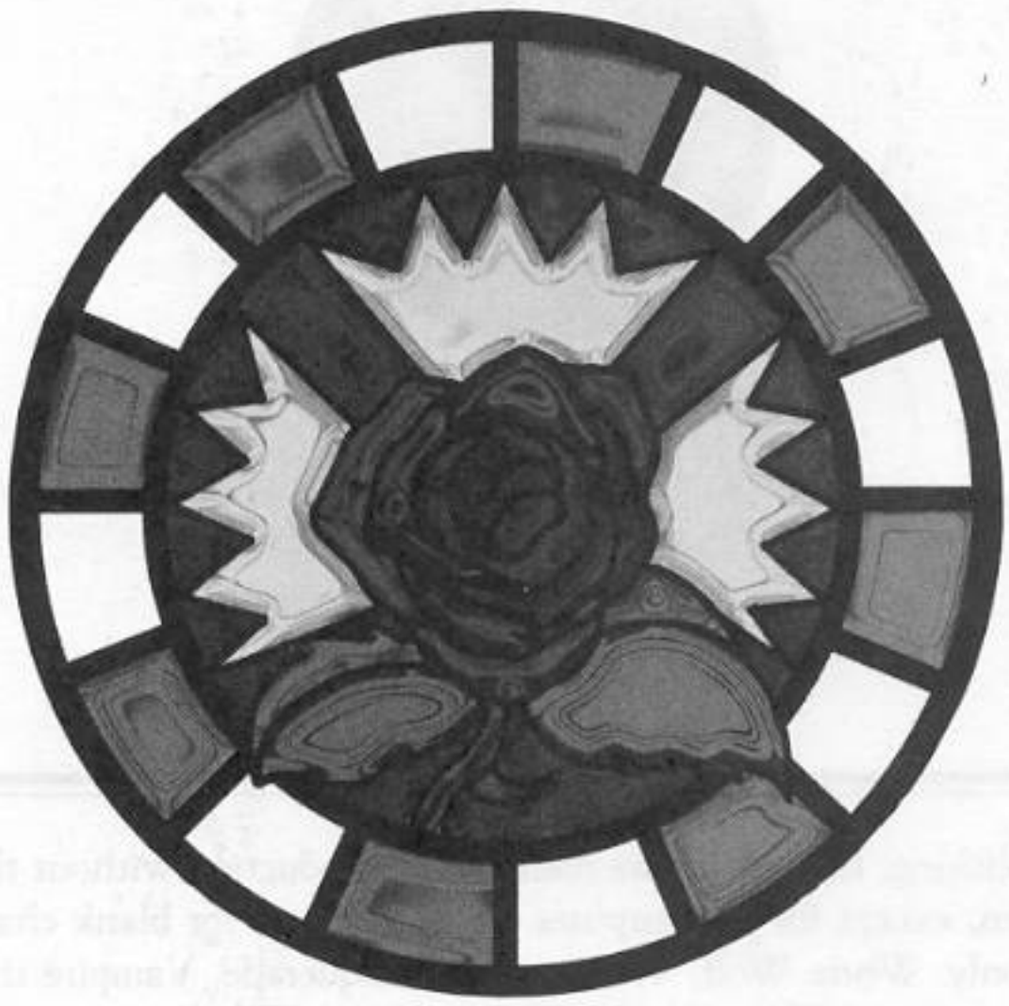
Noblesse Oblige™

The Book of Houses

For Changeling: The Dreaming™

Noblesse Oblige™: The Book of Houses



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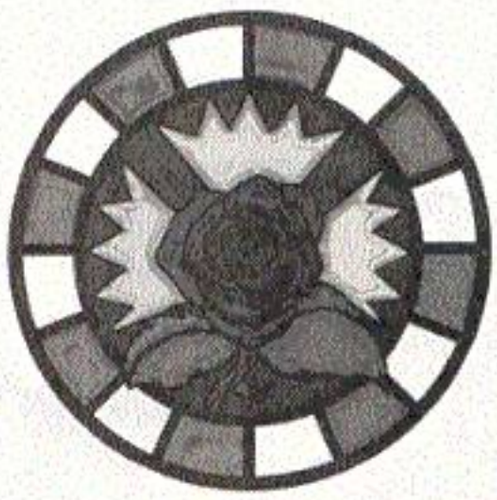

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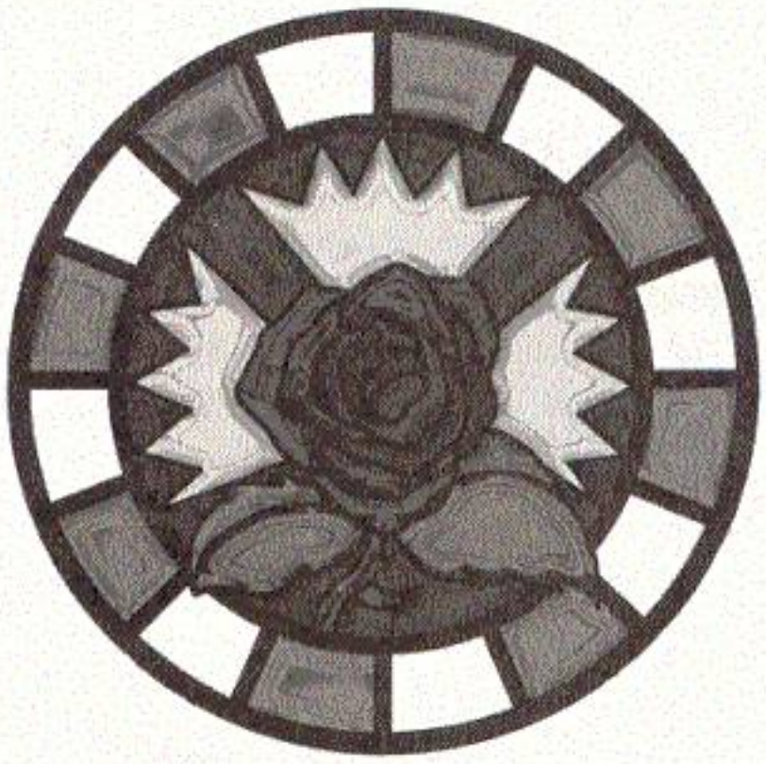
Introduction

Long have we awaited this day…a day when peace could finally be declared between noble and commoner. One day I hope to see peace among all — noble and commoner, Seelie and Unseelie, and all of the kith….

— High King David, upon signing the Treaty of Concord



The book you are holding is a compilation of treatises detailing the five ruling Seelie houses of Concordia. In the following pages, you will come to know these houses through the eyes of their own members: Their histories, politics, passions, beliefs, societies and honor — every aspect of what makes each house unique. Though many commoner Kithain view the sidhe as being all of the same mind, those who examine them closely come away with quite a different view. The variances of opinion and of character between the houses can often be as widely deviating as those between different kith, or even Courts. However, once one takes the time to look intimately at the inner workings and beliefs of each of the houses, then these differences become readily apparent. For, in order to be successful rulers, the sidhe must present a front, a facade, if you will, of unity among themselves.

Five noble houses rule the Kingdom of Concordia. These are the Seelie houses, exiled from Arcadia during the Resurgence for reasons only half-remembered by the sidhe themselves. They seek to establish a new Arcadia here on Earth — a utopian realm in which all fae can feel welcome. Forever in quest of a return to Spring, many members of the noble houses believe that their return to Earth heralds the coming of a new age — an age where humankind and faerie-kind co-exist in harmony. Unfortunately, despite their similarities in beliefs, every house has widely divergent means of pursuing its goals — differences that, at times, come close to tearing them apart. It is opportunities such as these that the Shadow Court and other enemies of the sidhe pursue in the hopes of fracturing the rulership of the Seelie houses.

The selections in this book are from chapbooks or guidebooks designed for fosterlings of the respective houses. Many nobles will be undoubtedly angered at having their secret guides so openly touted. Understandably, there are those who fear that this information may be used for foul purposes — as a means of discovering the secrets of the various houses and using these secrets against them. But, if this collection helps to cultivate better understanding among the houses in the end, then it is well worth the risk. Perhaps through this better understanding, cooperation will come.

How to Use This Book

Noblesse Oblige: The Book of Houses offers a unique look at each of the five core houses of the Seelie Court. Each chapter is dedicated to a particular house and is written from the perspective of that house. Like a Kithbook, it explores the history of each house as well as its unique culture, society and outlooks. The format is quite similar to that of a Kithbook, though you will find that the authors have taken liberties with the specifics of layout and organization based upon the eccentricities of

the house being described. History may be more significant to one house, so more emphasis is given there, while to others, the society and rituals may be of greatest import. Some of these sections even contain additional rules for that specific house. Yet, if you find that you do not like some of the rules presented (or feel that new rules are needed elsewhere) feel free to change them as you see fit. Changeling, perhaps more than any other Storyteller game, is about personal freedom and creativity. Storytellers should allow this aspect to carry over into the rules, as well as into the story.

Although the exact format varies from house to house, there are certain consistencies throughout. Every chapter begins with a story that centers around that certain house, which is then followed by the house's history, its society and concludes with descriptions of several of its most prominent members. Some of these individuals have been talked about in previous books (though, they are usually updated here), while others are brand new.

Contents

House Dougal: Forged in Fire describes the house of the crafters and blacksmiths. Although not one of the more politically active houses, House Dougal has a great deal of power among the courts of the Kithain because of its members' superb craftsmanship. Faerie kings and queens have long relied on this craftsmanship of House Dougal and on its nocker apprentices to help them maintain a military edge through superior arms. Where nockers have long been considered the masters of technological gizmos and wonders, House Dougal excels in the perfection of arms and armor.

Light and Shadow: A Primer on House Eiluned gives a rare inside look at the house of secrets. Misunderstood and distrusted by most, House Eiluned is an active player in the politics of the Kithain. Among the Kithain, the Eiluned members are also considered to be masters in the realm of magic. Few dare tread the paths of mystery so avidly followed by this most elusive house. Many fear House Eiluned for the power it is known to possess, and even more fear it for what is unknown.

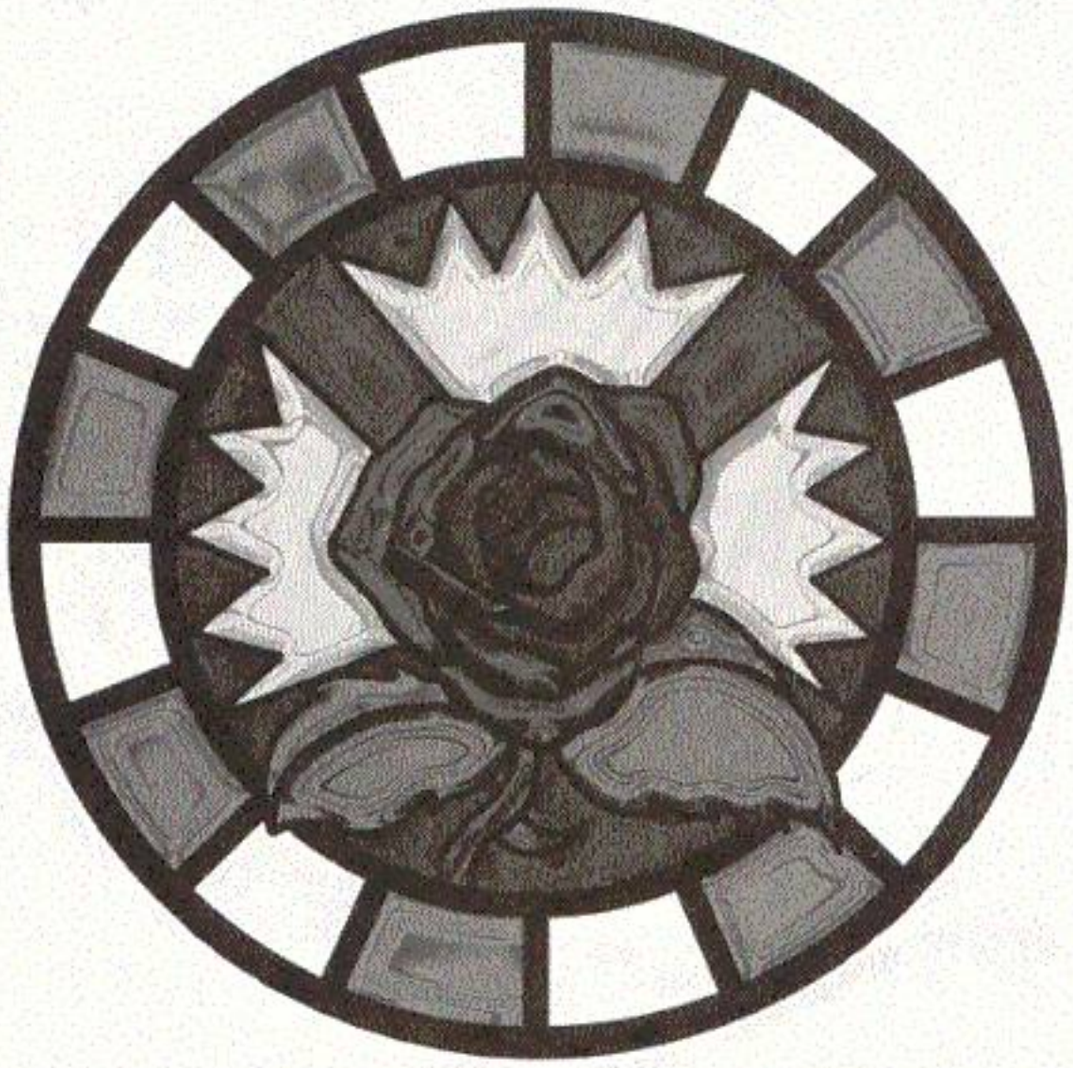
House Fiona: Love Conquers All explores the glamorous world of the most passionate house. Though their amorous exploits are well-documented, less is known of the actual history and inner machinations of House Fiona. Here you will learn of the members' close ties with the Garou, among others. As fierce in war as they are in love, few dare to stand in the way of this house once its ire has been roused.

In **Gwydion: The House of the Falcon,** you will witness the heroic exploits of what is considered ubiquitously among Kithain to be the noblest of the houses. The fact that the High King of Concordia, David Ardry, claims

his heritage from this house gives Gwydion a great deal of prestige among the fae…prestige that the house intends to hold onto for as long as possible.

House Liam: The Exiled provides a close look at the least known of the five houses. Exiled for their love of humanity — many Kithain hold this house in disdain. Despite the contempt and malignment the other houses have for Liam, it has been the members' love and understanding of humanity that has allowed the fae to exist among humankind. Some even say that it was constituents of House Liam who discovered the Changeling Way — the melding of the faerie spirit with the mortal body that allows changelings to exist on Earth. Herein, the truth behind the house's exile is finally exposed, so that all can make their own judgment.

The **Appendix** offers a selection of character templates for beginning players or for those who don't have time to go through the character creation process. Whether they are used as they are presented or modified slightly (by adding Merits and Flaws or just swapping around points), these templates cover a full-range of noble characters from each of the five houses.



House Dougal: Forged in Fire

What the hammer? what the chain?
In what furnace was thy brain,
What the anvil? what dread grasp,
Dare its deadly terrors clasp!
— William Blake, *The Tyger*

Dougal and Death of Cold Iron

Hours later, as he held the iron in his withering hand, Dougal remembered how he balked when the other sidhe planned murder next to Fergus' hearthfire. The House Gwydion Lord of Strathcruach called the nobles together to hear their council — what would be the fate of the human settlers who had carved out small farms in the southern edge of the wide valley? Four nobles sat in a semi-circle around the great fire pit: Fergus of House Gwydion was the tousled-haired lord of the vale, a tall thin lord of fearsome deeds in battle; Eilean of House Eiluned was his sorceress, lately come from the Western Isles; Macus of House Fiona, the hawk of war whose scarred hands had lifted many a bronze axe, and many a maids' skirts; and lastly, the great smith, hulking Dougal, who sat furthest from the other sidhe. Dougal knew he was there only as a courtesy to his great skill — it was his smithy that made Strathcruach one of the wealthiest and most powerful remaining domains of the fae.

As soon as the servants carried the last drinking bowl from the room, Macus leapt to his feet from the chair, nearly knocking it over, "Fifteen warriors, my lord. With 15 warriors, I can drive Magmul, his curs, pups and bitches out of the southern end of the glen and into the firth beyond!"

"Now, Macus," Fergus said, "we've tried that before. I'm afraid the humans will not be driven off as easily as that. Also, you forget while this situation has just become bothersome to us, it has been as such much longer for the humans. Remember it was Erik, Magmul's grandfather, who first moved his people into our vale. Time is different for them...."

"Yes, and every leader since Erik has conveniently forgotten his treaties with us!" Macus said. "The humans' farming wastes the land and their fires and flocks encroach upon the forested holdings of Strathcruach, my lord! And the cold iron they wield has killed two of our warriors."

"But the iron, not the hand that uses it, is the real problem," Dougal said, not realizing that he had given voice to his thoughts.

The two fae lords looked at him in amazement. Macus glared at Dougal and wondered if the smith's words were a challenge, and Fergus' eyebrows raised, for he was surprised that Dougal, silent all these years, had finally spoken.

Eilean ignored Dougal. Clearing her throat, she strode nonchalantly in front of the fire. The flames framed her body from behind, and her beautiful spider-silk dress, illumined by brightness of the fire, became transparent.

Dougal choked back a gasp and began rubbing his hands together, then inspected his cracked nails with shame. He wondered if the other fae lords could detect his blushing cheeks.

"Although I agree with young Macus' desire to quench this fire quickly," Eilean said, "it need not be done with more warfare. After all, it is their weapons we wish to avoid. I suggest other means. If we deprive them of their leader Magmul, the warriors and farmers the humans protect will be forced to leave our valley. Magmul is but a man. Get the corbie-pooka to enchant their wine, and I will take care of the rest."

"No, no," Fergus said, shaking his head. "It is true that they must be driven out, but I will do it neither by deceit nor thuggery. I will demand that the humans withdraw. If they do not, our warriors will ride out to meet them on a field of battle."

"We must not!" Dougal shouted. "I-I-I mean, Eilean is right! The iron is too dangerous. I need time...give me time to study it. Perhaps one of their blacksmiths will show me."

"My good, simple crafter," Eilean said, clutching the smith's fist where he shook it in the air for emphasis, "you were...impolitic when you allowed them into your workshop in the first place. The humans used the knowledge you gave away so freely for their own banal ends. Besides, time is running out for the fae of Strathcruach. Every cycle sees more humans and less fae. We must strike soon."

Dougal's face burned more harshly as he strode from the great hall than when he was working in front of his forge. Fergus had discounted his words again and Eilean had befuddled him. In the end, Fergus decided to send Eilean and Macus to Magmul to demand he take his folk out of the valley with the coming spring. If not, the fae would drive the humans out by that winter. Yet, Fergus had said no more; he should have continued. Words often failed him, but he wrote his honor with deeds, not words.

Dougal knew the fomorian's poison was in the iron, not in the heart of the humans. He must drive the poison out, and soon, before the winter's first snow was stained with fae and human blood.

Dougal knew he must act, and when he saw the Fiona lord's chariot, he knew what he had to do. Grabbing the reigns, Dougal slapped the horses' flanks and sped off toward Magmul's village.

Nearing the first warder's fire, he quieted the horses and crept through the fir trees. Dougal found the old warder asleep there, with his helmeted head pillowed on his bent arm. Beside him lay a crude, thick-bladed, iron dagger. To Dougal's eyes it was as if the dagger bore a shadow of its own, one not cast by the flames of the fire. Deep and malignant, the shadow grew of its own accord — a creeping blot in Dougal's vision.

Dougal's strong sidhe body was not normally bothered by autumn's frost, but the dark, icy presence of the man's cold iron dagger pierced Dougal like a fomorian's arrow. Yet, he crept forward and stood over the sleeping human and he grabbed the dagger's handle and ran for the shelter of the trees.

Dougal could not tell if it was his fevered pace, the sound of the old warder's shouts, or the cold iron itself that spooked the horses, but they stumbled back and turned over the chariot. A clamor was heard in the forest as their panicked flight bounced the chariot off the fir trees.

Nonetheless, Dougal stumbled on — the iron began to numb the fingers of his left hand. Then the cold began to burn. He limped finally into his forge hours later. The iron was imbued with such a fierce hatred for children of the Dreaming that his left hand had become a smoking ruin of bone and meat. At the sight of him, most of his journeymen failed him by fleeing into the forest. Yet, three remained: Donovan, the engineer; Aife, the silversmith; and Morann, the nocker master of the forge.

Dougal threw the iron into the furnace and turned to the three, "With coke, arsenic, hammer and tong, I will drive the poison from the iron. I need your help but not your words. Stay, and we will make this lump of crude metal dream. I will make a weapon the world has never seen — a weapon that will save lives by its artistry and by its mere being.

"Wrap my hands, Aife, and then ready your silver. Your art will give this weapon its soul. Morann, take the bellows — the coals must be as fiery and steady as your heart. Donovan, bring me Achen, (the hammer of Dougal) and then retrieve your own. Tonight you make your masterpiece and become a master smith. We will beat out the cadence of the Dreaming on this bit of fomorian marrow and turn it to our will."

So Dougal set to work. He heated the iron in his forge first, then pounded it with Achen. All the while, flinders of cold iron flew onto his hands and blinded his eyes, until he was a smoking monstrosity. His flesh boiled away, then his muscle, then his bone. But onward he stayed his will, and the iron changed. Dougal alloyed it with coke and arsenic and, finally, his own blood — which flowed down from his wounds, down his massive arms, and poured in torrents down Achen's handle until the blood bubbled on the iron.

The sides of Strathcruach rolled as with thunder, but the stars blazed on overhead. The workmen of Dougal's forge returned first, but all of the nobles had soon gathered to watch the feat. Miraculously, Magmul and his men came, too, summoned by what remained of their dreams. And Magmul's blacksmiths wondered at what they saw, but their envy was not stirred — rather, they felt a joy and kinship with those who had created art from nothing.

Some of the sidhe workmen who had run in cowardice motioned as to help, but a glimmer from Morann's eye quelled and shamed them. Those lesser fae saw the great deeds of the nocker. Morann stood alone at the bellows and he strove with their handles as a giant might wrestle to uproot an ancient stout oak — even when the weight broke on his arms, he doubled his efforts and endured.

Aife inlayed Dougal's hammer on the blade, still hot from the forge, then on the devices of the great houses. Wherever Dougal's blood poured, soon followed a rivulet of silver; but the silver and the iron blistered Aife's lovely hands, eating them away slowly.

Donovan kept the cadence of his mighty heart with his hammer — even as the hammer melted. He struck a blow precisely in the same place that Achen had struck, and Donovan wove mighty Arts into this — his masterpiece. When the filings and flinders of iron took Donovan's eyes, it was the power of the Dreaming that guided his hammer and tongs.

But none strove as Dougal did. At the end, he stood alone by the anvil — it had been blasted into slag from his blows. He looked like a thunderhead, swathed in mists of steam and seared flesh. Dougal's hammer and new blade glowed forth from the cloud like lightning bolts. He approached the tempering pool, and when he plunged the blade, the pool spewed forth a blast of vapor so strong that no one stayed on his feet.

Fergus was first to reach the pool; he drew the blade out from its bubbling depths. It was lighter than bronze yet stronger than iron, and it held no hate for the Dreaming. Fergus wisely gave the sword to Magmul, who passed it on to more men, and the mystery and wonder of steel spread. Such was the magic of the blade that none could bare to horde it. All took it into their hands that night. Every one of the smiths who touched it understood suddenly the mystery of steel, and cold iron died there beneath the stars. And thus, Anweyth — the inspired one, the masterpiece of Donovan and nonpareil of Dougal — passed from hand to hand and into our lore. Nobody knows where it is today, but wherever inspiration flames, there is Anweyth.

A year and a day later, in the court of the High King, the three crippled smiths — Donovan, Aife and Morann — were ennobled as the first lords of House Dougal. All that swore the Oath of Dougal took on some physical reminder of Dougal's sacrifice, but they also received part of his heart. The new house took Achen as their symbol, in honor of Dougal.

And Dougal? Some say his ruined body was blasted to dust. Others say he was taken by the Dreaming, and yet others believe that whatever was Dougal is now in the steel that he made.

A Journeyman's Guidebook to House Dougal

by Baron Weyland, Steward to High Lord Donovan, Mentor to House Dougal

Welcome, journeyman. Your days as an apprentice are over. As with the wilders of other houses, this is a time of passion, to explore your skills and talents, but never let this passion consume you or make you fickle or lazy in your work. Restraint is impossible to most wilders, but if so, then you would not be reading this. You are House Dougal, so you rise above, no matter your seeming, no matter your kith.

All changelings face dichotomy. We must all balance our mortal seemings with fae miens. House Dougal faces more challenges than other Kithain. Other than the (over) much-maligned House Liam, we are the most overlooked, under-valued great household of the sidhe. Though the rulers of other houses belittle us, the Kingdom of Mary Elizabeth is the happiest and most productive in Concordia. And in Caledonia, King Liam's commoner charges would have no other sidhe as their lord.

In the machinations of sidhe politics, many believe that House Dougal is superfluous, but it is our devices that fuel the intrigues of House Eiluned. The hot-blooded Fiona squabble over our beautiful artifices. The lords of House Gwydion perform their great deeds with *our* swords clasped in fists protected by *our* mail, and some of our devices even shelter the sidhe of House Liam. And who sits to inherit the throne of Concordia? Princess Lenore, charged to High King David and lady of House Dougal! So House Dougal is intimate with politics, yet apolitical.

While most of the other houses squabble, pout and piddle, we work, we build — we create. The truth is subtler than an Eiluned's compliment — House Dougal is the unseen center of the sidhe. Without the examples set by the members of our house, the Kithain would wander into ruin.

We're called arrogant. Perhaps we are. If arrogance is pride in workmanship, then we are for certain. If arrogance comes from providing lessons by deeds rather than by words, then we are arrogance embodied. If arrogance is holding the sidhe to a higher standard, then we are guilty of this sin. So be it.

Listen to the other Kithain and search your heart for truth. Sometimes our critics are right, but it is the strength of House Dougal to listen, adapt and improve — to cast off our failures and build again. I say this because as a journeyman in our house, you will face ridicule and failure. As a member of this August house you must stand after a fall and bear silently burdens others cannot.

Nowhere are our values better exemplified than in the story of our founder, Dougal. No one knows exactly when the events of this tale took place, for "when?" is the wrong question for a tale set during the twilight of the Time of Legends and the dawn of the Sundering.

Nomenclature

You have grown as a member of House Dougal using our words for the aspects of your mien. I wanted to place some definitions here as reference for your further reading. I switch between the common terms and House Dougal's terms more freely in the following sections.

Apprentice — Most other houses use the derogatory term "childling." While this word means a time of play, it is also a time of learning.

Journeyman — Other fae use the term "wilder." Again, we find this word to be depreciative of the efforts you put forth during this time of your life.

Master — Well, what could be more insulting than "grump"? While it is true that elder members of House Dougal have little patience for foolish journeymen or apprentices, they are not grumpy. Masters are cross merely at having their work interrupted.

Workshop — Other houses and commoner motleys use the term "freehold" since these are often places of frivolous Dreaming to them. We of House Dougal do the work of the Dreaming in our freeholds, hence our appellation, workshop.

Dougal's Code

Work Not Words: We learn best by seeing and doing, not by listening. You will be judged by your deeds — judge others by their deeds as well.

Honesty: Seek not to deceive by words, works, or the omission thereof.

Integrity: Face your failures and do not cover up your missteps. Let others glorify your successes.

Improve the Dreaming: Seek always to improve yourself and enlarge the Dreaming by your work.

Many-Fold Paths: A History of House Dougal

Here alone I, in books form'd of metals,
Have written the secrets of wisdom,
The secrets of dark contemplation
— William Blake, *The Book of Urizen*

Precision, long considered my forté, has little place in history. Permit me to use what I hope is a coherent metaphor for this history lesson — a garden path. Some would have you believe that history either has no direction, or the other extreme, that it is a path like that of a formal garden, straight and true. Neither is good enough for me. History *is* like a garden path. It definitely goes somewhere, but often you discover you have been down it before. The end is often the beginning.

The Knotwork Paths: The Time of Legends

During the Time of Legends, this world and the Dreaming wove in and out of each other like intertwining garden paths, and there was no House Dougal. Dougal was but a smith to Fergus of House Gwydion at this time. He served Fergus well and, in turn, Fergus built him a smithy such as the world may never see again. A hundred smiths could work there and never get in each other's way.

Dougal was the greatest smith Arcadia ever produced, but he was not perfect. (Remember: Admitting and exploring our faults is the axiom of improvement, journeyman.) He shared his knowledge freely with the fae lords, for Dougal's joy lay in the creation of things — this was the seed of our house's conflict with the Prodigal Garou. For during this time, the most fair Lady Fiona came to Dougal and asked for a weapon that the humans could use against the Garou. Dougal gave her silver — out of deference to the great lady, but also out of hatred for the Impergium, the Garou's foul plan to herd and cull humans as sheep. Few of any house knew of this plan, which has always pained us.

The smithy became a workshop and gathering place for all the best fae and human artisans; it was a hub of innovation and artistry for centuries. To Dougal's discredit, he did not look into the hearts of his students. He welcomed everyone into his smithy during the Age of Legends — including ones that would betray the fae: the daughters and sons of Balor, lord of the fomorians, and unscrupulous men interested only in armor and weaponry.

The Divergence: The Sundering

The paths of man and fae began eventually to diverge, like a favorite gown whose edge is unraveling and if not caught quickly, the result is irreversible.

Dougal and his smiths improved continually the quality of bronze, but mortals and the dark fae perverted the skills they had learned — they had used their expertise to produce better weapons and armor. Dougal banned the sidhe of House Balor from his workshop, and later, the war-mongering humans as well.

Perhaps it was this act of rejection that began the Sundering, certainly it contributed to it. Numerous forces were at work. The copper and tin supplies used to produce bronze were growing harder to obtain. Mortals discovered iron while searching for a replacement metal from which to craft weapons. Maybe it was the hatred and jealousy of Dougal's work that infected the metal and the mortals who produced it; or perhaps the progeny of Balor used their foul Arts to poison the metal. Or, maybe it was the Prodigal Garou, angered over our arming humans with silver to end their terribly foul Impergium. Man pounded the dirt and taint out of the ore with bronze hammers, purifying their hatred and quenching the red-hot metal in the dull waters of the future — thus, cold iron was born. No one can remember exactly who did it or when, but the Sundering came, balanced on the edge of cold iron daggers and poised on the tips of iron arrowheads.

The silver-clad warriors of the sidhe began to fall beneath the iron-shod boots and spears of humans until the mortals ventured into Strathcruach, the ancient vale that sheltered the smithy of Dougal... but you've heard that tale. Dougal's sacrifice stemmed the tide of cold iron. Perhaps it was too late, for it did not stop the end.

Myths and Mysteries of Cold Iron

More than any other house, House Dougal has striven to understand why cold iron harms the fae. After all, our founder gave his life to try to break cold iron's grip on the fae. It is our duty to continue his work and to protect the fae. And as Donovan said, "To fight a thing, you must understand a thing."

Before we get to the theories of cold iron's nature, let's talk about the reality of it as opposed to its myths. First, iron is not cold iron. Most of what we think of as iron, thanks to Dougal, is actually steel. We live in a modern age of blast furnaces, alloys, plastics, steel and ceramics. Cold iron is quite rare for modern changelings — even ferriers use steel nowadays.

The best way to think about cold iron is not as a *thing*, but as a *process* — a very low-tech and crude process. The ore is found all over Concordia, sometimes very close to the surface. (Some freeholds are built on deposits of it!) Once hunted and gathered, the ore is heated in a large crucible over a charcoal fire. The resulting lump of black-gray material can then be hammered into shapes.

Compared to steel, cold iron makes poor weapons — they are heavier, more brittle and they lose an edge more quickly than steel ones. Thus, cold iron weapons tend to be small — axe heads, daggers, arrowheads, darts, bolts, etc. It is rumored that some Prodigals produce cold iron weapons with steel properties. Other gossip says that weapons quenched in sidhe blood are extremely hard for fae to sense.

The most common form of cold iron found nowadays is known as wrought iron, which is used in older human cities in fences, gates and balcony railings, for example. So if you are planning a vacation, watch out. Some of the most beautiful cities are bastions of cold iron — like Paris, Savannah, Charleston, and New Orleans. They are full of wrought iron. (Fae stick to the middle of the streets during Mardi Gras.)

Sundering Incarnate

Many believe that iron represents the force of the Sundering — the philosophical division between humankind and the Dreaming incorporated, made flesh. Cold iron was formed not by any "thing," but as a "natural" effect when Banality reached a critical level. Paradoxically, this mystical assertion is backed by hard science: Steel actually contains more iron than cold iron does. After all, most of the things we associate with iron are actually steel or cast iron (cold iron that has been melted and poured into a mold).

Nightmare Metal

Some believe that iron is the "anti-matter" of Glamour. Some masters in the Hinterlands Initiative believe there is a location opposite of the Dreaming, "Nightmare," if you will. Iron, the masters propose, is made up of material from this place.

Balor's Bones

Others stipulate that iron was poisoned by Balor, or that it may even be made from that demon's body. While this is ridiculous to most fae, two hard facts back up this theory. First, the members of House Balor seem to be immune to cold iron's effects. Secondly, many fae have dreams of Arcadia involving cold iron — suggesting that it exists in Arcadia as well.

Garou's Revenge

An Emissary reported recently that some Garou are able to talk to spirits that live in machines. This report has led to a frightening possibility: Perhaps cold iron houses some evil spirit, placed there by the Garou. Dougal's refining process that transforms cold iron into steel may drive the spirit off. If true, then the Garou may be able to infest other materials with this spirit. The same informant says there is much dissension among the tribes of Garou, perhaps they lack the power or perseverance to do so.

The Paths' End: The Shattering

Our wonderful walk down the paths of Earth may have been drawing to a close, but for House Dougal, the garden seemed, until nearly the end, to be in spring — burgeoning with potential. For during this time of great sadness, our house saw its largest growth.

As sidhe fought sidhe, culminating in the betrayal by King Falchion, demand for our smithwork grew. Our house swelled under the leadership of the founders Aife, Donovan, and Morann. Disaffected or orphaned sidhe and talented commoners filled our workshops. Our smithies spread throughout the lands as lord after lord built forges to propitiate our craftsmen and artisans.

Be warned, our talent awakens easily what is worst in man and fae. We are so often maniacal in our quest to become the masters of our arts that we forget what our tools do in lesser hands. We should have worked harder to bridge the widening gap between the worlds of man and fae. In the end, we did nothing as one of the greatest artifacts of our race, Silver's Gate, was destroyed and the Dreaming was ripped from this world.

Morann's Lonely Path: The Interregnum

Unlike the older houses, we attempted to organize our withdrawal from this world. Aife and Donovan returned to Arcadia. Morann, the nocker, became the titular leader of the house — until the sidhe returned. Remnants of our house remained on Earth, although our numbers were small — most of the sidhe had returned with Aife and Donovan. The fine leadership of Morann undoubtedly led to the belief that Dougal was somehow guiding our progress during the

Long Night. Most sidhe hate to admit that exceptional commoners can be good leaders. (Our house also kept records of this time. I recommend especially *Interregnum Est*, by Master Twofingers, the boggan master bookbinder.)

The greatest mystery of the Long Night is the fate of Achen, Dougal's hammer. Some say Donovan took it to Arcadia and it is now in Aife's hands. Some sidhe claim they left it in the possession of Morann. Many commoner members of the house who remained loyal claim that Donovan was to return with it, but he himself has no knowledge of Achen's whereabouts.

Morann managed the house well for numerous years after the bulk of the sidhe left. Along with members of House Scathach, most of the sidhe masters of House Dougal became changelings and faced the uncertainties of their long exile from the Dreaming. They died eventually. Other fae of the house closed off their workshops from the world and made pockets of the Dreaming from their own devising. They are the Lost Ones.

(The studios of the Lost Ones are storehouses of knowledge, but due to our dual nature as human and fae, these studios can also be snares from which a changeling cannot escape. Pay special attention to the section on the Gallain, journeyman.)

Many forces beyond the bitter tides of Banality worked against Morann and House Dougal during the Interregnum. Sidhe masters began to detest being led by a nocker. The growing commoner "nobles" often used our craftsmen as wagering chips, or even as hostages. Most members began to regard the House Dougal name as a liability in those dark times. The house's numbers began to wane inexorably.

Most of the sidhe members of House Dougal crowded for decades around the balefires, descending into Bedlam first. Some fell victim to the Lost Ones, and commoner members of our own house betrayed some sidhe to appease commoner kings; our sidhe leaders have bore many stains on their leadership, but no mark has measured up to this dishonor. To their credit, though, the nockers and boggans still loyal to the house tracked down the traitors and captured them; the loyalists beheaded most, others suffered more...final judgments.

Morann's first death led to a great crisis in the house — one that still echoes loudly today. Donovan, Aife and Morann created no rules for an exchange of leadership before Aife and Donovan left for Arcadia. In typical House Dougal fashion, members rolled up their sleeves and set to work. The remaining sidhe lords lobbied for the creation of a new triumvirate, but the commoners rejected this suggestion that two sidhe should be chosen automatically to fulfill the roles of Aife and Donovan. They all decided instead that the master craftsmen should vote for a single leader until Donovan and Aife returned and/or Morann's new changeling body, his *de facto* heir, could be identified. And so, the craftsmen created the position of Grand Master of House Dougal.

During the 600 years of the Interregnum, there were 10 Grand Masters — most of whom relinquished their control whenever Morann reawakened. Twice Morann's fae mien never awoke before his human seeming died, but it was the last change of power that was the most tumultuous and that set the stage for the Accordance War.

A nocker named Cranad became the Grand Master in the late 1950s. Cranad was a hard-edge arbiter and led the house well for a while. A shadow slowly fell over him. Perhaps his Unseelie nature got the best of him, or maybe it was an outside influence such as one of the Thallain. In either case, Cranad's treachery reared its head soon after he learned to make simulacra.

At first, Cranad used the simulacra for pranks — copies of friends used for practical jokes, etc. But the return of Morann plunged him into the dark waters of the Unseelie. Somehow Cranad made a simulacra of Morann and killed the true. Why Cranad did not give him the death of cold iron is not clear — perhaps this was too horrible even for an Unseelie, but who knows?

Exile

The Mists obscure all but fleeting, maddening remembrances of fair Arcadia. Aife and Donovan led House Dougal upon their return, and it is presumed that they ruled until the paths to this world reopened in 1969. The exact nature of our house's exile is unknown. Frivolous Fiona bards tell tales of one of Donovan's machines running amok during battle. (A goblin trademark, you know.) Others in our house whisper of an Eiluned plot gone awry — the only justice there is that they, too, were exiled. Donovan is troubled with dreams of human wizards violating the sovereignty of Arcadia. My dreams are of a fair warrior-maiden of Gwydion and of an injustice done to her; I remember standing by her during some court censure.

Nonetheless, we got ready and were on Dafyll's right hand when we re-entered the world.

The Road Home: Resurgence and the Accordance War

When Donovan returned, it was not the true Morann that awaited him, but Cranad's simulacra. Since the Resurgence, Cranad and the false Morann gave only mock obedience to the fae lords, so their shipments of supplies were often late and of mediocre quality. (They directed the best goods to the commoner armies.) The false Morann avoided a face-to-face confrontation with Donovan. Dafyll eventually ordered the House Dougal lord to take control of Morann's freehold (Freehold of the Forge), and Donovan sped quickly to Rochester, N.Y., where Morann's workshop lay.

Cranad and the false Morann were confident that the most of the commoners supported their cause against the sidhe. The house's guards greeted Donovan in full battle gear. Donovan suspected Morann's motives by now, but he could not believe his old friend would harm him. So, Donovan took his helm off at the freehold gate and left his sword on his chimerical war steed. The sight of Donovan in full House Dougal regalia awakened stronger bonds in the master craftsmen than Cranad's poisoned words. Another waited inside to serve her true lord: Hanna was a nocker welder who also headed the Mothers of Morann, the group that long suspected the false Morann. By the time Donovan made it to the great hall, nearly half of the commoners and newly awakened sidhe were in his wake. Cranad began to speak openly of rebelling against the nobles, but Hanna interrupted him and told the massed journeymen, apprentices, and masters of her fears.

Torgail Ainn

The celebration of a changeling's passing from one seeming to another is the Torgail Ainn — a time of great celebration in a House Dougal workshop. Each passing requires an example of the changeling's work in the house. This often takes the form of a powerful or beautiful item, such as a treasure or chimera. Dougal members who do less tangible work undertake a great task: research, organizing the files of *Achen Press*, etc....

The preparations for such a creation often involve a quest (Oath of the Long Road) just to gather items and Glamour to prepare for the Torgail Ainn.

Apprentices create an "exemplar." If it is accepted by his mentor, then the Torgail Ainn is celebrated and the apprentice becomes a journeyman. Journeymen must complete a "masterpiece" to become a master. A masterpiece is the epitome of a journeyman's skills and often involves years of work and a quest, or three!

Enraged, the Morann simulacra attacked Hanna. Donovan leapt to her defense — forcing a rousing battle in the freehold as Donovan and Morann's followers fought one another. Donovan refused to draw a blade on his kinsmen. Seeing this, all but Cranad and the Morann simulacra sheathed their swords; the kinsmen renewed their oath to Dougal in that moment of Donovan's triumph. Cranad and the false Morann fled, and the true leader of House Dougal took his rightful place as the head of the house.

Donovan turned the freehold toward prosperity and soon the knights of the Accordance War bore the finest House Dougal weapons and armor produced since the Shattering.

The Workings of House Dougal

The Atom of Democritus
And Newton's Particles of Light
Are sands upon the Red Sea shore,
Where Israel's tents do shine so bright.
— William Blake, *Mock on mock on, Voltaire, Rousseau*

The basic framework of House Dougal society is the relationship between the student and her teacher. This house is about work. Status is awarded primarily due to a member's skill. To a lesser extent, seeming and kith also play their parts.

It is your responsibility as a journeyman to travel from workshop to workshop and offer yourself as a worker. You must contract out your labor with a master, and you must stick to that contract. Your purpose may *seem* to be cheap labor (to be honest, that is part of your purpose), but in actuality, you are searching to find a rewarding job. Follow your bliss. This is a time for you to learn as much as you can under as many masters as will have you.

Should you break a contract or act dishonestly, your master will tell me. Let us say that that would be unwise. I know several thousand nockers that could (ab)use an assistant...or shall we say, "lackey."

Genius

Every member of House Dougal is led foremost by his or her own creative spirit, or genius. While we preach and reward order and efficiency, it is because, for many of us, those qualities define our own genius. Do not let the rules you read in this section, or organizations you may join, blunt your search. The time you have as a journeyman is set aside so you may find that genius. It is the universal pursuit of that part of the Dreaming that binds our house together.

Once you have found it, follow it — this is our most precious tenet. This is why we overlook the politics of the courts and the squabbles of the houses. I hope to see us rise above the prejudices of kith and sex. The pursuit of genius may even lead us there. It is Dougal's true legacy to you. This is what makes House Dougal great.

The Great Secret of Making

So, you want to know how it's done — how you will make your masterpiece? Well, how did Dougal make steel? Go back and read the story again. It's all there.

There is no special list of ingredients, no hidden cantrips, no secret Art. The Dreaming is a place of wonder and passion, and it rewards your genius only if you dedicate your life to bringing forth its emanations. Work. Sacrifice. Dedication. These are our secrets and why so many of the other houses fail, and why House Eiluned has never stolen our powers to create. They are not up to the task of creation.

You are.

Dream about what you wish to create, let it consume you. Then fall in love with the act of creation. Keep your mind from the glory it brings, the position it wins you in court or in House Dougal. When your heart is pure, your sacrifice great, your work done in joy, then the Dreaming comes — and whatever "it" is, is made.

Chain of Command

High Lord Donovan controls the affairs of the household from the Freehold of the Forge. He holds the ultimate responsibility for members' actions and collective future. As such, the High Lord is the one being that decides ultimately the fate of wayward members of the house. Supporting him are three offices: the Mentor, the Grand Master and the Council of Preceptors.

The first office is house Mentor — me. This position is actually Aife's. Until she returns from Arcadia, I am responsible for the training and education of new members. I see to it that newly Sained members of the house are given the correct fostering and that their training is efficient and complete. It is for these reasons that you are reading this book.

The Grand Master, Morann's position, is held for him by Lady Legre. Her Sisyphean job is to summarize the work performed by House Dougal members. All masters must submit written reports of their work and of the innovations of their journeymen. House Dougal's quarterly journal, *Achen Press*, publishes excerpts from these reports and longer essays on the most innovative and miraculous works of the house. (As a journeyman, you can co-author articles in the *AP*!)

The Council of Preceptors is a body of honored advisors, made up of five masters. One member is Unseelie, two are always commoners, and two are always sidhe. The Preceptors are there to offer advice to High Lord Donovan and to aid the Mentor and Grand Master, if need be. The Preceptors are the only members of House Dougal who can summon the High Lord to a meeting, but they do not speak against the High Lord's rulings.

Seelie Members

Most of our members are Seelie and it is from that court that we derive most of the traditions of our house.

Death Before Dishonor

Doing is more important than saying. What you do is the measure of your life. Lying by saying that you cannot accomplish a task or claiming credit for a work that is not your own is a grievous sin.

Love Conquers All

Some call us a cold house. Our love is as fragrant as the glint of stars off the dew on a midnight rose, as loud as the thunder produced at a thousand-foot waterfall, and as bright as a lone candle above the wedding bower. Which is to say it is not fragrant, loud or bright, but just as you smelled the rose, heard the waterfall, and saw the light — so is our love often overlooked, but nonetheless it is true. Our love reveals itself in our work, in our deeds and in the romance of our hearts.

Beauty Is Life

Our appreciation for the beauty of precision and efficiency are our greatest gift to the Dreaming. Our ability to create machines, works of art, and even bylaws, are proof that we can rebuild the Dreaming even in this twilight world.

Never Forget a Debt

One good work deserves another. Your greatest debt is to your foster and to your teachers. Repay them with honored service and by treating your charges with love and dedication.

Unseelie Members

Our house contains a few Unseelie members, but they are not unwelcome; the work you do is more important than your code. You will fail or flourish by your deeds in House Dougal. Unseelie members have their own traditions.

Change Is Good

Things fall apart. Things decay. It is our duty to rebuild what breaks and dismantle what is not working. Anachronism is death.

Glamour Is Free

Glamour is like everything else — how can it be recycled if it is not used? If a cup is not emptied, how can it be filled again?

Honor Is a Lie

The most efficient way to govern yourself is to look to your own needs. Sometimes self-sacrifice is necessary, but honor is often just a tool someone is using to manipulate you. Watch out. Think and do for yourself.

Passion Before Duty

Let your instincts guide your work. Your masters gave you training, now you must go beyond. To fulfill your passion, you must not only stand on the shoulders of giants, but on their heads as well. So be it. The passion for your work or your goal is paramount. The ends always justify the means.

Secret Societies

Even though our house esteems honesty highly, a plethora of our fellows find it necessary to hide their activities. House Eiluned unfortunately deems it appropriate to stick their noses into our business, and they do this by secret societies. These are the secretive groups I have discovered that exist in our house. It is your duty to report any of their activities to me immediately.

Cranad's Legion

Cranad and his puppet, the false Morann, are still active and have a large number of followers. These former members of Dougal now support the twisted causes of the Shadow Court, who mainly operate in the northeast, but many wonder if they now flourish in Meilge's hothouse of intrigue — the Kingdom of Willows.

The leaders of the legion, it has been speculated, may have ventured to Hibernia to meet with the lords of the Unseelie houses. Fellow House Dougal members on the Isle of the Mighty tell us that Cranad and the simulacra Morann started an Unseelie version of House Dougal in Hibernia. They craft items for the Shadow Court there and even consort with House Balor! Who knows what knowledge they have exchanged? The treacheries of House Balor and the other Unseelie houses will consume them eventually, but what damage will be wrought to our house's honor and to the power of the Seelie Court until then?

Temperance League

No doubt your peers have informed you of the Temperance League. This league is one of the "boogie-men" organizations of our house, so named for its desire to "temper" the runaway passions of certain members. The league's methods are supposed to be rather painful and direct.

Its leader, the "Grand Master of Disaster," is a redcap, one of the two or three in our house. This redcap controls a number of the violent-minded and several Unseelie members of House Dougal in every duchy of every kingdom. One word from the Grand Master of the Temperance League and all wrongs are righted.

Since the league's mission involves the education of constituents of House Dougal, the Temperance League takes orders from the house's Mentor — me.

Now, I wouldn't do something like that, would I?

Mothers of Morann

This is a select group of female nocker members of the house who have always kept watch for Morann's "heirs." Their membership is secretive, but their great service is not. Of all of these secret societies, I wish no harm to these vigilante members of House Dougal.

The founder was Morann's mother in his first incarnation. She was a Kithain of singular skill: She developed a whistle only Morann could hear. This special trait has been passed down from member to member since the group's inception, and it has probably been duplicated. The Mothers of Morann scour the world for his new incarnation even now.

Discordian Engineers

These hackers rejoice in creating marvelously efficient computer viruses. The Discordian Engineers are also responsible for defeating several hackers who've tried to eradicate many of the files in the Freehold of the Forge.

Queen Mary Elizabeth strongly suspects the Discordian Engineers of infiltrating DreamSoft, her software company that directs Donovan's Internet Initiative. These computer whizzes delight in alternately helping, and then thwarting, the initiative. They always leave behind either the Discordian Engineer name or a rotating icon of Dougal's hammer jammed in several gears.

The Loricas

The Loricas are powerful House Dougal sorcerers who are masters of the Primal Art. (Sorcerers are fae who have attained rank 5 in one Art and at least rank 4 in another.) They work to forge the cantrips of this and other Arts into powerful chimera and Talismans. Armor made by a Lorica can render warriors capable of sustaining gross amounts of damage.

The Loricas are not suspected of direct intrigue against the house. Rather, it is their believed association with House Eiluned (and possibly the Shadow Court) sorcerers in the Crystal Circle that give the leaders of House Dougal pause. Since the Crystal Circle constituents are particularly adept at Dream-Craft, many Loricas are believed to also lead Donovan's Hinterlands Initiative.

Loricas also seek to re-create the forging of Anweyth, the first steel sword. This work, called the nonpareil, always involves the death of the changeling attempting to do so. All Loricas undertake the creation of a nonpareil, but many of these masters die without results. Even the greatest Loricas often do not have Dougal's heart or vision. House Dougal does not condone the nonpareil, even though they all respect its sacrifice secretly.

Many believe that Caliburn, High King David's sword, is a nonpareil, crafted by a nameless smith. Others claim that King Meilge's mask is also a nonpareil — possibly crafted by a member of Cranad's Legion hiding in the Kingdom of Willows. (Who knows what fell powers the nonpareil may harbor?) Whatever the case, it is always an item of singular beauty and awe-inspiring power.

Antiquarians

Some of our members belong to another organization, possibly controlled by House Eiluned. This organization's members seek to obtain ancient Talismans to study and horde; therefore, I call them Antiquarians. Since the documents that let me know of the Antiquarians' existence were brought to me by a Lorica informant, I believe these two groups to be working at cross purposes. Whereas the Loricas seek to create new Talismans, the Antiquarians seem interested only in the past. This study of the past is not illegal, but they are held responsible for the loss of some of House Dougal's Talismans.

The Escheat

As the most ancient tradition of the fae, the Escheat is the basic guide to a changeling's behavior. The rights of demesne, dream, ignorance, rescue, safe haven and the right to life are to be followed with no modification. Noble or not, you are to follow the Escheat's precepts for it is the most precious code of the fae. Since House Dougal rarely controls holdings outside its workshops, it is often necessary to put one's lord's interests above those of House Dougal. This is allowed to a small degree, but serious breaches in the house codes and traditions are not tolerated.

The Right of Demesne

House Dougal fellows, of course, support their superiors, but a good member also points out the faults of others so that they may improve. House Dougal also applies this right to a master and his workshop. Not even Donovan would think to order around a master in her workshop!

The Right to Dream

We do not support Ravaging or Dream Rape of any kind by any person. If someone attempts these heinous crimes, we act. If we ourselves cannot act right then, we find those that can act in our stead.

The Right of Ignorance

Mortals are enchanted only when deemed necessary by a noble or a master. Donovan's Emissary Initiative could be regarded as posing a threat to this law, but Donovan's will must be trusted.

The Right of Rescue

This right is one of the most basic of the fae, and House Dougal follows it to the letter. Dougal members have been known to risk life and limb to rescue members of House Eiluned and those of the Shadow Court. The Right of Rescue is also extended to those approaching Chrysalis — these persons are to be conducted to the nearest sidhe freehold. House Dougal also extends this right to Gallain, Inanimae and Talismans.

The Right of Safe Haven

Dougal constituents do not like letting strange or suspect Kithain into their workshops. They will if pressed, but they often keep strangers under guard, or make them stay behind locked doors until the suspected are ready to leave.

The Right of Life

House Dougal believes in this right, but it also holds the belief that a Kithain who breaks it loses all of her rights. Kithain who kill members of House Dougal beware — their knives are as sharp as their will for vengeance.

The Fior

The Fior, focusing on a noble's right to a trial by ordeal, is the only tradition older than the Escheat. We modified it to a trial by great deeds. House Dougal sometimes forgives an offense if the offending member creates a new masterwork or takes on some task that most nobles find beneath them — like serving as an apprentice for a year and a day.

Fostering

The only task more important than deciding what work to dedicate your life to is your responsibility as a foster. Fosters of House Dougal have three Herculean tasks. First, they must instruct an apprentice (childling) on her new life as a changeling — and protect her from the forces of Banality.

Fosters are responsible for cultivating skills in their charges, too. All Kithain of this house must have work to give their life beauty and meaning. Due to an apprentice's behavior, fostering is often a disheartening and exasperating task. You must do the unspeakable and neglect your work to see to it that an apprentice does not neglect his. You must also know when to overlook the flightiness and unpredictability of your charge. House Dougal must engender childlike wonder while tempering some of the childishness. We do not run sweatshops and assembly lines: Work's goal is beauty. Unpleasant to the extreme, but fostering is required for an apprentice to become a true member of House Dougal.

Finally, fosters must let the apprentice go. It is natural for a foster to wish his apprentices to carry on their work. But to be a good foster, you must call your apprentices "journeymen" when they are ready, and then you must let them go — and even force them to go on some occasions.

Noble Relations

Most of our house, both Unseelie and Seelie, are Traditionalists. The sidhe nobility has shown the wisest leadership over the centuries, but our house's emphasis on deeds — not words — gives way to a surprising number of Reformers and Modernists. We believe that noble actions and deeds are justifications for noble rule. Nobles whose comportment is ignoble must be re-educated or removed from office.

House Eiluned

Of all the great houses, House Eiluned is the most troubling: It is without a doubt the least noble and the most Unseelie. Other than their mastery of magic, House Eiluned members have no skills of which to boast. They generally do no work. Rather, members waste time dissembling, rumormongering and scheming. Their efforts range from pointless to pernicious.

Conversely, truth is often at the core of House Eiluned criticisms. Look for that truth, but ignore the rest of the bile that obscures it.

House Fiona

Despite our admonishing stares, it is hard to disapprove of members of House Fiona for long. If we are the strong heart of the fae, House Fiona is its soul. But, even their grumps seem to be childlings to us; they never follow through with their tasks, leaving most unfinished (or shoddily completed). Their songs and poetry move us nonetheless, and their machinations are mostly harmless to all but themselves (unlike House Eiluned's).

House Gwydion

House Gwydion spawned our house and supported it during its youth. And, if the Mists do not betray me, even when we returned to Arcadia, House Gwydion spoke for our house. Our finest weapons and armor have gone to this house's kings for centuries, yet our debt to them is still unpaid. Do not serve blindly, but listen to their wisdom. It has served the fae well.

House Liam

Although House Liam is often blind to the banal side of humans, we must not add to the house's misfortunes. The members have brought us human workers who have become some of our most talented of the enchanted. Our greatest conflict with them stems from their penchant for talking too much, while doing very little. Many nobles believe that House Liam's misfortune is really the work of other forces, such as House Eiluned or the Shadow Court. Help Liam members when it is appropriate, but do not coddle them.

House Scathach

Those of House Scathach do not trust us, probably because we are seen to be an arm of House Gwydion, or blind Traditionalists. What a pity. Their supposed mastery of Dream-Craft would make them welcome researchers on Donovan's Hinterlands Initiative.

Commoner Kith

The other kith are not the sidhe's equals in power and prestige in House Dougal. Boggans and nockers have always held a high place in Dougal, but after they told of their kith's treacheries during the Interregnum, most sidhe have treated them unfairly.

Since the Resurgence, all other kith are measured by sidhe standards. Boggans are believed to lack the sidhe's aesthetic skills, and nockers seem incapable of making a device without some flaw, however minor. Morann and Lady Legre are regarded as the exceptions to this shameful rule. But, as always, House Dougal is ready to work on a problem.

The final criterion for position in our house has always been the work that a member does. And this factor will always be the final consideration for ranking.

Wake Up and Smell the Coffee

While many other houses believe that we Dougal are too busy with our own projects to concern ourselves with the outside world, we, in fact, crave exchanges of knowledge intensely. Contacts with the promise of an interchange of learning and skills are a major part of Donovan's initiatives for House Dougal. I have included some commentary from Aaquila, Head Emissary of the house, to supplement my own knowledge and to give you an example of her wit and integrity. I ask you to pass on any contacts you may gain with these other groups to Aaquila.

Gallain

Too often we regulate ourselves to deal only with the fae that we know best. But if House Dougal is to grow, we must seek knowledge and inspiration from other sources — who better than from our faerie kin?

Inanimae

Of all the Gallain, we look for contact with none more than the Inanimae. The writings of Lady Sierra and Professor Edgewick tell of golems, will o' the wisps and nymphs — fascinating. Living machines, Talismans of the Tuatha de Danann — who knows what forms the Inanimae may take?

> **To:** Oracle@ChimeraNet.com
> **From:** Aaquila@ChimeraNet.com
> **Re:** Sightseeing with an Inanimae
>
> I met him while I was hiking in Craggy Gardens, near Asheville, N.C. A cloud grazed the mountaintops and wrapped the paths through the blooming rhododendrons with luminous mist — glorious! I wandered in a daze wiping away the dew and tears from my eyes when a hand touched me, and I yipped like a poodle. When I turned, there was a beautiful fae with deep-green eyes — funny, I can't remember how he was dressed — but he gave me a handkerchief for my tears. We talked for a time perched on a low rock wall. He, too, was a traveler, but his mission wasn't knowledge *per se*. He granted small favors (such as the handkerchief) and delighted in showing others what they really wanted. (He told me where I could find some of the Yunwi Tsundsi I was looking for in Waynesville.) I thanked him, when he suddenly said his "ride" was leaving. The cloud thinned and a ray of sunlight hit me — I still remember its fantastic warmth. He gave me a quick kiss on the cheek and jumped into the off-rushing cloud, and he disappeared.
>
> His name was Sulieman. He was an Inanimae.

The Nunnehi

Truly, the fae share the "white man's burden" when it comes to the nunnehi. But we have nothing to offer but our backs, muscles and the willingness to try to repair what was done. We would welcome an exchange of knowledge and skills with our cousin fae.

Although King Meilge of the Kingdom of Willows makes many honest efforts gathering information difficult for our house to obtain, we have heard reports of a nunnehi kith called the Yunwi Tsundsi, fae of the Cherokee peoples. Some of our crafters have had congenial conversations with these "little people." Although they seem to be gifted craftsmen, they have so far ignored our inducements for a more formal exchange of ideas and skills.

Prodigals

House Dougal considers most of the Prodigals dangerous to the extreme. Deal honestly with them, if at all.

Children of Lilith

These vampires wallow in the banal and blood-dimmed muck of this world. Their presence steals your Glamour; their bite robs you of your fae mien. Fear them.

Garou

The Garou are friend and foe. Some remember when they danced at the fae gatherings in the Time of Legends, but they, like the Children of Lilith, began to feed on humans. It drove them mad for a time. Our silver changed that balance of power. Dougal thought this was necessary to cure them of insanity, but it gave Dougal no pleasure to harm them. The Garou are a vengeful folk, so do not speak of our gift of silver to the humans!

Some of these Garou never recovered from this stain upon their souls, and now they seem to worship some kind of fomorian, perhaps even Balor himself! A few of these same Garou attacked me as a child and killed my mother; I always carry a silvered weapon now, just in case.

Now, some Garou, like many mages, fight against the same forces of Banality we so abhor. We learned this when High King David called upon us to interpret some technology brought to him by knights of House Fiona. These knights fought alongside a pack of Fianna Garou against humanoid creatures wielding exquisite, but twisted, technology. Strangely, the Garou called these creatures "fomori."

The enemies of these Garou are our enemies.

The Emissaries encountered a pack of Garou in Japan called the Glasswalkers. The Emissaries are now acting as mediators between one named "Xiao Xan" and DreamSoft, Queen Mary Elizabeth's software company. Xiao Xan is helping DreamSoft design a mechanical doll that will interface with their software. This robot-doll will display emotion and be used to teach childlings of their fae heritage.

Ghosts

House Dougal does not pry into the human afterlife. From all of the information we've obtained, the human afterlife is a dreary and unproductive experience. I have heard rumors of Unseelie Loricas who sought to forge weapons out of human souls — the horror.

Wizards

Human wizards seem to turn their dreams into reality — the human equivalent of the power of the Dreaming. We actively seek contact with the wizards, but be warned, human wizards are likely to be as banal as normal humans.

Lord Greyhawk is friends with Native American wizards, Dream Speakers, and fae on the Isle of the Mighty have connections with wizards called the Wyck (or Verbena) and Order of Hermes. Our ambassadors have sought

contacts with three cabals (I do not think this is the correct term) that exist in Concordia: the Sons of Ether, House Merinita and the Virtual Adepts.

No doubt you have heard some of the tales of our exile. One story states that High Lord Donovan constructed a machine to battle a human incursion into Arcadia. Donovan believes that these humans who were attacking Arcadia may have been a cabal of magi. These magi are not to be sought out, but any information concerning their whereabouts and activities that you stumble on must be reported directly to Lord Donovan.

Humans: The Enchanted and The Kinain

No race is as precious to House Dougal as humans are. Our house harbors very few philosophers, but it is clear that humanity's dreams are part and parcel of the Dreaming. Human smiths and artisans have been part of House Dougal from its inception. Indeed, it was Dougal's assertion of the innate goodness of humanity that became the impetus for our house's creation.

It would be hypocritical to disdain humanity for its penchant for Banality since we are the only house formed on Earth. But more than any other house, we know the pain of cold iron, and for this reason, Dougal's ban on accepting humans into our house remains firm.

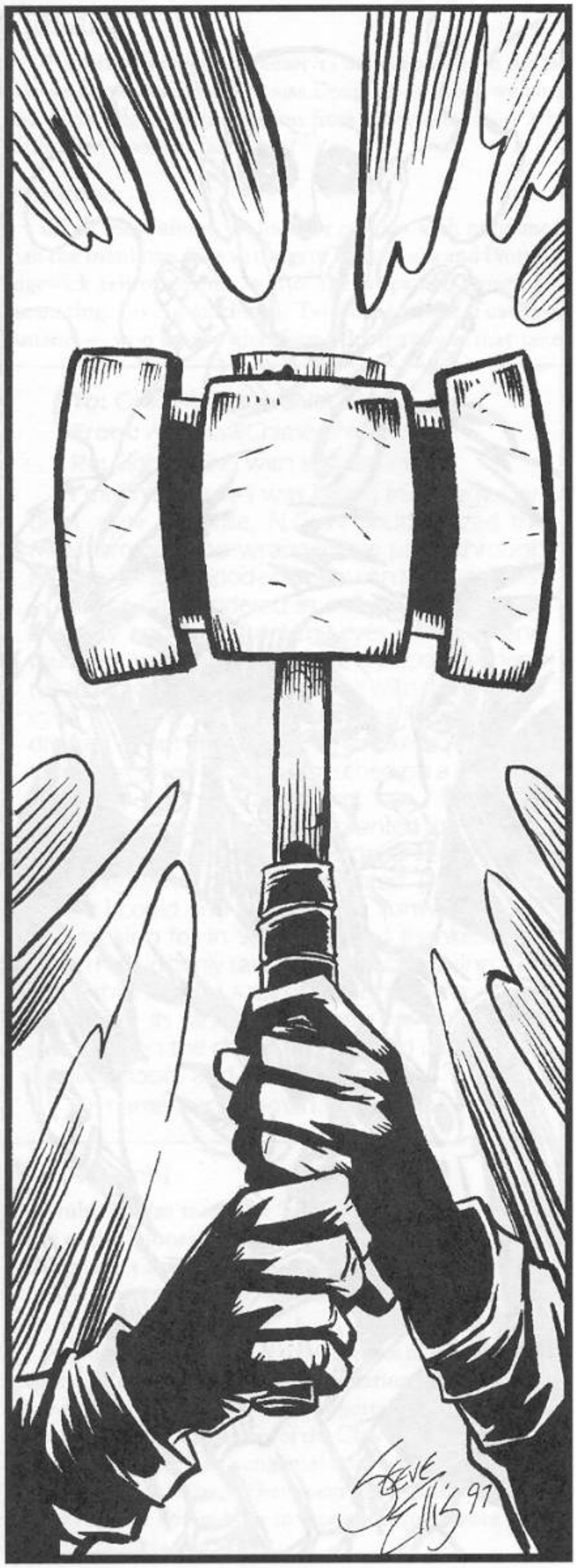
To: Oracle@ChimeraNet.com
From: Aaquila@ChimeraNet.com
Re: Enchanted Proletariat

I had the honor of visiting Sir Nigel's workshop in Trenton last week and I am writing to give the household a word of warning: Nigel's workshop was a paragon of organization and productivity. He and his journeymen still turn out the most beautiful and functional prosthetics in Concordia, yet it is not for his sake that I am writing.

Nigel's apprentices adopted a young girl from the streets several years ago. After punishing the apprentices for enchanting a mortal, Nigel was persuaded by her story enough to let her stay. Rita was an object of pity at first, but she has grown to be a great asset since then. Now she works with the journeymen mostly. Nigel, as any good master does, corrects her missteps, and I am sure he cares for her. However, there is no talk of her own exemplar, rather, she helps the apprentices with theirs.

Her work is better than many of the apprentices' work, and I see the resentment in her eyes.

Please reconsider Dougal's ban. I fear more troubles on the horizon if this is not lifted soon.



This dictum is under severe attack from Reformers and Modernists and the Unseelie members of our house. It is known that two members of the council are in favor of allowing enchanted kinain into our house again. These fae argue that this prejudice is the largest impediment to Donovan's initiatives.

Enchanted or not, slavery is not permitted in this household: It is a violation of the Escheat and it risks the Dreaming as a whole.

Fomorians

Although our house members have examined the bodies of some of the so-called fomori, they seem to be mere brutes with similar names. I believe our old menace has resurfaced, but I doubt it is from the bowels of some human corporation. What the Garou call fomori may be ugly and unkind, but the fomori lack the inhumanely intelligent malevolence of the fomorians. Perhaps Balor is just warming up with this brood; therefore, we should not dismiss the unhappy coincidence of their name too soon.

I think the deranged Garou, like the ones who attacked me, fit the old definition of the fomorians the best: They are cunning, they are strong, they are evil incarnate. We should strengthen our bonds with the Garou who are our friends so we can learn to hunt down the ravening beasts and put them out of our misery!

The Unseelie Houses and the Shadow Court

These groups pose the greatest threat to the noble houses. But while they are related, they should be thought of as separate entities.

The Shadow Court represents the Unseelie of the noble houses, and as such, they should have a greater say in our government; a mere 5% of the Parliament of Dreams is not enough. Are not we all, at least in part, Unseelie? I would prefer to see power shared between the two courts rather than drive all Unseelie into the waiting arms of the Shadow Court.

None except the fomorians and the Thallain deserve mistrust more than the Shadow Court. House Leanhaun makes the Fianna look like tenured professors of mundanity. House Ailil makes House Eiluned seem almost honest (almost). None is more foul and a greater foe of House Dougal than House Balor; its members delight in infiltrating our workshops, stealing our discoveries, recruiting commoners to their cause, and, if nothing else, slipping a cold iron dagger into our backs! House Balor's resistance to cold iron is the only way to detect them. Give them no quarter, by now they know better than to ask.

Thallain

All Thallain are dangerous, but boggarts and goblins give House Dougal reason to fear. Boggarts can pass themselves off as Unseelie boggans. One such boggart, Sharkie, was able to turn an entire workroom of boggans into more of his kind.

Before the Temperance League crushed the operation, the bastard was involved in a scheme with a perverse corporation to develop a chinchilla-shucking device.

Bogies are capable of getting by our electronic security devices, and goblins have been the instigators of malfunctions and serious disasters. The nobles of our house believe that a goblin was responsible for the "malfunction" in the device created by Donovan that resulted in our exile from Arcadia!

Lost Ones

Many of our greatest smiths and crafters became Lost Ones during the Shattering. The most famous was Ilmarinen. His fantastic workshop excelled in the production of beautiful items of whimsy and Glamour — toys. He, his wife, along with his nocker and boggan servants, closed themselves off in the cold wastes of what is now Finland or Norway. He sends a chimerical simulacra of himself to distribute his chimerical toys to children all over the world via a large sled. Unfortunately, the Mists now confuse his legacy.

A few changelings have visited Ilmarinen with no ill effects, but most of the Lost Ones are extremely dangerous. I believe there is a Lost One operating in Silicon Valley. Despite the success of Queen Mary Elizabeth's Internet Initiative, every fae sent to find talent in that wellspring of creativity has either disappeared or has been found later in a state of Bedlam.

Dougal's Oath

My heart is Dougal's heart. My arm will take up his hammer. My body will take on his burden. My heart will take on his will. I will work until the end of my days doing his work.

This is the oath sworn by the fae who want to join House Dougal. A master normally administers it after the applicant serves an apprenticeship — thus proving one's dedication to the house — but any master or noble of the house can oversee the taking of the oath. It seems short compared to the oaths of other houses, but deeds are always more important than words in House Dougal, of course. The applicant swears the oath in work clothes while holding a silver hammer.

The Boon and Flaw of House Dougal manifest in the taker upon swearing this oath. The oathswearer also gains one permanent point of Glamour and Willpower. Anyone who loses his status in the house, then loses these points and gains a permanent point of Banality. He also loses the Boon of the house, but keeps the Flaw.

(Characters who begin as members of House Dougal do not gain the additional points of Glamour and Willpower.)

Current Politics

"Yawn."

— Meilge's comment after reading a detailed report of the state of Dougal's intra-house intrigue.

There is plenty of fighting and outright gossiping in House Dougal, but it is usually over who is getting more raw materials, whose liege built the better workshops, and who took my Glamour-spanner and the like. Tame stuff.

But, we are all too busy working to plot against one another. Besides, messing with another's work is simply not done. Period.

Donovan's Initiatives

The greatest political force in our house comes from Donovan's initiatives. Donovan himself supports several fields of work for the betterment of the house and the Dreaming as a whole. Masters who choose to work on these initiatives are given first crack at the promising journeymen, liberal amounts of Glamour and remuneration for their mundane expenditures.

Catalog of Dreams

This is the oldest initiative, started soon after Donovan reclaimed rulership of the house. The Catalog of Dreams is an encyclopedia of Talismans and mechanical chimera. It includes pictures and descriptions of their powers. House Dougal makes copies of the catalog available for all of the monarchs, as long as they reciprocate by sending submissions to the house.

Here are a few items that have recently been added to the catalog by industrious journeymen. Some of these devices were their creator's exemplars, but all are provided here to inspire and to initiate contact with your colleagues.

DreamCarbon (Montcrief, sidhe, Kingdom of Willows) — This paper will copy an enchanted paper. Just place the DreamCarbon on top of the sheet you wish to duplicate. The images and text from the original bleed quickly through the surface of the DreamCarbon. It can be used a multitude of times.

Sleep Bank (Corbie John, pooka, Kingdom of Burning Sands) — By placing the piggy bank on its side, the pig will store your sleep. This is an incredibly useful, but disgustingly cute, device and it is invaluable for those journeymen with demanding masters. When done, turn the pig right-side-up. You better be lying down when you do this, for the sleep you "banked" will overwhelm you immediately. You will sleep until your debt is repaid. Luckily, the pig charges no interest, although intravenous feeding and incontinence-pants may be in order for those who have banked a lot of sleep!

WorkDummy 3.5 from DreamSoft (Francis Dilbert, enchanted mortal, Kingdom of Grass) — Ideal for the enchanted workplace, WorkDummy is a screen (or job) saver. It creates a perfect 3-D image of you at your computer when you need to be away doing more important things. DreamSoft is

working on DummyBreak, an add-on that will actually take breaks, make coffee, and go to the bathroom, too!

Goblin PlaneFax (Mumgrumble, nocker, Caledonia) — This version of Goblin Parchment can be folded into a paper airplane, one with limited homing capabilities. Just write the address on the front and give it a fling; although, it sometimes "crash-lands" — bursting into flames over the head of receiver.

ChimeraNet 6.0 by DreamSoft (Caltuinn, sidhe, Kingdom of Grass) — This program connects your PC or Mac to DreamSoft's virtual balefire. It allows Glamour to be transmitted over the Internet, but to users of ChimeraNet only.

DictuMator (Mirram, sidhe, Kingdom of Willows) — The DictuMator is a pager that fires off up to three stored dictums when called. I found this especially useful for calling apprentices home, or teaching them to clean up their workspaces. "Eat your spinach!" and "Don't touch that!" are equally useful.

Hinterlands Project

This is one of the most dynamic initiatives. House Dougal members in the Hinterlands Project attempt to map every trod that connects Earth to a location in the Dreaming. The project's other goal is to reactivate old trods and create new ones in the Dreaming. Impressively, the nocker Rumpelbrow finished recently a prototype of his Dream Telegrapher — a device that allows instantaneous communication between sites in the Dreaming!

The Hinterlands Project is headed by Master Ansel from Phantasmagoria, his fortified workshop in the Dreaming. Here, Ansel and his right-hand nocker, Master Rumpelbrow, lead four more masters with their journeymen and apprentices in studying the Dreaming.

The project has seen several setbacks since the initial testing of the Dream Telegrapher. The device works well, although it has a nasty habit of also picking up "elevator music" from some unknown source. It also attracts the attention of several rather nasty creatures from the Dreaming. King Meilge, Rumpelbrow's liege, has used this opportunity to send a detachment of House Eiluned knights to help protect Phantasmagoria.

Internet Initiative

Queen Mary Elizabeth proposed this initiative and heads up its development, despite being alternately helped and hurt by the Discordian Engineers. Her programmers at DreamSoft have produced a wide variety of children's edu-tainment software and web pages that also monitor for the Chrysalis.

DreamSoft maintains three workshops devoted to the initiative and employs changelings of all kith, and several closely watched, enchanted mortals and kinain. It is the invaluable work the enchanted have given Mary Elizabeth that softened her heart toward mortals of late. She now lobbies strongly to allow one of the mortals (not even a kinain) to become a full member of House Dougal.

Emissaries

This one is perhaps the most important and least "Dougal" of the initiatives. Under the watchful eyes of Lady Legre and Donovan, a group of journeymen have begun an ambitious project to contact as many "Dougal-like" of the Prodigals and Gallain as possible for an exchange of ideas and information. Many masters have voiced strong opposition to this initiative, yet Donovan, uncharacteristically dismissed their complaints.

The field operative in charge is Aaquila, Lady Legre's foster, and one of the few eshu members of Dougal. There are only six Emissaries at present, since one of Aaquila's appointments must also win the approval of Donovan, Lady Legre and the Preceptors. The group operates out of the Freehold of the Forge, but it is rare for more than Aaquila and an applicant to be there at one time.

Legendary Treasures of House Dougal

I am sure you have heard of these treasures before, and it is good for a young member of our house to keep these items in mind as he starts a quest for his art. These treasures have inspired our household for ages — they are icons to the constituents of House Dougal. Two are lost and so the others are closely guarded, but none is owned by anyone. The treasures are kept in trust for all to gain insight and inspiration from them.

Achen

Achen is Dougal's double-headed hammer, whose shape graces the device of House Dougal. No one knows if it is in Arcadia or lost here on Earth. Achen can be wielded only by a master of the Dougal house (who gains 3 automatic successes). Also, Achen is picky about the tasks it performs. It can be used to make only treasures of the highest quality (level 4+ treasures). Any lesser item struck by Achen will be pounded into dust.

In combat, Achen enchants automatically any weapon or armor it strikes so that it cannot be used against a member of House Dougal. Tales are told of whole armies stopped by the

hammer's power — suits of mail and swords frozen in place. Their owners and wearers had to leave them on the battlefield and retreat naked by the power of Achen.

Anweyth, Mother of Steel, The Blade of Invention

Anweyth is a beautiful short sword, inlayed in silver knotwork, with a handle of jet. It holds a mystical place in the lore of House Dougal — it was Dougal's last work, his nonpareil. Anweyth has two known powers: It tells any smith the secret of making steel; secondly, it cannot be coveted. Anweyth must be passed from hand to hand. (This is why we lost track of it.)

Modern loremasters of our house believe that the sword's powers have grown over the years. They now believe that it inspires all creation and that it cuts through any creative block an artist, inventor or scientist may have.

Calipers of Aife

Aife crafted a fine set of calipers from the tusks of some forgotten beast — each arm of the caliper is about as long as a troll's arm. These calipers can "measure" anything that can be placed between them: distance, weight, length, purity, honesty, love, hate, etc.

Our legends tell of many Unseelie lords whose plans were foiled when pinched in Aife's calipers. Some even theorize that the calipers led to our house's exile from Arcadia. A bard of House Liam sings a song of the calipers, revealing some secret plot involving the High King of Arcadia!

Closet of Mirrored Dream

Although it is said that the Unseelie of our house look to it for motivation, this treasure is kept as a warning to our members. This is Cranad's simulacra creator. This glass cube stands ten-feet-tall and six-feet-square at the base. On the outside of the door, into the cabinet, hangs a mirror. Whomever's image is caught in the mirror is then duplicated inside the box.

The box is hung with black velvet curtains and is in the possession of Master Rumpelbrow in Phantasmagoria, Master Ansel's vanguard workshop in the Dreaming.

Morhaut's Anvil

Just as the Closet of Mirrored Dream, Morhaut's Anvil was created during the Interregnum by commoners. Morhaut was a troll master armorer living in Austria. His honor and smithwork were legendary, but he never found a commoner or noble worthy of his service. Due to his integrity, Morhaut became a judge and arbitrator in his old age, and the court was always called in session over his anvil.

Shields made on his anvil gained magical powers (+2 soak dice). Indeed, many believe the trollish Shields of Virtue were crafted by Morhaut himself on his anvil. But Morhaut's Anvil has an even greater power: It forges truth. Oaths made over it have their effects doubled, and any oathbreaker will be burned (automatically Wounded) if she touches it.

Morhaut's Anvil has always been passed down to troll members of House Dougal. It is now in the trust of Sir Hugin, armorer of Chief Greyhawk (Kingdom of the Burning Sun).

Aunt Finny's Wheel

The boggan master, Lady Finny (Kingdom of White Sands) is the most talented seamstress of our time — and one of the few of our house who has made a treasure since the Resurgence. Her spinning wheel is made of blue alabaster, with the spokes of the main wheel forming the legs and body of a great spider. When Lady, or Aunt (as she prefers) Finny sits at her wheel, she spins silk from the wheel itself. And from her hands, the silk magically knits itself into clothing.

Clothes made from the wheel change color and size at the whim of the wearer for one year, then they fade away from existence. (This is not seen as a problem in the decadent Court of Queen Morganna.)

Prominent Members of House Dougal

High Lord Donovan (Kingdom of Apples)

High Lord Donovan is a striking sidhe wilder with bright-red hair. He is tall and graceful, but his skin still bears the scars left from cold iron filings produced by Achen. His eyes are now alabaster with gold — Talismans of Dougal's and Fergus' devising. These eyes give him a House Gwydion member's boon to sense falsehood.

Donovan, arch-typically of his house, is known for his long silences. He has a tendency to ask few questions and then let those who ramble on do just that, which often exasperates his courtiers, especially since many kith (boggans, satyrs) have the gift of gab.

Donovan's passion lies in the construction of huge machines. Although known for the fantastic flaw of the siege device of the bard's songs, he actually enjoys building wonderfully arcane construction equipment.

Princess Lenore (Kingdom of Apples)

Under the tutelage of David, Lenore has grown into a beautiful young sidhe. It is to David's credit that he didn't try to convert her to his house, although she seems to have the blessings of both in many respects. Since taking the Oath of House Dougal, she has gone deaf in her right ear. (A testament of the Dreaming's poetic license. It is the same ear in which an Unseelie arrow impaled her mother.)

Although quite young in mortal years, Lenore's Torgail Ainn approaches and it is time for her to prepare her apprentice exemplar to celebrate her change from apprentice to journeyman. She has taken to weaving with a skill unseen on Earth since the Shattering. Her skill has led the High Lord to give her use of several Dougal journeymen to build a large loom for her exemplar.

Queen Mary Elizabeth (Kingdom of Grass)

Most would call the spinster queen aloof, and they would be right. But all who live in the Kingdom of Grass know that she is firm and fair, above all. Many of the other rulers suspect that she remains essentially separate from her court and subjects because the queen does not play favorites — and they are correct.

Mary Elizabeth and Donovan play a delicate game, for each holds superior and inferior positions in regards to one another. While many other High Lords of the noble houses have chosen to live under the protection of one of the regents of their house, Donovan and Mary Elizabeth knew that this would make things difficult. The queen could not be seen taking orders from one of her own vassals! As such, their distance from each other helps things run smoother. And Donovan finds her to be an ardent supporter of his initiatives. In fact, she heads up House Dougal's Internet Initiative.

Lady Legre

Lady Legre is a boggan who knows how to get things done. The sidhe wonder at her ability to organize the hundreds of monthly reports sent to her by Dougal masters from all over the globe and from the house's workshops in the Dreaming. She is a marvel because she is quite attractive and has suffered more than one proposal; but Lady Legre's only marriage is to her work. (This makes her all the more attractive to House Dougal men!) Lady Legre is known to speak more than seven languages and she acts as an advisor to the Emissaries and to the publishers of *Achen Press*.

Aaquila

Aaquila is an anomaly. First, she is an eshu. Secondly, she is a journeyman and nominally in charge of one of Donovan's initiatives — the Emissaries. But both of these strange characteristics also make her uniquely suited to the job. As an eshu, she enjoys meeting new people and is skilled in conversation and decorum. As a journeyman, she is free to wander to any place and work for any master.

Aaquila's foster was Lady Legre, from whom Aaquila learned impressive powers of organization and how to be a skilled writer. She is also an excellent scientific illustrator, as she had worked on the Catalog of Dreams for a time after completing her exemplar.

Baron Weyland

I began this guide with Dougal's story, forgive me if I finish with my own. I hope you will find some parallels with your own story and realize that all of House Dougal shares triumph and tragedy. We all work for the promise and wonder of the Dreaming.

I was born Aaron Kilmartin in my mortal seeming, and I awakened when the fomorians broke my spine. To be precise, and I require precision, I really Awakened during the recovery from my injuries....

My father had left us for a life on the road and my mother was a silversmith. We found employment in one of those medieval festivals near our home in upstate New York. I was helping her, as much as a seven-year-old could, when a pack of fomorians and crazed Garou attacked some actors performing "The Miller's Tale" on the stage across from us. (The lead actress was Terece, the daughter of Lord Donovan.)

My mother killed one of the Black Spirals by throwing a crucible of molten silver in its mouth. But before eviscerating her, the fomorians made her watch as they twisted and broke my spine — all for the affront of delaying their attack.

Lord Donovan and his knights arrived too late to save my mother, but he brought me back and personally oversaw my healing in honor of my mother's bravery. I was paralyzed, and all their healing Arts could not change that, but the Glamour of the workshop also awakened my changeling nature.

Donovan oversaw my Chrysalis and Saining and the nockers of the Freehold of the Forge gave me a silver exoskeleton. It allows me to walk normally, if a bit clumsily. but this lack of fine dexterity prevented me from pursuing my mother's art, although silver remains my favored adornment.

Again Donovan took me in as an apprentice, and as a journeyman I wandered the breadth of Concordia. I went from master to master, but no craft or art held any appeal for me; my joy came in instructing the apprentices. Despondent in my inability to find my work, I went back to Donovan and thought myself a failure. Donovan showed me the reports gathered from all the masters I had served. While my work was never stellar, the remarkable training I gave the apprentices was always mentioned. I found my art. Donovan first made me his steward — eventually appointing me as House Dougal's Mentor.

So, my last words to you are to be true to your quest. Find your part of the Dreaming and fulfill it.

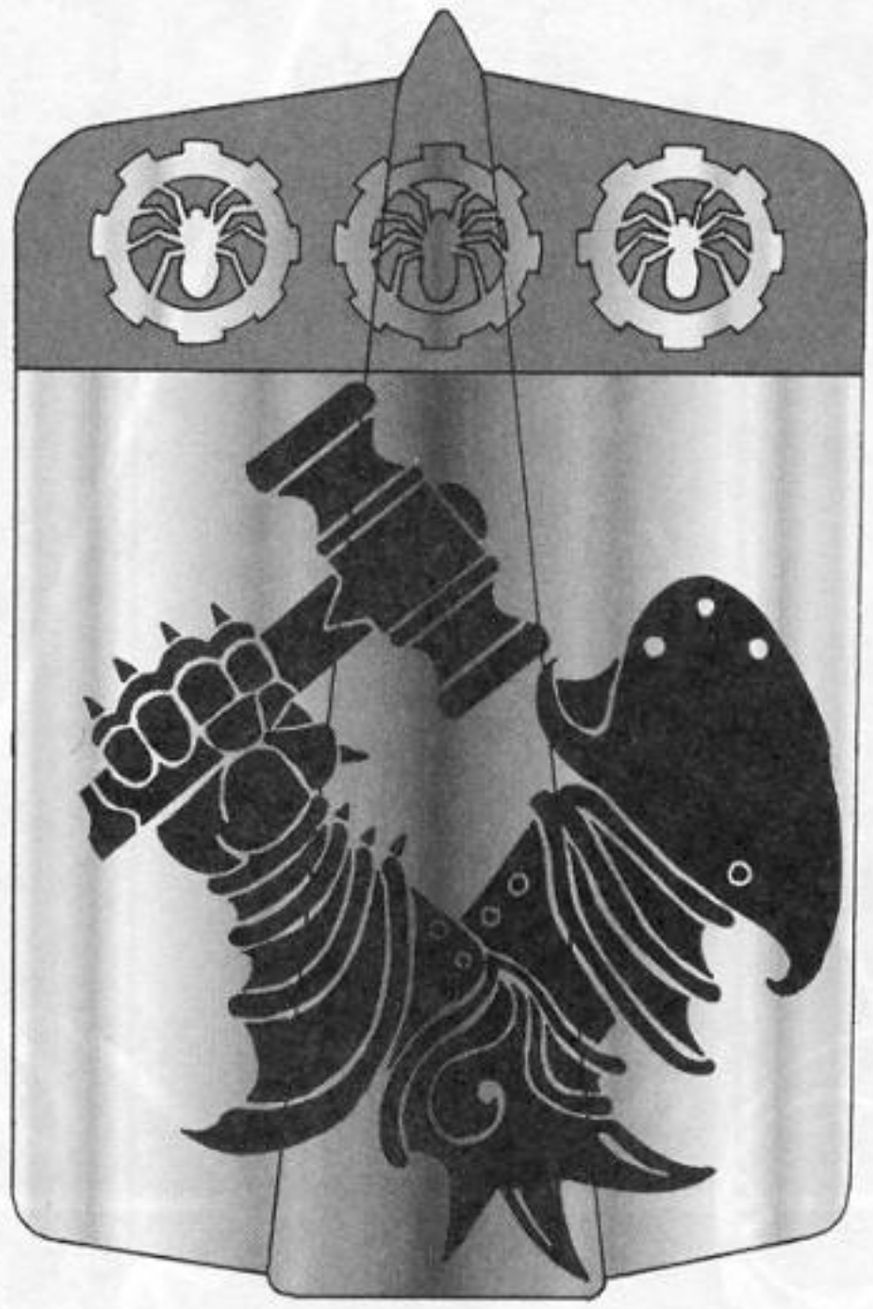
A Note to All Others

If you are an apprentice in House Dougal (i.e., a childling) and you are reading this, then you either hacked the codes into my BBS, or stole a copy of the Guidebook from one of the journeymen (wilders) of the household. Either way, you set off a cantrip of my own devising and your Mentor now knows.

I applaud your skill and/or acumen for either of these feats, but at the same time, I wish to impress upon you that this is not House Eiluned — we do not steal or spy in House Dougal. Embrace your impending punishment as an opportunity to improve yourself.

For those of you of other kith and house into whose hands this missive may have fallen: Well, you have my enmity. I look forward to the opportunity to refuse you a future favor from House Dougal.

Baron Weyland
Mentor, House Dougal



Light and Shadow: A Primer on House Eiluned

When the moon on a cloud cast night
Hung above the tree tops height
You sang me of some distant past
That made my heart beat strong and fast
Now I know I'm home at last
— Loreena McKennitt, "Samhain Night"

Her Majesty's Secret Service

The sleek, silver sportscar wound its way over the downs of East Sussex, softly purring as it sped along the road to Datasoft International, Ltd. The driver, a tall man in his early 20s with dark hair, was nearly as handsome in his mortal guise as he appeared in his fae mien. The differences between his mortal and fae appearances were subtle; both were understated, classic and at the height of fashion.

The license plate, a meaningless string of letters and numbers to the unenchanted eye, shimmered under an enchanted gaze, resolving to read "Sterling-0714." A number that could belong only to one man: Stephen Grey of House Eiluned, knight of the realm and member of Her Majesty Queen Karolinda's Secret Service.

Grey pressed a button on the dashboard and a conservatively dressed woman, in a somber-colored suit with a skirt ending just above the knee, appeared in the passenger's seat. The only spot of brightness, aside from a twinkle in her eye, was the lone pink rose in her lapel. *Really*, Grey thought, *I don't know how other agents make due without a chimerical secretary*. This secretary cleared her throat demurely.

"Ah yes, Ms. Cashfarthing. I take it you have the dossier?"

"Yes, Mr. Grey." She read from a small, hand-held notepad computer. "Her Majesty has asked that you erase all information regarding members of the nobility and gentry of the Kingdoms of Mist and Roses from the databases of Datasoft International, Ltd. D. I. L. is one of several corporations known to be under the control of a Mr. Raymond Blackwater, better known in some circles as the Dauntain, or Blacksea. As a secondary objective, you are to obtain any information regarding Blacksea's supposed 'black book,' believed to be a grimoire of dark sorcery. Did you receive the package from Y-Branch before leaving this morning, sir?"

Grey nodded. "The gadgets those nockers come up with never cease to amaze me. In fact, I learned much of the information that led me here by using one of Y's 'bugs' — ingenious little contraptions that look like common insects, but they can infiltrate a building based on a simple chimerical program. Once in place, they transmit a signal to this," he said, indicating a small black box on the dashboard, "which can be used to eavesdrop on any conversation within a room."

Cashfarthing raised an eyebrow. "Fascinating, sir." Looking down to consult her notes for a moment, she asked, "Were you able to obtain the passcodes for the security system, sir, or should I make other arrangements?"

"No need, Cashfarthing." Grey smiled wistfully, recalling the scent of lilacs and a certain Ms. Mona Wansamore, a secretary at D. I. L. "Y's roses did the trick quite nicely — not that I needed them, mind you. I think she would have told me what I wanted to know without them. But it never hurts to try out the equipment in the field, though, eh?"

"No, sir," Cashfarthing replied with a smile. "I need not remind you that this mission is technically in the Kingdom of Chalk, and as such, is outside Her Majesty's jurisdiction. Discretion is the watchword of the day, sir. Property damage should be negligible, according to the dossier."

Grey smiled. "Yes, well. I'll do what I can." As they approached the driveway for D. I. L., Grey pulled the silver sportscar he referred to as "Sterling" off the road and parked it. He lit a cigarette and leaned back for a moment, deep in concentration. After a long drag, he blew three rings of smoke out the window, where a breeze wafted them until they encircled the car. Had a passing motorist looked back, they may have noticed that the car sitting beside the road a moment before had vanished into thin air.

Thus concealed, Grey continued up the drive and parked to one side of the main entrance to D. I. L. He spoke into a small microphone on the dashboard, "Sterling, come 'round to the front of the building in 10 minutes time." As Grey made his final preparations, making sure he had everything he needed for the job, Ms. Cashfarthing smiled.

"Good luck, sir."

Grey smiled back at her, and if a chimera can be said to blush, Ms. Cashfarthing most certainly did. "Is there any other kind, my dear?"

The initial approach was simplicity epitomized. Although a security guard at the front desk asked to see his identification, Grey explained how he had "left it in his office" and then applied a liberal dose of Sovereign to the fellow. Grey was waived in without incident.

The passcodes obtained from Ms. Wansamore made getting past security at the elevator and at the door to the executive hallway routine procedure, and he then found himself outside the door to Blacksea's office. The doorknob itself was unfortunately cast of cold iron. This gave Grey pause; he stood there for a moment, uncertain of the best course of action. A cantrip in

this situation would be a challenge, even to Grey's considerable skill, and although a quick pistol shot at the lock would do the trick, the loudness would certainly capture the attention of the security guards. Time was of the essence, so Grey didn't have time to deliberate. Taking a deep breath, he gritted his teeth and turned the cold iron doorknob, his leather driving gloves dulling the burning only a little. What was more, as he crossed the threshold into the room, he paused in mid-step. He felt...disoriented somehow. What had he come here to get? And...what was he doing in this office building?

In the hallway behind him, a chime announced softly that the elevator doors were about to open, and this brought him out of his banal reverie. Grey nudged the door closed with the toe of his boot, rather than touch the knob again.

He crossed the spacious room in a few strides, and quickly accessed Blacksea's personal computer. The neatly labeled disks beside the computer were arranged alphabetically, which made locating the disk "Project Medrawt" even easier than Grey would have imagined. "Medrawt" is the Welsh name of Arthur's bastard son and the code name for the operation Blacksea and his cohorts had been planning. And this disk was the only location where all of the information on intended targets had been stored. It had been so simple...perhaps, a little *too* simple....

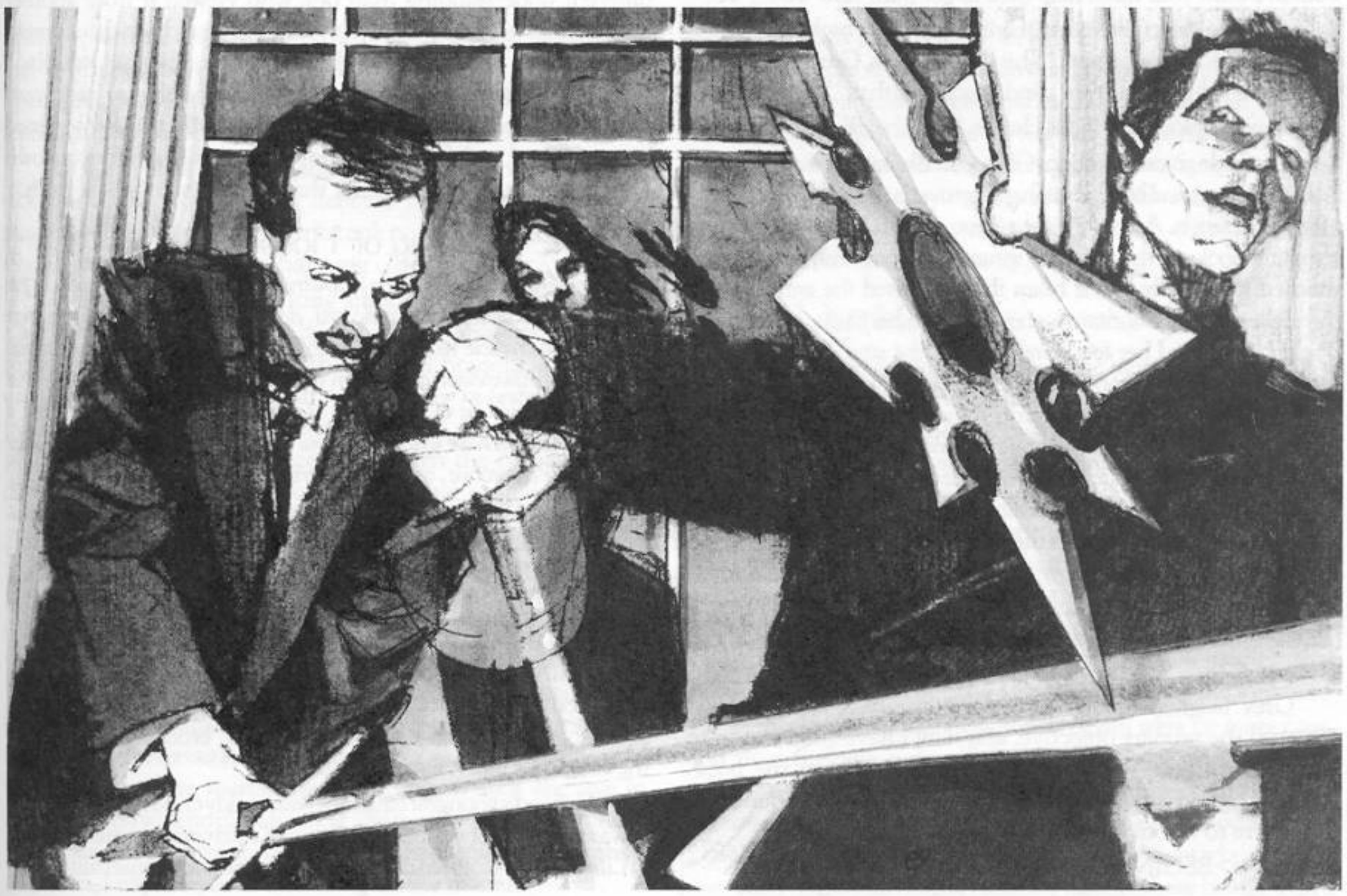
A few keystrokes later, the information on the server had been erased, and an ingenious little program designed by a colleague in House Dougal had been introduced into the network; once it had run its course, all information stored therein would be irretrievably damaged.

Tucking the disk into the breast pocket of his suit, Grey stood up to survey the room. It was spacious, with high ceilings and a rough-hewn, almost-Renaissance feel, right down to the wrought iron chandeliers and sconces. *Cold-forged iron, no doubt,* Grey thought with a shudder. The floor-to-ceiling windows behind the desk gave a panoramic view across the Sussex downs as twilight descended over the hills. Where would Blacksea keep this grimoire? While Grey looked in the lower drawer of the large, mahogany desk he heard the cold iron doorknob turn softly. And while a common thief, or even one of Her Majesty's better sluagh agents, would have tried to conceal himself beneath the desk, Stephen Grey sat up and leaned back in the high-backed leather chair as the door swung open.

"Mr. Grey, I presume? Or, should I call you "Sir Stephen?" A man in a double-breasted suit like that Grey himself was wearing strode confidently into the room, followed by an extremely tall woman holding a number of throwing weapons and small firearms. The man's hair was slicked back against his head, and he reminded Grey of a used car salesman.

Grey nodded politely. "Of course. And you must be Blacksea."

"No, Mr. Grey, you are mistaken," the man sneered, "I am Raymond Blackwater, President and Chief Executive Officer of Datasoft International, Ltd., and you are guilty of criminal trespassing." He looked over Grey's shoulder at the computer monitor, which was now filled with line after line of gibberish. "And industrial espionage as well, so it would seem. I am afraid I will have to ask you to leave, sir."



Grey stood up, adjusted his jacket and tie and nodded curtly. "Of course. I do apologize for the misunderstanding, sir. Madam," he smiled warmly at the dour bodyguard, pausing at her side as he made his way toward the open door. Their eyes met for an instant, and it seemed momentarily that her icy facade was about to crack.

The sound of a sharp intake of breath behind Grey gave him a split-second to react before the Dauntain could bring the sword down on him, which would have cut him cleanly from one shoulder down to the opposite hip had it struck its target. Whirling around, Grey pulled a Cross pen from his shirt pocket. He then mumbled a few words in an ancient tongue, thereby Calling Upon the Wyrd, and the pen transformed into a gleaming chimerical cutlass. As Grey brought his weapon into position to defend against Blacksea's next move, he moved deftly aside, narrowly avoiding being hit by one of the bodyguard's gleaming throwing stars.

Blacksea was on him once more, bringing his sword down toward Grey. Bringing his own weapon up to block, Grey's and Blacksea's blades clashed with a loud clang, and the two stood face to face, sneering at one another across their weapons' crosspieces. "So, Mr. Grey, you are too quick for Ms. Blackjack's blades? Perhaps we should even the score a bit." The Dauntain stepped back into a defensive position, then sheathed his blade and pulled a black leather-bound book from the breast pocket of his coat. As Blacksea gripped it tightly in his left hand, Grey saw a blue swirling mist coalescing into the Dauntain sorcerer's other hand.

That moment was enough. Grey again stepped quickly to the side, grabbed Blackjack's hand and twisted it up behind her back as he brought his sword up to her throat. "Now now, Blacksea. We wouldn't want your hired help here to get hurt, now would we?"

The Dauntain, flustered momentarily, stepped back a pace as the energy dissipated around him. "This is between us, Grey. How unlike you to hide behind a woman...and a mortal at that," he sneered.

Grey felt blood rise to his cheeks. "Touché, Blacksea."

In a single graceful motion, Grey spun Blackjack out as he would a dance partner, and brought his hand up over his head, as if to assume a fencing position. A second later, a strong, silken thread with a small grappling hook on the end of it sprung out from Grey's sleeve and attached itself firmly to the beam that supported the wrought iron chandelier. As the Dauntain sorcerer brought his blade up again and Blackjack regained her feet, Grey grasped the strong thread to the grappling hook and leapt into the air. With a symphonic crash, Stephen Grey swung feet-first through the plate-glass window facing out onto the downs. As his erstwhile opponents looked on in stunned silence, he fell two stories and landed on the airbag that had just inflated in Sterling's driver's seat beneath him. *Ah well*, thought Grey, *so much for discretion this time 'round.* As the airbag deflated, he waved over his shoulder at the broken window. "Until we meet again, Blacksea."

Ms. Cashfarthing sighed as she daubed his forehead with a handkerchief as they sped down the road. "I take it things didn't go as planned, sir?"

Grey laughed loudly. "On the contrary, Cashfarthing. I achieved the primary objective, and now I have good reason to return again later — having allowed him to keep the book. Besides," he said with an impish grin, "there's a certain young lady back there to whom I owe an apology."

>>>>>BEGIN TRANSMISSION<<<<<

On the Ways of House Eiluned

A treatise by Dr. Thomas Lagarri

The manuscript you now see before you, whether on a monitor or in printed form, is the result of my research. Some of it comprises my own thoughts, though for the most part I've tried to obtain works by "experts" on particular subjects.

As much as I would like to say that every newly Sained member of our household is given formal tutelage as part of her fostering, that's not the way things happen all too often. You may be living far from the nearest freehold, or you may be the only member of the house in your area. There is much that may be learned from Mentors of other houses, or even from commoners. But there is a great deal that can only be passed on from one of us to another; thus, the purpose of this "manuscript."

That you have obtained a copy of this is a credit to you and shows both a thirst for knowledge and a level of skill that will serve you well in the future. Read on, and may the shadows reveal more than they conceal....

History

History is not a flat thing, like a piece of paper that one reads and, in doing so, understands. No, history is more like a sculpture; one who sees a single side only may come away with a completely different understanding than one who viewed it from another perspective. All is subjective. It is important to keep this in mind when reading any account of "history," including this one. Had I years of your undivided attention, I might be able to give you a fuller, more accurate representation of the way things happened in years past. Let this brief account be the basis only for your own explorations, and do not think that there is but a single truth.

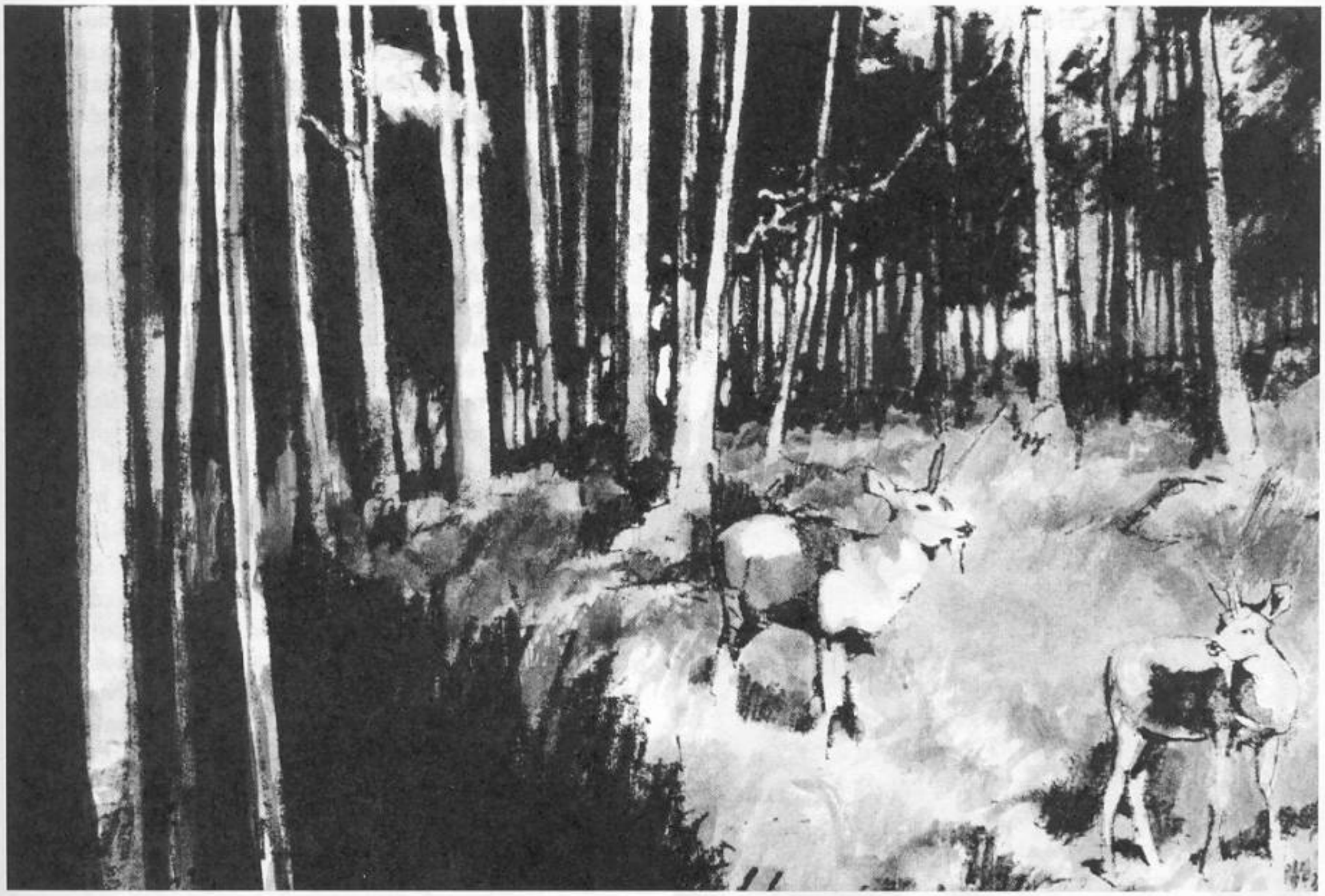
On the Founding of House Eiluned

It should be noted that the following account, while believable as far as all research thus far has indicated, dates from a period during which there are no credible records. What has been learned of this time comes to us through divination and dream visions, corroborated by folklore and the like. It should be viewed more as parable than gospel, although I'll warrant that you have learned by now to take things like this as a matter of course. Perspective, my friend, perspective is all.

Alynyad lived during the birth of the Golden Age of Legends, when the world was new and the world's greatest dreams were still before her. The fae of that age lived a life akin to that of the gods in song and story, interacting with mortals but living a life all their own, with rules no mortal could fathom.

Of all Alynyad's children, it was believed that her eldest son, Ailil, would succeed her, and he certainly seemed up to the task. A strong boy with raven-black hair and dark, brooding eyes, he was the subject of much amorous attention.

Alynyad's youngest daughter was a sickly child named Eiluned. It was whispered by some that Eiluned's playmates were Children of Lilith—fair-skinned children like herself, who came calling only



when the sun had crept beneath the horizon. By day, the girl read and wove tapestries, preferring her own company to that of others. Those few adults who took the time to speak with the queer child found that she possessed a wisdom beyond her years.

As she blossomed into adulthood, few noticed that the sickly one had grown into a delicate young woman; she remained quiet and studious. Little took note of the girl who lived ever in the shadow of her charming older brother.

And so, Ailil became a king among the fae. His skill with a blade was exceeded only by his way with words, and although some distrusted him and also those of his household for their occasional duplicity, this trait was usually overshadowed by their charm and wit. Ailil's younger sister, Lady Eiluned, acted as his seneschal in his absence, for though the two were very different, they shared a love closer than that of siblings.

Lady Eiluned was the first of the fae to foresee the coming Sundering. Her skill with prophecy and divination magics was unequaled, so when she first told her brother and the other kings and queens of her vision, they took her words with great interest.

"We must prepare for the coming storm," Eiluned had said, "lest we be caught unawares. For although we have lived for time untold alongside mortals without directly interfering with their affairs, I have seen a dark future for our people should ways continue down this same path: a future where mortals have cast dreams aside and live in despair, a world with no place for us, or for anyone who dares to dream. I know not how we may prevent this from happening, but, brothers and sisters, I implore you to think long on this matter."

But in this time, at the height of the Mythic Age, few heeded Eiluned's warnings. Even her dear brother dismissed her vision, and their quarrels became so great in time that Eiluned took leave of Ailil's court. With her companions, fae and otherwise, she founded a kingdom of her own several leagues hence. And though they did not always believe the things this strange child said, it was not long before the other kings and queens came to recognize her as one of their own.

The Mythic Age

The "Golden Age of Myth," as some have called it, was not all sun-lit fields and prancing unicorns. Creatures of the dark terrorized the land, and despite what the histories written by House Gwydion say, it was not through the might of the sword alone that the darkness was driven back.

To this day, many call us sorcerers, which I suppose we are intended to perceive as an insult. As if those who fight with shield and steel are innately more "noble" than those who harness the primal energy of the Dreaming in battle! And yet it was that very ability to weave Glamour and reality to do our bidding that cemented our place among the 13 noble houses during that time.

In this long-forgotten age, the Thallain were far more common than they are today. Twisted creatures of nightmare and terror, the Thallain allied with our ancient enemies, the fomorians, and sought to wreak havoc on the lives of fae and mortals alike. It is said that Ailil, Gwydion, Fiona, and many more whose names have been forgotten, fought valiantly against these beings with a

fervor unknown in these times. But while a great many houses competed for the honor of being renowned as the mightiest warriors, none came close to matching our skill at weaving Glamour to befuddle and assault our enemies. It was our magical skill in tandem with the martial prowess of the other houses that felled our enemies in the end. With blades alone, it is doubtful that the sidhe would have triumphed, but with spell and sword in marriage, we were more than a match for our enemies.

Even the most martial among the fae had to grant us our measure of respect from that point onward. We risked as much on the battlefield as they did — if not more — for when dealing with the powers of sorcery, one puts both mind and body at risk. Our skill with primal sorcery was as great as our well-known talent for prophecy, to say nothing of our abilities with subtler arts. To be sure, not every member of House Eiluned was (or is today) a paragon of sorcerous skill, but as is typical, we became best known for the traits displayed by the most prominent household members during those early days.

The Sundering

As the ties between the Dreaming and the mortal world began to strain and snap, we looked to the past, as well as the future, for some indication of how things would unfold. Some among us foresaw a future bleak and grey, devoid of the spark of Glamour. Others took this to be a warning of what *might* come to be and worked all the more diligently to help interweave the Dreaming and the mortal world in the hopes that this future might be avoided.

It is widely thought that the most learned of House Eiluned were among those who proposed the notion of fortified freeholds, where they and their companions might remain near to the world of mortals, yet safe from the encroachment of Banality. House Eiluned members believed in their hearts that the tide of Banality might be turned, and that the world could return to a kind of second "Golden Age." Alas, wishes for the future had clouded their vision, and their scrying had shown them only what they wished to see. So they constructed freeholds, whose walls they hoped would shield them from Banality's chill.

If the tales are to be given credence, many of these freeholds were torn from their moorings in the mortal world by the Shattering and now exist as islands — albeit intact — in the Near Dreaming. It is believed that trods are in some of these island freeholds, though the ways there and back are seldom the same. Other freeholds of this period failed, collapsing spectacularly under the increasing weight of Banality in one final conflagration of Glamour. Still, others faded slowly away. But a scant few survived, and they remain some of the most potent freeholds in the world to this day. One such freehold still stands in Glastonia, Kingdom of Mist, England, in sight of the fabled Tor of Avalon.

One freehold that did not survive is stipulated by scholars to have been the basis for tales of "Shallot" — an enchanted tower whose inhabitants were cursed to know the mortal world only through visions of it that appeared on a magical tapestry. Although it is impossible to know with any certainty where this tower once stood in the mortal world, many say it was in the Brocilande Fôret in Brittany, France. Those who left the shelter of the tower, which some claim survived the Shattering and

existed for several hundred years afterward, died after a few hours, struck down by the "curse" of Banality. It is also rumored that a band of wilders claiming allegiance to the Order of Shallot have made it their quest to discover the remains of this freehold.

Others fled to distant lands, where they hoped to found new kingdoms. It is commonly thought that a band of sidhe and commoners under the black and silver banner founded outposts in the Americas and in the mountains of Eastern Europe. Some go so far as to say that many intermarried with the Kachinas and Inuas native to the Americas. What became of these far-flung outposts remains a mystery. They may have adapted to their new homelands, changing to reflect the character of the land and the dreamers there. Or, they may have simply died off. Who can say?

The Shattering

When the Shattering tore the Dreaming asunder, rending from the rest of the world those lands more dream than mortal and fraying the threads that the trods and paths were woven of, most sidhe of House Eiluned were prepared. Whether they had chosen to depart for Arcadia or the uncharted wildernesses of the world, we had taken certain precautions. It is said that a great many mirrors and "scrying pools" of that age were gateways of limited enchantment, whereby the initiated could view the goings on of those on the other side. Some mortal wizards possessed these enchanted mirrors, though the majority were either forgotten or viewed as simple curiosities by the local peasantry. The sluagh were alternately responsible for maintaining or destroying these tenuous gateways, depending on whom you talk to.

When we departed, we entrusted the guardianship of our lands to our chamberlains and seneschals — commoners whose judgment and loyalty was such that we felt them to be trustworthy. Most were granted the title "Lord Regent" of our former lands, with the understanding that one day we would return to claim them. Most upheld this agreement for a time, in some cases, for a dozen generations or more. But in time, the power of oaths sworn faded.

The Age of Twilight and Exile

They are all gone into the world of light!
And I alone sit lingering here;
Their very memory is fair and bright,
And my sad thoughts doth clear.

—Henry Vaughan, "They Are All Gone Into the World of Light!"

And then comes the Age of Twilight. For centuries, nearly all surviving members of House Eiluned were cut off from the mortal world, either in Arcadia, or exiled in lands far from those of their birth, or of the handful who remained — virtual prisoners in their freeholds. It is no wonder that the majority of those who stayed behind fell into their Unseelie natures, cut off as they were from all that they had once known. Who would not grow more concerned with their own survival in such dire circumstances? It is unfortunate, and I believe that we had overcome in part our reputation as "dark sorcerers" by our collective role in the wars. Of those who remained behind, nearly all went mad. Such was their agony.

And what of Arcadia? It is to our constant torment that we cannot know with any certainty what transpired there, or what happens there now. We are each filled with a profound sadness and sense of loss, often felt all the more sharply by those who experience occasional flashbacks. The story goes that the High Court of Arcadia took back those who had spent generations in the mortal world, but some have memories of a less-than-warm welcome when we returned.

The Resurgence

On the Departure from Arcadia

Why was House Eiluned among those who returned in '69? There are many within and more without the house who will tell you what they know. But, as is the case with much of our history, little is known with true certainty.

One tale tells of an artifact of great power, whose destruction one from our house prevented. I will not pretend that this is something without a ring of truth to it, for our kind are loath to see anything magical destroyed. It remains a mystery as to what the nature of this object might have been, or why we felt that it was worth the wrath of the lords and ladies to keep it intact. Whether or not this event was the singular reason for our exile, it resolutely sounds as if there might be more than a morsel of truth to it.

It is claimed that ties to a band of "sorcerers" caused the rift between the Arcadians and our house. Now, as you know, there are many different groups who fit this profile. We have sometimes been referred to thusly, but it seems some other group is referred to in this case. Yet, others assert to know that the sorcerers in question were undead Prodigals who followed an extinct branch of one of the hermetic houses known in the Mythic Age. I believe this is a grave offense, one sufficient to merit banishment; but upon further inquiry, I cannot help but wonder what two members of these disparate groups would have to talk about. From what I can gather, these vampiric warlocks are concerned with knowledge only of immediate and temporal natures, and it is unlikely that anyone in Arcadia would have anything to say that these narrow-minded creatures would consider "useful."

Others have suggested the various "Traditions" of mortal magicians, though this, too, I find to be suspect. Although many of them have a thirst for knowledge more abstract than that of their brethren who have chosen the path of undeath, only those who follow the path of the "Dream Speakers" seem to have any real understanding of our kind. And of all their kind, these Dream Speakers appear to be the least concerned with anything that would threaten Arcadia.

More likely, to my mind (though still without sufficient evidence to pursue with any degree of force), is that the beings in question were werewolves who call themselves the Lords of Shadow. These savage scholars know how to walk between the worlds using mirrors, such as those gossiped to have been left behind by our forebears. It may well be that our Arcadian cousins, longing for a way to journey back to the mortal world that they left behind, attempted to form a

compact with these Lords of Shadow. The one creature I've been in contact with who admits to being a member of this "tribe" of lycanthropes claimed to have no information of such a compact, though I encourage those with contacts with these moonchildren to pursue further investigation.

The third story of our exile tells of a secret pact between one of our leaders and an Unseelie High King also sentenced to exile. Were I to hazard a guess, I think the most likely candidate for this is a sidhe of House Ailil, for the relations between our two houses have ever been that of siblings, hating and loving one another at once, and sharing a common heritage yet one that has diverged in wildly different directions. But what kind of pact would we willingly enter into that would be seen as such a threat?

But in the end, does it matter? Oh yes, strange words to hear from one such as myself. Am I suggesting that we give this mystery over to the mists of time, to remain unsolved and our desire to know unsatiated? Certainly not. But it is my belief that, in the end, all will be made plain: It may be a combination of these three stories, or it may be nothing of the kind. Though, I warrant that there could be a title in it for any of you who learn the answers....

The Return

For most of us, our awakening in this new-old world was traumatic. For those who were the first to cross over, disorientation and confusion made for a difficult Chrysalis. But we are survivors and we are able to look beyond what is immediately apparent, to see the mysteries that lie behind. It did not take long before our people, newly awakened, were drawn together. We learned what we could of the present state of affairs and soon sought out members of the other houses in exile to show what had become of the world in our absence.

Being the seers and the advisors of our kind has its price, and we paid it in full shortly after the Return. Our sources among the common folk provided the first word of the coming conflict, as we began to hear the rumblings of discontent grow to a dull roar. Those who had pretended to have noble title during our absence had grown protective of their titles, as they feared our arrival meant their downfall. And while it is true that we felt it only right that we begin to reassume our place as leaders of the fae, we are not the heartless, power-mad bastards that most of the commoners made us out to be. Alas, the lines between Seelie and Unseelie had blurred to such an extent in the years since we left that many are unaware of the differences. Some of these "nobles" who claimed Seelie allegiance had a defiant spirit and such treachery in their hearts that they debased the honor of the Seelie Court. Others among these "commoner kings" who stipulated they had allegiance to the Unseelie Court were little more than foul-mouthed bullies who set about to convince the populace that those of us born sidhe — the rightful rulers of the land and her people — were weak and ineffectual, too used to life in the ivory towers of Arcadia to be capable of taking any action in the modern world that benefits the people as a whole.

The Night of Iron Knives

And so it was that the plan for the Night of Iron Knives was formed. Through our magics and more fleshly sources, we learned of a gathering of many of the pretenders who sought to murder any of Arcadian noble lineage. In cooperation with the leaders of the other houses (though, today many of them pretend to have had no knowledge of it), we staged a quick and brutal attack on those who sought our death and downfall. We hope that through this show of strength we demonstrated that we weren't the spineless leaders the commoners hoped us to be, nor were we going to stand blithely by and watch as others planned our assassination.

We were not as successful as we had hoped. I leave it to the scholars of Gwydion and Dougal to recount the particulars of the actual battles; suffice it to say that from that single battle, a succession of smaller battles stretching out for several years ensued. I am no military tactician, and it is against my nature to lay the blame for anything at the feet of another household, but I cannot help to wonder if things would have been different had all sidhe stood together in strength that night. We held the line in the face of the opposition, striking with both deadly force with cold iron weapons and wyrd eldrich power. But as any military strategist can tell you, if one group breaks rank and flees battle, their betrayed comrades have little hope of winning the day.

A great many of us who had indulged our Unseelie natures during the battle found it difficult to change back. Our plan to demonstrate our strength and leadership had backfired, mainly due to a lack of commitment on the part of our allies. How could we not feel betrayed? Is it any wonder that many of our number took it upon themselves to finish what was begun then? To this day, mention of that night casts a dark shadow over any of our number who were present, as well as over many of those who were not.

But all's well that ends well, eh? Compromises were made, and today commoners can hold any rank up to, and including that of, king. Sidhe hold the majority of the senior noble titles in most lands, but I have met many commoners in the past several decades who have shown themselves to be worthy of title. And we have let our disgust for those who championed our plan until the moment came to executing it fade with the years. We do and will continue to advise those who bear the crown, whether they be of noble blood, or not. But should the commoners ever rise against us once more, there is going to be a bloody reckoning indeed.

The Information Age

In naming the various ages, some wag has called this the "Age of Silicon." And so it is; the world has changed in ways we had scarcely imagined, but we have adapted. It is perhaps fitting that we, of all houses, have been best suited to adapting to this "Age of Information," as others have called it. For we understand the value of knowledge, as well as how to use it best to our advantage.

Today we sit as advisors to kings and princes, many with title but some without. The majority of us are Seelie, though we do not share the puritanical hatred for those who engage in the

odd dalliance the way some of our more rigid fellows do. A lot of us have parlayed our knack for cryptography as well as creativity into successful careers in the computer sciences, and we have been at the forefront of those who have helped to prove that "modern" is not necessarily equal to "banal."

Let the rest of them squabble over who wears the crown and who sits where at the high table. I fancy myself to be a little beyond that kind of juvenile one-upmanship — a feeling shared by many in our house. We understand that while titles are a good measure of respect and social status and, therefore, useful in certain circumstances, but to have the ear of the king is often a far better position to have than the title of king itself.

Society

Each of us is composed of two natures: good and evil. If this primitive duality of man could be separated, life would be relieved of all that is unbearable. It is a curse that these polar twins should be constantly struggling.

— Leslie Bricuse, Introduction to "Jekyll and Hyde"

Having learned something of who we've been in the past, let us now turn our attentions to the present. We hold ourselves to a higher standard of behavior than we expect from others, and you should learn the Escheat by heart, as well as the laws written and unwritten of your particular kingdom.

The Escheat

A tradition passed down for time untold, since the days of the Shattering and beyond, if the old tales are to be believed, the Escheat forms the foundation upon which our society is based. And, to the commoners credit, they did a passable job of holding to most of its tenets for the centuries during which they went unsupervised. Of course, the way the tenets are interpreted has varied over the years, and they differ from one kingdom to the next just as from one person to another. I have given a brief *précis* below of some common interpretations of the Escheat, although I encourage you to inquire tactfully as to the local interpretations when entering a new kingdom. Everyone has their own truth after all.

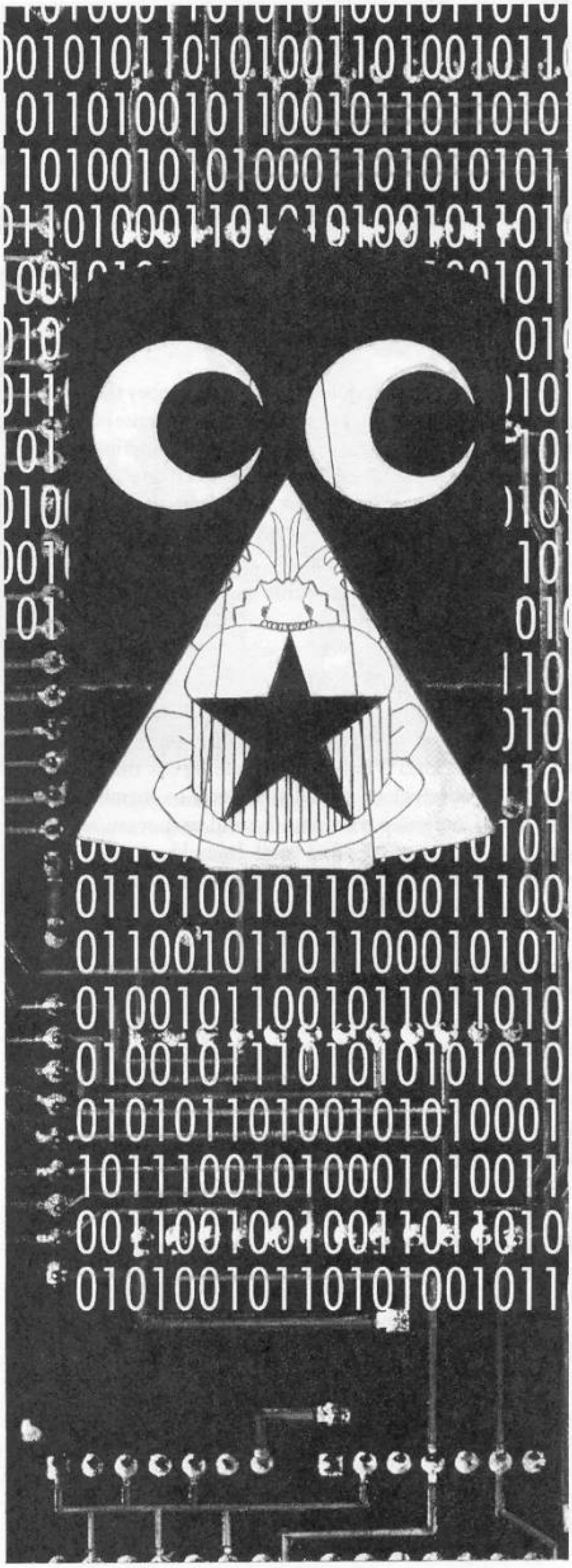
The Right of Demesne —

Our society exists and thrives because of the societal hierarchy, not in spite of it. There must be leaders and followers in any group. A society where the rulers hold no true power and where the subjects can rise up at any time is destined for chaos.

Reality:

While the other houses squabble frequently over titles, we of House Eiluned have learned that the formal hierarchy, while necessary, does not always show accurately who holds the power. One need not hold the highest title to wield the most influence in a given area.

On the whole, by virtue of our kith, inborn graces and the training we receive as part of fosterage, we of the noble houses are better suited to rule than average commoners. There are exceptions, and we are not elitists to think that no commoner could ever rule well. Even so, the exceptions do not mean that this rule is incorrect.



As sidhe, we are uniquely well-suited to the task of leadership, and this responsibility to rule is ours in the end. If others of common stock are worthy, they may be granted title, but should they fail in their duties, it falls to us to remedy the situation — thus, the unpleasantness of the Accordance War.

The Right to Dream —

Mortals are fragile creatures, and the most vibrant dreamers among them are, alas, often the most easily manipulated. While most agree that Ravaging is a crime, there are many who delight in inspiring greatness in mortals. Do they not understand that this is as much an infringement upon their right as dreamers as it would be to Ravage them senseless?

Reality:

Perhaps out of an adolescent need to disobey those born of a strong Unseelie nature, or out of a misguided sense of affection, there are those among us who insist on tampering with the proverbial goose that lays the golden egg. To do so goes beyond selfishness; it is a crime against the Dreaming and should be prosecuted to the fullest extent.

The Right of Ignorance —

I hesitate to even bring this up; if you are truly born to House Eiluned I need not explain to you that a secret shared is a secret lost. Should we ever "go public," the mystery that is our meat and drink is then forever lost.

Reality:

The burden of secrecy becomes too much from time to time, and our kind is known for revealing our true nature (or some part thereof) to mortals, or even to members of the Prodigals. Confession is good for the soul, as they say, and we are fortunate enough to be gifted (well, I should say *most* of us are) with the ability to confuse the mind so sufficiently that confession need not mean betrayal.

Don't think this means you can chatter all you please and expect to wipe all knowledge away in a puff of Glamour. Fate is fickle and Glamour often more so; any who depends on magic to undo what poor judgment has wrought is in for a harsh awakening. Remember, any time you reveal a part of your true self to the unenlightened, you put all of our kind at risk. Autumn Warriors seek out glib-tongued, overly confident youngsters to prey on, and the golden boys of House Gwydion and the odd, slumming Liamite will not satisfy the desire of the Dauntain to destroy our kind. Do not make yourself a target.

The Chicken or The Egg?

Scholars have speculated on the nature of the bond between mortals and the Dreaming for centuries. Which came first? Did the Dreaming exist before there were dreamers? And are the dreamers themselves dreams of millennia past? This reasoning becomes quickly cyclical. And presently, there is no real need beyond pure academic reasons for us to wonder.

The Right of Rescue —

The struggle against Banality is one we must all face, individually and collectively. I am the first to admit that our kind aren't the militant type, like players in some war-time drama, diving into danger to save a "buddy." But, this means something more.

Reality:

It is often up to us to seek out and rescue those who have succumbed to Autumn's chill. Though skill with a sword may win you many a tournament, when dealing with the vagaries of the mortal world, cunning and wisdom are our greatest weapons.

The Right of Safe Haven —

I'm told a poet from the beginning of this century once remarked on the need for "a room of one's own" if one is to be able to create. And so it is; we all need to have places where we can be ourselves, where we can be free from Banality for a time. It is for this reason that freeholds are thought by most to be neutral ground, at least, where no one in need should be turned away. Freeholds and glades must not be used as a means of having power over others.

Reality:

We quibble rarely over court affiliation or other political matters when lives are at stake, but neither do we fling wide the doors of the freeholds to all comers. Providing needed shelter and succor to another child of the Dreaming is one thing, but I can show you the desiccated remains of more than one freehold that welcomed a meek would-be dreamer, mortal as the day is long, only to find out too late that the creature was a magus seeking to drain the balefire of the place. Be on your guard, and do not mistake *naiveté* for generosity.

The Right of Life —

To take the life of another being brings sadness and pain into the world, and all the dreams of all the dreamers cannot undo that. There are countless ways to defeat an opponent that do not involve death, and we are adept at many of them. Do not think that spilling someone else's lifeblood will make you right.

Reality:

The Accordance War is one of our greatest sorrows. Some have interpreted our actions to mean that several of the more prominent members of our household held this aspect of the Escheat in contempt; they could not be more wrong.

There are times when being a leader among one's people means that hard decisions must be made; it is never easy, except perhaps for the most callous among the Unseelie to end the life of another. But when the alternative is the slow, agonizing deaths of many people, is it not better to "do a little wrong to do a great right"?

On the Taking of Oaths

Do not take the swearing of an oath lightly or jest in matters concerning such things.

Note that to break either of the oaths below through swearing its opposite is to devastate one's faerie soul; I have heard tell of only one who attempted it, and once forsworn, the part of her that tied her to the Dreaming was shredded utterly, destroying all that she had once been. It is said that she went mad soon thereafter.

The Oath of Silence

As much as some would have you believe otherwise, there are some truths that should not be spoken. When the time comes to seal certain information away, this oath serves as a reminder to the swearer and as "insurance" that the secret won't be revealed.

I do pledge this day, with heart, mind and soul, that I will never betray this confidence. Until the stones have crumbled unto dust, and the sea fallen a hundred thousand thousand times from the thundering heavens, this long will I remain silent. When the last star flares and fades in the night sky, leaving naught but blackness and this world is but a dream once more, this long will I keep my word.

System: Once sworn, the one swearing this oath can speak only of the forbidden topic by spending a permanent point of Willpower. In doing so, the character also gains a permanent point of Banality.

The Oath of Truth

We have earned something of a reputation for duplicity among certain groups in Kithain society. I, myself, do not pretend to have never painted the truth in such a way that might make even a pooka blush, but there are times when true honesty is called for, however brutal and forthright and painful it may be.

Although it may bring tears or sorrow, burning rage or silent hatred, let the veil be lifted now. Let all see clearly and know in their hearts that this I do speak without deceit or duplicity, but plainly and honestly as best I know how. This do I pledge: I shall speak the truth.

System: Anyone attempting to lie about the subject of this oath after swearing it gains a permanent point of Banality as well as being completely drained of Glamour until the following sunrise or sunset, whichever comes first.

The Oath of Fealty

This oath is put to use when commoners wish to swear their allegiance to House Eiluned. Although its wording binds the swearer to a particular lord, this is more to ensure that a house member in good standing takes responsibility for the new housemate than anything else. Some within House Eiluned have made it their lives' work to keep tabs on who owes fealty to whom. And many an Unseelie lord has found himself in a bad spot, with his plans of revolution dashed, when asked for what purpose he has oathbound so many redcaps and trolls in such a short period of time.

Today I pledge my loyalty to the Black and Silver, through my lord <insert name of liege> . I will grant my betters the respect they have earned and work to guide those younger than I to the path of understanding and wisdom. Each day shall I strive to learn more of the world and my own heart, to better enrich both Eiluned and myself. Above all, I pledge to House Eiluned myself as vassal, and I hope I may serve with honor and distinction.

System: Anyone attempting to willfully and deliberately betray House Eiluned after swearing this oath gains a permanent point of Banality, and henceforth, he pays double for anything requiring him to spend Glamour points. This effect can be reversed only by a public proclamation of forgiveness by the betrayer's former lord.

The Laws of Light and Shadow

The following are the essence of what it means to be of House Eiluned. Although in different lands and among different groups, there may be additional "laws," these tenets are common among all house members. I advise you to learn them, though I expect that they may already be second nature to you.

1. Truth is a jewel with many facets. Do not believe because you know something to be true that the opposite may not also be true.

2. No sane person could ever be wholly Seelie or Unseelie. Each of us has aspects of both, and to deny the existence of one or the other is to walk the path of madness.

3. To seek knowledge through sorcery is to tiptoe a fine line. There are some things we don't yet understand, some secrets the world holds today for which we are not ready. Each time you seek to discover the truth through magical means, you open yourself up to possibilities you might not be ready for.

On Fosterage

It is a great honor to be born of one of the noble houses, but it is also a great responsibility. Certain things are expected of you when people know you to be a sidhe of House Eiluned, and each of us must stand as an example to our fellow changelings — noble and commoner alike. It is for this reason that fosterage for those born of our line is a longer and more rigorous process than it would be for a commoner, or for one of another house.

Training always means a solid grounding in the sorcerous arts, with each student's training tailored to her own strengths and interests. While we believe firmly in the need for a strong foundation, we are not old school marms who force pupils to learn things that are of no interest to them. But, one must also learn to recognize and overcome weaknesses. The manner in which each person does this is unique, and we encourage creativity in discovering what methods work best for each individual.

For many, training in courtly etiquette and politics occupies nearly as great a place as that of magic in a young person's education in the ways of House Eiluned. Spending time at Kingdom Court as a page to the High Lords, or even in the household of High King David himself is considered to be an asset to any who would some day be part of a prominent household, regardless of position. It often falls to us to set the example for other members, whether our peers are commoners or our "rough" cousins in House Dougal.

An extended period of fosterage is not possible in many cases in this modern age. I recommend any in this predicament to work all the more at learning "on the job," as it were, for just as we enjoy certain privileges as members of the sidhe, so, too, do we bear responsibilities.

From the works of Dr. Thomas Lagarri, Historian and Scribe

I had hoped to include a kind of section on the society within our house, from a cultural, anthropological and sociological viewpoint. And while I grant that what observations I have seen from scholars of other houses makes for interesting and even enlightening reading, I fear that by our very nature, we are rather opaque creatures. To understand the workings of House Eiluned requires a depth of knowledge far beyond that afforded to those raised outside the house. I have therefore turned to a number of my more promising pupils for short essays on aspects of our unique culture and society, which I hope will be of assistance to those who would understand us better.

The Seelie Court

Squire Marianna de Lynn

The vast majority of House Eiluned constituents identify themselves publicly as members of the Seelie Court, and for the majority, this is true…most of the time. Doubletalk? Perhaps. But sometimes, it is through a certain amount of confusion that the truth can be clearly seen.

We acknowledged that no one is completely Seelie or Unseelie — no one sane, at least. Those who plunge headlong into one extreme or another deny their true natures, and it is no coincidence that these beings are often the ones who fall prey to Bedlam. We are able to adapt, which is how we have become who we are. This is not to say that we are without ethics; on the contrary, we hold ourselves to a higher standard of character and behavior than we do others. Thanks to those among us characterized by a more Seelie nature that the Kithain as a whole have learned so much about the world around them.

The Unseelie Court

Simon Evandale, page to King Meilge

Unlike many of the other noble houses, we do not pretend to be pure as fresh-fallen snow, without an Unseelie fiber in our collective beings. We understand that the world exists in shades of gray as well as black and white, and that there are times when in order to do a great right, one must do a little wrong. Moreover, we understand that while reverence for tradition is the basis for our society, we will perish as surely as the fae in days of yore if we refuse to adapt to a changing world.

To be of an Unseelie nature within House Eiluned is to pursue knowledge — some would say "truth" — without regard to following the letter of the law. There are things that go beyond the scope of what any lawgiver could imagine, and in these circumstances, we must decide for ourselves what the best course of action is. For those of us who consider themselves more Unseelie than Seelie, the ends nearly always justify the means. Malicious gossip and forbidden ritual are like honey mead upon the tongue, and it is no coincidence that those of an Unseelie bent are often more successful than their Seelie counterparts when they set their mind on a goal.

The Shadow Court

Submitted anonymously; I include it here as an indication of how these creatures function.

The Shadow Court is nothing more than a myth dreamed up to scare Seelie squires. The Shadow Court exists and controls the actions of all the key players in Kithain society. The Shadow Court is a prank dreamed up by some medieval pooka and perpetuated across the ages by those who ought to know better. The Shadow Court is populated entirely by Unseelie wilders who are venting their rage against society in the same manner as mortal teenagers, seeking to tear down the walls of their parents' supposed ivory towers.

This is what most will tell you of the Shadow Court. And honestly, it is probably best that way.

While there is a scrap of truth to almost everything stated above, the Shadow Court is a real threat to mainstream society, more than anyone likes to admit. That a number of the more influential members once held allegiance to House Eiluned is a polite understatement; what is more, some still do.

But that, I think, is enough of an introduction. Know that the Shadow Court is no mere story to frighten childlings, and seek further knowledge at your own peril. You have been warned.

How's that for a recruitment speech, eh?

On Remembrance and the Dreaming

I have been here before,
But when or how I cannot tell:
I know the grass beyond the door,
The sweet keen smell,
The sighing sound, the lights around the shore

You have been mine before,
How long ago I may not know:
But just when at that swallow's soar
Your neck turned so,
Some veil did fall — I knew it all of yore.

Had this been thus before?
And shall not thus time's eddying flight
Still with our lives our love restore
In death despite,
And day and night yield one delight once more?
— Dante Gabriel Rossetti, "Sudden Light"

Societies

Of all the sidhe, we of House Eiluned have adapted best to the challenges of this modern world in many ways, which is not to say that we have rejected our past; on the contrary, as much (or more) of the wisdom we gain comes from understanding the past than looking to the future for answers. So it should come as no surprise that the groups formed of our brethren hold a wide range of methods and philosophies, from the traditional to bleeding-edge technology. Below is a brief *précis* on a few of the more prominent and influential groups.

Rothman & Associates

Founded in the mid-'70s by then-squire Davis Rothman in Baltimore, Maryland, Rothman & Associates has gone on to become a tremendously successful international law firm with offices in Seattle, London, Toronto and Boston. Kithain all over the world rely on Rothman & Associates when dealing with matters of mortal law, and the private investigators on retainer are among the best in the world. Any Kithain with law training are encouraged to spend at least some time with a branch of R&A.

This is not to say that all members of the staff at R&A are fae, or even kinain. Many aggressive, inspired young mortals make up the support staff of R&A, and some have even risen to supervisory positions. Even when dealing with matters within fae society, there are aspects that are mundane enough to keep several staffers occupied with more complex assignments in most cases.

Although "burnout" is popular among staff members, given the high level of stress nearly everyone in the firm is under, Sir Davis has a vacation policy that is best described as "extremely generous." He understands the need for both privacy and excitement his employees have — ironic, given the nature of most investigations the firm is called in on.

The Knights of the Silver Key

A chivalrous and scholarly order reportedly tracing its roots back to before the Shattering, the Knights of the Silver Key are among the most relentless searchers of knowledge in the world. With "seekers" in every corner of the Western world, the Knights of the Silver Key have some of the most extensive libraries one has ever seen. Each knight has a particular area of scholarship, though in order to gain admittance, one must have a near-encyclopedic knowledge of topics both fae and mortal.

The Knights of the Silver Web

These knights are a loosely affiliated group of changelings across the globe, though the majority of its members remain House Eiluned members. The Silver Web grew out of an offshoot of the Knights of the Silver Key, when in the mid-'80s a number of technologically-minded childlings and wilders with similar interests (but different methods) separated from the older order to found their own.

Maintaining informal ties to the Modernist society of the Golden Sickle, these cyberknights have been instrumental in the rescue of countless changelings who have forgotten their fae natures. Their skill of getting information quickly has made them heroes on more than one occasion.

The symbol of the knights, not surprisingly, is a silver spiderweb on a black field; status in the order is indicated by the number of "rings" in the web.

The Order of Moonfall

This order is dedicated to the pursuit of divination in all its forms and was made up exclusively of Eiluned sidhe until recently. The order has been consulted by kings, as well as good many would-be revolutionaries, for indications of what direction a given course of action will point them in. Although the order guarantees confidentiality in all matters, the price it exacts for its services is often high. Boons ("to be specified at a future date"), objects of power and oaths are included as part of the price. In the past five years, however, a sluagh and sidhe of Houses Ailil and Fiona have been admitted to this select fellowship. This is one of the "borderline" groups within House Eiluned, for the order's activities cross the line frequently from Seelie to Unseelie, and beyond.

Relations with One's Peers

From the notes of Dr. Thomas Lagarri

We are just one of many houses among the sidhe, and it is here, among our peers, that foreknowledge is useful. We each approach the challenges of leadership, whether of a motley or a kingdom, in a different way, and some are better suited to certain tasks than others. But we must always remember to treat those of other houses with respect, for we of all people know that if the nobility do not present a united front to the commoners, we can be deposed and the entire society turned inside out.

Gwydion

Every kingdom must have its king, and High King David has done admirably throughout his reign. His house, likewise, has been the image of nobility, and its members seem to have more than a dram of wisdom. On more than one occasion, however, a member of this house has tried to put something over on us. More than one Gwydion ruler has earned his place and held it thanks to an Eiluned advisor, and they would do well to remember that the kingmakers can undo their work just as easily if things begin to go badly.

Of course, there is the matter of the talent those of House Gwydion have for seeing through deception. When speaking to one of the griffon, one should choose one's words carefully. Their gift for detecting lies leads to a sense of complacency in some cases, where they assume that people are always telling them the complete truth, without embellishment. And while it is not advisable to attempt even sight modifications to the truth unless the sidhe in question is at a considerable disadvantage (intoxicated, for example), it is possible to leave out pertinent facts and, thereby, guide the hearer to conclusions more advantageous than they might reach had they all the facts before them.

Fiona

A love never ending and a sword never resting. These warriors are devout patrons of love and all other emotions. Their banners hang in defiance of those who would suppress their freedom — not that any ruler with half a brain would try. For those who have such strong emotion, to them equal frailty is given. Love is House Fiona's weakness, and its members' fear knows nothing like a dagger to the throat of a loved one. Their zeal for the physical pleasures of life is their Achilles' heel — one that has spelled their downfall more than once. Cherish them as patrons of the finer (and coarser) things in life, but do not count on them for consistency or realism.

Dougal

Their homespun wisdom and love for material crafts make them the most "provincial" of all the houses, save Liam. House Dougal's "common touch" makes the house popular with the people, who will often show loyalty to a noble of their house that is unheard of for a ruler of any other household. And not all of Dougal are as rough around the edges as you might think; a good many treat politics like a craft, to be mastered and refined to the point of achieving art. But although their meticulous attention to detail makes them excellent administrators, many members experience frustration when placed in a position of actual rulership. The world is not as neatly ordered as they would like to believe, and not all handicaps can be overcome with simple tinkering.

Liam

A house of fae who love mortals more than their own kin — what are we to make of that? They hide their numbers and do not announce their membership out of fear. Understand the ridiculousness of the Liam belief — mortals should exist undisturbed. Yet, they sit by and watch the walls of the Dreaming come crumbling down, all the while hiding in the arms of mortals. More than one among their ranks has faded into the bleak realm of the Dauntain. Yet, House Liam members still have the arrogance to claim that the mortals deserve to be left alone by us. I ask you — what are their true intentions? I, for one, have wondered whether House Liam's constituents' allegiance to the Seelie Court is as unfaltering as they claim....

Ailil

With a quick wit and a disarming smile, a member of the Ailil household can charm anyone into believing his story. The Ailil have a way with politics and understand the subtleties of secrecy. But while we always grant our errant cousins a measure of respect, their methods are less than savory. Their pride is their downfall, as when a leadership position becomes within reach, they stop at nothing to possess it.

Never forget that they are, in part, our siblings, more so than the other houses. We share an ancestry with the Ailil and often have certain traits in common, but bear in mind in all your dealings that, as a household, they claim allegiance openly to the Unseelie Court. Do not fool yourself into thinking that they are as mercurial as we are with regard to court status, and do not believe that an Ailil ever does anything that doesn't help himself in some way.

Leanhaun

Glamour-hungry Ravagers who leech the dreams of mortals to extend their own lives, these masters of inspiration rarely seek to be known for what they truly are, even among Unseelie. Their destructive ways usually bring dreamers to a highpoint of inspiration and creativity, then rend the very fabric of their dreams away from them; all of this to prevent the inevitable aging that they are subject to due to an ancient curse. We believe they are scattered in different regions all over the globe, hiding from the laws of the general court system. However, some secrets can be kept...for a price.

Balor

These are fools who wish for things that can bring them closer to Banality and their own destruction; desire for material wealth and fae power are not things that normally go well together. The last of the fomorians are all within this house, hiding their hideous forms until the time of the Long Winter. Only madness exists in the hearts of Balor's remaining family.

Scathach

These warriors who protect our kind from the forces of the Prodigals were once thought lost. They are rarely seen, though most sidhe trust their lives to the hands of these noble warriors. Truth be told, they are not normal sidhe, but savage assassins. They fight and kill with such ferocity that no one should consider themselves safe. Have we deluded ourselves into thinking that they could have stayed behind when the rest of us departed for Arcadia and not paid a terrible price? The Scathach are tied to the violence and despair of this modern world. We hope that they may be brought back into the fold in time.

On the Common Folk: An Editorial

The following are excerpts from a lecture given by Lady Carmelia Cadwynn, an esteemed colleague of mine from the Kingdom of Chalk, who hails from Hove, East Sussex.

By way of introduction, I say that the inclusion of commoners as members of our house strikes me as an incongruous, generous gesture. Admittedly, there are some, such as boggans and trolls for whom fealty seems a natural option, who can be valued members of one's household. The added insurance one has if they are oathbound to the house more than makes up for any potential downside. Others, however — notably the eshu, pooka and redcaps — are best left outside the bounds of our household. For while their assistance can be valuable, it is advantageous to be able to deny knowledge of their activities in most cases. These same kith often rankle at the notion of fealty as well, so it is best that they are left to their own devices.

— Dr. Thomas Lagarri

Boggans

For the most part, boggans are model subjects — hard workers who deal fairly, if dealt with in kind. Their only fault is their fascination with petty gossip. A well-placed rumor with a local boggan has on many occasions helped spread a screen of information to conceal our own secrets. Do not misuse their trust, for an angry boggan is a rather large problem for all of our house.

Eshu

As reckless as they are useful, the eshu can be fountains of information. If challenged, these tale-spinners tell you anything to keep your interest — especially if you tell stories that are better than theirs. A drunken eshu barely needs a nudge to get him to spill all he knows on any given topic. However, you must be willing to sift through the ego of the tale's teller in order to find the truth.

Nockers

Dour and unfriendly, the nockers rarely cooperate enough to give us anything we seek. Their skills do not go without use, however, and their gadgetry has helped us in some way or another. Listen closely though, my brothers and sisters, for even the whirring of their machines or the grumbling of the fae can give you a glimpse into a realm of knowledge — albeit, a realm unbeknownst to anyone except the nockers.

Pooka

Pooka possess an odd ability to gain the truth of a person's soul through sheer presence. The ease with which some speak around these tricksters is disturbing. I suppose that within the twisted puzzles that are their minds, the pooka guard their secrets well; however, even lies can be deciphered with patience and a keen ear. Think of how many treasures have been tucked away and can be yours for the listening — to gain the confidence of a confidence man. The potential is limitless.

Redcaps

Nasty beasts born of anger and appetite, their behavior has been studied by House Eiluned for many a year. The simple brutality of their kind has led some to believe that the redcaps are nothing more than violent dreams given life. How sad it is that the nightmares of dreamers walk the streets of their towns — and date their daughters. A redcap's hunger never ends, my friend.

Satyrs

We'll leave it to those in House Fiona to tumble with the goats. Certainly they have their uses, though. The sheer primal draw that a mortal has to one of our lusty friends can be very entertaining at times. When a goat has his eye on a mortal, or fae, there is just no end to the lengths they go to obtain their affection. Satyrs are difficult to deal with at times and do not often cooperate with our needs; agreements are rarely reached. And they use their passion to help us in our own quest for information.

Sluagh

I have heard a tale that the first sluagh was the child of Eiluned, and that she was cast out when they saw how ugly it was. The tale has a ring of truth about it. Sluagh share our passion for knowledge, even if they are commoners undeniably. In my experience, they make excellent informants, as long as they feel they are being dealt with fairly and if you can stomach their company. They have secrets of their own, you see, and want to protect them so they can hide in their dark passageways, just listening to the silence.

Trolls

These stalwart guardians have spent years diligently protecting what is ours. They are usually true to their word, and so they are rarely a good source of information. No one gives information to those who work with us; and those who don't are tight-lipped about their own lords' and ladies' business. They are formidable foes, never underestimate the cunning wit of one of these giant warriors.

On the Gallain

Those fae born outside the natural order of things present a particular quandary: Should we attempt to bring them into the fold of mainstream fae society, or are they best left to their own devices? Some propose establishing a kind of worldwide fae empire, incorporating the fae of the Orient, Africa and elsewhere, but how are we to do that when we don't have our own house in order yet?

The Nunnehi

Some of our ancestors fled to the Americas following the Shattering with the hope that the weight of Banality would not be so great there, and that they could reestablish themselves in a land where magic still flowed in the rivers and sang in the breezes. It was not to be.

Thus far, the fae native to Concordia have been less than forthcoming with offers of assistance in locating any remaining treasures that our forebears may have left behind. Whether it is because they still view us as invaders on "their" territory, or because they have something to hide regarding the fate of our forebears, I cannot say for certain. But, I do know that if you plan to have any extensive dealings with the nunnehi, you would be well-advised to learn what you can of their ways and customs, to better ensure that you won't commit an unforgivable *faux pas* in what passes for society among their kind.

Inanimae

These folk are often forgotten by our more short-sighted fae brethren, and yet they are among our best sources of information. If you can understand their ways and earn their trust, there could be no better spies.

On the Prodigal

We are not the only creatures who can weave Glamour. The Prodigal races are similar to our kind in many ways, though their power is limited by the particular story that they are caught up in. One wonders what the stories of this modern age will lead to a few centuries hence. Will computer viruses given sentience be the next form of Prodigal?

I must say that I have no desire to see the Prodigal brought back into the fold of fae society. Their ways are so far removed from ours that reconciliation seems impossible. And, by their very nature, they have become so stuck in a particular way of thinking that they are, for all intents and purposes, separate races. Still, it is worth remembering that they, too, come from the same primal spark of Glamour.

Vampires

These walking dead seem to be enjoying something of a vogue lately, with countless mortal children and younglings imitating their pallor and monochromatic fashion sense. And although many of them can be witty, charming, and fascinating conversationalists, one mustn't forget that these creatures live off the blood of the living. Not all live by murder, but how much better is it to leave victims alive, yet violated and betrayed?

Vampires run the gamut from the very civilized and scholarly to the bestial and monstrous. Some believe their immortality is a gift, and the vampires try to use the time they have in this world for some purpose, while others live only to garner power and to satisfy their own insatiable thirst. Many of the elders of their kind wield powerful magics, though they lack the versatility of our flavor of magic.

Lycanthropes

Though many lycanthropes possess a sort of native wisdom, they are wild creatures at heart, savage and brutal. The understanding of the spirit world demonstrated by their scholars and shamans is fascinating, but do not deceive yourself by thinking that they are all hippies or "New Agers"; their feral cunning rules them as much as their spiritual side, at least among those I have encountered.

In my experience, the werewolves are the most common, but I have heard tell of other shapeshifters more than once. I know not whether these creatures are chimera given flesh and form, or whether they are truly mortals afflicted with lycanthropy.

Ghosts

These are spirits of the dead who have become so tied to the pattern of their life that even death cannot provide release for them. They are tragic souls, even more than vampires, for it is only their own narrow-mindedness that keeps them here. If they could let go, they might begin anew, but ghosts are so used to their fear that they are unwilling to surrender it. Though they exist outside the realm of what most mortals believe possible, they are extremely banal creatures in truth. They are static, unchanging, by their very nature. Dealing with these creatures is discouraging and bound to lead to fits of melancholy.

Magi

Magi are mortal dreamers who have learned how to harness the Dreaming's power and make it do their bidding here in the physical world. Magi make potent allies...or fearsome opponents. These mortals have gone beyond credible limits to the point that they can work a kind of Glamour of their own, thus, reshaping reality to suit themselves.

Not everyone views magic the same way, and those who are of a similar mindset obviously tend to congregate together. Much as we have our Seelie and Unseelie Courts, the magi too divide themselves into Traditionalists and Progressives, though with considerably more animosity than we have for our brethren. Those known as the Dream Speakers are often favorably disposed toward our kind, and I am told that many a satyr has found a kindred spirit among the "Cult of Ecstasy." But the majority of others have a different perspective, with many of their kind seeking out our groves and freeholds with the intent to drain them of Glamour. Beware when dealing with these mortals, for they may turn on you when you least expect it.

Notables

Countess Anne

A dark-haired vixen with laughter like bells in a fae grove, Countess Anne has broken many hearts at each of the private schools she has attended. Now a sophomore at Mount Holyoke College in western Massachusetts, she seems to know the gossip on everyone in Concordia. As one of the more prominent members of the Cat's Cradle, Anne hosts gatherings once a season at "her" estate in the Berkshires (actually, it is the summer house of her mortal parents, though they frequently travel to Europe for extended holidays). Her Samhain parties are legendary in the region, and Queen Mab has exchanged harsh words with Anne after things got "out of hand." Anne has of late taken up archery as a hobby and she received a finely crafted bow from Duke Guile last Yule as a present. That the two had a rather torrid affair is considered old news, though no one seems to know what caused the two to split up so suddenly.

King Meilge of Willows

Meilge is an anomaly within our household: someone who prefers the spotlight to running things from behind the scenes. But make no mistake — his network of informants is the best of any ruler in Concordia. His style and grace have caused speculation as to whether he might be more Ailil than Eiluned, but Meilge has proven to be a solid member of our house through his actions. While many claim that his domain serves as a base of operations for countless Kithain criminals, Meilge is quick to point out that his is one of the most peaceful and problem-free kingdoms in Concordia — probably due to the fact that he enforces strict rules in his domain, but he sometimes turns a blind eye to what his subjects do once outside the kingdom boundaries.

Meilge recently sent his ward, Faerilyth, to spend time in the court of the High King, in keeping with the belief that in order to rule well, one must have an understanding of "the big picture." He does not seem too worried at the rumors that the High King may have taken a fancy to Faerilyth; after all, what better match could there be?

Faerilyth

With dark hair falling in waves nearly to her waist and with eyes the color of moon-lit amethysts, Faerilyth is among the most beautiful ladies in the Willow Court. Her status as the adopted daughter of King Meilge heightens the respect shown to her by the other court members, for those not acquainted with her reputation as a skilled sorceress have at least heard the

ballads praising her beauty. The occasional rumor that she is of House Ailil adds to the mystique that surrounds this enigmatic young lady. Meilge has sent her to live at the High King's Court as part of her training, to learn the ways of fae politics and etiquette. It has been whispered that the High King himself has taken a hand in the young beauty's education, and that Meilge has high hopes for her future.

Doctor Thomas Lagarri

A distinguished gentleman with glints of silver in his beard and a twinkle in his eye, Dr. Lagarri resides currently in Berkeley, California where he teaches Old English and Irish Literature at the University of California. An avid history buff, Dr. Lagarri is known as the premiere authority on the history of House Eiluned and on the sidhe in general.

Sir Davis Rothman

Davis Rothman sits at the center of an information network that a Nosferatu vampire would envy. As the founder and leader of Rothman & Associates, he has put together a group of aggressive young mortals and Kithain who have become a force to be reckoned with across Concordia over the course of the last decade. A Dauntain has a writ foreclosing on your freehold? No problem. Your oathmate has been kidnapped by her mortal parents and institutionalized? They'll have her back in time for supper. Subtly navigating the mortal legal system, Rothman's "knights" are masters of subtly applying a cantrip here and a pinch of Glamour there to grease the wheels of bureaucracy. Staunchly Seelie in his overall philosophy, Sir Davis and his staff are not beyond occasionally bending the rules in the name of justice.

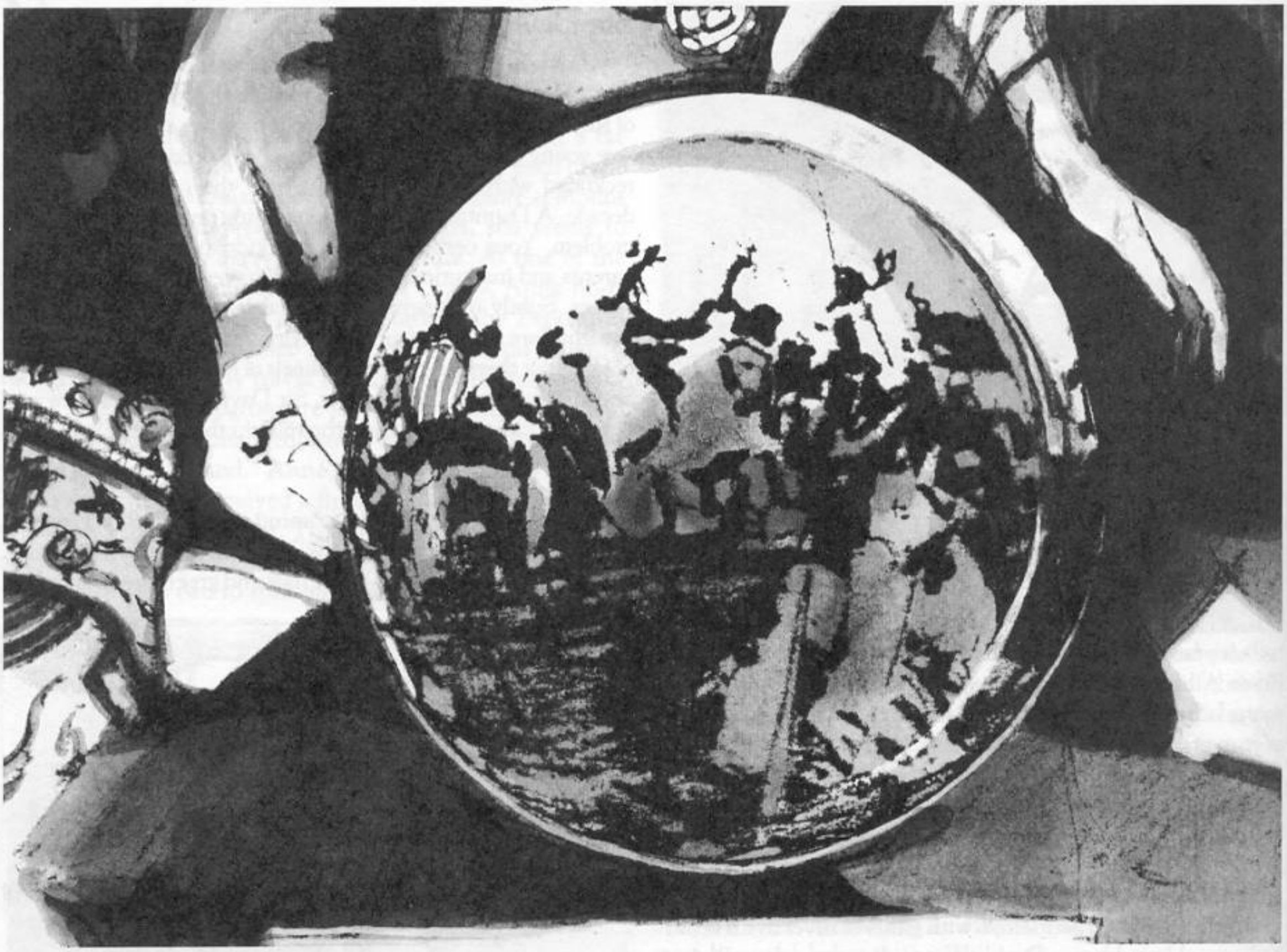
Dame Josephine

Though her title calls to mind steel-haired dowagers, Dame Josephine is, in fact, a wilder not yet out of her teen years. With short white-blonde hair and green eyes framed by

tiny silver-rimmed spectacles, she hardly looks like anyone's idea of the up-and-coming force behind House Eiluned, but that is exactly what she is. As co-founder of the Knights of the Silver Web some 10 years ago when she was but a childling, Dame Jo has been a great influence on younger members of the court, despite her infrequent visits. She is at present a sophomore at a small liberal arts college in the Kingdom of Grass.

High Lord Ariadne

More mysterious than the norm, even among our kind, Ariadne is as much known for his penchant for cryptic responses as for his formidable talents for precognitive sorcery. His position as one of the Nine High Lords of the Fallen World (or Parliament of Dreams, as it is more commonly known) grants



him both a right and a responsibility to speak more freely among his peers than is usual for our kind. And although he shares liberally what information he obtains through his mammoth network with the other High Lords, his quick wit and cunning have made him a thorn in the side of the more conservative members of the Parliament.

Objects of Mystery and Power

What follows are a few of the objects known to our household to have uses particularly well-suited to our talents. In the hands of someone else, they may be useful, but to someone skilled in the art of seeing through the veils of deception, they can be invaluable.

Mooncrystal

Rare Treasure, Level 1 to 3 (variable)

Ranging from marbles to basketballs in size, mooncrystals look like the stereotypical "crystal balls" one would expect to see among fortune tellers — spherical, with a milky white color that seems to shift and refract colors as you look into it. A mooncrystal allows its user to gain insight into things happening in the present or the recent past between one and three times per week, depending on its potency and size.

System: Mooncrystals function once per level of the treasure per week, and reduce the difficulty for Soothsay cantrips by two times the level of the treasure (no difficulty to go below 3).

Elena's Mirror

Unique Treasure, Level 5

One of the few remaining treasures from the mythic age, no one knows for certain who possesses this extremely powerful one. It is said that Elena's mirror lets the bearer see clearly to anywhere else in the world for a period of up to one hour, once per day. In addition, it allows the bearer to cast cantrips on those pictured in the mirror. It is believed that the mirror aids especially in casting Sovereign, for there are tales from ages long past of sorcerers using the mirror to influence the decisions of kings and princes halfway across the world.

System: Elena's mirror shows any location for up to an hour once per day, and it gives the user an additional five dice for Soothsay cantrips during that period. It also gives the bearer an additional three dice for Sovereign cantrips cast on those depicted in the mirror.

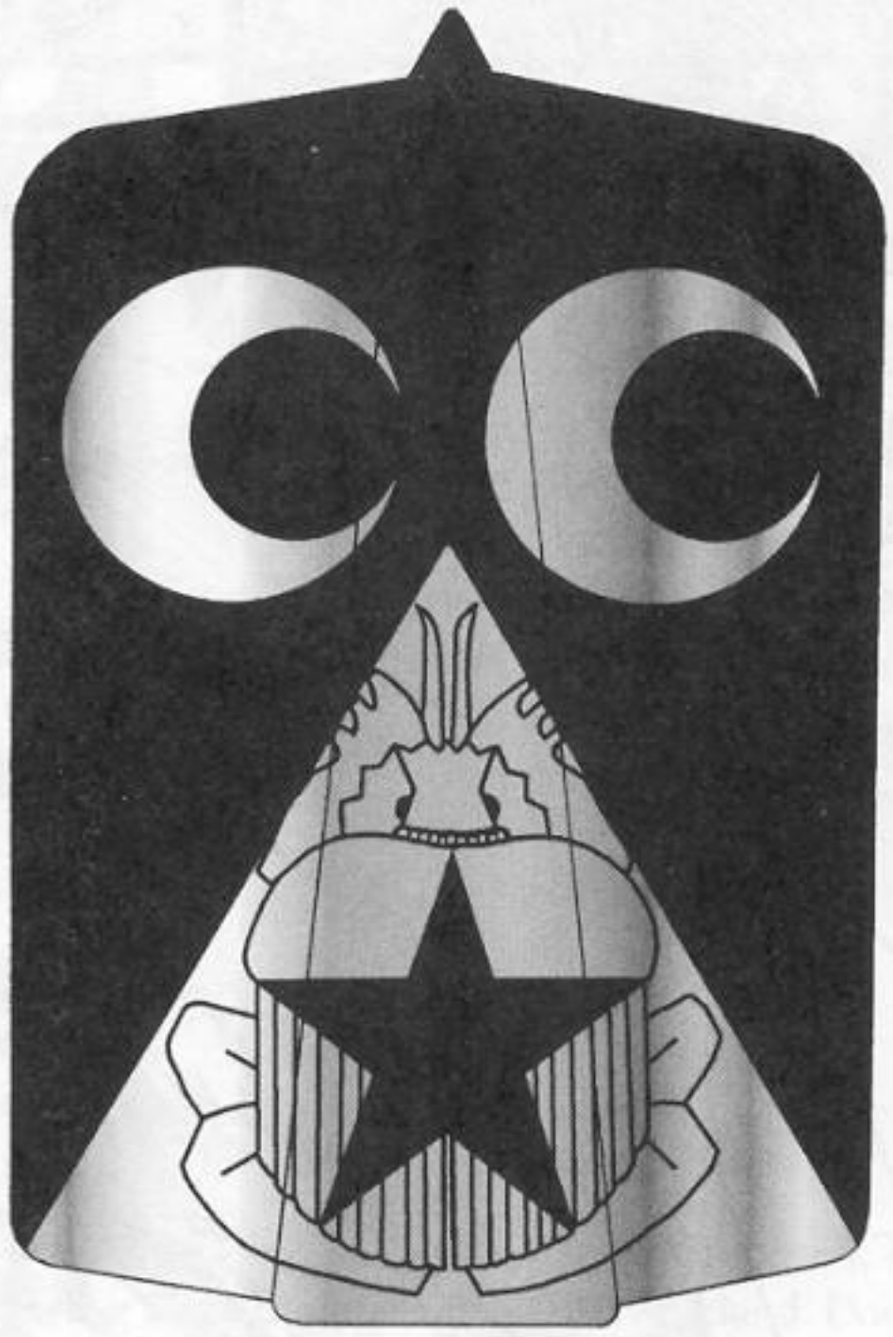
"The Cleaner" Software

Uncommon Treasure, Level 1 to 3 (variable)

Initially developed over five years ago, "The Cleaner" has gone through several different versions. In its present form, available for both Mac and PC platforms, a changeling utilizing this software can conceal both the time and place she is logged in from, making covert operations online much easier. Although it is virtually impossible to find evidence of where or when the crime occurred, those who know what to look for find telltale signs indicating that things are a little *too* clean and that some tampering has occurred.

It is thought widely that "The Cleaner" was developed by a changeling of House Eiluned hailing from the Royame du Brocilande in France, who drew inspiration from the film, "La Femme Nikita."

System: The Cleaner gives the user an additional three dice to his Computer skill, although it may leave traces of tampering (if *any* dice are 0, evidence of tampering will be left).



PHILLIPS 1997

House Fiona: Love Conquers All

I am the fountain of affection — the instrument of joy.
— Oysterband, "When I'm Up I Can't Get Down"

Love's Oath Lost: Fiona's Tale

One day you shall be the slave of this love you disdain,
And you shall see how hard it is; I know that time will come.
— Prince Michael of Greece, *Sultana*

From the Annals of House Fiona by Lady Julia Spencer-Drake:

I see her on rainy days at dawn as I wake from the edge of sleep. Hair the color of fresh-turned soil, eyes green like those of the prince of cats. I could go on about her skin, voice, lips and body, but why should I? Imagine a woman born in dreams of love, and you can picture Lady Fiona. I remember something of days before the Shattering, but after that time, I have only vague dreams and feelings. This story is from the lips of Fiona herself, if you believe Queen Glynis of Three Hills in Scotland. Doubt the word of an Eiluned noble? One whom bards call the Queen of Tentpegs? Yes, I know there are dozens of tales of my lady Fiona floating around. I know, too, that this one contradicts much of the canon lore of House Fiona. And yes, everyone of our house learns from the first hour of their fosterage that the devious Eiluned love their plots. But we sometimes forget that the sorcerers understand life's passions, too.

The story says I was Fiona's herald. Her confidant. Her friend. Never her lover. I feel an unexplained loss within, and I believe the tale.

Once upon a time, when the world was new, two mortal lovers lay naked in a bower, speaking of their souls. The girl had just tasted the loss of innocence, the bitter and the sweet. The boy rested from both lovemaking and the excesses of his first hunt as an adult; fresh venison still hung in a nearby tree. As the lovers whispered with the pure ideals of the young, they spun a tale of grace and ardor. And in Arcadia, so near when the world was new, the most beautiful creature imaginable sprang forth; where she walked, flowers bloomed, trees bent their limbs to flutter leaves on her chestnut tresses, animals stood fearless on the trails of the land to watch her pass. And even the High Lords and Ladies of Arcadia looked on her with wonder. Many fell in love with Lady Fiona, and though she was loving to all, she never shared her heart in full. The sages say she embodied passion from both young human lovers, invincible battlelust from the boy's victory and an alluring sadness from the girl's broken maidenhead. These attributes became the hallmark of her own people — a house also thriving in lust, willfulness and delight. But whatever the case, Fiona rose to be a mighty noble among the Kithain. Even the most terrible redcap smiled when Fiona looked kindly upon his grotesque form.

Now, just because no one had stolen her heart did not mean Lady Fiona lacked paramours. Indeed, nobles and commoners alike graced her bed; some other sidhe clucked and sighed at the thought of coupling with satyrs, pooka and eshu, but not Fiona! Nor did any bear a grudge against her, for she was a magnificent and tender lover until she decided the time was ripe to move on. She left behind fond memories and hopes for the future, but always mendable broken hearts. Fiona also built friendships with the walking dead, spoke with restless spirits and danced around the pagan wizards' solstice fires. Especially beloved by her were the Prodigals called Garou and of all those, dearest to her heart were the Fianna; their inner fires and love of oaths and songs matched easily her own. More than a little of her passions mixed with those Fianna and even with others calling themselves Gaia's Children. Alas, in sowing her blood, she, too, planted the seeds of her fall.

One day in an ancient summer, Fiona rode her strong destrier across the world walls to the green hills of Hibernia in hopes of finding song and romance. She passed many comely farmers in the fields but for some reason spurred on her mount. So it was she came upon a lame horse, saddled but riderless, wandering in a rocky copse of trees. Fiona gently grasped the horse's reins and salved its sore leg. Then she heard moans coming from behind the rocks. She went to look and there lay a mortal, afflicted sorely from his fall. Fiona felt her heart burst asunder at his black curls and ruby lips. She knelt and kissed quickly his bruises and cuts, and they vanished at her touch. Fiona's arts healed the man right then, yet when the mortal opened his eyes, she saw bright sea-green shadows that threatened to devour her. Lady Fiona was lost as his hands unlaced her bodice, touched her skin and pulled her into his grasp. His name I can never remember, nor is it ever mentioned in the tale, but Fiona took the human man for her own that day. Marriage as we know it today did not exist in those primeval times, but they were troth-plighted in oaths beyond any mortal or fae laws. They were never far apart from that time onward for many happy years. Fiona had not the intricate spells of the Eiluned, but she had skill enough certainly to enchant a beloved mortal and grant him long life. He found welcome in her earthly holdings as well as her crimson palace in Arcadia. As Queen Glynis reminded me and as I can sometimes recollect, I served as a friend to both, for even the most attached lovers quarrel from time to time. But this I do recall with perfect clarity: They were content.

None of us saw the blade that was to fall, yet it hung above our necks for a long duration. Word had come to us that mortals were spreading over the Earth like mist after a spring shower. We thought little of this as humans were no real threat to us; indeed, their crafts and songs gave us shape and form. But the Prodigal werewolves did not see the mortals in this light at all. Rather, the howling ones shrieked in fury at the mortals crawling over the land, stripping the world of its natural beauty and wealth. The Garou struck out in fear and anger, and scores of mortals died from their rage. In our strongholds, we worried at first, but as is the wont of the fae, we soon forgot about the bloody war happening outside our keeps. Humans, for all their dreams, also spread Banality. A few less could hardly matter. But the mortals could not ignore the slaughter of their children and families at the hands of the werewolves. Fiona felt sorrow for the pain of the Garou and the plight of the humans, but so enamored was she of her lover that she gave the matter limited thought. Until, that is, the day he saw one village of his kin and name burned to the ground. He found Fiona and told her of the madness that had come upon the werewolves, and of the killing of babes, the razing of countless human settlements. He begged for her aid. Fiona fell silent for a long while, then finally spoke.

"This killing rage will pass, beloved. Even now I have heard those among Gaia's Children beg for peace. The Prodigals are frightened and they often destroy in fear. I know there has been suffering and grief aplenty, but I also know it will not last. Only stay with me, do not worry and you will be safe."

Her beloved shook his head and tried another tact, so desperate was he for relief to his fellow mortals. "Lady, do you not see? If this rain of death and fury continues, one day their bloody claws will likely strike me, too! I am not fae, but human. Would you have me perish at the hands of a beast? For the sake of the love we share, you must give my kin your aid. Else I shall die also from the strokes of the werewolves, for I will not leave my relations, no matter how distant, to suffer alone."

Bold Fiona had never tasted fear, but now it struck her a hundred-fold. This became a curse on us ever after, for we will always succor our paramours, even at great risk of life or chance of dishonor. She then made a solemn oath to give aid to her lover and his kin, even though it meant betraying the Garou whom she admired so greatly. What aid she could give, even she knew not. Nor did she realize that as the oath was given, she herself was being betrayed. Genevieve, a young girl who served as Fiona's handmaiden, perched outside the door and listened to every passionate syllable of that terrible oath. Boredom filled the girl, and as we of House Fiona are wont to do, she decided to sample the delectations of an Unseelie path. On some days,

this lascivious creature had been the lover of Lord Robiard of House Eiluned, who was one of Fiona's castoffs. Of course, my Lady Fiona had let him go easily and he pretended to feel only a mild sorrow. But truth to tell, Robiard burned in bitter hatred at Fiona's rejection. He, unlike any of her former lovers, wanted revenge. When Genevieve blurted out gleefully to Robiard of Fiona's oath, he began plotting, plotting....

Fiona began her quest to find aid for the humans with House Liam, speaking with a sage of that ilk named Sir Athanar.

"Ask me no questions," she warned, "but tell me true. Would you give help to humans in peril, even if it meant harm coming to certain distant cousins of the fae? And what relief could I possibly bring to the mortals?"

Athanar saw much but asked no questions. "Lady, you knew half my answer ere you came. We alone among the fae recognize the value of the dreamers and defend them against the anger of our own kind. Give them your aid, but remember they are mortal and need not magics, but tools." Fiona grasped his meaning immediately and set out to the forges of Dougal, the greatest craftsman of the sidhe. Therein, even the nockers stopped their tinkering to watch as she passed into the halls of stone to speak with Lord Dougal. One grizzled old nocker forged a delicate golden rose on his anvil for her, and to my memory, it was the only perfect creation of that kith. Fiona kissed his brow and carried the rose on her bosom thereafter. Lord Dougal likewise received her with grace and dignity. He listened to her request for aid, pondered for a moment, then tossed her a rock. Threads of dull-gray ore wound around the plain brown stone.

"That is silver," he said in answer to her puzzled glance. "Give it to the humans. They know something of crafting metals. Any weapons bound with this ore will burn the howling ones." Fiona nodded in understanding.

"And your price, master craftsman?" she asked, fully expecting to divest her garments on the spot.

Dougal shook his head as Fiona's hand strayed to her bodice. "Nay, Lady Fiona, even you who are love's perfection could not tempt me from my craft. But for three drops of your crimson blood, I will call our bargain even." He told her nothing of how he planned to use the precious fluid, but caught the drops in a jeweled flask as Fiona sliced her finger deep to the bone. She thanked Dougal and departed to her holding in Hibernia, where her mortal lover awaited.

"This stone contains veins of silver," she said to him, "and I suspect more is nearby. Have your crafters forge weapons of this metal, and the werewolves will feel the sting of your anger. No longer can the Garou slaughter you quite so easily." Tears streaked down her face as she handed him the stone, visualizing the death that would follow among the Fianna she cherished. And then, he took her hands in his own.

"Thank you, most beautiful and wonderful of ladies. Now I must tell you the truth — all of it. You did not find me by happenstance that day long ago. I was chosen by the humans to

appeal to the faerie-kind for aid against the werewolves. I knew of an ancient legend that no highborn fae could leave a mortal in distress on Midsummer's Eve, the day I leapt from my horse in that grove of trees. But I knew not that I would find you, nor that I would truly love you with all my heart. I had a duty to perform, and I did my duty, even though I put it aside many years while I enjoyed your company for its own sake. I had no knowledge of the true destiny upon me, that I would have Lady Fiona for my own and that I would hurt so horribly from causing her to weep. But that is the truth of it. Take it as proof of my love that I now tell you all."

Fiona drew her sword to slay him with an anguished cry on her lips, aching with the betrayal of her love. But the oath's coils tightened about her, and she could not harm him until he had delivered the silver to the humans. Love wounded her then, it stung her to the core of her being. The tears she sobbed throughout his confession stopped cold. Many days passed before Fiona ever cried again.

"Go then, yet return to me when you finish your task," Fiona said flatly and he departed the stronghold, returning after showing other mortals the silver. He knew he would die at Fiona's hand, but he nonetheless returned to her, like a moth to the scorching flame. Fiona waited, as he expected. Naught but sorrow remained on her face.

"I still love you, despite what you have done," she said.

"And I love you. Believe me when I say that duty aside, our bond was that of legends. Can you not forgive me and allow us to go on as before?" he pleaded.

Fiona shook her head. "There is nothing more sacred to me than oaths, and you have broken the one you made to me when we plighted our love. I cannot kill you. I cannot remain with you. I am lost without you. So until I can forgive you, we shall remain together yet apart." With that, she kissed him one last time, and he fell into a deep, dreamless sleep. Fiona built him a magnificent couch with her own hands, covered with a mantle displaying her house's device. She then secreted him in a tomb deep beneath her Hibernia freehold. This done, Fiona went to find one among the Prodigal Garou who would hear her tale.

Strangely, no Fianna wandered near her trods that night. But after many days of searching, she met with one of Gaia's Children, fortune and fate making him a cousin of that tribe's most famous peacemaker, Lore-Speaker Gron. The Garou listened patiently and with great sadness at Fiona's tale.

"Would that you had waited just one more turn of Luna's face!" he cried in anguish. "For even now, we have earned the ear of the other tribes to guarantee peace. The path to ending this Impergium will be difficult, but Gaia demands our success. And now you have given the humans a weapon against us all."

"So you shall tell them all what I have done?" asked Fiona. She cared not if these Prodigals slew her, but she couldn't bear the thought that all fae should suffer because of her folly.

The werewolf shook his head. "No, for even though what you did changes the balance, your reasons were pure. Moreover, we have no desire to see anyone else die in this conflict. I shall tell my cousin, the Lore-Speaker, but your secret will be safe." Gron departed then

on the paths of the moon, leaving Fiona to walk slowly back on her own trod to Arcadia. Yet, no sooner had her feet touched that land than the knights of the High King took her prisoner. Lord Robiard's revenge was complete, for Fiona was not the only one who treasured the Prodigals. Many others among House Gwydion and House Leanhaun cried out for justice when House Eiluned made the truth known. The High King appointed Lord Gwydion to hear the case and mete out sentence, and all deemed it a wise and fair decision. Lord Gwydion questioned not only Fiona, but countless others, noble and commoner, Seelie and Unseelie, who vouched for her goodwill and character. Touching were the tales of the redcaps, nockers and boggans, from whom her kindness now returned full force. Ever after we of House Fiona have remembered the grace of their words that made our ties with the commoners stronger than those of any other house. At last, Fiona heard the confession of her maid Genevieve, and Lord Gwydion assented to the truth of it.

Fiona's eyes squinted, and in that moment she knew a fury so great that the entire hall went ice-cold from her words. "So be it, Lady of White Flowers, that all who bear your name in any tongue shall suffer in love, no matter how they are reborn, noble or commoner, human or immortal, Prodigal or Gallain. Ever more shall your lust be insatiable, your thirst unslaking, until you have lost all and are alone and forlorn as the last breath ebbs from your body." Genevieve shrieked as the curse struck her. One of the knights had tried to stifle Fiona's words, but he was too late. Above the clamor, Lord Gwydion stood tall, thus making order return to the panicking court.

"Was House Liam behind this?" Lord Gwydion asked so softly that he caused the other sidhe in the room to tremble. Fiona met his gaze and did not move.

"No, my lord," she said in her sweet voice. "Myself, I bear the blame. Do what you must to me, but no others." Lord Dougal, full of quiet despair, held back a reply, as did Sir Athanar of House Liam. Lord Gwydion nodded and pronounced his sentence: The gates of Arcadia were closed to Fiona until the High Lords and Ladies deemed her welcome once more. Moreover, none of her noble host could join her in earthly exile. The lords and ladies of House Fiona cried in outrage, but Lord Gwydion would not budge. A wonderful thing happened then: A cadre of commoners of many kith gathered around Fiona, and as she strode from the hall to depart to Earth, they walked with her to be her companions in exile. When I think on this, I feel my stomach turn and in my hands, I seem to feel the oaken staff bearing her banner tremble. It could be my imagination, but in my heart I believe otherwise.

Fiona then began a quiet life on Earth. The slaughter of the humans ended, but thereafter her heart broke whenever she heard the mournful songs of the Garou. As the Sundering continued, followed by the Shattering, the High Lords and Ladies finally relented and welcomed Fiona back to the safety of Arcadia before the last trods closed. She would have nothing of them. Protected by her commoner court, she hid herself away from the agonies of Banality in a waking dream until the sidhe walked the lands during the Resurgence. Fiona came forth only then, in a land still known as Hibernia — a much sadder place than she recalled. Fiona had forgiven during her long exile the lover who betrayed her. More than Arcadia's fields she wanted her paramour's touch once again. Heeding the warnings of the commoners who still loved her, she enshrouded herself in Glamour against the horrors of Banality, and Fiona ventured forth to find him. Where his tomb had been now rested a prison called "the Maze," where many had died and where many lived who had killed. Every trace of the tomb was gone, spoiled and destroyed. Fiona became an old woman that day and though they searched valiantly for her, the loyal commoners never saw her again. Some believe she found her way to Arcadia, while others think she perished from the overwhelming waves of Banality that she could not face. Queen Glynis tells a different story.

One dark night in the first days of the Resurgence, when the War of Ivy still held Britain in its grip, the queen welcomed an elderly sidhe lady to her abode. This woman embodied terrible sadness and ancient beauty, as well as a whisper of madness. She claimed to be Lady Fiona and in her bosom she carried a perfectly crafted gold rose. Queen Glynis made her feel welcome and heard the sorrowful creature pour out the tale I have just told. Then the queen watched helplessly as the old woman let a torrent of tears pent-up for near an eternity spill forth. Like water over stone, they washed the ancient sidhe away to nothingness. Only the rose lay on the soggy ground. Soon after, word came to me of the old woman's wish that I hear and tell her tale. Needless to say, I didn't trust the queen one whit.

"I am not wont to speak much of my own life, and if what the lady said is true, you have every cause to hate my house," Queen Glynis said uneasily. "But I ask you to believe me when I say I do understand her sorrow." I stared closely and saw that she spoke from her heart; I'm no stuffy scion of House Gwydion, but even I can hear stark truth. I believe Queen Glynis' tale — hence, the story you now read.

As I understand things from those with better memories than I, the High Lords of Arcadia pronounced word of Fiona's death and granted permission for all of her kin there to emerge and attend the wake for my lady in Scotland. All those who knew they were of House Fiona gathered there along the Borders for the lament. Of course, commoners were as welcome as any. Lord Rathesmere became head of House Fiona that night and has ruled ever since.

Really, I can offer no proof of any of this. But the gold rose lays on my mantle and on occasion, I catch glimpses in its reflection of a beautiful sidhe and a mortal man. If fate has any mercy, she will one day let me know the truth of it, I pray, once more in the green fields of Arcadia.

Fiona's Laws of Love

1. There *are* no laws of love, only ideals; once the wheel of love is in motion, there is no absolute rule.

2. Your heart will always overrule your head; accept this and find joy where you may.

3. Love with great risk is all the more sweet.

4. Love is both pleasure and pain; all in life has duality.

5. True love comes in many forms. Deny it not, however it appears.

Love's Lore: A History

And I regret even waking; I dangle from day into day.
And I can't list what I've lost…but I've lost it the same.
— The Jody Grind, "Promise of Sleep"

From the Annals of House Fiona by Lady Julia Spencer-Drake:

The Mythic Age

Great historians like Thomas the Rhymer and Professor Edgewick write that the Tuatha de Danaan gave birth to all the fae. These fair folk also taught humans how to dream, though past histories do not explain where humans came from, save that they are Sons of Adam and Daughters of Eve. My personal hypothesis is that the dreams of humans had profound effect on the children of the Tuatha de Danann. In other words, human imagination shaped the natures and appearances of the kith in some unfathomable way. Perhaps some had nightmares that caused the Tuatha to birth redcaps, while dreams of might and majesty summoned forth the sidhe. I may be heretical, but I believe simply that humans *did* have significant power in the Dreaming during the Time of Legends. Furthermore, this hypothesis fits with Fiona's tale about how she herself came into being. The Mythic Age stands as our epic childhood, full of legends and sagas. There we first learned about love and lust, pleasure and pain. Our passion for battle and devotion to danger and excitement swelled during those ancient days, bearing fruit ever since.

The Founding of the House

Contrary to what the other sidhe might believe, Fiona and her followers didn't receive the proprietorship of a noble house by bedding the High Lords and Ladies of Arcadia. No, Fiona and three trusted companions founded the house after a battle with a terrible redcap named "the Fachan" — probably related in some fashion to the Fachan's Brood now plaguing Caledonia. This Fachan was a giant cyclopean terror, the most frightening redcap ever known, with one leg, one arm and long-fanged teeth. It hopped around the highlands squashing mortals and fae, gnashing their flesh while the bodies still wriggled. Worse, the Fachan was in league with a fearsome pooka called the Each-Uisge (ekh-oosh-kiya). It looked like a coal-black Percheron most of the time, but heaven forbid the thing should reach a body of water. For then, it turned into a horse-demon with ruby eyes, razor-sharp hooves, with worms crawling out of its nostrils. The Each-Uisge gobbled up eagerly the Fachan's leavings, save for the victims' livers, which the water beast shunned. This foul pair ran amok through the hills, sometimes venturing into the lowlands for a snack.

The number of deaths grew, so the dreamers and fae called for help. The High King of Arcadia listened in earnest. He summoned the best knights of House Gwydion, splendid warriors all, to hunt down the two beasts and bring back their heads. The finest dozen came, but the king chose only four deemed worthy of the task. They never returned. The remaining eight clamored for the chance to avenge their comrades, but the king refused with a heavy heart. He promised them their vengeance, but after they'd assembled a force great and strong; the Fachan and the Each-Uisge were simply too vile for a small company to thwart. As word went out among war leaders of House Gwydion to muster their forces, Lady Fiona came to see the king in private. Fiona was a well-loved noble with loyal retainers in those days, but she was a minor player in Arcadian politics. With her were three beloved sidhe knights, all cousins and good friends: Sir Orpheus, a master of song and story; Sir Ardal, with his eagle eyes; and Dame Epona, Fiona's mistress of horse.

"Sire, we offer our services to you before the gathering of Gwydion's battle host," Fiona said after all greetings were exchanged.

"Good lady, I do not spurn your request," the king replied, "but I would be a poor ruler if I allowed you and your small band to go forth after these menaces while I denied Gwydion's folk chance to avenge their brethren."

"We will serve you as scouts and not engage the enemy until you arrive," Fiona explained. "By use of a gift from the Fianna, we will send word to you of the beasts' location. We will not attack until Gwydion's forces crest the battlefield; then, we shall join you in the victory." The king consented to this plan, sending Fiona and her three warriors off with ample provisions.

The small band tracked the Fachan and the monstrous pooka for days. Ardal finally found huge footprints and splinters of bone in the Strath Naver Valley of Caledonia. Hardly anything was left of the victims, perhaps a family of crofters, save some rotting livers. The Fachan's tracks were slightly older, indicating it had left the site before the Each-Uisge. Fiona's party surmised that the Fachan had done the killing, ate the bones and marrow while leaving the innards for the pooka, and then lumbered off to find more prey. The Each-Uisge had followed apparently at its leisure. Fiona grimly packed the livers into a reserve pouch, wondering why the Each-Uisge didn't eat them. The group came upon more and more remains, fresher each day, while moving quietly along the sloping highlands. Finally, just before sunset on the 20th day of their journey, Ardal spied the quarry. The Fachan and the Each-Uisge both lounged just over the next rise in a small vale surrounded by sloping hills on three sides. The monstrous pair were chewing gleefully the remains of some furry cattle. Orpheus lifted a golden horn to his lips and blew; the Fianna horn was silent to his companions, but the winds carried his notes across the lands, through the sea and air, and back to the High King. The clear tones sounded there, sending a siren's beacon to summon the warriors of Gwydion. The host ready and waiting, they plunged down great trods to encircle the valley cliffs that overlooked the monsters; the foul creatures had only one means of escaping the dead-end bend, and on that path stood the furious eight knights who demanded vengeance for their slain kin.

Spotting the shining warriors, the Fachan and the Each-Uisge roared in fury as one beast — and the mountains shook. Then a terrible fear settled over the sidhe warriors like a death-shroud. Their hearts, brave as they were, quivered. Mouths and lips turned dry as dust, and the terror of the mighty redcap Fachan struck all the host and their brave steeds. The Gwydion

warriors tried so hard to resist, but could not. They backed away in horror and loathing in unison. Some darted away outright; others just hid their faces. Weeping, the eight knights felt rage rise in their breasts, but they could not confront the Fachan, whose power was too strong. The knights pulled away to let the dread beasts pass unharmed. Fiona and her three companions stared in disbelief at the balking of the shining host.

"Why do you run?" Fiona shouted over the din of horses' hooves and clanking of armor. "Stop your lament and attack! They cannot escape this thrice-blocked vale! Slay them now so we may go home and celebrate our victory!" Even the king turned his face away, but he did not run. Fiona stared a moment longer, feeling nothing of fear, before turning to Epona, Orpheus and Ardal. They too stood their ground, confused at the other sidhe's fright. They hesitated no longer. The mistress of horse pulled forth a golden bridle, while the maker of songs began a soothing tune on his harp. The eagle-eyed knight drew his sword and stood alone to guard the musician and block the valley's exit. Fiona and Epona moved forward slowly. With an evil grin, the Each-Uisge charged these ladies, as the Fachan loped toward Orpheus and Ardal while wielding a spiked club in its one grotesque arm. The Fachan and Each-Uisge had found a taste for noble flesh after the slaughter of House Gwydion's four best knights. Tonight, they would feast indeed.

Epona leapt as the pooka struck at her with its sharp hooves, she landed gracefully on the beast's back. Before it could throw and trample her, she had leaned forward and slipped the bit of the golden bridle into the monster's mouth and the strands of chain and leather over its head, as only one of her great skill could do. The Each Uisge's jaws opened as Epona yanked hard on the reins. Choking at the fetid breath of the creature, Fiona ignored the sharp teeth ripping her hands as she shoved all of the livers from her pouch into the pooka's maw.

"Chew, swallow and devour, you mockery of a steed! Were not the livers of the dead good enough for you? Eat them now and perish forever!" Fiona cried. For the livers of any being were deadly to the Each-Uisge, as the beast knew well and Fiona had already surmised. It fought to spit out the deadly organs, but a portion nonetheless slid down its gullet. The Each-Uisge fell to its knees and died in misery. Epona, partly trapped beneath, managed to pull herself free, though her bones were nearly crushed. Fiona drew her sword with a mauled hand and sliced the pooka's neck clean through.

At the vale's entrance, Orpheus' sweet song gave new hope to the fear-entranced sidhe. They could not move forward, but watched as the Fachan thumped along, enraptured and made sluggish by the music. The beast towered over Ardal, even with his proud bearing, and bashed the knight with a strong swing from its spiked club. Ardal's shield blocked most of the blow, but his arm was shattered. He thrust upward with his sword with all his might in retaliation, toward the Fachan's bloodshot eye. Luck and skill were with Ardal that night, for his target was within his reach and the Fachan was too slowed by the harp music to dodge the blow. Ichre and aqueous humor jetted out of its eye as it screamed in agony. Moving swifter than most eyes could follow, Ardal then cut off the monster's

leg and made quick work of the rest of the redcap's misshapen form. The spell of terror was broken. While sorry they had not been the instruments of revenge, the remaining warriors of House Gwydion cheered for the triumph of Fiona and her companions. The king ordered the beasts' heads taken, then gathered the entire host around him to praise the victors. The king's personal healers cared for the grievous injuries of Epona and Ardal and for the lesser wounds of Fiona. When all had rested and enjoyed mead, the king had his herald summon forth the Lady Fiona and her knights.

"Good lords and ladies, this day you have proven your mettle. You have stood ground against fear's foul enchantments and fought with valor and honor. For this, I reward you with a noble house of your own, with sufficient lands and arms for those whom you recognize as your family. The House Fiona's blazon shall be a lion *passant reguardant argent*. This device symbolizes what I have today witnessed with my own eyes: Red for Fiona's spilled blood and her courage, a lion for Epona's mighty leap, silver for the strings of Orpheus' harp, and the arms' main charge always guarding for Ardal's watchful eyes. Go now and enjoy the fruits of your estate."

All the wild ardor you might expect commenced then. So while you might remember we of House Fiona as seekers of earthly pleasures, never forget that we were founded through our might as warriors — always defiant and never knowing true fear in battle.

The Sundering

Simply because Fiona had no sidhe in her retinue on Earth doesn't mean the Dream Lords shunned the Waking Lands. True, this was a time of what Professor Edgewick calls "hierarchy," when humans and other beings set up centers of power in cities, where Banality spread its dark tendrils. Likewise, he refers to the Sundering as a chilly autumn. The good Professor fails to mention that autumns are also beautiful in their days of gold. Perhaps we alone of the noble houses found much to treasure during this time — this swansong of the old ways. As humans built kingdoms and empires, they fought great battles. For us, war is the finest meat and drink. What greater glory could there be than a valiant death saving your oathmates? Many of House Fiona dreamed of honorable death on a field of blood, while gladly fighting alongside heroes such as the Fianna and the Kievan Rus. Most got exactly what they wanted. Perhaps *because* we saw darkness approaching, we threw ourselves into living full-force. Some fae wasted this time in silly squabbles between Seelie and Unseelie Courts. Such foolishness! We are inherently fickle and changing creatures; denying this is wrong. Rather than supping at the table of life and glory, they preferred to quibble over philosophy. Thus, when times became darker still, they ran willy-nilly for the safety of Arcadia. I am proud to say that we of House Fiona stayed until the bitter end.

The Shattering

Eventually, things changed even too much for us, though. The Banality and hate waxing among the humans made our hearts ache, and yes, I do believe we felt it more sharply than most. Truth be told, many of House Gwydion wouldn't feel heartbreak if it bit them on their royal purple bottoms. Or if it did, they'd never show it. We saw people dying, hardly recognizable under the swollen blue pustules of the Black Death. The fae waged an internecine battle that brought sorrow to everyone, all for the precious resource of Glamour. House Fiona was fortunate because of our good relations with the commoners; we were able to share their freeholds where other houses weren't welcome. We have never forgotten their kindness to us in those terrible days. The most fortunate among us went through the last gateways to Arcadia; the few staying behind threw themselves on the mercy of the commoners and were hidden away. Many a noble of House Fiona handed over her crown and scepter to trusted commoners and bid them good fortune in their rule. Other houses didn't dream of stooping to such measures, and much disharmony resulted 600 years later.

The Interregnum

I call this period of history by the name commoners use rather than the Twilight Time because I learned my stories of these days from certain eshu and satyrs; as it was *their* time, I'll respect their tradition. The common kith fought alone for survival in a banal world, even while managing our lands with skill and aplomb. They took mortal forms and huddled together for survival. Yet, highpoints came, such as the Renaissance and the Romantic period of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. What fun the gay '90s and roaring '20s must have been! Though we'll never know, I daresay a lot of sidhe of House Fiona would've been running liquor and hanging out in speakeasies with their commoner brethren.

The Resurgence

Like most of my ilk, my return to this world is blurred and confused; I came into myself at a high school prom when I was 16 in mortal years. Fortunately, it was a time when people were freely giving of physical love, mind-altering substances and transportation. Shedding my frilly pink dress and white bedroom furniture, I left home to join a motley of commoners in the District of Columbia. We journeyed to then fledgling renaissance fairs and camp-outs up and down the eastern seaboard. Some kith looked upon me with suspicion, but I generally found a warm welcome in many freeholds — once I'd mentioned my house. Soon after, word trickled to us from Caledonia that all those of House Fiona were summoned to the Kingdom of Three Hills for the wake of Lady Fiona. Understandably, I found more than I bargained for with the tale and Fiona's charge. Returning home to the States, I looked forward to continuing my roving. What I found instead were days of war.

The Accordance War and Beyond

Recall, if you will, the manner in which most Fiona sidhe left behind their lands and titles. We had the foresight in the Shattering to bid goodwill to the commoners, leaving them our treasures and tools. When we returned, we *asked* for the privilege of once more ruling those fiefs. The commoners welcomed us in most cases and gave back what they had held in trust. We didn't stride in, demand the freeholds we'd abandoned and march all the commoners out at swordpoint; some nobles of other houses were relatively kind and gentle. But, most sidhe saw their rulership and right of demesne as part of some sort of natural order. That's amusing! There's no such thing as a natural order, for in love, there is no absolute rule. We of House Fiona, on the other hand, *earned* the trust, affection and respect of the commoners. When we saw how rudely and cruelly some other sidhe treated the common folk, that tore things apart. Many members of House Fiona refused to fight against the commoners, though they had no heart to battle the sidhe, either. Despite our love of combat, most of us just kept a low profile and waited for the politics to get sorted out. Some of Fiona's ilk actually fought on the side of the commoners against the other noble houses; the skill of our archers is the stuff of legends 'til this day. Several of the house served as neutral messengers between sides, or as healers for all forces. But when peace finally came, I think the nobles had a goodly amount of respect for the commoners. You'll now find the strongest and most prosperous courts in Concordia ruled by Fiona sidhe who welcome and cherish their common kith. Observe Queen Mab in the Kingdom of Apples, Queen Laurel in the Kingdom of Northern Ice and Queen Aeron in the Kingdom of Pacifica.

Looking to the future, my personal belief is that this time of peace and calm is just a respite before a greater storm. We Fiona are not complacent, admittedly; nor are we afraid to acknowledge that the potential for great good and terrible ill exists within us all. Things have been a little too quiet for too long for my tastes, and I am among the more moderate of my house. Whether from politicos such as Duke Selim, terrorists like Count Gut Splicer or errant fops like Sir Sathar, change is coming. Woe to any who tries to stop House Fiona from stirring the pot!

I Wanna Live a Life of Danger

Usually, Fiona Kithain exhibit daredevil ways in feckless affairs of the heart. If one of this crowd desires someone, she'll have her way, regardless if the target of love is dead, undead, or brimming with sin or rage. In fact, many Fiona view impossible love trysts as challenges, and they'll always rise to the occasion.

Numerous house members engage in frenetic physical activity — they love risky sports like skydiving, parasailing and hang gliding. Likewise, they'll take most any opportunity to indulge (usually *overindulge)* in sex, drugs, and liquor. Nothing can keep a determined Fiona away from his pleasure.

Such habits are problematic, of course, when the underage Kithain in question gets caught by the mundane authorities....

Love's Whirl of Gaiety: Society

Love like a sudden breeze tumbling on the oak-tree leaves left my heart trembling.

— Sappho, "The Moment I Saw Her"

Practically all Fiona are Romanticists; they gleefully indulge in courtly love and build elaborate games and rituals around all affairs of the heart. Fiona courts are places of beauty and passion, often filled with playful intrigues, secret trysts and forbidden loves. We're forever changing our allegiances among the so-called Orders of the Heart, loosely structured Romanticist clubs. These include the Order of Shallot, personifying love unobtained; the Ascetics, lovers of romance's ideals rather than carnality; and the Cerenaics, those who pursue the excesses of love in all its forms. General trends indicate that Fiona grumps migrate toward the Order of Shallot, while wilders prefer the Ascetics. Several of our many Unseelie enjoy the company of the Cerenaics, though many Seelie Fiona engage in similar excesses and taboo loves. (For more details on these groups, see **Nobles: The Shining Host.**)

House Fiona has countless mottos. An extremely popular one is: If it feels good, do it. Another is: The heart is the dumbest muscle in the body. Most of us interpret these mottos to mean that there's no limit to what you should do, so be happy and don't worry about consequences. We'll try anything at least once, and if it involves great risk and situations with chance, so much the better.

These basic principles (I hesitate to call them philosophies — that sounds too structured) guide our entire social system. Many of our so-called secret societies arise because a group of Fiona want to band together to fulfill a common desire; the hedonistic Boytoys and Sir Sathar's knights are two examples. The bottom line is that emotion guides everything we do, from making love to waging war. Any of House Fiona who refute this simple truth are fooling themselves.

Commoners

Unlike other noble houses, House Fiona has a large number of affiliated, and even titled, commoners. Kith doesn't matter — guts, glory and love of life do. If a commoner performs unprecedented acts of bravery (or astonishing feats of love), a sidhe House Fiona ruler may reward do-gooder with a title. This individual's actions *do* have to be pretty extraordinary, though. The downside to this is that lands seldom accompany the title; thus, non-titled commoners jibe the new noble for being uppity while the landed sidhe often look down their long noses at the upstarts. More typical is for the deserving commoner to be granted status as an oathmate of the house: He gets to claim rights of friendship and aid without having to put up with much of the negative social stigma. Of course, expectations work both ways....

The Seelie Court

We of House Fiona take the Seelie Code, love conquers all, into our hearts and souls; love is who and what we are. Seelie Fiona expend great amounts of time and money on whatever person or pastime that's most recently struck their fancy; if a Fiona sidhe falls in love, she'll spare no expense or effort in wooing her new object of affection. Most Seelie in the house are Modernists, believing the world as it is now must be dealt with and that living in the distant past is a mistake. A small number are Reformers; they follow a moderate path between the Modernists and Traditionalists while practicing just rulership by the will of the people. A few rare Traditionalists also exist among the ranks of the Seelie. These folks, both sidhe and commoner, think the sidhe rule by the will of the Tuatha de Danann, and that right makes might.

Unlike most Seelie, those of House Fiona don't worry much about preserving justice, stability and tradition; instead, they reserve their energies to punish oathbreakers, cowards and traitors. They delight in making the punishments fair, yet fitting to the crimes. This isn't to say traditions such as the Escheat aren't important, it's just that curbing dishonor is of much *more* import. Fiona of the Seelie Court tend to remain true to each other until death, despite petty squabbles or even bloody disagreements. I've heard many a tale of two lovers parting in anger only to reunite years later when one needs a protector. Our ire and hatred can burn as brightly as our love, but we don't desert our own in times of trouble, be they noble or commoner. Such is the nature of duty and honor to the Fiona Seelie.

The Unseelie Court

I am bewildered by the other nobles who think there's a crime in being Unseelie. In all honesty, the lines between Seelie and Unseelie in our house are sometimes a bit blurred. The major difference is that the Seelie strive for the duty and honor of the house, not the individual, while the Unseelie contend more for the power of the self. Also, while all house members seek out rich experiences and new sensations, the Unseelie really push the envelope. A Seelie might enjoy spending the day engaged in sexual play with toys, drugs and multiple partners; an Unseelie stretches this into a week and adds sadomasochism and a little torture, just for fun. They unleash the wild side that rests in all of us and don't bother with any trappings of decorum. By denying that we have dual natures, we're lying to ourselves. The Unseelie are at least brutally honest in this respect.

The Shadow Court

Truly, I sympathize with many of their philosophies. Negotiate with the more unsavory Prodigals and Gallain? Very well, there is some wisdom in that. Overthrow the Seelie Court? A bit radical, but I can't deny that a shake-up in the current power structure might be exciting. Spread chaos? Again, we of House Fiona can't abide stagnation. These outlooks don't bother most of us too much.

On the other hand, cold-blooded murder (unless you're avenging the death of a loved one) is heinous. Using cold iron weapons is terrifying to all Kithain and absolutely wrong. Death in battle, where your foe stands on equal ground and you both have a chance for honor, is acceptable. The Shadow Court, however, seems to endorse back-stabbing and the devouring of human flesh. If you doubt this, listen to some yarns about the infamy of the Shadow Court, such as the story of Etienne duBois, The Face of Terror. Legend has it he murdered

dozens by cold iron in the French Revolution. If you are even more brave, hark at the darker tales of pooka who turn into bloodthirsty monsters or mad sluagh who consume innocent children. Threads of truth run through these nightmarish accounts, and even those of us who cherish change and freedom desist at such foulness.

Samhain: Fiona's Descent

When someone mentions Samhain, we of House Fiona feel our throats tighten. For this is the night where we enjoin duality and face our worst fears, when our Unseelie natures gnaw through our hearts and souls to escape and wreak mischief. Most Fiona purposely indulge their Unseelie passion at other times of the year because of Samhain; we think of those other days as pressure valves because waiting until Samhain carries great risks. But, because we like danger, most of us *do* wait, sometimes to our sorrow.

The strongest and most Seelie among us treat Samhain as a challenge — to resist the calling of our Unseelie ways on October 31st takes tremendous strength of will. These folk don't necessarily deny the duality of their natures and often gladly indulge in their darker sides on other nights. It's just that they believe they gain more esteem through resistance on the night most sacred to the Unseelie. They're the G. Gordon Liddy's of the house, I suppose.

Others of House Fiona revel utterly in Samhain. I was among their number this past year, apparently. I certainly don't remember what happened, but when I returned home one day in mid-November, I found a black parchment with silver writing lying on my dresser. What I quickly jotted down in my notebook surely is no more than a reflection of a shadow's dream, for I read the parchment only once, thoroughly, before it crumbled to dust. The following is the best recollection I have of its contents.

Proof? I have none, save that my token bears a light bloodstain and a bit of grease. I've found no word of any Kithain, noble or commoner, going by the name of Sir Aedward of Glastonbury. Then, there's the matter of the dart-throwing contest. Sir Percy's sweet little cherubs haven't come *near* me for months now, though they aren't telling why. Let's just say I would pay dearly to know what happened that dark night.

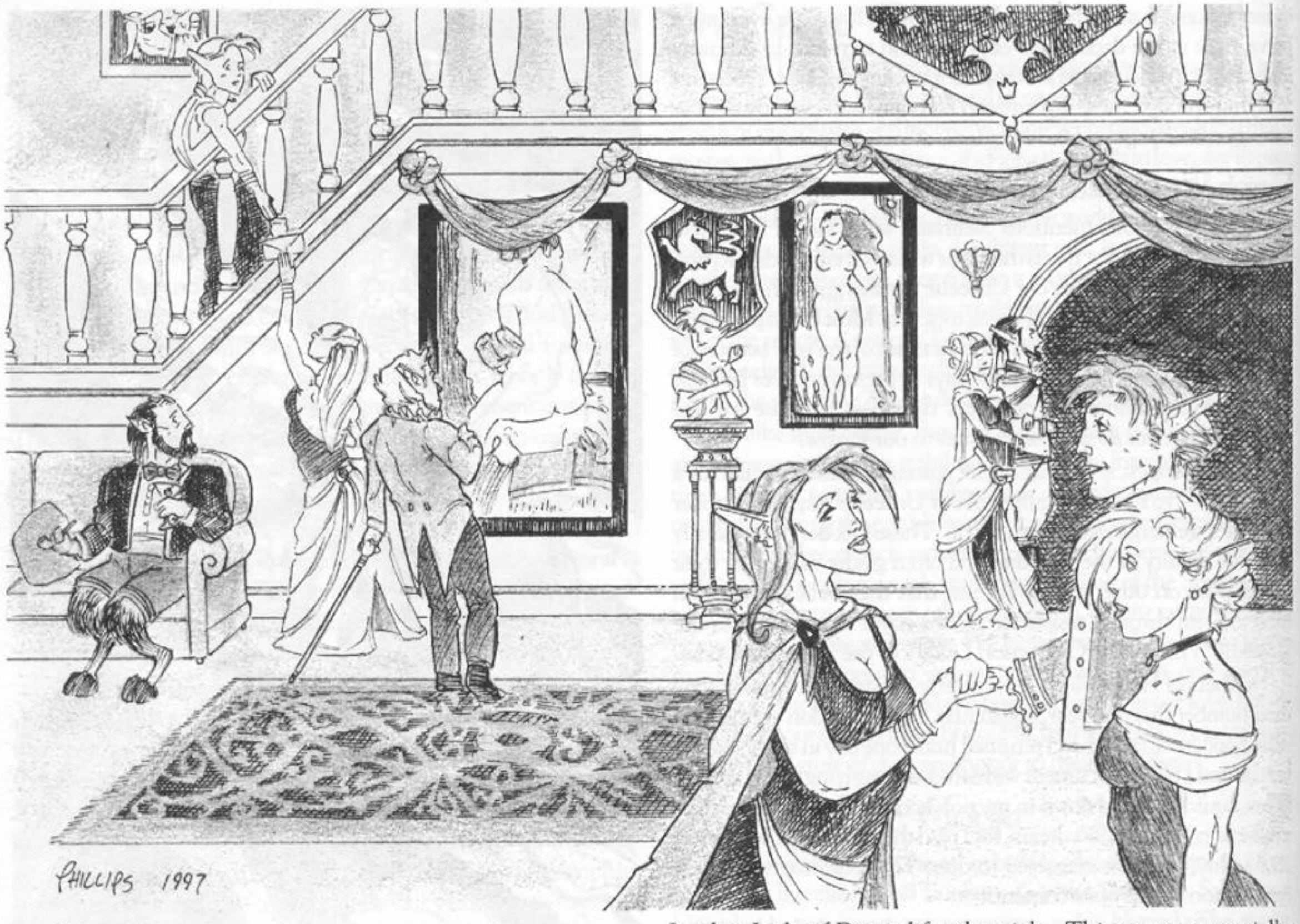
My Dearest Lady Julia,

'Twas an honor of uncommon sorts to bear your token Samhain evening. What fortune that you fell into my lap just before the Criss-Cross-Crash Journey. So, I suppose I should keep my side of the bargain, not that I have much choice. Did anyone ever tell you how lovely you are when you're shrieking down geasa? Positively ravishing! Too bad you don't remember what happened after I wrecked that nice Jag XJ-6.

So here for your amusement is the program of delights we Fiona of the Shadow Court enjoy during Samhain. These parts of the pageant are our house's particular variations on ancient Shadow Court customs. I've not told you all, since your request was rather vague, and naturally the events vary from year to year. But maybe this will whet your appetite to come play with us again. My squires were so taken with your suggestion of the dart-throwing contest that they've declared you eternally welcome. Of course, Sir Percy's poor chimerical cherubs may not be speaking to you for a long time, since you nailed them right in their rosy little bums. I do love to see flying, crying babies, don't you?

Until we meet again,

Sir Aedward of Glastonbury (Crazy Aeddie)



Descent:

Some Seelie hide themselves away on Samhain, for they know how deliciously tempting it is to slide into their Unseelie natures. We sometimes take the party to them, if they're too cowardly and ashamed to come out on their own and free their darker passions. Being a tempter is quite fun; you'll never have a better opportunity to mess with someone's mind. One bit of anger, one glimpse of a Samhain ceremony, one sniff of those special candies the satyrs and boggans sell, and chances are — the Seelie snobs lose it. But the truth is, dear girl, that the vast majority of Seelie Fiona run into Samhain with open arms, yourself included.

Lover's FaVades:

Some of the Shadow Court might have mock reenactments of famous lovers, but we Fiona do it right. Many of us take on aspects of history's most doomed paramours, such as Romeo and Juliet, Tristan and Iseult, or even Bonnie and Clyde. Thus disguised, we proceed to act out the drama in detail to its conclusion, along with the violent deaths using chimerical weapons. Some of the newbies get disguised and play bait-and-switch with other people's lovers, but that's rather amateur for us. Hell's bells, we dabble in that kindergarten stuff any day of the year, so why be such a shrinking violet on Samhain?

Court of Fools:

This is actually a bit lighter event for Fiona of the Shadow Court than other nobles, since we're on good terms with the commoners generally. Yes, dear, even the Unseelie Fiona! All the commoners of a freehold choose one of their own to be a Lord or Lady of Discord for the night. This person essentially becomes the host for a down and dirty roast of the nobility, usually against other houses, but sometimes against the Fiona. Most folks really dress up for this in the most bizarre costumes they can imagine. The grimmer and weirder, the better.

Feasts and Famines:

After court concludes, there's a huge feast followed by a food fight. Before the fight, though, we stuff ourselves until we vomit, then we start all over again. That's good for a lot of laughs before the cream pies start flying. Some of the more perverse folks will capture a human, bind him fast and put him into a giant bowl of cold chocolate pudding. Then the feasters eat *just* until they get to his naked flesh, though the victim is led to believe otherwise. Any mortal who manages to stay conscious 'til the bitter end gets to join in the revels as a welcome (enchanted) guest.

Bonfire of Vanities:

At midnight, we light blazing bonfires, and if any Garou are around, this is when they join the party. Some Unseelie confess their greatest sins around the fire, but we Fiona put a twist on it: We proclaim what things we'd *like* to do but haven't. It's still a confession of sorts, for denying desires or suppressing a wild hair is a near-crime to the Unseelie Fiona. A group of judges decide who has screwed up the worst by not giving in to their more barbaric cravings and that individual gets punished in whatever manner the judges see fit. Enough said on that.

Revenge Served Cold:

Before dawn and the Mists arrive, we swear oaths of vengeance on those who have wronged us the previous year. We state the extent to which we'll punish the offenders, and we do keep our word. If we think we can't, we leave the price of restitution unspoken. Revenge may mean a season in Hell, but we don't shirk on that account. These are the passions that will drive us until the next Samhain.

Secret Societies and Social Clubs

The whole concept probably gives House Eiluned a collective heart attack, but many constituents of House Fiona find keeping a secret rather difficult; we're naturally inclined to be talkative and forthright. So I hedge a bit in calling these organizations "secret." I'm sure there are *truly* forbidden cadres and leagues within the house, particularly among the Shadow Court, but I'm not privy to them. Not yet, anyway.

The Knights of Sathar

The Knights of Sathar are an order of chivalry founded by, oddly enough, a satyr named Sathar. During the days of the Resurgence and the Accordance War, this wilder gathered and trained his quartet of commoners — these folk fought so honorably that when peace came, Queen Mab of the Kingdom of Apples knighted the four and awarded them a freehold in upstate New York. Today, the order's ranks hold both common kith and sidhe. Requirements for membership are strict; unanimous vote is required for admission. Sir Sathar and the knights meet on Pennons (October 4th) each year to discuss candidates, possible criteria, including preeminence on the battlefield, honor and chivalry, devotion to courtly love, game-playing, dancing, archery, scholarship, singing and storytelling. Symbols of the order are peacock feathers worn on silver helms and burgundy cloaks embroidered with the silver lion of House Fiona.

The Boytoys

Members of this elite little clique are the quintessential beautiful people among House Fiona, both male and female. Most Boytoys are sidhe, but the group has a fair number of satyrs, eshu and pooka as well. Needless to say, the sexual appetites of these folk are legendary. To gain membership, all a hopeful has to do is pull off some kind of solo performance (stark naked) at a Boytoy gathering. The members assembled then vote. The candidate gets admitted by majority. Of course, initiation ceremonies involve drunken orgies, ridiculous dares or blindfolded duels with live steel. Has anyone perished during these, ahem, rites? If so, the Boytoys certainly don't mention it. The latest initiate, a pooka florist named Wally, danced and sang in the buff juggling his very own chimerical fruits and vegetables. That sounds pretty tame until you consider he was reenacting *The Story of O*.

Loki's Brood

Loki's Brood are a group of Fiona sidhe politicos, several of whom serve in the Parliament of Dreams. You might deem them all domestic opposition gurus —whatever seems to be the will of the majority, they'll oppose it. Duke Selim is their charismatic leader and generally sets the tone for other group members. There is no formal membership; all one has to do is wrangle an invitation from the duke or another regular and show up for a meeting, which takes place in a salon at Caer Flamingo, or in some sumptuous hotel suite before a meeting of the Parliament of Dreams, or at a large festival such as Carnival (February 28th). Any court or political viewpoint is welcome, although members expect newcomers to have a clue and to make quality conversation. Outsiders usually have one of two opinions: Loki's Brood is either an extension of the Shadow Court in disguise or just a big joke from House Fiona. Only the regulars know the truth.

Maker's Markers

The Maker's Markers are more of a guild than a club, welcoming any who have passions for arts and crafts. Above all other loves, they treasure beautiful objects of art and extend this definition to cover variations such as fine meals, rare maps, ancient books and even clever computer games. Membership in the guild is for life, provided the member attends and exhibits at one show per year. These shows are gala social affairs, bringing in heaps of dreamers and Glamour for the attendees (and though the fae may not realize it, their little fetes are also attended by the Toreador). While most members construct their own exhibits, some act as patrons for others. This way, both get inducted into the guild. Unlike House Dougal where the *process* of crafting is all-important, the Maker's Markers believe that only the *end product* matters. Thus, while some exhibits are masterworks lovingly constructed over years, many are objects produced in a burst of inspiration the day before the show. Favored crafts seem to be weaving, painting, photography, vintning and sculpture. Sidhe are plentiful in the guild, though there's a strong representation of boggans and nockers as well.

Passion's Many Faces

While love, lust and romance are the usual indulgences for House Fiona, they certainly aren't the only pleasures. Passion comes in many forms, and that felt for a paramour is one facet only of a complex prism. Fiona are also driven by love of beauty in art, song and nature. Duty and honor often replace physical love as chief achievements in a Fiona's book of days. And because of the overwhelming martial prowess of House Gwydion, some observers forget that the Fiona are fierce warriors who love the heat and fury of battle, too. The gist is that stereotypes don't always bear true; lumping all of House Fiona together as a bunch of sex-crazed hedonists oversimplifies a complex and diverse family of Kithain.

The Escheat

The Escheat is extremely important to us, of course, though we have a more liberal interpretation of its words than other houses. House Fiona, despite its love of freewill and of individual power, needs a framework of behavior to work from. While many rules were meant to be broken, some are timeless and universal. Hence, the Escheat.

The Right of Demesne —

True, a lord is the master of his own demesne and all vassals should be loyal. By the same token, a lord should love and safeguard his subjects, even when they displease him. His role is not only one of protector, but also of friend. Loyalty and respect walk a two-way street.

Reality:

This right works well until a fit of the glooms takes us or we get so enraptured in a new love affair that we let court business descend *too* much into chaos. When the local pooka set up a mockery of court in your absence, things probably have gone a bit too far.

The Right to Dream —

Mortals are not endless wellsprings of Glamour; it is wrong inherently to take it from them by force. As with the treatment of commoners, we find it more pleasant and fair to befriend mortals and engage in Reverie. Rapture is much more difficult since it requires considerable time and discipline.

Reality:

Unseelie Fiona are not at all above harvesting Glamour illegally. Some even copycat their distant cousins in House Leanhaun by inspiring, then burning out, mortals. Seelie Fiona, conversely, detest Ravaging and seldom indulge in it even in dire emergencies.

The Right of Ignorance —

Humans, for all their Glamour, are creatures of Banality. They can't be trusted just to know the facts and cope with them. Instead, many deny our existence or, worse, hunt us and slay us. Keep your fae nature a secret from the mortals unless they are kinain and known to you.

Reality:

While it's best never to reveal your true seeming, accidents happen. If possible, making the mortal forget or believe she's seen your face in a dream is the kindest and least invasive cure. Even Unseelie Fiona don't advocate murder or violence against humans who know too much, though they're perhaps a bit cruder in messing with the person's memories.

The Right of Rescue —

Our passion for love and our love of honor demand that we *always* respect this right, even if such actions impart great danger to us. It matters not if the prisoner of Banality is an enemy; do all that you can to recover them and do it quickly. We can't afford to lose anymore Kithain.

Reality:

Nothing makes all members of House Fiona angrier than tales of commoners murdering newly arrived nobles. Since the Fiona usually treat commoners as equals, they expect friendship in return. A few radical organizations like the Ranters have earned House Fiona's ire for flagrantly disrespecting the Right of Rescue. Needless to say, the Fiona rescue anyone from Banality, noble or commoner, if it is within their power.

The Right of Safe Haven —

This law is nearly as important as the Right of Rescue. Once again, even strangers and enemies should be granted hospitality, even if it is for just three days. Treat your guests as you would like to be treated. Explain to them the customs of your home, but be patient with their manners, too. When their visit is done, be sure to bid them safe journey and give them what provisions they need.

Reality:

Fiona uphold this law to the letter and have a reputation as superb hosts...for the requisite amount of time, that is. After three days, if an enemy won't leave, we're not above booting them out the door.

The Right of Life —

Killing is wrong, especially if the death is that of a sidhe. Period. It's not that we're so superior to the commoners, it's just that after the first death, there is no other. Or at least, we don't think so. Murder is a loathsome crime that should be punished to the fullest extent of our laws.

Reality:

Hmmm. In a perfect world, I could say that we Fiona have never killed except in the heat of battle. I'd be a liar. Our passion and fury sometimes drive us to strike down opponents in anger, perhaps unjustly, perhaps not. Most of these killings resulted from jealousy or when our lovers had been harmed. We are willing, though, to take with a brave face whatever punishment the Uasal Court deems fitting.

Oaths of House Fiona

House Fiona considers oaths to be deadly serious; aside from love and lovers, oaths may be the *only* things it takes so seriously. Because the Fiona are so wound up in passion and ardor, virtually all of their oaths somehow encompass devotion and affection, with penalties for failing the oath striking where it hurts most: on their hearts. A noble of Fiona who has broken an oath is the most pitiful of creatures, usually bitter, lonely and deep in despair.

Here is an example of an oath for an arranged marriage. As a matter of course, carnal fidelity is not part of the swearing.

Oath of Betrothal

Lady/Lord, to you I give all the affections and warmth of my heart that these may ease you across miles and years to come. I will be your friend, your companion and your mate as you desire. In desolate hours shall I keep you company and on the field of battle bear your token with pride and honor. Never shall you be lonely; never shall your tears go untouched by my hand. Ere my bond be broken, no longer shall my loins find pleasure; no longer shall my heart find gladness in carnal pleasure. May the teeth of Fiona's silver lion tear me asunder if I betray your trust!

Fostering

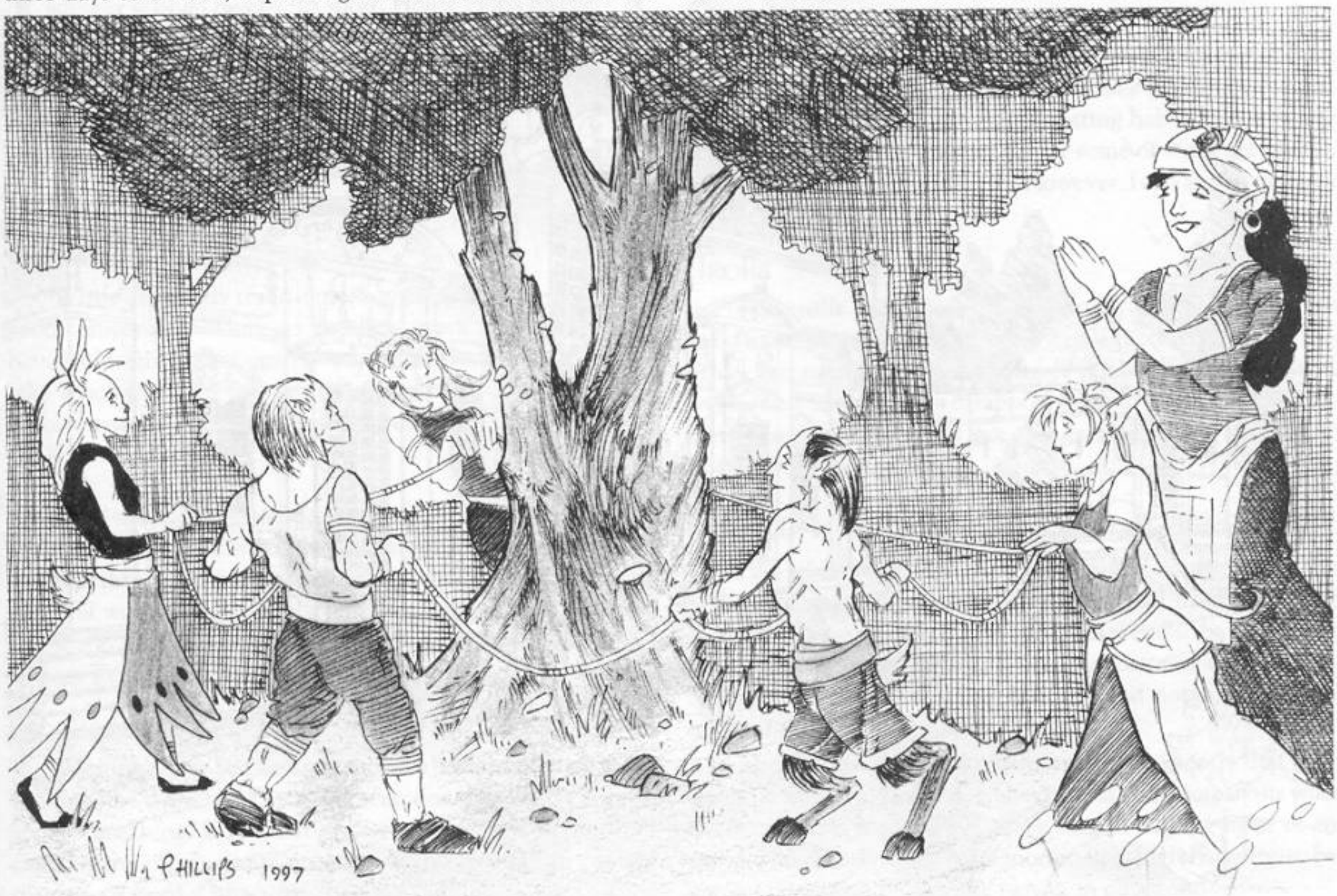
Youth deserves ample opportunity for frolic and folly, and so we view fostering as a time for plenty of games and silliness. Too quickly do demands of love and war descend on us, so let the new ones enjoy themselves while they can. During this crucial time, Fiona nobles like to encourage childlings of all kith to play together and learn each others' weaknesses and strengths; therefore, they can aid each other in future need. This tradition likewise shows sidhe childlings the value of common kith. Of course we teach the Escheat and other crucial facts of life in Kithain society, but fosterage should be fun and not a series of dreary lessons.

Often, Fiona lands contain both nobles' households and commoners' motleys. The fosterling is given to an older Kithain whose temperament and skills best suit the youngster. It usually works out that sidhe stick with sidhe, but not always. Satyrs, trolls and even pooka have occasionally been guardians for Fiona childlings (though I've never heard of a redcap being asked to serve). If a commoner is chosen as guardian, a sidhe acts as a secondary mentor, usually giving the lucky commoner some reward and making the childling an heir.

At the end of a year and a day, we have grand celebrations for Saining. The Fior-Righ is attended only by those who are in liege to the particular Fiona noble overseeing the ritual, and yes, this sometimes includes commoners (I can hear the other houses gasping in horror). The celebrations afterward, though, are open to all freehold members. These revels last anywhere from three days to a week, depending on the constitutions of the party-goers. While we certainly *don't* let childlings indulge in more adult habits, neither do we keep a secret that we obtain pleasure from sex and potent substances — honesty is important in these matters. By shielding youngsters from the truth about bodily delights, we do them a disservice. So they learn about the innate sensual natures of House Fiona early on. Later, when they reach physical maturity, we take great pride in showing them the wonders of sexual and sensual fulfillment.

A recent tradition has come about in our house called First Night. This is the physical initiation of the fully mature wilder into the world of the sensual. To be chosen to take a young Fiona sidhe through the first tastes of love is a tremendous honor; this is a night both remember for many years to come. The local noble (who chooses the young Fiona's first lover) sometimes throws an enormous banquet on the night of the celebration and a huge brunch the next day. Many boggans compete for the privilege of cooking the feast and decorating the love chamber. The sweetest occasions, though, are those where neither of the young Kithain have sampled the delectations of love. Much teasing ensues, but mostly in good taste.

We obviously teach our young ones about much more than physical pleasures. Music, dance, works of art, heraldry, fine food — all are part of learning. Likewise, we teach martial skills, including war tactics, archery, fencing and horsemanship. And if they get training scars or bruises, what of it? Pain is part of life. Children are tough, energetic creatures, and to deny them a chance to run and scream is banal in our eyes. Show me a child who has to stay neat and clean all the time, and I'll show you one miserable kid.



Relations with Other Houses

For all our exasperation and occasional eye-rolling, we get along well with the other houses, in general. A few have even asked for our advice on dealing with commoners. Most could stand a little mud in their faces, but we'll do our best to support each other, especially in troublesome times. In days of peace, we'll do what we can to bring a little joy into their dull lives.

House Dougal

Lighten up, for goodness sake! You make all these items of beauty and grace, yet you never step outside your workshops to enjoy the things you've built. How can you find perfection in your crafts when you've no idea what place they have in the world around you? Moreover, there are more kinds of virtue than that found in *things*. Have you ever sampled excellence in the flesh? Is your lack of physical perfection what drives you to seek precision in your devices? Your bodily disabilities don't matter a whit to us; we're more worried about the tension of your libido, frankly. Our advice is to take a respite and come over to one of our freeholds. You might find your work a little easier afterwards.

House Eiluned

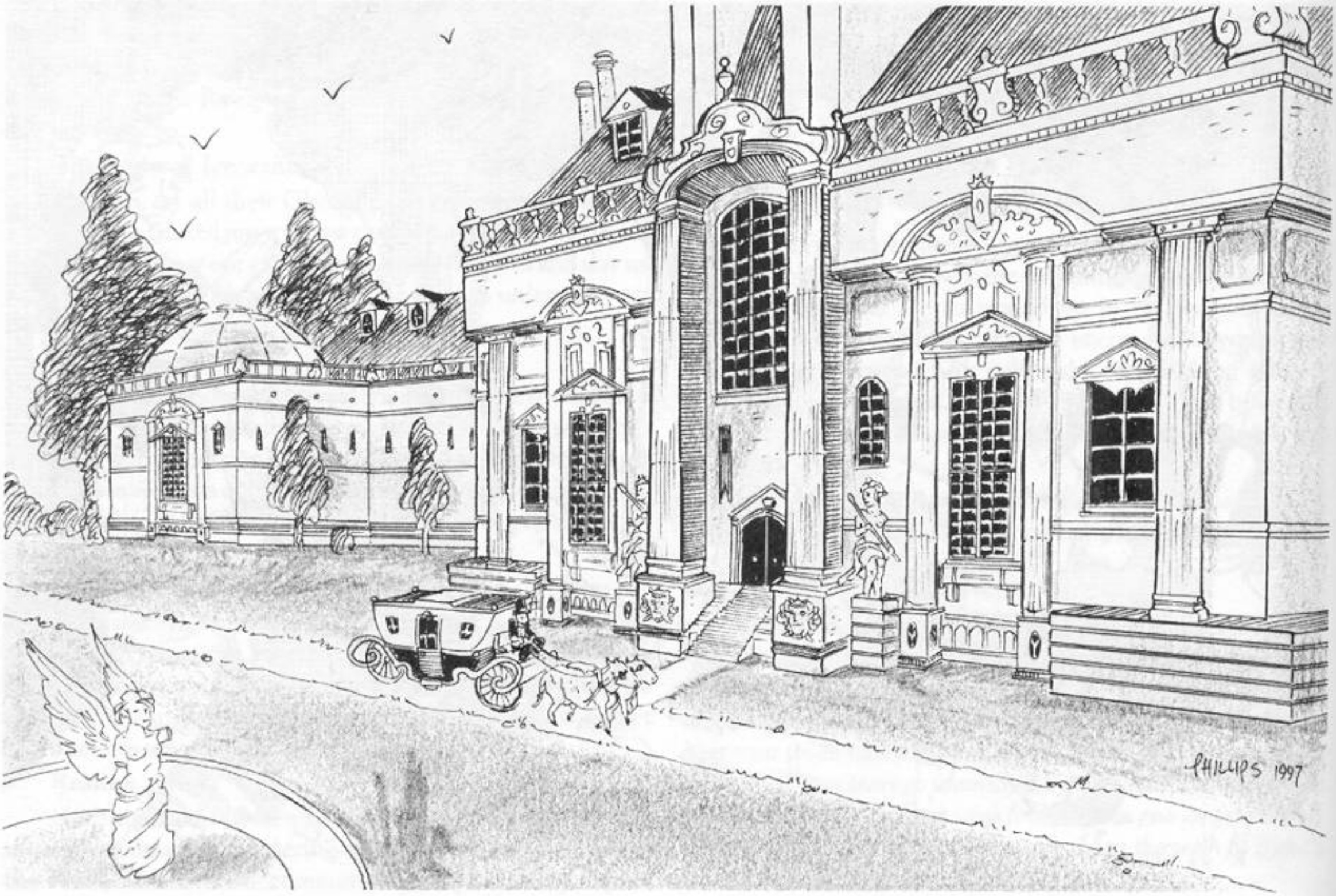
Our relationship with these keepers of secrets is of quintessential love and hate. Their curiosity and mystery draw us close, yet their close-mouthed, conspiratorial ways push us apart. We're honest and forthright, and these things are seemingly anathema to the Eiluned. Still, the Eiluned can certainly stir up trouble when things get dull; bring one into a sleepy court, and things get lively right away. Their adroit magic and arcane knowledge make them useful allies, but given a choice between trusting an Eiluned sidhe and any commoner, I'd choose the latter every time.

House Gwydion

Stuff and nonsense! Don't touch that! Stodgy up! Get off my hem! *Geez*! There's no house more uptight than House Dougal, these folks have that renown. But, we give credit where it is due: Nobles of House Gwydion are ordinarily trustworthy and honorable. The fact that they occasionally give in to base desires means there's some small hope for them. But overall, they're arrogant, pompous snobs who think they know best for everyone. Have they ever seen the sorrow of a commoner who has worked hard all her life, only to lose her freehold to an upstart noble? I doubt it. On the other hand, be sure to not anger them overmuch, for if we have equals in battle, they definitely number among warriors of House Gwydion.

House Liam

Mortals have an irresistible allure, and we believe Ravaging and cruelty to humans is wrong. House Liam's quest to care for mortals is virtuous and just, if hopeless. We've found great wisdom in their words and generally welcome their pitiable ilk to our freeholds when they need shelter. However, be aware of some inherent risks: First, their Banality is dangerous occasionally, and secondly, they *are* oathbreakers. Some Fiona find this highly offensive. Treat members of House Liam well, but always with a modicum of caution.



Love, Marriage and Other Indoor Sports

Fiona are experts in the art of love, both the courtly and the true. Even from the time they are childlings, most Fiona are in some flux of passion. As young fae, this is puppy love, usually a crush on a house Mentor or the most popular person at court. Older childlings moving into wilderhood have infatuations rising to a peak of passion, then falling into a pit of despair (just like any teenager). Many Fiona grumps, having flitted from affair to affair in youth, settle with a single partner for their last years of life. Largely as an act of self-interest rather than an upholding of tradition, many House Fiona nobles quickly betroth their youths in arranged marriages. The marriages rarely take place; though, sometimes the two fae find true love with each other, which is a particularly joyous occasion. Regardless, the arrangement satisfies convenience and decorum. A betrothed fae is never without an escort for celebrations, never alone in times of sorrow and never without a love-token on the field of battle. Conjugal fidelity is not regularly expected before or after marriage, although certain Fiona craft their own special oaths to make constancy part of the relationship (such as Baron Arawn and Baroness Ellawyn). More often, the fae couple appear together on social occasions while each partner has his or her own lover and courtly admirer stashed nearby. In short, House Fiona has perfected the talent of having its cakes and eating them, too.

Views on Other Kith

Deeds, not words and seemings, that's how we judge other Kithain. But on a deeper level, we do prefer some kith over others.

Boggans

While dreadfully traditional, boggans are trustworthy and good companions. They do excellent work and many Fiona households employ a boggan as seneschal. The best among them take special care in creating exquisite feasts and sumptuous decor for our revels. They're always well worth the price.

Eshu

Of all the other kith, eshu indeed understand our love of chills and thrills. Many close friendships have formed between the Fiona and eshu through sharing dangerous exploits. Next to satyrs, these beautiful wanderers are most numerous among the commoners who share our beds. Much like us, they also like exploring their dual natures. Every Fiona should have an eshu affair once in her life.

Nockers

We Fiona have bad days and fall into hollows of despair, but nothing like these fae! I've never seen one that wasn't grumpy about something. If you can say something witty about their crafts, many of which are unique and interesting, they might spare you a word. Otherwise, they're a dull lot.

Pooka

What sidhe hasn't been the brunt of a pooka joke? I've certainly had my share, ranging from pies in the face to ruined kirtles. But overall, these *adorable* fae are charming; we can't see one without wanting to pull them into our laps and stroke their ears, whatever form they might be. Pooka antics also help keep things hopping at freeholds, no pun intended. Keep them around for their wits, if no other reason.

Redcaps

Most of this kith are violent to the extreme and find little commonality with our beliefs. However, they do have certain insights, and when our Unseelie natures come forth and display our darker motives, they can prove to be reasonable associates. Don't shun them on principle, but watch their kind carefully.

Satyrs

O moons of delight, what pleasures these lovers bring! No other kith appreciates the satyrs as we do. Maybe some other nobles fear the complexities of satyr love affairs, but not the Fiona. With them, we can let our passionate natures run wild; lovemaking with a satyr is a time when we indulge in our Unseelie desires. And there's no hard feelings in the mornings, either. On the less carnal side, they're also chock full of useful insights. But let's be honest — with the satyrs, it's the sex that matters.

Sluagh

These wormlike folks are unpleasantly reminiscent of the Eiluned and give me the creeps, frankly. We may enjoy danger, but not when it's coupled with disgusting habits like crawling around sewers and trashcans. Maybe some of them are gentle, and I do pity their poor whispers. However, I can't seem to warm up to the sluagh at all.

Trolls

The trolls attract our love of honor and war. They are good fighters and willing to teach battle tactics. Many are the Fiona strongholds that have troll guardians, knights and warlords. I suspect they disapprove of our flightier mannerisms, but they've usually got the good sense to keep their opinions to themselves.

Gallain, Prodigals and Others

We of House Fiona have had limited contact with the Gallain, and from some of the stories I've heard, maybe this is for the best. The most appropriate approach seems to be entreating with them based on rituals and pacts from before the Sundering. Still, the chance to discover new ties and potential allies is appealing, despite the risks.

The Prodigals, however, demonstrate frequently that they are good friends and lovers. Other houses condemn affairs with these creatures absolutely, but we suggest making more of an individual choice. Some carry inordinately high Banality, so be careful if you don't know the person in question.

Nunnehi

From Lady Sierra's tales, these odd creatures hate us with no rhyme or reason. Are they angry about our arrival from Arcadia? Did we unwittingly offend them? I want to know the answers to these questions, yet if we can't get close enough to talk to them, how can we ever strike up a friendship?

Nymphs

I've never been privileged to see one of these beings, though Sir Sathar seems to know much about them. From his brags, the nymphs have many of the same physical needs and desires as we do. Not that I would turn down one of these ladies' heartfelt offers, but I wonder if there are male nymphs?

Inanimae

Inanimae reflect the base elements of the Waking Lands: earth, air, fire, water and so on. They're as varied and unpredictable as any part of the Dreaming. I feel the sages among us should make a concerted effort to learn more about the Inanimae and be willing to share some of our own lore in return.

Fomorians

The true nature of these bestial creations is unknown to us. Are they chimera? Monsters from the Dreaming or Arcadia? That they are related to Garou Prodigals is suggested, but I've not seen any evidence of such. I propose that members of House Balor and even House Dougal have more information. Whatever they are, the fomorians are never a threat to take lightly.

Autumn People

The majority of the Fiona find it tempting to go on risky quests to thwart schemes of the Autumn People and their occasional allies, the fallen Dauntain. I've heard whispers about a secret cadre called the Order of Bianca who make it their sworn duty to rescue Dauntain. These inexperienced fae see the Right of Rescue as a chance to prove their worth and express their love for battle and glory. Many don't return. If we need to show restraint and a curbing of our passions, dealing with the Autumn People is an ideal venue to do so. There is no shame in this, nor is it a matter of fear in facing them that should stay our hands. Rather, it is the price we must pay, the loss of the Dreaming, should they destroy our fae seemings. Think twice before you even *consider* facing these sad and twisted people.

Wizards

Once upon a time there were kindly wizards calling themselves Merinita who befriended us and shared our love of the world. They've vanished since the Sundering, and more is the pity, for the willworkers who have replaced them are a crabby, self-centered lot. One family of wizards, the Cultists of Ecstasy, are quite fun; among all the humans I've met, these men and women are able to hold a candle to our excesses. Practically all cultists have exquisite drugs and sexual urges aplenty; moreover, they seem to have many spells to prolong their pleasures. Another family, the Verbena, has also proven to be a friendly ally.

When a Fiona Loves a Fianna

Much more than blood, pacts, and oaths bind House Fiona and the Fianna. Recall those two young mortals laying naked in their bower, dreaming of love personified in faerie flesh. They were none other than a young Fianna Galliard and his Kinfolk bride. It was their fantasies that gave shape to Fiona herself in the first days of the world; her bittersweet passions, battlelust and courage were born directly from the Fianna's dreams. Or so tell the tales. Some among the Fianna's Moon Dancers say the story goes a little deeper, with Dana, mother of all the Tuatha de Danann, taking Lupine form and mating with the first wolf who lifted his voice in joy. From their passions sprang the Fianna. So in a sense, the Tuatha de Danann created the Fianna, while the Fianna created Lady Fiona.

Whatever the original story, millennia of history have formed inexorable ties between House Fiona and its Fianna companions; even their names evolved from the same roots. As the Celts migrated throughout the world, the fae and the Fianna traveled together. Each taught the other certain Gifts, Rituals and enchantments. Legends abound concerning shared treasures, such as the Gae Bolga. Fianna are sometimes willing to trade Talens to the Fiona for chimera or enchanted objects, and, of course, the making of faerie mead is a cherished skill among both groups. It's easy for Fiona's people to enchant the Fianna, since a number of these werewolves are kinain. In fact, some Fiona are *also* Kinfolk to the Fianna, bringing all the joys and trials of family ties into play. The Fianna camp with the closest bonds to the fae are the Tuatha de Fionn; members of this group often have extensive knowledge of Fiona nobles and politics (see **Kinfolk: Unsung Heroes** and **Tribebook: Fianna** for details on Fianna camps, fae relations and changeling kin).

Too cozy to be true? Indeed it is. For even as the Fianna have become bitter and divided over the troubles in Hibernia, so have the Fiona followed suit. They've taken sides and played a greater role in the violence slowly but surely. The Welsh Fianna, the *Dryn y drowd yn flaidd*, cultivate strong relations with House Fiona and, at the same time, they produce an alliance with the pro-British Brotherhood of Herne against the Irish Fianna and fae. King Finn of Ulster, once a beloved and wise monarch, has turned more and more to his Unseelie drives, going so far as to try to taint others in his realm. Nor have the machinations of Doireannara of House Ailil and members of the Fianna Brotherhood of Herne helped matters (see **Immortal Eyes: Court of All Kings**). While sober and challenging, a chronicle set around Hibernia's woes could be engaging for characters of House Fiona, the Fianna and their kinain and Kinfolk relatives.

However, beware a group of wizards who sometimes masquerade as the Cultists. This group is terribly vile and seeks to twist our bodies and hearts. They're quite clever and try to lure one in with promises of exotic substances, only to perform agonizing experiments and tortures, all for the sake of science (shudder).

Ghosts

Let's face facts — these spirits of the dead can't exactly engage in physical activities, can they? I mean, at best, they're wispy bits of ectoplasm, or whatever. But that doesn't mean they can't be lovers in the broadest sense of the word. I've heard some woefully sad tales of how our mortal lovers die then become ghosts, hanging around freeholds and so on. Sounds rather intriguing, doesn't it?

Children of Lilith

While the vampires engage too much in complex politics (yawn), I think the whole idea of drinking blood is kind of kinky, provided no one has to die. I've never met a vampire, but most stories about them really play up the sexual allure. The big danger from Lilith's Children is that the older they are, the more Banality they carry around; think of them much like grumps, wilders and childlings. If you can locate one of the prettier ones, from a group called the Toreador, I'd say a little cross cultural research is in order.

Garou

Of all those not fae, the Garou are dearest to our hearts. If Fiona's tale is true, maybe we're trying to atone for our past atrocity by befriending them today. Perhaps the ancient call of our blood binds us. Or, the attraction between us could simply be conjunctive desires for music, dance and battle. The Fianna are the tribe closest to us, and they've joined in our wars as we have attended their festivals on Beltane and Imbolc on occasion. Our ancestors and theirs made pacts of friendship long ago, and we still honor them in full. As we sometimes find kinain among their kind, so, too, do they find kin among us. House Fiona looks on the Fianna as family.

Love in Vain: Politics

The sacred crocodiles are always hungry.

— Lloyd Alexander, *Time Cat*

Politics isn't really a means to an end; it's nothing but a great game. Bureaucracy and the day-to-day handling of state affairs are *boring*. What's more fun and practical is to become immersed in the lives of the people. And that's exactly how we of House Fiona tend to rule so successfully. We're not like *some* noble houses, whose unofficial motto is "We pretend to care." No, our concern for people, commoners as much as nobles, is rooted in the belief that everyone matters and should be treated with affection and respect. I've heard that other rulers sometimes dress down and hide themselves among the rank and file to check up on things. Why not just show up on some boggan's doorstep, bring a good wine and spend the evening together and have a great time talking? Why make such a big secret of the whole affair? All this falseness does in the end is remind the commoners once more how separate the nobles are.

So the tricks to the great political game are these: First, never let yourself become complacent. If you find things at your freehold getting dull, do something different. Switch your allegiances, invite a known Shadow Court member to visit or bring over a bunch of Unseelie satyrs and redcaps. Just do *something* to shake things up a bit. Next, be sure to walk a mile in your subject's shoes, be they noble or commoner. Find out what it's like having to whisper all the time or work all day over a steaming forge. You might gain a little more appreciation for the sluagh or the nockers. Finally, don't be afraid to admit to screw-ups. This is so difficult for the sidhe; our very natures prevent us from looking inept. But we can still say, "I'm sorry, I made a mistake," and look dignified. All of these tricks of the trade have enabled our house to do our duties as rulers well and *still* hold the love and respect from our subjects. I think the other houses' nobles could learn something from us.

Movers and Shakers

With our rulers holding the Kingdom of Apples, the Kingdom of Pacifica and the Kingdom of Northern Ice, House Fiona controls immense portions of Concordia. And this doesn't even take into account the smaller freeholds scattered about the realm. The vast majority of House Fiona are Reformers, with a liberal sprinkling of Modernists, but few Traditionalists. (For more details on these groups, see **Nobles: The Shining Host**.)

We also have monarchs and important nobles across the pond, who include High Lord Rathesmere in the Freehold of the Questing Blade (Aquitaine), King Finn of Ulster (Hibernia), Lady Ellyndil in the Principality of Tears (Albion), Duke Leyden in the Tuath of Iron (Caledonia) and Countess Angharad in the Principality of Clywd (Cymru). There is little communication between the Fiona of the old world and the new, with High Lord Rathesmere as an exception. Members of the house in Britain and Ireland are caught up in the own local politics and fetes. My impression is that they take rulership far more seriously than we do here in Concordia.

High Lord Rathesmere

Of all among House Fiona, I daresay there is no other so closely attuned to the Dreaming as Lord Rathesmere. He recalls clearly being exiled after losing a duel and dragging his followers with him (though many claim they came of their own free will). More disturbing is that Lord Rathesmere claims a terrible war is brewing in Arcadia, one that may spill over into the Waking Lands. So, he uses his magnificent estate in south France to train sidhe warriors of mettle to keep peace here and to retake Arcadia eventually. How he plans to get there, I have no idea, but anyone can hear the absolute conviction in this fae's words. Many younger members of House Fiona visit the High Lord and receive a quest from him. Most of these would-be knight-errants end up fighting wayward chimera or odd beasts that have crept through from Arcadia, according to Rathesmere. He tries to match the skills of the hero with an appropriate task, though a few whisper that his quests are becoming progressively challenging. The High Lord, though beautiful with gold hair and brown eyes, is a little more stern than the average Fiona noble. He takes his duties most seriously.

Note to self: Should I write of the darker stories that echo to my door from France? I find it disturbing that the young heroes of House Fiona are disappearing on Rathesmere's questings. Is this mere bad luck, or does Rathesmere have a different agenda than the one he speaks in court? What's happening to these knight-errants? Have they found a hidden gateway to Arcadia, or the lairs of long-forgotten questing beasts? Something tells me I need to visit the Freehold of the Questing Blade for myself, sooner than later.

Lady Julia Spencer-Drake

I admit I'm only average looking for my kith, with mousy-brown hair and gray eyes. Plus, most sidhe wouldn't be caught dead in glasses. But I think they add to my scholarly appeal. That's right, I'm a hopeful scholar. I imagine nobles like Processor, oops, I mean Professor Edgewick to be appalled at my take

on Kithain history. Well, call me a radical, then, because I'm going to put a new spin on things. Many of the commoners' tales plainly aren't in the picture that Edgewick and others present: I think it's time for a change. So this is an open invitation to anyone and everyone to look me up and tell me what *you* want to see in Kithain history. I'll be waiting.

Duke Selim

Many think the duke is an eshu, with his dark skin and rich, deep voice. But he's a sidhe through and through; it's a bit more difficult to see his ears under the huge turban, though. As a leading member of Loki's Brood, he's constantly spurring the Parliament of Dreams to consider outlandish changes. On the other hand, the minute the legislative body considers something innovative, he pushes for more traditional reforms. Duke Selim is the ultimate political gadfly, and most sidhe would love to give him a good

drubbing were it not for his charming and witty repartee. He doesn't, however, engage in mindless fluff. The duke deals in facts, solid predictions and uncanny tidbits of wisdom. A compliment from Selim is praise indeed. And while he generally acts Seelie in terms of House Fiona's honor, his fickle ways are more Unseelie. His lover, a beautiful young woman only seen at night, is also a mystery. Whatever the case, Selim spends much of his time at Caer Flamingo in the company of the lovely Queen Morganna. Gossip speculates that they've had an affair.

Count Gut Splicer

Leave it to Queen Laurel to make a redcap noble! Gut Splicer impressed the Queen of Northern Ice when, using only his teeth, he carved an incredible likeness of her betrothed, Duke Rococo. Laurel, in an impulse, granted the redcap title *and* land on the spot. Now the randy little twit (he's only four-feet-tall, but all muscle) lords it over a bunch of commoners about

200 miles north of Vancouver. Laurel may have some cause to regret her action, for much of Vancouver's artistic community has been severely Ravaged by some outlaw Kithain. No one saw Gut Splicer and his friends do it, but no one was looking either. The Fiona possess remarkable tolerance, but the wanton and willful destruction of dreamers is no laughing matter.

Gut Splicer dresses in a parody of noble garb; his favorite costume is a black leather suit with silver studs that cut into his flesh. A mantle of crow feathers completes the ensemble.

Lady Finnula Finnegan

Of all who love the songs and revels of the Fianna, none is more keen on their parties than Lady Finnula. With her auburn tresses and violet eyes, she always finds the Prodigal Garou welcoming her with open arms; some utter that she's

got a drop of two of werewolf blood in her veins, too. Lady Finnula is an accomplished poet and enjoys refining her skills in the company of other bards. She has even performed at Tara-Nar for High King David. She has requested recently a boon from Queen Aeron of Pacifica to serve as an official emissary to the Fianna and other werewolves, and the queen is taking the matter into consideration. I've heard a yarn that a certain red-headed man with a silver sword and occasionally tufted ears carries Finnula's silken green love-token. This fellow *could* be just another pooka, but I don't think so. Most pooka stand less than nine-feet-tall, even when they're not happy.

Sir Sathar

A satyr Ascetic (though by no means celibate), Sir Sathar is one of the handsomest and most sought-after commoners in House Fiona. He's willing to share his bountiful affections with just about anyone, until someone else

comes along who strikes his fancy more. Like most of his kind, Sathar lavishes attention and goodies on his paramour *du jour* and generally ends up being close friends with former loves after moving on. What sets the knight apart from many of his kind is a deep sense of honor and concern for others. Likewise, folks seek out the satyr for his wise council; he knows plenty of commoner history as well as human lore of events in the Sundering. Aside from chasing skirts, Sathar's other claim to fame is game-playing. He knows many archaic games such as fox and geese, nine man's morris and draughts, but his greatest skills lie in chess and backgammon. Sathar is always looking out for potential candidates for his order of chivalry; he bemoans the fact that fewer Kithain seem enamored by his noble ideals. The knight is toying with the idea of admitting some younger members in the hopes of "bringing them up right."

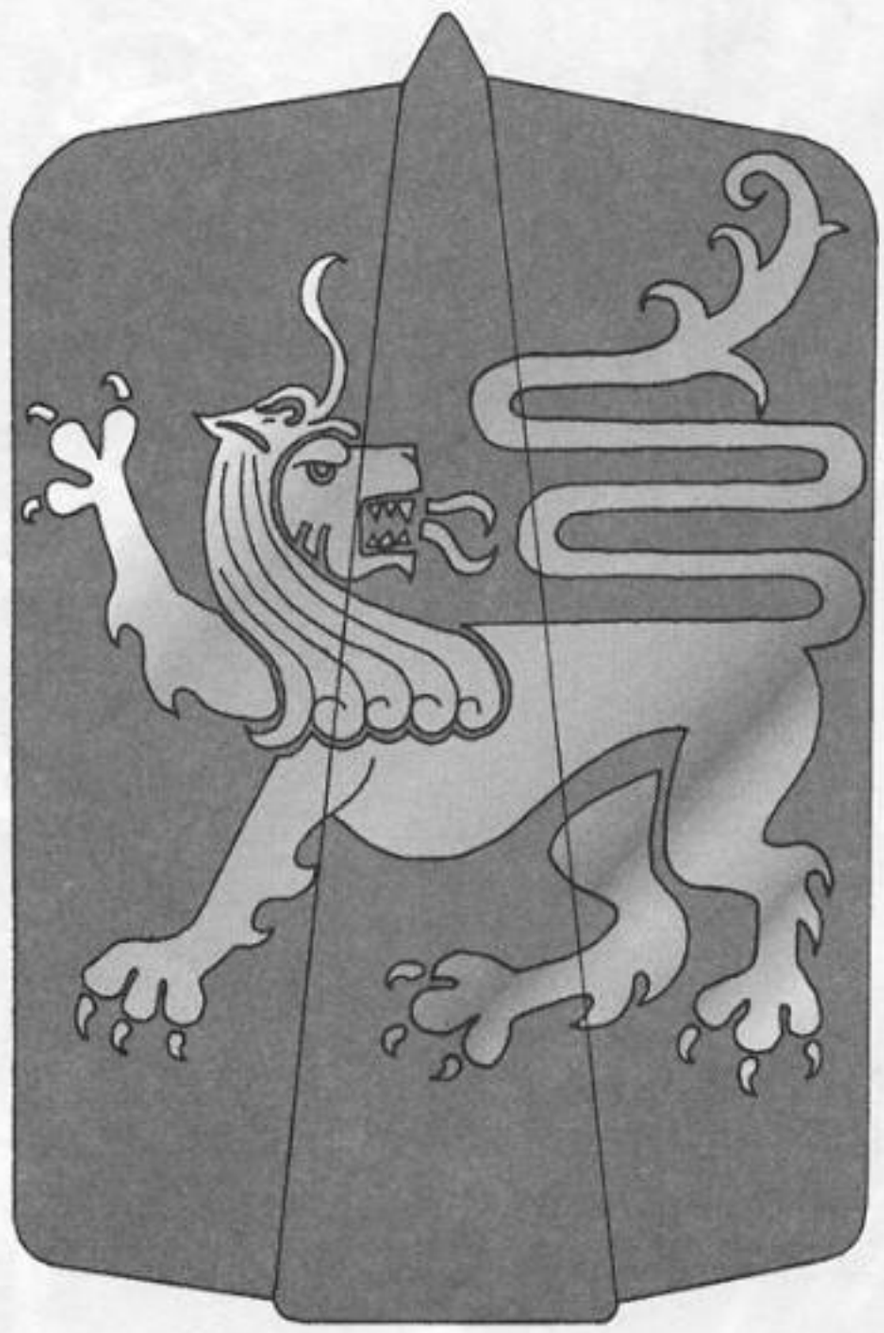
Lord Dillon

Lord Dillon of House Fiona, from the Kingdom of Apples, is a man with a mission. Some time ago, his twin sister Lady Arienh fled to the Kingdom of Willows with her lover, Sir Cianán ap Liam. Disregarding both his sister's happiness and the inherent goodness of young Cianán, Dillon swore a dread oath that he would see the Liam knight punished for his audacity. (For more on these events, see Chapter One of **Freeholds and Hidden Glens**). Dillon sent hounds and huntsmen after the lovers to no avail; now, his passion to find them borders on madness. Dillon is a hair's breadth away from contacting darker minions in the Shadow Court who will spare no mercy in locating the wayward pair. Dillon accepts that the Shadow Court's price for bringing in Arienh

and Cianán won't be cheap. What the son of House Fiona *doesn't* realize is the price that's being exacted on his soul for his ill-natured quest.

Baron Arawn and Baroness Ellawyn of Vellumton

Northeast of King Meilge's stronghold in the Kingdom of Willows lies the Barony of Vellumton. The wise lord and lady of that land hold strong Seelie sway over Kithain who live around the mortal towns of Athens, Madison and Watkinsville. The barony is steeped in history and Glamour, renowned as a haven for artists and musicians. Arawn and Ellawyn rule over a prosperous court of commoners and nobles, and though Vellumton is a happy place, its guardians secretly worry about their Eiluned liege lord and the criminal elements among his retainers. The baron and baroness can find no overt evidence of wrongdoing and remain loyal to their king. But rest assured, they would be among the first to denounce him should darker times come to the Kingdom of Willows. Arawn and Ellawyn embody the sidhe ideals of beauty; the baroness has golden tresses and soft- blue eyes and the baron is dark-haired with brown eyes. Both wear heraldic garb at all times, in the colors of House Fiona. Each spring, they hold a grand tournament on their magnificent lawn at Whitehall Keep (a Victorian bed-and-breakfast to human eyes). Local mortals visit the tourney to ogle "them medieval people joustin'" and to sample the delicious foods from Ellawyn's larders.



Gwydion: The House of the Falcon

Unseelie offal, throw down your arms or fall back. On the honor of House Gwydion, no Shadow Court assassin shall pass this archway alive!

— Squire Kelyn Oakspear, House Gwydion

A Winter's Secret Tale

The sky was dark, as is so often the case in the clouded afternoons of Appalachian November. At the bottom of the wooded hill, two cars idled — a sleek dark Porsche, and a gray Chevy pickup. Up above, two sidhe stood under the oaks, braced against a chill wind that smelled of winter.

One of the fae was slender and no older than twenty-five; his hair was silver, his eyes violet. His ornate, dark longcoat was fashioned of some exotic leather and brushed the tops of his glossy black boots. He bore a silver brooch on his breast depicting an intertwined harp and rose.

The other was dark-haired, but he wore green and gold livery. His frame was well-muscled, and his face had strong features, a far cry from the delicacy of many sidhe.

Both wore swords, and both had their hands on the hilts as they regarded one another.

The silver-haired sidhe spoke first, "Sir Cernwin." One corner of his mouth lifted in an amused half-sneer. "A pleasure."

The other didn't smile or frown. "Duke Scalock."

Scalock chuckled. "I'm glad that Duke Amberon saw fit to grant my request by sending you. Your reputation as a warrior exceeds what I'd normally expect even from a ducal master-at-arms."

"If I can repay my lord's debt, I'll do so." The touch of bitterness in Cernwin's voice was faint, very faint.

Scalock smiled wryly, slowly twisting the delicate gloves in his hands. "I don't see why you should object. It's not as if I live a difficult life." There was a touch of steel around the corners of his smile. "You'll stay in my chambers, drink from my freehold's font, and enjoy my women. I'm certain your lord isn't so generous at dividing his luxuries. Why not enjoy the privileges that come with rank?"

Cernwin slowly shook his head. "I agreed to serve my lord by facing your enemy in combat. I don't see the need for wearing your likeness or assuming your duties from now until then."

Scalock chuckled again, a brittle, insectile sound. "Afraid you might stumble across something you'd enjoy?" He ran a finger across his chin. "I asked for you to take my place so that *I* — and I gather you take my meaning — might duel with that perennial nuisance Balrad, best him in front of my court, and enjoy the glory that comes with such a feat. A large request, to be sure, but your duke...owed me nothing less."

Cernwin frowned. "Why is this ogre such a threat to you that you haven't had him assassinated, or worse?"

"Why, good sir," Scalock laughed, "how pragmatic! You're thinking like me already. I like that." He waved one hand dismissively. "Balrad is the nephew of a Leanhaun lord more powerful than I, and he looks to expand his borders at the expense of my own. He has challenged me at achingly regular intervals these past two winters, but I must always decline. My soothsayer tells me that were I to face him in anything other than a duel, grave things would descend on my household. However, I *am* more lover than fighter." The wry smile danced around his mouth again. "Thusly, the need for a more...appropriate solution."

Scalock then withdrew two identical silver-hilted daggers from under his coat, and handed one to Cernwin. "Turn the pommel as I do," he advised.

As the sidhe twisted the pommels, each man's features began to blur and melt. Colors ran, pooled, reformed. Finally, Cernwin faced Scalock again, and vice versa — but each looked out from the visage of the other.

Cernwin scowled as he saw his own face on the Unseelie sidhe. The false Gwydion, in turn, smiled gleefully and when he spoke, it was with Cernwin's voice. "A necessary part of the arrangement, sir knight! Don't frown like that — you'll give me wrinkles!" He chortled at his own joke. "What? You don't trust me to uphold your name as I trust you to uphold mine?"

None of Scalock's humor reflected in his double's stern expression. "Should I?" he rumbled.

"Touché. Rest assured, my friend, I don't want this bargain to be made public any more than you or your lord. I'll behave as you would, save that I'll likely be more retiring, the better to avoid betraying myself with the odd mannerism." The disguised Scalock chuckled, "I understand you're not married, though. Pity."

"Nor am I courting at present. Put your hands on any women of the court and you'll certainly be noticed." The masked Cernwin's eyes smoldered with another threat.

The Unseelie pouted. "This will be more inconvenient than I'd assumed...well, I have no such inhibitions, so do be sure to enjoy Meriedra and Tallow's charms while you're there." His tone was slightly bitter. "And don't try anything stupid — I'm going to want them fully tractable when I return."

The changed Gwydion knight nodded sharply, with a look of disgust on his new face.

Cernwin closed the bedroom door behind him, more than a little sickened. Only two days as regent to Scalock's Caer Wanwither, and already he'd had to endure the presence of more Unseelie than he'd ever met outside of battle. Bad enough that Scalock's two consorts consistently hovered close while he held court; they were physically fair and graceful, but they had an unpleasant not-quite-smell to them that reminded the Seelie sidhe of Winter. Bad enough that the boggan seneschal, Hammond, seemed to have lost his spirit in the process of being broken to Scalock's crop.

What was worst was the presence of the other Seelie fae in the stronghold — although they formed almost a quarter of Scalock's subjects, they all bore the haunted look of those who'd been the first choice of target for one "prank" too many. The one-eyed sluagh was the worst — bruises speckled her shoulders like the markings of a snow leopard. *And yet there is nothing I can do without breaking my word*, Cernwin fumed. *If only—*

A short knock at the door disrupted his musings.

"Aye?" he growled, then swore to himself. Scalock's voice still felt unnatural in his throat — mirrors he could avoid, but silence was more difficult.

The door opened and closed quickly, with enough time only for the comely built satyr woman to slip through. She wore the loose-fitting gown of a councilor, which had already slid over her shoulders.

"Meriedra." His voice was carefully free of inflection.

"Milord," she smiled gleefully. "You've seemed most tense of late, and I thought you might be in need of comfort — true, heartfelt comfort, rather than the clammy touch of a more distant companion." She set the lock with a flick of her wrist. "Care for a bit of a diversion?"

He shook his head curtly. "No. No, I don't."

"M-M-Milord? Is something wrong?" Her voice had the sharp edge of fear.

Damn that Scalock, Cernwin thought, flexing his fingers. "No. Nothing is wrong." He gave her what he hoped was a cool, detached stare. "The problem with that damned ogre has begun to gnaw at my belly, and I don't need distractions

now, nor at any point this winter." He pointedly turned away and stared at the window.

"I…I see." He could hear her swallow. Pause. Then, in a rough voice: "Sorry. I…" Another pause. "I suppose…I'll be going, then."

Hmm. What's she—The sidhe held up one palm. "Wait."

The two stood dead-still. After a long pause, he spoke quietly. "Don't be foolish, Meriedra. You haven't fallen from my favor. If it's…appearances you're worried about, then you may stay here. On the divan, of course."

"Of course. Thank you, milord."

He waved his hand dismissively. "I can't have the others preying on you, Meriedra." Cernwin turned toward her, and the smile on his face was malicious, almost perfectly Scalock. "That's my prerogative."

Two nights later, on a cold and windy evening, Scalock's other consort came calling. She was a thin sidhe with hair of the palest yellow and deeply shadowed blue eyes. She slid delicately into the room and sat daintily on the edge of the bed. There she waited silently, watching him pour a goblet of wine, until he spoke.

"Tallow, I have neither the energy nor the inclination. I've no choice but to face Balrad this winter, and I require a certain amount of focus to do so properly." He gestured with the silver goblet toward the divan. "I'll not need your company."

She didn't protest; rather, she rose and noiselessly stepped to the door. As she rested her hand on the latch, she glanced back over her shoulder. "Milord's will is mine," she said.

"Oh, for—" Cernwin waved more abruptly to the divan. "You can still stay here, if you're worried about Meriedra taking on airs! I haven't dismissed you — remember that. I simply require some time to think! There! Are you satisfied?"

Tallow smiled weakly then gathered her skirts and sat on the divan. "You are most gracious, milord. You'll not even know I'm here."

He turned his back on her, taking a long sip of wine. "Good. That's exactly how I want it."

The faint sound of metal bending between his fingers was lost on the wind.

And so it went for the winter months. Meriedra or Tallow ventured occasionally to Scalock's chambers, slept on the divan, and then left in the early hours or late morning. Cernwin ceased worrying about either woman and focused his attention on court matters. He hunted, judged criminals, and presided over feasts. And if any noticed that the duke acted with a touch more fairness than whimsy these days, they kept their theories and misgivings to themselves. The duke was there, he was strong — that was enough.

Of course, when Balrad finally came calling, there was no ignoring him. The fiend strolled casually into Scalock's

hall, his wake of steel-studded redcaps keeping the court guards at a respectable distance. He stood at least seven-feet-tall, and his axe looked like a sharpened plow-blade riveted to the end of a small tree. The ogre's metal-shod boots boomed on the hard floors until he drew up before Scalock's throne and sneered at the sidhe that sat there quietly.

A long moment passed. The duke then slid gracefully to his feet and descended the dais, one hand on the slim sword at his waist.

Balrad chortled, a growling rumble that stank of rot and excrement, "Glad to see you could make it. I thought you'd beg off again this year."

The sidhe's face was like a porcelain mask. "When your toilet backs up, you can take the smell only for so long before you have to do something about it."

The ogre's corpse-blue facial features shifted, like tectonic plates rubbing together. "Real funny, little shit." His axe came up to shoulder height. "You got anything else funny to say before I bone you like a chicken?"

The sidhe shook his head.

A bellow exploded from the fiend's chest, and the axe came whirling out from side to side. But Cernwin wasn't there — he'd twisted and rolled to one side, and his sword whipped neatly into Balrad's calf. The ogre roared again, more angrily than before.

Cernwin shuffled back three steps then gestured with his narrow blade. "Come now, Balrad. Again!"

"Fuck you, little man! Graaaaahh!" The axe whirled down at the sidhe and smashed into the floor tiles. With an elegant pirouette, Cernwin had spun to the Balrad's side and slid his sword neatly between the ogre's ribs. The breath whooshed out heavily from the Balrad's mouth and he staggered back to face Cernwin again.

The sidhe only shook his head reproachfully.

Balrad then ambled forward into a stumbling charge. Cernwin shook his head once, took two steps back, then leapt forward. The courtiers and redcaps gasped as the two combatants slammed together, the ogre's axe still raised over his head.

Cernwin stepped back immediately and withdrew his sword from the Balrad's chest, who then swayed and crashed down to the tiles. There Balrad lay, a stubble-chinned human in battered denim and leather.

The assembled courtiers cried raggedly, but enthusiastically. The boggan Chancellor Hammond scuttled over to Cernwin's side but halted as the sidhe cut him off with a gesture. Cernwin slipped the scarf from Hammond's perspiring neck, curtly wiped his sword clean on the cloth, then tossed the scarf back to the boggan's hands.

The sidhe sniffed the air and replied, "It smells foul in here. I'm going out for a ride. Don't expect me back until that brute's stench has been cleared from the keep." He gestured to the guards, who were already closing in on Balrad's quivering redcaps. "Take their weapons, armor and boots, and let them go at the edge of the woods. If they set foot in my realm again, strike them down." The guards grumbled a little but began collecting blades and clubs obediently as Cernwin strode from the hall. A smattering of applause, and the eyes of two women, followed him.

Some hours later, Scalock stepped into the hall, a high-spirited smile on his lips. "Hammond!"

The boggan materialized, kneeling. "Yes, sire?"

"Ah, I feel fantastic! I should have dealt with that brute long ago — but then I wouldn't have had the time to savor the anticipation, I suppose." The laughing Scalock punctuated this with a kick to Hammond's ribs. "Get up, idiot! I feel like having a revel — see that we're ready to feast by midnight. And for God's sake, smile!"

The quavering boggan managed a trembling grin. "Of course, milord."

Scalock unbuckled his sword belt and threw it over his shoulder. "I'll expect everything to be superb." He stepped onto the stairs upward, then glanced back over his shoulder. "And send both Meriedra and Tallow up to my chambers."

"Y-Yes, milord." Hammond bowed quickly, but not fast enough to hide his puzzled expression.

Scalock frowned. *Does he suspect? Damn that Gwydion. If he didn't live up to his end of the bargain, I'll kill him yet. With a slow poison.* He bounded up the stairs. The echoes of his bootheels on the marble sounded freely over the whispers of the courtiers.

The two fae women were at his door within 10 minutes. Both had nervous smiles as they stepped tentatively into the room. Scalock, stretched out on the bed, raised an eyebrow. "What's the matter with you two?"

Meriedra and Tallow glanced unwittingly at each other. "Um...matter? Nothing," Meriedra said. "We had to get ready." Her expression was one of guilt. "I mean, we're obviously a little out of—" Tallow shot her a warning glance.

"What are you talking about? I can't send for you both at once?"

"No, no!" The satyr slid onto the bed with an abashed grin. "You may do as you please, milord. In fact, I'm glad to see you're feeling better." She leaned in to kiss him, but he sat up and held up a hand.

"Stop. What do you mean, 'better'?"

"Well...now that you've dealt with Balrad...."

Her voice died. Then Tallow blurted out, "We're glad that you've won...and happy that you were simply preoccupied. I was afraid you'd tired of us, and that—" She trailed off as she caught Meriedra's glare.

"Tired of you? You mean—" Scalock caught himself. "Oh, *that*. Well, yes. It made me all the more fierce." He turned away from them abruptly, storms playing on his face.

"Milord? Have I—"

"Shut up. I'm thinking."

Silence followed for a minute or two. Meriedra and Tallow sat very still, while Scalock twisted his empty gloves in his hands. A gust of wind moaned at the window.

He rose finally. "I have to make a call."

The wind was still chilly under the oaks, yet it carried a faint promise of something green. The clouds were heavy with March rain, but not a drop had yet fallen. Again, two sidhe stood beneath the oaks, watching one another with carefully neutral faces. Finally, one cleared his throat, and spoke.

"Sir Cernwin."

The Gwydion's expression didn't change. "Duke Scalock."

Scalock coughed nervously. "I'm glad you accepted my invitation to meet here again. That gives me hope...." He smiled wryly, although his lip twitched just a bit. "Hope. There's a word I haven't used often. Surprised I remember it."

He shook his head, then looked Cernwin full in the face. "Knight, you've done my court a great service, and you've treated my dominion with more honor than I'd have expected from anyone, much less an enemy. In the name of House Leanhaun, I thank you for that," he paused, as if searching for words, "—and in my own name, I offer you friendship. If ever you seek hospitality in my lands, I'll grant it to you...and I'm damned if I ever thought I'd say that to any Seelie." He extended his hand. "What say you?"

A raindrop struck Scalock's extended hand before Cernwin even moved a hair. The knight's lips parted in the tiniest scowl, and the teeth behind seemed whiter than a bat's fang.

"You appreciate the way I've treated your property?" The wind still beat at the two, but as it struck the knight's form, it seemed to heat up. "Is that what impressed you? My unexpected concern for the value of your subjects?"

"I-I-I" Scalock choked and the color slid from his cheeks. His hand fell uselessly to his side.

"How *wonderful* of you to notice that I wouldn't abuse your subjects in your name. How *generous* of you to offer the goblin-feasts of Leanhaun to someone who has served your purposes well." Cernwin's scowl deepened, and Scalock fell back a step. "What's next, your Grace? Will

you offer me the younglings of your dukedom for my pleasure? Those whose wills you've already broken?"

"You…You misunderstand, I—"

Cernwin cut Scalock short with a snarl and a quick wave of a green-gloved hand.

"I've sat in your chair and slept in your bed, and I've listened to your commands and pontifications. That time is *through*. Now *you* listen to *me*, Scalock, I've walked every inch of your freehold. I know where it's strong and where it's weak — better than you do, I'd wager. I know how many guards I'd have to overcome to catch you in your bed, bath, or wherever I chose, and I'd know how to escape intact afterwards."

The pale Scalock caught at a tree to steady himself. "I'll keep your secrets," Cernwin continued, "and you'll keep mine. What's more, I expect never to see your face in my cantrev again, or I *will* come for you, and nothing short of the High King himself will be able to stop me."

With that, Cernwin turned on his heel and marched stiffly away. Scalock remained there for a fluttering heartbeat or three more, then slunk away as quickly and quietly as he could.

The two never spoke again. Cernwin remained in his post as master-of-arms to Duke Amberon, and true to his word, he kept the tale of that winter close to his breast.

As for Scalock, his courtiers gossiped for weeks on end at his wan and haunted look. He posted extra guards at his bedroom and dismissed his consorts. Soon, the Court of Wanwither was abuzz with the rumor that a friend of Balrad's had set assassins after Scalock in vengeance, and the cold, oiled wheels of intrigue began to turn around the subject of a successor to the throne, if any.

None suspected that it was no shadow-cloaked sluagh or steel-fingered redcap that haunted Scalock's dreams from that day forward. Rather, every night when the unlucky sidhe twisted and turned in his sleep, it was from fear of the green-and-gold griffon that chased him throughout his nightmares.

The Ways of House Gwydion

"Now what I have thought," said Arthur, "is this. Why can't you harness Might so that it works for Right? I know it sounds nonsense, but, I mean, you can't just say there is no such thing."

— T.H. White, *The Once and Future King*

Welcome, my lords, to House Gwydion. Would that I could see your faces as you read this book, for the sight of any fae newly reborn to our beloved house is a sight of hope. I and all your brethren of the golden falcon are at your disposal. May you find what you seek from us, and may you learn well to serve your house and subjects with the courage we expect from you.

The libraries of the sidhe suffered greatly during the Shattering, and today the greatest portions of our lore come from old ballads, ancient tales and of course, the occasional scraps remembered from the Dreaming itself. For a newly Sained noble of House Gwydion to learn the full and truest ways of the House of the Falcon would be a long, exacting task.

Hence, the purpose of this folio. My lords, I am no bard, no wordsmith, no poet. I am a rememberer. I have been both blessed and accursed with a memory that keeps even the events of childhood clear and sharp as broken glass. For this reason, Baron Edgewick of the Silver Chalice has charged me with recording whatever accounts, tales, legends and experiences of our house I may remember, and with assembling them into a volume that may be presented to our newest arrivals, the better to prepare them for life as a member of House Gwydion.

Lords Among Lords

First, you should understand that you have been born to no life of luxury. True, we enjoy the privileges of station; however, we are forever bound to a sacred duty, one that has its roots in the beginning of all things, the Mythic Age. We are the ruling house among the Seelie fae, and tradition demands that we rule well and wisely.

We are the house of the summer sun, the falcon, the griffon, the lords of high summer. The vibrancy of our rule staves off Winter, and our light is necessary to give our subjects hope. We lead by right and by example. We cannot fail in this, for if we do, all is lost.

All of Concordia, Europe — even the entire Dreaming, I daresay — the welfare of all this rests on our shoulders. In the name of our first lord, and of our High King, we are worthy of such a task.

The High History of House Gwydion

The tale of our noble house stretches back to the Mythic Age, in the rolling hills of a cool, green land. The Tuatha de Danann still walked the hills in those days, and in their footsteps came great heroes.

We call those lands Cymru, and any learned man once could tell you the story of Math Mathonwy and his sister's son Gwydyon. Times are different, of course, and the tale has changed much since it first fell on mortal ears. Listen, then, to the story of Lord Gwydion as I learned it:

The Tale of Gwydion

In the Mythic Age, there was Glamour aplenty throughout the land, and the heroes of that age were mighty indeed. This held true for none more than the brash young sidhe called Gwydion the Grey. Lord

Gwydion was not only a masterful warrior by all accounts, but an accomplished warlock besides. He had wrested the secret of shapechanging from a terrible giant and could take the form of a swift stag, a horrid boar or a wolf the size of a horse whenever he so chose. It was said that no man or woman could best him, short of the Tuatha de Danann themselves.

Gwydion was young, foolish, and full of pride at first. He cared for little beyond his own desires, or the whims of his companions. He and his cousins were near-bandits at the time, riding the land and taking what they liked when the mood struck them. But for all that, they were no worse than most of the Unseelie at the time. This foolish period ended when they did a much greater wrong.

While the Tuatha were away at war (for they were in such a habit of doing so then), Gwydion's band came to one of their households, Caer Dathal. There, Gwydion bested the guards and hurled them down a well while his cousins ransacked the town. And while the grey-haired, grey-eyed Gwydion drank himself into a stupor, his companions carried Caer Dathal's chambermaids into the highest towers and took them against their will.

But the Lord of Caer Dathal returned much earlier than expected. His name was Math Mathonwy, and he was a great sorcerer of the Tuatha de Danann. He and his retinue were greeted at the gates by a weeping servant, maiden no longer, and the wizard's wrath grew terrible; he strode through the keep's halls, slaying the raiders with white fire. The last one Mathonwy found was Gwydion's own cousin. Math kept the brigand alive a little longer to discover how his guards had been overcome. When Mathonwy learned that Gwydion was the one who had conquered his entire household guard, he stormed out and captured the besotted young warrior easily.

When Gwydion recovered his senses, he was dragged from the dungeons and brought into the woods of Caer Dathal. There he was flung before Math Mathonwy, who was dressed in hunter's garb. Gwydion could hardly look on the blazing countenance of the wrathful Tuatha de Danann, so he turned his face away.

"Why have you done this thing?" Math boomed. "Why did you help your companions defile my household and hurt my subjects?" Gwydion said nothing and hung his head. "You have no answer for me?" Math rumbled.

Finally, Gwydion spoke. "I did such a thing…because I could, and because my cousins asked me to."

Mathonwy scowled, the heat of his anger wilted the leaves of the tree he stood under. Then he grew calmer and said, "I am in a kind mood and willing to grant you some leniency, for you slew no unarmed man or woman in this deed. However, you are still responsible for your cousins' acts, and the suffering of my subjects rests fully on your shoulders. Are you willing to accept the terms I offer?"

Gwydion still dared not look Math in the face. "I have no choice but to accept," he said, "no matter what your terms may be."

So then Math called for his daughter, a girl who had only just set aside the dresses of a child and who had been away at the time of the raid. She came quietly and knelt at Math's feet as he said, "Daughter, do you see that bold young man there? I have made a bet with him. He is to fight you, as warrior wizards do, and should he lose, he is to do as I say for three years. However, should he win, I have agreed to let him take my head. Go and fight him, for he is impatient."

Gwydion was released and given a spear, and the young girl took up one as well. Filled with desperation, Gwydion attacked with all the force he could muster. However, she met every attack with equal force and returned even more force. Soon she won, and Gwydion the Grey lay battered and exhausted on the forest floor.

Math took Gwydion by the ear. "You are strong, pup," he said grimly, "but you have yet to learn the secret of true strength — virtue. My daughter fought for me, while you fought only for yourself. You must learn to think of others before you if you are ever to become a knight of any worth."

With that, Math struck Gwydion with his wand and Gwydion was suddenly in the stag's shape that he'd worn so often. "I give you three years to learn," Math added, "and for each one, you will wear the form of a beast and nothing else. At the end of this time, we shall see whether you deserve to live as a man, or die as a beast."

And so Gwydion lived for a year as a stag, challenging hunters and driving trespassers from the woods. When a year had passed, Mathonwy came to the woods and changed Gwydion into a second beast's shape. The second and third years passed as Math had decreed. Many men tried to hunt Gwydion, questing after the great Grey Stag first, then the Grey Boar, and the Grey Wolf finally. None could catch him, but one almost did. This man was named Bleiddwn Wolfson, a great and enduring lord with the strength of 10 packs of wolves. It was Bleiddwn who pursued the Grey Wolf on foot and managed to take the Wolf by the tail, but at last he relented and let Gwydion go.

(It is said that in those years, Gwydion lived *fully* as a beast — that he guarded the forest more ferociously because his own cubs romped in a hidden den in the deepest thickets. No one knows the truth.)

The three complete turns of the seasons passed. Math Mathonwy strode into the forest on Midsummer, and the Grey Wolf slunk from the brush on his belly. Math struck the wolf with his wand and suddenly there was Gwydion the man again, kneeling naked before the great wizard.

"You understand what you have done?" Math asked calmly.

"I do," Gwydion rasped," and I am most ashamed. I have used the strength I've won for wrong."

"And who have you wronged?"

"I have wronged my people. I have bullied and abused those who needed my protection. My lord, I exist only at your sufferance."

Math smiled. "And if I give you your life?"

Gwydion raised his head and looked Math full in the eye. His gaze burned, but the anger was of a different sort. "My lord," he growled, "then surely the tyrants and monsters of this land shall curse your name, for I shall be upon their throats from now until I draw my final breath."

Math smiled again. "You have changed, Gwydion. I know you speak honestly, and that you will fight hard against those who are as you were. To that end, I shall gladly teach you the trick of sifting falsehood from truth, that you might judge your foes fairly — as you yourself have been judged.

"Of course, there must be a final test. If true nobility has entered your heart, and you absolutely know what responsibilities strength brings, then call upon it. Show me your newfound nobility. Show me that you will be able to see farther than your own hands."

Gwydion stood, shimmered, then was gone. In his place was a golden falcon that beat its wings joyously against the air and shot into the sky with a scream of fury and delight.

From then on, Gwydion the Grey was a different man. Those that knew Gwydion the upstart, the selfish warrior who cared for the welfare of himself and his friends alone — they would not have recognized the grey lord that now strode Cymru. Now he was a prince among warriors, a lord among sorcerers. He stalked among the cantrevs of the day like a lion among a flock of sheep, and the villainous were hard-pressed to stay hidden from his falcon eyes. Wherever Gwydion found a wicked lord or brutal ogre misusing their strength, he flew into a righteous anger so terrible that he would uproot oaks in his fury. All of Cymru soon knew that wherever the golden falcon dove from the sky, an evil one was soon to meet his fate.

He fought like this for a year and overthrew many a sinister foe. And yet, the creatures of nightmare and the most corrupt of fae remained far too numerous. Lord Gwydion realized that the war was too great. He could not win it alone.

So, he sent messengers speeding to all corners of the land. Each one, whether bird, beast, sprite, man or woman, bore the same message: Gwydion the Grey would be waiting for a year and a day at the mouth of Annwn, and he would pass his greatest magics to the one who came and bested him in single combat.

And they came. Whether dire enemies or devoted admirers, whether lofty fae or doughty humans, whether haughty lords of many cantrevs or valiant commoners with not so much as a pig to their name, they all flocked to the mouth of the Twilight Land. There they camped in the cool shadows, and Gwydion emerged from his tent each dawn and called for the next warrior to come and face him. They fought duels of swordcraft, shapeshifting, wrestling and sorcery. Gwydion battled 20 men and women each day, many for hours on end, and he bested them all.

But you see, Gwydion fought with his eyes sharp. Those who attempted to cheat, or who behaved with little honor, received a brutal thrashing at Gwydion's hands. Those who fought fairly and who comported themselves with the honor of true warriors — Gwydion took these aside and spoke quiet words to each one. The first lord to show enough nobility and strength was the very same Bleiddwn Wolfson who had nearly caught Gwydion as a wolf. But after Gwydion defeated Bleiddwn and spoke with him afterward, Bleiddwn moved his tent beside Gwydion's.

Many lords and warriors went home defeated and sad as the seasons passed, but the tents pitched by Gwydion's people grew slowly in number. When the year passed, Gwydion had only 300 warriors loyal to him, but they were the finest in all the land. On the dawning of the final day, one last combatant remained to challenge Lord Gwydion — Keredwyn, daughter of Math Mathonwy, who had grown into a stronger young woman. Gwydion's heart sank when he saw her, for he remembered the shameful way in which he'd last done battle with her, and she was only a girl at the time.

They battled all day and into the night, for Math's daughter had, too, grown more powerful and wise, able to match Gwydion in strength, magic and skill. As they fought on, Gwydion's shame began to weaken him: He began to lose. But as the sky once again lightened, Gwydion felt the eyes of his warriors upon him. He knew then that his quest to provide the lands with true champions was for nothing if he was to lose now, so he put aside thoughts of all things save defending his beloved people. At that point, Gwydion's strength rose as never before and he struck Keredwyn unconscious.

The 300 warriors cheered, but Gwydion silenced them with one resolute look. He knelt by Keredwyn's side until she awoke then bowed his head to her. It's said she smiled, and the two spoke only a few words to one another before she took her place among those gathered at Gwydion's side.

It's no secret that Gwydion and Keredwyn were wed within a few years, but the story of their marriage and love for one another was one they kept to themselves. No, the tales that endure are those of their deeds, and the deeds of the 300 newly knighted fae that followed them. I

cannot recount the tales of all of these first nobles, though court historians still recall their names and claims to glory. What concerns us most is that these 300 rode, ran and flew forth, and they brought justice and valor with them wherever they traveled. They were more than heroes now — they were a band of brothers and sisters, and within a generation or so, they were more.

They took the badge of the Falcon, the shape that Gwydion himself had learned only after he knew nobility. They placed an oak leaf in its beak, to signify strength. They colored it with gold for honor, and they set it on a field of green, for the cool hills of Cymru. As for their name — well, none other would do. From that time on, they were known as the House of Gwydion, and they were foremost among the champions of the lowly and unfortunate.

Life in the Sundering

The golden times ended when the Sundering came, and the worlds of flesh and dream were torn apart. It was a terrible blow to all fae, and as in all times of war, we were forced to be stronger for the sake of others.

Only a fool couldn't tell that everything had changed. Our house, long accustomed to the role of knight-errant, recognized a new responsibility. We had walked previously the lands of others. Now it was necessary for us to claim lands as our own and to guard these holdings against the depredations of the lost and desperate.

You must remember that we didn't do this from lust for power. When you seek lands, holdings or title, you must do so because you believe yourself worthy of such honors, not because you crave your due. That which you deserve, you shall receive eventually — so it was with us. We were prepared to assume the responsibility of rulership for the first time, and we did so out of love for the land and its people. And we proved ourselves strong enough to rule and protect our lands justly.

So we took holdings for the first time and we learned to rule. We made mistakes in the governing of our first cantrevs, as anyone might. But as time passed, House Gwydion found itself well-suited to the role of leader. We began to rule by example and others followed in our wake. That was when Lord Gwydion himself came to us for the last time. Tales say that he was present for the coronation of the first High King ever to rule and that he made a present out of a pair of huge grey griffons to the new lord. *If ever doubt claims the heart of your subjects*, he said, *then let them look to the griffons, who will be the heralds of the true High King.*

And so it was, and so we continued. The Sundering was a harsh thing, but we adapted; we showed others how to survive. We thrived in the last years of those times. Alas, had we only been able to see the even worse calamity approaching — the Shattering.

The Shame of Gwydion

Of all the times we faced, this was the worst by all accounts. I cannot say how or where it first began, but a great leaden sea of Banality flowed slowly across all lands. Unlike the true sea, though, it would not ebb.

Many lords of our house fought against this tide, and not one was able to win. We drew our strength from the very heart of the Dreaming — but it was worthless against the terrible flood of despair that would *not* cease.

The order from the High King arrived at last: The houses were to gather themselves and retreat to Arcadia, where we might have the time to arrive at a solution to the terrible threat. We could not disobey.

To this day, many of us consider this the greatest failure of House Gwydion. We did what we could; we fought to help as many commoners as possible across the worlds and into Arcadia. We were oathbound to do no less — when a lord succumbed and had to be taken into the Dreaming, his liegemen were bound to follow. But we could save only a certain number, so we failed so many. This shame burns in the breast of each of us to this day, and it angers us terribly to think of failing a second time.

Court bards still tell of valiant members who cared so much for the welfare of their subjects that they refused the call, instead remaining behind to face their banal dooms. I believe that there must be truth to at least one of these stories, although other evidence of such pariahs is lacking. No, the far greater part of the house returned to Arcadia — and of the time spent there, even I can say little. I remember a scarlet-crystal tower in a sapphire lake; a resplendent dragon with gleaming scales curled around a black needle of a mountaintop; a forest of hollow branches that caught the wind and transformed it into piping. Everything else — the names, the people, the lands — fades to a colored blur under the light of the mortal world.

The Interregnum

Obviously, we cannot speak with any authority on the times between. How infuriating that our lore should be incomplete by the sum of *six centuries*! Only those who stayed can speak of the Interregnum with accuracy — and legend holds that of House Gwydion, there were only three. One was a doughty baroness who defied the High King's wishes for the welfare of her people. Another was a masterless knight whose only oath was to his love, a commoner. The third was Lord Gwydion, according to the tales.

It's said by some that Gwydion spent many of the years between not as a lord, but as a wanderer. As he had so many years before, he traveled to the courts of humanity's greatest warriors and learned statecraft and warfare from the finest generals and leaders of the time. I wish to believe

it true — that the memories of the mortal world are still unbroken in our founder's heart, wherever he may be. I fear, too, that it might be true — and that even Gwydion the Grey may not have survived six centuries of Banality. It's a question few wish to have answered, you see.

Return of the Griffon

As I said before, none can remember Arcadia — our memories begin again only at the time of the Resurgence. We cannot even remember exactly why it is that we returned when the gates opened. However, knowing our hearts as we do, we have a few guesses. The truth is likely that we returned of our own volition, to defend the other houses. And so we did, through one of the worst wars in all of fae history.

I regret to say that I was present for the Accordance War — and I remember it as clearly as my own name. Such memories bring pain to anyone who was alive in those times. I remember a wounded knight, his green and gold livery stained crimson, lunging at a band of half-starved boggan cutthroats while a motley of nockers scurried into boltholes behind him. I remember a baron smashing in the head of a childling who was armed with nothing more than a pointed stick. I remember—

Enough. It is enough that you know that House Gwydion was always at the spearhead of the Accordance War, and that we were witness to enough atrocities. When we arrived in the modern world, we knew that the enemies of our long-lost subjects would be many and terrible, and so we were ready for a fight.

We hadn't expected the enemy to be our subjects themselves.

House Gwydion sided with the other houses in the Accordance War, and most of our soldiers fought to unify the fae. All of the old traditions had been forgotten, and this infuriated far too many of our warriors. Although many heroes rose from our ranks, this was a time of shame more than anything. So many of our own behaved in a manner completely unsuited to their duties and abused their strength exactly as we were charged not to do. Toward the end, it seemed that many of the sidhe fought from desperation rather than strength of purpose.

It was an ugly, ugly war, and up until the last, it still seemed as though an end would never come. We hoped and we knelt in prayer with our swords — it seemed that only one thing would deliver us from the strife.

To have the violence stopped, what was needed was a king.

The Rise of High King David

I'm certain you have already heard the tales — how True Thomas found David and set him on the throne. With David came Concordia — the land reunited. As with the best of Gwydion lords before him, David estab-

lished a just rule and has exemplified our highest ideals since then. We could not ask for a more just or gracious High King and we have loyally served him since.

It wasn't long after the end of the Accordance War, though, that the Gwydion nobles took note of another struggle. We are a house of warriors, you see. As such, we are ill-at-ease without a crusade or an opponent. Thankfully, the modern era has provided no shortage of adversaries; the new-found strength of the Shadow Court is the least of such proof.

Today, it is a great struggle simply to endure. The tug of Banality on our souls is more akin to the pull of a vast ocean than the river's current it once was. For many of our kind, merely surviving this battle is thought of as a great victory.

Not so for House Gwydion.

If mere survival were the stuff of honor and legend, then surely the sidhe of House Liam would be the greatest among us — the trials they have brought upon themselves are numerous and terrible, and yet they still exist, yes? Why not crown them the noblest among nobles, and look to them for guidance?

Because survival is not enough. It is not fitting for warriors and kings to huddle behind rocks as Winter approaches, hoping that the bitter winds will not seek us out.

We are of House Gwydion. We are the lion, the falcon, the knights of summer. We will take our battle into the throat of Winter itself, we will free our people into a grand new Spring. Come what may, we will not fail again.

The Society of the Gwydion

We have adapted fully to the government structures that are expected of us — the concepts of "king" or "duke" are not ones that we invented, but we will wear such honors nonetheless. As such, our first and foremost loyalty is to High King David.

Of course, David must remain largely impartial. Although his word is certainly law in house matters, he cannot be expected to spend his time regulating Gwydion affairs as well as those of all Concordia. Therefore, the house takes most of its orders from the High Lord, who rules in the place that Gwydion himself would take, were he active. As such, your oaths of fealty currently bind you to High Lord Ardanon, and it is his will that you serve.

However, although his rule is unquestioned, Ardanon is not a constant master. His rulings are infrequent; he trusts us to govern our own affairs responsibly and justly. I counsel you, lords, to remember this: The wrath of a High Lord is not something you care to incur.

Although we have adopted the trappings and titles that the other fae find most familiar, we still remember how things once were. Even today, many Gwydion nobles refer to their holdings by the traditional name of cantrevs. True, the word connotes a domain of any size, rather than the one hundred homesteads of old. Nonetheless, the term is one of pride to us, one that speaks of a better time.

Rather than maintain a strict bureaucracy in order to regulate justice within the house, Gwydion nobles are largely answerable to one another. If one lord has proof enough of another's wrongdoing, he may challenge the offender to a test of honor. It is on this level that we largely interact.

There are a hundred forms of proper trial among the fae and House Gwydion may use any of them. Most commonly, we weigh an offender's mettle in the Fior, the trial by ordeal. Mere strength is not enough for the Fior, as house sorcerers use scrying to test the purity of the accused's purpose. Few can maintain their deceptions under such circumstances.

We value justice and are willing to exact whatever punishment or compensation seems fair. A criminal is rarely executed with iron, and then only if he has proved himself an irredeemable threat to the Dreaming and its subjects. If a person stands wrongly accused, she may demand compensation from her accuser, if it can be proved that she was charged from malice and not from a mistake. House Gwydion does not revel in punishments, nor do we prize mercy above justice — we seek only what is fair.

We have originated many of the common oaths of purpose, as the house of honor, and we uphold them with great reverence. When we swear oaths to fellows of our house, however, we often use other oaths. A Gwydion must be prepared to swear by his personal honor if need be. Even more serious is the oath taken on the honor of your fellow knights' and lords' names. It is one thing to dishonor yourself if the need is undeniable, it is inexcusable to dishonor your brothers and sisters of the Falcon.

The most terrible oath anyone of our house may swear is by the honor of Lord Gwydion himself, of Lady Keredwyn, or of the first 300 nobles of the house. The naming of these, our forefathers, is a most sacred vow. Those who swear this oath complete their promises, or die trying.

On Intrigues

House Gwydion conducts its affairs in the open, rather than in shadow. We have little to hide. However, do not assume that we are unskilled in the ways of intrigue; it is a weapon, like any other. Most secret dealings among our house involve the aforementioned challenges of honor, or obtaining the right to challenge. An affair may begin in shadow months before it is resolved under the sun.

Nonetheless, a Gwydion noble is still more likely to encounter intrigues set in motion by the members of other noble households. Our eye for truth and falsehood

is well-known to other houses. A sparse few are careless enough to lie to our faces as a result — they worm about for other ways of cloaking their machinations and spying out our secrets.

Be careful of trysting with the Fiona, for they are fondest of extracting secrets in the bedchamber. Know that the Dougal are typically fair-dealing, but they are not above adding particular clauses to their contracts in order to obtain an advantage. 'Ware the mortal allies of the Liam, for even the most insensible human may be an extra pair of ears for a rival. And, of course, trust the Eiluned little or not at all in everything they do. They delight in deception and unethical politicking and will attempt to gain influence over you by whatever means they may.

Matters Seelie and Unseelie

The calling of our house extends beyond our provincial duties. We are the caretakers of the fiefdoms, yes, but remember that the Dreaming is a vast banquet hall to all fae — and we are the roaring hearthfire, the blazing torches that keep the cold and dark at bay.

— Duke Topaz

The Seelie

We are, and always have been, a Seelie house. The concepts of responsibility, of *noblesse oblige* — such traits can be found only among the courts of spring and summer. We uphold the Seelie reverence for life and light and are unwilling to compromise such an important ideal.

I cannot stress how vital the welfare of our citizens is to the honor of the House. Gwydion himself exacted terrible punishments against those who violated their trust and abused their subjects. Bear that in mind. Should you decide to pluck the fairest of your subjects into your own bedchambers for sport, or levy draconian taxes of dross on those unable to pay, the horrible wrath of Gwydion will surely come upon you. A lord must serve as well as be served.

The Unseelie

The tradition of the olden days granted equal power, and equal reign, to both Seelie and Unseelie fae. Ours was the spring and summer, theirs the autumn and winter, and the crown was always passed freely. Al-

Serpent-Tongued Falcons

And what of the intrigues within the house of high summer itself? Tcha, my friend, there are far more than you might think. Even the most proudly starched knight in green and gold may dabble in a touch of mendacity here and there. To be sure, they much prefer settling their matters at tourney — far easier to keep track of winners and losers — but you'd be a fool to think that the Gwydion don't deign to dip into their own intrigues now and again.

Not just any affair will be suitable to start a falcon to double-speak and careful slippings-about, oh no. Only three things tend to set them in such circular motions: love, sovereignty and the Unseelie dance. By "love," I don't mean the suitor under the window, singing paeans to his dearly-desired lily until she opens her petals. No, the Gwydion are open enough about their affairs of the heart — unless the lady or lad in question is what one would consider dubious. By that, I mean Eiluned fae, commoners of almost all sorts (the house frowns on the larder guards snacking, if you know what I mean) — and the rare tryst with a sympathetic Unseelie. I tell you, when fire meets ice, the steam is something fierce!

Sovereignty's easy enough to understand, but know that a Gwydion is more likely to support covertly a friend's reign than his own. They make honest lords and don't usually have any fears of telling an enemy off to his face. And as for the last — well, if you found yourself drifting to the shadow in the house of golden light, would you care to advertise it? That old rival would have a fine new reason to demand satisfaction!

So how do they go about it, with their raptor's eye for the truth and all? Well, I probably don't have to tell you that many of them quickly master the half-truth. When the duke asks you, "Where have you been?" and you reply, "I've been searching out Ysbaddaden's Spear," perhaps you would've been more truthful if you had added, "but for the last day I've been in the arms of your seneschal." As long as you've honestly been searching out that spear, you're telling the perfect — if not complete — truth. Of course, the Gwydion know measure and countermeasure to such things. It may be a fool-proof technique, but there aren't so many fools among the falcons that you should get comfortable.

Oh, but please don't go repeating this! It may be an unspoken and even accepted practice among the house, but woe, woe if you ask a Falcon to admit it! For that would be a slap to his honor, sure enough, and they get so terribly angry when that happens!

— Lillia Greyruff, sluagh chambermaid

though neither court enjoyed fully the reign of its rival, at least the arrangement was honorable.

Those were better times, however. In recent years, the Unseelie have grown more sinister than childling threats of shadow and scorpions. They are no longer merely our dark reflection — they are something else. Their breath stinks of sickness, and their souls seem decayed within their hollow skins. Nowhere is this taint more evident than in the Thallain — the changelings whose selves are irretrievably lost to the role of ogre, goblin, monster. No Seelie is capable of casting away his Unseelie nature; and yet these Unseelie have divested themselves of all that is fair and joyous. Forever.

We do not have the luxury of tolerating them. The other houses may laugh nervously and dismiss their ever-bloodier antics as "expected," but we know better. They have stepped across a border from which there is no return, and unless we wish to see all of the Dreaming warped forever into the Nightmare Realms once more, we must offer the Unseelie no compromise and no quarter. They have already begun a war, one that the other houses refuse to see. So help us, we must win.

The Falcon in Shadow

Regrettably, all Gwydion must understand that not all battles are fought with sword and helm. The balance between light and dark in our souls is a difficult one, and with rare exception, we cleave to the light. There are enough Unseelie in the world without our adding to their ranks.

Even I have felt the dark pull from time to time; but I have only succumbed when alone. Many times, only great tragedy shifts a Gwydion into the shadows. At all other times, we must be models of chivalry. As such, the struggle to remain Seelie and not let the Unseelie conquer our souls is nothing more than another battle. And we are well-versed in battles, my friend!

I refuse to let my ignoble half destroy the welfare of my companions and subjects in the name of honoring some ancient "compact." The balance has been skewed, and there is no need to honor a poisoned, broken, blasphemous contract. If the Unseelie will be eternal darkness, then we will gladly meet them with unyielding light.

— Duchess Gwynn Alarch of Caer Bluetrees

Gatherings and Camps

It is hardly an appealing concept that there are secretive groups in the house of high summer, but there are nonetheless. In some cases, a noble's membership in such a society is common knowledge, but it is tactfully not mentioned. In others — well, judge for yourself.

The Iron Paladins

You should be warned that there is rot beneath the griffon's wings. Though none can say when they first gathered, there has arisen a secretive circle of knights within the house, knights who have fallen into their Unseelie natures without a struggle. Although at first glance, they seem to retain most of the honor of the house, they violate the Escheat and the code of chivalry with their utter lack of mercy. Their enemies remain our own — each of these knights still considers himself a Gwydion first and foremost, and each wars against the Unseelie houses as always — it is solely their methods that have become dark and most reprehensible.

Mercy is a trait unasked for and unwelcome. Why are we to tolerate a foe for more than a battle, if given the opportunity to end his crimes once and for all? We wear our gray tokens with pride and welcome the opportunity to do the work that so few of our house-brethren are willing to take on themselves.

— Sir Tagamarch Ebonnails, Iron Paladin

The Red Branch

It is unfortunate that as noble a group as the Knights of the Red Branch is still treated with cloak-and-dagger secrecy. If tradition dictates that we speak lightly of their affairs, then so be it. However, I will say this much: Their values are twin to our own, and their staunch bravery is beyond reproach. If there are nobles to be found in the other houses that we would claim as our own, they have likely been already claimed by the Red Branch. We offer our support and hospitality to this peerless order, and many of our lords encourage their households to strive for admittance. We have often petitioned that they join with us fully, the better to administer justice across the lands. They have always refused politely on the pretense that they wish to retain impartiality. Considering how our goals are no different from their own, I hope they change their policy.

Our loyalty extends beyond the cramped bounds of the houses, a fact that many sidhe have difficulty accepting. We cannot be loyal as an order to all of fae society and to a house simultaneously. The Gwydion — my own house — are closest to understanding this. However, I cannot fault them for remaining first and foremost true to the house; the legacy of heroism we inherit is something we should be well proud of. It's part of what has brought me here today.

— Lady Tathyn, Knight of the Red Branch

The Beltaine Blade

This is a scurrilous and dangerous group — and yet we cannot deny that they have their ties to House Gwydion. They have many supporters among lords who feel that power should be distributed to those most suited to rule, those who are closer to their subjects. However, the Blade's desire to empower the feudal nobles is a strike in the face of the High King, one we cannot ignore. Depose a truly rightful ruler in the hopes that many rulers might do even as well? Not as long as House Gwydion stands.

Gentlemen, I'm sure you can all see the rightness of my claim. We, the nobles, are most fit to rule. We know our subjects better than any other. We can uphold our responsibilities best. What harm is there in empowering ourselves to serve our people better?

— Duke Dray

The Escheat

I speak to you now of the Escheat. The nobles of House Gwydion must know the word and the spirit of these rules well, for we can trust no others to enforce them as vigorously as we do. The Escheat is our meat and drink, and we have gladly accepted its keeping as our duty.

The Right of Demesne

Perhaps it is more the influence of the more anarchic Americas, but the lack of respect for this edict is widespread throughout Concordia. How readily many commoners expect us to fulfill our obligations as liege lords, yet how reluctant they are to accept our judgments when they gain little from a just ruling! We cannot rule effectively unless all are willing to observe the Right of Demesne. As in Arcadia, so it is here.

Who is this popinjay that comes swaggering into my hall as if it were his own, and who has the audacity to revile my edicts as he pleases? Sirrah, if you do not understand respect, I shall make certain your vocabulary is expanded this evening! One side, guards — the right to school this wretch is mine!

— Baroness Adoin Fireplait

The Right to Dream

Inviolate. We, and all other fae, are nothing without the Dreaming. We must protect it as we would our own subjects. No Ravaging is ever to go unpunished, and we must act to enforce this tenet even when others do not. Many of our knights proclaim that the Right to Dream is yet one more reason to take the fight directly and unrelentingly to the Unseelie. I cannot advise that we begin war on this cause alone, but I do counsel utmost vigilance within your own cantrev.

What kind of idiot do you have to be to abuse this law? What sort of misbegotten fool lets Ravagers walk the streets freely, devouring dreamstuff however they choose? Their summer feast will lead to a harvest season famine! Who will come with me to set this matter right?

— Squire Kelyn Oakspear

The Right of Ignorance

This is often overlooked by fae, much to our consternation. Yes, the Right of Ignorance is painfully easy to enforce, yet that does not necessarily mean to ignore this tenet entirely. We are often the only voices raised in opposition to freely enchanting mortals and letting kinain wander as they do through our lands. If we are to defend all fae in this time of need, we must place their welfare above that of the rank-and-file of humanity.

Mortals come and mortals go. It would be wasted effort to dog their every movements hoping to stumble across the one in a hundred that might threaten the Right of Ignorance. Pah! The rare mortal that can unravel the mysteries of Glamour is too dangerous to roam free, anyway. Forget the prevention and administer the cure forthwith.

— Sir Tagamarch Ebonnails

The Right of Rescue

We are first typically among rescuers when this tenet is invoked. To be sure, the results are most perilous endeavors — but we cannot let a subject fall into Banality and remain unchallenged by house law. Such a thing would be wrong, and your fellow Gwydion know that.

Oh, Sir Palsimir? Yes, milord. He and his satyr companion, last I saw, were still staring at the walls inside St. Anselm's. I regret to say that there was nothing my band could do to aid him — we were forced to leave the hospital before our own seemings were lost. I shall send a letter of apology to House Ailil, if you like.

— Sir Tethych Arrowblood

The Right of Safe Haven

We naturally see the wisdom in this charge, even if other, more selfish lords do not. As sworn defenders of all fae, we often find ourselves having to be the ones in charge of freeholds, the better to ensure that the worthy and desperate are not turned away in their hour of need. It is yet another duty, and it grows wearisome at times, but it cannot be ignored.

I understand your plea, my friends. However, I am sorrowful to say that I cannot allow you entry into my home. Word of your deeds against Count Harwyn have traveled quickly, and I regret to inform you that Harwyn and I are steadfast comrades. You have 15 seconds to remove your boots from the floors of my halls — step lively, or my wyverns will have those elegant sashes for their nests.

— Duchess Gwynn Alarch of Caer Bluetrees

The Right of Life

Even if this were not part of the Escheat, it would be implied by my house's code of conduct. It is only fair and chivalrous to offer our enemies enough leniency as is feasible. After all, had Math Mathonwy not granted clemency to Gwydion himself, the Dreaming would lack its most relentless protectors.

It is no secret that we rely on dueling as a matter of settling disputes and that these duels aren't commonly fought to first blood — wars are rarely ended by one artful strike, and our talents run toward the long battle. However, anyone base enough to draw cold iron on another fae in the Gwydion household will face immediate and terrible justice. We are unforgiving of such matters.

Hold your sword with a little more confidence than that, lad. Come now, don't you want to strike me down? Listen to me, boy — I'm giving you the chance to fight like a noble before I end this. If that were an iron blade in your hand, you can be sure you'd be dashed to the cobbles by now. But seeing as how you're threatening me fairly, I'll give you the chance to take defeat with a little dignity. There. That's it, lad. Now steel yourself!

— Dirmyg the Sharp, grump guard-captain

The Fostering

Whenever another changeling undergoes the Chrysalis in one of our cantrevs, it is cause for both celebration and solemnity. Yes, our duty has expanded by a subject — but at the same time, another fae soul has blossomed, and this is always joyous.

When the signs indicate that another Gwydion has come into her own, we are quick to act. As you may recall from your own Sainings, the fae of a household recognize that there is no time to lose.

The augurs look deeply into the Dreaming, to search out whatever true name the fledge bears. Sometimes a fledge even proves to be one of the Three Hundred reborn; the lord of the household always throws a lavish celebration on such an auspicious occasion. I regret to say that since the Resurgence, not one of the Three Hundred has reappeared — at least, to the best of my knowledge. This should not be seen as hopeless, though. Should one of our first forebears reappear, he would certainly wish to keep his identity secret, lest the sorcerers of the Unseelie recognize the true name of an old foe.

Most often, the lord of the cantrev or another noble of his household acts as guardian. There are simply too few of us these days for it to be otherwise. If the court is primarily Gwydion, then several nobles may volunteer for guardianship. Most typically, the lord grants custody of the fledge to the master-at-arms or guard captain, who ensures the fledge's safety and sees to his training.

The Seelie Code

Although the Gwydion are self-appointed enforcers of the Escheat, and the majority are unmistakably Seelie, they tend to cleave less literally to the Seelie Code. If given the choice between honor and art, most Gwydion choose honor. Some pick honor even over true love — the Lancelot-esque legend of the knight compromising his duty to be with his paramour is not a common theme in Gwydion ballads. Nonetheless, House Gwydion as a whole upholds the Seelie Code in the rigorous, chivalric manner for which it is notorious....

• **Death Before Dishonor:** It's said that a Gwydion poet was the first to recite the Seelie Code and that he was the one to place this tenet first. The thought of turning away from one's responsibilities for simple self-preservation sickens Gwydion fae. Rather than surrender or flee, a Gwydion falls into one of the house's infamous rages — better to be cut down in a final berserk battle than to slink off to an honorless defeat.

Afraid? No. I'm certain that the 20 of you will cut me down. The thought doesn't please me, but neither does it frighten me. I'm sworn to defend this post, and I'll damn well see how many of you I can drag down with me before I fall. Who's first?

— Squire Kelyn Oakspear

• **Love Conquers All:** All but personal dishonor, that is. Although still sidhe, and still prone to sweeping affairs of the heart, it's a fair bet to say that the Gwydion sidhe have the greatest percentage of tragic lovers who will not compromise their duty for their paramours. The heroic love affair of Gwydion and Keredwyn is the romantic ideal to many nobles of the Falcon: one man, one woman, one quest. Of course, this has a positive side to it, as well — when a Gwydion sidhe promises his love, he usually proves loyal as a well-fed hound. And when the unyielding knight finally lets her passion free, it can be an overwhelming torrent that would even make the most vibrant Fiona blanch. But the Gwydion noble who falls in love with the unattainable lover often strives to kill his own passion rather than fulfill it.

No. That is past. Once, long ago, he and I shared many a beautiful hour, and we drank in the delight of each other's company like satyrs in a winery. Then he turned to the shadow and embraced the Winter within him. At that time, he died to me. Do not speak his name again.

— Baron Ciaran of Caer Tenvines

• **Beauty Is Life:** Ever the most conservative of houses (for whatever it's worth), the Gwydion see this as yet another charge to protect artists from Ravagers, rather than viewing it as a call to foster artistic visions in themselves. Gwydion fae make better patrons than artists; their pursuit of excellence is dedicated to "practical" affairs like swordplay, rather than poetry or sculpture. Some falcons seek to lighten their burdens with artistic pursuits — but it is an unspoken rule of the house that the Gwydion must be ready to do the unpleasantness of fighting so that others might have time to pursue beauty.

It's a most flattering portrait, your Grace — more beautiful than my poor face, I daresay. Had I a keep, I should be delighted to display it proudly. However, I must ask that you cherish it for me, for I am a wanderer and ill-suited to care for it in the manner that such a work of art deserves. Thank you, my lord. I must be going.

— Lady Kelemon, wandering knight

• **Never Forget a Debt:** Not surprisingly, the Gwydion fae more frequently interpret this as a code of vengeance or *noblesse oblige* than otherwise. The falcons do indeed honor their debts, even to their enemies, but they zealously avoid incurring such debts. The Gwydion are stubbornly opposed to owing any Unseelie a favor, and many would rather choke than let even an Eiluned offer the Heimlich Maneuver.

You have safely escorted my chamberlain out of Baron Schaden's territory. For that I thank you and grant you this pouch of dross — catch! You have also filled my chamberlain's ears along the journey with base slander about myself, my friends and our affairs together. For that — On guard!

— Baroness Adoin Fireplait

As to the actual training, tradition holds that a noble be well-versed in many arts, both militant and courtly. Some amount of martial training is almost always enforced, and we tend to assign such learning a higher priority. The foremost house of warriors cannot let its blades go to rust; the same holds true for our skills. House tradition also dictates that fledges know the basics of house lore, although the custom of learning the names of the Three Hundred has fallen by the wayside. An aspiring Gwydion should also know the rules of governing and chivalry; and all must learn the Escheat and Seelie Code by heart.

Once the guardian deems the young one ready for his full duty as a Gwydion, she calls for the seers, requesting the attendance of neighboring Gwydion nobles as well. This is the time of the Fior-Righ.

On Birthrights

Although the fae of House Gwydion are as varied in personality as any group of people, their common threads of disposition tend to stem from their birthrights. A Gwydion noble can be brave, cowardly, loving, cold, gregarious, withdrawn — however, only the rarest of them are serene. The house itself does not recognize formally its innate tendency toward fury, although few members deny their short tempers to themselves. (Heaven help the unfortunate who asks them to admit to their rages out loud, though!)

Why is this? Where does such anger come from? None can say, and no theories are on record within the house. Historians of other houses say that the Gwydion fae value their honor with such ferocity because they are under constant pressure to justify their worth. Others privately smirk that the members' bestial rages ultimately come from the time that Gwydion himself spent as a beast.

Whatever the combination, it's no surprise that the famed arrogance of Gwydion nobles is probably born from pride fused with anger. Add to this the trick of deciphering falsehood from truth, and it's even less of a wonder that house members learn to trust themselves as the ultimate judges of right and wrong. Even the most compassionate and tender Gwydion sidhe has such pride in her house's deeds that she contests any challenges to her honor.

But apart from that, they're a pretty varied lot, and even the wickedest Gwydion blackguard usually has at least one commendable character trait. In fact, although many outsiders grumble to themselves about the stereotypical "bull-headed Gwydion prig," they have also grown used to (and even take for granted) the equitable and generous nature of the house. If the Gwydion fae were to suddenly lose the fair-mindedness and honor that they value so highly, it's easy to imagine the hue-and-cry that would follow.

We never hold the Fior-Righ indoors; it is always to be performed on natural earth and under trees, preferably at the height of summer. There the fledge must prove his pluck and character to the satisfaction of his house. There are a number of challenges levied on the fledge at this point, from blindfolded sword dances to riddle games to lie-guessing. (The latter is often the most important; if a fledge bears the boon of truth, there can be little doubt remaining.) However, the traditional final challenge is for the fledge to face his guardian in non-lethal combat. This can be a duel of mock swords, a wrestling challenge or even a test of sorcery, but we enact this ritual combat to honor Lord Gwydion and his formation of the house. The fledge is expected to ultimately lose — after all, the guardian has the advantage of experience and skill. The true measure of the youngling is taken by watching how he comports himself during the ritual; if he fights fairly and well, and he accepts loss gracefully, then he is accepted as a Gwydion. If he uses underhanded tactics or is afraid to undergo the Fior-Righ, it is a bad sign. If he actually defeats his guardian in combat, then further auguries are called for — for certainly this new fledge is exceptional.

Merits and Flaws

Unstoppable Fury (3 pt. Merit)

You are as susceptible to House Gwydion's rages as any other — however, the fury of the house has settled more strongly in you, making you capable of mighty deeds when enraged. Whenever you fly into a berserk fury, you gain one dot each of Strength and Stamina until the anger leaves you. (Note that this can be a drawback as well — it's painfully easy even to cripple your friends if they happen to cross your path while you're in this fury.)

Blood of the Wolf (4 pt. Merit)

It's said that House Gwydion's ties to the wolf-changer Prodigals are stronger than shared purpose. You are living proof of that connection — although you are a full-blooded changeling, you also have the blood of the werewolves in your veins, and the Garou call you kin. Although they may not think of you in glowing terms, the werewolf tribe whose blood you share may call on you to perform certain tasks for your Changing relatives. What's more, you may be expected to take a Garou spouse, the better to strengthen your bloodline. This can lead to some powerful connections, or some *very* intriguing plotlines; the Storyteller has perfect right to forbid this Merit if she doesn't want to deal with werewolf affairs as well as courtly fae intrigues. (For a fuller idea of what it is to be Kinfolk, see **Kinfolk: Unsung Heroes** for **Werewolf: The Apocalypse**.)

Judgmental (2 pt. Flaw)

You aren't as open-minded as a true ruler should be, and you form opinions about people quickly. The difficulty to detect if a person lies is raised by two, as you're inclined to trust your prejudices rather than your senses. What's more, if you fail, you must make an Intelligence + Empathy roll (difficulty 6) or automatically assume that they're lying or telling the truth, whichever you're already inclined to believe.

Rivals and Allies

I have spoken long on the internal matters of our house; every lord knows that one cannot govern solely from within. Before you take your proper place among us, you must be prepared to meet our fellow houses and kith — and, if need be, even the Prodigals — from a position of strength.

On the Exiled Houses

Our allies, and yet, those whom we must guard most carefully against — we gladly let them in our walls, as hospitality and honor dictate. But beware the occasional viper in the colors of a friend; it is easiest to strike lethally from within an opponent's guard. Let your judgment guide you as you choose your companions.

Dougal

The Dougal are first among our allies and supporters. We have enjoyed their goodwill since the Resurgence and our houses are more closely bound than any other two. Indeed, the heir to High King David's throne is Dougal, but at the same time, an honorary Gwydion.

Their endeavors are forthright, which is most respectable. Their counsel is well-reasoned and usually unimpaired by undue emotion. They quietly build good works as we openly strike down foul designs. They devote their efforts toward administration rather than rule, and we gladly play their opposite. The Dougal are an excellent counterpart and complement to our ways. If they have a failing, it is that their craft surpasses their art — but this failing is a small thing to us.

Eiluned

It is problematic to speak of our dealings with House Eiluned in a purely objective manner. These spiders are forever creeping into our courts, attempting to probe oh-so-quietly at our armor for chinks. And, I have no doubt that if they found a tender patch of skin, they would sink their envenomed fangs into it forthwith. I can remember very few instances in which members of this house willingly offered a Gwydion aid. As I say, objectivism is difficult. Yes, our duty demands that we work with them and protect them as we would any other Seelie fae. We willingly do so. But trust them with our hearts and charges? That is left to the judgment of the ruler, and he must review the facts of the matters at hand.

What of the general matters between both our houses? The facts therein are: The Eiluned are our rivals, and they are those most often to challenge our right to rule, as well as our very judgment. The Eiluned are dissemblers, and even *we* must rely on guesswork to judge whether their

statements are truths or elaborate fictions. The Eiluned are accepting of the Unseelie among their ranks and have been known to go so far as to entertain various treaties with the Ailil, Balor and Leanhaun.

I'm sure I need not elaborate further.

Fiona

The record for House Fiona speaks for itself, and it is certainly commendable in most cases. Fearless to the last, they are our rivals for being closest to preeminence among warriors. I can think of no other house that I would rather fight beside, and I have been in battles aplenty with comrades innumerable.

However, the Fiona sidhe *will* be ruled by their hearts, and they long for petty pleasures and flighty romances more than they do for true purpose. They follow hungrily trends among human society, and they try to be at the forefront of all trends among the fae courts as well. As such, their lack of discipline makes them less than ideal governors.

Conduct yourself with courtesy in their domains, and grant them the respect they deserve. Stand proudly beside them on the field of valor — and ready yourself to stand alone in their courts when distractions draw your allies undoubtedly away from your side.

Liam

The Liam have a certain wisdom, almost in spite of their history of poor choices. Some say they are hardly sidhe anymore — that years of consorting with mortals have dulled their blood. They can't be expected to honor an oath, so I advise against swearing with a Liam.

But even if they had only one-tenth the nobility they once possessed, they would still be fae. There is little glory left to the once-proud Liam. Yet, they are our cousins still, and we treat them with all the honor that that implies. We have no particular ideals in common with them — they care for the mortal world, while we must devote our attention to the fae. Yes, they may be a pale shadow of what a true house should be — but at least they have not turned to the Unseelie, and we will honor our duty to protect them on that basis alone.

On the Common Kith

Despite what the other houses say, we hold no prejudice against the common kith. Such a thing would be foolish! I have seen how nobles treat commoners in many courts. Is the Fiona habit of adopting commoner lovers for only so long as they prove interesting an example of a proper noble's treatment of his subjects? If so, then we of House Gwydion are truly poor rulers, for our obligation to protect our fae subjects from all ills precludes such behavior.

Boggans

Despite their less-than-glamorous image, boggans are truly princes among commoners. No kingdom could function without their tireless support. If their failing is that they are generally unskilled at martialry, it is an insignificant one. It is our honor and duty to defend our commoner charges, and the boggans are most worthy of our protection.

Eshu

These wanderers are worrisome to many lords, but welcome in all courts. Frankly, they are hard for us to understand. We guard our holdings with griffonlike ferocity and pride — the eshu know nothing of, or care little for, borders and territories.

Responsibility is another hard word to the eshu. The eshu I have met seem to feel that their true duty is to roam as far and to hear as much as possible. If that is truly their task, then we can accept that — but it is a hard thing for us to comprehend.

Nockers

Ahem....

Nockers are a subject that I find difficult to describe — due more to my crystalline memories than anything else. Even the nockers most casual epithets are difficult to forget, and to this day I am embarrassed to admit the capacity for profanity that I have developed unwittingly, thanks to the nockers entirely.

As a folk, however, they have several qualities that merit commending. They are honest, often venomously so. They are intelligent and can offer multiple solutions to any problem. (Not all of these prove *feasible*, of course — sometimes explosive.) They make useful allies in warfare, although they can scarcely be depended on for fully skilled footsoldiers. As sappers, armorers and engineers, however, they are peerless.

And yet I hesitate to recommend full adoption of their arsenals, for too much of their weaponry relies on the element of surprise rather than skill. We find ourselves forced to adopt whatever nocker innovations are necessary, if for no other reason than to keep our rivals from gaining the advantage, but many of their devices have failed at the worst possible time. The nockers are a random element in battle (and in any social situation, I have learned), with all the good and ill that implies.

Pooka

The pooka present a large share of headaches to us; our insight into truth and lies allows us to note with perfect clarity that *every last word* they speak is an untruth. Our responsibility to them is painful at times, but we cannot ignore them simply because their innocently duplicitous prattle can grate on us after a time.

Redcaps

We grant the redcaps this: They are most dire and well-respected foes. And we say "foes" because of the kith; the redcaps are those most frequently staring back at us across the field of valor. They are unchivalrous and ferocious savages, hard to cultivate or guide.

They make valiant opponents, although once the backbone of a motley is broken, they crumble a bit easily. It must be stressed that the redcaps prize inspiring terror in their enemies and victims — indeed, fear makes quite a repast for a redcap. This is their weakness. Meet a redcap's assault without the slightest inkling of fear, and his strength will wash away.

Satyrs

We keep surprisingly few (to others) satyrs in high positions amongst our retinues, compared with the courts of other houses. Again, this is not a bias on our rulers' part; it is a reflection of how discerning we are when selecting our vassals. Wilder satyrs, although often rugged and hardy yeomen, typically prove to be more distraction than asset. (Their notorious "Song of Pan" has no place in high court, no matter what their young does and bucks claim.) Childling satyrs have little experience and, therefore, minute wisdom to offer. Among the grumps, we find the insight particular to the kith, and satyr grumps are often inconsolably bitter — hardly boon companions.

The greatest thing to be said for the satyrs is their forthrightness; rarely does a goat keep his opinions close to his chest. If their stoicism matched their honesty, we would be gifted with a kith of utmost distinction.

Sluagh

They are no warriors, to be sure. In fact, I value the sluagh who travels unarmed more than the sluagh who carries a blade, for those of this kith who learn the use of weapons are more often assassins than soldiers.

The sluagh who meets your gaze without flinching, who bows but does not cringe — that is the sluagh that you should watch carefully. Either he is an assassin, or he is a creature of great merit. A loyal sluagh is a great resource, and I know the tale of many a noble who was felled because he had no one to warn him of his fate.

Trolls

It goes without saying that the trolls above all others are nearest to our souls. They are the epitome of steadfastness and honor among the common kith, warriors almost without peer. Many trolls hold knighthoods throughout Gwydion lands. We accord them the respect and trust that their merit is worthy of, which is considerable. Many other households look askance at the trolls, fearing that someday the trolls might rise up as one body and attempt to claim rule once more. We know their honor forbids

such a thing — and it is precisely because of this unstained honor that we grant the trolls as much power within our holdings as we do.

Note, of course, that I refer only to the Seelie trolls. Those who have bartered away their honor to the Shadow Court are worthy of respect as powerful warriors and have earned not one jot more. They make formidable foes, ones that we gladly meet with no quarter asked, or given.

A Rise in Station

A commoner distinguishes himself so grandly on occasion that adoption into a noble house seems the most fitting reward. Although it is rarer for us to do so, even we Gwydion welcome the truly valiant and chivalrous into our ranks, regardless of kith. But our standards are exacting, and we do not do such a thing lightly.

The Commoner Made Noble

House Gwydion is noticeably calmer than other houses toward the practice of inducting commoners into their ranks. Some consider this condescension, but the Gwydion fae claim that little fae of any kith can live up to their highly exacting standards. Trolls make up the majority of Gwydion commoners-of-rank, as Duke Topaz exemplifies. It's very rare for a boggan or sluagh to attain such an honor — tradition requires that a commoner not only do a great service for the house, but he must also have achieved great glory in battle before being heeded for nobility. Should a commoner prove his martial prowess and sterling leadership to the house's satisfaction, he may be offered the Oath of the Falcon. To date, not one commoner has refused such an honor — which speaks as much for the rarity of the offer as for its esteem.

The Oath of the Falcon is always sworn before a gathering of Gwydion fae, to remind all present that the newcomer is now as Gwydion as the rest. The ceremony takes place in full sunlight, often on Midsummer itself. Once done, the new noble's name is entered into the great register of House Gwydion.

Many nobles offer the oath to a worthy commoner months before actually holding the ceremony. The aspiring noble often performs with even greater enthusiasm during those months, justifying his patron's faith. However, those who are offered the oath and arrogantly grow lax in their efforts before the actual induction find the offer rescinded. House Gwydion has no use for fair-weather champions.

The Oath of the Falcon

Lords and Ladies of the Falcon, I do swear fealty unto thee and to the noble House of Gwydion, from this day until the sun burns no longer. I shall never fail to defend my charges, nor the honor of my brothers and sisters. I shall be gracious in peace and unyielding in battle, and I shall bring the House of Gwydion honor by my deeds. In the name of Lord Gwydion the Grey and Lady Keredwyn, I swear it.

Those swearing this oath are bound to serve House Gwydion loyally in all fashions. Those who betray the oath are stricken of the house's Boon, but keep the Flaw. Once broken, it can be renewed only by the High Lord of House Gwydion.

Whether sidhe or no, all of our house must embody the high standards of Gwydion. We will accept no cowards, blackguards or oathbreakers in our ranks; falsehood, treachery and pettiness are the marks of churls, not of a noble house.

Only the noblest and most stalwart may stand alongside us. The first standard excludes virtually all redcaps; the second discourages most other kith. It is true that we look favorably on trolls who have proven themselves. We are a house of warriors, and who better exemplifies the potential for valor in commoners than the trolls? Racism and sexism have little place in House Gwydion. Only the most worthy are offered the Oath of the Falcon. And if nine from ten of them are trolls, it is not because the eshu, nockers and the rest are incapable of meeting our standards — it is simply because they have not made the grade.

The Gallain

I have never been much of a mystic, so I must confess that the ways of things outside the Dreaming remain largely a mystery to me. However, one need not know how an airplane works to have visited an airport. Although their customs are mysterious and their powers nearly inexplicable, I have met with some of the Gallain in my time. The experience was always wrought with tension, for they and I recognized something in each other — something foreign, yet wise in an alien way. My postulations follow.

On the Vampires

Ah, yes. The vampires. So much our opposite, and recently the subject of so much romance. Young mortals grow to adolescence these days preferring the glare of neon at night to the warm touch of the afternoon sun, or the rosy warmth of dawn. No surer sign of Winter is there than this death of spirit, this craving to be chill as death rather than warm with life.

Of course, if these misguided children knew the reality of the vampires, they would not idolize the night-dwellers so. House Gwydion has little to do with those born of bloodiest nightmare. They are of the night, and we are of the summer sun. We care nothing for their empty mystique, and they could not bear to face our grandeur, even if they knew we existed.

Still, I have met one once, and I remember — I remember a voice like black ivy, full of chill promise. Her eyes were empty like old wells — and the only glimmer of emotion therein was the coldest flame that ever burned. She was the most dangerous creature I have ever met, and from that day I have savored walking in the sun all the more.

On the Werewolves

The tales of our lost Prodigal brethren, and of their unceasing battle with the Dark, strike the harpstrings of our hearts. Who among the Gwydion fae would not offer his life to defend his realm? Few indeed.

My lords, be aware that the *dyn a drowyd yn flaidd* still live, and their battles with the fomorians still rage in the wilderness and shadowed parts of the cities. I have myself been honored enough to meet with them on one occasion. They are bold and brave, great-hearted, but savage beings, of ancient wisdom and frightful temper. Their revels are joyous but hint at great sadness born by their tribe. The kinship I felt with these magnificent and terrible beasts is a kinship I have felt with no mortal being since before my Saining.

I understand that our house is making some overtures to gather them back into the fold, to lift from them the name of "Prodigal" and to welcome them to the Dreaming once more. Most lords of our house would whole-heartedly support these endeavors, save that they make further demands on the scanty resources of Glamour in the world today. It is the right of each individual lord to decide whether or not the gains of the returned wolf-shifters would be worth the cost to his or her demesne; I cannot objectively advise this matter, and so I leave it at that.

On the Wizards

We have limited exchange with mortal sorcerers; we are a far cry from the days when all magic was one. Some have offered to teach our kind, but it seems that we cannot learn their ways. They are no longer tied to the Dreaming; instead, they use eldritch arts to enforce their dreams on others. They have drifted away from the category of our "charges" and into the role of rivals. Time shall tell.

On the Wraiths

We are aware that often the ghosts of men linger on, unwilling to enter the gray realms of death. However, I have never stayed in a place that even the mortals would call "haunted" — most of my lore on the wraiths is secondhand at best. I understand that they thirst for the vibrancy of life, and from the stories I've heard, they may well envy our Glamour.

Why, then, have I never encountered one? I can only presume that if the energy of our spirits is like a beacon to them, then we Gwydion must be as blazing bonfires, almost painful to look upon. It is a poor theory, to be sure — but without experience, I can manage no more.

On Mortals

It has always been the mistake of Houses Fiona and Liam to concern themselves too much with mortals. Need I remind you that it was the mortals who broke the roads from here to Arcadia, the mortals who drove us into the farthest reaches of the wild, the mortals who smother Concordia in the miasma of Banality even today? Some accord them lenience for their ignorance; we tend to believe otherwise.

It strikes at the heart of every Gwydion fae to scrounge among the mortals for Glamour. We were some of the mightiest of lords in Arcadia; now we must live as paupers, clutching at whatever motes of imagination we can find amongst humanity. This is a duty we are willing to bear, both in penance and for the sake of those who cannot leave. Until all fae can drink from a torrent of pure Dream, or all can return to Arcadia, we are bound to stay here to protect our brethren.

But the duty nonetheless saddens many of our house, and although we laugh and love in the presence of dreamers as readily as any fae, the average mortal is a painful reminder of how we have failed. For this reason, few lords of the Falcon encourage the enchantment of mortals.

The Fomorians

Troubling rumors persist of the return of the fomorians. What troubles me further is that the rumors are not limited to fae circles. Although I spent but a brief time among the werewolves, some of that evening was devoted to the exchange of old stories. The younger ones — outwardly no different than mortal adolescents — badgered me with questions as to the origins of my kind. When I mentioned the battles between the Tuatha de Danann and the fomorians, many of my hosts took on a grim expression.

I asked if they knew the tales, and they told me that they battle with fomorians even today! Although their descriptions varied — they spoke of deformed shocktroopers, not powerful and clever lords — I wonder if they mean the same enemies of old. Their elders turned the conversation to more pleasant talk then, so I can say no more.

I cannot help but presume that the return of House Balor is a sign that the fomorians will be close behind. Although the other houses believe that the house of the evil eye was named in jest, it is obvious that such nobles have never dealt with the Balor. The connection is more than a casual jest, exactly what it is, however, remains to be seen.

Current Affairs

Conservative doesn't mean inert. Although House Gwydion seems ostensibly to be primarily interested in maintaining the status quo, it is foolish to assume that they don't want some things to change. They may conduct their business fairly openly, but as mentioned before, the Gwydion fae are no strangers to intrigue.

• **Eternal Enemies:** House Gwydion is well aware that three Unseelie houses crossed over from Arcadia during the Resurgence. It's no surprise that the Gwydion feel compelled to drive Houses Leanhaun, Balor and Ailil back into the sea. They see the Unseelie houses as an obvious symptom of oncoming Winter, and believe that overthrowing the Unseelie may well be the key to precipitating Spring. The fact that Leanhaun and Balor emerged very close to Cymru may have something to do with their conviction as well.

• **The Homeland Regained:** Coincidentally, there is a very real desire among the house to regain full control of the Gwydion homeland of Cymru, or Wales. To think that they can no longer roam as freely over the Welsh hills as Gwydion himself once did sticks in the house's craw. Although few house nobles would dream of starting a war of conquest, the house has begun steps toward accumulating more power in Wales.

• **Patronage:** Some Gwydion nobles have suggested further cementing the house's ties with House Dougal, almost to the extent of incorporating the Dougal into themselves as a lesser house. Although the idea smacks of condescension to most Gwydion nobles, there is still a very real movement to bring Dougal and the House of the Falcon closer together, so that each might further benefit from the other's strengths.

Similarly, House Gwydion's undisguised respect for the Red Branch Knights has never been in question. Many nobles have petitioned High King David to grant the house full patronage of the Red Branch. To date, David has refused, maintaining that the knightly order can do far more good without such political ties. However, the motion has yet to die out within the house.

• **Holding the Keep:** Ultimately, the prime political goal of House Gwydion doesn't concern reaching for a prize. They are already the ruling house of Concordia and hold a slim majority of power across the world. Therefore, much of Gwydion's intrigues revolve around maintaining their lands, duties, and responsibilities. The falcon's house is loath to admit that any other house might rule as well as they do, and its members refuse to believe that any house could serve its subjects better.

Lords of the Falcon

House Gwydion has held a majority in the government of most fae kingdoms, notably Concordia, since the Resurgence. Such a feat would be difficult to manage if the nobles of the house were not distinctive in their own right.

Many Gwydion fae are worthy of mention in more than a few tales, either as the strong-handed rulers or as the knights-errant. The following are just a few of the more famous Gwydion nobles in the world.

High King David

His majesty, the King of Concordia, is a source of pride to all Gwydion fae. David ascended to the throne in dramatic, even mythic, fashion and he has defended Concordia staunchly since the first day of his reign. What's more, he has proven a wise and benevolent ruler, to such an extent that the house has taken an extreme interest in grooming an heir who would be an honest, worthy successor. The High King influences events across the house by his very presence; few others can boast of such a thing.

Morwen

Although David's sister is often overlooked in favor of her brother, it is unwise to discount her as a potent force in

house politics. One of the most powerful sorceresses of the modern age, Morwen has displayed a patient wisdom uncharacteristic of many Gwydion.

Morwen is not as vocal a supporter of the High King as some might expect. Some nobles (particularly of the Beltaine Blade) have tried to influence her, mistaking her as the "weaker link" in David's rule. It has always gone harshly for these fools. Morwen loves her brother fiercely and is dedicated to preserving his rule. However, she is not above playing the "over-shadowed sister" role in order to attract David's rivals to her — and then to deal with them summarily.

Sir Lleu Ardwyad

At the center of gossip at David's court one can usually find the name of Sir Lleu Ardwyad. Since his arrival from the Kingdom of Grass, this bold young sidhe has distinguished himself as the finest warrior at the court. Courteous and brimming with valor, as well as dynamically resplendent in his house finery, Lleu has attracted the romantic attention of many a noble and commoner. Yet, he politely rebuffs all advances in such a manner that none can take offense; gossip is that he must be pledged to a woman of exceptional qualities and that his Gwydion-esque pride forbids him from naming names.

Interestingly, none can say where Lleu learned his unparalleled fighting skills and courtly grace. He admits to growing up in a Michigan shore town, one far from any freehold of note. If the young paragon has a secret mentor of unsurpassed skill, he keeps such a name as close to his chest as that of his lady fair. This infuriates many rivals, naturally, who dare not challenge Lleu as long as his mastery of blade and firearms far surpasses their own.

Duke Topaz

The ruler of the Kingdom of the Feathered Snake is the paradigm of the commoner elevated into House Gwydion. He was inducted into the house after a glorious and highly distinguished martial campaign and granted control of his kingdom when it became apparent that no weaker lord would do. Although it remains to be seen how much longer Topaz can control his kingdom, it's fair to say that no other lord of any other house could have lasted even this long.

Queen Morganna

The Queen of White Sands is not the most archetypal sidhe to wear the mantle of House Gwydion, but she is among the most beloved. Some conservative Gwydion fae attribute her hedonism to a bastard streak of Fiona blood (conveniently ignoring the often Epicurean tastes of the sidhe of all houses). However, Morganna's love for her subjects is as much as the house could ask for, and even her most celebrated frolics have a reverent tone to them. She is nonetheless a falcon at heart.

Duke Dray

There's no mistaking that the conniving Duke Dray is a Gwydion sidhe; he's the very model of all the house's worst traits magnified. He is arrogant beyond compare, utterly convinced of the rightness of his quest, and intolerant of anyone who dares to criticize him. If anything, Dray is an example of what it is to be *too* Seelie — his obsession with bringing about Spring once more has led him into very questionable intrigues. Many nobles dismiss him as a ridiculous posturer of a theatrical villain, even assuming him to be Seelie. This is a mistake, for Dray has all the courage of his house, a sorcerous talent almost unrivaled, and a head for intrigue that the lords of Eiluned would envy.

High Lord Ardanon

Though House Gwydion is fervently devoted to the word of their High Lord, they do less to personally imitate him. Ardanon lives poised on the edge of Bedlam, dreaming his dreams of Arcadia itself. As he wakes each morning, he speaks of kiths unseen in the modern world, treasures lost to the fae and beasts more terrible than most can imagine. The fae of the house listen somberly to his tales and duly record them in turn. However, their respect for the High Lord comes less from his tales of lost Arcadia and more from his wisdom and prowess. Although seemingly the prisoner of his dreams, and although he must often be briefed on recent events, Ardanon shows uncanny insight toward any situation about which he knows even the slightest facts.

As is, the Gwydion sidhe defer to their High Lord's wisdom, but they rely very little on his guidance. When he storms forth from his castle in Germany, they rally behind him and obey his decrees, and when he returns to sleep again, the sidhe return to governing their cantrevs as usual. After all, they say, he trusts them with the responsibility to see to their own affairs — which suits the Gwydion lords just fine.

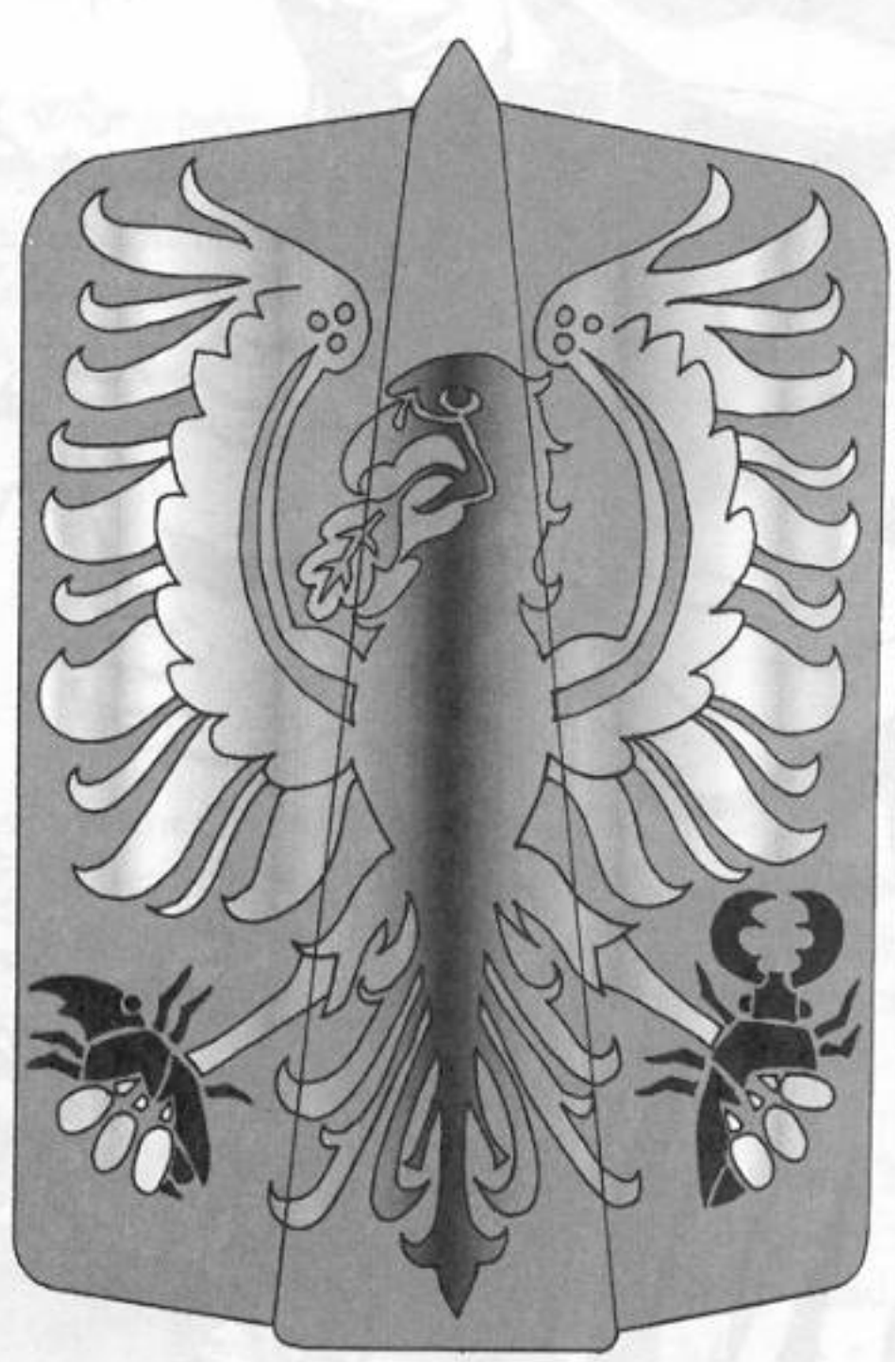
Baroness Adoin Fireplait

Numerous tales have arisen recently dealing with this raucous noblewoman's exploits, which are more delightful to commoners than to the gentry. Adoin is a spirited warrior who exemplifies the common perception of the Gwydion fae — fearless, proud, ferocious in battle and not *quite* as sharp as she would like to think. She has had many suitors and has fought in duels over romantic entanglements. She takes life very casually, although her demeanor becomes as serious as a wounded griffon when she is insulted. Ever quick to anger, she is equally swift to drop from a killing mood and ransack the kitchen for beer, ale or Jack Daniels. And though her peers do not much respect her, the commoners generally sing her praises and would be quite sorry to see their lovable brawler of a baroness go.

Lady Kelemon

This valiant and beautiful young knight has turned many heads since her emergence some two years ago. Her personal quest has taken her across Concordia and Europe, where she has stopped in various domains to speak with the lord and assist in any critical battles that erupt at the time. Many a smitten noble has begged this lady's favors upon meeting her or seeing her in action. She politely rebuffs them all, stating that she is oathbound to seek out her lost love, then refuses to discuss the matter any further.

However, a persistent rumor circulates through Gwydion households — that Lady Kelemon is in fact Keredwyn, reborn into the modern era, and that the lost love she seeks is no less than Gwydion the Grey himself! Although no one has asked her the truth, an increasing number of eyes have fallen on Lady Kelemon, just in case....



House Liam: The Exiled

What a piece of work is a man! how noble in reason, how infinite in faculty, in form and moving how express and admirable; in action how like an angel, in apprehension, how like a god: the beauty the world, the paragon of animals — and yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust?

— William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

Office Songs

The first day of the week began as any other. Jane drove around the purple and green building. To her, it looked like some demented madman's dream of a '50s gas station wrought in modernistic extremes: four stories high and stretched out along the freeway as if it had fallen asleep there. Visitors parked in front, and employees in back, where the parking lot was plain and utilitarian. Jane parked behind the building, in her usual corner, at her usual time.

Her Honda needed repairs; it coughed and sputtered a moment or three after she turned it off. Her voice was soft and gentle and too quiet to be overheard against the motor noise. "Don't die, Charlie." The car didn't listen, but it did stop. Jane exited the car and made her way — already tired — toward the building and her cube.

The morning's work awaited her. Ten letters to be typed and many appointments to be scheduled. Jane worked in Engineering once, which was much quieter, and her manager had appreciated her more there. Marketing was different. She took a few moments to settle in before getting to work.

Hours passed. The initial 10 letters were replaced by of the same. There were photocopies to be made. And Jason stuck his head around the corner of her cube right after lunch.

"I've got a developer CD offer with about three hundred coupons to be processed. There'll be maybe another 400 to 500 over the next two weeks or so. I checked with Rog, and he says I can borrow you."

Jane pulled off her telephone headset and brushed her long straight hair away from her eyes. "Sure. I'll get Jess to fill in for me. Unless you want it squeezed in around everything else?"

Easy question. "No, no, they're late already. I screwed up. Can you start this afternoon?"

"Sure."

"Great. I'll e-mail you the details, OK?" She nodded and Jason left, as busy as everyone else.

Jane turned to complete the details that could be finished before her new project arrived. Jason's e-mail arrived about half an hour later. She made a brief stop to explain the situation to Jess and returned to her cube to begin.

By the end of the day, she'd finished just under a hundred coupons. Software developers have handwriting like ants trailing in a thousand directions across the page, and data entry is exhausting on the eyes. Each coupon had a name and address, along with check-boxes for areas of interest. There was not enough space for comments. Many people had rebelled against the crowding by running their comments up the side of the coupon, making their handwriting even more illegible.

There would be satisfaction once I complete an even hundred, she thought to herself. But her eyes hurt and her back was sore from sitting in that chair. There would be no victories that night.

She placed the coupons in two stacks, stood up and made her way back to Charlie the Honda. He started on the first try, and she grinned for the first time all day. One small victory. The trip home was as uneventful as the evening that followed, with highways sifting into residential streets.

That night she dreamed of a stranger. He was tall with eyes that were bluer than a summer sky, and he moved with a certain grace undamaged by an urgency that possessed him. The dream seemed almost real, except she could not speak.

He gestured hurriedly, anxiously. Jane again tried to speak, somehow knowing that nothing was more important than to tell this man what he needed to know. Her voice was pent-up, locked away from the light of the sun, down in a dungeon, in a cell next to a hundred other cells. The words refused to come, and the anxious man turned and fled whatever horrible fate awaited him. Jane felt horribly guilty when she awoke.

A year or two ago, Jane had guessed that maybe 2000 people worked with her in the same building. She recognized hundreds of them by their faces, and she knew the 20 or so in her department by name. As she arrived at work next day, she nodded to the usual nameless faces while stopping to get coffee, smiled to the people with names, and returned to her cube to start work.

Two hours later, squinting at the cramped handwriting and survey data had now become a rhythm. There'd been a song on the radio on the way to work that morning — something with a lively guitar that had encroached itself into her mind. She was humming it as she worked, soft-voiced melodies resolving into words. The original lyrics had faded far back into a web of allusions, and she was finding new harmonies in every verse. Then a harsh beep cut through her deliberation, sending her to peer red-eyed at her computer screen. She had new e-mail. It was the woman who worked in the cube one over — Melanie. Jane read it quickly.

"Your voice is lovely, dear," Jane could feel the "but" preparing itself to spring.

"Your voice is lovely, dear," she read again, "but I really hate to tell you that it's keeping me from concentrating...."

Jane's cheeks flared with heat and she bent her head to her work again, ferociously. After five more coupons, she remembered to send e-mail back, with polite thanks for the advice. Then she returned to squinting at coupons and deciphering scrawls, keeping her lips pressed tight against the treacherous lure of the song. Jane eventually forgot the bass line.

After she got home that night and ate her predictable pasta dinner, she watched television before falling asleep. One of the channels — she did not notice which one — was showing a documentary on the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. Jane fell asleep watching it, stretched out on her bed with the flickering patterns of the television throwing fragmented light on her.

The anxious man came into her dreams again. His black hair was tousled tonight, as if he had been constantly running his fingers through it, overcome with worry. Jane found that again she had no voice. His eyes pleaded with hers, but she could not speak. Behind her, invisible, the youthful voices of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir sang the praises of their God.

The third day of the week opened with rain, falling dull and hard on the roads Jane drove on her way to work. The rain beat patterns and natural rhythms against her windshield. She finished the original 300 coupons by the middle of the afternoon and picked up another 200 on her way back from an afternoon break.

She was careful not to hum all day long. Melanie sent a nice note in reply to Jane's apology. Right before Jane left for the day, she dropped by Nasim's cube and coughed nervously.

Nasim looked up from his sales charts. "Hey, Jane. What's up?"

"Well," she said, "this is kind of a stupid question, OK? But have you ever heard me humming loudly?"

He frowned, tugging at his ear. "Hm...not really. Why?"

Jane gave an "it's-not-important" smile. "Someone was talking about choir the other day in the breakroom and I was thinking of trying out."

That drew a grin from him and Nasim had a nice one. "You should. I mean, if you like singing. I bet it's fun."

"Probably not. I mean, I don't have time. See you tomorrow," she said.

Jane left for home. It wasn't what she meant to say, and she thought about it all the way home. The rain hadn't stopped all day and on the 10 o'clock news that night, the weatherman said that it would keep raining for some time.

Sleep came earlier than usual that night. Jane was recalling the dreams of the past two nights, although she did not admit it to herself. She was hoping, in a quiet corner of her mind, that the anxious man would return. The look in his eyes made her want to weep, but she believed that with a little more effort, she could decode his cryptic message and free her voice.

He did appear — just as anxious and concerned as before. Jane greeted him with a silent confidence. Far away, the memory of the Mormon choir tickled her until she lifted her voice in unapologetic, wordless song as the anxious man watched her.

His smile was as lovely as she had hoped. The dream lasted as long as her song, which was quite long indeed; she awoke with the memory of music on her lips. It tasted perfectly sweet, like strawberries.

The fourth day of the week proved the weatherman to be an honest man. The continuous rain kept the highways slick. Jane drove past an accident on the way to work, which made her late. Nobody noticed when she entered the building with haste, but she was still nervous as she sat down at her desk. It took a while before she was able to submerge herself into work.

After making sure no one was listening, Jane spent her morning break calling a local Unitarian church. The church had a choir and the man on the other end of the phone was very polite to her. There was a practice that Friday, open to new people. Jane wasn't sure how to admit that she didn't know how to read sheet music, but despite her embarrassment, she found herself whistling after hanging up. Then, Jane pressed her lips tight and bent her head to her coupons.

It was the 34th coupon she processed that day that changed her life. Theirry Copien was his name. That was not unusual. The handwriting was neat and stood out for that reason alone. It was, however, the message in the small comments section that caught her eye.

"Are there any other comments you would like to make about our product?" the coupon asked blandly.

"No," the handwriting replied, "but I think you should sing because the stifling of beauty, while not a crime, is truly lamentable."

Jane stopped, physically jolted. She said loudly, "How did you—"

She broke off, looking around guiltily. After a moment or two, she entered Theirry's information into her database and put his coupon underneath the stack of completed coupons so that it could not speak to her again.

Though, when she went home that night, she brought the coupon with her. There was something intangible

about the little slip of paper. The handwriting was comforting. "The rest of the coupons just get recycled anyhow. Nobody checks," she justified to herself.

Jane's dream that night was most vivid, saturated with colors and sounds. The anxious man was there as she had expected. In her dream, she held Theirry's coupon, except that it had become a parchment scroll.

The anxious man gestured hopefully to her, and so she began to sing in that voice that was almost, but not quite, her own. For a while, the wordless melody comforted him. She could see it in his eyes and in the peace that came over his face as the music ebbed and flowed. In the end, though, his expression found worry again; once more, he began to gesture urgently.

Jane's stomach felt empty, even in the dream. It was the curse of failure. The man gestured more fervently, until in a rapid, graceful movement he came close to her, almost touching. Jane's breath caught in her throat. He was touching the scroll.

With sudden comprehension, she opened it: The words were no longer those of the coupon. Rather, it was a song — the language was not one she knew, but it was one she could sing. At the first word, this man was no longer anxious. His face lit up, and Jane woke up with the sonorous cadences of a Latin hymn resonating in her ears.

She left work early on the fifth day of the week. It was common at her company. And 3 o'clock on a Friday was late enough to be working on data entry, especially as it was still raining.

Besides, she'd been restless the entire day. Several times, she had caught herself humming and quieted herself quickly. Each time, she was more resentful of the need to hush herself. By mid-afternoon, she was certain she would explode if she wasn't able to get out of her cube. Jane felt she ought to be...somewhere else.

A man she didn't know was waiting for Jane near her car in the parking lot. He offered her an apologetic smile as she approached, which she pretended not to notice before she gave in to the inevitable conversation. *Perhaps*, she thought, *it was only that he needed a jump for his car*.

"Hi. I was wondering," the stranger said, "if I could get a ride to choir practice with you?"

She blinked once and said without hesitation, "I'm not going to choir practice." Then her wariness kicked in, and she blurted out, "Who are you?"

He smiled with slight anxiety. She felt a sudden shock, as if someone had just prodded her out of a dream — or pulled her into one.

"Theirry," he said. Jane had mouthed the name with him. "I'm terribly sorry—" And Jane cut him off.

"Who in the name of God are you, and what have you been doing to me?" She heard the rising tone in her voice and decided she didn't want to control it.

Softly, still apologetic, Theirry said, "I'm not mortal. I know this is awful for you. Will you do me one favor?"

She started to speak, then stopped, befuddled, and looked around to see if anyone was watching. "What?"

"Open up my letter to you. I know you have it."

She did. And, it was no great surprise, somehow, that the coupon in her purse was now a scroll. Unsure of why she was listening to him, Jane opened it gingerly.

Rainbows arched across her field of vision like insanely colored comets, blurring her sight. When she could see again, Theirry was dressed in silk and satin, with a blasted tree emblazoned on his chest. He bore a finely crafted sword on his hip. There was a horse behind him.

The last detail was the most shocking to Jane. The horse had been Jane's beat-up Honda a moment ago. Theirry saw where she was looking and said, "I thought the steed of a bard should be somewhat more noble than an internal combustion engine would permit, so I took the liberty. You will forgive me? He hasn't changed his name."

She nodded. And without realizing it, she smiled.

His smile in return was like the sun. "Then you will come with me, to your choir practice? I think you will enjoy it very much, truly, I cannot lie to you. There are so many things I'd like to show you."

Jane hesitated another minute. Insanity had never run in her family, but what if? She looked at the horse again. The splotch of dark color over his left eye, the only place on his body that was not pure white, matched an old collision Charlie had suffered before she bought it — er, him.

"I will," she said at last as she reached to take his hand.

The Dusty Road to Exile

The Fall

It happened like this.

There was a land that mortals, both then and now, called France. It was a beautiful realm, marred by the clash of war and by the blood of those who fought for their lords, but beautiful nonetheless. There were beaches as pure as a sidhe maiden's virtue, mountain ranges running high as a nocker's temper and orchards with fruit as ripe as promises.

Christianity was new to mortals in those days, but its power was growing steadily stronger. It was not long before almost all mortal souls of France were bound to the one Church, for it is in the nature of mortals to need beliefs. The new faith bound, yet in some ways freed; for while dark corruption and the hunger for power worm their way into anything mortals believe in, there is a great power and joy in that belief. It is often one turned to good. Though peals of church bells were harmful to many faeries in those days, there were those who gathered outside the new places of worship to stare in rapturous contemplation at mortal dreams frozen in stone.

Not many, mind you — but some. The nobles, the elders and the teachers warned against such games, for faith had given the Church a mighty power against faeries, and lingering in holy places often led to discovery by Church authorities, and even death.

In this time — the year known as 590 C.E. by the mortals — France was known to the Kithain as the Kingdom of Flowers.

King Liam, who was at that time the beloved leader of his house, was an honorable sidhe and a stubborn ruler. As a youth, he had come to the mortal lands to play and to admire mortal dreams; it was then that he discovered the lure of the mortal Church, encrusted with golden ritual and rich meaning. In Spain, Liam reveled in the images and songs of worship at the Moorish mosques, while keeping a careful distance from those who would cast him down as a demon.

Even at this young age, he was no fool. He knew the dangers he faced; it was simply that the sweet taste of reward was so succulent. The artisans of the Church were impassioned in their service to God, and this passion was reflected in their art unlike anything secular. Liam judged the risks and found them acceptable.

He also found the entire subject wise to be kept private. In the councils of the other houses, a large degree of time was spent discussing the proper ways to manage the religious fervor of the mortals. For while the very nature of faith, and the belief in angels and demons fired the imagination, faeries were cast into the roles of demons. This focused animosity of mortals threatened the Dreaming. There were those, too, who said that for every artist who created, there were 10 monks, priests, mullahs and friars who preached of destiny and a fixed place in the world. There was little creativity there. Whether it was the result of the Church deeming that the fae were devils to be destroyed or their focusing the masses on a fixed destiny, the end was the same — the Church posed a dangerous threat to the fae. King Liam held his tongue.

Still, he spent much of his time with those who had given themselves over to a single God. He began to foster the notion that the creative elements of the Church could be nurtured while stemming its authoritarian tendencies — but this was a matter for the long-term, and in the short-term, Liam craved religion.

There was an abbey in the land called France, not far from a forest where the realm of faerie overlapped that of the mortals. This abbey was small and home to a handful of women — perhaps a few dozen, at most. It was peaceful, shaped and nurtured by the people who dwelled there.

Liam came to this abbey, only a few years into his rule, intrigued by the rumors he had heard: It was said that there was a young nun there whose voice was like crystal watered with tears, who could sing with such beauty as to bring faith to the faithless and raise hope in the midst of despair. The rumors of her whereabouts were vague and he had visited a number of nunneries prior and had only one more to visit

before giving up hope of ever finding her. Liam suspected that if the rumor was true, it was a case in which the Church had avoided to have too much attention paid to a novice in the order. And if that was true, she might have given up singing at the orders of her superiors.

But, this had not occurred. As Liam rode his steed from the forest, reining in at the edge of the fields around the nunnery, he heard her voice. It was a hymn of glory, a hymn of praise to He from whom all blessings flow, and in that moment the faerie lord almost wondered if there might not, after all, be a God.

The moment passed, although the song did not. Sister Melisande, as she was called, was gathering strawberries in the field. Singing helped her forget the pain that stooping caused her back and legs. Three hours Liam sat upon his horse, while Melisande sang.

When she finally left her chores and went in for her midday meal, he returned to his senses and took himself back to his lands, amazed and lulled at what he had heard. Liam's distraction was noted by his court; rumors flew like ravens, curious and malicious. After a fortnight, he returned to the nunnery, plagued by fears that he had merely dreamed such beauty.

Again he heard her voice, lifting to the heavens. King Liam settled down in the fringes of the wood to listen. He spent the remainder of the day in joy and returned to his court very pleased. Such a dreamer was no common thing. Now that he had settled the matter of her reality, this fount of Glamour would be his prize and jewel.

His next year was spent in this manner: He ruled wisely and well, with even more good judgment and calm wisdom. And once or twice a fortnight he would venture out alone to listen to Melisande. His comings and goings were noticed by the faerie court, but most assumed that he was visiting some secret lover, which was smiled upon. Those who dared even began to wager on the said lover's identity. It was a good era for the king and his people.

Time passed, and among the faerie courts, Liam continued to slowly advance the question of benefits to be reaped by fostering creativity in the Church. While he was delicate and gentle, there nonetheless came a time when Liam's efforts were noted. In particular, Duke Haleson, a noble of House Gwydion, took an interest in the matter. The duke was a prominent conservative voice amongst the fae, one with a particular dislike for religious matters.

So it was, after some quiet investigation by Duke Haleson, that a trap was laid at the abbey where Melisande sang. Haleson himself was present, in order that a noble might testify as to what was seen, along with a double handful of his best warriors. Posing as churchmen from Rome, the duke and his men took Melisande from the place of her heart, leaving behind the a sigil so that King Liam knew who had done this thing.

It was a week before Liam came to the nunnery to listen to his mortal singer, as he and his court had been busy. It was no more than an hour before he discovered her absence, and worse, her abduction. His rage was beyond his ability to control.

Those who kept House Liam exiled for eternity account his actions then as one of the root causes of the Church's hatred for faerie-kind, and it is true that the devastation he caused to the nunnery has been remembered even to the present day in some corners of the Vatican. Those nuns unfortunate to see Liam's rage lived out their lives as madwomen, driven insane by the terrible splendor of his Glamour. Many of the remainder, wise enough to hide themselves away, were nonetheless savaged by the magics born from his fury.

Although it was not before night had fallen on what was once a nunnery, Liam awoke from his haze of anger knowing that Haleson had stolen his prize. The sigil was proof of that, and the description he ripped from the mind of the Mother Superior was the visage of Duke Haleson.

His anger still burned within him. It was with that night-cold anger that Liam rode back to Arcadia; his entry into Duke Haleson's court was marked by the passage of a winter breeze. He was met by Haleson himself, his retainers, and by Melisande. She was at Haleson's side, looking up at the duke with nothing but adoration in her eyes.

Now, the Right of Demesne is an ancient right and even now is still in effect. King Liam's assault on Duke Haleson violated that right in the most direct and violent way possible: He cut down two of Haleson's knights in his rush for vengeance before the duke, older and wiser in the ways of war, took the brunt of the attack and engaged his foe in single combat. It was no great matter for age and experience to defeat blind anger, and King Liam lay gasping at Duke Haleson's feet in the end.

In accordance with the rank of the chief witness and the magnitude of the crime Liam had committed, the trial might have gone quickly had Duke Haleson not elected to bring up the reasons for King Liam's actions. His actions at the nunnery were painted as crimes likely to cause the Church to hunt faerie-kind throughout Europe; his assault on the duke was characterized as the ways of a man dangerously obsessed. What began as a trial concerning King Liam's attack eventually became a trial about his nature.

And thus, the sentence was accordingly harsh. Exile. For the crimes of inviting the interest of the Church, and for placing the welfare of humans above that of faerie, and most of all for rebelling against the wisdom of the nobles of Arcadia, King Liam and his children, and his house were deemed unfit to live as nobles, and they were cast out.

The Shattering

A good number of House Liam nobles chose to remain on Earth during the Shattering; with life among those who had exiled them the only other choice, the thought of abandoning Arcadia was almost pleasant. Furthermore, it was difficult for any of the house to fight their way into Arcadia against the forces of those houses each considering themselves more deserving. Those who took the mortal's road split in nearly even numbers. Half of them holed themselves up in the few freeholds still held by House Liam and in the freeholds abandoned by the other houses. There are more Lost Ones of House Liam than of any other house. A startlingly high percentage took on the shroud of Banality and remained voluntarily among the mortals.

This was not as cruel a decision as it might seem. The best minds of the house had pursued the hints provided by King Liam's obsession with Melisande, trying to learn ways in which they might draw from the faith of the Church. While there was little success in this endeavor, the difficulty and danger of the research yielded much knowledge as to how to hide under the very noses of the Inquisition. Coaxing inspiration from the hearts of those who served God became key to House Liam's survival, and those skills helped the faerie who remained on Earth in good stead.

Still, living in monasteries and cathedrals while Jesuits and Dominicans searched ceaselessly for traces of evil was more difficult than the wounded, sundered faerie had hoped. One by one, the stranded Kithain fell prey to the relentless Hounds of God. Those remaining wrapped Banality closer and closer around them, forgetting that they had once been lords of the Dreaming — forgetting the Dreaming itself. In the end, a cathedral with inspired gargoyles or magnificent stained glass was the only sign that a faerie had once lived nearby; certainly, the aged laborer stumbling back to his hut would never be suspected of supernatural origins.

Betrayed by the Church they had hoped proved to be their refuge, very few escaped the crushing weight of the Inquisition. These few joined the rest of the Kithain scattered across the hostile world. Some commoners pitied the exiled nobles, and some took their sad state as another chance to revenge themselves on the haughty nobles of the past. House Liam historians have no record of any line of their house surviving to the Resurgence, although it is rumored that in the dark corners of the monasteries of Europe there are very old monks who await the touch of Glamour once more.

There is no memory of the lot of those of House Liam who fled back to the Dreaming along with their former peers. Those who care to think about their fate assume that House Liam shouldered more than their weight of the blame for the

Inquisition and the Banality that shattered so much of the Dreaming, and those of other houses who will speak of the matter offer no counter-opinion.

However, there is a persistent dream that has come to many members of the house: A number of House Liam knights led by King Liam battle their way through opposing forces to bring a group of mortals into Arcadia with them. This small band, under the cover of night and concealing magics, journey to a distant corner of Arcadia where they establish a city, away from prying eyes.

In the dream, this city is a shining monument to the ideals of House Liam. King Liam and his mortals find joy in companionship and in living in cooperation. This union demonstrates the value of truth between faeries and mortal-kind. He rules there, or so the dreams have it, even to this day.

The tale is not often told, as it is ridiculous from the first word to the last. One can hardly imagine what effect a community of mortal worshippers would have on the purity of Arcadia. And, even if by some miracle such a city could exist, all in Arcadia would surely feel the strangeness of it. It is nearly impossible to believe that no mortals from that city would have been returned to Earth upon the Resurgence. The tale cannot be true.

Regardless, the dream continues to come.

The Return

House Liam's return to Earth was no choice at all; members of the house of oathbreakers were expelled with dispatch. There are many tales of those who attempted to stay in Arcadia — most of which end in violence — enough to justify resentment against any other house. The expulsion of House Liam was swift, direct and harsh.

Earth was no refuge from the disdain that other sidhe felt toward House Liam. The realization that in order to live they would have to steal the bodies of mortals was repulsive to the extreme. Nothing is known of those who failed to assume mortal form. Some say they became lost forever in the Dreaming, while others believe they were destroyed forever when their unprotected faerie forms came into contact with Banality.

Furthermore, House Liam suffered more than other houses from shattered memories and broken recollections due to the violence of the expulsion and the weak position they held in Arcadia. As Kithain already exiled, no House Liam member was permitted to sip fully from the Glamours of Arcadia, and there was little to remember upon their arrival on Earth without a strong connection to the land. On occasion, there are dreams, such as the dream of King Liam's city, but they are hazy and thought of as unreliable.

The first few years of this greater exile were spent in a sort of dazed regrouping. It did not help that the numbers of the house were thinned by their reluctance to displace mortal souls. A handful of Liam nobles knew the most harmless ways to eke out Glamour from human dreams, and they became the core of the nobles of the house. Although certain radical members (see the Midnight Mummers) argue that it is not known for sure if those few radicals were nobles in Arcadia.

These nobles were, however, the members of Liam who were suited to form new freeholds in the strange, hostile environment they now lived in, and their efforts were appropriately rewarded by their peers. Regrettably, sidhe of other houses were not so appreciative of the work the exiles had done.

The Wars

House Liam was presented with an unexpected opportunity during the Accordance War. Yet, no one was quite sure of the nature of it. Several days after the Night of Iron Knives, the ranking nobles met in private session. The session lasted a week and the argument raged this entire time. Baron Malcolm, direct and violently Traditionalist, demanded that the house throw its weight behind Lord Dafyll immediately for the chance of regaining some status, and perhaps even redemption. Sir Peltis, famed historian and scholar, recommended a moderate course; House Liam had always tried to stay unnoticed, out of the public light. It was, Sir Peltis believed, a matter of survival. Count Dongahue, one of the few Modernists in the council, argued passionately for action, yes, but why fight for a society that had exiled the house? It was, in Dongahue's eyes, the commoners who needed House Liam and who would appreciate the house properly.

Blades were drawn only twice during the course of the week, and there were no fatalities, although Baron Malcolm limps to this day and has not spoken Count Dongahue's name since. House Liam's passions are quiet but furious when they erupt: This occasion was no exception.

Matters were no more settled at the end of the week than when they'd begun. Tempers were high. Each of the three predominant factions had supporters, and there were a handful of various viewpoints besides. Isolationism, in particular, was gaining strength.

On the seventh day, with tempers frayed and tension a palpable haze, Sir Gwilliam spoke. He had not said a word until this time, as befitted his lowly rank; he was present as a replacement for his lord only, the elderly Count Edward, who was too sick to be present. In truth, Gwilliam should not have spoken at all.

Perhaps it is in his favor that he didn't say much. "I'm tired of sitting around debating endlessly. It's all we ever do." Count Dongahue looked up then, surprised at who was speaking. "I'm going to Europe, and one way or another, I'm going to find a home for House Liam."

The room erupted in outrage. The whippersnapper had no business criticizing the council of his elders. Why, he was only recently past his childling years. Blades were nearly drawn for the third time, then brash Baron Malcolm called out for Gwilliam's head.

The fact that the young noble suited his actions to his words, and was already at the door leaving the council chamber, kept blades from leaving their scabbards completely. Count Dongahue slipped out of his seat and followed a moment later, leaving the rest of them to argue about appropriate penalties for such behavior. By the next day, the remaining nobles had put the unpleasantness behind them with a vote of censure for both Gwilliam and Dongahue, and the old debate began again.

While the Traditionalists debated, Dongahue caught up with Gwilliam and the pair discussed the future of the house. They agreed that Concordia was too unsettled for safety and perhaps it was best for those of House Liam to return to the ancestral shores of Europe. It seemed that everyone in Concordia was an eager youth seeking to carve out a new duchy; in Europe, they hoped for less competition and more opportunity. They would begin in Amsterdam, known to the faerie as the Duchy of Tulips.

By the time the pair had reached Europe, the council had come to a decision that really was no decision at all: strict neutrality. Baron Malcolm accepted reluctantly the decision of the majority and, as spokesman for the house, he announced to all of Concordia that House Liam intended to remain aside from the conflict. Furthermore, Malcolm stated that any actions taken by house members were individual actions and not indicative of the politics of the house as a whole. Those of other houses who paid attention to the pronouncements of an exiled house deemed this cowardice as to be expected from Liam.

Meanwhile, in the Duchy of Tulips, Sir Gwilliam decided that the sometimes cruel streets of Amsterdam were precisely the sort of environment in which House Liam could do the most good. With the count's able assistance, Gwilliam met with the commoner lords of the region: He was a witness to the horrors of war in Concordia and was willing to offer both an alternative to open conflict and the recognition they craved. There were, of course, those who were too proud to treat with a simple knight of an exiled house, but Gwilliam and Dongahue were persuasive, and the majority of the commoners were sensible enough to see the wisdom in what they proposed.

The rise of High King David made little difference to either branch of the house. While the Concordians petitioned for an end to the exile, King David did not see any reason to countermand that which his forefathers had decreed, and he felt the matter of the commoners was more important than that of a long-since-faded noble house. In Amsterdam, King David's example was proof that Sir Gwilliam's dream of cooperation was possible.

Gwilliam had solidified his position by 1980 to the point where he felt confident that he could safely petition King Picolette of the Kingdom of Flowers to recognize his claim on the Duchy of Tulips. In a private session with his closest advisors, the king contemplated the unrest that had plagued portions of his realm and that troubled the High King of Concordia even to that day. He then weighed that against the relative peace that had blessed the Duchy of Tulips — undeniably the work of young Gwilliam. In the end, Picolette braved the protests of the Traditionalists of his court and granted Gwilliam the duchy.

The Nature of House Liam

Of the Seelie Court

House Liam is by nature overwhelmingly Seelie in its orientation, even though most Kithain consider the exiled Liam members to be oathbreakers and worse. Many sidhe admit (in private) that the individuals of the house are usually of pure heart and honest mind. The thread that binds this group of exiles together is its devotion to the cause of protecting the humans among which they live. This dedication mixes poorly with the Unseelie inclination of casual Ravaging and the general treatment of humans as inferior.

Also, many members of the house react to the disdain with which they're held by going to the opposite extreme. Liam's grumps recommend extreme discretion in all situations in hopes that one day they will find that sufficient good behavior has resulted in a renewed welcome to the ranks of Kithain society. Naturally, the recommendations aren't always taken. Still, those who are inclined to ignore the wisdom of their elders often find the prospect of swearing themselves to another house more attractive than spending their lives as outcasts from society. The majority of those childlings and grumps who remain in Liam do so because they, like the grumps, burn with the desire to defend humanity.

The official House Liam position, thus, is that the Unseelie Court is completely unwelcome within the house. Those found to be of that court are stripped immediately of any title they hold and drummed out of the house, or worse. No house member wishes to give other Kithain any excuse to believe any worse of Liam than they already do, and the presence of Unseelie within the house is a disturbing reminder of the Unseelie side that every Seelie possesses.

Of the Unseelie Court

This doesn't mean that House Liam is entirely Seelie in its composition, as much as some like to claim that it is. The house is Seelie by majority and the ratio of Unseelie to Seelie members is far lower than that of other houses. However, it is an essential truth of Kithain nature that no faerie is completely one or the other, and this is just as true of every element of faerie society; House Liam is not as pure as it wishes or pretends to be.

Most Unseelie of the house are singletons, working alone in danger of discovery. They tend to be those who were once given to their Seelie nature, but they turned to the Unseelie Court for various reasons. Few remain for more than a year's time; most slip back into Seelie ways, or flee the house for the company of their kind, or worst of all, they are discovered. Those who meet this fate rarely live.

While the Seelie aspect of House Liam upholds the nobility and worth of the individual mortal, not all who belong to the house hold the belief that individual needs outweigh the greater good. There is ample precedent in human political philosophy for the belief that the needs of society must take priority over the needs of the individual. One scholar at Harvard University produced an entire monograph on the subject, concluding that individual mortals could be sacrificed — even by Ravaging — if necessary in order to strengthen House Liam for the greater good of all mortals.

The scholar vanished subsequently at the hands of a furious band of Liam knights, but the monograph is widespread both in photocopy and floppy disk forms. The philosophy of individual sacrifice is presented in seductively persuasive terms, speaking as much to the Unseelie side present in every faerie as to logic; the more superstitious ones view the monograph as a kind of curse, destroying any foolish enough to open its cover.

One might also hear an Unseelie member arguing that Banality is a peculiarly mortal phenomenon and that it behooves the house to spend time studying it. It is not right, the argument goes, to fear and fight blindly that which seems to be an important part of mortal life. True, Banality directly opposes mortal creativity, but it is possible that the tension between the Dreaming and Banality is one of the keys to creativity itself.

Such arguments, and others of their kind, result in a small but constant flow of converts to their Unseelie legacies. This need not create instant conflict with the house; if Unseelie instincts were completely antithetical to House Liam, there would be far less of these converts. However, in the long-term, the gulf between those who have gone Unseelie and their Seelie comrades grows too wide.

In addition to the Unseelie scattered here and there throughout House Liam, there is also a secret society that represents the primary Unseelie influence in the house. This society, the Midnight Mummers, dates back to before the exile. There are ancient histories that mention the Mummers, but the group is believed to have died out well before modern times.

Finally, the influence of the Shadow Court is almost completely absent from the house. While it is possible to reconcile an Unseelie nature with House Liam's ideals, the Shadow Court is much less compatible. House Liam is not a culture in which abandoning oneself to impulse and desire and darkness leads to any sort of reward.

Of Societies

Midnight Mummers

The Midnight Mummers are as old as House Liam. They were simply a group of friends who met to sympathize about the difficulty of being Unseelie in a predominantly Seelie Court in the beginning. They chose "Midnight" as a mockery of what others assumed about them and "Mummers" for the masks they were forced to wear. After the exile, they became a focus for dissent with the man many saw as a fool, King Liam, who brought disaster on his house.

Time passed and the disaffected departed for other houses. At the time of the Resurgence, the Mummers had returned to their original state: a small band of friends, grouped together for support. The Return found them as unprepared as the rest of the house, and during the Accordance War, the Mummers were just as unsure of the proper actions to take.

They contribute what they believe to be an essential function today, although the rest of the house disagrees — to them, they are the mockers of the house. A grump who becomes too self-absorbed and self-righteous in his politics is likely to wake up one morning to find his new bard is singing parodies of his policies; the Liam knight who ignores manners in his guardianship often acquires magically a pack of chimera who ape his every move in exaggerated fashion. The Mummers say this teaches much needed lessons, and sometimes they're right.

Baron Malcolm once swore a mighty oath of vengeance against the Mummers after a particularly nasty group promulgated a false decree in his name, one that ordered his court to limp so they might not embarrass him. It is not clear whether he would have been as upset had his court not believed it to be a valid order, and then not obeyed.

While the Mummers are mostly sidhe, they have little bias against the other kith and there are quite a few pooka in their ranks, in particular. There is no requirement to be Unseelie, either; the anarchic attitudes attract those of that predisposition and the Seelie members find themselves inevitably slipping into Unseelie ways.

Leadership of the Mummers is by consensus and those who've tried to hold the position too long find themselves a target of Mummer mischief. There is, however, a tendency toward sidhe leaders — they have ties to the Shadow Court, although they don't belong.

Knights Templar

The Knights Templar adopted the name in a sardonic fashion, for while they are nobles and some have been knighted, their actions are in no way chivalrous. The Knights fancy themselves to be the covert action team of House Liam, acting in the dark to uphold their own interpretations of the Escheat and of house law. Fanatic to the core and highly Traditionalist, they make their own rules and fight their own battles.

In general, House Liam is wise enough to avoid large-scale conflict with the rest of faerie society. The Knights are those sidhe in the house, generally wilders and childlings, who chafe at the restrictions exile places on them. They are secret only in the sense that it's hard to be sure who's a member; their existence is known widely in House Liam and that's the way the Knights like it. They have hopes of eventually coming out into the open, when their methods are acknowledged as right and proper.

A typical Knight Templar mission perhaps involves infiltrating a court in which House Liam is treated badly. After observation, to make sure they've chosen the right target, they'd attempt to punish the court in whatever manner they'd judge as fitting. The Knights lean more toward the direct than the witty and subtle. While they take up the cause of defending mortals if need be, it's their feeling that the remainder of the house is more than able to deal with those issues.

The current leader of the Knights is Sir Joseph. He is experiencing a great deal of pressure to allow non-sidhe to join, but he has refused so far on the grounds that upholding the honor of House Liam is a task too tricky for anyone who does not have the instinctual honor of a sidhe. This has affected the popularity of the Knights to no small degree.

Grey Monks

The Grey Monks are those of House Liam who are the most passionate about the belief that there is Glamour in human religions. The Monks attempt to live among the priests, mullahs and sensei of the religions themselves, taking on the role of true believer. (Some actually believe, although this is considered to be getting too close to the subject of study.) For the most part, they follow the Catholic Church, but the Monks are too few in number to discriminate — at least openly.

The Monks' primary goal is to learn to extract Glamour from the rituals and beliefs of the devout. If you ask a Monk, she'll tell you that she and her society have had success in this endeavor. If another examined the evidence, he would likely claim the opposite is true. While no faerie can deny that mortals inspired by religion have created great works of art on occasion, it is only the Monks who stipulate that the Glamour thus created is indistinguishable from the religion and that a congregation of true believers can produce Glamour as well.

Those outside House Liam who've encountered or heard of the Monks believe them to be insane. The strictest sidhe of Dougal and Gwydion go a step further and actively battle against them, remembering the offenses for which House Liam was originally exiled. The Monks, as an essentially scholarly society, try to avoid such conflicts; it helps that most faerie are at least a little nervous about entering churches, while the Monks have no such qualms.

Most Monks dwell in or near pockets of devout believers. There is a large grouping of Monks in Russia researching the Russian Orthodox Church, although their numbers have mysteriously fallen in recent years. Not surprisingly, the Vatican is another stronghold. The largest faction that is not involved with Catholic practices resides in Calcutta, studying Hindu ways.

Some Monks have established connections with certain radical sects of the Mage Tradition known as the Celestial Chorus. This development is by no means approved by the senior members of the society.

The Escheat

The Right of Demesne

The Right of Demesne is a traditional right that has slid into being an optional custom in the modern world. House Liam, often stubborn in its attempts to show that it's purer and more noble than those houses that exiled it, upholds this right scrupulously. The very few Liam rulers do not tolerate disobedience or disrespect.

Some non-Liam rulers expect obedience from those of House Liam. It is a matter of pride. The wise who have adopted Liam scholars into their household as record keepers and librarians take advantage of this fact.

The Right to Dream

No right is more important to House Liam than this one; no right is more absolute. If mortals do not dream, then Banality lays waste to the world and faerie is a dim memory of brighter times; in the eyes of any member of House Liam, Ravaging is the most dangerous action a faerie can perform.

Many within the house believe that the Right to Dream goes further than the mere injunction against Ravaging. Often, a Liam member who stands by and does not act to prevent Ravaging is found guilty of not only breaking house law, but of violating the Escheat as well. Enthusiastic House Liam nobles have extended this viewpoint to those of other houses, which contributes to the general dislike of Liam.

The extreme claim that failure to provide a creative mortal with an environment suited for their Dreaming can be interpreted as a violation of this right. While this is not a common view, those who hold it are exceedingly vehement in defending it.

The Right of Ignorance

It is, of course, important not to reveal the existence of Kithain to the world at large; Banality forces are strong and there are far too many who would stamp out the faerie for what they saw as the greater good. Accordingly, in dealing with those who are not of House Liam, the Right of Ignorance is given strong lip service and a certain degree of respect.

However, in the inner councils of the house, almost all agree that this so-called "right" is a ploy — a plot designed to keep mortals ignorant of danger. This false right was likely inserted by some cunning Unseelie ages ago, and there will eventually be a reckoning.

The Right of Rescue

While this is an important component of the Escheat, it's important to weigh the risks and causes before risking oneself for some Kithain overcome by Banality. Members of House Liam are taught to ask themselves why someone has been caught before moving to her rescue; if she has fallen because of foolishness or stupidity, it's not worth saving her unless she learns a lesson. Further, those who treat their dreamers well and do not abuse mortals rarely have to worry about getting caught short of Glamour.

In practice, this attitude denotes that the Right of Rescue is left to the individual's judgment. No Liam ruler calls one of her subjects incorrect in said judgment, except in truly exceptional cases. Some Liam save anyone they can, as a matter of honor, but it's not a good idea to count on this.

The Right of Safe Haven

As another right that is honored rarely by most of faerie society, House Liam's stubbornness has led it to maintain this tradition. No faerie is to be turned away from a freehold controlled by House Liam unless he has violated the Escheat. While the hospitality may not be of the highest quality, no Liam freehold is to deny the basic obligations of food and shelter. In cases where this may tax the freehold's resources, it is acceptable to seek help from others.

The unkind claim is that this is a simple obligation for House Liam to fulfill, given the rarity of House Liam freeholds. While this is true on the surface, the policy is nonetheless sincere.

The Right of Life

There is no question as to whether or not it is wrong to kill one's brothers and sisters; killing faeries violates the Escheat and must be punished appropriately. If one traces the threads of effect back through destiny's web, there are those who have lent their hand to betraying their heritage by preying on mortals.

Consider that for every dreamer whose dreams have been destroyed by Ravaging is a dreamer who no longer contributes to the health and Glamour of the world. This affects all faerie and makes the death of the Dreaming that much more likely. There is no question that those who Ravage deserve the same punishment as those who kill directly.

Fostering

Fostering is a sore subject with House Liam. There are far too many well-meaning nobles who, if a fosterling proves to be of House Liam during her Saining, will attempt to steal the child away to an entirely different house "for her own good." This practice eats away at the very heart of House Liam, and none of the other houses are willing to speak against it.

And, there's nothing quite as pleasant as watching some snobbish member of House Gwydion realize that the oh-so-promising childling she has been watching with glee is bound to the exiles of House Liam. Further, if one of House Liam is present at the Fior-Righ, there's hope that any potential kidnapping will be preventable — the Knights Templar are particularly eager to play this role.

On the whole, though, House Liam prefers to keep close track of its children and take the course of adoption: deliberately placing those who have not undergone the Dream Dance into families they can watch closely — ready to bring the new childlings into House Liam fosterage. Unlike others who take this course, Liam members are not concerned with the station of the mortal family; they care more that the parents will raise the child to be kind and wise. Good middle- or lower-class families are preferable, so that the child will not acquire the feeling of superiority.

The Other Houses

Dougal

Bloody idealists. Look, everyone says Gwydion is stuck up? Well, they have nothing on House Dougal. Dougal cloaks it all in a cowl of excuses, "We're idealistic, that's all. Can't blame a faerie for being idealistic." You can when their ideals don't include you, I say.

House Liam has very little to do with House Dougal. As far as Liam's concerned, a member of House Dougal faced with imperfection curls up into a little ball and gibbers, whereas House Liam deals with these imperfections and injustices of the world on a daily basis. In fact, House Dougal is perhaps the only house to which House Liam feels wholly superior.

When a Liam scholar is objective, he states that Dougal feels just as superior when compared to the imperfect exiles of House Liam. Thus, it's not often that Dougal's members bother to have anything to do with House Liam's either. The result is an arrogant neutrality between the two, which neither has any good reason to disrupt.

Eiluned

I had an affair with an Eiluned sorceress once, when I was a wilder. It seemed very natural, you know; nobody liked me for my house, and all were too willing to say the same sorts of things about Eiluned. Well, I learned my lesson. The difference between them and us is that with them, it's all true.

It's a rare member of House Liam who has anything nice to say about House Eiluned. The House of Secrets is everything Liam despises: treacherous, arrogant and far more concerned with the supernatural than with mortals. Additionally, Liam considers Eiluned to be the most Unseelie of the five great houses, and so it is irredeemably stained.

House Eiluned finds reason to deal with House Liam, though, generally to Liam's detriment. For example, an Eiluned scholar needs some scrap of information in House Liam records and obtains it by whatever covert means are necessary. Further, the courtiers of Eiluned find that House Liam makes a perfect scapegoat when covert plans go awry — all too common an occurrence.

Fiona

Yes. Well. In theory, we have a great deal in common with the debutantes of Fiona. I hear rumors that we're secret allies. But note that they don't often care much about the poor mortals after their little love affairs end, now do they?

Mortals aren't pets, and the romantic chevaliers that populate House Fiona forget that far too frequently for Liam's tastes. Fiona is believed to have great potential, but it's wasted unless the members take some responsibility for their actions. While they may be loved by the commoners, it's always good to remember that your House Fiona lord could turn his attentions to another motley tomorrow, so be prepared for the worst — and House Liam will be happy to remind you of this as needed.

There is, admittedly, a certain undertone of jealousy here. It is horribly unfair to House Liam that while Lord Liam was exiled for his love for the mortals, Lady Fiona was merely laughed at. There was very little difference in the two cases.

Gwydion

Our only real friends of the other houses are of House Gwydion. Ironic, considering they got us exiled in the first place. 'Tis a pity they're so damned arrogant about it, or we might teach them a thing or two about true nobility and the obligations thereof.

House Gwydion constantly toes that narrow line between kindness and condescension. There are many tales of a Gwydion warrior stepping between some Eiluned lady and a persecuted Liam knight, and no member of House Liam fails to be properly grateful for this. But there is no shortage of cautionary stories in which the same Gwydion warrior goes on to casually hurt the mortal that the knight was protecting — nobody forgets these either.

The Kithain of Gwydion are noble, and they treat Liam better than any other house ever does. One must remember that they do not understand the true importance of guarding mortals and that Lord Gwydion was responsible for House Liam's exile in the first place.

The Other Kith

Boggans

I was fostered by a boggan. Don't look surprised, it happens, the house is too small and so hard to find someone with the time and the qualifications to foster a childling. Anyhow, she was the kindest Kithain I have ever met and I won't hear a word against any of her kind. Understood?

You can talk about the nobility of trolls, but boggans have the nobility that is especially difficult: the quiet, calm kind of those who understand the call to help those weaker than themselves. Boggans take care of things and they don't think being stronger makes one superior. Show them you understand their ways, and they make fine friends.

Boggans are represented well in House Liam. Not every boggan extends his protective instincts to mortals, but it's not that much of a leap, and many is the boggan who's been having a nice cup of tea with some poor lost lamb only to discover that there's an arrogant sidhe with the same idea — or maybe he isn't so arrogant after all.

Eshu

The eshu are good folk. Not quite as dedicated as we might like; you won't get an eshu to stay around long enough to help a dreamer in need. But they usually mean well.

They can be good companions; eshu are clever and they know a flurry of interesting things. They are certainly the most akin to the sidhe, in elegance and grace. Their nature drives them to wander, though. An eshu who could stay put would be an asset to any court, but she would not be an eshu.

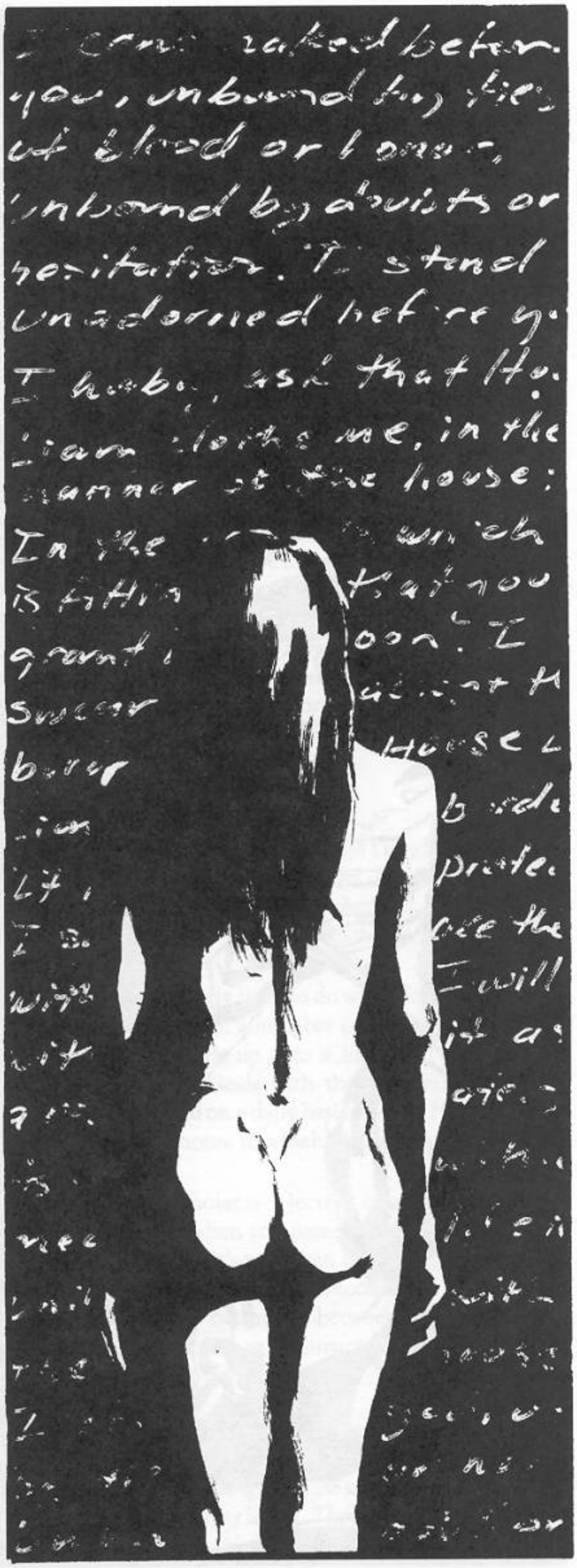
Despite their unreliability, there are a fair number of eshu who've joined House Liam. Their tale-telling nature mixes well with the scholarly side of the house.

Nockers

Nockers are like roses — no, no, hear me out. Nockers are like roses, without the pretty petals. I've found the more you leave them alone, the less you get pricked.

While nockers have their place in Kithain society, they're too sharp around the edges for House Liam. The value of their creativity is unchallenged, but for a house that delights in bringing the creative to its full potential, it's rather disturbing to deal with someone who won't admit they've created a perfect work. What's more, the nockers are prone to criticizing the works of others, which is not productive when one's nurturing a mortal.

Few nockers join Liam; they find that the house is overly idealistic on the whole. No nocker wants to live with her head in the clouds. For House Liam's part, the uneasiness one feels around a nocker is ten-fold for those nockers who actually do join the house.



Pooka

They're tricky, elusive, devious, little wretches in the best of times, that's what I say. The problem is, they're also kind-hearted, warm, generous, understanding companions in those same times. Pooka are a real paradox. As long as you remember what you're getting into, they aren't so bad.

If the pooka of the world weren't so good at listening, they'd be completely annoying. It's understandably very hard to trust anyone who can't be open with you and who can't tell you the truth. House Liam would fall apart if its members couldn't trust each other. Yet, pooka have a rare talent for consoling a damaged mortal, or for that matter, a wounded changeling. You trust them, even though you shouldn't. There's no way to resolve the paradox, and so you live with it.

Pooka are common in House Liam. In general, they're on the outside of this group of outsiders; most pooka who've united with the house have been brought in by a sidhe member who has learned to trust an individual pooka.

Redcaps

Mmmph. There's little to say except they're little: Their souls are little, their imaginations are little, their beady, squinty eyes are little. The only thing large about them is their appetites. They're a very bad joke on us all.

Redcaps are violent, angry creatures. Perhaps it's not their fault they're the way they are; it's not as if they're sluagh, who are bright enough to conceivably choose to repudiate their natures if they wished. Still, what good can you say of the delinquents of faerie? It would be better if they didn't exist.

There are fewer redcaps in House Liam than those of any other kith, not surprisingly. Those rare individuals who have sworn the oath almost always end up as rovers, unable to make a home in any freehold or court. The resentment is too much to bear.

Satyrs

Satyrs are wonderful for a good time and an easy laugh, or more if that's what you're looking for. Give them a title and they'll get as snooty as any other noble, sure, but the commoners are happy to ignore that cursed exile. It's just not wise to count on them for anything outside the physical.

The frivolity of satyrs is almost as legendary as that of the pooka. They're excellent company when you need a break from the wear-and-tear of House Liam duties, and what is less known about them is that they make excellent conversationalists.

Sluagh

Secrets, always secrets. What's knowledge good for if it isn't written down where others can benefit from it? But that's me all over — expecting altruism from the Unseelie wretches.

Nobody trusts a sluagh. Useful, yes; often in possession of some useful tidbit of information, yes; trust, no. The little wrigglers know everything, but there's always a price for it, and House Liam knows far too much about prices.

A few sluagh have joined Liam and they have admittedly an easier time of it than redcaps, for what it's worth. These few tend to align themselves with the more scholarly branch of the house because it fits their natural inclination and it keeps them away from bigoted eyes.

Trolls

Couldn't ask for a better warrior. Oh, they aren't always the brightest, but once you get an idea into their heads, they don't let go of it. Not gentle, either. But we have our fights, and they'd go much more poorly without our trolls.

Trolls are as noble and brave as the falcon; House Liam has always been a strong proponent of trolls. While they have odd ideas about their history, it doesn't prevent them from being brave, noble and everything else you'd want in the strongest of kith. Those trolls who consider Liam's members to be oathbreakers are dangerous and best avoided, of course, as nobility works both ways, though it's not the trolls' fault they've been led astray by the other houses.

There aren't that many trolls in the house. The average troll knows as much about being an outcast as any member of Liam, but he deals with it in different ways. And, as a kith very concerned with honor, trolls are the most likely of all kith to consider House Liam's exile a matter of import.

Commoners of House Liam

House Liam is willing to accept commoners into the house. Paradoxically, this is the house with the least commoners among its numbers. While a wholehearted acceptance of a general idea is one thing, finding commoners who meet the high House Liam standards is another, which is made all the more difficult by the lack of commoners inclined to seek Liam in the first place. Being born with a predilection toward Liam is one thing; choosing to swear to an exiled house is another entirely.

Nor does Liam accept oaths lightly. Anyone wishing to join the house, commoner or not, must first convince the highest ranking noble of his desire during a special assembly known as the Council of Union. These proceedings are carried out openly, before all members of Liam. While the presiding noble guides and channels the session, anyone may question the would-be house member. The supplicant must show evidence of her past inclinations: Independent work in the same vein as the house's character is very helpful. Any hint of moral ambiguity is risky. More petitioners are denied than accepted.

The Oath of Duty

May the light of the Sun burn my skin,
May the light of the Moon bring me fear,
May the food of the Earth bring me hunger,
May the waters of Life parch my throat
Should I forego the compass of my journey,
Should I neglect the care of the Dreaming,
Should I be blind to the needs of my charges,
Should I ignore the purity of my duty.

This is the first and most sacred oath of House Liam. No member fails to swear it, for it is the foundation of the house's laws and beliefs. Without it, little would hold the house together.

The key to understanding the Oath of Duty is that it's voluntary. House Liam forces no childling or wilder to belong who does not wish it. A good deal of any fostering is dedicated to explaining the meaning of the oath and reassuring the fosterling that it is completely her option whether to swear it or not. Without choice, an oath is meaningless.

The first quatrain is not just a list of penalties for one who breaks the oath. House Liam considers its duty to be its life. Without duty, without the willingness to carry on the example of Lord Liam himself, there is no meaning to the sacrifice he and his house have made. Life is service and the first quatrain reflects this tenet.

The second quatrain reinforces and expounds upon that duty. The house carries the concept of *noblesse oblige* to the *nth* degree. The direction of obligation should be clear for a noble: As nobles, they are obliged to protect those who need it most. This single pure principle is the core of the House Liam moral code.

The Oath of Duty is sworn at the end of the Saining, usually to the Kithain who fostered the changeling who is swearing. There is no great ceremony associated with it, as it is considered private. Those who come to the house from outside take this oath after they have sworn the Oath of Union (also in private) to a House Liam witness of their choice. The bond between the oathswearer and the witness is akin to that of siblings.

Once a petitioner has been accepted by the Council of Union, he is given until the next solstice to live among Liam constituents and act in all ways as a member of the house. There is no shame in changing one's mind during this time; childlings and wilders may take this time to haze the petitioner, while nobles turn a blind eye, regarding the hazing as an extra test as to the seriousness of the petitioner's intent.

The Oath of Union is sworn at the coming of the next solstice. It is policy not to accept the Oath of Union from any Kithain who is not at least a year out of the childling stage. This is a hotly debated issue in the house and as recently as five years ago, any can be accepted regardless of age. The Duchy of Tulips is pushing to remove this requirement.

Those who have attained acceptance and sworn the Oath of Union are in no way treated differently than those born to the house. Indeed, in some ways it is considered more honorable to seek and earn membership than to be born to it.

The Oath of Union

I come naked before you, unbound by ties of blood or honor,

Unbound by doubts or hesitation. I stand unadorned before you.

I humbly ask that House Liam clothe me, in the manner of the house;

In the manner that is fitting. I pray that you grant me this boon.

I swear I will accept the burdens of House Liam, as they are no burdens;

It is no hardship to protect. I swear that I will take them up with joy.

I hope that I will wither if I fail it, as a rose without water;

As a life without meaning: For my life is united with the house.

The first sacred oath of House Liam is for those who were not born to the house. It is, as such, a rebirth. It is treated as such in the ritual associated with it.

The changeling swearing the oath goes before the witness naked. He is expected to swear the oath with eyes closed, trusting that the witness hears him and accepts his words. If the witness believes the supplicant's sincerity, he places a white robe, representing swaddling clothes, onto the oathswearer.

The Oath of Union carries a great deal of symbolic and magical weight and is enforced by the weight of Glamour. Breaking it can lead to sickness and a literal wasting away, if the Kithain breaking the oath is not too banal. Banality is a defense against impact.

The Gallain and Prodigals

House Liam has a fair store of knowledge about the Gallain; given the amount of time its members spend outside normal Kithain society, this is no great surprise. As the best record keepers of fae society, Liam has accumulated an impressive library of information, although the exact records kept vary from kingdom to kingdom.

The following scraps of knowledge, beliefs and pieces of Liam folklore are relatively common.

Vampires

The Kindred, as they call themselves, are not to be taken lightly. They are too individually powerful to bring to open battle, and their political influence among the humans is also great, yet it is possible to inspire a neighborhood to defend itself against their nocturnal depredations. Further, as they are as factional as the fae themselves, they are reasonably easy to manipulate.

The most important vampire faction, in House Liam's viewpoint, is the Toreador. They feed on House Liam's mortal charges in a manner as damaging to the physical body as Ravaging is to the soul and, in some cases, far worse. Fortunately, they are particularly susceptible to the beauty of the sidhe — which seems to befuddle their judgment.

One must also remain wary of the Nosferatu, as they are rumored to have an alliance with the sluagh. There have been some scattered contacts with this breed, in the service of knowledge, and it appears the Nosferatu are honest, but slippery.

Finally, there is a breed called Sabbat, who are darker than the darkest of the Shadow Court — they are to be avoided at all costs. They are more malevolent than the chimera of a child's nightmare and they prey not from necessity but for the twisted joy of causing pain. If they can be opposed safely, they should be — but beware, they run in packs.

Werewolves

Werewolves are a sad example of divergence from the true faerie line. Liam scholars suspect that the passions that led the werewolves to devote themselves to protecting the Earth may be similar in nature to those that lead Liam to guard mortals. Some very devoted individuals have attempted to spend time with the packs in hopes of learning more of this, and with mixed results.

The werewolves' isolationism has kept House Liam from learning much of their culture. Since those werewolves who actively hunt humans seem to target mostly the sorts of individuals who produce the most Banality — large corporations and the like — there's no overwhelming need to oppose them. It is, in other words, a wary peace.

House Liam often finds itself cheek-to-jowl with a tribe of werewolves known as Bone Gnawers. The Bone Gnawers are to other werewolves as House Liam is to other Kithain,

and they are inclined to live near the inner-city freeholds of House Liam for this reason. The proximity makes both cooperation and conflict more prevalent.

Gwilliam's duchy cooperates with the Bone Gnawers of Amsterdam, which has proven to be a source of reward for both werewolves and changelings. The Bone Gnawers, plentiful in Amsterdam, have allowed Kithain into some of their cairns, which operate in a manner similar to freeholds. In return, Gwilliam and his sidhe use their charisma and influence to ensure that the laws of the city benefit the Bone Gnawers as much as possible. Further cooperation may come with time.

Mages

Mages are humans who have learned the world is not banal and choose to study its true nature. Unfortunately, they do not respect the Kithain sufficiently and, as such, it is advisable to avoid them. Their interests in mortal affairs seldom intersect with those of House Liam.

If a mage asks you for aid, "no" is always a safe answer, "yes" is seldom recommended. Some mages think of the fae as objects of study, or worse, magickal experiments. Some, and it is fortunate that these mages are few and far between, claim to be working toward the goal of restoring whimsy and Glamour to the world. While this is an honorable and worthy ambition, their methods and plans do not include much consideration for safety, and they are hated by other mages to an incomprehensible degree. Allying with them is riskier than agreeing to be experimented on by the others.

It is known that many of the most banal scientists think of themselves as mages, for reasons poorly understood. It is wise to be aware that some scientists have access to the kind of resources one expects only the rich and politically powerful to have; this issue bears further examination, but it is highly risky. Many of this breed have perfected scientific methods of detecting Kithain and are far too aware of their presence in the world.

House Liam has met with the so-called Dream Speaker organization most often; the organization is well-aware of the presence of changelings in the world and bear the Kithain no ill will. House Liam is generally more interested in the Cult of Ecstasy, however. While their methods are suspect, the cult is as interested in encouraging creativity in mortals as any House Liam Kithain. With the exception of the Grey Monks, House Liam is very wary of the Celestial Chorus, understandably, as they further the goals of the Inquisition with regards to Kithain.

Ghosts

No real evidence exists for undying spirits and it's suspected that what a mortal might call a poltergeist or a spook is really some pooka or sluagh playing a trick. After all, a sluagh looks very similar to the reported appearance of ghosts. There has never been any report of a changeling returning in this way.

Childlings of the house tell many ghost stories, as do those of other houses, and they are listened to about as often.

The Nunnehi

The native changelings of North America have their reasons for their customs and their ways. However, while House Liam must respect them (just as the house would like to be respected even by those who do not understand them), the nunnehi's unreasonable hatred of European Kithain is met only with staunch caution. If necessary, one should not shy away from open conflict. Walk warily in their lands, for it is dangerous.

These faerie do not seem to need mortals as a source of Glamour, which is promising and disturbing. If they could teach this trick to others, it might be a way to reduce the frequency of Ravaging, although there are too many who Ravage for pleasure rather than necessity. It is possible, though, that the trick is somehow a trap; if it was easy, House Liam would already have discovered it, while certain accounts speak of a great price paid by the nunnehi.

Internal Politics

The driving conflict in current House Liam politics is the ongoing war of words between young Duke Gwilliam, his Court of Tulips and the European faeries who follow his lead, and the unexpectedly united front of the ranking Liam nobles in the Kingdom of Concordia.

Duke Gwilliam is the source of the rumors of alliance between House Liam and House Fiona. Unwilling to accept the historic disdain of an entire house, he began quietly to open discussions with the three Queens of House Fiona in the New World. Gwilliam's efforts have led to small alliances at the moment, but it has not yet blossomed into anything anyone of House Fiona admits openly. Gwilliam is aware that attempting to use the progress that has been made as a public relations tool would be counter-productive. He has made some effort to stamp out the rumors himself, so he might stay in the good graces of Fiona — if this effort is successful, he is to begin talking to influential courtiers of other houses as well.

The success of the discussions with House Fiona has prompted Gwilliam to attempt to reopen lines of communication within his own house that have been closed since the schism. Since 1995, he has been sending his trusted liegemen to Concordia to speak of the value of standing up for one's rights. This quiet act is aimed at his fellows in Liam, rather than attempting to convince other houses that House Liam deserves redemption: Duke Gwilliam does not believe in begging. He thinks that the house will do well enough by carving out its own territory and ignoring the whole matter of exile.

The duke's men are considered to be agitators by the Liam nobles of Concordia: The Baroness Grayswan, who succeeded Baron Malcolm as *de facto* leader of the Concordia

faction when he passed away in 1989, has decreed that any men of Gwilliam are to be arrested and thrown out of Concordia. The irony of this exile within an exile has not gone unnoticed.

Gwilliam is more willing to deal with the Prodigals than the average Kithain, as told earlier. His flexibility has served him well as he makes inroads into the hearts and minds of Concordians; he has access to information that his rivals and enemies will never reach. At present, Gwilliam has received word of a potential explosion in the ranks of the High King's Court and is unsure how to best exploit this. In the end, he may remain on the sidelines, prepared to take advantage of the chaos that could result.

The Baroness Grayswan has been less restrained by the chains of tradition than her father and more willing to compromise for the goals she seeks. She is a dangerous enemy. Her goals, however, are those instilled in her by her father before his death. No less than he, she seeks stability rather than any real change in the status of the house.

Still, she is more skilled than her father at building support and alliances, and while Baron Crane seemed as if he would be the next leader of the Concordians, he stepped aside for her in 1992. The baroness has solidified her strength in the house in the subsequent five years and has ingratiated herself into High King David's counsels.

From Gwilliam's point of view, the Traditionalists of Baroness Grayswan are too eager to subsume themselves to the dictates of High King David's Court. David is a good ruler, but there are too many demands on his time for him to reconsider and reevaluate the exile of House Liam. Furthermore, what knowledge he has of their exile is indicative that there is no reason for reopening the matter.

If Baroness Grayswan and her supporters were to push the issue, it's possible that King David would make time for them. The reward of conformity has been a slow-improving reputation for the house, at least among the more cosmopolitan Kithain. Yet, the decades of rule and the relative safety of House Liam's current position in Concordia make it unlikely that Grayswan will ever find the "right time" to speak to David of the matter.

Thus, the role of House Liam — at least in King David's eyes — is two-fold: First, its members serve as scholars and librarians, albeit more of the latter as the house is viewed as overly biased in its scholarship. As librarians, they provide the documentation and notes so desperately needed to give faerie society some feeling of continuity after the Shattering.

Secondly, the skill with which House Liam nurtures creativity has been noticed; King David and his nobles use the house as a tool with which to reclaim the blighted Banality-plagued regions of the land. On Queen Mab's advice, David promulgated a decree allowing Liam members to hold non-hereditary titles under special circumstances. The majority of these titles went to those willing to work in said regions; it is his plan that the lands recovered fall to more respectable hands, as those who reclaim them pass away.

This practice infuriates Gwilliam, but the Liam nobles of Concordia are not willing to listen to his arguments. They state that it is a step toward respectability and that full recognition will come by taking such steps. It is not clear that they are wrong. A generation of childlings and wilders are learning that House Liam can provide strong and just leadership, which is a lesson of value.

An objective observer might ask: In uncertain times, does House Liam have the luxury of patient, certain measures? No one is truly objective and, thus, no one can provide a fair answer to that question. Time is the only test.

House Notables

Ellen Rynson

Ellen "Cat" Rynson is one of those former commoners held up as a shining example of why House Liam is copasetic with accepting commoners into its ranks. She underwent her Saining during college, changing from a shy journalism student into a talented eshu photographer. She set out to travel and change the world immediately after graduation. She soon discovered the nobility behind the stories told of House Liam and joined the house with pride.

She is working currently on a collection of photographs of broken families — abused children, battered wives and other corruptions of the human spirit. Her past books are unyielding explorations of the darker side of humanity. More than anything else, Cat wants to make it impossible for people to ignore the pain and suffering in the world.

Unfortunately, this is not a recipe for good sales, and while Cat is talented, she is not so skilled in convincing Middle America to buy her depressive books for coffee-table

display. And she is too stubborn to change. While she can find house members to put her up for a night or two on her travels, she continues to put forward her stories and pictures.

The numerous people whom she has met, both Kithain and mortal, speak of her strong demeanor, full of laughter and life. Cat is quick to ire when she sees injustice — a tendency that gets her into trouble more often than an impartial fortune allows. She has better luck in the battle when she uses her art, rather than her fists, but she does not always think before acting.

Harlequin

It's incredibly egotistical to name yourself after an archetype and everyone (including him) knows it. But Harlequin doesn't care. He thinks it impolite to point fingers at him, though, and what sidhe tolerates impoliteness? Not he; surely those who slur his good name must be made into mockeries themselves....

He wants to be the heart and soul of the Midnight Mummers and believes that flamboyance and charm are the best ways to accomplish this goal. It's not his fault that few take him seriously, but he still feels the sting. Thus, he's driven to more outrageous actions in hopes of shaking his reputation, which, of course, cements it only more strongly.

The ironic result is that he's better known (and feared) outside the house than within. It's rumored in the Kingdom of Concordia that he is the leader of the Mummers and that the Beltaine Blade has put a substantial price on his head. Harlequin loves hearing this; it's another reason for him to be even more outrageous.

His mother, the Countess Giancotta, is very worried about her son. He's given up listening to her some time ago and her influence in the Kingdom of Concordia is limited, as she is of Duke Gwilliam's nobility. The countess may soon attempt to involve others in her efforts to curb Harlequin.

Count Dongahue

The count, bone-skinny and possessing a wit as biting as his rapier, is the prime representative of age in the Court of Tulips. He is not Duke Gwilliam's chief advisor; his sarcasm and off-putting manner make him too prickly to do well in that role. However, his voice is a strong one in the duke's ear.

His history explains why he, alone among the ranking nobles of Concordia, was able to see the promise in Duke Gwilliam's actions. During the Resurgence, the count found himself with limited options as to which mortal form to occupy. He settled for the body of an Irish street tough in Boston. The pangs of guilt he feels at the crime he committed are the reason for his sarcasm; although none realize it, his most cutting wit wounds himself as well as his target.

Dongahue found one of the better freeholds available in Boston and defended it against the inroads of House Eiluned by an alliance with the local commoners and by his innate skill at arms. Yet, when he made the decision to join Gwilliam in Europe, the freehold was left in the hands of others; they proved to be unable to maintain Dongahue's fine balance of diplomacy and skill at arms, and the freehold fell to Eiluned. It is another burden of guilt for the count.

For this and for his value to Gwilliam, the Concordian faction bear a grudge against the count almost as large their resentment against Gwilliam himself. Dongahue is very fond of taunting his opposites and encouraging dislike. He claims it is meant to distract them from important issues, but those who know him see through the lie.

The count is most likely the highest ranking noble in the Amsterdam branch of the house to be found in Concordia, as he acts as a sort of unofficial ambassador. While he rarely chooses to use his diplomatic skills anymore, his knowledge of protocol and his keen talent for observation allow him to

win allies in King David's Court. Dongahue's travels are unpredictable, almost as much as those of any eshu, and he can be found in the most unlikely places.

Sir Elaine

Elaine insists on the title. She is a member of Baroness Grayswan's Court, and it is a matter of pride for her that in a court leaning toward tradition that she has risen to a position of leadership among the knights. While Sir Nicholas is still the Captain of the Guard, as he has been since the early days of Baron Malcolm's rule, he is growing more and more the grump and is expected to retire in due course. Elaine intends to be his successor.

She is tall, even for a sidhe. One of the best ways to trigger her infamous temper is to raise the hoary rumor that there is trollish blood somewhere in her heritage. Those who arouse Elaine's ire, by spreading rumors or by abusing those in her care, shortly discover that she is skilled with a great blade. She returns to her usual quiet state when her fury abates; it is this habitual silence that leads the unwary and unknowing to assume that the tall warrior is not as observant as she is dangerous.

By special request granted by the baroness, Elaine is permitted to spend two months traveling up and down Concordia every year, to satisfy her sense of justice. She is known as one of House Liam's most fervent defenders of mortal-kind. She often finds a talented mortal who for whatever reason has been unable to realize her talent fully.

Sir Elaine has never associated herself with any of the informal factions or secret societies within the house. Her only affiliation at present is with her baroness. Elaine's prestige and skill make her a prime target for recruitment; the Knights Templar are eager to bring her sword arm to their cause. Elaine is more aware of their machinations than they believe.

On the rare occasions when she is dressed for court rather than for duty, her smile appears as a treasure like the legend-

ary roses of Arcadia. The crasser court members have a long series of wagers concerning when she might fall in love and who the lucky man, or woman, will be.

Tenebrea

Tenebrea is the goblin that House Liam grumps use to frighten their childlings into behaving when nothing else works. He has been a figure of fear ever since the Resurgence, rumored to appear in the dead of winter wherever House Liam grows too strong. By the time summer comes, or so rumor has it, Tenebrea vanishes again, leaving only the traces of his punishment behind him.

House legends say that he (or she; while most assume he's male, there's no real proof) is a member of the Shadow Court who once was among the noblest of the Seelie. It is not known why his Unseelie side has grown so strong; some say that his liege lord fell prey to chimera spawned of an Autumn Person's nightmares and others believe that his brother slew his greatest friend. Liám scholars give the most credence to the theory that he loved a Liam lass who spurned him, so his love darkened to hatred and vengeance.

Regardless of his history, he has preyed on the house for two decades. While he does not challenge the stronger house freeholds — the Duchy of Tulips has been safe from him, as have those of the house who are historians and scholars to other lords — once every two years he strikes silently at those he considers over-arrogant. He does not always manage to kill his targets, but that is always his goal.

Duke Gwilliam has placed a price on Tenebrea's head, as has Baroness Grayswan: Tenebrea is one of the infrequent matters in which they are in agreement. What the Baroness has learned, and the duke has not, is that Tenebrea was once of House Liam. She is keeping this information private while she investigates Tenebrea's reasons for joining the Shadow Court, for the changeling who unravels the secret of Tenebrea and stops his depredations will gain great status in the house.

Baron Crane

The baron is a quieter key figure in the Concordian opposition to Duke Gwilliam's policies. While the baron is an imposing man, over six-feet-tall and massive with both muscle and gut, his political tendencies do not match his physical presence. Rather than bully his way to recognition, he works in whispers and in calm suggestions, which has proven very effective over the years.

The baron is a sidhe who retains fragmented memories of the time before the Shattering, in Arcadia. He was a young man when the Shattering occurred and he did not take it well; the first decade of his life in the mundane world was spent in restless search for the answers nobody had. And his isolation was a poor base for research.

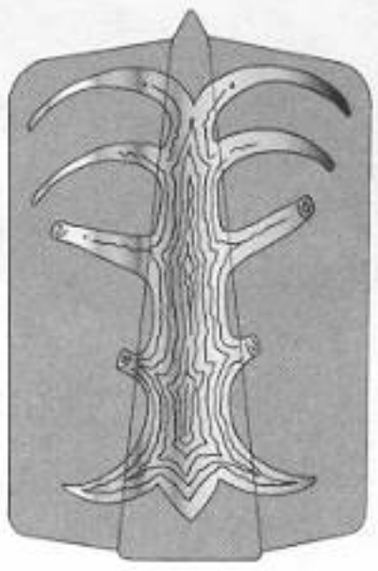
Toward the end of this time, the baron spent a year in dalliance with Lady Sara, a minor noble in House Eiluned. Her observations on the utility of political power with regards to the uncovering of secrets led him to choose his current path. Since the late 1970s, he has been working to ensure that as many faerie owe him as possible, then using those favors to create a library that is the envy of any court. He became the Baron of New Haven in 1993, trading in a number of political chits for the privilege, which enabled him to add the resources of the Yale University Library to his own.

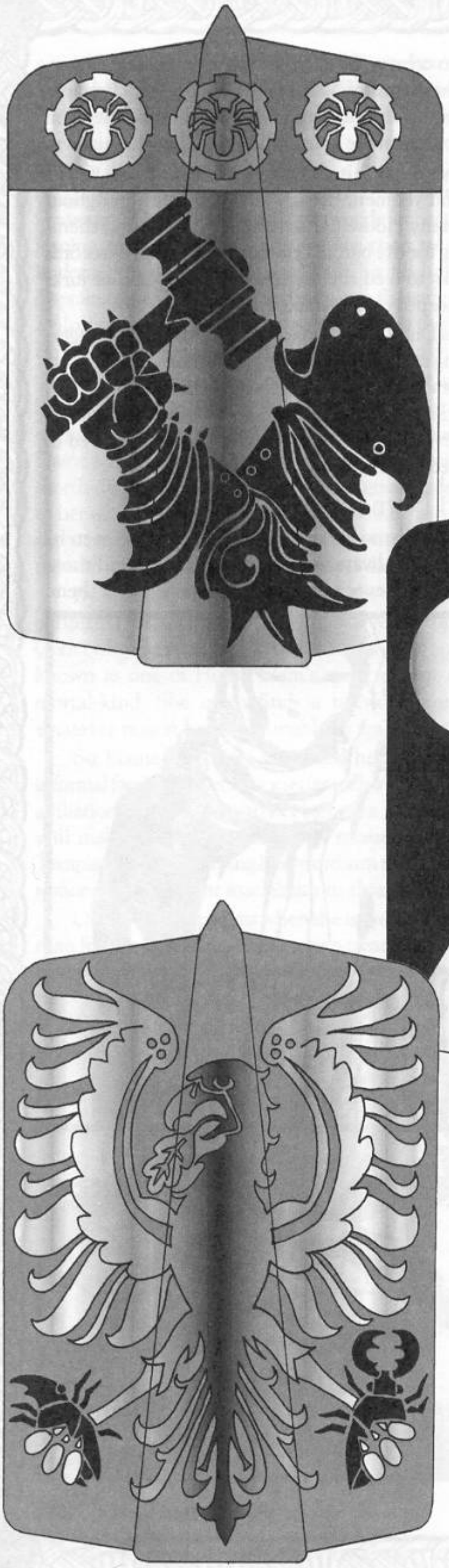
He rarely leaves his fief or his freehold today. His messengers and yeomen, though, are scattered throughout Concordia. Many House Liam members have found themselves working for the baron, bringing back scraps of records or entire books to feed the desire for knowledge that lurks behind his deceptive, clear-blue eyes.

He thinks Duke Gwilliam to be headstrong and dangerous; by pushing so hard against the established way, one cuts oneself off from resources. For a scholar, this is unthinkable. It is unimportant, in Baron Crane's opinion, whether or not House Liam ever returns to favor as long as it is allowed to pursue knowledge and creativity.

High Lord Noman

This figure is shrouded in mystery. He has been seen by many of the house, always arriving just in time to aid those in need, but he has never appeared the same to any of them.





Appendix: Character Templates

House Dougal Template

Architect of Doom

Quote: *To make an omelet, you have to break some eggs.*

Background: You have always known you were better. In school, you never quite won the election for school president, but it was funny how the president always had to resign. Getting caught cheating is always so humiliating....

That accident in shop class didn't really keep you down for long, a couple of fingers are nothing to worry about — besides, you had to show that stupid vocational teacher a thing or two. Brake lines rust so easily!

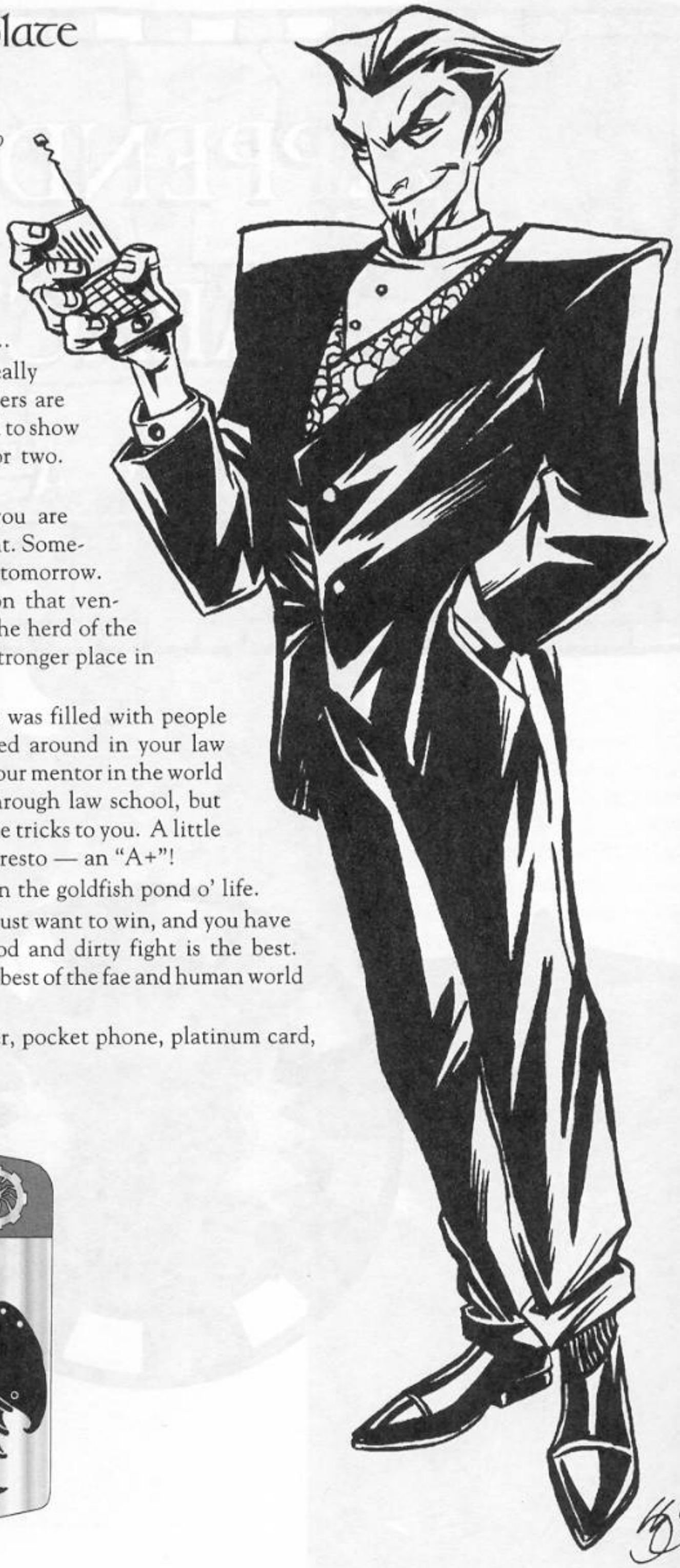
Winning counts, especially when you are bringing down the stupid and incompetent. Sometimes you fail, that's okay. There's always tomorrow. You greet each dawn with the realization that vengeance will be yours. Your job is to cull the herd of the weak and imbecilic, the world will be a stronger place in the end because of your victories.

College was a drag since the campus was filled with people almost as smart as you. But things turned around in your law school ethics class. That's when you met your mentor in the world of the dark fae. Most people struggled through law school, but that charismatic professor explained all the tricks to you. A little Glamour here, a few cantrips there and presto — an "A+"!

Now you're on your own — a shark in the goldfish pond o' life.

Roleplaying Hints: Some think you just want to win, and you have to admit that victory is sweet, but a good and dirty fight is the best. Matching wits and machinations with the best of the fae and human world is what you really live for.

Equipment: Pager, portable computer, pocket phone, platinum card, Mercedes, loads of cash.



Noblesse Oblige: The Book of Houses

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Court: Unseelie
Legacies: Savage/Crafter
House: Dougal

Seeming: Journeyman
Kith: Sidhe
Motley:

Attributes

Physical

Strength ●●○○○
Dexterity ●●○○○
Stamina ●●○○○

Social

Charisma ●●○○○
Manipulation ●●○○○
Appearance ●●●○○

Mental

Perception ●●●●○
Intelligence ●●●○○
Wits ●●●○○

Abilities

Talents

Alertness ●●○○○
Athletics ○○○○○
Brawl ○○○○○
Dodge ○○○○○
Empathy ●○○○○
Intimidation ●●○○○
Kenning ●○○○○
Persuasion ○○○○○
Streetwise ●○○○○
Subterfuge ●●○○○

Skills

Crafts ○○○○○
Drive ○○○○○
Etiquette ●●○○○
Firearms ○○○○○
Leadership ●●○○○
Melee ○○○○○
Performance ●○○○○
Security ○○○○○
Stealth ○○○○○
Survival ○○○○○

Knowledges

Computer ●●○○○
Enigmas ●●○○○
Gremayre ●○○○○
Investigation ●●○○○
Law ●●●●○
Linguistics ○○○○○
Lore ○○○○○
Medicine ○○○○○
Politics ●●●●○
Science ○○○○○

Advantages

Backgrounds

Contacts ●●●○○
Resources ●●●●○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○

Arts

Chicanery ●●○○○
Sovereign ●●○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○

Realms

Actor ●●●○○
Fae ●●○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○

Other Traits

Glamour

● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑

Willpower

● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑

Ravaging/Musing Threshold

Banality

● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑

Health

		Real	Chimerical
Bruised		❑	❑
Hurt	-1	❑	❑
Injured	-1	❑	❑
Wounded	-2	❑	❑
Mauled	-2	❑	❑
Crippled	-5	❑	❑
Incapacitated		❑	❑

Birthrights/Frailties

Experience: ☐

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House Eiluned Template

Private Eye

Quote: *I believe I have some information you might be interested in.*

Background: Growing up in a suburb two blocks over from what was politely referred to as the "rough" side of town, you saw more than your share of violence. Walking home from school was always an adventure, though not one you looked forward to each day. But you found you could talk your way out of most situations by doing a little homework. You unearthed who had done what, and what everybody's girlfriends were doing behind their backs. Pretty soon, the guys learned that it was in their best interest to be sure that you made it home safely, especially after the time that you told Joey what LaTasha had been doing in that abandoned boxcar last Saturday night (and with whom). So what if it was a lucky guess? It worked, didn't it?

A few years later, one of the city's finest approached you with a proposition: Give him and his fellow cops the goods on what was going down in your neighborhood, and they'd see to it that you got some kickbacks. It was a good deal for a couple of years...until the night you came home to find your front door had been kicked in and your apartment trashed. Dad had apparently walked in on the guys who were doing it, and now he's in the hospital with a bunch of stab wounds. You decided it was time to move, so you called your cousins uptown to tell them you'd be coming to stay for a while.

Like that wasn't enough, you'd been feeling woozy the past couple of days. You figured it was a flashback or something, but everything looked too bright, with colors like you'd never seen before. You hoped that getting out of the neighborhood would help, but it only got worse. Your Chrysalis had begun.

Adjusting to the double life wasn't as tough as you expected, and you discovered that the skills you'd learned on the street served you well among the fae. The local baron took you under his wing and hooked you up with a sweet job doing surveillance work. Now you have your own business, working alone, making your own hours, and finding out the dirt. What could be sweeter?

Roleplaying Hints: This is the information age, baby. That's what everybody wants, and the smart ones are willing to pay for it. It's just a matter of learning what information a person wants, what they don't want others to get...and what they're willing to do to make sure things go their way.

Equipment: Cellular phone, sunglasses, notepad, binoculars, '85 convertible sportscar

Noblesse Oblige: The Book of Houses

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Court: Unseelie
Legacies: Pandora/Hermit
House: Eiluned

Seeming: Wilder
Kith: Sidhe
Motley:

Attributes

Physical

Strength ●●○○○
Dexterity ●●●○○
Stamina ●●○○○

Social

Charisma ●●●●○
Manipulation ●●●●○
Appearance ●●○○○

Mental

Perception ●●●○○
Intelligence ●●○○○
Wits ●●●○○

Abilities

Talents

Alertness ●●●○○
Athletics ●●○○○
Brawl ○○○○○
Dodge ○○○○○
Empathy ○○○○○
Intimidation ○○○○○
Kenning ●○○○○
Persuasion ○○○○○
Streetwise ●●●○○
Subterfuge ●●○○○

Skills

Crafts ○○○○○
Drive ●●○○○
Etiquette ○○○○○
Firearms ●●●○○
Leadership ○○○○○
Melee ○○○○○
Performance ○○○○○
Security ●●●●○
Stealth ○○○○○
Survival ○○○○○

Knowledges

Computer ○○○○○
Enigmas ○○○○○
Gremayre ○○○○○
Investigation ●●●○○
Law ●●○○○
Linguistics ○○○○○
Lore ○○○○○
Medicine ○○○○○
Politics ○○○○○
Science ○○○○○

Advantages

Backgrounds

Contacts ●●●○○
Resources ●●○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○

Arts

Chicanery ●○○○○
Sovereign ●●○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○

Realms

Actor ●●●○○
Fae ●○○○○
Nature ●○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○

Other Traits

Glamour

● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑

Willpower

● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑

Ravaging/Musing Threshold

Banality

● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑

Health

		Real	Chimerical
Bruised		❑	❑
Hurt	-1	❑	❑
Injured	-1	❑	❑
Wounded	-2	❑	❑
Mauled	-2	❑	❑
Crippled	-5	❑	❑
Incapacitated		❑	❑

Birthrights/Frailties

Experience: ☐

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House Fiona Template

Escort Diva

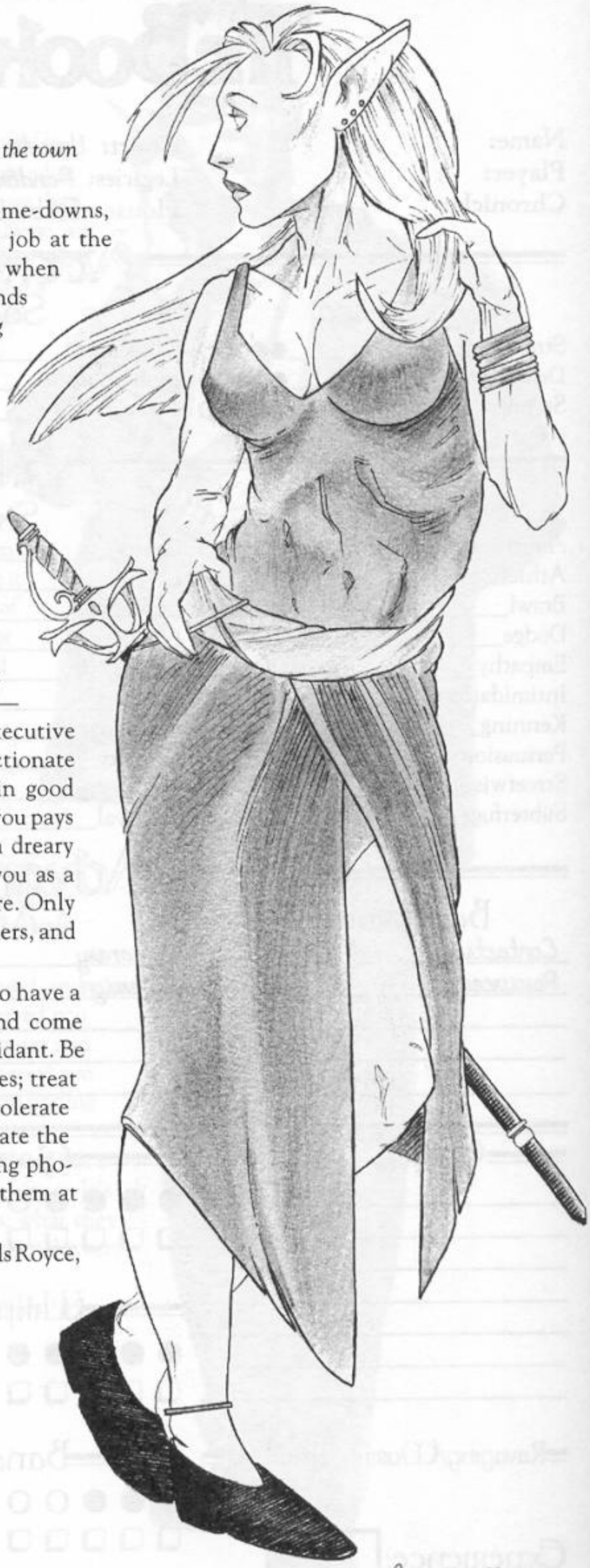
Quote: *Yes, that's a party of eight for dinner. We'll show you the town and a night you'll never forget.*

Background: As a young woman, you wore hand-me-downs, getting new clothes only when you took an exhausting job at the hamburger joint after school. You tried to be happy even when you were poor; at least your family loved you, and boyfriends with cool bikes abounded. Still, something was missing that you couldn't even put in words. When you found out about your faerie nature and the existence of changelings, the emptiness in your life faded away. The newly discovered world of the Kithain delighted you beyond any daydream.

Your friends among the fae, commoner and noble, helped you get a job as a model, then as a fashion designer. You finally had lots of money, and the first thing you spent it on was your family. You started a small modeling agency that gradually turned into a high-class escort service. Contrary to what some of the snooty nobles say (they remind you of the stuck-up girls in high school), the young ladies in your charge are *not* prostitutes — they're lovely, charming professionals trained to serve as executive companions for an evening or two. You're a stern but affectionate taskmistress, making sure the ladies are cared for and in good health. Many are grad students who find that working for you pays better and offers more chances to make contacts than a dreary assistantship would. Some of the women even look to you as a mentor, sharing their problems, hopes, dreams for the future. Only once did you have to take a client in hand for his bad manners, and he still bears the scar from your rapier's sting.

Roleplaying Hints: You're not only beautiful, you also have a shrewd mind and vision. The role of mentors and friend come naturally, and you've discovered that you like being a confidant. Be attentive to details among your clients and your employees; treat them with respect without sacrificing your dignity. Don't tolerate any crap from smart-mouthed mortals who don't appreciate the beauty and skill of your escorts. Snobs and social-climbing phonies annoy you to no end — secretly, you enjoy besting them at their own game.

Equipment: Cellular phone, *haute couture* garments, Rolls Royce, Dom Perignon



Noblesse Oblige: The Book of Houses

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Court: Seelie
Legacies: Sage/Beast
House: Fiona

Seeming: Grump
Kith: Sidhe
Motley:

Attributes

Physical

Strength ●●○○○
Dexterity ●●●○○
Stamina ●●○○○

Social

Charisma ●●●●○
Manipulation ●●●○○
Appearance ●●●●●

Mental

Perception ●●○○○
Intelligence ●●●○○
Wits ●●●○○

Abilities

Talents

Alertness ●●○○○
Athletics ●○○○○
Brawl ○○○○○
Dodge ○○○○○
Empathy ●●○○○
Intimidation ●○○○○
Kenning ●●○○○
Persuasion ●●●○○
Streetwise ●○○○○
Subterfuge ●○○○○

Skills

Crafts ○○○○○
Drive ●○○○○
Etiquette ●●●○○
Firearms ○○○○○
Leadership ●●○○○
Melee ●○○○○
Performance ●●○○○
Security ○○○○○
Stealth ○○○○○
Survival ○○○○○

Knowledges

Computer ●○○○○
Enigmas ●○○○○
Gremayre ○○○○○
Investigation ○○○○○
Law ●○○○○
Linguistics ○○○○○
Lore ○○○○○
Medicine ○○○○○
Politics ●●○○○
Science ○○○○○

Advantages

Backgrounds

Contacts ●●○○○
Dreamers ●○○○○
Remembrance ●○○○○
Resources ●●●●○
Title ●○○○○

Arts

Primal ●○○○○
Wayfare ●●●○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○

Realms

Fae ●●○○○
Prop ●●○○○
Scene ●○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○

Other Traits

Glamour

● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑

Willpower

● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑

Ravaging/Musing Threshold

Banality

● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑

Health

		Real	Chimerical
Bruised		❑	❑
Hurt	-1	❑	❑
Injured	-1	❑	❑
Wounded	-2	❑	❑
Mauled	-2	❑	❑
Crippled	-5	❑	❑
Incapacitated		❑	❑

Birthrights/Frailties

Experience: ☐

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House Gwydion Template

Falconer

Quote: (high-pitched whistle) *Hooooo-aah! Catch me that bat, Cadarn! Don't let the little snitch get away!*

Background: You were the child of suburbia at its most middle class. You grew up on a street where all the houses were the same color, and where the backwoods were thicker with joggers than chipmunks. It wasn't even *boring* — it was too drab to merit even monotony. You spent your time up in the branches of the big oak in your yard, staring at the sky through the leaves, just thinking about what might be.

Your Chrysalis hit when you were halfway through high school. A motley of well-meaning commoners found you and took you to the nearest household. Your guardian was the court falconer and master-at-arms, and you enjoyed your fostering like nobody's business. You clung to the new world around you like a baby to its mother — nobody, nohow, was going to take this away from you. When you were inducted, you drank up the lore and pageantry like nothing else. Of course, you weren't the fiercest of warriors — the Fior-Righ *hurt* — but you knew you would find a way to serve your house, regardless. And to date, serving your house hasn't been all that bad.

Roleplaying Hints: You avoid actual court functions, mostly leaving politics to those best suited for it. You feel more at home among commoners and enjoy spending time in the household mews. However, you always turn up for pageants, as much to stare at the nobles in their finery and watch the dances as anything else. You think of yourself more a spectator than a participant where the nobility is concerned, but there's more to being Gwydion than holding court. And you love being Gwydion — it's absolutely wonderful to belong to something that's worth it.

Equipment: Chimerical falcon, dagger, thick leather gloves

Noblesse Oblige: The Book of Houses

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Court: Seelie
Legacies: Virtuoso/Fatalist
House: Gwydion

Seeming: Wilder
Kith: Sidhe
Motley:

Attributes

Physical

Strength	●●○○○
Dexterity	●●●○○
Stamina	●●○○○

Social

Charisma	●●●●○
Manipulation	●●●●○
Appearance	●●●●○

Mental

Perception	●●●○○
Intelligence	●●○○○
Wits	●●●○○

Abilities

Talents

Alertness	●○○○○
Athletics	●○○○○
Brawl	●○○○○
Dodge	●○○○○
Empathy	●●○○○
Intimidation	○○○○○
Kenning	●○○○○
Persuasion	●●○○○
Streetwise	○○○○○
Subterfuge	●○○○○

Skills

Crafts	●○○○○
Drive	●○○○○
Etiquette	●○○○○
Firearms	○○○○○
Leadership	●●○○○
Melee	●●○○○
Performance	○○○○○
Security	○○○○○
Stealth	●○○○○
Survival	○○○○○

Knowledges

Computer	●○○○○
Enigmas	○○○○○
Gremayre	●○○○○
Investigation	○○○○○
Law	○○○○○
Linguistics	○○○○○
Lore	●○○○○
Medicine	●○○○○
Politics	●○○○○
Science	○○○○○

Advantages

Backgrounds

Chimera (Falcon)	●●●●○
Mentor	●●○○○
Title	●○○○○
	○○○○○
	○○○○○

Arts

Primal	●●○○○
Wayfare	●○○○○
	○○○○○
	○○○○○
	○○○○○

Realms

Nature	●●●○○
Fae	●○○○○
Scene	●○○○○
	○○○○○
	○○○○○

Other Traits

Animal Ken
Falconry

Glamour

● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑

Willpower

● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑

Health

		Real	Chimerical
Bruised		❑	❑
Hurt	-1	❑	❑
Injured	-1	❑	❑
Wounded	-2	❑	❑
Mauled	-2	❑	❑
Crippled	-5	❑	❑
Incapacitated		❑	❑

Ravaging/Musing Threshold

Create Hope

Banality

● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑

Birthrights/Frailties

Awe and Beauty: Noble Bearing/ Banality's Curse

Experience: ☐

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House Liam Template

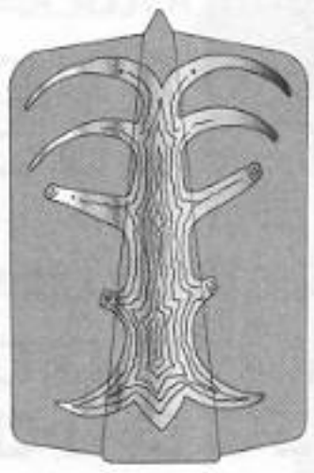
Diplomat

Quote: *I think we can work things out....*

Background: You were born in the Court of Tulips and raised among your kind. As one of the most trusted and capable youths in Duke Gwilliam's Court, you were asked to go to Concordia to travel and speak in support of his efforts and his rule. Nothing could have brought you more honor, and you were proud to accept the assignment. Although the road has been harder than you imagined, you continue to move from court to court, speaking to the rulers of Concordia and providing a living example of the potential House Liam holds.

Roleplaying Hints: You have a hard job, but you're up to the task. All members of House Liam in Concordia benefit from what Duke Gwilliam is doing, even if they don't appreciate your efforts just yet. House Liam is so weak here, they don't dare speak up when an injustice is done to mortals; that's simply not how the world is meant to work. You're here to fix that. You show the nobles of Concordia that House Liam produces nobles just as good as those of any other house, if not better. You speak of the success of the Court of Tulips. Eventually, they're bound to listen.

Equipment: Sword, old beat-up Honda, sleeping bag, maps



Noblesse Oblige: The Book of Houses

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Court: Seelie
Legacies: Courtier/Fatalist
House: Liam

Seeming: Wilder
Kith: Sidhe
Motley:

Attributes

Physical

Strength ●●○○○
Dexterity ●●○○○
Stamina ●●○○○

Social

Charisma ●●●●○
Manipulation ●●●○○
Appearance ●●●●●

Mental

Perception ●●●○○
Intelligence ●●○○○
Wits ●●●●○

Abilities

Talents

Alertness ●●○○○
Athletics ○○○○○
Brawl ○○○○○
Dodge ●○○○○
Empathy ●●●○○
Intimidation ○○○○○
Kenning ●●○○○
Persuasion ●●○○○
Streetwise ●●○○○
Subterfuge ●●○○○

Skills

Crafts ○○○○○
Drive ●○○○○
Etiquette ●●●○○
Firearms ○○○○○
Leadership ●●○○○
Melee ●●○○○
Performance ○○○○○
Security ○○○○○
Stealth ○○○○○
Survival ●○○○○

Knowledges

Computer ○○○○○
Enigmas ○○○○○
Gremayre ○○○○○
Investigation ○○○○○
Law ●●○○○
Linguistics ●○○○○
Lore ○○○○○
Medicine ○○○○○
Politics ●●○○○
Science ○○○○○

Advantages

Backgrounds

Resources ●○○○○
Title ●●○○○
Treasure ●●○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○

Arts

Chicanery ●○○○○
Sovereign ●●○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○

Realms

Fae ●●●○○
Scene ●●○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○

Other Traits

Glamour

●●●●○○○○○○
❑❑❑❑❑❑❑❑❑❑

Willpower

●●●●●●○○○○
❑❑❑❑❑❑❑❑❑❑

Ravaging/Musing Threshold

Banality

●●●○○○○○○○
❑❑❑❑❑❑❑❑❑❑

Health

		Real	Chimerical
Bruised		❑	❑
Hurt	-1	❑	❑
Injured	-1	❑	❑
Wounded	-2	❑	❑
Mauled	-2	❑	❑
Crippled	-5	❑	❑
Incapacitated		❑	❑

Birthrights/Frailties

Experience: ☐

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Since the Mythic Age, the noble houses have been hailed as the leaders of the fae. Though most know only a little of these houses, few truly understand them. Finally, Baron Edgewick, scribe to High King David, has assembled a discourse on the five most powerful houses of the Seelie Court. These pages are a complete dissertation and serve both as a primer for those fae new to a house, as well as offering an insider's look at the inner-workings of noble houses.

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