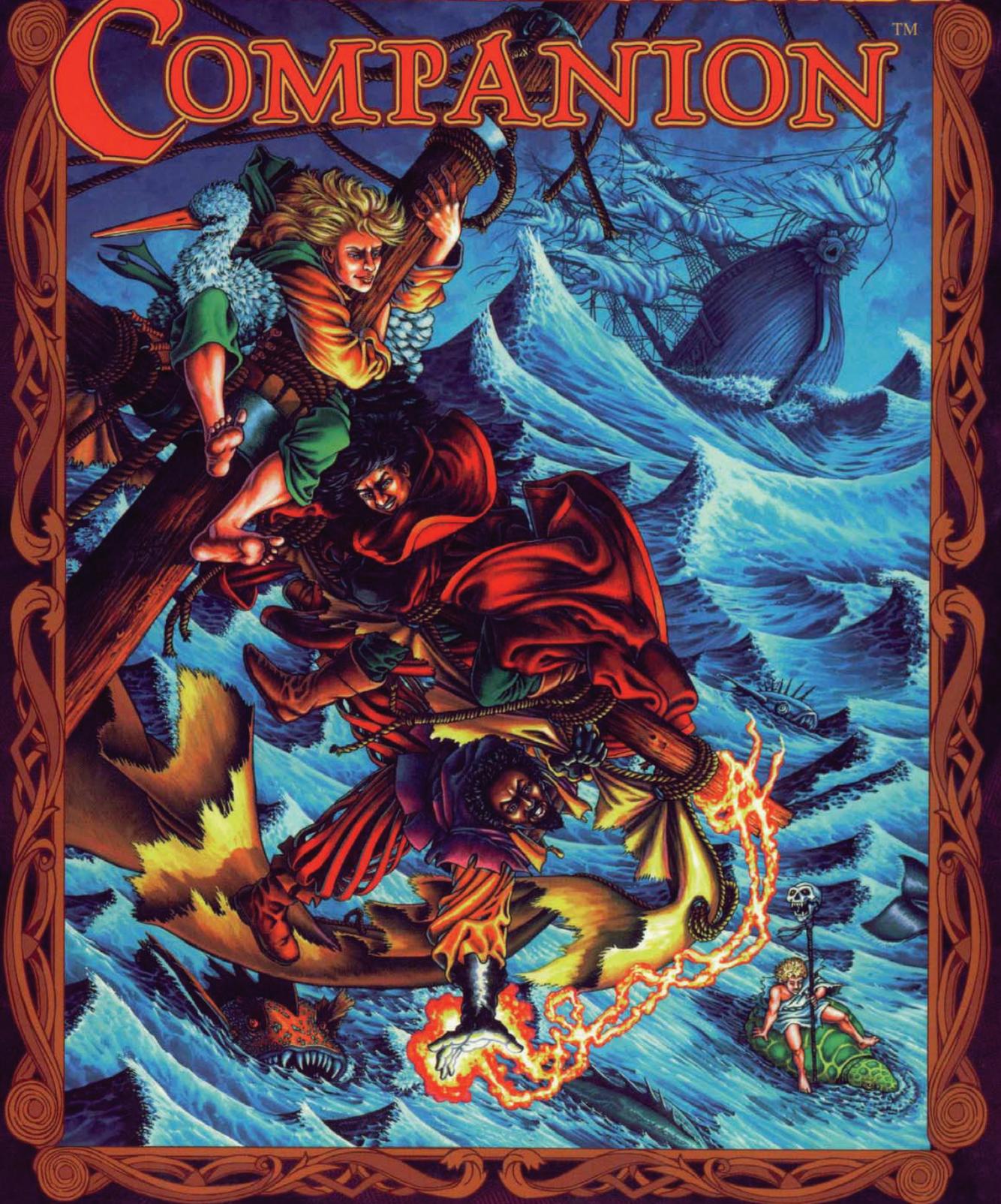


THE SORCERERS CRUSADE COMPANION™



A Sourcebook for the Dark Fantastic world of Mage: The Sorcerers Crusade™



SORCERERS
CRUSADE
COMPANION



THE SORCERERS CRUSADE COMPANION™

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Mirror, Mirror

by Sian Kingstone

By moonlight I practice my art, sometimes in the woods where diaphanous cloud drifts high above me. At other times, as now, I am in my workroom, candle at hand. Here, shadows leap and twist, dancing from dusty tome to discarded potion; but tonight, nothing here is as shadow-torn as my mirror.

Quite suddenly, I wish it were daylight.

I stare at the face; the face stares back at me. I grimace for want of tears. My dark reflection smiles — a soft sinuous curve that draws his contempt. He even dares to sneer at me down his eagle's beak of a nose.

"It was not my fault," I whisper and place my hands upon the glass, trembling fingers spread wide as if to push that visage away from me. But how do I banish a reflection — my own?

The mirror shimmers, flickers, and the shadows within bulge like the fleshy cup of a black tulip. My breath catches as I sense time and space twisting, tearing. The figure steps through the surface of the glass that was not-glass.

The intruder is my mirror image, but he no longer moves at my command. He walks around me, arms folded over his velvet robes of darkest indigo.

"Well," he says, looking me up and down with eyes of glittering marcasite, "what shall you do now?"

"Demon," I say, "you have no place here."

He laughs, and in that laugh I feel the whole world tremble. My feeble heart flutters, and anger burns on my lips in one command: "Begone!"

The demon slowly moves his head from side to side, and soon the glacial gaze returns. He lifts a finger — too long for mine, yet mine even so — and pins me with finger and gaze alike. "Ask of me what you will, Nikolai, but do not attempt to compel me."

Flames of indignation rage within me. "Why are you here?" I demand.

Before me the demon wears my face and tilts his head just as I would. I feel a cold tremor as he raises a quizzical eyebrow. "You summoned the judgment, did you not? Can it be you have forgotten so soon?"

There is something so knowing in that whirlpool gaze, that I feel the bedrock of my resolve begin to crumble. I have no answer.

"What ails you?" The demon peers closer and whispers as if to caress my bones. "Cat got your tongue?"

On the last word he smiles as if enjoying the spectacle. Then, in one unearthly stride, he crosses to the other side of the room. As he settles in my solitary arm chair, he gestures towards the low stool normally reserved for Antoninus, my apprentice; I sit.

The demon studies me a moment, then speaks softly. "It seems I must remind you of what has happened between us these last few days."

I begin to protest, but my doppelgänger raises his hand and the words die on my tongue. "Be still, Nikolai. I have neither the time nor the patience to repeat myself. As you have often said to poor Antoninus: Open your heart and listen."

"So," says the demon, "it began when you purchased the mirror." He shakes his head sadly. "Three farthings! What charm did you employ on the merchant that day?"

"None!" I say. "The man was glad to be rid of it."

"Indeed. But you knew its true nature, did you not?"

"I did."

"And, therefore, its true value?"

I nod, not daring to say more than is necessary.

The demon leans closer, head turned slightly so that one dark eye can bore into mine. "But you kept your knowledge to yourself," he whispers with the merest hint of scorn tainting his words.

This time I simply look at him. The chill fingers playing at my scalp tease and torment an already agonized mind. A disembodied voice in my head screams: He knows! He knows!

My double leans back and taps the arm of the chair, as he considers me with a gaze that does not belie his judgment of me.

"You did not think to go back, then?" he says. "No pangs of regret?"

I shake my head.

"A pity," says the demon.

"Why?" I snap.

The word is out even before I know the thought is born. Worse still, the flow continues, for now my anger pushes aside whatever fear and despair I might have had.

"The man had no interest in bartering. I made an offer and he accepted it. What is wrong with that? Go on, tell me!"

"Oh, I can do better than that."



His lips softly form a few arcane words, and with one swift movement of his left hand, the mirror is beside us with its stark silver frame and boiling shadows.

"Watch," he says.

No sooner does my gaze rest upon that silvered glass, than it clouds. Although I do not move from the stool, it feels as if I am sucked into the mirror, like an egg into the bowels of a snake. Shadows coil and flex around me, sliding within my garments to caress my skin with a touch far colder than any viper. All around me they hiss and twist, these spirits of the glass, their ravings too faint, too foreign even for my learned ear to decipher.

The mirror's fetches bind me close, gripping my ankles, wrists, neck, even my hair: Something cold and damp strokes my skin. I jerk away but am powerless as they prod and poke. When some of them slip into my nose, I open my mouth to scream, and they are in, wriggling, sliding, coursing down my throat.

Oh, gods! I feel them snaking under my skin — alive!

"Be still!" the demon hisses, and the writhing stops, theirs and mine.

Then it is over, and the shadows dissipate. In the mirror I see, not a reflection of my room, but a coarse fabric that irritates the eye. A hand pulls the cover back and my own face peers back at me.

It is that day again — the day I bought the mirror.

As usual, the warehouse had been in complete disarray that day. On the walls, Persian rugs competed with each other for

hanging space, and everywhere was a tangle of color and texture. I remember how light streamed through the arched window, and how the atmosphere was thick with the warm scent of sandalwood. That was the only warmth in the place though, for there was no fire in the grate, despite the frost flavoring the air.

As soon as I had uncovered the mirror, I felt a rush of exhilaration. Oh, yes — I knew what it was even then. At the sound of movement behind me, I immediately pulled on a mask of scorn.

Through a stately congregation of Egyptian spice jars walked the figure of the man I had come to see. I had known Christophe for years, and in all that time he had never changed. He was squat, rather plump on past profits, and eagle-eyed for more. In short, not a man to bargain with lightly.

I turned to the merchant and, gesturing toward the mirror said, "You don't honestly expect to sell that, do you?"

The merchant looked up with a worried frown from a sheaf of papers, and he tugged his long beard.

"Hmm? Oh, the mirror. I paid twenty pounds for that."

He owed me several favors, I reasoned, while his help always came at a price. Well, he wasn't going to pat me on the back and cut my purse strings this time.

"Look," I said, almost certain he was trying to squeeze my last ha'penny from me, "why don't I take it off your hands, as a favor? I'll even give you three farthings for it."

Christophe shrugged and rubbed his forehead wearily. "Do what you will," he said.

With that, muttering about fickle weather and unfair prices, he shuffled back through the chicane of spice jars.

As my own hand drops the cloth back into place, the surface of the mirror writhes like boiling thunderclouds, dark and threatening. Finally they disperse and the mirror is clear once more.

Why has the demon shown me this? How cruel. Only today I went back to see my friend. My discovery in that warehouse has haunted me all day.

Beside me in my chamber there is a rippling and shuffling sound, something I am accustomed to hearing in the gaming rooms of my high borne friends. My dark companion is in my armchair, splitting and fanning a deck of cards, first with two hands then with one.

"Well, Nikolai, did you see it?"

I cannot answer. My emotions are as raw as flayed skin.

The demon leans forward and slaps the deck of cards on the low table before him. Taking the first two cards, he lays them edge to edge, so that they support one another, steeple-wise. He places another two next to these.

I shift in my seat uneasily. "Show me something I do not know."

"So, my friend," the demon says, "you did not see it?"

The steepling of cards continues until he has five peaks. Then he proceeds to balance more cards flat across these, peak to peak, until he has built a platform of cards.

"See what?" I answer at last.

"Consequences," comes the enigmatic reply.

Steeple upon flat upon steeple; a mountain of cards grows before me. It quite surprises me that he is so sure of hand; never a pause, just on with the next. Very soon my companion slips the last two cards into place.

"Your merchant friend had a ship which went down off the coast of Carthage," the demon says, and flicks a card from the top of his construction. "It was a large shipment, and much of the cargo was not paid for." Flick, another card falls. "With the cargo lost he could not raise funds to pay for it, except out of his own coffers." Flick. "This he did as soon as news of the disaster reached him. But worse was to befall poor Christophe: bandits waylaid his courier just outside Burgundy." Flick. "With the money gone, all your friend had left was the stock in his house, hardly enough to cover one fifth of what he owed." Flick.

A chill creeps over me as I remember the frost and the empty fireplace, the bundle in his hands that at once absorbed and saddened him.

"The papers," I whisper.

"Yes, Nikolai, the papers in his hands that day you bought the mirror: debts and petitions for credit, rejections and pleas and more rejections. They weighed heavily on him that day, and you did not even notice."

"How was I to know what he would do? The fault was hardly mine."

My dark companion's expression is one of pure contempt. "Really? Like these cards, one action in our lives rests on another action while supporting others itself. The future is built on past

actions, a crack here in the foundation, a crack there... ." The demon flicks a card at the base of his construction, and the remaining cards clatter to the table. "Do you see it now? Had you paid what the mirror was truly worth, Christophe could have cleared all those debts and put enough aside to begin another venture. But no, you paid your friend with viperous silence, and now Christophe will never speak again!"

Realization invades my reason like a slow poison. "It cannot be so...."

"It is so," my doppelgänger counters, "and that is by no means all."

He rises from the armchair and smooths his indigo robes. "I shall leave you for a while now to think on it."

Without a backward glance the demon steps into the mirror. I can still hear the tumble of cards like nails on a coffin.

Even though my dark reflection has left me, I continue to sit on the low stool and tremble. I had known the mirror was an instrument of magick, but I had not expected this turn. I am not even sure I understand what is happening.

What was it Antoninus said?

Two days ago I had brought the mirror home, my conscience yapping at my heels. Antoninus was waiting for me when I returned. The sight of him soon made me forget the nagging voice that scolded me for paying so little. I could tell he was perplexed; I had fetched the artefact myself instead of sending him for it.

For the first six months of his apprenticeship, Antoninus had stuttered incessantly. Now he stumbled only rarely, usually when I lost my temper with him, or when the kitchen girls made cow eyes at him and stroked his long, flaxen hair. He stood straighter, these days, too, and could even be described as handsome were his face was not pitted with pox.

I set the mirror down in my work room, roughly casting aside other tools that had failed to serve me in my quest.

"This," I announced triumphantly, "is going to change my life. Knowledge, immortality, the Philosopher's Stone—all will be mine for certain now."

"How is that going to help?" Antoninus said. The war between doubt and curiosity was quite evident in his misty blue eyes.

"Antoninus, have you learned nothing at all in the last three years? Don't you know a scrying tool when you see one?"

I could tell there was more to come. He had become much freer with his opinions these days. I should have been proud of him, but instead I made a mental note to remind him of the value of humility in a magus.

The boy's face crumpled into a frown. "But mirrors reflect."

I rolled my eyes heavenward. "Oh, you really are worse than the village idiot sometimes. Of course they reflect!"

Antoninus paused, obviously wondering whether he should press his point. "But, there's scrying and there's scrying, isn't there?"

"Meaning?"

He continued cautiously. "How can you search for an object unless you know how to look?"

His respectful tone did nothing to smooth the rumpled feathers of my ego.

"Rubbish!" I roared. "I already know how to scry. I just need a better tool to do it with, that's all."

"No, I didn't mean that. You taught me to look inside myself before looking outside. Isn't that the secret of all knowledge?"

"You presume to tell me — your master — how to be a magus?"

It was one of the few times I ever hit him. After that I was unable to get a clear word out of him. He stumbled over his apologies, sending his face ever more crimson with each stutter.

As I sit here on the boy's stool, I finally begin to see the truth of his argument. I truly wish I had listened to him. Perhaps then I would not be cowering in my own chambers, waiting for the demon to reappear.

The walls press in on me like those of a tomb. I should not have looked into the mirror and wished.

Finally I muster the courage to cross the shadow-laced floor to my bed. I grab a large earthenware pot on the way. It is a feeble gesture I know, but somehow a circle of salt around the bed helps boost my frayed nerves. I laugh at my folly. Am I trying to keep something out — or in?

I lie down, covers drawn tight under my chin as my eyes scour the darkness. How I dread his return: It will be worse than looking in a mirror.

It is still dark when I awake. My sleep has been a troubled one indeed, for my bed is damp with sweat.

I pad over to the mirror and with heart pounding I check my reflection. It moves as I do, no more, no less. My sigh is heavy and tangles with the laugh of one who has been at the very brink of sanity. Then I cough and find I am unable to swallow without wincing. My throat is so raw I could believe I had shouted and screamed all night. I hope none of the servants heard.

"Oh, but we heard."

My blood runs cold. The voice comes from the far corner of my room where the lamp has not melted the shadows. The demon laughs and steps into the half-light.

"We always listen to you, dear friend," he says.

"Stop!" I cry.

He ignores me and advances farther. I glance over my shoulder at the mirror, only to find my reflection has vanished.

"Perhaps I can explain," my dark companion offers. "What did you see?"

"What?"

"In the mirror, what did you see?"

From the demon's face my eyes stare back at me with a strange light I never knew they had. For the first time the thought strikes me that I am talking to myself. I would laugh, were I not so stricken with terror. What is happening to my mind? Has any of this been real? When I looked into the mirror, that had been real; it had meant something.

"Memories," I whisper.



"Excellent!" cries the demon, and he beams as if his favorite pupil had just performed an intellectual feat. "No, whose memories? Can you tell me that, hmm?"

"Mine."

"Exactly! The mirror holds the memories of all those who wish upon it. Your last wish summoned the judgment." The demon places his hands before him as if on the mirror itself and whines, "It wasn't my fault."

His mockery stings.

"Your soul is in the celestial scales, Nikolai; how do you think it measures up? Is it lighter than a feather?" The demon leans closer and, with a gleeful grin, says "Shall I tell?"

A fragment of my old conceit drifts to the surface of my mind. I grasp it as would a drowning man a piece of rotten flotsam. "You are my reflection. What could you possibly do to harm me?" Even before I have finished my sentence, I feel my new-found confidence crumble beneath me. It is the demon's sneer that deals the killing blow.

"I am more than that," he says, "and you know it. I am the Medusa within you — the real you. Look in the mirror, Nikolai, and weep!"

From the heart of that silver frame, my reflection smiles back at me. The demonic image crooks a finger and somewhere within me the shadow-spirits stir anew. My blood is alive with them, coursing through my body as the fetters tug at the fibers of my being. Even my voice is not mine to command, and a stifled cry is all I can utter.

I step up to the frame, touch the glass. Then, in a brilliant whirlpool of light, demon, shadow-spirits and I collide.

The starburst dies.

My hands still press against the glass; cold, gelid, unyielding glass. On the other side I see the armchair and my bed where the oil lamp burns. This side darkness reigns.

I fear this realm inside the mirror, for in that whirlpool of light, the demon finally granted my wish for immortality. His voice echoes in my head, an invisible blade that cuts to my core.

"What a shame you did not keep the mirror covered, Nikolai," he says, his words steeped in vitriol.

Is this where the madness begins, in the waiting? I cannot take my eyes off the door. Are those footsteps I hear outside? Does the handle begin to turn?

The oil lamp gutters — light is sucked back into the flame — the flame into the lamp. Now it is dark on both sides of the glass. A creak, a squeak and a cold draft brushes my neck. Someone opens the door.

"Master?" comes the timid call; my apprentice. Moonlight flares in his flaxen hair.

It stirs my bile to think of asking the boy's aid, but what can I do? "Antoninus," I cry, "Antoninus!"

At first I do not know if he has heard me, then slowly he turns his head. My nerves scream like fine, stretched wire.

"No! Don't look in the mirror!"

He frowns, turns farther still and squints into the gloom. "Is that you, master?" he calls.

"Antoninus, destroy the mirror!"

I hear the scrape of flint, and the lamp blooms into life. The boy picks it up and holds it high over his head.

"No! Put it down!" I scream.

But he does not hear me. As if to make sure the room is indeed empty, he casts one more look around, then turns toward the mirror. From the expression on his face, he would be rubbing his hands in anticipation were he not holding that lamp. Its light falls on the silvered glass and at once his mirror image blooms.

The spectral voice of the demon cuts in again, razor edged. "You asked for knowledge, Nikolai, and knowledge you shall have. Do you feel it now?"

I find myself holding one hand aloft as does Antoninus; my face feels pitted, as is his; my hair is no longer short and dark; now, fair tendrils suffused with the light of the moon spill over my shoulders. With a creeping horror, I realize I have become his reflection. Indeed, the master has become the apprentice.

Yet this is only the surface of what I see, of what the mirror shows him. My apprentice's soft blue eyes are clear to me, and in them his essence is clearer still: he will make a good teacher, because he truly knows what it is like to learn; to feel frustrated and swamped by the seething mass of the unknown; to really listen as if his life depends on it. He knows the search is unending.

Perversely, as the mirror gives him his self-knowledge, my own is also revealed to me: Christophe never trusted me because I never trusted him. Greed and suspicion beget the same, it seems.

The whole universe is a mirror, reflecting back our energies tenfold. Intention is all, for there is nothing so potent as the power of the human will. Change your intention, and the universe bends to your will. However, to do that you have to know what those intentions are, especially the darker ones we turn our face against. As Antoninus said, you have to look inward before looking outwards — in short, know yourself.

Is that not what magick is all about?

So, the knowledge I wished for is mine at last, as is the immortality. This is what I should have learned even before I became a magus. The experience I have denied myself, I am now forced to endure for eternity: I am everyone's reflection, doomed to live a hundred thousand lives and more — a hundred thousand miseries — doomed to learn and never to know.

Yesterday, when I visited the warehouse, I learned Christophe was dead — by his own hand — driven to despair by the twisted pit of men's dark souls.

"Oh, yes," says the demon in my head again, "you will wish you could step out of the mirror; you may even beg for death's compassionate release — but I grant no wishes this side of the glass."

And in this realm of eternal night, I can almost feel the demon's crooked smile — my own.

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ntroduction

*Pastime with good company
I love, and shall until I die.
Grutch who lust, but none deny,
So God be pleased, thus live will I.*
— Henry VIII, “Pastime With Good Company”



nce, not so long ago, “magick” was not a myth.

In the shadows of what we call “history,” an epic clash of magick, faith and science shook the foundations of the world. As the mortals around them stumbled from the Dark Ages into the Renaissance, hundreds of magi in cults, sects, lodges and churches found themselves at odds. The world, once vast, suddenly seemed too small to contain them. Like the kingdoms they lived in, these sorcerers went to war — over land, over wealth, over faith, over power. Some wanted only to survive, but others demanded conquest. The Sorcerers Crusade had begun.

Although it simmers in the background for centuries, this crusade explodes during the European Renaissance. For magus and mortal alike, this “Rebirth” is a passionate age, inquisitive and determined. People literally dare the gates of Hell to achieve their aims. Although grace, fashion and wisdom are treasures to behold, this is not a dainty era. Blood flows, steel rings and clothing falls to the ground. It’s an age of excess — in many ways, a reflection of our own — and it carries a mystique as powerful as the sword in a conquistador’s hands.

The clash that forms the background of **The Sorcerers Crusade** adds an extra dimension to this historical legacy. In the game, magick, faith and reason slug it out in a brawl that stretches from the catacombs beneath Italy to the forests of the New World. That conflict stirs the elements

themselves to a frenzy; the Scourge of God Himself turns magickal attempts into disasters, demonic visitations, firestorms, earthquakes and insanity. Tempests rage across the face of the Earth, and many people feel that the Final Days have begun. While the notion of an Apocalypse in 1500 may sound amusing in the modern day, some of the folks in the **Sorcerers Crusade** era are willing to bet their souls that God Almighty has begun knocking on the door...

How to Use This Book

As it may be, no single rulebook can contain the various options, alternatives and extra trimmings that make a truly elaborate game. Thus, we present a “companion” volume to the basic **Sorcerers Crusade** rules. Like any good companion, this volume offers advice and suggestions. You may, of course, feel free to ignore them, but you might well be poorer for having done so.

In addition to self-explanatory Preludes and Introductions, this book includes....

- **Chapter One: Life in the Renaissance** — Many folks confuse the Renaissance with the Dark Ages or the Middle Ages. (Don’t get me started about Renaissance Fairs featuring King Arthur or Robin Hood rather than Queen Elizabeth or Torquemada!) This chapter offers a host of facts and tidbits about the period, the places and the people of the era.

• **Chapter Two: Matters of Faith — The Sorcerers Crusade** is all about the clash of magick, faith and science, and all three of them keep religious devotions at their cores. Religion provides both the cornerstone of this world and the torch for its cradle. Atheism is almost nonexistent (although some heretics speculate on the absence of God), but heresies, alternative faiths and the rising shadows of science and art are throwing orthodoxy into chaos. This chapter details the most prevalent faiths and religions of the time.

• **Chapter Three: Lands Beyond the Sun** — Both the Traditions and the Conventions unite magi from across the world — a world that is clearly larger than anyone had ever imagined it could be! Thus, we explore the fringes of other lands and other cultures in this chapter. Europe is only the beginning of a Renaissance sorcerer's journey.

• **Chapter Four: The Disparate:** — In a magickal world, mystick societies abound. This chapter details a few of the many sects that exist outside the Conventions and Traditions.

• **Chapter Five: Wizardly Treasures** — Here we offer a host of new Abilities, Merits and Flaws for Dark Fantastic characters. As with good spice, their judicious use can add flavor to the game.

• **Chapter Six: The Scourge of God** — The mystick Arts are not used lightly. When good or ill fortune strikes, this chapter offers some suggestions — Storyteller hints, a F.A.Q. section, and over a score of Scourgelings both benevolent and baneful.

• **Appendix: The Cup and the Blade** — Herbal cures, poisons, fencing lore, important figures of the era... here are tidbits that do not fit into the other chapters.

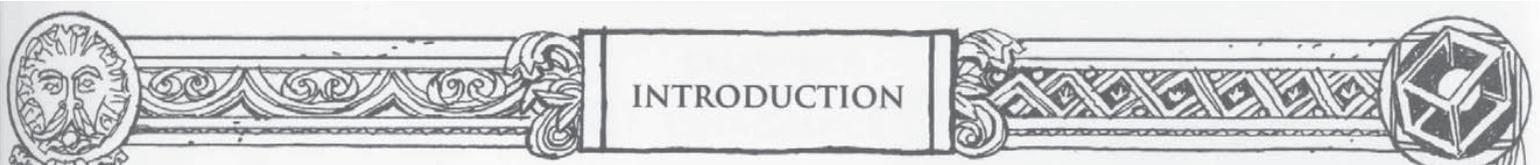
Lexicon

The Renaissance sees an explosion of travel, sophistication and diplomacy. No wonder, then, that language bursts into new forms. Both low slang and high culture produce new terms. The borrowing of phrases and words from other languages is quite commonplace. No traveler worth his salt would be without a few choice bits of linguistic legerdemain.

Common Parlance

Abraham man — An ex-asylum inmate or madman (or a beggar posing as one).
 Apple-Squire — A procurer.
 Ale Passion — A hangover.
 Alms — Charity, often food or money.
 Apocrypha — Hidden writings, often referring to Scripture.
Ars Amatoria — The art of amorous etiquette, sexual politics and manipulative plays.

Baggage — A prostitute or woman of "easy virtue."
 Beak — A magistrate, so named for the long-beaked hats commonly worn by such officials.
 Beefeater — A respected servant paid in room and board.
Beffa — A practical joke used to embarrass the victim.
 Bell, Book and Candle — A shorthand way of referring to a ceremony of excommunication.
 Bezoar — Mineral or gem pendant dipped into a liquid to detect or neutralize poison (or, more specifically, a calcareous concretion that comes from the alimentary canal of a goat, and that changes color in the presence of arsenic).
 Bit — Money, especially small and cheap coins.
 Black Art, the — Picking locks (a possible source of confusion among the Awakened).
 Brawl — A raucous dancing party.
 Cart of Shame, the — Public display of criminals on a conveyance, in order to deride or make an example of them.
 Castle in Spain — An imaginary glory or daydream. Moorish occupation of Spain made ownership of a castle there unlikely at best for persons of the Christian faith.
 Chested — Buried in a coffin.
 Chichevache (from Chaucer) — A monster that feeds on patient wives, and thus is always famished.
 Coals to Newcastle, taking — To bestow the unneeded or to state the obvious.
 Cokenay — An effeminate man or homosexual.
 Colt's Tooth — Youthful exuberance, often sexual in nature.
 Cony — A dupe or victim.
 Credence — Testing a wine for poison by tasting or by "bezoar."
 Crocodile Tears — Hypocritical tears, from the belief that crocodiles weep when they eat.
 Cuckold — A husband whose wife is engaged in an intimate (and clandestine) relationship with another man.
 Cup-shotten — Drunk.
Danse Macabre — Common artistic and literary theme meant to remind that Death is inevitable to all.
 Derring-do — Bold deeds.
 Dexter — Right-handed, often meaning good or lucky. *See also sinister.*
 "Divorce Italian Style" — Poisoning by arsenic.
Docere et delectare — The best art. Literally, "to teach and to please."
 Domna — A high-born woman who inspires poems of courtly love.
 Dunce — A thick-witted person.
 Earwiggling — Whispered sharing of secrets.



INTRODUCTION

Energumen — A person possessed by demons or evil spirits.

Evestrum — A spirit summoned to divine the future.

Ex Cathedra — A papal announcement; believed to be infallible.

Food for Worms — Dead.

Gate of Ivory — A place from which false dreams come.

Gate of Horn — A place from which true dreams come.

Geas — A forbidden word or gesture, with dire consequences if invoked.

Gnoff — A foolish old man (often rich).

Golden Mean — The perfect point between two excesses.

Golden Thumb — A dexterous cheat, who surreptitiously adds weight to mercantile scales.

Gong — A privy.

Harry ten shillings (slang) — A half sovereign coin minted in the reign of Henry VIII.

Hectoring — Loud bullying or assertiveness.

Hocus Pocus — A nonsensical Latin phrase used by various charlatans.

Honeymoon — A fermented honey wine served at marriages to encourage conception.

Hoodwink — To deceive, as if hooding a falcon.

Hurly Burly — Excited noisy commotion.

In the Cards — A pronouncement that something is fated, often through the use of divinatory card reading.

Jakes — A privy.

Kameah — A Hebrew good luck charm, often inscribed with sacred names or symbols.

Lamen — An amulet or good luck charm, often astrological in nature.

Love's Merry Business — Wooing and foreplay.

Leech — A physician, surgeon or healer.

Ockham's Razor — A belief that the simplest truth is the most likely; also called the "Velvet Covered Razor."

Rebis — An alchemical hermaphrodite uniting male and female principles and chemical opposites.

Rose Alley — Any spot used as a urinal (for "plucking a rose").

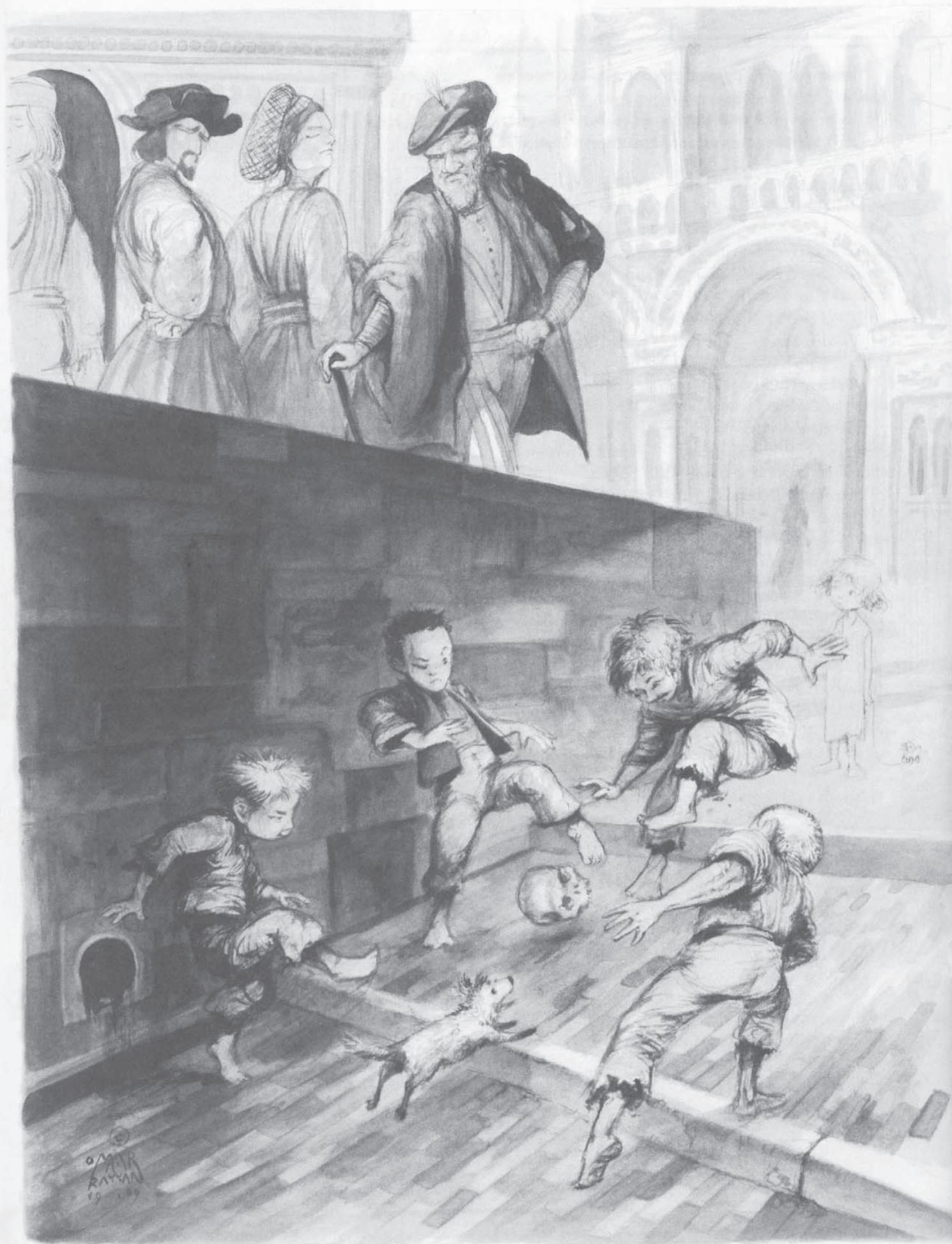
Sinister — Left handed, often meaning tricky, evil, or unlucky. *See also* dexter.

Sprezzatura — Unforced ease of accomplishment, or effortless superiority; the trademark of gentlemen.

Stews — A house of prostitution.

Swyve — To engage in sexual intercourse.

That Old Dance — Courtship and foreplay.





Chapter 1: Life in the Renaissance

It is undoubtedly a golden age which has restored to light the liberal arts that had almost been destroyed: grammar, eloquence, poetry, sculpture, music.

— Marsilio Ficino, 1492

Fashions

No proper courtly peacock can afford to be caught behind the latest fashions. Ruffles, frills, lace and embroidery are accoutrements to unique outfits designed to dazzle. Though commoners may be caught in simple garb, a true socialite must uphold the fashions of the era or risk snubbing and mockery.

Indeed, appearance alone can carry great weight in courts and military circles. Proper attire is thus richly detailed and flamboyant, at once announcing the wearer's station, opulence and willingness to sacrifice both money and comfort for status. Feminine dress is rich, heavy and frequently uncomfortable; male garb, too, sacrifices ease for appearance. Velvet, furs, and silk from Cathay are all favored for their luxurious appearance and texture. Obviously, upkeep of a common wardrobe requires more than modest means! Furthermore, accessories, perfumes and makeup add to the difficulty of preparing for any occasion. A good half-hour or hour of work with attendants is not unreasonable for a lady of fashion preparing for a social occasion.

Clothing

The main article of women's clothing is the bodice, composed of fabric siding attached to a triangular stomacher in front. Ties, hooks or pins join the bodice pieces at the sides, allowing it to be tightened. Often, the bodice is stiffened with bone or wood to give a slimming effect and better posture. Necklines vary greatly from great showings of rouged bosoms to collars and ruffs. Sleeves attach separately from the bodice, with ribbon bows, hooks or pins fastening the sleeves to the shoulders of the piece. Cruelly tightened corsets are worn by well-to-do women, further exaggerating figures and adding yet another layer of discomfort. A section of fabric called the wing conceals the attachment by covering the shoulders. A simple skirt or kirtle covers the legs and abdomen below the bodice; sometimes a gown covers the entire ensemble. Women do not wear any undergarments, though; panties or underdrawers cause stimulation (or so it is said), which is unseemly in polite society. The complete outfit is called a "dress," as in "court dress."

A formal occasion requires a woman to wear a farthingale, a long skirt or kirtle with a structure of hoops made of wood, wire or whalebone. The hoops cause the dress to stand out like a bell or a column. The farthingale makes sweeping motions as the woman walks, providing a rhythmic swaying for languorous movement.

Male dress is also elaborate, involving tight sleeves and colored hose. Men's hosiery runs all the way up to the groin, often forcing men to walk in a prancing manner (interestingly, women's garments are not referred to as hosiery). The groin is covered by a fabric pouch called the codpiece. Often, men use codpieces as pockets and keep their handkerchiefs or small items in them. Men unlucky enough to be struck with venereal disease put medicinal balms or herbs in their codpieces. One popular cream even has a mercuric base!

Velvet tunics are popular for men. Lace frills and ruffles are used for ornamentation. The tunic itself is a simple vest-like affair; sleeves are separate from the tunic, attached with laces. Often, the color of the sleeves contrasts the color of the tunic. Cuffs are turned back or laced, with some so exaggerated as to get in the way of using one's hands. Some sleeves come slashed, which allows for a second layer of sleeve to be worn underneath and pulled through.

Accessories

Accessories add color and further elegance (as well as weight and expense) to already complicated outfits. The progression of civilization brings more flamboyant additions to costume. High heels and soles in shoes avoid the muck of the streets, allowing dainty feet to remain clean. Handkerchiefs are becoming a popular accessory for both men and women; they are made of fine linen and lined with gold or lace. Even shoes and gloves may be trimmed with lace. The end of the 16th century sees the emergence of fans as a popular accessory for women as well, and a means of expression through pointing, coyness or angry fluttering. Court dresses become increasingly elaborate with high collars, fanciful headdresses and sometimes-shocking exposure of the breasts.

Both men and women wear perfume. Almost every article of clothing may be scented. Letters and gifts may be perfumed; sometimes, the perfume itself may be more important than the missive — as a means of identifying the sender. Sources for scents include musk, civet (a small mink-like mammal), ambergris, aloe, nutmeg and storax (a brown resin acquired from trees common to Turkey). Simple scents such as rose water and lavender water are made at home, whereas more exotic concoctions are purchased from professional perfumers.

Jewelry is used with wild abandon. The new wealth of the Renaissance allows the middle class to wear pearls, diamonds, rubies, and other stones in their rings, arm-bracelets and tiaras. New sumptuary laws enacted in many countries, especially Italy, denote the sorts of jewelry that citizens may (or must!) wear; some such laws even regulate the styles and colors of wardrobes. Needless to say, such laws are as often ignored as obeyed.

Spectacles make their first appearance in Italy. They are made for close up work. Often, scholars and merchants use them to prolong the workday.

Makeup is applied with the aid of mirrors made from polished metal or new silvered glass. Because glass and fine metal are still expensive, the mirror is a sign of vanity and affluence. However, as improvements in glassblowing and metalworking make mirrors better and more common, they become instruments for other uses as well: Scholars study the properties of mirrors, while artists engage in new self-portraiture with the assistance of their reflections.

When the weather becomes cold, people pile on more layers. Women wear long, padded gowns, while men wear rabbit or lambskin jackets. Scarves, mufflers and mittens are worn by both sexes, and serve many of the same purposes as other accessories — not only function, but style. A scarf conveniently left behind can serve as a token for a lover, or as a condemning piece of evidence in a social affair.

Style

Though the Puritans disdain any use of ornamentation, others of this time revel in it. Most women use makeup to bring themselves closer to the fashionable standard of beauty. All manner of substances are used in women's makeup, including a few that are poisonous.

Pale skin is considered beautiful in women, although it is unattractive to be overly white. Many substances can bring a lovely pallor to the skin: Arsenic is sometimes used, as is alabaster, or a concoction known as ceruse (white lead mixed with vinegar). Unusual recipes for good skin include white fucus made by burning and grinding a hog's jawbone, sieving it and applying it with an oil of white poppy. Obviously, many of these substances could be quite hazardous — though the science of medicine is so crude that the common beliefs of the day may hold true. For the moment, the question is one of beauty, not of later consequences. A lady must be elegant, after all.

Dyes are commonly used to accentuate various features. Fucus typically indicates a dye used on lips — the predecessor to lipstick. Often a fucus is made from madder, red ochre or red crystalline mercury (the last is dangerous because it eats away flesh). By contrast, the dark colors of belladonna (which is also poisonous) and kohl are used to make the eyes seem larger. These latter substances are exotic eastern imports, so they are most often seen on major trading routes. Women also redden their bosoms and cheeks with rouge or with a recipe of egg whites, milk of green figs, alum and gum arabic.

Caustic substances are used to remove warts or blemishes. Popular freckle removers include birch sap, ground brimstone and sublimate of mercury. Other preparations polish the fingernails or soften the skin — though with similar hazardous efficiency.

Women's hair is preferred thick, long and blond. Auburn is also a favored hue. Women frequently dye their hair and add false locks to make it appear thicker or longer. As a result, poor women, especially older ones, cut off their hair and sell it to noblewomen.

Men typically wear their hair shoulder length or at the bottom of the ears. Faces are generally clean-shaven, although Henry VIII brings beards back into style in England.

Sundries

For persons unable to afford the expense of style, dress is a simple affair. Field hands and common laborers wear simple tunics and breeches — common shirts and pants. Inexpensive working clothes are usually made from wool and spun at home; commoners need not spend hard-earned money upon luxuries that are to be soiled at work. Lower-class clothes are rarely dyed and remain brown or reddish. Heavy shoes are used to stand up to the hard use of field work and manual labor.

Amusingly, wearing red, especially a red cap, is the sign of a prostitute, as are bells in some communities (no doubt to the endless frustration of the Order of Hermes' messengers). There is no particular bias against this, and localities may not have laws against prostitution. The color red inflames desire, so a bit of red in a woman's wardrobe has a clear meaning — though it is certainly not appropriate for public display except by the most *risqué*.

Fashion and Magick

All but the most reclusive anchorite must deal with day-to-day life — indeed, the projects and whimsies of the enlightened may well hinge upon sponsorship by the well-to-do! Magi and sorcerers can no more ignore the pull of fashion than any other men (or women). Clever sorts can often tell much about a magus, though, by the wardrobe of the wizard.

As the enlightened truck with unusual sciences and mystical elixirs, clothing often follows function: A stalwart Artificer certainly wears a protective leather apron and heavy gloves while working at the forge, whereas a skilled alchemist may have a heavy cloth robe to defend against unpleasant spills. Members of the Order of Hermes can be easily noted by their arcane trappings; the seals of Solomon and bejeweled amulets of the Hermetic magus are quite noticeable unless pains are taken to conceal them (which most Hermetic magi, in their arrogance, do not do). More exotic practitioners of magick often wear clothing of their native lands, clearly marking themselves as strange. The Akashic Brotherhood's flowing outfits and the tribal patterns favored by Those Who Speak with Dreams are all unusual to the eyes of Europe. Any such magus can be quickly noted when outside of his homelands.

For those who dabble in fantastic sciences, intricate devices are even more prominent than the fanciful fanfare of the era. Who can fail to notice the tremendous armor worn by a seasoned warrior of Reason, or the smoke-belching and noisy accoutrements of a tinker? Even the noxious preparations and tools of physicians and astrologers draw attention. Because no magus or craftsman would dare be caught without the proper tools to work his craft (especially in delicate negotiations or dangerous meetings, where a little magickal inducement can work wonders), these trappings immediately indicate special studies. A cunning magus could perhaps reduce some of his tools to concealable fashion, or even leave behind his works if truly confident in his abilities — but who would dare risk it in this dashing age?

Foods

While common meals are usually modest, formal meals are as excessive and artful as can be afforded. Main meals consist of as much meat as people can buy or raise. The hard days of the Dark Ages are gone; now, even simple laborers can afford some meat. Fresh meat is a staple of many recipes; whereas the Dark Ages saw the use of moldering and rotting courses heavily spiced, the cooks of the Renaissance treat food preparation as an art no less deserving than any other! Spices, sauces and marinades prevail. One's wealth can truly be measured at the table set for visitors and guests.

Many meals consist of a series of removes, or courses. Typically, a remove features several dishes, perhaps including a sweet fruit dish or glaze, some bread or pastry, and a meat or vegetable course. Supper is not simply a time to eat. One must engage in charming discourse and well-mannered behavior whilst supping with friends. Indeed, a proper formal dinner may last for several hours, and all manner of topics may be discussed — the banter of an evening banquet can be more informative than any tiring diplomatic counterplay.

Meats

The hearty center of any meal is meat dish. Beef, mutton, pork, venison and rabbit are all prominent in daily meals. Chicken, doves and several varieties of wild fowl are also eaten. The 1520s even see the introduction of turkeys from the New World. Eggs are considered common foods; they are present in the day-to-day diets of many folk.

Fish, eel and shellfish are plentiful at the coast and rivers, as are some edible seaweeds. Some species are rarer or more favored than others and consequently more expensive. Smoked and dried fish are sold inland, though much "fresh" fish may be two or three days old — let the

buyer beware! Still, fish remains a staple for people in coastal towns and provinces, and especially during church-declared meatless days on Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays and all through Lent (though many people ignore the church's prohibitions).

Fruits

The lack of sugars and refined sweets makes fruit a tasty dessert. It can be eaten whole but is more often served with spices or as a sauce. Combined with saffron, cinnamon and almonds, fruit can be either a pleasant side to a remove or a part of a tart, pie or pastry.

Apples, pears, quinces and peaches are cultivated, and a variety of berries are gathered wild by people without the means to grow or purchase anything else. Verjuice, the juice of green, unripe fruit, is used in cooking. Grapes and cherries are popular for beginning a meal. Dried dates, prunes, figs and raisins are stored for winter. Currants, oranges and lemons are available in the more tropical climes of Spain, but they remain an expensive luxury in most other places.

Many of the fruits of Renaissance Europe are quite sour; oranges, for instance, are used more for their acidic juice than for any sweetness. Indeed, the juices of citrus fruits are excellent for setting certain recipes, especially ones involv-

ing eggs or dairy products, and as such provide a flavorful (if sour) addition to otherwise poor servings.

Dairy

Milk, cream, curds, whey, butter and many kinds of cheeses are common. The rich tend to use butter only in cooking, while the poor spread it on their food. Dairy products and eggs are referred to as white meat, and seen as food for the poor because they are common and available to any rough farmer. Milk as a beverage is considered unhealthy except for children and the aged, the latter drinking a posset of warmed milk with fruit or spices added. Ass milk is preferred to cow's milk.

By the 1500s, the processes of fermentation and culturing come into use, and yogurt-like dairy products can be had as well. Milk is sometimes used in the cooking of particular desserts, but even then its use is uncommon.

Bread and Potage

Bread is the most important staple and is most often baked in communal, rural ovens or purchased from urban bakers. Flour is usually wheat, rye or oatmeal, but peas and nuts are sometimes ground and mixed in when grain is scarce (some sorts of mold and fungus — most notably ergot — contaminate the grains used for flour; in these cases,



eating the bread can cause visions and hallucinations). Once the bread becomes old and stale, it is used as trencher bread. Trencher bread is used as a platter for eating and to sop up gravy and sauces. Leftover trenchers are sometimes toasted and given to the poor who beg at the gates.

Unless made by the poorer classes, bread is almost never plain cooked flour — almonds, ginger or other nuts or spices may be added. Other recipes call for beer; pastries (such as small meat or fruit pies) are also common.

Any cereal or grain crop is referred to as corn, including wheat, barley, oats and rye (corn from the New World is called maize and is not to be planted in Europe for another century).

Meat stews, grain porridge and boiled mixed vegetables are common fare. Vegetables include leeks, endive, cauliflower, onion, marigold or dandelion leaves, watercress, garlic, turnip, tarragon, radish, succory, beet, spinach, dock and asparagus. Salads are not yet fashionable, but lettuce is believed to counteract drunkenness. Vegetables are rarely served cold or unmixed; most dishes call for boiling or other preparation, and vegetables are often combined in mixed dishes, such as carrots with cabbage.

Pasta and rice are eaten in Italy and Cathay but are exotic, less common imports in other nations.

Spices

Spices temper *everything* in Renaissance cooking. Saffron is popular, as is (rarer) cinnamon. Pepper, cloves, nutmeg, cinnamon, juniper and ginger are all used to flavor food and to stimulate thirst. The Italians prefer spices to sauces whereas the French prefer the opposite, but everybody cooks with some sort of seasoning. Vinegar is used in cooking to help set other spices. Even the juices of fruits are used to embitter and set some recipes. Salt, placed in the middle of the table, is important enough to show social standing: Persons seated above the salt are considered important, while those below the salt are often servants or lower classes.

Spices can help to conceal the taste and stench of decay in some foods, but more and more commonly people partake of fresh comestibles. As a result, spices serve more as a means of status or as part of a family recipe, although food prepared for long journeys still requires the use of salting for preservation. Indeed, travelers on ships are advised that the fruits and meats on board are likely to grow rather rancid after a few weeks.

Beverages

Pollution makes much of the water unsafe, and plain water is not often used as a beverage. However, the process of fermenting alcohol also manages to destroy many of the diseases that can them in infest water. Thus, just about everybody drinks some sort of alcoholic beverage.

Ale made from malt or barley is popular among all classes, as is mead, a fermented honey drink. In Wales, mead is sometimes spiced or medicated to make metheglin. A drink called swish-was is made from spiced honey and water. Country people drink apple cider or perry, a pear cider. A wide variety of wine is available, too, and is commonly served even among the poorer classes in provinces where it is plentiful. Beer, plain or spiced, is available but has not yet caught on in very many places. Whiskey is called aqua vitae, and is considered more medicinal than beverage. The poor who can afford nothing better drink whey or buttermilk.

Tea, coffee and chocolate have not yet been introduced in Europe, but tea is a regular beverage in Cathay. Explorers bring back unusual fare from faraway lands, but limits to availability make it difficult to import any large quantities of tea or other drinks. As extensive trade routes become more common, different beverages spread across Europe, often becoming novelties in places where they are newly introduced.

Meals

Breakfast is usually a simple meal. Often, it includes bread, porridge, and ale. Some breakfasts include fruit sweetmeats, but mostly it is a luxury. Dinner, eaten between 10 A.M. and 1 P.M., is the largest meal (what will come to be known as lunch). Generally, the gentry eats earlier and the merchants and lower classed citizens eat later. Dinner consists of meat and vegetables to get through the rest of the day; it can last up to three hours for people with the luxury of time. Supper is the late meal eaten in the evening. As with dinner, nobles eat earlier than merchants — generally, merchants eat supper around 8:00 P.M., after business hours.

The rising standards of wealth bring new accoutrements to the table. Where once people had eaten with fingers and kept "neat" with a simple dish of water (or even the fur of pets at hand!), tables now feature cloths and napkins. The fork joins spoons and knives for eating, mostly in cultured France and Italy (England does not adopt the fork until the late 1600s.) Finger bowls are provided as a substitute for utensils, as not everyone can afford flatware. Tableware, when used, is often made of brass or silver. Many neighborhoods own only one or two complete sets of flatware and share among each other when guests arrive.

Books on cooking emphasize herbal lore and good health, freshness of produce, domestic efficiency and the art of hospitality. Recipes are not often found in books, but rather learned from other cooks. Cooking is hardly seen as a separate art; rather, one learns to cook, to present, to host and to serve. Cooks learn to use their own judgment in cooking, since there are few standards

or measures. Instead, spices or ingredients are called for in "pinches" or "goodly amounts."

Preparation and Preservation

For cooking with grease or oil, animal fat is used instead of vegetable oils. Meat is often boiled before roasting. Food is often dry-salted and smoked for preservation or just for flavor. If meat is to be preserved for a long term, it is pickled in brine.

Display or illusion food is popular — disguised food that looks like something other than what it is. Meat-filled pastries baked in the shape of apples and adorned with green marzipan leaves, or shaped as wine pitchers, called "appreylere," could decorate a course; likewise, allemain, an enormous dessert from which jugglers or acrobats leap, or an actual four-and-twenty live blackbirds hidden beneath a pie crust to fly out and amaze guests, might be a spectacle more than a meal. Food is also colored or painted to make it appear more appetizing or beautiful. Common colorings include sandalwood, mulberry juice and saffron.

Social Customs and Manners

Regardless of proper dress, no one can expect to be taken seriously without etiquette and culture. The Renaissance is an era of elegance; people are casting off the blinders of the Dark Ages, moving into a world of enlightenment and wonder. Civilization is progressing beyond coarse and crude behavior.

Concomitant with the changes in *savoir-faire* are the rapid changes to society. The new wealth of the Renaissance allows for merchants and craftsmen who can afford a luxurious lifestyle. Even the poor have a better quality of life now than any time in memory. People live longer, learn more and have more possessions — what could be better? Certainly, wars, famine and death have not been conquered, but the questing scholars of the age and the pious churchmen who bring reform and salvation cannot be far from the conquest of God's greatest mysteries. The rapid pace of change is exhilarating to people who ride the crest of society.

Age

During the Dark Ages, or earlier Roman times, few people would live beyond 25 years. In the 15th century, though, a person of 40 is considered old, though there are

Setting the Table

Though a full dissertation on Renaissance recipes is beyond the scope of this book, a diligent Storyteller can easily find several examples of the era's cooking. The removes of the Renaissance feature courses that would hardly be considered by the modern middle class — stuffed sardines, chicken and chopped pork with saffron and leeks, omelets with citrus fruits. An appreciation of the unusual courses of the Renaissance can truly set the stage for a roleplaying session of diplomatic table talk. Clever players may even catch on to the foods of various classes ("The diplomat didn't ask for cider instead of whey — is he really a high born man as he claims, or is he a fraud?").

The truly daring may indulge in a bit of Renaissance cuisine to set the mood for the game — but be careful! Quite a few of the recipes are rather unpalatable by modern standards. Such experiments are best left as asides to add a little atmosphere to a game, not as a mandatory live-action complement that may leave the players ill.

individuals, mostly women, who live to be 70 or 80 years old. High mortality rates for children under four make the average life expectancy around 30 — one-fourth of all babies die before their first birthday. Three-quarters of women who die within 10 years of marriage do so in childbirth. Still, these numbers represent a great improvement over the large but unfortunate families of earlier years.

With longer life spans, people have the time to be more leisurely in their life decisions. Most children start working at age seven. Women may even agree to an espousal at that age and receive a dowry at nine, though they are not bound to the choice until affirming the espousal when 12 or older. At 12 years of age, women may take their vows and become nuns. Those women who remain lay people most often marry between the ages 18 and 20; an unmarried woman is considered an old maid at 25. Boys, conversely, come of age at 14, and are then able to consent to marry. At 18, they are liable for taxes and military services. By the age of 21, men are considered respectable citizen (or at least worldly) and may sign contracts or wills. Men generally enter politics at 25, having put their previous careers behind them.

Marriage

Ninety percent of all adults over 20 are married. Men tend to be two to three years older than women at the time of marriage. Nobles marry earlier than commoners in order to secure inheritances and political alliances. To be an unmarried man is to be a ruffian; an

unmarried woman has an uncertain place, no supporter and husband to care for her welfare (though certainly there is no shortage of strong-willed women who make their own way in this new world).

Courtship is seldom as flowery as depicted in tales about the age of chivalry. Generally, the man asks permission from the father of his intended. If permission is granted, he visits her and gives her gifts. Once there is a decision to marry, the parents of both families set a date and the bride's parents set the dowry. Arranged or forced marriages are less common, but they do occur. In any case, marriages are as often for political or social reasons as any other. With the affluence of the era, though, women can sometimes afford to be selective in their choice of suitor, and men have the opportunity to lavish new gifts and arts upon their beloved. Poetry and romance are coming into full flower, and the strength of the romantic heart is affirmed by marriages made for love instead of convenience.

A marriage follows five steps. First, the parents draw up a contract that determines the financial arrangements, specifically dowry and curtesy (prices for the privilege of the marriage, and to show that the prospective husband's family has the proper means to support the bride in the lifestyle to which she is accustomed). Second, the bride and groom exchange spoken promises to marry in front of witnesses. Third, there is a public announcement by the church; such announcements proclaim the weddings taking place over the next month, and give time for complaint by any party who feels that a marriage should not take place. The fourth step is the wedding ceremony in the Church — there are no civil marriages, and only church marriages are recognized. The final step is actual consummation of the union. One can only hope that the many steps give enough time to ensure the would-be couple a happy marriage, or at least a survivable one.

Preventing incest and enforcing Biblical propriety are the laws of consanguinity. A couple wishing to marry cannot have any common relatives closer than great-grandparents. If the bride is a widow, this proscription also applies to any relatives of her late husband, who are related by affinity. Technically, affinity also applies to the relatives of mistresses or extramarital affairs, and consanguinity applies to the families of godparents. Generally, though, the church grants a dispensation from affinity and even consanguinity for a "modest donation."

Weddings are held between eight and noon. It is considered bad luck to marry at any other time, and even forbidden by law eventually. The doorway to the church is the most auspicious location to hold a wedding — doubtless with the enthusiastic input of the Church as a whole. Marriages outside a church are uncommon, and in some places even considered nonbinding.

A wedding is an occasion for great festivity, and even poverty-stricken families indulge. Bride and groom sport fanciful garb specific to the occasion. The bride may dress in white or russet and generally wears her hair loose. It is the groom's duty to bring the ring that symbolizes the bond of marriage. To protect the bride from demons who are jealous of marriage, the groom places the ring on the wrong finger three times before finally placing it on the third finger of her left hand. Most rings are elaborate, and some, called gimmel rings, divide into two parts at betrothal and are put back together at the wedding. Aside from such pieces, though, the groom does not wear a ring of his own — the band is as much a mark of possession as a symbol of marriage.

Once consummated, marriage is truly "til death": Divorce is not allowed. The Church can grant an annulment, but there are few grounds. Annulments are granted for incest, lunacy, male impotence, bigamy or marriage through coercion. Less-than-scrupulous priests might be persuaded to grant an annulment for yet another modest donation... but tradition runs strong, and the estranged may suffer the protests of a community less tolerant of such "lecherous practices."

Children

Though families are seldom as large as the farming households of the Dark Ages, children are still expected of any married couple. However, because marriage is as much a political affair as a romantic one, children are not necessarily a product of the marriage in question. In some countries, mistresses are considered quite the norm, and accepted children may well result from such unions. Not to have bastard children is a distinction; having them is not a particular disgrace. Often, bastard children live with the father alongside their legitimate half-brothers and half-sisters. If the bastard is sired before marriage, the Church may even grant a legitimization for a modest donation.

If a woman can afford it, she stays in bed during her pregnancy. This time is called "lying-in." Friends visit during this time and bring lavish gifts, often of money. Underlying these celebrations is the fear that the woman might die in childbirth. Should woman and infant both survive childbirth, the husband is to abstain from intercourse for 40 days. During this time, the mother oversees the critical first days of the child, possibly with the aid of a nurse. A woman of station may hire a nurse to look after the child, or even a wet nurse to feed the infant. Nursing a baby is believed to transfer the qualities of the nurse to the child, so the nurse's character and personal qualities are paramount. Forty days after childbirth, the mother is churched. This ceremony brings the mother back into the fold and is required before the woman may participate in communion or other church rituals.

Babies are baptized as soon as possible due to the fear of infant mortality. As the unbaptized cannot ascend to Heaven, even very young children (*especially* very young children) must be baptized lest they succumb to disease or mishap. During the baptism, the child is named and the family and godparents are recognized by the Church. The newborn is likely to be named after biblical persons, or after a member of the royal family. The godparents raise the children if the parents die. After the baptism, a feast is held, and guests bring gifts.

Until the age of five, children are dressed in long gowns, bibs and caps. Blue is preferred for boys because the color is believed to ward off evil spirits. Pink is chosen for girls because it is a complement color to blue. Children over five are dressed in much the same styles as adults.

Death

Death comes inevitably to all, but the specter of death in the Renaissance is much more immediate — people can expect to see family members, friends and children all dying due to endemic diseases, poverty or warfare. Funerary rituals are therefore attended as much for the survivors as for the departed. Funerals are announced by ringing bells; generally the parish bell rings out a number of times based upon the age of the deceased. The courtyard, entrance and place where the coffin lies are draped in black cloth, and any mirrors in the house are turned toward the wall. During the funeral procession, the horses and coaches are all outfitted in with black ribbons or drapes. The church is also draped in black. Men wear black gowns and hoods to funerals, though the funerals of children and unmarried women are draped in white linen instead of black (probably as a symbol of spiritual innocence). The poor wear rat colors, a range of dull grays, because of the expense of black dye. After the last rites at the Church, the body is interred, usually in a Church graveyard (for a small fee), though nobles generally lie in state for a time.

The Church believes in intercession for the dead even after interment. Thus, long masses are said for the dead, offerings go to the poor on behalf of the deceased and long mourning periods follow. A deceased parent is often mourned for three to four years; a surviving spouse wears black until remarriage or death. A lock of the deceased's hair may be put into a locket or ring and worn as mourning jewelry. With proper sacrifices from the living, the souls of the dead can move on to paradise, often for yet another modest fee. The souls of the unsaved may wait in Purgatory for eternity or may even become trapped as ghosts. The only recourse then is to hire the services of a priest who can exorcise the trapped soul. Some magicians make a habit of trafficking with souls that have not moved on to their proper rewards; such necromancers are condemned by the Church for their heresies. Even so, a mourning relative may consult with a

spiritualist to speak with the departed — though the risk of such converse is damnation.

Once the proper funerary arrangements are finished, life moves on. Widows usually remarry, often soon after the funeral. Those widows who do not remarry maintain control of their husband's property. This control is occasionally relished, and powerful widows make for the stuff of legends (and no small amount of jealousy from their male peers). A wealthy woman sometimes funds the establishment of a convent, which later provides for her comfortable retirement if she survives into old age. Life as a widow can lead a woman to a position of some authority in society and make for an excellent means of fostering independence and unusual learning in a woman.

Cemeteries are set aside by the church and blessed. Unbaptized babies are buried at the north end of the cemetery (small mercy by the Church for the young), so that area is particularly unpopular. The poor are buried without coffins, simply lowered into their graves and given a final blessing by the presiding priest. The rich, conversely, are not only chested but also have marble busts and monuments erected in their memory. The poor, the unshriven and the diseased are sometimes buried in pauper's graves, in shallow fills away from the church and town; such a burial, unsupervised by the Church, prevents salvation. Suicides are also not permitted burial in a cemetery. Generally, a suicide is buried at a crossroads in the dead of night — it is thought that, should the suicide rise again as one of the demon-tormented undead, the evil spirits inhabiting the body will be unable to sort out the directions of the crossroads, making it impossible for the monster to wreak vengeance upon the living. Many traditions also require driving a stake through the body of an unconsecrated dead person so that he does not rise as a vampire. To assure a restful death, rituals involving salt and flame are sometimes employed, rendering the grave barren so that nothing may rise again from it. One German tradition even recommends singing to the dead to keep them from returning!

Education



Business and commerce require the new middle class members to learn reading and writing, and the use mathematics to count money. Reading is taught before writing, and many people who can read can write only their own names. Only scholars, poets and account-keepers actually learn the intricacies of writing and calligraphy.

Most schooling takes place at home. Nobles and gentry begin teaching their sons literacy at age five. The lower classes still do not have the time to engage in much schooling, and in any case the opportunities for education



are limited for persons without money. As a result, many people still have only a cursory education, mostly for the crafts that they will use later in life. The spread of more books and of critical thought paves the way for more egalitarian learning; it does take some time to be disseminated among everyone, but especially with the advent of printing, enough Bibles and books exist for commoners to learn to read.

Universities

Young gentlemen are expected to spend a few years at universities for higher education, usually starting around age 12. Often they attend several universities and tour the court and the kingdom before settling down in their early 20s. The wandering scholar is an archetypal figure of the period. With the mind-broadening experiences of travel and schooling come a new class of literati, ones exposed to the many different workings of the world. Suddenly, people are traveling more than a mere 20 miles from their homes, finding the wondrous expanse of the world! The simple truths often held by isolated communities crumble under the discriminating gaze of learning, and travelers begin to realize that the customs of strange lands aren't so strange after all. New

ideas are no longer threatening — they're exhilarating. It's just this sort of change in attitudes that leads to discovery, exploration and invention.

Universities and academies operate like guilds to control the quality and type of teaching. An awarded degree gives the bearer the license to teach. Only a minority of students actually seek a degree — most simply engage in discourse and learning to better their social position or to improve their skills in a profession; a holder of a degree is a pure academic. Attendance of particular classes or schools is loose and varied, leading to competition for students among rival schools. Universities influence social and political life, as well as the academic world; instructors are consulted in legal matters, while the academies serve as testing grounds for the ideas of reform movements. Universities also influence the professional fields for which they train many prominent students. Where once guilds alone passed on the specialized knowledge of their crafts, universities now hold books that explore the secrets of ages and questioning students who bring new ways to the old arts. Although it is still possible to be expelled from a university for teaching too many radical ideas, there is great freedom to explore the classical works of the ancient philosophers,

and to build new ideas. While it was once thought that all the secrets of the world were written in ancient texts from the academics of old civilizations, academics are proving that there are new ways to think and to do things.

In the past, the Church served as the primary source of education, but new academies emulate Greek and other classical traditions. Traditional textbooks include the catechism, psalters, and the Bible, but now there are also courses to be found on mathematics, medicine and Aristotelian philosophy. Classical texts, though still uncommon, are available to many students now, not just a few isolated monks.

For the most part, universities teach only men. Education of women takes place at home or in convents. Young women are raised in seclusion from men not of their family, and premarital chastity is taught at an early age. Thus cloistered away, women can be shielded from the undesirable and corrupting elements of the outside world. Often, women of noble status are raised in convents and taught Latin, Greek, literature, and occasionally sculpture or painting. This intellectual equality emboldens some women of the time to argue philosophy and politics openly. Women may even rule their estates when their husbands are absent. While it is believed that deep thought is too strenuous for the fragile female constitution and mind, more and more self-educated women challenge this notion.

Literacy

Literacy, no longer restricted solely to the Church, requires writing implements. As academies create a greater demand for books while spreading new ways of making writing tools, scholars spread cheaper and easier means of writing. Writing is done with feather quills. Instead of relying on expensive dyes or rare squid ink, writing ink is made from vitriol and oak apples (galls). Paper-making, learned from the Arabs who in turn borrowed it from the Chinese, has flourished in Spain, France and Italy since the 13th century. By the 15th century, it has replaced parchment and vellum as the primary material for letters, manuscripts and printing. Watermarks are used to distinguish different paper manufacturers. A manufacturing process for a sort of rag paper, combined with the explosion of unused pulp and rags after the Black Death, allows paper to become suddenly cheap and readily available. Anyone can now write a simple note! Whereas writing was once the province of mystics and churchmen who traded secret wisdom through marks unintelligible to the common man, now everyone can study letters.

Of course, with the spread of literacy, there is a real fear of the dissemination of secret knowledge. For letters concerning political or business secrets there is the possibility of interception by rivals, so people sometimes use a disap-

pearing ink made from orange juice, milk and urine. They may also write in elaborate codes involving letter, number or symbol substitution, or use code words such as "the Devil" to mean "the Papacy." The Church itself bitterly fights the translation of the Bible, in an effort to keep Scripture in the hands of the clergy so that people remain dependent upon the interpretations of priests.

Mass printing makes books available to the common classes on an unprecedented scale; even so, the Church continues its creation of beautifully illuminated and copied books. Between the two sources of writings, any serious academic can reasonably expect to own a half-dozen books or more, perhaps even heretical texts from faraway places such as the Levant! With more widespread travel, linguistic translation becomes more usual — reformers in the Church cry for an accessible, non-Latin version of the Bible, while the classical and scholarly works are often translated into new formats readable in French, German or other popular languages. Manuals are popular for people who can afford books; these instructive volumes can be found on such disparate topics as bookkeeping, elegant manners, lovemaking, hunting game and rhetoric. Books of riddles and humorous or clever proverbs are also published. Influential literature includes Greek and Roman classical themes, Chaucer, Romances, histories and love poetry.

Manners and the Unmannerly

Good manners are considered one of the arts of the Renaissance, and Italy is seen as the model of cultured behavior. Hygiene, rhetoric and table manners are taught in popular books. Flowery speech for formal occasions and courtship is a highly admired skill, as is demonstrating one's verbal cleverness.

While intelligent and witty conversation is highly valued, there is also a great freedom to speak of coarse subjects, make lewd jests or propose blasphemous philosophical arguments. Young men curse inventively to outdo one another and prove their manhood. As long as there are no respectable unmarried women present — an unlikely situation as such women are sheltered from society at large — there are few limitations on what may be said, so long as it entertains. Immorality, especially among men, is seen as a way to emphasize one's individuality. It shows that one is free from the bounds of clergy and law. Success, not virtue, is the measure of a man.

Once harshly frowned upon, homosexuality comes into vogue. Several countries pass laws that prescribe harsh penalties for sodomy. In truth, offenders are rarely punished. Such laws prove unenforceable, and many powerful people indulge in a little experimentation of

their own. Among famous people believed to be homosexuals are Michaelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci and even Pope Clement VII. Both women and men break with convention by dressing as the opposite gender especially shocking now that there are detailed costumes and garb differing for either gender.

Although the enlightenment of the age brings political revolution, religious protest and scientific exploration, Renaissance Europe seems to be in moral decline. The enormous spread of new wealth brings with it the opportunity for people to indulge in vices and pleasures on an unprecedented scale. Trade increases dramatically, and for the first time there is a middle class. These *nouveau riche* are able to indulge themselves in a fashion that was impossible for poor serfs of the Middle Ages. Often, the newly wealthy do everything to excess. When presented with the opportunity to try something new, the spread of education makes people

less hesitant to indulge. Although sports and entertainments were once the purview of a few nobles, now everyone has a little money to spend on a good time.

Another factor in Renaissance conflict is civil unrest. Wars are common in every nation during this time, plague is a familiar threat and the fear of death brings wantonness with it. People live frenetically as they might die any day. Countries are becoming nations, complete with kings and borders; the world is mapped, and suddenly nationalistic causes bring war over ideals or politics instead of simple land disputes or money. Financial corruption of government agents and of the Church is also a factor. Many individuals become skeptical of the sale of false relics, profit from usury or the selling of indulgences. The advent of learning encourages people to question both Church and nation. People draw their own conclusions about the rightness of religious rituals, which leads to reforms or schisms. The average citizen of the Renais-

Universities and Magi

Eppur si muove ("Nevertheless, the earth does move")

— Galileo, after being persuaded to recant his notions of astronomy by a Church-sponsored tour of the Inquisition's dungeons

A classical university can serve as a perfect base for a magus, or for a group. Students are waiting to be exposed to new ideas and new ways of looking at the world. Ancient resources are available, and scholars in all manner of specialized forms of knowledge hone their debating skills with their fellows. Wealthy nobles may even contribute money in the search for knowledge!

For the magi of the Traditions, the academies are a double-edged sword. Though students can often be influenced with mystical learning — astrology, gematria and alchemy are sciences as valid as physics and philosophy, after all — the Order of Reason often takes especial interest in brilliant thinkers. Following the models of the classical philosophers, academics are formulating ways of thinking that will lead to scientific methodology and logic. The precise craftsmanship of Renaissance engineering requires diligent study of mathematics, leading to the Artificers and Craftsmen. A student exploring the nature of the human condition may find himself approached by the Cosians with their unusual ideas on medicine and even rudimentary psychology.

The omnipresent Church cannot be ruled out at universities, either. Although academe represents places to exercise more freedom of thought, the Church still carefully watches for heresies. "Revolutionary" ideas such as the studies of Copernicus, Galileo and da Vinci may be persecuted by the Church for their heretical notions; when the Church seriously argues

doctrine over whether beauty and ugliness reflect spiritual qualities, or whether Judas could be absolved, there's no room for radical ideas that the Earth may not be the center of creation or that man could ever approach an understanding of God's order.

Of course, with enemies afoot amidst the fields of truth, the bravest souls are required to seek willing students. Any member of the Order of Reason could face heresy charges for teaching Godless science. A Traditionalist could fare even worse, facing charges of sorcery and trafficking with the Infernal. Students may scoff at extreme ideas and rebel against the notions of Truth held by individual magi. Other instructors might seek to undermine a magus' teachings, fighting for noble patronage or simply to advance their own theories. Thus, the most dynamic, determined and charismatic of magi are the ones who choose the universities as their battlegrounds.

A group of magi working at a university should probably have a diverse set of scientific and academic skills, with Knowledges predominant among the group. Resources are possible for ones with patronage, and scholars who get students to keep tabs on the competing academics might have Spies as well. Most forms of vain magick are still problematic at a university, but a craftman's workings may be accepted as revolutionary designs. Similarly, an instructor of natural sciences, astrology and philosophy can be expected to have a more mystical temperament than, say, an instructor of stonecutting and engineering. Students make for excellent allies and even potential apprentices. A game could even begin with the players as students, sent to the university by their diverse families, and Awakening under the tutelage of their various enlightened instructors!

sance, however, is still pious, attending mass, venerating Mary, and keeping crucifixes and icons at home. Hypocritical clergy are seen as the exception, not the rule. Even so, skepticism is more common than it once was. If the Church does not have a monopoly on the Word of God, then perhaps it also does not have a monopoly on salvation.

Political and personal violence seems to increase even in the midst of new enlightenment, art and beauty. Punishments for crimes are often brutal public spectacles of torture and execution. Poisoning or hired assassins are common ways to eliminate rivals. Dueling to the death is legal in most cities. Corrupt officials and judges in many communities enforce the law sporadically and are susceptible to bribes. Wars are fought with more vicious, frenzied fighting, more looting, and the selling of prisoners into slavery. Secret plots, conspiracies and assassinations are used to manipulate governments. The clash of huge armies, the roar of guns and the thunder of cannon heralds a new form of war: With longer-distance travel and specialized production, strategy suddenly becomes more important. Men devise means of killing so rapidly that the battlefield changes every decade.

Terms of Address

In high society, titles are paramount — failure to address a noble by the appropriate title can mean a literal death sentence. Duels and worse may be brought upon an offender.

Kings are referred to as “Your Majesty.” Persons close to the monarch may refer to him as “Sir” or “Sire” in informal occasions. A prince or princess is called “Your Highness.” The prince consort or heir to the throne is called “Your Royal Highness.”

A duke or duchess is called “His Grace” or “Her Grace” in dialogue. A duke is referred to as “The Duke of” a given locale; it is improper to refer to a duke as lord of the realm (“Lord Rochester”). A duke may be referred to by his land only if the person speaking is a close friend (“I say, Rochester, let’s go hunting for quail today”). The children of dukes go by “lord” and “lady.”

Lesser nobles, of whom there are several categories, go by “lord.” They are called “My Lord” when addressed. In the impersonal, they are referred to by title and land (“The Marquis of Champagne”). Common lesser noble titles include Marquises, Counts and Barons. Their children are sometimes called “lord” or “honorable.”

There are a host of lesser titles. Knights are referred to as “sir.” Gentlemen who are not knights but have some sort of gentry about them are called “master” (by the time of the Renaissance, the title is no longer exclusive to guildsmen). A magistrate or justice of the peace is called “your worship.”

Clerical titles follow civil guidelines. The pope is called “your holiness.” A cardinal has roughly the status of

Spiraling into Moral Turpitude

Though the Dark Fantastic world is one of great ideals and heroic adventure, the extremes of the brilliant age lead to debauchery just as well. Heroes fencing along the battlements or charging into cannonade can be cleverly matched in the dining salons and back-alleys of the cities, where vulgar entertainments divert the masses. The frenetic pace of advancement applies to vice as well as virtue!

Nobody in the Dark Fantastic world is *boring*. Even a simple tenant farmer has character, as a virtuous laborer or a rugged and surly cur. Exceptional people lead even more extreme lives! The suppressive mores of the time are challenged constantly. The Church promises spiritual salvation yet also demands financial and political obedience; developments in medicine also lead to new recreational drinks; chastity is considered a virtue, yet bastard children and mistresses are the norm. This is an era in which a man may solicit a prostitute in a side alley and consummate his lust in the streets, where a wealthy merchant can glut himself on the expensive cuisine of faraway lands and a scholar may dive into heresy in his quest for Truth.

The Renaissance is, ultimately, an age of *passion*. People undertake everything with a zeal and fervor brought on through an explosion of new ideas. Everything can be explored; whereas once the world was defined by the strictures of the Bible and of history, now *anything* is possible! Why wait? The entire world is ripe for the plucking!

No matter how noble the magus, individuals may find themselves caught up in the whirlwind of fervent activity. The Enlightened, especially, with their penchant for causes, can join the frenetic dance eagerly. Indulgence in the dark side can be a spicy flavor, and the Resonance that it draws may be more instructive than punishing.

a duke, while a bishop has the status of a lesser lord. Priests of all types can be addressed as “father,” as the term “reverend” does not come into use until the early 1600s. Cloistered priests refer to each other as “brother” and nuns generally are referred to as “sister.”

Clerical names can occasionally be confusing. Often when a man or woman takes holy orders, he or she takes on a new name. Generally, the name is of a saint or apostle that the new clergyman hopes to emulate. Some priests take on yet another new name upon becoming bishops, but this practice is less common. The pope commonly takes a new name when he is elected as pope. The pope is referred to by his papal name, never by his secular name.

Magi rarely take on specific titles — at most, a magus *might* use her expertise with magick as a ranking (“The Disciple Elise” or “The Master Yaroslav”). Even then, magickal titles are not used in mixed company. Instead, magi must bow to the traditions of the prevailing culture — presuming to overreach one’s status often carries grave penalties (legal or social), so a magus of humble birth would hardly be referred to as “Master” in public. Because the Traditions and the Order of Reason have hardly formalized their systems of magick, even these titles are infrequently used.

Entertainments and Diversions

Work-saving devices and specialization mean that people now have time to indulge in games and contests. For the first time, common people actually have *free time*, instead of devoting their days to work in the fields. With money and time, people desire entertainment — and so, at last, new games and luxuries are invented for the bored and jaded.

Children have toys such as balls, dolls and jumping ropes. They chant nursery rhymes that are often ghoulish

and macabre — “Tell-tale, tit! Thy tongue shall be slit, / And every dog in town / shall have a little bit.” Adults as well as children sometimes play games such as hide-and-go-seek or blind man’s buff. Since children are not always needed for labor any more and there is no formal public schooling, youngsters have time to play.

Athletic sports are highly popular. Boys study fencing at a young age; wrestling, though a “commoner’s sport,” is also learned. Dueling, even to the death, is legal through the late 16th century. Archery is a popular sport, for competition, hunting or war. Football, first evidenced in the 12th century, is now common among the lower classes; it is frequently banned because of its violence. Tennis has its beginnings in France. The idea of competitive games is resurrected from the old Greek athletes, and anything from a foot race to a throwing contest is fair game for a wager.

Traditional physical competitions continue to be enjoyed. Nobles hold jousts, tournaments and hunts. Different species of dogs are used for hunting different animals, and the keeper of hunting dogs holds an important position among servants in a noble household. Commoners hold mock battles and ball games. Fairs and holidays showcase many public spectacles of this sort. Some travelers even take up competition as a living, moving from town to town and winning money



or prizes from participation in tournaments; unlike the poor knights of the Dark Ages, these protagonists could also be specialized hunters, guides or scholars who teach as well as participate in games. Races between people, animals, boats and vehicles are popular as well; skilled captains command great respect for their shipboard prowess, while artisans and engineers tinker with clever machines for competition. Some students of universities race their own inventions more for learning than for fun — but such spectacles always draw curious crowds of onlookers!

Sedentary games are generally frowned upon and often made illegal. Cards and dice are both popular in taverns; as the era progresses, dice come to be associated more with the lower classes, while cards become more fashionable (probably due to the use of magnificent art on cards). Wagering is made on games of chance and on everything from the outcome of sporting events to the election of popes. Chess is one of the few sedentary games not played for money; expensive and elaborately crafted chess sets are fashionable accessories. Indeed, knowledge of chess is slowly becoming a respected art instead of an unusual pastime, and its merits in strategy are occasionally appreciated by the right sorts of people....

Parlor games involving clever wordplay, rhetoric, fortune-telling, or questions about courtly love are a fairly new phenomenon in the early 16th century. However, they are quickly popularized by printed guides to amusements after dinner parties.

Festivals and fairs are common means of entertainment. Fairs might include all manner of goods for sale, dancing, entertainers and even fireworks displays. Holidays ("holy days") are celebrated at least once per month, often with archery, feasting, dancing and performers. Among these are New Year's Day, Twelfth Night, All Fools Day (although the idea of an April Fool's joke has not yet come into practice), St. George's Day (April 23), May Day, Midsummer (June 24), All Hallows Eve, All Souls' Day and, of course, Christmas.

Traveling companies and entertainers are an up-and-coming class; early in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, entertainers are shunned as vagabonds, but the increasing demand for diversions makes performers and actors more popular as the Renaissance continues. Generally, entertainers are men; young boys play female roles, though a few traveling companies may include roguish women (who generally engage in prostitution in addition to their other acts). Professional entertainers are still seen as disreputable individuals, and indeed many performers also indulge in a little petty larceny. Because most entertainers travel from place to place and fair to fair, there's little to be done if one manages to leave town before getting caught stealing! As a result, traveling companies are often forced to set up outside of towns, away from respectable folk. Poor entertainers

survive on donations during feasts, but more prestigious companies and entertainers enjoy the patronage of nobles. Most entertainers study a variety of skills and make money through various wonders or diversions — often, with a little bit of tumbling, acting, juggling, poetry and perhaps some music or stunts. Companies that perform plays rely on the morality plays of the Church, thus showing Biblical or religious topics, although stories and reenactments of popular tales are coming slowly into vogue. The advent of more books also means that some people can write their own plays and that actors can memorize written lines instead of improvising from a stock set of characters... although this practice will not really come into vogue until demand for performances causes the building of established theaters and troupes.

Let the Show Begin!

A traveling troupe of Traditionalist magi can work *perfectly* as a company of entertainers (see *Castles and Covenants*, pp. 115-120). See the exotic savages of faraway lands! Witness the incredible power of the man who shatters wood and stone with his bare hands! Gasp in awe at the woman who makes flame dance at her command!

As travelers, a group of magi and their companions are likely to be allowed to roam as they please and considered little more than simple ruffians. Though they may not have the chance to rub elbows with the wealthy upper classes except at feasts, they can visit many cities and even carry news or valuable commodities from place to place for their more settled allies. Plus, nobody thinks much of a traveling company leaving abruptly — so the group can flee persecution without drawing undue attention.

Best of all, many works of magick are much easier to perform when the audience believes in them! Although a skeptical scholar might doubt the efficacy of sorcery in a university, nobody thinks twice about trickery and tomfoolery at a fair. Witnesses who do not doubt a performer's abilities — or who actually expect miracles! — make vain workings much easier to perform.

A troupe working as traveling entertainers should have only limited social status and Resources; its members must rely on their skills and their magick to bring bread to the table. Such characters also do not have settled assets such as a manor house. Each character should have at least two areas of performance, unless the individual just recently joined the troupe; even when magi are masquerading as mere performers, they must be able to keep up the act! Some magi might even learn to use their mundane tricks as foci for performing additional magickal feats.

Cruder entertainments make their way through the lower classes. Puppet shows are considered vulgar and scandalous. Paradoxically, this perception makes them quite popular, especially among the lower classes or individuals hoping to show their scorn for conventional mores. Acrobats and puppeteers are considered so scandalous that in some towns they are paid not to perform.

Dancing

Dancing is enjoyed by all classes. Country dances are popular at fairs, while court dances feature gliding, elegant displays.

Common dances include roundel, hay, trenchmore, jig, and the slow, mournful dump. Morris dancing, which involves swords, head-wreaths, and bells on the ankles, is a stamping dance usually performed by men in country villages. Its name is derived from the word "Moorish" and probably refers to Spanish Moors, but its older origins refer to pagan spring and fertility rites. Most country dances, though, are simple affairs, originating in England and then spreading to Germany and France.

Court dances are far more elegant and structured than country dances, and grow ever more formalized with passing years. The gliding *basse dance* (or "low dance," since its movements are low to the floor without leaping), from Burgundy and Italy, becomes probably the most structured dance, with perfect and imperfect forms, different step measures and irregular or minor divergents. The leaping galliard from Italy later spawns not only choreography and contests, but entire books about dancing etiquette. The stately pavane and the swaying bransle ("side-to-side") hail from France, often as line or circle dances alternating men and women. Ballet finds its debut in the 15th century as well. The upper classes hold lavish masquerade balls, and the popular disguise of a madman or wild man in straw and grass makes the threat of guests catching fire sufficient to coin the mocking French phrase *bal des ardents*, or incendiary ball.

Superstitions

Great thinkers of the Renaissance set about categorizing and studying every phenomenon of nature. What, then, of the events beyond the ken of the everyday material world? Why, they too are subjects of keen interest.

The study of magic is seen as unusual, but it actually flourishes, especially in Italy. Magic is seen as a science and its study is another way to assert one's individuality. The practice of magic is dangerous outside the most liberal of cities because that means flouting the authority of the church — to study magic openly in Spain is to court death. The more cosmopoli-

tan academies of the Mediterranean see magic as simply another means of exploring knowledge. Some universities may even offer instruction in various supernatural arts!

Magic as studied by dabblers and scholars comes in three types. Natural magic studies the "natural properties" of objects and of the natural world. This sort of magic involves alchemy and uses potions and poultices. The practitioner seeks out the material correspondences of various substances and the means by which they interact with the surrounding world. Celestial magic is magic from the stars; astrology and divination usually fall under this category. The use of celestial magic is thought to foretell upcoming events; Heaven's will is written in the very stars. A practitioner of celestial magic also studies mathematics and learns the motions of heavenly bodies. Ceremonial magic — summoning and converse with spirits — is a ritualistic form of magic most often learned from ancient tomes. This last form has too much of a tie to necromancy and commerce with evil spirits to be easily accepted, and it quickly draws the ire of the Inquisition. However, it is thought that spirits contain wisdom gleaned from their time in the worlds beyond the mortal realm, so they may be consulted by would-be magicians hungry for answers or power. Indeed, some of the tomes of ancient wisdom contain exhaustive exercises and hidden riddles that can challenge the reader's perceptions enough to lead to true enlightenment!

Superstition isn't limited to arcane magic, of course. Many common people believe in the potency of certain tasks or preparations. The practice of dowsing, for instance, is widespread across Europe. A dowser walks slowly while holding a pair of sticks, commonly ash, oak or yew, one in each hand. When the sticks are drawn to cross over a site, the dowser finds there whatever he seeks. Dowsers most commonly search for pure water, but occasionally people dowse for gold or other treasures. Nobody thinks twice about the practice; it is as accepted and practiced as using a plow to till a field.

Herbalists and wise women make tonics and potions from unusual ingredients. The efficacy of preparations and poultices comes as much from the sympathetic properties of an ingredient as from any natural qualities; mandrake root, for instance, has power over people because of its human-like form. Ginseng and briony are other common herbs in aphrodisiacs or philters. Although not truly magical, these preparations see broad use, from warding against disease to insinuating certain emotions. Some countries, particularly England, levy sanctions against those who "provoke unlawful love."

Persons who consort with forces from beyond the material world also make a study of other entities that do the same. Written manuals purport to reveal the secrets of other supernatural creatures... at times, such books are disregarded as mere myth, but just as often they are considered valuable treatises on dangerous foes of mankind. While the forces of Reason fight to quash such notions, common

folk continue to ward themselves against vampires, specters and other creatures of malice.

Ghosts are common at this time. Everybody knows that a soul might be drawn back to earth for a final task or may even be trapped if its body is buried improperly. Ghosts return to take revenge on their murderers and to protect loved ones. Properly trained clergymen can banish ghosts from an area, and pure sea salt or properly invoked Psalms may drive away ghosts, but most people have little desire to invoke the fury of the restless dead. Worse still, evil spirits may sometimes take on the form of a deceased loved one, pretending to be a benevolent ghost while actually leading their survivors astray. Wise folk avoid inciting the dead and make sure to follow properly all of the customs of funerals and mourning.

Belief in the Fair Folk also widely persists. A ring of mushrooms or an unusual mound may be a fairy ring; if someone has a seizure or stroke, and the cause is not obvious, she is said to be elf-shot. A wife who slips off to a surreptitious affair with a lover for a few days but returns as normal as ever must have been replaced by a fairy wife.... It is believed as well that fairies take children and leave changelings in their place. Such changelings are often noticeable due to some extremely unusual quality, such as brilliantly colored eyes or an intractable, wild nature. There are few stories where a fairy is a helpful creature — generally, they are to be avoided. The motives of faeries are not understood by mortals. As mischievous and chaotic creatures, the Fair Folk may sow discord in communities, kidnap hapless travelers or steal possessions and replace them with worthless rubbish. To forfend the notice of these whimsical creatures, they are referred to by pseudonyms such as “Wee Folk” or “Fair Ones,” when they are mentioned at all.

The Wilds of Europe



One certainty can be realized from the waves of explorers crossing the farthest reaches of the Earth, it is that the world contains more mystery and wilderness than any single man can catalogue. Even the great cities and empires of Europe are still tiny, isolated outposts in comparison to the long stretches of unblemished lands in between. Roads cut across kingdoms to bring cities together for trade or war, but once away from the ruck and run of humanity, the traveler realizes the full extent of Europe’s (and the world’s) landscape.

Forest and wooded tracts still make up the bulk of lands outside Europe’s cities. Forests at this time are still full and lush, covering much of the countryside. It is easy to get lost in the dark and dense woods. Stories abound about children who enter the wilderness, never to be seen again. Though

the press of humanity eats away at the woods, they are too thick to ever be conquered by the meager populations. Some visionary madmen see the woods as resources for sprawling towns and wooden creations, but even they admit that mankind could never more than pitifully compare to the majestic, consuming grandeur of the deep forests.

In lowlands or coastal areas lie swamps and fens. These areas are generally seen as waste or blight. The swamps carry disease and are not good for grazing, growing crops or producing wood for manufacturing. Most countries try to drain their fens in order to increase the amount of arable land and some hardy settlers harvest the peat or other natural resources of the swamps, but only the desperate would consider the marshes for homesteading. Whereas the woods are dangerous, swamps are ghoulish and mysterious. Will-o’-the-wisps hide in the marsh. Hags and twisted creatures make the fens their homes. Traveling into swamps is a mark of desperation. Even people too crazed to consider the dangers of the fens find no real reason to go there. Of course, explorers may need to complete their maps, and academics may desire the cadavers and organs of the hideous beasts that thrive in the marshes — whether either such motive is sane is questionable at best.

Surrounding the hamlets of civilization are cultivated fields or croplands. These areas are sparsely populated, due to the large areas of land necessary to support even a modest family. Away from the cities, farms dot the countryside. Farmers cultivate acres of land with their sweat and effort. Manual labor is distasteful in the Renaissance, but someone has to make the food.

Cropland generally surrounds a manor, where the lord lives; farm families cluster in a few hamlets and villages. If the lord does not live at the manor, he appoints a steward in his stead to collect taxes and manage the property. Villages outside the large cities average about 200 people, including some craftsmen such as bakers, carpenters and smiths to keep the village running. Most of the inhabitants, though, are simple farmers and laborers. Roughly 90 percent of the population must farm in order to grow enough food.

The people working the land are rarely serfs. By the time of the Renaissance, a tenant pays rent to the landlord, but prosperity is great enough that the farmer often makes a profit. Freeholders are the closest types of laborers to serfs; they make fixed payments to the landlord for life. Just above freeholders financially are leaseholders, who have a fixed rental for a certain number of years that can be renegotiated after that term ends. Copyholders have a year-to-year rental. Common laborers simply work for the holders for daily wages and live where they can without any agreement with the landlord.

Travel

The development of trade routes and luxuries makes travel more common in the Renaissance, but still less than 20 percent of the populace ever goes far from home. Most travel is to the market or to fairs, generally within seven miles of town.

Most people travel on foot. An adult can easily cover three to four miles an hour. Although the trip to the market is an all-day affair, it is easy to be home before nightfall, which is good because travel by night is an invitation to

robbery and bandits! Highwaymen patrol the roads and demand bribes for safe passage. In addition, the roads are not well maintained, and there are few road markers. In many places, people simply use beaten paths traveled by merchants or follow the ruins of old Roman roads.

Long journeys are best made on horseback if at all possible. A horse can travel 20 to 30 miles a day. Though this is not much of an advantage over a person on foot, a horse allows the rider to bring more supplies and also means that the rider is less fatigued at the end of the day than someone walking (assuming that the rider is experienced—someone who has never ridden before is likely to find the experience quite painful by the end of the day). Horses allow much faster travel on open roads, but there are few bridges, so fording streams is time-consuming.

Travelers who do not relish the idea of sleeping in the brush can spend the night at inns. Inns are fairly commonplace by this time. Lodgings can be found in major cities and along common trade routes or roads where constant travelers support enough business to keep an inn profitable. Most inns house fewer than 100 guests, but some can hold up to 300 at a time. Inns usually have stables for horses; some new coaching houses even act as way stations for people who travel by carriage in the later years of the Renaissance. Larger inns even grow into new towns, as blacksmiths and craftsmen take up residence to do business shoeing the horses of travelers, selling supplies for the road and growing food for the guests.

Magick is Everywhere

In the Renaissance, signs of the supernatural are always present. One simply need know how to look. That's part of the quest for knowledge in the age: discovering the secret signs by which one may interpret the workings of the world.

Obviously, the World of Darkness games allow for the introduction of changelings, wraiths and other creatures into a *Sorcerers Crusade* chronicle. Used sparingly, such entities can easily leave a group of magi bewildered simply by their strange natures, unknowable motives and bewildering powers.

More importantly, though, are the supernatural signs that are present all about the world. A falling star may presage some momentous event, and a ghost or vampire might seek out mortal victims, but these are the exceptions. The learned scholar of the arcane sees patterns in everyday life, and the world's natural movements divulge the keys to the future.

For example, the movements of animals are said to be signs of the future. If a cow is seen in the garden, it foretells death. Swallows are supposed to be lucky; if they nest in the eaves of a house, the household will be fortunate. Any activity in the sky is given supernatural credence. Lightning, eclipses and even strong rains are seen as harbingers of disaster. Comets are especially ominous. Numbers, conjunctions of days with events and specific calendar times are given weight; some people even publish almanacs of propitious times for certain ceremonies such as weddings. Rival publishers may even have contradictory advice about auspicious days!

Many learned people scoff at the notion of a universe where the movements of a cow can predict the future. Some magi, though, argue that all of Creation wheels about a pattern of infinite complexity, and that every action pulls a thread that touches on the rest of the cosmos. If true, then perhaps understanding of Heaven's will is as straightforward as watching the mundane steps of the world.

Riding

Geldings make the best riding horses. Mares are unmanly and fit only for breeding. Stallions are often too high-strung for long travel; though they may make excellent war horses, a traveler needs a steady mount, not an aggressive one. The tremendous, powerful horses ridden by cavalry are not well suited to long travel; a sleeker, lighter mount is good for speedy journeys. The horse's color is a factor as well: bays are the best types of horses, and stars or other markings on the forehead are considered lucky.

Both men and women ride for enjoyment or for travel. With bridles, saddles and stirrups, horses can be easily controlled, and a horseman can expect a consistent ride. Men of station are expected to learn to ride; for persons without the means to support their own stables, a good living can be made training horses to be ridden. Women riders differ from men, often riding apillion with a man. The pillion, which is strapped behind the saddle, is a cushion upon which a woman sits while holding onto the man, who directs the horse. If a woman rides her own horse, she generally rides side-saddle.

Even for people unable to own horses, it is still possible to rent one. The main roads between cities may boast way stations every 10 miles. It costs about 2 pence a mile to rent



a horse. For exceptionally long rides a horse can be hired for the day at about 12 pence on the first day and 8 pence thereafter. A traveler who plans a lengthy ride and has enough money available may simply buy a horse at one end of the journey and then sell it back at the destination.

Transporting large amounts of goods, either for moving or for trade, often calls for a pack train. Pack trains travel about 15 to 20 miles per day on open roads, though poor road conditions may reduce that amount. In pack trains, wealthy individuals may move large amounts of their possessions, or several people may band together to defray the cost of a pilgrimage or trip. Pack trains thus consist of about 30 mules or horses, carrying both goods and passengers. Pack trains are also used as a postal service, charging about 3 pence for a hundredweight of goods. Often, a pack train includes armed guards to prevent theft. Their presence encourages other travelers to join the pack train for safety. A pack train is a good place to hide from the law, make new acquaintances and travel in general anonymity.

Money and Economics

The burgeoning economy of Renaissance Europe, including trade with the lands of Asia and Africa, lends a new wealth to society. This time is truly a blessed one, as everyone can afford a little luxury! Why, even simple farmers may pay in coin instead of relying upon barter. Houses and cities grow in size; people live longer and entertainments abound.

The growth of guilds and merchant houses means that a market exists for trinkets once too expensive and rare to move across long distances. Improvements in sailing, coupled with a renewed zest for exploration, make maps and routes

more commonly accessible. The world will never lack for new places to colonize and new resources to exploit. Who can see anything but a brilliant future in this?

Homes

Common houses are modestly furnished at this time. All but the rudest country farmers live in homes with rooms, now. Stoves, furnishings and decorations, once limited to the wealthy, are now the norm. Stools and chairs provide sitting space now that people have time to sit, and the new supply of books means that people take the time to read and write. More expensive and flamboyant, high-backed chairs are generally reserved for the heads of the households. A single table provides a family home with work space as well as dinner space, and chamber pots can be found in all rooms so that families need not share filthy septic pits. Bedrooms have actual beds; only the poorest need sleep on hay. A washbasin is also standard fare. Smaller families and larger homes mean that people can even sleep in their own separate rooms instead of sharing the bed with the entire family!

Although the poor rarely have any ornamentation in their houses, the upper and emerging middle classes try to make their houses pleasing to the eye as well as functional. Carpets cover tables and cupboards for decoration as often as they are put on the floor. Ceilings are often decorated; a truly wealthy house sports painted canvas ceilings. Paintings, often portraits of the family or the local monarch, are prominently displayed. Worldly citizens display maps as well as portraits.

Houses are lit with candles of tallow and beeswax. Such candles give off a lot of smoke and drippings, along with a foul stench. Small candles are often carried in case someone needs to walk about at night; larger candles, set in supports known as candle-beams, hang from the ceiling and provide light at inns or in houses where members may be up and about regularly after sunset. The large candles may burn for up to an hour. Because of the expense of keeping candles lit all the time (not to mention the smell), most houses and workplaces close up at night — very little is worth the expense of keeping more light. Of course, some eccentric individuals might experiment with lamps, and the enlightened sometimes toy with magickal lights or even electricity, but such indulgences are expensive and even dangerous. Better simply to shut the doors and shutter the windows to await the sun the next morning.

For ease of living, even townsfolk keep small gardens. Herbs and vegetables are grown to supplement meals; some herbmongers specialize in particularly rare or unusual plants and use them for medicines. The idea of a garden as a place of leisure and beauty is coming into vogue; the wealthy sometimes hire gardeners specifically

to tend flowers and trees in a pavilion. Some even keep exotic birds to impress visitors.

Fortresses and Manors

In the large cities, rulers make their homes in stone fortresses. Buttressed by powerful engineering techniques, a castle or keep can boast several stories, towers, spires and wide walls, all elegant as well as defensible. Because the construction of a fortification may take several years, competent stonemasons and engineers include artistry in their designs. The typical fortification surrounds several interior buildings, including a small lake and gardens with a cellar for storage, in case of famine or siege. However, the advent of powerful cannon changes matters: Even the stoutest stone walls can be breached now. The crumbling castles of medieval days must give way to more practical fortifications, to thicker walls and to battles that will be decided in mere weeks or even hours instead of months.

Outside the cities, manor houses are the order of the day. Whereas once the minor lords of the realm lived in small keeps or towers, now nobility make their homes in beautifully worked mansions. As a small fortification cannot stand against the huge, gun-and-cannon-bearing militaries of the day, there is little point in fortifying a common country home. Instead, nobles make their homes of stout wood, often with multiple stories, and near the greens of the small villages dotting the farmed countryside. Such estates are serving less and less as tiny fiefdoms and instead becoming simple points of local authority for larger nations. Indeed, many nobles (who can afford the expense) forsake their homes in the country for the greater bustle of the cities and leave only a simple seneschal to oversee the affairs of the farmers.

(More information about the houses in which magi might dwell can be found in the supplement *Castles and Covenants*.)

Coins

In the 15th century, the supply of European silver increases, and new exploration brings both African gold and a wealth of precious metals from the Americas. Formerly poor Portugal becomes rich, and the money supply in general grows. Prices and denominational systems are shaken and altered by this sudden wealth.

Exploration also improves trade routes, now that travelers and merchants need stable roads upon which to ply their trade. With the new opportunities for investment in colonization or mercantilism, a new worldwide economy blossoms.

Even the coins reflect the vibrancy of the era. The artistic developments of the Renaissance inspire more

elaborate designs, most notably more realistic portraits of rulers and coats of arms or religious images on the reverse.

There is no paper money in Europe. Coins are referred to as "yellow money" (gold), "white money" (silver), "red money" (copper), or "black money" (billon — mixed copper and silver). Copper and billon are new, used mainly in Italy. The value of a coin depends on its constituent metal, so the amounts used are carefully controlled. Counterfeiting any coin is punished by death in most nations. Clipping, or shaving bits of metal off the edges of coins, is also a crime.

Improvements in metallurgy and art make counterfeiting more difficult; ironically, this development turns crime from simple random thuggery to a career of sorts, with professionals and innovations.

New attitudes toward money are also emerging. The Protestant Church, while still disapproving of usury, is more approving of wealth and profit than the old Church, and even the Catholic world-view begins to soften on such issues. Whereas moneylending had once been left to Jews or heathens, merchants can now engage in speculation. The

English Coins

penny (plural pence): silver, the most common English coin (d)

shilling: silver, minted in 1504 at 12 pence (s)

mark: not an actual coin, but an imaginary unit of 100 pence based on a Germanic unit of weight.

pound: The pound sterling indicates 20 shillings, but is not an actual coin (£). It is based on the unit of weight.

sovereign: gold, minted in 1489 at value of a pound sterling

angel: gold, worth 6s, 8d

anglet/ half angel: gold, 5s

crown: gold, minted 1526, 5s (later silver crowns are of the same value)

dollar/ thistle dollar: silver, a Scots coin worth 30s

farthing: silver, 2s, 6d (30d)

groat: 4d, an older coin devalued to 3d in 1551

half-crown: gold (or later silver)

halfpenny: silver

half-sovereign: gold, 10s

quarter angel: gold, 2s

ryal (noble, rose noble): gold, 10s, then raised to 15s under Henry VIII

sixpence (testoon, tester): silver, 6d

three farthing piece: silver, 90d

threehalfpenny piece: silver, 1.5d

threepenny: silver, 3d

twopence piece (half groat, twopenny): silver, 2d

Other coins

cavallo: copper, from Naples

duit: copper Dutch coin, less than a farthing

double plack: silver, Flemish, 4d

ducat, Venetian: gold, approximately 5s — the dominant coin of the eastern Mediterranean area

ducat, Spanish: 4s, 6d (value rises later in 16th century)

ecu a la couronne: gold, shield/ French crown, 4s, 6d (value rises later in 16th century)

florin, Dutch: gold, two types, 2s, and 3s, 3d respectively

florin, Florentine: gold, initially worth 1£, but inflated to as much as 4£, 16s by A.D. 1450
(The most generally accepted international coin in the 15th century)

gulden: gold, German, worth less than a florin

escudo: gold, Spanish, 6s, 4d

courte: copper, Netherlands

cruzado: gold, Portuguese, 6s, 2d

sou: bronze, French, 1s

powerful trading houses of Italy even form commerce banks; notes of credit may be drawn on a house's assets, so that large sums of money need not be transported.

Two or three pounds a year is considered a low income sufficient for survival. Servants are paid by the year and often receive food, clothing and lodging as well. Women and children are paid less than men — usually half to two-thirds of what a man makes. Apprentices also make less than journeymen. Some governments set standards for how much certain servants are to be paid. Slavery is also practiced in some parts of Europe, particularly in the early 15th century, after the Black Death of the 1300s makes workers harder to find.

For people with more money to spare, a meal at an inn might cost five or six pence, four pence for a quart of ale, six pence for a whore. To see a play might cost one or two pence. A horse might cost 30 shillings.

Weights and Measures

Most of Europe uses either natural units such as the foot, Roman and Germanic units (once, pound, grain, mark) a few pre-Roman units such as the French league, or some combination of these. Local standards are generally based on either an agreed-upon average (the length of a typical foot) or a pronouncement by some local authority. In the latter case, the items that set the standard are kept locked away and official copies are made available in the marketplace, church or guildhall. Weights and measures may vary from one region to another, and even in areas with an enforced standard, tradesmen often add a little extra — the baker's dozen, the extra "thumb" on the end of a measured yard of fabric, the scale tipped just past even — as a traditional discount. Thus, prices of goods in different markets are difficult to compare, as are the measurements and calculations of early astronomers or natural philosophers.

The demands of science and engineering require more rigorous measuring, though. For dedicated scholars, measurements may be written in common terms that can be similar from place to place — some clever inventors might even use the dimensions of their own books for standards! However, until faster communication allows for uniform testing of weights and volumes, the idea of a truly unified system of measurement remains a dream.

Of course, the Order of Reason need not be bound by the guesswork and strictures of common academics. The precise machining of Artificers can guarantee measuring tools of fairly close accuracy; most Craftsmen also learn to adjudge weights and volumes with incredible skill. Through the routes mapped by the Explorers and with the trade caravans of the High Guild, the Order can send its own common measurements across all of Europe to slowly become accepted in local craftworks. It is only a matter of time before all things are standardized.

The Working Class

Apart from laborers, there are two types of working classes. There are the professions and the guilds. The professions are generally more scholarly; often, one goes to university in order to study for a profession. Guilds, by contrast, comprise craftsmen of various sorts.

Professionals

A professional is, strictly speaking, someone who follows a profession — hence the term. Thus, a professional

Annual Income for A.D. 1630

gentry: 200-300 £
beneficed clergy: 10-100 £
yeoman: 40-60 £
farm family: 75 £ (including wife's income)

Common Units

inch: breadth of the thumb-nail
foot (pes, pied, aune): length of a human foot
yard: distance from the nose to the end of the outstretched arm
fathom: length of the outstretched arms
perch: from 16 to 25 feet (many local variants)
furlong: furrow length — 40 perches or 220 yards
mile: 1760 yards or 8 furlongs, from the Roman *milia passuum*, 1000 paces
league: distance one may walk without resting — 1.5 to 3 miles
acre (German, Morgen): amount of land plowed in a morning, from *æcer*, field
setier : French measure of land based on amount of seed required to sow it
arpent: Widely used measure of woodlands
pint: English measure of volume (0.57 liters metric); 1 quart = 2 pints, 1 gallon = 8 pints, 1 peck = 2 gallons, 1 bushel = 8 gallons
tun, hogshead: measures of wine
pund: pound/ pint of water (Anglo-Saxon)
grain: based on a wheat grain — a unit for precious metals
carat: 3 barleycorns or 4 wheat grains (originally the weight of a carob bean); expression of fineness of gold — a Constantinian gold solidus weighed 24 carats
pennyweight: 24 grains
ounce: from the Romans — set at 20 pennyweights

engages in an intellectual practice, a craft that requires specialized training and a keen mind as well as skill. Professionalism is seen as the hallmark of the elite — indeed, few but the nobility or the wealthy can afford the university education necessary to follow a profession.

The most highly respected profession is the lawyer — not surprising, in an age where explosive economies and rapid invention demand litigation and controls. A lawyer may be a judge who hears and interprets the law, or an advocate who can plead cases before the court. Lawyers are considered knightly and expect to be addressed as “Ser” or “Messer.” Often, lawyers are civic leaders; the practice of law and politics is ousting the old hereditary systems of merit, though noble families still retain much clout. Nobles often study law, and it is not considered base to practice. For persons with a penchant for law but without the means to a full university education, there is the lesser function of notary: Notaries act as witnesses for contracts and important documents. Some notaries even learn their trade in a guild fashion, studying under other notaries or lawyers, instead of taking on the additional expense of schooling.

Whereas once doctors and leeches were dreaded, now they constitute a respected civil profession second only to lawyers. Physicians are the highest class of doctors; a full physician goes to a university and studies the body, humors and remedies. The more specialized but less erudite class of surgeons do more physical work, mostly setting bones (since the idea of actually *cutting open* a patient, other than performing an amputation or lancing a carbuncle, is considered insane, even by a visionary Cosian). The barber-surgeon bleeds patients to adjust the balance of humors and may deal with infections or dental problems. Because of the Church-ingrained distaste for touching blood or bodies, barber-surgeons are accorded little respect; though necessary, they are nearly in the class of laborers.

Teachers are, for the first time, becoming a full profession in their own right. Teachers in the university are mostly former doctors and lawyers who have quit practicing their art and now live in semi-retirement. The heightened interest in culture and literacy has brought in several new classes, though. One can study Latin, Greek and the humanities. History and philosophy are making their mark as acceptable studies; now, it is possible to be a teacher or professional in a purely academic capacity. University teachers outside of law or medicine still have lower status, though. Beneath even university instructors are traveling schoolmasters. Schoolmasters generally teach privately, outside of universities. Such instructors may teach for a town or for a wealthy family.

Merchants are a new trade flourishing in the Renaissance. In the middle ages, trade was mostly through barter, and few (if any) could afford the exotic expense of transporting goods over long distances. With new wealth come

new consumables, and merchants are the people who procure these goods. This trade is considered a respectable one, so some lesser nobles act as merchants. Though merchants technically produce nothing, the increased demand for luxuries means that they are tolerated, even accepted, in the Renaissance.

Artists also get a boost during the Renaissance. Wealthy patrons now indulge in portraiture, or even spend their money to support artists simply as a sign of conspicuous riches. The goal of most artists is to find a proper patron; an artist who must sell his works on the open market risks starvation, as the demand for art among common folk is not yet great. Ironically, artists are not respected as much as their work: Though their art may be respected, revered and treated as a trapping of the upper class, artists are seen as laborers.

Technically, priests are classified as a profession, but the clergy is a special case — with the regal might of the Church, they can command even nobility, yet are expected to adhere to the strictures of their higher calling. The practice of entering the priesthood is still common among lesser sons of nobility, and as nations grow in prestige, power and wealth, the Church follows; the position of bishop or cardinal carries as much weight as any university professor or baron. Men of God do not stoop to be judged by mere usurers, despots and astrologers!

Guilds

Between the laborer and professional is the guildsman. Guilds perform specific crafts and work together both to perpetuate and protect their arts. The proliferation of specialized crafts, made possible by large towns, means that there are more than 100 common guilds, not even counting the secret societies of the arcane! Guildsmen include vintners, dyers, grocers, smiths, weavers, tailors, fishmongers and any other craft whose members could assemble. The collective might of a guild's control over its form of trade gives guildsmen more influence than common laborers, a situation that increases as specialized craftsmanship becomes more common.

An apprentice, the lowest entrant to a guild, hires out for daily wages. Apprenticeship begins at age seven and usually lasts 14 years. During this time, the apprentice receives food, lodging and education required for the guild's craft. An apprentice is forbidden to marry, gamble or frequent taverns; they are also forbidden to carry any weapon but a knife. It is a hard lot, but it is one that many people of middling means undertake, in hopes of someday becoming masters and commanding their own shops. When an apprentice graduates (if he does — some masters may keep apprentices past their time, sell the product of the apprentice's work and keep the proceeds), he receives two suits of clothing, a sum of money and tools of the trade.



From this point forward, he is a journeyman, expected to make a living at his trade.

A journeyman may travel to a new place to set up his own shop and begin producing his goods, or he may simply wander from town to town and offer his wares. Moving in and competing against the former master is discouraged and draws little business. As a result, the typical journeyman travels from village to village to find a place where he may make a living. Once he finds such a place, he settles in to improve his craft.

After several years of practicing as a journeyman, a guildsman can apply to be named a master. This pass is generally achieved by presenting a particularly good piece — the so-called “master-piece” — to master-level craftsmen. If that piece is accepted, the journeyman is promoted. Of course, some unscrupulous journeymen might title themselves masters when they think that none may be the wiser, but calling oneself a master without the approval of the guild is a good way to be run out of business. Master guildsmen are responsible for keeping the trade decent and honorable. Thus, the masters set prices, control quality and take on new

apprentices to perpetuate the guild. In a moderate township or hamlet, a master guildsman may command as much respect and authority as a minor noble simply by weight of his superior skill and guild backing.

Medicine



Order insight into the workings of the universe leads naturally into inquisitiveness about the human body itself. From such curiosity springs the basis of medicine. At last, one may study the treatments and practices of physicians, such as the balance of bodily humors or the use of hot irons to relieve pressure from the skull. Extensive literacy means that surgeons can keep records of their trials and successes, and the trade with Persia and Cathay brings new remedies. Fifteenth-century doctors are more likely than their medieval predecessors to keep casebooks of current practices.

By the time that the Renaissance is fully upon Europe, someone who visits a doctor may even survive the experience.

Health and Hygiene

Despite Church concerns about the unclothed human form, bathing becomes more popular in cities, especially in Italy. It is seen as a good method of social mingling to "take to the waters." Sulphurous streams are popular as having healing properties. The notion of bathing as a method to keep clean, though, has not yet developed.

People try to take care of their teeth, but only crude methods exist. The most common means of dental care involves vigorous scrubbing with white wine and vinegar boiled with honey. The toothpick is a novelty, often given as an inexpensive gift. Still, wear on teeth causes some damage by the 30s. Without refined sugars, though, tooth decay is not particularly prevalent. For the unlucky few who develop cavities, barber-surgeons are skilled in tooth-pulling — a painful but necessary experience.

Infants are swaddled, covered in blankets. Doctors who subscribe to the theory of humors believe that swaddling prevents the baby from losing too much moisture.

The more comfortable homes of the era provide better health, too. A snug house, made to exacting specifications of craftsmanship, keeps out the elements much better than a rude hut of straw and twigs. Clean sheets and beds mean less lice and ticks; washbasins and chamberpots let people dump their refuse away from their homes and clean themselves afterward.

Medicine itself is as much superstition as science. Diseases are believed to have supernatural causes as well as physical reasons. Plagues and epidemics are seen as God's curse. Monasteries and convent hospitals provide some of the best medical care of the day, but caregivers there associate illness with punishment for sin and require prayer and repentance along with any treatment. University-educated doctors subscribe to the theory of the four humors of the body: sanguine (blood), choleric, phlegmatic and melancholic humors determine proper treatments. To determine a patient's balance, a physician examines the patient's urine. Then, the physician may prescribe a concoction to restore the proper balance or recommend treatment by a surgeon. Some physicians even specialize their studies, and the ill who have no other hope may have to submit to treatment by physicians who use them as experiments for new theories: Holes bored in the skull relieve pressure from the brain; the burning vapors of animal fat and fur might be good for keeping away ague. Needless to say, these experiments often prove as fatal as the conditions they are meant to cure. Still, progress is made ever so slowly; the idea that certain diseases may have natural causes that can be treated in a repeatable fashion is considered radical yet potentially useful, and many physicians even now scoff at the old superstitions of demonic illnesses or fevers brought on by planetary alignments.

Signs of the Times

What happens when the entire family need not engage in farming from dawn until dusk every day? People begin having fewer children. When money is dependent on trade rather than labor, children are a burden. Often, the richer the family, the smaller it is. Slowly declining rates of child mortality mean that offspring are more likely to survive as well, and so there is no need for the passel of young once common to every farmstead.

The explosive growth of industry also erodes the relationship between employer and employee. Skilled laborers can demand better wages or treatment, so even serfs gain new privileges. However, an apprentice in training must submit to the judgment of his tutor, so guildmasters wield authority over their charges with the threat of withholding graduation. The lord is expected to take care of his citizens, but a boss is under no obligation to protect his workers.

Smaller families and less stable labor relations mean that family remains one of the most important social units. Families look out for one another in finances and marriages. The eldest male of the family generally makes the important decisions for all the younger family members, whereas the eldest woman runs the household. Children can be cherished, the elderly can be supported, and couples actually have time to relate to each other instead of concentrating on the meager scratchings of a subsistence living. Suddenly, there is room for hopes and dreams. Parents can encourage their young to aspire to new crafts or professions, and people can actually change their jobs and their lots in life! Each generation of the family can expect a better world. Some see this progressive trend as the first step on a long road to a *perfect* world, a world where man orders his own destiny, unfettered by God or the whims of nature. It seems a distant vision, but one can hope and dream now....

The most common doctors are barber-surgeons. The red-and-white-striped pole is an announcement that the barber practices blood-letting or phlebotomy. Bleeding evens out the humors of the body and keeps the patient healthy. Certain areas of the body are good to bleed to cure particular ailments; practicing as a surgeon requires a knowledge of anatomy and such proper places for blood-letting.

For more serious problems, such as fractures, burns or major cuts, the only hope is a surgeon. Often drawing upon skills learned from battlefields or other practical experience, a surgeon sets bones, sews up cuts and prescribes ointments for burns. This sort of trauma care is hardly developed — the brutal necessities of hammers, saws and

nails are unpleasantly practical. In an ironic twist, many surgeons are more successful at their craft than university graduates; when the patient is rapidly dying on the table, there is room only for practiced pragmatism.

Medical Studies

Most Renaissance medicine is a continuation of well-established methods, and most medical knowledge comes from reading books rather than actually treating patients. University-educated physicians study works by authors including Galen, who consolidated Alexandrian medical and anatomy texts while drawing on Egyptian, Greek and Middle Eastern advances. The concepts of Hippocratic medicine are known as well. Many works on drugs and chemistry come from Persia and Araby; some explorers even set forth to distant lands in search of legendary remedies.

The Church frowns on opening a body. Dissecting corpses is seen as unsavory and has long been forbidden, but the practice is revived both with an interest in medical understanding and realistic portrayals of anatomy in art. External anatomy is taught in art schools, and artists attend and sketch dissections. Curious doctors and artists question the Church's squeamishness — how can God have crafted a form so magnificent as the human body yet left it barred from study? Despite Church objections, well-funded schools more and more often bring in cadavers and subjects for study.

Chemical and herbal drugs are prescribed for ailments, and several surgical procedures are commonly known, including the tracheotomy, Caesarian section, the stitching of wounds, and, later in the period, the extraction of bullets. The explorations of the latter part of the century also bring new diseases which doctors study and attempt to treat.

Ailments and Remedies of the Age

Ague — A general term for fever. It includes malaria, pneumonia, and typhoid. The cure is opium or spider's web.

Apoplexy — A stroke or epilepsy. Blowing white pepper into the nostrils cures it.

Pox — Generally, diseases that cause eruptions of the skin, including smallpox and occasionally chicken pox. Saffron cures stomach ailments. Lavender is good for swooning or falling sickness. Periwinkle staunches bleeding if held between the teeth.

Amethyst prevents drunkenness. Sapphire held in the hand is a cure against the sweating sickness. Toad-stone, taken from the marrow of a toad when the moon is waning and stored in linen for 40 days, is a powerful amulet against dropsy and poison.

Curious? Perhaps. In the Dark Fantastic world, though, the placebo in which the patient most firmly believes may be the most effective medicine of all...

Other Medicines

Women rarely practice medicine except in the role of midwife. Midwives and physicians often have an antagonistic relationship. Indeed, some physicians portray midwives as witches, thus setting the Church against women who would dare to intrude upon doctors' practices.

Apothecaries are just now becoming popular. An apothecary typically keeps a catalogue of home remedies that have worked over the years. These remedies are prescribed in pharmaceutical fashion; apothecaries also often make poultices available for purchase. This odd combination of alchemist and physician has the benefit of working without surgery or experimentation and instead drawing upon "proven remedies." The two factors serve to make apothecaries' services popular — who wants to go to a surgeon for a broken leg when a simple herbal poultice strapped to the shin can repair it just as well?

The insane fare poorly in this era. Lunatics are confined to bed, and there is little actual treatment for them, other than prayer and the experimentation of well-meaning physicians.

Any proper Cosian is, of course, familiar with all of the treatments of the era, in addition to her own special remedies. It is the frustrating task of the Cosians to separate the medicines that *work* from the remedies without effect — or, worse still, the ones that are detrimental to patients. Pitted against the rational exploration of scientific treatments are the properties of natural objects, such as stones and spices, as held up by the more mystically inclined. The difficult job of cataloguing treatments is tasked by the inability of many physicians to discern separate causes and effects for illnesses. Some patients appear to get better upon the advice of hedge wizards and herbmongers, even as others die under the best surgical care available. The only thing to be done is to persevere in recording every experiment, thus advancing the proper theories until they do work. In the meantime, people may suffer from the lack of proper medicine. It is a hard road littered with many bodies, but ultimately the footsteps of reason will follow it to health and understanding for all humanity.



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Chapter II: Matters of Faith

*That light did lead me on,
More surely than the shining of noontide,
Where well I knew that one
Did for my coming bide;
Where He abode, might none but He abide.*

— St. John of the Cross, "The Obscure Night of the Soul"

The end in 1417 of the Great Schism that divided the leadership of the Church should have heralded a reaffirmation of faith among Europe's Catholics. Instead, it signaled the beginning of a power struggle between secular and religious organizations that would ultimately rock the foundations of the Catholic church and lead to dissent, open rebellion and, finally, anti-clericalism. That transformation, from unquestioning belief in the tenets of Holy Mother Church to informed skepticism and intellectual doubt, formed one of the central motifs of the Renaissance.

Catholicism

This is the new Church, no longer built of living rock, namely, of Christians steadfast in the living faith and in the mould of charity; but built of sticks, namely, of Christians dry as tinder for the fires of hell.

—Girolamo Savonarola, "Advent Sermon"

"I am sorry, mademoiselle," Pere Bertrand said gently, trying to avert his eyes from the shapely form of the young woman standing at the abbey gate, "but the abbé cannot see you at this time." The elderly friar raised his eyes to meet the woman's gaze and saw that her blue eyes were moist with barely suppressed tears. Her shoulders slumped in dejection.

"Sweet Virgin," Pere Bertrand prayed silently, "this daughter of Christ comes in need to your holy place. Give me wisdom that I might render assistance and comfort to her." Bertrand recognized the young woman from his monthly visits to Ville du Forêt, the small village that nestled at the foot of the hill upon which stood the monastery of Ste. Marie du Forêt. Madeleine d'Argeuille, the daughter of the village's deputy mayor, Claude d'Argeuille, was by reputation a maiden of good standing, chaste and pious.

Now, as he regarded her fragile form, Pere Bertrand could not help but notice the slight swelling just below her breasts. He closed his eyes to regain his composure as the reason for her visit suddenly became clear to him.

Madeleine bowed her head in acknowledgement of her rejection. "Thank you, Pere Bertrand," she said, her voice low and heavy with despair. "Will you tell Paul—the abbé that I was here?" Bertrand nodded gravely, ignoring Madeleine's near usage of the abbé's Christian name. As Madeleine turned to make her way back down the path to the village, Bertrand heard her whisper softly to herself, "Then there is no hope."

"Mademoiselle!" Bertrand called to her, quickly coming to a decision. Madeleine stopped, looking over her shoulder, her face suddenly alive with hope. "Come inside to the foyer and I will speak again to the abbé on your behalf."

A short while later, Bertrand stood before the door to the abbé's private chambers, on the top floor of the monastery, waiting for an answer to his knock. Paul Dupin, abbé of the monastery, answered the door. He wore a dressing robe of



dark wine-colored velvet, his angularly handsome face a picture of annoyance.

"What is it, Bertrand?" he snapped. "I asked not to be disturbed during my private meditations." Bertrand bowed his head before his superior. His keen ears caught the sound of a muffled giggle, a woman's voice, from somewhere behind the partially opened door.

"I am sorry, Reverend Abbé," Bertrand said, "but something has come up that requires your attention."

"Has the painter I commissioned last month arrived from Florence, then?" the abbé asked, curiosity and anticipation mollifying his tone.

Bertrand sent another silent prayer to the Virgin for patience, not for the first time since the abbé's arrival at the monastery eight months ago. Paul Dupin was young for an abbot, a nobleman's son given to the Church and advanced within its ranks through political favors. He had quickly set about transforming the monastery and its grounds into a place of ostentation and opulence, the better (in his own words) to glorify God and the Virgin tangibly. His most recent endeavor was the commissioning of a series of paintings of Ste. Marie du Forêt; he had hired a young Florentine artist and, lately, interviewed local maidens to find a model for the Virgin. Undoubtedly, his latest "candidate" was still in the midst of her interview.

"Regrettably, Reverend Abbé, he has not yet arrived," Bertrand answered. "It is about Madeleine d'Argeuille. She waits downstairs to see you on a matter of some import." Bertrand lifted his head, an expression of determination on his face as he let his eyes speak to the abbé of the implications of Madeleine's visit.

"She knows that she is unsuitable to pose for the Virgin of the Forest," Dupin snapped. "Surely, you can see the evidence for yourself of her moral weakness." The abbé's lips curled upward in a faint sneer.

"She is most distraught, Reverend Abbé," Bertrand persisted. "Nor is she the first who has failed your rigorous methods of testing," he added before he could stop himself. His fixed his gaze at a point just past the abbot's shoulder, as if focusing on something within the room beyond.

Dupin's face reddened with choler, and he drew a deep breath in preparation for a vicious reproof. Just then, from somewhere behind him, a woman's voice interrupted the response forming on his lips.

"Paul, mon cher, why are you taking so long? I have a great desire to continue our prayers. My sins are not yet fully revealed."

The abbot flinched and Bertrand felt a small glow of vindication within his heart. This evening, before Vespers, he would have to confess his petty gloating, but he would postpone his remorse until then.

"Very well," Dupin said, his expression now calm and imperturbable. "Draw a purse from the treasury — ask Pere Auguste to note its expenditure as "charity," and give it to the mademoiselle in lieu of a dowry gift. Then arrange a place for her

at the Convent of Ste. Jeanne. The abbess will tend to her distress and welcome her into their community there. Now leave me to my ministrations." He retreated from the doorway and pulled the door closed.

As quickly as he could, Bertrand retrieved the funds and made his way downstairs to the room where Madeleine waited, her fingers twined around a mother-of-pearl rosary. Bertrand took a moment to gather his thoughts and present the best possible face for his troubled visitor.

"Mademoiselle," he said, "the abbé is aware of your difficulty and has proposed a solution which, if I were you, I would seriously consider." Praying for God's forgiveness for the maiden's misfortune, the abbot's licentiousness and his own inability to do more for Madeleine, Bertrand outlined the abbot's proposal.

"Sœur Robine, of the Convent of St. Jeanne, will treat you like a daughter," he began, hoping against hope that his words would bring comfort rather than despair.

The fragmentation of leadership within the Catholic Church ended in 1417, but the work of consolidating power once more in the hands of the pope has just begun. The idea of the pontiff as sole authority comes into question as cardinals and archbishops insist on their right to act as advisors to the Holy See. In keeping with the spirit of the times, the Church also develops a taste for art and culture that reflects the return to classical themes. Priests become patrons of artists and collectors of art, and many amass sizable fortunes. At the other extreme, people who deplore the increasing interest in material matters shown by the Church grow louder in their opposition. The spirit of reform rises.

A Century of Decisions

The end of the Great Schism (1378-1417) and the recentralization of the papacy in Rome (and only in Rome) signals a period of consolidation of power for the Church.

Papal bulls and proclamations by a series of councils during the 15th and 16th centuries set out official church policy with regard to witches and heretics, the prohibition of books opposing papal authority and the condemnation of individuals who dare to protest openly against the practices of the church. From these councils, Church policies arise that determine the course of Catholicism for centuries to come.

The Council of Constance (1414-1418), which ends the Great Schism and places Martin V on the papal throne, also speaks out in condemnation of the heresies of the Czech preacher Jan Hus and the English don John Wyclif. Both these precursors of Protestantism rail against the amassed wealth of the Church and its involvement in secular power. Given safe conduct to Constance, Hus goes unwittingly to his own trial and condemnation. By

order of the Council of Constance, Jan Hus is burned at the stake in 1415.

Two decades later, the Council of Basel-Ferrara-Florence (so called because it convenes in three separate locations) attempts, but ultimately fails, to heal the rift between the Roman and Eastern churches. A revival of Hussite beliefs among those who attended the gatherings at Basle prompts Pope Eugenius IV to reconvene the council in Ferrara, where he tries unsuccessfully to reconcile with the patriarch of the Greek Orthodox Church. A third version of the council meets in Florence and hammers out an agreement, which is destined to fail, with the eastern empire. Rebellion within the church, focusing on whether or not the pope's power should exceed that of his advisory cardinals, leads to the short-lived appointment of Felix V as a rival pope. Though Felix abdicates under pressure and the Council disbands, the bitter taste of dissent remains to undermine future attempts at bringing the leaders of the church under one ecumenical roof.

Between the end of the Council of Basle-Ferrara-Florence in 1445 and the convocation of the Fifth Lateran Council in 1512, comes more than half a century of struggle over beliefs, practices and the secular role of the church. The Lateran V Council, convened by Pope Julius II, addresses the concerns that plagued the church since the last of the councils. In the face of rising opposition to the Church by remnants of Hussites, Lollards and other incipient groups that seek to find God without the authoritarian trappings of the Church, Lateran V decrees that salvation is impossible outside the auspices of the Church. Responding to the invention of the printing press and the relative ease with which printed matter could find its way into the hands of the increasingly literate population, the Council also establishes the conceit of the Vatican *imprimatur*, which forbids the printing of any books without papal approval. Finally, as the Church moves steadily into the halls of commerce and finance, Lateran V lifts the ban on usury, thus allowing the collection of interest on loans and ensuring that the Church, too, can profit from the borrowing and lending of money.

By the time of the Council of Trent (1545-63), the Church's failure to stamp out opposing or unorthodox views becomes all too evident. Martin Luther's new Protestantism gains footholds in many European countries and the Church sees its political power failing as national interests adopt various dissident faiths as their own. To combat this tide and to elucidate once and for all the binding dogmas of the Catholic Church, the Council of Trent meets over a period of two decades to hammer out the basis of faith. By ruling that only the Church may interpret Scripture and by increasing the authority of priests and priestly orders, the Council of Trent ultimately sides with the forces of retrogression.

Decadence, Devotion and Dissent

The Church seeks throughout the 15th and 16th centuries to present a uniform face to a world growing increasingly secular and political. Within its fold, however, disparate tendencies eat away at internal unity. This period manifests extremes of decadence rarely equaled before or later. In contrast, proponents of simplicity and piety raise their voices in a desperate cry for reform within the arms of Holy Mother Church. When reform fails, the voices grow louder and true dissidence and defiance arise.

Corruption escalates as high-ranking members of the Church æ bishops, cardinals and archbishops æ amass all sorts of luxuries, including fine works of art, mistresses, monetary wealth and lands.

Although not the first of the popes to garner a reputation for licentiousness and excess, Pope Alexander VI, born Rodrigo Borja (later changed to Borgia), epitomizes the depths of decadence to which many churchmen fall during the Renaissance. Occupying the papal seat from 1492-1503, Alexander VI sets the tone for the behavior (or misbehavior) of Church officials for many years to come. An urbane, educated, cultured member of one of Rome's most influential and powerful families, Alexander manages to establish himself not only as a patron of the arts but also as a grand carouser. Bullfights, gambling, excess and orgies mark his papacy. The lesser fathers of the Church follow the examples set by their pontiff and indulge not only in similar pursuits of pleasure but also in such questionable practices as nepotism and simony. The widespread use of family connections to fill vacancies within the Church leads to the ironic emergence of dynastic regimes (unusual in a religion that espouses clerical celibacy and chastity).

Simony, or the sale of sacraments, indulgences and other Church benefits, reflects the growing association of the Church with mercantile powers. The pope, as a political leader in his own right, claims the authority to act in the name of God. Renaissance popes, more often than not, realize the connection between material wealth and political power æ and act accordingly.

Various movements arise within the Church in efforts to redress the corrupt practices of the times. The Lollard heresy, condemned in the 14th century, objects to the payment of tithes and the accumulation of material wealth by Church officials and manages to persist underground. The Hussite heresy, which rises in Eastern Europe in the early years of the 15th century, echoes many of the beliefs espoused by Wyclif and his Lollards. Among these beliefs are the insistence on popular access to the instruments of faith, such as the chalice and the Bible, and the promulgation of a simpler, more Christian way of life.

Perhaps the most outspoken critic of the Church is Girolamo Savonarola, a Dominican friar who, in 1494, rises to power in Florence and institutes a theocracy in that city. His attempt at purifying the excesses of the church, however, also extends to the burning of books, art and other "frivolous" items of a secular or lascivious nature. These bonfires of the vanities draw the attention and censure of Church authorities. Savonarola, along with other members of the apocalyptic harbingers known as the Seven Thunders, rouses many to new heights of spiritual fervor; other listeners, ones with involvement in political power and material gain, react less favorably. The voices of these proponents of purity and asceticism gain the enmity not only of the Church but also of powerful magi within the Council of Nine and the Order of Reason. Retribution for this criticism is swift, and the followers of the Thunders target magus and scientist alike as practitioners of devilry and hubris.

Heady with his accomplishments in Florence, Savonarola set his sights on a higher target æ Pope Alexander VI. Condemning the pope for his excesses and his lack of spirituality, Savonarola calls for the pontiff's resignation. Alexander VI responds by excommunicating Savonarola and branding him a heretic. In 1498, the Inquisition visits judgment on Savonarola, burning him at the stake. With the fall of their most powerful leader and his widespread following, the Seven Thunders find their influence broken. One by one, the voices of the Seven Thunders fall silent or succumb to corruption.

A Time of Inquisition

In 1478, Ferdinand and Isabella, joint monarchs of Spain, seek out a means to bring together all their subjects under one faith æ the Catholic Church. Resurrecting the Inquisition as a tool for both secular and clerical politics, the Church attempts to cleanse the nation of heretics, witches, Jews and other undesirables. Although originally appointed by the pope, the Inquisition in Spain soon becomes a battleground for a power struggle between Ferdinand and Pope Sixtus IV.

The Inquisition's first efforts center on the *conversos* æ Jews who had converted to Christianity æ and consist of attempts to purge that group of individuals and families who had reverted to their old faith. The Church's watchdogs, however, also target other groups suspected of harboring ideas and beliefs outside the rigid dogma of the Church.

Typically, small groups of inquisitors visit a target city and deliver a homily delineating specific crimes that constitute heresy. A grace period, usually up to 30 days, follows; during this time of grace, individuals who present themselves to the inquisitors and confess wrongdoings receive the opportunity to reconcile themselves with the Church. Instead of suffering trial and possible execution or impris-



onment, persons who recant their heresy escape with minimal penalties —usually fines. Of course, the Inquisition collects these fines and uses them to support the continued holy war. Only after the expiration of the grace period do the inquisitors hold their *autos da fe*.

The use of torture to extract confessions from individuals accused of heresy or of secretly relapsing into old (non-Christian) ways of worship follows the standard procedure of the times. Because Church regulations prohibit shedding blood or causing the death of the victim, the methods of torture used by the Inquisition are, in fact, somewhat milder (if such a word applies) than secular practices. Nevertheless, the combination of *toca* (water torture), *garrucha* (suspension from a pulley) and *potro* (a form of torture on the rack) frequently cause the subsequent death or permanent debilitation of the victims of these practices. Individuals judged guilty by the Inquisition suffer death by burning. Some of the accused are tried *in absentia* and burned in effigy.

Protestantism

If, therefore, I could by any means comprehend how that same God can be merciful and just who carried the appearance of so much wrath and iniquity, there would be no need of faith. But now, since that cannot be comprehended, there is room for exercising faith, while such things are preached and openly proclaimed: in the same manner as, while God kills, the faith of life is exercised in death....

— Martin Luther, "The Bondage of the Will"

"A safe stronghold our God is still, a trusty shield and weapon," Lisle sang, letting her clear soprano soar aloft, filling the tiny Alpine valley with music. The words and tune belonged to Martin Luther, whose Lutheranism was banned within the

Calvinist town of Mursel, but here, in this secluded spot, no one could report her blasphemous singing. The midmorning sun brought a pleasant warmth to the chilly air of early autumn. Before long, the snows would fall and the goats would move to winter pastures just outside the village.

She would have to forego her music then, for her voice would no doubt reach the ears of the church elders at their daily chores, and she would have to answer to charges of ungodliness. Lisle envied the people of the nearby village of Halse, in the canton just across the mountain pass. They were Lutherans in that village. It was in Halse that Lisle had first heard the hymns of Martin Luther, glorious paeans to God that lifted the spirits and brought the heart closer to heaven, or so she felt.

A soft bark from Brutus, the herd dog who accompanied her every day to the valley, warned Lisle of someone's approach. She ceased her song abruptly, midway through the final chorus. She strained to see the figure plodding slowly toward her. With a flush of pleasure, she recognized the tall, lanky form of Matthias, the rector's son and her betrothed. As he strode toward her, Lisle saw that he carried a piece of white cloth dangling from one hand. With a start, she realized that he held her cap. Self-consciously, Lisle put a hand up to her wheat-blond hair and brushed back the long curls into some semblance of order. She pushed down the desire to run to greet him and simply stood smiling as she waited for him to come closer.

"Good day, Matthias," Lisle said. "What brings you to the meadow so unexpectedly?" She wanted to tell him how pleased she was to see him, but she knew that he would consider such an outward show of affection unseemly.

Matthias nodded his greeting to her. "I finished with my chores early," he said, "and thought to see how my intended wife spent her time. Did you perhaps drop this along the way?" He handed her the cap carefully so as not to touch her hand. "I shall look aside while you make yourself presentable."

Lisle took the cap, her face hot with embarrassment, and hastily donned it, pushing her unruly curls out of sight and tying the long strings securely beneath her chin. "I suppose I did lose it in my haste to keep up with the goats. I should have retrieved it sooner, but I did not think that there was any urgency since I was alone."

Matthias glanced in her direction. Satisfied that she was properly attired, he turned once more to face her. "You are never alone, Lisle," he said, his voice heavy with emphasis. "God is always with us. Would you shame yourself before Him by flaunting your bare head?"

Lisle shook her head. "No, of course not!" she said. "I did not think—"

Matthias raised his hand in a gesture for Lisle to be silent. "I know you did not think," he said, concern and tenderness at war in his voice. "It will be my sweetest duty to teach you to think once we are wedded before God."

Lisle sighed, knowing that any explanations she could give would only plunge her deeper in to a pit of moral lapses.

"I shall try to remember to act in a manner more worthy of you," she said. "I do want to be a good wife to you."

Matthias nodded. "I know that," he said. "And I shall be a good husband to you as well. But you must first remember your duty before God. We are His elect, chosen before our births to one day sit at the foot of his throne in glory. As such, we must take every care to display our godliness and avoid any taint of frivolity and sin."

Lisle lowered her head.

Matthias stood with her for a few minutes more, talking soberly of their future together. Before he left her, he had her kneel beside him in the meadow while he offered a prayer for their lives together. Lisle's mind drifted as her husband-to-be droned incessantly about sobriety and abstinence from all trivialities. She listened instead to the complacent bleating of her goats, finding in their ignorant voices a kind of music. Finally, Matthias rose and, careful to touch only her elbow with the tips of his fingers, assisted Lisle to her feet.

"One more thing," he said as he was already turning to go. "I will say nothing to the elders this time about your singing, but once we are married, I will brook no tolerance of such cacophonous blasphemy. Fare you well, Lisle," he said, turning back toward the village.

Lisle watched him depart, taking with him the joy that had been hers. "Though my voice shall be silent," she whispered to no one in particular, "yet my heart will continue to sing."

The failure of reform within the Church, as evidenced by the martyrdoms of religious reformers such as Hus and Savonarola, leads to the inevitable realization by dissidents that to save their faith, they must seek to do so outside the framework of the Catholic Church. The scholar Erasmus, whose love of learning and reason causes him to believe that reform of the Church is possible, suffers condemnation as a heretic and the banning of his books. Nevertheless, the spirit of reform remains strong — and results in the final and irrevocable splitting of Christianity by the Protestant Reformation. Although the primary instigators of this rift, Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli, intend only to call attention to the abuses within the church and to act as advocates for reform, their actions soon force them to part company with the Church they had once served. To save their faith, they rock the foundations of the Catholic Church. What they start, others continue.

Faith Versus Works

Desire for religious reform manifests in two primary ways: criticism of the structure and practices of the Church and redefinition of the underlying philosophy of salvation. The medieval Church, mimicking the feudal structure of secular politics, concerned itself with material manifestations of power and authority. With the trappings of wealth and ostentation, the Church visibly proclaimed its religious sovereignty in order to assert its ability to survive in a world

full of warring kings and ambitious pagan tribal chiefs. Somewhere along the way, the leaders of the Church discarded the unprofitable image of Christ and his disciples as a band of wandering missionaries who eschewed material possessions in favor of spiritual wealth. Protestantism, at its heart, set out initially to redress that loss of vision.

During the Renaissance, the tangible evidence of the Church's material substance grows even more opulent, its political entanglements more convoluted. Early critics of the church deplore the lack of separation between affairs of the flesh and matters of the spirit. They seek in their protests to erase obvious practices such as the sale of indulgences and the amassing of material wealth. This asceticism remains a major point of contention between the Church and its growing body of dissidents.

The advent of the printing press adds fuel to the fire of protest. By 1500, printing presses exist in most of the major countries of Europe. Gutenberg's famous Bible is only the first of many reproductions of the book that expresses the basis of Christianity. Before the invention of moveable type, copies of the Bible were elaborate (and expensive) hand-lettered documents, jealously guarded and often chained in place in church sacristies or monastery libraries. The writings that lay at the heart of the Church came primarily within the grasp of priests and educated laymen. With the production of mass-published Bibles, though, the exhortations of Paul and other early Christian leaders come to the attention of more than a privileged few for the first time. These teachings enjoin the churches of the second millennium after Christ to put aside their obsession with the world and to concentrate on the souls of their followers.

Soon the arguments of the early leaders of the Church receive unexpected support from even earlier pagan philosophers. The rise of interest in classical philosophers, with their emphasis on the perfection of the human form and spirit, transforms the concept of how to achieve salvation.

The Catholic Church of the Renaissance rewards the rich. Whereas poor people had to pray, fast and perform numerous acts of penance to expiate their sins, wealthy individuals simply bought their way into God's graces (and the Church's) through monetary contributions, political favoritism and other "charitable" acts. In contrast stood the counsels of the Church's founders, particularly St. Paul, whose advice placed poverty and virtue above material wealth and moral corruption. Additionally, the writings of Aristotle concerning the virtues of temperance and the beliefs of the Stoic philosophers regarding self-discipline and abstinence lent credence to a revisionist theology which insisted that salvation came about through individual faith, not through "good works."

As the Protestant movement develops over the course of the Renaissance, this concept of faith (as opposed to

works) undermines the spiritual authority of the Catholic Church. If a God-fearing individual need only believe in Christ's saving power and forgiveness, then why should that same individual need to consult a priest as an intercessor? Several Protestant sects take steps to eliminate even the rituals that stand between God and His faithful. They reject the sacraments, the mass and the veneration of saints as frivolous and superfluous, if not outright sacrilegious.

Protestantism, as it evolves from its beginnings in the late Middle Ages and the early Renaissance, relies less on a community of the faithful than Catholicism. If salvation is attainable through direct intercession (without the intervention of a priest), then it stands to reason that each individual serves as his or her own priest. This distinction, in fact, cuts to the core of the difference between Protestant and Catholic communities.

Reform or Revolution

By the end of the 16th century, Protestantism makes enormous inroads throughout Europe. In keeping with its emphasis on personal salvation, however, the movement devolves into numerous sects, each headed by a charismatic or influential speaker who attracts a devout and often fanatical following. By the time the Church calls the Council of Trent in 1545 to deal with the threat posed by the new Protestants, the damage to the Church's claim to be "one, holy, and apostolic" is irreversible. Although the Counter Reformation seeks to address (belatedly) some of the problems within the Church, it is too late to do much more than define Catholicism for individuals who remain within the Church.

Like so many dissidents before him, Martin Luther never intends to cause a permanent break with the Church — at least not in the beginning. A brilliant Aristotelian scholar and translator of the Bible, Luther reasons his way to the concept that selling indulgences is not only unnecessary but also erroneous. His objections, publicly posted on the door of the church in Wittenberg, Germany, where he holds a professorship, challenge the Church's authority over the souls of its followers. By forcing the hand of the bishops and, by extension, of the pope himself, Luther sparks a controversy that grows larger as word of his radical proposals spreads across Europe.

At first, Pope Leo X ignores the charges levied against the Church by the brash Augustinian monk. This inaction spurs Luther to greater heights of confidence and inspires him to continue to excoriate the Church, extending his catalog of misdeeds to include other practices such as pilgrimages and the veneration of saints. The peasants, who often found themselves sorely taxed by constant tithing to the Church, flock to Luther's liberating message of justification by faith, not works. As

Luther's support grows, Pope Leo finally realizes the implications, and the danger, inherent in Luther's words, and he summons the errant monk to Rome.

Reminded, perhaps, of the fate of Jan Hus, whose summons to the Council of Constance resulted in his death at the stake, Luther refuses to answer the summons. Granted refuge and sanctuary by Frederick the Wise, the German elector who rules Wittenberg, Luther remains in Germany while the storm caused by his protest breaks over his head. Eventually, Luther does stand trial. Threatened with excommunication if he fails to recant his stand on the sale of indulgences and certain of his other objections, Luther refuses to compromise his convictions. Declared anathema and branded a heretic by the Church, which he dared to criticize publicly and successfully, Luther gives birth to a new form of Christianity; people who follow him became known as Lutherans.

In Switzerland, Ulrich Zwingli voices his own opposition to the Church. Like Luther, Zwingli begins as a reformer and ends up as the founder of a new sect of Protestantism, one that denies the authority of bishops and regards the sacrament of communion as merely symbolic.

Luther's successful defection from the Catholic Church signals an outburst of similar protests, each of which gives rise to its own peculiar form of Protestantism. Over the next century, Calvinists, Anabaptists and other groups announce

their separation from Catholicism, and from other Protestant religions. Each sect claims it possesses the true doctrines that lead to salvation, and few of them agree with one another. The only point they do agree upon is that they do not accept the authority of the pope.

Though they do not begin as nationalist movements, many new Protestant religions gain political support from the countries where they arise. In Switzerland, a series of bitter and bloody wars divides the country as some cantons embrace the teachings of Zwingli or Calvin, while others remain within the embrace of the Catholic Church. Religious diversity does not, however, lead to religious tolerance. The custom which dictates that a country should follow the religion of its ruler prevails throughout Europe. In lands where rulers adopt one form of Protestantism, Catholics and rival Protestants alike become targets of persecution. The Protestant churches quickly denounce all who oppose them as heretics and blasphemers.

Perhaps the greatest blow to the authority of the Catholic Church, however, comes not from Luther, but from an English king. In 1534, Henry VIII defies the authority of the Church, which refused to grant his request for an annulment of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon. His new church, called the Church of England (or the Anglican Church), differs little from the Catholic Church



in practices and theology; its main point of divergence consists of the acknowledgement of Henry as the ultimate authority in both spiritual and secular matters. Anglican Protestantism demonstrates, once and for all, that the Catholic Church can no longer be certain of asserting its power over princes. This defiance of papal authority and the substitution of secular leadership in religious matters marks the end of the period of faith that characterized the Middle Ages. From this time forward, Church and State grow steadily further apart from one another.

The Life of Faith

Although all the Protestant sects agree on their opposition to the authority of the Catholic Church, each individual group holds to its own body of beliefs. The Lutherans, who enjoy their primary base of support in Germany, propound the doctrine of justification by faith alone. To this end, they proscribe the sale of indulgences and the need for an intercessor between God and man. Lutherans also believe that the Scriptures are the final authority in all spiritual matters and advocate the usage of the common tongue in religious ceremonies. In other ways, however, they retain many trappings in common with Catholics. They keep most of the sacraments and do not prohibit the singing of hymns; in fact, Luther himself composes many songs for use during church services.

The followers of Calvin, who gain a foothold in Switzerland and, later, through the ministry of John Knox, in Scotland, believe that God predestines some men and women for Heaven and others for Hell. They espouse a life of godliness, prohibiting all kinds of frivolous behavior, including recreations such as dancing, drinking, games of any kind, singing, play-going and the reading of nonreligious books. Instead, Calvinists enjoin their followers to live soberly, work hard and fix their minds entirely on the life of the spirit. In their strict division between things of the world and things of the spirit, Calvinists resemble some of the older heresies, such as the Cathars (or Albigensians). Because they do not believe in ostentation or in the depiction of God or other religious figures, Calvinists keep their churches free of adornments such as statues, elaborate stained glass windows or holy pictures.

The Anabaptists, so called because they pronounce all Catholic baptisms invalid and believe that everyone needs to seek a new baptism, suffer persecution by both Catholics and Protestants for this belief. Perhaps the most radical of Protestants, Anabaptists forbid the taking of oaths, due to the Biblical injunctions against taking God's name in vain. In addition, they denounce the concept of private property and return to the early Christian ideal of holding goods in common. Many Anabaptists do not accept the Incarnation of Christ as defined by the Catholic Church, nor do they believe in the use of violence for any reason. From their

origins in Saxony, the Anabaptists, despite fierce persecutions, persist and spread throughout Europe. From them come the Quakers, Baptists and many fundamentalist sects of later centuries.

The Low Countries have their own variety of Protestantism, founded by Jakub Hermans in the late 16th century. Reacting against the strict Calvinism that overtakes parts of Switzerland, Hermans' followers, called Armenians, proclaim the doctrine of free will, maintaining that men and women freely choose salvation or damnation; predestination does not doom anyone from birth. The Armenians also believe that the Crucifixion served as an act of redemption for all who have faith in its power.

Judaism



And he said, take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.

— Genesis 22: 2

Josué and Simona stood with their three children on the docks of Valencia, waiting their turn to board the ship that would take them across the Mediterranean from Spain to sanctuary in the empire of the Turks. A crowd of other Spanish Jews, many of them neighbors of the young couple, also waited nervously, glancing around them at the spectators who had come to view the departure of those who had refused to accept Christianity. Soldiers of the Crown formed silent sentinels, on guard to prevent rioting or other outbreaks of violence. Privately, Josué believed that the soldiers' true purpose was to ensure that no one attempted to slip away from the docks and seek to stay behind.

"Did we forget anything?" Simona asked anxiously for the fourth time in as many hours. Josué nodded. "We have each other and the children," he said, putting a hand on the shoulder of Bernabé, his oldest and, by Talmudic law, a man, and smiling fondly at his daughters Marita and Susana. "We have enough food for the journey and trade goods which we may use as collateral until I have established myself in trade. Most importantly," he continued, touching his long jacket where he concealed a bulky package close to his heart, "we have this." "This," Simona knew, was a copy of the Torah, Josué's most valued possession.

"Look!" Simona said, gesturing toward a small group of people who had broken away from the onlookers and were approaching. She recognized her sister Alonsa and her brother-in-law Miguel. The third person wore the distinctive black-and-white robes of the Dominican friars, while a soldier followed a few paces behind the trio. Simona held her breath as the newcomers stopped a few feet away from her and Josué.

For a long moment, no one spoke as an uneasy tension filled the air around the group. Then Alonsa broke the silence. "We

came to bid you fare well and safe journey," she said, holding out a basket to her sister. "I baked some bread for you and Josué, and there are some sweet cakes for the children."

Simona smiled weakly, remembering the angry words that had formed an impenetrable barrier between the two families since Alonsa and her husband, as new converts to Christianity, refused to shelter Simona and her family when they sought to avoid the edict of expulsion. Instead, Miguel had threatened to report that Josué had attempted to convince his family to recant their new beliefs and re-embrace the Jewish faith.

"Let there be no harsh words among us," Miguel said, "for we may never see each other again in this life."

Josué glared at his wife's kin and tried, for Simona's sake, to bite back the harsh words that rose unbidden to his lips. Finally, he managed to control his anger enough to speak with a halfway civil tongue. "We understand your concern for your Christian law and the need for you to walk carefully on the straight path of your newfound faith."

"There is one thing more," the Dominican spoke up for the first time. He was a young man, and the shape of his eyes and his jutting chin suddenly reminded Simona of her brother-in-law.

"This is Brother Domingo," Alonsa said. He is Miguel's nephew from Castille, recently arrived to help with the purification of the conversos.

"Good friar," Miguel said, feeling a twinge of uneasiness rise from his stomach into his mouth, "I hope we have done nothing to warrant your displeasure. We only try to obey the order to leave Spain as quickly as possible."

Brother Domingo smiled through thin, colorless lips. "We applaud the wisdom of your decision," he said, "since you do not see fit to renounce your false religion and accept the salvation of our Lord, Jesus Christ." Josué noticed that the inquisitor dipped his head in reverence as he uttered the name of the crucified prophet. So, they, too have their gestures and obeisances, he thought. Do they not realize how similar we are in our rituals and practices? "However, you may not take one of our own with you."

Simona felt a sick sensation in her breast and her heart began pounding. "What do you mean?"

"We have come for your son," Brother Domingo said. "During your brief sojourn in your sister's house, Miguel had conversations with his nephew about the true faith of Christ. Your son has chosen to reject his false beliefs and seek baptism in the Church."

Josué looked at his first-born, his grip tightening on the boy's shoulders so that his knuckles grew white with tension. "Is this true?" he demanded. "Did you turn away from the faith of your fathers?"

Bernabé's eyes widened with alarm. "I spoke with my uncle of such things, Father," he said, "but I agreed only in theory that the truth of his religion was possible."

"What a man accepts as a possibility, he soon accepts as a truth," Brother Domingo said. "I declare in the name of the Holy Church that this child is ours."

"You must let him go," Alonsa said, her voice shrill with pleading. "If you refuse, the Inquisition will detain you for questioning æ all of you. We will raise him as our own son, for we have no living children of our own."

Josué turned his gaze to his wife and children, imagining them in the merciless hands of the Inquisition. Then he slowly released his grasp on his son and closed his eyes. "You ask of me what God Himself did not, in the end, require of Abraham. You may have my son for the lives of the rest of my family. We will depart these shores in sorrow, knowing that a part of us has been severed from us forever." He took the basket from Simona, who did not protest, and handed it back to Alonsa. "Take back your gift of bread and sweets, for we shall find them too bitter to eat on our long voyage."

While the Renaissance gives rise to a host of new ideas, philosophies and religions (or rediscovered old ones), it also retains some sinister elements of the Middle Ages. Nowhere is this more evident than in the Renaissance attitude toward the Jews. For centuries, the children of Abraham lived precariously among Christians in Europe. Blamed for the death of Christ, distrusted for their refusal to adopt the official religions of their adopted countries, Jews during the Middle Ages dwelled in segregated communities within (or sometimes outside) Europe's cities. Restricted to certain professions (mostly ones that were forbidden to Christians), Jews suffered criticism and persecution for practicing those very occupations. During the Renaissance, conditions for Jews worsen in most of Europe.

A Precarious Existence

The relationship between Christianity and Judaism reaches a critical point during the late 1400s. Throughout the Middle Ages, Jews in Europe lived under a cloud of uncertainty. Subjected to frequent persecutions, banned from many aspects of society, European Jews were crowded into discrete sections of major cities. Here, they practice the few occupations available to them, laboring as money-lenders, apothecaries, physicians and many other trades labeled undesirable for Christians to pursue. In many parts of Europe, including Spain and Portugal, Jews find a modicum of security. At times, various European rulers seem to appreciate the contributions of the Jewish communities and project a protective attitude toward "their" Jews.

More often, however, Jewish populations within Christian lands survive only because they take great pains not to arouse the anger of their host countries or call undue attention to themselves. Sometimes, this course proves difficult. In an age where clothing serves to identify everyone from nobles to lepers, many countries require Jews to don specific garments or to wear badges

that proclaim their separateness to all eyes. In parts of France, laws force Jews to wear large yellow, circular patches on their clothing. In other parts of Europe, regulations permit them to wear only the coarsest of clothing, thus signifying their lowly social standing.

Although not all Europe's Jewish population lives in the cities, only a few families manage to exist in rural areas. Most Jews prefer the protection of numbers, despite the oppressive conditions they are forced to endure. A significant number of Jews accept Christianity, particularly in Spain, where the monarchs frequently grant them a status of near-equals to born Christians at least for a time. In fact, many *conversos* find niches in Spanish society and achieve a modicum of respect generally not accorded nonconverted Jews. Because Spain's Jews pay taxes only to the crown, Ferdinand finds it personally profitable to ensure that "his" Jews remain safe from many of the persecutions inflicted on Jews outside his lands.

Though most of Europe takes pains during the 15th century to rid itself of the Jews, the Iberian peninsula and parts of Italy still retain sizable Jewish populations at the beginning of the Renaissance. Poland, as well, contains the largest single gathering of Jews until the mid-1600s.

A Tradition of Scholarship

While many Jews in Europe practice (and excel at) those few occupations permitted them, they also keep alive a devotion to knowledge, particularly in scholarly and spiritual matters. A tradition of Talmudic scholarship arises in Spain and in other parts of Europe. Many rabbis devote their lives to the study of the Torah, which serves the practical purpose of delineating the laws of Judaism and the spiritual purpose of outlining God's plan for his chosen ones.

In addition, the Sephardic Jews of Spain develop a mystical approach to the scriptures. This form of study, called the Kabbalah, appears sometime in the late 13th century with the publication of the *Zohar al ha-Torah*, or the *Book of Splendor on the Law*.

In essence, Kabbalism borrows from ancient Gnostic traditions in its conception of creation as a product of the interplay between God and the Devil, each of whom has both male and female forms. All existence is seen through the mirror of warring dualities: light and darkness, good and evil, male and female, action and passivity. The Jewish mystical tradition also supports the idea of the transmigration of souls, rather than an afterlife in the Christian sense.

Kabbalistic scholars search the scriptures for hidden meanings in the belief that many passages contain encoded truths which need deciphering in order to provide a true understanding of their message. Over the years, these mystics develop a series of techniques used to ferret out the truths hidden within other truths. Gematria, the most

widely known of these methods, posits that all numbers have particular meanings. Practitioners of gematria assign numerical values to letters of the alphabet so that names and dates can be translated into numbers and their meanings revealed. Notarikon, another method of uncovering hidden messages, posits that certain letters within significant words represented other words that, when translated correctly, reveal a secret message or mystical truth. The third form of decryption favored by Kabbalists, *temurah*, subjects words to a complex process of transformation based on the many Hebrew names of God.

While most Kabbalists approach their studies with reverence, they develop an unfortunate reputation as fortune-tellers and dabblers in the forbidden arts. In Renaissance Europe, they are equated with heretics and followers of witchcraft.

Kabbalism enjoys some support from Christian academics and scholars. In 1486, Italian humanist Giovanni Pico della Mirandola dares to suggest that Jewish mysticism and Christian theology share much common ground. Denounced by the Pope and forbidden to defend his beliefs publicly, he agrees to write an apologia recanting his heretical thoughts. Although he seeks refuge from persecution in France, papal authorities arrest him anyway. Released after a short time, he dies from poisoning shortly thereafter.

Another Christian supporter, Johannes Reuchlin of Bavaria, engages in a lengthy controversy with the ex-rabbi Johannes Pfefferkorn, now a Dominican monk turned rabidly anti-Semitic. Pfefferkorn's *Judenspiegel*, *Mirror of the Jews*, advocates nothing less than the destruction of all Hebrew documents, including the Talmudic scriptures. In response, Reuchlin publishes a formal protest defending Jewish scholarship and advocating mandatory study of Hebrew in universities. For his actions, Reuchlin undergoes a trial for heresy; surprisingly, through the efforts of Erasmus and other respected Christian and humanist scholars, he wins his trial and gains a small victory for tolerance. His experience, however, proves the exception rather than the rule.

From Tolerance to Terror

By the 1400s, both France and England have expelled their Jewish populations. After that time, most Jews who proclaim their faith openly live in Spain, Portugal or southern Italy, which harbor a great cultural center for Judaism. For a time, Spain and Portugal prove marginally more tolerant of their Jewish residents. Near the end of the 15th century, however, national and religious fervor takes an ugly turn. Riding on a tide of nationalism and Christian unity after the defeat of the Moslems in Granada, Spain becomes obsessed with the desire to eliminate all forms of non-Christian religions. For a time, the Spanish authorities seem content to focus

solely on Jews who persist in adhering to their traditional faith. Over the last half of the 14th century, a series of statutes requires Jews to convert to Christianity in order to remain in Spain. In the meantime, Church authorities perceive those Jews who do not convert as a threat to the *conversos*. By 1492, the mandate to the Jewish population of Spain is clear: convert or leave the country. Portugal follows suit in 1497. Jews who fail to leave fall victim to a massacre that claims nearly 4,000 Jews in 1506.

Although Spain believes that expulsion can solve its "Jewish problem" and assist in the efforts to Christianize the country, Ferdinand and Isabella fear that some of the *conversos* may renege on their conversions and return to traditional ways. The Inquisition is reinstated in Spain in 1478 for the express purpose of dealing with relapsed Jews. Many Christian Jews, therefore, flee the Iberian peninsula at the end of the century to seek shelter in less inhospitable parts of Europe or to throw themselves on the mercy of the Turks, who prove more tolerant than Christians toward the sons and daughters of Abraham.

While some Jews remain in parts of Europe that had officially expelled them, they must do so either by living as Christians or by maintaining the utmost discretion. Only parts of Italy (including, ironically, Rome) remain open to Jews, and even there, followers of Judaism must abide by many restrictive laws.

Paganism



*O*h, the holly and the ivy,
Now both are full well grown
Of all the trees within the wood,
The holly bears the crown
— "The Holly and the Ivy"
(Old English carol)

Kenton Woodson and his wife Winifred remained behind in the village church after Midnight Mass had ended. The priest's final words, "Go, the Mass is ended," concluded the holy ceremony in honor of the birth of the Christ Child and signaled the beginning of the Yule festival. Tomorrow, the villagers would burn their Yule logs, specially cut and prepared according to the traditional methods; the wood would burn long and warm against the cold winter's day. Kenton, whose surname marked him as the village's wood master, had chosen the logs himself from the nearby stand of trees dedicated to that purpose.

Kenton took a broom made of sweet rushes and swept the church floor carefully, pushing the dust and grime brought in by the villagers toward the rear door of the small stone building. As he did so, he muttered an old charm he learned from his grandmother to send the village's troubles outside with the sweepings. As he worked, Winifred, her arms full of fresh greenery, replenished the decorations along the walls and at the

feet of the statues in the sanctuary. The pine boughs filled the chilly night air with an odor of cleanliness, while the prickly holly leaves and bright red berries with which she adorned likenesses of the Virgin Mother and Saint Stephen, for whom the church was named, added bright color to the cold stone of the statues.

She stood on tiptoe to place a woven crown of ivy, holly berries and mistletoe around the head of the Virgin. "Red for the blood of the little babe grown to manhood, white for the purity of your love and green for the everlasting cycle that begins with this night's birth," she said.

"Hush, woman," Kenton said, giving his wife a broad wink. "The Christian priest may still be nearabouts."

"He's already gone to his lonely bed," Winifred replied, returning her husband's wink with a coy grin. "There's naught but the likes of us still up and around. Sensible folk have gone to their houses to tumble their mates and sleep 'til sunrise."

"We have work to do yet this night," Kenton said. "Our time is just beginning."

"Will it be just the two of us, then, tonight in the old place?" Winifred asked, referring to the oak grove deep within the forest, where she and her husband conducted their own rituals to honor the supplanted gods of England.

Kenton shook his head. "A few will come who have need of us this night," he replied. "Ansel and Mollie wish to speak their troths beneath the Goddess' moon. John Cobble and his wife want their new babe doused in the waters of the Lady's Pond."

"That's the child that was baptized last week, isn't it?" Winifred asked.

"Aye, little Timothy Cobble," Kenton said. "His parents want a thrice-born child, once from woman, once from the God and once from the Goddess."

Winifred chuckled. "He'll be triply blessed then," she said. "I hope this new priest works out better than the last one," she added, as if the thought had just occurred to her.

Kenton grunted an unintelligible reply as he finished with his sweeping. He made a sign for luck over the threshold of the rear doorway before he shut the heavy wooden door and bolted it from the inside.

Winifred, finished with her own tasks, waited for her husband to join her at the front door of the church. Together they walked out into the night. Most of the village was dark, the houses shuttered against the cold. Here and there, however, a few folk slipped silently out of their homes and made their way into the forest.

"Old Father Rupert nearly discovered this place," Kenton said as he and Winifred reached the sacred grove. "It's unfortunate for him, but well for us, that he turned so sickly all of a sudden and petitioned for the bishop to recall him to London. He'll recover there, I expect."

Winifred nodded. "I think Father Brendan will find much to do tending to his own reborn god," she said. "Either that or he's blind to what goes on under his nose."

Kenton made a sign to avert ill luck from his wife's statement. "Let us speak no more of such things, lest we draw them to us," he said. Winifred shrugged in acquiescence. The couple positioned themselves in the center of the grove where they waited as, one by one, the villagers who honored both old and new religions came to present their offerings of winter wheat and jugs of cider to the priest and priestess of the Old Religion.

"Will you accept one more humble offering?"

Winifred gasped as she recognized the voice of the last villager to lay his gift at their feet. She had heard it only an hour ago, reciting the liturgy of the Mass.

"Father Brendan!" she said, her voice caught between fear and amazement.

The young priest gave her a shy smile as he bowed before her and Kenton. Gone were his clerical robes, replaced by sturdy laborer's clothes of the sort worn by the men of the village. "Here, I am simply one of your flock," he replied, "just as in the church you are members of my fold."

Winifred released her breath in relief as she noticed the sprig of mistletoe tied around the priest's wrist.

"Welcome, then, to the grove of the Mother," she said.

Although Europe strives to eradicate all vestiges of non-Christian religions throughout the Middle Ages, paganism manages to survive beneath the surface of the dominant Christian faith. Although Lithuania, the last bastion of state-supported paganism, officially succumbs to Christianity in 1414 with the official conversion of Samogytia, pagan practices still permeate the lives of the common people. Even after the union of Poland and Lithuania in 1569, paganism manages to cloak itself in the trappings of Christianity. The Renaissance reawakens interest in the old traditions throughout most of Christian Europe.

The Persistence of the Old Ways

Despite the efforts of Christian missionaries to bring the Gospel of Christ to the ends of Europe, paganism never completely dies out, at least among the peasants. Old traditions die hard, and many of the old ways never truly die but linger on in folklore and superstitions adhered to by the common people. During the Renaissance, when new ideas surface and old knowledge comes to light once again, paganism enjoys a revival of sorts, though often in Christian disguise.

Christian missionaries, most notably St. Patrick, arrived in Ireland in the fifth century A.D. and made short work of converting the populace to Christianity. In truth, the Church in Ireland simply grafted itself onto pagan roots

after finding many similarities between the druidic nature religions of the Celtic population and the Christian story of the dying and reborn God. Pagan celebrations become Catholic feast days. Although May Day processions purport to honor the Virgin Mary, local pagans use the occasion to venerate the Goddess in her aspect as the mother and consort of God. Farmers still make offerings at sacred wells and springs and sacrifice animals or crops in harvest celebrations; that they assign a saint's name rather than that of a nature deity to their offerings makes little difference.

Though Christianity had established itself as the official religion by the 11th century in Germany and Scandinavia, many practices associated with Norse paganism continue unabated. Pagan midwinter celebrations take on Christian connotations as Yule or Christmas holy festivals. Norse gods and goddesses, like their Celtic counterparts, join the company of saints, many of them with new names. Instead of worshipping Freya, Norse pagans honor "Mary," while the warrior archangel St. Michael receives veneration from those who know him as Thor. Often, no one bothers to change the names of pagan deities; instead, the Church approves the addition of the appellation Saint to the names of these erstwhile gods. The obvious parallels between Odin, who hung for nine days on the world tree, and the crucified Christ make assimilation of Christian beliefs relatively painless for many of the common folk. While paying lip service to the precepts of the Christian church, peasants continue to swear by Odin and make offerings to Thor for good sailing and fruitful travel by sea.

Lithuania holds out as a pagan kingdom until the 15th century; as a result, during the Renaissance, paganism remains in widespread practice. Pagan priests, known as Vurshayten, conduct a variety of ceremonies and rituals in honor of Pegrubre, the god of growth and flowering. Eventually, the feast of St. George's Day (April 23) co-opts Pegrubre's holiday, thus making it possible for the local population to continue to honor this god while appearing to adhere to Christianity. The people of Eastern Europe's Baltic lands continue to offer thanks to their harvest gods and nature deities despite official prohibitions.

For the most part, the Church (whether Protestant or Catholic) learns to look the other way with regard to many local pagan customs. So long as the common folk attend mass, receive the sacraments, tithe regularly and give visible support to the precepts of Christianity, their quaint folk customs hold little interest for the Church. In fact, many local priests sympathize with the pagan population. It is not until the resurgence of the papal Inquisition in the late 1500s that paganism, equated with witchcraft and devil-worship, comes to the attention of Church authorities.

Classical Studies, Classical Gods

The Renaissance's reawakened interest in the classics sparks a renewal of old pagan cults, such as those of Dionysus and Mithras, in the lands that first adopted Christianity – Greece and Rome. The humanism and classicism that sparked the Renaissance in Italy had its roots in the culture of the Greeks and Romans. Due to the resurgence of popularity of the ancient gods of Greece and Rome, Dionysian, Mithraic and other cults honoring the Hellenic and Roman pantheons soon come back into their own.

Architecture, sculpture, art and literature all evidence a new awareness of pagan gods and goddesses. Decorative friezes and statuary depicting the Olympian and Roman deities spring up throughout Italy. Authors seek inspiration from the Muses, while painters immortalize scenes from ancient mythology æ many of which are mixed with Christian overtones.

Many wealthy patrons of the arts, particularly in Italy, commission pagan-style temples to adorn their private courtyards. In contrast to other parts of Europe, where paganism flourishes among the unlettered villagers and peasants and takes the form of superstitions or local folk customs, classical paganism holds its primary appeal here for the privileged, or at least educated. Even the clergy is not immune to the appeal of classical mythology: Influential churchmen commission many of the works of art depicting pagan themes.

Persecution and Retreat

Near the end of the 15th century, both Protestant and Catholic authorities become concerned with the coexistence of pagans in their midst. The witch-hunts of the Renaissance seek as their primary targets persons who worship the devil and openly defy the Church. Although this latter category includes many Jews and Christian heretics, the newly reconstituted papal Inquisition (as opposed to the Inquisition of Spain) also catches many pagans in its net. Beginning with the publication of the *Malleus Maleficarum* in 1486, the Inquisition has at its disposal a definition of actions that constitute witchcraft. These activities now include many customs once ignored as superstitions or local customs.

Although many pagans die at the hands of both Protestant and Catholic witch-hunters, many more retreat into hiding, burying their true beliefs beneath the outward show of Christian faith, something the centuries have taught them to do very well.



Infernalism



After all this, the Judges and jury of the Court of this Town of Dillingen, by virtue of the Imperial and Royal Prerogative and Rights of his Right Reverence, Herr Marquard, bishop of Augsburg... gave the verdict that the aforesaid Walpurga Hausmännin be punished and dispatched from life to death by burning at the stake as being a maleficent and well-known witch and sorceress... and her body to be torn five times with red-hot irons. The first time outside the town hall in the left breast and the right arm, the second time at the lower gate in the right breast, the third time at the mill brook outside the hospital gate in the left arm, the fourth time at the place of execution in the left hand. But since for nineteen years she was a licensed and pledged midwife of the city of Dillingen, yet has acted so vilely, her right hand with which she did such knavish tricks is to be cut off at the place of execution...

—Fugger Newsletter, "The Judgment of a Witch"

Gunter von Baden, Baron of Gruenwold, listened with undisguised pleasure as his agent made his report. When the nervous young man had finished his carefully prepared recitation of recent events, the baron tossed a bag of coins at his feet.

"So," he said, "my rival is dead at last. And his lands?"

"They are yours for the taking, my lord," the agent replied. "His death came unexpectedly, and his estates are in turmoil."

The baron nodded. "I shall dispatch troops on the morrow to bring order to my unfortunate neighbor's troubled realm. You may carry my condolences back to his widow. He has no heir?"

The young man shook his head. "No, Lord Baron," he said. "There was a son, but he died of a mysterious sickness last fall." "His widow is not with child, I presume," the baron continued, wishing to make certain of his good fortune.

"She has been unable to conceive since her recent accident, when she fell from the tower."

"A most unfortunate happenstance," the baron said, not bothering to hide the sneering tone in his voice. "You have done well," he said, "to bring me this news. You may take a meal in the kitchens before you leave."

The man bowed his way out of the baron's presence. Left alone in his lushly decorated chambers, the baron sat for a few minutes and considered his recent spate of luck. He would have to please his Master tonight for the death of his rival.

Pulling on the bell rope beside his chair, the baron summoned a servant. "Tell the new chambermaid—the one caught pilfering the linens last night—to present herself to me in my study at midnight. And tell her to bathe..."

After the servant departed, the baron rose from his chair to begin his own preparations. Just before midnight, his body still moist from his ritual bath and scented oils, he donned a black robe



of Cathayan silk and poured for himself a goblet of wine infused with the herbs that would open his senses to the presence of his dark Master. Thus prepared, he made his way to his study in the tower of his stronghold. There, in the room he had dedicated to his Infernal rituals, he inscribed the warding circle and the pentagram of containment, lit a brazier of cloying incense and awaited the arrival of his sacrifice.

At midnight, the door to his study opened and the young chambermaid stepped shyly into the room and curtsied to her lord. The baron stood braced against a pillar in the center of his study, safe within a circle inscribed in colored powders.

"Shut the door and remove your clothing before you approach me," the baron commanded, his voice husky with desire and deepened by the herbs that accelerated his perceptions. The girl, he saw, was comely—particularly now that she had washed away the grime and soot from her body.

Frightened, the chambermaid hesitated until a barked command from the baron startled her into obedience. "Now, approach me and kneel," Gunter said, opening his robe. "Do not disturb the markings as you come forward. You have committed a crime against my house and now you must atone for your actions." The girl's eyes went wide as her face turned red with shame. "Would you prefer a beating?" the baron asked, enjoying her discomfort even as his Master, whose presence he felt stirring within the confines of the pentagram, reveled in this degradation of an innocent maiden. Tears streamed down the girl's cheeks as she complied. The baron steadied himself and chanted softly the words of summoning as the girl ministered to him.

When she had finished, the baron—his lust sated—lifted the girl's chin in his hand and studied her humiliation. With his other hand, he drew a dagger from a pocket in his robe and quickly sliced her throat from ear to ear. The girl tried to scream, but her severed vocal cords prevented her from making a sound louder than an agonized gurgle. The baron lifted her in his arms as she collapsed against him and carried her to the edge of the warding circle. Facing the pentagram, which now seemed, to his altered senses, to shimmer with an unseen but nevertheless tangible presence, he cradled her body so that her head dangled outside the circle. Her blood spurted from her throat into a shallow bowl just within the pentagram. When he was certain the girl was dead, the baron lowered her body to the ground.

"With the blood of this sacrifice, who has been corrupted to your glory, I tender my gratefulness to you for your aid in overcoming my enemy. Take her soul to your place of torment and enjoy her in your everlasting darkness as I have done for you in this earthly realm."

Having completed his task, Baron Gunter spoke the words of banishing and, once he was certain that his Master was no longer present, he stepped carefully outside the warding circle. His efforts had exhausted him and the herbs would ensure that he slept well into the day. Secure in the knowledge that his servant and sometime acolyte would dispose of the body on the morrow,

the baron retired to his bedroom to recover from his ordeal and contemplate the expansion of his domain.

Throughout the history of Christianity runs a parallel history of Infernalism. The concept of dual gods perpetually opposed and perpetually at war with each other—with Creation hanging in the balance, provides one of the oldest story cycles in the history of religion. During the Renaissance, devil worship (or Satanism) experiences an upsurge as part of the new personification of the Devil created by the Church of the Middle Ages. Infernalists of the 15th and 16th century, though they practice a religion that is not new, reflect the manners of the times. Many are cultured men and women who make a deliberate choice to bargain away their souls for earthly power. These cunning individuals, in many cases, manage to stay one step ahead of the Inquisition—unlike the poor hedge-witches and pagans who mistakenly bear the label of devil-worshiper.

The Roots of Infernalism

People who traffic with darker powers form one of the most secret elements of the Renaissance. In an age when many voices protest the excesses of the Catholic Church, and Protestant sects espouse a variety of beliefs, it is not surprising that some individuals carry their hatred of the Church to its extreme: the veneration of the archenemy of God.

Some Infernalists come by their beliefs through adherence to the ancient philosophy of Gnosticism. Gnostics believe in God as the supreme being but not as the Creator of the world. Instead, the *Demiurge*, a being equal in power to God, created the world as a means of entrapping the spirit in matter. From the perpetual struggle of spirit to free itself and return to its original state of cosmic harmony comes the duality that permeates all of existence. Good and evil, darkness and light, order and chaos, male and female all represent aspects of this dichotomy.

Evidence of Gnosticism finds expression in many religions, from the earliest Christian writings of St. Paul to the secret doctrines of the cult of Mithras to the Kabbalistic teachings of the Jews. Gnosticism surfaced in the Middle ages in several forms: the Manichean, Cathar and Albigensian heresies all contained a seed of Gnostic dualism at their cores. In most cases, however, believers in Gnosticism adhered to the worship of the "good" God and attempted to live lives of extreme asceticism. By denying the things of the flesh, Gnostics sought to purify themselves to such a degree that their spirit could put aside its physical prison and regain its true, intangible form in the immaterial realm.

There are others, however, who choose to serve not God, but Mammon—the embodiment of the god of matter. These worshipers of the sinister side of the cosmic

duality, while they are, in fact, Infernalists, at least understand that they form a part of a unity.

Other Infernalists choose to deal with some Infernal spirit because of their lust for power, forbidden knowledge, material wealth, sexual conquest or other temptations of the flesh. Lured by the promise of untold riches and power, these individuals act not from any philosophical motivation but solely from self-interest.

Additionally, there are false Infernalists—men and women who believe that they have made bargains with the Devil or who have, without any true conviction, gone through the motions of desecrating the sacraments and rituals of the Church. The Church condemns these quasi-Infernalists with the same enthusiasm as it does the true believers in Satanic powers.

Witch-hunts During the Renaissance

The publication of the *Malleus Maleficarum* in 1486, in conjunction with the papal bull *Summis desiderantes* in 1484, gives the Church ammunition for conducting a witch-hunt on a scale heretofore unseen. In addition to targeting persons who knowingly serve the Devil and who make pacts with demons, these documents also list numerous practices and customs that had once been considered nothing more than curious forms of local superstitions and folklore. The expansion of the definition of “witchcraft” to include herbalists, midwives, wise women and pagans of all sorts guarantees that the papal Inquisition, which resurfaces in the mid-1500s, does not lack for victims.

True Infernalism consists of deliberate attempts to mock Christian practices and rituals or to venerate the Devil in place of Christ. The practices of Infernalists differ greatly from those of pagans and witches, whose beliefs predate Christianity.

Whereas pagans and practitioners of the old religions employ their own symbols and rituals to invoke the blessings or curses of their deities, Infernalists pervert Christian (and particularly Catholic) ceremonies. Basing their veneration of Satan on the principle that the Devil represents everything that God (or Christ) is not, Infernalists perform Christian rituals in reverse or use sacramental vessels in perverted or inverted ways. Thus, they display crosses upside down, and they depict Christ, the Virgin and the saints in lewd situations or defaced and mutilated.

The Black Mass becomes the chief ceremony of Infernalists. Frequently celebrated by apostate or renegade priests (some of whom still remain active in the Church), this mockery of Catholicism’s holiest ceremony takes place on unholy ground—either a spot especially prepared for the purpose or in a deconsecrated church. Traditionally held at

midnight, considered the hour most amenable to malevolent or diabolic spirits, the Black Mass consists of recitations of prayers in reverse (or with the substitution of Satan’s name for God’s), the desecration (rather than the consecration) of the Host and the befouling of the sacramental wine. The ceremony most often culminates in an orgy of sexual excess, in blatant parody of the Church’s strictures regarding chastity. Some notorious Black Masses, such as those celebrated by the Abbé Voisin, use a naked woman’s body as the altar.

Other practitioners of Infernalism include ritual attempts to summon demons through the use of warding circles and pentagrams, the sacrifice of certain animals—or, in the case of Gilles de Rais, infants and young boys—to gain the favor of infernal powers and the casting of curses on enemies or rivals.

Not all who participate in Infernalist practices such as the Black Mass do so for religious reasons. The Renaissance spirit of reasoned discovery and the emphasis on humanistic studies leads many to question the validity of religion. In some cases, the deliberate mockery of Christianity becomes both a symbol of revolt against the monolithic control exercised by the Church and a repudiation of its excesses. Many participants belong to the titled or aristocratic classes, jaded individuals with too much time and too little to do. Infernalism becomes a trifling fad among many members of the European courts and, some believe, in the halls of the Vatican itself.

Infernalists in Hiding

Although the Church attempts to root out witches and devil-worshippers, it often misses the most dedicated Infernalists altogether. While the Inquisition sees witches and diabolists everywhere and zealously roots out any who are “suspect” (particularly if they represent a threat to the Church’s power or authority), the true Infernalists often remained hidden. In fact, some who make bargains with the Devil cloak themselves in priestly vestments and attain great power within the Church as a reward for services to their demonic masters.

Although both power and prestige offer wealthy or noble Infernalists protection from discovery, location proves a significant factor as well. In Spain, the Inquisition works as diligently to uncover heretics and blasphemers as it does to unmask relapsed *conversos*. France, however, presents a study in laxity. Numerous cases brought to trial result in acquittal or “rehabilitation,” particularly if the accused possesses influence with the Crown. The German Emperor Charles V actually attempts to reduce sorcerous practices to civil, rather than religious, matters. In Italy, influential families such as the de’ Medicis and the Borgias use their political power to shield members of their courts suspected of Infernalism or dabbling in magick of any kind. Small

towns and rural communities pay more attention to witches and devil-worshippers than large cities; perhaps the greater focus on spirituality and moral living contributes to the watchfulness of villagers.

The precepts laid out in the *Malleus Maleficarum* define so many acts as indicative of witchcraft and devilry that almost anyone could, in theory, come under suspicion of wrongdoing. In reality, the practices detailed in the *Malleus Maleficarum* more often lead to the entrapment of individuals innocent of true devil-worship. The standard procedures of detecting witches, including denunciation by acquaintances, lead to many wrongful accusations. Once caught in the grip of the Inquisition, however, and subjected to torture and prolonged interrogations, even the innocent confess to crimes in order to gain an end to their agony.

Astrology

Who sees the eternal fires
With fixed laws move on their heavenly way,
How each with each conspires;
Uneven their array,

Yet, varying, they one ordered scheme obey;

— Luis de León, "Night of Stars"

Giulia stood on the balcony of her father's country house and listened to the sounds of the night. Far from the noisome crowds and fetid humors of Venice, she felt at once peaceful and excited. By all rights, she should be abed, but the worrisome tempers of her mother and younger sisters made sleep impossible. Signore Carrigiere, the astrologer, had spent most of the evening secluded with her father. Although no one had bothered to inform her of the substance of their conversation, Giulia knew that her parents desired to consult with the learned scholar regarding her betrothal to Basilio de Locci.

A wisp of a cloud crossed the moon's path, altering the pale light that barely illuminated the terraced gardens below the balcony. The shift in the play of shadows drew the girl's attention to the sky. Aside from a few ghostly trails of cloudy mist, the heavens were clear. Thousands of stars salted the blackish purple sky, crowned by the luminance of the full moon.

Quickly, she sought and found the constellation of her birth æ the noble Lion. Not an auspicious sign for a modest woman: So Signore Carrigiere had informed her mother just last year, unaware that Giulia lurked, listening, in the room next to her mother's chambers. Those born under the sign of Leo, the astrologer had remarked with concern, possessed fiery tempers and flaunted themselves shamelessly for the sake of drawing the attention and admiration of others.

Giulia shrugged at the memory and laughed softly in the darkness. She stared at the celestial lion, caught forever in his noble stance, and wished briefly that she could enjoy the same

profound understanding of Leo's starry form that the astrologers possessed. What message would the celestial lion have for his flame-haired, earth-bound daughter?

Basilio would need a lioness, Giulia thought. Born under the sign of the Water Bearer, the gentle youth was only a few months older than she, yet so far removed from the ways of the world that he seemed many years her junior. Basilio's father enjoyed great prestige as an ally of the leading families of Venice; his son would need to evince the same masterful command of politics and finance to continue meriting the trust and confidence of the city's leaders. Unfortunately, Basilio preferred the life of a reclusive scholar. Without Giulia's guidance, he would soon lose the privileges and luxuries his father had so carefully nurtured.

A sudden gust of wind reminded Giulia of the lateness of the hour. Her mother would soon come to her room to make certain she was safely in bed. Tomorrow, Giulia knew, her parents would deliver the astrologer's recommendations as to the most propitious day for the betrothal ceremony. Giulia's curiosity could wait.

As she turned to leave the balcony for the warmth of her small bedroom, Giulia cast one last look at the sky. From near the Lion's tail, a sparkling star seemed to detach itself and plummet earthward in a fiery streak across the heavens. Giulia gasped as she watched the falling star disappear into the darkness.

The death of a star, everyone knew, boded ill for someone. Giulia tried to tell herself that there were many others born when the sun entered the Lion's domain. The comet did not necessarily correspond to her. The betrothal would take place at the appointed time. Signore Carrigiere could not possibly know of the star's decline and thus could not predict doom for the joining of her own house with that of Locci. Putting her fear firmly out of her mind, Giulia turned her back to the heavens and retreated to her room. There, for a long time, she lay sleepless, with visions in her head of a lion stalking restlessly across the sky, looking for the part of itself which was lost forever.

Astrology — the study of the effects of celestial bodies on earthly affairs — occupies a central place in the Renaissance. Since earliest history, the desire to interpret the natural world and make sense of the universe has remained one of humanity's most fundamental motivations. The belief that the movements of the stars through the heavens affect what happens on earth forms the basis for a complex system of correspondences that link the planets and constellations to worldly events. As a metaphysical science, astrology occupied a prestigious place in the civilizations of Babylon, Egypt, Greece, Rome and other ancient cultures. During the Middle Ages, interest in astrology waned somewhat; associated with paganism in many cases, astrology came under censure by the Christian Church in Europe. Byzantine Christians, however, had little trouble reconciling astrology with their own world-view. In the Islamic realms, astrologers occupied honored places in society,

although they, too, came under criticism by Muslim judges and philosophers. Jewish Kabbalists incorporated astrological phenomena into their studies of the Talmud and into their divinatory practices.

The Renaissance sees a rebirth of interest in astrology, partially linked to its relationship to early classical writings. In Spain, due to the presence of a large Muslim population, astrological texts appear in translation from their original Arabic, thus bringing astrology into popularity in the Spanish courts.

At the same time that astrology peaks in respectability and credibility, however, the cosmological discoveries of Copernicus erode the premise which lies at the core of astrology. The rise of astronomy, with its heliocentric basis, challenges astrology's earth-centered theories and principles. The end of the Renaissance and the beginning of the Age of Enlightenment relegates astrology to the status of a dead pseudo-science, suitable only for charlatans and the superstitious masses. During the heyday of the Renaissance, though (and even beyond, among some), astrology is more than a simple science — it is a means by which to determine the influences of the heavens upon the earth, to mark auspicious or unfortunate events and times, and to shape one's destiny.

The Dance of the Stars

For centuries, humans have looked to the stars for guidance in the belief that the movements of celestial bodies affected the fates of individuals.

Early astrology developed alongside religion. Priests and seers used their observations of the heavens as a means of divination, and they evolved methods of studying the positions of the constellations and the movements of the planets in order to determine propitious moments for certain activities. The earliest religions revolved around the deification of the sun and moon (usually as god and goddess, respectively). The movements of those heavenly bodies appeared to control such major forces as day and night, the tides and the seasons. Thus, it became important to be able to predict patterns in the movements of the gods in their starry abode. Lesser gods and goddesses became associated with the constellations, filling the sky with heavenly beings who presided over events on earth.

Priests and astrologers devised methods for tracking the movements of sun, moon, stars and planets. The calculations of Greek mathematicians, the sophisticated measuring instruments of the Babylonians and the Egyptians, and the stone monuments of the Celtic druids perfected the art of determining the positions and courses of the celestial bodies throughout the year. These early astrologers took note of which stars or planets figured most prominently at certain times, thus noting which gods or goddesses governed the seasons, planting and the harvest, childbirth



and other notable recurring events. In this fashion, a series of correspondences emerged.

Deviations in the perceived patterns of celestial movements — comets and eclipses — portended momentous events: the deaths of rulers, or the onset of drought or floods. These things, too, had their place in the cosmic order. In all things, the macrocosm reflected the microcosm, or, as stated in Hermetic philosophy: "As above, so below." Needless to say, astrology influenced a substantial portion of both Jewish Kabbalistic study and Hermetic magick.

Different forms of astrology developed in order to focus on specific aspects of world and individual affairs. The position of the stars at the time of a person's birth supposedly determines an individual's temperament, character, success or failure in marriage, most likely occupation and most probable time of death. Referred to as natal astrology, this form of the "science" constitutes its most popular and widely known variant.

Astrological correspondences assign various portions of the human body to certain stars or planets (and to the protection of the gods or goddesses associated with those celestial bodies). Physicians and surgeons use medical astrology to determine the best times for performing certain medical procedures such as the applying of leeches or diagnosing illness. Bodily fluids — the humors — also have astrological correspondences that affect fluctuations of bile, blood and other secretions.

The fate of nations and rulers also rests in the courses of the stars. Mundane (or worldly) astrology deals with the positions of the stars as they apply to political concerns. When Halley's still-unnamed comet appears in the skies above Europe in 1531, many astrologers fear that cataclysmic events are soon to follow.

Horary astrology calculates the position of the stars with regard to specific undertakings, such as proposals of marriage or financial dealings. Most courts of Renaissance Europe keep astrologers specifically to advise rulers of the best times to fight wars, negotiate peace and make public appearances.

Many people of all classes seek astrologers' advice to predict the future; thus, divinatory astrology comes into vogue during the Renaissance as individuals desire to know what lies ahead for them.

Elements of Astrology

The belt of stars (or constellations) that encircles the earth along the path of the solar ellipse — the region around the equator, where western civilization had its roots — forms the zodiac. The 12 constellations that compose the zodiac provide the framework within which the planets, sun and moon appear to move in a regular and orderly fashion.

Each of the constellations occupies one-twelfth of a circle, so that during one solar year (beginning and ending with the vernal equinox), each constellation — or sign — serves in turn as the ruling house for the sun, the most important heavenly body in European astrology.

Astrologers assign certain attributes to the constellations, based on their associations with mythical figures. A person born at a time when the sun occupied the zodiacal position assigned to the constellation Aries (the Ram) supposedly possesses the qualities attributed to his sun's sign. A complete horoscope, or representation of the sky at the time of an individual's birth, also takes into account the positions of the moon and known planets. Thus, a child born with her sun in Aries, her moon in Libra and Mars in Scorpio would have a driving, ambitious personality, a keen sense of fair play and a violent temper.

Astrology also assigns relationships to groups of constellations within the zodiac. Each of the four elements earth, water, fire and air — rules a triad of signs, thus forming an equilateral triangle within the context of heavenly geometry. Taurus (the Bull), Virgo (the Virgin) and Capricorn (the Goat) are the earth-ruled signs. Pisces (the Fish), Cancer (the Crab) and Scorpio (the Scorpion) fall under the province of water. Aries (the Ram), Leo (the Lion) and Sagittarius (the Archer or Centaur) are governed by fire. Aquarius (the Water Bearer), Gemini (the Twins) and Libra (the Scales) form the triangle ruled by air.

Additionally, the twelve signs of the zodiac arrange themselves in three groups of four signs — one from each elemental group — according to whether they are fixed (Taurus, Scorpio, Leo and Aquarius), cardinal (Capricorn, Cancer, Aries and Libra) or mutable (Virgo, Pisces, Sagittarius and Gemini). These groups form a square in the heavens. Cardinal signs represent the essential qualities of the element assigned to them. Fixed signs embody their element's most inflexible qualities. Mutable signs exhibit the changeable aspects of their assigned element.

Signs located directly opposite each other (separated by 180°) complement one another, whereas signs that have a 90° difference between them are considered antagonistic or incompatible. Cancer (cardinal water) and Capricorn (cardinal earth) are complements; Aries (cardinal fire) and Libra (cardinal air) are incompatible with both Cancer and Capricorn. By studying all these interrelationships among the signs and the planets, astrologers provide detailed horoscopes for their clients.

Like the scholars of the Kabbalah, astrologers revel in symbolism. Both Kabbalism and astrology share the belief that all things in the universe exist in a grand interplay of opposites and similarities. Kabbalists assign the letters of the Hebrew alphabet to a number of correspondences; letters represent numbers, parts of the body, angels and demons, virtues and vices, and numer-

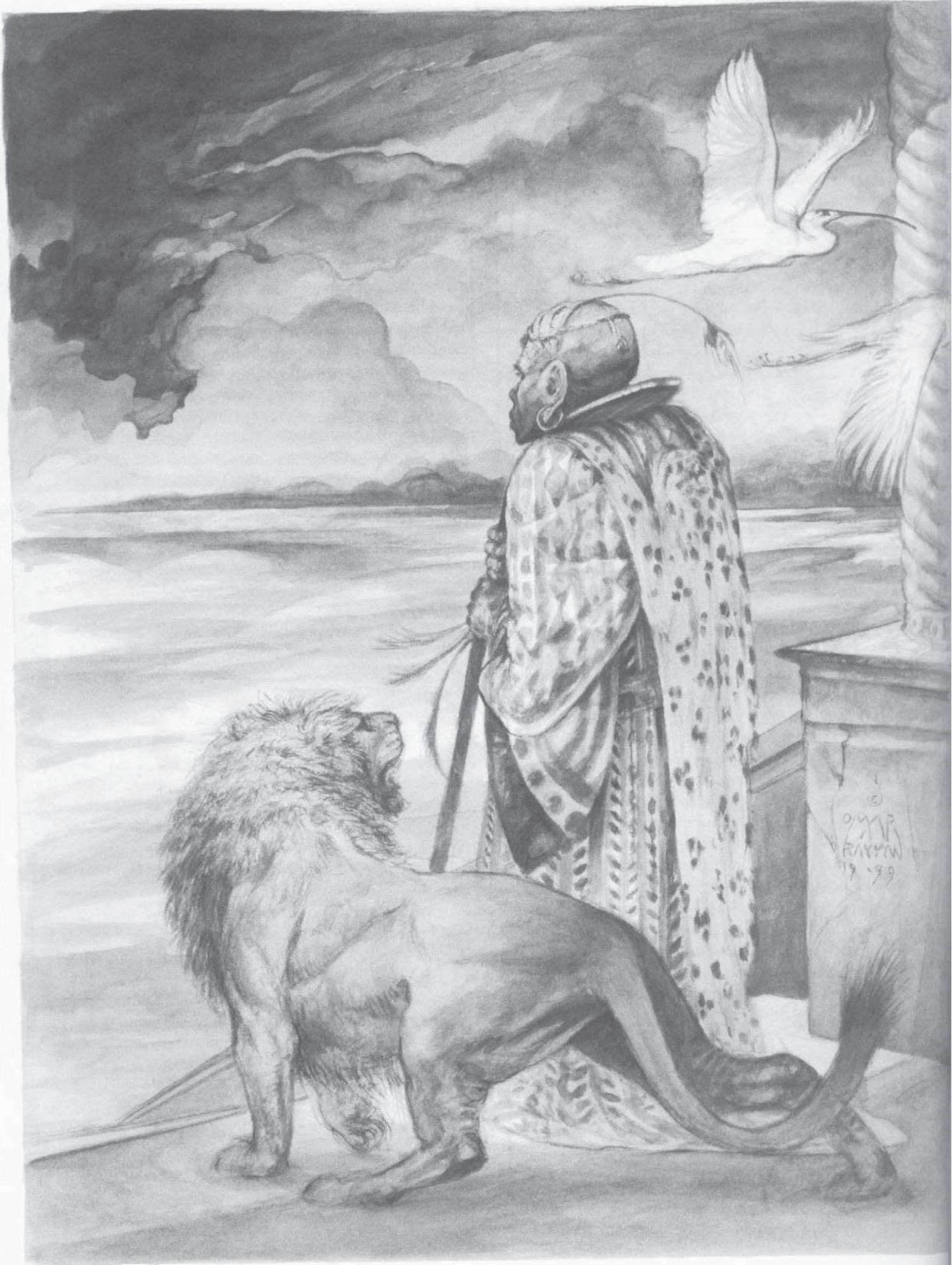
ous other aspects of existence. Likewise, astrological signs have their correspondences with angelic and demonic beings, mythical personae, areas of the body, animals and other natural phenomena.

The Dual Paradigm

The Renaissance sees not only the rebirth but also the decline of astrology, both of which have their origins in the intellectual atmosphere of the times. Even as humanism places humanity at the center of the universe, displacing God in the minds of many thinkers and scholars, the early scientists ponder the true place of humans in a world that has grown both larger and smaller, more and less mysterious. For a time, both points of view — that the stars hold sway over the affairs of mortals and that the heavens proceed in their courses unmindful of what occurs on earth — coexist in an uneasy juxtaposition.

The spirit of inquiry rules the Renaissance. Seekers of knowledge follow wherever their search for truth leads — down paths of divergent religious faiths, toward an understanding of the correspondences between the macrocosm of the universe and the microcosm of the human body, or to the reasoned laws that govern the natural world. At the same time as the age encourages the revival of classicism and mysticism, it also sets the stage for scientists such as Galileo, Copernicus and Kepler. The brilliant flames of religious faith and the smoldering embers of mysticism may soon give way to the cold illumination of the Age of Reason.







Chapter III: Lands Beyond the Sun

The events of the Sorcerers Crusade do not simply trouble the Mediterranean states. The cultures of other lands beyond Europe are unknowns, first becoming explored by the brave travelers who press outward and return home with fantastic tales. All of these lands seem strange and fantastical to European mystics.

Do you hear that? The lands beyond the horizon call. Come and follow for a while.

The Rudder of Captain Uberto Pavone

Dedicated to the Lodge of Argo, Venice

Here are my story, my charts, my musings and my life. I give them all to you, my lodge brothers. I know this log is long overdue, but a transcript of over twenty years of travels must be worth something... read it and be damned. I'm sure many of you, especially those in the League of Paul, will similarly damn me after your perusal.

So be it.

After all, I was born a mongrel, what care I if you add heretic to my titles? My father was a Seer and my mother, Allah rest her soul, a Cosian too righteous to let a Moor die, and thankfully too much a woman to deny her heart... no matter the

dictates of the Church. You, the Void Seekers, were a boyish compromise — a hope to preserve my soul, find the course of my Daemon and serve mankind.

In an Odysseans ship, I embarked on this adventure and found my Daemon. And to honor my word, as my mother would have wished, I give you this rudder. With this gesture, I'm afraid, though, I have lost my soul. For on this journey the long-rejected warnings of my father, Abraham haj-Souk, have come back to haunt me. I fear now that the Explorators are harbingers of a well-reasoned doom, rather than the bringers of light. We must ask ourselves, do our maps define the world or redefine it in our own image? Do we illumine God's glory, or out of hubris shape the world for our own venal desires?

— Uberto Pavone-Souk, Constantinople

September 18, 1473

West Africa: Songhai and Mali

Songhai and Mali are lands of gold and sorcery. Magick is as rich and plentiful as the yellow nuggets of sunfire lifted from the hidden mines of the Sosso. Underestimate the power of gold or the skill of these magnificent sorcerers at your peril.

The Seeking Begins

I found a room near Sankore University-Mosque after a month's hard travel from the mouth of the Senegal River. It took two weeks for my hired canoe and Sosso rowers to reach the headwaters of the Senegal River. I left the river there and trekked east over the broken hills to Niani on the banks of the Niger. In that town of gold, I joined a caravan of Arab traders traveling to Timbuktu via the shrinking Kingdom of Mali.

The university teems with life, as does all of Timbuktu. This great city is perched between the dying light of Mali to the west and the growing power of Songhai to the east. Twenty years ago, the Tuareg tribesmen came out of the desert and took this city from the king of Mali, and he has ever despaired of taking it back. The Songhai kings now thirst for this city and its riches.

There is a Songhai proverb which any of my brothers visiting this land would do well to remember: "A log floating in a river will never become a crocodile." While many in our Order are quick to use their Arts to conceal themselves or to mimic a savage tongue, the canny Songhai are even quicker to find us out.

I thought I had hidden myself well in the scriptoriums of Sankore (a university almost two centuries old), when I discovered that the name "Ansara" the locals had given me meant "European!" These people are used to paradox and duplicity. After all, the Songhai Empire is a land of heathens, infidels and magic. A land where governors are not paid four hundred ducats of gold — rather, they earn four hundred pounds of gold a year. This is a place where a pound of salt is more precious than coin. It is a place of great universities and artisans, and a country where ebon sorcerers stride beneath the waters of powerful rivers and consult with their gods.

— Captain David Pavone, Timbuktu
March 18, 1451

Prejudices and Knowledge

West Africa is not well known to most Europeans. A few readers of Arabic may have found a copy of the *Rihla* (travels) of Ibn Battuta who traveled extensively along the Mediterranean coastline of Africa and even made one trip through the Sahara to the Kingdom of Mali. For most, though, the land is a burning desert beyond the Moorish territories, inhospitable and languishing with the ruins of ancient societies.

To most Europeans, Mali and Africa are indistinguishable, and the kingdom of Mali is the source of much of the Arab world's gold. Maps of the early Renaissance still have a picture of a bearded and turbaned king regarding a golden nugget — the image of the King of Mali.

In 1324 A.D. Mansa Musa made a grandiose pilgrimage to Mecca. He carried so much gold with him, and was so generous with it, that his largess nearly destroyed the local economy — in fact it took almost 15 years to recover! Stories of his fabulous wealth and power still entertain the

covetous courts of the Mediterranean. Mansa Musa's train totaled nearly 60,000 persons: guards, courtiers, scholars, teachers, relatives, friends — all took up the 3,000-mile journey. Each of Mansa Musa's personal slaves bore a staff of solid gold — all 500 of them.

Location and Travel

Though nearer to Europe than Cathay or the strange islands in the western ocean, Africa is still a distant place, more an imaginary land in the minds of many. This land of gold lies far from demesne of the Church. By ship, its nearest port is found at the mouth of the Senegal River, over 2,000 miles beyond Tangier along the western coast of Africa. By land, a traveler must cross a thousand-mile sea of sand from Fez to one of the towns bordering the great desert: Sansanding, Timbuktu or Gao.

Fortune and Fate

Until the coming of the Portuguese in the late Renaissance, West Africa's fortunes were not unlike those of Europe. Powerful societies rose and dominated the land before giving way to the next empire. Invaders swept into the land only to be integrated into the society as they settled and intermarried. Unlike the Islamic raiders who became part of West African cultures, the Europeans came to dominate and exploit.

History

The story of West Africa is actually a tale of three empires: Ghana, Mali and Songhai. The rise of Ghana begins at about 800 B.C. in a valley between the Niger and Senegal rivers. A Soninke chief (*ghana* means war chief) founded the city of Kumbi. There, the followers of the chief began to tax and patrol the trade routes between Arab North Africa and what is now the Gulf of Guinea. The leaders of Ghana founded many of the traditions and economic systems that carried into the later kingdoms.

Arab raiders from Morocco invaded Ghana in A.D. 681, but their army was crushed by the Ghanaian forces. The warriors of Islam had expected the black Africans to be as easily bested as the European barbarians. Unfortunately for the invaders Ghana had a standing army of about 250,000! Still, the seeds of destruction were planted, not by the sword, but by Moorish traders who followed in the wake of the army.

With the advent of trade (both in material goods and ideas), Islam grew in popularity, and by A.D. 1042 30,000 fundamentalists of Moorish and Ghanaian descent, the Almoravids, took the capital of Kumbi. This capture precipitated the kingdom of Ghana's bumpy slide into ruin. The Almoravids did not rule long, but the ancient kingdom was shattered. The savagery of the Almoravid zealots drove a wedge between the ancient

Lexicon

Amiru: The chief of a village or neighborhood within a larger city.

Ansara: European.

Baata: A container, usually a dried gourd or box in which a Songhai sorcerer places sacrifices to the gods or spirits; a focus for a sorcerer's power.

Baba: Father; a term of respect for any old man.

Boro bi: The black-skinned people.

Griot: The bard of the Songhai. Like the bards of Ireland and Greece, the griot is a living history book, sage and performer. Every king and many a chieftain has a personal griot.

Gris-gris: Magical talismans, usually highly decorated leather pouches filled with portentous herbs, bark, roots, etc.

Pui: A poem about a mythological hero; a song of praise, or a prayer to a supernatural being.

Sisiri: The "chain of power" the Sohanci carry in their abdomen; the Daemon.

Sohanci: Songhai wizards.

Sorko: Songhai hedge magicians.

Sorko Benya: Literally, a sorko's slave, but figuratively it means an apprentice magician or witch.

Zima: The head of a possession troupe.

Zongo: A section of a town or village set aside for strangers.

a Tuareg chieftain from the Sahara sacked the city — burning its mosques and killing many of the Islamic scholars who form the core of the city's sages. Thus came the end of Mali's greatness. By the 1450s, Mali is still a kingdom on European maps, but its days are numbered.

Current Events: Songhai

The mythic past of Songhai features two peoples: the Sorko, who were masters of the river, and the Gabibi, who were masters of the soil. The greatest of the Sorko, Faran Makan Bote, was a great wizard supposedly sprung from the mating of a demon and a water spirit. He gave the Sorko magical fish that helped them to control the farmers. As with most subjugating societies, this domination was eventually overthrown. According to tales, a Berber from the desert defeated the Sorko, and in gratitude the Gabibi made him king. The first nobility, the Dia family, came from the Berber Dia Aliamen's union with a Songhai princess.

Originally, the capital of the Songhai peoples was Gao; Mali captured it in A.D. 1325. Two Songhai princes, Prince Ali Kolon and Prince Sulayman Nar, were then taken and raised in Niani. They went on to become great generals of Mali, but when Mansa Musa died in 1337, the princes fled back to Gao and successfully regained their kingdom. Ali deposed the last of the Dia Kings and installed a new dynasty: the Sonni (*sonni* or *sunni* means restored).

Gao lies roughly 200 miles downriver (southwest) from Timbuktu. Although not as famous as the latter city, it too has fine universities and is the hub for the eastern trade routes to Egypt and the Middle East.

Future Fates

Of course, the fates of the Songhai and of West Africa are really up to the Storyteller and her players, but barring interference, events could unfold thus...

The Songhai king, Sunni Ali Ber, takes Timbuktu from the Tuareg in A.D. 1468. His wrath is so great that he massacres everyone associated with the Tuareg, including some of the great scholars and clerics in the city. In 1473, Songhai devours the last vestiges of Mali, the town of Jenne. The Songhai Empire quickly grows to extend from the estuary of the Senegal to the center of the African Continent — almost 2,000 miles at its widest. By 1493 its greatest king, Askia Mohammed Tourre, comes to power.

In A.D. 1471, the Portuguese built a trading fort on the Guinea coast. There they trade salt and other goods for gold and, later, for slaves. Within a hundred years, the European demand for slaves becomes the heart of the economy. The local rulers become so dependent upon European money and arms to support their leadership that they lose control of their own fates.

By A.D. 1591, the lure of gold is too much for the Sultan of Morocco. He sends his general Judar Pasha across

religion and Islam. Eventually, the Sosso and their wizard-king Sumanguru, who persecuted faithful Muslims, conquered the kingdom.

During his rulership of Ghana, Sumanguru grew afraid of the Mandinka people to the west. He summoned his sohanci and his army and swept into Mandinka capital of Kangaba to kill their king and eleven of his twelve sons. The last heir, Sundiata ("The Hungering Lion"), was a mere child, and a sickly one at that. Yet he grew strong in exile, and it is believed he became a great sohanci himself. Soon Sundiata gathered the growing enemies of Sumanguru to his side and slew the demon sorcerer on the side of Mount Koulikoro in a great battle. The Kingdom of Mali was born.

By A.D. 1235, Mali's rise to greatness eclipsed Ghana. Although Mali became a predominately Islamic state, the old ways remained tolerated. The zenith of Mali came with the rule of the wanderer Mansa Musa. He brought back from his pilgrimage incredible knowledge in the form of books and scholars and enriched the universities of Timbuktu. Without his intelligent guidance, though, the kingdom proved difficult to manage. Too soon after the death of Mansa Musa, Mali began to break apart. In 1433,



the desert. Judar first seizes the salt mines of Taghaza, and even though his army is outnumbered almost two to one, his guns always best the enemy's swords. The Moorish rulers ravage Songhai for nearly two centuries, yet they never discover the secret gold mines.

West Africa becomes a feast for the powers of Europe, and in A.D. 1878 the European powers divide up Africa among themselves at the Berlin Congress. Cultural and tribal boundaries are ignored in favor of "enlightened" European sensibilities. Parts of Africa still reap the benefits from lines scribbled on that map: tribal genocide, dictatorships and revolution.

A Journey of the Senses Geography

West Africa's heartland is the Sahel, a belt of grassland along the banks of the Niger that is gradually being devoured by the Sahara Desert from the north. In some areas, the grassland is now little more than dry tufts and stunted trees. Mesas and stark mountain ridges are common, and dunes travel sometimes to the banks of the river in times of drought.

Weather

The Sahel suffers from extremes of climate and weather. The northern desert areas receive as little as two inches of rain a year, whereas the forests along the gulf coast can get as much as 40 inches of rain. Drought and flood, feast and famine are all too common.

The region's proximity to the equator means that there are really two main seasons: wet and dry. The rainy season extends from July to October, and the dry season usually begins in January and can last through April, but some areas suffer from sporadic year-long droughts.

The low humidity makes the days hot and dangerous, but the nights cool. Only near the coast and rivers are there humid conditions. In the heat before the rainy seasons, temperatures above 100 degrees can last for weeks. Conversely, the month of November can be very chilly when the Harmattan, a cool wind from the desert, blows though the Sahel. It brings the time of disease, for the loose cotton clothes of the natives cannot withstand the chilly blasts.

Architecture

Adobe reinforced by wooden beams is the most common form of construction. On large structures such as mosques and citadels, the ends of the beams are left jutting

from the mud brick so that workers can easily repair damage caused during the rains. Traditional architecture favors low, domed huts, although larger cities evidence both square and round buildings. Most villagers live in a compound, an adobe-walled area containing an outdoor kitchen and huts for individual families.

Food

Villagers use egg-shaped ovens to produce wonderfully rich meals. Usually, meals center on rice or millet with a variety of sauces made of peanuts or sesame seeds. Meat is a rarer treat — goat and chicken being the most common; fish supplements everyone's diet along the river, of course.

Dress

Men and women favor loose robes of cotton, colorfully dyed, which they wound around their bodies. The patterns are usually bold, and the colors range from neon blue to orange, green and red. Women also wear a veil-like piece of cloth over their heads for protection from the sun and dust, sometimes tied, sometimes left flowing. Men commonly wear a plain, sleeved robe called a "boubou."

Devout Muslim men wear turbans, but even religious women rarely wear the full kafia. Nobody wants to expire in the heat of the Sahel!

Navone's Story

My meeting with the ancient Yejede, the Sorcerer Queen, did not go well. I brought forth my compass and sextant, telling her how I could locate any point on the round globe with them. She scoffed, so I put them aside.

She bid me take a dipper gourd from the pail in front of me. I did, and she held it to her withered breast. With a wave of her hand her breast ripened and milk flowed from it, filling the ladle.

"Come look, ansara. I show you the milk of Nya Beri. See what the lines on your map-paper bring."

Clutching my crucifix and sextant, I peered into the cup.

From a red dot floating in the middle of the milk grew a widening stain of blood. The blood painted pictures: war, famine, pestilence and slavery.

"This is what your map brings in the end, ansara. But Yejede knows your heart is good and she will educate you in the wonder and pain of the world. First I will show you death, then life. Then you choose your path."

The ground beneath me began to groan, but Yejede just laughed. Suddenly I was slammed to the earth and held there. Yejede stood up, giggling, and walked outside the hut door. When I could stand again, I followed her out of the leopard skin hut, and there below me stretched the world as the Celestial Master must see it — a blue gem in a sea of velvet.

"You stand on the throne of Dongo, high in the sky, child. Before I push you off I give you seven seeds of grain, blessed by

Harakoy Dikko. One will feed you for a week. Three will grow you a reed boat. Use them with what wisdom you have for such a young child."

I opened my hand and she placed the seeds there, counting as she did.

"What do you mean, 'push me off?'" Saying that, I summoned forth my Daemon, remembering my arts and my long travels. I called upon my affinity to the earth to root myself to the ground.

The earth crumbled beneath me, and I fell.

Economy

The kings of Songhai, like those of Mali and Ghana, depend upon their control of the salt-gold trade for their wealth and power. The people of the Sahel have no good source of salt — a necessary part of the diet in a dry, hot climate. Salt is brought in from Taghaza, a hellish town deep in the Sahara. There, slaves of the Moroccan merchant princes use their bare hands to lift slabs of salt from dry seabeds. In the parched depths, away from the rest of Songhai, salt is everywhere. The slaves paradoxically sleep in salt-brick hovels and die with salt clotting their lungs, even as they supply the mineral to the rest of the kingdom as a necessity of life. Traders bring salt through the towns controlled by Songhai and Mali, where it is taxed and where the Songhai purchase some for their own needs. Then the salt is taken toward the land of the Wangara, the people who guard the secret gold mines.

The transaction for gold is done in secret, in a process called "dumb" bartering. The gold merchants of the Wangara leave word for the salt merchants to meet along the river. When the salt merchants arrive, all they find is a drum and the gold for barter. The salt merchants leave a quantity of salt they think is fair, then beat the drum and withdraw. The gold merchants come back and take the salt — if they think it is a fair offering. Otherwise, they beat the drum and repeat the process until a deal is struck.

The basis for the monetary system involves barley, gold and salt. A gold dinar weighs exactly 72 grains of barley and is worth about five pounds of salt. Every camel-load of salt is taxed at three dinars: one to enter the empire, two to leave (thus, trade with the Wangara is taxed twice by the Songhai king).

Mortal Society

The Songhai people are forceful, hospitable, honorable and strong-willed. Most of the society is divided into farmers and fishers, yet each tribe has a particular way of life that differentiates it from the others. Villages, usually within a day's canoe ride of one another, dot the banks of the great rivers. In the desert regions of the north, every sizable oasis supports millet farmers and herders.

The languages of Songhai are related to one tongue called Mande, but like the Romance languages of Europe,

Mande has evolved into distinct forms. Tribes of the distant east and west have as hard a time communicating as do a Spaniard and a Corsican.

Religion

Islam is a prominent religion, but most Songhai still practice their pagan beliefs as well. Every village has a handful of sorko and witches, along with a collection of professional mediums, headed by the zima — an experienced spiritualist who is frequently possessed by powerful spirits.

Roles

Village life for women centers on the home, just as in Europe, although the Songhai woman is usually the master there (in the Kingdom of Mali, the predecessor of the Songhai Empire, rulership passed to the oldest male child of the ruler's sister, not the king's own children). Although wives are expected to work together to complete household chores, the bonds between wives are not strong. Mothers, daughters and sisters are regarded as true friends. Perhaps those relationships derive from the power of a mother's milk — the medium for the transmission of magical power.

Men often have stronger attachments to their sisters and mothers than to their wives, mistresses or even their brothers. Men also form strong bonds with discussion groups among their peers. These groups meet when it is too hot to work, and instead discuss politics, tell stories and gossip. The networks of discussion groups often make the policies for the entire village, although it may take some time for a problem to be talked through.

Mores and Custom

The great tribal peoples of the area are the Mandinka, Mende, Susu, Soninke, Dialonke, Bambara and Dylua. In the larger villages and towns, people segregate themselves by tribe, profession and religion.

Any kind of legal dispute is handled by the local chieftain, who normally calls an informal court. The proceedings end up being a debate between the two sides, with the chieftain arbitrating the dispute. Often, wise chieftains defuse the situation by guiding the sides to a mutual agreement. Compromise, not authoritarian dictates, usually carry the day.

Divorce, remarriage and multiple-partner marriages are the norm. A man may have as many wives as he can support. All of the children go with the man after a divorce, but the house and household possessions go with the woman.

Time passes slowly in the Sahel, which may explain why patience is the one of the most prized virtues of a Songhai. Children, because they are the most impatient, are beneath notice. Most men do not feel that anyone

younger than 40 is mature enough for power. Sixty-year-olds are regarded as just entering their true wisdom!

When greeting another, you must ask about the health of all in his or her compound, which usually means his or her extended family. When approaching a doorway (as there are rarely doors), the Songhai clap and wait quietly for an invitation to enter.

The Supernatural

One kills something thin in appearance only to discover it is fat.

— Songhai proverb

Dozens of sorcerers and hundreds of hedge magicians are active in the Songhai territories. The Awakened are referred to as sohanci; sorko is the title for hedge magicians and individuals with only the rudiments of power. Sorko are not thought of as lesser beings either by the sohanci or the regular populace. Sohanci are the ones the fickle spirits have seen fit to elevate to greater power, but they all are part of the same mystical family.

There is no formal school or curriculum of magic and sorcery. Each sorko or sohanci may choose students as desired — usually after some propitious action on the part of the student. Patience and persistence are the qualities one looks for in a student. All of the sorko's wisdom must be committed to memory without error. Thousands of pui, or praise songs and rituals, must be exactly memorized — a process which takes ten years (or more) of study. The student must also become a sorko benya, a slave to the master for as long as the master sees fit.

Even students with strong Daemons are not rushed into Awakening, and sometimes it never happens. As with popular wisdom, 40 is considered the correct time to welcome the transition. Most wizards have long been masters of hedge magic when the Daemon comes to them — forcing them to abandon the static arts and start anew with the ways of True Magic (for this reason, most characters will be regarded as rude upstarts by the sohanci — mere children playing with fire).

Once in a great while a woman is found to possess a powerful Daemon. Such women are rare prizes — oftentimes fought over or killed out of jealousy. The Songhai believe that women should not be sorko, but one with the talent to become a sohanci is worth the risk for most mages, for female sohanci are considered to be the most powerful of all. Such women wield great power and guard their positions with extreme prejudice — even going so far as to kill the promising female students of rivals. Most importantly, the children of two sohanci are greatly feared for their powerful spirits.

Gods and Spirits of the Songhai

Tooru: The spirit nobility; these beings control the great forces of nature.

Dongo: The god of thunder; he lives on a great rock that floats in the sky.

Nya Beri: The great mother goddess. When she looks into pools of milk she can see the future. When she looks into pools of blood, she can see the past.

Harakoy Dikko: The benevolent goddess of the Niger.

Ouagado-Bida: The old god of Ghana. He took the form of a seven-headed serpent. A hero called Amadou Sefdokote cut off the god's heads. Each head supposedly became one of the gold mines in Songhai. The death of Ouagado-Bida heralded the death of Ghana.

Magicians of the Songhai

Kunele Amadou has been the court griot of the Kings of Songhai for 60 years. Although unawakened, he is a mighty sorko as well as a poet. He trained Mahamane Widou and many other sohanci — led them to the door of enlightenment, if you will. Although not supernaturally powerful, his word and opinion carry great weight.

Mahamane Widou is a great warrior-sohanci. He lives in the village of Wanzerbe, downriver and a day's ride inland from Gao. Although he prefers to work his magic in his forge, Mahamane is obliged to serve the king in battle when his master calls. When at war he takes the form of a great bull with horns of iron.

Yejede is the most powerful sohanci in Songhai. She lives with her three sons on an island which is said to move its position in the Niger; others say her home is a hut built on the back of a giant crocodile. Her sons are fierce warriors who have magic weapons given to them by their mother.

The Traditions

Ahl-i-Batin: When Mansa Musa returned from Mecca in A.D. 1325, he brought with him a host of Batini scholars who took up residence at Sankore University in Timbuktu. There they started a collection of esoteric knowledge from all parts of Africa and the Middle East. Adamu Fasseke is the Batini in charge of this part of the library. An oven in his compound in Timbuktu serves as a gateway leading to Mount Qaf (and showcases his unusual sense of humor).

The Batini have good relations with Kunele, the most powerful sorko in Gao. Yet Kunele has warned them that the Songhai king means to kill Adamu when Timbuktu

falls, for Adamu is a close friend of the King's greatest enemy, the Tuareg chieftain Akil.

Crossing the Sahel

The far-off kingdoms of Africa seem savage and barbaric to the European mind, yet they boast cities as complex and populous as any city of the "civilized" continent. Mathematics and philosophy are well-known among these so-called "savages," as are techniques of construction rivaling some of the Craftsmasons'. The cradle of mankind is a mysterious continent, filled with men of insight, women of power, sorcerers who consort with spirits and craftsmen of superlative skill.

The Order of Reason sees only a culture that it does not understand. Many visiting Traditionalists see the same. The Council of Traditions has the audacity to try to put all sohanci into the category of Dream-speakers simply because of their appearance! Travelers who spend any time at all in Africa soon discover a world far more cultured than any they had suspected before. The outsider may sneer at "primitive" clothing and "rustic" food, but the insightful recognize the society as a vibrant place where both Art and Craft flourish in equal measure.

Of course, the colonial spread of Europe draws ever nearer, placing people on the northern shores and seeking resources in the deep jungles of the southern continent. The fragmented tribes and independent cities cannot match the sheer power that can be brought to bear in one place by the European Daedaleans. One by one, the Africans may slowly fall, crushed beneath the heel of colonization. The dreams of Africa may fall again, buried by a people too content to understand the frenetic pace of the European invaders.

Some few recognize the threat of the Order of Reason, of course. Such voices are limited in number — doomsayers are hardly welcome in any age. From the union of spirituality and artifice comes a powerful whole. Mayhap all of "enlightened" Europe could learn from such examples.

Central America: The Aztec Empire in A.D. 1455



magus often needs to be reminded that there are older supernatural forces in the world — forces that give justification to the supernatural purges committed by the Order of Reason. In the lands newly discovered by explorers of the seas, travelers find all manner of wondrous

societies. Some, though, carry with them terrible secrets or brutal customs.

Note that, despite its use throughout this section, the term "Aztec" is an anachronism in this period. European visitors to the empire probably referred to these people, in one way or another, as heathens.

Pavone's Story

Three weeks ago I landed in a lush jungle. Shaken, but unharmed, I eventually found a marvel — a road cut out of the heart of this forest. I made my way along the road toward some smoke, when suddenly warriors dressed as eagles (complete with feathers!) rushed out of the bush and captured me. They took me to a wondrous city made of brightly painted stone, yet floating in a lake. My senses, fading after all that had befallen me, completely fled when I realized that the stones forming a pyramid in the central square were actually human skulls — thousands of them!

I awoke in a cool room to the scent of flowers and the harsh caress of a cat's tongue. Hundreds of petals were spread about me, and curled by my side was a spotted cat, almost like a small leopard. A bowl of something like milk sat on a ledge near me, along with a platter of flat bread. I let the cat finish the milk while I devoured the bread.

My host entered soon after and took me outside. His home was grand — it had a large central courtyard with a pool. His children came and gawked at me. In the afternoon came some important-looking men. By this time, I had used my craft and traveling experience to begin understanding their language. I also relied upon tricks of memory and bits of phrases heard from other travelers. The men were amazed to see that I could communicate with them, and they explained that I was to have an important visitor that night.

When the sun went down, the demeanor of the house changed — everyone went inside, yet my host told me to stay in his courtyard. Suddenly, another rain of petals descended from a cloudless sky, and from the riot of color stepped a beautiful woman. Long, dark hair flowed down her back and the petals, stuck to the sheen of her body, yet could not cover her nakedness.

I could not deny her — though her bite threatened to shred my soul, I was powerless. She fed from my mind, too; until dawn kissed the sky, she questioned me about my world. I told her everything.

My host did not understand when, exhausted as I was, I tried to flee the next afternoon. Xochiquetzal, Goddess of the Flowers, favored me! They tied me to a post in the garden the next night, and there I awaited the touch of petals.

— Captain David Pavone, Tenochtitlan

January 3, 1455

Prejudices and Knowledge

The entire American Continent remains hidden from the world at large. Unlike what most history books report, many educated people believe the world is round — they simply think that if a ship sails long enough to the east it will land in Cathay (China), Chipango (Japan) or the Indies, not the Americas (for convenience, we use the term "the New World," but even it has no meaning... yet.)

The Dream-Speakers, Void Seekers and Celestial Masters know different, but they also keep their secrets. In general, the Traditions wish to keep the New World a mystery, both to protect the Dream-Speakers from visions of Europe's terrifying, maddening colonization and to offer a possible haven as tensions build with the nascent Order of Reason. The Daedaleans, though, are far beyond this debate. There is no conception of "if" the New World should be discovered and colonized! Presently, the Council is arguing over how, when and who should discover the New World, and how to put it to the best use thereafter.

Conversely, because this decision has not been made, it is not impossible to "miss" the New World. Reality is still very mutable here, as the compass and sextant have not yet done their work. Sailors who expect to sail across the seas to Cathay may circumnavigate the New World and travel across deep and misty seas broken only by seaweed and the occasional oceanic creature.

Fortune and Fate

1492 — a year that everyone shall remember, the date that the bounty of the Americas opens to Europe. Gold, colonies, food, potatoes, slaves, rum, sugar — all for the gullet of Europe and its masters. Bringing these riches to the old kingdoms are the names that also march into history: Pizarro, Cortes, de Soto and others.

Ultimately, it is not the explorers who are important, though — but the diseases that they bring with them are. The bacteria and viruses the explorers carry bring doom to the cultures of the Americas. Cortes and his men kill thousands of natives, but compared to the hundreds of thousands the Aztecs sacrificed in bloody rites, it's a meager amount. Disease wipes out over 80 percent of the natives. De Soto's exploration into the plains of North America ushers in a plague that destroys the mighty Mississippian culture and sets the stage for the conquest of North America, as well as introducing the horse to the region.

It is the growing acceptance of the idea of disease that makes this change possible. The beneficent work by the House of Flame in the Cosian Order lays the groundwork for this horror, as the work of the house gains adherents. Even more ironically, the Ahl-i-Batin see the adoption of their teachings by the Hippocratic Circle as a point of connection for the two groups. They feed more

information to the Circle, and so disease theory spreads — and a behemoth begins to stir. The waves of plagues and pestilence in the Dark Ages made just about any living European a walking plague-hound — an arrow aimed at the heart of Native American culture. No one knows whether this weapon came about by accident, or was deliberately crafted. Nonetheless, it is a lesson the Order of Reason learns well, and repeats.

History

A Dream-Speaker of great power, Quetzalcoatl (Precious Serpent), led his people along the eastern edge of the Sierra Madres during the late 12th century. He was the last in a long line of wizards, and no member of the 20 clans shone with a Daemon strong enough to succeed him. For centuries, his ancestors had led the people from across the cold plains of the north in search of a valley that promised good crops. Often they found good land but never unguarded land, and the peaceful Tenochca were always forced to keep moving.

In 1168, as the Tenochca searched still for land, a hunter named Huitzilopochtli found a god resting deep in a cave. It woke and drank his blood, but in exchange told him how to find a valley of plenty called Mexico. Huitzilopochtli led the people there and Precious Serpent, for the first time, followed rather than led. The god was correct. The valley was fertile, and the neighboring tribes were friendly — the Tenochca had finally found a home. The local tribes showed the Tenochca how to farm, and Huitzilopochtli rose to prominence among the 20 clans.

In time, the god in the cave demanded more blood for more revelations, but in return Huitzilopochtli grew ever stronger, and the others coveted his powers. One day, Huitzilopochtli walked into the cave to seek the power necessary to defeat all who would challenge him, but the god destroyed him and took his skin. The new Huitzilopochtli demanded to be worshipped as a god with vast blood sacrifices. He turned the people to war, and they rejoiced in triumph. Quetzalcoatl spurned the sacrifice and the new warlike ways of the people, but the people turned their back on the magus and he sailed to the east, exiled but vowing one day to return.

He never has.

Quickly, the people mastered the arts of war and dominated the entire valley. Great temples were raised to a new and growing pantheon of blood-hungry gods. The blood-debt to the gods had to be paid, and each successive victory demanded more prisoners lose their hearts and blood to the obsidian blades of the priests.

Current Events: The Apogee

The Valley of Mexico is now under the command of the Aztecs, and their civilization is reaching its zenith. Few uncon-



quered city-states are left within their reach. By the time of Cortes in 1519, more than 40 conquered provinces pay tribute to the emperor. All is going well — too well, perhaps.

The emperor knows that unless new states can be found to conquer, he will soon have to call for a *xochiyayotl*, a “War of the Flowers” in which warriors of allied cities must fight for the sole purpose of securing captives. Although the death of the flowers (the prisoners) assures them a place in the higher heavens, the logistics and politics of the *xochiyayotl* make it a nightmare.

Future Fates: the Conquistadors

Before he left, Quetzalcoatl said he intended to seek the aid of a bearded, white-skinned man. As the later emperors and priests revised their histories, his statement was altered such that he would *come back* as a bearded, white-skinned man. Cortes’ appearance along with a series of unnatural (but possibly planned...) portents, places the fate of the Aztecs into his hands. He lands in Veracruz, and each of the client states he marches through views the Spaniards as saviors from an Aztec rule of blood and servitude, so they join him and his army grows.

Deeper plans and wills also bend the course of Aztec society. Huitzilopochtli is in search of a new evil. As Cortes’ army approaches, the ruling council and priests pray for Huitzilopochtli’s aid, but the god remains silent. The willing slaughter and piles of hearts and skulls have lost their luster for Huitzilopochtli. He offers up his childer and their kin to the Inquisition that comes with the Spaniards, and the foolish mortals look no further. A bloody tapestry unfolds for his enjoyment — the Spaniards, their guns and disease are portents of death beyond his dark hopes or imaginings!

Journey of the Senses

And when we saw all those cities and villages built in the water and the other great towns on dry land, and that straight and level causeway leading to Mexico, we were astounded. These great towns and cues and buildings rising from the water all made of stone, seemed like an enchanted vision from the tale of Amadis. Indeed some of our soldiers asked whether it was not all a dream.

— Bernal Diaz, 1519

Geography

The Valley of Mexico is encircled by mountains that rise approximately 7,500 feet above sea level. Streams flow down from the mountains and forests into a large, salty lake, Lake Texcoco. Two of the mountains stand out from all the rest: Popocatepetl, the Smoking Mountain, and Iztaccijualt, the White Lady. Both are snow-covered the entire year and often shrouded in lacy, white clouds.

Weather

Mexican winters are cool and dry, whereas the summers are hot and wet. Temperatures in the sheltered valley are not extreme. The Tenochca first settle in a swampy, humid area near a lake — undoubtedly one of the reasons for moving the main Aztec city away from the marshy banks of Lake Texcoco and onto the body of the lake itself.

Engineering: Tenochtitlan

The first things built by the Tenochca were the chinampas, the floating fields made from layers of mud and plants in the shallows of the lake. As they became firmer, thatched houses were constructed atop them.

For the land to build Tenochtitlan, the capital city, the Tenochca reclaimed from the lake in the same fashion. By 1450, nearly 60,000 households make up the city, and almost 200,000 people live there. The central network of large islands of the city is a place for the greatest temples, palaces and universities, and for the emperor’s zoo and gardens.

Radiating out from the central islands are multi-island communities called *calpulli* — each with its own schools, temples and council areas for clan elders. As on the main islands, most of these houses are multi-story homes with courtyards and pools. In the hot summer, tent-like awnings are erected on the roofs of the homes, allowing the families to enjoy the outdoor air in the shade.

The most remote islands have simple farmers’ huts and gardens to supply the nobility with fresh flowers throughout the year. The canals and causeways are crowded at all times during the day as barges of refuse and human waste are hauled to the chinampas at the lake edge and fresh supplies are brought to the city.

At night, only the astrologer-priests and bravest warriors walk about the city. The common folk know that evil spirits patrol the night looking for victims.

Food

The staple for all Aztec diets is the *tlaxcalli* — the tortilla — a flat platter of baked mashed flour usually twelve to fourteen inches wide. Because no utensils exist, the tortilla is both food and a means of eating other foods — usually ground beans, chilies or tomato sauce. Game is scarce near the cities, so people have to content themselves with the occasional turkey or small dog raised in the house. The rich can afford duck, avocados and most importantly, *chocolatl* — chocolate mixed with honey and cinnamon, a favorite drink of the elite. All classes sometimes drink *pulque*, a kind of beer made from the fermented innards of the cactus-like *maguey* plant (though the nobles only allow the aged public drunkenness). Women and children drink *pinole*, a mixture of corn meal and water.

Cannibalism is a respected part of special festivals. The palms of the hands are delicacies. Often, the arms and legs of special sacrifices are prepared in a special stew, although it is considered rude to eat one's own prisoners.

The Ball Game

Wearing leather aprons and protective pads as a defense against the considerable heft of the solid rubber ball, warriors play a dangerous ball game. Players may not use their hands, nor can they carry the ball or let it stop moving. The field is made of three courts laid out like an "I," but the central connecting court is longer than the rest. At either end of the crossbar-court is a stone hoop. The object is to propel the ball through the hoop. Once a point is scored, the game is over. Sometimes the game is played for very high stakes: The losers are sacrificed. Winners might be sacrificed as well, though, allowing them to go to the heavens flush with victory as a final reward!

Dress

Women wear a wrap-around skirt and a square-necked blouse; men wear a loincloth and a capelike mantle. The mantle is formed from a square piece of cloth that is worn over one shoulder and tied around the neck. Wealthy men also wear a wide belt of material tied around the abdomen.

Wealthy men and women can afford richly appointed clothes — some adorn themselves with beads, bells, feathers and gold thread. Most people go barefoot, but sometimes sandals are worn in the city.

Mortal Society

The entire society for the Aztecs focuses on one occupation, one goal — war. It is not the excellence of the Aztec artist or the skill of their mathematicians which gives dominance, it is the creation of a huge, professional standing army and the society and belief structure to maintain that army.

Religion

The world is a place of chaos and death for the Aztecs. Only their blood debt, paid with tens of thousands of victims, staves off the inevitable end of the universe. Only the religious observation of the skies for portents and the clarity of pain-induced visions gives guidance.

Priests live lives of abstinence and privation. They prick their tongues, hands and foreskins with cactus needles to draw blood and prophesy the future. By looking at the patterns of the blood they can see future events. Blood and the pain of body piercing allow the priest to commune with the gods. Noble blood is the most valuable of all.

On high holidays, victims by the thousands are brought to the temples, stretched over the altars and sacrificed to

Gods of the Aztecs

Coatlicue: The Great Lady of the Serpent Skirt. She is the goddess of poverty and the pain of life. She is represented as a woman wearing a robe of intertwined serpents.

Huehuetol: The god of fire; his pictograms and statues show him as a toothless old man.

Huitzilopochtli: The god of war and the rebirth of the sun. He is the chief deity of the Aztecs. He is depicted as a man wearing a cloak of humming-bird feathers. His high holiday (of carnage) is the winter solstice.

Quetzalcoatl: The lord of life who created mankind and brings fertility and new life. His name means both "feathered" and "precious serpent." The Aztecs believe he sacrificed himself for the people to become the Morning Star. He is depicted as a serpent with jade scales or feathers. Someday he is supposed to return as a bearded, white-skinned man and overthrow the rule of Huitzilopochtli.

Tlaloc: The god of rain and farmers. He is often depicted as a serpent-headed man.

Tloque Nahuaque: Lord of everything; he is the supreme god, unconcerned with the fate of man.

Tezcatlipoca: The Smoking Mirror; the god of evil, war and death.

Xochipilli: Prince of flowers and god of the ball game and of love. He is depicted as a red-painted man.

Xipe Totec: The god of spring, new life and suffering. His festival is marked by the skinning of a drugged prisoner. His priest then wears the skin.

Xochiquetzal: The goddess of the flowers; she is the goddess of lust and womanly love. Only young women (usually harlots) are offered to her as sacrifices.

Yacatecuhtli: God of commerce; he is the god of merchants and travelers.

pay the debt of blood. Sacrificial victims have their hearts carved from their chests with the smooth, swift cut of an obsidian blade. Their heads are then severed and the lower jaws skewered on long poles (and left to rot in the growing heat of the day).

Without this blood, the sun will not rise, the heavens will be torn asunder and the evil beasts of the forests will rise

up and slaughter the Aztec people. The debt of blood must be paid. Whether the blood loosed by the conquistadors proves enough to finally sate this price remains to be seen....

Roles

The leader of the Aztec society is the emperor. The office is both a secular and also a religious post. Below the emperor are the four counselors nominated by the 20 clans and the high priests. When the emperor dies, these counselors select the best candidate from the many sons of the emperor.

The governors, judges and war leaders are called the *tecuhtli*, the great lords. They are the nobility, the leaders of the 20 clans, who live in palaces in the cities of the Aztec.

Warriors fall just below the nobles. Untested warriors have no title, and if they do not prove themselves in battle they lose their station in society. If a warrior manages to bring home a prisoner, he receives the true warrior's title, *iyac*. Once he captures four such prisoners, he is called *tequina*, and he takes up a greater role in society. Perhaps the *tecuhtli* select him to lead others in battle, or he might find a position in court. Military advancement is a desirable means of attaining power, especially as there are always other provinces to conquer.

Captured warriors are not slain immediately unless it is a festival time. Prestigious warrior prisoners are, instead, honored guests. Their hosts give them good food and treat them as befits their station. After all, the dead report to the gods how their captors treated them.

Below the warrior caste were the *pochteca*, the merchant travelers. These Aztec and their armies of porters venture from city to city bartering goods for the nobles and the emperor. By the time of Cortes, the *pochteca* rival the noble class in wealth and standing. Many of the *pochteca* are also spies for the emperor and the council. They take extensive notes on the wealth and armies of the city-states they visit, acting as unofficial assessors.

People who fail at war or travel become ordinary citizens, the *maceualti*, which means "worker." They are the farmers, laborers and builders of the Aztec. Clan elders give these citizens land to work, and these persons are considered valuable members of the clan. In times of need, the *tequina* or *tecuhtli* recruit soldiers from this caste, thus giving all a chance to rise in Aztec society by virtue of prowess during war.

The *thalmaitl* are the lowest level of society. Like European serfs, they are considered attached to the land they work. Rarely, they may be called for military service, and although lowly, they are then afforded the rights of citizens of the empire.

Below the *thalmaitl* are the slaves. Usually, they are taken in raids and wars, but were not warriors, and therefore not suitable as sacrifices. Slavery is not exclusive to the lower

Tools of the Trade

Atlatl: Aztecs employ a throwing stick that fits into a notch at the base of their javelin-like spears. The atlatl takes some practice, but it gives their spears incredible range and killing power (Range = 15 yards x Strength of thrower; Damage = Strength +1).

Costumed Armor: Aztec warriors wear ornate, brightly colored armor that resembles animals. Its effect adds one to the difficulty of any opponent's attacks until the enemy has killed an Aztec in one-on-one combat. The armor offers one soak die of protection, but does not slow the warrior down (no Dexterity penalty). Aztec warriors also carry small shields, which function like bucklers in hand-to-hand combat (+1 to opponent's attack difficulty).

Fighting Orders: The clans maintain fighting orders. The warriors wear armor to honor the animals whose power they try to emulate: the jaguar or eagle.

Macana: The Aztec fight with a flattened club lined with square pieces of obsidian (which is far sharper, but more fragile, than steel). Conquistadors report having a horse's head whacked off with one blow of macana! (Difficulty 6; damage Strength +5; add +1 to the defensive value of leather armor and +2 to the protection of metal armor against the macana, thus making it difficult for the weapon to penetrate such defenses.)

Other Weapons: Warriors also carry large thrusting spears with obsidian points. Bows, slings and clubs are used in battle. Wealthy *iyac* warriors hire porters to follow them into battle and carry extra weapons, food, medicines and bonds (for capturing prisoners).

Tactics: Tactics? The Aztec never fight after dark or even at twilight; nor do they ever attack from surprise. Usually they march to a city, wait for their war-leader's signal and fall screaming upon the foes. Seasoned warriors, *tequina*, watch out for the raw recruits and follow their brave exploits. Prisoners are turned over to the leaders, and scribes keep track of how many prisoners are taken.

stations of society, though — persons of the higher classes may even sell themselves in to slavery to pay debts. Slaves usually work alongside the *thalmaitl* or act as porters. Aztec slaves are not without hope: Some industrious slaves can purchase their own freedom, and the children of Aztec slaves are free. Strangely, if a slave manages to escape and steal himself into the emperor's palace (no easy feat), he is declared free.

Mores

Bravery and fearlessness are the highest virtues for the Aztec. While people certainly value love and friendship, war is the only means for social advancement, so a warrior's ethics became paramount. Even among the priesthood, a violent and bloodthirsty temperament is a necessity. The gods have seen fit to give the Aztec people a flourishing civilization; in return, the Aztec must pay the demands of blood. The gods are hungry, so it is only fitting that the people should carry out the will of the gods with vigor.

Economy

Most of the Aztec empire participates in a barter economy. Cacao beans, used to make chocolate, are so valuable that they make a convenient medium of exchange, but no coin is minted and no formal rates of exchange are observed. Merchants barter for the value that they think they may demand. Furthermore, the upper castes need not concern themselves with such trivial matters as subsistence — the provinces (the conquered city-states) pay monthly tribute to the Aztec, and so in turn, provide for most of the nobles' needs.

As with all other societies, each Aztec village and city has marketplaces where people from all over the empire meet, gossip and exchange goods. Markets had to be close at hand, though. Without horses, all trade is done via canoe or with porters. Only the Inca in far-off Peru use beasts of burden (llamas). As a result, merchants must deal in valuable, portable goods and travel only to nearby cities. Heavy objects can be more easily made than transported, and foodstuffs may spoil on long journeys, so traveling merchants bring weapons, cacao beans and other non-perishable goods in demand.

The Supernatural

Supernatural forces pervade the lands of the Aztec. The cities are the haunts of vampire god-kings, and the jungles are the hunting grounds for skinchangers. Priest and citizen alike recognize the power of these hungry patrons, whom they give obeisance instead of fighting. Indeed, some warrior societies seek to emulate the strength of their predators. Supernatural creatures are by no means hidden in the empire — they walk as lords among the meager mortals.

Magery

Few mages exist in the Aztec Empire; in fact, almost all of the supernatural creatures apart from vampires have been wiped out — Huitzilopochtli's forces have been especially effective in eradicating the local populations of Garou and Bastet. A secret cult of Quetzalcoatl worshippers and hedge magicians remains in the valley. Also, many of the con-

quered peoples have their own sorcerers. A few shapechangers travel through the provinces of the empire, and some warriors respect their prowess. The driving blood-worship of the Aztecs is inhospitable to proponents of a more peaceful or harmonious society.

But what have visitors to fear? Many temples are the resting places for powerful vampires, and many of the high priests are ghouls, but they have one powerful ally: Huitzilopochtli. In the 300 years that he has been manipulating the natives, he has grown bored. His greatest threat, Quetzalcoatl, was driven off long ago. The Garou and Bastet are few and fragmented, and the hundreds of thousands of lives sacrificed to him have made the game... uninteresting. He craves news of the Old World, and he longs for new challenges. So what if he has to watch his children fall to the bullets and broadswords of the Order of Reason? In fact, it might prove diverting.

Huitzilopochtli

The god Huitzilopochtli rarely stirs from his tomb deep in the heart of the Sun Temple. In fact, the great glut of blood and the complete security in which he lives threatens him with torpor. He has sired several children over the years, but keeps the population of vampires down by feeding exclusively from them. The children accept this arrangement as another form of sacrifice — the bodies of captives are sacrificed to the gods (the vampires), who are in turn sacrificed to their master, Huitzilopochtli. Still, these vampires tend to be nearly as potent as their sire, Huitzilopochtli. Certainly, they are not to be trifled with! Each has the aspect of a god and ministers to the people and priests as such.

There are fewer than 20 vampires in the empire, and all must seek Huitzilopochtli's permission to sire more. Huitzilopochtli is usually reluctant to grant this permission unless he desires a new vessel; he needs no would-be usurpers to his throne. However, the invading conquistadors provide a bloody sport that drives Huitzilopochtli to recruit new victims for the guns, swords and crucifixes of the invaders.

It is important to note that while the True Faith of the most devout European priests still affects the vampires of Huitzilopochtli's Aztec brood, the latter do not see themselves as damned (even though they are). In their minds, they are the rightful gods of the Aztec people. They know and believe in the powers of Quetzalcoatl. If confronted with white-skinned mages, or the powers of True Faith, they may believe the prophecies of the Feathered Serpent's return are coming true and turn to Huitzilopochtli for aid.

Travelers in the New World

Guided by Explorer maps, strange tales or simply a drive to set out west, traveling magi may find themselves in



the lands of the Aztec empire long before Cortes and his ships arrive. Surviving to tell tales of the empire is a feat in and of itself!

Explorers in the Aztec empire must, first and foremost, confront the problem of the aggressive culture — travelers from beyond the sea are likely to become targets for sacrifice first and foremost. Should the natives be convinced to refrain from striking (perhaps by a display of powerful magick or by communication either with magick or through a translator), travelers are still likely to find themselves embroiled in the Aztec war. Outlying provinces seek to overthrow the rule of the empire, while the Aztec themselves must expand to gather more prisoners for the gods. Particularly powerful, incautious or notable visitors may even draw the attention of those vampire gods, thus throwing themselves into political machinations centuries old.

Should strong-willed and fortunate explorers manage to make their way into Aztec society, they find an advanced culture spread across great expanses. Though the Aztec people value warfare and pay homage in blood, they are no strangers to sport, art and beauty. The quaint cacao beans and bright plumage of jungle birds make for excellent exotic trade goods among Europeans, whereas the Aztec themselves gladly gift welcome visitors with gold in exchange for harder metals such as steel.

A cunning group of magi might well alter the Aztec reception of Cortes and the conquistadors by posing as the white gods or their emissaries. The client states could be turned to civil war, or the Aztec people might make a unified front against the invaders. The culture could even be turned against its vampiric masters and restored to its former peaceful glory by one with the strength and willingness to guide it through the centuries. Though the Aztec may not have the tools of the Order of Reason, they have an empire of thousands, all strong-willed, hardy and devout — could such an empire survive in a changing world if it, too, could change?

Isles of the Dragon King



Perpetually veiled in silver mist, the Isles of the Dragon King rise out of the azure waters of the Pacific on cliffs of jade. Ancient hands carved the islands out of myth and harnessed them to gigantic Atlas turtles, which still propel them through mysterious seas. The isles are a remnant of magic and mystery still extant in the world. They fade into view for a moment and give travelers a chance to stride a land of magic with all the wonder and horror that entails. In their wake, the cultures of the world

create many stories of disappearing islands. In these tales, brave explorers visit the drifting locales to seek wisdom, or eternal youth, and sometimes eternal happiness. The tale-spinners give the isles many names: the Isles of the Blest, the Five Fortunate Isles of Yu, Paradise, the Disappearing Isles, the Isle of Re, I Brasil. The isles fill a need for magick in every society.

Pavone's Story

God is great! On the third night as I awaited Xochiquetzal, I felt the rough tongue of the cat I had been feeding rasping across my bonds. Soon, it chewed through my tether. When I turned to thank the beast, a woman — well, something part woman, and part cat — stood there. A skinchanger! She brought my satchel and handed it to me. Then, she motioned for me to follow her.

We fled through the night, pursued by a storm of flowers. In two weeks' time she guided me to the sea. She spoke only twice to me. Once she told me her name, Palcan. The other time she described Quetzalcoatl to me. She asked me to find him and entreat him to return and drive the bloody gods from the temples, and their hunting parties from the jungles.

After a week on the seas, the sun baked the very will out of me. The reed raft made from the seeds of Harakoy Dikko was falling apart. Finally, one night, a bump shook the remnants of my raft as I drifted despondently in half-slumber. The previous night's shark attack immediately leapt to mind, but instead I found a wonder — a cliff of yellow jade, luminescent in the moonlight.

Unbelieving, I reached out and learned it was real! Gathering my rudder, I stepped off my raft and began to climb.

— Captain David Pavone, P'eng Lai

April 16, 1455

Prejudices and Knowledge

The stories of the "Isle of the Blest" appear in the mythologies of Cathay (China), Chipango (Japan), Egypt, the Indies, Polynesia and the Celts. The Emperors of China and Japan fund missions to discover the isles so their minions can gather *li chih*, the fungus of immortality. Shipwrecked sailors clutch flotsam and pray the isles' jade cliffs will come into view.

The Disappearing Isles have many homes. Believers claim they appear in the Yellow River, the Nile and the Mediterranean. The Gaels and Celts also have their stories of disappearing islands with fae inhabitants. Tales from the East cite the appearance of the isles all over the Pacific, especially in the Yellow Sea. In China and Japan sailors believe them to lie just beyond the horizon in the East, where the waters of the sea mingle with the Celestial River Ho (the Milky Way). Everyone is right — the isles exist independently of any one place.

How does anyone find isles that move through the sea? The answer is a paradox, of course, for no one who knows of the isles' existence can find them — unless invited or kidnapped by one of the island's denizens. Those who look cannot find. Other than guests, only those travelers who stumble unknowingly into the islands' path can encounter the Isles of the Blest.

A seafarer who blunders upon the isles has but one opportunity to tread these enchanted grounds. But he must decide quickly — any hesitancy, any doubt and the eternally snow-hooded mountains once again disappear into their robes of luminous mist.

Fortune and Fate

The isles are on the knife-edge of existence. The dawning Age of Reason threatens to dash them on the rocks of the quotidian world. Worse, the powerful artifact that once protected them and promulgated their traveling existence is long gone. Already the threads of Chi energy — or quintessence — binding the isles together are coming undone.

History

Lei Tze, a Chinese sorcerer, credits the creation of the Isles of the Blest to five great dragons — each representing one of the Chinese elements: earth, wood, fire, metal and water. In the twilight of the Fourth Age, the dragons of the East gathered artisans from among the mortal and supernatural creatures of the land, including many Asian conjurers. On a rosette of islands, the dragons hoped to preserve a bit of the wonders of the Age of Legends until the great cycle of being returned the world to a more magical time.

The stability of the isles was maintained by the Kila of P'an Ku, a gift to the Dragon of Earth from the mythic creator of the world. As with kila of Indian myth, or the phur-ba of Tibetan Buddhism, it consists of five parts. The most important is a central spike made of yellow-gold jade and over eight feet in height. This spike represents the axis of Earth, about which the other elements turn. Atop the spike sits a four-armed demon holding four lesser spikes. These spikes are made of colored jade matching the cardinal points of the Chinese compass and the other elements: green for east and the element wood; red for south and fire; white for west and metal; and last, black jade for the northern spike, representing water.

The dragon Yu kept the central stake in his palace and gave each of his siblings one of the lesser spikes. When the dragons planted them in their palace's courtyards, the kila balanced the flow of Chi in and around the isles. The objects collectively helped keep the islands in the proper orientation and repelled the blight of the Scourge. Today,

though, the artifact is gone from the isles, and no one knows where it rests. Perhaps if it were returned, the isles might garner the Chi to survive the storm of reason — or perhaps the artifact itself might prove dulled beyond function.

Since their construction, the isles have wandered the seven seas — pulled by Atlas turtles harnessed to the undersides of the floating wonders. In their travels they have picked up stragglers and adventurers from all the lands of the world — and a few lands that are not of this world.

Current Events

The isles are in trouble. The most pressing danger is the work of the Explorators. As they map and define more and more of the world, the isles find it difficult to hide themselves. Tragically, the death knell of the isles was brought about due to the generosity of Yu. Twice before in the history of the isles he lent out the Kila of P'an Ku to quell floods or other natural disasters. The hero who made the latter request never returned, nor did the others sent after him. The Kila of P'an Ku was gone.

With that, the binding force of the islands was gone. Eventually, all of the dragons but the Great Yu left the isles, which have become disjointed. The eastern isle (Tai Yu) and the southern isle (Yuan Cho) have become harder to reach from the other isles.

The Five Isles

The Isles of the Dragon are an archipelago of five islands arranged on the cardinal points of the Chinese compass. Distances between the islands vary, but usually they are within sight of one another. In this Age, one or more of the islands sometimes goes out of alignment, causing earthquakes, tsunami or powerful storms. More subtly, the elemental nature of the isles now affects the creatures and plants dwelling on them, warping them slightly in favor of each element's virtues.

Tai Yu, the Isle of the East

Tai Yu is girdled with low cliffs of green jade. Beyond that is thick jungle, which fades to forest as it climbs toward the snow-capped mountains that dominate the isle's center. There, deep amid the firs, is a stream that flows from a jade-lined fissure. This rivulet is the fountain of youth. A gulp of its waters confers a powerful magickal effect that postpones physical aging for ten years. At the end of that time, the aging process catches up with the drinker, so a drinker can be 20 years old one day and 30 the next day!

The Dragon of Wood left the isle eons ago. Her pagodas are overgrown, and the blue jade flagstones of her palace are covered with moss. The isle is still home to a few of the dragon lady's retainers — Eastern fae known as hsien. Though scarce they still hold court in the old palace, far

from the eyes of eavesdroppers. These elemental spirits dwell in the forest that surrounds the decrepit edifice and in the misty vale of the Fountain of Life. Their Mandate from the Dragon of Wood was to protect these places, above all others. Too few of the hsien remained to stem the ravaging of the isles by barbarians who invaded over the years. Nevertheless, they still guard these sites and rarely mix with the new rulers of the isle.

A hundred years ago, a group of the Kindly Ones — the faeries of Europe — took up residence on the isle when it wandered near the west coast of Wales. Their king, Avalloc of House Liam, still rules over them from a fortress facing the eastern shore. Either through fae glamour, or the wishes of the isle itself, the oriental nature of the isle has all but disappeared in the lower climes — and been rewritten in the Celtic themes of the Kindly Ones. The isle now responds to their desires. Oftentimes it wanders far away from the archipelago and into the wilds of the North Atlantic.

Avalloc regards all interlopers with suspicion and subjects them to weeks of interrogation. Those who pass his tests may rest in his abode for a time. Newcomers who agree to his rule are allowed to live on the isle, but no cold iron weapons are allowed: Those who violate this rule are tossed into the surf along with such weapons (and any who have the stupidity to return are slain). Still, Avalloc is a generous and kind ruler — several small villages exist on the isle, all paying tribute to Avalloc's court. The inhabitants include humans, fae and scattered shapeshifters. Yestin, a Hermetic magus of the House once called Merinita, lives in one of the villages. Although he is the person who found the isle for Avalloc and his kind, Yestin prefers not to live in the castle.

The fae are somewhat aware of the isle's past but consider it their own land now, especially since the isle reshaped itself to their whims. They know of the pagoda and the fountain at the mountaintop, but do not dwell there. Avalloc's people believe the hsien to be tree-spirits and have learned not to disturb the forest near these sites. They also know that leaving food and gifts allows them to drink from the fountain. Persons of ill intent are not suffered here. Any thoughts of hoarding the gifts of the fountain — or even passing thoughts of violence — summon swift retribution as the forest springs to life around the offenders. The death-screams of the wicked can be heard far away, echoing through the wood.

Virtues of Tai Yu: This place is one of rest, growth and change. The slight Yang nature of the isle means that action and growth are favored, but it is still tempered by Yin. Most of the creatures and inhabitants are benevolent until provoked, but thereafter actions may be hasty and later regretted.

Crays: Minor crays exist at the fountain, the old palace, and at Avalloc's castle (also a Balefire).

Yuan Cho, the Southern Isle

The red jade cliffs surrounding Yuan Cho are stained with black, volcanic flows. The isle is the home of Mount Raiden, a volcano that can be seen at times from all the islands. Raiden constantly shakes, sputtering ash and flame into the sky. The Fire Dragon may still dwell in the volcano — his troubled sleep probably causes the many earthquakes and small flocs of lava that commonly trouble the island.

Even more often than Tai Yu, Yuan Cho wanders away from the archipelago. Some say it has inherited the predatory nature of the beasts that dwell upon it. It wanders the seas in search of the survivors of shipwrecks; it slakes its thirst for blood and violence upon these foundlings.

Anarchy grips the southern isle. The jungles that reach up the sides of the volcano teem with life and predators. Many fantastic and dangerous beasts live in the jungles and glades of Yuan Cho. Hunters from the other isles sometimes travel here for trophies, but most fear the wildness of the Southern Isle.

The red pagoda, the ancient home of the Dragon of Fire gleams like a jewel on the southern side of the volcano. Partially covered by a volcanic flow, it still lures many up the sides of the volcano and into the dangerous jungles that wreathe it. This dilapidated example of oriental splendor is home to one of Yuan Cho's self-styled rulers called Veasna, a shapeshifting Spider Queen. She and her cohort of Nezumi and other unsavory skinchangers are locked in never-ending war with a band of werewolves. The garou, led by a great old wolf, Hisoka, are determined to rid the island of Vaesna by any means necessary.

All interlopers are attacked; any strong enough to withstand an initial assault are pressed into service, and resistors are killed. Anyone fortunate enough to escape had best not return, for there are no second chances.

Virtues of Yuan Cho: This isle is dominated by Yang energies, which almost always place it in the grip of one turmoil or another. Saturated with vibrant Chi, the volca-

nic soil is rich, and creatures heal wounds quickly (twice the normal rate, actually). Yuan Cho is a land where violence, lust and passion are always in great abundance.

Crays: A major cray exists at the mouth of the volcano, with minor ones literally opening and collapsing at random about the isle.

Fang Hu, Isle of the West

The mountains of Fang Hu are the tallest in the archipelago of the Dragon Isles. The towering mountains crowd the coastline, and their roots of white jade gleam in the surf. The farmers of Fang Hu carve thousands of terraced fields in the low scrub forests of the mountain isle; here also are caves of hermits and an austere monastery — but Fang Hu's main industry is mining. The mountains are veined with rich deposits of iron, copper, silver and gold.

Fang Hu has the highest concentration of magi among all the Disappearing Isles. The Monastery of the Silver Light is built in the highest vale. Wing Chao, the founder of the monastery, was one of the first emissaries sent to the West. Dispatched to try to understand the Stone Dragons (Daedaleans), he traveled to Europe and watched the tools and machines of the Order of Reason in warfare. The machinations of the Stone Dragons sickened him, and he gave up, seeking return passage on a spice ship. As the ship entered the Yellow Sea, a storm overtook it, and it wrecked on Fang Hu's white cliffs. The mountains reminded him of the stories of Meru, and he set out to create a monastery to contemplate the fantastic nature of the isles. Wing Chao, now in his nineties, still leads the monks. All are accepted, and a few here are even Europeans, shipwrecked on the isle, who now seek enlightenment.

The mines harbor a danger to the brothers and the isles as a whole. Six years ago an Artificer named Helga Wiessel washed up on the shores of Fang Hu. She convinced the abbot that she desired to work in peace. Seeing her arrival as a sign to repent his old failure, Wing Chao agreed, hoping

Table of Correspondences

The mythic nature of the five isles is based upon a series of correspondences. The Storyteller should play upon these yokings during an adventure on the isles. Magic that takes advantage of these correspondences is more casual. Feel free to expand this list and come up with more categories — do not let this chart limit your imagination.

Creating magical effects with some Spheres is easier on a particular island. The affected Spheres are listed below. All spells generated along these lines are at -1 difficulty.

Isle	Element	Direction	Season	Color	Spheres
Tai Yu	Wood	East	Spring	Green	Life, Matter, Spirit
Yuan Cho	Fire	South	Summer	Red	Forces, Prime, Spirit
Fang Hu	Metal	West	Autumn	White	Matter, Spirit, Mind
Ying Chou	Water	North	Winter	Black	Matter, Entropy, Spirit

to understand and eventually convert the young woman. She has spent that time building a mining machine, much to the workers' delight. Wiessel's success has allowed her to convert most of the miners to her way of thinking.

Virtues of Fang Hu: The western isle is a place of lesser Yin energies. As such, it is stable but the Yang forces still allow farms — life at a slow pace.

Crays: Several crays exist in the mines and monasteries of Fang Hu. The ones located in the monasteries are minor, and the crays in the mines, like the veins of silver and gold, gradually weaken and fade over time.

Ying Chou, The Northern Isle

Ying Chou is the least hospitable of all the Disappearing Isles. Only a few fishermen eke out a living on the black sand beaches of Ying Chou — nine months of winter climate do not support large farms. The sickle-shaped island is low, filled with swamps and bogs. Its deep harbors are often encrusted with ice. Still, the fish pulled from its black waters are huge, and their numbers are bountiful.

The great northern isle is the haven for Zhixin, a pirate of the Wan Kuei, and his ferocious crew. They prowl the waters just inside isles' magical effect, hunting for lone ships. He attacks by night. Then, the pirate lord and his followers feast on the flesh of their prey and hoard their gold at Zhixin's palace on the icy isle.

Zhixin is careful not to prey on the ships of the other isle's rulers, or upon their subjects. To them, he portrays himself as a necessary evil, and the vampire fleet as the protector of the isles. As the magic fades from the isles, who can say whether Zhixin is correct or not?

Virtues of Ying Chou: Yin forces dominate Ying Chou. Things here feel stagnant, unchanging and ancient. Even the waves buffeting the shore are low — all the energy is sucked out of them.

Crays: A major cray exists at the center of the bay — in the mouth created by the semicircular isle.

P'eng Lai, the Central Isle

Also known as Re in Egyptian mythology, the land beyond the cliffs of yellow jade consists of rolling hills, low mountains, small forests and fertile valleys. At the center of P'eng Lai is a palace of yellow jade. Just south of it is a lake, from which flow five canals that irrigate the fields of the farmers who live here.

The Earth Dragon is gone, but his ministers still keep order on P'eng Lai. A system of exams and contests of rhetoric determine the Five Ministers, who govern the isle. Lesser exams select their magistrates and clerks — all the way down to the heads of villages. In short, the government of P'eng Lai is an enlightened bureaucracy (as much of an oxymoron as that may seem).

Between the cracks of the yellow-tiled Court of the Earth Dragon, at the center of his palaces, grows a rust-brown fungus: The *li chih*, the food of paradise. A tea made from the fungus cures all ills and heals all wounds. However, when the kila did not return and the dragons seemed to leave, the magic of paradise too began to fade. In response, the once-immortal ministers of P'eng Lai made a supreme sacrifice. Rather than horde the *li chih*, they now harvest it and return it to the isle as a whole. Any *li chih* harvested is taken to the lake outside the palace and dumped in. The sages believe that the curative powers then flow to everyone and even restore the isle itself.

Of course, not everyone is so noble. A secret flow of *li chih* makes its way to the right bidders. Some of the powerful people on the isle crave it. As corruption spreads, the isle as a whole unravels.

Virtues of P'eng Lai: P'eng Lai is a worldly paradise exuding peace, timelessness and order. As the isles lose their magick and the *li chih* dries up, though, strife overtakes P'eng Lai. It may simply fade into lifelessness, or fall to some catastrophe unless salvaged through heroic sacrifice.

Crays: The Court of the Earth Dragon is the most powerful cray in the archipelago.

Weather

Each of the Dragon Isles experiences the seasons differently. P'eng Lai is the only one that experiences all of the seasons for more or less equal periods of time. The other isles have a primary season that lasts for nine months; the other seasons last only a month each, but the order of the seasons remains the normal. Tai Yu is in springtime nine months of the year, whereas Yuan Cho experiences summer for that long. Fang Hu enjoys the colors of autumn for three quarters of a year, and the poor fishermen of Ying Chou must chip the ice of winter off their boats for an interminable nine months!

Visiting the Isles

The Dragon Isles can be encountered by nearly any group at sea. Even a simple trip across the Mediterranean could be interrupted by their appearance. Travelers seeking safety might find a welcome respite here or inhospitable wilderness. The isles can also offer refuge after a disastrous shipwreck.

The Vampire Fleet: Zhixin might attack persons traveling by ship. The Wan Kuei may be ruthless, but he is not a fool. If faced with strong magickal resistance, Zhixin halts his attack in exchange for valuables and information about the outside world. The pirate may even conduct strong adversaries to his palace and perhaps from there to P'eng Lai — though woe betide anyone who actually trusts the demon!



The Kila: The Five Ministers know the end of their paradise approaches. They still periodically send adventurers forth to search for the kila. It holds the only power that can restore balance to the isles. Anyone on such a quest could lead others back to the isles, invited to return as they are by the nature of the quest. The islands powerful magical crays and enchanted natural places make for enticing environs; the Five Ministers could very well offer up stores of Chi energy, quintessence, mystical knowledge or minor artifacts to any who would quest for the kila.

Ming China, A.D. 1456



China is a land of opulent power and ancient supernatural societies. Magi who go there see the future and the past: the wealth of the Dragon Wizards, the mysteries of the *shen* and rise of the Order of Reason.

Pavone's Story

The weeks I spent on P'eng Lai were the most peaceful of my life. The people there were happy and content, the magi wise and benevolent. Perhaps it's the juxtaposition, but my fellows here in Canton seem petty compared to them.

I speak ill of him, but Dionis, a Portuguese member of the Grand Financiers, has been good to me. He has arranged passage on a ship bound for Basra. From there I plan to cross through the lands of my father, the Turk, and then home to Venice.

*I had friends in the Guild, so Dionis' greed was expected. I was more troubled by Xuan Ya, the Chinese healer I met. When he found where I had been, all he did was rhapsodize about the *li chih*. Did I have any? Did I see it? Then he and Dionis, over a full pipe of opium, got into a long conversation over what they could do with the magical herb — not the good they could do, but the money that it could bring. And with money, power.*

Is this the gift we give the East?

— Captain David Pavone, Canton

November 5, 1456

Prejudices and Knowledge

China is viewed much like the dragon, the symbol of its imperial might, by the West. It is immensely old and powerful, and likewise rests on an irresistible treasure of technological and material wealth. China is the font of silver and porcelain craved by the masses of Europe. As with a dragon, the Europeans who deal with her treat China with (sometimes sycophantic) respect, lest she stir and destroy them.

Fortune and Fate: The Mandate of Heaven

China tends to exist in states of interminable stagnation followed by bloody revolution, then a quick shift into stability, then a decent into another long period of conformity and inactivity.

Like the European ideal of the "divine right of kings," the emperors of China rule with the Mandate of Heaven. Usually this mandate passes down the family line, but in the blink of the eye it can be removed. It is a slippery concept. At least three times heaven has chosen peasants to rule, rather than princes.

History

One peasant favored of Heaven was Hung Wu, "very warlike," a monk of peasant stock who, with his Red Turban Society, overthrew the Mongol khans and took up the Mandate of Heaven in 1368. He began the Ming, or "brightness," Dynasty.

The early Ming rulers reformed China. They repaired roads and dikes, reclaimed land and started new agricultural practices. One of the most important developments was champa rice, taken from the Indus valley — it allowed two harvests per year. Land was taken from corrupt officials and nobles and given back to the peasants. In exchange, the burden of taxes shifted from the merchant class to the farmers, but with the increased yields they were easily paid during the early part of the Ming dynasty.

Current Events

Just as the Mamluk assume control over their masters in the Levant, the eunuchs of the Ming court eventually take over its administration. Eunuchs receive prominent positions in the government because they cannot produce offspring and because they are usually orphans from the lowest walks of society. They therefore owe allegiance only to the court. Unfortunately, they help to create such an arcane bureaucracy of procedure and ritual that the government ceases to function.

The eunuchs and courtiers convince the emperors that the Mandate of Heaven can be maintained only via elaborate ceremonies and rituals. The result is that the emperor has no time to govern. Thus, the eunuchs and their bureaucracy take over. Intrigue and scandal so preoccupy them that little is done.

The Forbidden City's size, staff and mismanagement are incomprehensible to most Westerners. Nearly 20,000 eunuchs work there, along with 3,000 domestic servants and more than 2,000 relatives, concubines, guards and wives. The city's greed and graft suck gold out of the treasury faster than the emperor's crushing taxes can possibly fill it. Were it

not for the boom of trade going on in south China, the empire would be in ruins. Trade caravans from India still ply the Silk Road. Portuguese, Japanese and lately Dutch merchants crowd the southern harbors. From these merchants come foreign goods and bountiful taxes that support an empire ready to collapse under its own bureaucratic weight.

In 1449, Wang Zhen, the head eunuch, convinces his young emperor, Ying-tung, to lead a military expedition against the Mongols. The campaign is a disaster, and for six years the emperor remains a captive of the Mongols. Wang struggles in negotiations with the Mongols for six years, yet the throne stays empty. Some believe that Wang arranged the whole matter, but such words must be spoken in secret, as the eunuchs have their own network of spies and secret police.

On the southern seas, Japanese and Korean pirates raid merchant ships of all nationalities. Taxes, which have risen greatly to support the army, are ignored in many parts of the country. Magistrates cannot possibly prosecute tens of thousands of delinquents, so the tax rolls are forged or written off. The once-proud dynasty is ruled through procedures created to exclude rather than to test. One can only guess at the forms that may follow as China continues its slow, yet inexorable, slide back into a slumber.

Future Fates

Even with all of its internal problems, China looms large over the world stage. Its military is made up of mercenaries, but there are more than a million of them. The government is corrupt, but the raw materials China produces are in high demand — some believe that between one-third and one-half of all the silver removed from the New World by Spain and Portugal eventually ends up in China!

By 1457, the emperor is back on the throne — nominally. He rules until 1464, followed by more puppet emperors. In 1573, the emperor Wan-li ascends the throne and briefly attempts to assert his independence. He tries to increase the size of the military and to initiate other reforms, but the entrenched bureaucracy proves too much for him.

In the 1600s, the Manchus from Northern China threaten to take over the Empire. Disastrous wars fought in Korea and Japan further deplete the treasury, and when the army can no longer be paid the country erupts into chaos. The soldiery goes outlaw, and warlords and petty kings rise in the provinces. By 1644, the Manchus defeat the remnants of the Ming and take over. Another period of renewal and reform begins.

Journey of the Senses

China is strange, ancient and vast — far beyond any European's experience. The experience should be overwhelming to any visitor.

Geography

The western two-thirds of China is dominated by high plateaus and lofty mountains. More mountain ranges stretch north and south in the eastern regions, reducing the productive farmland to less than 15 percent of the total land area.

This arable land lies in the east — dominated by plains and river valleys of China's great rivers, the Yangtze, the Amur and the Yellow Rivers.

Weather

The Yellow River valley is a semi-arid region that goes through periods of flood and drought. The Yangtze valley is much more humid, and Chongqing, far inland, boasts an 11-month growing season. Fantastic floods are common on the river, where the loss of life and property are high.

Architecture

Chinese architecture is dominated by the ideals of feng shui — a belief that proportion and alignment to the cardinal directions can influence the health of a structure's inhabitants. Buildings commonly have windows, doorways or even entire rooms designed to propitiate the spirits. Doors open to directions other than the north (which is unlucky). Colors are chosen with regard to the building's function and inhabitants. Fang shih — sorcerers who perform the rites of feng shui — are highly paid and respected.

Most formal building have large, overhanging roofs supported by beams. The joinings are ingeniously flexible to prevent damage during earthquakes. Wood predominates for building, at least partially because stone is not as safe during a tremor. Bells, tassels and other decorations are considered appropriate to adorn doors and roofs. Statuary is common; depictions of various gods or deceased family members take positions of importance in even the poorest households.

Food

There is an endless variety of foods in China, and the Chinese love to cook and eat. The foods of mountainous Szechuan are hot and spicy, whereas the northern foods are laden with noodles. Rice is the staple of the diet, often supplemented with soybeans and small servings of fish or pork. Duck and other fowl can be caught for their meat, but the beef and mutton so common to Europe are almost never to be had. Meals range from simple dishes of rice with a few dumplings or pieces of boiled flour to elaborate suppers of several courses. In many provinces, one's wealth and standing is measured through the number of courses that can be served in a meal. A seven-course supper, therefore, is a great honor to serve and to attend, a feast hosted by the wealthiest of nobles. In such cases, the host gains great prestige by

ensuring that as many guests as possible may be filled with as much as they can eat.

Different kinds and blends of tea are drunk all over China. Some people add milk, sugar or dried flowers to flavor their tea. Tea has sustained China for centuries; supposedly invented when a wandering monk found that some leaves had fallen into his boiling water and given it a particular flavor, tea is a part of nearly every meal. Tea is sometimes served to customers by merchants, simply as a common courtesy!

Dress

The length of a man or woman's cloak, and its colors, are a hint to his or her station in life. Color also differentiates the masses. Orange-gold silk is reserved for the emperor's clothes, as are five-fingered dragon motifs. In formal courts or religious occasions, nothing is too ostentatious: long tassels, trailing tails, elaborately detailed and curled slippers and silken sashes all make appearances. Variegated dyes, combined with a surfeit of textiles (including the silk so highly valued in Europe) mean that robes are brilliant, supple and soft.

Commoners may wear heavy cotton outfits that consist of baggy trousers and a simple jacket. Sandals or slippers are the order of the day, though laborers may make do with bare feet and even without a coat or vest on a hot day.

Mortal Society

Although many of the reforms of Hung Wu deteriorate in time, his model of society is still followed in word if not in deed. First he divides China into four provinces, which are composed of about 10,000 counties. Thus, regions can be controlled directly by bureaucrats and ministers, yet the emperor can still exercise absolute authority if some small county proves troublesome.

To provide a class of skilled administrators, Hung Wu re-establishes civil service exams during his reign. These tests ensure imperial bureaucrats who are educated and culturally literate. Over 100,000 positions are available, covering all manner of government and social services. Bureaucrats are tested on legalism, Chinese classics, mathematics and essay writing. High scorers are encouraged to take further tests, thus allowing for participation in progressively higher posts of office.

Cities are even rarer in China than in Europe. Most people live in villages and towns; towns are just villages with markets. Market days occur two or three times every 10-day week, and villages within walking distance rotate such days so that traveling merchants are always busy. Inside the markets are stalls for traveling artisans, carpenters, barbers, joiners and locksmiths. Locals sell raw and prepared foods and homespun items of dyed cloth or em-

broidery. Since small groups of villages can host a single central market, there is little need for a gathering of craftsmen in a city; artisans can live in smaller communities, their wares traded with the other nearby villages. Cities thus serve less as places of specialized craftsmen and more as government centers, where bureaucrats process information and run the day-to-day administration of all of China's millions of communities.

Religion

Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism are the three primary religious philosophies of China. The Chinese mix and match them at will, often ignoring what would be considered contradictions elsewhere.

Confucianism is concerned only with actions in this world. If such a thing can exist, it is purely secular religion. Confucius proposed a system through which one could become a "superior man" by seeking wisdom and serving in a proper place. The rigid hierarchy of Confucianism leads to obedience to superiors, respect for family, duty to country and adherence to tradition. Confucianism stresses a mastery of sagely wisdom, study of the classics and a broad education; Confucius believed that a man could make proper judgments and live a virtuous life only if well-versed in the intricacies of propriety and order.

Taoism is the oldest of China's religions. Its ideal is a balance between humanity and nature. Feng shui and Chinese medicine both derive from precepts of Taoism. In Taoism, all action and thought springs from the Tao, the primal motion of the universe. Only when ego and thought interfere does the Tao become discarded, causing men to make errors and to move against the harmony of the cosmos. To bring peace and contentment, one must follow the Tao, move as the universe requires and act only out of necessity. The principle of *wu wei* (non-action) guides the Taoist in flowing with the waves of the Tao. When one surrenders oneself to the Tao, it drives all action and motion, so that the Taoist need never concern himself with the exigencies of existence — the universe takes its natural course.

Of the three, Buddhism, an import from India, conforms best to the Western idea of a religion. Yet its emphasis on personal enlightenment and the rejection of the material world have resonance with both Confucian and Taoist beliefs (otherwise it probably would have been outlawed by the authorities). Mingling a host of gods, demons and hells with the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, Buddhism seeks to teach a transcendence of material desire. Since all things change, attachment to or desire for worldly things leads ultimately to suffering. By removing desire, the Buddhist overcomes suffering. Regular prayers to various gods propitiate the spirit world and ask for intercession on behalf of the supplicant seeking enlightenment or just an easing of suffering for the worthy. By overcoming the desires of the

self, a Buddhist hopes to escape from the cycle of reincarnation; even the gods and demons are trapped in the eternal cycle and freed only by the promise of eventual salvation as guided by the bodhisattvas, once-mortal beings who realized the highest truths of existence yet remain out of compassion to show the way to others.

Roles

The entire Chinese population is roughly divided into three categories. Male children are automatically placed in the same category as their father and are expected to replace him. For example, families assigned as soldiers are expected to replace sons fallen in battle.

The three classes of Chinese citizenry are peasants, controlled by the Ministry of Finance; artisans, controlled by the Ministry of Public Works; and soldiers, controlled by the Ministry of War. Geography is key in determining a family's role: The location of a family allows it access to certain careers, thus defining its position. Soldier families tend to live along the mountain borders of the north or along the coasts, where defense may be necessary against invaders. Artisans live in cities and larger towns, whereas peasants live in villages and small market towns.

There are two avenues of escape in the social order. First, one can take the civil service exams re-instated by the Ming Dynasty; a high score could lead to a prestigious imperial appointment. The other route to advancement comes through the act of castration. Castrated males can appeal for a position in the imperial court (first at Nanking, then Peking). Most of the time, the operation is done first, to prove one's earnestness to serve. In fact, castration is a thriving trade outside the Forbidden City.

Mores

Confucian values dominate the morality of China. The central tenet is *jen*, which can be defined as "goodness" or "humanity." To show this virtue, one must be faithful to oneself and other people — in short, to exercise the golden rule. Other virtues include integrity, righteousness, propriety and filial piety. Although Confucius was not a spiritual man, most Chinese extend filial piety beyond the grave to include ancestors and local gods in their rituals.

Without a central, organized church, China lacks the sort of guiding compass provided by Christianity in Europe. Each individual is expected to make his own contributions to his faith and to follow the forms he feels necessary. Though from time to time some parts of the government may ban or encourage particular religious practices, tolerance is much more common. There is no Inquisition and no stern denial of money or flesh. Indeed, the government seems more inclined to regulate against stupidity than against any sort of moral failings (one infamous example cites the death penalty for anyone caught swimming during

a storm — to dissuade people from doing so and thus possibly *accidentally* dying from lightning).

The Supernatural

Most Chinese take the supernatural forces at work in the world as a matter of course. Although some people's faith may seem shallow or detached from emotion, why take the risk of offending the gods? Sacrifices are made, prayers said, the precepts of feng shui obeyed during construction projects. To some outsiders it may seem like cultural inertia, but to even the most jaded members of the Middle Kingdom the supernatural is a part of life.

All of which is not to say that many people do not care about the unseen world and its struggles. The temples are filled with ardent monks, and sages of Confucianism and the Tao abound. Spirituality in China is, in fact, alive like no other on earth.

The *shen*, as supernatural beings of Asia refer to themselves, are far less factionalized than in the West. While uncommon, it is not improbable for magi, skinchangers and vampires to sip tea together as associates or even colleagues. (Any of the *Year of the Lotus* products can give a Storyteller a wealth of information on the *shen*.)

Chi'n Ta

The "Lightning People" are setting the stage for the tumultuous times to come. The dark forces of the Infernal have allied with the ancient Eastern version of the Order of Reason against the classical powers and already they are levering them off the throne.

Wu Lung: For the moment, the old court magi still hold onto the mystic throne of China. Whereas the Traditions are often austere, the Dragon Wizards are ostentatious, even arrogant. Their success has blinded them. They belittle the money-grubbing Five Metal Dragons and the shambling Wu-Keng. Merchants and women — fear them? Preposterous!

Akashic Brotherhood: The Brotherhood is very strong in China. Martial arts schools are located in most major cities, and secluded vales hold hermit-like masters. The Buddhist temples also serve as recruiting and training grounds. Often, temple acolytes engage in open displays of disapproval for government corruption — a shadow of the Akashic Brotherhood's battle against the Wu Lung.

Wu-Keng: These peasant magicians camouflage their diabolic natures in the twisted bodies of women. Long ago they began to consort with demons to combat their ancient enemies, the Dragon Wizards. In the past few years, they have come back to the cities to help the Five Metal Dragons in their struggles with the Wu Lung.

Five Metal Dragons: A new force of once-disaffected magi gathers the strings of power in China. These magi have

allied themselves with the emissaries of the Daedaleans who arrived alongside the first traders and ambassadors from the West. They have subverted the court politics of the Wu Lung and have instead concentrated on the merchants and warlords. In short, the Five Metal Dragons control much of the wealth in the port cities and growing trade centers of the East. Forbidden technologies and Western ideas are already poisoning the heart of the dragon. The Hua T'o, the Chinese version of the Cosians, are among the most powerful weapons of the Five Metal Dragons. Their work with the nobility and peasantry has put a kind face in front of darker schemes, even as they analyze the machinations of the Wu Lung and win thousands of converts to new ideas.

Wan Kuei: The vampires of the East control vast fortunes and are intimate with the Wu Lung and the human government. Although many of the other supernaturals blame the Wan Kuei for the fallen state of the world, the vampires are still considered a necessary component of Heaven's Mandate. Diligently crafty, the Wan Kuei follow aims inscrutable to most mortals or magi. The vampires can be found in the courts of the Wu Lung and in the temples of the Akashic Brotherhood, pulling strings of mortal society and breathing the rarefied air of enlightenment, but they are first and foremost monsters. Any magus fool enough to forget that may soon find his flesh giving sustenance to the unliving.

Hsien: Cut off from the spirit worlds, the former messengers of Heaven clothe themselves in mortal flesh to avoid destruction by those who would steal their powers. Hsien society has two classes: the kamuii and the hirayanu. The kamuii are noble elemental spirits charged with the maintenance of the Middle Kingdom. The hirayanu are animalistic spirits. Much like the shapeshifters, they concern themselves with preserving the natural world and protecting humanity. Simultaneously arcane and majestic, the hsien move unnoticed among mortals. Sometimes, a messenger may be found in a position of government, but most often the hsien dedicate their mortal spans to the search for the immaculate state in which they may return to the grace of Heaven.

Zhong Lung: The skinchangers of the East are marvelously diverse, but the best known are the Zhong Lung, the dragon changers. Indeed, it is whispered that in the early days of the empire, China was ruled by literal Dragon Emperors! Perhaps the imperial bloodline even now holds a bit of reptilian nature within its blood — but if so, it has been all but lost. The Zhong Lung are not the only shapechangers in China; mischievous ghost foxes from Chipango sometimes play havoc among the gullible, and rat-folk are said to dwell in the sewers or tunnels under the cities, while men clothed as sharks hunt near distant fishing villages. The majestic dragons are certainly the most noticed of all, though.

The Ottoman Empire History



he lands of the Turk are the home of Islamic might, poised to destroy Europe and reign over it in autocratic might. Or are they? That is the nature of Constantinople — intrigue and surprise.

Pavone's Story

My steps to the crowded streets of Constantinople have brought me to a sort of enlightenment after all. I cannot go home. I have seen too much to return to the Lodge. My trip though the heartland of the Turks proved even more fateful than my escape from the gods of the Mexica, or my stay in paradise. Here there is war, and human vanity, but there is also brotherhood — far more than I have seen in the West. We must not divide, and I cannot get my hand to draw another line demarcating the peoples of the world. We must connect, otherwise my brothers in the Order of Reason will match the demons of the Tenochtitlan night soul for soul. In their case it will be the knife of schism, rather than obsidian, that cuts the heart out of the world.

I do not know where I stand yet, but I do not stand with them. I go on another journey, but this time my feet shall rest. It is my mind that will wander and taste the world.

— Uberto Pavone-Souk, Constantinople

September 12, 1458

Prejudices and Knowledge

Europeans behold the might and wealth of the Ottomans with green eyes, cold hearts and closed minds. To the Christians of Europe, the Turks are the ministers of Satan himself. The leaders of Church and state sell this demonic image to the masses because they fear the truth: The plight of the common man under Ottoman hegemony is much better than in the lands of the Church.

Indeed, in the many Crusades that sweep across Europe and the Turkish lands, the opposing sides cry out to God or Allah before charging, neither side realizing that they call out to the same deity in differing languages. For much of Europe, the Turkish lands provide a convenient means to be rid of troublesome nobles who could be convinced to join a crusade or to expand lands and capture wealth. The differences of religion, concealed in a bitter irony only by language, prove excuse enough for wars in which faith ultimately matters little.

Fortune and Fate

The Ottoman Empire is one of the most enduring powers of world. It will exist from the 14th century to the early 20th century — a legacy of over 600 years!

The fathers of the great sultans were Turkoman warriors who worked as mercenaries for the Seljuk Caliph, Ala al-Din. They cleared Anatolia (Turkey) of the dynasty's foes, and in recompense they received the land abutting the decadent Byzantine empire — a slight gift, due to the danger of the Christian barbarians, but one that would spell doom for both Byzantium and the Seljuk Caliphate.

In 1299, Osman (whence the world "Ottoman" springs) declared his lands independent of the Seljuk. He and his descendants quickly expanded his realm. In order to put down a rebellion of his own, the Byzantine emperor let the Ottomans pass the Dardanelles, and they quickly dominated parts of Bosnia, Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia — thus surrounding the Christian Empire in an Islamic sea.

The Byzantines were spared, not by their Christian brothers in Europe, but by Timur the Tartar. He conquered vast parts of the Ottoman Empire in the early 15th century. But under the rule of Mehmed the Restorer, the empire was reunited within decades.

In 1453, six weeks of cannon and siege engine bombardment herald the end of Byzantium. The great walls of Constantinople, decrepit after centuries of ill maintenance, finally fall and the Turks rush into their new capital. Europe wails, even as its people leave their brethren to die under the scimitar.

Current Events in A.D. 1458

Mehmed II sits on the throne of the Ottoman Empire, and Europe holds its breath. Next to the Chinese Emperor, he is the most powerful ruler in the world, and unlike the Chinese, he is willing to use his power for more than defense.

In 1456, the Janissaries help to capture Athens, and the might of the Turkish army turns to Serbia, whose future seems poor. The only weakness of the Turks seems to be their navy. The Venetian sea-captains usually get the better of Turkish privateers, but the Turks still outnumber the Italians, so the Venetians avoid any head-on clashes.

Turn from the West, and four factions dominate the Islamic world. The Mamluk of Egypt are the old power, now in the last throws of Byzantine decadence, but still powerful and wily. They are led by Qansah al-Gwhari.

To the east is the shah of the new Safavid dynasty of Persia (Iran). The Persians also wish to conquer heathen lands and open the way for Islam, but their Shia roots make them bitter enemies of the orthodox Sunni Ottomans.

The titular head of the Islamic world is the Abbassid Caliph living in Baghdad. He is really a puppet of the Mamluk leader in Egypt, but a prize the other three forces of Islam covet. Being his "patron" gives one the de facto seal of righteousness the Ottomans crave.

Two Faces of Islam: Sunni and Shiite

History suggests that Islam should be a united faith. In the early years of the caliphs, the leaders of the Islamic faith, such union prevailed. The unification of church and state gave great impetus to the Arabic/Islamic juggernaut under Abu Bakr, Umar I, Uthman, and Ali — from A.D. 632 until 661 the caliphate spread from Medina to include the entire Arabian peninsula, Palestine, Syria, Egypt, Libya, Mesopotamia and parts of Armenia and Persia.

When Ali, the fourth caliph, died, the governor of Syria, Muawiya I, came to power. The Shiites (or Shia) claimed that, because he was not descended from the Prophet, he was unfit for rule, so they broke away. Over the years, Shiite beliefs, cleaving to a traditionalistic mold, have diverged more from Sunni, which attempt to integrate more recent worldly beliefs. Though war between the factions is not common, the schism is as important as the divergence of Protestantism from Catholicism.

So far the Ottomans and Mamluk have had good relations, but the Mamluk are not the power they were, and the Turkish juggernaut must have new lands to sustain itself....

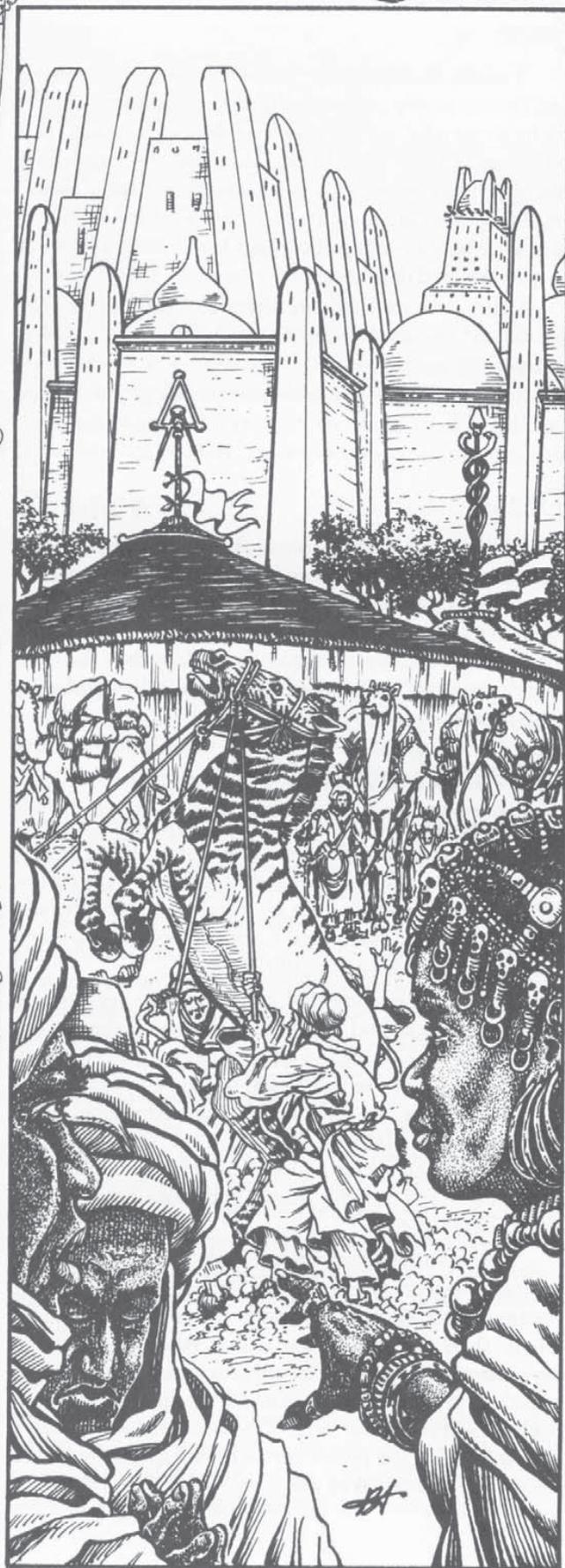
Future Fates

1463: All-out war begins with the Venetians for control for Mediterranean shipping. This war seemingly ends with the crushing defeat of the Ottomans in the Battle of Lepanto, in October of 1571 (Out of more than 200 warships, only about 40 survive). Within the next century, as Venetian power declines, the Ottomans once again reign supreme on the waves of the Eastern Mediterranean.

In 1512, Selim the Grim launches an all-out war with the Mamluk — the prize is the Caliphate itself.

By 1520 Sulieman I becomes the sultan. He leads the Ottomans to victory over the Hungarians in 1526 and the Safavid Empire in 1534. His reign marks the high point for the Turks.

The true decline of Ottoman power does not begin until the late 17th and early 18th centuries, but even these times see periods of reform and regrowth. Not until the 20th century, more than 600 years after its founding, does the Ottoman Empire end, replaced by the Republic of Turkey.



Journey of the Senses: Turkey and Anatolia



The lands of the Ottoman include North Africa, parts of Spain, Greece, Central Europe, Asia and the Middle East — too large to cover in a small space. For a brief view of the center of Islam, one can look at Anatolia, or Rum — the homeland of the empire, the lands of fierce tribesmen, the ancient ruins of Greek and Roman settlers and the ancient home of Troy.

Geography

Anatolia, or Rum as it was once called, has a varied topography. Mountain ranges dominate the west and south — in fact, they spawn the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers that flow into Persia. These mountains are not especially high, but individual peaks are impressive.

High plateaus dominate Anatolia's heartland. In Cappadocia, the eroded hillsides harbor a troglodyte city of monks and mystics... and, some say, darker creatures. The east is the most fertile region, dominated by rivers and lakes, but here too are more mountains, including Mount Ararat, which is more than 17,000 feet high.

Weather

The whole of Anatolia is rather temperate, lying in the same latitude as Naples. The warm Mediterranean keeps coastal areas warm, but the central and eastern plateaus are subject to extreme temperatures in summer and winter.

Architecture

Secular architecture is greatly influenced by many other cultures, chiefly Byzantine, Persian and the Mamluk of Egypt. Ottoman cities are dotted with a hodgepodge of styles: gothic domes, pointed arches and tall minarets at the corners of mosques.

Most interiors are sparsely decorated — there is little furniture. Rooms may have lamps or small braziers for the cold in winter. Carpets, cushions, and mattresses fill most living spaces.

Muslim tradition forbids figurative design (though no such dictum is in the Koran), so religious ornamentation consists of ornate, geometric designs and bas relief of Koran verses. Intricate lattice-work's and patterns come from the adept hands of artisans, leading to a distinctive style unmatched by western Europe. Indeed, the only statuary and animal depictions come from Turkish capture of European lands (primarily in Spain).

Food

Turkish cuisine bears the mark of the Mediterranean and Eastern cooking — it is rich and spicy. Signature dishes include rice pilaf, a wide variety of dishes containing rice with small pieces of lamb, mussels or shrimp. Eggplant is also a specialty, including a dish called imambayildi, meaning "the imam fainted." Colma is a common street food. It is made from a wrapping of cabbage leaves filled with meat — portable and delicious.

Other common foods are olives, sunflower seeds, goat cheese and breads. As with other Islamic cultures, pork is not eaten.

Pastries abound by the thousands: Baklava and a rice pudding called sutalk are favorites. Tea and extremely strong coffee are common ways of washing down sweets.

Dress

Most people in the heart of the Islamic empire wear nested sets of robes. The caftan is a long-sleeved robe usually belted about the middle. An open, short-sleeved robe or coat is worn over that. Rich embroidered silks, dyed in bright colors, are typically the fabrics of the rich. Merchants and herders dress in cotton and wool, but of similar cuts.

Mortal Society

The idea of separation of Church and state, the root cause of much strife in the West, does not exist in Ottoman Turkey. Allah is the head of state. The sultan carries out Allah's laws and administers His land — he protects and defends the faith. The ulema, scholars of the Koran, interpret the law and advise the sultan.

The divan, the imperial council, meets regularly in Istanbul. Made up of the pashas, the leaders of the empire, the council is controlled by the grand vizier. Its members include the aga of the Janissaries, the Kapudan pasha, the head of the navy, the chief judges, the Seyhulismal, chief interpreter of the laws of Islam and other luminaries. The sultan sits behind a screen, hidden from view, which allows him to come and go as he pleases, with none but the vizier sure of his presence.

The divan meets four times a week. The morning hours are taken up with public sessions, including the hearing of petitions and complaints. At noon the court is excused for lunch, then the rest of the day is taken up with the movement of troops and political concerns. In addition, the vizier may call a more intimate meeting called a meshervets. Such a meeting would be a more focused group, possibly only the Aga of the Janissaries and the Kapudan pasha, to discuss the difficulties of war.

A Turkish Lexicon

Amir: A military leader.

El Hajj: A title given to one who has completed the pilgrimage to Mecca.

Imam: A religious leader.

Iblis: Satan.

Maraboaut: An Islamic Cleric.

Muezzin: The crier who announces the daily prayers, traditionally from the minarets of a mosque.

Muhtedi: The name given to a Christian willingly converted to Islam; literally "one who has found the true way."

Religion

Islam means submission — the submission of all, equally under the rule of God. There is no priesthood; anyone can pick up the Koran and dedicate himself to becoming a scholar of the book. One of the basic misunderstandings of the time is that Muslims worship Mohammed. While esteemed above all other prophets, such as Jesus or Moses, he is not worshiped. He is merely God's final prophet and his revelations supersede those of the earlier prophets.

The Sharia, "the way" governing the life of all Muslims, derives from four sources: the Koran; the sunna, or customs of the Prophet; the quyas, analogies made between decisions of the past and new problems; and the ijma, the consensus of the community of believers.

Faith itself lies on five pillars. The first is shahada, the profession of faith in God and the Prophet Mohammed; salat, the prayer one performs five times a day while facing Mecca; zakat, giving to the poor; sawm, fasting during the daylight hours of the month of Ramadan (September); and last, the hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca. These are the basic and central requirements of Islam.

Most Muslims regard Jews and Christians as wayward cousins — many hope to coax such "People of the Book" into the fold of Islam. Much to the chagrin of Christians and Jews, Jesus, his Disciples and Abraham are regarded as Muslim. On the whole, these almost-believers are treated very well within the empire. They are allowed to practice their own religions openly, as long as they pay an additional tax to the Turks.

Roles

The roles of men and women are clearly delineated in Islamic societies. Men hold authority and are responsible for the safety and wealth of the house. Women are their servants who keep the household and bear the children.

Distinctive Institutions of the Ottomans

The Devshirme: The term referring to the Ottoman tactic of collecting young Christian boys (ages eight to 20) to serve in the Janissaries or in the government as slaves. The boys are taught to read and write and to be good Muslims. In return for service, they can rise to great power in the empire as warriors, generals or even governors. Their slave status ensures their honesty and their advancement only through ability, not family connections. These slaves are the muscle and brains of the empire.

Imperial Fratricide: Murad II engages in an ugly tradition among the Imperial household. Upon the naming of the new Sultan, all of his brothers — possible rivals to the throne — are murdered. The government views this act as a necessary evil to keep the empire together, and for a time it works. An unseen side effect is that the entire royal family must be watched, monitored — in effect imprisoned until someone rises into the sultanate.

Janissaries: In the time of Murad I, long before Europe has a professional army, the Janissaries are born. This army of slaves, made up of Christian boys taken as captives of war, are the most feared forces of their day. They have a unique *esprit de corps*, for this day and age: They take pride in their training and professionalism.

The Janissaries cannot marry and so are prevented from becoming a social class, yet, like the Praetorian Guard, they let their will be known and are also quick to attack corrupt officials and institutions of the empire.

Seraglio: The name for the sultan's court and palace, but more specifically his harem. Usually, the Sultan's mother rules the seraglio. She administers the cooks, the eunuchs and the sultan's many wives and concubines.

The Sublime Porte: This term refers to both the grand vizier and his home, the Babiali, or "high gate." This man is the portal through which all information flows to the sultan. He is the most powerful man next to the sultan and the sultan's personal slave.

Although some women who rule European countries, no woman rules in the lands of Islam — at least not directly. Powerful women exercise their abilities via their sons or husbands. This fact causes the seraglio to become a hotbed of politics and intrigue.



Mores

The Sharia answers most of the questions regarding daily conduct of a Muslim, and the Turks are no exceptions. Boys are circumcised, alcoholic beverages are forbidden and usury is condemned.

A Muslim is supposed to be generous and to treat all fairly, no matter their skin color. Christians and Jews, being People of the Book (the Koran), are allowed to practice their religion. These almost-believers are assessed heavier taxes and forbidden to ride horses (though they may ride donkeys). Still, it is generally true that Muslims are far more tolerant than Christians. Jews flee to Anatolia during the 16th century because of Christian persecution and find the Muslims far more accommodating.

Even so, women do not have the same rights as men. Men may marry up to four wives, but women cannot divorce. A man has only to berate his wife in public and wait three months before throwing her into the street.

Slavery is acceptable, but slaves have rights such as the possession of property, and their position is not hereditary.

The Supernatural

The tales of the Middle East are rife with djinn, demons and sorcerers. As with most tales in the Dark Fantastic world, these stories are but dim shadows of the supernatural forces that lie waiting in the wings.

The Subtle Ones: The Ottomans owe much of their enlightened nature to a group of cunning magi, the Ahl-i-Batin. They are not the sultan's advisors — not that many are in the government — only those whose mortal ties landed them in a position of influence. Batini have no desire to rule — they wish to connect, enlighten, and when necessary, direct. Why open oneself to the corruption of worldly power when, with a word, a dream or a thought, one can influence the mightiest government in the world? They consider the Ottomans an example of how the traditions can grow alongside the forces released by the Order of Reason. Too bad the Batini's wayward child, the Council of Magi, is too ignorant to see this.

Mafgouh Doudi: The forces of Iblis wage a constant war with the Batini, taking advantage of the deep divisions

between the zealots on both sides of the Christian/Muslim divide. Many of the ancient supernatural beings of the Middle East throw their lot in with the Defiler once Islam destroys the old faiths.

Sahajiya: The Seers of Chronos have a small but vital sect that recruits from the Dervishes and other Muslim splinter groups. Some of the stricter adherents to Islam protest the excesses of the Seers, but more understanding leaders prevail and this group continues its ecstatic rites.

Taftâni: The Koran divides the world into the unseen or invisible world, the land of angels, spirits and djinn, and the visible (or material) world, the land of mankind. Through the practice of magick, the exercise of names of power and the agency of Allah (or Iblis), a magician can bind the djinn to her will. Such sorcerers wield tremendous powers — casting lightning from the heavens, moving castles through armies of djinni, flying upon embroidered carpets and turning men to beasts. However, the forces of Reason and the traditionalists of Islam have little patience for such vain works.

In the Holy Lands

Magi of Europe may visit the Holy Lands for any number of reasons — to rescue a comrade, to fight in a small

holy war, to learn foreign magicks or to convert others to their faiths. Some magi may even hail originally from the Levant, and the demand for a pilgrimage to Mecca must still be met!

Adjoining Europe, the Turkish lands are not utterly strange to the inhabitants of the “civilized” world. Though the language is different and the customs unusual, there is enough trade (and there are enough war stories) to allow some understanding of the Middle East. Islam’s open tolerance means that peaceable magi, once past the tense borders, can seek out stores, sages, noblemen, traders, travelers — the whole of the empire is open to clever travelers.

A trip to the Ottoman Empire may be just the salve for a magus whose hubris places Europe at the center of the world. Here are people as advanced as the greatest minds of Europe, if not more so, and possessed of a strong but tolerant religion and a powerful mystical heritage besides! Exposure to new ideas leads to new ways of thinking and to the acceptance of disparate solutions to problems. Perhaps if the differences between Christianity and Islam can be tolerated by the Muslims, other problems such as the differences between faith, magick and science are not so insurmountable after all.



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Chapter IV: The Disparate

Magi of Great Zimbabwe

The groups described below represent some of the magi who opted for independence from the Council of Nine and the Order of Reason. Each Disparate group, exploring its own particular vision of reality, follows a different path of magickal practice. Most of the Disparate societies claim a history and tradition as old as or older than their more organized counterparts in the Council and Order. In the centuries that follow, the majority of Disparates either die out or change form. In some cases, the death of the Mythic Age and the rise of rationalism give rise to conditions and paradigms that do not allow for the existence of Disparate magick. In other instances, Disparate groups opt to subsume themselves under the aegis of one or another of the Council Traditions. During the period of the European Renaissance, however, the Disparate maintain a distinct and sometimes threatening presence as they meet with and frequently clash with European magi.

For thousands of years before their “discovery” by European traders and explorers, civilizations flourish in Africa. In the southernmost region of the continent, on the plains of Zimbabwe, mighty cities rise and prosper. The foremost of these, Great Zimbabwe, boasts nearly 20,000 people.

A center for trade in gold, iron, bronze and crafts of all kinds, this mighty city dominates the Zimbabwe Plain and commands the surrounding area.

Magick abounds in this fertile land. Mysticks, shamans, ritual magi and spiritualists of various kinds practice their arts within the cities and in lonely rural areas. For many years, no official organizations of wizards exist. Each individual pursues her own path to knowledge and enlightenment, occasionally taking on a student or two to share her burden or receive the benefit of her accumulated knowledge.

This situation changes in the mid-14th century, when an invasion by hostile sorcerers — practitioners of elemental magicks who follow no standard path and recognize no constraints upon their powers — sweeps down from the Kalahari Desert and brings ruin to all in their wake. To combat these Marauds (to give them their European designation), the mages of the Zimbabwe Plains form themselves into two major sects, each representing a particular philosophy of magical working. These two groups, the Madzimbabwe and the Ngoma, come together to battle their common enemy. This War of the Dust Witch lasts for five years before the combined efforts of the Ngoma and Madzimbabwe finally succeed in driving out the Marauds.

Both the Ngoma and the Madzimbabwe coexist in relative peace until a massive outbreak of plague around 1420 decimates the population of Great Zimbabwe and other cities of the Plain. Each group blames the other for the coming of the Year of the Great Sickness, and a magical war breaks out between the former allies. King Kola'a Ti intervenes and forges a truce that involves the geographical separation of the two groups. The Madzimbabwe relocate to the rural lands outside the cities, while the Ngoma remain within the urban regions. Although the two groups no longer seek to attack each other, relations remain only marginally peaceful.

A series of portentous omens and outbreaks of plague continue to ravage the peoples of the Zimbabwe Plain. Shamans and mysticks have similar visions foretelling the arrival of a giant, pale ghost, its corrupting shadow covering the land and visiting destruction upon its people. Although the Ngoma and Madzimbabwe strive to maintain peaceful relations, they cannot prevent isolated bands of younger, more intemperate magicians from attacking each other or any strangers they might encounter (particularly if such newcomers show any ability to command magical powers).

This state of affairs prompts Niaoba, a powerful shaman and visionary, to travel the Mo-Mo Keu dreamlands in search of the reason for the plagues and the disturbing visions. There, she meets a fellow walker-in-the-spirit, a young magick worker named Star-of-Eagles, who hails from the distant lands of the Americas. Together, the two wage a mystical battle against the dream ghost. Hearing from Star-of-Eagles about a Grand Convocation of wizards meeting at Mistridge, she returns to her homelands and urges her father, King Kola'a Ti, to send representatives of both the Ngoma and the Madzimbabwe to this important meeting.

During the Convocation, Niaoba once again meets Star-of-Eagles. They fall in love, marry and accept the leadership of the new magical Tradition known as Dream-Speakers, a catch-all term that unites shamans and tribal magi of all sorts. Boorish treatment by some of the European magi alienates many of the tribal mysticks, however,

and a rift develops between those groups that join the Council and ones that elect to remain independent of Council controls. Naturally, the Ngoma and Madzimbabwe take opposite sides of the division. The Madzimbabwe join the Thanatoic magi, eventually becoming subsumed in the ranks of the Chakravanti or Euthanatoi. The Ngoma refuse to bow to the authority of outsiders who do not understand them or respect their ways.

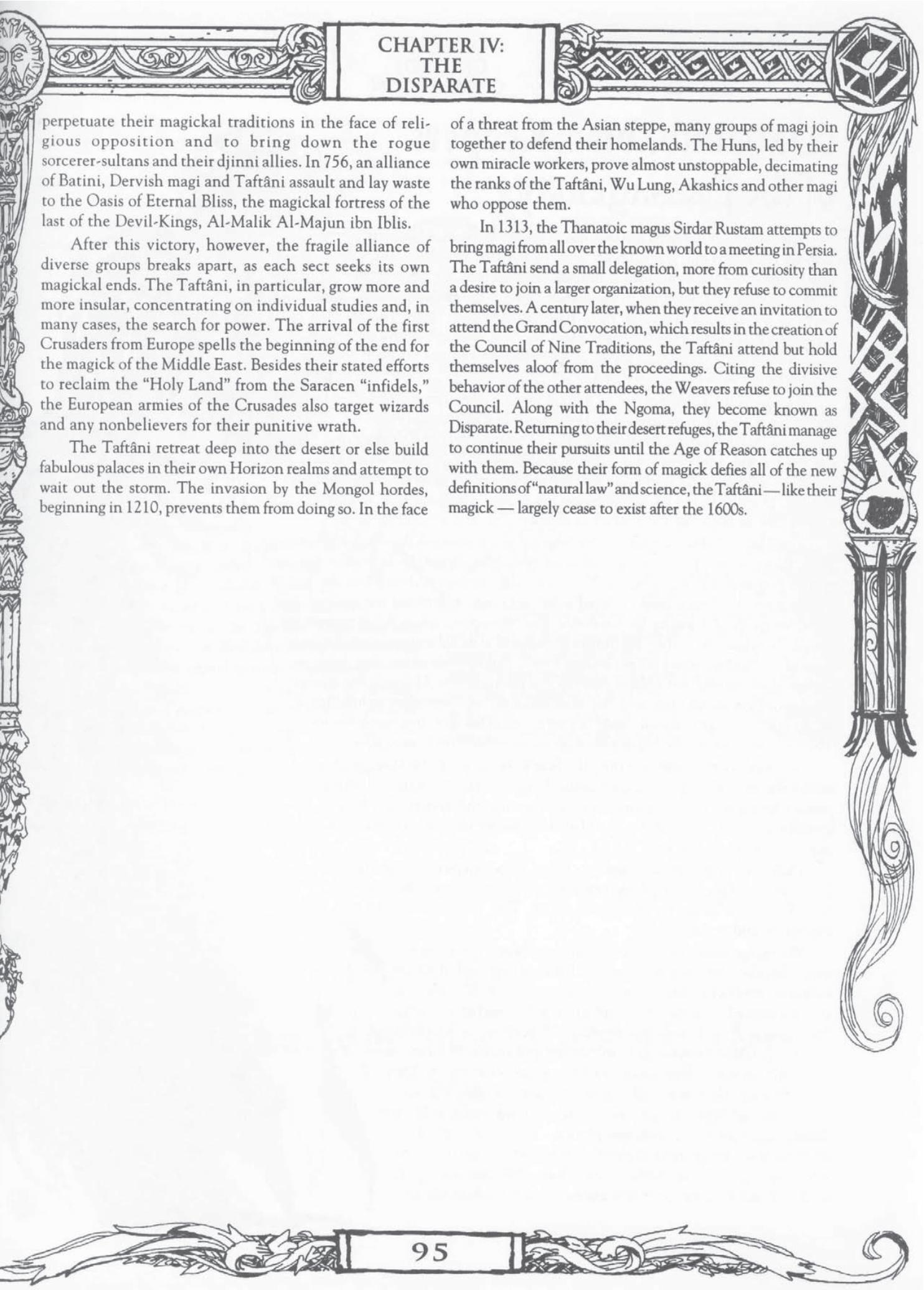
In the early part of the 16th century, the Portuguese discover the trading cities of the Zimbabwe plain. Although Great Zimbabwe and its sister cities have already begun to decline, the arrival of the Europeans — the white ghost of prophecy and vision — hastens the end of a once great civilization.

Wizards of the Sands

The sorcerers of Persia and the Arabian Peninsula embody an approach to magick that reflects their outlook on the world. Seeing the material world as an emanation of the invisible one, Middle Eastern magi do not make the same distinctions between realms as do their European counterparts. The appearance of spirits of all sorts, commonly referred to as "djinni," occurs as a natural, though not always desirable, manifestation of the invisible world on the material plane. Persians who feel drawn to the practice of magick concern themselves with the mastery, control, summoning and banishment of these spirits.

Beginning around 945 B.C., a veritable horde of malevolent spirits manifests in the material world to overrun the lands of Arabia and the Middle East. Sorcerers of all kinds, including the priest-magus Solomon, spend more than a decade battling and destroying these creatures or containing them in various devices or behind mystical seals. This grand effort serves as a lesson in cooperation that prepares the magi of the Middle East for an even greater test of their powers. Beginning in A.D. 100 and continuing for the next seven centuries, a series of sorcerer-rulers, commanded by various infernal djinni, arise throughout Persia and Arabia. Despite the efforts of wizards, alchemists, priests and other visionaries to combat these demon-inspired tyrants, the phenomenon continues unabated, bringing chaos to the region.

The arrival on the scene of Mohammed, founder of the Islamic religion, alters the balance. Aided by many of the Ahl-i-Batin, the forces of the Prophet wage war against the sultans who draw their power from evil djinni and other infernal spirits. Some magi, however, oppose the fanatic zeal of Mohammed's followers. In A.D. 650, Hazan I-Sabbah creates a school of sorcerers who take the name Taftâni, or Weavers. These magi join together to



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perpetuate their magickal traditions in the face of religious opposition and to bring down the rogue sorcerer-sultans and their djinni allies. In 756, an alliance of Batini, Dervish magi and Taftâni assault and lay waste to the Oasis of Eternal Bliss, the magickal fortress of the last of the Devil-Kings, Al-Malik Al-Majun ibn Iblis.

After this victory, however, the fragile alliance of diverse groups breaks apart, as each sect seeks its own magickal ends. The Taftâni, in particular, grow more and more insular, concentrating on individual studies and, in many cases, the search for power. The arrival of the first Crusaders from Europe spells the beginning of the end for the magick of the Middle East. Besides their stated efforts to reclaim the "Holy Land" from the Saracen "infidels," the European armies of the Crusades also target wizards and any nonbelievers for their punitive wrath.

The Taftâni retreat deep into the desert or else build fabulous palaces in their own Horizon realms and attempt to wait out the storm. The invasion by the Mongol hordes, beginning in 1210, prevents them from doing so. In the face

of a threat from the Asian steppe, many groups of magi join together to defend their homelands. The Huns, led by their own miracle workers, prove almost unstoppable, decimating the ranks of the Taftâni, Wu Lung, Akashics and other magi who oppose them.

In 1313, the Thanatoic magus Sirdar Rustam attempts to bring magi from all over the known world to a meeting in Persia. The Taftâni send a small delegation, more from curiosity than a desire to join a larger organization, but they refuse to commit themselves. A century later, when they receive an invitation to attend the Grand Convocation, which results in the creation of the Council of Nine Traditions, the Taftâni attend but hold themselves aloof from the proceedings. Citing the divisive behavior of the other attendees, the Weavers refuse to join the Council. Along with the Ngoma, they become known as Disparate. Returning to their desert refuges, the Taftâni manage to continue their pursuits until the Age of Reason catches up with them. Because their form of magick defies all of the new definitions of "natural law" and science, the Taftâni — like their magick — largely cease to exist after the 1600s.

Madzimbabwe: Keepers of the Passageways

The journey of the spirit assumes many stages; the passage from birth to death represents only a small portion of the journey. The shamans and priest-magi of the Madzimbabwe dedicate themselves to understanding the totality of existence, whether in the material world, the realm of dream-spirits or the lands of the dead. From their beginnings as tribal wisdom keepers for the people of the Zimbabwe plain, the Madzimbabwe evolve over the centuries into consummate travelers of the many worlds and explorers of the diverse forms of living and dying.

Because of their closeness to the natural world, these shamans cultivate and refine the art of shape-changing; thus, they come into contact with the Changing Breeds who inhabit their territory. The Madzimbabwe's travels in the spirit worlds lead many of these magi into the Bush of Ghosts, where they commune with ancestor spirits and learn otherwise forbidden secrets concerning the afterlife. Eventually, the Madzimbabwe come to regard themselves as the keepers of the rites of passage from one life to another and from one world to another.

The Madzimbabwe see the barrier between the living and the dead as a false one. Thus, they not only promote ancestor worship and encourage the belief that the dead remain part of their former human lives, they also take upon themselves the task of deciding which humans have outlived their usefulness. Borrowing the ancient code practiced by the Changing Breeds during the Impergium, when the werereatures served the balance by culling the human population of its old and useless individuals, some of the Madzimbabwe assume animal form to hunt people whom they single out as expendable or who they believe ready to join the ancestors. Although the Ngoma condemn them for this practice, the Madzimbabwe see themselves as fulfilling a sacred duty to ensure that souls ready to journey out of life do so in a timely fashion. They, in turn, despise the Ngoma for their overemphasis on human affairs.

As visions of the coming of the pale ghost grow stronger, the Madzimbabwe accept the inevitability of change and the decay of their way of life. All things prosper for a time before wasting away. By the time the invitation comes to attend the Grand Convocation, the Madzimbabwe are ready to take the next step into a new existence.

Philosophy: All things come into being, grow, age, wither and die. Life consists of journeying from one form of existence into another, from flesh and bones to immaterial spirit. This journey is both inevitable and desirable.

We recognize a kinship not only with our human brothers and sisters, but also with the animals and with those changing folk whose bodies contain twin souls — one animal, one human. We celebrate their existence by taking the form of animals. The end of life in this world does not mean that existence ceases. Therefore, we travel through the Bush of Ghosts in order to learn more fully the needs of our ancestors. Those who do not understand our ways fear us as necromancers. They fail to see that a circle is beautiful only when it is complete.

Tools and Style: Magick reflects the natural cycles of life and death, transformation and completion. The workings of the Madzimbabwe bring them closer to the knowledge of the many worlds and the various forms of existence. Whether acting as wisdom keepers for a tribe or as bringers of death to those whose



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time has come, these shamans seek to dwell in harmony with the laws of the natural and supernatural worlds.

Trances, ordeals of pain and endurance, animal sacrifices and elaborate dances provide the means whereby the Madzimbabwe transform into animals, walk the lands of the spirit-folk and of the dead, and celebrate the passing of the soul from one world to the next. Though their practices appear animalistic and primitive to all but the Dream-speakers, they demonstrate a keen insight into the instinctual nature of true magick that many "civilized" magi lack.

Organization: These natural magick workers avoid formal organization and prefer to practice their arts alone or in the presence of one or two promising students. Their independent natures foster a territoriality that sometimes verges on the extreme; disputes between these magi often result in violence. When faced with outside threats, such as invasions by foreign magi, however, the Madzimbabwe prove capable of acting in concert with each other and even with their longtime rivals, the Ngoma. Their alliances, however, do not last, as they find the internal politics of any "group" identity counterproductive to their beliefs.

Initiation: Following the path common to so many shamanic schools of magick, new Madzimbabwe Awaken by means of some crisis or by receiving a vision. Ones who discover their Daemon's presence soon find a teacher, usually a tribal elder who adopts such fledgling shamans as

students. Various rites of passage, usually involving strenuous and life-threatening ordeals in both the material and spirit-world, mark the student's progress. Eventually, the new shaman leaves his teacher and embarks on a wilderness quest to learn his place in the cycle of life and death.

Daemon: Totem animals, friendly spirits and ancestors aid the Madzimbabwe in their passage and support their growth in magick.

Affinities: Entropy, Life, Prime and Spirit

Followers: Tribal members, family and occasionally members of the nearby Changing Breeds

Concepts: Necromancer, tribal shaman, wise woman, herbalist, predator, healer, destroyer

Future Fate: The Madzimbabwe eventually join the Chakravanti, as they find more in common with the Thanatoics than with the other members of the Council or with the new Dream-Speaker Tradition. Many believe that the Madzimbabwe avoid the Dream-Speakers because of their long-standing feud with the Ngoma and because of their distrust of Niaoba. In truth, the Thanatoics value the insights brought to them by the Madzimbabwe. For a time, the Madzimbabwe keep their own identity within the ranks of the Chakravanti, but by the end of the 16th century, they are philosophically indistinguishable from the Thanatoics.



There is no fear, for we stride the lands of both living
and dead.

Ngoma: Wizard-Priests of the Zimbabwe Plain

The mysteries of the world exist in order to be fathomed. The Ngoma excel in unraveling the secrets of existence and in using their knowledge to communicate with the other worlds, even the regions where the gods dwell. Part priest, part miracle worker, a Ngoma spends her time trying to solve the great riddles of the universe in order to serve as an interpreter for the spirits. Though the Ngoma trace their history back to the earliest times (when they acted as shamans for their people), their true origins as a group lie in their move to the cities of the Zimbabwe Plain.

Away from the harsh exigencies of rural existence, the Ngoma have the luxury to perfect their grasp of the ways of magick and to expand their knowledge. Many Ngoma spend their time studying natural phenomena to become adept at astrological forecasting and geomantic divinations. Others employ dream-travel to explore distant realms. A few undertake physical journeys throughout the African continent to meet with other magi and exchange information and knowledge.

Within the cities, Ngoma act as counselors to local rulers. Their vast knowledge rivals that of the most educated European magi. Ngoma serve as healers, architects, philosophers, teachers and priests. Some of them prefer to dwell in seclusion, devoting all their time and study to one particular aspect of magick or learning, but most play an active role in city life. This reputation for worldliness and preoccupation with the affairs of humans earns them the abiding contempt of the Madzimbabwe.

Even before they receive visions of the coming of the Europeans, the Ngoma possess some knowledge of the pale-skinned foreigners. Trips to Ethiopia and northern Africa expose the Ngoma to fugitive Templars and other wide-ranging European magi. When they receive the invitation to the Grand Convocation, the Ngoma do so with the intent of sharing their knowledge. Unfortunately, the prejudices of many of the other attendees present insurmountable obstacles to true understanding.

Philosophy: Magick represents a gift from the gods to their human children and sets them apart from the rest of the world. Not everyone knows how to use this gift. It is the duty of the wizard-priest to learn to use his magick to interpret the will of the gods and the ancestors for people whose eyes see only the material world.

We study the stars in order to solve the riddles of the universe. We touch the Earth with our magic to uncover its secrets. In dreams, we walk the realms of our ancestors and partake of their ancient wisdom and counsel.

Tools and Style: The Ngoma employ a wide variety of techniques in their magickal

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workings. Their knowledge of ritual magick resembles that of Hermetic magi in complexity. Dream trances, invocations, summonings and conjurations provide the means whereby Ngoma communicate with various spirits beings.

Although most Ngoma prefer to work by themselves, occasionally they band together for major workings, such as the raising of great buildings or the erection of protective barriers against enemies.

Organization: The Ngoma tend to gather in loosely organized schools, each of which focuses on a particular form of magickal working, such as astrology, geomancy or summoning. Elders instruct younger magi, much as Hermetic masters guide their apprentices. It is not uncommon for an individual to study with more than one school; the wisest and most respected Ngoma are those magi who demonstrate ability in several forms of magickal knowledge.

Titles reflect the function a Ngoma fulfills in society or within a particular school. Students refer to their teachers as "master," "elder," or, simply, "teacher," whereas the ordinary individual employs titles such as "honored one" or "counselor" when addressing one of the wizard-priests.

Occasionally, all the Ngoma in a particular city gather together to review disputes between rival magi. Most often, problems are settled through peaceful means, based on the decision of the oldest or most senior member in attendance. Exile or ostracism punishes serious transgressions.

Initiation: Promising young men and women either seek admission to one of the various schools or are discovered by one of the wizard-priests. Students who Awaken receive instruction in magick from elder Ngoma. Students who show no

magickal talent but who possess keen minds learn as much as they can so that they can serve as assistants and companions to other Ngoma.

Magickal instruction involves years of arduous study. Many teachers use riddles and parables to stretch their students' minds and encourage them to puzzle out their own path to power. Ordeals and vision-quests play a part in the education and training of the Ngoma, but they do not place as great an emphasis on them as do the Madzimbabwe.

Daemon: Ancestor spirits most often counsel Ngoma wizards, although astral spirits sometimes inspire these magi in their workings.

Affinities: Life, Mind, Prime and

Spirit

Followers: Family, students, sages

Concepts: Wizard-priest, astrologer, sage, advisor, ritualist, geomancer, astral traveler

Future Fate: The Ngoma attend the Grand Convocation in good faith, but they become disenchanting with their reception by the European magi. Although they have more in common with the Solificati and the Hermetic magi, the leaders of the Convocation attempt to lump them in with the tribal shamans who eventually become known as Dream-Speakers. The Ngoma refuse, holding out for their own Tradition. When the Council denies them this right, the Ngoma leave the Convocation and return to their homeland. Their refusal leaves them vulnerable to predation by European invaders in the 16th century. The Ngoma do not survive the wholesale ravaging of their lands and the exploitation by the "enlightened" Europeans.



Men are but tools of the cosmos, and so strive for
simplicity and correctness.

Taftâni: Weavers of Wondrous Designs

Magick infuses the fabric of creation, and magi who are strong of will and clever of mind can harness the power of the invisible world. The Taftâni represent the last remnants of an age of unbridled sorcery and limitless magick. Following the ancient traditions and religions of their Persian and Arabian ancestors, the Taftâni acknowledge the existence of an infinite number of deities and spirits.

The art of commanding and controlling the djinni makes up the bulk of Taftâni magick. They use the powers of these beings to fabricate their own miraculous works. Castles in the clouds, invisible fortresses, enchanted oases, flying carpets and magickal lamps are only a few of the wondrous effects created by these mysterious and unpredictable magi. Some Taftâni see themselves as the protectors of mere mortals. To this end, they concentrate on binding the fickle djinni into physical objects such as rings, lamps and other items that can serve as "djinni-traps." Other Weavers view the various types of djinni as magickal servants and seek to bind them in order to command their powers.

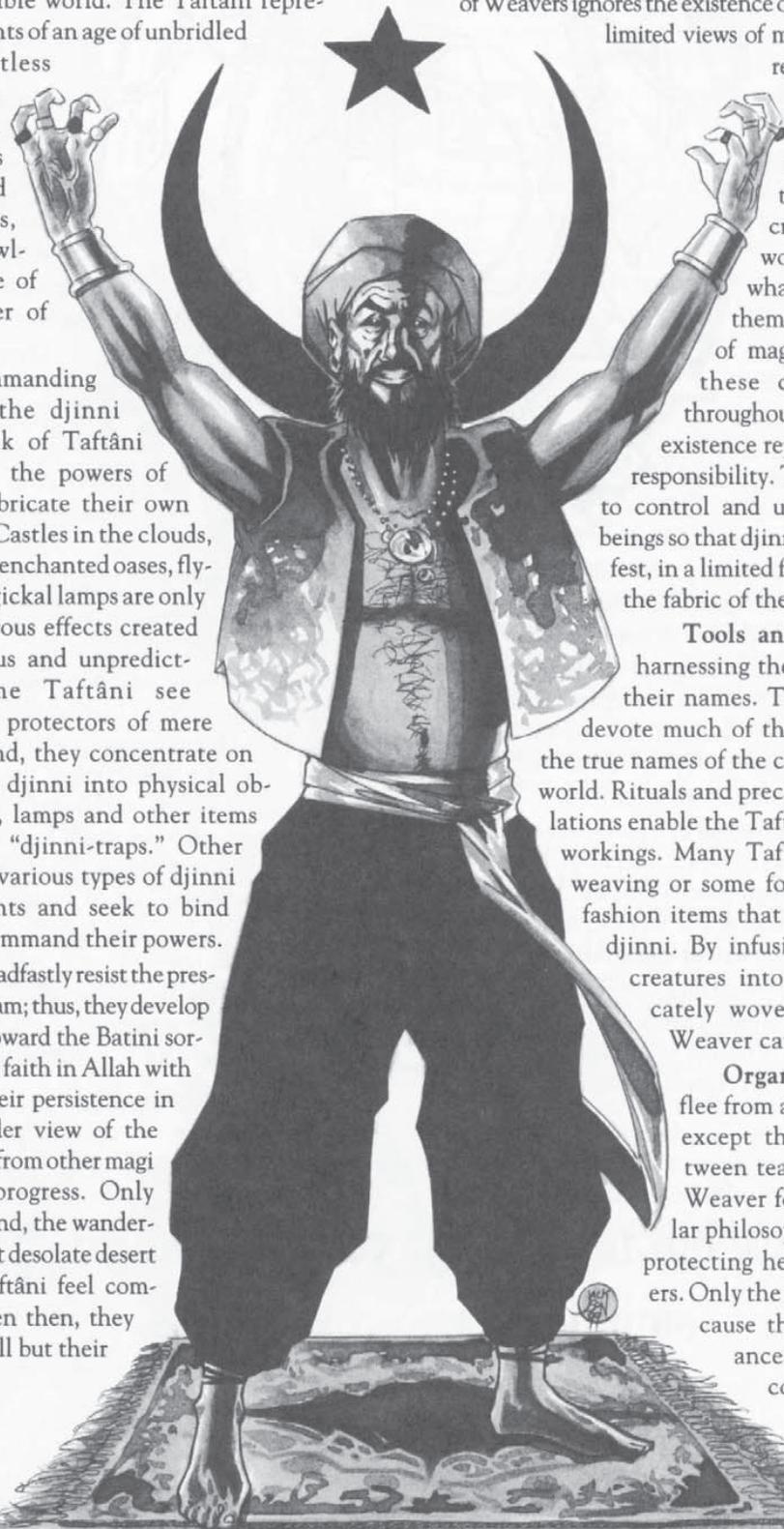
The Taftâni steadfastly resist the pressure to convert to Islam; thus, they develop a growing enmity toward the Batini sorcerers who combine faith in Allah with skill in magick. Their persistence in adhering to an older view of the world isolates them from other magi as the centuries progress. Only among their own kind, the wandering tribes of the most desolate desert regions, do the Taftâni feel comfortable — and even then, they remain aloof from all but their closest kin.

When they receive the summons to the Grand Convocation, only a few Taftâni actually deign to attend. The majority of Weavers ignores the existence of the European magi, their limited views of magick and their stringent regulations concerning its use and practice.

Philosophy: What the mind can conceive, the will can create. The creatures of the invisible world — djinni, angels or whatever else you might call them — exist as embodiments of magickal energy. To allow these creatures to rampage throughout the material planes of existence represents the height of irresponsibility. The Weavers have a duty to control and use the magick of these beings so that djinni and their ilk can manifest, in a limited fashion, without harming the fabric of the universe.

Tools and Style: The power of harnessing the djinni lies in knowing their names. To this end, the Taftâni devote much of their time to seeking out the true names of the creatures of the invisible world. Rituals and precise mathematical calculations enable the Taftâni to accomplish their workings. Many Taftâni take up the art of weaving or some form of craft in order to fashion items that can house their bound djinni. By infusing the power of these creatures into an elegant and intricately woven rug, for example, a Weaver can create a flying carpet.

Organization: The Taftâni flee from any form of organization except the very loose bond between teacher and student. Each Weaver follows her own particular philosophy of magick, jealously protecting her secrets from any others. Only the gravest of circumstances cause the Taftâni to form alliances, and these instances of cooperation usually last



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only long enough to address the problem at hand. Most Weavers live in isolation from the world and keep to themselves so that they can perfect their art, harbor their secrets and amass power over the invisible world.

Disputes between Taftâni usually find only one form of resolution: the magickal duel. These contests of power often prove disastrous for bystanders, as they involve grand displays of flamboyant (and frequently flammable) magick. Many such duels end in the (dramatic) death of one of the contestants — and sometimes prove fatal to both. Scourge and Resonance hover close to the Weavers because of their disregard for subtlety and inconspicuousness.

Initiation: Taftâni usually select an apprentice or two from their region's most talented youth. Occasionally, a Weaver discovers a prospective wizard among the exotic slaves captured from the infidel races (such as Europeans or Africans). The Taftâni subject their students to the most rigorous of tests and hardships before allowing them access to magickal knowledge in the belief that only individuals who demonstrate endurance, persistence and indomitable will deserve to possess the secrets of power.

To prove herself as a wizard and earn independence from her master, a student must undergo a series of magickal trials or quests. If she survives and succeeds, she may then leave her master and strike out on her own. Usually, once an apprentice "graduates," she severs her ties with her master.

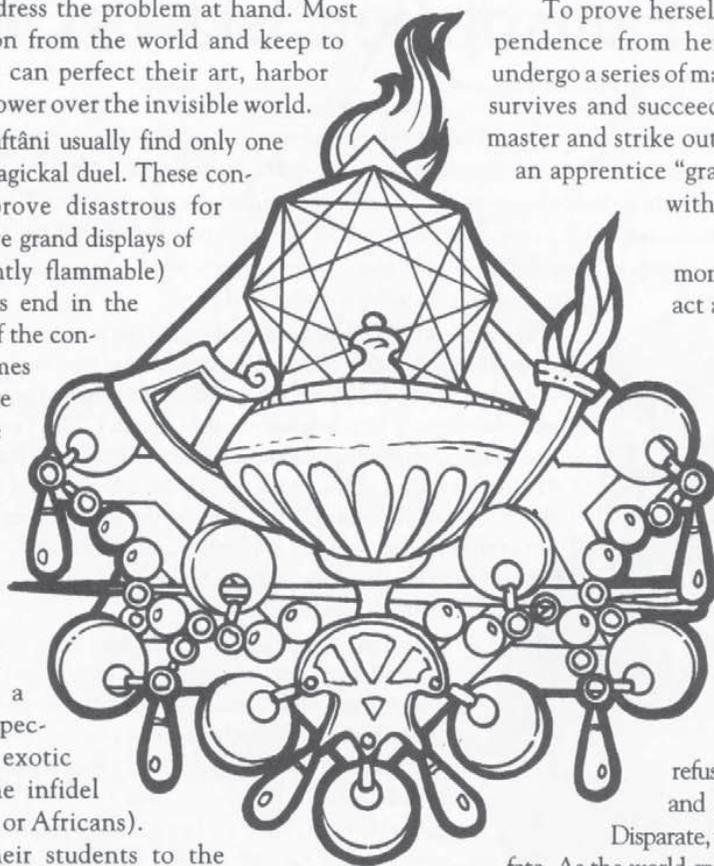
Daemon: Djinni, angels, demons and other spirit creatures act as familiars for the Taftâni.

Affinities: Connection, Forces, Matter and Spirit

Followers: Non-Islamic Arabs, carpet weavers, slaves, Persian merchants, nomads

Concepts: Conjurer, eccentric wizard, mad magician, wanderer, scholar, advisor to a local sultan, mysterious recluse

Future Fate: The Taftâni refuse to join any of the Traditions, and so they join the ranks of the Disparate, which unfortunately seals their fate. As the world grows less and less magickal and gives way to the scientific paradigm, the Taftâni's styles of magick become more and more dangerous. Eventually, the Taftâni literally disappear from the face of the earth — often in violent and pyrotechnic displays as the Scourge falls upon them.



Feel the thunder of the invisible world as it follows
my command!

The Lions of Zion: Israel's Guardians

Creation is a wonder, a set of nested mysteries and subtle patterns hidden by a bounteous Creator. Moreover, men of insight have the capacity to discern these patterns, to seek the ephemeral in the mundane and the jewel in the dust. Kabbalah ("tradition") hands down methods both theosophic and ascetic for pulling secrets from the *Torah*. Through these secrets, written down in books such as *Sepher Yetzirah* and hidden with numerology and wordplay, the Lions of Zion discern the names of angels, the words commanding Creation and the energies from the multiple faces of the one G-d.

The most powerful allies of the Lions are the angels themselves, aspects of G-d given name and form. By calling upon the true names of the angels, the Lions draw upon G-d's power in its many-faceted forms. From defense to healing to righteous wrath, there is little outside the scope of this "magick" — the Church's "Old Testament" bears witness to the storms, plagues, miraculous cures and defenses afforded the faithful. More ephemerally, the Kabbalistic practices of the Lions unlock the *sefirot*, divine radiances of power that flow about the levels of existence and describe the shapes of reality. By corresponding letters of the Hebrew alphabet to numbers, the Kabbalist discovers the esoteric meanings of otherwise mundane passages in the *Torah* and translates this understanding into practices to strengthen the soul.

As elders of the small communities of Jews scattered about Europe, the Lions blend in, alternately ignored or persecuted like the rest of their people. This status troubles them little; they have always survived, and they will continue to do so. Pushed out of one country, they find another to call home. Persecuted by a hostile Church, they find ways to express their faith quietly and unobtrusively. Besides, no true Lion of Zion would let such hardships stop him: He must, after all, be capable of ministering to his community and bringing hope to his own family, too. The Lions save their power to fight against their greatest foes — the depraved rulers and citizens who take it upon themselves to visit bloody destruction upon Jews' communities, the servants of Infernal powers and, most of all, the *shedim*, entities that come from outside Creation itself.

When the Grand Convocation forms, the Lions are completely overlooked — even with the Order of Hermes adopting elements of Kabbalistic numerology, the Lions remain largely unknown. This anonymity suits them; they have no desire to be caught up in the whirlwind politics and warfare of the Traditions and Daedaleans. Left to their own devices, they continue their practices quietly, shining forth only when called upon to defend their people.

Philosophy: Every level of reality is influenced by the divine emanations that reverberate from different aspects of the soul. The key to understanding these divine aspects lies in passing through the realms of existence and bringing one's consciousness to the light of G-d. As the *Torah* contains the literal truth, but disguises it with hidden meanings, the diligent student must apprehend the meanings hidden beyond sight in order to achieve the "crown," the light of the divine realm of *Atzilut*. The *Torah*'s inner dimensions are but arrows pointing the way to the soul's inner dimensions.

Tools and Style: Gematric confluences, scriptural quotes with hidden meanings and angelic names are the invocations most commonly used by the Lions. By using the *chassidut*, the "inspiring drives" behind each *sefirot*'s function in reality, the Kabbalist invokes the *sefirot* and shapes the cosmos around it. Some Kabbalists also engage in trance states or fasting, although these practices are rarer in the enlightened age of the Renaissance than they were in earlier days; the epistemological development of the era lends itself well to a more introspective and studious interpretation of Kabbalah. A traditional approach to living is also a requirement; the Lions invariably have full beards and the accoutrements often associated with elders of their community. Careful thought into the puzzles of the Kabbalah and related writings focuses

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insight; given voice, these insights appeal to the facets of G-d. The Lions live an existence pleasing to Him and do as He requires; in return, He defends His people. Not surprisingly, many Lions are possessed of great True Faith, often channeling their works with the strength of their Faith. Religious icons and symbols are used and carried in conjunction with both Faith and magick, but the Lions have long since realized something that the Christian Church will not internalize for centuries — that Faith ultimately comes from inside.

Organization: The Lions of Zion have little in the way of “organization.” Rather, each Lion is a servant of his local community. While individual Lions may occasionally cross paths and meet to trade their secrets or to pass along particularly important news, they do not engage in the political structures of the other groups of magick workers. Typically, a given Lion is known only to his extended family and community, and even they rarely call upon his aid. No disaster has ever been enough to call together all of the Lions in defense of their people... yet.

The rare cases of dissent between individual Lions are settled through diplomacy and mediation. In the unlikely event that two scholars are unable to reach agreement regarding a particular practice, they generally go their separate ways — in the Renaissance, persecution of the Jews generally means that they are forced to move every few years anyway. No dispute of any nature ever interferes with the mandate to serve the community, though — in cases of true danger, all differences are immediately put aside, and the Lions stand together as brothers.

Initiation: Study of Kabbalistic texts such as *Sepher ha Zohar* and the deeper secrets of the *Torah* is undertaken only with the most serious intent. Thus, only a properly married Jew of strong character and faith should ever undertake the practice of magick, for the concerns of a family and community lend perspective to balance such esoteric pursuits. From the most talented and studious of these “magicians” come those who Awaken to power, driven to it by calculating insight or their own strong faith. Once the Daemon awakens, the student becomes one of the Lions — none should ever undertake the studies of Kabbalah without a desire to find truth and to serve the community. There is no formal testing or initiation; the process of unlocking the secrets and following the traditional ways is test enough.

Daemon: The Lions rarely manifest Daemons directly, though sometimes the Daemon appears as a particular angel in dreams.

Affinities: Spirit, Mind, Connection and Entropy

Followers: Hopeful students, family members, business associates



Concepts: *Shedim* hunter, mathematician, rabbi, counselor, historian

Future Fate: As they study magick only to serve their communities, the Lions of Zion avoid many of the skirmishes that plague both the Traditions and the Order of Reason. Their powerful Faith also protects them from the worst depredations of the Nephandi, at least until the Fallen Ones learn to work through intermediaries more effectively. As insular guardians who conceal their powers and work only when they must, the

Lions survive as well as their charges and remain a hidden protectorate throughout the ages. The persecutions heaped upon the Jews during the Renaissance and later cannot extinguish their light.

Reality Check

Kabbalah is an actual part of Hebrew tradition and mysticism. As such, it's an element that should be handled with care.

“What about the Akashic Brotherhood, which is based on real Buddhists? Or the Verbena, who are based on Wiccans?” Frankly, most of the magickal traditions in this game are loose extrapolations of real-world practices. The Akashics do a lot of things that Buddhists don't, and they believe in a conglomeration of philosophies encompassing several Asian schools of thought. The Verbena are far departed from modern-day neo-pagan practice. In contrast, the Lions of Zion, though a fictional group for the context of the game, are based pretty closely on real-world beliefs and traditions, though with (deliberately) far less detail than one would find in Reality™.

More importantly, although Wiccans don't mind converts and Buddhists are happy to instruct, there's a long history in Kabbalah of keeping the practices secret until the prospective student has achieved a great deal of respectable stability in the community. Kabbalists do not study mind-bending truths without a firm grounding in reality! Neither should you.

So, by all means let the Lions enrich your game — *but leave them in the game*. Then, when you come back to the Real World, give Kabbalah the respect that it deserves.

Heck, you might as well do that for *all* of the religious beliefs in *Mage: The Sorcerers Crusade*.

Heed the call of harmony, for we are all children
of the divine.

Wu Lung: Dragon Emperors of China

Heaven's rulers pass their mandate on to the most gifted of mortals, who in turn commune with the proper spirits to ensure that the world moves in its appointed cycles. Guided by the invisible hands of ancestors and the messengers of the spirit world, the Wu Lung stand as the highest order of China's educated hierarchy. Schooled in politics, Confucian Legalism and religion as well as mystical training, ancestor worship and ritual, the Wu Lung move through the turning of the Wheel to dispense wisdom and justice while preserving harmony and propriety.

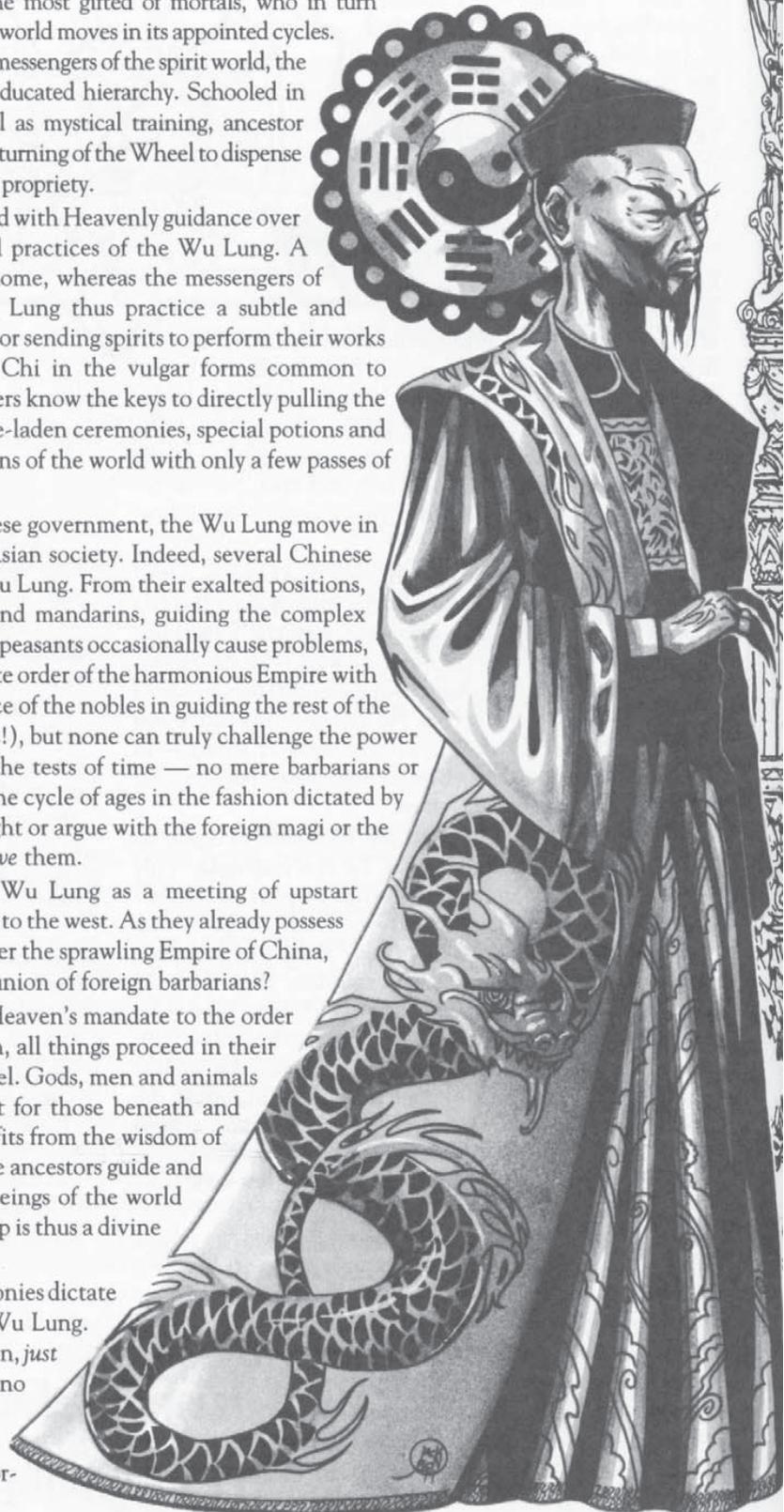
The wisdom of venerable ancestors combined with Heavenly guidance over the confluence of forces makes up the mystical practices of the Wu Lung. A venerated spirit may offer advice or protect a home, whereas the messengers of Heaven may answer proper appeals. The Wu Lung thus practice a subtle and ritualistic magick, often setting events in motion or sending spirits to perform their works instead of directly manipulating the flows of Chi in the vulgar forms common to Westerners. Only the most powerful of the Masters know the keys to directly pulling the strings of Heaven and Earth, but through incense-laden ceremonies, special potions and carefully-cut jewels they can direct all the motions of the world with only a few passes of their long-nailed, elaborately-manicured hands.

As masters of the educated systems of Chinese government, the Wu Lung move in and manipulate many of the highest levels of Asian society. Indeed, several Chinese Emperors have themselves (supposedly) been Wu Lung. From their exalted positions, the Wu Lung fill roles as teachers, ministers and mandarins, guiding the complex bureaucracy of the Empire. Of course, the upstart peasants occasionally cause problems, and the Akashic Brotherhood disrupts the delicate order of the harmonious Empire with its esoteric teachings (that ignore the proper place of the nobles in guiding the rest of the world according to Heaven's movements, no less!), but none can truly challenge the power of the traditional ways. The Empire has stood the tests of time — no mere barbarians or tinkers can destroy an Empire that moves with the cycle of ages in the fashion dictated by the order of the cosmos. The Wu Lung do not fight or argue with the foreign magi or the Order of Reason — the Dragon Wizards are *above* them.

The Grand Convocation is seen by the Wu Lung as a meeting of upstart unschooled peasants and heretics in the far lands to the west. As they already possess good relations with the Artificers and control over the sprawling Empire of China, what need have the Wu Lung for any pathetic union of foreign barbarians?

Philosophy: From the delicate balance of Heaven's mandate to the order of the spirit world and the creatures of the Earth, all things proceed in their appropriate places ordained by the Cosmic Wheel. Gods, men and animals all answer to the same mandates. With respect for those beneath and obedience to those above, the dutiful man benefits from the wisdom of the sage and the power of righteous conduct. The ancestors guide and lend power to such a reverent man while the beings of the world serve proper functions to the mandarin. Rulership is thus a divine duty, magick a responsibility.

Tools and Style: Intricate rituals and ceremonies dictate the magickal (and mundane) practices of the Wu Lung. Every part of the cosmos works in a specific fashion, *just so*; as a result, every form of magick, every feat, no matter how insignificant, must be properly conducted and practiced, *just so*. Tradition is more than a way of life: Tradition preserves the uncor-



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rupted means to petition and appease Heaven and the spirits. Thus, ornate regalia, precise writing and exacting pronunciation are required to please Heaven, to fit the clockwork order of the cosmos and to pull the appropriate forces into conjunction. With the help of wise ancestral spirits, the confluences of Earth can be properly guided.

Organization: An unbending structure of master above student makes up the ladder of Wu Lung society. At the top is the T'ien K'ung te Huan Ti Wu Lung, or "Heavenly Emperor of the Dragon Wizards," who exercises supreme authority over the entire sect. He is given no other name, and indeed needs none; he is seen to be a direct servant of Heaven who enforces the will of the Celestial Bureaucracy on Earth through the Magickal Bureaucracy of the Wu Lung. Below the Dragon Emperor is the Feng Huang Hou Wu, the "Phoenix Empress-Wizard," who acts as consort to the Dragon Emperor; she is the only formally recognized female member of the Wu Lung, and her position is not replaced — rather, she reincarnates herself with each lifetime, to be raised once more to her proper position. Next is the Hu Kuei Tsu Wu, "Tiger Lord Wizard," who commands the military forces of the magical society and acts as a sort of seneschal, rising to the position of Emperor should the current Emperor fall. Working with the Tiger Lord are eight Kieu Tsu, lords of other positions within the courts; each oversees a particular area of political acumen, such as Education or Tradition. Nine ministers, or Pu Chang, serve as overseers for the Spheres of magick. These ministers in turn select the Sifu, or teachers, who are Masters of their areas of study and who teach the Nan Wu (senior students) and Ch'uang Shih (junior students).

Initiation: Divination and spirit-guides lead the Wu Lung to find new Sheng Shou, students on the cusp of awareness. The Sifu send visions or dreams to the potential initiates in hopes of causing the Daemon to awaken. Once a promising student is found, he must pass all manner of rigorous examinations and tests; the Wu Lung value highly the series of trials used to select government officials, and emulate this selection process. Indeed, new Sheng Shou are sometimes found among candidates taking the examinations for government offices. The prospective candidate

must be Chinese, preferably of a high caste; he must have an abiding respect for, and must rigorously practice, the customs and traditions of the Empire. Once the Sheng Shou's suitability as a candidate is affirmed, the Sifu begins instruction in the proper forms of the society by enforcing a rigid code of conduct and indoctrinating the student with the hierarchy of the Wu Lung. The Sheng Shou is fully expected to memorize the names and deeds of important wizards, to venerate his ancestors and to show proper respect to his superiors at all times — after all, the ancestors do not come if their names are not properly invoked with the appropriate rituals. A Sheng Shou graduates to the status of Ch'uang Shih, or senior student, only after he passes a series of written, magickal and spiritual tests set by his Sifu. The Wu Lung only introduce men into their society, a tradition that does not change for centuries; women are considered inferior under the Legalist system and are relegated to the status of peasant wizards (when magickally talented women are acknowledged at all).

Daemon: Ancestor spirits and messengers from the Celestial Bureaucracy are the most common taskmasters for Wu Lung.

Affinities: Spirit, Forces, Matter and Life

Followers: Political functionaries, family members, students, religious faithful

Concepts: Bureaucrat, nobleman, scholar, priest, philosopher, alchemist

Future Fate: Despite (or perhaps because of) good relations with the nascent Order of Reason and mastery over much of China's bureaucracy, the Wu Lung fall into complacency. Unable to see either the Traditions or the Order of Reason as threats, the Dragon Wizards continue to rule China, oblivious to the changing outside world. By the 1700s, they crush Akashic power in China, and they enjoy another two centuries of prominence until the revolution of the modern age pushes the traditional ways out with guns and ships. Thrust into isolated enclaves at the outskirts of China and in surrounding territories including Hong Kong, the Wu Lung eventually have no choice but to accommodate the mystic Traditions in an attempt to gain allies and retake power in China.

Be a sage in wisdom, a monk in temperament, a servant
in graces and a dragon in war.





Chapter V: Wizardly Treasures

Concepts

Whoever is born of a sound mind is naturally formed by the heavens for some honorable work and way of life. Whoever therefore wants to have the heavens propitious, let him undertake... this way of life; let him pursue it zealously, for the heavens favor his undertakings... for this above all else you were made by nature — the activity for which you do, speak, play-act, choose, dream, imitate... which you enjoy above all else. That assuredly is the thing for which the heavens and the lord gave birth to you.

— Marsilio Ficino, *De Vita* ("On Life")

When you don the mask of your magus, you enter her world. The past few chapters have provided a wealth of details about that world. What about the mask itself... or, more properly, the Traits and concepts that make up that mask? The character creation chapter of *The Sorcerers Crusade* features all the basic Traits for the game; even so, many players want more. Hence, this chapter — which, of course, provides more.

Like the aforementioned chapter in the main rulebook, the following Traits, concepts and additional ideas use "you" to refer to both the magus and the player behind her. After all, when you put on the mask and speak the speech, you do, in effect, become your character. Keep an eye on the edge of the stage, improvise your lines, and enjoy the applause. Awakening, after all, is far more than a dance of numbers and stats.



Know then thyself, presume not God to scan:
The proper study of mankind is man.

— Alexander Pope, *Essay on Man*

Although we generally identify the characters we play by the groups they belong to ("I've got a Ksirafai, Lindsay's playing a Cosian, and Brian's got the gun-toting Artificer"), the real root of your magus comes not from what she is, but from where she came. This origin provides the concept upon which the character's loyalties are formed; that concept, in turn, shapes the kind of sorcerer the character becomes. After all, a Ksirafai who was once a street urchin acts differently than one who's a courtesan, a scholar or a tradesman.

Concepts offer a blueprint for a sorcerer's skills, motivations, background and magicks; many of the questions asked in the Prelude section of *The Sorcerers Crusade* find answers in the concepts below. While the following suggestions give few hard answers, they provide a list of possibilities. Choose from those possibilities as you see fit. From a Storyteller's perspective, the concepts also offer a range of story threads. Your Ksirafai was a Florentine urchin? What happens when she crosses paths with an old friend from the streets? Or a nobleman who nearly ran her down with his horse? Or the parent who abandoned her to the streets all those years ago? You don't need angry wizards, dragons or

witch-hunters to devise a good story. On top of that, character concepts also provide a place for the sorcerer in mortal society. After all, very few magi are “just” magi — they’re professors, hunters, farmers, and so on. The Awakening changes your life, but it rarely becomes a life unto itself.

The following concepts are just a few of many possibilities. Feel free to modify them or to create your own. Roughly two dozen additional concepts can be found in *Crusade Lore*, pp. 27-33, and the list on the Character Creation Process chart (*Sorcerers Crusade*, pp. 114-115) offers many others besides.

Alchemist

The dirty crust of Creation is corrupt and imperfect. Beneath the dust, however, perfection awaits the alchemist’s hand. In signs and riddles, you read the secrets of the Lord. Such secrets were never meant for common men’s eyes. Good thing you’re not a common man!

It may have been poverty that inspired you to make lead into gold... or was it greed? It may have been curiosity that led you to the strange drawings in alchemical texts... or maybe you were just fascinated by the artwork within them. Was your father a lodge-member? Perhaps. *Someone* had to teach you the odd formulae and codes that define your Art. Now that you understand them, you know that turning lead into gold is only a diversion. The *real* treasure of alchemy lies in self-perfection. That goal is a long way away right now, but with your able mind and active imagination the secrets of Creation are sure to be yours someday.

Apprentice

Every person must learn a trade. To learn yours, you offered yourself (or *were* offered, perhaps) to a master who would instruct you in return for a few short years of service. When that teacher feels you have passed the requisite tests, learned the important trade secrets and mastered the necessary arts, you will be initiated into the local guild. Until then, you’re a combination of child, associate and slave. You do what Master says, when Master says to do it, or you never join the trade.

Apprenticeships are offered by most trades, especially ones such as masonry, smithing, moneylending and magick. How far along are you now? That depends on the chronicle. It could be that you’re a new initiate in a mystick sect, and your adventures will revolve around service to the leaders of that sect. Or you might have been involved in a mortal apprenticeship when the Daemon came calling, and you must now choose between the craft you were studying and the Art that beckons to you. If you wound up on the Master’s bad side, you might be on your way out the door with nowhere else to go and no trade or association to fall back on. Or maybe you gave yourself over to a cruel taskmaster who refuses to let you go until you finish your apprenticeship... or finish him.

Bladesman

You’re uncommonly good with a blade, and you make your living with cold steel. Were you taught the new sword-arts in the gymnasiums of Florence, or did you learn crude but effective techniques in the army or the alley? No matter — you’re a master of cuts and parries now, and few men would dare to stand against you. Naturally, these skills have taken on a life of their own. Young rakes wish to test their steel on yours. Family foes want your blood and are willing to take it cut by cut. If you belong to an academy, you’ve found that such schools have rivals both inside and outside their walls. By the same token, you’ve probably become a bit like a blade yourself. Are you like the poignard, pointed and quick? Or the rusty dagger, notched by hard use but still fast enough to gut an overconfident foe? Might you be the broadsword, thick and heavy but strong enough to shatter most opponents, or are you sharp and graceful like the rapier or stiletto? No matter. Bladecraft allows many masters, but no fools.

Courtier

Like the fish in rushing water or the serpent in the thick grasses, you’re in your element at the courts of fine and powerful folk. Perhaps you’re a steward, waiting at the arm of your lord, or a confidant, privy to affairs of heart and state. With flattery and gossip, you might be climbing the social ladder or bending your back to the yoke of the common good. The court accepts all kinds of folk, from the power-brokers who stand behind the king to the servitors who kneel in his shadow. You are one of these favored few, spending your days in conference and luxury and your nights in bed-hopping and intrigue. Grace, wit and raw charisma are helpful here, but any courtier worth the name understands art, politics and human nature, too.

Glamorous as it seems, your life is perilous. A nest of snakes has nothing on the average court, and if you live in a city such as Rome, Madrid, Prague or Byzantium the games can be lethal indeed. The price of misstep can range from embarrassment to disgrace to wedlock (or lack of it!) to a horrible death. Magick gives you an advantage in this arena (especially if you favor the discreet Arts of the Guildsmen and Ksirafai), but it can turn into a noose if you’re not careful. Keep your alliances open, your affairs discreet and your ear to the nearest keyhole. Turns of fortune are common in your line of work, but one bad turn can be your last.

Courtesan

Unlike a common whore, you are cultured and refined. Powerful men want a bedmate who is witty and intelligent as well as beautiful, and many of them are willing to grant you access to places few women can go — libraries, courts, bedchambers and parties. To *keep* that access, you have learned literacy, poetry, intrigue and even bladecraft. With skills both carnal and cultural, you entice rich and influen-

tial men to your side. For a while, at least, they'll make you rich and influential, too. In the meantime, you can have a lot of fun and set aside money and favors for the inevitable downturn. Women often hate you, of course, but women rarely run things in your world... that is, with the exception of women like you.

Sunsmith

The Devil, they say, crafted the first gun. You would argue otherwise, but there's still something sinister about your trade. Who else could bring an armored knight down and rout his horse with a storm of fire? Who else could blow down a castle wall with lumps of rock or iron? Who else would dare to stand near a roaring caldron and continue to feed its flames? You are a practical man, of course, but even you can understand why the smell of gun smoke drives others away.

Yours is a rare and dangerous trade. Guns are often as deadly to their handlers as they are to their victims, and you probably have a few bad burns, scars and powder-tattoos. Steady hands and a firm heart are vital to a gunsmith — without them, you're dead. Like brimstone, the reek of fire never leaves you. It's in your hair, your nostrils, your skin. Perhaps it's true: You've been too close to the Devil. If that's so, then at least he taught you a marvelous skill!

Hermit

Out of love for God or disgust for Man (or perhaps both), you have sequestered yourself away from humanity. Are you a monk sheltering in a monastery? Or a lone madman on the edge of the wilderness? You might be an old woman who prefers the company of animals over people, or a young one who has fled poverty or an arranged marriage for a life of solitude. Hermits live in cities, too, bundled away in laboratories, libraries, academies and workshops until necessity breaks their silence. Whatever life you have chosen, something has intruded on it; for the moment, you have companions and a goal. Perhaps after this cursed business is finished you can retreat into solitude again!

Hunter/Forester

Cities are too dirty and loud for your tastes. You prefer the dew-kiss and the owl's cry. In the towering woodlands, you ply your trade. Perhaps you're a hunter in the prince's service, or a poacher dodging his justice. You could be an outlaw hiding in the forest, or a runaway who has learned to forage her own shelter. If you're a warrior, you might be a scout, ranger or tracker specializing in woodcraft. You might come from a land where *everything* is wooded — from Africa, the New World or the deep wilderness. The forest might be your pagan temple, your refuge or even your chosen bed. No matter what your origin or trade, you understand the ways of the forest — its inhabitants, its bounties, its tricks and its



Etiquette and Speech, or, "Conducting Yourself Correctly . . ."

A bad manner spoils everything, even reason and justice; a good one supplies everything, gilds a No, sweetens truth, and adds a touch of beauty to old age itself.

— Balthasar Gracian, *The Art of Worldly Wisdom*

Half the fun of a Renaissance chronicle is the romance of the setting. The grace and finery of this dashing age stand in bright contrast to the MTV era, even if our impressions of it are highly idealized. Why not play that mystique for all it's worth? Get into character and have a ball.

Whether you've been born into servitude or wealth, you must remember the era in which you live. It is an age of elegance and style. New ideas are blossoming. Languages are being refined. Change is the byword of the day. Even so, proper behavior is essential. You're not a *barbarian*, after all!

First, consider both your mannerisms and your speech. People act differently in this era. They carry themselves with respect and confidence, mind their place in society and rarely act "out of station" or violate the rules of protocol. A peasant from the hills, for example, may spit on the cobblestones, yet he will not spit in the presence of a noble lady. Consider your breeding, observe your company and err on the side of politesse.

Manners are important. Each social station follows different rules, but there *are* rules for all. Even a peasant strives for culture and distinction. Always try to be respectful of others, regardless of their station. In a lord's presence or court, conduct yourself with modesty and reverence. In the local pub, treat the serving wench with respect. She may not be high-born, but she is a lady nonetheless. Besides, she *will* be holding your food in her hands, too. Best not to anger her.

The way your character chooses to speak is extremely important. Grace is essential. A lady in discomfort does not scratch her breasts and complain, "Damn! These clothes are nasty!" First of all, a lady would not scratch *anything* in public; secondly, she would not speak in such a manner. Instead, she would excuse herself from the room, explaining her situation thus: "Pardons, m'lords, I take my leave of you, for my garments are in dire need of attention." A lord will not yell, "Yo! Whaz up?" upon meeting fellow colleagues. He may call out a greeting, but he uses a welcome that suits his station. Think about where your character lives, the education he has, and the social rank he bears, then try to act accordingly.

Depending on your troupe's talents, hobbies and pain threshold, you might want to use accents to set the mood.

Examples

"Dude!"
 "Don't be stupid"
 "Wasted 'im!"
 "You are so dead!"
 "Who do you think you're talkin' to, asshole?"
 "Yo! How's it goin', Queen Margot?"

You don't have to mimic BBC English to sound genuine, nor do you need a command of Chaucerian speech (although *The Canterbury Tales* are worth a glance). Just speak *well* with flourishes of imagination. Accents may help you keep in character, though, so long as they aren't painfully overdone. Don't feel limited yourself to a British accent, either. Characters can come from any region in the world, and Italian, Spanish or German accents are perfectly appropriate. If all else fails, "Renglish," that standby of Renaissance festivals, might serve as a model for how — or how *not* — to do things. Be forewarned!

Cursing is appropriate for the period, but obscenities are not. Profane speech is far more colorful than "Fuck this shit" — "I'll be forthwith damn'd" is far more eloquent and expressive. You don't have to speak in flowery phrases all the time, but your language should be cultured. Remember, this is an age when speech is the only real communicator; without TV, radio or widespread literacy, eloquence is vital. Even the low-born strive to speak well, and the high-born are schooled in expression from an early age. People respect style in both speech and manner, and most strive for gentle grace in their diction. Play your character accordingly.

Shakespeare's plays are loaded with great examples of both high speech and groundling grumbles. How can you bear "Thou damned and luxurious mountain goat?"

Body language is also important when playing a role. When you speak, use gestures to accentuate what you say. Think about how your character would sit or gesture, too: Are you playing a nobleman? He would sit differently than a peasant would — he's been trained to be graceful. Is your character a *Lady* or a serving wench? A *Lady* sits up straight, with her legs crossed and her hands gently folded in her lap. A country girl sits more comfortably, unmindful of how a proper woman should sit, but even she would be careful about how her skirts fall.

Speaking of skirts: Dressing the part goes a long way toward establishing a mood. You don't have to rent costumes to meet the period halfway; throw on a robe or a long dress, wear boots instead of sneakers, tie your hair into braids or rolls, and maybe even wear long gloves or other props. Be imaginative! The right clothes and speech — *different* clothes and speech, for that matter — can change your style of play more than you might expect. And the more dynamic your play, the more fun you'll have playing.

Alternatives

"Dear fellow!"
 "Let such follies slide from your heart."
 "Nicely dispatched."
 "The ravens shall be feasting upon ye by nightfall!"
 "Whom are you addressing, good sir?"
 "Greetings, my Queen. How do you fare?"

perils. Let others call you "rustic," "bumpkin" or "barbarian." Someday, they may need to cross these woods of yours, and then they'll thank you for your wisdom.

Monster-Slayer

Someone must stand against the night. Vampires, devil-lovers, slaving beasts and cannibal maniacs set forth each night in search of innocent blood and in the grip of twisted hungers. Terrible monsters plague the cities and stalk the wilderness. Only a coward could step aside to let them pass, and you are anything but a coward!

Naturally, you possess an edge that allows you to deal with the monsters on somewhat equal terms. You could be a scientist with deadly potions and devices; or an artilleryist with an arsenal of potent weapons; or a priest or priestess whose faith cuts through the dark; or a sorcerer whose magicks make even the vampires tremble. Regardless of your methods, this is a holy calling. Your victims might dub you a heartless fanatic, but that isn't true at all. If not for compassion, you would not risk limb and soul to slay the dragons.

Outcast

What was the crime that cost you your family? Are you a thief, an oathbreaker, a kinslayer, a sodomite? Are you even, perhaps, innocent although everyone thinks otherwise? No matter. Your old life has cast you away. Your loved ones spit at the sound of your name, and your former liege probably wants your head on a pike outside his keep. To survive, you fled their wrath and set out alone.

What part did the Black Arts play in your censure? Were you caught performing rites to forbidden gods, or did some neighbor or witch-finder uncover your devotions? You'll know better next time. Let your flamboyant fellows dodge the stones! These days, you keep one eye on the road ahead and the other focused on the darkness behind. Fellowship is grand, but survival is the most important thing in life. Any illusions you might have had about faith or family were discarded long ago.

Scholar

This is truly an age of miracles! At no other time have the mysteries of God, Man and Creation had so full a catalogue or so prominent a place in the human heart! These mysteries are your bread and butter, and you spend inordinate amounts of time studying them. Libraries, universities and laboratories are taverns to you, and the rustle of pages or the thrill of a good debate is sweeter than Parisian wine.

Naturally, you come from a wealthy family. No poor man could afford your devotion to expensive books or the time spent reading them. Oh, you *could* be one of those renegade scholars the gossips revile — the servants sneaking into their masters' libraries, the women disguised as men or sponsored by indulgent relatives, the Churchmen idling



away their vows with earthly studies, and so forth — but everyone *knows* such people are a minority (aren't they?). Perhaps you favor the sciences, languages, politics, culture or theology. Is it curiosity that feeds your endless hunger of learning, or is it desperation? The archives are good places to hide, it is said, and many a poor man has taken up the scholar's robes to escape a debt. Perhaps you're a professor, passing your studies on to other able minds; or a ritual magician seeking the riddles behind the ancient rites; or an architect of the future, charting Creation's laws. No matter. The universities have room for them all.

Shaman

Before you died and were reborn to the land of men, you walked blindly through the domain of spirits. Oh, you may have realized they existed, but their world was not your own... or so you thought. The spirits taught you differently. Perhaps you went looking for wisdom, wandering off on a vision-quest that killed you and brought you back to life; or maybe you were called away from a happy life to follow the Great Road. Was it some deformity of mind or body that marked you as the spirits' own, or was the path you follow blazed for you in some invisible way? There are no easy answers for those such as yourself.

By the standards of the "learned men" around you, you're a primitive, a superstitious throwback to the pagan past or a follower of devils. You know better. Can they read the seasons as you do? Or step into the True World that shimmers behind this wall of illusions? While the "men of reason" chew their beards and mumble, you commune with the immortals. As you know, mankind exists at the whim of these enigmas, and they are notoriously indifferent to people's suffering. By the standards of many folk, you seem equally indifferent but the truth is you're simply aware of a greater world. If that makes you "primitive," so be it.

Skyrigger

Once, you wanted to sail the seas. Now you sail the skies instead. It's a wonderful thing to taste the clouds and leave the birds behind beneath you, but it's terrifying as well. Once you ignore the vertigo you experience high above the ground (which is never easy to do, especially if you're in the rigging), there's the question of annihilation — very few of your fellows ever return from their voyages. You have been fortunate thus far, but you've seen what can happen when ships fly and men cannot....

Once, you trained in the rigging of sailing craft and honed your skills beneath the sun and the lash. By dint of talent, imagination and courage, you won a better prize and joined the elite air navy of the Daedaleans. A man (or woman, if you're especially brave) of action, you pit yourself against the heights, the wind and the Inquisitor's stake, all in the name of science. No one can question your courage, at least not without provoking a good fight. When you

New Character Traits

Abilities

Talents	Skills	Knowledges
Carousing	Climbing	Animal Speech
Diving	Disguise	Beast Lore
Elusion	Hunting	Politics
Empathy	Lockpicking	Seneschal
Musician	Pilot	Symbolism
	Seamanship	Theology
	Swimming	Weather-Eye
	Tracking	

return to earth, enjoy yourself! After all, not even your seafaring brethren endure the kind of peril you do. Even so, there's nothing else like it in the world, and you would not forswear such a vocation... not even if it meant your soul.

Urchin

In the shadows of some great city, you make your home. Chances are you're an orphan, although perhaps it was a particularly cruel parent, an arranged marriage or a terrible master that drove you to the uncertain solace of the night. Now you live on what you can steal or beg. It's not much, but it kept you alive... until magick came into your life. Now you have better things to hope for — and better ways to achieve them. True, you're still a child of the streets (possibly still a youngster even now; see the Flaw: *Child*), with crude ways, no manners, and a self-sighted view of the world. But now you can look beyond the shit-filled gutters and grasp the treasures of the mystick Arts. Will compassion guide your hand, or will desperation, suspicion and greed shape the magus you have become?

New Abilities



ur bodies are our gardens, to the which our wills are gardeners.

— William Shakespeare, *Othello*

Although it's impossible to summarize all forms of mundane and magical endeavor, the following Talents, Skills and Knowledges offer a bit of additional flexibility for your character. While all of these Traits are "official," they're not essential to playing a good game; like the "Other Abilities" referred to in the *Sorcerers Crusade* rulebook, they're simply "specialist" Abilities, available to all but practiced by few. For the sake of completeness, some are carried over from

New Character Traits

Merits and Flaws

Merit	Cost	Flaw	Worth
Acute Senses	1 or 3	Absent-Minded	2
Ambidextrous	1	Age	1
Arcane Heritage	2	Bard's Tongue	1
Bardic Gift	2	Beholden	1-3
Beast Affinity	1-4	Bound	5
Code of Honor	1	Child	3
Cupid's Gift	1	Clumsy	2
Enchanting Gaze	2	Coward	1-5
Fae Blood	4	Craven Image	1
Faerie Affinity	2	Criminal Marks	1-5
Ghoul	5	Cursed	1-5
Graceful	2	Dark Fate	5
Hands of Daedalus	3	Dark Secret	1-3
Honeyed Tongue	2	Deformity	3
Huge Size	4	Disturbing Mannerism	2
Innocent	2	Echoes	1-5
Iron Will	3	Enemy	1-5
Letter of Commission	1-5	Family Enmity	1
Luck	3	Geas	3/5/7
Mark of Favor	3	Haunted	3
Mistguide	4	Inconvenient Alliance	1-3
Natural Linguist	2	Infamy	2
Noble Bearing	1	Infirm	3
Noble Blood	1	Lame	3
Poison Resistance	2	Leper	4
Renaissance Man	5	Magickal Rival	2
Spark of Life	5	Oathbreaker	4
Ties	2	Obsession	2
Title	2-5	Plague Bearer	4-5
Traveler's Intuition	1	Reaper's Touch	5
True Faith	7+	Religious Aberrant	2
True Love	1	Repulsive Practice	3
Unbondable	4	Stumbletongue	1
Well-Traveled	3		



Crusade Lore and The Bygone Bestiary but have been altered to read more suitably.

Talents

Carousing

Hang tomorrow — let's celebrate tonight! Any fool can drink or wench, but you're a master of good times and great fun! You know the best taverns, the best tales, the best jokes and the best vintages. If tempers start brewing, you can often diffuse them before your friends come to blows.

This Talent helps you make a good impression: A successful Manipulation + Carousing roll allows you to keep people in good humor. It's also useful for distracting enemies, covering gaffes, impressing would-be allies, or just finding a warm bed for the night. The difficulty of the roll depends on the size and mood of the gathering — it's easy to cheer a bustling tavern, but hard to impress a stuffy court or calm a drunken brawl.

- Novice: You know a few songs and dirty jokes.
- Practiced: Friends look to you for revelry.
- Competent: Innkeepers break out their best for you.
- Expert: The Three Musketeers
- Master: Sir John Falstaff

Possessed by: Buskers, Nobles, Courtesans, Performers, Mercenaries, Rakes, Merchants, Spies

Specialties: Drinking, Exaggeration, Lewd Jokes, Sexual Innuendo, Avoiding Fights, Tale-Telling, Sophistication

Diving

While others huddle on ship or shore, you bravely descend into the depths of the sea. This is no mean feat — without magick, you have no way to breathe, and vicious creatures wait just below the waves. Perhaps you're sea-side-bred, like a Nipponese ama or a Greek islander; or maybe you pursue an unusual trade, such as sponge-fishing or treasure-salvage. It could be that you have... mysterious... ancestry that grants you some affinity with the ocean. (Some Verbena, being masters of Life Arts, build underwater strongholds where witch-hunters cannot find them; see "Eska" in *The Sorcerers Crusade*, p. 25.) In any case, you have no fear of the sea.

In game terms, this Talent allows you to swim underwater (see that Skill, below), hold your breath for some time without panicking, and reckon things such as depth, current, diving time and the like. A Stamina + Diving roll allows you to dive to great depths without injury, so long as you can hold your breath or breathe underwater; a Dexterity + Diving roll allows you to win free of strong currents; and a Perception + Diving roll helps you recognize hazards such as sea urchins, vicious fish, rip tides, and the like. Note that this is an exceedingly unusual set of skills for the time, especially in

Europe. A character with such uncanny talents could find herself in great demand — and under great suspicion — in a coast-based chronicle.

- Novice: You can duck your head and swim without fright.
- Practiced: In depths of 20 feet or so, you can dive with little trouble.
- Competent: Full fathom five, you can descend, explore and rise again.
- Master: Assuming you can breathe, there are few places you can't go.
- Legend: A mermaid's child, to be sure!

Possessed by: Verbena, Shellfishers, Treasure-salvagers, Pearl Divers, Fisherfolk, Weird People from the Coast

Specialties: Fishing, Retrieval, Strong Currents, Tropical Waters, Ship Sabotage

Elusion

You're a hard person to catch; whether in city, field or forest, you know how to make the most of hiding-places and obstacles. Anyone who wants to snare you had better take care!

Although this Talent does not render you silent, invisible or untraceable, it allows you to use any concealment (crowds, brambles, fog, etc.) to your best advantage. Assuming there's some cover to employ, a successful Wits + Elusion roll lets you slip away from pursuit... at least for a moment. The Arcane Background adds to this dice pool, as it does to Stealth attempts. With a very good roll (four successes or more), the things that hide you begin to hinder your foes: crowds berate them, brambles ensnare them, fog cloaks holes in the ground, and so on. Although this hindering is beyond your control, a subtle magus could easily take advantage of it....

- Novice: In busy surroundings, you can duck from sight.
- Practiced: You easily evade casual pursuit.
- Competent: If there's concealment to be found, you can use it.
- Master: It takes a skillful hunter to track you.
- Legend: A veritable fox!

Possessed by: Street Urchins, Hunters, Animals, Robbers, Assassins, Adulterers, Outlaws

Specialties: Woodlands, Cities, Distractions, Swamps, Mountains, Fields, Misdirection

Empathy

The heart is an open book to you; emotions and moods are easy to read, and you can respond to them in kind. People have a hard time lying to your face, and they trust you to an unusual degree. With little effort, you can discern a person's motives or charm him with a few meaningful glances. On the other hand, like calls to like:

Your feelings often reflect the humors flowing around you, which often makes you temperamental.

- Novice: Gossipy widows trust you.
- Practiced: Few folk can look you in the eye and tell falsehood.
- Competent: You have an amazing insight into moods and humors.
- Master: You're a grand judge of nature, both human and otherwise.
- Legend: You possess the heart-wisdom of Solomon... or Salome.

Possessed by: Judges, Courtesans, Fortune-tellers, Gossips, Priests, Merchants

Specialties: Truths, Trust, Inspiration, Mood-reading, Perfect Timing, Calming, Wordless Expression

Musician

In your hands, a piece of shaped wood and gut becomes the voice of an angel. You might not be able to sing with your own voice (that's a separate Talent), but you can put your emotions into song with a variety of instruments. This Trait represents more than just the ability to strum a fretboard or blow on a flute; other folk might be able to play pleasing sounds, but you create *music*.

- Novice: You can play one instrument without embarrassment.
- Practiced: You're always in the band at harvest festival time.
- Competent: People pay to hear you perform, and you're conversant with several different instruments.
- Master: Crowded inns and courts hush to hear you play.
- Legend: When people speak of bards, your name is on their lips.

Possessed by: Traveling Players, Village Entertainers, Minstrels, Court Jesters, Shepherds, Courtiers, Sailors, Troubadours

Specialties: Flutes, Pipes, Lute, Fiddle, Harp, Recorders, Oud, Hammer Dulcimer, Psaltery, Percussion, Sacred Music, Ballads, Tavern Playing, Court Performance, Village Revels

Skills Climbing

A touch of billygoat allows you to clamber over rocks, up walls and across rocky peaks. Granted, you often need some form of gear — ropes, grapples, spikes and hammers — to ascend sheer surfaces, but mere handholds and footholds suffice for a skilled climber.

- Novice: You can scale gradual slopes or walls with handholds.
- Practiced: You can shimmy up a tree in moments and can scale heavily weathered stone walls.

- Competent: Rocks are easy for you to climb; cliffs and walls slow you, but do not stop you.
- Expert: In your time, you have scaled mountains and climbed over many a smooth stone wall.
- Master: You find handholds on sheer surfaces and notice climbing routes where no one else can see them.

Possessed by: Burglars, Guides, Impetuous Boys, Mountaineers, Woodsmen

Specialties: Buildings, City Walls, Caves, Cliffs, Ice, Trailblazing, Trees

Disguise

You can change your appearance or conceal your true identity with clothes, makeup and acting talent (note that Renaissance makeup is fairly primitive; detailed disguises are difficult to sustain). A must for intriguers and witches who don't want to get caught!

- Novice: Under ideal conditions, you can fool simple people.
- Practiced: You can impersonate another person with a bit of effort.
- Competent: You're good enough to fool most strangers.
- Master: You can assume other identities for days on end and pass for another person of your general size.
- Legend: Man? Woman? Who can tell? You're whoever you want to appear to be.

Possessed by: Assassins, Masqueraders, Shapeshifters, Spies, Traveling Players

Specialties: Impersonation, Improvised, Magickal, Opposite Sex, Theater

Hunting

To live, one must eat, but few men can survive on grains and fruits alone. Thus, you hunt, and hunt well. You know where to find game, how to bring it down and how to prepare it for a meal. Under most circumstances, you can tell what kinds of game are available, how much you might find and how long it might take you to track some down. With a little effort (and a bit of patience), you can also help others hunt; chances are, you understand where *not* to hunt, too — nobles are a prickly lot when it comes to poaching on their lands.

- Novice: Poaching peasant
- Practiced: Typical nobleman
- Competent: Skilled forester
- Master: Captain of the royal huntsmen
- Legend: A wolf in human guise

Possessed by: Nobles, Poachers, Foresters, Outlaws, Hermits, Mercenaries, Vagabonds

Specialties: Trapping, Falconry, Bare Hands, Horseback, Group Hunts, Archery, Dangerous Game

Lockpicking

Your nimble fingers can persuade most locks to open. Although few homes have locks as later folk understand them, many chests, desks, devices and vaults boast unique and complicated devices. With this Skill, you know how to spring such locks, avoid simple traps connected to the mechanisms, and often re-set a lock after you're done with it. Just don't get caught....

- Novice: Simple locks are all you can pick.
- Practiced: You understand some complex mechanisms and can spring them with little difficulty.
- Competent: Most locks are child's play, and you recognize simple traps, too.
- Master: You sneer at locks and defuse traps with ease.
- Legend: King of Thieves

Possessed by: Robbers, Spies, Courtesans, Gaolers, Urchins

Specialties: Traps, Puzzle-locks, Door-locks, Escape, Gaols, Fetters and Chains

Pilot

You are no common teamster. Although the Craft: *Coachman* allows a character to drive wagons and chariots, most Daedalean Devices are far more complex. You specialize in such vehicles — war machines, skyships, odd sea-craft and other inventions — and have received training in their handling from the makers themselves. Chances are, you're an Explorator or Celestial Master with a taste for adventure. The things you can fly, drive or pilot may confound other folk, but you're just the man (or woman) for the job.

In game terms, this Skill reflects your understanding of odd vehicles. (See *The High Artisans Handbook* and *Crusade Lore*.) An Intelligence + Pilot roll lets you grasp the principles behind such a craft, even if you've never seen one before (not unusual — many such Devices feature unique designs). Dexterity + Pilot allows you to drive or fly one, and Perception + Pilot helps you recognize problems such as structure stress, obstacles or impending Scourge backlashes before things get out of hand.

- Novice: You're new to the crew.
- Practiced: A bit of experience makes you comfortable around odd machines.
- Competent: You can size up a strange craft in no time.
- Master: A Resplendent of the Explorators or the House of Helios.
- Legend: Captain Bernardo Marzani.

Possessed by: Explorators, Celestial Masters, Artificers, and the brothers of those Conventions

Specialties: Skyriggers, Clockwork Beasts, Tanks, Automotons, War Balloons, Submersibles, Navigation, Tactics

Seamanship

Landlubbers gape as you run the ratlines, sound the depth, careen the hull and trim the sails. Although Renaissance ships are not as complex as their later counterparts, it takes a wide variety of unique skills — sail-craft, repairs, reckoning and so forth — to make a competent seaman. You are one such, and those skills are your pride. Although sailing ships require knowledgeable crews, you can pilot a small boat yourself; on larger craft, you can work without making a fool of yourself, or order a pack of lubbers around long enough to get back home in one piece. (Although the Craft: *Seamanship* represents basic sailor skills, you might want to use this separate Skill to reflect extensive experience.)

- Novice: You've got your sea legs.
- Practiced: You're comfortable on most boats and know your way around a ship.
- Competent: You've survived a few storms and long trips.
- Master: You have sailed seas, seen grand sights and laughed in the teeth of storms .
- Legend: Your name and skill are known in every port of call.

Possessed by: Explorators, Captains, Seamen, Marines, Pirates, Fishermen

Specialties: Fishing Boats, Galleys, Trading Vessels, Great Ships, Warships, Native Boats, Long Trips, Storms, Command

Swimming

A rare skill in these times; unlike most folk, who sink like stones in the sea, you can keep afloat and dog-paddle for a short time. Without this Skill, you cannot swim at all. In game terms, you move roughly eight yards + Dexterity per turn. Under duress, you can push yourself, going 12 yards + Dexterity per turn for two turns per point of Stamina. Swimming in rough waters demands a Stamina + Swimming roll; a failed roll or botch condemns you to Neptune's embrace. (See "Drowning and Suffocation" in *The Sorcerers Crusade*, pp. 207 and 209.) For exceptional swimming ability, see "Diving," above.

- Novice: You can float and move in calm waters.
- Practiced: With a bit of effort, you can swim passing well in smooth seas.
- Competent: You can swim in rough waters without drowning too quickly.
- Master: Even in a tempest, you might survive.
- Legend: Are you some selkie's offspring?

Possessed by: Sailors, Sea-travelers, Coast-folk, Island Dwellers

Specialties: Rough Seas, Long Distances, Riding Tides

Tracking

Like a hound, you can track animals... or men. Through a combination of knowledge, experience and instinct, you know how to identify different kinds of spoor, tell how old it is, pick the best (and worst) spots for hunting or ambush, and follow tracks through the wilderness even if they happen to be several days old. In game terms, this might require a Perception + Tracking roll. The difficulty of the feat depends on the terrain, the age of the tracks and the size of the prey — following a stag through fresh snow is far easier than tracing the path of a hedgehog through deep underbrush.

Conversely, you may also hide your own tracks (a helpful skill for an outlaw!) with a Manipulation + Tracking roll. The difficulty for this feat depends on the terrain you've been traveling and the number and competence of your companions. Hiding the tracks of three woodsmen is simple; cloaking the passage of 100 militiamen and their pack train? Good luck! When hiding your own tracks, the Arcane Background adds to your Tracking dice pool. (*Storyteller's Note:* Should one tracker try to follow another, have both parties make a resisted roll of Manipulation + Tracking versus Perception + Tracking.) Again, the difficulty depends on the ground, climate and age of the tracks.

- Novice: Father took you hunting occasionally.
- Practiced: You've led a hunt or two.
- Competent: You hunt to survive.
- Master: A king's tracker would have a hard time besting you.
- Legend: A bloodhound must have raised you.

Possessed by: Hunters, Foresters, Wood-folk, Outlaws, Guides, Shapeshifters, Spies

Specialties: Deep Forest, Concealment, Sport Hunts, Large Groups, Identification, Magical Beasts

Knowledges Animal Speech

In the dead of night, parliaments of animals gather to discuss important matters. To unlearned folk, their discourse sounds like chittering and mewling — not true speech, but beast-babble. You know better.

Through some circumstance of fortune (which must be worked into your background), you can speak to and understand animals. Naturally, this is unusual — mastering Animal Speech takes talent, training and no small degree of help from the animals themselves. Unlike humans, beasts see things in very direct, simple terms. Very few understand complicated or abstract concepts, and most describe the world in sensory impressions. The ways in which those impressions translate into language depends a lot on the animal — whereas most animals have keener senses than a human does, those senses often work differently. Likewise,

the differences between a beast's body and a person's body can make communication... amusing. Asking a dog to "hand me that thing" would be as confusing as that same dog telling you to "bite that and toss it here." Despite the difficulties, you understand animals better than most humans ever will.

Animal Speech is a Knowledge, not a magickal power. In game terms, it works just like Linguistics, with the following differences:

- To speak to animals, you've got to be able to make sounds like the animal in question. A man might be able to speak with an eagle, but a deer would be beyond him (although he could understand it). A bit of Life magick (Life 3, to be exact) can help, but you've still got to practice before you can be understood.

- Many animals speak fairly common languages, provided they share similar physical and social characteristics. A wolf, for example, could talk to dogs, but not to cats. By the same token, some "terms" and attitudes won't translate well — a barn tomcat would sound pretty coarse to a lion, and a blue jay would seem like an utter fop to a hawk.

- Intelligence (and lack of it) makes communicating with certain beasts almost impossible. A woman could speak to a wolf with little trouble; a mole would be more difficult, and an ant would be out of the question. As a rule, assume that a human may speak only to fairly intelligent beasts (birds, mammals and reptiles, not insects or most fish), and is sure to have difficulty with particularly simple-minded ones.

The scope and utility of this Knowledge depends on the Storyteller and the level of fantasy she wants to employ in her chronicle. Talking with horses and owls might be perfectly fine in a high-myth tale, but seem silly in a grim witch-hunt chronicle. Although scientists scoff at the idea, many folk still believe that beasts can speak; even so, a human who can speak *back* is considered unusual at best, insane or Infernal at worst.

- Dabbling: One additional language
- Student: Two additional languages
- Scholar: Four additional languages
- Master: Eight additional languages
- Virtuoso: Sixteen additional languages

Possessed by: Young Children, Pagans, Hermits, Shapeshifters, Faeries, Greater Beasts, Hunters, Saints

Specialties: Diplomacy, Profanity, Legends, Prophecy, Songs and Poetry

Beast Lore

There is an order to everything, even unto the beasts of field, stream and air. Although the rough hierarchies and esoteric legends of the animal kingdoms are far simpler than the tapestries of human endeavor, they *do* exist. The lion is king of all the lesser beasts, the dragon is lord of the greater beings, the whale is the monarch of the deep, and the eagle

is the king of the sky... as far as you know, at any rate. With the Void of Heaven beckoning beyond the clouds and a swirling Hell below the oceans, some magi have begun to question *all* forms of order. The beasts, meanwhile, do not concern themselves with such things. They merely live by the rules they were given. And you know what those rules are.

Like other Lores (Tradition, Vampire, etc.), each type of Lore must be purchased separately. The higher your rating, the more you know... or *think* you know. Lores, especially those pertaining to strange animals, are based largely on oral tradition — the few written records that exist are notoriously inaccurate and biased. Humans have a hard time understanding the beasts; while a magus is more likely to understand dragons than a mortal is, the magus is not *truly* a dragon. Thus, she can learn only so much...

See **The Book of Mirrors: The Mage Storytellers Guide**, pp. 103-112, for ideas about animals in the chronicle; and **The Bygone Bestiary** for details about different animals and the roles they have been given by God and Man.

- Dabbling: There is indeed an order to the beasts....
- Student: By God's command, the beasts are organized into certain hierarchies. You know what they are.
- Scholar: You know a few secrets.
- Master: The beasts themselves rarely know as much as you do.
- Virtuoso: You know hidden myths, ranks and histories that only the most learned elder beasts ever learn.

Possessed by: Shamans, Pagans, Hermits, Saints, Shapeshifters, Bestiary Scribes, Faeries, Wise Beasts

Variations: Dragons, Birds, Lesser Beasts, Symbolism, Bestiaries (usually inaccurate, but often the "best" source of information available to humans), Divine Hierarchies (Eastern, Christian, African, New World, Hindu, Hebrew and Muslim are all separate Lores)

Politics

This is an age of princes and merchants, intrigue and innuendo. You understand the currents of power, the players in the grand play and the histories behind their positions and deeds. Whether you be a cunning priest, an insightful servant, a courtier or a courtesan, you understand who's doing what to whom, why it's being done, and how you can take advantage of it. Because men tend to act in similar ways despite their stations, you can apply this Knowledge to Church affairs, royal courts, guild business or even magickal strongholds; if you're new to the place, a few discreet questions and observations (reflected by Perception + Politics rolls) can usually tell you what you need to know.

- Dabbling: Casual observer
- Student: Local herald
- Scholar: Aspiring heir
- Master: Courtier



••••• Virtuoso: Machiavelli

Possessed by: Courtiers, Guildsmen, Courtesans, Her-
alds, Judges, Lords, Clergy, Merchants

Specialties: City, Courts, Covenants, Heraldry, Guilds,
Religious, the Church

Seneschal

You were (or are) responsible for managing and main-
taining a household or organization. Maybe you're a
prominent Guildsman, an abbot or a bailiff. Or perhaps
you're a noblewoman, an innkeeper or even a Covenant
seneschal. Regardless of your vocation, you know how to
balance the books, keep inventory of the larder and wine
cellar, manage servants, entertain guests, and keep the house
and lands in good repair.

Although you know your own household best, this
Knowledge helps you evaluate other households, appraise
the quality of trade goods, or take care of guests even if you're
outside your usual domain. A wise steward knows his busi-
ness anywhere.

- Dabblers: You can keep a small place running with-
out too many problems, and you know how much
money is available.
- Student: You can keep your household solvent, and
guests are never a problem.
- Scholar: You can handle a large house hold without
assistance, and your guests always have a good night.
- Master: You can manage a large house hold or series
of small households without trouble.
- Virtuoso: You can keep your house running even
during the most difficult of times, and your superiors
consider you indispeable.

Possessed by: Chief Stewards, Innkeepers, Noble-
women, Seneschals, Wives, Guildsmen, Spies

Specialties: Accounting, Guilds, Hostels, Innkeeping,
Kitchens, Noble Households, Covenants, Lodges, Religious
Orders, Taverns

Symbolism

Great wisdom hides in plain sight. In artwork, lore and
Scripture, symbols reflect a greater truth. As you know,
everything is loaded with deeper meanings; gestures, plants,
animals, weather — all these things hold secrets for persons
who understand them.

In game terms, this Knowledge allows you to send and
decipher codes or recognize heraldry and omens (Intelli-
gence + Symbolism); notice the theme and significance of
an artist's work (Perception + Symbolism); or send and
receive secret messages in art, speech or even architecture
(Manipulation + Symbolism, if you have Artist, Crafts or
Metaphysics as well). To a magus, symbols provide keys to
Creation. It is a dull custodian who cannot handle such keys.

- Dabblers: You grasp the obvious.
- Student: Sudden revelations impart hidden meanings.
- Scholar: You're versed in many formal symbolic "languages" (Biblical verse, flower codes, hand gestures).
- Master: *Everything* has a deeper significance and you know where to look for it.
- Virtuoso: You read prophecies in the patterns of leaves.

Possessed by: Artists, Art Patrons, Bards, Gypsies, Lorekeepers, Spies, Theologians

Specialties: Alchemy, Animals, Architecture, Biblical, Codes, Foreign Cultures, Heraldry, Omens, Paintings, Sculpture

Theology

The Devil, some say, can quote Scripture. So can you... quite well. In an age when the beliefs of humanity are up for debate, you know the books, the chapters, the theories and the philosophies that make faith such a contentious matter. This Knowledge is not an idle one in the Renaissance — court and chapel resound with religious quarrels. Although these arguments can be quite esoteric, they're anything but polite. These days, a person can be — and often is — burned at the stake for disagreeing with the "established truth." But, as you understand, truth is in the eye of the beholder... and there are many eyes beholding God.

In practical terms, this Knowledge reflects a familiarity with your core faith's doctrine and a passing knowledge of its "heretical" counterparts: A Catholic priest would know the Bible well but also understand the tenets of Islam and Judaism; a rabbi would know the Torah and Talmud, but could speak passably about the New Testament, and so forth. Your view of these doctrines and their validity is up to you, but "religious tolerance" is nearly unheard of. Although theologians like Martin Luther and Savonarola stand up to challenge the established Church, they play an exceedingly dangerous game. Anyone who knows religious matters as well as you do is a prime candidate for suspicion — especially if she practices the forbidden Arts of magick, knows too much about other faiths, or consorts with obvious heretics.

- Dabblers: You have read the core book of your faith.
- Student: You're familiar with all the tenets of your faith, know some esoteric secrets of it and can speak knowledgeably about one or two other religions.
- Scholar: Grounded with a firm knowledge of your faith, its doctrines and its deeper layers, you reach out to learn more about many other religions.
- Master: Although you bow your head to God, few others know his ways as you do.
- Virtuoso: You could argue faith with Aquinas, Luther and Abraham at once.

Possessed by: Clergy, Philosophers, Witch-hunters, Ritual Magicians, Scholars, Artists, Heretics, Infernalist Conspirators

Specialties: Scripture, Esoterica, Symbolism, History, Heresy, Prophets, Rituals, Philosophies, Codes, Enemies

Weather-Eye

Some folk say you say you can taste the wind; in actuality, you simply know what to look for. The signs of harsh or temperate weather can be read by one who understands them, and you are such a person.

This Knowledge does not, in itself, cause any kind of change, but it helps you understand the forces already at work. Folklore, experience and a dash of intuition help you guess impending weather (Perception + Weather-Eye); shape it with your magicks (Intelligence + Weather-Eye); or use it to your advantage (Wits + Weather-Eye). Guessing the weather is easy — just note the clouds, the wind and its direction. Commanding the weather takes Forces magick, of course, but a good Weather-Eye roll can work to the caster's advantage. (See "Abilities Enhancing Magick" in *The Sorcerers Crusade*, p. 245.) Using the weather to hide things, impress people or sway a fight is tricky, but a knowledgeable person can do so simply by guessing which way the elements will flow. Assuming the weather suits your purpose, a successful Weather-Eye roll can reduce the difficulty of your task by one for each success rolled. (If, for example, Kestral wished to hide in a fog, she might roll her Wits + Weather-Eye; three successes on that roll would reduce the difficulty of her Stealth roll by three.) Naturally, the weather has to be appropriate before it can be used; hiding in a fog is difficult if there is no fog to hide in. (No, you cannot use a Manipulation + Weather-Eye roll to lower the difficulty of a Wits + Weather-Eye roll that reduces the difficulty of a weather-related Arete roll. One or the other, not both.)

- Dabblers: Grandmother told you how to read clouds.
- Student: You can pick the direction, strength and current of the winds, and can predict how soon and how hard rain will fall.
- Scholar: Like a seasoned farmer, you easily notice what others cannot see.
- Master: You've got the expertise of a storm-witch or an old salt.
- Virtuoso: Do you *know* the weather, or *control* it...?

Possessed by: Sailors, Pagans, Guides, Witches, Farmers, Gypsies

Specialties: Sea, Winter, Summer, Magical Storms, Rain

Merits and Flaws



fortune is not on the side of the faint-hearted.

— Sophocles, *Phaedra*

As explained in *The Sorcerers Crusade* (pp. 105-106), these Traits offer you a few perks and problems in exchange for a

couple of freebie points. Although they're often used to "power up," Merits and Flaws provide a great way to flesh out your character, too. Isn't it more interesting to have a ruthless prince (the Title Merit) who cherishes the Lady Giulia (the Merit: True Love) but is troubled by the ghosts of his victims (the Flaw: Haunted), as opposed to a cardboard evil dude who occasionally sends his guards out to harass the player characters? And isn't a character with a bad reputation (Infamy) but a code of honor (the Merit of that name) more fun than a guy who's just wandering along with a sword at his side?

For completeness, the Merits and Flaws from **Crusade Lore** have been included here, in addition to many new ones. Players who have **The Book of Shadows: The Mage Players Guide** will notice that some Merits and Flaws have also been carried over from that book. Most are pretty much the same, but a few (Poison Resistance, Iron Will, Child and Geas) differ from the original versions. This difference reflects changes between the **Mage** first edition and second edition rules and can be considered an official adjustment. The important Merit: True Faith and the common Flaw: Echoes are presented in the **Sorcerers Crusade** rulebook. Although neither one has been reprinted here, both have been included on the Merits and Flaws listing on page 113.

Merits

Ambidextrous (1 pt Merit)

Two blades are more dangerous than one. This aptitude allows you to use both hands normally — a helpful talent if you specialize in Florentine-style fencing. (See **The Sorcerers Crusade**, p. 198.) Normally, there's a penalty for using both hands to perform different tasks simultaneously: +1 difficulty for the "right" hand and +3 for the "wrong" one. This Merit eliminates that penalty.

Code of Honor (1 pt Merit)

Your personal sense of right and wrong serves as a binding code, governing your actions. This sense of honor gives you the ability to resist many temptations or inducements that contradict your beliefs. You can even resist supernatural coercion, such as use of Mind magick or the vampire Disciplines Dominate and Presence. In game terms, add three dice to resistance rolls against attempts to influence your actions supernaturally. Alternatively, the Storyteller may increase the difficulties of such attempts against you by two. You must compose your own code, detailing your ethics and convictions as clearly as possible. If you claim to have a code, you should be able to define it.

Cupid's Gift (1 pt Merit)

You're unusually seductive. It isn't so much that you're fair of face or quick of wit (though you may be) — you simply

possess a certain animal charm that few can resist. In any roll based on Seduction or Subterfuge, subtract two from the difficulty... and get ready to suffer the displeasure of your rivals! Folk who are not swayed by your charms often hate you for possessing them.

Noble Bearing (1 pt Merit)

Some people were born to lead. You are one of them. Were you born of noble blood? Perhaps not, but you still act as if you were, and often you impress others as a result. Your true heritage doesn't matter; people respect you on sight.

In game terms, this Merit lowers Social roll difficulties in conciliatory situations by two. In story terms, it gives you an air of respectability no matter where you are or what you do. It also makes you a target for jealousy, gossip and assassination attempts, but that's the cost of charisma....

Noble Blood (1 pt Merit)

Whether a bastard or favored child, you possess an obvious link to a noble family. It's well known that "the blood will tell"; prominent features and other, less physical, traits — good ones and bad ones alike — have been passed on to you. Perhaps you share the duke's fine features, the baron's temper or the princess' deep-green eyes. People recognize your heritage, no matter how you dress or behave.

In game terms, this Merit is two-sided: It declares your parentage and wins you respect, but that's not always a good thing. You might acquire your family's enemies through no fault of your own, or cause scandals if you were born on the wrong side of the sheets. If your family has some noted personality trait — extraordinary courage, deviousness, generosity, wrath — you'll probably display some sign of it as a matter of course. Note that this Merit doesn't apply to every noble child; it reflects an *undeniable* tie to a specific aristocracy, not a simple heritage.

Traveler's Intuition (1 pt Merit)

No matter where you might be headed, a certain "navigator's reckoning" keeps you going in more or less the right direction. This sense is in no way exact, but it can keep you from getting hopelessly lost, even in a maze. It might take time — lots of time — but you *will* find your way to your destination.

Ruleswise, this Merit functions as a plot device. In any nonmagickal maze, wilderness or city, you can find your way to your goal without becoming hopelessly lost. Navigation-based rolls (usually Perception + Science: Navigation) have their difficulties reduced by two. Note that this is *not* an "internal map"; under most circumstances, you simply have a feeling about which direction to take. Unless someone uses magick to puzzle you, you'll never get really lost. If someone does try to foul your senses with a spell, this Merit gives you an extra die of counter-magick to resist the enchantment's

effects. When combined with magical navigation (like the Wayfarer's Reckoning spell), this Merit reduces the casting difficulty by two, but does not confer any other benefit for Connection-based spells (and the usual maximum reduction of -3 still applies).

True Love (1 pt Merit)

Undying love for another character gives you resolve and inspires you to greatness. The thought of your beloved lifts you above the tedium and turmoil of daily existence, even if a kingdom separates you. Not even death can undo your devotion. In an age when courtly and unrequited love are revered, your true love is the stuff of legends.

This pure devotion grants an automatic success on Willpower rolls related in some way to protecting or defending your beloved. The strength of your emotions may also serve as a charm against supernatural foes if the Storyteller so chooses; in such a case, any magical Discipline, spell or so forth that might cause you to harm your beloved adds two to its difficulty. Still, lovers are not known for their presence of mind; your passion may distract you from other issues (study, intrigue, celibacy, etc.) or even make you seem somewhat absent-minded at times. Such is the curse of True Love!

Acute Senses (1 or 3 pt Merit)

You have the senses of an animal. One or more of your perceptions is far sharper than the human norm; although it makes you more susceptible to loud noises, bright lights or powerful sensations, this acuity helps you notice small details, detect surprises, and enjoy life to the fullest.

In game terms, one point gives you one sharp sense, while three points make all five senses sharp. Subtract one from the difficulty of all Perception die rolls relating to your sharp sense(s), and add one success to any Rank 1 Perception spell based on that sense. Major shocks to that sense (explosions, torture, etc.) might render it "numb" for a while; a wizard with unnaturally acute vision could be struck blind for some time by a sudden lightning flash. In time, however, the sense returns to its usual acuity... more often than not, anyway.

Beast Affinity (1-4 pt Merit)

Animals love you. Whereas other people must use force, training or magick to forge bonds with beasts, you do so naturally. Perhaps God has blessed you with the gift of St. Francis. Maybe you're a shaman with a powerful totem, or a witch touched by the Goddess. Regardless, animals are well-disposed toward you. You cannot speak their language or read their minds, but some limited communication (based on gestures and vocalizations) is possible. You are probably safe from harm by animals unless you or your companions act aggressively toward a beast or its pack.

- For one point, you get along well with a specific type of animal (wolves, cats, hawks).
- For two points, you bond with general types of animals (canines, birds).
- For three, that bond extends to any natural beast.
- For four, even the greater (magical) creatures regard you with favor, if not trust or friendliness.

The payback for this Merit is respect; a magus with a beast-bond must love the wild in return. Farmers, foresters and "barbarians" are more likely to win this trust than are priests or princes. This Merit is not an instant protection; if you anger a beast, it attacks. Intelligent or magical animals are still free to make their own decisions; they're inclined to like you, but may be wary of you or even turn on you in the long run. Likewise, this Merit fades if abused; a sorcerer who uses her affinity to recruit sword-fodder soon finds her favor revoked. Animals are not stupid and their goodwill is easily taxed.

Letter of Commission (1-5 pt Merit)

Some authority — a prince, king, bishop, etc. — has given you a letter of privilege. In his name, you have been granted leave to do certain things that would not otherwise be allowed. So long as you have this letter in your possession, people consider you an agent of your patron. It is, of course, a double-edged blade — his enemies are your enemies, and your deeds reflect on him.

This Merit takes a physical form: a letter, ring or token embossed with the seal of your patron. Often, the item includes instructions outlining the commission ("*Know that by this hand and this seal, I do hereby declare the holder of this note to be my agent, and she is hereby authorized to appear in High Court in my stead. What she has done, she has done in my name,*" or other missives to that effect.) If you lose the token or letter, you also lose all benefits of the Merit. Although most authorities respect the dictates of the Letter of Commission, some people may choose to ignore it. Naturally, it can be stolen, transferred, burned or otherwise destroyed. Anyone who holds the Letter holds the power, so a careless agent may find herself on the receiving end of someone who takes the Letter away and uses its power against her.

Different Letters have different prices:

- Free Travel Pass (allows the holder to move freely through the kingdom without hindrance or toll): one point
- The Right to Hospitality (entitles the bearer to expect free food and lodgings befitting an agent of her patron): two points
- Admission to Court (lets her into meetings and audiences that would normally be closed): three points
- The Right to Break the Law ("forgives" certain indiscretions such as stealing, forgery, trespassing, poaching, brawling, insubordination, destruction of property and possession of illegal goods, assuming the bearer can make a case that the law was broken for good reason): four points

• *Carte Blanche* (“forgives” lesser crimes, including the murder of commoners and soldiers, assuming she can make a case for such killings; does not apply to the murder of nobles, which is unforgivable): five points

Although a Letter seems to be a free pass to outlawry, certain constraints exist. Most commissions are good only within the patron’s domain — a ring from the Duke of Milan won’t mean much in London, and might well mark you as an enemy. Although certain passes and commissions may apply to outside courts, the rights to break laws and/or murder people almost never do unless they have been granted by a high-ranking bishop or the Pope. Your business must ultimately serve your patron’s cause, too — a lawbreaker who flashes her commission too freely will lose her credibility and enrage her patron in the bargain. There are some very nasty spots in the dungeon reserved for agents who break the trust of their benefactors....

Arcane Heritage (2 pt Merit)

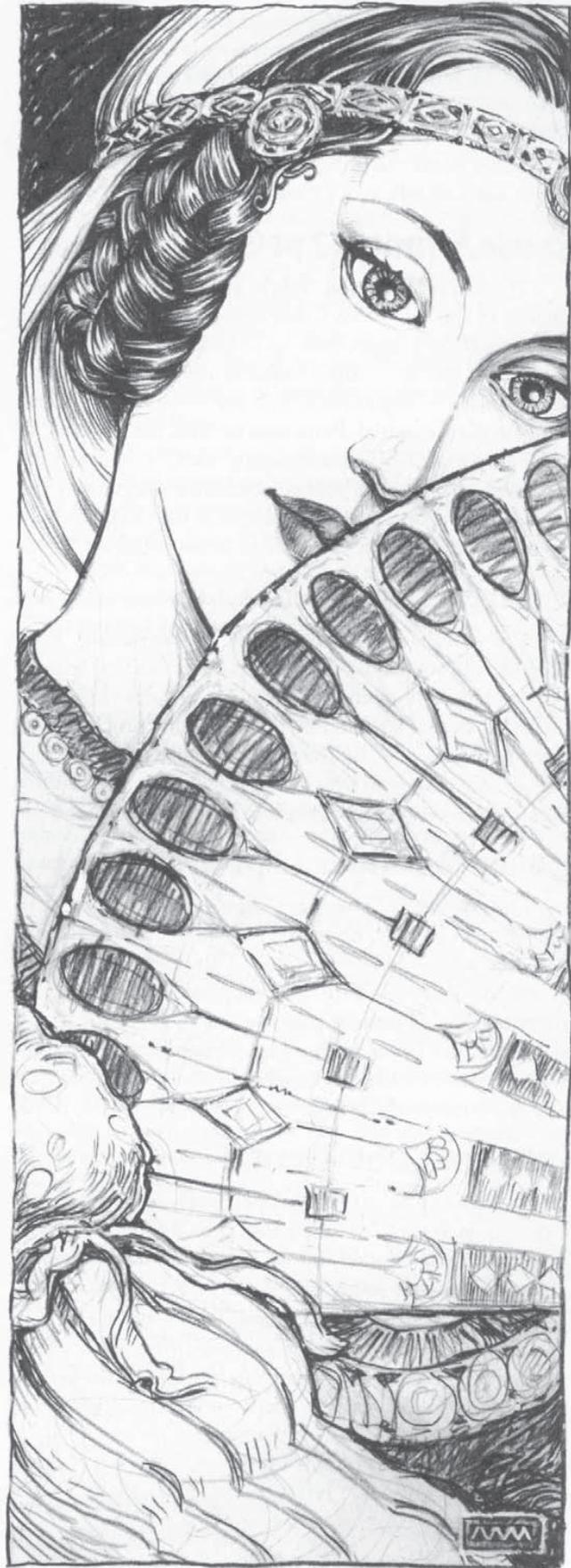
The blood of magi runs through your veins; one or both of your parents (and perhaps other ancestors as well) Awakened to the calling of magick. You grew up in extraordinary company, and lessons about magick and myth were as familiar to you as lullabies. In story terms, your Awakening comes as an expected event rather than as a spiritual trauma. You begin the game with an extra dot in Occult (or two dots in Magus Lore) to reflect your familiarity with the arcane.

Bardic Gift (2 pt Merit)

Gifted by the Muses, you sing sweetly, play an instrument divinely and speak with passion and eloquence. In all cases, your skill is not as impressive as your delivery. Somehow, everything you say or perform rings with power and conviction. In game terms, subtract two from the difficulty of any Social-based roll that involves speaking, poetry, music or song. (*Storyteller Note:* Although this Merit can be combined with other Social Merits, such as *Enchanting Gaze*, the combined bonus should not lower the final difficulty by more than three; anything further, and things just get silly.) Naturally, you’ll make an impression wherever you go. People are bound to talk about such a distinctive individual, and such talk may not always be in a character’s best interests....

Enchanting Gaze (2 pt Merit)

You’ve got the most *fascinating* eyes. People find it hard to avoid them. Even if your gaze is sort of... unearthly... it’s most seductive. There isn’t anything actually magickal about your gaze, but others cannot help finding it intriguing, whether you want them to or not. Perhaps your eyes are unusually vivid, or uncannily colored, or incredibly trusting and inviting... they’re distinct, regardless, so you might as well make use of ‘em.



In game terms, this Merit subtracts two from the difficulty of any Social roll that involves sustained eye contact, or from an influence spell that includes eye contact as a focus. (See *The Sorcerers Crusade* — “Charms” on p. 261, and “Evil Eye,” p. 268. The usual maximum applies.) It also makes you stand out in a crowd; long after you’re gone, people will still talk about those marvelous eyes....

Faerie Affinity (2 pt Merit)

The Fair Folk like you. While they avoid most humans (at least by the light of day), they seek you out for good times and council. You might even be of faerie blood. Whatever your origin and tie to the Dreamers, they treat you like a young sibling — regardless of your age — and rarely plague you with their mischief. From time to time, the fae may call upon you to mediate disputes among them, or between the fae and the magicians of your acquaintance. Sometimes, you can even call upon them for assistance in your own affairs — if you dare submit your problems to faerie judgment.

Graceful (2 pt Merit)

You move with uncanny poise and sensuality. Even under duress, you manage to be both dexterous and refined, and you have a fine sense of balance under even the worst circumstances. In game terms, your difficulty for Dexterity-based actions is one less than usual. Botches, even serious ones, do not make you trip or fumble; although you can still make serious mistakes, you’ll probably look good doing so.

Honeyed Tongue (2 pt Merit)

Lies pass your lips like the Gospel truth. People tend to believe what you say, no matter how inane your conversation or how incredible your stories. This liberty enables you to spread falsehoods with impunity, deceive friends and enemies alike, or explain your way out of grave situations. Ruleswise, all of your attempts at Subterfuge gain an automatic success, and Social-based rolls that depend on glib assurances reduce the base difficulty by two — you sly devil!

Innocent (2 pt Merit)

You convey an aura of childlike innocence. Surely *you* cannot be guilty of any wrongdoing! Even if people catch you in the act, your impression of innocence leads them to suspect someone or something else to be behind your deeds.

In story terms, this Merit makes life a lot easier for you. You usually suffer mild punishments (even if someone catches you in the act), and your accusers tend to give you the benefit of doubt. In game terms, this Merit lowers the difficulties of rolls involving Subterfuge or Manipulation by two. Still, be wary of how far you press this advantage. There may come a time when a saintly face is not enough to save you....



Natural Linguist (2 Pt Merit)

You've got an able tongue and a good head for languages. Even if you cannot understand a language, you have a better chance of grasping the speaker's intentions. In game terms, add three dice to any dice pool involving languages either spoken or written. All additional tongues must be purchased with the Linguistics Knowledge, however. This Merit does not teach you things you did not already know, it simply helps you understand things better.

Poison Resistance (2 pt Merit)

In a world filled with poisoned cups, you stand immune to such trickery. For some reason (good birth, strong constitution, a built-up immunity, and so forth), you cannot be slain by normal toxins. (Magickal ones may prove to be exceptions at the Storyteller's discretion.) In game terms, you can roll Stamina to resist a normally fatal dose of poison; the difficulty depends on the potency of the draught; mild toxins are 5 or 6, powerful ones are 7 or 8, and really nasty ones are 9 or 10. You might become sick, you might even be incapacitated, but chances are that you'll survive. See "Poisons" in *The Sorcerers Crusade*, pp. 201-202. For a list of poisons, see this book's Appendix.

Ties (2 pt Merit)

You have friends in high places — the Church, the guilds, the underworld. These friends can help you pull strings, meet people, funnel information or get a word in edgewise. Unlike the Allies, Influence or Spies Backgrounds, these contacts are not permanent or reliable — you are known but not established and your influence is limited. However, this Merit may improve your chances of using one of those Backgrounds successfully.

In story terms, Ties get your foot in the door. In game terms, appropriate Ties lower the difficulty of Social rolls by one or two, depending on what you're doing. A subtle request, such as a dinner invitation, is easy to achieve (-2 difficulty). A greater demand, such as requesting an audience with a prince, is harder (-1 difficulty), but not impossible. It's not a good idea to abuse Ties; the more you strain them, the weaker they become. A social blunder, betrayal or ridiculous request might sever Ties completely.

Before the chronicle begins, create a rationale or story explaining the Ties you have. Your Storyteller may disallow any Ties that seem inappropriate or overly powerful. Unlike many other Merits, this Trait has variations; each one must be purchased separately for two points. These variations include: Local Church, Vatican, Jewish Society, Pagan Sects, Local Underworld, Craft Guilds, Artists, Local Prince, King's Court, Sultan's Court, Local Marketplace and Shipping.

Title (2-5 pt Merit)

You've acquired rank, whether by birth or deed. That title confers privilege, of course, but carries obligations, too. Honors are not given lightly, nor are they ignored when trouble brews. And in this world, trouble's always brewing somewhere.

You're expected to act according to your station. God assigns people to certain places in life and you must do honor to yours. Others watch over you; their opinions are based on your wisdom, generosity, valor and honesty — or lack of same.

- For two points, you possess a minor claim or title (knight, lady, priest). Your duties include doing what you're told; although you can command the common folk, you also have many superiors.

- Three points gets you a lesser title (countess, bishop) or a minor title and some status (renowned knight, honorable lady). In addition to your rank, you can expect a certain amount of respect, but you must shoulder several responsibilities.

- With four points, you acquire a powerful title (archbishop, duke, princess) and all the benefits and duties thereof. Your romances are arranged, your movements are scrutinized and your commands are obeyed. Few people can order you around, but opinion and intrigue weigh heavily.

- Five points make you mighty — a prince, archbishop or royal confidante. You command obedience from most people, but blades are forever at your back. Step lightly....

Note that the Storyteller may disallow any title that she feels would disrupt the game — or she may revoke your title, benefits or both on a whim. She will certainly make your rank the springboard for many adventures; assassins, toadies, gossips and supernatural meddlers surround powerful folk. This Merit bestows certain privileges, but rank is a fragile thing. Uneasy rests the head that wears the crown....

Hands of Daedalus (3 pt Merit)

Glorious is the inventor, the craftsman, the genius, whose hands shape God's Creation into man's creations! You are one such person, and like Daedalus himself, your talents surpass most of your peers'. Things seem to come to life in your hands; from simple constructions to esoteric Devices, you have a knack for shaping and an eye for quality.

In game terms, this Merit makes it easier to build, brew or shape things. Any roll that involves designing, making or shaping something (the Traits: Artist, Crafts, Herbalism, Invention or Poisons) has its difficulty reduced by one. (See "Art and Science" in *The Sorcerers Crusade*, p. 190.) Magickal castings that involve building or shaping things reduce their difficulty the same way, up to the maximum -3 reduction. This Merit does not in any way grant a character knowledge or magick she does not have, nor does it allow her any bonus with Life-based spells, combat rolls or long-range work. The "Hands of Daedalus" are well-named, too; an

A Table of Ranks

The highest rank in Renaissance Europe is Emperor, and only two rulers bear that title: the Holy Roman Emperor (or *Kaiser*) of the German Nation and the Emperor of the Byzantine Empire (or the *Basileus*). Otherwise, the order of precedence runs roughly as follows:

Men's Titles

England	France	Italy	Germany	Spain
King	Roi	Re	Koenig	Rey
Prince	Prince	Prince	Prinz	Principe
Duke	Duc	Duca	Herzog	Duque
Earl	Comte	Conte	Graf	Conde
Baron	Baron	Barone	Freiherr	Baron
Knight	Chevalier	Cavalliere	Ritter	Caballero
"Sir"	"Sieur"	"Signore"	"Herr"	"Señor"
Squire	Ecuyer	Scudiero	Knappe	Escudero

Women's Titles

England	France	Italy	Germany	Spain
Queen	Reine	Regina	Koenigin	Reina
Princess	Princesse	Principessa	Prinzessin	Princesa
Duchess	Duchesse	Duchessa	Herzogin	Duquesa
Countess	Comtesse	Contessa	Grafin	Condesa
Baroness	Baronne	Barone	Freiherrin/ Barunin	Baronesa
Mistress	Maîtresse	Maestra	Meisterin	Duena
"Lady"	"Madame"	"Signora"	"Herrin"	"Señora"

Church Titles

Pope — "Your Holiness"
Archbishop — "Your Grace" or "Your Excellency"
Bishop — "Your Excellency"
Priest — "Father"
Minister/ Deacon
Subdeacon
Cardinal — "Your Eminence"
Cardinal Bishops
Cardinal Priests
Cardinal Deacons

(Nuns and monks are not technically part of the Church's hierarchy, as they take their orders from God; even so, they take their worldly orders from higher-ranking clerics.)

Abbot/ Abbess — "Father Abbot," or "Reverend Mother"

Monk/ Nun — "Brother" or "Sister"

artisan must physically work with an object or material before she can use this Merit to help reshape it.

Iron Will (3 pt Merit)

Magick is an effort of will, and sorcerers are willful people by nature; even so, you possess a will of superhuman proportions. No spell or charm can influence you for long if you have set your mind against it.

Ruleswise, this Merit allows you to spend a Willpower point to shake off the effects of the vampiric Dominate Discipline, and Mind-based charm and possession spells (as opposed to Spirit-based ones; see below). A sorcerer who is trying to influence you without your knowledge adds one to her casting difficulties; one who wants to drag you under her spell while you're aware of it adds three to her difficulty. Each turn you spend actively resisting the spell's effects costs you one point of Willpower, though, so your resistance is only as strong as your determination.... This Merit has no effect against spirit-based or Spirit-magick-based possessions, or against emotion-based charms or appeals. Even the most stubborn sorcerer can be undone by the whims of the heart.

Luck (3 pt Merit)

Glad omens or favorable astrological conjunctions coincided with your birth and graced you with an undeniable luck. Those who know you believe you have received Heaven's blessing or the Devil's favor, depending on their opinion of you. In story terms, you seem to live a charmed existence. In game terms, you may repeat three failed attempts at actions that do not involve magick during a story. Only one re-roll may be made for any single action. Good luck stretches only so far!

Well-Traveled (3 pt Merit)

Your exhaustive travels and broad experiences have given you piercing insight into life. You possess a wealth of odd facts about cities, libraries, travel routes, obscure fighting styles and other subjects. Once per game session, you may gain an automatic success on any non-magickal roll to reflect your recall of some piece of helpful information.

Fae Blood (4 pt Merit)

Your mother or father lay with a faerie one night; now you bear the blessing of the Otherworlds. This heritage manifests in your eyes, which see the Dreaming world. Normal folk regard you with both desire and suspicion. Fair in an unearthly way, you tread the line between human and changeling.

In game terms, this Merit makes you *kinain* — a human with faerie blood. Your Banality is low, even for a magus (typically 2), and your presence is often welcome in places where most mortals are shunned. Half-enchanted from birth, you see faeries for what they are, penetrating the disguises that hide the fae from human vision. This insight makes you

vulnerable to chimerical attack, but lets you witness and perhaps live among things that few mortals even sense. To you, the world is vivid, intoxicating, enchanted. Other magi call faeries "mysteries"; you call them "cousins." (See **Changeling: The Dreaming and Crusade Lore**, Chapter Three, for details about the faerie world.)

Mark of Favor (3 pt Merit)

Your God or gods have marked you as one of their own. Although you don't look inhuman *per se*, this Mark is easy to notice: Perhaps you glow with a faint inner light, possess curly "horned" hair, or radiate the aura of a prophet. Maybe you have stigmata, animalistic features or slitted "dragon's eyes." Those who follow your god will recognize the Mark, and those who oppose it (or who fear anything that seems... different) will consider you a mortal enemy.

From time to time, you can turn this favor to your advantage. Any Social roll that involves worshipers of your god subtracts two from its difficulty. Other things, small affinities and talents, advertise your favor, too; a follower of Christ might soothe pain just by standing in a sick person's presence; a Freyja-blessed pagan could have a special affinity for cats and seduction, although a good Jew might speak in powerful, musical tones. These phenomena are subtle mysteries, not magickal Effects, and they depend on the story's circumstances and the Storyteller's whims. You have no real control over such manifestations, but you can be sure they'll appear occasionally. God smiles in your direction; even if you lack True Faith in Him, He has faith in you.

Huge Size (4 pt Merit)

You're a regular Little John, a massive individual with brawn and girth to spare. A giant among men, you probably weight over 400 pounds and stand at least six-and-a-half feet tall. In game systems, you have an additional health level; if and when you suffer damage, this bonus counts as an extra "Bruised" health level.

Mistguide (4 pt Merit)

Pagan blood runs in your veins. The Otherworldly Mists might confound other travelers, but not you. The Paths of the Wyck, the Moonpaths, Shallowings, the Dreaming... they still hold terrors for you, but they're far less impassable than they would be for others. Something within you answers the call of the spirit worlds; you feel more "at home" there than any mortal should.

In game terms, this Trait functions like the Merit: Traveler's Intuition, but works only in the Otherworlds and magickal mazes. Any roll that involves finding your way around in the spirit worlds or other magickal Realms has its difficulty reduced by two. Similarly, any magickal casting that helps you find your way into, out of, or through the

Otherworlds reduces its difficulty the same way. This includes Shadow-Walking casting rolls, in which the Merit lowers the local Gauntlet rating by one *for your character only*. Additionally, you may find entrances to the Paths of the Wyck, even if you're not one of the Verbena. This Merit applies only to the character who has it; she may lead her friends into the Otherworlds, but she cannot share her directional instincts.

Unbondable (4 pt Merit)

You are that terror to the undead: a mortal who cannot fall under the thrall of the Blood Oath. No matter how much vampire blood you consume, the "owner" of that blood cannot command you against your will. For obvious reasons, the Storyteller may refuse to allow this Merit to mortals — it's exceedingly rare, and could disrupt the balance of power in the chronicle, particularly if it's taken with...

Shoul (5 pt Merit)

You have a taste for blood — vampire blood. At some time or another, you have supped from a creature of the night. Her vitae gave you unnatural strength and vigor, but also bound you to her curse. God frowns on you and the Devil capers as you pass. You must now feed again and again on the tainted stuff; perchance your mistress will claim your soul and bind it through the dreaded Oath of Blood....

In game terms, this Merit grants you one automatic success on any Strength roll you make, and you inflict an additional die of damage with all hand-to-hand attacks. You age slowly and can remain awake and alert while others grow weary. Given time and teaching, you might acquire other vampiric powers as well. However, those gifts fade quickly unless your blood supply is fairly constant (and comes from elder vampires). Your powers disappear one month after your last draught.

This Merit also imposes an insatiable thirst for blood — one that can drive ghouls to perverse and damnable actions. And then there's the Blood Oath; a ghoul who feeds three times from the same vampire becomes that demon's thrall. Not even a skilled magus can resist the demon's commands — and given the value of a captive mage, those commands are sure to be onerous indeed....

See *Crusade Lore*, pp. 48-52, for details about undead society. If your game integrates the *Vampire* rules, you have a Blood Pool, a dot in Potence and the potential to buy and use other several Disciplines known to your diabolic master. You may *not* use Thaumaturgy, Necromancy, Chimerstry or Quietus; such Disciplines clash with the powers of magick.



Renaissance Man (5 pt Merit)

In this age, a person is respected for his acumen with many things. Like many people of your time, you have studied and experienced a wide range of subjects and skills. Although you cannot be familiar with *everything*, you've got a superficial understanding of most endeavors.

In game terms, you have one "phantom dot" in all Skill and Knowledge dice pools. This dot represents a basic familiarity, not working knowledge, of the subject; it should not be listed on your character sheet, and it cannot be increased to a rating of more than 1. The "phantom dot" is not counted as the first dot in anything. If you choose to actually buy the Skill or Knowledge in question, you must spend the usual amount of character, Freebie or experience points. Thus, the "phantom dot" simply means you know something about a subject that you haven't really studied in depth.

Spark of Life (5 pt Merit)

Life thrives in your presence. Something about your vibrant soul stirs the life-force in plants, animals and your fellow human beings. In your hands, flowers bloom, children laugh and sickly beings revive. Animals favor you, and any crop you plant will prosper. You're a natural healer, a friend to farmers, and a lover of all things sensual and alive. Cruelty and waste are abhorrent to you — you might occasionally heal even enemies if they seem to have some chance of redemption.

In game terms, this Merit allows you to heal both yourself and others. If you suffer aggravated wounds, they may be "repaired" as if they were normal wounds. Your own injuries heal as if they were one health level less severe than they are; if you are Injured, you recover in three days what others need a week to restore. Your touch comforts ailing people or animals, too, easing their pain and allowing them to heal at your accelerated rate. Even so, this benefit requires constant care; a bruised friend can recover in minutes, but a badly hurt or sickly person requires days or even weeks of hands-on healing.

This mystic Spark flows directly from the essence of Life itself; thus, any Life Sphere working that heals, creates or encourages growth subtracts two from its casting difficulty, up to the maximum -3 difficulty limit. (Note that Life spells which harm or torment a living thing *do not* receive this bonus; note also that bacteria and viruses are unknown during this period.) Naturally, this wonder has a price: vampires and demons find your blood extraordinarily tasty, and they love to corrupt persons such as you. Ghosts often become melancholy in your presence, and evil spirits seek to annihilate that loathsome Spark. You are everything the Devil hates, although your kindness and carnal appetites may be turned to his advantage. Tread your path with care!

Flaws

Age (1 pt Flaw)

You began your magickal training either very early or very late in life. Perhaps your teachers saw great promise and began your instruction when you were little more than a babe. Or maybe the Awakening struck you late in life, long after the age at which most apprentices begin. Either way, you are unusually young or old for your vocation.

Now people look askance at you. If you're "too young," they may disrespect you; if "too old," they might assume you know things that you have not yet learned. People might distrust or even resent you for being "out of place." Although you're not to blame for anything in particular, some magi could even take your age as a personal affront. In game terms, increase the difficulty of your Social rolls by one to three, depending on the situation or the individuals involved. Even if you prevail, of course, certain people will *still* hold you age against you....

Bard's Tongue (1 pt Flaw)

What you say often comes to pass. This is not something you can control; like any prophet, you often say things you had not intended to say, or speak truths you'd rather not reveal. Those who know of this blessing (or curse) are uncomfortable around you — who knows when your prophecies will affect *them*? You don't cause the events you speak of to happen, but you have been granted foreknowledge and are compelled to make that knowledge public.

Bard's Tongue comes into effect at least once during any story. You can try to resist making a prophetic statement by spending a Willpower point, and you might even cover it up with a few dissembling words afterward. Still, you get a certain look when you speak the Truth. Somehow, people recognize it for what it is even if you'd rather they didn't.

Craven Image (1 pt Flaw)

No matter how highborn you are, there's something "low" about you. People tend to treat you with less respect than you deserve. While this might be good for an occasional disguise, it hampers your dealings with others more often than it helps. In story terms, your superiors chastise you, your peers mock you and your lessers disrespect you. In game terms, the difficulties of social rolls increase by two if appropriate to the situation; making requests or asking favors is daunting for you, for example.

Family Enmity (1 pt Flaw)

You hold no love for your family, nor does it feel any great affection for you. The change sparked by the parting of the Mists might have caused this fracture between you and your blood relations, or this enmity might have preceded

your calling as a magus. Whatever the reason, you can find no support or succor among your parents or siblings. In fact, some of your family members may actively seek to do you harm. Alternatively, you are loyal to and loved by your family, but your clan is locked in a bitter feud with another. Members of these competing families conflict whenever they meet. The Storyteller can use this rivalry as the foundation for stories or as a subplot in larger tales.

In game terms, a Willpower point must be spent to resist slighting or attacking an enemy family member. The difficulties of Social rolls involving clan enemies increase by one to three, depending on the circumstances. Naturally, an enemy might still help you if there's something in it for him — or if he's setting you up to take a fall....

Stumbletongue (1 pt Flaw)

You know what you mean to say but have a hard time saying it. You stutter, trip over words, lose your thoughts and otherwise embarrass yourself. Add two to the difficulty of all Social rolls, especially in situations where eloquence is important.

Beholden (1-3 pt Flaw)

You owe a debt to someone — someone mortal but powerful. It may be a queen, a bishop, a merchant prince, a master thief, or some such. Whoever it is, that party occasionally calls favors due. If you can't (or won't) do what your master says, you may wind up in serious trouble....

The Flaw's bonus depends on who you owe and how much you owe him:

- Minor debt (you owe money to a merchant; you made a promise to a priest): one point
- Major debt (someone saved your life; you swore to raise someone's child), or debt to a really important person (the king; the Pope): two points
- Major debt to someone important (you swore your life to defend King Henry): three points

As always, the patron should be a Storyteller character with his own agenda, personality and resources. A really intriguing patron makes this Flaw far more entertaining. Breaking the promise should carry a heavy penalty — powerful people have no mercy for oathbreakers.

The debt is not without its advantages. So long as you live up to your end of the bargain, your patron may continue to grant you favors in return. In this case, consider the Flaw a one-point Ally Background as well. (But *do not* add it to your Ally rating if you already have that Background.) Naturally, he'll probably consider those favors a continuation of the debt-cycle: you owe him, you do a favor for him, he does another favor for you, you owe him some more.... (see "Intrigue" in *The Sorcerers Crusade*, p. 31). Still, it's nice to have friends in high places.

Dark Secret (1-3 pt Flaw)

You harbor a secret that could humiliate you, ruin your reputation or even turn your friends into enemies. You might have succumbed to diabolic practices, committed a murder or planned a prince's overthrow. You may even have been instrumental in betraying a magus to the Inquisition. Whatever the secret is, it lurks just out of sight.

Some secrets are disturbing, but not damning. Others are clear paths to the gallows, wheel or stake. The cost of the Flaw is determined by the consequences of discovery:

- You participated in some shameful act — petty theft, adultery, masquerading as a man. If discovered, you'd be punished, but not too harshly: one point.
- Blood is on your hands — you've killed a cousin, murdered a nobleman or betrayed a village. You may not have committed murder personally, but people would tie you to the crime: two points.
- Your crime is so great that mere death or banishment would be too mild a punishment. Perhaps you're a heretical cult leader, a shapechanger or a child killer. If discovered, you'll be sentenced to the most hideous public punishment your captors can devise, if only to make an example of you: three points.

Inconvenient Alliance (1-3 pt Flaw)

Some associate of yours is... well, *difficult*. Although he's a good companion (or at least a worthy ally), people just would not understand your association. Perhaps he's an Inquisitor, a heretic, a shapechanger or a thief. Depending on the circles you travel in, he might be exceedingly virtuous or totally corrupt. Nevertheless, you owe him, perhaps even like him. Out of necessity, though, you prefer to keep your friend at a discreet distance.

Ah, yes... the rub. It seems he's the demanding sort. You cannot just walk away from him. The bonus for the Flaw depends on just how demanding and inconvenient your associate is:

- He may be distasteful, but otherwise unremarkable (such as a beggar or a street orphan): one point.
- He could be a dangerous person to know (a Turk or a vampire's pawn), or a very persistent creditor (such as a moneylender or priest): two points.
- He's really dangerous to know (an Infernalist), really persistent (a greedy bastard son), really repulsive (a leper), or all three (a lecherous and perverted baron): three points.

Whatever the circumstances of your alliance, it is not a short-term association. You might even enjoy this person's company. Now if only he weren't so... *disconcerting*....

Coward (1-5 pt Flaw)

This is no age for cravens; nevertheless, you are one such, at least where certain things are concerned. Perhaps you've suffered some heavy torture or mishap that has left



you fearful; or maybe a curse has robbed you of your courage. Then again, you could just be a lily-livered git. The Flaw is the same: In the presence of the thing you fear, you cringe, whimper, weep or flee. Only a powerful effort of will allows you to stand your ground.

In game terms, the cost of the Flaw depends on the object of the terror. The base Willpower roll for standing up to a threat or "mortal terror" is 7, although certain fears get harder to face at the higher levels.

- For one point, one group of related things (cats, oak trees, priests) becomes your "mortal terror." In the presence of that terror, you shiver and quail. Nothing else bothers you overmuch. Assuming you succeed on a Willpower roll, everything will be fine, although you certainly won't want anything to do with the object of your fear.

- For two points, common threats (crowds, fires, storms) make you uneasy; if you encounter your "mortal terror" or other very dangerous circumstances (being trapped in a fire, faced with torture, etc.), you panic unless you can make a successful a Willpower roll.

- For three points, everything makes you uneasy and certain things drive you wild with fear. Under calm circumstances, you can control yourself, but the presence of a "mortal terror" or a common threat (a battle, an angry nobleman, etc.) panics you unless the required roll is made.

- For four points, you're prone to fits of trembling, and avoid hazards as much as possible. To stand up to combat, danger or authority figures, you must make a Willpower roll. The presence of your "mortal terror" drives you to your knees (or out the door) unless you make a similar roll at difficulty 9.

- For five points, everything that could be even remotely dangerous makes you tremble, and any direct threat makes you want to flee. (See *Divided Allegiance* by Elizabeth Moon for a good example of a hero laid low by this level of fear.) This doesn't mean you cannot function in day-to-day life, but combat, heroism and open rebellion are virtually impossible without a normal Willpower roll. Should you encounter your "mortal terror," a successful Willpower roll (difficulty 9) is the only thing that can keep you from fainting. As you might imagine, this Flaw cannot be taken by a character with the Merit: Iron Will.

Criminal Marks (1-5 pt Flaw)

Your body bears the marks of punishment. Unlike normal scars, such marks are inflicted deliberately, and designed for maximum pain and disfigurement. They are, of course, the most common ways of dealing with lawbreakers these days. Whippings, brandings, ear-cuttings and amputation serve the ends of justice, both by incapacitating the criminal and by making him stand out from polite society.

Bearing a criminal's scars does not make you a criminal (you may have been innocent, or injured by war or disease),

but people consider you one if they can see the marks. Some scars are easy enough to hide, but others are damned near impossible to conceal. Someone branded on the forehead could cover it up with strategically placed mud or soot. A missing nose, on the other hand, is considerably harder to hide. Thus, the Flaw depends on the nature of the marks and the difficulty of concealing them:

- Cancelable brand or scarring: one point
- Small brand/severed ear or fingers: two points
- Large, obvious brand: three points
- Severed nose or lips: four points
- Loss of hand or foot: five points

Note that some of these marks may call for other penalties as well, such as lameness or slurred speech (see the Flaws: Stumbletongue and Lame). If you bear such disfigurement, your Appearance and Social activities will probably suffer accordingly. On the other hand, it might suit your purpose to pose as an outlaw. Of course, you lose the Flaw bonus if magick heals the marks. No mutilation, no Flaw.

Cursed (1-5 pt Flaw)

Someone with supernatural powers — a mage, faerie, vampire or some other creature who possesses a form of magic — has invoked a curse against you. The nature of the curse is specific and has some bearing on the reason you received it. Only the most extreme measures can dispel it, and fulfilling them may result in your death. The severity of the curse depends on the cost of this Flaw. The following examples illustrate the types and point values of the Cursed Flaw.

- If you divulge some information received in secret, your betrayal rebounds unfavorably upon you: one point.
- Some physical malady (such as a violent tic, spasm or stutter) affects you whenever you attempt to relate the fact or event that resulted in your curse: two points.
- Tools and weapons break in your hands when you try to use them for specific kinds of tasks: three points.
- You are fated to alienate persons closest to you (including other players' characters): four points.
- All your efforts and ambitions, your loves and possessions — everything you hold near and dear to you — ultimately suffers: five points.

Enemy (1-5 pt Flaw)

Somebody hates you. Depending on the Flaw's worth, your Enemy could be a merchant, a jilted bride, a magus or a queen. She could want you embarrassed, hurt, dead, or... sick. This Enemy could be:

- One foe who's more or less on your level, and who only wants to harm you: one point
- A foe who's at least as powerful or resourceful as you, or a weaker enemy with a few close friends: two points

- An enemy with some notable connections, powers or allies, who wants you seriously hurt or dead: three points
- A supernatural foe with resources, allies and a deadly grudge: four points
- A really nasty enemy (or a pack of them) who wants you to die slowly and painfully, and will stop at nothing to do you in: five points

Like many related Backgrounds, Merits and Flaws, an Enemy becomes a Storyteller character (or a number of them). The more interesting she is, the more fun the Flaw — from the Storyteller's perspective, at least....

Absent-Minded (2 pt Flaw)

Where *did* you put that book? Your memory is not what it used to be... if it was ever good to begin with. Oh, surely you can recall things that are important, but keeping track of things minute to minute... where was I? This Flaw comes through mostly through roleplaying — you simply tend to forget everything that isn't nailed to your forehead. Names, places, tasks... damn. If it's absolutely imperative that you recall something *right now*, you may have to roll your Willpower (difficulty 6) to bring it to mind. Otherwise, you'll remember it when you remember it.

Clumsy (2 pt Flaw)

Are your fingers dipped in butter? It would seem so, the way things slide from your grasp! By the rules, you add two to the difficulty of any Dexterity-related roll except combat actions. When a sword's in your hands, you're steady enough — it's the times in *between* that have people wondering....

Disturbing Mannerism (2 pt Flaw)

Something about you makes other folks uncomfortable. Perhaps you laugh like a gored pig, stink like a tanner, whisper to yourself constantly, or blink rapidly when speaking. Odious as it may be, your habit isn't something you can simply *stop*; as soon as you stop concentrating on it, the habit returns full-force. In game term, this Flaw may increase the difficulty of Social rolls at the Storyteller's discretion, depending on how well someone knows you. Strangers may find your behavior odd and distracting, whereas close acquaintances may find it difficult to deal with you at all.

Infamy (2 pt Flaw)

Justly or otherwise, you have a poor reputation. Did you kill an innocent man? Are you a ravisher of maidens? Do people say you made a pact with Satan, or are you known as a coward? Whatever the rumors may be (and whether or not they're true), people dislike you on sight... or even sight unseen. Your Infamy often precedes you; by the time you've had a chance to challenge the rumors, most people have

already made up their minds. More often than not, they'll go out their way to make trouble if they discover who you are. In game terms, add two to the difficulty of any roll used to impress, seduce or petition someone. Conversely, rolls used to frighten or threaten someone — or impress an evil person — reduce their difficulty by two. Bad calls to bad... even if you aren't *really* bad at heart.

Magickal Rival (2 pt Flaw)

Another magus seeks to outdo you in reputation, talent or some other aspect of your magick. This person is not necessarily an enemy — she may even be a close friend. However, she attempts to discredit your work, exceed your standards or steal your glory, no matter what you do. Although your rival may mean you no physical harm or even realize what she is doing, she remains a constant irritation and is a serious threat to your reputation at times. Even if you confront your rival and succeed in convincing her to forswear her need to outdo you, she eventually reverts to her previous behavior.

Obsession (2 pt Flaw)

Something (or *someone*) fascinates you. It may be a subject (mathematics, demonology), a person (Lady Giulia, the Duke with one red eye), a group (vampires, the House of Prometheus), a pastime (dancing, haggling), a faith or practice (Christianity, witchcraft), or even an abstract concept (sin, redemption). As the player, you choose an Obsession that fits your character's concept and motivations. In the presence of her Obsession, the character acts irrationally; she might go out of her way to be around the object of fascination, discuss it incessantly, or put herself in threatening situations to pursue it. Chances are, you'll have to make a Willpower roll (difficulty 8) to resist the pull of that Obsession; failure means the subject is too enticing to resist.

Religious Aberrant (2 pt Flaw)

In the Dark Fantastic world, "religious tolerance" is an oxymoron. With this Flaw, you subscribe to a heretical sect or some religious philosophy that's out of place in your society. If you're a Christian, you may adhere to any one of a number of unconventional (and proscribed) interpretations of your faith. Alternatively, you might be a pagan, a Muslim, a Jew or a worshiper of some bizarre set of unknown gods — or you might be a Christian in some non-Christian part of the world. Depending on your preferences, you might hide your true devotion and fit in, or reveal it and risk the inevitable persecution.

Child (3 pt Flaw)

You're a wee lad or lass, far too young to be doing what you're doing. Perhaps you Awakened at an early age, were orphaned by a war, or were raised among sorcerous or



Enlightened company. In the company of men and women, you stand out — too small, too inexperienced and too innocent to be taken seriously.

In the Dark Fantastic era, this Flaw represents a character between five and 13 years old. Younger children are difficult to play well, and older “kids” are on the path to adulthood. In system terms, you have the following adjustments and limitations:

- You’re between three and five feet tall, and you have a hard time seeing over large objects, using adult-sized furniture and keeping up with adults. Your walking, jogging and running rates are roughly half of those given in *The Sorcerers Crusade*, p. 187. Subtract two dice from any movement-based rolls, but add two to any concealment-based ones.

- No matter how smart or eloquent you might be, people dismiss you because of your age: add two to the difficulty of any Social roll that involves intimidating or impressing someone. On the other hand, people want to take care of you: subtract two from the difficulty of any Social roll that involves getting away with something because you’re young, cute or both.

- You begin the chronicle with only 10 Freebie Points (you haven’t done much yet), a maximum of six dots in Physical Attributes, and a Strength maximum of 2. You also start with two dots in Arete instead of the usual one, almost certainly have a high Daemon and/or Destiny Background, and probably have a Mentor, too. Merits such as Innocent, True Faith, Acute Senses, and Arcane Heritage are common among young magi, as are Flaws such as Stumbletongue, Family Enmity, and Beholden (to your parents).

Deformity (3 pt Flaw)

Your body is twisted by some sort of deformity — a misshapen limb, a hunchback or some other physical abnormality — that affects your interactions with others and makes some physical tasks harder. The difficulties of all dice rolls related to physical Appearance are raised by two, as are some Dexterity rolls (depending on the nature of your affliction). The difficulties of Social rolls in regard to those who do not know you are also increased by one or two; many folk believe deformity is a punishment sent from God to reflect the nature of a twisted soul.

Haunted (3 pt Flaw)

You are pursued by a ghost. Perhaps he’s someone you killed, like Banquo, or a love lost to some misdeed; he could be a murdered parent who wants to be avenged (see *Hamlet*), or a stranger who has picked you for some errand, mischief or solace. This spirit never lets you rest for long; he appears to you after sundown, rattles chains, screams when you least expect it and performs other disturbing activities.

Your Storyteller takes the role of the ghost. Depending on what you both want to do, she could let you define the wraith’s

identity and purpose, or she could keep both a secret and let you discover the ghost’s motivations the hard way. In game terms, the ghost becomes a supporting character (like an Ally, Mentor or Spy Background), and his powers become plot devices that do whatever the Storyteller wants them to do. Although the spirit occasionally manifests his powers on the mortal side of the Gauntlet, he does so in small but insistent ways. Obviously, the haunter must be fairly persistent; if he can be easily exorcised with Spirit magick, he’s not worth any points. Should you banish the ghost, you must “pay off” the Flaw’s bonus before purchasing any other Traits. For more information, game systems, and ideas for haunting spirits, see *Wraith: The Oblivion and Crusade Lore*, pp. 58-62.

Infirm (3 pt Flaw)

It’s a hard world you live in — few people make it past 40 — and the years have left their mark. While age is a sign of wisdom and knowledge, it takes a toll on mortal bodies... even though many sorcerers have been known to ward off age with their Arts. Perhaps you’ve done so already, but the effects of your seniority are catching up with you regardless.

In game terms, you cannot have a Strength or Stamina rating higher than 3, and you suffer aches and stiffness most of the time. Your mind is keen, but your senses are not what they used to be (all Perception rolls add one to their difficulties). Note that an elderly character is not required to take Infirm — the Flaw reflects hard wear, not seniority. A young sorcerer might take the Flaw to represent a curse, sickness or injury.

Lame (3 pt Flaw)

Some disaster of birth or circumstance has left you without the use of your legs. In game terms, you suffer a four-dice penalty on all dice rolls related to movement. Perhaps you cannot walk at all; unless you can drag yourself around by your hands, you’re unable to move without crutches, a wagon, or some other aid.

Repulsive Practice (3 pt Flaw)

Yours is a dark, forbidding Art. The magickal rituals you employ are gruesome, unsettling or downright repulsive. Perhaps you require rotted flesh, blood from infants, or human waste in order to align the powers for your rituals. When you cast your spells, people turn away in disgust... and perhaps fear, as well. Although you understand the necessity of what you do, bystanders and companions might not be sympathetic; you could easily be branded an Infernalist even if you aren’t. To avoid trouble, weave your spells in private and clean up afterward. In Christian Europe, this Flaw is a common one for old-style pagans, especially Norse and Celtic ones; however, some Daedaleans — especially Cosians — use unsettling practices, too.



Geas (3/5/7 pt Flaw)

By force of birth, magick, an oath or a curse, you are forbidden from certain things. The word *geas* comes from Celtic paganism, but the idea is fairly universal: There are things you must not do for fear of death... or worse. Bestowed at birth or during magickal initiation, a *geas* lasts a lifetime. At that time, a mentor or holy person laid hands upon you and intoned a phrase; that phrase outlined the terms of prohibition. Break them, and disaster will result.

The cost of this Flaw depends on the severity of the restriction:

- Three points reflect a commandment or taboo unlikely to be broken. (“*Thou must not brew nightshade under the full moon’s light.*”)
- Five points reflect a commandment or taboo likely to be broken. (“*Thou must not harvest the Nightshade plant, nor brew poison with its bitter berries.*”)
- Seven points reflect a commandment or taboo that can be broken very easily. (“*Thou must never brew poisons nor any thing injurious to a man.*”)

Not all *geasa* are taboos — some are mandates or oaths, things you *must* do, rather than things you *cannot* do. In this case, the Flaw reflects things that are fairly easy to do (“*Go*

thou unshod always”) for three points; unusual to do (“*This shirt shall be thine only garment*”) for five points; or very difficult, inconvenient or hazardous to do (“*Go thou naked at all times of year*”) for seven points. Other examples could include eating only at noon, bowing three times west each night, singing up the sun each morning, or always drinking what is in your cup.

Breaking a *geas* is a deliberate act, and is always punished. You know what you’re not supposed to do, so if you do it anyway, do not expect sympathy! Atonement is possible, of course — assuming you can get to a holy person (generally the one who laid the *geas*), you might be able to escape a dark fate by suffering some heavy penance. That “dark fate” might include harm to yourself, your loved ones, your allies, or even your magickal powers. Disaster won’t fall immediately, but it *will* fall. The bigger the Flaw, the greater the punishment; legendary heroes often die for a broken *geas*. Even if you survive the experience, such punishment should be sobering indeed.

(Storytellers Note: It’s both easy and entertaining to put a player character in a no-win situation. Still, use your better judgment with this Flaw. Rather than presenting a character with impossible circumstances, set things up so that he has a choice: break the *geasa* or risk more trouble. Perhaps a

physician forbidden to brew poisonous herbs needs a healing poultice; the only recipe he knows includes nightshade. Does he violate the edict or invent some new concoction that doesn't require belladonna? The choice should be — *must* be — his, not yours.)

Leper (4 pt Flaw)

You suffer from one of the most fearsome diseases of the known world, a scourge that rots your body into stinking pieces. Some of your extremities (toes, fingers) may have been lost already. In any case, you have difficulty handling small items and performing delicate tasks (in game terms, all Dexterity-based dice pools are reduced by four). Furthermore, most people, terrified of catching your dread disease, fear and ostracize you. Barring the most advanced magickal healing, you are not long for this world.

Oathbreaker (4 pt Flaw)

Once, you were sworn to some great cause or oath. (See the Flaws: Beholden or Geasa.) For whatever reason, you have forsworn it, and your turn of heart has marked you. Now, certain people want you punished or dead, and God, the gods or the Devil frowns on your infidelity. You know that you'll probably meet a bad end, and in the meantime bad fortune dogs your heels. Your soul-colors have been blackened by the broken oath; people who can see such things know you for what you are, no matter how you behave.

The execution of this Flaw falls into the Storyteller's hands. Before the chronicle begins, the player and Storyteller should figure out what oath was sworn, to whom it was made, and how and why it was broken. From that point onward, things should go against the character. Scourge backlashes go poorly, and the magus might find herself pursued by a single Scourgeling time and time again. (See "Poena" and "The Hunter" in Chapter Six.) A black stain darkens the sorcerer's aura, and chance occurrences inconvenience her (cart wheels break, rain falls, spiders lair in her cloak, etc.). Agents of the wronged party might hunt the oathbreaker, either to bring her back for judgment or to kill her. The severity of the Flaw's effects depends on the strength of the oath and the sadism of the Storyteller.

Only sincere repentance can erase this Flaw. The offending character must return to the site of the original oath, beg forgiveness and perform whatever cleansing, quests, services or trials the wronged party demands. Will you be forgiven? That depends. Jesus has been known to be more forgiving than Satan, but sometimes devils can be more tolerant than the followers of God....

Plague Bearer (4-5 pt Flaw)

You had a close brush with an outbreak of plague and survived. Now, though, you carry the disease, and might

pass it to others even though you are unaffected by its ravages. Those who fall ill from association with you may believe that you have cursed them; others may suspect you of trafficking with Infernal powers, or of bearing a curse from God.

In game terms, your associates must make Stamina rolls (difficulty 6) to remain in your presence without falling ill. If the roll fails, the disease spreads. The Storyteller may also spread your contagion as a story element, and might do so without allowing innocent bystanders Stamina rolls. If you have the four-point version, you are aware of your tendency to spread disease and may counteract it slightly by keeping your distance from your companions. If you have the five-point version, you are ignorant of your condition and do nothing to contain it. (See "Disease and Poison" in *The Sorcerers Crusade*, pp. 206-207.)

Bound (5 pt Flaw)

Like Faust, you owe a grand debt. Mortals might bargain with merchants or princes, but you have assumed a debt of greater coin: some mighty service, or perhaps your soul. The holder of that debt is no mere human, but a spirit entity — a demon, an angel, an ancient ghost, even a god. Someday — someday soon! — that entity will come to collect his due. Until then, you live in the shadow of your bargain.

The player and the Storyteller ought to work out the details of this bargain before the chronicle begins. What did you barter? With whom? What did you gain from it? What will the final price be? For some Infernalists, this Flaw is an essential Trait; for other magi, it might be payment for some Merit, magickal power, or even life itself. Essentially, it puts your character on borrowed time; when the debt comes due, you may have to retire the mage, send her off on some great quest, or surrender her to service. (Note that the last two options could break new ground for the chronicle, whereas the first offers a "back door" to players who might have to leave the game.) In the meantime, ill omens, nightmares and occasional mysterious messages remind you that your life — or soul — is not your own.

Dark Fate (5 pt Flaw)

God, Fate, the Devil, the stars or some other great force has marked you for a hideous end. Whether your death comes about in the fires of the Inquisition, at the hands of a supernatural enemy or through some catastrophic act of nature, there is no escape from your ordained demise. Worse, you fear that salvation and redemption are beyond your reach. Not only will you die

in agony, you will continue to suffer in the afterlife. Perhaps worse still, all of your hopes and dreams will die with you, ground into the dust of anonymity. Dreams, visions and vague premonitions plague you, giving you tantalizing and horrifying hints of what is to come.

This Flaw (an excellent, if depressing, addition to the *Destiny* Background) drives you to near-madness. You may spend Willpower to avoid succumbing to an overwhelming despair, but the next reminder of your fate plunges you over the edge again. Yet, in lucid moments, you revel in the present; you do not have to live cautiously or circumspectly — your destiny has already been decided.

Sooner or later, the Storyteller will bring your fate to pass. In the meantime, you can strive to wrest some meaning from your lot. Do not choose this Flaw lightly — your Dark Fate will befall you.

Reaper's Touch (5 pt Flaw)

You draw the life from whatever is around you. Plants wither, people sicken and wounds refuse to heal. Your melancholy temperament and darkened aura encourage people to avoid you. Although some folk might call you "ally," few suffer to call you their friend.

In game terms, this Flaw is the reverse of the Merit: *Spark of Life*. Any person you touch for more than an hour loses one health level for every hour after the first; although it's not aggravated, this damage reflects life-force drained from their bodies and into yours. Any character who has been injured cannot heal in your presence, and Life-based healing spells suffer a +1 difficulty penalty if they're performed within three yards of you. If you cannot draw a bit of vitality from some sizable living thing at least once per day, you'll grow sick yourself: one day costs you one health level; three days costs you a second; a week inflicts a third health level, a month inflicts a fourth. If you're still isolated after that, you take one additional health level every three months until you perish. You may "refresh" yourself with touch only. Obviously, dungeons are to be avoided unless you work in one.

"Reaper" magi who employ Life Arts subtract two from their casting difficulties for spells that corrupt, wound, stunt or kill; they add two to the difficulty of weaveries that grow, heal, refresh or purify. (The usual maximum modifier of +/- 3 applies.) That which kills others makes you stronger, however. For every health level inflicted by a Life-based attack spell, the "Reaper" gains one health level (if she was injured), or puts off the hunger for life-force (if she was not injured) for one day.

Obviously, most other magi regard this Flaw as a devil's blessing. Holy folk and good pagans despise wizards cursed by the Reaper's Touch, while Infernalists regard it as a sign of kinship. Vampires loathe the blood of such a magus — to the undead, such blood is bitter and sickening.







Chapter VI: The Scourge of God

How dark are the ways of god to man!
— Euripides, *Heracles*



he sages all agree: that which you do returns unto you many times over. Call it karma, divine retribution, Threefold Return or what have you. No one is immune to the consequences of his actions. And, being what he is, a magus acts on a grander scale than most mortals. Thus,

the “return” takes some rather drastic forms—forms known collectively as the Scourge.

But in magick, as in mundane life, justice does not always seem, well, *just*. Occasionally, virtue is punished and vice is rewarded. Good things happen to sinners, and saints often meet bad ends. The Scourge epitomizes this paradox; sometimes it seems so arbitrary and unfair that the most reverent magi declare that it cannot come from a just and loving God. The demonic manifestations and deadly tempests that give the Scourge its name often seem to rise from Hell rather than descend from Heaven. The contradiction disturbs religious magi; it's far easier to blame the Devil than to question God. Some sorcerers prefer to avoid the question altogether. As science and philosophy replace blind faith, many enlightened ones view the Scourge as a natural phenomenon rather than a divine enigma. In time, the name “Paradox” will redefine the Scourge, while a host of theories link it to psychology, the elements, reality-currents and even rival magi. Even then, however, two facts remain: The form of

a backlash often depends on the activities of the magus, but its effects are never completely predictable.

The Scourge can seem almost as puzzling to players and Storytellers as it is to their magi. Although the main rulebook features a host of rules and suggestions (see pp. 231-237), there aren't many firm systems governing backlashes or their effects. Where are the charts? Where are the tables? They don't exist. Like lightning from the skies, the Scourge is too sudden and unpredictable to be defined. In the game, this characteristic can be frustrating. *What should I do*, asks the Storyteller, *when the Scourge appears?*

This chapter offers a few suggestions.

Frequently Asked Questions



Art is man added to nature.

— Francis Bacon

• Do I add the Fortune Die to the successes on my Arete roll? Does that die add to my dice pool when I'm casting a spell?

No to both. The Fortune Die exists only to determine whether or not a Scourge backlash occurs, and to decide whether you get a Boon or a Bane. If you roll several Fortune Dice at once, they merely

increase the chances of something happening. These dice do not affect your casting dice pool in any way.

• **Why are the Scourge and its effects so open-ended? Why not just have a table of backlash effects?**

A mysterious and unpredictable force, the Scourge works best when it's tailored to fit the circumstances and characters in your chronicle. A random backlash table would be too pat and impersonal ("Oh, no! I rolled an '8'! Here comes a Scourge spirit!"). Ideally, a Scourge backlash isn't just a stroke of fortune, it's a stroke of poetic justice. A random backlash table would eliminate that element of justice and undermine the idea that magick has consequences. Besides, isn't it more fun to make up rewards and punishments that fit your game, as opposed to having a bunch of them handed out impersonally?

• **My player rolled the dice and got a Scourge backlash. I don't have time to invent one off the top of my head. What do I do now?**

As the "Storyteller Hints" box (*The Sorcerers Crusade*, p. 232) suggests, you don't have to spring a backlash on the character the minute she rolls it. Wait until you've got a good idea and an opportunity to use it, then let loose.

If the idea of "custom-made" backlashes seems too ambitious for your game, you could always make up a backlash table that fits your chronicle. In between games, select a few of your favorite backlash types (and perhaps a

few of the Scourgelings detailed in this chapter), make up a few of your own, and assign die rolls to them.

Frankly, this isn't the best option (see above), but it is a possibility.

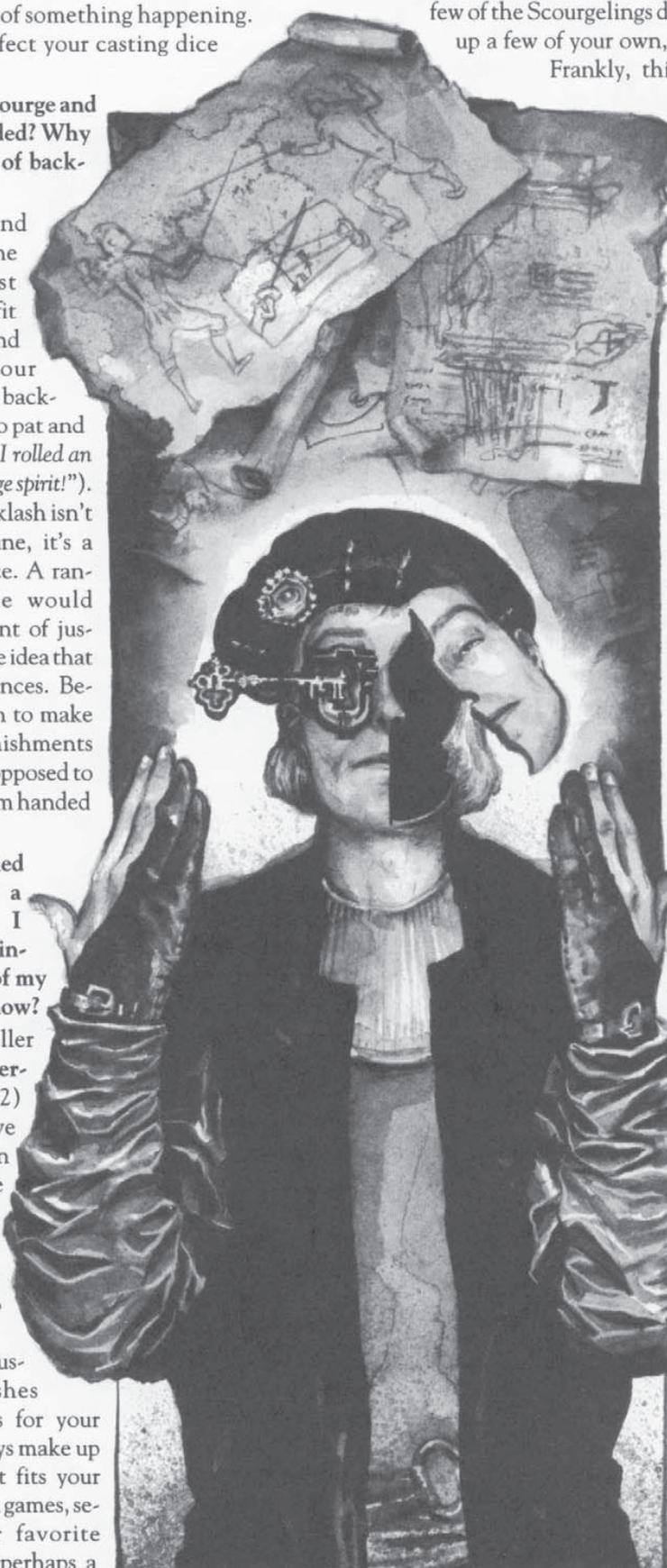
Another option involves making up a list of rewards and punishments appropriate to the mages in your group. Fashion each backlash with an eye toward the personality, deeds and magicks the character prefers. Marie le Marque, a Hermetic of House Flambeau, might have three Banes ("Devil's Brand, a Witchwalk of burning hair and an annoying fire spirit") and three Boons ("an extra die to the damage of her spell, a helpful salamander spirit, and a sudden surge of courage and hot temper") listed on the Storyteller's reference sheet. By setting out a list of punishments and rewards ahead of time, you can make the Scourge fit the character and her magick — an option that's always better than a simple "random backlash table."

• **What if I set a Boon aside and then the player rolls a Bane before the Boon takes effect? Or vice versa?**

Depending on what you want from the story, use one of the following options:

— Let the two backlashes cancel each other out. Wipe out the character's Scourge Pool and start again.

— Let both of them manifest and stage some kind of "war in heaven"; an angel and a devil appear and battle it out for the wizard's soul, or something like that.



— Have an apparent Boon turn into a Bane. Maybe Blodeuedd the Temptress shows up, gives the sorcerer the time of his life, then proceeds to tear his world to pieces. Many Scourgelings have good and bad sides. Feel free to switch from one to the other if it seems appropriate to do so.

— Let the most fitting result win out; a virtuous magus gets the Boon and drops the Bane, while an evil one suffers. Or turn the tables; the good guy gets stomped and the evil one prospers. Either way, keep the result you want and ignore the other one. By the way, if the player rolls several Boons or Banes in a row before anything actually happens, just make the payoff *memorable*.

• **Should I base Scourge effects on the mage's behavior and personality, or on the spells he casts?**

They usually go together. A wizard with a short temper and a greedy heart usually weaves magicks out of anger and selfishness. If all else fails, however, judge the character on his overall personality and deeds. God is always watching....

• **What if a virtuous character rolls several Banes in a row? Doesn't that sort of invalidate the whole "that which you do" thing?**

A Storyteller is never bound to the results of the dice. If luck seems to be kicking a good mage when she's down, you can always just say "things look dark, but suddenly Fortune turns your way..." and totally ignore the Bane result. The Fortune Die represents the fickle winds of Fate, but you have the option of deciding which way those winds blow. If you don't like the direction, change it.

Naturally, this principle can work both ways. If a really rotten sorcerer seems to be literally getting away with murder, you can always turn a Boon into a Bane and knock her into next week. Either way, though, be fair. Don't be a "Story-tyrant" and change the die rolls to reflect your whims or grudges. That sort of invalidates the whole "we're playing a game" thing, and justifiably pisses off players. Let the character's actions be your guide; if the dice seem too unjust, ignore them for a minute. Just remember, this is the World of Darkness. Virtue is not immediately rewarded, and vice often prospers.

• **What About Jhor? Why are the Chakravanti (Euthanatoi) punished with a curse on their whole Tradition? And if it's only a problem for them, why was it included in the rulebook at all?**

They aren't, and it isn't. Jhor affects anyone who deals in death-magick. It is literally the essence of the Underworld, a bit of death that a necromancer carries around with him. While many Chakravanti practice necromancy, there are plenty of them who do not. Those who avoid death-based spells do not suffer from Jhor.

By the same token, *any* magus who spends too much time in and around the Underworld is susceptible to Jhor. Gaspar the Alchemist is no Chakravati, but he's a walking

testament to the effects of Jhor. In the Dark Fantastic world, many sorcerers practice the forbidden necromantic Arts. We included Jhor in the rulebook because necromancy is so widespread. (See p. 257 for details and specifics of death-magick.)

• **Who controls Paradox in the Sorcerers Crusade setting? The Technocrats don't seem powerful enough to have established their view of Reality yet. Are the mysticks calling the shots?**

No one is calling these shots (except, of course, for the Storyteller), and *no one* "controls" the Scourge. Rather, the Scourge punishes or rewards a magus for the things he chooses to do. It is not a trap laid by "Technocrats" or the slap of an outraged "Reality"; indeed, the early Technocrats end up on the receiving end of Scourgelings more often than their mystick counterparts do. Although the definitions of "casual" and "vain" magick depend on what mortals believe, no single group has a monopoly on Scourge backlashes... and no one is truly immune to them, either.

(By the way, the terms "Technocrat" and "Paradox" are several centuries in the future. Members of the Order of Reason are "Daedaleans," "Icari," "philosopher-scientists," and so on. "Paradox" is, naturally enough, called "the Scourge" for some time to come.)

• **Can a magus deliberately summon a Scourgeling?**

Yes. It's risky, though — the spirit might decide to punish the wizard for his presumption. Summoning one is fairly simple: The magus invokes the spirit in the usual way (see "Summoning and Warding" in *The Sorcerers Crusade*, pp. 259-260), using the Scourgeling's name and a ritual that involves the vices or virtues associated with that spirit (see "Scourgelings," below). In game terms, most Scourgelings qualify as spirits of moderate power, requiring between five to 10 successes to conjure. At the Storyteller's option, the spirit might simply decide to show up on its own... at which point the sorcerer had better have a good reward or escape route ready.

• **Aren't some Scourge effects more "unnatural" than the magick that invokes them?**

Yep. But remember, this is an inherently magical setting. To the average person, the Black Arts and other otherworldly events are as "real" as the blade of a knife. The whole "magick is just fairy-tale stuff" idea doesn't take hold until much later. Besides, many Scourge effects appear perfectly natural — an explosion just looks like an explosion! Most Scourgelings remain invisible to everyone but their victims, and few such spirits stick around long enough to make an impression on mortal witnesses. Ones who do, of course, make quite an impression indeed!

Speaking of which....

Building the Perfect Nemesis

In Greek mythology, Nemesis was the goddess of justice and retribution. She would pursue her quarry relentlessly, finally avenging his offense with some eerily appropriate reward. A Scourgeling, if played well, can become a regular member of the chronicle's cast — a “nemesis” in the original sense of the word.

The Scourgelings presented here are really just samples. You can use them, of course, but your players will probably know who they are, what they do and how to get rid of them. The most effective Scourgelings are designed by the Storyteller, custom-built to suit the magi and kept secret until a backlash strikes. If and when you, the Storyteller, decide to make up your own Scourge spirits, a few guidelines can keep them from becoming faceless “monsters of the week”:

- **Make the Punishment Fit the Crime:** Spirits are simple creatures — they are what they are, and do what they do with little misdirection or pretense. When you craft a Scourgeling, base it on things your player-characters do: If you've got a stubborn Craftmason with a gambling habit, give him a nemesis that rolls dice and refuses to take “no” for an answer (a Scourgeling that changes the magus *into* dice would make for a fine tale, so long as the Crafter returned to his human state eventually). A Scourgeling that just shows up and makes things explode isn't memorable for much of anything other than property damage. Create one with an appropriate shtick, and make that shtick fit the character's actions.

- **Provide a Motivation and Origin:** Scourgelings exist for a reason. Something, good or bad, has twisted the fabric of Creation so intensely that the twist has manifested as a Scourgeling. If you define what that twist was, you get the basis for a memorable spirit. Look at the backgrounds of the Scourgelings in this chapter: Arkados was beaten as a child; Inanitas grew from the hunger of an entire village; the Iron Master was a man who could never be satisfied with imperfection. Give your Scourgeling a similar reason for being, and you'll have an excellent handle on its personality and actions. The players may never know the secrets of a spirit's origins, but you will. If you decide to let a few of those secrets slip, the details will add an extra layer of realism to the Scourgeling's existence.

- **Give the Spirit a Reputation and a Personality:** Which is more impressive? “Look! A badass spirit just appeared in a cloud of smoke!”, or “Oh, no! It's Shivaka, Destroyer of the Unclean!” If your Scourgeling has an identity and a cool name — even if you just made it up — that spirit will be more memorable than a list of stats that pops up to pound on the player-characters.

How can you do that? First, scatter around a few tidbits about powerful spirits. When your mages are doing research or talking with their elders, drop a few spirit names like Whisper or Andalus the Unblinking. Even if those spirits never appear, the players will remember them; if one of them *does* appear, the spirit automatically has more weight.

Next, give that spirit a handful of personality traits — a tendency to shout, wag its finger or speak in Gospel verses, for example. Here's where the motivations and origins mentioned above come in handy: the Iron Master isn't likely to abide a smartass, and Arkados might pity a wizard who was beaten by her own parents. Play the Scourgeling like any other character, and that entity will take on a new dimension.

Spirits have long memories, too. If a mortal displays a special tendency toward certain sins or virtues, a Scourgeling might single her out for special attention. At this point, the spirit becomes a supporting character, showing up repeatedly to reward or punish the magus. It might hold a grudge, lecture the wizard, or even declare a certain amount of hatred, exasperation or respect (“*Will you never train that cod-snake of yours, Caesario? T' will be the death of you yet!*”).

- **Give the Scourgeling a Weakness:** Nothing is less fun than hearing “There's nothing you can do! Your magus takes 20 health levels and dies instantly!” Granted, a Scourgeling should be terrifying — no simple Spirit 2 spell can banish *this* nemesis! All the same, each spirit should have a weakness — a personality flaw, a mystick prohibition or a “time limit” on its punishments — that allows a character to survive the encounter. Fools deserve no mercy, but a clever player should be able to take her lumps (or even avoid them) with some good roleplaying or brave behavior. Raw force, on the other hand, should always fail. If wizards can simply kick Scourgeling ass, the whole idea behind the Scourge kinda falls apart.

- **Avoid the Obvious:** Yeah, we *expect* a fire-demon to appear and make a Flambeau wizard go “boom!” So foil those expectations by taking a slightly different approach. Look at the differences between The Burning Page, Powderbane and Ompnir the Scribe (from *Crusade Lore*). Each of them is affiliated with fire, but they all manifest and act in very different ways. Invest a Scourgeling with individuality and you make it less predictable and more mysterious.

- **Maintain an Element of Weirdness:** Scourgelings are scary! Even the most benevolent of them are elemental forces, and the really nasty ones devour human souls for breakfast. When a Scourgeling appears, describe the effect it has on its surroundings — the cold wind that suddenly blows, the bone-deep chill in the room, the way every living thing falls eerily silent.... Even if the spirit comes disguised, like Dorian the Demon Lover, there should be something otherworldly about its presence. No Scourgeling is ever a simple “monster” to be slapped down. Not even by a sorcerer... *especially* not by a sorcerer!

Scourgelings



he field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one;

The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels.

— Matthew 13: 38-39

These spirits, the most obvious agents of the Scourge, are poetic justice incarnate. Some are clearly demonic; others seem to be angels. Some remain invisible to mortal eyes, while others seem as mortal as a milkmaid. All of them are beings of frightening power. The magus who crosses swords with a Scourgeling will be lucky if he lives to regret the act.

In game terms, Scourgelings are spirits and they follow the rules set down for their kind. (See **The Sorcerers Crusade**, pp. 213-215.) In story terms, however, they're characters and plot elements. Depending on what happens, a Scourgeling might not be recognizable as a spirit at all; some entities, like Inanitas the Urchin or the Cat of Good Fortune, seem to be as mortal as you or I. Only hard experience reveals whether or not the stranger at your side is a human being or a spirit with justice on his mind. The distinction is not always obvious to your characters, even if the players know that the systems are different. (*Storyteller Note*: If you're dealing with a "hiding" spirit, like Blodeuedd or Ber Willider, don't tell the players that a backlash has occurred. Simply play the character or event normally and let the players discover the Scourgeling the hard way. If rules come into play, fudge the results so that your players won't get suspicious — unless you *want* to tip them off, in which case simply let them notice "something odd" about their company or circumstances.)

This chapter boasts a cast of Scourgelings. A handful of others can be found in Chapter Three of **Crusade Lore**, and several new spirit Charms are detailed at the end of this chapter. Some of these beings are punishers with a cruel sense of justice, whereas others are veritable angels. Although most "spirits of ill deeds" appear when a Bane is rolled, and many "spirits of benevolence" arrive with a

Boon, you don't have to limit them to those roles. An angel can punish sinners and a devil can reward them. Each of the following entities also features a listing of vices and virtues associated with that spirit, Scourgelings are drawn to certain kinds of behavior, especially if that behavior involves magick. Dorian the Demon Lover doesn't come riding out of the night to seduce just anyone — he's attracted to vain and lusty women, and occasionally torments chaste ones, too. When a Scourgeling manifests, the Storyteller should decide what the spirit wants to do based on the vices or virtues that fit the mage's behavior, the Scourgeling's personality and the Storyteller's sense of perversity. Although they have certain defining characteristics, these entities should be anything but predictable!

Spirits of Ill Deeds

This is the foul fiend Flibbertigibbet: he begins at curfew, and walks till the first cock; he gives the web and the pin, squints the eye, and makes the harelip; mildews the white wheat, and hurts the poor creatures of earth.

— William Shakespeare, *King Lear*

The punishment fits the crime, especially when magick is involved. These entities personify the Scourge of Divinity, making sinful wizards pay for their crimes. Many such spirits follow magi from the cultures that spawned them: the Celtic Lady of Flowers isn't likely to manifest for a Muslim magus, nor is Masaigi likely to torment an Akashic Brother. Others, however, are fairly universal: the Burning Page has brought tears to scholars from London to Beijing (although it has no real influence in lands without written languages).

In general, these are spirits of ill-temper and bad intent. Although they often arrive to punish a vice, they occasionally punish a virtue just as severely. If a virtuous sorcerer rolls a Bane backlash or a sinful one rolls a Boon, there's a good chance one of these entities will arrive. If a sinner has "earned" a reward, the spirit will visit her with favor rather than with malice. Even under the best of circumstances, however, a Boon from one of these spirits is of questionable value. Although a lustful wench might enjoy a romp with Dorian the Demon Lover, he's not the most trustworthy of bed-mates...

Some infamous Scourgelings include:



Arkados the Crook-Back'd

Willpower 7, Rage 7, Gnosis 7, Power 45

Charms: Airt Sense, Appear, Armor, Bolts of Wrath, Charm the Innocent (like the Charm: *Corruption*, but it works only on innocent souls and cannot be used to provoke violence), Healing, Materialize, Re-form, Soul Reading, Spirit Away (to take children from home)

Materialized Attributes: (second set of Traits reflects the spirit's "wrath form") Strength 3/6, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3/8, health levels 7/14

Abilities: Alertness 3, Awareness 3, Brawl 2, Dodge 2, Expression 3, Intimidation 3, Etiquette (children) 4, Torture 4, Enigmas 3

Punishes: Selfishness and Wrath; occasionally rewards Generosity.

Description: To sorcerers with children, Arkados is the most fearsome of his kind. In the guise of a hunchbacked leper, this punisher visits the homes of magi, even when those magi are far away; with treats and guile, he then tricks the sorcerer's children into following him away from home. If the offender has committed a small sin or two, Arkados leaves the little ones in a safe place and grants the parent clues to their whereabouts. If the magus has been especially cruel or selfish, Arkados decides that the children are better off somewhere else. They may be left as foundlings at a virtuous mortal's doorstep, or sent away to live as orphans in the streets of rich cities. Some say there is a special haven

where the Crook-Back keeps the children of ill-tempered parents; there, the offspring are raised by spirits. In either case, Arkados takes his charges far away. Unless a magus makes a heroic effort, she never sees her children again.

This stunted Scourgeling does not favor one type of sorcerer over another. Craftsmen, pagans and even Ecstasies have returned from cruel errands to find their children gone. In other lands, this spirit is known as Rock-Spine, Crippled Louis, Ihana the Bowed, and other names. In all guises, he is clever and remorseless, yet kind to children. When he speaks, it is to often to chastise a parent: "You who know the gifts of Heaven still keep a mean and petty heart" he taunts. "You do not deserve get such as those I took from you." Bribes and threats do not impress Arkados; this spirit is conjured by violence and he has seen many barbarous acts. Tears and sincere repentance, on the other hand, may win him over. He is not truly unkind, and cannot bear to see a person in pain. Legends claim the Crook-Back was once a child whose spine was twisted by beatings; some say he died, but was granted a new life with which to save other children from his fate.

Sometimes an especially generous person draws Arkados' notice. If the spirit has a child in need of shelter, he might appear before the person as a charming (if malformed) vagabond, leading a child by the hand. If the magus displays kindness and generosity to this hunchbacked stranger, he gifts her with a loving child and a bag of gold for its care. If she reacts poorly toward the spirit, he chastises her, spits upon her and leads the child away again.

If pressed, Arkados often disappears into empty air; sometimes, however, he flies into a rage, returning wrath for wrath on a frightening scale. At those times, his body swells to ogre-like proportions. As lightning crackles around his fingers, the Crook-Back hurls bolts of sizzling fury at his attackers. These thunderbolts do little true harm, but cause incapacitating pain; a person struck by them crumples to her knees, and weeps in agony. In time, the pain fades, but until then the Crook-Back's "gift" reminds the magus that wrath returns wrath... threefold or more.

Ber Willider, the Imp of Confusion

Willpower 2, Rage 3, Gnosis 3, Power 15

Charms: Airt Sense, Babelmind, Possession, Re-form, Scatter Thoughts

Materialized Attributes: none

Punishes: Sloth and Vanity.

Description: Logic, science, the Arts both magickal and mundane... all of them depend on precision and clarity. How terrible, then, to be suddenly confused... befuddled... betrayed by one's senses until... what was I saying... oh, dear...

Memory? None. Logic? Tangled. Words? A slurred susuration of syntactical stumblings. In short, this Scourgeling undermines a magus or scholar at the simplest



but most irritating level. Under its influence, one... cannot... think... straight....

Ber Willider manifests when a supposedly intelligent person uses his gifts to question God's Creation, or to tangle a rival in knots of sticky logic. In the heated debates of the Renaissance era, this spirit must be busy indeed. It appears to "favor" magi and scholars who define the limits of Creation; because argument, observation and influence mean so much to such men, Ber Willider makes it hard for them to concentrate on *anything*. As their logic and perceptions teeter, logic must give way to faith or even dementia. Although called an "imp" in the records of Marcellus the Bedazzled (an Umbrood-chronicler who frequently fell under Ber Willider's influence), this spirit is invisible and bodiless. Otherworld travelers report that the imp has a vague, fuzzy hive-shape, like a cloud of gnats swiping about their victim's head. Whether the entity has any measurable intelligence, no one can tell. Any attempt to communicate with the Scourgeling results in even more confusion.

How long does Ber Willider torment its "host"? Who knows? What begins as a slight loss for words or error in judgment might — or might not — signal a visit from this spirit. The Imp of Confusion comes when it wants, leaves when it wishes, and leaves its normally articulate "host" wondering when his wits will return.

Blodeuedd, the Flowered Temptress

Willpower 7, Rage 5, Gnosis 8, Power 40

Charms: Airt Sense, Blighted Touch (in this case, the dark passions are lust and jealousy), Corruption (lustful thoughts), Create Wind, Healing, Love Gift, Materialize, Mind Speech, Re-form, Shapeshift (only three forms: human, owl and flowers), Soul Reading

Materialized Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, health levels 7

Abilities: Alertness 2, Artist 3, Dodge 2, Expression 3, Seduction 7, Subterfuge 3, Animal Ken (birds) 4, Archery 2, Etiquette 5, Melee 2, Stealth 5, Survival (woodlands) 5, Enigmas 3, Herbalism 7, Metaphysics (Stone Lore) 2, Poisons (plant-based) 5, Occult 4

Punishes: Envy or Lust; sometimes rewards same, or punishes Love or Temperance.

Description: Long ago, the British pagans say, the sorcerer Math crafted this entity from the blossoms of broom, oak and meadowsweet. Originally made to be wed to the hero Lleu, Blodeuedd eventually fell into lust with a huntsman, slew her husband and was transformed into an owl. Since that time, she has regained some semblance of humanity and now haunts pagans who burn with passion... especially ones who betray their wed-partners in favor of some new lover.



mortal eyes (and non-magickal senses), she appears in all ways as a human woman, an owl or a flower patch. Attracted by strong passions (especially those involving magick), she soon finds a magus or mortal who lusts for a person he cannot have. Sensing a kindred heart, the spirit manifests, seduces her paramour and leads him to disaster. Despite her murderous past, she never seems to mean to harm anyone. Even so, her attentions, sincere as they may be, are always catastrophic.

To men, the Flowered Temptress appears as an unnatural beauty, a woman no one could resist. Remote at first, she warms to her new lover like a shy but lusty maiden. Sometimes she watches a man from afar, following him as an owl or blossoming at his feet as a patch of wondrous flowers. Sooner or later, she comes to him in a woman's form. Consumed by ardor, she seduces him, wins his love (often at the expense of his other relationships), then quickly grows bored, and abandons him. So powerful are her charms that even an elder magus can be reduced to foolishness, then disgrace, then despair. When she departs, she leaves a bitter, broken man.

To women who've grown tired of their partners, or who pine for a man they cannot have, Blodeuedd assumes the role of kindly friend. Consoling her new "sister," the spirit advises the magus to pursue the object of her affections no matter what the cost or method. Sometimes she provides a "love gift" (actually a bit of her own essence) with which to ensnare the lover. Blissful as it may seem, this affair soon ends badly. Occasionally, she simply spies on her "sister's" beloved, gathers gossip or personal effects, gives them to her "friend," then seduces the man herself. When the "sister" discovers the affair, Blodeuedd departs in a storm of feathers, tears and falling flower petals.

Spirit though she may be, Blodeuedd prefers to walk about in mortal form. If and when her "friends" take offense at her behavior, she disappears into the Otherworlds. So charming is she that even the most suspicious wizards accept her on face value. Although some might compare her to a demonic succubus, Blodeuedd is more tragic than evil. Her lusts are born of pure emotion rather than hellish deception, and no one is hurt more by her games than Blodeuedd herself. Still, she's been playing those games for hundreds of years, and few mere succubi could match her seductive powers.

In game terms, Blodeuedd becomes a new Storyteller character, hanging around the chronicle just long enough to make a colossal mess. If she has come to reward a magus, her visit is long on pleasure and short on melodrama; even then, though, she leaves longing behind when she goes. Unless a magus inspects her with Spirit 1, she appears to be a shyly charming young woman. Her charisma and powers are such that even if a magus does use Spirit 1 to check her out, he needs to beat her in a resisted roll to see through her wiles (viewer's Perception

+ Awareness against Blodeuedd's Gnosis + Seduction, difficulty 7). Unlike many Scourgelings, this spirit breaks hearts and ruins reputations; her "chastisements" take time, but can be more devastating in the long run than a simple "Boom! Take damage" backlash. Months or years after her appearance, magi remember Blodeuedd with a mixture of rage, depression and longing: *If only things had worked out differently...*

The Burning Page

Willpower 1, Rage 4, Gnosis 3, Power 25

Charms: Airt Sense, Create Fires (uses 5 Power; cannot be extinguished until the book is consumed), Materialize (as fire), Re-form

Materialized Attributes: none

Abilities: none

Punishes: Stinginess or Vanity.

Description: This spirit, literally a spark that sets a book on fire, punishes proud scholars and selfish wizards by destroying that which they cherish: the written word. The Page is not particular — it will ignite an illuminated Bible as quickly as a goat-skin scroll. When the magus opens his book, a sudden flash appears; in an instant, the open pp. are burning. The rest of the work soon follows. In a world where every written work is the product of days, months or even years of labor, this is catastrophic indeed.

Once The Burning Page ignites, no force known to man or magick can stop it. Once the book is ashes, the spirit departs. Generally, this flame consumes only one book — the magus' favorite tome. Still, it is said that truly vainglorious acts of selfishness can set entire libraries afire. Consider the tale of Louis Pracilious III, a hard-hearted Guildsman of Venice. So important was his library that he sold his children into hard labor so that he might purchase more books. When his wife protested, he used the Arts of Influence to charm away all memories of his misdeed; in her mind, the children had perished in a fire. Soon, that lie came to pass... only it was not the children who died, but Lady Pracilious herself. While Louis was in his study, The Burning Page turned the place into an inferno. The magus escaped, but all else was destroyed. His lady slain, his fortunes consumed, his children sold, the proud Daedalean fell into madness and became a beggar on the streets he once strode in splendor. Such is the touch of The Burning Page.

The Hunter

Willpower 6, Rage 7, Gnosis 8, Power 60

Charms: Airt Sense, Armor (five soak dice), Cleanse the Blight, Create Wind, Element Sense (wood), Healing, Lightning Bolt, Materialize, Meld (earth and wood), Mind Speech (to hounds), Re-form, Soul Reading, Tracking

Materialized Attributes: Strength 6, Dexterity 5, Stamina 7, health levels 11 (no extra growth)



Abilities: Alertness 5, Athletics 5, Awareness 5, Brawl 4, Dodge 4, Animal Ken 5, Animal Speech 5, Melee (spear) 4, Stealth 5, Survival (woods) 5, Tracking, Enigmas 4, Herbalism 5, Medicine 3

Punishes: Avarice, Cowardice, Stinginess or oathbreaking; sometimes rewards Courage or Faith (in pagan gods).

Description: In the darkness, you can hear the howls: ghost-hounds, led by a spectral hunter who blazes with the light of a hungry moon. Since the days of the Wyck, this spirit has pursued the faithless and truthless across the thick woodlands. pagans, Christians and outlanders all know him; many simply call him the Hunter and leave fine distinctions to lesser beings.

The “wild hunt” is a common terror in deeply forested lands. This Hunter, however, is no slayer of innocents. While some spectral stalkers kill anything in their paths, the true Hunter keeps his hounds away from virtuous pagans. Cowards, thieves, oathbreakers, greedy folk and Christians, on the other hand, are delicious prey. The spirit swirls into being deep in the forest and calls his hounds to the chase. As his victims flee, he leads his pack on a vigorous romp before tearing the throats from the prey and sacrificing their blood to the sacred woods.

Strong and silent, the Hunter is a master of forest-craft. Like an animal, he runs naked and eats his meat raw. Some pagans consider him a god, others a ghost, and still others an incarnation of the forest itself. His fists and teeth seem solid enough, though, and the fangs of his hounds can bite through steel. As he pursues his quarry, winds rise, shadows fall and tree-

roots reach out to trip unwary feet. Although the Hunter resembles a man, he’s obviously far more. Sometimes he takes a lover, a pagan woman who bares herself to the forest night. His touch is said to be as gentle as Spring rain, and his kisses burn like cold embers in the dark. Despite his affections, he never speaks. When the sun rises, he is gone. Every so often, his lovers bear children — eerie, silent youngsters who shun clothing and keep company with beasts. Sooner or later, these offspring return to the woods. Some tales say they become the hounds at their master’s feet, joining his sport as the dusk descends. The Hunter is one with the night and is never seen by day. Although he takes lovers, he ultimately remains alone.

Occasionally, this spirit appears to especially virtuous pagans. When he chooses a mortal companion, the Hunter and his pack hound her enemies instead of her. This outcome is especially likely if the pagan has kept the Old Faith in the face of Christian oppression. The Hunter seems to hate the followers of Christ; in return, they consider him the Devil incarnate. He isn’t, but his antlers and savage mien certainly seem demonic enough. A pagan who tends the old fires has little to fear from the Hunter and his pack, however... unless she has broken an oath or surrendered to cowardice. Then, not all the tears in the world can save her. The Hunter is a killer, and he has little use for mercy or forgiveness.

In game terms, the Hunter is a materialized spirit who can enter and leave the Otherworlds at will. When he appears, his Charms turn the woodland into a nightmare of grasping branches and lashing winds. For the most part, he relies on brute strength and hunting prowess to bring down his prey. He can be driven off by True Faith in Christ, and can be eluded if the target can avoid his pack until dawn. The Hunter’s spear works like any normal weapon (Strength + 3, difficulty 6), and his teeth and antlers allow him to bite and “claw” his victims (as those combat maneuvers). He can Meld with trees and bare earth, and communicates with his hounds through instinctive Mind Speech. Although he speaks no human tongue, the Hunter seems to understand them all, and he is remarkably empathic with gestures and expressions. If he meets a pagan in need, he might give her some help (leading her to water or to a path home) or teach her some elementary woodcraft. As terrifying as he is, this spirit isn’t truly evil. On the contrary: A pagan mystick may find him a welcome sight, provided she keeps the Old Faith and meets the night bravely.

Hunter’s Hounds

Willpower 3, **Rage** 6, **Gnosis** 3, **Power** 35

Charms: Airt Sense, Materialize, Tracking

Materialized Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 4, Stamina 5, health levels 7

Abilities: Alertness 4, Athletics 6, Brawl 4, Dodge 4, Stealth 5, Survival 4, Tracking 4

Punishes: (see above)

Description: These pale and glowing spirit-dogs follow the lead of their master. If he declares a hunt, they follow the prey unto death; if he stays his hand, they remain watchful but calm.

In game terms, these materialized spirits can cross between this world and the Umbra at will. Their bodies seem solid on either side of the Gauntlet, and their teeth inflict six dice of aggravated damage per bite (normal attack and soak rolls apply). Although they appear to be mortal beasts, no wizard's charms can sway them. A magus might blast a hound with lightning, of course, but he cannot gain their trust with any form of magick. Characters with the Skill: Animal Ken or the Merit: Beast Affinity can impress the hounds, but their first loyalty is always to the Hunter. No force between Heaven and Hell can turn them against him.

Inanitas the Urchin

Willpower 3, Rage 4, Gnosis 4, Power 20

Charms: Airt Sense, Appear, Craving, Healing, Materialize

Materialized Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 1, Stamina 2, health levels 7

Abilities: Alertness 2, Expression 5, Intimidation 4

Punishes: Gluttony and Stinginess.

Description: Woe unto those whose greed is greater than their charity, especially if these greedy ones use magick to amass their wealth. Woe unto those whose appetites are greater than their generosity, especially if they fatten themselves on magickal fruits. Every so often, this spirit appears. Her eyes are as vacant as her belly. Her cries are as piteous as her sunken face. She seems like every hungry orphan you've ever ignored, except for one thing: her wailing follows you long after she has been driven away, and the sound of it creates a craving that no amount of food or gold can still.

The archives of Doissetep list Inanitas — "Emptiness" — as a minor spirit created by great hunger. One account describes her rising from the empty cottages of a town struck down by famine; the town's lord, Count Augustus the Fat, had set a magickal cone of silence around the town to silence the cries of the hungry. Those cries wove themselves into a single ghost, Inanitas, who soon haunted the glutton to his death. Such was the agony of her "birth," however, that Inanitas has continued to wander. Four-hundred years later, she still appears at the tables of misers, wastrels and gluttons, reminding them of the common people's pain.

To mortal eyes, Inanitas appears to be a bony girl in her early teens. She never truly speaks, but the look in her eyes is eloquent in all languages. Her ragged dress sags on her emaciated frame, and her bare feet scuff the dust as she wails a wordless plea for food. A greedy magus might encounter her in his garden or banquet hall. If he gifts her with food or riches, she will depart happily; if he ignores her or sends her away, her cry will follow him. Wherever he goes, whatever wards, prayers

or protections he invokes, the young girl's wail echoes in his mind. And with that cry comes the hunger....

Inanitas' revenge is threefold: First, she sends her voice to nag his conscience; soon she appears, arms outstretched, to hound him privately or shame him publicly; finally, she shares her hunger with him. As the days wear on, a burning ache rises in his belly. No matter how much he eats, he remains famished. If he's especially greedy for material wealth, his fingers also itch for the touch of gold: unless he immerses his hands in wealth, they soon drive him half-mad. If he has been foolish enough to deny the spirit her first request, no later appeasements will satisfy her. Until Inanitas has proven her point, the magus must suffer.

The length of the "lesson" depends on the wizard's greed and callousness: if he's a simple glutton, she makes him hungry for a week or so; if he has repeatedly used his magicks to conjure food and wealth, she might stay a month or so; if his hungers have cost other people their lives or livelihoods, she will torment him unto death. Only a great act of generosity — feeding an entire town for a season, saving a city from plague, giving all of his riches to the poor, etc. — followed by sincere repentance can satisfy the Urchin's justice.

According to the Hermetic records, Inanitas is an incarnation of starvation. Although she can be dissipated in both her physical and ephemeral forms, she cannot be destroyed. So long as there is hunger, this ragged girl will return to the tables of those who consume too much.



Lu Chen, the Iron Master of 10,000 Perfections

Willpower 10, **Rage** 6, **Gnosis** 6, **Power** 60

Charms: Airt Sense, Appear (in dreams only), Armor, Cleanse the Blight, Healing, Materialize, Mind Speech, Re-form, Soul Reading, Spirit Away

Materialized Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 5, Stamina 8, health levels 7

Abilities: Alertness 5, Athletics 8, Awareness 8, Brawl 6, Dodge 5, Instruction 3, Acrobatics 3, Archery 5, Do 7, Etiquette 5, Melee 6, Stealth 4, Survival 5, Academics (Chinese) 3, Law 2, Linguistics 3, Herbalism 3, Medicine (Chinese) 4, Metaphysics (Taoist alchemy) 3, Secret Code Language (Akashic code) 1

Punishes: Cowardice, Sloth, Vanity or Wrath; sometimes rewards Courage or Temperance.

Description: When they came across the mountains or wandered through the Mists to join the Council, the Akashic representatives left many things behind, including their ancestral spirits. Many of the Scourge incarnations the travelers were familiar with remained behind in the Old Lands. More often than not, "transplanted" Asian magi and Daedaleans encounter variations on the other spirits presented here. But there are exceptions, of course... exceptions including Lu Chen, the Iron Master.

According to the Akashic Record, Lu Chen was a master of great talent and unshakable dedication to order. Once, he was said to have been kind to outsiders but strict to his pupils; the common people, even leaders, could be expected to err, but those who sought the deeper truths of Do were to be held to higher standards. "If one expects to be bathed in the waters of the All," he often said, "one must swim with great care." In time, he grew remorseless in his perfectionism. Akashics he considered careless were beaten, often with an iron staff he carried for that purpose. Never could anyone accuse Lu Chen of being unjust or capricious, but everyone, even the masters, learned to fear his anger. When Lu Chen died, it is said he was taken into the Celestial Court. Despite his mastery of Do, he was too inflexible to be truly enlightened, but too talented to be cast back into the waters of rebirth. And so he exists, a spirit of iron still carrying his staff. When the Akashics traveled, they told tales of their heroes and terrors. Lu Chen is a bit of both, and he followed the travelers' tales.

Sometimes the Iron Master appears in dreams: If an Akashic Brother grows careless, he enters her dreams, chastises her and runs her astral body through grueling exercises until dawn. If this does not correct the problem, the Iron Master manifests in person. The offender is taken from her companions, mystically Spirited Away to a far-off Realm, and run through a series of exercises from dawn until

dusk. If she refuses to comply, makes a mistake, or collapses from exhaustion, Lu Chen beats her with his staff until she falls unconscious. When she awakens, he begins the exercises again until she completes the discipline to the Master's satisfaction. Then, with a warning, he departs.

Although he frowns upon laziness, pride or a quick temper, the Iron Master is not a bully. Sometimes, if a "student" has been especially virtuous, he may appear in her dreams to praise her. If a humble and honest Akashic is besieged by treacherous or vain enemies, Lu Chen occasionally appears to fight by her side. His iron staff makes short work of any threat, but cannot kill a true disciple of The Way; as painful as a strike from this weapon may be, it does not truly injure an Akashic magus. Any other target, however, is not so fortunate.

Lu Chen resembles a small but muscular Chinese man of mature years. His skin has taken on the gray sheen of his iron staff, and his bald head reflects the sun like a polished bowl. The Master's eyes are black and pupil-less, his movements graceful and precise. Lu Chen's speech is stilted and formal, and his dress recalls the *Xiudaoyuan* training-yard — a short yellow robe, bare feet and a Master's sash. He is not wrathful, but punishes the errant with swift, sure strokes. To Lu Chen, magick is a gift with great duties. Barbarians may abuse it at their loss, but the Master's people never shall!



In game terms, Lu Chen is a powerful fighter with a "training heaven" Realm of towering peaks, crisp snow and mighty trees. When he appears in dreams, he speaks to the "pupil" on those slopes, then runs her through a series of daunting tasks; when she awakens, the Brother is unhurt but tired. If she needs further discipline, he takes her to his home. There, she undergoes an exhausting 24 hours of work. If she resists, uses magick, or collapses, he beats her into unconsciousness (Incapacitated); this thrashing does not truly inflict health level damage, but it hurts like hell. In game terms, the player can make a Stamina + Athletics roll, difficulty 9, to pass the Master's test without mistake. No magick is allowed. Once she can do this, she is free to go.

Once in a great while, the Iron Master may appear as a Boon; a Brother who faces overwhelming odds may suddenly see Lu Chen swinging his staff with full effect at her foes. Naturally, she had best be grateful for his help! Once finished, the Master bows and vanishes.

Masaigi the Screamer

Willpower 6, Rage 6, Gnosis 6, Power 40

Charms: Airt Sense, Appear (voice only), Spirit Away, Terror, Tracking

"Materialized" Attributes: (to be used during a fight in the Realm) Strength 4, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, health levels 7

Abilities: Alertness 3, Brawl 4, Stealth 3

Punishes: Cowardice

Description: Imagine living your life in a forest or plain. Imagine never having seen stone cities or metal armor. Imagine coming across the world to encounter things you had never believed possible. Scary? Yes. And in that fear rides Masaigi the Screamer, Slayer of Cowards.

Like most spirits, Masaigi has many names; some call him Sha're Kaa the Mocker, or Sibli the Grinning One; in the mountains of old Kush, he was called Ahmat of the 10,000 Hatreds, and the wanderers of Tazl'aal know him as Sher Wa Sen. To the Dream-Speaker Naioba, however, he is Masaigi, so many of her people call him by that name.

The Slayer of Cowards appears to those who have used magick in a treacherous manner. Masaigi's visitations begin with a high-pitched scream, followed by laughter. To the magus, the shriek and laughter seem to come from nearby; her companions, however, hear nothing. No matter how hard she searches, the sorcerer will not be able to find the source of the sounds. In time, she might convince herself that she heard nothing... until she hears "nothing" again. Over time, the shrieks grow more frantic and the laughter more condescending. Soon the screams sound more and more like the mage's own voice. Still she sees nothing. Soon, however, the spirit appears....

It starts with a dream or vision, or perhaps with a trip into the spirit world. The familiar screams begin again, followed by the mockery, but now they seem closer, ever

closer. The tormented voice definitely sounds like the magus now, and the laughter scorns her fear. Stone monoliths rise from the landscape, higher, ever higher. Soon they twist into monstrous parodies of castles and city walls. The voices, which tantalize the dreamer, soon come from behind her, just over her shoulder. Soon panic sets in and she begins to run. At last the Screamer appears, howling and mocking. Now the magus has a *reason* to run....

Once, it is told, the Screamer was a hyena (or some other scavenger) who was craven even by the standards of his kind. He lived only on scraps and dung, and eventually wasted away until only his voice was left. Now he feeds on fear, and he's always hungry. To him, a coward is a banquet, and he'll follow that food until either the spirit gets tired or the coward dies.

For as long as Masaigi chases his prey, the magus is locked in a mad Seeking (see *The Sorcerers Crusade*, pp. 177 and 237); to her friends, she's dead or close to it. In the mindscape, the Screamer — now revealed as a fearsome, skeletal hyena — drives his victim through nightmarish landscapes of towering stone and decaying ruins. Until she confronts Masaigi in single combat (which is no easy task), the magus will be hounded by the Screamer until her body rots and her mind becomes food for the spirit's hunger. No one can save her; unless she faces the terror, she is doomed to run forever.

In the dream, the magus has no weapons and cannot use magick. She must take what she can from her surroundings and fight her nemesis hand-to-hand. Should she take a stand and fight, the magus returns to the mortal world savaged but alive, even if she dies in the vision. A witness sees the sorcerer's body struggle in the grip of some unseen attacker, who rends it to the point of death, at which time the dreamer awakens. The scars which remain become marks of honor to an African shaman; the person who bears them has conquered her fears.

Masaigi the Screamer often appears as a gaunt, rotting hyena, although some magi see him as a hound, a jackal or a gigantic rat. His screams sound like the sorcerer's own, and his laughter sounds like a chorus of mocking voices. The spirit's eyes burn with cold yellow light, and a white haze (the aura of death) surrounds him. When he finally strikes, his teeth and claws rip distinctive scars in the victim's flesh. Even when they heal, these marks can be recognized by a shaman who Speaks-With-Dreams.

In game terms, this spirit harasses the fearful character using his Appear Charm. Eventually, he snatches his sleeping (or spirit-walking) prey into a nightmare Realm using Spirit Away. There, Masaigi works his Terror Charm as he hounds the magus through a stone-studded dreamscape. From that point onward, everything is played out as if both the spirit and the mage were physical beings: His claws and teeth inflict his Rage rating (6) in normal damage, and his

Stamina can soak damage normally. If “killed,” Masaigi disperses and the magus is freed.

To fight the spirit, the sorcerer cannot use any magick whatsoever — she must use courage, bare hands, and whatever weapons she might scratch up in the ruins. She may soak the spirit’s attacks normally. Whatever damage she sustains in the fight follows her back to her material body. If she dies in the battle, the mage is reduced to Crippled, but may heal normally. If, by some chance, she can kill Masaigi and cut out the spirit’s heart and eat it, all damage will be healed instantly. She has devoured the heart of terror and lived to laugh about it.

Poena, Scourge of Oathbreakers

Willpower 6, Rage 8, Gnosis 7, Power 50

Charms: Airt Sense, Armor (10 soak dice), Healing, Materialize, Re-form, Soul Reading, Terror, Tracking

Materialized Attributes: Strength 6, Dexterity 4, Stamina 5, health levels 10 (no extra growth)

Abilities: Alertness 6, Athletics 3, Brawl 6, Intimidation 5, Melee 5, Stealth 3

Punishes: Cowardice or oathbreaking; sometimes rewards Courage (in pagans).

Description: To many Romans, honor was a man’s greatest virtue. Breaking a vow, therefore, brought the gravest disgrace. Among the ranks of Mithraic centurions and legionnaires, dishonor was beaten from a man’s bones with a heavy barbed whip. In time, it is said, the soldiers’ fears gave rise to this spirit of punishment: Poena, the Coward’s Bane.

A massive centurion wrapped in shadows and black armor, Poena (“Punishment”) bears a single weapon: a huge cat-o-nine-tails bristling with rusty iron and jagged glass. He speaks a single word — “*Mendax!*” (“Liar!”) — in an ominous, affronted whisper. Fiery eyes burn in his coal-black face, and his black hands unfurl the heavy leather whip. He never runs after his prey, but always seems to be right behind the oathbreaker, even if the liar has used Connection magick to escape the spirit. Cowardice makes this Scourgeling even angrier, of course. The beating, when it comes, will be far more severe if the magus tries to flee.

Sooner or later, Poena corners his prey. Sometimes he tricks the liar into a corner or brings the whip across the quarry’s back as he runs. More often, however, he simply lets raw terror do his work for him; the Charm and the spirit’s fearsome presence bring the coward to his knees. When he falls, Poena flails him to the brink of death. Such a fate was never meant for women; Poena pursues men only. If a magus has the courage to face his punishment like a man, the spirit may go easier on him. When the beating is finished, Poena disappears.



This Scourgeling draws his name and appearance from the tales of ancient Romans; even so, some other pagan cultures have similar spirits. Among the Celts, the Treun Sidhe and Lady Crow chase oathbreakers across the misty Highlands and moors, whips a’cracking; Greek pagans quail before the winged Furies; and Nordic ones suffer beatings at the hands of Agnar Blood-Flailer. These other spirits often punish women as well as men — no one should be immune to the lash of truth! In all his (or sometime *her*) incarnations, the Scourge of Oathbreakers is silent and pitiless. If any magus is foolish enough to break a sworn vow, he deserves what he receives.

Every so often, an especially courageous pagan may be gifted by a visit from the Coward’s Bane. If she has been felled by some treachery, the magus might suddenly find herself defended by this spirit ally. Poena (or Lady Crow, or Agnar, or whoever) fights by her side until the danger is past, heals whatever wounds the pagan might have suffered, then disappears.

Although he’s a spirit, Poena Materializes before he attacks. As he approaches, he radiates a haze of Terror and cracks his whip between his fists. Once he has spotted an oathbreaker, this spirit dogs him no matter where the coward might run. When the victim falters, Poena lashes out with his whip, inflicting eight dice of damage per stroke. Although the victim can try to soak the damage, the health levels that get through are effectively aggravated for the purposes of healing. A character

who's brave enough to bare his back to Poena will be beaten only until he's Crippled; a victim who runs or fights may be beaten to the brink of death. If his material form is dispelled, the spirit returns later to finish what he started. Honor is not mocked, and those who do so can never rest.

Powderbane

Willpower 2, Rage 10, Gnosis 3, Power 20

Charms: Airt Sense, Blast Flame, Create Fires, Materialize (as a spark or explosion only)

Materialized Attributes: none

Abilities: none

Punishes: Cowardice, Vanity or Wrath.

Description: It only takes a spark. That's what every gunsmith tells his apprentices. Just one spark. Any artificer who's ever packed a cannon, any soldier who's ever tested a new gun, any alchemist who's ever fiddled around with odd compounds knows how true this is. Just one spark can blow you to bits. Over time, that fear takes shape. And every so often, that shape explodes.

"Powderbane" is the most common name of a spirit (or family of spirits — no one's quite sure) that detonates explosive mixtures. Although many magi — especially Artificers and Guildsmen — seem reluctant to recognize the spirit for what it is, Powderbane occasionally flares to life, demolishing their grand devices (and occasionally the magi themselves) before returning to the spirit world. The manifestation lasts only a moment — long enough to set off a gunpowder charge or shatter a laboratory filled with strange experiments. Fear, arrogance or treachery seem to summon Powderbane, but you'll never see it coming....

In the spirit world, Powderbane resembles a firefly of unusual brilliance. Once it chooses to alight, it bursts into a bright, igniting flash at the center of a volatile compound, then disappears after the explosion. There's no reasoning with this entity, although some shamans and skilled Hermetics might be able to direct it elsewhere before it blows a friend to Kingdom Come.

In game terms, this Scourgeling simply provokes a huge explosion. Generally, the spirit "detonates" its new "home" for 10 dice of aggravated damage, although the explosion might be a great deal bigger at the Storyteller's discretion — a powder-keg wagon for an artilleryist's pack train would wipe out everything for many yards around. Depending on what's exploding, where it's exploding, and how much Scourge the character has in his Pool, Powderbane might cause a detonation worth 15 dice, 20 dice, or even more. (See "Explosions" in *Sorcerers Crusade*, p. 199, and the Cannons chart on p. 206.) The victim(s) can try to soak this damage, and the player(s) had better roll well....



Snaptimbers

Willpower 3, Rage 4, Gnosis 3, Power 20

Charms: Airt Sense, Armor, Cleanse the Blight, Element Sense (wood and plants), Healing (plant matter only), Materialize, Meld (wood), Shapeshift (wood forms), Wood Warp

Materialized Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 2, Stamina 5, health levels 15

Abilities: Alertness 2, Brawl 4, Crafts (woodworking) 5, Herbalism 5

Punishes: Vanity.

Description: To the Craftsmen, building is a sacred art. Every so often, however, one of them will get it in his head that his skill, not God's generosity, creates the structures and inventions that define the Renaissance. Every so often, that vanity must be punished. Many an Explorer, Artificer or Guildsman has put his trust in some vehicle or weapon, only to have the woodwork break at the worst possible time. When such ill luck falls, wise Craftsmen know that Snaptimbers is at work. Is he demon or God-servant? Either way, his antics are costly... and sometimes fatal, too.

Anything man can build can be broken, and breaking things is Snaptimbers' job. While man's pride whittles the forests to ruin, this spirit undermines that pride by cracking wood and warping lumber. A craft-magus who offends this



In game terms, Snaptimbers manifests by Materializing within wood and twisting it out of shape. The scope of the damage he does depends on the amount of Scourge in the offending character's Pool: A small backlash (5-8 points) might crack a frame or break a wheel; a medium one (9-12 points) might buckle a timber or warp a structure; a large one (13-18 points) might shatter an important part or structure (an axle, a floor, a wall), while a really bad one (19+) will devastate something vital at the worst possible time (an axle breaks during a chase, an airship falls apart in midair, etc.). The severity of the damage and its effects on the magus and other bystanders is left to the Storyteller's discretion, but it should be dramatic. Again, no human force can undo the effects of Snaptimbers' powers. Even if the wood can be reshaped, it is forever marred by the spirit's anger.

Whisper

Willpower 3, Rage 3, Gnosis 5, Power 25

Charms: Airt Sense, Appear (voice only), Corruption, See the Secret, Re-form

Materialized Attributes: none

Abilities: none

Punishes: Cowardice, Deceit or Envy; occasionally rewards Prudence.

Description: The bane of spies and plotters, Whisper cloaks itself in shadows. Whatever the offending magus wishes to conceal becomes Whisper's favorite topic of conversation. As the frantic magus attempts to find and silence the spirit's voice, Whisper speaks and secrets are exposed. Sometimes Whisper employs a soft woman's voice; occasionally it prefers a man's baritone. Regardless, the spirit never raises its words above a gentle yet insistent tone. Anyone who has ears may hear those words and act upon them as he sees fit.

Whisper is a simple Scourgeling; totally invisible in the mortal world, it seems to be a faint shadow if viewed from the spirit world. Even so, it sees a great many things — even unspoken secrets — and occasionally makes perverse suggestions. If a magus is vigilant and prudent, Whisper may inform him of some plot or conspiracy, rather than reveal his secrets. If confronted, Whisper merely fades away silently. Without a secret to reveal, the spirit seems empty. Perhaps that's why it seems compelled to watch mortals... and to tattle on them.

Spirits of Benevolence

If it were not for hope, the heart would break.

— Thomas Fuller, *Gnomologia*

Virtue is often its own reward; most often, a Boon grants a magus good fortune (see the examples given under "Virtues" in *The Sorcerers Crusade*), not a spirit helper.

spirit will see his works turned or broken. The greater the sin, the worse the break; an erring carpenter might suffer a broken wagon wheel, while a vainglorious inventor might have his contraption come apart under his feet.

Snaptimbers' punishments destroy whatever item he chooses to affect, so long as that item is made of wood (a wagon, a spear, a boat, etc.) or includes a wooden structure to support it (a roof, a bridge, a mill, etc.). Once the spirit has done his work, no repairs, even magickal ones, may undo it. Although his idea of justice is cruel by human standards, he is as reverent as the oak and the rowan. If a magus suspects that the spirit might soon visit, the craftsman may pacify Snaptimbers with a prayer spoken in Jesus' name. After all, the Lord was a carpenter himself, and He has been known to forgive sins on occasion....

Every so often, Snaptimbers manifests as a gnarled old man with spindly limbs and bark-like skin. If he chooses to speak, he does so slowly and carefully, gesturing with his spindly fingers and broad, leafy hands. If he chooses to appear this way, the spirit has more on his mind than simple punishment; occasionally, he comes to warn a crafts-mage of danger, or to chastise one who should know better. More often than not, however, Snaptimbers does not address his victim; a creak, a sudden warp, a loud crack — these are all the warnings most magi receive.

Still, there are times when an Otherworldly guardian comes to the aid of a particularly noble wizard... or to reward a lucky sinner.

These entities are as benevolent as their counterparts are malevolent. "Good" doesn't always mean "nice," of course; the Lion of God is terrifying even when he's on your side. Still, there's something comforting about these odd beings. Even the fiercest of them inspire reverence and awe. Perhaps it's their essential good intentions or their touch of Divinity within. In a World of Darkness, these entities are incarnations of hope. And sometimes hope is the most powerful weapon of all.

Some noted "spirit helpers" include...

Ariadne's Handmaidens, or The Spinners of Perfection

Willpower 6, Rage 4-7, Gnosis 6, Power 25-40

Charms: Airt Sense, Calcify, Solidify Reality (some also have Appear and/or Materialize as well)

Materialized Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 6, Stamina 5, health levels 7

Abilities: Alertness 2, Awareness 2, Brawl 3, Dodge 4

Rewards: Fortitude, Generosity and acts of industriousness; some punish Deceit, Sloth or Vanity.

Description: It was a thread that led the legendary Theseus through the minotaur's labyrinth—a thread given by Ariadne, secret apprentice to Master Daedalus. It was thread that God used to bind the Earth together at its seams, and that the three Moirai spin to decide the weave of Fate. The spider weaves thread into a dwelling of surpassing beauty and strength, and the Daedaleans weave the threads of Creation itself into new and superior designs. As any Daedean apprentice learns, thread is the metaphor for building. These spirits, literal weavers of Creation, are the incarnations of that metaphor.

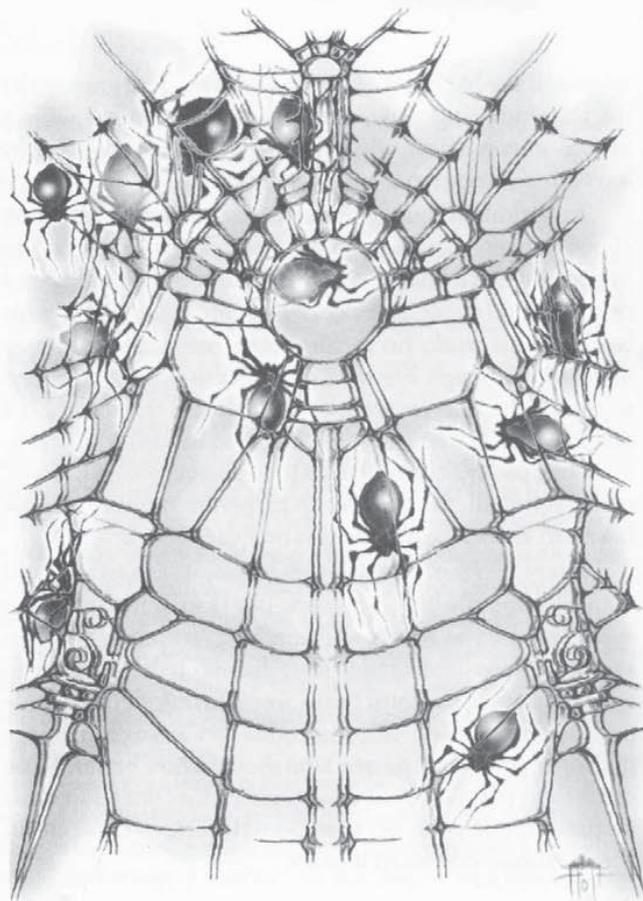
In later days, shapeshifters and Technocrats will call these industrious beings Pattern Spiders. To the Daedean, however, they are living symbols, Handmaidens of the Arts whose tapestries inspire any good artisan. Sometimes they appear to clever Daedaleans to offer guidance and even aid: An inventor stumped by his device might suddenly glimpse the solution to the riddle in the glowing strands of Ariadne; a Celestial Master, lost in the Otherworlds, might be guided to a landmark by the patterns woven by spirit-spiders; a monster-slayer who has been overcome by his opponent might suddenly find the beast entwined by these Spinners. In their grand webs, the Handmaidens reinforce order and stability. Can any philosopher-scientist do less?

Though unintelligent by human standards, the Spinners share a vision of the Grand Design. Blessed by Divinity, they weave their webs in every new object or structure made by man. No mortal eye can see them, of course, but

Daedaleans with specially ground lenses (in game terms, Devices with Spirit 1 or Prime 1 Effects) can watch them go about their work. With a closer look, he might notice the minuscule threads that bind the patterns of older items or places. Philosopher-scientists who venture into the Otherworlds can see these spirits plainly; some have chronicled the Handmaidens' activities in esoteric treatises. Many readers consider these documents symbolic rather than literal, but as anyone who has seen them can attest, the Spinners are quite real.

Bodily, these spirits resemble glowing spiders; some are too tiny to be seen without special lenses, while others grow to intimidating size. Typically, Ariadne's Handmaidens appear only in the Penumbra. Some rare specimens, however, may manifest on the mortal side of the Gauntlet or Appear as large, glowing spiders in impossibly elaborate webs. Spinners who appear with a Scourge backlash belong to the latter two groups. Their webs, quickly woven, actually solidify reality around their prey, capturing its pattern in their new designs. Should a magus suffer a Bane, the Handmaidens spin him into a cocoon of shimmering light, then scurry away. Should he win a Boon, they may offer inspiration, advice or outright help. In game terms, this aid comes as:

- A -3 reduction to the difficulty of a single Artist, Crafts, Enigmas, Invention, Medicine or Science roll (as



the web design offers inspiration to the magus) in the case of a small Boon;

- A Storyteller hint to the player (in the form of an answer or prophecy woven into a spectral web) in the case of a medium Boon, or;
- An attack by a gang of Spinners, who weave the Daedalean's enemy into a spirit-cocoon in the case of a large Boon.

Either way, the Spinners offer a single service, then depart. Creation is too large, and the works of man too elaborate, to hold their interest in any one place for long.

The Cat of Good Fortune

Willpower 5, Rage 5, Gnosis 5, Power 30

Charms: Airt Sense, Cleanse the Blight, Create Wind, Healing, Materialize, Mind Speech, Shapeshift, Tracking

Materialized Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 5, Stamina 3, health levels 7

Abilities: Alertness 5, Athletics 5, Awareness 3, Brawl 3, Dancing 3, Dodge 5, Intrigue 4, Seduction 5, Animal Ken 3, Etiquette 4, Stealth 5, Survival 5, Academics 3, Enigmas 3, Occult 4, Science 1

Rewards: Generosity, Love and Trustworthiness; punishes Avarice, Gluttony, Stinginess and Wrath.

Description: While many Christians quail at the sight of a cat, Muslims, Jews and heathens of all kinds recognize the fortune the animal brings. Clever and quick, this feline spirit epitomizes the luck that follows the chaser-of-mice. The magi of Egypt, Cathay and Persia seek her advice, and wise folk keep her brood close at hand.

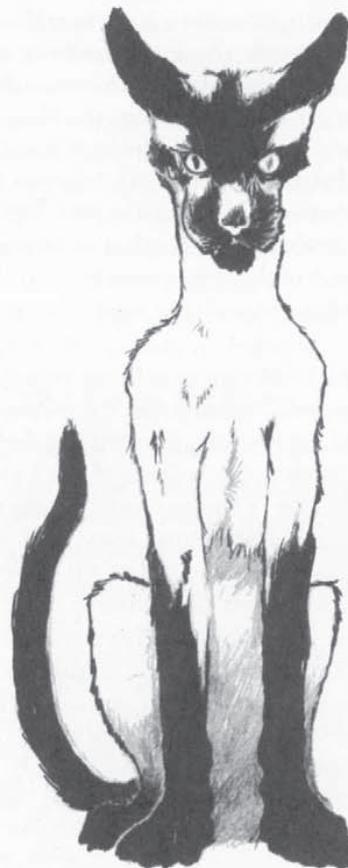
Although she appears in many guises — from black cats with narrow ears to fluffy longhairs with sparkling eyes — this spirit is the incarnation of good fortune. With her purr, she sends evil scurrying away; with her gaze, she confers fine luck. Foreswearing the barbaric languages of humankind, she merely meows, purrs and occasionally spits. Woe to the victim of her displeasure! Just as she bestows good luck, she can take it away. A magus or mortal who angers her can be accursed for weeks on end.

Unlike many Scourgelings, the Cat appears to be a perfectly normal beast — a bit more beautiful and well-groomed than the average barn-cat, perhaps, but otherwise mortal. In this guise, she moves across the land, testing humans. Those who treat her with kindness and affection are rewarded; those who abuse or attack her are dealt with cruelly. If badly threatened, the spirit simply departs the mortal plane; from the Penumbra, she then follows her tormentor until he places himself in harm's way. Nothing kills this Cat; even a spirit-death merely scatters her essence for a while. Like her earthly cousins, this spirit always lands on her feet, literally and otherwise.

Graceful and sensual, the Cat favors women and young children. Drawn to magick, she often winds her way into a magician's stronghold and sits down to observe the fun. If the sorcerer seems kind, she presents herself like a stray. If he behaves himself, she grants him a bit of company. When she leaves (which she soon does), she leaves her benefactor a gift of luck. Until then, she watches to see if he deserves it. Despite her resemblance to mystick familiars, the Cat is no one's servant. Any magus who treats her like an errand-slave is soon disappointed... *badly* disappointed.

If the whim strikes her, the Cat might assume a woman's form. Like the spirit herself, this disguise is strikingly beautiful and dexterous. Inquisitive as ever, this "young girl" watches anything that seems remotely interesting. Occasionally, she might play with a particularly intriguing "toy" — a mortal, a court, even a scientific device. Sometimes a muse, other times a pest, always an enigma, the Cat of Good Fortune enjoys a colorful existence. Answering to no one, she comes and goes at will.

Like any other character, the Cat is essentially material unless she chooses not to be. Her Charms work in all guises, but she almost never seems connected to the events she sets in motion. As a woman, she is fickle and playful, essentially good but frustrating company nonetheless. As a cat, she makes her nest where she will. To people of good virtue, she pays a long and loving visit; to harsher folk, she's an



annoying guest. If anyone raises a hand or foot against her, the Cat howls, spits and disappears. Bad fortune soon follows. In all guises, the Cat's gift of luck (good or bad) follows the Storyteller's discretion. The Cat is a plot device, not a spell-slinger or roll-modifier. See the Charm: *Fortune* for details, but leave the specifics up to chance. The Cat, after all, is an enigma. And she likes it that way.

The Halo

Willpower 5, Rage 5, Gnosis 5, Power 30

Charms: Appear, Blast Flame (five dice), Soul Reading

Materialized Attributes: none

Abilities: none

Rewards: Courage, Faith, Fortitude, Hope and Love; punishes Deceit.

Description: It is said that God recognizes his most virtuous followers. Crowning them with a halo of light, He sets them apart from the mass of humanity. When their time comes, these blazing souls are bound for seats of honor at the table of the Lord. Until then, their crowns of light are invisible to all but God. Every so often, in times of great distress, He reveals them. Blessed is he who wears such a crown!

Those who study the Scourge dismiss the Halo as a simple spirit — one sent by God, of course, perhaps a minor angel, but not a manifestation of God's Own Hand. The faithful would disagree. To those who walk in Christ's light, the blazing crown of light marks a saint, or at the very least a holy person. Although the Halo does not grant any particular powers to its wearer, good Christians defer to the honored one. For some strange reason, the Halo occasionally appears around the heads of Muslims, Jews, heathens and other non-Christians. Although Christians tend to be suspicious of unbelievers who shine with Divine favor (surely such manifestations are devilish mockeries!), those who follow the ways of the appropriate faith still know the light of God for what it is, and they respect one crowned by the Halo's light.

Naturally, the Halo cannot tolerate sinfulness, especially not from one who "wears" it! In the presence of great evil, the crown blazes brightly, illuminating darkness and sometimes even sending out tendrils of fire to burn away uncleanness. If the Halo's wearer commits some evil act or denies his faith, the Halo burns him, then disappears forever. Once a man has sullied the crown of Divine favor with impurity, he will never enjoy its like again.

In game terms, the Halo is simply a corona of light that appears around the head of a faithful magus. It's actually a spiritual manifestation, not an object, and cannot be donned or removed. Normally, it remains invisible, even to the wearer; if some great crisis threatens, though, the Halo suddenly blazes above the character's head, sending out bright rays of light. When this light appears, the character wearing it reduces all his Social difficulties by one to four,



depending on his actions and audience. (A gentle healer in a room filled with Christians would seem angelic, whereas a haughty missionary on pagan ground might be merely impressive.) When the crisis has passed, the Halo fades away until the character wins another Boon.

Despite its Christian connotations, the Halo is nonsectarian and appears on the heads of virtuous magi of all religions. At the Storyteller's option, a character with the Merit: True Faith may add an extra 10 points to the Halo's Power. The Merit has no other effect on the "spirit," although an especially reverent magus makes a good candidate for the Halo's appearance.

In the presence of a truly evil entity or item (an Infernalist, a Satanic altar, etc.), the Halo actually bursts into flame, attacking the offender with its Blast Flame Charm. As long as the "spirit" has Power, the Halo will continue to attack; if it runs out before the evil is destroyed, the Halo falters and fades. Should the wearer commit some grave sin, deny his God or use the Halo's power for ill purposes, the crown burns *him* instead, then disappears. Most sins warrant a single Blast, but really murderous or blasphemous ones pit the Halo against the magus; it will not depart until the wearer is dead. Truly, the favor of God is a sharp, double-edged blade!

The Lion of God

Willpower 7, Rage 10, Gnosis 8, Power 70

Charms: Airt Sense, Appear, Armor (10 soak dice), Cleanse the Blight, Element Sense (earth), Healing, Materialize, Mind Speech, Re-form, Shapeshift, Soul Reading, Terror, Tracking

Materialized Attributes: Strength 6, Dexterity 4, Stamina 10, health levels 17 (larger than a normal lion, but not colossal)

Abilities: Alertness 4, Athletics 2, Awareness 5, Brawl 4, Dodge 4, Intimidation 8, Animal Ken 5, Stealth 5, Animal Speech 5, Cosmology 5, Enigmas 4, Metaphysics (Celestigraphy and Demonology) 4, Occult 5

Rewards: Courage, Faith, Fortitude and Justice; sometimes punishes Cowardice, Deceit and Wrath.

Description: In many sacred texts, God is a lion. Like the lion, He blazes like the sun, roars like thunder and strikes down the wicked with swift surety. His claws are lightning, His justice is true and His courage is as firm as the land itself. From the Christian to the heathen, from the shamans of distant jungles to the Craftsmasons in their cathedrals, magi understand the link between the King of Beasts and the Lord of Creation. And so, when great evil stands triumphant, God sometimes sends this spirit: the incarnation of Lord Lion himself.

The Lion appears from a thunderbolt or bonfire. With a deafening roar, he unleashes his *Terror* (as the Charm) and leaps at the enemies of the faithful. So awe-inspiring is his presence that minor demons and evil spirits disappear rather than face the Lion's claws. Those that stand and fight

face a remorseless opponent. Once he springs, God's Lion has no mercy. Sinners and their tempters are torn between iron fangs and silver claws.

Yet despite his ferocity, kind and brave souls have nothing to fear from this spirit. As gentle as he is furious, the Lion heals the sick and wounded with a lick of his tongue. Although he appears to be a beast, this entity knows great secrets — the paths of the Otherworlds, the ways of angels and demons, the speech of every animal on Earth, even the riddles of magick. Although he rarely shares his lore with mortals (especially not with magicians!), he may impart an important hint or prophecy. If he chooses to "speak," the Lion knows all languages, human and otherwise. His rumbling voice swells in the mind of the most faithful person nearby. With a few well-chosen words, the Lion offers his counsel, then disappears in a blinding flare of light.

In the spirit worlds, the Lion shines with holy fire; even in the mortal realm, his mane and coat blaze. His eyes are obsidian-black, and his fur is like spun gold. Nearly twice the size of a mortal lion, he ripples with muscle and vitality. Sometimes he takes the form of a kindly black man, a warrior (either a white knight, an African hunter or a soldier of Allah, depending on the magus who called the spirit), a rabbi or even a child. In all incarnations, he epitomizes masculinity and radiates charisma. Should anyone in his presence dare to defile truth, love or the law, they will suffer the Lion's displeasure. Once riled, this spirit cannot be calmed until the blood of the wicked has been spilled. As gentle as he can be, this Divine beast is still a beast — an incarnation of the Lord's holy vengeance.

In game terms, the Lion is a War-Spirit. Materialized, he lashes out for 10 dice of aggravated damage and remains nearly impossible to hurt. A manifestation of the Lion totem, he occasionally aids wercats and werewolves who display courage and honor. In the presence of evil creatures (demons, Infernalists, etc.), the Lion bristles until embers fly from his coat. Although he might spare a repentant sinner, no wicked thing is safe when the Lion of God appears.

Mara, the Sea Maiden

Willpower 5, Rage 5, Gnosis 8, Power 45

Charms: Airt Sense, Cleanse the Blight, Create Wind, Element Sense (water), Flood, Healing, Materialize, Meld (water), Re-form, Soul Reading, Water-Breathing, Waves

Materialized Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 6, health levels 7

Abilities: Alertness 3, Diving 5, Empathy 5, Logic 4, Singing 3, Animal Ken (sea creatures) 5, Seamanship 3, Animal Speech (sea creatures) 5, Beast Lore (same) 5, Culture 3, Enigmas 3, Linguistics 5, Politics 3, Science (navigation) 3, Weather-Eye 5

Rewards: Courage, Fortitude and Hope; punishes Avarice, Vanity and those who would despoil the seas.





Description: As treacherous as the seas can be, there is mercy there, as well. In the arms of this spirit, who rescues sailors from drowning, a fearful Explorer may find comfort. Once, it is said, she was a maiden betrothed to a brave sailor. When a storm-witch brewed up a tempest, Mara ran out to save her beloved. She dove in, but courage was no match for the storm. Death could not still her passion, though; even now, she rescues sailors, in hopes of finding her lost lover. Other tales claim Mara was a mermaid who fell in love with a Christian seaman; when he drowned, she vowed to save all worthy men in honor of her love. Touched, the Lord made her immortal so that she could honor that promise.

Ghost or mermaid, Mara is a wave of compassion on the vast and pitiless seas. A drowning sailor might feel soft hands about his neck. Salty kisses breathe air into the sailor's lungs, and a beautiful woman drags him to the surface and leaves him safe on a nearby shore. Despite her resemblance to the deadly mermaids and sirens of lore, Mara is not a seductive killer. Although she boasts a beautiful singing voice, she's quite virginal. A sailor may desire her, but her affections are spiritual, not carnal.

Although Mara has been known to save mortals as well as magi, Explorer Daedaleans intrigue her. The spirit seems drawn to the strange new ships and brave deeds of these pioneers; when she saves them, she often asks ques-

tions about their methods and philosophies. Sometimes she engages them in debate: *Is it wise to map the whole world? Aren't some mysteries better left unsolved? Are there limits to what man should know, and where might those limits be?* Surprisingly, she's quite astute, and knows a good bit about mortal affairs. Mara is more than just a helping hand; for sailors of the Forge and Sail guild, she provides a conscience, as well. In gratitude, many shipwrights have immortalized her on the prows of their vessels, or worked her image into shipboard carvings.

Kind as she is, Mara has an angry side. If an Explorer prefers dark Arts, or comes to plunder the virgin seas, Mara sometimes calls down storms upon his ship. If a greedy or faithless sailor falls overboard, he might find himself dragged down into the darkness rather than hauled back to the light. If the Sea Maiden meets an especially lecherous or selfish Explorer, she might decide the world is better off without him. Withdrawing her hands, she lets him sink or summons sharks to the kill. Mara is a spirit of hope and redemption, but she does not suffer fools at all.

An incarnated Umbrood, the Sea Maiden swims in that place where flesh and spirit are nearly one. The deep oceans have very low Gauntlet ratings, and Mara moves easily between the worlds. In game terms, she's effectively a material being, but can shrug off her mortal form if threatened or attacked. Any man who tries to hold her will find himself with a handful of sea water as a prize and an angry water-spirit as an enemy.

Mother Comfort

Willpower 10, **Rage** 2, **Gnosis** 10, **Power** 50

Charms: Airt Sense, Appear, Cleanse the Blight, Healing, Materialize, Mind Speech, Re-form, Soul Reading, Spirit Away

Materialized Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, health levels 7

Abilities: Awareness 4, Empathy 5, Expression 5, Animal Ken 5, Herbalism 5, Medicine 5

Rewards: Faith, Fortitude, Hope, Justice, Love and Trustworthiness.

Description: Magus or mortal, everyone has a mother. And when disease strikes, heartbreak threatens, spells go bad and God seems too distant to care, most folk want their mothers. This spirit, an incarnation of the Great Mother in all her forms, occasionally comes to comfort her suffering children. In her embrace, even the greatest magus may be soothed.

Mother Comfort has many names and faces. To Christians, she is Mary; to Muslims, Fatima, and to Jews, Sarah or Ruth; pagans see her as Freyja, Demeter, Ceres, Brigid, and a host of others, while the tribesmen of the outlands recall their own mothers or the ancestral goddesses of mercy. She has no single identity, but comes in the guise of nurture and



enough to attack or enchant her suffers a jolt of crushing despair, then sudden loneliness. This spirit offers consolation; the man who spurns her finds himself more alone than ever before. Even demons let her pass. Someday, even *they* might need her healing touch.

Ojala the Benevolent

Willpower 6, Rage 3, Gnosis 6, Power 30

Charms: Airt Sense, Cleanse the Blight, Element Sense (earth), Healing, Materialize, Soul Reading (also has a bag and gourd that can never be emptied so long as Ojala holds them; if taken away, these items simply disappear).

Materialized Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 2, Stamina 5, health levels 7

Abilities: Alertness 3, Dodge 5, Expression 4, Animal Ken 4, Crafts (farming) 3, Survival 3, Beast Lore 4, Cosmology 3, Culture (African) 4, Enigmas 5, Hearth Wisdom 5, Herbalism 5, Medicine 3, Occult 2

Rewards: Courage, Faith, Fortitude, Generosity, Hope and Trustworthiness; often appears to African mortals and magi who are poor and hungry.

Description: For strangers in a hostile land, generosity is hard to come by. Hunger and poverty are common plagues among the Dream-Speakers, who brave the cold weather and colder temperaments of Europe to join hands

support. Her words are soft prayers and lullabies; in Mother's arms, it's all right to cry.

Mother Comfort comes in the darkest nights of the soul. When despair becomes a whirlpool, and the pain is too much to bear, a shimmer of light or a kind word reveals her presence. No matter who you might be, Mother knows your secrets and she loves you anyway. Even a blood-spattered Satanic priest may be forgiven. Mother Comfort never judges; although she cannot undo what has been done, she offers a moment of sanctuary. Sometimes she cures illness of the body, but her true realm is illness of the soul. When the pain has receded and strength returns, she departs. A kiss on the forehead, and she is gone.

If the pain is too great to heal, Mother Comfort takes souls away from this vale of tears forever. Crippled children (who have done little to deserve suffering) and people too sick or wounded to recover are often taken into Mother's arms. A hush descends; when the suffering person opens his eyes, he is in Paradise. Back home, his body has died. He has passed on to a better place and will remain there for eternity. Eventually, Mother leaves him to his own devices. In this sanctuary, nothing can hurt him again.

Although she seems to be flesh and bone, Mother Comfort is as ephemeral as the dawn. No blade or spell can touch her, and no bond can make her stay. Anyone foolish



with the Council. Far from their ancestors, these wanderers have few spirit allies. One such is Ojala the Benevolent, a wandering ghost with an endless sack of food. When he is nearby, no African need go hungry.

Long ago, it is said, Ojala was a poor and crippled man. Despite his withered legs, he tended a small patch of land, then shared the crops with anyone who seemed hungry. The Iwa were pleased with his generosity; in time, his fields yielded greater and greater harvests. No matter what he planted or how frequently, the land always gave forth a bounty. Soon, no hungry mouths remained in Ojala's village. With the help of his ancestor spirits and a few local youths, he traveled to distant villages and nourished starving people there. In gratitude, the Iwa healed his legs and kept him healthy and safe. Although he had many friends and offers of marriage, Ojala never took a wife or sired children. When age finally claimed him, the Old Generous Father left his bountiful field "to the hungry and the poor, wherever they may be." Several men tried to take control of it after his death, but the ground turned to stone when they tried to plant in it. Only when his helpers returned to their errands did Ojala's field become fertile again.

The ancestors were pleased with Ojala. At his request, they granted him a wandering spirit and many Otherworldly gifts. Since that time long ago, he has wandered the countryside searching for the poor. When he finds people in need, he opens his bag and fills their bellies. When they have eaten well, he walks away into the Mists to search for some other needy soul. When courageous men and women left their homes to defend their people, Ojala followed them. Now he stays close to the Dream-Speakers of Africa, tending them with food, drink and wondrous tales.

Ojala's generosity extends beyond food. He has a friendly disposition and an endless well of stories and songs. As his beneficiaries eat, he regales them with fables and jokes. A sour disposition is an affront to this kindly spirit, and he likes to make sure everyone is laughing when he leaves. However, the cold manners and greedy habits of the Europeans ("frost people and white hyenas") disturb Ojala. Once, he aspired to help every living person; the "white hyenas," however, were gluttonous and ungrateful. Some tried to snatch his bag away, and others tried to enslave him or drive him from town. Now he disdains the "hyenas" and tends his own people. Although he might help Dream-Speakers from other lands, he considers white magi to be liars and fools.

The Old Generous Father is a wandering spirit. Although he appears to be an ancient man, he possesses incredible strength and endurance. With his bright robes and laughing voice, he lifts the spirits of his friends. Across his back he bears a sack of yams, breads, meats and vegetables; a gourd at this side sloshes with clean, cool water. No matter how much he gives away, the Old Generous Father always has spare food and drink. His gifts are sweet

and perfect, always ripe or well-cooked and spiced with savory herbs. So long as a person is hungry, Ojala is generous; so long as they are grateful, he returns when they need him. If someone eats his gifts but does not thank him, however, Ojala grows angry. He will not curse them openly, but that visit will be his last. The Generous One is too busy to waste his time with ingrates.

In game terms, Ojala has an endless supply of food but no combat abilities to speak of. If trouble begins, he steps through the Gauntlet and walks away. In his native lands, this spirit was well-respected. Even the fiercest spirits let him pass without harm. In the "hyena dens," however, he has become something of a trickster. When confronted with malicious spirits, he challenges them to riddle contests or dazzles them with exotic stories. Still, many shamans worry about Ojala. Perhaps the hostile spirits of the white lands will poison the Generous One — or destroy him. Surely he's too gentle for this savage world!

New Spirit Charms



The following Charms work in all ways like those given in the *Sorcerers Crusade* and *Ascension* rulebooks. See those volumes for detailed spirit systems.

- **Babelmind:** By intruding on the subject's thoughts, the spirit jumbles whatever the subject says or hears. Simple words are misheard and complex conversations turn into gibberish. This Charm affects a single mortal, and it lasts one turn (minute) for each point of Gnosis the spirit has. Costs three Power.

- **Bolts of Wrath:** With a shrug of Rage, the spirit turns its target's anger inward. Struck by fiery bolts, the victim burns herself from the inside out. Any non-spirit suffers excruciating pain. Unless she rolls her Willpower against difficulty 8, the target falls to the ground and helplessly writhes in pain. If she rolls successfully, the pain is intense but not crippling. This agony lasts one turn (minute) for every point of the offender's Willpower; the stronger she is, the more she harms herself. If the target happens to be a shapeshifter, the pain is based on her Rage rather than her Willpower. This Charm may be cast more than once on the same target, increasing both the pain and the duration of her helplessness. Costs five Power per bolt.

- **Calcify:** Weaving a web from Creation's threads, the spirit traps its target in a shimmering cocoon. The weaver rolls its Willpower against the target's own Willpower (or its Rage, if the target is a spirit or shapeshifter). Each success subtracts one from the target's Physical Attributes (or its Willpower in the case of a spirit). When the Attributes or Willpower reach zero, the victim is bound fast. Until he's freed by some other character, the target is helpless. A

rescuer must attack the web and score more successes than the spirit rolled to trap its prey. Costs two Power.

- **Craving:** When the spirit works this Charm, a single mortal grows hungry. Until the Charm has been rescinded by the spirit that cast it, the victim suffers stomach pangs that no amount of food or drink can soothe. Costs four Power.

- **Fortune:** Depending on the whim of the spirit, the target either enjoys good luck or suffers bad luck. This fortune (or misfortune) manifests as a series of minor plot devices — things just go the character's way or turn against him. The spirit rolls its Gnosis against difficulty 7; each success indicates one lucky (or unlucky) event that will happen to the target in the near future. The spirit decides whether the luck is good or bad, and the Storyteller decides what happens, how it happens, and how good (or bad) the results are. These "strokes of luck" should be significant enough to be unusual (winning a favor from the prince, twisting an ankle), but not significant enough to unbalance the story (becoming a prince, losing an arm). Costs five Power.

- **Love Gift:** Taking a bit of its own essence and giving it to a mortal (often in the form of dust, flowers, a kiss, etc.), the spirit imbues that mortal with a powerful charisma. For one person and one person only, the recipient becomes the most beautiful thing in sight; in game terms, she gains Social Traits of 5 and a Seduction Talent of 5 when dealing with that person. This Gift lasts as long as the spirit favors the mortal. When the bond between them breaks, the Charm dissipates. Costs three Power

- **Scatter Thoughts:** Like Babelmind, except that this Charm confuses sensory impressions and complex thoughts rather than words. Costs three Power.

- **See the Secret:** With a limited form of mind-reading, the spirit uncovers one secret that a mortal creature wishes to hide. Minor or obvious secrets ("I'm dressing as a man," "I just stole a sack of coins") do not require a roll to uncover. Deep secrets, or ones concealed by a strong will, demand a

successful roll. To discover a deeply held secret, the spirit rolls its Gnosis against the target's Willpower (the Merit: Iron Will or other magickal or mystical protections raises the difficulty to 9). A successful roll indicates that the spirit knows the mortal's secret. This Charm does not share that information with any other being — the spirit must communicate the information somehow. Costs three Power.

- **Terror:** When a spirit employs this Charm, an overpowering aura of raw, overwhelming terror knocks mortals to their knees. Unless a character makes a Willpower roll (difficulty 8), he will either collapse in fear or run away as fast as possible. If the spirit remains close by, a character may try to resist the fear; each Willpower roll after the first failure adds one to its difficulty. For example, a mage who had failed the first Willpower roll would resist at difficulty 9; if he failed again, it would rise to 10, but never higher. This Charm affects only mortals, not spirits, the undead, or the half-spirit Changing Breeds. The *Terror* radiates outward from the spirit, runs roughly 50 feet in all directions, and lasts five turns (minutes). Costs five Power.

- **Water-Breathing:** With a touch (often a kiss), the spirit grants a single air-breather the ability to breathe water and withstand the pressure of great depths. So long as the mortal and the spirit are close to each other, the Charm remains intact. Once separated from his benefactor by more than a few yards, the mortal loses his new gift. The spirit may choose to rescind the Charm at any time. Costs two Power.

- **Wood Warp:** The spirit twists all wood within a 10-foot radius into new and interesting shapes. Unless the wood has been magickally protected, or is part of a Fetish or other mystical item, the *Warp* is automatic. If the object is protected, the spirit rolls its Rage against the item's level + 5 (a Level 5 Talisman would thus be difficulty 10). Success reshapes the object; without some magickal spell or Gift, the wood cannot be bent back into shape again. Costs two Power per use.

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Appendix: The Cup and the Blade



he Renaissance is filled with too many fantastic topics to do justice to its every bit of whimsy and verve. For the sake of completeness, this appendix covers several of the high points of Renaissance Europe that don't fit into the other chapters of the book — the particulars of fencing, details about herbs and poisons and descriptions of several luminaries of the period.

For the truly determined or interested Storyteller (or player), this appendix also includes a list of excellent reference works for use in researching more material than this book could ever hope to contain.

Duello and the Art of Defense



n these days of the Dark Renaissance, the courtyards of Europe are spattered with draining life; a thousand blades are bright with blood. But these battles aren't fought by masses of armored soldiers: These combats are fought between two unarmored foes, one pair at a time. The duel is the means to preserve honor, to prove bravery or to kill a foe in a socially acceptable manner. Though banned by monarchs and

condemned by the church, the practice of dueling remains a popular pastime. Teachers skilled in the Art of Defense — commonly known as the Art of Fence — are in high demand from both the nobility and those aspiring to noble pretensions.

Background

During the Middle Ages, swords were relatively heavy; they needed mass to cleave through armor. On the battlefield or in single combat, the victory typically went to the fighter with strength and endurance on his side. It took several hundred years for the trusty "hack and slash" broadsword of the Norman and Frankish kings to evolve into the slim, thrusting rapier of the Renaissance. Ironically, one of the developments that set the stage for rapier fencing among civilians was the use of guns in the military. Firearms had become common enough on the battlefield that heavy armor was more trouble than it was worth. As full-body armor disappeared, swords that relied on mass more than sharpness became unnecessary. Thus, swords grew lighter, setting the stage for their widespread proliferation in the 15th century.

Why are swords so common among civilians, when just a few generations ago only the soldiery could bear them? There are several reasons, two of which are closely connected: status and money. In feudal times, only the nobility could carry a sword, which worked out as only a noble could afford one. With the rise of a merchant class, the price of a

sword comes within the reach of the newly wealthy, who want the status symbols that intimate they have breeding to match their money. A blade at one's side becomes a required accoutrement for young hotbloods eager to prove themselves. Besides defending himself against brigands and cutthroats, the upwardly-mobile man of the age is also expected to defend that most delicate area — his honor.

By the middle of the 16th century, swords evolved further into the more familiar thrusting sword, the rapier. Almost certainly the first rapiers were Spanish, as were the first rapier fencing schools. The style was taken up by the Italians, whose techniques soon surpassed the Spanish style in popularity. As Italian and Spanish masters — and their treatises, now printed on the new moveable type presses — made their way across Europe, the style took hold.

The Duel

Duels have become a favorite pastime of the nobility, and the practice is beginning to catch on among the more fractious youngbloods of the middle class as well. Duels can be fought over slights real, imagined or contrived. The challenge can be the culmination of years of bitter resentment or a casual affair with a complete stranger.

At its simplest, a duel is a combat between two individuals, typically to settle a point of honor. The duel can be divided into two general types. The first, the judicial duel, is quite formalized and legal, often with the king himself presiding over this trial by combat. The sovereign chooses the field and acts as the final arbiter; he may declare the winners if any; the king may even end the duel before blood spills. Judicial duels are well publicized and guarantee crowds of spectators. Once a standard method of establishing guilt, this sort of trial rarely happens after the 1400s (although as a legal option it was still on the books in England in the early 19th century). Contrast this with the extra-judicial variety of dueling, also known as the duel of honor, which is seldom announced and usually a private affair. This is by far the most common variety of duel — and the most dramatic.

Honor and Custom

For these and such like offenses the law can make no adequate retribution — in such a state life is a burden, which cannot be laid down or supported, till death either terminates his own existence or that of the despoiler of his peace and honor.

— A. Bosquett

Just as the rapier and rapier techniques develop together, so do customs and rules of the duel develop over time. From the “catch as catch can” style popular among ruffians and commoners to the elaborate rules of form used by the aristocracy, the duelist needs to know what to expect from his opponent; if he's wise, he'll expect trickery, whether

A Word of Anachronism

As mentioned in the main rulebook, fencing is in its infancy in the 15th century. Camillo Agrippa and Achille Marozzo, two sword masters who were among the first to favor thrusts above cutting edges, wrote their treatises in the mid-1500s. The upshot is that, historically speaking, characters in a chronicle set in 1475 would carry the heavier cut-and-thrust style swords. Having said that, the Storyteller who is dead set on *Three Musketeers*-style sword fights can rationalize that in the Dark Renaissance, advances in swordmaking and fighting techniques have come earlier.

Some Notes to Start With

1. Olympic sport fencing resembles rapier dueling in much the same way that Lazer Tag™ resembles a firefight. Although sport fencing may be useful for learning fundamentals, using modern moves would get you killed in the 15th century.

2. Likewise, beware taking your cue from movie fight scenes. If cinematic derring-do is the sort of mood you're looking for, that's fine, but choreographers usually stage swordplay using a combination of modern fencing moves and their own flashy inventions. The object is not to hit the enemy's sword with a satisfying clang, it's to let the blood out of the enemy's body.

3. Everything presented in this chapter is a generalization. Different fencing schools focused on different techniques, some very specialized, some a bit absurd. Also, styles and fashions changed tremendously over the course of the period.

or not he uses tricks himself. Though they ostensibly fight to maintain their honor, more than a few duelists resort to backstabbing, hidden armor or worse. When duels are fought in secluded areas away from judgmental eyes, most duelists play for keeps. In this case, chivalry isn't common when the steel comes out, and nearly any advantage — from sand in the face to a thrown dagger — is considered fair game. It's all well and good to be virtuous in a duel, but survival is also commendable. And remember, meeting three cutthroats in an alley or wooded road requires nothing of one's honor — win by any means.

This is not to say that many duelists don't fight honorably. Indeed, when you think you're the best with a sword, you prefer death to cheating. Of course, in a public duel, peer pressure serves to keep the fight “clean.” And in a judicial duel, where every effort is made to ensure equity, not playing by the rules almost certainly guarantees immediate execution.

APPENDIX: THE CUP AND THE BLADE

Why duel? What provokes a challenge? There are several common reasons. Women are a typical cause, either to preserve her honor — for no gentleman would let either insult or injury to the fairer sex go unanswered — or to dispatch a rival for her hand. Duels over long-standing quarrels or family or factional rivalries are also common. A slap or other blow is almost sure to lead to swordplay. Possibly the most certain provocation is the “giving of the lie,” for to call someone a liar is to prick the very heart of honor.

For a formal duel (as opposed to the spontaneous “draw and have at” affair), a certain etiquette is usually required. First, and perhaps least important, someone must feel that honor has been offended in some way. Depending on where one is, this can be ridiculously easy. Next, the offense is brought to the attention of the offender, and it is agreed that spilling blood is the best way to solve the problem. All this can be done at the moment of insult, often with an insult returned (such as a slap in the face), or the offended party may pen a note declaring the challenge. The challenge may be refused, but to do so invites certain disaster to the reputation of the challenged unless there is a socially acceptable reason for the rebuff (challenges are sometimes refused based on a great disparity of rank between two nobles; class distinctions make it rare for a duel of honor between a commoner and noble to be permitted). Often, each party chooses an assistant called a “second” to act as a go-between, negotiator, backup and lookout. At times, there may be several such attendants, following down as thirds, fourths and so on. In England, the challenged party has the choice of weapons, though elsewhere in Europe it is the reverse. Of course, the majority of duels are with swords. The weapons and other paraphernalia must be more or less equal, to ensure that skill or divine favor rather than equipment is the deciding factor in the fight. A devious duelist can use the right of choice to his advantage by giving very strict requirements for equipment. He might insist on arms for which he has specially trained, or use weapon choice as a ploy to cost the opponent time and money. In one instance, the necessity of acquiring an outlandish assortment of weapons and several horses for a single duel led one man to remark, “This man wants to fight both my valor and my purse.” Usually, though, the terms are very straightforward, and little preparation is necessary — simple swords at a given place and time. Because of the temptation to wear a shirt of leather or mail under one’s clothes, it is often the custom to duel coatless or even shirtless.

But there is more to the duel than good weapons and skill. In many cases, how one faces the blade is just as important as how one uses it. Showing fear in the face of death brings more disapproval from the audience than actually dying. This is especially true when dueling won’t get everyone thrown in jail, for the contest invariably brings an audience. To show up at all requires some



bravery; to appear calm and confident increases one's standing among the watchers, whereas to cry, faint or vomit from fear marks the combatant as a coward. In some circumstances, showing a willingness to fight by meeting the opponent serves the demands of honor, and the seconds are expected to do their best to talk the duelists out of fighting. On the other hand, depending on the fashion, the seconds may be expected to fight a duel of their own. It isn't uncommon for onlookers to pair up and draw steel themselves, "for the sake of Honor."

Learning the Blade

Everyone who seeks to learn the way of the sword has his own reasons for doing so. Quite a few people desire a crash-course on swordplay after finding themselves challenged to a *duello*. Dilettantes wish to learn enough of fencing to keep up appearances or to intelligently follow conversation. Others take the blade very seriously; they may plan to survive many duels, or even to become professional duelists. Not a few feel called to the art, and desire perfection of form for its own sake. But no matter what the reason for learning the art of fence, the seeker should expect some difficulties, and certainly some expense. There are three typical sources for fencing lessons: wandering swordmasters, texts and schools.

Wandering Masters

Perhaps the best way to learn the art is from a swordmaster. The master may be a professional, teaching to take a break from proxy work or prize fighting. He may also be a scholar, devoted to the perfection of his art. Or he may simply be a duelist with numerous victories under his belt. Many teachers are itinerant, going where their services are in demand. To obtain the tutelage of a wandering master (often known as a "free-lancer"), a student must first get his attention. Large amounts of money work in some cases, but many masters need to see some potential in the applicant before accepting him as a student. After all, if a student is too clumsy to use a sword in the first place, why would a master waste time and jeopardize his reputation by expending effort on training? Likewise, some wealthy sons would gladly pay the outlandish fees for the reputation of a famous master — an opponent might think twice about challenging a pupil of di Grassi, Agrippa or Capo Ferro, for instance.

Treatises

For those who wish to learn from the great masters but don't want to travel, there is still a chance. Many master swordsmen have written treatises on their philosophies and techniques. With the advent of the movable-type printing press, such works have become far more accessible. Although a diagram or a written description of a maneuver is a poor substitute for seeing the move in person, it's better than nothing. Frequently, a text is more of a gentleman's guide or a treatise on honor and general philosophy than a

A Formalized Duel

In a tavern, Lord Baldrick overhears Count Ricasso saying that the lord had done something rather dishonorable with a lady both are fond of. Hot-tempered Baldrick tells the Count in no uncertain terms that only spilled blood will erase Ricasso's offense against him and stalks out. An hour later, as the Count contemplates the situation, a friend of Baldrick's, his second, enters and iterates the challenge. The offender's second introduces himself, and the two seconds go off to make arrangements for the morning's affair. When the particulars are agreed upon, the seconds return to their respective principals to verify that all is satisfactory.

The principals, armed with rapiers and daggers and attended by their seconds, arrive in a park outside the city an hour after dawn. Also on the green are a handful of young swordsmen and acquaintances of the combatants; the audience murmurs quietly, waiting. The principals are experienced at swordplay; they stand at ease, hardly a tremor betraying tension or fear. The seconds look over the opponents' swords and, satisfied that neither has an unfair advantage, stand aside. With a flourish of steel, the two salute each other and begin to circle warily. After some moments, the Count lunges; Baldrick parries the sword and the follow-up dagger slash and jabs his foe's arm before withdrawing. Blooded, Ricasso hesitates, then, seeing Baldrick's guard waver, he lunges again. It is a trap, and almost before he recognizes the feint, he feels the point enter just below his sternum. His frenzied dagger thrust is turned aside, and he cries out as the rapier withdraws and plunges into his chest. Ricasso staggers, lunges and falls, wounded mortally. Baldrick, calmly wiping his blade, turns to his second as Ricasso's man cradles the dying Count. His honor is restored; the offense is erased.

"Excuse me, my Lord." Lord Baldrick looks at a well-dressed young man who steps over the moaning noble's legs. "I was most impressed with the way you handled your blade. I was wondering if I could trouble you for another demonstration...." His hand rests on the polished hilt of a rapier.

Baldrick sighs. It's going to be a long morning....

fencing manual, and the fencing instructions may be too vague to be serviceable. Of course, skill at reading is required, and often the books are written in the master's tongue. For all that, translated editions of fencing books are in great demand. Some of the many examples include Fiore di Liberi's *Flos Duellatorum* (1410), Camillo Agrippa's *Treatise on the Science of Arms with a Philosophical Dialogue* (1553) and George Silver's *Paradoxes of Defense* (1598).

Schools

Fencing schools traditionally have reputations as training grounds for killers and highwaymen, and as hangouts for unsavory characters. To be sure, these schools are the recourse for common folk who can neither afford an expensive swordmaster nor read the texts. Usually, a school's lessons focus less on the etiquette and niceties of the proper duel, concentrating on tricks to ensure the student can walk away after a fight. Due to the immense popularity of swordsmanship, many lads from the middle class and even some young nobles take to training in these dens, thus giving the schools increased respectability. More than a few masters of renown have founded schools of their own in an effort to teach larger groups (and make more money). As if there weren't enough to fight about, students have ready-made rivalries against students from other schools to bleed over.

Both Spain and Italy are well-known for their fencing schools, and masters from these countries open schools across Europe; however, other nations have schools of their own. Although some fencing schools teach the use of such things as quarterstaves, cutlasses, halberds and two-handed swords, by far the most popular weapon is the slim, one-handed sword.

Women and Dueling

Though the Art of Fence is almost universally a man's sport, a few women pick up swords. Because the world is a dangerous place, full of brigands and wolfsheads of the vilest character, some women learn the use of the rapier for personal protection. Although the touchiness of honor pervasive among the men of society occasionally infects the fairer sex to result in bloodshed between two women, duels between a man and woman are practically unheard of, for no gentleman would stain his honor by striking a lady with a blade. For a woman with an aptitude for Fence and an appetite for blood, this limits her options, and it is certain there are a few female duelists masquerading as men. This idea would make for an interesting character for the player or Storyteller — how does the woman receive her training, and how can she keep her identity secret? Things could get sticky should she be discovered, not least because of her opponents (or their friends) who have been dishonored for losing to a woman.

Dueling and the Law

Naturally, the practice of spitting one's neighbors meets with disapproval from the church and many governments. Punishments range from fines and confiscation of property to excommunication, exile and even execution.

Those who are serious about their art disregard the law and take care not to get caught. It is fairly easy to fight without the authorities finding out. The most serious opponents even travel to countries where they can fight without fear of prosecution. To make matters even more muddled, sovereigns, particularly those of France, are lax about en-

forcement and freely give pardons and special dispensations to detained duelists.

Malta

Home of the Order of St. John, Malta is one of the few places where dueling is legal. However, even here there are rigorously-enforced restrictions. Duelists are confined to settling scores along the course of a single street. Furthermore, should a knight, a priest or a woman bid them to sheathe their blades, it is death to disobey.

Chevalier d'Andrieux

A famed duelist, the Chevalier d'Andrieux claimed to have slain more than 70 men before his 30th summer, often on the most trivial of pretexts. Occasionally, he offered to spare his defeated opponents if they would renounce God, killing them after they had done so. This way, he boasted, he could slay body and soul at once.

Playing the Prize

A young man desiring certification as a guild member of the English masters of defense must display his skill before all the Masters in the area. The demonstration can take several days to complete, and it often draws large crowds. Between bouts, the student passes the hat in hopes of making enough money to pay for the event.

Fencing Across Europe

In Spain, where the Art of Fence has long been surrounded by an aura of mystery, duels are surprisingly uncommon. A duel is legal provided a field is granted by royal decree, but this is easy enough to obtain. Perhaps the lack of fencing to settle questions of honor stems from the fact that assassination is the more traditional way to avenge slights.

Spain invents fencing, but Italy advances it to a fine art; some of the premier fencing masters, including Agrippa, di Grassi and Marozzo, perfect their techniques here, and their treatises were translated and copied throughout Europe. The Italians have a reputation for brutality, and a victor often lets the defeated go after crippling him or scarring his face, so that the "lesson" isn't forgotten.

France holds a fencing distinction of its own. The French take up the rapier quickly, fighting duels with a zeal unparalleled by their neighbors. Between 1590 and 1610 nearly 4,000 gentlemen — almost a third of the French nobility — are killed in duels. Swordplay on the green is an almost daily affair.

In England, where quarrels are often settled by brawl or ambush, the duel of honor is slow to catch on. The English have native fencing masters who teach their own home-grown style of cut-and-thrust, along with other weapons such as the bastard sword and battle ax. As rapiers become common, the rapier and dagger become the fashion over the heavier and less subtle English blade and buckler; soon, the English gentry becomes nearly as sensitive as the French where honor is concerned. While England has a number of Italian-style schools, there is a movement against Italian dueling methods and weapons; Queen Elizabeth even orders that rapiers above a yard in length are to be broken. Edicts against duels are enforced here more often than elsewhere, but in spite of this, fencing guilds are readily found to teach the young bravo how to "defend" himself. Access to fencing master becomes a necessity for a true gentleman.

Some parts of the Holy Roman Empire practice sword-play in earnest. German masters favor edged swords and fight with a slashing style. Currently, a group known as the *Marxbruder* have the right, given by royal decree, to teach fencing. However, the rival *Federfechter* are gaining popularity by teaching young nobles the Italian methods of rapier fighting. The *Marxbruder* are forced to adopt the thrusting sword in the late 16th century.

While the peoples of the Netherlands aren't as enthusiastic about the *duello* as their neighbors, some conspicuous French and English nobles find the Low Countries a convenient place to cross steel in secret.

The Sword

The early 16th century is a transitional period for swords. The slim cut-and-thrust blade carried by civilian and many soldiers is gradually evolving into the even slimmer thrusting sword known as the rapier. The former, a bridge between the knight's broadsword and the rapier, is typically between two and four pounds, with a double-edged blade around 30 inches or so in length. Beyond a more elaborate hilt guard, it looks like a slimmer version of the medieval sword.

In contrast, the rapier is first and foremost a thrusting weapon. Most rapiers have two edges, but because of the shape and lightness of the blade these aren't that important in a fight. Even when sharpened, the edges do not cut very deeply, although minor lacerations may deter the opponent from grabbing the blade with bare hands. The rapier is not something one carries onto a battlefield, as it is too light and fragile and cannot deliver quick slashes in a melee. Rather, it is a weapon for defending life and honor in town or court.



Parts of a Sword

Foible: Narrower portion of the blade, near the tip.

Forté: Wider portion of the blade near to the hilt.

Hilt: The whole apparatus attached to the blade (quillions, grip, pommel, etc.). Also refers to the type of hilt guard.

Pommel: knob or counterweight at end of the grip.

Quillions: the simple bar on in front of the grip, also known as the crossguard.

Ricasso: the part of the blade nearest the grip; rarely sharpened.

Terzo: Middle of the blade.

The average rapier is just shy of 3 pounds, with a blade length between 35 and 40 inches being most common. The blade, which gradually tapers to the point, is generally diamond-shaped in cross section. Some blades have wider tips which allow scratching cuts; others, known as flambards, are waved to assist in parrying and for dealing more severe wounds.

One of the most obvious differences between medieval and Renaissance swords is the elaborate hilt guard, which may be as simple as a cup or complex as a cage, depending on function and fashion. The movement toward the familiar semi-enclosed "swept hilt" begins long before the rapier. As thrusting becomes a more important maneuver in cut-and-thrust fighting, the swordsman loops his forefinger over the crossguard to better direct the sword point. After the loss of a few fingers in this manner, a ring is added to the cross guard to offer some protection. Gradually, the ring becomes more elaborate, eventually extending downward to protect the knuckle. Later hilt guards consist of plates in front of the quillions, and in the mid-seventeenth century cup hilts, similar to ones used in the 20th century epee, appear. Many swords have hilts that are detachable so that the owner can "upgrade" a worn or unfashionable blade. A hilt can even be designed for use with both a rapier and a heavier sword.

The rapier duel is one of the first sword styles emphasizing speed and skill over stamina and strength. The blade can defend or attack from the same position, whereas for the cut-and-thrust sword to do significant damage it must be drawn back, exposing most of the body to a preemptive counterstrike from a rapier.

The Basics of Rapier Fighting

If sport fencing today is "a conversation in steel," then the rapier was an all-out argument.

— John Clements

The basic stance of Renaissance fencing is more aggressive than the modern sporting style; while balanced

overall, the fencer leans forward, leads with either leg (depending on individual style) and holds the off hand forward rather than as a counterbalance behind the body. If the medieval duel was won by strength and endurance, the lighter swords of the Renaissance require coordination and agility.

Footwork is vital, more so even than in modern sport fencing. Rather than fighting in a straight line "catwalk," the duelist fights "in the round," circling left or right as he attacks and defends. A swordsman who cannot move is in very dire straits, which is one reason a stab to the foot can be almost as dangerous as a cut across the hand.

A ready sword position is termed guard or ward. High ward puts the weapon at eye level, middle ward roughly at the chest, and low or base ward is at waist level. The hand held farther forward is the leading hand, regardless of the length of the weapon. For example, a stance could be described as "dagger leading, low ward; rapier high ward," or "rapier leading, middle guard, dagger high guard." Other terminology refers to parries. To parry "outside" is to send the opponent's point to your right; an "inside" parry sends the blade to your left.

Though it seems obvious, it must be stressed that rapier fighting is always very dangerous; "friendly" duels between companions are rarely done because of the nature of the blade. In earlier times, one could perform non-lethal "mock duels" with blunted weapons and expect to walk away with bruises and perhaps some cracked bones. Rapier work is not something one can fool around with, however, because any thrust can penetrate an artery or an organ.

The Basics of Cut-and-Thrust Fighting.

Not only the Queen of Weapons, but the weapon paramount between man and man.

— Sir Richard Burton

As swords grow lighter and fighting styles change, the cut and thrust techniques fall from favor among prowlers on the field on honor. However, heavier civilian swords are not ubiquitous during the early Renaissance, and they never completely disappear. While the rapier's speed and agility give it a decided advantage in single combat, it is less effective when facing multiple opponents as in a brawl or ambush. In the rapier duel, the combatants must focus on the opponent, watching every nuance right down to a subtle shifting of weight. Such finesse is impossible when there is more than one opponent.

Because the cutting blade is slower than the rapier, footwork is even more important. Evasive movements and attacks "on the pass" are standard. Feints are important in misleading the opponent, allowing the attacker to move and strike without having to waste a motion on



blocking. As with the rapier, cutting swords are held at different guards or wards. Off-hand weapons (see below) are almost universally used, making up for the relative slowness of the blade.

Stances are not unlike those for the rapier, although the fighter tends to stand more upright. There are high, middle and low wards; however, particularly in the high on-guard position, the sword is often held at a 45 degree angle rather than pointed straight at the opponent. This allows the blade to gain enough momentum to cut more effectively than the relatively weak “wrist flick.” Close-in cuts are delivered from the elbow, while the slowest but most powerful strikes come from the shoulder.

While many of the positions and maneuvers are reminiscent of medieval fighting, there are differences. The leaner cut-and-thrust blade is quicker and more agile, and has the advantage of an easily-directed point. Attacks can be made much more quickly, and require less force to be effective since armor is less common. While the cut is the focus of sword fighting, the thrust becomes more important in the latter half of the 16th century.

Maneuvers

These are maneuvers a duelist would be well-advised to know. Unless otherwise noted, these maneuvers work with either the cut-and-thrust sword or the later rapier.

The Parry

The term parry is usually used in two ways. The first is a basic block, which is simply using brute strength to interpose one’s sword against an enemy’s sword. The second takes more skill, but is easier on sword and arm alike — using the parrying sword to guide the opponent’s blade away from the defender. The term “parry” describes any number of maneuvers used by both the sword and the off-hand weapon (see below). As rapier fighting becomes more specialized, most parries fall into disuse in favor of the point-forward parry. This keeps the blade ready for the riposte. The defender generally uses the stronger part of his blade — the forte — to catch the attacker’s weapon. With a rotation of the hilt, the enemy’s point is redirected; hopefully, the defender’s blade can strike before the parried weapon can be re-readied. When using two weapons, the

attacker may turn aside his foe's blade with one blade as he steps in to strike with the other. It is important for cut-and-thrusters to parry with the flat of the blade, protecting the fragile edge from gouges.

Beating the Blade

The beat is one of the basic moves, where the attacker simply uses his weapon or hand to slap the opponent's blade out of line. In game terms, treat the maneuver as a parry, allowing a follow-up riposte which adds one die rather than two to the next initiative roll.

The Riposte

This nearly simultaneous block-counterthrust is a relatively late-period maneuver, due in part to the weight of the sword, which is another reason the second hand is used for defense. The weight of a cut-and-thrust sword doesn't lend itself to the speed necessary for a riposte.

The Feint

Also known as "falsing," the feint is a difficult but very useful trick that should be used only by accomplished fencers. The duelist moves his weapon, tenses his body or simply looks a certain way to feign an opening or to telegraph to his opponent a strike is coming. As the enemy reacts to the supposed attack or vulnerability, the duelist shifts unexpectedly and attacks from another angle or a different speed. Should the opponent recognize the feint for what it is, he may not react — or worse, counterattack. Feints are also used to test an opponent's level of skill.

System: The duelist must win the initiative for the round. Both sides make Wits + Fencing rolls (difficulty equals the opponent's Wits rating +3). The one with the most successes subtracts the difference from the difficulty of his next combat action. For example, Florio has a Wits of 3 and a Fencing of 4, while his opponent Joyner has Wits of 4 and Fencing of 2. Florio wins Initiative and decides to attempt a feint. His player rolls 7 dice (difficulty 6) for 4 successes, while the Storyteller rolls 6 dice (difficulty 7) achieving 2 successes. Joyner takes the bait, so Florio rolls his next attack at -2 difficulty. Had Joyner won by 2, he would have seen through the ploy, and either parried the real attack or delivered an attack of his own, either way at -2 difficulty.

The Grype

By stepping inside the opponent's defenses, the duelist can use his free hand to grab either the opponent's arm or blade (although some hand protection is useful for the latter). He may then attempt a disarm and thrust, or simply knock the enemy in the head with his pommel. Grypes are useful to know and, when no other off-hand weapons are available, necessary (see "Off-Hand Fighting").

Draw Cut

Although it does less damage than a common slash, the draw cut is not without its uses. A thrust can become a draw cut as the attacker moves past his opponent, causing a painful but

often superficial wound on leg, arm or chest. Because it lacks a good edge, draw cuts are seldom practical with a rapier.

Optional Rule: Reading your Opponent.

Inigo: You are using Bonetti's Defense against me, eh?

Man in Black: I thought it fitting considering the rocky terrain.

— *The Princess Bride*

Each master, and therefore each school, teaches particular moves. Vovelle may feel that mastering the feint is the key to winning the duel, while del Ferro's "sidestep-thrust" maneuver is feared throughout the province. These stylistic variations can be recognized by the observant fencer. At the Storyteller's discretion, players may roll Perception + Fencing (difficulty depending on the familiarity with the style) to deduce the stylistic "signature." For example, if Hans gets three successes, he realizes that the hotblood facing him uses the same serpentine thrust his archenemy is known for — is the young buck merely a student of Hans' foe, or a henchman out for more than just a little blood?

This knowledge, Storyteller willing, may even have tactical significance. Should Hans' enemy specialize in high feints and low thrusts, for example, Hans may be able to use the knowledge to surprise his opponent the next time a high feint comes around. Again, the effects in game-terms are left up to the Storyteller, but may include a small bonus to the difficulty to attack or defend.

What to Watch

Students inexperienced at fencing may well ask what the fighter should focus on during a duel. They learn quickly that the common sense answer — the enemy's sword — is dead wrong. If they are still alive, they find that it is commonly known that an opponent's eyes can telegraph his movements. However, an experienced fencer will use this bit of lore to misdirect his adversary. It is safer to watch the opponent's torso, as where it goes the rest will follow. Regardless of what he tells his younger peers, a seasoned swordsman will not focus on any one area, but watch everything (eyes, stance, torso, etc.) peripherally. Needless to say, a deadly duel takes considerable concentration.

Off-Hand Fighting

During the 15th and early 16th centuries it is quite common to use both hands in a duel, as swords are too slow to provide simultaneous offense and defense. As rapiers became lighter, off-hand weapons fell from favor.

Empty hand

Because rapiers seldom have a strong edge, duelists may parry or even grab an opponent's sword with their off hand. Mail or leather-scaled gauntlets are frequently used to protect the hand, although winning a duel at the expense of some lacerated fingers may be considered a fair trade-off.

Buckler

More common during the cut-and-thrust days, small shields are rare accoutrements in the 16th century, probably because they aren't very fashionable. Some bucklers have a central spike on them for punches. Because the buckler is lightly constructed, it is more useful for deflecting attacks than direct blocking. As a bit of trivia, the term "swashbuckler" refers to the sound these small shields made when hit.

Dagger

Almost everybody has a dagger, which serves as a standard tool, utensil and weapon. In a surprise attack, a parrying dagger may give the defender the precious seconds needed to draw a rapier. The smaller blade could be used offensively or defensively, depending on style and circumstances. Daggers ranged from 10 inches to around two feet. Unlike medieval times, when daggers were typically held "point down," dueling daggers are almost always held "point up"; that is, the blade extends from the thumb rather than from the little finger. More specialized dueling daggers included elaborate handguards, serrations to discourage grabbing, and projections to catch and break a blade.

Cloak

Like the dagger, cloaks are ubiquitous. A combatant may wrap one end of the cloak around his arm and leave the better part of the length swinging from the hand; in a pinch, the cloak can be used while still worn around the neck. Cloaks can distract, bind the opposing blade or even be thrown into the opponent's face to momentarily blind him.

Rapier

Sometimes known as Florentine fighting, wielding a *case* or *brace* of rapiers gives some deadly advantages. However, being proficient with a brace of rapiers is difficult to achieve because of the increased demands on coordination and extra attention required.

In a pinch, a swordsman can fill his off hand with just about anything, from a mug or stool to a scabbard or tree limb.

The Future of the Sword

Just as the cut-and-thrust sword is giving way to the rapier, the rapier soon evolves to a lighter, even simpler, thrusting sword. By the turn of the 18th century, rapiers are largely to be supplanted by the "small sword" or "town sword." Shorter than the rapier, the town sword has a diamond- or triangular-shaped cross-section and is capable of lightning-fast strikes; however, it has become so specialized that the weapon is really effective only

against other town swords. These blades are the precursors to the familiar sporting weapons of the 20th century. Unlike rapier duels, small-sword duels are seldom lethal. Unfortunately, the thrusting blades will lose much of their quarrel-settling importance in the face of the new weapon of choice: the pistol.

The Magickal Art of the Blade

Is fencing a magical art? A weak but sharp-witted man with a slender blade can defeat a giant wielding a greatsword — who can't say there is something magic in this? To master the rapier requires finesse, wit and control — all hallmarks of an accomplished magus. To those untutored in the way of the blade, fencing seems a small wonder, the mark of a powerful man. The mystery of the art is especially evident among Spanish schools, which teach geometry and similar occult sciences as they teach swordplay.

Conventions

Although many Daedaleans shake their heads at the gratuitous bloodshed from rampant dueling, few disapprove of fencing as an art; some hold it as a symbol of the new age of reason. Begin with a blade of fine steel, well-balanced — a marked improvement over the rude iron blades barbarians used to hew each other in the dark ages. Now, create a style of fighting which relies on wit, speed and subtle cunning over brute strength and stamina — mind over matter, science over superstition, Reason over Passion. It should be no surprise that some of the masters who develop and teach the art belong to the Order of Reason. Daedaleans who can wear a sword often do, and most have at least a basic understanding of the blade's use. Craftsmen have forged some of the finest blades available, and Artificers strive to develop the next breakthrough in sword design (although some have abandoned blades for gunpowder). Because of

The Aide of Magick

The enterprising conjurer can come up with any number of coincidental ways to use her Art to improve her survivability in a sword fight. Forces can reflect light off a blade to blind an opponent. A duelist with Mind magicks can pick her opponent's next maneuver out of his head, or put a new one into it. A grasp of Life can infuse the magus with catlike agility, or make the foe's limbs weak as a kitten's. Using the Sphere of Connection can ensure a successful parry, while Time allows a faster riposte than ever. There are many more possibilities. However, beware: Scourge can appear at the most inopportune times. Furthermore, people may grow suspicious that a bookish scholar could bring down a veteran swordsman. Also, the use of magick may alert other Awakened beings who may not be sympathetic to the character's plight.

their wealth and status, the Grand Financiers are expected to carry blades, and some are quite good fencers, much like the Celestial Masters. Obviously, the ordained members of the Order of Reason, including many of the Gabrielites, are not allowed to carry blades; the "Falcons of Gabriel" generally disdain the frail blades in favor of a warrior's broadsword or bastard sword. Likewise, the Void Seekers have little use for town swords, preferring cut-and-thrust or broadswords on their expeditions. As would be expected, the Cosians condemn dueling wholeheartedly, and are the only Convention to denounce the rapier unreservedly. And the Ksirafai wear the blade only when it fits their disguise, as they have subtler means of ending life.

Traditions

What the Order of Reason embraces, the Traditions watch with a wary eye. For many, the sword is a tool of war or a tool of magic; the casual death-dealing of duelists is profane in their eyes. Others consider the heavier edged swords to be more honest than the nimble and subtle rapier.

Nevertheless, the young noble or wealthy merchant who carries no sword may draw unwelcome attention. So for appearance's sake, if for no other, most who *should* have a blade do. Furthermore, if Tradition mages are at least familiar with the new style of fighting, they are less likely to be murdered by Daedaleans, who are quick to take advantage of the bloody fashion to lash out at their enemies. A few of the Council have become master swordsmen themselves, priding themselves at beating the Daedaleans at their own game.

As a Tradition, the Hermetics are most inclined to take up the light sword. Indeed, several Spanish covenants are known for incorporating the cut-and-thrust lessons into their apprentice training. Some young Hermetics believe fencing to be a proper form of certamen, although the idea hasn't caught on among the elders of the Tradition, who believe the certamen should be a magical contest only. Less likely to follow fashion, the Verbena see the dueling culture as a madness peculiar to "nobles" and the wealthy city fops. As such, few Pagans have the need or desire to learn the art of fencing. While Verbena lament the pointless spilling of life's blood, some secretly condone the practice for thinning the ranks of a bloated aristocracy and keeping attention away from the sacred groves. Almost universally against the practice of dueling, the Celestial Chorus, through the church, has put considerable pressure on monarchs and nobles across Europe to put a halt to dueling, with only modest success.

The traditions of other lands — the Akashics, Dream-speakers, Seers of Chronos and Ahl-i-Batin, are largely indifferent to the light sword, preferring their native weapons and styles. The exception, the Chakravanti, rail against the wholesale slaughter brought on by dueling frenzy, although more than a few have used the duel to further their

dark work. And the Solificati? Apart from a handful who see mastering the blade as another step towards perfection, these alchemists disdain light swords except in defense against highwaymen.

Health and Ill Will



Without the marvels of 20-century chemistry, healers and poisoners must rely upon nature's bounty for their supplies. The following lists scratch the surface of the possibilities; for an in-depth treatment of herbs and poisons, see "Resources" in the *Sorcerers Crusade* Appendix.

The Healer's Basket

Plants and herbs provide both food and medicine for those who know how to use them. Herbalists, midwives, surgeons and healers of all sorts familiarize themselves with the gathering and preparation of many useful plants. Such training includes precautions; a healing herb may still be dangerous unless it's properly dried, brewed or otherwise prepared. Passed down through kinship and talent, herbalism is often considered "women's lore." As most plants also have mystical associations, noted herbalists are often regarded with both esteem and suspicion.

Common *Sorcerers Crusade* healing and beneficial herbs include:

- **Agrimony (*Agrimonia eupatoria*); Cocklebur, Stickwort:** This tall plant bears delicate yellow flowers; its leaves are covered with tiny soft hairs. Known to the Greeks and Anglo-Saxons, it is a common herb treatment for eye disorders and various internal ailments. Used as a salve or solution, it speeds the healing of wounds. Common throughout Europe, agrimony grows in woods and along roadsides.
- **Bay (*Laurus nobilis*); Roman laurel:** When chewed, the glossy leaves of the bay tree act as a mild narcotic and painkiller. Used as a savory spice along the Mediterranean, bay leaves have become a much sought-after commodity in other parts of Europe. Burned or scattered, the leaves dispel evil spirits and enchantments; brewed, it heightens perceptions.
- **Catnip (*Nepeta cataria*); Catmint:** Catnip grows in dry fields and gardens, and along roadsides. When brewed, its gray leaves and tubular lilac flowers produce a pungent tea — useful for soothing sore throats and minor colds. Many healers also believe catnip relieves leprosy; that theory, however, is far from certain.
- **Chamomile (*Chamaemelum nobile*, *Matricaria recutita*):** Growing in shady, dry soil, this tall plant bears daisy-like flowers with an apple smell. Ground, dried or brewed, it soothes women's monthly pains, eases headaches, improves kidney and liver problems and repels insects. Used as a rinse,

chamomile becomes a popular hair lightener; dried, its flowers may be strewn on floors to freshen the air.

- **Comfrey (*Symphytum officinale*); Blackwort, Knitbone:** Comfrey stands two to three feet tall and has dark-green leaves, a hair-covered stem and yellow or purple bell-shaped blossoms. It is often used to staunch bleeding and to treat coughs. It also makes a gluey paste that can help knit broken bones and speed healing in general. Ingested in large doses, however, comfrey can be harmful — and sometimes fatal.

- **Elecampane (*Inula helenium*); Horseheal, Elfwort:** Growing as high as six feet tall, an elecampane plant boasts broad, bright-green leaves, a thick stem and large sunflower-like blossoms. Drinking an infusion made from elecampane roots settles the stomach and soothes lung ailments. Used as a veterinary herb, the plant effectively eases sickness in sheep and horses.

- **Fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*):** Used as a charm to repel evil spirits, fennel also serves as a popular spice because of its anise flavor. On fasting days, it eases a pious family's appetite. The plant consists of web-like leaves and yellow flowers on a tall stem. Many herbalists employ fennel as a treatment for flatulence and other gastric disorders. Unlike many herbal remedies, the entire plant can be eaten without harm.

- **Garlic (*Allium sativum*):** The pungent cloves of the garlic plant offer many remedies: As a seasoning, garlic strengthens the blood and makes food taste better; eaten raw or rendered into syrup, it soothes coughs. Herbalists and healers use garlic to ease rheumatism, intestinal problems, and to kill parasites. In Eastern Europe, the cloves ward off evil spirits and supernatural creatures, especially the undead.

- **Great Burdock (*Arctium lappa*); Cockle Buttons:** Great burdock grows as a weed in pastures, along roadsides and in open fields. Although its characteristic prickly burrs are largely useless, the rest of the plant has many medicinal uses. Healers treat leprosy with wine made from burdock leaves, whereas its roots relieve gout, fevers and diseases of the skin.

- **Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*); Scotch Heather:** This hardy evergreen shrub sports brilliant, dark-pink flowers in profusion. Infusions of heather tea act as soporifics and provide antidotes for snake and insect venom. The plant's flowers produce a rich, dark-brown honey used in some distilled beverages.

- **High Mallow (*Malva sylvestris*):** Popular since the Roman era, this common herb has heart-shaped leaves and large, pink flowers. High mallow cures nausea and other forms of gastric distress, and clears up coughs and lung disorders. Many healers consider it a potent cure-all, and witches often employ it in medicinal spells.

- **Horehound (*Marrubium vulgare*):** This plant bears white flowers upon a fleecy-looking gray stem that grows up

to three feet tall. It is a popular laxative as well as a remedy for colds and respiratory diseases. Horehound also counters snakebites and poisons. Herbalists either mix an extract of the boiled plant with honey, or brew it into a tea.

- **Marjoram (*Origanum vulgare*); Oregano:** This herb has a purple stem and reddish-purple flowers. Its minty aroma freshens the air and flavors food, while an oil extract allays toothaches. Healers use marjoram to treat sprains. Greek astrologers associate the herb with Aphrodite; thus, marjoram flowers appear in wedding garlands and love spells.

- **Milk Thistle (*Silybum marianum*); Marian Thistle:** This Mediterranean plant grows up to six feet in height. Its large, prickly leaves have white veins, while its crimson flowers display distinctive spikes. Legends claim that the Virgin's milk fell from her breasts when she nursed the infant Jesus, and that milk streaked the leaves. Herbalists and midwives, therefore, use milk thistle to promote lactation in nursing mothers. The herb also serves as an antidote to victims of death cap mushroom poisoning, and is an effective cure for liver problems.

- **Motherwort (*Leonurus cardiaca*); Lion's Heart, Throwwort:** Used by the Greeks as a sedative, motherwort also provides relief from heart disease. Midwives use it to ease the pains of childbirth, and herbal healers soothe convulsions and brain-fevers with lion's-heart tea. Motherwort grows in desolate areas, stands five feet tall and has shaggy leaves and pink or white clusters of flowers.

- **Mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*); Bunny's Ears, Jacob's Staff:** This towering plant has a thick, rounded stalk surrounded at its base by a rosette of broad leaves. Yellow flowers rise from the central spike in the plant's second year of growth. Many people believe that mullein stalks dipped in tallow can ward off witches. Herbalists burn mullein in the rooms of asthma sufferers and ease the patients' suffering with mullein tea.

- **Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*); Old Man:** This shrub-like herb has leathery leaves with green tops and silvery undersides; its flowers are pale blue. The ancient Greeks used rosemary sprigs to stimulate memory; since then, rosemary has been affiliated with memory. When burned, the herb cleanses foul smells and impure spirits; dissolved in solutions, it cures toothaches and aids digestion.

- **Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*):** The mighty rowan tree (an essential component in magickal wands and staves) provides berries and leaves for divination spells, and bark for healing draughts. A protective plant of the highest degree, rowan parts can be found in charms, dowings and countermagicks among magus and mortal alike.

- **Sage (*Salvia officinalis*):** This Mediterranean evergreen possesses elongated, furry grayish-green leaves, and violet-blue flowers. Herbal practitioners use sage leaves and

flowers to relieve menstrual pains, purify tainted places, sharpen concentration, purge a suffering patient of worms and dysentery, and divert the Evil Eye.

- **Solomon's Seal (*Polygonatum biflorum*):** Connected to the King Solomon legend, Solomon's seal grows in moist forest lands and in roadside thickets. Growing nearly three feet in height, the plant has broad, pointed leaves and pale yellow-green tubular flowers. Herbalists use Solomon's seal to stop wounds from bleeding and to treat bruises and skin rashes. It wards against evil people and spirits when burned.

- **St.-John's-Wort (*Hypericum perforatum*); Scare-devil, Amber Touch-and-heal, Goatweed:** A powerful charm against magick, St.-John's-wort serves priests in their exorcisms, witch-hunters in their inquiries (witches are often questioned with scare-devil in their mouths), and magicians in their counterspells. Herbalists use the plant to cure melancholia, infections, bruises, insect bites and other surface ailments. Found in meadows and along roadsides, St.-John's-wort stands almost three feet tall, with bright-yellow flowers growing from a woody stem.

- **Tansy (*Tanacetum vulgare*); Scented Fern:** Strewn about, this strong-smelling herb repels insects and clears the musty air of cottages and keeps. Herbalists prescribe tansy seeds as a cure for worms, while a tonic made from tansy relieves gout. Tansy poultices help heal cuts and bruises, while a sprig of the plant supposedly promotes longevity. Even so, in large doses, this plant is deadly poison. Tansy plants grow in abandoned places and by the road; standing three feet high, they feature fern-like leaves and clusters of yellow flowers.

- **Tarragon (*Artemisia dracunculus*); Dragon's Mugwort:** Native to southern Europe, tarragon has a reputation as an effective cure for the bites of poisonous animals. Herbalists also use tarragon to treat toothaches and to relieve colic. Tarragon grows in open spaces and on dry hillsides. The plant stands almost five feet tall, with narrow leaves and tiny greenish-gray flowers.

- **Vervain (*Verbena officinalis*); Verbena, Pigeon's Grass, Herb-of-the-cross:** Considered to be a cure-all for many ailments including colds, fevers, diarrhea, snakebites, skin infections and other problems, this perennial plant forms a staple of the herbalist's store. Magickally, it protects, purifies and drives away evil spirits. Used in love spells, the herb promotes chastity or pure love. Its leaves may be dried, its juices drunk, its parts bundled into charms. The Pagan Tradition made a wise choice with its name.

Vervain grows by the roadside, in pasture lands and meadows. The small, light-purple flowers of this tall plant bloom from midsummer to late fall. Vervain may be brewed, chewed or made into a poultice, depending on the type of treatment desired. Legends claim that vervain was used to

minister to Christ's wounds, explaining its association with the Cross and its powers of protection.

- **Woundwort (*Stachys palustris*):** Found in marshes and hedgerows as well as in forests, woundwort stands two to three feet tall with broad, serrated leaves and red or purple flowers. Its distinctive (and somewhat offensive) aroma belies its medicinal properties. Herbal healers place the leaves on wounds to staunch bleeding and prevent infection. Boiled, the herb eases vertigo and stomach ailments.

- **Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*); Bloodwort, Stanchgrass:** This plant possesses feathery, fern-like leaves and clusters of tiny white flowers with yellow centers. Instrumental in healing cuts, lesions and other wounds, yarrow enjoys great popularity among healers and herbalists. Chewing yarrow leaves serves as a common treatment for toothaches; brewed into tea, the herb sharpens the mind; dried and hung as a charm, it assures everlasting love.

The Apothecary's Back Room

Obviously, all poisons are deadly. Some of the plants described below make good medicines, but cause protracted, painful death in large doses. A skilled poisoner might not want to kill her target at all; a bit of henbane in a salad carries just enough clout to make a good, firm warning.

Typical Sorcerers Crusade toxins include:

- **Aqua Toffana (*Aquetta di Napoli*):** This colorless and odorless poison is very rare. Many folks consider it a favorite of the Medici family, but that rumor, like the recipe, is open to debate. Depending on whom you ask, aquetta di Napoli might be a combination of arsenic and cantharides, a special distillation of hemlock, or the tears of the Devil himself.

- **Arsenic:** A very popular tool of amateurs and professionals alike. Known for causing "gastric fever," the poison's side effects include cold, clammy and jaundiced (yellow) skin, rashes, burning throat pain, headaches, brief paralysis, vomiting, dizziness and general weakness. These symptoms begin about half a hour after ingestion. Arsenic's most popular form is a powder, easily carried in poison rings.

- **Baneberry (*Actaea alba* [white], *A. ruba* [red], *A. spicata* [black]; Snakeberry, Necklaceweed, Herb-Christopher, and Cohos:** Only the roots and berries of this plant are deadly. Large quantities of them cause nausea, vomiting, convulsions and shock, as well as occasional (and really severe) hallucinations. A common witch's tool, baneberry is unpredictable; a dose can take effect in a few hours, or in a few days.

- **Belladonna (*Atropa belladonna*); Nightshade or Banewort:** "Belladonna" is Italian for "beautiful woman"; accordingly, many ladies apply an extract of this plant to their eyes. This dilates the pupils, making the wearer seem

wide-eyed and beautiful. In small doses, belladonna is a medicine, a soothing anesthetic. All parts of this creeping vine are deadly. Symptoms include blurred vision; hot, dry, red skin; dry mouth; disorientation; hallucinations; aggression; paralysis and fever.

• **Castor Bean (*Ricinus communis*); Gourd, Palma Christi:** Only the meat from these smooth, black seeds is deadly. The seed oil is harmless, and makes a good purgative. The seeds themselves can be ground to a powder and injected, used on arrows or blades, or mixed into a cake (using linseed oil to cover the bitter taste). The symptoms of castor bean poisoning include burning sensations in the mouth; cramps; drowsiness; severe hemorrhaging throughout the body, and induced labor in pregnant women.

• **Corn Cockle (*Agrostemma githago*); Purple Cockle:** This small flower is commonly found in wheat fields. All parts of it are deadly. Cockle poisoning effects include giddiness, delirium, sharp pains in the spine, and severe headaches. The entire plant can be ground into bread; this deadly meal takes between 30 minutes to an hour to take effect.

• **Cyanide:** This white powder has a bitter almond smell, and occurs naturally in the seeds of a large number of plants, including the peach, apricot, apple, wild cherry, plum or jetberry bush. Inhaling, ingesting, or absorbing cyanide into the skin leads to rapid breathing, gasping, dizziness, headaches, nausea and fainting spells. Roasting the seeds for 30 minutes over an open fire releases the poison.

• **Daphne (*Daphne mezereum*); Spurge Olive, Dwarf Bay, Wild Pepper, and Wood Laurel:** The berries of this small purple or white flower badly burn one's lips, mouth and throat. Some say that such "delicacies" are best presented in a pie. Symptoms begin roughly 45 minutes after ingestion, and last until either the burns heal or the victim dies.

• **English Yew (*Taxus baccata*):** Everything but the fruit is deadly on this plant. The seeds are especially dangerous. English yew has many medicinal uses, being a purgative, expectorant and tonic. An overdose causes vomiting, convulsions, and stops the heart of the victim. Symptoms should develop in under an hour.

• **Ergot (*Claviceps purpurea*); Saint Anthony's Fire:** This fungal parasite is found on rye. When dried or distilled, it makes a very powerful curative, providing relief for headaches and post-partum bleeding. If used injudiciously, ergot can cause gangrene in fingers and toes and may also permanently damage one's central nervous system. A powerful hallucinogen, ergot will, in later days, be connected to the wild dreams of desert-bound prophets (like Saint Anthony, who spoke of battling hordes of demons). The effects of ergot poisoning may not be apparent for days or even weeks. Small doses, improperly distilled, can be extremely deadly.

• **Hemlock (*Conium maculatum*); Poison Parsley, Muskrat Weed:** Powdered and mixed into a drink, this plant becomes Socrates' bane. Leaves from the plant can also be made into a fatal salad. This poison gradually weakens muscle power; the victim suffers severe pain as her muscles deteriorate. Paralyzed and often blind, she'll probably remain conscious until death sets in. Water hemlock causes convulsions. An interesting variation on hemlock salad is to feed a quail hemlock seeds; the meat of the bird then becomes as deadly as the plant itself. It's truly a meal fit for a king. **Fool's Parsley (*Aethusa cynapium*)** is very similar to hemlock and makes a nice addition to your fatal salad, too.

• **Jimsonweed (*Datura stramonium*); Devil's Trumpet, Stinkweed, Mad Apple:** This fetid, white annual is commonly found alongside roadways and in pastures. It has extensive medical uses; a tincture of jimsonweed is an excellent aphrodisiac or a cure for coughs. An overdose of jimsonweed, however, causes headaches, vertigo, extreme thirst, muscle twitches, mania, delirium, drowsiness and death.

• **Lily of the Valley (*Convallaria majalis*):** Careful — all parts of this plant are deadly. In fact, a sprig of Lily of the Valley kept in a vase poisons the water in that vase. Even so, the entire plant wards against and often finds its way into headache salves. Overdose symptoms include hot flashes, irritability, headaches, hallucinations, stomach pains, excess salivation and a slow heartbeat. The poison takes effect immediately. Lily of the Valley is often mistaken for wild garlic and made into soup.

• **Mandrake (*Mandragora officinarum*); Devil's Apple, Loveapple and Mayapple:** Ripe mandrake fruit can be eaten in small quantities. The root grows three or four feet into the ground, and divides itself into man-like shapes. This root is useful as an anesthetic, purgative and expectorant, and it often winds up in love potions, magickal incantations, salves and protective charms. In Biblical times, it was used as a fertility drug. Legends say that mandrake root lets out a mind-shattering scream as it is pulled from the ground; for this reason, herbalists use dogs to do the actual harvesting. The unripe fruit, stems, roots, flowers and leaves can all be deadly.

• **Meadow Saffron (*Colchicum autumnale*); Fall Crocus or Naked Ladies:** Medicinal uses of saffron include cures for rheumatism and arthritis. Even a minor overdose will cause intense thirst, pain and death. Goats fed with this plant give toxic milk. The actual poison, colchicine, is chemically similar to arsenic.

• **Poison Mushrooms (*Cort, Death Cap, Galerinas, Inocybes, Panther Mushroom, etc.*):** Common enough in the open fields, these deadly growths lend themselves to chopping, drying, powdering or stewing. Some, like cort, are extraordinarily deadly, while others, like inocybes, can



cause pain without killing the victim. Mushroom poisoning often takes hours or days to affect the victim; by then, it's usually too late to do anything about it.

- **Oleander (*Nerium oleander*); Jericho Rose:** Fittingly enough, this ornamental flower is used in Italy as a funeral plant. It grows almost anywhere, and all parts of the plant can be harvested for their poisonous potential. An oleander branch makes a deadly spit for a shish kebab. Results are immediate.

- **Rhododendron (*Rhododendron ponticum*); Azalea Plant.** This plant is beautiful but deadly. Unique symptoms include drooling, seizures and paralysis. The poison takes effect within six hours of ingestion. All parts of the plant are poisonous; honey from bees that feed on azalea bushes is deadly, too, making this poison an easy addition to someone's nightly cup of mead.

- **Rhubarb (*Rheum rhabonticum*):** The roots of the rhubarb plant make valuable medicine and can be used to cure constipation or diarrhea (depending on the dose), or used against worms and dysentery. The leaves of the plant, however, are extremely poisonous and stop one's heart a few hours after ingestion.

- **Star-of-Bethlehem (*Ornithogalum umbellatum*); Summer Snowflake, Dove's Dung, Nap at Noon:** Ingestion of star-of-Bethlehem causes shortness of breath and respiratory distress. The poison isn't always fatal, however. The flower's bulbs can be ground and mixed into flour for bread, but that bread will have a bitter aftertaste. Some poisoners get around this problem by sweetening the bread with honey.

- **Strychnine:** Strychnine occurs naturally in many fruits and seeds, and it can be distilled easily into a tea or broth. The nerve poison's effects start with the neck and face, which suddenly stiffen; the arms and legs then begin to spasm. The slightest sound or movement produces more spasms, and these get worse over a period of hours until the victim dies.

- **Venom (Miscellaneous):** Various toads, frogs, salamanders and newts secrete venom from glands under their skins to deter predators. These skins are used in various rituals, and can provide a source of deadly poison when dried, boiled or powdered. Snakes (like the asp, puff adder and cobra) use deadlier stuff. An assassin "milks" a captured snake, then distills the venom down to its most toxic elements. Most forms of venom cause

shortness of breath, swelling (sometimes to grotesque levels), spasms and suffocation.

Luminaries of the Renaissance

What the poets once sang of the four ages, lead, iron, silver, and gold, our Plato in the Republic transferred to the four talents of men, assigning to some talents a certain leaden quality implanted in them by nature, to others iron, to others silver, and to still others gold. If then we are to call any age golden, it is beyond doubt that age which brings forth golden talents in different places.

Marsilio Ficino, "The Golden Age in Florence"

The Renaissance is a time of both renewal and retrospection. Scholars unearth ancient philosophies and practices, infusing them with new life, while innovators make amazing new discoveries and suggest radically different ways of thinking. Artists, architects, philosophers, religious thinkers, political leaders, definers of new social practices, explorers, musicians, magi and inventors give of their talents to bring about a true rebirth. Built upon their wondrous works, Europe assumes a premiere position on the world stage.

Dozens of innovators over a period of more than a century help shape and define the age, sometimes in sync with the times, but often at odds with prevailing thought or religious beliefs. Some are hailed as geniuses during their lifetimes while others become martyrs. Those profiled below range from the famous to the obscure, but all have an effect or influence on those who follow in their footsteps. In some cases, their lives may suggest interesting scenes or stories that Storytellers may wish to integrate into chronicles.

To better provide the opportunity for Storytellers to utilize them in **Sorcerers Crusade** stories or to feature them in the background to enrich and flesh out a chronicle, the people whose works define the Renaissance are arranged according to the general time in which they live and under the type of work for which they are known. If **Mage: The Sorcerers Crusade** is a game about ideas and the promotion of beliefs, these thinkers and originators are the people who shape the world of the players' characters. Their travels, discoveries and new perspectives provide the fuel that fires the imagination of an age and radically change the way magic is perceived by magi and sleepers alike.

Individuals mentioned present a smorgasbord intended to help Storytellers people their chronicles with interesting characters while also providing a little information on the proper placement (by time) of the arts, sciences, political

powers, religious beliefs and learning of this era. Those interested in fleshing out the bare bones presented here should consult histories of the Renaissance and biographies of the leading minds of the age. As space precludes a thorough treatise on every influential or important figure, most of those presented have some specific relevance to **Sorcerers Crusade** chronicles.

Renaissance Families

Several influential families come to power during the 15th century. Their actions, alliances and patronage of artists and thinkers set the tone for the age and provide many magi with protection, space to work, funds and respectability. Further, their interactions, political maneuvering, wars and conquests create a backdrop of instability against which stand the glorious arts and inventions of the age. A few of those families (and their famous — and infamous — members) are detailed here.

The Borgia Family

This Spanish noble family boasts two popes, a ruthless soldier who serves as the model for Machiavelli's *The Prince* and the beautiful Lucrezia, whose reputation for debauchery is exceeded only by her beauty. The family's ascent in the realm of politics begins when Cardinal Alfonso de Borja of Catalonia attains the papal throne in 1455. Alfonso takes the name Calixtus III and brings several members of his family, including his nephew Rodrigo, to Rome. Pope Calixtus' reign sees the annulment of Joan of Arc's trial. Calixtus III dies in 1458.

Other members of the family prove more significant to the times than Calixtus. They weave a legend that makes the Borgia name synonymous with lewdness and excess. Many members of the Borgia family are accused of all manner of corruption, including the poisoning of rivals. This taint to the family name is partially expiated by Rodrigo Borgia's great-grandson Francesco (descended from his son Juan I, Duke of Gandia), who becomes General of the Jesuits in the 16th century and who, in 1671, is canonized as St. Francis Borgia.

Rodrigo Borgia (Pope Alexander VI)

Born in 1431 in Spain, Rodrigo accompanies his uncle, the newly elected Pope Calixtus, to Rome. Appointed a cardinal by his uncle and using his ties to the papacy, Rodrigo builds a career for himself within the Church. Much of his popularity results from the gifts and riches he lavishes on the other cardinals. He himself becomes the richest cardinal in the church. In 1492, Rodrigo Borgia's blatant play for power pays off, and he is elected pope. Taking the name Alexander VI, Rodrigo uses his papal authority to increase his temporal power and provide riches for his daughter Lucrezia and his sons Juan and Cesare (all of whom are born of Rodrigo's

APPENDIX: THE CUP AND THE BLADE

mistress Vannozza de Catanei before Rodrigo becomes pope, but well after he becomes a cardinal).

The Borgia pope's reputation for greed and corruption is well earned. In 1493, Pope Alexander issues the bull *inter cetera divina*, which divides the New World between Spain and Portugal and appoints his son Cesare a cardinal. He is rumored — along with both his sons — to frequent the bed of his daughter Lucrezia. He hosts wild parties followed by extended orgies in the Vatican and indulges in “living art,” naked, gilded youths and maidens posed erotically like statues for the titillation of his guests. Aside from these tasteless displays, Pope Alexander lavishes his patronage on selected great artists. He favors Raphael and Michelangelo as well as several lesser lights. The pope also shows his appreciation to Giulia Farnese, his young mistress. Alexander's extravagant gifts to Giulia become the foundation for the Farnese family's wealth, while his intervention allows Giulia's brother Alessandro to become a cardinal. Though he epitomizes the humanist patron of artists and architects, Alexander issues a papal bull ordering the burning of books that contain material questioning the authority of the Church. Such a move is not intended to end suspect or heretical notions, but to curb challenges to his own power. Despite his corrupt rule, Alexander VI is noted for his strong leadership and attempts to recover lost papal lands and authority. He dies in 1503.

Cesare Borgia

One of the most feared and hated tyrants of the time, Cesare Borgia is born in 1475.

Handsome, blond, tall and strong, he develops a reputation as a fearless and talented tactician and soldier. Though most of the Italian states know him as a ruthless killer, he displays a far different social personality. Clever and usually cheerful, he demonstrates a keen intelligence. His dapper demeanor and eloquent oratorical gifts allow him to master the convoluted politics of the day. Though he makes no pretense at scholarship, his aesthetic taste makes him a fine judge of art, sculpture and architecture. When another cardinal refuses to buy a cupid because it is not an antique, but the work of an unknown Florentine named Michelangelo, Cesare pays the young artist well for it. Both he and his father become patrons of the immensely talented artist.

By 1492, Cesare attains the position of archbishop of Valencia; a year later, at the age of 18, he becomes a cardinal. By this time, the Papal States have fallen into the hands of Italian nobles who refuse to surrender lands they acquired under former, weaker popes. Pope Alexander assigns Cesare to reacquire lands for the papacy and bring these territories under the central authority of the Church. Cesare performs the task with speed and ruthlessness, using church monies to finance these campaigns; in addition, Pope Alexander appropri-

ates fortunes left by cardinals and other ranking churchmen to pay for Cesare's victories. Rumors circulate that Alexander (or more often Cesare) resorts to poisoning such ecclesiastics to acquire their money.

Enriching himself by looting his conquered territories of much of their wealth and art, Cesare makes and breaks alliances according to the rule of expediency. In 1497, rumors connect Cesare with the savage death of his brother Juan, reputed to have had an affair with their sister Lucrezia. In the same year, Cesare travels as a papal legate to Naples, where he helps crown the new king. Upon his return, he renounces his cardinalcy. Some say this is forced by the admission by Pope Alexander that Cesare is his own bastard son (in actuality, Cesare had never become a priest, either), but Cesare has tired of the restraints placed upon him by the office. He wants temporal power. Despite his loss of standing within the Church, Cesare receives an appointment from Pope Alexander as a general of the Church. Alexander also arranges a marriage between Cesare and the sister of the King of Navarre.

Cesare's first campaign ends when his foreign troops mutiny over lack of pay. During his second campaign, several cities, tired of their whimsical rulers, welcome Cesare as a liberator. Faenza, however, holds out against his siege all winter, finally surrendering when Cesare promises leniency. The city's ruler and his brother join Cesare's retinue and travel with him to Rome. Once in Rome, Cesare reneges on his promises and imprisons his erstwhile guests. Their bodies turn up in the Tiber River a year later.

Considered the “prince” of Rome due to his work in restoring the Papal States, Cesare earns the enmity of the rulers of Florence and Venice, who fear the existence of a strong papal territory. Both cities attempt to reclaim the lands won for the Church by Cesare; both cities fail. Capturing enemies who conspire against him, Cesare has them executed, thus solidifying the integrity of the papal lands. At age 28, many acknowledge Cesare Borgia as the most powerful man in Italy.

Ever mindful of his public image, Cesare introduces the sport of bullfighting to Rome, engaging in a formal contest to demonstrate his strength and courage.

In 1502, Cesare begins his third campaign in Romagna and hires Leonardo da Vinci as his military engineer. His military advances in the name of the Papal States continue as he claims the city-state of Urbino as a fief of the church after loudly protesting his friendship for its duke and duchess. The former rulers (and Cesare's one-time allies) flee to Mantua, which expels them out of fear for reprisals from Cesare's armies. Finally, Venice offers sanctuary to the exiled rulers of Urbino, in defiance of Cesare's threats, and survives.

A few months later, both Cesare and Pope Alexander contract a malarial fever. Though the pope dies, Cesare

recovers; his finances, however, collapse in the wake of Alexander's passing, since the new pope, Pius III, no longer supports him.

During Cesare's illness, many of his old enemies retake key fortresses and cities. Pius III's successor, Pope Julius II refuses to allow Cesare to command a papal army, instead appointing one of Cesare's enemies. Cesare flees to Naples, but Ferdinand of Spain has him arrested and imprisoned for two years. Lucrezia tries to have him freed, but fails. Prompted by his wife, the King of Navarre helps Cesare escape. To repay the king, Cesare leads part of his army against a rebellious count at Viana. During the fight, Cesare's armies are routed. Cesare stands his ground and fights until overcome by the sheer numbers of his enemies. He dies at age 31.

Lucrezia Borgia

Born in 1480, Lucrezia Borgia, the illegitimate daughter of Pope Alexander VI, enjoys a reputation as one of the great beauties of Renaissance Italy as well as one of the era's most intelligent and educated women. She speaks several languages fluently, reads Greek and Latin, possesses an uncanny knowledge of style, etiquette and manners, and she excels as a poet. She has a sweet, innocent face and golden blonde hair that reaches to her feet. Mindful of his daughter's political usefulness, Pope Alexander arranges a marriage for the 13-year-old Lucrezia to Giovanni Sforza, a member of the illustrious Sforza family of Milan. When the expediency of that marriage ends, Alexander orchestrates the annulment of the union on the grounds of Giovanni's impotence. A few months after the dissolution of her marriage, Lucrezia bears a child — reputedly sired by her own father, although rumors also implicate both her brothers, Juan and Cesare. That Lucrezia enjoys illicit relations with her father and brothers only contributes to her growing reputation as a wanton siren.

Later the same year, she marries Alfonso of Naples. In 1500, Cesare Borgia murders Alfonso, leaving Lucrezia free to remarry. Her critics, including political rivals of her brother Cesare, accuse Lucrezia of poisoning her husband to rid herself of an inadventurous marriage. In 1503, she marries Alfonso I, Duke of Ferrara, and spends her mature years presiding over the cultured court of the Este family in Ferrara. Their son, Ercole II, succeeds his father as Duke of Ferrara. In her later years, Lucrezia retires to northern Italy, where she reportedly lives a pious life with her son, Giovanni, the incestuous result of her relations with her father. After spending her early years as a pawn to her family's ambitions, Lucrezia settles into an exemplary marriage with Duke Alfonso, bearing him several children. Lucrezia dies from complications following childbirth at the age of 39. During her life, however, she is notorious throughout Italy and most of Europe.



The Farnese family

Though the Farnese are a noble family, their fortunes truly begin with the favor shown Giulia Farnese, mistress of Pope Alexander VI. Alexander makes Giulia's brother Alessandro a cardinal, opening the way for him to later become Pope Paul III. Paul arranges for his son Pierluigi to become Duke of Parma, and Pierluigi's son Ottavio marries into Charles V's family.

Pope Paul III (1468-1549)

Born Alessandro Farnese, this learned humanist becomes pope in 1534. As pope, he begins religious reform, instigating the Council of Trent in 1535. Paul III encourages new religious orders and grants approval to the Jesuits. Under his patronage, artists also flourish; he commissions Michelangelo to create his magnificent fresco *The Last Judgment* in the Sistine Chapel. His tenure as pope provides stability and ushers in the consolidation of papal authority and the growth of Rome.

The Este family

Rulers of Ferrara since the early 15th century, three brothers, Leonello, Borso and Ercole I consolidate the family's power in Ferrara, with Ercole marrying Eleanora of Aragon. Their daughters, Isabella and Beatrice, are both maven of culture and learning. Isabella marries Gianfrancesco Gonzaga of the ruling family of Mantua. Though Gianfrancesco is noted for his military prowess, Isabella's accomplishments are what turn the Mantuan court into one of the most gracious and brilliant in Italy. Beatrice marries Lodovico Sforza (also called Il Moro), ruler of Milan. Alfonso, Ercole's son, marries Lucrezia Borgia and succeeds his father as Duke of Ferrara.

The Sforza family

The Sforza family originally serves as condottieres to the Visconti dukes of Milan. In time, after marrying the duke's daughter, Francesco Sforza takes over the dukedom. His achievements as ruler of Milan are celebrated in epics concerning his military triumphs and his skill in rulership. His son Lodovico marries Beatrice Este. They both have scholarly and artistic interests, becoming patrons of Leonardo da Vinci. The beginning of the end of Sforza family power occurs when Lodovico encourages Charles VIII's invasion of Italy. Eventually defeated by Charles' successor, Louis XII, Lodovico dies in a French prison, thus breaking the Sforza's power in Milan.

The Hapsburg family

The Hapsburgs found a dynasty that lasts the longest and takes in the most territory of any royal family in Europe. Their possessions in Austria lead to the election of a Hapsburg as Holy Roman Emperor in the 13th century. This position

becomes almost hereditary, with Frederick III, Maximilian I, Charles V, Ferdinand I, Maximilian II and Rudolf II holding that title in succession. During the Renaissance, the family increases its holdings and influence through advantageous marriages: Maximilian I marries Maria, the heiress to Burgundy and Flanders, and their son Philip I marries the daughter of Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain. Maximilian is known both for his wars against the French and his friendships with noted artists and scholars of the time.

Charles V

King of Spain from 1516 until 1556 and Holy Roman Emperor from 1519, Charles becomes heir to the Netherlands and to Spain as well as being emperor and ruler of Germany, Austria, Naples and portions of Spanish America. Charles' reign is noted for his devotion to humanist scholarship as well as his staunch Catholicism. His love of scholarly pursuits echoes his patronage of the arts, particularly Titian's portraits. When Charles abdicates in 1556, he gives Germany and Austria to his brother Ferdinand I, who then becomes emperor, and cedes Spain to his son Philip, dividing the Hapsburg dynasty. Charles himself retires to a monastery in Spain, where he lives out his remaining years.



The Medici family

Though they have no actual authority and hold no titles until 1537, when Florence becomes a duchy, this family of merchants and bankers spreads its influence and domination throughout Florence. Under Medici leadership, particularly that of Lorenzo the Magnificent, Florence achieves renown as the premier center of humanism. Lorenzo promotes the study of the classics, the translation and editing of Greek and Latin texts and the search for Roman antiquities. His patronage of painters and architects encourages the growth of Florence, and his embracing of both

scholarship and the arts makes the city the leading light of the Renaissance. Lorenzo's son Giovanni becomes Pope Leo X and his nephew Giulio becomes Pope Clement VII. Cosimo, descended from Lorenzo the Magnificent's uncle (also named Lorenzo), becomes Duke of Florence and later Grand Duke of Tuscany, while Lorenzo's great granddaughter Catherine marries Henri II of France. The true significance of the Medici lies not in their political aspirations, however, but in their inspired leadership in the arts and sciences that defines the Renaissance and makes Florence the greatest city of the 15th century.

Catherine de' Medici

Born in 1519 and orphaned three years later, Catherine de' Medici spends her formative years in the tutelage of her Aunt Clarice, a formidable woman in her own right. Political intrigues cause young Catherine's delivery as a hostage to Florence, where she spends several years locked away in a convent. Rescued by her kinsman, Pope Clement VII, and brought to Rome, Catherine joins the ranks of eligible noblewomen who serve as marriageable pawns in the convoluted politics of alliances and treaties. Married to Henri of Valois, son of Francis I of France, Catherine hones her survival skills in a hostile land. In 1544, Catherine gives birth to a son — the first of ten children — and thus secures a position of relative stability in the French court. When her husband ascends to the French throne, Catherine quickly proves her value as an advisor. In addition, Catherine cultivates the friendships of Diane de Poitiers, her husband's mistress, and Marguerite of Navarre, the king's aunt and one of the most intelligent and enlightened women in France.

Catherine rules France as regent during her husband's military forays into Italy and gains a reputation as a tireless and enthusiastic administrator. Her knowledge of Italian politics makes her an expert in foreign affairs.

Henry's accidental death in 1559 brings Francis II to the throne of France, a position the sickly youth holds for only a year before his own demise. Despite her deep grief at the deaths of her husband and son, Catherine acts as *de facto* ruler of France even though she does not sit on the throne. She manages to hold the country together through civil war and religious upheaval, despite her position as a foreigner and a woman. Although three of her sons sit ascend to the throne of France, Catherine continues to exert her influence and her ideas, promoting the idea of compromise and toleration despite bitter religious wars. She dies, of pneumonia, in 1589.

The Fugger family

One of the most influential families in Europe due to their financial and mercantile interests, the Fuggers begin as a house of weavers from Augsburg, Germany, who soon expand into mining and moneylending. Eventually, they have holdings throughout most of Europe.

The Fuggers lend money to most of the royal houses (including Henry VIII of England) as well as several popes. In addition, they finance ventures such as Magellan's expedition and other enterprises in the New World. Among those who owe much to this investment family is the scholar Erasmus, who receives financial support from the Fuggers. Jakob Fugger, the patriarch of the family, establishes the family's respectability among the nobility through his efforts in support of the emperor Maximilian I, who rewards Jakob by knighting him.

The Tudor family

The death of Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth Field in 1485 ends the line of the House of York and ushers in a dynasty of Tudor rulers whose reigns bring sweeping changes to England. Henry VII labors to increase the English treasury and secure a claim to the riches of the new lands under exploration and exploitation. In addition, Henry VII creates alliances with Spain and Scotland through the marriages of his son Arthur to Catherine of Aragon and his daughter Margaret to Scotland's James IV. During the course of the next century, England moves, under Tudor guidance, into serious contention among the other countries of Europe by gaining an empire, fashioning a new church and embracing the cultural renaissance that had already blossomed in Italy.

Henry VIII (1491-1547)

As the second son of English monarch Henry VII, Henry spends his youth studying for the priesthood. The death of his brother Arthur, heir to the throne, in 1501, brings Henry into the direct line of succession. Upon his father's death in 1509, Henry VIII ascends the throne at the age of 18. In order to preserve the alliance between Spain



APPENDIX: THE CUP AND THE BLADE

and England forged by the wedding of the late Prince Arthur and Catherine of Aragon, Henry marries Catherine.

In the first years of his reign, Henry wins the hearts of his people and the approval of the Church. Tall, robust and comely, the young King Henry excels in riding, music and, above all, charm. His efforts to stamp out the heresies propounded in England by followers of Luther and Tyndale earn him the papal-granted title "Defender of the Faith."

After 18 years of marriage during which Catherine bears only one surviving child, a daughter, Henry seeks to have his marriage annulled in order to wed his mistress, Anne Boleyn. Catherine's uncle, Emperor Charles V, opposes the annulment and exerts his influence on Pope Clement VII to refuse to dissolve the marriage.

Rather than see his wishes thwarted, Henry VIII defies the Church and the pope. He severs ties with the Papal See in Rome and creates his own *Ecclesia Anglicana* (or Church of England) with himself as supreme authority. The repercussions of this bold and unprecedented action resound throughout the Christian world, weakening the Church's base of support by removing one of its most staunch defenders.

Henry's ambitions cause the downfall of all who stand in his way, including the distinguished statesman-scholar, Sir Thomas More, who succeeded Cardinal Wolsey as Henry's high chancellor. As diligently as he once sought to wipe out Protestant heresies, Henry seeks to stamp out all who disapprove of his defection from Rome. He requires oaths of loyalty to him as head of the English Church.

When Anne Boleyn fails to produce a son, giving birth instead to Elizabeth, Henry accuses her of adultery and treason. Found guilty, Anne Boleyn is beheaded, leaving Henry free to remarry. His third marriage, to Jane Seymour, produces the long-awaited son, a sickly child named Edward. Jane does not survive childbirth, however, and Henry goes on to marry three more times.

Upon his death, in 1547, his son becomes Edward VI. Unfortunately, Edward's ill health continues and he dies, from consumption, in 1553.

Mary Tudor (1516-1558)

Mary Tudor's five-year reign as queen does not give her enough time to accomplish her dearest ambitions, the reversal of her father's secession from the Church and the restoration of Catholicism as the state religion of England. One of her first actions as queen, however, does settle an old grievance with the man who orchestrated the divorce and humiliation of her mother, Catherine of Aragon. Along with many other notable Protestant clergy, Thomas Cranmer, who approved Henry VIII's marriage to Anne Boleyn, goes to the stake.

In an effort to produce an heir and to ally herself with a staunch Catholic power, Mary marries Philip II of Spain.



Unfortunately, this alliance proves less than happy. Philip despises England and spends much of his time in continental Europe. Mary dies childless in 1558, leaving behind only her half-sister, Elizabeth, to inherit the throne.

Elizabeth I (1533-1603) Queen of England 1558

Declared a bastard after the execution of her mother, the daughter of Anne Boleyn spends her early years living on the sufferance of others. Mary Tudor's childless state places Elizabeth in line for the throne, despite the fact that Mary resents the daughter of the woman who displaced her own mother, Catherine of Aragon. After Mary's death, Elizabeth ascends the throne with the support of many who believe that she can heal the wounds caused by the actions of both her father and her half-sister.

Despite attempts by luminaries such as Spain's Philip II to encourage her to continue Mary's work of returning England to the Church, Elizabeth assumes her place as head of the English Church and solidifies the work begun by Henry VIII. While she does not display the fanaticism of Mary or the intolerance for opposition of Henry, Elizabeth firmly establishes both her temporal and spiritual authority.

During Elizabeth's reign, England experiences a cultural and economic prosperity that transforms the country into one of the most formidable powers of Europe. The defeat of the Spanish Armada and the successes by English privateers such as Sir Francis Drake against Spanish ships proclaim England's naval might. Elizabeth's patronage of the emerging British theater, with such playwrights as William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe, brings about a flowering of arts and letters to a land once considered barbaric by "civilized" Europeans. The sciences, too, flourish under Elizabeth, who entertains all manner of great



minds in her court. Alchemists, philosophers and metaphysicians all find the atmosphere of Elizabethan England conducive to their work.

Although she never marries, Elizabeth nevertheless leaves behind a lasting legacy — not in children, but in a golden age that endures in the minds of future generations.

Architects, Engineers and Inventors

Visions of awesome building styles and heretofore unimagined feats of engineering prompt Europe's builders to design new tools and embrace new perspectives. Melding rediscovered classical knowledge with original theories, they open minds to new possibilities and make the unbelievable a reality. Their achievements mirror those of magi, who utilize a whole new mindset and language to envision and create their magick.

Silippo Brunelleschi (1377-1446)

Originally, this influential Italian architect trained as a sculptor and goldsmith. Combining an artist's eye with his keen interest in mathematics, Brunelleschi developed single-point perspective, the key to Renaissance art's realistic depiction of both the human figure and the illusion of depth. This innovation also allowed craftsmen and engineers to draft accurate plans for devices and buildings, thus allowing the construction of objects never before imagined possible. He is most celebrated for his architectural skill, particularly for solving the apparently insoluble construction difficulties to construct the Florentine Cathedral dome. His works

display classical lines, visual harmony with their environment, exacting proportion and decorative restraint. He influences every successive generation of engineers, artists and architects and is revered by every craftsman of the time.

Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519)

Unlike typical humanists, da Vinci is not a scholar. He has no interest in classical literature and thought, preferring invention and practical application to philosophy. He excels as a writer, scientist, engineer and artist. Trained in Florence, he indulges in meticulous preparation for his artwork, which results in soft contours that become the hallmark of the Milanese School. While working for the Sforza family of Milan, he paints the *Last Supper*, which becomes a highly influential masterpiece. Returning to Florence after the French invade Milan, he paints the *Mona Lisa*. Soon thereafter he tires of painting and turns his full attention to scientific experimentation. Dissecting bodies, he makes detailed drawings and observations, contributing greatly to the study of anatomy. His other interests include botany, the movement of water and control of rivers, flying machines and war machines. In 1502, Cesare Borgia employs da Vinci as a military engineer to draw topographical maps, bridge streams, build fortresses and create new engines of war. His legacy lies in his numerous notebooks holding his detailed observations.

Some suspect da Vinci of true enlightenment — of carrying the torch of an awakened Daemon, of being a magus. Certainly, his bizarre inventions and incredibly advanced theories seem the work of a mind of pure Reason. Still, few of his most intriguing inventions are actually built; his devices and paintings could be as much inspired of whimsy and dream as of rational construction. In truth,



none can fathom the workings of his incredible mind. Though the Order of Reason claims him as one of their own, he seems to be an independent dreamer, unfettered by any consideration for a greater scheme or a battle against mysticism. Rather, his works are the purest form of invention, science for the sake of wonder.

Bernardo Buontalenti (1536-1608)

Working almost exclusively for the Grand Duke of Florence, Buontalenti is an engineer, designer and architect. His constructions include not only palatial buildings and facades, but also elaborate fireworks displays, water spectacles and moving scenery for court galas. Best known of his designs is the villa he builds for Francesco I, which incorporates amazing water effects and fountains run by hydraulics as part of its gardens. Buontalenti's designs embody the style that succeeds classically influenced Renaissance art and architecture. Composed of elements that deliberately abandon balance, rationality and harmony, his style consists of bizarre — even insane — juxtapositions, weird scales and irrational features: Upside down arched windows proliferate and columns taper from top to bottom, resulting in heavy, broad pillars spiraling down to slender points set on small bases. This deliberate breaking of all the rules and embracing of the strange and disturbing creates an atmosphere conducive to the shattering of old paradigms and the creation of new ones.

Explorers and Innovators

Just as scholars and crafters seek to increase knowledge and explore new possibilities, Europe's navigators and astronomers expand the world's horizons through their travels and observations.

Cristobal Colon (Christopher Columbus) (1451-1506)

As early as the 1470s, this Italian navigator studies every source on geography and observes the phenomenon of a rounded horizon. He reaches the belief that the earth is not flat, as most Europeans of the time think, but a sphere. Although a few others also believe the earth to be round, Colon sees a practical application for this knowledge. Because the normal land routes to the Indies have become difficult due to predation and warfare, Colon hopes to find a new passage to these rich trading ports by sailing westward. Unable to find patrons to finance an expedition, he has to wait until 1492. Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain, having finally driven the Moors from their land, provide Colon with three ships in the hope that his belief is correct. In all, Colon makes four voyages, discovering the West



Indies and exploring sections of coastal South America. Although he himself never realizes he has not found the Indies, his courageous voyage leads to an unknown continent that becomes the New World. With Colon's discovery, European mages can cross the ocean and interact with the native shamans more easily than was possible before.

Ferdinand Magellan (1480-1521)

Spending his early career in Portugal's service in the East Indies, Magellan hopes to achieve what Columbus (see Cristobal Colon above) could not — find the western passage to the Indies. He takes service with Charles I of



Spain and sets out in 1519. Magellan crosses the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, passing by the straits that will bear his name, leading the expedition in search of such a passage. He is killed in a fight with the natives of the Philippines, however. His expedition finishes the journey, returning to Spain as the first circumnavigators of the globe and proving conclusively that the world is indeed round.



Francis Drake (1545-96)

Highly esteemed by his countrymen and queen, Francis Drake, an English navigator and privateer, leads an expedition through the Straits of Magellan in 1577 to attack Spanish possessions and ships on the western coast of the Americas. Reaching California, he harries the Spanish, then returns to England by crossing the Pacific Ocean, becoming the first Englishman to circumnavigate the globe. Drake brings back Spanish treasure worth 800,000 pounds and is knighted aboard his ship, the *Golden Hind*, by Queen Elizabeth I for his efforts. He acquires more fame for his heroic part in defeating the Spanish Armada in 1588 and is made an admiral.

Tycho Brahe (1546-1601)

This Danish astronomer spends decades observing the heavens and calculating the exact position of the planets. Initially, he enjoys the patronage of King Frederick II of Denmark, but late in life, he joins Rudolf II's court in Prague. He leaves his notes and the legacy of his knowledge to his assistant, Johannes Kepler, who calculates the elliptical orbit of the planets and opens the way to Newton's laws of planetary motion. He also leaves behind stories of his unusual exploits, not the least of which is his golden nose and his uncommon demise (supposedly from an exploding bladder after drinking too much at a feast).

Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543)

Educated at both Italian and Polish universities, this Polish astronomer becomes canon of the Frauenburg Cathedral. Continuing his astronomical studies, Copernicus reaches an unbelievable conclusion by 1514 — the planets (including earth) revolve around the sun. This theory flatly contradicts that accepted and taught by the Church, which assumes that the earth (and man) rest at the center of the universe. He circulates his belief as a means to simplify the mathematics of astronomy, not as a challenge to the Church. Nonetheless, his hypothesis (officially published in 1543) changes forever how mankind perceives its self and the universe. Along with Luther's 95 Theses, this changing perception spells the beginning of Europe's emancipation from rule by Church doctrine.

Artists and Sculptors

Wars may be won by soldiers, but it takes the artist both to see the world differently and to share that vision with the rest of the world. Artists' perceptions become the view most people accept, shaping reality to the images they create.

Donatello (Donato di Niccolò Bardi) (1386-1466)

One of the most influential Italian sculptors of the age, Donatello (along with Brunelleschi and Massaccio) is a key figure in the developing Renaissance style. Working in marble, bronze, wood and stone, he develops a style that incorporates radical innovations based on linear perspective. Before Donatello and Brunelleschi, few sculptures or other works of art or architecture depict depth or a realistic human form. Creating both monumental free-standing figures and relief forms, he impresses the Florentines with his lyricism, while achieving fame for his complex arrangements and the illusions of depth he achieves even in shallow carvings.

Domenico Ghirlandaio (1449-94)

An Italian painter, Ghirlandaio specializes in frescoes. He decorates the chapels of many rich Florentine merchants and adds his particular genius to the Sistine Chapel in Rome. Most of his paintings represent his patrons' families, frequently as spectators at religious events (reproductions of his work may prove useful for Storytellers who want a clear documentation of the dress and buildings of Florence during this time). Ghirlandaio is much in demand; he runs a studio where Michelangelo is an apprentice, thus helping to train one of the premiere artists of the Renaissance.

Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475 -1564)

One of the best known and most revered artists of the time, Michelangelo apprentices as a painter at Ghirlandaio's workshop and learns the art of sculpting in the Medici Garden. His talents as painter, architect and sculptor blossom into works of unequalled power and intensity. More than any other figure of the time, Michelangelo helps promote the idea of artist as exceptional being, someone whose unique vision of the world should be allowed to find its ultimate expression regardless of opposition from the Church or temporal powers. He creates the *Pieta* at age 20, and begins the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in 1508. He redesigns St. Peter's Basilica, achieving a triumph with his design for the dome. Although his career in the visual arts spans some 70 years, he also writes sonnets and maintains great interest in religion and philosophy. A seminal figure of the Renaissance, he greatly inspires future generations.



Graf, Urs (1485-1527)

This Swiss goldsmith, engraver and draftsman creates engravings and woodcuts in the popular style, but depicts commoners and low subjects rather than the nobility and elevated themes. Repeatedly in conflict with the authorities in Basel for his public brawling, Graf frequently leaves his home to fight in France and Italy as a mercenary soldier. From these experiences, he garners his images: dark depictions of battle and death, down to earth portraits of soldiers and satirical visualizations of courtesans and the follies of love. He creates many of his woodcuts as book illustrations, leaving a legacy of non-religious and low-style art to future generations.

Sofonisba Anguissola (1532-1625)

Daughter of a noble family from Cremona, Sofonisba studies painting with a local artist æ an unheard of indulgence from her father. In 1554, she travels to Rome to sketch the city's antiquities and meets Michelangelo. She creates self-portraits and likenesses of her family while accepting important commissions from eminent nobles like the Duke of Alba. Invited to the court of Philip II of Spain in 1559, she produces several royal portraits and teaches the queen to paint. One of the first women painters to find fame, Anguissola serves as an example of what women of talent and determination may achieve.



Hieronymus Bosch (1450-1516)

This artist from the Netherlands confines himself to religious paintings in his early career. He is most noted for his phantasmagoric works depicting demonic creatures and human depravity in weird, disturbing landscapes like something out of nightmare. Most famous among these is his *Garden of Earthly Delights*, the details of which defy rational interpretation. Whether intended as allegory or not, his works find great popularity and attract the attention of imminent collectors, including Philip II of Spain. Certain circles whisper, however, that his inspiration comes not from imagination but attendance at infernal or Nephandic rites.



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Scholars, Writers and Composers

Just as their counterparts in the visual arts break new ground and teach the world to see in a different fashion than before, scholars open minds to new possibilities through a study of the old, disseminating classical arts and philosophies, transforming them with new modes of thought and making that knowledge potentially available to anyone who can read. In like manner, musicians and composers break through accepted musical practices, creating polyphonic compositions as gloriously resonant as the era's paintings.

Manuel Chrysoloras (1353-1415)

Sent by the Byzantine Emperor to seek aid against the Ottoman Turks, this Greek scholar remains in Italy. He ardently promotes the study of Greek literature, teaches in Florence and translates the works of Homer and Plato. His other passion is religion, prompting him to search for a union of the Eastern and Western Churches, a goal he does not reach. Certain scholars claim that Chrysoloras is actually a Celestial and that his translations contain esoteric messages for those willing to search for them.

Christine de Pisan (1365-1434)

Born in Venice, this French poet-writer grows to maturity in the French court of Charles the Wise. Her father holds a place as the court's astrologer. Mother of three and widowed in her 20s, she uses her scholarly education to support herself, writing evocative verses exploring her grief over her husband's death and composing poems of courtly love. The Duc de Berry and Philip the Bold both act as her patrons. She is best known for her biography of Charles the Bold and *La Cite des Dames*, a history concerned with portraying courageous, virtuous women. She is the first female writer to extol women's strength and intelligence.

Ciriaco d'Ancona (1390-1455)

Not so much a scholar as an ardent collector, this Italian antiquarian is the first merchant to bring Greek and Egyptian gems and manuscripts to Italy. His notes and drawings of Greek antiquities provide the earliest records of such treasures. Among the antiquities he acquires are sometimes found occult objects of interest to mages.

Johannes Gutenberg (1398-1468)

Gutenberg spends years experimenting with different processes until he successfully invents moveable type in 1455, which becomes available in Mainz and Strasbourg. A landmark in scholasticism, the ability to print copies of works that previously could be copied only by hand changes

the world. Classical works, religious ideas, poetry and literature all become known to anyone capable of reading. Further, scientific discoveries can easily be disseminated



Poggio Bracciolini (1380-1459)

An Italian who moves in the humanist circles of late 14th century Florence, Bracciolini is noted for his expertise in Latin scholarship. He becomes well known as the author of works in Latin æ most of them moral and religious æ yet he also pens the *Facetiae*, a book of jokes, and a history of Florence during his years as chancellor of that city. As a papal secretary, he attends the Council of Constance (1414-18), and while traveling in northern Europe he searches monastic libraries for lost classical manuscripts. His discovery of heretofore unknown works by Quintilian and Cicero engenders enormous excitement among classical scholars. Some claim that Bracciolini's discoveries do not stop with scholarly works, but embrace more esoteric manuscripts as well.

throughout Europe, opening the way for refinements and other discoveries. Gutenberg is credited with printing the first Bible and his moveable print makes it possible for the common man to receive an education and learn scholarly texts which have, until this time, been the exclusive province of dedicated scholars, the Church and the nobility.

Marsilio Ficino (1433-99)

This Italian author and philosopher becomes a key figure in the developing humanist movement in Italy. A noted classical scholar under the patronage of Cosimo de' Medici, he translates the works of Plato from Greek to Latin, giving many Renaissance scholars access to Plato's philosophy for the first time. He relates Plato's teachings to Christian doctrine, which becomes a cornerstone of Re-

naissance humanism. The central figure of an informal Platonic Academy in Florence, he also translates many Hermetic writings, works that are key to Renaissance magic.

Johannes Reuchlin (1455-1522)

A German humanist and scholar, Reuchlin corresponds with Erasmus and Ficino concerning his classical studies. He believes the Church needs reform, and is chiefly noted for *De rudimentis Hebraicis* (On the Fundamentals of Hebrew), written in 1506. It becomes a crucial tool in Old Testament studies, allowing him to espouse the cause of preserving Hebrew literature when the Dominicans attempt to suppress it in Cologne. Many believe he also dabbles in Kabbalistic studies as well.

Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536)

This Dutch scholar and humanist is an ordained priest. He receives permission to study in Europe, makes several journeys to England and becomes a professor of Greek in Cambridge. He associates with Thomas More and John Colet, a leading humanist theologian and dean of St. Paul's Cathedral. One of the greatest scholars of the northern Renaissance, Erasmus makes available many classical texts intended for ordinary readers. He publishes the first edition of the Greek New Testament, and satirizes religious superstitions and corrupt practices within the Church in *The Praise of Folly*, a work which made him widely popular and influential. He works in Venice before settling in Basel.

Marguerite of Navarre (1492-1549)

Sister to Francois I, Marguerite is a French humanist and writer. Her best known work, called the *Heptameron*,

concerns tales recounted by travelers. Following the death of her first husband, Marguerite marries Henri II of Navarre and attracts the age's leading humanists and literary lights to her celebrated court at Nerac.

Francois Rabelais (1494-1553)

One of the foremost minds of France, Rabelais attracts the disapproval of his Franciscan brothers for his studies of Greek, and he obtains permission to join a Benedictine monastery instead. Traveling to several universities, he eventually renounces his monastic habit. Though he studies medicine in Paris and becomes well respected as both physician and teacher, he is best known for his epics satirizing monastic ignorance and scholastic pride. Both *Pantagruel* and *Gargantua* reveal his vast knowledge and true insight into religion and morality, yet attract popular acclaim due to their humor.

Andreas Vesalius (Andries van Wesel) (1514-64)

Educated in Paris and Padua, this Flemish anatomist and physician becomes a teacher at Padua University. Vesalius studies anatomy through dissecting human cadavers, and publishing *The Seven Books on the Structure of the Human Body* in 1543. It features fine engravings copied from his own detailed drawings and becomes a vitally important anatomical textbook. Associated with the Hippocratic Circle, Vesalius becomes court physician to the household of Charles V. In 1559, he moves to Madrid to attend Philip II.

Laura Battiferri (1523-89)

Married to Bartolomeo Ammanati, himself a noted sculptor and architect, Laura spends most of her life in Florence. A poet herself, this hawk-nosed matron associates with the leading luminaries and foremost humanists of the age, who acclaim her collection of madrigals, sonnets and verses. Her accomplishments, though mostly appreciated by men, open the door for more women to receive scholarly educations and express their creativity in ways usually reserved for males. Some of the scholars with whom she interacts belong to the *Choeur Celeste*, attracted to her by her musical expertise.

Palestrina (Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina) (1525-94)

A master of composition both of unaccompanied vocal music and rich polyphonic accompaniments by the age of 20, Palestrina take his name from Palestrina Cathedral where he serves as organist and choirmaster. In 1550, he is appointed



choirmaster to the Vatican. He serves in a series of important positions under Pope Julius III. His vocal music later becomes the model for Counter-Reformation sacred music. Palestrina is well known to the Choeur Celeste and some claim that he himself is a member of that order.

Cervantes (Miguel de Cervantes) (1547-1616)

This popular Spanish poet and novelist also contributes significantly to Spanish drama. Seriously wounded at the Battle of Lepanto, he is later captured by pirates and enslaved for five years in Algiers. He is most noted for his novel *Don Quixote*, published in two parts (1605 and 1615). Filled with both humor and sadness, the novel satirizes chivalric ideals. More than this, however, Cervantes explores the inner workings of an overwrought mind. He becomes a major figure in the literary world, and his ideas and opinions carry great weight with his readers.

Rulers and Theologians

Echoing the changes in scholarship, building, art and song, new beliefs about religion and man's place in the universe spark changes in both the canonical and political arenas. Shifting political boundaries, the introduction of classical thought to areas still struggling under feudal rulers, the desire for national autonomy, the attempt to eradicate corruption within the Church and new thoughts concerning man's relationship to God all flash across the face of Europe, forever changing its destiny.



Joan of Arc (1412-1431)

This young girl from the town of Domremy in France hears the voices of saints. They tell her she must lead France's armies against the English invaders and re-establish the French monarchy. In 1428, she leads French troops against English forces, resulting in phenomenal successes. Devoutly religious and devoted to France, Joan sees that the Dauphin (the heir) is crowned and pushes the English to the point of surrender and negotiation. Betrayed by some of the French nobles allied with the English, she is captured, tried by the English Church authorities, found guilty of heresy and witchcraft and, in 1431, is burned at the stake. Though she is not herself a magus, Joan is seen as a holy person. Gilles de Rais, one of Joan's followers, leaves the Gabrielites when Joan is sacrificed, later turning his castle into an Infernalist stronghold.

Matthias Corvinus (1440-90)

The son of Janos Hunyady (called the White Knight of Christendom), Matthias Corvinus becomes the King of Hungary and secures it against the Turks. He conquers large sections of Austria as well. Aside from his stance protecting Christian Europe against the Turks, Corvinus introduces the Renaissance into Hungary. He passes his interest in the arts and scholarship on to the people under his rule, thus freeing large parts of Hungary from oppressive feudalism. Inviting several Italians to his court, he commissions them to work on his palaces of Buda and Visegrad and to supply his court with paintings and manuscripts of classical texts.

Fra Girolamo Savonarola (1452-98)

A sudden call to the Church leads this Ferranese Italian to abandon his home and enter a Dominican monastery in Bologna in 1474. His eloquence and religious fervor cause Lorenzo de' Medici to request the theologian's appointment as prior of the convent of San Marco in Florence. Despite this patronage, Savonarola becomes critical of the Medici, the Florentine republic, and the excesses of the Church. He cites their corruption. To protest the corruptive luxury the nobility live in, he encourages the public to burn books, paintings, musical instruments and any vanities he deems immoral. He is excommunicated by Pope Alexander VI (Rodrigo Borgia) for his criticisms, but continues to preach and incite the populace. The authorities (both canonical and governmental) bring charges of heresy against him in 1498, and he is hanged and burned in Florence.

Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-94)

A man of phenomenal intellect, this Italian author and philosopher (from a noble Lombard family) masters most

classical disciplines and languages. Whereas other Renaissance humanists see a relationship between Platonic and Christian thought, Pico incorporates Hebrew and Arabic writings and thought, including Kabbalistic magicks, into a unified philosophy. At age 24, he travels to Rome, publishes his 900 *Conclusiones* and invites scholars to debate with him publicly. The papacy condemns outright some of his theses as heretical and he is forced to flee. Along with Ficino, Pico becomes a leading light of the Platonic Academy in Florence, but finds himself drawn inexorably to theological studies. He becomes a friend and follower of Savonarola, embracing the friar's philosophy of purity of the spirit even if he decries the burning of books and the priceless knowledge they contain. His *Oratorio de dignitate hominis* makes known his philosophy that humans hold no fixed place in creation. Rather, they have free will and the liberty to make of themselves what they will — a key tenet in the magickal workings of the Renaissance.

Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527)

Employed by the city of Florence as a diplomat and militia supervisor, Machiavelli undertakes missions to Maximilian I and Julius II on behalf of the city. When the Medici return from exile, they dismiss him from office. Though he is subsequently cleared of conspiracy against them, they do not recall him to public office. Embittered by this, Machiavelli retires to his farm near Florence and spends his time writing. He produces such works as *A History of Florence* and the *Art of War*, but is best known for *Il Principe* (The Prince), written in 1513. In this work, he espouses a political theory arguing that if a ruler wants to

retain power, he must base his decisions purely on expediency rather than on moral or ethical considerations. The prince he creates is based on the life and political actions of Cesare Borgia. Machiavelli's political analysis and portrait of the quintessential ruthless prince gains recognition throughout the world.

Sir Thomas More (1477-1535)

Born in London, Thomas More receives a classical education. He begins a career in law. In 1516, he writes *Utopia*, an essay concerned with the perfect social and political state that also contains satirical commentaries on things as they are. More comes to the notice of Henry VIII, who employs him, and he makes great contributions to England's diplomatic triumphs. Henry appoints the charismatic and diplomatic More his Lord Chancellor in 1529. Though the chancellor never takes Holy Orders, he maintains deep religious convictions. His home becomes a center for learning, philosophical and religious debate. In the wake of Henry's break with the Church over his divorce of Catherine of Aragon, More refuses to deny the pope's position as supreme head of the Church. Stung by his chancellor's seeming betrayal, Henry accuses More of high treason and has him beheaded.

Martin Luther (1483-1546)

This German theologian leaves the University of Erfurt to join an Augustinian friary. On a visit to Rome in 1510, Luther is appalled by the corruption and venality he witnesses in the papal court. He remembers this through his years of teaching theology at Wittenberg. Studying scripture, he comes to the belief that salvation is granted by God's grace to the faithful and does not come about through sacraments or penance. He opposes the sale of indulgences for this reason, feeling that they merely pay for the pope's princely mode of living. He prepares his 95 Theses on the question and publishes them. The pope excommunicates Luther when he refuses to recant. Emperor Charles V summons Luther to the Diet of Worms, where the errant friar offers his famous defiance. Luther takes refuge in Saxony. Over the next decade, his position against the corruption in the Church grows, and he writes the *Confessions of Augsburg*, the first expression of Lutheran doctrine. His break with the Church signals the beginning of the end for an all-controlling Catholic Church.

Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556)

An English theologian and scholar, Cranmer is a fellow at Jesus College, Cambridge. Strongly committed to the reformation of the English Church, he becomes part of Henry VIII's intimate circle during negotiations for the king's divorce from Catherine of Aragon. Becoming the first Protestant English primate, Cranmer is appointed



Archbishop of Canterbury. He gives his support to Henry as the supreme head of the Church of England. Cranmer introduces the English Bible into churches throughout the kingdom and compiles the *Book of Common Prayer*. When the fanatically Catholic Mary ascends the throne, she retaliates for Cranmer's part in having her mother divorced. Cranmer is dismissed from his archbishopric, accused of heresy and burned at the stake.

Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556)

This Spanish noble knight experiences a spiritual conversion while recovering from a serious battle wound. He makes a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, then returns to Europe where he dedicates himself to theological studies at both Spanish and French universities. Loyola travels to Rome with a few followers and espouses strict vows of poverty, chastity and obedience; in 1540, he is accorded papal recognition of his new Society of Jesus. Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises* become widely accepted as a guide to meditation and prayer, especially among his new order. The Society of Jesus makes it their mission to minister to the sick and to convert others to the Catholic faith. Their zeal makes the Jesuits a key force in the Counter-Reformation and the Catholic reform movement.

Jean Calvin (1509-64)

Calvin studies theology, Greek and the law at French universities. By 1533, his studies lead him to break with the Catholic Church and become a spokesman for reform. In 1536, he publishes *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, a justification for Protestantism he bases on Scriptural evidence. Though written in Latin, it is translated into French and becomes a factor in the spread of Protestantism in France. Soon thereafter, he moves to Geneva, where he establishes the Reformed Church of Geneva. Its discipline and organization become the models for other reformed groups. Calvin believes that redemption is available only to the predestined chosen of God; the rest are condemned to damnation, and nothing they can do will change that fate. Naturally, those who follow Calvin's beliefs are far more likely to be among the elect.

Additional Resources

Books

Baldick, Robert. *The Duel*. A wealth of anecdotal information. Covers dueling up to the present day.

Clements, John. *Renaissance Swordsman*. An excellent guide to basic period techniques, reconstructed using surviving contemporary texts and accounts and tested by modern practice. Contains an extensive bibliography of sources both modern and medieval.

Cornelius, Geoffrey and Devereux, Paul, *The Secret Language of the Stars and Planets*. A must for all would-be Celestial Masters and Explorators.

Cosman, Madeline Pelner, *The Medieval Wordbook*.

Cottrell, Arthur, *The Encyclopedia of Mythology*. In actuality, this book covers only Greco-Roman, Celtic and Norse myth. Still, it's a gorgeous volume and can inspire all kinds of mystical weirdness.

Durant, Will, *The Story of Civilization V: The Renaissance*.

Emereson, Kathy Lynn, *The Writer's Guide to Everyday Life in Renaissance England*.

Gravett, Christopher, *The World of the Medieval Knight*. A wonderfully easy-to-use book about arms, armor, feasting, ceremonies and lifestyles of knights and nobles. More medieval than Renaissance, but the armor and jousting is early period.

Hale, J.R., *A Concise Encyclopedia of the Italian Renaissance*.

Hartman, Gertrude, *Medieval Days and Ways*.

Holmes, George, *Oxford Illustrated History of Medieval Europe*.

(Editor) Loyn, H.R., *The Middle Ages: A Concise Encyclopaedia*.

Parker, Geoffrey, *The World: An Illustrated History*.

Roberts, J.M., *A History of Europe*.

Sancha, Sheila, *The Castle Story*. An exceedingly rare but accessible and complete resource on castles and keeps.

Time/ Life Books, "The Enchanted World" series, especially *Spells and Bindings*, *Ghosts* and *Sea Monsters*.

Turner, Craig, and Tony Soper. *Methods and Practice of Elizabethan Swordplay*. Fencing from the point of view of 16th century England. Besides useful background material, this book also discusses the theories of three masters.

Films

Fortunately, the past year has been generous with regards to Renaissance-era movies. Players who want to capture the feeling of *Sorcerers Crusade* games might want to add the following movies to the list given in the main rulebook:

* *Dangerous Beauty*. Now on video and highly recommended.

Elizabeth. An entertaining tale of the transformation a young woman undergoes when power is thrust upon her. Very *World of Darkness*, if a bit loose with history and believability.

Ever After. A revisionist fairy-tale for the romantically-inclined. Lots of fun.

* *Shakespeare in Love*. A wonderful warts-and-all comedy set in the late English Renaissance. Also highly recommended.

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