

# HERMES' PORTAL

Issue #5



# HERMES' PORTAL

Issue n° 5

August 2002



|                                                                      |    |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Who's Who                                                            | 3  |
| PUBLISHER'S CORNER                                                   | 3  |
| NEWS FROM THE LINE EDITOR: JULY 2002                                 | 3  |
| PERIODS OF DARKNESS<br>by Jérôme Darmont                             | 4  |
| SEASONAL CHARACTERS<br>by Erik Dahl                                  | 14 |
| DEAR ABELARD                                                         | 22 |
| STORIES FOR ELOER MAEL<br>by Timothy Ferguson                        | 24 |
| THE MAEL OF THE FOUNDERS<br>by David Chart                           | 31 |
| OMNIBUS GRIMOIRE: ANIMAL<br>by Andrew Gronosky                       | 33 |
| EX BIBLIOTHECA DURENDARE<br>by Eric Minton                           | 36 |
| HERETIC'S CORNER: THE PRACTICE OF TEACHING<br>by Michaël de Verteuil | 38 |
| ATMOSPHERIC MAEL<br>by Mike Sloothaak                                | 42 |

## HERMES' PORTAL

**Publisher:** Hermes' Portal

**Layout:** Eric Kouris

**Contributors:** David Chart, Erik Dahl, Jérôme Darmont, Timothy Ferguson, Andrew Gronosky, Eric Minton, Mike Sloothaak, Michaël de Verteuil

**Editorial and proofreading help:** Sheila Thomas

**Cover, back and page numbering:** Radja Sauperamariane

**Interior illustrations:** Angela Taylor (border & p. 5, 9, 10, 21, 22), Alexander White (p. 4, 6, 12, 25, 26, 29), Radja Sauperamariane (p. 35, 42) & illustrations from Lacroix P., Sciences & Lettres au Moyen-Age et à l'époque de la Renaissance (Firmin-Didot, Paris, 1877) & Mertens M., Les Alchimistes Grecs, tome IV, 1<sup>re</sup> partie, Zosime de Panopolis, Mémoires authentiques (Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 1995)

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### Contacting HP

#### Email

Hermes.Portal@wanadoo.fr

#### Web site

www.hermesportal.fr.st

## Who's Who?

There is two new authors in this issue, Jérôme Darmont and Mike Sloothaak. You can find the bios of the others in the previous issues.

### Jérôme Darmont

Jérôme Darmont is an associate professor in computer science. He started roleplaying in 1984, and discovered *Ars Magica* through its French edition in 1993. He has been a regular contributor to the French zine *Ars Mag* since 1995, and also appeared in *Mythic Perspectives* #4 with a humorous column. He sometimes writes for the French RPG magazine *Casus Belli*, and translated a *Nephilim* sourcebook from French into English (the sourcebook was never published, though). He is also the secretary of the French RPG Federation. His favourite games include *Ars Magica* (of course!), *Blue Planet*, *Castle Falkenstein* and a couple of excellent French RPGs.

### Mike Sloothaak

I am a former Peace Corps volunteer and hold a Master's degree in Physics from Western Michigan University. I am currently employed by Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana. Much of my free time is spent working on gay rights and justice for Palestinians.

## Publisher's corner

The scenario contest is over. No doubt there will be people who say "If only I had known about it!" Too late! In the end, I received only one submission. It has certainly turned the burden of choosing the winner into an easy task! So the winner is Jérôme Darmont for his scenario *The Pilgrims of Darkness*. He received a complete set of the late *Redcap* fanzine. Congratulations!

This issue also features the second and last part of Timothy's *Story ideas for elder magi*, Erik Dahl's *Seasonal characters*, on how to create mature characters in a rational way, David Chart's view of the *Magic of the Founders* and Mike Sloothaak's take on *Atmospheric Magic*.

And of course, you will find all your regular columns and more! Andrew Gronosky is launching a ten installment series made up only of new spells. We naturally begin with the Art of Animál.

There are no new Mysteries in this issue — but in the next one (which should be released sometime in October), the authors of *The Mysteries* will give you their views on the creation of our world according to *Ars Magica*. But I'm sure you've more than enough in this issue to keep you busy until the next one!

Eric



## News from the Line Editor: July 2002

**T**he news I provided in my last column proved to be less accurate than I might have hoped. *The Bishop's Staff* was at the printers, and is now out. *Sanctuary of Ice* is still coming out, and we still don't know when. Beyond that, things have changed a bit.

First, the next *Ars Magica* product will be Niall Christie's excellent Levant tribunal book, *Blood and Sand*. Advertising copy is available on the Atlas web site. This has bumped *The Black Monks of Glastonbury* from the September publishing slot, because *Black Monks* was delayed in editing and *Blood and Sand* was ready. *Black Monks* should be released late this year or early next, but may still be held up again.

The *Living Legends* deadline was extended, but the extended deadline has now passed, and the book has gone into playtest. There will be about forty legends in the book, from all over Europe, and many new names among the authors. *Living Legends* should be out some time in 2003.

The Covenants project is still in progress, and I hope that it will provide us with lots of useful information about the way that older covenants should look. If you aren't participating, you might want to look at the guidelines, available from:

[http://www.atlas-games.com/arm\\_submit.html](http://www.atlas-games.com/arm_submit.html)

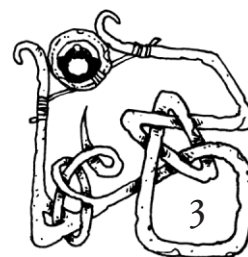
The biggest piece of recent line news is the decision to go to hardback books, at around \$30, for most releases in the line. The main purpose of this

is to make more money. *Ars Magica* is a niche game, and at the moment we cannot afford to pay authors and artists a reasonable rate. We hope that the price rise will mean that we can. We decided to go with hardback because the difference in price between soft and hard cover turned out to be quite small, and we felt that you might as well get harder-wearing books for your money.

We have also started to sell PDF versions of out of print books on [rpgnow.com](http://rpgnow.com). This is still a bit of an experiment, and only *The Fallen Angel* and *The Dragon and the Bear* are available at the moment. However, more books should become available in the future. It is likely that only books originally published by Atlas for fourth edition will appear, because those are the only ones for which we have the electronic files. It is not impossible that a few of the more sought-after older publications might make it to PDF, though. We are unlikely to produce PDF-only products, as the writers and artists still need to be paid, and at present the return from this form of publishing is not as good as that from paper publishing.

Also on the web sales topic, Warehouse 23, the mail order division of Steve Jackson Games, is now handling all mail order for Atlas Games. That means that customers without a local shop get the convenience of shopping carts and credit card payments, while the small staff of Atlas can concentrate on making games.

As before, if anyone has any questions that they would like me to answer in this column, they should send them to [arsmagica@dchart.demon.co.uk](mailto:arsmagica@dchart.demon.co.uk), and mention that they would like to see the answer here.



# Pilgrims of darkness

by Jérôme Darmont

*Inspired by the novel "Pèlerins des ténèbres"*

*by Serge Brussolo, Le Masque, 2000*

## Introduction

This scenario normally takes place in the Pyrenean mountains. However, its precise location does not have a crucial impact on the story arc. It can be relocated in virtually any Christian area with mountains of fair size. To facilitate such adaptations, I voluntarily remain vague about the exact setting of this story.

The *Medieval Bestiary* might be useful during play of the last part of the scenario, but is not strictly necessary.

## Synopsis

The magi are called upon for help by the Prior of a monastery neighboring their Covenant. This monastery is dedicated to Saint Gaudemon, and organizes a regular pilgrimage to the saint's sanctuary, which is located in a remote place up in the mountains. This pilgrimage is reputed to be very tough, and for some time there have been rumors about pilgrims mysteriously disappearing. The Prior sent a young monk to investigate, but he came back apparently mad. Since Saint Gaudemon already has a poor reputation, the Prior needs the magi to solve this mystery as soon as possible to avoid the wrath of the Holy Inquisition.

The characters thus join the pilgrimage of Saint Gaudemon, under the direction of a strange guide. From the beginning, they leave the main trail and, as they later discover, they are tricked onto a fake path dotted with fake pilgrims' hostels inhabited by fake monks. Strange events also occur during the whole journey, and the atmosphere is oppressive. The characters eventually find out what the pilgrims' true destination is.

The fake monks and their guide finally attempt to capture them and lead them to a gigantic ark that is

being built between two mountain peaks. They are followers of a wingless angel (actually a demon) who prophesizes the Flood and tricks humans into thinking they have been chosen to build the ark and repopulate the Earth after the cataclysm... Some pilgrims are convinced and voluntarily turn to heresy, losing their soul, while others are mere slaves used to build the ark... or as food for the animals that are caged in it!

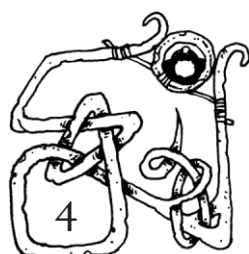
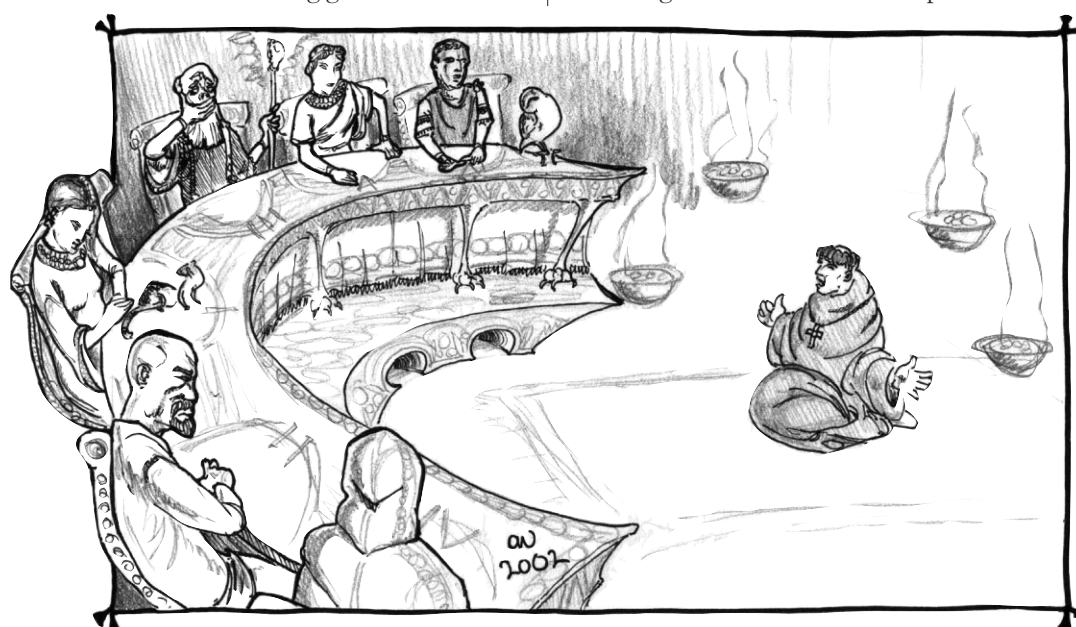
The characters probably put an end to this sham, but after confronting the demon, they also have to escape from the Inquisition that has finally sent an army to destroy all evil: demon, men, women and magi alike.

## Opening scene

One spring morning, a messenger from a nearby monastery shows up at the character's Covenant. The monk, Brother Azael, requires an audience with the council as soon as possible. He represents the Prior of the monastery of Le Moutier, Diodore the Elder, and literally begs the magi for help. His monastery is dedicated to Saint Gaudemon, and organizes a regular pilgrimage to the saint's sanctuary, which is located in a remote place up in the mountains. For some time now, pilgrims have been regularly disappearing while on the road to the sanctuary. Though the pilgrimage is notoriously tough and dangerous, avalanches and wild beasts cannot be held responsible for so many people vanishing. This causes great concern to Father Diodore, who also fears that Jome the Black, an inquisitor and old enemy of the Order of Saint Gaudemon, might finally find an excuse to bring the religious order down. The Prior sent a young monk with the last pilgrims to investigate, but he came back apparently mad. Hence, the Prior desperately needs the help of more... learned people.

## How to bring the magi into the scenario?

The Covenant may already be in contact with the monastery of Le Moutier, or even owe Diodore the Elder a favor. Otherwise, it may seem interesting to the magi to initiate a relationship with the monastery



and have it owe a favor to the Covenant. In any case, make it clear, by the word of Brother Azael, that the Order of Saint Gaudemon will consider itself an ally of the Covenant if they help.

If the magi are reluctant to help the monks, remind them that having the Holy Inquisition investigating around their Covenant is certainly not a good idea... Brother Azael is not in the position of threatening anybody, but he will make that statement clearly if he has to.

### What the magi know of Saint Gaudemon

Have the players make an Intelligence + Theology, Church Lore or Area Lore roll. Depending on the result, reveal to them what they know of Saint Gaudemon. If there are books covering these subjects in the Covenant library, you may allow some characters to replace their own skill level by the relevant book level. However, reading and searching through a book takes half a day. Brother Azael, if questioned, can tell them the first piece of information, and even the second one, if pressed.

6+ Saint Gaudemon was an early Christian. Caligula, the mad Roman Emperor, had ordered him to be torn to death by four black horses in the *Circus Maximus*. The martyr accepted the judgment with serenity. When he fell flat on the ground, he shouted his faith in Jesus Christ. Gaudemon was strong, but he could not resist. His arms and legs were torn off his trunk and dragged in the dust. But he prayed to the Lord, the horses walked back, and the bloody limbs of the saint got back in place. From this day, Saint Gaudemon has been prayed to by people suffering from limb afflictions: the paralytic, the wounded, the lame... He performs miracles too. Pilgrims who travel to the sanctuary where his bones rest and offer him a sculpture of the suffering limb are said to receive relief.

9+ The path to Saint Gaudemon's relics is one of the hardest. It meanders in the high mountains and crosses areas inhabited only by eagles and bears. Reaching the sanctuary is a victory against nature and the elements. Most people prefer easier pilgrimages, such as Santiago de Compostella.

12+ Saint Gaudemon has a pretty bad reputation within the Church. He is rumored to be a magician, a sorcerer who came out of the desert and preached the word of Jesus only to fool the first Christians. What can you expect of a "saint" whose name contains the word demon? An inquisitor named Jome the Black is known to seek the proof that the Order of Saint Gaudemon is founded on a deception.

### Le Moutier

Le Moutier is a small town located in the foothills of the Pyrenees. There is nothing of particular inter-

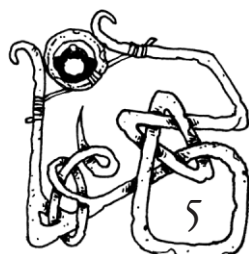


est here, but the region is a crossroads for pilgrims from all over Mythic Europe. The city is organized around a central gathering square bordered by inns and taverns. Pilgrims carrying the srip (*pera*) and the staff (*baculum*) are numerous here. They use signs and symbols to rally: the shell for Santiago de Compostella, four horse heads constituting a cross for Gaudemon, etc.

### A dark confession

The monastery of Saint Gaudemon is located at the edge of the town, so the characters may want to meet the monk who went on the pilgrimage and came back mad. Diodore the Elder has no objections. Brother Guillaume is held prisoner in a crypt underneath the monastery. Every monk knows he is here and what happened to him, and an atmosphere of fear has taken hold in the monastery. However, only Father Diodore and Brother Azael have spoken to the unfortunate (and that is why they decided to hide him, incidentally).

Brother Guillaume is locked in an iron cage. His state is frightening. The smell is terrible in the crypt. He is nude and lies in his own excrement. His whole body is sore. Visibly, he hurts himself on the cage





voluntarily. If talked to, he speaks incoherently, mixing insanities with tales of pilgrims slaughtered in villages inhabited by demons, devils disguised as monks, and churches that are lairs of sorcerers.

If calmed down by magic (a spell such as *Return of Mental Lucidity* of second magnitude, even spontaneous, can do the trick for a short while), Brother Guillaume becomes immediately quiet, and then begs the characters to kill him, since the monks do not have the courage to do it. He just keeps repeating that the brotherhood has fallen into darkness. He sincerely believes he is possessed by demons and, though he seems lucid, he is visibly hopelessly mad. Just before the characters leave, though, he whispers a mysterious warning: “beware of the werehorse!” The characters cannot learn more from him.

### The codex of the roads

Before the characters leave, Brother Azael gives them an exemplar of the *Codex of the roads*, an illuminated book that describes in detail the way to the sanctuary of Saint Gaudemon, including the description of the hostels where pilgrims stop and the monks who live in them. In game terms, the *Codex of the roads* is an Area lore (Saint Gaudemon’s pilgrimage) *summa* of level 5 and quality 7. The book is available in Latin or in a vulgar tongue, at the characters’ convenience.

### Finding a guide

Make it clear to the characters that they cannot go on the pilgrimage without a guide. The mountain is treacherous, and even the grogs the magi may have with them do not know this particular region well. Lots of guides, dark skinned men wearing bear furs, speak loud on the city central square, but the best guide in town does not stand among them. The characters can learn that by chatting with the pilgrims of Saint Gaudemon (and maybe with a Communication + Carouse roll of 6+). The only really good guide in the area is called Malestrazza, according to the pilgrims. He is so good he selects the people he takes along with him. He never chooses the easy trail in the mountain, but the harder the pilgrimage is, the more Saint Gaudemon is likely to hear the prayers!

Malestrazza does not show off on the square. On the contrary, he waits for pilgrims in a nearby inn. Then he examines them carefully, feels the calf and back of each candidate, and decides who is going

with him and who is not. Magi who are physically weak will probably want to cheat his examination with magic. They had better! Corpus or Imaginem will do the trick, but Mentem magic cast directly on the guide is likely to fail (see Malestrazza’s stats).

Physically, Malestrazza is thin and tall. His face is deeply lined, though he looks young. His hair is a black and curly mane. Perceptive characters might notice he shows some resemblance to a horse (Perception roll of 9+), but that is hardly a proof of anything. He wears a leather jerkin and tight breeches. His clear gaze is piercing and he has a wild expression that commands respect. He apparently never smiles, and does not speak much.

It is quite important for the scenario, but not strictly essential, that the characters select Malestrazza as their guide. If they do not care and do not look for him, just have them choose him “by chance”. If the players feel you drag them toward the guide or the characters get suspicious about him, you can try to replace their first guide by Malestrazza early in the scenario after an accident, or just have their guide be a fake monk (see below). Just do not impose him on the players if they do not want him.

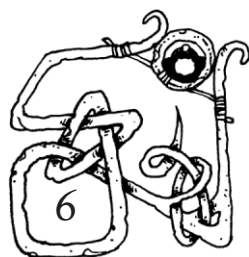
## The journey

This section describes the characters’ journey throughout the mountain, to a destination that is not the sanctuary of Saint Gaudemon. It is maybe the more delicate part of the scenario to storyguide, because it is as linear as the journey. It should be played at a steady pace without boring the players (and preventing them from realizing too soon what is happening), but not too fast either, so that they feel the atmosphere become darker and darker. The following subsections describe the general timeline of the pilgrimage and various events designed to break its monotony.

### General considerations

**Fatigue** Walking in the mountain is an exhausting task, because of the slopes and altitude. Have the characters roll for Fatigue twice a day against a Difficulty Factor of 9+. A failed roll costs the character one Fatigue level, a botch two levels. Fatigue levels are recovered in a special way: one full night in a Maison-Dieu pilgrims’ hostel helps recovering two levels, while one night in the wilderness bestows only one Fatigue level.

**Aura** Once the characters leave the normal trail for the pilgrimage (i.e., after day #1), they enter a +1 infernal aura. This aura is weak, but will probably make the characters uneasy. It also influences the pilgrims and exacerbates sinful behavior, gossip, etc. Of course, it can be detected by people with the *Sense Holiness and Unholiness* virtue, or by similar powers.



## Timeline

- Day #1 from Le Moutier to the pilgrims' hostel of Les Saraires. Malestrazza does not take the straightest path, but he leads the pilgrims to the real hostel. He prevents them from singing, making them save their breath, which appears to be a good advice. The company reaches Les Saraires after dusk and long after the other pilgrims, who walk on the "easy" trail. The hostel is a very simple building that is barely comfortable. Pilgrims have to crowd in the attic and sleep in the straw.
- Day #2 from Les Saraires to Les Paturiaux. From now on, Malestrazza leaves the normal trail and leads everybody onto the fake pilgrimage's way. However, this is extremely hard to tell since all the places where the company stops look exactly like their description in the *Codex of roads*. The inhabitants of each place also match those who are described in the book. The characters do not have a true chance to realize what is happening before they reach the pilgrims' hostel of Venzome (see day #7). Les Paturiaux is actually not a hostel, but a small cottage tended by a family of hunchbacks. They look very poor, but nonetheless offer bread and soup to the pilgrims.
- Day #3 from Les Paturiaux to a cave somewhere in the mountain. In the afternoon, a thick mist prevents the pilgrims from noticing the abyss they walk next to, which is a blessing, according to Malestrazza.
- Day #4 from the cave to the pilgrims' hostel of Vauldoire. The hostel is run by Brother Gilbert.
- Day #5 from Vauldoire to a plateau where the pilgrims have to camp.
- Day #6 from the plateau to the hostel of Paragon. The monks of Paragon wear their habit in strict adherence to the Order of Saint Gaudemon's rule, i.e., they wear their hood pulled down over their face, like a cowl (and see through two holes). Furthermore, they also made a vow of silence and only communicate with each other by means of hand gestures. One single monk is in charge of talking to the pilgrims. They adopted this behavior so that the pilgrims do not recognize them, since it is the same gang who took the part of the hunchbacks of Les Paturiaux and the monks of Vauldoire.
- Day #7 from Paragon to the hostel of Venzome. Run by Prior Mazolas of

Caradoz, the (true) Maison-Dieu hostel of Venzome is the jewel of Saint Gaudemon's pilgrimage. Its architecture is famous, especially a mezzanine decorated with fine marble statues that gives access to a great library containing thousands of sacred books. The fake Venzome is the weak point of the fake pilgrimage, since it was not possible to reproduce such a rich place as the original hostel. The mezzanine is a wooden *trompe l'oeil* painting, and the library is filled with fake books made of painted wood. Access to the mezzanine is forbidden to the pilgrims, who can only admire it from the ground floor. There is always a monk standing guard, even at night. It requires a roll of Perception + Craft (Sculpture) of 12+ to notice the sham from below. Like in Paragon, the monks of Venzome (except for Mazolas of Caradoz) wear their hoods pulled down over their faces and do not speak.



## Pilgrims

Beside the characters, a dozen pilgrims follow Malestrazza. The most worthy of note, those who are the most likely to interact with the characters, follow.

*Andresis* the bowman is a barrel-chested chap with a thick mustache. He is accomplishing the pilgrimage for an old brother-in-arms with a gangrenous leg. Though aging, Andresis still has a keen eye and may be helpful to the characters.

*Constance*, Baroness of Huraut, is walking for her husband, who came back from the crusade suffering from leprosy. She is thin and stiff, invariably sad (for she is deeply in love with her husband), but a nice person.

*Jehan* the glazier is a young redheaded apprentice who is making the trip to the hostel of Venzome to repair the stained-glass window representing Saint Gaudemon, which has been broken during a tempest. His master hopes this good deed will help him in recovering from a foot paralysis. He carries on his back a big box full of colored glass.

*Mabaut* the laundress is a solid countrywoman with a reddish face. She is walking for her son, whose legs have been broken by a lord's horse during a hunt. She looks easy-going, but in fact she has a wicked tongue and is prone to jealousy and is prompt to gossip about anybody.

*Mario* the sculptor is a young, sturdy fellow with great paws. He has been sent on the pilgrimage by the monks of Saint Gaudemon, who expect him to sculpt a stone statue of their patron during the journey. The statue is destined to ornament the sanctuary. Mario works in a wagon Andresis has agreed to drive. It is the only way to carry the block of stone he is sculpting, but this raises a fair share of envy among the other pilgrims, who have to walk. Furthermore, if



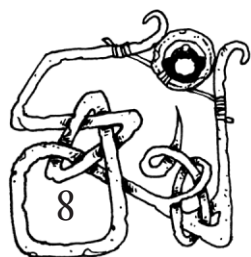


it is the first time the monastery of Le Moutier is in contact with the characters' Covenant, Mario is supposed to observe the characters' actions.

### Events

Most of the following events can be played in any order and in any location (you can even roll a die to pick them up at random). However, some events are related and/or tied to a given place. In that case, it is clearly indicated in their description.

1. *The vision.* If a character has the Visions virtue, he experiences the following vision. If no character has the virtue, have any of them (or maybe all of them) dream the scene. "You see the black horses. You are lying down, nude in the arena. Your back itches because of the sand. Leather bonds on your wrists and ankles immobilize you. You are about to be quartered. Up there, on the terraces, the Roman plebians are heating up. They want blood. They scream. They just cannot get enough. The horses fidget, ready to leap forward. The groom, holding his whip, is ready too. When he hits the horses' rump, they will rush and tear your limbs apart from your body. You smell the animals' odor, you hear them neighing. You get ready to shout in pain. The whip cracks. The horses rush off." The character(s) then wake(s) up sweating.
2. *Unicorns.* Mario's horse has been nervous all day long. Perceptive characters (Perception + Awareness roll of 9+) can hear stifled hoof noises in the distance. When the evening comes, the characters can learn from the hunchbacks or the monks (who are the same people, anyway) that unicorns wander in the mountain. This is both true and false. A fake unicorn has been sold to the demon's followers and has escaped. It is actually a white mare with a narwhal horn glued on the head.
3. *Silhouettes in the mist.* Mist has surrounded the company since the early morning. The characters have the feeling they are being followed. A successful Perception + Awareness roll of 12+ helps them to catch sight of silhouettes in the mist behind them. If they investigate, they find nothing and raise the ire of Malestrazza and the other pilgrims, who threaten not to wait for them.
4. *First slaughter.* With a Perception + Awareness roll of 9+, the characters notice vultures flying in circles above a rocky peak. When they arrive on the spot, they discover ten dead goats. Vultures have begun to tear their skin, but the goats otherwise bear no trace of bites or claws. Their necks are oddly torn, as if they have been hanged. A dozen paces away, the goatherd has encountered the same fate. He is lying on his back, his hair whitened in fear, his broken neck

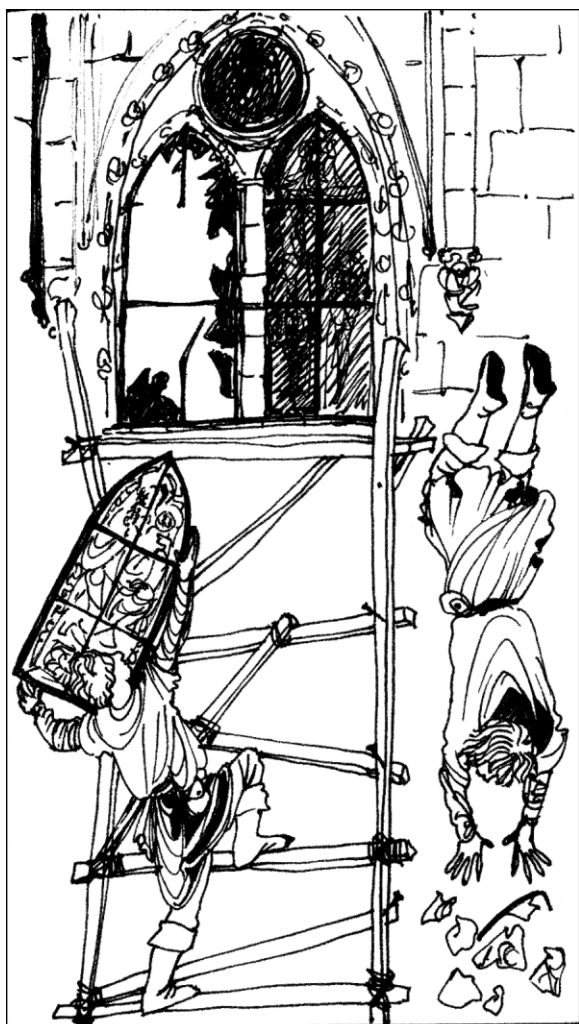


marked by a large human hand. Andresis, who has seen worse, will likely set the goats' meat apart, since it is not spoiled.

5. *Public confession.* At the hostel of Vauldoire or Paragon, the pilgrims are encouraged by Brother Gilbert to a public confession. He exhorts them to cleanse their souls before they carry on the pilgrimage, and indirectly threatens them, making it clear that the confession is mandatory for the salvation of their souls. The first one to talk is Constance of Huraut, who confesses she is not a loving spouse. Since her husband came back from the crusade, he fills her with horror. She feels ashamed, but cannot get rid of this feeling. All the other pilgrims are much less forthright, only confessing minor sins (Perception + Folk ken roll of 9+). Now, what do the characters say? Are they sincere? Do they even confess? If they do not, they risk exasperating the other pilgrims... If the storyguide is in a sadistic mood, he can call for a Communication + Guile roll.
6. *Encounter with the Inquisition.* During another foggy day, menacing silhouettes suddenly come out of the mist (a Perception + Awareness roll of 9+ is required to hear them approaching). A dozen hooded monks armed with metal-tipped quarterstaves surround the company. They actually look more like dirty thugs with tonsures than monks. The leader of the troupe, Brother Denunzio, acts in the name of Jome the Black. He asks the pilgrims whether they have seen anything strange. He talks about wandering devils, roads whose destination mysteriously changes at night, and blames Gaudemon the sorcerer. He is very suspicious, and brutally examines the pilgrims' hands. He is actually looking for the strangler (see event #4). Mario is the perfect suspect for him, as well as any grog with large, strong hands, so the characters would do well to convince Denunzio that he is innocent. This event cannot be played after event #7, though event #7 may be played even if this event did not take place. After this encounter, the magi should be extra-cautious when casting spells. Any dubious behavior can raise the suspicion and anger of the other pilgrims.
7. *Second slaughter.* After a sharp turn on the trail, the pilgrims suddenly discover Brother Denunzio, lying in the middle of the path, his habit turned up and in a disgraceful posture, sticking out an enormous tongue, his eyes bulging. The characters can notice the bluish handprint of his murderer on his neck. The other monks also have their necks broken. Some seem to have faced their enemy, while others were obviously fleeing when they were killed. There is no survivor.

8. *Jehan's death.* This event takes place at the hostel of Venzome. Jehan has been asked by Mazolas of Caradoz to repair the library's stained-glass window from the outside of the building, for he would disturb the copyists if he worked inside. The true reason is, of course, to prevent him from discovering the library is a fake. After climbing on shaky scaffolding, Jehan realizes the glass elements he brought with him are not cut to the right dimension (because the fake Venzome is not an exact replica of the original). The window he has prepared is one inch too wide. Hence, he has to work on the dangerous scaffolding to fit it in, at the risk of breaking a precious piece of colored glass. Later that day, Jehan is found lying on the ground. He apparently fell. The characters will not have much time with him before the monks carry him in. He dies soon after... If the characters manage to hear his last words, they can catch a weak breath: "...ook...door...". Mazolas of Caradoz will claim Jehan was drunk when he fell. Of course, he had a look inside the fake library and was pushed.

9. *Wagon accident.* This event can occur at any time, but is best placed after the pilgrims leave Venzome (after day #7). A wheel on Mario's wagon suddenly breaks, and the



characters may have to prevent it from falling down the cliff. A new wheel must be retrieved from the previous pilgrims' hostel. This is a good excuse for characters to walk back to Venzome with Mario and investigate the mezzanine. The hostel will be totally empty, the fake monks having already moved on.

10. *The strangler.* The pilgrims, and especially the characters, are eventually confronted by the brutish strangler who has been prowling around them since the beginning. It is actually a huge, male gorilla (large, strong hands...) that has escaped from the ark's menagerie, maddened by its female's death from cold. The encounter can occur in any number of ways, preferably when the characters are isolated from the other pilgrims (alone near Venzome after event #9, for instance). They should be able to take care of the gorilla, especially if they use magic, but if they get badly hurt, the storyguide can have Malestrazza intervene with his bow. If given the opportunity, he and the fake monks will probably exploit their weakness to capture them.



## The end of the trail

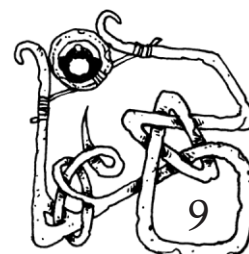
The end of the scenario is much more open than the journey. In the following paragraphs, I try to provide elements of background that will help storyguiding these events, though the storyguide will certainly have to improvise.

At this point of the journey, Malestrazza and the fake monks have to act. The next step in the pilgrimage is normally the sanctuary of Saint Gaude-mon, which is in reality pretty far away. Their normal course of action is to turn on the exhausted pilgrims, capture them, and then take them to the ark. However, the characters' presence probably changes the deal. If a fight occurs and the characters win, they can make them talk and walk to the ark knowing what to expect. Of course, if the characters lose, or pretend to lose to see what happens, they will be taken there. It is also possible that they may split apart from the company and follow the tracks of the fake monks. In case of a fight, adapt the number of fake monks to the characters' strength.

## The ark and the camp

The true destination of the fake pilgrimage is an amazing sight. A huge, stout ark is being built between two mountain peaks. The construction seems almost complete. Right under the ark, on the side of one peak, sits a small, antique fort surrounded by two or three big huts.

If the characters are prisoners, they are taken to one hut. It shelters former pilgrims like them who work either on building the ark or feeding the workers and the wild animals that are caged in the ark. Everybody here apparently follows the guidance of Noctus Ira Melanox, a wingless angel who prophe-





sizes the Flood. Mazolas of Caradoz and his fake monks claim Noctus has been warned of the imminent cataclysm in his dreams. Thanks to him, some will survive while the valleys are submerged.

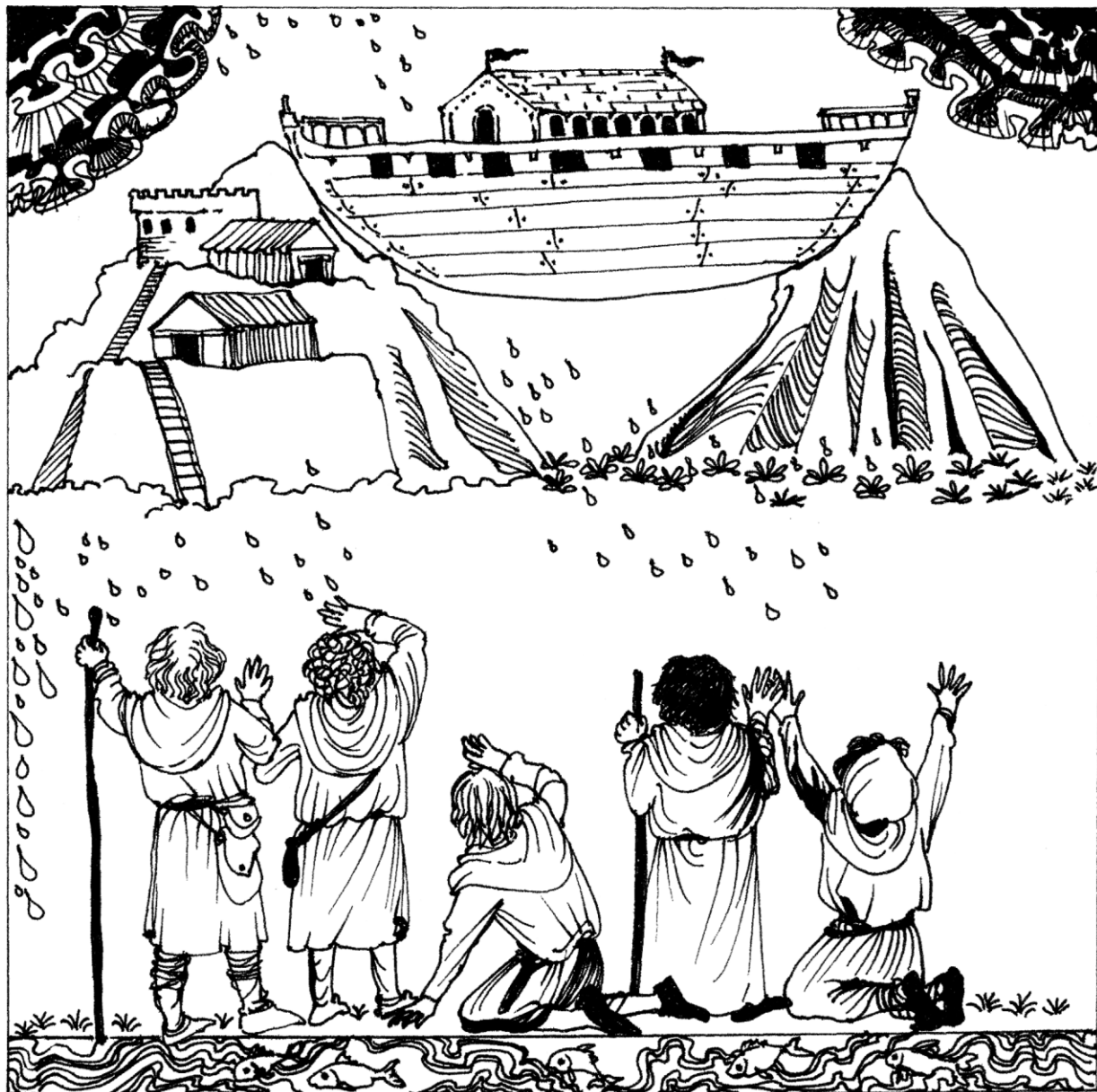
Nobody is forced to stay. Nobody is chained. However, no pilgrim knows the way back to the valley. Furthermore, lots of traps have been set up around the camp to catch game and feed the animals in the ark. Eventually, as soon as the characters arrive, it starts snowing hard (which means it rains a lot in the valley — indeed, the Flood is coming!). So, there is not much of a choice... The pilgrims squeeze into the huts... The workers are divided into two groups: those who accept their fate because they simply cannot leave, and those who are convinced by Noctus' word and think they are the elect.

*The ark* is basically a huge, floating (hopefully), wooden structure. It is roughly divided into three areas. The lower deck is devoted to the animals that will repopulate the Earth (there is normally a couple of each represented species). They are held in narrow cages, are not well fed and hence are perpetually hungry. This place is quite dangerous! The upper

deck comprises of the crew's living quarters (that are currently empty) and food stores (which are almost full). Eventually, the afterdeck is destined for Noctus and his closest disciples. If they have any knowledge of carpentry (Perception + Craft: Carpentry roll of 6+), the characters may notice that the hull's wood is not dry. They can also learn this from Matthieu, the carpenter, who has to work fast. This is not very good from a shipbuilding point of view, but on the other hand, the big boat cannot be easily set on fire.

*The fort* is really small, the ceiling is low, and there is barely enough room for Noctus and his disciples. It has been excavated from the rock, and though it is not in good repair, it is very hard to take by sheer force. A siege would be much easier, but a secret tunnel leads on the other side of the mountain peak.

*The huts* are very crowded, and men and women live together in total promiscuity. But this is not a problem here: Noctus and his disciples actually encourage them to leave in a state of sin. After all, the circumstances are exceptional and women will have to bear children soon to repopulate the Earth after the Flood! This will probably make the characters



wonder about Noctus’ true nature, if they are not already doing so. Furthermore, the aura is particularly disturbing in the area: it is indeed a +3 infernal aura. Eventually, some characters may remember (Intelligence + Theology, Church Lore or Area Lore roll of 12+) the scandal of a false messiah who prophesized the wrath of darkness (*ira melanox*, in a mix of Greek and Latin) and was hunted down in three provinces before escaping, a couple of years ago.

Meeting the angel

All the newcomers are supposed to meet Noctus, one by one. That is basically how most of them get converted to his doctrine. Noctus lives in the deepest cave of the fort (the secret tunnel starts there). When entering the tunnel leading to the cave, any character feels the temperature getting warmer and warmer. The ground is covered with white feathers, and there are more of them as the character progresses. All this smells more like a hen house than anything else...

Noctus is an ageless creature. He looks genderless, his head is shaved, and his skin is as white as a candle. He is nude and half buried in the feathers. The skin of his back is scarred by long, bloody wounds near the shoulder blades. His disciples claim he is an angel fallen from the sky during a storm. They also claim the Inquisition has cut his wings. Noctus always smiles lightly, moves slowly and gracefully. His presence is very comforting.

Noctus speaks about the world that is now too old, the need to break it and start anew. God will do it and drown the nasty beasts that propagate rabies. Water will cleanse the earth, and it is a good thing, a source of joy! The Flood. Purification by drowning. Noctus knows exactly what will happen. He dreams about it every night, and God sends him the images of the people he must save, the ones who will bear the immense responsibility of repopulating the world. Now, if the characters do not realize Noctus is dangerously mad, I give in! However, he is so kind and convincing, his speech dupes many people.

Saving skin and soul

Once the characters have uncovered the plot, they must act. They could simply leave, but they do not know the mountain either and the snow will endanger their enterprise. They would certainly have better chances to survive than the others, though. However, Diodore the Elder would be very disappointed by such behavior. They can also lead a revolt or directly confront Noctus. This last option is certainly the most dangerous. In case of trouble, Noctus does not fight. He prefers fleeing. He wants to remain on Earth as long as possible to pursue his dark task of corruption somewhere else. However, if forced to fight, he resorts to all his terrifying powers.

The characters’ plans will be complicated by the arrival of the Inquisition. An armed troupe led by Jome the Black has eventually managed to track down Noctus. They are not here to parley, but to destroy all evil and every heretic in the area, so they

take quick action and simply and methodically attempt to slay anyone who crosses their path. With them comes the sun. Snow stops, contradicting Noctus’ prediction and instilling doubt in his followers (except the true disciples).

At this point, the characters would do best to finish what they are up to and escape, preferably with all the former pilgrims they can take with them. The inquisitors block the way to the valley, but the secret tunnel in the fort is a possibility. A more dramatic and cinematic option is to barricade themselves in the ark. It is only a temporary solution, since the inquisitors will besiege it, but it buys time. The ark cannot burn at first, but it will dry under the sun and the attackers’ flaming arrows will eventually set it on fire after a day or two. One solution is to free the animals (especially the most ferocious and ravenous) and take advantage of the confusion to make an escape. Another possibility is to somehow break the scaffolding that secures the ark (by triggering an avalanche or weakening the scaffolding itself), so that the big boat slides down into the valley like a giant sledge. This is obviously very dangerous, and anybody in the ark will likely be wounded after the inevitable crash, but if the characters are crazy enough to attempt such a feat, have them succeed! It is also a good way to save as many people as possible.

Aftermath

If the characters succeed in driving Noctus away and saving many pilgrims of Saint Gaudemon, the reputation of the pilgrimage is partly restored, and Diodore the Elder is very grateful to the characters’ Covenant. Pilgrims give evidence that the order of Saint Gaudemon is not responsible, and Jome the Black has to reduce his pressure on the monastery — for now. If magi talked to Jome the Black or openly used their powers before him, he now suspects they live in the area, which should definitely be a concern to them. Eventually, if Noctus or Mazolas of Caradoz are still walking on this Earth, the Covenant has earned new enemies that might pop up in the far future...

Appendix #1: Primary NPC stats

Brother Denunzio and the inquisitor monks

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

Size: 0

Virtues and Flaws: Mendicant +1, Bad reputation -1, Obsessed -1

Personality traits: Fanatic +3

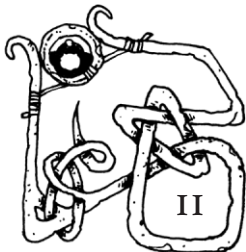
Primary abilities: Speak Latin 1, Church Lore 3

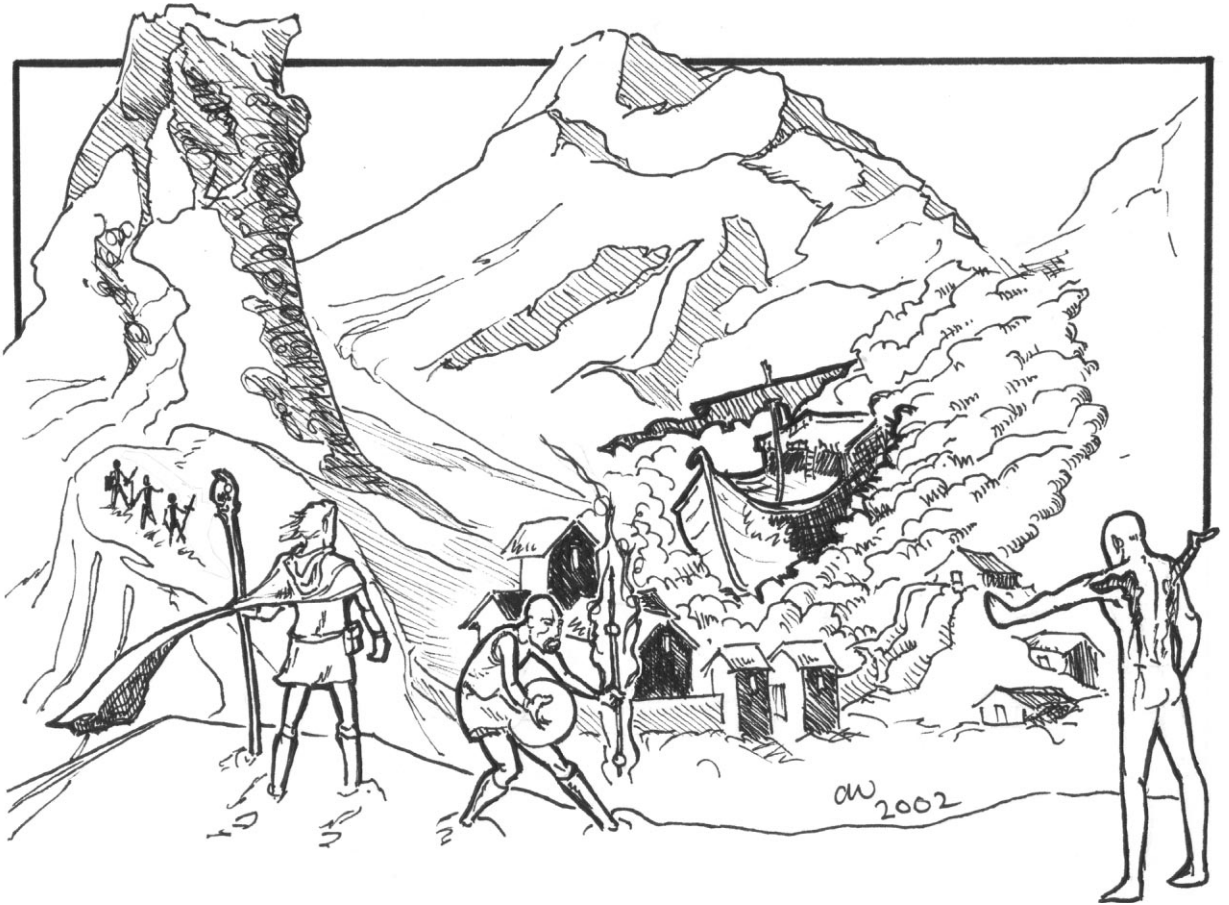
| Weapon       | Init | Atk | Dfn | Dam | Fatigue |
|--------------|------|-----|-----|-----|---------|
| Brawl        | +5   | +5  | +4  | +1  | +4      |
| Quarterstaff | +11  | +10 | +11 | +4  | +5      |

Soak: +2

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

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





### Jome the Black

Jome the Black, as his nickname hints, is preceded by a dreadful reputation. When they face him, heretics confess their sins, whatever the means. He has been hunting Noctus down for a while, and might not consider the connection with the Order of Saint Gaudemon as a random event...

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

Size: 0, Faith: 2

Virtues and Flaws: Priest +3, Inspirational +1, True faith +3, Infamous -2, Overconfident -2, Non-combatant -1

Personality traits: Devout +3, Overconfident +3, Inflexible +2, Sadistic +2

Primary abilities: Folk ken 4, Disputatio 5, Leadership 3, Theology 6, Church Lore 5

| Weapon | Init | Atk | Dfn | Dam | Fatigue |
|--------|------|-----|-----|-----|---------|
| Brawl  | -6   | -7  | -4  | -2  | -2      |

Soak: +1

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

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

### Jome's fighters

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

Size: 0

Virtues and Flaws: Veteran +1

Personality traits: Obedient +3, Brave +2

| Weapon         | Init | Atk | Dfn | Dam | Fatigue |
|----------------|------|-----|-----|-----|---------|
| Brawl          | +2   | +2  | +1  | +2  | +3      |
| Sword & Shield | +4   | +5  | +9  | +6  | +4      |
| Short bow      | +2   | +3  | —   | +4  | +4      |

Soak: +9

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

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

### Malestrazza

Malestrazza has been fooled by Noctus. He is in charge of selecting good candidates for the ark and taking them on the fake pilgrimage. However, though he is convinced by Noctus' vision, he is not a fanatic. If confronted with the evidence that Noctus is a sham, he may prove a precious ally for the characters. Malestrazza was given a magical amulet by Noctus (a silver necklet), who wanted to protect his closest servants from magical inquiries. It grants him a +25 Magic Resistance.

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

Size: 0, Confidence: 3

Virtues and Flaws: Piercing gaze +2, Famous +2, Well-traveled +1, Wanderer +0, Dutybound -1, Curse of Venus -2

Personality traits: Taciturn +3, Insensitive +1, Fatalistic +1, Heretic +1

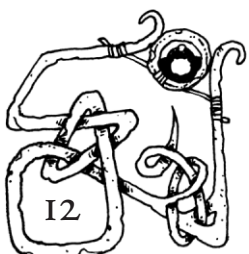
Primary abilities: Climb 5, Folk ken 2, Stealth 3, Bargain 4, Survival (Mountain) 5, Area lore 6, Leadership 2

| Weapon    | Init | Atk | Dfn | Dam | Fatigue |
|-----------|------|-----|-----|-----|---------|
| Brawl     | +6   | +6  | +5  | +0  | +7      |
| Longsword | +7   | +6  | +8  | +4  | +6      |
| Longbow   | +5   | +9  | —   | +10 | +8      |

Soak: +3

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

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



## Mazolas of Caradoz

Mazolas is truly and totally faithful to Noctus. He has been his closest disciple for a long time now, has saved him a couple of times, and is totally corrupted. Like Malestrazza, he wears a silver necklet that grants him a +25 Magic Resistance. Furthermore, Noctus has given him a short, black wand instilled with an infernal power similar to the spell *Grip of the Choking Hand* (PeCo 15). It can be used 6 times a day. The effect is triggered when the wand is pointed at someone. Anyone who uses it temporarily gains the flaw *Overconfident*. The effect of regular or repetitive usage is left up to the Storyguide.

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

Size: 0, Confidence: 3

Virtues and Flaws: Outlaw leader -2, Delusion -1, Inspirational +1, Hex +2

Personality traits: Overconfident +3, Heretic +3, Pompous +1

Primary abilities: Charm 4, Folk ken 3, Guile 4, Storytelling 3, Forgery 2, Disguise 5, Leadership 3, Occult lore 2

| Weapon         | Init | Atk | Dfn | Dam | Fatigue |
|----------------|------|-----|-----|-----|---------|
| Brawl          | +7   | +6  | +6  | +0  | +6      |
| Dagger         | +8   | +7  | +8  | +3  | +6      |
| Throwing knife | +7   | +8  | —   | +3  | +6      |

Soak: +1

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

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

## Noctus Ira Melanox

Noctus is not the violent kind of demon, but he can become so if needed. His purpose on Earth is to convince mortals into heresy. The victim must be sincerely convinced so that Noctus wins the soul, but he is quite good at that. However, his appearance as a wingless angel is not discreet. Noctus is constantly hunted down by the Inquisition and cannot remain in the same place for long. So far, he has always escaped the wrath of the Church.

Infernal Might: 35

Characteristics: Int +2, Per +2, Pre +4, Com +3, Str -1, Sta -1, Dex 0, Qik 0

Size: 0

Personality traits: Kind +4, Subtle +3, Brave -1

| Weapon | Init | Atk | Dfn | Dam | Range |
|--------|------|-----|-----|-----|-------|
| Brawl  | +6   | +5  | +5  | +4  | Touch |

Soak: +4

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

Vis: If blood from Noctus' back wounds is gathered, it provides two pawns of Auram vis per season. Yet, it is not very wise to hold a demon prisoner as a vis source!

Powers:

- *Psychomachia*: Pride +3, Compassion (for Noctus) +3, Lust +1
- *Comforting warmth*, CrIg 10, 0 point: The air around Noctus is always warm and comfortable.
- *Whirlwind*, ReAu 15, 2 points: effect similar to the spell *Circling Winds of Protection*

- *Flight*, ReAu 20, 4 points: effect similar to the spell *Wings of the Soaring Wind*
- *Stinging warmth*, CrIg 35, 6 points: the temperature around Noctus brutally rises. Everyone in a radius of 15 to 20 paces suffers +20 damage (armor offers no protection against heat). Noctus can also center the hot zone up to 15 paces away from him.

## The fake monks, disciples of Noctus

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

Size: 0

Virtues and Flaws: Petty outlaw +0

Personality traits: Heretic +2

Primary abilities: Guile 3, Disguise 4, Climb 3

| Weapon     | Init | Atk | Dfn | Dam | Fatigue |
|------------|------|-----|-----|-----|---------|
| Brawl      | +5   | +4  | +4  | +0  | +5      |
| Shortspear | +10  | +6  | +7  | +3  | +6      |
| Net        | +4   | +8  | +6  | +0  | +5      |

Soak: +3

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

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

## The gorilla

Characteristics: Cun +1, Per 0, Str +4, Sta +1, Dex +1, Qik 0

Size: +1

Personality traits: Wild +3, Maddened +3, Fierce +1

Primary abilities: Athletics 3, Awareness 3, Climb 2, Thrown weapon 1

Ferocity: 3 (wounded)

| Weapon       | Init | Atk | Dfn | Dam | Range |
|--------------|------|-----|-----|-----|-------|
| Bite or claw | +5   | +5  | +3  | +5  | Touch |
| Thrown rock  | +5   | +1  | -   | +6  | Near  |

Soak: +4

Fatigue: +1

Fatigue levels: OK, 0/0, -1, -3, -5, Unconscious

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

## Appendix #2: Pronunciation guide

Constance of Huraut: con-stance of hu-roh

Diodore: dee-o-door

Gaudemon: go-day-mon

Guillaume: guee-yohm

Jehan: juh-han

Jome: johm

Le Moutier: luh moo-tee-ay

Les Paturiaux: lay paa-tu-ree-oh

Les Saraires: lay saa-rayr

Mahaut: mah-ho

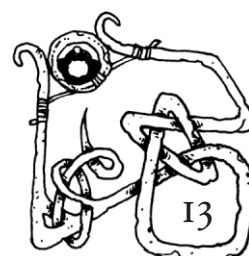
Matthieu: mah-tee-uh

Noctus Ira Melanox: noc-toos ee-rah may-laa-nox

Vauldoire: vohl-dwar

Venzome: van-zohm

MI ECENAS ATAVIS IDITERE GIBUS.  
& presidium & dulce decus meum.  
Sunt quos curiculo puluerem olympicum  
Collegisse huic, metaq. feruich DEATHLETIS



# Seasonal Characters

by Erik Dahl

**A**rs Magica does not have a canonical system for designing advanced characters, and thus the examples of these that we have seen in canon have varied wildly from one to the next. Elder characters in published material seem to have been designed by starting with beginning characters and advancing them with arbitrary experience until an appropriate level of power is reached. This seems to work in many cases, but as it is inconsistent and cannot be duplicated exactly from one saga to the next, I have designed a system whereby starting points for characters of the different seasons may be clearly indicated.

## Seasonal Concept

In order to provide a standard for designing these characters, I propose a system based on my ideas for streamlining covenants (“Covenants as Characters”, *Hermes’ Portal* 4). Basically, what this article suggests is that **Ars Magica** characters, like covenants, can follow a seasonal model. Characters are born and grow through spring, graduate into adulthood in summer, peak and reproduce in autumn, and finally wither into winter.

### Spring Character Concepts

In spring, characters are new and fresh, but have little experience with life. They are awkward. Their bodies do not always fit them properly, they might have bad social and emotional habits, or they may simply be sheltered and overprotected. Spring characters are usually children, though adult characters who have never adjusted to the world around them might also be considered spring. Spring characters have left infancy behind, and thus should be at least (12 - Intelligence) years old. As young magi, they have begun apprenticeship and begun their years of initiation into the Order.

It was partly a desire to play spring characters that led me to write this article. In one saga I played, two of the players had their elder magi take on apprentices, and each played the other’s filius. When these new magi graduated fifteen years later, the players set the older magi aside and played the new ones as their primary characters. This was a nice way to bring variety into a long-running game and to represent the natural cycle of passing from winter into spring.

### Summer Character Concepts

Summer represents a graduation into adulthood. It is a recognition that childhood has passed away, and the voluntary pursuit of greatness. Most starting characters are summer characters, since they embody the prime of life. Usually about twenty-five years old, they are still young and strong, but mature enough to survive on their own. Of course, it is possible to have summer characters who are much older or even much younger, as long as their outlook is one that embodies their quest to distinguish themselves.

Summer characters are how **Ars Magica** players typically begin, much like summer covenants are good for new players. There are no new rules in this article for starting summer characters; everything still works out exactly as it is in the books.

### Autumn Character Concepts

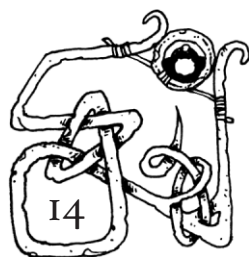
The change to autumn represents the pinnacle of the character’s greatness and achievements. An autumn character has become the master of his craft, and is beginning the descent into old age. Autumn is also typified by reproduction, by passing on what the character knows to others. The character’s focus changes from achieving all that he can to ensuring the continuity of his line, and he becomes less concerned with his own skills and more attentive to his community.

This change comes very gradually, usually after age 35 for companions and grogs. The character begins to age more noticeably, but has accumulated a lot of experience through several years of adventuring and practice. He is accomplished in his field, and a master of his craft. The best way to describe this change is to purchase a “masterpiece” for the character, something that represents the fruits of his summer labor. For companions or grogs, simply purchasing one or more related Abilities at level 5 or 6 might be enough to represent this mastery.

Autumn magi have also reached master levels of appropriate Abilities, such as Magic Theory, and mastered many of their spells — or invented one or two of their own. But beyond that, magi typically accomplish something that proves they have matured to magical greatness and can take their place among the powerful. This might involve training an apprentice, reaching a certain level of authority and knowledge in a secret society, constructing a talisman, binding a familiar, or discovering a Hermetic breakthrough. For a follower of Tremere, this might involve besting the holder of his sigil at certamen. For one of Criamon’s line, it might involve having a major Twilight episode with very good effects. For the faerie magi of Merinita, it could involve an extended visit to Arcadia. Whatever the event or achievement, it changes the character and defines the high point from which he will begin to descend into autumn, and is the basis for the character concept.

Most magi older than 35 have been taking a longevity potion since they began to age, and so can have very, very long autumns. Unless it is integral to the concept that a character does not have a longevity potion, you should assume that the character has not noticeably advanced in age since his mid-30s. However, unless you actually purchase a longevity potion (with the Magic Item Virtue, or by spending some of your starting lab experience, as described below), the potion you have been using has recently failed and you will need to make or commission a new one very soon.

While the player may be aware that the character has entered autumn, only rarely will the character recognize this. In fact, many characters may prefer to



believe that their masterpiece is only one step in a long line of great achievements. This might be so — they might extend their autumn equinoxes, so to speak, as they extend their lifespans — but more likely they will fail, never able to duplicate their earlier achievements and frustrating themselves and others trying to recapture their waning youth.

Winter Character Concepts

Winter comes at a terrible price to most characters. To pass into winter, the character has suffered some terrible misfortune, a calamity that accelerates decay and without a doubt sends the character down the spiral towards the end. The effects and scope of the catastrophe define the essence of a winter character.

Many winter characters have physical troubles, such as afflictions and decrepitude, while others have psychological and supernatural failings, such as a poor memory or a warped appetite. Companions typically begin this stage of life at about age 50. For magi, the journey into winter may come from a failed longevity potion, a lab experiment gone wrong, or a particularly bad Twilight episode. These events can really take their toll on magi, as they have so much more to lose.

I believe winter characters are best played as story characters, rather than player characters, because their end is certain and is clearly in sight. As physical embodiments of death, age, and madness, they should be dangerous and frightening, even if they do not always appear that way on the surface. Unless your players would enjoy playing that theme for an entire saga, I think winter characters can be used most effectively as examples to the young.

Virtues and Flaws

The most drastic differences between characters of different seasons are the effects of stories. This is difficult to measure, as they can vary from saga to saga. The most common way for starting characters to represent these differences is with Virtues and Flaws. The totals are balanced so that all characters have the same base level of benefits and penalties, but they describe a character's background very well.

To represent the effects of different seasons on a character, I first suggest using a varying ratio of Virtues to Flaws, to represent the greater or lesser opportunities of a starting character. Based on season and status (magi, companion or grog), you can use the following chart to determine starting totals.

| Seasonal Virtue to Flaw Ratios |                       |        |       |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------|--------|-------|
| Season                         | Maximum Virtues/Flaws |        | Ratio |
|                                | magi & companions     | grog   |       |
| Spring                         | +10/-20               | +3/-7  | 1:2   |
| Summer                         | +10/-10               | +3/-3  | 1:1   |
| Autumn                         | +20/-10               | +7/-3  | 2:1   |
| Winter                         | +20/-30               | +7/-10 | 2:3   |

Characters gain and lose Virtues and Flaws over time, as they grow and change through the seasons.

These figures represent the maximums for a starting character, but characters can go beyond these limits during the course of a saga. To maintain the balance of the character compared to others, however, it helps to keep the ratio constant. For example, if an autumn character has +24 Virtues, he should also pick up a few extra Flaws to bring him to -12. It is this relationship that defines the character as one season or another.

Using this model, it is possible for grogs to gain as many as seven Virtues and ten Flaws. However, I don't recommend that they be allowed to take Virtues or Flaws greater than +3 or -3 to make up this total. That is, spring grogs might have two -3 Flaws, but not a single -6 Flaw. Otherwise, it might become difficult to tell autumn grogs from summer companions, and companions and grogs would begin to lose their distinguishing focus in the saga.

Here follows Virtues and Flaws that have either been specifically designed with seasonal characters in mind, or that further develop existing Virtues and Flaws so that they may be used at many different ages. There are many more Flaws, especially ones dealing with aging or childhood, but any character can take one of these as long as the troupe agrees it is appropriate.

Of course, the standard Hermetic or General Virtues and Flaws can be used as well, but I suggest that when dealing with additional points of Virtues or Flaws that you stack them, counting multiples of the same Virtue or Flaw by counting with pyramid points. For example, the same +1 Virtue taken three times could be stacked as a +2 Virtue. Two -2 Flaws might be stacked as a -3 Flaw.

Variable Virtues

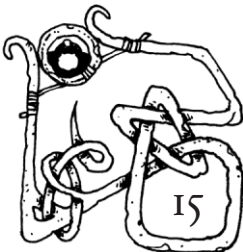
**Improved (Characteristic):** Through practice, maturity, or repeated supernatural influence, you have temporarily increased your natural aptitude in one area. Divide the cost of this Virtue into pyramid points and add them to a particular Characteristic. For example, a +3 Virtue would raise Dexterity -2 to +2.

+1 Virtues

**Extra Practice (magi):** You have spent more time in the lab than other magi, and thus have additional points to spend on spells and other practical activities. When calculating your experience for time spent in the lab, add one to your age. For example, summer magi might receive 10 additional lab points.

**Extra Study (magi):** You have spent more time studying compared to other magi, and thus have additional points to spend on Arts and other forms of knowledge. When calculating your study points, add one to your age. For example, summer magi might receive 10 additional study points.

**Family Reputation:** Your children, siblings, parents or teachers have a positive reputation that rubs off on you. Because of their great achievements, you get a positive Reputation, at 3, through association with them, but you are expected to follow in their





footsteps. While they are a source of pride and inspiration for you, you may often feel that you cannot possibly measure up, and when you fail, others are not as understanding because of your potential.

**Guardian:** A mentor looks after you, giving you extra attention and privileges within your covenant or Tribunal. Most of the time you receive special treatment because of this relationship, but if you take advantage of your Guardian, you may end up in greater trouble.

**Story Experience:** You participated in an adventure of some kind when you were younger, and have picked up additional experience because of it. For example, you may have participated in a military campaign, or made a pilgrimage to a holy shrine. Depending on your starting season, you receive experience points according to the chart below. These points may be spent on any Abilities that the storyguide deems appropriate to your background.

| Story Experience |                  |
|------------------|------------------|
| Season           | Story Experience |
| Spring           | 3                |
| Summer           | 7                |
| Autumn           | 10               |
| Winter           | 7                |

**Youthful:** This Virtue compensates for one annoying affliction, allowing you to ignore it completely. You suffer no negative effects because of it. If you have no annoying afflictions, you simply appear to be in good health, to such an extent that you seem a few years younger than you actually are.

#### +2 Virtues

**Good Health:** Because of your exceptionally good constitution, you can ignore one minor affliction or three annoying afflictions caused by aging or Flaws. You suffer none of the consequences of these afflictions. If you have no minor afflictions, you simply come across as exceptionally youthful, perhaps even mistaken for a character from an earlier season.

#### +3 Virtues

**Fast Learner** (companions and grogs): You learn very quickly, and thus gain an additional point of experience every year. You also gain an additional point of story experience on every adventure. When starting, add one to the number of experience points you gain for each year of your age.

**Time's Blessing:** You appear in the prime of life, though you may have advanced many, many years beyond. You hardly age at all, and you may accumulate as many as two minor afflictions or five annoying afflictions before your body begins to show signs of decay, or you can choose to ignore the effects of one major affliction.

#### +5 Virtues

**Fast Learner** (magi): You get an additional experience point for each year of your starting age, and receive an extra experience point for each story. You also receive a +1 on rolls to study from vis (before multiplication).



### Variable Flaws

**Block with (Ability):** The opposite of a Knack, you have a mental block with a particular Ability, typically one that is or will become very important in your saga. Subtract the value of this Flaw from all totals involving that Ability. Examples of common Abilities that might be appropriate for this Flaw include Brawl, Speak (Language), Awareness, Concentration, or Athletics.

**Decreased (Characteristic):** While you may grow out of it, one of your basic Characteristics has been reduced because of your age or situation. For each pyramid point spent on this Flaw, reduce one Characteristic by a similar amount. For example, a -3 Decreased Presence Flaw would change a +1 Presence into a -3.

**Susceptibility:** Your body is more vulnerable to a particular kind of affliction, perhaps because of age or because of prior exposure. Add the cost of the degree of susceptibility, the commonality of the affliction, and its deadliness to determine the cost of this Flaw.

#### *Degree of Susceptibility*

-3 to Soak rolls: -1

-6 to Soak rolls: -2

Automatic: -3

#### *Commonality of the Affliction*

- Very common (the average person comes into contact with it on a weekly basis): -1

- Uncommon (the average person comes into contact with it once every few months): 0

- Rare (the average person comes into contact with it once a year or less often): +1

#### *Deadliness of the Affliction*

- Inconvenient (like fevers, flu, or the common cold): +1

- Debilitating (like mild poisons or varieties of plague): 0

- Crippling (an effect that has a permanent effect but does not kill): -1

- Deadly (an effect that can be expected to incapacitate or kill the average person): -2

**Twilight Points** (magi): You have suffered one or more encounters with wild, strong magic that sent you into Wizard's Twilight. The nature of these events is important, as it may set a precedent for future Twilight episodes. You receive one Twilight point for each level of this Flaw, i.e. a -2 Flaw gives you 2 Twilight points. Since this is a Flaw, good effects are not included in the cost, but you can purchase those separately if they would be appropriate.

### -1 Flaws

**Annoying Affliction:** You have an annoying physical affliction caused by age. This might include gray hair, failing eyesight, stiff joints or aching limbs. Note that an annoying affliction is simply an opportunity for roleplaying; there is no mechanical effect. However, you can only have five afflictions, so this annoying affliction will probably worsen over time.

**Crush:** You are romantically attracted to someone with whom you have no chance of a relationship,

because it would be inappropriate or perhaps simply unrequited. This Flaw will probably do no more than embarrass you on occasion, but it is impossible to hide your feelings from the object of your affection, and others may pick up on it and make fun of you.

**Debt:** You owe someone up to 70 pounds of silver, or approximately seven pawns of vis. If there is interest on the loan, the total cost including the interest is covered by this Flaw. If you do not pay it back, there will probably be unpleasant consequences.

**Frail:** You cannot take physical punishment as well as most people. You get a -3 penalty to your Soak score.

**Less Practice** (magi): You have spent less time in the lab during your time as a magus. Subtract one from the number of years you have been studying magic when calculating your starting lab points. For example, a summer character might have 10 fewer points to spend on spells and other lab projects.

**Less Study** (magi): You have spent less time studying in your time as a magus. Subtract one from the number of years you have been studying magic when calculating your starting study points. For example, a summer character might have 10 fewer points to spend on Arts.

**Seasonal Crisis:** You believe yourself to be in a season other than what you are; if you are an autumn character you may believe you are still in summer and have difficulty accepting that your best days are behind you. A spring character may desperately act older. Whatever the case, you have a negative Personality trait at -3 to represent your attempts to emulate another stage of life.

**Short-winded:** You cannot last as long as others when exerting yourself, and receive -3 on all your Fatigue rolls. For magi, this penalty does not apply to casting spells.

## -2 Flaws

**Abstraction Handicap** (companions and grogs): You cannot comprehend most abstractions, meaning that you can never learn to read, interpret maps, or understand money.

**Child:** You have the body of a child, which reduces your Size by 1 and gives you one less Body level and Fatigue level. This Flaw can still be combined with physical Virtues and Flaws such as Large +1 or Small Frame -2, because at some point in the future, probably when you pass from spring into summer, you will grow up and lose this Flaw.

**Dangerous Obsession:** You are obsessed with an object, action, or ideal, similar to the -1 Obsessed Flaw, but your obsession has begun to drive you down the path of destruction. Describe this dangerous habit in terms of what will happen when you go too far. Examples include an obsession with demons that will lead to the character's corruption, an obsession with battle that could lead to death by violence, or an obsession with being right that will cause the character to lose his friends and allies.

**Dependence:** You are very clingy and do not feel comfortable without a mentor or someone you can

trust watching over you. On your own, you suffer a -3 penalty to everything you try to do, and feel an intense feeling of abandonment and fear.

**Feral Lifestyle** (companions and grogs): You have lived in the wilderness for a lot of your life, so much that you cannot remember most of the niceties of civilization. At least half of your starting experience must be spent only on Abilities that could be learned or practiced in the wild.

**Inept:** Even with concentrated effort, you have difficulty with Abilities that others find natural. You suffer a -3 penalty to rolls against a Talent in which you have no score, unless you have some time to consider what you are about to do. You cannot improve Skills or learn new Talents without specific training.

**Know-it-all:** You have a need to show off your experience and superiority to others, which gives you a bad reputation among your peers. Take a negative Personality trait associated with your proud behavior, and a negative Reputation at level 3 among an appropriate group.

**Minor Affliction:** You have a minor physical or mental affliction that causes you some trouble and increases your chances of dying of old age. Take an affliction at 1, and subtract 1 from all rolls associated with that affliction.

**Self-absorbed:** You pay less attention than most to your surroundings and what is going on around you. You do not pick up Casual Knowledges through exposure, and must purchase starting Abilities like Speak (Local Language), Carouse or Brawl with your experience points; you don't get them for free.

**Slow Reflexes:** You do not react well to surprises. Whenever you are startled, you need a few minutes to consider what to do before you can act, and in the first round of any combat you receive a -9 to your Initiative total as you assess the situation.

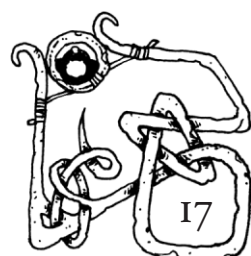
**Unreliable Magic Ability:** You have a magical quality (purchased separately) that has already manifested but that is inherently unreliable. You may not be aware of it, but your power will occasionally fail to function, for no apparent reason, and may disappear completely at some point in the future or in response to some relevant event.

## -3 Flaws

**Feral Lifestyle** (magi): As the -2 Flaw for companions and grogs. At least half of your starting study and lab points must be spent on things that you could learn or practice in the wild without books or special equipment (spell mastery, Abilities, studying Arts from vis).

**Major Affliction:** You have an affliction caused by age or injury that increases your chances of dying of old age. Take an affliction at 2, and subtract 2 from all rolls associated with that affliction.

**Shaky Magic** (magi): You have difficulties making your magic function as you intend, either through lack of experience or because of something unfortunate that has happened to you. Because of this, a 0





always indicates a possible botch on your magical activities, even when rolling a simple or quality die.

**Slow Learner** (companions and grogs): You receive one less experience point per story and per year of your age because of your difficulty with picking up knowledge.

#### -5 Flaws

**Crippling Affliction:** One of your afflictions caused by age is so bad that it is crippling. Take a physical or mental affliction at 6, representing something that you are now completely unable to use.

### Age and Starting Experience

After choosing Virtues and Flaws, the next step in designing a seasonal character is to determine the character's age, which is used to determine starting experience. This is probably established by the character concept, although ages may vary wildly depending upon the power levels of your saga.

I have found that applying a seasonal modifier to starting experience helps to represent the varying power levels between younger and older characters. This number grows larger as one approaches autumn, representing a greater range of experience, and then begins to decay in winter, as the character loses the ability to retain knowledge.

| Seasonal Modifiers |                            |
|--------------------|----------------------------|
| Season             | Starting seasonal modifier |
| Spring             | 1                          |
| Summer             | 2                          |
| Autumn             | 3                          |
| Winter             | 2                          |

#### Companions and Grogs

Companions and grogs use the following formula to determine their starting experience, and for ease of reference, I've calculated them by season using the seasonal variables.

| Starting Experience<br>(companions and grogs) |                     |
|-----------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Starting experience                           |                     |
| age × seasonal modifier                       |                     |
| Season                                        | Starting experience |
| Spring                                        | age                 |
| Summer                                        | age × 2             |
| Autumn                                        | age × 3             |
| Winter                                        | age × 2             |

Companions and grogs also receive additional starting experience in Casual Knowledges and other Abilities like Brawl and Carouse, picked up through exposure. These include things like (Area) Lore and Speak (Language). I simply add the character's age again instead of setting requirements for all grogs or companions to start with particular Abilities.

These factors together help define the range of the character's experience. For spring characters, these totals indicate that they have not had much time to learn more than basic abilities during infancy. Summer characters have had more opportunities to

learn as they grew into adulthood. Autumn characters benefit from a long summer of opportunity and experience. Winter characters have begun to lose some of their abilities but still have a rich history to draw upon.

#### Magi

Besides using the character's age, magi must calculate their starting experience using the number of years they have been studying magic. I have decided to call these years **aetas**, the Latin word for age. For example, a starting summer magus has 15 aetas, the years he spent as an apprentice.

| Starting Experience (magi)              |                     |
|-----------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Starting experience                     |                     |
| age + (aetas × (seasonal modifier + 1)) |                     |
| Season                                  | Starting experience |
| Spring                                  | age × 2             |
| Summer                                  | age + (aetas × 3)   |
| Autumn                                  | age + (aetas × 4)   |
| Winter                                  | age + (aetas × 3)   |

For spring magi, starting experience is simply the character's age, plus exposure experience, as if they were companions. This is because they have not yet begun formal training of magic, and so have no aetas. Older magi already have their exposure experience included in the formula, but if you need to tweak it, I suggest you simply use the character's age.

Exposure experience for magi is usually spent on Casual Knowledges like Speak (Local Language) and Organization Lore (Order of Hermes), but in any case is accounted for in the House templates. Autumn and winter magi will have some Casual Knowledges experience left over after they buy the Abilities described by their lineages, but storyguides may require some of their other Abilities to be advanced with this as well. For example, as a storyguide, I would expect every autumn follower of Bjornaer to have at least a 4 in Will Over Form.

Once magi begin taking longevity potions, they can live a very long time. The practical maximum is about 500, but of course that assumes that the character has received no Twilight points from sources besides the potion. If Twilight points are more or less common in your saga, this maximum may be much younger or even older.

I have found that a starting age of about 65 is good for autumn magi, as that gives them a long and productive summer with about 50 years of magic, and power levels that seem appropriate compared to summer magi. For winter magi, it depends upon their catastrophes and the power levels of the saga, but about 180 years of age seems right to me. I have tested magi as young as 80 without difficulty, though.

In addition to their experience from their age, magi receive training in their Arts and other magical activities. I have calculated these totals separately as study points and lab points. Study points represent study of magic that is not dangerous, learned from books in the library or through formal instruction.



Lab points come from the practical study of magic, involving research in the lab or fieldwork.

Another factor is the amount of time the character spends studying each year. For starting characters, I assume the character has had a limited number of seasons in which to study and practice magic, as indicated by the following table. For example, a starting summer magus typically would have had only one season of practice and study each year during his apprenticeship.

| Study Time |                     |
|------------|---------------------|
| Season     | Starting study time |
| Spring     | no seasons          |
| Summer     | one season          |
| Autumn     | two seasons         |
| Winter     | three seasons       |

Using these variables, here are the formulae I have designed for calculating starting study points and lab points.

| Study and Lab Points                                                             |                          |                          |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Study points                                                                     |                          |                          |
| $\text{aetas} \times \text{seasonal modifier} \times \text{study time} \times 5$ |                          |                          |
| Lab points                                                                       |                          |                          |
| $\text{aetas} \times \text{seasonal modifier} \times \text{study time} \times 5$ |                          |                          |
| Season                                                                           | Starting study pts       | Starting lab pts         |
| Spring                                                                           | 0                        | 0                        |
| Summer                                                                           | $\text{aetas} \times 10$ | $\text{aetas} \times 10$ |
| Autumn                                                                           | $\text{aetas} \times 30$ | $\text{aetas} \times 30$ |
| Winter                                                                           | $\text{aetas} \times 30$ | $\text{aetas} \times 30$ |

I use these rules combined with my ideas in the last issue for covenants as characters, which redefined covenant characteristics on the character scale, usually +3/-3. To represent the effects of covenants with exceptional libraries or labs, I have incorporated those characteristics into this formula, below. I only recommend this when all the characters come from the same covenant, as they can cause summer magi to begin with many more (or fewer) points than a normal starting magus.

| Using Covenant Characteristics                                        |  |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| Study points                                                          |  |
| $\text{starting study points} + (\text{aetas} \times \text{Library})$ |  |
| Lab points                                                            |  |
| $\text{starting lab points} + (\text{aetas} \times \text{Magic})$     |  |

Study points are primarily used for Arts. However, as they represent learning from books or instruction, they may also be used for Knowledges. 5 study points may be used for 1 experience point in an Ability that can be learned from a text. This assumes, of course, that the character has had access to books or teachers of this level, and storyguides may wish to alter these totals based on what is available in their sagas.

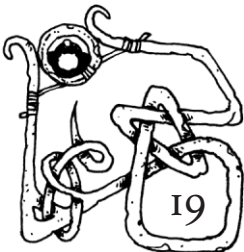
I have found the tables in *Ars Magica Fourth Edition* that provide example Arts for starting magi to be extremely useful, and also the lists of pyramid costs, and so I have expanded them for use with later seasons and included them here.

| Example Arts for Starting Magi  |                                                            |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| Summer (15 aetas, 150 points)   |                                                            |
| Specialist:                     | 16, 4, 2, 1                                                |
| Dual Arts:                      | 12, 11, 3                                                  |
| Concentrated:                   | 10, 10, 8, 2, 1                                            |
| Widely Adept:                   | 7, 7, 7, 7, 7, 4                                           |
| Generalist:                     | 6, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 4, 4, 3, 2, 2, 2, 2, 1                |
| Autumn (50 aetas, 1500 points)  |                                                            |
| Specialist:                     | 50, 6, 6, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5               |
| Dual Arts:                      | 35, 35, 6, 6, 6, 6, 6, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5              |
| Concentrated:                   | 23, 23, 22, 22, 22, 7, 7, 6, 6, 6, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5           |
| Widely Adept:                   | 17, 17, 16, 16, 16, 16, 16, 16, 16, 16, 7, 6, 6, 6, 5      |
| Generalist:                     | 15, 15, 15, 14, 14, 14, 14, 14, 14, 14, 13, 13, 12, 12, 11 |
| Winter (170 aetas, 5100 points) |                                                            |
| Dual Arts:                      | 50, 50, 30, 30, 30, 16, 16, 15, 15, 15, 15, 15, 15, 15, 7  |
| Concentrated:                   | 39, 39, 39, 39, 39, 15, 15, 15, 15, 15, 15, 15, 15, 15, 6  |
| Widely Adept:                   | 31, 30, 30, 30, 30, 30, 30, 30, 30, 30, 13, 13, 13, 13, 12 |
| Generalist:                     | 28, 28, 28, 27, 26, 25, 25, 25, 25, 25, 25, 25, 24, 24, 24 |

Lab points are used to represent the practical work that the character has done in the lab or in the field. These points are much more versatile, and arbitrarily kept separate from study points to ensure that starting characters are well rounded. If the characters in your saga have spent much more time in the lab than in study, it may be appropriate to convert some of their study points into lab points, or vice-versa.

The costs are based on several Virtues, including Magic Item, Beginning Vis and Extra Spells. I believe that Virtues generally should be worth more than lab

| Pyramid Points                                                                        |        |       |        |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|-------|--------|
| Pyramid points needed to advance:<br>$(\text{target} \times (\text{target} + 1)) / 2$ |        |       |        |
| Value                                                                                 | Points | Value | Points |
| 1                                                                                     | 1      | 26    | 351    |
| 2                                                                                     | 3      | 27    | 378    |
| 3                                                                                     | 6      | 28    | 406    |
| 4                                                                                     | 10     | 29    | 435    |
| 5                                                                                     | 15     | 30    | 465    |
| 6                                                                                     | 21     | 31    | 496    |
| 7                                                                                     | 28     | 32    | 528    |
| 8                                                                                     | 36     | 33    | 561    |
| 9                                                                                     | 45     | 34    | 595    |
| 10                                                                                    | 55     | 35    | 630    |
| 11                                                                                    | 66     | 36    | 666    |
| 12                                                                                    | 78     | 37    | 703    |
| 13                                                                                    | 91     | 38    | 741    |
| 14                                                                                    | 105    | 39    | 780    |
| 15                                                                                    | 120    | 40    | 820    |
| 16                                                                                    | 136    | 41    | 861    |
| 17                                                                                    | 153    | 42    | 903    |
| 18                                                                                    | 171    | 43    | 946    |
| 19                                                                                    | 190    | 44    | 990    |
| 20                                                                                    | 210    | 45    | 1035   |
| 21                                                                                    | 231    | 46    | 1081   |
| 22                                                                                    | 253    | 47    | 1128   |
| 23                                                                                    | 276    | 48    | 1176   |
| 24                                                                                    | 300    | 49    | 1225   |
| 25                                                                                    | 325    | 50    | 1275   |





points, since they are more versatile, but for these activities I felt a scale based on 10 lab points = +1 Virtue was appropriate. This does not mean I think it should be possible to buy any Virtue with lab points, but I concede that there may be other Virtues like these that seem representative of lab work, and could thus be purchased with lab points on this scale.

Most importantly, lab points can be spent on formulaic spells. 5 lab points buy 5 levels of spells. These can be standard spells or unique spells that have been designed by the character. Also, 5 lab points purchase one experience point towards mastery of a spell.

Lab points may be spent upon Arcane or Exceptional Abilities associated with the character's magic, representing practice and training in the field. 5 lab points equal one experience point in a particular Ability. The exception to this is Magic Theory; because characters can receive experience in Magic Theory from so many different lab activities, each experience point in Magic Theory costs only one lab point.

You can produce vis with lab points, either by distilling it from an aura, seeking it out in the wild, or performing valuable lab work that is reimbursed in turn. 10 lab points may be exchanged for 10 pawns of Vim vis, or 7 pawns of vis of any Art.

An extremely important application for lab points of autumn and winter magi is a longevity potion. Each 5 lab points spent equals 5 points of your longevity potion's Lab Total. If it is your own formula, you can only exchange these for a potion that you could feasibly produce. Otherwise, you have purchased your longevity potion from a specialist and cannot duplicate the formula should it ever fail.

Magi can produce enchanted items with lab points. 5 lab points equals 5 levels of spell effects in an invested device, or 10 levels of spell effects in a lesser enchanted device. Potions and other projects cost 5 lab points for each 5 points of their Lab Total. You may even create a talisman at the cost of 20 lab points. These costs include the necessary vis.

| Lab Point Costs |                                                         |
|-----------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| Lab points      | Achievement                                             |
| 1               | 1 experience point in Magic Theory                      |
| 5               | 5 levels of spells                                      |
| 5               | 1 experience point towards mastery of a spell           |
| 5               | 1 experience point in an Arcane or Exceptional Ability  |
| 5               | 5 points of Lab Total (potions, longevity potion)       |
| 5               | 5 levels of spell effects in an invested device         |
| 5               | 10 levels of spell effects in a lesser enchanted device |
| 10              | 10 pawns of Vim vis, or 7 pawns of vis of any Art       |
| 20              | a talisman                                              |



## Twilight

The greatest equalizer for magi is Twilight, for it keeps autumn and winter magi from continuing on indefinitely. Because there are so many ways to get Twilight points, I have integrated a system of automatic points for characters that meet certain criteria.

The inevitable source of Twilight for all magi is the longevity potion. Every 20 years, characters receive another Twilight point, and since they succumb to Final Twilight after 24, this limits their lifespan considerably. If magi are careful, and engage in few activities that will net them further Twilight, they may survive several centuries.

The study of Vim also causes Twilight points. Each point of Vim equals 1/5 of a Twilight point. To survive a long time, magi must avoid studying too much of this strange and powerful Art.

The final cause of Twilight points is magical botches. Whenever characters perform magical activities involving a stress die, they risk Twilight points. These activities include casting spells they have not mastered, performing arcane experimentation, studying from vis, or dealing too often with supernatural entities.

The first two Twilight conditions should be checked and applied retroactively as needed to starting characters of any season. The latter is more problematic; since the results of fortune and adventure are handled with Virtues and Flaws, older characters likely to have engaged in these sorts of activities should begin with the Twilight Points Flaw. Winter magi require a large number of Flaws, and this is a good way to fill them out.

I have also found in my saga that studying Arts beyond a certain level becomes very difficult without using vis, and so I usually give characters an additional Twilight point for each five levels above 35 they possess in any Art. Because I prefer to discourage astronomical Ability scores, I follow a similar formula for the study of Magic Theory.

### Twilight Points

| Condition             | Twilight points                         |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| Longevity potion      | (age - 35 + Stamina) / 20<br>rounded up |
| Studying Vim          | Vim / 5<br>rounded down                 |
| Studying other Arts   | (Art - 35) / 5<br>rounded down          |
| Studying Magic Theory | Magic Theory - 7                        |

### Advancement

While these rules make it easier to develop older characters, they are intended to represent characters who have just begun a new season, as is appropriate for player characters. However, there may be occasions where you wish to have a character that has advanced farther into a season, either as a one-time story character or even as a recurring character that has grown since his last appearance. I have compiled rules for this sort of advancement below.

I do caution against using this advancement for player characters; these mechanics are intended to approximate how characters grow and change, but they can never take the place of actual adventuring. I had thought of using these rules to bring a new player's character "up to speed" with other summer characters who had been adventuring for a while, but he ended up too powerful and not very interesting, and his background felt very artificial. The player quickly grew bored with him. I believe that if he had simply begun in starting summer, he would have eventually caught up with the other characters and been a more rewarding character to play.

To advance a character, first determine how far the character has progressed and what that character has been doing. Since the ratio of Virtues to Flaws depicts the character's season, a character that has advanced over a long period of time should have a slightly skewed ratio. For example, a magus in late spring might have +10 Virtues and -15 Flaws, rather than +10/-20. A late autumn companion might have closer to +20/-20.

When designing a starting character, all of their experience is based on the previous season; a starting summer character is fresh out of spring, and a starting winter character had been in autumn up until that moment. So, when advancing characters, you need to use different seasonal modifiers, to represent their current season rather than their backgrounds.

| Advancing Seasonal Modifiers |                   |
|------------------------------|-------------------|
| Season                       | Seasonal modifier |
| Spring                       | 2                 |
| Summer                       | 3                 |
| Autumn                       | 2                 |
| Winter                       | 1                 |

The seasonal modifier represents how many experience points grogs and companions receive each year. Magi use it to calculate their experience, study points and lab points, all of which use slightly different formulae for advancement, below.

I have modified the rules for exposure to simply grant one additional experience point in a Casual Knowledge, or two if the character has a positive Intelligence, every year through advancement. This is more gradual, but is also constant, and it keeps me from having to think about whether the character is being constantly exposed to something.

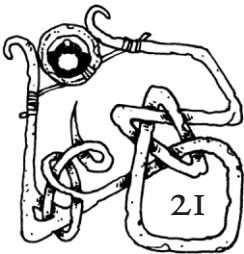
Study points and lab points do not all have to be spent right away, since many lab or study projects

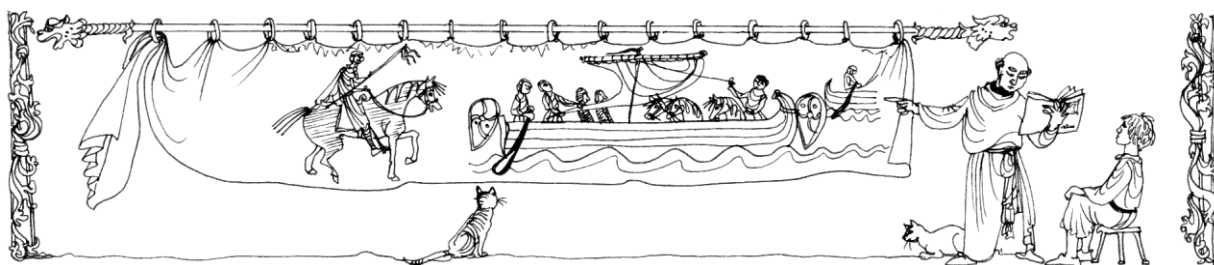
| Advancement Experience<br>(magi, companions and grogs) |                              |
|--------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Advancement experience                                 |                              |
| seasonal modifier/year                                 |                              |
| Exposure                                               |                              |
| 1 or 2 experience/year                                 |                              |
| Season                                                 | Advancement experience       |
| Spring                                                 | 2 exp/year + 1 or 2 exp/year |
| Summer                                                 | 3 exp/year + 1 or 2 exp/year |
| Autumn                                                 | 2 exp/year + 1 or 2 exp/year |
| Winter                                                 | 1 exp/year + 1 or 2 exp/year |

that would normally be accomplished in one season can take many seasons' worth of lab or study points to accomplish. By holding them over, you can approximate larger lab totals without involving stats or more complicated formulae. If advancing characters pursue specific lab projects, however, I find it is better to handle these projects as you would for player characters, determining the specifics of the lab total and making rolls where appropriate, rather than using the advancement shortcuts suggested by this article.

I hope these ideas inspire you to try seasonal characters in your saga, and that the rules I have come up with make it easier for you to play them. I'd like to give acknowledgement of my thanks to Bjarke Roth for his feedback and suggestions, both on this article and the previous one. My ideas would have been very rough and difficult to understand without his help. In the same spirit, I welcome and appreciate any other comments and suggestions you might have. Have fun!

| Advancement Study and Lab (magi)               |                             |                           |
|------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| Season                                         | Advancement study time      |                           |
| Spring                                         | one season                  |                           |
| Summer                                         | two seasons                 |                           |
| Autumn                                         | three seasons               |                           |
| Winter                                         | four seasons                |                           |
| Yearly study points                            |                             |                           |
| (seasonal modifier × study time × 5) + Library |                             |                           |
| Yearly lab points                              |                             |                           |
| (seasonal modifier × study time × 5) + Magic   |                             |                           |
| Season                                         | Adv <sup>st</sup> study pts | Adv <sup>st</sup> lab pts |
| Spring                                         | 10 + Library                | 10 + Magic                |
| Summer                                         | 30 + Library                | 30 + Magic                |
| Autumn                                         | 30 + Library                | 30 + Magic                |
| Winter                                         | 20 + Library                | 20 + Magic                |





## Dear Abelard

*Translator's Note:*

**D**ear Abelard is a column devoted to the writings of an elderly follower of Bonisagus who believed the best way to fulfill his duty to the Order was to share all of his advice and research in the form of written correspondence with a network of readers, carried by Redcaps to magi throughout Mythic Europe. If, through the course of your saga or studies, you discover a question that you think could have at one time been answered by Abelard, please forward it to the editor,

Hermes.Portal@wanadoo.fr or to  
dearabelard@yahoo.com  
and we will attempt to find a record of his reply.



Salvete Sodales,

I have just returned from meeting at Tribunal, and I am still alight with the excitement of participating in our grand process. The work of our founders fills me with pride; I am glad to be a part of the great order they created and it does my heart much good to see that it continues as they envisioned.

There is one singular event that occurred during my experience of these ponderous political days, and I would like to bring the circumstances to your attention. I found it a fascinating example of Hermetic tradition, legend and law given living form.

A very serious crime was brought before those of us at Tribunal. Temeritas, follower of Merinita, was accused of the slaying of her rival, Integra, follower of Tytalus. Temeritas, according to two of her sodales who witnessed the event, waylaid Integra one night while she was travelling, leaped upon her, and without a word clawed and strangled her to death. Her companions made no move to help her, as they did not believe it was their place to interfere, but they did attempt to prevent Temeritas from casting the spell she used to leave, and they subsequently carried Integra's body back to the covenant, where, as their tradition dictated, they cast a spell designed to preserve the body until the murder could be investigated.

Integra and Temeritas had feuded for many years. Their quarrel may have started about twelve years previously, when Integra adopted a faerie changeling as her apprentice. As alleged by Temeritas at the Tribunal before last, Temeritas had claimed this child as her apprentice, but (as she said) she had been waiting

for the right moment to take him into her confidence and her charge. Integra had simply stolen the child from his adopted parents during the night, in such a way that they had no idea what had become of him. Temeritas claimed that Integra had stolen what was rightfully hers, for she had been negotiating with the child's faerie mother and had only just obtained her permission when Integra acted. Furthermore, she had interfered with the mundanes and molested the fay. The Tribunal ruled that the apprentice was Integra's, as Temeritas had neither formally claimed him, nor ever spoken to the child, and acquitted her of the charges of molestation and interference on the grounds that the victims did not know who was responsible, and thus could not blame the Order.

In the years that followed, according to testimonies made by Integra's sodales, Temeritas did everything she could to make trouble for Integra. She began impersonating Integra in the nearby cities, making wild predictions, begging for alms, and attempting to impugn Integra's reputation. She sought out the faerie apprentice's adopted parents and told them that Integra had stolen their son, hoping to incite their wrath. She even asked the local bishop to investigate the child's disappearance, alleging that demons were involved in the abduction. After dealing with these dangerous machinations, Integra sought out the child's faerie mother in response and secured her blessing as his teacher, while demonstrating the untrustworthiness and malice of Temeritas and in so doing extracting the faerie's oath of aid against her.

The two women hated each other immensely, and both had threatened to call a Wizard's War to end their quarrel. Integra made clear her intentions to charge Temeritas with her own charges of interference with the mundanes and molestation of the fay. Witnesses had seen Temeritas murder Integra, and her motives were clear. A quaesitor also went to the scene and confirmed the events through the *Eyes of the Past*. There was little doubt as to what the verdict would be.

Inexplicably, however, Temeritas made no attempt to flee justice, but instead pitifully called for more investigation, repeatedly claiming that she had nothing to do with the attack. She maintained her innocence, though all appearances were against her. When questioned using *Frosty Breath of the Spoken Lie*, it became clear that she believed her words to be true. Temeritas clearly had no memory of the murder. Yes, she wanted Integra dead, but she did not kill



her. She had not conspired with others against her, and she had not plotted her demise through some other method. Integra's successors insisted that Temeritas had somehow erased her memory, and that the evidence was clearly enough to convict her.

The discussion stymied, and then a senior quaesitor of the Tribunal brought forth a suggestion. It has been said that the body of a murdered victim can recognize its murderer, he declared, and he knew of a magical ritual that might discover the truth. The spell he described would cause the wounds of a murder victim to reopen in the presence of the killer. As Integra's body was still whole, the bloody cuts caused by her attacker's long nails should tell whether Temeritas was guilty. Temeritas immediately agreed to the ritual, and though her accusers were sceptical, they also agreed to be bound by its findings. The magic was performed, and the wounds did not, in fact, reopen.

Temeritas then declared that she was innocent, and that she had reason to believe the true culprit was the faerie mother of Integra's apprentice. Integra had lied to her about the care she was giving the faerie's son, and had twisted her words to hold her to an oath that she did not intend to give. Perhaps in revenge, she suggested, the faerie mother had killed her, using the face of Temeritas in a misguided attempt of honouring their former friendship.

This story did not ring true to the assembled magi, for we suspected that Temeritas was not as guiltless in her affairs with this faerie as she made it seem, but it was nevertheless clear that she was not responsible for the murder. Whoever impersonated her was immaterial, for her sodales did not pursue the matter. Because of her admitted attempts to poison mundanes and the fay against Integra in the years before the attack, however, Temeritas was fined several rooks of vis.

This incident taught me a strange humility, or as my good friend Moratamis would say (she has asked me to refrain from calling her my "amica"), "I have skipped ahead a few pages in the book of wisdom." It is not always clear what the truth is; magic is not infallibly correct, and neither are we. Had Temeritas fled the Tribunal in fear for her life, she would doubtless have joined Integra in the world beyond, slain in the Wizard's March we would have quickly dispatched to deal with her. I hope that all of our gatherings this summer have similar examples of clear thinking prevailing over ignorance and mystery.

*Translator's Note: Players can approximate the ritual used at the Tribunal above with the following spell, based on Abelard's description and other accounts we have of the event.*

### The Ordeal of the Bier

InCo20

R: Reach, D: Sun, T: Ind, Ritual

Spell Focus: A Vial of the Victim's Blood (+3)

This ritual is cast upon the corpse of a murder victim. If the murderer is standing within a pace of the corpse, its wounds reopen and produce a thick

stream of blood. If nothing happens, either the victim was not murdered or the murderer is not present.



Dear Abelard,

I have passed my apprenticeship and have been given leave by my mistress to leave her. However, I have not yet sworn the Hermetic Oath, as the Tribunal in Stonehenge is still four years away, in the thirteen hundred and sixty fourth year of Aries. I was wondering what my position under Hermetic Law is; am I still considered an apprentice, am I considered a magus, or am I in some no man's land in between? I most concerned about the protection I have under Hermetic Law, if any.

Signed,

Ambrose Magus

My dear Ambrose,

Allow me to offer you my congratulations upon your graduation. As you have passed your Gauntlet, and your parens has declared that you are fit, you are a magus of our Order and entitled to all the protections that entails. None of the Order may deprive you of your magical power, slay you outside of justly declared Wizard's War, or scry upon you with magic.

As this has not yet been declared formally at Tribunal, there may be some who do not recognize your status as a magus. This is their error, of course, and should they fail to respect your rights they may be punished still according to Hermetic law. However, to prevent complications that might arise from this sort of misunderstanding, I recommend that you seek out a quaesitor and ask her to ratify your status. This will affirm your status legally, as she will have you recite the Oath and declare you a magus, and should any dispute your status, she will speak on your behalf.

It should be said that many tribunals have customs concerning when magi are sworn into the Order, and while you are now a full magus with all the rights that entails, your sodales or the praeco of your Tribunal may not recognize those rights until after you have sworn the Oath before them. I think it is best to go along with this custom if that is what is expected of you (I have no idea what typically occurs in Stonehenge), as long as it does you no harm.

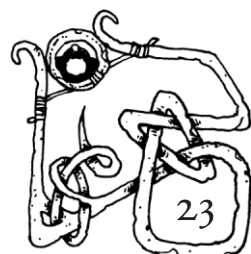
Again, welcome to our Order, and I hope your pursuit of magic is long and fruitful.



Until next issue, my dear readers,

ABELARDO

"Dear Abelard" was written by Lanatus, follower of Bonisagus, and his amica Moratamis, follower of Guernicus. To receive his regular correspondence, or to ask for his advice, please send your name, covenant and Tribunal to Dear Abelard, Scriptoris Socii, Normandy. Your confidentiality will be respected.



# Stories for Elder Magi

by Timothy Ferguson

## Outside Context Problems

Some context problems emerge without forewarning. After the crisis has begun, skilled characters, possibly working independently, will begin a rectifying process. The first stage is securing a base of operations. The assessment phase then begins: detailed examination of the problem and attempts to contextualise it occur. The breakthrough comes when the magi develop a new world-model that allows them to understand the problem, since this allows them to apply conventional resources to its solution.

### The Devil's Horsemen

An impending context problem is the invasion of Eastern Europe by the Mongols. To deal with it, characters need to accept that the East isn't an empty desert filled with wandering tribes. Beyond this, they may need to step outside the narrative of history in which they were raised. They may need to accept that Western Europe is half of an impoverished and culturally backward promontory jutting out from the more politically significant landmass of Asia. Pro-active magi, with a grasp of geopolitics, who find a way around the Mongol threat, would pave the way to the Order's next wave of eastward expansion.

### Prester John

Rumour has it that there is a magus-emperor who is descended from the Grail kings and has more gold than all of the kings of Europe put together. If his crusading armies sweep out of Africa, India or a regio, then reconquer the Holy Land, what will the Order do? A decisive victory for the crusaders, despite intermittent Hermetic support for the Cause of the Cross, might seriously harm the Order.

The Crusades bleed pressure out of Europe, and if they end, it needs to find a new outlet. The Catholics get the Holy City back, and that might boost the Dominion and free up crusaders to smite heretics back in Western Europe. Re-enforcements return fuelling the temporal wars, proto-Inquisition, pogroms, and assaults on the Orthodox Church, and crusades in North Africa and along the Baltic coast. The turmoil could damage many of the Order's younger and more public covenants.

Hermetic violence also needs to find new outlets for expression. Flambeaux find themselves deprived of Asiatic Muslims awaiting murder, and either clash with other magi, and the Catholics, or refocus their efforts on the Berber states. Young hotheads have to be shipped off somewhere else, and allowed to let off steam, which puts pressure on the Novgorod and Roman Tribunals. Political tensions increase as tribunals quarrel over newly conquered African territories, while settlers attempt to found independent Tribunals. This pits them against the Roman Tribunal, which currently claims the African coast around

Mauritania and sees harvesting chapters in this hinterland as the best solution to Italy's chronic vis shortage.

Despite the dangers, there are opportunities hidden in the massed ranks of underemployed zealots. Just as the Order settled the Baltic after crusaders had swept away the indigenous magi, the Order could ride Catholicism's coat tails down the Nile, or past the Holy Land and along the Silk Road. Those covenants which weather the turmoil in Europe can claim the harvest sites vacated by the less fortunate, and develop mundane influence by assisting feuding nobles. Finally, Prester John may be the Order's weapon against the Catholic Church.

It is likely that Prester John's crusaders are heretics, or hold heterodox beliefs. If they come from Africa, they may be Ethiopian Orthodox. If they come from India, they might be Nestorians. Either way, Prester John claims to be a priest and a king at the same time, and if his forces hold Jerusalem, he's unlikely to acknowledge the primacy of the Papacy, except in honour. A powerful, third force in ecclesiastical politics, likely closer aligned to the Orthodox than the Romans, provides magi of the Order with countless opportunities for intrigue.

To overcome this problem, characters need to find out where Prester John is from, how large his forces are, if they are likely to be effective and how his arrival will affect Church, secular and Hermetic culture in Europe.

### The Black Death

Historically, the Black Death does not sweep Europe for another century, but as a survival story, it provides drama without making "killing the foe" the obvious solution. The plague comes from the East, and the further west the characters are, the more warning they will have. To Second Sight, the plague looks like a cloud of greasy steam that wafts across the earth, smearing all it touches.

When the Black Death sweeps Europe, it affects most communities. Since a disease spirit causes it, covenants with a sufficiently high aura may remain unaffected in the short term. Madness sweeps the land as people search for the causes of the plague, punish scapegoats or do all the sinful things they doubt they'll have a chance to do tomorrow. Those nobles of sufficient resources flee populated centres, and may demand admittance to a community that seems untouched. Others may blame magi, who rest unharmed behind intangible, invisible enchantments.

In theory, surviving the immediate crisis isn't difficult for a well-supplied covenant. The problem is in the detail. A covenant with sufficient supplies stored for several years of siege, or with vis that can be transformed into nutritious food, needs not only to deal with the dozens starving beyond the door, or the vengeful ghosts of those left to die, but with grogs who will gladly steal supplies to feed their families and sweethearts. How do the magi maintain morale when they have to tell each grog that, no, the supplies





and sanitation are insufficient for every turb member to be allowed to save their loved ones?

In the longer term, once the plague recedes, the covenant will need to embrace a change in the balance of immaterial powers within its surrounding district. The Dominion may have been weakened by depopulation and the death of half the priests, constantly exposed while giving unction. Infernal activity may have peaked as people trade their immortality for life. Faeries are, to some degree, reflective of the psyches of the humans who live near them; so faerie places may become nightmarish expressions of grief, agony and despair. Plentiful ghosts may provide additional Vim and Mentem vis, and the plague may leave behind charnel pits of Perdo vis, some tainted with aesfotedia.

The mundane population will have been shattered by the plague. Save a miracle, between a quarter and half of the people will die. Nobles returning to depopulated lands steal each other's labour forces where possible, and gradually the lot of peasants improves. Shortages of manufactured goods may last for decades after the plague, as the economic network of Europe recovers, and the studios of the remaining craftsmen nurture a new generation of artisans.

The combination of higher wages and lower commodity prices drives many noblemen toward penury, which they hold off by dividing their demesnes, and granting land to freemen. This reduces their labour costs. Covenants with income based on trade of luxury items or agriculture will face similar problems to the nobility. Those that have the ability to use magic in place of human labourers may weather this financial crisis better than their sodales. A plague is always useful for Hermetic magi who want to participate in a bit of selective homicide. A daring strategy, just after the plague peaks, is to kill off the current line of nobility and lend authority to a friendly figurehead, who will rule the area on behalf of the covenant.

Women enter many professions at this time, inheriting the businesses of dead husbands and fathers. Their role, as leaders of families, is apparent in the next generation, when a new range of feminised surnames emerges. Examples include Baxter, the feminine of Baker, and Brewster, the feminine of Brewer. Women left free of the scars of the plague are rare, and therefore tremendously marriageable.

Some may sacramentalise their way into the nobility, but even if this doesn't occur, the covenant's folk, as a community filled with fit husbands and attractive wives, are likely to attract attention.

#### *Other plagues*

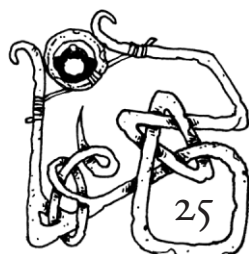
Other pandemics can provide similar effects, but may be more frightening and mysterious because they are ahistorical. Clark Ashton Smith wrote a story of a plague that blew from space onto a country, turning the people there into silver statues. In that case, at least some Hermetic magi would be tempted to spread the plague and melt the victims down afterward. Other plagues may be attracted to the Gifted, or those with certain Affinities or Virtues. These won't damage mundane society so grievously, but may crush the Order. Another alternative is that a symbiotic organism causes the Gift.

#### **Crusade**

The Church knows the Order exists, it simply chooses not to direct its wrath toward the Order at this time. There are sound reasons for this. The Order is an essentially apathetic institution. It doesn't want to change the world. Sure, the Church may think the Order is a pack of sinners who deserve brimstone on the Final Day, but it's a lazy pack of sinners who can wait until the Church does in those idolaters in the Holy Land. Before the rise of Islam, the Church was busy with the Holy Roman Emperors, and before that there wasn't a lot of temporal power in the hands of the Papacy, and it was being directed at heretics within the Church. The Order has always been near the bottom of the Church's list of priorities, but that may change.

There are many wizards who know the Church is too busy with other things to punish them, and so they take liberties with Church property. One or more of these groups may provoke the Church, shifting the Order from the category of inactive sinners to active antagonists. Most notorious for annoying mundanes are the Flambeaux, who like to burn things, but since they are firmly committed to killing Arabs, the Church tolerates some of their other indiscretions. The Jerbitons are sometimes caught spying on the Church, or infiltrating its senior ranks, but have excellent diplomatic skills, with which to control the damage. Houses that have less contact with the Church are more likely to set it off. The Merinitans and Bjornaer want to halt the spread of civilisation, which places them directly at odds with Rome, but keeps them out of Italy. The Order is also a depository for heresy. Many ideas which modern readers take for granted are arguably heretical in the medieval Church.

If the Church does crusade against the Order, the covenants most likely to fall are the spring and summer covenants in Normandy, Provencal, Rome, Iberia and Spain. Although nobles in other Tribunals might take this opportunity to rally troops against individual covenants, the British tribunals lack the stable, powerful monarchs necessary for a campaign against all Spring covenants in series. Covenants in





the Rhineland might well fall, but that would depend on the complicated game of patronage played by the Imperial nobility. Novgorod is beyond the influence of the Catholic Church, and Thebes, although recently conquered by Catholics, has divided, ineffective leadership. Levantine covenants are small, but either shelter under the protection of the Muslims, or are the allies of the Crusaders. It's important to remember that if the Church tries to destroy the Order's younger covenants, the Order's older covenants may support the Church, not their sodales.

### Visionaries

Medieval Europe suffers from a plague of people who hear voices in their head and think that it's the Lord talking to them. A lot of the time, we may say with the virtue of hindsight, they were wrong. Peter the Hermit led the Peasant Crusade to Anatolia, butchered hundreds of Orthodox Christians and was then slaughtered by a Muslim army. It's clear that whoever was speaking to him, telling him it was his duty to retake the Holy City, was pulling his leg. The Children's Crusade was a similarly doomed quest.

The problem with someone who has a voice in their head is that they are far less predictable than the Church. If aggravated they can rouse the peasantry, so that the magi are forced to choose between letting their covenant get sacked by a torch-bearing mob or killing the farmers who grow their crops. To avoid this, the magi need to work out what aggravates the visionary, and how whimsical the voices will be about torching the scholars on the hill. They then need to determine a level of support for the visionary, remembering that the Church is likely to send priests and soldiers to the area, to stamp out heresy.

Visionaries become less of a problem once the Order works out what is causing the person to hear voices. If they are saints, they can be pointed toward corrupt people elsewhere. If they are mad, they can be safely martyred or controlled. If they are possessed or faerie ridden, Waiting Spells can be set in areas where they will pass. If other Hermetic magi are controlling them, the visionary needs to be neutralised and protected while the Quaesitores are called.

### Rogue magi

Every few generations, a group of Hermetic wizards goes rogue. Many quietly enpustulate the Order for decades before being discovered. Others are detected within a generation, and exposed. Two saga arcs can be constructed using rogue magi: exposure and extermination.

The first arc, exposure, requires the characters to discover who the corrupt parties are, then gather evidence against them. This is extremely difficult, because until they are exposed, the rogue magi are afforded the protection of the Code. The best evidence comes from those inside the cabal, and the player characters may need to cultivate informants and, ultimately, defectors. Once the characters can confront their enemies with evidence, before a gathering



of other magi, the saga moves into its second phase, extermination.

Hermetic wizards are very difficult to kill, because, given sufficient preparation, they are extremely difficult to find. This allows a group of corrupt magi, like the Shadow Flambeau (see ToH: Iberia) to stage a guerrilla war. It's vital for the player characters (assuming they aren't the outcasts) to find their enemy's base of operations. Without a place to accumulate books and vis, their enemies cease gaining experience, which means time is on the side of the player characters. The initiative stays with the insurgents, but they need to pick their targets carefully, since they lack re-enforcements.

Sometimes player characters will fight these saga arcs to a draw. They are too powerful for the outcasts to attack, but they have no way of preventing their enemies dispersing, and attempting to find new niches in Hermetic society. This sort of limited victory gives the characters time, perhaps decades, to prepare for the next encounter with their enemies.

### The End of the World

Many Hermetic magi are aware that, at some stage, the Christian God is going to take away the faithful to prepare them for the Final Battle. At this stage, repentance is still possible, and magi who notice a sudden lack of pious churchmen would do well to prepare items that cast high-level versions of Demon's Eternal Oblivion. The battle for the Earth is likely to be a difficult and deadly affair, almost certainly dissolving enforcement of the Code.

Another option is to run the end times of a religious group of which few Hermetic magi are members. Ragnarok begins with a long winter, then an

invasion by giants. The Zoroastrian and Mithraic religions end in a climactic battle between the forces of Light and Darkness. The Buddhist epoch ends when the Maitreya Buddha descends from Heaven and reorders the Earth. Jewish history ends with the arrival of a Messiah who rebuilds the Temple and gives the Jews control of the Holy Land, among other things.

As an alternative, players can try to prevent the end. Sometimes the End requires a human herald, someone to perform a symbolic action in a sacred place. Characters can learn of the plan to end the world, then find ways to disrupt it, possibly, as the campaign arc concludes, finding a way to make the required action impossible.

### The truly bizarre: when genre breaks down

Although Mythic Europe is a fantasy setting, there's nothing to prevent sagas from stepping outside that genre. If you want to start the Renaissance early, there's nothing stopping you. If you want your characters to voyage out into a universe filled with quirky aliens, the publisher isn't going to kick down your door in the middle of the night. If you want Edward the White to discover America, so that the Order of Hermes allies with the Catholic Church to fight the Aztecs, you can do that. If you want your characters to be whisked through time, to the discovery of fire or Victorian England, that's allowed. Like to play a game of global corporate finance, where owning vis futures gives you the power to cast ritual spells, but if you don't have enough futures when they mature you go into Twilight? Run with it.

You can go as far outside the context as your players will let you. Just because characters were bought up in Mythic Europe, doesn't mean they have to grow old there.

## Explorations

In *Ars Magica*, what medieval people believed to be true happens to be correct. One of their less explored beliefs is that the natural is familiar and nearby, while the odd is distant. As an example, Ireland, described by Continentals, is an odd isle where the laws of nature are distorted almost to breaking. As a counter-example, Irish pagans believe that everything more than seven waves from the Hibernian shore is in Faerie. Which of these is correct in your saga depends on your storyguide. Many unconsciously reflect this idea, making the area around the covenant "normal" — usually European feudalism — while the odd is further away. This is why magi need to travel to go adventuring, because near is mundane, and far is magical.

For Elder magi, the same general rule holds true: the extraordinary is far away. The difference is the scale. The secret ingredient they need, the clue they follow, the goal they pursue, may draw them not simply to the next valley or next Tribunal, it may drag them to the corners of the Earth. To fuel experiments of — and indulge in adventures of — world-

altering scope, it is often necessary to travel outside the safety, comfort and familiarity of Europe.

### Supply lines

Successful adventurers are concerned with logistics. An expedition with a set quantity of supplies has a finite operational span. As soon as they leave the gathering point and open the first bag of flour, the expedition's time is trickling away, and when the supplies are gone, the expedition ends, regardless of the success of its mission. This trickling of time can only be countered through re-supply. Although mundane goods, like food, can be acquired through purchase, trapping or theft, certain goods simply can't be foraged for. These include many of the tools of the magical art, most significantly casting tools and laboratory equipment.

The most skilled explorers arrange periodic re-supply from Europe. Even with Hermetic magic, regular re-supply over extreme distances is difficult to co-ordinate. The perfect re-supply line would be a mobile Hermes Portal, which would mean the expedition was never more than a few minutes from the assistance of their suppliers. Since this is Hermetically impossible, a similar trick, using variants of Leap of Homecoming are desirable, even if enormously expensive.

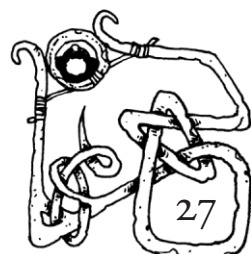
An important requirement for any form of teleportive re-supply is the need to send Arcane Connections back to the supply base. For example, if you have a magic chest that carries its contents to a designated site, and arrange for daily re-supply, it is absolutely vital that when the otherwise-empty chest is sent back to base, a pebble or other Arcane link to the party's current site is included. This serves a role similar to a return address on a modern letter. Alternatively, items can be designed to move between individuals. These also need a fresh Arcane Connection each trip, unless a connection to the individuals is designed into the item. In this latter case, the supply of the entire expedition is dependent on the continued well being of the human beacons. Such items aren't favoured by, for example, the redcaps or House Verditius, since they prefer items that are useful intergenerationally, and the earlier types of items are both easier and cheaper to make.

### How far has the Order gone?

It's unclear how far members of the Order have gone, but some suppositions are supportable. Hermetic covenants have been founded in the Atlantic islands off the coast of Hibernia, in Persia, and in North Africa. It is likely that they have travelled beyond these borders, possibly remarkable distances. To take each direction in turn...

#### North

The northernmost covenant is either Hchank or Sinus Wodinis, each Scandinavian. Habitation further north is made difficult by aggressive faeries, territorial spirits, lack of supplies and extreme cold. Sufficiently determined and resourced covenants can be self-supporting, or have Hermes Portals linking them





to the warm lands of the south. In the extreme north, the cycles of day and night, so important to Hermetic magic, are distorted. As such, a research covenant in the Ultima Thule may interest certain magi. Were such a foundation to be laid, those with links to ice faeries, or handy distortions, would be valued contributors. Members of the Sanctuary of Ice are particularly suitable recruits, or instigators.

A place of particular interest to magi is the pole — the Axis Mundi — the pivot around which the Universe spins. No magus has ever been there, and none are certain of the nature of this place. It could provide insight into breaching the spheres, be a vis source of tremendous copiousness, pour forth malleable vim, or grant Enigmatic Wisdom or symbolic power over the Earth. It might also be the abode of ice giants so potent as to dwarf the Faerie gods of the pagans. The Pole lies beyond the reach of magi, for the moment, but everyone suspects that the magus to first stand upon it will be granted miraculous powers. The least of these is, many suppose, that the day-twisting properties of the northern latitudes culminate, blurring night and day into a eternal twilight where permanent effects require no vis.

#### *East*

The easternmost covenant is Thousand Caves in Russia, closely followed by Urania in Persia, but this direction is intermittently permeable to Hermetic settlement, and usually open to travellers. The Mongol Empire forms an effective barrier against any eastern expansion at this time, but isolated explorers almost certainly have followed the caravan routes that stretch across the deserts to “Serica”, the land of the Silk People. The Romans mistakenly assume this is a smallish country, and would be shocked by the extent of the Sung Empire. Hermetic magi may, however, have contacted the Central Kingdom.

There are several reasons to suppose incidents of contact with China. “The Broken Covenant of Calabais” a module for the second edition of *Ars Magica*, contained a Chinese temple bell. How it travelled to the Provençal Tribunal is unclear. Another possible link is Trianoma herself, who may have come from the East.

Mercurial magicians may have been strewn throughout the Middle East prior to the fall of the Order. Imperial Roman armies travelled along the road, coming within a few weeks of the Chinese army on one brief occasion. They left magico-religious sites, for example Mithraeum caves, along much of the road. Chinese records indicate that some men of the “capital” of the West were taken as prisoners and founded a city in China, called Li-jien. Their descendants persist to the present day. Any of these clusters of Roman magicians might have been the source of Trianoma.

House Criamon’s riddles also seem thematically similar to the koan of the Ch’an school of Buddhism (called Zen in Japan and the West).



#### *West*

The Order’s westernmost covenant is in the Hibernian Tribunal. It is a base for Seekers who are interested in Atlantean mythology. Some of these explorers have attempted magical voyages to the West, seeking Arcadia, Atlantis, Hy Brasil or the islands visited by Saint Brendan the Navigator. If any of them have found anything of interest, they haven’t disclosed it.

Another possibility for founding covenants in the extreme west is placing them underwater. The foundation cost, in vis, is enormous, but it is possible that sufficient vis sources can be found subaqueously that the experiment would prove self-sustaining. Of exceptional importance would be techniques of either self-sufficiency or rapid transport of supplies. Such covenants may appeal to those planning a retreat before the growing power of the Dominion, although they may prefer the shallow, tideless and merchant-frequented Mediterranean.

#### *South*

The Order’s southernmost covenant is in Tunisia. It’s likely that Seekers have staged Egyptian expeditions, but no permanent Hermetic presence has been established along the Nile. It’s possible, although undemonstrable, that Hermetic magi have pushed through the Arab lands on the Mediterranean coast to the animist tribes beyond. Settlement in these distant sites may appeal, since there is no Dominion, and the deified ancestors worshipped by some of these tribes are similar to faeries or spirits in Europe, and can be bargained with. Vis may be plentiful in Africa, and a comprehensive peace with the Brotherhood of Sulemain might initiate a violent land-rush, similar to that first experienced in the Levant.

An interesting alternative area for covenant foundation is Ethiopia. Although wracked by famine and civil war in the late Twentieth Century, this nation’s people — believed by the Romans to be the most sensual and attractive in the world — are Christians of the Eastern Orthodoxy. Their nation is wealthy, and rumours indicate that the kingdom of Prester John, where the rivers flow with rubies while giant ants mine gold, lies here.

#### *Down*

If you dig far enough, you reach Hell, but there might be a lot of territory between the surface and there. Some of it contains infernal regiones, which is why miners sometimes hear the screams of the damned, or are overcome by noxious fumes. Some of it contains faeries, and therefore may contain faerie auras. These are likely suitable for Hermetic settlement. Few Hermetic magicians have given serious consideration to literally disappearing under the Dominion, but as mining techniques and environment-affecting spells become more precise, Hermetic settlements under major cities, or on the seafloor, may be tried.

#### *Up*

Hermetic magi, could, in high fantasy sagas, create mobile, floating structures in which to dwell. This



lifestyle would only be sensible if they discovered a resource best exploited by avian life. Examples might include vis gathering sites which migrate along the air currents, the cloud-castle of a giant, or a regio entrance which lies in the upper air.

A sufficiently well-resourced and eccentric Auram specialist can probably develop something similar to a zeppelin, while a skilled Terram mage might be able to enchant a levitating building, but there's no pressing need for such innovations. Covenants form for defensive reasons, and an airborne covenant, although mobile, is difficult to defend from enemies with the power of flight or the ability to cast spells at Sight range. A basic problem is that the Aegis of the Hearth, which keeps minor nuisances out of most covenants, would not follow a roving building.

### Upsetting the neighbours: meeting the Orders at the Borders

Hermetic magi have little contact with members of these exotic traditions. Some serve as barriers to Hermetic expansion, while others offer unusual insights that might fuel original research. A few might be integrated into the Order, if a sufficiently skilled and determined group of elder magi made the effort.

#### *Geonim*

The Jewish Kabbalists in Barcelona have entered into a treaty with the Order in which they are referred to as members of the Order of Geonim. Although individual clashes still occur, the Flambeau have no taste for the futile, and the Jerbiton have all-but threatened civil war over mistreatment of Jews. Not close, the two Orders nonetheless coexist remarkably successfully, because Kabbalists are non-expansionist and don't require vis.

#### *Proto-mercurial and proto-hermetic magicians*

The Order does not yet claim all of the territory once held by the Romans. It's possible that some few magician-priests — either of the styles predating the dominance of the Mercurial Order, or using the techniques preceding the founding of the Hermetic Order — live on in isolated sites. If discovered these magicians could be retrained and incorporated into the Order of Hermes, either as one of the minor traditions within House Ex Miscellanea, or directly into House Bonisagus if they demonstrated abilities beyond Hermetic power. Such magi would likely have major flaws, similar in magnitude to Veriditius's need for casting tools or Bjornaer's incapability with Ignem, but their descendants might slowly generalise.

#### *Brotherhood of Sulemain*

An ill-defined group of spirit-masters, the Brotherhood of Sulemain is a hedge tradition reinforced with the power of the Kabbalah. Paralleling the Hermetic Order, the Brotherhood arose from the rubble of an older institution, the order of Zoroastran priests which clashed repeatedly with Byzantine magi as the Roman Empire refocused on the East. When the Arab tribes invaded Persia and merged their desert culture with the opulence of Babylon and Csetiphon, the magical techniques of desert mystics and the teaching methods of the Zoroastrans combined to form a new style of magic, similar to European spirit mastery, but made more complex by the archiving and exchange of information.

Members of the Brotherhood differ from Hermetic magi in that they do their work through intermediaries. Whereas a Hermetic magus wanting to destroy something need only wave a hand, a member of the Brotherhood needs to call a spirit and demand it follow his instructions to destroy the object. This makes Hermetic magic slightly more flexible, and faster, although the powerful minions of the Sulemainites make them formidable opponents in war.





An interesting feature of some Sulemainic magic is that it combines power from two realms in ways Hermetic magic cannot duplicate. Most Sulemainic spells are similar to Hermetic Rego spells, but a few of these contain elements passed down by the prophet Solomon, and virtually all contain prayers. The Solomonic elements of Sulemainic magic are Kabbalistic, so these Islamic magi combine Magical and Divine power in a way that Hermetic magi can only envy.

#### *Zimbabwean Magi?*

Although many African magicians are tribal animists, indigenous sub-Saharan orders may exist. Strong, centralised kingdoms allow the development of archival and communication networks, which assist comparatively rapid advances in magical practice. Three of these may have germinated practitioners of sufficient ability to seriously challenge Hermetic magi: Egypt; The Empire of Prester John; Zimbabwe.

An appealing, if unlikely, idea is that a group of Egyptian priests survived the indignities visited upon their country by fleeing south along the Nile. Such a school of magicians might continue to exist. Their abilities would vary depending on which god they were primarily devoted to, and they may dislike Hermetic magi, if they perceive them as servants of a thinly disguised Thoth, and are theologically opposed. Such a group makes an interesting third player in the Sulemanic-Hermetic conflict over Egypt's magical resources.

Egyptian magic of the highest class, read literally, is terrifying stuff. None of the usual pleading here; Egyptians using the Book of the Dead command the Gods to do their will. Borrowing spiritual muscle from Osiris, they blackmail other personified magical and natural forces, threatening to turn the Earth upside down, drag the Gods to Hell, or perform other cosmological vandalism unless they get what they want. "Nice planet you have here... it'd be a pity if someone dropped it." is an approach absolutely foreign to Hermetic magi, although between fits of terror they'd probably be fascinated. Lesser magical traditions existed, outside the Osirian messiah cult, and to Hermetic magi these seem similar to European paganism, with humans worshipping a powerful faerie or spirit.

Prester John's Empire, a little like Solomon's, is thought to have magicians in it. What they are capable of is speculated upon, but nothing is confirmable. Herodotus speaks of an Ethiopian burial custom that encases corpses in clear crystals, but fails to explain why this should be considered necessary.

The Empire of Zimbabwe is hitting its peak during the game period. This may lead to an emigration, where civilised, African wizards push northward into the Berber Muslim territories of Mediterranean Africa. The Zimbabweans are similar to the Sulemainic magicians, in that they act through magical servants. They differ in that they sometimes allow their servants to possess them, they retain commun-

ion with the ghosts of their ancestors, they don't use Kabbalistic powers, and they are herbalists, while the Sulemainics are usually alchemists.

#### *The Diamond Vehicle*

A Tibetan group of monk-magicians, to Hermetics these men seem a lot like Kabbalists, except that they don't lose power when they sin. This means that a spiritually unbalanced Tantric magician can do terrible harm to himself, his neighbours, and their surroundings. To avoid this unpleasantness, the followers of the Diamond Vehicle are trained to be utterly devoted to a master skilled enough not to fall into dark habits.

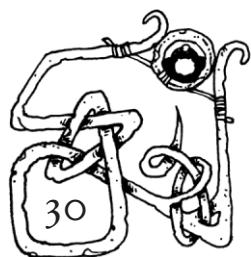
These magicians believe that energy should never be suppressed, only channelled into useful paths. Compared to Hermetic magi, they have an extraordinary understanding of exactly how magical energy is concentrated within the body during the spellcasting process. They may also have mastered methods of converting procreative energy into magical energy, allowing them to store it up within their body, so that they suffer less fatigue during magical conflicts. Such pooled energy, called *rasa*, bulges out the practitioner's forehead.

#### *The Greater Purity Sect*

The dominant Chinese mystical group in the game period, the Greater Purity sect, practices an extremely elaborate series of rituals. Their magic is part ascetic, part their equivalent of Kabbalah, part talismanic, and part summoning. One of the products of the multi-millennial accrual of magical information in the oldest Empire on Earth, these magi are capable of fantastic feats. Said to be capable of becoming immortal; said to be able to shapeshift into beams of light, or dragons, or suns; said to be able to bind gods with contracts, these magi have only one major flaw.

Chinese magic is religious: their powers wane to nothing if they violate the taboos of their school, and they cannot experiment to create new effects. Greater Purity followers learn only what their masters share with them from the sacred texts. Their magic may also be impaired if they leave China, since they believe in elemental energies which derive from the four edges of the world and its centre. Leaving the balanced magical ambience of the Empire may discomfort them, since they consider these energies vital for personal health.

Ancient Chinese monks, now the immortals, visited the corners of the world to seek knowledge, the material essences of magical energies, and new magical effects. Sometimes their followers attempt pilgrimages to the corners of the Earth, or float spiritually to remote places, in emulation. Hermetic magi might meet these exotic, ethereal pilgrims. Those attempting a push into the furthest East will face immortal monks living in the regions of sacred mountains, seeking to spread the Doctrine of Greater Purity, while defending their followers from violent barbarian demons.



# The Magic of the Founders

by David Chart

This article contains a possible system for the magic of the Roman founders of the Order of Hermes and for the story of the foundation of the Order, along with some suggestions as to how this could have had an impact on the structure of magic in 1220. Along the way, it suggests revisions to spell mastery and non-hermetic magic. It assumes that you are using variant magic resistance rules, such that the level of a spell cast is subtracted from penetration totals. There are a few ways to do this, but the details do not matter for this article.

## Mercurian Magic

The Cult of Mercury knew thirty eight great ritual spells, each of which had to be studied separately, and which required the co-operation of many magi and vast resources if they were to be cast. When the Cult began to decline in the civil wars of the third century, some of its members began to study the possibility of magic cast by an individual. They knew of other magic workers in the world, such as the Cunning Folk and the Spirit Masters, but they regarded their power with contempt. The magic of the Cult of Mercury could split mountains, not just bless someone with good looks. Thus, they sought a way to capture that power.

When the Cult disbanded in the fourth century, some of its members knew minor spells which could be cast by an individual with little more effort than a moment's thought. While these spells had nothing like the power of the Mercurian rituals, they were still obvious enough to intimidate mundanes and attract apprentices. With time, and great effort, these magi were able to create more and greater spells, which they passed on to their apprentices. Creating a new spell took decades of work, and thus most magi could create only one in a lifetime.

By the eighth century, there were a dozen lineages of Mercurian magi in Europe. Each lineage knew only its own spells, passed carefully from master to apprentice, each magus or maga creating a spell or two of her own to add to the knowledge of her line. The most powerful representatives of each line knew about fifteen spells, but a handful of those spells were of great power.

## Mercurian Lineages

The known lineages of Mercurian magi in the eighth century were as follows:

*Magistri Terrae*: Masters of Earth, these magi knew spells dealing with earth, stone, and other solid elements. Guernicus was the greatest of this line.

*Magistri Ignis*: Masters of Flame, these magi used light and fire as weapons. Flambeau was of this lineage.

*Magistri Naturae*: Masters of Nature, these magi knew spells governing birds, beasts, and plants.

Merinita was the last and greatest of this line, and her creation was the familiar ritual.

*Magistri Sentiendi*: Masters of the Things that must be Perceived, these magi studied illusions, thoughts, and mysteries of philosophy. Criamon was the greatest of this line.

*Regentes*: The Rulers, these magi knew magic that controlled things and people around them. Guorna the Fetid was the most powerful of this line, and she trained Tytalus and Tremere. Tremere had only recently begun his training when the order was founded.

*Mutantes*: The Changers, these magi had the power to alter many different things, including their own bodies. Mercere was of this tradition.

*Fabri*: The Makers. Rather than casting spells, these magi knew how to create items which could produce magical effects. Verditius was the representative of these magi.

*Homines*: The Humans. These magi knew much magic dealing with the human body, including healing. Jerbiton was their scion.

*Magistri Tempestatis*: Masters of Storms, these magi controlled and created the weather. Trianoma was drawn from their ranks.

*Frangentes*: Those who Shatter. The magi of this tradition were most noted for spells which could break the effects of other spells. Bonisagus learned from them.

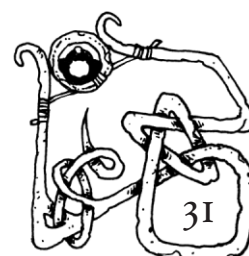
*Cursores*: The Runners. These magi enhanced their own bodies with their magic. They refused to join the Order, and most were hunted down and slain. It is rumoured that one of their spells restored physical energy.

*Colorati*: The Coloured. Pendule was a member of this tradition, which revelled in the senses, but most of them were slain when they refused to join the Order.

## Rules for Mercurian Magic

The magic used by the traditions of the Roman founders was based on individual spells. Each spell is learned as a separate ability, which can be taught by Disputatio or learned from a book. These abilities improve by the full study total every season, rather than dividing by five, although the normal limit of no more than three full levels' improvement per season applies. Thus, their levels are comparable to those of Arts, rather than Abilities.

In order to cast a spell, your score in its ability must equal or exceed the spell's magnitude. This is the same as its magnitude under Hermetic magic, as Bonisagus systematised these spells when he devised his system. Provided you can cast a spell, doing so costs no fatigue. What is more, you need not speak or gesture, and you may cast the spell quickly (fast casting, using the normal rules for that), and many times at once (multicasting, using the normal rules for that). Further, you may expend a number of pawns of vis equal to the spell's magnitude to increase its range, duration, or target.





Your penetration with a spell is equal to five times the amount by which your ability with the spell exceeds its magnitude, plus your Penetration score. Most Mercurian magi had very low penetration totals, rendering them weak when facing faeries and magical beasts. However, in facing mundanes and other wizards, this was no problem, as no Mercurian spell and no power known to the hedge wizards could grant magic resistance.

Using this kind of magic, Flambeau could easily learn fifteenth magnitude fire spells, and thus had at his disposal power far beyond that of modern magi.

For example, consider the spell *Ball of Abysmal Flame*. This was a Mercurian spell, and was one of Flambeau's favourites. In order to cast it at all, he needed a score of 7 in it, and that score gave him a penetration total of 35. This gave him no other abilities with fire, not even the ability to make a spark.

Modern Hermetic magi may still learn Mercurian spells according to these rules, if they can find either a text or a teacher.

## The Parma Magica

Bonisagus's first great invention was the *Parma Magica*. In many ways it was like any other Mercurian spell. It had one major advantage, and two major disadvantages. The advantage was that it could be used at any level of proficiency. There was no need to learn it to a certain level before any effect at all was gained. The disadvantages were that it was slower to learn (learned as an Ability rather than as an Art, although Disputatio and texts can still be used), and that it took almost two minutes to cast.

However, the *Parma Magica* provided magic resistance for a whole day, and even relatively low scores were enough to shrug off the penetration that most of the Founders could manage. With its protection, Trianoma was able to withstand the attacks of the other founders, and convince them that Bonisagus had something to offer.

This was the first time that any human mage had found a way to gain magic resistance like that of inherently magical creatures. Thus, no hedge magic tradition can grant magic resistance. (This is a major change to the rules for most forms of hedge magic in ArM4. However, it is rather hard to reconcile *Parma Magica* as a great breakthrough with magic resistance being available to every hedge wizard and his dog.)

*Parma Magica* may be taught to any human being with the Gift. Any hedge magician could learn it, but teaching it to those who have not agreed to join the Order is still a crime which merits Wizard's March.

## Hermetic Magic

Hermetic magic was created when Bonisagus learned from each of the Founders, including Bjornaer and Diedne, and found a way to understand the fundamental principles behind magic. The result was a general system within which spells could be created in months rather than decades, and in which a magus would expect to know more spells than any of the Founders within a few years. In his study of mag-

ic that affected magic, Bonisagus was able to simulate the *Parma Magica* with a spell. Many magi thus learned it in that form, rather than studying the ability that had enabled the Order to form. Spells cast with Hermetic magic also tended to have higher penetration than Mercurian spells, as the penetration of a spell increased as a magus learned more of its Arts.

Hermetic magic did have disadvantages. The most powerful of its spells were significantly weaker than the most powerful available to the Founders, and its spells had to be cast with words and gestures, rather than with a thought. This was the penalty for not studying each spell with full intensity. However, Bonisagus predicted that future members of the Order would learn to cast magic far greater than the Founders, and even within Hermetic magic it was possible to study an individual spell in more detail, gaining the benefits that the Founders had with their few charms.

## Spell Mastery

Spell mastery is the analogue of the old Mercurian skills within the system of Hermetic magic. Each spell has a corresponding ability, which is learned as a Knowledge, not as an Art. It is possible to write tractatus on any spell you have mastered, and these tractatus can be used to gain mastery of the spell. You can, unusually, also practice these spell abilities, and gain experience according to the normal rules. Alternatively, you can be taught via Disputatio, but not through Lectio.

If you have a score greater than zero in a spell's ability, it is mastered, and you roll a quality die rather than a stress die when casting it, no matter how stressful the situation. This applies even if you are using raw vis to boost its power. Your score in the ability adds to your casting total whenever you cast the spell. In addition, for every level you have in the ability, you gain one of the following bonuses, chosen as you desire.

**Penetration:** Your penetration total with the spell is doubled.

**Magic Resistance:** Your magic resistance to the mastered spell, and to any spells or powers that count as similar, is doubled. In general, this only applies to Hermetic and Mercurian magic, as other forms are fundamentally different.

**Multiple Casting:** You may multi-cast the mastered spell, according to the rules in ArM4, p. 75.

**Fast Casting:** You may fast cast the mastered spell. This means that you may make a Quickness + Finesse + Encumbrance roll to cast it in response to another event, such as an attack or a spell being cast at you.

**Still Casting:** You may cast the spell without gestures, at no penalty.

**Quiet Casting:** You may subtract five from the penalty for casting the spell without speaking loudly. You may take this bonus twice, and if you do you may cast the spell silently without penalty.

A character with the Flawless Magic virtue automatically gains a score of one in the spell ability for



every spell she learns, and may choose a different bonus for every spell if she wishes. She may increase her mastery of any spell normally.

For example, Gratian of Tremere wants to master *Enslave the Mortal Mind*. He does not, at first, have access to any texts, so he practises for a season, and gains three experience points (as is almost inevitable from a base of zero). This gives him a score of 2. The spell is now mastered, and he can choose two

bonuses. He chooses Magic Resistance, to reduce the ability of others to control him, and Quiet Casting, so that he can cast it less conspicuously.

Soon afterwards, he finds some good books on the spell, and studies them for three seasons. At the end, he has a score of 4 in the ability, and he takes, as his additional bonuses, Still Casting and another level of Quiet Casting.



## Omnibus Grimoire: Scroll I (Animal)

by Andrew Gronosky

Honored colleagues in the Order of Hermes, it is a lamentable fact that even as generations of magi labor to invent new and wondrous spells, many of these spells are not well known throughout the Order. It may be that many covenants, having limited time and resources to copy books, prefer well-known, traditional spells over more modern inventions. It may even be that some magi believe spells of ancient origin are better and more powerful than newer spells. Whatever the cause, magi who invent spells today often have trouble getting their spells accepted and disseminated throughout the Order.

In the tradition of fostering cooperation and communication among magi, for which my House is well known, I have copied from various obscure grimoires many useful, but little-known spells I believe may be of interest to the Order. I am in the process of assembling these spells into one omnibus grimoire. To ensure that interested magi need not wait until my work is completed, I present each book of my omnibus on a scroll as soon as it is completed. There are to be ten scrolls in all: one devoted to each Form. I shall endeavor to provide on each scroll at least two spells for each Technique, making an omnibus of five score spells in all. It is my hope that you find these scrolls enlightening and valuable, and may perhaps see fit to send your little-known spells to me for inclusion in later editions of my omnibus.

Your colleague and servant,  
**JARIUS OF HOUSE MERLERE**

### Animal Spells

Animal is a versatile Form because it deals not only with living animals, but also with animal materials and animal products.

#### Creo Animal

*Conjure the Ephemeral Feast*

CrAn 15

R: Touch; D: Sun/Inst.; T: Group

Spell Focus: A tablecloth (+2)

Conjure several portions of cooked meat, fish, and poultry. There is enough food to serve two

dozen people. The food is magical and non-permanent (unless raw vis is used), so when the spell expires, anyone who ate it will feel as if he hadn't eaten at all.

This spell is sometimes used to teach apprentices the versatility of casting requisites. Several optional casting requisites are possible: Aquam creates beverages as well as food; Ignem serves the food hot instead of cold; Herbam creates bread and vegetables as well as meat; Terram serves the food on metal platters; Imaginem adds the flavor of spices.

Some magi use this spell to enable their guests to enjoy more than one feast in a day (the first one being magical, the second real). It provides only the sensation of being fed and does not prevent or remove the ill effects of hunger.

When using the spell focus, spread the tablecloth on a flat surface. The food will appear on it.

Design: Create an amount of processed animal material, level 10. Increase Target to Group.

*Conjure the Woolen Garb*

CrAn 15

Range: Touch; D: Sun/Inst; T: Group

Spell Focus: A bit of unspun wool (+1)

Create a complete outfit of clothing made from animal material (wool, silk, and leather). A Finesse roll may be required to create elaborate outfits. Casting requisites: Herbam to include plant materials (cotton or linen), Terram to include metal buckles and the like.

This spell is common among Bjornaer magi and other shape-shifters, who often become separated from their clothing. It is also useful as a quick disguise. The caster's Wizard's Sigil usually influences the appearance of the clothing this spell creates.

Design: Create an amount of processed animal material, Level 10. Target is Group because an outfit is composed of more than one piece.

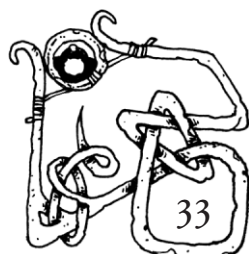
*Swarm of Angry Hornets*

CrAn 15

Range: Near/Sight; D: Diameter; T: Special

Spell Focus: A hornets' nest (+2)

Conjure a swarm of large, aggressive hornets. The hornets attack nearby creatures (including, possibly, the caster!) and continue their onslaught until the spell expires. Magic Resistance protects against the hornets' attack.





If cast indoors, the hornets fill a room. Outdoors, the swarm is big enough to attack everyone within a 5 pace radius. Everyone inside this area suffers painful stings: they take a stress die +5 of Fatigue damage each round. Armor helps normally against this damage. Inside the swarm, an Int + Concentration roll of 15+ is required in order to cast spells.

Hornets will follow characters who leave the swarm. A Qik + Athletics + Enc roll of 9+ lets one outrun the hornets. Otherwise, they continue to attack until the victim outruns them, dives under water, or manages to drive them away. Note that the swarm does not move to seek out new victims: it only pursues characters who were once inside the swarm. The swarm may be dispersed by smoke, strong winds, fire, and the like.

**Design:** Create an insect, Level 5. The Target is treated as Room, since the swarm is large enough to attack everyone in a room-sized area. The damage and other details were assigned arbitrarily.

*Conjure the Mystic Steed*

CrAn 35; Req: Vim

R: Touch; D: Sun; T: Ind.

Spell Focus: A silver horseshoe (+2)

Create a magical horse out of thin air. The horse has Magic Might of 17 and will accept a magus rider. It comes without saddle or riding tack.

While the horse is well-trained and obedient, it is not under magical control: its rider must control it as he would a mundane horse. A variant does exist that also includes a Rego requisite, allowing the caster to control the steed with mental commands.

**Design:** Create a large animal, CrAn 35. Add Vim requisite to make the horse magical. The horse's Might was arbitrarily set at half the level of the spell, rounded down.

### Intellego Animal

*Sense the Passions of the Beast*

InAn 15

R: Near/Sight; D: Momentary; T: Ind

Spell Focus: A sapphire (+5)

Determine the basic emotional state of a beast: for example, whether it is defending its territory, hungry, startled, etc.

**Design:** *Sense the dominant drive of a beast*, InAn 10. Increase Range to Near (+1 Magnitude).

*Pierce the Veil of Modesty*

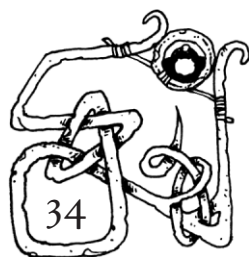
InAn 25; Req: Herbam

Range: Near/Sight; D: Conc.; T: Ind

Spell Focus: A crystal lens (+3)

See through a person's clothes. This spell would be considered an apprentice's prank, except that its Magnitude is beyond the capacity of most apprentices to cast. It does have one practical use: it is an unobtrusive way to search somebody. Magic resistance blocks this spell entirely.

A variant exists that makes Herbam an optional casting requisite, but since linen undergarments (made of plant material) are common, the "optional" requisite is often needed in practice.



**Design:** Seeing through animal materials was deemed a Level 15 effect. Increase Range to Near (+2 magnitudes).

*Eyes in the Treetops*

InAn 45

R: Arcane Connection; D: Conc.; T: Ind

Spell Focus: A mirror (+1)

See through an animal's eyes. The title of the spell suggests it is used on birds, but it actually works on any animal (for birds, it requires an Auram casting requisite; for fish, Aquam). You must have an Arcane Connection to the animal. This spell does not, in itself, allow you to communicate with or control the animal. It is sometimes used by magi whose familiar lacks the "shared senses" bond quality.

If you are using the spell focus, the images appear in the mirror. Otherwise, you must close your eyes to see through the animal's eyes.

**Design:** Seeing through an animal's eyes was deemed a Level 20 effect, equivalent to reading its surface thoughts. Increase Range to Arcane Connection (+5 magnitudes).

### Muto Animal

*Doublet of Impenetrable Silk*

MuAn 15

R: Touch; D: Sun; T: Ind

Spell Focus: A small iron plate (+1)

Transform ordinary clothing made of animal material (silk, wool, leather) into magical armor. The weight and appearance of the garment remain the same, but its Protection is changed to +3. No one has yet made a stronger version of this spell that creates better armor, perhaps because heavy armor often relies on thick padding to absorb shock, and this spell does not create or emulate such padding.

If using the spell focus, slip it under the garment, which gains the hardness of iron through the Law of Sympathy.

This spell originated recently, in the Novgorod Tribunal. The magi there are said to have based it on a similar spell used by Mongol wizards on their warriors. Its use has spread rapidly because it is popular among redcaps, urban magi, and others who like inconspicuous defenses.

**Design:** Following the Armor Enchantment guidelines from *Parma Fabula*.

*Transformation of the Timid Mouse to the Charging Bull*

MuAn 30

R: Near/Far, D: Sun/Perm, T: Ind

Spell Focus: A whip (+1)

Transform any animal of Size -2 or less into a large bull (Size +3). Contrary to the spell's name, the resulting bull is not angry and does not usually charge.

Many variants of this spell exist that transform creatures into lions, bears, and other dangerous beasts. A popular tactic among its users is to first transform a small animal into a dangerous one, and then cast a separate spell to control the newly-dangerous beast.

Design: Similar to *Transformation of the Ravenous Beast to the Torpid Toad*.

*Wings of Pegasus*

MuAn 40; Req: Auram

R: Touch/Near, D: Sun/Perm, T: Ind

Spell focus: A feather from a chimerical beast (+5)

Give feathered wings to an animal. The animal magically knows how to fly but may lack experience. It is possible to ride a flying horse, but difficult: increase the difficulty of all Ride rolls by 3 and add 3 extra botch dice.

A chimerical beast is any beast that is a combination of two or more other animals: for example, a griffin or the Sphinx.

An alternate, less-poetic name for this spell is "When Pigs Fly." It does affect all kinds of animals, after all.

Design: This is a straightforward application of the Muto Animal guidelines. The Auram Requisite was considered necessary because almost all flight-related spells need one; some Troupes may choose to drop the Requisite.

### Perdo Animal

*Blunt the Viper's Fangs*

PeAn 20

R: Near, D: Inst, T: Ind/Group

Spell Focus: A muzzle (+1)

Blunt an animal's teeth, claws, tusks, etc. Only one weapon (teeth, both foreclaws, etc.) is affected per casting. Blunted natural weapons do -3 Damage.

Small animals like snakes and rodents can't even break a person's skin after being affected by this spell. Wild animals may have trouble hunting for themselves.

Design: Blunting teeth is somewhere between superficial damage and destroying a limb, so it was assigned Level 10. Increase Range to Near (+2 Magnitudes).

*Purge the Odious Vermin*

PeAn 20

R: Touch, D: Inst, T: Room/Struct

Spell Focus: A fly-whisk (+1)

Cleanse a room of lice, bats, mice, and other vermin. All animals in the area, Size -5 and less, take 1 Body Level of damage, which should be enough to kill them. In case it matters, animals may resist the damage with a Stm + Size roll of 6+. This is a



favorite spell of many Bonisagus magi, who use it to keep libraries free of bookworms.

Design: Inflict 1 Body Level of damage to an animal, PeAn 15. Increase Target to Room.

*Clip the Eagle's Wings*

PeAn 20; Req: Auram

R: Far/Sight, D: Inst, T: Ind/Group

Spell Focus: A pair of shears (+1)

Cut the flight feathers of a bird or feathered animal. The bird can no longer fly, though it can safely control its fall, and can still flutter for short distances. The feathers will grow back normally within a few weeks.

Some magi use this spell to capture specimens for the laboratory. Other, unsportsmanlike magi use it to catch dinner.

Design: Cause superficial damage to an animal, PeAn 5. Increase Range to Far (+3 Magnitudes).

### Rego Animal

*Ferocity of the Mad Dog*

ReAn 15

R: Eye/Sight, D: Concentration, T: Ind

Spell Focus: Foam from the mouth of a rabid dog (+3)

Enrage an animal. The animal is likely to attack nearby animals or people. After the spell expires, the animal behaves normally. If the animal is in combat when the spell ends, it will fight on or flee, according to its nature.

Design: Manipulate an animal's emotions, ReAn 15.

*Slumber of the Bear in Winter*

ReAn 15

R: Eye/Sight, D: Sun, T: Ind

Spell Focus: A chamomile flower (+1)

Put an animal into a deep, hibernation-like sleep. The animal may resist on a Stm + Size roll of 12+, and the spell does not work on animals that are rabid, engaged in combat, or under magical control. Once asleep, the animal is difficult to awaken, but will respond to pain or to vigorous shaking.

Design: By analogy with the Rego Mentem guideline to control a target's mental state (ReMe 10). Increase Duration to Sun.

*Command the Distant Beast*

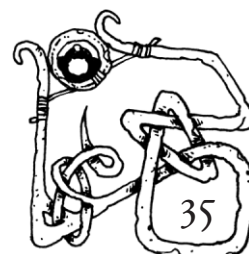
ReAn 50

R: Arcane Connection, D: Concentration, T: Ind

Spell Focus: A yoke (+3)

Mentally command an animal to which you have an Arcane Connection. You need an Auram casting requisite to affect birds, an Aquam casting requisite to affect fish, and a Vim casting requisite to affect fantastic beasts.

Design: Completely control an animal, ReAn 25. Increase Range to Arcane Connection (+5 Magnitudes).





## Ex Bibliotheca Durenmare

by Eric Minton

It takes a good bit of time and effort to create a covenant library. Turning that library into something more than a list of names and numbers is much harder. Here you'll find all manner of pre-generated magical and mundane books to flesh out your Saga's libraries. Feel free to submit your own books, scrolls, clay tablets, and so on for inclusion in this column.

To determine a book's point value during covenant creation, use the following formulae:

Liber Quaestionum: Target + Quality

Summa:  $2 \times (\text{Level} + \text{Quality})$

Tractatus:  $3 \times (\text{Quality})$

Note that the costs provided do not include additional costs for any special benefits that may apply to a given book. Such alterations to the book's cost are left to the discretion of the individual Storyguide.

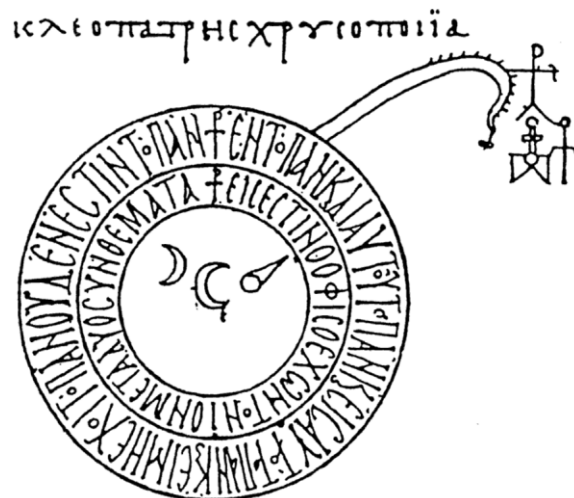
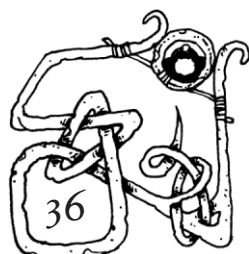
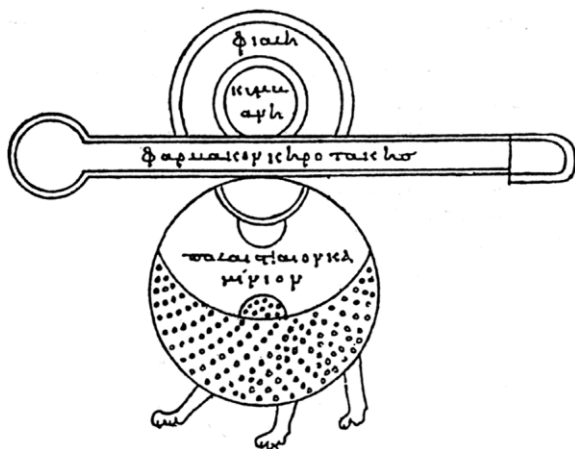


### Observations on Magical and Alchemical Techniques for the Transmutation of Base Matter

By Attalus Investigator scholae Bonisagi

**Appearance:** This work consists of two volumes bound in embossed brown leather with silver corner-pieces. A plain leather slipcase serves to further protect each volume. The script is in a distinctive hand, with odd curlicues depending from each word's final character. Unadorned sketches of alchemical apparatus appear throughout the text.

**Description:** A well-written text, contrasting the transformative abilities of the Art of Muto with those of specific mundane alchemical processes, such as distillation and fermentation. Attalus provides extensive footnotes within the work, crediting much of the alchemical material to respected Arabic and Hellenistic sources. Note that the alchemical procedures detailed in the work are of the vulgar sort, dealing with the creation of mundane substances such as acids and dyes, rather than the supernatural practices of Hermetic alchemy.



Mechanics: Muto Summa, Level 9, Quality 8; Alchemy Summa, Level 3, Quality 8; Magic Theory Tractatus, Quality 5; Philosophiae Tractatus, Quality 5.

Cost: 34 points of Arts + 52 points of Knowledge.

### The First Element

By Tertia scholae Tremendi

**Appearance:** This plain, heavy tome's black leather binding has begun to crack and peel away from the wooden boards underneath, and its copper corner-pieces are green with verdigris. Between the covers, the book's square, blocky script has faded from its original black to a dull grayish-green. Bluish borders and accents mark the many Biblical excerpts to be found within the text. Several pages bear water stains, leaving the text blurred but readable with some effort.

**Description:** This text approaches the art of Aquam from a Biblical perspective. This involves a detailed and occasionally contrived exegesis of relevant Biblical passages, from the separation of the waters in Genesis to the Gospels' depictions of Jesus walking on water and transmuting water to wine, with each passage used to illustrate specific Aquam techniques. Two spells of Aquam follow the primary text.

### New spell

*Call the Sparkling Spring from the Reluctant Stone*

Creo Aquam 25

R: Reach, D: Sun/Inst, T: Spec.

Spell Focus: A Vial of Water from a Pure Spring (+3)

Requisite: Terram

Causes a trickle of fresh water to spring forth from unworked earth, sand or stone. None of the water created is refreshing unless the spell is cast with vis, but if the spell is made permanent it will provide a supply of pure water indefinitely. If the spell focus is used, it must be poured upon the spot where the spring is to appear.

(Design: Create a small spring 25, decrease range to Reach -5, increase target to equivalent of Individual +5)

Mechanics: Aquam Liber Quaestionem, Level 3, Quality 9; Theology Tractatus, Quality 3. Contains the following spells: *Call the Sparkling Spring from the Reluctant Stone*, *Parting the Waves*.

Cost: 12 points of Arts + 9 points of Knowledges + 55 levels of spells.

### The Well-Ordered Mind

By Moradira scholae Tremendi

Appearance: This square, leather-bound volume is over two feet on a side and almost a foot thick. A single buckle holds its covers shut. The covers show a good bit of wear and the pages have curled badly, with several being folded or creased. The handwriting is small and plain. A few scattered illustrations depict abstract hierarchies, with alchemical and Hermetic symbols used to represent specific psychic elements and mental states.

Description: This text's overarching metaphor equates the human mind with a covenant of magi. The magi themselves represent the higher functions of the mind, with baser functions and elements symbolized by covenfolk, beasts, inanimate objects and the rooms of the covenant itself. Interactions between elements of a mind and between different minds manifest as commands, requests, compromises, manipulation, magic and certamen, with each of these methods used to represent Mentem techniques that are spelled out at length in the body of the text. Naturally, the author uses a Tremere covenant as the template for the ideal, well-ordered mind, and goes so far as to liken specific mental flaws and disorders to the presence of magi of other Houses within a covenant. In addition to information on Mentem magic, this text contains sufficient theoretical information on the functioning of a covenant for meaningful study.

Note: This work has a bad reputation within the Order, as many magi outside House Tremere find its contents offensive. A story could involve a temperamental Flambeau's efforts to get hold of a covenant's copy of this text in order to destroy it.

Mechanics: Mentem Summa, Level 14, Quality 6; Organization Lore (Hermes) Tractatus, Quality 3.

Cost: 40 points of Arts + 9 points of Knowledges.

### Magical Architecture

By Aemilius Mensor scholae Jerbitonis

Appearance: A large, heavy tome bound in chapped and dusty brown leather. Two leather straps with iron buckles hold its covers shut. The text is written in a broad, clear hand, with large capitals and vermilion accents. Numerous ink sketches depict an assortment of architectural subjects, from Roman roads and ancient stone circles to modern castles and cathedrals.

Description: Written in a laconic style, sprinkled with sardonic witticisms that fall flat as often as they hit the mark. The text uses the construction of stone buildings both as subject matter and as metaphor for

the methodologies of Creo and Terram. Several potent Terram spells round out the work.

Mechanics: Creo Liber Quaestionum, Level 3, Quality 10; Terram Liber Quaestionum, Level 3, Quality 10. Contains the following spells: *Wall of Protecting Stone*, *Conjuring the Mystic Tower*, *Wizard's Quarry*, *Raise the Cyclopean Stone*, *Sculpt the Earthen Servant*.

Special Rule: A character that refers to this book while spending a season practicing Craft (Architecture) or Craft (Masonry) adds one to the practice roll if his or her current score in that Craft is 3 or less.

Cost: 26 points of Arts + 125 levels of spells.

#### New spells

*Wizard's Quarry*

Perdo Terram 15

R: Near, D: Mom, T: Ind.

Spell Focus: A Chisel (+1)

Cuts a single stone block from a mass of unworked stone. The block may measure up to three paces in each of its dimensions.

(Design: Destroy stone 5, increase range to Near +5, increase target to Individual +5)

*Raise the Cyclopean Stone*

Rego Terram 20

R: Near, D: Conc, T: Ind.

Spell Focus: A Bone from a Cyclops (+4)

Levitates a stone measuring up to three paces in any dimension. The stone moves at a walking pace in whatever direction you wish, even directly upwards. The spell ends if the stone moves out of range.

(Design: Control or move stone 10, increase target to Individual +5, precise manipulation +5)

*Sculpt the Earthen Servant*

Rego Terram 30

R: Near, D: Sun/Perm, T: Ind.

Spell Focus: A Dragon's Tooth (+5)

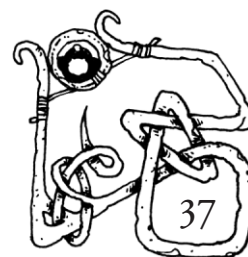
Molds a mass of earth and clay into a roughly human form that moves and acts at your unspoken command. This earthen servant has the same statistics as a zombie, but is mindless and incapable of independent action. If the servant is reduced to zero Health Levels, strays beyond Far range, or leaves your line of sight, it crumbles back to the earth and clay from which it was made. This spell may not be cast upon holy ground.

(Design: Control or move dirt 5, increase range to Near +5, increase target to Individual +5, precise manipulation +5, complex movements +5)

#### Essences

By Origo scholae Criamones

Appearance: A work consisting of three heavy volumes, each bound in fresh brown leather and guarded with iron corner-pieces and locked iron clasps. The pages within are crisp and new, and scribed in a broad, energetic hand. Small black-and-white illustrations depict an assortment of animals, plants and other objects in mismatched groups; these





### New spell

*Gathering of Inner Power*

Creo Vim General

R: Personal, D: Diameter, T: Ind.

Spell Focus: Quicksilver (+1)

By drawing a mass of unformed magical power into yourself, you briefly magnify your ability to cast spells. When you cast the Gathering, make a Twilight check, adding the spell's magnitude to your roll. On a failed roll, the sudden surge of magical energies sends you into Twilight. With a successful roll, you maintain control of the magic, giving you a bonus to all casting totals equal to the magnitude of the Gathering.

(Design: Not covered by existing guidelines)

illustrations rarely have any obvious connection to the text.

Description: A thorough study of the arts of Creo and Vim. While the author seems to possess a deep understanding of the subject matter and writes in a clear, unadorned style, his persistent association of magical concepts with his House's notions regarding essential nature and the Enigma makes it difficult for most readers to assimilate the substance of the text. The text concludes with three Creo Vim spells.

Mechanics: Creo Summa, Level 12, Quality 5; Vim Summa, Level 10, Quality 5; Enigmatic Wisdom Tractatus, Quality 2; Magic Theory Tractatus, Quality 2. Contains the following spells: *Gathering of Inner Power* (Level 20), *Shell of Opaque Mysteries* (Level 20), *The Phantom Gift*.

Special Rule: A magus studying from this work may add a bonus equal to his Enigmatic Wisdom

score (up to a maximum bonus of 3) to his or her study total.

Cost: 64 points of Arts + 12 points of Knowledges + 55 levels of spells.

### On the Formulation of the Hermetic Longevity Potion, In Regard to Possible Refinements to the General and Specific Formulae Thereof

By Aculeatus scholae Bonisagi

Appearance: This slim, cloth-bound volume suffers the ravages of centuries. The cloth covers are worn and raveled at the edges, while the spine has disintegrated, leaving only a few stray threads to hold the gatherings together. Its flaking pages bear faded characters in a tiny, crabbed hand.

Description: A lost work from the Order's early years, written by a filius of Notatus, the first Primus of House Bonisagus. Once one filters out the author's complaints about intellectual theft by his pater and other fellow Bonisagi, there is much to be gleaned from the text. Many of the author's techniques for improving the longevity potion have long been in general circulation, but even masters of the Hermetic arts can find valuable inspiration in Aculeatus' notes on the research that led to those techniques.

Mechanics: Magic Theory Tractatus, Quality 5.

Special Rules: A magus consulting this text throughout the process of preparing a longevity potion may add 1 to his or her Lab Total. This text may be used as a source of inspiration for original research to design an improved longevity potion.

Cost: 15 points of Knowledges.

## Heretic's Corner: The Practice of Teaching

by Michaël de Verteuil

All good things (like Gaul, for example) are divided into three parts and this installment of Heretic's Corner is no exception. As regular readers of this column will have noticed, Andrew Gronosky held the pen as in-house heretic last issue with his excellent "Fighting with the Combat System". I did not vet what he wrote, and I will devote the first part of this column to a friendly critique of his efforts. Next up will be a proposal posted for comment by Yair Rezek, in which he tentatively offers up an original take on Arts and specializations. A free issue of *HP* to Yair for his suggestions which will help me clarify a couple of rule points. And finally, I offer up for discussion (dissection?) a proposal on how to simplify and standardize the learning rules.

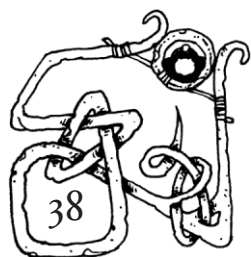
### In Praise of Other Heretics

When I received Andrew's draft I considered adding my own comments, but ultimately decided to let his text stand alone. I also pointedly did not com-

ment on it on the Berklist. In retrospect this was perhaps unfortunate as his was the first Heretic's Corner article that, while interesting and provocative, elicited absolutely no comment. I wondered why this might be and came to the conclusion that Andrew's suggestions were not radically simple enough. In fact, in a couple of cases they actually added complexity. It is also apparent to me that the *ArM 4* combat rules are so confused and broken that no one plays them as written. This greatly diminishes our ability to judge proposed reforms to parts of the rules we don't use. Instead of trying to tackle the full breadth of the combat system in three pages, I think Andrew would have been better off trying to reform one chunk at a time. For what they are worth, here are my own comments concerning some of the issues Andrew brought up. These might be the subject of future articles.

Combat initiative determines who strikes and moves first, but we use it mainly to disengage or change melee range. I am not sure I understand how Andrew's zone of control suggestions affect this.

Do not roll for initiative. For the first round, use your base initiative total unmodified by a die roll. For each subsequent round, use your previous combat



die rolls to determine movement order (if necessary) and to resolve engagement contests. Keep non fast-cast spells for the end of the combat round. This is too fundamental a rule to change.

Personally, I use paper and pencil to indicate tactical layout. I don't really see the need for miniatures, but I guess they may help some of us visualize things better.

Why not dispense with multiple engagement penalties altogether? You can choose to attack only one opponent in a round. You use the same die roll for this attack and (with different modifiers) for your defence. If your attack beats your chosen opponent's defence, you hit. If your attacker beats your defence, he hits you. Additional attackers just roll against your defence without the risk of being attacked themselves. If they beat your defence, they hit you. I don't see why it has to be more complicated than that.

I also don't see any benefit in a separate Skill for shields. The one-time math involved in figuring out each weapon/shield combination is no big deal. Andrew's suggestion requires a separate investment of eps in a separate shield Skill and spreads scarce eps even thinner. I thought we had handled the varying Weapon and Shield vs. Single Weapon score issue quite neatly in *Ordo Nobilis*. They are optionally the same Skill, so you can't be a master of one and totally inept with the other. You just have a shield bonus with one and not with the other.

Still, what Andrew has offered us is fuel for discussion. Perhaps I should have taken the time to discuss his draft with him before letting it go to print. I know my own articles are best when they have been heavily reviewed by eagle-eyed critics like Bjarke Roth and Erik Dahl.

Well, that's it for my review of the last Heretic's Corner. On to the mail bag!

## Arts as Specializations: A Reader Writes In

"After reading Heretic's Corner in *Hermes' Portal* about streamlining abilities, including its suggestion of turning specializations in abilities into separate skills (that add to the base ability), I had the thought of making Arts a specialization of Magic Theory. It works like this:

One must decided how to treat a case where two specializations apply to the same project. For example, using Artes Liberales to calculate the exact positions of the constellations at a character's birth may require both Astrology and Arithmetic — both specializations of Artes Liberales. It may be ruled that, in general, only two "skills" may be added to the roll. Where several specializations apply, the character should apply his **lowest** specialization ability in addition to the base skill. However, if he wants to, he can replace the base skill itself with the **next lowest** applicable specialization. So, in the example above, someone with Artes Liberales 1, \*Astrology 5 and \*Arithmetic 5 would have a total bonus of 10 because this project fits right into his speciality.

In this interpretation, it is possible to treat all Arts as specializations of the arcane knowledge Magic Theory. As long as we are treating Arts as exceptional knowledges (as Heretic's Corner suggested), this seems plausible mechanically. By doing this, all the Arts are transformed into mere specialisations of the base Magic Theory. I believe this does make things more simple — actions involving two Arts are merely involving two specializations. Even requisites don't require any special rules — they are merely three "specializations" (although perhaps the separation of Arts into Forms and Techniques should be maintained there). It also has the (rather realistic, I believe) implication that someone knowing something about the theory of magic would not be totally incompetent at actually wielding magic.

Comments? Suggestions?"

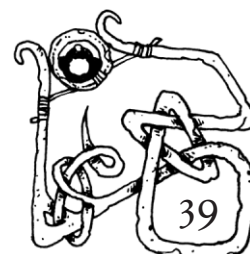


For the record, I should emphasize that Yair is not wedded to this idea and was just offering it up for discussion. It took me a couple of readings to wrap my mind around what he was getting at. Readers may wish to refer back to two previous Heretic's Corner articles, "Less Is More" and "Artistic Ability", in issues 1 and 2 of *HP* respectively to understand what Yair is suggesting.

Intriguing as Yair's suggestion might be, I fear it would fundamentally alter the game mechanics. A basic premise of Heretic's Corner is that, after a set of rules has been homogenized and reduced of its excess complexity, the end result must still be recognizably *Ars Magica*. As Yair himself noted elsewhere, this proposal would end up turning Magic Theory into a mega-Art, particularly if you treat Arts as Abilities or, at any rate, reduce their scores to those of Abilities.

In "Less Is More" I noted that it would not be cost effective to have a \*Specialization (i.e. with its own score and in which one could add separate eps) rise higher than the base Ability. This would be particularly true for this example. If you could substitute your Magic Theory score for any Form in spell casting, it would be more cost effective to dispense with investing in the ten separate Forms and invest instead exclusively in Magic Theory and the five Techniques. As such, no one would bother learning the Forms at all.

This problem would be somewhat reduced if Art scores were left at their current high levels and not reduced to Ability equivalents. In that case Magic Theory merely becomes a default minimum for either a low Form or Technique. It would then still be worth your while studying the Forms and Techniques separately, though it would also end up turning all magi a bit more into generalists. Nonetheless, I still think it would do some violence to the game mechanics because Magic Theory is meant to be distinct from the practical ability to cast spells. Each Gift is unique, and a mage's progress in the Arts represents his or her unique mastery of this Gift. Magic Theory teaches you how things work in principle, but





not how you can make things happen through your Gift. This is why practical magical instruction (Arts and spells) can only be done one-to-one, whereas Magic Theory can (under the current rules) be taught to several students at one time through training or Lectio.

And that's it for the mail bag. This last point on learning permits me to segue neatly into the third and final part of this article.

## Learning Made Simple

There are currently six different ways for characters to acquire "seasonal" (as opposed to "adventure") experience other than from books or from studying vis, namely Lectio, Disputatio, training, practice, exposure and lab work. I propose we reduce them to two: Teaching and Practice.

As mentioned in "The Magic of Simplification", there is no real need for two separate formal instruction Skills. This simply results in teachers having to spread their experience points over two Abilities (not to mention the Ability they intend to teach). In addition, and if anyone is not already convinced of the utter futility of Disputatio, let's draw a simple comparison between Disputatio and plain, unadorned training as they apply to Abilities.

### *Disputatio*

- 1 Requires investment of eps into an Ability
- 2 Requires the Educated +1 Virtue
- 3 Can only teach one student at a time
- 4 Can only be used for Knowledges (and Arts)

### *Training*

- 1 No requirement to invest eps in a teaching Ability
- 2 No special Virtue required
- 3 More than one student can be taught
- 4 Can be used for both Skills and Knowledges

And if this were not bad enough, in the hardly extraordinary circumstances where the trainer and student have positive Communication and Intelligence respectively, training yields three eps. A teacher with a Communication of +1 using Disputatio has to have a score of at least three before he can teach three eps to a student with a +1 Intelligence. Four eps are theoretically possible through Disputatio, and Disputatio may actually be better than garden variety training for super-competent deaf-mutes teaching dunces, but in the vast majority of cases, Disputatio will be less or no better effective than plain training. The only significant exception is for the Arts, which cannot be trained. I trust that the irony of a Skill designed to represent historical "scholastic" instruction being counterproductive to that end, while being completely suitable for the teaching of historically fictional Arts, has not escaped anyone.

Let's postulate the existence of a Social Skill called "Teaching", and assume that "training" is what occurs when the trainer does not have a score in this Skill (i.e. as per *ArM* p. 51, the Ability is used with a -3 modifier). Using the current formula for Disputatio as a template, we would get something like:

(Teacher's score + COM + student's INT + 6) / 5 rounded up.

The current rules use the teacher's INT rather than COM, but we will let that inconsistency pass. Under these proposed rules, a totally untrained but well spoken instructor (+1 Communication) could teach a moderately intelligent student (+1 Intelligence) one ep worth of a Skill or Knowledge (-3 +1 +1 +6 = 5 which divided by 5 is 1). If he had a score of 1 in Teaching, he could teach 2 eps (1 +1 +1 +6 = 9 which divided by 5, rounded up, is 2). If he had a score of 3, he could teach 3 eps (3 +1 +1 +6 = 11 which divided by 5, rounded up, is 3). This strikes me as more reasonable than the currently absurdly generous training rules.

What about multiple students? I recommend subtracting one from the study total (i.e. the total before division by five) for each additional student beyond one.

So there you have it, a simple rule and formula using a single Skill that replaces Disputatio, Lectio and training. But, I can hear the whining already, what about the loss of the medieval feel associated with Disputatio and Lectio? The techniques existed, surely they must have amounted to something more than plain teaching, some of you might claim.

All right, here are some "complicating" optional rules that bring the medieval flavour back in. Instead of treating Disputatio and Lectio as separate Skills, let's treat them as contextual bonuses that can be added to the study total in specific circumstances.

When teaching Knowledges (or Arts), add the lower of the teacher's or student's Speak Latin score (or, if applicable, Speak Arabic, Hebrew or classical Greek score) to the study total. This represents Disputatio with the enhanced technical precision and vocabulary associated with use of a literary language. Where the Speak Latin score of the teacher or student is low, the instruction probably takes place in the vernacular, but is still enhanced by the addition of Latin technical terms and concepts, much like we pepper our own Ars talk with "vis", "regiones" and "sodales".

When teaching Knowledges from a text, add the lower Speak Latin score as above, but substitute the lower of the lecturer's Scribe Latin or half the Quality of the text for the +6 modifier in the equation, and ignore the multiple student penalty entirely. For example, Rhetoricus is giving a season-long course on Artes Liberales. He has Teaching 3, Speak Latin 5, Scribe Latin 3, a +2 Communication, and is lecturing from a copy of Donatus' *Ars Grammatica* with a Quality of 9. One of his students is Assinus who has Speak Latin 3 and a -2 Intelligence. The study total for Assinus would be:

Rhetoricus' Teaching [+3] + COM [+2] + Assinus' INT [-2] + the lower of the two Speak Latin scores [+3] + the lower of Rhetoricus' Scribe Latin or half the book Quality [+3] for a study total of 9 which divided by 5, rounded up, is 2. If Assinus'



Intelligence had been merely average, he would have gained three eps instead of only 2.

Note that lecturing to large numbers of people in this way would require a large enclosed room with good acoustics such as a church or a great hall. Outdoors is simply not suitable given the wind and other distractions, particularly for students attempting to take notes. I am not sure whether the current restrictions requiring either new lecturers or fresh texts are needed.

In all uses of the Teaching Skill, the following restrictions would still apply:

- 1 Only Skills and Knowledges (and Arts) can be taught
- 2 In no case may a student exceed his teacher's score in the Art or Ability being taught
- 3 Arts (and spells) can only be taught in one-to-one instruction
- 4 No more than three levels in an Art or Ability can be learned in a single season

If you are not treating Arts as Abilities, as suggested in "Artistic Ability", use the undivided study total when teaching Arts.

That's it. Training, Disputatio and Lectio all rolled into one!

Next we have the second triptych of practice, exposure and lab work. Lots of confusion surrounds these three concepts as each applies to different Abilities, follows different rules, and yields different ep totals. Practice applies to Skills and Talents, involves a die roll and can yield 0-3 eps. Exposure applies to Casual Knowledges, yields 1-2 eps but cannot raise a character's score above four. Lab work is limited to Magic Theory and yields only one ep per season.

I propose that these three sets of rules be standardized and bundled up together as "Practice".

A character can gain one ep per season in an Ability in which he already has a score of at least one, if he has used it intensively during that season. A

score in an Ability cannot normally be raised beyond four through practice, but this maximum could optionally be modified by the character's intelligence. The storyguide is the final arbiter of whether an Ability has been used sufficiently for a character to gain practice experience.

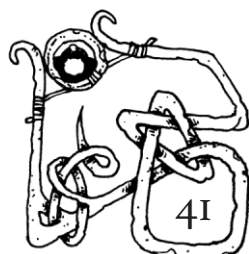
For example, a season spent working full time at a Craft would qualify. A merchant spending a season buying and selling could be considered as practicing his Bargaining. A gate guard systematically searching every passing wagon or pack animal during a season could gain an ep in Awareness. A season spent writing a book could net you an ep in Scribe Latin. And yes, a season spent as an apprentice helping your master in the lab SHOULD let you acquire an ep in Magic Theory.

On the other hand, a character spending a season on guard duty should not be assumed to be practicing martial arts. A student attending lectures would not be assumed to be practicing his Speak Latin sufficiently to gain an ep unless he was also cloistered in a Latin speaking monastery (or possibly covenant) in his spare time. A lecturer spending a season teaching Philosophiae would not be considered to be practicing this Ability, but he could claim an ep in Teaching.

That's it. Everything reduced to "Teaching" and "Practice" with standardized and consistent rules!

Just one last common sense reminder: whether you use Teaching, Practice or learning from a book, you can only gain seasonal experience from one or the other and only in one Art or Ability during a given season.

I think that's enough heresy for this issue. I still have a backlog of simplifying suggestions to offer, but if any of you would like to fill in as chief heretic for a column or two, or have a suggestion that you would like discussed, just let me and Eric know. There are still lots of rules that are in serious need of mowing. But remember: keep it simple!



# Atmospheric magic

by Mike Sloothaak

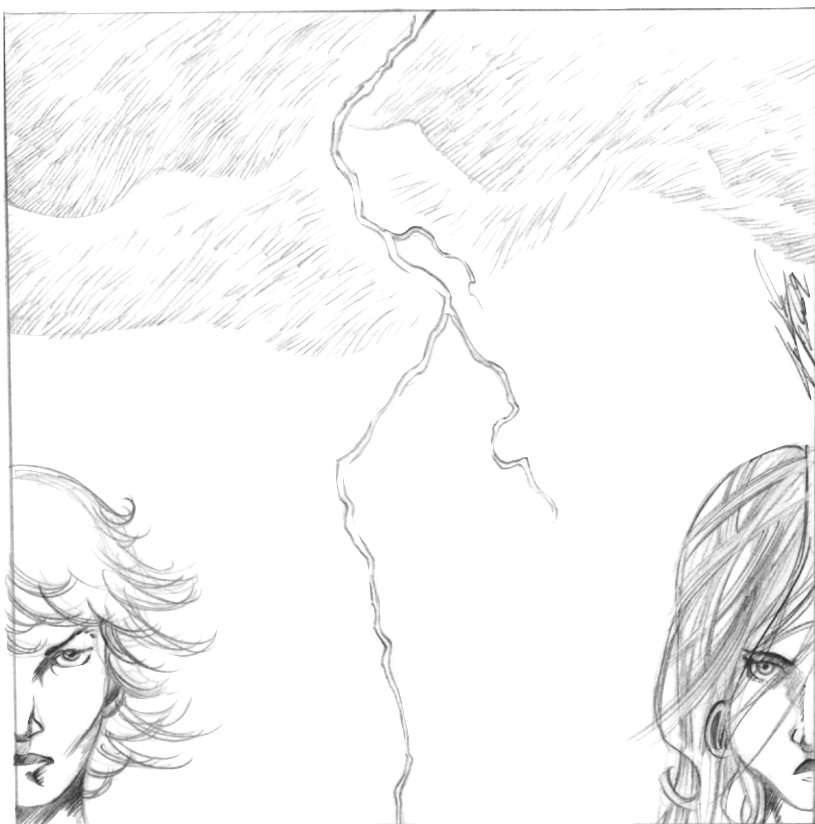
One of Ars Magica's greatest strengths is its strong dependence on medieval history. The line between Ars Magica's mythic Europe and history's medieval Europe is so blurred as to be non-existent. Players argue as much or more about historical sources and interpretations as about die rolls and game rules. Exploring medieval history is one of the great rewards of participating in the game, and medieval sources provide an endless source of ideas ready to graft onto the mythic Europe of the game world.

Why limit one's "real world" resources and exposure to medieval history?

Rare atmospheric phenomena provide a wondrous array of "magical" events to include in stories. (All but the rainbows' magical effects were completely made up.) Here are a number of rare atmospheric events, listed from common to exotic, with concise, modern scientific explanations italicized. More details can be found by searching for the phenomenon on the web.

## Lightning

In the preparation of one's longevity potions, it is very useful to ignite your laboratory hearth with a bolt of lightning (+1 to lab total). Use a long conducting metal rod above the laboratory to attract the bolt. One often has to wait several years for a strike. A bolt that is too large can destroy the entire lab. As long as your fire remains burning, the bonus stays in effect. Tending such a fire is a good job for that new apprentice.



## Rainbows

*Everyone knows that there is a pot of faerie gold at the end of the rainbow. Rainbows only appear when both sunshine and rain are nearby. The rainbow moves when the observer moves. The raindrops act like countless tiny prisms to diffract the light into the spectrum of colours.*

A third magnitude spell *Fix the Rainbow*, can stabilize the position of the rainbow while an assistant can track down its terminus. If the pot of gold isn't too far away, it might be recovered. Dealing with the Faerie owners is another matter.

## Double Rainbows

*Double Rainbows can be seen when rainbow conditions are at their best. The secondary bow is caused by a portion of the light reflecting once inside the raindrops and then exiting. The colours of the secondary rainbows are always in reverse order of the brighter primary rainbow.*

Rainbows are created by God to remind his people of his promise never to send another universal flood. Whenever a person of True Faith sees a double rainbow, he or she is reminded that — no matter how bad things appear at the moment — God is redoubling his promise and will not abandoned the faithful.

## Hail

Of course ice from the sky in the middle of summer is magical.

*Hail is ice formed in the cold upper atmosphere. It normally melts into rain by the time it reaches the earth's surface, but when a strong down draft accelerates its descent, it has insufficient time to melt.*

To collect the Aquam vis in hail, it must be caught before it hits the earth, and be collected in a mistletoe basket. One can determine the amount of vis in each hail stone by total weight and volume. Catching half a dozen baseball size stones would hold the same vis as several hundred pea size stones. Even in period armour, attempting to catch baseball sized ice balls can be a dangerous undertaking, but only the largest of stones give a practical return for the work invested.

## Snow Rollers

*Snow Rollers are rare, natural snowballs that occur when large flakes, accelerated by high, steady winds, collide with wet surface snow. They occur in large numbers on frozen lakes and other horizontal surfaces as the wind whips them along, but can also occur individually on the sides of steep slopes, with gravity doing the pushing, instead.*

Each roller contains a pawn of Auram vis, no matter what its final size.

## Aurora Borealis

*The Northern Lights occur when high-energy streams of charged particles thrown off by the sun are attracted into the earth's atmosphere by the earth's magnetic field. Although not an uncommon phenomenon, seeing them regularly requires a difficult trip to extreme northern latitudes.*

Exposure and study for one winter season while above the Arctic circle gives the magus +3 to their Imaginem score — no matter what level it currently

is. But spending a winter in the Arctic is a challenge indeed for the average magus.

## Green Flashes

*Green (or Emerald) Flashes occur rarely, and when they do, it is only for a few seconds, after a sunset. There are at least four different atmospheric conditions that produce similar flash events. They involve different combinations of refraction of the sun's rays by the atmosphere, which spreads the light into its spectral colours; scattering, which affects the higher frequency light (violet) more than the lower frequency light (red); and often mirages similar to those one sees when looking at a distant pavement.*

One can wait a lifetime to see a green flash, but if one can expose a magic item to the flash, it will open itself to an enchantment of the same level as the magic aura surrounding it at the moment of exposure.

## River Bores

*River bores are resonating tidal waves that sweep along a few particular river estuaries. Best known to Europeans is the Severn River bore, which can be seen in the upper tidal stretches of the Severn and its tributaries. There are a few estuaries on the Earth that are shaped so as to resonate at the frequency of the tides. This resonant frequency needs to be very precise (just as blowing over a soda bottle to make a resonating sound requires some precision). Wind direction and barometric pressure affect the magnitude of the effect considerably. Being linked with the tides, bores potentially happen twice a day.*

Catching the bore wave as it curls over itself is necessary, and the wave curl only happens with the strongest bores. Once the curl water is boiled away, the remaining salts provide a pawn of Rego vis per gallon of water collected. The raw curl water is also an excellent base for making healing and longevity spells (+2).

## Parhelia

*Known by the mundane as "sun dogs", parhelia occur when light is refracted through high altitude hexagonal ice crystals. As they fall, these flat crystals spend a disproportionate amount of time in the horizontal position (just as many leaves do as they drift down from a tree).*

Sun and moon dogs (the latter known as *paraselenae*) have complementary effects. Observing a parhelus through (or reflected by) one's crystal ball, magic mirror, or scrying pool will forever bind the power of the crystal to you alone — no one else can make use of it, and it becomes an arcane connection to you. This binding can be loosed by anyone observing a paraselena through the same object. Unbinding through the use of paraselenae is the standard first step in taking possession of such an object once bound to another.

*Unfortunately, both paraselenae and parhelia are relatively rare and unpredictable events. They usually happen near the horizon, so one should situate oneself near the sea, on a mountain, or on the great eastern steppes, to increase the chances of observing one.*

## Pillars

*Sun and moon pillars are caused by the same phenomenon as the dogs, but instead of their light refracting through the ice crystals, it reflects off the horizontal flat surfaces of the crystals.*

They work in the same way as the dogs do, but the effect of the pillars is only temporary. Using a sun pillar to bind or lose a scrying tool only works for a year. A moon pillar only works for a month.

Once a young astrologer reported a *Venus* pillar. What that event could do for a scrying instrument has not been investigated.

## Saint Elmo's Fire

*St. Elmo's Fire is often seen around ships at sea. It is a similar phenomenon to the process that lights neon and mercury vapour lamps. Heat and high voltage cause atoms to lose electrons. When the electrons find their way back to an ionized atom, they are recaptured, and emit a characteristic frequency of light as they collapse into the less energetic state.*

Fortunately it takes no gift to make use of St. Elmo's Fire. Any edged weapon exposed to it becomes magically animated (+2 to hit) until it next kills (man or beast, even plant). It then loses its charm.

## Tornados

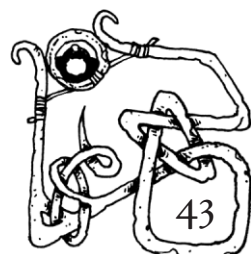
*Tornados are turbulent eddies occurring upon the mixing of large masses of warm and cool air. Over water, they often cause water spouts. Relatively rare — especially in Europe — these events are so powerful, unpredictable and dangerous that only the most experienced wind wizards dare attempt to pursue or entrap them.*

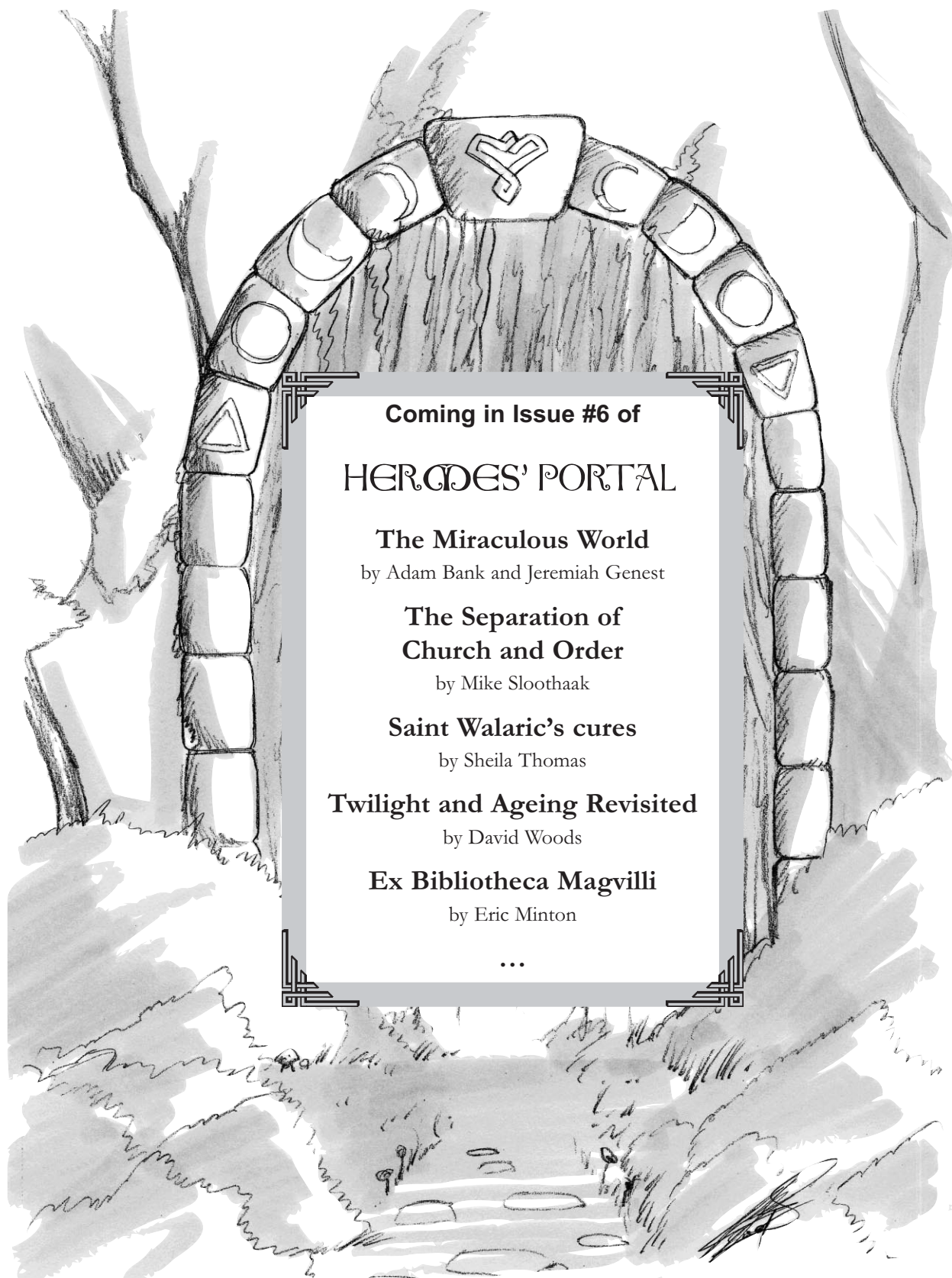
Such a wizard — even if she is so lucky (or unlucky) as to encounter a tornado heading towards her — will need to know this Finnish wind wizard's trick: Lay a long rope woven throughout with a strand of unicorn hair on the ground in a circle, and hope the tornado passes over it. If it does, the wind-storm will be captured within the circumference. It will eventually die down, and you will find 50 to 100 pawns of Perdo vis clinging to the rope. On only two known occasions have Hermetic magi succeeded in this endeavour.

## Ball Lightning

*Even 21<sup>st</sup> century scientists cannot adequately explain Ball Lightning. In some instances, investigators suspect that it is caused by the oxidation (burning) of silicon (from surface sands) ionized after a conventional lightning strike. But there are many reports of ball lightning in and about aircraft — places where apparently no silicon was available to be ionized. There continue to be some sceptics who believe ball lightning is a psychological, not a physical, phenomenon.*

This rarest and most mysterious of events may be the easiest for a gifted magus to exploit. Simply guide the ball in one's hands while casting a first level spontaneous Rego vim (voice only) spell. Once it is in your hands, continue squeezing and chanting (for three or four rounds) and you will soon find you are holding 3-13 pawns of Intellego vis. But one botch will turn that vis into twilight points.





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