

Lords of Gossamer and Shadow

Gossamer Guilds: Praecones



By John Snead

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Praecones



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Gossamer Guilds: Praecones

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To Roger Zelazny who showed us the paths between shadows and to Steve Russell who introduced us to the Grand Stair.

Based on Lords of Gossamer & Shadow by Jason Durrall

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Preliminary notes on the Praecones, by Librarian Shanya Talis

It's rather odd to be writing about an organization I belong to, and stranger still to be doing so as part of a guidebook. I'm far more used to academic letters and papers about myths and mythic histories. However, I shall endeavor to provide the same degree of accuracy and at least some pretense of objectivity here.

Everyone remotely familiar with the Grand Stair knows that the praecones are bards, storytellers, performers, and occasional spies who travel seeking new songs, stories, and of course information of all sorts. The majority of praecones are travelers who spend much of their lives walking from one Gossamer world to another performing songs, collecting stories, and in turn learning the songs and stories of the worlds they visit. Most travelers on the Grand Stair consider praecones to be lucky, as do many residents of Gossamer worlds who know of the Grand Stair. Because of this and also because praecones are excellent company, experienced travelers, and skilled performers, many who walk from one world to another are eager for the company of a praeco. These performers rarely need to travel alone unless they feel the need to do so. Also, as long as they serve solely as entertainers and avoid involving themselves in other's struggles and battles, their reputation tends to protect them from all but the most foolish or paranoid of brigands, and even brutal tyrants allow them to freely pass.

A Passion For Stories & New Horizons

Outsiders are often puzzled by who is and isn't considered a praeco, and for that matter, who exactly is doing the considering. Almost all of us agree that being a praeco requires someone to possess three traits: the ability to travel between Gossamer worlds, a love of stories, and a passion for discovery. The first of these is self-evident, but the other two require a bit of explanation.

Praecones can be musicians, actors, standup comics, epic poets, puppeteers, or storytellers. However, according to all members I've talked to, jugglers, acrobats, and clowns cannot. In addition, musicians who only create and perform music that lacks lyrics are typically not considered to be praecones unless they also include some music with

lyrics in their repertoire. The essential unifying feature of all praecones is that they learn and perform stories. These stories can take any form, from timeless comic or tragic tales of love and loss to stories of a particular important event, like a war, a vast natural disaster, or a major local social movement that changed a world.

Some praecones seek commonalities between songs and stories from wildly different cultures or even different intelligent species, while others wish to learn and recount evidence of the vast diversity of ways of life on the countless worlds of the Grand Stair. However, all of us are passionate about stories. Many love stories because of their emotional impact, others because of what they reveal about specific places and times, and some of the more devious or power-hungry praecones value stories for the power they hold to change minds or even topple governments. However, beyond all of these countless motives, everyone who becomes a praeco values stories for their own sake. Even a passionate crusader who carefully gathers songs about the indiscretions of tyrants she hopes to overthrow also feels a special joy when she encounters an entirely new style of music with songs of a sort she has never heard before.

This joy also highlights the third important quality all praecones share - a love of discovery. All of us dream of discovering something new, whether that is a song or story no praeco has ever heard or read before or a Gossamer world unlike any he has ever visited. Most praecones love the mixture of excitement and fear that comes whenever one of them opens a new Door, not knowing what they will discover on the other side.

As for who decides whether someone is a praeco or not, while anyone is free to claim to be one of us, most of us are highly social and enjoy meeting other praecones. We regularly encounter unknown individuals who claim to be praecones, and those of us who work out of the Storyhouses do so more than most.

After talking to someone for an hour or so, or perhaps simply playing music or swapping stories for a shorter while, we usually have a feeling whether or not we consider strangers to actually be one of us and we treat them accordingly. There's nothing like formal membership, but someone who claims to be one of us but cares little for stories or discovery will soon find that most people they encounter on the Grand Stair do not believe their claims of being a praeco. We may not be organized, but we can swiftly and widely share information that we consider to be important.

History

The origin of the praecones is, unsurprisingly, a mixture

of truth and story. We predate the Dwimmerlaik Wars by at least a millennium and have been around as long as any of the current Gossamer Lords and Ladies can remember. Some of our earliest records were lost or destroyed when we were forced to move our main Storyhouse from The Grand Plaza to the Agora, after the first location was razed during the Dwimmerlaik Wars. All that is known for certain is that long ago, performers and a few scholars began collecting stories from all across the Grand Stair. According to tales passed down from master to apprentice, some of us have worked as messengers and spies, but our focus has always been the same as it is now, collecting and performing stories.

Joining

There are several paths to becoming a praeco. The most well-known is displaying excellence at performance. All across the Grand Stair, when one of us encounters someone with a rare gift for performance, the praeco finds a way to talk to this performer, and asks if she has an interest in travel to other worlds. If the individual knows of the Grand Stair, the praeco often approaches openly. In other cases, long conversations, usually intermixed with jam sessions or story swaps, eventually get around to questions of whether the person would be willing to travel beyond the boundaries of anywhere they know.

Depending upon the situation, the praeco may reveal that she comes from another world and wishes to invite the performer to travel with her. Alternately, after a long night of talking and drinking the performer may awaken in another world with more suns or moons than they have ever seen, and their drinking partner singing ballads about the Grand Stair. The particular style of performance doesn't matter, only the level of skill and commitment. However, judging excellence is difficult in an unfamiliar medium, so musicians typically recruit other musicians and storytellers usually recruit storytellers.

Praecocones who take a particular interest in the power of songs and stories to raise armies, collapse dynasties, or to turn a tyrannical sovereign into a blackmailed puppet frequently look to recruit performers who possess a similar talent for intrigue and espionage. They seek people who can easily blend into any gathering and collect valuable information while merely seeming to make conversation, sip their drink, or tune their guitar.

Possessing impressively well-honed skills is only one path to joining the praecocones. We also recruit both students and teachers. While someone may not be a consummate performer, some praecocones believe they can identify untrained

or partially trained talent and approach people they believe have the potential for greatness. Also, while far fewer in number, and little known to outsiders, praecocones occasionally recruit individuals who are skilled at teaching performers.

If one of us encounters a consummately skilled teacher of music, performance, or on rare occasions, music or story-based magic, we will offer this person a chance to teach individuals from all across the Grand Stair. While some have no desire to leave their life or current students behind, others welcome the chance for travel and the knowledge that they will have a steady stream of excellent students. While many of these teachers are also skilled performers in their own right, some possess only modest abilities and are especially skilled at honing the talents' of their students. While few praecocones ever encounter such an individual, those that do usually attempt to talk them into accompanying them to the nearest Storyhouse.

Although the stereotypical story about praeco recruitment involves introducing a talented resident of a Gossamer world to the Grand Stair, we also attempt to recruit performers who already have some method of opening Doors or otherwise traveling from one Gossamer world to another. By definition, every praeco must possess some method of traveling between Gossamer worlds, and finding individuals who already know how to do this, via cantrips, sorcery, making Icons, or in rare cases, being Wardens or having ties to Eidolon or Umbra, makes this process far easier.

Although praecocones approach most prospective recruits, sometimes the situation is reversed. Some gifted performers or individuals who believe they are or can become gifted performers seek out praecocones and ask to become their apprentices. Depending upon the individual and the praeco they approach, there are several possible results. Praecocones who are willing to take on an apprentice give the prospective member a chance to audition. If this person impresses the praeco, then they become that praeco's student. If the prospective student fails to impress the praeco, or the praeco can't or won't take on a student at this time, they inform the person of the other, more difficult path to becoming one of us, which is honing their talent and skill on their own and learning to travel between Gossamer worlds. The praeco then gives them directions to the nearest Storyhouse and tells the person to introduce himself when he gets there.

Of course, typically, the nearest Storyhouse is on a different Gossamer world, and so the only way to reach it is for the prospective praeco to find some way to travel between worlds. Anyone who manages to travel the Grand Stair to a Storyhouse is considered to have proven their dedication and if they also possess a passion for stories and

Training

Most praecones learn their trade via apprenticeship to a single individual, typically the person who recruited them. This apprenticeship can consist of something as simple as an experienced praeco convincing a skilled musician or storyteller to travel with her, and showing him the wonders of the Grand Stair and the methods of recognizing other praecones. After at least six months of regular travel, during which the two travelers encounter other praecones and visit at least one Storyhouse, if the new recruit wishes to commit himself to this life, his teacher teaches him a cantrip for opening Doors, hands him a carta, and sends him off to travel the Grand Stair.



even a modicum of talent, the praecones at the Storyhouse welcome this person as one of their own. Even if the person can't sing or tell a story to save their life, if they can at least teach either performance or methods of traveling between worlds or show an aptitude as a librarian, they're one of us. Otherwise, the staff of the Storyhouse attempts to persuade them to not call themselves a praeco and to find a new path for their life.

However, at least as often, these apprenticeships last several years, either because the new recruit is not willing or able to travel the Grand Stair alone, or because the recruit is relatively young and has far more talent for music or storytelling than training. As a result, her teacher must share information about both the Grand Stair and life as one of the praecones along with rigorous training in music, storytelling, or methods of travel between worlds.

Occasionally, apprenticeships become lasting friendships or romances and teacher and student end up traveling together for many years. However, part of the unofficial code of the praecones is that one must travel between worlds on their own for at least several months to earn the right to call themselves a praeco.

Members

The praecones have a simple hierarchy, and many of us spend little time with our fellows. The vast majority either travel alone or, more commonly, traverse the Grand Stair in caravans with travelers who are not praecones. Even praecones who decide to remain on one world for months or years usually do so alone. However, despite our solitary reputation, praecones are highly social and do not merely consist of lone wanderers. Instead, we maintain a small but exceedingly important number of teachers and librarians who work in the Storyhouses. The following are the various types of praecones.



Traveling Praecones

Most praecones are travelers. The majority have at most a single apprentice for company, but occasionally several praecones travel together, most often because in addition to being friends or lovers, they are all part of a performance troupe. Traveling bands, theater troupes, improv teams, and performance artist ensembles are not uncommon, especially for relatively new praecones and for those who prefer performing with others.

A few praecones who prefer performing alone are usually solitary travelers, although most still wander the Grand Stair with other people, both for company and for safety in numbers. Especially on sections of the Grand Stair that are more dangerous, praecones who are about to leave one Gossamer world usually organize a caravan of travelers if there is not an existing one they can join. Traveling with a praeco is widely considered to be lucky, and if the praeco knows the destination of their travelling companions, they are generally more than happy to provide information about that Gossamer world to everyone accompanying them. Merchants who accompany experienced praecones know what goods to carry and also what to trade these goods for.

Traveling praecones usually remain on one world for at least several weeks, unless forced to flee. Spending less time does not allow a visitor to learn many of the songs or stories that the world has to offer. However, most do not remain on any single world longer than six months, so most remain only a month or two. After that time, the majority find that the call of the Grand Stair, and the unknown wonders behind another Door, are too strong to ignore and travel onward.

Resident Praecones

While most praecones regularly travel the Grand Stair, some remain on a single Gossamer world for longer periods, ranging from many months to a decade or more. Some of these long-term residents are content to become successful local performers who gain in-depth knowledge of the world's music, history, and stories. Others use this opportunity to demonstrate their experience and talent and become huge celebrities. Depending upon the world and the desires of the individual praeco, they might become touring rock stars, famous theater, movie, or dreamvid performers, or they might obtain a wealthy and powerful patron who allows them to live in luxury in return for private performances and perhaps teaching the patron's children. A few individuals in these positions abandon their ties to the praecones and live out the remainder of their

lives in luxury, but most keep watch for the signs of others of their kind, welcoming and providing them with all the best new songs, stories, and potentially important information. Many create recordings of the best songs and stories they've encountered on that world and pass them on to visiting praecones.

If all or even just a select subset of the inhabitants of a particular Gossamer world knows of the Grand Stair, resident praecones share tales of various worlds, while also quietly seeking to learn how this world fits into the fabric of politics and power that pervades the Grand Stair.

The vast majority of us who settle on a particular Gossamer world as a resident do so for no longer than a few years. After that time, we return to our wandering lifestyle. Some praecones are content to spend a few years on one Gossamer world, wander the Grand Stair for a few weeks or perhaps a month or two, and then settle into a new Gossamer world for another lengthy stay. A previously unknown style of music, new and wondrous musical instruments, unusual stories, someone particularly fascinating, or perhaps a mystery that puzzles the praeco, can keep one of us on a single world indefinitely until we either solve it or decide to give up and move on.

The Storyhouses

While all praecones can travel between worlds, not all of us choose to do. A few reside in especially well traveled locations and let the songs, stories, and other information come to them. Working out of buildings known as Storyhouses, these individuals provide traveling performers with something like a home and a location to collect and catalog all they have learned.

Shortly after a group of traveling performers began calling themselves praecones, some of them formed the first Storyhouse in the now blighted Grand Plaza. They created it as a place where performers from all across the many worlds of the Grand Stair could come to show off their talents as well as use the space as an informal headquarters.



At a Storyhouse, praecones can come to spend time with comrades, catch up on news and gossip, take lessons from one of the Storyhouse's teachers, and also add songs and stories to the Storyhouse archive and perhaps learn a few in return. The first Storyhouse now lies in ruins, but most of its archives and personnel moved to the Agora when the Grand Plaza became the Black Market. Later, other praecones constructed a new Storyhouse in Nexopolis, and today there are at least half a dozen other Storyhouses each located in a major nexus of cross-world travel. In addition to providing a gathering place for praecones, Storyhouses attract many visitors from among the countless Gossamer worlds who pass through each of these locations.

Local musicians and storytellers come to a Storyhouse in their Gossamer world to pay for new songs or stories that are unknown in their homeworld, and the wealthy come to hire a praeco to perform for an important gathering or a luxuriously wild party. These transactions make up most of the Storyhouses' business and keep the residents well paid and living comfortably. Also, each Storyhouse contains several large performance spaces, where praecones regularly perform concerts, epic poetry sessions, and many similar events.

Storyhouses are also where someone can go to buy, sell, or exchange information. Storyhouses buy gossip about Gossamer Lords and Ladies and songs and stories that none at the Storyhouse know, usually with the currency of the Storyhouse's Gossamer world. Alternately, if the seller wishes, the Storyhouse can pay for information with a new song, story, piece of history, or even information about the purported location of an impressive treasure. However, Storyhouses also buy and sell far more sensitive information, which can include everything from a dark and ancient secret, information to ruin the reputation of a Gossamer Lord or Lady, a detailed description of how to secretly gain entrance to a well-guarded vault containing unique and powerful magics, or knowledge of a powerful being's weaknesses. This information is only spoken of in the Storyhouse's back rooms which are protected from

observation or interruption by advanced technologies and potent sorcery. As the few thieves foolish enough to attempt to rob them have soon learned, knowledge is power. We as praecones use both our own knowledge and that of powerful individuals that owe us favors, to make certain that every Storyhouse is exceptionally well protected against both theft and spying. Also, as I discuss below, our reputation and the favors owed to us protects both the Storyhouses and those of us who travel the Grand Stair.

The Storyhouses only sell exceedingly sensitive information in return for other equally valuable secrets or for rare and powerful items which can function on multiple Gossamer worlds. However, when selling information to someone who is sufficiently powerful and important, the praecones sometimes simply ask for a future favor as their payment. As a result of such sales, each Storyhouse contains records of the many dozens of favors owed to them, a fact they freely make use of if anyone threatens either the Storyhouse or the praecones as a whole.

Whether selling the services of a performer, a short series of hilarious jokes guaranteed to have never been heard on a particular Gossamer world, or details of how to create a duplicate key to a Nexopolis warehouse, Storyhouses are scrupulously honest. On the few occasions that their information turns out to no longer be current, they offer either a full refund or second piece of information of the person's choosing, so long as this information is no more

valuable than the one that proved to be inaccurate.

In return, they do not expect to be cheated. Storyhouses are staffed by individuals with copious knowledge, who can call on vast electronic and sorcerous databases, contacts from all across the Grand Stair, and their own excellently trained memories to evaluate and verify the information. To sell especially valuable information, the purveyor must make psychic contact with one of the local praecones, who verifies that this information is being delivered in good faith and is correct to the best of the seller's knowledge.

The Icon Network

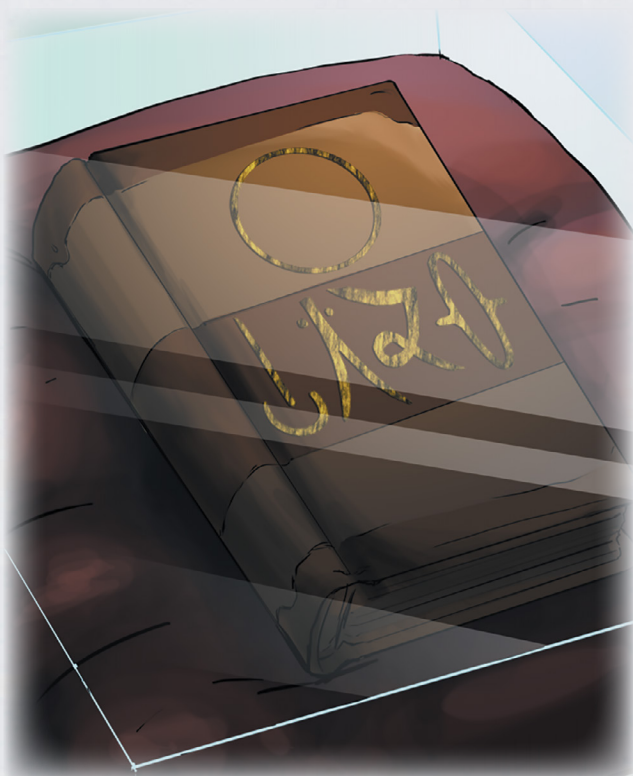
Every Storyhouse asks praecones who visit for more than a day or two to allow someone skilled in Wrighting to create an Icon that the Storyhouse can keep. In return, one of the people working at the Storyhouse volunteers to give their own Icon to the praeco. As a general rule, every Storyhouse has several Icons of individuals working in all of the other Storyhouses. These Icons help tie the praecones together and provide a swift method of passing along important news. In times of crisis, this Icon network allows the praecones to respond as one, or to gather members together when a matter comes up that concerns all praecones.

Librarians

Every praeco is a free agent, however we do possess some degree of hierarchy. More experienced members are regarded more highly than relatively new ones, and at the top of this loose hierarchy are librarians like myself. Some librarians are retired traveling praecones, but the majority are recruited because of their keen passion for collecting, organizing, and studying music, stories, folklore, gossip, oral history, dangerous secrets, and all of the various other sorts of knowledge we collect and dispense. I was recruited in this fashion when I was sixteen.

Excellently trained memories are necessary for all praecones, but librarians' memories exceed those of all but the best traveling performers. Most of us know where to find almost any entry in our vast collections, even without using the semi-sentient computers or sorcerous servitor-minds that every Storyhouse library contains. Although there is no formal requirement that librarians be performers, some are skilled musicians and most, like myself, are at least moderately accomplished storytellers.

Many librarians rarely, if ever, travel beyond the Gossamer World where their Storyhouse is located. Occasionally, one of us receives a report about a particularly impressive performer, or perhaps some mystery, like a Gossamer



A Note on Cartas

Cartas were introduced in *Lucien's Guide to the Grand Stair*. Simply put, they are maps of Doors on the Grand Stair. In Lucien's words: "The exact form that a carta takes depends upon the talent and inclination of its creator. They can range from simply sketched maps to comprehensive guidebooks. It might encompass a dozen worlds, or it might encompass thousands. The most sophisticated cartas are technological or magical marvels, though most are a bit more old-fashioned, as durability is also a factor in their utility."

world which has no apparent knowledge of the Grand Stair but where there is an abundance of traditional songs and stories about well-known events on other worlds. On one occasion, a librarian I know learned of a world where plays recounting the activities of particular Gossamer Lords and Ladies were performed shortly before these deeds happened. In such cases, younger and more daring librarians often travel to investigate these mysteries for themselves, instead of relying on other traveling praecones..

Teachers

Newly recruited praecones must hone their performance skills, learn the secrets of traveling the Grand Stair, and also a cantrip or two. Most apprentices learn all of this from their masters, but some praecones find that they are ill-suited to teach a particular student, either because of different learning styles, or because the student is sufficiently talented that they require an exceptionally skilled teacher. Sometimes, the praeco finds their student another, more skilled master, and occasionally theses masters are associated with one of the Storyhouses. Many of these teachers are highly skilled performers with a passion for teaching who decided to retire from traveling the Grand Stair, either due to age, injuries, or simply a desire to put down roots. However, as was mentioned above, some teachers were recruited for just this purpose – to teach. Almost all of the praecones treat teachers stationed in Storyhouses with great respect, and former students regularly visit the Storyhouse where their teacher works.

Additional Staff

Younger and less experienced students who are training at a Storyhouse perform the majority of the day to day operations, but most Storyhouses also have praecones who have retired or who are taking a break from traveling acting

as administrators and senior clerks. In addition, every Storyhouse makes deals with local sorcerers and individuals capable of creating Icons to provide the Storyhouse and visiting praecones with necessary magical protection and services, and to keep their Icon network up to date.

Maps and Messages

By their very nature, almost all praecones are exceptionally well travelled and many keep records of their travels. Most make notes or compose detailed oral records of their path on the Grand Stair, and deliver copies to one of the Storyhouses. Then, librarians like myself use these records to create cartas. Many praecones possess one or more cartas and sometimes either sell copies of these maps or give them to other travelers that they encounter whom they either like or feel sorry for.

We have no formal rules about sharing cartas, either with outsiders or with other praecones. However, when praecones deal with one another, most exchange cartas on a one for one basis, with the expectation that more experienced praecones will give more extensive maps to relatively new recruits. This policy also applies to the Storyhouses, where praecones who offer a carta, or information that can be used to create one, are typically free to either ask for a map of a specific portion of the Grand Stair or to search through the map library and make a copy of one of them. Praecones who regularly donate well done carta, carefully written notes, or extremely detailed oral records that can be turned into carta, rarely have trouble obtaining two or three when they only have one to trade. In contrast, individuals who only trade cartas that are copies of common ones made by others often find members of a Storyhouse watching them carefully to make certain that they only make a copy of a single map, and are sometimes forbidden from accessing the Storyhouse's records until they can produce an unfamiliar carta.

In addition to trading cartas, praecones are also sometimes called upon to act as messengers. Praecones who are headed to or who will be passing through a specific destination are usually more than happy to carry a message there for a friend or another praeco. Although such messages occasionally go astray, either because the messenger ended up in a different destination or because they were robbed or killed, the vast majority get through.

Outsiders also ask praecones to carry messages for them. Most individuals who wish for a praeco to deliver a message travel to the nearest Storyhouse in hopes that someone there is headed to the desired destination, or knows someone who is. Delivering messages for individuals outside the praecones is relatively common,

Learning Grand Stair Talents

While only a tiny fraction of praecones ever become Wardens of the Grand Stair, the few teachers who are Wardens or skilled magicians sometimes attempt to impart the Warden talents of Exegesis [3 Points] and Opening and Closing Doors [5 Points] to all members who are interested. While only a minority can learn to sense and open Doors, the natural facility with language and performance that all praecones require means that almost half can master Exegesis, permitting them to easily fit into any world they visit.

but is rarely free. We have no desire to become a free postal service for the entire Grand Stair, and while members deliver messages for their friends and close allies without requiring payment, everyone else is expected to provide the praeco or Storyhouse with a reason or incentive to deliver the message. On rare occasions, this reason is the message itself, or perhaps a promised reward by its recipient. Most often, the sender must provide the reward, which could be anything from magical training to a sorcerous artifact, an exquisitely made musical instrument, or perhaps a letter of introduction to a famous musician or a library containing recordings of important music on a particular Gossamer world.



Methods of Travel

As with every other cross-world traveler, by definition each praeco must have some method of traveling from one world to another. Apprentices regularly travel with their master or mistress and thus do not need their own method of travel, but to be regarded as a full praeco requires possessing some method of opening Doors or otherwise traveling between Gossamer worlds. While a few members are Wardens or become Wardens during their apprenticeship, the vast majority do not, just as only a handful of praecocones ever attune themselves to either Eidolon or Umbra. Instead, our most common method of travel is the *Open* cantrip.

The vast utility of this single cantrip has caused the praecocones to develop an entire series of cantrips designed to be sung, each of which consists of a single line of music. Some praecocones have also adapted these cantrips so that they do not require voice at all, but can instead be cast by playing a few specific chords on an instrument. The ability to use the *Open* cantrip by singing or playing an instrument is widely seen as one of the marks of being a praeco, and many travelers on the Grand Stair are inclined to doubt claims of membership in this organization by any who lack this ability.

However, some praecocones possess alternative methods of travel. In addition to various items that can open Doors, like the travel watches (Appendix 2), the praecocones also contain more than a few sorcerers among their ranks. There are traditions of sorcery from all across the Grand Stair that use music or oratory as their means of casting spells, and sorcerers trained in these arts are natural recruits.

Some praecocones begin wandering the Grand Stair before joining, often because they found an item that allows them to open Doors. Others acquire such an item during their apprenticeship. These individuals are not obliged to learn cantrips or other means of travel, but the self-sufficient ethos of the praecocones causes most to at least learn the *Open* cantrip, since their voice is far less likely to be lost or stolen than a valuable magical trinket.

Relations With Other Organizations & Powerful Individuals

Most praecocones are fiercely independent and have little interest in hierarchy. During gatherings at Storyhouses

disagreements are common, but the one fact universally agreed upon is the need for praecocones to be able to control our own destiny, both as a whole and individually. Anyone with sufficient talent and dedication can join regardless of whether they are a busker dressed in rags, the heir of a multi-world empire, or a Gossamer Lady who is a Master of the Grand Stair and controls the powers of the Eidolon. However, no single member commands us and we do not serve or owe obedience to any individual or organization. Older and more experienced praecocones command greater respect, as do all of the librarians, but no one can tell other members what they must do or bind other praecocones to another group or individual.

Individual praecocones are free to work for other organizations or powerful individuals for a period of time, but are expected to cease calling themselves praecocones if this fealty interferes with being a praeco and lasts longer than a year or two. One of us who works as a performer, but has a Gossamer Lady as their personal patron, is clearly still a praeco. However, working as someone's hired spy, thief, or even as someone's servant or travel guide for an extended period prevents that individual from also being a praeco. In addition, individual praecocones frequently ally themselves with other organizations and with individual Gossamer Lords and Ladies for short periods of time. These allegiances are always arranged for mutual benefit.

Serious threats, like a suspected Dwimmerlaik invasion, are obviously in everyone's best interest to help prevent and so praecocones always work together in these cases. Also, organizations and individuals can approach a Storyhouse for aid. If their request does not directly and obviously benefit the praecocones as a whole, praecocones will then expect something in return. Access to previously unknown worlds with particularly interesting music or stories can serve as payment for some requests. Others require more tangible rewards, which can range from creating Icons or various other minor magic items, to asking the individual or organization to build and fund a new Storyhouse on a well-travelled Gossamer world. The semi-sentient technosorcerous library system which many Storyhouses use were originally given in return for a significant service provided by the praecocones before the war with the Dwimmerlaik, as were some of the warding protections found in some security systems that protect our Storyhouses.

For the right price, praecocones can provide a wide variety of services. Access to a Storyhouse library for all known stories about a specific individual, creature, phenomena, or event is a common service that is *relatively* inexpensive, although our prices are somewhat higher for particularly impressive and well-off clients. As previously mentioned, praecocones can also attempt to deliver secret messages to

individuals unwilling or unable to make contact via Icons, and of course, they can act as spies. In both of these cases, the praecones involved do their best to appear to be nothing more than wandering storytellers or musicians who care nothing about the troop movements of a cross-world army or what message a noblewoman imprisoned in a sorcerously warded tower might wish to relay to her allies.

While praecones could also serve as excellent assassins or thieves, a praeco must refuse all such requests. Long ago, praecones held one of our rare votes and decided that interfering in war, politics, or intrigue too directly would place us all in too much danger and could also severely restrict our access to exactly the sorts of wealthy and powerful patrons who often surround themselves with talented performers. Praecones are free to take note of conversations happening around them, listen at doors, or on rare occasions, open a safe to memorize or copy the documents inside. However, anyone known to work as a saboteur, thief, or assassin is shunned by every Storyhouse and publically denounced by their fellows. Praecones are free to defend themselves and their friends and companions for direct attack and to hunt down attackers, but almost

all of us frown on members participating in organized or preplanned violence.

The Wrath of the Praecones

In return for the widely known fact that the praecones never seek to steal from or directly harm those around them, most powerful individuals and organizations are willing to do nothing more than exile praecones who are discovered or suspected of spying. The few who dare to imprison or execute praecones soon find that no praeco will talk to them and that every performer they encounter knows songs, stories, and jokes about their previously secret indiscretions.

If one of the praecones commits serious criminal acts, most of us accept any just punishment, although that praeco's comrades may intervene. However, if the accusations are unjust or even simply unproven, then the Storyhouses work to rally all praecones to this individual's defense. Messages about the incident are swiftly relayed from one Storyhouse to another, and from there to most



of our number. The attacker must then either release their prisoner or suffer the consequences. Anyone who harms or imprisons even a single praeco without just cause can find her darkest secrets made widely public in hilarious songs and stories, while thieves with detailed knowledge of her security rob her. Soon after that, powerful Gossamer Lords and Ladies call her to account for her misdeeds. Rulers who harm one of the praecones find talk of revolutions or coups spreading through their realm, as disguised praecones work to fuel resentment, ambition, and greed in the minds of the Ruler's enemies and potentially untrustworthy allies.

The praecones are in general opposed to organized violence or becoming embroiled in wars. However, we are willing to defend the Grand Stair as fervently as we work to rescue our own members. During the Dwimmerlaik Wars, the praecones spied, carried important messages, spread propaganda and otherwise worked to harry and defeat the Dwimmerlaik. Today, we stand ready to join forces against anyone who threatens the peace and safety of the Grand Stair.

Appendix 1: Adventure Hooks

The following are a series of suggestions for scenarios involving the praecones.

- While visiting Nexopolis, the Agora, or some other location with a Storyhouse, the characters are approached for help in rescuing a praeco who is being held captive by a powerful goddess-queen who rules a primal Gossamer world and (falsely) believes that the praeco helped kidnap her son. The characters are free to rescue the praeco, prove his innocence, or rescue the goddess-queen's son and trade him for the praeco. If they rescue the praeco, the Storyhouse owes the characters each a major favor.
- Pursuing rumors of an ancient, sentient Gossamer world that collects myths and stories, several praecones have vanished. Either one of the characters is a praeco who wishes to help, or the characters know one of the vanished praecones. In either case, the characters have a good reason to find out what happened. The rumors are true, but the Gossamer world hides its true nature from most visitors. It appears to be a normal world sparsely inhabited by unusual looking intelligent beings who are polite and friendly.
- These creatures are actually temporary extensions of the sentient world, and the world attempts to

capture anyone who reveals themselves to be a skilled storyteller. The local sentients lure such individuals away from their companions and take them into caverns that block the use of Icons. These caverns are part of the sentient world's body. Here, it engulfs these performers, keeping them alive and in good health, but trapped in dreams and memories which entertain the world.

- The characters discover evidence that a prominent Gossamer Lord may secretly be working with the Dwimmerlaik to plan some sort of attack on the other Gossamer Lords and Ladies. To determine if this accusation is true and also to learn what the Dwimmerlaik are planning and why a respected Gossamer Lord may be working with them, the characters must visit the Gossamer Lord's Domain and infiltrate his exceedingly secure and well-guarded household. The Gossamer Lord and his family are known to love music and stories. If one or more of the characters are praecones, they could easily infiltrate the Gossamer Lord's household, or the characters could recruit a praeco to help them spy on the Gossamer Lord. The identity of the Gossamer Lord is ultimately up to the GM.

Appendix 2: Common Praecones Items

Although Wardens and Masters of the Grand Stair require little aid when they walk from one world to the next, like many ordinary sentient beings who regularly wander the Grand Stair, praecones often find themselves in need of assistance in traveling between worlds or when visiting unfamiliar worlds. The following are three of the items most commonly used by praecones.

Portable Libraries

While all praecones must have excellent memories, no one can precisely capture a performance as well as a recording, and even the most widely travelled praeco can only learn a tiny fraction of the uncounted trillions of songs and stories found upon the worlds of the Grand Stair. The praecones have found a method of remedying these problems with small techno-sorcerous devices known as portable libraries. Designed to function on all known worlds of the Grand Stair, these small devices consist of a semi-sentient data processor which also contains tiny, high quality cameras, microphones, speakers, and video displays. These devices

can record and play back performances in exquisite levels of details, and all of them are designed so that they can transfer data to one of the Storyhouse libraries.

These devices are relatively rare, and most praecones only obtain one as a reward for exceptional service to a Storyhouse, or by performing a major favor for a librarian. There are three types of portable libraries, all of which are designed to be worn in a variety of styles. Glasses, monocles, headbands, pendants, earrings and wristbands similar to a large smartwatch are some of the most common designs. The praecones obtain these devices from the Storyhouse that exists in the Agora, where some of the greatest crafters have learned to create items that function anywhere on the Grand Stair. However, each portable library requires a minimum of many weeks of work, and so demand always outstrips supply.

Basic Portable Library [2 points]

This device can record and play back an essentially unlimited amount of material. The user can speak with it to obtain either specific recordings or recordings of certain types of performances. Requests like “play me the saddest ballad of lost love you have” or “display all stories you know about minotaurs” are both valid. These devices can record and play back both sound and video.

Able to Speak and Reason [2 points]

Improved Portable Library [5 points]

This device has all the abilities of a basic library, but it can also contact the wearer psychically, giving her the knowledge of a specific song or story, and thus allowing her to perform it with little or no practice, as long as she continues wearing the library.

Able to Speak and Reason [2 points]

Psychic Sensitivity [1 point]

Psychic Neutral [2 points]

Librarian's Interface [8 points]

This device has all of the functions of an improved library, and in addition regularly exchanges data with the Storyhouse library of the Agora, uploading new performances that it has recorded and downloading new recordings that someone else has entered into the library. In addition, the owner can use this device to contact a librarian or anyone who is wearing another Librarian Interface. These devices are only given to librarians who decide to travel the Grand

Stair and to other praecones who have performed or are performing a truly impressive favor for a librarian.

Able to Speak and Reason [2 points]

Extraordinary Psychic Sense [4 points]

Psychic Neutral [2 points]

Translators

One of the major limitations on praecones is that few of them are Wardens of the Grand Stair, and so do not benefit from a Warden's exegesis. While roughly half of all praecones can learn this ability, the other half cannot. Without sorcery or some form of psychic contact, when these praecones visit a new world, they must first learn one or more local languages. Translators offer an alternative to this process. While almost every praeco who has not been blessed by the Grand Stair is a skilled student of languages, translators allow wearers to immediately begin interacting, and for the sufficiently dedicated, help the wearer learn languages more easily.

Many Gossamer worlds have their own translation devices, ranging from a helpful sprite or imp that sits on your shoulder and translates for you, to wearable or implanted microelectronic AIs. However, the vast majority of these devices only function on the world where they were made. The translators praecones use come from a vast store of such items that Lylis Chas, a Warden of the Grand Stair who is also a praeco, found on a blasted and barely habitable world that was the site of a major battle during the last war with the Dwimmerlaik. Lylis called this world Bleak Winds Six, and has only shared knowledge of its location with the senior librarians of each of the Storyhouses, who continue to pass down this information to other senior librarians.

The storeroom containing these translators is in the enormous basement of the toppled central tower of a vast ruined metropolis. The storeroom holds tens of thousands of these items, as well as strange devices that if repaired would allow individuals to create more. Most of these items appear to be pairs of glasses that can be adjusted to fit any humanoid face. They contain a rudimentary sentience that can understand any spoken or written language native to the world it is in, as well as the wearer's native tongue. The device automatically translates speech, broadcasts it into the wearer's ear via an attached earpiece, and displays translations of text in adjustably sized print on the lenses of the glasses. With a simple command, the device can translate something written by the wearer into one of a world's native languages and allow the wearer to trace this translation. Wearers can also whisper something they

wish to say and have the translator respond in a bland and somewhat monotone voice, or they can have the device whisper the response and attempt to repeat it.

Standard Translator [4 points]

Able to Speak [1 point]

Exegesis [3 points]

Psychic Translator [5 points]

Slightly more than a third of the translators on Bleaks Winds Six are psychic devices consisting of a narrow adjustable metal headband. These devices have all of the capabilities of the other somewhat more limited translators, but also create a psychic link with the wearer's mind, allowing easier and more fluid translations and permitting the wearer to merely think a verbal response which the translator then either says or coach her to say.

Able to Speak [1 point]

Exegesis [3 points]

Psychic Sensitivity [1 point]

Travel Watches

One of the most valuable assets of the praecones is found in a vast abandoned metropolis on a Gossamer world known as Shadowdawn. Almost all of the inhabitants of this world now exist as intelligent software in vast and shining crystalline computers. However, more than two thousand years ago, the inhabitants had physical bodies and lived in cities. In one of these now-ruined cities, a praeco discovered a device that can still create transparent crystal disks roughly the size and shape of a pocket watch.

If touched by a literate intelligent being, these devices display the current time and temperature in the user's native language. They also record a map of the user's travels for as long as the user carries it, recording both distance and relative direction and allowing users to easily retrace their paths. All of these abilities also function on the Grand Stair. In addition, these devices can open Doors. The user merely needs to touch the device to a Door's keyhole or other locking mechanism, and the device uses an unknown means to unlock it.

The city where these items are found has a single Door located a short distance from the mechanism that creates the travel watches. The city's automated facilities still function, providing food, water, and climate control to all dwellings,

so several praecones maintain a small permanent base here. They collect the travel watches and use crystalline interface crowns to learn the song and stories of the bodiless inhabitants of the vast crystalline computer located several miles from the city. The mechanism which creates these devices is built into the city's ruins and cannot be moved, but it can produce up to 200 in a day. The praecones give these devices to members who have performed an important service for, or otherwise sufficiently impressed the staff of, one of the Storyhouses.

Travel Watch [2 points]

Follow Path [2 Points]

On the world of their origin, they are a Horde [2 x 3 = 6 Points].



Lords of GOSSAMER & SHADOW

Performers, bards, storytellers... These things are what the famed Praecones appear to be, and what some of them are, truth be told. Yet there is more to them than appearances would lead many to believe, layers of intricacy beneath the shimmering veil of their performances, and wisps of intention behind their incredible tales.

Delve into the truth of the guild most well known for its entertainers, as see what lies beneath their polished veneer. It is time to see the Praecones for what they truly are, for they are certainly more than many would believe...

