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The snow falls. The wind howls as it rages against the rocky cliff face. It would blind any other, but it is home for me. When I think back to my younger days, many snowfalls ago, it is painful. Everything I have given up, everything which would have left me happy in my ignorance to the world of magic. My childhood friends, now all dead, have had children and mates who gave them happiness and made their lives worthwhile. I have had none of that. "Enough of this," I scream, mostly for myself, as there are no others around to hear my lamentations anyway. Not that they would care. I am as distant to what a regular person is as anyone could be. Looking up to the cliffs above, I make my way to the top of a fissure, where I look out at the small town in the secluded valley below.

This is still my favorite spot. I gaze through the blizzard, its heavy clouds swirling with deadly winds and intense cold. And it is cold. Even the rocks themselves shatter in this cold. Just a moment away from the warmth of the covenant at these temperatures can mean certain death for many, if not all, mortal men. Down in the valley, the villagers warm themselves by their fires and eat their modest rations and tell stories of the once great fortress on the hill and its wondrous inhabitants. These stories have nurtured and given them strength and unity, as a mother would suckle her young. Stories to remind them of the great things they can do when called upon to be heroes. Straining, one can almost hear their voices, raised high in song, ringing through their halls far below, cutting through the raging storm around them.

They don't know how envied they are. Even with all the power I possess, I envy their revelry, their friendships, and their camaraderie. As footsteps now ring hollow through the halls of the once great covenant beneath me, the people are still keeping the promise of greatness flowing like blood through the valley.

Once, not so long ago, there were several others of power to share excitements with. Others whose mere names still strike fear or inspire greatness at their utterance. Others to confide in or to discuss topics of interest; those with the Gift, to laugh at the private jokes and share in great discoveries, even those who were in competition with each other, after the very same limited resources, fighting as cats and dogs, or, more specifically, like brothers and sisters, brought strength to this place.

The storm rages on. I can taste the power within it. It gathers upon the wind and cuts the very rocks of the mountain. It tingles as it gathers on the tip of my tongue. This one is a good one for magic; the power is easily stored for later use. There is no competition now. No grand discoveries. There is no one to share pain or sorrow or joy or anger. That is the greatest loss suffered here. That, above all else, has truly crippled this place. The recent disasters have been but shadows, no, I err, rather more like buzzards, which would not dare hinder the strong, but plague the weakened, nipping off every opportunity for its victims to pull themselves upright again.

Still, I hope for others to return here, putting things right and making this place strong once more. Looking down at the valley is inspiring. Those people down there have hope, they believe in the promise of this place. They are here for us, and we must do what we can for them. They are ours just as we are theirs, in a strange way.

But, now it is time to return to the horrors of the covenant. My duties are there and I shall not be negligent. Those people need us.

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This is a story of two covenants, rivals from long ago. The source of their contest has been long forgotten by those long dead. What remains are scattered descendants who *know* the other has wronged them and now must pay.

Cavernius Covenant

Long a Tremere stronghold in the Transylvanian Tribunal in the Alps, it has not aged gracefully. Its remaining wizards were hoping to bring prosperity to its old walls when a recent series of mysterious events brought them low.

Hesperus Covenant

A covenant in the Tribunal of the Greater Alps, it too was once seen as a place to retire, away from the politics of Valnastium. Its crop of wizards squabbles over control of its council, after its leader has died.

This story focuses on both loyalty and isolation, and the tension between them. Members of the Order of Hermes swear an oath to not harm their fellow members, an oath that carries the penalty of death if not upheld. Moreover, each member also belongs to one of twelve great Houses, each member of which has more in common with each other than with those of other Houses. Each magus also has familial ties within his House. These ties are complicated in that, much like any family, there are no guarantees for support, emotional or otherwise. Additionally, most members of the Order belong to a covenant. Covenants act as a magus' home, castle, and retreat. It is where he spends the majority of his time, and his covenmates are trusted above most others.

This web of loyalties may cause a magus many problems when they conflict. Placed in a situation where the need for loyalty gets in the way of a magus' personal goals, how one reacts when faced with such a conflict defines one's character.

Magi are isolated in many ways, either due to the basic nature of their Gift, the strange environments in which they choose to live, and the strange people they associate with. When faced with dealing only within a select group of people, loyalties will often define when a magus can associate with another, and more obviously, who a magus can or will associate with. This is a very isolating practice. Although the Order is relatively small, any given magus will often only associate with an even smaller subset, and then only briefly.

These themes should be emphasized during play and can entice the characters to go on the adventure either because they belong to a young a spring covenant and are looking to make a name for themselves and ingratiate themselves with powerful allies, or because they are already powerful but see the need to secure themselves with other powerful allies and friends for mutual benefit. Once the adventure is underway, these themes could be used to foretell a possible future for the characters and their covenant.

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This is a story not only about two covenants, but two magi; two rivals who are very good at what they do, more alike than different from each other.

Vinitania, follower of Tremere, was once was a competent, even excellent, covenant Archon, one who knew the strengths and weaknesses of herself and those around her. She was efficient, and most had respect for her. She still is all those things when she's sane. Recently, she came to a turning point, a catastrophic event changed her. No one knows what that was (well, one did...) but she has been different ever since. Now she's unable to run her covenant, unable to even see that her covenmates are running things in her place.

Chalchis was a member of House Jerbiton, and much like Vinitania, he ran his own covenant. Unlike his rival, he ruled with an iron grip. He knew and controlled all that occurred around him. That is, until he died. Some think it was murder, others say it was a lab accident. One thinks it was both. Soon a quaesitor will have the chance to weigh in with his opinion, for he will soon arrive to sort through the whole mess.

This is a murder mystery where the characters are asked to watch a covenant that has been experiencing certain problems. The characters will travel to the covenant and investigate the area. There will be opportunity for young magi to make a name for themselves with a quaesitor, and for older wizards to further their reputations. If all works out for the best, characters will gain a powerful covenant as an ally.

[Overview for the storyguide]

We are assuming this adventure will take place in and around the Greater Alps Tribunal. If this is not appropriate for your campaign, all which is necessary is that there is a winter covenant (Cavernius) located in an isolated mountain range. The rest can be modified for your saga without too much trouble. This

adventure assumes that the covenant is in an isolated pocket between the Roman, Greater Alps, and Transylvanian Tribunals. It officially last participated in the most recent Transylvanian Tribunal, though it has participated in the Greater Alps some while ago, and some in the Roman Tribunal have wondered if they might show up there on occasion as not a few wizards associated with the covenant frequent areas within that tribunal.

The characters are asked to go to a covenant to watch out for its enemies by a quaesitor and his party. When they get there they find that the head of the covenant is insane and few of the covenfolk will go back in there unless under duress. The characters can investigate or wait things out at the village. If they stay within the covenant, they will more or less be forced to investigate. If they stay at the village, they will be looked at suspiciously by the villagers. The job of the troupe will be to solve the mystery of the missing apprentices and to keep this covenant standing while doing it. Of course, they are never really asked to solve anything....

The covenant that the characters are asked to watch is suffering two immediate, yet separate, troubles. Vinitania is laboring under a Mentem effect cast upon her by Chalchis from Hesperus covenant. Also a monster is killing Cavernieus covenant's people. No one has identified or separated these two phenomena. Solving one problem won't solve the other.

Let the troupe field several ideas for the source of the problem. We've included a number of red herrings to help the storyguide throw off the players, and to also allow the storyguide to change the nature of what is killing the covenfolk at Cavernieus covenant. The Mentem effect on Vinitania is meant more for atmosphere—the characters may get stuck trying to cure her while the monster is eating their grogs.

For this to work properly, the players cannot know the results of many of their investigation rolls. Use good storytelling techniques to work around this like rolling dice secretly or behind screens, whatever works for you. This adventure is basically a “stay the night in the haunted house on the hill” scenario.

There are many ways in which this adventure may unfold. Some may want to accompany the quaesitor and his party, a dangerous situation to say the least. Some may simply want to sit up safe and warm amidst the plight of the covenfolk. Others may seek to dig into every nook and cranny of the covenant, either to help solve its problems or to rob it blind. Of course, there will be variations based on your campaign, especially based on the makeup of your troupe.

From the time the party arrives at Cavernieus covenant, they have one season to do whatever they wish—investigate, explore, bother covenfolk, et cetera. At the end of that time, Vilarious shows up. He has to send messages and collect items from various folks to bring back to Bathanare. He will inform the party of the investigation at Hesperus covenant. Vilarious will judge their actions depending on what they have accomplished:

- If the troupe raped the covenant, they can go home now. However, they'll be strongly encouraged to attend the impromptu tribunal, and asked of their opinions there publicly and often.
- If they were honorable (no matter the outcome of their actions) they get recompensed as agreed. They will be warned of the dangers at the tribunal and to stay away from it. Hesperus covenant, and all associated with it will most likely meet a bitter end.

If something else happened then... work it out as the storyguide sees fit.

[Timeline]

There is a lot of background the players may want to ask about. For your reference, here is a consolidated timeline and a list of the characters they may meet.

Long ago

- Occultes Serpentis has difficulties in tribunal with Chalchis.

5 years ago

- Octavian had a lab accident. This is a harbinger of things to come but its cause is mostly innocent.
- The accident causes a change in a tiny animal that lives in the mundane level of the covenant's regio. It starts to grow into the monster.
- Philippe joins the covenant

2 years ago

- Chalchis casts a spell on Vinitania. She begins her play, denying the inevitable, searching for some means of escape, attaching this escape with the persona of the "King."
- Altresecus arrives to claim Octavian's effects.
- The monster grows past the ability of birds and rabbits to sustain it. It starts eating covenfolk.
- Dominica starts her investigation
- Laertes' first breakdown during this period.
- Over the next six months, Vilarious experiments with Vinitania and runs things in her "absence."
- See Appendix 2: The Evidence which details who goes missing when and where.

Six seasons ago

- Dominica disappears.
- Vilarious finds Vinitania's Secret Senate scene and has a council with her.
- Vilarious writes a letter to Clavius' parens.

Five seasons ago

- Using Dominica's notes and his own investigation, Vilarious preliminarily concludes Hesperus covenant did something to Vinitania.
- Due to these findings, Occultes Serpentis bites Fenris and inadvertently kills both Fenris and Chalchis.

Four seasons ago

- Hesperus covenant begins a bitter leadership dispute as Chalchis is determined "missing."

Two seasons ago

- Octavian's apprentice, Carmine, goes missing
- Laertes' most recent breakdown.
- Since no quaesitor has arrived, Vilarious leaves to find help.
- Clavius finally arrives.

One season ago

- Clavius' apprentice and two of his grogs go missing.
- Clavius leaves and meets the Tremere below the covenant

Now

- There's a bunch of influential magi at your covenant!

[Dramatis Personae]
[Cavernieus covenant]
[Magi]

Maga Vinitania, Archon of Cavernieus covenant (see Appendix 1, page 1)
Occultes Serpentis, the Ice Snake, Vinitania's familiar (see Appendix 1, page 4)
Magus Laertes, an exceptional teacher (see Appendix 1, page 7)
The late Magus Octavian, follower of Bonisagus (see Appendix 1, page 9)
Rex, Octavian's lost familiar (see Appendix 1, page 11)
Magus Vilarious, a dedicated follower of Tremere (see Appendix 1, page 59)
Nick, Vilarious' Ferret familiar (see Appendix 1, page 62)

[Apprentices]

Dominica, Vinitania's apprentice (see Appendix 1, page 12)
Barnabus, Vilarious' apprentice (see Appendix 1, page 12)
Carmine, Octavian's apprentice (see Appendix 1, page 13)
Lucius, Clavius' apprentice (see Appendix 1, page 12)

[Covenfolk]

Michael, the retired gatekeeper (see Appendix 1, page 15)
Corbin, the dead grog (see Appendix 1, page 17)
Aldino, the librarian (see Appendix 1, page 18)
Margareta, the cook (see Appendix 1, page 21)
Anna, the servant (see Appendix 1, page 22)
Geno, the servant (see Appendix 1, page 22)
Guntero, the Seneschal (see Appendix 1, page 23)
Claudio, a grog (see Appendix 1, page 25)
Pasquale, a grog (see Appendix 1, page 26)
Milo, a grog (see Appendix 1, page 27)
Bardo, a grog (see Appendix 1, page 28)
Armando, Vilarious' custos (see Appendix 1, page 63)
Gregorio, Vilarious' custos (see Appendix 1, page 64)
Sebastien, the astrologer (see Appendix 1, page 29)
Philippe, the historian who's not from around here (see Appendix 1, page 30)

[The Villagers]

The Binders Tomas, the family elder (see Appendix 1, page 31)

	Aldino, librarian Volens, church caretaker Risa, scribe Candra, illuminator Arturo, child Mary, child	
The Hansons	Casio, the family elder Hans, General Staff Bardo, grog Sebastien, the astrologer Eleanor, child Frederico, child	(see Appendix 1, page 31)
The Farmers	Sofia, the family elder Miguel, The Former Gatekeeper Anna, General Staff Amber, child Kane, child	(see Appendix 1, page 31)
The Herders	Giuseppe, the family elder Celia, physician, who also acts as a midwife and surgeon for people Claudio, grog Pasquale, grog Gregory, custos Andre, child Jarek, child	(see Appendix 1, page 32)
The Shepherds	Vera, the family elder Milo, grog Rufio is in charge of raising dogs Masaccio, child Vera, child	(see Appendix 1, page 32)
The Weavers	Brina, the family elder Amanda, Brina's favorite grandchild Herman, custos Genevie, child Ronald, child	(see Appendix 1, page 33)
The Cooks	Cordelia, the family elder Margareta covenant cook Guntero, Seneschal Heda, child Greta, child	(see Appendix 1, page 34)
	Volens, the Church caretaker	(see Appendix 1, page 36)
	Luther, the Traveling Priest	(see Appendix 1, page 37)

The Monster... (see Appendix 1, page 19)

[Other locations]

Hesperus covenant

Chalchis, the dead Leader of Hesperus covenant (see Appendix 1, page 44)

Fennis, Chalchis' wolf familiar (see Appendix 1, page 45)

Brand, the oldest Jerbiton and obsessed with living. (see Appendix 1, page 38)

Amadeus, the former apprentice of Chalchis (see Appendix 1, page 42)

Basil, aka Count Orsini (see Appendix 1, page 40)

Bathanare, the archmaga and hoplite (see Appendix 1, page 56)

Razach, the hoplite (see Appendix 1, page 57)

Clavius, the quaesitor (see Appendix 1, page 46)

Aldo, Clavius' grog (see Appendix 1, page 49)

Bruno, Clavius' grog (see Appendix 1, page 50)

Eduardo, Clavius' grog (see Appendix 1, page 52)

Falco, Clavius' grog (see Appendix 1, page 53)

Vittorio, Clavius' grog (see Appendix 1, page 54)

Roberto, Clavius' grog (see Appendix 1, page 55)

Pitch, Clavius' grog, deceased (see Appendix 1, page 50)

Nicolaus, Clavius' grog, deceased (see Appendix 1, page 50)

Philburt, the Redcap (see Appendix 1, page 65)

Altresacus, Octavian's sole living apprentice (see Appendix 1, page 66)

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Hearth light shines on the remnants of a feast. Drunken men lay about. Two stately, wizened men discuss matters intently.

"I would train this young one in your ways as well or better than you, dear brother."

"You would do the best you could, wouldn't you?"

"Better. I always seek to better myself."

"Yes, you do. Fine." Grim determination reflects in the older man's voice.

"Which shall it be? Do you have one ready? Or one even selected?"

"Yes. My cousin." A boy sleeps under a table nearby.

"One of the Ierbii it is then."

They drink in agreement. And thus starts the root of troubles between two covenants not yet founded. The vicissitudes that change a friendly, even loving, agreement into a subtle war of attrition, and venom, do not concern us except to say that all have forgotten, or never knew, this story. This is history never meant for young ears.

When Tytalus entered Maddenhofen Wood, he did not do so alone. He took a small entourage with him, much as modern magi bring their custodes with them on expeditions of import. One does not often hear of these companions. Much as one hears of Caesar taking Rome, but almost never hears of his traveling companions, much less his army, neither did Tytalus act alone. Tytalus may have had a philosophy of personal conflict and personal growth, but he wasn't stupid either. One of his earliest tests taught him the importance of a good backup plan.

The number of his companions is unknown, but likely was eight or thereabouts, eight being the number of men in a Roman contubernium. One of these young men was an apprentice Tytalus had recently started training. This man was related by blood to the magus known to modern magi as Jerbiton—he was a distant, but not too distant, cousin. It was one of Tytalus' personal goals to train the young man in the same manner as Jerbiton may have, simply to prove he had mastered his "brother's" ways.

That Tytalus has not done this is the crux of the argument between these two covenants today. One of the descendants of Jerbiton felt that one of the descendants of Tytalus owed his house an apprentice. But, you ask, why would Tremere be involved? You see, in the late tenth century during House Tytalus' corruption, a few Tytalus joined House Tremere to distance themselves from those troubles. Cavernieus covenant held the descendants of one of those Tremere.

That this matter never came before tribunal is no surprise. It is a matter of honor—that, and no one wants to be ruled against by a tribunal. To be sure, this problem has come before tribunal, but only tangentially. Problems related to the core issue—vis sources, trade relations, and such—bring cause for the tribunal to rule. Over time, the apprentice issue was lost and myriad others have taken its place. For that matter, the descendants are barely that—members of each covenant having taken up the "cause" and/or fighting over unrelated items. The spell cast upon Vinitania is only the most recent in a long string of actions resulting in a perceived injustice that happened so long ago, none can remember the root cause.