

# HERMES' PORTAL



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# HERMES' PORTAL

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# Who's who

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## Scott Beattie

Scott calls himself an illustrator because he is in denial about his day-job. As Scobie, he self-publishes his Wuxia minicomic "The Seven Swords" and has provided illustrations for the On the Edge card game and for Werewolf. He has recently finished writing and illustrating "Casefile: ZODIAC", a 1970s weird espionage roleplaying game, soon to be available online. Real soon, promise.

<http://www.livejournal.com/~scobie>

## Jarkman

Jarkman (not really a forger, just a bit derivative at times) and his wife recently moved to Melbourne, Australia. He started playing RPGs over fifteen years ago and never thought that medieval history would be interesting or that Latin would ever come in handy. He has spent a year telling people they have leukaemia and then trying to almost kill them with chemotherapy in order to make them better. Only some of them got better. Now he spends half his time looking after his one year old son and getting back to dreaming up articles for RPGs; the other half is spent working out ways to almost kill people with brain lymphoma in order to make them better — he much prefers the former.

## News from the Line Editor: November 2004

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The biggest news for the line right now is, of course, that Fifth Edition is now out. I very much doubt that there are any Hermes Portal subscribers who didn't already know that, though, and there probably aren't many of you who don't already have copies. (If you don't have a copy yet, remember that the promotional price is only available until the end of December.)

Personally, I'm very pleased with the way that the book has turned out, both visually, and in terms of actual content. Naturally, the BerkList has already started arguing about what they want to change, but that's only natural. I think I'd be happy playing ArM5 exactly as written, but given the nature of role-players it's a bit too much to expect that such people will be widespread.

So, what can you expect in the future? The first supplement, *Calebais Revised*, came out simultaneously with the new edition, so you doubtless have that already.

*Guardians of the Forests: The Rhine Tribunal* should be out in January, as announced. This book will serve as the model Tribunal for ArM5, and includes a worked-out setting for a beginning saga. On the other hand, we don't plan to produce a lot of Tribunal books for the new edition, and certainly not for a while.

*Houses of Hermes: True Lineages*, covering Bonisagus, Guernicus, Mercere, and Tremere is currently on schedule for its April release date. You'll get more background details on the Houses, new rules and abilities to play with, and lots of ideas for playing the magi of those Houses. We plan to produce one of these books every year for the first three years, replacing the old *Houses of Hermes* book.

After that, things are a little more vague. *Realms of Power: The Divine* is well along, and should provide the solid treatment of religion and divine powers that the game has needed since, well, ArM1. I currently have three more books at earlier stages of preparation, and I'll say more about them as more happens with them. At any rate, the pipeline of new supplements is moving along nicely.

On the subject of supplements, we are currently running an Open Call for vis sources for the new Covenants book. (One of the three in earlier stages of preparation.) Details should be available from the Atlas web site by the time you read this. The deadline is February 15th, and if you've always wanted to write for *Ars Magica*, this is your chance to show me that you can.

## Publisher's corner

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"Oh dear! Oh dear! I shall be too late!"

Well, this time I'm really late! At least by a month... I could say I've been busy, my job is taking up too much of my time (or should I say, wasting too much of my time?), I didn't put enough pressure on the authors to follow the deadline — I could find numerous lame excuses... But I won't because I have the ultimate lame excuse: I was waiting for the Fifth Edition release! You have before your eyes the last Fourth Edition publication and the only one to have been published after the Fifth Edition release!

While I was not working on this issue, I didn't lose all my time to wondering how to teach division to 11 year old children who don't understand how to multiply by ten (no kidding) or how to add fractions to 13 year old kids who can't calculate  $1 - 3$  (still no kidding... one day, I should look for a real job, instead of pretending to be a math teacher); I took the time to read a proposal for an *Ars Magica* book. I found it very interesting so I decided to publish it. It will be released in the same way I publish HP, but it will be a bit thicker than an HP issue (the current version reaches 80 pages without illustrations). I still have to decide the cover price with the author. I'll give you all the information when the book is ready.

"... but, when the Rabbit actually *took a watch out of its waistcoat-pocket*, and looked at it, and then hurried on, Alice started to her feet, for it flashed across her mind that she had never seen before a rabbit with either a waistcoat-pocket, or a watch to take out of it, and burning with curiosity, she ran across the field after it, and was just in time to see it pop down a large rabbit-hole under the edge." (Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*)



# Prince of Magi

by Alexander White

While magic undoubtedly had its origin with the sage Zoroaster, it was his pupil, Osthanes (known in Persian as Vishtana) who wrote the first book on magic, and the tribe of Magians that lent the world the word 'mage'.

Western history has little to say about Osthanes other than that he was responsible for bringing magic into Greece and aiding the Persian army to invade Greece. A few sources tell of prolific authorship of magical texts. Some mystic texts remember Osthanes' placation and control of gods, spirits and ghosts. Pliny the Elder's *Natural History* condemns Osthanes as being the hated source of superstition and magical books. Tertullian, the Christian writer, in *De Anima* attributes the categorisation of the restless dead to Osthanes. Apuleius in his *Apologia*, describes him as a philosopher who mapped out the workings of universal providence. In Persia, Osthanes is best known for his pivotal role in the triumph of Magianism, the orthodox branch of Zoroastrianism, which stressed religious wisdom as the highest principle of metaphysical theosophy. Osthanes is mentioned in connection with the reign of Alexander the Great. During this time he further spread his magical arts into the West.

The Magians were the guardians of Zoroastrian orthodoxy, a sacerdotal Median tribe who had guided innumerable empires in their religious faith. With the rise of the Persian Empire, the Magians embraced Zoroastrianism and came to characterise its priesthood entirely. Under the Sasanid Empire, Magian priests introduced complex dogmatic edicts, purging most of the original syncretic aspects of Zoroastrianism — paganism, Zurvanism and Mazdakitism. During this time, they repressed and ultimately scattered the Manichaean heretics. Their spread into the West brought an explosion of mystical practice, and these practices became so analogous with the Magians that their name came to be synonymous with magic.

This article is aimed at giving a 'Mythic' biography of Osthanes and the Magians, both of whom are important, if opaque, magical figures. It includes the biography of Osthanes, and details the Magians, their role within the Middle East, their relations with the Cult of Mercury and the Order of Solomon. Some familiarity with the principles of Zoroastrianism is recommended due to the number of unfamiliar terms, titles and names (see *HP#9*).

Since so little is known for sure about Osthanes (such as whether he existed at all), I have taken a great deal of liberty with the sources. If anyone has any (concrete) sources, please let me know, either on the BerkList or directly at [aw@vurt.net](mailto:aw@vurt.net).

Thanks to Niall Christie for early insightful comments and proofreading. Thanks also to Michaël de Verteuil for his sometimes severe, but always

invaluable, advice. Again, thanks to my troupe, past and present, for participating in my saga and being the mother of my inspiration. Acknowledgements to David Chart's *Numismancy* article in *Mythic Perspectives* #10 for the idea of Magian Numismancy, and the BerkList debate on coin minting.



With *Ars Magica* Fifth Edition imminent, I can only hope that mysteries are not only integrated into the cloth of *Ars*, but that mystae groups designed under ArM4 are easily translatable to the new edition.

Terminology Note: ‘Magi’ and ‘Magian’ is used throughout this article to refer to the tribe of Medians known as ‘the Magi’. When non-Magian mages are referred to, attempts have been made to label them specifically (as ‘Hermetic mages’, for example), or to use other terms, such as ‘wizard’, ‘sorcerer’, etc. ‘Magoi’ refers expressly to the Zoroastrian mystery group detailed in *HP#9*.

## Prince of Magi

### Unrecorded Centuries

Osthanes was a prince of the sacerdotal tribe of Magi (or Magians), one of the six Median tribes. Before his conversion by Zoroaster, he was the high priest of Vishtaspa, greatest of the Iranian kings. Originally sceptical of Zoroaster, he was overcome by awe after witnessing many miracles and wonders and not only converted to the new monotheistic faith, but also convinced his liege-lord to do likewise. As Vishtaspa waged war on his diabolically deluded neighbours, Osthanes accompanied Zoroaster on his many journeys, recording his words, sayings and hymns, and formulating the first Mazdean scriptures.

The early Mazdeans had little organisation and few holy sites, apart from the scattered *agjari* (‘fire temples’) founded by Zoroaster. Osthanes worked to fight the followers of the *Druj* (‘Lie’) and to establish the new faith. Despite his many attempts however, his own people, the Medians, denied Ahura Mazda. In 614BCE, the Medes overthrew the Assyrian Empire with the help of Babylon. A great number of Mazdeans came under their sway. Missionaries amongst the Mazdeans helped undermine the Median

Empire, reinforced by hostage royal believers living at the Median court.

### The Achaemenian Golden Age

One such Zoroastrian prince was Cyrus the Great, son-in-law of the reigning Median king. In 549BCE, Cyrus rebelled and overthrew the Medes, establishing his own Achaemenian dynasty that ruled Asia Minor, Babylonia and finally all of Eastern Iran. His celebrated victory over the Lydian king Croesus, demonstrated his wisdom and bravery. Upon capturing Babylon, Cyrus showed that he possessed mercy as well as might, and repatriated many of the subject peoples, including the Jews. As he was close to Vishtaspa, so too was Osthanes close to Cyrus, offering him religious advice and presiding over rituals and ceremonies.

With the reign of Cyrus, the Median tribe of the Magians finally accepted Mazdeanism. As they had done with so many other kings and empires, they stepped up as the sacerdotal caste of the new Achaemenian Empire, quickly receiving the Mazdean doctrines and observances. The sacred script of the Magians — Avestan — was adopted as the official religious alphabet to be used for royal inscriptions, and to record the hitherto orally transmitted *Avesta* (Sacred Scriptures). Cyrus was so pleased with Osthanes that he granted the sage the perpetual title of ‘Prince of the Magi’, symbolising eternal lordship over his once recalcitrant people.

At various times over the course of the Achaemenian period, Osthanes would be given the tribal homeland of the Magians and the Medes as his personal fiefdom; eventually the Magians would consider those lands to belong to the Mazdean priesthood itself.

The Achaemenians thrived under the guidance of the Magians. Mazdeanism was spread to every corner



### Prophecy of Cyrus

Cyrus’ coming was greatly prophesied. The most famous of the prophetic visions was that of his grandfather, Astyages, heir to the Median Empire. He had two dreams. In the first his daughter Mandane urinated so much that she not only flooded Babylon, but the whole of Persia. Astyages, after consulting with the Magians, promptly married her to a socially inferior Persian noble called Cambyses. A few months later, he had another dream in which a vine grew from Mandane’s genitals and overshadowed all of Asia. Magian dream-interpreters advised him to send Mandane away from Persia. He had her watched, and planned to kill her child when it was born, since the Magians interpreted the dream to mean that her child would rule in his place.

When Cyrus was born, Astyages called his trusted friend Harpargus to take the baby into the wilderness and slay it. Harpargus gave the child to the herdsman Mitradates with orders to expose the child in the hills. It happened that Mitradates’ wife was in labour while the herdsman was receiving his orders.

When she saw the child, she begged her husband not to expose the child, since their own had been still-born. Instead, they swapped the babies, and adopted Cyrus.

Upon his tenth birthday, Cyrus’ identity was revealed. His natural kingliness and bearing singled him out, and before very long, he came to the aged Astyages’ attention. The Median Emperor consulted his Magian advisors, the chief of whom was Osthanes. Osthanes, seeing a grand future for Mazdeanism under Cyrus, convinced the Emperor to keep the boy alive. As revenge for being disobeyed however, Astyages killed Harpargus’ son and, in a banquet, fed the corpse to him in a stew.

Under the guidance of Osthanes and the vengeful Harpargus, Cyrus eventually incited the Persian army of the Emperor to rebel. After killing the few remaining Mazdean Magians still in his court (the others had fled to the banner of Cyrus), Astyages led a force out to fight Cyrus. He was defeated and captured. Cyrus became the King of kings and started the Golden Age of Zoroastrianism.



of the Empire. Under first Cyrus, then Cambyses, Darius and Xerxes, demons and diabolists were purged from Asia. Mazdean missionaries battled demons and vile spirits in the Iranian wilderness, destroying the taint of Angra Mainyu from vast parts of the Persian Empire. It was a Golden Age for the followers of the Wise Lord.

### Invasion of the West

Still however, Osthanes remained in the mortal world. Looking west he saw a vast, untamed and barbarous wilderness under the dominion of the daevas. King of kings, Xerxes, inspired by Osthanes' compelling call-to-arms, summoned his satrapies and generals to proclaim the invasion of Greece. An army of over five million troops was gathered as an expeditionary force from every corner of the Empire. As the hundreds of thousands of soldiers, and the even greater number of camp followers and hangers-on, moved towards the port of Casthanaea in Magnesia, they drank rivers dry and consumed entire herds and fields of grain.

In Greece, civic leaders quickly learned of the oncoming exterminatory Persian force. The Athenians quickly sent off a messenger to the Delphic Oracle, which advised them to appeal for help from their son-in-law. The quick-witted priests remembered a legend that Boreas, the North Wind, was married to Oreithyia, daughter of Erechtheus, seventh king of Athens. They reasoned therefore that this was a marriage connection and concluded that Boreas was their son-in-law. Prayers and sacrifices were made. Soon a great storm gathered over Casthanaea.

The storm raged for three days, but eventually Osthanes, who accompanied Xerxes, set about soothing it, with the aid of other magi. They performed intricate rituals and made sacrifices, until on the fourth day the winds subsided. Over four hundred ships were lost, along with uncountable people, vast amounts of supplies, and unimaginable wealth. Nevertheless, the remains of the fleet were gathered and the Persians crossed into Greece.

### Appealing to Boreas, the North Wind

When the Athenians appealed to Boreas for help, they did so on the grounds that they were the fathers-in-law of the North Wind. Since there were ties of 'blood' that linked Athens to Boreas, the spirit was more inclined to aid them. This is not the only time in Greek history that cities or heroes had appealed to the gods or to spirits for aid and relied on blood relationship or marriage to ensure help.

In the thirteenth century, such bonds are few and far between. A few mortals, however, still retain a strong enough heritage that they can call on their spiritual relations for assistance. Likewise, certain peoples can rely on spirit-aid due to long-time bonds, now rarely applied due to the prevalence of Christianity. (See below for new Virtues: Elemental Blood, and Tribal Blood-bond.)

Entering Greece, the Magians quickly placated the native spirit and god population, Osthanes

presiding over vast rites offering sacrifice to river gods and regional heroes. Many favourable omens were received. The invasion of Greece saw the Persian halt at Thermopylae, the battle of Artemisium and the devastating sack of Athens. Xerxes was finally defeated at the naval battle of Salamis in 480 BCE, which saw his return to Persia. A year later, the Persian army withdrew from Greece after the battles of Plataea and Mycale.

### A Wonder of Osthanes the Magician

There is a legend that tells of Osthanes happening across a winegrower in Greece called Midas. A deadly viper had just bitten Midas, who was about to die, so Osthanes quickly hung around the unfortunate man's foot a fragment from the stele of a dead young girl. He then uttered seven sacramental words, which he drew from an old book. Midas was immediately cured, and watched in amazement as Osthanes purified his entire farm with sulphur and fire. He summoned all the snakes in the farm and breathed upon them, which instantly consumed them all.

Meanwhile, Osthanes remained in the West. He took under his wing Democritus of Abdera, a philosopher eager to learn the secret truths of the world. After learning the basics of the Art from Osthanes, Democritus journeyed to Persia and studied Chaldean astrology in Babylon, returning to the West to write many treatises on the Magian arts. Democritus disseminated many of Osthanes' secrets, his works influencing notable alchemists such as Bolus of Mendes and the peripatetic Theophrastus.



Key to this tradition of mystical alchemy is creation of arcane alloys through the fusion of metals (within this tradition of alchemy also stand the Gnostic Isis, Iamblichus, Moses and Eugenius).

No original text by Osthanes is known to have survived, although there is a standing bounty from Doissetep for an original copy of 'On the Transmutation of Nature', found by Democritus and Ostanes in a shrine to Ahura Mazda.

While his students went on to make important contributions in the magical arena, Osthanes slowly sank into the mists of history. The Magians in Persia

were now completely Mazdean, their doctrine established with the weight of generations of tradition.

### The Accursed and the Decline

Osthanes was to make his last appearance during the reign of Alexander the Great, known as 'Alexander the accursed' (*guzastag*), the epithet of Ahriman himself. Seeking to sack the tomb of Cyrus, Alexander found that its Magian guardians had already moved the great treasures of the first Persian Emperor. The conqueror had them tortured to find out where the relics were being held, but to no avail. The height of Alexander's destructive ways came with the



### The Prince, his Pupil and his Son

In Democritus' *Physica et Mystica*, there is a passage that describes the ghost of Osthanes being summoned by his son Ostanes to unlock the secrets of hidden tomes of wisdom. Democritus, long unable to effect true alchemical transformations, approached Ostanes to summon the Prince of Magi from Hades. The two magicians did so, pleading with Osthanes to give up his secrets. The dead Magian replied that his words were bound by a powerful demon, and he could only say that 'The books are in the shrine.' Son and alchemist searched the shrine, for Osthanes had not mentioned them to Democritus in life. Unable to find the texts, the two worked fruitlessly to unlock the essence of alchemy by themselves. Some time after giving up their pursuit, they were feasting in the shrine when a pillar split in two. Although no one else could see them,

Ostanes reached into the crack and pulled out the books. Inside, the necessary phrase required for their alchemy to work was found.

**Story seed:** Osthanes is renowned for having written innumerable books. In their search of an old library, ruins or temple, the characters discover a magical text offering the potential of amazing powers or enlightenment. In order to unlock the book's secrets however, they must call upon the spirit of the one who wrote it. This could be as simple as casting a spell, or tracking down fragments of those who have done so before (such as Democritus and Ostanes accounts of the event), finding Osthanes' resting place, or even his remaining living descendants. Of course, in so speaking to Osthanes (or his *fravashi*), the characters also rouse the demon that prevented him from revealing the book's location to his son and pupil.

### Sacred Kingship under Cyrus the Great

One of the great secrets of the unity of the Persian Empire was the face of Cyrus the Great, who ruled over thousands of peoples, tribes and kingdoms. In later ages, the Romans and Greeks would use this numismatic secret to stabilise their own empires, and in the thirteenth century, the heirs of the Byzantine Empire carry on the much-diluted tradition.

As Zoroaster taught, an image can mystically represent the thing it depicts. The early Magian followers of Cyrus used the Law of Sympathy upon coins minted by Cyrus to engender loyalty in whoever used or owned the coins. Kingship in Persia was Sacred, as the king represented the Desirable Dominion of Ahura Mazda. As the divine representative of God on Earth, the Magians used his image to radiate that same Dominion to his subjects. His heirs did the same, representing themselves as divine personages to ensure the stability of the Empire.

### Chaos and Alexander the Great

The continuity required for Magian Numismancy was disrupted when Alexander the Great invaded Persia and killed the King of kings, Darius. Alexander, in the midst of extinguishing holy fires and torturing Mazdean priests, learned the secret of Numismancy. He minted his own coins, depicting himself as God and Conqueror. The most famous coins

depicted Alexander with horns, associated by Zoroastrians with Ahriman. There was no doubt in the minds of the Mazdeans that Alexander was an agent of evil.

Although Alexander died, his coins continued to remain in circulation. Under the reign of his successors, the Seleucids, the Mazdean faith was degraded and diminished. Countless cults and rivals sprang up as Hellenistic thought spread throughout the East.

Note: Alexander the Great is seen by both Christianity and Islam as a potent force of good. Islam for example has a prophet named *Dhu'l-Qarnayn* ('the one with two horns') that is often identified as Alexander the Great. Depictions of Alexander in Christian iconography show him triumphing over eastern demons as a pious and chivalrous knight. Whether the Zoroastrian view of Alexander the Great as a force of evil is accurate is left up to individual troupes and story guides.

### The Righteous Fire of the Sasanids

Although the Greek rulers of Persia were overthrown by the Parthians in 150BCE, Desirable Dominion was not restored entirely to the Middle East until the reign of the first Sasanian king, Ardashir. His Magian sponsor learnt the lost Numismatic Art to re-cement the faith of Zoroaster in the Persian people using the symbol of *Asha* ('Righteousness', 'Truth').



burning of Persopolis, where the great master copies of the Avesta were destroyed. A few Persian priests did fall under Alexander's sway, when at a grand banquet in Babylon, they broke bread and drank wine with the Macedonian. In the seven years of his reign, Alexander did much damage to the Mazdean faith, destroying temples and scriptures, slaying hundreds of Magians and extinguishing countless sacred fires. Osthanes received a vision of Alexander's punishment; in his dream vision, he saw the Great Spirit of Ahriman dying in Babylon. Three months later, Alexander fell ill and never recovered.

The damage was done. The Achaemenian Empire was over. The Greek cities of Antioch and Alexandria succeeded Babylon as the cultural capitals of the East. Following Alexander were the Seleucids, who introduced vast panoplies of gods and cults. Mazdeanism was left to languish amidst the countless temples and churches that sprang up. Not until the *herbad* ('High Mage') Tansar and Arch Mage Kartér,

last pupils of Osthanes, would Zoroastrianism gain supremacy, this time under the Sasanids.

### The End of the Prince

Osthanes passed from the historical record after the death of Alexander the Great. No one knows what became of him. It is assumed that he passed on to his final reward. Perhaps however, he lives on in the world still, retreating to an isolated place like his great mentor Zoroaster, to contemplate the world. Perhaps he travelled further east to proselytise India or China. Perhaps he fell in battle against some great threat sent by Ahriman. Perhaps his spirit remains somewhere in the world, offering help to the Mazdeans and struggling against the *Druj*. Whatever the truth, Osthanes, Prince of the Magi, finally left the pages of history.

The three wise men who visited the infant Christ in Bethlehem were Gaspar, Melchior and Balthasar. Certain accounts however place the number of wise men visiting Christ as high as twelve (in the Gospels only the gifts are enumerated, not the number of givers). From around the sixth century, certain tales of the nativity recount that Osthanes was amongst the wise men who came into the house or cave that Jesus lay in, and fell to his knees and worshipped him. If this tale is true, perhaps after witnessing the Incarnation of God in Flesh, the Prince of Magi finally found his rest.

### The Magians

Osthanes belonged to one of the six Median tribes, known as the Magi (the others were Bousai, Pareteknoi, Strouchates, Arizantoi and Boudioi). A close-knit tribe, they were the most obstinate and implacable foes of the religion of Zoroaster, as they provided priests not only to Median tribes, but also to other peoples, such as the Persians, Assyrians and

### The First Book on Magic

Written by Osthanes early in his life as a devotee of Ahura Mazda, the First Book of Magic is a powerful Zoroastrian artefact. Believed lost for a thousand years, it occasionally crops up in tales and rumours amongst the wizards of the Theban or Levantine Tribunals. Its powers can only be guessed at, since the few records remaining are vague, but it is commonly accepted that it contains the most profound record of Zoroaster's teachings on the true nature of reality.

While accepted wisdom assumes that the text is largely magical, the private journals and diaries of pious mages who lived in the East hint that the First Book is much more than that. They say it is an allegory for the reconciliation of magic and the Divine, and hint that through the power of the First Book, truly devout wizards can gain a personal relationship with God.

Story guides should decide the nature of the book themselves. Two obvious options appear,

however. The first has the book as a magically enchanted book that reveals the great secrets of the cosmos. In this form it could be a ridiculously high quality or level Summa, granting experience in Occult Lore, Enigmatic Wisdom, Magic Theory or Theology (Zoroastrianism). It could also have supernatural abilities, such as indestructibility, imperviousness to magical investigation (such as Intellego), and even the power to send a reader into Twilight. The second option is for the First Book to be a holy relic, a story device that could allow PCs to gain True Faith, Pious Magic, or a Zoroastrian Virtue. In this form, it could either be an allegory for the search to know God/Ahura Mazda, or an actual book imbued with Faith Points. In either form, the First Book can serve as a story tool to involve characters in Zoroastrian adventures, whether as a prize for their searching or as a more intangible reward for a character's personal search for understanding.



Babylonians, and the cities of Urartu and Elam. During Zoroaster's lifetime, the Medes continued to reject Mazdeanism, much to the dismay of Osthanes. It was not until the reign of Cyrus, a Mazdean King of kings, that the Magians and the Medes accepted the faith of Zoroaster and came under the sway of Osthanes.

Under Osthanes, Mazdeanism was turned into an imperial faith, with the Magians presiding over every ritual aspect of governance. Grand temple complexes, shrines and broad estates served an ever-increasing number of priests. However, the disparate nature of the Persian Empire meant that although the central body of the Mazdean church was formed primarily of ethnic Magi, local *athaurvani* ("priests") continued to operate with relative autonomy.

As the learned caste, the Magians were responsible for many aspects of the running of the empire, including administration of law and bureaucratic running of the state. Their strict adherence to the doctrine of duality — the cosmos divided between Ohrmazd, Wise Lord of Good, and Ahriman, evil spirit of Lies — saw their customs more rigidly followed and heeded than most other groups. Because they were the priests of Ohrmazd, they took it as their sacred duty to destroy the followers and creatures of Ahriman, killing with their own hands any vile creature that crawled on the ground or flew in the air. From the Magians came the veneration of the natural elements, personified by the Amesha Spentas, and the detailed rules on purity.

### Spreading the Art

The Magians spread far and wide, expanding not only throughout Asia, but also into Europe, Greece and Italy. In Persia they remained the sacred priestly caste, but in the West, they personified the practice of magic, lending their name to the very act of controlling the supernatural forces of the world.

Several great efforts were made by the Magians in the West to spread the magical arts of Zoroaster. In particular, their skill at astrology made them highly desired as advisors by powerful aristocrats. Those Magians who were not regular visitors to the imperial court offered their services to normal folk, selling powerful protection charms and casting spells against criminals or evil-doers. They willingly passed on their secrets to other practitioners of the magical arts, spreading the influence of their magic. Many worked with the Mithraic priests who began to seek converts within the Roman territories.

### Magians versus Mercurians

The Cult of Mercury (and the Cult of Hermes before it) was resolutely opposed to the Magians. The Persians represented a rival Imperial State, whose expansionist tendencies came into conflict with Rome's own. Just as Roman and Persian emperors were adversaries, so too were their powerful magical priesthoods. Magian and Mercurian were drawn into a conflict between two world powers, both representing their divine favour and supremacy. Furthermore,

the magical practices of the two were in discord, particularly as their places of worship emanated different auras.

The Cult of Mercury despised the Magians for bringing with them the Dominion of Ohrmazd, an aura that superseded the Magical Aura of the Mercurians, and also was detrimental to their rituals. The practices of the Magians were such that individuals could perform great wonders, rather than the large numbers of Mercurian priests required by the Roman cult. Worst of all, the Magians converted and taught their arts to anyone who would accept their Dominion, with the result that uncultured plebeians and slaves could potentially learn potent mystical rites that rivalled the Imperial mystic apparatus of the Roman State.

Every generation, the Cult of Mercury would attempt to outlaw the practice of magic, seeing as subversive the Dominion of the Magians and their wide-spread following amongst the slaves, plebeians and foreigners in Roman cities. These attempts failed, doing little more than drive the practice underground. Although individual followers and supporters of the Magians were executed for the crimes of sorcery and witchcraft, the Mercurians could not eradicate them as a whole.

Conflict between Magians and Mercurians was bitter. As the Roman Empire spread into the Middle East, the Mercurians regularly came into conflict with Magian priests. Quickly realising that their hated Dominion Aura emanated from sacred fires, the Mercurians instituted a policy of extinguishing them wherever they were found. Legionaries were instructed to destroy Mazdean temples and to erase sacred inscriptions. Try though they might, the Cult of Mercury could never make their way deep into Persian territory. Every attempt to do so resulted in catastrophic failure, such as the disastrous expedition by Sulla against the Parthians where legionary standards were humiliatingly lost, until the Emperor Augustus recovered them.

The multiculturalism of the Roman state allowed the proliferation into the West of many eastern sects and faiths. Despite their size and power, the Mercurians were unable to halt this spread. By the first century CE the Magians had the ear of no less than the Emperor Nero, inducting him into many Mazdean secrets. The chief Magian adviser to Nero was Tiridates, the Armenian King who taught the Emperor the power to divine the future through the art of hydromancy. During this time, the Cult of Mercury lost significant amounts of influence, as Nero broke ancient traditions and taboos that had been maintained since time immemorial. The madness of Nero ultimately led to the Magians abandoning him to his fate.

Another brief Magian coup came in the early third century, when Antoninus Elagabalus was crowned Emperor. Elagabalus was a zealous follower of the Magian faith, wearing the sacerdotal robes of the ancient Medians and openly worshipping the





Mazdean yazatas and Ahuras. In particular, Elagabalus' grandmother Julia Maesa was a Mazdean and encouraged the Syrian legions to support her grandson. During his short four-year rule, science and the arts received increased imperial patronage and the Mazdean gods were granted statues at Palatine Mount in Rome. So full of the purifying Fire of Zoroaster, he married a Vestal Virgin, Aquilia Severa, the most chaste and holy woman in Rome. Elagabalus was overthrown, but the Magians were entrenched, in both the West and particularly in Egypt.

With the decline of Rome however, the communities needed for Magian practitioners' survival dried up in most European areas. The dramatic rise of Christianity in the remaining Eastern Roman strongholds, such as Constantinople, Alexandria and Antioch meant that holy men and sorcerer-Bishops usurped the niche formerly filled by the Magians. As communication between communities became harder, Magians in different areas fell into decline and decay, their arts practiced by countless hedge-wizards and commoners as superstition and mummery, their tomes copied and translated by semi-literate ascetics and sceptical philosophers. In some regions of Syria and the Middle East, a few Magian potentates gave up their Median robes for the episcopal vestments of the new Christian Imperium. The Magians left an indelible print upon Western magical practice, and many of their basic laws and traditions, particularly warding and luck charms, survived amongst the

common folk, while the cultural influence of the Mercurians predominated with the truly Gifted.

#### Magianism and Islam

Like Zoroastrians in general, the Magians suffered after Islam became the dominant religion of the East. As well as discrimination from being Mazdean, Magians were also an ethnic minority who no longer had the protection of being the Imperial sacerdotal caste. The Arab conquest of the Sasanid Empire was fought under the Qur'anic Surah 9:29 'Fight those who believe not in God and the Last Day and do not forbid what Allah and his Messenger have forbidden — such men as practice not the religion of truth, being people of the book — until they pay tribute out of hand and have been humbled.' The last Sasanid king Yazdegird III was defeated at Qadisiya in 636CE, and over the next few years fought a losing battle as he lost first his capital Ctesiphon, and then individual provinces and cities. He died in 652 in Merv, but isolated resistance would continue for another two centuries.

Although Muhammad originally meant only Jews and Christians to be 'people of the book' (*dhimmi*), there were simply too many Zoroastrians for them not be also considered as such. Despite this, a large body of laws was instituted to enforce the social and legal inferiority of the *dhimmi* in the community. Zoroastrians particularly were (unofficially) discriminated against, called *gabbars* (polytheists) and accused of fire and devil worship. Over the years, as it

became clear where the new seat of power lay, many Zoroastrians converted to Islam. For converts there were a number of incentives, especially for women, who had long suffered under the strict Mazdean purity laws. Islam in its early years was not bound by millennia of dogmatism. A few Magians did likewise, joining the Order of Solomon with other ex-Magoi to aid the Caliphs. In some regions, forced conversions took place, and agiari were desecrated — their fires extinguished.

Social and economic segregation did not prevent the two faiths from interacting, and early Islam absorbed much Zoroastrian theology, such as belief in Heaven and Hell, the nature of the End of the World and the Day of Judgement, five daily prayers, rejection of images and so on. Much of this early introduction of Mazdean concepts were due to early Magian converts attempting to take a place as a theological caste. Unfortunately, they largely failed.

Note: Many Muslims would consider the above view of the syncretism of early Islam heretical. Tradition holds that Muhammad was illiterate and that the teachings of Islam came directly from God. Troupes should decide what the exact truth of this matter is.

Those who remained true to the Zoroastrian faith were slowly pushed east, out of Syria and Iraq, and into the far reaches of Iran and even India. The loss of many temples and communities saw a fracturing of the Zoroastrian scriptures. By the tenth century the remaining Magians were so scattered that many had lost complete copies of the Avesta, and few could afford to fuel a permanent sacred fire.

When the Seljuk Turks invaded, Zoroastrian communities were subjected again to a conquering force. Many were killed, records were destroyed and temples razed to the ground. Under the new Seljuk rulers, the few Zoroastrians who had remained in Syria and Egypt were forcefully converted.

Although Magians in the thirteenth century believe that times cannot get any darker, little do they realise that when the Mongols arrive, the devastation will be complete: every copy of the Avesta will be destroyed; every major temple and fire will be demolished. The last bastions of Zoroastrians will be the province of Fars on the Persian Gulf, and the cities of Yazd and Shiraz, where they will congregate under the protection of poverty and obscurity.

### Magians and the Order of Solomon

The Order of Solomon was an organisation that predated the rise of Islam. It was a federation of unaligned magicians and hedge-mages throughout Syria and Egypt, many of whom inherited some of the lost arts of Solomon. Prior to the collapse of the Persian Empire, the Mazdean priesthood largely ignored the Order of Solomon as irrelevant and powerless. Most inhabitants of the Persian Empire professed Zoroastrianism, and its Dominion was largely detrimental to the members of the Order of Solomon. Most members of the Order of Solomon

lived in Roman territories anyway, with only a few inhabiting the Persian territories. Many were Jewish mages, who had already been taught their place in the distant past during the Babylonian Captivity. So long as the Order did not engage in anti-Imperial activities, and did not break any Mazdean dictates, such as supporting evil, then they were left alone.

### Where was the Prince of Magi?

Several months before Muhammad fled Mecca to Medina, Kartér the Prince of Magi vanished. He gave no warning, left no messages, and despite his responsibilities as head of the Zoroastrian faith, he refused to answer prayers and invocations. This left the Zoroastrian priesthood in deep confusion and instilled in them deep anomie. The Magian dream-readers knew some momentous event was about to occur, but without guidance from the Prince of Magi, this information was not widely propagated, even to the Emperor.

In the aftermath of the conquest by Islam of Persia, seven of the surviving Magians set about trying to learn what had happened to Kartér. Although they searched for many years, they found no trace of him. All attempts to communicate with him or with any former Prince of Magi were unsuccessful. It was clear that the Zoroastrian faith had lost its most powerful and enlightened leader at the time it needed it most. Many Magians saw this as the sign that Islam was the true successor of Zoroastrianism, and converted, joining the Order of Solomon and taking many arcane secrets with them. Most others followed their communities as they were pushed out of Iraq and into Eastern Iran.

This all changed with the fall of the Sasanid Empire. Suddenly the Magians lost the Imperial support required to maintain their magical hegemony over Persia. The Zoroastrian Dominion was replaced by the Islamic one, and hedge-mages and sorcerers from every conceivable background rallied to the banner of Muhammad. The Order of Solomon grew into a force to be reckoned with, as even some Magians converted to Islam and aided the conquering religion.

Key to the Order of Solomon's rapid rise was the immediate adoption of Islam as its patron-faith. Many Arabian spirit masters joined the Order, bolstering the Syrian and Egyptian conjurers, meaning that the Order gained the financial and political support of the leader of the Faithful, as well as the martial aid of the Islamic holy warriors. The Zoroastrian priests were so unready for an assault that the invading Muslims and their allied sorcerers were able to target many of the great fire temples that hampered Solomonic magic. As the Order went deeper into Iraq, they recovered many of the Zoroastrian's magical secrets that bolstered their own powers, in particular lore on spirit summoning and astrology.

### Magians and the Order of Hermes

By the time the Order of Hermes was convened in Durenmar, the Magians had largely been relegated





to a minor position in Iraq and Iran, with most of the Syrian and Arabian wizards professing Islam or joining the Order of Solomon. Hence, little direct contact between the Order and the Magians has occurred. Certain Zoroastrian wizards have travelled west, or come into contact with Levantine and Iberian Hermetic mages, but continuity with the European Magian communities was lost.

The arcane writings of the Magians, however, are well known and respected, as is their reputation as the pioneers and founders of the magical arts. Just as Hermetic historians and Seekers trace the roots of Hermeticism back to the Mercurians, Chaldeans, Egyptians and Babylonian astrologers, so too are the most primal arts of the Zoroastrians and Magians seen as the forerunners of the Order of Hermes. Hermetic magic, while deriving some of its origin from Magian practice, is of course the more advanced and more evolved descendant of all of its predecessors. Hermetics nevertheless desire the rare Magian tomes as seminal masterpieces of early magical theory. Zoroaster's classifications of spirits and demons are still largely accepted, and Hermetic alchemists still use the principles laid down by Osthanes.

Despite the respect held for Magian writings and wisdom, there is still a deep undercurrent of hostile opinion within many members of the Order of Hermes. Centuries of warfare between Persia and Rome, and now a rivalry between the Orders of Hermes and Solomon means there is distrust held regarding practitioners of the Eastern Arts. Hermetics accept that their magic is descended from Greek, Egyptian and Eastern traditions, but they also believe that Hermetic magic is not only superior, but that Eastern practitioners and wizards are their enemies or detested rivals.

That the Order of Solomon now makes use of some Magian secrets also makes true Magian practitioners more likely to be distrusted and considered part of the enemy Solomonic Order. The Imperial Roman edicts, declaiming the magical arts as malefic and criminal are still considered by many traditionalists to be binding upon the Order. The Hermetic Arts are obviously legitimate and humble Mercurian practices, while the Eastern magical arts, in particular those of the Persian Magians, are despised and loathsome, and deeply corrupted forms of the admirable works taught by Zoroaster to Pythagoras, Plato and Empedocles.

### The Magoi and the Magians

There may be some confusion regarding the differences between the Magoi (the mystae group introduced in *HP#9*) and the Magians. 'Magoi' is the name for any priest of the Zoroastrian faith. Thus, the Magoi come from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, from Syrian to Indian. All that is required to become a Zoroastrian priest is faith and devotion towards Ahura Mazda and training in the precepts of Zoroaster.

The Magians by contrast are a specific Median ethnic group that has, since the earliest days, specialised in sacerdotal roles. After their conversion to Mazdeanism, they stepped into the role of Imperial priests to Ohrmazd. One must be born a Magian; it is not possible to join their ranks. Because of generations of hieratic service, Magians are born with innate traits that lend them particularly towards their occupation as priests and wizards. All Magians who follow the traditional priestly path become 'Magoi', and are initiated into those secrets, as well as the Magian-specific mysteries. Because in the past most powerful or influential Magoi have been Magians, this ethnic group defined orthodoxy and tradition for the Zoroastrian priesthood, with most Magian rites and customs being absorbed by the Zoroastrian priesthood in general.

### The Magians: An Esoteric Lineage

The Magians are an ethnic group dedicated to service as the priestly caste to Ohrmazd. Even before their conversion to Zoroastrianism, they served as the priests to the other Ahuras (divine Lords) who came under the umbrella of Ohrmazd. While not every Magian becomes a priest, the majority of priests in the Persian Empire were ethnically Magian, particularly in the Sasanid Empire. Since the ascendancy of Islam, Magians form an ethnic minority; in Muslim communities they enjoy few of the honours their predecessors were awarded. In Zoroastrian societies, Magians are most often found as priests, but the peripheral nature of the Mazdean faith means that they enjoy few of their former sacerdotal dignities.

### Organisation

The priests of Ohrmazd congregate in fire temples but rarely perform their magical arts in conjunction with each other. In the past, a complex and hierarchical church existed, organised in a similar manner to the Medieval Church, with regions presided over by local *Dasturi* (equivalent of bishops), and with a central authority, the Prince of Magi, living with the Emperor.

Sacerdotal activities, such as lighting or consecrating fires or performing the thanksgiving is a communal effort, but most holy practices such as the marriage rite, the *sedra pushan* or performance of prayers can be done by a single priest. Magians likewise are organised around their fire temples, but since the rise of Islam, only the largest Zoroastrian communities can maintain such a large priesthood. Most Magians operate as individuals or duos, while a few live alone in the wilderness or journey continuously through the Invisible World (for more information on the Invisible World, see a future article *A Hyperborean Ghost Story*). As such, few Magian practices require that large numbers of other Magians be on hand to participate.

As a former Imperial faith, Zoroastrianism did have rites and practices that allowed them to perform grand rituals involving scores of mages. When

Osthanes journeyed into Greece with Xerxes, he and his followers performed many rituals in concert. The mystery of Magian Numismancy is one such tradition that has survived. Like the Hermetic spell Wizard's Communion surviving as a remnant of Mercurian practices, the Universal Mystery of Ceremonial Magic (*The Mysteries*, p.24) is the only survival of the once vast Imperial rituals performed in the Magian Golden Age.

### Philosophy and Theosophy

Most Magians in the thirteenth century spend their time in contemplation of the cosmos; inquiring into the hidden mysteries of nature and setting themselves apart so as to fully enjoy life away from sin. More so than most, the Magians understand the nature of the Invisible World, and their lives consist of uninterrupted communion with the airy spirits and angels.

Key in the minds of many Magians is the Great Work of Zoroaster, a realisation of the truth he taught. It is made of three analogous degrees: religious realisation, philosophical realisation and physical realisation. The first is the solid basis for empire and priesthood; the second is the establishment of an absolute doctrine and hierarchical instruction; the last is the discovery and application of the Microcosm of Humanity, the creative law in which people move in concord with the greater universe. The principle of the law is divine impulsion through the universal light of Asha, which bathes and nourishes everything in existence, whether the stars and planets, the plants and metals, or the vital energies of animals and humans.

This three-fold division of the Great Work is symbolic of the knowable manifestation of Ahura Mazda's Godhead itself. Transcending the Amesha Spentas (they are mere knowable emanations) is the triad of Ohrmazd the unknowable. Primary in the triad is the creative Wisdom, whose colour is white; proceeding from the first is Peace, coloured red, combatant of evil discord; finally comes the azure of abundance, fecundity and fertility. These three truths are the macrocosm of the philosophy of Zoroaster's Great Work. Nevertheless, the Magians emphatically state that they believe in a unified God, and that the three divine principles of Ohrmazd in no way contradict his Oneness.

Magians are iconoclasts. Under the Sasanids, they rejected the veneration of cult statues and symbols, replacing them with sacred fires instead. While they forbade cult statues, they still allowed the depiction of Ohrmazd. Their hard-line against icons was to ensure that no false-yazatas were venerated, as had been the case under the Seleucids and the chaos caused by Alexander the Great. Lighting *agari* across the Empire also ensured that a stabilising Zoroastrian Dominion was established, even in areas where there were few Mazdeans.

### Osthanes' Seven Sacramental Words

There are seven powerful voces mysticae that empower the spoken word. Over time, magical accretion has warped them beyond recognition, as they entered Egypt, then Greece and Rome. The original seven sacramental words embodied the Holy Immortals, known as Amahraspénd (Amesha Spentas). They have come down the ages to be: Vohuman (Pure Intellect), Ardwhisht (Highest Truth), Shahréwar (Beneficial Sovereignty), Spandarmád (Holy Piety), Hordád (Rightness), and Amurdád (Perpetuation).

As the Magians spread through the Roman Empire, they used derivations of these names to empower their magic. While the Cult of Mercury never made use of the voces mysticae, many minor hedge traditions did, and by the decline of the Western Empire, they were a staple of magical practice in the failing Empire. When the Order of Hermes was founded, many of the arcane principles behind the *voces mysticae* were examined and simplified by Bonisagus. He stripped them of many unnecessary elements and incorporated some of them into his Unified Theory to empower standard magical Latin phrases. Few would recognise any similarity between the sacramental words of Osthanes and the magic stanzas of Bonisagus.

### Magian Characters

Whether or not individual Magians become priests, there is no question that they are suited to the job. Service since time immemorial has gifted the Magians with certain traits. Magians may be any type of character — including Hermetic mages, hedge mages, unGifted Companions and so on (they are rare and mystical enough that they should not be made as Grogs however). Being a Magian means that you automatically have traits common to the tribe as a whole.

**Required Abilities:** All Magians must start with: Asha 1, Second Sight 1, Theology (Zoroastrian) 2, and Organisation Lore (Magians) 1

**Starting Experience:** As per character template, -4

**Bonus Virtues and Flaws:** +1 Second Sight, +2 Tribal Blood-bond (Mazdean yazatas), -1 Cabal Legacy (*The Mysteries*, p.20), -1 Outsider (Ethnic Minority-non-Zoroastrian communities)

**Required Virtues and Flaws:** +1 Asha (see *HP#9*, p.16), +1 The Vaj (p.@@), -2 Vow (Mazdean Faith)

**Virtues taught:** +1 Guardian Angel, +1 Higher Purpose (Magian Faith), +1 Magic Sensitivity, +1 Sense Holiness and Unholiness, +2 Magian Astrology (p.@@), +3 Affinity with the Divine, +3 Augury, +4 Magian Numismancy, +5 Necromancy (*Kabbalah*, p.116)

Like the Gifts of Gayomart (*HP#9*), the Magian secrets are only taught to those who have gained the requisite understanding of the Zoroastrian faith. Your Theology (Zoroastrian) score must be double





the desired Virtue value. Thus, if you wanted to become initiated into Augury (+3), your Theology (Zoroastrian) score would have to be six or greater. Only those who deeply intuit the words and works of the Wise Lord can gain His Gifts.

## New Virtues and Magian Mysteries

### New Virtue: Elemental Blood (+2/+4)

This Virtue is the magical equivalent of Faerie Blooded. At some point in your ancestry, your forebears had a close relationship with a powerful spirit. As well as gifting you with some aspects of that magical heritage, you can also rely on that ancestor for occasional aid and protection. The precise details of this Virtue depend on the spirit's nature. The strength of the elemental blood in your veins is also important. The following example is for Wind-blooded. Other elements can easily be inferred, with (for example) Earth-Blooded characters gaining bonuses to their Stamina and/or Soak, and magical affinities with the earth.

*Blood of the Wind* (+2/+4): Your blood is filled with the breath of a powerful wind spirit, possibly even one of the Four Great Winds themselves. You gain +1 to your Quickness (even if that takes you over +3) and +3 to natural resistance rolls for spells you choose to resist. If you have the Gift or can cast magic, you also gain a Magical Affinity with Wind at 1.

If you choose the +4 version of this Virtue, your elemental blood is more potent; this version of the Virtue is meant for Gifted characters only. You gain the above benefits and may also cast Auram spells spontaneously without any division by spending a Fatigue Level; if you do not spend a Fatigue Level, your spontaneous Auram spells are only divided by two instead of five. Finally, the Magic Might of Wind spirits allied to your ancestor is considered halved when you summon or compel them (this may require Hermetic Theurgy). Your story guide is the final arbiter of whether a spirit is allied with your ancestor.

### New Virtue: Tribal Blood-bond (+2)

While you may not have a magical heritage, your city, tribe or family has an ancient bond with a spiritual entity. This Virtue works similarly to Close Family Ties (ArM4, p.41), as you can rely on the assistance of your ancient ally. Because the spirit's obligation is with your people, rather than with you personally, most calls for aid need to be couched in terms of how the spirit will be helping the entire group. You should work with your story guide or troupe to determine which spirit you have, and why it is allied with your family or city. For example, all Magians are bonded to the *Prince of Magi*, the powerful spirit of Osthane and his protégés (see below), and many have connections to other *yazatas*.

Use the Ars Notoria Theurgic virtue (*The Mysteries*, p.133) for the mechanics of the spirit's aid, substituting Legend Lore. Remember that this Virtue

attaches your family or tribe to a single spirit, so appeals are made to that spirit, rather than the airy spirits in general. Continued or frivolous requests may see the spirit ignore you, or even punish your hubris. It is also possible (although incredibly unlikely) that your patron may be destroyed, seriously wounded or reduced by a malicious Theurgist (or other spirit). Rejuvenating the spirit or finding a new patron could be a story seed.

### The Vaj (+1)

Magian understanding of wisdom differs from the standard Zoroastrian concept (*Vohu Manah*, HP#9, p.9). While Magians influenced the common perception of Vohu Manah, they hold a deeper and more personal relationship with the Spirit of Wisdom, for they hold that the spirit came down and spoke directly to Osthane and bestowed understanding and enlightenment upon him and all his followers. The Magian viewpoint holds that Wisdom is the highest essence of Ahura Mazda, his most innate quality, from which all creation was wrought, all actions guided and all efforts preserved. Every created thing is nourished and sustained by the strength of the Innate Wisdom. If Wisdom were to fail or be dispersed, not only would Angra Mainyu claim immediate dominion over the universe, but all of creation would cease to exist, for it is by Wisdom alone that it remains.

The Spirit of Wisdom gifted the Magians with the mystery of the *Vaj* ('Utterance'), the arcane practice of holy mantras, whose purpose was to surround the Magian with a secure shield of holy words when performing unclean tasks. This purifying shield gifts the Magian with immunity to the putrefaction within the world. The *Vaj* is a short prayer that takes but a few seconds to say in most cases, but the words and length vary according to the situation, time and place.

Each week, if the Magian character performs the *Vaj* before taking any significant action (such as going to sleep, eating, drinking, ablutions, touching something unclean), he may roll a quality die + Stamina + Theology (Zoroastrian); this may be modified by Virtues like Strong Willed, etc. This total divided by three may then be added to any soak or resistance roll against a creation of the Druj (such as Infernal attacks, disease, physical or mental afflictions, supernatural effects that engender negative emotions, etc). This protection lasts for a week and does not stack with protection gained from the *Parma Magica*, but does add to protection from Arts and Might scores, or from protective charms and the like. The *Vaj* only provides protection against Infernally aligned supernatural powers, or the dark forces of the Unseelie Fae; it grants no protection against magic of the Divine or Magic Realms.

A lesser form of the *Vaj* is practiced by the Zoroastrian laity, from the most exalted nobility to the lowest commoner. It is an act of such piety and faith that unless a Mazdean had 'taken the *vaj*', he would not be willing to drink a single drop of water, even if thirst tormented him. A Mazdean that has

taken the *vaj* faithfully and continuously each week may add his Theology (Zoroastrian) Ability score divided by three, to any soak or resistance rolls as above.

### Magian Astrology (+2)

According to the *Dadistan i Menok i Kbrat* ('Judgments of the Spirit of Wisdom'), the art of Astrology was passed from the Spirit of Wisdom unto Zoroaster, along with many of the secrets of the created world. Magianism has a rather divergent view on some astrological matters, compared to normal understanding. Magians hold that all welfare and adversity that comes to humanity and the world is through the seven planets and the twelve zodiacal signs.

Standing on the bright side of Ohrmazd are the Twelve Commanders of Righteousness, who guide and direct the world towards goodness; on the dark, vile side of Ahriman are the Seven Commanders, who oppress creation and deliver it to evil and death. The twelve great Spirits of the Zodiac are amongst Ohrmazd's most capable and holy defenders, constantly striving to bring goodness and wellbeing into the world. The planets on the other hand are ruled by monstrous demons, which, by dint of being closer to the world, constantly thwart their zodiacal rivals and more often than not succeed in bringing ruin and misery to humanity (hence explaining why the earth is not a paradise).

Because of their innate understanding of astrological truths, Magians may make use of hidden sympathies and connections, in particular those that sympathise with Wisdom. This Virtue works precisely the same as the Hermetic Astrology Virtue (*The Mysteries*, p.68), granting you the Magical Affinity Magian Astrology at level 1. In addition, you may make use of several hidden Magian correspondences.

Greater correspondences occur during the ascendancy of the zodiacal sign and grant a +1 bonus to any total where you would normally add your Magian Astrology affinity, lasting for the length of the zodiacal ascendancy). You gain the +1 lesser correspondence bonus to rolls using the Astrology affinity when you burn a branch of the appropriate sacred wood in an *agiari* ('holy fire') while performing the activity (spell casting, laboratory activity, etc).

Greater correspondences with the astrological Spirit of Wisdom are Libra, Cancer, Aries and Capricorn; lesser correspondences are rowan wood, hazel, willow and cypress.

### Inner Mystery: Magian Numismancy (+4)

While hedge-mages in Mythic Europe use coins to manufacture apotropaic charms, Magians use coins in circulation to work magical effects. The original aims of the Magians were to engender feelings of loyalty to the King of kings. Under the rule of Alexander the Great, this art was put to the use of breaking the spirit of the Mazdean people, to allow more complete integration of Hellenistic ideas, and acceptance of foreign rule.

Magian Numismancy requires a great deal of time, care and resources. There are three phases: the design of the coin-face, the minting of the coins, and distribution.

**Design:** The Magian must chose the image the coin will bear. This image is of vital importance as it determines the effect that the coins will have on those who use or carry them. A sample list is in the nearby table. When designing the coins, the magi must make a Communication + Theology (Zoroastrian) roll equal to or greater than 9+ the highest magnitude of the effect they wish the coins to have. Designing the coin face takes two seasons to complete (no matter the number of effects the coins are to have) and a number of pawns of vis equal to the ease factor. Other Magians can aid in designing the coins, adding their own Theology (Zoroastrian) scores to the primary designer's total. The primary designer may only have a number of helpers equal to his Communication + Leadership total (as usual). If the roll is successful, the Magian moves onto the Minting phase, otherwise the season is wasted.

**Effect:** Any type of magical effect can be enchanted into the coins. However, several aspects of the effect are set and cannot be changed. The effect must always have Duration: Fire (*HP#9*, p.18); furthermore, the Effect Frequency must always be Constant, and it may not have any Effect modifications. Most effects will be T: Individual. Generally the trigger for the coins is merely handling them, although it could also include their being defaced or damaged. The total magnitude of effects able to be imbued into the coins is equal to the number of pawns of vis spent in the Design phase.

**Minting:** Minting the coins is much like the process of Hermetic magical enchantment. After obtaining the desired amount of silver (or other precious metal), the Magian begins work. An Intelligence + Craft (Minting) + Theology (Zoroastrian) + Aura total is generated over a season, and compared to the highest level of the effect(s). A number of pawns of vis equal to the amount spent during the Design phase, plus the number of coins being minted is spent during this time. Other Magians (or artisans with the appropriate ability) may help, adding their Craft (Minting) ability to the total, as per the Design phase above. Vis may be spent to increase the total, with each pawn of vis adding +5 to the total. If the total is above the total level of the effect(s), then the minting work is completed in a single season, otherwise additional seasons may be spent until the combined total adds up to the effect level. Each additional season requires half the amount of vis (drop fractions) being invested as the first.

**Distribution:** The Distribution phase involves ensuring the coins are disseminated amongst a community and that they are not diluted with foreign currency or debased by counterfeits. In the past, Magians would rely on the state to distribute and





police the newly minted currency. There is no real system for this. Assume that the coins are disseminated among the target community over the course of a year, less if the community is small or more if the coins are few in number.

**Note:** When minting coins, characters are limited by the maximum number of pawns of vis they are allowed to use in a single season. Because the minting process is often carried out by a group of Magians, the leader of the group may increase the number of pawns he may use in a season by the sum of the Theology (Zoroastrian) of his helpers.

#### Example Coin Effects

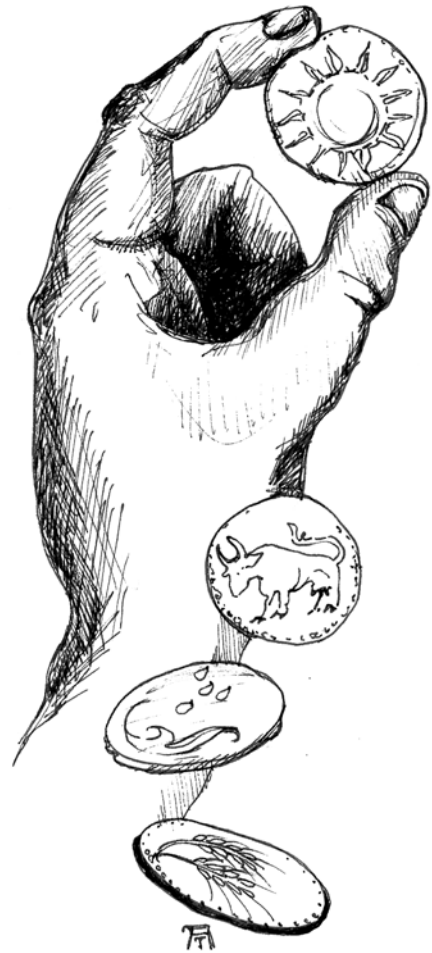
The samples here are based off the Amesha Spentas and use Hermetic spell guidelines. However I encourage troupes to experiment and use wacky non-Hermetic things. Other suggestions are to base the effects on the powers of spirits, or Form and Effect tables. The Technique/Form levels here are at their 'base'. You will need to calculate their total level with D: Fire and with a Constant effect. Most effects will be R: Touch, but most ranges are possible.

- Asha (image of fire or Mithras/sun): CrMe15 — creates the emotion of truthfulness.
- Armaiti (image of cattle): ReMe25 — control the mind, ensuring loyalty and obedience to the will of the King.
- Haurvatat (symbol of water or Ahurani): CrCo15 — stops the progress of diseases, or gain +3 to Wound recovery rolls.
- Ameratat (image of crops): CrHe5 — ensures the crop shown on the coins does not become sick.
- Khshatra (image of King): CrMe15 — creates the emotion of loyalty towards the person shown on the coin face.
- Spenta Mainyu (symbol of Ohrmazd or a *fravashi*): ReVi10 — grants a magic resistance of 10 + a quality die against creatures with Infernal Might.
- Vohu Manah (image of Ohrmazd): CrVi30 — grants the +1 Virtue Self-Confident, or the +1 Virtue Strong Personality (This is a guesstimate, since it is non-Hermetic. I recommend troupes or story guides meddle with this one, as each troupe may have its own method for magic granting the effects of Virtues or Flaws.)

#### Example: Coins of Ardashir

Ardashir was the first king of the Sasanids. Under his rule, High Mage Tansar propagated the worship of Ohrmazd and the *yazatas*, and supervised the minting of the new dynastic currency, depicting the Holy Fire of *Asha*, and on the other side the face of Ardashir himself, embodiment of *Khshatra*.

*Design:* Subjects of Ardashir are imbued with emotions of truthfulness and loyalty to the Emperor. This amounts to two Creo Mentem 15 effects. The



Duration is Fire (+15), Target is Individual (+0), and Range is Eye (+0). Those who look at the symbol of Asha on the coin's face activate the coin's effect. The total level of the effects is therefore 30, so the Magi designing the coins needs to roll 15+ on a Com + Theology (Zoroastrian) roll, as well as spend 15 pawns of vis.

*Minting:* Ardashir wants enough coins to be used in the heart of his new empire. Being an Emperor, he can afford to finance enough silver to produce coins to cover his new domain easily. His Magi generate their Int + Craft (Minting) + Theology (Zoroastrian) + Aura total and aim to get over 30. During this time they spend 15 pawns of vis, and another 55 pawns of vis due to the volume of silver being enchanted (assume Great Lord +10, since he is not covering the entire empire), for a grand total of 70 pawns! If their total does not exceed 30, they would continue to enchant the coins each season, spending 35 pawns of vis each season until they accumulated the total 30 points.

*Distribution:* Since Ardashir needs to distribute the coins over only the heart of his empire, the Province of Persia, they are quickly dispersed in little over three seasons. If he had wanted to cover his entire empire, it would have taken a year; only producing enough coin for a city would take a season at most, and so on.

#### Inner Mystery: +6 Prince of Magi

This mystery is the highest Magian secret and has been achieved by only three people in their long



## Minting Coins in Mythic Europe

The amount of resources required to finance the minting of coins is generally restricted to the greater nobility and royalty. In the thirteenth century, the right to mint coins is almost entirely possessed by kings alone, although a few powerful barons and bishops may also usurp or possess the right. Due to the complex state of minting in Mythic Europe (and in general), this process has been abstracted. A lord can be expected to accumulate enough silver (or other precious metal) to provide coins for his or her lands. In doing so, the lord expends enough of their resources that they cannot make any further financial outlays that year without borrowing money (assuming they have no other Virtues affecting their resources). Most nobles live in debt and few would want to mint their own coins; in reality, only kings and 'bishop-princes' did so. The Virtues referred to are: the Great Lord variable Virtue in *A Medieval Tapestry* (p.26), and the Well-Off, Prosperous and Wealthy Virtues from *Ordo Nobilis* (p.35-6).

A Landed Knight (Great Lord +6) could thus mint enough coins for his modest domains (although it is completely unlikely that he would), and a Duke (Great Lord +10) would have enough resources to mint coins for his lands across Europe. Kings, Emperors or Caliphs (assume Great Lord +12 or more) may obviously mint and distribute coins across their kingdom and are the only people likely to do so. A lord could decide to under spend, in which case, he mints enough coins for the next

Virtue down. An under-spending count mints enough coins to distribute amongst the equivalent domain of a Landed Knight; an under spending king only mints enough for a duchy, and so on. Should the lord over-spend, they beggar themselves for two years, but mint enough coins for the next level up. Virtues such as Wealthy or Prosperous reduce the length of time by one season per pyramid point of the Virtue's value (a prosperous count is financially strapped for only one season after minting coins for his counties for example).

Wealthy Covenants who want to mint their own coins use their Income Characteristic. Each season their Income generates a number of pyramid points equal to its score +1. When the pyramid points equal the number required for the Great Lord Virtue, the Covenant has gathered enough silver to mint coins for that sized community. Thus, a Covenant with an Income of 0 would take 21 seasons to accumulate enough silver to make coins for the equivalent of a Landed Knight. Covenants can pool their resources, adding their Income +1 Scores to more quickly gather silver. Using magic can also aid this, with the magnitude of appropriate CrTe spells (D: Inst) adding to the pyramid points accumulated.

When determining the number of pawns of vis required during the minting process, use the pyramid cost of the Great Lord Virtue. Therefore, a Duke enchanting the coins in his mint would need 55 pawns of vis in addition to the number spent during the design phase.

history. The title Prince of Magi is not only honorary, but carries great mystical weight. The Prince of Magi is the ruler and leader of the Magians: the highest priestly position in Zoroastrianism, akin to being the Patriarch, Pope or Caliph.

This mystery is not taught by the Magian priesthood, but is rather granted through divine insight to the person most befitting the position. The first Prince of Magi was Osthanes and he filled that role until his heir Tansar succeeded him. Tansar quickly moved on to his final reward, and so the title was granted to Kartér. Since the rise of Islam, there has been no Prince of Magi.

To become the Prince of Magi, one must have embodied all of the Amesha Spentas. This process is almost impossible, as most venerable Zoroastrians choose either one path or another when they gain the Gifts of Gayomart. Furthermore, by the time that a particularly holy Zoroastrian Magoi has gained all of the Gifts, they are world-weary or have another destiny. Although being the Prince of Magi is the highest rank in Zoroastrianism, it carries many burdensome responsibilities.

There are no ordeals for this mystery. Since divine forces (either Ahura Mazda or the Amesha Spentas themselves) grant it, this Virtue merely augments the chosen Prince of Magi with no adverse effects. Story guides or troupes may decide that ordeals are necessary however, and should choose ones such as

Quests, Good Works or other non-crippling ordeals. It is recommended that Ordeals be used as a major part of a story based around a character becoming the Prince of Magi, rather than just a system by which this Virtue is bought. Good works, quests and Twilight episodes are great opportunities to explore the Zoroastrian world-view.

The Prince of Magi adds the following traits to his own; this means that the bonuses here stack with ones from other traits. (Note: although all past Princes of Magi have been men, there is nothing stopping someone becoming a 'Princess' of Magi.)

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

Divine Might: +40\*

Size: +0

Personality Traits: +3 to all of the Amesha Spentas Personality traits (i.e., Good, Holy, Righteous, Love of God, etc).

Soak: +5

\*Note that this stacks with any Divine Might gained through the Outer Mystery of Asha or some other source.

### Powers

*Elemental Immunity*, 0 points (Re[Form]): The Prince of Magi is completely immune to the non-magical effects of any Zoroastrian element because of the love they hold for the chosen of Ohrmazd. This means that metal or





wooden weapons cannot harm him, fire does not burn him, water will not drown him, lightning will not strike him, and so on. Because humans are one of the Zoroastrian elements, the Prince of Magi is also immune to harm from physical attacks made by a person, such as barehanded strikes.

*Magical Immunity*, 0 points (ReVi): When he becomes the Prince of Magi, he becomes immune to spells of second magnitude or lower (i.e., level 10 or less), regardless of Penetration or casting totals.

*Sense the Lie*, 0 points (InMe): The Prince of Magi is aware of any infernal or diabolical entity touching the same ground as him (defined by the Ground range in *HP#9*, p.18). Infernal creatures with an Infernal Might greater than the Prince of Magi's Divine Might may choose to hide themselves from this power by spending a point of Might.

*Divine Magic*, 1 point (Cr[Form]): A number of spells with a magnitude equal to the Prince of Magi's Divine Might become supernatural Powers, able to be performed at will without needing a roll, and using a Penetration equal to total Might + level of the spell + aura. For example, if the Prince of Magi knew *Ball of Abysmal Flame*, he could chose for that to become a Power, and could cast it whenever he wanted by spending one point of Divine Might, with a penetration total of 35+ the Prince of Magi's Divine Might + aura. If the Prince of Magi had a Divine Might of 50, and were to choose *BoAF*, this would result in 7 magnitudes being designated as Powers, with 43 magnitudes remaining.

*Free-casting*, 0 points (MuVi): Because of the intimacy the Prince of Magi has with the Amesha Spentas, he may cast spontaneous spells using the Zoroastrian ranges, durations and targets, even if they would normally only be able to be cast by ritual or formulaic magic.

*Tribal Prince*, 0 points (CrMe): Through prayer and concentration, the Prince of Magi may become aware of any or every ethnic Magian alive. This allows Magians to communicate with their Prince, gain insight and awareness, warnings and advice. The Prince of Magi may only communicate with a Magian who has initiated the contact; he may not talk to an unwilling Magian, but he can choose to be aware of them. Any Magian may initiate contact with the Prince of Magi, who is obligated to assist to the best of his ability. A Prince of Magi who ignores a genuine request for help or advice loses all of this template's abilities, the Gifts of Gayomart, and even the power to perform magic. For this reason, and because he will always be a paragon of the Amesha Spentas, no Prince of Magi has ever refused a request.

*Apotheosis*, special: This power may be used only once. It allows the Prince of Magi to become a yazata, a divine angel of Ahura Mazda. In so doing, the Prince of Magi journeys to heaven where his body and mind are transformed into divine substances. He retains all of his previous abilities, and may gain more besides. In this form, the Prince of Magi becomes a Tribal Spirit of the Magians, and may become someone's Guardian Angel. The mantle of Prince is passed to another.

### Using the Prince of Magi in Stories

The above template is designed for use by characters (yes, really). Just as characters may initiate themselves into the highest mysteries of Alchemy or Theurgy, so too are they able to do so with the Zoroastrian Mysteries. A saga that has a non-Hermetic focus would allow the PCs to explore the myths and history of Osthane and attempt to imitate him. A story or even a saga could be based around either trying to find someone worthy of becoming the new Prince of Magi, or even a quest to allow a player-character to become the new Prince of Magi. Given the soon-to-be arriving Mongols, there is a pressing need amongst Zoroastrians to find a leader and protector.

Alternatively, the characters could encounter the Prince of Magi, in the form of a yazata. While determining the precise traits of the Prince of Magi would be an exercise in futility, the above gives an indication of the kind of abilities the Prince may have. Furthermore, if there were a Magian in the troupe, this option would allow the character to interact with his blood-bound tribal guardian, or guardian angel.

If the troupe is uncomfortable with allowing Zoroastrian mysteries to grant Divine Might, the Prince of Magi is merely aligned with the Magical Realm, and becomes a powerful spirit, able to be summoned or bound with magic. As a powerful spirit, the troupe could attempt to locate the Prince of Magi for advice or help against a powerful diabolical enemy. Given Osthane's interest in the West, there may be relics or artefacts left by him in Greece (or even Italy) that could allow them to contact him.

### A Select Bibliography

A great number of books and websites were referred to for this article, quite apart from the various *Ars Magica* books referred to. For more useful general sites and books, check the bibliography in my *Mythic Zoroastrianism* article (*HP#9*, p.23). Generally useful websites are linked from those. Sites and books referenced in the earlier bibliography were also used for this article, and were of great use.

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## Omnibus Grimoire Scroll VIII: Mentem

by Andrew Gronosky

Honored colleagues,

It is my privilege to offer to you this eighth scroll in my Omnibus Grimoire of lesser-known spells collected from the tomes and libraries of the Order. This season's collection concerns the Form of Mentem, surely a subtle Form and one most useful to magi who walk among mundanes.

There are a fair number of Mentem spells that are widely known and quite useful. Most of these well-known spells deal with thoughts and emotions. Yet there are equally useful spells that concern lesser-known aspects of the mind: personality and dreams. These are the main themes of this scroll's collection. Truly subtle and useful Mentem spells tend to be of high Magnitude, for the mind of a man is difficult for even a magus to truly master. Most of the spells on this scroll, therefore, are of fourth magnitude and above, in a break from my usual habit of offering low-magnitude spells. Still, I have made a point of including a couple of spells that can be learned by the Mentem beginner. May they serve you well.

Your colleague and servant,

**Jarius of House Mercere**

### Creo Mentem

*Reverie of the Unbroken Daydream (CrMe 15)*

R: Near/Sight, D: Diam., T: Ind.

Spell Focus: A bit of wool (+1)

Conjure vivid, distracting daydreams into the subject's mind. This generally causes the subject to stop paying attention to his surroundings and whatever he

was doing. The subject takes a -3 penalty to most Concentration or Perception-based rolls, and has a tendency to just sit and daydream while the spell lasts. Important events like being attacked or being yelled at by one's superior break the spell immediately.

Design: Put a thought into another's mind, Level 10. Increase Range to Near (+2 magnitudes) and reduce Duration to Diameter (-1 magnitude).

*Whisper Through the Gates of Dream (CrMe 15)*

R: Arc., D: Conc., T: Ind./Group

Spell Focus: A pinch of sand (+1)

This spell only affects a subject who is asleep and to whom you have an Arcane Connection. You may speak to the target and your words will be heard in his dreams. You may speak for as long as you maintain concentration, but long and complex messages are difficult for the subject to remember upon waking.

The voice that speaks is identifiable as yours. If you are speaking to someone who trusts, fears, or obeys you, then there is a good chance your message will be remembered after the subject wakes up. Otherwise, the target may pay no more heed to your message than he would to an ordinary dream.

To remember details of what you said, the target should roll an Int + Concentration stress die. A 3+ is required to remember a brief message, up to 9+ for detailed or complex messages. A botch means the message is remembered incorrectly. Like all dreams, your message begins to fade from memory after the target wakes up. If the subject does not try to remember your words immediately after he wakes up, the Ease Factor to later remember your exact words increases by +3 per hour.

In Mythic Europe, people often believe that recurring dreams are some kind of omen, or are



caused by demons or faeries. You may be able to affect the behavior of a stranger merely by speaking in his dreams. The storyguide may wish for you to make Communication rolls, opposed by the target's Personality rolls, if you try to influence your subject in this way.

**Design:** Form words in another's mind, Level 5. Increase Range to Arcane Connection (+3 magnitudes). Reduce Duration to Concentration (-1 magnitude).

*Bond of False Loyalty (CrMe 25)*

R: Eye/Arc., D: Moon, T: Ind.

Spell Focus: A silver coin (+1)

Instill in the subject a strong, but artificial, sense of loyalty to you. The subject will not willingly betray you or act against your wishes, though he may resent you none the less. In mechanical terms, the target gains a Personality Trait, Loyal to Caster +3. The target may resist this spell when you first cast it, by making a Stamina roll of 9+. While the spell remains in effect, the subject may be tempted to acts of disloyalty; these can be resolved at the storyguide's discretion or by making opposed Personality rolls against the subject's new Loyal to Caster trait. If the subject does give in to temptation, the spell is broken.

When the spell expires, the sense of loyalty goes away, but the subject remembers what he did and how he felt. Most mundanes will conclude they were "bewitched" and react accordingly.

If using the spell focus, give the coin to the subject. Whether the subject keeps the coin does not affect the spell, but he must accept it for the Spell Focus to provide a bonus.

**Design:** Create an emotion in another's mind, Level 15. Increase Duration to Moon, +1 magnitude. Add +1 magnitude because the created emotion is very focused and specific.

## Intellego Mentem

*Judge the Mettle of Man (InMe 15)*

Contributed by Andrew Mitchell

R: Near/Sight, D: Mom., T: Ind./Group

Spell Focus: A clear crystal (+1)

Learn all the Personality Traits of the subject. This spell was recently invented by Tiburon of House Jerbiton, and is being shared widely through that House because it is so useful in smoothing relations with mundanes. It is also popular as an aid to finding brave, diligent grogs — or at least weeding out the slothful, cowardly ones.

If the clear crystal is used, it changes color and patterns to indicate the Personality Traits of the subject.

**Design:** Equivalent to 'sense all of the emotions in a being', Level 15.

*Name of the Stranger (InMe 25)*

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

Spell Focus: Parchment and ink (+2)

Learn the name of the target. If the target has more than one name, you learn the name by which the target thinks of himself. This spell must penetrate the target's Magic Resistance in order to work, and is considered an act of scrying under the Peripheral Code.

If using the Spell Focus, sprinkle drops of ink from a cubit's height above the parchment. The falling drops will spell the target's name.

**Design:** Pick a single answer from the mind of the target, Level 20. Deduct 1 magnitude because the spell is very specific in scope. Increase Range to Near (+2 magnitudes).

*Speech of the Two Minds (InMe(Cr) 50)*

R: Arc., D: Conc./Sun, T: Ind.

Requisite: Creo

Spell Focus: A silver cord (+3)

Hear the surface thoughts of the subject and send your thoughts silently to him. This enables instant and silent communication over any distance up to ten leagues. You hear everything the target thinks, not just the thoughts he chooses to send to you, but the target receives only the words you specifically choose to send.

If the target is unwilling, a Stamina roll of 6+ resists the spell.

A silver cord mystically connects the minds of two beings, such as a magus and his familiar. If using the silver cord, tie it to the Arcane Connection you have to the subject. The silver cord strengthens the connection between you according to the Law of Sympathy.

**Design:** Read a person's surface thoughts, Level 20. Increase Range to Arcane Connection (+5 magnitudes) and increase Duration to Concentration (+1

magnitude). Add *Creo* requisite to allow you to send thoughts in reply.

## Muto Mentem

*Open the Vault of Memory (MuMe(Im) 10)*

R: Eye, D: Sun, T: Individual

Requisite: Imaginem

Spell Focus: A mirror (+2)

Restore clarity and detail to a person's memory of a specific event. As you cast the spell, you must describe the event to the target specifically enough that he knows exactly what event you are talking about. For example, "Remember your most recent conversation with Duke Thibault" would work, but "Remember what happened at two o'clock yesterday afternoon" would not. This spell adds +3 to rolls to remember specific details of an event, but it cannot restore memories that have been magically removed or altered.

Unfortunately, the caster's Wizard's Sigil has a tendency to appear in the subject's memory, sometimes interfering with the efficacy of the spell.

This spell was once used by House Guernicus to interrogate mundane witnesses, but its use fell into disfavor when Quaesitors in the Rhine Tribunal started to try using it on magi. Magi resented the implication that their memories were less than perfect, and often refused to submit to the spell. Quaesitors stopped using it around the 11th Century and it was recently re-discovered by an archivist at Magvillus.

If using the spell focus, the target (and only the target) can see his own memories reflected in the mirror.

Design: Make a major change to a person's memory of an event, Level 10.

*Fan the Fires of Passion (MuMe 15)*

R: Eye/Near, D: Diameter, T: Individual

Spell Focus: An emerald (+3)

Make the subject more excitable, adding +3 to all Personality Trait rolls involving passions such as anger, love, and so on.

This spell originated in House Merinita and is widely circulated there, but it is not a Faerie Magic spell per se.

Design: Make a major change to a person's emotion, Level 15. Reduce Duration to Diameter (-1 magnitude). Add +1 magnitude because multiple emotions are affected.

## Perdo Mentem

*Day of Oblivion (PeMe 20)*

R: Eye, D: Sun/Moon, T: Individual

Spell Focus: A black opal (+3)

Prevent the subject from remembering what he experiences during the spell's duration. This can cause the subject to behave strangely, since he forgets what he was doing a few moments ago and often starts doing it again. This is similar to having the *Flaw, Short Attention Span* (ArM 4, p. 48). The subject can still remember events from before the spell was cast.

This spell may be resisted with an Intelligence stress roll of 9+.

After the spell wears off, the subject can remember everything up until the time it was cast, but the next thing he remembers is the moment the spell wore off. Everything in between is blank. The subject might remember vague impressions of extremely important events such as being chased by a dragon or being reunited with a lost love, but ordinary events are completely forgotten. Since this spell prevents





memories from forming, future Mentem magic (including *Open the Vault of Memory*) is usually ineffective in probing the subject's memories of the day.

In the early days of Doissetep covenant in the Provençal Tribunal, this spell was sometimes used on mundane visitors, who would be led into the covenant and then not remember how they arrived.

Design: Diminish a single mental capacity in a person, Level 15. Add +1 magnitude because the ability to remember is diminished to such a great degree.

*Blessing of the Dove's Peace (PeMe 30)*

R: Near, D: Sun, T: Group

Spell Focus: An olive branch (+2)

The targeted group loses their violent impulses and emotions for the duration of the spell. Subjects who are already fighting are not affected — the impulse of self-defense is stronger than this spell — but those who are on the brink of violence will stand down. If a person affected by this spell is attacked, he will first attempt to escape for one round, but if that fails the spell is broken and he can fight normally to defend himself.

Each subject may resist this spell with a Stamina stress roll of 9+.

Design: Diminish a single mental capability in a person, Level 15. Increase Range to Near (+2 magnitudes) and increase Target to Group (+1 magnitude).

*Tap the Mind, Sap the Will (PeMe 35)*

Contributed by Andrew Mitchell

R: Eye, D: Moon/Perm., T: Ind.

Spell Focus: A ball of lead (+1)

Remove all Personality Traits from a person. The person can still act, but lacks initiative and volition. He becomes very detached, though not listless or morose. Friends and loved ones will certainly notice a profound change and may not even recognize the subject.

Design: Remove all emotions from a person, Level 30. Increase Duration to Moon, +1 magnitude.

## Rego Mentem

*Wakefulness of the Vigilant Sentry (ReMe 10)*

R: Eye, D: Sun, T: Individual

Spell Focus: Rosemary (+1)

The subject will not naturally fall asleep for the duration of the spell. If the subject is already Dazed due to lack of sleep, he will remain Dazed until this spell wears off. This spell cannot prevent a person falling Unconscious due to hard exertion, including exertion due to spell casting.

This spell is commonly used on grogs who are standing watch while the magus is encamped. It is also commonly used on apprentices who doze off too frequently while their master is lecturing.

Rosemary is an herb known to increase alertness and mental clarity.

Design: Control a person's mental state, Level 10.

*Courage of the Valiant Lion (ReMe 20)*

R: Eye, D: Sun, T: Individual

Spell Focus: A lion's heart (+5)

Impart great courage to the target, increasing his Brave personality trait by +3 (to a maximum of +5). This can sometimes go so far as to eliminate all fear from the target, causing him to disregard his own safety or even to ignore danger. Thus, casting it on a sentry could make him more able to walk his rounds on a dark night, but it could also instill so much bravado that he fails to raise the alarm when an intruder is seen. Any Brave rolls the subject makes become stress rolls, and if the subject botches, he does something foolhardy due to exaggerated bravery.

Design: Control an unnatural emotion, Level 20.

*Invisibility of the Discreet Servant (ReMe 25)*

R: Touch, D: Conc., T: Room

Spell Focus: A veil (+1)

Cause everyone in the target Room to consider you so unimportant that they completely fail to notice you. They will not react to your presence or remember you were there unless they succeed at a Perception roll of 9+. You can move among the people, speak, or even pick up and move small objects, but any obtrusive action like shouting or dropping a book entitles everyone to a new Perception roll. Extremely noticeable actions like attacking someone or casting a flashy spell cancel this spell immediately.

This spell was invented by Gaston of House Jerbiton, who claims that it provides a form of "social invisibility" that is more effective than simple physical invisibility. An invisible person can be heard, for example, while someone under the effects of this spell is unlikely to be noticed at all.

Design: There is no applicable guideline, but controlling a person's awareness to this degree is not much different from controlling the person himself, Level 25. Reduce Duration to Concentration (-1 magnitude), and increase Target to Room (+1 magnitude).

*Still the Liar's Tongue (ReMe 30)*

Contributed by Vesna Gronosky

R: Eye, D: Sun, T: Individual

Spell Focus: A fine golden chain (+4)

The subject can only make statements he believes to be true. He can choose to remain silent. There is no Natural Resistance roll against this spell.

The spell is broken if you lose sight of the subject, so even though its duration is Sun, it's generally only useful for one interrogation session at a time. If using the spell focus, bind the target with the chain.

Design: Control a person as long as you can see him, Level 25. Add 1 magnitude because there is no Natural Resistance roll.

*Omnibus Grimoire is accepting spell submissions. E-mail your spell to agronosky@comcast.net and if your spell is chosen for publication, you'll receive a free issue of Hermes' Portal. Next issue's column will cover the Form of Terram and all submissions must be designed according to Fifth Edition rules.*

# Vis-à-vis Vis

by Michaël de Verteuil

**S**o this is it: the last Heretic's Corner before the new and much-awaited edition of our favourite game comes out. Come November, this heretic expects to have a whole slew of new overly-complicated rules and mechanics to chew on, but in the meanwhile we will have to make do with the current partially desiccated corpse before us. There's still some gristle left on the bones (yum!) and most likely the heresies set out in this issue will have continuing relevance well into the new edition.

One of my favourite spells (a ritual, actually) disappeared in the transition from ArM3 to ArM4. *Change the Nature of Vis* permitted the caster to alter the correspondence of a specified amount of vis from one Form or Technique to another. As the spell was a ritual, vis had to be expended such that one pawn was lost for each pawn changed. The ritual hadn't been perfectly thought out in its design, however, as it was described as "General" with each increase in magnitude corresponding to the transformation of an additional pawn. This meant that no time or vis was saved in performing the ritual at higher magnitudes. In fact, given the associated concentration of botch dice, it was simply more dangerous. As such there was no point ever learning or using the ritual at greater than first magnitude.

It is generally not cost effective to design your starting mage with first or second magnitude formulaic spells as these can generally be spouted without much difficulty. First and second magnitude rituals, on the other hand, cannot be spouted and as such play a useful role in filling in those tiny residual nooks left over after you have chosen your higher magnitude spells and only have five or ten spell levels to select. Somehow, *Change the Nature of Vis* always seemed to find a way into the grimoires of my player magi.

"This is all fine and good," you might say, "but what is the point of this trip down nostalgia lane? Where's the heretical beef?"

Well, when I queried the then line editor, Jeff Tidball, on the deletion, he noted there had been some concern that the ritual might be perceived as abusive when used in conjunction with the return of the vis extraction rules (brought back in modified form from ArM2). More significantly for this discussion, he also observed that some players had objected to the ritual as a violation of the Hermetic limit of Essential Nature. These arguments didn't impress me at the time and I continue to allow *Change the Nature of Vis* in my sagas. Nevertheless, the question does present an excellent starting point for this issue's heresy: what is the nature of vis, and is it properly reflected in the game background and mechanics?

Nowhere in the canon is it specified that the Art of a given pawn of vis forms part of its "essential" nature. In fact, as we shall see shortly, the canon has historically sided more with the view that vis is simply

vis. This suggests that its Art, like its colour, shape and physical form, is part of its "accidental" rather than essential features. Let's review the history of vis over the ages.

## Vis in ArM2

In the second edition "most actions can use vis of any art, but some actions (such as casting a ritual spell) require vis of a specific type." A quick review of ArM2 reveals only one other use for which a specific type of vis was required: studying Arts. For all other purposes (Certamen, boosting spontaneous or formulaic spells, magical enchantment, etc.) vis was just vis. The point is emphasized all the more by the description of Vim vis, in contrast to the other Forms, as "pure magic power stored in physical form". This phrase implies that vis associated with other Forms, at least, was less "pure". It doesn't take a great leap of faith to infer then that what determined the Art associated with a pawn of vis was the nature and extent of its impurities. Note to those who would cavil that the quoted description makes no reference to Techniques: insofar as I can determine (not, sadly, possessing a copy of the ArM1) the first edition restricted vis to Forms and not Techniques, and this part of the text was probably carried forward from ArM1 to ArM2 unchanged. In any case, it appears safe to conclude that for ArM2 the Art associated with vis did not form part of its "essential" nature and was thus implicitly mutable.

## Vis in ArM3

Given the inclusion of *Change the Nature of Vis* in the ArM3 spell list, it should perhaps go without saying that ArM3, at any rate, certainly considered vis mutable. We have to explore the issue further, however, given the objection that this inclusion if the ritual might be an error or rather an inconsistency. The one big change concerning vis brought about in ArM3 was the tightening up of restrictions concerning its uses. Vis consumed in the preparation of an enchantment now had to be Vim, and vis used to instil an effect had to be of the appropriate Form or Technique, as had vis used to boost spells and Certamen. Vis thus lost its flexibility, and this apparently suggested to some that pawns of vis associated with different Arts were now to be deemed "essentially" different from one another. Nevertheless, ArM3 continued to describe Vim vis as "pure magic power", suggesting that the difference between pawns still lay in their relative impurities. Rather than an inconsistency, what we seem to be left with is a mistaken inference concerning the rationale behind ArM3's new restrictions on the versatility of vis. They probably related to game balance concerns given the suggested distribution of 5 pawns of vis per mage per adventure. Reducing the versatility of vis also not only cut back on its usefulness, but it also increased its effective variety and could thus be portrayed as adding more colour to the feature.





## Vis in ArM4

We now come to perhaps the most pertinent review, that of the current though soon to be superseded edition. Here we find further subtle mutations in the text. As noted already, *Change the Nature of Vis* was dropped (at least from the sample spell list, though Jeff did make the point of stating that it had not been banned per se). Vim vis is also no longer described as “pure magic power” in distinction to other types. This would suggest a further hardening in favour of the Art-as-essential-nature-of-vis school.

There are, however, three changes in ArM4 that row in the contrary direction and implicitly support the continued viability of my beloved *Change the Nature of Vis*. Vis extraction (albeit at a reduced rate, but significantly still of Vim vis only) has made a comeback, again suggesting that Vim vis is generic or “standard” vis. “Raw” (i.e. Hermetic) vis is also now described as “fluid vis which has become trapped in suitable material.” We have here the beginnings a theory of vis as a coherent and consistent phenomenon. As there is no suggestion that “fluid” ambient vis is similarly differentiated into the 15 Arts, we are left to conclude that the differentiation is a by-product either of the process of “trapping” or of the “suitable material” in which it occurs. Finally, we have the concept of “wild vis” introduced in *Hedge Magic*. This type of vis differs from its “raw” counterpart in that it is not associated with a specific

Art. As such it cannot be used in Art-specific magical operations and cannot even be detected by means of conventional Hermetic magic. Conversely, however, all “Cunning” operations that can use wild vis can also use raw vis associated with any Art. It follows then that raw vis is merely a subset of fundamentally undifferentiated material vis which happens to be suitable for Hermetic purposes, and that wild vis merely represents another subset which is not.

### A New Proposed Heresy

As regular readers of this column will attest, however, Heretic’s Corner is not about determining and defending the canonical take on any given subject. Appealing as it may appear, the theory of vis inferred above, i.e. raw vis being a manifestation of undifferentiated ambient vis trapped into and “tainted” by varying physical receptacles, posed at least two difficulties.

First, if the “nature” (i.e. Art) of vis is determined by the process of “trapping” and/or the physical form in which it is trapped, why can this differentiation not be reproduced Hermetically through the process of extraction? Why must all extracted vis be Vim? Granted, it should be easier to refine a “substance” to its purest form than to some specifically “impure” variant. It is easier to distil pure alcohol than to produce Scotch whisky, for example. But, given the utility of such a process of differentiation to Hermetic magic, why would there be no lab

equivalent of *Change the Nature of Vis* which refined ambient vis into raw vis of types other than Vim?

Second, why does Technique vis exist? Or, posed more cogently, why do both Form and Technique vis exist? This may appear to be a silly question, but it goes straight to the specific nature of Bonisagus’ insights and discoveries which lie at the heart of Hermetic magic. If one of these insights was that all magical operations could be undertaken through two





mutually supporting lines of approach (Forms and Techniques in a process later described as “Hermetic magic”), it should follow that vis usable for Hermetic magic (i.e. raw vis) must apply only to one approach or to both at the same time. The scope of Hermetic magic is meant to be universal. This scope is covered separately in overlapping fashion by the ten Forms and the five Techniques. So all vis should be Form vis, or all vis should be Technique vis, or all vis should be both. But it makes little sense to have some vis be Technique and some vis Form.

In fact, this principle seems to have been reflected in ArM1 in which, I am told, there was only Form vis. You can still find traces of this principle in ArM4 through the fact that only your Form score counts towards your magic resistance. By providing for Technique vis, ArM2 and later editions have garbled the logic behind the interaction of “action” (Technique) and “object” (Form). They have also greatly unbalanced the respective values of the two Art types. Because the five Techniques cover together the same scope as the ten Forms, they are twice as versatile. Logically they should cost up to twice as much, but they don’t, thus also violating the principle that all (Art) eps should be of equivalent value. Under the current dispensation, an ep in a Technique is worth more than an ep in a Form. In ArM1, Forms benefited from their exclusive association with vis (the amount you can use depending on a Form score) and this helped rebalance the respective values of Forms and Techniques.

Ok, so to paraphrase Lenin, “what is to be done?” Returning to the ArM1 approach would just be conservatism. This column is into heresy, not conservatism, so besides bringing back *Change the Nature of Vis*, let’s try the untried approaches. Let’s free up vis extraction so as to permit the extraction in the Lab of other types of raw vis. And instead of 15 types of raw vis, let’s go for 50!

Last issue’s Heretic’s Corner was criticized for being heavy on analysis and light on mechanics. So let’s spell out some new optional mechanics in an effort to keep all our readers happy. These proposed mechanics can be adopted in individual sagas either separately or as a group.

## Change the Nature of Vis

Not everyone has access to the ArM3 rule book, and I am proposing minor modifications to the ritual, so I shall write it out in full here.

### Muto Vim Spells

*Change the Nature of Vis*

Level 5

R.: Touch/Near, D: Inst, T: Small, Ritual

The Magus may change one pawn of vis to another Art. The Technique associated with a pawn of vis (e.g. Creo) may only be transformed into another Technique, or the Form (e.g. Herbam) may only be transformed into another Form. Thus at the

expense of one pawn you can change an Art associated with another pawn.

## Vis Extraction in the Lab

Not every mage will be willing to spend vis to change newly extracted Vim vis into something else through a quickie *Change the Nature of Vis*. So why not add Requisites to the vis extraction rule to provide for non-Vim vis? If you want to extract Corpus vis, for example, just apply the lower of your Vim or Corpus scores to the extraction formula instead of just the Vim score.

## The Vis of Many Colours

This is the biggie: 50 types of raw vis. Each pawn of vis has both a Form and a Technique and can be applied to magical operations using either Art. The number of pawns that can be used at one time in the field is limited to your score in the appropriate Art. Pawns with different Form/Technique combinations can be used in conjunction so long as they are all of the same appropriate Art. The number of pawns associated with any Form/Technique combination that can be used in a given Lab operation in one season is limited by your Vim + MT score. Exceptionally, pawns of vis used in magical operations for which both Arts are appropriate do not contribute to botch dice so long as all the vis used is of the appropriate combination and the total number of pawns used does not exceed your score in the relevant Form. The default combination for vis extracted in the Lab if using this optional rule is CrVi. If you want to change, using *Change the Nature of Vis*, both the Form and the Technique of a pawn of vis, you must perform the ritual twice: once to change the Form and once to change the Technique.

### Pros and Cons

Beyond greater logical consistency, I see several advantages to this approach.

1. It helps rebalance the respective values of Forms and Techniques.
2. It simplifies the relative economics of Technique vs Form vis.
3. It returns vis to some of the flexibility it enjoyed in ArM2.
4. The variety of vis types expands significantly (by a factor of 3 and a third to be exact).
5. It increases the dramatic tension concerning the way in which a particular pawn is to be used.

I think this last advantage is particularly noteworthy. Dramatic tension concerning the alternative uses to which a given pawn might be put shrank dramatically in the transition from ArM2 to ArM3, and this decline carried forward into ArM4. This stemmed not only from reduced flexibility of use but also from a subtle change in the defined properties of vis itself. Here is the description of raw vis in the Storytelling chapter of ArM2:

“Raw vis is universally valuable. Wizards use it for many purposes and it often has magical properties of





value to other characters as well. To design raw vis, decide in its physical form, the art to which it is linked, the number of vis points it has, and any magical properties the material has.”

Here are two examples of magical properties given in the text:

1. “Quartz Crystals, 1 to 4 Intellego vis per crystal, depending on size. Grants + 1 on rolls involving sight if worn as an amulet.”
2. “Healing Berries, 4 Creo vis each. Heals the eater 1 body Level (must make Stm roll of 6+).

Note that the Healing Berries would also be of use to a mage who had never learned the corresponding CrCo spell.

ArM3 on the other hand describes the properties of vis in subtly different words as follows:

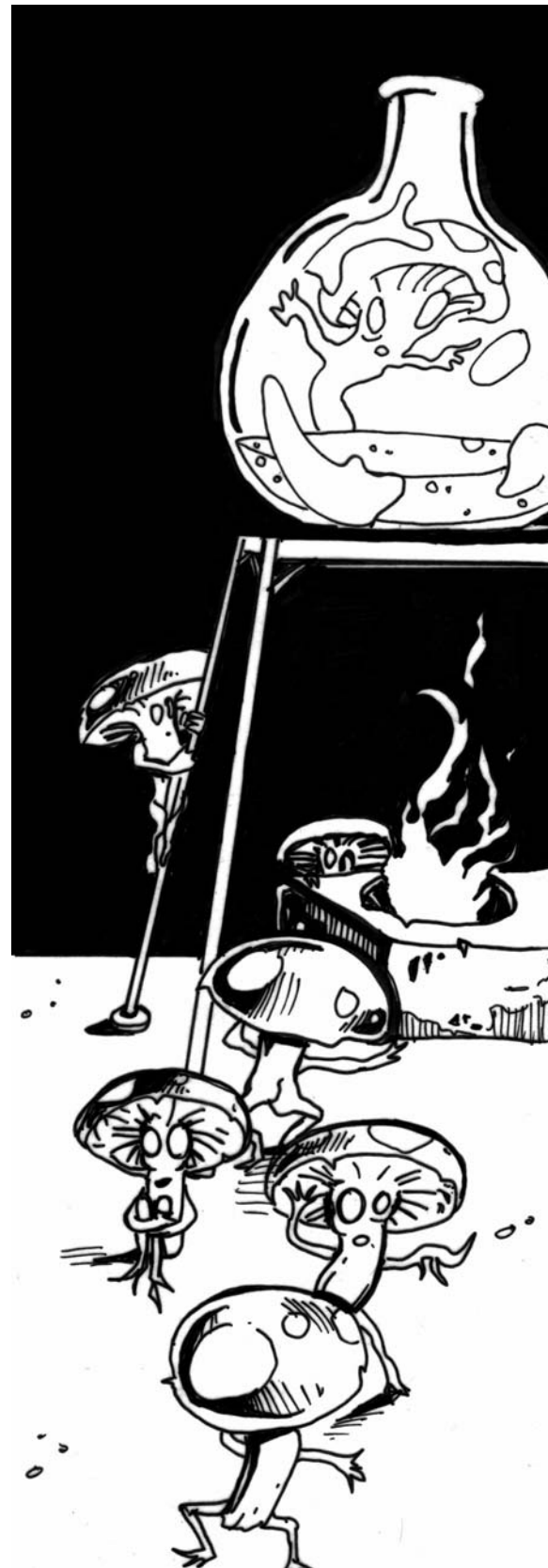
“Raw vis is universally valuable: Magi apply it to a variety of uses, and it often has magical properties of value to other characters. To design raw vis, decide first upon its physical characteristics, the art to which it is attuned, and the amount of vis points in it.”

Gone is the requirement to specify its magical properties, and gone are the evocative examples (though they have made a very minor comeback in highly attenuated form in Hedge Magic as stones and herbs of virtue). The game has been impoverished as a result of this careless deletion. No longer do we have grogs objecting to the use of their Healing Berries when the mage wants to use them to create a magical horse for himself. As the flexibility of vis has declined, we no longer have the tension between using the vis now or later in the adventure for a completely different purpose. The range of use is now so narrow that you might as well use your vis at the first opportunity since no other opportunity is likely to occur before you return home and secure a new supply.

What of disadvantages? Some might argue that the loss of flexibility was a good thing, that vis use tended to dominate adventures in ArM2. If that was the case, then I humbly submit that the correction overshot the mark. My players find ArM4 vis so inflexible they almost never have the appropriate variety on hand unless they travel with a veritable pharmacopoeia (which they have never chosen to do). Instead, vis use in the field has pretty well disappeared and it is now only used in the lab where, given the ease of storage and the different time scale providing opportunities for trade or purchase, flexibility is less of an issue. If vis use was proving to be too common, the proper solution would have been to reduce the suggested reward of five pawns per mage per adventure. Indeed, this was the approach half-heartedly adopted in the transition from ArM3 to ArM4 which suggests reduced rewards of 3-5 pawns rather than the previous 5. Unfortunately, ArM4 didn't restore the flexibility of vis use previously found in ArM2 (which, to be fair, probably had been a tad too flexible). As this subject has only rarely come up for discussion over the last few years,

I will be pleasantly amazed if ArM5 doesn't here just blindly follow in ArM4's footsteps.

And this, dear reader and (hopefully) fellow heretic, brings us to the end of this volume of heresy. ArM5 should be available as you read this or shortly thereafter and a whole new field of heresy will then be open to us. Until then, fare well and remember to munch those berries when you are feeling poorly.



# Covenants As Characters, Continued

by Erik Dahl

When I designed the rules for treating covenants like characters in issue #4, I wanted them to be as consistent as possible in order to make them work intuitively. That is, since characters work a certain way, and since most players grasp how characters work, I thought it was good to model them as closely as I could. I still subscribe to this opinion; and I'd like to begin by explaining how it affected some of my mechanical choices.

The system began with Characteristics, because I thought Characteristics work best as constants for a character's entire life. That is, they represent something of a character's essential nature, and therefore generally embody aspects of the character that do not grow or change over time. Flaws, Afflictions, and Decrepitude can effectively lower these traits, just as Virtues can raise them, but the scores themselves remain constant. Fourth Edition covenants didn't work that way, so I set out to design something that would.

That goal made designing a Library Characteristic a difficult consideration, since the very nature of a library is something that grows and changes over time. I tried to get around this by providing vague guidelines for what sorts of books would be available, but it seems that an important aspect of the covenant is the range of information to which its members have access. Books seem almost as important as covenfolk; the flavor provided by describing them is too valuable to the game to leave to a chart.

However, I have no stomach for designing individual books for my covenants. It simply takes too long! Even with a simpler system for determining starting points, I would still have to choose what kind of books are there, what subjects are covered, and the quality of every individual book, all of which must involve a lot of numbers that aren't easy to remember and don't make sense as a unit (e.g. a single book = X points). I refuse to do this. I believe there must be a simpler way.

At their most basic level, books represent the breadth of knowledge available to those who study them, and I realized that this is much like how a character's Abilities represent everything he has learned. Assigning stats to individual books seems to me like describing each individual experience point a character has gained. I could, but it is much easier to generalize them as different stages of common Abilities. The information contained in a book can be generalized too, by extending the metaphor of the covenant as a character, using books to represent a character's experience in Abilities.

Many argue that books have too much flavor to generalize, though. However, when I look at books

that have been designed in *Ars Magica*, I feel they are invariably missing something. They have Quality, which might describe their physical attributes and the author's clarity of writing, and a Level, which describes the depth of their treatment of the subject. Each book applies only to a single Ability, however. From a design perspective, an attempt to design a book that covers a range of subjects comes out looking like multiple books. It would seem that a single book cannot teach both Theology and Church Lore, for example. Yet isn't this exactly the role of a book like the Bible? Surely a book should be able to cover a whole range of topics?

Since in this regard at least *Ars Magica* books don't work exactly like real books anyway, I wonder what this simulation gains us. Perhaps books and libraries can be generalized a bit more — not so much that the concept of books is removed entirely, but enough that designing and maintaining a library is a little easier? With that goal in mind, I propose two courses of action.

Firstly, I suggest thinking of a library not as a collection of books, but rather as a collection of subjects. A library with a single Bible would effectively have a Theology section, a Legend Lore section, and perhaps even an Area Lore: Judea section. They're all part of the same book, but studying it yields different knowledge depending on your focus. In this way, the same book can be considered to cover all of these fields of study, and any of these topics can be studied as desired. This means a fundamental change in how libraries are designed, because the list of Abilities it teaches becomes more important than the list of books it contains.

Secondly, to make this change work smoothly and consistently, I have devised several new rules for representing and improving Abilities. My inspiration comes from many sources, including: Michaël de Verteuil's column in HP1, *Less Is More*, which introduced the idea of specialties separate from their related Abilities; and David Chart's article in HP5, *The Magic of the Founders*, which proposed incremental benefits for mastered spells. These are both excellent articles, filled with useful material on this subject, and I would like to see if I can build upon their suggestions.

I have also developed rules for studying and teaching that take advantage of these ideas. While I would like get to those things immediately, I find that I must first explain the changes I propose to the way Abilities and spells work, in order to make the new framework for the Library characteristic make sense.

Also: I'd like to thank Alex White and Bjarke Roth for their suggestions and encouragement with the early drafts of this article. I find it difficult to write without feedback, and I can't emphasize enough how helpful I find their comments.

## Abilities

Libraries exist to teach Abilities (or Arts), so in order to streamline a library, we should take a look at





simplifying or making more intuitive the Ability scores they affect. Here are several ideas that may improve how Abilities work in your game.

### Specialties

To improve on Abilities, simplifying them while keeping their range of applications intact, I suggest that we treat specialties separately. That is, instead of giving every Ability a specialty that is recorded with the Ability, specialties would become sub-Abilities that are tracked with their own experience. For example, my character might have *Artes Liberales* 3 and (*Astronomy*) 1. When using *Artes Liberales* to deal with astronomy, I can add 1 to his total, just like any character with a specialty in astronomy. However, if he studies a lot of astronomy, he might increase that specialty beyond 1, yielding a greater bonus in that field.

Continuing the example, suppose this character begins devotedly studying astronomy. Over time, he increases his (*Astronomy*) specialty to 4, even surpassing his *Artes Liberales* score. Now when he performs an action that requires his knowledge of the heavens, he may add *both* his *Artes Liberales* Ability and his (*Astronomy*) specialty, giving him a total of 7. For other applications of *Artes Liberales*, he still has only a 3.

In this sense, it's like I'm proposing treating specialties like *Magical Affinities*, only with Abilities. They are basically bonuses to particular applications of related Abilities that can increase over time. A character can accumulate experience in the Ability or the specialty, and both increase on the pyramid scale, so that at low levels, a score in both is almost as valuable as having a single high general score. For balance, just like *Magical Affinities*, they should not be stacked with other bonuses, though.

A specialty doesn't have to apply to only one Ability, either. For example, I might take a (*Horses*) specialty, which would typically apply to *Animal Handling*. However, since it means I am particularly good with horses, I might be allowed to apply it to *Hunt* when tracking horses, or even *Brawling* when trying to dodge a horse's kick.

Of course, I must have an Ability to which a specialty would apply before I can take it, and I cannot use the specialty without using an appropriate Ability. That is, a (*Horses*) specialty might apply to hunting for a horse, but if I don't have the *Hunt* Ability, I can't use my specialty for that action, because I don't know what I'm doing.

This change would allow many Abilities to be condensed into even more general groups. For example, all the *Performance Skills* might be reduced to a single "Perform" Ability. A musician would probably specialize in *Sing* or *Storytelling*, but might also pick up related skills as she improved her general ability. Likewise, many social Abilities (*Charm*, *Guile*, *Bargain*, etc.) can be incorporated together, with the specifics becoming specialties of the general *Folk Ken*.



Another thing this allows is for characters to have an Ability that describes a profession or trade, without having to assign experience to every Ability that makes up that profession. For example, a mounted warrior might take experience in a Knight specialty instead of in Single Weapon, Longshaft Weapon, and Ride. His score in (Knight) could be applied to any total for which that training is applicable. Likewise, a fisherman could take a (Fishing) specialty that includes fishing aspects of Survival, Hunt, and Swim.

This professional specialty works particularly well with grogs and specialists in a covenant, because such characters tend to be somewhat two-dimensional anyway, and in this way they can develop their experience along a single career track. A shield grog can practice (Shield Grog). The steward can take points in (Steward). It becomes very easy to keep track of what different minor characters are doing, because all their seasonal experience goes in one place.

A third benefit to this system is that players do not have to pick a single specialty for each of their characters' Abilities. They can explore many different specialties as they have different adventures, or they can increase their general scores as usual when they become exposed to different aspects of the base Ability.

Finally, I find this widens the divide between an apprentice and a master. A master craftsman doesn't just have a score of 5 in his craft, he probably has a 5 or more in one or more specialties, too. A journeyman might have achieved a score of 5, but has yet to develop any particular focus.

Michaël de Verteuil suggested this change in his column in HP1, and I think it's an excellent idea. I've adopted it into my saga, with the changes I suggest above, but I impose no limits on the specialty over-taking the Ability — if a character wants to raise her (Astronomy) to 5 and ignore the general Artes Liberales knowledge, I think that's fine, because the narrow application of the specialty offsets the numerical advantage.

It's been suggested that players might abuse this system by developing combinations of Ability 5, (Specialty) 5 or greater, allowing them an effective 10 in Abilities that would otherwise be limited at around 6. I don't think this is that abusive, since the character has spent a lot of experience points for bonuses that should be situational, and I think that gives the character a lot of depth. Just be careful about allowing specialties that are not very situational.

### Specialties Summary

When using an Ability, you can add your score in an appropriate specialty as a bonus, instead of simply adding one.

### Languages

In Fourth Edition (and in previous editions) languages are treated as Abilities. However, when I was looking at the different Abilities with an eye for condensing them, I realized that most of what one does with languages can be done better with other

Abilities. For example, Scribe is covered by Artes Liberales, and understanding what a person wants has more to do with Folk Ken than one's Speak Language score.

It seems to me that language is actually sort of an extra layer that affects communication-based Abilities. To represent that, I suggest we create an additional type of Ability, called Language. A Language is treated like a normal Ability, and increased just like a Casual Knowledge, but when using an Ability or specialty that depends upon language, you use the Language total as a requisite to the Ability + specialty total. That is, you take the lower value when calculating the character's total. When making a roll that is entirely based on language, such as translating an inscription or asking for directions, you can use the Ability on its own.

Of course, this allows for Language specialties, too. You can have specialties like Slang or Scribe, or you can even relate similar languages together by taking a sort of superspecialty like Romance Languages or Roman Alphabet. The essence of the rule is simply that the character's language ability acts as a "cap" on other abilities that use it.

### Language Summary

When using an Ability that involves language, use the lesser of the Ability and Language totals.

### Spell Mastery

David Chart has suggested several excellent ideas for spell Abilities, and I liked them so much I incorporated them into my home system. Each spell is an Ability, but instead of keeping track of which "paths" each character has taken when mastering each spell, I decided that it would be simpler for me to make the benefits more general, based directly on the character's level of mastery.

### Suggested Benefits of Mastery

- You may add the Ability score to your casting roll.
- When rolling for a potential botch, subtract one botch die for each level of the Ability.
- You may add five times the score to your magic resistance when affected by the spell or a similar spell.
- You may multi-cast the spell, casting it up to a number of times equal to the level of the Ability.
- When you spontaneously cast a similar spell, you may add the score to your casting roll.
- You may reduce the penalties for casting the spell in unusual circumstances, such as Fast Casting or casting without words or gestures, by the level of your specialty.

In this way, I can track the spells like Abilities, with a single score that represents my level of expertise. However, I will still improve my mastery with the spell if I spend my story experience on it instead of Abilities.





To retain some of the flavor of David's original idea, the "paths" he developed could still be taken as specialties. They wouldn't just apply to the particular spell, but rather to all mastered spells. For example, (Quiet Magic) 2 would reduce the penalty for casting all mastered spells without voice by an additional 2, while (Mastered Spell Penetration) might increase your Penetration score.

## Books

In essence, books represent a method for transferring knowledge from a library to something else, either a person or another library. To explain this in *Ars Magica* terms, I think of a book as a container for experience points. That is, a scribe copies a book from a library, and the book he brings back increases his library's experience points accordingly.

Therefore, to revise books, I propose a very simple system. Libraries have Abilities, and books have experience points in those Abilities. When a book is integrated into a library, it loses its identity as a book and increases that covenant's score in the related Ability accordingly, as long as the source Ability isn't higher than that of the destination.

For example, let's say I've copied 11 experience points' worth of knowledge of diseases from a library with Medicine 6. The resulting book would make a nice addition to my covenant's library, raising it from 4 (its current score) to 6 (a score of 4 is 10 experience points, and  $10 + 11 = 21$  experience points, for a score of 6). In a library with Medicine 5, it would still increase the library up to level 6, but no higher. In a library that already had Medicine 6 or more, the book would be useless and therefore would not be integrated.

Books are not usually found outside of libraries, so it isn't really necessary to keep track of the level of the source except in transit. However, if you want characters to find a book as a reward, you will need to determine the level of the source beforehand, so that you can say whether or not there is a place for it on their library's shelves. If its source level is too low, they may want to keep the book anyway (perhaps to trade it).

I suggest describing books in a way very similar to how they have been in the past, simply noting the subject, source level and the experience points, like so: Medicine 6/+11. This tells us that it came from a level 6 Medicine library and contains eleven experience points. This isn't that different from the way books are handled in Fourth Edition, though Quality doesn't exactly translate.

Using this system, though, I don't see a need for different kinds of books, as I explained earlier. It seems to me that there's no real world difference between a *summa* and a *tractatus*, except that a *tractatus* might be more specialized. For flavor, the term "tractatus" could deal with specialties rather than general Abilities, but I think there is basically little distinction. If desired, it is possible to use this system to generalize most books, but occasionally introduce

unusual books that follow more complicated rules that just don't get integrated into the library.

### Book Summary

Books outside of a library have a subject, experience points, and occasionally a level. This is written like so: *Title*, Ability [Level]/+XP.

## Library

As I suggested in my *Covenants As Characters* article in issue 4, Library is an essential characteristic of a covenant. It represents the organization, physical attributes, and scope of a covenant's book collection, and in that sense it can provide a generalized Quality when looking at all the books the magi have on hand. That is, studying in a covenant with a high Library score will yield more experience per season than studying in a covenant with a poor Library score. This is extremely useful when designing a covenant, because it means you don't have to design every book.

These new rules make it necessary to outline a covenant's library in terms of its Abilities. This means we need to know how many experience points it has. One way to do this is to treat the covenant as a seasonal character, and use my rules in *Seasonal Characters* (issue 5) to figure out how many experience points the covenant would have based on its season and age. However, I fear that is still too complicated. My primary goal is to reduce the amount of work necessary to design and maintain a covenant, so I feel you should be able to use the Characteristic as a baseline, and assign specialties or unusual Ability scores with Virtues and Flaws.

So, then, an additional purpose of the Library characteristic is to give an idea of how extensive its library is and assign a baseline value in the subjects it would cover, and thus provide a starting point for a storyguide to commence hand-waving. To this end, I have developed a chart, below, that addresses this need.

The way this works is when a character wants to study a subject or add a book to your collection, and the covenant doesn't already have an Ability for that subject, you use the table to determine the level of the study source, based on how you rate the subject. Treat the Hermetic Arts as an Essential resource in a covenant's library, and use the second number, the number after the slash, for them.

For example, let's say my character wants to study *Artes Liberales*. I would consider that a Basic Ability in my covenant. We have a poor Library, rated at -3. Therefore, we have an *Artes Liberales* section, but there isn't much in it, and it is only rated Level 3. If I wanted to study Arts, my character could study them up to a maximum Level of 7.

For spells, assign them a category and compare their magnitude to the chart. This is the maximum level you can have of that spell in your library. For example, I would rate *Chirurgeon's Healing Touch* a Common spell. My poor Library probably doesn't

have a copy. I would need to have at least an average (+0) Library to have Common spells of fourth magnitude.

### Modified Library Characteristic

Lib	Level
-5	Essential 3/5
-4	Essential 4/6
-3	Essential 4/7, Basic 3
-2	Essential 5/8, Basic 4
-1	Essential 5/9, Basic 4, Common 3
+0	Essential 6/10, Basic 5, Common 4
+1	Essential 6/11, Basic 5, Common 5
+2	Essential 7/12, Basic 6, Common 5, Uncommon 3
+3	Essential 7/13, Basic 6, Common 5, Uncommon 4
+4	Essential 8/14, Basic 7, Common 6, Uncommon 4, Rare 3
+5	Essential 8/15, Basic 7, Common 6, Uncommon 5, Rare 4

A couple of the Virtues and Flaws from that article need to be revised slightly to take advantage of these changes, and I'll do this below. I have also added a few new Library-oriented Virtues.

### Modified Covenant Virtues and Flaws

**Quality Library, +1:** Special attention and care has been paid to the books in the library, many of which have been glossed or given physical improvements over the years. Treat your Library score as one greater when studying from it.

**Neglected Library, -1:** Due to neglect, wear, or accidents, most of the books in the covenant's library have been damaged somewhat over the years. Treat your Library score as one less when studying from it.

### New Covenant Virtues and Flaws

**Good Books, +1:** The covenant has a special section of the library on a particular subject, covered in greater detail than normal. Take seven experience points and use them to increase the level of these Abilities in your library, or to take specialties. This Virtue may be taken multiple times and stacked, but no more than seven points may be spent on a single subject.

**Good Hermetic Books, +1:** The covenant has developed a particular Art over the years, so that it is a higher level than the others. Take twelve experience points and use them to increase the level of Arts in your library. This Virtue may be taken multiple times and stacked, but no more than twelve points may be spent on a single Art.

**Extra Spells, +1:** You start with 10 extra levels of spells, which you may use to purchase spells that wouldn't normally be found within your covenant. This Virtue may be stacked, so that at +2 you get 30 levels of spells, at +3 60 levels, and so on.

**Extensive Library, +2:** Your library is particularly diverse, covering a very wide range of subjects. Treat all your library's subjects as one lower category than they are. For example, Basic subjects are in your

library's Essential section, and if you would normally have Uncommon subjects, you can study Rare subjects.

**Exceptional Books, +3:** The covenant has some exceptional sections, and thus begins with 21 additional experience points to spend on Abilities or specialties. These raise the default scores as determined by the Library characteristic, but no more than 21 points may be spent on a single subject.

**Exceptional Hermetic Books, +3:** The covenant has raised its Arts to incredible levels, and begins with 35 additional experience points to spend on its Hermetic library scores. These raise the default values as determined by the Library characteristic, but no more than 35 points may be spent on a single subject.

**Inferior Books, -1:** One or more sections of the library are of much poorer quality than would be expected. Subtract seven experience points from the Levels of Abilities in the library. These should be subjects that are very common or are likely to have some particular bearing on the saga. This may be taken multiple times and stacked, but no more than seven points may be subtracted from a particular subject.

**Inferior Hermetic Books, -1:** One or more Arts do not get as thorough a treatment in the library as they should. Subtract twelve experience points from the starting levels of Arts in the library, noting them at their adjusted value. This Flaw may be taken multiple times and stacked, but no more than seven points may be subtracted from a particular subject.

**Narrow Library, -2:** Your library, while covering a narrow field of subjects well, is not as diverse as would be expected, and consequently it is difficult to find books outside of that range. Treat all subjects (except Arts) as one category higher when determining their rarity. That is, to study a Basic subject, you must look for it in your Common section. If you do not have a Common section, you cannot study that subject.

**Difficult Books, -3:** The library has no introductory texts, making it hard to study subjects in which one does not already have expert knowledge. Subtract the difference between the source book and the student's level in the Ability from the amount of experience points in the library's study pool.

## Study

In order to use these mechanics, there must be a new way to study books, and a new way to write them, since the library has only a list of Abilities, not a Level and Quality for each book. The study system doesn't have to be simple, since it's the only activity the players have to worry about for an entire season, but I would like it if it were and I think it should be consistent. That is, I think it should follow the same basic formula when the character is studying from a book or from a teacher, or even writing a book for the library.





As I see it, there are two characteristics that can apply to learning. The first represents a teacher's ability to communicate the subject to the student. The second is the student's ability to understand the lesson. Between two people, these are represented by Communication and Intelligence. When one of the parties is the covenant, the covenant's Library characteristic applies instead. The Ability being studied should also be accounted for in the formula, and also the participants' proficiency with the language. Finally, when books are involved, a writing skill should apply.

With these requirements, here's what I developed. Assuming the teacher has a higher score in the ability than the student, when he begins teaching he generates a study pool of (Communication + Ability). Then the student generates a study total using his (Intelligence + Language). If the student is more proficient in the language than the teacher, he should use the teacher's Language score instead. The student will gain this much experience in the Ability, but no more than the amount of experience in the pool.

This may seem complicated, but I find it's actually pretty simple. The student usually gains his Intelligence + Language in experience points, though it could be less than that if the teacher can't communicate very well. He can only learn up to the teacher's level in the Ability. Finally, as usual in Fourth Edition, he can't increase an Ability more than three levels in one season.

#### Teaching Summary

Teacher's Ability must be greater than student's Ability.

Teacher's Communication + Ability = study pool.

Student's Intelligence + Language = study total.  
Use the lesser of the student's and the teacher's Language Ability.

The student gains experience points equal to his study total, but no more than the study pool. This total cannot raise an Ability higher than the teacher's Ability or more than three levels.

So, as an example, let's say Alphonse is teaching Jean how to fight with a single weapon. Alphonse has Com +2 and Single Weapon 5. To learn from Alphonse, Jean must have Single Weapon at 4 or lower (less than 5). We'll say Jean has Single Weapon 3, and so he can learn from Alphonse.

They train together for a season. Jean is a good student, with Intelligence +1. They are speaking French, a language in which they are both fluent (5). The pool has 7 experience points in Single Weapon, and Jean can gain 6. If Alphonse did not speak French as well as Jean, this would limit his total further, as it would hinder their ability to communicate.

#### Studying from a Library

The covenant's Library characteristic may be used like a character's Communication. When a character studies from a book, he is essentially learning from the covenant, and the Library characteristic also





represents the covenant's influence when "teaching" that character. That is, a covenant with a low Library score has many distractions, poor quality books, and inconvenient study conditions. A high Library score indicates an organized, brightly illuminated covenant library, with few interruptions and books that are kept in excellent condition.

Language isn't really an issue in a library. That is, it may be assumed that all books are written proficiently unless there is some reason to penalize them, in which case the effective Level is simply lowered. When studying from a book, a student should use his Artes Liberales instead of the Ability being studied, but he is still limited by his knowledge of the language in which it is written (which is probably Latin unless otherwise specified).

### Library Study Summary

Covenant's Ability must be greater than student's Ability.

Covenant's Library + Ability = study pool.

Student's Intelligence + Artes Liberales = study total. Use the lesser of the student's Artes Liberales and Language Abilities.

The student gains experience points equal to his study total, up to the amount in the study pool. This cannot raise the Ability higher than the covenant's Ability or more than three levels.

As another example, let's apply the formula to library study. Mira wishes to study Philosophiae from her covenant's library, which is rated at -3 and covers the subject up to level 5. She must have less than 5 to learn anything, and she has 0. She reads Latin moderately well (Artes Liberales 3, Latin 3) and is quite intelligent (Int +3), but the study source is so poor that she can only gain 2 experience points. She could have gained as much as 6 points from the same book in a better study environment.

### Specialized Study

When studying a specialty, the student may add the covenant's score in the base Ability to the experience in the study pool. For example, if her library had Moral Philosophiae 2 in addition to Philosophiae 5, Mira could gain 4 experience points a season in the specialty, even in the poor study environment, though she could only raise her score in the specialty to 2 at first because she cannot go higher than the covenant's score.

This makes it more efficient to study a specialty, because characters can advance faster in a specialty than in a general Ability. However, most libraries don't start out with specialties, so this is a feature for covenants that have developed over time or whose founders spend their covenant Virtues to ensure exceptional training.

The same rule applies when learning specialties from a teacher. Add the value of the base Ability to the totals when determining the experience in the study pool and study total.

### Writing for a Library

Writing a book works the same way as studying from a book, but in reverse. Decide on a target level for the book, and determine the author's (Communication + Artes Liberales). This is the number of experience points that are placed in the book or added to the library.

#### Writing Summary

Author's Ability must be equal to or greater than the target Ability.

Author's Communication + Artes Liberales = study total. Use the lesser of the author's Artes Liberales and Language Abilities.

The covenant gains experience points equal to the Study total. Note that this total cannot raise the Ability higher than the author's Ability, or more than three levels in one season.

If Mira decided to write a book for her covenant on Theology, which she has at 5, the covenant must have no more than a 4 in the Ability, to avoid duplicating knowledge. The covenant has no Theology, so Mira begins writing. After a season, she adds her Communication (+3) to her Artes Liberales and compares her Latin, generating six Theology experience points for the covenant. After the book is incorporated into the library, the covenant would have Theology 3.

### Other Study Options

This system is very flexible, and gives a lot of options for study, including teaching multiple students at once or writing about several subjects in one book.

Mira could also study or write about several subjects at once, splitting up her experience into any number of Abilities as long as all of them were less than her Ability total. That is, if the library's Medicine section was also lower than her Medicine score, she could write books on both Theology and Medicine in one season and divide the six experience points any way she chose among the two Abilities, perhaps resulting in Theology 2 and Medicine 2.

In the same way, a teacher may teach multiple students at once. In this case, each student generates his own study total, and the teacher's source total (study pool) is divided among all students involved. For example, if Mira taught Philosophiae to three identical neophytes with Int +0 and Latin 3, each could gain a maximum of 3 experience points. Her source total would yield 6, so she could give 2 points to each student, or even distribute them unfairly if she wished: 3, 2 and 1, or even 3, 3 and 0.

A student studying from a library may study multiple subjects at once, as long as there is some reason those subjects would overlap. He determines the library's source total and his own study total as normal, using the lowest of (Library + Ability + specialty). The resulting experience points can be assigned any way he chooses among the subjects studied.





When writing about a specialty, the author may add her score in the base Ability to the specialty when generating a study pool. This can even be done when studying or writing about multiple subjects in one season, as long as they are all specialties of the same Ability. For example, an *Artes Liberales tractatus* could cover Logic, Grammar and Rhetoric.

Spells can be dealt with as normal without using these rules, but using Level to determine which spells a starting covenant has on hand. Unique spells should be specially designed and listed separately. Use the laboratory rules to determine if a magus can learn or invent a spell, and the transcription rules to copy new spells for the library.

To write about a mastered spell, or to study a spell for mastery, treat the character's level of mastery as an Ability. A character must know the spell in order to study this Ability, but otherwise it may be developed like any other Ability in the library.

To serve the role of *Hermetic tractatus* in the game, I allow characters to use mastered spell Abilities as specialties when studying one of the related Arts, as long as they have some level of mastery in the spell. This is like saying the Arts are specialties for mastered spell Abilities that use them. That is, you determine the study pool by adding Library + spell Ability + Art. You can also add your score in the spell Ability when determining a maximum level you can write about for the related Arts.

These changes make glossing a library useless, because all books have a standard Quality. Particular books can be poorly written, but those should be treated separately and can be glossed separately. However, characters can gain appropriate Virtues for their covenant by spending seasons glossing or illuminating the books in their library, just like they can improve their defenses by building fortifications or improve their reputation by aiding their community.

## Covenfolk

A final application of this system is the idea that standard grogs and covenfolk may be generalized with covenant Abilities. For example, if a covenant has a very good cook, that might be represented by giving the covenant Cooking 5. The character can be drawn up if it is likely to appear in a story, but otherwise the players just know that the covenant has a good cook, because it's part of the design.

It can also be assumed that a good cook can pass on his knowledge to others. By spending a season working in the kitchen, another grog could pick up some experience in the skill. In this sense, it's like the covenant has a Cooking section of its library, even though that information isn't stored in a book. Instead, it's stored in a teacher.

Perhaps the covenant has a training program for grogs. Rather than drawing up the sergeant as a character, you can simply list his Single Weapon skill in the covenant's Abilities. If grogs are training, you can treat him as a study source for Single Weapon and give them a season's worth of experience.



When teaching directly from the covenant in this way, though, don't use the Library characteristic. The Inhabitants score is much more appropriate for this sort of study, since it represents how well the covenant members get along with each other and participate in this sort of teaching.

And, rather than developing a stack of grog characters, to be searched out when the company goes out adventuring, you can simply assume that the characters bring a certain number of grogs along, and look to the Inhabitants Characteristic when you need to know what those grogs can do. For example, I would have to have a very high Inhabitants score to have a grog with an uncommon Ability like Perform or Legend Lore, but with Inhabitants -3 I would still have Basic Abilities like Brawl at 3.

If you have a horrible Inhabitants score, like Inhabitants -5, it doesn't mean that your grogs don't have any Abilities, just that the Abilities they have aren't applicable to their assigned duties. For example, the new shield grog might be a beggar who has never held arms before in his life. He has other skills, but they aren't applicable to what he's doing.

#### Modified Inhabitants Characteristic

Inh	Level/Specialty
-5	Essential 0
-4	Essential 1
-3	Essential 2
-2	Essential 3, Basic 1
-1	Essential 3, Basic 2
+0	Essential 4, Basic 3, Common 1
+1	Essential 4, Basic 3, Common 2
+2	Essential 4, Basic 4, Common 3, Uncommon 1
+3	Essential 5, Basic 4, Common 3, Uncommon 2
+4	Essential 5, Basic 4, Common 4, Uncommon 3, Rare 1
+5	Essential 5, Basic 5, Common 4, Uncommon 3, Rare 2

If you're using this idea, I suggest that every season and after every adventure each magus and each companion gets one experience point to spend on covenant Abilities, to represent their grogs. You can also spend this experience on covenant specialties, like the professions I suggested earlier. For example, if you find your grogs using Awareness and Hunt a lot, you might put covenant experience in a Scout specialty. If your magi are often getting attacked, put it in Shield Grog.

I have developed a few Virtues and Flaws to support this concept.

#### New Covenant Virtues and Flaws

**Fast Learners, +1:** Your grogs pick up Abilities particularly well, making them a little better at what they do. Treat your Inhabitants score as two greater when determining starting grog Abilities.

**Sense of Community, +1:** The people at the covenant get along better when teaching each other.

Treat your Inhabitants score as one greater when studying Abilities.

**Specialized Grog, +1:** Your grogs are particularly accomplished in one area. Choose an Ability focus, such as Combat Abilities, or Casual Knowledge. Treat your Inhabitants score as one greater when determining starting grog Abilities in that area, or give them all a specialty with those sorts of skills.

**Teacher, +1:** The covenant has a specialist, who is both accomplished at his craft and willing to share his skills with others. Take 15 points of experience to spend on Abilities or specialties that would not normally be part of your covenant's skill set. Any student who can spend the season helping and learning from the specialist can study this Ability.

**Specialists, +2:** The covenant has access to specialists who can teach Abilities to the people of the covenant. Take 45 points of Abilities or specialties that wouldn't normally be part of your covenant's library. These might all be taught by one specialist, or indicate three different specialists at the covenant.

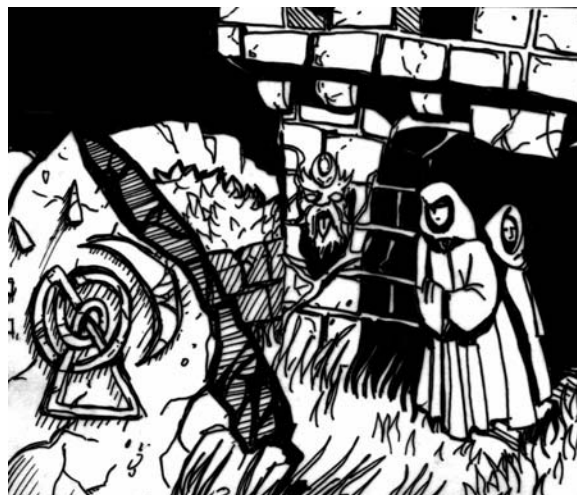
**Lacking Grog, -1:** Your grogs don't learn a particular area of knowledge very well, or else you can't seem to recruit grogs with many of those skills. Choose a focus, such as people Abilities or Strength Abilities. Treat your Inhabitants score as one lower when determining starting grog abilities in that area.

**Proud Covenfolk, -1:** The members of the covenant are a very independent lot, and prefer to learn on their own. Treat your Inhabitants score as one less when studying Abilities.

**Slow Grog, -1:** Your grogs have become very lazy, or at least don't learn very quickly. They haven't improved their Abilities as much as they could have. Treat your Inhabitants score as two less when determining starting grog Abilities.

#### Conclusion

With these additions, I hope I have demonstrated further how designing the covenant like a character can make it much easier to use, and greatly simplify the process of translating a collection of books into a ready resource for characters. As always, I'd love to read your comments, sent either to [eriktdahl@yahoo.com](mailto:eriktdahl@yahoo.com) or through the Ars Magica mailing list.



# Germanic Shapechangers

## The Primal Hedge Wizard Tradition of Bjornaer the Founder

by Jarkman

Shapechangers exist in many magical traditions throughout Europe, but the most infamous with respect to the Order of Hermes is the loose gathering of Germanic shapechangers from which Bjornaer the Founder descended. Although more limited in power than the progressive descendants of Bjornaer and resistant to learning Hermetic magic, this small tradition has survived, hidden in their animal shapes throughout continental Europe. Mortal enemies of House Bjornaer, the shapechangers have tried to disrupt the Gathering of Twelve Years several times since House Bjornaer's founding but have never mounted a significant threat to the Order. Despite this, they continue their guerrilla war against the Hermetic branch of their tradition and the Order in general, safely hidden from Hermetic magic in the form of their Heart-Shapes.

### The Germanic Shapechanger

If run as player characters, Germanic shapechangers (referred to as shapechangers hereafter) are *mystic companions*. The troupe should decide whether the character occupies a player's magus or companion slot.

All shapechangers begin with Animal Ken, Faerie Sight, Ways of the (Land) and the normally Bjornaer exclusive virtue Will over Form. They also start with the equivalent to the +2 Inner Bjornaer Mystery: The Many Forms (see Erik Dahl's article "Bjornaer Mysteries" *Hermes Portal* #2 p25-31) and a unique Inner Mystery: See Through the Hidden Shape (detailed below) that allows them to detect shapechanged Bjornaer and other members of their primal tradition. Although Gifted, they suffer from only its social penalties with regard to mundane humans and not in regard to animals.

Apart from shape shifting, the rest of their magical talents are limited, and they have only a minor aptitude with a form of natural magic derived from their unique understanding of animal nature. They disdain learning other forms of magic, including both Hermetic magic (in which they can be trained, albeit with difficulty) and the common forms of continental European hedge wizardry (see *Hedge Magic*, p5).

All shapechangers start with the following ability scores: Animal Ken 2, (Area) Lore 2, Faerie Lore 2, Faerie Sight 2, Shapechanger Wisdom 2, Speak Own Language (Germanic) 5, Will over Form 4.

All Germanic shapechangers receive age + 10 experience points to spend on additional starting abilities. They have a starting minimum age of (21 - Intelligence).



Shapechangers may choose up to 10 points each of balancing Virtues and Flaws, besides those gained automatically.

### Shapechanger Magic

A shapechanger's magic primarily involves the acquisition and mastery of different animal shapes and an understanding of shapechanging represented by their mastery of Will over Form. This form of magic was brought to the Order by Bjornaer but remains exclusive to her House, although the application of Hermetic theory has allowed her descendants to exceed some of its inherent limitations and develop it to a more sophisticated degree than the primal shapechangers can achieve.

A shapechanger's only others magic consist of a limited form of Animal based magic gained through their unique affinity with wild creatures. The ability to tune local faerie auras to a "Germanic" temper through pagan rituals has been suspected of this tradition, but its practice and mystery appears to have been lost over the centuries as the number of shapechangers has declined in the face of Hermetic expansion.

Sometimes additional minor magical Exceptional Talents are found in a gifted individual (no more than two magical Exceptional Talents with a +1 Virtue cost such as Magic Sensitivity, Premonitions or Second Sight). Those shapechangers that pursue magic outside their gathering's teachings and initiated Virtues (effectively any magical Exceptional Talent with a +2 or greater Virtue cost) are ostracised and earn the enmity of their peers, like Bjornaer before them. To this tradition, the pursuit of shapechanging is seen as the only sanctionable form of magic and



Bjornaer's blasphemous learning of other magic compounded her betrayal of their shape shifting secrets.

### Hermetic Potential?

As individuals with a warped, but otherwise full Gift, shapechangers can learn Hermetic Forms and Techniques, Magic Theory, Parma Magica and other aspects of Hermetic magic if properly trained. Just as the inexperienced Bjornaer was able to learn the basics of Bonisagus' Hermetic magic from her tutor, Merinita; a young shape shifter may be able to absorb enough teaching to develop into a passable Hermetic magus. Such a path is tedious and difficult, invariably resulting in the shapechanger's expulsion by his xenophobic brethren who will mark him as a traitor to be hunted down and slain. Like Bjornaer before him, a shapechanger is unlikely to master the full complexity of Hermetic magic, having been trained in an incompatible magic system prior to their apprenticeship. Unbalanced deficiencies with one or more Arts are likely, although an Affinity with Animal with a score equal to the average of the shapechanger's Animal Ken and Will over Form may offset this. Other Hermetic flaws may be required however as the shapechanger will likely be able to learn only a very stunted form of Hermetic magic (see *Hermes Portal #8: "The Galdor Mysteries"*, p45-49 by David Woods for further ideas on learning Hermetic magic after being initiated into a partially compatible magic tradition).

A more plausible scenario (based on an idea first presented in *Houses of Hermes*, p47-48) is for an exiled shapechanger (perhaps one who has pursued more esoteric magical talents forbidden by their brethren), to petition to join the Order for protection. The fleeing shapechanger could be sponsored into House Ex-Miscellanea provided they meet the minimum requirements (see *Hedge Magic*, p33), without needing to learn the full complexities of Hermetic magic (perhaps just the Parma Magica), becoming a newly

accepted exotic lineage and entitled to the protection of the Code of Hermes.

Regardless of how an exiled shapechanger attempts to join the Order, the potential political ramifications of an accepted exotic lineage outside of House Bjornaer privy to its Inner Mysteries are enormous. Any Bjornaer magi aware of the proposal will strongly oppose the shapechanger's initial inclusion. Even if accepted at a Tribunal, the shapechanger will be considered to have all Bjornaer and his former brethren as Enemies (as the Flaw at -3 or -4 depending on the Storyguide) and may be subject to assassination attempts from both groups. In addition, all Roman heritage Hermetic magi will regard him as if he had both the Hedge-Wizard and Discredited Lineage flaws with no gain in balancing virtues.

The repercussions of a large majority or the entire Germanic shapechanger tradition joining the Order en masse would have interesting major repercussions on any Saga featuring Bjornaer or Ex-Miscellanea heavily (see *Houses of Hermes*, p47-48).

### Bestial Affliction

As a primal, unrefined form of magic linked to a shapechanger's understanding of their Heart-Beast, the more often a shapechanger uses his magic, the more bestial he becomes. When a shapechanger botches using Will over Form or employing Animal Magic, the shapechanger gains a Bestial Affliction at level 0, or adds +1 to an existing Bestial Affliction, instead of checking to enter Twilight. Shapechangers may only gain five separate afflictions.

Typical Bestial Afflictions might be: Horns, Fangs, Claws, Furred Hide, or Strong Musk depending on the physical characteristics of the shapechanger's Heart-Beast. Essentially the character slowly transforms into his Heart-Beast. When the shapechanger has five Bestial Afflictions at level 6 (the maximum level), he begins to lose his sanity. Further points are added to a Bestial personality trait. If the shapechanger's Bestial personality trait reaches +6, he becomes a Beast of Virtue of the appropriate





type and flees into the wild as a non-player character. The cunning-folk of Germany believe that some of the Beasts of Virtue encountered in their lands were once elder Germanic shapechangers.

Assume non-player character shapechangers gain one affliction point every five years.

### Will over Form

As the ancestral tradition of Bjornaer, all shapechangers possess the exclusive magical talent Will over Form. This functions in all ways the same as the Bjornaer talent (see ArM4, *The Medieval Bestiary* and *Hermes Portal #2*: “Bjornaer Mysteries” for details) but the shapechanger may only choose an animal found in continental Mythic Europe as their Heart-Shape. They use the following formula to change shape:

stress + Sta + Will over Form

The ease factor target is 9 or above.

It may also be used to resist transformation effects that target you specifically, allowing you a natural resistance roll equal to that calculated above. A roll of 9 or above means that you resist the effect.

### The Many Forms

You possess the power to discover multiple animal shapes within yourself, each representing a different facet of your personality, although your Heart-Beast remains the only true expression of your soul. You may learn a number of additional forms equal to your Will over Form as detailed in the Bjornaer Inner Mystery: The Many Forms (see *Hermes Portal #2*: “Bjornaer Mysteries” p29-30) and begin play with four additional forms learnt during your initial instruction by the traditions elders. At least one of these forms is an Avenging Form although the other shapes can be any animals found in continental Mythic Europe.

### See Through the Hidden Shape

The primal ancestors of the Bjornaer have learned to recognize one another, even through the Hidden Shape. They can therefore recognize members of House Bjornaer in their Heart-Shape or other inherent forms, a feat normally impossible through Hermetic magic. Shapechanged non-Bjornaer Hermetics, and other hedge-wizard shapechangers, are even easier for them to spot. The shapechanger uses the following total:

stress + Per + Will over Form

The ease factor varies depending on the target according to the table below:

Germanic shapechanger	9 + Will over Form
Bjornaer magus	9 + Will over Form
Other natural shapechangers	6
Hermetically transformed	6

### Regency of Beasts

This aspect of shapechanger magic is not common knowledge outside of their gatherings and its existence is kept secret from outsiders. Bjornaer, as a young initiate of the tradition, had only rudimentary knowledge of this art but it was this specialised



knowledge that formed the foundation of the Hermetic Art of Animal. Bjornaer’s inexperience with this magic is responsible for the traditional view amongst the Order that the Germanic shapechangers were incapable of other magic, a myth they encourage for their own protection.

To invoke a magical effect, a shapechanger must first determine the level of the desired effect. The effect is limited in the same way as a Hermetic spontaneous spell. You can only create Animal-based effects, and only those that do not have a requisite. For example, a shapechanger cannot duplicate the effects of *The Beast Remade* (MuAn (Co) 25) because of its Corpus requisite. A shapechanger may only add their Will over Form score as a known Shape bonus if the animal to be affected is known to them as one of their mastered shapes. This roll is not modified by the Words and Gestures table and requires neither words nor gestures to invoke. To invoke an effect requires an uninterrupted 5 minutes per magnitude of the desired effect.

stress + Per + Animal Ken + known Shape bonus (if applicable) + aura

If the roll is equal to or greater than the level of the equivalent Hermetic spell, then the effect occurs. The shapechanger loses a fatigue level regardless of the success or failure of the attempt. The shapechanger cannot use vis, either to increase the roll or boost the range and duration of the spell effect and cannot achieve a Ritual effect with this talent.

### Vis

Although they hail from a similarly ancient European tradition, unlike cunning-folk, shapechangers are not able to recognise and use Wild vis without requiring further virtues beyond their initial package — a practice discouraged by their shapechanger brethren. They cannot utilise the raw vis identified by Hermetic theory.

### Magic Resistance

The Magic Resistance of a shapechanger is equal to their Will over Form and Faerie Sight scores only. Additional magical Exceptional Abilities whether

present at character creation or acquired later, do not contribute to this score. A shapechanger can gain the +4 virtue: Magic Resistance through initial purchase of the virtue or later initiation into their inner mysteries.

## Shapechanger Initiation

A shapechanger may learn a new Exceptional Talent by learning from elder shapechangers. The shapechanger generates a learning total based on:

Stress die + Per + Shapechanger Wisdom

Auras have no effect on this total.

The character must have 3 points of Shapechanger Wisdom for every point of the Virtue Cost of the Talent. For example, learning Speech of Nature (a +3 Virtue) requires a Shapechanger Wisdom score of 9.

The ease factor to learn successfully the Exceptional Talent is 10 times its Virtue cost. Thus Magical Music would have an ease factor of 20.

The process requires at least one season. For each additional season spent in continuous study, the shapechanger adds a stress die to their learning total. Once the ease factor is reached, the shapechanger gains a score in that Talent of 1 if applicable. Experience can then be applied in the usual fashion.

All initiation rolls for shapechangers are stress. If a zero is rolled, the shapechanger's learning has gone awry and he immediately gains one level in a Bestial Affliction. In addition, check for a botch. A botch reduces the study total to zero and the whole process must begin again. If no botch results, the shapechanger has learnt nothing that season but may continue to study the Talent in subsequent seasons.

Shapechangers can learn the following virtues: Incredible (or Great) Perception, Incredible (or



Great) Stamina, Incredible (or Great) Strength, Speech of Nature (see *Hermes Portal* #2, p30), Magic Resistance, Ways of the (additional Land).

Unlike their Bjornaer cousins, shapechangers cannot learn the +4 Virtue Inner Mystery: Mythic Forms (see *Hermes Portal* #2: "Bjornaer Mysteries" p30-31) as this was developed out of Bjornaer's understanding of Hermetic techniques rather than as part of the heritage of her shapechanging tradition.

## Aura Interaction

Shapechangers use the following additional column of the Realm Interaction table to determine how they are affected by auras. A "Germanic" tuned faerie aura is one specifically linked to the Germanic Old Gods and pagan powers of Arcadia. Since the shapechangers have lost the strength and the mysteries needed to tune faerie auras, such sites are rare in the current magical climate of Mythic Europe, having been displaced primarily by the encroachment of the Divine realm. Some regiois and remnants survive dedicated to the old Germanic powers and these are the focal centres and refuges of the shapechanger brethren. "Other tuned" faerie auras refer to faerie auras tuned to either Slavic or other pagan religion tempers by Volkhvy Great Rituals or similar ceremonies (see *The Dragon and the Bear*, p70-74).

## Shapechanger Realm Interactions

The following chart describes how the four different realms affect aspects of a shapechanger's magic, which includes an aura modification:

Aura	Bonus/Penalty
Magic	+(1/2 aura rating)
Divine	-(2 x aura rating)
Infernal	- aura rating
Faerie ("neutral")	+ aura rating
Faerie ("Germanic")	+(2 x aura rating)
Faerie ("Other tuned")	- aura rating

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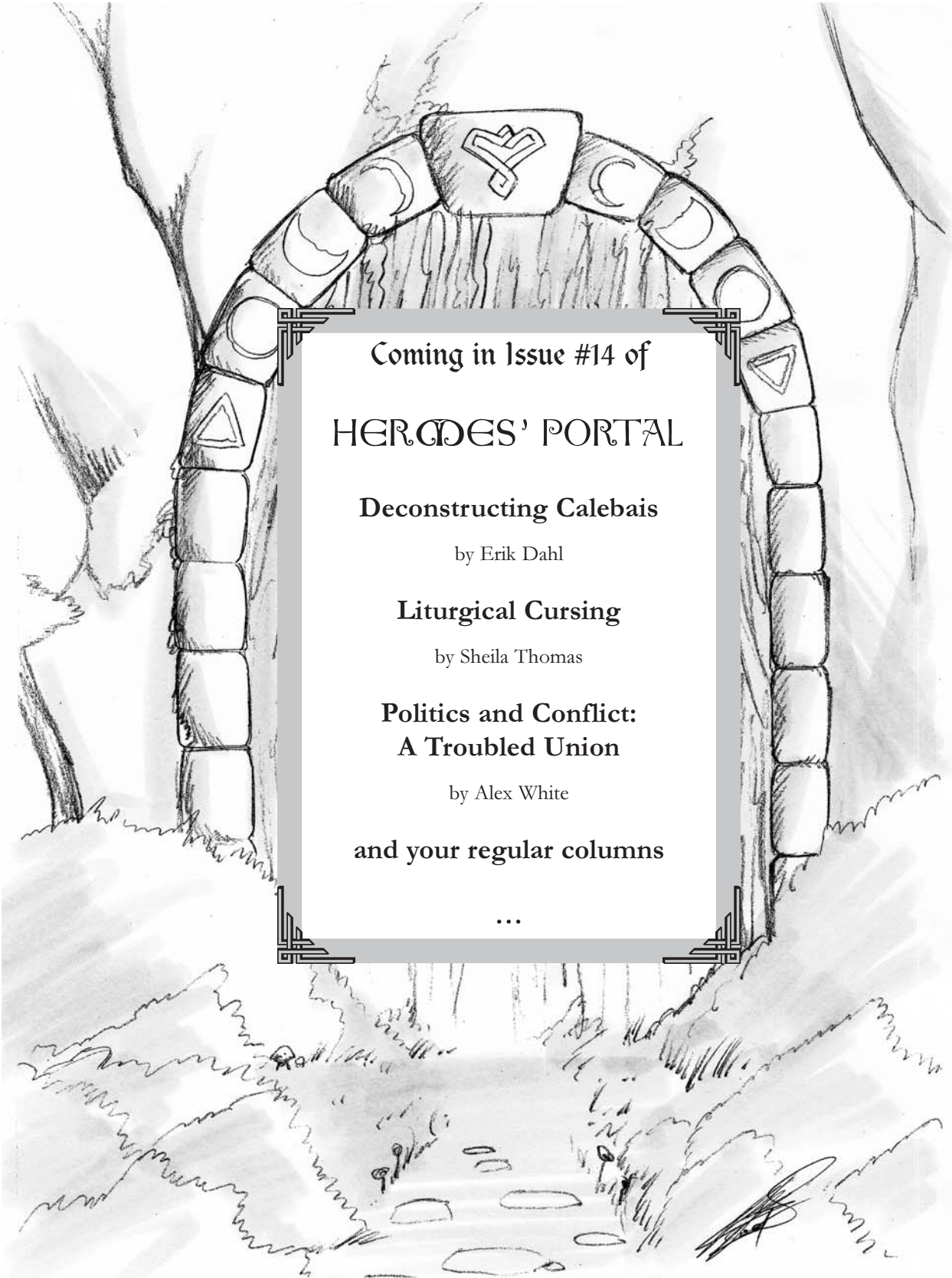
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(Framework for incorporating non-Hermetics into the Order)





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