

HERMES' PORTAL



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Issue n° 10

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HERMES' PORTAL

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Who's who

Jérémy Provost

Jérémy is 28, a software developer living in Paris, France. He started roleplaying in 1989 with The Dark Eye, and created a website as soon as he discovered Ars Magica (he doesn't know if he spends more time on the website or playing). He contributed to Ars Mag recently, but needed the help of Michaël de Ver-teuil to translate his awful English here. He usually loses his time on the French RPG site www.sden.org, where he is an active member.

Sean Michael Winslow

A native of the Silicon Valley, Sean now does graduate work at the University of Toronto, where he is taking his degree in Medieval Studies, Book History, and Print Culture. He became interested in Ars Magica in 1997 and has been a playtester for *Land of Fire and Ice* and several as-yet unreleased supplements. While waiting to get his next Ars Magica Troupe together, Sean currently plays in a Classic Traveller campaign, and pretends to work on his Latin.

Publisher's corner

Hermes' Portal has reached issue #10!

I won't say HP is going well; the sales are still low with less than 100 copies sold per issue. But at the same time, more readers are taking out a long-term subscription. I've been thinking about a special issue for long-time subscribers, some kind of special gift. I'll give you more info when this project takes shape.

This issue, following the pattern of previous ones, is offering you food for your saga: ready-to-play plot ideas in Mark Shirley's Three Faerie Herbs, another lost chapter from *The Mysteries* giving a new dimension to the +4 Virtue Sacred Architecture, new points of view on the mechanics of the game.

I hope you will enjoy it, and then I hope you will let other Ars Magica players know about it, bringing new readers to Hermes' Portal. Eric



APPOLONIOS OF JERBITON



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Familiar Business is now available on high quality vellum. You can order it from any Redcap!

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Medea and Talos would have appreciated the help of Mopsos, but the wise Criamon has passed into Final Twilight. Putting their faith in the last pure House, they team up with Caineus of Bjornaer to fight against the rampant evil at work in the Order and the enemies striking at its borders.

But what will happen when they take part in the oldest and best preserved ritual of House Bjornaer, the Gathering of Twelve Years?

What they say

'A marvellous, magical novel, as profound and thought-provoking as it is richly entertaining.'

Harco's Tribune

'Appolonios is a wise and subtle artist. He manages things in Familiar Business with consummate skill that other writers are well advised not to attempt.'

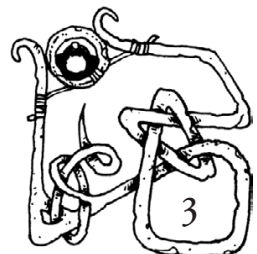
Valnastium Book Review

'A brilliant new vision of a future Order, stark and provocative. A twisting thrill-ride that sweeps across the page with all the force of a monster storm.'

Library Journal of Durenmar

'Very well informed! Discover the Gathering of Twelve Years from within!'

Tharbaud of Bjornaer





Three Faerie Herbs

by Mark Shirley

This article deals with three Herbs of Virtue (see *Hedge Magic*) which are strongly associated with the fae. Note that when I refer to the herb by its common English name (mistletoe, mandrake) I refer to the common herb (ergot does not have a mundane form), whereas the Magical name (Viscum, Mandragora, Ergot) refers solely to the Herb of Virtue. Each herb has a number of powers attested by folklore, story seeds, and major plotlines involving a character, an enchanted item, a type of Hermetic wizard, or a faerie court.

Note that some of the information in this article is derived from a number of *Ars Magica* sources; in particular, all three herbs were mentioned in *Faeries 2nd Edition*, and the basic mandrake virtues can be found there and reprinted in the *Wizard's Grimoire Revised Edition*.



mistletoe (Viscum), a Herb of Virtue

These dark green, glossy plants spring mysteriously from the highest branches of trees, and are thought to have been brought to earth when lightning strikes the tree. Mistletoe can be found on a number of different trees — particularly apple and other fruit trees — but Viscum, Mistletoe of Virtue, is only found in oak trees.

The waxy white berries of Viscum are worth 1 pawn of *Herbam vis* each, and can be plucked without affecting the plant. Cuttings of the Viscum itself are worth 2 pawns of *Intellego vis*. Unless the cutter



has been given permission by the faeries, however, cutting Viscum arouses their anger — the cutting can root itself in the body of anyone who touches the cut end, or any preparation made with the cutting may turn out to be a deadly poison.

There is an elaborate ritual for the taking of mistletoe which is still remembered in a few places. The ritual must be performed at night, when the moon is full. The mistletoe must not touch the earth or any base substance — usually utensils and containers of precious metals are used. If the ritual is correctly performed, the faeries are pacified and the mistletoe becomes Viscum, mistletoe of Virtue. If treated well, the faerie which inhabits the herb may answer questions and give faerie knowledge, but if the Viscum ever touches the earth or any base substance, the faerie disappears and its power is lost. Viscum is well known for its power over bird life.

Mistletoe Faeries

These faeries reside permanently within bushes of Viscum — the plant is their home, and they cannot leave it. They are secretive and loathe to part with their knowledge; however, they are insufferable know-it-alls, and when asked a question cannot help revealing the answer in the unconscious twitching of their branches, which skilled persons can interpret (see main text). They are also very touchy, and must be treated correctly and with reverence, else they will depart their home, leaving mundane mistletoe in their place. To those that can see them (see below), mistletoe faeries appear as small men and women with wizened green skin, leaves instead of hair, and huge glistening eyes with no iris.

Faerie Might: 10

Personality Traits: Touchy +2, Secretive +3, Self-Important +3

Powers:

Lore: Mistletoe faeries have remarkable knowledge about faeries and fae things, especially

matters pertaining to the local area. This knowledge is brought to them by the birds. Assume that they know everything about the faeries within the region, and have a Faerie Lore of 10 regarding faeries outside this limit. They may be unwilling to pass on this knowledge, however. (No Hermetic equivalent)

Insubstantial Form: Mistletoe faeries reside inside Mistletoe of Virtue, and occupy no real space. Those with Second Sight may be able to see their faces within the leaves of a mistletoe bush, or reflected in the berries. (No Hermetic equivalent)

Control Birds: Mistletoe faeries have a long-standing compact with the King of Birds, and his subjects will do anything for the faeries in an effort to repay a boon granted long ago. (ReAn 30)



Frequency: Uncommon

Wild Vis: 10 pawns (whole plant)

Standard Vis: 1 Herbam in each berry, 2 Intellego in a cutting

The Viscum communicates its knowledge to the bearer through subtle movements of the twigs, and reflections in the glossy berries. It requires an Intelligence roll to interpret the Viscum, modified by Faerie Lore or Enigmatic Wisdom. The herb can be treated as potentially knowing everything about faerie matters, but the answers to complex questions are difficult to interpret. As the Viscum is loathe to intrude on the affairs of powerful faeries, the interpretation roll suffers a penalty equal to the Might/5 of the faerie asked about, or the level of the aura, if a faerie place is enquired after. The storyguide may impose other penalties for other situations. The ease factor is 3 for simple questions ("Do goblins favour the courts of Light or Dark?"), 6 for more difficult questions ("what is the name of the Goblin-King who haunts yonder wood?") and 12 for extremely difficult or complex questions ("How do I make myself immune to the powers of the Goblin-King?").

If a branch of mistletoe is hung in an oak tree with the wing of a bird, then all birds of that type in the area will make all haste to the tree containing the Viscum, and remain there until the next sunrise.

Form and Effect bonuses for mistletoe

- +3 Fertility
- +3 Repelling evil
- +1 Promote peace
- +4 Prophecy

Jervais

There's a man who can occasionally be seen at fairs, particularly the spring fairs. It is said that he used to be a soldier, although none would believe it now. He walks with stooped shoulders and halting gait, his arms cradling his grossly swollen belly as if it constantly pains him. People who have met him before avoid him, for he has the unnerving habit of gripping an arm and staring intently into people's faces, his watery grey eyes flickering over their features. No-one knows where he lives, but he is assumed to be indigent as he has been seen at several fairs during the spring and summer.

As he shuffles through the milling crowds in his rags, he mumbles to himself, eyes casting left and right, as if searching for someone. Sometimes he will find them. He'll latch on to somebody, and speak to them in hushed tones, hurried and urgent. Usually, at first, they will try to shake him off, but he must be saying something that interests them, for soon they will be huddled with him, listening intently to his mutterings. They will then part company, and the stranger will leave the fair. The person with whom he has conversed will then generally do something completely out of character. A cautious merchant might take a chance on a risky venture. A peasant might burn his crops and move away, never to be seen

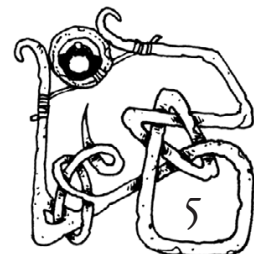
again. A priest might miss Mass for the first time in his career. Every time this happens, it will be for the best — they will undergo a life-changing experience because of their actions, and their lot in life will dramatically improve.

Some are aware of this, and have tried to engage the stranger in conversation. He rebuffs any attempt to speak with him, refusing even to make eye-contact. Once, a lord tried to imprison him so that he would work his magic, threatening him with being burnt for witchcraft. The stranger didn't even acknowledge the lord's existence, but the next day the keep's foundations gave way and the place was razed to the ground. The only structure left unaffected was the donjon, and the prisoner walked free.

Background

Jervais was once the turb captain of a nearby covenant. He accompanied the magi on a vis-collecting expedition, and passed their instructions onto his men — at no point should the mistletoe that they were cutting from the tree be allowed to touch the ground, or its magic will be lost. As a loyal grog, when he saw the tiny sprig about to fall, he dived for it, trying to save it for the magi. He managed to catch it, but the cut end touched his belly — and took root.

The magi tried everything they could to remove it, but it wouldn't budge. They were surprised when it started to grow, sending out shoots until the tiny sprig became a bush. They were delighted when the plant growing out of their captain produced berries. No more would they have to trek into the forest — they had their own vis source here within the covenant. When they tried to pluck one of the waxy berry however, Jervais screamed, and blood poured from the broken end of the branch. With this they decided to hold off their plan to implant some more grogs.





Jervais' behaviour changed. He became more introspective, and the bush growing on his stomach made it difficult for him to fight effectively. He started to have powerful visions — disturbing visions — about horrible things happening to people he didn't know. The morale of the turb took a nose-dive from the obvious suffering and general weirdness that had affected their captain, and they started to question why the magi hadn't done anything about it.

Then, one night, Jervais disappeared. He left in search of the people in his vision, and soon found out that he could ease the hallucinations by finding the people concerned and telling them what he'd seen regarding their lives. He keeps the Viscum hidden under a shapeless robe.

Story seeds

There are any number of possible stories, revolving around what Jervais might tell a character, or resulting from an NPC important to the player characters undergoing a total life change after talking to him.

1. Jervais's prophesies are often cryptic in the extreme. If he tells a character not to talk to the woman wearing men's clothing, that character might be consumed with the desire to know what would happen if they did so — and there is only one way to find out...
2. Someone with Second Sight may work out that Jervais is possessed by a mistletoe faerie — and a particularly powerful one at that. Once the PCs discover this, will they try to help Jervais? Does Jervais want to be helped? And what exactly is the grand plan of the faerie — why is he causing all these people to dramatically change their lives? The storyguide should decide upon what other powers this faerie has in addition to those listed above.

The Mistleteinn

The Mistleteinn is a magical item, which appears to be a twisted shaft of black wood, 3' long. One end has a wickedly barbed point. Close inspection reveals embossed images of leaves and berries all along the shaft. To those in the know, these are mistletoe leaves. The Mistleteinn appears to be proportioned to be used as a short spear, or thrown as a javelin.

History

Norsemen recount the tale of the Goddess Frigga, who, wanting to protect her beloved son Balder from all harm, made every living thing promise not to harm him. The god Loki, despising Balder, tricked Frigga into revealing that she had not asked the mistletoe to swear such an oath because it was too young. Loki picked the mistletoe and enchanted it with his hatred for the sun-god Balder, then slipped it into the quiver of the blind god Hoder. Loki suggested a game of throwing weapons at Balder, who accepted, believing himself to be safe from all harm. When Hoder's turn came about, Balder was killed.

What happened to the mistletoe dart after Balder's death is unknown, but the Mistleteinn has

surfaced now and again in history, always figuring prominently in the slaying of powerful faeries. However, there is a distinct danger in using it due to its purported god-slaying ability. The Mistleteinn does not merely slay the faerie, it wipes out their very existence. This has little effect when the faerie is minor in nature, but when faerie lords reach a certain level of power, they become living embodiments of a particular concept. Obliterating that concept can have profound effects. For example, when Balder was slain, a fearful winter came about that lasted for seven years, during which time the sun wasn't seen in Norse lands, and evil prospered.

Powers

Talisman: If held, the Mistleteinn will add its Form and Effect bonuses to all spellcasting totals as if it were a talisman. This power works even if the magus using it already has a talisman of their own. Form and Effect bonuses are all those belonging to wands and mistletoe (see insert), +10 for killing faeries. These bonuses will stack! (non-Hermetic, rated at 20th level for investigation purposes)

Absorb vis: If left in a magical aura, the Mistleteinn will accumulate a pawn of Vim vis each season for each point of the aura. The weapon has the capacity to absorb 10 pawns of Vim vis. If it is buried with a fresh corpse in an unconsecrated grave, it will absorb 2 pawns of Perdo vis each season, and it has the capacity to absorb 10 pawns of Perdo vis. This vis can only be used to power the Kill Faeries enchantment of the Mistleteinn, but this fact will not be revealed by any level of investigation. (Absorb Vim vis: Non-Hermetic, rated at 30th level for investigation purposes. Absorb Perdo vis: non-Hermetic, rated at 40th level for investigation purposes only)

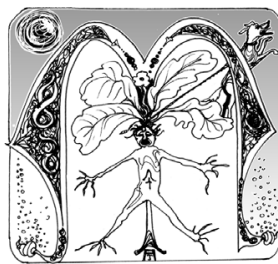
Fae Bane: The Mistleteinn was invented for the sole purpose of killing powerful faeries. When wielded in combat against a faerie (whether as a short spear or a javelin), it gains a bonus to hit equal to one fifth of the faerie's Might. This means that the more powerful faeries are, the easier it is to hit them. When a hit is successful, the wielder must make a penetration roll against the faerie's Magic Resistance, and they may use any or all of the Perdo or Vim vis stored within the weapon. A magus may choose how many pawns of vis to use, a non-magus may use all or none (in which case the penetration total is +0). If the penetration is successful, the weapon deals damage to the faerie equal to its own Permanent Might. A pixie with a Faerie Might of 5 will take +5 damage, a Forest Lord with a Faerie Might of 50 will take +50 damage! If the penetration roll fails, then normal damage is taken by the faerie. (non-Hermetic, rated at 50th level for investigation purposes)



Story seeds

1. When doing some excavation work (perhaps doing repairs at their covenant?), the characters find the Mistleteinn in an unmarked grave. It may have been buried there many years ago, or it might be a recent interment. If the grave happens to be in a magical aura, it is possible that the Mistleteinn is fully topped up with Vim and Perdo vis. What will the characters do it once they discover what it does? If it is a recent burial, whoever buried it there may be a little annoyed that it has been taken.
2. The Mistleteinn could be particularly dangerous if it falls into the hands of a faerie lord who might use it to obliterate his rivals. Trees within woodland where forest faeries used to live will sicken and die, and pools once inhabited by naiads will become dank and stagnant. Vis sources may dry up as a result. Within a short space of time, the only fae left in the area are those who swear loyalty to the owner of the Mistleteinn. Perhaps faerie allies of the covenant are victims of the depredations. Eventually, a faerie of power will be killed, and his passing will be marked by the removal of his correspondences in the mortal realm. The death of the Prince of Wolves would mean the disappearance of all wolves from the area; whereas the loss of a patron of wisdom might result in the failure of all oracles and foresight in the region (apart from those of a divine origin, of course). The storyguide must determine what happens when the particular faeries in his saga get obliterated, but the consequences should be far-reaching. For an added (and perhaps more humorous) twist, the faerie who gets his hands on the Mistleteinn could be the lowliest of brownies or goblins who can make even the mightiest lords tremble in fear.
3. If destroyed (and bear in mind, this artefact was made by a god), the Mistleteinn reverts to its previous form — a herb that was consid-

ered too innocent by Frigga to swear an oath. The spear literally unfurls into the small bush which was compressed by Loki's magic into a spear. Where this bush takes root may be important, for it is likely that this personification of innocence will be of great importance to the player characters. Precisely what it can accomplish is up to the storyguide, but it should be a force for peace and fertility. For a start, its berries might, if planted, give rebirth to the fae that have been slain in the past. Eventually one of those planted seeds will give rise to a powerful faerie — perhaps Balder himself.

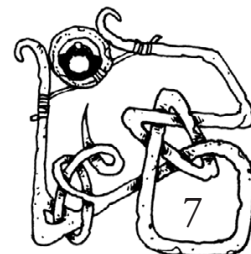


mandrake (Mandragora), a Herb of Virtue

This herb grows besides the gallows-tree or at the crossroads on the graves of witches and suicides. Particularly potent Mandragora grows from the tears of an innocent man who was executed on the gallows. It is a low fleshy herb with scented blossoms and yellow fruit, rarely found anywhere on ground trodden by living feet. It is the root which has the potent virtue; and Mandragora can always be distinguished from common mandrake by the anthropomorphic form of the root — it has a deeply forked form making two 'legs', two side roots forming 'arms', and sometimes another root forming a 'tail'. The 'head' of the Mandragora is a small knot at the base of the leaves and stalks. The male root is white, the female black and more widely forked.

Its virtue is great, but more so is the danger in collecting it. Few sources agree as to how the Mandragora should be harvested. One source says that the plant should be marked by iron as soon as it is seen to prevent the virtuous properties escaping. Some insist it should be harvested in the hour of Mars on the day of Venus. Seeing an eagle while approaching or excavating the Mandragora will signify the death of the hunter within the year. Three circles should be drawn around the plant with an enchanted blade, and prayers should be said to the east. Erotica should be whispered to the plant at all times to distract it, while the earth around it is dug up with an ivory staff and as soon as the limbs are visible, they should be tied up, without actually touching the root. Then a dog should be tied to the plant and caused to run away. The shriek of the plant as it leaves the ground will kill the dog, but the plant will be free from the ground.

Note that only the Mandragora needs to be treated with such care, for only it has the deadly scream. The common mandrake is harmless; however, distinguishing the two is not a simple matter from above ground, and one can never be sure which you have found.





Frequency: Rare

Wild Vis: 4 pawns per shaving / 8 pawns per fragment

Standard Vis: 2 pawns of Corpus vis per shaving / 4 pawns per fragment

The storyguide must determine which of the precautions mentioned above is absolutely necessary; however, the Mandragora will always scream when pulled from the ground, and all who hear the unearthly shriek will die. Traditionally, deaf people and dogs are the ones who pick mandrake. *Parmae Magicae* can also protect — treat the scream as a level 45 *Perdo Corpus* / *Animal* spell. The scream's range is 15 paces in every direction.

There is a chance that the root will break as it is pulled from the ground. This chance may be lessened by the various precautions, or may be down to pure luck. A broken root has 4 pawns of *Corpus vis* or 8 pawns of *wild vis*, depending upon how the collector sees these things.

The reason why so much care is taken to obtain a whole Mandragora root is because of the remarkable



Mandrake Homunculus

Faerie Might: 45 (initially)

Characteristics: Int (either one less than blood donor or +1, whichever is highest), Per (equal to Int), Pre (that of blood donor -4), Com +1, Str -5, Sta -5, Dex +1, Qik +2

Size: -5

Personality Traits: Any 3 chosen by the storyguide. Homunculi usually have extreme personality traits.

Virtues and Flaws: The storyguide should pick up to 15 virtue points of Exceptional Talents or Virtues that grant Magical Powers. Two points may be traded in for two Hermetic Forms, or one Hermetic Technique. Mandragora can have any Exceptional talent in *Ars Magica* 4th Edition, *Wizard's Grimoire* Revised Edition or *Faeries* Revised Edition. They can also know any of the exceptional talents of Cunning Folk, Spirit Masters or Natural Magicians (from *Hedge Magic*).

Soak: -5

Abilities: Assign 20 experience points to Talents and Skills. They cannot learn Hermetic Talents. Assign a further 20 experience points to Knowledges, and there is no restrictions as to which Knowledges they can have (and it is recommended that at least 6 experience points are put into Magic Theory). They also gain a score of 5 in all Exceptional Talents that they possess, a 15 in any Hermetic Art they possess, and both Herbalism and Faerie Sight same scores of 5, and gain the ability to speak the same language as the blood donor at the same level.

Powers:

Poisonous Flesh: if mouthed or licked by a person or animal, the victim must make a *Stm* roll of 12+ or be paralysed. If bitten into, the

penalty for failure is death. If the roll is made, 2 body levels are still lost, and the attacker is crippled with pain.

Wealth of the Greedy Merchant: The homunculus can double the amount of coins that are left in contact with it overnight. Because of its small size, this amounts to no more than 100 coins. Neither the original coins or their duplicates (and they are exact duplicates) may be duplicated again by the homunculus — new coins are needed to repeat the feat. Remember that the silver shilling (or its local equivalent) is by and large an accounting currency — there are very few in circulation.

A finished homunculus resembles the blood donor closely and is the size of the original mandrake root. It can speak, move and do anything else a human being its size could do. The Faerie Might of a newly made homunculus is 45. However, as homunculi get older, they become weaker. Their Permanent Might drops by 1 point every 2 years, and when it reaches zero, they die, becoming just a standard Mandragora root, which may be harvested for vis, as stated above. Their vegetable nature makes them immune to *Mentem* spells, and their Faerie Sight can render them unaffected by deception through *Imaginem* spells.

Homunculi have knowledge of magic, but cannot cast spells or use magical abilities themselves. They will teach magic or give advice; but they are free-willed, and their advice is only as good as they want it to be. All homunculi have individual personalities; they want to be paid for their advice and assistance, and must be treated well. Payment takes the form of information, additional privileges, services in return, or fresh blood.



powers granted to whoever possesses one. All Mandragora can move — they writhe and contort, and can even drag themselves along — at a very slow rate (about one pace an hour). They have at least a rudimentary intelligence, they will attempt to overcome any barrier to wreak horrible vengeance on anyone who has mistreated them (which includes taking excessive quantities of vis from them).

A whole root can be used as a source of Corpus (or wild) vis. Shavings of the root may be taken, each one containing 2 pawns of Corpus vis (or 4 pawns of wild vis). Alternatively, larger fragments may be taken, each one containing 4 pawns of Corpus vis (or 8 pawns of wild vis).

An average sized root has about 10 shavings, or 5 fragments. Those making an Int + Herbalism roll of 12+ will know that the damage caused to a root by taking vis can be healed using Vim vis or the blood of a magically-active creature or person. The damage caused by removing a shaving can be healed with 1 pawn of vis or one pint of blood, but the root must be left for a season before taking another shaving. The damage caused by taking a fragment takes 2 pawns of vis or three pints of blood, and a whole six months. Theoretically, if the root is healed for every shaving or fragment taken, a whole mandrake can supply an infinite amount of vis. If the damage is not healed, the root will die, but still contains the total vis it had in life — 20 pawns of Corpus vis, or 40 pawns of wild vis!

A skilled Herbalist can manufacture a love potion from a root fragment (or two shavings) of the Mandragora. The male root must be used to make a woman fall in love with a man, and vice versa. Such a potion requires a few days of work and an Intelligence + Herbalism (+Folk Magic, if a cunning-man) roll against an Ease Factor of 12. Anyone who drinks the potion will be affected by a powerful, all-consuming lust for the next person of the opposite sex that they see. Note that this infatuation is clearly unnatural and disturbing to all who witness it. A cunning-man can make a charm from the Mandragora that has similar effects using the vis inherent in the root-fragment. It is said that the lust can only be cured by having the other partner consume a similar potion, at which point the effect can be overcome, or converted into genuine mutual attraction. Mandragora fragments can also be used to make Minor potions (Hedge Magic p35) of Dousing or Visions, but the effects last 1 day per pawn of wild vis (i.e. usually 8 days).

Alternatively, a whole root can be made into a homunculus, but only if it has not been used for any other purpose. Once made into a homunculus, it can no longer be harvested for vis.

Form and Effect bonuses for mandrake

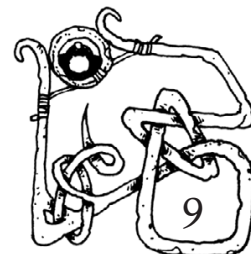
- +3 Inciting lust
- +2 Causing or curing sleeplessness
- +7 Turning men into pigs (this was the herb used by Circe)

Making a homunculus

Making a homunculus requires a person with the Herbalism skill. A pint of blood from the person who will own the homunculus is needed, in addition to 4 pawns of Vim vis (or eight pawns of wild vis). Many other ingredients are also needed, and the process takes 9 months, during which time the Mandragora is sealed into a vessel which must be kept warm for the whole incubation period. It is believed that the Mandragora becomes the home of some spirit which animates it, as opposed to it becoming truly sentient on its own. After all, the homunculus shows true intelligence, not animal cunning. This spirit is closely allied to the Faerie Realm rather than the Magic Realm.

New Virtues and Flaws

Owner of a Mandragora +3: You own a whole Mandragora root, and know how to gather vis from it. You obtained the root through luck, or your own skill. By carefully shaving the mandrake and healing it using the blood of a Gifted person, you can obtain two pawns of Corpus vis per season (or 4 pawns of wild vis). You can also sacrifice the whole root in one go by cutting 20 shavings from it, each worth 2 pawns of standard vis. You have learnt the trick of divination using mandrake root as well: by watching





the writhing of the root after asking it a simple question, you may be able to divine the answer. Make an Int + Faerie Lore roll of at least 9+. The answer takes the form of a single word.

Owner of a Homunculus +4 (magi) / +5 (companions): You are the owner, or perhaps the servant, of a mandrake homunculus. It has all the abilities described above, and is reasonably well-disposed towards you, as long as you treat it well. You can be trained by the homunculus if it has non-Hermetic magics which you already have some skill in, and it can teach you any Knowledges it has (see below for details). If you are a magus, you may still learn any Hermetic Arts from the homunculus (as described below), but cannot learn any of its non-Hermetic Exceptional Talents from it unless you also possess the appropriate Virtue.

Mandrake Magus +1 / -4: You are a gifted individual who was taught magic by a Mandragora homunculus. You are a member of House Ex Miscellanea, and have the Hedge Wizard Flaw. Because the training you received was from an animated plant rather than a magus of the Order, you have the greatly reduced starting template given below, and you may not place any starting experience into Certamen, Hermetic Law, Order of Hermes Lore or Scribe Latin. It is quite possible that there will be some Hermetic Arts that you will have no knowledge of; but you can learn any Exceptional Ability possessed by your homunculus as if you had the appropriate Virtue. You are likely to be afraid of normal Hermetic magi. This virtue is a +1 Virtue if your homunculus is still alive and able to give you advice and training, or a -4 Flaw if the homunculus is dead or permanently missing. Life as a mandrake magus is not easy. See below for details.

The Mandrake Magus

Template for a Mandrake Magus

Starting Abilities: Magic Theory 3, Parma Magica 1, Speak Own Language 4, Herbalism 1

Starting Experience Points: 15 + age

Note that unless a mandrake magus takes the Educated Virtue, he cannot have access to any Academic abilities at character creation, including Speak Latin and Scribe Latin.

Required Virtues and Flaws:

Mandrake Magus +1 / -4: described above

Herbalism +1: all Mandragora homunculi teach how to prepare herbal compounds. The character may only increase Herbalism using his starting experience points, not points gained through magical training described below).

Hedge Wizard -1: other magi distrust the source of your magic, and more importantly, grant you no respect.

Special Rule: As mentioned above, homunculi rarely have purely Hermetic abilities, and they often do not know all the Arts. Therefore, starting mandrake magi may not have access to all of the Hermetic Arts, and may have access to non-Hermetic powers. The storyguide, perhaps with input from the

player, will decide upon the powers of which a homunculus has knowledge, following the guidelines given in the insert. For every Hermetic Art possessed, they have 10 points with which to buy levels. For every Exceptional Ability taught by the homunculus, the character has 6 points with which to buy levels. The character need not buy the virtues that accompany the Exceptional Ability, and cannot put any of his starting experience points into these Exceptional Abilities, as this count as magical training. The character has 10 levels of spells for every Hermetic Art they know. When calculating whether a spell is allowed to a starting magus, a 'missing art' is treated as a zero. However, when a 'missing art' is used in any total during play — a spell-casting total or lab total, for example — the total is halved.

Exempli gratia: A homunculus knows the non-Hermetic abilities of Blessing and Enchanting Music (5 Virtue Points). It also knows the Hermetic Techniques of Creo and Rego (4 Virtue Points) and the Forms of Herbam, Animal, Terram, Auram, Aquam and Vim (6 Virtue Points). The player therefore has 12 experience points to buy levels in the talents of Blessing and Enchanting Music; and 80 experience points to divide between the 8 Arts allowed to him, and 80 levels of spells.

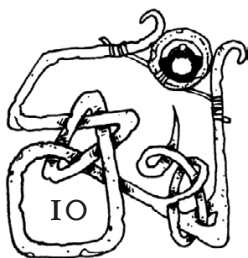
Learning from a homunculus

Assuming that a magus can appease the homunculus, it can learn from it. It can teach any of its Knowledges through Training (*ArM 4th ed*, p187). All magical training takes place through Disputatio (even abilities such as Hex, which strictly speaking are talents). Hermetic Arts not known by the homunculus cannot be taught by it; instead the magus must be opened in that Art by another magus as if they were an apprentice (this takes one season per Art), at which point they may increase it in the normal way. Most mandrake magi cannot face the humiliation of this process, even if they can find a magus willing to teach them. In addition, their homunculus may get jealous.

Life of a Mandrake Magus

Within House Ex Miscellanea there are several lineages of mandrake magi. These were started by a homunculus who escaped from a non-Hermetic wizard who was mistreating it, and met up with a member of House Ex Miscellanea. The homunculus and the magus became friends, and the homunculus taught the magus the secret of making more of his kind. The magus in turn instructed his apprentice, who created the first homunculus with Hermetic powers. Since then, other homunculi have found refuge with the lineage, and their magical powers have diversified.

The current practice in the lineage is for a magus not to take an apprentice until they get quite old, perhaps sixty or so years from apprenticeship. They then instruct the youngster in the basics of their magic, and teach them how to make a homunculus. This brief period of contact — at most three years — is



all the connection that a mandrake magus will have with their human master. The newly-formed homunculus will then take over the training of the apprentice. Following orders from the old master, when the homunculus considers that the apprentice has learnt enough magic, he will be instructed to present himself at a tribunal and declare himself a member of the Order of Hermes. The new magus will know virtually nothing about the Order, but will be able to prove himself worthy to join by knowledge of Magic Theory and the *Parma Magica*, and the fact that his master was a member. It is almost certain that he will be ridiculed and derided, but no-one can deny that he has the right to join the Order of Hermes.

Mandrake magi tend to know the least about Hermetic magic out of all of the Magi Ex Miscellanea. They often have non-Hermetic magical powers, and are usually skilled herbalists. They live on the fringes of society, usually in seclusion from other magi who treat them badly. They have no *parens* who can lend them any political clout, and they find it very hard to be taken seriously by any properly-trained magus. Members of the Order look very dimly on those who take orders from a creature, and they may be permanently excluded from tribunals on the flimsiest of grounds. More than one mandrake magus has been Marched for suspected diabolism — magi can be just as superstitious as the common man. Ruthless magi may take advantage of the fact that they know next-to-nothing of Hermetic Law to screw them over at every opportunity; and, as they rarely have the *Certamen* skill (mainly due to lack of finding anyone who will teach it to them), they have difficulties in defending their rights should they ever find out what they are.

However, mandrake magi will on occasion join a covenant, usually when they have learnt all the magic they can from their homunculus, or wish to learn magic that their homunculus does not know. Most of them will not bother however, as book-learning first requires that they learn to speak and read Latin, and it can be slow-going for the novice. As the homunculus is incapable of learning how to read, and finds it pointless to learn a new language, they actively discourage their magi from taking up such pursuits, becoming easily bored during the long seasons that the magus spends struggling with bookish skills.

The benefits of owning a homunculus are many, not least the training it can provide; but the downsides are manifold. Apart from problems with the Order of Hermes mentioned above, life with a homunculus can be quite demanding.

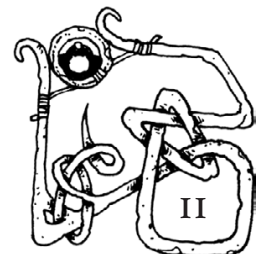
Homunculi require that they are planted into fresh soil every night to recover from the day's exertions, although many have nocturnal habits and need to be in the soil during the day (in which case the magus may benefit from the *Versatile Sleeper* Virtue). When visiting towns, a mandrake magus cannot just carry around a bucket of soil — it needs to be 'living soil', in contact with the earth. Homunculi require feeding regularly. Often a few drops of blood

is enough, but occasionally they will demand more esoteric food, claiming that they will die without it. Examples of such demands might be the tears of a maiden, or the urine of a three-legged horse. Often they are just pushing at the relationship they have with the magus, seeing how far they can go. They tend to have the power in the relationship, however, threatening to withhold advice or training.

Homunculi require regular payment for the seasons they spend teaching, once the apprenticeship period is over (the apprenticeship is payment for their very existence). This payment may take many forms. They most often ask for *vis*, nearly always in liquid form that they can absorb easily. They might also ask for bizarre types of food that require many weeks ("soil from the top of Mount Blanc") or considerable danger ("a gill of viper venom taken from living snakes") to collect. They are usually hungry for knowledge, and might desire the answer to a particularly obscure question. They are totally whimsical when it comes to demanding payment, possibly asking for an impossible task on one occasion, and a single pawn of *vis* the next. They will usually accept *vis* as a default, however. The frequency of these demands also varies. They certainly won't demand payment for every season — this would be too crippling to the magus — but will see what they can get away with. A particularly firm and strong-willed magus who is prepared to call the bluff of the homunculus might get away with having to make a major payment once in three years (with minor payments in between), but a less self-confident magus might lose a season for every three spent learning from the little tyrant.

A bored or jealous homunculus is a dangerous thing. If a magus spends too much time doing things that it cannot take part in (for example, learning from tomes, creating spells or magical items in the laboratory, etc.) it will become peevish at best, mischievous at worst. A peevish homunculus might refuse to teach a magus further, requiring him to spend a season with it for every season that he ignored it. During these seasons the homunculus might make outrageous demands, seeing how far he can push his magus into appeasing it. This can be a very humiliating experience. A mischievous homunculus can be even worse. Although they only have minor magical abilities of their own, their small size will allow them to get into all sorts of places, and steal all sorts of objects. They can frighten mundanes with their appearance, or make pacts with local faeries. The possibilities are endless.

This might all seem as if it is not worth having a homunculus. However, if they are treated well, they can be a great asset. Many mandrake magi, once the apprenticeship period is over, have trouble adjusting to the new arrangement for a few years, but soon settle down into a friendly arrangement that can last many decades.





Homunculi can often outlive their magi. In this case they might seek out a new apprentice and start again, or enter a relationship with a mundane.



ergot (Jack-in-the-rye), Herb of Virtue

Also known as jack-in-the-rye, ergot is both a faerie and a faerie plant. There is no non-virtuous version of this herb, all ergot is equally powerful and equally dangerous. Few people have ever seen its faerie shape, a tiny man with grass flowers for hair who hides in the heads of growing grain. Not many have seen its other form, strange purple seeds in the place of kernels in the ripe grain head, but many have felt its effects. Those who eat the faerie flesh in flour, bread or porridge are seized with faerie madness — visions, sudden paralysis, terror and / or death. Millers careless enough to allow ergot into their flour have been put to death and farmers whose blighted crops show his touch have been banished from their villages. Those few who survive the taste of this bread are usually marked with the faerie touch — a dead and useless limb, madness, nightmares or occasionally Faerie Sight.

A good herbalist or alchemist can distil ergot. The ergot must come straight from the grain head,

not from flour or cooked food. One ounce of ergot seed, distilled (make an Int + Alchemy or Herbalism roll of 14+), yields a clear liquid containing 3 pawns of Imaginem vis and a black powder containing 3 pawns of Perdo vis. This distillation process takes a few weeks, and is very dangerous — a failed roll can release a cloud of poisonous smoke; a botched roll provides enough of this smoke to cover a village.

Frequency: Common

Wild Vis: 12 pawns per ounce, when distilled

Standard Vis: 3 pawns of Imaginem and 3 pawns of Perdo per ounce, when distilled

Half an acre of infected grain will yield an ounce of ergotized seed, but cultivation of or traffic in ergot in any grain-growing area is a serious crime. Cunning-folk can brew a minor potion of Visions of unusual strength with a half-ounce of distilled ergot. Anyone drinking this potion gains the Cunning-folk's full Herbalism total +3 to their Visions score, if any. The visions will last a whole day, and severely impair the abilities of the drinker while they persist — they will need help even to walk. However, the visions are unusually clear; and to those whose Visions Talent is temporarily raised above 10, they grant true prophetic power.

Anyone eating ergotized food suffer the effects of being elf-shot by a jack-in-the-rye (see insert), but any pain or visions that result last for as long as it takes to purge the food from the body — usually a

Jack-in-the-rye

Faerie Might: 5

Characteristics: Int 0, Per 0, Pre -2 (unearthly), Com -4 (tiny voice), Str -5 (minute), Sta 0, Dex +3 (acrobatic), Qik +5 (swift)

Size: -5

Personality Traits: Capricious +3, Mischievous +3

Virtues and Flaws: Carefree +1, Short Attention Span -1

Description: A tiny, tiny man with purple grass flowers for hair and greenish skin, who can sometimes be seen leaping from stalk to stalk in a cornfield. They are about the size of a harvest mouse, have huge eyes, mindless grins and a very fickle temperament. As they caress the heads of grain-stalks with their very long fingers, the seeds turn purple-black. When using this ability on humans, their touch can cause madness, paralysis or worse.

Abilities: Athletics (jumping) 8, Brawl (dodging) 5

Attack	Init	Atk	Dfn	Dam
Touch	+10	+8	+15	none

Soak: -5

Body Levels: 0, Inc.

Vis: 1 pawn of either Imaginem or Perdo, in body.

Powers:

Control Fertility: The jack-in-the-rye can limit or enhance the fertility of 3 acres of land. This includes plants, animals, humans, and encom-

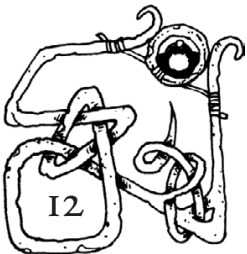
passes the faerie's ability to ergotize grain (CrHe 30 or PeHe 30)

Travel: The jack-in-the-rye can appear instantly anywhere they have been before

Vulnerability to Iron: cold iron will instantly kill a jack-in-the-rye. They are understandably hostile to those who carry it.

Elfshot: When the faerie manages to touch someone, roll a stress die and subtract the victim's Stamina. Consult the table below:

Roll	Effect
Botch	No effect to the victim, and the jack-in-the-rye is destroyed.
0	No effect to the victim
1-3	Causes excruciating pain for one round, and must make a Stamina roll of 12+ to act in subsequent rounds. Once the Stamina roll succeeds, the pain ebbs away
4-7	Causes intense, frightening visions, and the subject can perform no actions until they end. Roll a simple die every round; on a 8+, the visions cease. While affected, the victim can see faerie things as easily as normal things, but cannot distinguish the two.
8-10	Causes permanent paralysis in affected part of the body
11-15	Causes permanent madness — a raving lunatic at first, which later becomes a major Flaw such as Terrors
16+	Causes instant death (PeCo or PeMe 30)



couple of days. Anyone with even the merest hint of faerie blood — assuming that they survive exposure to the ergot — may gain the Faerie Sight virtue.

Ergot has no Form and Effect bonuses — its innate powers are too strong to be used in Hermetic magic except when distilled as vis.

Rye Bread

The story begins with a strange event at the covenant, some time in the late summer. Unless explicitly stated beforehand, it is assumed that the magi are fed better than the common covenfolk. If this is not the case, the PCs could be in trouble, for the porridge made for the covenfolk has been made with a batch of ergot-infected rye. Anyone that so much as tastes the gruel must roll a stress die and compare it to the Elfshot power of the jack-in-the-rye. It is probably best that the storyguide assumes that this gruel is served only to non-player covenfolk and grogs.

The characters are likely to first become involved when they notice that some of the serving folk of the covenant are affected by ergotism. A serving girl may collapse right in front of a PC, suddenly unable to use her legs. Nearby they may hear a howl of terror from the stablehand, finishing with a mad throaty chuckle. Some of the grogs who were on an early shift might start fighting invisible opponents, while the blacksmith knocks himself cold when he collapses in pain onto his anvil. Everyone will be infected differently. When the PCs take control, they may be perplexed at the pattern of those affected. They might look around for invisible foes such as the fae, as the symptoms are almost identical to those attacked with Elfshot (Int+Faerie Lore, 8+). However, by examining who has been infected, it will become clear that only the serving folk are suffering, plus the grogs who were on guard during the night. Poisoning might be diagnosed by a surgeon or physician, which will then lead back to the porridge. Careful inspection of the corn it was made from will reveal the root of the problem. A few grains in the sack are swollen, with a purple bloom to them. This amounts to only a dozen or so grains in the whole sack — this is very potent poison.

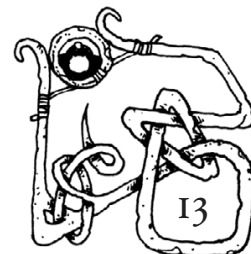
Anyone from a farming background will know of ergot, as may those with a good Herbam score, Herbalism or Faerie Lore (Intelligence roll, modified by Herbam/5, Herbalism or Faerie Lore, 10+ needed). The seeds have a residual magical scent, but there is less than a pawn of vis here. Those that detect this may be interested in investigating the source of the corn; and there is also the issue of the danger of a farmer selling ergotized rye.

The autocrat will tell them that all their corn is bought from a grain merchant in a nearby village. This merchant will be curious as to why the PCs want to know which farmer sold him the grain — if they decide to buy direct from the farmer, he loses his profit. If they mention ergot, he will go pale — selling ergotized corn carries the death penalty, as does growing it. He will try and make a run for it, thinking

that the PCs are agents of the local lord. Chasing him down the streets could cause added complications, but there is no other way to find out where the rye came from — the merchant doesn't keep written records. Given the right coercion or assurances, however, he may reveal that it was a farmer by the name of Tomas who holds a farm a few miles up the valley.

The farm consists of a few acres of land with a few small buildings at the end of a rough track. Half of the corn has been harvested, but the stubble not burnt, and it can be seen that volunteer weeds are starting to grow through. The farm buildings seem quiet. The farmhouse kitchen is a scene of tragedy — the farmer, his wife and three children lie dead near the table. One of the children has no visible signs of death, the others have all been stabbed. Food lies on the table, now covered with green mould, and tiny toadstools grow from the bread. There is one living habitant of the farm — the farmer's eldest son, Peter. He hides in the loft, tormented by the visions he saw when he partook in the poisoned meal. He grips a baling knife tightly, and will probably try to attack anyone who approaches, probably with the element of surprise. However, his left leg is completely paralysed due to ergot poisoning, which inhibits his fighting somewhat. The ergot also caused him to acquire the Virtue of Visions — it was vivid hallucinations caused by his emerging talent that led to him attack his own family. Now he is overcome with remorse, and throws himself at any warriors in the hope that they will kill him. Peter might make a good grog or companion, if he can get over his suicidal tendencies.

Of the corn that has been harvested, there is about 2 oz of ergotized rye, which, if distilled correctly, becomes 6 pawns of Perdo and 6 pawns of Imaginem vis. If the PCs go into the unharvested rye, the more perceptive (Per+Awareness, 7+) may notice a jack-in-the-rye leaping between the heads of rye, occasionally pausing to caress a head with its long fingers, causing them to turn purplish black. If spotted by the PCs it will turn to grin at them, then





disappear off into the corn. If pursued, it is difficult to catch, but this may be possible with magic. Alternatively it might be followed — in this case, the PCs might follow it into a copse in the middle of the field and find themselves in the court of a powerful faerie called Robigus (see below). If it is killed, Robigus will show up to see who has killed one of his favoured servants. This would be a Bad Thing™ for the PCs involved.

The Court of Mushrooms

Robigus's court is, naturally enough, located within a ring of mushrooms. Within the ring is a small hillock, upon which sits the throne of Robigus, constructed of many types of living fungus. Here the king is most often to be found, brooding, while around him sit (or grow) his subjects, the faeries of mushrooms.

Corn dollies are scattered around the court — the remnants of past sacrifices to him. Robigus would be favourably inclined to any who brought him such a gift, and indebted to those that restarted the tradition of offering them to him. However, after a while, he would remember that once he was offered more than just dolls of woven straw, and will start to resent the meagreness of the gifts.

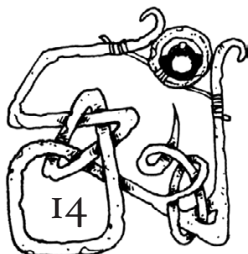
The inhabitants of the Court of Mushrooms represent the many types of fungi that are to be found. They fall into two categories — those that are beneficial to man and those that are poisonous. The poisonous mushrooms are represented by malicious, man-hating fae, whereas the edible mushrooms are more kindly inclined. Several of these mushrooms have been described in the *Faeries* supplements for *Ars Magica*, however, the sections below concentrate on the faeries that represent the different faerie plants.

Edible Servitors

Stinkhorns (*Faeries II*, p 124) Ugly but benevolent faeries, appearing as small gnarled men covered with warts. They smell truly foul, just like their mushrooms, and have enormous phalluses and an appetite to match.

Truffles (*Faeries II*, p 125) Truffle-gnomes look like truffles — strong, squat and black, with incredibly wrinkled horny skin. They are roughly human in shape, though not always quite symmetrical. Their eyes are tiny and deep set, and their sense of smell is uncannily accurate. They live under oak trees, blessing them with truffles beneath their roots. Tiny truffles mean a gnome no more than a couple of feet tall, but they can grow to taller than a human. They keep diminutive black swine which they are inordinately fond of; however, they are afraid of dogs.

Earthstars (*Faeries II*, p 86) These faeries appear as short women dressed in brown. These women are always podgy and plump, and perpetually pregnant — they never seem to give birth. They bear their children by



transforming themselves into earthstar fungi. This metamorphosis is irreversible, and the fungi are often eaten by a human woman who then gives birth to a fey child. Alternatively, the earthstar may ripen and open to reveal a faerie child, who usually grows up to be an earthstar.

Puffballs: Rotund (almost spherical) faeries that often appear as animal-human hybrids, particularly favouring the shapes of dormice, voles, hares and pigs. They are always a creamy-white in colour; and most grow no bigger than a 3-4", but they can reach more than a foot tall / across. These comical creatures are very kindly, but can be very annoying, as they seem to have a compulsive habit of meddling in the lives of others. What's more, their feelings are very easily hurt — one cross word to them will result in them bursting into tears, closely followed by them exploding into a shower of spores. Each spore can potentially form another puffball — let this be a warning to those who take malicious delight in making puffball faeries explode...

Poisonous Servitors

Jack-in-the-rye: While being the least of Robigus's servitors, these diminutive fae are his favourites. See insert for details.

Destroying Angel (*Faeries II*, p 122) Sexless naked beings, about 1' tall, a chalk white in colour. They have red hair, and often wear red hats. They have a pair of gossamer wings which fold up under their arms. Their touch is death, some can kill with a mere look.

Robigus, the Rye King

Robigus is a very old fae lord. He was worshipped by the first inhabitants of the land as a fertility god, and the ancients offered their Mound God human sacrifice to ensure the fertility of their fields. The Romans gave him his first name — Robigus, who was an aspect of their corn-god Mars, and he guarded the grain against rust in return for their worship.

With the coming of the Christian God, his faith was put aside. He no longer received their worship, so he no longer protected their crops. As his power declined, he became embittered with the fickle humans. Since the Christianisation of the region, he has spread his three weapons of rust, dodder and ergot through the crops of mankind. He rules over a Court of Mushrooms, some horribly malignant, some beneficial to man. Robigus, as mad as the ergot he spreads, vacillates between these two sides; sometimes (most often in the spring and autumn) he is the gentle god of fertility, sometimes (usually in summer and winter) he is the man-hating sudden destroyer. He is teetering on the brink of becoming the Lord of Rot and Mould, a thoroughly unseelie fae. In days of yore, Robigus received propitiation through human sacrifice. Later on, he was happy with the last harvested sheaf of corn being left for him. Corn dollies were made in his honour, and these pleased him greatly — the artifice of human hands is prized by the fae. Now the Church has forbidden even that practise in many areas, and the Rye King thus receives no homage from those that harvest his bounty. Rust, dodder and particularly ergot have become more and more prevalent since then...

Robigus appears as a healthy man, broad of shoulder and tall of build. He has pale skin, though, and dark hair. He usually dresses in rust coloured clothing in the style of ancient Rome. He is accompanied by a woodpecker and often by a white horse. His clothes are often decorated with ears of corn.

Inky Caps (*Faeries II*, p 87). These faeries are kin to stinkhorns, but are wholly malign. They are straighter and less ugly (though still quite unpleasant to the eye) than their benevolent cousins, but have faces that are screwed up with malice.

Dodder (*Faeries*, p 87). The faerie of dodder appears as a being taller than the average human, but hideously thin. It is sexless, and has skin as translucent as damp parchment. Their hair consists of many fine tendrils that coil and writhe of their own accord; these, when plucked, form the deadly strangling dodder threads. Dodder fae are physically very strong despite their emaciated physique, and have long fingers, which they wrap around the necks of their victims. The touch of these hands draws the breath out of animals and the life out of plants.

Robigus is dangerously mad, and his Personality Traits vary with the season:

Spring Playful +3, Energetic +2, Competitive +1
Summer Vengeful +3, Angry +2, Murderous +1
Autumn Generous +3, Calm +2, Slothful +1
Winter Brooding +3, Apathetic +2, Malicious +1

Despite these general personality traits, he switches Personality Traits frequently — these are just the general trends for each season.

Faerie Might: 45

Size: 0

Personality Traits: See above

Powers:

Control Fertility: Robigus can limit or enhance the fertility of up to 20 acres of agricultural land at a time. This power affects all reproduction in the area: plant, animal and human alike (CrCo, CrAn, CrHe 45)

Control Plants: Robigus can duplicate the effects of any Rego Herbam spell of up to 45th level, at a cost of 1 Might per magnitude of the spell (ReHe varies)

Elfshot: Like the power of the Jack-in-the-rye, but Robigus can afflict people at a distance up to Near range. If he is able to touch someone, he gains a +9 to the stress die (PeCo 45).

Travel: Robigus can appear in any field containing a cereal crop, even if the crop has been harvested (but not if the stubble has been cleared through ploughing or burning). This costs him 4 Might points per journey, and he can take up to seven people with him (ReCo 45)

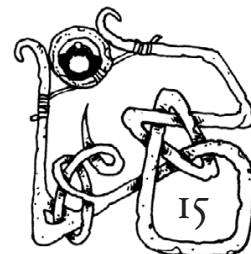
Vulnerability to Iron: Robigus does not share a faerie's usual vulnerability to iron, unless the weapon used against him has been forged from an iron ploughshare, or is an implement of harvesting such as a scythe or sickle. Such weapons strip him of 5 Might points per blow.

Robigus should be given other powers as the storyguide sees fit.

Rust is a pernicious faerie, much hated by farmers because of its ability to infect any living plant with a rust-coloured mould. This mould causes the plants to die, and imparts a foul flavour to any stored food. The rust faerie is very hard to see — if you know where one is, and you are looking directly at it, it cannot escape from your sight, but as soon as no-one is watching, it can become invisible. They appear to be naked men or women with rust-coloured hair and skin, but with empty black pits where their eyes should be. They can destroy anything made of plant material, such as linen clothes, the wooden hafts of weapons, ropes, laces and food.

Story seeds

1. Characters may decide to grow their own corn and purposely infect it with ergot to gain the vis. This would be a profitable exercise — half





an acre would give an ounce of ergotized seed, assuming that Robigus sends a jack-in-the-rye, however, there are more complications here. Firstly, land cannot be bought, only leased, with the rent being usually paid in grain. The risk of giving a lord potentially ergotized corn is great — the offence is punishable by death, and a covenant purposely growing infected grain would be all put to the death. Plus, Robigus is needed to ergotize the grain — it won't just happen naturally — and so his goodwill must be sought. Dealing with this mad fae lord is dangerous indeed...

2. An occasional visitor to Robigus's court is a demon, who has made it his pet project to corrupt the mad Rye King. He is already danger-

ously insane, but the efforts of the demon have been pushing him closer and closer to the edge in recent years. Should the demon's plans go unchecked, Robigus will undergo a complete transformation into the King of Rot and Mould. The beneficial faeries will abandon his court and it will become a place inimical to man. This Robigus would have much darker powers, and instead of idly sitting by and watching his domain crumble, he will go out into the countryside and spread blight and rot wherever he can. If the characters have an ongoing relationship with Robigus, they may only discover this change when it is already too late.

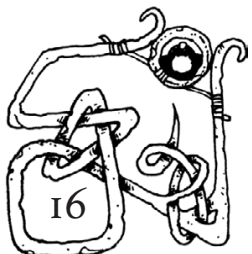
Soulflower

Divine breath, an epiphany
As words flow and worlds grow
I'm peering into infinity,
Formless in the void,
Spewing forth creation
From deep within;
A higher self of the self.
A melody wells from the birth of emotion,
From the seat of the soul,
Inspiring wonder in the beholding of beauty,
Awakening the spirit of an unfolding destiny.
Now I'm set to go on the wyld,
Perched on the edge of the cliffs of forever
With poetry as my might.
I head off into twilight
Rebirth in bliss,
My eyes reflecting
The eternal golden dawn
Cauldron of Poesy
Honey tongued lips
Cause to spring forth
Images torn from fantasy:

Sweet caresses,
Skalding burns,

Illumination,
Manipulation,

Conduit to the truth,
Catalyst of reality,
Symbols poured pure.



The Temptation

The pure, singing, girl without care,
Gradually, casually, completely unaware,
Slipped ever deeper into the regio.
Piercing the barriers,
Passing through the twisted mirror,
Entering into my realm.

Oh, fair maiden step not any further,
For the heart of my realm
Awaits in the inner ring
Of stones and mushrooms,
Past this grove of ash and rowan.

Beware! for the saytyr's lust roams.
Fear also, the blood craving kia sidhe,
And most of all, awake not the forest lords,
Slumbering in their ancient trees.

Many are the dangers in my woods;
Soon beautiful lady, night will arrive
Within the grand dreaming,
Influencing my nature, childe,
Shifting light into shadow,
Filling me with a growing need.

As the gloaming deepens,
With a titanic effort,
My human half screams,
Leave now! or forever stay,
For my nature can be held
Long enough for you to go
And pass beyond my golden bough.

Tyler Larson

Towards a New Learning Model

by Sean Michael Winslow

When Virtues became learnable with the publishing of *The Mysteries*, the learning model improved somewhat, but it is still notable that *Ars Magica*, a game about magical scholars, does not do a very good job of modeling what scholars would presumably be most interested in: learning. In fourth edition *Ars Magica*, there is no way of modeling learning outside the categories of Skills, Arts, and Virtues. This raises a series of interesting problems for both player and storyguide as to exactly where certain classes of learning and information belong—there is no real distinction between a trick and an xp source, or a powerful breakthrough and a Virtue. The basic system is inherently conservative in its model, which is to say that knowledge may only be learned if someone else knows it and can teach it. While appropriate to the mediaeval paradigm of the game, this process is complicated by the addition of the optional rules for breakthroughs in *The Wizard's Grimoire, Revised Edition*, which introduce ways to generate original knowledge and techniques. The *WGRE* also allows for another type of learning: a breakthrough effect may be learned by reading a report written by its originator. This introduces further complexity to the system, and it is the intent of this article to take a look at where the system fails and address those issues with a new way to model certain classes of learning that will add 'granularity' to the ArM4 learning model.

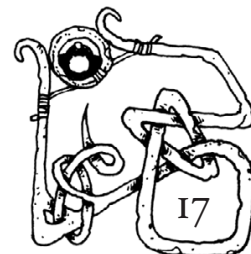
Currently, there is no level of learning between reading the report of a breakthrough and a full-blown +1 Virtue initiated through a Mystery group. This is inherently problematic given the potential overlap between the two systems: it is perfectly reasonable for a player, reading through the Breakthrough rules in the *WGRE*, to decide, based upon those rules, to research a new methodology which involves giving astrologically-aspected bonuses to Hermetic magic. However, if the storyguide of said player were to introduce *The Mysteries* into his campaign, then there is a problem, as the new breakthrough may well end up duplicating the effects of Hermetic Astrology, as outlined in that book. If the player has their character research the new ability, there is little game-balance concern for the player, as they will have spent perhaps decades for the benefit of a +1 Virtue. The problem is introduced later: in this scenario, there are two different ways to get this same Virtue, one of which requires mystae initiation, the other of which requires three seasons and no total, service, or ceremony. In fact, any mage who knows the non-mystae version of Hermetic Astrology bestows it upon their apprentice for free, totally circumventing the mystae mechanic. The simple

solution is to prohibit effects that duplicate Virtues, but this is undesirable, as Virtues come and go with each new book published, and this would create not only a storyguiding headache, but a diminishing supply of fields that can benefit from original research. Though this may not be a huge issue in a majority of sagas, it does highlight a fundamental issue in 4th Edition *Ars*: a proliferation of incompatible learning systems. A quick scan brings me to more than a dozen discrete types of modeling things that a character 'knows how to do.'

While it is outside the scope of this article to clean up the whole of the *Ars Magica*, 4th Edition canon as regards learning models, I do intend to introduce what I hope might be a more organic system for modeling things that are currently not covered as well as they might be under the present rules set. Specifically, learning things that fall short of a full Virtue in value, but are nevertheless valuable enough that a storyguide doesn't wish characters to simply acquire them for free. In the course, this article will also tackle:

- Exceptional Abilities & Otherwise Limited Abilities
 - Enigmatic Wisdom, Herbalism, Alchemy, Astrology, etc (Parma would also fit)
- 'Toggles' that change one learned Ability to another ('upgrades')
 - Greater Herbalism, Hermetic Alchemy, Hermetic Astrology
- Abilities intended to be initiated as part of Mystery groups
 - Hermetic Alchemy, Hermetic Astrology, etc.
- The results of research, as outlined in *WGRE*
 - Parma (a Breakthrough discovery)
- Bonuses/methods that have no inherent downside
 - Verditius Runes, Certamen Maneuvers
- Different/Special methods of study
 - A method for studying Vim from auras, for example
- Non-hermetic methods that might be learned by Hermetics
 - Vitkir Rumes [Will be discussed in a future segment.]

Due to 'real-world' considerations, the system here has not been extensively playtested. Rather, it is presented in order to provoke discussion about learning models, and how the game might better address learning in the future. As such, the system here includes examples, but I have not aggressively converted current abilities, as such would take more pages of text than are available here. I suggest that storyguides work this out on a case-by-case basis. Also, the system as written explicitly does not model learning before character generation, but is intended to serve to model learning after character generation. Learning during character generation is currently modeled by the system of Virtues and Flaws. Though this system could ultimately be adapted to





completely replace Virtues and Flaws, such work is not part of this introductory article.

The System

The core of the new system is simple, and based upon a unit unimaginatively called the 'Meta-ability'. Meta-abilities are presented in the following format:

[Name]
[Flavour Text]
Prerequisites:
Time: [x]/[x] seasons
Ability:
Effect:
Special Notes:
Source:

Name and Flavour Text are self-explanatory.

Prerequisites are just that, and are covered below, in their own section.

Time: the time to learn meta-abilities is seasonally-based, in order to keep with *Ars Magica* tradition. Where two numbers are indicated, the first is time to learn from a master, the second from a book or other source. This is intended to represent a world-view where transmission from a master is the standard of measuring authenticity of knowledge, as well as to make learning from a group known for that ability more cost-effective than simply reading about it in a book. It takes twice as long to learn a meta-ability from a book or other source as from a master; certain more complex abilities will require extra time without the benefit of a master — this will be represented by the number after the slash (the first number representing base time with a master).

Ability: If there is an ability attached to the meta-ability, or if it somehow modifies an ability, it will be noted here.

Effect: What the meta-ability or ability does.

Special Notes: anything not covered above, this includes requirements for initiation (for certain Mystae Virtues) and whether it is requisite for a further ability.

Source: Is this a mystae Virtue jealously guarded by a Mystery group? Is there a book that teaches the proper use of Verditius Runes? Is the secret of Chaos Magic taught to anyone who can answer the 527 lesser riddles of Criamon? (Enigmatic Wisdom > 7) This doesn't preclude it being found elsewhere, but this is the proper place to find it. Such groups might take extreme exception to there being another way to acquire their secret, or they may lay gessae down on all who learn it. Or, it may just be lost.

N.B. Availability and whether or not it is a guarded secret are the two most important balancing factors with such abilities, just as is true of mystae and of research discoveries.

Examples of possible pre-requisite trees

Herbalism	⇒	> 3	⇒	Greater Herbalism
Certamen	⇒	> 3	⇒	Telerion's Gambit [maneuver]
MT > 5	⇒	First Secret of Pendule	⇒	Second Secret of Pendule

Example: Enigmatic Wisdom

As described in *Ars Magica*, 4th Edition, and *Houses of Hermes*.

Time: 2/4 seasons

Ability: Grants the Ability Enigmatic Wisdom at Level 1

Prerequisites: none

Effect: as per ArM4

Special Notes: all members of House Criamon receive this for free at character creation, as part of their instruction.

Source: The characteristic Ability of House Criamon, they are willing to teach it to members of other Houses. The others just so rarely ask...

Prerequisites

Meta-abilities may require prerequisites in order to model sequential learning. Once all prerequisites are met, the character may learn the meta-ability normally. Prerequisites allow storyguides to control the progress of learning advanced abilities, and replace increased Virtue costs as the balancing mechanism for learning more advanced abilities, and are thus integral to the system as presented here.

The intent of the prerequisites is to model a more gradual process of learning an advanced ability (see the examples of pre-requisite trees, below).

Example: The Secrets of Pendule

The model here only replaces the Virtues for mystae; it does not replace the initiation-point mechanic or the need to attain a certain status in the mystae group before a new meta-ability will be taught. In converting to this system, the storyguide will need to make decisions relating to how the Virtues break down into the new system. The first two secrets of a new mystery are presented here as an example of prerequisites and to show how the mechanic may subsume the current mystae mechanic.

First Secret of Pendule

Pendule was a wizard whose magic involved esoteric concepts of colour. Though he refused to join the order, he kept contacts with a few Hermetic Magi and taught them something of his magics. (Pendule is mentioned in *Order of Hermes*, p. 34)

Prerequisites: Philosophiae > 2, Magic Theory > 3

Time: 2/4 seasons

Ability: Grants the Exceptional Arcane Knowledge Pendulian Magic (First Secret: Colour) at level 1

Effect: Allows the caster to add his Pendulian Magic Score to all Casting totals involving a certain colour. That is to say, if the caster chooses purple [Pendulian Magic (First Secret: Purple)], they gain a bonus to making a purple phantasm, to creating purple flowers, or changing the colour of a person's skin to purple.

They also get this bonus when affecting an all-purple item.

Special Notes: Requisite for the further secrets of Pendule

Source: Followers of Pendule are very rare, and this secret is hard to learn. There are rumours of lost books containing Pendule's secrets, but these have most likely been hidden by his followers.

Second Secret of Pendule

Having mastered application of magics based upon physical colour correspondences, the initiate into the second Secret of Pendule extends their mastery of their chosen colour by use of allegory into the realm of affecting abstract ideas.

Prerequisites: Pendulian Magic > 2

Time: 2/4 seasons

Ability: Changes Pendulian Magic (First Secret: Colour) to Pendulian Magic (Second Secret: Colour)

Effect: Caster may now add his Pendulian Magic score to all rolls involving a specific set of concepts that are embodied by his colour (storyguide's decision). In the above example of purple, this means that, in addition to the uses above, the caster gets a bonus to all rolls involving rulership (Crown of Rightful Authority) or affecting rulers and aristocrats (note that, while this is powerful, kings and the like have Divine Might that resist magic).

Special Notes: Almost certainly requisite for future Secrets of Pendule, should they exist...

Source: as above

Exceptional Abilities

The current system for Exceptional Abilities denies characters the chance to take up such knowledge later in life. The core of this proposed system, however, is to open the category of learnable abilities, and so, the system incorporates them into the same basic format. This makes sense on a rational level, as the ability to differentiate herbs and list their potential uses, for example, is eminently learnable. Thus, Herbalism may now be acquired (though with some difficulty) during play.

Herbalism

As per ArM4.

Prerequisites: none

Time: 1/4 seasons

Ability: Grants the Exceptional Knowledge 'Herbalism' at level 1

Effect: As per ArM4

Special Notes: This ability requires extra time due to the difficulty and error factor of learning the differences between herbs without a proper teacher. It is prerequisite for Greater Herbalism.

Source: Traditionally taught by Cunning-women and some nature-based traditions of House Ex Miscellanea

'Toggles' or 'Upgrades'

Certain abilities are very closely related, one being a more powerful, useful, or expansive version of the other. The meta-ability model both allows and encourages characters to eventually advance to the next level of ability in their chosen field of study. As such, certain meta-abilities serve as 'toggles' to upgrade an ability to a greater ability. The ability in question remains at the same level, but changes name to represent the added utility.

Greater Herbalism

As per WGRE p65 and *Hedge Magic*, pp. 34-36

Prerequisites: Herbalism > 3

Time: 2/4 seasons

Ability: Upgrades 'Herbalism' to the Exceptional Knowledge 'Greater Herbalism'

Effect: As per *Hedge Magic*, pp. 34-36

Special Notes:

Source: Traditionally taught by Cunning-women and some nature-based traditions of House Ex Miscellanea, it is unlikely that any texts provide instruction in this largely apprenticeship-based ability.

Non-ability Meta-abilities

The purpose of meta-abilities is to create one learning model that is more inclusive than other, previous, *Ars Magica* models. As such, meta-abilities encompass non-ability forms of learning as well. There is no fundamental difference between such forms of learning and ability-based forms of learning, and they are modeled and presented the same way.

Verditius Runes

As per *HoH*, pp. 123-125

Time: 2 runes per season (1 from a book)

Ability: n/a

Prerequisites: Magic Theory > 3

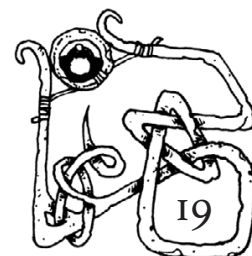
Effect: Scribing the runes corresponding to the Form/Techniques used in an enchantment will grant a +1 Virtue for one rune, +3 for all associated Forms and Techniques (as per *HoH*, p. 123)

Special Notes: All members of House Verditius can choose to know a number of runes equal to their Int + MT + Verditius Magic at Character Creation.

Source: Once jealously guarded by House Verditius, the secrets of these runes has long-since passed into more general circulation, and several of the more valuable books on Magic Theory or magic item creation include a section on their use. Also, books on a certain Form sometimes include the secret of that Form's rune, if the author was a master of the rune, and saw fit to include it.

The Lore of Verdi

This is one of the less well-kept secrets of the Verdi covenant, and has leaked out through instructional





books to Verditi that have since been copied and distributed.

Time: 1 season on Verdi, 2 not on Verdi (from a book)

Ability: n/a

Prerequisites: none

Effect: allows the use of all of the Form and Effect bonuses from Verdi, p 88 of *ToH: Rome*

Special Notes: The one season on Verdi is traditionally spent meditating on the natural bounties of the island, and becoming familiar with the properties of its resources.

Source: Time on Verdi or several books on the art of enchantment.

Aura Study

Laurentius of Bonisagus was a noted, if notably odd, Vim researcher in the Provencal Tribunal. He developed a method for generating study totals from auras, eventually packing up and leading an itinerant lifestyle, moving from aura to aura in order to study each for a season before moving on. Due to limitations of his theory, only Vim and Aura Theory may be learned by his method, though he indicated before his disappearance that he was very near to expanding this to any Form that might aspect that aura. The rarity of aspected auras of any one particular Form would have made this of only limited use in any event.

Time: 1 season (no benefit from a teacher) + must learn 12 InVi5 spells

Ability: n/a

Prerequisites: Magic Theory > 5

Effect: User may spend one season to generate a study total from an aura of INT + (2 × Aura) in either Vim or Aura Theory.

Source: A book written by Laurentius of Bonisagus called 'Dixitque Vulpes' (And the Fox Said...) contains an extremely well-written, if rather bizaare, conversation between a fox and a magpie, in which the magpie explains the methodology to the fox, who ends the book by eating the magpie, apparently representing the digestion of the knowledge, as well as the bird. Laurentius was noted for being a Bonisagus with Enigmatic Wisdom, which may explain the strange nature of the allegory. Appended to the book is a set of 12 InVi 5 spells which are necessary for the use of the study technique. (Three of said spells are *Sense the Nature of Vis* and a variant of *Scales of Power* and *Feeling the Font of Power* for the appropriate realm. The proper realm variants must be known to the caster, so there are actually 18 spells in the book, 12 needed for any one season of study.)

Certamen Maneuvers

Note: By making a Per + Certamen stress roll of greater than the opponent's Guile + Certamen, a certamen participant may deduce what maneuver is being made, if they have seen it before, and switch to

another maneuver on a Int + Certamen stress roll of 9+.

Telerion's Gambit

Made famous by the mage Telerion in his certamen for his sigil-rights, this is an all-or-nothing risk to win against an otherwise superior opponent. Many a young mage has used the gambit to good effect once or twice to gain a reputation, then shrewdly switched to Telerion's Feint, to keep their opponent on the offensive, and from employing any of the defensive techniques.

Time: 1/2 seasons

Ability: n/a

Prerequisites: Certamen > 3

Effect: Upon a successful contest, the magus may DOUBLE his next round's total, but will leave himself totally open to any techniques that attack him directly-such attempts automatically succeed. Telerion's Gambit bypasses any technique that does not specifically say otherwise.

Special Notes: Must succeed at a Presence + Certamen Stress Roll of 9+, as the gambit musters the personality of its user to overwhelm the defences of their opponent.

Source: This is almost never taught outside of House Tremere, but copies of Telerion's book on certamen techniques may be found in the libraries of most Archmagi, as well as some (rare) covenant libraries, but such are guarded jealously.

Telerion's Feint

The sister-maneuver to Telerion's Gambit, this simulates the effects of the former maneuver, while actually maintaining a defensive posture, trying to lure the opponent into switching to an offensive maneuver. The feinter may choose to lower the difficulty for their opponent to deduce their maneuver by broadcasting what they are doing, but the maneuver will appear to be indistinguishable from Telerion's Gambit, leaving the opponent guessing...

Time: 1/2 seasons

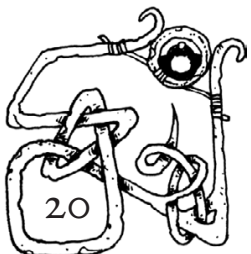
Ability: n/a

Prerequisites: Certamen > 3

Effect: The feinting magus may nullify the effects of any attacking maneuver their opponent makes in that round. If the opponent attacks, the magus adds three to their certamen total from the round. If the opponent does not use an attacking maneuver, the magus may not carry over any positive difference from that round (although they will still carry over a negative difference.)

Special Notes: Telerion's Feint and Telerion's Gambit are indistinguishable. A magus employing the feint may voluntarily subtract points from their opponent's difficulty target to guess the maneuver.

Source: As Telerion's Gambit



Teaching the Hedgies...

If a character wishes to play a member of a hedge tradition that joins the order, the character will have to learn the Parma Magica, among other things. Parma, as the result of a research breakthrough, is an Exceptional Arcane Ability, and modeled just as any other.

Parma Magica

The great invention of Bonisagus which allowed for the creation of the Order of Hermes.

Time: 2 seasons (while a book could theoretically be written with this knowledge, it would not be, due to the sensitivity of the subject matter, and the desire that it might not be distributed outside of Hermetically-controlled channels)

Ability: Grants the Exceptional Arcane Ability Parma Magica at level 1

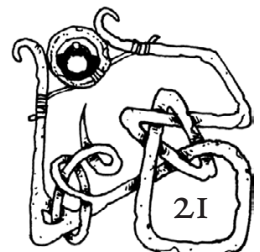
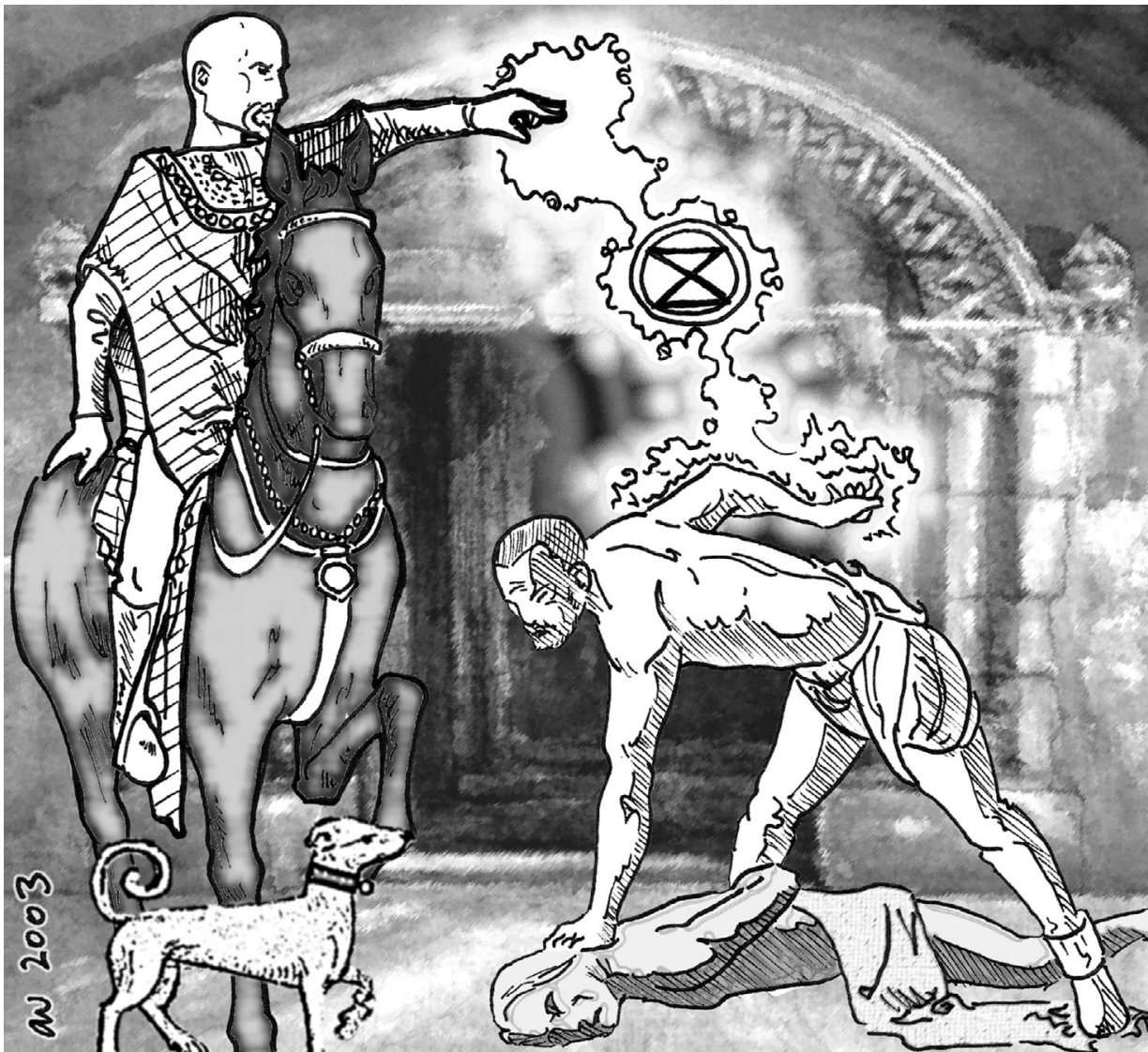
Prerequisites: The Gift

Effect: Allows use of the Parma Magica, as per the rules in ArM4

Source: Any Hermetic Magus qualified to teach an apprentice

Conclusion

It has been the intent of this article to illustrate the concept through examples rather than lengthy analysis; the core mechanic is simple, and, as I hope I have demonstrated here, may be used to model a wide variety of situations. That said, I must re-emphasize that the mechanic is not a replacement for the character creation rules, Arts, or Abilities, but rather an addendum to add functionality to the advancement system in play, and hopefully to help bring together many divergent types of knowledge. Most of all, I hope to introduce discussion into new and better ways to model advancement.





Ars Mathematica: Mathematics

by Adam Bank and Jeremiah Genest

Quick Glossary of Important In-Character Terms

Bibliomancy: Applying numerology to written words for working magic.

Golden Number: A magical ratio used in art and architecture.

Primary Numbers: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9.

Sacred Architecture: Buildings constructed according to Sacred Geometry.

Sacred Geometry: Geometrical shapes and figures that possess symbolic, religious and magical power.

Secret Societies

Society of Pythagoreans

Symbol: Tetraktis ("the fourness," a sacred pyramidal symbol made of ten dots)

Motto: "Number moves itself."

Patrons: Pythagoras, Apollonius of Tyana

House Affiliations: Any, although members from Houses Flambeau, Tylalus, and Tremere are extremely rare

Flaw Requirements: Noncombatant -2, Vow (not to use any animal products in any way) -2

Origin Myth: The members of the Society believe themselves to be the reincarnations of the original, massacred Pythagorean cultists. The original cultists knew that servants of the evil Demiurge

planned to destroy them, but their pacifism left them no defense. Instead, the doomed cultists performed a ritual that guaranteed their souls would be reincarnated at a time when the world needed their wisdom most.

Levels of Initiation: The Society's outer circle of members, the akousmatic, is spread throughout the Order, and only gathers together on nights with astrological or numerological importance. The akousmatics live according to the principles of Pythagoreanism, and are occasionally called upon by the Society's inner disciples, the mathematikoi. The Society's inner circle members divest themselves of all personal possessions and never leave the Society's headquarters, the Covenant of the Semicircle. Hidden somewhere on the Ionian Islands, the mathematikoi of Semicircle purportedly elect a leader who guides their esoteric studies.

Goals and practices: The Society recruits rarely. The Society must always have at least 36 members, a sacred number known as the Great Tetraktis; the sum of the first four odd numbers $((1+3+5+7) + (2+4+6+8))$. Whenever a member dies, the akousmatic outer-initiates are ordered to search the world for his or her reincarnation. Usually the reincarnation is found in a Gifted child. Once, however, the Society granted a seagull full membership rights as the reincarnation of a former member. Outsiders can pursue membership, but they must each somehow prove themselves a reincarnation of an ancient Pythagorean.

The Society furthers the ideals of the ancient Pythagoreans by researching mathematics and magic. They freely publish their newfound spells and knowledge, circulating copies by Redcap, each text supposedly authored by "Pythagoras of Samos," as if Pythagoras himself has returned to Semicircle. Only inner disciples know the exact location of Semicircle, as it is protected by many powerful spells, and no outsider knows their full agenda.

Virtues Taught: Affinity with Music (+1), Arithmancy (+1), Magical Imagination (+1), Enchanting Music (+2), Monadic Magic (+2), Onomancy (+3), Inscription Upon the Soul (+4), Affinity with Intéleigo (+4)

Cult of Pythagoras

"Pythagoras met two different people, in two distant cities, in one single hour. Pythagoras' left thigh consisted of solid gold. When asked about it, he admitted to being the reincarnation of King Midas. He tamed eagles in an instant, converted wild bears into vegetarians. When he walked on a shore, rivers would cry 'Hail, Pythagoras!' He could see beyond the horizon of the sea.

"Once, he bit a poisonous snake to death.

"Pythagoras stands as the first archmage, the first hermetist to truly awaken his Gift."

— Alcmaeon filius Diodorus, follower of Bonisagus, a 10th Century Society member



A native of the Ionian island of Samos, Pythagoras (circa 560-480 BC) trained in Egypt and became a master mystic/theoretician in Babylon, famous home of magical secrets. When the politics of conquest permitted, Pythagoras returned to Samos to found a school, the Semicircle. He lived in a cave outside the main city, where he delved into the mysteries and researched the conundrums of mathematics.

Gaining few followers in his native country, he moved to Croton, established a renowned school of philosophy and religion, and began his cult, the Society. The Society was comprised equally of women and men who dedicated themselves to numerology, purification, friendship, honesty, loyalty, and secrecy.

Pythagoras reputedly lived well over 100 years, and branches of the Society grew all over Italy. Not many years after his death, however, the Society was struck down. Meeting houses everywhere were sacked and burned. In Croton, the heart of the Society, historians say some sixty Pythagoreans were massacred in "the house of Milo."

Apollonius of Tyana

My own system of wisdom comes from Pythagoras who taught me to worship the gods in the way you see. The very fashion of letting my hair grow long I have learned from Pythagoras as part of his discipline, and as a result of his wisdom I keep myself pure from the meat of animals. Therefore, I cannot accompany you or anyone else in drinking wine or idleness and luxury.

– Apollonius describing his lifestyle

Several tales speak of the strange, ascetic, wandering teacher Apollonius of Tyana (1st century AD). Born in Cappadocia, he traveled the civilized world and beyond, helping spark a revival of Pythagoreanism.

What we know of Apollonius' teaching coincides with traditional Pythagorean doctrine. Animals have a divine soul, just like human beings. To kill an animal, therefore, is a grave sin, and one must abstain from eating meat, sacrificing animals to the gods, or wearing fur or animal skin for clothing. Apollonius also believed in the transmigration of the soul and claimed to remember his own previous existences. It is said that he descended into the underworld and that he could raise the dead.

He authored *On Sacrifices*, a treatise on how to properly worship the gods without committing sin. Purportedly written by Apollonius himself, *The Golden Flowers* discusses summoning and dealing with spirits. Around the end of the 12th century, Hugo of Santalla translated the *Secrets of Creation* from Arabic into Latin. This strange text contained a long allegorical story about Apollonius. Guided through a passageway by a magical lamp, Apollonius arrives at a chamber where he finds an old man seated on a golden throne. In one hand the old man holds the book on the Secret of Creation, in the other an emerald tablet inscribed with obscure symbols and the caption, "the art of reproducing nature."

While any philosopher could read from the Secret of Creation, only the initiates of magic could glimpse the art of reproducing nature.

Initiation Seed

Eat no beans: Pythagoras often told his followers to "abstain from beans," which they interpreted as avoiding politics. When searching for new incarnations, the Pythagoreans pay closest attention to magi who remain neutral in Tribunal politics or refuse to play along with Tremere plans or Tylus schemes. A player magus who continually refuses to get swept up in political machinations will be approached as a potential candidate.

Esoteric Lineages

Line of Petrus, House Quaesitor

Petrus was a sage, diviner, and close friend of Guernicus the Founder. His magical abilities were insufficient to warrant his invitation to the first Tribunal, but Guernicus welcomed him into the Order as his assistant. When Guernicus took the title of Quaesitor, he found Petrus' powers to be invaluable.

Petrus was a master numerologist and bibliomancer. His interpretations of Hermetic texts and letters were instrumental in many of Guernicus' investigations. In the 13th century, his descendants continue Petrus' duties as numerologists and archivists of House Quaesitor.

Starting Abilities: Arithmancy 1, Hermetic Law 2, Hermes Lore 3, Magic Theory 4, Parma Magica 2, Scribe Latin 3, Speak Latin 4, Speak Own Language 4

Starting Experience Points: 5 + Age

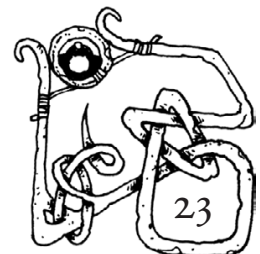
Required Virtues and Flaws: Quaesitor +1, Arithmancy +1, Bibliomancy +3, Obligation (write one tractatus on Hermes Lore every year) -2*

* Your lineage requires you to spend one season a year studying the writings of the Order and reporting on your findings to the chief Quaesitor of your Tribunal. You spend this season writing a tractatus on Hermes Lore. You gain no direct study from your duties, however, since you search for patterns behind the words, not the knowledge contained in the words themselves.

The Mind of the Numerologist

Mathematics contains the plans of the Divine: Numerologists study the mathematic arts of the quadrivium (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music) to reveal the mind of God. When Pythagoras discovered what we call the "Pythagorean Theorem" of right triangles, he proved the existence of God. Only an all-knowing, omnipotent divinity could make mathematics and geometry so utterly perfect. Each new theorem discovered, each formula tabulated, reaffirms divine supremacy and reveals part of the invisible world beyond.

Numbers are the true reality: The invisible world is composed of numbers. Numbers and mathematical formulae are more formal than physical





phenomena (two plus two always equals four, whereas the physical world can be much less reliable). Numerologists conclude that numbers have greater actuality, or are “more real” and important, than the observable world. Pythagoreans, for example, believed human souls and divine spirits were composed of musical harmonies.

Numbers are the source of magic: Numerology finds meaning in mathematical patterns and their occurrences in nature. Belief in numerology is widespread among the philosophers of antiquity, Jewish and Arabic scholars, the Church Fathers, and Christian philosophers of the 13th century. Most numerology springs from the central concepts of Pythagoreanism, the belief that divine numbers maintain the structure of the cosmos.

Important Numbers

Pythagorean numerology begins with the primary numbers: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9. Each primary number has its own name, shape, personality, and significance when found in nature or in formulae.

- The **Monad** (1), also called Unity, symbolizes Divinity, the oneness of divine purpose, the beginning of all things, the singularity and infinity of God. The shape of the monad is the dimensionless point, impossible to truly conceive. The Monad signifies the unity of complete opposites, such as even and odd, male and female.
- The **Duad** (2) represents diversity and equality. “Two” embodies polarity, opposition, and division. The Duad, as sexuality, can signify dynamism and change. Another aspect of the Duad, the hermaphrodite, represents ambivalence.
- The **Triad** (3, or Ternary), the first uneven number, is also the first number that can be visualized, in planar geometry as the triangle. The Triad signifies heaven and the spirit, humanity’s ability to approach the understanding and power of the Monad, and the influence of the Divine visible on Earth. Multiplying a sum by three gives great power. The Triad is the perfect number, echoing Plato’s three great principles (Matter, Idea and God) the three dimensions of space (length, height, and breadth) and the three stages of time (past, present and future).
- The **Tetrad** (4, or Quaternary), symbolizes truth, reason, observable (as opposed to infinite) unity, and perfect rhythm. As the number of Jupiter, the Tetrad signifies law, protection, and organization. Four is the number of order, representing the solstices and equinoxes, the seasons, the elements, the cardinal points, the phases of the moon, the winds in the skies, and the rivers of paradise.
- The **Quincunx** (5, or Pentad) represents health and love. The Quincunx is the number of humanity and the human body. The head controls the four limbs (a total of 5 extremities),



the mind has five senses, and each hand has five fingers. The Quincunx’s symbols are the pentagon and pentagram.

- The **Hexad** (6, or Hexagon) is the number of perfection, beauty, stability, and balance in the terrestrial realm. God created the Cosmos in six days. There are six colors (blue, yellow, red, green, orange, and purple). Six is the number of the Seal of Solomon, the great Hebrew king who built the Temple on six steps and elevated his throne by six steps.
- The **Heptad** (7, the Septenary) captures the mystic imagination more than any other primary number. The Heptad symbolizes cosmic organization and pervades the universe. Seven is the solar number since there are seven heavens, seven planets, and seven days of the week. The summer solstice occurs when the Sun enters the seventh sign of the Zodiac; the winter solstice occurs after the Sun passes through the next seven signs. Seven symbolizes abundance, sin, and revenge.
- The **Ogdoad** (8, the Octahedron) represents the eight souls saved from the Flood in Noah’s ark. As an even, female, passive number, and the first cubic number ($2 \times 2 \times 2 = 8$), eight embodies the volume of the earth. The Tetrad symbolizes the Earth, but the Ogdoad symbolizes an intermediary realm between Heaven and Earth.
- The **Ennead** (9, Nonagon) represents concord. Nine is an uneven, male, active number and the first squared uneven number. The Earth plus the seven planets plus the sphere of fixed stars make nine concentric spheres. Nine is the number of hierarchy and the crowd. There are nine muses, nine choirs of angels. The Ennead is the number of the Virgin Mary. Due to its many arithmetical peculiarities, nine is called the unbound and the number of reflection.
- As a composite number 10, the **Decad**, combines the meanings of the Duad and the Quincunx, and represents rational, orderly love, or marriage. The five fingers on the two hands add up to 10, and so Decad is the number of totality. The Decad signals change through the death of an old life and the beginning of a new.

Sacred Geometry

The constructs and theorems of geometry also contain great magic. The Egyptians believed that geometrical theorems were miracles produced by the god Osiris. The ancient Greeks assigned various magical attributes to the geometrical shapes and ratios, investing them with meaning.

Geometry is the science of relationships. To the geometrician, the universe is God regarding himself. Creation cannot exist without perception and perception reduces to relationship. The archetypal patterns of relationship can be contemplated through

Ancient Atomic Theory

Shape	Element	Hermetic Form & Effect
Tetrahedron	Fire	+4 Ignem, +2 Intéllego
Hexahedron	Earth	+4 Terram, +3 leadership
Octahedron	Air	+4 Auram, +2 Mentem
Icosahedron	Water	+4 Aquam, +3 metals
Dodecahedron	Cosmos*	+4 Vim, +3 divination

* The entire universe itself, comprised of the four elements, took the shape of the dodecahedron.

the laws of proportion contained in pure number and geometric form.

Platonic Solids

The five Platonic solids are: the tetrahedron (pyramid), the hexahedron (cube), the octahedron (8-sided figure), the icosahedron (20-sided figure), and the dodecahedron (12-sided figure). These five shapes, however, were revered as symbols of divine power long before Plato's time.

The Platonic solids are the only possible regular polyhedra, straight-sided figures with equal sides and equal angles. Because you can geometrically prove that only five regular polyhedra exist, the ancients gave them great cosmological significance. Early Greek physicists, including Plato, concluded that the solids were the shapes of elemental atoms, although Aristotelian physics rejects the theory of atomism.

Heavenly Curves

Golden Section: A line, divided into two unequal parts where the ratio of the larger section to the smaller section is the same ratio as the larger section to the entire line. This ratio is called the "divine proportion." The ancients considered the golden section to be a great source of beauty and perfection. It is the fundamental principle of classical and medieval art and architecture in the form of the golden rectangle. All architecture is governed by the relationships between sides and diagonals of a series of squares. The golden section is a powerful sacred geometrical symbol of learning and knowledge, as it represents the process of generational change.

Spiral: The logarithmic spiral, constructed through a series of nested golden rectangles, has long been recognized as one of the great recurring patterns in nature. The spiral symbolizes generational growth.

Pi: The sphere is the shape of the divine, the simplest and purest symbol of perfection. A circle, the

flat shadow of a sphere, represents the divine at work within the natural world.

Vesica Piscis: When two identical circles are drawn intersecting one another so that the overlap equals their radii, the intersection forms a vesica piscis, the shape of the human eye, the portal to the human spirit and a joining of minds.

Opposition

Opposition is a source of great power. An opposing pair, such as fire and water, contains the power of the Duad. Opposites cannot unite in the terrestrial world; opposites never attract. The joining of opposing pairs can only occur in the invisible world of magic and number. The joining of an opposing pair unleashes the power of the Monad and transcendent unity.

The Pythagoreans believed ten great oppositions ruled the universe. Aristotle listed them, but even he did not know why the Pythagoreans gave them such importance, or how they functioned in the greater world.

The Great Oppositions

Limited	Unlimited
Odd	Even
Unity	Plurality
Right	Left
Male	Female
At Rest	In Motion
Straight	Curved
Light	Darkness
Good	Evil
Square	Oblong

Harmony of the Spheres

The modes of music represent the structure of reality. According to Pythagoras, each celestial sphere sings a single note of perfect pitch. People ordinarily cannot hear the harmony of the spheres because they have lived with it all their lives. Originally defined by Pythagoras, the eight musical modes have been expanded over the years to include other phenomena. Pope Gregory codified the system used in the 13th century from Roman and Greek sources.

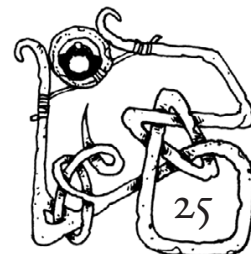
Outer Mystery: Arithmancy

Arithmancy is the science of the effect of mathematics on magic. Specifically, arithmancers study the power of the three lower arts of the Quadrivium: arithmetic, geometry, and music. Astrology, the most



The Modes of Music

Mode	Element	Humor	Change	Effect	Planet	Note	Harmonia
Dorian	Water	Phlegm	more	awake	Sun	D	Phrygisti
Hypodorian	Water	Phlegm	less	asleep	Moon	A	Hypodôristi
Phrygian	Fire	Choler	more	anger	Mars	E	Dôristi
Hypophrygian	Fire	Choler	less	flattery	Mercury	B	Mixolydisti
Lydian	Air	Blood	more	happy	Jupiter	F	Hypolydisti
Hypolydian	Air	Blood	less	sad	Venus	C	Lydisti
Mixolydian	Earth	Melancholy	more	melancholic	Saturn	G	Hypophrygisti
Hypermixolydian	Earth	Melancholy	less	beauty	Stars	A	





challenging mathematical discipline, requires its own school of magic. (See *The Mysteries*).

In addition to allowing you to purchase the inner mysteries of mathematics, Arithmancy functions as a Magical Affinity in sacred geometry, explained in the next section.

Circles and Signs

Magic circles and inscriptions descend from the wisdom of King Solomon. More than protective devices, perfect circles have inherent power as symbols of celestial power. In Hermetic terms, circles draw upon the power of the celestial spheres through the law of sympathy. This power can be directed outwards, to protect those inside, or inwards, to work great magic within. Other signs partaking in sympathy include pentagrams and astrological symbols.

Theurgical circles vary from central designs: The theurgist constructs a square platform of fine and finished stone. On top of the square the theurgist places a circular platform, seven feet across and three feet high. After purifying this site, the theurgist carves two concentric circles into the top platform, using a new and unblemished knife, writing names of power in the band between the circles. Another ritual carves four concentric circles, from nine feet to twelve feet across, and the Seal of Solomon in the center, all inscribed in concentric squares whose corners point to the cardinal directions, with names of power between the squares. Lighted censers sit within two small concentric circles at each of the four corners of the outermost square. Such circles have Form and Effect bonuses of Rego +7 and Theurgy +7.

Sacred Geometry Spells

All spells with the target of Circle or duration of Ring are sacred geometry spells. Arithmancy is not required to cast sacred geometry spells, but functions as a Magical Affinity for each spell listed below.

Wizard's Duad (MuVi Gen)

R: Near, D: Ring (spec.) T: Spec, Ritual

Requisite: Mentem

This originally pre-Hermetic ritual allows two magi to combine their power. The ritual spell requires two casters. Both casters must know a version of the spell, and both must successfully cast it (each with vis) for the ritual to be effective.

The two casters stand, facing each other, at the centers of a vesica piscis. Once the ritual is complete, and as long as the two casters remain inside their circles, both cast magic as one magus. When casting formulaic or ritual spells, the magi make a single stress + Sta + Sta + Technique + Technique + Form + Form + aura roll. Individual Affinities are also added. Any roll involving magic (including Magic Resistance) is similarly doubled. Spontaneous magic may be attempted this way, but adds an Intéllego requisite to the ritual.



If any roll exceeds the combined levels of the dual rituals, the roll automatically fails. If combined Magic Resistance fails, each caster can resist individually. For example, two magi each know a 30th level version of a *Wizard's Duad*, for a combined level of 60. They both cast *Wizard's Duad* to engage in a long-range duel with a powerful foe. Their enemy sends a *Ball of Abysmal Flame* their way via an *Intangible Tunnel*. They add their Magic Resistance totals to a (unfortunately high) single roll resulting in a 76. Because 76 is greater than 60, their combined Magic Resistance fails, and both must resist separately.

Botching Muto Vim spells always results in a spectacle. When ensconced in a *Wizard's Duad*, both magi make separate botch rolls, but share each other's botch results.

Enchanted Castle (ReVi 30)

R: Touch D: Inst. T: Structure, Ritual

Spell focus: target itself built according to sacred geometrical principles (+1)

Allows an entire building or like structure, built according to sacred geometrical principles, to be opened for enchantment, ordinarily not possible as a lab activity. The structure must still be opened for enchantment separately. Treat any such structure as "gigantic," with a vis multiplier of $\times 6$ (ArM4 page 83). Any Vim vis used in the ritual is counted toward the Vim vis needed to open the building for enchantment.

Radian Glyph (ReVi Gen)

R: Touch D: Moon/Perm T: Structure, Ritual

Spell Focus: target itself was built in accord with pi (+3)

Infuses a man-made structure with a magical effect. During the ritual, the caster must carve a geometrical representation of pi no smaller than one pace in diameter into a surface of the structure. Once the ritual is complete, the magus casts a spell at the glyph. The spell cast at the glyph effects the entire structure for the duration of the ritual spell, or until the glyph is destroyed, regardless of the duration or target of the spell cast. The glyph can hold any one spell of a level less than or equal to the ritual's level - 20. Aimed spells cannot be held by this spell.

Golden Glyph (ReVi Gen)

R: Touch D: Moon/Perm T: Room, Ritual

Spell Focus: target itself was built according to the golden ratio (+3)

Infuses a room with a magical effect, affecting everything therein. During the ritual, the caster must carve a geometrical representation of the golden ratio (such as a spiral) into the wall, ceiling, or floor of the room. Once the ritual is complete, the magus casts a spell at the glyph. The spell can have any duration including Momentary, but cannot be an aimed spell. For the duration of the ritual spell or until the glyph is destroyed, anyone or anything that enters the room will have that spell cast upon it as if cast by the performer of the ritual himself, each time it enters.

The spell trapped in the glyph must have a sufficient target and requisites (a spell with a target of Small cannot affect a person, for example). Penetration of the glyph's spell is equal to the level of the ritual. The glyph can hold any one spell of a level less than or equal to the ritual's level - 15.

The glyph will not cast the spell trapped in it on the caster of the ritual itself if the caster adds requisites of Intéllego and Corpus.

Inner Mysteries

The +4 Inner Mystery, Sacred Architecture is on page 168 of *The Mysteries*.

Monadic Magic (+2 Virtue)

Monadic magic draws on the inherit power of sequences and opposites.

Opposition

With Monadic Magic, your Arithmancy score functions as a Magical Affinity with opposing forces. Examples include: using Creo in a spell to cancel the effect of Perdo magic, using a Creo Aquam to put out a fire, or using Muto magic to turn a target into its exact opposite.

Monadic Spell Casting

A numerologist can enhance spells by entering a trance and chanting long sequences of numerological formulae. Using additional numerological formulae in spell casting, however, possesses dangers, as the numerological power of a spell cannot be known until actually cast. Any ritual, spontaneous, or formulaic spell can be enhanced with monadic magic.

Monadic spell casting uses incantations of number sequences and rhythmic gestures first developed

by the Pythagoreans. Monadic spell casting cannot be performed silently or without gestures (see "Words and Gestures," ArM4 page 76).

Roll to cast your spell as normal, adding your Arithmancy score to the casting total. If you botch, the opportunity for monadic magic is wasted, and you must resolve the botch normally. If you succeed, the spell is prepared but not cast, and numerical incantation to enhance and control the spell begins.

Reduce your spell casting total (without Penetration) to its primary number by adding its digits together. If the result is not a primary number, add the digits together again until you reach the primary number. For example, if your total is 37, the spell's primary number is 1, because $3 + 7 = 10$, and $1 + 0 = 1$. You may choose to cast the spell immediately, looking up your casting roll's primary number on the "Monadic Effects" chart to determine the result of your spell, or continue incantation in the hopes of improving the outcome.

If you choose to continue incantation, you must spend 1 minute per 5 levels of the spell cast chanting and gesturing. If you are interrupted (follow the normal rules for disrupting concentration), the spell fails and you must roll a number of botch dice equal to the aura, minimum of 1. Once the requisite time has passed, roll stress die + Sta + Concentration + previous primary number, and reduce the new total to find your spell's new primary number. You may choose to cast the spell along with the new primary number's effects, or continue the incantation, performing the same procedure again.

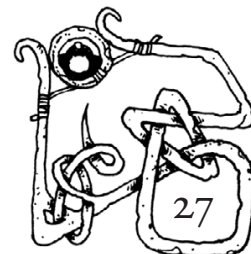
If you botch your incantation roll, the spell is out of your control and takes effect according to the



Monadic Effects

- 1 the Monad: Divine Unity. Your spell operates normally, but also briefly links you to the invisible world of Truth and pure Number. Roll to check for Twilight, adding Arithmancy to any roll modified by Enigmatic Wisdom.
- 2 the Duad: Opposition and ambivalence. Your spell is cast as if *Mirror of Opposition* (ArM4 page 157) were successfully cast upon it. You cannot stop its effects.
- 3 the Triad: Power. The effect of any vis used is doubled. If you did not use vis during the spell casting, you gain no benefit. If you are performing a ritual spell or boosting the duration or range of a formulaic spell, only half of the vis usually required is consumed. If you are using vis to increase your formulaic or spontaneous spell casting total, double the bonus to your roll.
- 4 the Tetrad: Order and control. Add your Arithmancy spell to any Finesse or Concentration roll made in conjunction with the spell cast.
- 5 the Quincunx: The number of humanity. The spell gains Corpus and Mentem requisites. If

- your casting total is reduced so that you would have failed to cast the spell, you still succeed, but roll 5 botch dice. If your spell is unaffected by the requisites, you lose no Fatigue due to the casting of the spell if casting a spontaneous or formulaic spell from memory. If you are casting a ritual spell or a spell from a text, you only lose half the usual fatigue.
- 6 the Hexad: Balance. Your spell is cast as if *The Sorcerer's Fork* (ArM4 page 157) were successfully cast upon it. Your spell is divided in two, one spell affecting your intended target, the other affecting yourself (you may still Magically Resist if possible).
- 7 the Heptad: The solar number. Your spell's range changes to Sight. If the original spell had a range of Personal or Arcane Connection, you must now cast the spell at an appropriate target in Sight range or roll 7 botch dice.
- 8 the Ogdoad: The intermediary. Your spell is cast as if *Wizard's Boost* (ArM4 page 157) were successfully cast upon it.
- 9 the Ennead: The unbound. Your spell is cast simultaneously on every target to which you possess (on your person) an Arcane Connection, including yourself, without extra vis.





previous primary number, in addition to any other botch effects.

The actual casting total of the spell when eventually cast is equal to the original casting total. Spontaneous spells are still divided.

Bibliomancy (+3 Virtue)

The inner mystery of bibliomancy teaches the secret meaning of the written word. Bibliomancy reveals the hidden connections between the contents of a text and the Hermetic and liberal arts. The letters in words are substituted with numbers. Correspondences are found through a large repertoire of mathematical methods. (For more on numerology, see *Kabbalah* page 77.)

There are three techniques of bibliomancy.

Divination

Similar to ceremonial augury (see *The Mysteries*, page 107), careful examination of a text for mathematical omens can reveal many secrets. Bibliomancy can replicate any Hermetic spontaneous or formulaic spell effect combining the Technique Intéllego with any other Form; no spell using a Technique beside Intéllego can be replicated with divination

through bibliomancy. You cannot use vis when divining with bibliomancy.

In addition, the target of the spell must be associated with the subject of the book examined. You cannot use bibliomancy to cast Intéllego spells targeted at the text's author. The target itself or a similar object must be discussed within the text.

Texts on Academic, Arcane, and Casual Knowledges are the best books to use with bibliomancy. For example, a text on Philosophiae can be used to cast a spell on a herb or a strange metallic alloy. A text on a particular (Area) Lore can be used to cast Intéllego spells on a geographical location.

A text on a Hermetic Technique (such as Corpus) can be used to perform any Intéllego spell of that form (such as any Intéllego Corpus), but is less effective. Texts on Hermetic Forms cannot be used to divine with bibliomancy.

Once you choose the Technique and level of effect of the spell you wish to attempt, you must examine the text. You must spend 15 minutes per magnitude of the spell performing numerical computations on random passages of the text. Roll a



stress die + Int + Arithmancy + Intéllego + appropriate Hermetic Form + aura. If you are using a text on a Hermetic Form, divide the total by two. Otherwise, if your roll is greater than or equal to the level of the effect of the intended spell, the divination is successful. Divining with bibliomancy costs 2 Fatigue levels.

Improving Spell Casting

You can improve a spell by spending time in bibliomantic computation before casting. You can improve any formulaic, ritual, or spontaneous spell of any Form or Technique combination with bibliomancy. First, you must spend 5 minutes per magnitude of your intended spell in numerical study of a text. The text's subject must be an Academic, Arcane, or Casual Knowledge related to the target. Once your study is complete, you may add the Quality of a text to your spell casting total. You can only use a particular text to improve spell casting a number of times equal to your Arithmancy score.

Improving Study

When spending a season studying a text, you can attempt to improve your study by searching for numerical correspondences. After spending the season, roll a stress die + Perception + Arithmancy with an Ease Factor of 12+. If you succeed, you add your Arithmancy score to your Study Total. If you fail, the season is wasted and no experience points are gained. If you botch, you become so confused that you can never study that particular text again.

Tapestry

Mandarcus filius Duecius, Follower of Guernicus

Mandarcus, a Line of Petrus bibliomancer, is never without a stylus and tablet or scroll to record



observations. When away from the covenant library, he has a grog accompany him with a wheelbarrow full of books. A native of Venice, plotting, scheming, and spying are Mandarcus' birthright. He turns almost every conversation into an interview. Everything he hears and says will wind up in his yearly tractatus on Hermes Lore, one way or another, which accounts for his reputation as a meddler.

Mandarcus the Bibliomancer*

Characteristics: Int +1, Per +2, Com +3, Pre -2, Str 0, Sta +1, Dex 0, Qik -1

Age: 28

Size: 0

Confidence: 3

Virtues and Flaws: Arithmancy +1, Book Learner +1, Quaesitor +1, Secret Vis Source (Intéllego) +1, Strong Writer +1, Gossip +2, Bibliomancy +3, Blatant Gift -1, Meddler -1, Poor Eyesight -1, Clumsy -2 Obligations -2, Major Magical Deficiency (without a text or parchment to consult) -3

Personality Traits: Meddlesome +3, Ambitious +3, Awkward +1, Devious +1

Reputations: Meddler 1, within the Order; Up-and-coming Quaesitor 3, within the Order

Weapon/Attack	Init	Atk	Dfn	Dam	Fat
Brawling (dagger)	+2	+2	+2	+3	2

Soak: +1

Fatigue levels: OK, 0, -1, -3, -5, Incapacitated

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

Abilities: Arithmancy 3, Awareness 2, Brawl 1, Certámen 2, Concentration 3, Enigmatic Wisdom 1, Etiquette 2, Finesse 2, Guile 1, Hermes Lore 3, Hermetic Law 2, Intrigue 3, Magic Theory 4, Occult Lore 1, Parma Magica 2, Scribe Latin 3, Speak Italian 4, Speak Latin 4

Arts:

Cr 3	In 10	Mu 3	Pe 3	Re 2
An 5	Aq 5	Au 2	Co 2	He 5
Ig 5	Im 0	Me 3	Te 2	Vi 0

Wizard's Sigil: Convolution. His spell effects are achieved in the most complex way possible.

Spells:

Frosty Breath of the Spoken Lie (InMe 20/ +14)

Posing the Silent Question (InMe 20/ +14)

Mighty Torrent of Water (CrAq 15/ +9)

Disguise of the New Visage (MuCo 15/ +6)

Whispers Through the Black Gate (InCo 15/ +13)

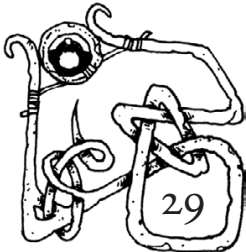
Intuition of the Forest (InHe 10/ +15)

Trust of Childlike Faith (PeMe 10 /+6)

Circling Winds of Protection (ReAu 15/ +5)

Growth of the Creeping Things (MuAn 15/ +6)

Agony of the Beast (PeAn 5/ +9)





His secret vis source is a gift from his pater Duecius. Duecius, a master of natural philosophy, searched many years for powerful stones of virtue: male and female gemstones. According to Aristotle and other naturalists, gems possess gender, and give birth to smaller gems if left alone (resulting in the occasional great deposit of precious gems found in rocky areas). Duecius gave his apprentice a mated pair of sapphires that each year (if left undisturbed) produces a handful of smaller sapphires worth 4 pawns of Intéllego vis.

Mandarcus is suitable for a beginning player character.

Iphigenia of Samos, Mathematekoi of the Society

Characteristics: Int +3, Per +2, Com +1, Pre 0, Str 0, Sta +1, Dex 0, Qik 0

Age: 163

Afflictions: Hunched Over 3, Cataracts 2, Incontinent 1

Size: 0

Confidence: 6

Virtues and Flaws: Arithmancy +1, Magical Imagination +1 (initiated), Onomancy +2, Sense for the Gift +1, Affinity with Intéllego +4, Inscription Upon the Soul (initiated) +4, Noncombatant -2, Vow (No animal products) -2, Personal Magic -6

Personality Traits: Patient 2, Quixotic 1

Reputations: none; Iphigenia dropped out of sight when she joined the Semicircle

Weapon/Attack	Init	Atk	Dfn	Dam	Fat
Brawl (fist)	-2	-3	-3	0	1

Soak: +1

Fatigue levels: OK, 0, -1, -3, -5, Incapacitated

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

Iphigenia of Samos

Iphigenia lived almost a century of seclusion at the Semicircle Covenant, heart of the Society of Pythagoreans, but she now walks the earth. On the very edge of Final Twilight, Iphigenia is on a quest to find a woman pregnant with the child that will be her reincarnation. She takes the guise of a wizened soothsayer traveling from town market to town market, selling charms, telling fortunes, and practicing medicine.

Important Abilities: Arithmancy 9, Awareness 5, Certámen 1, Charm 4, Concentration 6, Enigmatic Wisdom 8, Etiquette 2, Finesse 4, Folk Ken 6, Guile 2, Hermes Lore 3, Intrigue 7, Magic Theory 9, Magical Imagination 6, Occult Lore 4, Parma Magica 5, Scribe Greek 5, Scribe Latin 6, Speak Greek 4, Speak Italian 4, Speak Latin 4

Arts:

Cr 22	In 26	Mu 3	Pe 7	Re 16
An 15	Aq 13	Au 13	Co 12	He 9
Ig 7	Im 17	Me 17	Te 14	Vi 19

Twilight Points: 23

Decrepitude: 3

Wizard's Sigil: Complex patterns

Spells: Iphigenia knows all of the healing and beneficial Creo spells in ArM4, and most Intéllego spells.

Inscriptions Upon Her Soul:

Cloak of Mist (ReCo 40)

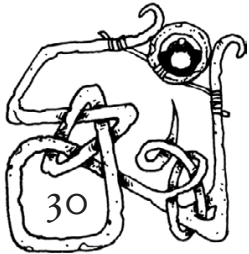
Greater Ward Against Heat and Flames (ReIg 45): increases Soak to +30 versus fire.

Seven League Stride (ReCo 45)

Silent Vigil (ReCo 45)

The gift

Ah, the awen comes arushin'
Casting me adrift
Upon the ship of poetry,
Seizing my mind
With the instant, all encompassing
Might of the divine inspiration.
I'm awash in a sea of music
As notes riding the wave echo
Emotion's tide
Which ebbs and flows
Overwhelmingly,
Drowning me in creation's ecstasy.



Silence

Upon Ireland's castles
Ravens alight,
Dark and unnumbered
Like little deaths
As they dreamt
On the battlefield
Above the vacant stares
Of glimpsed divinity
And the fading of memory.

Tyler Larson

A New Character Sheet: Innate and Learned Attributes

by J  r  my Provost

Introduction

Let's begin with an explanation of the title of this article. I was not inspired to write this because of any incoherence in the ArM4 rules, or because of a sense that some rule had to be revised. My point of departure was the ArM3 character sheet, which did not strike me as very usable. The character sheet highlighted for me some of the underlying key features of the rules and game system: notably the definition of characters in terms of Characteristics, Abilities, Virtues and Flaws, and Hermetic Arts.

Why did the ArM3 character sheet strike me as unusable? Because the Virtues and Flaws were listed on the back of the first page, combat stats were included on the front, and magic was at the very end. I found it more useful to have Virtues and Flaws right next to Characteristics, just like Abilities (an approach later adopted for the ArM4 character sheets, but unfortunately in a style I find too modern for my taste). A few other points bothered me, such as having to list Exceptional Abilities twice, under Virtues and Flaws and under Abilities, or the fact that combat stats were still presented before magic.

Redesigning the character sheet helped me examine a number of key assumptions, and I found that I needed a powerful tool to question these and justify a new approach. This is the basis for the sub-title to this article: "Innate and Learned Abilities".

This tool proved to be the following principle: [innate potential] + [learned Ability] against an ease factor to determine success or failure. This is the principle behind ArM Ability checks (using Characteristic + Ability). As we will see shortly, I found this to be a very powerful tool for redesigning the character sheet.

I found I was able to do the following:

- Merge Characteristics and Virtues & Flaws,
- Eliminate Talents and Exceptional Skills, and
- Greatly reduce the required maths in the game in general.

Characteristics and Virtues & Flaws (V&Fs) merged

Example

This idea came from something I saw in the 4th edition rules, a tweak that managed to find its way onto many of my players' characters sheets. It's the overlap between Characteristics and Virtues & Flaws. Let's begin with an example, the hapless companion Contrario, a mercenary (+2):

Str -2 / Reserves of Strength (+2)
Sta -2 / Giant Blood (+3)
Int +3 / Simple-minded (-1)
Per +2 / Missing Eye (-1)
Pre -2 / Inspirational (+1)
Com -2 / Gossip (+2)
Dex +3 / Arthritis (-3)
Qui +3 / Enfeebled (-5)

He could be a truly interesting character, with a lot of background to explain these scores, but for each Characteristic, there is a Virtue or Flaw at odds with the assigned score. For some of the Characteristics the contradiction only applies narrowly, as in Reserves of Strength, but others are more problematic: Arthritis, for example, seems to have a broader application than as just a modifier to Dexterity.

Explaining the overlap

In essence, Characteristics and Virtues & Flaws can be complementary, but they can also conflict and overlap: Characteristics are defined as 'a given character's inborn attributes' while Virtues and Flaws are portrayed as 'unusual strengths or weaknesses'. The problem, however, is that Characteristics with scores other than 0 score are also effectively 'unusual strengths or weaknesses'!

In fact, I see Characteristics and Virtues & Flaws currently as two often-overlapping approaches to defining a character:

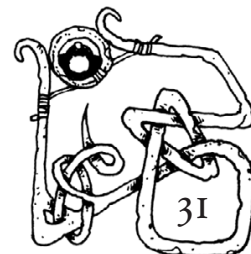
Characteristics describe the underlying attributes of the character in a comparative context, as if a major survey had been taken of a given population and the results in individual cases expressed in terms of divergences from the mean, not as features that defined the character's capabilities in a given situation. I get the impression, however, that a +1 or -1 should be far too fine a distinction for any survey-taker to notice.

Virtues & Flaws, on the other hand, describe a character's features in terms of a story — what you need to know to distinguish him from his brother on a human level (if you know them both), not expressed in terms of divergence from a mean. Virtues and Flaws may lack the broad scope over a given area of competence covered by a Characteristic, but are more specific and usable in role-play.

The problem I want to call your attention to arises when Virtues & Flaws describe something already covered by a Characteristic: the score seems inadequate and abstract compared to a human-level description (compare, for example, "Jehan has a +2 Perception", and "Jehan has Keen Vision"). In this sense, it seems right that the Characteristics should be inferred from Virtues & Flaws where possible.

V&Fs from a Characteristics perspective

If we look at Virtues & Flaws as a whole, a majority of them seem to relate only to a given Characteristic. It would seem logical then to classify Virtues & Flaws by Characteristic. However, Virtues & Flaws cover more ground than just Characteristics,





so I have devised two other categories: Personal History, and Powers.

Personal History deals with Virtues & Flaws that are not linked to a specific Characteristic, like Secret Hiding Place or Obligation, or those that bestow additional experience points, for example Fast Learner.

Powers deal with all that is supernatural, and not linked to a specific Characteristic: most of Hermetic Virtues & Flaws, and Virtues that bestow Exceptional Talents (which are innate attributes) and Knowledges.

Let's take a closer look at what Virtues & Flaws affect, setting aside Personal History and Powers for the time being.

Modifiers to whole attributes

There are actually three different cases: Virtues or Flaws like Sidhe Blood (directly affecting Characteristics), those affecting Size, Soak, and combat stats (like Dwarf), and the exceptional Characteristics (Mythic, Pathetic...).

Virtues & Flaws directly affecting Soak or Size help define Stamina, but the idea behind Mythic Characteristics is that the Characteristic is so phenomenal that it affects all the character does using this Characteristic, no matter what Skills, Knowledges, or situational specifics apply. This implies that such Virtues or Flaws not granting phenomenal Characteristics should not affect all that the character does with the affected Characteristic: V&Fs generally give a +3 bonus in specific situations, +1 or +2 not normally being seen as significant enough to warrant a whole Virtue point. This also begs the question of why Characteristic scores of +1 or +2 should be seen as significant, whereas V&Fs granting such minor bonuses are not.

Modifiers to Characteristics in special circumstances

Some examples are Sharp Ears, Piercing Gaze, Missing Hand, even Arthritis. The relevant bonuses or penalties are described on a human level, not just as modifiers to a Characteristic.

Which leads to an uncomfortable thought: the Ars Magica system is founded on [innate potential] + [learned ability] versus a level of difficulty. Under current 4th edition rules, a test for hearing, for example, would be Perception + modifier for Sharp Ears + Awareness versus Ease Factor. This translates to [innate Perception] + [innate Sharp Ears] + [learned Awareness]. Well, [innate Sharp Ears] should be sufficient for the "innate potential" part of the formula.

Modifiers to Abilities

These include Knacks, Cautious, or those Virtues granting access to specific Abilities. Because each Ability description mentions the Characteristics most often used with it, it is then easy to classify Abilities by Characteristic, and thus the V&Fs that grant modifiers to these Abilities as well.

Conclusion: Reasons to classify V&Fs by Characteristic

It's simpler than current 4th edition rules classification.

We should avoid adding two types of innate attributes (Characteristic + modifier from V&F) to the formula. One is sufficient.

Only Mythic Characteristics should modify all checks within their range of significance.

Modifiers of less than +/- 3 are not significant to a die roll.

Non Mythic Characteristics can be described by V&Fs applying a significant modifier (± 3) in restricted circumstances.

Most V&Fs would each relate to one Characteristic only.

V&Fs classified

Now let's classify the Virtues & Flaws from the 4th edition core rules:

Abilities-related: Knacks, Cautious with Ability, Learn from Mistakes.

Affecting whole Characteristics: Mythic, Incredible, Great, Pathetic, Feeble, Poor.

Intelligence:

- (Related Abilities: Concentration, Academic Skills, Knowledges)
- Virtues: Method Caster, Adept Student, Free Study, Inventive Genius, Cautious Sorcerer, Book Learner, Carefree, Clear Thinker, Common Sense, Educated, Further Education, Strong-Willed, Well-Traveled, Intuition, Fast Learner, Visual Eidetic Memory
- Flaws: Creative Block, Poor Reader, Poor Student, Unimaginative Learner, Compulsion, Delusion, Hatred, Obsessed, Poor Memory, Short Attention Span, Simple-Minded, Uncommon Fear, Weakness, Weak-Willed, Common Fear, Terrors, Fury, Sense of Doom

Perception:

- (Related Abilities: Awareness, Bows, Crossbows, Thrown Weapon, Hunt, Survival)
- Virtues: Keen Vision, Light Sleeper, Sharp Ears
- Flaws: Deep Sleeper, Missing Ear, Missing Eye, Poor Eyesight, Poor Hearing, Blind

Strength:

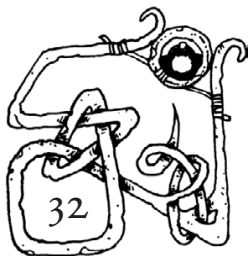
- Virtues: Reserves of Strength

Stamina:

- (Related Abilities: Athletics, Climb, Combat Skills)
- Virtues: Immunities, Berserk, Enduring Constitution, Large, Long-Winded, Rapid Convalescence, Tough, Versatile Sleeper, Giant Blood
- Flaws: Fragile Constitution, Decrepit, Small Frame, Dwarf, Enfeebled

Presence:

- Virtues: Hermetic Prestige, Quaesitor, all Social Class Virtues, Social Contacts,



Well-Known, Famous, Temporal Influence, Protection

- Flaws: Hedge Wizard, Infamous Master, Discredited Lineage, all Social Class Flaws, Outsider, Bad Reputation, Black Sheep, Infamous

Communication:

- (Related Abilities: Charm, Folk Ken, Guile, Sing, Storytelling, Social Skills, Animal Handling)
- Virtues: Gentle Gift, Busybody, Faerie Upbringing, Free Expression, Inspirational, Reckless, Self-Confident, Strong Personality, Venus' Blessing, Enchanting Music, Gossip, Piercing Gaze
- Flaws: Blatant Gift, Incomprehensible, Disfigured, Evil Eye, Hunchback, Judged Unfairly, Low Self-Esteem, Magical Air, Meddler, Offensive to Animals, Oversensitive, Reclusive, Social Handicap, Soft-Hearted, Tainted With Evil, Curse of Venus, Overconfident, Sheltered Upbringing, Feral Upbringing, Mute

Dexterity:

- (Related Abilities: Jongleur, Play (Instrument), Ride, Swim, Work Skills)
- Virtues: Strong Writer, Ambidextrous, Perfect Balance, Jack-of-All-Trades, Light Touch
- Flaws: Weak Writer, Clumsy, Lamé, Missing Hand, Arthritis

Quickness:

- Virtues: Fast Caster, Lightning Reflexes
- Flaws: Slow Caster, Obese

Personal History:

- Virtues: Secret Vis Source, Magic Item, Animal Companion, Beginning Vis, Close Family Ties, Good Armaments, Heir, Higher Purpose, Indentured Servant, Prestigious Family, Secret Hiding Place, Troupe Upbringing, True Friend, Veteran, Blackmail, Faerie Friend, Indulgences, Training, Magical Animal Companion, Mentor, Patron, Superior Armaments, True Love, Highly Trained, Relic, Wealth, Destiny, Quality Armaments, Ways of the Land
- Flaws: No Sigil, Tormenting Master, Vis Obligation, Old, Cursed, Enemies, Vow, Dark Secret, Dependent, Driving Goal, Dutybound, Expenses, Favors, Infamous Family, Lost Love, Oath of Fealty, Obligation, Poor Armaments, Diabolic Upbringing, Noncombatant, Poor

Powers:

- Virtues: Cyclic Magic (positive), Follower of Bjornaer, Magical Affinity, Deft Art, Extra Arts, Extra Spells, Faerie Magic, Mastered Spells, Special Circumstances, Quiet Magic, Side Effect, Student of Faerie, Subtle Magic, Enduring Magic, Life-Linked Spontaneous Magic, Elementalist, Silent Magic, Purifying Touch, Alchemy, Animal Ken, Contortions, Direction Sense, Dousing, Empathy, Healer, Herbalism, Magic Sensitivity, Mimicry, Premonitions, Read Lips, Second Sight, Sense

Holiness and Unholiness, Weather Sense, Hex, Latent Magic Ability, Luck, Skinchanger, Visions, Withstand Magic, Charmed Life, Guardian Angel, True Faith, Divination, Entrancement, Ghostly Warder, Magic Resistance

- Flaws: Cyclic Magic (negative), Deleterious Circumstances, Magical Deficiency, Poor Formulaic Magic, Disjointed Magic, Flawed Parma Magica, Follower of Verditius, Incompatible Arts, Loose Magic, Necessary Condition, No Familiar, Twilight Points, Warped Magic, Clumsy Magic, Lack of Concentration, Lack of Control, Limited Magic Resistance, Rigid Magic, Short-Lived Magic, Stingy Master, Weak Magic, Magic Addiction, Painful Magic, Study Requirements, Weak Parma Magica, Chaotic Magic, Susceptibility to (Supernatural Power), Unpredictable Magic, Non-Spontaneity, Personal Magic, Unstructured Caster, Faerie Enmity, Magic Susceptibility, Haunted, Lycanthrope, Plagued by (Supernatural Entity), Age Quickly

Remarks about the classification

The Presence / Communication overlap

I have grouped all social-related V&Fs under Presence (Reputations should be as well), and innate attributes under Communication (as Personality Traits should be), as Presence describes a character broadly whereas Communication is for one-to-one interactions.

Characteristics without many V&Fs

Very few V&Fs relate to Quickness and Strength. This is understandable for Quickness as it is a rarely used Characteristic in day-to-day life, applying normally only in stress situations. This is even more true for Strength, as day-to-day work relies more on Stamina, and rarely on Strength alone (Basque stonemasons, for example, could be an exception).

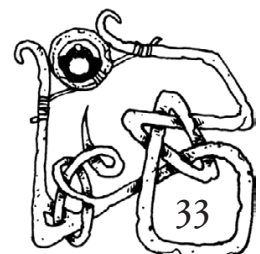
Conclusion: Character Creation revised

In fact, I don't have a whole new system to propose here. One could use the ArM4 rules and my new Character Sheet with minimal change by, for example, listing the character's V&Fs by Characteristic.

But this would involve ignoring some of the reasons outlined for this new classification: such as not having to add two components to determine "Innate Ability" in the formula, or the idea that Characteristics should be defined in terms of Virtues and Flaws. The most irritating feature of the current system appears most obvious in our sample character for whom the score in a Characteristic can be negated by a Virtue or Flaw applying specifically to that Characteristic.

A Radical Approach: eliminating Characteristics

The most radical solution would be to dispense with Characteristic scores, leaving Characteristics as





categories for Virtues and Flaws. These Virtues and Flaws already supply enough modifiers to describe the innate aspects of a character.

According to this radical approach, an important character (such as a player mage) would only have to choose Virtues and Flaws and would not have to determine Characteristic scores.

There is no requirement to eliminate all Characteristics, however, and other approaches are possible.

Modular Characteristics

Characteristics do have the advantage of permitting a quick overall view of a character, whereas a list of Virtues and Flaws might be too detailed for this purpose. Furthermore, it would take longer to create a character from Virtues and Flaws alone than it would using Characteristics by themselves without Virtues and Flaws.

If, for example, I simply wanted to create a group of grogs from a given covenant for combat purposes, why take the time to focus on Virtues and Flaws? Only the Characteristic scores need be used. Similarly, quick character design only requires Characteristic scores and can ignore Virtues and Flaws.

For example, the standard Val Negra grog could be Int 0, Per 0, Str +1, Sta +1, Pre 0, Com -2, Dex 0, Qui 0.

Some grogs could then be described with a bit more detail. All this would involve would be the replacement of one or more Characteristic score with Virtues and Flaws classified as relating to those Characteristics.

For example:

One grog could be more curious than the others: Int 0, Per 0, Str +1, Sta +1, Pre 0, Com: Magical Air, Sheltered Upbringing, Personality Trait: Curious, Dex 0, Qui 0.

The Characteristic score has been replaced by Virtues and Flaws offering more detailed modifiers to Communication.

Alternative Approach: determining scores from V&Fs

This would require a new approach to the Virtue and Flaw descriptions. For example, the costs of the Virtues and Flaws for a given Characteristic could be added up to determine the relevant score, either directly or according to the pyramidal function.

Replacing Characteristic point allocation

I think this is a Munchkin issue. In previous editions, Munchkins could chose high Characteristic scores where they wanted them, and then use Virtues and Flaws to reinforce those aspects of their characters. With this approach, this kind of abuse is no longer possible.

Here are a few suggestions (I don't know if they belong as "core" Ars features as some fans will probably howl in protest when reading them. Let's just consider them useful "house" rules, something to think about):

Under the current system, magi don't spend Virtue points for being magi (as a Social Class). They

can enhance their status with Hermetic Prestige or hamper it with Hedge Wizard, for example, but it only affects their status with respect to other magi, not commoners. Then, they all have the Educated and Arcane Lore Virtues for free, and the Magical Air Flaw as well (plus their powers).

On the other hand, simply being a merchant or a knight, for a Companion, requires Virtue points. If we compare two Companions, this implies that the higher one is on the social ladder, the fewer other Virtues one can have, unless more Flaws are taken on to equilibrate.

Mythically speaking, it should be the contrary. If you are a knight, you are "better" than a merchant, who is "better" than a slave. One could also argue that all humans are equal, and that Social Class should not make one better or lesser.

This is why I do not think Social Class should be bought with Virtue or Flaw points. Agone RPG grants free points for the Social Class, for example.

Another little tweak, from the Amber RPG: players should not feel obliged to balance the costs of Virtues and Flaws, but would get Good or Bad Karma depending on their choices... For example, I have a mage in my saga who is clearly superior to the others, but he always suffers the brunt of each adventure, and is always being disturbed in the lab for one reason or another.

Doing away with Talents and Exceptional Skills

Exceptional Abilities: too much like supernatural skills

Under current ArM4 rules, some Virtues grant access to specific Exceptional Abilities with an initial score of 1 that can then be improved using story points or practice as per other Abilities.

But most Exceptional Abilities are simply supernatural. According to some folk beliefs, children could see faeries when adults could not; or a witch could cast a Hex more effectively during a full moon. In Brittany, Second Sight is possessed by those who have accidentally not been christened as well as by those that have found a four-leaf clover, an ear of grain with 7 seeds, or a grain which has passed through the mill without grinding or that has escaped from a pot uncooked.

In addition, to a medieval peasant, the not-so-supernatural Exceptional Abilities might just as well be supernatural, even if not so for modern players. In fact, an inventive Storyguide could make great use of this different approach in his saga.

The Concept of "Powers"

Let's look at a few definitions from ArM4:

- Talents are 'untrained but intuitive capabilities'. In other words, they are innate attributes of a character. As Talents are Abilities, a Characteristic modifier is added to the Talent score when making a roll, for example Pre + Entrancement + d10 to influence someone.



This follows the standard formula (innate potential) + (learned Ability) + d10 vs. ease factor. But if Talents are innate attributes, the formula becomes (innate potential) + (innate power) + d10 vs. ease factor. As with V&Fs, Characteristics and Talents overlap, as they are both a way of describing innate attributes of a character.

- Knowledges are 'Abilities that require application of the mind rather than the body, so they almost always use Intelligence as a modifier.'
- Magical Arts 'represent your aptitude for working with the various types of magic. But Arts are not merely Knowledges; your Arts are ultimately ways your very being expresses magical energy'.

Exceptional Talents could be better described as representing 'your aptitude for working with [the various types of] magic' rather than as 'untrained but intuitive capabilities'.

Exceptional Knowledges, also, are better described with this than 'Abilities that require application of the mind'.

Moreover, according to our classification of V&Fs by Characteristic, all the V&Fs that grant access to Exceptional Abilities could be described as "Powers". Let's classify the Hermetic Arts and Exceptional Abilities as 'Powers', i.e. in one category instead of two. And as we already have V&Fs listed in the 'Powers' section, why bother to list them again under Abilities?

Doing away with Talents

If supernatural Abilities are dealt with under Powers, only Arcane Talents and General Talents are left. Arcane Talents, as innate attributes, should also be treated as Powers. But what about General Talents? Athletics and Climb are purely physical, and are not innate: they should be Skills. But Awareness, Charm, Folk Ken, Guile and Concentration, are not considered Skills that can be improved easily. In fact, these are more or less innate attributes which could be seen as supernatural by a medieval peasant. Therefore, they would be better as Powers. No more Talents!

Conclusion: Rules for Powers

Now there are Abilities on one side, and Powers (former supernatural abilities, and Magical Arts) on the other side. Abilities can grow using the 4th edition experience rules (Story Experience, Training, Practice, Exposure, and the various studies of texts for Knowledges), but what about Powers?

As I said before, Powers are more elusive than Abilities, so I think we should

use the system described in The Mysteries, Initiation Points and Ordeals, instead of Experience Points. Initiation Points can be gained in many ways: using Story Points, gaining Flaws, working under someone, losing Confidence, etc.

Magical Arts are a special case amongst the Powers: a magus can study Hermetic texts, or study vis, under the 4th edition rules. As Powers, the Arts should grow using Initiation Points, but these Hermetic teaching techniques should be preserved: other Powers should not use them, as they are not so well understood and developed as Hermetic Magic.

Conclusion: the new Character Sheet (example)

You can download a blank character sheet on *Hermes Portal's* web site.

Ars Magica																																																																																																	
Name	Aidan the Traveller	Year Born	1193	Size	0																																																																																												
Player	Loriel	Current Year	1220	Decrepitude	0																																																																																												
Covenant	Gavrinis	Age	27	Confidence	3																																																																																												
Saga	Brittany's edge	Gender	Male	Current Score	3																																																																																												
Virtues & Flaws			Skills & Knowledges																																																																																														
Intelligence - Educated (+1) & Arcane Lore (+1) (0 as magi) - Well-Traveled (+1) - Obsession (-1) - Pax Magica Perception - - Strength / Stamina - Small Frame (-3) - Presence - Redcap (+1) - Cabal Legacy - Pillar of Hiram (-1) - Communication - Piercing Gaze (+2), Inspirational (+1) - Personality Traits : calm, imperious - Social Handicap (0 as magi) - view all as equals - Magical Air (-1) (0 as magi) Dexterity / Vivacity - Jack-of-All-Trades (+2) - Personal History - Secret Hiding Place (+1) - Secret Vis Source (+1) - Obligation (-2) - Mercere duties			<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Name</th> <th>Specialty</th> <th>Score</th> <th>Exp.</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr><td>Magic Theory</td><td>potions</td><td>4</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Hermes Lore</td><td>geography</td><td>3</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Parma Magica</td><td>Ignem</td><td>2</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Scribe Latin</td><td>copying</td><td>3</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Language: Latin</td><td>hermetic</td><td>5</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Language: Oc</td><td>grog</td><td>4</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Pillar of Hiram Lore</td><td>history</td><td>2</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Legend Lore</td><td>mountains</td><td>3</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Awareness</td><td>alertness</td><td>3</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Brawling</td><td>knives</td><td>2</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Certamen</td><td></td><td>1</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Leadership</td><td>grog</td><td>2</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Survival</td><td>mountains</td><td>3</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> </tbody> </table>			Name	Specialty	Score	Exp.	Magic Theory	potions	4		Hermes Lore	geography	3		Parma Magica	Ignem	2		Scribe Latin	copying	3		Language: Latin	hermetic	5		Language: Oc	grog	4		Pillar of Hiram Lore	history	2		Legend Lore	mountains	3		Awareness	alertness	3		Brawling	knives	2		Certamen		1		Leadership	grog	2		Survival	mountains	3																																					
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Omnibus Grimoire

Scroll V: Herbam

by Andrew Gronosky

Esteemed Colleagues of the Order,

Once again, I am pleased to present to you this, the fifth scroll in my omnibus collection of lesser-known spells from the libraries and grimoires of the Order. As is, I hope, now well-known, I am in the process of assembling a grimoire in ten scrolls, one for each Form of magic. It is my humble aspiration that this Grimoire will help to preserve certain obscure or unpopular spells from being forgotten, and perhaps even stimulate renewed interest in exchanging spells among covenants and magi.

This scroll is concerned with the Form of Herbam, an Art which is doubly useful. It can affect both living plants and trees, which are found everywhere out of doors, and items made of dead wood, which are equally common indoors and out. I have endeavoured to provide a balance of spells relating to living plants and spells relating to wooden objects, since both are likely to be of wide interest.

Several highly effective Herbam spells are rated at the third magnitude or below, making Herbam a beneficial art even for the non-specialist. In a slight departure from my usual emphasis on low-magnitude spells, this scroll makes a point of including three spells of sixth magnitude and higher. I believe these higher-magnitude spells illustrate that the power of Herbam is not limited to simple spells affecting single objects or plants.

May these spells reach you in good health, and prove useful to you in your studies and travels.

Your colleague and servant,
JARIUS OF HOUSE MERLERE

Creo Herbam

Conjure the Mystic Staff (CrHe 4)

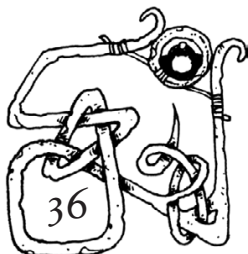
R: Touch, D: Sun/Inst, T: Small

Spell Focus: A twig (+1)

Create an unshod wooden staff. The type of wood, and any carvings or shaping of the staff, are determined by your Wizard's Sigil. The staff is suitable for use as a weapon, as a spell focus, or as a projectile for spells such as *Tangle of the Wood and Thorns* (ArM4 p. 133) or *Piercing Shaft of Wood* (ArM4 p. 132). If using the spell focus, the twig grows into the staff and the staff reverts back to twig form when the spell ends.

This spell was more popular in bygone days than it is today, for at one time a wizard's staff commanded awe and respect from mundanes. Alas, it is often more advisable these days to keep a low profile rather than to cut an imposing figure.

Design: Create wood, Level 15. Reduce Range from Near to Touch (-2 magnitudes) and reduce Target from Individual to Small (-1 magnitude).



Ladder of the Climbing Vines (CrHe 15)

R: Near, D: Sun/Perm, T: Group

Spell Focus: A sprig of ivy from the wall of a building (+2)

A group of climbing vines sprout from the ground and quickly grow up the side of any wall, cliff, tree, or other large object. The vines attach themselves to the surface and are firmly anchored. They do no damage to trees or structures, but are quite easy to climb (requiring a Str + Climb + Enc roll of 6+) — hence the name of this spell. The vines are strong enough to bear the weight of four men climbing at once.

Design: Similar to *Conjure the Sturdy Vine* but with Target increased to Group (+1 magnitude).

Conjure the Sturdy Planks (CrHe 20)

R: Reach, D: Sun/Inst, T: Group

Spell Focus: A carpenter's saw (+1)

Create a stack of about a dozen broad, sturdy hardwood planks, each somewhat longer than a man. Adventuring magi can find many uses for these planks, provided their grogs are industrious: barricading doors, bridging narrow gaps, building small lean-tos, and even burning as firewood.

This spell originated among magi who emigrated to Iceland and the Orkney Islands, where timber is scarce.

Design: Create wood, Level 15. Increase Target to Group (+1 magnitude).

Intellego Herbam

Carpenter's Keen Eye (InHe 5)

R: Touch/Sight, D: Momentary, T: Individual

Spell Focus: A carpenter's ruler (+1)

Learn the mundane properties of a piece of non-living wood you examine: its suppleness, the fineness of its grain, any hidden knots or weak spots, etc. This knowledge can give you a +3 bonus to certain Craft rolls, such as when you are making a bow stave or a musical instrument. It can also help you evaluate the quality of wooden items.

Design: Learn all the mundane properties of wood, Level 10. Reduce Duration from Concentration to Momentary (-1 magnitude).

Eyes of the Peerless Stalker (InHe 35)

R: Personal, D: Concentration, T: Sight

Spell Focus: The eye of an eagle (+3)

Make your eyesight unhindered by foliage and undergrowth. Nothing can hide from you by taking cover in leaves or bushes, but this spell does not enable you to see through the trunks of grown trees.

This spell is popular among magi of House Bjornaer, particularly those whose heart-beasts are predators that hunt by sight.

Design: No guideline exists for making one's senses unhindered by plants, but there is an Intellego Terram guideline of Level 20 to make your senses unhindered by earth. Reduce Range to Personal (-1 magnitude) and increase Target to Sight (+4 magnitudes).

Whispers of the Trees (InHe 50)

R: Special, D: Concentration, T: Group

Spell Focus: A lock of hair from a dryad (+5)

You can eavesdrop on the conversations of trees within earshot, understanding the speech within what ordinarily sounds like the wind rustling their leaves. Trees usually discuss the weather and announce the presence of fires or lumberjacks. They care little for the day-to-day affairs of animals or humans, but they might also take an interest in events of mystical importance. Trees in magical or faerie areas are more perceptive than those in mundane areas, while those in Dominion areas are sleepy and converse much less. This spell only allows you to understand the whispers of the trees, not to reply to them.

Design: Speak with a plant, Level 25. Range is equivalent to Sight (+4 magnitudes). Increase Target to Group (+1 magnitude).

Muto Herbam

Tool of Infinite Convenience (MuHe 15)

R: Reach, D: Sun, T: Individual

Spell Focus: A whittling knife (+1)

Transform one wooden object into another of the same size or smaller. Thus, a door could be reshaped into a table, a staff into a bow stave, or a wand into a wooden spoon. Magical items transformed in this way still function but they may be difficult to activate while in their new forms. With a Terram casting requisite, one can also transform items that have metal parts: a hoe could be made into a short spear, or a pickaxe into a shovel. Since the spell works at Reach range, one could also transform an opponent's wooden weapon into something harmless, like a paddle. Int + Finesse rolls are required to make complicated new shapes.

This spell was invented by Clementis of House Verditiis, who was awarded a special prize by his Primus for ingenuity.

Design: Change a wooden item, Level 5. Increase Range to Reach (+1 magnitude) and Target to Individual (+1 magnitude).

Growth of the Impenetrable Thicket (MuHe 25)

R: Near, D: Sun/Perm, T: Special

Spell Focus: A willow twig (+1)

Cause an existing area of undergrowth to grow into an incredibly dense, tangled thicket. A human can push his or her way through with a Strength roll of 6+, but that allows progress at the rate of only one pace per round. Hacking one's way through with an axe or large knife is not any faster, but it allows one to move without making a Strength roll. This spell is useful both to trap opponents and to escape from them by placing a dense barrier in their path.

The spell focus, a willow twig, is from a fast-growing plant.

Design: Change a plant, Level 5. Increase Range to Near (+2 magnitudes). Target is equivalent to Room (+2 magnitudes).

Perdo Herbam

Smite the Faeries of the Wood (PeHe General)

R: Near, D: Instant, T: Individual

Spell Focus: An iron dagger (+5)

Weaken and possibly destroy a faerie of the wood. Roll a quality die + this spell's level - 10. For every point by which you exceed the target's Might, it loses one point of Might. Should the spell reduce the target's Might to zero or below, the faerie vanishes. Whether it is forever destroyed, or eventually reforms from Nature after a long period of time, is not known.

This spell was once fairly well-known, but has been almost lost in recent years through the efforts of certain magi of House Merinita and sympathetic Quaesitores. These magi have taken it upon themselves to suppress copying and dissemination of this spell on the grounds that molesting the fae is forbidden by the Code.

Although this humble archivist is not an expert on Hermetic law, it is evident to me that many spells could be abused to violate the Code, but this alone does not make the spells illegal. The strongest protest I can make against this kind of censorship is to disseminate this spell as part of my Grimoire. I pray the reader to forgive my presumptuousness in making a political statement through this Grimoire, and remind him to uphold the Code and its stricture against molesting faeries. This spell is to be used only for scholarly study (or perhaps in self-defense).

Design: Similar to *Demon's Eternal Oblivion* with a +1 magnitude adjustment because the base Target of Perdo Herbam is smaller than the base Target of Perdo Vim.

Shiver the Arrows in Flight (PeHe 20)

R: Near, D: Instant, T: Group

Destroy a group of arrows as they fly within Near range of you, fragmenting them to harmless splinters. The arrows must all belong to a cohesive group, such as a single volley fired by a formation of archers. If the arrows come from multiple, unconnected sources, only a few of them will be destroyed (determine randomly). You may cast this spell ahead of time and hold it ready (by concentrating) until someone fires arrows in your direction.

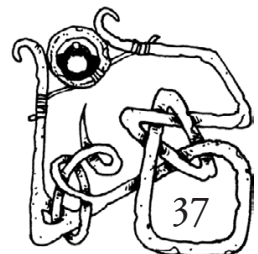
This spell is the brainchild of an unknown Flambeau magus, who used it to protect his Spanish allies from Moorish arrows while fighting in the Reconquista.

Design: Destroy an amount of wood, Level 5. Increase Range to Near (+1 magnitudes) and increase Target to Group (+2 magnitudes). No magnitude adjustment was applied for allowing this spell to be held until needed, because the base Duration for Perdo Herbam is already much longer than Concentration.

Weed the Wizard's Garden (PeHe 30)

R: Reach, D: Instant, T: Boundary

Spell Focus: A sickle (+2)





Requisite: Intellego

Destroy certain plants within the target Boundary. When you cast this spell, you may choose to destroy all plants of a single variety, all of several varieties, or all except for certain varieties. Thus, you could cast this spell on a garden and kill all the plants except for those you had planted there. This spell is powerful enough to kill grown trees, so can be used for clearing land as well as merely weeding a garden.

Design: Destroy a plant, Level 10. Increase Target to Boundary (+4 magnitudes). Add Intellego requisite to kill only varieties of plants the caster wishes.

Rego Herbam

Protection of the Invisible Shield-Bearer (ReHe 5)

R: Reach, D: Concentration, T: Small

Animate a shield to defend you. The shield gives you a Defense score equal to your Quickness + Finesse + the shield's Dfn bonus. You must maintain concentration on the shield for it to protect you. This spell is usually better than simply strapping the shield to your arm because magi often have low Combat Abilities, but respectable Finesse scores. This spell works on bucklers, round shields, and kite shields, but not on tower shields (the latter are too large). Improvised wooden objects — platters, shutters, and so forth — may be used with Dfn bonuses assigned by the storyguide.

Design: Control an amount of wood, Level 5.

Cloak of Concealing Greenery (ReHe 15)

R: Reach, D: Concentration/Sun, T: Group

Spell Focus: A green cloak (+1)

Cause plants and trees nearby to quietly gather around you, covering you with their leaves so you remain hidden. The concealment gives a +6 bonus to Hide rolls. This spell only works where there is sufficient foliage in which to hide, and it is ineffective against *Eyes of the Peerless Stalker*, above.

Design: Control an amount of wood, Level 5. Increase Target to Group (+2 magnitudes).

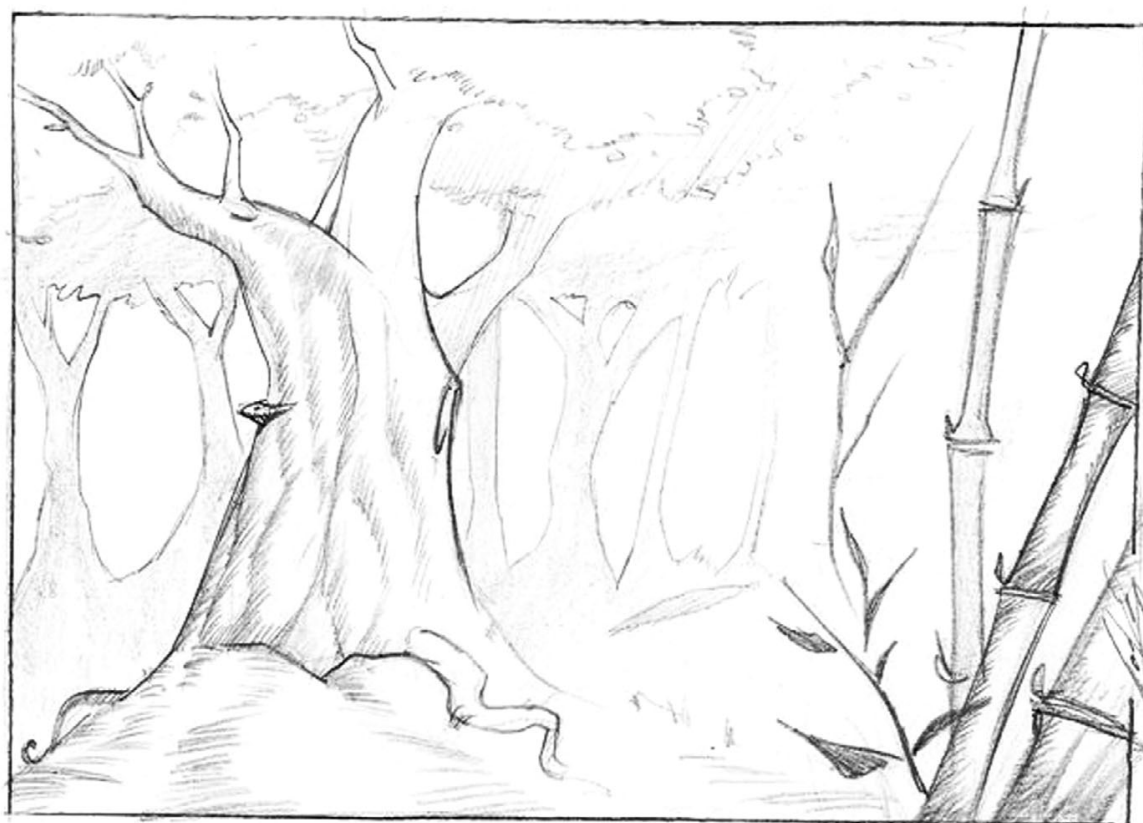
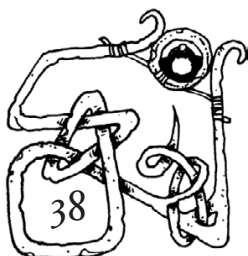
Passage Through the Green Tunnel (ReHe 20)

R: Reach, D: Concentration/Sun, T: Group

Spell Focus: A hatchet (+2)

Cause plants to bend out of your way, allowing you easy passage through normal thickets and brambles. This spell does not work on magical barriers such as *Growth of the Impenetrable Thicket* or *Wall of Thorns*. You still leave footprints on the ground, but you do not leave such traces as broken branches. This may make you more difficult to track, at the storyguide's discretion. You may bring one other person with you if he or she follows immediately behind you.

Design: Control an amount of wood, Level 5. Increase Target to Group (+2 magnitudes). Add additional +1 magnitude because the Target of the spell moves with you — new plants fall under the influence of the spell as you walk.



Stories in the Chinese Style

by Timothy Ferguson

A note from the author: I'd like to thank my co-authors in the Mythic Cathay project, Steve Saunders and Michael Schloss, for their support. I'd also like to thank Erik Dahl and Alexander White for prodding me until I tidied this up for publication. Oh, and Adam and Jeremiah, for comments and advice.

Chinese stories contain common elements, which, if included in your stories, will give your saga a different flavour to traditional Ars Magica games.

Interconnectedness

The Chinese don't divide their supernatural figures into discrete realms in the way Mythic Europeans do. Humans, even animals, can become gods, joining those deities which pre-existed creation. Foreign gods can be given roles in the Celestial Bureaucracy, so that they become attuned to Chinese civilisation. The lords of the Chinese Hells are also attuned to the Celestial Bureaucracy, so they aren't evil, or opposed to Harmony, although some are cruel.

Hermetic magi are likely to want to cast spells on these creatures which classify them within western Realms. Their Might scores are marked in both Chinese and European form.

Where are all the monsters?

Many of the supernatural enemies characters will fight in China are spirits, definable as being of a certain class, but beyond that, completely individual. The bestiary for Mythic Cathay (HP, issue #11) describes classes of creature, but the storyguide should ensure that each member of that class is clearly distinct from its fellows, except in the few cases where creatures are interchangeable, for example minor warrior spirits.

Constructing stories for the cunning

Evangelical Buddhists wrote many Chinese stories, which alters the role of the hero from that which players may expect. It is wrong for a Buddhist to kill; even if the creature they are annihilating is absolutely evil. Further, it's wrong for Buddhists to fight evil, since that is striving and is therefore itself mistaken. Buddhist heroes often trick, capture or convert their opponents.

In Journey to the West, for example, Sun the Monkey Spirit makes war on Heaven and creates such disharmony that the Buddha imprisons him. After a thousand years he is released to serve the monk Tripitaka. Tripitaka's companions rarely kill their enemies, always preferring to fight them to exhaustion, and then convert them to Buddhism.

Monkey eventually finds enlightenment, becoming the Buddha Victorious in Strife.

Heaven did try to kill Monkey, but success would have done little good. His spirit would simply have been reborn, possibly embodied as powerfully as before, but even more degenerate. The Buddha demonstrated wisdom, by imprisoning the Equal of Heaven until he was ready to find enlightenment and add to Harmony.

Enemies you should talk to

One of the most important features of Monkey's story is that his enemies are evil, not simply dangerous animals. To be evil requires the ability to make immoral decisions. Evil characters can be reasoned with. Generally, player characters will be aligned to the Civilised aura, and will tame their enemies by demonstrating that were they too to become civilised, then solutions could be found to their problems. A recurring theme in Monkey's story is that evil is unnecessary, but sometimes a wise man is needed to demonstrate why.

Solutions that don't involve murder

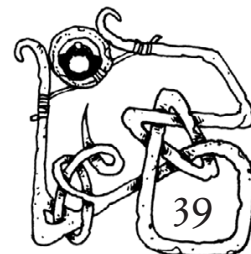
The enemies of evangelical Buddhists often represent the danger of obsession. They are made evil by a vice they dare not surrender. The non-violent way of dealing with these enemies is demonstrating to them the futility of their vices. "Journey to the West" emphasises this idea. The hog-spirit, Pigsy, is bothering a family for food and a wife, but is shown that if he gives away these things and leads a spiritual life, he can rise above his bestial nature and re-enter Heaven. A king who is oppressing Buddhists ceases to when shown he need not fear the power of three despotic Taoist magicians. The pilgrims reveal that the persecutors are only animal spirits with minor powers, by tricking them into committing suicide.

Trickery and deception

Monkey is charming because he's deceptive. His quick tongue lets him get away with many kinds of mischief. His illusions allow him to surprise his enemies. His habit of turning up at the palace of the Goddess of Mercy, then complaining bitterly until she makes his task easier, strikes a chord with many readers. Player characters should follow Sun's example. Many Chinese Spirits resist magic, but few are as nimble-minded as a party of Hermetic magi.

Inconclusive Combat

Monkey is one of the finest fighters in the world. Superhumanly strong, magically armed, impervious to damage and able to conjure armies of monkeys, he drives all before him. Such is his skill, and desire for combat, that it draws him away from the true path. Kuan Yin places an ensorcelled helmet upon him, so that if Tripitaka chants a certain sutra, he must stop fighting because of headaches. Player characters lack his advantages, but often face similar situations, in that they have inconclusive combat with their enemies.





In confrontations like these, a few minor demons and a handful of grogs die, and the main parties taunt each other. They clarify the reason behind the villain's opposition to the characters, and provide hints toward the story's true resolution. Even on those rare occasions when the solution is simply to keep fighting the enemy until he falls over, inconclusive initial clashes often demonstrate the need for a special weapon or stratagem, to exploit a weakness that has been accidentally revealed.

Yearning for love

Many Chinese stories relate the impossible romances between scholars and ghosts, fox spirits or goddesses. The studious youth is the usual beau of one of these creatures, so Hermetic magi, who have a cultural disinterest in marriage and children, or Hermetic apprentices, on the cusp of choosing the cerebral lifestyle of their masters, are perfect targets for star-crossed love. It's notable that the authors of these sorts of stories were often themselves scholars, rebelling against social conventions, such as arranged marriage, which they found stifling.

Rebellion

Although Chinese writers valued order, they understood the dramatic necessity of conflict. Their stories often contain heroes who rebel against their society, but do so to end corrupt or oppressive practices. They are rebels who favour harmony, casting down despotic emperors so that Heaven's will can be served.

Self-sacrifice

Chinese heroes die a lot more often than their counterparts in modern fantasy literature. The genre makes some allowance for this, in that many heroes have sons or brothers who can take up their task. Chinese heroes are expected to persevere, sacrificing

comfort and status to overcome their enemy by attrition.

The moral

Chinese stories are designed to teach the reader how to live correctly. They have a far stronger moral emphasis than many *Ars Magica* sagas, which reflect the conventions familiar to those who read modern fantasy literature for pleasure. One way of enforcing this convention is to grant experience points only after the players describe what their characters have learned during the story. A pithy aphorism is the best way of expressing this newfound wisdom.

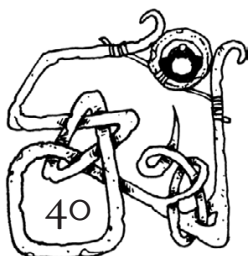
Story design checklist

Storyguides writing stories for characters in China should remember these key points.

- Enemies should be redeemable; a method of converting or capturing them should exist.
- Characters should be given the opportunity of making their tasks easier using deception and trickery.
- Characters should usually be able to retreat before the enemy to rework plans, usually because spirits are bound to certain geographical features.
- Chinese villains are generally not suicidal, but their tie to the landscape sometimes makes retreat impossible. This makes converting them simpler.
- Violent confrontation should occur in phases, with characters able to discern information as a result of inconclusive, early encounters.
- Pining for women beyond one's reach is traditional.
- Even rebellion serves Harmony.
- Characters, especially grogs, will die more often than usual, but will have similar brothers and sons who continue their quests.
- The story must have a moral. Wise old men, arriving just in time to narrate the moral before the story ends, appear even in Taoist holy texts.

Fighting to a standstill

Many of the local gods magi fight in China have excellent magic resistance and high Soak scores, but weak offensive powers. This is why so many spirits carry magical weapons. Such creatures understand the importance of massed attacks, distraction and fatigue when fighting spell casters. This is one of the reasons why those represented in Chinese cinema have so many underlings. Why the underlings only attack one at a time is not absolutely clear, since it is probably a holdover from acrobatic theatrical performances. From the storyguide's perspective it has the advantages of: making the combat easy to describe and quantify; extending the combat to burn fatigue; allowing the characters to exchange information in the form of taunts and allowing the player characters to describe the sorts of weird moves their martial artists are performing.



Mythic Cathay: Popular beliefs

by Timothy Ferguson

Religion

Chinese religion is usually practised as a conglomeration of the three great faiths, Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, with added lashings of animist, regional folklore. This theological mélange is called folk or popular religion. In popular religion, the divinities of all three faiths co-operate, and a worshipper can flit between pantheons, as the need or desire arises.

Popular religion is directly functional, and is observed as a duty. Minor gods who don't help supplicants are rapidly replaced by those who will. Major gods whose worship is neglected are expected to punish, much as a nobleman would if defrauded of taxes. The idea that each supplicant is personally beloved of the Supreme Being is entirely absent, as is the idea that those who are contrite will automatically be forgiven. Shen are useful in a way similar to the saints of the West. They might be able to arrange a favour for you, if the smooth running of the Celestial Clockwork provides sufficient leeway.

Words with baggage

The way many people in the modern West conceive of the idea of religion has been influenced by the Christian hegemony. When playing Chinese characters, it's important to remember that although we translate many terms from Chinese into more familiar ones from the Christian legacy, the meanings of those terms are not the same. A Chinese character considering religion doesn't usually think within the Western tradition. In some sagas it is useful to use Chinese religious terms, instead of the English translations, so that players can leave behind their preconceptions of how they should respond to saints (shen) gods (also shen), demons (guei) and the undead (kuei).

Magic and prayer

The Chinese often perform magic and prayer together, using similar rituals, so that the line between them blurs. For game purposes, magic and prayer are divided by coercion. Magicians force outcomes, by controlling magical forces or compelling spirits. Prayer is a non-binding request for a favour from spirits. Although later sections provide game mechanics for prayer and magic, which may appear similar and contain random elements, attitudinally, characters approach prayer and magic differently.

Most sagas told in China will assume that, in some sense, popular religion reflects the truth. In part, this is because sorcerous powers gained from secret rituals are a popular superstition, while strict Buddhists and Taoists practice magic through asceticism. It's

easiest to understand popular belief and daily ritual after examining the four components, Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism and animism.

Popular religion characters

The popular religious practices of China include several types of magician. These are suitable for Companion characters.

Spirit mediums

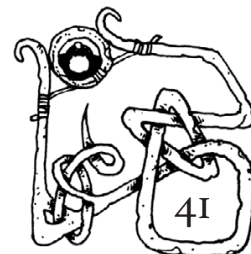
Spirit mediums allow a god to possess their body for a brief time, so that questions can be asked and answered. Questions are usually those which divinatory blocks, that answer yes or no, cannot satisfactorily resolve. Buddhist clergy, orthodox Taoists and Confucians regard spirit mediums as vulgar. Their practices are forbidden in all nominally-Confucian temples and ancestral shrines.

Mediums come in two types, those who have been trained from childhood to control their abilities and those who enter trances unwittingly. The latter type have, at best, a less useful version of the "Visions" virtue, costing 1 point. They cannot request visions, or add experience points to their talent. With remedial training they can develop control over their ability.

Mediums trained from childhood have a divine patron, who inhabits their body when invited and answers questions put by others. This is a +3 Virtue, but, since the medium has no control over the process, it has no skill score. Although practices vary widely by region, mediums can be divided into those who write on a sand table (literate mediums) and those who write charms on paper (soldier mediums). This later group often injure themselves as part of the meditational process, and some use their blood to write replies. Some media find a middle ground by writing on paper in red ink. A very few mediums speak with the divine voice. Written responses are usually interpreted by an elderly aide, often a retired medium.

The responses of the god are often quite practical, making the seance a roundabout way of allowing the questioner to access the Common Sense virtue. It's not unusual for a god consulted on legal or medical matters to say that they will guide a professional that the querent is ordered to consult. Sometimes the ashes of a written response are taken as medicine, more rarely, the blood shed by a soldier medium is mixed into a tonic that is taken by the querent. Seances take about fifteen minutes, although the god might stay longer if they wished. The medium does not recall the seance, since the god's presence shunts part of their soul — the bit Hermetic magi would call a ghost after death — from their body. Li-Na-Cha is the most common possessor, but there are many others. Select one from the list of shen (see issue #11).

There are many charlatans acting as mediums, since it allows them to have the Wise One virtue, balanced by a Dark Secret. Other false mediums are Delusional. Involuntary mediumhood is a source of





flaws such as Plagued by Supernatural Entity and Epilepsy (-4), which may be counterbalanced by virtues representing divine gifts, such as Immunity to Pain (+2, removes 1 from all wound modifiers).

Geomancers

Geomancers are a sort of magical architect or interior designer. Their practices derive from early Chinese attempts to avoid ill-luck by making houses comfortable for both their living and ghostly inhabitants. Geomancers have a limited ability to craft charms, in this case by making houses into amulets. Rules for crafting fu, Chinese charms, are given in issue #11.

Geomancers can create fu, but only those which target buildings, or those inside buildings. Their range of effects is usually extremely limited. It often includes creating barriers against demonic entry, calming ghosts and bringing good fortune to a household.

Geomancy is an exceptional talent with a beginning score of 1, and is a +1 virtue. It substitutes for Ching knowledge in the fu crafting formula given in the Taoist article (issue #11). The finest geomancers have an ability to feel lines of geomantic force, which is similar to the ability of those with Faerie Sight to detect ley lines.

Exorcists

In the strictest sense exorcists are Taoists, and use the rules for crafting fu (see issue #11) to banish demons. They do this by asking the Landlord God the name of the demon, so that they can scribe a writ

commanding it to leave. There is, however, an alternative group of folk sorcerers who cast out demons using traditional gestures, whip-cracking and inherited chants. Some of these have the right to use the ching they know, while others are effectively threatening demons with fu that they have no right to, and that the shen are therefore not bound by. This last sort of exorcist has the Wise One virtue, a Dark Secret and a Knack with either Guile or Leadership (intimidation).

Other minor magicians

Other minor magicians can be developed using weaker versions of the Virtues given for Taoists, in a following article. Characters with a few simple charms, or a handful of formulae, can be enjoyable companions, forced to live by their wits instead of their might.

Confucianism

Many authors mistake popular religion for Confucianism. In its pure form, however, Confucianism is the least mystical of the Chinese religions. Confucius's purpose was to create a set of rules that would allow for the harmonious governance of states. He had no particular knowledge of life after death, so didn't discuss it beyond suggesting that one had a duty to venerate the memory of one's ancestors, in case they really were present. Similarly, he believed in Heaven, also called the Shang-ti, a disembodied Creator spirit, self-aware, but not concerned with things as trivial as human lives. The purpose of Confucian ritual was to strengthen the state by bringing it into accord with Natural Law.

Confucian worship is arguably not a religious practice at all, but an expression of the virtue of filial piety. Although it follows many of the ritual forms of the Taoist veneration of deified sages, Confucian worshippers don't expect the Disciples of Confucius to grant them favours in exchange for their incense. The works of many of the disciples represented in Confucian shrines are still circulated, and several of them spent their entire lives wandering the countryside preaching against the foolishness of superstition and idolatry. For similar reasons, divination is never permitted in Confucian shrines.

Confucius espoused eight virtues, and these are prominently displayed in most Confucian shrines. These are brotherly reverence, loyalty, honesty, propriety or politeness, righteousness, integrity and chastity. Followers don't expect a blessed afterlife if they cultivate these traits, or to suffer Purgatory if they do not. They believe that if everyone cultivates these virtues, then the state will be able to cope with political and natural disasters. Some of the more mystical also consider a correct lifestyle to bring good luck.

Confucianism fulfilled the need for a social religion, which defined how people should interact within their society, but it offered little save stoicism in the face of death and pragmatism in the face of difficulty. These omissions are filled in the lives of most



Chinese by debased versions of Taoism and Buddhism. It is these absences which allowed the governing religion to be permeated by the other traditions.

Playing a religious Confucian

Religious Confucians are almost always of the scholarly class. They don't, for the most part, separate their religious and secular practices, so their spirituality isn't a mystical thing, but an everyday one.

Confucianism is difficult to describe in a role-playing context because there's little mechanical advantage to being a follower, beyond doing that which is right, and helping others. There's no bribe which players can be tempted with, like True Faith, which allows their characters to do things which others cannot. A Confucian who lives according to the style outlined in the Analects doesn't expect supernatural help in return for his activities, but he does expect to suffer if he wrongs Heaven by harming the state. This translates, in the view of a Westerner, to Confucians being slightly luckier than other people.

Confucian characters, then, are likely to be common because social factors make religion all but compulsory for those wishing to take other virtues. Since the Court system is based strongly on the philosophies of Confucius, it is difficult to rise within the bureaucracy if one does not follow the forms of Confucian worship. Since membership of the scholastic class is the only Chinese source for many virtues, and is one of the few sources for others, some PCs will be Confucians, even though it seems to limit characters more than empower them.

A Western character who embraces Confucianism and immerses himself in the Analects develops the following Virtues. Chinese Confucians commonly also have others, but these derive from their training and social position rather than the religion itself.

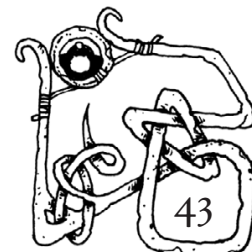
The following attributes are lost if the character ceases to live as a Confucian should, including dabbling in popular religion, but are regained immediately upon return to the correct state of mind. Many distraught Confucians, for example, gain the assistance of Taoists and Buddhists for funereal rituals, then return to strict Confucianism afterward.

Confucian Philosopher (+2 Virtue, +3 once the Mandate is revived)

Chinese Philosophy Score and Virtue or Flaw Table

As your Chinese Philosophy score increases, you become more dedicated to the Confucian life. If you choose not to follow the Analects, the following Virtues and Flaws disappear, although they reappear immediately if you begin to follow the Analects again. There is no concept of penance for these transgressions.

- 1 A variant of Dutybound (-1), you embrace the Confucian virtues, although your understanding of them is, as yet, poor. You might study Confucianism out of social need, rather than true devotion
- 3 Higher Purpose (to live the virtuous life), if you wish. There are corrupt men who can quote the Analects, but they lack Higher Purpose.
- 5 Common Sense
- 9 Luck, only while within the Civilised Aura, only if you've selected Higher Purpose.
- 12 Charmed Life, in very limited circumstances. The character must be acting as a Confucian should and be within the Civilised Aura, while the Emperor has the Mandate of Heaven. Unfortunately, this isn't the case in 1220. The Mandate is fading away.



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