discern sources of true evil (wicked intent alone is not sufficient; the subject of this sense must be a being saturated, by its nature, with evil: vampires, demons, etc.). Also, sources of conflict, nobility of spirit and potential for leadership and strength might be sensed and, further, by suffusing his sight with the holy radiance of the Sun itself, a Voice can see perfectly in all but complete darkness.

•• The Messianic can summon and control physical illumination. He may mantle himself in the Archangel's glory, taking on an aura of authority, strength or control. He can project violent emotions into the hearts of the righteous (or the easily provoked) and can ask Mikha-El to shield him against

JUST TO CLEAR THINGS UP

The nature, number, identities, etc., of the Archangels are subjects better suited to real-world theological debate than the pages of a roleplaying game. That said, you may feel free to disagree with the names selected here and their attributes (as many scholars of religious, occult and other varieties have for centuries); many Messianic Voices do just that. Faith is a complex matter, to say the least, and any manner of simplification can fairly be called an oversimplification. For the sake of clarity, remember that most Voices do not think exclusively of the Archangel in question when calling upon a given miracle. **The Word**, for example, can just as easily stem from an intercession on the part of the Metatron as it can from Mikha-El. In short, don't feel bound by what we've presented.

While we're on the subject, the same goes for the Hermetic mage who calls his control over force and energy **Vulcan's Forge** or the Valdaerman who refers to her Galdrar Rune as the **Eye of Odin**. There are no universally agreed upon names encompassing all possible magical spells. Wizards tend to call their Pillars whatever they were taught by their own mentors, who could have been as close to center or far afield as you wish them to be.

outside influences (adding one per success to the difficulty of most supernatural powers of control or coercion). Also, the Messianic may make his blade sharp and his arrows to fly true, adding either one die per success to Archery, Brawl or Melee die pools or to damage.

••• Mikha-El comes to the aid of his chosen in times of battle, adding one dot to Strength or Stamina per success on a simple spell. The mystic may control the winds as a sculptor works clay, though the scope of her spells is limited to her general vicinity. She may clothe herself in celestial brilliance and power (adding one per success to Leadership die pools), and her weapons are bane to even the greatest soldiers of the Enemy (allowing her to inflict or soak aggravated damage with normal weapons or armor).

•••• The Messianic's words resound with the power of the Divine, commandments that must be obeyed. He rises up before ordinary men and they are cowed by his splendor (add one dot to Charisma per success on a simple spell). He may create fear or inspire courage and can call forth sunlight in the darkest depths of the night. Gales howl at his behest, and he may summon up angels in physical form to treat with them (this usually requires an extended spell involving prayer and supplication).

••••• Mikha-El's radiance flows with the Messianic's will, annihilating the enemies of the Divine (inflicting two Health Levels of aggravated damage per success). She can create authority that is believed by all who cannot meet or exceed her successes on a Willpower roll, causing even kings and archbishops to bend knee should they fail. She may incite fury among great numbers of people, creating riots, armies or Crusades, and may bolster or sap the will of others (restoring or subtracting a point of temporary Willpower per success, a spell which may be resisted with either magic or Willpower).

Specialties: Battle, Ensuring Compliance, Inspiring Awe, Sunlight

Sample Foci: Battle-cries and fierce shouts, gold, light, swords or armor, white garments

Repha-El

Dominion over creativity, peace and water

The artisan and artist among the Seraphim, Repha-El governs the creative spirit. While Gavri-El is reason, Repha-El is passion. He is associated with water, mystery and imagination. He is a healer and a guide, a protector against demons. This Seraph watches over the sick and the lost and cares for those often overlooked by his more zealous brethren. Of the four who offer their intercession to the Messianic Voices, Repha-El is perhaps the most humane and is certainly the most empathetic toward humanity. He teaches compassion and admonishes his followers to extend an open hand to others. Still, he is a foe to those who would harm the innocent and interposes himself between such people and the forces of evil. He demands the same of those who would call upon him.

• As she first comes to know the power of Repha-El, the Messianic Voice learns how to detect the presence of strong passions, sickness and health, threats (imminent or not) and artistic vision. Likewise, she can discern the location of water, Repha-El's favored element, even in the most barren of lands.

•• The Messianic can cleanse herself of sickness and illness of any sort (including magical, though such ailments often require more time, effort and energy) and may perform such healing for any soulless living thing as well (such as animals). She can summon and control small quantities of water and can also embody the Archangel's kind and creative spirit (adding one per success to Crafts, Empathy or Performance die pools).

••• Now, the Messianic Voice learns how to ward against demonic power and intrusion (creating a barrier that such beings must overcome with successes on a Willpower roll to pass through, either physically or with any powers they may possess). He also learns how to control compassion and empathy in others, thus forging bonds of peace and brotherhood and also destroying contention. The Messianic also learns how to stir extant passions in herself or others (possibly allowing her player to create temporary bonuses or penalties to difficulties).

•••• The artistic and inspirational qualities of Repha-El may be physically drawn into the world, fabricating mundane objects from concepts alone. By winning a contested Divinity + Repha-El roll against an otherworldly being's Willpower, the Messianic may banish such a being to its place of origin. Further, he can breathe water as though it were air and navigate both over the sea and under it as if born amid the waves. The Messianic may unmake even burning wrath, turning it to calm, and can disperse fear, curses and mystic maladies. Any manner of emotion can be created in any being that experiences them.

••••• When the Messianic intercedes in a conflict, the point of contention itself ceases to be, even if local reality must move to accommodate the change (for example, a sudden land grant ending a squabble between two feuding lords). She can call the tides, driving them up upon the shores or forcing them down, as she will. Her tongue is glib and expressive and her ideas move the hearts of others (adding one dot of Wits per success). She can imbue ideas or concepts with celestial momentum, possibly

causing them to take root and thrive as trends, movements or schools of thought.

Specialties: Creating Hope, Healing, Inspiration, Warding Against Evil, Water

Sample Foci: Chrism, music, paintings or sculptures, soothing words or gestures, water (especially purified or holy)

Uri-El

Dominion over darkness, death, fear and earth

The Angel of Death, Uri-El is responsible for endings. He guards the ways between life and death and is a foe of those who cheat the grave. He is grim and forever alone, made distant from the joys of the living world by his dark but necessary work. He reaps the souls of beggar and king alike and is the warder of the Earth, the resting place of the bones of mortal men. A reluctant destroyer, he is dispassionate and reserved, confident in his work but without love of slaughter. Uri-El, as mortality's keeper, is perhaps the most feared of the Seraphim. He has authority over night, solitude, silence and mercy as well as extinguishing the light of life.

• Uri-El's initial lessons are perceptions of death, decay, fear, darkness and the stuff of elemental earth. His blessing allows the Messianic Voice to detect the presence of the dead (including unquiet shades, vampires and other such beings). He shows those he favors the impending moment of conclusion, be that the end of life, the close of a war or the last word of a conversation.

•• The Messianic can wrap himself up in shadow and silence (adding one per success to Stealth die pools on a simple spell) and can reach into the Dark Umbra to interact with the Restless Dead as though they were physically present. Small quantities of earth, stone or metal can be shaped by the Messianic's will alone. By wearing Uri-El's aspect, the mystic may project an aura of fear and dread and can subtly suggest an end to a given activity (bringing a conversation to a close, for example, or causing a scribe to pack up his work for the night a hour or two early).

••• Now, the Messianic may stride physically into the Dark Umbra and from there into the truly sunless realms beneath. He may walk through earth, stone and metal as though they do not exist and can direct such substances counter to their inertia or momentum (subtracting one per success from damage die pools of weapons made, in whole or in part, of such substances). He may also attack the soul of a living being directly, inflicting one Health Level of aggravated damage per success — this damage is soaked with Willpower, rather than Stamina. Also, he may cool emotions, reducing them to serenity or apathy, as he chooses.

•••• The power offered henceforth by this Archangel is dangerous and has led many pious souls into corruption. Souls may be fed upon (healing one Health Level of any sort of damage per two Health Levels inflicted with the offensive ability of the previous level), killing the subject even as the magic heals the Messianic (a sensation best described as "morbidly euphoric"). Feelings of isolation or loneliness may be created, turning a raucous banquet solemn and transforming a marketplace into a sullen parade. Darkness can be summoned, wreathing an area in thick shadows.

••••• At this point, even normally immortal beings may be slain (such as many kinds of spirits and undead) by the Messianic and souls may be compelled to remain in their terrestrial shells beyond death (creating walking dead) or forced into any shape, place or condition the caster wishes (the departed soul resists with Willpower). The Messianic may bring about the end, even, of ideas or organizations at the local level, spreading the Reaper's influence forth — with greater degrees of concentration and effort — to expunge these concepts on a broader scale. Decay may be hastened to any degree or halted utterly (needless to say, using this to extend one's own life span beyond the allotted time is possible, though *extremely* dangerous; see the Hermetic spell **The Incorruptible Water** for a good idea of just how dangerous). The Messianic also may obliterate souls utterly, erasing them from the Book of Life (Gilgul).

Specialties: Decay, Interacting with the Dead, Preventing Death, Shadows, Silence

Sample Foci: Ashes, bones, dust or clay, Last Rites or other benedictions, shrouds and burial garments

Sample Rotes

The Word (Mikha-El ••)

When bolstered by Divine authority, words spoken by earthly lips can carry a degree of forcefulness that compels obedience. By calling upon the grace of Mikha-El, a Messianic Voice can speak with the breath of Creation itself. Such a statement is not to be undertaken lightly, for the things of terrestrial origin are in many ways robbed of free will by this overwhelming Word. The result is not so much a command as an undeniable appeal to the human sense of hierarchy and righteousness. Even the black-hearted or rebellious can be swayed beyond their conviction to resist by the purity of the Word.

System: For each success on a Divinity + Mikha-El roll, the caster adds one to the difficulty to resist the next directly commanding statement he utters. This statement must be spoken in a forceful voice and must be relatively straightforward ("Drop your sword," is acceptable, whereas "Forsake your life of sin and retire with me to the Abbey of St. Joseph, where you will commit the Bible to memory," is not). Note that this compulsion is not a compulsion of the will, but rather

one that creates a sense of legitimate authority on the part of the caster and a sense of his unyielding goodness. Thus, those who are immune to such manipulations or inured to them (such as an angel, for example) will be similarly shielded against this form of control.

Shattering the Void (Gavri-el ••••, Mikha-el ••••)

As the Kabbalistic Sephiroth illustrate the sacred Chain of Being, so, too, do the Qlippoth give names to the Nameless, those things that exist outside of the Divine Plan. Likewise, that which is opened to Hell is shut out from God's sight and the touch of Shaitan is abhorrent before the gaze of the Most Merciful. This effect reverberates destructively with beings emptied, in whole or in part, of their Divine grace, or those which exist by their nature outside of the Tapestry of Creation. Primary among these great enemies are demons of various sorts and terrible, Outsider Things known to some of the societies of the ancient Near and Middle East (and the knowledge of which persists in certain gatherings of degenerate mages to this day), but there are certainly others. Infernalists, vampires, souls condemned to walk beyond the grave and various other beings are at least in part lost to the Book of Life and are thus partially subject to this rote.

System: For each success scored in creating this spell (in the case of truly extraordinary monstrosities with a Willpower greater than nine, the difficulty levels out at 9, subject to the normal rules for magical difficulties above 9), the subject suffers two Health Levels of aggravated damage (which may be soaked like any other source of aggravated damage), seared by terrible white fire. This spell is at its most effective when dealing with creatures purely of the Void (demons, Outsiders, etc.) and only inflicts half damage (rounding up) on those beings that still maintain at least a partial spiritual presence within the Tapestry (vampires, for example). In no case can this effect cause harm to beings without any kind of spiritual emptiness (rendering it completely ineffectual against most humans, no matter how evil they may be).

Mortal Clay (Repha-el ••••, Uri-el •••••)

This effect may be either the most welcome of blessings or, rarely, the most terrible of punishments. The Messianic spins a human shell out of clay and raw mystic power, then inserts into that body, by means of Uri-El's domain, the shade of a deceased human being. The body may look like whatever the caster wishes and be in any condition she deems fitting, though most casters use a shape approximat-



ing that which the subject once knew. While the body is not flawless (beneath the skin, it tends to be quite uniform and not completely anatomically sound), it allows the incarnated ghost to use all of the five normal senses and appears completely human while possessed. Further, the incarnated ghost may use the most basic biological functions of the human form, though without lasting effect; thus, ingested food will be expelled in the state it was in when swallowed and intercourse cannot result in pregnancy, for example.

System: For each success scored on the roll to create this spell, the body lasts for one day of time before returning to lifeless clay and expelling the spirit back into a purely ephemeral state. Each success also creates an increased degree of realism and consistency with the desired appearance. One success might result in a somewhat misshapen and unwholesome form, whereas five creates exactly what the caster envisioned.

The spirit can resist with Willpower, unless it chooses to enter into the simulacrum.

Old Faith

Firmly rooted in the natural flow of elements, in the cycles of the stars and in blessings and curses spoken with a tongue sharp and swift, the powers of the Old Faith are those of women stooped by years, druids of wild manes and steely eyes and maidens who wear the first flowers of the year in their tresses as they dance with beast and Fae alike. These powers arise in the living moment, the razor's edge of the Now, in which all things occur. It is the Now in which we dwell, the moment that must be lived to the fullest, for it can never be gotten back once it has passed.

Foundation: Spontaneity

Sympathy with life's pulse

In the Old Faith, it is Spontaneity that calls forth blessings and curses alike. Witch and druid both must balance the timeless and unchanging cycles of the seasons with the demands of the living moment. This is not to say that patient and introspective folk may not walk this road, but instead that the source of this organic magic flows out of the space between breaths. It is not the ponderous stone circles, with the endless march of days written in their patterns, nor the knowing of rains, snows and harvests that defines this mystic way, but instead the elusive instant wherein all is drawn together and spun forth from the loom of Maid, Mother and Crone.

• With confidence, the practitioner strides forth into the realm of the arcane. She sees the world in living instants and becomes capable of channeling the power of the Now. Laughter and tears come freely, as do wrath and love, and she draws strength from this unchecked tide and learns how to impress the suddenness of her will onto her surroundings in a small way.

•• Be she called witch, druid, wise woman or something else, the mystic now discovers that the power in every instant is the life's blood of Creation. She is immersed fully in the wonder of each new moment as it unfolds, for good or for ill, and begins to grow like unto a force of nature.

••• The mystic is strong in the power of the moment and increasingly finds past and future becoming remote concepts. Change comes easily now and flows freely as a source of magic and a result of it. Forethought is unnecessary and serves only to remind her of the plodding enchantments of staid and boring pedants.

•••• Now, the mystic can spin magic together as quickly as he can utter a phrase (allowing all his hurried spells to take place as they are cast, rather than upon the following turn). Even when his sorcery is premeditated, it explodes forth from the core of his being in a torrent of unchecked passions and creativity. Every act of will is a new day, a perfect instant suspended in time. He knows now that no man changes yesterday or rules tomorrow.

••••• The priestess of the Old Faith is at peace with the power of every moment. Earth-shattering spells roll from her tongue with a whim (her hurried castings are treated as normal spells). Though she must plan her magic and while away hours in preparation like any other mage, she knows that all of it is symbol and ceremony, tributes to honor the cycles of nature and the elements, and that it is nothing more than the instant in which she channels her wisdom that gives that wisdom life.

Specialties: Blessings, Curses, Living Creatures, Weather

Pillars: The Seasons

The Pillars for Old Faith mysticism are the four Seasons of the year. A microcosm of life itself, the year is born, waxes, wanes and, finally, dies. This natural progression of genesis, growth and termination is the very essence of the Old Faith. Nature knows both the gentle caress of Spring and the harsh fury of Winter. So, too, must all witch-wise folk be open to Nature the provider and Nature the destroyer. All the spells of this faith fall under the symbolic purviews of the Seasons. Autumn, for example, is a time of wisdom and maturity, Summer of passion and vibrancy.

Sample Foci: Blood, chanting, ordeals

AUTUMN

Powers of wisdom and fruition

Despite setting the trees ablaze with shades of red and gold, Autumn is the season that cools the blood, beckoning farmers to their harvests and calling beasts to prepare for the coming snows. It is the time of age and wisdom, when that which is planned comes to fruition. Likewise, as the leaf withers on the branch, it is a time for conserving strength and fortifying against coming hardship. The dead grow close to the land of the living during this season, as the Earth itself prepares to die.

• At this level of knowledge, the witch can detect the presence of maturity and ripeness in a thing, its readiness for harvest. It is possible to sense wisdom in words or in a person (such as the telltale ring of prophecy), or to perceive when a woman will give birth to the child she carries. Likewise, one can see when a thing is ready to begin its twilight time, whether that thing is an animal, an idea or an institution.

•• The priestess of the Old Faith can calm extant emotions with her magic and can make simple life (plants or insects, for example) or simple ideas (such as the blacksmith's son's idle thoughts of asking the shepherd's daughter to marry him) mature and, if appropriate, bear fruit. Also, she may gather up her energies and guard herself against mystic assaults directed at her pattern (adding successes to Stamina for the purposes of soaking direct pattern attacks).

••• With the power of Autumn, the keeper of the Living Faith can stymie change, slowing time (reducing a subject to one action for a number of turns equal to successes rolled, for example) or the proliferation of ideas. The druid may sculpt the Earth, which draws its energy inward during this Season, controlling its shape and causing it to flow as he will. Also, as this is a changing time, a mystic time, a time of crossing over, he can move into the Penumbra at crossroads and other between-places. He can protect living patterns, bolstering their powers to resist (adding one dot of Stamina per success).

•••• The witch may now strike at the life of another directly with Autumn magics, just as the farmer's scythe fells his grain and trees yield up their leaves in a fiery rain (inflicting one Health Level of aggravated damage per success on a simple spell). Brashness may be transformed into patience and a fool might be made to rethink his plans, forsaking them for a wiser course of action. Also, the witch may evolve nonliving things or concepts into their final form (turning ambition into a desire for conquest, a felled tree to dry timber or coal and iron into steel).

••••• The witch may afflict the body of a living being with age (two years per success) and can create wisdom and understanding (adding one dot to Intelligence per success). She can simulate the land's final sigh as it gives up its life to make way for Winter, creating failure in a venture (subtracting her successes on a simple spell from those scored by another, to a minimum of zero; if the subject's roll is magical, however, she must expend a point of both Willpower and Quintessence to do so). By summoning up the power of contemplation, the witch can contact the minds of others directly or can, with great effort, bring a new place of power into being (creating a cray after an extended spell limited to no more than 10 rolls, one roll per day; every 10 successes equals one level of the new cray)

Specialties: Contemplation, Creating Calm, Harvesting, Wisdom

Sample Foci: Ashes from a quenched fire, fallen leaves, a lock of newly-cut red or brown or golden hair, scythe, sheaf of wheat, soil, stones

SPRING

Powers of life and creation

The time of renewal, rebirth and innocence, Spring is the essence of youth, vitality and virility. As the land shakes off its icy mantle and green begins to stir, at first showing through and then displacing the white, the Earth reawakens. Birds unheard for months cry out to the warming sun and the creatures of nature emerge from Winter dens, bringing with them newborn progeny. It is a time of intuition and impulse, of love and laughter. Spring rains wash away the dreary shadow of the previous days and infuse the soil with life-giving power.

• The practitioner of the Old Faith learns to see the life in things and their potential. She can sense the first stirring of an unborn child, feel the flesh knitting in a healing wound (revealing how many Health Levels of damage remain in a subject) and perceive the bond between young lovers, no matter how well they try to conceal it. She sees the blossoming of new ideas, friendships and possibilities.

•• The mystic now discovers how to insinuate the properties of Spring into himself and, in a smaller way, others. He can mend his own hurts (healing two Health Levels of bashing damage or one lethal per success), make simple life (such as plants and animals) to grow hale and strong, and bring on wakefulness or the suggestion of fresh perspective. By summoning up a child's wonder with the first bloom of Spring, he can add one per success to Awareness die pools on a simple spell.

••• The wind, element of motion and action, comes to the witch's call. She can mend the

hurts of greater beasts, humans included (healing them as per the capabilities conferred by the previous level); can restore even terrible damage to her own being (healing one Health Level of aggravated damage per success); and can exert control over the gentler emotions, such as love, compassion, appreciation and friendliness. She can also impart supernatural swiftness and grace (one dot of Dexterity or Appearance per success) and is able to move another to sudden action or impulsive behavior.

•••• The mystic gives birth to ideas that grow and spread among others (implanting a thought or concept that spreads with supernatural ease, alacrity and force). She can feed energy into others' spells, fueling or expanding them (adding one success per success rolled to another person's spell that is cast at that time). She may walk physically into the otherworldly realms of the Fae and can erode the stasis of the Gauntlet naturally, allowing transit between multiple worlds (subtracting one from the Gauntlet per success). The hurts of others, no matter how grievous, can be undone (allowing the mage to heal aggravated damage for others as she could for herself with the previous level).

••••• Life itself is in the witch's hands. She can restore the souls of the recently dead to their bodies (only those who died within one minute per level of the witch's Spontaneity score; the arisen person has one Health Level and is barely conscious) and can create living beings (though they lack minds and souls, such forms still possess instincts). Even the improbable may be given genesis (oak trees in the desert, conversion to the Old Ways in the Papal City, etc.), though such changes are not likely to take root and persist unless they are tended and maintained by careful use of mystic and mundane incentives.

Specialties: Creating New Ideas, Fair Folk, Healing, Uncontrolled Change, Wind

Sample Foci: Breath and breathing, clear water, herbs, incense, salves, saplings or other newly-bloomed flowers or plants, sex or sensuality

SUMMER

Powers of fire and passion

As the sun burns hot overhead, Summer is the season of passions. The blood courses with lust and the thrill of battle. Summer brings storms that rend the night sky with bright fire and batter the land with furious downpours. Choices are made swiftly, for there is always tomorrow. People are quick to take offense, chafed by the heat and the stillness of the daytime air. Summer magic is undertaken swiftly and with conviction, though it might lack wisdom. It is bold and strong, the most vigorous of Seasons. It is a time of fire and fury, a time saturated with the glorious vitality of the prime of life.

• The witch can see the fullness of things, their vigor and intensity. Strong passions, hot tempers and powerful beliefs are evident to her. She can detect things and people in their prime, and she knows sources of energy and activity (this also allows her to detect crays, talismans and other concentrations of mystic power). Her perception allows her to sense when a thing is in or near its greatest possible state of readiness.

•• Now, the mystic can provoke aggression, action and motion (using subtle impulses to impel such brash responses onward). She may induce vitality (reducing Health Level penalties deriving from fatigue by one per success rolled) in herself or others. When moved to violence, her weapons grow strong with the power of Summer (inflicting lethal damage instead of bashing, in the event of fists or light blunt weapons, and adding extra dice of lethal damage to all successful attacks equal to successes scored on a simple spell). She can create ironclad (and angrily defended) convictions out of whimsies, can stir a docile beehive into a rage and can inspire a retiring scholar with the fervor of his youth.

••• Fire, the element of Summer, can be created and controlled by the wielder of this power (inflicting a Health Level or two of lethal damage). The fury of a druid who reaches this level of understanding is a terrible thing. Patterns or objects or living creatures can be directly assaulted, forcing them to adapt and grow strong or be destroyed (causing one Health Level of aggravated damage per success; this can be soaked with Willpower instead of Stamina). Discontent can be whipped up into mob violence, and a conservative priest might be made to throw sense and inhibition to the winds and embrace his deepest desires.

•••• The witch acquires control over power and vitality on a conceptual level. She can rise up, bloody but unbowed, from blows that would fell trees (effectively adding an additional -2 Health Level per success for the duration of a conflict). She can assail the consciousness of another with raw aggression (inducing homicidal rage or some other manner of madness if the subject does not resist with a Willpower roll). She is able to attack the pattern of magic itself (dissolving even ongoing spells by reducing successes accrued in the casting on a one-for-one basis) and can sculpt raw Quintessence into ideals (giving them substance in the various Umbrae) or physical objects (such as conjuring a shield out of thin air). Storms answer her beck and call and lightning strikes from a clear sky when she wills it.

••••• Summer's final lesson manifests in fantastic displays of power, bestowing upon the mystic

the heart of a dragon. The witch's displeasure makes itself known in maelstroms of force, blistering heat and raw elemental fury (inflicting two Health Levels of aggravated damage per success scored to all unfortunate enough to be caught within the radius of the effect). She can spark tempers that flare into wars or turn a passing fancy into a love affair that becomes legendary. Everything around her becomes strong and vital (adding one dot of Strength per success) or withers beneath the fangs, the fists and the spells of those who are.

Specialties: Combat, Fire, Inciting Wrath, Quintessence, Raw Force

Sample Foci: Daggers or other bladed weapons, dance, fire, lust or wrath, physical contact (preferably skin-to-skin)

Winter

Powers of death and despair

This is the dying time, when claws of frost scour the Earth, flaying man and beast alike and field and forest as well. Winter is the season that kills, when day is short and night stretches on. A thick blanket of white, like a grave shroud, is cast upon all things. It is a time of secrets, fear and separation. Folk gather close, around life-giving fires, huddling against the cold and the dark. Winter magic may be subtle, like the stillness of a frozen pond by night, or obvious, like a blizzard come to claim a heavy toll of the living. But always it is tinged by energies of death, dissolution and finality.

• A bleak Second Sight comes to him who learns the rudiments of Winter's Gift. He sees death and the dying, feels the imminent ending of things and can sense the proximity of restless ghosts. Further, he knows when an idea or group is at its end, the point at which it must die. He sees things that exist between life and death (including vampires and other walking dead), waiting to fade completely or be reborn.

•• Apathy, fear and stillness can be created with this level of power. Thoughts die unspoken and inspiration dries up when Winter's wisdom is called upon (subtracting one success from an Intelligence or Wits roll per two successes, rounding down, scored on a simple spell). Feelings of isolation, lassitude or boredom are spun at the mystic's command. She may speak with the dead, and a chill follows her when she summons it. Also, she may create silence or deepen shadows (adding one die per success to Stealth die pools).

••• The druid may control water, the element of Winter, in any of its forms, and can strike directly at the vitality of the living, seeking to snuff it out (inflicting one Health Level of lethal damage per success). He may create cold or darkness at will and can stride into the domain of the dead without giving up his spirit. Animated ephemeral ideals, such as emotion, can be lulled into a truly deathlike state (reducing an individual to an automaton of reason). Wakefulness can be transformed into slumber and hope turned to despair.

•••• The mystic may compel the spirits of the dead, summoning them up to work her will (to control a lifeless corpse, however, she needs other magic). Even those restless shades who dwell in both worlds, such as vampires, are not free from her influence (though any intelligent undead beings may resist this compulsion with Willpower). She may rob almost any system of momentum and may render such systems unchanging unless later acted upon by outside forces. Power and sources of energy, including magical energy, may be rendered dormant (lulling ongoing spells or talismans into inaction for the duration specified by her number of successes).

••••• Filled with the harsh and unfeeling power of Winter, the adherent to the Old Faith can kill with a glance (destroying the link between body and spirit and inflicting one Health Level of aggravated damage per success that can be soaked only with Willpower). His words quell even powerful and compelling ideas among large numbers of people. He can pull the vital force out of any unliving physical or mystical pattern, dissolving it instantly (any spells attacked in this way lose two successes per success scored in the casting of such a spell). When he wishes it, change ends and a pervasive lethargy sets in. He may naturally strengthen the Gauntlet against intrusion (raising the Gauntlet by one per two successes scored) and is a living symbol of fear, dread and terrible, unnerving power.

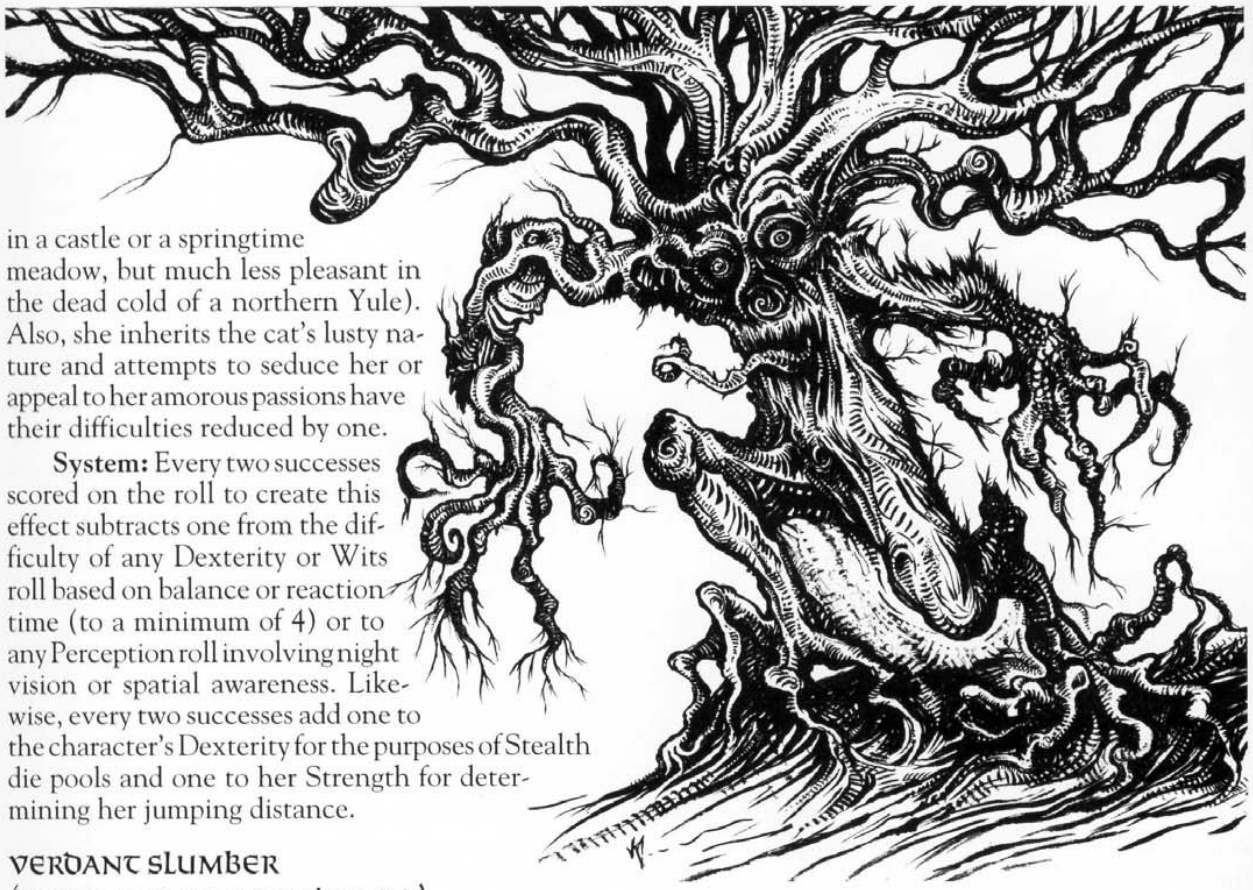
Specialties: Destroying Ideas, Souls, Stifling Physical Change, Water

Sample Foci: Altar, battering or bludgeoning implements, grave dirt or bodily remains, sacrifice (animal or possibly human), water (especially snow or ice)

Sample Rotes

Donning the Night-Daughter's Skin (Spring ••, Summer ••, Winter ••)

The cat has long been a friend and ally to witches by serving as a familiar, with stealth, grace and sharpened senses. This enchantment, a supplication to Diana or a similar goddess, allows the caster to adopt certain spiritual characteristics of the cat. The blessings of Winter silence her steps, and Spring grants her unswerving, light-footed balance. Calling upon the long, bright days of Summer, she sees starlight as though it were cast by a brilliant noonday sun. These powers come with two drawbacks, however,. Just like the cat, the witch must tread barefoot to benefit by her stealth (not so much of a problem



in a castle or a springtime meadow, but much less pleasant in the dead cold of a northern Yule). Also, she inherits the cat's lusty nature and attempts to seduce her or appeal to her amorous passions have their difficulties reduced by one.

System: Every two successes scored on the roll to create this effect subtracts one from the difficulty of any Dexterity or Wits roll based on balance or reaction time (to a minimum of 4) or to any Perception roll involving night vision or spatial awareness. Likewise, every two successes add one to the character's Dexterity for the purposes of Stealth die pools and one to her Strength for determining her jumping distance.

Verdant Slumber
(Autumn ••••, Spring ••)

By offering prayers to the Fair Folk (who are known to favor transformative magics in their punishments), the witch can overwhelm a foe with a terrible sleep that hardens his limbs and dulls his mind, until he roots to the ground where he stands and branches and leaves sprout from his flesh and bone, changing him into a tree.

System: Each success accrued in the casting of this effect inflicts a Health Level of aggravated damage. Each Health Level of damage sustained erupts across the surface of the subject's body as leaves, branches, vines, flowers, or whatever other plant life is appropriate to the region and the caster's wishes. A subject slain by this spell is changed fully into flora, often frozen into an expression of pain and terror, a visible reminder of the awful fate that awaits those who challenge the Old Faith.

Ancient Warder of the Land
(Spring •••••, Summer •••)

In the deepest forests of the world stand trees sometimes centuries old. With boughs that reach halfway to the heavens and roots that spread deep into the bones of the Earth, such titans slumber the seasons away, only dimly aware of the goings-on about them, content in their majesty. Sometimes, however, a druid with the proper knowledge can rouse a sleeping giant to do battle on his behalf, tearing its roots free of the soil and shaking off the lethargy of decades to strike at enemies with limbs as thick around as a man's torso. All but the mightiest of weapons are shrugged off with a few chips of bark and smattering of sap, even as the tree heaps thunderous blows upon all who would dare to incite the wrath of the Old Faith.

System: Naturally, this effect functions only in places where there is at least one particularly large and ancient tree to call upon. The Ancient Warder follows simple commands ("Attack him," or "Carry me over the river," for example) and typically has the following stats; Strength 8, Dexterity 1, Stamina 8, Wits 1, Brawl 1, eight -0 Health Levels, one -1, one -2 and one -5, and it may soak normally against any source of damage that does not directly attack its pattern (even many kinds of aggravated damage). For every three successes scored, rounding down, the caster may bestow one point in an Attribute that the Warder possesses or another -0 Health Level. At the end of the effect's duration, provided it has not been reduced below its -5 Health Level, the tree simply puts its roots back into the soil, in whatever state it might be in, and resumes its existence as an ordinary, inanimate tree. If the Warder is slain, however, or finishes out the duration of the spell in a

place where its roots cannot burrow to soil, it topples over and withers, bleeding a sticky sap stained with threads of crimson.

Order of Hermes

Hermetic mysticism focuses on a rigid system of precision and control. The self is a microcosm of the Universe and the source of all potential earthly authority. Metaphor and symbolism are strong in Hermetic praxis, even in the Dark Medieval age, though considerably more of the Ars Arcane hinge upon physical tools and literalism in this age. Ancient writings, dating back to Rome, Greece, Egypt and even Sumer are prevalent, as well as the ubiquitous swords, wands, chalices and even more esoteric components, such as the tears of a Sidhe or dragon's blood. Astrology and alchemy are, likewise, common among Hermetic wizards, and rare indeed is the master's laboratory devoid of at least a star-chart or two and unguents and philters aplenty.

Foundation: Modus

Formidable discipline

Modus (Latin for method or technique) is the Foundation for all Hermetic magic. It represents the strict doctrine of study, willpower and discipline required to wield the Ars Hermetici. This ethic of perfection reflects itself in all the mage does, enabling him to transcend the boundaries set forth for cloddish and simple men and to wield powers that make the gods themselves tremble. Modus is both the means and the end, the Ouroboros, swallowing its own tail in an endless quest, using focus to beget greater understanding and, in turn, using understanding to further one's focus. While all masters of the arcane craft radiate an aura of otherworldliness that sets them apart, the Modus of the Hermetic Master impresses itself upon the Tapestry in displays of raw, unadulterated power.

• The mage is capable of exerting her will to extend a rudimentary degree of control over things outside of herself. At this point, the focus remains on expanding one's knowledge of self, though the promise of mystic might expresses itself in a growing aptitude for more blatant acts of will, spurring the initiate onward.

•• At this level of study, the mage comes to understand the truths behind many of the fundamentals of Hermeticism. Her will takes on a forceful edge and she begins to see that power is there only for those who demonstrate the courage to reach out and grasp it. Indecision and meekness (if such can truly be said to exist among any the Order chooses) are burned away in a crucible of growing power.

••• Now, the mage learns that it is his will that gives justification to the world and his place within it, not the other way around. While the point of view expressed at this level of comprehension cannot be said to be truly dynamic, it can be truthfully noted that the Hermetic wizard is finally ready to begin sloughing off the conception of the possibility of failure. His Art is honed, his power is considerable and he sees the promise of all things laid out before him, waiting for him to reach for it.

•••• With nigh-flawless precision, the mage conducts her every breath, her every waking moment, as an exercise of will and ability. Her being is suffused with the Gift and she is filled with the nagging perception that an unknown, unquantifiable *something* lies just beyond her capabilities, the promise of limitless mystic might. She is at one with her magic and it flows through her as a natural extension of her spirit, like a movement of her arm or words from her mouth.

••••• At this, the final level of mastery, the Hermetic mage sees that his journey has just begun. His Modus is transformed, like the Philosopher's Stone itself, and he comes to know that the journey toward perfection and supremacy over the Art is a never-ending one. He moves out of the realm of mortal concerns and into the company of dragons, giants and slumbering gods. His magic makes itself known in all he says and does and none can mistake him for anything but what he is: *Magus Rex*. (The Hermetic Master may spend up to *two* points of Willpower per turn.)

Specialties: Control, Destruction, Elements, Transmutation

Pillars - Forma

Each Pillar of the Order of Hermes is a Forma. Each Forma embodies a fundamental aspect of Creation, a pillar that shores up the world itself. These four ancient Forms are: Anima (the "Breath of Life" that flows through every living being), Corona (the "Crown" which grants control over the workings of the mind), Primus (the raw power of magic itself) and Vires ("Forces", mastery over the energies of the Universe). Although the four Forms encompass a great many potential powers, in no case can current Hermetic theory violate certain precepts set forth by the Church (precepts which Bonisagus himself subscribed to and set forth in the founding doctrine of the Order): the resurrection of the dead, the creation of true life and travel beyond the Lunar Sphere. Further, though many scholars of the Order have truck with various spiritual entities, both benign and malefic, their control of those beings hinges mostly upon mastery of the energies that sustain those beings, rather than power over ephemeral matter.

Sample Foci: Conjunctions or other astrological phenomena, Enochian language (chants, recitations or text), numerology

ANIMA

Command of life

Life is a breath. The ancients knew that breath is the only thing that separates the living from the lifeless. Just as the soul escapes with a gasp at the moment of death, so too did God make Adam live by inspiration (literally, breathing into). Thus, it is unsurprising that the Order's Forma of life derives its name from this sacred breath. This is the power to heal, the strength of the ox and the speed of the wolf, it is mastery of sickness and health and control over all flesh, from the smallest ant to the mightiest oliphant of Araby. When first setting out upon this path, the mage must content herself with curing or bestowing fever and dispelling the need for sleep and sustenance. As her experience grows, she can summon and unmake plagues, restore lost limbs as a salamander does and quell heartbeats with a word.

• The wizard can detect the presence of life and living beings of an earthly nature (even if they possess supernatural characteristics, such as a werewolf or Hermetic consor) and can also discern states of health and well-being (such as knowing what Health Level a subject is currently at). Conspicuous absences of life (such as barrens unhallowed by a demon's presence) may also be detected, though the mage must be specifically searching for such unless they are exceedingly pronounced.

•• At this level, the mage is capable of altering lesser life patterns (such as those found in flora, fungi, insects, invertebrates and the like), mending or ruining (healing or inflicting up to two Health Levels of bashing damage or one of lethal per success), or of changing such patterns as he pleases, so long as he does not elevate them to higher states. Also, he may, to a limited degree, interact with the pattern with which he is most familiar, his own. The mage may freely heal or harm himself as he does with lesser beasts.

••• Now, the mage is capable of healing and harming other higher beings (including people) with magic alone, just as with the previous level she could affect herself and lower beings. She can also alter the parameters of higher (nonhuman) life and those of her own living pattern. She can freely create alterations that move between higher and lower patterns, augment or stunt physical capabilities and bend the shape of such patterns to her liking (such as adding a dot of Strength, Dexterity, Stamina or Appearance per success).

•••• The Hermetic wizard can now alter the patterns of other human beings and can restore life to a failing pattern or snuff out a healthy one (healing aggravated damage as though it were lethal). She may manipulate the forms of fantastic creatures as well (this includes the ability to shapeshift), provided they possess fleshly bodies (coupled with Vires, it can allow for transformations into various basic energies). Permanent changes may be made to nonsentient life, changes that will carry over to any offspring, though these effects may not enter the realm of the blatantly magical (a roc is possible, whereas a gorgon is not).

••••• The mage can create life out of nothingness. She can fabricate a human (or any other terrestrial) body out of magic, but it is an inanimate husk, unless inhabited by a spirit of some sort. She can conjure a plague or eradicate one over a wide area. She can control the actions of all manner of dumb beasts by exerting influence over their bodily humors. The alterations she makes to living beings may be truly fantastic, so long as they have a basis in Nature (such as using the regenerative capabilities of the earthworm to make a hydra grow its heads back when they are severed).

Specialties: Creating Life, Healing, Human Form, Hybridization, Lesser Creatures

Sample Foci: Cup or chalice, mandrake or other mystic plants, mercury, pentacles of Venus, staves or wands of green wood

CORONA

Command of the mind

Harking back to the wisdom of Solomon himself, the greatest crown a ruler might don is that of a puissant mind. Building upon that precept, Corona enables the Hermetic mage to enhance the quality, the quantity and the forcefulness of his thoughts. At its most basic levels, the Crown of Kings helps the mage to hone his intellect and to perform subtle manipulations of perceptions and the intellect. When wielded by a Master fluent in its ways, this power can be used to extinguish or create sentience, eradicate free will, forge genius from idiocy or set consciousness free from the shackles of the flesh.

• By taking the first step upon the path of mental clarity, the mage finds himself able to perceive thought and intellection. All thinking minds, whether sentient or feral, are known to him (provided they are not concealed by stronger magics). Though, at this point, the mage cannot read minds or control thoughts, he can hone his own consciousness by analyzing it and acting upon what he sees (thereby creating, for example, a simple mind ward that adds dice to Willpower rolls to resist intrusion or allowing for one parallel thought process per success, up to a limit of the mage's Wits score).

•• Now, the mage can exert his will outward, to encompass other minds. He can speak with emotion alone (creating basic empathic contact) and appeal to directly to the thoughts of his desired subject (by impressing a psychic imperative, such as

obedience, fear or joy, that influences the subject's actions). He can perceive the spiritual auras of other beings, reading their emotions as he might read a book. He can forge bonds between minds, allowing one party to know the feelings and general state of another over vast distances.

••• True mental communication is possible at this point and the mage is no longer fettered by the crude barriers of language and speech when she chooses not to be. Thoughts and memories may be explored, tampered with or even severed from a subject's conscious mind (though they continue to exist in the subconscious). Emotions can be created, though those inimical to the subject are likely to be pushed aside quickly.

•••• The mage learns to tread the aether, casting off the chains of flesh to walk in the Astral Umbra as a being of pure thought. Mental afflictions can be created and cured, and the mage is capable of altering deeply held convictions in another with little more than a single enchantment (the subject may, however, attempt to resist with Willpower). He also discovers the means by which the mind might be made to betray the body, assailing it with confused impulses such that damage to the physical form ensues (inflicting a Health Level of bashing damage per success).

••••• To create and annihilate consciousness, to project one's mind across the worlds, to control utterly the will of another — these are the powers commanded by the master of Corona. The mage can selectively manipulate any aspects of the mind that she wishes, including advancing her own intellect far beyond the capacity of ordinary men (enhancing Intelligence and Wits by one dot per success). She can move minds between bodies or exist long after physical death as an astral shade, moving from body to body as the mood takes her.

Specialties: Creating Consciousness, Subtle Intrusion, Subverting Wills, Telepathy

Sample Foci: Circlet or crown, dagger, diamond, mirror, silver

PRIMUS

Command of Quintessence

A Form perfected becomes an Ideal. It is this perfection to which the student of Hermes' arts aspires, this elevation to the status of the Ideal. Magic itself, its cause, its effect, its very substance, exists in this exalted state. Composed fundamentally of the unblemished Fifth Essence, magic itself may well be the greatest power a mage can control. It is the Prime or foremost element of the Universe. By mastering this Forma, the mage finds herself able to sculpt and manipulate the elusive threads of mystic force itself. Whereas apprentices are capable of altering the flow of Quintessence and sending gentle ripples through the arcane channels of the Tapestry, those who are truly adept in this art can give life to new places of power, destroy the Gift in another or set in motion enchantments that stand for a thousand years.

• At this level, the mage is able to sense the flow of mystic energy around him: magics of all kinds, sorcerous creatures and those with the Gift, as well as anything else that contains excess Quintessence (thus, the energy bound up in a normal pattern, such as a chair or cat, cannot usually be discerned) and is not expressly concealed and warded against detection.

•• Now, the mage is capable of altering the flow of magic to some small degree, gathering and storing free Quintessence (that which is not bound up in extant patterns) above and beyond that allowed by her Fount Background. Also, she may, for example, infuse a weapon or garment with Quintessence, in order to enable it to harm or be warded against magical beings, respectively (thus inflicting or defending against aggravated damage and harming or warding against fully spiritual beings). She can also create purely Quintessential ideal forms visible to those with the appropriate mystic perceptions and which might act on and be acted upon by mystic phenomena.

••• The Hermetic learns to manipulate any source of Quintessence not directly protected against such tampering, such as those bound up in living patterns or those of objects, or any Quintessence warded by magic more powerful than the mage's own. Such sources may by bolstered or drained (one point of Quintessence per success), at the mage's discretion. He may create Tass (by distilling it into liquid or a powder, for example) and spells of any type may be directly attacked (dispersing successes accrued in the casting on a one-for-one basis).

•••• The mage can assail nonliving Quintessential patterns, drawing their energy out and using it as one would any other sorcerous power. Naturally, the patterns of such forces or materials crumble out of existence (suffering an unsoakable Health Level of aggravated damage per point of Quintessence drained; note that most objects have only a scant few points invested in them). Also, she learns to create self-sustaining Quintessential patterns. Alone, these are unimpressive, but they can be melded with physical patterns to create self-sustaining systems fueled by magic alone (this allows the creation of ongoing spells, such as talismans, for half the normal cost in Quintessence and Willpower, rounding up).

••••• This, the final authority over magic itself, enables the wizard to completely cease or

destroy the flow of magical energy that pervades all things (inflicting a Health Level of aggravated damage per success that may be soaked only with Willpower). It is by means of this process that the dreaded Gilgul rite is used to forever sunder the Gift in a mage. Permanent enchantments might be dispelled and sites of power torn apart for the Quintessence they contain. Likewise, threads of power might be manipulated, with great care and at great risk, to beget new crays where before there were none (an extended spell with no roll limit, one roll per day; every 10 successes equals one level of the new cray)

Specialties: Creating Ideals, Dispelling Magic, Drawing From Unusual Sources, Enchanting Items

Sample Foci: Books and scrolls, gold, fragrant oils, rings, sunlight or sun-imagery, the number 1

Vires

Command of elemental forces

A wizard's wrath is a conflagration and his laughter warm and pleasant sunlight. Certainly the most fantastic and visually stunning of the Forms commonly taught to mages of the Order, the way of Forces summons the storm, masters light and darkness, bends the tides and grants the mage flight without wings. Though it is considered the least subtle of the Hermetic arts, Vires is as well suited to the spy, the courtier and the assassin as it is to the blustering mage. After all, this Forma is as capable of conveying whispered words across leagues or gathering a mantle of shadows as it is of raining lightning down on the heads of those who displease. At first, disciples of this art flicker candle flames and send chills through the air and, later, transform moonlight into flame and tear castles from the Earth to set them atop the clouds.

• At this level of knowledge, the mage can follow the movements of various terrestrial energies (light, heat, sound and so on). She is capable, for example, of discerning how long a candle has been extinguished by its residual warmth or feeling out where lightning will strike even as thunderheads gather.

•• Now, the mage can manipulate what she could perceive with the previous level, if only on a small scale. Thus, she can conjure a candle flame, increase the force of friction to the point that a wall could be scaled with hands and feet, or whisper her words directly into the ear of an ally from across a dining hall. The effects at this level must be small and subtle, but, when targeting visible energies, are obvious uses of the Gift.

••• At this point, the mage can direct Vires on a wider scale. The control of terrestrial forces is within the wizard's grasp. He can project a thunderbolt from his fingertips or wrap himself up in shadows that hang like a cloak (adding a die per success to Stealth die pools). Further, he can defy his own earthbound nature to take to the skies, or he can sap the heat from an enemy's frame, turning blood to ice in another's veins. The many martial applications of this level of power inflict either a Health Level of lethal damage or two of bashing per success.

•••• Now, the mage learns to harness some of the most potent of forces. She can create true sunlight or transform a scream into a conflagration (inflicting two Health Levels of lethal damage or one aggravated per success). She can make an object "fall" sideways, with as much or as little force as she wishes. If she wishes, she may fly above the sky itself, out to the limit of the Lunar Sphere, or she can freeze rivers solid at midsummer and bat aside an entire volley of arrows with a wave of her hand.

••••• The true master of Vires can shake the heavens themselves with his awesome might. He can bend the tides, topple mountains and create raging storms. If he chooses, a blow from his fist can shatter steel and stone, or the raging power of a landslide might strike his town with no more force than a mass of falling feathers. When the Master is angered, lava floes erupt, thunder rains on all sides and foes fall screaming, embraced by withering flames (two Health Levels of aggravated damage per success).

Specialties: Electricity, Fine Manipulation, Fire, Flight, Physical Contact

Sample Foci: Candles, fire, iron, pentacles of Mars, swords

Sample Rotes

Aegis Magicus (Primus •••)

Also called the Greater Magical Shield, this rote is a version of Bonisagus' magic that helped bring the Houses of the Order together in peace. It sheathes its wearer in an unseen cloak that warps or cancels the energies of spells directed at him.

System: This rote requires a normal, simple casting (it cannot be cast hurried or extended), and its duration lasts for half a day, regardless of number of successes rolled (if cast at sunrise, it lasts until sunset, and vice-versa). The number of successes on the casting automatically subtract (on a one-to-one basis) from the successes of any spell directed against the Aegis wearer, thus either reducing or canceling their potencies. one point of Quintessence must be spent to fuel each such defense, however (regardless of how many successes are drained from an incoming spell). This can be invested into the spell during casting (the caster spends up to three Quintessence to be later used up by the spell as needed) or spent as

the Aegis blocks spells. Obviously, if this is cast upon a non-mage, that person cannot spend Quintessence to resist spells; the caster must invest such protective spells with his own Quintessence. If cast upon a mage, regardless of fellowship, that mage may spend his own Quintessence to fuel the armor.

A mage can choose to admit any incoming spell by not spending Quintessence. A non-mage cannot make this choice; the spell automatically blocks any magic (except for spells cast by the Aegis's caster), as long as it still has invested Quintessence points to spend.

Hermes' Brand (Anima •••, Primus •••, Vires •••)

A recent innovation in the *Massasa* War, **Hermes' Brand** is a defensive weapon, designed to dissuade the nocturnal demons from slaking their infernal thirst on mages of the Order. By ensorceling one's own vital humors with a lingering enchantment, the blood itself becomes a deadly weapon when used as sustenance by a vampire, as the mystic sustenance derived by the parasite transforms into a raging inferno within the lifeless monster's gullet. As fire is bane to such creatures (a fact the Order learned early on in the war), this enchantment typically proves fatal to the offending vampire.

System: Each success scored on the roll to create **Hermes' Brand** is one blood point of blood (the caster's or that of another) that will react violently with the vampiric physiology a specified period of time after ingestion and transformation into the mystic substance that sustains the *massasa*. For each success scored (up to a maximum of the number of blood points the vampire ingests), the blood explodes into flames, inflicting *two* Health Levels of nonsoakable aggravated damage, as fire erupts out of the creature's body and devours it from the inside out. Note that this enchantment lasts for the normal duration, given number of successes, even if the recipient of this spell dies, so long as the blood retains the mystic energy consumed by the *massasa*, making it possible for a slain mage to have his final vengeance.

The Incorruptible Water (Anima •••••, Corona ••••, Primus ••••)

More so than any other mystic society known to the civilized world, the Order of Hermes makes use of a variety of longevity elixirs designed to preserve not only flesh and bone, but also to protect the mind against the rigors of days beyond counting. The ultimate conquest, that of Death itself, is not, however, to be had easily or by the inexperienced and this enchantment requires considerable knowledge and power. Still, the potentially limitless life span offered by this spell, which almost invariably takes the form of a potion of some sort, is sufficient of itself to inspire many mages of the Order to pursue such knowledge and power. By means of this enchantment, a handful of Hermetic mages have dwelt among the living since the days when the Founders first gathered the keepers of Hermes' arts together to speak of unification.

System: For each success on this rote's roll, the mage staves off the ravages of aging for ten years. There are two considerable drawbacks to this process, however (as might be expected of a spell designed to hold the Reaper himself at bay). First, one point of Quintessence must go into the casting of this spell for each year (chronological, not biological) of the caster's life and this power must be garnered from sources conducive to longevity (such as dragon's blood or the tears of an angel) or physical health (a healing spring, for example). Also, every 1 rolled in the casting (provided the effect does not botch, in which case the wizard has other problems...) must be recorded, as these 1s stack over the course of the caster's life in regards to this spell. These 1s are always treated as though they had been rolled in the process of casting each use of **The Incorruptible Water**, for the purposes of figuring botches. To alleviate this latter effect, though, the mage may expend a point of *permanent* Willpower to reduce his running total of 1s by his previous permanent Willpower. In this fashion have a handful of mages eked out many centuries of life, though the sources of Quintessence suitable for this effect grow fewer and fewer as the years march on. Perhaps such eternal life will soon prove unsustainable.

Wrath of Apollo (Primus •••••, Vires •••••)

Easily the most spectacular of the Order's offensive sorceries, **Wrath of Apollo** summons an unrelenting curtain of solar flame with which to scourge the life from one's foes. As Hermetic elemental theory maintains that the sun is formed of pure Quintessence, this mystic energy is used to ignite the very air, projecting withering heat that renders steel to liquid sludge, stone to a bubbling mass and flesh and bone to a bare handful of cinders. Within this conflagration, virtually nothing without some manner of mystic shielding can survive, for no natural barrier or proof will endure.

System: This rote is virtually unsurvivable by any being not completely shielded against its power. Each success scored inflicts three Health Levels of aggravated damage on everything within fifty feet of the spell's center per success scored on the casting roll. The effect siphons most of the Quintessence out of nonliving matter in the area of the spell, so nearly all physical objects caught within the **Wrath of**



Apollo are obliterated, even if they would normally be highly resistant to fire (naturally enchanted objects are considerably likelier to endure than ordinary ones). The caster may direct the center of this spell anywhere within one hundred yards per success (though he is apt to be harmed by the blast and by flaming debris if he cannot or does not center the enchantment more than two hundred yards distant). Note that the use of this spell also creates a rift in the Quintessential pattern of the area it affects that only slowly recovers a natural flow of mystic energy.

Spirit-Talkers

From a thousand ancient traditions they hail, men and women chosen by the inhabitants of worlds hidden to the eyes of the ordinary. In the dark forests of Eastern Europe, they offer prayers to Svarog and Byelobog. In the lands of the Teutons, they implore Wolf and Stag for gifts of strength, cunning and fleetness. And, among the dunes of Araby, they speak to the desert wind and coax gentle laughter from the waters sleeping deep within the earth, that they might bubble forth and give life. With dances and drums, ancient chants and timeless images, they call upon the might of the spirits. They walk with one foot in each world, treading in fantastic realms that have not yet receded from the expanding masses of humanity. The two sides of their magic are life and death, and they are entrusted with maintaining the sanctity of both. They speak with the mouths of men and the tongues of spirits. They have died and been reborn.

Foundation: Sensitivity

The call of the Invisible World

The Foundation of shamanic faith, Sensitivity gauges the Spirit-Talker's connection to the unseen world and her awareness of its nuances. A strong Sensitivity enables the Spirit-Talker to easily transcend the barriers between realms and to hear the voices of the spirits, no matter how subtle or distant. This can be a double-edged sword; in places where the spirits cry out in pain or lash out with malevolence, one strong in Sensitivity goes without the shield of blindness worn by most. Still, for those who hear the laughter of the rivers, to wear the skins of beasts and to tread where no living mortal goes, their fantastic perceptions of the unseen world far outweigh the risks.

- The first perceptions of the spirit realms come to the shaman now. He sees and hears things that his fellows do not and can feel the presence of the truly otherworldly just beyond the range of his senses. His kinship with the beings of the Invisible World is almost a tangible connection to him (the Spirit-Talker can automatically see into the Umbra

in any location with a Gauntlet equal to or less than his Sensitivity).

•• As she grows into her role as the mouthpiece of the spirits, the shaman finds herself capable of drawing their presence forth into the material world in small ways. With supplications, she can partially embody a given totem. She is attuned to the motions of the unseen and seems, to the uninitiated, nearly as much a thing of spirit as of flesh.

••• The Spirit-Talker constantly dwells halfway in two worlds. His counsel is sought by the totems and their servants and counsel is offered to him in both his waking hours and in his dreams. He is esteemed as a brother in the other worlds and is expected to uphold the responsibilities of one who is trusted with many dangerous secrets. His flesh is a garment and his "otherness" can be easily sensed by even the most mundane of folk.

•••• When the shaman is not careful, her awareness slips between worlds without her knowledge. She is more than just kin who must be respected; she is a friend and confidante to the spirits. Just as the phenomena of the invisible realms impress themselves upon her, her thoughts, moods and emotions are reflected upon those realms and their denizens (who treat her as a native of their own worlds now and no being of mere flesh).

••••• An elder to his own people, the Spirit-Talker is likewise regarded thus by the spirits. They heed his words and rush to his aid. The shaman walks where he will, a being of all worlds and none. Ancient spirits, beast-lords and demigods truck with him as an equal and his will in every way ripples across the realms unseen, realms with which he constantly and concurrently interacts on a level as real and physical as the one in which he was born (the shaman regains three points of Quintessence per day while in the Umbra or points equal to his Fount rating, *whichever is higher*).

Specialties: Awakening Spirits, Dreams, Shades of the Dead, Summoning, Travel

Pillars - Totems

Each Pillar in Spirit-Talker cosmology resides in a Totem, an archetypal spirit. These tutors guide and inspire, whether they speak through the voices of a thousand spirits or through the shaman's dead ancestors, although they most commonly take the shape of animal totems. Indeed, many shamanic traditions are blind to foolish hierarchies and attempts to control and classify that which is as invisible as the wind and as vast as the sky. Named for four of the cornerstone positions of tribal society and spirituality, the Totems are intended to give some structure to unnumbered systems of belief so diverse that almost any form of categorization fails to suffice. Still, upon the open steppes, Mongol mystics know the importance of a cunning mind and deep in the ancient woodlands of Eastern Europe, timeless knowledge guides the hand that fells tree, stag and foe. Thus do the four Pillars of the Totems find their place among their chosen peoples.

Sample Foci: Dance, drumming or chants, prayers to gods or totem

Chieftain

Gifts of leadership

Leadership is a sacred role in tribal society. To rule is to be responsible for life and death in a world where magic abounds and the lands of the spirits are close at hand. A single poor choice can mean starvation or annihilation in a battle that cannot be won. The burden of leadership rests heavy in those places that remain free of the chains of the written word, of machines and beasts broken to the will of Man. This freedom, of course, comes with the price of hardship, a crucible that the people of these untamed lands must be strong enough to bear. A crucible that the Chieftain must be strong enough to endure for the sake of his people, be he called elder, king or *khan*.

• The first powers of the Chieftain enable the shaman to detect leadership; its potential, its sources and its effects. She can perceive the touch of the Chieftain in those favored by him, can see whence control flows and whether that authority is born of respect, fear, age or whatever.

•• Now, the Spirit-Talker is able to implore the Chieftain for his blessing. She can speak with confidence, and her words carry weight (adding one die to Leadership die pools per success). She may ask the spirits of regal beasts (Lion or Eagle, for example) for wisdom and advice, the better to discern the proper course of action (subtracting one from the difficulty of any roll involving planning or organization per success). She can create auras of authority or obedience or issue simple impulses to others that must be obeyed and acted upon (resisted with Willpower).

••• The shaman becomes a leader among men or beasts when the Chieftain smiles upon him (adding one dot to Charisma per success). He may also take on a terrible aspect that inspires fear and complicity (adding one to Intimidation die pools per success on a simple spell). He can stifle or amplify any of the qualities of leadership in another, turning a disorganized ruler into an exemplar of efficiency or a benevolent elder into a tyrant (adding or subtracting one per success from the difficulty of rolls to assert leadership or to make use of its qualities, such as diplomacy or provisioning).

•••• The Spirit-Talker may speak commands that cannot be questioned by man or beast (resisted by Willpower) and compel those around him with supernatural grace (adding one dot to Manipulation per success). He may shape the concept of authority itself, transferring the sense of control from a king to his young daughter or causing each person in a given community to regard a random person as leader, for example.

••••• The final blessings of the Chieftain enable the shaman to utter commandments to the very elements (calling storms or droughts, for example) and to the spirit realms themselves (causing the shades of the dead or the ephemeral spirits of nature to answer her call). Although she cannot order about the lords among the spirits, they regard her as possessing legitimate leadership qualities (adding one to all Etiquette die pools per success). When she needs to be, she is the most capable of rulers and can easily control and fabricate any of the qualities, positive or otherwise, of rule (bestowing mastery of the law upon a child or turning a brilliant king into a boorish clod, for example).

Specialties: Creating Authority, Human Subjects, Organizing Groups, Unreasonable Commands

Sample Foci: Fine goods, posture of dominance or control, rods, splendid garb, teeth or pelts from a beast epitomizing leadership (Lion or Bear, for example)

TRICKSTER

Gifts of deception

The Trickster holds secrets in trust and deceives men and gods alike to show the wisdom of humility. Likewise, he often fools himself and so learns by his own defeat. The Trickster must gain by his wits that which cannot be had by either erudition or the sword. He is the scout, the trailblazer, the one who forges the path for more traditional, constrained minds to follow in his wake. He liberates his people from stagnation and teaches them by the pain he causes, pain which, like a broken bone, mends all the stronger for the suffering it begets. He is a lover and a thief, often at the same time. He laughs even when he fails, for he knows that there is a lesson in it. The Trickster must be swift, for he knows that there are those who do not appreciate what he has to show them. These, he taunts and infuriates until they learn or are destroyed by their own impotent rage.

• With this level of knowledge and experience, the shaman is able to sense lies and detect illusion and deception. The Trickster knows his own and opens the mystic's eyes to hidden paths and places, as well as revealing his chosen beasts, spirits and people (though the shaman is cautioned to beware; this Totem often likes to play tricks on even his favorites).

•• The shaman's tongue is made wise in the ways of lies, and she learns how to cloak her actions in mystery and occlusion (adding one die to Legerdemain, Stealth or Subterfuge die pools per success). The Trickster makes fingers swift and footfalls silent, and he confounds perception and memory for his friend. The Spirit-Talker hears the secrets of others (by reading superficial thoughts) and learns how to befuddle those who consider themselves to be clever or to possess authority (subtracting one die from Leadership pools per success; alternatively, subtract one from Wits per two successes, rounding down).

••• Now, the Trickster sends spirits to steal for the shaman (subtracting one from all difficulties for sleight of hand or simple pickpocketing per success) and offers his power to bring misfortune upon those who need to be humbled (raising a difficulty by one per two successes, rounding down). The Spirit-Talker may change her face or speak with a voice that leaves the listener unsure of what he has just agreed to (add one dot to Manipulation per success). She hides and cannot be found by earthly vision alone (mystic senses must exceed the shaman's successes in creating such a spell).

•••• Good fortune (and, betimes, much-needed bad fortune) follows the shaman as a close comrade now. When she needs something, a fool is often on hand to part with it. She can lie to spirits and powerful lords among beasts (deceiving their senses or mystic perceptions just as she does with humans) and can even deceive herself into believing powerful untruths that make her more than she is (gaining levels to be distributed among her Abilities equal to half her successes, rounding down). When she wishes it, her trail is invisible, and the blame for her misdeeds placed squarely upon the shoulders of others.

••••• The Spirit-Talker walks closely beside the Trickster and is a friend and councilor to him. His own calamities almost always yield up sweet fruit and those who would do him harm are beset by foul luck that persists until they mend their ways or give up the chase (adding one to all difficulties per three successes, rounding down). He can deceive magic itself (bypassing wards or sensory effects with a contested roll), and his silvered tongue beguiles gods and demons. He becomes what he wishes (changing shape) and discovers what he needs, by happenstance, persistence or theft.

Specialties: Convincing Others, Illusion, Ridiculous Gambits, Thievery

Sample Foci: Foolish risks, lies and deceptions, prayers to an animal spirit noted for cunning (Cat or Monkey, for example), stolen items

WARRIOR

Gifts of fury

The way of the Warrior is the way of the wolf and the lion. Strength and fortitude are the Warrior's constant companions. Without them, he falters at the killing moment and is himself struck down. He must

know himself and his capabilities and those of his brethren. The Warrior speaks with actions, not words, and does not waste time with contemplation and reflection when great deeds are called for. He must know, by instinct, the right course of action, for battle gives only one chance and forgives no man his mistakes. He defies the enemies of his people and drives back the corruption of those who would call themselves civilized. He scorns their false promises and greets with the sword those who would harm his kin. When driven by great need, the Warrior can slay dragons and fell gods.

• The first thing the Warrior's chosen must learn is how to detect the flow of battle and the presence of violence. The Warrior offers striking insights into all manner of confrontations, physical or no, and shows his faithful, among other things, the weaknesses of foes (subtracting one from attack difficulties per success, to a minimum of four), the battle-prowess of others (allowing the shaman to learn Archery, Brawl, Dodge and Melee scores) and the direction in which a given conflict is moving.

•• Now, the Spirit-Talker learns to use the Warrior's blessing to shield herself in battle and to stir the spirits of conflict to come to her aid (adding one to her difficulty to be hit per two successes, rounding down). Her strikes are truer and her blades sharper than those without the Warrior's countenance (turning bashing or lethal damage to aggravated). She is also beginning to learn how to incite conflict by magic alone (creating confrontational states and combative emotions), drawing on the violence within the souls of man and animal alike.

••• With the power of his magic, the shaman becomes capable of emulating the wolf and the tiger, the strength of fang and claw (adding one level to any Physical Attribute per success). He can seek the aid of great warriors of the spirit realms, calling up such totems as Wolf, Bear or Tiger. He shrugs off mighty blows (soaking one Health Level of aggravated damage per success), and his weapons are as swift as they are sure (allowing extra combat actions per turn equal to successes or Wits, whichever is less).

•••• The violence in Nature itself now aids the mystic. Lightning fells her enemies and those who would strike at her are buffeted by the fury of the storm (subtracting a die from enemies' combat die pools per two successes, rounding down). Hate and rage erupt from the hearts of the gentle and peaceful, and warrior-kings among the spirits ride the shaman's flesh in battle (adding their own strange attributes to her own, but temporarily suppressing her magic). Steel blunts upon her flesh (subtracting one from damage die pools per success), and she shatters bone with a touch of her hand (inflicting one Health Level of aggravated damage on objects or living creatures per success).

••••• The Spirit-Talker is at peace, smiled upon by the Warrior. He speaks with violent intent and mortal men die (two Health Levels of aggravated damage per success). A thousand vengeful shades direct his hand when he moves it in anger (adding one die to *all* combat-based die pools and to initiative per two successes, rounding down). He can strike to the heart of titans and terrible monsters and batters down foes, wills and even magics directed against him (dispersing casting successes on a one-for-one basis). He is an ally of battle itself and walks with its favor always.

Specialties: Amplifying Prowess, Bestial Fury, Causing Fear, Inflicting Harm, Weapons

Sample Foci: Animalistic howls or battle-cries, bloodletting, bones of strong animals or powerful enemies, weaponry (especially crushing or piercing weaponry)

Wise One

Gifts of ancient power

The Wise One offers counsel by the fire's light. Bent with years, she has seen much and knows sacred tales, mystic wisdom and simple truth. She was a mother and a grandmother and has seen the coming and going of seasons uncounted. She was young once and knows well what is in your heart. The Wise One remembers the ways to honor the dead and appease the spirits. She tells of the paths that are safe to follow, what roots are good to eat and how best to treat a wound inflamed with fever. The denizens of the unseen world flock to her, to watch over her and to whisper hidden knowledge and be whispered to in kind. She teaches the next generation all that has been learned by the generations who have come before. She recites tales of heroes and monsters, demigods and ancient spirits. She can answer that most troubling of questions, "Why?"

• The Wise One first teaches the ways in which her touch is felt. She whispers to the Spirit-Talker the heart-wisdom of others (adding successes to Empathy die pools). She points out to him places of power and shows him magic that may be hidden from mortal sight (successes rolled contest mystic concealment effects). Further, she knows foolish words from those spoken with weight of understanding behind them.

•• The shaman can ask the Wise One for simple guidance and counsel (adding one to Enigmas, Hearth Wisdom or Occult die pools per success). She knows the migrations of beasts and the healing properties of the natural elements around her (creating salves and poultices that heal one Health Level of lethal damage or two of bashing per success). She is taught by the Wise One how to appeal to the spirits with pleasing supplications (allowing them to be summoned to the local Penumbra). She divines intent simply by staring into the eyes of another, allowing her to read surface thoughts.

••• Spirits of all sorts may be summoned into the earthly realm, waking from slumber, if need be (though they remain ephemeral unless embodying under their own power). Preternatural understanding comes easily to the Spirit-Talker (adding one level to any Mental Attribute per success). He can enter the worlds of the spirits now (passing through the Gauntlet), and can channel mystic energies, fortifying any magical patterns or eroding them (adding or subtracting casting successes on a one-for-one basis).

•••• The shaman can pull back the curtains between worlds, allowing beings to pass freely between them (creating shallowings by lowering the Gauntlet one level per success). She can cause spirits to embody physically, even those that cannot normally do so. The spirit world rises up in anger against those who displease her, and they find their footsteps dogged by storms, the rivers from which they drink foul and bitter and bird and beast turning upon them. The Wise One teaches her the answers to questions few mortals know enough even to ask (lowering the difficulty of any Enigmas, Hearth Wisdom or Occult roll by one per success, to a minimum of four).

••••• The mystic can bring new fonts of power to life (creating a cray, as per the Old Faith's Autumn •••••), shred enchantments with a gesture (each Quintessence point spent, up to a limit of the shaman's successes, disperses five casting successes) and knows the ancient words by which even the mightiest spirits (Incarna Avatars and the like) are summoned and placated. She can return life to the recently dead (as per the Old Faith's Spring •••••) and can proclaim curses that last for generations. Healing herbs and poisonous roots are awakened by the very touch of her hand, and she walks at will in any world she pleases (there is no Gauntlet for her).

Specialties: Awakening Spirits, Curses, Guidance, Mystic Energies

Sample Foci: Bones or skins of snakes, burial sites, hallucinogens or trance states, mortal remains of a shaman, smoke



Sample Rotes

Listening to the Heart-Voice (Trickster ••)

There has always been a difference between the majority of what is said in life and what is truly meant. Most people so take for granted the little deceptions and omissions of day-to-day conversation that such matters are virtually never even pondered. Not so with the Trickster, who hears the intent behind every spoken word and knows truth all the better for the illusions he weaves. The Spirit-Talker who masters this spell is

capable of hearing through Trickster's ears and knowing the true intent that hides behind pleasant words. Thus, when a noble bids his valet fetch him a cloak for the rain, the valet's response of, "Right away, milord," might have an unspoken addendum of, "*you simpering, helpless fool...*" that only the Spirit-Talker hears. However, there are limits on this magic. First, the shaman doesn't hear the literal truth, but instead what the subject is truly thinking when she speaks. Therefore, a very young child (whose memories are highly subjective), for example, who claims that "faeries broke the milk jug" may well remember it as such, even if he himself did it, and his heart-voice would reflect that.

System: The caster makes a normal Sensitivity + Trickster roll, with each success beyond the first enabling him to hear the heart-voice of one additional subject within conversational distance (even if that means shouting from one end of a great feast hall to another). Unless shielded from magic in general or else guarded by a proof against scrying or mind-reading magics, the subjects' true thoughts and intents will be heard by the shaman as clearly as if they have spoken them aloud. A similar Trickster •••• spell would allow all the subjects of the spell, as well as the caster, to hear one another's heart-voices for the duration of the spell.

The Dream Within the Blade (Warrior •••, Wise One •••)

With prayers and supplications, the shaman can either awaken the spirit within a weapon or draw one of an appropriate aspect (War, Rage or a fallen kinsman or suitable animal totem, such as Bear or Stag) into the chosen instrument. This weapon becomes a sacred channel for the Spirit-Talker's will to fight. Although the shaman need not be bloodthirsty or combative, this weapon nonetheless serves as a friend and boon companion in battle. A weapon with an awakened spirit dwelling within is capable of causing harm to all manner of mystical beasts and can inflict hurts resistant to even magical healing.

System: The die pool and difficulty for this spell are standard. Whether through spiritual awakening or inhabitation, a weapon infused with a spiritual presence is capable of inflicting harm on creatures immune to mundane attacks and causes aggravated damage when it strikes. This weapon is also able to strike beings in the Penumbra and Dark Umbra as though they were on the physical plane.

The Rightful King (Chieftain ••••, Wise One •)

This effect helps a Spirit-Talker to empower the fittest leader possible for a given situation. The aid of the Wise One instinctively directs this magic to cause a group of people (or animals) to regard with respect and deference the individual who would make the most capable authority in whatever matter currently faces them. Among some ancient societies, this supplication would be used to find the Chieftain's favored one and so nominate a ruler.

System: The numbers rolled on the dice when creating this spell are applied against the Willpower of all the beings in the area (keeping in mind the normal rules for magical difficulties over 9). Even one success causes a given individual to regard the one with the most advantageous combination of natural talent, learned skills, etc., for the job as one to be heeded. More successes create more intense devotion and a stronger sense of communal responsibility to support and obey the chosen individual.

Valdaermen

Sons and daughters of the ancient ways of the Runes, the Valdaermen are the holy visionaries of the Nordic people. In them resides the knowledge of the symbols that encompass the secrets of true power. By bringing the energies that those Runes represent forth into the physical world through meditation, carving or some other means, the runecaster realizes that power in the mortal realm, bridging the gap between men and the gods. Although often seen to be a woman's craft (to the point that Odin, the All-Father himself, endured scorn from his fellows for practicing such magics), women and men alike are called to the service of the ancient letters.

Foundation: Blôt

Depth of sacrifice

The Foundation of runecraft revolves around the runecaster's conviction. The greatest sign of this conviction is a willingness to suffer deprivation and pain for the sake of the gods. Just as the All-Father gave up his eye and hung from the Tree of Knowledge to find wisdom in torment, so too must the Valdaerman offer himself up for the sake of his craft. Among the Norse, all that which is worth having is worth suffering for. Even the gods must give up their lives at Ragnarok. In time, all men succumb to the burden of *Blôt* (sacrifice; specifically, a sacrifice to the gods), but it is those who live up to their commitment and do justice to Odin's example who are truly blessed in Valhalla.

• Now, the wisdom of the Runes enters into the Valdaerman's spirit and he feels the touch of the gods upon him. He feels the pervasive sorrow of their impending doom and is attuned to it, drawing strength from the fate he shares with them. At peace with his mortality and the knowledge that all things

must end, he strides forth to know the secrets of power.

•• The runecaster at this point comes to see that all things are Sacrifice. Like the giant felled to build the world, like the suffering of the runecaster's people, like the price Odin paid to discover the Runes, all things are had in offering oneself up to the magic. She has, literally, learned to bleed for her power (whenever suffering damage from any source, the Valdaerman may opt to use that damage as a mystic focus for a number of turns equal to her Blôt score or the number of Health Levels sustained, whichever is less).

••• Giving of himself for his Gift is now as natural to the Valdaerman as breathing. He wears the scars of his art with pride, knowing that wounds always leave one stronger for the healing. The power of the gods acts in him and through him, and he is becoming a vessel, a chariot to carry them forth into this world. He can see now that he is being transformed by his practice into an instrument of the will of the Aesir.

•••• The fortitude of the Valdaerman has become a deep pool from which she might draw up her own pain and suffering as offerings to the All-Father. She is a holy woman, fated and foredoomed, like the gods and like her people and their ways. Unrestrained by uncertainty or doubt, she draws power from the terrible inevitability of destiny.

••••• Rune-wise and powerful beyond mortal imagining, the runecaster now keeps company with the gods. His bones throb with the weight of Ragnarok, and he sees the end of his world looming. The truth of it steals his remorse and his regrets and leaves him strong, pure, unflinching. He knows what must be done and makes it so, heedless of the cost. His life is now just one more price to be paid — his final debt to Valhalla. (The Valdaerman may pour out his life into his magic, suffering unsoakable Health Levels of lethal damage that must be healed nonmagically, allowing him to add one die per wound level to a single casting roll.)

Specialties: Blatant Magic, Divination, Empathy, Physical Augmentation

Pillars - The Runes

The Pillars of Valdaerman magic are the Runes, the sacred power of written symbol. Each Rune holds sway over certain fundamental forces of the world that are given to men to harness and control. These powers are divine in their source, a holy wisdom by which the secret tricks of reality are known. Rune-wisdom derives from Odin himself, the true measure of craft and wizardry, for which he transfixed himself by a spear, a sacrifice for the hidden arts of magic. Each Pillar represents a number of actual runes.

Sample Foci: Blood, offerings, scarification

FARA

Mysteries of travel

Runes: Ehwaz, Raidho

Long have the Vikings been people of the journey, people of adventure. Typified by the western direction, whence the forefathers of the Dark Medieval age's Norsemen discovered Vinland and the Skraelings, Fara (journey) appeals to the Nordic spirit, and is the very essence of freedom, exploration and discovery. Motion and the migration of concepts also fall under the purview of this Rune. This is also a Rune of trade, as the Norse ranged far and wide, and not all their acquisitions were had by the sword.

• The Valdaerman becomes attuned to motion and movement on the literal as well as conceptual levels. He senses the energy of physical action and can see when something or someone is going somewhere. This allows him to know, for example, that water rushes in an underground stream beneath his feet or that a pilgrim is still far from his destination; it even allows him to watch the progress of an idea from mind to mind.

•• This level of power enables the runecaster to exercise some degree of control over movement. She can insinuate feelings of wanderlust, adventurousness or a simple desire to move into a person and is able to direct the immediate vector of such ephemeral substances as concepts. Also, she may escape any form of mundane physical confinement, given time and a bit of work.

••• The mystic may walk through any unsolid physical medium (such as through the air or on water; no protection against such environments is yet offered, however) and can ward against mental confinement, control or intrusion, or else slip such bonds once they are placed (adding one die per success to Willpower pools in both cases). He may redirect ongoing motion (such as a charging horse or a thrown dagger) and can walk between worlds to enter the Penumbra.

•••• Now, the Valdaerman can direct his thoughts into the mind of another, blatantly or subtly, as he wishes (reading minds or changing surface thoughts). He may bring fellows into the Penumbra or himself walk deeper into the Umbrae. He can specifically dictate the motion of a group, idea or individual not actively resisting him (and might be able to overwhelm any resistance as well; apply successes to an appropriate contested roll). He may move himself through space (teleporting) and may likewise transport objects and animals in this fash-

ion (one extra person or thing per success, plus one per Quintessence point spent).

••••• Wise in the true essence of Fara, the runecaster may enter physically into dreams, the realms of the Fae, and the Astral and Dark Umbrae. She may move locations or groups of people largely at will. Her consciousness can pass out of her body to move as an astral form when she wishes (although her body remains inert and defenseless unless precautions are taken). She may bestow or inflict any of the boons or woes of travel upon a single being, a group or a concept (granting clear passage or never allowing rest, for example).

Specialties: Dream-Walking, Individuals, Slipping Bonds, Swift Passage, Umbral Travel

Sample Foci: Arrows or throwing spears, boats or oars, foreign goods, stargazing, water

FORLOG

Mysteries of luck and fortune

Runes: Fehu, Gebo, Jera, Othala, Wunjo

Forlog is fate or destiny. For most men, this is an unforgiving force, beyond their ability to master; the best they can do is stoicly accept what comes. For the Valdaerman, however, personal fate and fortune are often a result of one's own efforts. Hence, this Pillar is also associated with prosperity, or one's *lof* — the praise won through skill. In the cold northlands, the importance of this Pillar cannot be overlooked and many a family or raiding band has eked out a harsh winter only through its auspices. Many sagas recount the greatness of a man not only by his lineage and his accomplishments, but also by what he calls his own. Similarly, heroes and lords among the Norse are burned in their funerary barges while surrounded by the goods they have accrued. Truly, the prosperity of a good fate is a virtue in an unforgiving land.

• Forlog seeks both the obvious and the subtle. Sources of physical wealth and rich goods can be detected, as well as less substantial rewards. Just as Forlog's gaze seeks out gold and jewels so, too, does it help to locate persons, places or ideas that could be of benefit, lead to comfort or otherwise result in profit or happiness for the mystic.

•• The Valdaerman can create feelings of general well-being, accomplishment and contentment in others. Little runs of good fortune come to him when he is in need; he finds a few lost coins when he is hungry or a knife when he is unarmed. Others feel more at ease in the presence of the rune-wise one (adding one die to Empathy die pools per success), for a palpable sense of goodwill and success seem to follow in his wake.

••• Now, the mystic can extract the wheat from the chaff. Fine ores trickle like water from base stones to collect like dew in his hands. A bad deal suddenly yields an unexpected windfall. When no food or rest is to be had, Forlog alone can sustain the Valdaerman and few can avoid being entranced by the fine words that drip like honey from his silvered tongue (add one dot to Manipulation or Subterfuge per success). So long as he is willing to put effort into what fate gives him, he does not want.

•••• Gold from thin air and open hands of friendship from even the direst foes are but two of the miraculous abilities granted by this Pillar to those who grow wise in its ways. The Valdaerman can control the concept of good fortune as it applies to individuals and small groups. Those she favors find their cups never empty, their stomachs always full and amicable company abounding, whereas those she despises are plagued by the worst luck (adding or subtracting one die per two successes to any nonmystical Background, such as Allies, Contacts or Resources; pushing the hand of fate permanently with this power, however, often yields disastrous results).

••••• The Valdaerman who masters Forlog finds that his honest labors always turn out for the best. When he feels generous, those who have but the will to try are rewarded richly. He can bring success or failure, as he will, to a person, a group or a venture of almost any sort (adding or subtracting successes from an action on a one-for-one basis, though he must expend a point of both Quintessence and Willpower to bring this effect to bear on magic). He can virtually guarantee that a concept or movement will take root and thrive or wither and die, depending on whether or not he approves of it. He is beloved by complete strangers and is a close friend to opportunity (lowering difficulties pertaining to friendship or good fortune by one per success).

Specialties: Fulfilling Ambitions, Making Friends, Non-Material Gain, Riches, Simple Contentment

Sample Foci: Coins or jewelry, fine garments, friendly overtures, strong spirits, thralls

GALDRAR

The mysteries of magic and secrets

Runes: Ansuz, Gebo, Iwaz, Perthro, Uruz

This, more than any other, is Odin's own Pillar, that of hidden wisdom and occult knowledge. Its runes resound with the power of Galdrar (incantations or magics). Intrepid explorers, the hardy people of the north truly appreciate what it means to discover the unknown and to bring to light that which is concealed. This is also the Rune of sorcerous power, gathering up the energies of the mystic world through the sacred letters, so that such mystic forces might be harnessed and directed by the rune-wise. Prophecy and detection likewise fall under the auspices of Galdrar.

• Hidden objects and occult forces are all under the purview of Galdrar. The gaze of the All-

Father misses nothing, and those who call upon his sight see magic for what it is, know lies and codes when they hear them and are able to discern disguises and hidden chambers when their eyes pass over them. In any case, the Valdaerman often knows when something is not what it seems or is deliberately concealed (subtracting one die from others' Subterfuge or Stealth die pools per success).

•• The mystic now learns to draw secrets out of hiding, where she might look on them and learn the truth of them (adding one die to Empathy or Subterfuge die pools per success). Her sight moves beyond her body and she sees where she will (gaining the ability to scry). No matter what others say or do, she sees the feelings in their hearts, reading their emotions. She can look upon magic and know its purpose, even when such is not obvious. She may speak the tongue of spirits.

••• Galdrar now reveals the way by which the barriers between the worlds are breached (allowing for travel in the Penumbra), and the Valdaerman may summon spirits of nature. She can read minds and speak in thoughts. She may glance into the past or the future, seeking truth in the metaphors she finds there. Also, she gains some control over the very concept of secrets and may use her powers to make a person, object, group or idea better known or more obscure (adding or subtracting one per success from all difficulties to discover or notice such a subject or, in the case or subjects not actively searched for, simply making them more or less likely to be discovered).

•••• The Valdaerman may speak to any being that has a language, can decipher the hidden meaning of nearly anything, no matter how obscure (adding one to Enigmas die pools per success) or enter the deepest thoughts and hidden dreams of any sentient creature not protected against her presence. She can unweave the magic others have spun (subtracting casting successes on a one-for-one basis) and can veil herself in secrecy as she wills, becoming invisible or silent (adding one per success scored on a simple spell to all Stealth die pools). She also learns to see the workings of fate (and may discern beings with a special Destiny).

••••• She who dares delve this far learns Galdrar's innermost mysteries. The Valdaerman can manipulate the thread of fate like the Norns, changing the destinies of people, organizations or ideas. She may seek audience with the gods (speaking directly with the Vanir and Aesir or, if she is daring, other powers as well) and can summon up the hidden power of a place to give birth to a new source of Quintessence (creating a cray after an extended spell limited to no more than ten rolls, one roll per day; every ten successes equals one level of the new cray). Those she targets with her ire are remembered by no one (or by all the wrong people for the wrong reasons), and she knows a man's past, present or future at a glance.

Specialties: Divination, Learning by Magic, Magical Energies, Manipulating Fate

Sample Foci: Blood, divinations, meditation and trances, reflective surfaces, smoke or fire, thread

ᚺJALᛞAR

Mysteries of battle

Runes: Isa, Kenaz, Naudhiz, Sowilo, Thurisaz, Tiwaz

Hjaldar is the secret of struggle and victory. The symbols of this Pillar are those that resound with the fierce energy of combat and the thrilling rush of conquest. As the ancient people of the North brought with them the ferocious north wind and the sacred *bearsarks*, so does Hjaldar (battle) grant strength and endurance and lend keen edges to spear and sword. This Pillar dispels fear and doubt, instilling courage and confidence in every way. Thor is but one of the deities who looks in favor upon this Pillar and who gives his blessing to those strong in its ways. Hjaldar is also the way of the leader and the ruler, for the greatest of Nordic lords have been as mighty and as fearless as they were wise.

• At this level, the Valdaerman is attuned to the essence of conflict. He can sense violent intentions in another and sources of tension or discord. Likewise, actual sources of violence and struggle can be detected. Areas, people and objects saturated with the essence of Battle are also apparent, and the Valdaerman knows an ancient battlefield or veteran warrior when he sees one.

•• The mystic may now create minor sources of conflict between persons or groups in proximity to one another. A vassal chafes at his lord's command, or all male wolves in a given pack begin to resent their alpha. The Valdaerman may enchant weapons and armor to strike and defend against supernatural beings (allowing the caster to inflict or defend against aggravated damage to or from incorporeal spiritual beings). Feelings of discord, courage or general combativeness are his to command.

••• Now experienced in Hjaldar's ways, the Valdaerman can call upon the terrible power of consuming flames and grinding ice (inflicting one Health Level of lethal damage per success). Predatory animals heed her command, and she is fearless and strong beyond mortal limitation (adding one dot of Strength or Stamina per success). Implements of battle heed her will. Swords turn from her flesh and armor betrays its wearer (reducing damage or soak die pools by one per success, to a minimum of zero).

•••• The runecaster speaks with a voice that echoes like thunder. When she raises her spear, a chorus of war cries gives voice to the fire in her heart (adding one dot to Leadership per success). She takes the shape

of furious beasts (shapeshifting into wolves, bears or other predators as a simple spell; her possessions do not shift with her, but she sheds armor painlessly upon transformation), animates weapons and armor with will alone and can spark blood-feuds between even close allies (resisted by the subjects' Willpower). Her rage can cow strong men and break weaker wills with mind-numbing terror.

••••• At last, the Valdaerman is as one with Hjaldar's lessons. The touch of his hand shakes the ground like a dragon's footsteps. The Valkyrie take wing at his direction (summoning up hosts of the spirits of battle), and lightning flies where he wills it (inflicting one Health Level of aggravated damage per success). When he dons the bear-shirt, he retains his weapons and armor (he can shapeshift into a half-man, half-animal form that provides him all the traits of an animal yet retains use of his hands; he can stand or run bipedal, or on all fours). He leads armies with the splendor of a god (adding one dot to Charisma per success), and his awesome fury can destroy concepts, hierarchies and ideals, as well as mortal men. Truly, he is a conqueror by the sword and his name shall be spoken with honor and fear.

Specialties: Bloodlust, Creating Enmity, Elemental Wrath, Shapechanging

Sample Foci: Bones, fire or ice, live runecutting, ordeals, weapons and armor

Sample Rotes

Revealing the Dwarf-Hoard (Forlog •, Galdrar •)

Deep within the earth, the dwarves forged fantastic treasures of gold and steel, fit for any king. Although they long ago all but vanished from the world of men, their lesson, that of concealing those things of value, was not lost. For the rune-wise, however, little is truly hidden, and this casting reveals that which others would try to hide. The locations and natures of all valuables in the Valdaerman's vicinity are made plain with this Casting, from the gold in a man's purse to the lock of hair from his mistress tucked in his belt.

System: A person's most valued items are easiest to pick out with this casting, so the esteem a woman places upon a token from her true love may overshadow the worth she ascribes to the twenty pieces of gold secreted on her person, unless the caster scores multiple successes. Objects hidden in the area and not on a person are likewise detected according to their value to the one who concealed them. The key to remember is that the less important a given item is to the one who hid it, the harder it will be to discover with this effect. Items concealed by magic are, by nature, usually quite precious, and each success scored in this spell negates a



success in the original roll to hide the item. If all successes to conceal the item are lost in this fashion, the Valdaerman automatically knows where the object is, regardless of whether it is the item in the area most important to the one who concealed it or not.

Unsleeping Swords (Fara •••••, Hjaldar ••••)

The lands of the north are heavy with the bodies of fallen warriors, those who have died with sword and spear in hand and been called to feast with the gods. By carving the bodies of the battle-slain with letters of wrath and conflict, their corpses can be raised to make war once again.

System: For each success the caster scores on this effect, she may expend a point of Quintessence to animate a single body for the express purpose of sending it forth to fight. The average human corpse raised by this effect has Strength and Stamina 4, Dexterity and Wits 1, Brawl and Melee 2, and the following Health Levels: Healthy, Healthy, -1, -1, -2, -5, Destroyed. By channeling extra successes (and Quintessence) into a single body, the Valdaerman may raise any of its Attributes by one or add a -1 Health Level per two successes, or one Ability by one per success.

Curse of Empty and Endless Roads (Fara •••••, Galdrar •••••)

Those afflicted with this terrible curse can never know comfort or joy. Circumstances conspire to keep them forever wandering, never welcome anywhere and forgotten (or remembered only vaguely with hostility and derision) everywhere. If the victim builds a home, it is rent asunder by the elements or happenstance. If he tries to take a family, that family is torn apart by strife, mistrust and death. His friends no longer know him and treat him as an outcast and a stranger. His brothers scoff at the notion that he is of their blood and demand that he leave. His travels are beset by bandits, foul luck and unsympathetic ears. No one welcomes him in, and he is essentially an exile from humanity, forever traveling and never getting anywhere.

System: The effects of this spell last for the standard duration and are exactly as described above. Often, the Curse is created as an ongoing spell, ensuring that the recipient may never again know peace or belonging.

Combining Systems

Sometimes, it is not enough simply to master one's own path. What of the druid who wishes to learn the tricks of space and time or the religious mystic who needs to shape the threads of magic itself? For these intrepid souls, the first recourse is found in the sorcerous arts of other Fellowships. Thus, the druid might undertake a pilgrimage to the deserts of Araby, in order to spend time among Batini holy men, or the Messianic utter her prayers against the heresies of the Order and reluctantly enter into the tutelage of a practitioner of Hermes' lessons. Although this period of training and instruction is difficult (for the student must learn mystic practices she considers to be counterintuitive, impossible or even blasphemous), it can be done and, for most, is the only real way to grow adept in sorceries unfamiliar to one's own practice.

Hedge Magic

Hedge magic is the Order of Hermes' derogatory catch-all term for any sorcery they deem to be of insufficient power. In practice, this means any magic not practiced through means of a Foundation and its Pillars. There are various folk throughout the world who can cast charms, enchantments and minor rites without ever learning the arduous willworking of a true mage. Their magic, however, has none of the mutability or broad range of the mystic traditions practiced by the Fellowships.

Examples of hedge magicians might be the boy who sells his soul to the devil (or some such spirit) for a love charm; he can cast that charm, but no other. Certain families (such as the Rosselinis of Italy in Chapter Five) may practice highly ritualized spells handed down to them over generations, while never understanding the basis of these spells or how they can be reworked for better effect.

The one advantage hedge magic seems to have over the true power wielded by mages is that it rarely — if ever — unleashes Backlash. Many such spells require no Quintessence expenditure. Some do, but these hedge magicians lack the ability to store and spend Quintessence; they must then rely on Tass, usually harvested from crays, to fuel these spells.

Once a mage begins studying what the Hermetics call true magic (i.e., learning at least one level in a Foundation), he can never go back — he cannot then cast successful hedge magic spells (if he even knows any). None knows why this is, but the Hermetics put forth the theory that the soul, once ascended to heights of power to any degree, is no longer in sympathy with the dross of lesser magics.

In **Dark Ages: Mage**, hedge magic is not practiced by mages, although it may be encountered in Storyteller characters.

Of course, it can be a quest in and of itself to seek out a tutor open-minded enough in this age to impart his secrets to a "heathen," "foreigner" or "child of flawed Arts." Further, just as a would-be teacher must swallow prejudices she understands to be right in order to take on a student of alien, improper magics, so, too, must the would-be student come to terms with beseeching the aid of a teacher whose lessons stem from an erroneous understanding of the Art. Few, student or master, are willing to make that leap of faith.

For those intrepid few, however, a long and arduous road awaits. On this road, the student is as the newest and most fledgling mystic. She is not aided, but instead disadvantaged, by what she already knows, and she must teach herself a different way of thinking, even as her guide upon this journey struggles to educate her. It is as difficult a task as learning that things may fall up or that the sun shines by night and not day. For those new to the Gift, all things are possible, whereas those who have already set out upon a particular path find that it is almost unthinkable to embrace these "untenable theories." Still, for those who can reconcile two (or even more) schools of mystic thought, the rewards can be great indeed.

Quintessence

A staple of Classical elemental theory, the elusive Fifth Essence, the mortar that binds the other four elements together, is also the raw fuel of magic. This *Quintessence* is, in the most basic sense, the most powerful and worthwhile resource in the world. With an ample supply, a weak mage grows stronger and a strong mage is able to shake the very pillars of the Earth. In an age when power is the coin of the realm, Quintessence is the first, best coin.

Although uncommon, this raw ore of mystic might is there for those with the will and the courage to seek it out. Numerous still are the places of power, uncorrupted by human hands. In these hidden glens, sacred burial grounds and dragons' aeries does the unrefined stuff of magic pool and gather. In some places, it condenses in morning dew; in others, it flows in the sap of ancient trees or sleeps within dry and decrepit soil.

This physically embodied Quintessence is called Tass. It can be collected and carried on a mage's person in the form of a potion drawn from healing waters, as powder ground from vibrant roots, or even in enchanted mushrooms or as candles. The Quintessence is released for the mage to use by drinking the potion, ingesting the powder or mushrooms, or burning the candle or incense.

Quintessence is heavily "flavored" by the nature of both its physical vessel and the circumstances that caused it to coalesce. Thus, the energies found in a faerie pool will be entirely different, and suited to different purposes, from those found in the wake of Baba Yaga's mortar and pestle or those extracted from a wyvern's bile. And, although one *can* tap the power hidden in Pictish barrows to implore the aid of Chernobog, such Quintessence would be better suited by far to summon up the ancient wisdom of the Conqueror Worm. At the Storyteller's discretion, some Quintessence might come from a source, or carry an impression, so inimical to the type of magic being used that it simply cannot apply. Blood harvested from the butchery of virgins is entirely inappropriate when begging for Heavenly guidance, and woe betide the giver of such a foolish gift.

Quintessence may be spent by those with the Gift to a variety of ends. Simplifying and enhancing magic are probably the two most common, though many other useful purposes are often found for this richest of treasures. Quintessence can transform fleeting mystic effects into everlasting ones, and it can tame the fierce appetite of Backlash. Sometimes, it is even used as a form of universal currency among mages who cannot find any other common ground.

Backlash

When a practitioner of mystic arts fails an incantation, summoning or supplication badly, terrible things can happen. These unfortunate happenings are almost always, whether directly or indirectly, harmful to the caster and can often be to those nearby as well.

Backlash effects are commonly typified as the meddling of spirits, divine or infernal retribution, or the terrible consequences of a single misspoken word of power. The world is a frightful and antagonistic place to the minds of many people in this age, and mages can be little different, no matter how puissant.

Effects enhanced with mystic energy are likely to yield up stronger Backlashes than those created without the benefit of such; every point of Quintessence spent is added to the total as though it were a 1 as well. When the essence of magic itself is poured into a successful casting, wonderful things can happen. When that essence is channeled through flawed sorcery, only pain and sorrow can come of it. From such epic mishaps have come tales of cities swallowed by desert sands and armies from Hell itself pouring forth to put all the mages in an entire chantry to the sword. Truly, when great enchantments fail in such ways, everyone, not just the mage, suffers.

Types of Backlash

Not all sorcerous mishaps are created alike. For some unfortunates, their failed enchantments rebound in the shape of driving hail or fire from Heaven. For others, terrible mutations wrack their bodies, afflicting

them with nightmarish and misshapen forms. Still others are consumed by powers that will not bend to the hand of any mortal. Some of the most common sorts of Backlash are detailed below.

Branding

The threads of the Tapestry, like any other thread stretched too far, can snap. Sometimes, they leave a scar by which the mage might remember his presumption. Branding Backlash inflicts physical change of some sort upon the mage. For minor infractions, this might mean a so-called witch's mark or perhaps just glassy fingernails or an odd cast to the eyes. Alternatively, the mage may create minor disturbances in his physical environment, such as a chill breeze. Other such minor effects might include a faint smell of pine and earth or one's presence causing flowers to bloom at night. In any case, the astute and perceptive can pick up on even minor Brandings.

Naturally, more potent Backlashes result in more distinguished Brandings. Likewise, a wizard who has accumulated numerous small Brandings over the course of time will slowly begin to accrue increasingly severe ones, regardless of whether his botched magics are great or small. As Brandings grow in intensity, they may actually physically hamper the mage. Fingers or toes may grow, wither or lengthen. Eyes might become blind or hypersensitive (or, in rare cases, the third eye of some mystic practices might physically open). Some particularly gruesome Brandings may cause limbs to sprout or atrophy, or the flesh to take on a corpselike aspect. More severe environmental effects might make one's shadow move against the light, rust to gather on metal or earn the wizard the enmity of bird and beast. In the most extreme cases of Branding, certain mages have ceased to be recognizable as human altogether. This degree of mutation is most common among those who are also suffering the deep throes of Twilight (see below) and who might no longer think themselves any more of the race of man than they now appear to be.

To determine the severity of a given Branding, multiply the number of 1s rolled in a given spell by the highest Pillar involved in the casting. If the result yields between one and five, inclusive, then the Branding should be something small, like an uncanny glint to the eyes, a slight pallor or gentle heat radiating from the mage. These effects might be slightly disconcerting to perceptive individuals but, as a rule, are not a hindrance to the character's interactions as yet. If the number yielded is six through 12, then a more significant mark is called for. Perhaps the skin takes on a mildly metallic sheen or nails harden into a shape more reminiscent of bestial talons (swift-growing and awkward for fine manipulation, but without the resiliency needed to pierce flesh). The character's arrival might be heralded by faint moans, quiet enough that the listener could think them a fancy but be disturbed nonetheless. Such Brandings are likely to confer a difficulty penalty of +1 or +2 on a given Physical Attribute (uncommon at this level) or a character's Appearance or Charisma (which is more often the case). Beyond this point, changes become truly bizarre.

At 13 though 20, much more serious alterations occur. Scales could sprout on an arm or fangs might grow. The touch of the character's bare flesh could leech the color from things, turning the contacted areas to shades of gray that only slowly recover their natural hue. Increases in difficulty of +2 or +3 to Social rolls of would not be uncommon, and some associated physical difficulty is likely appropriate as well (a hand transformed into a paw cannot grasp as it otherwise might, and fish skin must be kept moist, lest it crack and peel). This transformation might have some benefit associated with it (a +1 to soak for the afflicted area, or slightly heightened senses, for example), though the drawbacks obviously outweigh the advantages. Characters afflicted with this level of disfigurement must usually make some effort to hide their condition, which obviously marks them as unnatural.

At 21 through 30, the mage undergoes tremendous vicissitudes. Stag's horns erupt from the brow and the feet become hooves or perhaps the spine twists to bend nearly double. Environmental changes might cause the character to be perpetually surrounded by a cloud of flies or to radiate searing cold. Normal folk are likely to regard the character with shock and horror. The Appearance score may be reduced to zero, or at least penalized heavily, compounded by extreme modifiers to Social Attribute difficulties not directly pertaining to intimidation. Some Physical Attributes may be bolstered, whereas others are stunted (in any case, the penalties should more than compensate for the benefits). The character may experience some strange, but probably unwelcome, advantages (the ability to eat, speak and bite one's foes with a fanged maw in one's chest, while potentially useful, is not apt to be warmly received).

At totals numbering 31 or greater, the most terrible metamorphoses take place. The character's flesh may shred away in a gory heap, revealing a hideous lycanthrope beneath (or perhaps revealing just muscle, bone and throbbing organs, against all logic and sanity, still imbued with terrible life). The mage is almost certain to take on an utterly inhuman aspect. She might be wreathed in a writhing flame that never subsides or sprout foot-long quills of a bonelike metal from the backs of her arms, her outer thighs and her back. She might appear as though drowned at sea and bloated by the tides. The mage becomes the very portrait of horror, an exemplar of the terrible price of arrogance and folly in one's magic. Social rolls are all but impossible for the character for any purpose other than terror. Physical Attributes are likely to be bolstered and amazing abilities gained, but at an unbearable price. The mage suffers

from terrible afflictions (being turned to living stone might work wonders for one's Strength and soak, but reduces Dexterity to almost naught and cuts the character off from all physical sensation) and is utterly incapable of even passing for human. Her countenance inspires only fear, and she is severed absolutely from any semblance of normality.

As stated above, Branding can accrue over the course of time, heaping deformity upon deformity, until what began as a scattered collection of subtle mutations coalesce into a shocking portrait of grotesquerie. As a rule, every third deformity at a given level causes all three to metamorphose into a deformity of the next highest stage. This transformation should be logical (claws on the left hand and catlike eyes might combine with a third Branding to create a patchwork of feline fur on portions of exposed skin from the face to the affected hand). Thus, do many mages unconcerned with the consequences of their actions gradually descend into a state befitting their lack of human compunction.

Manifestation

When a mage calls upon the Art, she is opening a door that can sometimes swing too wide for her own good. Many are the tales of proud sorcerers, witches and enchanters being spirited off to infernal realms, the land of the dead or various other unsavory fates by vengeful beings from beyond our world. Manifestation Backlashes occur most often (not surprisingly) as a result of a botched summoning of some sort, though mystics who frequently call or compel the otherworldly are likely to be subjected to this form of Backlash, regardless of the nature of the failed spell.

Manifested Backlash most commonly takes the shape of an otherworldly being appropriate to the caster's frame of cultural and magical reference, though creatures more in keeping with the mystic traditions of the surrounding area, if the caster is far from home, also sometimes appear. As a rule of thumb, trifling spells (those with low difficulties and little to no invested Quintessence) tend to result in Manifestations that are, at worst, pressing irritations. Examples include mischievous imps, unquiet shades or thieving faeries. More grandiose effects, naturally, lean toward far more hazardous Manifestations. Terrible djinn and demonic nobility come in answer to such failures. In certain rare instances, unique creatures (the Minotaur of Crete or Asmodeus himself) appear in reply to the latter degree of mishap. The results of these Manifestations are often as unpredictable as they are terribly brief.

The strength of a given Manifestation Backlash may be determined by multiplying the highest Pillar involved in the casting, plus one for each additional Pillar used, by the number of 1s rolled in the failed spell. Each of these points converts directly into three points of Attributes; two points of Willpower, Quintessence



or a Pillar; or one point of Foundation. Most often, Manifestations favor physically brutal forms that are low on finesse and intelligence and high on their ability to wreak havoc, but the some of the most terrible of them are those with a measure of guile and subtlety. Manifestations can last for quite a while, depending on the severity of the Backlash, and one who becomes a mage's lover or ally is often in a position to inflict much more lasting and meaningful hurts than one whose sole objective is to batter the offending wizard's body.

Scourging

Sometimes, the world has a keenly ironic sense of retribution. Sometimes, it can be as cunning and cruel as any human mind. And, sometimes, it is as simple and brutal as a winter gale and announces its vengeance with a terrible report. Such is the case with Scourging. In this instance, the Backlash of magic causes immediate (and often severe) physical trauma to the mage. She is battered by pure mystic force, her body rent and torn by wild flashes of energy or sudden bursts of heat, cold, darkness or anything else the sorcerous weave sees fit to inflict upon her. Mages affected by this form of Backlash have sometimes been sundered completely by it, their frames devastated utterly from without (or sometimes, even more horrifyingly, from within).

Under most circumstances, a Scourging affects only the offending caster. Occasionally, though, the area of the Backlash's effect spreads beyond the mage to encompass any unfortunate enough to be nearby. This is particularly common in instances when the Scourging is well beyond the scope of the mortal frame to absorb (damage equal to twice a normal human being's Health Levels or more, for example), though it is sometimes seen in much smaller Backlashes. Unfortunately, there is no way to predict what shape a given Scourging will take or whom it will affect until it is too late.

To calculate damage from a given Scourging, total all of the 1s rolled when attempting the spell. If the highest Pillar rating required for the spell is a one or a two, then the Backlash results in one Health Level of lethal damage (which may be averted only by soak incorporated into the caster's own body) per 1 rolled in the botch. For effects with a highest Pillar of three, this increases to two levels of lethal damage per 1. At a highest required Pillar of four, this becomes one level of aggravated damage per 1 and two Health Levels of aggravated damage per 1 at a highest required Pillar of five.

Twilight

One of the most universally expressed forms of Backlash, Twilight (first documented by the Order of Hermes) is a state of withdrawal from the world. A mystic in the throes of Twilight recedes, to some degree, into a world of his own fashioning. As knowledge about the human mind and consciousness is largely nil and the concept of consensus reality is still centuries off, many mages are inclined to see this condition as a form of "sorcerous madness." The Ahl-i-Batin in particular find this state to be especially abhorrent, calling it "False Unity" and seeking fervently to redeem those who fall under its spell, lest they become separated from true Oneness and forever ensnared in the trap that Shaitan has set for them. At the other extreme, certain Messianic Voices are inclined to see the touch of the Divine in those who perceive worlds that are not there and answer to voices no man or woman besides can hear. Divinity, after all, is above reproach, and who is to question those who can work miracles and sing down angels when they claim that they hear the voices of saints and seraphim?

Fortunately for those who fall under Twilight's sway, it is a condition that most often grows gradually upon the victim, consuming one's connection to the world patiently, rather than ravenously. Unfortunately, this sometimes means that Twilight can be quite difficult to perceive in its earliest stages. After all, mages are apt to be curious people and few would presume to question a powerful wizard who develops a curious habit or two over the course of decades or even centuries. The earliest stage of Twilight, *Shallow Twilight*, usually does little more than put a unique slant on what the mage sees. A keeper of the Celestial Hymn who is appalled by the evil in the world may see Hell's mantle settling a little too thickly on the works of Man, whereas an especially devout Batini may begin occasionally to lose track of the divisions between objects, people and even concepts. The key element in early Twilight is that it is easy for others to overlook as a byproduct of single-mindedness, eccentricity, enlightenment, sanctity or similar states.

As the individual's state progresses to *Median Twilight*, he begins to move halfway in, halfway out a world of his own devising. What were once vague intimations of a slightly skewed world now become bolder, clearer. Unsavory strangers take on a malevolent aspect. Moonlight through ice-crusted trees shines with the otherworldly radiance of the Faerie Queen's own abode. Wind howling through the mountains becomes the snoring of a slumbering worm. Although this stage of Twilight does not often plague the mage with visions of things unreal and sounds from nowhere, it often distorts the qualities of perception, making real sensory input out to be something it is not. The victim is at this point unlikely to see truly fantastic things (such as mistaking just any armored knight for King Arthur or a common village priest for the Pope), but everything around him begins to fall more in line with his erroneous vision of the world.

As it closes on its final stages, Twilight starts to redefine completely the world perceived by the victim and becomes *Deep Twilight*. Voices of long dead friends and foes whisper to the sorcerer. People and other beings appear from thin air, unseen by any save the afflicted. For some, these spirits of pure fantasy impel the victim onward, deeper into the waking dream. Sometimes, however, some of these figments admonish the mage to turn back and to forsake the path of madness. Often, the victim is so deeply immersed in this fabrication that he views all assistance (real or ephemeral) as threatening and seeks sanctuary within the comforting familiarity of the illusion. Only the truly strong-willed and canny are able to set out on the long road back at this point. Most that come to this threshold are essentially already lost.

In the last throes of Twilight, the afflicted is divorced completely from the world as others know it. This stage is known as *Final Twilight*, as the victim only rarely returns from this unfortunate state. The divinely inspired see themselves as dwelling physically within Heaven or Hell. Witch-wise folk and dancers with spirits become lost in realms of primordial purity: the Arcadian glades, Elysium, the shade beneath the World Tree. The victim no longer interacts with the reality others perceive, save accidentally. Practitioners of the art who reach this stage are, quite naturally, a danger to themselves and to others. They are typically dealt with, by one party or another, in short order. Those who are too powerful or cunning, or who remove themselves too far from the rest of humanity, however, continue in this state, sometimes for days, sometimes years (or more), until at last the Tapestry of Creation can no longer support the weight of these dread imaginings. When this point is reached, the afflicted literally disappears from the face of the Earth, borne elsewhere by forces unknown and best left unconsidered.

Twilight can be considered similar to Willpower, in that it also requires one to keep track of permanent and temporary totals. Unlike Willpower, though, Twilight is not spent and can accumulate a higher temporary total than permanent. For each 1 rolled on a botch in which the highest Pillar is a one or two, the character gains one point of temporary Twilight. For each 1 rolled when the highest Pillar is three or four, the character accrues two points of temporary Twilight. If the highest Pillar involved in a given casting is five, then the character gains three points of temporary Twilight per 1 rolled. When a character's temporary Twilight reaches ten, the pool rolls over into a point of permanent Twilight and then adds any excess points accrued as a new temporary pool that begins at zero.

A character does not suffer any real symptoms of Twilight until she reaches a permanent Twilight rating of two. Before that, minor flashes of oddity and incongruity may occur, but these can easily be dismissed as coincidence or tricks of the light. The character enters Shallow Twilight upon first attaining the second point of permanent Twilight. This state persists until the fourth point of permanent Twilight, when the mage descends into Median Twilight. At seven points of permanent Twilight, Deep Twilight is reached, and at nine the unfortunate falls into Final Twilight. Note that the progress from stage to stage is much more of a smooth and gradually intensifying curve (the better to disarm the mage's suspicions) than a sudden leap from plateau to plateau.

Mitigating Backlash

The wise and resourceful mage is always prepared for disaster. Inevitably, from the most bumbling apprentice to the mightiest master, everyone graced with the Gift falls short in some terrible way at least once or twice. Under normal circumstances, such occurrences are, at the very minimum, a nuisance. When greater powers are being spun, the result of such a failure can be classed more correctly as catastrophic. When the Tapestry tears beneath the weight of insupportable magic and the essence of that occult power threatens retribution, the cautious mage can do little more than attempt to weather the storm.

For the first 1 rolled in a spell botch, the caster may spend a single point of Quintessence to negate it, reducing the Backlash to simple failure if the net number of 1s in the botch is now effectively zero. For each 1 remaining, the character may spend increasingly doubled amounts of Quintessence (three points total to negate two 1s, seven points to negate three 1s and so on). (Spending more than two Quintessence points per turn requires the Fount Background; see pp. 86-87.) The caster may undertake this expenditure even if she lacks the Quintessence to fully nullify the 1s rolled in her botch, thus reducing the severity of the Backlash she will receive, even if she cannot completely cancel it. A player may not partially negate 1s by spending a fraction of the Quintessence needed to eliminate them.

Although the price for this respite may seem quite steep, the ability to reduce a spell botch by three or more 1s can easily be the difference between life and death (or fates literally worse than death), something most mages are willing to spend a little Quintessence for.

Losing Cumulative Backlash

Branding and Twilight both create an ongoing "bank" of accumulating Backlash. While initially more forgiving, perhaps, than other such sources of Backlash, they eventually become some of the most terrible and punishing fonts of mystic retribution. This being the case, many mages have sought through the ages for any means of divesting oneself of these plagues.

As in many things, the surest (and often best) cure for this ailment is inactivity and restfulness. That is to say, the mage refrains from exercising the Gift and so gives his mystic pattern the time and peace it needs to gently and gradually reassert itself. The suppositions as to why this is so are many, but the common philosophy of the day dictates that this state of calm demonstrates restraint and maturity on the part of the individual. The Messianic Voices, Spirit-Talkers and Ahl-i-Batin particularly favor this interpretation, as it accounts easily for the presence of the divine in every exercise of mysticism. Still others have their own views, but none can deny that abstinence from the powers of the Gift are the safest way to eliminate the taint of magic gone awry, if perhaps a bit slower than most would prefer.

For those who are less patient (or in less of a position to be patient), there are, of course, other options. That said, these choices are as varied as the societies that practice them. The Order of Hermes has probably the best and most predictable regimen of mystic purgation, though reliable methods exist among all Fellowships. As a rule of thumb, the quicker the fix, the less likely it is to provide a full cure or to do so safely.

If the mage wishes to forego magic and "bleed" his Backlash away, he will find that it takes a while to be rid of smaller symptoms and might require quite a long time indeed to eradicate deeper and more persistent ills. Twilight bleeds off at a rate of one temporary point per day through the second permanent point of Twilight. At three through four points, three days are required per point. Five through six demand a week per point of temporary Twilight. Each temporary point in the seventh point of permanent Twilight requires a month to fade, increasing to four months per point in the eighth point of permanent Twilight and a year per point in the ninth. Thus, a mage with seven points of temporary Twilight and with no permanent Twilight requires but a single week without magic to leech away the ill effects completely, whereas one with eight points of permanent Twilight and two points of temporary must abstain from using magic for a little over two years (provided he has even the slightest shred of sanity left to convince him of the prudence of doing so) in order to return safely to reality.

Branding is a slightly more difficult situation to handle, as it does not really accrue in points. Instead, it is a gradual buildup, with only five roughly defined levels with which to count out the toll it demands. It takes a week of abstinence from the mystic arts to purge a first-level Branding. Second-level Brandings require two weeks to fade, becoming two first-level Brandings (which must then dissipate in their own time). A third-level Branding takes a month to subside into two second-level Brandings, which must then fade on their own. Note that a higher-level Branding must always be dispersed into lower level Brandings, if possible, before lower-level Brandings themselves begin to fade. A forth-level Branding requires four months of refrain from the use of the Gift before becoming two third-level Brandings. Fifth-level Brandings are usually permanent, unless reversed by further use of magic, though some tales of mages forswearing their powers for years or more and recovering some small shred of their humanity surface from time to time. In truth, the ability to recover naturally from such advanced mutation is a questionable proposition at best.

In the terribly unfortunate circumstance that a given mage is afflicted simultaneously with both Branding and Twilight, *both* totals may fade at their natural rate at the same time. Of course, when dealing with all but the most superficial cases of concurrent Branding and Twilight, most mages are usually lost from the start, as their warped perceptions of both self and the world drive them quickly beyond the edge of sanity. Indeed, some of the great magical beasts in the world today might be nothing other than Gifted men and women who have lost their way and themselves to magic gone terribly wrong, never to be human again or even to remember ever having been.



They came to Marjatta with heads bowed,

offering lavish gifts: bear hides, steaming meat, ale. She grunted and motioned the chieftains into her hut. In the dim gloom, she listened to their story. The reindeer died, and the people starved. They herded the four-legged beasts and made everything they needed to live from them: meat for food, hide for tents, sinew for thread and bone for tools. But now their beloved providers died of a terrible sickness that left them weak, with no desire to eat. Then came a slow withering away.

They had gone to their own wise man, and he had sought the cause. He could not see it, though, for it was clouded from him. He told them to travel nine days north, into Lapland, to the twisted pine forests, and there to seek Marjatta. This they did.

Marjatta chewed absently on the deer jerky they had brought. The men sat quietly for what seemed like half a day, watching her in the dim light for any sign of mercy or compassion. Finally, she yawned and spoke:

"I will travel for you, to see the father of your reindeer, and find what ails him. I will do this tomorrow night. You will come here once the moon has risen, and watch over me."

The men smiled, relieved. They left the hut and gathered among themselves, glad that she would lend her power to them. But their smiles hid their fear. None among them wanted to go the hut on the next night, for they feared what spirits would be unleashed there. She was powerful, and would surely protect them, but to feel the chill touch of a spirit across one's neck was not a welcome thing for any man. They shivered at the thought but gathered their courage, and on the next evening they came to her hut as commanded.

Marjatta burned many strange smelling herbs and filled the room with smoke. A surly youth had joined them, but he would not speak or even look at the men. He only stared into the dark corners and slowly, steadily played a drum. The sound echoed through the hut as if it were a deep cavern, and Marjatta danced to it. She hummed and yelled at things the men could not see, and then collapsed to the ground, as if she were dead.

She was not. Unseen by their eyes, she arose and left the hut and donned her snowshoes. These she swiftly rode over the crest of the hill and into a great valley. There, the reindeer gathered, and lay upon the ground, listless and empty of the will for life.

And there she saw their elder, the mightiest among them, but he was fallen, too. And on his back was a thing, a black, shapeless thing, sucking at its blood.

Marjatta hissed and unslung her crossbow. She slid a special bolt into its groove, and hummed a prayer to her secret totem. The thing rose up and looked at her. It had no eyes, but she felt the weight of its gaze nonetheless. She raised the crossbow and took aim just as the thing launched into the air at her. As she pulled the trigger and let the bolt fly, she hoped her power was strong enough to best this thing that had felled Grandfather Reindeer....

CHAPTER FIVE: MAGICAL LANDS

In the centuries following the sack of Rome by barbarians, comfort is strictly a luxury affordable by kings, noblemen, a handful of rich merchants and, of course, mages. Commoners throughout Europe lead lives of well-monitored piety and subservience to pope and king.

Magic, though not (typically) taking place in the town square, is a regular enough occurrence that the common man doesn't even think to doubt its existence. How can you question the existence of the Fae when you've seen them dancing in the hills at night? Or how can you question the existence of magic when you've seen the strange lights coming out of the stone tower where the hell-bent heretic practices his strange old rites?

Throughout Europe, there are places that are known for their strange connections to a stranger, older, more magical world. In the west, the Fae boast of mounds throughout the Celtic world that serve as otherworldly habitations for their strange kind. Likewise, castles belonging to wizards and vampire lords dot the landscape in the Carpathians of eastern Hungary. And that, of course, doesn't even scratch the surface.

It doesn't even take into consideration the weird worlds that only touch upon our own in haunted places or in the magical glens on nights of the full moon, when spirits and shades can pass across into our world, bringing wonder or terror with them.

From Norway's northernmost reaches to the hollow English hillsides, from rugged Spanish mountains to the warm islands in the Aegean or the sands of distant Arabia, magic is spread all across the known world and beyond.

And that is just as it should be.

Celtic Lands

Up the airy mountain
Down the rushy glen
We daren't go a-hunting
For fear of little men
— William Allingham, *The Faeries*

Unlike the people of Europe, to whom the Church has made magic synonymous with heresy and evil, the descendants of the Celtic peoples still respect the magical places that dot their countryside. Although they may avoid venturing into the woods at night, that's not necessarily due to fear. It's just a sign of respect for the Fae folk who live there.

The old Celtic kingdoms — Breizh (Brittany), Alba (Scotland), Éire (Ireland), Cymru (Wales), Mannin (Isle of Man) and Kernow (Cornwall) — once had more of the fair folk than the rest of Europe combined (with the possible exception of Germania).

Crays

Crays are mystical places in the material world where magic wells up and collects in the form of Tass — embodied Quintessence. They are thus highly valuable to mages. More details on how much Quintessence may be harvested from a cray (and how quickly it replenishes it) can be found in the Cray Background, in Chapter Three.

Crays are rated by level, ranging from 1 (the weakest) to five (the greatest).

- • Minor cray; a mystical spring or pilgrimage site (for example, where Mary, Mother of God, was seen by a peasant)
- •• Small cray; a haunted woods or a monastery
- ••• Notable cray; a centuries-old druidic grove or a renowned saint's shrine
- •••• Major cray; the main temple to a god or holy ground sanctified by a miracle
- ••••• Legendary cray; Avalon

Off the Map

Many of the stranger mystical places in this chapter can be found on no map, even those maps that existed in the 13th century. This isn't due to simple cartographic error — it's partly because many of these places don't really exist in our world. Mages who study and theorize about such things (and they are rare) argue about the nature of the world prior to the rise of the Dark Medieval age. Legend tells of strange places and magical creatures that once existed side by side with the settlements of man. This is no longer true. The reason for this is the point of contention: Some mages claim that the world was once more magical, and that, with the draining of raw Quintessence from the world, magical places disappeared. Others claim that these places never existed in this world at all, but were always part of the Other World. In olden days, the Gauntlet was so thin that even a wise mage would be hard put to identify the boundaries, and residents of both worlds could wander back and forth between them freely. With the thickening of the Gauntlet, these places come to exist only in Umbral pockets, ones still greatly resembling our world but not truly of it. At times, during shallowings, they can still be entered freely.

Such is the case with places like Jotunheim, the City of the Giants. It exists in an Umbral pocket of our world, in a shallowing that can often be reached by traveling to the northernmost coast of Norway. Some can find it, other can't, and none know the rules governing its discovery, not even the giants.

In the Dark Medieval period, Alba, Cymru and Éire remain among the most popular places for the Fae.

England

Not everything magical that happens in Dark Medieval England centers upon the faeries.

English Hermetics rejoiced in 1167 when a major institution of learning, Oxford University, was founded in London. It immediately became the site of a major Hermetic collegium, and by 1230, European mages are envisioning London as the next great city of scholars, like Alexandria or Baghdad.

But even as Hermetic magic maintains its plateau, the legendary Wyck are missing from the English countryside and the druidic tradition is dying out, leaving its sacred groves to the tender mercies of those with less piety for nature.

The Fae

The native mages of the Celtic lands have long-term allies and occasional nemeses in the form of the Fae, the strange and mercurial folk who seem to be part human and part dream.

In olden days, mages and the Fae are rumored to have had much closer ties than they do in the Dark Medieval period. With the Roman occupation, however, many of the fair folk fled the world for some distant kingdom, rumored to be somewhere in the farthest reaches of the Umbra.

By the Dark Medieval age, the Fae retain only a shadow of their former glory. The Hollow Hills in the green countryside that they once inhabited are more often found abandoned than occupied as the remnants of England's fair folk retreat farther and farther from the sites thickest with human habitation.

The last great joint dealings between mages and the Fae took place in 1102 when both pagan mages and the Messianic Voices struck an alliance with the Kingdom of Mist to oust vampiric sorcerers from the area around Avalon (Glastonbury). Called the Glastonbury Compact, the agreement also prevents mages from stealing lands from the Fae, something the pagan mages had never done, but that certain other mages, particularly those from the Order of Hermes, had developed something of a reputation for.

Since that brief (but effective) alliance, English mages have been too preoccupied to attend much to the fate of the Fae, and the faeries themselves have continued to retreat from areas of human settlement. There remain those places where willworkers and fair folk cross paths, but they are much less common than they were even a generation ago.

What Mages Know of the Fae

Despite the fact that they occasionally keep company, mages and the fair folk, for the most part, remain enigmas to one another.

Mages are familiar with only the generalities of the faeries' world: There appear to be as many types of faeries as there are humans. Some are tall, beautiful and imposing, others are squat and horrid with big teeth and cruel dispositions. Before its destruction, one of the Hermetic Houses that focused on the fair folk allegedly had catalogued seven different varieties of faeries, but no records remain. There appear to be two factions (called Courts), composed of these various different Fae: the noble Seelie and the nightmarish Unseelie. The two Courts appear to have some manner of power-sharing agreement that seems to work about half the time and results in enormous wars the other half.

The Fae have their own powerful form of magic that, although not as lethal as the magic of a mage, can cause enough damage (or just mischief) to make mages hesitate to cross the so-called little people.

Likewise, two things seem to be the bane of the Fae. One is cold iron, and the efficacy of that metal is widely

THE LEGACY OF THE WYCK

Followers of the Old Faith claim that their knowledge of natural magic came from the Wyck, a tribe of fantastically powerful — some say godlike — individuals who, due to their practice of living in full harmony with Nature, were awe-inspiring in their command of magic. They neither ate nor drank nor suffered from aging or death. Members of the Old Faith credit the Wyck with the building of Stonehenge, though the source of that tradition has been lost for centuries. They gifted a dedicated, talented and intelligent few of the early Celtic peoples with the knowledge of how to work magic by becoming one with nature; thus was the lore of brewing and healing, fire-tending and astronomy passed to humanity.

Certain of the Wyck's other, more challenging secrets — the ways of magic and navigating shortcuts through the Umbra, for example — were passed along only to the most intelligent and insightful of their students.

The primary beneficiaries of the lore of the Wyck were the druids, some of the Old Faith's most powerful adherents in the Celtic lands. Although the Romans killed druids as a matter of course, cunning is a significant component of intellect, and the druids had, after all, been chosen for their brilliance. Many druids went underground, preserving the lore of the Wyck for later generations. Once the Romans abandoned England to defend their doomed city, the magical descendents of the Wyck — the mages of the Old Faith — came out of hiding to teach the people the wisdom of living in accordance with nature.

The people, unfortunately, had fallen prey to a new faith called Christianity that, if anything, made an enemy and a slave of Nature. Thus did the people stray from the way of Nature, in the process losing the vast portion of the knowledge granted them by the ancient Wyck.

The immortal Wyck, however, may not all be gone from the hills of England (and Eire), and certain members of the Old Faith, those with a direct lineage to the druids in particular, claim to have spoken with them in recent memory.

known. There are rumors that the only thing that can actually kill one of the Fae is a weapon of cold iron (what luck, then, that that's precisely what most weapons are made from).

The second thing that seems to cause the Fae undue distress is tedium or drudgery. Anything saturated with the dullness of daily life pains and repels faeries. Mages have speculated that this is due to the fair folk's partial existence as dreams, but the Fae themselves haven't been forthcoming in explaining the nature and basis of their weaknesses.

The Fae homeland appears to be located in the deepest (and strangest) regions of the Umbra.

Beyond those basics, most mages know no more about the fair folk than the average peasant: that the Fae are alluring and mercurial beings with strange powers to enchant and mislead mortals. Some mages can't even come to a decision about whether faeries are creatures of matter or spirit.

How much a mage knows depends on her background. A Valdaerman may know something about giants and goblins, but few of the other types or their various factions, whereas a certain Hermetic may have a great deal of dry lore about the Fae but no actual experience. Yet another mage affiliated with the remnants of druidry may have grown up with a faerie playmate and know many of the specifics of the Fae.

Faerie Treasures

Some mages deal with the Fae out of a spirit of idealism and a sense of kinship, but many are fascinated not by the fair folk themselves but by the legends of the mighty magical treasures and artifacts that the Fae possess or guard. Legend abounds with tales of the immortal steeds of the faeries, the great weapons produced by Fae smiths and assorted objects — torcs, clothing, cauldrons and the like — that combine dazzling beauty with immense power.

By and large it is the mages of the Order of Hermes who most often seek out the treasures of the Fae; the druidic mages of the Old Faith generally have more respect for the fair folk. The following items are among those most sought after by mages in the barrows and glens of the fair folk.

The three mystical Albion Pools, one each hidden in Cymru, Alba and Breizh, respectively, are among the most desirable treasures sought after by mages because it is said that whoever has power over all three pools will rule all of England. One was reputed to grant youth everlasting, one healed all wounds and the third allegedly granted control over the hearts of mortals. By the Dark Medieval period, no one remembers which pool is alleged to bring about which effect, though there may be some among the Fae (rumored to be immortal) who still remember.

The Singing Sword of Madog Cynydd is, by all accounts, a weapon of exquisite craftsmanship and lethal power. When swung in battle, the sword sings a dirge for the enemies of its wielder. Every enemy felled in battle by the Sword of Madog Cynydd renders up to his slayer whatever remained of his natural life span. Thus, slaying one young man with the Sword of Madog Cynydd could extend the sword-wielder's life by a good forty years. The sword's wielder also reaps whatever good fortune the fallen may have had in his future, and the victim's bad luck dies with him.

The enormously extended life and good fortune granted by the sword is a true boon, but it can be lost: if the wielder loses possession of the sword he loses those extra years as well. Consequently, those in possession of the Singing Sword are easily willing to fight to the death to keep it.

The Black Torc of Carniog is rumored to be able to steal souls and cause whole armies of mortals to fall into a near permanent (though peaceful) sleep. Some have suggested that it grants the ability to command the Fae themselves, but on that issue the Fae themselves grow quiet.

The Blazing Silver Torc of Myfanwy Du causes those who look upon the wearer to be filled with deep respect and affection. They will do anything in their power to help him, even if they were bitterest enemies before the wearer donned the torc. If the torc's wearer gives the proper cues, that affection turns to passionate love in the heart of the one so signaled (regardless of the gender of the wearer).

The Cauldron of Gruffydd creates twisted warriors out of whatever its master puts in it. If a mage fills the cauldron with rocks, a stone elemental will emerge to fight for him. Likewise, filling the Cauldron of Gruffydd with daggers and clay will result in a horrible (and deadly) servitor something like a barbed golem. Obviously, certain combinations are more effective than others, but even an army of willow branch soldiers is better than no army at all.

The Cauldron of Annwn was once found in the Underworld beneath Glastonbury Tor, but after Morgan le Fey's betrayal of her father and the fair folk (see "Avalon," below), Avallach, one of the great faerie lords, hid it. A dying mortal submerged in water within the Cauldron of Annwn comes out of it healthy, whole and young.

All of these items have been greatly sought after by mages for centuries. Some have been lost or destroyed, others hoarded and kept secret by their possessors, and still others have been taken to places where they could be more easily guarded by the Fae, and those items are the least likely to fall into mortal hands.

Not only do the legends go into intricate description of what each of these treasures looks like and what remarkable powers are possessed by each, they also speak at length about the terrible guardians set by the Fae to watch over their treasures. These tales are enough to cause even powerful mages to hesitate before beginning such a fool's quest.

Stonehenge: The Celestial Clock of the Old Faith

4th-level Cray

The great stones of Stonehenge rise above the green expanse of Salisbury Plain. Circles within circles within circles, the megaliths are reined in by a henge, a ditch-and-bank earthen construction that rings the whole of the site. Most members of the Old Faith assume that the legendary Wyck built the monument, but the truth remains nebulous.

By the Dark Medieval period, the true purpose of Stonehenge has been lost — as have most of its secrets. A wise willworker (especially one versed in astrology or other types of celestial magic) is probably capable of figuring it out on her own: The posts and lintels of Stonehenge keep track of cosmic time. The standing stones and their horizontal crosspieces are positioned to mark the places on the horizon where the sun and the moon rise and set at certain sacred times of the year (the solstices, equinoxes and the cross-quarter holy days of Imbolc, Beltane, Lughnasadh, and Samhain). Carefully placed grooves in the stones also mark important events in the lunar, planetary and sidereal cycles, though the explanatory notes in Ogham script have long since worn away.

Any of the Wyck (or the greater mages of the Old Faith) could stand at the center of Stonehenge and read the universe like an eternally unfurling scroll. The Wyck masters could render transparent the infinite layers of meaning in the heavens, and by correlating vast webs of dates and events, the ineffable pattern underlying the whole world could be glimpsed and read. Time and individual destinies became as clear as pure water. Druids, as heirs to the lore of the Wyck, used Stonehenge to foretell the weather for the upcoming year and give warning when the skies contained ill omens.

The megaliths and bluestones are in a state of grave disrepair by the Dark Medieval age, and as a result the great ineffable pattern is more lacuna than comprehensible text, even to those mages great enough to make use of the site. Still, there are a few remaining druids with



the ability to garner the overall gist of what the sky has to say; even cracked, the lens that is Stonehenge channels power to the learned far in excess of what can be obtained elsewhere. For that reason, those willworkers residing near Stonehenge are likely to be more than a little proprietary of the site should they catch others messing with the stones.

Ireland

Unconquered by the Roman invasion, the old ways of the druids stayed strong in Eire until the conversion of Ireland to Christianity (allegedly by St. Patrick) in the 5th century BC, 400 years after the rest of England was effectively placed under Papal subjugation.

Even in the Dark Medieval period, the Church holds less sway here than in almost any other place in Europe. Their way of life under attack, many of the Fae and pagan mystics fled to Eire to avoid the Romans and their religion; consequently, these two groups are much more prevalent here than elsewhere. Many of the old surviving druids, kept alive (and, in a handful of cases, still young) by elixirs and other magical means, pass on their comprehensive knowledge of magic, nature, medicine and law to those few young mages who still cleave to the old ways.

Druid Groves

Long before the Romans came westward bringing their soldiers and church-builders, there were sites so sacred that not even the purest and most consecrated souls could enter. The druids were aware of nature as a thriving, interdependent and amoral force, and these ancient oak groves were some of the few places where the veil between the worlds (more commonly called the Gauntlet) was thin enough that the greater forces of nature could be parlayed with, petitioned and, if need be, appeased.

Werebeasts were frequently drawn to such places for their own reasons, as were the Fae; in such situations the druids often lost access to their own holy places unless their mastery of magic was sufficient to repel the would-be invaders. Whatever the history, it is known that the sacred groves that the druids could claim were the holiest of the holy places. They cherished those small tracts of living forest and poured energy into them in the form of belief, ritual and blood.

The druids indeed engaged in human sacrifice, but the Romans who chronicled that sensational element of life on the Isle neglected to mention that the victims were criminals and murderers.

Still, the regular sacrifice of living victims, the spilling of their bodies' most precious fluids, thinned the Gauntlet even more. In some of these groves, the mass belief of the druids and their followers was strong enough to dissolve the Gauntlet entirely during the year's eight holy festivals, creating a shallowing (see pp. 173-174) through which the appropriate spirits could be called, or where mere mortals could wander into the spirit world for the purposes of initiation, supplication or sexual congress with the spirits.

The Romans slaughtered most of the druids, the scholars among the Celts, and effectively destroyed entire libraries' worth of knowledge in doing so. By the time of the Dark Ages, however, not all of the druids' groves have been defiled. Many of these groves, awakened by the blood sacrifice of the druids, continue to open to the Umbra when the world, the moon and the sun are in certain alignments. Some of them still resonate with the feelings with which they were imbued by their druidic caretakers: some with erotic abandon from the spring fertility rites, others with the aura of violent death.

Power for the Tapping

Contrary to popular belief, it is not the stones that give Stonehenge its vast power. The Wyck, the immensely powerful ancestors of the druids, brought the multi-ton stones to the site as a lens or focus for what would otherwise have been a potentially dangerous source of wild magic. By positioning the stones in a pattern that linked the earth with the march of time across the sky, the learned wizards of the Wyck were able to consecrate the site to the primordial forces of time and magic itself.

For this reason, *any* extended spell performed within the bounds of the henge is easier (-2 difficulty). Even spells quickly cast are a little easier (-1 difficulty), though no willworker can benefit from that more than once per lunar cycle. Furthermore, any spell that foretells destiny, time or prediction or that manipulates the flow of magic itself (Quintessence) is made supremely simple by the vast and focused powers of the cray (-4 difficulty).

Wales

Wild is an apt descriptor for both the land and the people of Cymru. Those who avoid the throngs of civilization find themselves in each other's company in Wales, as they all get pushed together: Werewolves, vampires, mages and Fae all succeed in maintaining a carefully cultivated reciprocal ignorance of each other as a means of (not) interacting peacefully.

And, perhaps most potently of all, Wales is the setting for the myth and folklore of King Arthur, including his final resting place.

AVALON

5th-level Cray

By far the most powerful upwelling of Tass in England is in Glastonbury on the Isle of Avalon. The Celts maintained that the Isle of Avalon was one of the greatest intersections of ley lines in the entirety of the known world. It would seem that the mages, werewolves and Fae of the Dark Medieval period were in full agreement, because skirmishes to possess the island were, though unusually subtle, seemingly constant. Even the vampiric sorcerers of House Tremere made a concerted effort to take charge of the area, and only an allied force of mages and Fae prevented them from doing so. The burgeoning human population and the rise of Christianity ultimately settled the matter in favor of mages. Christian mages were in possession of the island for nearly ten centuries, but the old ways were always the true ways here. Thus, Christian theurgy was always harder to perform here than pagan rites, a fact that remains true even in the Dark Medieval era.

Avalon is best known as the place where the dying king Arthur was taken by three great queens: his wife Guinevere, the sorceress Vivienne and his half-sister, Morgan le Fey. Even in the Dark Medieval period, the specifics of Arthur's life and death are lost in the distant past, as removed from those times as they are from our own. In the last decade of the 12th century, something that the Church asserts were Arthur's remains were unearthed.

The specifics are actually moot. Arthur's going to Avalon was not the cause of the island's greatness, it was simply one more acknowledgement of it.

The Isle of Avalon is the site of one of the greatest and most stable shallowings in England. The isle sits in a small inland sea of perpetually calm water. A thick mist hangs over the isle and the waters surrounding it. On the island are two hills. The larger one, Glastonbury Tor (a tor is local terminology for a rocky outcropping on the top of a hill), is the more sacred of the two. It is a prototypical sacred mount and a nexus between the physical and spiritual worlds. For centuries, it was also one of the most active faerie mounds in all of England, but with the Christian occupation, that begins to wane. The Fae have mostly decamped by the Dark Medieval period, largely alienated by the construction of the Abbey of St. Michael (sometimes called Glastonbury Abbey) on the very pinnacle of the tor.

Pagan mages knew Avalon as both an isle of the dead and an isle of the blessed. Celtic mystics describe it as an earthly paradise containing a gateway to the Underworld where the souls of the deceased went for the dual purposes of death and rebirth.

Even the most jaded willworkers, particularly those wise in the ways of geomancy, wax giddy when discussing the mystic significance of Avalon's geology. On the island are two hills, both of which have springs. The springs are called the White Spring and the Red Spring (the Red Spring is also called the Chalice Spring, but mostly by the region's Christian inhabitants). Celtic mages explain that the two springs represent the forces of life and death. The White Spring originates in a cave, thought by the druids to be a place of prophecy; it symbolizes the creative properties of semen and the nourishing properties of mother's milk. The Red Spring represents blood and death.

The entrance to the Underworld upon the tor is not simply a metaphorical turn of phrase. It is physically present in the cave atop the tor. Beneath the surface, the island is honeycombed with a vast network of caverns. Because of the shallowing effect, this complex of tunnels leads directly into the Underworld in many places, allowing even a Commoner wanderer access to the land of the dead (though mage and Fae alike try to prevent that from happening; such things rarely end well, and more often than not if there's blame to be assigned, it falls on the heads of the magical folk).

Trees cover the island; ash, oak, elm, hazel and hawthorn abound. Willows, reeds and alders grow along the isle's shores. Interspersed among the other trees are enormous groves of yew and apple trees. It is from the last that the island gets its name. The Welsh word for apple is *aballon*. Avalon, in essence, means Isle of Apples. Celtic lore holds the apple as the fruit most favored by those in the underworld (akin to the pomegranate in the Greek Underworld, for example).

Those who live near Glastonbury claim that the island is a place where the higher and lower elements of the world connect, sometimes coming into conflict; thus spirit and matter, psyche and shadow, pagan and Christian, lands of the living and lands of the dead all intersect here. This is true not only of the geography but of those who venture onto the island as well. Long term residents say Glastonbury is a place of conflict, a place of the shadow and the higher self, a place where Heaven and Hell hold hands. It is a place to go when trying to reach normally inaccessible depths (for that reason, many of the local mages make a visit to Avalon to further

their understanding of the magical world and its complexities). It is often said by those who live near Glastonbury, "Where the light is brightest, the shadows are darkest."

Presiding over the Isle of Apples was the faerie king Avallach. That ancient soul watched over the Fae who lived in the tor and guarded the shallowing as well, preventing access to all but the most driven, intent and intractable. This last was important because the passage into the Underworld that was located on the tor not only allowed the dead to reach the Underworld with relative ease, it allowed them to return, alive, to the lands of the living after undergoing a purification and rebirth in the sacred Cauldron of Ceridwen. In the high Mythic Age, Avalon, though not unique, was a rare and sacred site in being a two-way passage to the land of the dead. Travel to the underworld and back was relatively common at one time, as evidenced by the voyages undertaken by Gilgamesh, Inanna, Hercules and Orpheus (among many others).

For centuries the native mystics of England, including the wise and magically powerful Wyck, guarded that knowledge carefully, keeping secret the one site in all of England where the dying could get their deaths over with and return once more in the peak of their prime.

The Labyrinth

To reach the heart of the shallowing on Avalon — and thus the Celtic Underworld realm of Annwn — the seeker must walk the labyrinth that wends its way up the slopes of Glastonbury Tor, and he must do it unaided. Many of those seeking to renew themselves in the Cauldron of Ceridwen were close to

THE FATE OF ARTHUR

The last hours of the life of Arthur, greatest of the Kings of England, has been the subject of a much speculation by scholars, historians and mages alike.

The whole story is told only by the descendants of the priestesses of Morgan le Fey, who learn it from their mothers and their mothers' mothers. During the burning times in the 16th and 17th centuries, the lineage is broken and, having never been put in writing, the story is lost.

In the Dark Medieval period, however, at least one version of the story of Arthur's last moments in Avalon is not yet lost and the characters may well learn of it in the course of the chronicle. There are many who believe it, but also many who scoff (especially the Messianic Voices) and offer their own versions.

The three great queens, Guinevere, Vivienne and Morgan le Fey, took the ailing King Arthur across the waters to Avalon, intending to take him to Annwn, where he would be reborn in the Cauldron of Ceridwen.

Avallach, the vastly powerful Fae king, long a foe of the enemies of paganism, had decreed that no Christian was ever to be reborn in the cauldron. The only mage in all of Europe who would challenge him on that point was Morgan le Fey, and that only because she was his daughter.

Morgan was keenly aware that the invading Christians were barred from using this route to Annwn, but her love/hate relationship with her half-brother swung strongly at that moment toward love.

As one of the guardians of the mysteries of Avalon, Morgan knew the lore well. The mystic code stated clearly that the dying supplicant must walk the labyrinth into Annwn on his own two feet. After sipping a tonic given him by his half-sister, Arthur managed this much, though it took all his strength to do so. At the entrance to Annwn, the gatekeeper Gwynn ap Nudd, the White Son of Night, barred the dying king from entering, saying that Arthur, a Christian, must solve a complicated string of twelve interconnected riddles before entering. Arthur didn't have breath in him to solve even one of the riddles, much less twelve. And though he was an acclaimed warrior and leader, riddles were not his forte.

Morgan was apoplectic with shock and rage. Betraying all her pagan loyalties, Morgan le Fay struck down Gwynn ap Nudd with her mighty magics, and the eleven of them — Arthur, Morgan and her nine priestesses — hurried through the Underworld to get to the Cauldron of Ceridwen.

When they got to the cavern of rebirth, the cauldron was gone.

Just as Morgan's love for Arthur was greater than her love for the Fae, so was Avallach's hatred of the invading Christians greater than his love for his perfidious daughter.

Not only had the Cauldron of Ceridwen been moved, but many of the Fae folk had also left within the hour. For many of them, Morgan's betrayal proved to be the last straw in a long-growing quarrel with the increasingly Christian England.

Mere moments later, Arthur's body toppled over and his spirit took flight.

death, and it happened not infrequently that the bodies of those who couldn't complete the labyrinth were found somewhere along the path. When the seeker reached the center of the labyrinth at the summit of the tor, he found the entrance to the caverns that led to Annwn. By Avallach's command, these caverns were guarded by Gwynn ap Nudd, the "White Son of Night." The Fae champion prevented the unwary and unworthy (including Christians and others perceived as hostile to the Celtic ways) from entering Annwn.

Once in the caverns, all that was left was to find the enormous black Cauldron of Ceridwen. The cauldron was said to be like unto a great iron womb wherein the body and soul of those within were once more brought into accord, healing the flesh and returning the body once more to the healthiest point in its prime.

The druids who managed this lore were extremely careful with its dissemination. Even many of their own number were never initiated into the mysteries of the Cauldron of Ceridwen, but for centuries, the mages of England had one of the greatest magical artifacts in the known world no more than a few days' travel away.

Avalon is the reputed resting place of three great artifacts from England's mythic past. While two of them may (or may not) be found there, the third, the Cauldron of Ceridwen, has not been there for nearly seven centuries. Legend puts the final resting place of the Holy Grail somewhere on the slopes of Glastonbury Tor, or perhaps in the tunnels beneath, in the walled-off section of the caverns where the shallowing is still in effect. Some theory-drenched Hermetics have claimed that the Holy Grail and the Cauldron of Ceridwen are and always were two different and mutually antagonistic iterations of the same Platonic form that finally came together, somehow canceling each other out. What they mean by this remains unclear except to other old-school Hermetics.

Likewise, it was into the placid waters surrounding Avalon that Arthur's knight Sir Bedwyr threw the famous sword. The Lady of the Lake took back the blade, Calad-Bolg (Welsh for "hard lightning," later Latinized into "Excalibur"). The identity of the Lady of the Lake remains unclear, as does the final resting place of the great sword. If the Lady of the Lake remains in the waters around Avalon, it's possible that there are heroes who are worthy of wielding such a blade even as late as the Dark Medieval period. Given a good deal of thought and effort, it's possible that a mage (or a cabal of them) could have the magical resources to find out.

Scotland

The wilds of Scotland are aptly named: the countryside as well as the people who reside here have a feral inclination and what some have suggested is a tendency toward excess. The rumors of degenerate Scots persist, sometimes the empty product of English bigotry, other times well-earned by some of the Highland's more atavistic inhabitants.

Picts and Celts had unusually potent battle magics they brought to bear on each other in the millennium of skirmishes between the two groups. The Celts ultimately proved victorious when they wove a terrible spell that banished the most powerful of the Pictish mages into pits (sometimes called cysts) beneath the ground. The magic preserved the woad-covered Pictish battle mages in barrows across the eastern reaches of the Lowlands and the Dales of Alba. Records of which of these pagan mages were entombed where once existed, but like much old lore have vanished. A mage freeing one of these powerful old willworkers *could* learn a great deal, but given that they've been described as "powerful, mad and royally carked," it's best not tried by any but the most powerful.

The Picts have been gone for some three centuries by the Dark Medieval period, but in the lands they once roamed, dark things take shape beneath the ground.

The Pits

For the most part, Scotland is a green and pleasant land. This is the rule, but there are some disturbing exceptions. In the Dark Medieval period, there are regions of Scotland that are infested with tunnels containing creatures best described as filthy and malicious degenerates who can change into giant, deformed man-wolves with sickly greenish matted fur and a range of disturbing behavioral traits ranging from cannibalism to incest.

These foul brutes waylay travelers, not for money but for their flesh, dragging the bodies back to their tunnels to be either eaten on the spot or pickled for later consumption.

The Highlands are not densely populated enough for a many of these caverns and tunnels to have been discovered, but the disappearances are noted, though attempts to discover the killers are unsuccessful. Among those few who, through one means or another, have learned of the enormous tunnels' existence, it's rumored that some of the passages are deep enough and go far enough that they run under the English Channel to mainland Europe. Such things are clearly impossible, however, so the tales are generally dismissed.

Generally.

Those Celtic mages who investigate (many based on urgent omens or word from the spirit world) find that not only are there miles of tunnels beneath Scotland, but dark and filthy things are taking place down in them.

The only problem with this knowledge is figuring out how to stay alive after learning it.

These rumors are true. The horrors bounding around in the tunnels are the degenerate remnants of the once-proud Picts. They have become the breeding stock for shape-changing things that are the attack dogs of the Devil.

Scandinavia

By the end of the 12th century, Christianity has taken root in Norway and the practitioners of runecraft are rapidly finding that Asatru, the old Norse spiritual practice, is falling by the wayside and runecraft is becoming a lost path of magic. That said, runecraft still lives on in the Dark Medieval period, as does one of its great sacred places.

Kaldheim

In the grim and unforgiving lands of northern Norway, far from the bustling port city of Bergen, exists another, stranger community where the dead — and those who traffic with them — reign.

Kaldheim, a small town surrounded by a bleached and rune-covered wooden palisade, is among the most sacred sites of the Valdaermen. It is a city where those who communicate with the dead and engage in necromancy do so openly and are revered for doing so. It is here that the students of runecraft come to petition the masters of the craft to teach them what they know.

This far north, the ice of winter claims the land nine months out of twelve. The bodies of those who die in the winter are considered gifts to the Valdaermen from Odin because the frozen ground is too hard to bury the dead and Kaldheim is too far from the ocean to dispose of the dead by sea. Instead, the old necromancers of Kaldheim force the dead to rise and serve the living until the first full thaw in the spring, usually in late May.

During the winter, citizens from miles around bring their dead to Kaldheim so the Valdaermen can work their rune-magic on them. By the time of the first thaw, there may be anywhere from 50 to 200 corpses serving the living in a variety of ways: carving blocks of ice from the lake for water, chopping wood, checking traps, rebuilding homes that have burned and, on occasion, defending Kaldheim from invaders. The residents of Kaldheim (in fact most of the inhabitants of Norway) see the use of the dead not as a desecration but as simple pragmatism: The dead serve their community one more winter before they can rest, and the living, who need to conserve their resources in the bitterly cold winter months, can stretch those resources a little further.

Kaldheim in the summer is a picturesque town in the midst of craggy, wildflower-covered hills. From late August to late May, however, it is a realm of corpses, bones and necromancy. When they make their yearly trek in from the craggy hills, the Svalaholdr bring a collection of grisly totems and servitors with them: reanimated animal carcasses, ghostly servants, and colossal war-monsters put together from mismatched bones and animated by ghosts bound into the device by sorcery — all brought in on wagons made of the bones of their enemies.

As the seasons change, so does the balance of power in Kaldheim. In the summer, the town's mortal population, predominantly farmers and craftsmen, controls the town. For those three months, Kaldheim is almost indistinguishable from any other Norwegian village, albeit in somewhat better repair than most, thanks to the winter labors of the dead. Some of the Svalaholdr's students, generally those from farther away, stay around as cheap labor, milking cows, harvesting crops and the like in exchange for room and board. Even in the summer the town's population offers food and favors to the necromancers in the rugged hills beyond the village palisade. Once the first snow falls, the Valdaermen return in their bizarre bone wagons, take up residence in the great mead hall at the center of town and become the community's de facto rulers.

Locals simply call them the old men, and though they are not cruel rulers, they are stern. Mercy is not foremost among their virtues, and crossing them often results in severe punishment. The townsfolk are keenly aware of where the power lies and try to

THE SVALAHOLDR

The Svalaholdr, meaning "the Winter Men" or "the Chill Men," are the elders of an offshoot of the Valdaermen who emphasize the study of necromancy. They are harsh masters and dogmatic in the extreme about how to work magic, but their mastery of death magic is indisputable.

The Svalaholdr are the heirs to a wide range of Valdaermen magic, experts in many Pillars. This is why so many mages are willing to give up the relative comfort of more southerly Europe for the ice, snow and walking dead of Kaldheim.

avoid conflict with their strange guests, because the Svalaholdr who rule Kaldheim in the winter are among the wisest of the runecraft elders.

Despite their power and reputation, the Svalaholdr are neither cruel nor ostentatious. They wear only the furs and formal black robes of their office, they do not make a point of evincing emotion of any sort and behind their great beards they are as gaunt as the dead they command and as serious as the gallows-god they revere. Many of the old men are horribly scarred or even more severely disfigured from their long lives of practicing sacrifice magic. All have runes cut, flayed or burnt into their skin. Many of them lack an eye, a sign that they, like their god Odin — also called the All-Father or the gallows-god — made an almost inconceivable sacrifice in exchange for mastering the wisdom they possess. Some of the old men are followed through the streets of Kaldheim by a retinue of animated corpses; others prefer solitude; still others prefer going out only in the form of a raven or a wolf.

The squeamish leave Kaldheim as soon as they are able, but those who wish to study the mystical principles of runecraft make long and arduous pilgrimages from as far abroad as Russia, Spain and Italy to visit the Svalaholdr. Kaldheim's population in the Dark Medieval period is surprisingly large for its locale and still growing. The number of people willing to serve the servants of the gallows-god in exchange for the favors of the dead grows with each passing year. Likewise, as the legend of Kaldheim grows, supplicants travel increasingly longer distances to deliver their dead (and sometimes the occasional stolen corpse) into the hands of the old men as a means of propitiating the powers that be and seeking favor in the eyes of the Svalaholdr. Paying tribute to jarls or lords is an age-old custom in Norway, and corpses are a far more plentiful commodity than gold or high-quality weapons.

The increasingly Christian population of Norway is beginning to look askance at these practices, however, and conflicts have been known to flare up when Christian knights or Messianic Voices mages attempt to waylay wagonloads of corpses to prevent them from reaching Kaldheim. When successful, these pious souls give Christian burials to the bodies they rescue and mete out punishment to those with the effrontery to do otherwise with the bodies of the dearly departed.

Kaldheim serves the purposes not only of the Svalaholdr but also of those young mystically inclined initiates who want to learn the higher arts of runecraft. Runecraft and necromancy are the core of



this strange curriculum, but several of the old men also teach the arts of shapeshifting, weathercraft, scrying, divination, weaponcrafting and cursing. It is as close to a collegium for Valdaermen as there will ever be. Whereas the All-Father had to pluck out his own eye to gain the knowledge of wisdom, those who would learn runecraft need only make the trek to Kaldheim and convince the old men of their dedication and magical aptitude to be allowed to study the arts. At first, anyway.

From late October through the early winter months, the town of Kaldheim is the setting for an aggressive and gruesome competition between the Svalaholdr to see whose mastery of the necromantic arts and whose knowledge of death-lore is greatest. The old men call ghosts, animate dead and even summon the occasional vampire. The Old Men earmark some of the winter dead for grotesque necromantic experimentation, although they do this in their respective sancta, as even the devoted citizenry of Kaldheim place some limits on the uses to which their dead may be put.

Unsurprisingly, the spirit lands around Kaldheim, particularly the Underworld, are swarming with ghosts the whole winter long. Hauntings are not allowed; any ghost who attempts to haunt a resident of Kaldheim is sent on its way.

The old men don't traffic as heavily with the denizens of the Spirit Wilds, but, in keeping with the Asatru, their old religion, they do occasionally call on bear, wolf or raven spirits.

Once the weather grows warm, the walking dead begin to rot. The old men give the corpses their final task of digging their own graves before freeing the animating spirit. When the citizens of Kaldheim have filled in the graves and planted wildflowers on top, the old men load up their cauldrons and skeletons and other grim apparatus onto their bone wagons and return to their caves and lodges in the distant hills.

Jotunheim

The giants' day is long gone, but in the far northern extremes of Norway and Greenland lies their last bastion.

Technically, giants are faeries, most closely related to trolls. Whereas trolls stand maybe eight feet tall, however, giants stand between twenty and thirty feet tall and their strength is even greater than their immense size would suggest.

The city of the giants is located on the northernmost coast of Norway. Stone walls in excess of a hundred feet high ring the city. The inside structures are also built out of stone, for there are too few trees this far north.

Outside of those magical Fellowships based out of Norway (like the Valdaermen) or the Celtic lands, very few mages are aware that the giants have not yet died out. Those that do know of the giants (or at least their lore) should be hesitant at best to enter Jotunheim. The bit about giants grinding human bones to make bread isn't just an old wives' fancy.

Giants can be lethal opponents. Their size makes them difficult to effectively damage and their power to kill a mage, even inadvertently, is phenomenal. In addition to their size, frost giants can harness wind and elemental chill to their wills, and fire giants manipulate flames.

The one thing giants have that a mage might conceivably need to travel here for is very long life and eidetic memories. If approached with sufficient finesse, a giant could conceivably ignore its urge to crush and eat a mage. Those characters used to getting their way through threats, intimidation and strong-arm tactics will be at a serious disadvantage in the presence of these enormous creatures. Etiquette, surprisingly, goes a long way in dealing with giants (so those characters with high Charisma + Etiquette dice pools have a definite advantage over those with high Dexterity + Brawl).

For their part, the giants know that they are a doomed race, and there is little that even a relatively powerful mage could give them that they couldn't get for themselves. However, there are two recorded instances of mages dealing with giants in exchange for information. In the first instance, a giant asked for current information on some aspect of the civilized world. In the second, the giant asked only for a magical draught that would help him forget (which presented the mage a bit of a conundrum).

Although the world may be forgetting the giants, the giants have not yet forgotten the world, and the thing they generally crave the most is knowledge about the world: the fate of the druids, news of the Fae, updates on the arrogant werewolves and similar information. They often ask very specific questions requiring a great deal of effort on the part of the mage, but if a giant enters a bargain, he does so in good faith. Woe to the mage who bargains with a giant and then reneges on his agreement.

Germania

There are pockets of wilderness where, despite the rapidly growing European population, civilization remains wholly unable to flourish. The thick deep woods of the Schwarzwald are one such place. Villages are

JACK THE GIANT KILLER, ANYBODY?

Warring with giants is pointless, and more often than not lethal. They don't enter human territories and prefer to be left alone. Furthermore, the race will be extinct within a couple of centuries anyway. That said, more than a few mages have been tempted to make a name for themselves by slaying a giant or two. The few mages who survived those attempts are still breathing only because they fled. Giants are related to stone elementals (making them tough) and they're *huge*, meaning that even *if* a mage can wield enough power to make a giant feel pain, they'll have to do orders of magnitude more than that to actually have a chance of killing it.

Humans, by and large can take seven health levels of damage before they're dead. Giants, on the other hand, can withstand a minimum of five times that (for a young girl), and up to ten or twenty times the norm for an ancient giant warrior. What's more, their hard skin absorbs a lot of punishment. You do the math.

Mages can interact with giants in a myriad of ways, but, from the mage's standpoint, violence is the least rational of them all.

established only to be found in ruins a year later. Humans are dwarfed by the enormous oaks, elms and rowans of the Black Forest, and the trees seem almost to devour the comforting light of lanterns or even bonfires. If there is a place where humans are unwanted, this enormous tangle of trees is it.

Mages of a more animistic or primordial bent adapt well to the place. The Schwarzwald is an undisputed stronghold of the werewolves of Germania, but mages are not unfairly targeted by the wolfchangers, provided that any given mage remains cognizant that he is there only at their sufferance.

The Schwarzwald Umbral Court

4th-level Cray

Deep in the ancient forests of the Schwarzwald, at the convergence of several powerful ley lines, there exists a powerful cray that acts as the hub of the whole European spiritual landscape. Nature spirits of all description fly, walk, scuttle, slither and ,above all, swarm the Spirit Wilds here. Although the cray is not a shallowing, the Gauntlet is extraordinarily thin, and it is considered by most European Spirit-Talkers to be the most appropriate or formal entrance to the spirit lands when entering the court for all dealings with major Umbrood.

Here, above all other places in Europe, a mage is capable of parlaying with spirits, including those that are not otherwise disposed to deal with humans or mages. Mages with urgent business for the Umbral Overlords may bring it to them here; likewise, willworkers wishing to do the bidding of the spirits may present themselves for service.

At the center of the cray is a natural outcropping of black basalt rising from a limpid pool. In the Umbral landscape, it is here that the powerful Umbrood conduct the business of the spirit world and oversee the orderly continuation of the natural world.

Spirit-Talkers come to the Schwarzwald from all over Europe to make vision quests into the Umbral court. Although they are not the favored children of the powerful Umbrood residing here, mages serving the natural order may gain a certain degree of standing in the court through service to nature and adherence to the principles of the Spirit-Talkers' ways. Some elders among the Spirit-Talkers have even been afforded high status and ranking among the Umbrood, though this is by no means a common occurrence.

Two Umbral Overlords rule over each spirit court. One sovereign represents the spirits of natural phenomena (sun and moon spirits, weather, certain spiritually charged places and the like), the other represents the interests of plant and animal spirits. These spirits are among the most powerful denizens of the Umbra. They are forces of nature to be feared and revered, and any mage stupid enough to offend them isn't likely to live beyond that one imprudent moment. The Umbral Overlords are chosen by Incarna even greater than they. Each lord or lady guides the local spirit world for a period of roughly two hundred years, and the periods are staggered such that any two given sovereigns only preside together over the spirit courts for one hundred years. Overall, this prevents sudden shifts of course in the spirit world.

All told, there are no fewer than five other spirit courts of this size elsewhere in the world. Each of those comprises two Umbral Overlords as well, but beyond that similarity, many of the other details are drastically different, as are many of the spirits that make up a court. Mages spending any significant amount of time at the Umbral courts are liable to learn about things that their peers have no knowledge of. For example, though the New World has yet to be discovered by Europeans (other than a few hardy Vikings), many Spirit-Talkers are aware that it exists because many bird spirits, wind spirits and

similar Umbrood are aware of it, and they make no secret of its existence.

There are no human habitations anywhere near the entrance to the Umbral court. Any that spring up are swallowed by the forest, one way or another, before the passing of a single year.

Man-eating redcap Fae make the depths of the forest dangerous enough, but by far the most dangerous adversaries a mage is likely to encounter here, on both sides of the Gauntlet, are the werewolves. The werewolves of the Black Forest are legion and their ferocity in battle is unequalled even among others of their kind. They consider the Schwarzwald their sacred charge, and their approach to protecting their lands is violent and uncompromising. The werewolves consider the entrance to the Umbral Court a caern, one of their sacred places, and they defend it from outsiders at least as viciously (if not more so) as the Saracens defend the Holy Lands.

That said, those Spirit-Talkers needing an audience with the more powerful nature spirits must successfully make the journey to the forest's very heart, or the Umbral Overlords will simply ignore them, deeming the gate-crashers unworthy of their time.

The Frost Mother and the Wolf King

Ancient, powerful and inhuman in their outlook, the exalted guides of the European spirit world hold court in their palace of oaks in the heart of the Schwarzwald. Whereas some pairs of Umbral Overlords are sympathetic to the requests of human mages, Spirit-Talkers at this point in history do not benefit from such luxury. Both Umbral Overlords are almost antagonistic toward the human race in general and mages in particular, making it easier and more preferable for all but the most powerful Spirit-Talkers to work with lesser spirits.

The Frost Mother oversees the spirits of natural phenomena. Moonlight, storms and fire all obey her directives, just as she obeys the directives of the Incarna above her. The few mages who have had dealings with her give vastly different accounts of both her appearance and demeanor. All mages agree that the Frost Mother is absolutely alien, with nothing about her, leastwise her thought processes, being human. Spirit-Talkers, however, speak of her extraordinary beauty, cold impartiality and infinite grace. The few Hermetics who have dealt with her, on the other hand, describe her as a frigid and menacing hag. There are reasons for this discrepancy: The Frost Mother disapproves of the degree of power to warp the physical world that mages have, particularly because it is her responsibility to put things aright if the mage disrupts the natural order. She reserves her benevolence for those mages who work subtle magic that strengthens (or at least remains within) the natural order, whereas those who work abrupt, flashy magic that is disruptive of the natural order are the recipients of her ire.

Her consort, representing the interests of animal and plant spirits, is the Wolf King. Valdaermen and werewolves alike allege that he is the great wolf Fenris. He typically wears the form of an enormous silver wolf, though there are rare times when the Wolf King appears as an enormous man, a warrior so hirsute it's difficult to tell where his skin stops and his ragged fur garments begin. In this form, the Wolf King is always wielding either an enormous sword or a great axe made of pure moonsilver.

The Wolf King is a harsh master; he embodies the concept of the powerful eating the weak. Although he couldn't care less what kind of magic a mage wields, he cannot abide a mage who is weak or cowardly. A mage afraid of bloody, brutal combat would do well never to seek out the Wolf King, who can smell cowardice at a thousand paces.

That said, warrior mages (including a number of mages of Pictish, Norse, Germanic, Magyar and Russian descent) may gain great insights into the nature of

WHAT IS A CAERN?

A caern is a natural upwelling of spiritual energies, similar to a cray but always located in a remote wilderness area. Such places have very thin Gauntlets and Umbrood swarm around such sites, making them ideal locations for working spirit magics.

Although such locations are excellent for willwork and communing with spirits, there is a serious drawback: a caern, by definition, is also a place sacred to werewolves (and sometimes other shapeshifters as well), who guard them aggressively. It is the werewolves' belief that channeling the energy of the caern is in some way harmful to it. Unless he is powerful and schooled in the lore of shapechangers, a mage intending to use a caern as he would a common cray is unlikely to live through the experience.

The only mages usually ever granted permission to use a caern are those associated with the Spirit-Talkers, and even then only with the permission and backing of powerful Umbrood. Needless to say, such events take place maybe once a century, if that. The werewolves do not care to have their places of power tampered with by even the most sympathetic mage.

war magic if they are able to somehow impress him with their courage, skill or battle cunning.

The Wolf King saves his true, unmitigated hatred for Christians, particularly the mages of the Messianic Voices. He sees the entire Christian religion as a widespread corruption and weakening of the natural order, and the very concept of the lion laying down with the lamb sends him into a berserk rage.

Iberia: Warring Against Civilization

In the hands of the Muslims, the great cities of Moorish Spain — Sevilla, Cordoba and, the jewel of them all, Granada — remained centers of art, learning and literacy even when Europe was in the very nadir of the Dark Ages. Mages, benefiting from the intellectual climate as well as the relatively open society, reside in these cities in extraordinary numbers.

A wide array of knowledge that has been lost to the rest of Europe survives in Spain's Islamic territories: medicine, chemistry, geometry, higher mathematics, advanced architecture and a host of other intellectual disciplines.

In the midst of this intellectual environment, the subtle viziers of the Ahl-i-Batin conduct their business of learning and preaching Unity. The Batini are wise enough to know how to travel north without being spotted by the barbaric Christians, and they use Spain as a base from which to recruit gifted mages from Europe.

The Christians of Northern Spain are waxing zealous to oust the Moors, however, and that cultural flowering is placed in grave peril. The *Reconquista* is like the sacking of Rome all over again. Buildings are razed, scholars killed and libraries burned. For the moment, however, Moorish Spain remains a bastion of learned and knowledgeable men.

Eastern Europe: By Dragons Held

A dark cloud hovers over the distant reaches of Poland and Hungary. The infamy of Eastern Europe grows with each passing day. There is no bogeyman in all of Europe that is not found in the grim mountains of the Transylvanian Alps. Demons, vampires, werewolves and worse haunt the nights and nightmares of those who live there.

The legendarily byzantine schemes and intrigues of the Church are nothing compared to the twisted and secret dealings of ancient vampire lords and old scheming wizards.

In the Dark Medieval age, the archetypal vampire lord living in a castle overlooking a village of pale and despairing peasants was not a lurid fantasy but a nightmarish reality. Cities including Bucharest, although not ruled by vampire lords, are infested with the bloodsuckers and control the local power structure: Princes, bishops, merchants — all perform like puppets at the hands of the undead.

House Tremere

Among the greatest enemies of the Hermetic Order is Clan Tremere, formerly House Tremere, an entire house of mages fallen into vampiric corruption on a heretofore unseen scale. For years, the mages of the Order of Hermes made war upon the twisted night-creatures that had once been their colleagues. It was a grinding, bloody and seemingly interminable conflict resulting in the deaths of many wizards and vampires — and it never did produce a victor. The only outcome of the so-called *Massasa War* was a deep and abiding hatred between the two factions.

House Tremere remains strong in its homeland. Despite its strength, however, the scars left by the Massasa War run deep and infighting is kept in check only by lockstep adherence to hierarchy and discipline.

Nor is that the whole of House Tremere's struggles. Even as the house rots from within, it is viciously and repeatedly attacked by foes from without. Armies of cunning vampires and ravening ghouls assail the house's primary chantry, a necessarily formidable fortress called Ceoris. Its other, weaker chantries fall one after the other before the onslaught. Mages watching the spectacle unfold speculate that the house must have threatened or insulted some powerful vampire lord (or perhaps more than one). If that's the case, Ceoris' location in the heart of the Carpathians could not be worse.

A three-way war between the vampires, the werewolves and the mages rages in the Dark Medieval period. It is a testament to the power of the deeply entrenched vampires that they're capable of fighting a supernatural war on two fronts and not toppling before the combined might of their extraordinarily powerful enemies.

There is an underlying reason for the carnage in Eastern Europe. In the dark shadows of the Carpathians resides the essence of a major demon named Kupala. This knowledge is possessed by perhaps a handful of mages at most at this time.

In centuries to come, Kupala's presence will become more evident and will, in time, lead to the birth of Tezghul the Insane, one of the magical world's bloodiest and most horrific enemies. (More

information on the malignant presence called Kupala — which sometimes refers to itself as Stars Beyond — can be found in the **Transylvania Chronicles I-IV**, **Transylvania by Night** and **House of Tremere**.)

ITALIA

There are some who say Rome had risen to such heights that, when it fell in 410, its topple crushed all of Europe.

While Rome, per se, may never again be a world power, the Church is an empire in its own right, maintaining a power over the religious that transcends national boundaries — a phenomenon the secular authorities find increasingly suspect.

In the Dark Medieval period, the Italian Peninsula is a patchwork of Roman territories, Papal states and independent city-states such as Venice and Florence that have grown vastly wealthy through trade.

Two of the sites most salient to willworkers reflect the Church at its best and at its worst. Firmly under the control of the Messianic Voices, the Basilica San Marco is one of the most ecumenical of the churches in the Medieval world. On the other hand, the Carceri Piranesi embodies the Church's growing paranoia and enmity toward the pagan religions that it's trying to supplant.

BASILICA SAN MARCO

3rd-level Cray

In the Dark Medieval period, the wealthy and independent city-state of Venice ranks among the premiere strongholds of the Messianic Voices. Within striking distance of the Church, but difficult enough to invade because of the lagoon on which Venice is built, Venice grants the Messianic Voices a degree of freedom to mix orthodoxy and a relatively liberal ecumenism in ways that capture the true heart of the Voices' spiritual beliefs.

Venice is one of the rare examples of a city built on a cray where the ultimate result was not the cray's destruction but the city's enhancement. The mystical charge from the cray suffuses the city's very ambience. Light and water combine with the Venetian architecture to create a restless magic that eradicates dogma, nullifies boundaries and allows the mingling of the real and the ideal — with enchanting results.

The Basilica San Marco is a vast church completed just over a century ago. Its architecture, with its onion domes and painted enamel tiles, borrows heavily from its Byzantine forebears. Many of the tiles on the basilica's walls and ceilings aren't even just borrowed but outright stolen from the older Byzantine churches, including the Church of the Pantocrator and the monolithic Hagia Sophia itself.

Iohannes Valdecci, the Bishop of the Basilica San Marco, is a Messianic Voices Exarch capable of powerful acts of faith. He is among the kindest and most virtuous men in the city of Venice. Luckily for him, his slightly less virtuous (and far more cunning) brethren watch out for his best interests by making sure that Valdecci is not taken advantage of.

The number of Messianic Voices mages studying and teaching at San Marco hovers in the teens. The minority of the mages here are monastic, observing strict vows of chastity, poverty and, in a few cases, silence. Most are priests and some are gifted laity who have taken up residence at the Basilica to study the word of God and theurgy with their spiritual leaders.

Although the basilica itself provides an uncompromised bastion for the holy mages, their power is contested just beyond the Piazza San Marco by two separate families of necromantic hedge magicians, and even more so beyond the city of Venice.

The greatest concern shared by the brethren of San Marco is the possible investigation of the basilica as a bastion of heretics. Although all of the brethren are very Christian, the mages of the Messianic Voices follow the loving spirit of the scriptures over the mere words they comprise, and they seek to foster a sense of ecumenism among all believers in the true God. To this end, they occasionally welcome mages from among the Jews and even the Saracens (the Ahl-i-Batin) to the Basilica San Marco to compare notes on the one God. To the zealously orthodox, this would make these Voices appear more than a little heretical.

THE RELICS OF SAN MARCO

The relics used to consecrate the Basilica San Marco traveled a long road before they made it to their final resting place in the Venetian church. St. Mark the Evangelist was martyred in Alexandria in the year 68 AD. The pagans of Alexandria — adherents of the old Roman gods, mostly — including the occasional Hermetic adept, were inclined to burn the remains of the holy man who had waged such a successful campaign against the established religions. A number of Messianic Voices mages were able to soothe the pagan crowd and distract them long enough for the saint's remains to be successfully interred in a Christian church. In the year 828, however, the remains had to be moved because invading Muslims were threatening to desecrate the church where the relics were installed.

A cabal of Messianic Voices mages from Venice, who needed a saint's relic for their church *anyway*, volunteered to rescue the relics from Egypt, and with a great deal of angelic aid, made their way past the Arab customs officials who saw, not the relics of a saint, but the carcass of a pig (considered anathema to Muslims).

The holy relics of St. Mark, sacred and saturated with holy magic, now sit in a white marble tomb at the very center of the grand basilica that bears his name.

Carceri Piranesi: The Wizard Gaol

Pope Nicholas, troubled not only by the crumbling state of the Church's empire in his time but also by the persistence (and, in some cases, the growing influence) of various pagan sects and the power they wielded, established an institution in the farthest and least settled corner of the Papal States for the incarceration of known mages who were deemed heretics, pagans or simply insufficiently Christian.

By all rights, his attempt should have failed. Only his choice of architect prevented the whole effort from becoming another of the Church's embarrassing secrets in need of quiet hiding.

Giambatista Piranesi was a brilliant man at war with himself. Reared Christian, he had studied the Hermetic arts side by side with architecture. Piranesi loved Christ but also took pride and comfort in his ability to affect the world through such a potent tool as magic. Although he never appreciated the fact, it was the struggle between his various loyalties that granted him the passion to do such powerful and excellent work.

Once the Pope had sworn the architect to secrecy, he explained to Piranesi exactly what it was he planned to build: a prison for pagan mages. The architect was both flattered and horrified that the pope had chosen him for such a task, but he proved himself more than up to it. Piranesi devised complex

NECROMANCER VS. NECROMANCER

The Messianic Voices maintain — wholly in line with Church teaching — that the relics of saints are mystically charged and can trigger powerful miracles. Although technically a form of necromancy (the magic of death) most Christians (Messianic Voices included) prefer to think of magic using saints' relics as the magic of the saints, or, better yet, theurgy, the pious and direct channeling of the power of God. Semantic games aside, there are those mages among the Messianic Voices who harbor concerns that magic using relics, including the consecration of grand churches like the Basilica San Marco, is a form of necromancy and somehow wrong or evil. And it troubles them.

There are others who are not so troubled.

Two other sects in Venice also believe that magic using the dead is extremely powerful, and the study of thanatology and of a wide range of necromantic hedge magic is considered a matter of gravest importance to both large families.

The larger and more magically talented of the two families is the Rosselini family. Patrician, pedigreed and noble in their public dealings, the entire family has a pronounced tendency toward hysteria and madness in private. Many supporters (spies, some have said) of the Rosselinis look out for the best interests of the family in exchange for favors; this gives them a great deal of power in Venice proper and an extensive reach throughout the Italian countryside. The Rosselini family is essentially matriarchal and knows its hedge magic and necromancy dangerously well. Hedge magic, to the Rosselini family, is a matter of spectacle and drama. To the Messianic Voices' dismay, the line has even produced a number of true mages. On the bright side, the Rosselinis do not consider themselves enemies of the Church, nor do they know of the existence of the Messianic Voices.

On the other hand, the other large family of necromantic scholars is made up of rich and ruthless merchants with a potent urge for power and a haughty disdain for the Church. This is the Giovanni family.

The mages of Basilica San Marco find the presence of the necromancer families, especially the Giovanni, almost more than they can bear. The repulsive practices of the Rosselinis, the gratuitous perversions of the Giovanni and their blatant use of death magic (made all the stronger by the presence of the cray beneath the city) cry out to the heavens for retribution, but the Voices' resolve is weakened by endless debate on just what kind of necromancy is holy and what kind of necromancy is abominable in the eyes of God. Because they do not want to feel hypocritical, they rarely act.

Although a full-scale confrontation has yet to break out between the Messianic Voices and the Giovanni, skirmishes between the two are commonplace. The only place the mages are safe from the hauntings of malicious ghosts is within the sanctified walls of the basilica. Likewise, the hedge mages of the necromancer families are careful to keep a low profile near the basilica, for fear of being burned by divine fire or other incendiary miracles.

The barely concealed loathing between the Voices and the Giovanni family only worsens as the Giovanni family slowly but surely becomes riddled with the curse of vampirism.

geomantic formulae to block the flow of magic. He was also careful to build the prison far from any crays, shallowings, ley lines or any other geomantic phenomena to make the working of magic as difficult as possible within the Carceri.

Inside, he arranged every element of the Wizard Gaol — angles, building materials and the like — to hinder the flow of magic within the confines of the prison.

Once it was completed, the Carceri Piranesi was a grand edifice, easily the equal of any cathedral of the time. Its enormous stone walls were covered in castellations. The interior of the prison appears to have been designed by a madman, but it was precisely that bizarre design — stairways and halls at odd angles, strange little rooms with seven walls and the like — that made magic so difficult to use inside the Carceri.

Pope John VIII toured the structure upon its completion and wrote that the place "epitomized the notion of a prison as the instrument of retributive justice for acts against Christendom." The Pope later wrote: "While incomprehensible to those of a healthy mind, Piranesi's construct is ideally suited for its grim purpose; the bizarre and seemingly interminable arrangement of stairways and corridors seems to paralyze the vitality of those held within and prevents their foul pagan magics from misleading or threatening all pious Christian folk."

Swords and Hammers

Once the Carceri Piranesi was established, Pope Nicholas was obligated to establish a force of devout soldiers and guards to capture, interrogate and hold prisoners capable of (what he saw as) foul pagan deviltry. He sent a communiqué to all bishops to be alert to the existence of those talented few among the faithful who combined great piety and miraculous power; those faithful were to be sent to him.

The messengers returned, slowly at first, but then with increasing regularity, with reports of "young Christiana who can soothe a troubled soul" or "a young man named Vortoric through whom Our Lord works His more aggressive miracles." Those priests and bishops associated with the Messianic Voices made a concerted effort not to provide the Pope with any mages at all once they learned the details of his plan. Such subjugation of pagan folk, in their eyes, showed blatant disregard for the edict of the scriptures to love thy neighbor, and so they quietly (but respectfully) declined the Pope's request.

In the space of two years, Nicholas had established a force of nearly thirty Christian mages, hedge magicians and possessors of palpable faith to help make his prison for heretics a reality. These he



divided into two factions based on the skills and merits manifested by the individuals.

Gladius Dei — the Sword of God — are the more subtle of the two factions, specializing in magics of the mind and soul. These are, in effect, the Pope's secret police force and interrogators in all matters magical. They investigate known non-Christian mages and, when possible, capture and interrogate them. The interrogations, for the most part, anyway, are not the festivals of torture later made popular by the Spanish Inquisition but serious probings into a mage's mind, his belief system and the workings of his magic.

Pope Nicholas was outraged that young pagan priestesses could perform miracles equal to, or surpassing, those of the Christian saints. Consequently, he commissioned a detailed study of the practices of non-Christian mages. Ironically, the results of these interrogations were themselves called into question years later and quietly swept into the darkest shelf in the Forbidden and Restricted section of the Vatican library.

Gladius Dei spends most of its time and effort investigating accusations of magic use. Unlike the later Inquisition, the Swords do not police belief or even heretical activity but the use of magic in a non-Christian context. Although its jurisdiction technically includes all lands touched by Christianity, Gladius Dei rarely travels far from Rome unless its target is clearly guilty of murder or Infernalism.

The Swords also act as the elite prison guards of Carceri Piranesi. The prisoners are kept quiescent

LIES, GAMES AND BETRAYAL: THE HUMAN SIDE OF HISTORY

Piranesi spent his early life feeling like a hypocrite, a liar and a betrayer. Even as he designed a prison to hold non-Christian wizards, he used the Hermetic tools of geomancy and sacred architecture to make the structure ideally suited for that purpose. Even more troubling to Piranesi was his love for the young man Davido. Although Piranesi was married (more out of obligation and for the sake of appearance than anything) he had been wooing Davido for years, with varying degrees of success.

Davido, for his part, enjoyed playing with Piranesi's affections and, at times, almost returned his affections. It would never work out so simply. Davido was not the naïve young man he appeared. Piranesi was a Christian, but Davido was pagan with a vengeance (a fact he neglected to mention to Piranesi out of convenience) and a student of magic in his own right. Although he was nowhere near the practitioner of magic that Piranesi was, what he lacked in magical talent he made up for in beauty and cunning. One need not practice magic if one has a wizard at his beck and call.

The upshot of all this was simple: while Piranesi shared his accounts of designing the Carceri with a simple village youth, he effectively gave all the secrets of his creation to the one who would pass them along to a loose network of mages who would undermine the effectiveness of the magician's prison for the duration of its existence.

The six-year romance between Piranesi and Davido ended shortly after the Carceri was built. Not only was Piranesi its architect, but also its first inmate. Pope John VIII, learning through Gladius Dei that Piranesi was a magician, had him confined to the prison he designed just in case his Hermetic loyalties ever won over his Christian ones. It was the Pope's rationale that if a prison can hold its designer, it could hold anyone.

And it would have, had a cabal of outraged Hermetics, alerted by Davido, not launched a raid on the fortress to rescue the imprisoned architect.

His trust betrayed, the brilliant architect renounced the Church, went underground and relocated to Baghdad (and later still, Marrakesh), where he openly took a male lover and furthered his studies of sacred architecture among the less dogmatic (and less perfidious) Arabs.

Before his death in the late 18th century (in Rome, ironically), Piranesi published his architectural papers, including his carefully preserved sketches of the prison that bore his name.

Throughout its existence, the Carceri had a mixed reputation for keeping its prisoners incarcerated. Those imprisoned within were at an immense disadvantage for working magic (though it wasn't impossible), and without outside assistance, all but the most powerful mages were likely to rot there. That said, it was not difficult for a cabal of mages to rescue a fellow from without. Thus, those mages who were well connected and well thought of were rescued, whereas secretive or reclusive mages who treated magic as some form of solitary vice (as Infernalists typically did, for example) frequently spent their last years in the hellish confines of the papal Wizard Gaol.

When, in later days, the prison was repeatedly breached (thanks to the information supplied by Davido), John VIII felt (wrongly) that his suspicions regarding Piranesi's loyalties had been well founded after all.

For his part, once he spread word of Carceri Piranesi, Davido conceded Italy to the Christians and went west, where he ultimately became one of the great mages of the pagan sect called the Old Faith.

SYSTEMS

The net effect of Piranesi's bizarre walk ways, circular stairways and stone walls is to block and stifle the flow of ambient magical energy, called Quintessence.

Those outside the Carceri are free to use what magics they've mastered, but getting close enough to the stone walls to have any effect is another matter. The sprawling building is situated on a hill in a relatively dry and rocky region of the Apennine Mountains northeast of Rome. Its location affords a phenomenal view of the surrounding territory, and there are no trees to hide the advance of wizards. All three levels of the Umbra are relatively deserted here; the world around the Carceri resonates with an energy that doesn't appeal to either spirits or ghosts, and the Gauntlet is relatively thick (for wilderness, anyway).

A mage who does not bring his own supply of Quintessence in some way will be at a distinct disadvantage. Inside the Carceri Piranesi, all magic rolls are made at +3 difficulty. The Gladius Dei are able to work their own forms of miracle magic largely because they keep large quantities of Tass (in the form of holy water, which they can drink to gain its stored Quintessence) on their persons for this purpose.

There is one group of mages who do not find themselves at any particular disadvantage in the Carceri Piranesi: the Ahl-i-Batin who practice Al-Hajj (though whether the Swords have discovered this yet in any given chronicle is up the Storyteller). For whatever reason, the strange magic of the Saracen viziers seems to suffer very little from the Carceri's bizarre architecture. Although Batini immunity may appear to be an advantage, once the Swords realize the situation, they'll interpret it as just one more way in which the Saracens are abhorrent in the eyes of the Lord and worthy only of a quick death.

with calming magics, herbal potions or through whatever other means prove necessary; those mages who can work magic with only their words, for example, are kept bound and gagged, whereas those who work magic through dancing are kept strapped to a board.

The Malleus Dei — the Hammer of God — are those with the ability to work more bluntly powerful miracles, a necessary requirement, since the Hammers have a more aggressive role in the Pope's grand plan. It is they who are expected to take errant or heretical mages into custody when the Swords' investigations deem it necessary.

Except among the most overzealous, it is not considered a great blessing to wind up among the Hammers. Attempting to remove an unwilling mage from his or her sanctum is generally a fairly reliable way to find Heaven the hard way. The Hammers, therefore, wait until their target leaves his sanctum before springing their trap, relying on surprise and superior numbers (10 to 1, generally) to make a capture successful.

Sword and Hammer Magic

Gladius Dei and Malleus Dei lump together all manner of supernaturally gifted folk with no regard to the origins of these powers. Some are simply astute folk knowledgeable in the paths of hedge magic, others have powerful levels of True Faith (for more, see **Dark Ages: Vampire**) and others are true mages bending reality itself through angelic magic. Mages encountering the Swords or the Hammers, consequently, will have no idea what to expect. A conflict between the two groups could result in the players fighting against soldiers outfitted with weapons forged by a powerful enchanter or they might be assailed by a legion of wrathful angels. One thing is clear: neither the members of Gladius Dei nor those of Malleus Dei were chosen for their humble piety; they were chosen to act as the enforcers of the divine will and their abilities are appropriate to that calling.

Exotic Araby

The learned European has two clashing notions of Arabia. It is simultaneously a place of sweet perfumes and exotic spices and the homeland of the hated Saracens.

In the Dark Medieval, the lands controlled by the Muslims (including the southern portion of the Iberian Peninsula) are the last bastions of science and learning. Whereas math and science have been forsaken by the largely barbaric Europeans, they are topics of particular interest to the Arab world, and it shows. During Europe's Dark Ages and Medieval period, the Islamic world is in the midst of its Golden Age of reason.

Elsewhere in Arabia, however, there is no sign of a Golden Age, only a shadow that reaches out of the past to haunt the present.

The Foul Cities

Arabia is haunted by her past. From A.D. 100 to 756, a dynasty of Infernalist mages thrived in the burning sands of Arabia and Persia. These thralls to demons built decadent and repulsive cities arrayed

around great black temples to the gods of filth, plague, pain and decay. The best known of these cities, and the last to fall, was called the Oasis of Eternal Bliss (see below) but it is not the only such corrupted place. At their height, around the year 600, there were as many as thirteen of these hives of abomination, and so much as speaking the name of such a place — Admah the Poison Well, Arraka the Golden Pit, Bhat, the Flesh Gates of Kyphon, Hel'jibb the Unforgiving, Zeboim of the Cankered Whores, the Bleeding Isle of Zughb — could chill the blood of folk who had heard of the deeds that took place there.

Evil in all its forms — malice, torture, excess — are what these cities are known for now. At the time they were also known for something else: their vast wealth. These cities were strategically placed along commercial routes through the desert, and travelers and tradesmen were frequently inclined to stay and watch torture pageants and competitions of sexual excess as though they were common public entertainment. Many of these travelers became desensitized to the horror and in time, became so comfortable with torment, perversion and horror that they moved to the city and established their own place in the dark spectacle.

Vampires, minor demons and dark spirits of all descriptions were welcome and honored guests in the Foul Cities. Those with the most disturbing reputations were treated as nobles and fed until bloated.

Great libraries were also assembled in these cities, and their archives cataloged the many names of agony. Obsessed monks, dark and zealous scholars of knowledge that should not be known, copied liturgies to the great demons and formulae for binding the souls of the dead, then bound these dark grimoires in the smooth and pliable skin of children. These books — with titles to fearsome too be spoken — originated in the Foul Cities and spread throughout the known world to become the basic lore of Infernalism.

Knowing that their grand game couldn't last forever, the Devil-Kings dug catacombs and vaults beneath the sand to store their dark libraries, and though the great and terrible citadels fell, those secret repositories of dark lore were not destroyed. They remain beneath the sand, protected by old magic and twisted, evil spirits.

With the increase in the population throughout the known world, it is impossible that those places will remain undiscovered. When something wants to be found this badly, it gets found and the spirits set to guard these places have a knack for drawing to them just the right people — the innocent, the eager and the damned.

The Oasis of Eternal Bliss

4th-level Cray

Of the Foul Cities, one stood out more than any other as a place of utter corruption. Deep in the Arabian desert exists a place called the Oasis of Eternal Bliss where, for over six hundred years, the filthy Devil-Kings made sport of the excruciating suffering of others. Although the Ahl-i-Batin and other desert mages finally annihilated al-Malek al-Majun ibn Iblis, the last of the Devil Kings, in 756, the wound left in the Umbra by the foulest of the Foul Cities was not tended and the ground remains as desecrated as any in the known world.

By the Dark Medieval period, all that remains of the Oasis of Eternal Bliss — in the physical world, anyway — is a vast plain of smooth, sun-blasted obsidian, mute testament to the fury of the magical battle that finally ended the dynasty of the Devil-Kings.

Although one would expect sand to accumulate on the smooth surface of the glass and hide the enormous black scar on the landscape, it does not, as though even the grains of sand fear its contamination.

By day, the heat of the sun makes the obsidian slab hot enough to char skin. The heat causes the air to shimmer, and some say that the resultant mirage looks like a great, dark city...

By moonlight, the obsidian mirror casts dark reflections of anyone looking at it too closely. The desert nomads go several miles out of their way to avoid the Oasis of Eternal Bliss, especially at night. They say that those who gaze at their reflection in the obsidian mirror fall in, and even those who make it back out are never the same.

A mage looking into the Umbra doesn't see the desert at all but a city of black stone populated by a throng of the foulest spirits.

The glass slab was that city for nearly 700 years, and the powerful emotions and lakes of blood that poured from the city corrupted the very essence of the Umbra for miles around. And thus, even though the great temple city of the demons was destroyed nearly four hundred years before the Dark Medieval period, in the spirit world it remains all that it ever was.

Greece and the Aegean: Fallen Empires

In the Dark Medieval period, Greece, the true cradle of Roman (and thus European) culture, is but a shadow of its former self. The once great temples of Athens — among them the Aereopagus and the Parthenon — and the colonnaded civic buildings of the enlightened ancient Greeks stand only as reminders of an age of lost greatness.

All the same, Greece was the land of the great god Hermes, the messenger god, the god of communication and symbolism, the god who provided the wisdom that eventually resulted in the founding of the wizardly order that took his name. In all the ancient world, only Egypt (Alexandria in particular) rivals Greece as the founding place of European magic.

But not all Greek magic is the male-dominated ceremonial magic of the Hermetics. On the contrary, there are some places in the Aegean where male willworkers are the exception to the rule.

The Island of the Amazons

In 329 B.C., Alexander the Great overwhelmed and sacked a city in retribution for not paying tribute to him. Although the act was not remarkable in itself (he sacked many cities for similar reasons), what made this city noteworthy is that it was populated only by women. The city was called Themiskyra, and the women were the fierce Amazon warriors of legend.

Relentless warriors that they were, few Amazons survived the sacking of their city. Most died in the battle, others killed themselves rather than be raped and sold into slavery. The few survivors, however, vowed to recreate their city.

The refugees went underground in the cities of Greece and Rome. For generations, they remained a secret sisterhood, almost always with the assistance of magic. Finally, somewhere around A.D. 10, the sisterhood felt they had enough recruits to found a new Amazon city.

The Amazon city of New Themiskyra sits on a rocky island located off the coast of Greece. The New Themiskyran community comprises the great-granddaughters of the city's founders as well as the brightest and most independent women culled from lands as far away as Ireland.

Every woman works at the things she does best. Those who like animals tend to the goats and sheep, and those who are good at the loom make cloth. A few times a year, small bands of ten to fifteen sisters sail to the mainland and journey through Europe looking for bright and capable young women to join the Amazons. Every woman in the city is expected to go on such recruiting missions at least once every few years. The state of the domesticated women of Europe appalls the Amazons; to them it looks like slavery of the worst sort. The women chosen by the Amazons are frequently freed from situations that modern standards would call abusive, but such was the lot of women in the Dark Medieval period.

The Amazons' manner of recruitment in some of these lands occasionally causes problems. Timid women who change their minds after agreeing to meet the band of Amazons outside the town or husbands who secretly follow their fleeing wives tell of covens of strange and powerful women out to steal away daughters and wives. More than once such allegations resulted in charges of witchcraft (though until Pope Gregory IX decrees that heresy is to be punished by death and establishes the

THE COSMOLOGY OF SPIRITUAL POLLUTION

It is one of the foundational principles of spirit magic that the world of spirit and the world of matter reflect each other. Although it takes a long time and a powerful emotional charge to completely warp the Umbral reflection of a place, it can happen, and once it does, the tainted Umbra is always trying to pull the physical world back into line with its spiritual reflection. Typically, the world of spirit affects the material world only indirectly by shaping the dreams and ideas of those in the material world. But it doesn't always work that way.

Once or twice a millennium, a locale is the site of such torment and sheer evil that the Umbral landscape becomes saturated with so much blood and horror that it spews echoes back through the Gauntlet.

In the case of the Oasis of Eternal Bliss, the Umbra is swarming with foul and demonic spirits (called Banes by some). These spirits try to bring the physical world back into line with the spiritual world by attracting to that place creatures that will return it to the way it was: a hellhole of sadism, torture and slow death. The Oasis is pulling to itself elements that will help the physical world conform to the spiritual template that has been established: evil mages, evil werewolves, evil mortals, evil vampires. Evil spirits and ghosts. You get the idea.

It doesn't help that the Oasis is located on a powerful cray. Potent magical energies well up here, keeping the Gauntlet so weak that spirits and demons can sometimes just ram their way through the thin membrane into the physical world. For that reason, the desert for miles around the obsidian slab is filled with abominations and unclean things, and even some of the smaller towns on the edge of the desert have had to build walls to protect their inhabitants from the things that wander out of the sands.

Until the spiritual landscape is healed, the Oasis of Eternal Bliss will continue to act on the physical world until the connection between them is severed (making the Gauntlet impassable) or the spiritual taint is somehow healed.

Papal Inquisition in 1231, such accusations rarely amount to much).

Generally, there was very little a Dark Medieval town could do against a band of ten Amazons — torches and hoes make weak weapons when confronting a band of warrior witches — but sometimes the young woman the Amazons were rescuing turned out to be the daughter, wife or even ghoul of someone with enough power to be a dangerous adversary.

The recruitment effort is more than adequate to keep the population of New Themiskyra hovering around five hundred, but those women inclined to procreate are encouraged to do so in order to help regenerate the population. The woman makes the journey to the mainland where she seeks out a man (or men) with the requisite strength and intellect and, after a month of passion, she returns to New Themiskyra for the duration of her pregnancy. Children are reared on the island, but boys are taken to the mainland and given to their fathers or other foster parents when they are five.

Although all the women of the city are highly capable, the strength of New Themiskyra is in its mages and shapeshifters. Two powerful lineages of witches and one all-female tribe of werewolves are strongly represented among the Amazons and give the women guidance in both warfare and spiritual matters.

The Amazons are neither strangers to supernatural events nor are they bothered by them. In part, this is because such occurrences are relatively common, and magic is considered a healthy and normal facet of this life — in contrast to the male-dominated mainland, where dogma and excess are given prominence over pragmatism and balance.

The Amazons' Secret Weapons

Three quarters of the women of New Themiskyra are mortal women carefully chosen for their intelligence and fighting ability. The other quarter of the Amazon population comprises women from two powerful witch sects and members of an all-woman werewolf tribe.

The Adessi Stregae: As members of the Old Faith who pay homage to the Crone aspect of the Great Goddess — most commonly Hecate — the Adessi Stregae are skilled in scrying, cursing and weather manipulation. Their understanding of magic focuses on the extremes — the seasons of Summer and Winter, fire and ice, cacophony and silence. Some among the Adessi put even the Hermetics to shame with their skillful (and highly lethal) use of fire magic, and it is largely through the storm-brewing efforts of the Adessi that the island remains undiscovered. Women of the Adessi Stregae are trained only in martial arts until the age of 20, and only then are they considered knowledgeable, stable and powerful enough to learn and effectively use the lethal arts of Adessi witchcraft.

Because of the focus of their training, the Adessi Stregae get a -1 modifier to the difficulty of all Summer and Winter extended magic effects and a +1 modifier for extended Spring and Fall effects.

Hippolytics: More concerned with peace than with war, the Hippolytics emphasize the use of magic for healing and agricultural purposes. The Hippolytics use their subtle (but indisputably powerful) magics to keep the fields of the Amazons producing, even in cold or rainy years, and to assure that every sister has

FEMINISM BEFORE FEMINISM

The Dark Medieval world is perhaps the grimmest time for women in all of European history. Although the misogyny of the Church has yet to reach its full expression in the witch-hunts, women are thought of as little more than property, domestic laborers or breeding stock. Those with an obvious intellect are considered suspicious and it is assumed that they are probably witches. The literature of the time (written by men) portrays women as faithless, scheming whores.

It would boggle the mind of every man alive (and most of the peasant women) to know that on an island in the Aegean Sea is a small city of female warrior-scholars, where loyalty and sisterhood are considered among the greatest virtues and where the least educated woman is likely to know more than any male peasant on the continent.

The worldview of the Amazons, then, is at complete odds with the worldview of essentially all of Europe in the Dark Medieval period. Whereas women of the mainland might occasionally dream about leaving the men who use and subjugate them, the concept of actually having the freedom to do so is terrifying to many.

Given such basic differences, conflicts almost inevitably arise between mainland men and Amazons on their recruiting missions because the Amazons don't know their place, according to mainland rules. The men often react with knee-jerk violence, and by the end of such encounters, they usually have a few bruises, possibly a few broken bones, and, in all likelihood, a different perspective on the so-called weaker sex.

a long and healthy life. The Hippolytics revere the Goddess in Her maternal and nurturing phase, most commonly Demeter. There isn't one among the Hippolytics who couldn't deliver a baby in her sleep or brew a willow bark potion with one hand tied behind her back. The powerful nature of Hippolytic magic comes from the fact that it is nearly always done as part of a group working. Although the magic of the Hippolytics may not be flashy, it can sway the hand of Nature herself.

The Black Furies: The Amazon werewolves taught combat skills and proper spirit dealings to their sisters. While all Amazons are taught martial arts and weapon skills from age nine, the Furies are undoubtedly the backbone of the Amazon's fighting force, and New Themiskyra is, in many ways, a homeland for the Furies. The primordial spirit gifts of the werewolves gives the Furies access to potent abilities in battle and tools for dealing with the spirit world.

As the world becomes more densely populated, it's proving increasingly difficult to keep New Themiskyra from the eyes of men. Although neither the werewolves nor the Adessi Stregae have any qualms about killing, the rest of the women would rather find other ways of maintaining the security of their city.

The Bull Maze of Crete

3rd-level Cray

Hermetics (and possibly other mages with some degree of academic prowess) might know the tale of the Minotaur from the stories of the Greeks. The great Athenian architect Daedalus designed a vast labyrinth and, at the direction of the king, constructed the maze beneath the palace at Knossos. At the center of the maze lived the Minotaur, a terrible man-eating creature, half-bull and half-man, that devoured seven young men and seven young women every year.

In later years, the Minotaur was said to have been killed by Theseus, lover of the king's daughter Ariadne.

Although none of this is literal, nearly all of it is true. The Minotaur, however, abides.

The Bull Maze of Crete (also known as the Labyrinth of Knossos, or the Cretan labyrinth) is also a fairly potent cray. The tales and traditions surrounding it are also among the most complicated and byzantine, in the way that only deeply symbolic and semi-religious mystical thought can be (not unlike the web of interconnected symbolism and connections made in the modern world by the Hermetics' spin-off organization, the Masons).

Esoteric metaphysics aside, there are two things that are certain: the Bull Maze exists, as does a powerful Umbrood — called the Minotaur — at the labyrinth's center. Three levels of the maze exist wholly in the physical world. Four additional levels of the maze (two above and two below) exist in a semi-Umbral pocket space accessible only to those with the right magic or those with other similar spiritual awareness (the Changing Breeds perceive all seven layers of the labyrinth as well, though vampires and ghosts do not).

The Minotaur itself, combining animal and human qualities, is a spirit of aggressive and unmitigated masculine sexuality. It is a spiritual manifestation of power, violence, fertility and indomitable will all fused into one. Like the nature god Pan, the Minotaur is pansexual and insatiable and beyond the range of such simplistic constructs as good and evil. Although the Minotaur does not leave the Bull Maze, those who enter the labyrinth are subject to his forceful appetites. But by making a sacrifice of themselves, mages who do so are opened up to new understandings and are prone to experience certain penetrating insights into the nature of magic.

Some members of the loosely aligned Greek faction of the Old Faith sometimes enter the Bull Maze to gain insights into magic, sexuality and the confluence of those two things. Many of these mages make the pilgrimage to the Bull Maze and offer themselves to the Minotaur when they want to increase their understanding of magic dealing with sex, healing or shape-changing.

Mysteries of the Great Bull

The bull was sacred to Minoan culture, as it was to many other religions at the time. In part, the bull's religious symbolism dates back to the time of the Apis, the legendary race of bull-men who tended to humanity and acted as guides to human relationships.

The bull (along with the serpent) was considered one of the animals most connected to the element of earth. Bulls were sacrificed to both Dionysus and Zeus.

The shape of the bull's head is immortalized in the Greek letter Tau (which later found its way into

Ariadne's Thread

Those mages walking the Bull Maze may find (in addition to the Minotaur) lengths of finely spun cord. This is pure Tass and mages can use it to make their magical workings easier.

In addition to the normal bonuses granted by Tass in the working of magic, Ariadne's thread subtracts an additional point from the difficulty of all magics pertaining to direction, healing, sex, crop fertility, physical resilience and the element of earth.

the Latin alphabet and thence into English), in the shape of the capital letter T. The two crossbars of the letter represent the head and horns of Taurus, the Celestial Bull.

The foremost sport on Minos was bull jumping: Participants would enrage a bull and then spring over it in a show of acrobatic skill when the bull charged. Those with skill were celebrated as the favored of the gods; those without skill died horribly.

The mysteries of the Great Bull combine all this lore, along with the sacred geometrical patterns in the Bull Maze and the complex and interwoven myths of the Minotaur, Theseus, Ariadne, Daedalus and Dionysus to form a vast network of symbolic references that cloak fundamental mystic principles. Any Hermetic mage or wizard who learned magic in or near Greece is likely to be well aware of the Bull Maze of Crete as a pivotal and sacred element in a complex web of magical metaphysics. So basic and all-pervasive are the mysteries of the Great Bull to mages in that portion of the world that some willworkers may base their entire practice of magic on its complexities. For such mages, a pilgrimage to Crete to walk the Bull Maze is almost *de rigeur*.

The Sunken City

Somewhere off the coast of Europe (sources vary, but many seem to suggest the Mediterranean Sea) lies an island that once contained a vast city and an enlightened populace. The city has gone by many names, but the one immortalized in the accounts of the ancient Greek scholars is Atlantis.

The old tales indicate that the citizens of the sunken city (widely held by Hermetics to be somewhere in the Aegean, although others claim it is beyond the Pillars of Hercules — the rocks of Gibraltar) were wise men and scholars and that they had raised the study of magic to new heights. Their city was founded on the principles of willworking and served as a haven for all those capable of magical working. The city is described as one of incomparable beauty and comfort. By all accounts, it surpassed all seven of the wonders of the world in magnitude, brilliance and beauty. Orderly and systematic feats of magic made the city a delight to live in. All accounts describe the vast temple to the Atlanteans' strange primordial sea god — with its unparalleled (if bizarre) statuary, enormous pillars of gilded marble and basalt and vast enclosed area — as nothing short of miraculous.

On the cause of the fall of Atlantis, few of the rare surviving sources agree. Some accounts claim that the capricious sea god worshiped by the Atlanteans was, in fact, a powerful oceanic titan or devil who destroyed its worshippers in a cataclysmic fit of pique or malice. Others claim a simple earthquake laid the city low.

Most surviving sources suggest that the Atlanteans offended their god with an act of magic so hubristic as to be intolerable.

These chronicles of the tragedy state that the Atlanteans grew so arrogant with the power they commanded that they attempted an unchronicled mass magical working of unprecedented magnitude. Their will was focused and their skills undeniable, but reality can only be reconfigured so far, and their great working not only failed but backfired with cataclysmic results. The island city, its exquisite architecture, its sprawling gardens and multi-tiered temple plunged beneath the waves. Then, water swept in and wiped away all trace of Atlantis from the surface world.

Mages of such skill and potency do not die easily, obviously, and a sizable minority escaped through the use of their Arts. These survivors, unable to find any city on the mainland where knowledge and magic were as respected as they were in Atlantis, wound up in the great cities of the day: Babylon or Mycenae in all likelihood, where they told the scholars and chroniclers of the age of their misfortune and passed on their knowledge of the magical arts at whatever collegia would have them. For centuries, the label "refugee from Atlantis" referred either to a mage or an exceptionally wise scholar, but with the fall of the great centers of civilization and learning that ushered in the Dark Ages, the term passed into disuse and was forgotten.

Banished from the surface, the sunken city became home to fish, kelpies and sea folk. In the centuries that followed, as the oceanic currents washed the stain of magic from the island's cracked pillars and foundational basalt, it rose until most of the great city, and the temple at its heart, now stands above the waves.

The ruins show clear signs of wear and their time beneath the waves. Seawater corroded whatever was made of bronze or the other metals of the age; these items largely exist only as green and flaking hints of their former selves, though many still contain gemstones that remain untouched by time.

Dried barnacles and papery seaweed mar the enormous temple to the Atlanteans' strange primordial sea god, but nearly all of the structures on the island were alchemically tempered and reinforced by their wizardly architects and are not easily destroyed. Some of the beauty of fabled Atlantis is gone, and some of it has been strangely enhanced, but the city overall remains as magnificent and awe-inspiring as ever.

Of particular interest to those mages fortunate enough to find the sunken city is the library of Atlantis. Within its vast chambers are thousands of ancient books, magically immune to rot or tearing. To the denizens of the Dark Ages, such a sight is unprecedented and more than a little intimidating. With no way of making more than one book at a time, the few books that exist in Europe must all be painstakingly copied by hand, and only the Church has the resources necessary to maintain even small libraries. Especially one of this extent, for a library to exist unbeholden to the Church and its dogma is unheard of. For such a library to be brimming with the pagan wisdom of antiquity is mind-boggling. Hermetics, in particular, will find the books here an infinitely precious asset — those they can read, at least. Many of the books on these shelves are in languages that even the wisest Hermetic has never seen before: cuneiform, linear B, or perhaps Chinese. The only other problem is that there is no comprehensible order to the books. Whatever device or system the Atlanteans used to bring order to their knowledge has been lost or destroyed, and without that device in place, mages can do nothing but wander the aisles, glancing through tome after tome, looking for languages that appear vaguely familiar.

The sunken city, now ironically misnamed, has a haunted feel to it these days. Something about its wide streets, disturbing statuary and temple courtyards still resounds in the soul like an echo in a lonely place. The tallest spire rising above the ruined temple was once a lighthouse of sorts, a vastly powerful spirit beacon designed to alert the mages of the age to the existence of a city where knowledge and magic guided the people. Powered by the wellspring of magical energy beneath the island, the beacon remains, shining its silent summons through the vast distances of spirit world. The beacon's beam strikes any sensitive willworker with a yearning that has grown more powerful with time. A mage hit by the beam will feel it as an almost overpowering sense of loss and sadness, and all but the coldest will break down in tears they can't explain. Those so affected know only that there's a place far off the coast that they desperately want to go.

Because of the library, the Astral Realm in the vicinity of the sunken city is unusually busy for the Dark Ages. Concepts and magical formulae lost elsewhere linger in the Atlantean spiritscape, waiting to be discovered once more by mages capable of understanding them. Those mages with the ability to speak with spirits may even be able to find spirits



capable of translating some of the tomes in the sunken city's vast library, although the spirit is likely to ask a high price for such a grueling task.

There have been idealistic mages who, drawn by the island's beacon, aspire to creating a colony of willworkers there. Such attempts have always ended poorly. The island, exposed as it has been to strange magics, is not well anchored in the physical world and it flickers out of the real world on occasion. Some claim that strange fish-headed gods of the spirit deeps laid claim to the island while it was beneath the water. In his writings on Atlantis, Plato described it as a temple city to Poseidon, but the enormous statue of the cephalopod-headed deity that now stands in the temple bears no resemblance to any sea god humans (sane ones, anyway) have ever worshiped.

Mages who have lingered too long in the Sunken City have told of hordes of scaled and spined fishmen, with piscine lips and bulging eyes, who have swarmed up out of the water and attacked (and, in many cases, devoured) those who tarry more than a day or two on the accursed island.

Apart from Atlantis, two more lost island civilizations may exist. Islands called Mu and Lemuria are mentioned in scrolls preserved from the destruction of the Library of Alexandria, but in both of those cases, the task of separating fact from myth has thus far been greater than any mage could overcome.

The Umbra

Beyond the mortal sphere there is a place where the spirits of the natural world hold sway, where concepts in the human mind assume a life and form of their own, a place of nature, magic and, predominantly, spirit. Mages call this place the Umbra, a word from the Latin meaning shadow, but whether the spirit world is the shadow of the physical world or vice versa is the subject of much magely speculation and debate.

The Umbra and its realms transcend the boundaries of nature and the human mind. Here is where dreams and concepts are made manifest, the place where the dead linger on after doffing their fleshly vessels and where memories reside. All things may be found in the Umbra.

Predominantly, the Umbra is a realm of pure spirit where the laws of the physical world play no part. It exists parallel to the quotidian world, but it may be entered by those who know of its existence (predominantly the Spirit-Talkers) and by those who possess the will and magical talent to do so.

Those who practice magic are able to access the spirit world through a variety of methods. Powerful mages adept in the spirit arts simply transform themselves into ephemera, the stuff of spirit. In the Dark Ages, few mages are capable of such blunt manifestations of raw power. Most Hermetic willworkers have to settle for projecting their consciousness into the spirit realm where it floats, guided by the mage's will but often at the mercy of the Umbral winds.

The Umbra appeals to mages for myriad reasons, and it is a danger to them for countless more. The spirits that reside there should not be underestimated; they can be quite dangerous to the mage on a physical level. Furthermore, the Umbra and its denizens can pose other threats, not only to the willworker's life but to his sanity and his immortal soul as well.

The Dark Ages present no great and pressing reason for mages to turn from the material world to the Umbra. Magic is everywhere; it has yet to begin its long decline.

At the very top of the list of spirit world wonders and terrors for most mages are the strange and exotic beings that reside there, the ones willworkers call Umbrood.

Umbrood

Any non-human creature born outside the material realm is referred to as Umbrood, an all-encompassing term for both the spirits that populate the Umbra and any of the inhabitants of otherworlds. Elementals, gods and djinn are all different kinds of Umbrood.

It should be clarified that some Umbral denizens are not spirits in the strictest sense of the word, but creatures of the material world that have taken refuge away from encroaching human society; thus it is possible to find dragons, griffins and, in the Umbral seas, krakens. The wise mage gives these creatures a wide berth. The foolish mage gets eaten.

Dealing with the inhabitants of the Umbra can be the most difficult and dangerous part of venturing into the spirit world. In the Dark Medieval age, an open mind was not considered a virtue; on the contrary, it was considered an invitation to heresy, and even miniscule differences in language, appearance or belief could result in someone being branded a heretic. Exacerbating the situation was the fact that minding your neighbor's business was one of the few entertainments available to the people of the time. On a larger scale, such differences were the impetus for pogroms, war or even Crusades. Among the common folk, conformity was the rule. Although powerful mages might have had the freedom to indulge in flamboyant dress and strange mannerisms, they still existed in a world where everyone else strove to fit in with the neighbors and go unnoticed. Imagine, then, how difficult it would be for

a mage coming of age in such circumstances to deal with Umbrood with vastly different appearances, customs, norms and expectations. Worse (from the mage's perspective, anyway), there is no quick and simple way of determining the power level of a spirit. In the Umbra, a spirit's form is whatever it wants its form to be. A menacing giant can be nothing more than a spirit of ego, whereas a simple snake can be a primordial god of the chthonic world.

Umbrood range in power from those barely capable of causing wind to blow in the material world, to those great Lords and Ladies of the Umbral Courts whose power is nothing short of godlike. A mage who forgets his manners could wind up roasting on a spit in any one of several hells or, at the very least, wind up with a dangerous lifelong nemesis.

Although there is established etiquette for interactions between the inhabitants of the material and spirit worlds, and though most Umbrood are reasonably familiar with it, few mages are. Information does not travel far, fast or well in the Dark Ages, and, in many cases, it may be a moot point as many mages hoard their knowledge, guarding it with a zeal that borders on fanaticism. This is how the wild desert mages of Arabia treat the Solomonic Code that grants them control of powerful djinn. Not only are they disinclined to share that information, but they might try to hunt down and silence anyone else who stumbles upon such lore.

Even if a knowledgeable mage is inclined to share his understanding of Umbrood lore, other than the Order of Hermes there is no institution acting as a clearinghouse for information on interactions with Umbrood. Among the Spirit-Talkers, the wisest in the ways of the spirits, that knowledge passes from master to apprentice and no further.

Consequently, many young or inexperienced mages are forced to reinvent the wheel with regard to spirit dealings, and though many of them are naively willing to assume they'll know what to do when they encounter an Umbrood for the first time, many of them assume wrong and wind up dead (or worse). There *is* a reason, after all, for all the prohibitions on dealing with the spirit world, and primary among them is the fact that, for neophytes at least, it's dangerous.

It is the first rule of survival in visiting the spirit world that the mage must first put aside his pride — a difficult proposition for most willworkers, who are frequently known to fall prey to the vice of arrogance — and deal with every denizen of the Umbra with deference and respect. Even if the mage knows nothing of the protocols of Umbrood interactions, this approach will at least protect him from the worst fates and may even keep him alive and intact.

THE WAY OF THE SHAMAN (AND THE HERMETIC, AND THE VALDAERMAN, AND...)

The subjective experience of crossing the Gauntlet varies radically from mage to mage. A Spirit-Talker entering the land of the spirits will not do so via the same means as a mage from the Order of Hermes, for example, nor will all Umbral Realms be equally accessible to mages following different paths.

The shaman's method of crossing the Gauntlet is more likely to include a lengthy period of fasting, chanting and possibly the consumption of sacred plants (belladonna or monkshood, for example) or certain mushrooms. These may be eaten whole, pulped and held between the teeth and gums, smoked or incorporated into an unguent of some sort and spread on the body. The shaman may need to wait for a spirit guide or she may just commence a journey into a deserted wilderness and watch the material world fade away as the world of spirit takes its place.

A Hermetic, on the other hand, is more likely to stand in his sanctum, within a specially prepared sigil inscribed on the floor as he recites an incantation in Persian or Greek. Once the incantation has been finished or at the peak of the recitation (and the mage will know because his words will have taken on a strange resonance), the mage will make a key gesture of some sort (possibly by using a dagger to channel his will or similar means) and a gateway, visible only to the mage, will open and grant him access to the Umbral Realms. Some Hermetics or Church mages may simply summon angels to take them to their chosen realm, though the protocols of angelic bargaining and control are complex and may present some significant pitfalls for the unlearned or unwise.

Obviously, not all paths of magic will grant access to all kingdoms of the spirit world. Valdaermen can enter the Underworld through near-death experiences, for example, but they have few, if any, techniques for gaining access to the Astral Realm. Likewise, Hermetics have little problem getting to the Astral Realm, but entering the spirit wilds and the land of the dead require a great deal more research and scholarship.

Landless Geography

The Umbra, or most of it, anyway, is not just empty and unchanging ether or simple reflections of the physical worlds with spirits floating through. It is incomprehensibly vast, containing entire worlds and

realms beyond those accessible to the majority of the human populace. Its enormity is a cause for legitimate concern. The Umbra could most accurately be compared to the ocean for sheer vastness. Although Hermetics might stand on the beach and study the fish and tide pool denizens and the Spirit-Talkers might even swim a short distance from the shore, few mages make any but the briefest forays into the Umbra, as it is — at this time — just too vast, uncharted and dangerous to warrant the risk. The Age of Exploration is still three hundred years away, and in the Dark Ages, most people (and, indeed, most mages) would rather partake of the comforts of home and hearth (and possibly library) than subject themselves to the dangers of a long and potentially lethal voyage into *Umbra incognita*.

Entering the Umbra is very like stepping into the ocean in one additional way: The ability to use magic no more allows a mage to voyage comfortably to all of the realms of the Umbra than knowing how to tread water allows a man to swim to China — or to prevent the attempt from killing him. Players and Storytellers would both do well to keep this in mind if their chronicle leaves the material world. The mere thought of entering the world of spirits should send fearful anticipation rippling along the mage's spine. It is partaking of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge. It is trespassing on sacred ground and risking life and limb all rolled neatly into one magical act. To the mages of the Dark Ages, the Umbra is vast and strange and terrifying. They may know some lore about a few of the more common Umbral denizens, and the more adventurous mage may even have once managed to survive a trip to one of the realms (and back, even) but what even the most knowledgeable Hermetic Master or Spirit-Talker knows of the Umbra is just a fraction of a fraction of the vast and incomprehensible world that lies beyond the Gauntlet.

The mages who make a study of such things have noticed that, though the spirit world is large and strangely malleable, there do seem to be certain recognizable features of the Umbra that can be taken for granted.

The Periphery

Not technically part of the spirit world at all, the Periphery is the term given to those physical places where the barrier between the worlds is thin enough that events in the world of spirits can bleed through and be felt by anyone. Mages who have no facility with spirit magic and even Commoners can sometimes make contact with the Umbra while in the Periphery, though commonly only while dreaming or in certain ecstatic or meditative states.

SPIRIT RULES

As creatures of ephemera, Umbrood are not bound by the same laws as creatures of the material world. In game terms, this means they don't have the same stats as the characters.

Spirits have only four Traits: Willpower, Rage, Gnosis and Power.

Willpower is the measure of the spirit's innate determination and drive. This trait takes the place of Dexterity and allows the spirit to move or attack. Hitting a human target is usually difficulty 5.

Difficulty	Action
3	Very simple
5	Simple
6	Normal
8	Difficult
10	Nearly impossible

Rage, measured on a scale of 1 to 10, measures raw anger and provides the spirit with means to inflict harm on both material and ephemeral targets. Each success on a Rage roll (difficulty 6) allows the spirit to inflict one health level of damage on a material being or remove one Power point from another Umbrood.

Gnosis is a spirit's degree of enlightenment. It is the Umbrood's replacement for Social and Mental traits. As Gnosis ranges from 1 to 10, spirits can be very charismatic or intelligent.

Power reflects the strength of the Umbrood's pattern and its innate reserves of mystical power. A weak spirit may have a Power of 20, whereas an old and powerful lord of an elemental realm may have a Power rating in excess of 100.

Umbrood have access to a wide range of spirit powers called Charms that are detailed in Chapter Six. A minor nature spirit may have access to two or three minor Charms while a djini caliph will have a long list of powers, attacks and the like at his command, some of which might be unique to him or particular to the race of djinn.

The Gauntlet

Separating the quotidian material world from the fabulous world of spirit is a barrier thinner than a bubble but impossible to breach without the use of potent magic. Willworkers commonly refer to this barrier as the Gauntlet.

The Gauntlet is not uniformly thick everywhere. There are places where it is thicker, making all traffic with the spirit world more difficult, and there are places where the Gauntlet is thin or even non-

Place	Gauntlet Rating
Busy marketplace	8
Private home	6
Wilderness	5
Stonehenge	3

The ratings above reflect the Gauntlet rating during the day. The Gauntlet rating of a place is generally (but not always) a point or two lower at night.

existent, making contact with the spirit world dangerously simple.

As a general rule, the more people who pass through a place, the stronger the Gauntlet is. The very presence of the masses of humanity sucks away the spiritual energy of a place and causes the Gauntlet to thicken, like a callus. On the other hand, in those quiet, sacred places where spiritual energy is recognized, revered and tended — sacred groves, powerful crays, sanctified churches and the like — the Gauntlet may be uncommonly low as a matter of course and it may, during certain spiritually charged sacred festivals or holy days, dissolve entirely.

The thickness of the gauntlet varies over the course of the day as well. In general, it is thickest in early afternoon and thinnest by night, but the Gauntlet will be thinner yet during certain mystic or sacred times: holy days, during the alignment of certain celestial bodies, and at certain liminal times — the time between official temporal designations. Midnight is a powerful ceremonial time because it is the hairline fracture between days when, for just a splinter of a moment, yesterday is gone and tomorrow hasn't quite yet arrived. In that shadow of a moment between times, the Gauntlet might dissolve for an instant and let through almost anything.

Shallowings

Not as much a place as a state of being that may occasionally affect a particular locale, shallowings are rare convergences of time and place in which, for any number of potential reasons, the Gauntlet temporarily dissolves, allowing traffic to flow freely between the world of spirit and the world of matter. When a shallowing is in effect, anyone, mage or not, can pass into the Umbra. Likewise, any manner of Umbrood might also pass into our world (and cause all sorts of mayhem in the process). Some mages use shallowings as their means of accessing the spirit lands, but such practices are risky unless the mage knows exactly when and where the shallowing will occur again and allow him to cross back. Although getting trapped in the Umbra is one way for a mage



to take a crash course in the spirit world, it's more likely to result in death than enlightenment.

Many tales of Commoners entering the kingdoms of the faeries are the result of their wandering into a shallowing and, surprisingly, living to tell the tale.

The Penumbra

Just on the other side of the Gauntlet is the spiritual reflection of the material world. It is the reflection of our world as viewed through a lens of spirit. The Penumbra reflects the resonance of a place and reveals its essence for anyone to see. A place that has absorbed a great deal of horror — a battlefield, for example — may appear fine in the material world, possibly even lush with the tall grasses that have been glutted with blood. The Penumbral reflection of that place, however, will be stained in some way; the intensity of that stain depends on how horrible the event was and how long the place has had to recover. As a general rule, natural settings recover relatively quickly from even the most intensely traumatic emotional impressions as the natural processes of the spirit world cause the emotional stain to fade. Manmade settings, however, insulated as they are from the cycles of nature, can hold on to an emotional charge for a very long time, resulting in some buildings being haunted and staying that way for years.

It must be noted that the Penumbra reflects more than just horror. A home containing a happy family with many plump, healthy children may glow with the warm aura of security. A hidden glen often used by lovers may, in contrast, take on an erotic charge palpable to those walking through the Penumbral reflection of the place, and the breeze blowing through it may sound a bit like moans of ecstasy.

Likewise, places can be marked by more than one spiritual impression. A home where an entire family resided happily before being wiped out by a plague can have a mixed and disturbing spiritual resonance that radiates both joy and sickness. Such places can be very confusing and disturbing to those sensitive to the vibrations of the spiritual world, and they are frequently shunned.

Occasionally, the mage in the Penumbra perceives the world through the lens of his own soul. His impressions are crystal clear, but the mage's beliefs, philosophies and history all alter his experience of the Penumbral world. A cathedral, for example, experienced by a member of the Messianic Voices might appear to possess a comforting radiance and he may hear the sound of wings or a chorus coming from within; that same cathedral, however, perceived by one of the pagan mages, may seem noteworthy or extraordinary only for the amount of effort that was invested in its construction, or it may even seem malevolent and menacing, surrounded by the noise of distant Crusader horns. It is usually only very opinionated mages who experience this phenomenon, but all mages might notice a bit of distortion from time to time, depending on their emotional state and frame of mind as they pass through the Umbral landscape.

The Storyteller should feel free to give unusually vivid sensory descriptions of those places in the Penumbra that resonate strongly with a particular emotion.

The Dark Umbra

The Umbra, by and large, is a place of wonder and mystery where mages can count on being surprised by whatever they find. There are some places, however, that have reputations potent enough to make their way into the consciousness of even the densest willworker. Most mages figure out early on, for example, to avoid the cold and dismal land of the dead. This grim place is the realm of the dead, specifically those dead who are unable to find peace after death. These forlorn spirits reside in a world that resembles a colder, twilit version of our own, ravaged by rot and decay. However dreary the world of 13th century Europe is, the Underworld is orders of magnitude worse.

The lore of the Underworld makes one thing quite clear: The Underworld is for those who are dead — or those who wish to be.

Although there are mages who make a point of visiting the realms of the dead (notably the somewhat morbid Valdaermen of Scandinavia and some of the mages of the exotic east), unless there is dire need to learn the secrets of the dead, most mages are better off avoiding the afterworld. More than one willworker intending to make a brief foray into the lands of the dead has met his fate there and become, himself, one of the dead, forced to dwell among the other lost souls — without the benefits of magic.

There are many reasons for mage to avoid the lands of the dead, among the most serious of which is that magic does not always work there the way it does in the material world. In particular, those magics that call upon the power of death or decay are known to backfire in horrible and gruesome ways.

The foolhardy mage who opts to visit the lands of the dead would be well advised to travel incognito. All but the oldest ghosts in the Underworld are likely to have pressing business to attend to in the lands of the living: spouses or children to communicate with, unfinished business that needs doing, and, of course, the occasional act of revenge. Once a mage is found out, ghosts will swarm to him offering

anything and everything if the mage will just do one little favor for them in the living lands. Although this may have the occasional benefit (contacts in the afterworld can be quite valuable at times), it's more likely to be a recipe for trouble. The forces that preside over the lands of the dead do not approve of traffic between the living and the dead, and if they discover a mage acting as an agent for a ghost, there's likely to be Hell to pay. *Caveat magus.*

The Shadowlands

A rotted reflection of the living world sits just beyond the barrier between the world of the living and the world of the dead. This world resembles the living world...with some important differences.

In this world ghosts walk the streets and watch the world of the living through the barrier between worlds. What is highlighted here is the slow decay of the world. From here, every flaw, every wrinkle, every sigh of age and despair and disease is magnified a hundredfold. A woman recently deceased would look across to see that her husband, who had seemed so healthy and handsome, was riddled with disease, covered with parasites and much older looking than she remembered. Decay and rot, after all, are the provenance of the land of the dead.

The inherent tragedy of the dead is made manifest in their relationship to the lands of the living: It exists for them, but they do not exist for it. Barriers impede them (though they can ignore these at the cost of some pain), but everything else is like a waking dream: without the use of ghostly powers they have no ability to affect the living world in any way. And, all in all, that may be for the better.

A mage's awareness of the constantly increasing sickness and decrepitude of those in the material world is multiplied when interacting with shades who watch from the Shadowlands, because they are intensely sensitive to events unfolding in the mortal world. They can tell just how heavy is the burden of the world on those they watch. It has been noted also that they are strangely alert to the emotional states of the living. Some mages find the dead's fascination with the living... ghoulish and disturbing. One wonders if they will feel the same way once they have found their way permanently to the lands of the dead.

Mages entering the Underworld are essentially giving up the gift of life itself, if only briefly, to make the trip. Discovering "the undiscovered country" means becoming a part of it. Mages who spend any significant time at all in the Underworld are said to develop a disturbing hint of winter about them that chills the skin and kills seedlings. It is not a thing done lightly, and there is a reason why only the grim Valdaermen make the journey with any frequency.

That said, however, it sometimes comes to pass that there *are* reasons for a mage to enter the afterworld. There are rumors that the dead guard treasures untold, but only a fool would enter the Underworld out of simple greed after hearing such rumors. More likely, she may want to see a loved one who died without a final goodbye or get important information from a former companion or colleague.

The difficulty of finding a specific person in the lands of the dead is mind-boggling. Only powerful magic will allow the mage to discover which of the myriad Afterlives her subject has gone on to, and only through a great expenditure of time and resources (and sometimes sanity) will a mage reach the person she sought. It is a grim ordeal, and one that cannot help but change the mage's perspective on life and death, but it is never a light undertaking to enter the lands of the dead, and the things she sees there will haunt her for the rest of her life. And beyond.

The Sea of Shadows

Much of the Shadowlands is surrounded by a vast and utterly lightless ocean. It is impossible to discern whether this is a sea in the sense understood in the material world, or if it is cool and liquid obsidian or if it is a flowing mass of souls. It resembles all three. Either way, the Sea of Shadows covers much of the Underworld, the product of the River of Death flowing for these many centuries. The Sea of Shadows is rarely anything but calm, but every rule has its exception.

Soul-storms vary in appearance. Some resemble enormous thunderstorms, others look like water spouts or whirlpools. A mage close enough even to glimpse such a sight is filled with a permeating chill. A mage caught on the surging ocean of spirits at such a time is almost sure to be lost.

That has been said of many things that have disappeared into the Sea of Shadows, however, and it is not always so. The Sea is a catch-all, a dump heap of things that have passed from the world. So vast and old is the Sea of Shadows that it contains antiquities dating back to prehistory as well as memories from yesterday. Cast a line with a suitable lure into that writhing mass and a mage might catch anything: lyrics of a lullaby, someone's memory of a hot, sinful tryst in a woodshed, shards of an unfinished philosophical treatise. Why a mage would brave enormous hazards to body and soul to venture deep into the Underworld to go fishing for mental debris is hard to fathom, but such a thing could be done, were he so inclined.

The Far Shores

It is claimed by the scholars of the land of the dead that all Heavens and all Hells exist *somewhere* in the Underworld. The dead themselves call these places the Far Shores. Every one of them is alleged to exist on its own dark (or not so dark) island in the Sunless Sea. Those souls — well stocked with belief — who embark on journeys to those places rarely, if ever, return, but whether they find the paradise they hoped for (or the torment they think they deserve) remains a mystery. Those who returned obviously didn't. As for the others, one can only speculate.

What mages do know is that there are places in the Underworld that bear unmistakable similarities to the popular conceptions of Heaven and Hell. There is some general skepticism among mages that these places truly are what they appear to be, but for the perfectly happy spirits in Caelum and the tormented souls of Infernis, they're real enough.

As with most Umbral realms, the land of the dead responds to the dreams and beliefs of both the living and those who reside there. Among the strongest held by those in the Dark Ages is the belief in Heaven and Hell. Although there may be real Heavenly and Infernal realms elsewhere in the vastness of the Umbra, these Underworld versions seem to be places forged from the collective belief of the living and the dead; consequently, they adhere strictly to popular conceptions of these places.

It should be noted that these realms of the land of the dead are not easy to get to. On the contrary, traditional means will not get a mage there. They lie on the far shores of a vast Sea of Shadows and few enough have been there and returned to tell the tale that they remain firmly in the realm of rumor, even for those dead who haunt the Underworld.

Caelum

In a world filled with hardship and toil (as the Dark Medieval period unquestionably is), there has to be some bright goal the sufferer can look to that will make all his struggles, sacrifices and selflessness worth it. The Church excels at creating just such an anesthetic fantasy. They call it Heaven, and such is the power of this dream that it has taken shape on the Far Shores in record time.

Those souls who cross the Sunless Sea in search of Heaven will find the foot of a long marble staircase that wends its way up into the perfectly white clouds (a sure sign that the seeker has found something, as the sky in the Underworld is pitch black and cloudless). At the top of that stairway, surrounded by grand walls is the realm of those ghosts who feel they have lived virtuous lives. Through its opalescent gates lies Caelum, the Latin name for Heaven (the Church is careful to Latinize all sacred things).

Unlike the vast portion of the land of the dead, Caelum is bright, clean and calm. A sense of tranquility and safety permeates the place. Gold streets lead from manse to manse through fruiting orchards and fields of blooming flowers.

The Gatekeeper of Caelum, a spirit of necessarily immense power, admits only the virtuous dead. The living, however saintly, are barred, as are the souls of the unworthy dead.

Mages who need to consult with the spirit of one who has entered Caelum may request to speak with that ghost at the gates of the city, but that spirit is under no compunction whatsoever to speak with those outside the city.

Some mages, angered at not being allowed at least a glimpse of those shining streets, have speculated that Caelum is nothing but an elaborate deception by demons hoping to lead good souls to a bad end. The mages of the Messianic Voices just smile to themselves; such things, after all, are what faith is all about.

Infernis

Much easier to enter is Infernis, the City of the Damned. Getting in is not as much of a problem here as getting out.

Once the traveler seeking Infernis has crossed the Sunless Sea, he need only step onto land and follow the smell of sulfur. Of all the afterworlds, Infernis is by far the easiest to find. Some have said that one need take only a few steps and the city springs up around the supplicant as though a curtain had suddenly been raised.

Others have said that the road to Hell comprises two distinct segments: It is often necessary to be dragged down the first part of the path, but the last bit must be walked by the seeker on his own feet. To this, the Messianic Voices say: "So was it ever and so it ever shall be."

The Dark Medieval vision of Hell can be viewed in any number of paintings by Pieter Breugel or Hieronymous Bosch: demons, unholy admixtures of man and beast, coming up with clever and sadistic ways of inflicting pain on human sinners.

In essence, that's exactly what Infernis is.

A vast landscape of flames and jagged rock populated by repulsive beasts and their suffering victims, Infernis is only called a city by virtue of the presence of a scattering of eternally burning huts arrayed around the Iron Citadel at its center.

The Iron Citadel is vast, and its immensely thick outer walls are covered with upward-curving foot-

THE SPARK OF DEATH

If a mage flirts too much with disaster, disaster may decide to follow him home and take up residence. In the case of too many trips to the Underworld, the mage may find that some of his life force gets left on the other side of the Gauntlet, and to make up for it, his body pulls the life force from nearby sources. In the presence of one with the Spark of Death, plants wither and insects die. Although the mage can be in the presence of others without harming them, others will feel a subtle but uncomfortable chill when in the presence of one with the Spark of Death. Any person the mage is in close physical contact with for more than half an hour suffers one level of bashing damage (experienced as acute fatigue) as the mage's body drains the other of life force. Those already injured cannot heal in the presence of a mage with the Spark of Death. Anyone sharing a bed with the mage will start to show signs of sickness that will get worse until the person leaves the mage's presence long enough to recover. If the mage does not feed this hunger by being close to some living thing for at least an hour a day, then the mage himself begins to sicken and die. The rate at which the mage suffers damage is the reverse of the order of natural healing: he takes one Health Level of damage after a day, a second in three days, a third in a week and so on.

Mages with this condition have a difficult time using magic to heal themselves or others (+2 to difficulty).

Mages of the Old Faith and Messianic Voices are suspicious of a mage evincing the Spark of Death and tend to jump to the conclusion that the one so marked is either an enemy of the natural order or in league with the devil.

The only advantage to this curse is that vampires derive no sustenance from his blood, regardless of how much they drink. Vampires will not choose him as vessel from which to feed.

The Storyteller may give the Spark of Death to any character who spends too much time in the Underworld or channeling destructive death energies. A quest might be required to remove this curse. Alternatively, a player may take it as a 5-point Flaw at character creation, with Storyteller permission.

long iron barbs. On these are displayed sufferers of note. Contrary to appearances, the souls impaled on the barbs were not victimized by the city's demons nor by its Hellish duke. On the contrary, *those* arrogant souls are the ones who feel that *their* sins — ranging from farting audibly in church to raping and killing a younger sister — were so grave that only the cruelest, vilest and most excruciating torments will do. To that end, they put themselves upon the citadel's barbs as a way of offering themselves up to the worst punishments of the most sadistic demons. In essence, it's a fancy waiting line.

The Iron Citadel is the residence of the Duke of Hell. In theory, Hell has many dukes (Not to mention princes, earls and many, many queens), and it is unknown which of them resides in the Iron Citadel. Inhabitants of Infernis refer to him simply as the Devil. To most of them, the point is moot; the only thing that does matter is that they have gone to Hell to pay for their wicked wanton ways. All the hand-wringing is done, and the unending torment they anticipated is upon them at last. And even as the acid drips and the tongs burn, even as the pincers rip and the spikes penetrate, even as they cry out for mercy and recant their sins, in their heart of hearts they wouldn't have it any other way.

Those Who Would Make Bargains

The most frequent living visitors to Infernis by far are mages seeking demonic masters to enslave them. This they do in hopes of an exchange for a modicum of worldly power: ten thousand gold coins, the love of a girl, artistic recognition or similarly ephemeral rewards. In large part, the Church is to blame for this; it has been quite clear in stating that those who are not with the Church are enemies of the Church, and to some poor, benighted fools, that means that the only alternative to Christianity is Infernalism.

Such practices reach a peak in the Dark Medieval period. In some ways, it's understandable: Work is hard, winters are long and life is brief and the disparity between the quality of life between commoners and nobles is like night and day. Those who want money are willing (in some instances, eager) to turn to crime to get it; likewise, those who want other things are equally willing to break the rules to get the power they feel they deserve.

Typically, a would-be Infernalist learns just enough magic to get him into Hell, his sole aim being to bargain away his immortal soul to the highest bidder. Very few of these eager damned are true mages. Most of them are one-trick ponies who fathom just enough of one branch of hedge magic to get them to one infernal realm or another; though they can project themselves into the lands of the dead and navigate their way to Infernis, they haven't the slightest understanding of the principles behind the rituals they perform, they can't perform any other magic (which, sooner or later, they're bound to

need), and they certainly don't fathom the intricacies and pitfalls of bargaining with Umbrood.

But still they come, sometimes as many as two a day and often double that on Sundays. With their stolen grimoires and their bad Latin and their unguents made of belladonna and baby fat, the hopeful Infernalists arrive in Infernis, where they ask haughtily to be ushered into the presence of the Devil because, by hook or by crook, they're going to sell their souls.

And then they learn something that they inevitably find difficult to fathom.

The Devil isn't particularly interested in their souls. The souls of ignorant peasants are as common as dirt. The Devil, like everyone else, wants souls that are valuable, souls that are rare, souls that take work to obtain. The soul of a woman with palpable faith, for example, is easily worth a few dark miracles, a few demonic investments or the like. Likewise, the souls of scholars, priests, nuns, kings' children and virgins are all highly sought after by the world's assorted demons. The soul of a pasty, ignorant, louse-ridden, petty and venal 16-year-old (considered an adult at that time), however, is worth nothing. The Devil laughs in his face, rudely disinvites him from coming back (until he's dead, anyway) and sends him packing back to the Sunless Sea.

What this Devil fails to mention is that the spirits in the afterworlds have little in the way of agendas or power in the material world. They are, by and large, spirits of guilt and self-loathing. Although a demon could assign the would-be Infernalist some task, he would probably be unable to pay up once the deed was done. And then word would get around that the devil *didn't* grant favors in exchange for souls and then there would be Hell to pay.



The Dark Medieval world *does* contain demons willing to bargain for both foul deeds and souls, but those demons wanting thralls seek out the servitors they want and offer to strike a deal, not the other way around. In such situations, the relationship always begins beautifully; the thrall has something he's wanted his entire life and the price seems so... affordable. There is no clear point at which the arrangement degrades into enslavement, no parchment of human skin covered in fine print and no dramatic moment in which the thrall signs in blood. There is only the imperceptibly slow descent into willing corruption made worthwhile by the demon's increasingly rare favors. Once the thrill of

the money, the girl or the power has faded, there's nothing more for the thrall to look forward to but the further descent into infamy and horror, and in time, the torments of Hell.

Other Heavens

Caelum is the predominant Christian reward realm, but those other European faiths that preceded or, briefly, co-existed with Christianity also have their own notions of the afterworld. These, too, can be visited by the determined mage, although visiting without earning the right to do so can be problematic, particularly if the mage overstays his welcome.

The Summerlands

The Celtic Afterlife is a place of reward for those pagans who led virtuous lives. Those souls who make the journey to the Summerlands are gently returned to a point in their living days when they were at their strongest and most beautiful. Life is a series of delicious meals, pleasant surprises and sensual encounters. Food is plentiful, work is easy or nonexistent and the mead is strangely delicious and strong. The Summerlands are a place of eternal youth and beauty. All these aspects combine to make the Celtic afterworld very appealing to the mages aware of their existence.

The Summerlands are relatively easy to access from most of England, and, unlike most afterworlds, those wishing to make extended stays are welcome to do so.

The problem here lies in returning. Time in the Summerlands does not pass at the same rate that it does elsewhere. A visitor staying a day returns to find that a year has passed in the physical world, and the lover, job, friends and life he once had have all undergone profound changes. Worse, the effects are amplified by ten for those who partake of the Summerlands' mead. A day spent drinking mead in the land of eternal youth costs the mage a decade of life (around a quarter to a fifth of his natural span in the medieval era) that he can never replace. The repercussions of such tarrying are recounted in the tales of Oisin and Rip Van Winkle (among others).

Other Hells

Although Infernis is Europe's primary Hell realm in the Underworld, it connects to a multitude of hells throughout the Umbra. Some of these are simply places for souls to expiate the guilt of a misspent life, others are playgrounds for sadistic demons, and still others are simply the home realms of Umbrood so strange and powerful that demon is the only word available to those living in the Dark Medieval period. Whatever the case, there is no shortage of hells (or places throughout the Umbra that simply seem hellish).

Valhalla

Not all of the Far Shores of the afterworld are for Christians. During the Dark Medieval period, in fact, more pagan dead have poured into the afterworld than Christian, and these places remain the most populous of the lands of the dead and will continue to be so for at least a century more. The afterworld most sought out by the Norse necromancers is Valhalla. Ironically, even though living Christians outnumber living pagans by the Dark Medieval period, Valhalla sees far more living visitors than Caelum and Infernis combined, a testament to both the skill and the fervor of the Valdaermen.

Valhalla is the afterworld of a hearty, warlike people. As such, it is a hearty, warlike place. Horn after horn of mead is filled by serving wenches, and food is good and plentiful. Between feasts, the heroes of Valhalla fight. These combats are not good-natured, jovial competitions but preparation for Ragnarok, the last battle between the gods and the giants. The combat is brutal and bloody. The carnage is almost beyond belief. When the battle is over and only one side or the other remains, the dead heroes all rise once more, severed limbs are put back in place and hearty slaps on the back go all around as the warriors return to the mead hall.

As with most afterworlds, Valhalla reflects only one two-dimensional aspect of the living world — in this case, fighting and eating. The living get bored with it, but it seems to suit dead Norsemen just fine.

The warfare and feasting, however, is not what brings the Valdaerman necromancers to Valhalla. What brings them here is the presence of the dark god of death and magic, Odin All-Father.

When a Valdaerman has successfully made his way to Valhalla, the Valkyrie test his knowledge of the runes and their meanings. If he succeeds, they give him a horn of dark mead and usher him into Valaskjalf, the hall of Odin. Valaskjalf is not in the Underworld, but given Odin's role as god of death and magic, it is not far between Valhalla and Valaskjalf. When he has been ushered in by the Valkyrie, the supplicant knows he has made his way into the presence of the All-Father. Even more than warriors, it is said, Odin watches over runecrafters. It wasn't for the berserkers and barbarians that he spent nine days on the World-Ash, after all, but for the mystics to whom he gave the runes.

Once the one-eyed god has advised the supplicant, he quickly sends him off, back to the world of the living. Valdaermen do not share what they learn from the All-Father, at least not directly, and it is the height of rudeness to ask.

It should be noted that Valhalla is not the only afterworld of the Norse people, just the only one that

THE JOURNEY TO VALHALLA

The Asatru faith decrees that Odin All-Father hung on an ash tree for nine days learning the arcane secrets of the world, including the lore of the runes that he gave to man. After ritually strengthening themselves, both in body and spirit, many advanced Valdaermen do likewise, getting as close to death as possible while still being able to return. This gives the mage nine days to enter the lands of the dead, journey across the Sunless Sea, make it to Valhalla, undergo the requisite tests of knowledge, skill and bravery, receive his audience with Odin (in whichever of his many guises the All-Father chooses to wear for the occasion) and journey back to his (often spear-wounded) body hanging on the tree.

Such a remarkable feat (a Fara ••••, Galdrar ••••• spell), successfully accomplished, brings with it both power and recognition, but it is not without risk.

Although the Norse are an uncommonly hardy people (owing to the fact that the weak just don't survive childhood), and the runic meditations prepare their bodies even more for the grueling nine-day ordeal, the fact remains that many Valdaermen die on their quest for knowledge and join their compatriots in Valhalla for the long term.

Those who return, however, almost always have a deeper understanding of the runes and a new degree of power in their magical workings.

anyone is likely to want to visit. For the corrupt or truly evil Norse, there were worse alternatives as well, including Niflheim and the horror-haunted dark beneath the roots of the world-tree Yggdrasil. With nothing to gain and everything to lose, no mage is likely to venture into such grim places — at least not of his own free will.

Niflheim

Only the greatest warriors, hand-picked by the All-Father's handmaidens, the Valkyrie, are allowed in Valhalla. The majority of Scandinavian dead wind up in Niflheim (literally, "the Dark Realm"), in Hel's Hall, an enormous mead hall built on a long narrow stone peninsula jutting into the Sunless Sea. The shades of those Norse dead do very little but wait for the world to end. Described in the rune-lore as one enormous blood-red hall where snakes coil along the walls and poison drips from the ceiling, Hel's Hall is as grim and hopeless an afterworld as there is. The purpose of Hel's Hall is neither punishment nor reward: It's simply a cold, dim place for spirits to wait out eternity. Although Valdaermen may visit Hel's Hall in search of a particular soul, there is no other reason to go there and even the best necromancer hesitates to risk nine days on a gallows-tree for anything so niggling.

The living are not welcome in Niflheim. Once a mage has ended his love affair with breathing, he will be coldly welcomed to his seat at the eternal hall but until then, he will be denied entrance by the Niflungs, terrifying Umbrood, amalgams of darkness and mist. Not exactly demons (because they're not malevolent, just... stern) — the Niflungs are frequently described as demonic, and they are among the most fearsome and disturbing denizens of the Norse underworld.

NIFLUNGS

Willpower 9, **Rage** 6, **Gnosis** 9, **Power** 45

Charms: Airt Sense (allows the Niflung to spend 1 Power to navigate its way to any destination in the Umbra), Influence (allows the Niflung to subtly change the target's mood—from nervous to terrified, for example—or from wary to neutral. The effects are gradual but can be very powerful. This Charm costs 3 Power), Mindspeech (allows the Niflung to spend 2 Power to speak directly into the mind — or minds — of those it wants to communicate with), Tracking (lets the Niflung unerringly track its prey for a cost of 5 Power)

Dominion: Darkness and mist

Attacks/Powers: The Niflung's caress is its greatest weapon. Each gentle touch drains warmth from the target (after a successful hit, the Storyteller rolls the Niflung's Rage against a target of 6; each success causes one Health Level of bashing damage that cannot be soaked without using magic.) A fight against a single Niflung would be bad enough, but when they act, they act en masse and swarm their targets three or four to one. Niflungs can see through all forms of invisibility except those that work on the mind of the perceiver.

Description: The so-called sons of mist resemble little more than vaguely humanoid smudges of darkness on the air. They are mostly intangible, but when they make contact with a living target, the target will want to do anything in his power to avoid experiencing the chilling sensation of having his life's warmth drained from his body.

Physical attacks do no damage to the Niflung, nor do those relying on cold or those that require a physical body for their effect. Fire affects Niflungs, but there is no fire to be found in Niflheim and magical effects that call fire are never more than half-strength in Niflheim.

It is said that Hel, the queen of this realm, is the greatest of these things, their master, or both. What is known is that no Valdaerman ever wants to feel her caress, and that alone is reason to stay out of Niflheim.

Stygia

There is an island in the Sea of Shadows — though perhaps fortress is a better word for it — that acts as a way station for the soul en route to its respective afterlife. Some liken it to the Christian Purgatory, a place where souls too good for Hell but too worldly for Heaven linger until Judgment Day.

Enormous seawalls of black iron ring the Isle of Sorrows, protecting the city within from the catastrophic maelstroms that occasionally sweep through the afterworld. This city of ghosts, called Stygia by its inhabitants, was old when Rome itself was founded and is now truly ancient. The city of the dead is not pretty. Because of its very nature — it is a city of buildings that have been destroyed in the physical world — Stygia is a jarring amalgam of architectural styles: incinerated huts surround a collapsed cathedral, which is next to a flood-destroyed mill.

The grim order of Stygia is maintained by the vast walls around the city and the ghostly legions that patrol its haunted streets.

Ghosts of the European dead usually pass through Stygia on their way to the Far Shores, though some seem to linger here longer than others. There are those souls who have been swept so far out of their way that they stay in Stygia indefinitely, lost souls too scared or demoralized to continue on, preferring the gray tedium of Stygia to the real afterlife for which they were destined.

The Spirit Wilds

Closest to the world known to the wizards of the early 13th century is the Spirit Wilds. Here are found the countless spirits of nature. Every rock, every river and every breeze has a spirit, and if that spirit is awake and active — many spirits go into slumber, sometimes for years or even centuries, so only a fraction of the Umbrood in existence are active at any one time — it can be found in the Spirit Wilds. According to some mystic scholars, it is debatable whether the Spirit Wilds *contain* the spirits of nature or it *is* the spirit of nature showing the myriad aspects of itself.

Mages are not the only visitors from our world to be found in the Spirit Wilds. Werewolves and certain other beast-men also prowl the spirit world; they are quite knowledgeable about the world of spirits, and to their eyes, they are the only rightful visitors. Although a seasoned mage might be able to survive the attentions of an angry werewolf, a younger mage is best served by beating a hasty retreat.

The Spirit Wilds contains a number of other realms. Willworkers disagree about how many. Some insist that there are 13, others insist that there are fewer or many, many more. If it is truly the reflection of our world, then it seems sensible to assume that the number changes, just as our world does. Still, many mages, Hermetics in particular, would very much like to get an exact count, regardless of the difficulties involved.

That is unlikely. The higher orders of Umbrood — those that that can (and do) pass for gods — can create entire realms with but a single act of will. These great spirits establish around themselves courts of like-minded spirits, and there they stay so long as their power remains intact. Courts come and go with the regularity of summer following spring. The courts of the great Egyptian empire, once the most powerful in the Umbra with their grand animal-headed lords and ladies, are now little more than decaying bastions of ragtag spirits. The urban spirit of Londinium, however, has been growing for centuries and appears ready to do so for several more as it gathers around it a collection of street spirits, hearth spirits and associated Umbrood.

Among the most popular courts are the elemental ones, the spirit kingdoms of the four great elements: earth, water, fire and air.

Castellum, the court of earth, comprises nothing but miles and miles of tunnels and the vast underground cities of the gnomes. Those who reside in the court of earth seem to have no problem knowing where they are, based on differences in the stone, clay or dirt around them, but those who are not privy to such lore are likely to get lost. It is rare for mages to venture to Castellum, but it is true that those seeking wealth are well served by venturing in, because it is home to all manner of gems and precious metals. The realm's inhabitants, however, might be more difficult to deal with than expected. Apart from the gnomes, the realm of earth is populated by dwarves mining for treasure, an array of metallic, crystalline and other sorts of elementals and Minotaurs in their mazes like spiders at the center of their webs.

The most powerful Umbrood in the Earth Realm during the Dark Medieval period is Motsognir, the emperor forge-master of the dwarves, who built a mutually beneficial alliance with the elementals and brought to a halt gnomish plans to create closer ties with the other elemental kingdoms.

Mare (MAR-ay) is the court of the water spirits. It is an unending sea with no surface or floor. The only thing that varies from place to place is light, temperature, salinity and opacity. Those mages with the means to avoid drowning may visit this realm on rare occasions for their own reasons. Water is the element of insight and introspection, after all, and there are those mages who find such things the most precious treasure of all. Mages making such a pilgrimage must be ready to deal with the treacherous undines, water and ice elementals (invisible, for the most part, in their own medium), an

infinite array of strange fish, merfolk and sharks that can become men.

By far the least survivable of the elemental realms is Furo, the court of fire. Even with great magic, it is difficult for mages to withstand the rivers of molten stone, the randomly occurring explosions, the sulfurous atmosphere and the nigh unimaginable heat of the place. Those who seek power, however, have been known to attempt the voyage to study the realm of pure energy. Salamanders rule the realm, presiding over the infinite swarm of raging fire elementals. Salamanders are easily angered, and their wrath is lethal.

The least deadly elemental court is Susurro, the Court of Air. Clouds, fog and open air comprise the whole of the realm. Sylphs are the rulers of this court and preside over the birds and storm spirits.

The Astral Umbra

Dreams and natural phenomena are not the only notions that generate spirits. Love, curiosity, hatred and imagination, for example, also have swarms of spirit manifestations. Likewise, higher concepts — among them logic, mathematics, alchemy, philosophy and magic — can also be found in spirit form as well. These, however, are found in the Astral realm.

Spirits of knowledge and higher thought reside in the Astral Umbra side by side with the spirits of complex concepts. The more organized and scholarly mages (commonly those of a Hermetic bent) are fond of making forays into the Astral realm in search of even more esoteric knowledge: complex alchemical formulae or the True Names of powerful Umbrood, for example.

The nine muses of classical antiquity — in essence, pagan saints of creativity and scholarship — reside in the Astral Umbra and remain among the most potent Umbrood found there. If approached with proper humility and respect, these beautiful sisters may grant a mage great insight and inspiration, though what they offer occasionally comes at great cost to the supplicant.

The higher one ascends into the Astral realm, the more rarified and abstract the concept spirits become. The spirit of the Arabic language may pass on the right while the embodiment of the concept of polyphony passes overhead, singing to itself. After a point, the ideas that one encounters are comprehensible only to the true genius; farther still and the concepts become too complex or abstract for the human mind at all. It is true that some mages have traveled far into the Astral Umbra and returned with brilliant insights and great knowledge. For every mage who comes back edified or enlightened, however, nine come back mad — if they return at all.

In 1230, the Astral Umbra is strangely somber and depopulated. A sense of emptiness lingers and occasion-

On Djinn

Before mankind, the djinn, immortal spirits created from smokeless fire, were the favored children of Allah and heirs to the material world. When humans came into the picture, weak, ignorant and mortal as they were, the one God who is Allah favored them, and the djinn were left all but forgotten.

Or so the djinn say. The wizards of Arabia have other opinions on the matter, but those opinions are moot when a mage is staring into the eyes of a vindictive and powerful djinni.

What counts is that there is no love lost between humans and djinn. In the material world, knowledgeable mages have at least a slight advantage in the form of the Solomonic Code, a complex catalog of formulae for binding and enslaving djinn — but Solomonic bindings work *only* in the physical world. In the Umbra, and *especially* in the City of Brass, mages are at a pronounced disadvantage in dealing with djinn. A djinni's primary skill is deception. Though the djinn portray themselves as noble and high-minded, they are, by nature, con artists, salesmen and liars extraordinaire. A djinni can sell ice to a Norseman and dust to a housewife. If a djinn wants to sell a man a carpet, for example, and the man has both good luck and a strong will, he may get off with buying only two carpets and for only twice their actual worth. The wizards of the sands know this and ignore most of what a djinni says. Some mages accustomed to treating spirits with deference and respect may be appalled upon seeing a desert mage treat a djinni like dangerous vermin, but after his first embarrassing encounter with one of these Umbrood (if he survives it), his attitude will change.

Djinn do not like humans. They deal with them civilly if forced to by the Solomonic Code, but a mage in the City of Brass (or anywhere in the Umbra, really, because the Solomonic Code works only in the material world) is a nearly defenseless target. For that reason, mages venture into the City of Brass only if they don't know any better or if they absolutely have to.

And that's how the djinn like it.

Dealing with Djinn

Humans and mages unfamiliar with djinn are down three dice in all social dealings revolving around a djinni trying to sell the mage something, literally or figuratively. Mages familiar with djinn and their honeyed tongues are down only one die.



ally resounds here, a hollow echo of the catastrophic mass extinction of higher concepts that occurred when great cities such as Rome, Alexandria and, most recently, Byzantium, fell to anti-intellectual forces. Knowledge and understanding of more complex concepts — geometry, poetry and Hermetic lore, for example — remain rare commodities. As the great libraries and colleges fall to barbarians (as Rome did) or to religious zealotry (as happened to the Library of Alexandria) — and as the few scholars of that knowledge die — the spirits of those ideas in the Astral realm either retreat to the Astral Umbra's far reaches or wink out altogether. Many of these concept-spirits won't become accessible again until the Renaissance or later, and some are lost entirely.

At the time of the Dark Medieval world, two major purges of knowledge and learning have yet to take place: the taking of Cordova by the Spanish *Reconquista* in 1236 and the sack of Baghdad by the Mongols in 1258, depopulating the Astral realm even more.

City of Brass

In the spirit world reflection of the sands of far Araby there exists a city teeming with djinn and myriad other spirits. In the shadow of its towering brazen spires, an entire economy of barter and services goes on. The City of Brass is aptly named. Its high walls and enormous towers, made from different shades of brass, rise high above the scorching sands and provide a rare nexus of trade between the human world and the world of the djinn, the powerful and arrogant spirits of the Arabic world.

Mages who have dealt with spirits before should be circumspect while in the City of Brass. Those who have dealt humbly and deferentially with spirits will not be in any unusual danger, but a mage who has dealt arrogantly with spirits (particularly those mages who have used the Solomonic Code to bind or enslave djinn) may have to deal with his servitor's enraged friends and relatives.

Djinn are subtle creatures, accomplished liars, and dangerously talented at bargaining. Any mage bargaining or wagering with a djinni is liable to lose everything, including his soul.

The City of Brass is not hospitable to humans, and those without access to magic are likely to die from the immense amplified heat of the sun blazing on those vast metal towers.

Throughout the empty places of Arabia there are shallowings that lead to the City of Brass. Mortals who wander in disappear. Mages, on the other hand, may have the intellect and skills necessary to outwit the arrogant djinn and find their way back, but even for willworkers, being lost in such a hostile land makes survival a dicey proposition.



"Averki Skogarmadur? What sort of name is that?"

The boy standing under the ash tree was perhaps 14 years of age, and his voice cracked under the strain of youth and curiosity.

"Mine," replied the outlaw. "Have you what I asked?"

"Yes, I have, but...." The boy's voice trailed off. Averki approached closely enough to be seen by the light of the boy's torch, and the lad cringed. From somewhere in the distance, he heard a woman's sobs, a horrible, desolate, lonely sound. The boy grew pale.

"Don't be afraid, boy. I'll not hurt you. I've come only for the blade."

"Yes." The boy drew a short dagger from beneath a cloth. Its blade was stained with dried blood. "My father wanted to take it to town and sell it. He told me to wash it. But the raven—"

"The raven is my friend." As if in answer, the bird, waiting in the ash tree, let out a loud cry. The boy yelped in fear and swung the dagger over his head. "Careful, idiot! The blood on that blade must remain intact! There's enough of it gone already."

"The raven," the boy said, panting. "The damned raven has followed me everywhere I went. Everywhere I tried to find water to wash the blade, that raven landed before me and frightened me."

Averki smiled under his hood. "That raven does my will, boy. The man that dagger killed three nights ago owed me a great boon. Now that he is dead, I must find the man who murdered him and collect the debt from him instead." The rune-carver shrugged. "A custom in my lands. A man who kills another man assumes his debts, and this is a debt I cannot let go. It is a matter of souls and blood, and few things are so precious."

The lad held the dagger close to him with his left hand and crossed himself with his right. His already pale face had grown ashen and gray with horror.

"God's blood, what have I agreed to? My mother told me of men like you. You've come to kill me and take my blood! Satan take your soul—"

The Valdaerman raised a hand and the boy gaped as the firelight revealed the fresh rune carved into Averki's flesh. "I have no time for your fear or your curses *or* your devil, boy. I only want the blade. Give it to me now, and I shall bless your father's lands and herds, and the coming winter will trouble your family not at all. Refuse me again," — he leaned closer, and the boy nearly wept as the shadows danced on the man's rough features — "and he'll find the winter easier to weather anyway... with one less mouth to feed."

Chapter Six: Creatures and Talismans

Come, follow, follow me,
You, fairy elves that be:
Which circle on the greene,
Come, follow Mab your queene.
Hand in hand let's dance around,
For this place is fairye ground.
— Anonymous, "The Fairy Queen"

Magical Creatures

The creatures detailed in this chapter are all magical in nature. Their bodies and spirits are imbued with Quintessence, and hence, their body parts are listed with their Tass values; mages who hunt these things often harvest them for magical power. Although this may seem onerous to some, this is an era where mythical monsters, although rare, are viewed with terror. Few creatures have mankind's best interests in mind (and why should they?). Few mages who best such a creature feel any compunction against using its remains for magical effect. However, these creatures may prove

more valuable alive than dead. Even in this era, some mages suspect that killing the last of such beasts may, rather than rid the world of evil, rob it of something vital and irreplaceable.

Unnatural Habitats

Magical creatures do not live in this world. Although they can be encountered in the real world, they come from the Other World. Although they might once have lived on the good, green earth, they, like the magical lands they often inhabit, are no longer part of this reality. Most people do not know this, however. They believe that these creatures thrive in the wilds. Even most mages are not learned enough to realize this. Thus, they believe that a lesser drake may be hunted by tracking one down near where it was sighted, not realizing that it has been slipping in and out of its Umbral den thanks to a shallowing or some other magical phenomenon that lowers the Gauntlet.

These creatures can wander into our world and become trapped. Unless they are lucky enough to find a natural cray or other source of Quintessence, they will slowly wither and die, for magical creatures are thaumivores. This means they feed on magic, although usually in the form of magical plants or spirits that they hunt and kill. To anyone who wanders near their dens during a shallowing and witnesses them feeding, it appears that they eat like normal creatures. Only one knowledgeable in the ways of the Other World might recognize that the grass a unicorn eats is not real grass, but its spirit shadow, and that the goats a lesser drake devours are spirit goats. Magical carnivores can survive perfectly well on what little Quintessence may be had by devouring a man, however. Devouring a mage is an even more nutritious meal.

There are exceptions, of course, such as the Sin Dragons, who reside in the real world (at least, for now...). Also, faeries come from their own strange realms, which can confuse even the most experienced Spirit-Talker, for they are unlike the lands where ancestors and totems dwell. Faeries are not thaumivores, but they rarely stay in the real world for long, for its cold mundanity can prove painful to them.

Nonetheless, the Mythic Age is not fully dead. Like a wan ember still burning deep in the coal of a cold fireplace, it can occasionally flare up, introducing the mythic into the world once more. When the Gauntlet is thin, residents of the Other World creep into ours, searching for prey or wreaking mischief on unsuspecting mortals.

Dragons

From time immemorial hushed stories told over the evening fires speak of great ponderous lizards of immense size, strength and cruelty. Their descriptions vary almost as often as the tales: talons, horns, wings, spikes and all manner of wicked fangs and claws adorn these terrible beasts. A dragon in your path is cause for mortal terror.

Fewer and fewer of these great beasts have been seen in recent years. Their numbers wane as the years pass, and no one theory as to their demise long holds true in wizardly debates. Whether they die out due to valiant knights slaying them to protect villages or a simple lack of virgin females to devour, none can say with surety.

One thing wizards do know: dragons come in many different types and degrees of power. A Lesser Drake is dangerous, but not undefeatable by an experienced mage. A Greater Drake, however, is beyond the powers of many Masters, and woe be the mage who dares contend with one of these primordial beings. Their wisdom is uncanny and far beyond mortal ken, and their mastery of magic is nigh instinctual. Nonetheless, mages often seek out even the scantest rumors of such beasts, in the hopes of tracking them down and wresting from them some secret of the elder universe or even a mere scale from their awesome hides, for it is invested with potent Tass.

Great Drake

There are many tales concerning the origins of these awesome beings. One such, known to the Messianic Voices, tells of how, when Creation spilled forth from the Garden of Eden, man was not the only wicked beast expelled. The Deceiver's silvered tongue whispered temptation into the hearts and minds of many of God's creatures. Poisoned thoughts caught the beasts of Eden as well, turning them from the path of God to ways of evil. The foul ideas planted included notions of violence, theft, murder and unnatural selection. But man was not alone in his theft from the Tree of Knowledge.

The gliding lizards were not the most intelligent of God's creations. Tempted by sweet fruits and fat insects, Lucifer seized their attention with ease. "You could be as wise as man. Wiser still!" He spoke. It was true. The forbidden fruit did have that power. "We are too small!" protested the lizards, unsure they could even sink their teeth into the apple's flesh. Lucifer produced a small basket of berries in response. "Eat these and you will grow large enough. In time you will continue to grow in proportion to your wisdom." Happy with this proposition, the basket was quickly emptied by the dull-witted beasts. In moments they had grown: from butterflies to rats, from rats to dogs. And they were pleased.

En masse they swarmed the Tree, dining on the fruits' forbidden flesh, staining their maws with the sweet juice of wisdom and swallowing the seeds of wisdom. In



that moment, they knew what they had done: They had been fooled and had lost paradise. Rage overtook them. They took flight, fleeing God's paradise in shame.

Why it was not simply enough to cast them from Eden is uncertain even to them. Like all his gifts, Lucifer's had its price: a hidden cost and unmentioned effect. In time, the beasts would learn of it. They were the first and would be the last of their kind. They would grow with age, unable to die of causes natural. Violent death resulted in rebirth in their original form. This was not initially seen as negative. The toll of violent deaths, however, addled many of the great beasts' minds. Some retreated to sleep, hoping to awake to God's forgiveness and find their place in Heaven. Others raged against creation, punishing sinners and pious alike for perceived slights. Madness took its toll.

Other legends concerning the drakes, ones told by pagans, proclaim the creatures the oldest living beings, leftovers from some previous age of the world, or perhaps the rulers of the now-long gone Golden Age, when men and beasts walked as one and spoke the same tongue. These deposed kings now slink off to live in the abandoned or hidden places of the world, waiting to finally die when the Winter Without End descends once more, as it did in the past.

Dragons are not just magical creatures: they are mages in their own right. Their magic comes through an ancient affinity with the world (similar to the Old Faith's magical practices), one which slowly fades as the Mythic Age dies, making way for reason, which has no room for dragons. As a Greater Drake progresses through its life, its affinity with seasonal magic comes of age: When young, it is strong in Spring magic, but as time passes, its Spring affinity fades, giving way to greater Summer, then Autumn, then Winter. There are no longer any Great Drakes in the world who are not now in their Winter phase. Soon, there will be no dragons left in the world at all.

Attributes: Strength 12, Dexterity 10, Stamina 10, Charisma 7, Manipulation 9, Appearance 0, Perception 5, Intelligence 12, Wits 10

Abilities: Alertness 3, Animal Ken 4, Athletics 4, Awareness 5, Brawl 5, Cosmology 7, Enigmas 5, Intimidation 9, Occult 7, Subterfuge 5

Foundation: Spontaneity 5

Pillars: Autumn 4, Spring 2, Summer 3, Winter 5

Willpower: 10

Quintessence: 20

Health Levels: OK x 8, -1 x 8, -3 x 6, -5 x 4, Incapacitated

Armor: +6B/+6L/+4A

Attacks: Bite or claw (Str +4L), tail-lash (Str +5B), fire-breath (8A)

Powers: Fearless, Immortal

Weaknesses: Unknown

Tass: When ground into a fine powder, a single Great Drake scale may be ingested for up to 10 points of Quintessence. The powder may be divided into tenths and mixed with food. It will retain its power for any length of time so long as it is not cooked. This

Quintessence is especially sympathetic with the working of any primal magic, such as the Old Faith's Seasons or the Spirit-Talker's Totems, or in the making of longevity elixirs.

What's more, the fires from a Great Drake's belly can be used to forge items of incredible power. This requires the cooperation of a living Great Drake, however — magically compelling these beings is a nigh impossible task. Items forged with such fire — swords, wands, rings, etc. — become sources of Tass, that can naturally regenerate any Quintessence drawn from them.

Lesser Drake

When the youngest of the Greater Drakes grew lonely in the early years of his first life, he found no comfort among his own kind. Desperate for companionship, he turned to his lore of creation. Taking clay of the earth, breath from the sky, and a scale from his hide he combined these with the lightning and fire of creation. In that moment, the first pair of lesser dragons was born. So pleased was he with his creation that he did not see the hunger in their eyes. Within moments of their birth, they fell upon him, devouring him and all his knowledge. The pair took to the air and soon found a new lair. They produced a treacherous brood of their own. The wisdom gathered from the Greater Drake was passed on to the hatchlings, though not completely. With each successive generation, these dragons have grown less intelligent until those found today, ones barely brighter than the village idiot.

These dragons of knightly lore can be found in a handful of remote lairs in several parts of the civilized world. With rare exceptions, they are the color of spilt blood, sporting wings attached firmly to their forelimbs. They stretch the length of several horses and measure untold stones in weight. Most are quiet, save during mating season and the occasional feeding frenzy. Do not take this to mean they aren't vicious beasts — they will gladly swallow a man whole while he is still ahorse. A few of them take to a form of banditry, stealing from travelers, occasionally eating them and their horses as well. The legends of their love of gold are true, but misunderstood. Anything shiny grabs their attention.

Attributes: Strength 10, Dexterity 8, Stamina 8, Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 0, Perception 5, Intelligence 2, Wits 4

Abilities: Alertness 3, Animal Ken 4, Athletics 4, Awareness 3, Brawl 5, Intimidation 6, Occult 2

Foundation: Spontaneity 2

Pillars: Summer 3

Willpower: 6

Quintessence: 10

Health Levels: OK x 6, -1 x 5, -3 x 4, -5 x 2, Incapacitated

Armor: +4B/+4L/+2A

Attacks: Bite or claw (Str +4L), tail-lash (Str +4B), fire-breath (5A)

Powers: Fearless, Immortal

Weaknesses: With each death it suffers, a reborn Lesser Drake loses one die in an Attribute and one in an Ability. The traits above represent a strong Lesser Drake. Once all Attributes reach 3, only skills are lost until none remain.

Tass: Like their elder brethren, the scales of a Lesser Drake may be ground for a Quintessence-yielding powder. The difference in size and magical potency between the two beasts reduces the effectiveness, giving only three points of Quintessence per scale. The eyes of a Lesser Drake, when pickled like an egg, provide five Quintessence points apiece.

Sin Dragons

The codification of sins by St. Gregory the Great spawned a small number of sects in the late 5th century. Believing they could achieve spiritual and moral purity by expunging themselves of these sins, they spent years searching for ways to live better in the eyes of God. When the years proved that human nature made it nigh impossible to avoid the seven deadly sins, the course of their path changed.

Members of more than one sect ended their lives in sacrifice, certain that the sins of the flesh could be absolved once the body was left behind. Others fell to darker paths, believing it was not their own failure, but that of mankind. They destroyed entire villages in the name of expunging sin, never once seeing the irony of their own acts.

Ultimately the movement dwindled and became a distant memory to all but the peoples of a remote village nestled on the edges of the Black Forest. The priest of the village, a borderline heretic, had a vision of a great magical rite capable of ripping the very sins from human flesh and banishing them from the world.

For forty days and forty nights, in accord with God's punishment for sins, the flock fasted. On the forty-first day, amid the prayer and song of service, an angel entered the church doors. "You have done well," he said. "Your sins are absolved and will be nevermore." Blue-white light filled the church, drowning out even the sun. When the light faded, seven vicious beasts stood before the congregation howling for blood. They found it.

Once the last of the congregation fell to the new-formed beasts, silence reigned. Each creature looked to the others with innate knowledge of their place in the world. The time to find it had come.

Envy

Envy's natural form is a great sea serpent, far longer than any vessel. A green-fanged dragon's head sits at the top of a vast, serpentine body, with two pairs of clawed fins. Sleek and supple, Envy delights in wrapping his body around ships multiple times before depriving them of their crew and cargo, then consigning all to the depths.

The green-eyed monster makes his home swimming the northern seas between England, Iceland, and the Northlands. For centuries he was able to encourage raiding parties to cross the vast waters to steal from neighbors. Now that his primary agents have retired from their raiding ways, he seeks new agents to infect with the mix of jealousy and anger that he finds so entertaining. He delights in tempting men to try to steal his treasure or that of others. By deliberately leaking tales of a hidden grotto filled with the treasures of piracy, he passes time in wait to catch thieves within his lair. These unfortunates he then compels to steal on his behalf.

Attributes: Strength 10, Dexterity 7, Stamina 8, Charisma 5, Manipulation 5, Appearance 0, Perception 4, Intelligence 4, Wits 5

Abilities: Alertness 3, Animal Ken 3, Athletics 4, Awareness 3, Brawl 5, Expression 5, Intimidation 5, Subterfuge 6

Willpower: 5

Health Levels: OK x 5, -1 x 5, -3 x 3, -5 x 2, Incapacitated

Armor: +4B/+4L/+2A

Attacks: Bite or claw (Str +3L), tail-lash (Str +3B), constriction (Str +5L)

Powers: Aura of Envy, Fearless, Immortal

Weaknesses: Tales of treasures more spectacular than any Envy possesses can be used to lure him from his lair.

Tass: Envy's possessions hold his power. The very act of thieving even the smallest trinket from his collection yields a point of Quintessence to the thief.

Aura of Envy: Unlike some of his fellows, Envy cannot take human form. He can, however, speak human language with silvered tongue. His very words induce envy in those who hear them. Roll Envy's Manipulation + Expression (difficulty 7) opposed by the listeners' Willpower (difficulty 7); if the serpent wins, the listener is overcome with envy toward whatever or whoever Envy speaks of, whether it be a rage to destroy a newly perceived rival or a need to steal something from someone. Note that Envy rarely shows himself to those he speaks to; he most often slips near to the shore or a vessel and whispers loudly enough for people to hear him. Those who fall for his honeyed words assume it is their own inner voice goading them on. Those who resist may assume it's the Devil speaking, even if they do see the serpent himself.

Gluttony

This great, fat snake coils in the northern Black Forest, not far from the location of his birth. The coal-black lizard didn't need to travel far to find a home suitable to his needs. Unlike some of his kin, he has no wings and thus cannot fly. His ground speed in serpent form, however, more than makes up for the loss. He can speed through vast tracts of land in mere moments, leaving huge clouds of dust and a trail of debris in his wake.

Shortly after his birth, he struck a pact with a farming village. For three sheep a week, he "protects" the village from the neighboring monsters. Four other villages also fell prey to this bargain, no one realizing that the only creature to fear in the area had become far too content to raid them.

Attributes: Strength 6, Dexterity 9, Stamina 8, Charisma 3, Manipulation 5, Appearance 0/2, Perception 2, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 7, Awareness 3, Brawl 5, Expression 3, Intimidation 5

Willpower: 5

Health Levels: OK x 5, -1 x 5, -3 x 3, -5 x 2, Incapacitated

Armor: +4B/+4L/+2A

Attacks: Bite or claw (Str +3L), tail-lash (Str +2B), poison mist

Powers: Fearless, Immortal, Shapeshifting (into a human or a four-legged, twelve-foot long serpent form)

Weaknesses: Gluttony is easily distracted by food—fresh, stale or still kicking.

Tass: Gluttony's venom can be mixed into olive oil and burned, slowly releasing Quintessence in the resulting smoke. If inhaled, the vapors from one draught of venom will release three points of Quintessence.

Poison Mist: Gluttony is able to produce a fine mist of paralyzing contact poison that can quickly disable any in his path. The poison is potent, rendering those failing a Stamina roll (difficulty 6) instantly unconscious. Those with two successes or fewer are dazed, performing all tasks at +2 difficulty for the remainder of the scene. Gluttony may use this attack only once per scene. The mist dissipates after five turns.

Greed

The Serpent of Greed fled into the mountains of Italy to search for a new home. Few saw the great black beast cut through the night. None saw his arrival, in the guise of a beggar who asked for what gifts he could get, his silvered tongue always loosening even the tightest of purse strings. Soon, he had amassed enough of a fortune to set up business. Again, his honeyed voice persuaded the unwitting, this time to attract partners for his

ventures. Their fortunes added to his and grew at the same time. It was not long before he was a business force.

For decades, he has manipulated the local mercantile houses. Minions perform his bidding, building the routes, competing, and otherwise growing wealth — not to distribute to others, but to collect for himself. He appears to be a corpulent, wealthy Italian merchant with villas throughout the peninsula. Only those highly attuned to magic may catch a glimpse of his true, serpentine form — unless he chooses to throw off his disguise and unleash his full powers.

Attributes: Strength 6, Dexterity 7, Stamina 6, Charisma 7, Manipulation 8, Appearance 0/3, Perception 4, Intelligence 5, Wits 5

Abilities: Academics 2, Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Awareness 3, Finances 5, Brawl 2, Expression 5, Intimidation 4

Willpower: 5

Health Levels: OK x 5, -1 x 5, -3 x 3, -5 x 2, Incapacitated

Armor: +4B/+4L/+2A

Attacks: Bite or claw (Str +3L), tail-lash (Str +2B)

Powers: Fearless, Immortal, Shapeshifting (into a human or a four-legged, twelve-foot long serpent form)

Weaknesses: Greed is attracted to valuables, though not to the point of stupidity as many assume. He can be bargained with, even if he has caught you stealing from him.

Tass: Greed's power is in his wealth. A pound of precious coins stolen from his coffers, when melted down and used in the creation of a talisman or other magical item, reduces the difficulty of creation by two.

Lust

This great red beast took to the sky after its birth, flying across the waters to the British Isles. The Serpent of Lust is a slim and supple drake, not so large as some of its kin, but still of formidable size. Its wings stretch half again its length. Its shimmering scales are as red as rubies, making for an attractive creature, were it not for the man-sized fangs and spear-length claws.

Finding a great many people to amuse itself with among the mountain tribes, Lust took the shape of a comely girl and began a trail of mischief that has broken hearts, marriages and lives. As "she" (the true serpent is hermaphroditic) travels from village to town, she sloughs her form as a snake sheds, changing size, features, and even gender, as befits his mood. In each form, the creature carries one bit of vanity: Its ruby scales take the form of red garnet adornments. It cares not a whit for completing the game, only in its playing. So long as there is someone to tempt....

Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 7, Stamina 8, Charisma 8, Manipulation 6, Appearance 1/8, Perception 5, Intelligence 3, Wits 5

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 4, Awareness 3, Brawl 5, Expression 5, Intimidation 5, Seduction 5, Stealth 3, Subterfuge 5

Willpower: 5

Health Levels: OK x 5, -1 x 5, -3 x 3, -5 x 2, Incapacitated

Armor: +4B/+4L/+2A

Attacks: Bite or claw (Str +3L), tail-lash (Str +2B)

Powers: Aura of Lust, Fearless, Immortal, Shapeshifting (into a human or a four-legged, twelve-foot long serpent form)

Weaknesses: Lust lives for the mating dance, the tempting of men and women to succumb to their more bestial urges. Nothing tempts the creature more than a happy couple, clearly in love and dedicated to one another. Anyone in possession of Lust's garnets is immune to its wiles.

Tass: Lust's garnets hold a small portion of her strength. Each holds two Quintessence points and is capable of containing up to 10 more points, should a mage choose to use it as a focus for matters of the heart and loins.

Aura of Lust: The serpent can evoke extreme, unthinking, and even bestial lust in others with but a wink and a smile. They will go to any length to have him or her (regardless of gender), even to the point of killing loved ones who stand in their way. Roll Lust's Charisma + Seduction (difficulty 7) opposed by a chosen target's Willpower (difficulty 7).

Pride

The scaled Serpent of Pride makes his lair beneath the catacombs of Rome, in tunnels long sealed off by his own servants. A heavy, locked door is the only useable entrance or exit; the corridor outside it leads to the palatial residence of his current human form. He spends time here among high society, always careful to be just a little more handsome, a little better dressed, and surprisingly, a little better mannered than anyone else. He leaves most of his mock mortal affairs in the hands of trusted — and usually duped — human servants. He keeps a persona for decades at a time, shedding it only as the disguise grows too old. Eventually, the old guise "dies," witnessed only by his "heir," a handsome boy recently adopted.

Pride's dragon form features a confusing, vibrantly patterned series of blue and green scales, with feathered wings and the tail plumage of a peacock. It is thought that he is now somewhat embarrassed by his native form, which is perhaps why it is rarely seen.

Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 6, Stamina 5, Charisma 7, Manipulation 5, Appearance 0/6, Perception 5, Intelligence 4, Wits 5

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 4, Awareness 3, Brawl 5, Etiquette 5, Expression 4, Intimidation 6, Performance (Acting) 5, Subterfuge 3
Willpower: 5
Health Levels: OK x 5, -1 x 5, -3 x 3, -5 x 2, Incapacitated
Armor: +4B/+4L/+2A
Attacks: Bite or claw (Str +3L), tail-lash (Str +2B)
Powers: Fearless, Immortal, Shapeshifting (into a human or a four-legged, twelve-foot long serpent form)
Weaknesses: Pride is particularly fond of his appearance. If wounded, the very prospect of a scar will enrage him enough that he reverts to dragon form and goes on a rampage.
Tass: A lock of Pride's hair in human form can be burned to release a single point of Quintessence. Similarly, if one can be found, a tail plume used as a focus reduces the difficulty of illusion or shapeshifting spells by one.

Sloth

Sloth is a great, dirty-brown wyrm, completely unconcerned with his appearance. Unlike his kin, he has no wings or limbs. He is a huge, fat snake with a dragon's head. As his name suggests, his body is a solid coil of reptilian rope, its smooth surface broken only by the occasional lump of a still-digesting meal.

Sloth still lives in the Black Forest. True to his name, he never left. He spends the majority of his days sleeping under a coating of earth, rock and leaves. When he feels the occasional urge to eat, he shifts about slightly and opens his toothy maw. A scent drifts from the depths of his throat to attract local fauna, convincing them that his mouth is a fine, warm, safe place to sleep.

Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 4, Stamina 8, Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 0, Perception 5, Intelligence 4, Wits 3
Abilities: Alertness 2, Animal Ken 3, Awareness 3, Brawl 5, Intimidation 4, Subterfuge 3
Willpower: 5
Health Levels: OK x 5, -1 x 5, -3 x 3, -5 x 2, Incapacitated
Armor: +4B/+4L/+2A
Attacks: Bite or claw (Str +3L), tail-lash (Str +2B)
Powers: Aura of Sloth, Fearless, Immortal
Weaknesses: Lazy. So much so that his very presence makes anyone near him fatigued for no reason whatsoever.
Tass: There is no valuable Quintessence to be gleaned from the Serpent of Sloth.
Aura of Sloth: Sloth emits a palpable aura that forces an imbalance in men's humors, evoking a feeling of malaise and general apathy. So long as one is within an hour's walk of him, one suffers this effect, though it causes no game effects until one is within 30 paces. Once a person is this close, any activities requiring moderate exertion require a Willpower roll against difficulty 5. The closer to the beast one is, the stronger the effect; the difficulty increases by 1 for every 10 paces closer one gets. Once in the beast's open mouth, a Willpower roll against difficulty 9 is required to avoid falling asleep.

Wrath

When the Serpent of Wrath burst forth into the world, her hostility shook the very ground. Her thoughts of aggression and revenge rippled out until a willing host was found for her anger. The Huns crashed through Europe, sating the beast's temper. She dwells in sleep beneath the frosts of western Russia. When next she awakes, it will surely be at the scent of slaughter.

Her slumbering form is nonetheless frightening. Deep blue scales protect the few parts of her body not covered in sharp, bone spikes. The floor below her is littered with sloughed spikes from previous years' moltings. Two rows of sharp teeth fill her maw, though only the great fangs extending beneath her snout are visible in her current position.

Attributes: Strength 8, Dexterity 8, Stamina 8, Charisma 2, Manipulation 5, Appearance 0/2, Perception 5, Intelligence 4, Wits 5
Abilities: Alertness 3, Animal Ken 2, Athletics 4, Awareness 3, Brawl 5, Intimidation 7
Willpower: 3
Health Levels: OK x 5, -1 x 5, -3 x 3, -5 x 2, Incapacitated
Armor: +4B/+4L/+2A
Attacks: Bite or claw (Str +4L), tail-lash (Str +4B), fire-breath (5A)
Powers: Aura of Anger, Fearless, Immortal, Shapeshifting (into a human or a four-legged, twelve-foot long serpent form)
Weaknesses: Wrath has the temper she'd be expected to have, as well as a fondness for the spoils of war. A sufficiently cowed and suppliant person can escape her anger with the proper show of respect and gifts. Anyone who becomes the creature's direct target will find himself pursued by man, woman and beast (servants of the serpent), as well as the serpent herself, until all are dead, including the offender.
Tass: A spike from Wrath's hide (shed through molting or plucked from its skin) can be ground and mixed with a small bucket's worth of water to provide two Quintessence points.
Aura of Anger: Wrath projects a force of will that makes all within a day's walk of her irritable. Within an hour's distance, tempers flare, erupting into petty arguments over seemingly important issues. By the time one is within 30 paces, all but the most resolute

are nearly constantly squabbling. Only fear of waking the beast can stop the aura's victims from attacking her. At 30 paces, a Willpower roll against 5 difficulty is needed to retain composure; add one to the difficulty every 10 paces closer to the beast.

UNICORNS

Speculation of the true nature of the unicorn is complicated by the existence of at least three creatures bearing that name. The white horse is the unicorn of civilized Europe; the Re'em seems the likely origin for the unicorn of biblical lore; and the red unicorn roams the plains far to the west of Macedonia.

White Unicorn

Common bestiaries of the day describe the unicorn as a small white horse with a pure mane and tail, long forelocks, and — most importantly — a spiraled horn jutting straight from its forehead. These beasts go almost always unseen. They come out of hiding only upon encountering the aura of chastity, whereafter they move closer slowly and cautiously until they can catch a person's scent. As creatures of fertility given flesh, the scent of unfulfilled promise intoxicates those unicorns lucky enough to encounter a lone human female. This preference for the most pure of the fairer sex often leads to the beast's downfall; a virtuous maid can be bid to sit among the trees, perfumes covering the scent of hidden hunters. Properly perfumed, a chaste boy of marrying age can sometimes fool the poor eyesight of the unicorn. Those responsible for the death of a unicorn find themselves struck with a curse of infertility for seven years; Nature does not take the loss of her valued creatures lightly. Unicorns are rich in Quintessence, their blood yielding power even from the stain on an arrowhead.

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 5, Stamina 4, Charisma 4, Manipulation 1, Appearance 0, Perception 2, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 5, Animal Ken 3, Brawl 2, Dodge 4, Stealth 4

Willpower: 4

Health Levels: OK, -1 x 2, -2 x 2, -3, Incapacitated

Armor: 0

Attacks: Gore (Str +4L), front kick (Str +2B), trample (Str +4B against prone targets)

Powers: Curse of Infertility (on any who slays a unicorn)

Weaknesses: A unicorn cannot resist the scent of a human female virgin. They have poor eyesight (-2 on vision-related rolls), but good hearing and sense of smell.

Tass: One point of Quintessence can be gained per wound level of spilled blood.

Red Unicorn

Some scholarly writings on the unicorn come to the conclusion that the unicorn is misunderstood as the monoceros, also called the rhinoceros. This is compounded by southern wise men who have never seen the unicorns roaming northern Europe. This is only partly correct, as a red unicorn is descended from the mating of roan stallions and female rhinoceros. The resulting creature is something like an ass in size, yet strong as an ox. Its thick, shaggy hide is capable of blunting spear tips, and the short, blunt bone horn on its forehead can easily punch through an iron shield.

The fantastic properties of this beast do not end here. Blankets woven of the beast's fur are said to guarantee conception if coupling occurs upon them. The horn can neutralize any poison with just a touch, making these beasts a prized catch for any hunter. The meat is a treasure unto itself, for nothing else in the world is as flavorful and tender. Many have tried to breed them in captivity, but no one has yet succeeded.

Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 2, Stamina 4, Charisma 0, Manipulation 1, Appearance 0, Perception 3, Intelligence 1, Wits 2

Abilities: Alertness 1, Brawl 3, Dodge 3

Willpower: 7

Health Levels: OK, -1 x 3, -2 x 3, -3 x 2, -5, Incapacitated

Armor: +3B/+2L

Attacks: Gore (Str +5L), trample (Str +4B against prone targets)

Powers: Cure Poison (with a touch of its horn)

Weaknesses: The Red Unicorn is limited in its sense of hearing and its sense of sight; they suffer a -2 on Perception rolls in which these senses are involved.

Tass: The tail hair of a Red Unicorn may be mixed with hashish and smoked as the Turks do. The vapors emanating from this burning mixture grant one Quintessence point to all who inhale.

Re'em

One set of belief ties the origins of the unicorn to the Re'em of Jewish lore. These creatures haven't been seen commonly since the Jews' expulsion from Palestine. A sighting of a Re'em is sometimes considered a sign from God. In truth, these creatures are not unicorns. Wild blue-gray oxen of great strength and durability, they have a pair of horns that, when viewed from the side, appear as one horn in the middle of the creature's forehead. It is for this reason they were never caught. Most people leave the Re'em alone once it turns its head toward them, for they are embarrassed to have believed it a unicorn. Others find it puts up far too great a fight to be worth the trouble.

The powdered bones of a Re'em, mixed with milk and honey, are said to settle a number of stomach ailments. The meat is inedible, making it a

poor prize for hunting. The animal's belligerent attitude prevents most from trying to domesticate it, despite its strength and endurance. It would surely make a fine beast of burden for those who could control it.

Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 3, Stamina 5, Charisma 0, Manipulation 1, Appearance 0, Perception 2, Intelligence 1, Wits 1

Abilities: Brawl 2, Dodge 2

Willpower: 5

Health Levels: OK, -1 x 4, -2 x 3, -3 x 2, -4 x 2, Incapacitated

Armor: +2B/+1L

Attacks: Gore (Str +4L), kick (Str +2B)

Weaknesses: A Re'em can be struck unconscious by hitting it with a stone squarely between the eyes. Re'em fear moving water and will not cross it.

Tass: Re'em have no appreciable Quintessence; they are mundane creatures.

Faeries

No one truly understands the Fae. They are beyond categorization, for they are as fickle as morning dew. They seem to possess two Courts (the Seelie and Unseelie), which are ruled by nobles and have throngs of courtiers. Beyond these loosely organized groups, there are lone menaces or helpful sprites, cursing or eating those they dislike and aiding those who show them kindness. However, it is nigh impossible to tell which type a faerie is just by looking at it.

Brownie

These helpful creatures live in and about households all over Europe. They come out only at night, performing needed chores around the household, from cleaning and scrubbing to polishing and darning. The moment just before they are spotted, they vanish without a trace, leaving most to wonder exactly how that boot was repaired or who refilled the wood box. Those aware of their nocturnal visitors must take great care. Brownies expect nothing in return, nor desire compliments, thanks or other rewards. The unwary host who inadvertently leaves a gift in exchange will find the gift refused, left untouched or cleaned up with the rest of the refuse. If this persists, the brownie will take great offense and may leave, never to be heard from again. Some even take such exception to the insult that they turn upon their hosts in the dark of night, a grim testament to those who later discover the carnage.

Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2, Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3, Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Abilities: Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Craft 5, Dodge 5, Stealth 5

Willpower: 7

Health Levels: OK x 3, -1 x 3, -2 x 2, -3, -4, Incapacitated

Armor: 0

Attacks: Brownies attack with animated or controlled household items.

Powers: Animate Objects (by spending a Willpower point, a brownie can telekinetically control a number of objects at once equal to his Wits rating; he can attack with these or simply use them to aid his crafts, and can manipulate them from up to 10 yards away)

Weaknesses: Brownies cannot bear compliments for their selfless deeds. Sufficient compliments will drive a brownie into the night. Brownies cannot stand the light of the sun — it transforms them into mushrooms for seven days.

Tass: A brownie's magic is in its bones. Acquiring the bones is difficult; the mage must find a brownie who was struck by the sun's light, then cremate its mushroom form, after which it will transform back into its original parts. Powdered brownie bones provide three Quintessence points, which can be spent to reduce spellcasting difficulties for spells of construction or reinforcement. Brownies have an innate sense of who has used their brethren to fuel such magic, and will never render that person aid.

Child Stealer (Night Elf)

The dark elves of Bavaria have long terrorized local villages. Their habits and habitats are largely unknown. Only the deranged tales of those who have discovered their treetop villages speak of them. Few men survive this experience with mind intact, damaging the credibility of these tales.

New parents live in constant worry of night elves. One moment spent too long away from the child and it is gone, spirited away and replaced with a malformed, dead elf baby. In truth, the Child Stealers cannot have children of their own. They steal those of men and reshape them in their own image. The dead elf child left behind is just an illusion given flesh, lasting only so long as the parents grieve. The broken-hearted parents' shattered happiness is channeled through the illusion to the stolen child, and then used to twist the once-human child further away from the form of man.

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2, Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3, Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Abilities: Archery 2, Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Dodge 3, Melee 2, Subterfuge 3, Stealth 4, Survival 2

Willpower: 5

Health Levels: OK, -1 x 3, -2 x 2, -5, Incapacitated

Armor: Light chainmail +3B/+4L

Attacks: Fae Bow (3L; if any damage from a Fae Bow's arrow is actually inflicted after soak, the vic-

tim must make a Willpower roll against difficulty 6 or be dazed for one turn per wound inflicted, during which time he cannot act)

Powers: Mimic (by spending a point of Willpower, the Child Stealer can expertly mimic any sound and make it seem as if it came from anywhere else within 10 yards)

Weakness: Child Stealers are so strongly attracted to the happiness of a giddy child that it blinds them to potential danger. Small bells and similar sounding instruments, such as a tambourine, reminds them of the laughter of childhood, a pleasure lost to them when their humanity was stolen. Such sounds fill them with so much rage that they flee into the wild.

Tass: The lifeblood of a Child Stealer carries with it grief and sadness and the power these emotions have over people. If collected from the still-living body of a Child Stealer, the blood may be distilled in the same fashion as brandy into doses the size of a soup-spoon. Each contains power when used for emotional manipulation, decreasing difficulties by one and providing three points of Quintessence.

Goblin

These fiendish beasts live in the darker forests of most of Europe. They look like misshapen childrens' dolls grown large, left in the peat for months then brought to life, complete with a taste for human flesh. No two are precisely alike; only their foul stench, poisoned claws, rotted yellow teeth, and boil-infested green skin are common features. Stories describe them as having noses (and not), possessed of extra limbs, hairy, bald, vocal, mute and countless other variations.

They fight with abandon, having little fear of death — or at least lack the sense to fear it. They seem perfectly happy with their own martial prowess, crude as it may be. It is not unheard of, however, for the presumably elder members of a motley pack to sport armor or weapons gained from previous encounters with knights.

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3, Charisma 0, Manipulation 3, Appearance 0, Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

Abilities: Athletics (Running) 3, Brawl 3, Dodge 2, Stealth 2, Survival 3

Willpower: 4

Health Levels: OK, -1 x 3, -2 x 3, -3 x 2, -5, Incapacitated

Armor: +1B/+1L, or as per scavenged armor

Attacks: Claws (Str +2L), or as per scavenged weapon

Weakness: Goblin weaknesses are always spectacularly fatal. This is small comfort, for these weaknesses are as varied as goblins are. The most commonly known are fire, sunlight, holy water, and fresh flowers.



Tass: Goblins are imbued with no Tass desired by a sane mage, for their forms are not the only things twisted beyond the natural. A goblin heart pulped to a thick paste in a marble mortar and pestle is a potent source of Quintessence (providing up to five points), but highly dangerous — each point spent during spellcasting is considered two points for the purposes of determining Backlash effects. Goblin-heart Tass must be prepared in a marble bowl, lest its potency seep away.

Malicious Faerie

These spiteful creatures are the bane of the living. They can think of nothing better to do than create mischief, from harmless pranks to the destruction of villages, and are more than happy to send a lost traveler down the wrong road, conjure up a poison to "cure" the well water or even lead a band of goblins to a merchant's camp. They are fond of finding the desperate and making impossible bargains with them, gifting them magics in return for a firstborn child (a delicacy), or some other unthinkable demand. Common lore holds that they can be tricked into their own undoing or forced to dissolve a bargain by those who learn their true name. It is possible to force a boon from a captured faerie, one that generally comes with a price.

Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2, Charisma 4, Manipulation 4, Appearance 2, Perception 2, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Abilities: Animal Ken 2, Athletics 3, Brawl 2, Dodge 3, Melee 3, Subterfuge 4, Stealth 2

Willpower: 5

Health Levels: OK, -1 x 4, -3, Incapacitated

Armor: 0

Attacks: As per weapon (typically, a dagger: Str +1L)

Powers: Illusion (by spending a point of Willpower, malicious Fae can create a false image or object, such as a pot of gold or glowing sword, that seems completely real to others; at the end of the scene, it fades into nothingness), Summon Animals (by whistling and spending a Willpower point, the malicious Fae summons local animals of ill demeanor, such as angry boars, bears or swarms of bees)

Weaknesses: As malicious Fae are unable to resist preying on those in need of aid, it is possible to trick one of them into a false sense of security. If captured, it will have no choice but to grant a gift within its capabilities. Such Fae are overconfident, far more sure of their mental faculties than is warranted, which allows them to be tricked with skilled wordplay. If called by their true name, they must release the caller from any bargains or pacts.

Tass: The blood of a malicious Fae, when boiled and skimmed, can be baked into a batch of 10 biscuits, each of which provides one point of Quintessence to its eater. Other Fae can smell such biscuits on the breath of anyone who has eaten them up to one full month after the meal, however. Needless to say, the Fae will become disgusted with the person, regardless of which Court they come from.

Troll

Trolls stand two heads taller than the tallest man, differing only in stature on first glance. Their faces are often comely, in the rough-hewn, angular way of the less-civilized peoples. They wear their hair long, braided over each ear. The length in the back is never cut, growing until it reaches mid-back. Here is how one discovers a troll is, in fact, not a man: A troll's back is covered in thick, shaggy fur so dense it appears he (or she) wears a bear cloak. While the fur stops just above the waist otherwise, it continues down the length of a thick, stubby tail.

Fortunately, few have the poor fortune of encountering a troll south of the Northlands. When encountering a troll it is best to look away. The moment the troll knows you have seen its deformity, it flies into a rage, killing all who have seen through its secret.

All a troll's strength, ferocity and magic lies in its tail. If its tail is chopped off, by act of battle or treachery, it loses all these gifts and becomes a normal man. Female trolls are seen only by those prospective human mates who were kidnapped and brought to the altar. If a troll maid can persuade the human to marry her, her tail will fall off, making her human.

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2, Perception 2, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Abilities: Brawl 4, Craft 2, Dodge 2, Melee 3, Survival 2

Willpower: 3

Health Levels: OK, -1 x 3, -2 x 3, -3, Incapacitated

Armor: +1B

Attacks: Fist (Str +1B) or by weapon

Weaknesses: Trolls are angered by reminders that they are not human and, as such, cannot enter Valhalla when slain. If a troll is revealed to be a troll, he flies into a rage and attacks anyone who has seen him.

Tass: The tail of a still-living troll, smoked as a ham, releases its power to the careful mage. If eaten with a morning meal, it decreases the difficulty of extended enchantments by one. If eaten at noon, it provides three Quintessence points until the next sunrise. If eaten at night, scrying, foretelling and weather manipulation spells are decreased in difficulty by two. A male troll provides four portions, a troll maid, three. The tail from a dead troll reverses these benefits.

Revenants

The angry dead have long had a habit of returning to the world of man and wreaking havoc. Reasons for their return range from unrequited love, revenge, unfinished business, or simple, unadulterated malice. Others still are brought back by foul acts after their death, be it desecration of their grave or a danger confronting their family line. Only those brought back to the living world by the most foul of magics can bear the sun. Most must limit their activities to the dark of night.

The Risen

Spirits unable to leave the world of flesh commonly find themselves bound to their earthly form. They rise from their graves each night to search for whomever or whatever holds sway over them so that they might go on to their final reward. Rarer are those who were born, lived, and died by evil, returning from the grave to harm those who ended their life and cast them into the fires of the damned.

These creatures cannot be completely destroyed, only delayed until their task is complete. Should such a revenant's physical form be destroyed, it will reform within a month.

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 2, Stamina 5, Charisma 1, Manipulation 2, Appearance 0, Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

Abilities: They still possess the Abilities they had in life, in addition to at least: Brawl 2, Melee 2, Dodge 1.

Willpower: 5

Health Levels: OK x 5, -1 x 4, -2 x 3, -3 x 2, -4 x 2, Incapacitated

Armor: +1B/+1L/+1A

Attacks: By weapons or magic.

Weaknesses: The Risen cannot rest until the task that brought them from beyond the grave is complete. Those forced back into their mortal shells by evil magic cannot bear the sun, suffering one Health Level in wounds per minute of exposure until they are under cover.

Tass: If captured and bound with a holy object, a Risen's strength can be sapped. By invoking the names of those spirits responsible for the souls of the dead, the mage gains one point of Quintessence for one scene, and the Risen loses one point of Strength (which cannot be drained below one dot). If this point is not spent by the end of the scene, it dissipates into the Underworld. The avenging soul does not take kindly to its power being subverted and delivers a small revenge for each bit of itself sapped: The mage suffers one point of lethal damage (nonsoakable) per point of Quintessence taken from the Risen corpse.

Ghosts

Not all who rise are bound to their bodies. Some are instead trapped in the place of their death, their lifelong home or a place that held great passion — love as often as enmity. Accounts of these poor souls place them both with the least and the most dangerous of the restless dead. Most haunt the place of their life, or their death, repeating there the actions from their fragmented memories until they are released to the afterlife. These beings are rarely disruptive and often are oblivious of the still-living. Others, however, are displeased with their lot and vent their anger as best they can with noises, frightening visions or violent force. Having no bodies, they cannot be harmed by physical weapons. Only the holy Word or similar magic can put them back into the grave. The stats below are for just such an angry spirit.

Willpower 3, **Rage** 6, **Gnosis** 4, **Power** 20

Charms: Appear, Blighted Touch or Influence; some ghosts have the Possession Charm (such creatures usually have at least 30 Power)

Description: When ghosts affect the physical world, they appear as insubstantial versions of themselves at the moment of their deaths — torn and bloody from animal attack, thin and starved from deprivation, etc.

Weaknesses: Ghosts are often trapped by memories of their lifetime loves and hates.

Tass: Ghosts provide no measurable Quintessence.

Raising the Dead

As long as there has been magic, there have been mages foul enough to consider those without magic to be their playthings, in life as well as in death. They become mere tools to be used, components to be exhausted, beasts to experiment upon. Mages with such proclivities commonly have a fascination with life and death, feeling no compunction about exploring their limits, using and reusing victims who do not survive their tests. The border of life is a perilously thin line. Those who stretch themselves across it unduly often find themselves trapped there. One must be careful in the realms of the dead.

These dead are used by certain mages of questionable character as shock troops, guards, or sometimes merely servants. Fortunately, these madmen are more the province of legend than fact, one reason the world is not overrun by armies of the dead.

The Restless Dead

These ghosts forced back to the living world find themselves in familiar looking, solid forms — their own corpses. Enslaved by dark magic, they are unable to act except as commanded, existing in constant torment and waiting for the chance to return to the

afterlife. Some of these enslaved souls were meant not for Heaven but for Hell. These monsters can prove to be too strong to compel, and they can rebel against their masters. Once the summoning mage is slain, his control over the ghost fails, leaving it free to pursue its bestial, destructive nature.

Spells: Many magics can raise the dead. A sample rote for the Valdaermen, **Unsleeping Swords** (see p. 135), provides the following corpse warrior:

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 1, Stamina 4, Charisma 0, Manipulation 0, Appearance 0, Perception 1, Intelligence 0, Wits 1
Abilities: Brawl 2, Melee 2
Willpower: 1
Health Levels: OK x 2, -1 x 2, -2, -5, Destroyed.
Armor: 0
Attacks: As per weapon.
Weaknesses: Highly flammable; suffers double damage from fire.
Tass: None

Bone Soldiers

Those without fresh materials to work with can still string together some bones and animate them anew. Animated skeletal warriors are a chilling sight.

Spells: As with the Restless Dead, above.
Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 1, Stamina 3, Charisma 0, Manipulation 0, Appearance 0, Perception 1, Intelligence 0, Wits 1
Abilities: Brawl 2, Melee 2
Willpower: 2
Health Levels: OK x 3, -1 x 2, -5, Destroyed.
Armor: +2L (only half soak against bashing damage)
Attacks: As per weapon, or fist (Str)
Powers: Immune to Fire
Weaknesses: Bone Soldiers soak only half of bashing damage. When one reaches its -5 Health Level, it is broken into two or three large pieces. These pieces are still animate and are treated as fresh (i.e., undamaged) skeletons until the skull is destroyed, at which point the skeleton collapses into piles of bones.
Tass: None

Dragons' Teeth

Unable to fully depend on human lackeys, many a sorcerer has been able to carry his protectors with him, leaving them hidden in a bag until needed. A simple bag with a handful of eyeteeth can contain an army of these unholy warriors — each tooth, once tossed to the earth, sprouts a full skeletal warrior, ready to rend, maim and kill at its master's bidding.

Spell: Creating Dragons' Teeth requires the incisors of 20 great warriors, all slain in battle. The teeth are simmered in specially prepared olive oil for seven days while the oil slowly boils away. This charm is known to many Fellowships. For an Old Faith mage, it requires an ongoing spell with the following Pillars: Winter ••••• (harness the power of death), Summer ••• (instill warrior skills). The charm is cast over a week, with four rolls allowed each day; every five successes produces one Dragon's Tooth.

A Dragon's Tooth warrior's Traits are the same as a Bone Soldier's (see above).

Spirits

Spirits take a variety of forms and functions in the Dark Medieval world. No one set of beliefs about their natures proves any more true than any other. To some, they are ancestors, advisors or enigmatic friends. To others, they are a raw force of divinity to be manipulated and controlled. From any view, they are a force of great potential power in the physical realms, should they wish to exert their "muscle."

Spirit traits were introduced on p. 172 in Chapter Five. More details are provided below.

Movement: Most spirits can fly or hover in the Umbra. Maximum movement per turn in the Penumbra is 20 + Willpower in yards. In the Umbra, distances can warp without warning in relation to the material world.

Pursuit: A fleeing spirit rolls Willpower (difficulty 6) and begins with three automatic successes (if in the Umbra). A pursuing mage rolls Dexterity + Enigmas (difficulty 8). If a spirit gains a 10-success lead, he escapes. A spirit with the **Re-form** Charm can simply use it to escape without a roll.

Communications: Spirits speak different languages than physical beings. Communication among spirits is not so much a language as it is mutual comprehension among all parties. Not all mages can understand spirits — a Sensitivity Foundation of two levels is required to communicate with them, unless they speak familiar human languages.

Charms

Every spirit has special powers called *Charms*. These powers require a certain amount of Power to use. Unless otherwise specified, each Charm lasts for one scene and combat-related Charms last for one turn per use.

• **Airt Sense:** Most spirits have a natural sense of the spirit world's airts (directions) and can travel without much difficulty. Simple navigation costs nothing; to locate a specific object or person in the Umbra costs one Power.

• **Appear:** A spirit with this Charm can manifest to an Earthly observer without taking material form. While manifested in this manner, the spirit cannot affect (or be affected by) the physical world of the Umbra in any way. Demons often use this power to taunt their victims. Costs 10 Power, due to the great difficulty in crossing the Gauntlet.

• **Armor:** A spirit can use this Charm to gain one soak die versus lethal and bashing damage per Power point

spent. Without this power, spirits may not soak damage (unless Materialized). This Charm may be used at any point in a combat turn before the attacker rolls damage.

• **Blast:** The spirit can project damaging energy at opponents. This Charm costs one Power per bashing damage die, two per lethal and five per aggravated. The blast can take any form appropriate to the spirit: fire elementals project fire, weather spirits project lightning, etc.

• **Blighted Touch:** A spirit can use this Charm to bring out the worst in its target. If the spirit attacks successfully, the victim must immediately make a Willpower roll (difficulty is the spirit's Rage). If he fails, his negative personality traits dominate for the next few hours. A botch causes the personality disorder to become permanent. This Charm costs two Power points.

• **Call for Aid:** This Charm allows the spirit to call others for assistance. The spirit rolls Willpower versus a difficulty based on the likelihood of similar spirits being nearby (3 when spirits are within sight, 8 for common spirits within their habitat, 10 for rare spirits or spirits outside their habitat). This Charm costs five Power points.

• **Cling:** The spirit may attach itself to any target. Only successful grappling — reducing the spirit's Power to zero, or forcing the spirit into Slumber — can remove the clinging spirit. To cling, the spirit must successfully attack the target. Once successful, the spirit is at +5 Willpower for grappling purposes. This charm costs one Power per use, but lasts indefinitely or until the spirit is separated from the victim.

• **Corruption:** The spirit can whisper a suggestion into the victim's ear; the victim is inclined to act upon the suggestion, but may spend a Willpower point to negate the Charm. Costs one Power.

• **Create Fires:** If the spirit succeeds in a Gnosis roll, it can create a fire. The difficulty varies (from 3 for small fires to 9 for a conflagration). Power cost varies from one to five points, depending on the fire's size.

• **Create Wind:** This Charm creates wind effects. Power cost varies from one for a light breeze to 20 for a tornado.

• **Death Fertility:** This Charm stimulates the rapid growth of whatever will kill a target, be it disease, infection, parasites or cancer. This requires a Rage roll, difficulty of the target's Willpower. Every success inflicts a level of lethal damage. This Charm costs five Power points.

• **Disable:** This Charm can temporarily paralyze a single target. The spirit rolls Rage (difficulty is target's Stamina +3, or Rage if a spirit). The Charm costs one point of Power per remaining Health Level (or Power point if the target is a spirit; minimum cost is 10 Power points).

• **Dream Journey:** The spirit may use this Charm to intrude upon a sleeping target's dreams. Nothing the spirit does carries over when the victim awakens, but its actions will hurt, arouse or comfort for as long as the subject slumbers. Despite the vivid nature of such dreams, the sleeper will not necessarily remember the visitation in the morning. Each visitation costs 10 Power, 15 if the spirit wants the subject to remember everything.

• **Ease Pain:** The spirit can ease a material creature's pain for a scene. The Charm soothes even the most terrible wounds (thus negating die pool penalties from injuries, but movement restrictions remain), but does not heal them. When the Charm fades, the spirit may use it again, spending one Power point per hour. If the spirit departs, the pain returns. Cost is one Power.

• **Flee:** This Charm gives the spirit an effective 15 Willpower for the purpose of escape. This Charm includes any rolls that actively give the spirit a chance to avoid the presence of others through peaceful means. Cost is two Power points per turn.

• **Influence:** The spirit may use this Charm to change the target's mood gradually. The spirit need not speak to the victim to use the Charm. This Charm costs three Power points per die of effect; target's player makes an opposed roll against the victim's Willpower.

• **Insight:** Through this Charm, the spirit can gain insight into any one hidden aspect of the target's self. The Charm costs 10 Power if used to gain a specific piece of information; it costs only five if the spirit reaches for the simplest insight.

• **Iron Will:** The spirit can lock its mind on certain goals from which it cannot stray (guard a location, hunt down a target or remain unpossessed). Upon activation, the spirit receives +5 to its Willpower to resist any attempt to sway it from its course. This Charm costs one Power point per hour.

• **Materialize:** A spirit may use this Charm to materialize in the physical world, but doing so can be quite dangerous. The spirit's Gnosis must be at least two points higher than the Gauntlet for the area. When a spirit Materializes, it must spend Power to create a physical shape and give itself Physical Attributes, but the spirit still uses Gnosis for Social and Mental Attributes. The Power cost is five points plus the following:

Power Cost	Trait
1	Per one Physical Attribute level
1	Per two Ability levels
1	Seven Health Levels (as a mortal)
1	Per additional Health Level (each extra Health Level also increases size)
1	Per Health Level healed (regenerate damage to physical form), three points per level of aggravated damage healed — spirits take aggravated damage from magic
1	Weaponry: Per die of aggravated damage above and beyond Strength (bite or claws are one additional die, large talons are two, etc.)

Spirits have no limit to Attribute or Ability purchases beyond available Power. It is possible for them to form extremely strong or fast bodies if they spend enough Power points. Most have a "prime form" to which they default when Materialized.

Aside from the above restriction, a spirit can remain Materialized for as long as it desires, provided it does not enter an area with a Gauntlet higher than its Gnosis minus two. While Materialized, the spirit may not recharge Power unless it has a Charm that allows it to do so. When a Materialized spirit is attacked, damage is applied to Health Levels. If Health Levels are reduced to zero, the spirit loses five Power points and dissipates into the Umbra. It may not re-Materialize for [20 minus Gnosis] hours.

Note that aggravated damage inflicted upon a spirit is applied to both Health Levels *and* Power.

• **Mind Speech:** A spirit can use this Charm to communicate directly into a subject's mind. Cost is three Power points per die.

• **Possession:** Demons and evil spirits most often have this Charm. It allows the spirit to possess a living being or inanimate object. To use this Charm, the spirit must make a Gnosis roll (difficulty equal to victim's Willpower, or the Gauntlet rating if an inanimate object). The number of successes equals the speed with which possession occurs.

Successes	Time Taken
1	six hours
2	three hours
3	one hour
4	15 minutes
5	five minutes
6+	instantaneous

Until the possession is complete, the spirit will find a dark, isolated part of the Umbra and remain there, concentrating on the Charm. The spirit may take no other action during this time; if it engages in spirit combat, the possessive link breaks. Other spirits usually guard the possessor to ensure that the process is undisturbed. Possession costs 10 Power points.

• **Quake:** The spirit can cause the ground to shake in the area that corresponds to its current Penumbral location. The Power cost is five per one-mile radius. In addition, the spirit can increase the quake's intensity by increasing the Power per mile expenditure.

• **Re-form:** This Charm allows the spirit to dissipate and Re-form elsewhere in the Umbra, usually far away from enemies. Re-form costs 20 Power.

• **Shapeshift:** The spirit may take any form it desires. It does not gain any powers or abilities unique to the new shape, only the form and visage. Power cost is five.

• **Track:** The spirit may unerringly track down its prey. Power cost is five.

• **Umbral Storm:** The spirit can cause a great downpour in the surrounding Umbra. Due to the Umbra's strange nature, water is not the only substance that might fall from the sky. Power cost is five for a storm one mile in diameter, with 40 m.p.h. winds. The spirit may increase the storm's size by ten percent, or the wind speed by 10 m.p.h., for two additional Power points spent. Storms created in this manner last until they naturally abate.

Minor Spirit of Hunger

These spirits of hunger are not so much a form as they are a scent, drifting through the air currents of the material world until they can find a victim. Once the spirit chooses its victim, as much on whim as purpose, it subjects him to the full range of its powers to induce insatiable hunger. The spirit, in turn, feeds on the resulting eating frenzy until the victim dies or the spirit is discovered.

Willpower 3, **Rage** 3, **Gnosis** 2, **Power** 20

Charms: Airt Sense, Corruption, Dream Journey, Influence, Possession

Image: A vague, smoky patch of mist floating around its victims.

Major Spirit of Magical Ambition

These mysterious spirits, often the deceased mages of a particular mystic Fellowship, use their Charms and knowledge to shepherd an adopted "student," regardless of that individual's willingness to listen. As with living teachers of the art, its methods vary greatly in tact, subtlety and methodology.

Willpower 6, **Rage** 5, **Gnosis** 8, **Power** 40

Charms: Airt Sense, Appear, Armor, Dream Journey, Influence, Insight, Materialize, Mind Speech

Materialized Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 4

Abilities: Cosmology 2, Enigmas 3, Etiquette 2, Occult 4

Magic: Foundation (choose one) 4, primary Pillar 4, secondary Pillar 3, tertiary Pillar 2

Materialized Health Levels: 7 (as a human)

Image: This spirit takes the form of a wizened old master appearing to those with the talent to work magic, even if they do not yet know that they can. In some instances, it appears as, or even is, the former teacher of the mage it encounters.

Minor Djinn

These self-proclaimed servants of the Entelechy puzzle the Batini. Their motivations and activities do not always fall in line with the Batini understanding of Entelechy. Do these spirits lie, or do their statements simply operate beyond the understanding of men? Do they come to aid, hinder, oppose or serve? Or worse, is an encountered Djinn in the service of another mage

with undesirable motives? Djinn always bring more questions than answers.

Willpower 5, **Rage** 5, **Gnosis** 4, **Power** 30

Charms: Airt Sense, Appear, Flee, Shapeshift

Magic: Al-Ikhlas 3; Al-Anbiya 2, Al-Fatihah 2, Al-Hajj 2, Al-Layl 2

Image: A minor djinni's appearance is mercurial, for it can take on the appearance of anything it desires, even inanimate objects.

Magical Constructs

Magic has long been employed to bring the inanimate to life. Magicians, sorcerers, witches and warlocks have used such magics for spying, protection, deception and vengeance for as long as magic has been known. From the earliest animated skeletons to statues brought to life with a mad alchemist's potions, no two are alike. The origins of such constructs varies nearly as much as their intended purposes. The next time you feel eyes upon you, and yet only see a sculpted fawn in a fountain, look again.

Golem/Embodied Vengeance Curse

The curse of vengeance is a powerful one, so strong that, once unleashed, it cannot be undone except through someone's death. Certain powerful curses can give form to this urgent vengeance, enlivening a body to destroy those who did someone wrong. The constructs' unique shapes are often determined by local custom, local materials, and even magical tradition. Tales of monsters made of sticks, stone, clay, earth and even wheat litter local legends across Europe.

The curse of **Nature's Vengeance** is known only to the more learned practitioners of the Old Faith, trusted only to those who have garnered enough wisdom to avoid using the curse in haste. It is fortunate that this is so, for the curse calls forth an angry spirit of the land, embodied in native foliage, given the shape of a man. The spirit cannot be destroyed, only delayed. It will not rest until the curse's victim or its issuer is slain. The curse is equally dangerous for the witch, for a Backlash on the casting may cause the embodied curse to hunt her down instead of its intended victim.

Spell: The following Pillars are used in creating an ongoing spell: Autumn ••• (sculpts the earth and gives it purpose), Summer •• (instills a passion to kill), Winter •••• (compels the spirit to its task).

The Messianic Voices can achieve a similar ongoing spell, requiring: Mikha-El •• (instills rage), Repha-El •••• (animates the form), Uri-El ••••• (creates the form). This creates a creature of living mud or clay to punish the wicked. It can be stopped only when the caster destroys the scripture placed within the golem's body.

Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 3, Stamina 8, Charisma 0, Manipulation 1, Appearance 0, Perception 2, Intelligence 1, Wits 1

Abilities: Athletics 4, Brawl 4, Dodge 2, Intimidation 5, Stealth (wilderness) 4

Willpower: 7

Health Levels: OK x 4, -1 x 4, -3, Destroyed. Once destroyed, the golem's body dissipates to re-form at a later time until the curse is resolved.

Armor: +3B/+5L/+2A

Attacks: Limb bash (Str +3), charge (Str +5)

Weaknesses: None

Tass: None

Guardians

Priests of powerful orders, secret wizards of great strength and even the occasional hedge witch are known to place power upon normally inanimate objects to guard their sanctuaries. These commonly take the form of decorative statuary; the more creative mages make use of dead flora, gates, and even their abode itself. It is unusual to find more than a handful of these creatures in any one place, as they are taxing to create. Rarely can these guardians leave the area where they were brought to life.

Many Batini chantries contain a number of decorative columns in the shape of men or women (primarily women) supporting washbasins, oil lamps, or even the rooms themselves. Sometimes, these columns have been gifted with a semblance of life, making them stone watchdogs, hidden in plain sight from the unknowing. Creating such a **Caryatid** (or **Telemon**, if male) takes great personal investment. The figure must be exquisitely crafted.

Spell: The following Pillars are used in creating an ongoing spell: Al-Anbiya ••• (allows the Caryatid an awareness of danger), Al-Hajj •••• (animates the construct), Al-Layl •• (hides the construct's true nature from intruders).

The Valdaermen of the North are known to bring a semblance of life to the decorative prows of their longboats, providing an extra watchman in times of need. Fara •• (allows the prow to steer the boat), Galdrar ••• (awakens the prow's spirit and gives it eyes), Hjaldar • (allows the prow to sense danger).

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 5, Charisma 0, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception 2, Intelligence 1, Wits 1

Abilities: Athletics 1, Brawl 2, Dodge 1, Melee 3

Willpower: 5

Health Levels: OK x 3, -1 x 3, -2 x 3, -3, Incapacitated.

Armor: +3B/+5L/+2A

Attacks: As per weapon. Treat any oil lamps it holds as torches.

Powers: Immune to Fire

Weaknesses: None

Tass: None

Homunculus

A Homunculus is a magical construct created in the image of a tiny man, rarely standing more than three feet tall, and more typically only one foot high. It is meant to be both servitor and watchdog for the mage, fetching and gathering his magical materials and always on guard for danger or untoward circumstance.

The problem is that Homunculi have no hearts, and thus feel no human emotion. They can become cruel and even spiteful against their master's enemies or even friends, and some are even known to turn on their masters. Once for each year of game time make a Willpower roll for the Homunculus against a difficulty of 6; should this roll fail, the creature loses one dot of Charisma. Should it ever lose all dots, the Homunculus has gone bad and will act maliciously toward anyone but its master. From this point on, failed Willpower rolls will drain Manipulation; should this Trait drop below one, the Homunculus turns on its own master. For this reason, few mage keep the same Homunculi around for more than five years at a time, destroying the bad ones and creating fresh ones anew.

Spells: The Order of Hermes uses the following Pillars to create Homunculi with an ongoing spell: Anima ••••• (creates an animate body), Corona ••••• (imbues it with sentience), Primus • (provides it with the Awareness Ability).

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 0, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Awareness 2, Brawl 2, Dodge 2, Melee 2

Willpower: 5

Health Levels: OK x 2, -1 x 2, -2, -3, Incapacitated.

Armor: +1B/+1L/+1A

Attacks: Fist (Str B), dagger (Str +1L)

Weaknesses: Homunculi cannot soak fire damage; they fear uncontrolled fire and will flee from any flame not contained by a firepit or fireplace.

Tass: Homunculi carry no recoverable Quintessence; their magic dissipates with their destruction.

Talismans

Not all a magician's efforts result in an immediate display of power, levitation, or some other, obvious effect. Many spend a great deal of time using their craft to perfect more long-term processes or things. Some concentrate on agriculture, using their gifts over water, wind, and plants to produce more robust crops. Still others concentrate similar abilities on the animal kingdom, to breed superior animals or to train them with unquestioning loyalty and obedience. And others spend hours or even weeks bent over a forge to produce weapons or rings of legendary power.

As many artisans come to the ways of magic by accident or happenstance during the practice of a common craft, it presents little surprise that many continue that craft, now enhancing it with their new powers. More than one alchemist knows a blacksmith nearby who is eager for the chance to help forge magical steel that won't break and never needs sharpening.

Creating permanent, reusable magical effects within an item requires an ongoing spell cast upon that item. Rules for such lengthy enchantments are provided in Chapter Four.

Regardless of origin, once an enchantment is perfected, there will always be those willing to pay high prices for its fruits. Whether they deserve such powerful gifts is the mage's call alone.



Enchanting Items

Magic has a variety of uses in the everyday world: to sharpen knives so that they never dull, to strengthen a wagon wheel so that it never splinters, or to enchant a well such that its water is always pure and fresh. Below are a number of effects and some magical means of achieving them.

The methods and materials listed are by no means the only ones possible; they are simply those that fit best into local superstitious beliefs, aiding a mage to cast his spells when performing them as listed (thus allowing his player to negate a single 1 rolled when determining a Backlash effect).

Sharpness

This common charm is promised by many an alleged magician. Most who can actually perform this task do so silently, letting the charlatans collect the grief when sharp blades are not enough. To place a blessing of sharpness upon a forged blade during its final stages of sharpening and polishing is a somewhat common craft among Batini tradesmen. Olive oil is carefully buffed into the blade with cloth made from the hair of a jackal, while chanting a sacred ode to the One. The Pillars used are Al-Anbiya ••• (to cheat fate and corrosion) and Al-Hajj •• (to sharpen the blade).

The task is completed with a simple test. A cord of rough wool is dropped over the blade; if the blessing went well, the cord will split without hesitation, stopping not a moment on the edge of the blade. Subtract one from an opponent's armor per every two casting successes.

The Spirit-Talkers produce a similar effect on knives made from the shoulder blade of a stag (using Warrior ••); its spirit helps guide the knife to the target's more tender parts.

Unbreakable

This mix of will, sulfur and iron can aid in the strengthening of almost any creation. Hermetic smiths create this effect through precisely forged iron, tempered in a mild copper solution exactly twenty-two times. Once cooled, the item is packed in red clay for two days. When removed, the item is impervious to all but the most grievous of damage dealt by the hand of man. Even powerful magic finds difficulty harming these creations. This requires Primus • and Vires •••. The forged item has an effective armor rating of +8B/+8L/+4A and delivers +3 bashing damage.

The Valdaermen produce a similar effect upon shields. They must be crafted from the door of a village chieftain and stained with his blood. This requires Forlog • and Hjaldar ••.

Unerring Valor

This blessing is often placed upon the blades of kings, lords, chieftains, or their champions by a resident holy man. This blessing protects the wielder from fatigue and fright on the battlefield, making her certain in the righteousness of her cause. Conversely, the blessing limits the weapon's use, forbidding it to be so much as drawn from its sheath for an unjust cause.

The Spirit-Talkers perform this blessing by persuading an ancestor spirit to watch over the weapon and its owner. Doing so shields him from fear, reminds him of his place in glory and prevents him from any act that would embarrass his ancestors and children to come. This requires Chieftain •, Warrior •• and Wise One ••.

The Batini create great scimitars capable of maintaining the holder's attunement to the Oneness of all, preventing fear of those not worth fearing, while equally protecting the innocent. This requires Al-Fatihah ••••.

Lightened Weight

This not-so-simple charm aids in lightening armor, weapons and other heavy materials. It requires few exotic materials, but is dangerous to put in place, as the mix is know to combust when pouring or shaping metals, ruining the item. The Messianic Voices use this craft to lighten the arms and armor used by the Pope's holy guard. It allows the guardsmen to move in their normally bulky and heavy steel armor as though it were cloth, wielding their weapons effortlessly. The item must be made with the mage present at all times, using blessed water and iron ore from the Holy Mount. This task requires Repha-El ••• and cancels out any Strength or Dexterity penalties.

The Spirit-Talkers can make an object as much a part of the world of spirits as it is the world of men, shifting its weight to where it holds no encumbrance on the body. This requires Wise One •••.

Purity

This charm of the Hermetic Order protects the contents within a cask or bottle from spoiling due to age, weather or poor care. Whether wine, mead or water, no natural or supernatural source may foul the contents. Even poisons added are rendered inert. To provide this protection, the mage must coat the outside of the container with a mixture of volcanic ash and river clay, carefully baked at a constant temperature for three days. This requires Primus •• and Vires •••.

By coating a waterskin in the blood of a three-day old lamb, practitioners of the Old Faith can ensure that all water that leaves the skin will be pure and cool. This requires Spring •• and Winter •.

Quintessential Divining Rod

Some mage aren't so lucky as to have easy access to a cray. When in this predicament, a wizard has little choice but to seek out a source. Although he can find one on his own by simple force of will, this is a slow and

tiresome process, able to work only at limited distances and in very vague directions.

A solution to this problem is to create a divining rod. A simple charm, this forked branch from a tree can be used by to determine the general direction of the nearest cray or patch of free Quintessence. Those with greater power can expand the range of the rod's view in rough proportion to their skill and art.

The Batini make this charm from a fig branch. It takes only a few moment's concentration to attune oneself to the branch and then begin its use. It points the mage in the general direction of any cray or free Quintessence within a day's walk. This requires Al-Anbiya •••. The Hermetics, more obsessed with raw power than others, can perform this task with Primus •.

If a node cannot be located within a day's walk, the mage may spend an hour further attuning himself to the branch and its sensitivity to the flows of power in the world. At the end of the hour, the mage will be able to sense the general direction of all crays within one week's walk. This requires the expenditure of one Willpower point.

Magical Foci

Every Fellowship has layers and layers of habit and ritual associated with its magic, such that it is no longer certain if the practices themselves create the magic or the magic creates the practices. Habit is reinforced by belief, which in turn reinforces the habit. This circle of ritual is a powerful thing. Important components in any ritual are the instruments through which a mage's power is focused, channeled, and in some cases, amplified. Many witches and wizards continue to use these instruments even when their mastery has long surpassed their necessity.

Chapter Four discusses the use of mystic foci and lists some samples with each Fellowship's Pillars.

Attuning and Investing Foci

Apprentices learn to use certain materials or processes when casting their spells. These do not have to be attuned or special items. If a spell requires water or a bone, any water will do, whether it be collected from falling rain or drawn from a rushing stream; likewise, the bone could be that of the chicken the mage ate for dinner, or one dug up from a graveyard under the new moon.

Items that have a special tie to the mage provide some extra benefits for her magic, however. These might be staves or rings handed down from master to apprentice, or a beloved grandfather's cloak or mother's shawl. Items used regularly as foci for spellcasting can be invested with Quintessence, providing them with special properties.

It generally takes at least one year of regular magical practice with a particular item as focus before it becomes attuned. An attuned focus can then be invested with Quintessence points, storing them for the mage to draw out and spend as he sees fit (only the mage attuned to the focus can tap its Quintessence). An attuned focus can store up to two points of Quintessence for each point the mage has in his Foundation. Hence, a Spirit-Talker with a Sensitivity of 3 can store up to six points of Quintessence in his favorite drum.

Some Fellowship's have well-known traditions of using certain foci, and these are known to provide various special properties....

The Wayfinder's Staff

A common focus among wandering Old Faith wise women, this staff itself appears to be a sturdy length of common wood, weathered by time and use. Decoration is a personal issue, subject to the wise woman's personal beliefs, patrons or whim. A quiet word and the expenditure of stored Quintessence from within the staff brings another aspect quickly to light — literally. The staff emits a scent, rather like perfumed oil, intoxicating to fire sprites. Within moments, all minor fire elementals within an hour's walk are drawn to the staff, from both the physical and spirit realms. Until the scent is extinguished, the sprites dance about the staff, hovering about its tip. To those without the ability to see the spirit realm, the sprites appear as a swarm of fireflies, oddly attracted to the wise woman's staff.

The light generated is equivalent to that of a well-lit torch. It can also be used to start small fires.

The Wayfinder's staff can function as a focus for different Pillars, but it is used most commonly for Autumn and Summer.

The Healing Drum

Used by Spirit-Talkers (usually those from the east, such as the Mongols), this hide drum can aid them in driving spirits away from the afflicted. When played by the shaman as he peers into the Other World, or even steps into it, it sets up a reverberating thrum that surrounds him and the patient he seeks to aid, as long as the shaman also spends a point of the drum's stored Quintessence. While this provides an eerie effect for most listeners, it is jarring to a spirit's very essence. Any spirit who has possessed or is attempting to possess the patient must make a Gnosis roll to maintain the attempt. If successful, the drum is ignored. If not, the thrumming noise distracts the spirit enough to halt the process of possession. The spirit can try again, but only after a successful Willpower roll. If this roll fails, the spirit cannot possess that person at all.

The Healing Drum can function as a focus for the Wise One or Chieftain Pillars.

Crucifix of Absolution

With its carved likeness of the suffering Christ, this crucifix can help others to gain peace with themselves and God by removing guilt over sins. By muttering a

prayer over the sinful with the crucifix and spending a point of the crucifix's stored Quintessence, the Messianic Voice mage can convince the person that he has been absolved of any petty sin. Serious sins, such as unwarranted murder or rape, cannot be cleansed this way.

Persons so healed by the prayer and crucifix feel thankful to the theurgist. They will aid him however he asks, as long as the task is within their power and not obviously or immediately dangerous to them. Helping to smuggle the mage past some guards in a hay wagon is acceptable, although attacking the guards to distract them while the mage runs is not.

The Crucifix of Absolution can function as a focus for Gavri-El or Repha-El Pillar magic.

Hermetic Tome

The Order of Hermes takes its duties to preserve lost lore seriously. Many mages not only collect ancient tomes, they often compose new ones themselves. This focus is just such a personal tome, a collection of the mage's own writings about his magical experiences. It does not have to be written in a common tongue, or even a tongue known to any one else (it can be a special alphabet or glyph series created by the mage for himself). When he thumbs through its pages and spends a point of its stored Quintessence, he remembers some fact or imagining he once had during its composition that provides an incredibly relevant insight to a current problem, adding one die to his player's Enigmas or Academics die pool for one roll only (choose which skill the tome affects when it is attuned; it can affect only one of them).

A Hermetic Tome can be used for any Forma Pillar, for it is created to store insights concerning that Pillar's use.

Elixirs and Poultices

Modern pharmacology has revealed to the learned man and midwife a number of ways to aid the body in removing unwanted devils, imbalanced humors, or imperfections of flesh and mind. Nearly every village and town has an old hag, a self-proclaimed doctor, or other local healer capable of crafting these items. Some even have the Gift to make them work.

The methods used to make these potions are not required of the true magician, but they are usually believed to aid the effectiveness of the magic nonetheless (as with any magic that adheres to superstitions, using the following processes in a spell negates a single 1 from any roll).

Fertility/Sterility

A popular request among nobility, this elixir works equally well on all manner of live-birthing animals. More than one farm wife knows its secret. The elixir is made by taking honey-sweetened mead and mixing in it the petals of a daisy and an egg. It must be mixed well and cannot work if the drinker knows its purpose. Sterility is caused by omitting the egg yolk. Stories hold that this elixir can be made with sweet wines by court wizards. It is achieved with the Pillar of Spring •• (fertility) or Winter •• (sterility).

Truth/Falsehood

This concoction compels the speaker to speak only the direct truth. Made with crushed rosemary, brook water and boiled with rosehip wine, the result is indistinguishable from any mild red wine until the drinker is questioned. By substituting the brook water with stagnant water, the speaker is compelled to lie, no matter how much he wishes not to. The Hermetics create both versions of this potion with Corona ••.

Strength/Weakness

This elixir, made with salt, pepper, honey and cow's blood, when used as a sauce or marinade over beef, mutton or venison, endows any who eat it with greater strength than the human form allows for three full days. If chicken's blood is used in place of a cow's, the victim will find himself unable to rise from his bed for the next four sunrises. Valdaermen devise this brew with Hjaldar ••• (strength) or Forlog •••• (weakness).

Mental Clarity/Madness

By carefully mixing the green of wild onions with assorted wild greens, and then dousing them in a coating of vinegar, oils and sweet spices, the alchemist can produce a meal that provides its diner with heightened mental acuity until the next full moon. Should the oils, vinegar and spice be cooked with mutton and onions, the result is madness until the next full moon. The Ahl-i-Batin concoct this potion with Al-Fatihah •••• (madness) or ••••• (mental clarity).

Health/Sickness

This simple poultice is made by wrapping a leech in damp peat, coating it with mud, and then wrapping it over a wound with soft linen. If kept damp for as many days as it is needed, a man can heal from all but the most grievous of wounds, so long as the skin was punctured. A live leech must be used. If a dead leech is used, the wound will fester and rot, eventually killing the patient if the leech corpse is not removed. Spirit-Talkers use Wise One •• (health) or Trickster •••• (sickness) to make this poultice.

Slow Rot

The industrious witch has all manner of potions, fair and foul. Many of the less moral find no trouble at all selling their wares. When someone comes looking for a way to cripple a foe without using an obvious poison, numerous choices exist for delivering seemingly common afflictions or social diseases.

This particular poisonous curse inflicts the indelicacy of gangrene upon a person. Two separate snake venoms must be mixed with spider silk and wood

alcohol. The poison must be applied with a pin prick to the lower half of the body. The poison is slow acting; it may be days or even weeks before its effect is noticeable. The Old Faith makes such a poison with Winter ••••.

Heavy Sleep

When the body needs rest and cannot, ill health and temper result, leading ultimately to madness. A fevered child must rest or she will never heal. Sometimes it is necessary to render a man unconscious, to subdue him for reasons of state or crime.

This sleeping draught is made with honey, moon-dipped well water, a crocus petal and a few iron shavings. Mixed well at three hours past sunset, it will store indefinitely, allowing it to be used as needed to aid in sleep or more in nefarious purposes. The Messianic Voice brew such draughts with Repha-El ••.

Vigor

There are days when it is simply impossible for man's body to keep up with what his mind wills it to do. Times of extreme crises might call for superhuman strength and endurance until the challenge is overcome.

This potion is made with the powdered leg bones of a wild hare mixed in mare's milk. The sturdier the horse's bloodline, the more effective is the draught. For the next day, the imbiber finds himself without fatigue, able to keep his top pace at any physical endeavor without fail or need of rest. The day of activity is followed by two days of absolute rest. Valdaermen create such potions with Fara • and Hjaldar ••.

Weapons

As long as there has been powerful magic, there have been those who use it to craft items of great cunning and even wicked power. Some were created to be the penultimate act of a wizard's power, others to aid, guide, or even destroy a hero of legend. Most such items of power are now lost or destroyed; only a handful remains. New works are created every now and then, however. The occasional weapon of legend reappears, hopefully in the arms of the righteous, but just as often not. Some take this to mean that the time of great magic has passed, that the gods have abandoned the earth and take their power with them.

Not all these weapons are of great power, used by a single man to cleave opponents by the score. Instead, some aid his brethren, steel his spirit or speed his journey. Although the magic of the battlefield is rarely subtle, such items don't make the magic grossly blatant; it simply isn't always hidden from the mundane eye. Great magic can be hidden in plain sight, in a captain's breastplate or a herald's trumpet.

Sword of Recompense

Many items of such power come from unknown sources, created for equally unknown purposes. As oft as not these creations exist for solely malevolent purposes, doing the devils work unknowingly.

All accounts of this particular creation of Hell are consistent in a number of details. The sword reveals itself with little subtlety, appearing embedded in the ground before its victim. This is always someone who has just lost a loved one to petty strife or blatant malevolence. The blade has been described in many forms, all having winged serpents etched into the surface of the blade. Beyond this, it takes the shape most suitable to its new master and his abilities. It is not unusual to hear of it appearing as an axe or even a long spear, or even the form of a weapon not used in that part of the known world.

The blade's evil is rarely known to the new wielder — how it devours of the soul of the one avenged, powering itself and its master until vengeance is achieved. Then, and only then, is the true nature of the blade apparent. Most cannot live with themselves after learning the truth and, in suicide, feed the blade with their final moments.

Arrows of Alarm

Not all martial creations show their results directly on the field of combat, in the dance of a duel or through the skulking form of an assassin. These particular arrows are found in the northwest, crafted by a village fletcher and blessed by the local priest to aid in the town's defense.

The arrowhead is a blunt egg of metal with a set of fine holes bored through it. These holes create a piercing whistle as the arrow flies. The priest's blessing (using Gavri-El ••) creates an additional effect, attracting the arrows to large metal shields hung like gongs about the town. When properly crafted, these arrows may be fired as far as three days march away from the town, traveling directly to the gongs unless caught or forcibly intercepted. Unfortunately, an arrow only works with a given target and may only be fired once, for the arrow's speed shatters it upon hitting its target, leaving nothing but dust.

The arrows travel at great speed; while magic allows them to move around obstacles, they can be caught or blocked in flight. Treat the arrow as a target with a Dexterity + Dodge die pool of 8. If intercepted, it hits as a normal arrow, but delivers bashing damage.

Distance Arrows

Renowned by hunters and scouts alike, these arrows are able to fly to great distances until they strike their target. These long-bow arrows, fletched with the feathers of an eagle, can hit any target, at any distance, so long as the archer can see it. The target must stand still, for the arrows do not magically follow the quarry.

The arrows can be fashioned by many magical principles common to most Fellowships. The magical fletcher must have at least two levels in his Fellowship's

travel- or combat-related Pillar. For the Spirit-Talkers, this is Warrior, for the Messianics, Gavri-El. The Valdaermen perform a similar charm on spears wrapped in snakeskin, using Hjaldar or Fara.

As the text implies, the arrows may strike at any distance the archer's eye can see. A round must be spent aiming; hasty firing wastes the arrow's benefit. When the target is within the normal range of the archer, the arrow decreases firing difficulty by two and negates all range-based penalties. If the target is beyond normal range, the archer's player still faces no range-based penalties but loses the difficulty reduction.

Staff of Ten Men

This stout oaken staff seems to have wandered its way through history, appearing in the hands of some skilled peasant warrior, then vanishing after his death. It is attracted to those who can martial their fellows, strengthen their resolve, and form them into a capable force for the defense of their homes. There are no known sightings of the staff in the hands of any who do not embody selflessness for their fellow man. The staff is a man and a half tall, with a stylized sun carved at its midpoint. Additionally, a ring of five faces is carved at each end. Other than a fine, polished finish, the staff bears no additional decoration. The staff is unbreakable, protected in some unknown way. As the name suggests, the staff bears the strength of 10 men, which it shares with its current, chosen wielder.

This gift bears a price. When the wielder dies, his (or her) spirit is drawn into the staff, adding its strength to the collective. One face falls from the staff and is replaced by that of the most recent wielder. This imprisonment lasts until 10 new spirits have been drawn in. There are never more or fewer than 10 spirits in the staff.

The staff grants the user an addition 10 dice of Strength for all actions using the staff.

Sublime Snare

This rope snare has a dual purpose. It is used primarily for trapping small- to moderate-sized game, for its magic encourages an appropriate catch to come near while discouraging away game too small to feed upon or so large as to be wasteful. Upon capture, the prey's panic and fear are channeled into the rope, calming it to prevent suffering until the hunter is able to come and thank the animal for its bounty.

It can instead be set to guard places holy or mundane from intruders who are well aware they do not belong. When an intruder steps into the snare, the panic and fear drawn from captive animals are forced into him. Nightmarish visions of torture and impending death assail the captive until he is released.

The snare's magic makes it difficult to detect, increasing by two any perception difficulties to spot it. The images assaulting a person captured in the snare require a Willpower roll versus difficulty 8 to prevent all-out panic. These snares are most often found in use near holy places of the Old Faith in French Normandy and the British Isles. It is made using the Winter •• Pillar, both to hide it and allow to it to store fear.

Banner of Valor

Every force has its colors, a rallying point, a warning, or claim of divine right. When this special banner is flown, no man breaks, fears death or contemplates failure. The colors of the king are ever-glorious. The banner may be made of any material deemed fit; the colors and decoration are determined by the ruler's lineage and whim.

Banners such as these are prepared carefully by the king's tailors, then blessed by a Messianic Voice four times, one in each cardinal corner of the land. In each location, the priest must say three prayers, one each requesting the blessings of Gabriel, Michael, and Uriel, over the burning sacrifice of wheat and a ram. Completion of each prayer requires Gavri-El ••, Mikha-El ••, and Uri-El ••.

If the prayers are answered, when the banners are flown at the front of any army, they bolster the troop's confidence, for God has blessed them. So long as they are within a day's march of the kingdom, all troops make all Stamina and Willpower rolls at one less difficulty. Should the banner fall and not be recovered, these benefits are reversed until the banner is righted.

War Drum

This great drum, made from the oak of a century tree and the skin of a great stag, sends its rumbles across great distances, from ally to ally, gathering strength before a descent upon the enemy. Anger and hate build, focusing their strength upon those poor unfortunate souls about to be put to the sword. On the battlefield, the drum's roll strengthens the army's resolve, bolstering confidence in their skill and weakening their fear of death.

This powerful drum was once made by the Valdaermen (using Forlog •••• and Hjaldar ••) to embolden those about to travel across angry seas to "borrow" goods from English neighbors. So long as the drum is played, those allied with the drummer are fearless, acting without second thought and effectively increasing their initiative by two. Additionally, the drum's magic reduces wound penalties by one level. If played before the battle begins, terror creeps slowly into the foes' bones — those opposing are also affected by the beat's power. As the armies rush forth in the first clash, the players of those stricken by the drum's fear must make a Willpower roll versus difficulty 7 or flee the scene. Those able to resist bolting are still encumbered by fear; their players act with initiatives reduced by one.

Armor of Air

Rumors swell of a great defensive magic from the lands of the Djinn. The very air is shaped by magic and craftsmanship into a perfect shirt of chainmail, invisible save for a brilliant reflection in the light of the midday sun. This chain weighs less than nothing — it might float away if not pinned down. The chain alone has no weight, and its enchantment even reduces the wearer's own weight by half. It is durable, seemingly incapable of permanent damage, and repairs itself as the day passes. This item has only one flaw: its magic dies in the light of the moon. It then becomes visible and heavy.

Should the shirt be removed and not properly held down, it will rise into the clouds; only the light of a full moon will force it back to earth, landing with the weight of steel. Although these were first made by Djinn, certain Ahl-i-Batin have figured out the trick to their making (Al-Hajj •••).

Helm of Nightmares

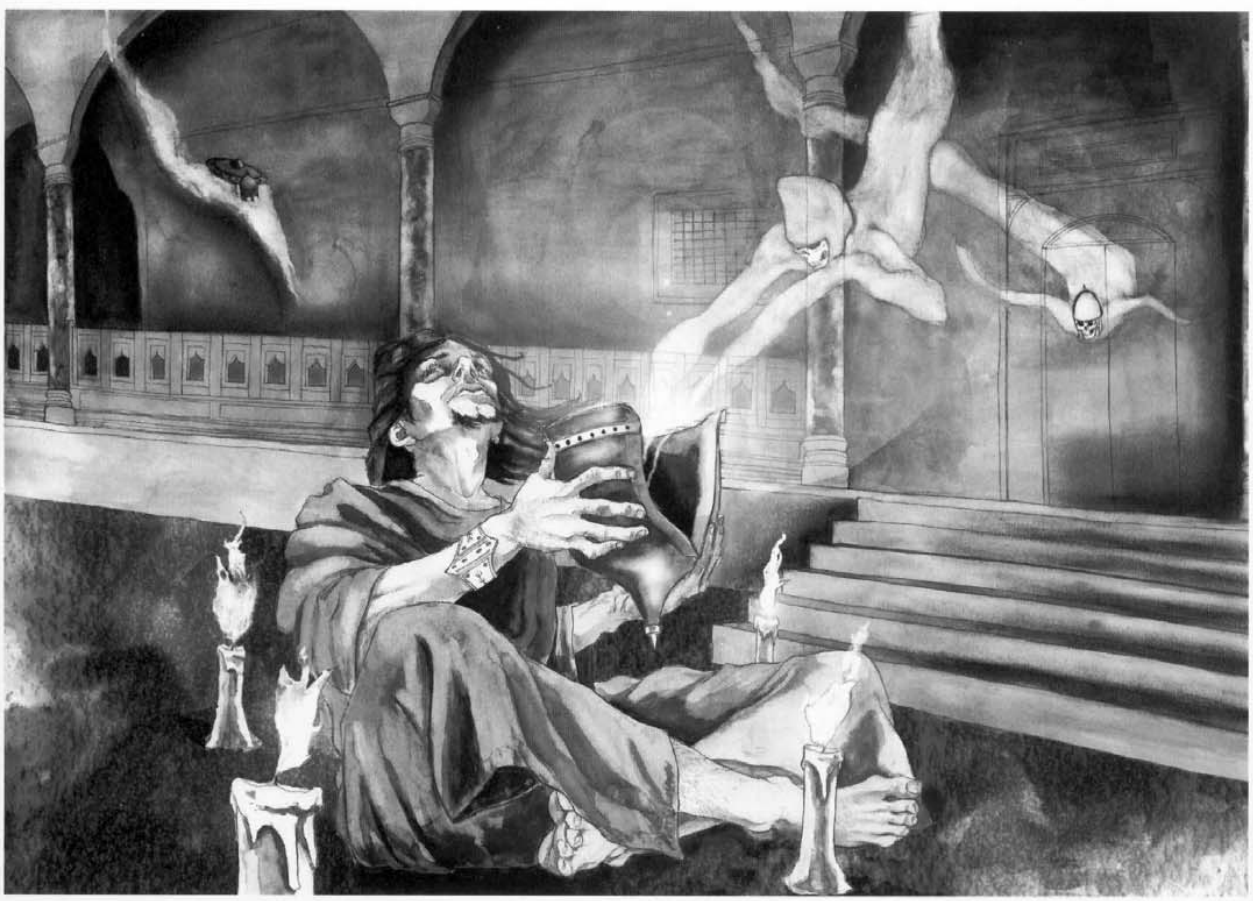
Created for a specific victim, these helms usually resemble one the victim already owns. When worn, enemy forces appear stronger and larger while allies' losses appear more grievous. Should anyone sleep in the same room as the helm, it will whisper doubts and send nightmares of fantastic losses to them.

This helm is ensorceled by a Spirit-Talker, to prevent atrocities of war from occurring on their own lands. By planting these doubts and fears, they hope to force invading armies to reconsider their plans and prevent bloodshed. The helm is prepared by encouraging ancestor spirits of the area to take up residence in the helm. Those who died by violence and war are preferred, having greater strength when it comes time to cloud the victim's mind with images of carnage and loss. Only those wise enough to have mastered Chieftain •• and Trickster ••• can create such a helm.

While these creations are made for a specific person, any who wear one will be subject to its effects. Those suffering the helm's nightmares will have an increasingly difficult time sleeping until it begins to affect their activities. After two weeks of regular exposure, the victims will suffer one level of increased difficulty on all activities. Additionally, wearing the helm increases the difficulty of Willpower rolls in combat-related situations by two.

Valkyrie's Barding

These rare treasures are not found on the battlefield as often as they once were. Most of these items are taken into the afterlife with the horse and rider after their untimely death in battle. Most still in use are found among the descendants of the Norse who settled in the British Isles.



The barding is of a simple enough design: thick, boiled leather pieces with an assortment of steel rings sewn on in the shape of runes of war, strength and protection. The leather plates are attached to each other and placed upon the horse with a set of leather straps bearing the names of family members who have died in glorious battle, and were thus afforded a place in Valhalla. The barding is surprisingly light given its durability; the rider finds that he and his steed can move as easily as without armor. The barding has an armor +4B/+4L/+2A and levies no encumbrance penalties.

The blessing on the barding is hereditary, but it may be passed along only if the last owner died in battle. His name must be added to the harness straps to acknowledge this transition. Should the name of any family member unworthy of a place in Valhalla be written upon the straps, the blessing placed on the barding is reversed, causing the barding to weigh so much it cannot be lifted. So few have earned this armor in the past century that the Valkyrie no longer bestow it anew. certain Valdaermen can mimic its make (Forlog ••, Hjaldar •••), however.

Slepnir's Shoes

Crafted by those who remember the old ways, these horseshoes are created in honor and homage to the great steed of the All-Father. Shining black as Slepnir's coat, these iron shoes grant the horse that wears them great endurance and speed. A single shoe allows the horse to travel all day without rest. A pair adds half again to the distance he may travel. Three grant the horse strength to travel a full day at full gallop. A horse wearing four can carry a fully armored man at full gallop for a week without rest. This last journey will unfortunately result in the steed's death, however.

Any number of shoes grants to the horse toughened skin that can repel arrows (armor +3B/+4L/+1A). The shoes must be forged in the deep of winter, while the snow still stands waist high. The iron may be worked only over coals of ash and cooled only directly by the snows outside the forge. Any who fail to perform this task properly can never succeed at it again. This requires the Valdaerman Rune Pillars of Fara •••• and Hjaldar ••, with nine successes per shoe over three rolls: one while stoking the coals, another while shaping the iron, and the last while cooling the shoe.

Shield from Assassins

Armor is not the only protective magic created. Dating back to the time of the Roman Senate, this protective amulet is reported to have saved the lives of many in its centuries of service. Although no proof exists, tales claim it was created by the Oracle of Delphi. The amulet is believed to presently be in the possession of a Messianic Voice exarch. It is said that similar amulets may be created with Repha-El •••.

This amulet, when worn, keeps a constant impression of the intents of those present. Anyone plotting the wearer's death will cause the amulet to turn so cold the wearer can barely withstand it against exposed skin. Anyone actually attempting the wearer's death causes the amulet to warm enough to burn. The wearer need not be aware of the presence of the assassins, would-be or otherwise; he must simply be within 20 paces of those with untoward thoughts and the intent to fulfill them. False impressions rarely occur, although it is possible. Most are from short thoughts of rage quickly suppressed by better judgment. The amulet is useless on a battleground, giving no indication of the wearer's personal danger.

Magical Aides

Every magic worker worth his salt has numerous aides to make his life easier. Magic takes great effort; very little wisdom is required to know that reducing effort is always desirable. Not all aids are meant to supplement the magical craft; some exist for daily chores or less routine but equally mundane tasks. Still others carry ages of wisdom, granted by the life experiences of past owners or even the spirits of those very same ancestors.

Seer's Pool

For every old crone predicting doom, gloom and other less pleasant futures there is a seer's pool. Few would attempt for long the scrying arts or the interpretation of omens without this important aid. The pool must be made of a difficult-to-obtain item, such as the shell of a dragon-turtle or the helm of a cyclops. Once acquired, the insides must be polished so smooth and clean that the reflection of the moon's light blinds the onlooker. It must then be consecrated at the height of a new moon, and placed into its final home. Every night, until the next new moon, it must be filled with fresh water and four drops of the mage's blood, stirred with the wing feather of a raven. By the time of the next moon, the mage and her pool will be joined in power, and it will extend her powers of augury.

The Old Faith makes the most uses of this device; it demands much of their art to complete, requiring an ongoing spell wrought with the Autumn ••• and Spring •••• Pillars. The rite takes 28 days to cast, and one roll may be made per day; 84 successes must be obtained. The resulting pool adds three dice to any form of scrying or prediction used with the pool. If the pool is moved, its power is lost.

The Valdaermen dedicate their runes similarly, in a brass bowl of water mixed with their own blood. This requires Forlog ••, Galdrar ••. This grants one bonus die to scrying or prediction attempts. The runes may be rededicated for more power; this requires Galdrar •••• , granting a bonus of three dice.

Animated Tools

Many an hour in the alchemist's lab is used up preparing ingredients *just* so. Such things can be dangerous, and is not work meant for a bumble-headed apprentice who can barely be trusted to fetch fresh water. The simpler, and safer, solution is to animate the tools themselves. They do as told, waste no time daydreaming and never fall asleep in the sulfur. These things are difficult to create, taking great skill and patience. Perfecting a mortar and pestle is often the first sign an apprentice is ready to strike out on his own. Similarly, such a tool might be an aid in other ways, providing advice of a sort, or supervising a situation for its mistress. A generations-old anvil speaks encouragement to the apprentice smith, reminding him when it is time to reheat the iron or if he strikes too softly. Grandfather's walking stick knows every path in the county and never gets lost.

The Spirit-Talkers often create such animate items, by either binding spirits to them or awakening the spirits slumbering within. They spend many hours with the item in question, sitting and talking with the spirits around them until one agrees to live within the item, or the item itself awakens. It's not unheard of for a rope, door, walking stick, or rucksack to act as much as a mentor as it does an aid. This requires Chieftain ••, Wise One ••. A day must be spent with the item, with one roll per hour of darkness; a total of 20 successes per item is required.

Hermetics are also fond of this craft, using their will to force a semblance of life into an item, thus making it capable of following simple orders and performing equally simple movements. It requires Corona ••• and Vires ••• (•••• for the item to levitate), with the same number of successes as required for the Spirit-Talkers.

Concealed Journal

A wizard's thoughts should stay his own. What knowledge these minds hold is not meant for mortal men. What compels a mage to put such dangerous things to pen where a Commoner can read them (well, those who can read) is beyond comprehension. Fortunately, for those who have the knack, this simple enchantment makes a wizard's secret journal exactly that — secret. The oldest form of this journal probably comes from the Batini, who claim to have relearned this skill from those who came long before them.

The written work, or materials to be written upon, is dusted with a fine coat of dander from a mouse. The dander must be allowed to sit for a day before being brushed off with the feather of a bird of prey. Once enchanted and cleaned, anything written upon it is visible only to the caster; everyone else sees only an empty surface. If closed, sealed, or similarly shut and again dusted with the dander of a mouse, the item will be unobtrusive in plain sight or invisible if hidden.

For the Hermetic, this requires Corona ••• and Vires ••. The Batini require only Al-Layl •••. Closed items hidden in plain sight are -4 to spot; deliberately hidden items are -8. Invisible text may be seen only if the hiding ward is broken.

In times past, the early Messianics used this effect to hide the symbols that showed the way to their secret places of meeting. This is still a common practice, though one practiced more from habit than need. The surface must be washed with sacramental wine. Once the stain has set, the symbols are written with lamb's blood. Those not holding the proper crucifix will see nothing but red upon the wall. This requires Repha-el •• and Uri-el ••.

Wizard's Lock

This charm prevents a lock from opening without the presence of the wizard's chosen focus. If the focus is unavailable, the lock simply will not open, not even for the caster. Should a thief try to pick or otherwise disable the lock, she'll find it has been strengthened, though a few lockpicks may break before this becomes obvious. Most brute force attempts to break the lock will remove the latches long before damaging the lock. This magic is used by Hermetics who have mastered Vires ••. Enchanting the lock requires a small bit of sulfur and the key matching the lock. Should the mage fail to enchant the lock, it will not be apparent until the first time he tries to lock it, which it will repeatedly fail to do.

The Valdaermen of old used this charm to prevent the pilfering of a raid's spoils before returning home, ensuring that there was proper distribution of the voyage's gains. The charm was placed on ropes that allowed only the raid's leader to tie and untie them. The charm for making this rope is still taught to those who have learned Fara ••• and Galdrar ••. The rope retains this charm only for a journey to and from a place.

Irresistible Spices

Hunger can tempt a man beyond sanity into acts that could surely lead to certain death. This potent packet of seasonings reminds a man of his worst hungers, making him pliable for a witch's needs. Mushrooms from a faerie mound must be gathered under a full moon and then dried only in the midday sun until they are brittle enough to crumble by hand. Sea salts hand-gathered from a fisherman's net are added, along with the meat of an acorn and crushed pepper over slightly warmed coals, all while speaking softly the name of the victim. As practiced by the Old Faith, this requires Summer •• and Winter ••• for 15 successes over two days. The player rolls once per day of game time at moonrise.

Once the victim catches the scent of mutton cooked with these spices, he is compelled to sit and eat. He is willing to do anything demanded of him to get

even the smallest morsel. Once the mutton is eaten, the victim is unable to resist fulfilling his promise.

The Batini create a similar wine, used to seal bargains with those who are likely to prove untrustworthy. Those who drink the wine at the end of an agreement will find themselves unable to break the agreement so long as the other party is equally true. A red wine is warmed for two days over a low fire, flavored with honey and flower petals. This creation requires Al-Anbiya •• and Al-Fatihah •••.

Ever-Opening Door

Sometimes, as hounds nip at your heels, an exit is never as close as it need be. The exit you were certain was just over there is actually a ladies' dressing closet. There's never the door that you *need* when you need it. In the realm of magic, anything becomes possible, something every mage is thankful for at least once in his life.

This brass door handle, when pressed against a door or gate links it with a specific door up to two hundred leagues away. The handles are crafted as any, then carefully painted with a Batini-made gold patina. One of the handles is permanently attached to a door, and its mate is held to the opposite side for four hours while the sorcerer attunes the handles to each other, meditating on the idea that distance is an illusion and that all places are the same. This requires Al-Hajj ••••.

The Hermetic Order has a similar talisman that aids in making a quick exit. A small charm in the shape of a bird's wing when touched to a door before opening it forms a gateway to the outermost door of the structure. The mage must have mastered Vires ••••.

Light of Understanding

As long as there have been more than two peoples in the world there has been divergence in thought. From divergent thought comes separate language and, in turn, differing understandings. It is difficult to broker peace, educate the masses, or even buy dinner provisions when one cannot understand the local language.

In the light of the Almighty, all is made clear. When the holy oils are burned in these lamps, all words in their light are made clear.

The Messianics produce this item literally as used. It is made by filling a brass altar lamp with oil from the Holy Lands. A brief prayer is said as a single serving of sacramental wine is poured into the oil. Once the oil is lit, all who are touched by the light of its fire will be understood as though the listener and speaker share the same mind. To fashion such a lamp requires Gavri-El •••• and Repha-El ••.

The Batini uses a heavily perfumed oil for similar effect; when placed in a lamp, all who can see the light and smell the oil will know without flaw the intent of a man's words. It requires Al-Al-Fatihah ••• to charm the oil.

Self-Climbing Rope

This infinitely useful item appears to be a typical coil of flaxen rope. Upon command, the rope becomes animate, able to move along any surface. The rope does not have much of a backbone, however, making it unable to stand up for more than an arm's length.

When the rope is created, fresh pine needles and spider's silk are woven in with the fibers. The rope is then left to steep in a cold kettle of brine made from sea salts and the eggs of a snake. This rope is most commonly seen in the possession of members of the Old Faith along the coast of Portugal. This task takes seven days once the rope is wound, requiring Spring ••• and a total of 21 successes, with one roll per day. The rope has a Strength of 7, a Dexterity of 2 and is limited to 30 feet in length. Additional ropes may be tied or spliced to it, but they do not gain its magical abilities.

The Batini have learned a similar function by drawing on the commonality of all things. This may be created once one has mastered Al-Hajj ••. The rope is similarly made, using silk and nettles in the weaving and scented with rose perfume.

Unfolding Constructs

This tightly bundled pack of sticks, when untied, moves swiftly to take the shape of a necessary object. The user need only speak the appropriate words as he unties the knots to have an instant bridge, hut or ladder. More creative — and dangerous — uses are not uncommon. The power is limited, allowing the owner to create things that are no more than one hundred times the size of the bundle. A sixty-foot, simple bridge or a similarly sized ladder is possible, but one can not shape large fortifications or a massive longboat.

The creation of this item is a closely guarded secret among the elder Valdaermen. The process requires the bones of an enemy shaman be ground to powder then mixed with eggs and oils to make a glaze. This glaze is in turn used to varnish 10 straight and smooth branches of an ash tree, tied together with rope made from the same shaman's skin. This requires Fara •, Forlog •• and Galdrar ••••, plus 15 successes on six rolls — one for each day the glaze must bake before the fire.

The Hermetics create similar ladders of rope and oak that are portable and compact, but not nearly so versatile in function. This craft requires a mastery of Anima •••, Corona ••• and Primus••, and five successes on three rolls as the ladder's rope legs are tied.

Magic Hindrances

Parallel with a mage's need to assist himself in his work is the need to make things harder for others. Many a crone makes a good living delivering curses for those deserving and not. Some of these annoyances and curses require a physical form, a source of even a small

bit of power to keep the spell going until its appointed end. These cursed items are a bane on their victims.

Not all these effects are a direct curse; some instead affect those around the victim. With a small bit of creativity, they can still be turned on a victim. One should be careful of a witch's gift.

Glyph of Obscurement

This complex ward, when sewn with red lamb's wool on the inside of cloak, makes the cloak's wearer increasingly unrecognizable the farther away he gets. The ward muddies the viewer's mind, causing his eyes to blend the face of the cloak wearer with others he has seen that day. Although useless at sword's range, one can easily blend into a crowd to elude missile attacks, for example.

This is sometimes bestowed in more powerful form on someone whose identity is of import, to sully their claims at who they are. In a time when the only proof of identity is being recognized and confirmed, this glyph can be a powerful nuisance, or even a cause of death.

This ward requires one foot of red lamb's wool thread for every year of the victim's life. All the thread must be used in fashioning the glyph; none can be wasted. The Spirit-Talkers who perform this curse need to have mastered Chieftain •• and Trickster •••, rolling one attempt for every five feet of thread sewn, with two successes needed each roll.

Tempest's Anger

Many a mob has been stirred up seemingly by magic. Truth is, they often were. By spreading this powder about an area, discreetly or overtly, any who come in contact with it feel compelled to gather and harass, fight, or otherwise raise civil mischief against something they all feel strong opposition toward. The powder is made of a mix of river clay, goat dung, salts, and the blood of a wronged man. Once mixed, it resembles simple soil, making it easy to spread about a village square or other place, to slowly gather forces.

The Old Faith use Summer •• to make the powder, while the Valdaermen use Hjaldar ••.

Aura of Disbelief

For those unfortunate enough to have suffered the curse of the village wise woman or forest hag, there is little respite until something is made right. This curse is a popular choice against thieves caught in a lie who will not admit guilt or return what was stolen; the curse follows them until they admit their misdeed and make things right — for whatever value of right is relevant.

The victims of this curse will no longer be able to speak with a silver tongue; every word uttered will be questioned and doubted. If asked the color of the sky, a truthful answer will be met with words questioning the speaker's eyes or even sanity.

This curse is well known to the Old Faith and commonly used on traveling thieves calling themselves



merchants. The curse requires no physical components, only the angry words of someone wronged and a clear view of the perpetrator. It requires Winter ••.

Forced Belligerence

Sometimes, it's not enough to manipulate a diplomat with words. Calm and rational people can be difficult to sway without reasoned argument. To force the truth to the surface, it must often be provoked forth. Struck with a stick, the angry serpent will itself strike out, showing all its venomous ways. Batini mystics have a scent that forces a victim into dissonance with the One. This perfume, thinned with water, will make a calm man edgy. Mix it thicker and he will become tense, responding to every word as an accusation. Mix it pure and he will be beyond rational, searching for conflict in whatever form he may find it. Batini create the perfume with the needles, water, and crushed petals of a desert cactus, ground and blended to a thick paste. If thinned with anything but pure water, it will be fouled and not work. For reasons not understood, the perfume does not affect women.

This requires Al-Fatihah •••. The perfume affects all men who can smell it for up to one day. The scent expires after one scene.

A similar poultice is known to the Valdaermen and requires Hjaldar ••. This poultice is painted on the chest of men about to go into battle, increasing their resolve. They gain an additional two temporary Willpower points for the duration of the combat.

Ever-Present Pebble

This curse creates a constant pain in the foot of the victim, as though a pebble were stuck in his boot. No amount of effort can cause the pebble to be found or dislodged — even if the victim travels barefoot. It will persist any time weight is placed upon the foot, until sufficient time has passed.

When they still practiced in secret, the Christian progenitors of the Messianic Voices would commonly create a salve that, when placed on the underside of a horse's bridle, would convince the animal it had a burr or similar affliction. The salve was created with both the bristles and sap of an aloe plant, carefully ground for four hours. Once each hour, a prayer is said, begging forgiveness for the falsehood needed for the greater good. Each hour, two successes are needed with Mikha-El ••.

The Old Faith mages create this inconvenience with a small stone washed smooth by a brook. The stone is dotted with hare's blood from the end of a porcupine's quill. One dot is placed for each day the effect will last, requiring one success each. This requires Summer ••. To take effect, the stone must strike any portion of the victim's body below the knee, thus inflicting the phantom injury on that extremity.

Look of the Wolf

Few animals react well to the presence of the wolf. Its wild nature and thirst for blood make even the most calm uneasy in its presence. This ward, painted on a saddle in fresh wine, inflicts a similar condition upon the first to sit upon it. Animals become uneasy, even skittish in that person's presence. Horses will refuse to carry her, become hostile, and attempt to defend themselves is she comes too close. This unfortunate condition persists until the next full moon or the victim is killed.

The Spirit-Talkers paint this glyph in a mixture made with the urine of a wolf, fresh from marking its territory. The urine is mixed with water wrung from a poisonous mushroom cap and the fat drippings from the leg of a lamb, let to set overnight. This requires Summer •• and Winter ••.

The Valdaermen have a similar charm made from the incisors of a wolf. The incisors are left to sit in a bowl of the mage's blood from sundown to sun up while he casts the runes. This requires Forlog •• and Hjaldar ••.



September, A.D. 1230

Three days since we fled the library, my Masters, and things have gotten worse. After losing nine mages and servants during the exodus, we have lost three more to unknown fiends in the wilderness. We may feel invulnerable within our walls, but it seems that magic and knowledge do not keep one safe at night. We are able to keep the elements off of us, but with five magi needed at all times to control the forces, as well as scrying for the damned undead and other monstrosities, we are all exhausted.

Tremere's forces were expected, but their power was not. I had heard their magic was weakened during their transformation. I saw nothing of the like as they attacked. Their drive and their thirst overcame our small village. We had the foresight to place some wards on our homes and leave the library as they feasted on the Commoners in the town. You now know my shame: I let the innocent people die to save myself and my House. The smoke has cleared from the horizon: now we wait in the wilderness and return to the town at sunrise to see what is left.

Alas, the one thing I did not count on was my inability to protect everyone. The weather, flight and the frequent attacks have been difficult for all, and many grow weaker daily.

I will continue this journal when we discover what remains of our homes.

† † †

We have returned to our homes without incident.

The wards we placed around them and the library were strong, and the vampires were unable to break through them. Apparently some tried, and were caught up in them, to later burn in the morning sun. Peter showed his disappointment at not having any bodies left to piss upon.

The rest of the town did not fare as well. Some survivors were discovered huddling in the cellar of one of the wealthier merchants. Half are mad with fear, the other half mad with hunger. We have taken in those remaining, offering protection. They are grateful, and know nothing about our inaction in the massacre. It's best that way. The rest of the town is gone: burned or looted or devoured.

Rose, our matron, warns me that even though our houses are safe, along with the information inside them, we might as well be dead. The lack of a town from which to buy supplies and food will soon show itself to be a slower death than one at the yawning mouth of a vampire.

Very suddenly the appeal of being pursuers of knowledge in our small village is tarnished as the reality sets in.

The wolves seem to howl much more loudly now. Peter told me myths of shape-shifting vampires, and I forbade him to repeat the tale. Panic is not what will help us now.

We may have to return to London and forsake our research here. I don't see how we can survive. It was simple to do the hunt and let the Commoners worry about the workings of the town, but now we are the town.

† † †

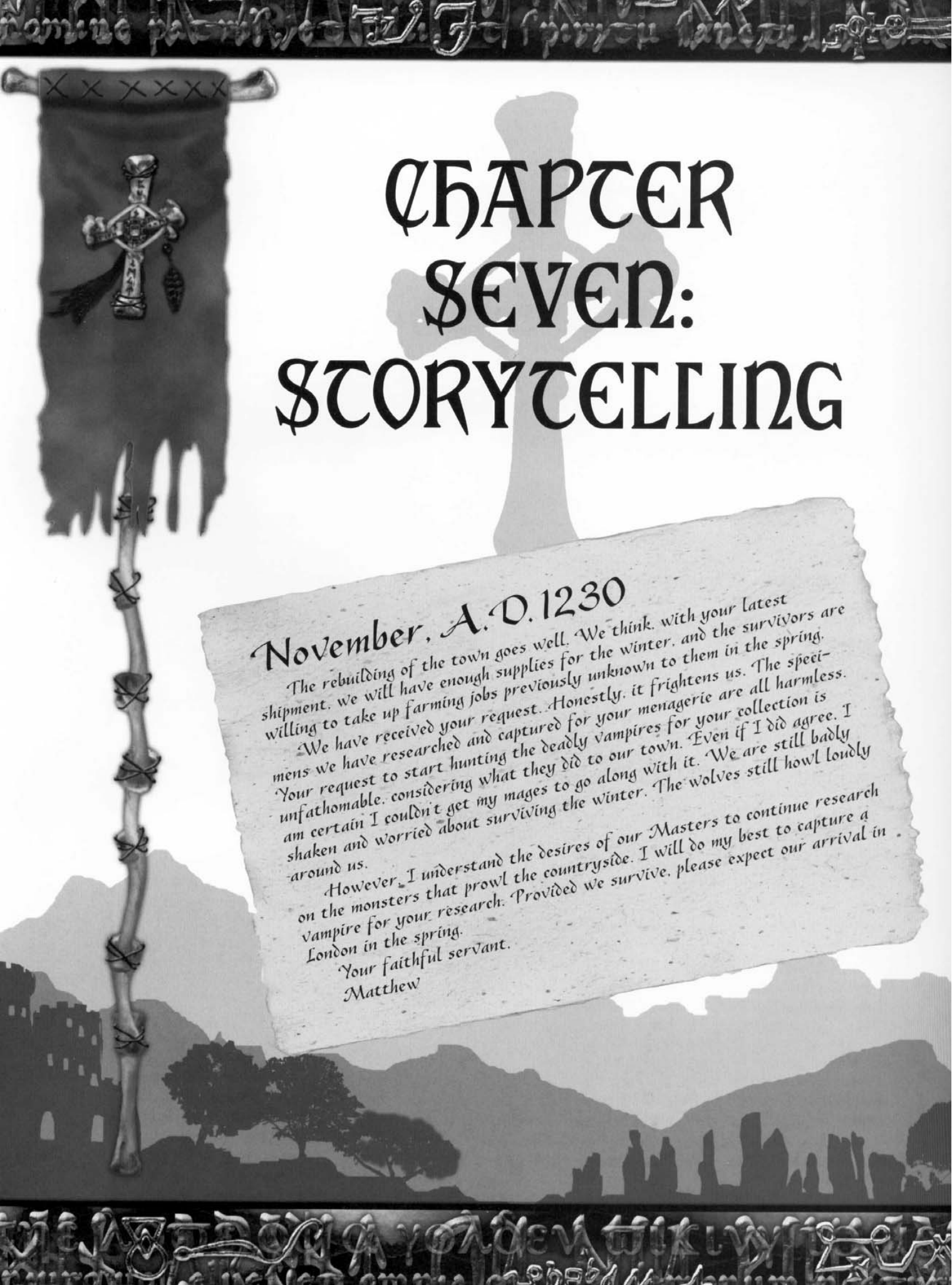
I am convinced we will need your help with extra provisions, else we must leave town and allow the Commoners to perish. We are nearing the harvest time, and everything is burned or looted.

I will report the few items of positive news. We have sent the Commoners out to recover as many supplies as possible from the houses that remain standing, as well as the destroyed fields. We have tried to house some of those without homes. I know some of you in London do not understand kind treatment of the Commoners, but right now we need them as much as they need us. We have been working on burying the dead and cleaning up the town. Our current goal is rebuilding what is left of the town and the economy. The positive light falls on the fact that the Commoners are accepting our rule without question. I never thought I would see this happening.

The specimens for your menagerie are safe. We have them caged below the library, although they suffer as we do from hunger. We will continue to make sure the townsfolk know nothing about them. I am sure they would react badly to the news. I do not know when we can continue our hunt for more specimens.

Your faithful servant,

Matthew



CHAPTER SEVEN: STORYTELLING

November, A.D. 1230

The rebuilding of the town goes well. We think. with your latest shipment. we will have enough supplies for the winter. and the survivors are willing to take up farming jobs previously unknown to them in the spring.

We have received your request. Honestly. it frightens us. The specimens we have researched and captured for your menagerie are all harmless. Your request to start hunting the deadly vampires for your collection is unfathomable. considering what they did to our town. Even if I did agree. I am certain I couldn't get my mages to go along with it. We are still badly shaken and worried about surviving the winter. The wolves still howl loudly around us.

However, I understand the desires of our Masters to continue research on the monsters that prowl the countryside. I will do my best to capture a vampire for your research. Provided we survive. please expect our arrival in London in the spring.

Your faithful servant.

Matthew

Setting the Scene

Consider your origins: you were not made that you might live as brutes, but so as to follow virtue and knowledge.

- Dante, *The Divine Comedy*

Put down the book for a moment and listen. Close your eyes, take a deep breath, and really hear everything around you. Don't worry, we won't continue without you.

What did you hear? Radio? Television? Construction outside? Traffic? Maybe just a refrigerator or central heating or air conditioning kicking in? Odds are, you heard sounds of the present, sounds of the 21st century, the sound of technology. Modern day life is so inundated with noise - loud music, gentle humming, repetitive construction - that we are used to it. It even soothes us; when the power goes out, people are frightened. They panic, they stumble around for candles and lanterns, anything to beat back the darkness that is always there. It is an eerie existence, living without the constant hum of power, the silence that comes when the machines are silent. We usually don't realize it, but our lives are reassured by the knowledge that tells us that somewhere a machine is doing work for us.

The world of **Dark Ages: Mage** has none of these sounds. The sounds that break the silence are distinctly human, animal or natural: voices, chirps, rainfall, thunder, footsteps, cries of pain, laughter. The whisper of a spell, the pounding of a door, the creak of wagon wheels, bird song - these are the dominant sounds that carry. If you think about it, the differences in just the everyday sounds of the Dark Ages are staggering in themselves.

The other senses have their differences as well. Taste is not the same; of course, fresh meat is rare, and older meat is heavily salted and spiced to hide the flavor of rot. People do not deliver pizza or Chinese food to your door. The fresh plums you may be eating wouldn't be heard of at a polite table - raw fruits were considered unwholesome.

The smells of the Dark Ages were also different from modern day. Missing were the smells of exhaust, ozone, spilled gasoline, fresh newsprint. Although the air would have been much more fresh to the 21st century way of thinking - air pollution as we know it doesn't yet exist - the concept of picking up bodily waste was not as important. Wastes from dogs, horses, and even humans littered the roads. The foods of the era were so heavily seasoned with spices and flavors such as garlic that legend has it the breath of the French offended many enemies during the First Crusade.

You do not have gleaming cities clouded by smog, nor do you have nice paved roads and warm, safe cars in which to travel. There is much more wilderness, far more overgrown areas.

As a Storyteller in this world, your job is to weave a story that your players can experience and believe in. This will involve setting up the story itself, but also including period-correct sensory details - the things your players' characters will see, smell, hear, taste and touch will undoubtedly be different than everything they are used to. You will create the template for their world, play the people they encounter and make sure they stay rooted in the correct century. As your setting is not in the 21st century, this will take perhaps a bit more planning than a game of **Mage** set in present day.

Historical Accuracy

The challenges facing a Storyteller are considerable: you have to make a world that is plausible and enthralling, put people into that world that are lovable, loatheable, believable and useful, and set your characters on a path that they can care about. **Dark Ages: Mage** throws another curve ball your way, setting the story in a world that most have heard about only in passing in history classes. You and your players will have to face new problems that scarcely need solutions in the modern world.

While being historically accurate can be difficult, remember that you can be as detailed as you want. Remember that you are the Storyteller. If you just want to set your characters in a sort of generic land of peasants in squalor and kings in massive stone castles, wizards in lonely towers and Vikings on the waters, feel free. It is important to have fun with the chronicle, not feel tied to certain restrictions and rules to the point of boring everyone. If extensive research isn't your cup of tea, then use just this book to guide you and run with it.

If, however, your goal is to immerse your players deeply into the world of the Dark Medieval age and be as historically accurate as possible, you can do all the research your heart desires. If you want to pattern your chronicle around the myth and magic of Dark Medieval Ireland, then feel free to research all you like about the life of the Irish, the role of the Church, the ruling class, the mythology that drove the lifestyles, and then decide how your mages fit into the story. There will be a list of helpful books at the end of this chapter to aid you on your quest to bring your characters the most realistic story possible.

There are, however, some things you may want to avoid. Anyone who has studied Geoffrey Chaucer will let you know how unpleasant Middle English is to

struggle through. It is unlikely your group will want to play their characters down to the language of the day. "He koude songes make and wel endyte," makes for pretty reading in college, but unless you're playing with a group of Middle English scholars (and you might well do that), speaking like the Wife of Bath will probably be more frustrating than fun. And it bears repeating that fun is the reason you're doing this.

Historical accuracy is only as important as you and your players make it.

The Role of Mages

Here's where the history splits - the story you're telling isn't a story from the Dark Ages, it's a story from **Dark Ages: Mage**. This world is like our own in that it also experienced William the Conqueror and the Inquisition. But in this world, William was perhaps influenced by a mage advisor who can change the weather to aid him in battle, and maybe the Inquisition is helped along by some powerful mages in the Church who wish to use the Inquisition as a tool to take out some rival magic schools. The superstitions that made life fearful for much of the population have some merit in this world, and the monsters that plagued the nightmares of Dark Ages Europe are real.

Mages have a great deal of power and influence: from the wise woman counseling small towns on how to rid themselves of warts to the mages advising kings and queens from shadowy backdrops. Magic is a pervasive force in this world.

This is a world in which the Church is obeyed out of fear, but astrology and magic are trusted as well. The Church has instilled in people a fear of Hell, and so they go to church and worship, but old religions die hard. Peasants will set out a plate of milk for the faerie folk on the evening before church, and on the way home from church they will stop by the wise woman's house to get a swollen ankle cursed away. The Church has some influence in the harassment of mages, as the Pope has begun to emphasize heresy more and more, and things are beginning to get dangerous for magicians.

It is the responsibility of your players to create their backgrounds and describe their coming into their magic, whether they were supported by a mentor, thrown out of their village for heresy, or perhaps even accepted. If they need help, you'll need to be there, but encourage them to come up with as much as possible on their own. What is their social background? Their religion? Their gender (more on this below)? Did their families and community hold them in awe, or were they feared to be demons? Did a mentor find them and teach them, or did they learn themselves? These are all questions to be answered before the game begins. A bit different from character creation (discussed in Chapter Three), your characters need to place themselves in the Dark Medieval age by understanding this world of, poverty, plague and darkness.

Mages are different from others. They desire to learn more about themselves and their powers, to meet others like themselves, or to even test out their magic against dangers unknown. Even though the majority of the era's people are born, live, and put to rest in the same town, your mages' pursuit of magic will drive them to journey throughout Europe.

Gender and Social Roles

Social and gender roles are rigidly defined and often cruel in the Dark Medieval. Slavery and feudalism are facts of life, and most people are born, live and die as peasants. Some laws require peasants to work the land for their lord, plus get taxed by the crown. They are not permitted to hunt game in forests owned by their lord, or even leave their lands without permission. If they do leave, they are jailed. Education is not given, lest the peasants try to rise above their station.

Similar restraints are placed on women. While women are often found heading the household responsibilities, everything from keeping track of supplies and finances to, in the case of noble women, managing servants and slaves and educating the children, they are still second-class citizens. The main goal for a woman's family is to get her married, at which time all her assets - if any - become her husband's. Upon his death, however, the widow once again attains a small level of power over her assets - if they don't all go to her son.

Players accustomed to the (mostly) equality-minded present day will need to adjust to this mindset. Those playing second-class citizens including female or peasant characters will experience more difficulty adventuring in the Dark Medieval age. Single women are assumed to be looking for a husband, widowed or part of the Church, while married women should be managing the household and not delving into the workings of the very fabric of life. Male peasants will have the not-so-small problem of money or means with which to barter. Can they afford a coat? Boots? Food?

Make sure the players consider this as they create their characters. An explanation of how a woman or peasant manages to break free of her perceived responsibilities to pursue a life of magic will need to be worked out before they start, as many encountered characters (Storyteller or player-driven)

will no doubt ask. This may be a sticky situation to control. A female or peasant mage will be socially inferior to those around them; yet, they will have powers and knowledge far above any noble or male non-mage above them.

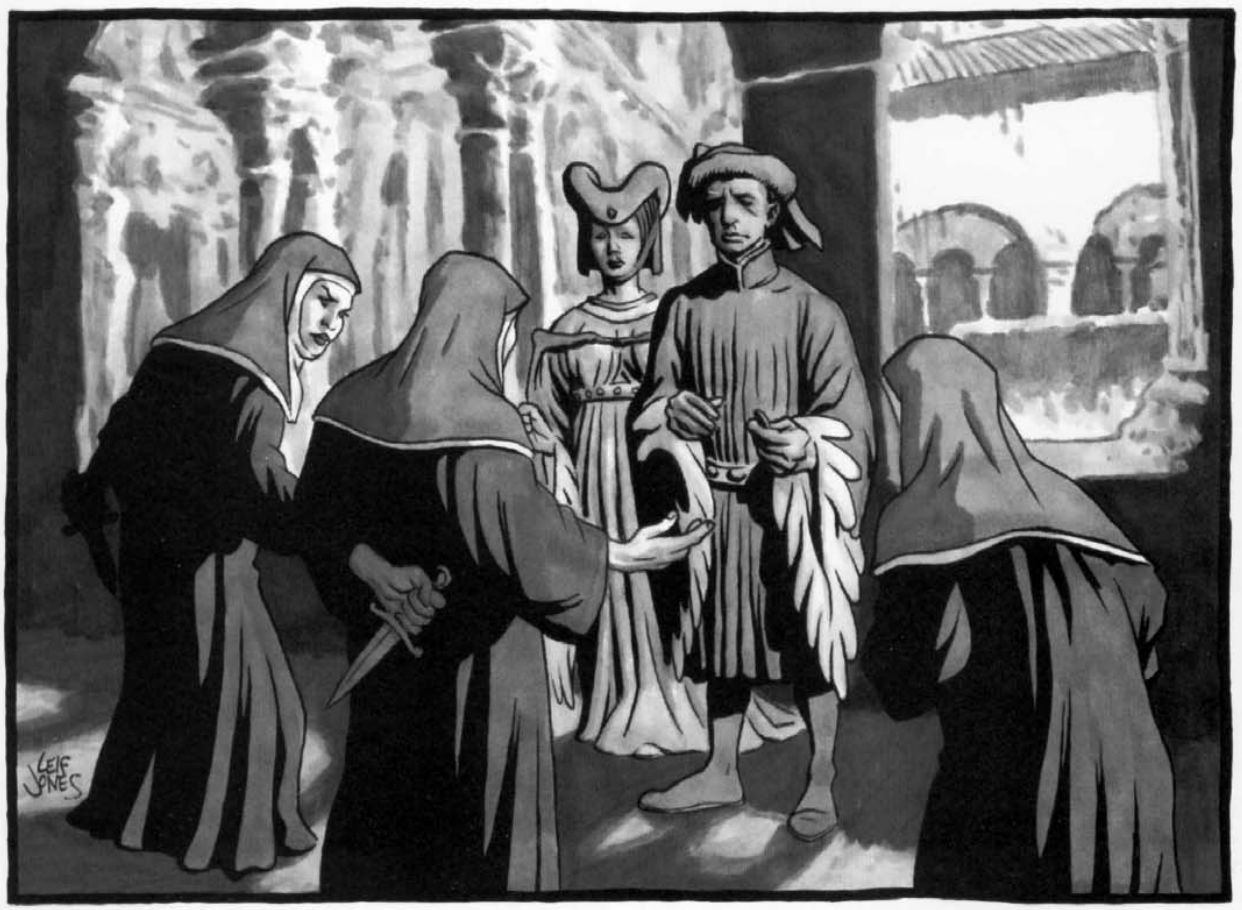
Storytellers can see that this can bring some captivating roleplaying opportunities for the characters who have been brought up to be subservient but have the natural arrogance of one who is clearly superior. How are they treated in the world of their peers? The social structures of the different Fellowships are very different. Perhaps they would be readily accepted in the earthy Old Faiths but not among the haughty Order of Hermes.

Another problem that can crop up is your players' reaction to period-relevant prejudice. You may have someone in your group who has always played female characters and is surprised to encounter - in their 21st century opinion - unreasonable obstacles for their character. You will have to strike a balance between your own level of historical accuracy and fun for your players. If you players start to complain about how their characters are being treated, explain to them the social expectations of the day, and why their character is experiencing difficulties in the particular situation.

Like most challenges, the social and gender roles of the age can be an intriguing obstacle rather than a deadly flaw. For instance, an all-female group may pose as a group of nuns on pilgrimage and use that to their benefit, or a group of peasants armed with nothing but their magic can attempt to raid a manor and assassinate the cruel lord.

Props and Advanced Techniques

Many players find their game sessions are more immersive when the Storyteller goes to the effort to create a mood and set props. The more they feel they are in the Dark Medieval age, the easier it will be to assume their characters and play the game. These are technology-poor times. Yet, they're called the Dark Ages for more reasons than one: Not only has electricity not yet been harnessed, but the poverty, the fear, the illness and the wars give a bloody and cheerless tint to everyday life. Mix in some werewolves, vampires, dragons, kobolds and mysterious mages and warriors and the dark and foreboding overtone of the time becomes all-encompassing.



LIVING UNDER PERPETUAL DARKNESS

There is a lot to keep in mind during play in the Dark Medieval setting. Life was radically different 600 or so years ago. "I understand," you may think, "no electricity. No cell phones and no cars." It's more than that - much more. There are so many things you may take for granted, but you may be surprised at the things that have changed, for in the Dark Medieval age:

- Only a few rude maps exist
- Forks are not around yet - you eat with your spoon, knife and hands
- The Church frowns on medical studies; cutting into a dead body is considered a transgression
- No democratic government - and even the rigid monarchy has constant struggles over the throne
- No free speech or freedom of religion (remember the Crusades and the Inquisition)
- No guns or artillery of any kind are used
- Many armies are commonly composed of hundreds instead of hundreds of thousands
- Celibacy is not demanded for clergy
- Slavery is alive and well, even approved of by the Church (although it does frown on mistreatment of slaves)
- Infections that would be considered simple to heal nowadays age were life-threatening.
- Major cities are befouled with waste. Toilets do not exist, and sanitary considerations are nil. Rural areas are much cleaner than cities.

Needless to say, your game sessions will not attain proper mood with harsh fluorescent lighting, pop music on the stereo and pausing the game to answer your cell phone. The epic themes of dark and dangerous intrigue or a bloody flight for survival can be brought to the forefront of the players' imaginations with the simple use of some mood-setting elements.

Music

Music and sound are an important tool used to set mood. Movies and television use music to create feelings of joy, apprehension and fright in their audiences. We're so programmed to mood music that we can tell whether a walk down a hall is a casual stroll to the kitchen or a stumble into an ambush. We also use music to enhance our own moods: You may put on your favorite gloomy CD to enhance your already depressed mood or pop in a perky compilation to spur you out of the dismal mood.

You can create similar moods in your game with music. Think about what your characters will be facing during the gaming session. Will they be traveling to the Umbra or Spirit World to retrieve a lost artifact on an epic quest? Something similar to the music of The Orb or Ray Lynch will give an epic and dreamy mood to the chronicle. Are they traveling through the darkness of wilderness and forests? Several contemplative and dark scores like Mozart's "Requiem" and Barber's "Adagio for Strings" would add to the anticipation. Triumphant battle music would aid the mood for fighting heretics in the Crusades or setting a siege to an enemy mage's castle. The soundtracks for *Braveheart* or any *Star Wars* movie might be appropriate. Entering the private abode of a solitary mage or a Hermetic library can be enhanced with contemplative soundtracks such as *The Last Temptation of Christ*. Period music like Gregorian chants will always fit somewhere, and Celtic music like The Chieftains and Clannad will also add to most chronicles set in the British Isles. Play around with your own music collection, and you'll find the albums you think are best for setting moods and creating apprehension, expectation and fear in your players.

Lighting

Lighting is a powerful tool you can use to set a certain kind of mood. The less harsh your overhead lighting is, especially fluorescent lights, the better. As your characters are in a world with no artificial light at all, candlelight is ideal; even mages have to read by candlelight late at night. Setting several candles around the playing area will provide a very dark and eerie scene to supplement your storytelling.

GOING TOO FAR

As pizza, Chinese food, and soda are gaming staples dating back a couple of decades, we wouldn't presume to suggest you deny your group these modern day luxuries, especially as we do not wish any mutinous behavior or bodily harm to come to you as Storyteller. Bringing some food from the era for the group to sample would be a unique touch, however. Some foods you may be able to get from a gourmet foods market, such as haggis, Carrageen jelly or eels. You could make simple beef stew or Blackmanger (a chicken and rice dish boiled in almond milk and seasoned with anise, salt and sugar) yourself to let your group taste what their characters would expect to eat daily.

The proper use of candlelight can let your players know that darkness and danger is but a breath away. Be careful with candles; make sure not to knock them over with rolling dice.

You don't have to focus completely on candlelight, though. Making use of natural lighting can also be helpful, as the sun is the main source of light in the Dark Medieval. If you are playing during the day, cut all lights in the room and let the light coming through the window be the only luminescence. Halogen lamps with a dimmer switch can also be used, as the variable settings can help mark the passage of time. Turn it all the way up and you have sudden daylight. Turn it almost all the way down and you have dusk or full moon illumination. Even simply closing and opening blinds to indicate the fall of night or the break of day can be effective.

Electricity

Most people say they can understand what it is like to live without electricity, but they panic when the lights go out and the refrigerator doesn't run any more. To give your players an even stronger sense of the time period, ban any and all electric devices from the gaming session. Cell phones, pagers, even watches should be put aside. Turn off your phone's ringer, turn down (or off) the answering machine. Try to have your gaming session in a room with no humming electrical appliances like a bedroom or a living room. The kitchen, laundry room, or any room with a window air-conditioning unit might have noises that distract from the overall mood of the game.

This may sound drastic, and we are not suggesting you inconvenience yourself and your players. You know that you are free to take as many or as few of these suggestions as you like, but the main point of setting the mood is that you are taking your players to a world where electrical conveniences do not exist. The best way to get this message across is to remove most of these from a gaming session.

Storyteller Characters

During the life of your chronicle you will have to create several characters for your players to interact with. If you've ever spent the long procedure to create a player character, you may shudder at the prospect of doing this multiple times to flesh out your campaigns.

The good news is, you don't have to create every last detail about your Storyteller characters. The game is not about them, it's about the player characters and how they fit into the story you are telling. The characters that you run are there only to help the story along. Their sister's name isn't important. The old scar that aches when it's going to snow probably doesn't need to be mentioned.

That's not to say that you need to go to the other extreme and think up only a gender and a name and run with it. You do need to do some planning or else your players will feel cheated, and you will look unprepared when they ask questions about the Storyteller characters and every other answer begins with, "Umm..."

Coming up with quick and dirty characters to fill out your story in all the right places is not as hard as it seems. Striking the happy medium between extremely detailed characters and yet another random Hermetic mage named "Jonathan" is your goal. Being that many Storyteller characters could spend all of fifteen minutes with your group, what you need are quick stats, short but solid backgrounds and believable personalities at your disposal.

Go ahead and create some stats for some characters ranging from low level to high level. These are just numbers, now, so don't worry about the story behind them. Consider taking some of the numbers from other sourcebooks' template characters. If you have to make someone up quickly, you'll have these numbers ready just in case a player grumbles that you're making it up as you go along.

Once you have the generic "on the fly" stats for the unexpected characters, think about the characters you know will be in the story to aid your group. What are these characters supposed to accomplish? What skills do they need? Focus on these things; if the character is an information tool, don't worry about her physical attributes as much. If your group needs some muscle, don't worry about his Etiquette score as much. Think about what you'll need, set some stats down, and have them ready.

When it comes to personalities and background, you can pull from the setting. Some minor characters don't need to be fleshed out very much: an uneducated servant pointing the way to town, a haughty lord mistreating those lower than he, a swindling merchant trying to cheat his customers. If your Storyteller characters are going to have more involvement with the story, thinking up a quick background is safe. What is his goal within the story? Is it likely she will be more forthcoming with information if there is a woman in the group, or a mage of the same Fellowship as hers? Pulling in information from your setting is a way to get easy personality information. A town living between two warring lords may have fearful and bitter residents, whereas

a lonely monastery in the mountains may be eager for any news of the outside world.

So what happens if you have your list of stats, your brief backgrounds, and your names all ready and your player asks your Storyteller character a question you hadn't thought of beforehand? Avoid breaking character and letting them know that you're not prepared. Any character can easily say, "That's personal," or, "I'd rather not talk about that, thank you," or some other evasive tactic.

And remember, your Storyteller characters are there to help the story along, and to help (or hinder) your mages. If something unexpected happens, such as if the NPC meant to save the mages in a tense situation botches every roll, simply fudge the scores. You're the Storyteller; you don't have to go by every roll of the dice. The story comes first.

Story Ideas

Your role as the Storyteller is significant - you are in control of the game, and the responsibility for each player's fun rests mostly on your shoulders. It is possible one can be intimidated by the charge. If you are feeling bereft of story ideas, there are several here to start you off. You can take these broad plots and put your own spin on them to make them fit into your own chronicle. The ideas are grouped into categories to fit a larger theme. With each plot you will also find possible pitfalls to watch out for.

The Dark Medieval age is a time of great adventure, intrigue and not a little bit of danger. The setting is ripe with story possibilities. A young mage and his companions face the problems of plague, civil wars, invading Vikings, and Inquisitors wishing to burn them as heretics. They are also without reliable and speedy travel; most of them walk or ride horses. If they are lucky (or rich), they have a coach of some kind. Their travels in the open also put them at the mercy of the weather. And this is without all the magical problems, monsters and rival mages thrown in.

It is a bloody time. Wise people travel in groups because no laws govern the wide stretches of land between inhabited areas - or if there are laws, there are few officers patrolling the areas of wilderness. The monsters waiting to attack your travelers are numerous. Bandits, criminals, vampires and werewolves are some of the things that your group should watch for while traveling (see more about monsters in Chapter Six).

The era is a contradictory one, in that some people never leave their hometowns in their entire lives, but some spend their lives travelling thousands of miles. Many things united all of Europe: The Church, the Crusades and terrible plagues are some of the things that span the continent and England, but strangers are not trusted and small towns can vary widely in customs even within the same country. Whereas many live their lives in isolation, your chronicle will most likely take your mages across different lands and into different situations.

What's in a Name?

While many common names of today have endured the ages, many have not. Don't limit yourself to popular Biblical names while creating your characters; a little research will show you that thousands of names crumbled away with the ages. Here's a small list of names from the Dark Ages, as well as where they hail from:

Men's Names	Women's Names
British Isles	
Adam	Amabel
Clement	Desiderata
Gavin	Eve
Jacob	Hiliard
Jon	Loveta
Makok	Myldrede
Robyn	Ragenild
Symone	Thomasina
Portugal	
Rodrigo	Elvira
Sancho	Orraca
Germanic	
Albert	Alfgard
Deddo	Avin
Frigdag	Brunihilt
Hugo	Conegunt
Meinzo	Ega
Reinold	Hiltrude
Sigizo	Mathildis
Walter	Sigiwih
Finnish	
Airik	Agda
Cecil	Clara
Faste	Eris
Arabic	
Khalid	Azzah
Ishaq	Munya
Umar	Zubaydah

The Crusades

The Crusades were holy wars directed by the Church and fought by knights, peasants, and nobles.

Officially, there were eight of them, but there were several smaller Crusades (the Peasant's Crusade and the Children's Crusade were two notable ones) fought in the interim. They began in 1096 for one reason: for the Christians to take back the Holy Land of Jerusalem from the Muslims. While the reason for the wars were holy in the eyes of the Church, the reasons people joined the Crusades were varied: some did feel the divine call to wage a holy war; others wanted something to do with extra sons and thought that sending them off to fight for God's cause was a good use of time.

With mages in the world, the Crusades take on a different element. Their power is formidable, but possibly frowned upon by the Church. Their non-magical companions will be impressed, fearful, distrustful, admiring, or simply skeptical of their talents. With religion coloring the motivations of the Messianic Voices and the Ahl-i-Batin, mages will have their own goals concerning the Crusades.

The Crusades can be an effective campaign setting containing travels, convictions, war, espionage, and whatever else you wish to throw in. They are epic and bloody, and a group of mages can spend years of their lives involved in them.

The Antrustiones

Your mages are resting in a large French town where they are forming a party to join the Crusaders marching through the village in a couple of days. The army camps outside of town, but there are leaders and captains that stay in town for the night. Your mages are approached by a Hermetic mage who wishes them to join the Crusade, regardless of their religion.

He is recruiting mages to protect the generals, because there are rumors of devils that target the kings and generals, killing with frightening efficiency and destroying the morale of the men. He says that these assassins are strange, sorcerous Moors who fight for the Muslims (probably Batini), and he is being paid very well to protect the men in charge.

The best part, he says, is that they don't have to travel with the army. Their only job is to protect the generals and king from the Batini, not from mundane problems. As long as they travel close to the army, they're free to do as they like. He confides that he believes they are given this freedom because they make the soldiers nervous.

The travel to the Holy Land should not be uneventful. Some monsters are not even scared off by armies, and indeed, vampires and werewolves might see them as smorgasbords. The army should be attacked a couple of times, and the players can decide whether to get involved. If they do not, the army will get decidedly resentful towards them. One

Ahl-i-Batin and the Crusades

So you've got an Ahl-i-Batin in your group and you wish to run a Crusade chronicle where your mages fight alongside the Christians? This can be difficult, but by no means impossible. Not every mage follows her Fellowship's doctrines to the letter. Money has been used throughout history to turn alliances, and this may also work with your mages. The mage could be a young rebel trying to escape the confines of his Fellowship. Perhaps you could even work with your player to discuss the possibility of being a spy for the Batini during his travels in the Middle East.

So yes, a by-the-book Batini would never join the Crusades to fight with the Christians. However, your mages have free will and motivations. Let your mages play with those reasons and drive those mages to the Holy Land!

Interesting Facts About the Crusades:

- The very first advance party of the First Crusade (1096-1099) - often called the Peasant's Crusade - consisted of unsolicited poor knights and peasants who left without preparation. Peter the Hermit and Walter the Penniless led them. They paused in their travels to kill German Jews (actions not sanctioned by the Church), only to be slaughtered in turn by the Turks when they reached Anatolia. The Frankish barons set out soon after with proper preparation and were much more successful, capturing Jerusalem.
- The disastrous Second Crusade (1146-1148) had Eleanor of Aquitaine bringing with her the Queen's Guard, made up of noblewomen in armor.
- The Fourth Crusade never reached the Holy Land at all. It did result in the capture of Constantinople and the cementing of the hatred between East and West.
- Children and clerics made up the Children's Crusade (1212) which met with quick death and slavery.
- Peace and negotiation won the Sixth Crusade (1228-1229) in which Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II diplomatically won back Jerusalem.
- Men were allowed to become crusaders only with the permission of their wives, to avoid depriving the women of "marital rights."

thing they do notice is that some mornings reveal a number of dead people. No one saw anything, and it looks as if the men were murdered in their sleep. Distrust starts to be sown around the camp, and the mages themselves are suspect.

Leave some clues, but not terribly easy ones. The army is being followed by some Batini who decide to stop the Crusade before it starts. They are killing some lower-level soldiers to cause chaos in the ranks and hopefully the casting out - or outright killing - of the mages before they target the higher-ups. The generals call the mages in to their sides to protect them, but the army is distrustful.

Be Careful:

Bringing your mages into the middle of an army may cause a strain on your Storytelling abilities. Try to keep the Storyteller characters to a minimum: the Hermetic Mage, at most two generals, and perhaps a soldier distrustful of the mages who wants them thrown out or dead. If the mages are not of the Christian faith, distrust will surely arise, and this may cause the mages to get thrown out. It depends on how they play the tense situations.

On the subject of getting non-Christian mages to join the Crusade in the first place, remind your players that their Crusading doesn't have to be based to their deeply-held religious beliefs. Some may be in it seeking glory, some may be wastrel sons or daughters avoiding marriage, some may fear the afterlife and wish to fight for the winning team, some could be atoning for sins (perhaps their magic?) and some may simply wish to offer spiritual guidance or healing to the soldiers. They could also seek the fabled treasures of the Holy Lands, and figure that serving in the army would be the best way to fund their treasure hunt.

Crusade Close to Home

Pagans have watched the usurping Christians kill the followers of their religion in recent centuries, driving them to the more remote areas of Europe to perform their rituals or even speak of their faith. But now, as the Crusades get called, many pious Christian soldiers, peasants and clergy gladly join the fight. The warriors have left the towns to the women, the old, the young and a handful of clergy.

The hometown of one of your characters has left a charismatic, power-hungry Messianic Voice in charge of the religious leadership. Lacking a leg, Father Milton is unable to make the travels to cast the Muslims from the Holy Land. Knowing that he is surrounded by pagans living in the hills and remote villages, he decides to lead his own Crusade to root out the last remaining non-believers and convert them. He tells the player characters that there is a solitary mage to east of the village who recently died. He was reported to have an extensive library and an impressive personal treasury. He offers a map to the dwelling if the mages will look for pagan groups to be converted along the way. He is very friendly and persuasive, and if the group consists of several non-Christians, will plead that the pagans are in need of medicine and should be persuaded to come to town to receive it. There is no reason your mages should think he wishes anyone harm. He sends a large, heavily armed mage with them, insisting that the pagans will need a bodyguard to aid them on their return through the wilderness.

The map is fairly legible and the group will follow it with little difficulty. Upon finding the first community of pagans, your group can do whatever they like to try to convince them to go back to the village. The "bodyguard" will interrupt, asking if the pagans serve the lord Christ. When they say no, he will viciously attack them. Many will die, but they will fight back. When your characters try to stop him, he will fight them. The mages, along with the pagans, should have little trouble taking him down.

If your mages can prove their innocence of the situation, the leader will step forward and introduce himself as Walter, a member of the Old Faith. His lover was recently killed by zealous men who left for the Crusades, and he is bent on returning the favor. After the recent attack, he invites your group to join him on a nighttime raid of the town to kill Father Milton and the remaining clergy. Your mages have fallen into two warring groups bent on religious cleansing. They must decide which side to take, if any. They may still believe that Father Milton is a good man. Then again, there was the unprovoked attack on the pagans. And there is also the supposedly abandoned library to think about....

Be Careful:

Religious differences can cause strife within groups, and this chronicle can get tense if you have pagan and Christian mages in your group. It might be tempting to suggest your players create characters from the same faiths or Houses, but resist this. A homogeneous group is often a weak group. The group should see the death and persecution of innocents - mage and non-magical alike - as something that should be stopped. Being that both groups wish the slaughter, they will have to choose carefully.

Quests

Questing is an excellent way to get some lazy mages out of their comfortable homes and on the road. The journey has a purpose, the promise of a

fantastical item, some long-forgotten knowledge, a lost heir. The glimmer of fantasy - that if they do fulfill the quest, they will be heroes forever - is enough to get most adventure-hungry mages on a quest. Sending your players' characters to search for saints' relics, items forged by the gods or ancient weapons is an excellent way to build a chronicle.

The Holy Hair of St. Agnes

In Rome, 309 B.C., a beautiful 13-year-old girl was noticed by the prefect's son, Eutropius. She had a reputation for spurning all admirers, and she did the same to the official's son. He offered her treasures if she would be his wife, but she said she was already pledged to be Christ's wife, and would remain a virgin her entire life.

The prefect tore her clothes from her body and took her to the local brothel. As he paraded her naked through town, her lovely golden hair grew to cover her nakedness. Upon reaching the brothel, an angel came and covered her with a mantle. All of her would-be customers feared her holy cloak, and no one would approach her, save her former suitor, Eutropius. He grabbed her by her mantle and was struck dead.

Agnes restored him with prayer, but the prefect denounced her as a witch and ordered her burned at the stake. The flames didn't touch her, though. She finally died when stabbed with a dagger.

Agnes became the patron saint of virgins and girls. Her tomb lies in Naples, to which thousands of virgins make pilgrimage each January.

Sister Mary Simon of the Fair Knight's Nunnery in Villa Borghese, north of Rome, sends for your mages. She has heard that they are a strong set of adventurers, and she wishes to hire them. It seems that young girls are being sold into prostitution in Rome, and she wishes for a relic of the saint to focus her prayers to release the girls into safety. She offers some riches of the Church if they will find it for her. She has done much research on the saint and says that even after eight centuries, the holy martyr's hair should still be intact, as it was imbued with holy magic before the girl's death.

The group must travel through Rome to get to Naples. Any women in the party will be harassed by natives, and they will see several of the aforementioned young girls and women as prostitutes. Attempts to help them will be met with violence from thugs who "protect" the girls.

The relics of Saint Agnes will be found in Naples and are guarded by some Messianic Voices who are more concerned with their holy item than the situation of some street urchins in Rome. Your players' characters may want to exhaust every nonviolent solution before getting mean. Sister Mary Simon may frown on church defenders killed in her name, and it may be unwise to bring attention to them during the time of the Inquisition.

All Mary Simon wishes is a lock of the saint's hair. If your players' characters bring that to her without inciting the wrath of the guardians of the tomb, she will ask for their help in taking down the prostitution ring in Rome.

Do the characters care about the Commoner girls? Are they in it just for the riches? What exactly does Mary Simon promise them? Does she fulfill the promise? Is she herself a mage, using the power of the holy relic to focus her power?

Be Careful:

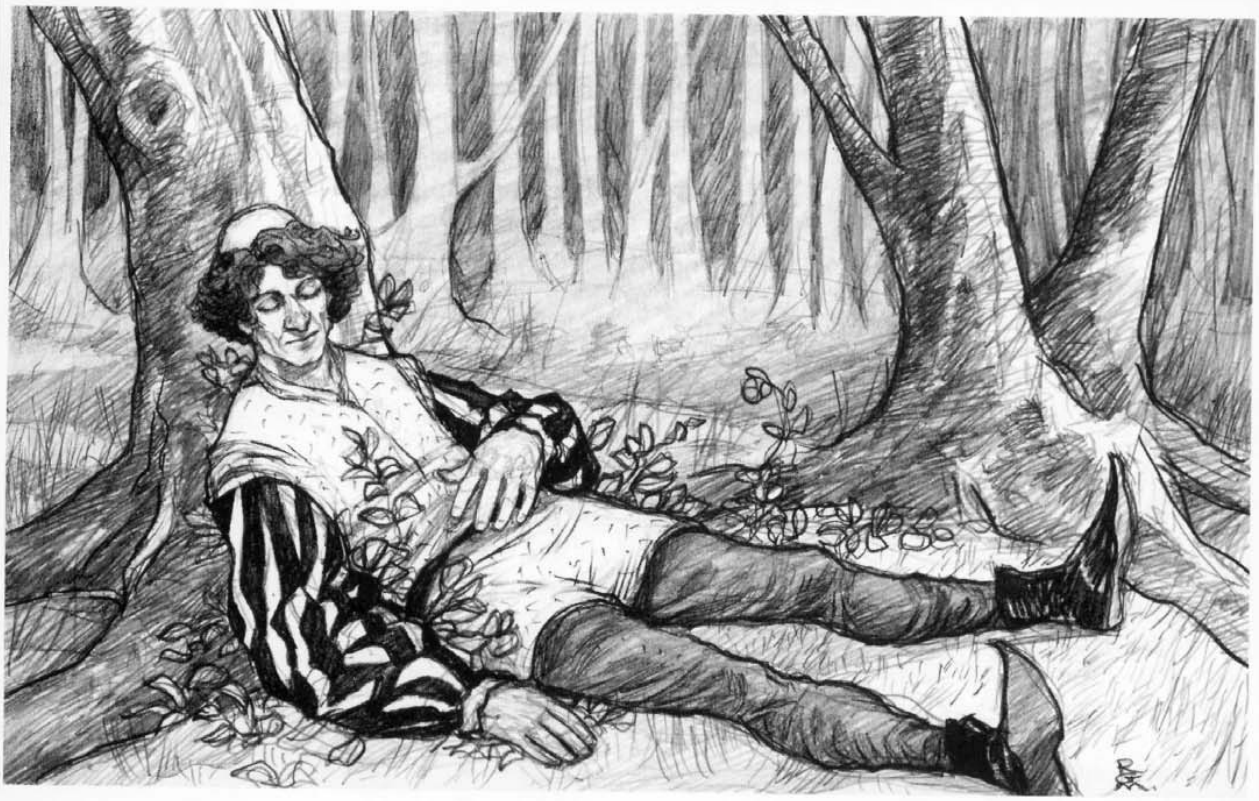
It's not a good idea to have an all-powerful magical item in your story. Limitations need to be set. If your mages decide not to take the relic back to Mary Simon and decide to use it for themselves, will it work for them if they are not of the faith? Will it act differently in the hands of a good non-Christian man than those of a corrupt friar?

The Divine Fruit

Norse legend has it that a wise man, Kvasir, was born from a jar into which all the gods and goddess of the Aesir and Vanir spat in order to form a truce. He traveled the earth giving wisdom and advice, but he was killed by two dwarves who wished his wisdom for themselves. They drained his body of blood and mixed it with honey. This divine mead was said to give the drinker wisdom to rival the poor dead Kvasir and was stored in three urns.

Through deceit and trickery, the mead went from owner to owner until the All-Father, Odin, stole the remaining mead. He held it in his mouth and escaped in the form of an eagle. He was chased by the former owner of the mead, and barely made it back to where his gods and goddesses had lined up several pots and urns into which he was to spit the mead. He was in such a hurry that some of the mead landed on the ground instead of in the pots. The gods took their mead and shared it with those worthy of wisdom, but mortals tended the ground where the mead had fallen.

Your mages are visiting a festival in southern Scandinavia. It's fairly obvious that a group of wine merchants is overrun with customers, even though their wine sells for outrageous prices and they do not accept barter. The players' characters hear the other wine merchants complaining about the "stolen business." The successful merchants are sold out by the



time your group investigates, but promise to be back in three months with more.

A Valdaerman by the name of Andre pulls your mages aside and explains that he thinks the wine is more than it seems. He says it is saturated with Tass. To Commoners, it merely tastes glorious, but to mages, it strengthens the gifts. He wishes to follow the wine caravan back to their vineyard on secret, hallowed ground to steal some of the grapes - and therefore the seeds - for himself. He invites your group to come along, for he fears he won't be able to make the trip himself, or be able to defend himself if discovered.

The merchants travel with stern-looking, muscular men armed with mighty weapons. The journey takes several days. Monster attacks on some evenings cause your mages to have to help defend their merchant guides without showing themselves.

The vineyard is, of course, rooted in the Umbra. It is glorious - the ground positively glows, and the vines growing from it are almost alive. The caravan the players' characters follow stops and waits for them, as if the merchants knew they were there the whole time.

Their companion, Andre, explains that they were brought here for a reason. The gods, he says, have been dead for a while. The ground started to lose its potency several hundred years earlier, and they needed something to replenish the power. An accident with a wandering mage showed that the blood of mages, when mixed with the waning power in the ground, would give it a boost, if for only a couple of years. Every five years they lure new mages to the area to slaughter them and feed their vineyards. The land is tied magically to Andre, and when he performs the ritual to cover the ground in the blood of mages, both he and the ground grow stronger.

Andre speaks as if it is a great honor to keep feeding this dying magical grove, but your characters should feel free to attack him as soon as possible. The caravan of wine sellers will leap to his defense; they are mages who were concentrating on hiding their powers from the group. There are at least four of them, but you can change the number to balance out the fight with your mages.

Upon Andre's death, the grove starts to wither. Your mages have five minutes to gather as much fruit as possible before the vines crumble into dust and leave a wasteland. Once the grapes have been removed from the vine, they will stop decomposing and have the same shelf life of any fruit (not long).

It is your call as Storyteller to decide how much power the grapes have. If eating one boosts an Ability, what happens if you eat an entire bunch? Will it affect a low-level Spirit-Talker the same way it affects a venerable Hermetic mage?

Be Careful:

Balance Andre's power with the power of your group. You don't want him to overpower and kill

everyone because of his connection with the grove, but you don't want your mages to travel all that way to just whack him once and then get the rewards. Andre should be stronger once he reaches the grove. Keep track of the shelf life of the grapes; they will be useful magical items, but only for so long.

Plague

The immense squalor and disregard for sanitation in these times makes life very easy for bacteria and germs to infest the population, causing disease and death. The occasional magical curses brought about by some mages cause even more harm. Many mages have a theory that some villages said to have been destroyed by plagues were simply devoured by other atrocities, or had a magical, rather than earthly, cause to their demise.

New Weapons Are Discovered

A chronicle built on revenge during this time in history would be dark indeed. The disease and plagues of the time brought about perhaps the first documented cases of bioterrorism. Armies would take dead bodies and hurl them over the castle walls of their rivals, infecting - and in some cases killing - everyone inside within two weeks without a sword drawn.

Your mages are on the road. They come across a smoldering castle and a retreating army. Getting closer, they discover a lonely remaining camp from the army. A friar, by the name of Michael, greets them at the perimeter of the camp and tells of the horror he has come across. The soldiers inside the camp are all stricken with an unexplained disease. Their army had taken dead soldiers and thrown them over the wall of the castle. They separated their sick comrades from the well, and camped, waiting for the castle inhabitants to die. They then looted it a week later and moved on, leaving the sick behind to die. Michael tells the players' characters that he was traveling alone to his monastery north of the castle when he came across the camp and wanted to help out. Michael is sure he cannot help the infected men, only lessen their suffering. He advises the mages to take a wide berth, but everything about him besides his words says he could use help if they're feeling altruistic.

If your mages are attuned to the workings of magic, they may sense that Michael is a member of the Messianic Voices, although he will not volunteer this information.

Here is where your mages take over. The sickness is very frightening thing, but Michael doesn't seem affected. Are mages immune? Do they stay and try to help him nurse the sick? Do they run upon realizing they have been exposed? (It's very likely the next castle they come across will be infected as well.) Or do they remember a harm done to them once, and try to manipulate the plague to attack their enemies?

The Hermit

The cabal is traveling through a horrible storm one night and asks for shelter at a solitary manor. It is inhabited by an old mage who gruffly allows them inside. He manages to be hospitable while still implying they are a great imposition on his solitude.

His manor is huge, made of stone with large statues and disturbing paintings. He is apparently a very wealthy man, although none of the mages has ever heard of him. He says his name is Alexander, a Hermetic mage, and he leads the players' characters to a kitchen with a massive hearth. He conjures a demon from the fire and commands it to serve dinner. It grudgingly obeys.

After dinner, they are taken to a barracks-style room to sleep. Alexander leaves them. Later in the night, they hear pounding on the great wooden portcullis outside and hear Alexander swearing loudly about the traffic in his castle this evening. If your mages try to leave, they will discover their door is magically locked.

It turns out that the visitor is a messenger from the king (King Henry III if your story is set in England). It seems that Alexander is in service to the Crown, and has been for some time - the previous king built him this manor as reward for service. The messenger is quite in a panic, telling of plague in the country and of how the king cannot turn his attention from the war with France (or some other local war, if the story is set elsewhere than England or France). He begs Alexander to help. Alexander readily agrees.

Regardless of whether they eavesdrop or not, Alexander approaches the players' characters over breakfast (again, served by a demon) and say he needs to travel to London on business. He asks the mages to accompany him. He is vague with any answers, but he offers money for help, he offers horses if they have none, and he supplies all food. But he says nothing of the reason for the trip.

During the journey to England, Alexander gives towns a wide berth, always with the excuse of keeping his demon servants from prying peasant eyes. It is obvious, though, that some towns have no activity at all.

The company is attacked by various monsters on the road. It appears that Alexander wants the mages

along for protection, as he doesn't participate in any fight, and he seems never to be attacked directly.

Upon reaching London, Alexander goes straight to the castle, and he and the mages are welcomed without question. The mages are given a place to eat and rest while Alexander meets with the king's advisors.

After resting for a day - the castle folk are very deferential to the mages for being Alexander's companions - their employer tells them to pack up. Leaving the city, they discover that there are now armed guards at every road leading into the city, and people are allowed out, but not in. By now, as rumors spread amid frightened gossip on the streets, the characters should have figured out that there is a bizarre sickness infecting London and the surrounding towns.

Alexander finally tells them what their horrifying mission is - they must burn all farmhouses and villages within a large radius of London to protect the city residents and the royalty. They are also instructed to kill any person seen showing signs of sickness.

The symptoms of the sickness are very innocent at first, and it might seem rather drastic to kill anyone who simply coughs or sneezes. Alexander is very dedicated to his quest, and your mages must make the decision to join him or try to escape, knowing his formidable power.

Fallout from the Massasa War

The Order of Hermes' very foundation was dealt a crippling blow when the mage Tremere defied everyone in the Order and led high ranking members of his House on a search for immortality. His search led him, naturally, to study and then steal the secret from vampires. It was a completely unanticipated act in a Fellowship that relied so much on order and obedience. Tremere had already been causing much strife within the Order; before his change he had caused the downfall of certain Houses by accusing them - ironically - of corruption by demons. He then corrupted himself and his House by embracing vampirism. The Order of Hermes dismissed them from the Order and declared a Wizard's March. It is now over, but conflicts still simmer as the vampires desire information held by the Hermetic mages, and the mages wish to remove this stain on their past. This tumultuous time is ripe for exciting campaigns.

Unlikely Allies

When Tremere turned himself into a vampire, he destroyed Saulot, an Antediluvian of Clan Tzimisce, and drank the elder's vitae. The Tzimisce are devoted to washing the earth with the blood of the Tremere for more than one reason. They wish for violent revenge for the death of their slain elder and they - as well as the other vampire clans - do not appreciate the usurpers trying to form their own clan. They see Clan Tremere as a pretender clan, infant usurpers who stole immortality. The Gangrel and Nosferatu want all members of the Tremere clan to suffer Final Death as much as the Order of Hermes wishes to erase the embarrassing blood stain on its history and reputation.

The characters have been taught to think that all vampires are monstrous abominations, and that the Tremere are pitiful abominations who were once mages like them. The group is summoned to a local Order library for a frightening assignment.

They are hired by the Order of Hermes as a diplomatic group. Their job is to offer an alliance to one of the vampire clans to help bring down the local Tremere. The Order promises excellent compensation for the work and for their silence. Samuel, the head of the local House, sends a sealed letter with them.

Samuel also sends with you a recent addition to the Order - Patricia. Having survived vampire attacks in the past, she is the resident vampire expert (as expert as one could be on those monsters). With her help, the mages must find the vampires, avoid violence with them, make sure they are not Tremere, and convince them that mages' abilities are useful to the cause of destroying the usurpers - all without getting eaten. Working with creatures considered abominations will also require exemplary diplomacy and careful negotiations for all parties.

Once a vampire is found and actually stops to listen, the mages will be brought to a forest to meet with the leader of the clan, surrounded by several underlings (numbering as many as the players' characters). He will listen patiently to the treaty and read the letter. He will smile and ask which one is Patricia. Once she identifies herself, the vampires attack the group, ignoring her. It turns out the mages are the peace offering from the Order to the vampires.

Now the mages are betrayed by their own kind, caught in a nest of vampires, and all alone. Do they run and come back? Do they fight? Do they seek vengeance on Patricia first?

Be Careful:

Offering an alliance to a creature that considers you to be food is tricky. The first part of the story should not be too easy - vampires will view the mortals as impotent fools who will only get in their way. Once the attacks start, avoid having the char-

acters Embraced. If it is, in your opinion as Storyteller, unavoidable, it is advisable to take the control of the character away from the player and have her create another mage character.

Don't throw your mages into certain-death scenarios. If you are running a chronicle with two or three mages, make the attacking vampires' number just as small - or you could make it so large that the mages would get the hint that it's a good idea to run instead of fight (this time).

Sample Tones

So, we have discussed histories, magic, advice and story ideas. Now you must take all of that and weave a chronicle, setting the tone you want for your story. Little details need to be added to the larger picture. This will make the story more powerful and really pull your players into your world.

Harsh characterization of creatures of the night, rich descriptions of the environments, different accents attributed to different Storyteller characters, and an understanding of different concerns of the time will all work together to build on your tone. The conflicts that plague everyday people of the age will also affect your mages, but in a possibly different way. They are, remember, above-normal people, but this doesn't mean they are above normal people's problems.

Social Classes

During the Dark Medieval, it is a grave error to consider the general populace educated. There is a massive gap between the educated class and the peasants, the men and the women.

We talked a little about social standings earlier in this chapter, but below we can see how it would fit into a chronicle. A young woman named Maddie is discovering the magic in her blood, trying to leave her home and the control of her father, who essentially owns her.

The blow hit me from behind, sending me sprawling in the frozen mud, rutted deep with wagon tracks.

"Hello Father," I said meekly.

"You went to see her, did you not?" The winter sunset lighting his bulk from behind, making him look even larger.

"I needed a poultice for mother's cough," I explained patiently.

"You lie!" he cried. "You be training with her! The house needs your bride-price else we starve, and we get nothing if you run away with the hag!"

My only worth to my family was in what they could fetch for a dowry. With only 20 or so young women in the village, men were paying a high price for brides. But the crone, Sharrie, had seen something in me, something different. I was destined for something more, destined to learn the arts of the Old Faith, if my family didn't kill me first.

Father had been violent with me before, but usually to grab me, shake me, or push me. I was caught by surprise when he drew back and kicked me in the ribs. The breath whooshed out of me, and I doubled up from the pain. I heard a rib crack as he kicked again, and I began to sob, begging him to stop. He paid me no heed, and through the pain I felt it again: the power that Sharrie had hinted at. Father's foot came to kick me again, and when it made contact, I knew. Pain forgotten, I looked up at him. "I could stay. But I will leave in a month when you are dead," I said.

He stumbled back. "You curse me? Me, that gave you life?" he said.

"No, the death will not be from my hands. I do not know its name. I simply know when. And when you are dead, I will do as I please," I lay my head back down onto the earth. The magic was fading and the pain was returning. I felt a warm hand on my shoulder and flinched.

Sharrie was there, kneeling beside me. Beyond her was my father, sitting and sobbing on the cold ground. I had frightened him, and badly. As Sharrie took out the small knife I'd seen her use to cut herbs, she asked, "So what did you do to him?" She placed the flat of the blade on my ribcage and whispered, and I felt the ribs knit. I breathed a little easier.

"I think I told him a truth. He will be dead in a month, and I told him," I said, looking at father holding his head in his hands. I was surprised at my lack of shame at causing such a reaction. I simply felt pity.

"Well done, I doubt he will want you around much longer. We should leave this town, as I have a feeling we will not be welcome here very soon. And besides, you've got much training to do. We have got to control that Sight of yours," she said, and grinned, showing her gap-riddled white teeth.

The social and gender inequities, while being irritating to some players, can also create fascinating backgrounds and obstacles for roleplaying. Bringing these issues into your chronicle may be necessary; even if the players' characters are all upper-class men, they will no doubt encounter female and lower-class Storyteller characters.

Some questions to ask your players' characters, if they decide to make lower class or female characters, are: How did they come into their magic? How did their family react? How do they view their own lot in life? Most peasants and women, after being told their whole lives they were second class citizens, accepted their lot with no question. Does magic change their views of themselves?

It is possible one might play, or encounter, a very embittered mage. Having been considered a commodity, slave or servant his whole life, he may decide to return the favor by exacting revenge on the upper class. Once the magic manifests, the social balance changes drastically. As Maddie showed us above, when the previously powerless classes receive power unlike any of

their social betters, the effects can be anywhere from merely interesting to explosive.

Religion

Religion has always been a very touchy topic among those of differing beliefs. This problem increases tenfold if those in question are mages, a hundredfold if they believe their powers come from the deity they worship. Many of the Fellowships base their magic off some form of faith, whether it's the polytheistic Old Faith or the monotheistic Christianity of the Messianic Voices.

Getting mages of different Fellowships work toward a common goal based on religion can be a tough hill to climb.

For example, consider Ragnar, a burly Valdaerman; Deepu, a quiet Batini; and Theo, a pious Messianic Voice. Traveling together for the sole reason that they discovered they work well together, they have reached an impasse - Theo has decided they will follow the Crusades to take Jerusalem.

Deepu sat by the firelight, sipping the last of his mead while the others argued beside him. He watched impassively.

"We leave at dawn. South," said Theo, who had taken the leadership of their small party upon his shoulders.

"You will leave at dawn for the south," said Ragnar in his deep voice. "Deepu and I will continue our trek west. We do not wish to crusade with the Christians."

"We agreed to travel together! We make a good team, we are powerful together! There are soldiers who need our help and we should give it to them!" Theo said, frowning.

Ragnar slowly unfolded his massive form and stood to tower over him. "We agreed to travel together and make a good team for safety in the wilderness. Not to aid the Christians' massacre." He made no more movements but to finger the heavy axe that hung by his side.

Theo snarled and scrambled to his feet, still dwarfed by Ragnar's bulk. "You forget yourself! Our cause is just! The Church received its instructions from God! Christ marches with us! We are led by Divine inspiration! We-" he was cut off by the small Batini, who commanded attention even when he simply stood up.

"And what of us?" he asked slowly. "Will you kill us when it is over?" He cast an eye upon Ragnar. "None of you speak for me. We work well together, that is true. But, there are certain differences in our beings that cannot be overcome. If you," he indicated Theo, "choose to go south, I have no doubts that you will go alone. Nevertheless," he looked at the massive, scarred mage, "our power lies in the three of us, not the two of us. I will go my own way should the triumvirate be split."

As stated before, homogeneous cabals are simply not as powerful as a group of mages from different Fellowships. With many of the Fellowships basing their magic and their beliefs on a religious foundation, these mixed groups can quite possibly be more trouble than they seem to be worth.

Accept that conflicts such as these are going to arise within the group, especially as the Church takes more and more notice of mages and heretics. Your job as Storyteller is to let these conflicts play out, but make sure they add to the chronicle, not hinder it. Giving the players an opportunity to explore their characters beliefs and roleplay them against each other can make for exciting chronicles. As long as you have alternate plans in case a large disagreement comes up, you can use this to your advantage, letting the characters drive the story into an area you are already prepared for. If a group would rather split up than follow a leader, use Storyteller characters to bring them back together within the lines of the story. Also, remind your players that there are many reasons to go with a plan even if they don't agree with the reasoning behind it. Sometimes things as simple as greed, convenience, considering the greater good, or protection from something powerful are good reasons to stay with a plan - even a plan the mages disagree with.

Growing Power

Mages are almost gods among men. They may be admired, feared, or loved by the non-mages around them, but the question of who has more power never arises (unless it's one mage against an angry town armed with scythes and torches). If you are playing a chronicle with mages newly-come to their abilities, take that into account as you go through their clumsy acknowledgement of their growing power and how it affects those around them.

Take this story about young Tomas, considered a prodigy for having power so early. His joyful mother sent him to a mentor, Tor. Poor Tomas is desperate to prove to Tor that he has power, and has decided to set a trap for a forest monster that has been killing Tor's sheep. His plan goes horribly wrong and he is desperate to protect himself from the angry beast.

"One spell. Ah, gods, one trick, one spell, one little show of faith, one little gift from the All-Father, please!" Tomas chanted this to himself, blood and tears mixing and running down his cheeks.

He wiped his brow with his forearm to avoid getting more blood in his eyes. His vision was blurred enough from the wound on his forehead. The abomination he had met in the woods had swiped a-paw?-arm? at him and had connected before Tomas could utter a spell. He had run, trying desperately to get away and find a place where he could concentrate. The last thing he needed was for his bloody vision to get in the way of his concentration. And the sacrifice.

He crouched behind a tree, sending frantic prayers to the gods for a little time, just a little time. He cleared a small circle

of debris with his left hand while his right fumbled for his belt knife. He took it out with trembling hands, sobs catching in his throat. He heard crashing in the bushes and forced his gasping breaths to slow, to calm, so he could remember.

"Protection," Tor had said, teaching him his first lesson. Tomas fought to keep still and pay attention. "A boy as young as yourself doesn't need to bewitch a blade or speak with the gods. A rabbit needs a burrow, not claws."

Tomas had received his blade from Tor for his eleventh birthday. He used magic for the first time that night after a drink of mead with Tor. He had bitten back the pain and watched the blood flow onto the blade of his new knife, binding it to him. Tomas had named it Freki after the wolf that runs by Odin's side.

He now held Freki in front of his face. He had taken good care of it, and it was as sharp as that day a year ago when Tor had given it to him. His hand was still shaking. "Be a man," he growled, "or be dead."

He put his hand flat on the ground. He was sure he heard the monster coming closer, moving directly for him. He grabbed a stick from the ground and put it between his teeth. Lifting the blade high, he brought it down swiftly, forcing himself not to close his eyes at the last second. His aim was true, and his blow neatly severed his thumb from his left hand.

Be a man or be dead! his brain commanded as he somehow swallowed back the shriek of pain. He fell sideways in a fetal position, cradling his gushing hand close to his chest. Blood soaked his tunic, and he could think of nothing for several moments as the world went gray.

When he opened his eyes, the scene before him shocked him so much that he forgot to cry.

The massive, hairy creature was pacing the clearing in a fury. Tomas could see it and hear it, but it was apparent that the monster had no idea where he was. It raced around the clearing several times and ran off in the direction away from Tor's cabin.

Tomas stayed by his tree, too afraid to leave his area of protection, unsure how far it reached. He couldn't sense the end of the protective barrier. He wasn't even sure if his legs would hold him up for the walk back. He leaned against his tree and closed his eyes, exhausted.

The sun was low in the sky when he awoke with a scream as he felt something touch his injured arm. He relaxed when he recognized his mentor bandaging his hand.

"Boy," Tor said mildly. "Do you know what you have done?" Tomas shook his head weakly, fearing reprisal. "Perhaps I was too diligent with your training. You must have been at great need. You can tell me all about it as I get you cleaned up."

Tomas looked around the woods, worried. "The monster might be coming back soon!"

"I very much doubt he'll find us," Tor said, as they walked back towards the cottage. "You see, your spell has enshrouded the area from here to the village in an aura of protection for a good day's time. Your monster won't be finding us before nightfall. Now, let's get you cleaned up. You can tell me what you did to upset the beast, and I can begin to teach you about heavy-handedness in magic. I wouldn't want you a useless, blind torso before you are even a man."

Roleplaying through the training of new mages can make for an interesting chronicle. When working with new mages, let them make mistakes and see where the story goes with the consequences. Do it within reason, though; damaging the story is not the goal here. Storytellers can make much of chronicles wherein new mages discover their powers, making mistakes and working with their mentors. Will they obey their mentors? Chafe against the rules even as they learn? Cause more harm than good?

These amateur mages are prone to mistakes. Almost every mage they meet will be more powerful than they and may take advantage of them. But, for better or for worse, even without fine-tuned discipline, they are still mightier than any non-mage on earth.

The Umbra

In **Dark Ages: Mage**, the Umbra is a world easily reached by those with the proper knowledge. The Gauntlet isn't nearly as formidable as it will be in the future. Spirit-Talkers have the upper hand in reaching this world, for their allies live in it.

Hebba has been subtly moving Roderick to a place she knows has a weak Gauntlet. She needs his skills when she passes through to the Umbra, but she knows he would never voluntarily consent to go with her....

"There is no town here! Here is the map! Here we are!" Roderick yelled, slapping the map and tearing it slightly in his rage. "Here is the nearest town! We are in the middle of the wilderness and won't come near a town for days!" It was the middle of the night, food was running low, and his patience had gone at last.

Hebba, the focus of his rage, sat placidly. She stared into the fire and chewed on a piece of dried meat. "There will be a town soon. It is not on a map." Her brown eyes flicked to the Hermetic's and then to the paper in his hands. "Not your map, anyway."

Roderick ground his teeth in frustration. Members of his very House had mapped this region, and he was in possession of one of the few copies. His simple goal to reach Scotland using the shortest route possible was turning out to be an unexpected chore.

Hebba inhaled and closed her eyes. "They are concerned. They don't like anger."

Roderick swore and folded the map, running his thumb across the rip. He'd have to do something about that before returning it. "I should have left you comatose at the side of the road where I found you," he muttered, and returned the map to his bag.

"I was, and am, in no need of your help. I have the help

of those you will never meet. I have the help of those you will meet but never understand." She opened her eyes, turning to look at him. "I am traveling with you to protect you, sirrah," she said, "Not for your protection and certainly not for your company."

Roderick laughed. "Protected by a woman? A woman whose only power seems to be speaking with boggles only she can see and visiting towns that don't exist? Better that I be protected from one such as you, instead of by you! I could destroy you with very little effort. The powers of the heavens are mine to control, and yet I will not waste their energy. I leave in the morning. Alone." He settled himself under his blanket and closed his eyes, breathing deeply to calm his anger. He relaxed and started to drift toward sleep, deciding that the draining sensation he was feeling was his anger ebbing.

"No need, sirrah," Hebba said, rising from her seat beside the fire. "We are already here."

"What rubbish are you speaking now, witch?" Roderick muttered. He jerked violently as he felt her hand on his arm and sat up to push her away.

The fire was gone. The horses were gone. His pack and map were gone. Only Hebba remained, smiling serenely at the sight before them: A town, but like none he had ever seen. The light was unlike sunlight or moonlight. Each building glowed with an unearthly radiance. He could taste the magic; the air was thick with it. He scrambled to his feet as Hebba walked away from him, her arms raised to greet their new hosts.

There are many mages who have little or no connection to the spirit world (Roderick, above, commanded the power of the elements and the weather but had no sense of the Umbra), and need the help of those who can better sense it. This gives differently minded mages another reason to work together when their mercurial personalities might guide them instead toward solitude. Keep this in mind if you plan to do an Umbral chronicle - if your mages do not have the skills needed to travel between the worlds, you should prepare a Storyteller character to help them.

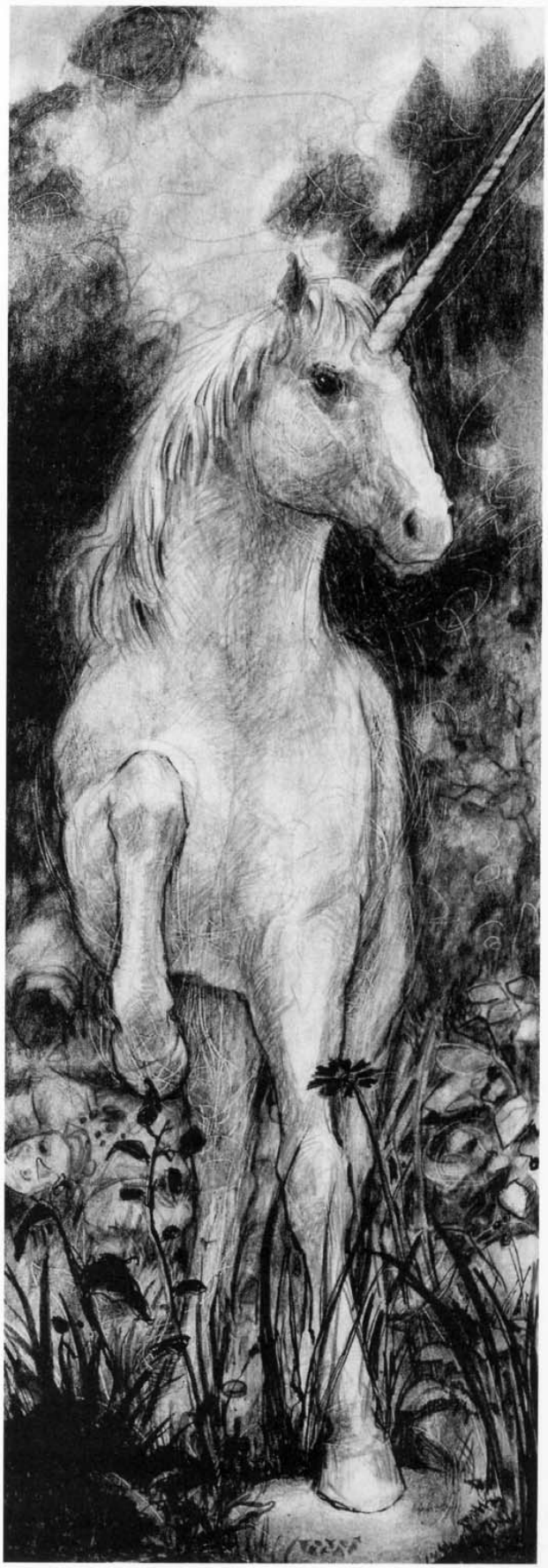
Flaws

One can expect mages, with all the power they acquire, to suffer some hubris. If mages can change the world, then what boundaries are there? Well, other mages, for one. Magical creatures, temperamental magical items and a horde of angry Commoners are others. But mages often have the illusion firmly lodged in their mind that they are invincible, and this is almost always to their detriment.

"We are lost!" Yorick cried, sliding downhill over rocks and debris as he stumbled down the hill in darkness.

"Not if you run instead of chatter," called Paul, dashing in front of him.

They were doing their best to get as far away as fast as possible. For if they were caught... Yorick didn't want



to think about it. He could hear noises in the forest; they were being followed. He ran faster.

The land leveled out and the woods cleared, and they broke into a large green field. Yorick caught up with Paul quickly as they raced across the moonlit area. The field was circular, surrounded on all sides by tall trees. The moonlight played on the grass, giving it a silver sheen. Yorick had the sudden feeling that this reminded him of a much larger version of where they had just been - the very sacred area they had just violated.

"Very sacred," he whispered, and slowed to a stop. Paul passed him again, running full tilt. Yorick's breath caught in his throat as he turned.

The mare bugled her fury from the woods, and Yorick could hear her crashing down the hill to catch up with them. Along the edges of the field he could see shimmers of white, and he called out to Paul, much too late.

Racing for the trees at the far side of the field, Paul didn't even have time to react as the unicorn leaped from the woods directly in front of him and skewered him through the chest. Yorick heard him scream and then fall abruptly silent. The stallion pulled free his horn. Paul fell, then was trampled beneath the angry animal's hooves as it focused on its new target at the center of the field.

Yorick heard the mare break free of the woods, and he could see other unicorns doing likewise all around him. He wished he hadn't let Paul talk him into trying to catch the unicorn foal. He wished he had stayed home and studied his texts. He wished unicorns weren't so big. He wished they were even more rare, for it seemed every unicorn in the world was running toward him. He scrabbled at the bag hanging at his belt and took a pinch of dried blood and blew it into the air.

He passed through the curtain separating the worlds and landed on the ground with only a slight headache. Congratulating himself on quick thinking, he opened his eyes.

Spirits surrounded him, and by the looks of things, they were not waiting to congratulate him for his skill. They looked menacing and angry, with tendrils of red floating from their auras. He froze and cast about desperately for another quick solution.

Mages can harness the elements, touch minds, influence crowds, enchant items, and simply inspire awe. If they claim to be not proud, then they are probably lying. The power they have can lead them to great things - or to extremely dangerous choices.

You probably don't want the characters to die trampled by monsters or in the grip of angry Umbral spirits, so as Storyteller you may have to invent a *deus ex machina* to save them if hubris raises its ugly head.

A tip for Storytelling magical creatures and their habitats: notice in this section the description of the sacred grove. Instead of telling your players that they notice a sacred area, describe it in detail. Let them decide for themselves whether this is a special place to another creature or not.

Prejudice

Prejudice is an ugly thing in any case, and mages in the present day feel it a great deal. In the Dark Medieval, however, mages have less to fear. In a superstitious world, mages are more often accepted, along with other mystical things not generally understood.

However, people fear those who look different, speak differently, or have different abilities than they do, and magic users are no exception. Mages may be admired, but they will also be feared.

Take our Hermetic mage, Arik, and his servant, Gavin. The solitary mage has taken in the poor boy as a servant but is about to lose him.

Arik accepted the wine brought to him by the boy, not bothering to pause in his reading. It took him a moment to realize that the boy hadn't left the room but was standing by the door and shifting from foot to foot, his head bowed.

"Yes, son?"

"I canna work for you any longer, sor," the boy said, staring at the floor.

Arik frowned. "I thought your family needed the money, Gavin. You do good work. I would not like to lose you."

"Me mam says...." Gavin continued to stare at the floor.

"Yes?" prompted Arik.

"Me mam says you're... evil, sor," the boy stammered, the tips of his ears flushing.

"Ahhh," Arik sighed and leaned back in his chair. He took a sip from his wine. "I have talents that she does not, and therefore it must be evil, is that it?"

"Sh-she says that yer a bomnation in the eyes of the Lord," Gavin whispered, still not raising his head.

"Does she, then?" asked the mage.

"Yes, sor," the boy mumbled.

"Ignorance is a power that can at times be more powerful than any I possess, Gavin. Ignorance can cause a woman to force her son to cease making the sole wages of the household. Ignorance can cause townspeople to drive out the only man who can save their dying crops. Ignorance can cause people to make decisions out of fear instead of logic," Arik said. His voice became serious. "But know this, boy. I hurt no one. I help the village when it needs it, and I help feed your family by employing your services. Remind your mam of that before you go hungry again. If you return to me tomorrow, I will be happy to have your services. If you do not, I wish you a grand life. You may go."

Arik turned to resume his studies.

Although mages control vast powers, they are still not above the ugly problems of everyday living. The characters will experience prejudice and hatred at times, whether it be a confused servant who refuses to

remain in the building while a spell is being performed or frightened townspeople intent on expelling a mage violently from their vicinity.

Will the mages see fit to destroy the frightened folk who hate them? Will they incinerate the peasant raising a farm instrument against them? Will they flee rather than kill the innocents? What kinds of decisions will they make, and how will these drive the story?

SAMPLE STORY

Muhazzab did not stir when the servant brought him water and grapes with which to break his fast. The late-afternoon sun still shone in the west, but darkness fell quickly in the holy month of Ramadan. Muhazzab would want sustenance when he broke his trance.

At sunset, his eyes did not open. The water and grapes remained untouched. Before sunrise, the servant returned and quietly removed them. Still, Muhazzab did not stir.

Jabir paced in the main hallway. The servants gave him wide berth, mindful of his outbursts. A young mage attempted to scurry past him and failed; he grabbed her by the arm and made her drop the jug of water she was carrying. It shattered on the stone floor and she cried out in alarm and dropped to her knees.

"You are drinking during daylight?" he snarled at her as she picked up the broken shards of clay.

"No, sir, of course not," she said, keeping her eyes averted. "I was carrying this to Muhazzab's room."

"And you presume that he sins by drinking during daylight?" he asked, keeping an iron grip on her arm.

The girl kept silent. Her gaze remained cast toward the ground. It was well known that the way to withstand the wrath of Jabir was to remain humble and quiet. He would eventually calm down.

It worked. He let go of her arm and allowed her to continue her cleanup. "What is he doing in there? I have not seen anything in my trances. What could he possibly be seeing? What is taking all this time?"

"I do not know, sir," said the young mage. "Abu also says he has never seen anything like it."

Jabir spat upon the floor. "Pah, what does the head of the servants know but when to bring food and when to take it away?"

She did not look up. "That is exactly what the head of the servants knows, sir. We are not permitted to disturb our Master while he is in trance, but the servants still enter his quarters to bring food and water for the evening's break of the fast. Abu knows that the servants visit our Master at sunset and sunrise," she said.

Jabir stared at her. "Your point is made. Leave the mess for the servants, Dahah. A mage shouldn't fetch and carry," he said. "Go and bring Abu to me."

"Yes, sir," she said, thankful her veils hid her wry smile at his contradiction, and left him.

As she left, Jabir stared out at the sunset. He usually spent the days of Ramadan in trance, but after hearing of Muhazzab's unending trance, he was too agitated. Muhazzab would have news when he returned, and Jabir wanted to be present for it.

Abu approached Jabir quickly and quietly, the way the best servants did. Dahah followed him, hoping to be dismissed. It would be better still if he were to notice her not at all. Although Jabir was the second-in-command under Muhazzab and received all the respect due to him by those below him, he was not well liked. His temper flared without warning, and he was often harsh and unfair with his punishments. Muhazzab was a kind master and excellent teacher, and few of his students understood why a man as unreasonable as Jabir would be chosen as his second.

Abu was an old man, having served many mages in his life. He stood, eyes downcast, as Jabir appraised him. "You have been serving Muhazzab food and water for all the month of Ramadan, yes?" Abu nodded. "When did you notice him entering his trance?"

"Three days ago," the servant said quietly.

"And he has touched neither food nor water nor spoken to anyone in that time? And he remains in his trance?"

"You are correct, sir," said Abu quietly.

Jabir's voice got very quiet. "And you chose not to alert anyone to this?"

"I trust that our Master is in a very important trance. I felt it best he not be disturbed. We continue to bring sustenance at sunset and take it away at sunrise. We will do this until the Master awakens," the servant said, a respectful tone in his voice.

"You will not tell me what you are going to do! It is I who commands you!" Jabir cried, and he struck the old man across the cheek with the back of his hand. Abu fell heavily to the floor.

Dahah sucked in breath but stayed where she was. "You will report to me every day to inform me of his condition!" said Jabir. He turned on his heel and strode away, fine robes trailing behind him.

The moment he was gone, Dahah rushed to Abu's side. He lay on the stone floor, panting, blood dripping from his nose. "Are you all right?" she asked him.

He smiled, although it looked a lot like a grimace. "Believe it or not, I have faced magi with worse tempers," he said.

"You were younger then," she said matter-of-factly. She helped him up. "Stay out of his-"

She stopped speaking when she saw Muhazzab's door creak open. He looked at them without seeing them. "I have seen the future," he said. "It has unrolled itself to me like a painted scroll. We can be involved in great things if we move quickly. Bring me Jabir. At sunset, bring us food and water. Prepare traveling packs and nine mages; we leave tomorrow."

He leaned on the doorjamb, visibly weak. His eyes were still unfocused. Abu bowed low and went back towards the

servants' quarters. Dahah paused before going to find Jabir. "Master," she said, hesitantly. "Travel away from the mosque during Ramadan?"

"Necessary. Allah will be behind us," Muhazzab said, and went back into his quarters.

What follows is a sample story for you to try out. You will find more details here than given in the broad story ideas earlier in this chapter, along with some Storyteller characters. As always, you are the Storyteller; feel free to change whatever details you like, as it's your game. This is merely a suggestion for a chronicle featuring a stolen child, the mages who will do anything to find him, and a chase through the British Isles.

Backstory

The children of mages are often assumed to inherit the powers of the parents. Thus, progeny are closely watched, especially when they reach puberty. When a parent is the head of a House or chantry, the children are considered even more precious and often are treated like royalty.

Charles is a well-respected and much-loved head of an eclectic chantry of mixed Fellowships just outside of London, to which the players' characters belong. They are a solitary group, seeking power in diversity, and are somewhat distrusted by other mages. Still, as they celebrate the powerful differences in the magics they practice, they are respected and sometimes even called upon by the English royalty.

Charles' wife, Martha, died twelve years ago in childbirth, and their son, Erick, was raised in the chantry. He is a favorite of everyone, a very bright child, and Charles adores him. There are few children in the chantry, and each gets much attention and tutoring. They are free to choose which Fellowship of magic to study, following their own developing strengths. This is, of course, extremely rare in other chantries, even those with mixed Fellowships.

One night in late autumn, some mages who were up late studying noticed a rather hurried party heading west from the chantry. Assuming it was simply someone traveling to London on an emergency, they went back to their work. The next morning, the chantry rouses an alarm - Erick is missing. Through the chaos, the mages realize that the hurried travelers the night before were the abduction party. No one saw anything unusual the night before, save the exit from the chantry.

Charles asks the characters if they will track and find the boy. He mentions that he will be indebted to them and will pay any ransom to get his beloved child back.

The Story

The mages descend into a dark world of intrigue and manipulation as they search for the missing child. They need to be able to track the party, guard against any attacks, and try to figure out why the child was taken and what the abductors want. If Erick dies, Charles will be devastated. Yet, if they do bring the boy back alive, the rewards could be substantial. Currying the favor of a very powerful and forward-thinking mage is a wise thing to do.

This story focuses mainly on the concept of loyalty: the mages' loyalty to their chantry, the abductors' loyalty to their master, and whatever loyalty Erick finally shows. The boy has a destiny, although no one knows it yet. Well, no one that knows him personally, anyway.

As the chronicle expands, the characters discover Erick's importance. They also discover that the kidnappers are split into two factions, one dedicated to keeping the boy safe and the other dedicated to his - and the pursuing characters' - death.

What with the problems of travel, tracking, diplomatic dealings and uncovering intrigue and treachery within the enemy's camp, the cabal will be quite busy.

Advice for Building a Group

If you are running this story with new mages, here is some advice for building your group. When it comes to making player characters for this campaign, any Fellowship will do, since they are all welcome in the chantry. If they are particularly bigoted towards other Fellowships, let them know that it would be wise to keep these feelings hidden.

It is best to avoid homogeneous groups in **Dark Ages: Mage**. Although it sounds like a good idea to have an entire group believing the same things and getting along fabulously, they will be incredibly weak in many areas of magic. It's better to have a varied group, no more than two mages of any one Fellowship.

If you already have an existing group, simply let your players keep their characters (unless, as stated above, they are all of the same Fellowship, in which case you should have at least some of them create new mages). Coming up with a story hook to get the players in the chantry shouldn't be too difficult. They may have heard about its excellent reputation through the grapevine. They may have been aided by the chantry in a previous adventure. Or maybe the chantry has heard about them and sought them out.

Initial Scenes: The Chase

The characters enter the story the day the chantry discovers Erick's disappearance. The chantry is in an uproar, and Charles is inconsolable. He chooses the players' characters for the task because they have a good history of working together or because they are powerful. He begs them to set out as soon as possible and promises supplies, money and all they need for travel. He reminds

them he will pay any ransom offered. The abductors have many hours' lead, assuming they're traveling by horse and not by magic; if the latter, they could be days ahead. The cabal would do well to leave quickly.

The towns west of London will have little or no information about the abducted child, although sightings of the rushed travelers are common, all of them indicating westward flight. Scrying reveals magical residue also going west.

The mages should encounter difficulties associated with traveling the unpoliced roads between cities, such as bandit attacks or even monster assault. These should be nothing they can't handle. There should be no attacks from enemy mages.

When they reach Gloucester and ask their normal sets of questions of the locals, a small street girl of about 13 will overhear and demand coin for information. She will tell the group that some strange brown men in robes with a boy about her age came through town just that morning. No one thought they were odd, which she wondered about, as they obviously were very different.

The characters may be able to tell that this girl is a mage just coming into her powers. She saw through the illusion the abductors placed on themselves. They are Ahl-i-Batin whose magic makes them seem to be a group of traveling European merchants. This is why no one has noticed them.

The girl's name is Ruth, and she may make for an interesting side-quest. She would be best as someone to come back for, as her powers are so underdeveloped she would be more of a hindrance than a useful addition. On the other hand, she is somehow able to see through the Batini illusion, so she may be useful. Regardless of what the final decision is, the subject of what to do with the young mage should be raised.

Depending on the time of day, the mages will want either to find shelter for the night or simply to replenish their supplies and get a bite to eat. Ruth will seek them out again and tell them that she has seen one of the robed men still in the city. If they pay her again, she will lead them to where she saw him. Note that if she has joined the group as a Storyteller character, she will simply tell them where she last saw the travelers, and she will then point out a lingering man who looks to them like a merchant.

The man travels westward alone, at the outskirts of the city. The mages can track him, but if they capture him, they can glean all sorts of interesting information from the encounter. If they track him, he senses them before he catches up with his group (and Erick) and the following encounter still takes place, only later.

When the characters attempt to capture or approach him, he attacks but is fairly easy to capture. His talents are mainly in illusion, and he surrenders before suffering too much bodily harm.

Successfully interrogating him reveals the following: His name is Musa, and he is a low-level mage serving the Ahl-i-Batin. They have traveled to England to kidnap Erick. He doesn't know why the child was kidnapped, but he knows the ransom price. The chantry has a number of holy saint's relics in its possession, and the Ahl-i-Batin demand the holy blood of Saint Januarius as ransom for the boy. The blood is very powerful and has been used in only a few key spells and rituals, for it is precious and finite. Musa assures them that his master will take good care of the boy. If the mages use guile and patience instead of pain and intimidation to get the information, Musa reveals that he is afraid of the second-in-command of operation, a man by the name of Jabir. He marvels that the characters are kinder to him than his own people. He also adds that though he knows his master will not harm the boy, he doesn't know about Jabir, whose temper is unpredictable.

Musa is a weak-willed mage and responds to kind words. Clearly, he was chosen for the trip because of his talent with illusion and not for his loyalty to his clan. He will not, however, tell the mages where the others are going or what his master's name is. If released, he will go south and lead the cabal away from the trail. If kept with the group, he will neither help nor hinder their search and will give them no more information.

Middle Scene: Confrontation

Now that they know what they're looking for, scrying for the Ahl-i-Batin is easier. They may send messages back to Charles about the demanded ransom to see what his answer is, although he did say he would pay any price. They can hire a swift messenger in Gloucester for this service.

Tracking the Batini will take them to Cardiff, Wales. The journey there is relatively uneventful. If they choose to take Musa with them, he attempts to escape, although he does not turn violent unless attacked; he attempts to use magic to slip past their vision. The reply messenger from Charles catches up with them during this time and either brings instruction on how to construct a fake relic, or is accompanied by an accomplished chantry Commoner servant who bears the actual relic (this is your call as Storyteller).

The group remains a steady day's travel behind the abductors, unable to make up any ground. They enter Cardiff hearing the same story: no suspicious group of robed men has come through town with a boy. The members of the small seaside town are suspicious of the mages, however, and aren't very helpful.

They can investigate the town, although they won't find out anything helpful to the search. Scrying

for some trace of magic will not help, either; the trail has abruptly gone cold. When they reach the seaside, they are suddenly attacked by the Ahl-i-Batin. Any attempts they make to placate the attackers with the ransom are ignored.

This attack is only a feint, designed to distract the characters from the core abduction party, which is now leaving by boat across the sea. Unless a player announces that his character is looking around, ignoring the battle, nobody will notice the boat until the battle ends and the vessel is well on its way.

The attackers are militant Commoners trained well in the arts of war. They do not seek to kill the characters (although they will, if they must) so much as wound them, distracting them long enough for the boat to be well on its way. Once that occurs, they will break off and disappear. One among their number is a Batini mage, whose magic will quickly move them away or hide them from sight.

If they are defeated and captured, they refuse to talk, except to say that their masters have gone to Dublin. They do not know anything more, anyway.

The mages can hire a boat in Cardiff to take them across the sea.

Final Scenes: Resolution

When the group reaches Dublin, a Batini emissary is waiting for them. He offers to take them peacefully to his master. When asked about the attack, he gets visibly tense and says it was the doing of a man who is no longer in their order. This man acted against the wishes of their master and has been punished. He apologizes for any injuries or frights caused by the attack.

They will be led to an inn where Muhazzab, the leader of the abductors, will greet them in a friendly fashion. His bodyguards are everywhere, appearing to be Europeans; unless the characters have a means of seeing past the illusions, they will not know who is a Batini and who is a local.

Muhazzab asks if they have the ransom, but does not ask for it to be handed over. He also apologizes for the attack and says he was not aware of the ambition of his servant. He tells them the story of his trance during Ramadan, of how he saw a future with a powerful mage. There was no indication as to the Fellowship the mage followed, and this allowed the Batini to believe that the mage was impressionable. If the boy - Erick, of course - chooses the path of Islam, his power will work towards their goals. Muhazzab assures the mages that Erick is unharmed.

If the characters behave well, Muhazzab accepts the ransom and gives back the boy. If asked why he's accepting a relic over the right to influence a powerful mage, he gives a small smile and says that, although the boy is valuable, the relic is even more valuable. Abducting the boy is a win-win situation for him: Either way, he gets something he wants. If the characters use magic to discover whether he is lying, they will be unable to determine his motives. He is indeed lying, but he is too powerful an illusionist to be discovered.

When the ransom is given, Erick is brought in and silently joins the cabal. He does not, however, greet them as close friends or relatives, and he is strangely withdrawn.

As the characters leave, the rogue mage, Jabir, attacks once more. His motive becomes clear: the former second-in-command is afraid of Erick's power and fears that the boy will displace him in the eyes of his master. He still hopes to regain his master's faith by showing Muhazzab that the infidels are a danger to him.

The powerful old mage, however, sits back and lets the players' characters handle the attack, rising to act only if Erick is endangered. Jabir will attack the mages first, then turn his forces against Erick and, finally, Muhazzab. When the Batini leader is attacked, if it comes to that, he is shocked and only then fully realizes the true colors of his former second. If the characters haven't killed Jabir yet, Muhazzab will attack so ferociously that Jabir flees.

In the aftermath, Muhazzab apologizes again for his blindness and aids anyone who is hurt. The mages are free to leave for London with Erick. Now, the quest is in their hands. What has happened to the boy? Does he now pray to Mecca every day? Will he continue being distant to his old friends? What has happened to Jabir? Does he beat them to the chantry? Do they return to a burnt-out tower? Is Charles upset at the state of his son? These are your questions to answer.

Things to Keep in Mind

Try to keep the travel between cities interesting for your players. Plan out any encounters beforehand.

Make sure the decisions your players make have consequences. All the Ahl-i-Batin in this story, save Jabir and his thugs, are very pleasant and accommodating. Musa tells most of what he knows if the players' characters are nice to him, and Muhazzab is helpful and gives plenty of information, all the while serving his own interests. If the characters get violent and try to torture or force information out of the Batini, they will receive very little information at all and will face a very angry and powerful mage. Diplomacy is a powerful tool in this story.

Keeping your mages tied to a chantry makes for a good community environment but can shelter and stifle new players who need to learn how to play within an independent group. Separating them from the chantry at the end of the story is a wise move, whether it is forced separation through Charles kicking them out for disobedience or their returning to find the chantry destroyed - or eerily empty. This can also help

launch a new story. Be careful and have a plan for the children your mages bring back, if any.

Storyteller Characters

Charles

Order of Hermes mage, head of the chantry

Charles is an extremely kind man, a very accepting mage who is very proud of the eclectic chantry he has created. His followers are loyal to him, and he considers them family. He mourns his dead wife and sees her in his son, which makes Erick all the more precious to him. He will reward the players' characters handsomely if they manage to bring back his son, but if they bring back a cold, distant boy, he may be less than appreciative. Although he might hold no active grudge against the Ahl-i-Batin, as there may even be a few of them in his chantry, he nevertheless does not wish his son to follow the faith of those who kidnapped him.

Traits: Charles' Traits are irrelevant to story; he does not appear in any dice-rolling situations.

Erick

Son of Charles

Erick is a boy about to begin feeling the first surges of his magic. He has the rare opportunity to follow any Fellowship he wishes and is placed in a unique position of finding the perfect fit for his talents. Without knowing it, he is destined to become a very powerful mage (thanks to a high Destiny Background), and his choice of Fellowship is the key to what kind of power he will wield - and for whose purposes. The Muslim mages, the Ahl-i-Batin, have foreseen this and wish for the boy's power to serve Islam. During his flight across the British Isles, Muhazzab has influenced him towards Islam; it is the Storyteller's job to say how much.

Traits: Erick's Traits should not come into play; he is a boy who cannot yet cast spells and is no match for armed adults in combat.

Muhazzab

Ahl-i-Batin mage (Qutb)

The epitome of a Subtle One, Muhazzab is a gentle, charismatic leader of a chantry of Ahl-i-Batin. While in a trance, he sees the future and leads mages away from their mosques at the most holy time of the year. He knows that the future will be greatly affected by a certain man who is yet a boy, but he cannot determine the Fellowship of this mage-to-be. Thus, he acts to turn the boy toward the ways of the Ahl-i-Batin. His influence on Erick during the flight may have worked. Although he knows the boy's future vaguely and can manipulate the players' characters, he doesn't know the heart of his own second-in-command, Jabir, who is planning to overthrow Muhazzab's rule someday.



Traits: Muhazzab's Traits are rather high, especially in his Al-Ikhlas Foundation and all four Batini Pillars. Essentially, he can do whatever the Storyteller needs him to. Physical combat against him is useless, for at a thought, he can be wherever a blade is not. Hence, his Traits are unnecessary unless he is to become a regular feature of the chronicle, in which case, you should feel free to write up whatever Traits for him that you feel are warranted.

Jabir

Ahl-i-Batin mage (Murshid)

Jabir is Muhazzab's second-in-command and is a ruthless, ambitious man. Known to his fellow Ahl-i-Batin as a temperamental man, Jabir is not subtle and prefers violence over manipulation. He hides this from



his master and hopes to overthrow him someday. After Muhazzab, in a trance state, sees Erick's power, Jabir is afraid of losing his master's favor to the boy and plans to get rid of them both once the boy is in their custody.

Nature: Bravo

Demeanor: Autocrat

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3, Charisma 2, Manipulation 5, Appearance 2, Perception 2, Intelligence 4, Wits 4

Abilities: Academics 2, Alertness 2, Awareness 3, Brawl 2, Etiquette 2, Intimidation 4, Investigation 2, Leadership 3, Linguistics (Arabic, English, Greek) 2, Melee 2, Occult 2, Ride 2, Politics 3, Subterfuge 3

Foundation: Al-Ikhlas 3

Pillars: Al-Fatihah 3, Al-Hajj 1, Al-Layl 4

Quintessence: 7

Willpower: 8

Weapons: Scimitar, dagger

MUSA

Ahl-i-Batin mage (Mutasawwif)

Musa is a weak-willed mage who has a talent for illusion. He is easily captured and even more easily interrogated. The players' characters will get more out of him with kind words, which he is unused to from Jabir, than with violence, to which he is inured.



Nature: Caregiver

Demeanor: Conformist

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4, Charisma 4, Manipulation 2, Appearance 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 2

Abilities: Alertness 2, Awareness 2, Brawl 2, Dodge 2, Expression 2, Linguistics (Arabic, English) 1, Medicine 1, Melee 3, Occult 1, Ride 2

Foundation: Al-Ikhlas 2

Pillars: Al-Fatihah 2, Al-Layl 2

Quintessence: 3

Willpower: 3

Weapons: Scimitar, dagger

REFERENCES

There are many media you can tap for information about the Dark Ages - everything from fantasy and fiction to historical documentaries and reference books. Because **Vampire: The Dark Ages** has an excellent and extensive list of movies and television shows that give a good look at the period, the following list provides some fiction and nonfiction books to reference.

FICTION

The Crown of Eden, Thomas Williams

Doomsday Book, Connie Willis

A Journey to the End of the Millennium, A. B. Yehoshua, Nicholas de Lange (translator)

The Dagger and the Cross: A Novel of the Crusades, Judith Tarr

The Name of the Rose, Umberto Eco

A Booke of Days: A Novel of the Crusades, Stephen J. Rivele

NON-FICTION

Everyday Life in the Middle Ages, Sherrilyn Kenyon

A History of the Medieval Church, 590-1500, Margaret Deanesly

Dungeon, Fire and Sword, John J. Robinson

Healing and Society in Medieval England, Fay Marie Getz

Life in a Medieval Village, Frances and Joseph Gies

Magic in the Middle Ages, Richard Kieckhefer

The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe, Valerie I. J. Flint

Dark Ages Mage

NAME:
PLAYER:
CHRONICLE:

NATURE:
DEMEANOR:
FELLOWSHIP:

CABAL:
CONCEPT:
MENTOR:

ATTRIBUTES

Physical		Social		Mental	
Strength	●○○○○	Charisma	●○○○○	Perception	●○○○○
Dexterity	●○○○○	Manipulation	●○○○○	Intelligence	●○○○○
Stamina	●○○○○	Appearance	●○○○○	Wits	●○○○○

ABILITIES

Talents		Skills		Knowledges	
Alertness	○○○○○	Animal Ken	○○○○○	Academics	○○○○○
Athletics	○○○○○	Archery	○○○○○	Cosmology	○○○○○
Awareness	○○○○○	Crafts	○○○○○	Enigmas	○○○○○
Brawl	○○○○○	Etiquette	○○○○○	Hearth Wisdom	○○○○○
Dodge	○○○○○	Herbalism	○○○○○	Investigation	○○○○○
Empathy	○○○○○	Melee	○○○○○	Linguistics	○○○○○
Expression	○○○○○	Performance	○○○○○	Medicine	○○○○○
Intimidation	○○○○○	Ride	○○○○○	Occult	○○○○○
Leadership	○○○○○	Stealth	○○○○○	Politics	○○○○○
Subterfuge	○○○○○	Survival	○○○○○	Theology	○○○○○

ADVANTAGES

Backgrounds

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Foundation

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Aura: _____ ( )

Pillars

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Other Traits

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Quintessence

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐
☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

Willpower

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

Backlash

Branding/Twilight

Health

Bruised		☐
Hurt	-1	☐
Injured	-1	☐
Wounded	-2	☐
Mauled	-2	☐
Crippled	-5	☐
Incapacitated		☐

Experience

AN AGE OF TERRIFYING MYSTERIES

It is a world lit by torch-fires and ruled by superstitions. It is a time before the birth of reason and before humanity's dominion over the world. This dark age is an epoch for castles, nobles, priests... and wizards. Treading in the shadows of the world, consorting with demons and monsters, these magicians, holy men, philosophers and pagans wield unfathomable magic in a world veiled in mystery.

AN AGE OF UNPARALLELED MAGIC

Before the rise of the Technocracy existed a Mythic Age when magic ruled and science was but a dream unborn. In these times, mortal men and women cower amid great wars and supernatural mysteries. Only wizards walk unafraid in the revenant-haunted and wolf-infested night.

Included in this supplement are all the game systems and rules necessary to build mages for the Dark Ages setting. This book requires the use of Dark Ages: Vampire™.

Dark Ages

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