

Secret Societies of Théah: Book Two

*Rilasciare*TM

The Free Thinkers



Roleplaying Game

The Rilasciare

Light from Darkness



"No law can govern the human spirit."

– Nolan Chaucer







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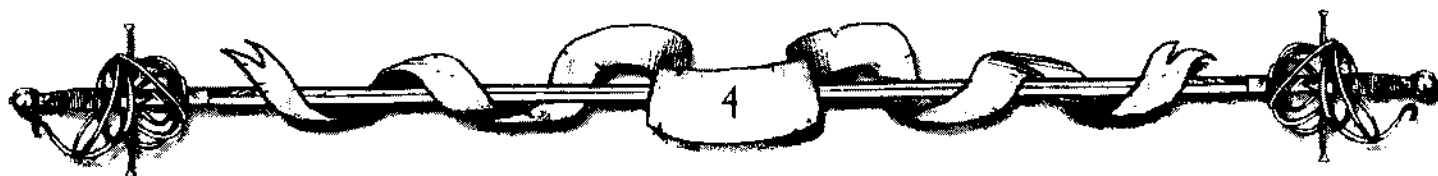
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Special Thanks

To Elizabeth Barkley Wilson for her wonderful article on Jacques-Louis David and to Cris Dornaus who brought it to my attention. You both da bomb.

Dedication

*For Matt Staroscik, the first Rilasciare.
Stop blinking, Matt – that's when they get you.*






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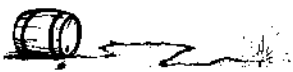


One Man's Meat

The Honorable Sergio de Benedictis walked briskly through the town square, past the subjects of last night's execution. The peasant bodies still hung from the gallows, bulging eyes staring out above blackened tongues. The cold weather had kept the crows away, but he'd have to have the bodies taken down before much longer. The flies in Vodacce were as large as the crows and twice as annoying. It wouldn't do to have such a picturesque setting spoiled.

Still, he enjoyed the impression his handiwork made on the locals. As he made his way to the courthouse, he could see passersby glance fearfully at the execution scene, then part before him like a wave. Most of them had known the men now dangling from the wooden frame; those who didn't had seen the execution. They had no interest in vexing the dead men's judge, lest he decide that a few more bodies should join them on the gallows. There was no telling how many traitors he could find if he put his mind to it.

As he reached the courthouse, he stopped and turned back to the gallows. *That's justice*, he thought. *My justice*. Across the square, the bodies silently agreed with him.



"We're far past casual indiscretions, Nolan. He's a butcher in judge's robes. If we let it continue, dozens more may die."

"You realize what you're asking? Getting approval takes time, and the Secret Court may not agree with your plan. Perhaps the Prince could intervene..."

"The Prince won't listen; he's too busy dodging assassins to worry about some petty court district. In order to reach him, I'll have to go through the bureaucracy."

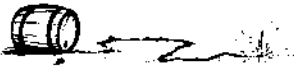
"That isn't an option."

"I know. Which is why we have to act now."

"Are you prepared to accept the consequences?"

"Yes."

"...All right. I'll convene the Court as soon as I can."



De Benedictis straightened his judicial robes and stared fiercely at the prisoner before him. A poorly dressed man trembled before the bench, hat in shaking hands.

"The Prince is at war, *signore*," de Benedictis began. "Not a war of armies and bullets, but a war of Guilders and trade routes. Do you understand that?"

The man shudderingly nodded.

"Do you also understand that victory in this war will benefit you and your family through greater prosperity?"

The man's eyes clenched shut, tears spilling through the lids.

"And that in order to fight this war, the Prince needs your taxes as resources?"

A single sob escaped the man's lips.

"And that by refusing to pay those taxes, you have placed our forces at a disadvantage?"

The man fell to his knees, unable to contain his silence.

"Please sir," he begged. "My family is in bad straits. My little boy has nothing to eat. I couldn't pay the tariffs, I had to buy him bread —"

"The law does not excuse circumstance, *signore*, no matter how tragic. You knew the penalties of withholding tax money and yet you willfully chose to ignore them. In my



Introduction -

eyes, you are guilty of far more than tax evasion. You have conspired to sap the Prince's strength in the face of his enemies."

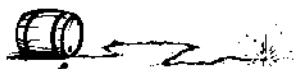
"Please —"

"I find you guilty of conspiracy to commit treason, and sentence you to eight years hard labor at the Dolla Mira quarry. You can repay your debt to the Prince by mining salt for him. Take him away."

The guards stepped forward to lead the tearful peasant out of the courtroom. Sergio watched serenely as the man's wife and children wailed in horror behind him. He didn't have long to wait before the guards forced them from the courtroom as well. They were getting better...

He banged his gavel and looked down at the paperwork before him.

"Next case."



"I submit that he did willfully misuse his position by destroying evidence, condemning the innocent, and acting without concern for the laws of Theus.

"I submit that he used his authority to do away with political enemies, terrify the populace, and impose unthinkable transgressions upon those placed in his care.

"I submit that he did willfully commit murder by sentencing Antonio Scalenì and Rudolf Morena — men he knew to be innocent — to hang by the neck until dead. I further submit that he personally oversaw their execution and left their bodies unburied as an example to those who might cross him.

"In short, I submit that he has grossly abused the power which Fortune and Destiny provided him, that he has violated the most basic tenets of human morality, and that he must be removed from his position with all deliberate speed. I ask this without bias or prejudice, and base my accusations on objective fact alone.

"In support of these charges, I have procured the following evidence..."



The wine was exquisite, as was the veal shank it accompanied. De Benedictis ate with relish as his eyes drank in the opulence of his surroundings. The dining room was richly decorated with polished wood, Church icons, and tapestries depicting the three Prophets. Across the table sat a man in the red robes of the Vaticine Church. His sharp beard matched the dark shadows of his eyes, and he tasted only sparingly from his plate. He flattered the judge with an oily smile as his ringed fingers folded in front of him.

Sergio spoke. "I'm honored that the Church of the Prophets has noticed my humble efforts to uphold the law. I would think that you had more important issues on your agenda."

The priest's mouth turned ever so slightly. "There are those of us who believe that the hour of repentance approaches. The justice you mete out has readied the unrighteous to meet their maker, saving hundreds from Legion's flames." He gestured at the banquet before them. "An evening's entertainment seemed the least we could do."

"Indeed," de Benedictis replied. "The food is exquisite — well worth the journey I had to take."

"I trust my carriage was comfortable."

"As comfortable as possible." He chewed thoughtfully at his food. "How can I hope to repay this generosity?"

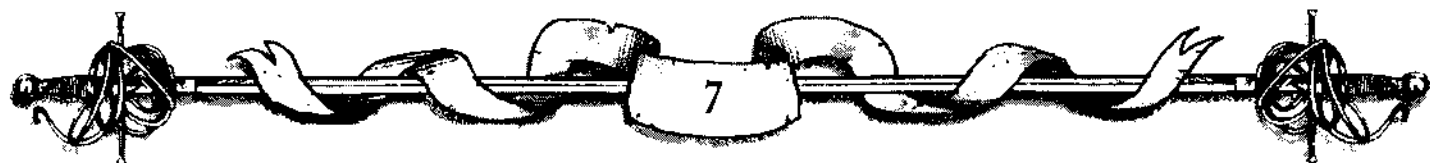
"Please, *signore*. This is a social visit. I have nothing in mind more than rewarding one of the Church's faithful for his zeal. Although —"

"Although?" Sergio smiled.

"There is a matter — a trifle, really — that concerns your district."

"Of course." He set his silverware down. "I am listening."

The priest continued. "A member of my order has recently arrived in your jurisdiction. On the surface, he is relatively unimportant: a minor pastor in charge of a single church. But he preaches... unsettling... things to his flock. The need for a new Hierophant. Restoring scientific research. A desire





to remove 'extremist' elements from the Church. These subjects have brought great distress to my superiors. We believe he is actively harming our endeavors."

"I see," de Benedictis nodded. "And you wish it to stop."

"There are subtleties here. This pastor has friends in high places and his voice carries beyond his simple parish. If we were to act against him directly, it could ignite a firestorm."

"So you want me to dispose of him for you?"

"The man is clearly a criminal. I ask only that you administer justice, as is your duty."

"And the Church will be... grateful?" Sergio asked archly.

"We reward those who perform Theus' work, as you well know."

The judge stroked his beard thoughtfully, then nodded. "I think something can be arranged."

"Excellent! I will have the necessary information prepared as soon as possible."

"Give it to me orally," Sergio replied. "I've found that committing things to memory in these situations works far better than written words. Our business is not for prying eyes."

"As you see fit."

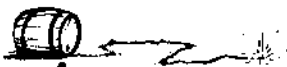
From the floorboards beneath them came the faint echo of screams. De Benedictis looked down with curiosity. The priest merely shrugged.

"Church business. There are many souls in need of saving."

"I should like to see the methods you use to obtain such pious confessions."

The priest rose and gestured towards the door.

"I think that can be arranged."



"They've decided. We've heard from every cell except Dechaine, and one more vote won't change the outcome."

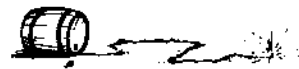
"Which is -?"

"What you had hoped for. I've contacted a suitable woman and she's agreed -"

"No. I do not want an outsider dispensing justice for us."

"You're not going to do it yourself!?"

"I called for blood and the blood should be on my hands. It would be wrong to ask someone else to take that burden. Besides, I want to see the look on his face..."



Sergio wiped the mud off his boots before letting his manservant Renard take his coat. The ride back had been exhausting, and he wanted to conclude his few remaining bits of business and retire as quickly as possible. Renard had prepared the fire in his study and placed a hefty snifter of brandy by his stack of correspondence. He took a moment to savor the liquor, then sat down to deal with the letters.

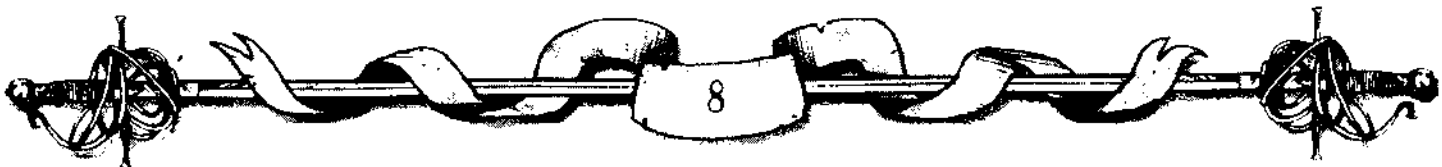
He broke the seal on the first, moving with casual efficiency through the information enclosed. Within moments, he had tossed it aside in favor of the next.

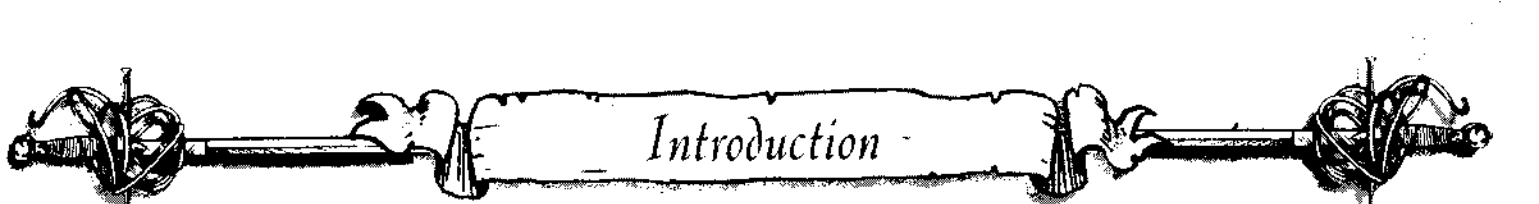
"Bill," he commented as he worked. "Bill. Transfer of prisoners - this shouldn't be here. Bill. Account to the Prince, I'll have to do that tomorrow. A invitation to the Mondavis' banquet; how interesting. I'll have to make time in my schedule for - hello, what's this?"

The letter at the bottom of the pile held no return address. He didn't recognize the seal on the wax: a sun emerging from an eclipse, encircled by the admonition "True Courage."

"And who might you be from?" He broke the seal and turned over the letter.

A handful of black soil fell from the wrapped paper, spilling across the paperwork in a small mound. It smelled fresh and mossy, tinged with something else - sulfur perhaps, or burning charcoal. The letter which held it contained a single word: "Guilty."





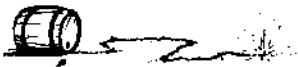
Introduction

Sergio became aware of a form behind his chair. He spun around, only to come face to face with an imposing man in a gray coat. His eyes widened.

“Eduardo?”

“Hello, brother,” the interloper spoke quietly. “Long time.”

The blade flashed in the firelight. Sergio didn't have time to gasp before it plunged into his eye.



The short man waited for him across the street, waited until the study light lowered and his companion appeared from a nearby alleyway. He was dressed in an identical gray coat, but his build was stockier than the killer's, his mouth framed by a thick handlebar mustache.

“Done?” he asked as Eduardo de Benedictis crossed the street to join him.

“He's judged his last case,” Eduardo returned. The blood stained his handkerchief as he wiped the blade clean.

“By Theus, you've got ice water in your veins! He was your own brother and you put him down without raising a sweat.”

Eduardo smiled. “This is Vodacce, Kasper. Brothers kill each other here for far less reason than I had...”

A cry rose from the study window, echoing into the streets below. The pair turned and vanished into the growing night. Eduardo's words lingered after them on the street corner, hanging in the air like ghosts.

“...if only his evil were as easy to undo.”



You hold in your hands the second sourcebook on the secret societies of Théah — detailing the hidden groups working invisibly among the heroes and nations of *7th Sea*. This book covers the Rilasciare, one of the most complex and contradictory secret societies in history. Their enemies

consider them bomb-throwing maniacs, bringing chaos and destruction wherever they go. In truth, however, they are far more enlightened than that, and most consider themselves the unsung heroes of their age. They are dedicated to the betterment of man and the overthrow of oppressive order — humanists some one hundred years earlier than those of our own world. They range from merry pranksters to nonviolent educators to fanatical malcontents determined to overthrow established authority. But they are united in their beliefs and fiercely dedicated to establishing a new, better world for their children. Of course, beginning a new world means destroying the old one first...

The first chapter contains the history and organization of the Rilasciare. It traces their roots from the halls of the Old Empire to their current façade as a series of social clubs. It relates the secrets at the heart of their order and includes a discussion of their political goals, the philosophical factions within their ranks, and the major cells across Théah.

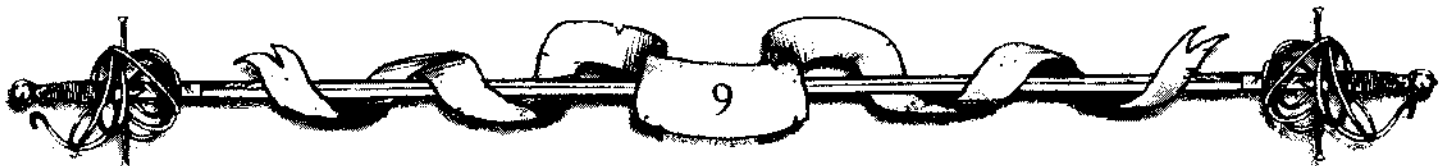
The second chapter covers the most important members of the Rilasciare — the leaders of its cells, the couriers who bind them together, and the men and women they call upon to execute their will.

The third chapter contains new rules for use in your campaign, including a new Swordsman school, expanded explosives rules, and an assortment of Skills, Advantages and Backgrounds. It also includes ways to join the Free Thinkers and directions on making your own Rilasciare cell.

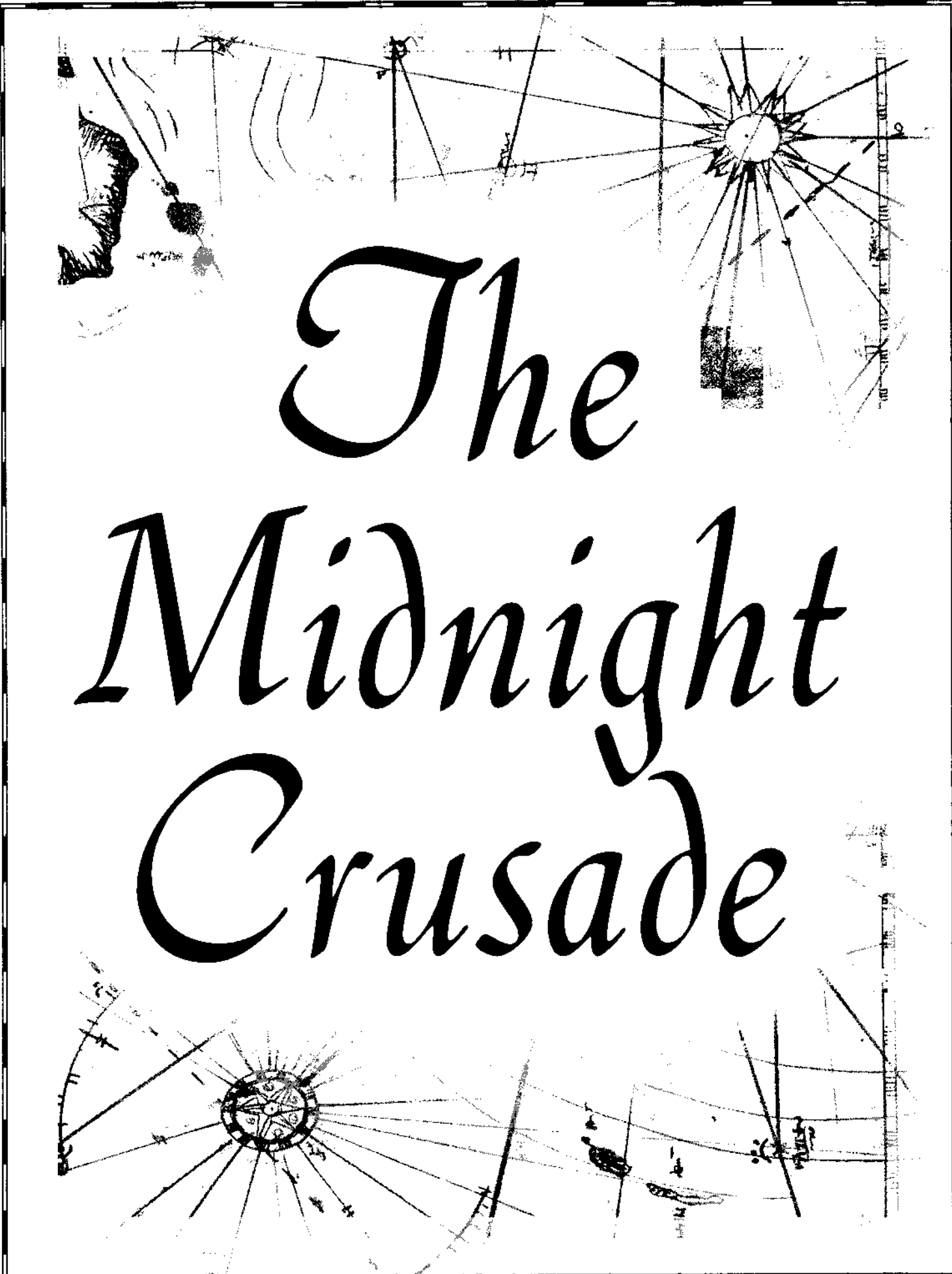
Finally, the fourth chapter contains helpful advice for players and GMs for handling moral gray areas in the black and white world of *7th Sea*, and ways to run an entire campaign based around the secret society. It also includes secrets for the Game Master only — hidden agendas and other tidbits that players shouldn't see.

The Rilasciare walk a thin line, using dangerous means to strive for a noble end. Those who fall from grace end up embodying the very thing they seek to destroy. But it takes a razor's edge to test men's mettle, and those who walk it may lead their world into a new golden age.

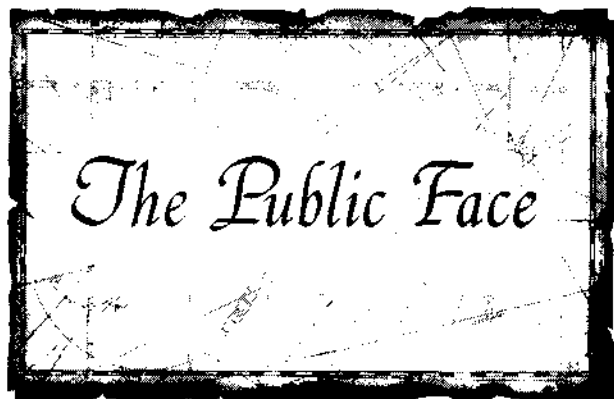
The greatest heroes are misunderstood.







*The
Midnight
Crusade*



The Public Face

The Rilasciare has no real public face. As far as most of Théah is concerned, it doesn't exist — or at least it exists only as unconnected groups of criminals, philosophers, and political reformers. Outsiders never learn their true agenda. Their fragmented nature — consisting of small cells only loosely linked to each other — disguises their true size, helping to keep them hidden. When one cell is exposed, it appears as nothing more than an isolated band, unconnected to any large conspiracy.

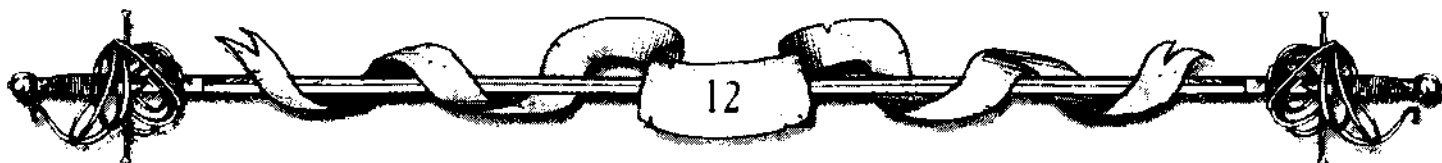
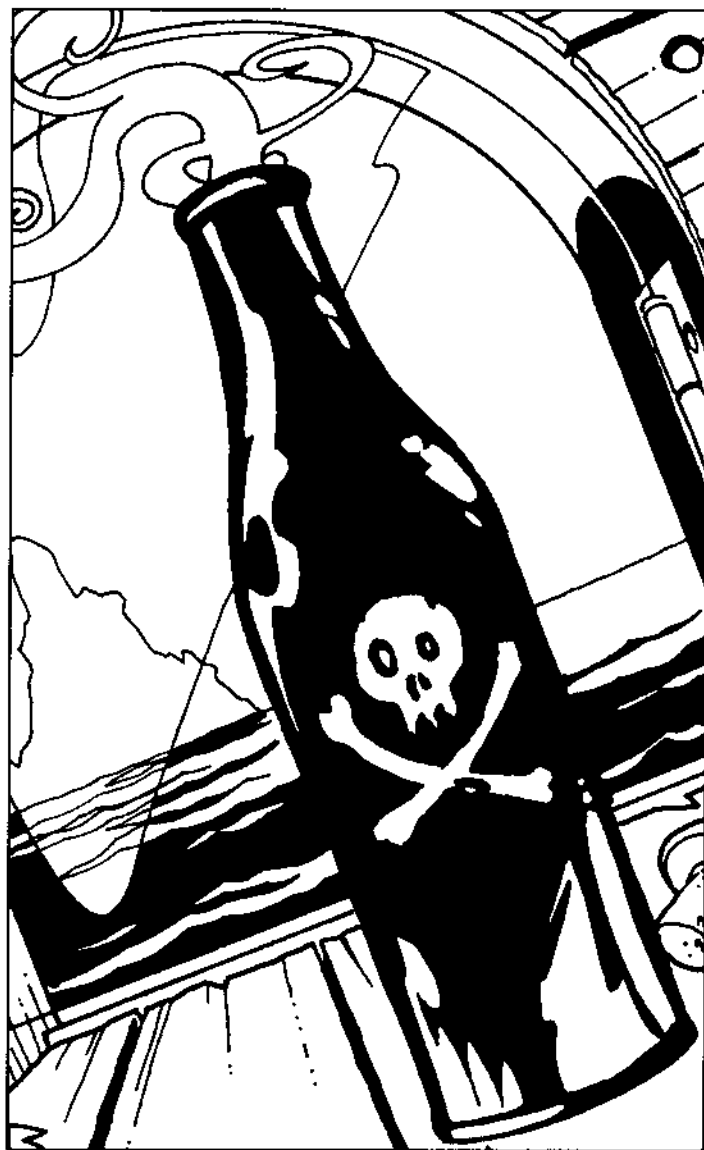
Those who keep up with political and social thought have a better sense of the Rilasciare. Nobles active in philosophical debates notice certain unorthodox arguments emerging from different groups at the same time. Some officials have found a similar pattern while investigating acts of vandalism or sedition against their government. The Rilasciare symbol has even appeared in public from time to time: on illegally distributed pamphlets or at the scene of a few high-profile crimes.

But no one has yet put all the pieces together. Those who have seen the symbol and heard the name refuse to believe the perpetrators are part of one all-encompassing group. They appear too randomly — are associated with too many disparate incidents — to constitute an organization that large. They may, for example, show up on a leaflet urging readers to love their fellow man, and then appear years later at the site of a grisly murder. Surely the same group cannot be responsible for both acts. It must be different organizations using the name and symbol: common sense demands it.

Thus, the few who know the Rilasciare by name never realize how large and enduring it truly is.

Théah is a less paranoid society than ours.

Without a public face, the Rilasciare doesn't have a positive image to maintain like Los Vagos or the Knights of the Rose and Cross. Instead, it can concentrate on its true goals without worrying about a "legitimate" façade. Of course, what those true goals are and how it should go about reaching them are matters of some debate. To understand them, you must go back to the beginning.





History

What follows are some of the Rilasciare's most profound secrets. Players whose Heroes do not belong to the order should probably skip to the "Recent History" section, below.

The Old Empire

It began with the Republic.

Founded on the ideals of fraternity and brotherhood, steeped in the tradition of rule by virtue, the Old Republic represented humanity's noblest ideals. At the height of its glory, it stretched across Théah, from the Highland coast to the edge of the Crescent deserts. It was ruled from the city of Numa in the land later known as Vodacce. An Imperial Senate, an august body of learned men, stood at the head of the government. They ruled wisely and led humanity to a pinnacle of art and culture — a golden age that lasted for centuries.

But with supremacy came complacency, and corruption eventually overtook the Republic. Power fell into the hands of an absolute ruler, an Emperor who refused to bow to the Senate's whims. He eventually died, only to be replaced by another Emperor, then another, then another. New Senators tried to seize power back from these rulers, sparking a silent struggle for dominance. Eventually, the Senators regained some measure of control, which lasted until a new, more forceful Emperor arose and began the conflict anew. The Republic — now an Empire — entered a

period of decline, as the political battles between Senates and Emperors fostered decadence and decay.

The conflict came to a head in the year 698 AUC, after nearly three hundred years of political seesawing. The Senate had held power for many years, and became notorious for its personal indulgences. Returning from a campaign in the north of Théah, General Gaius Philippus Macer took power from the Senators in a military coup. The people were tired of the Senate's abuse of power and welcomed the new Emperor with open arms. He reduced the Senators' power to almost nil and enacted a series of reforms intended to curb their abuses forever.

The Senate would not go quietly, however. For the next twenty-six years, they instigated a series of plots and assassination efforts against the Emperor. They all failed. Whether it was an adder in his bedchamber, an attack in a crowded marketplace, or an outbreak of civil unrest, Macer proved too clever to be felled by such tactics.

Finally, after all possibilities have been exhausted, a ruthless Senator named Octavius Montanus discovered a strange artifact — a mystic rod that allowed him to summon supernatural creatures from a far-off realm. He studied it for months until he felt confident enough to wield its powers. Gathering a small group of allies together, he erected a barrier in a hidden chamber of the Senate building and activated the rod, hoping to gain the power he needed to defeat Macer once and for all.

What happened next was unspeakable.

The Bargain

The creatures arrived through a schism in space, appearing to the Senators as horrifying demonic visions. Some of the conspirators fled screaming at the sight of them. Others fell to their knees in terror and one went irrevocably mad — clawing at the marble walls until his hands bled from the effort. Only Montanus remained calm enough to act. Haltingly at first, then with increasing authority, he began to bargain with the creatures. He promised them whatever they wanted if they would help him and his allies, pledging

himself and his bloodline in return for their aid. At first, the creatures threatened unending damnation if he did not bow to their will. Montanus remained strong, however, and gradually made his demands known. A bizarre negotiation ensued, as each side stipulated its desires and attempted to coerce the other into obeying them.

After many long hours, a terrible bargain was struck. The creatures – which Montanus referred to as “the Bargainers” – would give the Senators the powers they desired. The Senators in turn would spread those powers, first by teaching and eventually through the blood of their descendants. Each new practitioner gave the creatures a window into the world – a foothold in Théan reality that they had lost millennia ago. Each new usage of the dark gifts would increase their influence a little more, make the barriers keeping them out a little thinner. Then one day, far in the future, they might be able to break through...

But the Senators didn't worry about that. They eagerly agreed to the Bargainers' conditions and swore to pass on to others what they had learned. With inhuman smiles, the Bargainers granted their request. Montanus gained the ability to step between the shadows. His companions gained other powers according to their wishes – the ability to predict the future, the ability to control fire, the ability to kill with a touch. With the Bargain sealed, the rift closed, leaving the Senators alone to marvel at their new powers.

Unknown to Montanus and his companions, however, their activity had not gone unnoticed. A trio of pages – commoner servants of the Senate – had seen them enter the chamber and watched from behind a tapestry while the horrifying events unfolded. Though frightened, they maintained their composure, remaining unseen until the senators had left. They knew that such an abomination could not be allowed to stand, and agreed amongst themselves to fight the Senators however they could. As dawn stole across the Senate building, another bargain was struck... and the Rilasciare was born.

The three pages – Philo, Matias, and Vesta – knew that they could not fight the Senators alone. They were servants with no political power who lacked any power approaching

the Senators' sorcery. To directly confront Montanus and his fellows meant death. So they decided to bide their time.

Meanwhile, the Senators marshaled their new-found powers against Gaius. They burned several garrisons to the ground, dragged his political allies into a shadowy oblivion, and tugged the strands of fate to their advantage. Finally, they made an impressive display of their powers in front of the Emperor himself and demanded that he return power to the Senate. Gaius had no choice; he acceded to their demands rather than risk death. While he remained Emperor to keep their sorcery hidden, his power was broken. The Empire belonged to the Senators.

As these events unfolded, the fledgling Rilasciare (calling themselves *Fortis*, or “Courageous”) began gathering allies to their cause. They found those who had witnessed the Senators' powers and convinced them to help. They trained themselves in poisoning and assassination methods, for only stealth could stop their enemies. They met in cellars and on street corners, never revealing their intentions save to those they could trust. As the years went by and the Senators' influence grew, they struck back in small ways – thwarting certain laws, stymieing political appointments, and so on. They even managed to kill one of the conspirators, snuffing his sorcery with a pair of asps in his bathtub.

But though their organization had grown, the Senators' power had grown as well. Montanus had taught others his sorcery, starting with his family and moving to friends and political allies. In order to check his growth, his coconspirators began teaching sorcery to their own allies. *Fortis* soon found its enemies' numbers swelling, and the plots it had to contain growing beyond its ability to handle. To their dismay, they learned that public knowledge of sorcery could not stem the Senators' power. They could reveal what they knew to the common citizens, but most were too frightened to do anything about it. The Senators' wrath proved a stronger deterrent than the need to destroy their sorcery.



The Midnight Crusade

The First Prophet

For fifty years, things continued unchanged: the Empire was run by puppet Emperors controlled by the Senators and their descendants, who used their magic to destroy those who opposed them. Fortis swelled in numbers, but was limited mainly to Numa and could not strike a serious blow against the sorcerers. It might have remained that way indefinitely were it not for the rise of the First Prophet.

Vesta – the last survivor of the original Fortis trio – was walking home from the marketplace one afternoon when she heard the Prophet speaking on a street corner. He spoke of love for all mankind, and of the worship of a single deity called "Theus." More importantly, however, he spoke against sorcery – decrying the dark power of the Senators and calling for the people to rise up and destroy their abominable magic. Vesta was moved by his powerful words and touched by the courage he displayed. She also noticed the effect he had on the crowd: they hung upon his words, listening with rapt attention to the lessons he conveyed. In his message, she sensed a weapon that could galvanize the people in a way she and her followers never could – and perhaps even bring the sorcerers down for good.

Unfortunately, she suspected that his days were numbered. The Senators would not allow such an affront to their authority to continue for long, and when the Prophet inevitably disappeared, his message would fade with him. He would be just another street preacher with crazy ideas, an insignificant, unremembered madman.

Vesta thought long and hard about how to preserve his words, and more importantly, how to spread them far and wide. After consultation with Fortis and a great deal of soul-searching, she arrived at a decision that would alter the course of Théah. As a street preacher, the Prophet would have limited influence at best. But as a martyr... he could be unstoppable.

Approaching the Prophet as he spoke one day, she offered him the opportunity to deliver his message to the Senate floor. He did not appear surprised at her words, and accepted her offer as if he had been waiting years to hear it. Vesta used her contacts in the Senate to smuggle the

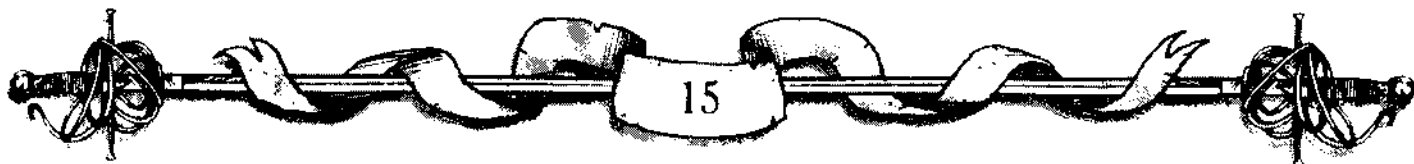
Prophet in, and arranged for him to enter the floor during a well-attended session. Then she sat back and watched the fireworks.

At first, it appeared as if her tactic had backfired. After delivering his speech, the Prophet was arrested, tried, and executed as a traitor. With his voice apparently silenced, the sorcerers launched an inquiry to discover who had allowed him in, and found Vesta. She was executed just a few months after the Prophet, depriving Fortis of its leader. In the wake of her death, the conspirators scattered, cursing their leader for her foolish mistake.

Then something extraordinary happened. Rather than dying out, the Prophet's words seemed to gain strength. Many had heard his speech to the Senate, and passed on to others what they learned. A cult sprung up around his teachings, which grew with each successive generation. Realizing what had happened, Fortis encouraged the spread of this cult – transcribing the Prophet's words, relating the message he had died for, and sending its members to the far corners of the Empire to preach.

The sorcerers – who now formed many noble families, passing the dark gift through their blood – tried to stop the Prophet's cult, but they could not even stem it. Soon it had spread across the world, with faithful in every town and village. The final blow came in 203 AV, when the Emperor announced his conversion to the Prophet's faith. The sorcerous nobles were forced to flee or face the wrath of an entire religion. They settled in exile in the outlying provinces of the Empire, their power broken forever. Vesta's plan had finally borne fruit, and Fortis rejoiced at the realization of its hard-fought victory.

From here, the society splintered into smaller groups. Some joined the newfound Church of the Prophets, lending their voices to its chorus. Others left in pursuit of the sorcerous nobles, who were establishing new power bases in the outlying colonies. Without the threat of the sorcerers to unify them, they no longer needed a strong central base, and they gradually lost contact with the greater whole.



The Dark Ages

As the Empire fell, the sorcerous nobles rose to snap up the pieces. They divided Théah into feudal kingdoms and warred against each other in an effort to gain more power. In addition to fighting each other, they battled local warlords, petty barons, and barbarian hordes from Vestenmannavnjar and Ussura. Magic by this time had become a genetic trait, and specific powers varied from one area of the world to the next. Some nobles lacked the trait entirely and envied their “betters,” while those who possessed the magic pressed their advantage. Eventually, the sorcerers came to dominate those without the Gift, even as they hid their abilities from the prying eyes of the Church.

During these dark times, the society remained decentralized. It was already divided (it had long since dropped the name “Courageous”), and its loosely-knit structure allowed it to weather the wars and barbarian hordes fairly well. Many cells were simply absorbed into the Vaticine, joining their ideals with the Church’s greater message. Those outside the Church pursued their own goals, which varied from group to group.

Connections between Vaticine members and those outside the Church were maintained through an informal communication system. Those within the Church provided safety and occasional information, while those outside informed the Vaticine of sorcerous nobles and other transgressions against the Prophets.

The name “Rilasciare” (Ril-ah-shee-AR-ay) first appeared at about this time — a tongue-in-cheek title meaning “troublemaker” in Old Théan. A few members began using it in their correspondence mainly to identify each other without raising undue suspicions. Over time, it became a moniker for anyone belonging to their organization. Few outsiders knew what it denoted, and fewer still asked about it; in these dark times, there were more important things to worry about.

The goals of individual cells varied wildly during the Dark Ages. Some were content merely to debate philosophy, or to record the deeds of Fortis for posterity. Others ruthlessly pursued noble sorcerers and anyone who might aid them. It was there that the Rilasciare truly asserted itself — fighting across petty Théan kingdoms in pursuit of the Senators’ descendants. Many members knew the true origins of sorcery, passed down from the days of the Bargain. They realized that magic had developed from a learned art to a genetic trait, which meant that the Bargainers had gained a greater foothold in Théah. Their realization lent a sense of urgency to their deeds.

For many centuries, they fought a quiet war against sorcery. The sorcerers, in turn, struck back at them as they would at any enemy. A noble family would be butchered in its sleep, only to have its relatives from the next kingdom hunt down the “bandits” responsible. Surprisingly, no one learned the attackers’ true nature, or of their informal connections to a larger entity. Anti-sorcery sentiments were rife across Théah; what was different about a few more fanatics?

Von Drachen Sorcery

The von Drachens’ powers — called *Zerstörung* — could age objects with a touch. Apprentices had the ability to wither wood and metal, while masters could turn living beings to dust. The Rilasciare wiped out the line in 918, and *Zerstörung* has not been seen on Théah since. However, it is possible that one or two Eisen still possess the sorcerous gene. Details on this lost form of magic can be found in Chapter 3.

918 — The Destruction of the von Drachens

The Rilasciare’s destruction of the von Drachen family, an old line of sorcerers who had formed a kingdom in eastern Eisen, marked both a great triumph and the beginning of a shift in its philosophy. The society had been able to kill a few members of other lines — mostly Porté mages and practitioners of Castillian fire magic — but the von Drachens provided an opportunity to do much more. Their sorcerous blood was concentrated in the ruling family, limited to a few branches of no more than thirty or so members. With the help of Karl Sieger, a rival nobleman who lacked any sorcerous traits, the Rilasciare devised a plan to wipe them out.

The von Drachens had a reputation as cruel rulers, and it wasn't hard to get the local peasants to work against them. The Rilasciare began by striking against the outlying families — minor cousins with little formal power in the von Drachens' kingdom. They attacked in the middle of the night, slipping into their homes and slaughtering them in their sleep. When the main family members realized that their line was under attack, they gathered at their fortified castle — which was just what the Rilasciare wanted. The kitchen staff smuggled a small group of assassins into the fortress, just as Sieger's army approached outside. Focused on the external threat, the family did not think to look within. By morning, not a single von Drachen remained alive.

The Rilasciare allowed Sieger to annex the von Drachen land, happy to reward its ally for his help. Within a few years, however, it became clear that they had replaced one evil with another. Sieger oppressed those beneath him terribly, taxing the peasants until they bled and ruthlessly exterminating anyone who opposed him. Worse still, he knew of the Rilasciare's existence and kept a sharp eye out for his former allies. They could not get close to him as they had the von Drachens. Sieger's lack of sorcery may have comforted the Rilasciare, but it did little to relieve the miserable souls beneath his thumb.

Word of the blunder slowly spread to different Rilasciare cells, prompting serious debate among its members. Perhaps sorcery was not the only enemy, some argued. Perhaps power itself was a corrupting force, as damaging to the human soul as the Bargainers themselves. If the destruction of sorcery could not prevent oppression like Sieger's, then more must be done than just destroy sorcery. Kings and nobles should become new targets, as should tax collectors, constables, and other instruments of governing. The issue became a catalyst for many members, who took new interest in the society and its still-murky goals.

The Third Prophet

The Rilasciare's disillusionment with authority came to a head with the rise of the Third Prophet in the eleventh century. Many Free Thinkers belonged to the Church, and believed that the goals of both organizations were essentially





the same. That changed when the Third Prophet came to power. While they applauded his strong stance against sorcery (and actively helped him rid Castille of the magicians who ruled it), they were appalled at his abuses of power. His crusades against the Crescent Empire cost the lives of thousands and served no purpose other than to fuel the Prophet's passion. In an effort to siphon power from the Hierophant, he moved the Vaticine capital from Vodacce to Castille, resulting in another long and bloody war. He established the Inquisition, ostensibly to ferret out sorcery, but also to find and destroy his political enemies. He had ascended his throne on the bodies of the dead, using the Church's authority to consolidate his personal power. The Rilasciare was horrified, both at his abuses and at its own well-meaning ideals which he perverted in his quest for domination.

The final straw came when Niccolo Benevisti, a Vodacce Cardinal and influential member of the Rilasciare, spoke out against the Inquisition's abuses. He was burned as a heretic, executed for daring to question the Prophet. The Inquisition launched a purge of his followers, and many Free Thinkers followed Benevisti into the flames. The rest fled the church, seeking outside Rilasciare cells to fall back upon.

The lesson of the Third Prophet was clear. Authority was poison and power corrupted everything it touched. Even the Vaticine Church wasn't safe from the terrible consequences of unchecked dominance. If mankind was to live free of fear, it must rid itself of this disease once and for all. Armed with new determination, the Rilasciare set forth to destroy all forms of authority in any way it could.

The Shadow War

During the next five hundred years, a secret war developed, both against the Vaticine and against the nobility who still controlled most of Théah. It wasn't easy; the Third Prophet had driven sorcery underground, and most nobles refused to practice their art in public. Discovering them while simultaneously battling the Church proved a potent drain on the society's resources. To make matters worse, they found themselves hunted by both the Inquisition and the

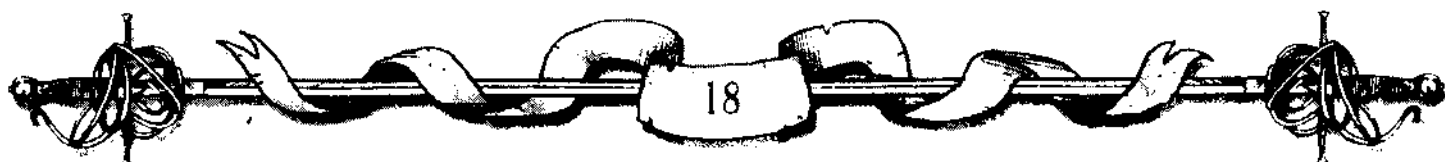
sorcerous nobles, who combined to hold most power in Théah. While the Rilasciare could occasionally play both sides against each other, their enemies were far too numerous to stay distracted for long. As they had during their earliest days, they went into hiding, biding their time and striking only when they could do so safely.

During this period, they found aid from an unlikely source – non-sorcerous nobles. Not every family carried the gift, and those who didn't found themselves at a disadvantage when dealing with their magic-enabled rivals. The Rilasciare carefully approached these individuals, offered its assistance, and helped them find ways of thwarting their enemies. In this way, it recruited some valuable members while bolstering its flagging resources. Gradually, the Rilasciare found a foothold within the elite of Théan society – the same elite it hoped ultimately to overthrow.

The situation settled into a lengthy game of cat and mouse, as the Rilasciare tried to strike back against its foes. It moved carefully, lest a potential ally turned out to be an enemy in disguise. This was especially important where magic was concerned; one could rarely tell who a sorcerer was until you knew him intimately. By then, it could be too late. Reckless members often found themselves on the wrong end of a Fate Witch's curse or sent through a Porté portal with their eyelids cut off. The survivors moved more cautiously, and acted only when circumstances favored it.

For over four hundred years this continued. The network of cells remained loose and informal, bound only by political philosophy and the personal correspondence of their own members. Different cells acted according to their own agendas, while occasionally consulting each other for advice and assistance. They scored a few victories here and there – thwarting an unjust law, destroying Vaticine records, killing the odd sorcerer or two – but could not become public enough to enact any real change.

As the centuries went by, a subtle code of communication slowly developed: a particular dress style which the Thinkers could use to identify each other without speaking. A member in trouble, for example, could wear an unbuttoned scarlet cloak, while one with vital information



could wrap a scarf around her arm. The so-called “coat code” was so successful that they began using it to identify potential recruits – instructing those who wished to join to wear a particular color to mark their allegiance. Aside from letters back and forth, it was the only thing binding the various cells together.

The Firework Dam

By 1500, the Rilasciare had developed into a series of salons and gentleman’s clubs. Direct action had given way to quiet debate, and most of the society concerned itself more with political philosophy than direct action. It remained secretive, for the issues they discussed could be considered treasonous, but their days of assassination and active unrest seemed behind them.

The cry for change rose from Montaigne. A cell leader named François Goddard du Rachitisse published a manifesto demanding the immediate dismantling of all forms of authority. He called himself a “Free Thinker” and urged all Rilasciare to follow his example. His fiery words caused a stir among the other cells, who argued endlessly about how to react. Goddard, however, wasn’t interested in arguing. He and his followers infiltrated an important construction project – a dam being built to provide the King with a fishing lake. They replaced the earth at the bottom of the dam with gunpowder, and set it off during the inaugural ceremony. It blew nearly forty tons of material into the air, spraying great billows of dirt for miles in every direction. Three members of the king’s entourage were killed in the resulting mayhem, and the flood of water from the dam washed an entire noble estate away. Newspapers dubbed the incident the “Firework Dam,” and Goddard became the most wanted man in Théah.

The incident also delivered a sharp kick to the Rilasciare’s knickers. Other cells began emulating his example, undermining the government through direct (and sometimes very public) acts of mayhem. Some preferred more subtle means of making their points – distributing leaflets or educating peasants – while others clung stubbornly to their quiet philosophical debates. But all of them had been shaken by the Firework Dam, and it soon

became clear that the Rilasciare would no longer be content to sit on the political sidelines.

Recent Events

In the century since, the Rilasciare has developed into a loose, but active, confederation of cells and branches. Through secret couriers, they exchange letters debating policy, arguing with each other, and acting to further their mutual agenda. In some ways, they remain very divided – certain cells are more extremist than others, and the distances between them means that each can act with a fair amount of autonomy. But all remain committed to a common goal, and work together for what they believe is the betterment of all mankind.

With action has come results. They have disrupted numerous bureaucratic activities, caused considerable mayhem within the larger Théan cities, and even enacted some real change here and there. Corrupt officials from both the Church and various nations have been taken to task – some gently, others far more brutally. Because of their loose-knit nature, pinning them down is quite difficult, making it difficult for their enemies to truly stop them.

The War of the Cross

Most Rilasciare were appalled at the terrible bloodshed caused by the War of the Cross. They saw the Prophet’s words distorted to senseless slaughter as brother turned against brother and an entire nation came crashing to the ground to the benefit of its greedy neighbors. Despite their horror, however, they have noticed some tangible benefits to the War. Eisen is now fractured and divided, its government shattered. The power structure has completely collapsed, leaving noble and commoner alike in equal straits. While they deplore the hunger and disease caused by the war, Free Thinkers believe that the suffering will be in vain if a new Emperor takes control. In the intervening years, they have gone to great lengths to keep the Eisen baronies at each others’ throats. The longer the barons squabble, the greater the chance that Eisen will never reunify – which would suit the Free Thinkers just fine.



La Bucca

The prison revolt on the island of *la Bucca* represents one of the Rilasciare's biggest successes — comparable to the destruction of the von Drachens or the martyring of the First Prophet. While none of the principal players belongs to the Free Thinkers, they received some timely aid which enabled the revolt to succeed... and may have produced the first humanist government in Théan history.

Several Rilasciare members were friends of Prince Javier del Castille, heir to the Castillian throne. When the Inquisition kidnapped him from his bedchambers one evening, they spent many years attempting to locate him. He finally turned up on *la Bucca*, a prisoner going by the name of Allende. Through a planted spy, they made surreptitious contact with him and asked what they could do to help.

Over the next few months, they smuggled Allende the materials he needed to pull off a revolt. He received chemicals allowing him to fake an outbreak of the White Plague, and a schedule of supply ships letting him know

when new sailing vessels would approach the island. A few bribes ensured that the island's gun fortresses would be accessible at the right time, and they even sent one of their own to the island, to protect Allende in case something went wrong.

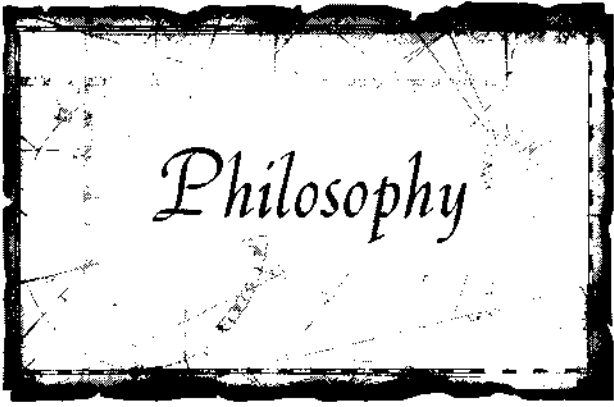
Nothing did. The prisoners took *la Bucca* from their jailers and immediately looked to Allende for leadership. Inspired by old debates with his friends and heartened by their vital assistance, he set about creating the Brotherhood of the Coast: a genuine democracy where all men have a say in their government. Allende has maintained contact with his Rilasciare friends ever since, and while he doesn't actually belong to the society, he has offered his

services if they need them. For their part, the Rilasciare watch the development of his fledgling nation with glee and work to ensure that the Brotherhood is never threatened by larger, more aggressive nations.

More information on the Brotherhood of the Coast can be found in the *Pirate Nations* sourcebook.

Present Day

The Rilasciare has traveled far from its origins in the Old Empire. In some ways, its founders' mission has not changed in all these centuries, but the successors have learned to adapt that cause to the broader social issues of contemporary Théah. Their flexibility has been vital to their survival. With the tremendous upheavals of the past few years, no other entity has proven as capable of rolling with the punches as they. What this bodes for the future of the Rilasciare, only time will tell.



Philosophy

For a group so divided, the Rilasciare has a remarkably unified philosophy. Every member shares its fundamental beliefs and supports them above all else. The Rilasciare's philosophy can be defined by three basic tenets:

- 1) No man, woman, or child should ever want for anything.
- 2) Sorcery is a tool of wickedness and must be destroyed for the good of humanity.
- 3) Power corrupts, and therefore all trappings of power — called "Dominion" — must be destroyed.

Through these tenets, a cohesive code of beliefs has developed among the Rilasciare. All three center around the need for enlightenment, and freedom of thought for all mankind.

The first tenet focuses on the positive aspects of the philosophy — of building up rather than tearing down. In an ideal world, there would be no hunger, no fear, no oppression anywhere. Yet children go without anything to eat; beggars live without a roof over their heads. Organizations like the Inquisition steal men from their beds in the middle of the night, and the peasants of Montaigne live in constant fear of their noble landlords. So how does one correct these problems?

The Rilasciare believes that enlightenment is the key. Enlightened thinking produces the strength one needs to conquer adversity. Free Thinkers refer to the trait as *vero coraggio*, or "true courage." Men must learn to think for

themselves, they argue, not depend upon others to think for them. If they can do that, then they can embrace *vero coraggio* and change the world. Peasants endure hardships because they don't know any better; teach them to feel life's joys and they will not stand for it. Rulers oppress their subjects because they do not care about them; show them the pain they inflict, and they will recant their ways. By spreading enlightenment — educating the ignorant, encouraging open-mindedness, and conveying ethical morality — the Free Thinkers can create *vero coraggio*, which leads to the end of all hardships. Starvation, ignorance, and oppression will wither and die, leaving an open-minded, free-thinking humanity to enjoy the bounty of Theus' gifts.

The second and third tenets stem from the first, but are much darker in nature. Not everyone believes that equality is beneficial; there are people opposed to the noble ideals the Rilasciare espouse — men and women who do not wish their fellow creatures to think for themselves. They seek to silence those beneath them, curtailing the rights of others to increase their own selfish pleasure. Their actions have given rise to stifling organizations — governments and other social structures whose only purpose is to keep a majority of the people under the thumb of a tiny elite. In order for all men to be free, such organizations must be done away with. Ironically, many of the Rilasciare belong to the very noble elite they are trying to overthrow.

No group of oppressors is greater than the Bargainers, the supernatural entities which allowed sorcery to seep into this world. They have corrupted an entire class of Théans through their dark gifts, granting them a suite of glorified parlor tricks in exchange for a foothold into this world. In addition, the nobles have used sorcery for millennia to keep themselves above the vast majority of commoners, widening the gap between haves and have-nots. Since the Bargainers exist beyond the reach of ordinary men, the Rilasciare cannot destroy them. So it must settle for destroying the instruments of their oppression. By cutting magic out of the human bloodstream, it can slam the door on the Bargainers and end the poisoning inequalities the creatures have introduced.

That is the philosophy of the Rilasciare. No member has ever disagreed with it or gone against its tenets. Every one of them believes that it can bring about a golden age of man, and most will cheerfully give their lives in its defense. As abstract philosophers, they are as unified as any group in Théah. It's implementing the philosophy that causes divisions.

Sorcery and the Rilasciare

The Bargain of 724 AUC produced seven lines of sorcery, which the Free Thinkers call the *Bargainer's Arts*. Of these, three have survived to the 17th century: *Porté*, *Sorte* and the Castillian fire magic of *El Fuego Adentro*. The rest were destroyed through infighting, cross-breeding, and in the case of *Zerstörung*, the Rilasciare's direct intervention. With the Third Prophet's coup, *El Fuego Adentro* became limited to isolated tribes in the Castillian hills; the Free Thinkers hope to do the same with Montaigne's teleporters and the Vodacce Fate Witches. Each time these groups practice their magic, they further oppress their fellows and give the Bargainers another foothold in the world. The Rilasciare has deemed their brand of magic the most dangerous in the world and will stop at nothing to destroy them.

The rest of Théah's sorcery is more problematic. It comes from sources other than the Bargainers – Glamour from the Sidhe, Pyeryem from Matushka, and Lærdom from Vestens' religious beliefs – and therefore may not be as directly harmful as *Porté* or *Sorte*. The Free Thinkers have yet to formulate a cohesive policy on them, although they don't approve of any form of sorcery. Some believe that all lines

should be wiped out; others think that some do not qualify as a Dark Art and therefore should not be persecuted. Pyeryem and Lærdom are particularly troublesome, since the cultures who practice them display the very lack of structure that the Free Thinkers espouse so strongly. Then there's Avalon's strange Druid magic, which comes not from an outside source, but from an enlightened understanding of the world – something the Rilasciare believe very deeply in.

Self-Evident Truths?

Most Théans accept that nobles are inherently "better" people than the commoners they rule. After all, nobles have sorcery: someone who can turn into a bear or travel hundreds of miles in an eyeblink has an inherent advantage over anyone who can't. Therefore, the concept that all men are created equal simply doesn't exist on Théah.

The Rilasciare know better. With their knowledge of the Bargain, they realize that sorcerers have given up something for their abilities. What it is, they cannot be sure (the original trio left few records), but signs of it can be seen on every sorcerer in Théah: from the lash marks of the Fate Witches to the bloody stains on every *Porté* mage's hands. If they have all paid some price for their abilities, then those without the Gift haven't – and are free of sorcerous debilities. In that light, it becomes much easier for the Rilasciare to believe that every human being is born essentially equal, and that no single ability makes one person "better" than another.

As a general rule, all Free Thinkers reject *Porté*, *Sorte*, and *El Fuego Adentro* as tools of the Bargainers. Glamour is also frowned upon, although not as much as the other three (it has only recently returned, after all). Opinions of Pyeryem and Lærdom vary. Whatever their opinions, however, everyone agrees that sorcery has no place in the Rilasciare organization. Those with the Gift are never approached for membership, and any sorcerers who infiltrate the Free Thinkers are soon discovered and disposed of.

Players should keep in mind that just because the Rilasciare believes that sorcery is evil doesn't necessarily *make* it evil.

Regardless of what sinister plans the Bargainers have, many heroic deeds have been performed through magic. Countless brave and honorable people have used their sorcerous gifts to benefit their fellows, whether it be a Fate Witch snapping the threads of a potential tyrant or a *Porté* mage saving a burning library by teleporting the books away. The Rilasciare don't discount the benefits of sorcery (at least *most* of them don't). They just believe that there's a price for all that power... and that humanity shouldn't have to pay it.



Structure

One of the strongest dilemmas facing the Rilasciare is its own organization. As a society dedicated to the overthrow of order, it cannot impose any real structure on its membership. How can you fight against authority if you have to ask for some leader's permission? The solution is to create an egalitarian structure based more on mutual cooperation than the chain of command. Add this to its scattered history, its struggle for purpose during the Middle Ages, and its need to remain undetected lest its enemies discover it, and you have a group about as decentralized as they come.

The Rilasciare is based around a series of semi-autonomous cells, each only loosely connected to the others. They vary widely in membership, organization, and operating tactics. Some meet secretly in hidden locations, while others hold open debates in posh clubs or libraries. Some are wanted for treason, while others advise the highest heads of state. All that binds them is their common background, their unifying philosophy, and regular contact with each other through a series of couriers (detailed below). Most cells keep to themselves, pursuing their own agendas without undue interference from others.

Many cells disguise themselves as legitimate gentleman's clubs – private organizations which meet behind closed doors to discuss any number of topics. The Rilasciare has found such façades maintain its secrecy without arousing undue suspicion. Cells without a legitimate cover meet in basements, on street corners, and anywhere else they can.

Factions

While each Rilasciare cell is unique, those with common methods usually develop into "factions," based around the way they implement the society's core philosophy. Five primary factions currently exist; the debates between them help shape the Rilasciare's overall policy (such as it is). Different factions can be identified by their methods, their fervor, and the type of members they attract. Outsiders who know them by name rarely associate them with the Free Thinkers, which helps to keep them hidden. A description of each faction, including their *modus operandi*, follows.

The Freeman League

When most people think of the Rilasciare, they think of the Freeman League. Franksters, discordians, and public nuisances, they are the most public Free Thinkers faction, and the most hunted.

The Freeman League is less concerned with sorcery than with the overthrow of order in general: replacing nations and governments with a decentralized system of city-states. It seeks to bring this about through public acts of destruction and sabotaging the bureaucratic process. Many of them believe that ridiculing those in power is the best way to remove their authority, and go to great lengths to satirize influential officials. The most harmless means involve distributing illegal leaflets – depicting scathing caricatures of the official in question, savagely witty parodies of an unjust edict, and similar attacks. Most Freeman use more direct methods – replacing a mayor's prewritten speech with seditious slogans or burying an expensive statue in cow manure. The more fervent among them plan spectacular acts of destruction, including burning down government buildings or filling Vaticine churches with flocks of incontinent geese. One year ago, Vendel's chief tax collector lost all of his records when the Freeman filled his office with red paint. These pranks are always carefully calculated, designed to spur gossip and increase derision toward the instruments of authority.

Beneath their frivolous surface, these pranks serve a serious purpose. The Freeman wish to render authority useless, allowing humanity to realize how well they can get along

without it. If the instruments of government can be fouled enough, then they will wither of their own accord, leaving a relieved and enlightened populace behind. While usually possessed of a pernicious glee, they can be quite solemn in the right circumstances; captured Freemen have engaged in lengthy hunger strikes and refused to leave prison, even if released.

Because their attacks are so humiliating, the authorities pursue the Freeman League ruthlessly. Nothing spikes the wheels of power like a nobleman made to look ridiculous.

The Freemen survive by disguising their true identities and have become very adept at hiding their tracks. Many Freemen are members of the ruling elite themselves (usually younger sons and daughters), and use their clout both to gain access to their targets and to provide safehouses for those in trouble. They meet at private estates or other areas where they won't be disturbed, and there's always enough money to pay for their missions.

For all the mayhem they cause, the Freeman League remains surprisingly principled. Freemen refuse to kill if at all possible and arrange their pranks so as to cause no physical harm. (They have been known to kidnap officials on occasion, but such individuals are always released unharmed... usually in a ridiculous and very public position.) For all their discordian tendencies, they plan their missions very carefully. It's very difficult to shake a Freeman's ideals, and other Rilasciare factions have found them both passionate and persuasive.

The Freethought Society

The Freethought Society is the Rilasciare's most moderate faction. It serves as a tempering influence on the more radical members, counseling caution and restraint where others charge headlong into danger. The Society is composed mostly of older members — nobles or wealthy men — who have left their bomb-throwing days behind them. They prefer talk to action, and spend their hours debating philosophy in warm studies while their compatriots are out hurling bombs. Nevertheless, its

membership has wisdom and experience — as well as a plethora of useful contacts — making it the most respected faction in the Rilasciare.

The Society focuses mainly on education and enlightenment. "Gradual change" is their mantra. It believes that laws and governments are necessary evils, which must eventually be done away with. For now, however, mankind isn't ready for the burden of such freedom. It must therefore be prepared by understanding the principles that can free it from oppression. Members warn others of the dangers of sorcery, encourage tolerance of other ideas, and bring

enlightenment to those who cannot reach it on their own.

They primarily achieve this through the spread of education. As things now stand in Théah, proper schooling is a tool of the elite. Only the nobility has the time or the inclination to learn how to read, and most universities require money to enroll. The Vaticine church controls almost every school in Théah, using them to increase its grip on power.

Noble Rilasciare?

For a group that espouses the overthrow of order, there is a surprising number of nobles within the Rilasciare ranks. Why would the wealthy elite choose to join such a group? Some of them act out of a sense of *noblesse oblige* — bringing freedom to those who have none. Others use the Rilasciare's philosophy to bring a sense of purpose to their lives, while a few are simply bored. The most dedicated among them lack sorcery of any sort and see the Free Thinkers as a way of evening the odds; in a strange sense, destroying the power of others is more honorable than building up one's own.

Most noble Rilasciare are very principled and believe deeply in the society's cause. They realize that they have a lot to lose if the Free Thinkers succeed in their goals. They simply feel that the gains of such a sacrifice — for themselves and for all society — is well worth what they must give up.



The Midnight Crusade

The Society's members want to undo all that. They use their resources to set up schools of their own, open to anyone and untainted by the trappings of power. When they can't do that, they use other methods — lecturing on street corners, passing out pamphlets, even training peasants in the fields to read. They have worked with the Invisible College in the past, helping to spread word of their discoveries as far as possible.

Beyond these activities, the Society works behind the scenes to improve life however it can. It has an extensive network of contacts — servants and bureaucrats bribed to relay information — who can access numerous vital locations and turn prominent ears when needed. Most of the time, it uses them for fairly modest goals: encouraging progressive legislation, planting members in key locations, and so forth. But if the situation calls for it, it can do much more: free a wrongfully accused prisoner, for example, or place incriminating evidence where it will do the most good. The rest of the Rilasciare may disdain the Society as do-nothing babblers, but when they need access to a government building or an oppressive law overturned, the criticism dries up.

The Society's most dramatic success has come about only recently: in Montaigne, Freethought philosophical essays have begun a new literary movement. Published anonymously and circulated among the noble courts, these essays question everything from the class system to the right to own property. They speak to high-flown ideals of government and society, challenging their readers to embrace revolutionary thought. They have quickly caught

fire, and are currently all the rage among *l'Empereur's* hangers-on — mostly because no one knows who would publish such scandalous material. The Freethoughts, however, consider the endeavor a rousing success.

The Society's chief adversary is the Church of the Prophets, which sees its efforts as an affront to Church authority. The Vaticines have closed down Freethought schools and had their creators arrested for heresy. With the Inquisition on the rise, several prominent Society members have disappeared in the night, while others have been openly burned at the stake. But like the rest of the Rilasciare, they remain undaunted. Their respectability keeps them safe, and even if it doesn't, most of them have led long lives already. The thought of dying for a cause holds more appeal to them than the Inquisition knows.

Underground University

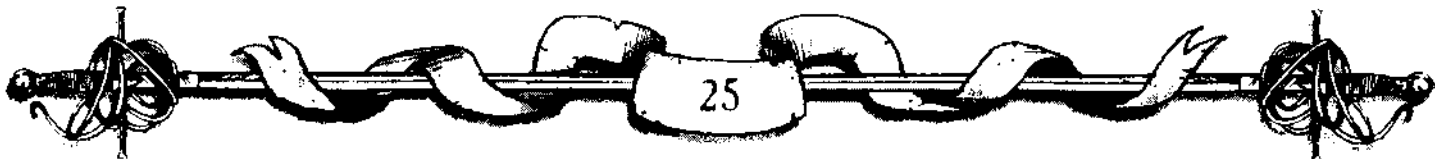
Freethought schools lack the resources and tradition of Vaticine schools, and suffer strongly in comparison. Most are jury-rigged, operating out of cramped quarters and hosting whatever students they can attract. Some have even been held in abandoned barns. The only advantage such schools have is that they will teach anyone; all you need to do is show up.

A few Freethought schools have achieved respectability, with proper campuses and learned professors to teach the students. They often do so with outside help, and rarely expose their Rilasciare roots. The most notable are the University of Kirkwall in the Highland Marches and the *Shkola Pravda* in Pavtlow, both developed by secret Freethought members with the blessings of the local government. It's no coincidence that both locations are far away from Vaticine City.

The Guerrilla Alliance
There are those in the Rilasciare who desire peaceful change, brought about by nonviolent methods. Then there are the Guerrillas. Abstract philosophical arguments do not interest them, nor do frivolous pranks or ineffective

half-measures. They want to dismantle the tools of oppression, and they want to do it *right now*.

Most of the Guerrilla Alliance comes from the lower classes: rag-tag revolutionaries who have never had anything but their beliefs. They scorn the gentleman's trappings of the other factions, wearing their common roots like a badge of honor. Most of them hold meetings on street corners, in cellars, or in burned-out buildings; some of them can't even read the philosophy they espouse so strongly. To the Guerrillas, it doesn't matter. They believe that society's





rulers will never give up their power voluntarily. The nobility must be pulled down by whatever means necessary, or else the Rilasciare's high-flown ideals will never come to fruition.

Those who see them in action know they aren't kidding. The Guerrilla Alliance is the most active group in the Rilasciare, launching daring missions with little regard for their own safety. They attack the instruments of government, the ruling class, the Vaticines, even other secret societies, in an effort to bring them all crashing to the ground. While sorcery is their preferred target (in keeping with the Rilasciare's original purpose), they make few distinctions between magicians and those with more tangible forms of power. They have bombed important buildings, kidnapped wealthy noblemen, and engaged in open sedition in an effort to destroy the chains of oppression. Many of them have explosive skills; most have seen military service. They even have a few poisoners and

professional assassins in their ranks, people they've used with devastating results.

One year ago, an Alliance cell infiltrated a Vendel masquerade ball and assassinated Master Soloman, the head of the Usury Guild, in front of five hundred noble guests. Six months before that, the Guerrillas destroyed a prominent public works department in the Montaigne city of Paix, demolishing the sumptuous building with forty-two barrels of gunpowder. While few operations are so prominent (and the Paix cell has since been arrested by the King's musketeers), they have shaken Théan society to the core. Unlike other Rilasciare, they have no compunction about killing when they feel it's necessary.

Their recklessness has resulted in a high turnover ratio as the targets of their ire chase them down. Almost every Guerrilla is wanted for some capital crime, and those who aren't simply haven't been identified yet. Three cells have

been uncovered in the last ten years, more than any other faction combined. But the Guerrillas believe that the results are worth the risk, and the surviving cells have learned to stay hidden. They disappear into the large crowds of the city, never meeting in the same place twice. Because of their lower-class roots, they know the streets well and can avoid the most dogged pursuer. Of all the factions, the Guerrilla Alliance makes the most use of the coat code (see page 36).

While fanatical, the Alliance has produced some of the bravest men and women Théah has ever seen. Other factions may decry the Guerrillas' violent methods, but few can deny their vigorous embrace of *vero coraggio*. Every mission of theirs contains great danger, danger they face without blinking an eye. They routinely risk their lives in the service of the order, and casualties only increase the survivors' resolve. At his execution, the leader of the Paix cell laughed at the gathered crowd before leaping off the scaffold himself. Such courage serves as an inspiration for other Rilasciare, even if the motivation for it does not.

The Liberation Guild

While some call them daring champions of the common man, there's really no other way to put it: the Liberationists are thieves. They favor equality through the redistribution of wealth, stealing from the rich (or the government's coffers) and giving it to the poor. No noble estate is safe from their attention, no painting or statue in all of Théah secure. They have instigated some of the most daring robberies in history and pass the profits on to those in need. How well this embodies the Rilasciare philosophy is a matter of some debate, but the Guild believes that its methods produce results.

Only two cells affiliated with the Liberation Guild exist, fewer than any other faction. Like the Freethought Society, they spend their idle hours in philosophical debate. Unlike the Society, their idle hours are few and far between. The Rilasciare's philosophy focuses their actions – to give them a sense of purpose lest they degenerate into just another adventurer's club. But every one of them possesses an overwhelming need for excitement... and a fair helping of kleptomaniac.

They target tax collectors, government coffers, the conspicuously wealthy: anyone with money. Using a combination of careful planning and stunning audacity, they steal the most valuable items they can find – overcoming locked gates, armed guards, and even magical barriers in the process. Entire estates have been stripped dry, years' worth of tax monies stolen at gunpoint. While the Guild is based in southern Théah (Castille and Vodacce to be exact), members travel across the continent in pursuit of their targets. The more valuable and better-protected an item, the greater allure it holds for them.

Beneath these daring escapades lies a strange adherence to Rilasciare beliefs. The wealth they acquire is always sent to those in need (although some funds go back into the Rilasciare). Tax monies are usually handed back to those they were levied on, while stolen works of art are ransomed or auctioned off to unscrupulous collectors. The money they procure has kept countless families from starving while draining tax revenues and forcing the nobility to waste their resources on guards and other precautions.

Over the years, a game of one-upmanship has emerged among Guild members. They exhort one another to greater and greater feats of thievery, using previous exploits as a measuring stick. The most recent dare sent Guild member Konrad Proovost into the summer home of *l'Empereur Léon* to steal a prized Synchron artifact. After dodging the guards and throwing the estate's hounds off his trail, Proovost penetrated the heart of the palace and replaced the prize with a cheap brass imitation. The original was sold to the Explorer's Guild at an exorbitant rate. Proovost, however, cannot claim as much glory as he would like; *l'Empereur* has so far failed to notice that the artifact is missing.

The rest of the Rilasciare condemn the Liberation Guild as frivolous and self-serving, but it has provided some dearly needed income to the group on numerous occasions. Some of the more dilapidated cells would not be able to function without the timely assistance of their light-fingered friends. The Guild has also produced some first-rate escape artists and second-story men – skills the Rilasciare can always use. Several powerful nobles have been reduced to bankruptcy by their efforts, and the peasantry always becomes a little

bolder after their lord is robbed blind. True, the Guild concerns itself more with the thrill of its own exploits than the Rilasciare's true purpose, but it produces tangible results and looks good doing it.

The Oppositionists

While other factions concern themselves with governments or the noble class, the Oppositionists remain true to the Rilasciare's original purpose. Sorcery is the real enemy, they claim. Nations, governments, the noble class — they all spring from the Bargainers' infernal powers. As long as sorcery remains, humanity will suffer under its blight. They must remove every trace of it before any other reform can take place. This faction consists of spies, informants, and witch hunters, all dedicated to destroying all traces of the Bargainers' Gifts.

It's hard to deny the evidence supporting their arguments. *Empereur Léon* was more or less stable until he made his *Porté* magic public. *Vodacce* has been bloody for centuries, thanks in part to the Fate Witches and their powers. The sinister *Sidhe* of *Avalon* bewitch their victims with *Glamour*, and *Pyeryem* keeps *Ussura* under *Matushka's* thumb. Sorcery breeds ill wherever it appears, and true enlightenment cannot exist as long as it does.

The Oppositionists have researched numerous ways to remove sorcery from *Théah*, but few tangible options present themselves. The easiest way, of course, is simply to kill everyone with sorcerous blood; the Oppositionists have no qualms about murder if they feel it necessary. Wholesale slaughter, however, is not an option. To do so would bring about a new form of tyranny, making the Rilasciare no better than the Inquisition. Instead, they have tried to undermine sorcerous blood by other means — developing wards against it, admonishing those with the blood to abandon their gifts, and so on. It's a difficult path, but the only one they feel they can take.

It should come as no surprise that the Oppositionists have retained close ties to the *Vaticine Church*. The Prophets have always spoken against sorcery, which the Church leadership has taken to heart. The Oppositionists are loath to lose such an invaluable tool. As flawed as it is, the

Church is still the best method to get their message to the people. They maintain extensive contacts with the *Vaticines*, allowing them to coordinate their efforts if necessary (and letting other Rilasciare keep an eye on the Inquisition). Most Oppositionists are quite devout, and some even belong to the priesthood.

Porté and *Sorte* remain the highest priorities for the Oppositionists. As direct results of the Bargain, they represent the most prominent threats. Consequently, their efforts center mainly in *Vodacce* and *Montaigne*, although *Avalon* remains a concern for them as well. They're still trying to form a cohesive policy on the other nations; for now, *Montaigne* and *Vodacce* are more than enough trouble.

The faction spends a great deal of time trying to identify sorcerers — an arduous process involving genealogy, political ties, and old-fashioned observation. They look for bloodlines rather than individuals, seeking to pinpoint the families most likely to produce the Gift. Once a bloodline has been found, they watch as many members of that family as they can.

What happens next depends on how their targets act. Those who use their gifts frivolously or for sinister purposes are marked for death. The Oppositionists maintain a small cadre of assassins to deal with those they feel have done the most damage with their gifts. Because of their small numbers, however, the Oppositionists cannot act in every instance they would like. So they strike only when circumstances dictate, making heavy use of the *Secret Court* (see below) to gain the support of their fellows. "Heroic" sorcerers or those who only sparingly practice the art are usually left to more subtle techniques, although that may change if the Oppositionists gain enough strength.

Those not targeted for assassination receive attention of a different sort. Sorcery is less damaging the less it is used, so Oppositionists try to encourage those with the Gift to let go of it. Sometimes, it can be very subtle: a *Porté* mage receiving a swift horse as a present, for example. If the target is open-minded, they can approach him more

directly, arguing against sorcery's dangers and encouraging him to stop using it.

Vodacce has proven a difficult nut to crack, since Sorte magic is the only power most Fate Witches have. The Oppositionists have responded by trying to wean them off such dependence — encouraging education and self-reliance so that they need not depend upon such magic. While educating Fate Witches is a decidedly dangerous business, they have found some unlikely allies in the nation's courtesans and in the secret society known as Sophia's Daughters. See "Relations with Other Groups," below, for more information.

In addition, they have used more indirect methods to stymie sorcerous blood. Nannies, stewards, and other teachers can dissuade young nobles from developing their powers; the Oppositionists have sponsored many such servants in hopes of keeping tomorrow's leaders from developing the Gift. They also use their political clout to dissuade marriages to

sorcerous families. If successful, they can wither some lines through lack of propagation and encourage sorcery to gradually die out. While such tactics require patience, they have proven more effective than simple murder.

The Oppositionists hold a rare set of ancient scrolls, in which Vesta herself wrote down what she and her companions saw that fateful night in the Senate building. They keep them locked away in the basement of a church in Vaticine City. Rumors of its contents have spread among the Rilasciare, but only a few Oppositionists have actually read it. Its words inspire the faction to keep Fortis' original purpose alive.

The Couriers

Looking at these different factions, it appears as if the Rilasciare is hopelessly divided. Even a unified background and philosophy could not normally hold such groups together. How can they remain part of a larger whole? What



keeps them from breaking apart and following their own paths? The answer lies with a band of messengers known as the Couriers.

As stated before, the Rilasciare has no real leaders; each cell operates without orders from any higher authority. However, they have always remained in regular contact with each other through letter-writing and other forms of long-distance communication. From the fall of the Old Empire, they have used correspondence to stay in contact with each other, conveying vital information and lending moral support to their widely scattered members. Without these connections, the society would have perished long ago.

Today, that tradition continues in the form of long-distance philosophical conversation. Each cell has its own ideas about how to implement the Rilasciare's purpose. They share them with each other through written debates, putting arguments to paper and sending them to the other cells who then debate them and write responses of their own. Topics vary from the most abstract ideals to contemporary issues which the society must deal with. This ongoing dialogue has continued for centuries, and forms the ties which bind the Rilasciare together.

Their correspondence, however, cannot use traditional methods of transport; the often seditious nature of their topics demands security. In order to preserve the members' safety and anonymity, a messenger service has developed to carry their correspondence back and forth. The Couriers, as they call themselves, consist of runners, horsemen, and ship captains, all skilled in rapid transportation. Their only purpose is to keep the lines of communication open, and ensure that important information goes to every Rilasciare cell. While hardly leaders, they are responsible for holding the Society



together, giving structure to an otherwise chaotic grassroots organization.

Based out of the Vendel city of Kirk, the Couriers were once a cell of their own, with their own agenda and ideals. As time went on, however, it became apparent that their skills were best applied serving the other cells. With almost two hundred years of practice, they have become very good at what they do. Letters between cells are not addressed to their intended recipients; indeed, few members know

anyone outside their own cell by name. They refer to each other through one-word titles, a simple code designed to let the Couriers know whom the letter is intended for (the leader of the Altamira cell, for example, is referred to as "Gull," while an underling might be known as "Psalm"). Letters are sent to Kirk, where the chief Courier sorts them and dispatches them to their intended recipients. Only he knows the full translation of the code and the true identities of every member.

The messengers range from poor serving boys to wealthy merchants. They use several means to transport their messages, from carriage to sailing ship to carrier pigeon (but not Porté; the Couriers know better than to toy with sorcery). Each Courier knows the identity of a single cell leader, and arranges some secure method of getting the letters to him; the precise manner depends on the cell. The Guerrilla Alliance usually arranges transfers in a public place, using the coat code to identify the courier. The Freethought Society, on the other hand, get their mail at their private clubs like any other gentlemen. Every Courier is a loyal Rilasciare and never lets his correspondence fall into the wrong hands. Couriers have been known to self-immolate rather than surrender their letters. Thanks to their dedication, the Free Thinkers can discuss their ideas and exchange information without fear of discovery. (Most cells burn their correspondence after reading them, however; it wouldn't do to have seditious literature lying around.)

In order for the system to work, the Couriers have had to remain out of political debates. They espouse no particular faction and never speak about the issues of the day. That way, they can maintain their neutrality and ensure that every faction trusts them enough to keep using them. While all Couriers believe fervently in the Rilasciare cause, most are content to serve the society in their way, and rarely do more than pass on the mail.

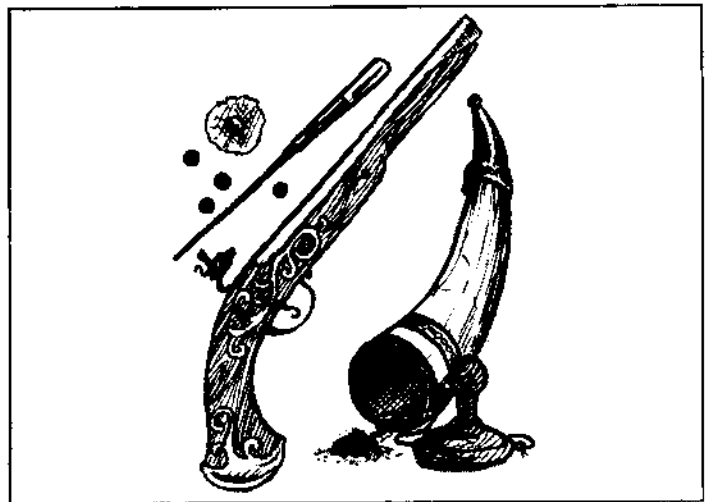
The very existence of the Couriers helps explain the Rilasciare's contradictory nature. While their constant efforts keep the group bound together, the necessities of their jobs have also pushed it apart. Correspondence takes time to deliver; even the fastest ship cannot cross the ocean in a day. Sometimes months go by between

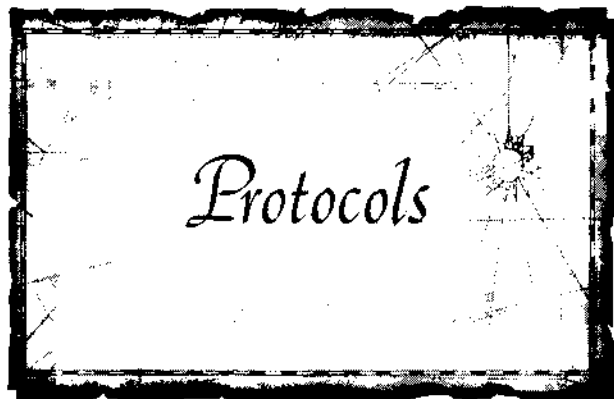
communications, and debates can take years to complete. This leaves each cell with a lot of time alone — out of contact with the rest of the group.

Free Thinkers aren't the types to twiddle their thumbs while waiting for the mail, so they pursue their own ends until the next batch of letters arrives. The Guerrilla Alliance in Vaticine City plots the destruction of some new cathedral, while Pavtlow's Freethought Society quietly debates over a game of Squares. When the Couriers come through, they can exchange ideas, plot new schemes, and act as one faction again — until the Couriers depart and they are left on their own. Thus, the group splinters even while remaining united. Such is the way of the Rilasciare — at least until a more expedient means of communication is found.

Others

Some Rilasciare members belong to no faction at all. Most of them have no set cell, either traveling or living in cities which do not support many Free Thinkers. They have their own ideas about how to achieve enlightenment, and while they may support one faction or another, they don't truly belong to any of them. While they have a difficult time keeping in contact with the larger cells, their voices are an important addition to the Free Thinker cause. The different factions sometimes court them, but most are content to let them find their own path to the future. Such is the nature of the Rilasciare; *vero coraggio* comes in countless different forms.





Due to its decentralized nature, the Rilasciare has few formal protocols. Traditions and ceremony are considered the trappings of authority: empty shadows which the weak use to hold power. Most cells have long since disregarded formality; those who haven't use their own unique protocols, unconnected with other Rilasciare cells. They do so out of respect for the past, and a need to remember the members who have come before them. Such protocols usually consist of slogans repeated in greeting or farewell, donning particular articles of clothing during meetings, or the occasional group prayer to Theus. The Freethought Society adheres most closely to old traditions, although the Freeman League and Oppositionists have been known to use their own protocols.

Joining the Rilasciare

François Goddard once said that you don't choose the Rilasciare, the Rilasciare chooses you. Anyone who has joined the society can attest to that fact. Few people know the Rilasciare exists, so almost no one ever seeks them out to join their ranks. Criminals, social clubs, and academic thinkers provide many of the same opportunities that the Rilasciare does, which keeps potential members from digging too deeply. No one needs a secret society to debate political philosophy.

Rilasciare members, however, are constantly on the lookout for new recruits. They seek out those who seem particularly discontented with the status quo, but who also adhere to a

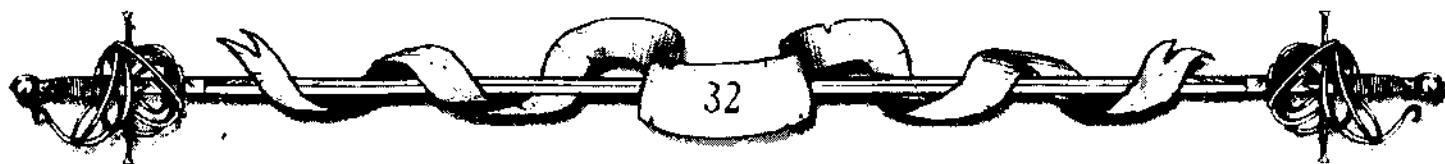
strong sense of morality. They want thinkers, men and women who personify *vera coraggio*, and those who are willing to die in order to make the world a better place. Some they find preaching on street corners. Others are busy making waves in the political circles of Montaigne or Vendel. A few are even rotting in prison. Simple criminals are usually ignored, as are those who lack conviction or a decent moral compass. Each faction has its own particular criteria as well, and individual cells never take on members whom they don't like. Suspected moles or those with conflicted loyalties are never approached, and there has never been a case of a sorcerer joining the Rilasciare.

Most potential recruits are those whose thinking has already gravitated toward the Rilasciare. They speak of bettering mankind, of destroying tyranny in all its forms, or even of universal equality. The Rilasciare have learned to recognize the raw material needed in a recruit, and rarely misstep when approaching new members.

The first step usually involves an active member befriending the new recruit. He will voice support for the recruit's theories and express a desire to hear more. If the recruit responds well, he suggests further meetings, during which he sounds the recruit out further. During these meetings, the member will gauge the recruit's commitment, his dedication to his ideals, and other criteria. In some cases, the recruit has been known to the member for some time, which obviates the need for the "getting to know you" period.

When the Rilasciare feels that the recruit is ready, it approaches him with an offer. Members explain their purpose, admonish the recruit about potential dangers, and offer him a permanent place in the local cell. Most recruits jump at the opportunity.

Initiation rites vary from cell to cell. The Liberation Guild, for example, requires new members to conduct an outrageous act of thievery, while the Freethinkers use rituals similar to fraternity initiations. Oppositionists usually perform a test to determine that the recruit is free of sorcery, and the Freeman League takes its new members along on several harmless (and relatively safe) pranks. The



Guerrilla Alliance has the most rigorous initiation rites. It sends new members on dangerous missions designed to test their dedication; those who fail rarely survive long enough to betray them.

If the recruit declines admission for some reason, the Rilasciare either points him toward another faction (one presumably more suited to his temperament) or accepts his wishes and departs. In either case, however, the Thinkers warn him against speaking about the Rilasciare to anyone. The ex-recruit is then watched for several months to ensure his lips stay sealed. Most are smart enough to keep quiet. Those who aren't – who talk about the organization or go to the authorities – inevitably disappear before their allegations can be proven. The Rilasciare values its anonymity.

Life in the Rilasciare

Life in a Rilasciare cell is surprisingly normal most of the time. Many members have families, hold jobs, and go about life the same way everyone else in Théah does. Those who don't, devote their entire waking lives to the organization, and have few friends or family outside of their particular cell. No matter what the circumstances, however, members have learned to stay quiet and unobtrusive... until the moment comes to act.

Rilasciare meetings are serious but informal affairs, conducted with as little pomp and circumstance as possible. Cells with regular meeting places gather at the appointed hour, ensure that no outsiders are eavesdropping, and get down to the business of bettering humanity. Cells without established headquarters are even more direct, determining a time and place, and wasting no time once all the members have arrived. The atmosphere at such meetings ranges from casual camaraderie to deadly tension, depending upon the subject involved. The discussion can involve anything from abstract philosophy to current activities to the need for action on one front or another. The more genteel cells use rules of order to determine who speaks and when; other cells simply shout at each other until a quorum is reached.

Leadership of the various cells is equally diverse. While no system exists to elect or otherwise ordain a leader, a few

cells have ways of determining whom they follow. Some choose lots, allowing different members to serve for set lengths of time. Others are bound by a single charismatic figure who holds *de facto* authority, while a few have no set leaders at all. Despite this, the cells all function with a great deal of coherence. The Rilasciare philosophy states that great men lead by example, so its members tend to gravitate toward whoever has done the most, had the best ideas, or otherwise embodied the virtues of enlightenment. In this environment, the right men and women rise to the forefront of each cell. While they hold no specific rank, everyone else immediately turns to them to see what should be done; they become the effective heads of their respective groups, regardless of what title or position they hold. Because their authority comes naturally, without any formal trappings, they rarely need to fend off rivals or engage in other political maneuvering. No one in the Rilasciare seeks power, either deliberately or inadvertently.

Each cell has its own set of goals to achieve, some short term, some greater in scope. Cells monitor those in power, admonish the peasants to think for themselves, steal priceless artifacts, and otherwise pursue the dream of a free and enlightened humanity. Every Rilasciare member is expected to help his cell with these operations, be it tailing a corrupt official, building a bomb, or passing out literature in the street. Free Thinkers in key positions (noble advisors, for example, or professors in universities) are expected to monitor developments around them and report anything of merit to the cell. Those with particular skills (chemists, spies, etc.) exercise them if necessary. Most operations involve most if not all of the cell's membership; everyone is always doing something to further some scheme or another.

Free Thinkers' skills vary widely depending upon the individual. Most can move quietly or stay unseen if they have to, and many have a keen memory for details. There are chemists who build explosive devices, and others who can manufacture poison if the situation calls for it. Public speaking is highly regarded, for articulating the Rilasciare's dialectic is vital to encouraging enlightenment. Printing is another highly prized ability, as is knowledge of law and government. Every cell has a quartermaster of some sort

who can provide supplies or equipment, and there are enough Rilasciare members skilled in combat to meet any of the society's more violent needs.

The Secret Court

The Rilasciare disdains killing by and large. History has proven that violence rarely solves problems, and those with blood on their hands have less chance of achieving the enlightenment the Free Thinkers prize so highly. While some factions (notably the Guerrilla Alliance and the Oppositionists) see killing as a useful tool, even they engage in it only when they must. To do otherwise risks the noble ideals on which the Rilasciare is based.

Unfortunately, violence is sometimes necessary. The Free Thinkers are dangerous to the powers that be and must sometimes defend themselves in order to stay alive. Their enemies have few qualms about the moral high ground, and can end all opposition to their schemes with a single barroom stabbing or signed execution. Against such tyrants, the Rilasciare's noble tenets can often be a disadvantage.

The Thinkers have developed a means to counter that disadvantage — a "civilized" way of addressing grievous crimes. They call it the Secret Court, the society's ultimate judge, jury, and executioner.

Any Rilasciare member can convene the Court. He simply informs the lead Courier that he wishes to do so, naming a single "criminal" or group of "criminals" as defendants to be tried. Such defendants are almost always in positions of power; most have abused their authority beyond the most



extreme circumstances (although a few are just guilty of being talkative; see "Joining the Rilasciare," above). The accusing member begins the process by gathering evidence against the accused — accounting the crimes in question, taking statements from eyewitnesses, procuring incriminating documents if possible. Any testimony given by Rilasciare members is considered gospel (the society

The Midnight Crusade

trusts its members to speak the truth in such matters); the reliability of other witnesses is measured through circumstance.

Once the accuser has procured all the evidence he wishes, he assembles his arguments in a written testimonial — recounting the defendant's crimes, recording the evidence against him, and otherwise explaining why he no longer deserves to live. He then sends the testimonial to the chief Courier, who sends copies of it of every Rilasciare cell. Each cell then has twenty-four hours to debate the evidence and return a verdict to the Courier. A "guilty" vote means that the accused's crimes merit execution — that the Rilasciare is willing to put aside its ideals in order to end his villainy.

Each cell receives only one vote, to be arrived at in any manner it chooses (most simply argue until a majority is reached). A majority count is required to render a guilty verdict. When the chief Courier receives all of the votes, he returns the verdict to the accusing member. If the charges are upheld, the accuser has the Secret Court's blessing to act against the defendant.

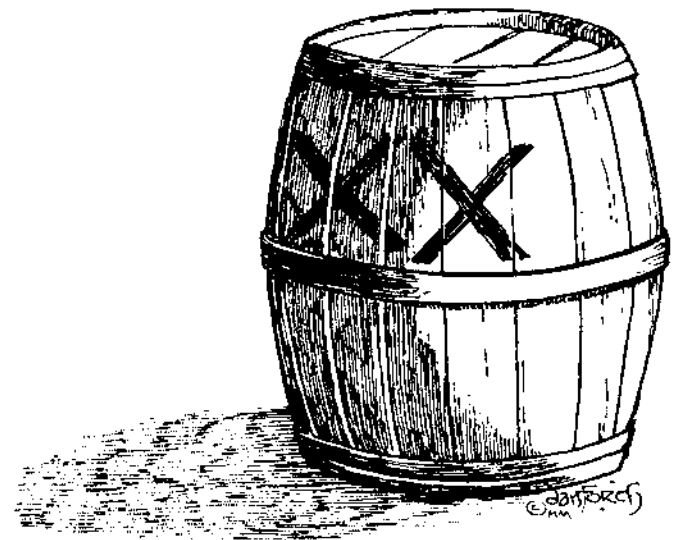
The actual means of execution varies. Usually, funds are procured to hire an assassin: someone from the Swordsman's Guild, or a more subtle killer if the situation calls for it. Sometimes, the Rilasciare sends one of its own to do the deed, especially if the society's security is at stake. A few accusers take action themselves. The exact method of execution doesn't matter; all the society cares about is removing the misanthrope and ending his crimes. Particularly brutal defendants may find themselves tortured for days before finally expiring (though circumstances rarely allow for such luxury).

If possible, the executioner always leaves a small mound of black earth with the remains of his victim — Vodacce soil from the spot where the Old Republic Senators first struck their Bargain.

Any Rilasciare member wishing to kill someone *must* convene the Court first. Incidental deaths (through bombings and other such mayhem) aren't the purview of the Court; the occasional accident can sometimes happen. Killing someone in self-defense or fulfilling a personal

vendetta likewise doesn't concern the Court. But if premeditation is involved — if a member sets out with the express purpose of killing someone in order to further the Rilasciare's goals — he *must* gain justification from the Court. Otherwise he risks sullyng the society's already malleable ideals, turning it into a band of common murderers. The Guerrilla Alliance has been known to act without consulting the Secret Court, but it tries to keep such incidents rare, lest the other Rilasciare turn against it *en masse*.

The Court gives structure and order to the sect's vendettas, preventing it from acting arbitrarily. While imperfect, it keeps the more aggressive members in line and provides a means of justification for some of their darker activities. Someday, the Rilasciare believes, the Court will no longer be necessary. Until then, it is a last resort against extreme wrong-doing — a way for the Free Thinkers to live with themselves when blood must be spilled.





Most secret societies have a fairly extensive system of handshakes, passwords, and other signs which members use to pass messages and identify each other. The Rilasciare's system is far more informal than that – more of a mutual understanding than an elaborate code. Members of individual cells know those connected with their cell by sight, and can read things in a glance or gesture the same way close friends could. The Couriers have a code to identify different members, but the names are arbitrary and change with each new recruit. In both cases, formal structure is unnecessary.

There are times, however, when security dictates something more structured. Members on the run from the law don't wish to incriminate their fellows by associating with them, and different factions need a common lexicon to identify their fellows. The Rilasciare has developed two distinct systems over the years to address such problems. The first is the so-called "coat code," which uses particular types of clothing to convey messages. The

second has no name, and consists of small sigils placed upon buildings and other permanent structures.

The Coat Code

The coat code evolved from the Old Empire, when members of Fortis identified each other by the patterns on their togas. With it, the Rilasciare can communicate over long distances without having to approach each other. Despite the name, it is not limited to coats; scarves, gloves, vests, and even hats are also used if the situation call for it.

The code consists of a series of colors, cuts, and accouterments, each designed to convey a different piece of information. It has been designed so that both men and women can use it; women's clothing has the same basic effect. The Rilasciare uses a particular clothing style in its code – sewn by a member of the sect and instantly recognizable to anyone in the order. That way, strangers who have never met can identify each other across a

crowded square. Every cell has at least a few coats, adequate enough to form any message they need.

The coats are designed to have readily changeable features – adjustable cuffs, removable sashes, even replaceable buttons. Scarves, hats, and other accouterments are added if more information is needed. While styles change with the times, the basic system has remained intact since the Old Republic, allowing the sect to keep up with fashion

without having to scrap the entire code.

An exchange begins with the messenger arriving at a predetermined location – usually as public as possible. He waits until the "listener" arrives and makes contact, signaled by unbuttoning two buttons. If the listener has a message to

Using the Coat Code

In game terms, the coat code can convey three concrete pieces of information. The information can include precise directions (addresses within a given city), types of people (guardsmen, judges, rulers), and events (meetings, ships leaving port, particular dates), but not exact names. A member using the code could, for example, refer to a musketeer staying at an inn five blocks up and three houses down, but couldn't say it was Charles du Chevalier staying at the Broken Compass. No more than three pieces of information can be conveyed at any one time; after that, the messenger starts to look like a peacock.

The Midnight Crusade

relay, he wears a coat conveying as much. If he's only there to receive information, he wears a basic red coat in the proper style. If possible, the message is immediately discernable; no adjusting should be required to pass on the vital information.

Once the listener has received the message, he indicates so by turning his collar up. The messenger responds by turning his own collar up, which marks the end of the exchange. If either party notices something amiss (loitering guardsmen, someone following), he buttons up the entire ensemble as a warning.

The man currently in charge of creating the coats, Hans Uppmann, has recently begun adding additional features to his wares — hidden lockpicks, spring-loaded knives, and other useful items. Demand for his coats has increased

dramatically and he hopes to make more available in the near future.

Building Marks

In addition to the coat code, the Rilasciare can mark buildings with a series of sigils, conveying important information to members who pass. The sigils come from the astrological calendars of the Old Empire. They usually appear on public structures or buildings which are somehow important to the Rilasciare. Sigils are usually marked in chalk and placed on the southernmost corner of the structure in question. Permanent marks (carved into stone or wood) are reserved for dire warnings. The Free Thinkers use the marks to convey basic information only; more elaborate messages require the coat code.



A message awaits within.



The area is safe.



The area is dangerous; leave immediately.



An enemy lives here.



Sanctuary can be found within.



A friend lives here.



This building will soon be destroyed.



A meeting will be held tonight.



More information will follow. Stay on the street and watch for the coat code.



The local cell is wanted by the authorities.

Relations With Other Groups

Below is a brief discussion of the Rilasciare's feelings toward the different nations and secret societies of Théah, and vice versa. Keep in mind that these views are not universal. The Rilasciare is nothing if not eclectic, and many members have their own opinions of the world and its rulers. Similarly, few people see the Rilasciare for what it truly is; most believe it to be unconnected social clubs and bands of common criminals. What follows is a guideline of prevailing thought, not a universal mandate.

Avalon

The Triple Kingdoms are enjoying a brilliant renaissance right now and don't want to hear about overthrowing the order which brought it about. Queen Elaine is universally beloved, and the government beneath her is effective and compassionate. In that light, the Rilasciare's goals are considered dangerously unstable, and the group has had a difficult time fostering support on the Glamour Isles. Elaine knows about the Rilasciare and has charged her black knight, Bors MacAllister, with keeping it in check (see the *Avalon* sourcebook for more information on Bors). So far, only a single cell has managed to survive on Avalon, hidden within the bureaucracy of Luthon.

For its part, the Rilasciare believes Elaine little better than the Bargainers themselves. She gained power through Sidhe magic, after all, and Glamour sorcery has spread like a wildfire since her rise. Such a woman stands against

everything the Free Thinkers believe in. Bringing her down and banishing the Sidhe themselves if possible are high priorities for them. Because the Sidhe reappeared only recently, however, the Rilasciare is unsure how to proceed against them.

As for Inismore and the Highlands, the Rilasciare sees them as a double-edged sword. Both reflect the potential of the Rilasciare philosophy: one bright, one dark. The Highland Marches, on the one hand, are a strong example of decentralized government and the benefits of enlightened leadership. The Clans keep organization small and local, and King James is one of the few national leaders who seems worthy of his position. Inismore, on the other hand, is a disaster: wild and fractured, ruled by a crazed demigod who could vanish at any time, it's a prime example of how a lack of structure can go badly wrong. Artificial authority must be destroyed, of course, but it cannot be replaced by such chaos. Naturally, there is little Rilasciare activity in either country; the locals don't care for their brand of mayhem. The Freethought cell in Kirkwall is the only active group, and even they stay fairly quiet.

Castille

Castille has proven a fertile ground for Rilasciare operations, thanks to its connections to the Vaticine Church. It was here where *El Fuego Adentro* was vanquished, and where the great universities rose to spread enlightenment across all of Théah. The Liberation Guild has had much success amid the abandoned *rancheros*, and the Oppositionists have found ready allies in the Church of the Prophets. The sect even has royal connections in Castille: Prince Javier's closest friends belonged to the Freeman League, and since his banishment they have kept an eye on young King Sandoval. It's safe to say that Castille is a land of opportunity for the Rilasciare.

The recent war with Montaigne has given the Free Thinkers greater freedom of movement, allowing the sect to more or less act with impunity. They must take care not to weaken the monarchy too much, however, lest Montaigne complete its conquest of the country. (However they feel about King Sandoval, the Rilasciare does *not* want *l'Empereur* to gain

any more territory.) So they stress more subtle means of decrying authority (the Freeman League and Liberation Guild), or else pursue interests that do not directly affect the crown (the Oppositionists). Their operations are often spectacularly public, but aimed toward raising awareness rather than damaging the social structure.

Castillians in the know see the Rilasciare as a group of well-meaning eccentrics – always interesting, occasionally helpful, sometimes a pest. While they don't tolerate outright revolution, they are perfectly willing to listen to the Free Thinkers' unorthodox lessons – gaining wisdom from them the same way they would a science experiment.

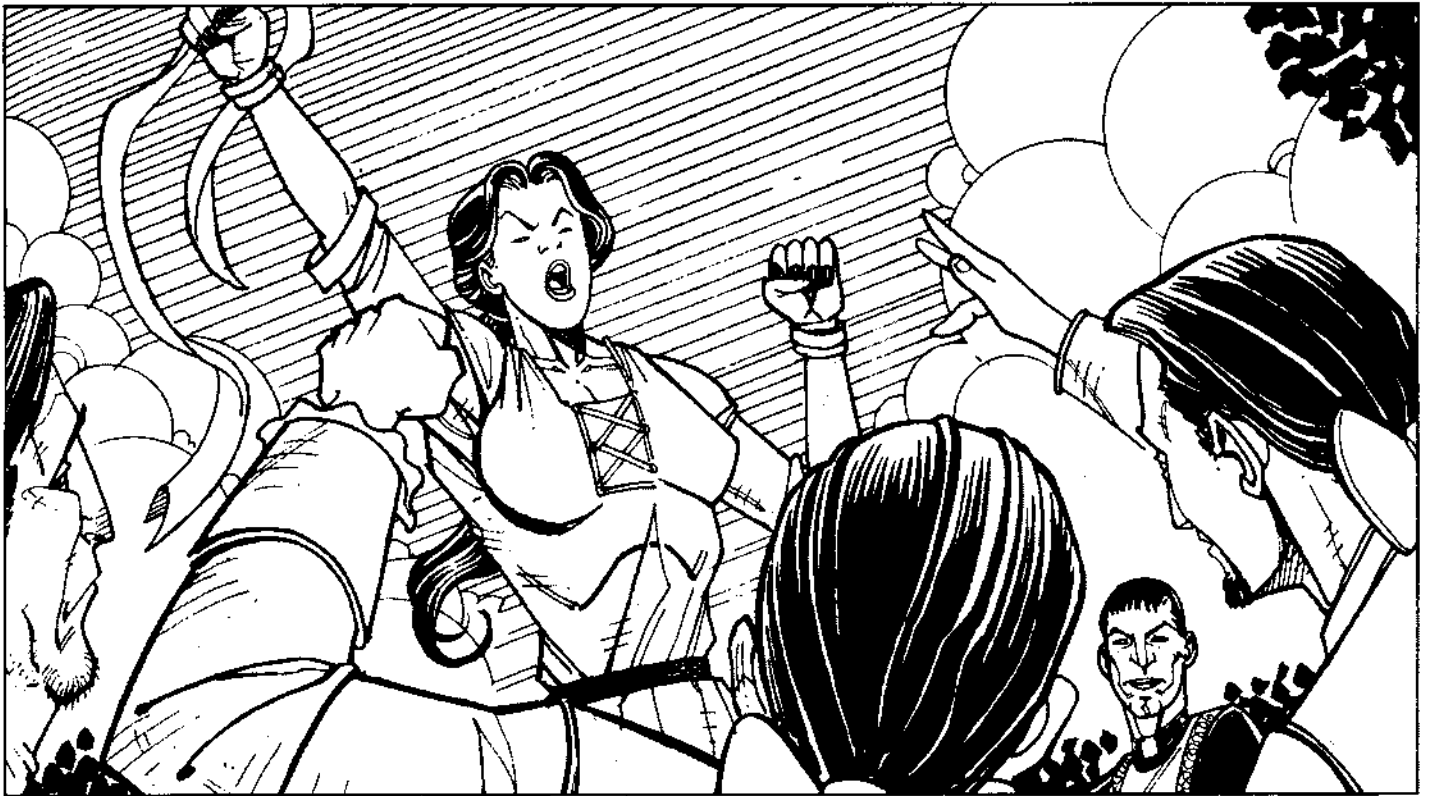
The Church is a different story. Those aware of the Rilasciare place it in the same boat as the Objectionists – heretical threats to Vaticine authority. It builds schools outside the Church's influence, questions the teachings of the Prophets at every turn, and even hints at eliminating religion altogether. With the Inquisition on the rise, the Thinkers have had to watch themselves very carefully. Church authorities have

begun making uncomfortable inquiries in their direction; if they ever uncover the society's true purpose, they will crush them without hesitation. Luckily, the Free Thinkers still have contacts within the Vaticine Church who keep them abreast of any important developments. Thus far, they have managed to avoid detection, and remain fairly low on the Inquisition's list of priorities.

Eisen

The War of the Cross horrified the Rilasciare, but it did have one tangible benefit – it turned one of the strongest empires in Théah into a fractious, disunified mess. With no central authority, the Eisen must depend upon themselves for guidance, something the Rilasciare hopes will foster a new sense of morality. The Free Thinkers are deeply committed to keeping Eisen divided, in order to give this morality time to grow.

The problem is that the seven Eisenfürsten have different ideas. Most of them wish to reunite the nation with



themselves at its head: something the Rilasciare will do anything to avoid. While Georg Hainzl has lost touch with reality and Nicklaus Trägue seems content to hold Freiburg, the other five are dangerous enough to give the Free Thinkers serious pause. Thus far, they've tried to play them off against each other (which requires little outside interference as it is), and to solidify the borders of their territories. Sooner or later, however, one of them is going to make a grab for power. When that comes, the Rilasciare must be ready to act.

The Eisen themselves are almost universally unaware of the Rilasciare and wouldn't care much even if they knew. With their country in shambles, they can't be troubled by a few more lunatics running around.

Montaigne

Nowhere is the Rilasciare philosophy more visible than in Montaigne. On the one hand, the nation embodies all that is wrong with artificial authority. *L'Empereur* is an arrogant pig, destroying the people through his petty indulgences. The nobility is no better, squandering their position with petty political games while the peasantry groans beneath them. But at the same time there are individual Montaigne who embody everything the Rilasciare stands for: noble, courageous, dedicated to the betterment of their fellow man. Artists and thinkers have the freedom to develop radical new theories, while the musketeers fight for justice among peasants and nobles alike. Amid this staggering contradiction, the Rilasciare has found much both to admire and condemn.

What's surprising, however, is how passive the Montaigne cells have become in the last few years. After the local Guerrillas bombed the Paix public works department, they were hunted down and executed. The survivors learned to keep a lower profile. Some are out trying to educate the peasants, while others put on radical plays, but their activities are rarely more radical than that these days. Perhaps they realize how difficult overthrowing the monarchy can be. Perhaps they are merely biding their time.

Due to the Freethought Society's successful essays, more Montaigne know about the Rilasciare than any other nationality. The nobility consider it very *avant garde* at the moment, and its philosophy has paved the way for a new literary movement. At the same time, they are deeply unsettled by the Paix bombing and other such incidents, and a few privately wonder if they're next on the list. Thankfully, little untoward has happened since Paix, and most believe that the strange political essays will fade with the next new fad.

Ussura

The Rilasciare don't have a strong presence in Ussura, mostly because they don't feel they need it. The country remains in a perpetual time warp, content to live on the land and spurning the modern advances of other nations. The simple farmers are happy with their lot, and the nation's sheer size makes tyranny difficult to enforce. In short, it's everything the Rilasciare could hope for.

Most Ussuran cells work to maintain the status quo: bringing news to the peasants and ensuring that the noble *boyars* don't overstep their positions. While the notion of Matushka bothers them somewhat, it hasn't caused the same problems that Sidhe have in Avalon. The sect dominates the nation's tiny intellectual circles, holding endless arguments in the teahouses of Pavtlow. Because of its isolation, many wanted sect members flee to Ussura, where they live lives of quiet exile. It's not surprising that the Pavtlow cell writes more correspondence than any other two cells combined.

It's probably best that the Rilasciare is so content here, for the Ussurans don't trust intellectuals much. The *boyars* dislike them for their meddling ways, and the peasants dislike them for complicating simple issues. But the Gaius indulges them, so Matushka must approve. As long as the Rilasciare stays quiet, the populace lets it be. In a world of enemies, that's the most it can hope for.

Vendel

The Vendel don't like the Rilasciare one bit and the feeling is mutual. Most Thinkers see the merchants' guilds as their greatest enemy, and nothing drives profits down like a terrorist attack or political assassination. Put them together and you've got a state of undeclared war.

The Rilasciare watches Vendel economic domination and sees more and more power falling into the hands of fewer and fewer people. The Merchant Guilds thrive on want, which goes against one of the sect's most basic principles — no human should ever want for anything. Free Thinkers see Vendel's cultural development as a cancer spreading slowly across the world. If they ever hope to found a truly enlightened society, they must do so on the corpse of the guilds.

For their part, the Vendel despise what they see as self-righteous do-gooders who condemn what they clearly don't understand. They are proud of their economic development, and believe that the Guilds have brought prosperity to all Vendel — not just a wealthy few. Who are the Rilasciare to judge them?

Because of this, Vendel Rilasciare tend to be more radical than their continental brethren. The Guerrilla Alliance's largest cell is in Kirk, and its constant acts of mayhem test the civic authorities to the limit. The Couriers also have their headquarters here, quietly hidden from the bomb plots and political slogans.

Anyone so hostile to the Vendel, of course, has an instant ally in the Vestenmannavnjar. The Rilasciare approves of the Vesten adherence to the old tribal structure (although Lærdom gives some members pause), while the Vesten need information which the sect can readily provide them. Members of the Guerrilla Alliance have found sanctuary amid the Vesten from time to time, which has only strengthened ties between the two groups. If the raiders weren't focused solely on the Vendel instead of the world as a whole, the sect might even be tempted to reveal itself to them and propose an alliance. As it is, they must content themselves with whatever help the Vesten can provide.

Vodacce

Vodacce is an important country to the Rilasciare — the home of the Old Empire, where their movement first began. The nearly empty city of Numa is as close to a sacred site as the sect has, and many members journey there to meditate on their cause. Unfortunately the nation surrounding it is one of the most dangerous in Théah, making it difficult to maneuver, let alone enact any change.

Vodacce's government is a bewildering array of contradictions. Sorcery exists, yet it remains in the hands of those with no power. The nation is divided, yet its corrupt Princes can act with surprising unity. Its people are devoutly Vaticine, yet break the Church's admonitions every single day. The Rilasciare has yet to ascertain the best approach to such a country. Most members have settled for the most pragmatic solutions: doing what they can while dodging the inevitable reprisals from the Princes. Over time, it's evolved into a strange game of hide-and-seek at which the Rilasciare has become proficient.

The Vodacce are a proud people, which means they don't take well to being prodded. Those who know see the Rilasciare as a tool against their enemies, rather than a force for any real social change. Many sect members find themselves serving some petty political agenda, regardless of their original intentions. They move *very* carefully when dealing with outsiders — trust is hard to come by and betrayal is never tolerated. The Secret Court has convened against more Vodacce citizens than any other nationality.

More on the Rilasciare in Vodacce can be found in the "Sophia's Daughters" section, below.

The Brotherhood of the Coast

The Rilasciare considers the Brotherhood its own creation and watches it as a proud father watches his child. Several Free Thinkers secretly sail on Brotherhood ships, while others work to establish a functioning society on *la Bucca* itself. While Captain Allende doesn't belong to the sect, he believes strongly in the same ideals. Ever so slowly, they have begun to enlighten the former criminals around them

— teaching the hardest men in the world a better way to live their lives. Both Allende and the Rilasciare are hopeful about the future.

More on the Free Thinkers' relationship with the Brotherhood can be found on pages 18-19.

Explorer's Society

The Rilasciare takes a divided view on the Explorers. It approves of the quest for knowledge, but distrusts the Syrneath artifacts that the Society seems so obsessed with. While not nearly as destructive as sorcery (they don't affect the bloodline, after all), the Syrneath are still very dangerous. The Explorers handle them with care, to be true, but how long before they unwittingly trigger something that can't be stopped?

For the most part, the Rilasciare is content to leave the Explorers be. Their noble intentions make them men and women of character. But should they go too far — should their discoveries become a serious threat to Théah — then the Free Thinkers will not hesitate to act. It's easy to sink a ship, after all...



Invisible College

The Invisible College lives up to its name as far as the Rilasciare is concerned — it has no idea who the members are or how to contact them. It applauds the College's goal of spreading knowledge, but cannot do anything to assist them until they know whom exactly to assist. The most it can do is watch the Inquisition for any suspicious activities. For now, that will have to be enough.

Knights of the Rose and Cross

While the Rose and Cross has produced some fine individuals, the Rilasciare thinks that the organization as a whole is one more form of artificial authority. The Knights have performed great deeds, but remain bound to an archaic system of discipline and obedience. This is not the way to enlightenment. Sooner or later, the Rilasciare believes, the Knights' system will stagnate, and they will become as corrupt as the men they fight. In order to forestall this process, the Thinkers have tried to insert their

own agents into the Order, but thus far all efforts have failed.

Die Kreuzritter

The Rilasciare suspects that the Knights of the Cross were not destroyed on that dark day in 1411. Through their connections with the Church, they have learned that members of die Kreuzritter still walk the land, performing the will of the Hierophant. Such an order could do much to mend the evils inflicted by the Church... or make the Inquisition unstoppable, depending upon their make-up. Either way, the Free Thinkers are eager to learn all they can about die Kreuzritter. They've sent a few members out in search of this long-forgotten order. They have turned up a few leads, enough to keep them on the trail.

Los Vagos

El Vago is a case study of ideal leadership as far as the Free Thinkers are concerned. He acts in the name of justice, inspires other men through his example, and yet never claims any form of authority. If humanity ever emerges from the chains of oppression, men like El Vago must lead the way. The Rilasciare has done whatever it can to aid the organization under him — dropping anonymous tips on the Inquisition, covering evidence in the noble courts, even providing hiding places amid Castillian cells. At the urging of their leader, Los Vagos has quietly accepted the Rilasciare's aid.

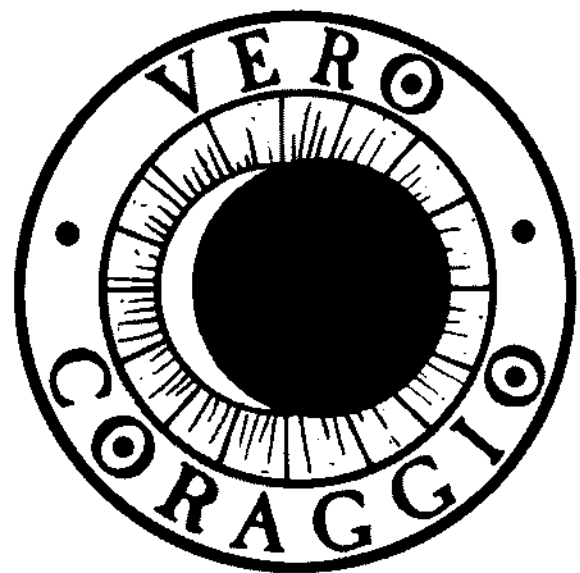
The Vagabond knows enough about the Free Thinkers to accept their help, but keeps them at arm's length. He isn't comfortable with the Rilasciare's antiroyalist sentiments. If necessary, he is prepared to defend Good King Sandoval from them, but hopes that things never reach that stage. For now, the enemy of his enemy is his friend, and he'd like to keep it that way.


Sophia's Daughters

The Sophia's Daughters work more closely with the Rilasciare than does any other secret society. Despite some key philosophical differences, the two have much to gain

from each other. Both seek the betterment of the oppressed, and have common enemies in Vodacce that necessitate working together. Each group also has access to information the other needs, and the Daughters have used Rilasciare safe-houses to smuggle women out of Vodacce on more than one occasion. Theirs is a marriage of convenience; the mutual benefits have kept their ideological disagreements from becoming more than an occasional nuisance. The Rilasciare even uses the Daughters' extensive library on occasion, in exchange for sharing its own resources.

There have been a few problems concerning the use of magic. Sorcerers, particularly Fate Witches, form a cornerstone of the Daughters' power, one which they are reluctant to abandon. That's a difficult pill for the Rilasciare to swallow. But the two have found some common ground over time, which has kept their relationship from deteriorating too badly. The Daughters see sorcery as a temporary tool, one which they can abandon once their goals are achieved. Many Daughters believe that Sorte is a crutch, keeping Fate Witches from the education and enlightenment they deserve. While it is far too powerful to abandon out of hand, they strive for the day when women don't need magic to gain what they deserve. For now, the Rilasciare grudgingly accepts that.





Locations and Resources

While not as well funded as the Explorers or the Knights of the Rose and Cross, the Rilasciare still has enough resources to support its operations. Wealthy members often donate their entire fortunes to the cause, while the Liberation Guild has secured enough precious knick-knacks to keep even the poorest cell afloat. Most of the monies go to establishing safehouses and other secure locations; the rest provide equipment, including weapons and explosive chemicals. Some of the more specialized items can be found in the Drama chapter.

There are currently sixteen main Rilasciare cells active in Théah, each averaging about fifteen members. Their numbers are augmented by traveling members, distant sympathizers, or others who don't live in the city in question. The sect's business is rarely limited to these locations. GMs should feel free to place their Rilasciare Heroes in any appropriate cell, or create one of their own if none of these work. Rules for creating a Rilasciare cell can be found on page 88.

Avalon

Luthon

Name: The Brothers of Freedom

Faction: Guerrilla Alliance

Numbers: 7

The diligent efforts of Bors MacAllister have eliminated most Rilasciare presence on Avalon. The Brothers of

Freedom are the only faction left in any number. They work amid the stagnant bureaucracy of Luthon, hiding from the authorities and changing meeting places at least once a week. They have struck a few small blows against the government – frightening corrupt clerks from office and passing out seditious literature on street corners – but realize that little can be done until Elaine herself is removed from the throne. To that end, they have made quiet contact with King Piram and offered their services. While they don't like Piram, they believe that the Graal must go in order to destroy Elaine's rule. Once Piram is on the throne, they can eliminate him with relative ease.

In the meantime, the cell plays a dangerous game of cat-and-mouse with Bors MacAllister. The black knight knows that the Brothers are out there, but hasn't been able to pinpoint them just yet. When he does, he plans on arresting them for sedition, then blackmailing them into implicating King Piram in their plans. The cell has stayed one step ahead of him, however, and has come to despise his diligent efforts. If it finds an opportunity, it won't hesitate to kill him.

Kirkwall

Name: The Faculty of the University of Kirkwall

Faction: Freethought Society

Number: 11

The University of Kirkwall was founded some fifty years ago by a pair of Highland nobles: Justin McFadden and Sean MacDonald. They intended for it to be a new sort of school, one separate from the Vaticine Church and dedicated to knowledge without the trappings of authority. Because they were so far away (and in a heathen nation to begin with), the Church never bothered to look into it.

Both McFadden and MacDonald were Rilasciare members: quiet leaders of a quiet sect with little to do in the decentralized Highland Marches. They filled their time by establishing tutoring programs, building roads, and striving to improve the lot of their countrymen. They instructed peasant children from their estates and established a series of governesses who could travel to the farthest corners of the island. Eventually, these operations outgrew their own meager means, so they petitioned the High King to build a

school at the capital. Eager to make a break from the Vaticine, the king agreed.

Today, the University instructs nearly five hundred students in history, philosophy, and the sciences. It also acts as a sort of training ground for the Free Thinkers, spreading their particular version of enlightenment among the students and faculty. Formal faction members meet over tea and coffee in the main classroom, where they plan curricula and ways to improve conditions in the Highlands. They are easily the most contented branch of the Rilasciare; their efforts, while quiet, are clearly working. They hope that through gradual steps, they can make the Highland Marches an ideal community of noble-minded men and women.

Castille

Altamira

Name: The Nimble Fingers

Faction: The Liberation Guild

Number: 14

The Altamira cell meets in a sumptuous villa on the southern coast of the great River. The villa holds all manner of stolen booty, from priceless works of art to otherwise simple items nearly impossible to procure. A marble statue of General Montegue is here, stolen from a public square, as well as a silk fan plucked from Madame Lorraine Weller's hands during one of Vendel's most outrageous parties. The two servants who tend to the villa never know what these objects truly are nor do they think to ask. Here, the Liberation cell known as the Nimble Fingers meets to add to its collection — the greatest collection of stolen objects in Théah.

The Fingers consist mainly of Castillian nobles, with a few Vendel and Avalons thrown in for good measure. Outsiders believe them to be idle rich, which is fine with them. They meet at the villa six times a year to discuss Rilasciare business, count their earnings, and challenge each other to new acts of derring-do. The rest of the time, they are scattered across Théah, plucking the richest pigeons they can find. The value of what they steal means less than the difficulty or outrageousness of the theft. Their aim is to

show how vulnerable the rich and powerful can be, as well as to feed their own sense of adventure. Montaigne-occupied Castille is the most popular area for their activities, but members can be found anywhere from Vendel to the Ussuran steppes.

A fair amount of what they steal remains at the villa: objects either with little material value, or those unable to be easily sold. The rest turns into hard currency, which they then distribute among the poor and needy. The other Rilasciare cells occasionally request funds from them, although most disdain contact (the Fingers are too frivolous for their tastes). The cell has no leader; every member speaks for himself, and cell decisions are determined by popular vote. Their meetings are uproarious affairs, conducted with as much drinking and merry-making as possible. For all their flippancy, however, they take their duties very seriously. Most train for hours a day, applying the utmost planning and forethought. Only a handful of their thefts has ever failed.

Vaticine City

Name: Holy Order of the Four Prophets

Faction: Oppositionists

Number: 26

The home of the Vaticine Church also houses one of the largest Rilasciare cells in Théah. The Holy Order of the Four Prophets is firmly dedicated to the Founders' original purpose of rooting out sorcery wherever it can be found. None of its members actively belongs to the Church, but they consider themselves the true bearers of the Prophets' faith. Their actions attest to their devotion more than any robe or golden cross.

The Holy Order was instrumental in the overthrow of *El Fuego Adentro*, and a few members still pursue the last practitioners of that art in the Castillian hills. Other members keep a sharp eye out for menacing acts of magic in Montaigne or Avalon. They mark sorcerers who practice their art for personal gain or abuse their powers to the detriment of society, then quietly move to snuff them out. If possible, they'll use the regular authorities; a well-placed letter and appropriate evidence is usually enough to do the

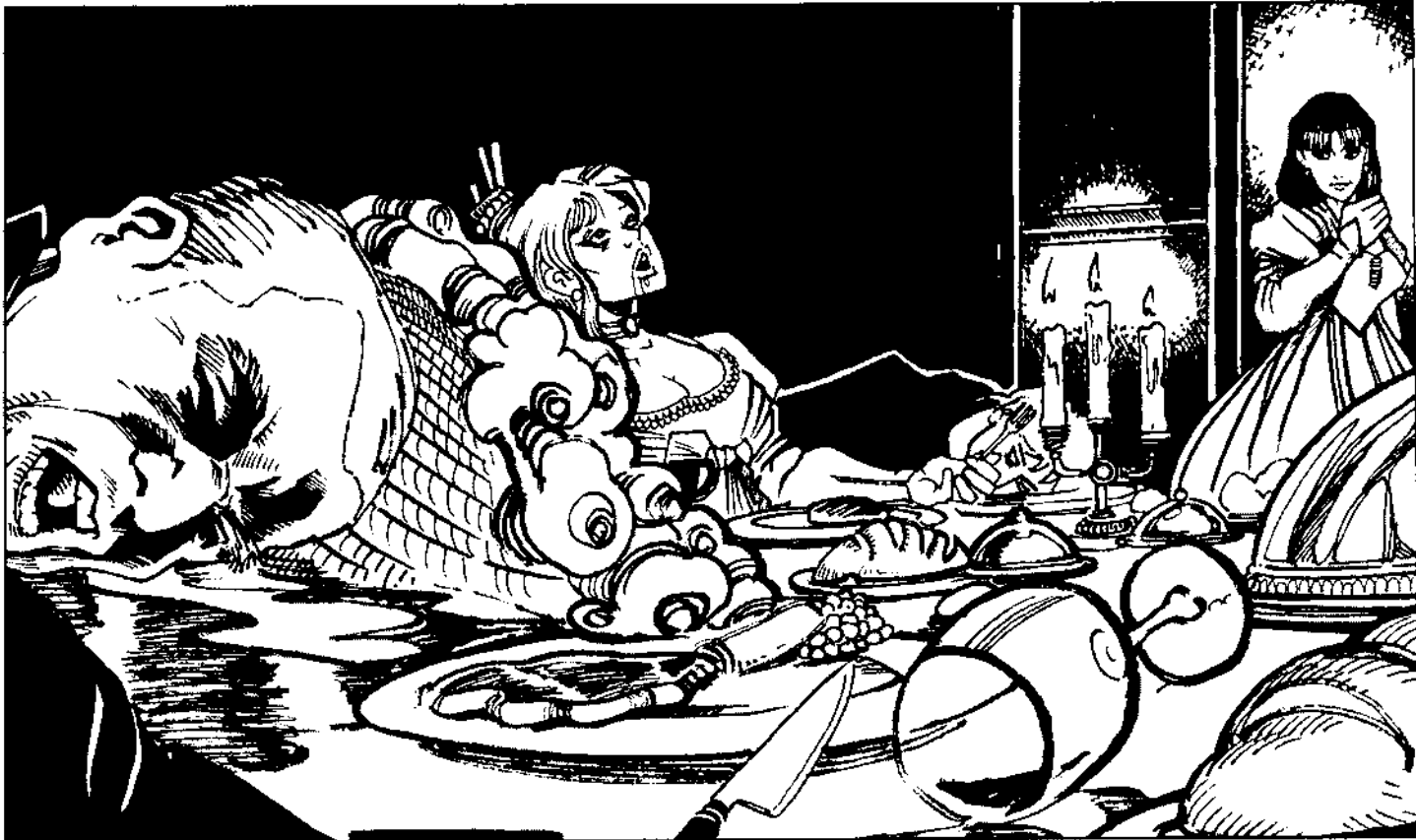
trick. Otherwise, they'll convene the Secret Court, which deals its own brand of justice.

Those who aren't out actively hunting sorcerers are prominent in politics, trying to do through breeding what wholesale slaughter cannot accomplish. They use noble connections to arrange marriages intended to dilute sorcerous blood, while isolating practicing families from the remainder of Théah. They do this through a delicate web of spies, informants, and blackmailers; the embassies in nearby Paix are rife with Holy Order connections. The small number of Montaigne nobles still faithful to the Church has been helpful as well. No one has ever discovered the force behind these political maneuvers. Most suspect Vaticine involvement, but never learn the whole truth.

When not pursuing the evils of sorcery, most members keep a close watch on the Vaticine Church. They have high-placed contacts amid the ten Cardinals, who keep them

apprised of new developments. They then pass on what they know to other cells, who use the information accordingly. While a few Cardinals are aware that there are moles among them, they have no idea whom they might be working for. Since they have yet to harm the Church, and since an uncovered spy would give Verdugo an excuse to grab more power, they have kept their suspicions silent thus far.

The Holy Order meets once a week to discuss its various plans. A pair of cathedrals, built by sympathetic noblemen, provides them with headquarters. There, members can talk openly without being observed; their meetings coincide with the Vaticine mass, so onlookers are never suspicious. Their proximity to the ten Cardinals, as well as the Inquisition and Church bureaucracy, makes them one of the most important cells in the Rilasciare. If they were to fall, it would take a long time for the others to recover.



San Cristobal

Name: Los Nueve y Siete

Faction: Freeman League

Number: 16

In his younger days, the crown prince Javier de Castille ran with an unorthodox band of noblemen who called themselves "the Nine and Seven." They spent their school years debating philosophy and performing all number of imaginative pranks. Prince Javier's antics ended when he graduated, but he kept his contacts with the Nine and Seven. They believed he was a righteous man, and that his rule would enact many revolutionary reforms. Then he disappeared. At first, they thought it was a prank, but as time went on, it became clear that he wasn't coming back. On the first anniversary of his disappearance, they gathered together and made two promises: first, to find the lost prince, and second, to disrupt any authority which might take his place.

Since then, they have struck against every form of authority they could find: dons, government bureaucrats, the Church of the Prophets. They lit the mountain above San Cristobal on fire with cooking oil, kidnapped the statue of the Third Prophet from the royal gardens, and inserted rank blasphemy into the mayor's annual speeches. The largest target of these attacks has been King Sandoval, whose actions were belittled in every conceivable way by the Nine and Seven.

That changed, however, when the second part of their promise was fulfilled. They found Prince Javier on the island of *la Bucca*, going under the name Allende. With their help, he orchestrated a revolt and founded the Brotherhood of the Coast. Here was a golden opportunity to practice the philosophy they had debated in their youth. Rather than simple reforms, Allende would form a whole new nation based on the Rilasciare's principles. A few written exchanges assured them that Allende would pursue those long-ago ideals to the fullest.

In exchange, the Pirate King had a favor to ask them: to stop undermining his little brother's rule. "Sandoval can be a great king," he explained. "He only needs the right teachers to help him." The Nine and Seven agreed to honor

their old friend's request, and since then opposition to the King has halted (although they have kept the pressure up on the dons and the Church). They have recently contacted Good King Sandoval and offered their services as advisors. While he hasn't exactly jumped at the chance, he does consult them from time to time, unknown to his primary advisors. They have made the most of their opportunity.

The Nine and Seven resemble nothing so much as a band of nobles out to raise hell and do little more. Beneath the surface, however, they are deadly serious. They have no wish to spill blood, but must challenge artificial authority; their pranks are merely the strongest way to do it. They hope to shape Good King Sandoval into a decent successor to their old friend, while halting the worst excesses of his government. It's a delicate balance, but the Nine and Seven are nothing if not confident.

Eisen

Freiburg

Name: None

Faction: Guerrilla Alliance

Number: 18

During the Thirty Years' War, the Guerrilla Alliance made great strides against the government of Eisen. When the war ended, they were ecstatic; the Emperor was dead and his proud nation shattered. Now they want to do even more. As divided as they are, the Eisenfürsten are still dangerous. Eisen's Guerrilla Alliance wants to shatter even their power, leaving the nation bereft of any authority at all.

The cell makes its home in Freiburg, the only city that tolerates its sort of politics. From there, members launch excursions against the Eisenfürsten, ranging from ambushes to assaults on the toll collectors. Nicklaus Trägue is spared their attentions since Freiburg is in a state of near-anarchy as it is, but the rest are laid into without mercy. By loosening their grip on the countryside, the Alliance hopes to bring their power crashing down. The Guerrillas must maintain a delicate balancing act lest they aid one Eisenfürsten by harming another, but so far, they are satisfied with their efforts.



The Guerrillas meet in a series of abandoned buildings throughout Freiburg, using the coat code and other signals to relay time and place. They have found new recruits in the disenchanting refugees who clog the city — bitter people more than willing to tear everything to ashes. When not attacking some patrol or another, they do their best to educate these poor souls, teaching them that life can be so much better if they only dispose of the last vestiges of authority. The Freiburg Guerrillas believe to a man that if Eisen prospers without the shackles of the Eisenfürsten, the entire world will soon follow suit.

Thus far, their targets have attributed their raids to simple bandits. Should they learn otherwise, they would go to great lengths to stop the Alliance — even invading Freiburg if necessary.

Gottkirchen

Name: Vereinigung das Uneinigkeit

Faction: Freeman League

Number: 20

Like the Nine and Seven, das Uneinigkeit are pranksters. Unlike the Nine and Seven, they have no worthy rulers to hold them in line. They concentrate their efforts on keeping the seven Eisenfürsten at each others' throats; they don't want to destroy them like their brethren in Freiburg do, but also don't want any one of them to reunite Eisen. As long as they can keep them divided, no Eisenfürst can ever become Emperor — and the people will learn that they don't need a powerful ruler.

They keep a close ear to the various courts, listening for perceived insults or slights among the seven lords. When one appears, they translate it into an appropriate prank and launch it against the Eisenfürst in question. Their pranks are all carefully calculated to belittle and humiliate while pointing the blame at one of the other six Eisenfürsten. While das Uneinigkeit can never reach as high as the lords themselves, they *can* reach their military troops and other officials. The result is an increasing enmity among the rank-and-file, which has had repercussions among the higher-ups. Tensions rise and diplomatic incidents flare up, making it all the more difficult for the seven lords to agree.

Gottkirchen is a fairly stable city, safe under the watchful eye of Stefan Heilgrund. Das Uneinigkeit meet in an old series of catacombs beneath the walls, where they write their plans in chalk upon the dark stone. They lack the Nine and Seven's *joie de vivre*, but still manage to give their pranks a proper sense of flair. Heilgrund has yet to detect their existence; they've gotten very good at masking their pranks as the work of someone else.

Montaigne

Charouse

Name: Jacob's Political Society

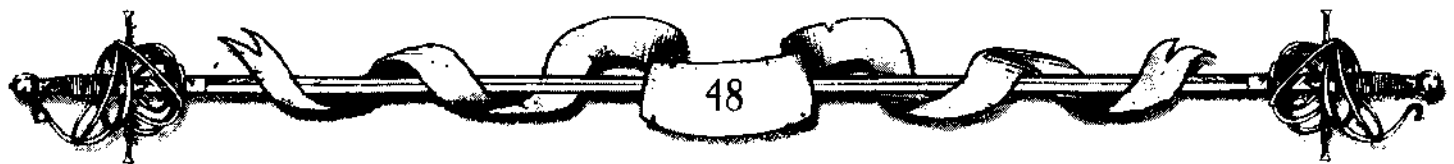
Faction: Freethought Society


Number: 12

This quiet, staid gentleman's club stands along one of the most fashionable streets in Charouse. Its members are a thoughtful reflective bunch who gather twice a week to debate their political ideals. As their ideas are slowly refined, they compose thoughtful essays which they then distribute anonymously in *l'Empereur's* court. They believe very firmly in the betterment of mankind, but would much rather talk about it than actually act.

Founded by a non-sorcerous nobleman, the Society was composed solely of idealistic aristocracy. Over the last fifty years, members have begun allowing *nouveau riche* and middle-class members as well — quite *avant garde*. They hold meetings every five days, but most members spend their free time at the club as well: drinking, playing Squares, and discussing high-flown governmental ideas. A trio of printing presses rests in the basement, on which they produce their essays. A cook is on staff to prepare meals, and copies of the world's newspapers are always available in the well stocked library. It's a very comfortable place to plan the betterment of society.

For all their do-nothing tendencies, however, Society members have a genuine interest in the Rilasciare's goals. Their essays have brought new ideas into the forefront, paving the way for social and political reform. Their ideas are among the most sophisticated in the Rilasciare, even if they don't have the first clue to implementing them.





The Midnight Crusade

Speaking to them, one gains the impression of dedicated belief, an idealistic fire stronger than their soft surroundings. While they enjoy the comforts of their lifestyle, they wouldn't hesitate to die for the Rilasciare if an opportunity presented itself. They simply aren't willing to make such an opportunity for themselves.

Dechaine

Name: Cirque d'Chaine

Faction: Freethought Society

Number: 15

While based out of Dechaine, Cirque d'Chaine can rarely be found there. It is a celebrated band of traveling actors, who use their plays to deliver thought-provoking political messages. They journey across northern and western Montaigne, using a carnival-like atmosphere to lure audiences. With jugglers and acrobats accompanying them, they present original plays designed to impart messages of self-reliance. Because they rarely cater to the upper class, their "radical" messages escape unnoticed. The performances have slowly spread the Rilasciare philosophy throughout Montaigne.

They make their headquarters in an old stable which has been converted into a gymnasium. When not on the road, they come here to write, rehearse, and occasionally politick with other Rilasciare cells. They travel in a series of gaudily-painted coaches, accompanied by jugglers on horseback and carts full of props. Most of the time, the troupe has no trouble with the authorities; the actors are also surprisingly good forgers.

In addition to its creative work, Cirque d'Chaine has made some small efforts to educate the illiterate Montaigne peasantry. It's a frustrating battle: teaching the peasantry to read is illegal in some provinces, and most farmers have little time for such frivolity as it is. They have, however, formed an informal mail service — composing letters and transporting them to others along their touring route — which has proven much more popular. The service has proven a godsend to Montaigne's poorest class, which has no means of long-distance communication. Cirque d'Chaine can count on help from certain grateful farmers because of

this. The Couriers sometimes make use of them, counting on the actors to get important messages to isolated members nearby. Because they travel so often, they remain out of contact with the rest of the sect for lengthy periods of time.

Paix

Name: Paix Historical Gentleman's Club

Faction: Oppositionists

Number: 8

The Gentleman's Club is quite addled, even by Rilasciare standards. Following the recent loss of the nearby Guerrilla Alliance cell, it has become even more addled. It claims to be the oldest cell in existence, having battled Senator Montanus himself during the early days of the sect. When the Montanus family fled Numa, its members followed in hopes of destroying the line forever. Their failure to do so has made their claims all the more foolish. Many Club members were captured following the destruction of the public works building (see page 26). It currently stands at only eight members, fewer than almost any other cell.

The Club focuses its efforts solely on Porté, "the oldest and most dangerous school of sorcery in existence." Its members believe that the Bargainers live in the nether dimension between Portals, and that by somehow confronting them in their home territory, the Rilasciare can destroy them forever. To that end, they have conducted extensive research into Porté magic, hoping to find some clues as to the Bargainers' true nature. While they haven't achieved the results they would like, they have learned a great deal about Porté magic — including how to sense Portals, and the long-term effects on those who use them. It makes it very easy for them to locate Montaigne sorcerers, should the need arise. The Club has been known to assassinate prominent Porté practitioners, but lacks the numbers to make such efforts truly worthwhile.

Members make their headquarters in a forgotten basement of a Paix library, where they can conduct their experiments in peace. Much of their work involves book research, although they study Porté mages from a distance as well. Thanks to *l'Empereur's* recent edicts, Porté mages no longer

need to hide their skills, something the Gentleman's Club has taken full advantage of. (In older days, the cell would kidnap mages and conduct gruesome tests on them, but the current batch is a tad more enlightened. A black book in a corner of the basement contains the results of their forefathers' horrible research.) They hope to eventually discover some secret weakness which they can exploit. Until then, they gather information, strike when they can, and wait.

Ussura

Pavtlow

Name: None

Faction: The Freethought Society

Number: 23

"Ussuran intellectual" is almost a contradiction in terms, but the few who exist have congregated around the Rilasciare cause. Like other Society cells, they spend a great deal of time in debate. They meet in informal groups in tea houses, spas, and restaurants, arguing over the issues of the day. While none of them publically admits to being Rilasciare, their political agenda is no secret. They consider themselves a legitimate cell, even though they have almost no organization at all.

Their greatest efforts involve the woefully backward Ussuran education system. Working with the Ussuran Orthodox Church, they have established several schools for rudimentary education in the outlying Pavtlow provinces, as well as the *Shkola Pravda* in the city itself. Many members serve as teachers at these schools, and they have encouraged the numerous exiles among them to assist as well. While it hasn't been a rousing success, the results have been encouraging.

The Pavtlow Rilasciare are uncomfortable with the notion of Matushka, but have no way to truly address it. She is a part of the land in Ussura; they might as well try to banish the trees or the hillsides.



Nevertheless, the thought of some powerful inhuman force fills them with unease, and their arguments often turn to the delicate subject of “the Matushka dilemma.” Wise members are content to leave these discussions at the table.

The Sophia’s Daughters have strong ties to the Pavtlow cell, and often ask them to shelter wayward women from the wrath of their husbands. Few think to look so far away, and Pavtlow is good place for a new start. In exchange for their aid, the cell receives news of world events, hard-to-find pieces of literature, and the gratitude of the Daughters’ leadership.

Vendel

Kirk (2 cells)

Name: The True Path

Faction: Guerrilla Alliance

Number: 16

The True Path is the most prominent Guerrilla Alliance sect in Théah, causing more public acts of destruction than any other two cells combined. Its proximity to the Merchant Guilds gives it plenty of targets to choose from, and it has attacked with reckless abandon. Buildings destroyed, officials threatened – its actions were infamous across Théah even before the assassination of Master Soloman. As things currently stand, its members are the most wanted criminals in Théah.

They have survived through some well-placed informants among the Vendel authorities, and by changing their meeting places with paranoid regularity. They have refined the coat code to startling precision, and can carry messages to every member within a few hours. Their meetings are all business; they speak only of the next target and the best way to bring it down. Their aim is to shatter the Vendel façade of security, turning their beautiful capital into a mass of scurrying panic. Most people blame their activities on the Vesten, which suits them just fine. It keeps their true allegiance in the background.

The True Path has several stockpiles of weapons and explosives scattered throughout Kirk. It sells some to the

Vesten, but most it keeps to use when needed. The cell can get any weapon it needs in short order, and has no compunction about using them. With the Guilds breathing down their necks, members never shoot to wound.

Name: The Couriers

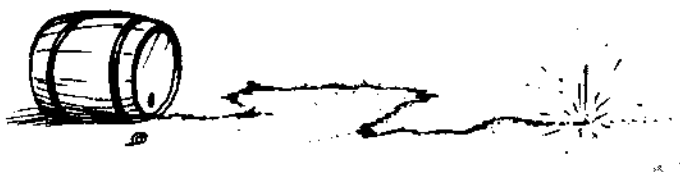
Faction: The Couriers

Number: 45

In addition to the True Path, Kirk also holds the headquarters of the Rilasciare’s Couriers – the messenger network that holds the sect together. They keep themselves deeply hidden from any observers; even the True Path doesn’t suspect their location. Their headquarters is located behind an innocuous storefront; inside, they have printing presses, desks for scribes, maps of every variety, and even a stable full of horses. Nolan Chaucer oversees it all like an Eisen general, carefully coordinating the tenuous links between each and every cell.

Detailed information on the Couriers’ activities can be found on pages 56-59. Only a few Couriers are in Kirk at any one time – mostly scribes and a few messengers waiting for a delivery. The rest are out delivering correspondence to the various cells. Chaucer’s duties keep him very busy, but in his free time he publishes an illegal newspaper called *The Rum Barrel*, containing political commentary, satirical cartoons, and other seditious content. It has become quite popular among the affluent circles, especially those opposed to the Guilds.

The Couriers have no direct links to the True Path, lest an errant arrest bring the sect’s entire structure crashing to the ground. They even route the Guerrillas’ mail through several alternate locations, ensuring that none of their more hot-blooded colleagues realize how close they are. Thus far, no one knows where the Couriers’ headquarters are, and that’s just the way Chaucer wants it.



Vodacce

Dionna

Name: None

Faction: Freeman League

Number: 17

The Vodacce do not take insults well. Personal honor means everything to the nation, and trampling someone's good name is an easy way to get killed. Which is why the Dionna Freeman League takes so much pride in its work. With its elaborately schemed pranks, it can humiliate the most dignified official without once revealing itself. In the dog-eat-dog world of Vodacce politics, such tactics work incredibly well; better to force someone from office by making him look ridiculous than kill him and have his eight brothers come looking for revenge.

The Dionna cell gathers in a rickety townhouse clinging halfway up the side of one of the city's towering buildings. Most members belong to Prince Giovanni's bureaucracy, moving within the cutthroat world of Dionna politics. They select officials who abuse their authority or otherwise prove themselves unfit for leadership, and prank them as publicly and imaginatively as possible. They try to prank at least three officials a year, hoping to spread chaos throughout the Prince's government. Every prank has a scapegoat who will be blamed if it goes off according to plan. (The scapegoat is always a rival or enemy of the target in question.) Their political acumen is extraordinary: they seem to know exactly where to strike to cause the most distress.

Their success rate is quite impressive. While they have never directly killed anyone, their work has prompted three suicides, forty-one duels, and over a hundred resignations in the past seventy-five years. Cries of frivolity from other cells fall silent in the face of such results. The League has destabilized Dionna's government considerably, making it difficult to assert any real control. In Dionna's back-biting environment, members can cover their tracks well; few are aware who truly engineered their pranks.

The biggest roadblock is the Villanova family themselves. The clam has made a game out of destroying those who cross them, and their authority has not diminished no matter

how chaotic things get beneath them. The current Prince, Giovanni, holds his realm in an unbending grip and can sniff out plots like a bloodhound. For all its success, the League dares not strike against him; to do so would be suicide.

Bernoulli's Isle

Name: Esteemed Union of Burglars, Clowns, and Roustabouts

Faction: Liberation Guild

Number: 9

The Burglar's Union, as they are commonly known, are more pragmatic than their Castillian counterparts the Nimble Fingers. Although they answer challenges, as befits their faction, they are more concerned with the amount of money they make than with spectacular or public thefts. They see themselves as the Rilasciare's financiers, the lifeline which keeps its operations running. The Burglars count success by the bottom line only, which in their part of the world means goods from the Crescent Empire. Prince Bernoulli has been granted Church sanction to trade with the Crescents, making him one of the richest men in Théah. The Burglars have tapped into that wealth by skimming from Bernoulli's shipments. Every time his trade ships unload, the inventory is just a little smaller than when they docked...

Most Burglars have day jobs along the docks. They cover their tracks very well, forging inventory lists and applying bribes so that no one is aware of the items they've taken. Spices, silks, strange new technology... all of it is pilfered in dribs and drabs, then dispersed throughout the black market. The Burglars' activities are practically invisible and it's vital that they keep it that way: the black market is staggeringly profitable, but also rife with informants. The Burglars don't need the Prince finding out what they're up to.

Some ask how stealing Crescent merchandise helps the Rilasciare cause. The Burglars claim that they are undermining the Vaticine blockade while simultaneously funding the Free Thinkers movement. They send most of their profits to the remainder of the sect, ensuring that destitute cells have enough funds to keep going. More money comes from the Burglars than from any other source, for which the poorer cells are grateful. The Burglars

keep enough left over to live comfortably and to deal with any problems they might encounter, which they feel is fair. Stealing as much as they do requires a staggering amount of bribes, and they have to keep their members out of jail, after all.

Florentina

Name: The Bane

Faction: Oppositionists

Number: 13

The small city of Florentina, located in Mondavi territory, is mainly a place for the local farmers to trade their rice. It also contains a small monastery, secluded on a hilltop and sequestered from the outside by a high stone wall. A hard-edged Oppositionist cell works within it, disguised as simple monks. Calling themselves "the Bane", members listen for news of errant sorcerers and ensure that those who fall into their grasp never live to spread the Bargainer's disease.

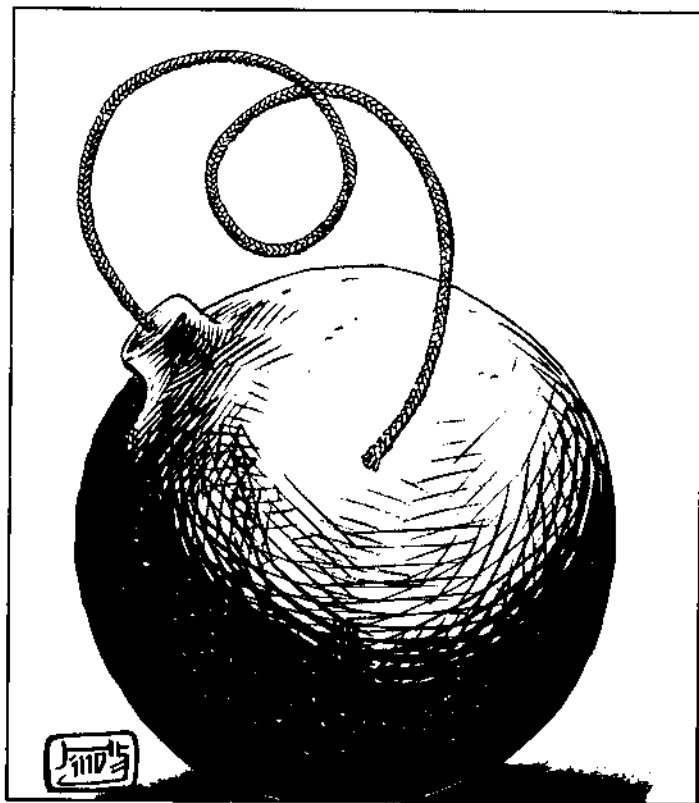
The Bane works very closely with its compatriots in Paix and Vaticine City, identifying sorcerous bloodlines and formulating ways to winnow them out. Members usually leave the dirty work to other cells, content merely to provide information. Fate Witches, however, are another story. As the only Oppositionists in Vodacce, they consider Sorte mages their own problem. A trio of trained assassins is on hand to strike down any witches who become too dangerous.

This practice has caused some friction with the Sophia's Daughters, who have many Fate Witches within their ranks. To further complicate matters, the Daughters require the Bane to help them smuggle women out of Vodacce. Florentina is an important stop along the roads to Eisen, making the monastery a convenient safe house (no Vodacce soldier would dream of intruding on sacred ground). After years of butting heads, the two sects reached an agreement. The Bane provides protection for women fleeing the country and receives a list of Fate Witches under the Daughters' protection, whom they cannot touch. In exchange, the Daughters provide them with detailed information on Sorte mages outside of their protection, and help the Bane strike against them. It's an uneasy

relationship, but thus far there have been no major incidents. The two hope to keep it that way; both stand to lose much should their alliance dissolve.

Others

Other cells exist in addition to those detailed above. They are small and disorganized, however, most located outside of the large cities. Each numbers no more than two or three members – exiles, farmers, and the like. They're often out of contact with the rest of the sect: the Couriers rarely reach them, making them *de facto* free agents. They act when they can, striking out in ways they believe are beneficial to the Rilasciare. Because they're so small, they never associate themselves with a particular faction; they're just Free Thinkers. The larger cells are only vaguely aware of them, and do not count their numbers during the Secret Court and other such activities.







Hero

The Couriers

Nolan Chaucer

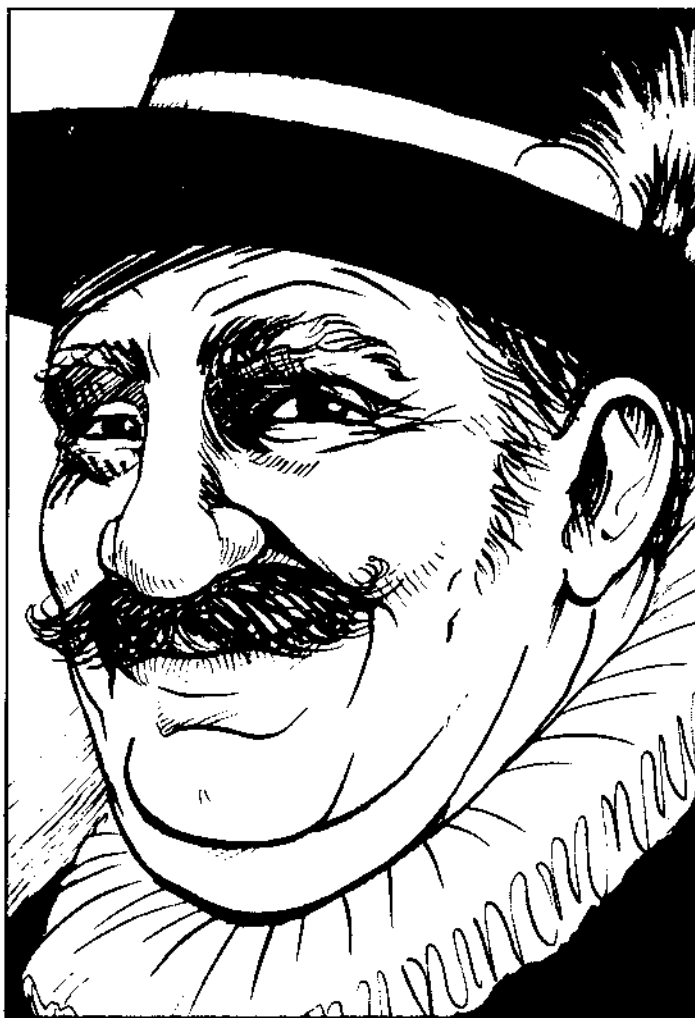
If anyone could claim to be the Rilasciare's leader, it's Chaucer – head of the Couriers and arbiter of the sect's structure. He rules his band of messengers from his shop in Kirk, controlling the flow of information to each and every Free Thinker cell. Without him, the Rilasciare would fall apart.

An Avalon by birth, Nolan moved to Kirk with his father when he was a small boy. The elder Chaucer had interests in the Vendel spas and wanted to be close to his means of income. The young Nolan found himself ostracized by the other children for his strange accent, and for his propensity to nose around in other people's belongings. By the time he graduated from school, he had developed a healthy distaste for the Vendel in particular and authority in general.

He landed a position at a courier service, delivering letters to important clients across the city. Sometimes he would rewrite the documents he received, delivering scandalous insults or misleading information. He was quite a good forger and could imitate almost anyone's style. His quiet form of rebellion lasted for over four years, and no one suspected what he was up to. Eventually, a Rilasciare Courier working at the same company caught onto him. Rather than turn him in, he

made Nolan an offer. Chaucer joined the Free Thinkers the next day.

He worked as a Courier for over a decade, sending letters and parcels across Théah. The Free Thinkers infused his rebelliousness with a sense of purpose. He learned how to apply discipline and ethics to his work, to realize the purpose rebellion served. He learned to be patient and to wait for the right moment, instead of wasting his efforts in futile spontaneity. He quickly advanced to a position of absolute trust, charged with the most sensitive documents



Nolan Chaucer

and messages. When the Head Courier stepped down, Nolan was the only choice to replace him.

He has served as the nerve center for the entire organization for over thirty years. Every piece of Rilasciare correspondence passes across his desk, giving him an untold wealth of information. He knows the true names of three-quarters of the sect, as well as the headquarters of every cell in the world. His knowledge goes completely toward keeping the Free Thinkers connected, and getting every member the information they need. It's a daunting task, but he has mastered it. The other Couriers trust him completely, and he is often the only voice that the more radical cells listen to. Few of them know who he truly is, of course; the Head of the Couriers is the only title that matters.

Chaucer's son, Ryan, stands in line to replace him when he dies. Ryan has been a Courier since he was thirteen and handles the most sensitive Rilasciare documents. A sheet containing all of the codes and pseudonyms of the Rilasciare organization waits in a lawyer's safe for him. None of the other Couriers dispute the boy's competence, making him the perfect choice for a replacement.

Nolan is a stout, heavy-set man with a beatific face and easy smile. He wears old but well-kept clothing, and keeps to himself when outside the Couriers' headquarters. His wife died long ago, and Ryan is the only living relative he has. He dines alone each night at a variety of Kirk restaurants and never attends parties or celebrations. His voice carries benevolent authority, which the Couriers have learned to trust implicitly. He considers them his surrogate family, and rarely consorts with anyone else.

Benoit Jantot du Toille

Jantot is a senior Courier under Nolan Chaucer, charged with carrying the most vital messages to various cells. He



Benoit Jantot du Toille

met Chaucer while serving as a petty officer aboard a merchant ship; the Avalon man saved his life during a pirate attack. Since then, he has pledged eternal service to his savior; his job as a Courier developed as a matter of course.

Unlike the other Couriers, however, he never shows his face at the Kirk headquarters. Chaucer delivers messages to him personally at a variety of drop-points, all out of the public eye. He doesn't know any other Couriers and is only loosely familiar with the organization (although he

respects its founding creed). His single contact is Chaucer, who entrusts him with letters of the most dire import. He knows where and who to send the letters to, but nothing more than that.

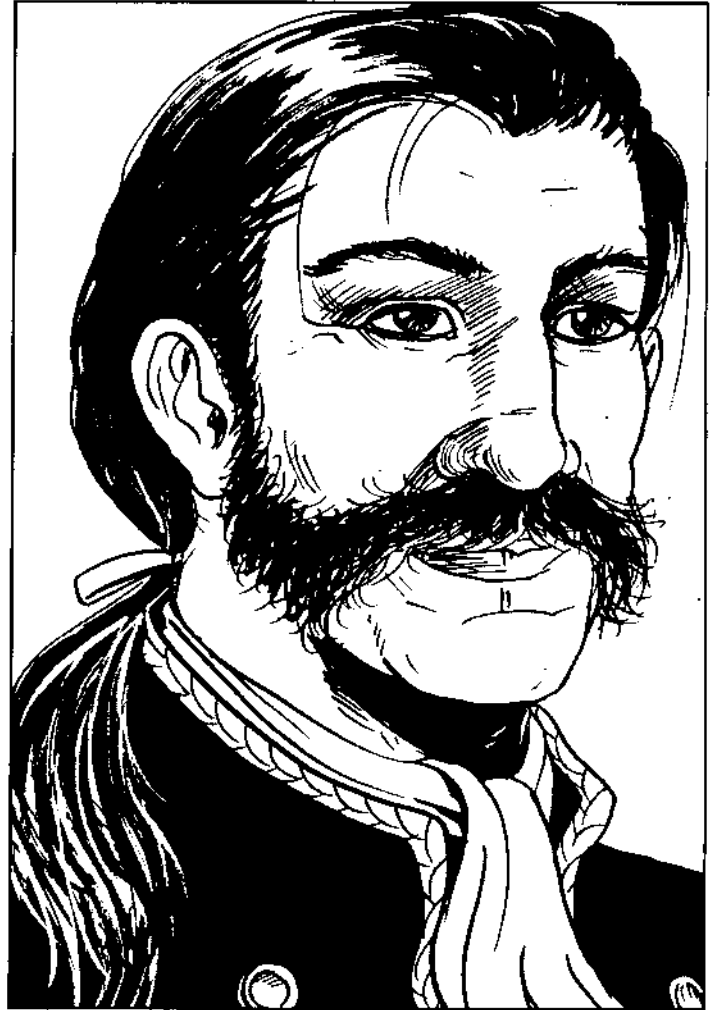
For his services, he has been well compensated; he lives in luxurious Kirk townhouse, and hob-nobs with the prosperous merchants who make up his social circle. Despite his blood, he rarely circulates among the courts, preferring the *nouveau-riche* middle class to the cutthroat nobility. His wife, Sophie, was a dressmaker before they met, and he has accepted the drop in station that marrying her entailed. It also keeps him away from those who might do the Free Thinkers harm.

Jantot has a reputation as a chatterbox and will go on for hours about any topic imaginable. Despite that, he never breathes a word of the messages he sends or the people he sends them to; he's too smart for that. He is quite popular among the Kirk merchants, and has become the life of the party amid the lower upper class.

Jantot is a handsome, clever man with an easy wit and intelligent brown eyes. He dresses conservatively but fashionably, and never aspires beyond his station. He has a knack for impersonations and delights his friends with uncanny accents and imitations. When delivering messages, his demeanor changes. He wears dark Eisen clothes to hide his identity and avoids speaking whenever possible. His wife never asks him the nature of his deliveries.

Willem Karls

Fritz Guren was born to fine Eisen parents. Both were Objectionists during the War of the Cross and fought valiantly to defend their homeland. When they died in the war, a 13-year-old Guren moved to Avalon and changed his name to Willem Karls. With a large inheritance and a hatred for Church, government, and Castille, Karls dove into private schooling away from the



Willem Karls

Vaticine. He attended the best universities and academies in Avalon, where he was noticed by the faculty of the University of Kirkwall. His inheritance began to disappear under the burden of his immature nature, but when Karls turned 19, he knew more than most men twice his age.

When his money had almost run out, the Rilasciare moved. Alerted by the Kirkwall cell, an important but aging Courier named Javier Rios del Guzman approached Karls and invited him to join the Free

Thinkers. For the first time in his life, Karls found something that he wanted. He joined up without a second thought.

The Rilasciare gave him a sense of purpose and a way to direct his rage at the hypocrisy of authority. His new life as a Courier was much harder than his frivolous school days, but he found it far more satisfying. The angry youth vanished, to be replaced by a disciplined and devoted Free Thinker.

Now, at the age of 28, Willem Karls is an important member of the Couriers. He serves on board merchant ships as a pilot, a topsman, whatever is available. He chooses ships with numerous ports of call, where he can carry a large number of messages to many different Thinkers. While he rarely touches land, he has become Chaucer's first choice for any information which needs to travel by sea. He uses neutral meeting places to pass on his messages and remains willfully ignorant of any cell's headquarters. Karls carries a ledger of dates and events that are important to the Rilasciare. The ledger is written in code and indecipherable to anyone not belonging to the Couriers (Wits + Cryptography, TN 30, to translate).

Karls is a well-built Eisen with dark hair tied back in a ponytail. He dresses in neatly pressed sailor's clothes and takes pride in his appearance — the last remainder of his aristocratic heritage. The immaturity of his youth has vanished, replaced by a stern commitment to the Free Thinkers. He speaks quietly but with great authority, and can readily enter any conversation he hears. His education covers a wide range of topics. He has never revealed his true allegiance to anyone he's served with, but tries to sound out potential recruits if he sees them. He alerts Chaucer to the names and ships of any sailors who might make good Rilasciare.



Eduardo de Benedictis

For a member of the merry pranksters, Eduardo is a cold one. He smiles the way a shark does, without warmth or emotion. His laughter is chilling and his eyes betray no trace of human feelings. He works for the Burglar's Union, planning and executing their skimming operations with mechanical precision. By all accounts, he's lived most of his life that way.

Eduardo grew up the son of a prominent barrister; his older brother Sergio was a famous judge and he was expected to follow in his family's footsteps. He attended the best law schools in the country, but his thoughts ran to unorthodox, even radical, ideas, which made his colleagues uncomfortable. He spoke of enforcing the law equally among all classes, of barristers defending to poor without charge. His ideas led to fierce arguments. When he dared to challenge the ethics of the school's most respected professor, he was expelled — only a few months before he would have received his letters. His father, now an old man, denounced him and threw him out of the house.

Luckily, some appreciative parties took notice of his behavior. The Burglar's Union recruited him into its ranks, promising him a means to change the world for the better. Alone and without prospects, de Benedictis

agreed. He soon displayed a knack for organization that the Burglars found indispensable. He could plan operations and handle logistical affairs without missing a dot. His knowledge of law allowed the Union to disguise its activities as legitimate business, which kept the authorities from getting too close. With devout application and a tireless work ethic, he made the Burglars one of the most successful cells in the Rilasciare.

What made Eduardo famous among his peers, however, was not the competence with which he performed his

duties, but something far more chilling. Eduardo killed his own brother Sergio when the elder de Benedictis grew corrupt. He sought permission from the Secret Court, presented evidence in a methodical and objective manner, then hunted Sergio down and plunged a knife into his eye, all with the fastidiousness with which an accountant fills out a ledger. That Sergio deserved his fate is unquestioned: the man had ties to the Inquisition and routinely sentenced innocent men and women to the most terrible punishments. But Eduardo's willingness – indeed, insistence – to be the assassin gave even the most hardened Rilasciare pause. One thing is for certain: no one doubts the man's dedication.

Eduardo is a lean, sinewy man with a Vodacce's dusky complexion and jet-black hair. He favors unassuming attire, though he dresses with a natural sense of taste. His noble upbringing can be seen in his polite bearing and ready knowledge of the arts. Like most Vodacce, he is a fine swordsman. For all his lack of emotion, Eduardo adheres to a rigorous set of ethics and has a strong sense of right and wrong. He values human life and has never struck anyone save Sergio. One gets the impression, however, that his ethics arise not out of any genuine morality, but simply because he is expected to behave that way.

Hans Uppmann

Uppmann joined the Freeman League after the War of the Cross left his country in ruins, his business in shambles, and his Objectivist faith in ashes. Before the war, he was the personal tailor of Georg Hainzl, a job he greatly enjoyed. The horrors of open conflict made him realize that the Eisen power system was truly flawed. For years, he worked with Vereinigung das Uneinigkeit, formulating ingenious pranks to keep the shattered factions at each others' throats. He retired when he could no longer keep up with the League's rigorous physical demands, but he didn't wish to stop serving the



Eduardo de Benedictis



Hans Uppmann

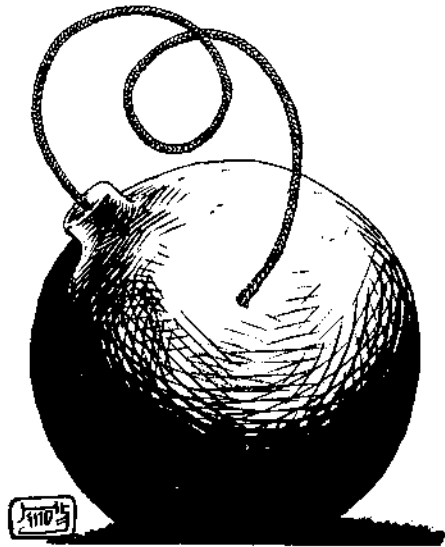
Rilasciare. He set up a small tailoring shop in Gottkirchen, where he began sewing some very special coats...

Since then, his designs have become the standard uniform of the Rilasciare's coat code. All of his coats follow the same basic design, keeping specific details consistent so society members can identify them. But they are far from identical – Uppmann uses different fabrics, colors, and patterns to ensure that no one else notices the coats' similarities. He makes men's and women's coats, in

the common fashionable style. A few times in his career he's had to alter the design to keep the style abreast of current fashion. Generally, each cell orders a number of coats through the Couriers for the use of its members. Lately, however, members who can afford it have been ordering custom-fitted coats for themselves.

Hans has recently been tinkering with a few other adaptations – lockpicks sewn into hems, knives hidden in pocket linings, spring-loaded daggers built into cuffs. He has developed buttons that can conceal messages, small items, or even poison, boots with unseen pistol holsters, and fans that hide deadly blades. Members armed with Uppmann's innovative attire and accessories have managed to pull off dangerous stunts and escape dire consequences that would have otherwise ended in disaster.

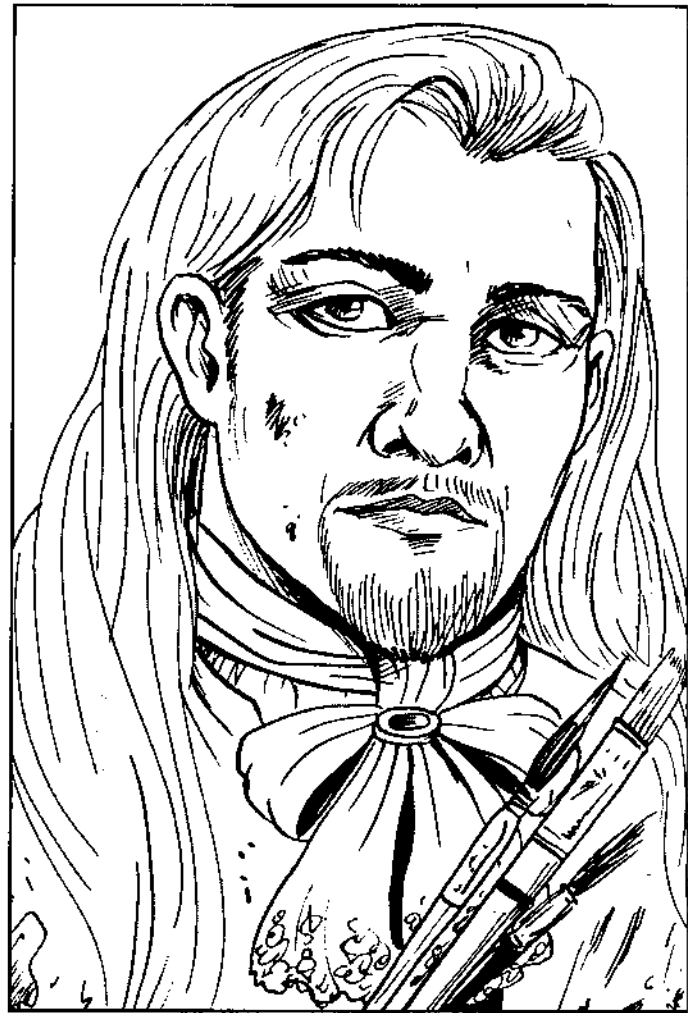
Hans is a small, compact Eisen in his early sixties. As a younger man he was quite athletic, but time has softened him a bit. He wears thick glasses perched on his forehead, and squints even when he's wearing them. His hands are quite dexterous and age has not yet robbed him of his hand-eye coordination. As do most tailors, he always dresses in his own designs.



Freethought Society

Hubert Michel du Gloyure

In the sparkling capital city of Montaigne, the arts are highly regarded as entertainment and the expression of the beauty and complexity of the human soul. Hubert, the leader of the local Freethoughts, has some even better ideas. A talented artist in many mediums, Hubert has earned a respected place among the creative community of Charouse and won the fascination of nobility and commoner alike. Having established this groundwork, he is now using it to the advantage of the Rilasciare, and ultimately, he hopes, all of mankind. His latest series of works has caused much debate and argument. While the other works displayed in the gallery portray idyllic scenes of courtiers in the robes of ancient heroes, Hubert's pieces portray the suffering of the peasantry and the decadence of the nobility. The most daring paintings, however, cannot be displayed publicly. They remain in a private gallery at the Political Society and only members may view them. They include two uncontested masterpieces. *The Maid's Mistake* shows a young maid – no more than 11 years old – cowering under the enraged slaps of an irate noblewoman, an overturned tray and broken teapot lying on the floor nearby; and *Sunset*, perhaps the most accurate portrait of King Leon ever drawn – slouched on his throne, hung over and



Hubert Michel du Gloyure

disheveled, a half-eaten pheasant's leg dangling from his fingers.

Hubert's scandalous images are scenes that the powerful elite of Montaigne are intimately familiar with. No one can dispute that his art engages the emotions of its viewers – expressing fundamental truths of the human condition that those before him have not dared to address. Hubert watches the reactions in his cohorts and prays for the day when he can show them to everyone.

In his small way, he knows it will change how people think about their “superiors.”

Hubert stands about average height, with formal manners and an aristocratic bearing. To meet him, one would never suspect him a radical at heart. He runs the Freethought cell like a benevolent dictatorship, adhering to rules of order and allowing all members to speak as long as they are polite. He’s proud of his fellows’ efforts to educate the masses, but prefers working on his art; it’s more directly fulfilling. He has set up a studio at the Society club, where he often works 12–15 hours a day.

Arnaud Maximilien du Charouse

No one would mistake this quiet Charouse lawyer for a revolutionary. He joined the Rilasciare almost by accident, earning a place in the local Freethought cell after successfully defending one of its members in court. He rarely speaks during the meetings, content to listen to the others and enjoy the benefits of the club. He has a house in a prominent middle-class neighborhood, lives with a wife who hasn’t shared a bed with him in years, and praises *l’Empereur* as a kind and benevolent ruler. Hardly the makings of a seditious firebrand.

The only time he betrays his sympathies is in his writings. His essays are eloquent and powerful, speaking to profound ideals and revolutionary fire. During court cases, he often recites his opening and closing arguments from notes, content that his written words will convey what his speaking voice cannot. His writings aspire to the highest ideals: benevolent utopias, freedom for the oppressed, and an end to all human suffering. The cell often relies on him to compose its letters, and most of the Society’s celebrated political essays were put to paper by Arnaud. While holding little political sway, he is deeply respected by his fellows.

Arnaud is a thin, pale man with a fish-like countenance. He dresses subtly, but immaculately, and has a penchant



Arnaud Maximilien du Charouse

for striped vests. He rarely talks unless angered, when he delivers tearful, venomous diatribes. Arnaud takes copious notes on everything he sees, which he never allows others to read. His hands are often stained with ink from the constant writing.



Boris Nicholaievich Sokolov

Sokolov refers to himself as the King of Exiles, a title that rankles his humanistic colleagues. He enjoys rankling his colleagues, so the name remains. Moreover, it's as accurate a description as any, for Sokolov serves as a lifeline to those Rilasciare who find themselves banished to the Ussuran wastes.

Boris's father was a minor boyar, disgusted with the selfish infighting of his fellow nobles. He sent his son to school in order to develop the young boy's mind, then admonished him to stay there rather than become corrupted by the boyars' politics. Sokolov eagerly agreed, for he shared his father's disdain for the nobility. He took a position teaching and had soon earned a place in Pavtlov's tiny intellectual community. When not instructing, he would go to tea houses and saunas with his fellows, discussing the philosophical or academic subject of the day. They were all reform-minded, but were tempered by the palpable presence of Matushka in Ussura. He was a member of the Freethought Society almost before he knew it.

Sokolov has a natural friendliness that endeared him to other cell members. He quickly fell into the duty of go-between for the cell and the numerous Rilasciare exiles in Ussura. The Free Thinkers espouse a dangerous philosophy, and every now and then one of them is forced to flee persecution in his native land. Most of them end up in Ussura, where the great spaces can hide them and the locals ask few questions. Sokolov is often the first contact for these newcomers. He helps them integrate into their new environment, gives them the tools and basic comforts they need, and ensures that they remain connected to the larger group. Through him, they receive correspondence, news of meeting times for the Pavtlov Freethought Society, and other information. He conveys their wishes to the sect as a whole and ensures that their voices aren't lost in the wilderness. It gives him the power to temper some of their sentiments, lest he cut them off



Boris Nicholaievich Sokolov

from the outside world. Many of the society's most potent firebrands have learned to behave under Sokolov's ministrations; most are grateful enough of his aid to raise too much of a fuss.

Like many Ussurans, Sokolov disdains the overly sophisticated ways of the west. He also believes that the Rilasciare takes itself too seriously at times. Fanaticism of any sort can be tyrannical, and he doesn't want to see the Free Thinkers overthrow one tyranny only to replace it with another. A sense of humor and an adherence to

practical reality will keep that from happening; Sokolov prides himself on having copious quantities of both. While his fellow cell members have grown used to his probing criticisms and good-natured jabs, other cells have less patience. Luckily, they're far away and Sokolov can continue to admonish them through his letters without incurring more than an occasional tongue-lashing.

Sokolov is a tall, thin man who compensates for his lack of weight by wearing bulky coats and other furs. He hides his balding pate beneath a stout cap and shaves his beard to a close Van Dyke: a fashion anomaly in cold Ussura. He speaks quietly, but with a strange weight; his words seem to boom without raising his voice. His sharp wit can cut through opposing arguments like a knife, but he never appears cruel or capricious when using it. He refuses to hold a grudge and always buys his debating opponents a drink after the argument. Many people who would like to hate him simply can't; he's too good-natured to let them.

trappings of his previous life. He called himself "Vincent" and swore that no one would ever suffer as he had. He was offered a position in Kirk's Guerrilla cell following a daring daylight robbery in which he stole nearly 10,000 Guilders from a prominent Vendel bank. He quickly embraced the Alliance's philosophy and his natural leadership abilities gave him a prominent place among his new comrades. Together, they have raised a ruckus unheard of since François Goddard and the Firework Dam.



Vincent

Vincent

The fiery and charismatic head of the Kirk Guerrilla Alliance has little regard for the tamer elements of the Free Thinkers. Imprisoned at the age of twelve for stealing a loaf of bread, he spent six years learning just how brutal artificial authority can be. When he was released from prison, he renounced his name and all

Vincent has masterminded most of the Guerrilla Alliance's schemes of the past ten years. He helped the Paix cell acquire the explosives it used in its plot, and pushed his own cell toward numerous acts of civil destruction. His plans are always energetic and unorthodox, and he has an almost uncanny balance of secrecy and publicity. He knows when to keep his head low and when to act, which has kept the cell active and out of the hands of the authorities. He personally engineered the assassination of Usury Master Soloman; his blade struck home at the masquerade ball.

Now, at age twenty-eight, he is the unquestioned leader of the Kirk Guerrillas. Other Guerrilla cells often consult him for ideas, which he's only too happy to share. Vincent is impatient and often short-tempered. The need to maintain a low profile frustrates him terribly. If he had his way, he'd tear down every brick in every building in Kirk, have men fighting in the streets, and destroy even the most basic rudiments of authority. Only then, he believes, can humanity make any real progress. But as the most wanted criminal in Kirk, he can't afford to be as bold as he'd like. The pain of waiting drives him nearly mad.

Vincent is either Vendel or Vesten by birth; he refuses to say which. His dark blond hair contrasts sharply with his nearly black eyes. He never smiles, but his voice is warm and comforting, which puts those around him at ease. He's capable of love and warm emotions on occasion, and can be exceedingly loyal to those who treat him well. He simply hasn't found many people worthy of such emotions. He wears commoners' clothes, usually gray or muddy brown, with wide-brimmed hats to hide his face. He only learned to read a few years ago and his prose is halting and labored. For a commoner, however, he sees things on a very larger scale; movements and cultures have more of an impact on him than individual human beings. Vincent has few compunctions about killing and ignores the Secret Court whenever he can. In his

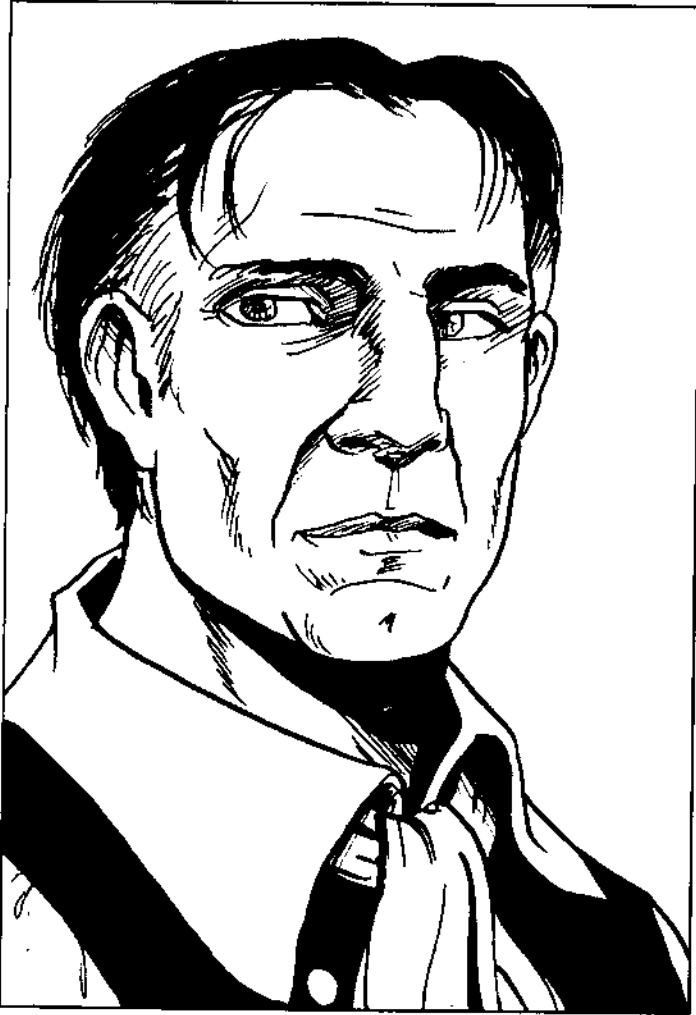
estimation, death is inevitable if the Free Thinkers wish to achieve their goals.

Gerard Trainer

While the Oppositionists complain about the evils of sorcery, Gerard has seen it first-hand. He served as an officer under a minor noble named Uwayne during the chaotic civil war to reunify Avalon. He believed his lord was righteous and just, a true ruler rather than the pretenders he battled against. His quest ended, however, when Elaine appeared with the Graal. In a heartbeat, Gerard's beliefs were shattered: his lord abandoned his cause to follow an unproven girl. Even worse, Uwayne became a general in Elaine's army, lending his clearly superior skills to her shaky claim. And all because of magic – a mystical cup from an alien race. Trainer quit Uwayne's army rather than submit to "Sidhe bewitchin'." The Brothers of Freedom soon hired him as a mercenary and he quickly became a full-fledged cell member.

Life for the Brothers wasn't easy in Elaine's new regime. The Queen brought prosperity to Avalon, and no one wanted to undo that. Moreover, she had a new knight – Bors MacAllister – who could hunt down conspiracies like a bloodhound does a hare. The cell quickly found itself on the defensive: its leaders arrested, its safehouses compromised. The few members left couldn't further the Free Thinker cause; they were on the run for their very survival.

It was Trainer who kept them alive. He was a skilled advance scout in Uwayne's army, and has put his military service to good use for the cell. He could hide like a fox and follow a man's trail for miles if need be. His strategic mind was a good match for MacAllister's, and had adapted well to the sooty streets of Luthon. While the others talked of last stands and suicide missions, he told them to think of the future. He held them together during the cell's darkest days. Slowly, quietly, they've gone from desperate criminals to a tough, unflinching pseudo-



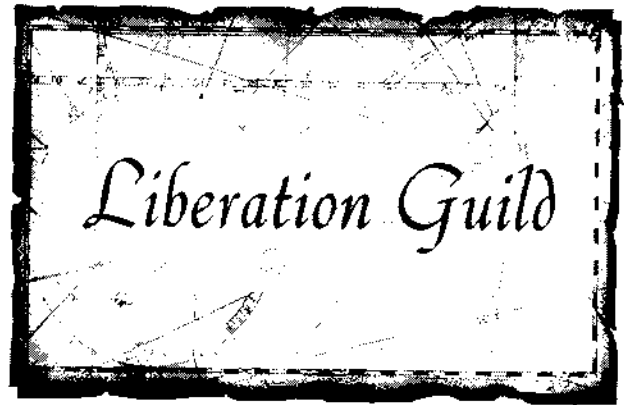
Gerard Trainer

military band. Thanks to him, they now have the skills to continue the fight in a hostile environment.

The cell has settled into a routine of hit-and-run missions, striking when they can and vanishing into the woodwork. They look to Trainer as a matter of course. He makes his home wherever the Brothers roost, keeping heated correspondence with the other Rilasciare cells when he can. His anti-Sidhe leanings have made him friends among the Oppositionists, who have sent him some dearly-needed support. While hardly a politician, he's

begun to learn how to make the most of his allies. He's made contact with King Piram – whom he once fought against on the battlefield – and offered his help.

Trainer is a tall man with a short round-headed haircut and an unremarkable face. He's skilled with both pistol and saber, although the explosives used by the Guerrilla Alliance confound him. He normally wears a drab clerk's uniform, which he calls his "camouflage," and carries a brace of pistols beneath his jacket. Bors MacAllister knows his name, but not what he looks like, a fact which has saved him more than once on the streets of Luthon. He never betrays any emotion, but his anger can be heard in the intensity of his voice. He runs the Brothers like an army under siege: as far as he's concerned, he's still at war. The other Brothers credit their freedom to his philosophy.



Gabriel Menendez de Altamira

As a boy, Menendez would do anything for a dare. His elder brothers would goad him into stealing fruit from a nearby rancho or scaling the highest tower in the local church. He did it all with grace and enthusiasm, while compiling some unique skills in the process. By the time the Montaigne took his family's rancho, he could pick locks, climb sheer walls, and hide small objects from even



the most thorough search. His mother called him "Magpie," a title he bore with pride.

At the same time, he was uneasy with the casual comforts of the ruling class, and with the equally casual indulgences by some members of the Vaticine Church. Why was it that they had so much while others had so little? Why would men of Theus wish to increase their temporal power? His questions soon led him into discontented circles, where he fell in with members of the Rilasciare. Given his skills, it was only a matter of time before he found the Liberation Guild.

The war gave him a grand opportunity to fully integrate himself into the sect. While his brothers joined the army or traveled eastern Castille as displaced dons, he moved to Altamira, changing his name and living with an eclectic group of fellow nobles in an isolated villa. His family condemned him for his perceived lack of patriotism, but he shrugged it off and went to work. Of course, the villa was the headquarters of the Nimble Fingers, and the nobles he associated with were his fellow cellmates.

Within a few years, he had compiled a truly astounding list of thefts. There seemed to be no place he couldn't go, no object he couldn't acquire. He's been as far away as the Ussura/Cathay border and stolen objects from the most secure locales. The other Fingers believe him to be a miracle worker and are hard-pressed to keep up with his example. To make matters worse, he's equally adept at issuing challenges, admonishing his fellows to greater and greater acts of daring. Karl Proovost's daring raid on *l'Empereur's* palace was his idea; he still laughs at the panache Proovost displayed in pulling it off.

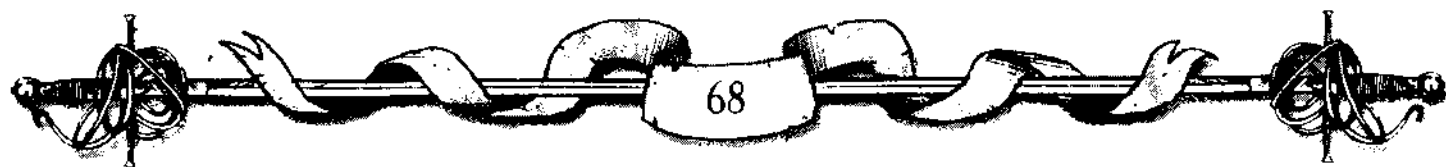
Today he lives the decadent life of a leisurely noble, enjoying the fruits of his work even as he plans new acts of bravado. Thieving is in his blood now, and he views it as a noble pastime like painting or falconry. He keeps the worthless trinkets from his thefts as mementos, while selling the valuable items and giving the money to the



Gabriél Menendez de Altamira

local poor. While he doesn't care much for the pious lecturing of other Rilasciare factions, he believes that they judge him – and the Liberation Guild – too harshly. If they can't enjoy life while they plan a better world, that's not his fault.

Gabriél's dark red hair is an anomaly among his fellow Castellians; he often dyes it or cuts it short before undertaking a theft. He wears dark velvet clothes and broad-brimmed hats common among the Montaigne Musketeers. His garments hide all manner of picks and



secret pockets; he's one of Hans Upmann's best customers. He has the easy grace of most Castilian nobles, which vanishes beneath the boisterous joy of his Guild meetings. There is warmth and caring behind his eyes, which come out when he sees the unfortunate suffering. When not thieving or celebrating with the other Fingers, he can be found on the streets of Altamira, performing magic tricks for the peasant children. He always lets them keep the gold coins he uses.

far more dangerous than the Church suspected. When the Vodacce Cardinals refused to hear his warnings, he renounced his vows in disgust. After two more years of searching, he managed to find the publishers of the mysterious book: the Vodacce Oppositionists.

While poorly trained in military matters, Ciccioni found he had a natural aptitude for silent acts of skullduggery. He served as the Bane's primary assassin for many years, petitioning the Secret Court whenever the Bane needed a killing. His victims rarely went quietly. They sent

Oppositionists

Brother Giancarlo Ciccioni

In his day, Ciccioni has killed over twenty-five sorcerers, most of them Fate Witches, most of them young. The damage to his spirit can be seen in his haunted eyes, his haggard face, and his clenched hands. He's done a lot of things he's not proud of, things his old body still bears the scars of. But he hasn't regretted a single thing he's done, and if called upon, would do it all again in an instant. The benefit to humanity far outweighs the burdens on his soul.

Ciccioni is (or rather *was*) the leader of the Bane, an old man who has spent his entire life trying to snuff out sorcery. He was once a Vaticine priest, but left the order long ago after stumbling across an ancient book in a Numan library. The book held a record of the early years of the Rilasciare; it convinced the priest that sorcery was



Brother Giancarlo Ciccioni

everything from runaway carts to maddened Swordsmen to stop him. One even tried to pull one of his own fate strings apart as he sunk the dagger into her chest. He survived them all, and sent each one of them to Legion's flames.

When the time came to retire some fifteen years ago, he volunteered to stay on, to teach others what he knew. In time, he assumed *de facto* leadership of the Bane. Younger members came to him for advice, which he dispensed with solemn dignity. He admonished them to look at his wounds, to feel his pain, and to realize that they might someday have to make the same sacrifices. He help forge the alliance with Sophia's Daughters, using them to locate dangerous Fate Witches in exchange for helping their victimized charges escape Vodacce. The act has given the Rilasciare a vital ally in their fight.

Now, in the waning years of his life, Ciccioni finds himself slowly losing the leadership role he has held for so long. The Bane has begun to follow a different path, something which pains him almost as much as the scars to his spirit. For the first time, other members don't automatically look to him as their leader. The sect trusts his judgment and his long experience against Sorte, but believe he is too set in his ways to be effective. They have begun ignoring his admonitions, turning to others for advice before him. He continues to argue loudly for his point of view – mostly for an unbending assault on the evils of Sorte – but realizes that he's no longer making a strong impact. He cannot decide how to change the situation.

Giancarlo is an old man with a long gray beard and a face sagging with wrinkles. He walks with a pronounced limp, a parting gift from one of his long-ago victims. The pain in his joints becomes crippling on rainy days. He dresses in monk's robes with the hood pulled over his face; other men start when they see the look in his eyes. He spends his time in the library or else gazing across the countryside from the monastery's belltower. Few people

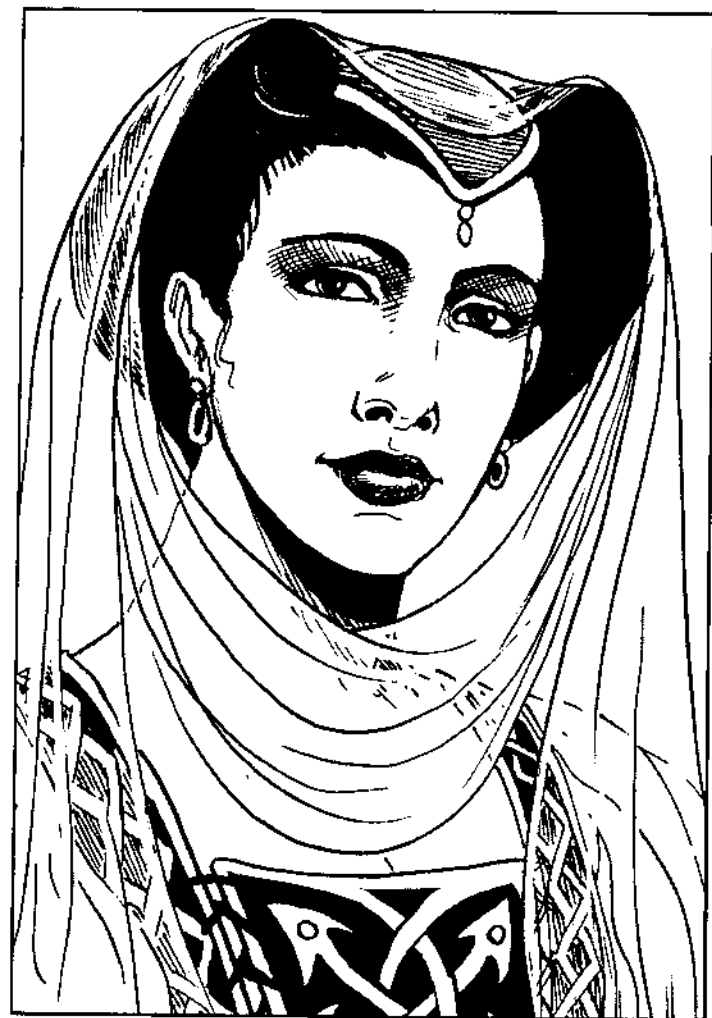
bother him anymore, a fact which is slowly breaking his heart.



Ramona Beckett

The daughter of an Avalon butler and a Castillian laundress, Ramona spent her youth as a chambermaid for a powerful Castillian don. Her meek peers seemed content to be treated like slaves and accepted their fate doing the unpleasant tasks that the nobility were too high and mighty to bother with. But something inside Ramona rebelled. She had a sharp mind and keen observation skills, and could plainly see that many of those she served were no more worthy of privilege than she was. As she grew older, her disgust with the arrogant elite became indignant hatred, but beatings and other punishments taught her it was wise to keep such feelings secret.

The Rilasciare discovered her when a member infiltrated the serving staff as a spy. She proved herself a valuable ally, her position allowing her ample opportunity to overhear damning conversations and gather information. When they decided to recruit her, at the age of 15, she was overjoyed to discover others who shared her disdain of the power-bloated court and were ready to do something about it.



Ramona Beckett

The Free Thinkers taught her skills she would need in her new life — how to use a sword, how to seduce important men, how to kill with razors and whispers alike. She belonged to no faction and never joined a cell; she didn't want to be engulfed in their politics. When her schooling ended, she made a daring proposal: she would assassinate anyone the sect asked her to. All they need do was come to her with a name.

Ramona realized that the only way to get close enough to the nobility to strike would be to gain their trust, and they

only trusted fellow nobles. To this end, she took up residence in a sumptuous townhouse in Carleon, posing as the cousin of a sympathetic Castilian noblewoman. Her transformation from humble maid to elegant courtier was flawless, and her natural intelligence and beauty allowed her to see countless opportunities to strike.

She has since become the Secret Court's primary assassin. When someone has earned the sect's death penalty, it is usually Ramona who strikes the fatal blow. Her independent status has earned her the trust of every faction, and should she be caught, she has very little that can incriminate the rest of the sect. She's killed eight people in her time, each through a different method. None of them suspected her true allegiance until their dying breaths.

On the surface, Ramona plays the role of petty Avalon noble, frivolous and basking in the glow of Carleon. The Queen's court finds her ravishing, and she has had to turn down several proposals of marriage. She has inherited the best aspects of her mixed heritage: porcelain skin contrasting with her wild eyes and silky black hair. Her heart still fills with hatred at the sight of the ruling class, and she relishes her bloody role in their undoing. She never betrays her true emotions, hiding her rage and pain behind a perfect mask. She dearly loves her work — almost as much as she loves destroying the very nobles who have embraced her so unthinkingly.

Velik Galecatcher

More information on Velik can be found on page 43 of the Pirate Nations sourcebook.

The Brotherhood of the Coast represents one of the Rilasciare's greatest achievements ever: the foundation of democracy and the first real example of Théan humanism in action. But while they trust Captain Allende and the ideals he aspires to, *la Bucca* is too important to be left entirely unmonitored. To that end, Allende's



Velik Galecatcher

friends in the Nine and Seven sent one of their own to keep an eye on him: Barnard du Ganador, better known as Velik Galecatcher.

Velik was a Montaigne smuggler, sharp-eyed and silver-tongued, working for the Vestenmannavnjar. He stole arms from the Montaigne-Castille War and sold them to raiders. The Nine and Seven were intrigued by his devotion to the Vesten cause, and sounded out his opinions through several seemingly random meetings. He leapt at the chance to join their ranks; while he never

participated in the Nine and Seven's pranks, he made sure they always had the equipment to do the job.

It was Velik who discovered Prince Javier's location on *la Bucca*, and offered to contact him for the sect. He allowed himself to be captured by the Castellians, who sentenced him to the infamous island prison. Once there, he contacted the Prince anonymously through written notes and offered the aid of the Nine and Seven. Together, the two of them concocted a plan for revolt. Velik struck up a friendship with fellow smuggler Bjorn Brind, who could bring the right supplies in. He then directed the Rilasciare toward Brind's connections; the Nine and Seven made sure the prisoners got what they needed.

Since the revolt, Velik has kept a close eye on Javier-cum-Allende, serving as quartermaster aboard his ship *The Hanged Man*. His silver tongue and quick thinking have made him a valued advisor, and he's been able to inject some subtle Rilasciare philosophy into the Brotherhood's action. He uses carrier pigeons to keep in touch with the Nine and Seven, sending messages back and forth to keep them apprised of the Brotherhood's development. The Rilasciare rarely asks anything from him other than to stay informed. The other crewmen believe that the birds are merely part of his supply network and don't ask questions. In fact, Allende himself doesn't realize that Velik belongs to the Rilasciare, and Velik is willing to let the Prince go on in ignorance.

Velik is a tall Montaigne man in his mid-thirties with tanned skin and long black hair. He wears loose-fitting pirate's clothes, with a loaded pistol stuck in his scarlet sash. The other sailors find him charming and easy-going, which he uses to curry favor should he need it. His odd nose for weather has kept the *Hanged Man* out of trouble, and his close friendship with Bjorn Brind ensures that the ship always has what it needs. Few Rilasciare have experienced the freedom that Velik has, though all aspire to it. He's a shining example of their philosophy in action.

Donnabella Zümerwindt

Donna's mother was a flighty, romantic woman who filled her daughter with visions of utopia (she gave her a Vodacce name because all the Eisen ones were too coarse). As Donna grew older her idealism ran headlong into the harsh realities of life in Eisen. Rather than compromise with the world, however, she demanded that the world change to match her ideals. In short, she became a radical. A small Rilasciare cell on the Vodacce



Donnabella Zümerwindt

border found her preaching on street corners and introduced her to the sect.

Her radicalism ended the day she was arrested while handing out seditious literature on Falisci's island. She was tried for treason and placed in one of the darkest prisons in Vodacce: a stone tower carved into the shoreline cliffs, where only the fiercest and most desperate criminals go. There, her ideals were put under incredible strain amid raving madmen and ruthless killers. She survived there for over fifteen years, fighting the guards, fellow inmates and her own growing despair, and never surrendered to any of it.

In fact, her condition has given rise to several philosophical manifestos, which she's carved onto the walls of her cell. Though rough and somewhat crude, they spell out a need for revolution in passionate and unflinching terms. A spy from the Burglar's Union once infiltrated the prison, and managed to copy her words down. He published them anonymously, and they soon spread to every Rilasciare cell in the world. Her name has become a rallying cry for the Free Thinkers, exemplifying the injustices they fight and the true courage required to fight it. Donna is unaware of just how much her former sect reveres her.

Donna is a hard, intense woman in her mid-forties, with stringy brown hair and flinty eyes. She wears gray prisoners' clothes which she keeps as clean as possible and carries a sharpened wooden spoon in her sandals. She's proud to say that she's never had to kill anyone with it. She spends her days in back-breaking labor, helping expand the prison deeper into the surrounding cliff. At night, she writes or contemplates her condition, depending on how exhausted she is. Her idealistic youth is a distant memory now, but the passion of it still burns within her mind.





Drama



Introduction

This chapter details the new rules that accompany the Rilasciare. It includes new Advantages, Skills, and Knacks, as well as an informal Swordsman school developed by the Free Thinkers. It also includes guidelines for joining the sect, rules for increasing certain Knacks to Rank 6, and a system for creating your own Rilasciare cell. Explosives rules are developed further and new equipment pertinent to the sect is covered in detail. Finally, we've provided rules for the sinister *Zerstörung* school of sorcery, which the Free Thinkers wiped out over six centuries ago.

Becoming a Rilasciare

Joining the Free Thinkers is a 5-point Advantage, which may be purchased at the beginning of Hero creation (see the "Hero" chapter of the *Players' Guide*). This assumes that the Hero has belonged to the sect for some time and is a trusted member of his cell, wherever that may be. The player should probably choose a faction to belong to and an appropriate cell from that faction. If you don't wish to join one of the described cells, create your own or simply decline to mention one. Some Rilasciare have no cell at all, but serve the sect as individuals.

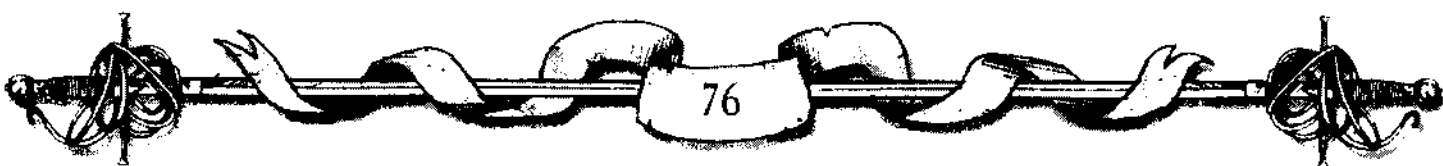
The Hero's nationality and current location doesn't have to dictate which cell he belongs to (for instance, he doesn't have to belong to the Brothers of Freedom just because he's Avalon), but the player should develop a plausible explanation for his status. Guidelines can be found in the "Freeman" Chapter, pages 88–90.

Heroes cannot voluntarily join the Rilasciare after character creation. The sect always approaches new members before revealing itself, and never allows interested parties — even benevolent ones — to find them. If you wish to join the Rilasciare at some point in the

campaign, consult your GM. If he's willing, he can work a scenario into the campaign whereby the Hero gets the opportunity to join the sect. He will probably ask you to use some Reputation dice and perhaps Experience Points as well. Details are up to him, and be warned: any GM worth his salt will probably throw some nasty surprises into the mix.

You may not belong to the Free Thinkers if you have sorcery. In exchange for this limitation, all Rilasciare members receive the following benefits:

- The embodiment of the Free Thinkers is True Courage, the ability to spit death in the eye without thinking twice. Once per Scenario, they may add one die to any Resolve roll they make.
- As an underground group, the Rilasciare has ready access to weapons and armaments. Members of the Free Thinkers may acquire any personal firearm, bow, crossbow, or melee weapon they wish without cost. This does not apply to panzerhands, Sidhe weaponry, Synchron artifacts, or any other magical weapons. It doesn't include cannons or other heavy ordnance. It may include gunpowder and ammunition, however. Only two such weapons may be acquired at any given time, and the Free Thinker must contact a local cell in order to do so.
- Free Thinkers may use the Courier network to move messages with absolute security. The Couriers are the most dependable form of communication in Théah; any information entrusted to them is almost certain to reach its destination without being compromised.
- Free Thinkers have a 2-point Connection Advantage with another member of their cell. This connection can provide the Hero with advice, guidance, and even shelter from the authorities if necessary. Keep in mind that this is an ally, not a piece of cannon fodder. If the Hero takes advantage of his good graces, the Contact will drop him like a hot rock.



In addition, members of particular factions each receive a unique benefit as follows:

Freeman League

- Freeman are particularly dedicated to disrupting authority — making those in power look foolish and challenging sacred cows in all their forms. They may spend a Drama Die in order to discern the best way to humiliate a Villain or Henchman. The GM will drop a hint or a piece of information concerning the target that helps you against him. Perhaps he has a secret mistress, news of which could disgrace him if made public, or a fear of spiders that can be used for a brilliant prank. This works for personal information only; it cannot be used to ascertain traits, combat stats, or other system-based information. You must observe the target unmolested for at least one day before using this ability, and it may only be used once a Scene.

Freethought Society

- Freethought members are all well educated and reasonably intelligent. They may read and write their native language for free and may purchase the “Language” advantage one time for 1 HP less than the listed cost (minimum 1).

Guerrilla Alliance

- Guerrillas have an uncanny ability with explosives. They may purchase the “Bomb Making” and “Arson” skill for only 1 HP apiece. In addition, when using grenades, they add one to the number of Phases before the fuse goes off. They may do this only once per grenade. (See the Grenade rules in the *Pirate Nations* sourcebook and page 91 for more details.)

Liberation Guild

- Guild members who purchase the “Criminal” Skill begin the game with a Lockpicking Knack at Rank 1.

Oppositionists

- Oppositionists are trained to spot sorcerers, whether it's the blood-red hands of Porté or the unreal sheen of Glamour. Members' Wits are considered 1 Rank higher when determining if a particular person practices magic.

Couriers

- Couriers always receive traveling money to cover their expenses; they can stay at inns and purchase food and other incidentals. If they start from the Kirk headquarters, they can receive passage on a ship, access to a carriage, or the use of a fast horse for a single adventure. All of this equipment belongs to the Rilasciare and must be returned intact if possible. (If not, you may be making a lot of milk runs to Pavtlow... in the dead of winter.)

Special Training

The Rilasciare have honed several skills to the point of mastery, beyond the abilities of even the most dedicated laymen. As a result, it is possible for Free Thinkers to reach a Knack of 6 under certain circumstances. A Hero who wishes to do so must first have a Rank of 5 in the given Knack. Next, he must find a fellow Free Thinker skilled enough to train under and convince him to pass on the knowledge. Training costs 25 XP and can take anywhere from one month to one year, depending on the circumstances (GM's discretion). If these conditions are met, the Hero's Rank increases to 6. Note that this does not convey the ability to teach a Rank 6 Knack to others; it simply means you have it. Normally, only NPCs and retired Heroes have a Rank this high.

Three members of the Rilasciare have attained Rank 6 in a Knack, and are capable of teaching what they know to others:

Lockpicking: Gabriél Menendez de Altamira, Altamira

Oratory: Boris Nicholeivich Sokolov, Pavtlow

Logistics: Nolan Chaucer, Kirk

The *Vipera ex Morsi* Swordsman School

Rilasciare assassins have developed a nasty technique allowing them to close on their targets and deliver a lethal blow very quickly. While not a formal school (few outside the organization know it exists), it has proven invaluable when time is of the essence and targets must be struck decisively. They call it *Vipera ex Morsi*: old Théan for “The Adder’s Bite.”

Vipera derives from a very practical conceit — make sure your target dies from the blow. Its users often have only one opportunity to strike and must make the most of it. It is designed for stealth and for fast, lethal blows, and favors long knives over fencing blades. As a means of assassination, it is brutal: it attacks from surprise and can finish an opponent off before he even realizes he’s in danger. Students of *Vipera* learn how to cut at vital points, such as the carotid artery or the spaces between the ribs. The blow opens up major blood vessels or ruptures vital organs — just enough to do the job. Their victims may not die immediately, but bleed out in a short period of time. Even those who receive medical care don’t survive more than a day or so.

There are drawbacks, however. Because it was not intended for lengthy combat, it has little defensive value



and cannot withstand a patient opponent. Any competent swordsman with warning can fend it off easily, and extended battles invariably turn against the user. Most practitioners of *Vipera* learn to break off combat if their first blows don’t strike home.

Vipera is a dirty, honorless school of fighting. No lady or gentleman with the barest hints of fair play would even think of practicing it. The Rilasciare use it as an ugly means to a necessary end — killing those who have been condemned by the Secret Court. In their minds, no

killing is noble. If it must be done, then it should be as absolute as possible; fair play never enters into it. The darkest Rilasciare assassins augment this school with poisons or other forms or treachery, just to make sure.

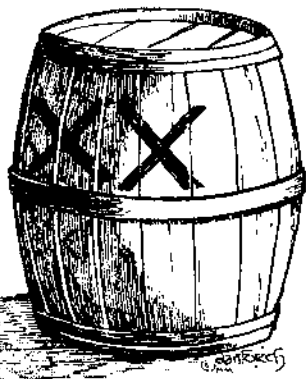
Basic Curriculum: Dirty Fighting, Knife

Swordsman Knacks: Beat, Corps-à-corps (Knife), Exploit Weakness (*Vipera ex Morsis*), Lunge (Knife)

Apprentice: Learning *Vipera ex Morsis* negates the off-hand penalty when using a knife, and grants you one free Raise to your Attack Roll when using a stiletto (see the New Equipment section, page 90). Called shots with a stiletto receive a Free Raise.

Journeyman: *Vipera* Journeymen rarely miss, so focused are they on sending the blade home. When you miss with a knife attack by your Attack (Knife) Knack x2 or less, the blow still strikes your target. Roll for damage as normal; your opponent doesn't make a Wound Check following the blow.

Master: Masters have learned how to cut their targets deeply with only a single blow. If your opponent makes a successful Wound Check for damage you've caused with a Knife Attack, you can force him to roll again. Only one reroll per blow is permitted; if he makes it the second time, you're out of luck.



The Zerstörung Sorcery School

Knacks: Called Shots, Disintegration, Indirect Touch, Focused Effect

Apprentice Degree: Wood and Paper

Journeyman Degree: Metal

Master Degree: Flesh

Of all the Bargainers' gifts, perhaps none was so terrible as *Zerstörung*, the power to corrode matter. Its practitioners were among the most feared men ever to walk Théah. They fled the Old Empire long before its fall, driven away by attacks from rival sorcerers. By the early tenth century, they had been reduced to a single large family in a small Eisen territory. The Rilasciare did the world a service by destroying their line forever.

It's possible, however, that a few *Zerstörung* practitioners survived. Perhaps the von Drachen bloodline endured through the centuries, hidden away in the darkest corners of a broken country. A tiny handful of sorcerers — perhaps no more than ten — may still walk the land, keeping their dark gift alive.

The GM has the final say on whether *Zerstörung* still exists in his or her campaign. Heroes should not normally be able to possess it (unless terrible secrets and relentless persecution are your thing). We've provided rules here for historical interest, and for the odd NPC (Villain? Or persecuted innocent?) who may may still practice it.

Zerstörung essentially accelerates the ravages of time, causing materials to corrode and collapse in the space of a few seconds. The affected object literally rots before the sorcerer's eyes, becoming dry, wrinkled, and desiccated as if it had lain untouched for centuries. This is not aging (it won't turn a baby into a man), but rather an increase in the natural entropy that causes wear and

decay. At lower levels it affects paper, wood, and other perishable items. At higher levels it can affect metal, weapons, and even flesh. The effect on living things is devastating. At the height of their power, the von Drachens could turn a twelve-year-old boy into a withered mummy simply by brushing his cheek.

Only Eisen characters may practice *Zerstörung*. They must have roots in the southern portion of the country, and were probably raised far from any civilized locale. Most have learned to keep their powers hidden from the rest of society. More information on *Zerstörung* can be found in the History section, pages 79–81.

Apprentice: At the earliest stage, the sorcerer learns to affect easily perishable objects – paper, foodstuffs and the like. By spending a Drama Die, the sorcerer causes a single non-living item no firmer than wood and no greater than man-sized height to become brittle and unusable. It takes three Actions of contact for the corrosion to work. Raises can be used to affect additional items: one per Raise to a maximum equal to the sorcerer's *Zerstörung* rank.

Journeyman: The journeyman understands the school well enough to affect more permanent things – metal, stone and earth. Canny sorcerers use this to crumble the foundations of a castle or rust a suit of armor. Spending a Drama Die causes one cubic foot of material, or a single object no greater than three feet high, to become pitted and rusted. A single piece of armor can be affected in this manner (a breastplate, a panzerhand, etc.). Each Raise allows an additional cubic foot or additional object to be corroded, up to a maximum equal to the sorcerer's *Zerstörung* rank.

Master: The final stage of *Zerstörung* opens the very essence of life to the corroding touch. Trees, animals and even human beings can be aged in this manner. By spending a Drama Die, the sorcerer causes one Dramatic Wound to the subject. Every two Raises allows the sorcerer to spend an additional Drama Die and cause an

additional Dramatic Wound, up to a maximum equal to the sorcerer's *Zerstörung* rank. It takes three Actions of unbroken contact in order for the power to work. The subject won't feel anything until the corrosion takes effect, but contact must be maintained for at least three Actions. See "Limitations," below, for more details.

The effects can be seen in the subject as a drying of the skin, a loss of body fat, an increase in wrinkles and a generally skeletal appearance. It takes one month of complete rest (bedridden, without traveling anywhere) to heal a single Dramatic Wound inflicted in this fashion. The visible effects fade during this time, but the subject will always feel a certain tightness in the joints.

Zerstörung may only affect creatures of horse-size or smaller. Drachen, leviathans, and the like simply have too much mass for the magic to work.

Limitations: *Zerstörung* requires the sorcerer's touch to take effect – bare skin contacting the object in question. It takes three continuous Actions of unbroken contact in order to work. If contact is broken for any reason, the sorcerer must start again.

If the sorcerer wishes to affect a moving object (such as a carriage or a human being), he must make an Attack (Pugilism or Dirty Fighting) or Wrestling (Grapple) roll. If he succeeds, he causes no damage, but may corrode the object as normal – provided he can maintain contact for three Actions or has the "Fast Application" *Zerstörung* Knack.

Dracheneisen, Syrneth artifacts, and Sidhe equipment are immune to *Zerstörung*. Water cannot be affected by it either, and ageless supernatural monsters (ghosts, Sidhe, etc.) simply shrug off its power. The rumored immortality potion of the Sophia's Daughters may render those who drink it immune to *Zerstörung* as well.

Zerstörung Knacks

Disintegration

Zerstörung tends to leave evidence in its wake – the pitted remains of a suit of armor, a skeletal mummy, etc. But Masters of the art can corrode an object until it is nothing but dust. For every Rank in Disintegration, the user may reduce one cubic foot of affected material to powder, which will blow away in a stiff breeze. Masters (Rank 5) can disintegrate anything they have corroded, no matter how large.

Distant Touch

You must have the “Indirect Touch” Knack in order to take Distant Touch. Your Rank in Distant Touch may never be higher than your Rank in Indirect Touch. This technique allows to sorcerer to corrode objects from a distance, without having to touch them even indirectly. For every Rank in Distant Touch, you can affect items from further away.

Rank 1	1 foot
Rank 2	2 feet
Rank 3	5 feet
Rank 4	10 feet
Rank 5	20 feet

Fast Application

Zerstörung takes time to work – three Actions of continuous contact, which can be quite difficult. Sorcerers with Fast Application, however, have learned to focus their powers much more quickly. It takes only a single touch – one Action – to use their power, quite handy during combat or when time is of the essence. Using Fast Application requires a simple Wits check. Success indicates that the effect takes only a single Action; failure means that the sorcerer must maintain contact for two more Actions (although he can try again next action). The TN for success depends upon the user’s Fast Application Rank.

Rank 1	TN 25
Rank 2	TN 20
Rank 3	TN 15
Rank 4	TN 10
Rank 5	TN 5

Focused Effect

A Focused Effect allows the sorcerer to corrode only a single part of the object in question – just one page out of a book, for example, or a man’s hand instead of his entire body. The sorcerer must meet all the conditions for corroding the object normally, then make a simple Resolve check in order to limit the effect to the desired location. The TN depends upon the sorcerer’s Focused Effect level.

Rank 1	TN 25
Rank 2	TN 20
Rank 3	TN 15
Rank 4	TN 10
Rank 5	TN 5

Success means the desired area and only the desired area is affected. Failure indicates the object completely corrodes as normal.

Indirect Touch

Most of the time, the sorcerer must touch an object with his bare flesh in order to affect it. With practice, however, he can learn how to corrode something which he isn’t touching – flesh through a shirt, for example, or a table through the floor it stands on. The sorcerer rolls Resolve + Indirect Touch; the base TN is 10, plus 5 for every additional piece of material between the sorcerer’s flesh and the target object. For thicker material (walls, floors, etc.) add 5 to the TN for every five feet of solid matter between the sorcerer’s flesh and the target object.

“Why Can’t I Have *Zerstörung*?”

Some players may be intrigued by the possibility of portraying a Hero with *Zerstörung*. There are some serious drawbacks, however, which make it extremely problematic. For one thing, you would instantly make a potent enemy of the Rilasciare. Unlike other forms of sorcery, *Zerstörung* has only a few practitioners still alive (if that), which means that killing them all is much easier than, say, killing every Porté sorcerer out there. If the Free Thinkers learned that the bloodline had somehow survived all these centuries, they would spare no effort to correct the oversight.

In addition to rising to the top of the Rilasciare’s hit list, *Zerstörung* practitioners have problems with mundane citizens as well. *Zerstörung* is practically unheard of in Théah; only the Rilasciare and a few Eisen scholars know it exists. Therefore, people won’t see it as sorcery, but as something terrible, monstrous, and inhuman. *Zerstörung* sorcerers will be treated like evil spirits — avoided and feared, even actively hunted if word gets out. The local Vaticines may be called upon, and the Inquisition could publicly burn you without a second thought.

Eisen who learn that you carry sorcerous blood will be even less kind. The Eisen are proud of their sorcery-free blood, and an Eisen sorcerer is proof that this was not always the case. Countless mercenaries would consider it a duty to their nation to destroy you, while fearful *Bauren* would drive you into *die Schwarzen Wälder* with your monstrous brethren. The Iron Princes might even decide to kill you in order to curry political favor with the populace. And then there’s Stefan Heilgrund...

As always, the GM has the final say in the matter. *Zerstörung* has potent powers, but its disadvantages can easily derail the campaign. Players looking for something unique for their Heroes should probably look elsewhere.

New Skills

All of the following skills are considered Civil Skills.

Arson

It takes more than just lethal intentions and a barrel of gunpowder to demolish a building. You have to know where to plant the explosives, how a fire might spread, and what points are most vulnerable to attack. Arsonists have a strong understanding of flammable chemicals and combustibility, as well as things like building foundations and load-bearing walls. While a bomb-maker can construct the explosives, the arsonist knows where to put them to cause the most damage.

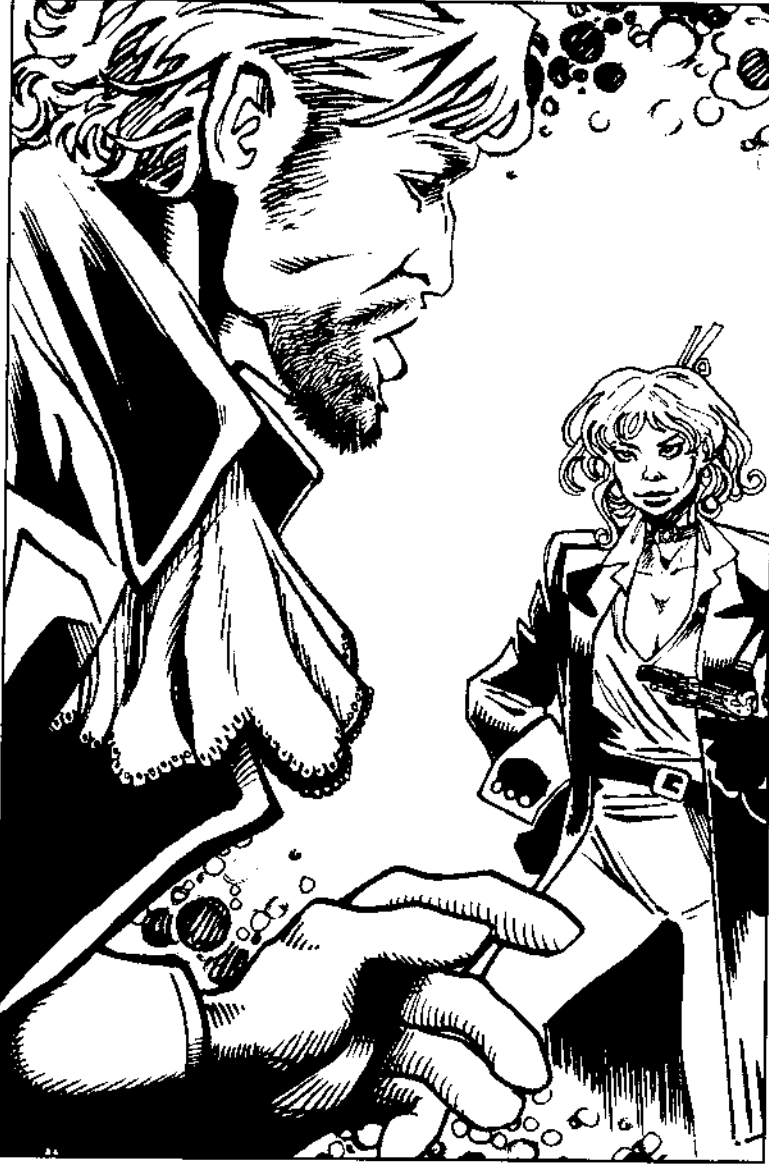
Basic Knacks

Mathematics: “Numbers define the world,” they say, and you are sure they are right. Measurements, navigation, knowing how far you have to run to beat the explosion, all require careful calculation. Isn’t it fortunate that you studied all those equations?

Street Navigation: Knowing the layout of a city is vital to choosing the right target. You can’t sneak gunpowder into the mayor’s townhouse if you have to stroll past the city guardhouse to do it. A successful roll grants you information on the layout of a particular locale, as determined by the GM. You suffer a penalty of -2 unkept dice when using this Knack in a city that you are unfamiliar with.

Advanced Knacks

Architecture: You understand the structure of buildings, from the barest mud huts to the grandest Vaticine cathedrals. A successful check allows you to locate foundations, stress points, and other vital information. It may even allow you to determine if there is a hidden room or passage in the building, though it cannot tell you how to access it.



accurate map of the area. Failure could leave a Free Thinker trapped in a corner as the guards close in...

Conceal: If you wish to get a pistol into a well-guarded ballroom, or plant a powder keg where it won't be found until it goes off, you need this Knack. Conceal is the ability to hide objects where they won't be easily found. To use this Knack, you must make a Simple Roll with it. The number generated becomes the TN for anyone nearby attempting to see through the concealment. Anyone specifically searching you or the area receives a Free Raise. Objects hidden in dark or hard-to-reach places add 5 to the TN.

Natural Philosophy: Natural Philosophy is the study of both chemistry and physics – sciences essential to building a proper bomb. You have an understanding of the (mostly) immutable laws that govern the physical world, such as gravity and inertia, and you can create compound chemicals such as acid, gunpowder, or weak steel (provided you can remember the formulas).

Bomb-making

Bomb-makers know how to manufacture grenades, gunpowder bombs, and other types of explosives – a dangerous and highly technical occupation. Creating a bomb takes the right chemicals, plenty of time, and steady nerves.

Basic Knacks

Blacksmith: You can forge simple metal utensils and tools for sale. This includes nails, hinges, horseshoes, and axe-heads, and also grenade casings, cannon barrels, and the like. While a smithy requires a large outlay of tools (and is hard to conceal), it is necessary for anyone wishing to construct proper explosives.

Cooper: You can make casks, barrels, and other wooden objects – quite handy for holding gunpowder. While not as watertight as metal casings, they do the job for much



less. They're also easier to build without drawing attention to yourself.

Mathematics: "Numbers define the world," they say, and you are sure they are right. Measurements, navigation, knowing how far you have to run to beat the explosion, all require careful calculation. Isn't it fortunate that you studied all those equations?

Advanced Knacks

Fuses: You know how cannon fuses work and can tell which ones burn faster than others. A fast-burning fuse stands out to you like a sore thumb, and you know how much to lengthen a fuse in order to achieve the desired effect. For every Rank you have in this Knack, you may add or subtract one Phase from the burn time of any fuse you have spent at least ten minutes modifying. With long-term fuses, you may add or subtract one minute per Rank from the burn time. The GM may penalize this skill as circumstances dictate (you can't lengthen a short fuse without a replacement, for example).

Natural Philosophy: Natural Philosophy is the study of both chemistry and physics — sciences essential to building a proper bomb. You have an understanding of the (mostly) immutable laws that govern the physical world, such as gravity and inertia, and you can create compound chemicals such as acid, gunpowder, or weak steel (provided you can remember the formulas).

Poison: Chemicals aren't safe, and a good bomb-maker knows which ones do what. Over time, he learns the properties of other chemicals, such as arsenic and mercury, which don't explode but can be lethal in the right hands. This Knack lets you know which poisons do what and how to handle them safely, as well as how to measure the proper amount to do the job. Rules for poisons can be found in the *GMs' Guide*, pages 184–186.

Fence

A fence is a middle man who can transfer stolen goods to a prospective buyer. The Liberation Guild often needs fences to move the art it steals, and legitimate thieves require their services as well. Most fences have legitimate occupations and rarely dabble in crime directly. A person with the Fence Skill receives the Appraising Knack as a Basic Knack.

Keep in mind that displaying a stolen object in Théah is much less risky than displaying it on Earth. The low population and lack of easy transportation means that very few people who see a work of art will be aware that it is stolen. This makes the fence's job much easier, and makes it less likely that he will be caught.

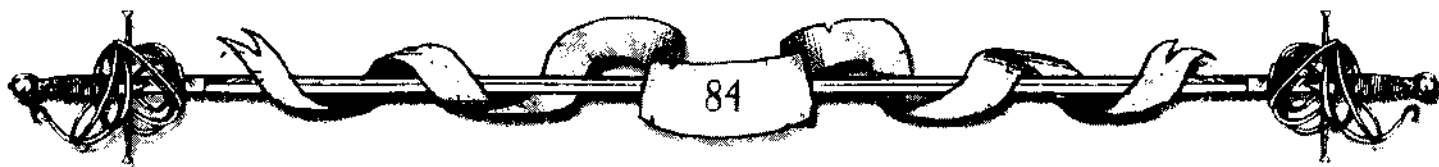
Basic Knacks

Appraising: Judging the approximate worth of an item is a vital part of a fence's occupation. Unless you buy low and sell high, you'll soon be out of business. The GM can give you a TN to determine an object's relative worth (rules are in the *GM's Guide*, page 137). How far you can undercut that worth is up to you.

Socializing: Knowing where to meet the right kind of people can be vitally important. You seem to know where every diplomat goes for beer, and what taverns are frequented by foreign collectors. Note that Underworld Lore covers the less reputable inhabitants of the city. Successful rolls with the Knack grant you contacts within the locale, as determined by the GM.

Advanced Knacks

Haggling: Being able to bargain is only the beginning for a person who wishes to become a successful fence. You must also know how to haggle — remaining aware of all the elements in a bargaining discussion and using them to your advantage. This is different from Shopping in that it doesn't allow you to find what you're looking for. It allows you to talk the buyer or seller into a good deal



once you've found it. Of course, you must be better than your opponent, for he's reading the same signs you are...

Shopping: You have dealt with many local merchants in the past and know who will give you the best bargains. When combined with haggling, you can get some truly good deals. You are at a penalty of -2 unkept dice when using this Knack in a city that you are unfamiliar with.

Underworld Lore: In every city, there's at least one place the city guard fears to tread. Muggers, assassins, and bandits make their homes there, and you know how to contact them. Successful rolls with this Knack grant you contacts within the locale, as determined by the GM. You are at a penalty of -2 unkept dice when using this Knack in a city you are unfamiliar with.

Forger

Many criminals can forge documents, but it takes a professional to truly excel at it. Trained forgers know how to locate specific documents, what kind of paper to use, and how to slip documents in and out of guarded locales. A person with the Forger Skill receives the Forgery Knack as a Basic Knack.

Basic Knacks

Calligrapher: You can write in a very formal, decorative hand, and illuminate the pages of a book. This Knack is only useful for those languages that you can read and write, or those which share a common alphabet with those you do (See the Languages chart in the Advantages section of the *Players' Guide*.)

Forgery: Signatures and wax seals are the only assurance a statesman has of the authenticity of a letter. As a forger, you have learned how to falsify these things. Rules for forgery can be found in the *GMs' Guide*, page 137.

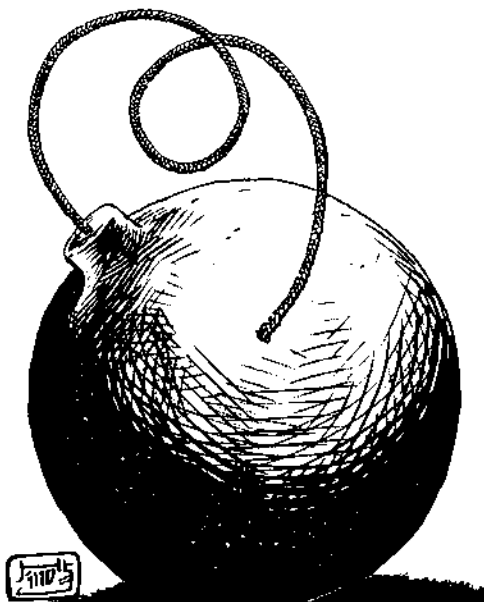
Paper Maker: You can make sturdy paper on which to write. You can also identify different types of paper and the places where they can be found.

Research: What is unknown can prove to be the most important part of any endeavor, and you know how to ferret out vital information. You have studied the ways that knowledge is gained – where to look and who to ask.

Advanced Knacks

Conceal: If you wish to get a pistol into a well-guarded ballroom, or slip a valuable book from its hiding place, you need this Knack. Conceal is the ability to hide objects where they won't be easily found. To use this Knack, you must make a Simple Roll with it. The number generated becomes the TN for anyone nearby attempting to see through the concealment. Anyone specifically searching you or the area receives a Free Raise. Objects hidden in dark or hard-to-reach places add 5 to the TN.

Cryptography: When messages must be sent in the most discreet manner possible, ciphers are often used to keep them from being read by those who aren't in the know. They usually follow a specific formula, which trained professionals can eventually decipher. This Knack makes you one of those trained professionals.



New Advantages

The Bargainers' Secret (4 Points, Rilasciare only)

Somewhere along the line, you learned the details of the Senators' Bargain and the creation of sorcery. Perhaps the discovery prompted you to seek out the Rilasciare, or perhaps you learned it after joining the society. In any case, you understand sorcery's terrible price. As a consequence, you can resist its effects a little better than most. Any sorcery directed specifically at you requires a 5 TN Raise to take effect (in addition to any other penalties).

Debater (2 points)

You were born to argue. Nothing thrills you more than a heated debate, and you love winning the way a general loves victory in battle. You receive one free raise to your Oratory Knack during Contested social rolls or any form of verbal argument.

Safehouse (3 points, Rilasciare only)

You know the location of a Rilasciare safehouse somewhere in Théah – either the headquarters of a local cell or a safe building owned by a sympathizer. You may use it to hide from the authorities, recuperate from injuries, or procure supplies if necessary. You and the GM should come up with details for the safehouse (location, size, etc.) and select the faction which controls it. Use the





"Creating a Free Thinker Cell" rules on page 80–83 to help you if you wish.

Uppmann's Coat (2 points, Rilasciare only)

You have acquired one of Hans Uppmann's ingenious coats, containing a hidden tool or special property of some sort. Alternatively, it could be a hat, a set of boots, or some other article of clothing; Uppmann's stock is quite diverse. Only one article of clothing per Hero is allowed: Uppmann has many clients and doesn't play favorites. All of his coats can be used to communicate via the coat code, regardless of their other features.

Choose one ability from the list below or roll a die:

1 — Picks. A set of lockpicks is concealed in the collar. The lockpicks require a simple Wits check at TN 35 to locate.

2 — Knives. The coat contains two small knives (1k1) hidden in spring-loaded triggers in the sleeve. Activating the trigger places the knives directly into the wearer's palms. It takes two Actions to reset each blade in the spring after they are used.

3 — Pistol. The coat holds a one-shot pistol hidden in a spring-loaded trigger in the sleeve. Activating the trigger places the pistol directly into the wearer's palm. Its range is ten yards, and it inflicts 4k3 dice of damage. The pistol is quite flimsy and can only be fired once before it is destroyed. Replacements cost 25 Guilders each.

4 — Secret Pockets. The coat contains two concealed pockets, unnoticeable to even the most thorough searches. Each pocket holds one item, pistol-sized or smaller (GM's discretion on what qualifies).

5 — Weighted. The bottom of the coat is weighted, making it an effective improvised weapon. The coat causes (soft) 0k2 damage; Heroes who have the Attack (Improvised Weapon) Knack or who belong to the Tout

Prés School (see the *Montaigne* sourcebook, pages 81–82) gain a Free Raise during attacks with this coat.

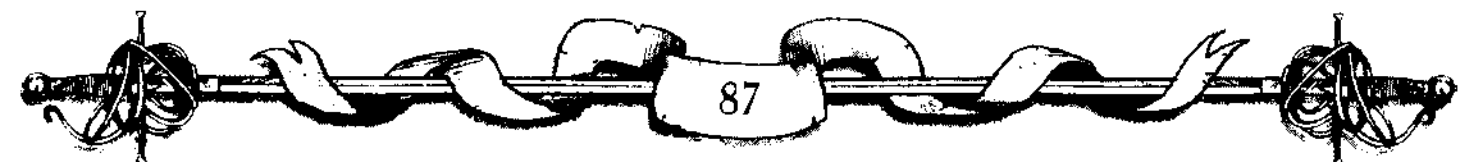
6 — Reversible. The coat is reversible, with a completely different exterior hidden beneath the lining. A wearer can turn it inside out and appear to be wearing a completely different outfit. If the Hero wishes, the reversed exterior can mimic a specific type of outfit, such as an army uniform or a priest's frock; a Hero would still need a hat and other accessories to complete the disguise. Such specific coats cannot use the coat code while they are reversed. It takes three Actions to reverse the coat; five while running.

7 — Secret Buttons. Three of the coat's buttons contain small amounts of gunpowder, which can be detonated by removing the button and giving it a sharp blow. The explosion causes 1 die of damage to anyone within three feet of it, and can be used to loosen the bar of a prison cell, blow out a window, etc. Alternatively, the buttons contain small amounts of poison, a wire garrote, or a hollow space to hide a brief message in. Rules for poison can be found on pages 184–186 of the *GMs' Guide*. Rules for garrotes can be found in the "New Equipment" section, page 90.

8 — Armor. A thin layer of chainmail is sewn into the lining, giving the wearer protection against blades, swords and pole-arms. The mail reduces the damage from any hand-held weapon by 2 Flesh Wounds per hit. Firearms ignore this penalty.

9 — Waterproof. The coat has been waterproofed using rare materials imported from Cathay. It can be inflated using a hidden tube to serve as a life preserver. Wearers can remain afloat for days if necessary. Only one person may use the coat at a time (it's a life preserver, not a raft).

0 — Roll twice on the table, ignoring this result hereafter.





New Backgrounds

The following backgrounds are available to Rilasciare members only.

Mole

You belong to another organization and spy on it for the Free Thinkers. It may be part of the local government or a faction of the Church. It may even be another secret society, although most of them are canny enough to keep spies out. You like your position and respect (for the most part) the people you work with, but in the end, your loyalty to the Free Thinkers means more. If called upon, you would betray them all to the Rilasciare. On the other hand, if they discover your true loyalties, you may end up on the end of a hangman's noose.

The number of points you spend in this Background determines how vital your position is and how dangerous it will be if your allegiance comes to light.

Sect Adversary

A fellow Free Thinker doesn't like you. Maybe he thinks you don't believe in the cause fervently enough, or suspects you will betray the Rilasciare to the authorities. Maybe you're just a Guerrilla and he's a Freethought. Whatever the reason, a long-distance rivalry has sprung up between the two of you. He will try to discredit and belittle you whenever he can — sniping at your arguments, ridiculing your plans, trying to upstage you at every opportunity. He's not strictly an enemy — he won't attack you outright, and you're in the same sect, after all. But there are days when you think it might be easier just to settle it all with pistols at dawn...

The number of points you spend on this Background determines how fierce the rival is and where he's located. One or two points means he's in another cell; three points means he's in yours.

Creating a Free Thinker Cell

Heroes who wish to create a Rilasciare cell may do so by investing up to 10 Hero Points (total) during character creation. GMs may also use these rules to create Rilasciare cells for use in their own campaigns; they may ignore the Hero Point requirements, of course. The players (or GM) should decide which faction the cell belongs to (if any) and what status the Heroes hold within it. Hero Points may be distributed as follows.

Size (Varies)

The size of the cell determines how effective it can be and what sort of manpower it can muster.

1 Point: Small

4 resident members
2 traveling members

3 Points: Medium

10 resident members
6 traveling members

5 Points: Large

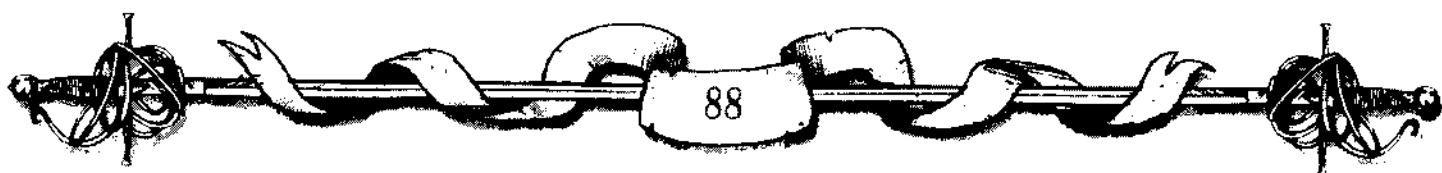
15 resident members
9 traveling members

Headquarters (Varies)

The cell's headquarters determines how much resources it has and how secure it is. Heroes will be unable to draw upon these resources unless they specifically use them to perform a mission for the Free Thinkers.

Destitute Cell: -2 Points

The cell has no resources and no ready headquarters. It meets behind bars, on street corners, and wherever else it can. It cannot take the "High Vantage Point," "Secret



Entrance", or "Secure Building" abilities. It receives 100 Guilders a year and gains one new member every three years. This disadvantage may not reduce the cost of the cell below 1 HP.

Average Cell: 0 Points

The cell has a permanent meeting place and reasonable access to resources. It receives 2,000 Guilders every year and gains one new member every two years.

Secure Cell: 1 Point

The cell is based in a well-established building and has several wealthy patrons. It receives 4,000 Guilders and gains one new member every year.

Successful Cell: 2 Points

The cell has been around for nearly a century, with an entrenched headquarters near a local hub. It receives 5,000 Guilders and gains three new members every year.

Leadership (Varies)

Leadership in the Rilasciare is a nebulous position, defined by a proven record and the consent of its members. Most cells have no formal head, and follow whom they trust rather than whom they're told. Those with an established leadership position arrive at it through a periodic vote or other pseudo-democratic means.

Leaders provide extra income and a level of security to their respective cells. A strong leader can keep a cell going for years, while a poor one will bring the city guards right to his doorstep.

Wanted: -1 Points

The leader is wanted by the local authorities and may not reveal himself in public. This disadvantage may be attached to any leader, regardless of status. It may not reduce the cost of the cell below 1 HP.

No Leader: 0 points

This cell has no discernable leader; it governs by committee, popular vote, or some other method. Recruitment occurs only through the actions of the Heroes or through other benefits of the cell (i.e. Headquarters). This trait cannot be taken with any other Leader trait.

Average Leader: 0 points

This cell gains an additional new member every two years.

Good Leader: 1 point

This cell gains the "Average Leader" benefit, and brings in an additional 500 Guilders a year in income.

Excellent Leader: 2 points

The cell brings in an additional 1,000 Guilders a year in income and attracts an additional new member each year.

High Vantage Point (1 Point)

The cell's headquarters has a bell tower, is perched atop a high hill, or has some other means of viewing the surrounding territory. All Stealth rolls made to approach the buildings have a +10 to their TN. If it fails, members within always have time to prepare for any interlopers: fleeing, arming themselves, even preparing a hasty ambush if they wish. A guard must be posted in order for this ability to work.

Library (1 Point)

The cell has an extensive library of forbidden books: secret histories, forgotten diaries, things the authorities don't wish to know. A Free Thinker who spends at least one month there gains an extra XP (usable only on Civil Knacks) at the end of each Story. Only one XP may be earned in this manner per story, no matter how many libraries the Thinker visits.



Plant (2 Points)

The cell has an informant in the local government who can change paperwork or warn members of danger if necessary. Treat this as a "Confidant" Connection, as detailed on page 159 of the *Players' Guide*. It is available to every member of the cell.

Secret Entrance (3 Points)

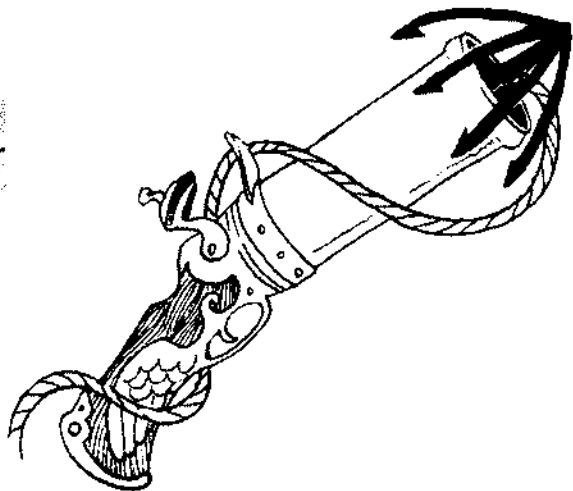
The cell's headquarters has an entrance below ground, behind a storefront, or otherwise unseen. Members may enter the building unseen or escape if the cell is compromised. In terms of the Chase Rules (see pages 169-172 of the *GMs' Guide*), it gives members an additional 4 Phase advantage over any pursuers.

Secure Building (5 Points)

The cell's headquarters has stone walls, stout locks and easily defensible positions. All Climbing and Lockpicking rolls are made at +10 to their TN.

Weapons Cache (2 Points)

The cell has a ready stockpile of rifles, pistols, ammunition, and explosives hidden somewhere nearby. Members can procure personal weapons for themselves if they need them, provide they return them when they are done. Only one weapon per person is allowed; Heroes can't expect to loot the arsenal at will.



New Equipment

Caltrops

Caltrops are small spiked balls which are scattered on paths in order to slow down pursuers (chase rules can be found in the *GMs' Guide*, page 169-172). It requires a Finesse + Athletics (Footwork) roll at TN 20 to successfully traverse five feet of ground covered by caltrops. Failure means the pursuer must slow to a walk, adding 2 markers to the chase. If the pursuer has at least one "1" on his kept dice, then he has stepped on a caltrop, causing 0k1 Wounds and forcing him to limp until healed (the chase is effectively over). GMs may adjust the TN up and down for mitigating factors (low lighting, whether the pursuer is watching the ground, etc.) as appropriate.

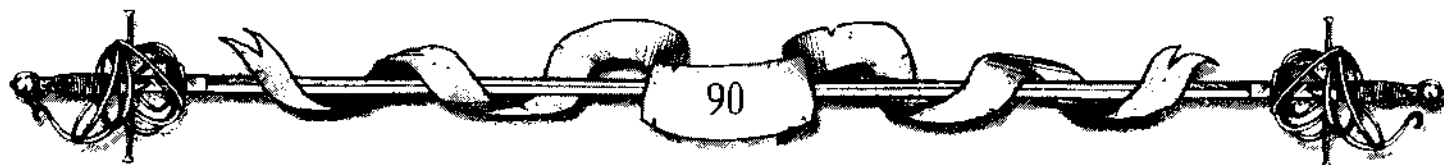
Caltrops cost 50 cents per bag; each bag can suitably cover five square feet.

Crossbow Bolts

The Rilasciare uses crossbows for long-distance assassinations. The bolts are quiet, have greater penetrating ability and accuracy than a pistol, and can be coated with poison if necessary. The sect has developed a special kind of bolt, made of metal, which increases the range even further. A Rilasciare bolt adds an additional 25 yards to the range and decreases the Long Range penalty to only -5 to hit (see the Weapons Table in the Combat section of the *Players' Guide*). Each bolt costs 1 Guilder to manufacture; the Rilasciare never allows anyone to carry more than two at any time.

Garrotte

A garrotte is a long piece of wire which wraps around a victim's throat in order to strangle him. Garrottes use Finesse + Dirty Fighting (Throat Strike); with a successful



attack, the victim cannot make a sound and begins to suffocate (use the Drowning rules, *Game Masters' Guide*, page 174). The victim is considered Grappled (per the Wrestling Knack, see *Players' Guide*, page 157) and can attempt to break free normally.

Grappling Gun

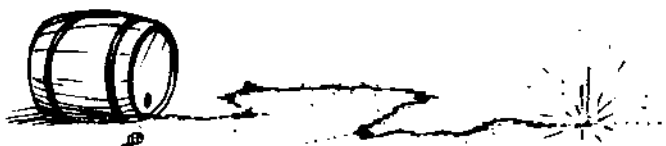
As discussed in the *Pirate Nations* book (page 101), a grappling gun fires a rope attached to a hook to a ship or building. Military vessels have used grappling guns for years, but the Liberation Guild has refined them for use in their elaborate thefts. Over time, they have spread to other Rilasciare factions. They have improved the basic design, giving it increased range and accuracy. A Rilasciare grappling gun has the following stats:

Damage	Range	Short	Long
1k1	80 feet	-5 to hit	-10 to hit

It takes 25 Actions to reload a Rilasciare grappling gun, just like an ordinary grappling gun. The Hero must make a successful Finesse + Attack (Firearms) check. The TN is 5 + Range Modifiers. These weapons cost 30 Guilders and are available only to Rilasciare members.

Stiletto

A stiletto is an assassin's knife, easily concealable, with a long, thin blade. For rules purposes, it is considered a knife and requires the Knife skill to use effectively. However, it causes 0k2 damage and gives you one extra unkept die on your Attack Roll when using it.



Rules for Explosives

As stated earlier, the Rilasciare makes copious use of explosives in its plots. Basic rules for explosions can be found in the *GMs' Guide*, page 174. These are some additional rules covering the construction of explosive devices, expanded rules on fuses, and how to handle the destruction of a building from a bomb.

Grenades

(Rules for grenades can be found in the *Pirate Nations* and *Montaigne* sourcebooks. Because they are so important to the Rilasciare, we've included them again here for your convenience.)

A grenade is simply a wrought-iron casing filled with gunpowder and lit by a short cannon fuse. When the fuse is lit, it burns down to the gunpowder, which explodes, turning the iron into shrapnel. Grenades cause a Rank 4 explosion (see *GMs' Guide*, page 174). Heroes caught in the blast who fail their Wound Check take one Dramatic Wound plus one for every 5 by which they failed the check. It takes one action to light the fuse and another Action to throw the grenade. Throwing a grenade uses the Throwing (Athlete) Knack. There's no special technique, and you don't need to be as accurate as you must with a knife or a spear. Range is 5 yards plus 2 x the thrower's Brawn. There's a -5 penalty to the TN at Long Range.

Unfortunately, quality control on cannon fuses is rather poor, and burn time varies wildly. Whenever anyone lights the fuse of a grenade, roll a die. The number rolled is the number of Phases before the grenade goes off. If its a "0", the grenade goes off immediately. Grenades always go off in a Phase before anything else happens, and anyone holding or lying on a grenade has no chance to avoid the explosion.



Long-term Fuses

Fuses used for larger explosions are usually longer – and require different rules – than grenade fuses. An ample length (fifteen feet or more) gives the demolitionist time to exit the area before the explosion occurs, so most *Rilasciare* members use long-term fuses whenever they can.

When a fifteen-foot long fuse is lit, roll a die. The result is the number of minutes it takes to explode. If a “0” is rolled, it goes off in thirty seconds. For every ten feet added to the fuse, add another minute to the burn time. The fuse must not loop upon itself or be touching any explosive to burn properly; a fuse looped upon itself cuts the burn time by the length of the loop (10 x one die roll seconds per foot). A fuse touching explosives along its length detonates them the instant the spark touches the explosives (GM’s discretion how long the the burn time is). The Free Thinkers have learned how to lay fuses carefully.

Building a Bomb

Bomb making in 1668 is a slow, unpredictable, and incredibly dangerous process requiring absolute concentration. Hair triggers and mercury switches are centuries off. What you have instead are volatile and unstable chemicals, triggered by fuses which cannot be accurately timed.

The simplest bomb is a grenade, or a cannon fuse stuck in a gunpowder keg, but such bombs lack finesse and are just as likely to kill the user as the intended target. Nevertheless, Heroes without the Bomb-making skill may need to take their chances. Consult the Long-term Fuse rules, above, and the Explosions chart on page 174 of the *GMs’ Guide* to handle these sorts of bombs.

In order to construct a proper bomb, you must determine how much explosive you need, what kind of deployment device you must use, how accurate your timer is, and so

on. A bomb requires three essential components: a trigger, a containment case, and some form of explosive. A Théan grenade, for example, has a fuse (the trigger), a metal shell (the casing), and a copious amount of gunpowder (the explosive). Canny bomb-makers can vary these elements to achieve different effects. The more complicated the bomb, the longer and more difficult it is to construct.

The Trigger

Fuse

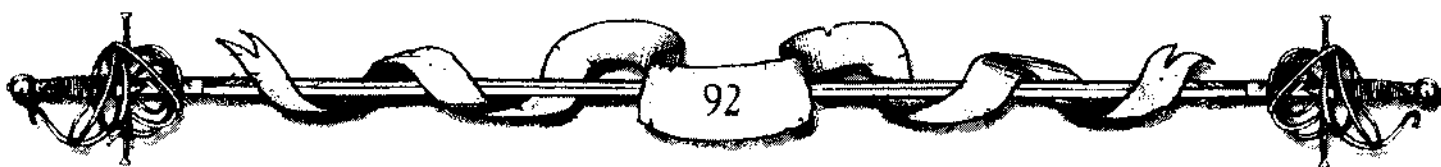
Fuses are the most common triggers, and their rules are detailed under “Long-term Fuses,” above. The time to create them is negligible.

Tripwire

A tripwire is a length of wire placed in a spot where someone is likely to tug it or trip across it. When tension is placed upon it, the bomb goes off. It takes one hour unmolested and a Finesse + Natural Philosophy check at TN 10 or Finesse + Mathematics at TN 15 to plant the tripwire properly. Conceal checks should be made to see if anyone notices the wires; you’d better have a good explanation if the guards come along. The GM should determine when exactly the tripwire is triggered.

Clock Timer

Clock timers are not actually clocks, but bags of sand, burning candles and other devices which involve some sort of timed delay. They are much more accurate than fuses, but require more time to set up and can be exceedingly tricky. It takes at least three hours unmolested and a Finesse + Natural Philosophy check at TN 20 or Finesse + Mathematics at TN 25 to set up a clock timer properly. If the check is successful, the bomb-maker can determine within ten minutes when the bomb will detonate. (Conceal checks should be made if someone might notice the device, however; GMs, use your best judgment.)





The Casing

The bomb casing needs to be tight enough to keep water and other elements out, and to keep the explosive from leaking. If the bomb-maker is creating the casing himself, he should make a Wits + Blacksmith or Cooper check depending on whether the casing is made of metal or wood. The TN is 15 for most casings, 20 for particularly complicated or elaborate casings. Failure reduces the Explosion Rating of the bomb by one for every 5 points by which the roll was failed. It takes half a day per

Explosion Rating (and the proper tools) to create a bomb casing.

Alternatively, the bomb maker can purchase a barrel or an empty cannon shell to use as a casing. The GM should make a secret Wits + Blacksmith or Cooper check at TN 10 to determine if a given object is suitable to use as a casing. Success means the casing functions normally. Failure means the bomb's Explosion Rating is reduced by 1 for every 5 points by which the roll failed. Gunpowder kegs do not require this roll; they succeed automatically.

Shrapnel

When a metal casing explodes, it creates shrapnel which can tear flesh to ribbons. Determine damage for those caught in the blast radius of a metal-encased bomb using the grenade rules, above. Wooden casings do not create shrapnel.

Experienced bomb-makers can add nails or metal shavings to create even more shrapnel – at the cost of explosive power. Each pound of shrapnel added to a bomb decreases its Explosion Rating by one, but adds one Dramatic Wound to those in its radius who fail their Wound Checks. Additional shrapnel can never reduce the Explosion Rating below 1 (you don't have a bomb at Explosion Rating 0; you have a barrel of nails).

The Explosive

The only effective form of explosive currently available in Théah is gunpowder. Other types of explosives, such as Crescent Fire and Syrneth creations, are extremely rare and hardly ever used. The amount of gunpowder determines the power and radius of the explosion. Consult page 174 of the *GMs' Guide* to determine how

much gunpowder you need to create the desired Explosion Rating.

Assembling the Bomb

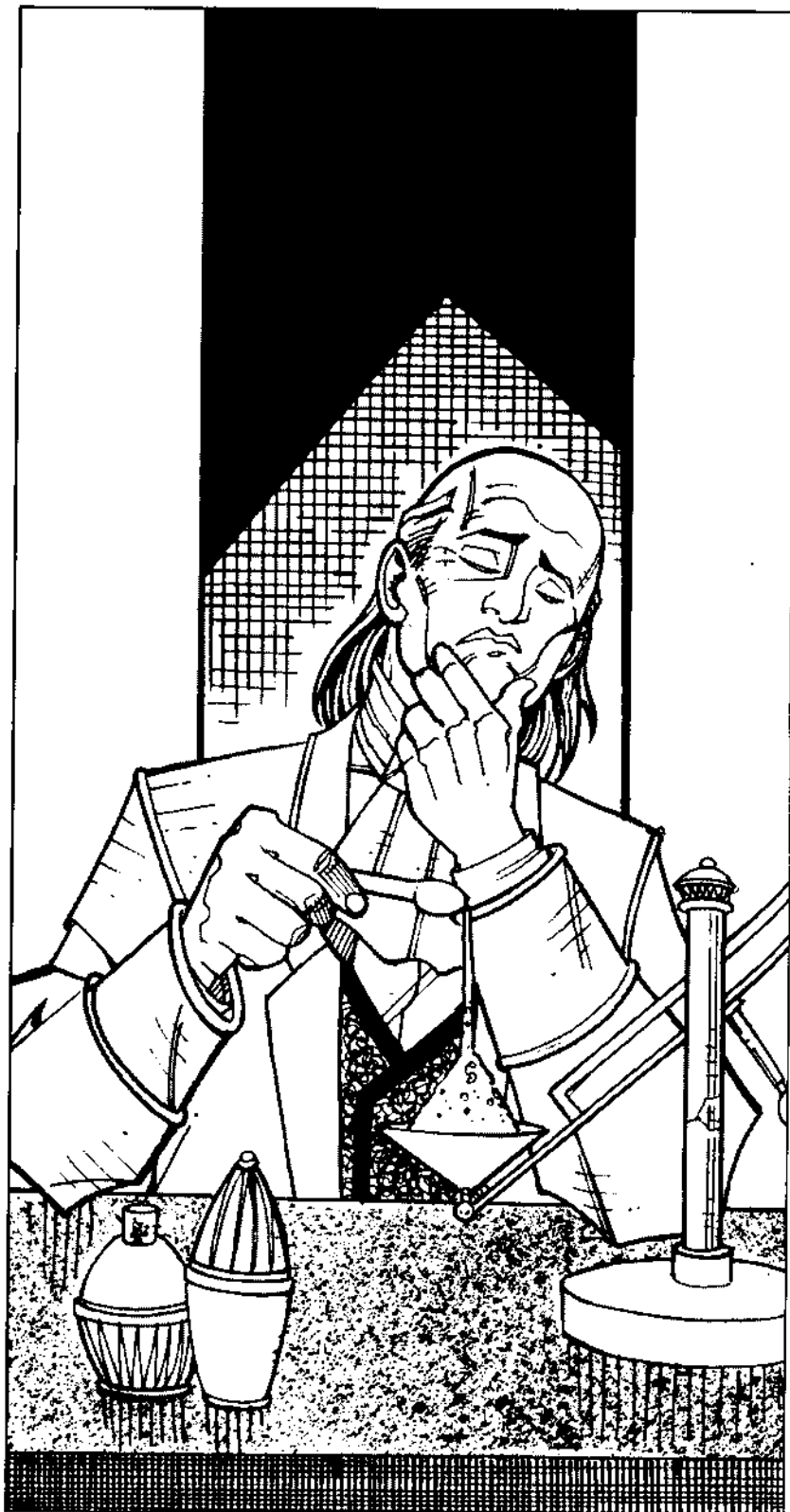
It takes three times the bomb's Explosion Rating in hours to assemble the device, over and above any time spent acquiring the materials. Successful assembly requires a Wits + Natural Philosophy check, TN 3 x the intended Explosion Rating, or a Wits + Mathematics check, TN 5 x the intended Explosion Rating.

Every 10 TN raise increases the Explosion Rating by one. You do not need extra gunpowder to make this increase, provided the roll succeeds.

The GM may assign penalties for difficult conditions or if the chemicals are particularly unstable. If the roll is particularly bad (GM's discretion), then the GM can spend a Drama Die to make the chemicals explode. The damage and radius are equal to half of the bomb's intended Explosion Rating (round down); again, the GM may adjust this number depending on the circumstances. Consult the chart on page 174 of the *GMs' Guide* for details.

Planting a Bomb

Planting a bomb is the toughest part of the process, and the Heroes should think carefully about how they intend to do it. Circumstances vary wildly. If they wish to detonate in a public place, they can probably put it in a disguised cart or some other vehicle. Buildings are much tougher, especially guarded ones. The Heroes have to sneak the bomb in, set up a trigger, and get out again, all without being seen. The scenario should be roleplayed out,



with challenges and obstacles appropriate to the setting. GMs should use their best judgment.

Destroying a Building

So what happens when the bomb goes off? Every building has a Demolition Rating, which matches the Explosions Chart on page 174 of the *GMs' Guide*. You must match the building's Demolition Rating with an equivalent Explosion Rating in order to bring it down.

The Architecture Knack can help by locating load-bearing walls, structural supports, and other vital points. A successful Wits + Architecture check, TN 10, reduces the building's Demolition Rating by 1. Each 5 TN raise further reduces the Demolition Rating by one. The arsonist must be familiar with the building's layout (studied maps or view the foundation) in order for this to work.

Demolition Ratings are as follows:

Rating	Building Type
3	peasant's hut
5	wood-frame town house
6	rural church
7	inn or large building
8	city wall (creates a 5-foot x 5-foot hole)
10	wooden fortress
11	stone guard tower
13	stone cathedral
15	marble building (courthouse, city hall)
17	stone fortress
25	<i>El Morro</i>

A bomb which cannot meet the Demolition Rating does not destroy the building, but still may damage it. It takes one week times the bomb's Explosion Rating to repair any damage it causes. During that time, the building is considered unsafe and cannot be used. Success, of course, mean the building is completely destroyed and will have to be rebuilt from scratch.

People Inside

Assuming the bomb goes off and has enough power to bring the building down, the people inside will suffer damage accordingly. Anyone in the building when the bomb goes off must make a Wound Check, TN equal to the Explosion Rating x 5. Failure means they suffer one Dramatic Wound, plus one for every 5 by which they failed the check, plus one for every story they're off the ground.

GMs, if they wish, may forego this system in favor of something more exciting. Heroes trapped within a collapsing building may have to race against time to escape, dodging falling beams and saving helpless victims in the process. If the situation dictates this sort of derring-do, by all means make the most of it. Explosion Ratings higher than the Demolition Rating will be more destructive, requiring speedier exits and causing more damage to the poor souls within. Play it by ear and use your best judgment.

Price List — Explosives

Item	Cost
Small gunpowder keg (175 shots)	15 Guilders
Medium gunpowder keg (225 shots)	20 Guilders
Large gunpowder keg (300 shots)	25 Guilders
Cannon fuse (50 feet)	2 Guilders
Cannon fuse (6 inches)	2 cents
Hollow bombshell	15 Guilders
Grenade	22 Guilders





Freemen



This section contains three essays designed to help you get a handle on the Rilasciare. Hopefully, players who wish to create Free Thinker Heroes can find some useful hints and advice within.

The Road to Hell

History is full of well-meaning individuals who only wished to make the world a better place. Today, we rank many of them among humanity's greatest monsters. Through their zealous dedication, their belief in their cause, and their desire to do anything to reach their goals, they ended up embodying the very evils they hoped to destroy. Good intentions have fermented noble revolutions, but have also started bloodbaths that claimed millions of lives. Humanity's two great extremes often have the same starting point: someone who who wants to make the world a better place.

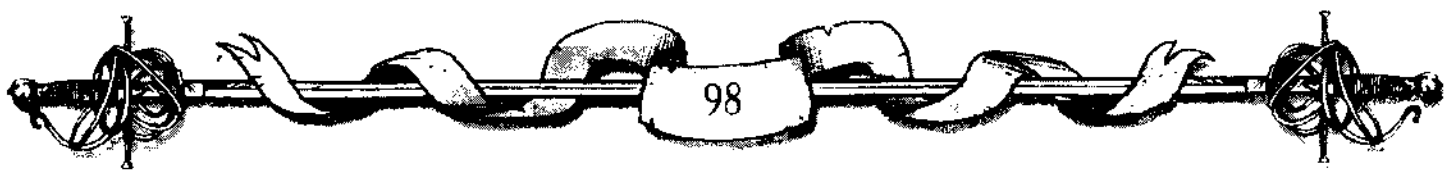
The Rilasciare walk this narrow path, a path trod by heroes and villains alike. They embody a disparate group of seemingly insurmountable contradictions. They wish an end to violence, but often use violent means to get there. They hate authority, but must depend upon strong leaders to dispose of it. They seek enlightenment even as they conceal knowledge from the public at large. It can be quite daunting to a *7th Sea* player. The Rilasciare are

a moral gray area in a world of black and white. How can you play Heroes such as these effectively?

Luckily, the Rilasciare have a head start on some of their real world counterparts. They are poised to avoid the arrogance and presumption that dooms so many other revolutionary movements. For one thing, they have little desire for temporal power. While they wish to change the existing structure, they don't necessarily want to replace it with their own. Instead, they hope to create a populace wise enough to follow those who truly lead, rather than charismatic charlatans or ruthless bullies. The smartest Free Thinkers refuse to accept any position of real authority, lest it destroy the values they fight for.

In addition, the Rilasciare can be a remarkably flexible organization, accepting all manner of thoughts and philosophies within its ranks. Bomb-throwing radicals rub shoulders with cloistered bookworms and grim witch hunters, all exhibiting different ideas about how to better society. Yet they all call themselves Free Thinkers and they all hold the same basic ideals at their core. Moreover, many of them have ordinary lives, with friends and families completely unrelated to their quest. Most have learned to juggle these elements quite admirably, keeping their ideals alive without being consumed by them.

The most important thing to remember about the Rilasciare is that they allow their own consciences to guide them. Every Free Thinker prides himself on... well, thinking freely. This doesn't mean that they have no morals, or can act as they please. Quite the opposite: most have a very strict ethical code. They simply don't allow anyone else to define it for them. It doesn't matter what society says, what the Vaticine says, what your friends say, or even what the Rilasciare says. You should know for *yourself* what is right, and how to act on it. If you can't – if you must depend on another to show you the way – then you empower artificial authority. Any Free Thinker worth his salt would die before allowing that.



It's a terrible responsibility, requiring difficult and often painful decisions. Do you kill a mass murderer in order to stop the violence he inflicts? Do you force peasants to learn to read, even if they wish to remain ignorant? Such dilemmas often force the Rilasciare nearer the razor's edge – nearer to the line that separates them from their foes. The strong ones know where to stop; they understand what would compromise their ethics and what wouldn't. If they don't, then they might cross that line... and become the very thing the battle against.

This places the sect in a very ambiguous area: a sea of variations in a world where right and wrong are clearly defined. To the Rilasciare, however, such moral ambiguity doesn't exist. After all, *they* know they're right. The rest of the world is blind, unable to see the nuances the Free Thinkers do. If it's more comfortable for them to see the Rilasciare in shades of gray, so be it. Sooner or later, they'll come around.

The Rilasciare use a strong moral frame to justify their activities. But there's a lot of room within that frame to find your own path. The Free Thinkers hope that such flexibility can transform Théan society; time will tell whether it's for the better or for the worse.

How to Play a Rilasciare

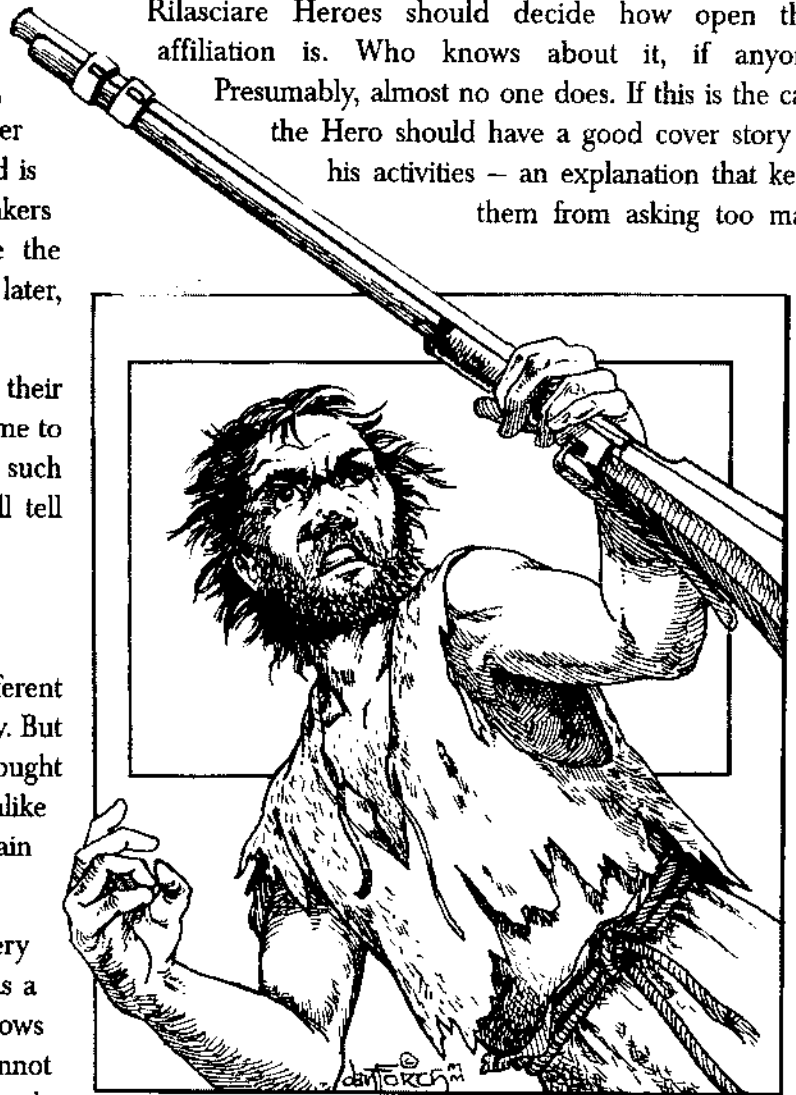
Playing a Rilasciare Hero shouldn't be all that different from playing a member of any other Secret Society. But it requires some extra finesse and a little forethought during Hero creation. The Free Thinkers are unlike any other group in Théah, and require a certain mind-set to play well.

The Rilasciare is a vocal society, yet also very anonymous. Because so many people see them as a threat, they must be very careful about who knows their true nature, but at the same time, they cannot remain anonymous without surrendering their goals.

So they walk a delicate line between the public and the secret. They don't have a public face like the Explorers or the Rose and Cross, yet their activities must reach a broad segment of the populace. They shout from the shadows, they argue from the faceless crowd. They plot cataclysmic acts of destruction while holding ordinary positions as clerks or barristers. No other sect (with the possible exception of Sophia's Daughters) maintains so precarious a balance, and no other sect must keep their true agenda so hidden.

Rilasciare Heroes should decide how open their affiliation is. Who knows about it, if anyone?

Presumably, almost no one does. If this is the case, the Hero should have a good cover story for his activities – an explanation that keeps them from asking too many

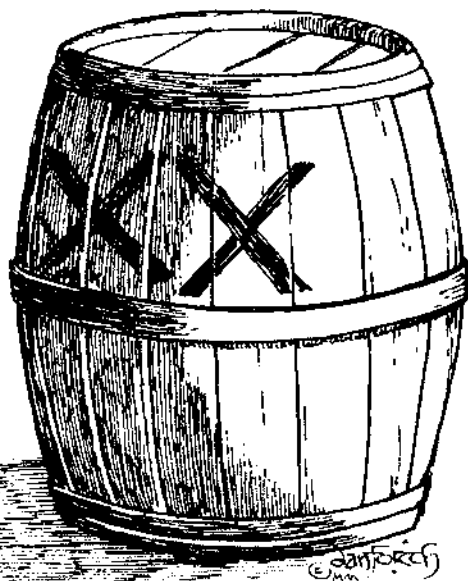




questions. Is he just “going down to the club” or does his normal job mask things? What’s his explanation when he returns home in the dead of night, or when they find barrels of gunpowder in the back of his wagon? Keep in mind that this applies to more than just NPCs: your fellow Heroes may get suspicious, too. You know what a conniving bunch of weasels your fellow gamers are...

If other characters – either Heroes or NPCs – know that your Hero’s a Free Thinker, mention it to the GM (and the respective players) and give them some ideas on how you want to handle it. Is your Hero’s husband understanding and supportive? Does his invalid mother curse his name whenever he walks out the door? Presumably, they sympathize enough to keep their mouths shut, or he would have been arrested by now. But perhaps there’s something more sinister at work. Maybe they don’t say anything because the Hero’s zealous cell-mates will pay them a visit. Or maybe they’re just keeping quiet until they can tell the authorities...

Regardless of what the world at large knows, there are two specific groups that a Free Thinker player needs to carefully consider: his fellow Heroes and the rest of the Rilasciare.



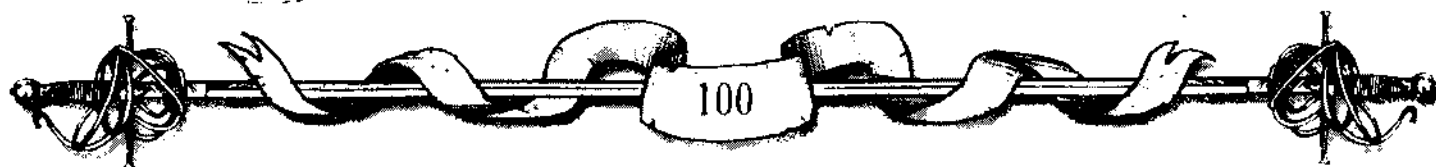
Your Relationship With The Party

In order for the gaming party to function well, you need to have a comfortable relationship with the other Heroes. Presumably, this means that you trust them and rely on them for assistance in dire circumstances. You don’t necessarily have to tell them that you’re a Free Thinker, but you do have to treat them with respect. They’re supposed to be your friends, after all, and while some of them may be disagreeable, in the end, you have to stick together.

This can be difficult if one of the others is a fate witch, or belongs to the noble elite. A little conflict can be healthy in a party, but you don’t want to be stuck with a potential mortal enemy. Depending on the circumstances, you may want to adjust your character profile to avoid any irreconcilable conflicts.

Luckily, the Rilasciare have a convenient stop-gap – *vero coraggio*. True courage can be found even in those who oppose the Free Thinker’s creed, and most Rilasciare respect those who exemplify it. If your companions are brave and noble, then your adventures with them can only aid the Free Thinkers. Even sorcerers and other nobles can display *vero coraggio*; the Rilasciare are flexible enough to make exception in their doctrine. After all, individuals are not the enemy (for the most part): social apparatus is. In that light, there’s no conflict at all between party loyalty and sect loyalty. If your companions are Heroes, then their actions automatically support the Rilasciare cause.

Of course, you might want to be less accommodating to your fellow Heroes – acting as a mole, perhaps, or even setting them up for betrayal – but those motivations will have to be defined as well. Why would you be willing to throw them over? Maybe they’re a bit too decadent, or perhaps they practice sorcery with too much zeal. Whatever the reason, you’re hiding your true allegiances from them, and if push comes to shove, may even turn your back on them.



We don't recommend creating this sort of Hero. While intriguing, it creates undue friction within the group and may cause problems away from the gaming table. If your group is willing to handle such Machiavellian elements, by all means go for it — but be prepared for the consequences if things go wrong.

Your Relationship With the Sect

After you've defined your place in the party, you should define your status with the Free Thinkers. The Rilasciare have a wide array of goals and a variety of methods to accomplish them, which makes it easy to fit your hero somewhere within them. All that matters is a dedication to the sect's basic ideals (see page 21) and a willingness to fight for them.

Decide which faction works best for your Hero and use that to help develop his or her personality. If he's freewheeling, the Freeman League or Liberationists probably work best. If he's a man of action, he's probably a Guerrilla. Or maybe you don't belong to any one single faction. Maybe you serve the Rilasciare cause in your own way, working towards enlightenment with your own set of rules. Once you've determined where you stand, you and your GM can develop connections with the rest of the sect, decide who likes and dislikes you, and figure out how much clout your word carries.

The biggest problem for any Rilasciare player is balancing the sect's activities with the "regular" party-based adventures. You can't be a Free Thinker all the time, and there will always be other things going on. Be prepared to let your affiliation lie fallow every now and then. Focus on the party's other goals; allow yourself to develop different skills and abilities. You can still maintain your Free Thinker principles in these circumstances, even if they don't directly involve the sect. Besides making your Hero more well-rounded, this keeps the Rilasciare from becoming too commonplace. Sooner or later, the sect will call on you again, and you'll have a chance to serve your secret society as intended.

Most Rilasciare characters belong to a cell. However, Heroes travel quite a bit, which makes their affiliation with a particular cell awkward in the extreme. The easy solution is to not belong to a cell — a fair number of Free Thinkers don't — but some players may wish to be part of a cohesive Rilasciare unit. This may cause a conflict, as the Hero must divide his time between the party and the cell. In order to keep the Hero in the picture, the other Heroes will have to start participating in cell activities, which they probably won't enjoy (they're not Free Thinkers, after all).

Luckily, the Rilasciare's structure permits a great deal of flexibility on this issue. Certain cell members travel from their home cities, pursuing sect business, procuring supplies, or conferring with other cells. They often perform vital services for their cell, and while they can't participate in every operation, they still pull their weight. Heroes who fall into this category can travel with their companions during their "mundane" lives, yet still belong to a particular cell and help them further the Rilasciare's goals. If this is the case, you should develop your own reasons for holding your position, and explain how you can belong to given cell even when you aren't always there. Below is a list of suggestions for each faction to give you some ideas:

Couriers

The Couriers are an ideal solution to the problem. They travel a great deal as part of their duties and can easily fit into any far-flung campaign. A Courier Hero could journey with his adventuring companions wherever fortune takes them — with a brief intermission to rendezvous with the local cell leaders, of course. Nolan Chaucer can be demanding, but has given leeway to certain favored protégés. If you report to him before setting out for some remote corner of the world, he could probably give you a few letters that need to be delivered.



Freeman League

The Freeman League is always on the lookout for new places to spread discord. They can't conduct a prank until they have a target, and suitable targets take time to discover. Many of their schemes require hard-to-get supplies, and wanted Freemen always need a far-away safehouse in case the authorities get too close.

Freeman Heroes are expected to keep tabs on local politics when they travel, and note potential targets in need of the Rilasciare's attention. They may be sent to procure particular pieces of equipment, or to watch a particular location in anticipation of a large operation. A Freeman Hero who spots a target far away from his home cell may be asked to coordinate an appropriate prank against him.

Freethought Society

The Freethought Society is the most quiet and easygoing faction in the Rilasciare. Many Society members belong to the leisure class and they often travel on legitimate business, so it's not unusual for members to miss meetings. The Society has more spies than any other faction, as wayward members usually try to acquire new contacts and keep tabs on the old ones. A Freethought Hero could be a spy, charged with finding out everything he can about the areas he travels to. Or he could be a middleman, in contact with several spies with whom he meets with regularly. Either way, the Society benefits from the vital information he supplies.

Guerrilla Alliance

The Guerrillas need *agents provocateur* in new cities — people willing to fight the ruling power by any means necessary. Traveling Guerrillas keep an eye out for new recruits and sometimes encourage others to join them. Small acts of rebellion are not uncommon either: breaking prisoners out of local jails, or destroying records in nearby civic halls. By the time authorities close in, the Hero will already be on his way to another city. Guerrilla

Heroes might also be involved in arms smuggling, purchasing gunpowder, or other such skulduggery.

Liberation Guild

Liberationists go anywhere where there's gold. The Nimble Fingers are scattered across Théah in pursuit of the perfect theft, and while the Burglar's Union sticks mainly to Vodacce, they still have agents searching other areas of the continent. Liberationist Heroes have plenty of opportunities to learn new security measures, spot valuable items ripe for plucking, or even pull off a few unplanned thefts. Their unfortunate companions may be asked to participate in this mischief, or worse: spring their friend from prison when he's caught.

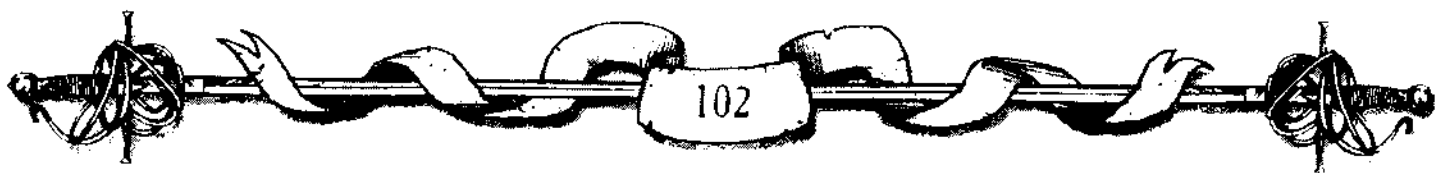
Oppositionists

The Oppositionists fight sorcery across Théah, and cannot limit themselves to a single area. They are constantly tracking new sorcery lines, determining which families carry the blood, and hunting down those who have gone too far. "Agents in the field" are quite common in their ranks — watching for the Bargainers' Gifts and marking those who display them. Some move within the courts, attempting to breed down the lines through political marriages or other means. A few have even traveled to the Syrneath ruins, searching for clues that may help them defeat the Bargainers.

And of course, Free Thinker Heroes who don't belong to any faction can come and go as they like. They serve the Rilasciare as they see fit, which can easily entail acts of heroism alongside their companions. As long as they hold true to the Free Thinker philosophy (and maintain occasional contact with the rest of the sect), they may act as they see fit.

Playing Nice With Your Friends

What about the other Heroes, the members of the party who don't belong to the Free Thinkers? Because of their revolutionary agenda, it might seem difficult for a



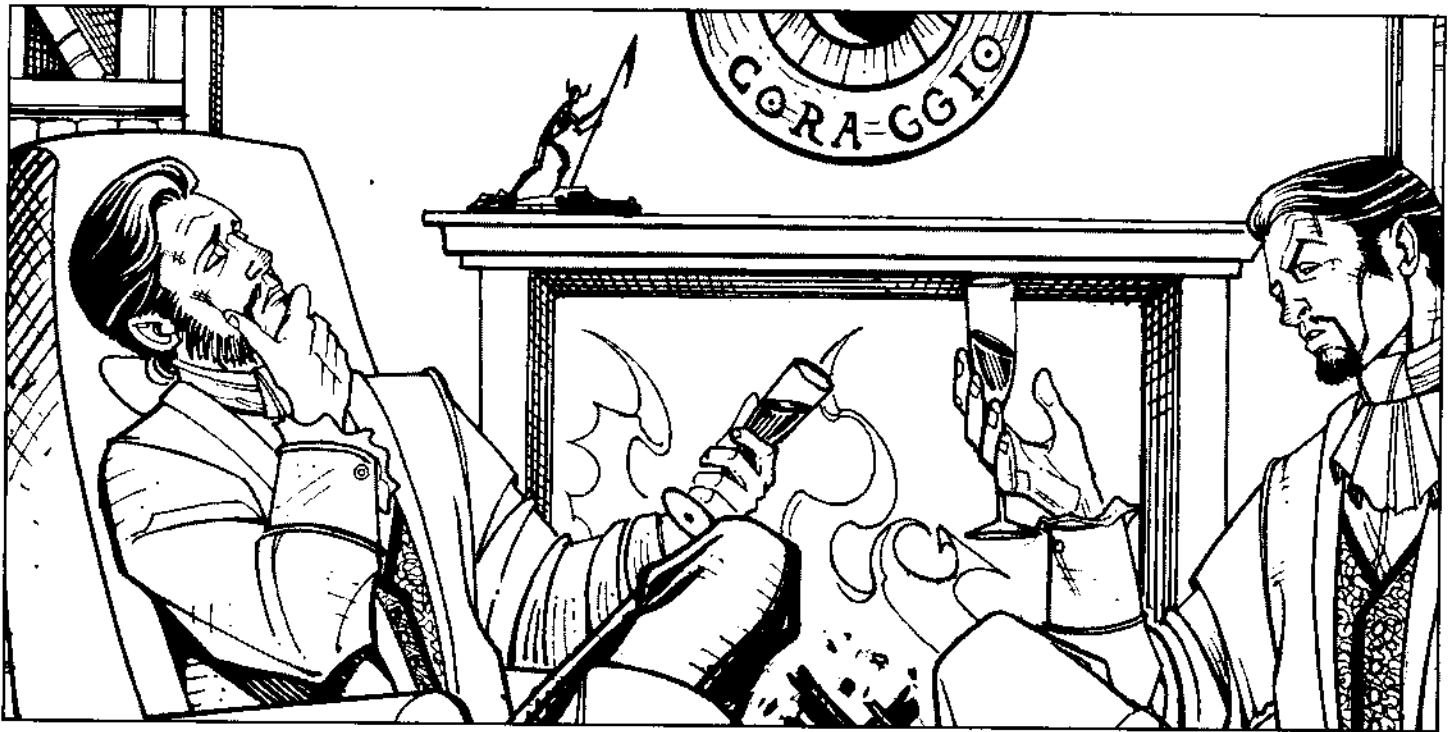
Rilasciare Hero to be accepted. It's actually not hard at all. Every Hero has differences which separate them from their fellows, be they nationalities, skills or other secret societies. These differences broaden the party's pool of skills, allowing the group to function more efficiently in dire situations. Assuming you know about your friend's affiliation, you simply need to treat it as you would any other skill — as a compliment to the party.

The best practitioner of this policy is Captain Allende from the Brotherhood of the Coast. When he was Prince of Castille, he associated with members of Freeman League and even shared some of their beliefs. But he didn't join them, and at the end of the day, pursued his own goals. He respects his Rilasciare friends and helps them on occasion; in exchange, they help him when he needs extra supplies or a well-timed diversion. Non-Rilasciare Heroes should look upon their Free Thinker allies in much the same way: maybe they have some crazy ideas, but they're good in a tight situation and at least their hearts are in the right place. (See the *GM's*

Guide, page 118, or the *Pirate Nations* sourcebook for more information on Allende.)

You should adopt the same policy when playing a Hero with a friend in the Free Thinkers. Look for common goals and ways that you can work together. You don't have to fight him at every turn just because your Hero doesn't like the Rilasciare, and cooperating with the Free Thinkers doesn't mean you're their pawn. If you disapprove of some of their actions, choose the place and time to make your stand. If you dislike being deceived, insist that your Free Thinker companion play straight with you. Remember: your Hero may have secrets of his own, and he'd want his friend to respect them.

By keeping your own goals intact, yet looking for places where they converge with your allies', you can maintain group harmony without feeling torn. The Free Thinkers aren't the easiest group to get along with, but they have some unique advantages and their loyalty can never be bought. For all their difficulties, they're companions well worth having.

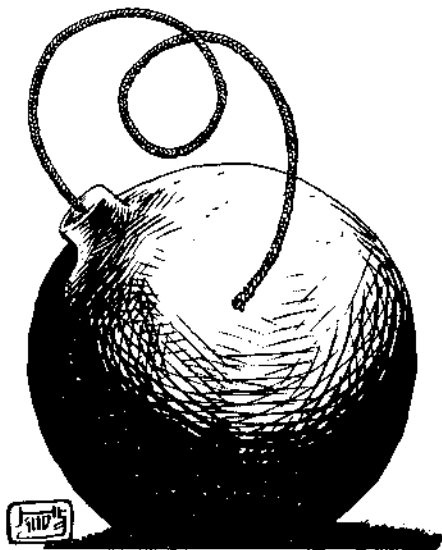




This section contains sensitive information that players should not be privy to. Ignoring this warning can spoil countless surprises during the game. If you're not a GM, proceed at your own risk.

NPC Secrets

This section contains secrets about the characters in the **Hero** chapter which players ought not to see. All characters presented here have the "Membership: Rilasciare" Advantage.



Nolan Chaucer: Hero



Brawn: 2
Finesse: 2
Wits: 5
Resolve: 4
Panache: 3
Reputation: 20
Background: None
Arcana: Focused

Advantages: Castille (R/W), Connections, Eisen (R/W), Linguist, Montaigne (R/W), Safehouse (all), Théan (R/W), The Bargainers' Secret, University, Ussura (R/W), Vendel (R/W), Vodacce (R/W)

Commander: Leadership 4, Logistics 6, Strategy 2, Tactics 2

Firearms: Attack 1, Reload 1

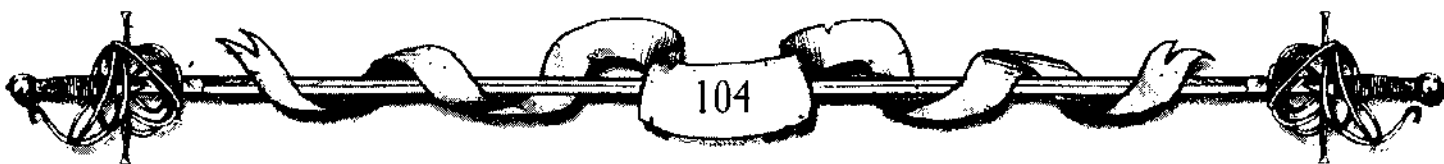
Forger: Calligrapher 5, Cryptography 5, Forgery 5, Paper Maker 3, Research 2

Rider: Mounting 2, Ride 2

Scholar: History 3, Mathematics 1, Philosophy 3, Research 4

Streetwise: Socializing 2, Street Navigation 4, Underworld Lore 2

Recently, Nolan has begun to suspect what only a tiny handful of people know – the existence of a sinister, ultra-powerful group bent on world domination. He doesn't know its name, but he's aware of its most prominent members. What he's heard scares him to death. He's begun quietly gathering evidence in an effort to prove the group's existence, but he has to move carefully, lest they become aware of him. Two men in his employ have already disappeared while searching for facts; he doesn't intend to lose any more. So he moves slowly and methodically, taking care to remain absolutely invisible. When he has what he needs, he will call a Secret Court against every member of this secretive group... and bring it crashing to the ground.



Benoit Jantot du Toille: Hero



Brawn: 2
Finesse: 4
Wits: 3
Resolve: 2
Panache: 4
Reputation: 35
Background: None
Arcana: None

Advantages: Avalon (R/W), Montaigne (R/W), Noble, Patron (Nolan Chaucer), Vendel (R/W)

Porté (Journeyman): Attunement 4, Blooding 4, Bring 5, Pocket 5, Walk 4

Courtier: Dancing 3, Etiquette 3, Fashion 2, Oratory 4

Fencing: Attack 3, Parry 4

Firearms: Attack 2

Sailor: Balance 2, Climbing 1, Knotwork 1, Navigation 3, Rigging 1

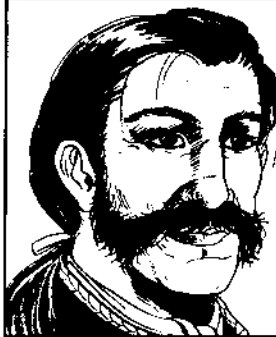
Streetwise: Shopping 2, Socializing 4, Street Navigation 2

Benoit is the only sorcerer in the Rilasciare: a Porté mage charged with delivering messages of utmost importance. He keeps his gift hidden from all; only Nolan and Ryan Chaucer know that he belongs to the Free Thinkers. Nolan considers Porté vital to moving important information quickly, even though the sect as a whole is dedicated to its destruction. Should the Free Thinkers learn that the Couriers employ a sorcerer, the breach of trust could destroy the organization. Benoit respects the Rilasciare's opposition to sorcery and wants to help their cause. They won't wipe Porté out in his lifetime, and he has no intention of teaching his children the dark art.

Benoit realizes how dangerous the situation is, and acts with utmost caution. He powders his hands to hide their blood-red color and has worked hard to disguise his Montaigne accent. He never gives his name to other Rilasciare, and tries not to speak if he can help it; all correspondence he transports has its date removed. So

far, no one suspects that a sorcerer is working for the Couriers. He'd just as soon keep it that way.

Willem Karls: Hero



Brawn: 2
Finesse: 2
Wits: 5
Resolve: 2
Panache: 3
Reputation: 11
Background: None
Arcana: Worldly

Advantages: Linguist, University

Athletics: Climbing 2, Footwork 4, Sprinting 3, Throwing 1

Donovan (Apprentice): Bind (Buckler) 1, Disarm (Fencing) 1, Exploit Weakness (Donovan) 1, Riposte 1

Fencing: Attack (Fencing) 2, Parry (Fencing) 2

Sailor: Balance 1, Climbing 1, Knotwork 1, Rigging 1

Spy: Conceal 3, Cryptography 3, Disguise 3, Shadowing 2, Stealth 2

Streetwise: Scrounging 2, Socializing 1, Street Navigation 3, Underworld Lore 3

Karls' notebook contains a large number of secrets which should not be written down: the names of contacts, safehouse locations, etc. It's encrypted, of course, and it doesn't threaten the entire Rilasciare. But should someone crack the code, they could do a lot of damage to several important cells. Karls is prepared to destroy the book rather than let it fall into the wrong hands, but he doesn't entirely understand the threat it represents. If he did, he'd burn it on the spot.



Eduardo de Benedictus: Hero

Brawn: 3
Finesse: 3
Wits: 3
Resolve: 5
Panache: 2
Reputation: 30
Background: None
Arcana: Judgmental

Advantages: Indomitable Will, Montaigne (R/W), Noble, University, Uppmann's Coat, Théan (R/W), Vodacce (R/W)

Ambrogia (Journeyman): Exploit Weakness 4, Feint (Fencing) 5, Riposte (Fencing) 4

Athlete: Climbing 2, Footwork 3, Sprinting 2, Swimming 2, Throwing 1

Commander: Leadership 2, Logistics 3, Strategy 1, Tactics 2

Criminal: Ambush 3, Gambling 1, Lockpicking 4, Quack 1, Shadowing 3, Stealth 2

Dirty Fighting: Attack 3, Eye-gouge 2, Parry (Improvised Weapon) 2

Fencing: Attack 4, Parry 3

Knife: Attack 3, Parry 4

Scholar: History 3, Law 3, Mathematics 2, Philosophy 3, Research 3

Vipera ex Morsi (Apprentice): Beat (Knife) 2, Corps-à-Corps (Knife) 2, Lunge (Knife) 3

Eduardo was devastated by his father's rejection and has never recovered. He feels that his radical beliefs caused the breach, and while he credits his ethics for saving him from a life of corruption, the pain of the rift they caused has never died. He hides it behind ice and steel, slowly cutting himself off from all human emotions. He clings to his ethics as a guideline, which helps somewhat. But the more time goes on, the greater his detachment becomes. Eventually, he may be unable to relate to other human beings at all.

Hans Uppmann: Hero

Brawn: 1
Finesse: 4
Wits: 4
Resolve: 2
Panache: 4
Reputation: 60
Background: None
Arcana: Creative

Advantages: Connections (4), Keen Senses, Left-handed, Patron (the Rilasciare; 4 points)

Merchant: Appraising 4, Hagglng 3, Seamstress 2, Spinner 3, Tailor 5, Weaver 1

Spy: Bribery 3, Conceal 4, Shadowing 3, Sincerity 4

While he nominally wishes to keep Eisen divided, Hans has a soft spot for his old employer, the thoroughly mad Georg Hainzl. While few people expect Georg to emerge as the new Imperator, Hans has made quiet preparations for that eventuality. Should another Eisenfürsten move against Hainzl, the little tailor plans to call some old favors amongst the Eisen mercenaries — and give his former employer an instant fighting force.

Hubert Michel du Gloyure: Hero

Brawn: 2
Finesse: 4
Wits: 2
Resolve: 2
Panache: 4
Reputation: 75
Background: None
Arcana: Proud

Advantages: Connections (4), Inheritance, Montaigne (R/W) Noble, Patron (8 points), University

Artist: Drawing 5, Sculpting 2, Writing 4

Courtier: Dancing 2, Diplomacy 2, Etiquette 3, Fashion 3, Oratory 2

Fencing: Attack 1, Parry 1

Scholar: History 2, Mathematics 2, Philosophy 3, Research 1

In addition to his painting, Hubert has written a play — *The Birdcage Revolt* — which was designed to be performed out in the open, amid a public throng. A few Society members have read it, but they don't dare perform it: the actors could be arrested for treason. Hubert hopes that one day — perhaps when *l'Empereur* finally dies — they can produce *The Birdcage Revolt* with the pageantry it deserves. Then his revolutionary art will truly have an effect.

Arnaud Maximilien du Charouse: Hero



Brawn: 2
Finesse: 2
Wits: 2
Resolve: 5
Panache: 2
Reputation: 12
Background: None
Arcana: Hot-headed

Advantages: Indomitable Will, Montaigne (R/W), Théan (R/W), University, Vendel (R/W), Vodacce (R/W)

Artist: Writing 5

Courtier: Dancing 1, Etiquette 2, Fashion 2, Oratory 1, Politics 3, Scheming 2

Scholar: History 4, Law 4, Mathematics 4, Natural Philosophy 3, Philosophy 5, Research 5, Theology 2

Arnaud has little to hide at the moment. To him, the *Rilasciare* is nothing more than a progressive social club with some nice perks. He truly believes in the Free Thinker cause, however: stronger and more fervently than even the most fanatic Guerrilla. He simply doesn't have the initiative to plan anything on his own. For now, he stays quiet, a minor member of an overly-deliberative

cell. But as tensions rise in Montaigne, this sallow lawyer may find opportunities he never dreamed of.

Boris Nicholaievich Sokolov: Hero



Brawn: 4
Finesse: 2
Wits: 2
Resolve: 2
Panache: 2
Reputation: 45
Background: Fear
Arcana: None

Advantages: Able Drinker, Connections (2), Debater, Eisen (R/W), Large, Ussuran (R/W)

Courtier: Dancing 1, Etiquette 2, Fashion 1, Oratory 6

Firearms: Attack 3, Reload 1

Polearm: Attack 2, Parry 2, Set Defense 1

Scholar: Astronomy 3, History 4, Mathematics 2, Natural Philosophy 2, Philosophy 4, Research 3

Boris fears Matushka as he fears no other living thing. As a boy, stories of the Little Grandmother kept him sleepless for weeks. She was everywhere and saw everything; he couldn't so much as breathe without her knowing it. While the *Rilasciare* philosophy offered him some hope against her, he doubts how much it can truly do. What good is enlightenment against a creature who can control the land itself?

To that end, he has tried to assuage the more outspoken Free Thinkers, hoping that they don't draw her ire. In the process, he has struck a tenuous balance between the Free Thinkers' beliefs and terrified acknowledgement of Matushka's true strengths. He scoffs at the boyars and their supposed superiority, and hopes that they will someday realize how small they truly are. Eventually, he knows he must choose between the *Rilasciare* and the Grandmother. He prays for the strength to make the right decision.



Vincent: Scoundrel



Brawn: 3
Finesse: 2
Wits: 2
Resolve: 5
Panache: 3
Reputation: -15
Background: Hunted
Arcana: Courageous

Advantages: Combat Reflexes, Keen Senses, Safehouse, Scoundrel, Uppmann's Coat

Vipera ex Morsis (Master): Beat (Knife) 5, Corps-à-corps (Knife) 5, Exploit Weakness (*Vipera ex Morsis*) 5, Lunge (Knife) 5

Arson: Architecture 4, Conceal 4, Mathematics 1, Natural Philosophy 4, Street Navigation 1

Athlete: Climbing 3, Footwork 3, Leaping 2, Sprinting 2, Throwing 2

Commander: Incitation 3, Leadership 4, Strategy 4, Tactics 4

Criminal: Gambling 1, Quack 1, Shadowing 4, Stealth 5

Dirty Fighting: Attack (Dirty Fighting) 4, Throat Strike 3, Throw (Improvised Weapon) 2

Firearms: Attack 3

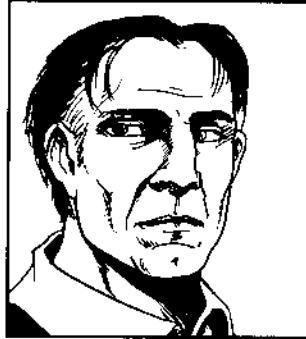
Knife: Attack 3, Parry 2

Streetwise: Socializing 4, Street Navigation 4, Scrounging 2, Underworld Lore 4

Vincent wants nothing to do with the rest of the Rilasciare, whom he views as decadent half-hearted swine. But he needs their support in order to stay solvent; without money and supplies, his cell would quickly be hunted down. He also believes that they can be useful when Kirk has fallen and the revolution needs to spread. so he plays the game, adhering to their loose rules and paying lip service to the concerns of other cells. Should he ever feel that the Rilasciare has outlived its usefulness, he won't hesitate to leave – and he might take the rest of the Guerrilla Alliance with him.

Vincent's coat has knives hidden in the sleeves (see "Uppmann's Coat," Chapter 3).

Gerard Trainer: Villain



Brawn: 3
Finesse: 2
Wits: 3
Resolve: 4
Panache: 2
Reputation: -40
Background: Nemesis
Arcana: Stubborn

Advantages: Avalon (R/W), Commission, Combat Reflexes, Indomitable Will

Buckler: Parry (Buckler) 3

Commander: Ambush 4, Leadership 4, Logistics 2, Strategy 3, Tactics 3

Donovan (Journeyman): Bind (Buckler) 4, Disarm (Fencing) 4, Exploit Weakness (Donovan) 4, Riposte (Fencing) 5

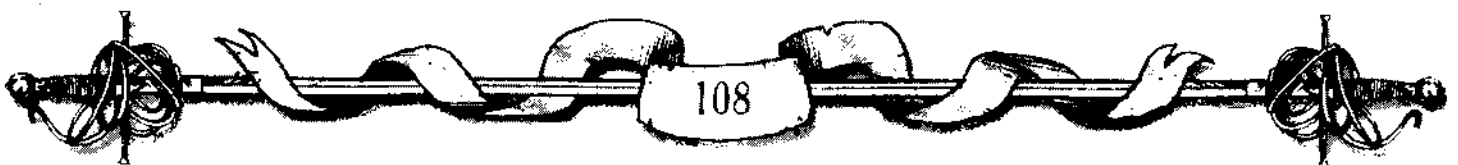
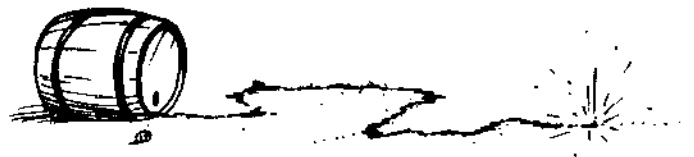
Fencing: Attack 4, Parry 2

Firearms: Attack 3, Reload 2

Rider: Ride 2

Streetwise: Scrounging 4, Socializing 1, Street Navigation 4

Gerard has a few secrets from his fellow cell-mates. He had to do some unpleasant things during the war, things he won't talk about but has never tried to hide. He sees Bors MacAllister as his personal nemesis, and has vowed to kill the Highlander with his own two hands. While that isn't likely, he's always on the lookout for an opportunity. When the time is right, he'll bring Elaine toppling to the ground... then cut the throat of her Highland bloodhound in front of her.



Gabriél Menendez de Altamira: Hero



Brawn: 2
Finesse: 5
Wits: 4
Resolve: 2
Panache: 4
Reputation: 62
Background: Obligation
Arcana: Fortunate

Advantages: Castillian Education, Castillian (R/W), Montaigne, Safe House, Théan (R/W), The Bargainers' Secret, Uppmann's Coat

Aldana (Apprentice): Exploit Weakness (Aldana) 2, Feint (Fencing) 4, Riposte (Fencing) 3, Tagging (Fencing) 4

Athlete: Break Fall 3, Climbing 4, Footwork 4, Leaping 1, Sprinting 2, Swinging 3, Throwing 1

Courtier: Dancing 3, Etiquette 1, Fashion 2, Oratory 1, Seduction 2, Sincerity 3

Criminal: Gambling 2, Lockpicking 6, Pickpocket 4, Quack 1, Shadowing 4, Stealth 5

Fencing: Attack 1, Parry 3

Scholar: History 1, Mathematics 2, Philosophy 1, Research

Streetwise: Socializing 3, Street Navigation 3

Despite his affiliation with the Rilasciare, Gabriél remains a patriot at heart. He cherishes his native land above the Free Thinkers' humanism, and his heart bleeds at what the invading Montaigne has done to it. His family's harsh words about his lack of patriotism sting him deeply, and he longs to find them in order to fully explain himself. He can't, however; not with the war on and the Rilasciare demanding secrecy. So he takes his frustrations out on the invading Montaigne, robbing them in order to make them appear ridiculous and give hope to the occupied people. Lately, he's toyed with the idea of joining Los Vagos, although he hasn't the first clue how to contact them. Even if he could, the question of whether they would accept an unrepentant thief into their ranks deeply troubles him.

Brother Giancarlo Ciccioni: Hero



Brawn: 1
Finesse: 2
Wits: 3
Resolve: 5
Panache: 2
Reputation: 24
Background: Vow
Arcana: Overzealous

Advantages: Eisen (ACQ), Faith, Ordained, Safe House, Théan (R/W), Vodacce (R/W)

Crossbow: Attack 4, Fletcher 1, Reload 4

Fencing: Attack 2, Parry 2

Firearms: Attack 3, Reload 4

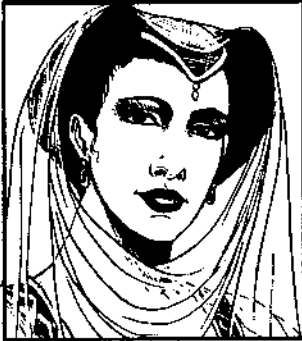
Hunter: Ambush 4, Stealth 3, Tracking 3, Traps 2

Scholar: History 4, Mathematics 1, Philosophy 4, Research 3, Theology 5

Giancarlo regrets his part in the alliance with the Sophia's Daughters. He believes the women are dangerous – too concerned with temporal power and too willing to use sorcery to get it. Although the Free Thinkers have benefited from cooperation with the Daughters, Giancarlo is convinced that the price is too high. His attitude has strained the treaty between the two secret societies and he suspects that it cost him the leadership of the cell. If he weren't so old, he would do something reckless enough to dissolve the partnership. Then the Bane could return to their open war against the Fate Witches, the way it was when he first joined. He's even concocted a plan to murder one of the Sophia's Daughters' inner circle. If he finds a younger person he trusts enough, he might let them in on it...



Ramona Beckett: Hero



Brawn: 2
Finesse: 3
Wits: 4
Resolve: 3
Panache: 4
Reputation: 30
Background: None
Arcana: Perspicacious

Advantages: Avalon (R/W), Appearance (Above Average), Dangerous Beauty

Courtier: Dancing 3, Etiquette 3, Fashion 3, Gossip 2, Lip Reading 2, Oratory 1, Seduction 4, Sincerity 3

Crossbow: Attack 3, Fletcher 1

Dirty Fighting: Attack 2, Kick 2, Throat-Strike 2

Fencing: Attack 3, Parry 2

Knife: Attack 4, Parry 1

Rider: Ride 2

Vipera ex Morsis (Journeyman): Beat 4, Corps-à-Corps (Knife) 4, Exploit Weakness (*Vipera ex Morsis*) 4, Lunge (Knife) 5

Ramona has begun an intermittent flirtation with Bors MacAllister. To her surprise, the Highlander returned her attentions, and the court has been abuzz with rumors of a secret romance. Nothing of the sort is going on, but Ramona can't help but be drawn to the secretive knight. She knows she should hate him, but he seems somehow different than most of the ruling pigs. He doesn't want anything from her; he doesn't see her as a tool to be used and then thrown away. For the first time in her life, Ramona feels a connection to another human being... and has no idea how to react.

Ramona knows nothing of Gerard Trainer or the Brothers' plans to assassinate MacAllister. Theus knows what she will do if she discovers it. Would she defend her would-be suitor from the sect that gave meaning to her life? Or help it destroy the one human being she might ever love?

Velik Galecatcher: Hero



Brawn: 2
Finesse: 4
Wits: 3
Resolve: 3
Panache: 3
Reputation: 15
Background: None
Arcana: None

Advantages: Avalon (R/W), Crescent (ACQ), Keen Senses, Montaigne (R/W), Swordsman's Guild, Vendel (R/W)

Athlete: Break Fall 4, Climbing 5, Footwork 4, Rolling 4, Sprinting 2, Swinging 4, Throwing 2

Captain: Bribery 4, Diplomacy 4, Gunnery 2, Incitation 3, Leadership 3, Logistics 2, Strategy 3, Tactics 3

Dirty Fighting: Attack (Dirty Fighting) 3, Eye-Gouge 3, Throat Strike 2

Fencing: Attack 4, Parry 2

Pirate Tricks: Death From Above

Rogers (Apprentice): Bind (Fencing) 3, Corps-à-Corps 4, Disarm (Fencing) 2, Exploit Weakness (Rogers) 2

Sailor: Balance 4, Cartography 3, Climbing 5, Knotwork 5, Leaping 2, Navigation 4, Pilot 5, Rigging 4, Sea Lore 2, Swimming 3, Weather 3

Streetwise: Shopping 4, Socializing 3, Street Navigation 2

Beyond his allegiance to the Rilasciare, Velik has no secrets — at least none that he knows about. More information on him can be found in the *Pirate Nations* sourcebook, page 43.



Donnabella Zümerwindt: Hero



Brawn: 4
Finesse: 2
Wits: 2
Resolve: 5
Panache: 1
Reputation: 68
Background: None
Arcana: Focused

Advantages: Indomitable Will, Keen Senses, Toughness, Vodacce (R/W)

Athlete: Break Fall 1, Climbing 2, Footwork 3, Leaping 3, Lifting 4, Sprinting 2, Swimming 3, Throwing 5

Dirty Fighting: Attack (Dirty Fighting) 5, Attack (Improvised Weapon) 4, Eye-Gouge 3, Kick 2, Throat Strike 4, Throw (Improvised Weapon) 3

Hunter: Ambush 3, Stealth 4, Survival 5, Tracking 2, Traps 2

Knife: Attack 2, Parry 1, Throw 1

Streetwise: Scrounging 5, Socializing 2, Street Navigation 1, Underworld Lore 2

Donna is preparing to escape her confinement. Another prisoner told her of a tunnel he carved leading to the prison sewer system and eventually, the open sea. She has loosened one of the bars of her cell, and knows exactly how to get to the tunnel. All she needs is a boat of some kind waiting for her on the shore below. She's tried to get a message to the Rilasciare, but has had no success so far. She has developed several schemes to get their attention, which she plans to implement as soon as possible.



How to Run a Bomb-Throwing Campaign

GMs who run a campaign featuring the Rilasciare must often juggle several different agendas at once. Like any secret society, the Rilasciare has its own goals, which may contradict those of the Heroes. Players who portray Free Thinkers may find themselves caught in the middle. It's up to you as the GM to make things easier for them. Of course, this is true of any Théan organization, from the Vaticine Church to Sophia's Daughters. But Free Thinkers are particularly tricky because they often skirt moral boundaries, which can lead to conflicts with the party. It's important to balance the needs of Rilasciare Heroes with the non-Rilasciare Heroes, ensuring that one side never becomes subordinate to the other.

Single Players

Most campaigns will involve only one or two Rilasciare Heroes, intermingled with characters who have nothing to do with the Free Thinkers. The sect becomes an intermittent element in such a mix, showing up occasionally but not on a regular basis. This keeps the focus on the party rather than on the sect, so their adventures won't center around one single entity. At the same time, the Rilasciare Hero shouldn't feel that his membership is wasted. Allow him to turn to the sect if he needs to; the Free Thinkers are privy to a wealth of information and hard-to-get items if he needs them. If the party isn't sure how to proceed, the local cell might provide a promising lead to get them back on track.

There's a give and take to such benefits, however. Every now and then, the Rilasciare should ask the Hero for assistance, which could lead to a Free Thinker-based adventure. Presumably, the Hero must fulfill a mission for the sect, although he might also need to alert them to an unseen danger, or otherwise take the initiative.

The other Heroes will doubtless become involved as well, helping their friend with whatever he has to do. This can be a potential trouble spot. The other players shouldn't feel forced to participate, or believe that the sect is using them. If they don't share the Free Thinker cause, then they're not going to assassinate the local marquis, no matter how evil he is. Wanton destruction may be equally repulsive and many of them would see a Freeman-style prank as trite and overly dangerous. Yet such operations are vital duties to a Rilasciare Hero; if he doesn't engage in them, he'll lose an important part of his character. How do you convince non-Rilasciare party members to participate without feeling used?

It helps if they can see justice in the cause. Rather than force them to do something they believe is wrong (or at least irrelevant), try to couch the adventure in terms that they can support. Let them aid the Rilasciare without compromising their own morality; let them feel as if they're serving a greater good. If possible, allow them to come to the necessary conclusion themselves, rather than telling them. That way, their participation becomes a conscious choice, rather than *deus ex machina*. They can help their companion without feeling forced, and the Rilasciare Hero can fulfill that side of his character without becoming an imposition to the rest of the party.

If handled properly, this could provide an intriguing subplot to an adventure. Say a Rilasciare Hero has to depose a corrupt official. There's no real evidence against him, just the sect's say-so (which is good enough for the Hero, who begins planning the official's destruction). The other Heroes might be reluctant to help; after all, who are the Free Thinkers to judge guilt and innocence? So they do a little research and discover that not only is the official corrupt, but he has sent several innocent men to



jail. Now they have a moral imperative to help the Rilasciare Hero. Moreover, they may be willing to free the official's victims from prison, even break them out if necessary. By allowing the party to reach their own conclusions about the matter, the GM lets them participate in the adventure without subordinating their values.

The Rilasciare shouldn't overwhelm a campaign just because a Hero or two happens to belong. At the same time, they shouldn't be ignored for the sake of the majority. Balancing both sides of the equation makes the Free Thinkers an intriguing element in your adventures without forcing an entire party to follow their agenda.

Rilasciare Parties

A party looking for something different may want to create an entire group of Rilasciare – perhaps even a cell, located in a major city. A Rilasciare-based campaign could focus on cloak-and-dagger intrigue as the Heroes dodge the forces of artificial authority and plan the next phase in their crusade. It wouldn't have as much flash and sparkle as a regular *7th Sea* campaign, but could encompass street-level grit in a war of nerve and shadows. A Rilasciare campaign would probably be limited to a single city (unless they belong to the Couriers; see the boxed text), but with a little foresight, one city is all you'll need.

Before beginning, the players should agree on a faction to belong to, and create Heroes who fit that faction (if they're Oppositionists, for example, they should all have a dislike of sorcery, and skills to battle it). They also need to select a city, the headquarters for their cell. If they like, they can choose one of the existing cells detailed in Chapter 1. They probably won't be the leaders of such a cell – at least not right away – but it can give them a strong sense of identity to build on. Otherwise, they can create a cell in an entirely new city or add a second cell to a city which already has one. If you choose the latter option, think about how the two cells would interact and what conflicts (if any) might arise between them.

Rules for cell creation can be found on pages 80–83. The GM may wish to grant the party some extra Hero Points for this purpose. The party should think about their agenda when building the cell. Who are they fighting against and why? What kind of resources does their headquarters have to help them in this regard?

While the players develop their Heroes, the GM should

get a thorough idea of the city where they're based. The Nation sourcebooks provide information on most of the the larger Théan cities, but the GM should be prepared to develop further details. How does the government function? Where do the various districts lie? What are the local politics like? Every city has an underworld, and Rilasciare Heroes will probably be knee deep in it. Is there any sort of criminal organization, and if so, what impact do they have? Prepare descriptions of important buildings, such as the civic hall or the inn where the Heroes meet their contacts. You may even wish to sketch out a

few maps, detailing specific interiors or a layout of the city in general.

Once the city is set, you should prepare a supporting cast – allies and adversaries to help or hinder your party. First and foremost are other Free Thinkers. Unless the Heroes are the only members of their cell, the GM needs to flesh

The Courier Campaign

If you want to run an all-Rilasciare party, but don't wish to limit yourself to one city, the Couriers are an ideal solution. A party of Couriers could travel the length of Théah, journeying to any number of exotic ports while fulfilling their duties. Like other parties, the Heroes would need a certain amount of variety (fighters to serve as bodyguards, courtiers to talk their way out of trouble, etc.). New adventures would be a snap to begin: the Heroes simply receive a new set of letters from Nolan Chaucer, and they're off. Such a campaign doesn't have to be limited to a series of mail deliveries either. As they travel, the Heroes can run into all sorts of trouble – kidnapping, piracy, courtly intrigue – giving them numerous chances to strike for the Rilasciare cause.

Courier campaigns require very little development and can be run much the same way non-Rilasciare campaigns are. Give the Heroes a breakdown of the Kirk Courier's cell and make Nolan Chaucer their go-to man, and you're set.



out their fellow Rilasciare, including a leader if necessary. If there's another cell in the city, develop its members, using the description in Chapter One as a guide. Most Rilasciare NPCs should be henchmen or underlings, and possess skills that the party doesn't have but may need. Leaders should be at least a little stronger than the Heroes, and have the support of most of his followers. Neither type should ever steal the Heroes' thunder.

Every cell has a list of snitches, spies and other contacts. While not necessarily friendly, they help the Rilasciare procure supplies, avoid the authorities, and learn vital information. The GM should develop at least three or four contacts, ranging from informants in the mayor's cabinet to gun smugglers from the Castillian front. Include at least one member of the Couriers in the bunch, serving as the party's lifeline to the rest of the sect.

Then there's the bad guys; the forces of authority who the Heroes battle against. Antagonists are vital to a strong campaign, and should be developed as long-term adversaries rather than one-shot villains. Think of Robespierre in the *Scarlet Pimpernel* stories: the Hero has countless adventures thwarting his schemes, but never manages to topple him until the very end. Defeating a major adversary could be the goal of an entire campaign, lasting years of game time. There should be a fairly large pool of adversaries in the Heroes' city, ranging from the city's mayor to the local nobility and the captain of the guard. They should be well-entrenched, clever, and extremely tenacious. Moreover, they should have legitimacy on their side, whether it's an appointed post or a military commission. The *GMs' Guide* has plenty of ideas on how to develop credible Villains.

Proper preparation is essential to making a successful Rilasciare-based campaign. With a limited locale and smaller-scale storytelling, the starting ingredients can make or break a campaign. A strong background adds immeasurable depth to a storyline, and can turn a one-note setting into a world unto itself. The Free Thinkers

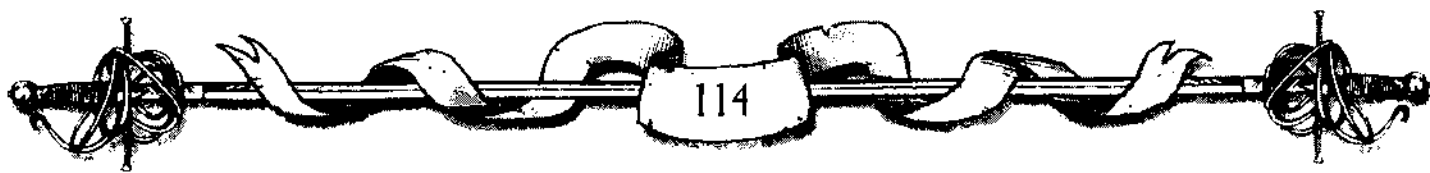
are a unique group, and require a different mindset from most *7th Sea* characters. By understanding that from the beginning, you can create a truly memorable campaign.

Adventure Hooks

The following is a list of brief adventure ideas involving the Rilasciare. They can quickly be fleshed out into a full-length story, or even a mini-campaign if you wish. All of them assume that none of your Heroes belong to the Free Thinkers. If someone does, it should be easy to adjust the adventure accordingly.

- The Heroes find a body on the side of a country road where they are traveling. He was apparently thrown by his horse; the beast stands eating grass nearby. A search of his possessions produces a set of letters, marked with a strange seal. There is no addressee, but if the Heroes read the letters, one of them recognizes several references to places and habits, suggesting that the messages are intended for a famous nobleman living in a nearby town. The noble is quite influential and would probably be grateful if his letters were returned.

The unfortunate rider was a member of the Couriers and the noble is a prominent Free Thinker. The letters contain a warning from another cell: the authorities suspect the noble of treason and will arrest him soon. The tone of the letters suggests that the noble has done nothing other than speak his mind about certain unjust policies. It's up to the Heroes to decide how to proceed. If they choose to deliver the letters, they'll have to dodge the local authorities while trying to locate the noble. If they ignore the letters, their troubles just get worse. Nolan Chaucer has dispatched a group of men to reclaim the letters. If they find the Heroes have read them, they will swear them to silence, or try to kill them. Either way, the party will have to think quickly or risk making some very dangerous enemies.



• The Heroes are at a ball or other social function when one of the guests produces a weapon and attacks a nearby nobleman. Presumably, they thwart the assassination and bring the would-be killer to justice. It turns out, however, that the nobleman is a thoroughly wicked man who had been found guilty by the Secret Court; the assassin was a member of the Rilasciare with orders to kill him. The Free Thinkers quickly dispatch a second assassin, with orders not only to kill the nobleman but his inadvertent saviors as well. The Heroes discover the nobleman's true nature, but are they too late to stop the killers? Do they join forces with the villain in order to save themselves, or can they somehow aid the Free Thinkers in stopping his wickedness forever?

• The Rilasciare approach the Heroes with an offer: one of their number has been imprisoned and they want the party to break him out. They're prepared to offer money, but might also have something more valuable — a key political connection, for example, or a vital piece of information concerning the Montaigne-Castillian war. The party can use whatever means available, from calling in political favors to blowing a hole in the prison wall. The captive's crime can be anything you wish, but the circumstances of his incarceration should skew the party's opinion in his favor (it's hard to become enthusiastic about saving a convicted serial killer).

Alternately, you could have one of the party imprisoned with a Rilasciare member. As the two plot an escape together, the other Heroes (with a little help from the local Free Thinkers) work to free their companion.



• An old Eisen ally – one who has appeared previously in the campaign if possible – seeks the Heroes out, asking for their help. Strange, nightmarish things have begun happening to him. Books and other objects crumple in his hands, and when he recently tried to touch his wife, she screamed as if in pain. He has sought them out to help determine his malady – and if possible, cure it.

Their ally has von Drachen blood in his veins. While he never learned to use it, he possesses the power of *Zerstörung*. It has begun to manifest itself in strange and unpredictable ways, wreaking havoc with all those around him. The Heroes are his only hope of finding a cure. There are many avenues they can pursue – Stefan Heilgrund, Surneth artifacts, even a powerful fate witch might do the trick – but time is not on their side. The Oppositionists have learned about their ally's condition, and have sent assassins to hunt him down. Can the Heroes help him before it's too late?

Alternately, one of the Heroes themselves could manifest *Zerstörung*, and be forced to come to grips with it.

• The Heroes are conducting research in a library and discover a packet of old scrolls during an unrelated adventure, or otherwise become privy to an ancient piece of writing. The text relates the Senators' Bargain, the origins of sorcery, and the three servants who founded the Rilasciare. Several days later, the Heroes are approached by a member of the Rilasciare, who wishes to speak with them about their findings. After several conversations, he offers them a place among the Free Thinkers.

The Rilasciare member is a fraud. He works for a Vodacce prince, an advisor to Empereur Leon, or someone else who doesn't want the Bargainers' Secret to come out. He attempts to steal the scrolls



and betray the Heroes to the authorities. Their first “cell meeting” is a set-up, crawling with guardsmen. Assuming the Heroes foil the sting, they’ll still need to find their new friend and force him to return the scrolls. He could be anywhere, however, and he won’t give up without a fight.

Generous GMs might permit the real Rilasciare to give the Heroes a hand during this adventure. They don’t like being used.

A Sample Prison

Il Muro (“The Wall”) is an infamous prison standing along the Vodacce coast. As abominable pits go, this one stands with the worst in Théah. It houses some of the country’s most notorious thieves and murderers, as well as Donnabella Zümerwindt, the Rilasciare’s most famous political prisoner. Although a specific setting, *Il Muro* can easily be adjusted to fit almost any location. You can use it as a repository of evil Villains, as the basis of an adventure to free a prisoner, or even as a hidden fortress or military base.

Il Muro stands on the western coast of Vodacce, in Villanova territory. It was built upon a tall seaside cliff, chiseled out of the rock as a series of shafts and corridors. It was originally an iron mine, but when the metal ran out, Lord Villanova decided to transform it into a prison. Diggers tunneled the shafts into lengthy corridors, then hollowed out a crude series of cells. The *de facto* compound soon earned a reputation as a terrifying prison.

Today, *Il Muro* is spoken of in the same hushed tones as *la Bucca*. It houses murderers, traitors and madmen of all stripes, as well as enemies of Prince Giovanni. Other princes trade favors with the Villanovas to dispose of prisoners there. There have been countless escape attempts in the 150 years since *Il Muro* was commissioned; only three have ever succeeded.

The prison is really nothing more than a series of shafts carved into the rock. Multiple levels ascend the cliffside, starting from the shore and reaching about two-thirds of the way up. Each shaft contains a cell block, holding twenty or more pens for the prisoners. Welded bars seal off the shafts, while a quintet of guards stands watch at each entrance. Getting from one level to the next requires a rickety system of ropes and ladders, strung up like lattice on the cliffside. If a guard wishes to keep someone from descending, he simply pulls the ladder down, trapping the interloper like a fly on the wall.

The prison’s lowest level contains docks, administrative offices, storerooms, and barracks for the guards. The shoreline around it is harsh and rocky, the waters shallow. No ship bigger than a ten-man rowboat may approach. The other levels contain only prisoners – cell upon cell of savage, desperate criminals. A sheer two-hundred foot climb separates the uppermost level from the top of the cliff.

Life in *Il Muro* is like being dumped in a hole. Prisoners spend their days digging into the rock, expanding the shafts to fit more prisoners. They’re fed on a thin gruel of hard-tack and fish, and most go years without seeing the light of day. Fights between prisoners are not uncommon; guards occasionally turn the more savage inmates loose on their compatriots. Cave-ins are a regular occurrence, and the guards rarely bother to dig out buried prisoners. The average life expectancy is two years.

The guards allot few punishments and no leniency. Troublesome prisoners are simply dragged out of their block and hurled into the ocean below. Legends tell of prisoners who escape in this manner, but the sharp rocks and savage tides suggest otherwise. Escape by sea is nearly impossible; large ships cannot approach and smaller ones are easily spotted and dispatched by the guards. Traveling overland is little better; even if a prisoner can scale the cliffs, he faces a forbidding



wilderness of rocks and thorns. Villanova maintains a pair of garrisons nearby, with regular patrols along the coastline.

The guards themselves are a miserable lot, the dregs of Villanova's forces. Many are former sailors, giving them the balance and footwork necessary to maneuver along the cliffside. Their duties are dangerous, yet dull in the extreme, consisting of little more than feeding the prisoners and watching for potential rescue attempts. They take out their frustrations on their charges; beatings average three a day in Il Muro. The casualty rate among guards is unusually high: one misplaced foot sends you plunging down the cliffside, and the prisoners are perfectly willing to kill if the opportunity presents itself. Smart guards transfer; stupid ones die. The ones left possess the cunning of a cobra and the morals of Legion.

The prison's commander, Roberto Cappidocci, is a disgraced army officer who took assignment here rather than lose his commission. He regrets the decision every day of his life. Fat and alcoholic, he rarely leaves the lower level, trusting his junior officers to handle the prisoners. He can usually be found in his offices, reading law books and drinking cheap wine. He hopes to find some legal precedent that will allow him to leave the army honorably, and wonders sometimes about slipping away on the next supply boat. His abject cowardice prevents him from trying.

Prisoners and guards alike are considered Brutes; use the "Cardinal's Men" stats found on page 168 of the *GMs' Guide*. The GM may wish to develop more specific stats for particular guards or captives who becomes important to the overall campaign.

Layout

The following is a description of the different areas within Il Muro. Consult the map on pages 120–123 for their exact location.

Barracks

The guards eat, sleep, and enjoy what recreation they can in these wide, low rooms. The ceilings are only six feet high, forcing taller guards to stoop. Two rows of five cots apiece line the walls, while a small wood-burning stove sits near the entrance. A low table graces the center of each room, where the men play dice or cards in their off-hours. There are no chairs, so the guards usually drag over nearby cots and sit on the end.

The senior staff (five men) have their own barracks, and the commander has a small room set aside for himself. He rarely sleeps there anymore, and the other guards have begun using it as a powder room.

Cells

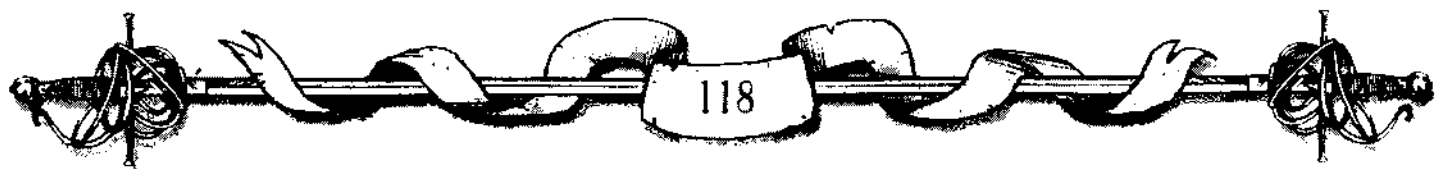
Each cell is approximately ten feet by ten feet; they are carved out of the rock in rough rows. The bars of each are sunk deep within the rock, making them almost impossible to break through. Prisoners receive a moldy cot and a bucket for their sanitary facilities. The lucky cells have their buckets changed once a week. Each shaft holds between twenty and forty cells; more are added each month as the prisoners dig deeper into the rock. The staggeringly high casualty rates keep Il Muro from overflowing; every prisoner can at least claim his own cell.

Commander's Quarters

This small office serves as headquarters for the prison commander. It holds an old wooden desk and chair, cracked from the salty air. A bookshelf full of swollen texts slouches in one corner, and a small cot stands against the far wall. The commander has recently taken to sleeping here (which is easier than staggering to the barracks when he's drunk).

Docks

A pair of small wooden docks are the only signs of the prison's true nature. They are only big enough to support





Guard Posts

Every cell block ends at an entrance to the shaft – the prisoners' only source of natural light. Thick iron bars are sunk ten feet into each shaft, giving the guards a small marshaling point between the cell blocks and the cliffside. Five guards stand watch over each cell block. Two hold the entrance, while the other three oversee the prisoners. Each post has a rusty iron bell to be rung in times of emergency.

Kitchen/Infirmary

The kitchen prepares meals for the guards and gruel for the prisoners (although the local wits claim there's no difference). The infirmary exists mainly for injured guards; an ex-surgeon's assistant is on-hand to treat any wounds (he doubles as a server).

rowboats and other such craft. Supply boats come twice a month; the rest of the time, the docks serve as fishing piers for idle guards. A trio of 10-pound cannons stand along the cliffside, ready to be brought to bear against any unauthorized craft that approach.

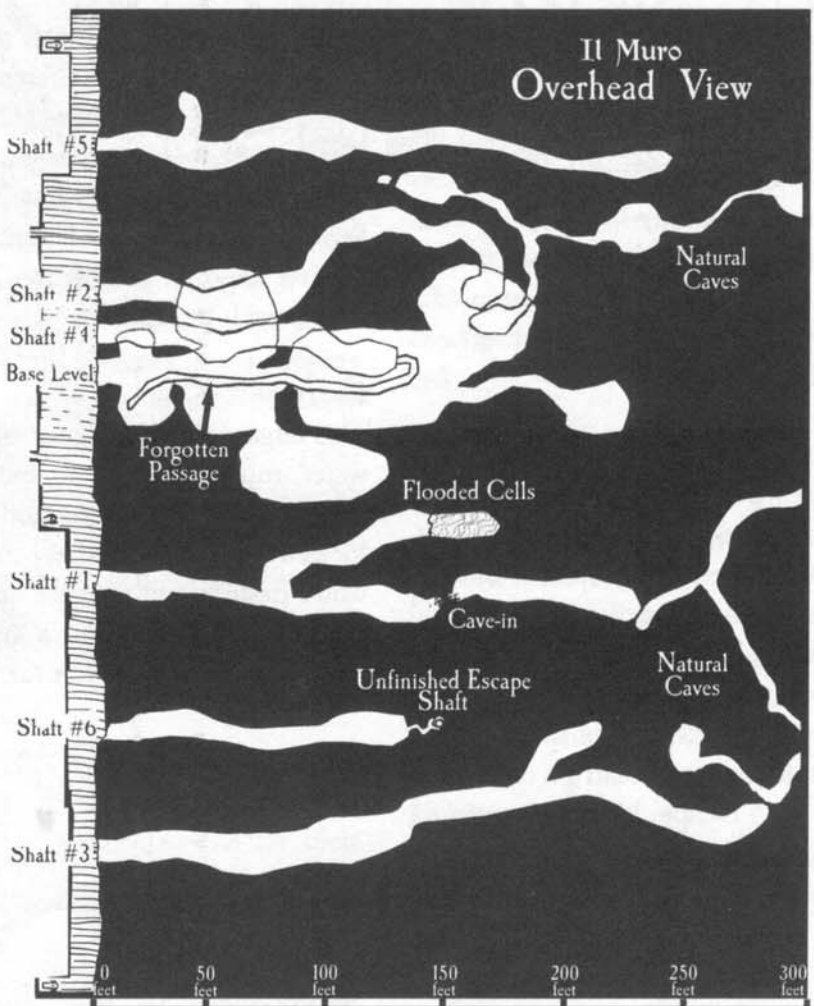
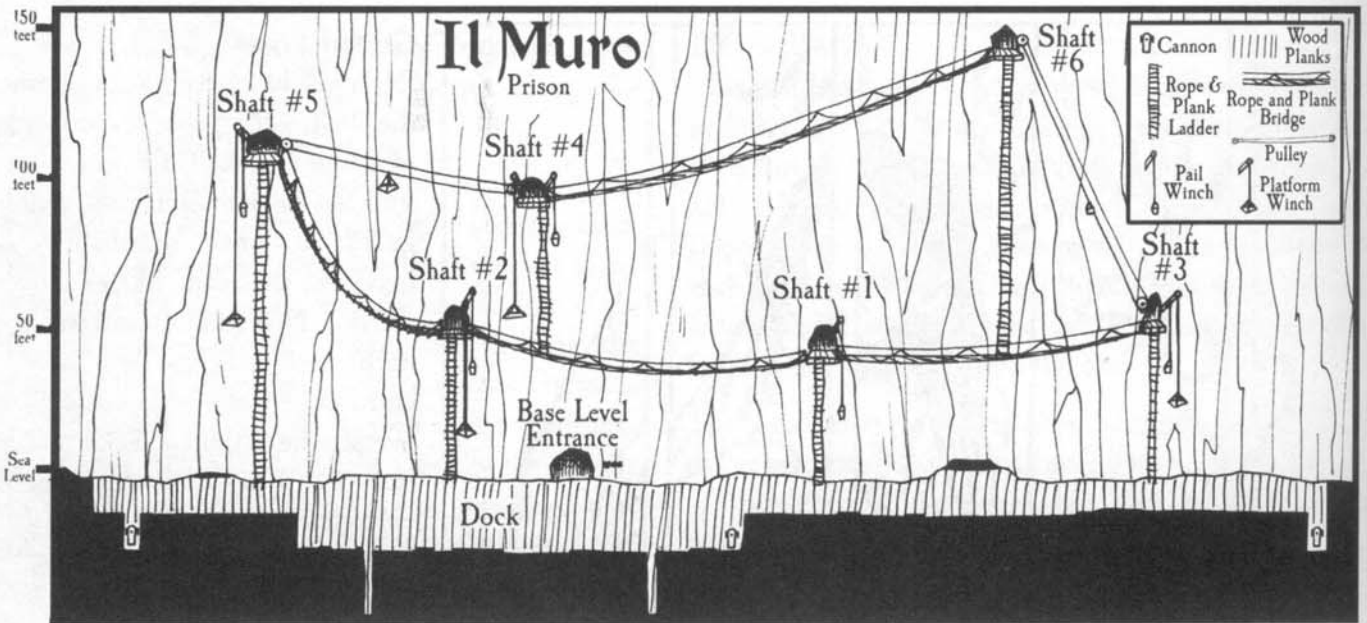
Prisoners never receive treatment for their injuries unless they're important for some reason (strong diggers or friends with the guards).

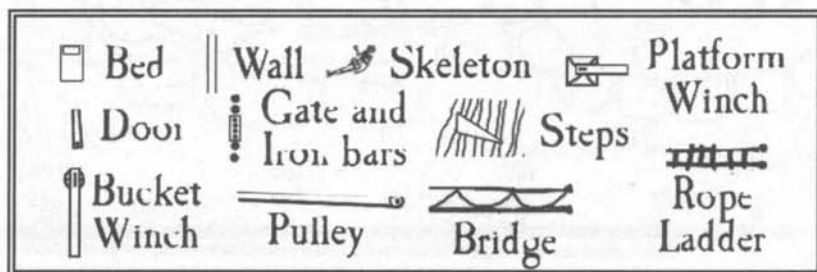
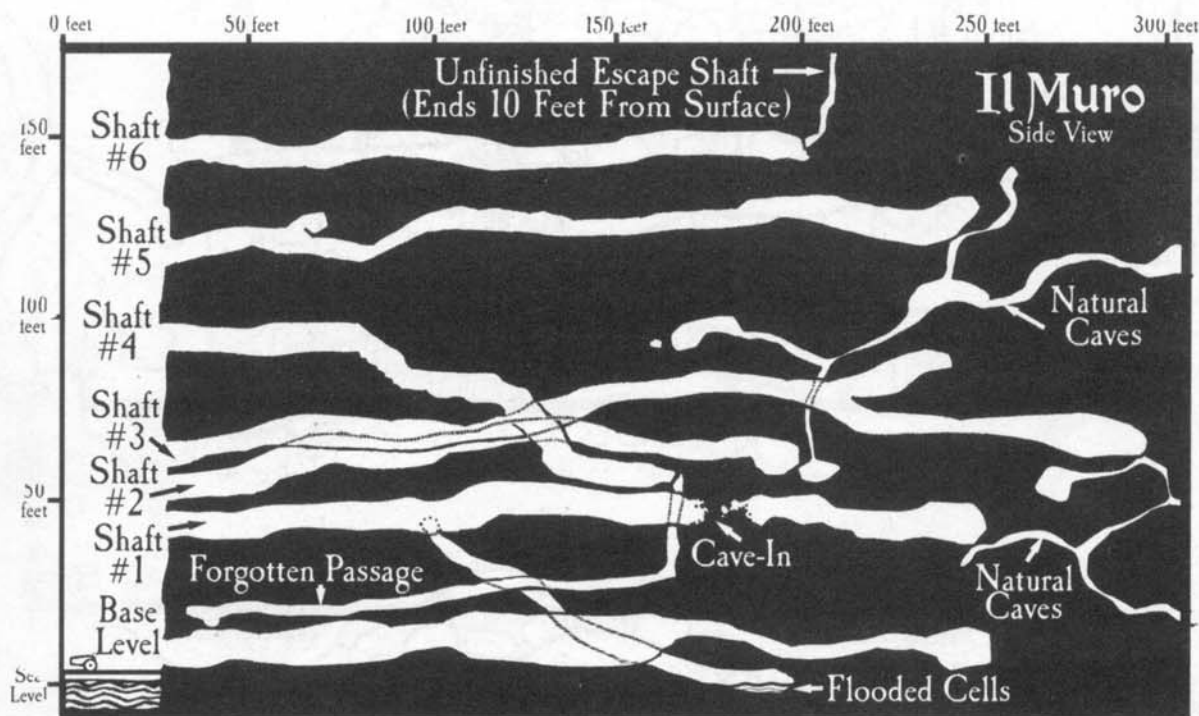
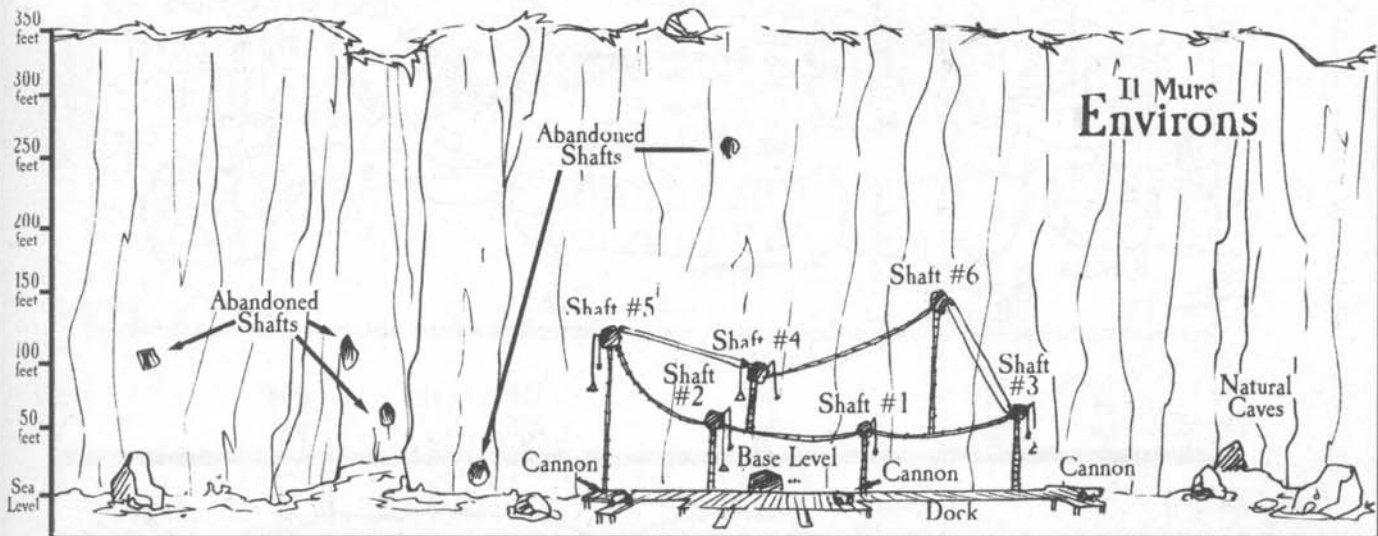
Forgotten Corridors

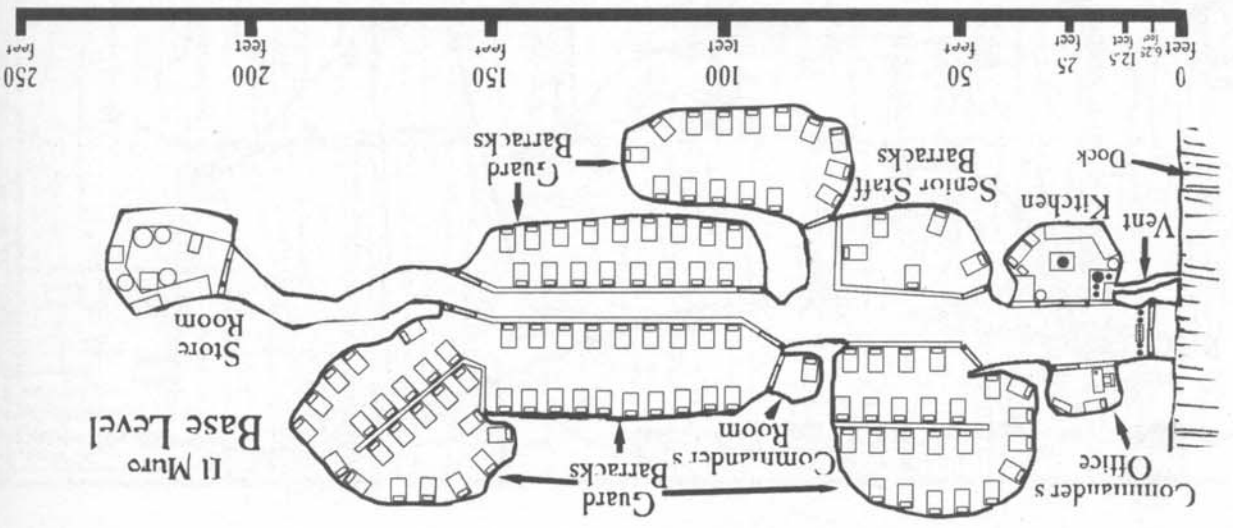
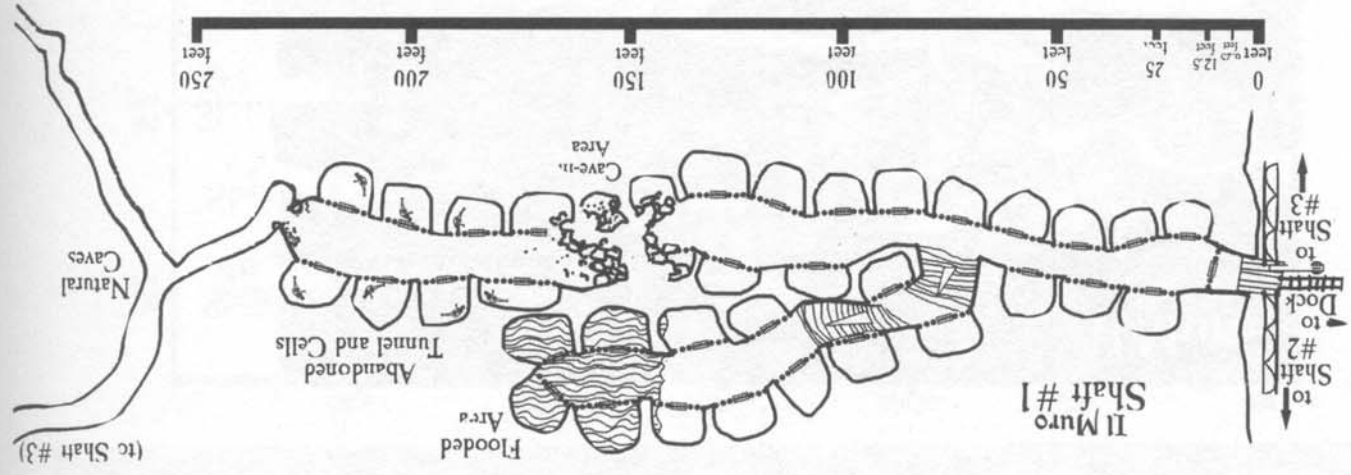
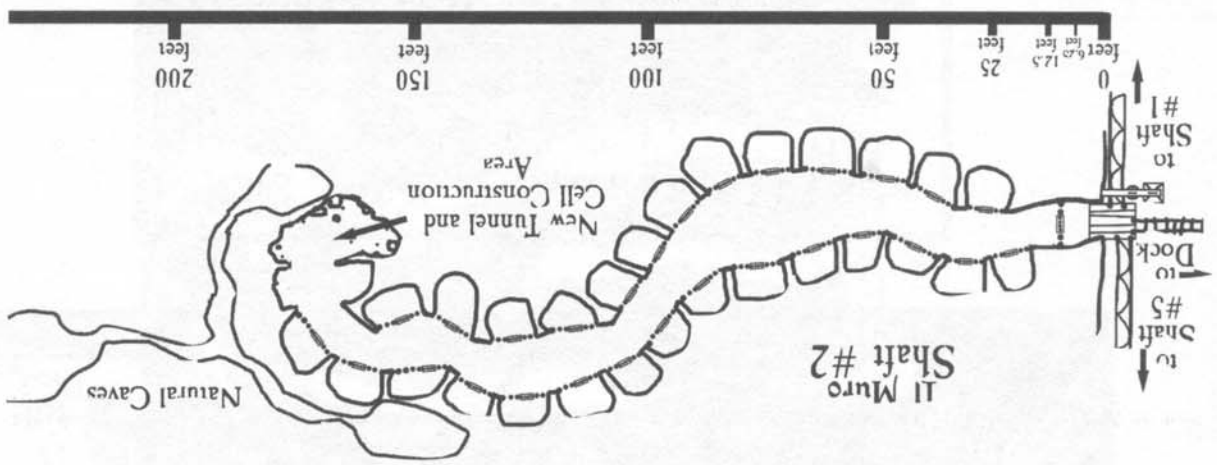
For all their Machiavellian pride, the Villanovas never entirely thought Il Muro through. When the mine was abandoned, several shafts were incomplete, and a number of tunnels linked them together. Most were sealed up when the Villanovas took over, but a few remain. A few passages even run down to the shoreline, where an undiscovered series of caves grant access to the open sea. Of course, even if someone could get down that far, they'd still need a boat to escape. It's a long swim to Castille.

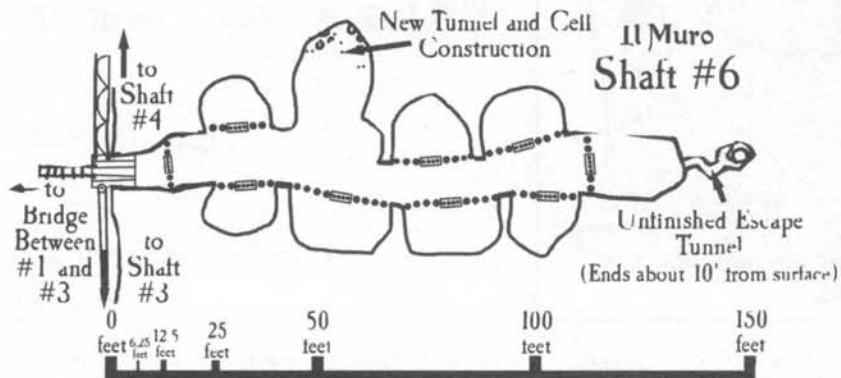
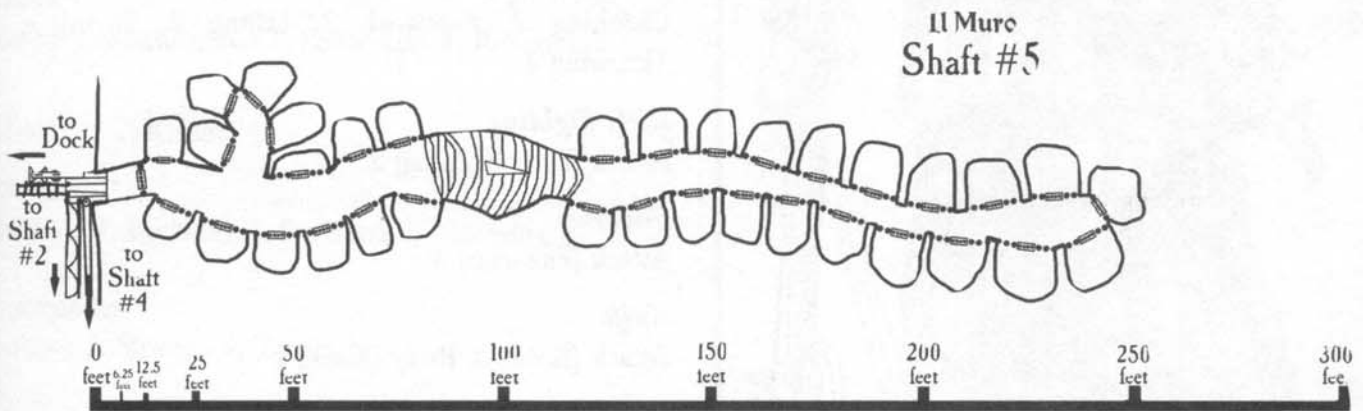
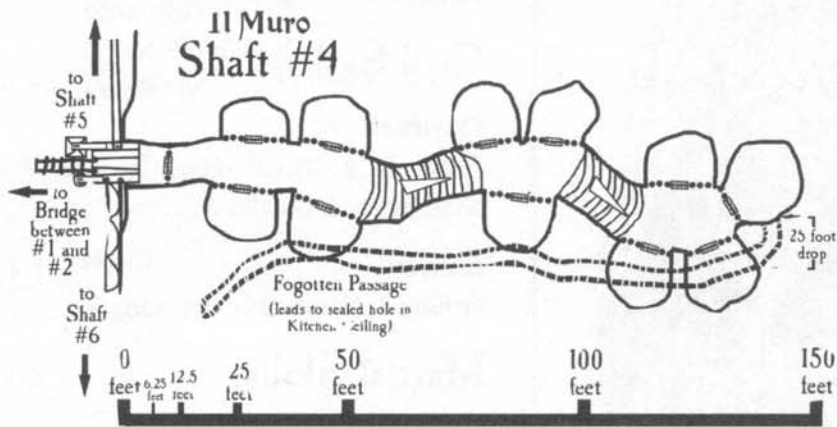
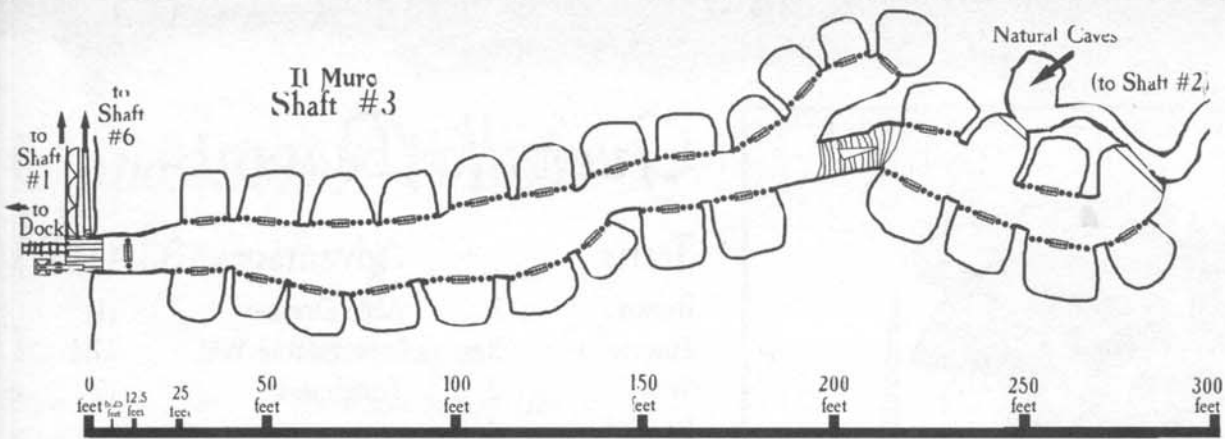
Storage

This large central area contains barrels of food, drinking water, rope, lanterns, oil, and fishing gear, as well as a small arsenal of muskets and gunpowder. The room is located deep within the cliffside, where the elements won't destroy any supplies contained within. The main door is kept locked and a guard is posted at all times. Only the commander has the key.











Guerrilla Peasant

Traits

Brawn	3
Finesse	2
Wits	2
Resolve	3
Panache	2

Advantages

Able Drinker	(1)
Indomitable Will	(3)
Toughness	(5)

Civil Skills:

Criminal

Ambush 2, Scrounging 2, Gambling 2, Quack 1, Shadowing 4, Stealth 3

Hunter

Fishing 1, Survival 3, Tracking 3

Martial Skills:

Athlete

Climbing 2, Footwork 2, Lifting 2, Sprinting 1, Throwing 3

Dirty Fighting

Attack (Dirty Fighting) 2

Firearms

Attack (Firearms) 4

Knife

Attack (Knife) 3, Parry (Knife) 2

Rider

Ride 1

Oppositionist Witch Hunter

Traits

Brawn	3
Finesse	2
Wits	2
Resolve	2
Panache	2

Advantages

Eisenfaust School (25)
Dracheneisen – Panzerhand (20)
Eisen (R/W) (1)
Minor Nobility (5)
Vendel (1)

Civil Skills:

Hunter

Stealth 2, Tracking 2, Traps 1

Spy

Shadowing 1, Stealth 1

Scholar

History 1, Mathematics 1, Philosophy 1, Research 2

Martial Skills:

Athlete

Climbing 1, Footwork 1, Sprinting 1, Throwing 1

Commander

Ambush 1, Strategy 1, Tactics 1

Eisenfaust School

Disarm (Panzerhand) 1, Heavy Weapon 2, Panzerhand 1

Fencing

Attack (Fencing) 3, Parry (Fencing) 1

Panzerhand

Attack (Panzerhand) 2, Parry (Panzerhand) 2





Freeman Prankster

Traits

Brawn	1
Finesse	4
Wits	2
Resolve	2
Panache	3

Advantages

Connections (3)
Keen Senses (2)
Castillian (R/W) (1)
Montaigne (R/W) (2)

Arcana: Uncanny

Civil Skills:

Criminal

Gambling 1, Prestidigitation 1, Quack 1, Shadowing 2, Stealth 3

Forger

Calligraphy 1, Forgery 2, Paper Maker 1, Research 1

Performer

Acting 1, Dancing 1, Oratory 4, Singing 1

Martial Skills:

Athlete

Climbing 1, Footwork 1, Sprinting 3, Throwing 1

Dirty Fighting

Attack (Dirty Fighting) 1, Eye-Gouge 1, Kick 1

Firearms

Attack (Firearms) 1

Liberation Thief

Traits

Brawn 2
 Finesse 3
 Wits 3
 Resolve 2
 Panache 2

Advantages

Noble (10)
 Scoundrel (3)
 Uppmann's Coat – Lockpicks (2)
 Vodacce (R/W) (1)
 Théan (2)

Civil Skills:

Courtier

Dancing 1, Etiquette 3, Fashion 1, Lip Reading 1, Oratory 2, Sincerity 1

Criminal

Gambling 1, Quack 1, Shadowing 2, Stealth 4

Fence

Appraising 3, Hagglng 1, Socializing 4, Underworld Lore 2

Martial Skills:

Athlete

Break Fall 1, Climbing 5, Footwork 3, Sprinting 2, Throwing 2

Fencing

Attack (Fencing) 2, Disarm (Fencing) 2



die Kreuzritter



Faith

Charity

Loyalty

Secrecy



Summer 2000

Rilasciare

The Free Thinkers

*"Some men may stand higher than others...
but that doesn't mean I have to like it."*

— Hans Uppmann

In the shadows of Théah lurks a strange and unique conspiracy — men and women who refuse to accept the status quo, who challenge authority in all its forms, and who fight to free humanity from its self-imposed limitations. Whether with pamphlets on the street or bombs beneath buildings, the Rilasciare battles for a golden future only it can see. Some call them heroes. Others believe they should be hunted down like animals. But their hidden crusade has rocked Théah to its very core. They will throw the light of truth on the closed minds of their fellow man... by any means necessary.

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