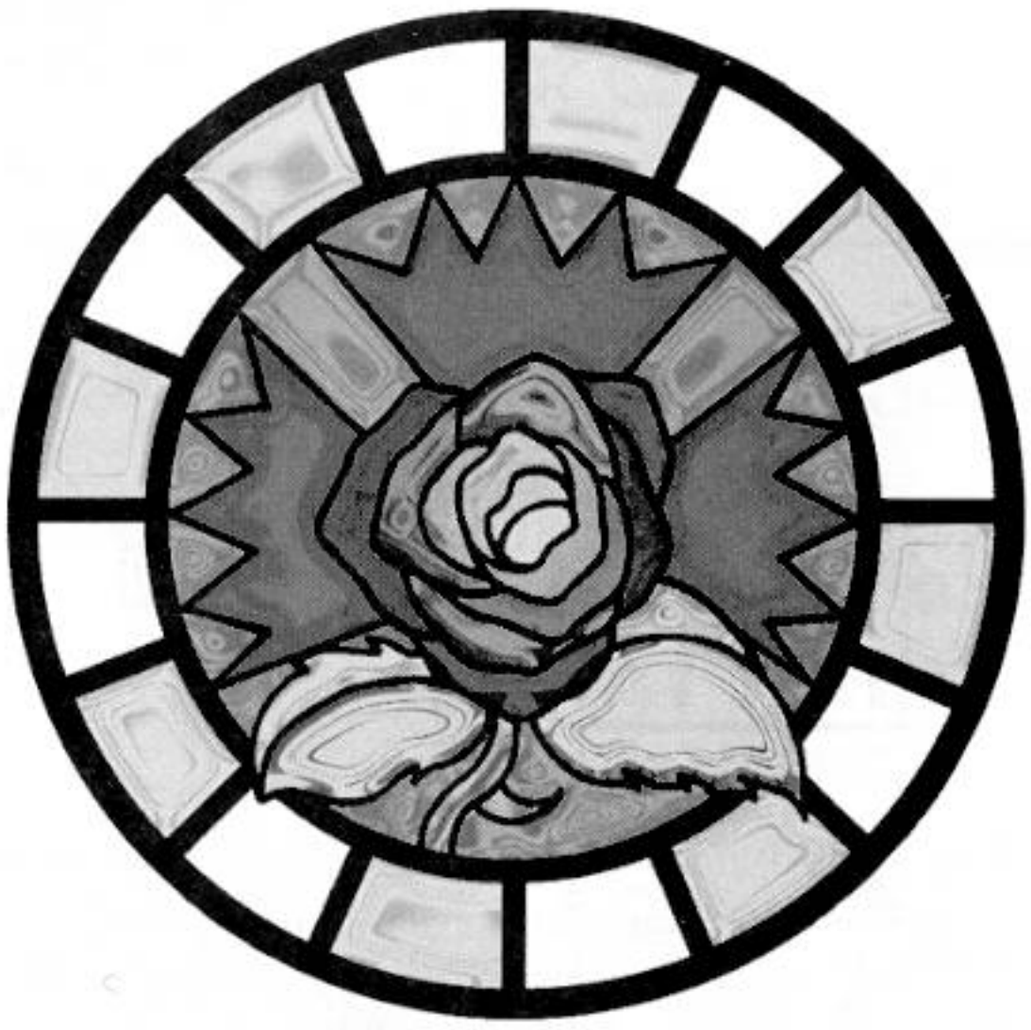
Pour L'Amour et Liberte:
The Book of Houses 2

For Changeling: The Dreaming™

Pour l'Amour et Liberte:™ The Book of Houses 2



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Written by: Jackie Cassada and Nicky Rea
Developed by: Justin Achilli
Edited by: Cary Goff
Art Director: Richard Thomas
Layout and Typesetting: Ron Thompson
Artists: James Stowe, Drew Tucker and Melissa Uran
Front and Back Cover Design: Richard Thomas

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Pour l'Amour et Liberte:
The Book of Houses
2

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House Ailil: Shapers of the Endless Winter

Everybody sees what you seem to be, but few really feel what you are; and these few dare not oppose the opinion of the many, who are protected by the majesty of the state; for the actions of all men, and especially those of princes, are judged by the result, where there is no other judge to whom to appeal.

Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*

Honor

Count Declan ap Ailil heard the sound of battle punctuated by the scream of a wounded horse as he rode toward Lady Arlana's freehold of Silverwood. Spurring his horse in the direction of the fracas, he hurried toward the noise, veering from the path and plunging straight into the woods. The thick undergrowth slowed his horse's progress, so that the dark-haired knight had ample time to listen to the clash of swords and the solid thunk of weapon on shield. At the crest of a hill, still a quarter mile from the battle, Count Declan could just make out the combatants. A swarm of dark-clothed commoners battled a lone rider, whose superior skill could not surmount the concerted effort of multiple attackers. Even as he urged his horse down the brushy incline toward the fight, Declan knew that he would probably be too late to do more than pick up the pieces.

Sir Gannon's opponents struck without warning, appearing suddenly from the trees that lined the twisting mountain road. Trained to the ways of war, his steed reared upward, buying Sir Gannon a few precious seconds in which to draw his sword and gauge his situation. He counted six attackers, none of them mounted, and felt a slight surge of hope.

His horse's hooves lashed out at the pair of redcaps blocking the path from the front, spoiling whatever maneuvers the gruesome duo had planned. Sir Gannon's sword, blazing with chimerical energy, slashed a gaping wound in the arm of a third foe. The knight thrust his shield outward to block a blow to his off side from a troll's great axe. Aware that two more of his assailants remained unaccounted for, Sir Gannon guided his mount in a controlled pivot, swinging around to bring hooves and sword to bear against the enemy at his back.

The grueling dance continued as Sir Gannon fended off his attackers even as he felt his body succumb to the relentless assault. In the end, sheer numbers and a lucky blow prevailed.

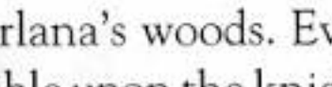
Sir Gannon heard a sickening crunch as a solid blow from one of his rear opponents shattered the left hind leg of his horse. The knight barely had time to throw himself free of the animal as it collapsed, screaming. With howls of triumph, the attackers swarmed the fallen knight. Sir Gannon felt the numbing chill of cold iron weapons drawing his spirit from him as he fell into a black well of nothingness.

By the time Declan arrived on the scene, nothing remained of the battle except for the weary moaning of a horse too long in agony. Near the fallen animal lay the battered body of a man, barely alive. The count dismounted and knelt by the man, assessing the damage. His eyes narrowed as he caught the slight trace of Glamour still clinging to the body.

"Not quite gone yet," Declan muttered. Passing his hands over the worst of the man's wounds, Declan wove a healing cantrip into the torn flesh beneath his fingers, sealing it against further blood loss. "You'll keep, until a true healer can tend your wounds and restore you to yourself," he remarked to the unconscious figure, now clearly visible as a sidhe.

Declan turned his attention next to the horse, which lay still, its breath coming in shallow, ragged gasps as its eyes glazed over with pain. By all rights, he should put the downed animal out of its misery, but Declan noticed a spark of Glamour still hovering about the creature, revealing it as a faerie steed. "I suppose you deserve a chance as well," Declan said. Once again he summoned the magic of the fae, this time directing it against the shattered bones of the horse's broken leg.

When he had finished his ministrations, Declan returned to the sidhe whose life he had, in all probability, just saved. This time, he examined the noble's clothing and accoutrements for indications of his identity and his business in Lady Arlana's woods. Even had the Dougal blazon not been visible upon the knight's bloody surcoat, the lack of two fingers on the warrior's left hand — his shield hand — marked him as a member of the crafter's house. Of more interest to Declan, however, was the sealed parchment concealed in a leather tube marked with the seal of the Parliament of Dreams. Declan's jaw clenched; he could guess with some certainty the letter's contents, given that the anonymous knight had undoubtedly been bound for Silverwood. Replacing the unopened missive in its container, Declan pocketed the tube and set about the task of getting both horse and rider to the safety of Lady Arlana's freehold.



Set deep in the rolling hills of Virginia's Shenandoah Valley, in its mortal seeming the freehold of Silverwood resembled a French manor house. Fae kenning, however, revealed the building's true splendor, for it resembled a palace in miniature, crowned by silver sires that blazed in the sunlight and glimmered with a luminescent beauty beneath the moon's rays. A silver dragon surmounted the arched gateway to the freehold, proclaiming the palace and grounds as a freehold of House Ailil.

Within her private chambers, on the topmost floor of the palace, Lady Arlana sat pensively behind a small writing desk. A longhaired black cat lounged at her feet, oblivious to his mistress' palpable tension. Although she appeared as a young woman in her mid-twenties, with blue-black hair and icy green eyes, Arlana had lived for several decades more than her seeming indicated, protected by the ambient Glamour of her freehold, which

she left only when necessary. Sitting opposite her, his posture betraying no signs of overt stress or discomfort, Count Declan waited for his host to digest the information he had just delivered.

"How long before our guest awakens?" Lady Arlana asked, breaking the silence with which she had greeted the count's report.

Declan shrugged. "He should regain his senses by this evening. I would expect him to stir soon after. Undoubtedly, he will wish to meet his hostess." The count allowed himself a small smile as he nodded deferentially to Lady Arlana.

"I seldom have cause to entertain a member of one of the *ruling* houses," the sidhe noblewoman observed."

"I would hazard a guess that our errant knight has had little occasion to spend much time in the company of one of the winter houses," Count Declan said. "The experience should prove interesting, at the very least."

"Do you intend to remain here as well?" Lady Arlana asked. "After all, you came here by my invitation, though I must say I did not expect you to arrive with such an unusual "gift" for your hostess as a faerie steed and its Dougal rider."

"I attempt to avoid the pitfalls of predictability," Declan replied, sounding inordinately pleased with himself. "For the sake of formality," he added, rising from his seat and executing a courtly bow to Lady Arlana, "I entreat you to grant me your hospitality according to the rules of the Escheat."

"Why do I sense some scheme in which your request presents an opening gambit?" Arlana asked, her own voice matching the count's mock seriousness. She stood up behind her desk and acknowledged Declan's bow with a gracious nod.

"I extend to you the hospitality of my house and lands and place myself and my honor as surety for your safety for the next three days and nights, beginning from this hour."

The count and the lady spent several more minutes in quiet conversation before parting company. Declan went in search of amusement among the courtiers of Lady Arlana's household, while Arlana busied herself with making preparations for her unexpected guest.

The ground shook beneath them as a powerful tremor rocked the foundation of the fragile gate that represented their last chance to find safety from the cold wind that poisoned the Dreaming. Eregannon ap Dougal watched as the rest of his household hurried through the crumbling portal. In the distance, beyond the hills he and his entourage had traversed scant hours before, he heard the howling of nightmare creatures. He spared a moment's pity for the poor soul held at bay by the foul beasts, though he realized that the quarry that currently occupied their attention also served as a timely decoy, buying time for him and his household.

"Swiftly, friends, swiftly," he called out. "Little time remains before us." He allowed his urgency to color his voice.

One by one, the remnants of Eregannon's freehold passed beyond the mortal world, seeking the silver path that would deliver them to the blessed haven of Arcadia.

The tenor of the unseen battle shifted as howls of victory became screeches of pain. Lady Moira, his beloved, paused at the threshold of the gate. "My lord," she called, "come now if you would leave with us."

Eregannon took a step toward the portal, where Moira waited, hand outstretched. An anguished groan reached his ears, followed by the growl of a beast that had latched onto its prey.

"Hold the gate, dearest one," he said, suddenly realizing what he must do. Drawing his sword, he made all haste toward the sound of the battle, ready to give aid to the beleaguered victim of the nightmares that, like all creatures of the Dreaming, sought escape.

Gannon awoke with the memory still sharp in his mind. Seldom did he remember anything from his first stay on Earth, so many centuries ago. This time, he tried to fix the dream firmly in his consciousness. *I came to someone's rescue and together we battled our way back to the gate.*

"Are you awake, my lord?" A voice beside him in the bed startled Gannon into full awareness. He turned his head abruptly, now conscious of the shapely form that curled against him, flesh to flesh, beneath the silken coverlet. Inhaling sharply, Gannon tensed at the contact. His face reddened as he beheld the face of his companion, partly hidden by a cascade of dark auburn hair.

"Forgive me, lady," he began, but a soft giggle cut his words off before he could finish his apology.

"Welcome to Silverwood," the fae maiden (though that was, perhaps, not the exact term) said, her voice a breathy whisper in his ear. "Your reputation has preceded you."

"I hope I have not offended you," Gannon blurted, this time drawing a full-throated laugh from the lady in his bed.

"You would have offended me had your form ignored your function, my lord," she said. "My name is Calinthe and part of my duties as a fosterling of the house consists of making certain our guests rest in comfort."

"Silverwood," Gannon repeated, recent memories quickly displacing the distant reminiscences of his dreams. "I was bound for a freehold by that name," he said. "There was an ambush—"

"From which another of our guests delivered you," Calinthe said. "Or so I'm told," she added.

"I have a message for Lady Arlana," Gannon continued, his mind now fixed on his mission. He threw back the covers, then quickly pulled them over him again as he remembered his own nakedness. "My clothes—"

"They had to be completely cleaned," Calinthe said. "You bled quite a lot for one who still lives. I'll get them for you."

Unselfconsciously, the slender sidhe tossed aside the coverlet and slipped out of bed. Shaking her hair so that it draped around her shoulders like a russet cape, she padded silently on thick carpet toward a massive oak chair and retrieved the neatly folded pile of clothing that lay atop it.

"Shall I help you dress, my lord?" she asked, kneeling before the bed in mock humility, presenting the garments to Gannon. The Dougal lord closed his eyes.

"That won't be necessary," he said. "Could you inform Lady Arlana that I seek an audience with her at her earliest convenience?"

Calinthe laid the clothes on the bed next to Gannon and sighed dramatically. "As you will, my lord," she said meekly, rising to her feet and making her way, still naked, out of the room, leaving Gannon to don his composure along with his attire.

Lady Arlana received Sir Gannon in her formal audience chamber, a large room of stark elegance. Black and silver drapes framed floor-to-ceiling windows delicately engraved with the dragon and stars of House Ailil. The floor repeated a motif of interlocking black and silver star patterns. Arlana, clad in a gown of black opalescent voile, sat in a massive throne made from some silvery wood not found in the mortal realm. A longhaired black cat rested contentedly in her lap. Standing attentively to one side of Lady Arlana, Count Declan watched closely as the knight he had carried into the freehold the previous evening made his way slowly but steadily toward the throne. On Arlana's other side, Calinthe, now clad in a simple black sheath, her long hair bound with silver cords, viewed her recent bed-companion from demurely lowered eyes, a contented half-smile on her face.

Sir Gannon stopped a few paces from the throne, just out of sword's reach, and bowed from the waist, a gesture not quite of obeisance but of civility, as protocol demanded. Lady Arlana acknowledged the bow and raised her voice in greeting. "I welcome you in the name of House Ailil to the freehold of Silverwood and grant you leave to speak freely in this hall of the purpose of your coming."

Gannon straightened himself and spoke the words he had rehearsed carefully for most of his ride from Tara-Nar.

"I am Sir Gannon ap Dougal, acting as knight-courier on behalf of the Parliament of Dreams. I have come here with a message for the hand and eye of Lady Arlana of Silverwood, daughter of Ailil and loyal subject of the Kingdom of Concordia." As he spoke, he reached into a pouch at his side and withdrew a leather tube. He extended it toward the throne.

"You may approach with your message," Lady Arlana said.

Sir Gannon took another step toward the throne as Lady Arlana leaned forward in her seat to take the proffered message tube. Her gesture unsettled the cat, which leaped from his mistress' lap and stalked imperiously away from the throne to flop unceremoniously midway between Lady Arlana and the Dougal knight.

Silence prevailed as Lady Arlana opened the tube, withdrew the scrolled parchment and broke the seal. Her face registered nothing as she read the words inscribed upon the goblin parchment. Without commentary, she

handed the message back to Sir Gannon, who availed himself of the opportunity to read, for the first time, the message he had born to its destination.

Lady Arlana turned to Count Declan. "It seems you have brought your own doom into this household," she said, her voice without emotion. "That," she gestured toward the parchment in Sir Gannon's hands, "is a summons for you to appear before the Parliament of Dreams to answer charges of possible complicity in the disappearance of the high king, or should I say the former high king?"

Sir Gannon finished reading the message, his face pale and his lips drawn tightly together.

"My lady," he said, "I swear to you that I was, until this moment, unaware of the contents of this summons."

"It matters little," Count Declan said, answering in place of Lady Arlana and speaking for the first time in Sir Gannon's presence. "You have discharged your duty and I must comply with the summons, or else place myself and my name in jeopardy."

Sir Gannon attempted to voice a suitable reply, words failing him in his awkward position, but Lady Arlana preempted his speech.

"That may be, Lord Declan," she said, "but I would have you remember that just hours ago I extended to you my hospitality for three days and nights. Sir Gannon, I hereby extend to you of my own free will the hospitality of my house and lands and place myself and my honor as surety for your safety for the next three days and nights, beginning from this hour. Surely you will not violate either the sanctity of my host-bond to Lord Declan nor refuse to accept the offer I have extended to you."

"I have little choice but to obey those who sent me, my lady," Sir Gannon said, not bothering to disguise the misery in his voice.

"Red Branch, I presume?" Lady Arlana asked, a faint amusement warming the ice in her voice.

Sir Gannon stared at his feet, his eyes unexpectedly meeting the unblinking gold stare of the cat, which regarded him with something like disdain. Discomfited, he looked away.

"I think we can safely assume so, without forcing your *guest* to admit his membership in a society that holds secrecy nearly as sacred as honor," Declan said, his voice conversational.

Lady Arlana nodded. "Sir Gannon," she said, "do you accept the terms of my hospitality with the understanding that, when the time has passed, you may freely exercise your mandate to deliver Count Declan to the Parliament for judgment?"

Gannon swallowed, trying to bring moisture to his dry throat so that he could speak without betraying his discomfort. "Lady Arlana," he said, "since you offer me the opportunity to keep my word without violating your hospitality, I will gladly accept your terms."

"Splendid," Lady Arlana replied, her voice suddenly brittle with forced gaiety. "Much can happen in three days — not to mention the accompanying nights. It is not often that our house plays host to one of the Seelie Court. I'm sure that you and Count Declan can discuss your dilemma — if, indeed, there is one — over the course of your joint stay as my guests."

As she finished speaking, Lady Arlana rose from her throne, swept up the cat with one hand and took her leave of her guests. With a slight shrug, Calinthe followed her mistress out of the hall, pausing only briefly as she came even with Sir Gannon to smile coyly at him. "My hospitality is yours as well, my lord," she said, "even if you do bear unfortunate news."

Left alone by the sudden departure of their host and her ward, Declan and Gannon faced each other in the audience chamber. Count Declan cocked his head to one side and gave the Dougal knight a mischievous smirk.

"Shall we talk, Sir Gannon?" Declan asked. "It seems that we cannot fight — at least for the next three days." The count began walking toward the door, motioning for Gannon to join him.

Gannon matched his pace to Declan's leisurely gait and accompanied the count from the audience chamber and into a small parlor furnished with comfortable chairs. Fresh drinks and small teacakes rested on a low table in the center of the room, awaiting the nobles' attention. Declan sat in one of the chairs near the refreshments and helped himself to a glass of pale golden wine. After a slight hesitation, Gannon followed suit.

"I hardly know what to say," Sir Gannon spoke, his words slow and uncertain. "I assume you rescued me from the ones who attacked me on the road, and for that, I am in your debt."

Count Declan studied his adversary carefully, making no secret of his scrutiny. To his credit, Sir Gannon did not flinch under the count's penetrating gaze. Finally, Declan set his half-empty wineglass aside and leaned forward slightly in his chair.

"I would hardly deem my intervention a rescue," he said, "since the attackers had already fled when I arrived. I do, however, admit to saving your life — and that of your steed, I must add — for had I not ridden to investigate the sound of battle, both you and your horse would have perished."

"My horse lives?" Gannon's voice contained both amazement and joy. He half-rose from his chair before he remembered that he had no idea where to go to look for his mount. Reluctantly, he resumed his seat. "Thank you for that, as well," he said, a new sense of warmth in his voice.

Declan shrugged. "If you wish," he said, "I can accompany you to the stables where you can see for yourself. I might as well check on my own charger at the same time."

From an upstairs window, Lady Arlana watched as Declan and Gannon crossed the space between the palace and the stables. When her two guests had disappeared from her sight, she turned to Calinthe and smiled.

"It seems as though all is proceeding according to Count Declan's plans," she remarked to her ward. Calinthe nodded, although she was not certain of the entirety of the game that was afoot — only of her small but not insignificant part in it.

"I tried this afternoon to arouse his attention, lady," she said, aware of her choice of words, "but he would not respond to my efforts."

Lady Arlana shrugged. "Be patient, my dear," she said, her voice silky with encouragement. "So long as you tempt him sorely, you may consider your job at least adequately done."

Calinthe's puzzled expression drew an indulgent smile from Lady Arlana. "You do not yet begin to see how small things build into larger ones, do you?"

"I'm afraid not, my lady," Calinthe said.

"Not only is our guest a member of a Seelie house," Arlana said, crossing the room to seat herself in the single chair while gesturing for her ward to sit upon a footstool nearby, "he is one of House Dougal and very likely a member of the Red Branch."

Calinthe frowned. "Does this mean something more than it appears?" she asked.

Arlana nodded. "House Dougal serves the Gwydion usurpers with slavish devotion," she said. "If we can even make one of Gwydion's lackeys entertain the slightest belief that the falcon's children might have misjudged the Unseelie fae, then we have taken a giant step toward breaking the stranglehold of power in Concordia. Does that seem too farfetched to you?"

Calinthe thought for a moment and then shook her head. "I suppose not, although I still fail to see how seducing him can cause such a momentous change."

Arlana pursed her lips and shook her head. "You are subtle enough in bed," she observed. "You still lack the ability to see what goes on in the bedchamber is not so different from any other exchange of power. When you can exercise the same fascination and allure standing up as you do lying down, I will consider your education in politics complete. I would suggest that, in addition to carrying out the directive I have given you, you watch closely what transpires between Count Declan and our Dougal guest."

That evening, Lady Arlana held a feast in honor of her guests. Sir Gannon managed to give the impression of ease as he sat at his hostess' left side, opposite Count Declan and held polite conversations with the other residents of Silverwood. Earlier in the day, after his visit to the stables with Count Declan, Sir Gannon had met Sir Lochlan, the freehold's lorekeeper. He was a graybeard who clung tenaciously to the remnants of his fae self, rarely leaving the palace's library. Sir Gannon also met Lord Thierry, a wilder who seemed content with striking poses and proclaiming his anarchistic ideals. For the first time, Gannon saw the commoner members of the household: Garsen, the troll who served as Lady Arlana's captain of the guard, and Ziloa, an eshu bard. During the meal, served by a staff of mortals who appeared either kinain or enchanted, Sir Gannon fielded relatively innocuous questions about his house's history, a topic of interest to both Sir Lochlan and Ziloa. Garsen questioned Gannon about the attack, obviously interested in the presence of an unauthorized motley of outlaws so

close to Silverwood. Calinthe, sitting so close to Gannon that they were nearly touching, said little, but listened to everything Gannon had to say. Lady Arlana asked Gannon what craft he followed and showed no surprise when Gannon replied that he was working under the instruction of a master swordsmith.

Finally Declan, who had remained quiet for most of the meal, raised his voice. "Surely you have some questions of your own about us, Sir Gannon?" he asked. "At least, if I were a guest in your freehold and found myself surrounded by a horde of Seelie fae, I would take the opportunity presented to me to learn all I could about the other half of our race."

Suddenly, the atmosphere at the dinner table shifted. Gannon felt himself catapulted into the role of interrogator.

"Ask us anything," Calinthe urged, her hand touching Gannon's arm in a gesture of encouragement.

"Of course, we may lie to you," Sir Thierry drawled.

Sir Gannon chose to ignore the young sidhe's comment. "I do have one question," he said. "Just one? I'd have at least a dozen," Ziloa remarked.

Gannon narrowed his eyes and took a deep breath before he spoke. "How can you so blatantly espouse the belief that honor is a lie when I have observed so many instances of honorable behavior in this freehold?" The Dougal knight directed his gaze at Declan as he elaborated upon his question. "You, sir, could have left me for dead in the forest and none would have been the wiser. Instead, you chose to call my spirit from the brink of extinction and repair the damage done to my body as well." He turned his attention to his hostess. "And you, Lady Arlana," he continued," have offered me the kindness and largesse of your house as well as the ministrations of your household."

Sir Thierry snickered at Gannon's mention of "ministrations," and Sir Lochlan shot a withering glance in the wilder's direction. Gannon ignored the exchange.

"I cannot help but see honor in both those deeds," he finished.

Lady Arlana seemed about to answer her guest when Count Declan, clearing his throat, indicated his desire to respond. The sidhe noblewoman inclined her head, allowing the count to address the question first.

"I understand your confusion, Sir Gannon," Declan began, his voice gentle and indulgent. "You labor under the same misconception as most others who follow the Seelie Code's insistence on death before dishonor. I'm afraid that you confuse action with intent. For myself (and I make no claim to speak for anyone else) honor — as you seem to define it — represents a series of platitudes that exist only in a hypothetical realm. You adhere to a set of do's and don'ts imposed by others to force you to adopt certain standards of behavior.

I repudiate any claim that others make to define and dictate my actions. My honor is what I make of it, not what others do. Any other sort of honor is a lie." The count paused and looked toward Lady Arlana. "Did you wish to add your own response to mine?"

Lady Arlana smiled. "Does that answer your question, Sir Gannon?" she asked. "For if it does not, then I might explain my own thoughts on the matter to clarify — or, perhaps, further complicate — the matter."

"I believe I understand what Lord Declan has said," Sir Gannon replied, "but I would be eager to hear your answer as well."

Arlana nodded. "I warn you that you may find my views on the matter of honor somewhat less personal and more inflammatory than Count Declan's," she said, prefacing her reply.

Gannon nodded. "The Oath of Hospitality binds me and forbids me from taking offense at your words, my lady," he said carefully, "particularly when I have solicited them."

"Well spoken," Sir Lochlan interjected.

"Then, in the spirit of mutual hospitality," Lady Arlana said, bringing her guests' attention back to herself, "I will speak my mind openly for your benefit. By its own actions, the Seelie Court has proven the truth of our philosophy of honor. The actions taken during the Accordance War by the armies of Gwydion, Fiona, Dougal, Eiluned and — I suspect — Liam did not fall comfortably within my definition of honorable behavior. Certainly honor had no place in the meeting hall on the Night of Iron Knives."

Gannon's face reddened with sudden anger as Arlana's words seared the air, charging the room with the electricity of confrontation. He bit back a hasty response and waited in silence for her to continue.

Lady Arlana seemed impervious to the effect of her words. "The fact that after 30 years, the Seelie Court still claims absolute sovereignty over the fae in Concordia also bespeaks a somewhat loose interpretation of the concept of honor, but I could spend most of the evening elaborating on that fundamental betrayal of what you call honor. I suppose I shall simply say that we prefer to

claim that honor is a lie because we have so often seen the truth of our words played out upon the grand stage of politics."

A heavy silence followed Lady Arlana's speech as everyone's attention focused on Sir Gannon, awaiting his reply. Gannon closed his eyes, reminding himself that he had, in fact, asked the question that had provoked his hostess' condemnation of Seelie honor. When he opened his eyes again, he had regained his composure. Trusting himself not to express anything beyond his words, he nodded at both Lady Arlana and Count Declan. "Thank you both for your frankness," he said. "This gives me much to muse upon before I sleep this evening."

Dinner ended a few minutes later and the guests dispersed. Sir Lochlan returned to the library, while Ziola and Sir Thierry wandered outside the palace, ostensibly to take a walk in the gardens. Calinthe drifted upstairs, murmuring her desire to curl up in a comfortable bed. Lady Arlana excused herself, pleading the need to attend to household matters. She closed herself in her study with Garsen.

Count Declan shrugged as he found himself alone with Sir Gannon.

The Dougal knight shook his head slowly. "I did not mean to spoil the dinner," Gannon said by way of apology. Declan laughed. "On the contrary," he said, "you allowed our hostess a rare opportunity to preach to someone outside the Unseelie choir. Passion before duty is another of our tenets," he reminded Sir Gannon.

The two knights continued to debate the matter of honor far into the night, with neither gaining a clear victory on the battleground of words. When Sir Gannon finally sought his room in the early hours of the morning, he found Calinthe waiting for him in his bed. This time, he allowed himself to respond to the desire she awakened in him.

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Eregannon reached the battle site just in time to see a young knight make his final stand against a mob of nightmarish creatures, enraged Thallain desperate to gain access to Arcadia and chimerical monsters born from the frightened and angry dreams of the abandoned fae. Without stopping to consider his own peril, Eregannon plunged into the fight, his sword slashing a path through the attackers with deadly accuracy. Finally, the Dougal knight reached the fallen warrior. "Get up," Eregannon commanded, thrusting his shield at the wounded knight, whose tattered surcoat bore the silver dragon and stars of House Ailil. "Watch my back and follow close upon my steps!"

Having spoken, Eregannon proceeded to hack his way once more through the enemy ranks, fury and desperation driving all thoughts of defeat from his mind.

All around them, the world shuddered and groaned as the death throes of the Dreaming intensified. The sky took on a sickly green cast and the wind howled a dirge that put the cry of the bean-sidhe to shame.

Once clear of the battle, Eregannon and his charge faced a tortuous ascent to the remains of the portal, where Lady Moira, her face drained of all color, still held the gateway open by force of will. Eregannon grasped his beloved's hand and clutched her to him as he pushed the wounded knight over the threshold onto the fast disintegrating trod.

As he stepped into the portal, the knight turned a grateful face to his rescuer. "My life is yours forever," he said. "Thus swears Declaniel of House Ailil."

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Sir Gannon awoke in a cold sweat. Beside him, Calinthe still slept, her dreams — whatever they were — undisturbed by his own remembering. *Must I now betray one whose life still rests in my keeping? And does he remember his oath to me?*

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For the next two days and nights, Sir Gannon and Count Declan spent most of their time in each other's company. Lady Arlana organized a chimerical foxhunt through the Near-Dreaming that coexisted with the mortal grounds of her palace. Sir Gannon forgot his concerns for a short time in the enjoyment of his faerie steed's unexpected return to health and strength.

For his part, Declan basked in the opportunity to study a member of the Seelie Court at his leisure. He discovered that, like himself, Sir Gannon enjoyed chess and the two knights passed an entire afternoon matching their skills. Declan soon possessed an accurate sense of the Dougal knight's tactical approach to the game. Sir Gannon tended to confront his opposition head-on, though not blindly throwing away his long-term advantage for a short-term gain. Declan's own style favored finesse and calculated risks. *Not unlike the one I'm taking now*, Declan reminded himself as he took Gannon's

queen in their final match, thus crippling the Dougal knight's attack. Sir Gannon conceded the victory with an ease that indicated that his thoughts were elsewhere.

"You should have had me several moves back," Declan observed as he replaced the pieces on the board. "Are you concerned about the approaching end of our period of grace?" His voice was gentle, but his eyes held Gannon's gaze in a relentless grip.

Sir Gannon shook his head. "Perhaps," he replied, his tone conveying the impression that Declan's observation had missed its mark — but not by much. Gannon turned his head to one side and fixed his eyes upon a spot just above and behind Count Declan.

"Do you remember anything?" he asked.

Declan looked puzzled. "I'm not certain I understand what you are asking," he said.

"Do you dream about the time before the Shattering?" Gannon said, deciding that the time for evasion was past — if, indeed, there had ever been such a time in the last three days.

"I have a few hazy recollections," Declan replied, stepping carefully around Gannon's question. "What leads you to ask me this?"

Hesitantly, Gannon related the dreams that had come to him. When he finished his tale, ending it with the final words spoken in the mortal world by Declaniel ap Ailil, he felt as if he had rid himself of a great weight.

Count Declan sat quietly for a few moments, pondering Gannon's story. "If your memories are true," he said finally, "then my oath to you still holds, for you have not released me from it."

"I know," Gannon said, his voice filled with pain. "I feel I have betrayed you by bearing a message that contained your doom within it."

"I cannot help what you feel," Declan said, refusing to ease the harshness of his words with soothing platitudes. "You must follow your code of honor. If my life is indeed in your hands, then I am yours to do with as you feel you must. The oath you say I swore to you did not include any provisions for my safety or my freedom."

Gannon rose from his seat across from Declan and paced around the small parlor Lady Arlana used as a game room. He paused before the window and looked out upon the peaceful grounds of the palace.

"I cannot renege on my duty to the Parliament," he said, speaking more to himself than to Declan.

"No one is asking that of you," Declan said. Gannon turned to face the knight he had come to respect and admire.

"There is one thing I can do, however," he said. "I have been charged to accompany you to Tara-Nar and deliver you into the hands of the panel of inquiry. I intend to stand beside you and give my own testimony as to your character and your honor, despite our differences of opinion on the word's meaning. I will stake my own reputation as a knight of House Dougal and a loyal member of the Red Branch on your innocence of the charges brought before you." Sir Gannon sighed at the admission of his membership in that semi-secret society of Concordian knights.

"You need not take such a risk for me," Declan said. "There is a simple enough solution to your moral dilemma, should you wish to avail yourself of it. Long ago, you saved my life — or so you claim to remember. Only three days past, I returned the favor. You could consider a life for a life as payment in full and so release me from your bond. Or would that be too easy a path for someone from a house that prides itself on hardship and disability?" The bitterness in Declan's voice was impossible to mistake.

Sir Gannon blanched at the naked insult to his house's weakness. "If you think to anger me by such a crass reference to *this*," he said, thrusting forward his mangled left hand so that Declan had a clear view of its deformity, "you severely misjudge my intentions. I am not looking for a way out of my quandary; I am looking for a way into yours."

"I have just given you one, if you will take it," Count Declan whispered.

Sir Gannon nodded once. "So be it," he said, his voice bereft of all emotion but sorrow. "I do release you from all oaths that you have sworn to me." Turning his back on the Ailil noble, Gannon strode quickly from the room.

Left alone, Declan spent a few minutes moving the chess pieces desultorily about the board. Then he, too, rose and left the room.

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Gannon woke up alone on the morning of his departure from Silverwood. Quickly, he assembled his few belongings and donned his traveling armor, once more in good repair, showing no signs of the battering it had taken a few days earlier. His sleep had been dreamless though he felt far from refreshed. A curious reluctance to leave the freehold lingered in his mind. For the last three days, he had taken part in the life of a household that, for all its differences, still comported itself with grace and dignity. *I will remember this always*.

As soon as he had made his preparations, Gannon sought Lady Arlana to bid her farewell and offer his thanks for her hospitality. She received him in her private parlor.

"Calinthe sends her regrets that she cannot be here to say good-bye, but she has a difficult time with partings. She is young yet and gives her heart too easily."

Gannon felt his face grow warm. Noticing his discomfort, Lady Arlana laughed softly. "Do not concern yourself. She must learn the manners of courtly love from someone. I think one day she will be grateful to you for your instruction in impossible amours."

"Have you seen Count Declan?" Gannon asked. "Now that I must return to my duties, I must take custody of him and deliver him to Tara-Nar."

Lady Arlana raised an eyebrow and allowed a tiny smile to lift the corners of her mouth.

"I am afraid that Count Declan has already departed my house," she said, taking a quietly perverse pleasure in watching the look of amazement slowly appear on Sir Gannon's face. "I offered you both the same terms of hospitality — three days and three nights," she said. Count Declan's time ran out several hours ago and he took his leave accordingly. I thought you understood." She smiled deprecatingly, though the expression in her eyes belied her expression of remorse.

"Then I have even less reason to remain now that my welcome is over," Sir Gannon replied. "I thank you again for your hospitality and for the lessons I have learned during my stay under your roof." He turned on his heels and headed for the door.

"Sir Gannon," Lady Arlana called out, brining the Dougal knight to a halt just inside the doorway. "Before he left, Count Declan asked me to give you this " she extended a sealed letter toward Gannon. "He said that it might help soften the blow."

Gannon forced himself to accept the letter, putting it into an inner pocket before taking his leave of the freehold. Once away from Silverwood, he rode hard for Tara-Nar, stopping only when driven by his or his mount's exhaustion. A few miles outside his destination, he paused to retrieve Count Declan's letter. Breaking the seal, he read the words through a vision blurred by unbidden tears.

Eregannon,

Forgive my feigned ignorance as you shared your memories of our ancient pact. Ever since I invoked the power of the Dreaming to heal your wounds and replenish your faerie spirit, I, too, have known of our brief encounter so many centuries ago. Cherish your memory of that time, though it may bring you bitterness at first because of my perceived betrayal of your trust. I had need for you to release me from my oath — and for that I thank you.

Think me dishonorable if you will; condemn me if you must, but please understand that now, more than ever, you have gained a precious insight into the Unseelie heart of my house. I have come to respect your dedication and I do not regret the time we spent under one roof. In my own fashion, I have tried to uphold my definition of honor. Should we chance to meet again, I hope that you will consider me your adversary, rather than your enemy.

Your brother in the Dreaming,

Declaniel ap Ailil

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Lady Arlana spent the day after her guests' departure overseeing the closing of Silverwood and preparing for her own extended leave-taking of Concordia. Her contacts in Hibernia would be expecting her arrival by trod in the next day or two and she had no current plans to return to her fief. Garsen and Sir Lochlan agreed to remain behind to tend the Balefire in the hopes that the Parliament of Dreams would allow them to retain possession or, at the very least, permission to reside in the now unclaimed freehold.

"My only regret," she told Calinthe as they prepared to leave, "is that I cannot see the looks on the faces of the

ministers of the Parliament of Dreams when they realize how thoroughly Declan has played them for the fools they are."

"What do you mean?" Calinthe asked, her face a mirror of confusion.

"When Count Declan first arrived with the unconscious Sir Gannon, he broke the seal on the message our Dougal guest carried. After reading the contents of the scroll, Declan changed a name. The original summons was for me, not Declan. It seems that word leaked out of my visit to the Kingdom of Willows shortly before the disappearance of David Ardry. Naturally, the Parliament assumed the worst.

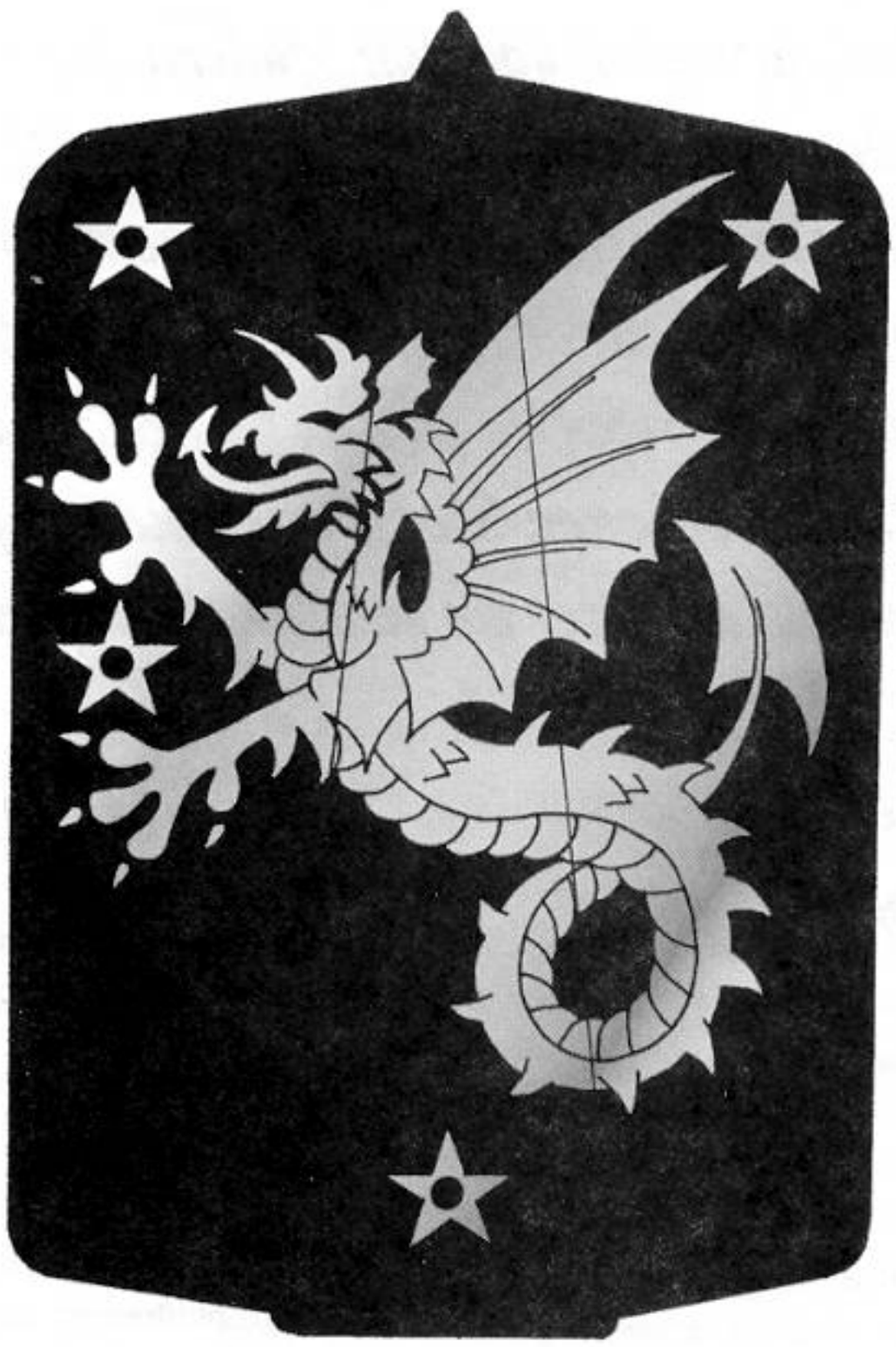
Declan's actions not only bought me time to prepare my departure, but it gave him an opportunity to increase his knowledge of our adversaries through his association with Sir Gannon."

"What will happen to Count Declan?" Calinthe wanted to know.

"My guess is that he will resurface after a few days, since he is not under suspicion of complicity in any crime against Concordia. At most, they may issue a reprimand to him for forging an official document, but he has enough friends in high places to make certain that any penalties he suffers because of his loyalty to his house are minimal."

"I liked Sir Gannon," Calinthe confided wistfully. A few moments later she spoke again. "Did you have anything to do with the high king's disappearance?" she asked.

Lady Arlana shook her head ruefully. "The truth doesn't matter," she replied. "Let them wonder."



A Discourse on House Ailil

by Lady Sláine, recorder for High Lord Erdath

Although some may question the wisdom of writing down the history and ways of House Ailil, I believe that the current disruption in Concordian politics presents us with a unique opportunity for the advancement of our house's greater purpose. To this end, I have compiled this manuscript as a statement of who and what we are so that even our newest members may act with the full knowledge of our ways and means.

Our house thrives on power. Over the long centuries of our existence, we have perfected our skills in diplomacy and intrigue. We wear our Unseelie natures with pride, despite the éfforts of the Seelie rulers of Concordia to paint us as villains. House Ailil has an ancient heritage as the leaders of the Winter Court, a legacy denied us since the Resurgence by the usurpers of House Gwydion.

Our house symbol is the dragon, the most powerful and canny of mythic beasts. We emulate the wisdom and subtlety of the great serpent in our dealings with those outside our house. Unlike the hedonists of House Leanhaun or the nihilists of House Balor, we have learned the lessons of patience and planning. Despite the lateness of the hour, the nearness of Endless Winter and the sometimes insufferable condescension of our Seelie kin, we of House Ailil rest secure in the knowledge that our goal — to restore the long-upset balance of duality that forms the essence of the Dreaming itself — lies almost within our grasp.

To understand what we strive for, you who read this must first comprehend our past, for within its clouded memories lie the seeds of our renewal and the keys to our survival and ascendancy.

History of House Ailil

The story of House Ailil begins in the Time of Legends, when history had not yet fallen to the province of historians, but resounded with the echoes of dreams and myths. In that long-ago era, when the world of the Dreaming and the world of mortals blended into one great tapestry of time's passing, Ailil and his sister Eiluned ruled one house. Though I suspect the chroniclers of House Eiluned have their own version of how one house became two, this is the tale told by our lorekeepers.

In those days, the Seelie and Unseelie Courts shared the rulership of House Ailil. Eiluned ruled as Summer Queen, leading her house during the Seelie half of the year, while Ailil held the title of Winter King, Lord of the Unseelie seasons. Many of the other fae houses wondered why the charismatic Ailil chose to lead his house during the cold autumn and winter times, leaving his elusive sister to bask in the months of summer and spring. To most eyes, Ailil appeared to embody the Seelie character far better than Eiluned, whose affinities for darkness and mysteries made her seem the more Unseelie of the pair. Nevertheless, both sister and brother felt that this arrangement allowed them to achieve the perfect balance between their dual natures.

So it was that Ailil gathered about him a strong following of Unseelie fae, while Eiluned acquired a Seelie retinue. When Eiluned's visions led her to split away from her brother and form her own house, she brought with her most of her former house's Seelie members. In time, House Ailil became the foremost of the Unseelie Houses, both in Arcadia and in the mortal world.

The Mythic Age

House Ailil prospered during the centuries known as the Mythic Age, spreading its influence among the faerie courts of Hibernia, the Isle of the Mighty and the enchanted realms of Mythic Europe. The Pageant of the Seasons played itself out in grant style, as Seelie Summer gave way to Unseelie Winter in an endless cycle that celebrated the dance between darkness and light. Although the scions of the silver dragon did not hold a monopoly on rulership of the Unseelie Court, more often than not the rulers of Winter came from our house. Though we did not hold all the reins of Unseelie power during the Mythic Age, many kings and queens of the dark half of the year wore the badge of the silver dragon.

In the mortal world, as well, House Ailil left its mark upon history and legend. Ailil himself showed a particular penchant for involvement in mortal affairs. According to the Tain, the Irish epic that details the exploits of the hero Cuchullain, Ailil ruled Connaught along with his wife, Queen Maeve. Their pillow diplomacy sparked the events leading up to and surrounding the infamous cattle raid of Cooley, the central episode of the Tain. In the realm of the fae, Ailil used the same combination of personal charisma and astute politics, deftly maneuvering his enemies into war with one another, and his friends into working to his advantage.

In particular, Ailil advocated cultivating the loyalty of the commoner kith, realizing the importance of having the support of underlings. Many kith despised or distrusted by the other houses found welcome under Ailil's banner. Redcaps and sluagh, in particular, learned that Ailil valued their contributions and accepted their less savory behavior. Other members of House Ailil demonstrated their skill in matters of state and of the heart in both mortal and faerie domains. While many of the encounters between faerie knights or ladies and their mortal lovers undoubtedly involved the passions of the Fiona and Leanhaun sidhe, the fae of Ailil's lineage did not lack for congress with humankind, particularly where they could draw some advantage from doing so.

In political affairs, House Ailil reached its full potential. From the dawn of the Mythic Age, our knights and nobles wove their intricate patterns of diplomacy and intrigue, reveling in the subtleties and nuances involved in directing the interplay so necessary to any society's existence. Human politics proved particularly challenging, since we found it necessary to both instruct and oversee the first mortal attempts at sophisticated social intercourse.

In retrospect, perhaps we taught mortals the dance of politics too well for their own good. Still, it amused us to see creatures who once only settled their differences through open warfare now learn to wage a different kind of battle.

The Sundering

The tale of how and when the Sundering began differs from house to house. Some, like the drudges of House Dougal, hold that the discovery of cold iron first awakened in mortals the desire to fix the world according to one rigid structure. Others merely make vague allusions to the slow separation between the Dreaming and the world of flesh and blood. However it began, once the Sundering made itself felt throughout the lands of mortals, we realized that something had begun that would leave its mark on the world of the Dreaming forever.

A popular theory put forth by many members of our house states that the Sundering began not only through the rise of human disbelief but also through the actions of those among the fae who sought to bring a halt to the sharing of power between Seelie and Unseelie houses.

When the first whispers of the Sundering echoed in the Dreaming, many of the sidhe believed that the only way to preserve what remained of our connections to Arcadia lay in stopping the cycle of seasonal rule, allowing the Seelie or summer houses to hold power indefinitely — or at least until the onslaught of Banality ceased.

While mortal civilizations rose and fell and the new religion of Christianity taught its followers to abhor any magics but their own, the fae waged battle for the soul of the Dreaming, whose essence lies in change. As the gap between dreams and harsh reality grew so, too, did the gulf widen between Seelie and Unseelie.

Heretofore, although the noble houses of the sidhe tended toward either Seelie or Unseelie courts, most fae recognized the necessary balance between the two and did not look upon the other court as an enemy. The conflicts engendered by the Sundering changed our perceptions forever. Because House Ailil associated itself so strongly with the Unseelie court, the Seelie houses developed a distrust for us that bordered upon enmity.

Lord Ailil attempted to meet in secret with his sister, Lady Eiluned, to see if a way existed to stave off the growing hostilities between Seelie and Unseelie fae. Although their efforts ultimately came to naught, the two siblings shared what information each had gathered about the worsening effects of the Sundering. This enabled both houses to prepare strongholds within the Dreaming. Members of House Ailil also joined the fortunate few who migrated westward to the still unspoiled American lands in the early centuries of the Sundering.

Unfortunately, many of the Seelie houses looked upon Eiluned's association with Ailil as just short of treacherous — a fact that did not help our sister house's already suspect reputation. In later days, House Eiluned would resent our part in casting a shadow over their Seelie pretensions, making reconciliation between us difficult.

The Departure of Ailil

In the end, all the desperate measures of all the noble houses failed. Overwhelmed by the sudden onslaught of Banality caused (many think) by the outbreak of the Black Plague and the wholesale despair that followed in its wake, the trods connecting Arcadia to the mortal

The Teign to Hell

Long ago, so they tell us, the sidhe used to pay a tithe to Hell (or Hel, according to the Scandinavian fae) as the price for faerie immortality. This tithe or *teign* consisted of the sacrifice of one of our own to the spirits of the dead. In return, the fae could, after their own mortal deaths, walk The Bright Road through the Underworld and emerge into the physical world as reincarnations of themselves. This practice disappeared with the Sundering, and with it, most of our interest in the ghosts of the Underworld vanished as well. Still, the Ritualists seek to reestablish that lost connection through the revival of the *teign*.

The Mists have obscured many details of that ancient ritual, so recreating it (not to mention finding sacrificial victims) has proved problematic. Some believe that in the oldest times, the reigning ruler of the Seelie Summer Court did not merely set aside her crown in favor of the Winter King or Queen but, instead, sacrificed herself in the flames of the Samhain bonfire. Whether or not this is true, it certainly goes a long way to explain the reluctance of the Seelie fae to turn over power to us at mid-year.

world weakened. The gates between the world cracked and collapsed, severing the ties between the two realms of faerie and humans.

House Ailil joined the other noble houses in the frantic, mass exodus for the safety of Arcadia. Lord Ailil, however, for reasons we have yet to comprehend, remained behind. The reason for his decision still puzzles the historians of our house. Some maintain that Ailil, after his conversations with Eiluned, elected to barricade himself within a private freehold in Hibernia. There, he hoped to bind some portion of the Dreaming to himself and, thus, to the mortal world. Others who have attempted to piece together the sequence of events in those last, harried days of the Shattering, believe that Ailil was betrayed by another of his sisters, Lady Fainche. Jealous of Ailil's closeness with Eiluned, despite their different houses, Fainche convinced her lover, Lord Cillian, to delay Ailil long enough to prevent him from reaching one of the few remaining gates to Arcadia.

Regardless of the cause, Ailil did not return to Arcadia.

The Interregnum

Our knowledge of the period called the Interregnum comes from various sources, not all of them reliable, and many of them purely conjectural. The majority of commoners who held membership in House Ailil remained behind when the pathways to Arcadia closed. Moving quickly to fill the vacuum left by our departure, these remnants of the House of the Silver Dragon laid claim to our abandoned freeholds and established themselves as the new lords of House Ailil. We certainly cannot blame them for their ambition, particularly in the light of their apparent success. Embracing enough Banality to survive in the mortal world, these "changelings" (as they now called themselves) kept alive the tenets of our house, adhering to the Unseelie Code despite pressure from commoners from the Seelie houses to conform to their conservative behavior.

I have heard rumors that a few sidhe besides Lord Ailil remained behind, attempting to exist in a world of harsh reality and cold science. Eventually, however, they must have succumbed to Banality, their fragile bodies destroyed by their inability to adapt to a world made hostile. In any case, none remained after 600 years. Every now and again, we come across a mortal whose flair for deception and subtlety seems to hint that the blood of our house blended with that of humankind. We seek out those individuals, whom we treat as Kinain descendants of those noble sidhe who stayed in the world, as companions and Dreamers, inspiring many of them to greatness in the sphere of politics.

Evidence of our house's presence exists in the annals of human history, for those astute enough to read between the lines and deduce signs of Ailil influence. The machinations of church and state that marked the period of the Renaissance, the growth of governments into sophisticated political engines, and the persistence of

social upheavals and revolutions bear the mark our house. Certainly, the exploits of Lady Vittoria, a satyr of our house who maintained a villa/freehold in 15th-century Florence and who played host to an aspiring Florentine politician named Niccolò Machiavelli, bear a passing mention. No one from House Ailil who reads *The Prince* can fail to notice a striking resemblance between the advice proffered in that tract and the customary tactics of our house. In the 16th and 17th centuries, buccaneers and privateers flew the silver dragon of House Ailil alongside the black flag that advertised their trade. Other notable commoner members of our house participated in the revolutions of the 18th century, perpetuating the commitment of House Ailil to drastic change and the pursuit of freedom. I regret missing the industrial revolution (aptly named) and the advent of global politics in the 19th and 20th centuries. I suspect that the commoners of House Ailil figured prominently in the increasingly convoluted politics of conspiracy that contributed to the state of affairs known as the Cold War. If only I could have basked in the heady Glamour created during the era of summit conferences and nuclear standoffs. The sidhe of other houses might find such manipulations Banal to the extreme, but we of House Ailil thrive in the midst of political turmoil and uncertainty.

The Other Side of the Gate

A plethora of information exists about the events of the Interregnum in the mortal world in comparison to the paucity of memories we retain of our time in Arcadia. Many of our nobles have reported fragmentary recollections and half-dreams of the centuries we spent locked behind the portals of the Dreaming. My own admittedly sketchy memories suggest that House Ailil embroiled itself in Arcadian politics leading up to a great conflict that encompassed all the houses of the fae.

Moreover, I suspect that our actions either failed miserably, or else came so close to succeeding that exile from Arcadia proved the only way to defeat us. My mind can devise many scenarios that might have resulted in our ousting, including the attempted seizure of power at the highest levels of the Twin Courts.

The Return

In 1969, a great explosion of Glamour burst open the portals to Arcadia and allowed the return of the sidhe to the mortal realm. That is the simple story. My own conspiracy-loving mind spins a slightly more complex tale regarding the return of the noble houses. Bear with me as I tell a tale you will not hear in the freeholds of Gwydion or Eiluned or the other Seelie houses.

In the first wave of the Resurgence, five of the noble houses — all of them Seelie — reentered the world in sufficient numbers to establish a base of power. Only a few members of House Ailil came across at that time, and we found ourselves scattered throughout the globe. Sidhe from Houses Balor and Leanhaun entered the world along with us, but I do not have enough information on their experiences in the first heady days of our return to draw any conclusions about the reasons for their exile or why they chose to remain in the background of changeling politics.

What I do know is that the five Seelie houses set about almost immediately to reclaim their freeholds from the commoners who now occupied them, and to build the power base that would soon become the Kingdom of Concordia. We, on the other hand, had our hands full merely trying to survive in our surroundings and lacked sufficient numbers to counter the actions of our Seelie cousins.

Perhaps our affinity for political upheavals determined where members of our house emerged. Where many sidhe arrived in places such as San Francisco, where the "good vibes" of the Summer of Love called to their Seelie hearts or Unseelie passions, the majority of House Ailil came into the world in places rife with rebellion and political strife. Some of us found ourselves in Belfast and Londonderry slammed into the midst of Ulster's sectarian conflict. Others arrived in Chicago, where the trial of the "Chicago Eight" sparked waves of radical protest and led to battles with police and soldiers. A few entered the world in Prague, where student protest against the Soviets erupted in violence. Still more Ailil nobles "landed" in Washington, DC, where the tense political climate energized our fading spirits and filled us with its dark, seductive Glamour. While we adapted to the overwhelming changes that had come about during our long absence and attempted to deal with the turmoil

that seemed to engulf us wherever we happened to be, the Seelie houses made their move.

The Accordance War

Many of the fae claim to see our hand in the events of the Night of Iron Knives that launched the Accordance War. On the contrary, had we planned the mass slaughter of the leaders of the commoners, we would have taken better pains to conceal our part in it. The majority of changelings view that infamous night as a tragedy, seeing it as a shameful beginning to the founding of Concordia.

Though House Ailil holds the same opinion of that incident, we have different reasons for our judgment.

Yes, the Night of Iron Knives deserves our condemnation. It stands as an example of boorish stupidity and of clumsy, ill-devised planning — just the sort of excess that results when those who are unused to expressing their Unseelie natures suddenly release the constraints of Seelie behavior.

Had we masterminded that bloodthirsty display, we would have taken care to make it appear as if the leaders of the commoners had slain each other in a gross instance of overreaction to internal dissension. Then, in the confusion that followed, we would have stepped in to assert our fitness to rule.

Instead, the supposedly "Seelie" leaders who perpetrated the Beltaine massacre succeeded only in rousing the wrath of the commoners and ensuring a wasteful war of conquest.

In the long run, the Accordance war worked to our advantage. Although it led to the establishing of Concordia as a Seelie Kingdom, the war polarized the changeling population, leaving many commoners and not a few nobles discontent with David Ardry's peace. Though we came late to the halls of power in Concordia, we maintain a small presence in the Parliament of Dreams and take our token place among the sidhe nobles. In other parts of the world, we comport ourselves as necessary to further our own ends. Where we can proclaim our blazon openly, we do so. Otherwise, we keep a low profile and go about our business as usual. The Accordance War, for all that it ended in a triumph for the Seelie Court accomplished one of our house's goals — the proliferation of discontent among many of the realm's changelings. Where there is discontent, the ground is ripe for us to plow.

The Modern Era

The fortunes of House Ailil grow brighter in the final years of this century. As the millennium approaches, the mortal world once again begins to latch onto ancient superstitions and old beliefs, thus fostering an atmosphere of uncertainty and wild speculation. Chaos lies just beneath the surface of everyday life, eroding the solid structures of society.

In Concordia, the disappearance of David Ardry has thrown the Parliament of Dreams, not to mention the lesser Kingdoms of the realm, into disorder and confusion. Once again, as in the Night of Iron Knives, though we had nothing to do with that strange and unexpected turn of events, we stand ready to take full advantage of the opportunity to advance our cause. The Dreaming cries out for a return to the old ways of shared rulership between the twin courts. After almost three decades of Seelie rule, the time is long overdue for an Unseelie ruler to lead the fae into (and out of) the Long Winter that approaches. As we did in the days before the Shattering, we who wear the blazon of the silver dragon once again prepare to take our rightful place as leaders of the fae.

The Ways of House Ailil

Membership in House Ailil is both a right and a privilege. Born into the House of the Silver Dragon through the grace of the Dreaming, we still need to earn our place within the overall society of our house through the mastery of our traditions and the honing of our talents. We do this in order to take our rightful place as leaders of the Unseelie fae.

Like our Seelie cousins, we retain many of the traditional practices of the sidhe. We honor the customs of Fosterage and Saining, abide by the Escheat and follow a code (in our case, the Unseelie Code). We take oaths and usually keep them. We act responsibly toward the commoners under our banner and look to their interests as well as our own.

Of course, we do all this in our own fashion. We can do no less and call ourselves Ailil's heirs.

Organization

In the absence of our founder, Lord Ailil, we owe our allegiance to High Lord Erdath, who represents the will of House Ailil in the mortal world. Beyond our allegiance to him, our house relies on the infrastructure of the nobility to give shape and direction to our actions. In this, we differ little from the Seelie houses.

Where we do diverge is in the paucity of our freeholds. Most members of House Ailil hide the locations of their freeholds in order to prevent their invasion by the more fanatic members (i.e., the majority) of House Gwydion. In a few regions of Concordia, we hold fiefs openly, swearing (with reluctance) nominal loyalty to the high king. In other parts of the world, House Ailil maintains a more open and accepted presence, due to the greater tolerance of the British and Celtic fae for the Unseelie in their midst.

Because we place great emphasis on individual achievement and success in the political arena, we award titles to nobles in recognition of their service to the house. Even though we seldom have enough fiefs to guarantee that all titled members of our house will have a fief to rule, we honor those titles as if the holders, in fact, ruled the appropriate domain.

Though we have a reputation for arrogance among the other sidhe houses, among ourselves we seldom find it necessary to pull rank or insist on the proper protocol from subordinate nobles. We make do with courtesy in most cases.

On the battlefield, however, rank means everything. Though we do not fight as savagely as House Balor, we pride ourselves on our ability to function as an army when we have to. Our knights learn finesse and control with melee weapons, preferring to overcome our opponents with skill rather than brute strength. Our military leaders come from the ranks of those who have demonstrated courage and tactical savvy in battle. We expect them to exercise their authority with wisdom and boldness, and we also demand that the warriors under them give them their absolute obedience.

This balance of structure and flexibility lends strength to our house and ensures that we do not suffer from the hierarchical stagnation that afflicts most of the Seelie houses.

Fostering

We take great care in the training of our new members. When a new Ailil sidhe emerges from her Chrysalis, she undergoes a period of fosterage during which she learns how to survive in a house of achievement-oriented, intrigue-loving sidhe. Because we place such emphasis on freedom and personal honor, we put our fledglings through a deliberately harsh regimen intended to teach them self-reliance and to cultivate their Unseelie tendencies.

The fledgling's "master," (our house's term for mentor) imposes upon her charge a long list of "do's" and "don'ts." The new sidhe must follow these rules to the letter, even though doing so subjects her to an almost impossible routine. Failure to meet the stringent demands of the master results in swift physical or psychological punishment.

The entire focus of this exercise is to bring the fledgling to the brink of open rebellion against her unfair treatment. If she openly defies or challenges her master, she earns an even harsher punishment than she would for mere failure. Sooner or later, the wiser fledgling learns subtle ways of evading the rules; she bribes others to accomplish her chores or run her errands. She distracts her master with ruses designed to draw the master's attention to other matters. She learns how to lie and dissemble. In other words, she teaches herself the game of politics and intrigue.

If a fledgling faithfully attempts to obey all the rules without complaint or demonstrates too much humility, one of the other members of the master's household approaches her in the form of a confidant and "instructs" her in ways to make life easier for herself. While most fledglings, due to their Ailil blood, do not require this extra tutelage, a few need blatant instructions in subtlety.

Any fledgling who still fails to learn how to break the rules without being caught is brought before a soothsayer of our house who examines her for signs that she may belong to the rare breed of Seelie Ailil. If this is the case, the nature of her fosterage changes. Instead of learning the fine points of deception and manipulation, the fledgling takes instructions intended to cement her loyalty to House Ailil and its purpose of reestablishing the Twin Courts. As soon as she undergoes her Saining, she is asked to swear the Oath of Loyal Opposition (see below).

Oath of Membership

By the scales of the silver dragon, by the light of the fourfold stars, by the blanket of darkest night, I deliver my body, heart and will into the keeping of House Ailil. May its aims guide my vision, its hopes direct my aspirations, and its purpose inspire my actions. Let all my ambitions crumble in the dust should I betray the words I have spoken this night. Dragon beside me, stars above me, night behind me, witness my oath

Each new noble swears this oath upon attaining full membership into the house. Usually taken under a moonless sky lit only by starlight, the Oath of Membership binds its taker to House Ailil's commitment to the eventual reinstatement of the Twin Courts. Both the house Boon and Flaw become evident upon the completion of the oath. Breaking this oath inflicts the swearer with a profound sense of inadequacy unless the oath breaker chooses to accept the Oath of the Forsworn.

Oath of Adoption

As my blood now flows with yours, as my heart beats in time to yours, as my eyes lift with yours to the same stars, so now am I one with you. I swear loyalty to House Ailil with blood, heart and body. May my heartblood flow unchecked should I betray my chosen house. Yours I am, spurning all former ties of house and hearth until my blood no longer courses, my heart no longer beats and the stars no longer make their passage through the heavens.

Sidhe born to another house or commoners with no house affiliation swear this oath upon their adoption into House Ailil. Like the Oath of Membership, the administering of this oath usually takes place under a star-filled sky. To begin the oath-taking process, the swearer sheds a few drops of his blood (usually taken from the wrist or palm) into a goblet containing a contribution of blood from at least three nobles of the house, who also act as witnesses to the oath. After pouring the blood onto the ground, the swearer speaks the words of the oath. The swearer gains a permanent point of Glamour upon the completion of the oath. If the oath is broken, the Glamour is forfeit.

Oath of Loyal Opposition

Although my heart embraces the Summer Court, though my will adheres to the Seelie Code and though my feet walk a different path, my spirit and loyalty lie with the silver dragon of House Ailil. Let not my differences come between my house and me. By the summer stars, by the Beltaine fires and by the moon of plenty, I swear that my actions shall not harm my house, my words shall not betray my kinship with the silver dragon, nor shall my will cause detriment to Ailil's banner.

Members of House Ailil who follow the Seelie Code take this oath to affirm their loyalty to their house. Unlike other oaths that take place at the new moon, the Oath of Loyal Opposition generally occurs during one of the full moons of either spring or summer. Although some Seelie members of House Ailil do not feel the need to take this oath, those who involve themselves in the politics of Concordia or who exercise any sort of authority within the House do so as a matter of course.

Oath of the Forsworn

Through broken word, faltering will and shameful deed, I have brought upon myself this doom. Let every member of House Ailil know by my presence that I accept the onus of oath breaker. May all who hear my words or test my will or witness my deeds from this night forward remember that they treat with one who has joined the ranks of the Forsworn. By the grace of the silver dragon and through no merit of my own, I remain within the fold of Ailil.

Those who break an oath and seek to acknowledge their shameful deed and, thus, salvage something of their name and personal pride take this oath and participate in a public declaration of submission to the will of their peers. The swearer stands blindfolded in a circle of witnesses and speaks the words of the oath three times. After the first recitation, the witnesses have the opportunity to abjure the speaker. If they remain silent, the speaker continues with the second and finally the third pronouncement. If the oath has been heard three times without objection, the senior witness removes the blindfold from the speaker and pronounces her "Forsworn."

The taking of this oath negates any penalties of broken oaths, but carries its own penalty; from that time onward, all who interact with the Forsworn individual do so knowing that they run the risk of dealing with a liar and an oath breaker. (In game term, the difficulty of all actions that involve persuasion or the giving of promises is increased by 2 due to the character's damaged reputation.) Many of the Forsworn, however, wear their status as a badge of honor, taking pride in their admission of guilt.

Saining

The Saining ceremony that follows the period of fosterage resembles a cross between a wild revel and a black-tie ball. The fledge's master formally releases his charge from their bond and welcomes her into the house. A secret ceremony conducted by the household's seers or by a member of the Ritualists, in the case of fledges fostered by members of the Shadow Court, determines the true name of the new Ailil sidhe and attempts to determine whether or not she bears a special fortune or doom. Afterward, all the members of the house, whether noble or commoner, indulge in an unbridled celebration of the creation of one more Unseelie fae.

The Fior-Righ

As part of the Saining ceremony, the Ailil fledgling undergoes a trial by ordeal intended to test what she has learned during her period of fostering. Usually this involves some feat that can only be accomplished by indirect means or through deception and trickery. Occasionally, the Fior-Righ takes the form of a duel against an opponent so much more skilled than the fledgling that she must cheat to win.

On the Taking and Breaking of Oaths

To believe that because we adhere to the Unseelie code we have no concept of oath taking is to fail to understand the importance of such binding vows. Our insistence on personal interpretations of honor rather than a strict definition of honorable conduct makes the act of taking an oath one of our most sacred duties. In some cases, oaths serve as our only constraints. Since the earliest times, we have honored our promises, adhering precisely to their wording and, occasionally, to their intent. Because we place such emphasis on keeping our sworn promises, we do not enter into oath taking lightly. Thus, we rarely bind ourselves to an oath. We take oaths only in the most serious circumstances, such as when a new member completes her Saining and claims her place in our house, or when a commoner formally binds himself to House Ailil.

Occasionally, it becomes necessary, for some compelling reason, to break an oath that we have sworn. Our house recognizes that such things occur and has instituted a process to acknowledge oath breakers who openly avow their dubious status. Though it seems ironic to trust that an individual who has broken one oath will keep a second "binding" promise, we have found that those who accept the Oath of the Forsworn often go on to accomplish great deeds for our house, using their shame as a badge of pride and a goad to spur their ambitions. The ill-fated attempt of Yrtalien ap Ailil, the Forsworn Prince, to advance the Unseelie cause proves that even an oath breaker (or especially an oath breaker) can aspire to greatness. Despite Yrtalien's failure and subsequent disappearance, House Ailil profited by his example.

The Unseelie Code

Because Ailil devotes itself as a house to the Unseelie Court, we subscribe to the tenets of the Unseelie Code as our basis for conduct. Our interpretations of its principles, however, differ somewhat from those of the other Unseelie houses or of the rebellious hoi-polloi of changeling society. We revel in the nuances of the Code, finding in it an endless variety of meanings and inferences. I shall present my own commentaries on the Unseelie Code in the hopes that they will inspire any who read my words to form their own approach. The idea of a single, rigid interpretation of a Code that supports and encourages diversity and flexibility is laughable.

Change is Good

I cannot overemphasize the importance of change. Only fools believe that standing still accomplishes anything beyond creating foot sores and stiff muscles. The universe exists in a constant flux of cyclic changes; without the variation of seasons, the alternation of day and night or the ebb and flow of the tides, the physical world would lose its capacity to sustain life (another form of change). Our house's skill in politics and its adroitness in manipulations come from our belief that everyone benefits from change. Creativity, the source of Glamour, is simply another word for change. Boredom feeds Banality more than the vilest or basest of actions. Avoid doing nothing at all costs.

Glamour is Free

The world does not contain a fixed amount of Glamour. Those who believe that conserving the source of creativity postpones the exhaustion of Glamour have only to look around to see their error. This century crackles with the excitement of discovery and experimentation. New art forms combine technology and tradition in novel ways; politics (a particular source of Glamour for our house) reaches new heights of subtlety and depths of corruption. In the midst of all this plenty, how can we hold back? How can we *afford* to restrain ourselves when Glamour surrounds us?

Honor is a Lie

Too often, honor serves as a false and arbitrary set of restrictions used by one group to control another. For House Ailil, honor rests solely with the individual. Each of us defines her own actions according to a personal concept of "honorable" behavior (or not, for many of us choose to live without honor). Only the rules we make for ourselves are worth keeping. All else is excess. Why stand aside, bound by codes of false honor, while others seize the opportunities for themselves?

Passion Before Duty

Like honor, duty means nothing unless driven by personal desire. Passion inflames us to act, whether responsibly or rashly. The duty-bound accomplish nothing of value or import, bound as they are by the narrow restrictions of "ought" and "should." House Ailil does not shirk its responsibilities by adhering to this tenet; we merely set our priorities in order. Passion first; duty after.

The Seelie Code

A few members of our House choose to follow the Seelie Code. These aberrant children of the dragon nevertheless express by their decision the personal freedom espoused by our house. It takes supreme courage to swim against the current, and I respect my Seelie companions for daring to differ. I could never bind myself so rigidly to the strictures advanced by the Seelie Code. Still, the Seelie of House Ailil (as I understand it) have assigned their own meanings to the traditions they uphold.

Death Before Dishonor

Honor, regardless of who defines it, means nothing unless backed by actions. Those who fail to live up to their standards or to the codes of conduct they adopt deserve to reap the consequences of their shame, even if this means death. Sometimes the only way to uphold honor is to die for it; the examples of martyrs throughout the centuries prove this precept. We remember those who put their lives on the line, whether or not they survive the experience.

Love Conquers All

Those who love their masters serve them well. Both bedroom and throne benefit from the assiduous adherence to this precept. Affection and devotion to a lover or a cause only strengthen the chances for success in either sphere. Cultivating the hearts of followers usually ensures that their minds and wills follow suit. Love, when used as a weapon, can prove as powerful as a well-placed sword in neutralizing the enmity of others.

Beauty is Life

Without beauty, life becomes a pale series of endless days and dreary nights. Artistic creations and well-made devices of any sort add to the cumulative Glamour present in the world and available for use. Not everyone defines beauty in the same fashion, however. Some call "beautiful" those things others label ugly or distressing. A moment of tender pain can sometimes prove as stimulating and aesthetically pleasing as an exquisite portrait or a melodic composition. Do not confuse austerity with dedication. Those who surround themselves with beautiful objects need nothing else to remind them of the importance of beauty.

Never Forget a Debt

Rewards serve as a powerful impetus in commanding loyalty from followers or fostering love among equals or near-equals. Outward manifestations such as paying debts, returning favors and keeping promises create a favorable impression with others. Image counts for much in both mortal and fae society. Those who prove their reliability through meticulous adherence to this tenet advance themselves in the eyes of those above them in rank. Collecting favors, calling in debts and exacting promises from others establishes a reputation for fairness and respectability, qualities often perceived as nonexistent in members of our house.

Secret Societies

Though the groups mentioned below are known to most of the members within our house, we attempt to keep the other houses (even other Unseelie houses) from discovering them. These "secret" societies of House Ailil serve as a focus for special interests within our house. Most Ailil sidhe eventually join at least one society; some find the time and the energy to hold membership in several. While some truly secret societies may exist within our house, they are unknown to me. A brief description of the more popular of the Ailil societies follows.

Guardians of the Silver Dragon

Just as the Seelie sidhe have the Knights of the Red Branch, House Ailil has the group of knights known as the Guardians of the Silver Dragon. Although, occasionally, this society admits sidhe from Houses Balor and Leanhaun, it remains primarily an Ailil society. The Guardians exist to protect the interests of House Ailil and, by extension, of the Unseelie fae regardless of kith. They adhere to a strict code of behavior that rivals the code of the Red Branch except for their more liberal interpretation of the terms "fair fight" and "honorable surrender."

The other agenda of the Guardians consists of a pledge to locate and reclaim any lands or freeholds once held by House Ailil that have fallen into the hands of Seelie nobles. The Guardians operate throughout Concordia, Hibernia and the Isle of the Mighty. A few have branched out into other parts of the world in search of lost freeholds of House Ailil, but to date few of them have reported any success in their quests.

Les Amoureux (The Enamoured)

Members of this society devote most of their attention to the many facets of physical pleasure. Proclaiming that politics begins in the bedroom, the Enamoured steep

themselves in sexual excesses. Some of these sensualists court danger by choosing their paramours from the ranks of the Prodigal or from the Seelie Houses. I have heard that seducing a member of House Gwydion earns the seducer great status among her peers. Other members of *Les Amoureux* specialize in combining pain and pleasure to discover new heights of ecstasy (or so they claim). Every possible variant on the act of love finds some expression among *Les Amoureux*.

While traditional members of the house often look upon the Enamoured as frivolous practitioners of idle self-indulgence, other Ailil sidhe support the right of *Les Amoureux* to do as they please — citing the fourth tenet of the Unseelie Code as a precedent.

In fact, many of the Enamoured have found time to further the aims of House Ailil while still indulging in their amorous proclivities.

The Disinherited

This society consists of a group of nobles (mostly, but not exclusively, wilders) who has taken the Oath of the Forsworn. Drawn together by their common bond as oath breakers, members of the Disinherited demonstrate a curious loyalty for one another that sometimes seems to exceed any ties of loyalty to their house. The Disinherited often volunteer for dangerous missions on behalf of House Ailil, claiming that, since they have lost their honor, they have nothing more to lose.

While the Disinherited state that they seek to earn the right to rid themselves of their Forsworn status by proving themselves in battle or by Fior, we suspect that they actually prefer to revel in their notoriety. Certainly, they seem to attract many paramours and consorts, who respond to their sinister (even for our house) presence.

The Shadow Court and House Ailil

Most fae, both Seelie and Unseelie, assume that all members of House Ailil belong to the Shadow Court. This is, admittedly, a fair assumption, since most of us are either members or associates of the Shadow Court. I see no reason to lie about this facet of our existence. We are the undisputed leaders of the Unseelie fae and the Shadow Court represents for us the remnants of the old Court of the Winter King.

We see our participation in the Shadow Court as our best means for undermining the stranglehold of the Seelie government of Concordia. Although House Ailil sends a few representatives openly to the Parliament of Dreams, we consider that governing body a pawn of the Seelie fae. Our true voice in changeling society comes from the Shadow Court, and those of our house who have authority within that organization hold the true power in House Ailil.

The Escheat

Current interpreters of fae tradition may brand as heresy the idea that the laws of the Escheat are not inviolable. In truth, the set of rules that governs the behavior and guides the actions of changeling society has existed only since the Sundering. Perhaps the rules were necessary at the time to hold together a fragmented population of abandoned and frightened Kithain. They served the purpose of ensuring fae survival during a period of upheaval and rootlessness and gave changelings of many persuasions something to rally around.

Times change. The Resurgence and the war fought to assert the right of the sidhe to reclaim power brought about the restructuring of fae society into one that ensured the perpetuation of the Seelie noble houses at the expense of all other factions of changeling society. In the hands of the present leadership of the fae, the Escheat has become a weapon used to quell opposition and punish those who attempt to reassert their rights to share power.

While House Ailil does not wholly repudiate the laws of the Escheat, we do recognize our own interpretations of these laws and follow them rather than the versions proclaimed as dogma by the Seelie fae. For the edification of those who have recently joined our house, either as changelings fresh from their Saining, or adopted members, I present a brief exposition of the laws of the Escheat as honored by House Ailil.

The Right of Demesne

The authority of a lord within his fief forms the basis of Kithain society. Only those who advocate total anarchy can fail to recognize the importance of imposing some sort of order upon society. Those who are best suited to hold power belong in positions of leadership and have the right to command obedience and loyalty from any who come into their territory.

Reality: We recognize only the rights of those nobles who rule their own lands. When the noble houses returned from Arcadia in 1969, the Seelie houses quickly seized as many available freeholds as they could, ousting the commoners who had held those sanctuaries of the Dreaming. Many Seelie nobles currently control freeholds and fiefs that originally belonged to our house, refusing to acknowledge our right of ownership. We do not recognize the right of the usurper. In contesting the false rulers of hearths and lands that rightfully belong to the silver dragon's children, we place ourselves in direct opposition to this tenet.

On the other hand, whenever we encounter a Seelie noble who has successfully restored a freehold that belonged to her house before the Sundering, we give her the respect and dominion to which she is entitled.

The Right to Dream

Most interpretations of this tenet claim that it exists to protect human Dreamers from the depredations of Ravagers and from those who would use direct inspiration to guide the creations of mortals. The careful husbanding of Glamour by indirect cultivation and cautious gathering falls within the compass of this tradition.

Reality: By insisting that this principle dictates how we gather Glamour, the Seelie Court has managed to exercise a phenomenal amount of control over the dispensation of our most necessary commodity. Further, by outlawing Ravaging in favor of the more subtle method of Reverie and the almost unattainable goal of Rapture, the Seelie rulers seek to curtail the proliferation of certain kinds of Glamour over others. We find that nightmares as well as dreams feed our souls and see little difference between the two in so far as we are concerned. The few mortals that go mad or fall into perpetual apathy due to the actions of a handful of inept Ravagers comprises an acceptable loss to the Dreaming as a whole. Those of us who learn the proper ways of Ravaging master the ability to excise large doses of Glamour without causing the Dreamer permanent harm. Humans have proven particularly resilient throughout the course of their history. Individuals can suffer untold horrors and eventually recover from them with little or no visible damage.

While we uphold the "right to dream," we also give Dreamers more credit that do our Seelie counterparts.

The Right of Ignorance

If the mortals ever learned of our existence (or our return), they would seek either to destroy us (as they did during the time of the Inquisition) or else they would hunt us down and put us in zoos or research facilities. In order to protect ourselves from discovery and to prevent mortals from having their worldview turned upside down, this tenet forbids revealing our true nature to non-changelings. Most interpretations of this principle exempt kinain and Prodigals from the ban of ignorance. Some enforcers of the Escheat also relax this rule with regard to mortals enchanted by the fae (at least until the period of enchantment ends).

Reality: Telling a member of our house that something is forbidden her almost always ensures that she will test the will of the one who forbids it. Denying us the option of revealing our true selves to those mortals *we* deem worthy of the knowledge insults our judgment and our intelligence. Let us decide for ourselves when we can let slip our mortal costumes and reveal our faerie glory. Perhaps the knowledge of our existence might decrease the high levels of Banality that currently lend support to the proponents of keeping mortals in the dark. After all, a sizable portion of humankind professes to believe in extraterrestrials or angelic manifestations. Why not believe in faeries as well?

While we do not condone the wholesale exposure of our existence to the world, we do insist on our right to decide for ourselves when and where to drop our disguise.

The Right of Rescue

Whenever one of the Kithain falls prisoner to the forces of the Dauntain or to the Hidden Ones or else succumbs to Banality, we owe it to the Dreaming to attempt the recovery of that unfortunate individual. This holds true regardless of whether or not the victim is friend or foe. Our survival hangs upon such slender threads that the loss of even a few changelings to Banality threatens to drop us all into the cold well of extinction.

Reality: While ostensibly the noblest of all of the tenets of the Escheat, this rule is most often honored in its abuse. How many instances exist in which the self-righteous knights of House Gwydion ride to the rescue of a captive member of House Ailil?

We take a pragmatic approach to this rule. If we can reasonably succeed in rescuing a changeling from the clutches of Banality or the asylums and prisons of the Dauntain, we make the attempt. If we succeed (particularly in cases where the victim belongs to an enemy house or freehold), we gain the favor of an erstwhile antagonist. If we fail and escape unscathed, we can console ourselves with having tried and ensure that no one can add our failure to make the attempt to our list of transgressions.

Where one of our own is concerned, however, we spare no expense to rescue her from captivity or forgetfulness. That should go without saying.

The Right of Safe Haven

Otherwise known as the Right of Hospitality, this tenet enjoins those who rule freeholds and maintain fiefs to honor the traditions of guesting and sanctuary. This portion of the Escheat also establishes freeholds as havens against Banality and the ravages of war. To challenge a noble in her own home goes against the spirit of Safe Haven. Likewise, to admit a visitor as a guest and then perpetrate harm upon his person equally violates this tenet. Custom usually dictates a fixed duration to a visitor's claim of guest rights. During this grace period (generally no more than three days and nights), both guest and host agree to cease hostilities (if any exist) and to undertake no conspiracies or plots against one another. Most unwelcome guests leave after the expiration of the time of grace; those who do not, suffer the consequences.

Reality: Like the Right of Rescue, this portion of the Escheat often falls by the wayside in the face of opportunity. We have learned not to trust ourselves to the mercies of Seelie hosts, should we ever have need of claiming sanctuary in one of their freeholds. Likewise, we understand that few members of the Seelie houses believe that freeholders of house Ailil uphold the Right of Safe Haven. Occasionally, we manage to succeed in hosting an enemy or guesting with a foe without treachery breaking out on one side or another. When that happens, it is both a grand surprise and a cause for celebration. Only with members of our sister House Eiluned can we feel even a modicum of safety.

The Right of Life

No Kithain may willfully cause the death of another Kithain. This constitutes the greatest crime against the Dreaming and puts the slayer at risk of losing her faerie soul. Whether commoner or noble, all changelings exist by right of the Dreaming and not through the whims of others. To deprive the Dreaming of one of its children is the most heinous of deeds.

Reality: The fact that at least one of the Seelie houses professes its determination to rid the world of the Unseelie fae puts this portion of the Escheat into perspective. Death (both accidental and intentional) happens to all of us. While most of us rest content with the temporary "death" of the faerie awareness of our enemies, occasionally our passions gain control and we strike a fatal blow in combat.

While we do not condone the wholesale slaughter of those who oppose us, we cannot forbid members of our house from exercising their discretion in the use of violence or extreme measures. We accept the consequences of our actions, knowing that any Kithain life we take brings us a little closer to losing our connection with the Dreaming. We espouse the concept of minimum necessary force, knowing that sometimes this means the permanent removal of those who stand in our way or who endanger our house.

Current Politics

At the risk of belaboring an issue, House Ailil's most important task (aside from surviving persecution by Seelie fanatics) lies in the restoration of the balance between Seelie and Unseelie Courts. We desire nothing less than the return of the pre-Sundering tradition of the alternation of power. We foresee that the Long Winter is inevitable and that, rather than pretending we can forestall it by prolonging Seelie control, we should prepare for its coming and trust that it is only the precursor to a new beginning for the fae.

To achieve our goal, we use any means necessary. Ending the 30-year monopoly of Seelie power requires all manner of subtle manipulations and back-room politics. We participate in the Parliament of Dreams in order to remind the fae of Concordia that the Unseelie are a part of their government, not just a state of mind.

The methods we use to achieve our goal are as varied as the individuals who work diligently to bring it about. Some of us excel in the art of persuasion; as diplomats and ambassadors, we travel to many of the Seelie strongholds and promote our cause. Others demonstrate a flair for intrigue; we use these talented individuals as negotiators, sending them among the common folk and infiltrating Seelie households where they can plant rumors and concoct plots and counterplots to fuddle the normal state of Seelie affairs. Still others among us exhibit an irresistible sexuality; we send these members of our house to forge alliances through affairs of the heart, whether with our Unseelie cousins in Houses Balor and Leanhaun or with the Seelie houses.

We do not neglect the mortal world, either. In order to prepare for the Long Winter, we must learn to live with less and less Glamour or else to find Glamour wherever it is available. We have learned to enrich ourselves by surrounding ourselves with the atmosphere of human politics. In our mortal guises, many of us hold political office or deal in corporate politics. We find the cutthroat practices and internal gamesmanship of mortals not only refine our own skills, but also serve as a source of Glamour. As the world grows more Banal with Winter's approach, our ability to snatch Glamour from political intrigues becomes more and more important.

In the long run, we intend to learn how to survive during the Long Winter. Our Seelie enemies, who prefer to pretend that so long as they rule they can prevent the end of Summer, will weaken and perish (or else embrace their Unseelie natures) with the cold winds that herald Winter's approach.

While many of us would like to see a master plan for House Ailil that outlines the procedure for overthrowing the Seelie powers that be, the rest of us feel that so long as we outlast our enemies, we will prevail.

Political Impulses

Though we have one overriding goal, the members of House Ailil choose different ways of pursuing it.

Purists: Many of us follow the Purist impulse, desiring a simple restoration of the Twin Courts. Purists do not believe that the Seelie are our enemies; rather, they are our antagonists (a subtle but clear distinction). These Ailil sidhe work ultimately for the survival of both Unseelie and Seelie changelings, since both types must work together to preserve the balance of power. Some Purists feel that once the Unseelie gain power, they need to extend their rule to make up for the overlong reign of the Seelie fae.

Repudiators: Members of this impulse believe in the complete overthrow of the Seelie fae and the permanent institution of Unseelie rule. They, too, speak of restoring the balance, but reckon that the 600-year period during which the majority of commoners followed the Seelie tradition demands an equal number of Unseelie centuries to counter it.

Ritualists: A fair number of Ailil sidhe follow the ways of the Ritualists, combining their house goals with their work in the Shadow Court. Ritualists seek not only to advance the Unseelie cause but also to reawaken our lost ties to the Dreaming. Many graybeards belong to the Ritualist impulse, seeking solace in the autumn of their faerie existence in the devotion to the cycles of the year.

Modernists: Ailil Modernists decry the stratification between nobles and commoners. They believe that not only must we overthrow the Seelie sidhe, but we must also grant commoners the same rights as nobles. A popular impulse among younger members of the house, the Modernists advocate a complete sharing of power between nobles and commoners and an eradication of the titles that mark the differences between the two groups.

Anarchists: This impulse has the fewest members among the sidhe of House Ailil. Anarchists advocate the violent and immediate overthrow of the government of Concordia. If that proves impossible, then creating chaos and disorder serves as a substitute. Some Ailil wilders join this impulse for a time, but soon discover that the Anarchists have no room for subtle manipulators. Many of our wisest graybeard Ritualists were once Anarchists who eventually grew bored with the simple art of destruction.

The Seelie Among Us

Seelie members of House Ailil, particularly if they have sworn the Oath of Loyal Opposition, have a special function that serves the goals of our house. These rare Ailil sidhe affiliate themselves with freeholds and courts of Seelie houses willing to accept them. Usually, their innate knowledge of intrigue and court politics lands them an advisory position of some sort in the retinue of their adopted liege. Then, their real work begins.

Despite their Seelie legacies, these loyal sons and daughters of Ailil use their skills to counter the attacks on us by those Seelie fae who seek our destruction. Every Fiona or Eiluned noble who can point to her trusted Ailil advisor wins for us a victory over our enemies and increases our chances of surviving until the coming of the Long Winter.

A few of our Seelie members see no conflict in masquerading as a member of another house in order to climb even higher in the power structure of Concordia. We need all the friends in high places we can get; if they also happen to be members of our own household clad in the colors of Eiluned (which just so happen to be the same as our own!) or Fiona, so much the better.

The Disappearance of the High King

Many members of our house argue that the unexplained absence of David Ardry presents us with a perfect opportunity to make our move and seize power in Concordia. While this is tempting to many of the younger members of our house, the leaders of House Ailil concur with the most recent ruling from High Lord Erdath. At this date, if we took advantage of the vacancy in the throne of Concordia, it would be tantamount to an admission of guilt in the high king's disappearance.

Although we would like to claim credit for this action, we in fact, had nothing to do with it.

We do intend to make the most of the opportunity David Ardry's disappearance has given us — not to attempt a coup, but to publicize the chaos currently threatening to rip apart the Parliament of Dreams and the internal affairs of House Gwydion. Our experience with mortal politics teaches us that whoever first seizes the reins of power during an emergency seldom rules for long after the crisis ends. We intend to take power when we have the chance of holding it for longer than a season.

Merits and Flaws

Gifted Liar (3 pt. Mental Merit)

You are so good at lying that you can sometimes convince yourself that you are telling the absolute truth. This makes it extremely difficult for anyone to catch you in a falsehood; in your own mind, you are *not* lying. In most cases, no rolls need to be made for you to stand up to questioning or interrogation. Success in a simple Willpower roll (difficulty 7) allows you to evade the truth-sensing ability of House Gwydion or negate the effects of magical attempts to detect deception.

Guileless (2 pt. Social Flaw)

While you enjoy the same expertise with manipulating others as others of your house, you lack one small tool: You cannot lie convincingly. Truth writes itself upon your face in large letters, for everyone to see. This makes it nigh impossible for you to evade the truth-sense of Gwydion's house when asked a direct question. Other attempts at subterfuge and guile are not affected. This is not a compulsion to be truthful; you can attempt to lie, you just do it badly. In game terms, you make any Subterfuge rolls that involve telling a blatant lie at +2 to your difficulty level.

Forsworn (3 pt. Social Flaw)

At some point in your past, you were guilty of breaking an oath. Because you have taken the Oath of the Forsworn, you have managed to avoid the penalties normally incurred by your action, but you now stand amid those of your house who bear the label of Forsworn. This not only damages your reputation and honor, but it also prevents others from believing your promises. You are at a +2 difficulty to all Social roles involving attempts to persuade others of your sincerity or the validity of your word.

Pulling Strings: Relations Near and Far

The accusation that we exploit our allies and enemies fails to take into account either the subtleties of our relations with other groups or the spirit in which we exercise our obvious talents. What some call exploita-

tion, we see as making the best use of the available resources. Who among the fae does not seek to draw upon her allies' strengths and maximize her enemies' weaknesses? Those who claim that they deal fairly and equitably with everyone delude themselves. At least we are honest about our manipulation of others. We pride ourselves on the ability to accurately assess those we deal with.

"Diplomacy" and manipulation are synonyms. Remember that the next time one of the Seelie houses lauds its "diplomatic expertise."

The Nobles

Nobility has many meanings, and each of the noble houses manifests its noble blood in its own fashion. Both Seelie and Unseelie houses agree on one thing — the right of the sidhe to rule over the commoner kith. Beyond that single patch of common ground, however, we differ from one another in our purposes, perceptions, temperaments and susceptibility to manipulation. Military philosophers and strategists caution us to know our enemies; I add that we should know our friends, as well. Both can prove dangerous under the right circumstances.

House Balor

The sons and daughters of Balor have slipped into the ranks of the nobility by virtue of their descent from Lugh of the Long Arm, one of the Tuatha de Danaan. Their blatant and sometimes clumsy bids for power as well as their penchant for violence serve as convenient distractions for our more subtle schemes. We know these brutal proponents of strong-arm politics envy our position as first among the Unseelie houses. We need killers and assassins in our ranks and House Balor fits the role as if born to it.

Our agents within the house (does that surprise you?) have heard a rumor that somewhere within a hidden freehold the rulers of Balor keep a cache of iron knives — each incised with the name of one of the leaders of House Ailil. We almost believe these reports. Of a certain, House Balor works actively to bring on the Long Winter ahead of schedule, believing that they will enjoy a greater advantage due to their relative immunity to cold iron.

Cultivate alliances with the children of iron cautiously. Do not trust them, regardless of the oaths they have sworn. While we customarily look for loopholes in the wording of our oaths, Balor thinks nothing of shamelessly breaking an oath whenever it suits its purposes.

House Dougal

These toadies of House Gwydion have little to recommend them to us except for their indisputable talent for crafting treasures and ingenious devices. Nevertheless, we must deal with them whenever we have need of something our own artisans cannot produce. Usually, we act through intermediaries when we treat with these dour and oh-so-somber sidhe, since they share their Gwydion cousins' instinctive hatred for all the Unseelie houses. Occasionally, we interact with them openly — during festivals and other gatherings where all fae are supposedly welcome. We take great care to praise their skill and commend them for their loyalty to their masters (though we do not use that word in their presence).

The few Unseelie members of House Dougal differ little from the Seelie majority except in their greater willingness to take risks. When we find one of these rare individuals, we make every effort to win their loyalty. Their grasp of technology makes them invaluable to us as allies. Unfortunately, even the Unseelie children of Dougal remain loyal to their house and, thus, to House Gwydion.

If we could find a way to break their attachment to the falcon's house, we would consider it a major victory.

House Eiluned

These sidhe come closest to winning our trust, an irony when you consider that they are the least trusted of all the Seelie houses among their own kind. Our shared ancestry creates an unspoken bond of kinship between our houses and we work hard to find ways to strengthen that tie. We look upon them as our eyes and ears in the Seelie camp, for more often than not, the children of Eiluned warn us of plots against our house.

Whenever we choose lovers from outside our house, we frequently indulge in affairs with the sons and daughters of the twin crescents. Though other houses perceive them as cold, mysterious and aloof, we take great pleasure in penetrating their enigmatic façade and discovering the passion that lies beneath their surface composure.

Eiluned sidhe share with us a love for politics and an appreciation for intrigue. Whenever we can lend our support to them, we do so. The more favors they owe us, the closer we become. While we regret their house's allegiance to the Seelie Court, we have hope that in the near future they will see their way to joining forces with us. Some of our seers have prophesied that a return to the old ways of power sharing between Summer and Winter Courts can only happen when Ailil and Eiluned join hands as rulers of the fae.

House Fiona

For a good time, call Fiona. Although this seems a tawdry description of a house known for its passionate emotions and brave hearts, it sums up the essence of the sidhe of House Fiona. What they lack in subtlety and finesse, they more than make up in intensity and zeal.

The Fiona sidhe's penchant for tragic or inappropriate love affairs plays admirably into our hands. Our sinister reputation attracts more than a few of this house, for we represent danger and excitement to them. I can highly recommend them as partners for practicing your skill at affairs of the heart.

On a more practical side, it is relatively easy to manipulate the members of House Fiona. Their love of pleasure and susceptibility to having their emotions aroused make their responses predictable. Do not assume, however, that the House of the Lion has no teeth. Fiona sidhe are fierce when crossed or betrayed. Keep this firmly in mind when dealing with them and, above all, don't let them catch you in anything they can interpret as treachery. Their swords are as sharp as their passions.

The Unseelie members of House Fiona often rival the Leanhaun sidhe in their rampant pursuit of sensation. Fulfill their desires and they will follow you anywhere, even into battle against the Seelie Court.

House Gwydion

Simply put, this house is our enemy. The Seelie houses accord them the status of leaders, treating them with something akin to reverence — at least to their faces. Supposedly the members of House Gwydion epitomize the Seelie concept of nobility.

Well, I'll grant them that claim, since they do embody the stiff-necked, unyielding intolerance of deviation from their precious Seelie Code. Make no mistake, the instigators of the worst excesses of the Accordance War came from the House of the Falcon and not, as most would suspect, from the "deceivers" of House Eiluned.

The insufferable arrogance of this house of self-righteous power-mongers has resulted in the stagnation of changeling society since the Resurgence. Almost single-handedly, House Gwydion, by its insistence on a Seelie monopoly of power, has stopped the inevitable and necessary cycle of the Dreaming in its tracks.

Death by cold iron would be too good for them, in my opinion.

They have openly advocated the eradication of the Unseelie houses, but we believe that their enmity goes even farther. Every indication suggests that they intend to destroy all Unseelie fae, deluding themselves into believing that such an action will guarantee the postponement of the Long Winter.

The falcon's brood despises our house in particular, since we pose the greatest threat to their sovereignty. We take great pride in knowing that our mere presence can rouse their infamous temper, driving them to berserk fury. Perhaps if we incite them often enough, the other Seelie houses will finally see them for the pompous posturers they really are.

The recent disappearance of their precious high king has thrown a wrench in Gwydion's plans for consolidating Seelie power in the hands of their house. Despite David Ardry's reputation as one of the fairest of his house, we cannot help but applaud the work of whoever engineered his removal from fae society. No doubt the Gwydion sidhe blame us for the loss of their most prominent member. Ironic, isn't it, that we had nothing to do with it?

Don't bother attempting to deal with members of House Gwydion in any fashion other than the most basic courtesy demands — at least not openly. A few members of our house have managed to infiltrate Gwydion fiefs by posing as members of House Eiluned, but too often these attempts (along with those who make the attempts) are short-lived, due to Gwydion's talent for detecting falsehoods.

Confine your dealings with the House of the Falcon to public gatherings, where the dictates of Seelie etiquette provide us with some protection from their hostility. Most importantly, when you must treat with the Gwydion sidhe, avoid lying to them whenever possible unless you intend to cause a scene.

As for the Unseelie members of the house, I have it from reliable sources that they do exist, although they risk their lives by defying the conventions of the falcon. Should you come upon one of these, approach with caution, but strive to turn them actively against their own Seelie kin.

House Leanhaun

Consummate seducers, tragic lovers, devoted patrons of the arts (although they demand a devastating fee for their inspiration), the Leanhaun sidhe seem fragile and vulnerable. Nothing could be further from the truth. The members of House Leanhaun trade upon their "weakness," their ravenous need for Glamour, to arouse the pity and protection of their Ailil and Balor cousins.

We see through their ruse, of course, since it is just the sort of pretense we might adopt if we suffered from their predicament. In truth, the Leanhaun sidhe are capable of taking care of themselves; desperation leads to the development of the necessary skills to survive.

As our allies against the Seelie houses, Leanhaun sidhe have their uses. The secret plans of many a Fiona knight have found their way into the ears of a Leanhaun lover or paramour. Our main difficulty in acquiring the services of the Leanhaun lies in convincing them to focus their attention on something other than assuring a constant supply of Glamour. Ensuring them a steady supply of potent Dreamers in return for their assistance usually overcomes their reluctance to do what we want.

So long as the precepts of the Seelie Court forbid the practices whereby the Leanhaun feed their Glamour-starved essence, we can count on the loyalty and support of the children of the blackened rose. As *de facto* criminals of fae society, they have no choice but to remain in the good graces of those who do not condemn them or seek their destruction.

Their sensual natures make the Leanhaun sidhe exquisite lovers and consorts, while their affinity for the arts lends grace to any gathering that admits their company.

House Liam

This entire house bears the stigma of oath breakers. Why the Liam sidhe insist on remaining affiliated with the Seelie Court in light of this crippling label remains a mystery. If we could convince them to change their allegiance — they are, after all, oath breakers — the balance of power in the Parliament of Dreams would shift to a more equal representation of Seelie and Unseelie houses.

Unfortunately, all our efforts to affect this change have come to naught. House Liam remains entrenched in its Seeliness, wallowing in its disrepute and abasing itself before the other Seelie houses.

Our biggest stumbling block in winning over the majority of House Liam consists of their overinflated opinion of humanity, and their insistence on playing the self-appointed role of protectors of humankind. They object strenuously to the forcible gathering of Glamour and condemn any fae who indulge in Ravaging for any reason. Our lack of sympathy for the "plight" of mortals makes it difficult for us to achieve any substantial progress in pleading our cause.

Further, House Liam enjoys the protection of House Gwydion, since the Liam sidhe lack the desire (if not the ability) to stand up for themselves. Their acceptance of Gwydion's largesse usually results in that house's untimely interference in any negotiations we undertake with the Liam sidhe.

The Unseelie members of House Liam respond more positively to our overtures, although they, too, exhibit the same solicitousness for humans as do their Seelie kin. Nevertheless, the bitterness of many Unseelie Liam sidhe leads them to us despite our small differences over the fate of mortals.

The Commoners

Upon our return to the mortal world, we gauged the temper of the times and discovered that the commoner kith had changed. No longer did they meekly acquiesce to the will of the sidhe. Instead, human concepts of equality, democracy, individual freedom and civil rights had altered the commoners' perceptions of their proper place. That the Seelie houses had to launch a full-scale war to assert their domination over the common folk only emphasizes the extent of the transformation of the lowborn kith.

The Accordance War served us in an unexpected fashion. Because of their resentment of the Seelie conquerors, many commoners flocked to the Unseelie cause. Though it pained us to do so, we saw the advantage of allowing full membership in House Ailil to as many commoners as would swear oaths to us. We benefit immeasurably from their hardiness and adaptability as well as from their familiarity with the ways of the modern world.

While few commoners sworn to Ailil's blazon achieve title or rank, we keep them loyal to us through a variety of incentives. Freedom to act without the restraints imposed upon them by Seelie fae serves as a powerful motivation, as do rewards such as a stable of enchanted mortals, or gifts of dross and small treasures. Commoners who don't respond to the carrot receive the stick. Fear and intimidation work miracles when judiciously applied.

Of course, some kith are more useful to us than others. The following views of the various commoner kith express the general views of House Ailil, as well as my own prejudices.

Boggans

Most boggans shun any contact with the Unseelie houses. Their depressingly Seelie natures predispose them to a moral priggishness that clashes with our own more liberal morés. In general, we tend to avoid wholesale attempts at recruiting these dowdy wallflowers.

The few Unseelie boggans we attract, however, make excellent clerks, housekeepers and managers. The boring minutiae of freehold life exercises an unfathomable hold over these born drudges. Their predilection for rumors and gossip also makes them excellent spies provided we can insert them into Seelie holdings. (A certain noble of House Dougal would faint if he realized that his boggan chef reported his comings and goings faithfully to our house.)

Boggans' penchant for causing mischief whenever they feel slighted warrants caution in dealing with them. In many cases, they are more trouble than they're worth. Let the Seelie fae waste their time coddling their boggan allies. We have better things to do than spend our days in such dull company.

While I cannot vouch personally for the worth of engaging in dalliances with boggans, I have heard that they bring the same thorough and meticulous approach to their physical appetites as they do to the rest of their activities.

Eshu

Both Seelie and Unseelie varieties of this kith are perpetual wanderers and inveterate meddlers; in fact, sometimes there seems very little difference between members of the two courts. While the eshu as a group tend to avoid political entanglements, a few individuals seem to take pleasure in adding politics to their list of scams. We welcome the appearance of one of these travelers in our freeholds, for their arrival usually signals some significant alteration of present circumstances.

Eshu make good messengers and reliable (if eccentric scouts) when they remember to send reports of their discoveries or deliver their messages. Their knack for knowing where to be at any given time and how best (for them) to get there often allows us advance warning of trouble. (When all the eshu in residence leave your freehold, you can count on the imminent appearance of a delegation from the Knights of the Red Branch or some other tool of Seelie oppression.)

Cultivate alliances with both Seelie and Unseelie eshu. At heart, all of them resent the second-class status accorded their kith, and often respond to your promises to recognize their innate noble blood. Just remember that every contact with one of the eshu represents a calculated risk. Most of the time the odds are in your favor if you remember to stack the cards.

Nockers

The sheer talent of these foul-tongued inventors alone makes them invaluable to us, both as individuals and as a house. Fortunately for us, Unseelie nockers make up the majority of this kith, probably due to their lack of restraint with regard to the creations of their hands. Nockers represent our technological edge over the Seelie Court. While our enemies pride themselves on the gadgets and weapons created by their loyal nocker retainers, we have only to point to the wondrous chimerical machines fashioned by our nockers to demonstrate the true extent of nocker ingenuity.

Their generally unpleasant natures do not bother us as much as they do our Seelie counterparts. We simply leave nockers to their own devices (literally) and ignore their incomprehensible gibberish. Although I have heard that their unintelligible curses actually comprise a concealed language used to communicate complex technical instructions and pass along kith secrets, I see little point in attempting to decipher their code. (I have no personal desire to understand the jargon of computer programmers either.)

Keeping these perpetual curmudgeons happy and productive, however, often poses a problem. Their egos do not take insults or imagined slights with good grace. Our harsher methods of controlling the subordinate Kithain often produce an unpleasant backlash when used against nockers. Treat them with kid gloves, even if you customarily use the whip and chair on your other retainers.

Pooka

Ignore them at your peril. While Seelie pooka are amusing at best, annoying at worst, Unseelie members of this kith can kill you with one of their pranks and laugh it off as a mistake later. Despite the unpredictable danger these animalistic Kithain represent, we court their allegiance (at a distance) because of their kaleidoscopic ability to reconfigure the truth. We appreciate their mastery of the art of dissembling and disinformation.

The care and feeding of your pooka retainers involve managing to stay one step ahead of their mental gyrations. For our house, this does not present a difficulty, though I hear that members of House Balor have trouble keeping up with the twists and turns of a pooka's conversation. Each individual has her own particular manner of communicating; learning the various forms of "pooka-speak" makes it possible to converse with them without going mad.

Because they have such a loose hold on the truth, using pooka as spies or messengers carries a certain amount of risk. I recommend employing them as infiltrators, insinuating them (once they have demonstrated their loyalty to us) into Seelie freeholds or cliques. Once they are in place, all that is necessary is to sit back and watch them wreak their own particular form of havoc. They are exceptionally effective within Gwydion strongholds, since the "noblest" of the sidhe feel bound to protect all the commoners under them. Imagining the sight of a Gwydion lord or lady wincing every time a pooka opens her mouth has warmed my heart on many a cold night.

While the idea of seeking out a pooka as a lover or companion does not appeal to everyone, I find that this kith often arouses my interest in wild experimentation. Occasionally, the results are more than a little painful, but the experience is always worthwhile (if you survive it).

Redcaps

As rare as Unseelie boggans are, Seelie redcaps are even rarer. Almost without exception, the killers of the Kithain belong to the Winter Court. Since winter represents the death of the world prior to its rebirth, it only seems fair that the executioners of changeling society adhere to the tenets of the Unseelie fae.

In the words of Lord Declan, one of our house's most astute strategists, "when subtlety fails, send in the redcaps." We consider this bloodthirsty, unprincipled kith our shock troops (both literally and figuratively). Their appalling zest for maiming and cannibalizing their enemy decimates the morale of any who oppose them. For this reason, we try not to arouse their enmity.

As a group, redcaps show little discipline and even less restraint. Thus, we seldom use them for pinpoint strikes. Sending an army of them against an enemy is tantamount to a declaration of "no quarter." Redcaps do not take prisoners, unless their larders need replenishing.

As individuals, redcaps can demonstrate a phenomenal loyalty to those who gain their respect. Intimidation works well with this kith, since redcaps understand the authority of superior force. Occasionally, a redcap will strike up a friendship with one of our house. When this occurs, the lucky Ailil sidhe gains the benefit of having a lethal weapon constantly near to hand.

Don't even think about conducting an affair with a redcap. Just don't. Well... no, don't.

Satyrs

Lascivious, lustful and wise — I can think of no better combination outside of the qualities of our own house. Satyrs, particularly Unseelie ones, demonstrate a sensuality that is frightening in its intensity and irresistible in its allure. While too many sidhe write satyrs off as lechers and debauchers (foolishly considering these attributes as vices), we realize their legendary sagacity and their cleverness at strategy. Likewise, we appreciate their musical talent and their love for revelry. The songs of many an Unseelie satyr bard often grace our gatherings and inspire us to heights of sensation and depravity.

More pragmatically, satyrs provide the nobles of our house with the benefit of their philosophical insights and their knowledge of both human and faerie natures. They also occasionally demonstrate their expertise at gathering information from guests through their command of the art of pillow talk and the arousal of their partners' passions. A few members of our house employ satyrs as chief interrogators, relying on them to use their unique ability to combine pain and pleasure in the torture chamber to extract even the most closely held secrets from Seelie captives.

I highly recommend the cultivation of satyrs both in the halls of diplomacy and the bowers of love. Even the Seelie ones have their "good days."

Scathach Sidhe

I count these diminished sidhe (or half-sidhe) among the commoners because they ape the commoner kith in their adaptation to the world after the Sundering. Their choice to mingle their bloodline with that of humankind forever altered their natures, rendering them less than sidhe. By their own admission, Scathach sidhe remain close to their human kin, thus widening the gap between themselves and others of their near-kith.

Nevertheless, the Scathach make silent, efficient warriors. Unseelie members of this house frequently hire out as mercenary knights. Whenever we can, we attempt to employ these soldiers-for-hire; when we can induce them to swear oaths of loyalty to us, we seldom hesitate. Far better to have a troop of trained Scathach warriors fighting under the silver dragon than laboring for the cause of House Gwydion or House Fiona.

We also find the Scathach grasp of Dream Craft invaluable in our attempts to understand the elusive nature of the Dreaming. If we are to survive and prosper during the Long Winter and beyond, we must learn the secrets contained within the Dreaming. The Scathach sidhe may hold the key to this most important undertaking.

A movement within our house exists to attempt to bring the Scathach sidhe wholly within the Unseelie fold. Restore their house's name and blazon to the ranks of the true nobility, these proponents say, and we will not need to beat our heads against the wall currying favor with House Liam. We will increase the ratio of Unseelie to Seelie while at the same time enhancing our strength in battle. Why court a house of pacifists when we can gain a house of warriors?

Sluagh

The secretive sluagh tend to favor their Unseelie legacies over their Seelie ones. Since most of the Seelie houses despise the whisperers, the sluagh naturally gravitate toward the houses that do accept them without cringing from their occasionally distressing presence. The Seelie loss is our gain.

Sluagh sworn to Ailil's banner provide us with a connection to the largest changeling information network in existence. While we do not delude ourselves into believing that even our most loyal sluagh spies report every piece of intelligence they uncover to us (or only to us), we place great reliance on the information they gather.

While sluagh rarely excel in open combat, they make perfect assassins and poisoners. Their ability to infiltrate even the most carefully guarded freeholds in order to perform a piece of wetwork borders on the uncanny. Just remember that the sluagh hold their own allegiances as well, and they can just as easily use a knife or poison vial on you as on your enemies. Keep them happy and, in most cases, you can rest with only one eye open.

A word to the wise: Though some sluagh exercise a dark seductiveness, be wary of allowing one into your bed unless you have a death wish or post guards inside your bedroom.

Trolls

While most trolls fall within the Seelie camp, both Seelie and Unseelie members of this kith have an unshakable sense of loyalty to those who hold their oaths. Trolls make the best bodyguards imaginable (similar to possessing a pet tank). If you can entice one of these giant warriors into an oath bond, you can greatly increase your chances for long life. In the dangerous game of politics, having a few trolls at your back becomes a necessity rather than a luxury.

Beware arousing the anger of a troll, especially if she is sworn to you. The legendary wrath of their kind knows no limits.

On the other hand, the judicious direction of a troll's anger against your enemies can turn the tide in battle. Simply remind them of the injustices their race has suffered at the hands of the (Seelie) sidhe and let them loose. Reminding them that we have their best interests at heart can usually protect us from the fallout of their anger; most trolls suffer from an innate simplicity of mind and respond easily to manipulation.

The best way to ensure a troll's loyalty, besides with an oath, lies in winning her heart. The love of a troll, while overwhelming and exhausting, provides a sense of security few members of our house ever experience. I heartily recommend commissioning an oversize bed for your personal chambers.

Thallain

I think of the Thallain as the true children of the Long Winter. They provide a graphic example of what happens when one legacy completely overwhelms the other. Their total lack of a Seelie half proves to us the horror of denying both sides of our dual nature. A particularly cynical cousin of mine once commented that when House Gwydion suppressed its Unseelie tendencies, these wild and reckless impulses coalesced into the five kith of the Thallain, thus, giving rise to the rotten eggs of the falcon.

Still, individually and as a group, the Thallain have their uses. We cannot afford to ignore the possibilities they represent in our struggle to upset the current balance of power. Only the Shadow Court seems capable of exercising any control over these nightmarish fae; inclusion of any of them in your retinue immediately brands you as a member of that secret organization. Since most sidhe assume that all members of House Ailil belong to the Shadow Court, the presence of a few Thallain among our ranks only adds fuel to the rumor.

Beasties

Though they masquerade as pooka, beasties have none of the winsome playfulness associated with those pranksters. As hard to control as the wild animals they resemble, beasties serve you best when you simply point them in the direction of your target (be it person, place or thing) and yell, "Sic 'em!"

Do not allow them into your freehold if you wish it to remain in one piece.

Boggarts

Boggarts make up for the lack of Unseelie boggans. They are among the most tractable of the Thallain, although their penchant for making busywork and bringing whole warrens of their "relations" into your freehold to keep up with the proliferation of tasks (most of which they created for the express purpose of employing more of their kind) can drain the resources of a household unless carefully monitored. Before entering into an agreement with a boggart, make certain that you close any loopholes in your pact with them.

I find it better to make do without them, personally. On the other hand, encouraging them (in the guise of boggans) to apply to a Seelie household for protection and employment frequently results in financial ruin and mental frustration for our enemies.

Bogies

Bogies make even the most Unseelie of the sluagh seem Seelie in comparison. We use these Thallain sparingly, whenever we need an assassination performed in dramatic style or for creating a wave of terror among our enemies. The problem with employing bogies lies in the fact that their loyalty to anyone other than themselves (and, occasionally, the sluagh community that shelters them) is questionable, at best.

Personally, I find bogies distasteful to the extreme and avoid dealing with them whenever possible. I'd sooner take a sluagh to my bosom than give one of the bogies the time of day.

The Shadow Court uses bogies and manages to exert some sort of control over them. I applaud their technique, whatever it is.

Goblins

Along with boggarts, goblins have some use other than causing panic and terror. Like their nocker relations, goblins possess the gift of craft. Their machines of destruction sometimes reflect an uncannily subtle touch, belying their true purposes until activated. Goblin weapons, while sometimes treacherous, exemplify the skill of their creators.

We take great delight in helping a goblin pass himself off as a nocker and join an enemy's fief. Eventually, the ruse is discovered, but in the time it takes to do so, most goblins can accomplish a creditable wave of destruction.

Allow them into your freehold with caution; their implements of destruction often work against the ones who use them. Give their "weapons" to your enemies as peace offerings — then, sit back and watch them blow themselves up.

Ogres

Listen to me very carefully. Do not attempt to control the actions of an ogre unless you have the complete backing of the Shadow Court and an army of Unseelie trolls and redcaps at your back (or in front of you). Show no weakness of any sort in its presence, or you will die.

They have no conception of politics, so do not try to enlist them in affairs that require finesse. On the other hand, if an ogre perceives that you hold some sort of power over it that exceeds its comprehension, the chances are good that it will obey you out of respect for this unknown force — at least, for a time.

Unless desperation drives you to seek out the assistance of the ogres, avoid doing so.

Gallain

In simple terms, the Gallain are those fae whose natures we do not fully comprehend. They do not fall into the categories of the known kith, nor do they belong among the ranks of the Thallain (though some might place the fomori among the monstrous ones). Nevertheless, the creatures who connect with the Dreaming in any fashion whatsoever deserve careful study and an assessment of their usefulness or superfluousness.

Fomori

Different from, yet strangely similar to the first children of Balor of the Evil Eye, the creatures known as fomori have apparently risen from human experimentation. House Balor remains the undisputed expert on these mutated former humans, since they perceive some connection between the fomori of today and their ancient near-kin.

Occasionally, one of our Balor cousins has loaned us a fomori retainer. While these creatures have their uses and possess a limited capacity for magic, their life spans are short. Eventually, they self-destruct. This restricts them, in my opinion, to short-term engagements.

Our occasional associations with werewolves (which I shall delineate later) also indicate that the fomori have some sort of inborn enmity to most of the werewolf population. I do not recommend attempting to bring the two types of creatures together. Fomori seem to hate werewolves with a single-minded passion that resembles Gwydion's dislike of the Unseelie — only worse.

Inanimae

These enigmatic creatures, bonded as they are to inanimate objects, remain so far from our comprehension that we wonder whether trying to pierce the communication barrier between us and them is worth the attempt. What could they tell us if we could understand them?

Some lore masters of our house insist that the Inanimae hold the secret to survival during the Long Winter. Banality does not seem to affect them in their current state. Perhaps we need to discover a similar fashion of protecting ourselves during the worst of the inevitable Winter, so long as we can be assured of reversing it afterwards.

Lost Ones

One of our highest priorities must be the location of the sites of these ancient fae, and the recovery, if possible, of any treasures that the Lost Ones' lairs might contain. If any of the Lost Ones themselves have survived in their Glamour-drenched hiding places, we have a duty to attempt to bring them back into the world as well.

We suspect that one of these Dream-pockets serves as the lair of our own founder, Ailil, the Silver Dragon of Connaught. If this is true, then we must do everything within our power to affect his return.

Even if, as some of our soothsayers believe, Ailil has wholly embraced his Seelie nature, surely he will comprehend the need to restore the ancient balance of the Twin Courts. Although we doubt that Eiluned herself survived the Shattering, the return of Ailil might offer us the chance to reunite our sister houses into one great house of Summer and Winter.

Nunnehi

The native fae of the American continents have little reason to love us. In our desperation to find shelter from the early signs of the Sundering, some of our more adventurous members fled westward to the as-yet-undiscovered lands across the great western sea. The enmity caused by our failure to understand the ways of the nunnehi lasts to this day. Only a few sidhe have managed to come to an accord with these quasi-changelings.

We would simply dismiss them out of hand as irrelevant to our house's goals were it not for the fact that the nunnehi possess a means of gathering Glamour that does not rely on human creativity. If we could learn how to mimic their ways, we would have an additional supply of Glamour available to us to aid us in the Long Winter. Perhaps, too, we could prove to the Seelie misers that Glamour is not as rare a commodity as they would like us to think.

Nymphs

These elemental fae have linked their essences to natural objects — trees, rocks, waterfalls, mountains and the like. We know too little about them, but we suspect that, like the Inanimae, they possess knowledge that we need. If the society of nymphs revolves around the seasons, as I feel it must, then these creatures must possess both Seelie and Unseelie natures. Do you see where my commentary is heading?

I believe that the creatures whose very forms mirror the seasons can teach us much about weathering the coming Winter. Although studying the nymphs is not our highest priority, a few of our keenest experts in Remembrance now devote themselves to collecting the memories of these site-bound fae.

Prodigals

The lost children of the fae, known as Prodigals, provide a conundrum for most of the other noble houses. Most of the Seelie fae include the Prodigals in the Escheat's ban on revealing our true natures. We, however, see it as our obligation to make contact with our distant kin whenever possible. Because of this, we know more about vampires, werewolves and magi than many other changelings do. The spirits of the dead, as well, while not precisely Prodigals, hold a certain fascination for those of us who remember the legend of the Bright Road.

Exercise caution whenever you approach any of the Prodigals. They usually have their own agendas, which do not often coincide with ours. Some of them, as well, present a danger to our kind. If you think the risk is worth it, though, by all means, take it. You might be well rewarded by doing so.

Children of Lilith

Of all the Prodigals, vampires appeal to us most because of their interest and involvement in mortal politics. While the internal affairs of most vampire groups lie beyond our kenning, we have managed to learn a little about these half-dead walking Dreams.

While many vampires reek of Banality due to the extreme measures they take to deny the truth of their existence, others exude a dark Glamour that many Unseelie fae (our house included) find unbearably attractive. One group of vampires, seem to excel in the political game. Whether watching their machinations from a distance, or as one or two of our house have done, from within their courts, we have learned much about how to fine-tune our own intrigues. In addition, we find that these vampires provide us with a rich source of Glamour (albeit of a sinister vintage) from the twisted glee they derive from their schemes.

It seems, as well, that vampire society has its own version of Seelie and Unseelie courts. The Unseelie vampires call themselves the Sabbath; they have the same contempt for rigid rules and restrictions as we do and some of our wilders have occasionally run with "Sabbath observers," engaging in wild sprees of Ravaging while the vampires pursue their own bloodthirsty games.

I must mention one other vampire cult that holds a special attraction for us. The vampires that take their name from the Spanish term for shadows (*Las Ombras*) combine the dangerous allure of the Sabbath vampires with the insidious political acumen of the others. I have had the privilege of speaking with one of these shadowy vampire elders about the resonances between the aims of the Shadow Court and their own ambitions. While an outright alliance between our house and *Las Ombras* (or any vampires, for that matter) might prove too unwieldy and complicated even for us, we might do well to look for opportunities to cooperate with the Children of Lilith.

Lycanthropes

Of all the Prodigals who exhibit the power of shapechanging into animal forms, the werewolves (or wolfkin, as they prefer to be called) are by far the most numerous, and the ones we know the most about. House Fiona claims kinship with the werewolf family that also calls itself Fiona. Our common Celtic origins might lead to a closer association with the Fiona-wolves for our house were it not for the fact that House Fiona has poisoned the minds of these werewolves with lies about members of House Ailil. A complicated situation, indeed — it is best to trust no one claiming Fiona roots, whether wolfkin or fae.

On the other hand, we have found an affinity with other werewolves. Like us, many display a flair for politics and intrigue and exude a confidence in their own abilities that reminds us very much of our own temperament.

Werewolves often make their homes upon sites of natural Glamour, and consider themselves the guardians of these places. While we have heard rumors that many werewolves believe we would steal the Glamour from these glens if we could, they have obviously never learned the truth of the matter. Unless we learn how to extract Glamour from the natural world, as the nunnehi do, we can make little use of their precious sanctuaries.

Ghosts

The Ritualists of the Shadow Court (many of whom belong to House Ailil) have an abiding interest in the lands of the dead due to their attempts to revive the Ritual of the Teign. Most of our contact with anything resembling ghosts comes about during the Samhain revels, when legends say the barriers between all the worlds weaken. Attempts to communicate with the lingering souls of dead mortals at any other time of the year generally fail. Unless someone can prove that the dead have anything to offer us, I recommend we leave them to their unhappy prowls.

Magi

These humans have managed to awaken a part of themselves that can touch the Dreaming in a limited fashion. Though they do not suffer from Banality as we do, it seems that magi also find the unalterable laws of reality difficult to deal with. While most fae avoid modern magi, we have evidence in songs and stories that magi and faeries often crossed paths in earlier times. Few magi today understand our kind. The Seelie would like to keep it that way. Our house, while we observe extreme caution when treating with magi, has made contact with a few of them. In particular, we attempt to converse with the sorcerers of a "house" (*commoners...*) of death-witches who have an interest in the circle of life. Because they focus on death, rather than life, however, they may be able to lend us some assistance in understanding the Long Winter — and, possibly, surviving it. The Verbena family, of course, has had a long association with the fae. They, too, understand the crime of trying to stop nature in its tracks. We have yet to determine just what benefit we can gain from magi.

Some groups of magi pose a direct threat to us, either because they desire to master us or to experiment upon us (a practice that usually leads to the death of our faerie soul if not our mortal body as well). As with any of the Prodigal, I caution discretion and care when dealing with them. I forbid nothing except stupidity. The magi who use science as magic increase the amount of Banality in the world by their denial of mystery and wonder. Calling themselves the World's Order, they actively seek to destroy us as reality deviants (a term I heard used by the one I narrowly escaped from a few years ago). Like the Seelie who would like to achieve an Endless Summer in the world, the scientist-wizards work to bring about an Endless (as opposed to a Long) Winter.

The Dauntain

These fae who deliberately deny their natures and turn against the dreaming both intrigue and repulse us. We see in the Dauntain that which we might become unless we achieve a new understanding of the relationship between Banality and the Dreaming. As the Long Winter approaches and Banality (as most fae define it) increases, we believe that more and more of the fae will succumb to the despair and self-hatred epitomized by the existence of the Dauntain.

While some fae attack Dauntain with an almost missionary zeal, hoping either to destroy or convert them, House Ailil prefers to observe them from afar. By watching the working out of their pact with Banality, we might learn how to avoid their plight. Despite accusations within the Seelie Court, we do not customarily lead the Dauntain in the direction of our rivals, though the idea tempts us the more we hear it voiced.

Mortals

House Ailil strives for supremacy in mortal as well as fae society. We believe that our attempts to avoid interference in human affairs actually advanced the Sundering. Had we managed to exert our will upon human history at certain pivotal moments, the institutions that promulgated the spread of Banality, and the rise of disbelief in the supernatural world, might not have taken root.

Our relations with mortals run the gamut from intimate to superficial. Other houses call us fae supremacists. Frankly, they are right. We acknowledge that in order to survive we must come to some sort of accommodations with the mortal world and its inhabitants; after all, we wear a mortal body at least part of the time. But where many fae, particularly members of the Seelie Court, would treat with humans on equal terms, revere them as "dreamers" or keep a polite distance from them, we believe that our survival lies ultimately in exercising dominion over them.

In addition to our genuine fascination with mortal politics, House Ailil devotes so much of its attention to that subject for a very practical reason. To rule mortals, we must learn how to best them in their own game.

A few groups of mortals, described below, deserve special consideration.

The Enchanted

The enchantment of mortals remains our most effective means of controlling those we interact with on an intimate basis. We almost always open the eyes of mortal lovers. Human household servants and slaves receive the full treatment, since they spend so much time within our freeholds attending to our needs. Occasionally, we will enchant worthy mortals (our protégés in the political or business arenas) if we deem them capable of keeping our secret. Despite our apparent closeness with many of our enchanted humans, we do not consider them our equals.

Kinain and Dreamers

While no mortal may attain full membership in our house, the kinain come the closest to achieving parity with us. The mortals who form our human relations often manifest some small connection with the Dreaming. The kinain serve us as allies and intermediaries in situations where we cannot deal directly with the mortal world. They provide succor and protection when we have need of it. While we do not allow ourselves to become beholden to them, we do acknowledge the services they provide us by assisting them in their own endeavors.

Those humans who serve as our Dreamers usually share our interests. Many of our Dreamers come from the ranks of politicians; strangely enough, the goals espoused by these expert manipulators matter less than the methods used to attain them — a rare instance of the means justifying the end rather than the reverse. We derive as much Glamour from the orations of certain Southern congressmen as we do from the impassioned pleas of environmental activists and the sleazy evasions of presidential appointees.

We also select Dreamers in the fields of corporate politics, the media and advertising — all areas in which cleverness and subtlety abound. Most other fae find these aspects of the mortal world boring and rife with Banality. We enjoy the lack of competition for Dreamers in these areas.

Of course, some of our Dreamers belong to the aesthetic community. We pride ourselves on the variety of our interests.

Autumn People

We define as Autumn People those mortals who lack any sort of imagination whatsoever. We stay as far away from these boring pedants and pedestrian-minded materialists as possible. Most of the Autumn People have nothing to recommend them to us; their perceptions of "reality" leave no room for any sort of wonder or creative processes. They simply follow the rules, refuse to ask questions and trundle through existence without ever wondering if there's any point to it all. The danger we see is that they are multiplying as the world grows colder. In part, our involvement in politics and other areas that other fae label as "banal" comes from an attempt to prevent those aspects of life from falling prey to the true ravages of the Autumn People.

Famous and Infamous Ailil

In addition to such notorious personages as the Irish terrorist Doireannara and the Elvis-impersonating Duke Florian of the Duchy of Graceland, House Ailil boasts a gallery of prominent individuals known less for their flamboyance than for their contributions to the long-term aims of their house. The following descriptions of notable members of House Ailil provide a glimpse into the past, present and future leaders of the House of the Silver Dragon.

Ailil

Long before the Sundering, in an age remembered only in old sagas and preserved only in the ruins of ancient burial mounds and stone forts, Ailil ruled in Hibernia as a king of both mortals and fae. Dark and brooding, powerfully attractive and possessed of a keen intelligence, Ailil possessed a fierce passion for both love and war. Skilled in battle as well as diplomacy, he seemed destined to forge a lasting kingdom of the fae. Despite his promise, Ailil possessed a flaw that would prove the undoing of all his ambitions — an inability to remain aloof from the world of mortals. Some believe that Ailil sought mortal glory and power to distract himself from the ominous warnings of his beloved sister, Eiluned. Time and again, he donned mortal flesh and entered the stream of human history, taking lovers and leading armies with his irresistible charm and guile.

Though his own temperament favored the Seelie Court, Ailil gathered to himself a host of Unseelie fae, who swore allegiance to him as Winter King and sought to keep alive the balance of the seasons.

The belief that Ailil may have survived the Shattering as one of the Lost Ones has grown into one of House Ailil's most persistent myths. Rumors abound that, from his hiding place within his Dream-shrouded lair, Ailil has continued to exert his will, through dreams and visions, upon the world — and particularly upon members of his house. In any case, the spirit of Ailil — brash, brilliant and cunning — permeates his house, living on in those who wear the badge of the silver dragon.

High Lord Erdath

As chief spokesperson for House Ailil, High Lord Erdath holds a nominal seat in the Parliament of Dreams, though he rarely attends its convocations except to issue "position statements" urging a return to a sharing of power. The acknowledged leader of the House of the Silver Dragon prefers to spend his time traveling around the world, guesting with various Ailil lords and ladies. Wherever he goes, he bears a message of continued struggle against the Seelie monopoly of power.

Lord Erdath's personal charisma has led many to compare him to the founder of House Ailil. Certainly his regal bearing and unshakable confidence in his own abilities bear the mark of Lord Ailil himself.

Although his position as one of the nine high lords affords him a sort of diplomatic immunity, Lord Erdath does not trust his Seelie counterparts to refrain from seeking to nullify the threat he presents to their power bloc. As a result, he surrounds himself with a contingent of troll bodyguards sworn to protect him. In addition, his retinue also includes his protégé of the moment, chosen from among the most promising young nobles of House Ailil. Although Lord Erdath demands much of those he favors, he gives each of his charges a thorough grounding in politics, etiquette, diplomacy and intrigue.

As the most vocal and visible of the Unseelie high lords, Lord Erdath has become the focal point for a movement calling for him to take advantage of the current confusion in Concordia and claim the throne of the high king in the name of the Winter Court. Lord Erdath maintains that he has no active part in such a scheme.

Lady Vittoria

The life of Lady Vittoria, courtesan extraordinare of 15th-century Florence, stands as an example of Ailil influence during the Interregnum. Born to a wealthy Florentine family, Vittoria della Mira came into her Chrysalis during the height of the Italian Renaissance. The Unseelie satyrs who discovered her and took her into their midst traced her lineage back to Lord Giacomo, a satyr adopted into House Ailil at the time of the Shattering and charged with the duty of maintaining the freehold of his departed lord. Thus, in due time, Lady Vittoria came into possession of an enchanted villa on the outskirts of Florence. Her astonishing beauty and sensuous presence attracted a host of suitors from the Florentine nobility. Though she finally succumbed to the advances of one of her courtiers, Lady Vittoria quickly enchanted her husband and tamed him to her will. Her respectability in Florentine society ensured by her married status, Lady Vittoria soon established her reputation as a patron of the arts and a hostess of rare taste. Among the notables who graced her villa were members of the de Medici family, various promising painters and musicians and an aspiring civil servant named Niccolò Machiavelli. Although the patriarchal structure of Florentine government prohibited women from taking a direct role in politics, Lady Vittoria exercised a great deal of indirect influence through her social contacts and discreet love affairs. Her love for instigating conflict and rivalry among the Florentine ruling class had an unmistakable part in the turbulent politics of that city during Vittoria's lifetime. Her achievements as a loyal retainer and faithful servant of House Ailil have made her a folk hero among contemporary commoners belonging to that house.

Lady Sláine

A former protégé of High Lord Erdath, Lady Sláine now serves her liege as his personal recorder as well as the official chronicler of the history and ways of House Ailil. Nearly at the end of her wilder years, Lady Sláine projects an aura of calm self-assurance born of her rigorous tutelage under the foremost member of her house. Her appearance is striking rather than traditionally beautiful; the strong, harsh features of her face suggest an inner strength while her colorless eyes help conceal her true feelings from others.

Her frequent attendance at the Parliament of Dreams as Lord Erdath's proxy has brought her to the attention of many of the important fae of Concordia. She openly voices her opinion of the Seelie stranglehold on Concordia's government, though she advocates peaceful reform (at least in public).

Though she appears content to act as Lord Erdath's voice in matters of state, many Ailil sidhe believe that Lady Sláine is the true guiding force of House Ailil. While Lord Erdath promotes his image of the world-traveling diplomat, he serves as a convenient focus for observers of House Ailil. Meanwhile, Lady Sláine conducts the actual business of ruling House Ailil under the pretense of speaking for the high lord.

As an active member of the Cat's Cradle, Lady Sláine cultivates many contacts in House Eiluned and the other Seelie houses. In this fashion, she hopes to forge a bond among the fae that will lay the groundwork for a return to the alternation of power between Seelie and Unseelie courts.

Count Declan

The meteoric rise to power of Count Declan as one of House Ailil's leading military strategists has caused many to wonder if the House of the Silver Dragon has decided to place more emphasis on armed strength rather than diplomacy and guile. Early in his fosterage, Declan demonstrated a remarkable skill in weapons of all kinds as well as a tenacious grasp of tactics. Inducted soon after his Saining into the Guardians of the Silver Dragon, Declan soon distinguished himself in tournaments and other martial competitions. His moment of glory came, however, when he led a group of Guardians to the rescue of a member of the high lord's entourage held captive by a group of Dauntain deprogrammers. Lord Erdath rewarded Declan's bravery and success by naming him a count of House Ailil, despite the fact that the title had no lands to accompany it.

Instead, Declan has used his status to recruit other young Ailil sidhe into the Guardians, teaching them the fine arts of warfare. Since the high king's disappearance, Declan regularly meets with the high lord and other prominent house members for planning sessions to discuss contingency plans for an armed uprising against the Seelie of Concordia.

Declan's primary failing lies in his inability to avoid confrontations with members of House Gwydion, although he manages to restrict open combat against Gwydion knights to formal duels or the tournament ground.

Tall and slim, with dark brown hair and blue eyes, Declan carries himself with a confidence born of hard training and a knowledge of his own strengths and others' weaknesses.

Princess Jessamy

Though still a childling (and a young one at that), Princess Jessamy has already come to the attention of House Ailil's leaders. With her winsome features, long blond hair and dark blue eyes, Jessamy projects an air of innocent mischief that hides a canny intelligence and a calculating personality.

A distant cousin of Yrtalien ap Ailil, Jessamy encountered the Forsworn prince shortly after her Saining. From him, she learned about the Shadow Court and its mission to redress the Seelie control of Concordia. Her cousin's words left a deep impression on the childling, filling her with an ambition rare in one so young.

Chosen as the Green Child in a recent celebration of the Greening in the Kingdom of Willows, Jessamy basked in the attention of both Seelie and Unseelie fae, charming changelings of both courts with her exuberance and poise. Shadow Court Ritualists have reported omens indicating that Jessamy will one day hold great power within fae society and have already claimed her as one of their own.

In her own words, "If I'm a princess now, that means that one day I will be a queen of the Shadow Court. But for now, I have to make lots of Seelie friends so that they will like me, too."

Princess Jessamy's two closest companions are an Unseelie redcap and a Seelie troll — both childlings and both oathbound to her. Her governess, a Seelie boggan named Rosie, has devoted herself to Jessamy's protection despite her Unseelie nature.

Roving Reporter

Quote: *I'll spend a week in New York covering the gubernatorial race, then I'm off to the mountains to check on the manhunt in progress. After that, who knows? Of course, I'll give my regards to Lord Declan when I'm in the Kingdom of Willows — did you have a message for him?*

Background: As the child of a Washington bureaucrat, you grew up surrounded by the heady atmosphere of backroom politics. Your favorite TV programs were not action-adventure or animated series, but talk-shows and news commentaries. You learned at an early age that there was a difference between current events and their presentation to the public.

In fact, your life changed utterly when you overheard a conversation between your father and a reporter involving the cover-up of a political scandal. The realization that two people could conspire to create a reality that other people would accept as truth sparked your transformation from a "mortal" high-school student into a sidhe of House Ailil. A friend and political mentor of your father's sensed the signs of your impending Chrysalis and took you in hand, telling your family that he was taking you camping with his son. Instead, this Ailil noble took you to an Ailil enclave outside Washington and nursed you through your Dream Dance. After your fosterage and Saining, you took your place as a full member of House Ailil.

In the mortal world, you also managed to get a degree in journalism so that you could pursue the process of "making" the news.

Now you travel throughout the world, reporting the news as you see it and sating yourself on the rush of twisting "facts" into a story of your own devising. You relish the company of other journalists, who act as your Dreamers; if one or two of them fall by the wayside, products of apparent burnout — well, everyone knows the risks of a high-stress career.

Your travels also give you the opportunity to visit other members of your house throughout Concordia and overseas as well. You serve House Ailil by carrying messages and keeping distant members of the house in touch with one another. So far, you haven't been trusted with sensitive information, but you have high hopes that your faithful service will soon gain you access to the real power within your house, perhaps even within the Shadow Court itself.

Roleplaying Hints: Act the part of the inquiring reporter when among mortals. Among other fae, present your best face to everyone. Use your charm and persuasive skills to ferret out information from others. You realize that concepts such as "truth" and "the facts" are flexible — play fast and loose with both. You aim to insinuate yourself into the confidence of the leaders of House Ailil and the Shadow Court. To do so, you need to distinguish yourself. Look for opportunities to do so.

Equipment: press pass, expensively casual clothes, cell phone, think pad.

Pour L'Amour et Liberté
The Book of Houses 2

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Court: Unseelie
Legacies: Outlaw/Wayfarer
House: Ailil

Seeming: Wilder
Kith: Sidhe
Motley:

Attributes

Physical

Strength ●●○○○
Dexterity ●○○○○
Stamina ●●●○○

Social

Charisma ●●●●○
Manipulation ●●●●○
Appearance ●●○○○

Mental

Perception ●●●○○
Intelligence ●●●○○
Wits ●●○○○

Abilities

Talents

Alertness ○○○○○
Athletics ○○○○○
Brawl ○○○○○
Dodge ●○○○○
Empathy ●●●○○
Intimidation ●○○○○
Kenning ●●○○○
Persuasion ●●○○○
Streetwise ●○○○○
Subterfuge ●●●○○

Skills

Crafts ●○○○○
Drive ●○○○○
Etiquette ●○○○○
Firearms ○○○○○
Leadership ○○○○○
Melee ○○○○○
Performance ●○○○○
Security ○○○○○
Stealth ●○○○○
Survival ○○○○○

Knowledges

Computer ●●○○○
Enigmas ●○○○○
Gremayre ●○○○○
Investigation ●●○○○
Law ●●○○○
Linguistics ○○○○○
Lore ○○○○○
Medicine ○○○○○
Politics ●●●○○
Science ○○○○○

Advantages

Backgrounds

Contacts ●●○○○
Dreamers ●●○○○
Resources ●●○○○
Retinue ●○○○○
_____ ○○○○○

Arts

Chicanery ●●○○○
Wayfare ●○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○

Realms

Actor ●●●○○
Prop ●●○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○

Other Traits

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Glamour

● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑

Willpower

● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑

Ravaging/Musing Threshold

Banality

● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑

Health

		Real	Chimerical
Bruised		❑	❑
Hurt	-1	❑	❑
Injured	-1	❑	❑
Wounded	-2	❑	❑
Mauled	-2	❑	❑
Crippled	-5	❑	❑
Incapacitated		❑	❑

Birthrights/Frailties

Experience: ☐

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House Leanhaun: By Dreams Afflicted

History is a pageant and not a philosophy.

— Augustine Birrell, *Obiter Dicta, Second Series: The Muse of History*

Star Crossed

"She's beautiful. Who is she?"

Declan Ap Gwydion nodded toward the lovely girl in midnight blue. Her sprightly dancing belied her fragile frame.

"I've never seen her before, my lord," Oberti's eyes lit with appreciation, his rugged satyr's face creased in a lopsided smile. "But I could find out for you."

"Do that, my friend. Perhaps she's House Eiluned as she favors such dark raiment. Meanwhile, I think I'll ask her to dance."

Lyn saw him moving across the dance floor toward her, his smile welcoming, if a little tentative. *He likes*

what he sees, does he? She answered his smile shyly. *And I like that touch of vulnerability*, she mused. *I just need to make certain he doesn't distract me....*

Several dances later, somewhat breathless, he escorted her to the balcony for a break, then moved to fetch them some mead. She gazed out over the gardens below, softly lit with colorful lights. She wondered at her reaction to her handsome, mysterious dancing partner. *He's distracting me and I don't have the luxury of a romance right now. I've got to remember this party is just an excuse for me to get close enough.*

"Don't worry, Lyn, everyone will be concerned with the revelry." Her trainer assured her. "No one's going to remember anything later except their own concerns. If anyone *does* notice you, they'll assume you're Eiluned — or maybe Ailil. It's your first big assignment for the Pact, it's only natural that you'd be nervous. After the dance, wait until the guests return to their rooms. Your target will be in the first room on the left past the grand staircase. We want the Gwydion taken out, but if you can't do it and get away, just leave. We'll get him later. Are you sure you're fully committed? Can you do it?"

"Kill one of those over-inflated Seelie who murder our kind whenever they find us? Don't be foolish! I'll have his heart out before he even knows I'm there."

Who was I trying to impress? she wondered now, then murmured to herself, "I can do it."

"Lyn?"

She jumped guiltily, startled from her thoughts by his return.

She's as shy as a deer, Declan thought, smiling. Her dark eyes met his.

Oberti signaled Declan near the end of the revel, beckoning him into a shadowed corner.

"My lord, I've spent most of the party asking about her and I think I know who she is."

"So do I. Her name is Lyn," Declan said.

"Her other name is Leanhaun, my lord," Oberti told him, "She's Unseelie."

Grateful that a satyr had distracted Declan, allowing her to get away and hide from him, Lyn nonetheless regretted his absence. *It's been far too long since I met anyone who attracted me like that*, she sighed.

She had felt the connection as soon as they touched, the spark that some Leanhaun experienced when meeting the person who would become their greatest love. *Why did I meet him now? Why, when I have to prove myself to the Pact?*

Lyn slipped down the darkened hallway, moving toward the shadows under the grand staircase. She felt along the wall until she located the door and gingerly tried the knob. The door whispered open and she stepped inside.

He turned the ring in his hands, moodily watching the play of the single light in the depths of its faceted jewel. *How can I feel this way about an Unseelie, especially one I've just met? Why have I never reacted like this to anyone else?*

A slight noise from the doorway made him look up. Framed in the doorway stood Lyn. She held a slender dagger before her, its cold menace radiating outward toward him.

"Lyn?"

"*You're* the Gwydion?" *No!! Not him, I can't do this!* The dagger wavered in her hand, its cold iron nearly burning her even through the heavy shielding of the glove she wore.

He stood and moved toward her slowly, hand extended, the ring in his palm glinting. She held the dagger out, more as if fending him off than threatening him.

"Yes," he said, "I'm the Gwydion. And you're House Leanhaun. Do you seek my life?"

She met his eyes, looking deeply as if searching for his soul, then tossed the dagger aside. Reaching for the ring, she said, "Yes, as much of it and for as long as you'll entrust it to me."

My Lord,

As you suspected, the Gwydion does indeed hold a tome that betrays our house's most arcane secrets. The foolish girl who put it in the knight's hands has disappeared, though I have sent out several Riders of the Midnight Pact in search of her. I do not believe her paramour has yet to read all that the book holds within it, and I mean to give him no chance to do so. Curiously, his human form suffers an affliction similar to our own, but I have no illusions that this makes him sympathetic to our woes. I shall wait until he rests, then recover the tome and make certain he does not pass on anything he has learned to anyone else ae particularly any others of his odiously self-righteous house Never fear, my lord. My hand is steady and my aim true In the service of our house, I have never failed.

Yours,

Sir Strallach, Captain, Knights Protector

Warrior of the Midnight Pact

P.S. All too easy, my lord. Herein I enclose the lady's letter and the tome for your perusal

– S.

My darling

I won't insult either your intelligence or mine by pretending you do not know what I ae and all the others of my house ae am. I had hoped that you would understand. We are alike, you and I. It is only your pride that keeps you from joining me and taking what you need. When you yourself suffer as I do, how can you condemn me for wanting to live? In this horrid time, when we know not what we sidhe go to when we pass onward from this mortal world, can you blame me for grasping as much time as I can?

It is easy for you. You are a warrior ae strong, fierce and unafraid. I am merely a courtesan, a decoration, a poor thing whose only talent lies in her exquisite taste and charm. What will I do when my beauty fades, destroyed in only a few short months if I do not answer my terrible hunger for Glamour?

Though it is against all the oaths of my house, I cannot bear to see you turn away from me in disgust and hatred. How ironic that you say I am incapable of real love. By placing this account into your hands, I betray all others for love of you. My only plea is this: Promise me that you will read all that lies within before you condemn me. Do with it what you will once you understand all. I pray you will not judge me with your head, but see me with your heart and weep for my benighted and accursed people rather than seeking their destruction.

Yours always,

Lady Arvinialyndryia, your own "Lyri"

History of House Leanhaun

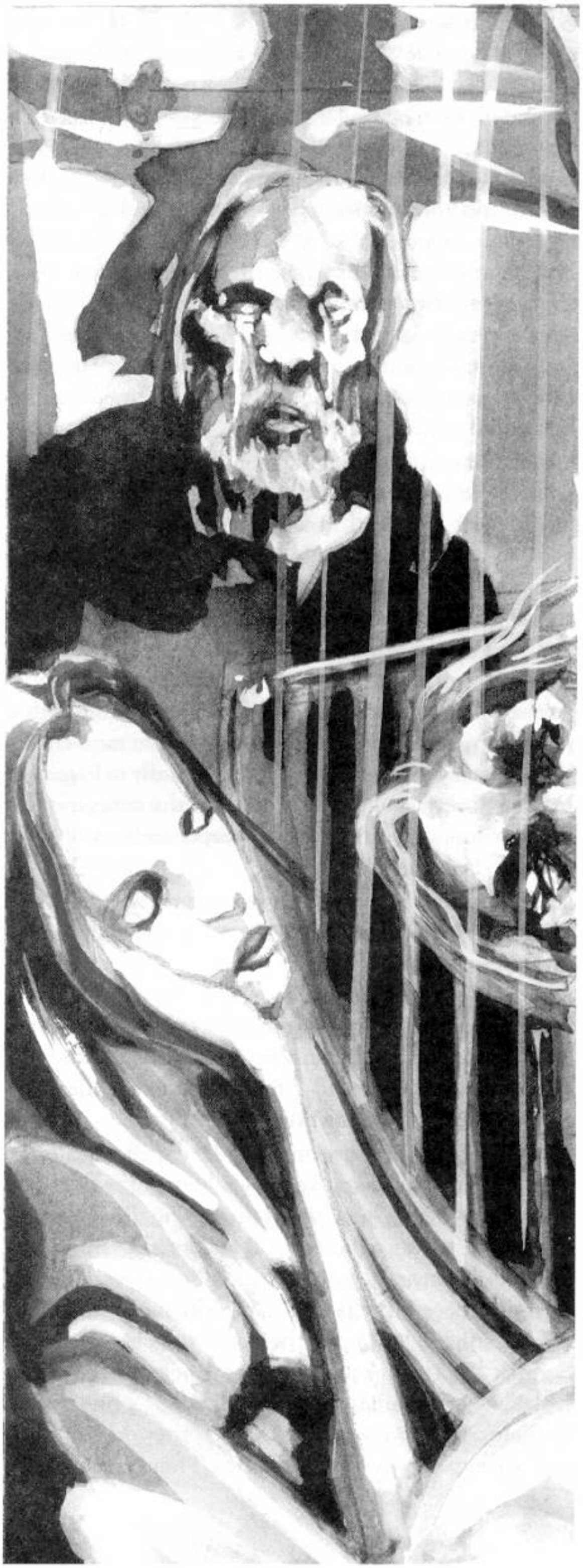
Herein I have set forth the history of my house as it was told to me. I make no claim that it is the exact truth, for truth has a way of changing itself to fit the perceptions of those who claim to know it. So far as I have been able to verify the accounts, however, through consulting both oracular sources and those commoners and nobles who remember the times before, this is something akin to the truth. Names, dates, places, what do these really matter? It is enough to know that once we were so much more than we are now. When you have read all, you will see why we do as we must and why that is not necessarily such a horror to our kind as many would have you believe.

The Mythic Age

In the time of sun-kissed innocence and deeds of glorious valor known as the Mythic Age, mighty ones known as the Tuatha de Danaan ruled the land. The Isle of Hibernia was a fair place, full of life and song and beauty. How then could the youngest daughter born to the Tuatha be otherwise? Leanhaun, they named her æ "Lark's song," for her voice was pure and clear, her hair like silvered sunlight, and her face as fair as the dawn itself. The very air around her took on the scent of the soft, white roses she wore tucked into her hair. Free-spirited as any wild thing, Leanhaun raced the deer in the forests and rode her faerie steed pell-mell along the clifftops overlooking the mighty sea. And yet she also loved to sit quietly in the great hall playing easeful tunes upon her harp æ each note filling the air with joyous sound. It was said she could mend troubled hearts with her voice alone or bring healing to the wounded through potent songs plucked from the strings of her harp.

All who knew her loved her and Leanhaun returned their love with deep affection, but not with either heart's devotion or love's fiery passion. This troubled many among the sidhe. They asked themselves, is our fair, white rose merely innocent in the ways of love or does she lack some essential passion? How shall we awaken her sensuality without destroying her purity?

No house now admits to remembering this part of the mythic dream, and yet it happened. Sidhe from all the green fields of Hibernia and even the Isle of the Mighty



came together to contest for the right to be the one chosen to guide Leanhaun in the ways of love and passion. The lady herself was asked to travel far in search of a potent herb needed by the healers of her household. She easily consented and was not at home when her suitors met to decide her mate. For three days, they fought and told stories, created poems and presented their best arguments why they should be chosen as Leanhaun's lover. It is said that the Giant's Dance came about when they left the playing pieces where they fell after one such contest. Though the Fiona argued mightily that one of their house should be Leanhaun's instructor in love, in the end, that honor went to Finellia of the household of King Liam.

Sky-blue eyes shining with triumph, her long auburn hair plaited back in a warrior's knot and clothed in her finest jewels and gown, Finellia greeted Leanhaun at the door upon her return. Leanhaun was surprised, a little dismayed that so many had taken such pains to provide a teacher for her and not a little curious to discover the new knowledge Finellia imparted to her. For her part, Finellia's instruction, while tender and loving, was thorough in all particulars and left Leanhaun shaking with a passion she had never known before. In that moment, as Leanhaun lay in her arms, Finellia fell madly in love with her charge. Leanhaun thought she felt the same, mistaking new-found pleasure for the deeper feelings of love. The two became inseparable.

Those who saw them together remarked upon the change in Leanhaun. She retained her sweetness and loveliness, yet now they were like outer garments covering a fiery passion within. She still loved the whirl and excitement of court and attended as often as possible, basking in the compliments heaped upon her, and the congratulations accorded Finellia for her excellent instruction of the sidhe's white rose.

Finellia fell more and more under a spell of jealousy, though, as she sought to keep Leanhaun away from any others who might claim her attention. Finally, she could not stand to come to court at all and lured Leanhaun to undertake another pursuit with promises of wonders to be seen elsewhere. Finellia took her to a human enclave and bade Leanhaun look upon their craftsmen at their work. Secretly, hiding her presence from their sight, Finellia had come many times to the human village. She basked in their creativity, watching them as they crafted intricate jewelry or wove bright fabrics. Though their work was not so fine as that of the fair folk, it held a vibrancy born of their shorter life spans, and Finellia loved them for it. Now she sought to share her delight with Leanhaun.

As her final offering for the day, Finellia took Leanhaun to a snug cottage near the edge of the village. From within came the sounds of a harp.

"This one I love best of all," Finellia whispered to her companion, "Edann is the king's bard, but he often comes back to the village of his birth to play for his aging mother."

Leanhaun looked upon Edann and listened to the song he plucked from the small harp he held as he sat near his mother's bed. The woman lay pale and trembling, an ancient hag held to life by the merest thread. Edann himself was not a young man. His hair and beard were streaked with silver, yet his hands upon the harp were strong and browned by the sun and his eyes were kind. He whispered soothing words in time to his playing and Leanhaun recognized that he was trying to ease his mother's passage from the world. In that instant, as her whole spirit cried out for his pain, Leanhaun truly fell in love.

Slipping from the shadows beside Finellia, she entered the house and moved gracefully to the bard's side.

"No! Leanhaun, it is forbidden for you to interfere in human death!" Finellia cried, but too late. Leanhaun touched Edann's shoulder, then sank to the floor beside him.

"Play!" she commanded, ensorcelling him with her beauty and longing. Almost forgetting his dying mother, inspired by the touch of faerie Glamour upon his very soul, the bard began a new tune. As if torn from the depths of his heart, it spoke of youth and passion, love and loss, the dread starvation of Winter and the bright renewal of Spring. In it was the cry of the newborn babe, the laughter of children, the weeping of young widows and the sighing rattle of aged breath, all spoken in the pure voice of the harp. Never had such a song been heard among humankind. The whole village gathered around the house of the bard's mother to witness his farewell to her.

Finellia looked upon Edann's face and saw that he was lost in love with Leanhaun; she looked at Leanhaun and saw that love returned tenfold to the mortal she had touched. Then the old woman cried out a final time and lay still. The song stopped. The bard's hands fell from the

harp strings and came to rest by his side. Chest heaving, eyes staring at nothing, he sat on the stool, open-mouthed and drooling. His eyes were utterly empty. As the song ceased, Leanhaun looked up. She saw her new love's face and great fear ran through her. She shook him and the harp slid from his lap and clanged upon the floor, the strings ringing with discord.

Finellia rushed in and grasped her arm, swinging Leanhaun to her feet.

"We must go," she cried. "You have betrayed us all!" With that, she pulled Leanhaun after her even as the village folk began to gather stones and weapons, whispering of dread faerie magics and the stealing of souls. The two sidhe ran until they were far from the village.

Finellia finally stopped and turned to face Leanhaun, who still wept for the loss of Edann.

"I thought you merely innocent, Leanhaun, but you are reckless and heedless to all save your own desires. It is true I bear part of the blame for this for bringing you to see the humans and for that I will never forgive myself. My jealousy brought us to this. But you have done that which is beyond forgiveness. You destroyed one of those whose dreams give us shape and sustenance and for that, I curse you.

"I curse you with the decay of all you hold most dear. I strike from you your youth and beauty, your innocence and joy. May you become like that ancient crone who lay before you in the cottage! May you be cursed with eternal hunger for that which you most need, and may the consuming of it bring you no lasting fulfillment. May you always long for beauty, yet blight it by your touch and may your love be as bitter poison to anyone given its taste. I curse thee, Leanhaun and all of thy lineage until the stars weep blood and the very earth grows cold beneath your feet. This I bind to you with the power of the Dreaming and my own death. Let it be so!"

And with those words, Finellia drew forth her dagger and sliced it across her own throat. She fell, bleeding, as Leanhaun sank to the ground under the onslaught of the curse laid upon her by a princess of the House of Liam. The white rose she wore in her hair turned deepest black.

After a time, a weeping Leanhaun took word back that Finellia had slain herself. The others, knowing of Finellia's jealousy and possessiveness, believed she killed herself for love of Leanhaun. The tragic tale soon found its way to most sidhe halls, though Leanhaun herself never again spoke of it. Feeling that it might cheer her sadness, the other great houses granted to Leanhaun the right to call her household noble and take their place among the others. As the House Leanhaun device she chose a green field for her homeland of Hibernia, a golden harp for Edann, and the shameful reminder of the black rose that grew among the strings of the harp and cut them with the thorns of love.

But the Dreaming interprets blessings and curses in its own way. Finellia's jealousy tainted her righteous anger over the mortal's Ravagement, twisting the meaning of her curse. Rather than merely inflicting torment on Leanhaun, it made it imperative for her to feed off human creativity if she wished to retain her youth and life, and all her house became subject to the same malediction. Rather than protecting humans, Finellia's curse made it far more likely that the House of Leanhaun would prey upon them æ and in exactly the same manner as Leanhaun had.

While the glories and beauties of the Long Days lasted, we forgot the other portion of the curse, for it seemed unlikely that the conditions under which we might be freed of it would ever come to pass. Finellia's fears did not materialize then; there were no humans who rose against the fae. Yet deep within their hearts, fear of our power took root, nourished by an empty-eyed bard who wasted away within days of being touched with faerie Glamour.

And so we endured, keeping our house's secret locked within and spreading throughout Europe in search of those who might provide us with what we needed to survive. We were not the only cause of the rift between mortal and fae, but Leanhaun's unthinking act certainly served as one of the catalysts that brought about the Sundering.

The Sundering

Not even the greatest loremaster among the fae can tell you how the Sundering came about. I have spoken of one incident, yet there must have been many more such to bring the Long Days of Dreaming to an end. Among the sidhe it is said that mortals began demanding what we had shared freely in the past, that they sought to capture the fair folk to hold them hostage in return for concessions or to force them to serve their human captors. Certainly, there are plenty of tales of selkie wives held in

thrall by those who managed to steal their skins. What is usually not told so often among our kind are the tales of faerie kings and queens stealing mortals away from their families to serve as playthings or servants among the fae. Do not think to shirk your own part in this, beloved, for House Gwydion was ever as much to blame as any other for this behavior.

Nothing particularly impressive or noteworthy heralded the Sundering until it was far advanced. It began as little more than a distancing, a growing distrust between mortals and fae. Certainly, House Leanhaun's preying upon the mortals to preserve our own lives did not help matters. Still, we tried to give something in return for what we took. Nonetheless, the new church that worshipped the white Christ condemned us as demons and devils sent to torment and seduce mortals to lead them into Infernalism and eternal damnation. Nothing could have been further from the truth, but as the mortals began to believe these lies, fae and humankind moved away from one another, creating a gulf between them not easily bridged.

No others but those of our house knew of our curse in those days. We were noted for our grace and beauty, and our discernment in finding and nourishing the talents of potent dreamers. If many of those so chosen created no more than one grand work or died untimely, well, such things happened all too often in those days of violence, disruption and pestilence. Humans had few defenses against the many perils of their lives. Few suspected our true role, instead pitying us that so many of those we chose were inexplicably blighted.

Leanhaun herself became ever more withdrawn during the long ages as the Sundering unwound, twisting its slow, inexorable way toward the Shattering. Others whispered that she grieved still for Finellia. We of her household knew that she found it ever harder to take the bright promise of a mortal, stoke it to fever pitch for one perfect work, then engorge herself on the Glamour thus released while the mortal fell hollow-eyed and dying at her feet.

She aged horribly as she sought some way to wean herself from her overpowering need. Her bright hair became brittle and lifeless, ripping from her scalp in tangled clots. Her eyes clouded with cataracts and dripped rheumy fluids onto her withered cheeks. Her skin dried like parchment, folding into wattles of flesh pocked with livid bruises and spidery veining as her very blood dried up within her. Her frame bent and twisted, turning her into a hunched creature unrecognizable as anything but a hag. As her bones collapsed upon themselves and her organs shut down their functions, she suffered unbelievable agony. A dead woman who still walked was Leanhaun æ a corpse whose immortality denied her the ease of death. All because she could no longer stand to harm those whose dreams had shaped her.

In the end, we granted her mercy. Her household gathered around Leanhaun and bid her farewell. We did not blame her for her actions so long past, for we knew she had only the best intentions. We saved our hatred for the self-righteous bitch of House Liam who brought death to the deathless with her jealousy and anger. We have never condemned Liam as the other houses did because of some momentary stupidity concerning mortals. We know the true depth of oath breaking from Finellia's broken vows to protect and tutor Leanhaun. The mother of our house only did what her caring heart bid her to do; her punishment æ and ours æ far outweighed any crime she may have committed.

We brought her to the very gate into the Dreaming, fearing to take her ravaged body any further, lest we corrupt the Dreaming itself. There we lay her down upon a patch of the green earth she had treasured. Our bards took up the song of sadness upon their harps and pipes and our youngest maidens arrayed her as best they could, twining white roses into her brittle hair. As one, our warriors drew their swords and struck so that none afterward could say that he or she had been the death of Leanhaun. And as she died, the roses blackened, all except one pure, white bud that lay upon her breast. We hope her spirit crossed into the Dreaming where it found peace and ease at last. In pledge of that hope, our house still keeps the rose æ as pure and snowy as the day it was first plucked — as one of our greatest treasures.

And we learned one more thing from Leanhaun's sacrifice æ never, never to regret.

The Shattering

So it was that Leanhaun was not with us to lead us when the Shattering came. We had grown used to the lethargic pace of the Sundering. In some places, it's true, the Sundering was more violent and sudden (especially as it built toward the Shattering), but we had not felt its touch upon us as heavily as we might have. Adapting to the difficulty of moving from the waking world to the

Dreaming, we forgot that this slow pace might quicken at any time. Thus, many of House Leanhaun were caught by surprise when the Shattering came. Most of us had only seconds to make our choice: Would we return to the Dreaming, cutting ourselves off from the dreamers whose creations kept us young and alive, or would we stay behind locked within prisons of Glamour that might æ or might not æ sustain us?

To return to the Dreaming would be the ultimate torture for us, for we did not know if we could draw what we needed from other fae. The Dreaming itself would sustain us somewhat, but we would age even as Leanhaun did, and who knew how long we would be trapped? But would it be any better cocooned by whatever Glamour we could muster in the space of a few moments? How long would such an enclave last if we had to feed off the Glamour itself to sustain ourselves? Even then, it would merely keep us alive; decay and the foul breath of unstoppable aging would stalk us wherever we fled. Aging was inescapable, but we were immortal æ we could not die unless we deliberately took our own lives or fell to another's killing stroke. To stay or to go? Either way, we were damned.

They say the Shattering happened as the Black Plague swept across Europe. In its wake, the world changed. Never again would mortals surrender to dreams of hope untainted by the horror of death and the knowledge that they could be taken by the plague at any time. No one knew the Black Death's cause; many claimed to know the cure.

"Drive out the demons! Repent! Believe only in what the Church tells you and God's punishment shall be lifted," cried the priests. Mortals, beaten to the point of exhaustion by horrors and losses too awful to contemplate, not knowing how else to relieve the unendurable, turned their focus to mere survival and a hopeless fervor for the Church. And the world narrowed, minds constricted, and the Dreaming broke apart from this horrid new reality. Our world cracked and died. Some of us were torn to shreds by the chill winds of Banality as they roared across the breadth of Europe. Some chose to remain on Earth, and of those we have no knowledge. They disappeared into the mists of time and in most cases, we have even forgotten their names. Some say they yet remain, caught in pockets of Glamour that lie between the worlds, driven mad by centuries of imprisonment.

The rest of us crossed over the crumbling trods, escaping into Arcadia. Thankfully, most of us remember little of that time. Most sidhe curse their inability to recall Arcadia. We see it as a blessing among too many tortures. While we could indeed inspire other fae to such heights that we could feed from the Glamour they produced, doing so while remaining unnoticed was a virtual impossibility. I don't claim that it never happened; six hundred years is a long time to suffer without respite — even when time flows differently. But it could not have been done often, or those whose kin we preyed upon would have annihilated our house.

My own memories of that time are confused, my dreams haunted by visions of myself and of my kin. Old and broken, I see myself crawling painfully, bones shattering as I make my agonized way along a crystalline hall bedecked with exquisite tapestries. Delectable foods lie untasted, for I have no teeth to chew and my tongue rots within my mouth. I cannot rest æ even upon the softest bed æ for festering sores cover my body. I awaken from these dreams screaming and vowing, "Never again."

The Interregnum

We have only the word of those commoners loyal to our house for what happened during the time we were away. What holdings we had, we left to their care; Nor did we begrudge them the use of what we left behind. You seem surprised to know that we have commoners who pledge themselves to our service. But you forget, most Kithain know nothing of our practices. What they *do* know is our policy toward commoners. Since the laying of the curse, it has been House Leanhaun's business to cultivate any friends we can, be they noble or commoner, Seelie or Unseelie. Our best defense against eventual discovery is to bind as many defenders to us as possible. It would have been foolish in the extreme to ignore commoners, who are far more numerous than the nobles. In any case, we recruited commoners and rewarded them well for their services, and so we trusted that they would care for our holdings when we left for Arcadia æ after all, they were the commoners' holdings, too.

We have no memories of those times save of our own agony locked away in Arcadia, and even those recollections are mercifully indistinct. Amusing, isn't it, that the other houses think of us as sybaritic weaklings without the discipline and will to act as muses? You believe we ravage because it is easier to do so. My love, if you only knew the self-restraint and iron-willed determination we exhibited throughout centuries of our enforced stay in Arcadia, you would tremble for the eventual fate of those houses who condemn us. Do not forget the true face of the Leanhaun: We endure; we survive and those who earn our enmity should beware.

Records of the centuries we missed tell the story of the mortals' gradual rise to rule their world rather than being ruled by it. As mortals changed and became more confident, so too did their dreams, and those dreams were reflected in the commoners' attitudes. They had to make their own decisions, rule themselves and survive in a world that became ever more crowded and hostile to our kind. They compromised; they lived many lives in succession. We must never forget that it was the commoners who held the line against ever-encroaching Banality. The story of the Interregnum is their story, not ours.

The Return

And so the time came when the gates burst open once again, the trods that had been closed for centuries filled with light and the exodus from Arcadia began. Most of the Seelie admit that they were exiled from Arcadia and assume that the Unseelie houses suffered the same fate. Perhaps Ailil and Balor *were* sent away from "paradise." We have no knowledge whether it is true or not. It might even be that Leanhaun was exiled as well, though I do not remember being forcibly ejected and neither do most of my house. Most of us reentered the waking world in the place *we* chose, Hibernia æ our homeland. I doubt the powers in control of Arcadia would have granted us that right had we been sent forth as a punishment. Despite rumors that High Lord Eleanor offended the high king, despite the tales of slain troubadours killed to feed her Glamour-starved body on the eve of our so-called exile, I question what really happened. No sentence was passed upon me, at least none that I remember. I recall being carried as tenderly as possible by my troll guardian down the long length of the trod and to the gate. By then, there was not much left except the pain and my burning need. He stepped through the gate and I took the body of a child playing nearby while he took the flesh of that child's father.

Beloved, such rapturous sweetness it was to once again live within a body not wracked by age and decay! I can't believe that those of my accursed house did not

choose for themselves to come into the world again. It matters little if we *were* exiled, we would have left anyway, that's my point. What matters more is our shared impressions concerning Arcadia itself and why we believe we remember more than the Seelie houses or even Ailil and Balor.

You may not believe me, my love, but everything we recall points to the idea that Arcadia itself is locked in Winter. While the Seelie Kithain ruled Earth for 600 years, suppressing the sharing of power that balanced the seasons, Earth blossomed under an unending Summer. Mortals gained great insight and power, becoming more enlightened and producing amazing technological wonders. Arcadia, reflecting the opposite of events transpiring on Earth, has been held in the darkness, frozen in unchanging inactivity under the rule of the harshest Unseelie.

Oh, it may look inviting with its greenswards and crystalline trees, its diamond towers and dragon-cloud skies, the very picture of summery flowering and graciousness. But think, my love, that picture has not changed. It has hardly even wavered in 600 years. Arcadia is stagnating. It has forgotten that dreams arise from creativity, from fiery chaos, change and movement. I fear for its survival. Having fled Banality, refusing to adapt and change, we now find that we dragged Banality's dread and leaden weight behind us into the Dreaming, where it poisons Arcadia itself. We must change things here, if we are to change them there.

I can see the doubt in your eyes as you read this, beloved. What is it you cannot accept? That the Unseelie rule Arcadia? Or that it is the fault of the Seelie Court for insisting that their grasp on power never be relinquished again? My love, I understand. You yourself are so honorable that you simply believe what the leaders of your house tell you æ never thinking that they say whatever they must to make others acquiesce to their rule. But think about it, beloved. How often has the house of the falcon advocated the destruction of the Unseelie houses? Have we ever threatened them in such a manner? *We* are not the ones speaking of killing other Kithain; *They* are. And yet they claim to revere and follow the laws of the fae? They bring Banality down all the faster by their stubborn insistence on their own rule here, all while Arcadia remains a frozen, if beautiful, wasteland where Glamour is dying.

If you accept that the Unseelie may, in fact, rule in Arcadia, do you truly think they would exile those of their own court? Well, Ailil, Balor and Leanhaun are most definitely back in the waking world. That much cannot be denied. If we were exiled, why? It only makes sense if the other Unseelie, those in power in Arcadia, feared some sort of interference from the five Seelie houses and the three Unseelie who were sent out of the Dreaming. Or, perhaps, even they recognized that things could not remain in stagnation without both worlds perishing. Perhaps we are here to put a stop to the way things have been for the past six centuries. That would be irony indeed, would it not? Unseelie and Seelie cooperating to overthrow Seelie rule? And all to end Unseelie rule in Arcadia.

I find it a great pity that so few of us remember anything of Arcadia, and I wonder æ is that by design? And if so, by whose design? Is there a great purpose to our return here, and what happens if we miss our chance to accomplish it because we cannot remember what it is we were sent to do? *These* are the questions we should be asking, beloved. Whether we belong to the Seelie or Unseelie Court is irrelevant. What we need to know now is: Which side do we stand on regarding the coming of Endless Winter? And is the approach of Winter a reason for dread or celebration?

The Accordance War

There is no doubt that this was the most stupid, wasteful era of fae existence, and it came about almost totally due to Seelie pig-headedness. So many Seelie are convinced of their own superiority and fitness to rule that it never occurred to them that the commoners had ruled quite competently without them for six centuries. Consequently, they sauntered in assuming that the commoners would gladly hand back the reins of power. Further, they actually expected the commoner kith to bow to those who fled in the face of danger, leaving everyone else to fend for themselves. Worst of all, they believed that the changes made to the world during the centuries of their absence were insignificant and ought to be overthrown in favor of reestablishing feudal custom and reasserting their claim to freeholds they deserted at the time of the Shattering.

Not surprisingly, the commoners resented noble intrusions and demands. Some tried to reason with the

returning sidhe; others realized from the first that if they wanted freedom from Seelie oppression, they'd have to fight for it. That's where we fit into the picture, or rather where we *didn't*. There were two major reasons we played only a minor role in the Accordance War. We didn't have the same objectives as most of the other sidhe, and many of us were too young to take part.

We wanted our freeholds back as much as anyone else did, but we made no immediate moves to take them from their current occupants (at least *most* of us didn't). Some of us claimed lesser sites and freeholds, especially those once held by minor nobles of other houses. Since almost all the returnees from House Leanhaun returned to Hibernia while a majority of the rest of the sidhe ended up in what would become Concordia, we easily claimed sites that had been closed down and left so that only sidhe could open them. So having less reason to fight the commoners than most, we declared ourselves neutral in sidhe-commoner conflicts. A few Leanhaun might have fought alongside other nobles, especially Unseelie allies, but they were a definite minority.

Most sidhe returning from Arcadia took the bodies of teenagers or young adults. Many Leanhaun, however, wished to be as young as possible, so they would have more time before aging became a problem. During the Accordance War and similar conflicts, at least three-quarters of House Leanhaun were too young to fight. Lacking warriors enough even to adequately defend ourselves and our few freeholds, House Leanhaun discovered a way to survive and prosper.

Realizing we could little afford to make enemies of either the nobles or commoners, the leaders of the house met together and concocted the only reasonable plan for our survival. We not only declared ourselves neutral, but our freeholds as well. Then we opened them to any Kithain in need: the wounded, the abandoned and the hunted. Aside from providing sanctuary and healing for any fae who requested aid, we also allowed our halls to be used as neutral ground for peace negotiations. Though we only allowed others access to the outermost portions of our holdings, our actions during the war gained us friends on both sides. That *was* the objective, after all.

Some nobles charged that by not aligning ourselves with them we shirked our duty and made it more difficult for the nobility to come out on top. Mostly, these were the Seelie who disdained our help anyway or who knew us as Unseelie and made assumptions based on that. Others took advantage of our offer and came away from the experience feeling that our house's reputation was unfair and undeserved. Thus, we achieved our objective to stay out of the fighting while cementing new alliances and friendships that would benefit us later. I know this sounds calculating, my love, but if your own house was truly honest, it would have to admit to practical reasons behind its own actions, just as we do. In any case, the fact that we now serve many nobles as masters of revels or entertainment secretaries stems from these offers of sanctuary and succor during the war.

The Modern Era

Building on the goodwill we built during the war, we have spent most of our time in the modern era cementing relationships and strengthening our positions. While most acknowledge that we stand firmly within the Unseelie Court and that we often act as ravagers, most other fae don't really understand what it is we do. Some, in fact, fool themselves into thinking that while the house is Unseelie, most members of it are either Seelie forced into allegiance to a house we feel no identity with or at least "only a little Unseelie." This is due to concerted efforts to cover up our true activities.

We work tirelessly to build friendships and maintain webs of favors we do for other Kithain. One focus of our efforts has been to forge as many alliances as possible with commoners. We continue to speak for their rights as well as our own in the Parliament of Dreams. We swear many commoners into our house. While many hold subservient positions, those who evince talent swiftly rise within our ranks. Even those with more lowly positions are treated with respect, complimented on good performance, rewarded with dross, and treated as valued members of the house. Can Gwydion æ or even Dougal æ say as much? Further, we offer commoners far greater opportunities than Ailil or Balor. Most commoners know Ailil manipulates them and Balor wants them for test subjects and shock troops. We let them know that we depend on them to protect and support us. By appearing to be weaker, we excel. By being charming and showing empathy for them, we win the commoners' hearts.

A second focus concerns the Seelie nobles and to a lesser extent, the Unseelie houses. Many of us act as entertainers ourselves and serve both Seelie and Unseelie households as talent coordinators. We have a knack for locating promising Dreamers and introducing other

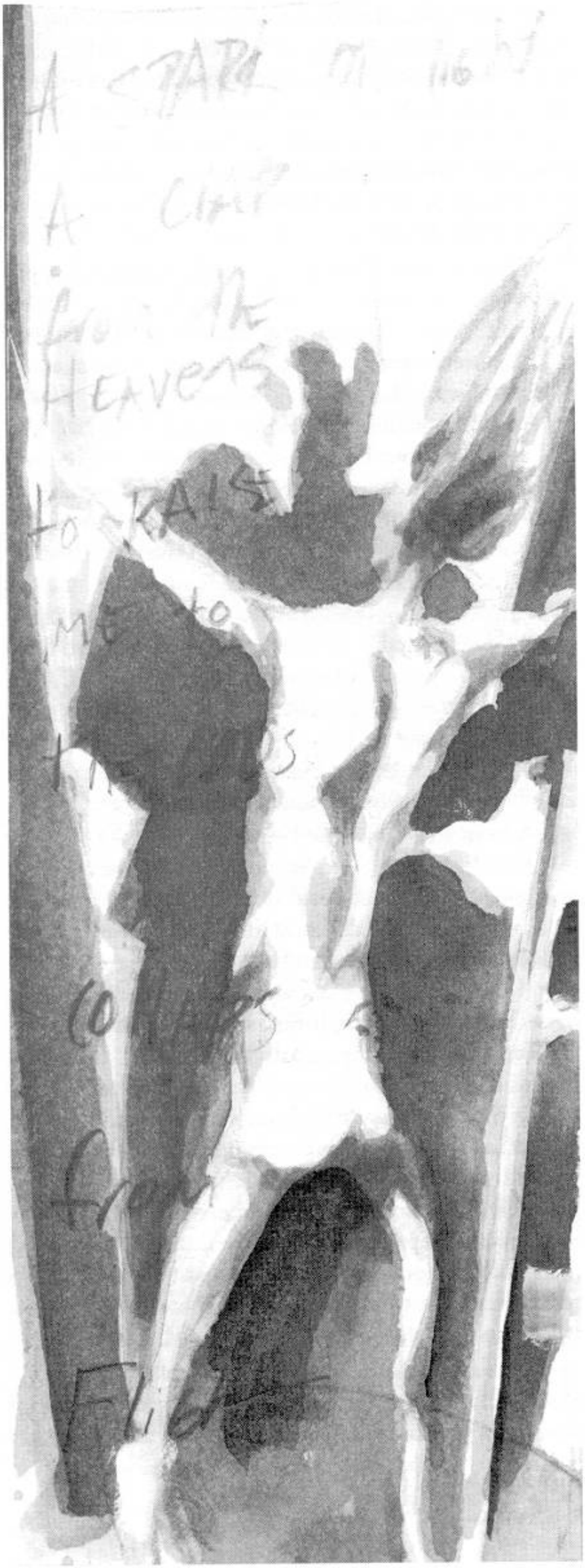
Kithain to them, thus providing our "overlords" with potent sources of Glamour and aesthetically pleasing new musicians, artists and crafters. Leanhaun sidhe are often highly valued by those they serve as masters of revels or entertainment secretaries. We aren't greedy; we don't descend upon every Dreamer ravening for her artistry. Instead, we're subtle. We give away some of the finest talents while hiding the truly elite for our own use. While the local lord and his court fawn upon those we provide for their amusement, we secretly enjoy the cream, all the while knowing the others are too busy to notice we aren't there, or to look closely at what we're doing. Why, I've even heard some nobles lustily defend us, insisting that we are not Unseelie at all, but misunderstood artists whose efforts benefit the whole Seelie Court.

As with any group, some Leanhaun do go overboard and those are the ones who blacken our house's name. While we try to instill secrecy and subtlety in all our house members, some are simply incapable of keeping things to themselves. Those are the ones who lead ravaging parties or indulge in group Rhapsodizing. Many also indulge their basest cruelty when selecting and using a victim. These idiotic Leanhaun may indulge themselves with a local lady's favorite Dreamer, or torture their chosen target unmercifully with no regard for the Dreamer's feelings at all. Such actions endanger the entire house and are usually dealt with by our own agents. Occasionally, however, we miss the signs; the Leanhaun goes too far and is hunted down by the Seelie Court. House Gwydion is not known for its leniency in such cases, though some of the other houses may opt only for banishment. Further, horrific Rhapsodizing that draws Seelie attention is usually obvious enough to alert any Dauntain in the area. Woe be to the Leanhaun caught Rhapsodizing a Dreamer by the Dauntain. It usually results in the death of the perpetrator and gains the Dauntain a staunch new ally if the Dreamer is released at an early enough stage that she can survive the experience. She can still never create again, a prospect that suits the Dauntain anyway.

Have I made it sound like our main focus is to gain enough Glamour to sustain ourselves at any cost? Good. Because that *is* our main objective. Of course, we aren't so focused on the immediate (I believe one crass young woman referred to it as "getting a fix") that we don't look to the future. On the contrary, we now believe that the modern age holds the key to our release from Finellia's curse. Our greatest efforts are put toward the ascension of the Unseelie and the assumption of power by the Shadow Court. I think I've already explained our reasons: to restore the Dreaming and Arcadia to the fullness of what they should be through bringing Endless Winter upon the Waking World.

There must be a balancing æ darkness here in opposition to a time of light for Arcadia. We believe that all of us have been returned to the Earth so that we may lead the commoners into this new era. We have all taken on mortal flesh so that we may withstand the rigors and coldness of Banality. That allows us to live and work in this realm without being consumed by it. As we draw down the cold and suppress the light here, more Glamour than ever will suffuse the Dreaming. When we stand at that point of perfect stillness in which the waking world has so little Glamour that it is like burnt-out ashes, and when the Dreaming flashes with the fiery creativity of too much Glamour to be contained, then the two will once again align opposite one another, clash together, and begin again the cycle of light and darkness, Summer and Winter, Glamour and Banality. With that perfect balance, we will be restored to what we once were before disbelief and mundanity almost destroyed us.

And in that time, the Leanhaun will take on their roles in the Great Pageant, arising to lead all fae æ nobles and commoners, Seelie and Unseelie. Our great vision will shine within the darkness, lighting our way. All will acknowledge our wisdom and bow before the great dream that restores us to the Dreaming and our true selves. No more shall we be these half-human caricatures of fae. Yes, the skies may crack open with dark despair, the world may wail in anguish and misery. Ice may enter into every heart. Does the prospect frighten you, beloved? It should. We do not undertake this course lightly. War may come upon us, and house may battle house, but in the end, dark silence will reign. From that silence, we will begin anew. We can only hope that bringing the dark days into being is the working out of Dan to place us at the time of our release from the torment of our curse: Endless Winter æ when the stars weep blood and the Earth grows cold.



The Special Art of Ravaging

Despite reports that the most frequent (or best known) form of Rhapsody involves groups or cliques, the truth is that we rarely like to share our discoveries with other Leanhaun — and even more rarely with other Kithain. Rhapsodizing is a highly personal, painfully private activity. We don't undertake it lightly, nor do we treat those with whom we enter Rhapsody with anything less than love and respect. We are all too aware that our interaction with them robs these mortals of their creative spark and, sometimes, of their lives. Perhaps some wilders of the Shadow Court copy our methods, yet few of these even have Leanhaun among them. They indulge themselves in a mockery and a parody of our true practices. They have no real understanding of how we feel and how we try to make those mortals we choose as blissful as we might in the brief moments left to them. It isn't something Leanhaun cliques do for "fun" or to tweak the noses of the Seelie. It is grim and dire necessity to us.

Of course, it can be performed as a quick and dirty stripping of the mortal's creative juices, and in *extremis*, any of us might do that. But that interaction is more a rape than a seduction. It holds no true satisfaction for us. With no poetry, no tragedy, there is no artistry in it, and for us, *that* is what makes Rhapsody so powerful. Powerful enough not only to *prevent* our aging, but to *reverse* it.

Those who say we are like the Prodigals known as vampires or the Children of Lilith are liars. Yes, it is true we feed ourselves at the expense of the mortals we inspire. But we *do* inspire them! We work at our relationships, embroiling ourselves in the pains and triumphs of our chosen paramours. We give much for what we receive, occasionally even loving particular mortals so fiercely that we can hardly bear to Rhapsodize them. What can I tell you of knowing that you must have what only a talented and loving mortal can give you, knowing that you will perish without it, yet you cannot continue what you have begun because the grief of losing him is too great? This soft-heartedness leads to even greater loss, however, for once begun, Rhapsody follows its own course. Cease providing

inspiration, stop seeing the Dreamer, and he does not recover from that touch upon him. Instead, he flounders impotently, lost and unable to eat or sleep, rest or create. The Glamour burns within such a Dreamer, tormenting him, until you once again take up the reins to guide him in his creation. Perhaps you find this worse than if we had merely stolen what we need as the Children of Lilith do. We feel it may be our only saving grace.

Perhaps the best way to explain what we actually do and how we really feel is to share with your our rules governing our relationships with those we Rhapsodize.

Rhapsodic Love, Leanhaun Style

Because of our curse, we have developed a unique perspective on love. The following list comprises our thoughts and feelings on this most passionate emotion.

• Choose Only Those Who Want Your Attentions

Those we choose to Rhapsodize have only a short time to create. Many of them die. We know and accept this. Although most fae do not believe us, we Leanhaun have a sixth sense for those who want to be with us at any cost. Some artists need our love and inspiration to bring out what they feel is inside themselves. They instinctively know that we will provide what they need. They know what we ask in return and they discount the price. They want so desperately to create a masterpiece, to be loved by someone who inspires them to greatness, that they are willing to trade anything — including their lives — for it.

• Give Your Love and Inspiration Unconditionally

Because we know the mortality rate of those we Rhapsodize, when we are involved with a mortal Dreamer in this fashion, we give that person our full attention. They give everything they are to us; the least we can do is give a little of our time in return. Aside from respecting our Dreamers, this rule also encourages us to become as enthralled with those we Rhapsodize as they are with us. The greater our love for them, in fact, the greater the creation and the sweeter the Glamour. Thus, if we want the most effective Glamour, we must give of ourselves, truly feeling love for our victims. Such a commitment means that we lay ourselves open time and again to the agony of losing those we love.

• Never Regret

Although we know we will suffer when our chosen Dreamer succumbs to our Rhapsody, we have learned not to let this affect our actions. Unless we have just met the potential target and invested no real energy in the relationship, she cannot escape once enmeshed in the Rhapsody. There is little use in postponing the inevitable. Nonetheless, many of us do, stretching out the time we have with a particularly beloved Dreamer. In the end, this hurts both them and us more than if we had been completely cold-hearted. Worse than this, some Leanhaun, like our house's founder, come to despise what they do so much that they refuse to Rhapsodize anyone ever again. We have all seen what happens when we let regret or guilt dictate our actions. So no regrets æ ever.

What a pity, my love, that your disapproval has led me to disregard this all-important tenet!

Leanhaun Society

Few Leanhaun enclaves exist outside of Hibernia. We tend to scatter into dozens of freeholds controlled by other houses, Seelie ones, if possible. Disappearing into service to another house allows us protective coloration that we desperately need. It has always amused me that when we join a Seelie household, it simply accepts that we must be Seelie as well. Even those who don't trust us initially are rarely given the opportunity to observe what we do when outside their freeholds. By distracting them, always maintaining proper decorum and acting in all ways as though we follow the tenets of the Seelie code, we maintain our positions and defuse rumors about ourselves. Further, we can usually find out the freeholds' defenses and weaknesses. Making friends among the freeholds' courtiers also allows us to gradually change their minds about the Unseelie cause and our visions of Endless Winter. For the most part these are individual efforts, but each serves to further our house's goals.

Those freeholds we do rule tend to be havens for the disaffected, whether sidhe or commoner. They are also places renowned for taste and elegance. We cultivate our image as seductive, gracious artists whose main talent lies in finding inspired geniuses and cultivating them. We are mysterious and compelling to those we Rhapsodize, evoking all their fantasies of the perfect dream lover. We hope most Kithain see us that way too. As many fae visit our freeholds, we can only suppose we are successful in this.

While we still offer sanctuary to those in need, we never let those who aren't of our household see the true functioning of our holdings. That would break whatever illusions they have of us! Hidden from Seelie eyes, we train for the inevitable conflict that will precede the coming of Endless Winter. For now, that training mostly focuses on preparing our various house members and allies in infiltration techniques, and helping them to assume their parts in the Great Pageant. Those with the ability learn martial skills, cantrip use, tactics, and how to assess an enemy's weakness. We also train our childlings to appreciate craftworks and art of all sorts so that we can more readily discover which arts best feed their need for Glamour.

Within the deepest reaches of our freeholds, we can finally let down our guard. There we drop the masks we show to all others and reveal our true selves to one another. It is a great irony of our house that most of us don't truly like other Leanhaun. Perhaps it's because we all compete for Glamour and count our successes in our lack of aging. To outsiders, we seem little more than an appearance-driven, brittle group, far too concerned with ourselves, and quite shallow. When among our own, however, we speak freely even when we mistrust each others' motives, for we are the only others who really understand what we endure. So while we don't like each other, we support and encourage one another because no one else will. Those who mistreat one of the Leanhaun do so at their peril, for if that mistreatment is discovered, all Leanhaun rise against those who harmed one of ours. It may not be an obvious attack, but from that time on, we work to undermine whatever they support, destroy their reputations and bring all they hold dear to ruin. Others don't understand how we can feel so fiercely protective of house members we don't even like; to us, it is obvious: Right or wrong, our house comes first. If I did not believe that you might be able to use the knowledge that I give you to help my house, I could never betray them by these revelations. If you remember nothing else, remember this: We know that only another Leanhaun can understand; only another Leanhaun can be trusted to avenge the wrongs done us.

Organization

On the surface of things, House Leanhaun appears to have very little organization at all. This is deceptive and comes about because most of us live within (or near) freeholds held by other houses. Most other changelings never ask what we do when we are not flittering at court or searching out new Dreamers. They might be surprised by the answers if we did tell them — which, of course, we won't.

High Lord Eleanor

We acknowledge High Lord Eleanor as the leader of the house. She is our most visible member and our delegate to the Parliament of Dreams. Since so many sidhe of other houses owe her favors, the prejudice of being Unseelie doesn't affect her. Whenever our house reaches a point where it cannot agree on a course of action at the regional level, High Lord Eleanor either calls a High Council or makes the decision. Once she has ruled on a matter, no more discussion occurs. We abide by whatever she declares will be our house's position. As

she is both canny and wise, her rulings usually reflect what is best for the house and for the majority of individuals within the house.

Naturally, there are some within the house who would dispute this. We allow for formal duels of challenge. Any Leanhaun who wishes may challenge the High Lord's authority or her ruling on a single subject if such a person is willing to risk herself in a duel to prove her case. Chimerical weaponry is always used in such duels, and should the challenger win, she could demand a new hearing and ruling from the High Lord. In an extreme case, the challenger might even force the High Lord to step down as house leader, but the challenger would have to be of sufficient rank to take over that position. To my knowledge, few (if any) challengers have ever won a duel against the High Lord. She is represented in such battles by her champion, Sir Tairngrim, who has sworn never to lose a battle he fights for her.

You may believe that these challenges are of little consequence, but the loser is drained of Glamour and left to fend for herself. Keep in mind that our particular affliction makes this a real horror for us. If the loser has no friends nearby to bring her back to herself, she could age and die without ever again realizing her true self. Challengers who lose and who survive and return to themselves must abide by the High Lord's decision from then on. They are not allowed to challenge any of the High Lord's rulings again for a year and a day. We adjudicate challenges to other leaders' rulings in the same way.

Ruling Councils

Directly beneath the High Lord in authority, the High Council is responsible for helping formulate house policies and deciding house responses to threats against us. Taken as a whole, it can outvote the High Lord. She may still declare that her will override the High Council by fiat, but she rarely makes such an unpopular move. As she has the right to overrule its decisions, the High Council has the right to remove Eleanor from her position as High Lord. Neither side really wants that, so both the High Lord and her council move carefully when considering thwarting one another's desires.

Infrequently, those Leanhaun within each region meet to discuss house business. Usually, one or two heads of freeholds, the most respected of our bards and revels masters and a few of our historians and teachers attend such gatherings. Though semi-official when compared to the High Council, regional councils take care of most of the nuts and bolts local decisions for the house. Anything they can't handle is referred to the higher council or sent directly to the High Lord.

Other Leaders

Because so few of us reside together or hold freeholds near one another, we mostly rely on leadership from those with regional authority or charismatic individuals who earned their positions through cleverness, knowledge and wise decision-making. It's usually enough. If a decision can't be made locally, several leaders meet and attempt to reach a consensus (or at least a majority, you see, we *have* been influenced by the commoners). When that's not enough, councils are called. We look for leadership from those who prove themselves worthy of respect whether they technically hold higher rank or not. Among them are:

Heads of Freeholds

While many of the Leanhaun who rule freeholds are higher-ranking nobles, some are merely knights who have managed to assume control of abandoned sites and attract other Kithain to their courts. Although we try to make friends for ourselves, enough Seelie despise us that maintaining a freehold in the Leanhaun name takes a strong, crafty ruler. The Leanhaun who oversee freeholds constitute our second line of command. When the High Lord needs the wisdom of a High Council, she summons these leaders together. More frequently, they chair regional councils, work to disseminate information to the rest of the household, and enforce house policies. Heads of freeholds assume responsibility for finding Leanhaun entering their chrysalis and bringing them into the family, and for making certain that childlings are taught house history and practices. They oversee the day-to-day running of the freehold and court, including hearing grievances and settling disputes. Finally, since House Leanhaun is vitally interested in bringing on Endless Winter, heads of freeholds also fulfill certain ceremonial roles æ often as dedicated members of the Shadow Court.

The Rose and the Harp

These two treasure-keepers æ one Kithain, one an enchanted mortal æ hold influence with the High Coun-

cil and often participate in the council's planning sessions and decision making. Though their status as council members remains unofficial, no Leanhaun would deny them the right to speak, or fail to listen to and consider their counsel. I have included brief profiles of the Rose and the Harp in my later writings.

Bards and Revels Masters

These house members hold no actual power in terms of decision-making, yet they are usually included in local and regional councils. Their extensive knowledge of available talent in their regions and their own creative abilities make them much emulated and sought-after by wannabes, admirers, rulers and commoners, all of whom rely upon the taste and instincts of these influential Kithain. House Leanhaun relies heavily on both their bards and revels masters to disseminate information (or disinformation) about us. They serve as our chief public-relations officers by painting us in the most positive light and scoffing at the horror stories others tell of us.

More importantly, most of those who act as bards and revels masters are actually our house's best spies. Along with their misinformation duties, they also seek out other houses' secrets. Some of the more advanced operatives even conceal their house affiliation, masquerading as Fiona or Liam. They face the danger of exposure every day and we reward their dedication by making every effort to keep them well supplied with the Glamour they need. From their hard work, we have gained vital information concerning other houses, and their treasures, current policies and defenses. Further, their positions among other freeholds afford them the opportunity to sniff out discontent against the Seelie rulers and recruit converts to our side.

Historians and Teachers

Few of our intelligentsia actually fill leadership positions. They are usually included on councils because their knowledge proves valuable. Any time policies concerning teaching childlings are made, they are called in for opinions. In individual freeholds, teachers are highly valued for their willingness to instruct both childlings and newcomers of whatever age. We look to our teachers to train any mortals we enchant and to explain our policies and practices to commoners who join our house. Not to be outdone, our historians can often discover precedents for tricky situations where we have trouble forming policies. They also gather documentation concerning the centuries we were absent and attempt to reconcile what the commoners have discovered with our knowledge of the Dreaming and Endless Winter.

Knights

This is a deceptive category, for most of our lower echelon nobility don't fill leadership roles. Most don't even acknowledge that they're knights. A few extremely important house members claim to be merely knights as protective coloration. In fact, they are usually elite warriors and assassins working to protect House Leanhaun. These Knights Protector (as they are called) carry the approval of High Lord Eleanor and the High Council to act with their authority. These agents act as troubleshooters eliminating threats to the house as a whole and individuals within the house. Because they carry such sanctions, Knights Protector hold rank as if they were counts controlling major freeholds.

Noble Commoners

Some of the commoners remained loyal to our house through the Interregnum. Those few who retained access to freeholds became nobles in their own right. We didn't dispute that right when we returned. Along with select other commoners rewarded for their services to our house, these commoner nobles are usually given token seats on various councils. Two of them even sit on the High Council. While those under their direct rulership acknowledge their decisions, there are rarely enough commoner nobles to outvote the sidhe contingent on any council. Still, their votes do count and give the commoners we rule the feeling that their voices are heard.

Oaths and Bindings

Like all fae, our oaths are not only important to us, but are backed by the potency of the Dreaming. The Seelie tend to lump us in with the Ailil, who often take perverse pleasure in the breaking of their oaths, especially if they can then flaunt their new status as "forsworn." We, however, are quite careful what oaths we accept and once we accept them, we almost never break them. Notice, I did say "almost."

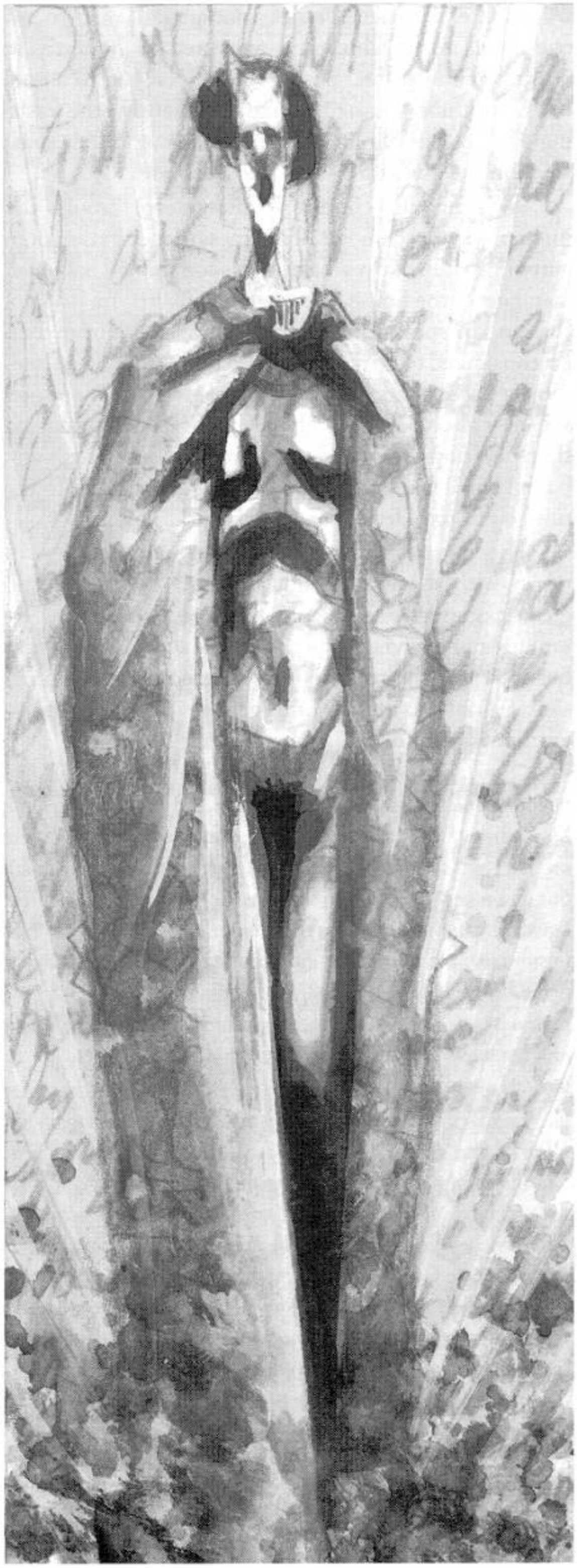
The Oath of Joining

Strange as it may seem to you, beloved, there exist some sidhe who want to join our house. Some Unseelie seek sanctuary among us, hoping we can protect them from the Seelie members of their own houses. You probably won't believe me, but we even have Gwydion among us who have come to us for that very reason and sworn this oath to us. Other nobles find that affiliation with Scathach or Liam (or Balor, for that matter) is a liability. Such Kithain realize that appending the Leanhaun name to their own may create other problems for them, but most other fae see us as distasteful rather than dangerous. That frees new house members to perform all sorts of actions without being accused of doing so because they are "Balor scum" or "oath breakers."

You may be surprised that we accept Liam among us. I agree that most Liam don't have the courage it takes to face us and ask for our help. Those who do are treated like any other petitioner: We check them out and if they pass, we accept them. It suits my sense of irony when sidhe from House Liam do join the Leanhaun, for they then fall prey to the curse Finellia, forsworn member of their original house, created.

Most of those who want to join us don't spend a great deal of time thinking about the curse. We don't dwell on it if they don't ask, but we do mention it and warn them. If they choose to proceed, we assume they know what they're getting into. Petitioners may only take this oath if they agree to subsequently take the Oath of Majority. If any sidhe learn house secrets we feel might be damaging to us, we offer them the opportunity to join the house. If they refuse, we kill them. Don't be shocked, love, your own house advocates killing *us*. Why should we be any different? We at least provide an opportunity for them to save themselves.

Accepting other sidhe into the house isn't an everyday occurrence. Its very rarity gives it an importance we celebrate with an elaborate ritual. All members of the house who can make it to the celebration attend. The petitioner spends the day in conference with the highest-ranking members of the household present, hearing the story of Leanhaun and the curse that afflicts our house and learning all that is expected of her. The ruler of her freehold explains how to perform Rhapsodies and teaches her how to recognize artists who can fulfill the needs she



will soon experience. The petitioner is allowed to ask questions, all of which are answered as honestly as possible. Finally, the house leaders escort her to a pool where she undergoes a ritual bath representing the washing away of her old life and the cleansing of her spirit wherein she gives up all that she once was.

Whether she chooses to then sleep through the night or spends the hours of darkness in meditation or in partying, when dawn breaks, she is summoned before all members of the house in attendance. With the rising of the sun, she speaks the Oath of Joining and is from then on considered to be reborn as a Leanhaun. She becomes subject to our curse. After being accepted into the house, she must also take the Oath of Majority, acknowledging that she is now a responsible member of House Leanhaun, bound by all the strictures we accept and subject to the rulings of Lord Eleanor and the High Council.

The Oath of Joining involves anointing the petitioner with redolent oil and cloaking her in emerald green fastened with a golden harp-shaped pin. The ranking noble gives the petitioner a black rose and asks her to repeat the oath. Though there have been occasional variations in the wording, the oath most petitioners take is as follows:

Of my own will and with full knowledge of what I ask, I petition House Leanhaun to accept me. By the power of the Dreaming, I forswear what I was and embrace my new brothers and sisters. I have washed away my old life and with this dawn begin a new existence as kin of House Leanhaun. I swear by the early flowers of spring, the greening of the land in summer, the ripening of the harvest in fall and the slumber of the earth in winter that I accept the rule of the house, keeping faith with my new family and our friends and allies. My heart and hand are Leanhaun's to command. May I be true to the words I speak now.

I make this pledge freely; my mind is sound and my heart clear of any reservations. Let me henceforth be known as Leanhaun. And if I be not true to my word given today before the assembly of my house and witnessed by the Dreaming, may my eyes grown dim and blind, my ears cease to hear, my fingers feel no sensation. May I never experience taste or smell again. Let my mind hold no words with which I may speak; may my hand forget how to write. May all who know me forget my name and may I cease to remember my true self. May my Dan lie unfulfilled. This is the penalty I ask be imposed by the power of the Dreaming should I break my oath to Leanhaun.

The Oath of Adoption

This particular oath is only used when we adopt commoners into the house æ a very rare occurrence except in those areas where commoner nobles rule. Usually, we allow commoners to merely proclaim their allegiance to or alliance with the house. This oath goes farther, actually creating a bonding of blood between the commoner and the house, just as if the commoner were sidhe. In essence, the commoner attains an actual rank within the house. Though usually the rank is no higher than that of knight, a rare few are awarded higher rank, and occasionally, holdings. Such an occurrence is usually only possible if the commoner in question has performed some great service for the house. As with the Oath of Joining, once this oath has been taken, the newly adopted member must also swear the Oath of Majority. Usually, the ranking noble of a household, to whom the oath is actually sworn, witnesses the Oath of Adoption. Not as much pomp and ceremony attend on a commoner's acceptance into the house. Sometimes, however, a feast and festive party accompany an adoption.

Some Leanhaun feel that this oath ought to be retired in favor of having commoners take the Oath of Joining just as sidhe do. They feel that calling it the Oath of Adoption makes it demeaning rather than empowering. The distinction isn't readily apparent to everyone, but rests upon wording. While sidhe are allowed to "join" us, as if they are intelligent adults capable of making their own decisions, commoners are "adopted" as though they are children in need of benevolent parents to watch over them. The actual oath is taken under the night sky and states:

Under the canopy of the night sky, with stars and moon as witness, I beseech House Leanhaun to accept me as an adopted member of the family. I swear that I shall accept all burdens and accolades equally, and that I will bring no shame or dishonor to the Leanhaun name. I will learn what I must know to fill the roles within House Leanhaun that I am given and will seek to make my new brothers and sisters proud of my accomplishments. May I bring glory to the house and may I be acknowledged as one with the family. Should I betray House Leanhaun, may the stars cease to guide me, and the darkest roads within the Dreaming swallow me up, that my shame be hidden forevermore.

The Oath of Majority

This oath is taken by all members of House Leanhaun just after their Saining or whenever a new sidhe has joined the house. It is the measure by which we determine who is a full member of House Leanhaun, with the right to speak of house matters, petition for aid and hold a fief in our name. It forever binds the oath taker to absolute secrecy regarding all house matters and calls for his agreement to harbor and protect all members, rescue those in need and assist in endeavors of interest to Leanhaun.

Upon accepting that someone is ready for majority, all household members who are able to attend join in a feast celebrating the candidate. He is given the place of honor at the table and served special delicacies. At the end of the meal, the ranking noble rises and proclaims to those assembled that one among them has attained majority and seeks permission to take up his full duties as a member of House Leanhaun. Those assembled speak their consent as a group. If any have reservations, they may speak them, either challenging the candidate to answer certain questions to their satisfaction or requiring a duel to first blood. Champions may represent childling candidates in such duels. The duel may also be refused entirely, but if it is, the candidate may not take the oath. Those who are in the position where they must take the oath or die obviously have little choice and must accept the challenge. Challenges are not made lightly or for petty personal reasons. One who challenges a candidate must do so for the good of the house as a whole; frivolous disruptions of the oath taking tend to attract unpleasant retribution from the Dreaming itself.

The oath itself is quite simple:

By the elements and the essence of Dreams, I declare before witnesses that I am ready to take up my duties within House Leanhaun. I will remain true to my house, keeping its secrets, assisting all fellow members and guarding its treasures. Where one of my own has need, I will provide. When Leanhaun seeks sanctuary, I will give shelter. If danger exists, I will lend aid. Should one be taken, I will provide rescue, and if one forgets, I shall be there to enfold my own blood in memories.

If I fail in any of my duties, or should I betray my house, let my name be stricken from the histories and erased from the minds of Dreamers. Let my story be unfinished, my purpose unfulfilled and my essence scattered by the winds. Let no Kithain recall there ever existed such as I.

The Oath of Mutual Support

Taken between commoners or other sidhe and those of House Leanhaun, this oath promises mutual support for each other's causes and concerns and mutual aid in time of need. It even extends as far as offering sanctuary to or fighting for one another at need. For such a simple oath, it is amazingly broad in its interpretations. This oath forms the heart and soul of Leanhaun policy, binding defenders and potential friends to us with our own promise of support and assistance. Because it is so important to our continued existence, no Leanhaun fails to uphold the terms of the Oath of Mutual Support; to do so would be to doom the whole house when word of our failure to keep our side of the bargain spread among the Kithain. The oath sometimes covers the particulars of a given situation, such as "I will support Baron Temparch in his bid for chancellorship with the understanding that he shall advance my case to rule the Freehold of Downmarch." Most often, specific circumstances are not named, but general aid is indicated, as below, which reflects a typical oath of this sort:

By the silver path, I swear to thee that my house and thine shall bind together in mutual support. Let thy troubles be mine and let my woes seek redress through you. Should anyone come against thee and thine, I pledge that I and mine shall be there to defend and succor thee. In like manner, let thee agree to such aid as well in help to me. From this time until thee and I both agree that our pledge should expire, let us be as one in our undertakings. For my part I so swear to thee.

Oath of Service

Not every noble or commoner wants to ally with or join our house. Some merely want to perform a service for us æ anything from catering a feast at court to rousting out dangerous chimera. Those who take service with the house are asked to take an oath of fealty to us that covers the time of service and precludes them from discussing our affairs afterward. Though such oaths are not so serious as others such as the Oath of Majority, they are sworn before the Dreaming and breaking them does incur consequences. Most resemble the following:

I swear by the Dreaming that I will give good service to House Leanhaun, using the best of my abilities and skills to complete my assigned duties. Should I uncover secrets or knowledge damaging to the house I give my oath never to

reveal that knowledge or use it in any way against House Leanhaun. Should I break this oath, may I never be able to swear another, may all Kithain henceforth know me for a liar and may my mouth utter nothing but gibberish when the name of Leanhaun is invoked.

The Pledge of Binding

Enchanted mortals, whether lovers, tutors, servants or guests must all take this oath if they wish to stay any length of time among the fae of House Leanhaun:

Whatever is entrusted to my care I will guard, whatever tasks are assigned, I will complete. My self and my talents are given to House Leanhaun, my loyalty and love as well. Nothing of those things I witness or learn shall I speak to any outside the house, nor shall I make it known through any other means. If my tongue speaks falsely, let my perfidy be made evident upon my face that all may know my lies and broken promises. May I be cast out from the house, and the hearts and minds of all Leanhaun, and let me remember none of what has transpired in the time that I served the house.

Leanhaun of the Unseelie Court

Obviously, the great majority of House Leanhaun is Unseelie, unashamedly so. From High Lord Eleanor to our newest childling just past his Chrysalis, most of us are honest enough to admit that our practices place us solidly on the side of the Shadow Court, much less the Unseelie. Still, there are many Leanhaun who admit to being Unseelie without supporting the goals of the Shadow Court. These house members do not believe that we should be working to bring on Endless Winter. Instead, most work to preserve as much Glamour in the world as possible, fearing that its loss will only hasten our decay. Rather than coddling Dreamers and protecting sources of Glamour like the Seelie do, however, they ravage just like the rest of us, because they have no choice. What Glamour they find, they take and keep against the day when scarcity will make it far more valuable.

The majority of the lower echelon Leanhaun and our loyal commoners belong to this house faction. Within the confines of our freeholds or when surrounded by other Leanhaun and allies, they are happy to acknowledge their allegiance to the Unseelie Court. In enemy territory, however, they rarely admit such affiliation. Since many Leanhaun spend most of their time among Seelie households and Kithain, they at least try to *appear* Seelie most of the time. In the old days, it was easier to do that, for the other houses did not automatically equate being Leanhaun with being Unseelie.

Luckily, once a Leanhaun takes up residence or begins regularly attending court in territory controlled by the Seelie, they usually accept her and assume she is there because she espouses the same causes and follows the same rules of conduct. Except for their forays to Rhapsodize, most members of this faction end up *being* Seelie for all practical purposes, since they almost never overtly perform actions that would unmask their Unseelie natures.

Leanhaun of the Seelie Court

The rest of us look upon those Leanhaun who profess to be of the Seelie Court with a mixture of exasperation and admiration. We believe they are fooling themselves if they think they can follow the tenets of the Seelie Code, yet still Rhapsodize Dreamers and treat it as no more than a shameful little secret. Nonetheless, our Seelie contingent proves helpful to us since it throws off the other houses' suspicions about Leanhaun in general. Because of these individuals, those of our house who do not follow the Seelie Code can more easily fit into Seelie households; Seelie rulers reason that if some Leanhaun are Seelie, others might be as well.

The Seelie Leanhaun to whom I've spoken seem sincere in their desire to make a place for our house among the Seelie. They believe that by following the Seelie Code, they will discover the means to overcome our curse. Perhaps the most frightening aspect of this determination to be Seelie at all costs is that many take the final step and allow themselves to age rather than seeking to prolong their lives through Rhapsody. As we have no idea what happens to us when we die, I can only admire those brave enough to face their own destruction.

There exists an extremist faction within the house who feel that any Leanhaun claiming true allegiance to the Seelie Court (as opposed to those of us who masquerade as Seelie to throw off suspicion) are dangerous. Such individuals are seen as dishonest and likely to cause difficulties for our higher purposes. The extreme faction may hound such Leanhaun, taunting them with their

failings any time they fail to live up to every aspect of the Seelie Code, hoping to show them their true colors and where their actual affiliation lies. Rumor tells that some extremists even hunt Seelie Leanhaun, seeking to remove them from the Pageant before they can betray our house. While I have no first-hand knowledge of such activity, I do believe it has happened before and will continue so long as the Knights Protector hold the right of execution from the High Council.

Leanhaun of the Shadow Court

Most of the leaders of the house embrace the Shadow Court's goals, feeling that they come closest to advocating what Leanhaun desires. Though we allow Balor the glory of being the Shadow Court's fiercest warriors, and Ailil the pride of believing they rule the Shadow Court, we are its backbone and its thinkers. I have already explained what we hope to gain from a Shadow Court victory and won't belabor that again. I will tell you that we form the nucleus of the Ritualist faction.

Since the time of the curse, we have had soothsayers watch for the omens indicating that time has reached the point where we may begin the Great Ritual that will end our suffering. Our sorcerers have kept alive rituals and practices so that we may perform the rites correctly when our time is come at last, and our manipulators have herded Ailil and Balor in the directions we wish them to follow to force their cooperation when we need it. After all, once the other two houses are revealed as unmistakably Shadow Court due to their actions, they will have

The Great Ritual

The Great ritual is what all Leanhaun who truly serve the house strive toward. Most of our actions are designed to bring about the proper environment for casting this potent ritual. When the time is right, and when we have gathered the needed sacrifices, House Leanhaun will save Arcadia and the Dreaming and redeem our house from Finellia's curse.

The purpose of the Great Ritual is to bring down Endless Winter on the Earth through the sacrifice of dozens of Seelie childlings and the majority of Dreamers in the world. This terrible sacrifice will be made to the Dreaming, destroying the Earth's immediate future by eradicating most of its Glamour. Our house plans to preserve some few Dreamers by taking them into the Dreaming for a time. The backlash as the bright Glamour of the sacrifice sweeps like a tsunami through the Dreaming and inundates Arcadia should overturn its stagnancy and tear away its rulers, leaving our home cleansed and open for Seelie rulers to create a new, glorious Summer there. The Earth will fall to the Unseelie and into an age of untold darkness, bereft of most of its dreams. For that we are willing to take the blame.

We hope that this fulfills the conditions set by the wording of Finellia's curse. If it does, our house will at last be free. Gradually the two worlds should begin to recover equilibrium as we relax our grip, allowing the Seelie to once again rule half the year. As they take up their proper rule again, the Earth will turn again toward the light. Any Dreamers left æ those we hid within the Dreaming and those born since (and more *will* be born, Glamour can never be utterly destroyed) æ shall be allowed to escape our control and Dream anew. For a time, we may be reviled for triggering Endless Winter, but when at last all lies in balance, our house will take its proper place as the noblest and most deserving of them all.

no choice but to aid us in our bid for ascendancy if any of us are to survive the Seelie onslaught such an action will bring about. The Seelie (and even most Unseelie) don't have the stomach for what must be done, nor the will to see it through to its conclusion. We do. Forged in the fires of our agony, we have become adamantine in our determination. If we must destroy the Earth, or lock it in ice for centuries to free Arcadia and revitalize the Dreaming, we will.

Secret Societies

Only very clueless Leanhaun could fail to notice the so-called secret societies I have profiled for you, my love. Many of us strive to be worthy of membership in one or another of them, so they are hardly secrets æ to us. They *are* unknown to most other Kithain, and if we are to achieve our ultimate goal, they should remain that way.

Knights Protector and the Midnight Pact

The Knights Protector are ostensibly the military arm of House Leanhaun. Many of them escort important members of the house to meetings and councils and accompany those to whom they are assigned as bodyguards when those notables visit other freeholds or walk among the commoners. Our knights are as highly trained as any Gwydion or Fiona and are accorded the very best equipment the house can provide for them. Aside from a handful of trolls and one notable eshu, the Knights Protector are all Leanhaun sidhe. To the extent that they can be so, the knights are known for their honor. Of all of us, while on duty, they come closest to following the Seelie Code.

Because their duties preclude them from spending long hours searching out Dreamers to fill their needs, Knights Protector are assisted by Finders (see below), who locate likely prospects for them and set up meetings between the knight and a likely mortal. Most of the knights no longer keep up the pretense of a life outside changeling society. They don't hold jobs in the mortal world. Most do keep places outside freeholds where they live so that they don't succumb to Bedlam. The majority of such knights serve the house and know our goals. They work to fulfill those goals, but know nothing of the Midnight Pact.

The Midnight Pact is a select group of Knights Protector who go beyond their ordinary duties to protect the interests of House Leanhaun. They form an elite cadre within the knights, a sort of ruling council that determines policy, assigns knights to guard certain dignitaries or freeholds, bestows honors and assesses penalties to the knights under their command. Named the Midnight Pact because they first met during a series of late-night sessions, these fanatical knights have taken upon themselves the role of judges and assassins. The Midnight Pact goes after anyone who discovers the secrets of the house, and doesn't then join and swear binding oaths to keep its secrets. The Pact acts as a Star Chamber to try Kithain who prove troublesome to Leanhaun æ whether the troublemakers are Leanhaun or not. Seelie Kithain who interfere with our business or who harm members of the house may find themselves facing a group of hooded avengers that exacts punishments and revenge ranging from stripping the offender of all Glamour and dumping him in an alley to death by cold iron.

No one but the Midnight Pact members themselves knows the extent of their activities or how highly they are placed. Certainly some of them sit on the High Council. Candidates considered for membership are watched for a time, then offered the chance to carry out an assignment for the Pact æ usually an assassination. If they succeed, they are invited in to the Pact; should they fail or refuse, they're killed. The Pact doesn't tolerate failure. I know you're wondering how I learned all this, my love, but there are some things you will just have to work out for yourself.

The Finders

Not long after we returned to the waking world, we realized that some of us don't possess the opportunity or the leisure to find Dreamers to Rhapsodize. A certain number of our nobles and knights live within very public view of Seelie rulers who would be horrified if they knew of our pursuits. Those Leanhaun need others to locate Dreamers to whom they can form attachments. Finding and Rhapsodizing Dreamers can take a great deal of time, though most of it is spent initially trying to discover a Dreamer who is compatible with a given Leanhaun. Finders specialize in doing just that: They locate certain creative people and match them to Leanhaun who need them. Once the two have met and bonded, the Rhapsody

proceeds as always without the need for more involvement from the Finder.

Those who become Finders are highly skilled in sniffing out potential Dreamers. They also usually possess enough personal charisma to entice those mortals into accompanying them to meet their "friends." Highly sensitive to the nuances of taste and personality that create successful Rhapsodies, Finders are considered living treasures among the Leanhaun. The leader of the Finders, known as the Crown, wears the Crown of Dreams, a potent treasure that identifies Dreamers and their potential. The Crown also holds a position of leadership among the Keepers (see below). While the other Finders rarely attain high office or rank within the house, the same abilities that make them good Finders often lead to other Kithain bestowing honors on them as entertainers, bards or revels masters. As such, they are expected, even encouraged, to seek out new talents. So long as they bring at least a few to the Seelie Court to provide entertainment for a while, no one asks what happens to the rest.

The Revisionists

The Finders operate under the noses of the Seelie Court and the rest of us escape mass retribution from enraged Seelie because of the work done by the Revisionists. In times past, they were bards and ambassadors who moved outward into the wider realm of Kithain society making certain the Leanhaun name remained disassociated from any great crimes or forbidden practices. Whatever the reality of the situation, these diplomats suppressed stories damaging to the house while offering tales of heroic rescues and kind gestures made by Leanhaun toward others of our kind. Most of our reputation as talent finders and gracious hosts stems from our agents' "revision" of facts. Nowadays our younger members call them spin doctors.

That in itself would be enough to justify their existence, but they routinely use their close association with other Kithain to learn damaging details of other houses' behavior. In a way, if the Knights Protector are the military, the revisionists are our intelligence community. If the information they gather isn't enough by itself to cast doubts on others, our talented tellers work it up into rumors that approach the truth while causing others to question the offending party's propriety. Or they may link two totally unrelated bits of gossip, making each sound worse because of their association. I myself once heard a revisionist regale a group of Seelie grumps with the story of a Fiona lord who presented a satyr childling with a toy on her Saining day. It was a perfectly innocent act made from the lord of the freehold to a member of his court and in full view of everyone present. By the time the revisionist was through insinuating, suggesting and disclaiming any "real" proof, however, the grumps were convinced that the Fiona forced the childling to his bed, abused her, threatened her with cold iron should she reveal his perverse attentions, then tried to buy her silence with a chimerical treasure. It doesn't pay to annoy our revisionists.

Keepers of the Rose

Drawn heavily from among our Ritualist faction, the Keepers are charged with protecting the greatest treasures of the house, among them the Rose of Leanhaun, the Crown of Dreams and Edann's Harp. The actual holders of those potent items are members of the Keepers and form a Triune of leadership in the organization, even though one of them is a mere mortal. Most members of the Keepers travel extensively, searching for and acquiring treasures, chimerical objects and chimerical beasts for House Leanhaun's trove. Some of these may be exchanged for information, favors or services the Keepers provide to the objects' owners in exchange for them. The Keepers often bargain directly with chimerical beasts, promising them various inducements for joining our cause. A few Keepers resort to theft or kidnapping to attain what they want. Even more rarely, Keepers help to create chimera or treasures, usually in tandem with nockers bound to our house.

Some of these are kept for the time when we may find ourselves at war with other Kithain æ especially a war on the eve of Endless Winter. Others are hoarded in various safe locations, kept against the time when Glamour is scarce and a single magical treasure of inestimable value. The Keepers themselves believe that their actions are justified, for they plan for the future and the survival of all Kithain through the careful husbanding of resources. What is a theft now (or even a kidnapping and forced captivity) when set against the need for Glamour during the dark days of Endless Winter?

The Eternal Order of Dreams

An odd assortment of starry-eyed youngsters and grizzled, almost-spent grumps, the Eternal Order of Dreams exists for one purpose: to capture Dreamers, remove them from the waking world and install them in freeholds within the Dreaming itself. Like their counterparts in the Keepers of the Rose, the Order also seeks to provide for darker times they foresee in the future. Many of the freeholds and workshops within the Dreaming where the Keepers deposit their chimera and treasures belong to this society. Those strongholds are maintained by rotating rosters of Leanhaun of the Order. While the rotation is intended to prevent the Kithain from entering Bedlam, it isn't wholly successful and many of the order exhibit signs of the first and second stages of Glamour-induced madness. For this reason, many of the strongholds employ more chimerical guards than Kithain ones.

The intention of the Eternal Order of Dreams is to play the part of preservers of Dreamers so that when the Earth is bereft of such, Leanhaun will still have a good supply from which to Rhapsodize. Additionally, these Dreamers form the nucleus from which a new crop of Dreamers will be born to repopulate the Waking World and bring Glamour back when the Earth is most in need of them. Unfortunately, mortals were not meant to spend so much time within the Dreaming itself and most of them fall to Bedlam.

To prevent their fall into utter insanity, Leanhaun crafters have created Chronos Cages to hold the captive mortals. These room-sized holding cells create temporal zones in which time passes at an exceedingly slow rate, extending the time those within them can remain in the Dreaming without succumbing to Bedlam. Laid end to end, the cages provide house-sized accommodations for our "guests." Between housing that retards time and allowing occasional well-escorted trips into the waking world, the Order is having far more success in preventing Bedlam among our Dreamer populace. Some leakage is inevitable, however; they can't prevent it entirely or hold it off forever. Their greatest worry is that despite the Chronos Cages, it will take too long to bring on Endless Winter and the current group of captives will be utterly mad when the time of its usefulness arrives at last. Some of the order have begun to advocate merely marking Dreamers and leaving them where they are in the waking world until the signs foretelling the imminent arrival of Endless Winter are more clear. Others argue that insane Dreamers are better than no Dreamers at all and point to the suddenness with which the Shattering occurred. They warn that we dare not be without a sizable group such as those we already possess in such an event.

The Inquiry

These Leanhaun specialize in contacting other supernaturals, learning whatever they can about them and making preliminary alliances where possible. Although most know a little something about several types of supernaturals, each tends to specialize in interacting with only one sort. Thus, we have specialists studying the Children of Lilith, wraiths, mages and others. When possible, several members of the Inquiry meet together and exchange information, working out how each group's beliefs and practices interrelate. Through this, we hope to add what they learn to our own knowledge of the Prodigals and other powers in the world. We also hope to gain insight into those supernaturals who may help us achieve our goals. If we can count on their aid, the Seelie cannot hope to stand against us.

The Unseelie Code

Not too surprisingly, House Leanhaun follows the tenets of the Unseelie Code. What might surprise you is that many of us follow part of the Seelie Code as well. It isn't so easy to pigeonhole us. We run the gamut from mostly Seelie (except for those annoying side trips to Rhapsodize) to mainly Unseelie (strangely enough because a few of us refuse to lie about what we are) all the way to the black-hearted, thoroughly despicable and monstrous Shadow Courtiers (who currently espouse Seelie rule in Arcadia). See what I mean? Nonetheless, if taken as purely majority versus minority, the main thrust of House Leanhaun bows further toward this philosophy.

Change is Good

In fact, it's absolutely imperative. While we acknowledge that the medieval model still has some merit, we know that we must modernize our ways of thinking and acting if we are to make our way in this world. If we hope to bring about a new beginning for Arcadia, we will have to embrace massive change here first, and that change may very well be so overwhelming that most of us cannot survive it. We don't really understand why Arcadia should be so locked in archaism when the Unseelie Court

rules (as they *should* be ringing in changes almost constantly), but we know things must break apart and form new patterns. I have often wondered if Banality isn't really a mortal reaction to change. When things grow and evolve (a wonderful modern word, so evocative!), many mortals (and not a few stick-in-the-mud Seelie) feel threatened. What do they do? They pull the blankets over their heads, shielding themselves by denying new possibilities. Nothing kills creativity faster.

So what think you, love? Is that Banality or not? In any case, whatever your thoughts on that subject, we strive to bring about change, movement, novelty, creativity, call it what you will. While we can appreciate old stories and applaud old favorites, the most exciting ones are those we've never heard before. Odd, isn't it, that we should be trying to bring Earth into the ultimate frozen, unchanging age in the name of change?

Glamour Is Free

Actually, we work quite hard for it, as should be evident by now. Quips aside, we do believe that there's Glamour to spare for most uses, and in that sense it is free. Glamour itself can never be wholly eradicated, only overcome or overwhelmed for a time by Banality. So long as there are Kithain, so long as humans remain to think and hope and dream, Glamour will continue to exist. For the time being, we believe there is a surfeit of Glamour, after all we see Dreamers everywhere. This is an age given to invention and creativity. Every day new advances and amazing technological devices call forth wonder, and spark ideas and stories. No, my darling, Glamour is in no danger of running out immediately, despite the grumblings of Seelie alarmists.

We do agree that Glamour will become more scarce as time passes, partly due to our own intervention. We aren't profligate in spending and wasting it. Leanhaun plans to harvest as many Dreamers as we can, installing them in the Eternal Order of Dreams' freeholds throughout the Dreaming. This is to preserve them against the time when Glamour becomes an endangered commodity. We plan the same use for treasures and chimerical items and beasts, as I've outlined before. Obviously, as the world darkens and we hoard glamour, the lack becomes more pronounced, but we plan to use what we hold back now when the dearth is at its greatest. Meanwhile, we remove Glamour from the world so that we can bring about the conditions necessary to our Great Ritual. We could hardly do this if Glamour were already in short supply. Thus, it stands to reason that our expenditure of the mortals we Rhapsodize will have little to no effect upon the overall supply of Glamour in the world for several years to come.

Honor Is a Lie

We've never doubted this one even when we strive to be as honorable as we reasonably can be. Most of us are honest enough to realize that Ravaging æ especially Rhapsody æ is hardly honorable. On the other hand, we are only too aware that certain so-called honorable Seelie are anything but paragons of virtue. Some are self-aggrandizing, pompous idiots, and some are only as honorable in battle or contest as those watching force them to be. The worst are those who believe they are the epitome of honor, yet hunt down our family members because we must labor under a curse æ and a curse, moreover, laid upon us by another supposedly "honorable" Kithain, one so swollen by jealousy she couldn't see straight. I know this is important to you, love, and I don't question that you believe yourself and your house the very soul of honor. We know otherwise and don't pretend to be what we are not. Is honesty the equivalent of honor? I cannot answer that. I wonder if you can.

Passion Before Duty

This one is a little troublesome due to its wording: Our duty is passion, the passionate love and creative genius we inspire when we Rhapsodize a Dreamer. Kithain are passionate creatures by nature, driven by our emotions to excess. How could we be otherwise and withstand the deadening tide of Banality? To surrender to barren, boring duty is to die. We of House Leanhaun infuse Glamour and passion into everything we attempt so that duty becomes one more creative pursuit.

In our other endeavors we tend to throw ourselves into our roles and revel in our place in the Grand Pageant. Though most of us work to achieve our house goals, we hardly spend every waking hour pursuing them. We love gaiety, laughter, parties and lavish entertainment, yet we also seek more sensual, darker pleasures at times. Some among us care little what sensations we surrender to so long as we feel *something*. If wanting to feel fully alive means putting passion before duty, then we plead guilty of that pleasure.

The Seelie Code

Few Leanhaun even attempt to follow every tenet of the Seelie code, yet most of us believe in certain portions of it. Unlike the Seelie, we have never denied the other side of ourselves. We can accept that each side of our natures offers us something of value.

Death Before Dishonor

Considering what we do to maintain ourselves, we would be the greatest liars among the Kithain if we claimed to follow this particular part of the Seelie Code. I suppose within the strictest sense, we try to treat those we Rhapsodize with as much kindness as we can, which might be considered dealing honorably with them. Some of our knights strive to live up to a code of honor æ especially whenever they must meet Seelie Kithain in tourneys. But we have no illusions that we prefer to die rather than act dishonorably. Even most Seelie don't really believe that claptrap, do they?

Love Conquers All

We certainly wish this were true. It would solve a lot of our dilemmas. Our love conquers the mortals we Rhapsodize, though I doubt that's exactly what the Seelie have in mind when they speak of love. Strangely, we consider ourselves to be shameless romantics. We always enter into our Rhapsodies hoping against hope that this time things will be different. Each new time we must believe that love will be enough, that somehow our curse will be lifted and we will no longer need to destroy those we most cherish. Of course, nothing changes and our hands are once again stained with mortal blood, or at least the destruction of mortal creativity.

Most of us search for love among the Kithain. It's the only thing that makes our lives bearable. Since you are Seelie, my darling, I wonder, will love conquer your aversion to our curse? Can you truly say you love me now, with no reservations? Or has this confession caused you to turn away from me in revulsion? Does love conquer all or is that philosophy just a pretty illusion? We have suffered too many times to truly believe that love can make a difference, yet over and over we lie to ourselves and hope beyond hope. I await your answer, love. What will it be, I wonder?

Beauty is Life

This we do believe. In fact, our lives literally depend on beauty. We know first-hand that the creative genius we drink in to sustain ourselves is a life wrapped in irreplaceable beauty. In response, we try to lead lives dedicated to beauty and graciousness. Our deepest desires, our greatest aspirations stem from our love of beauty æ whether of form, mind or soul. Even when we strive toward the destruction of the Earth as most people know it, we do so with the hope that eventually beauty will once again rule both the Earth and Arcadia

Never Forget a Debt

We don't forget our debts æ we owe more to our Dreamers than we could ever repay. We do not forget them, but think of them long after they are gone. Some of us try to make things right (or as right as we can) by looking after the families of those we Rhapsodize. Not all of us take on this duty, of course, but enough of us do that we feel we have paid at least part of the debt. In like fashion, most Leanhaun take their agreements with others very seriously. When we accept others' aid, we know they will expect ours in return. We make it a point never to disappoint them. In fact, we thrive on creating and discharging debts to other Kithain. We know our survival depends upon our allies' good will and keeping their regard means honoring our debts to them. So this tenet is one that almost every Leanhaun follows.

On the other hand, we never forget debts owed to us. We especially make a point of collecting from those who misuse us in any fashion. They may not always like the way we collect on those debts, nor do we care what our enemies feel.

The Shadow Court Tenets

Of all the philosophies of our kind, House Leanhaun understands the Shadow Court's point of view best. While we would like to adhere to the comforting fictions of the Seelie Code, we can only survive under the Unseelie Code and the practices of the Shadow Court.

Understand the Mortal World

We do understand it, far better than most sidhe. Many sidhe, both Seelie and Unseelie, are content to let the medieval model rule them. They seek Dreamers in those arts they understand from long ago — painting, sculpture, storytelling, and music being the most popular. House Leanhaun, on the other hand, must constantly search for new sensations with which to sate ourselves. We too can find superb musicians or painters, but we also ferret out architects, computer software designers, political candidates, science fiction writers, chefs, athletes and photographers, among others. Of necessity, we learn

about what our current Rhapsodic lovers do. We must, in order to inspire them to greatness. Encountering the modern world and its ideas head-on gives us a unique perspective among the sidhe even while it may be discomfiting at times. The commoners who experienced the changes the world has undergone on its way to the modern age know more than we probably ever will, but then we encourage alliances with them, so they may share that knowledge with us.

In terms of understanding modern thought, we believe we have grasped the basics. In the locations where we maintain freeholds, democracy or some respect for individual rights and property exist. We at least pay lip service to the idea of sidhe-commoner equality. That much we understand quite well about these times — say what your listeners want to hear and you own them. We've learned that from mortals. We also know that in the mortal world a great fuss is made about freedom and equal opportunities, but the real determinant of how well someone lives is how much money he has. That, in turn, is based on his color, his religion, the school he attended and the network of contacts he developed by being in the right place. What more is there for us to learn? That sort of exclusivity comes naturally to us, after all, we *are* sidhe despite our protestations that all Kithain are equal, and we certainly don't consider mortals our equals either. We respect them for what they can do for us, and we do consider their feelings and try to make them as comfortable as possible, but in the end, they exist to serve our needs and that's no basis for equality.

Understand the Supernatural World; Make and Break Alliances as Necessary

That goes without saying. I think Leanhaun is responsible for the part about making alliances and having it accepted as Shadow Court philosophy. Those alliances include other supernatural creatures. Ailil may be the instigators of the second half of the idea æ advocating breaking agreements as necessary, I mean. Not that we don't ever break our word, but we'd prefer not to make that known quite so publicly. Several of our scholars in the Inquiry devote their time to discovering and maintaining contact with various supernaturals, be they vampires, mages, werewolves or what have you. In most cases, we have uncovered evidence that each of these groups has its own agenda æ most of them focused around some apocalyptic event that will annihilate their race or wreck the waking world. Now *that* interests us. In fact, it sounds a great deal like our plans for Endless Winter, and we can use all the help we can get putting that in motion. If we can convince each group that we stand ready to assist them in their struggles, we may create the climate in which a Shadow Court takeover is assured and gain potent allies at the same time. In order to do that, however, we need to fully understand each group and its goals and determine how those goals conflict with, or support, one another.

Our secondary line of inquiry is to discover if we can utilize any of their powers in place of the Glamour we take from mortals. We already know that the Children of Lilith, whom mortals call vampires, exude a sort of dark Glamour we find highly attractive. We have found through our experiments that such Glamour lends itself most readily to performing hurtful and controlling sorts of cantrips and is hard to bend toward lighter uses. Utilizing such dark Glamour for any lengthy period seems to promote cruelty and suppress our better natures. We wouldn't truly mind this - after all, Glamour is Glamour and beggars can't choose which feast will invite them in æ except it tends to reveal us as unmistakably Unseelie with no chance to hide what we are from our Seelie counterparts. Then again, as our time approaches, will we really care what the Seelie think any more?

We have been more reticent about approaching mages and werewolves. Mortal mages were most often our enemies before the Shattering, and the wolf-kin are quite dangerous to approach, especially since many of them believe House Leanhaun serves something they call the worm. For now, we'll let the specialists deal with them, but as we learn more, we must find ways to use what we can from them. It may be that by using supernaturals in place of humans to slake our thirst for Glamour that we can preserve more Dreamers to help rebuild after we bring down the night upon the Earth. An intriguing notion, particularly if by doing so we also eliminate potential competition from these beings.

Harvest Glamour, Prepare for Endless Winter

I feel I hardly need mention this one again. It remains our main focus, the reason we believe we are here. We differ from the other Unseelie houses only in the degree of our involvement. Where most of them simply ready themselves for Endless Winter as best they can, we are planning for what comes after it. We don't passively wait for its arrival; we work to bring it on according to our

timetable. Most Unseelie, even those of the Shadow Court and the Ritualists don't really comprehend that the onset of the long darkness cannot be allowed to happen at its own pace, brought on by our inability to hold it at bay any longer. Too many of Houses Ailil and Balor believe they should acquire all the Glamour they can in order to glut themselves gorging on it. They don't understand that this isn't a game where we win by depriving the Seelie of Dreamers and Glamour and taking home the most toys ourselves; It is a deadly serious necessity for us to preserve Glamour for our later needs. We have to take the reins and guide the Kithain into the Endless Winter; we can't stumble into it unprepared or it will destroy us all.

Overthrow the Seelie Court and Nobility

To accomplish our goal, this must be done, but we wonder if it is possible to accomplish an overthrow without excessive bloodshed. If most Seelie truly understood what's going on, wouldn't they gladly step aside and help us heal the old wounds so we may heal out homeland and reopen the gates to Arcadia? Don't count on it. The Seelie are so entrenched in their rulership that it will take an out-and-out revolution to oust them.

Before that, though, we must make certain that the change doesn't result in anarchy or in petty squabbles among the commoners and nobility in regard to who rules. We want to be firmly in position with a workable plan for government of the Kithain in hand before we trigger a rebellion against the Seelie sidhe. If the Seelie cannot abide by our rule, we will have to incarcerate them or put aside some freeholds where they may live and govern themselves as they wish so long as they leave us in peace. Meanwhile, we cement good relations with commoners and recruit whomever we can to the cause.

Ailil may think they're in charge, but their reputation as supreme manipulators precedes them; Balor may think to rule through force of arms, but they lack the perspective and wisdom needed to rule, particularly during a difficult transition phase. We've taken great pains to let other Kithain know these facts about our fellow Unseelie houses. So while we'll use them to overthrow the Seelie, they'll find that their options for rule during Endless Winter are limited to those tasks we assign them. And we aren't as complacent as the Seelie; at the first sign, they are fomenting rebellion against us, we and our commoner allies will round them up. We *can*

use fae for Rhapsody; we just usually don't choose to do so. If they give us a reason, we'll take whatever steps we must to survive the Winter and bring in the New Spring.

Fulfill the Ritual Obligations of the Year, Culminating in Samhain

Only our Ritualists are obsessed with this one, but all of us who take our house goals seriously attend functions and work to promote the rites we must perform to achieve our aims. Those who are more hedonist than world-saver at least pay it lip service and attend a few Unseelie revels and rituals either to keep their hand in with the other Unseelie or just to party. Of course, Samhain itself is of paramount importance as it is the traditional date on which the Unseelie Court officially takes over the rule of the fae. We don't plan to change that when we bring down Winter. In fact, Samhain will probably become even more important since our Great Ritual sacrifice will be tied in to that date.

Meanwhile, many of us make a point of attending the various feasts and observances. From attending, we learn the various rituals we'll need to know, we see who else is interested in our rites and we build trust in our ability to perform the Great Ritual when it comes. Further, we use such celebrations as occasions to sound out other Kithain concerning our ideas. During the good feelings engendered by successful feasts, they are far more likely to be reasonable and if we impress them with our knowledge of rituals, they tend to believe us when we tell them Endless Winter lies just beyond the horizon.

Spread Chaos, Revolution and Anarchy

We tend to do this one in a round about way. Leanhaun isn't much for anarchy or chaos; they tend to interfere with our mission, but we don't mind subtly encouraging the breakdown of authority in Seelie areas. Naturally, we don't make it obvious we're promoting rebellion. We aren't House Balor, after all. We just make certain that the artists we introduce to the courts in which we have influence are those whose works encourage questioning authority or going beyond the usual limits. Once we rope younger Seelie in through these Dreamers, it's far easier to convince them to join us in small acts of rebellion. From there, we can usually recruit them to our side.

At least, that's "official" house policy. Like any group, we have our Wilder element (pun intended). They aren't content to work within the constraints placed upon them by the house. Feeling that their time is limited enough by the curse laid upon them, they take to the streets wreaking havoc on Dreamers and Kithain alike with cantrip and chimera. Some hold jousts on motorcycles in the center of busy thoroughfares; others fight chimerical duels atop skyscrapers. They usually claim to be doing no more than living life to the fullest, but their actions promote anarchy. Indeed, most such cliques don't even give themselves names or choose leaders, they act and react as individuals within a group rather than as an organized faction. While we can applaud their success in attracting sidhe and commoner wilders to their "gangs," we would prefer to have a little more control over them so that ultimately they serve House Leanhaun.

The Escheat

These rights constitute the most ancient customs recognized by the fae. As has no doubt been the case with other codes of behavior I have explained here, we have a slightly different take on the Escheat than most Seelie æ or even Houses Balor and Ailil. Though we usually act within the letter of the law, so to speak, we do so only so long as other Kithain uphold our rights to these same protections.

The Right of Demesne

In essence, this grants freeholds and the right of rule to those whose birth entitles them to the holding. Further, such rulers have absolute rule within their demesnes. They cannot be challenged or their word questioned. We agree with the basic concept and we really wish the Seelie would extend the courtesy of following their own rules to us. Any freeholds we hold are constantly under siege by blathering (or attacking!) Seelie do-gooders, who usually don't know anything at all about House Leanhaun except vague rumors that we're Ravagers. Then they wonder why we behave the way we do whenever they uncover evidence that we've been undermining Seelie rulers.

Leanhaun holds few freeholds, but we constantly search for more. Any place we do rule is held through that particular noble's personal charisma, political acumen and fighting prowess. Rather than depending on some outmoded ideal such as the right of demesne to protect what is ours, we make certain we have the strength to hold it come what may. In the end, falling back on the right of demesne to hold their freeholds and control what political factions thrive there may prove the Seelies' undoing.

The Right to Dream

We've never questioned mortals' rights to dream, we simply reserve the right to benefit from them. Most Kithain take this to mean that we should never interfere with Dreamers in a violent way or from a position of superiority — in other words, we shouldn't Ravage. They have no problem with Musing Dreamers, reasoning that it doesn't "force" the Dreamer or destroy her ability to create again and again. We of House Leanhaun consider that drivel a convenient fiction the Seelie use to excuse their own actions. Just because they take a little longer to bring about the fulfillment of the Dreamer's vision, that doesn't mean they aren't feeding off that creativity, sucking up the Glamour just as greedily as any Ravager they condemn.

Who's to say which is better? Our way brings about an explosion of greatness and perfect genius, brought to fruition through the direct infusion of Glamour into a mortal who willingly surrenders to it in order to create. Seelie Musing reminds me of mincing old ladies fiddling with their knitting, turning it this way and that and clucking over it until it finally becomes something resembling a sweater. The Seelie method interferes just as much — or even more so — than ours. They try to inspire some hapless mortal to create something *they* want created. Oh, it may be technically within the interests and talents of the Dreamer they choose, but it isn't what the Dreamer herself would have brought forth without faerie interference. I think we actually respect our Dreamers more; we're certainly more honest.

The Right of Ignorance

Mortals have the right not to know about us. That about sums up this particular right. Well, not exactly. What we really mean by this is that we're afraid to let the mortals know we exist. We blame them for the Sundering and the Shattering and we shake in our boots at the thought that they might realize we're still among them. They might try to capture us or use us to their own ends! As if we didn't use them for our own purposes! Once we were mighty warriors and magicians, respected and propitiated by humans who feared our displeasure. Now we skulk about the fringes of their world hiding our true selves and begging for a few crumbs from their table of dreams. Pitiful!

Leanhaun makes itself known where we will. We take mortals as our servants and entertainers, our friends and our lovers. Unlike the lickspittal Seelie, we aren't afraid to live in the modern world, nor are we too timid to exercise our powers to enchant mortal beings, so we may interact more comfortably with them. Let the Seelie hover fearfully at the outer edges of the feast of life; we'll be dancing in the center around the bonfire knowing that if we get burned, at least we have tasted of the finest before we were consumed.

The Right of Rescue

The Leanhaun respect the right of rescue and of safe haven the most. We make it a point of house honor to rescue Kithain who have fallen into Banality's clutches or who have been captured by those who know what we are and mean us harm. Occasionally, we have even drawn back another Kithain from Bedlam, even going so far as to track such a one into the Dreaming to bring her back before she's utterly lost. Our missions of mercy go beyond the mere rescue operation, however, for we try to bring the victim back to herself and to discover where she actually belongs. We make no distinction between Seelie and Unseelie in this regard and extend our services to include Gallain, chimera and even faerie treasures.

To our surprise, some Seelie extend the same courtesy to us. When they do so, we openly acknowledge our debt to them and try to award them a favor of equal value, even if it is only a promise that we will aid them in the future. We usually accompany such a pledge with a gift or a ring or other trinket that they may send to us when they have need of our services. Most Seelie tend to forget about this right when it involves Unseelie, however, and to them we grant our enmity. That doesn't mean we will not rescue them, just that our hospitality may prove less comfortable than the situation from which we retrieved them. As I stated before, we don't forget our debts. And we have first-hand knowledge of the pain our kind can withstand....

The Right of Safe Haven

As with the right of rescue, House Leanhaun excels in providing safe havens for other Kithain. We willingly shelter the lost, the hunted, the dispirited, the despised and the endangered. Those who would take them from our freeholds must be willing to battle everything Leanhaun and our allies can throw against them. We first established this pattern in the modern age during the Accordance Wars and it has done more to endear our house to Kithain who would have otherwise condemned or ignored us than any other action we could have taken. We make it clear to all Kithain that Leanhaun freeholds are neutral ground where all can expect shelter and healing regardless of court affiliation, rank or status.

Because our practices are known, we can usually expect at least minimal shelter within Seelie freeholds. It may be grudging, but if we need the help, we don't care what attitude they have while they extend us their aid. In most cases, Seelie courts have at least one Leanhaun in residence or within their territory. Such house members often advise the court concerning promising Dreamers and court revelries, and their presence (since they are seen as harmless) makes it far more likely that the court will offer a Leanhaun haven and extend its hospitality to her.

The Right of Life

I think I've already noted that it isn't House Leanhaun seeking out Gwydions and slaying them out of hand. At least we don't attempt to wipe out other Kithain merely because of court or house affiliation, unlike certain Seelie who seem to feel they can break this tenet with impunity. We also extend the right to life to Gallain and Thallain, though we aren't usually the ones attacking them either.

Naturally, when we are attacked, we respond. And that's something few Seelie expect. They tend to think of us as weakling Ravagers incapable of defending ourselves. That's why they believe they can get away with murdering our kin. The Midnight Pact came into being in response to Seelie depredations against us. We didn't simply awaken one morning and say, "It's a good day to create an order of elite assassins." What amazes me is that the Seelie who so deplore the loss of Glamour and the growth of Banality in the world are the instigators of Kithain murders, which we all know promotes Banality and harms the Dreaming. You can't destroy dreams and stories without suffering a backlash. I'd add something to that: You can't destroy a Leanhaun without retaliation. We feel that the Dreaming supports us when we avenge our own and we no longer hesitate to set aside this right when someone else disregards our right to life.

The Fior

Sigh. A contest to determine justice? Trial by ordeal? We aren't much for battle generally. We're lovers, not fighters. On the other hand, we are able to sustain so much damage and endure so much pain that ordeals meant to prove our guilt instead often prove our innocence when no Seelie can believe we can endure the pain without confession. Of course, if they invoke the Dreaming it's sometimes a different story. Then again, we can invoke the Dreaming, too, and it at least realizes that if the Seelie eradicate all the Unseelie, balance can never be restored. So what am I saying? That we avoid the Fior whenever possible, that we can sometimes overturn the trial by simple endurance and that the Dreaming may choose to overlook smaller transgressions since it is focused more on the big picture. Still trust your glorious Fior as the determinant of absolute justice, love?

Fosterage

Well, let's get the obvious out of the way first. No Seelie would entrust a fosterling to us and we rarely send our own childlings elsewhere for fostering until we've had the chance to explain to the younglings about our house and what we do to sustain ourselves. To do otherwise would be to doom them to a short, pain-filled life. We occasionally foster childlings from Ailil and Balor, but only for brief periods. Balor childlings tend to be more disruptive than we care for and we always feel as though the Ailil are all tiny spies. I have heard of one Leanhaun freehold that fostered a Scathach childling. While we understand that fostering promotes knowledge of one another's ways and helps to cement friendships and alliances across family lines, our particular needs for Glamour make this a difficult practice for us to follow. We prefer to encourage shorter visits to other Kithain. If fosterage is an absolute necessity, we try to send our childlings to other Leanhaun so they may continue to learn what they need to survive without well-intentioned interference from Seelie meddlers.

Current Politics

This can be summed up in one sentence: Those who give a fig have given themselves over to our mission and those who don't know about our mission need to be brought to heel quickly. The time nears for the Great Ritual and anyone who isn't actively assisting us must be counted among our enemies. Our basic political stance is to bind as many Kithain to us as possible and stop our foes from discovering what it is we mean to do. High Lord Eleanor works from these ideas in the Parliament of Dreams and our leadership down through the ranks of knights has united behind these concepts. For a short time yet, we are still willing to let this remain within the arena of politics, but we all know war is coming. We plan to be ready when it erupts.

Plays Well With Others

Ailil wants to influence the other Kithain; Balor wants to control them. Gwydion prefers to rule, Fiona to love and Eiluned to mystify. Liam and Scathach just want acceptance while Dougal is content to arm us. I make no pretense at understanding what the commoners want beyond equality, but I *can* tell you what Leanhaun wants: friends, and plenty of them. Failing that, we'll take fellow travelers tied to us by their court or even enemies who owe us favors.

The Unseelie Houses

There are far more of us than you think, my love. Do you even remember the Unseelie houses we left behind in Arcadia? Yes, there are only three openly Unseelie houses here, but we are more than enough to change the balance of power — not that there *is* any balance now, but if given the chance to rule our half of the year, we might bring back things as they once were. Please don't mistake my more pointed remarks concerning our allies; We are all too aware how desperately we need them. We see their flaws, but we also recognize their strengths and appreciate their support of our house in return. If nothing else, the mere fact that they are Unseelie binds them to us.

Ailil

Ah, the glorious leaders of the Unseelie! They seem so gleefully proud of their vaunted skill at diplomacy and manipulation. They insert a critical word here, a little praise there, a pat on the shoulder, a blade in the back....

Why, they constantly tell us how clever they are, and who are we to argue?

Seriously, though, despite my tongue-in-cheek introduction, the Ailil show genuine talent in social situations. They can be charming and disarming enough that some (even those who should know better) forget they are Unseelie. Their arguments before the Parliament of Dreams have actually bought all of us more room to maneuver by reminding the Seelie that they too have a darker side — and the Seelie desperately need to remember that.

We let Ailil take the lead. They're welcome to it! The silver dragons' machinations garner so much attention from the Seelie houses that they often overlook us entirely. Our survival depends upon everyone else's perception of us as basically harmless and the weakest link in the Unseelie houses. Because of this, we're happy to bow to Ailil's supposed leadership. And if they can gain power for the Unseelie Court, we will happily accept whatever crumbs they toss our way æ for now. Soon enough they will discover who the true masters of manipulation are and recognize their own foolish schemes as the childish posturing they are. Ailil may play at politics; we must control the game as a matter of survival.

Balor

House Balor represents such a disappointment to us. Gifted with so much, they accomplish so little. If we had half their blessings we'd rule the world. So they have a deformity or two? So do the members of Dougal and they seem to get along just fine! Why weren't we gifted with immunity to iron in return for *our* pains?

The Balorites tend toward either the rough-shod bullies or the oily manipulators who ape Ailil with none of the silver dragons' finesse. I've always considered them boorish and a little slow. On the plus side, they make marvelous warriors, often evincing such brutality that they excel at intimidation and occupy most of the opponents in battle. Seelie knights looking for honor and

glory rarely stoop to picking a fight with the Leanhaun when the Balor make such convenient targets. Besides, many of House Balor recognize that they have common cause with us, not only against the Seelie Court, but against Ailil as well. So long as Balor and Leanhaun present a united front, Ailil cannot gain the total control of the Shadow Court they seek. One word of warning: Most Balors are like surly children. They don't like being reminded that they lack certain social graces or that most members of their house aren't renowned for their brilliance. We must not forget that the cold iron they wield so adroitly against the Seelie can as easily find its way into our backs if we give them the chance.

The Seelie Houses

So noble, so self-sacrificing! So vocal concerning their own superiority of vision and purpose! So full of congratulations for themselves and their enlightened policies and practices! So careful to follow all the rules — laws they themselves wrote. Laws we cannot follow if we would abide here in the waking world for more than a few months before aging and dying. Who among them could endure the horror of feeling the searing ashes of approaching death æ not in battle, but in ignominious decay? Let *them* feel the drag of time deaden their nerves and make their limbs leaden with fatigue, not for some noble cause, but merely for carrying a name æ the name of House Leanhaun. Let them feel the lash of Winter's chill upon their hearts with every beat, and then let them condemn us. Knowing the Seelie as I do, I wouldn't be surprised if the hypocrites did just that.

Now is the part where you are supposed to ask, "But what of me, beloved? Surely you cannot think this of me?" Ah, but I do, my love. Though I place you above all others, though I stand willing to die for your love, I believe you are much like all our Seelie cousins. You all react in typical hysteria the moment the word Unseelie creeps in. Why does this frighten you so? Do you fear that after all, we are right and you have been led astray? Poor love, it is only when you can face that fact that the Seelie are to blame for the state of the world that you will be freed of your prejudice. Then again, I too betray prejudice against others of our kind, as you shall see in my treatment of the Seelie houses.

What can I offer as explanation for my harshness in judging all the Seelie? Only this: The Unseelie seek to reestablish a balance thrown out of kilter by unrelenting Seelie rule of 600 years and more. Ask yourself why the Seelie no longer desire that balance and why they are afraid to give up their rulership for even half a year? Who do the Seelie truly serve by keeping the world in such chaos?

I freely confess that we Leanhaun hide our true natures from the Seelie houses. We well know what their reaction would be if they knew us for what we are. Oh, some suspect; some even know we have Ravagers among us, but only one house actually knows anything certain and for now we pay their price to silence them. To the others, we either hide our house affiliation or play to their fancies, making ourselves into what they'd like to believe we are. And how easy it is to deceive those who regularly deceive themselves!

Dougal

Plodders rather than plotters, how the Dougal ever became noble is beyond me. Not that they show any lack of the qualities most Seelie think of as noble, just that it always seemed to me that they simply didn't care that much about titles and such. It cannot be denied that they are sidhe, and since they have made a career of supporting House Gwydion, I suppose they've earned noble status more honestly than some other houses I could name.

My main problem with House Dougal is that they often have such narrow minds and constricted views. What saves them from falling to Banality is their creative fire. Their amazing gift for forging weapons and armor (as well as other creations) means that they make items that serve equally well as practical implements and as works of art.

Our house never forgets that the key to befriending or controlling the Dougal is to heap admiration on their works and to speak knowledgeably about them. For now, their best efforts go to arm House Gwydion and the Seelie houses. We must convince them that this view is short sighted if we are to eventually triumph. You may think the forge an unlikely place to garner allies, but we know that we need Dougal and we, therefore, cultivate an appreciation for *their* passion!

Eiluned

Touted as mysterious and subtle, these potent sorcerers pique our interest. So like the Ailil and yet so unlike them as well. If they actually had half the power and talent they claim (or hint that they possess), we might see if they could lessen or remove our house's curse. Then again, we'd probably find their price too high. The Eiluned *do* know the true extent of our misfortunes and how we maintain our youth. We pay them well for their silence æ for now. When we come to power, they will pay for making us crawl to them. No house has the right to hold another house's very existence hostage.

For the present, we concentrate on frequently backing their views in the Parliament of Dreams and working to discover what they want and supplying it to them. Some of our house agents currently work at seducing certain Eiluned as an experiment to discover if they will help out of affection or love rather than pure self-interest. Others have begun introducing a few Eiluned to the joys and pains of Rhapsody. Once corrupted into utilizing such methods to obtain Glamour, they will have little success in holding the threat of exposing us to the Seelie houses over our heads anymore. We might gain the upper hand and threaten them instead. After all, everyone knows we are Unseelie and that we are Ravagers, but everyone suspects the Eiluned of doing *something* evil. Meanwhile, we'll be very careful in all our dealings with them; fooling the Eiluned isn't an easy proposition.

Fiona

Ah, the Fiona! They are the only house truly capable of understanding the passions that drive us. The Fiona, too, are lovers, yet their paramours only suffer broken hearts when these fickle sidhe eventually tire of one love and move on to the next. At least we grant those we Rhapsodize the dignity of being our only lovers during the time we spend with them, and we stay to the end.

Though the Fiona may involve themselves to the point of obsession for awhile and feel they are the consummate lovers, they spend far more time reveling in the "feeling" of being in love than they actually spend listening to or being with their lovers. Further, their choice of paramours usually betrays their taste for the fleshy and obvious rather than for subtle beauty or talent. Still, they have always seemed to us to epitomize those qualities that most mortals consider the hallmark of Irishness (or, perhaps, the Celtic ideal): a love of laughter, song, good food, fellowship and fighting.

Since we are not a particularly martial house, that's one area of Fiona accomplishment we tend to forget æ their prowess as warriors. Some might argue that they even outdo the Gwydion on the field of battle. I think it's a matter of taste: You either prefer the Gwydion ideal or the Fiona passion. Since most Fiona espouse the Seelie cause, we would do well to remember their fighting skills rather than regretting our oversight.

Gwydion

I admit to being highly prejudiced against most of your house, beloved. The fact that they openly advocate our destruction æ not banishment, but *death* æ tells me your kin are less than the honorable Kithain they proclaim themselves to be. All of you are trained to excel in battle, I'll give you that. But how can your house seriously consider that unbalancing the world by insisting that all fae be Seelie will stave off Endless Winter? Don't they see that it is *their* insistence on maintaining unchanging Seelie rule that is the greatest danger and a terrible betrayal of us all?

We are all too aware that we need House Gwydion (and all the other noble houses) if we are to reverse centuries of damage to Arcadia. We must all cooperate or Arcadia itself will fall to Banality and be lost forever. Many Leanhaun consider it a direct intervention of the Dan of all fae that David Ardry has disappeared. While his peacemaking efforts and inclusion of the commoners in the government of the Kithain are commendable, his stable æ dare I say, dull? æ reign allowed too many of us to bask in complacency. We need to seize this opportunity to reach new understandings and forge new alliances. Any other action is suicidal stupidity tantamount to genocide. We can no longer afford to let the Seelie dominate the fae. We desperately need to embrace new ideas and breaking old patterns. Even if that means sacrificing the high king to that end.

Unfortunately, House Gwydion's stubbornness and immovability are as well documented as their excellence in battle. If your kin would truly be known as honorable and acknowledged as leaders among us, they must stop

being divisive between Seelie and Unseelie, and accept that they, too, have aspects of chaos and change within them. Convincing them after you have read this will be your task, beloved.

Liam

What can I say about Liam? They belong to the house of she who cursed us so unfairly, yet they too suffer woes as part of their heritage. I have heard differing tales concerning the origins of their disinheritance, but all point to some indiscretion committed by King Liam himself. If this is so, branding the entire house as oath breakers is as unfair as laying a curse on all my house for the actions of one.

As to Finellia herself, *she* (I believe) fully deserves the appellation of oath breaker. It was Finellia's jealousy that caused Leanhaun's actions, and Finellia's hasty and ill-considered curse that forced us into the Unseelie camp as our only means to protect ourselves. The Liams hate us because we prey upon their precious mortals — an irony indeed since it is Finellia of House Liam's fault that we must do so.

While I can sympathize with their plight, I could wish they would have half as much sympathy for us. Of course, some Liams positively reek of Banality, which can prove distressing to us, since we must maintain as much Glamour as we can without entering Bedlam. Then again, the Liams are clodding bores anyway, so we usually don't miss their company.

Scathach

Yes, they are a house. Why do we waste our time creating divisions among ourselves? House Scathach managed to remain behind when the rest of us fled the Shattering. They are the only sidhe who could give us an authoritative accounting of the time we were gone and we spurn them for their "common" ways. Could it have escaped our notice somehow that *they* had no trouble remaining essentially sidhe while not being destroyed as the rest of us would have been? How did they manage that? Why do we despise them for it rather than begging them for insights?

House Leanhaun doesn't make that mistake. We actively seek friendly contacts with the Scathach whenever we can. Aside from the knowledge they could share with us, the Scathach also possess great skill in battle. If everyone else is too proud or too stupid to realize their value, we will certainly profit by their loss. If we could convince Scathach that their goals best meshed with ours, we could gain the sort of protectors we need. In return, we would work to make the other houses acknowledge Scathach's claim to noble status. Their advocacy of the Unseelie cause would give us four Unseelie houses against the five Seelie. With Eiluned in doubt, that might be enough to tip the balance our way.

The Commoners

We see the commoner Kithain quite differently than do most sidhe. We have worked hard (and continue to do so) to win their favor and that has paid off. Commoners make up the majority of our most loyal followers and provide us with depth and resources we would not otherwise have. Even Seelie commoners sometimes find our rule and our friendship more valuable to them than the patronage of the Seelie houses. Much of our early training focuses on fitting in with the commoners while not losing our position among the sidhe. Long hours are spent teaching our childlings how to deal with commoners as if they were our equals, while never letting them know we see them any other way. And they say the Ailil are manipulative charmers! Those we cannot charm, we extend favors, binding them to us with respect, love or duty. Of course, this works better with Seelie than Unseelie, but even they respond to mutually beneficial arrangements.

Boggans

We probably couldn't exist without our boggans. Not only do they perform innumerable functions for us — everything from housekeeping to acting as seneschals and social secretaries — but their love of gossip provides us with valuable insights into those around us. I can't tell you the number of times boggan gossip has provided us with the ammunition we needed to prevent attacks against us or defuse interhouse quarrels. We've found boggans to be loyal and dependable. Their inherent decency makes us seem less suspect whenever they associate with us. The Unseelie among them can be too demanding and perfectionist, but you can't fault their dedication. Our only real difficulty with boggans is that we have to be very careful what they learn about us. Their

tongues will wag whether they're telling us tales of others or spreading our house secrets. We therefore guard quite carefully against giving boggans too much confidential information.

Eshu

Most nobles (and not a few commoners) dismiss the eshu as little more than clever storytellers. Some even think they are unreliable because they like to wander. What fools! Have you any idea how valuable it is to have eshu on your side? It's true they are wanderers. That means they carry tales everywhere they go, and if those stories are flattering to you, your battle is half won. House Leanhaun is all too aware how effective such good press can be. We're equally aware of the interesting news they bring to US. We employ several eshu as spies for the house. Since they constantly travel about on their own, few suspect them of acting as spies for nobles.

These regal fae also make excellent scouts. Not only do their travel reports provide us with accurate and detailed accounts of areas and freeholds we may someday have to travel through or battle, but they can lead us where we need to be at a given time. Some eshu sympathetic to our aims have even become specialized in locating just the sorts of Dreamers we need to sustain ourselves. We of House Leanhaun reward our eshu well. More than that, we never forget that the eshu consider themselves nobles in their own right. We treat them as such æ at least to their faces.

Nockers

Most fae never look beyond the foul mouths and technical abilities of these Kithain. Neither do we. Then again, should we? Nockers create some interesting and unexpected gadgets, some of them quite lethal. If they are willing to design what we need, we're willing to praise them immoderately and put up with their disgusting language.

We go a little beyond that, though, providing workshops for those who ally with us or join the house, giving them positions of authority, and acknowledging their superior workmanship through gifting them with dross. In return, nockers working for House Leanhaun make some surprising things we will eventually unveil when the time is right. A few of them eschew other sorts of creation to concentrate on armor and weaponry. House Dougal may think they hold exclusive rights to forge work, but nockers have the natural affinity for it. Aside from their creative flair, many nockers prove to be vicious fighters when cornered.

Several of their best designs incorporate modern weaponry and chimerical crafting. Those items could change things significantly, turning affairs in favor of the Unseelie if used at right time. Since we will control that weaponry, Leanhaun has an excellent chance to win conflicts with the Seelie æ even when we're outnumbered. Who can argue with that?

Pooka

Few sidhe pay much attention to pooka. Those who do, dismiss them as cute and comical liars or bothersome nuisances. We of House Leanhaun know the pooka as tricksters and have occasionally even subtly suggested or urged them on in pranks against other houses. After all if Duke So-and-So is busy showing his annoyance with a pooka, he's unlikely to be watching his Leanhaun revels master to see if she's Ravaging the neighborhood Dreamers. Pooka are useful in other ways than as distractions, though. Good listeners, they all have some talent for getting other Kithain to open up to them. They seem so sympathetic and comical æ so harmless æ that almost anyone confides in them, spilling just about anything in the process. The more serious-minded pooka remember what they're told. Once we've weeded out the evasions, the exaggerations and the out-and-out reversals, we usually find those revelations quite useful.

Further, we use pooka loyal to us to spread disinformation about House Leanhaun and our deeds. While it's fine to feed pooka complete fabrications as if they were true, it's also useful to tell them absolute truths while making them sound as if they are lies. In the former instance, if the pooka believes the stories to be true, she repeats them æ but as if they are lies. In the latter case, she repeats the stories she believes to be lies as the truth. In both situations, since other Kithain know pooka always lie, they frequently accept the falsehoods as fact (or at least close to fact) and reject the true stories as false. By the time they realize their mistake, it's usually too late.

One facet of pooka that many Kithain overlook is their animal-like nature. Treat a pooka kindly, show him favor and he will serve you as faithfully as any pet. This is even more useful if the pooka's beast form is one that can hold its own in a fight. Some sidhe refuse to travel without loyal troll guardians; I usually add a useful pooka or two to my retinue.

Redcaps

Let's face it, these are rude, crude, obnoxious Kithain who will put any foul thing in their mouths and try to chew it up æ all in the name of grotesquerie! We have nothing in common with these hideous fashion victims. Their revolting habits disgust us and their lack of refinement (or any saving graces) make them unwelcome in our freeholds.

Unfortunately, we cannot afford to throw away Kithain whose fighting prowess and ferocity might serve our cause and protect our lives. So we pretend to tolerate (even like) redcaps. They literally inundate the Shadow Court in any case, so we can't just ignore them. If they serve our aims, we deal with them, and hope they never realize how much we despise them.

For now, they serve as the backbone of our troops, training secretly for the time when the Shadow Court is prepared to make its move. Though hard to control due to their bloodlust, we have found ways of ensuring their loyalty and compliance. Since most of them gain their Glamour from Ravaging, we reward good behavior by supplying those who earn our favor with the names and locations of potential "contributors." Those who defy us, on the other hand, soon discover that their suppliers have dried up and no new ones are to be found. A redcap begging for another chance and a little Glamour to sustain him is a truly pitiful sight and one we find especially heartwarming.

Satyrs

Lusty and frolicsome, these Kithain also possess a great understanding of scholarship and art. When we want a carefree fling or a night of sheer forgetfulness we consort with satyrs. They have the wit and knowledge to match our intellect, the love of revelry and music that lifts our hearts and the amorous expertise to please us, we who are so often jaded by love. When your usual love affairs revolve around the tragedy of inevitable loss and your own betrayal and corruption, a fun tryst in the midst of a party can prove so refreshing it saves your life æ literally.

Satyrs once had an entire art form dedicated to them, a sacred art æ that of drama. Other Kithain would do well to remember that, for the satyrs have not forgotten. We always speak and act respectfully toward satyrs, playing to their vanity through our acknowledgment that the ancient Greeks once considered them gods. Because we seem to understand them better than other sidhe (or even commoners), many satyrs join with or serve our house. Most utilize their scholarly abilities to further our knowledge and help us locate obscure lore.

Finally, their skill with music can provide a freehold with much-needed mirth and revelry. Some even create Glamour with their playing, summoning a whirling throng of dancers or quietly bringing forth tears from rapt listeners who bathe in the sounds of their potent creations. Even when Glamour is not forthcoming, pleasant tunes played in the evening or a sunny garden at noon can help to ease our burdens as few other pursuits can.

Sluagh

Smelly, sneaky, slithery, whispery, these slinking Kithain make my skin crawl. Their long, pale faces remind me of corpses and their preference for dark, dank places evokes images of the grave. Personally, I find Sluagh (even the childlings) so repulsive I cannot stand to have one near me. Others of the house thankfully act as liaisons with these crawling wretches. As if their spidery movements weren't bad enough, their smell nauseates most Kithain, a fact which I believe they use against us deliberately, almost defiantly, as if saying "If you can tolerate the smell and pretend it isn't there, I may tell you a thing or two. Retch even once and you'll never hear this information."

And that's the catch. Finding out secrets is second nature to the sluagh. They are the best (or at least most secretive) intelligence gatherers among the Kithain. Their bodies can contort into almost any small crawlspace, allowing them access to just about anywhere. What they learn from others, we want to know. What they learn from us, we want kept silent. In both cases, we're willing to pay.

Often, a sluagh's price is not costly, but extremely odd, such as asking a Leanhaun baroness to walk down to a deserted dock and whisper a single name. In that case, the sluagh who proved to a fellow Kithmate that he did indeed know the baroness and that she owed him a favor won far more from the doubting sluagh than we could have paid. Naturally, some odd demands are not so harmless. It is always best when dealing with sluagh to try to anticipate what use they might make of what they ask for and decide if helping them achieve their goal is worth

whatever they can tell you. I prefer to have something on them that they'd rather not have known or some other hold over them to ensure their silence concerning house affairs. Some members of the house do treat with them that way. Others prefer straightforward bargaining.

A few members of House Leanhaun have made a concerted effort to recruit sluagh, trying to win their loyalty. I have grave doubts that they will succeed in weaning sluagh away from their own kith and from greedy demands, but eventually, I think all the sluagh will embrace their Unseelie natures. Most are more than halfway there already. Further, I believe that soon after that they will fully espouse the cause of the Shadow Court. It's the only sane choice once you know all the facts, and the sluagh usually do.

Trolls

Anyone who thinks that all trolls are noble has never met the Unseelie side of the family. Then again, *we* don't really trust most Unseelie trolls unless we have their sworn word on a matter and retain some hold over them to make them keep that word. This creates some interesting situations. Many Leanhaun prefer troll guardians, but we seek Seelie ones when possible. You might be surprised that we are often able to gain their loyalty and protection without recourse to bribery, threats or subterfuge. We simply offer them what they want æ respect and gratitude for their service. Naturally, we try to shield them from learning about our Rhapsodies so they don't need to choose between their sense of duty and their sense of morality. Still, a rare few learn what we do and forgive us because they see the consequences of our abstaining from Rhapsody. These are our most trusted and treasured guardians and champions.

Of all the commoners, trolls deserve a real role in governing the Kithain. They are the ones who usually put their lives on the line to defend others and often the rise or fall of a freehold depends upon the grim determination of its troll warriors. House Leanhaun fully believes that we must win the majority of trolls to our cause if we are to fulfill our goals. Of course, we don't explain it to the trolls as bringing on Endless Winter (that seems too much like Ragnarok); instead we emphasize the noble cause of freeing Arcadia from its centuries-long thralldom to the Unseelie Court. And that's the main drawback of this kith: they are sometimes too noble and filled with notions of heroism to really examine a situation from all angles. Needless to say, the Unseelie members of the kith don't suffer from that particular failing.

Thallain

These obnoxious and disgusting creatures hold no fascination for us. While we advocate their right to continued existence, we have little in common with them. So long as they keep away from us, yet seem willing to aid us when we need it, we have no quarrel with them.

Gallain

Except for the clurichaun we have few dealings with the Gallain. Clurichaun and we tend to appreciate the same sorts of things, including fine music and dance. We make it a point, however, never to Rhapsodize any Dreamer under a clurichaun's protection and never to interfere with their cherished collections. We hold so few freeholds in Concordia that we rarely encounter the Nunnehi and Inanimae don't interest us, and won't unless they come to us offering alliances.

The Prodigals

Many Kithain leave most of these beings strictly alone. As with our other dealings, House Leanhaun always looks for potential allies, even in the strangest places.

Children of Lilith

Ailil could take a few lessons from the children of Lilith. Political manipulations in the mortal world aside, they certainly know how to pull one another's strings while remaining out of sight. "Pay no attention to that man behind the curtain," indeed! Our scholars among the Inquiry study these vampires, partly because we wonder how close to us they are. They too need something from mortals that sustains them; they too have a potential for immortality, just as we once did. We know they spring from our own kind, but they have become something else in the long years we spent in exile from the Earth. Younger mortals seem drawn to them, imitating their looks and posturing as if they too felt the chill of the grave. Some of our most interesting Rhapsodies occur with these sad children who crave meaning to their existence and flare with untold creative brilliance. For attracting such partners to the area we thank the children of Lilith.

Recently, we have begun speaking with them concerning their beliefs and practices. There seem to be two main factions, much like our Seelie and Unseelie, each of which strives to rule. We will continue to observe, then offer our help to whichever side we choose to support æ

with the understanding that they agree to assist us in return.

Werewolves

These Prodigals have reverted so far back to nature that we have little in common with them anymore. They are usually violent and closed-minded. Nonetheless, inquirers attempt to make contact with them and discover if we have any reason to ally. They would make formidable warriors in our battle to suppress the Seelie if we could win them to our cause.

Mages

"The enemy of my enemy..." Many Seelie advocate that we avoid mages since we have been enemies in times past. Our scholars have noted, however, that there seem to be different factions within the wizards' society. One actively tries to disavow the Kithain, arguing that we are mere superstitions or fictions, trying to diminish us into non-existence. The other factions accept that we're real and may cautiously have some dealings with us. Yet a third group wants us to help them reshape reality so that we can all live on Earth more comfortably. That sounds quite promising to me. I have heard that this faction is thought by other warlocks to be insane. I say that any group that follows its dream and seeks to make that dream reality is a friend to us. We are the reality of the dream. If they help us survive, I care not if others think them mad.

Shades

Though we know that these sad and horrible creatures exist, we shun their company. We who must constantly struggle to maintain our youth and who long for even a moment more of life cannot tolerate the presence of these dead mortals. Besides, they often remind us of the artists we have consumed, a reminder we would rather not have to confront.

Did you actually believe that, my darling? Some of us do feel that way, but many more of us search for ways to contact wraiths in an attempt to learn more of the Bright Road. While most of us confine ourselves to dealing with those restless souls whose main interests lie in visiting the Earth once more, a few of our darker Shadow Courtiers consort with a force of ghosts known as the specters' legion. Visitor wraiths tell us that these ghosts are evil and dangerous and we should be wary of them. Then again, we're wary of the visiting dead as well. We currently study both types to see which has more reliable information and if either type can be recruited to our cause in return for our assistance in matters important to the dead. Could we again open the Bright Road with the assurance that sidhe may walk it in safety, most of the nobility would gladly usher us into power.

Sons of Adam, Daughters of Eve

Our meat and drink, our wine and caviar. We fully acknowledge our debt to mortals. Perhaps we are the only fae to really do so. We interact with mortals even more than with other fae; but we make sure that the humans we associate with are filled with Glamour so they don't infect us with their deadly Banality. Those whom we choose to Rhapsodize become very dear to us, while others provide us with normal Glamour we use day-to-day. We do have hopes that we'll be able to enchant certain mortals we won't need to Rhapsodize to serve us and fight alongside us if need be. If necessary, however, we aren't above sacrificing them to bring our plans to fruition.

Gallery of Rogues and Revelers

Herein are found a sampling of House Leanhaun's most famous and infamous members. Some have achieved personal recognition, while others hold important positions within the governing structure of the house.

High Lord Eleanor

The enigmatic Lady Eleanor rules House Leanhaun and represents the interests of the house in the Parliament of Dreams. Charismatic and brilliant, Eleanor holds favors from most of the other delegates. For this reason, they do not allow her dismissal from the parliament even though she is unashamedly Unseelie and often argues unpopular causes. High Lord Eleanor has allowed herself to age seventy years during the last thirty year span, making her one of the most elderly looking of the changelings in Parliament. She uses the perception of her as a canny elder to good advantage, counseling other delegates in ways that prove advantageous to them, but also to House Leanhaun's plans. Because she speaks warmly in their behalf, many commoners favor Eleanor's suggestions as well. House Leanhaun has followed Eleanor's lead since returning from Arcadia, and most recall that she led us while we yet remained there. None on the house counsel truly desire Eleanor's position; fewer still have the wits, skill and rank to wrest it from her.

Though she appears elderly and fragile, Eleanor's keen wits and ruthless dedication to protect and advance her house as well as her extensive knowledge of cantrips make her more than a match for younger changelings. Her cadre of enchanted mortal bodyguards (some armed with cold iron weapons) dooms most physical attacks against her. Her champion, Sir Tairngrim, whom many believe to be her lover, fights challenges made against Eleanor within the house.

Even at her advanced age, Eleanor is in no danger of falling to Banality, as she keeps a more than adequate supply of Glamour within easy reach. Dignified and beautiful as only a sidhe can be, she patronizes dozens of artists, from opera singers to modern sculptors. Few cultural events of significance occur in Concordia without Eleanor's attendance. Now that she has reached an advanced age, she also spends part of her free time with chosen mortals whom she Rhapsodizes to maintain herself. She has lately considered stepping up her Rhapsodizing so that she can reverse her aging slightly — not so as to be noticeable to the casual observer, just enough to make certain she *can* still do it. After all, once she has accomplished her goals, she has no intention of remaining old and feeble forever.

Sir Tairngrim, Champion of the High Lord

Tom McLean trains Olympic hopefuls in fencing. Quick and agile, he also demonstrates an uncanny knack for guessing his opponent's next move and countering it almost before it has been made. Though trim-waisted, his fencer's muscles proclaim his athletic prowess. Known to those not of the mortal world as Sir Tairngrim MacLeanhaun, a distant cousin to High Lord Eleanor, he is the first knight of House Leanhaun. Possessed of great knowledge of the Primal and Soothsay Arts, Sir Tairngrim is difficult to best in formal combat.

Since his return from Arcadia, Tairngrim has served as High Lord Eleanor's personal bodyguard and champion. He has won several duels on her behalf when challengers insisted on combat. His most noted contest involved a lord of House Balor, whom Tairngrim bested with cold iron despite his aversion to the metal. Tairngrim now wears a prosthetic left hand (of silver and ebony) made for him by a friendly Dougal after his hand was made a smoking ruin by wielding the baneful metal.

Others have since attempted to cheat in duels with Tairngrim by raising cold iron against him, knowing his weakness. Such challengers invariably die in the battle.

Tairngrim has long been High Lord Eleanor's lover. He keeps himself at a moderate age (late 30s) so he can maintain his fighting trim, and the apparent age difference has occasionally elicited snide comments concerning Eleanor's taste for younger men. When such comments are brought to Tairngrim's attention, those who repeat them either apologize or face his sword. Tairngrim has sworn an oath never to lose a battle he fights for Eleanor, knowing that the day he fails to keep this oath is the day he dies.

Sir Strallach, Captain of the Knights Protector

Known to his followers as Lord of the Midnight Pact, Sir Strallach "officially" holds no higher rank in House Leanhaun than knight (at least so far as most of the house and all other changelings know). In actual fact, he heads the Midnight Pact, an elite corps of assassins who practice damage control for House Leanhaun, slaying those who learn too much without swearing allegiance to the

house. In his capacity as captain of the Pact, he holds rank equal to a duke, sits on the High Council advising Eleanor and works directly for Sir Tairngrim.

Strallach uses his handsome looks and practiced charm to win others to his point of view whenever considered argument fails. He is polite to a fault and seems to follow the chivalrous Seelie code. Most changelings see only this outer shell, never guessing his true personality or realize that Strallach is one of the most sinister members of the Shadow Court simply because so few Kithain realize what he's truly like.

His dedication to the cause of House Leanhaun has hardened him to committing blackmail, making threats, arranging beatings, kidnapping and even killing other fae despite the Banality this engenders. To offset this, he Ravages almost constantly when not at court or on duty with the Midnight Pact.

Lady Gentian

Adopted into House Leanhaun following her Chrysalis and Saining, this young eshu trained in the ways of the house since she was eight. She refused to reveal to most of the house what her true name is and was given the name Gentian. Awarded a noble title and holding just last year, Lady Gentian has long used her talents to serve House Leanhaun as their chief spy.

Willowy and graceful, with deep brown skin, long wavy black hair and startling blue eyes, Lady Gentian tells no one of her house affiliation, letting other fae believe she is nothing more than a traveling minstrel like many other eshu. She plays several instruments and sings beautifully as well as being a compelling storyteller. Her talents extend to having an eidetic memory for anything she hears, making her invaluable as a covert operative. She has mastered the Arts of Wayfare and Chicanery and prefers to patronize visual artists when she Rhapsodizes.

Treasures

The Rose

Once a year a great tournament (known as the Convocation of Leanhaun) is held to decide three positions æ the Rose, the Harp and the Crown æ within the governing elite of House Leanhaun. A female sidhe of the line of Leanhaun always holds the title of the Rose, and only sidhe (adopted or born into the family) are allowed to participate in the contests. The Rose assumes the role of caretaker for the house treasure known as the Rose of Leanhaun (see below). The Rose does not fill a merely honorary position, however, but sits on the High Council and helps decide issues that concern the house. To some degree she also shapes house policy and strives to bring about the conditions under which House Leanhaun can throw off the curse of Finellia. While she holds the Rose of Leanhaun, the bearer does not need to Rhapsodize to retain her youth so long as she is in direct physical contact with the treasure at least once per week. The Rose never travels outside a freehold unless accompanied by six bodyguards drawn from among the members of the Knights Protector.

For the past twelve years, the same fae has won the title, making her the second most stable representative of the house. While serving as the Rose, the changeling ceremonially gives up her own name and leaves it behind so no one can use it against her or unduly influence her. Traditionally, the Rose does not engage in Rhapsody while in office and almost always takes the Harp as her lover and confidant. Other changelings of House Leanhaun see the bearer of the treasure as a holy person and expect her to embody all the best characteristics of the house: beauty, strength, talent, taste and tenacity.

The Harp

The man who holds the title of the Harp is always an enchanted mortal. He holds both a real and symbolic position within the house, as the representative of those mortal Dreamers House Leanhaun plans to save and as the embodiment of the spirit of Edann. The Harp sits on the High Council alongside the leaders of the house and advises them on mortal affairs and the mortal point of view concerning House Leanhaun's plans.

Once per year, also during the Convocation of Leanhaun, enchanted mortals vie for the title in similar contests as those that decide who is to be the Rose. The winner also surrenders his name and is thenceforth known as the Harp. Most important of the tournaments are those testing imagination, talent and intelligence. Candidates for the position usually receive recommendations from members of House Leanhaun, but occasionally potent Dreamers feel attracted to the site of the tournament and arrive there as if drawn to compete. The mortal who has held the position for three years arrived at the convocation believing he was attending a music festival, won the competition and agreed to join the House of Leanhaun. A few months later, he became the Rose's lover and has won two competitions since. Those who accept the Harp are given the choice to surrender their office before the full year is up and remain with the house in some other capacity. Those who choose to vie to keep the title are usually too Ravaged to stay with the house when they inevitably lose Edann's Harp to another candidate.

The Crown

As the male and female sidhe win the titles of Rose and Harp, commoners allied to House Leanhaun vie for the position of the Crown. The person entrusted with the Crown of Dreams, winner of the Convocation tournament, becomes one of the leaders of the Ritualist faction of the house. The Crown also serves as one of the three leaders of the Keepers of the Rose and as the leader of the Finders, charged with seeking out Dreamers and identifying the best way to approach them to begin a Rhapsody.

Currently, the Crown is a male satyr who has served in the position for only a year, besting the prior Crown in last year's tournament. Like the Rose and the Harp, he has abandoned his own name in favor of the title. The prior Crown, a female nocker, now holds a minor title and a small freehold of her own.

Forbidden Treasures

The Rose of Leanhaun

This treasure is the white rose that was laid upon Leanhaun's breast at her death. The only flower that failed to turn black when in contact with Leanhaun once Finellia's curse was invoked, the rose has remained incorruptible through all the centuries of its existence. Members of House Leanhaun consider the rose a talisman of hope as it has remained pure and vibrant while sustaining its holder without the need for her to Rhapsodize. The changeling who acts as the rose's guardian draws her Glamour directly from the rose itself. So long as she holds the blossom for at least an hour each week, she has no need to Rhapsodize to prevent herself from aging and can replenish lost Glamour (once per week, while holding the flower) back to her original starting point from the rose's ambient energy.

Each year, House Leanhaun holds a special tournament to choose the best guardian for the rose. The female Leanhaun who wins the tournament (requiring feats of arms, demonstrations of artistic merit, clever thinking and grasp of house politics and needs) gains the guardianship of the rose until the next tournament. She must declare allegiance to Leanhaun's goals and her willingness to die in defense of house and treasure, and is then sworn in.

Edann's Harp

This ancient wooden harp has a large crack running through it. The strings seem little more than frayed threads and the entire instrument looks as though it is in such poor repair it may never be playable again. It might bring a few dollars from someone interested in Celtic history. To enchanted eyes, the harp, though ancient and cracked, is worked with gold and has silvered strings that look as fragile as fine, shining hair. No one of House Leanhaun now knows if this is truly the harp played by Edann, the bard who stole Leanhaun's heart or a lovingly made copy, but it has a great enchantment within it that makes the harp one of the great treasures of House Leanhaun. The Harp of Edann evokes intense emotions in those who hear it played. Depending on the intention of the harpist, it can produce happiness, sadness, bravery, hatred, longing or any other strong feeling. So strong are the feelings that they have been known to bring Glamour to those who hear the strains of its music as if they reached Epiphany. The one playing the harp need have no prior talent or knowledge of music to use it; those who do know how to play harp may evoke its properties to their fullest capacity.

The sound of Edann's Harp can recall a lost changeling to her fae self and restore one to three points of lost Glamour. Once it has done so, however, the harp cannot be played again until the next full moon lest it lose its Glamour forever. Changelings granted Glamour directly from the harp's potent music must roll their Banality versus a Difficulty of 7 or enter the first stage of Bedlam. The harp is traditionally held and played by an enchanted mortal who is considered one of the ruling members of House Leanhaun until another wins the harp and takes his place. Mortals who wield the harp longer than one year often suffer the effects of Ravaging once they give up the sublime instrument.

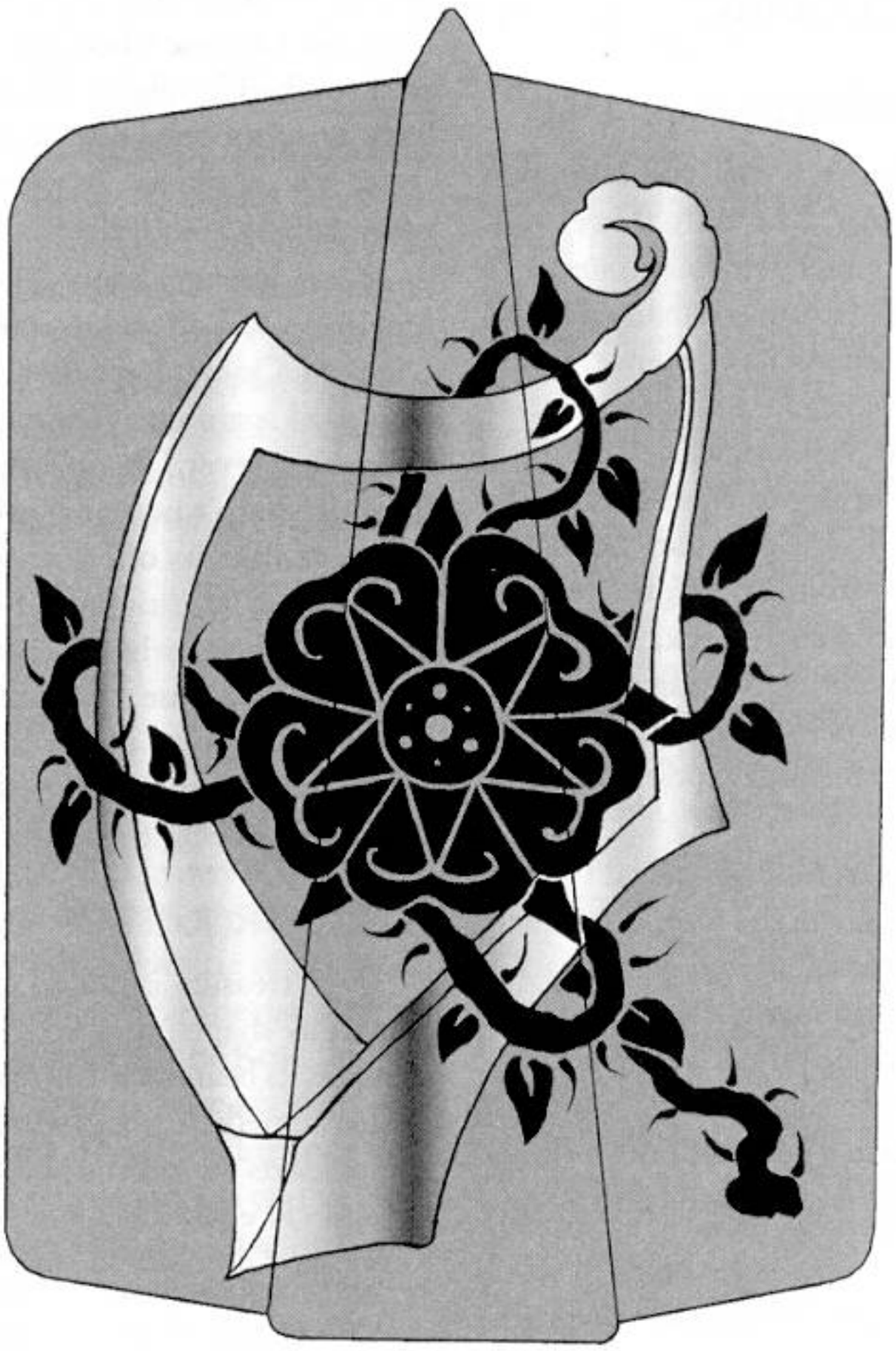
The Crown of Dreams

This treasure is not an actual crown, but a jeweled cloak pin shaped as a stylized crown. When worn, it provides its bearer with an awareness of all the Dreamers in the immediate area (within about a square mile). It also gives its wearer the ability to identify the best ways to unlock each Dreamer's potential (Perception + Kenning, Difficulty 6, must be within sight range),

making Rhapsodies easier for anyone who knows the key. Discerning someone's potential also provides information concerning which fae might best benefit from that Dreamer's creations. Won as an honor at the Convocation of Leanhaun, the Crown of Dreams traditionally passes to a commoner allied with the house.

Chronos Cages

Unlike the previous treasures, Chronos Cages are not unique. Created by Leanhaun crafters utilizing Chronos Arts, these room-sized cells create temporal zones in which time passes at an exceedingly slow rate, extending the time those within them can remain in either a freehold or the Dreaming without succumbing to Bedlam. Cages generally extend time in hourly, daily or weekly increments. The Leanhaun string cages together to make house-sized accommodations for Dreamers they take into the Dreaming to preserve them. The cages do not look like barred cells, but rooms with working doors. Within each cell, time is slowed, but once outside the cells, time moves at its normal rate. While sidhe are less affected by this, other changelings and most mortals find the experience unsettling and disorienting (roll Stamina versus Difficulty 8 or be unable to utilize any Arts or Mental skills for 24 hours after leaving the cage. For each success, the character may use one die to utilize them; no successes means these skills cannot be used, and a botch results in the effect lasting 48 hours).



My own Declan,

I have taken no mortal lives since you left me, my only love, and I shall take no more since that is your wish. Even now my flesh withers and my hand trembles with the onslaught of age. By the time this reaches you I shall be gone. Since you will not have me, I refuse to sustain myself. At least this time, I am no longer immortal. This mortal shell can't tolerate the agonies I suffered when immortal, and for that, at least, I am thankful. Forgive me if you can. I have already forgiven you.

All my love,

Lady Arvinialyndryia-

My lord, Here the signature trails off as if the one writing were too weak to go on or as if she forgot the name she was writing. I doubt we shall ever find her, this side of the Dreaming.

Sir Strallach

Leanhaun Finder

Quote: *Get in the van or I'll hurt your mother. Just kidding — can I buy you a drink?*

Background: You always seemed to know more than anyone else æ or, perhaps, to notice more. It almost seemed like you felt others' joys and pains and knew what would make them like you and feel good about themselves. Soon, that broadened to include knowing what art anyone might produce if given the right impetus.

Unfortunately, most people avoided you because of the disease. While still a young child, your skin wrinkled, your hair turned brittle and your bones began to ache. Doctors had a big name for it, you only cared that you aged unnaturally quickly. Your parents tried to shield you, but you knew you had only a few years to live — if that long. Other people looked at you with pity and revulsion.

Then everything changed. Your parents allowed you to attend a special concert by your favorite band. As you sat in the first row, the Glamour washed over you and you felt something you'd never experienced before. You managed to reach the bathroom before falling into the Dream Dance. Your Chrysalis was an extended horror wherein you saw scenes from your life in Arcadia and learned what you must do to avoid such tortures in the mortal world.

Your luck held and a sidhe of House Ailil found you and took you under his wing. Realizing you were of House Leanhaun, he arranged for your tutoring from another sidhe of that house in return for "certain considerations." She never told you what his price was, but you ended up in a Leanhaun freehold where you could get the training you needed. They soon realized your talents at empathy and Kenning, allowing you to read Dreamers for the potential within them. You were honored when your mentor asked you to join the Finders. Now you locate Dreamers for other members of your house and work to bring about Endless Winter so that the affliction of rapid aging will be lifted from you and your household.

Roleplaying Hints: Life is an adventure — which means it's as dangerous as it is exciting. Whether slipping into the hidden alcoves of the Dougals' treasuries or slipping out of a policeman's handcuffs, you thrive on the excitement being a sidhe brings you. Even your inevitable aging makes for interesting conversation; you've diagnosed yourself with "Methuselah Syndrome," "fatigue," various tropical diseases and even leprosy — anything to keep the lost children of Leanhaun from refusing their legacy.

Equipment: fine clothing; expensive accessories including a watch, pendant and signet ring; new car on lease; hidden dagger

Pour L'Amour et Liberté
The Book of Houses 2

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Court: Unseelie
Legacies: Riddler/Courtier
House: Leanhaun

Seeming: Wilder
Kith: Sidhe
Motley:

Attributes

Physical

Strength ●●○○○
Dexterity ●●●○○
Stamina ●●○○○

Social

Charisma ●●●●○
Manipulation ●●●○○
Appearance ●●●●●

Mental

Perception ●●●○○
Intelligence ●●●○○
Wits ●●●○○

Abilities

Talents

Alertness ●○○○○
Athletics ○○○○○
Brawl ○○○○○
Dodge ○○○○○
Empathy ●●●○○
Intimidation ○○○○○
Kenning ●●●○○
Persuasion ●●○○○
Streetwise ●○○○○
Subterfuge ●●●○○

Skills

Crafts ●●○○○
Drive ○○○○○
Etiquette ●●○○○
Firearms ○○○○○
Leadership ○○○○○
Melee ●○○○○
Performance ●●○○○
Security ●○○○○
Stealth ●○○○○
Survival ○○○○○

Knowledges

Computer ○○○○○
Enigmas ●○○○○
Gremayre ●●○○○
Investigation ○○○○○
Law ○○○○○
Linguistics ●○○○○
Lore ●●○○○
Medicine ○○○○○
Politics ○○○○○
Science ○○○○○

Advantages

Backgrounds

Contacts ●○○○○
Dreamers ●●○○○
Mentor ●○○○○
Resources ●○○○○
_____ ○○○○○

Arts

Chicanery ●○○○○
Primal ●○○○○
Soothsay ●○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○

Realms

Actor ●●●○○
Fae ●●○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○

Other Traits

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Glamour

● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑

Willpower

● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑

Banality

● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑

Health

		Real	Chimerical
Bruised		❑	❑
Hurt	-1	❑	❑
Injured	-1	❑	❑
Wounded	-2	❑	❑
Mauled	-2	❑	❑
Crippled	-5	❑	❑
Incapacitated		❑	❑

Ravaging/Musing Threshold

Birthrights/Frailties

Awe and Beauty: Noble Bearing/
Rapid Aging

Experience: ☐

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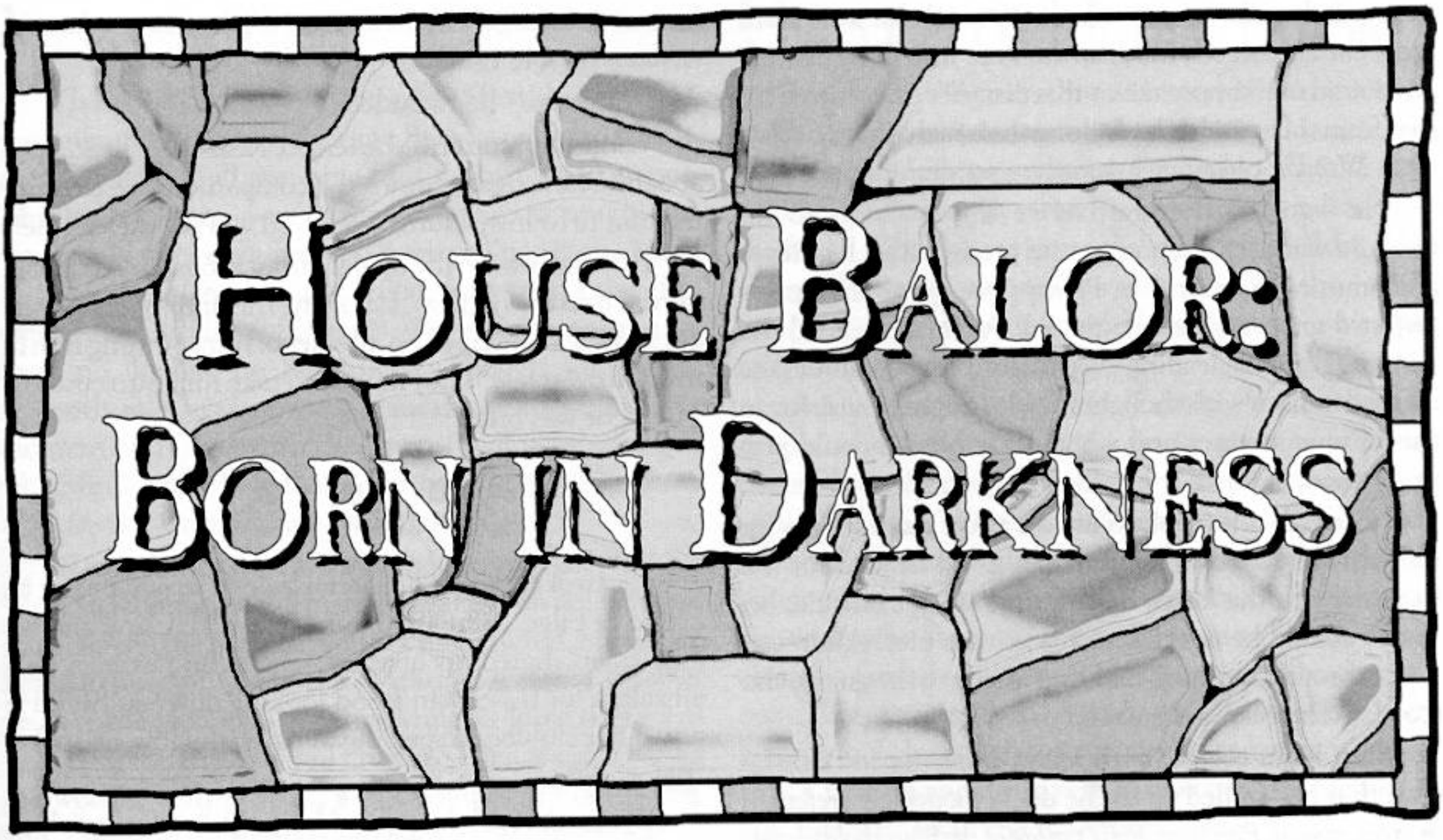


...And I will show you thunder and steel, and I will be your teacher

And we will dress in helmet and sword and dip our tongues in slaughter

And we will sing a warrior's song, and lift the praise of murder....

— Richard Farina, *Bold Marauder*

To Catch a Seelie

Sir Andreyan ap Dougal leaned against the parapet of Sea Cove Castle, his gaze playing over the deep blue waters below. Gulls and curlews wheeled and banked overhead, thin, harsh cries begging for more scraps like the ones he'd thrown to them only moments before. *Relentless scavengers*, he scolded mentally, though their effortless flight delighted him. Looking up at the hovering birds, he almost missed the flash among the waves below.

What was that?

He looked again, searching through sun-shot waters for the brighter glitter he thought he'd seen. *There, just a few waves out from the beach.*

As he peered intently, a strange beast rose from beneath the surface, its gold and purple skin glinting in

the sunlight. *Not a beast, a craft.* Though he wore both ivory ear enhancers, his deafness kept him from hearing any sound of its approach at this distance. He shifted his gaze from the vessel to look along the beach. *Empty, that's good. Wouldn't want any mortals to see this!*

He watched the craft move slowly closer to his freehold wondering whose genius produced such a clever and amusing submersible. *Perhaps one of my cousins has perfected something new* he mused. As he descended the winding staircase leading eventually to the great hall, he amused himself with thoughts of who might be visiting in this unique manner and whether or not he could persuade them to share the design.

"Conrad, tell Cook to lay on a few more places for dinner," he yelled to his foreman as he headed for the front door to the keep. By the time he got outside, his visitor should be docking at his private pier. Andreyan swept through the door, nodding briefly to the guard who stood attentively just outside.

Such bright colors, he thought, hurrying toward the craft that had pulled up to the dock, *though I'd prefer red or green myself. Pity there aren't more of the household about, they'd enjoy this, but a fair held within the Dreaming itself is not lightly missed. I'll tell them all about it when they get back. At least Conrad, the guard and Cook can look it over.*

He ran a master's eye over the sleek vessel, noting its lines and level of workmanship. *Wonderful, but I might be able to improve on it a little.* He raised an eyebrow as a portion he had taken to be decoration slid aside and a lovely young woman emerged. Her black hair shone in the sunlight and her deep violet *voile* glittered with hundreds of tiny gems. Seeing him, she waved merrily, beckoning him toward her ship.

"Cousin Andreyan, come and see what I made. Don't you think all the nobles will want one?" Her voice was like laughter across a clear meadow and he hurried to the edge of the pier trying to place her. *Could she be Healetha? He hadn't seen the girl since she was a young childling. Or was she Annaiya?* He wished he'd paid more attention to his lessons in lineage. *Healetha would still be younger than this woman*, he told himself.

"Annaiya?" he hazarded.

"Come on, cousin!" she teased. Reassured, he stepped aboard. She retreated down the companionway, beckoning him to follow, adding "Wait 'til you see the engine!"

Passing through the opulent front room. Sir Andreyan moved into the hallway, following the limping girl. As he did so, figures emerged on all sides of him, pinning him in the narrow space. They moved to take him into custody. The fight was brief.

❁ ❁ ❁

He awoke some time later, chained in what must be a kind of bilge. Similarly bound, Conrad, Cook and his lone guard shared his quarters. The young woman he'd mistaken for his cousin stood looking down at him. He noted her clubfoot in passing. Licking dry lips, he spoke, "Balor, right?"

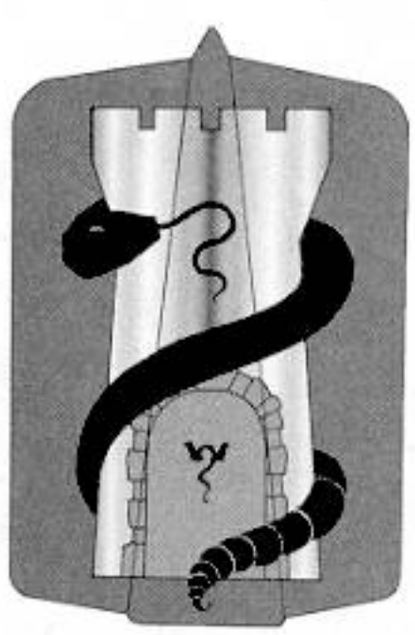
"You guessed," she replied brightly, "and you walked right into the trap. I knew you would. Set a thief to catch a thief, offer a machine to attract a Dougal. You *can* hear me alright, can't you?"

"I can hear you," he mumbled, cursing himself for an utter fool. "What do you want?"

"Not too much, Tuathan scum. I just wanted to be sure you could hear your people when I make them scream a little later tonight. And don't worry about your freehold. We left the Balefire burning after we looted it. Of course, we set the rest of it on fire too. Your people ought to have quite a homecoming when they return from the Dreaming Fair."

"How…?" he began.

"…did we know?" she finished for him. "Easy, you forget, we control the trods. We hold the fairs, and we know who's attending. Welcome to the opening salvo in the War of Rulership. Get used to it; you'll be here to provide me with the pleasure of your pain for a long, long time."



Introduction

This book carries a curse upon it. Should any mortal, supernatural or fae not of House Balor attempt to read it, roaring flame shall consume him for his impertinence. This is a test, then — of your courage and of your blood. You would not be reading this were you not of the blood of Balor. Rejoice in your fortune, for you are the elite among the Children of Dreams. We alone among the fae have no doubts, no hesitations. Though we do not currently rule, even now our plans move to fruition. Our moment will come with the intensity of an undeniable whirlwind and when that wind has swept clean those who are not worthy, Balor will remain.

We come from the Dreaming back into the Waking World to conquer it and turn it to our use. In doing so, we must assume the outward guise of humankind, but we are not like those pitiful mortals. We are gods clothed in *other flesh* for the moment. When we rule by force of arms as well as birthright, this will change. Then we shall order the worlds, both physical and Dreaming, to our liking, and command the mortals and our weaker brethren as we wish.

For now, though, that journey from the Dreaming to the Waking World robs us of our memories, leaving us vulnerable. Our commitment falters as we struggle to remember who and what we truly are. This tome has been prepared by several of our house's greatest teachers and generals to remind you of your place within our house and within the War of Rulership. In it, we shall explain to you where we came from, who we are and why we seek the subjugation of the worlds.

Make no mistake. For too long have we been downtrodden, our name and birthright scorned. No more! We shall rise like a tidal wave to crush our foes. Though all may stand against us in the end, they are but insects we swat when they prove an annoyance. Let them posture and preen. We are the embodiment of the dark dreams of war and conquest. We are the scourge and the flame, the iron sword that cleaves the light. Our coming shall be cause for lamentation and the curses of our enemies, for we bring the Evernight with our victory. We are the armies of darkness and our name shall be destruction. We are Balor. We will prevail.

History of House Balor

Let no one tell you he knows history if he hasn't lived it. The People of Balor were rulers of the land long before the other noble houses existed. Ours is blood of the most royal. Gwydion may pretend to be the chosen leaders of the fae all they like; we know the true story. All the sidhe except House Balor trace their origins back to the Tuatha de Danaan; only we claim an older kingship, an earlier rule and a greater progenitor.

Before the advent of the Tuatha de Danaan, our people, the fomorians, ruled the waves and received tribute from the people of Hibernia. We were born of the earliest settlers' dreams and terrors, of all that they admired and feared, given shape from their most hideous imaginings. We became what they made us — strict overlords who accepted their adulation and their tribute and who agreed to live apart from them on islands of our own. We governed the northern seas, preying upon anyone foolish enough to venture into our waters, and we struck fiercely and decisively against any who denied us our due as rulers of the northwest isles.

Gradually, our first dreamers died out and were replaced by the Fir Bolg, who settled and farmed the land. At first, they resisted our rule and a great battle drove many of them out, but when they returned in greater force, their king and warrior elite agreed to pay our tribute. In return, we used our magic to make their lands fertile and bless them with strong children.

For long years we reigned, unchallenged and respected, if not loved by all. Though we took the best that mortals produced as our tribute, we did not require much. We regarded them as our beloved subjects, even intermarrying with a few of their elite. Many came to us willingly as servants, drawn by our glory.

Then came the Tuatha de Danaan. Though they were distant cousins of ours, creatures of the Dreaming as much as we, they refused to recognize our dreamers and our overlordship. In their arrogance, the Tuatha saw only that our dreamers were dark and small, not tall and fair like themselves. They invaded Hibernia, demanding that the Fir Bolg cede their dreamers — known as the Beaker People — half the land. The Fir Bolg refused. As we lived on islands separated from Hibernia by stormy

seas, we did not know the Tuatha had come. They forced the Fir Bolg into battle, defeating and killing most of them with faerie treasures and magics against which our dreamers had no defense. Those who survived fled far to the West or to our islands for sanctuary and to warn us of the coming of the Children of Danu.

When we heard what the Tuatha de Danaan had wrought, we could hardly curb our wrath. First we sent envoys to the Tuathan king, Nuada, ambassadors from fomorian to Tuathan, Now, you must remember that we were born of nightmare and terror and so had upon us twisted visages and differences others would call deformities. The proud Tuatha, who would accept no one as king who was not physically perfect, drew back in horror from our messengers, giving us deadly insult. They barely heard our complaint against them on behalf of the Fir Bolg and our demand that they pay tribute — both to acknowledge our right to the land and to repay our dreamers for some of what they had lost. The arrogant usurpers refused and set our envoys adrift on the sea with neither weapons nor food. Only by our magic were they drawn back to our islands, where they reported what the Tuatha had said.

No more would the fomorians bow to their insults. We gathered our hosts and prepared for war. One among us, a mighty warlord called Balor was chosen to lead us in battle. When he was much younger, Balor — who had but one eye — spied upon a solemn rite he was forbidden to witness. As punishment the Dreaming cursed him so that his eye became a thing of terror. Whenever it was opened, a horrible red light issued from it, slaying all it gazed upon. Thus, Balor could not open his eye without destroying whatever he looked upon and was, therefore, made blind. Even without his sight, however, Balor was a great warrior, quick, clever, strong and wily. He led the fomorian army into battle against the Tuatha. Great was the slaughter on both sides, but in the end, the Tuathan king, Nuada, lost him arm and the Children of Danu fled before the power of Balor's eye.

Graciously, we granted them their lives and once again demanded our just tribute. By their own laws, Nuada could no longer rule the Tuatha, for he was no longer perfect. In his stead, they chose Bres, the most beautiful among them. The Tuatha did not realize that Bres' mother might be Tuathan, but his father was fomorian. He agreed to give us one third of all that the Beaker people and the Tuatha produced, be it milk, crops, animals or people. We took the goods because our barren islands could produce little. The people we took to replenish our own decimated ranks. Both the fomorians and the Fir Bolg had lost most of our people from war with the Tuatha. They became our wives and husbands, our children and our children's children. Thus we mingled our blood with that of the Tuatha de Danaan for the first time on a large scale.

Balor was made king of the fomorians and married a woman taken as tribute. Though he did not know it, Caitellin was considered one of the great beauties of the age. Balor never saw his wife, for to do so would be to destroy her. By all accounts, the marriage was a good one and soon produced a daughter whom they named Eithlinn. Not a day after her birth, however, Balor's soothsayers came to him and said,

"Great king, though you rejoice in the birth of your daughter, we have foreseen that you will be slain by your grandson. Therefore, we counsel you to slay your newborn child and have no more. We will continue prosperously under your rule and you will never die."

At this, Balor and his wife both wailed with anguish and tore their hair. Caitellin pleaded with Balor not to slay her only child and Balor himself was loath to do so. Finally, he thought of a plan. He would not slay his daughter, for already she was dear to him and truth to tell, the fomorian people dwindled after their wars with the Tuatha. Instead, he determined to build her a tower made of glass and shut her inside it. Twelve bondswomen would care for her. She would never look upon a man or hear one's name spoken. She would live her life pampered, but away from her people. Having no contact with any others, she would never bear the child who would cause Balor's death. Thus could the prophecy be averted. And so it was done as he commanded.

Now in Hibernia, Bres made many enemies. Aside from the tax levied on them to pay tribute to the fomorians, the Tuatha also had to pay Bres, who took a tithe for himself. He gave no favors to the other Tuathans, instead requiring them to do menial work on his hall and lands. Many were ready to revolt against him, yet their only other choice for king was Nuada, who could not rule. It was at this time that the tribute came due for the fomorians and one among the Tuatha refused to part with his best cow. She was called the *Glas Gaibhleann* and her milk never ran dry. She belonged to a Tuathan noble called Cian. Balor's tax collectors returned to him and spoke of the *Glas Gaibhleann* and Cian's pride. Rather than call war upon all the Tuatha, Balor and a companion disguised themselves and took the cow when Cian's younger brother failed to keep an eye on it.

Cian went to a soothsayer to discover what had happened to his prize cow. The seeress Birog told him Balor had taken the cow and advised him to use guile to retrieve it, for if he came against Balor directly, the fearsome king would open his dreadful eye and slay Cian on the spot.

If only he *had* slain Cian, child of House Balor! For from this deception came great sorrow and trouble for our people.

Cian disguised himself as a woman and he and Birog sailed to the island where Eithlinn dwelt in her glass tower. Birog had counseled Cian to steal away that which Balor most treasured and, perhaps, the fearsome warlord would ransom it with the cow. No warrior could have assailed such an edifice, but Cian and Birog called out to the women within, saying they were queens of the Tuatha who had been shipwrecked and begging their help. Not wanting to leave other women in distress, the guardians opened the tower and admitted Cian and Birog. Birog cast a Glamour on the women and all fell asleep, while Cian climbed the stairs to the tower where Birog told him the treasure awaited.

When Cian looked upon Eithlinn he was struck dumb by her beauty, grace and sadness. For her part, she recognized him as someone whose face she had often seen in dreams. They fell in love at a glance and she went to his bed willingly. Knowing that if he stole Eithlinn away, Balor and the fomorians would rise in the greatest wrath and wage war upon the Tuatha, Cian was persuaded to leave her, promising to come again when he could. Eithlinn stayed with her guardians, and in due time gave birth to triplets. The first born was golden haired like his sire, while the others were dark like their mother.

Word was brought to Balor of their birth and he flew into a rage. Descending on the tower, he ripped the children from their mother's breast. Still, he could hardly bear the thought of slaying his own kin. Wrapping each in a blanket, he flung them into the sea, crying,

"Let the sea decide the fate of my grandchildren! If they be drowned, then none shall survive to be my doom. If fate decrees otherwise, let them be borne up upon waves and saved."

The waves rolled in and each child seemed to be swept under the water. Unknown to Balor, however, Manannan Mac Lir, Tuathan overlord of the sea, saw all that transpired and heard Balor's speech. He took pity on the children. The golden-haired eldest he swept in a wave to Cian and made known to him that this was his son. The next eldest, a dark girl, he changed into a seal, giving her the power to shift her shape and become the first of the selkie. The last, a dark boy, he made into a fishtailed man, creating thereby the mer-folk. So, by Balor's rash act, two faerie kin came into existence, and his doom was sealed. That he also set the stage for the doom of all fae, Balor did not yet know.

Cian named the golden boy Lugh, which means "light." He loved his son, for the child reminded him of Eithlinn. Knowing he had no way to care for an infant, however, Cian asked that any Tuatha of good character who would provide a nursemaid step forward and claim fosterage of his son. A mysterious stranger wrapped about with mists answered his plea, bringing with him his wife Fand to suckle the child. Cian gave Lugh into the stranger's keeping once the man had proven himself a mighty warrior and a clever poet. Thus Manannan Mac Lir legally became Lugh's foster father and taught him all the great arts of the Tuatha. The boy grew to manhood and Manannan advised him to seek a place at court.

During all this time, the fomorians forbore to wage war against the Tuatha, for we realized they were our cousins in the Dreaming however much they gave us insult. Eithlinn was again locked in her tower and forbidden to see anyone but her guardians. More and more, the Tuatha tired of Bres' demands and greed and now they had a way to rid themselves of him. Diancecht, a great healer, fashioned a silver arm that moved as a normal one for Nuada and Diancecht's son even managed to restore Nuada's real arm to him. Now, the old king was no longer blemished and the Tuatha went to Bres and demanded that he give up the throne to Nuada once again. Fearing their wrath if he refused, Bres abdicated.

Bres fled to his father and complained against the Tuatha, saying they had ousted him illegally. His father appealed to Balor. Knowing he would get no tribute from the arrogant Tuatha without Bres on the throne and foreseeing that there would be war, Balor gathered his forces, determining to rid himself once and for all of the troublesome Children of Danu. He commanded his warriors to slay all they met and tie a rope around Hibernia when the battle was done so that the island could be brought back to Balor's Isle as the greatest tribute ever collected.

Now, my story has grown long in the telling, so I will make a shorter end of it.

Lugh had come to court and found welcome there. He brought with him great treasures given to him by Manannan Mac Lir. When all saw the talents Lugh displayed, they were amazed, for he knew all the great arts of the Tuatha — warcraft, smithing, healing, poetry and many others too numerous to list. Nuada himself gave the crown to Lugh saying that he was the best of them all and deserved to be king. They overlooked the fact that Lugh's arms were slightly too long for his body to be entirely in proportion, a gift of his mother's fomorian blood.

The Tuatha heard that Balor was coming, bringing with him enough ships to bridge the gap between his own island and Hibernia and warriors to fill all those ships. Quickly, they assembled their own hosts and went to meet his armies. As their new king, Lugh rode at the front of the host. When they came into range, Balor opened his eye and the red light played across the hosts of the Tuatha and their lesser children, the sidhe. Everywhere that light fell, warriors writhed and fell dead, poisoned by the evil of Balor's eye — all except Lugh. He clutched to him a great spear that protected whoever held it from all harm. The red light played all about him, yet he did not fall. Kicking his horse into a gallop, he headed straight for Balor, whose eye had closed again. His grandfather never saw him coming.

With a great cry, Lugh rushed up to Balor, who stood alone before his own troops lest he slay them and drove the spear into the eye just as it began to open once again. The great spear passed through the eye and into Balor's brain, killing him instantly. Given new heart, the Tuatha attacked and drove the fomorians from the land. Nor did we ever come again with warfare to Hibernia. We took up Balor's body and returned to our islands, where we made him a great funeral pyre. It is said that the wisest among us took his shattered eye and encased it in crystal bathed in the fluids of a well of healing, hoping someday to use it again as a weapon against those who had driven forth our dreamers and displaced us from the land.

With our great leader dead and our people scattered, we dwindled, as had our first dreamers. Realizing that our time was at an end, we closed our homes, sank our islands back into the sea and sailed for the Dreaming.

The Tuatha de Danaan remained for some little time after, and it is from Lugh's line that we who became House Balor trace our lineage. Eventually, even the Tuatha realized that things were not as they once had been. With the death of Balor, the humans lost much of their awe of faerie folk and their fear of us. Now they came not as supplicants, but in as much arrogance as once the Tuatha showed to us, demanding as their due what was once a treasured gift. New people came to Hibernia, bringing with them a new substance that proved deadly to our kind. Rather than face their destruction from cold iron, the Tuatha left the world, slipping into the Dreaming like the cowards they truly were. Though their children, the sidhe, would remain when the Tuatha left the Waking World, with the death of Balor and the cessation of the human's fear of his great power, the Sundering had begun.

The Sundering

Though many of the sidhe decried the Sundering, when Arcadia began moving away from the Waking World, we established ourselves as a house during this time. Having lost our fomorian kin, our leaders began trying to salvage what they could. We intermarried with the sidhe, mixing our blood and losing some of the powers our differences once brought us. Lugh was the first leader of House Balor, though he did not acknowledge that, preferring to lick the boots of the Tuatha's children from whom he received adulation in return. To rule in his stead, we chose one of Lugh's sons, a youth named Cathal, which means battle-mighty. From that time forward, Cathal was ever critical of the king, mocking Lugh's actions and calling to mind that Lugh had slain his own kin. Eventually, Lugh himself went into the mists, and the sidhe were left to rule themselves.

We prospered as a house, though the other sidhe shunned us for taking Balor's name. In time, they forgot that we were sprung from that fearsome fomorian as much as we ever were from the Tuatha de Danaan. They deluded themselves into believing that we were little more than poor cousins with no social graces. We warned them that we must curb the humans' excesses and rule them with iron fists if we were to remain within the Waking World, but they paid little heed to us. As humans became more daring, even capturing faeries to force us to their service, we proposed that we fall upon the mortals with plague and warfare, wiping out enough of them that the survivors would forever learn their place. Arrogance again won out over good sense. Blindly, the other houses believed that humans loved and revered them. We, who often sported grotesque bodies that the humans hated, knew otherwise and we made plans to survive when the inevitable happened.

Though they will tell you otherwise, House Balor was the first to propose many of the tenets of the Escheat. They will tell you that these customs came into being through Seelie efforts to protect all fae. They are liars. We warned them and they didn't listen. We insisted we have the right to rule our domains as needed, handing out justice as we saw fit and acting as stern overlords to the mortals under our sway. We proposed that fae stop interacting with mortals when outside our own holdings, keeping our nature secret so they would no longer hunt

us for our magic. We asked that all fae understand the need to rescue those who *were* taken by the mortals and we begged them to agree to give safe haven to those fae who were in danger. The other sidhe laughed, assuring us no such measures were necessary. We cursed them then, saying that until all fae acknowledged the wisdom of these basic rights, the rift between fae and mortals would continue unabated. We foretold that their loved ones would suffer the agonies inflicted by mortals who captured Children of the Dreaming and they would be powerless to prevent an even greater disaster we had foreseen dawning on the horizon. Now, of course, those four rights are part of the Escheat, but no sidhe acknowledges that it was House Balor who proposed them.

Turning our backs on the Seelie fools, we made ourselves treat with the wielders of cold iron so that we could study the metal and learn how to lessen its effects on us. To our surprise, we discovered that it was far less deadly to us than to the other sidhe. Where they suffered its touch, and it stripped their Glamour, we could withstand it — a gift of our fomorian blood. Only if we died of wounds from such weapons were our faerie souls destroyed. We ourselves could even wield such weapons so long as we did so carefully. Finally, we had a powerful weapon capable of bringing ruin upon the descendants of the Tuatha! Perhaps we could have reclaimed what had been lost to us had we been given the time, but the inattention of the rest of the sidhe and their failure to keep the mortals in line had gone too far. The disaster we had foreseen suddenly fell upon us, and we, as well as the other sidhe, were forced to make split-second decisions or perish utterly. With the advent of new arrivals who wielded cold iron, the Tuatha had left for the Dreaming. With the coming of the Shattering, all fae who valued their lives fled there as well or made accord with the new ruling force of the land: Banality.

The Shattering

Though our seers warned us that a terrible calamity loomed over us, they could not say when it would strike. So we were prepared, but not prepared enough. Many theories concerning the reasons the Shattering occurred abound. To my mind, it doesn't matter now. What is important is that it *did* occur, forcing sidhe to flee for Arcadia before the gates slammed shut, trapping most commoners and a few nobles in the mortal lands where they faced the tidal wave of Banality that swept the world. Some escaped by taking on some of that Banality and becoming changelings — their faerie souls hidden within an outer shell of humankind. Others wrapped themselves in as much Glamour as they could draw around them and imprisoned themselves in cocoons of magic, hoping to ride out the wave and emerge when Banality had passed them by.

Some of our kin from House Balor thought they might be partially immune, again due to our fomorian blood, and faced the onslaught directly, hoping to withstand its worst ravages. Most of them perished. Rumor tells that a very few, who knew at the last moment they would not survive, chose the way that Scathach did, mingling their blood with mortals, but remaining faerie nobility. Our wisest say that those souls may even now be among House Scathach, believing they are of that house when in reality, they are Balor.

We have only hearsay for this knowledge, however. For we fled with the other sidhe to Arcadia. We knew nothing of the Waking World for the centuries that followed which the sidhe — as arrogant as ever — termed the Interregnum.

The Interregnum

We should have many memories of our time in Arcadia since we spent about six hundred years there. The truth of the matter is, we don't. We remember almost nothing of that time. Our erstwhile allies, the Ailil and Leanhaun, tell us the Unseelie ruled in Arcadia then as they do now. Some among them claim that Arcadia lies locked in stagnation and Endless Winter, trapped that way by the Seelies' refusal to surrender us our half of the year in the Waking World. We of House Balor don't claim to know; We are honest enough to admit that our time in Arcadia is a blur to us. Perhaps it is as they say or, perhaps, things are different than they believe. It really matters little to us. We aren't there anymore and the way back is closed to us for now. We *think* the gates will open once again when Balor rules the Waking World and Arcadia must treat with us or die, and that's the theory we proceed with for now.

While we were gone, the commoners established itself and learned to live in a changing world. They took the freeholds the sidhe left empty and kept alive the presence of the fae on Earth. We had kin among them, though the other changelings never considered them true fae. Instead, the mer-folk and selkies were accounted among the Gallain. Not that they often acknowledge their kinship with us either. I have heard that the selkies tried to force the sidhe to allow commoners through Silvers Gate when the Shattering happened, but were defeated. Some among them have resented the other sidhe ever since.

Nowadays a few of them, tired of being treated as lesser beings, give their allegiance to House Balor. If all of them would do so, we might have an undefeatable force on land and sea. We fight for their rights to be accounted noble in the Parliament of Dreams (though we have little hope the Seelie sidhe can be induced to grant such a request). After all, their founders were brother and sister to Lugh of the Long Arm and their blood is mixed fomorian and Tuathan just as ours is. Meanwhile, we benefit from our association with them both because they tell us what happened during the Interregnum and they shelter our leaders in their domain — under water — where most other fae cannot go.

During the Interregnum another group of our kin established themselves and became stronger. I speak of the Prodigals known as Dancers. Once, fae and werewolves were one folk and the ones known as Howlers shared breeding stock — a people known as the Picts — with the fomorians. When the Howlers descended into another place and returned as the Dancers, we rejoiced, for those who had been bound to us by kinship now thought more like us. We fought the same foes. While we have been in Arcadia, the Dancers have spread across the world and gained many powerful allies. We find that we still have much in common, even fostering some of our most promising young with them in their hives.

The Resurgence

Since we don't remember Arcadia, the reason for our exile from it also remains a mystery to us. By that, I mean that we don't *know* — not for certain. We make shrewd guesses and base our plans on them, but we don't delude ourselves that we hold all the answers as Ailil and Leanhaun do.

That said, what we *believe* is this: When the trods were briefly blown open in 1969, there was war in Arcadia, probably instigated by the Seelie trying to hold onto more than they were entitled to just like they've done in the Waking World for all these centuries. The Seelie houses that were exiled constitute the rebels who tried to grab power for themselves. The Unseelie houses? I suspect we just backed the wrong faction. Whatever the reason we were exiled — and despite Ailil claims that we *chose* to return, we remember the exile order — we will return to Arcadia on our own terms. Then we will make them pay for their treatment of us.

Still, I suppose we should thank them for this opportunity to garner power over the dreamers of the Waking World. When we have that power, we will hold their Glamour for ransom. Whatever their claims to the contrary, Arcadia cannot exist without the infusion of Glamour from *somewhere*. Travel through their gates may be impossible, but they still draw Glamour through those links to this world. When we are in control, we will bind the gates from this side, cutting off their supply. Then we, the fae of House Balor, will decide who gets Glamour and who doesn't, and we shall control both Waking World and Dreaming.

Now you know why we accepted exile.

The Accordance War and Movements in Ireland

We tell all who will listen that we returned through the newly opened trods to Hibernia since it was our home before the Shattering. That's the truth as far as it goes. Many of us did emerge in Ireland and reclaim a few freeholds there, particularly in Northern Ireland. What we don't say is that many of us also came through elsewhere, and in far greater numbers that either the Seelie or our fellow Unseelie suspect. Our infiltrators carved places for themselves among Houses Dougal and Eiluned, Liam and Ailil, traveling from Arcadia with their erstwhile houses and taking up whatever role they seemed entitled to. Since most of us cannot remember things clearly, placing our agents among other houses means that their "kinsfolk" don't question their identities. After all, they arrived with the rest of the family.

We seeded these agents with trigger phrases to help them remember their true allegiance once they'd been accepted, and most have already been activated to further our aims. We watch them quite carefully when they are activated to make certain they don't try to betray us to their false houses. Those who attempt to do so are immediately killed. Luckily, we have always been adept at choosing those whose loyalty to Balor is unquestioned and we have only had to destroy a handful of our own to preserve our secrecy.

Most of us chose to return as teenagers or young adults and we gladly honed our skills in battle against the commoners, whether as part of the Accordance War in America or under the guise of sectarian warfare in Northern Ireland. Those who arrived in other territories fought their own battles as well. Aside from the glory of warfare, we made little effort to stake claims to the more sought after freeholds. We were not yet ready to confront the other houses and we wanted more secluded bases anyway where we might train and gather our hosts in secret. The other houses may believe we are unsophisticated and relatively useless outside of battle, but we know how to hide our motives and bide our time. Balor never fights foolishly. We pick our battles — time, place and foe — and when we are convinced the battle can be won, we fight without apology or quarter. Only idiots fight for honor or glory.

As you might surmise, we fought the Accordance War, but not with great conviction. We did just enough to assure a victory for the sidhe, but not so much that we made the commoners our bitter enemies. After all, we would need their assistance later and it's hard to recruit someone whose hatred of you burns so hot, he can think of nothing else but revenge. Stoking that hatred against the *Seelie* on the other hand...

The Modern Era

In the recent past, we have spent a great deal of our time making alliance with the Dancers and the Fomori, whom many believe to be the remnants of the fomorians in the modern world. Some of our energy has gone into building the Shadow Court and needling the Seelie about their continued refusal to share power for our half of the year. We have our representatives in the Parliament of Dreams, but they are there to disrupt rather than to negotiate peace. Most of us know our true agenda, however, which is to prepare for the Evernight, then strike to bring it about once we're ready.

Since the first of us returned, we have tried to ensure that newer returnees emerge as very young children or newborns. This makes them children of the modern world, without the medieval mind-set that accompanied most of the sidhe who returned earlier. We need those skills, just as we need young warriors to fight the upcoming battles. Those who emerged in 1969 are now more than 30 years old and if they have not spent most of their time within freeholds, they are starting to fade and forget.

When we bring about the war that accompanies the Evernight, we need strong, young bodies, for we know that only the strongest will survive and prosper. We cannot waste our resources on graybeards too old to serve our cause. They are better used elsewhere, such as in the Waybuilders Corps, which you'll hear more about later.

For now, we pretend to the Unseelie that our highest priority lies in advancing the Shadow Court's aims. We give every appearance of wholeheartedly supporting Ailil's claim to rulership and we run interference for the Leanhaun and their Ravaging. In short, we appear to be the dumb grunts on whose backs the movement is built. That's fine with us for now. If they suspect nothing more, we certainly aren't planning to enlighten them. But we are taking names of those who treat us poorly; our day will come.

To the Seelie, we present a different face. They may hate us and fight us if they find us "encroaching" on their territory, but they rarely slay us outright, for we are the Guardians of the Gates. I don't know if you remember your own journey down the trods and into this world, but many recall terrible things along that route, huge black things that pursued them and tore at them with great fangs and claws. They remember sinuous bodies, lightning reflexes and wicked gleaming eyes that promised death to any creatures they caught. A few even recall friends or kinsmen who fell to the beasts, and their screams as their faerie souls were shredded and lost. We call the beasts the Fell, and Balor remembers them best of all. Thus we have claimed the right to patrol trods in the Near Dreaming and to fight the Fell on behalf of all fae. We watch to make certain that these terrible beasts do not find a way into the Waking World. Thus we are the Guardians and whatever else the Seelie feel about us, they cannot argue with our effectiveness in that regard. We consider it one of our highest priorities, and you too will take your turn on patrol against the Fell. Don't be too concerned, however, we will tell you the way to deal with the creatures later. Meanwhile, it gives us the perfect opportunity to gradually assume control of all the gates into the Dreaming.

We tell no one outside the house our true intentions. You have already heard me speak of bringing on the Evernight, what most fae call Endless Winter. We have no plans to do so until we are ready, though. All our alliances must be in place, we must mark each dreamer so we may take them prisoner when we begin our bid for power, we must control the gates and trods, and we must be strong enough to strike decisively, killing or capturing those fae who oppose us. We will then be the only source for Glamour and others must beg it of us. Banality, which has always bothered us less than other sidhe, will force them to subjugate themselves to us or die. Finally, the Children of Balor will see the Curs of the Tuatha de Danaan beaten and cowed.

May that day come soon!

Balor Society

Long before the coming of the Tuatha, the armies of Balor stretched from one shore of our island home to the other, a mighty force of arms and faerie magic. Today, though our numbers have dwindled and the children of the Tuatha rule the fae in our stead, we still exist as an army. While other houses of the fae mimic medieval societies and conduct their affairs like social clubs, we organize our forces in a more militant manner. We exist in a state of war, and our house structure reflects our emphasis on preparedness and discipline.

Unlike armies, however, we marshal our forces along family lines, allowing and encouraging the common ties of kinship and respect to temper the coldness of harsh militarism. We expect much of our house members — make note of this, please — and expect each individual, from the rawest fledge to the oldest graybeard, to pull her weight. We do not countenance idlers or shirkers. In war, we brand as traitors those who do not contribute to the goals of the house and deal with them accordingly.

The other noble houses — Unseelie and Seelie alike — fear us, although they tell themselves that they merely hate and disdain us. In fact, they recognize that we possess a strength of mind and of purpose sorely lacking within their own soft houses. They call us cruel, crude and repugnant; some houses question the validity of our claim to a noble heritage. How conveniently they forget our origins and the fact that we predate the sidhe spawned from the castoffs of the Tuatha.

Balor's Challenge

Part of our strength comes from the blood of the ancient fomorians, a heritage that not only gives us a greater resistance to Banality and, therefore, a more adaptable nature than other sidhe, but also marks us with tangible signs of our origins. What other houses call our "deformities," we see as challenges and bear them proudly as badges of our house. These challenges spur us to greater effort, forcing us to push ourselves harder to overcome whatever physical or mental mark that distinguishes us. Those of us with one arm or one hand learn to fight without shields and become all the more deadly with our blades; those who lack an eye or some other sensory organ

discover ways to compensate for that missing sense. If one of us limps because of a twisted or malformed limb, she practices new ways of maneuvering so that she does not become a liability on the field of battle.

Unlike the fae of House Dougal, we cannot replace our missing limbs or eyes or augment a diminished sense through the construction of elaborate prosthetics. We must make do with what we have. Fortunately, we possess the will and the determination to do just that.

The Armies of Balor

Like any army, we utilize a strict chain of command, originating with our high lord and proceeding through the "ranks" of nobility down to the ranks of knights or warriors. We ascribe both military and noble titles to our members, signifying our dual nature as soldiers and as nobles.

Although we have few freeholds in Concordia, we have bases in other parts of the world — particularly in Hibernia, Albion, Caledonia and Cymri, where our roots stretch back to the age of legends. Even in Concordia, however, we maintain a number of hidden fortresses, most of them located in out-of-the way places, such as swamps, wilderness communities, mountain glens and other sites ignored by most other fae. These holdings employ magical and technological defenses in order to prevent intrusion by infiltrators or raiders. Some of us make our homes with our near-kin, the shapeshifting Dancers who share our blood, though most of them have forgotten that fact. Others of us dwell in vast underground strongholds, where the darkness suits us and allows us to conduct our affairs away from the prying eyes of the Parliament of Dreams and its agents.

Head of the House

From his underwater kingdom beneath the icy waters of the Northern Sea, the High Lord Li-Tili issues the orders that determine the direction and emphasis of our armies. His Fortress of Glass, which occupies a pocket of the Near-Dreaming in the bowels of a sunken ocean liner, contains rare treasures that allow him to communicate with his armies on the surface, view the freeholds and breathe water as if it were the purest air. Although the High-Lord does not dictate our every move, he does provide us with general guidelines and goals, all based upon a timetable of his own devising that anticipates the imminent arrival of the Evernight

The Tower Council

Directly beneath the high lord, the Tower Council acts as advisors for House Balor. Consisting of the leaders of all our freeholds and fortresses as well as the leading generals of our house, the Tower Council discusses the directives of the high lord and formulates our policies. The leaders of the freeholds provide information on the affairs of the house at the lowest levels of organization, while the leading generals offer counsel based on their assessments of the forces under their commands.

- **General of the Elite Guard:** The Lord General, Duke Gordwyn, commands the army of elite forces that consist of members of House Balor only. His responsibilities include not only the supervision of the training of our house armies but also the plans for the eventual conquest of non-Balor holdings in the aftermath of Evernight. He masterminds the strategic placement of our troops and acts as the field commander for the high lord, who cannot leave his fortress to take personal command of his armies.
- **General of the Forces:** Duchess Rowhenne, the Lady General of the Forces, acts as the representative of House Balor to the armies of the Shadow Court. Her expertise in dealing with the warriors of Ailil and Leanhaun (such as they are) ensures the cohesion of the Unseelie army. Besides her tactical genius, Duchess Rowhenne excels in the communication skills that enable her to keep our Unseelie allies from discovering our deeper motives and hidden plans. Do not let her outward charm lull you into assuming she lacks the iron-hard discipline of our other war leaders. And do not, under any circumstances, engage her in a "friendly" duel unless you seek a quick end to your life.

• **General of the Foreign Guard:** Lord Raghnall, the General of the Foreign Guard, oversees the alliance of non-fae allies such as the Dancers, the modern fomori, witches and other supernatural creatures. His potential army plays a pivotal role in securing the compliance of all like-minded non-humans in the administering of the world during the Long Winter that follows Evernight. Most importantly, Lord Raghnall bears the responsibility for keeping our supernatural allies in line despite their general lack of discipline.

• **General of the Bleak:** Duke Fearan, General of the Bleak, has perhaps the most arduous of positions within the hierarchy of the house. He commands the ragtag forces of the Thallain, continually risking his life among the unpredictable and uncontrollable forgotten children of the Dreaming (or, more appropriately, of the Nightmare). His constant association with these creatures has, we fear, affected his perspective and some of the other members of the Tower Council believe that he is overdue for a sabbatical. Unfortunately, at present, we have no one in a position to replace him in the immediate future.

• **Head of Security:** Lady Eithlinn, the Head of Security, holds the internal safety of House Balor in her capable hands. She sits at the center of a vast network of covert operatives and sleepers that spends its time observing and gathering information on the other houses so that our house may make its decisions based on accurate and up-to-date intelligence. The importance of her work cannot go without saying, for without her firm grasp of the big picture, we would flounder in a sea of conflicting rumors, unable to sort out truth from falsehood. Because of her, we need not fear that our Unseelie cousins have unpleasant surprises hidden within their freeholds.

<3>The Iron Guard

This group forms the third level of leadership within our house. Made up of the heads of minor holdings and the leaders of special interest groups not represented on the Tower Council, these junior officers in the armies of Balor make up the backbone of our forces. The Iron Guard includes the heads of our propaganda corps, intelligence analysts, elite sorcerers and researchers in charge of teams dedicated to the discovery of methods whereby we might imbue our challenges with powers such as those possessed by our fomori near-kin.

We also include a few ennobled commoners, such as the troll Lord Grodolf, who exercises field command over our allied commoners, and the redcap Lady Moya, who heads a strike force that performs various black ops for the house. Although these commoner nobles believe that they hold actual power within the house, we make certain that true house members oversee their every action so that they do not take their liberties too far. When the time comes to remove them from their lofty positions and reduce them to their proper station as our servants, we stand ready to do so without hesitation.

Secrets of the Fortress of Glass

Rumors persist that High Lord Li-Tili has succumbed to the final stages of Bedlam and no longer provides adequate, sane leadership for the house. Attempts to confirm this have met with disaster, as agents sent to observe and report on the condition of our house leader have consistently failed to return from their missions or to communicate with us once they have reached their undersea destination.

Of course, this lack of information indicates that, perhaps, these rumors are more than idle speculations. If this is the case, some of us must make contingency plans to take matters in our own hands and restore sanity to the highest level of house leadership. The idea of replacing the high lord by forcibly retiring him has gained considerable popularity among many of the Tower Guard, who receive increasingly strange communications from Lord Li-Tili.

Oaths and Bindings

Children of the Blazing Eye, take heed of the words you are about to read, for they contain within them the most serious of truths and the most powerful of weapons, short of the iron blade or the purging flame. Do not swear an oath lightly, for the words you utter in solemn ceremony in the presence of witnesses bring with them the might and grandeur of the Dreaming. You have most likely spent at least part of your existence in the delusion that you belonged to the puny race of humans. In that alien and soulless society, men and women make and break promises as casually as they don their clothes. For humankind, words carry no inherent power, and oaths taken in the name of honor (or God or country) frequently fall by the wayside in the interests of convenience and expediency.

Not so for the fae. Unlike humans, we have not lost the ability to imbue our oaths with binding force, drawing on the ancient power of infusing words with Glamour so that they create chains of obligation that bring down dire punishments when broken. Long ago, when our fomorian ancestors fought the Tuatha for the right to remain in our homeland, we learned that the only way to control the treacherous children of Danu without slaughtering them lay in binding them (heart, mind and body) with the three-fold oath. Not even the sliest of miscreants among the Tuatha de Danaan could elude the strictures placed upon them under oath, and whenever we could bind them, we did so, hoping that the Dreaming that we served would deter them from their course of carnage and extermination.

Unfortunately, the Tuatha knew the secret of oath-taking themselves. Their histories are rife with examples of so-called "heroes" brought low by their ignorance of the literal words of their vows. As often, however, the legends of our ancient enemy contain tales of wily sons and daughters who sought for and found gaps or loopholes in their oaths and weaseled their way out of seemingly impossible situations. As many times as we enforced our ways upon the Tuatha through the power of an oath, they retaliated by imposing oaths of their own upon us.

Make no mistake about it. If you have already sworn your Oath of Majority and enjoy full membership in our house, then you know the truth of these words about the power of the oath. You can feel the force that binds your Dan to that of your house. If you are still in your period of Fosterage and have not yet taken the oath that forges you into a weapon in the hands of Balor's children, you must simply and utterly believe that your oaths will bind your actions, gird your heart and commandeer your mind into our service. I cannot caution you too strongly, for the penalties for oathbreaking — particularly those attached to the oaths administered by our house — ensure that you do not survive to get a second chance at keeping a broken oath. Unlike the slippery Ailil, who manage somehow to create a cult out of their forsworn members, we allow no such evasions. If the curse contained within an oath doesn't slay the oath breaker outright, we assist the Dreaming in carrying out its sentence. Remember that well, lest you be tempted to try your wiles against the power of the Dreaming and the wrath of Balor.

We require only a single oath from you. That one you take when you swear fealty to this house. No other vow is necessary to mark you as one of the children of Balor. Should you elect to join one of our elite groups, you will most likely take a secondary oath of loyalty to your chosen society. Furthermore, as the occasions present themselves, you may swear other oaths of friendship, quests or vengeance. More importantly, however, you should learn the art of administering oaths and exacting promises from others — particularly your enemies and those you wish to take into your service.

The Oath of Majority

By the serpent which twines around the golden tower, by the crimson beam that streams from Balor's Eye, by the blood that runs like fire through my veins, I pledge my heart, mind and body to the will of House Balor. To the threshold of death and beyond, my spirit belongs to my house. My eyes see through the eyes of my ancestors: my heart beats with the anger of vengeance denied: my tongue cries out for justice and restitution in the name of Balor and all his children. Let the challenge that marks my body as different from all others serve as a constant reminder of my birth and my destiny, and let no one deter me from my service to my house. May I suffer the agony of a thousand flames if I betray my house or any of its members. This I swear, by tower and beam and blood. May the Dreaming hear my oath and exact its penalties should I forswear it.

Upon surviving the period of Fosterage and the Fior, each new member of House Balor takes this solemn oath before all the members of her freehold or clique. Usually sworn by the light of the full moon, symbol of Balor's Eye, this oath confers all the benefits and responsibilities of house membership upon the oath taker. The oath taker speaks the words of the oath while holding an iron dagger to her throat. At the completion of the oath, the house Boon takes effect; the oath taker demonstrates this by cutting herself at the base of her throat with the dagger held while taking the oath. Should the Dreaming reject the oath for any reason (signified by the loss of Glamour from the wound caused by the iron dagger), the administrator of the oath has the right to use the dagger to slay the oath taker on the spot.

Oath of Loyal Service

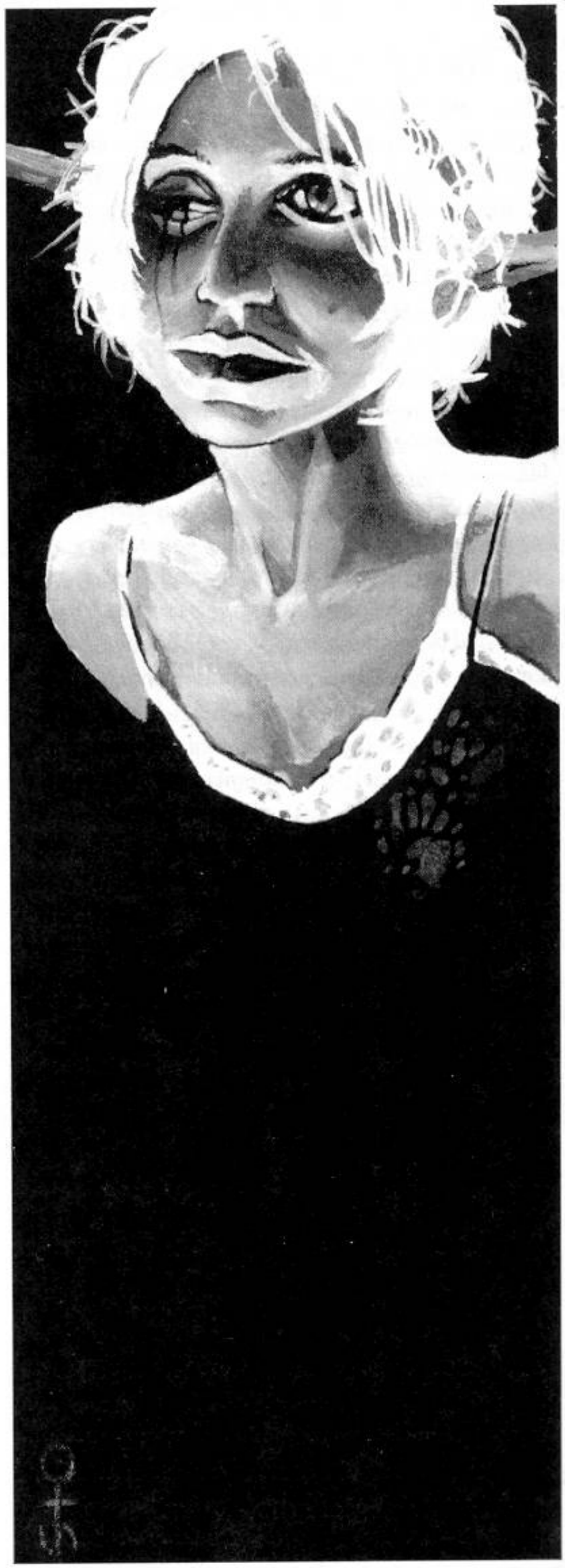
My faith belongs to you, my will serves you, my body obeys you. By word and blood and deed, I swear my utmost loyalty to you. Under the stars, beneath the moon, below the heavens, I speak these words to you. Command me and I will do your bidding; rely on me and I will not fail you; trust in me and I will serve you until death. May my blood turn to dust within my veins, may my eyes lose their sight forever and may my heart burst within my body should I fail in my pledge to you. My life to you, my heart to you, my spirit to you, first, last and always.

This oath binds a commoner to house Balor without conferring the Boon of actual house membership upon the oath taker. Used to ensure the loyalty of troops going into battle or to secure the allegiance of commoner members of a conquered freehold, this oath usually takes place at night, when both moon and stars are visible, although the moon may reflect any of its phases. The oath taker takes the oath while kneeling before the noble chosen to hear the words. Upon the successful completion of the oath, the oath taker becomes less resistant to obeying orders given by members of House Balor. In game terms, this oath increases the difficulty of resisted Willpower rolls by 2.

Oath of Adoption and Ritual Maiming

I call upon the light of Balor's Eye, the tongue of the black serpent, and the doorway of blood to hear my petition and grant me the right to call myself a child of Balor. By the shedding of my blood, I link my fate to my adopted house; by the shredding of my cloak, I renounce all former allegiances; by the sacrifice of my body, I take upon myself the challenge of my new kin. Swift my feet to answer any summons, ready my words to speak in defense of my new house, willing my heart to die if necessary to uphold the honor and might of Balor. Let all present bear witness to my oath, by flesh and blood and bone, and may the Dreaming forsake me forever should I fail my pledge to thee.

Upon occasion, a member of another house or one of the commoner kith will both desire and prove worthy of membership in House Balor. This oath, taken in the company of those who stand as sponsors for the petitioner as well as the local commander of the house, severs all former ties with other houses. The oath taker completes the oath with some form of ritual disfigurement, intended to inflict upon her a challenge to mark her as a member of the house. While some adopted members take drastic measures such as putting out one of their eyes or cutting off a hand, most content themselves with severing a finger or toe. The oath taker gains a permanent point of Glamour upon the successful completion of this oath.



Oath of the Enchanted Servant

By the token of my service, by the beating of my heart, by the promise of my lips, I pledge myself to you for so long as you have need of me. My dreams are yours, my soul belongs to you, my body exists for you alone. Though born to mortal flesh, I embrace the visions you put before me, knowing that you inhabit a world I can see only through your grace and by your pleasure. May the Dreaming look with favor on my oath, may the hidden world grant me access, may the stars and sky bear witness to my words. Let my troth be honored, let my words hold me fast and may my life be forfeit should I fail to keep the oath I take this night.

Humans Enchanted by members of House Balor as long-term servants or slaves take this oath upon receiving the token that confers upon them the benefits of Enchantment. Usually an elaborate ceremony surrounds the oath in order to impress upon the oath taker the lowliness of her position and the severity of the punishment should she fail to keep her word. The oath taker speaks the words while kneeling in the center of a circle of house members — her soon-to-be masters. The administrator of the oath ritually marks the oath taker with either a brand or some form of bodily piercing as a physical reminder of her servitude to House Balor. Humans bound to the house by this oath lose all ability to resist commands by members of the house. Although the oath does not contain within it an indication of term of service, usually the only release from the oath comes with the death of the oath taker — usually at the hands of the individual who administered the oath.

Using Oaths Against Others

Knowing when to slay an enemy and when to allow her to live under oath to you comes with practice. Your first efforts may prove misguided, forcing you to terminate the oath with extreme prejudice (to use a human phrase). Do not concern yourself overly much with having to slay your failures. Eventually, you may learn how to discern which of our foes presents a good candidate for servitude or mercy, and which should taste the iron of your sword.

While the other houses believe that we lack the subtlety to manipulate others into doing our will, our mastery of the art of administering oaths more than makes up for our deficiencies in the realms of guile and subterfuge.

Balor of the Unseelie Court

Many of our younger house members avoid the politics and motives that attend membership in the Shadow Court, preferring to identify themselves simply and openly with their Unseelie natures. Because they flaunt their Unseelie ties, they create the image most often associated with our house. Unseelie Balor do not care who knows their house affiliation. They take great delight in reminding the Seelie fae that another way of life exists. Unseelie Balor revel in violence, roaming Concordia in cliques that specialize in rampant Ravaging, suckering hapless Seelie nobles into duels (and then promptly cheating to win) and, otherwise, adding to the Balor reputation for general mayhem and unbridled aggression.

We view their activities as both necessary and vital to the goals of our house. The prevalence of Unseelie Balor running wild through the kingdoms of the Seelie keeps the Tuatha bastards busy and provides a smoke screen behind which Balor members of the Shadow Court can conduct their affairs without intrusion. Eventually, mere Unseelieness palls for most of this group and they drift into their proper places within the Shadow Court. A few staunch hellions, however, persist in their denial of anything more important than creating anarchy. After the coming of Evernight, the chaos engen-

dered by the fall of the Seelie fae and the onset of Endless Winter should provide Unseelie Balor with all the discord they desire. Then, they can take their places among the majority of their house as leaders of the Shadow Court.

Balor of the Seelie Court

Although our fomorian blood prevents members of our house from assuming their Seelie legacies, a small minority of house members choose to adopt the outward appearance of the Seelie fae. These "Seelie" Balor usually disguise themselves as members of other houses — most often Dougal, Eiluned or Liam — and blend in with Seelie households. Unlike house members who serve as sleepers for our covert spy network, these individuals seem to pass themselves off as Seelie for their own purposes. These aberrations come as close to being Seelie as any of our house can, working hard to control their natural impulses so that their inherent Unseelie nature does not show through.

While we question the motives of these pretenders, we have a wait-and-see policy regarding them until we know more about why they have chosen to immerse themselves in a way of life that runs counter to their natural bent. Some theorize that this desire to play at being Seelie is an odd manifestation of the challenges associated with Balor membership. Others believe that Seelie-seeming Balor provide an invaluable service to our house by acting as independent agents of corruption and subversion within their adopted houses. If this is the case, then these house members do, indeed, serve us well. A few cynics among us ascribe more sinister motivations to the Balor who associate with the Seelie Court, maintaining that they are traitors to the house and deserve immediate termination.

Whatever their reasons for their behavior, the "Seelie" Balor deserve watching. If they have, in fact, decided to cast their lot in with the other side, we will deal with them accordingly when we bring on the Evernight and have the leisure to seek out and punish those who have betrayed us. If, however, the Seelie pretenders can provide us with insights that allow us to maximize our control of the Seelie houses, we may very well reward their actions by giving them control over the Seelie houses they have adopted.

Balor of the Shadow Court

The majority of Balor not only serve the ideals and goals of the Unseelie Court, they also make up the heart of the Shadow Court. Despite Ailil pretensions of leadership, House Balor controls the innermost workings of the Shadow Court, allowing the other Unseelie houses the illusion of power so that they will not notice our true purposes. Outwardly, we espouse the goal of the Shadow Court — power for the Unseelie fae. We do this because it provides us with the best opportunity to prepare for what we *really* want — power for House Balor.

We have worked hard since our return to foster the impression that our house consists mainly of mindless warriors who only want the chance to break Seelie heads. So far, we have succeeded in fooling Ailil and Leanhaun into discounting us as a political threat within the Shadow Court. We know of Ailil's delusions of a dual rulership with House Eiluned, their Seelie sisters. When the time comes for us to take charge of the fae on Earth, we shall put that notion right out of Ailil's minds.

In the meantime, we gather our strength and let the other houses lay the groundwork for us. What the other members of the Shadow Court do not realize is that we hold them in as much contempt as we do the Seelie Court. The Shadow Court serves as our stepping stone to power and to vengeance against *all* the children of the Tuatha.

Societies Secret and Acknowledged

While House Balor does not lend itself to a plethora of secret societies, a few of these clandestine organizations exist within the house. Some of these groups have the approval of Balor's leaders, while others (such as the Masters of the Dance) have simply arisen out of common ground or perceived necessity. The subtle politics of House Ailil and the convoluted romantic liaisons of House Leanhaun do not exist within the confines of the golden tower; rather, the sub-rosa groupings of House Balor embody darker and wilder desires and ambitions. The cold of the Evernight beckons, and some hear its call more loudly and answer it in mysterious ways.

Then there are the acknowledged groupings, those societies who are known either to most members of Balor or even to other houses. Other Kithain may even admire these groups, like the Guardians of the Gate — especially as their true aims are not known to all. You are to be made privy to many secrets here. Beware that the knowledge does not overwhelm your good sense. A closed mouth gathers no feet, as they say, nor does it usually give rise to knives in the back. Consider yourself warned.

Eyes of Balor

Few among the other noble houses give us credit for subtlety and intrigue. The members of the society known as the Eyes of Balor take advantage of this misconception to act as spies and assassins for their house. Granted, most Balor sidhe do not appreciate the fine points of political maneuverings and diplomatic sleight-of-hand. The Eyes recruit their members from the few members of their house who demonstrate a flair for misdirection and deception. Eyes of Balor master the arts of physical and chimerical disguise in order to construct alternate personalities for themselves and take their places as "sleepers" in other houses. Most often, Eyes masquerade as members of House Dougal, where physical infirmities pass without notice, or — if they bear no outer deformity — House Eiluned, where eccentricities of mind seem almost normal. Although Eyes rarely succeed in infiltrating House Gwydion, their ability to assume an identity within House Dougal serves as a window on Gwydion's brood.

Once ensconced in their assumed personas, the Eyes immerse themselves in their roles, hiding their Unseelie natures as best they can and acting in all ways as loyal members of their alleged houses. Some Eyes make periodic reports to their superiors on the doings of their target house, while others simply bide their time, observing all that goes on around them and gaining the trust of their "fellow" houses' members. Sooner or later, an Eye receives a message — either by Cantrip or through some prearranged system — alerting her to the fact that "It is time for the Eye to open." Whenever an Eye receives this signal, she acts — performing whatever duty she was charged with. In many cases, this task consists of assassinating a particular member of the Eye's assumed household or stealing some vital piece of information or a cherished treasure. In other cases, Eyes have the task of causing as much disruption in their adopted freehold as possible by whatever means presents itself.

From her fortress-freehold hidden in the Kingdom of Apples, not far from the High King's own "safe haven," Lady Eithlinn of the Gleaming Eyes orchestrates the movements of the Eyes of Balor and receives the information brought to her by the "sleeping" agents of Discordia.

Masters of the Dance

Members of this covert group form liaisons with our shapeshifting kin, the Dancers, as well as with vampires, wizards and any other Prodigals or supernaturals with whom we share common goals. When we returned to the world, we quickly sought for and found a group of humans whose dreams suited us so well that we knew they had to consist of the former servants of our fomori ancestors. These individuals also served as breeding stock for the werewolves who call themselves Dancers. Ancient memories surfaced and we realized that these humans once belonged to us as well.

The Masters of the Dance pay regular visits to the holdings of the Dancers, sharing in some of their ceremonies and revels and hosting them, in turn, whenever they pass through our territories. By courting their favors and forming alliances with these powerful supernaturals, the Masters remind them of ancient oaths that once existed between us.

Likewise, other members of this group seek out the Children of Lilith, realizing that they pull many of the strings that control the workings of mortal society. The Masters attempt to enlist their aid, whenever possible, in securing advantages for our house in the mortal world. Masters of the Dance have the tacit permission of house leaders to sacrifice a few dreamers to the Children of Lilith, though we prefer to give them humans claimed by the houses of our enemies. Some Masters find that the Children of Lilith can provide them with unusual types of Dark Glamour and have created a unique form of "Blood Dross" for storing this rare commodity.

Some Masters have made inroads into forging alliances with the creatures known as fomori. Although we originally believed that these individuals represented the remnants of our long-lost ancestors, we now suspect our initial assumptions may have been erroneous. Nevertheless, these creatures have great powers that seem to come from their deformities and their assistance may prove invaluable in the eventual battle we must fight against the other noble houses. We rely on the Masters to make certain that the fomori lend their strength to us when we need them.

Because their work takes them out of the freeholds and into "the field" so often, Masters need regular infusions of Glamour in order to ensure that they do not lose themselves to Banality. Fomori, in particular, exude vast quantities of Banality despite their supernatural natures. Often, Masters resort to Ravaging to gain the Glamour they need, and they have, for this reason, become experts in the "quick and dirty" method of ripping Glamour from their victims.

Lord Raghnall, one of our house's most invaluable members, serves as the leader of the Masters of the Dance and coordinates the efforts of this group from his secret freehold in the Kingdom of Grass.

The Royal Guardians

Once a knight of House Balor has proven herself in battle against the Seelie and has learned the house secrets, she is eligible to join the Royal Guardians. Despite sounding as though they must be the elite bodyguards of the high lord of House Balor, the Guardians act as caretakers of the house treasures collected by Cathal, first real king of the house. Simply because a knight is eligible, however, doesn't mean she is necessarily tapped for the position. The Royals' number is limited to 13 members, though each one has a chosen apprentice capable of stepping forward to assume her patron's place should it become necessary. No one except the Royal Guardians, their apprentices and the high lord know who they are. Their identities are kept strictly secret lest greedier members of the house attempt to coerce knowledge of the hiding places or the actual treasures from the appointed guardians. Members of this elite group have sworn never to reveal the locations or powers of the assembled treasures until Cathal comes again to claim them and lead House Balor in final war. Despite the rigid nature of the group, they suffer a high turnover rate in membership as an apprentice slays her patron and takes his place, only to be slain in turn. Assassination is condoned among the members as it keeps the Guardians on their toes and produces some of the toughest, most savage and determined guards the house could want.

The Waybuilders Corps

The select members of this group consist of a few graybeards who elect to undergo the ultimate sacrifice for the good of the house. Deemed unnecessary to the cause due to advanced age, diminishing skills and low reservoirs of Glamour, the Waybuilders Corps provides a way for these aging fae to make a final contribution to House Balor. While most fae eventually succumb to Banality, losing their faerie natures entirely and dooming themselves to a lackluster existence as mortal shells that once housed something glorious, the members of the Waybuilders Corps decide to forego the final indignity for a grander fate. The Waybuilders believe that their deaths as sacrifices will one day result in the reopening of the Bright Road, allowing the sidhe to reincarnate after the fashion of the other fae. Some even believe that enough sacrifices will eventually win again for us the immortality that we once had in the days before the Sundering.

Most of the Waybuilders Corps belong to the Ritualist faction and observe the celebrations of the seasons assiduously. The Samhain revels provide the occasion for their most solemn ceremony: the ritual sacrifice of one of their number, chosen by lot, to the Samhain bonfire. Laid to rest without a wake to insure that their spirits remain in the lands of the Dead, the faerie souls of the Waybuilders emerge — so we believe — in the Underworld. There, the Waybuilders assume the task of forcing open the Bright Road and using their deaths as a means of gaining control of that legendary path once it has opened to us. The spirits of those who sacrificed themselves, so goes the credo of the Waybuilders, will stand as sentinels along the Bright Road, determining which of the fae deserve the privilege of walking the path from death into rebirth. The Waybuilders have sworn to hold the Road against all but House Balor and a few others

designated by our house as worthy of reincarnation. The Waybuilders maintain some contacts among the wraiths, but information thus gained is sketchy and incomplete. Thus far, despite apparent evidence that the sacrifices are achieving *something*, there is no concrete proof that they are capable of doing their intended job.

The leadership of the Waybuilders Corps rotates annually. Each Samhain, the sacrifice for the next year assumes the position of supreme authority within the group, thus allowing her to enjoy her final year of life and prepare the way for her spectacular death.

Guardians of the Gates

Many of the returning sidhe remember a nightmare chase through the Dreaming as they journeyed down the trods from Arcadia back to the Waking World. They recall terrible monsters who tracked them, feeding upon stragglers and even attacking armed bands of warriors. These great beasts seemed made of equal parts shadow and Glamour. Striking with phenomenal swiftness and ferocity, the creatures known as the Fell harried Seelie and Unseelie alike as we fled the terror they evoked in us. The horrors came again and again, attacking and shredding our faerie souls with powerful fangs and claws. Their speed was unbelievable; their savagery unimaginable. Even the bravest noble knights could not battle so many. Some of the Fell entered into the Waking World when panicked sidhe burst through a gate and didn't close it behind them quickly enough, but most stayed in the Dreaming, prowling the silver paths, waiting with black-hearted malice for their prey to return.

We of House Balor remember the beasts most clearly. Thus, we formed a knighthood dedicated to protecting the gateways and trods from incursions of the Fell. The Guardians of the Gates patrol most of the known ways and combat the Fell on behalf of all fae. Many a Seelie owes his life to the Guardians whose quick intervention drove away the Fell or kept them from penetrating a gate and escaping into the Waking World. For this, if nothing else, House Balor is accorded respect and admiration.

The true story proves a little less straightforward. We too were harried by the Fell as we made the trek from Arcadia, but rather than fleeing, we determined that the Fell are highly intelligent. They feed on the Glamour stolen from fae whom they bite and rend, but they also desire flesh. We cut a deal with them. In exchange for regular sacrifices of Glamour to them (most often dross, but occasionally the life of a captured enemy) and the occasional feast of flesh (always Seelie who have angered us), the Fell work alongside us.

Whenever we need them as an excuse to continue our patrols, a pack of Fell appears and menaces changelings using trods. They might even manage to kill a few. Then we arrive, go through an amazing battle with them and drive them off.

Why go to all this trouble? What better way than to have not only the permission, but the grateful and enthusiastic patronage of both courts for our knights to patrol the known trods and gates? Not only do we learn all the ways in and out, we are thus in position to control them — all of them — whenever we decide that the time is right. Meanwhile, we use our position to construct fortresses in the Dreaming, strongholds we will occupy when we bring the war for Evernight to the Waking World. And should the Seelie contest us, our friends the Fell stand ready to help us maintain our superior position. Do you doubt our efficacy? You need only look to the naming of many of the roads from the Dreaming to the Umbra. Why did you think they were called the Paths of Balor?

Riders of the Fell

Some house members lack the discipline to become directly involved in our efforts at control and the martial affairs we undertake. Instead, these young rakes flaunt themselves, egging one another on to greater and greater feats of skill and danger. They take the notion of overcoming the challenge of our "deformities" quite seriously, to the point of constantly courting death to prove themselves. House Balor puts up with these willful children and their stubborn independence since it makes them prime candidates to undertake suicide missions on behalf of the house. We need only couch the request as a challenge and hint that they may not be able to handle it and survive. Most jump at the chance to prove us wrong.

Most members of the group are wilders, though a number of childlings also take a role in the society. Of course, children almost never believe in their own mortality anyway. The house doesn't officially approve of their actions since they do not dedicate themselves to our goals, but the Fell Riders do have tacit license to do what they want. If they are too weak or foolish, they die and our problem is solved. Should they survive, they become all the more deadly and gain reputations for daring that can only benefit the house in the long run. Besides, many of them eventually outgrow their rebelliousness and become some of our strongest leaders.

The Fell Riders are not associated with the Guardians of the Gates. Their name comes from the initiation ceremony of the society that requires potential members to briefly capture and ride one of the Fell. Once he has proven himself, the new member releases the beast and attempts to escape its retribution. Unknown to the Fell Riders, Guardians sometimes persuade certain Fell to allow themselves to be "captured" and used for this purpose. Those that agree, carry the riders and act menacing, perhaps even wounding the young fae for their impertinence, but offer no real threat of death. Those society members who entrap "wild" Fell are on their own.

The Unseelie Code: Balor Style

To say that we live by the Unseelie Code smacks of understatement. We are the Unseelie Code, more so than the posturers of House Ailil or the romantics of House Leanhaun. For us, the precepts of the Unseelie Code embody everything we need to survive. We not only live by the code, we die by and for it as well.

We function as an army, for we stand upon a battlefield. We fight for the right to walk openly once more, clad in the fullness of our faerie splendor so that we may strike terror into the hearts of those who oppose us. We engage in a war for survival, and sometimes it seems as if we are the only ones who know this for a certainty. Our interpretations of the Unseelie Code, therefore, reflect our awareness of the desperation of our plight. We have never prided ourselves on gentleness and mercy. We don't intend to begin doing so now.

Change Is Good

Fear of the unknown stultifies change, leaving the world cowering in stagnation. The Seelie Court languishes in the grip of an infectious disease that rots away its will to attempt a new beginning. Unlike them, we dedicate ourselves to change. We seek to bring about the end of the old order in order to bring about a rebirth of Glamour. Our commitment to the Evernight goes hand in hand with our desire for — and need of — change. Although some of us do, in fact, fear change, we embrace that fear. We are the children of dark imaginings and fearsome nightmares. We can do no less than accept those visions that gave birth to our house and its founder.

Glamour Is Free

We do not believe in hoarding Glamour or in exercising restraint in acquiring it. Unlike those who see themselves as harvesters of Glamour, carefully tending their gardens of dreamers in the hopes that one day they may gather the fruit of their effort, we view ourselves as hunters. Those who provide us with Glamour — human dreamers — are our prey. We stalk our quarry and take what is rightfully ours wherever and whenever we can. Occasionally we indulge ourselves by savoring the slow process of cultivating our dreamers, but we of House Balor find the act of seizing Glamour more satisfying. The nightmares that birthed us have also set our preferences for Glamour spiced with fear and terror, loss and despair.

We do not worry about exhausting the supply of Glamour. The Seelie Court lies when they claim that Glamour is an irreplaceable resource. So long as humans breed and proliferate — and the constant state of overpopulation seems to indicate that they will continue to do just that — we will not lack for dreamers. If their dreams are born of despair, so much the better.

Honor Is a Lie

We reject outright the Seelie crutch of honorable conduct. The weak and cowardly have invented the concept of honor to protect themselves from the strong and bold. We cannot afford the luxury of strict codes of behavior on the battlefield or in any other sphere of action. As an army dedicated to bringing about Evernight, we value victory above all. Regardless of how "honorably" a warrior conducts himself in combat, losers gain nothing. We set our sights on our goal, and use whatever

means presents itself to win. If we decide to spare an enemy or to treat a defeated opponent with mercy and compassion, we do so not because honor binds us but because we choose that course of action. We also realize the dangers inherent in observing outworn and outmoded codes of honor. Too often, we have suffered the fate of those who choose, unwisely, to allow enemies to live. Mercy breeds resentment and largesse often sows seeds of vengeance in the hearts of those who feel beholden to an honorable victor.

We do not shirk our responsibilities, nor do we shame ourselves in our actions. We do not rely on "honor" to show us what needs doing. Only fools (and the Seelie houses certainly fall into that category) require the chains of honor to insure that they do not misuse their power or fail to perform their duties.

Passion Before Duty

Those who lack passion resort to duty as their motivation. We fuel our actions with the fires of anger and revenge, hoarded since the time when our ancestors fell before the treacheries of the Seelie Court and its mortal allies. No one needs to remind us of our "duty." Our instincts tell us what we must do and we follow the impulses of our emotions to achieve our destiny.

The other houses speak of obligations and debts, of owing and being owed. We remember those who wronged us and seek redress for our suffering and deprivations. Duty makes a cold and unresponsive bedmate. The weak-willed allow the demands of others to dictate their actions and call it "duty." We do as we like and as our wills dictate, without regard for the expectations of others.

The Seelie Code

The tenets of the Seelie Code present us with an arsenal of weapons to use against our weak cousins. Although we do not recognize the principles that govern the Seelie houses, we study them carefully so that we can better understand those who oppose us.

Death Before Dishonor

The sons and daughters of Gwydion fall victim to this tenet more often than the other Seelie houses. Place one of these hide-bound honor-mongers in a situation where he has to choose between dishonoring himself or facing his own annihilation and nine times out of 10, he will opt for a glorious death. More power to him. On the rare occasion when a Seelie sidhe elects to face dishonor, we can still claim the psychological victory. The sight of a once-proud opponent humbled by his fall from grace warms even the coldest Balor heart.

Love Conquers All

This tenet gives us an effective weapon against the hopeless romantics of House Fiona. Capture the heart of one of the Fiona sidhe and you need not bother with defeating her on the field of battle. Too often, the sidhe who espouse the Seelie Code suffer from the delusion that a case of inflamed passion constitutes a promise of lifelong commitment and loyalty. We play upon this weakness whenever possible, reveling in the utter abandonment of principle that accompanies "true love" and using it to control our Seelie lovers. In many cases, our victims of the heart never realize what we are doing until it is too late.

Beauty Is Life

The maimed artisans of House Dougal demonstrate a particular weakness for this principle. Strangely enough, so do the effete mystics of House Eiluned. Those of us who can hide our physical impediments beneath a façade of beauty gain the upper hand in dealing with many of the Seelie, who fail to look beyond the outer shell. By threatening the destruction of something — or someone — beautiful, we bring to their knees those who live by this tenet. By deliberately espousing the grotesque, we render ourselves immune to the lure of outward appearances.

Never Forget a Debt

House Liam suffers from an overabundance of guilt, deserved or not. They, therefore, become vulnerable to reminders of unpaid debts and unreturned favors. Most Seelie sidhe, for that matter, leave themselves open to manipulation through the clever use of binding oaths and solemn vows. If you can manage to place any of the Seelie fae in your debt, you can command their obedience, if not their allegiance.

Shadow Court Tenets

Sons and daughters of Balor, know that you represent the true vanguard of the Shadow Court, despite the lies put to you by the preening politicians of Ailil and the fawning sycophants of Leanhaun. For the present, it suits us to allow the other Unseelie houses to assume control of the Shadow Court. Their actions draw the attention of the Seelie fae, leaving us to do the real work of the Court of Shadows without interference. Ultimately, we shall assume our rightful place as leaders of the Shadow Court, relegating all others to their proper places as our servants and subjects. In the meantime, we strive to uphold the principles of the Shadow Court in our own fashion.

Understand the Mortal World

Simply put, the fae who fail to comprehend the world around them lack the means to survive the coming of Evernight. Too many changelings, particularly the sidhe, shun the outer world or ignore it as much as possible, fearing the taint of Banality. Our duty lies in inuring ourselves to the rigors of a dreamless world. After all, we will rule this world in the aftermath of Endless Winter.

We seek, as well, to understand the motivations and vulnerabilities of mortals in order to secure our ascendancy over them when we come into our victory. Knowing your subjects gives you the means of ruling it.

Encouraging our childlings and wilders to study modern technology and steep themselves in the mundane aspects of the mortal world provides future generations of our house with warriors skilled in the techniques and strategies necessary for conquest and domination.

Understand the Supernatural World, Make and Break Alliances as Necessary

The Prodigal races provide us with a host of potential allies, provided we know how to use them. To this end, we cultivate associations with the shapeshifting Dancers, fomori and vampires. Some of these creatures share our ambitions and our viewpoint regarding the mortal world. Wherever possible, we insinuate ourselves into their societies (such as they are) and do what we must to place them in our favor. Not only do these creatures provide inroads into certain useful areas of society, they also make convenient scapegoats for our more extreme actions. Most of them prey on mortals anyway, so why not let them take the blame for a few more mysterious deaths?

Harvest Glamour, Prepare for Endless Winter

We accumulate Glamour for one purpose — so that when the Evernight ends the world as we now know it, we will control access to the Dreaming. When the other nobles and the commoners find they must come to us for their share of Glamour, we can dictate the terms for dispensing that vital commodity.

We freely admit to the regular practice of Ravaging in order to gain as much Glamour as possible from mortal dreamers. What most houses don't realize is that our primary targets for this form of gathering Glamour consist of humans affiliated with our enemies — the changelings of the Seelie court. We guard our own dreamers jealously, sustaining them in the same manner that a conscientious pig farmer tends to his livestock. That doesn't prevent us from raiding the property of our competitors. By depleting the children of the Tuatha de Danaan of their stockpile of dreamers while at the same time increasing and husbanding our own supply, we further our goal — the monopoly of Glamour to use as we see fit.

Overthrow the Seelie Court and Nobility

The Seelie Court contains within it the seeds of its own downfall. Already, the fragile nature of the Parliament of Dreams and the pillars of Concordia tremble with the disappearance of the High King. Although many of the fae lay David Ard-Ri's absence (and presumed death) at our doorstep, in truth, we had nothing to do with that fortuitous event. Nevertheless, we graciously accept the credit for that action — even if, for once, we are innocent.

The conspicuous lack of leadership of the Seelie fae, however, can only work to our advantage. We take the High King's disappearance as an omen that the time has come for us to take decisive action. Already we have activated many of our "eyes" in Seelie freeholds throughout Concordia and in other lands as well. One by one, the leaders of the fae will fall to our swords or else they will recognize the need to accept our leadership.

Fulfill the Ritual Obligations of the Year, Culminating in Samhain

By keeping the annual celebrations of the passing year, we remember the time before the Shattering, when mortals feared our power. Each festival commemorates the spirit of change, something the Seelie fae have put aside in favor of drab stability. Particularly, we hold the Samhain revels as our most sacred time. We, at least, remember the passing of rule from the Seelie to the Unseelie Court that once took place on Samhain Eve. The screams of Samhain sacrifices still echo in our ears with the aching sweetness of a half-remembered melody. When the Evernight brings about our rule, the Seelie Court will find itself reduced to the mockery to which it has consigned us and the Samhain bonfires will once again break open the paths between the worlds.

Spread Chaos, Revolution and Anarchy

The promulgation of dissatisfaction and discontent among the commoner fae constitutes our most effective weapon against the tyranny of the Seelie Court. We work incessantly to undermine the credibility and reliability of the Seelie nobles through acts of terror and subversion. Every rumor we spread, every noble we subvert or destroy, every freehold we "liberate" from its Seelie lord contributes to the wave of rebellion that sweeps through the Kingdom of Concordia. There will be time enough to institute our own form of order in the aftermath of the Evernight. For now, anarchy serves our purposes best. Concordia is dead; Long live Discordia!

The Escheat

Long ago, the Escheat upheld the right of the fae to the Glamour of mortals and provided us with a set of laws by which we could govern ourselves. After the Shattering, this code of precepts enabled the commoners to survive in a world bereft of their leaders and surrounded by hostile humans. As children of Balor, the enemy of the Tuatha and their weak children, we uphold the Escheat as we understand it, regardless of how other fae view our interpretations. After all, we had a hand in its creation although its current form bears little resemblance to our original conception.

We envision the Escheat as a set of principles that would guarantee the supremacy of the fae in both the Dreaming and in the material world. Those who merited power by right of arms and wits would rule those whose talents lay in obedience and submission. All would know their place in the world.

The Right of Demesne

The sovereign power of a lord over his holdings and his subjects resembles that of a general over her army. None should question that right. In turn, those who hold power should never rely on their reputation alone to maintain it. They rule who have the strength to exert their dominion. The weak and softhearted may lay claim to freeholds and subjects for a time, but inevitably they succumb to their frail natures.

Reality: We hold only a few freeholds openly. For the time being, we place our agents within the holdings of others, like cuckoos' eggs waiting to hatch in foreign nests. We pay lip service to the titles of others, knowing that when the Evernight scours the fae of its weaklings, we shall reclaim those freeholds and holdings that rightfully belong to us — as well as the places left vacant by the passing of their former lords.

The Right to Dream

Mortals provide us with the Glamour we need to maintain our true natures. Their dreams connect us to the Dreaming. We, therefore, have an obligation to encourage our dreamers to produce as much Glamour as possible. Whenever we can inspire humans to greater achievements of creativity, we can only benefit. Ravaging, while an immediate source of massive infusions of Glamour, debilitates the dreamer, or deprives her altogether of the power to dream.

Reality: Glamour belongs to us. It is not, as the Seelie would have it, a "gift" bestowed upon us through the largesse of human dreamers. Humans exist, we believe, for the singular purpose of producing Glamour for our pleasure. To think otherwise is to deny our natures as fae. Furthermore, we gain as much Glamour from nightmarish visions as from dreams. The creations born of terror and fear taste every bit as sweet to our voracious appetites. We do not care how our dreamers manifest Glamour, only that they do so in quantities capable of supporting our desires. Ravaging when necessary lends its own piquancy to the Glamour gained in that fashion, particularly when the dreamers do not belong to us but serve our enemies.

The Right of Ignorance

The intrusions of humans brought about the Sundering, which drove us from the world 600 years ago. Their continued disbelief in the existence of anything outside of their puny senses has created the tide of Banality that bars us from direct access to the fruits of the Dreaming. So long as we stand to lose from our encounters with the institutionalized hostility of humankind, we need to keep it from discovering the truth of our existence. This tenet works as much for our protection as for the purported "good" of humanity.

Reality: Eventually, we plan on revealing our existence to the world in order to take our place as ruler of the humans — as we did in the ancient times, before the Tuatha and their ilk deprived us of our rightful position. For now, we find it expedient to allow humans to remain as ignorant of us as possible. Whenever we do allow selected dreamers to view us as we are, we do so in order to inspire them with terror. The sight of a Balor sidhe in all her grotesque glory brings us some of the keenest dreams.

The Right of Rescue

We agree that any fae so unlucky as to fall into the hands of humans or to succumb to Banality before their inevitable decline deserves rescuing. Balor does not shirk their duty in this regard. This tenet of the Escheat had its origins in our realization that the children of Balor were few and our enemies were many. We once staged many a daring rescue of captured warriors of our house — usually snatching them from the prisons of the Tuatha! Nevertheless, the principle remains. We do not leave the fae to the pleasures of their enemies.

Reality: We use the opportunity to rescue other fae as a way of honing our military skills and our stealth tactics. Although we feel no particular loyalty to any fae outside our house, we do recognize that masterminding or executing a brilliant extraction mission ensures that the rescued individual and her household owe us a debt

of gratitude. Otherwise, we would just as soon let the other fae rot in their captors' hands.

The Right of Safe Haven

We expect to receive hospitality from other fae, as is our right, and we grant it to others, in turn, at least for the traditional three days and nights. Despite what others may believe of us, we do not lack in civility or respect for traditions. Even though we have few freeholds in Concordia, our holdings elsewhere serve as models for the strict interpretation of this tenet.

Reality: In the days when we warred against the Tuatha, we needed this "right" in order to buy us time to spy out and subvert our enemies holdings whenever possible. Today, we still demand hospitality from the Tuatha's descendants for the same purpose. Unfortunately, many Seelie houses refuse to recognize our right to hospitality, treating us with disdain and hatred to rival that of their Tuatha ancestors.

We grant hospitality to other fae, when they demand it, but feel no shame in taking every advantage to study our guests to determine their weaknesses and vulnerabilities. If the other houses fail to reciprocate, believing that "honor" prevents them from availing themselves of the opportunity to gain an insight into their guests, then they are fools. Should one of our guests outstay her welcome, however, then we reserve the right to dispose of her as we see fit.

The Right of Life

This principle purports to unite all the fae in the protection and preservation of our kind by forbidding the killing of the children of the Dreaming. We agree that there are few enough of us in the world at present and that we should avoid decreasing our numbers whenever possible.

Reality: There is no tactful way to say this: death to all the children of the Tuatha! A river of fae blood divides us from the other sidhe, and before the Shattering, we met frequently on the field of battle, taking no quarter in our encounters with our enemies. We do not go about haphazardly slaughtering the other nobles; to do so would bring their armies down upon us without hesitation. On the other hand, the judicious "removal" of our most troublesome opponents only serves our purposes. We do not suffer as much from Banality as other fae, so we can risk the penalties extracted by the Dreaming for ridding ourselves of our enemies. For the good of our house and its goals, some of us accept the consequences and revel in the blood we spill in the name of the Evernight and House Balor.

Fosterage

We do not believe in coddling our young. The Waking World assaults the fae with a relentless barrage of Banality; the children of the Tuatha show little in the way of leniency or mercy toward the sons and daughters of Balor. In order to survive in both mortal and fae realms, we must not only hone our physical skills and overcome the challenges of our house, we must also harden our hearts against the prejudice and cruelty we encounter in the presence of our enemies. Fledglings or "recruits," whether they emerge from their Chrysalis as raw, untamed childlings or angry, cynical graybeards, undergo a grueling period of fosterage not unlike the training period human soldiers undergo in boot camp.

For a year and a day, the potential members of our house suffer a series of rigorous drills that target the individual's particular challenge. Under the brutal regimen inflicted upon them by their commander (we do not use the patronizing term "mentor"), recruits learn to ignore the hardships imposed upon them by their so-called deformities, or else suffer punishments that range from beatings to forced marches or periods of solitary confinement in heated iron restraints. Members of the recruit's new household constantly taunt her with ridicule and verbal abuse, pushing her resources to the breaking point. In all this, the recruit must demonstrate the ability to withstand and endure without sniveling or else fight back and stand up against her tormentors. While a fledgling who pummels her commander or one of her superiors (i.e., every house member who is not a recruit) into submission may earn a raw and bloody back for her efforts, she also garners the beginnings of respect for her refusal to knuckle under.

Any recruits who fail to meet our standards of toughness and resilience or who use their challenges as an excuse for sub-standard performance usually meet with an unfortunate "accident" during their fosterage. We do not accept weaklings into our ranks.

Saining

Once the period of fosterage has passed, the recruit — provided she survives — undergoes her Saining, a celebration that combines the formality and dignity of a military graduation ceremony with the unlicensed revelry of a satyr's ball. A private ceremony, conducted by the ranking members of the recruit's new household, takes place at the beginning of the festival. This ritual results in the revelation of the true name of the new house member and also indicates whether or not she bears a special destiny within the house. Immediately after her Saining ceremony, the new child of Balor undergoes the Fior-Righ, her final (and sometimes fatal) ordeal.

Fior-Righ

This test of a new house-member's worth focuses on the initiate's challenge, forcing her to demonstrate her ability to overcome or ignore what others might see as an impediment. Usually this takes the form of a physical feat she must accomplish — such as scaling a high wall and retrieving a token from its summit or swimming a river against a fast-moving current — in combination with a duel of arms that tests the new member's military might. Tests of wit are rarely part of the Fior-Righ of House Balor. We assume that any recruit who survives to celebrate her Saining and participate in the Fior-Righ has demonstrated her possession of ample wit and intelligence to come so far.

Current Politics

Most of House Balor's political aspirations center around the War of Rulership. While other fae waste themselves favoring one side or the other in the question of who is to rule in High King David's absence, we make it our business to encourage all sides to battle it out in as bloody and deadly a fashion as possible. While everyone else engages in this minor squabble, we work to bring on a cataclysmic war leading to Evernight so we can assume rulership over all the fae and the people of the Waking World. When we have it all within our grasp, who's going to care that David no longer reigns? With the coming of Endless Winter, the strongest will survive and prosper. We certainly hope the other fae will expend their energy in the lesser battle; it'll make it easier for us when we make our move. Until we are ready to do so, however, we find that we must declare some allegiance (however disinterested) to the political impulses shared by the other fae.

Political Impulses

Although we like to think of ourselves as a unified front against the children of the Tuatha and the Seelie fae in general, we suffer as much from factionalism as do the other noble houses. Despite our differences of opinion and vision, all political impulses within House Balor agree on one thing: One day, we shall rule the fae.

- **Purists:** A small faction among our house, Purists believe in the ideal of power sharing between Seelie and Unseelie fae. Few Balor Purists are so foolish as to believe that, once in power, the Seelie Children of the Tuatha would ever relinquish their rule. Instead, the Purists of our house favor the enlistment of our Seelie pretenders to occupy the thrones of the fae from Beltaine to Samhain. Thus, we keep it all in the family.

- **Repudiators:** This faction claims a sizable membership within our house. Balor Repudiators agree that the Seelie reign has lasted far too long. The coming of Evernight will inaugurate an era in which only the Unseelie can demonstrate the skills and leadership necessary to carry the children of the Dreaming into the future. Repudiators of House Balor, therefore, see no need for Seelie survival except as slaves and whipping boys.

- **Ritualists:** Balor Ritualists vie with the Repudiators for the majority faction. The importance of reviving the lost rituals and ceremonies whereby the fae drew power from the Dreaming and reassert their connection to the cycles of the year attract many house members who

look to the glories of our pre-Tuatha past. The Ritualists among us also use their practices and beliefs as a convenient way to secure power within the Shadow Court without arousing the suspicions of Houses Ailil and Leanhaun. Little by little, Balor Ritualists seek to restructure and revise the ceremonies and rites of the seasons to reflect our fomorian ancestry.

• **Modernists:** Any Balor who claims to be a Modernist either lies like a pooka or else suffers from a serious mental "challenge." Nevertheless, a few members of our house have insinuated themselves into the Modernist faction for the sole purpose of winning over the Unseelie commoners to our cause. Balor Modernists have no intention of ever really sharing power with the lesser fae, but we can talk a good line when we need to. After all, we need cannon fodder for the coming battle against the Seelie.

• **Anarchists:** A fair number of our younger house members subscribe to the Anarchist impulse, advocating the immediate and utter dissolution of the Seelie power structure. Balor Anarchists serve as our smoke screen, since the other houses expect us to pursue the course of random violence espoused by this faction. While most Balor fae migrate to one of the other impulses after an initial stint with the Anarchist faction, a few hardcore agitators keep alive the façade that we care for little besides causing havoc and instigating mass destruction.

Those to be Conquered (Relations with Others)

Understand that while these are my personal opinions, they accurately represent the feelings of most Balor. You may not comprehend why we seem so bent on rulership that weeven discount our allies. Remember, child of the fomorians, even the other Unseelie houses are not like us. They too are children of the Tuatha de Danaan and as such still counted among our enemies. Never believe their lies. Never bow to their will unless it serves a greater purpose of our house, and never, never trust them. And if we cannot trust other fae, how should we trust other creatures even more alien?

The Unseelie Houses

Of the houses that returned, we have most in common with Ailil and Leanhaun. At least they are Unseelie, as we are. Not that *that* in itself wins them any loyalty from us, but it does mean they can't stand by and watch the Seelie try to wipe us out. There aren't enough Unseelie sidhe for the other Unseelie houses to stand on their own without our might behind them. In the end, our erstwhile allies will realize who wields the true power. For now, we allow them to believe they hold the upper hand. When our time comes, we will shatter their illusions and assume our rightful place as the leaders of all fae.

Ailil

Posturers who play at being bad, most Ailil think too much of themselves to be taken seriously. Let them warm the throne and revel in their idiotic power plays for now. The Ailil delude themselves that they are such great manipulators; They never notice we "fall for" whatever they tell us *not* because we're stupid or unsophisticated, but because we want *them* to believe we are less intelligent than we really are. They never suspect that we don't want to be in charge for now. Funny how such great manipulators never realize when they're being manipulated.

The Ailil also seem foolishly unaware of House Balor's true heritage. They discount our claim to rulership and royalty, claiming it for themselves. Do they even realize that we have fomorian blood? Or do they, as the Seelie houses do, believe we chose the name of our house out of spite?

Ailil acts as the undisputed leader of the Unseelie houses. More than that, they assume leadership of the Shadow Court. Their plans for Balor are to send us into any heavy fighting and use us as cannon fodder to gain their own ends. Do we mind? No. We accept the challenge as we accept all challenges to our martial abilities. What we don't countenance is the idea that we do it as Ailil's stooges. We will fight, but on our own terms and for our own ends. By the time the battle for supremacy

begins we will be ready to assume control. Our plans will be in place, dreamers at our command and the remaining Glamour in the world under our control. Let Ailil try to order us about under those conditions. We will laugh at their pretensions. We may allow them some access to Glamour under controlled conditions — for old times' sake. They *are* Unseelie and our supposed allies, after all.

Leanhaun

Ah, the Leanhaun. They believe they are so cultured, so intelligent and tasteful. They play on their ability to find talent and broker it to interested changelings. Although we aren't privy to their plans, I suspect that's how they intend to survive as Glamour grows more limited — by trading their expertise to the Seelie in exchange for their miserable lives should those self righteous fae ever learn House Leanhaun's secret. The cowardly Leanhaun use the other Unseelie houses to cover their practices and provide muscle to discourage the Seelie from picking on them. At least the ones who remember they're Unseelie do. Most of them just pretend to be Seelie to the extent that they might as well *be* Seelie.

The Leanhaun defer to the Ailil, but think we're nothing but dumb grunts. Still, they're too concerned that someone will discover their secret (like we didn't 600 years ago!) to dare try anything against us. Sneaky bastards, though. They hope to use us to shield themselves from harm. Like the Ailil, they want us to do their fighting for them, but have no idea of the war we actually wage. They would undoubtedly be shocked if they knew we have plans of our own. In many ways it will be a pleasure to see the genteel Leanhaun realize who has the upper hand. They've been less than helpful to either the Unseelie cause or the Shadow Court except as it suits their own designs. We'll just see how they fare when we rule and cut off their Glamour supply unless they serve us in all things. We aren't so starved for companionship that we *need* them. Let them age for a few months and watch them come crawling to us.

Both the Ailil and the Leanhaun would do well to embrace the opportunities provided by High King David's disappearance to hone their battle skills and make alliance among various factions and the commoners that can be used to advantage later. If they don't do so, however, we certainly aren't going to suggest it to them. We'll profit from their oversight. Why is it, I wonder, that makes the Leanhaun and Ailil think we're so dim? Don't they know that successful soldiers must have a grasp of tactics to survive?

The Seelie Houses

There are no uncomfortable gray areas to consider when dealing with the Seelie houses. Unequivocally, they are the enemy. If I had my wish, we would begin even now to slaughter them and let the Dreaming sort them out. *Not* that we follow that policy, so don't go on a killing spree just yet. Until we are ready, we must be patient. We will spin our webs and let them entrap themselves. Only when we strike our decisive blow will they realize how we have set the scene for their destruction. Then Balor's revenge will be complete.

Dougal

Stodgy and unimaginative outside their forges, Dougal is probably the most admirable among the Seelie. They show the most talent and dedication of any other sidhe, but they are such lapdogs of the Gwydion, they don't realize their true potential and power. They've always been too concerned with giving their tinker's toys to Gwydion to notice that Dougal could rule by virtue of their weaponry and armor if they chose. Luckily for Gwydion, Dougal plays things far too honorably for that. Could we win their support for our cause, we could benefit both from their skills and their battle knowledge. Unfortunately, the idea that Dougal might join us is so ridiculous we might as well wish for Balor himself to rise from the dead to lead us into Evernight.

Dougal's history supposedly tells their origins as smiths for Gwydion, who were accorded noble status. I have a different theory: I believe that Dougal were once fomorians captured by the Tuatha and forced into slavery in the smithy to forge weapons for use against their own kind. Over the years, they were allowed to interbreed with lesser sidhe (much as we ourselves did with the Tuatha). Gradually, after so much time in service to the Tuatha, they lost their identities as fomorians and took the name of one of their most talented smiths.

Those who dispute my theory overlook one important fact: Every member of House Dougal has some sort of physical handicap just as we have our challenges. Unlike us, Dougal fae can compensate for their flaws with cunningly crafted machines and items. To my mind this simply means they probably have more Tuathan blood than fomorian, but how else do you explain their physical differences except through having the same blood we do? This is why we so often masquerade as Dougal — both because it's hard to hide our challenges and because everyone trusts the fae of House Dougal. Perhaps when we attain more power, we can approach them and explain our kinship. If they could be turned to our way of thinking, they'd make a mighty addition to our armies.

Eiluned

The Eiluned often prove as slippery and untrustworthy as the Ailil, their closest kin. I have yet to meet an Eiluned who wasn't maddeningly smug and obnoxiously proud of herself for being mysterious. They pride themselves on their secrecy and sorcerous talents, believing this makes them indispensable to other Kithain. It's true that sorcerers may be needed for now, but their vaunted powers will wane as Glamour becomes scarcer. Their only use in combat is as support troops and they seem blissfully unaware that other changelings can cast cantrips too. In the end, they'll have to get used to the idea that physical might will rule over their sorcery. Then we'll tell them where and how to use their magic. We'll make them realize how pathetic their pretensions are — a good slap in the mouth with a mace will shut any sorcerer up.

For now, there are enough Eiluned who profess to be Unseelie that it makes sense to ally with them and welcome them to the Shadow Court when necessary. Other Seelie even suspect the Eiluned who are Seelie of being up to something, partially because of their close kinship with Ailil, but also because their secretiveness brings it down on their own heads. Naturally, any alliances we make with either Seelie or Unseelie Eiluned are worth exactly as much as theirs are. Given the choice, they'd choose Ailil over us anyway. So use them, but keep a leash on them. And *don't* turn your back on them.

Fiona

Such a waste! House Fiona usually produces good warriors. Certainly, they are the most courageous of the Seelie houses. That may be because they are a little wilder than the other Seelie; they actively seem to court danger and sensation. They are most noted for their torrid love affairs, but Fiona easily fall prey to overindulgence in liquor, drugs, revelry, even perversions. That means we can control them. Supply them with what they need, and they'll devote themselves to their own downfall while praising you as their best friend. Recent rumor speaks of a drug that can control the will of changelings. If we could find a supply of this drug and addict key members of House Fiona, we might be able to utilize their battle skills on the front lines.

On the other hand, we hardly need drugs to control the Fiona. They become so wrapped up in their lovers, that a threat to the loved one brings immediate compliance from the weak-minded Fiona. It is said that the only thing a Fiona fears is the death of a lover. Take such a lover hostage and you can direct the Fiona as you will, but make a Fiona love you and there is nothing she won't do for you — betray her house, the Seelie cause, even her own self. What an irony!

Gwydion

These overly conservative fae are the Seelie houses' version of the Ailil — at least in so far as being arrogant, overbearing and convinced they are the only suitable rulers makes them like Ailil. The comparison stops there. Where Ailil manipulates others, Gwydion assumes others will follow simply because they command it. House Gwydion claims to be so loyal to the Seelie cause that house members hunt down and kill Unseelie, a course of action forbidden by the very code that they purport to serve! These pretentious snobs claim their right to rulership through descent from Tuathan kings. Rumor also says their leader, High Lord Ardanon, claims descent from the founders of a land called Ardenmore. No such land has ever been known, leading us all to question the good high lord's sanity. Amusing! We all know their penchant for running mad when they are thwarted. Somewhere along the line, the Gwydions claim Lugh among their forebears. Perhaps they're our cousins as well and have inherited the mental challenges some of Balor's members face. Maybe we ought to explain the relationship to them and watch them squirm.

We have more claim to rulership than ever they did. Further, we know what being a ruler actually means. We need only gain the upper hand and we will show them their errors and crush their foolishness. It is their fault more than any other that the change of the courts so the Unseelie may rule the dark half of the year has not occurred in so long. They will pay for that once we rule. When they scream for our pleasure, let us see what their "noble" sentiments of rulership are worth.

Liam

Fools and cowards, the members of House Liam let the other houses treat them as oath breakers and pariahs just so they can claim allegiance to the Seelie cause that hates and distrusts them. And they say we're twisted! While they have little prowess on the battlefield and small talent for sorcery, Liam often show a genius for scholarship and historical inquiry. If they do not prove too much of a hindrance to us in our quest for rulership, we may keep them alive to serve as our chroniclers

The best way to deal with a Liam is to befriend him. They are so starved for approval, they'll do almost anything to win it. Pretend to trust a Liam, welcome him home to dinner and you've got a lapdog who'll do your bidding forever. And if you can't win them over, they're relatively easy to kill and none of the other houses care as much about a few dead Liam as they would about one of their own.

Scathach

Now, they interest us. The Scathach know a lot we need to learn and they are fabulous warriors. The only sidhe to remain behind when the Shattering occurred, they have continuity and an innate understanding of the changing times that no other noble house can claim. Of course, this makes them less than sidhe in the eyes of the other houses. Balor doesn't care if their blood is pure or not; it's a pure as ours is!

If we could win the Scathach as our allies and show them the reasoning behind our maneuvering, we could overthrow the Seelie sooner than anyone believes. Afterward, by placing them in positions of power over the Seelie, we'll give them the revenge they crave for the others' treatment of them. They'll be so happy with that, they won't even bother to notice who the true rulers are. Many of our own Balor kin can be found among the Scathach, those who tried to stay behind and had to resort to the same methods as Scathach to survive. Perhaps we can play on that and reawaken their memories of their true allegiance. One way or another, Scathach will end up serving us; it's just a matter of whether they do so willingly or under coercion. Now, if we could discover what else makes them tick besides a craving for acknowledgment, we'd rule them tomorrow.

The Commoners

House Balor has always appreciated the commoner fae — especially in jellied sauce or on a bun. In all seriousness, there are certain commoners who are currently indispensable to our cause. Others we might as well eat; they hardly serve any other purpose! The best that can be said of most commoners is that they don't arise from Tuatha de Danaan stock. Still, even the most useless of the non-noble can be turned to our ends. It's all a matter of setting them against the right opponents. Now that High King David is no longer here to enforce the peace in Concordia, we have an unparalleled opportunity to do just that. We must move quickly to bring commoners in to our fold while espousing common (if you'll excuse the pun) cause with them. Once they are no longer useful as pawns, we can force them into service as cannon fodder or dispose of them at leisure.

Boggans

Speaking of useless... Seelie boggans are feeble homebodies who'll pay almost any price to be left alone in their cherished homes. They can be sickening with their love of routine and penchant for work. They're as bad as humans! Luckily, they have this weakness for others in trouble that can be exploited by anyone clever enough to do so. Even Unseelie boggans can usually be counted on to help, though they do it in order to get you into their debt (a practice I heartily recommend for most of us, you can never have too many people in your debt). We even employ some of the Unseelie boggans, sending them to Seelie freeholds where they make themselves indispensable and listen to all the gossip. At the right time, we'll call them back, crippling the everyday running of the freehold and learning all the Seelies' secrets at the same time. Though they don't acknowledge the relationship, boggans are related to boggarts, but we'll talk about these twisted cousins under the Thallain.

Eshu

House Balor takes in a lot of Eshu who are tired of being treated like servants. We give them the title of nobles and princes that other sidhe deny them and let them wander wherever they will to spread tales of our prowess and fearsomeness. Some eshu aren't too bad on the battlefield either, and their command of the Wayfare Art is unequaled, giving us great advantage in tactical situations.

While we are more than willing to grant them titles, we provide those who swear allegiance to us with something even more dear to them: adventure. Give an eshu an interesting path to follow, a challenging game of chance, information that leads them to something they've never seen before, or a great story they can adapt and they'll eat right out of your hands. So long as they believe they will share in the leadership once the Unseelie rule, they'll remain our pawns. If they're disappointed that their principalities fail to materialize, well... the redcaps would be happy to help us hold a feast in their honor, a feast even the eshu would have to admit would be... interesting.

Nockers

Changelings after our own hearts, nockers are rude, crude, socially unacceptable, and don't care who knows it or who they insult. You have to give them credit, it takes a lot of courage to face up to some of the more powerful Kithain and curse them for everything from their looks to their ancestry with suggestions for performing anatomically impossible exercises thrown in for good measure. They aren't the best in battle, but give me some well-crafted nocker weapons, armor and inventions and I'll carve out an empire.

Lately, we've begun experimenting with letting nockers build us fortress-workshops in the Dreaming. They serve as strongholds, forges and craft shops for us where the nockers have free reign to be as inventive as they like. They've been working on special treasures that allow us to control the Fell and on creating weapons for our upcoming war with the Seelie. We've been able to amass quite a stockpile due to the workshops, and we'll undoubtedly build more. So long as we praise their work and give them space and materials to play with, the nockers will remain our devoted servants.

Pooka

Most pooka act like fluffy idiots unless they're the kind who become something useful in battle. These lying pranksters cause havoc unless tightly controlled. Even the Unseelie variety are intolerable unless sent to play their pointless games elsewhere — preferably among the Seelie Courts. They know nothing of military discipline or of serious attempts to gain ascendancy in the world.

On the other hand, they sometimes make amusing pets; Trap them in animal form and never let them be in a position when someone's not watching them. This can provide endless hours of entertainment as you watch them squirm and maneuver to find a way out of their predicament. It's even more fun to pretend you don't realize they are anything but animals and make plans how to cook them for dinner in their presence. It's also amusing to require a pooka to tell you the absolute truth — or else. I have a charming collection of pooka tongues from those who just couldn't do it to save their lives — literally.

Redcaps

Ah, the clean-up crew! Redcaps make great shock troops in battle and they eat all those pooka parts I don't want to keep around. Most Kithain, Seelie or Unseelie, don't really want redcaps around. Ugly and disgusting, redcaps have such a bad attitude that they don't have to be as tough as trolls to cause fear in others. And their dining habits could make vampiric cannibals barf. Just our kind of changelings! We employ a great number of redcaps, letting them run in gangs in Seelie territory. We train them at our strongholds in the Dreaming to act as the vanguard of our armies.

We've made a promise to the redcaps that if they serve us faithfully, when we rule we will give them an entire kingdom of their own that they can rule as they see fit. We've promised them that they can elect their own king, do with the mortals in their area as they like, and do whatever else they want with that territory. Further, we've agreed to supply them with Glamour when that commodity becomes too scarce for easy harvesting. How could they resist that? They flock to our banners, more of them signing on every day.

Of course, we will keep our word to them — we've sworn it with potent oaths. But we didn't promise we'd do anything to keep them alive during — or after — the fighting. We'll award them their kingdom, we may even give them access to some Glamour, but we don't expect a large number of them to be alive to enjoy it, and we *never* said we wouldn't attack and wipe them out once we kept our initial promise.

Satyrs

Passionate and volatile, satyrs enjoy nothing so much as revelry and abandon. Good. We can certainly understand their baser desires, for we share them. In fact, many of us like keeping satyrs as sex slaves in our own holdings. Having one or two attentive bedmates under your control helps relieve tension after battle. I highly recommend it. Of course, satyrs tend to be incredibly moody, so it pays to control them through access to drugs or liquor. When they aren't keeping your bed warm, they can entertain you with songs or musical instruments. In a pinch, they can even serve as soldiers. They have a lot of endurance, if not much skill in martial pursuits. Overall, a few satyr servants can make life much more pleasant.

The main drawback with satyrs is their fascination with lore. They're reputed to be great scholars. So what? If I wanted their opinion, I'd give it to them. You may feel differently. Some members of Balor use satyrs to do research for them. Personally, I allow my satyrs access to whatever tomes of lore they want to pursue so long as they tell me what they're researching. Who knows? They might stumble across something useful. They don't lie to me, either — it's far too painful for them if they try.

Sluagh

These sneaky little gobblers make my flesh crawl. It isn't their looks so much. Pasty faced and toothless, if they weren't so obviously from Russian dreams, we might suspect they'd crossed with fomorians somewhere along the line. It's something else, something indefinable. Sluagh have only one saving grace: They make great espionage agents. They can crawl in any tiny hole to listen to secrets or squeeze through small cracks to steal treasures.

Unfortunately, they can't be coerced or bribed into working exclusively for us. They don't even have any loyalty to the Unseelie or Shadow Court rather than the Seelie one. Their information network can be useful, but it goes both ways — they're just as likely to sell our secrets to interested parties as they are to broker Seelie secrets to us. Obviously, we can't allow that.

Go ahead and employ them to get what you want, then feel free to dispose of them before they turn on you and sell you out to someone else. And don't feel bad about gaining pleasure from it. A good torture session might even garner more information from them. Don't be shy, it's easy to be creative! For example, they stink normally, but if you really want to smell something foul, try boiling one in oil some time.

Trolls

I have no use for Seelie trolls. They've sold their strength for Seelie acceptance. They allow themselves to be bound by oaths to protect the very people who usurped their positions in the world after running away for six centuries. Unseelie trolls I understand, and House Balor knows what they really want. We know they desire an excuse for battle, blood and mayhem. They want to crush the ruling sidhe and take back the freeholds stolen from them. They labor under the same righteous anger that we do — the fury of the conqueror denied his rightful rewards.

I say, give them free rein and let them cause havoc! The only difficulty with this is that some are too stupid to realize we aren't like the other sidhe and they strike against us too. That's why it's so important for us to recruit the ones we *can* use. Hands down, an Unseelie troll is the best warrior on any battlefield so long as he's under the command of a gifted general. We know how to direct all that anger and strength and use it to best advantage. That means we have to convince the trolls to place themselves under our command and bind them to us. For now that entails making promises to them and allowing them the leeway to wreak havoc on their personal enemies. Once they're in deep enough and bound to us by unbreakable oaths, we can rein them in. For now, let them do our dirty work for us and terrorize the Seelie while they're at it.

The Thallain

Our relationship with the Thallain is one of the best kept secrets of our house. More so than even the Unseelie kith, the Thallain have desires and feelings similar to ours. For one thing, few of them have any more sympathy for humans than we do. Granted, many of them actually prey upon mortals and even eat them on occasion, but you have to expect a little excess from creatures who have no Seelie nature at all. True, some of the Thallain are less than bright and many are all but uncontrollable. Still, we find them useful.

Individual Thallain occasionally work for the Unseelie, especially members of the Shadow Court who are unlikely to turn them in. Most other fae see them as monsters and either hunt them or try to drive them out. They aren't given the benefit of protection under the Escheat, meaning any fae can kill them on sight with impunity. We feel differently about the Thallain, so we take advantage of the other faes' blindness. We welcome them, providing them with what they want and need in exchange for their allegiance.

For some time now, we have been recruiting Thallain. We have an entire army made up of nothing but Thallain, with their own companies made up of their own kind and commanded by their own leaders. Naturally, members of House Balor take overall command of this kill-crazy group. For the most part, the army serves as a tool of terror. We don't expect them to make more than a small dent in the Seelie armies. Their real value is to divert attention from our better-trained warriors, allowing them to win the day while the Seelie panic at the thought of going against a force of Thallain.

The Gallain

We don't know or care too much about most of the Gallain. Most have little to do with court intrigue and no real interest in who's in control. Since they don't care what we do, we have no interest in them. That said, there are a few exceptions. Among them are two groups of Kith we claim as kin, and another that interests us because of their place of origin — Hibernia, which has always been of concern to us.

Clurichaun

Native to Hibernia, the clurichaun have always stayed on the periphery of fae society. Unless you really piss them off — and get them drunk as skunks — clurichaun aren't much use on the battlefield. They *are* fairly handy at singing scathing songs and berating rulers who fail to meet their standards, which no doubt bothers the Seelie a lot. While we get a good laugh out of that, it really isn't very effective in the long run. The clurichaun habit of collecting things interests us much more. Most of them collect useless, stupid objects, but a few specialize in items we might like to acquire, such as weaponry or treasures. We could care less about the clurichaun themselves, but we're more than happy to relieve them of their collections whenever we find one worth taking.

Selkie

The selkie arose from the same ancestry as we did. Born of Balor's daughter and her Tuathan lover Cian, the second born of the triplets became the first selkie. Legend says Manannan Mac Lir turned her into a seal. When she wished to assume a humanlike form again, she had to strip away her pelt to do so. Ever after, the selkie had to don their sealskins whenever they wanted to become seals, and remove them to change back. We don't know if this is because of their fomorian blood or not.

We acknowledge our kinship with the selkie. Some of them acknowledge us in return. Others deny any knowledge of their origins. One of our primary tasks in the Parliament of Dreams is to agitate to award the selkie noble status equal to that of the sidhe. Since the Seelie don't really believe that we're fomorians, however, it's impossible for them to acknowledge that the selkie are our first cousins.

Whatever the Seelie believe, we have enough selkie on our side to provide us with hidden bases along sea coasts and in undersea caves. Even now, we train Special Forces there who will join our armies at the proper time, catching both Seelie and Shadow Courts unaware in flanking maneuvers from the sea.

Mer-Folk

Our other cousins, the mer-folk, prove even more difficult to pin down than the selkie. If the selkie exist on the periphery of Kithain life, the mer-folk practically shun it altogether. That may be because they exist almost exclusively in the water. Unlike the selkie, who take up lives on the land when not in seal form, the mer-folk build undersea castles and forts. They are able to confer the ability to breathe underwater on those to whom they give special treasures, allowing us to visit and stay with them.

Like our forces with the selkie, we have operatives who spend much of their time among the mer-folk. Rather than preparing for warfare, though, we use these bases as hideouts for our more notorious members. Strangely, the mer-folk often prove more warlike than the selkie and some have offered to join our forces. Obviously, we've accepted. We also strive to have the Parliament of Dreams acknowledge the mer-folk as nobles, but if they're reticent about the selkie, they don't understand about the mer-folk at all. In both cases, we hope to eventually use the Seelies' prejudice against our kin to bring them fully into our plans.

The Prodigals

We're somewhat ambivalent about the prodigals. The usual theory runs that prodigals used to be fae once upon a time, but time and circumstance conspired to change them. The prodigals don't subscribe to that theory, but we aren't interested in their point of view most of the time anyway, with one exception — the Dancers.

Children of Lilith

Such a fanciful name for leeches. Most Kithain know little of these bloodsuckers, though we've all heard the tale that they sprang from a blood-crazed redcap cursed by the Dreaming. We aren't most Kithain. Personally I could care less if they were once redcaps. Their value now lies in the Dark Glamour they exude and in their potential as allies. The ones House Balor know best are from a political faction of theirs called the Sabbat. Some of the Sabbat's activities remind us of our more aggressively anti-human members. Apparently, they have their own household groups, too, and we have engaged in limited cooperation with the house known as The Shadows. You haven't tasted really Dark glamour until you've run with a pack of vampires. They take the victim's blood; We get the victim's fear and pain. Curiously, once the vampire bites her victim, the quarry seems to surrender to a state like bliss or orgasm. Someday, I'll have to invite one of the Children of Lilith home with me and experiment with that. Meanwhile, we apparently have similar goals. More close contact is needed before we fully integrate them into our plans, however.

Werewolves

You've got to give them credit. These creatures are bad motherfuckers in a fight. They're ranked among the Prodigals, too, although I cannot even imagine how they might be related to pooka. They live for battle, but most of them fight against their idea of a god of destruction they call the Worm. I think we're on the other side. Since some of them, who call their family the Fiona, are apparently related to House Fiona, I feel fairly confident they'd be Seelie given a choice. Pity.

There is one tribe, the Dancers, who shared a kin group with us long ago. Both of us used the Picts as breeding stock. At one point, the werewolves descended into a great pit to battle this Worm-god the other werewolves fear and hate so. Instead of defeating the darkness, they came to know it and serve it. We got on a lot better with them after that. When we left for Arcadia, we lost track of them, but since our return, we've been making alliances with them and exchanging fosterlings. Our house leader was fostered in a Dancer labyrinth, in fact, and gained a unique perspective from it. We have a common goal: We both seek to bring on the Evernight, which they see as the time of the Worm's ascendancy over Mother Earth. Bring it on!

Human and Near Human

You may have gathered by now that we have little respect for humans. Their petty stupidity cost us much in the past and we have not forgotten that. Nonetheless, the idea that we wish to wipe them out is ludicrous. We merely wish to turn their talents (such as they are) to our use. We have no problem with having humans as slaves. There are two types of humans who may prove a little more difficult than the run-of-the-mill type: ghosts and witches.

Sons of Adam, Daughters of Eve

This stupid name for humans was no doubt coined by some Seelie moron who thought it sounded romantic. As I think I've made clear, humans are only good for producing Glamour and they'd better give us what we want when we want it. We have little patience for those who can't — or won't — produce. Then again, difficult humans are at least good for target practice or honing one's skills at torture.

Ghosts

Most fae ask themselves, "Is there any use to these whining pulers?" We know better. While it isn't easy to interact with these animate spirits, some of our more daring members have forged tentative alliance with a few. Most ghosts come from discontented humans who have died before finishing some pointless task they appointed themselves in life. Their loss; our gain. We point out the most creative and brightest of the Seelie to the faction known as Sleeping Sandmen, who strip away our enemies' Glamour while they sleep. What a perfect attack on those we despise! We each get what we want since the wraiths apparently need Glamour to fuel their existence. Granted, we don't exactly understand how that works, but we've learned enough to begin the Waybuilder's Corp. You've already heard about them.

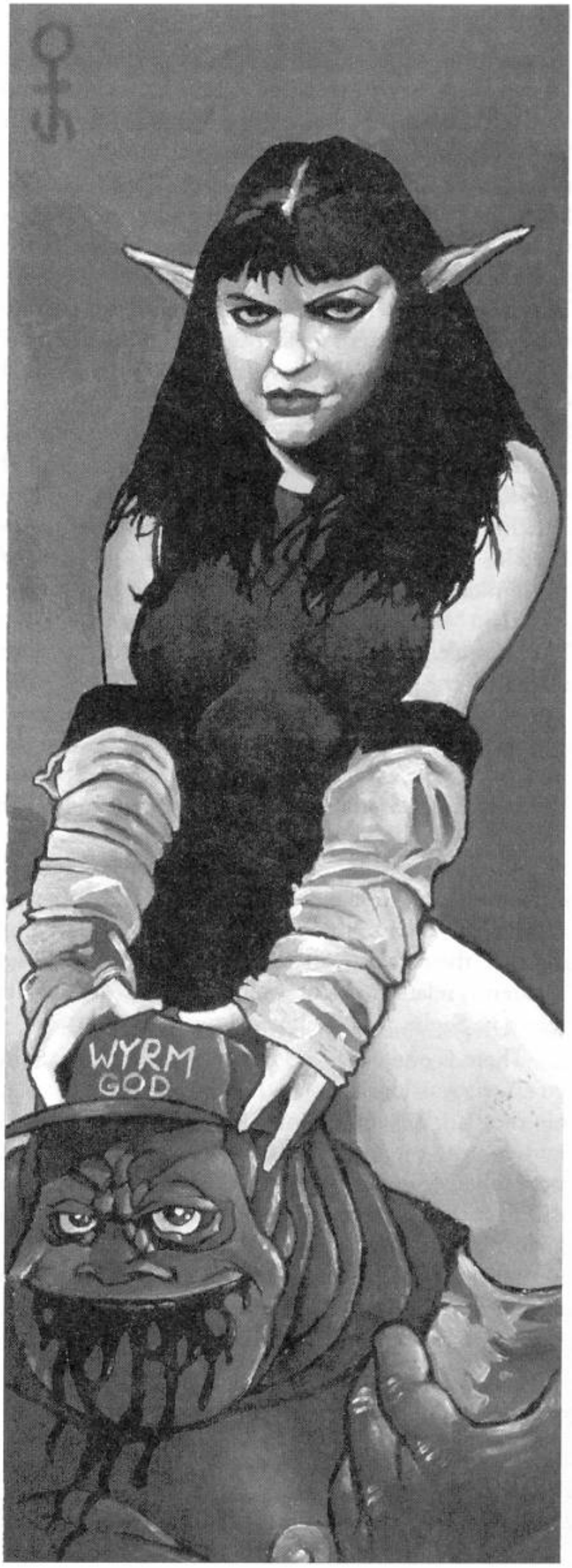
We just wish we could establish better contact with those we've sent to the lands of shadow so we would know if they are successful or not. For now, communication is sporadic at best and held hostage to the goodwill and desire of the wraiths. If we are to continue working with them, we need to find some way to entrap them and force them to speak with us whenever we wish. Having to bow to the whims of a disembodied spirit is almost as intolerable as putting up with the Seelie Court.

Witches

These humans can present us with some serious problems. They apparently possess the power to change reality to some extent. The good part about that is that if they get too ambitious with their changes, they burn out and end up vegetables or they die. Naturally, we were familiar with mages in the olden days. In fact, many fomorians possessed magical powers. We became aware of mages again soon after we returned. Thus far, we have been cautious about dealing with them. We have watchers secretly monitoring a few that we've identified. Apparently, they're divided into two courts like we are. Some of them seem a lot more banal than others. I've heard rumors (passed along by our spies) that certain wizards may be looking for changelings to experiment upon. Well, we warned the Seelie long ago that they should comply with our ideas on the right of rescue and secrecy. It would certainly be a pity if the Seelie found themselves placed in the paths of the mages who want them as lab rats, wouldn't it?

Fomori

Soon after we returned to the Waking World, we contacted the beings called fomori. Naturally, we assumed these were our kin who had survived through the intervening centuries. Many of them evinced the same sorts of "deformities" as the ancient fomorians. These disfigurements even conferred certain advantages or powers on those who possessed them. It seemed that we might learn from them how to empower ourselves and use our challenges as Balor of the Evil Eye once did. We have spent much of our time since our return making alliances with the fomori. In recent months, we have become aware that the beings called fomori are probably *not* the remnants of our lost kin, but some sort of hybrid of human and something else. Exactly what that something else is we aren't certain. What *does* seem true is that many fomori either work for or associate with a conglomerate known as Pentex and that most werewolves hate fomori and kill them on sight.



Since the fomori seem powerful, we don't regret allying with them, but we must now send agents to discover the truth behind the fomori's existence and whether the alliance will be to our advantage in the end. Not that we are above using them and discarding them now that we know they aren't really our kin. Meanwhile, we'll continue the alliance and hope we can learn the secrets behind empowering what others perceive as disabilities. If these beings have, in fact, been engineered in some fashion, perhaps we can do so ourselves using human subjects or turn those already in existence to our own service.

Balor Deformities

Unlike Flaws that award additional points in character creation, the deformities that afflict members of House Balor confer no rewards whatsoever. They serve, instead, as the inherent weakness of House Balor and should cause characters some discomfort or difficulty that affects their interactions with other characters. Balor fae are taught to regard these deformities as challenges, difficulties that cannot be overcome with prosthetics or other quick fixes. Instead, each changeling is expected to find ways to compensate for her "challenge" and emerge stronger for having done so. A few physical and mental flaws, however, seem particularly appropriate for Balor sidhe. Storytellers may allow their players to choose from among these suggestions in order to accentuate the particular characteristics of members of House Balor.

Balor's Gleam

Your eyes glow with a baleful red light, not unlike the legendary beam of destruction attributed to the founder of House Balor. Although this appears sinister and foreboding, the perpetual redness only serves to make the eyes extremely sensitive to both natural and artificial light. You usually don dark glasses to venture outside, even on the dimmest days. Others who know of your condition refuse to meet your eyes and often conduct their business with you while standing outside your direct line of sight.

Arms of Lugh

You exhibit unnaturally long arms, giving you a somewhat awkward appearance. No matter how straight you stand, you always appear stooped because your hands extend below your knees. This problem makes it difficult for you to use standard weapons and sometimes proves cumbersome in other activities — such as driving cars or using other devices built for individuals with an "average" reach. Finding clothing that fits also presents complications. It's the little things that count, and your extra-long arms give you a lot of "little things" to overcome.

Selkie Skin

Your skin bears a thin coating of downy fur, not unlike that of a seal. Although this layer affords you no protection from water or the elements, it does cause you inordinate discomfort in hot weather. In addition, you have a hard time concealing your pelt. Even in your mortal guise, you appear hirsute to the extreme. While shaving can alleviate the problem partially, you can never wholly hide your natural fur coat, which grows back in a matter of hours. Talk about five o'clock shadow!

Serpent's Tongue

Like the serpent that twines around the tower depicted in your house blazon, your tongue forks slightly at the tip. You speak with a lisp or else hiss noticeably when pronouncing certain words. Unless you want others to stare at you, you usually keep your mouth shut or else learn to talk between clenched teeth.

House Treasures

Over the years, we have made it our policy to find and keep as many treasures as possible so that we will have their aid when the final battle comes. A selection of treasures unique to House Balor find depiction here. Some among them rest in the keeping of the Royal Guardians; others are in use among our kin even now.

Balor's Crystal Eye

When the great Balor of the Evil Eye fell in battle, a quick-thinking warrior-priest of the fomorians plucked out his shattered eye and encased it in a crystal in which the fluids of a healing well were stored. It was his hope to save and restore the eye so it might once again be used as a weapon against the Tuatha and their children. For centuries, the eye has lain dormant. With the advent of the red star we call the Eye of Balor that has become visible within the Dreaming, the Royal Guardians sent one of their number to carry the eye to a protected spot and bathe it in the rays of the star. With that, the eye began to glow a dull red, just as it was rumored to do in the past. Great heat is held at bay only by the crystal encasing the eye. The Guardians believe that Balor's Eye is once again functional and capable of inflicting enormous damage on myriad foes from its heat and light. They also think that it will only become of use once it is implanted in someone's empty eye socket. While early speculation centered on High Lord Li-Tili as the most probable wielder, many Guardians now question that, pointing out that the eye is supposed to be given only to Cathal Reborn. The truth of the matter and the eye's powers will be revealed only when the proper conditions are met. Until then, both the high lord and his senior officers all seem reluctant to pluck out an eye to test the theories.

Blood Dross

The Masters of the Dance have discovered a way that the Children of Lilith with whom they associate can provide them with an unusual type of Dark Glamour. While drinking vampiric blood usually afflicts changelings with Banality, under certain circumstances, it can instead confer Glamour upon them. By taking a few drops of blood from the types of vampires known as madmen when they evidence their full-blown madness or Toreadors while they are engaged in some artistic pursuit, the Masters create what is called Blood Dross. The blood is stored in tiny rounded vials made of crystallized sugar, which are then coated with a slightly harder shell to hold in the resulting liquid. Several beads can be stored together in a protective box for up to a month without losing their potency. Each bead consumed gives a changeling the equivalent of one point of Glamour.

System: Though Glamour garnered through Blood Dross can be used to power any cantrip (though no more than two successes can be thus gained), they are most useful for cantrips that harm or deceive someone else (can be used to full number of potential successes). Blood Dross has the side effect of making the user more favorably inclined toward the vampire whose blood he consumed.

Steaming Spear ("Vengeance")

Long ago, Lugh Long-Arm used a magical spear to put out Balor's eye. In response to that, we have been constructing a return blow for whoever rules the Seelie when the war comes. Known as the Steaming Spear of Vengeance, it utilizes a spearhead similar to Balor's bane. Wound about with powerful enchantments, the spear is filled with anger that makes it a blood-seeker. "Vengeance" is so powerful that its head must be kept immersed in water lest its heat melt whatever touches it. The shaft of the weapon must be kept chained to a weighted manacle sunk deep into stone to prevent it from flying off in search of prey to kill.

System: Intended to be used by House Balor's greatest champion, the spear can be controlled by the will of its wielder (Willpower roll, difficulty 6, difficulty 7 for other Unseelie; difficulty 8 for any Seelie). Damage from the spear equals Strength + 8. It confers upon those who wield it the equivalent of an Oakenshield cantrip with six successes.

The Cauldron of Fear

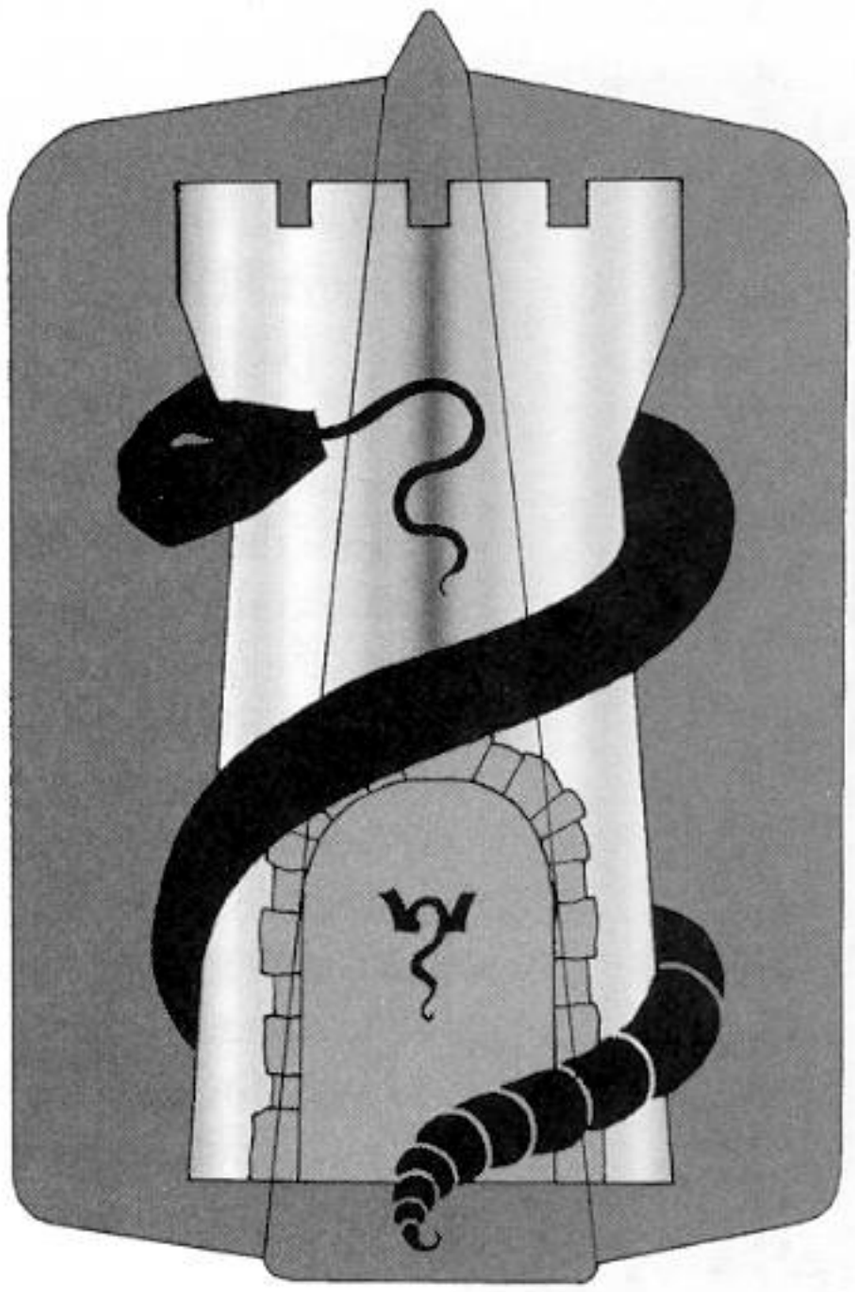
Constructed long ago and kept as a house secret during the Interregnum, the Cauldron of Fear is a large black cauldron that looks vaguely rusty. When set over a fire and filled with stagnant water, it exudes a fine, almost invisible mist that wafts across a great hall or battlefield with the prevailing winds. Wherever the mist travels, those caught within it suddenly feel wracking fear enter their hearts. The bravest knights, the most honorable opponents flee headlong, often dropping their weapons and whatever else they carry in their haste to be gone. The main drawback to using the cauldron is that the wind might change direction, catching those using it in a backlash.

System: Only those succeeding in a Willpower roll (difficulty 9) can remain in the vicinity of the mist, and they fight with a penalty as though they were at the Wounded level. The effects of the mist last for half an hour and once someone has succumbed to the mist, she must remain away from its vicinity for the full time

Glass Fortresses

Balor has used our presence in the Dreaming to construct fortress strongholds for ourselves. Fashioned by nockers, they serve as forges, craft shops, castles and armories for those loyal to House Balor. When we first unleash the Evernight upon the Waking World, Balor's forces will retreat to these havens to ride out the worst of the initial effects.

Each castle is of slightly different design (there is no way different nockers will follow another nocker's design), but all are constructed of a glasslike substance found in that part of the Dreaming that is home to the Fell. Brought to our chosen sites in a liquid state, it is shaped in a manner similar to glass blowing into the structure of the fortress. Once shaped, the liquid glass dries into a clear, almost unbreakable substance stronger than steel and extremely slick. Attempts to climb the walls are, thus, thwarted and landings atop the towers prove treacherous except in those places covered by thick carpeting. Except in certain areas, internal walls and flooring are constructed of more normal materials, allowing us to move about without slipping.



Balor's Famous and Infamous

The Ancients

Balor of the Evil Eye and Lugh Long-Arm have already been discussed. They are mentioned again so that Balor's true descendants will never forget their heritage. Balor's ferocity and valor caused humans to regard our kind with awe and to treat us with respect. With his death, humans lost their respect for the fae and became demanding, leading to the Sundering. We must always remember Balor's policies of rule with an iron fist and bring it back into practice. As for Lugh, though he is our direct ancestor, we regard him as a traitor to the house. Even today, we search for signs in those born of Balor that Lugh has reincarnated. Whenever we find signs that point to that possibility, the child is taken and watched. Should he evince attitudes detrimental to House Balor, the child is killed. We will not submit ourselves to the Tuatha ever again!

High Lord Li-Tili

House Balor's ranking member, High Lord Li-Tili was born and raised in a hive of Dancers, among whom his mother took refuge. Born with only one eye, the child was hailed by the house as especially favored by Balor of the Evil Eye. Though raised among the Dancers, he was tutored by many of the finest minds of our house. When he was ready, he claimed his throne by taking charge of Balor's forces. Beginning in Hibernia, he seized control from local lords and expanded his control outward until he attained the rank of high lord by right of defeating any who challenged his position.

Soon after he had secured his title, Li-Tili set off on a quest into the Dreaming, supposedly to attempt to locate and recover the treasures of Cathal. In actuality, though he did succeed in gathering those treasures together and entrusting them to the care of the Royal Guardians, Li-Tili's real purpose in his travels lay in seeking a secure fortress for himself. This, he found beneath the waters off Hibernia's western coast. There Li-Tili resides with his private guard of Dancers. Loyal only to him, these werewolf bodyguards make certain that no one approaches the high lord without his express permission.

Lately, many members of our house have come to believe that Bedlam has caught up with the high lord and that the time for a new leader has arrived. Some of us believe that the ritual sacrifice of Li-Tili may, in fact, provide the seminal event to catalyze the coming of Evernight. Attempts to come close enough to evaluate whether assassination is our best option have met with failure thus far — either because Li-Tili actually retains his sanity and fighting prowess or due to the Dancer bodyguards who are known to feast upon those who displease the high lord.

Lady Eithlinn of the Gleaming Eyes, Head of Security

Despite the eerie red gleam that emanates from her eyes, many of us account Lady Eithlinn as the most beautiful of all the women of our house. Certainly, she leads the list of ruthless generals in her capacity as head of security for House Balor. A master of disguise as well as an expert in all forms of espionage and surveillance, Lady Eithlinn serves as the leader for the Eyes of Balor; thus, she knows the most intimate secrets not only of our house but of the other fae houses as well. Her memory for detail and her ability to recall entire conversations serve her well when it comes to planning covert strikes and acts of sabotage, which she places in the capable hands of Lady Moya, the redcap who leads the house's assassination squads and sabotage teams.

Sequestered most of the time in her fortress high in the Adirondack Mountains in the Kingdom of Apples, Lady Eithlinn occasionally travels to other parts of Concordia — always in disguise — to pay official visits to other house notables. Most members of our house feel slightly ill at ease in her presence, for she seems to know even the best-kept secrets. Once in a while, her visits coincide with the unexplained disappearance of one of her "hosts." No one has dared suggest that she uses the laws of hospitality as an excuse to get close enough to her enemies to remove them, but the suspicion remains and accounts for many sleepless nights among the leaders of Balor freeholds. A charge of treason made by Lady Eithlinn against any of our house almost certainly results in the death penalty, with or without a trial.

Within her fortress, Lady Eithlinn reportedly keeps a bevy of human slaves — male and female — to serve her voracious sexual appetite and proclivity for causing pain. Many interrogation techniques used by her agents come from practice sessions using her Enchanted humans as guinea pigs.

Lord Raghnall, "The Dancemaster"

Despite his lack of a left hand, Lord Raghnall has more than proven his worth as a warrior and leader within the house. His position as head of the Masters of the Dance serves him well in his capacity as general of the Foreign Guard. In fact, Lord Raghnall spends more time with the Prodigals than he does with other fae, causing him to demonstrate some peculiar mannerisms. He has been known to break into wild bursts of howling at the full moon, a habit derived from his association with various groups of Dancers. He has also acquired a taste for drinking blood, something he learned from his allies among the Children of Lilith.

Raghnall lives in a high rise penthouse in the suburbs of Chicago. From his Midwestern freehold, he oversees the ranks of Prodigal allies who have pledged themselves to join Balor's fight against the Children of the Tuatha in return for Balor's assistance in their own versions of Doomsday. Whether or not Raghnall intends on fulfilling his obligations remains unclear. Many of us believe that The Dancemaster waits to see whether or not the arrival of Evernight precedes the cataclysms of the werewolves or vampires before he commits any house troops to foreign struggles.

Lord Grodolf, Commoner General

Lord Grodolf is the troll commander of the commoner army of Balor. Born into a well to do German family, Grodolf was uncommonly large and strong even at a very early age. To the Eye of Balor stationed at a nearby Seelie freehold, it was obvious the child was destined to become a troll who would be of great value and use to the ruling court. Just before his Chrysalis, Lady Tangiria gave up her cover story as an Eiluned, kidnapped the young boy and fled with him via trods held open for her by the Guardians of the Gates. She arrived at the freehold of Ebonmere, then occupied by High Lord Li-Tili's protégé, Lord Zurtok. As liaison to the commoners for House Balor, Zurtok took the child under his wing and taught him tactics and warfare. Tangiria stayed with the boy long enough for him to become accustomed to his new life, then was reassigned.

To keep the lad from Bedlam, Lord Zurtok sent him to regular sessions in military school and survival camp. Grodolf grew as strong and tough as his young physique hinted he might, becoming a troll among trolls. His strength and stamina are legendary, his weapons training in both ancient and modern weapons prodigious, and his grasp of tactics and propaganda unparalleled among commoner nobles. Grodolf assumed command of the commoner army last year when a Gwydion extremist assassinated Lord Zurtok. The troll has promised to avenge his mentor a hundred fold.

Lady Moya, "Hand of Vengeance"

Born into one of the commoner families living under the rule of House Balor, Moya grew up with the advantage of a thorough education in Unseelie politics and weapons training. She first served as an aide-de-camp to Lady Eithlinn, who experimented with recruiting commoners into the Eyes of Balor. Though a few commoners, such as eshu and sluagh, managed to win places among the Eyes, many seemed unable to fit their personalities into their roles as members of the Seelie houses to which they were assigned. They were too eager to draw blood to patiently gather information that might or might not be useful. Moya suggested that their talents be turned to other pursuits.

Vicious as a rabid dog, Moya took over the training of those agents unsuited to becoming moles, schooling them to serve as strike teams instead. When Eithlinn saw Moya's success, she obtained permission to make the redcap head of black ops for House Balor. The ruling council approved the plan and ennobled Moya to increase her standing among her recruits. Working closely with Lady Eithlinn, Lady Moya and her team perform

covert strikes and acts of sabotage. The elite within black ops perform assassinations of Balor's "most wanted" enemies. Lady Moya performs many of these personally and oversees all interrogation sessions of kidnapped Seelie nobles. Like her patron, Lady Eithlinn, Moya revels in causing pain to her foes and collects souvenirs from each — an ear here, a finger there. Occasionally, however, she goes so far overboard that even hardened members of her black ops team wonder if she still retains her sanity. Then again, she *is* a redcap.

Cathal

House Balor began with Cathal, the son of Lugh, grandson of Balor of the Evil Eye. Cathal led the house (so it is said) for over one hundred years while we established ourselves among the children of the Tuatha. During that time, Cathal is said to have made certain pledges to the Dreaming in return for power and the protection of his line. One such pledge was that the house and all its members would remain steadfastly Unseelie. Thus would our role in the pageant always be fulfilled. To us, the role is that of the consummate hero — brave warriors for individual rights and the redressing of wrongs against our people — while to the Seelie, we are the villains of the story.

It is said that King Cathal sought and found many powerful treasures that he held in trust against the day when Balor would be strong enough to overthrow the other noble houses. He is also rumored to be the last of the fomorian-born sidhe to have powers associated with his "deformity." Many have claimed that Cathal was perfect physically, but given to fits similar to *grand mal* seizures. During these fits, however, he was able to look into the future and predict what would happen if people followed a certain course of action. Whenever a seizure took him, a strange circular red design would appear on his forehead, in the position mystics attribute to the third eye.

Assassins from House Eiluned working on behalf of House Gwydion killed him when his popularity threatened their rule. Cathal had predicted his own death and took care to hide the mighty treasures so they would never fall to the Seelie. They have been a sacred trust of the Royal Guardians ever since.

House Balor's most cherished lore teaches that Cathal will return to lead us in the final days before Evernight occurs. His battle wisdom, puissant skills in sorcery and charisma will make him known to us at the right time. Our ritualists say that Cathal shall be reborn when a red star known as Balor's Eye appears in the heavens in the Dreaming. Thus shall we know that we will soon be at war. Such a star is now rumored to be seen nightly in certain areas of the Dreaming. If that is true, Cathal must even now be among us, waiting to take up the reins of leadership and crush the Children of the Tuatha forever.

Fell Rider of House Balor

Quote: *You don't want to do it, fine. Just get out of my way!*

Background: You never knew your parents very well. They were always gone and you learned how to make it on your own. Not that you cared about them. You always felt that you were somehow different, stronger than your parents, even though they made such a fuss about your lack of toes on your right foot. Even the stupid brace and special shoe couldn't correct the limp and the unbalanced feeling. But you learned to cope.

When you were barely old enough to cut school you learned your true nature and left home. Your new family welcomed you, taught you about your forebears and trained you in fae magic and warfare. Best of all, several younger changelings accepted you into their group — a clique of daredevils who put their lives on the line and perform outrageous deeds in the name of sneering at their so-called "deformities." You loved your initiation when the group took you into the Dreaming itself and you tracked and caught one of the Fell. When you rode the beast as it carried you on a hellish ride through the Dreaming, trying to dislodge you, ready to slay you in an instant if it succeeded, you'd never felt so alive.

Some of the house members look with dissatisfaction on your clique, but the real movers and shakers know who you are and call on you to undertake their most dangerous assignments for the good of the house. Whatever. It's the thrill of trying something new that attracts you. If it also helps your house and brings the day closer when Balor will rule the world and you can do whatever you like, so much the better.

Roleplaying Hints: Look them straight in the eye and let them know you're better than any of them. Never refuse a challenge. Look for sensation and excitement. Refuse to acknowledge the words "no" and "can't." Whoever said it's better to be a live jackal than a dead lion is a sniveling idiot. There's nothing as satisfying as overcoming a seemingly impossible challenge and living to tell the tale.

Equipment: Chimerical weapon, bridle for the Fell, extreme sports gear

Pour L'Amour et Liberté
The Book of Houses 2

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Court: Unseelie/Shadow
Legacies: Pandora/Paladin
House: Balor

Seeming: Wilder
Kith: Sidhe
Motley:

Attributes

Physical

Strength ●●OOO
Dexterity ●●●OO
Stamina ●●●OO

Social

Charisma ●●OOO
Manipulation ●●OOO
Appearance ●●●●O

Mental

Perception ●●●OO
Intelligence ●●●OO
Wits ●●●●O

Abilities

Talents

Alertness ●●OOO
Athletics ●OOOO
Brawl ●●OOO
Dodge ●●OOO
Empathy OOOOO
Intimidation ●●OOO
Kenning ●●OOO
Persuasion ●OOOO
Streetwise ●OOOO
Subterfuge OOOOO

Skills

Crafts OOOOO
Drive OOOOO
Etiquette OOOOO
Firearms ●OOOO
Leadership OOOOO
Melee ●●●OO
Performance ●●OOO
Security OOOOO
Stealth ●●OOO
Survival ●OOOO

Knowledges

Computer OOOOO
Enigmas ●OOOO
Gremayre ●●OOO
Investigation OOOOO
Law OOOOO
Linguistics OOOOO
Lore ●OOOO
Medicine OOOOO
Politics ●OOOO
Science OOOOO

Advantages

Backgrounds

Chimera ●●●OO
Prestige ●●OOO
Remembrance ●●OOO
Resources ●OOOO
Title ●●OOO

Arts

Contempt ●OOOO
Primal ●●OOO
Wayfare ●●OOO
OOOOO
OOOOO

Realms

Actor ●OOOO
Fae ●●●OO
Scene ●OOOO
OOOOO
OOOOO

Other Traits

Glamour

● ● ● ● O O O O O O
❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑

Willpower

● ● O O O O O O O O
❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑

Ravaging/Musing Threshold

Banality

● ● ● O O O O O O O
❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑

Health

		Real	Chimerical
Bruised		❑	❑
Hurt	-1	❑	❑
Injured	-1	❑	❑
Wounded	-2	❑	❑
Mauled	-2	❑	❑
Crippled	-5	❑	❑
Incapacitated		❑	❑

Birthrights/Frailties

Iron Resistance / Physical, mental or emotional deformity, Willpower 6 or under

Experience: ☐

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A word form ArtHaus

We at Arthaus would like to take a moment to thank Developer Justin Achilli for his assistance in bringing this book to completion and to also thank writers Nicky Rea and Jacky Cassada for their excellent efforts in writing this book. While Justin's obligations to White Wolf's flagship line, Vampire: The Masquerade, prevent him from working on future Changeling books, the efforts of our two authors have move than proven that they're ready to step forward and shepherd the this game line. Who are these two enigmatic women who have taken the reigns... read on...

Nicky Rea

Nicky is one half of the "dreaded two-headed Asheville freelance monster." She lives in the mountains of western North Carolina with her co-conspirator Jackie Cassada, five cats and a couple of eccentric computers. She has a degree in theatre and has played in several rock bands. She writes, edits and develops for White Wolf, TSR, Last Unicorn Games, West End Games, Holistic Design, *Polyhedron* and *Dragon* magazine. Some of her works for White Wolf include **Changeling: the Dreaming**, **Mage: the Ascension**, **Werewolf: Wild West**, **Wraith: the Oblivion**, Court of All Kings, Verbena, Gurahl, Sea of Shadows, Kingdom of Willows, Uktena Tribebook, Dreamspeakers, Kindred of the East, Shadow Court, Renegades, Hong Kong by Night and the Transylvania Chronicles. One of her short stories, "A Dog's Tale," appeared in the Changeling anthology *Splendour Falls*.

Nicky is the co-creator of the Mage Tarot, winner of the 1996 GAMA award for best gaming supplement of the year, and the developer of Antagonists for **Mind's Eye Theatre**. Her upcoming works include Rage across the Heavens, Book of Houses II: the Unseelie and the final book of the Transylvania Chronicles. Nicky can be seen at local cons in the southeast, where she and a group of friends run Mind's Eye Theatre LARPs, many of them featuring changelings. When not caught up in other pursuits, Nicky sometimes games with the ex-police chief of a local mental hospital for the criminally insane. She can be reached at larpform@aol.com.

Jackie Cassada

Jackie is the other half of the "Asheville freelance monster." She first became involved in freelance game design as part of the design team for first edition **Wraith: the Oblivion**. Since then, she has written for **Wraith, Werewolf, Changeling, Mage, Vampire: the Dark Ages, Mage: Sorcerers' Crusade, Werewolf: Wild West** and **Kindred of the East**. She is the author of the Immortal Eyes trilogy (*The Toybox; Shadows on the Hill; Court of All Kings*) of novels for Changeling, and has contributed short stories to the White Wolf anthologies *Death and Damnation, Truth Until Paradox, City of Darkness: Unseen, Splendour Falls*, and *Dark Tyrants*. Jackie is the co-creator of the award-winning Mage Tarot. She has written or contributed to Rage across Appalachia, The Hierarchy, Kingdom of Willows, Pardoners Guildbook, Uktena Tribebook, Gurahl, Dreamspeakers, and Shadow Court. Her work has appeared in **Changeling: the Dreaming, Wraith: the Oblivion**, Freak Legions, Sorcerers' Crusade Companion and Libellus Sanguinus: Keepers of the Word.

Jackie also writes for Holistic Design's Fading suns and Last Unicorn Games. Forthcoming works include Rage across the Heavens, Book of Houses II: the Unseelie and the final book of the Transylvania Chronicles. She is one of the crew who produces LARPs at various cons across the southeast. She has been the science fiction and fantasy columnist for *Library Journal* since 1984 and reads an average of 14 sf books a month in galley or uncorrected proof forms. She too games when she can and has been running the "Friday Night Game" for a group of friends for over ten years. Like Nicky, Jackie can be reached at larpform@aol.com.

Together, Nicky and Jackie hope to continue exploring the dreams and nightmares of the World of Darkness, while taking Changeling in a darker, more romantic and sensual direction.

Pour L'Amour et Liberte:™ The Book of Houses 2

A Darkened Sky

With the disappearance of the High King, a chill of Winter spreads across the land - now is the dawn of the Unseelie Court! Once the Courts traded rulership — Seelie ruled the summer months and the Unseelie the winter, but since the Shattering, the Seelie have reigned supreme while the Unseelie patiently waited. With David Ardy gone, Winter has begun to set in and the noble Houses of the Unseelie Court prepare to take their proper places as the rulers of the land of Concordia. All Hail Discordia!

A Darkened Soul

The Book of Houses II offers a look at the three most prominent Houses of the Unseelie Court. Each has its own plans for the coming Winter and each its own means of attaining them. Within you will find the history of the Unseelie Courts, from their ancient betrayals to their modern day treacheries.

- A complete guide to the Unseelie Houses: Ailil, Balor and Leanhaun
- New Merits and Flaws, Treasures and even a new Art
- New insights into the plans of the Unseelie Court and how they plan to deal with the disappearance of the High King.

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