

[The enemy covenant and the quaesitor]

"It is always important to keep one's allies carefully arrayed against one's enemies."

The Decline and Fall of a Hermetic Covenant — Bathanare

The characters will either go to Hesperus covenant or not. If so, this section is for them. If not, depending on their affiliations, they may receive missives and information from those there.

This chapter is relatively short. It is meant as an outline for those who wish to continue the adventure here. There are so many details that would be much better served if the storyteller simply tailored them to his troupe that our chronicling them here would be pointless. Additionally, these notes can be used as stories the characters hear about later on if they don't attend the "festivities." Nevertheless, do not let this chapter's inclusion in this adventure force one's troupe to visit this covenant. It is not recommended that they do. There is far too much that can go wrong for them, and almost nothing can be gained. Essentially, if the party has gotten this far, something has gone wrong.

Depending on how well the party performs at Cavernieus covenant, they may be rewarded by explicitly **not** being told of this special tribunal. Bathanare and Vilarious will try to protect the characters' interests by trying to exclude them from attending a tribunal in such an openly hostile environment. On the other hand, if the party botched the babysitting job, or raped the covenant of its remaining resources, they may be cordially invited to attend the exclusive meeting and extolled the many virtues of attending such a rare event. Bathanare is nothing but subtle, and vindictive....

[Hesperus Covenant]

"Did you see that?" "No, and you didn't either. Right?"

— two grogs of Hesperus covenant.

Hesperus covenant is a villa in a high vale in the Alpine foothills. The vale is peaceful with birds in the apple orchard. The main house and its many outbuildings are built in Roman style. There are few people about in the fields. The villa is set in a walled enclosure with ancillary farm buildings. The principal house is built with portices on three sides.

After the manor comes into view, simultaneously the party is greeted by two groups of guardsmen. They each ask the party's business. Once it is established that the party is not aligned with other members of the covenant, for example, a quaesitor is with the party, they will be taken to the council. If the party is arriving for the special tribunal, for example, without a quaesitor, they will be openly asked "who are you siding with?" They will be sent away if no declaration is made. Each group watches the other more than they watch their visitors.

Once the party arrives at the main house, it is obvious that all is not right. A third group stops them at the door to the main house. There is a small argument over who these people are. The third group doesn't trust the other two and wants to know what they are doing with these strangers. If a quaesitor is presented as evidence of the party's neutrality, or if proper credentials are presented they will be reluctantly allowed in. A shout is raised to convene the council.

[[Begin Insert: Behind the scenes]]

Each wizard at this covenant is fighting with the others for reign over the covenant. Whoever wins will be its Archon, the chief magus, the guy with the power to tell the others what to do. To this end, each has his own grogs, autocrat, cooks, and various other personnel. No group trusts the other. They may work together, as when the party first arrives, but they are always watching the other groups for trickery. What has been proven in the past is that the goals of the Archon are the only goals to truly be achieved. Since there is no Archon at the moment, the covenant is stuck in a spiral of infighting and quarreling, as each tries to present their own personal, resource heavy agenda.

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On the way to the council chamber, the party sees evidence of a recent struggle. Down a hallway, the sounds of combat can be heard. In other halls several areas show signs of fresh damage, burned tapestries line rooms with destroyed furniture still smoking. Dark stains cover the ground. Simple servants wear armor and weapons.

[The council]

“You use *two* sprigs of basil? Interesting.”

— Bathanare, interviewing the cook on important matters.

Clavius does the initial investigation. He speaks with the council of magi about his inquiry into the death of their parents, Chalcis. Arrogantly, he intimates that he is also here for another reason but gives no details. The council is very nervous but does not admit to any wrongdoing. Once the individual interviews begin, each member of the covenant declares one or more of the other members to be responsible. In fact, they won't admit it, but they are all in the middle of a guerilla war for the leadership of the covenant. There still are booby traps of all kinds around the covenant, grogs laying in wait, poisoned food and water, and such. While in council, screams are heard as covenfolk blunder into traps set for magi. Each of the magi, except the Criamon Stanislaus, conducts the council as if he were in charge. They redundantly welcome their visitors and redundantly call roll. Those attending are actually sitting through five separate council sessions all at the same time. Eventually, Clavius will tire of the redundancy and call for individual interviews—interviewing them together invites constant interruption. Interviewing them separately only grows suspicion.

The hoplites will be present at these meetings, though Bathanare will wander about on her own to investigate. Always pleasant and agreeable, she doesn't poke into anything untoward but does interview various covenfolk about rather mundane subjects.

She has already decided, after seeing the paranoia there that a certain action should be taken. The Tremere party is disappointed they don't get to take out this covenant (though they are getting a free casing of the place) and they may come back. This is the thinking until Bathanare reveals her plan: destroy the site in committee. She notes to the various magi that 'we are not here for you.' She makes sure to mention to each of the magi here that this group while not against anyone in particular, definitely is not on "your side." The paranoia starts getting to a high level and they start calling in their friends. Soon there are so many angry and agitated magi around a tribunal must be called to keep them from blowing each other to bits. While this covenant would be an easy target for her war-party, she has decided on a more gruesome end for "such fools." The covenant's fate is thus sealed.

Once each magus realizes that they are being investigated for crimes they did not commit, they all start to call in favors. At that point, lots of magi start to show up in support of their ally. Around 15 to 20 magi start to show up in support of their allies. All try to stay in groups and tend to stay in the main areas of the covenant, since those who wander off seem to find the many hidden booby traps or other gruesome and untimely fate; where people have been most recently tend not to harbor death as much.

[[Begin Insert: The Quaesitor's Grogs]]

If Clavius still has his grogs with him, he will not have gone out of his way to make their lives easy. He has not equipped them or even prepared for supplies. However, if the characters take pity on the grogs and help them out, even if not hiring them outright at a nominal cost, their spirits will be high enough to avoid the following.

Since the characters probably shouldn't have come to the covenant, the only chance they have to change this outcome is to hire them outright at the beginning of this adventure. Thus, the characters will have changed the ending of this from the beginning.

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This quaesitor isn't long for this world. If the characters haven't helped them out, the grogs are completely pissed off that he has taken them into this war zone, especially without outfitting them for it. They are now, to a man, totally committed to his demise. They will easily acquire a myriad of equipment scrounged from the other factions. They will argue over who gets "guard duty" that night, meaning to off him as soon as they can get the chance. Their plan is to open the door to one of the other factions who feel they will lose to a "biased" quaesitor. The grogs would have waited for about three to four weeks to get their plan just right (and to scrounge enough supplies).

This will be the worst thing that could happen to this covenant and anybody here. The death of a quaesitor must be investigated and punished. A real quaesitor will arrive with his retinue of lesser quaesitores and all

the resources to solve the predicament that Clavius was here for. At this point, everyone is suspect, and no one should think of running. Very few judgments will not carry severe penalties.

At this point practically all truths come into the open. Very little is spared. House Guernicus does not take lightly the death of one of its own, no matter how disliked or incompetent. It sets a bad precedent to let the murder of a quaesitor go unpunished. Someone will pay.

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[The investigation]

“This shit is really getting on my nerves.”

— Clavius

Clavius will find that Chalchis has been missing and presumed dead less than a year at this point. Chalchis “died” about a year after the spell was cast on Vinitania. How did he die? Where is the body? Which one of his covenmates killed him? These are all questions for which Clavius cannot get satisfying answers from the remaining covenmates. Clavius thinks the members of Hesperus covenant are lying to him about *something*. Clavius thinks Chalchis’ covenmates killed him to take over the covenant.

Soon Clavius asks where Chalchis’ lab is. He is shown a closet. Things digress from there. The magi of the covenant all know for a fact that his lab lies beyond this door. They’ve been in there on occasion. It has to be there. What no one realizes is that Chalchis suffered from a Curse wherein his magic is linked to the duration of this life and the portal to his lab ceased to be.

The dead leader’s lab cannot be found. Everyone was only ever told “what they need to know.” They were all accountable only to him and few knew what others were about and none know what he was up to. His lab door opens up into a closet. There is nothing here but a mop and an old pail (and some cobwebs). This will get Clavius very upset, thinking they are hiding stuff. In reality, his lab is a *Hermes Portal* away. Because of his curse, the portal is now gone.

Clavius is furious. He levels charges of wasting time, making up a wizard’s existence/killing this wizard, casting spells on magi, scrying, killing the covenfolk of Cavernius covenant, and “Since you are all Jerbiton there is no doubt interference with the mundanes as well.” This last is met with mute protest from the lone Criamon.

Whether he can prove them or not, he is serious. This only fuels the paranoia and the insistence that various allies arrive with help. Everyone at the covenant is looking for votes and ways to deny their enemies votes at the upcoming tribunal.

For the investigation into the effects upon Vinitania and Cavernius covenant, there is lots of intrigue and history of competition and animosity, but no signs of any plot these guys could succeed at. They are too busy screwing themselves over to get to anything real against another covenant. Chalchis is the reason Vinitania is disabled. Occultes Serpentis, based on Vilarious’ deduction, surreptitiously killed him. She bit Fenris, but due to their flawed bond (Sympathetic Wounds), when the wolf died, so did the magus. To prove anything against Hesperus covenant with regards to the attacks on Cavernius, Clavius needs either the body of the wolf, the body of Chalchis, or access to Chalchis’ lab.

Fenris’ body can be used to find Chalchis’ body. The wolf is lying under several year’s worth of debris in the woods five or six miles from Hesperus covenant. With the mountains, this will be a serious journey. Spells will, of course, alleviate this hardship, assuming, the characters can figure out where the familiar is, or if they even think to look.

Chalchis’ body is in his lab. With his body, the magi can grill him on his activities. All should be made plain from there.

With Chalchis’ lab, the magi will find evidence of the spell used. Over time, a counterspell can be made to fix Vinitania. In addition, there are lots of notes about various nefarious activities, most of which would probably have gotten Chalchis Wizard Marched or at least fined many rooks of vis. These notes also incriminate all the members of the covenant in different activities. Each thought the “special jobs” he had done for Chalchis would have placed him in his good graces. Little did they know that everyone at the

covenant performed “special jobs” for him. Chalchis did not see anyone as special and planned to rule his covenant for many years to come.

[The Tribunal]

“So, do we get to break somebody yet?”

— Razach

As soon as it becomes apparent that things will soon digress into chaos, Clavius will be forced to call a tribunal. Otherwise things will no doubt get out of hand. He would like this to be a Quaesitor's Tribunal, but, due to his past misadventures, he can't really afford to do so without jeopardizing the remainder of his already weak reputation. In addition, Bathanare doesn't want such a tribunal called either as cooler heads may prevail, and she's hoping that hotheads will cause so much trouble that it would be easier to simply March everyone rather than endlessly investigate. The difficulty with a “special” tribunal is that the oldest wizard here is one of the defendants. As praeco, he could silence everyone and use his power to get what he wants—leadership of the covenant and its vis sources. This is not what either Clavius or Bathanare want. They would like to find a neutral praeco. If one of the characters is unwilling, or unable, to fulfill the duties of praeco, they call in a ringer: Saxum Aeternum, known to be the oldest active hoplite. He is a Bjornaer with the heartshape of a stone. He is known to be extremely patient, quiet, and it is rumored that he doesn't age.

It takes two seasons to properly prepare for such an event. Clavius declares a moratorium on hostilities. He will try to investigate the death of Chalchis as much as he can, though he is usually too busy dealing with petty bickering to get much done. He will try to use the weight of his position, and that the reputation of “his” hoplites, to keep everyone from killing each other. The tribunal is being called to answer the question of what should be done about this covenant.

[[Begin Insert: An alternative to this story]]

The characters' ally calls for their assistance at an impromptu tribunal. Skip all the rest of this adventure as it's just information to be milled over at this “tribunal.”

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