

# Minor Covenants In And Around The Stonehenge Tribunal

The most influential covenants in the Stonehenge Tribunal are covered in the main Orphans of Merlin PDF. These are:

- Blackthorn (South Wales)
- Burnham (Norfolk coast)
- Cad Gadu (North Wales)
- The Chines (Isle of Wight)
- Sanguis Vento (Northumbrian coast)

Mercere members (including several who live apart from covenants) are described in the Mercere PDF.

The following gives brief outlines of some of the minor covenants in and around the tribunal which can be used as allies or rivals, to generate stories or just as background. These are:

- Dawn's End (Midlands)
- Dens (Forest of Dean)
- Murkfell (Yorkshire)
- Rossan / Castrum Spei (Pembrokeshire coast)
- Scholas Pythagoranic (Oxford)
- Tintagel (Cornwall)

Eliminating any which are too similar to or located too close to the players' own covenant might be prudent. Storyguides might also find it useful to change the date of foundation of the younger covenants (Schola Pythagoranic, Murkfell, Rossan) to occur during the saga – so, these do not exist at the start of play, but emerge during the saga.

## Dawn's End

Thirty years again, Dawn's End was a summer covenant facing a difficult future. Its own low hill retained a paltry magical aura, and down in the valley, in the midst of treacherous wetlands, an ancient altar stood on a muddy mound, yielding a supply of Corpus vis; but beyond that the location was problematic: halfway between the towns of Coventry and Cambridge, it was surrounded by villages and farmland, with burgeoning mundane populations and ubiquitous divine auras all around. The wild woods and arcane sites of the midlands of England were fading away, and magical resources were hard to come by. The covenant's main strength was in its leading member: Ilatersa the Thrice-Slain.

An experienced necromancer, Ilatersa had been trained into House Bonisagus, but had left to pursue the mysteries of Criamon. Now one of the leading Corpus specialists in the Tribunal, her fascination with the boundaries between life and death gave her great insight in crafting Longevity Rituals. And as one of House Criamon's few militant magi, she had fought half a dozen Wizard's Wars (being "killed" in three of them, though somehow surviving), making her an intimidating negotiating opponent. With offers of Longevity Rituals and veiled threats of War, Ilatersa secured written agreements or Tribunal rulings to give the covenant control of excellent vis sites far from their home – notably two ancient sites in the far south of England and a Roman graveyard in Yorkshire.

But then everything fell apart. Their charismatic young Jerbiton diplomat, Ilatersa's right-hand man, was assassinated. And then at a fateful Tribunal Meeting two of the covenant's finest vis sites were stripped from them and handed, along with the other ancient sites of the south of England, to The Chines.

Ilatersa held the covenant together until the next Tribunal Meeting, hoping to regain their sites, but when that gathering was inquorate her fellows lost hope and the community disintegrated.

All three of Ilatersa's fellows left. Two of them are still alive today: Steinmel Ex Bjornaer is now one of the leaders at Dens, while Omhila Ex Criamon left for The Chines in order to retain access to the southern sites that she had been studying. Nothing has been heard of Ilatersa Ex Criamon for nearly two decades, and everyone assumes that she is, finally, really dead.

## Dawn's End Today

The wooden structures of the old covenant now stand rotting and abandoned on the top of the hill overlooking the wetlands. Various curious visitors, including redcaps, have checked the place and concluded that the covenant has been abandoned. What they did

not realises was significant was a “derelict” cottage in the middle of the wetlands.

Ilatersa has relocated to the small mound in the middle of the marsh, where she has had a small (three story) stone tower built immediately next to the vis-yielding altar, shrouding it with an illusion that makes it look like a broken-down single-story cottage. There she lives alone, snaring birds with Rego magics and cooking them with Creo Ignem, transforming water from the bogs into palatable ale, and so avoiding any sign that her cottage is even inhabited: no smoke rises from it, and no gardens grow around it.

The site is generally very well defended, but with key weaknesses.

- A permanent enchantment on the wetlands ensures that anything which starts to sink into the mud is immediately dragged down – so anyone stepping on the damp earth, or trying to build a causeway across it, finds themselves or their constructions sucked down. At the edge this is problematic, as someone might become trapped waist-deep in mud; a few yards out the mire is deeper and the effect is lethal, dragging the unfortunate to drown in mud; as the cottage is half a mile from the closest edge, crossing seems impossible.
- A highly experienced necromancer, whose researches have been driven by a constant supply of Corpus vis, Ilatersa has an arsenal of (often Moon-duration) spells to create corpses and then augment, preserve, animate and command them as undead. Anyone attacking the island would face hordes of clawed, fanged, hard-to-kill undead.
- An apparently useless spell, “Step Upon the Earth”, allows a target to step on earth without sinking at all into it. This allows Ilatersa’s creations (or her, very occasionally) to walk over the sodden soil without triggering the defensive spell.
- Other spells and enchanted devices, invented or collected by the covenant in its prime, are also stored in Ilatersa’s sanctum, many with potent defensive abilities.
- At a small shack on the edge of the wetlands, beggars sometimes huddle. And once a day “the hermit’s envoy” walks across the bog carrying “a remedy from the hermit”. This is Ilatersa’s ploy to build agents and allies in the outside world (see below).
- The key weakness are that Ilatersa has no Aegis of the Hearth, and that there is little variation to her defences. To draw enough vis from the aura to power a worthwhile Aegis would take much of her time, and so she relies on deception. Moreover, she has no sentient guards around her sanctum.... This means that if someone did discover where she was, she would be vulnerable. A single moderately powerful Perdo Terram spell could bring her tower crashing fatally down around her, for example; or a stealthy mage (replicating her Step Upon the Earth spell, or flying) would reach the island to discover that assassinating her might not be difficult (a constant Intellego Corpus effect lets her sense the locations of all people near to her, but that does not help if she is asleep). The old maga is physically decrepit and teetering on the edge of Final Twilight, and so she is both physically and mentally vulnerable.

## A Remedy From The Hermit

Ilatersa has crafted a lesser enchanted device: a bowl. Once per day a person who drinks from the bowl has all their mundane aches and pains banished for Moon duration. Therefore once per day, the “envoy of the hermit”, clad in rags, steps across the wetlands to the small shack where a beggar will often be waiting. There, it listens to the rumours gathered by the beggar, lets him or her drink from the bowl, and in mumbled tones (this is an undead – precise diction isn’t its thing) tells that beggar where to go for the next few weeks.

In a world where even simple pain-killers are rare, the ability to relieve pain from those with chronic conditions is a great boon. And the beggars are grateful enough to heed the “envoy's” request, and scout where they are directed, begging along the roads as they travel. They are typically listening for stories of death-related oddities, and children with odd powers or curses (i.e. potential apprentices), along with general rumours. Sometimes the more capable are given more specific tasks, such as fetching an odd child to be examined by “the hermit”, or carrying a letter, but 999 times in 1000 their orders are just to go out and listen. In this way Ilatersa has a network of one or two dozen easily-overlooked agents out in the world scouting for her.

“The hermit” is a useful fiction. Rumour is that “he” is a renowned physician, or pious monk, or grieving scholar, driven to retreat from society by a curse or by piety or by leprosy... the details change, but the rumour never suggests that “he” is a mage.

The rag-clad envoy, meanwhile, is simply an undead crafted by Ilatersa as a kind of puppet. Using Arcane Connection spells she can see, hear and speak through it well enough to converse awkwardly with outsiders.

## Dawn's End's Development

Is Dawn's End even a covenant? Or is it just a lone maga in a shack near where a covenant used to be? Either way, Ilatersa is nearing the end of her life, and the question is less how she will progress and more how she will fade away – and in particular, how she may yet influence events in the Stonehenge Tribunal.

- Ilatersa still sends beggars to scavenge for Mentem vis on “her” vis site in Yorkshire. She doesn't tell them how dangerous this is, and she doesn't care if a few disappear; there are always new desperate wretches arriving at the shack seeking “the hermit's remedy”, so their ranks are easily filled. The problem comes with the foundation of the covenant of Murkfell, right on top of “her” vis site. This brings her into conflict with these young magi (see Murkfell, below).
- The two surviving ex-members of Dawn's End (Steinmel and Omhila), plus any surviving apprentices whom she has recently trained (e.g. Amissa) suspect (or even know) that she is still alive. Steinmel, for example, in a vis-poor covenant, will inevitably have trekked up to see if some Corpus vis might be pillaged from

the old altar; he presumably backs down from challenging the formidable necromancer, but such contacts could lead to an exchange of messages or trade in vis, for example, between Ilattersa and one or two outsiders.

- If someone were to try to gather enough magi for a quorate Tribunal Meeting then Ilattersa could be an asset – or a liability. If Dawn's End does still count as a Covenant then her presence would increase the number of covenants represented. On the other hand, her extreme age would probably qualify her to be Praeco – but one may not want an a-moral, emotionally bankrupt, morbid nihilist teetering on the edge of Twilight chairing such a vital meeting.
- And eventually Ilattersa will die, or pass into final Twilight. She is already ancient, and is unlikely to survive long past the re-establishment of quorate Tribunals in Stonehenge. What, then happens to her tower, her treasures, and the altar?

## Dens

Scattered around the Forest of Dean are temporary camps of poachers. Or perhaps they are outlaws. Or perhaps – since they are so hard to find, and seem to shun human contact – they are faeries. A few cynics even suggest that these camps are just legends, and do not even exist. The folks of the camps, if they can be found, rarely explain who they are, though they do not dispel the rumour that they are fae. Only if visitors identify themselves as members or envoys of the Order of Hermes will these people acknowledge that they are part of the covenant of Dens.

### The People of Dens

Fifty ago, a passionate young Bjornaer maga rallied some followers, exhorting them to defend the wild places, the ancient woodlands, the faerie groves.... Her warcry was that they should fight “tooth and claw” – “dens et unguibus.” A few young hotheads joined her, and the covenant of Dens et Unguibus began to drive mundanes and monasteries from the forests on the borders of Wales; but the backlash was swift, and youngsters who were inspired by the idea of fighting, found themselves alternately disturbed by the reality of killing and disheartened by the reality of dying. An inevitably fruitless guerrilla war did not seem so appealing as the romantic idea of it.

Following their leader’s death in a skirmish, the magi of Dens et Unguibus scattered, or retreated into the Forest of Dean. Hotheaded youngsters matured, and more peaceful outsiders joined. They dropped “et Unguibus” from the name and started to call themselves Dens – technically meaning “tooth”, but also reflecting the local mundane word for a lair or burrow.

When the people here speak of themselves they do not say “magi”, “grogs”, “covenfolk” – they are just people. Or families – mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters. Or they are hunters, healers, crafters... mainly hunters, in fact. Or they speak of the Elders.

At present there are four Elders. Nobody appointed them, and there is no written Charter defining their rights or obligations. But they are respected, established members of the community with remarkable powers, acknowledged by common opinion to be the leaders, and usually resident at The Heart of The Forest.

### The Heart of the Forest

The people of Dens often refer to “The Heart of the Forest” as a kind of magical core of the wilderness. Guests who have heard this assume that it refers to a single place deep in the Forest of Dean, and a common misconception among covenants who have dealt with Dens is that they guard some powerful “Heart” which somehow controls the whole

of the forest.

In fact the Heart is simply wherever the Elders of Dens have decided to base themselves for the time being, and its location moves every few years. Moving is a fairly major undertaking, as new shacks must be constructed, and chests of books and lab equipment must be hauled to the new location, and the covenant is vulnerable during these moves; on the other hand, if the leaders stay in one place for too long, outsiders may learn of the Heart's location.

Usually (but not always) the Heart is located in an area with a slight magic aura. Here are several shacks containing laboratories – although the magi often work in and around the shacks, working often in the open air. There is a shack containing the piles of chests, which are the covenant's library. And there are shacks providing accommodation for the magi and others. In the summer the Heart area is barely inhabited, but in the winter the shelters are cramped, as the people of Dens seek out these solid buildings in preference to less solid camps.

The key feature of the Heart, however, is an area set aside as a “moot ground” – an open space for discussions and gatherings. Around this, branches are driven into the ground, each carved crudely with letters indicating where each was taken from – these being Arcane Connections through which they influence the forest.

Several magics are important to running of The Heart. Senior magi will learn these if they can, but often they must be cast from Casting Tablets.

- Ear For Distant Voices, and Summoning the Distant Image. The collection of branches and other arcane connections kept at the Heart allows the magi to observe key locations in and around the Forest of Dean (including junctions of major paths, wayfarers' rests, prime camp sites, the approaches to key strategic locations, etc.)
- Aegis of the Hearth is usually cast around The Heart. However, the covenant is vis-poor and not rigorously organised, so some years the Aegis remains un-cast.
- Shrouded Glen might sometimes be cast to obscure The Heart, but that is a vis-hungry ritual and Dens do not always have enough vis available.
- Vitally, the covenant also has a treasured spell which is key to controlling movement around the forest. This is a Moon duration, Arcane Connection range level 40 Rego Aquam/Herbam/Terram spell that allows the magi to move the plants and terrain of areas that they Arcane Connections to (including trees, bushes, ditches, streams, etc.). This allows them to open up and cut off paths, hide tracks and old campfires, open up small clearings, etc. Obvious uses are in allowing them to move around easily, confuse trespassers and would-be enemies, and hide the locations of their camps (which is why many of the Arcane Connection branches around the moot ground are from junctions on key paths). Less obvious uses include camouflaging ambush locations, creating temporary fishing ponds, and arranging plants or rocks in symbolically significant patterns to communicate to other people from Dens.

## Elders, Moots and Camps

The covenant is organised into camps, which are mainly based on families. It is theoretically ruled by the Elders, but in practice major decisions are always made by a Moot. Any magi present are absorbed into this structure, rather than the organisation of the community being based around the magi.

The four Elders at present are:

- **Gradia Wild of Bjornaer** is the only survivor from the original foundation of the original militant Dens et Unguibus covenant. A feral child, trained late as a Bjornaer mage, she was once a lethal defender of the covenant, but now she is old and grey – hugely skilled, but no longer spry or healthy, and not likely to live for much longer. Most people at Dens call her “grandmother”; outsiders often recognise this as a sign of respect (which it is) but miss the point that she is, literally, the grandmother of two dozen of the mundanes here.
- **Steinmel of Bjornaer** is nearly as old as Gradia, but is still physically fit. He used to be at Dawn’s End (and the Longevity Ritual that Ilatersa crafted for him there served him very well), and having the most experience of the broader world he is the magus most likely to be tasked with negotiating with outsiders – whether that be the royal foresters (who are supposed to hunt down poachers, but know better than to risk battle with Dens) or visiting magi.
- **Ecghild the Herbalist** (Ecghild Ex Miscellanea) is a fairly young maga, in the pharmacopoeian tradition of House Ex Miscellanea. Though not yet forty years old she is already considered an elder by the community, due to a combination of her level-headed good judgement and exceptional abilities with the forest’s plants.
- **Mildrith of Suchelei** has no magical abilities, but is still considered an elder. A run-away serf who married a hunter from Dens thirty years ago, she is now around fifty years old, and is an exceptional healer and midwife. Certainly the community is impressed by mages’ overt magical powers, but many are much more impressed by Mildrith’s ability to stop them dying in childbirth and to nurse their sickly infants to full health, and so she is held in equal regard to the leading magi.

At any time at least one or two of the magic-using Elders will be at The Heart, so that they can observe and control the forest through the Arcane Connections.

In a crisis any one of the leaders might assume command, but in general they make decisions as a group, and typically in consultation with other members of the community, in public, at the moot ground. Delicate decisions might be made in private, but typically policy is set by Moots - public discussion - involving the Elders and anyone else who has expertise in the subject under consideration. **Harddwch of Merinita**, for example, inevitably gives her opinion if matters relating to the faeries are under discussion. And the younger magi are sometimes asked to contribute, if only to test their

wisdom. But just as likely, mundane experts (such as a renowned hunter, or someone who has scouted a particular area) will speak.

The people of Dens would usually be encountered, if at all, living in small groups, scattered through the Forrest of Dean and beyond. Each camp is likely to have four to ten people, possibly including one Elder. Most of these camps are family groupings. The people here are related to each other, most mundanes are related to at least one mage (by blood or marriage), and half of those present are likely to be children or teenagers.

The camps are nearly impossible to find, in part due to the residents' skills, but also because the Elders actively manipulate the forest to keep the camps hidden. They tend to move between well-known campsites, where shelter exists (camouflaged huts built by Dens, shallow caves, etc.).

The people may appear unassuming, but they are exceptional hunters and are at absolutely at home in the woods. High skills augmented by simple lesser enchanted devices allows them to poach game and forage food far more effectively than any normal mundane: for example, a hunting horn which summons a the nearest deer to come to the hunter much reduces the time required to track and stalk prey.

More rarely, camps may contain only specialist hunters and scouts, and these are typically found outside of the Forest of Dean, conducting missions on behalf of the covenant. A small group acting as envoys to faerie groupings may be encountered further north up the Welsh borders, for example; and it might be suspected that the groups that head down to poach in the New Forest in the south of England might actually be hunting not only venison, but also vis which they occasionally thief from sites granted to The Chines.

At present there are a total of seven magi here – the three who are elders, and four younger (two Bjornaer, one being Steinmel's son, and two Merinita). However, there are occasionally other magi who may stay here, and the covenant maintains loose links with half a dozen solitary magi (many of Ex Miscellanea) in Wales, the borders, and the south and south west of England.

## **Dens's Development**

The magi of Dens are not interested in Hermetic politics. Many of their members are not even especially concerned with developing their Arts. Most are far more interested in preserving their community, marrying, and raising children. They are also aware that they are no match for magi who do like to throw their weight around and develop their combat abilities, and so they wisely keep a low profile.

However, when the conspiracy that runs the Tribunal starts to lose its grip – after the fall of Blackthorn and the “death” of the Arch-Mage Stephanus – they may feel unable to remain aloof.

- Without Blackthorn and Stephanus intimidating anti-social magi, Dens may find itself suffering from raids by an unscrupulous mage or two. Without the threat of being disciplined by the Tremere and the Arch-Mage, someone might consider that raiding vis sites belonging to a politically unimportant and weak covenant in the Forest of Dean is unlikely to get them into much trouble. Meanwhile, without Tribunal Meetings, there is no obvious mechanism for Dens to seek redress. The magi of Dens are already vis-poor, and will struggle to deal with a determined thief.
- As Sanguis Vento then suffers attacks and starts to strong-arm the magi of the north of England, Dens will start to wonder why they themselves are so meekly abiding by the “unjust” conventions of the Tribunal. Specifically, they do not see why The Chines should get to dominate the magical sites of the south of England, while they can’t even scrape enough vis together for a Shrouded Glen and Longevity Rituals. The magi of Dens are not strong, but they are sneaky, and they have already been quietly thieving a few pawns of vis a year from The Chines’ sites. So when they decide to start looting these sites wholesale they are quite able to run rings around The Chines and its bookish researchers and thick-necked Flambeau enforcer. So, as their vis sites have been preyed upon, now they unrestrainedly thief from The Chines’ sites.
- Thus, when quorate Tribunal Meetings do begin again, they are in an odd position. First, they are both an aggrieved party (having been stolen from) but also they have raided others’ sites. Second, they have little interest in politics, in general, yet they could probably muster more sigils (votes) than any other single covenant, if they marshalled the sigils of the solitary magi whom they are friendly with. Third, they have a strong incentive to see mechanisms in place – such as Tribunal Meetings – to protect less powerful covenants from the depredations of warlike magi, since they want to live in peace and are not warlike, but on the other hand they loathe the idea of those mechanisms becoming tools for conniving magi (e.g. Tytalus), large power blocks (e.g. Tremere) or lawyerly bureaucrats (e.g. Guernicus) to push around quieter magi; having their vis stolen or lives curtailed by violent magi is barely worse, in their eyes, than having vis sites taken away and rules imposed by schemers and lawyers.

## Murkfell

Mists swirl around the vast cemetery that stands on a low rise outside the ruins of the forgotten Roman fort and town of Cataractonium, rolling down to the winding River Swale to curl in menacing tendrils towards any travellers who might pass too close. Shapes move in the mists. Cries have been heard and figures spotted in the night. Those who venture into the deeper mists and towards the cemetery do not always return, and those who do recount contradictory stories of empty grass lands, scattered ruins, or brooding mausoleums.

Few people delve into the mists. Some desperate and impoverished souls have been tempted to seek out the pale lights which glimmer around the old cemetery – it is said that mysterious folk from far away will pay good silver to any who collect these lights – and sometimes bands of scavenging beggars will even brawl across the frosted grasslands, competing for these prizes. But only greed and desperation would lure anyone here.

Until now. For now it is said that a small band has settled on the haunted rise itself. They have told the scattered farmers and cottages further down the valley that they have warded away the evil that lurked there. This, now, is the fledgeling Covenant of Murkfell.

### The Magi

**Ernisius of Verditius** thinks that he is in charge – partly because he is from a “proper” House (not like Amissa, from a house of freaks, nor Saegyth, from a mere rabble), partly because he is male and not inclined to be ordered around by women, but mainly because he is the sort of loud, over-confident person who always thinks that he is in charge. He dreams of crafting fabulous magical artefacts using Mentem (an Art he knows almost nothing about) from all the vis that floats around here. In reality he will probably be the first to die.

**Amissa of Criamon**, filia of Ilatersa, is as traumatised and dysfunctional as any apprentice that Ilatersa the Thrice-Slain has ever trained. She is a driven and obsessive Corpus specialist, at once enthralled by and repelled by death. It was her idea to set up a covenant here, as she knew from Ilatersa that it was a powerful site with links to the dead. That usurping the vis site might be considered stealing from Ilatersa is an extra bonus for Amissa, who loathes her parens.

**Saegyth of House Ex Miscellanea** (“the Bone-Eyed Witch”), is a paranoid, genius Spirit Master. Ernisius sought her out because he decided that taming an unknowingly vast, magical graveyard pretty well required a Mentem/ghost specialist “under his command”, but as she rarely speaks he has not yet suspected that she is several steps ahead of him in every scheme and challenge. Deeply suspicious of everyone, she avoids

even admitting to her name (“Why do you want to know? What are you up to? Do you think you can use my name against me?!”) and so others in the covenant just call her, on the basis of her left eye apparently being made of bone, “The Bone-Eyed Witch” or just “The Witch”.

## **The Covenant**

At cemetery is an inter-connected set of magical and infernal Regiones. Although the mundane level of the hill has few signs of this being an ancient graveyard, once scores of mausoleums and thousands of graves stood here. Now these have broken off into their own Regiones, some of which have grown to be dozens of miles across, and navigating between the mundane world and the Regiones, or between one Regio and another, can be baffling. This is why people have disappeared here. There are no guardians or ghosts or hauntings in the mundane world (at least, not unless the magi summon or create them to better defend the covenant and intimidate the locals). But people simply get lost, and never emerge.

Navigating through the lower levels of the Regiones is not particularly difficult, with time and practice, and the magi swiftly work out how to move easily between a number of fairly safe low-level Regiones where they build thatch and wooden extensions onto ruined stone buildings to provide structures for themselves.

This gives each mage a sanctum and laboratory in an area with a Magic Aura of 3, 4, 5 or 6, with a central cluster of huts for half a dozen grogs and a few covenfolk. At present there is no library (the magi just keep their few books in their sanctums), and there are no specialists (no book binders, no blacksmith, etc.). Navigating between these areas can be confusing, as the misted paths do not correspond to any real world topography, nor logic.

The key is to avoid stumbling into the higher level magical Regiones, and to keep clear of the infernal Regiones. There are many different things which do “live” here, many of them malign, and in particular something called “The Legatus” in a “palace” on a higher infernal Regio, should be avoided. For now the covenant are just starting to explore the inter-relations between the different pockets of misted reality, and although the verifiable death-toll among their grogs is zero the “disappearance rate” is demoralisingly high.

## **Murkfell and the Locals**

Nobody lives or travels within two miles of Murkfell. For years the brooding mists, and tales of disappearances, have kept everyone away. The closest village is Hindrelag, six miles away directly but eight via meandering paths across boggy land. Hindrelag is watched over by the castle of Riche Mount, but the castle and the title that goes with it (“Earl of Richmond”) is in the honour of the Dukes of Brittany, far away, and the Duke

has appointed a castellan who has no incentive to pick an argument with magi.

The covenant's closest neighbours are scattered farmers and cottagers. These, the magi say, should "thank" the covenant for "taming" the haunted land – specifically, should "thank" them with gifts of food and ale. If "thanks" are not forthcoming then the magi, backed up by rough looking men with cruel weapons and a tendency to leer at the farmers' daughters, suggest that the hauntings might resume, "but worse". Reluctant cottagers might lose livestock - "taken by the ghosts," the magi say – and if that doesn't persuade them then their children may not be safe.

In other words, the magi extort supplies from their near neighbours, falsely claiming to offer "protection", while avoiding contact with the better protected people of Hindrelag.

## The Lights

A Tribunal ruling forty years ago granted this area as a vis site to Dawn's End – which is nearly two hundred miles away. The ruling is hard to justify, but that's the sort of thing that happens when a genius Corpus specialist (Ilattersa the Thrice-Slain, Ex Criamon) offers to craft longevity rituals for the leaders of covenants which support her on a key Tribunal vote, while hinting at Wizard's Wars against those who "upset" her. Votes follow self-interest, and covenants get access to sites to which they have no logical claim.

Gathering the vis – which appears as dim, floating lights, and which seem to have "escaped" from a magical Regio – requires patience and nimbleness. Spotting, stalking and trapping the lights is akin to hunting, and following them across the misted hill runs the risk of becoming lost in the Regiones. But in theory this is an excellent vis site. An organised group of expert gatherers working all year around might snatch up to 30 pawns of vis in a year; even ill-disciplined scavenging has usually yielded a dozen pawns a year. The trick is finding and motivating people desperate enough to risk becoming lost chasing these orbs, but Ilattersa has never shy in sending wretched beggars to their doom for her benefit, and so for a few decades gaggles of ragged figures could sometimes be seen in the mists, hunting the vis and fuelling stories of the area being haunted.

In the last couple of decades, everyone has just assumed that Dawn's End is no more, and so both the well-informed covenant of Burnham and the relatively nearby magi of Sanguis Vento have begun to quietly offer bounties of silver to any who would recover these "lights" for them: the offers are made on the quiet to trusted but desperate minions, since neither Burnham nor Sanguis Vento want to advertise that there is a rich but "unclaimed" vis site available to be pillaged by rivals.

So, in the last ten years, rival gangs of the desperate and greedy have not only hunted the vis but have also brawled between themselves, with turf-wars between gathering gangs sometimes turning bloody. Both Burnham and Sanguis Vento know that the other is sending scavengers, and they have argued over the subject, but neither wishes to fall out with the other and so they have let their dupes battle it out and bleed for them without

directly intervening. Keeping the matter at arms length, however, neither covenant has realised that actually a third faction of ragged gatherers has also been continuing to work the area – beggars sent by Ilatersa.

Now, of course, Burnham, Sanguis Vento and Ilatersa of Criamon are all going to lose out, since this new covenant is going to use its grogs to drive off the scavengers while trying to keep all of the vis for itself.

This is exactly the sort of complicated dispute (does Dawn's End still exist? can Sanguis Vento claim the site on the basis of being the closest covenant? can a bunch of newly gauntleted magi squat on another's vis site and claim it as their own?) that Tribunal Meetings are supposed to adjudicate... but there are no quorate Tribunal Meetings, so this dispute is likely to be solved "by other means".

## **Murkfell's Development**

At the outset, Murkfell has three fresh-out-of-Gauntlet magi, six ill-disciplined grogs, and four covenfolk, with no specialists nor notable companions. Their only source of vis is what they can gather from the "lights". The provisions extorted from the locals are not adequate to sustain them, and they have no cash income. Their resources are negligible and have made some dangerous enemies. Their future may look something like this:

- The covenant must first get a source of income. Their needs are modest, but they have to eat - and buy laboratory equipment. The "gifts" made by locals only go so far. Ernisius will therefore travel to other covenants in the area to trade for silver. As a short-term solution he will swap Mentem vis for coin, but he will also make other offers – e.g. offering to craft magical devices to those without the time to waste seasons on minor items, or to sell thousand-year-old ghosts trapped by Saegyth in the Regiones to curious Seekers.
- Having then delved some way into the Regiones, they will have to slow their explorations in order to avoid a mutiny among their grogs.
- Meanwhile they will have driven away the other covenants' scavengers. Securing the vis allows them to continue to trade vis for silver, lab equipment, books, etc. Ironically, though they are sitting on a major vis site they actually end up being vis-poor, as they have to trade almost all of the vis away, either for silver or for books or for other vis types. Unfortunately, driving away the scavengers will have consequences...
- Sanguis Vento will react with brutality within-the-code (more or less). They have been gathering the vis here for years, now someone has deprived them of access to the site, therefore they are being "deprived of their magics". The logic is spurious, as the vis site was never really theirs, but it isn't as if there's likely to be a Tribunal Meeting where that can be discussed. So, they will happily threaten and then declare Wizards' Wars, and send in mercenaries as parts of those wars. The

magi of Murkfell simply hide. They know the Regiones well by now, and retreat into the deeper realms, allowing their pursuers to become frustrated and lose grogs in the mists – though not without taking losses themselves: two grogs and the over-confident Ernisius are killed in the Wars. The magi of Murkfell take to hiding as a matter of course, and soon the attackers are reduced to standing in the middle of a misty field under a full moon screaming “I’m going to kill every one of you cowards! Do you hear me? Wizard’s War – on all of you!” and hoping that that counts as a valid declaration. But eventually the magi of Sanguis Vento will tire of losing grogs, and will fear that they might even lose magi into the mists, and so they put their aggressions on hold.

- Ilatersa the Thrice-Slain is slower to act, but less restrained. Rarely taking notice of anything outside of her laboratory, it will take her a couple of years to realise that her beggars haven’t been bringing any Mentem vis back. So she sends a vessel (a rag-clad undead that she can see/hear/speak through at Arcane Connection range) up to remonstrate. Murkfell’s grogs are freaked out by the talking zombie, and kill it. Ilatersa needs no more provocation. This is her vis site (assuming her sole occupancy means that Dawn’s End is technically a covenant) and Murkfell have now squatted there, stolen “her” vis, and even attacked her (even if it wasn’t really “her”). So every few days she now Creos a Moon-duration corpse, buffs it with a range of grotseque Moon-duration enhancements (fangs, claws, leathery hide, enhanced stealth, ability to move without leaving tracks or a scent, etc.) and sends it off with orders to “kill anyone you find at this place” (using an Arcane Connection to Murkfell’s site to direct them). The stalking undead rarely stumble into the Regiones (they have no intelligence), and so Murkfell’s strategy of just hiding in the mists works well, but Ilatersa can send any number of these things, month after month and they essentially besiege Murkfell. (After a ten day hike, each undead still has twenty days left in its duration, so several of these will be besieging the misty hill at any time.) Getting food into the covenant becomes a challenge, and starvation looms. Eventually Ilatersa has to relent: despite the stealth-buffs, mundanes are noticing a stream of grotesque undead wandering north from the area of Dawn’s End, and she stops before investigations lead back to her. Murkfell survives, but for months they struggled to feed themselves, while the presence of dangerous undead around their home terrified the neighbouring mundanes; and in the end Ilatersa is still murderously irate, and may strike again.
- Burnham, meanwhile, has a more subtle and sophisticated approach. First, they appear friendly, and set up a deal to buy Mentem vis, with a little silver and a promise of lending them copies of Burnham’s books. Burnham do not have limitless funds, and buying this way is more expensive than hiring desperate scavengers, but by offering to support the covenant and to supply it with books they manage to get some Mentem vis and hopefully stop Murkfell looking further afield for trade partners - and all for some surplus silver and the labour of a mundane scribe. Meanwhile, with this stalling tactic in place, they set up their main plan: they prompt The Chines to launch an intelligence-gathering Wizard’s War against the “trouble-makers” (see the main *Orphans of Merlin* PDF for details of how this works), and through intermediaries they hire mundane spies to stake out Murkfell.

- Over the next few years, Burnham catalogues Murkfell's secrets, weaknesses, etc. Meanwhile, Murkfell become accustomed to enjoying loaned copies of Burnham's books; "their" library is not their own. What makes Burnham slow to act, however, is that Arch-Mage Stephanus "dies", and the remaining magi, though still shrewd, are not so driven in their deviousness. And so Murkfell survives, for a while, with its two surviving magi and handful of grogs hidden in the misted *Regiones*.
- This is about the point where *Sanguis Vento* comes under attack from their northern enemies. Fighting for their survival, these warlike magi now have no time to waste, and take more risks with the legality of their actions. They send messages out to all covenants claiming that "the Order" is under attack, and exhorting all to rally to their banner as they "lead the defence of the Order" (a somewhat disingenuous way to describe the situation, since they brought it on themselves). They follow this up with a personal visit to Murkfell from one of *Sanguis Vento*'s newest members and a squad of grogs: seizing a couple of Murkfell's grogs/covenfolk and using them as hostages to demand that the magi reveal themselves and negotiate. *Sanguis Vento*'s demands are simple – Murkfell must "pledge themselves to the defence of the Order, under *Sanguis Vento*'s banner" (i.e. submit to take orders from them) and "returning all remaining vis that Murkfell has stolen from this site" (i.e. hand over all their vis stores and acknowledge that their home is *Sanguis Vento*'s vis site). Murkfell refuse. *Sanguis Vento* leave, vowing vengeance, and take their hostages with them.
- This is the point at which the Tribunal has its first quorate Tribunal Meeting in decades. What brings the Tribunal together is fear over attacks from Scandinavia (against *Sanguis Vento*) and, even more so, *Sanguis Vento*'s threats and raids against other mages' vis sites in response. However, as there is now a valid Tribunal Meeting, the question of Murkfell's existence will come up. This could go in any number of directions, depending on Tribunal politics. Has anyone told *Ilatasera* that the Tribunal is gathering – and if so does she (or a proxy of hers) use the meeting to reassert her claim on this site, and demand that Murkfell leave? If she does, then plenty of people would be keen to ingratiate themselves to her, but others will fear this near-senile psychopath, so how much support does she have? How do Burnham use the information that they have gathered at this point? Do *Sanguis Vento*, desperate for allies, actually back Murkfell's claim on their covenant site, relinquishing their own claim, in exchange for Murkfell's support? When a *Quaesitor* starts taking about the *Peripheral Code* and quoting ancient precedents, does anyone even care? Possibly this will be the end of Murkfell. Or, they may yet survive....
- If this covenant-of-two does keep staggering on after the Tribunal Meeting, it soon becomes a covenant of one. *Amissa* disappears, swallowed by one of the deeper *Regiones*. She probably isn't dead. The truth may be much worse – for her, or for others. But she is no longer able to play an active part in the covenant's functioning, leaving the brilliant but paranoid *Saegyth* in sole control.
- Now *Saegyth* needs to recruit, and so as the next Tribunal approaches she starts looking for newly-gauntletted young magi to join her. Cautious as ever, she

refuses to leave the covenant, and so she sends envoys to seek out and attract applicants to her: she will send a message by redcap to any covenants where she believes that Ex Miscellanea Spirit Masters may be resident, as she thinks expertise with the dead would be appropriate; she will send a grog to any accessible Tribunal Meeting (where mundanes might be allowed to mingle with magi before or after the meetings), notably the Normandy Tribunal Meeting and tournaments (due to the sheer number of attendees) and the Hibernian Tribunal Meeting (which she feels might have magi with appropriate attitudes); and she will leave word with local Hermetic centres (the York Mercer House and any nearby covenants).

- This is when Burnham make their move. They will take whatever information they have and leverage that they have accumulated, and try to establish a long-term deal with Murkfell. They can demand the return of their books (leaving Murkfell with no library) if Murkfell are not compliant; or they can promise to keep sending more books, they can offer to bury any secrets that they have uncovered, and they can offer political support: in return, they want regular vis, and perhaps a degree of control or insight into what Murkfell are exploring. It is blackmail, of a sort, but it is blackmail that could leave Murkfell with an influential sponsor and a promising future.

## Rossan (Castrum Spei)

Stuscis of Bonisagus left the Iberian Tribunal in a hurry. He doesn't talk about it. But when he fled he had with him several dozen books (mostly summae on Hermetic Arts), a chest full of silver, a satchel of vis, and some enchanted artefacts; he may or may not actually have a legal right to that "salvage".

Now he has found a place which is far from Hermetic investigators and mundane distractions – a scattering of desolate rocks, jagged mounds of stone edged by cliffs, a couple of miles off the westernmost point of Pembrokeshire's coast.

With Welsh labourers and the aid of a Jerbiton master-mason/Terram-specialist who owed him some favours, in a year he has built a solid tower covering a 40-yard-wide island, a second tower covering an adjacent island, and a scattering of chambers hewn into and built out from the rock of the largest of the chain of rocks. If anyone asks, he'll say this is "the Covenant of Rossan", named after the largest of the rocks, which the Welsh call Carreg Rhoson - Rossan Stone.

### The Buildings

The first of these towers is the mage's home. It is entirely self-sufficient, with a cistern that turns sea water drinkable and a couple of simple magic artefacts that "attract" food (so long as you are happy to live on seagull, gull eggs and fish), and as well as housing the magus himself it also contains the covenant's library. A sanctum marker is carved above the main entrance. It is believed to be guarded by enchanted artefacts (there are no grogs), and the covenant's Aegis covers this tower (but only this tower). Stuscis himself is also able to defend himself capably – he started his studies as a Perdo Vim specialist, and has continued to specialise in Vim while also developing Intelligo, and he has a range of Perdo spells which are capable of hurting humans or sinking ships which he considers a threat. A stone drawbridge (raised/lowered by Rego magics) allows Stuscis to walk across to the next tower if the waves aren't too high.

The second tower is intended as accommodation for visiting magi. But these lodgings are not comfortable. As the rocky islands have no trees, there is no fireplace, so it is often freezing cold. The only food is surplus seagull, fish and eggs from Stuscis's tower. There are no guards nor servants on hand (so the place is pretty dirty), and the tower does not even have any magical defences (since only Stuscis's own tower is covered by an Aegis). On the plus side, at least Stuscis has invested in stout doors and shutters and some furniture: there are writing tables, benches, and comfortable beds with thick woollen blankets and sheepskin covers.

From the visitors' tower a stone causeway can be summoned from the sea by casting a

minor Rego Terram effect on a sigil at either end, triggering a Sun duration Rego Terram enchantment. (In this way only magi can raise or lower the walkway.) In high storms waves crash over the causeway, but in good weather it is easy enough to make the hundred yard walk across to the largest of the rocks – a cliff-edged island a hundred yards long called Rossan Stone.

On Rossan Stone itself a dozen houses of a sort have been built – half carved into the rock, and half built out to form stone cottages. Stuscis has no real interest in what these might be used for, but his Jerbiton colleague seemed to think that he might one day have mundane servants or visitors. Like the towers these are entirely built of stone, with stone columns and thin stone tiles used instead of wood or thatch. A cistern and drainage channels collect rain water, but there is no source of food on the rock at all, and in general this looks like one of the windier and more miserable places that one might choose to go to starve.

At each end of Rossan Stone is a staircase carved into the rock. At the north-east end the stairs go down to the causeway. At the south-east end they go down to an artificial harbour, where harbour walls built between further small rocks provide shelter and enough space for a couple of large boats or a single small ship.

Superficially the covenant may seem similar to Sanguis Vento – fortifications raised on rocky islands – but the actual intent is entirely different. Whereas Sanguis Vento are a highly disciplined community who have honed their defences in order to launch attacks on outsiders, here there is no community at all and Stuscis's intention is to ignore outsiders. This is why the mage has made no effort to defend anything but his own tower, and he wouldn't lift a finger to defend anyone on Rossan Stone if they were attacked.

## **Visitors and Members**

Once Stuscis's Jerbiton friend has finished the buildings, he leaves, and the antisocial Bonisagus magus is alone on these rocky islands.

Stuscis is theoretically interested in magi visiting, as he might profit from them. He doesn't care about mundanes, but accepts that in theory they might be useful. Therefore he has two very different approaches to new arrivals.

Mundanes, he simply ignores. If they turn out to be useful, that's great; if they stay out of his way, that's also great. If they get too close (e.g. squatting in the second tower) then he is handy enough with Perdo Corpus to cause them enough pain to drive them back to the more distant Rossan Stone rock where they can do as they please; if they kill or rob each other there he doesn't care.

Magi may stay in the second tower that he had built – that's what it is there for. Eventually he will acknowledge their presence, and ask what they want. In general, he

will accept all arrivals, with minimal questions asked, so long as they will give him something for his hospitality. If they want to stay for a season or more, he's happy to agree to call them "members" of the covenant for so long as they stay, and let them borrow one book at a time from his small library. However, there are no other benefits to membership: no Council meetings, no vis allowance, no right to stay any longer than Stuscis deigns; members can't even be sure that Stuscis will provide them with food (although his spells attract enough food for six people a day, so there is enough for him and a few visitors). And the price for membership, or for any concrete help from Stuscis, is steep.

If a mage wants to claim membership, then for each season that they stay they must either:

- Do a subsequent season of "covenant work" (i.e. half their seasons as "members" will be doing whatever Stuscis tells them). Or
- Pay three pawns of vis.

Since most of the magi who want to stay here are poor and/or desperate, few will pay him vis. Thus, he will set them to work, serving him for half of the seasons that they are here, doing any of the following:

- Writing a summa on their specialist Art (only if they can generate a good Quality score)
- Writing a tractatus (only if they can generate a good Quality score)
- Copying texts from his library, which he can then use in trade
- Extracting Vim vis from the area's aura (which he needs for his studies and for his Aegis) – this being the default task that he sets
- Rarely, crafting an enchanted device, if they have specialities which he doesn't (he will provide vis)

Any concrete help from him (e.g. having him investigate a magical artefact, or anything else that takes a season of his time) is even more expensive – at least two seasons of service or 6 pawns of vis. For supplicants from established covenants, he will always push to get vis, since he has no vis sites of his own.

## Rossan's Development

Perversely, the fact that Stuscis isn't interested in outsiders actually leads to a covenant growing up at Rossan. His demands for "covenant work" may seem steep, but he does at least have books to study from and a fairly safe place to lie-low, and while formal covenants are often very picky who they admit as members, Stuscis simply doesn't care. The flotsam of the Order starts to wash up here - magi with very poor reputations, or who are rejected for membership by more appealing covenants, or who simply need a place to hide for a while. Nobody would want to stay here for long. (No vis? No chance of a Longevity Ritual? Biting cold winds, disreputable company and awful food?) But many may need to linger here for a while, and beggars can't be choosers.

For the first couple of years, Stuscis will be alone; a redcap may stumble across the place and make an annual stop (in the *Orphans of Merlin* setting this is Uda of Bruges), but nobody else visits. Then slowly, the desperate, curious and criminal start to show up, staying for days or months each. After a few more years, more arrive, some staying for longer. The desperate, wretched magi who are attracted to the place start calling it *Castrum Spei* (Castle of Hope). After a decade or two a few people will start to settle on Rossan Stone as permanent residents, and new chambers may have to be built and the harbour expanded to accommodate them; and one or two magi may find that life here suits them and negotiate better “membership” terms from Stuscis to become long-term members.

In the *Orphans of Merlin* setting, when quorate Meetings resume in the Tribunal, it is likely that Rossan will present a range of thorny issues for the assembled magi. By then the place is an established blot on the Order, with thieves, scoundrels and outcasts frequently settled here for weeks or months. There may be no identifiable High Crimes associated with the place – but such lawlessness is exactly the sort of thing that makes respectable folk nervous (and not without reason). Legally-minded Quaesitores and assorted control-freaks will want Rossan “regulated” (probably regulated out of existence); while more individualistic magi (and there are plenty of those in Merenita, Ex Miscellanea and Bjornaer in the Stonehenge Tribunal) will have no desire to let the Quaesitores and their allies turn the Tribunal into a legalistic dictatorship, and (even while they themselves may fear the scoundrels here) will defend the Rossan’s rights against bureaucratic rulings.

## Reasons to Be Here

As the covenant becomes established, people might be here for any one of the following reasons, or more.

These give a flavour of the place and can be used as a basis for encounters here, but almost everyone stays only for a few days or seasons, and the population changes almost entirely from year to year. In the covenant’s first couple of years there may be no visitors at all; after a decade or so there will always be a few here at any time.

- A maga has passed her Gauntlet, but has not yet found a covenant to take her in. She intends to travel to a nearby Tribunal meeting (perhaps in Normandy) to seek a place, but for now she needs somewhere to live until the next Tribunal date.
- A magus has angered a more powerful fellow, and, fearing a Wizard’s War, has come here to hide out until his enemy calms down.
- A maga with surreptitious interests in the affairs of a neighbouring Tribunal (e.g. Hibernia) has become a member here for a couple of seasons. Every few weeks her agents sail out here to report to her and receive new orders.
- Magi from two Tribunals (e.g. Hibernia and Stonehenge, or Hibernia and

Normandy) have agreed to meet here to negotiate the end to a dispute between them. Ostensibly the site was chosen as a neutral territory. Actually the mage who suggested it wants to take advantage of the lawlessness of the place to betray the other; the other, suspecting this, has also invited a neutral mage (e.g. a Quaesitor, or some Flambeau muscle) to guarantee the peace of the meeting. This could get bloody.

- A maga has been thrown out of her covenant amidst a scandal, so that no other local covenants will take her in. So she has become a member here until she can find a way to redeem herself, or until her transgressions are forgotten.
- A magus who outspokenly defended his disgraced parents now has such a terrible reputation that nobody else will even give him hospitality. Stuscis doesn't judge, so he has become a "member" here.
- A demon-hunting maga has come to the island, having heard of Stuscis's specialism with Perdo and Vim. She is hoping that he may have some spell texts that will help her in her battles, and she is happy to trade some of her texts for a chance to learn any relevant spells.
- A magus with criminal ambitions starts hanging around on the island, both to scope out marks for his planned thefts, and also to meet possible co-conspirators.
- An envoy from a Spring covenant has come to ask for Stuscis's assistance. (E.g. as a young covenant they have no Vim specialist, and so hope that he will investigate an artefact for them; or they are hoping that he can help them with an Infernal menace which they are facing.) He will probably help them eventually (so long as he doesn't have to leave his sanctum) but he is in the middle of some obscure research and doesn't want to be disturbed. They may have to wait a few weeks.
- A group of Irish "entrepreneurs" – pirates, essentially – have anchored their ship off the islands while planning their next raid. They are happy to hide out here for a while, and might both sell their booty and buy provisions if they can find buyers/sellers.
- A visiting mage has brought along some guards and servants (very sensibly, since Stuscis employs neither); this miserable little band are now huddled here and hoping that they can all leave as soon as possible.
- A custos from another covenant has betrayed his masters/mistresses and stolen some magical goods from them. Having visited here before, and recalling it as a place where dubious magi sometimes lurked, he has come here to try to sell his loot.
- A well-informed schemer from a noble court has heard that unscrupulous "wizards" lurk on this island. He has come here in disguise hoping to recruit magi for a politically sensitive mission. He doesn't know or care that there is such a thing as a "code" which theoretically bars magi from entering into the service of mundane rulers.
- Three unemployed grogs, recently fired from another covenant, have come here hoping to be hired. Since Stuscis has no interest in hiring guards, they are now asking other visitors if they or anyone they know might want to hire experienced grogs.
- An envoy from a mundane power nearby (e.g. a monk from St David's) has hired

a small boat and its crew on the mainland, and has sailed out here to see what this weird place might be.

- A very minor noble is fleeing a feud in Wales. He and a few loyal retainers have taken over chambers on the rock, and are keeping look out for approaching sails, fearing their enemies may pursue them and hoping that their allies will come to rescue them or to offer aid.
- An outlaw has fled to the island. His family were supposed to come and rescue him, but they haven't turned up. His kin, it seems, have abandoned him, and he is running out of food and silver.
- A large boat has tied up the harbour, awaiting a rendez-vous with another mundane craft. They are planning to exchange a cargo (perhaps captives?) here, since this is the best harbour they know of where nobody will pay any attention to their dubious business.
- An underhand covenant pays a stipend to an assassin, retaining her for one job every year or so, striking against their mundane enemies – but they don't want her in their covenant in case her crimes are linked back to them. So she has set up home here, finding it an excellent, isolated spot, which her sponsors can easily find in order to give her new missions, but where their mundane enemies won't know to search. In between missions she hones her skill, but will also accept other freelance contracts (either killing for silver, or working as a trainer).
- A Welsh noble has kidnapped an enemy's daughter and is blackmailing that rival for the release of the girl. Not wanting to keep her on his own estates, he has a couple of servants drag her out here and imprison her in one of the guest chambers on the rock to keep her safe from discovery.
- A fugitive from the law (e.g. a robber, murderer, rapist) has settled here in order to escape a hanging. He has taken over the largest of the visitors' chambers and persuaded Stuscis to let him borrow a magical cooking fire which consumes no wood. He now imports food and ale from the mainland, and runs a kind of informal tavern for visitors, acting as cook and ale-seller. It is dark and cold, with only the cooking fire for light and the only seating being sheep skins draped over stones, but this does provide food to visitors who didn't pack their own provisions.
- A disgraced Bretton merchant has settled here, buying and selling goods “no questions asked”. His presence does attract a few other visitors (usually highly disreputable), but business is slow. He doesn't have enough trade to actually feed himself, so presumably someone else is supporting him. In fact, he is acting as a spy for and sending reports back to a covenant in the Normandy Tribunal, having agreed to stay here so long as they pay him to live and they promise to “sort out” the legal problems that caused him to flee Brittany. His sponsors actually have little interest in resolving his problems for him, as they like having a spy here, and as time goes by his loyalty to them will fade.
- A small mundane army musters and launches a campaign in a neighbouring area (e.g. Ireland or Wales). They place a small garrison on the main rock (Rossan Stone) and use it as a supply depot, with their ships ferrying goods between this island and their armies on the war-torn coast. Stuscis doesn't care, unless they

interfere with his studies; he also doesn't care if their enemies come along and slaughter them all.

It truly does become a wretched hive of scum and villainy.

## Schola Pythagoranis

Three young magi have recently set up home in the city of Oxford, a burgeoning centre of mundane learning which, some optimistically speculate, might one day rival the University of Paris. They love the philosophy and breadth of learning, the intellectual excitement, the debate of ideas... but are not especially interested in magic. For them, Hermetic magic is a tool that let's them explore broader intellectual currents.

### The Covenant

There is a "Covenant" here in so far as there is a community of magi who vaguely work together. But at present there are no actual buildings (and no grogs, no magic aura, no formal covenant Charter, nor any of the usual trappings of a Covenant.) Over time this will change a little, but this grouping is never going to function as the Order might expect.

All three of the members have taken houses or rooms within the town. The buildings are not connected to one and other, though two (Edward's and Lumen's houses) are recognisable by the sanctum markers carved above the front door of each.

The magi have a plan to build a shared common hall. They want to use this as a gathering hub, a dining hall and a library; and indeed they want to hire tutors and hold lectures and teach classes in their hall, under the name of "School of Pythagoras", which will educate magi, clerics and merchants' sons alike. But for now they have no surplus income to invest in building projects.

### Members

**Edward of Milton of Jerbiton** is very busy. Although newly gauntleted himself, he is, as a generalist and a gifted teacher, already able to train apprentices. He has just become possibly the youngest magus in the Order with his own apprentice. He also, as he loves teaching, spends the equivalent of one or two seasons per year offering tuition and conducting lectures in philosophy, algebra and geometry – which, due to his excellence as a tutor, is enough to pay for his home and to support himself, his apprentice, and his housekeeper. Then, to further indulge his curiosity, he has just been ordained into minor Holy Orders as an Exorcist. This leaves little time for magical studies. But then he has no formal library nor any vis available, so his options for magical advancement are currently limited.

**Lumen of Jerbiton** is a passionate collector and hunter of books – the rarer and more beautiful, the better. With a winning personality and a magic ring that lets her swap

between female and male appearances she can access the libraries of monks' monasteries and nuns' convents alike, and has set about establishing relationships with both the scholars of the city and also the librarians of a dozen abbeys, copying and trading books. Her personal passion is the books themselves, both as works of art and containers of beautiful wisdom, but she is also practical enough to appreciate books' potentials to support her in her lifestyle. She has therefore employed mundane copyists, made deals with a local book binder, and collected several copies each of the standard texts which are taught to mundane scholars at the city's fledgeling University – and thus she buys, sells, copies, and rents out to students, a range of mundane books, while keeping an eye out for usual texts and quietly building her book collection. Her home is quite large, but only because it must function as both a shop and workshop as well as her dwelling. Here she lives and works with a housekeeper, an errand boy, a silver-tongued book trader, and two copyists - swapping between her male and female identities as “Louis” and “Lisabetta”, whom her neighbours assume to be two different people.

**Fredegisa of Bonisagus** was trained as an Intellego specialist, but what fascinates her is the relationship between magic theory and the movements of the stars. As such, she can overlook the magical limitations of her location as she enjoys such excellent proximity to mundane scholars of astrology and mathematics, and to the books of astrology which Lumen is starting to collect. Such theoretical researches need no magic aura. The most discreet of the three, she lives in a single room, at the top floor of a cloth-merchant's townhouse, which she pays rent for by providing the merchant with astrological readings to inform his trading decisions.

The three magi tend to get along well, and often meet for an evening meal to discuss their researches and discoveries. But there are tensions. In particular, Fredegisa is of the opinion that Lumen's business's profits are “the covenant's”, while Lumen thinks that her business is her own; Fredegisa tends to turn up at Lumen's workshop with clothes for servants to mend, or expecting to be served food, and often orders items from local traders saying that “Louis the Bookseller will pay for it”, while Lumen, exasperated, repeatedly insists that Fredegisa should “get a job” and pay her own way as she and Edward do.

## **The Development of Schola Pythagoranis**

The covenant will slowly develop over time. Inevitably they will agree a Charter to resolve disagreements about what is individual property (most things) and what belongs to the covenant (surprisingly little). And as Lumen's business prospers and the covenant builds relationships with patrons (mundane and Hermetic) who might donate funds, they will come to build their hall, the “School of Pythagoras”, and raise their reputation among the local mundane scholars. But with limited magical ambition, no vis sites and limited funds, they remain more a part of life of the city of Oxford than a part of the life of the Order of Hermes.

The slow development of the covenant is likely to be marked by local, personal disputes

and conflicts, such as:

- Edward of Milton's role as an Exorcist creates tensions and divided loyalties (or suspicions of divided loyalties) as he has responsibilities both to the church and to the covenant.
- Lumen falls out with the trader who handles customers for her book trading business. He thinks he should be given greater pay and status, as he thinks that it is his eloquence that drives the success of the business, and he doesn't see why Lumen should control all the profit. She disagrees, and fires him. He then tries to blackmail her, threatening to reveal to her neighbours that "Louis" and "Lisabetta" are the same person (which would, at the least, be embarrassing, and may ruin many relationships that she has built up).
- Fredegisa begins to cast horoscopes for more of the notable locals. (Lumen, after all, is nagging her to support herself.) This is fine at first, but eventually leads to scandal and legal problems. When someone whom she advised attempts to murder a rival (saying that "his astrologer advised that it would be advantageous" if the victim died) then she is charged with conspiracy to murder, and some magi might wonder if her work has crossed the line into interfering with mundanes.
- As time goes on, the magi begin to fret about their lack of magical resources – in particular by their lack of *vis* or appropriate Arts to devise Longevity Rituals. So they strike up a relationship with another covenant, who will give them access to read (but not copy) magical books, and might arrange Longevity Rituals for the magi – in return for "friendly assistance". The covenant of Burnham would certainly be willing to fill this role, making "only a few" requests in return – access to mundane books, occasional tuition for its people, support and information for Burnham's spy network, keeping away from Tribunal Meetings and then (when Tribunal Meetings do start to become quorate again) support and compliant voting at those meetings.
- Living closely among mundanes the magi will inevitably become involved in the family disputes and relationships of the burgers of Oxford, and the surrounding minor nobles and higher-ranking clergy. They will be asked to be godparents of children (implicitly setting up an expectation that they will later help those children); Edward will be asked to tutor bright children (deepening relationships with wealthy families); Fredegisa will be asked to calculate horoscopes; Lumen will become close with other bibliophiles; eventually some or all of the magi will marry well-off locals, becoming legally and emotionally associated with these different rival factions. Their loyalties to their friends and (eventually) family will compete with loyalty to covenant or Order.

By the time Tribunal Meetings do become re-established, Schola Pythagoranic's situation may be uncomfortably complex, and a Quaesitor hoping to "regularise" the Tribunal's affairs may consider their status and actions questionable. This could lead to questions being raised at a Tribunal Meeting. Have any of the mages' involvements with mundanes been too close? Is Fredegisa, dependent upon advising prominent mundanes, actually too close to being a kind of hireling astrologer, working for mundanes rather than staying aloof from them? Is Edward's relationship with the church too cosy? If this

“covenant” has few resources and none of the usual structure of a normal covenant (even its Charter is unusually individualistic, reserving for the covenant itself almost nothing), and if they are dependent for the magical studies and Longevity Rituals on another (e.g. Burnham) then are they, in fact, even a covenant? Or are they merely three solitary magi, or even a satellite of (and so part of) their patron covenant?

## Tintagel

Tintagel does not, at first, look like a promising covenant. A small grey castle clings to a rock jutting out at the top of a cliff, its walls crumbling, the roofs visible inside pocked with holes, no smoke even rising from its kitchen-block. Is the place even inhabited?

In front of the bridge that leads to the gates, a filthy beggar scrambles and capers – a lunatic, it seems. “Pity poor Petroc. For Petroc hears all of the voices! You and you and you and you and all the others! Are you a real voice? Or a voice in Petroc’s head? Be gone! Bother not poor Petroc!” But if the visitors can convince Petroc that he should let them in (it almost seems that he is being deliberately obtuse, teasing them... but he is remarkably shrewd in working out who will be a valued visitor and who should be kept away) then he will lead them up the bridge towards the closed gates, and things start to change....

### The Covenant

Not everyone is allowed in. Almost all mundanes and most magi will not be judged suitable visitors.

But for those few who are considered worthy, with the faerie Petroc as a guide, visitors ascend to a higher Regio as they cross the bridge. Cracked sandstone flagstones give way to marble tiles; wooden posts at the edges of the bridge have become ornate stone columns by the time the visitor reaches the gates; and the battered wooden gates visible from afar are now, for one who has crossed into the Regio, are replaced by highly polished wood inlaid with fine silverwork.

And inside the gates, which swing open dramatically of their own accord, there is no sign of the crumbling, grey castle. Instead the visitor enters a castle which seems to be not merely a strong and beautiful fortress, but, as a vast palace of courtyards and gardens and halls, the epitome of all that a beautiful royal castle could be.

### The Magi

The covenant seems to be set up as a royal court. Here **Guillaume Gris of Jerbiton** is proclaimed by his “subjects” (the faerie covenfolk) as “Our most gracious king, Guillaume le Majestueux!” It seems that he is the sole ruler here, an absolute monarch presiding over a magnificent court.

Guillaume “rules” from a hall which is always changing, and always vibrant. One evening in the great hall there will be a raucous feat; the next day there will be a sublime recital of eerie lute music; the next night the hall will be divided into two warring factions who

fight duels with feathers; the next day courtly dancing is practised, with inhuman elegance; the next night a challenge is issued that all guests must fight duels of poetry, with the poorest poet to be beheaded in punishment for his or her dullness (a sullen human custos sadly rubs his sore neck and wonders if he is going to lose yet again); the next day it is decided that everyone will become chess pieces for a giant game of chess, but as that turns out to be very boring the plan is swiftly changed, so that two people at random (or perhaps a person and an inexplicably happy looking animal) are chosen to be married in a lavish ceremony; that night is given over to an utterly drunken wedding feast, where it is announced that nobody will be allowed to leave or sleep until they have drunk so much wine that they have learned to fly; then next day people take turns at climbing into a pulpit to deliver satirical or humorous sermons ostensibly criticising the debauchery of the night before...

And in and around Guillaume's "royal" hall are dozens of courtiers, servants and guests, almost all of them faeries, but with a few magi.

Aside from Guillaume, there is one other resident who is also of House Jerbiton.

**Amauberge the Poet of Jerbiton** is a maga from Provence – raised to expect the finest in art and culture, and yet still enraptured by the exquisite life available to her here. She is starting to suspect that Guillaume is not, actually, Guillaume – and she is right; the real Guillaume Gris of Jerbiton vanished years ago, after falling foul of the faeries, and whatever that is presiding over the court, it is not a human magus. But Amauberge doesn't really care. The whole place is so gloriously beautiful, her mind filled with wonder, her bed filled with a succession of perfect lovers, her poetry inspired to yet greater heights... why should she care what has happened to the real Guillaume?

The other six members of the covenant are all Merinita mages. At any time between two and four of them will be here. The others will be "elsewhere" – a couple perhaps in faerie places, but most living solitary lives elsewhere in the south-west of England, in quieter, saner places where they can study and pursue magic or other agendas with fewer distractions. (Tintagel may be an inspiring place to visit, but it is not conducive to work or study. Better to set up a sanctum somewhere quieter.)

The one mage who is always in residence, however, is **Auyr Dawnsinger of Merinita**. She is a maga with a couple of decades experience, who has perfected the art of dealing diplomatically with the faeries. She alone knows what has really happened to Guillaume Gris, and she is also the person who has transformed Tintagel into the freakish, faerie-infested wonder that it has become. When she joined, fresh from her gauntlet, this was just a slightly unsettling, decrepit castle in a faerie aura; over the years more and more faeries have arrived (at her invitation) and the other Merinita mages think that she is focused on building ever-deeper relationships with ever-more-powerful fae creatures. She, not the being that pretends to be Guillaume, really runs Tintagel. As a mage her powers have barely advanced over the years, as she rarely studies; but she knows that real power comes not from what one can do, but from who one knows and what stories one can tell.

## Encounters in Tintagel

Nothing here is mundane. Much of it is delightful. Some of it is lethal. As just a few examples:

- A snow-white lion lies napping on the lawn, his mane glittering with silver. This is the quietest garden in the castle, and a place visitors may come to flirt, chat, joke, scheme, or negotiate in peace. But if visitors discuss high-politics and royal intrigue within earshot of the lion, then he wakes up, blinks, gives a few pieces of exceptionally insightful political advice, and then rolls over and goes back to sleep.
- A group of beautiful young ladies in diaphanous gowns (faeries) giggle as they pass. They glance back at the visitor, coyly, and trot off through a door that wasn't there before, as if inviting. If the visitor goes to follow them, a grizzled old crone grabs his arm: “never go through that door!” No young man who has ever followed the ladies has ever returned. Some like to imagine that those who go live blissful lives. But when not flirting with potential victims the ladies exchange cruel glances, as they clean their teeth with little bone tooth-picks.
- A teenage boy walks past, urgently looking left and right, as if he has lost something. If asked what he is looking for he frowns “you know, that damn stone” and makes a pulling gesture before hurrying away.
- A spiky golden globe bounces on top of a fountain, held aloft by a jet of water which has no logical origin. Listen carefully, and you might hear it giggling gleefully, enjoying the ride. If someone tries to grab the globe it uncurls itself in a hurry, drops into the water, and splashes away to scurry into the undergrowth – as a gold-quilled hedgehog. If someone can grab it then its spines lacerate their hands before it wriggles free, leaving a golden quill behind, embedded in their hand. The wound never heals, unless the person seeks out the hedgehog and begs its forgiveness and returns the spike; but the spine may have beneficial powers if kept.
- A local peasant is fighting a duel with a mouse. The mouse – with a little silver sword and rakishly dashing hat – is literally running rings around him. The peasant came a year ago to rescue his girlfriend – the most beautiful girl in the village, who was “kidnapped” by the fae and is now the mouse’s lover. The girl has no desire to leave, and the peasant boy has no chance of defeating the mouse – who seems to be the finest fencer in all the lands, as well as being freakishly fast and so tiny as to be near-impossible to hit. After about an hour the peasant boy’s right foot has been pricked by scores of tiny sword-jabs and the mouse is cackling with delight. The lad yields. “Try again tomorrow!” the mouse goads him, before trotting away. The lad is never going to defeat the mouse. But the daily duels do seem to be excellent training for him, and he is well on his way to becoming a master swordsman.
- An irritated mortal custos is running around the courtyard trying to catch indistinct shapes which flit around like birds. She is currently mute. Having irritated “Guillaume” with some tedious conversation she found her words literally took wing and fled from the great hall, and she is trying to get them back.

She needs to recapture the flighty words so that she can get her voice back. She would appreciate a little help.

- Amauberge and a slender male faerie are sitting on a balcony toasting one and other with wine from golden goblets. They would be delighted if a stranger wished to join them – but the rules are that one cannot sip without a toast, and each toast must be a poem, ideally improvised, and the longer and more flowery the better. The flavour of the wine changes to take on characteristics of the poem that was last spoken (soft and sweet for a love poem, sharp and with a tang of iron for a battle poem, indescribable for a nonsense rhyme, etc.), and the better the poetry the finer the flavour of the wine. Amauberge and her companion will be especially happy to keep drinking with accomplished poets, but will be unimpressed with dullards whose turgid verses turn the wine to vinegar.

## The Future of Tintagel

As a covenant, Tintagel does not develop. As a cacophony of faerie weirdness, it just gets wilder. That sounds like it might be marvellous – but it isn't healthy.

Tintagel remains entirely aloof from politics, mundane and Hermetic alike. If Auyr Dawnsong were asked to throw the Covenant's weight into Hermetic politics (e.g. if she were asked to get her people to attend a Tribunal Meeting in order to try to get a quorum) then she might agree – but on perilous conditions: for example, she might insist that she and her people would only be involved if the actual Tribunal Meeting were held at Tintagel and if Guillaume (though barely fifty years old) were to be allowed to preside as Praeco. Weaving the businesses of a Tribunal Meeting into the lunacy of Tintagel and subverting it to the whim of an inhuman "Praeco" would serve her agenda, but would not go well for the attendees.

Eventually, Tintagel ends up aloof from reality as a whole. A place where living, breathing, dancing, scheming stories physically exist and interact, where the weirdness builds up year on year, where logic and even plausibility gradually recede, is not a place that one can hope to prosper for long. Eventually the whole magnificent glamour of Tintagel will melt away from the mundane world, to be lost in insanity and majesty and stories. A few people might manage to flee; a surprisingly large number will not even try. For Auyr Dawnsinger and Amauberge the Poet it would make no sense to retreat to drab reality, when they have a chance to be lost eternally in wonder.