

# Lore of Erets



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*Tome 1: Scribed by Thomas Lim and Boey Mei Han*

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## **THE ORDERS OF BRETUNIA**

### **1. The Magical Arts**

#### **Mage Guildmaster Romaine of Camelot**

Mages practise what is commonly known as defensive magic - magic used to avoid combat rather than challenge it. We prefer to hide from the enemy with cloaking spells, to manipulate his mind with fear spells and hallucinations, to taunt him with telekinetic and telepathic spells till, if he is eventually destroyed, he effectively destroys himself. This is in direct contrast to sorcery, which focuses on pure destructive power of Fireglobes, of floods and other elemental forces.

Magic involves the focusing of magical fields. There are magical fields all around us, acting as media for possibilities to become realities, emanating from every living thing, every substance on and off the planet, surrounding us. Magical fields usually lie dormant and useless until a magician channels them through their minds and bodies, shaping them into spells to accomplish a specific purpose. Some magicians are powerful enough to create their own magical fields, useful in areas where fields are weak, or where they are disrupted through magic or the presence of ghosts and spirits, who exude

their own natural fields and tend to absorb others from the atmosphere around them.

Runes - magical symbols - are used to focus magic. Although there are other forms of magic in this world, runes are the basis for all of them. There are over sixty thousand runes recorded, each with their own specific meaning and function. Simple verbal spells do not require rune-foci - these are mostly telekinetic spells such as 'Go' and 'Lift'.

Focusing runes is not easy. There are no comfortably general runes such as 'Heal' or 'Burn'. When a mage wants to conjure up a campfire, he must first draw the rune-combination for fire, which goes something like 'Matter-kindle-heat-source'. Joined to the 'matter' construct would be 'earth-plant-matter', meaning, of course, wood. And the direction must be specified - in this case the mage need only direct it to his hand or finger rather than an actual geographical location (necessary even to light a match two inches from one's eyes): 'being-mind-open', meaning human, the mage's name, and a description of which part of him he wishes to direct the magic to.

It is the runes that often foil would-be novices in their first year of training, but after they get used to it the connections, even for new spells, can be made almost instantly in a well-practised mind, and traced equally briskly in the air. Some spells must also be pronounced - a

similarly tricky venture since a rune in one spell is almost never pronounced in the same way as the same rune in another spell, and a slip of the tongue can cause quite alarming mishaps.

Extremely complex spells call for three-dimensional runes - these are usually the sort of spells left over certain areas the magician wishes protected. Three-dimensional constructs, if not properly combined, are easily broken. Many mages create new spells using the three-dimensional construct, only to find it so weak that it falls apart the moment it is spoken. The firmest construct is **tetrahedral**, but not all rune-combinations can be teased and squeezed into that specific shape.

For a rune-focus to work, the focus must be whole - gaps and breaks and bits and pieces sticking out will render a spell useless, no matter how meticulously researched. In instances like these, many mages have gone so far as to take a rune apart and fit the pieces in, or even use magical artifacts in their place.

# Orders within the Bretunic Magical Arts

## 1. *The Basic Guild Order*

The Basic Guild Order teaches a general repertoire of spells, usually for the training of a town mage. It consists of a two-year novitiate and an additional three years to complete the course, after which if the student wishes to continue, he must choose an area of specialty under the other orders. The Basic Order also teaches the spell Truthsense, the ability to detect lies, which lasts throughout the mage's entire lifetime.

## 2. *The Order of the Spheres*

Surely the most prestigious of the orders in our guild, for the Archmage Merlin himself was a part of it. As I have mentioned before, the tetrahedral rune-focus is known to be the hardest to break; but Merlin also discovered that a spherical construct focuses the highest amount of magic. Forming runes - which are admittedly very oddly-shaped at times - into spheres may sound difficult, and it is. However, graduates of this Order are among the most powerful mages in the world, and Merlin is a testament to that.

The Order's levels are measured from First to Fourteenth Sphere, with an addition of two years'

novitiate in the beginning for those who did not go through the Basic Guild training. Many stop at the Eighth Sphere, after which one is quite powerful enough to be a Guild Mage, the sum of the aspirations of the simply-contented. The more ambitious become High Masters in the Tenth, Twelfth or even Fourteenth Sphere, after which they must prove their ingenuity and prowess in the application of the skills they have learnt, and any others which they might invent. Once they have proved themselves so, they are bestowed the title Archmage.

### **3. *The Meniscus Order***

The Menisci are thus called because of their gold lunulate badges which they usually wear as cloak-clasps or rings, to mark out their membership in that order. They are the least conspicuous of mages, and spend most of their time huddled away in monasteries or hermitages, researching old runes and recording the discovery of new ones, studying magical artifacts and compiling spell-books and magical tomes. They are, in fact, more like a monastic order than anything else.

The Menisci are different from the other Orders in that they are the only ones who draw a regular salary from the Guild treasuries, and demand the most money for their research. Their incessant need for funding has led the novices of the Guildschools to pay them a dubious tribute in the form of a mocking tongue-twister : “The

Menisci menagerie of mendacious mendicants is mainly made of muttering madmen.”

#### **4.     *The High Earth Order***

Those of the High Earth Order specialise in nature magic and the control of the weather and elements. It is the closest thing to what is often called ‘Fairy Magic’ that we have. The High Earth Order calls for great dedication and discipline, rewarding this with great power and unique abilities that no other Order may boast. High Earth mages require intensive study, especially in the area of weather control, as such forces are liable to get out of hand if even the slightest slip-up is made and the mage loses control of his spring breeze and allows it to turn into a typhoon off the coast of a small island on the other side of the planet.

High Earth mages also dabble in alchemy, being the most knowledgeable about earthen ores like gold, and are not restricted by level-promotion; after a certain length of apprenticeship - which the master himself decides to end as and when he feels fit - the newly-initiated mage merely continues learning more and developing his skills at his own pace. The devotion required of them to become skilled mages is enough to keep their noses to the grindstone without the added weight of examinations and rote-training.

## 5. ***Order of Corporeal Transcendence (The Octi)***

The Octi are thus named for three reasons - it is a phonetic pronunciation of their official abbreviation, they customarily use octagonal rune-foci in their magic, and their full name sounds extremely ostentatious.

The Octi are involved with shapeshifting, teleportation, scrying (both past and future as well as present) and plane-shifting, and are currently doing research into the possibilities of time-travel. All in all, the Octi area of specialisation is anything that has to do with the moving or transforming of particles of matter by magic (as opposed to telekinesis, in which you are using magic to manipulate the laws of *physics*). They can shapeshift themselves and others into varying forms, some of which are normally inanimate, and can alter the appearance of whole landscapes if enough of them put their minds to it; theirs is an actual alteration, not a mere illusion. They are foremost experts in teleportation and plane-shifting. The heart of their magical prowess is the identification of what they call the *whit* - tiny particles of which everything in the world, they claim, is made of. In using magic to change the nature of particular whits, the substance which is made up of those whits accordingly changes as well. Teleportation, for example, is explained as follows in one of their manuals:

“...and thus it follows that, if the human whits are transformed into that of light, the human being is thus transformed *into* light, and can be *moved* as light to any part of the world by sending the human-light into the light of the *sun*, and *through* that light pinpointing the area of the globe which the sun shines on that the human wishes to be at. If in that area it happens to be night, a simple expedient would be sending that person’s light into the moon’s, or a star’s. Equally feasible would be to turn the person into sound waves, or particles of air...” Principally, a person is turned into light, beamed to another place, and turned back into a person; no-one, however, has yet exactly identified what a whit of light really looks like. It still hasn’t seemed to dampen their enthusiasm, though.

All the constant sojourns back and forth between planes and countries in different forms has perhaps made them light-headed, and the Octi are usually an extremely excitable lot, and tend to rush up and down hallways a great deal with paper trailing them several feet and their shoes on backwards. They are also the only magical Order known for the members’ sense of humour; when chided for their untidiness, most reply airily,

“I don’t care one whit.”

## **6. *Order of the Eye***

The reference to the organ of sight in their title is in fact misleading, for mages of the Order seldom, in fact, take much note of what they observe with that sense. The word Eye here refers more to the Inner Eye, as it is often called - the sixth sense. Mages from the Order of the Eye specialise in skills of the mind - clairvoyance; advanced telepathy, telekinesis and pyrokinesis; illusion and hallucination; animal communication and Lower Theurgy and Necromancy, in which they commune with animal spirits and ghosts. Genetic Theurgists have also been known to join the Order; Necromancers once made up a fairly large faculty, hoping to turn their arcane talent into something socially acceptable.

The Eye reference also points to a somewhat disturbing habit of the mages of this Order - when speaking to someone, they never look quite directly at the person, but rather through him, or slightly behind him, and appear to be keenly observing that which no-one else can see rather than the outward appearance of the person. Indeed, they barely notice anyone's face; they recognise those they know by the familiar thought-pattern. Conversing with a mage of the Order of the Eye can be quite disconcerting indeed, especially when one does not know exactly what they might be seeing.

## **7. *The Apprentices of Merlin***

A self-explanatory title. The Apprentices of Merlin are chosen by the archmage at a very young age. Unlike other Orders, members of this privileged group are bestowed their titles at once and are then made to live up to them, rather than earning them in the usual way. This is no doubt due to Merlin's powers of prescience, enabling him to foresee which Apprentice has the potential to hold what title. High Apprentice is the most highly-ranked title; even this is given prematurely to the bearer's earning it.

Although Merlin has been imprisoned for many years now, he is still able to speak to us through an artifact known as the Seeker's Opal, a large nugget of the precious substance covered with a glowing rune construct. The Opal was, according to Merlin, found in his prison; he cast a spell on it and managed to get it smuggled out, after which it was brought, by unknown means, all the way to the owner of a small curio shop. Along the way the Opal's spell of telepathic communication had become hopelessly jumbled, probably due to some hack magician attempting to cast the spell, unable to unravel it, and figuring the construct was wrong.

Many other magicians attempted to put the focus back together, jumbling the runes even more, till finally a young mage found it in the curio shop and managed to solve the puzzle. The Opal was brought to the Guild, and Merlin promptly made the young man High Apprentice, on

the spot. The Opal has recently been handed over to another of Merlin's Apprentices.

## **The Mage's Guild**

Guild mages wear robes which differentiate them from non-guilders. The robes vary in colour according to rank; basic-level members wear brown, and the intermediary levels are garbed in ascending levels of pale blue, maroon, indigo and deep blue or black. The Guildmaster wears a complex badge that none of the other guilders are allowed to wear. The location of the Mage Guildhouse is usually a meticulously-kept secret, though it can appear to unskilled eyes when the Guild members need it to.

## **2. The Art of Makidos**

### **Makidon Guildmaster Yvenne of Camelot**

Makidons do not study rune-magic or rune-foci. Consequently, they require magical artifacts to focus magical fields for them without the use of runes; a Makidon's magical artifact is thus his greatest and most precious weapon. Some Makidons do study rudimentary rune-magic; non-guild Makidons in particular tend to be knowledge-hungry and undertake almost every course of study they can possibly lay their hands on.

The Makidons' reliance on magical artifacts is a weakness both our enemies and ourselves know. This problem is partly overcome - but only partly - by order-specific weapons which are useless in the hands of non-Makidons. Some weapons are even owner-specific, and will function only with that particular owner, but this is reserved only for the most powerful of Makidons, as the artifacts will be useless after their owner's death, a great waste of magic.

## **History of the Makidon Order**

*After the death of the traitor Aventus at the hands of the mysterious Knight of Light, King Chevalis regained the throne, and men flocked to his support, replacing the knights he had lost to Aventus and serving him with a vigour equal to that of their predecessors. The Knight of Light had left behind his magical suit of armour, which Chevalis claimed for his own. Mages serving Chevalis immediately recognised the armour as possessing great magical power, though as yet undiscovered; Chevalis gave them leave to experiment with the suit, but they were unable to unlock its secrets or utilise its magic. Chevalis then undertook the task of his own accord, recording the results in a neatly-kept journal.*

*Now numbered among Chevalis' loyal knights was a youth called Makidos. Although tender in years compared to many a battle-scarred veteran, Makidos was nevertheless a formidable fighter, fast and dextrous, surprisingly strong for his slenderness, ingenious in both field and hand-to-hand combat. Makidos eventually defeated every Chevalier knight in friendly combat, save Chevalis himself...*

As Chevalis stepped onto the practice field in the light summer rain, he saw but one knight there, practising his strokes with firm and flawless execution that was lost on the battered straw dummy. Chevalis did not immediately stop him, watching silently and speculatively instead. The knight was obviously young, slenderly muscled and deeply tanned, with a damp mop of raven hair and dark green eyes intent upon the mindless dummy, feinting and parrying fancied blows as his sword fluttered back and forth with blinding speed and alarming power for what appeared to be fairly lightly-struck blows. Flax whirled off the hopelessly defeated dummy with each strike. Finally, in a single brilliant feint-and-pivot move Chevalis had not been expecting, the youth whirled back, came up behind the dummy, and swung a heavy blow at its neck that would have decapitated a human opponent in the blink of an eye. The knight drew back in satisfaction - then saw the King. Hurriedly he bowed, and began to make way.

“No, stay,” pressed Chevalis quickly. The knight obediently stayed put. “Your name is Makidos, isn’t it?”

“At your service,” murmured Makidos, gratified at the King’s personal recognition.

“I have heard of you,” smiled Chevalis, studying the young man’s wide-set features and upturned mouth, a sign of peasant heritage, so different from Chevalis’ own imposing, hawk-like features that would grow even more intimidating with age. “From what I’ve just seen, none of what I’ve heard has been exaggerated. You’ve felled every one of my best knights - consequently, *you* must be my best knight.”

Makidos bowed deferentially. “Your Majesty honours me.”

Chevalis’ smile grew wider, observing the young knight. Finally he offered, “Will it please thee to spar with me, Milord?”

Makidos jerked upright, startled, not quite believing his ears. *Will it please thee... Milord...*the King was challenging him as an equal! He was asking for a duel! Makidos stared at the young King’s pale blue eyes, searching for signs of mockery or deceit. None was evident; the King really meant it. Makidos’ face lit up perceptibly.

Chevalis laughed at the knight's eagerness. "Your answer, Milord?" he pressed.

Makidos bowed again, exultant with the honour conferred upon him. "And it please thee, Milord, I shall cross weapons with thee in friendly battle," he replied in the traditional way.

The King's squire hurried forward to remove the King's cloak; the heavily-furred mantle fell off to reveal a magnificent set of shining armour, gold of hue and glowing faintly with magic. Makidos stared in awe at the legendary Armour of Light, watched as Chevalis strapped on his shield and raised his glowing sword in salute. Makidos did likewise, quickly composing himself, and the battle began.

Makidos was hesitant at first, unsure whether or not the King had really meant his equal's challenge, but a few solid blows and a bit of dangerous teasing and taunting with the tip of the blade convinced him. Makidos relaxed and let his abilities have free rein.

Chevalis was at first pleasantly surprised, then astonished, then downright alarmed as Makidos' powerful strokes became fiercer and harder, yet more calculated and difficult to counter as the battle wore on; Makidos seemed to gain energy as the battle ensued, rather than grow tired. Chevalis was pressed almost to his knees when finally, as a last desperate resort, he activated some of the little magic he knew how to use in the Armour of Light,

and raised the magical shield to meet Makidos' next blow. In the resulting clash the shield burst forth with intense light, stunning Makidos temporarily.

It all but blinded him - yet in that moment the magical surge of power stirred something within him, something that thrilled through every fibre of his being and made his bones tingle. In that moment, Makidos became enthralled - and eventually obsessed - with the magic of the Armour of Light.

Chevalis, knowing he had effectively cheated Makidos of his victory, did not swing the winning blow, and instead offered his hand to Makidos and called it a draw. Makidos agreed almost absently - Chevalis was glad that he did not seem indignant or hurt in any way. Henceforth Chevalis and Makidos sparred often.

Makidos, intrigued by the Armour of Light, began to dabble in the magical arts in an effort to learn how to use it, mulling over spell-books and scrolls with such intensity that soon he could well have passed for a novice mage. He was now able to sense the magic, the power, of the Armour every time he was near it. Finally his overwhelming concupiscence got the better of him, and he made a foolhardy attempt to steal the Armour and Chevalis' journal.

Needless to say, he was caught directly; overcome with shame, he confessed, and was excommunicated from the knighthood. All were sorry to see him go, none more than Chevalis, who had grown to love Makidos as a brother; everyone knew that it was Chevalis' love that had stayed the executioner's hand this time. Mortification drove Makidos into self-imposed exile in the mountains.

It was here that Makidos met Golstar, a travelling mage. The two, equals both in depth of mind and in compatibility of character, became fast friends. Sharing what they had learnt, Makidos, upon a whim, decided to try and combine their abilities and found a brand-new order, a cross between the warrior and mage. Golstar was dubious, but obligingly taught Makidos all he knew, then left soon after, being more of a wanderer than a mage. He did, however, leave with Makidos a magical artifact that he had made - the twin-globed sceptre. Makidos later successfully combined the arts of combat and magic into one, and created several more sceptres, all of whom today have been either lost or destroyed, save one. Makidos' first students were the mountain nomads, who called themselves Makidons in honour of their teacher; the art from then on spread far and wide, becoming a full-fledged order.

Knights, being firm believers in cold, hard steel, are mistrustful of magic, thus they were scandalised by the emergence of the Art of Makidos; the first Makidons, being mountain nomads, thought the knight's armour

ungainly and impractical and ridiculous-looking, passing on their prejudices to their students. Both sides were equally stubborn; till today it has still not worn off.

### **Free-standing training houses**

A free-standing Makidon training house is one that is not subsidised or under the jurisdiction of the Makidon Guilds. These are usually operated by one or a few retired Makidons with a small class of pupils; some take on only one student. The student is usually required to board in the training house. Although it is free from Guild control in other matters, all students are required to attend religious services at least once a month in a Church of Elohim, as well as take part in certain classes that might otherwise be left out of their studies. This is mainly so that the Guild can keep track of the numbers of Makidons-in-training, and to make sure that these independent tutors do not graduate their students before they have obtained the equivalent of a full Guild training, to ensure that the Makidons' reputation as skilled warriors is not compromised. The Tower of Elada is an example of a free-standing training house.

## **Makidon training**

Makidons are essentially a form of warrior-mage. They go through both a knight's vigorous physical training as well as schooling in the magical arts. In the combination of the two, parts of the separate courses were necessarily left out for lack of time, otherwise students would take more than half their lives to complete their training.

Magic is imperative to the Makidon. Because Makidons traditionally shun the armour that knights wear, they rely solely on their magic to protect themselves. In magic, the study of rune-foci is what takes up a great deal of time; by eliminating the need for rune-foci and replacing them instead with magical artifacts, a great deal of time is saved. This means, however, that Makidons cannot improvise spells, and makes it harder to grasp the complexities of learning new ones. Some Makidons, however, take up rune-study after graduation, to enhance their magical powers.

Makidons dislike armour because it hampers them in combat. Knight-training commonly focuses on building up strength; Makidos, in paring down the course, re-focused Makidon training on speed and agility instead. Armour is heavy and redundant to someone who can easily dodge blows rather than take them in the hope of surviving them. Makidons thus tend to be on the lean,

wiry side - once again, unsuited to armour which better fits broader men.

An unexpected benefit from the combination of the two schools is the Makidon pathfinding abilities. Makidons are instinctual path-finders, and need to look only once at a map, after which they will never get lost, even in a place they have never been to before. When told to go in a certain direction, they are compass-accurate, and will travel in that precise direction in as close to a straight line as humanly possible. If diverted from their path, they can easily find it again once given the opportunity.

## **The Makidon Guild**

Makidons do not have a formal uniform like the mages' robes or the armour of the various order of knights. It was thus necessary to create a system of jewelled badges for Makidon Guild members to differentiate their ranks. The jewels increase in value up the ranks; the Makidon Guildmaster wears a large, finely-cut diamond, while the initiates merely wear whatever stone happens to be most cheaply available in their region. In the iron-mining city of Cordale, for example, the students actually wear small polished chunks of haematite - the usual stone, however, is quartz.

The Guildmaster is entrusted with the Guild Fellowship Staff, a tall slender rod of gold metal, encrusted with innumerable runes, impeccably carved, some small enough to cover with a finger yet more complex than a spider's web. The top of the Staff is curled into a fanciful hook, a symbol of unity and brotherhood. The staff is extremely powerful, but it is owner-specific, or more accurately, appointment-specific - and will work only with the Guildmaster.

The Makidons are the only official order that allows both men and women equally into their ranks. Female Makidons, however, are still rare; Briton female Makidons rarer still. Most female Makidons are from countries like Talmissra or Macherras, where women are also accepted as warriors; I myself am half-Macheri, and the only female in the Camelot Guild, as well as the third female Makidon Guildmaster.

### **Golstars/ Twin-globed sceptres**

*Golstar* is the formal name for the twin-globed sceptre. Today the word Golstar has fallen out of common use, even among Makidons - not surprisingly, for there is only one of these weapons still known to exist. Makidos originally created seven sceptres, one of which he gave to Chevalis' son, Larenor. Makidos died before he had the chance to teach anyone the art, in an attack by the last of

Aventus' loyalists. Golstar himself was never found, thus the art remains a lost one.

The Royal sceptre was kept in a vault; the other sceptres were in use by various Makidons. As time wore on, however, the sceptres were either lost or destroyed. The last known remaining sceptre Arthur gave to one of his knights as a gift - for Arthur had a far more powerful weapon, the Excalibur - which was perhaps a mistake as the knight, intrigued by the weapon but unable to use it, promptly left Arthur's court to become a Makidon. This last sceptre has been passed through many hands, and is now in possession of a young Makidon, Tosham of Torpann.

### **3. The Galanic Order**

#### **Matron Helena of the Galanic High Council**

#### **The Coming of St. Galania**

During the reign of King Drexus III, some three hundred years before the reign of the Pendragon royalty, a great plague fell over the land of Bretunia. No-one knew how or where it began, but it swept over cities and towns and villages everywhere. It breathed a burning fever upon its victims' skins and filled their lungs so thick they had to gasp for air, and kissed sores on their hands and faces, sucked the strength from them and replaced it with

violent fits of agonizing pain. Magician and physician alike worked frantically to contain the spread and find a cure, but in time it was plain that the whole country had to be quarantined.

In those days, the only healing practised was in the form of herblore passed down through the generations, and sometimes assisted physicians as nurses - Galania's mother was a nurse, and took the child along on her travels, often marvelling at Galania's apparent gift for healing, her tender and compassionate touching equalling, even surpassing, the effectiveness of the physician's medicines.

The Yellow Plague - called so because of the yellowish pallor of its victims - came when Galania was seventeen years old. She was a beautiful girl, with curling flaxen hair and gentle grey eyes, and many people, delirious with fever, mistook her for an angel when she tended to them. Even her mother had thought her an angel... just before the poor woman died of the disease she had contracted from those she had ministered to.

King Drexus had been quarantined in time, but Queen Imogen had not. She lay ill in her bedchamber, attended by chambermaids almost too frightened to touch her for fear of infection, her frenetic, agonised screams rending the silence of the empty halls in mad echoes each time the fits came upon her.

Drexus III had many faults, impatience not the least of them; his fury at his advisor's apparent ineptness and his own helplessness finally culminated in a wrathful ultimatum - Cure the Queen in three days, or die.

It was then that Saloma came...

Queen Imogen was asleep at last, snatching perhaps five minutes' respite from the medicine Galania had given her. Later she would be coughing and hacking again, but for now, at least, she was resting. Galania folded a cool towel over the flushed forehead and kissed the burning cheek tenderly. She was the only one ministering to the Queen now - almost all the maids and servants had fled the castle in fear.

Just then came a knock on the door; quickly Galania hurried over lest the visitor disturb the sleeping Queen, and peered out. It was one of the few nurses who had not run away, come to relieve her of her ward for the moment - Galania was wanted by the King. "A woman has come who says she can cure the Queen," explained the nurse, noticing Galania's astonishment.

Galania's heart leapt. "That's wonderful!" she exclaimed. "I must go at once." The young girl ran off to exchange her apron for a clean tucker and, in a short while, joined the other court physicians in the main palace lounge. Alaron, Galania's mentor, put his finger to his lips to indicate that he had been ordered into silence - accordingly, Galania was silent also, and followed Alaron's

gaze to the far end of the room, where the King was granting an audience to a dark-robed figure. “Her name is Lady Saloma,” Alaron whispered.

Lady Saloma was plainly beautiful, with a flawless porcelain complexion, deep-set green eyes like jewels, and copper-red curls that shone upon the dark velvet of her pelisse. Her features were fine, delicate and regular, a sign of high breeding. When she spoke, it was in a rich, smooth voice; Galania caught the words ‘plague’, ‘cure’, ‘pains me’ and ‘medicine’ several times; Drexus, on the other hand, was making ominous threats that promised to send Lady Saloma to Sheol if she failed to deliver on her promise.

Finally Drexus stood and, clasping Saloma’s slender fingers in his own, spoke a low, desperate plea that made Galania’s empathic heart go out to him. Saloma, her face beautiful and completely unmoved, bowed slightly and said, very clearly, “I will cure the Queen, Your Majesty”, in a voice of steel that for some reason set Galania’s teeth on edge. Galania also realised that she was feeling feverish, and her fingers were tightly clenched. She recognised her reaction as a premonition of evil, or danger.

Saloma bowed solemnly and turned to leave - the audience was over. As she headed towards the exit, she raised her eyes to Galania’s face. Slowly, deliberately, she smiled - a smile as cold and hard and biting as ice.

That night Saloma locked herself in with the ailing Queen. A pungent odour of simmering herbs and distillates hovered in the passageway; Galania recognised the herbs and plants she had brought in: mithridate, ipecac, menthol, various fungi... all of which previous physicians had already tried their luck with. Night passed, wore onto daylight, then night again. While indigo dusk was falling, Saloma finally unbolted the door and asked that King Drexus be brought to her. The King was quickly escorted to his wife's bedchamber; Saloma threw open the door, smiling triumphantly - like a cat who has got the mouse, Galania thought with a shudder - and said over her shoulder, "Come, my dear." And the Queen herself, leaning heavily on Saloma's shoulder, stepped forward.

Galania's first sensation was one of shock, even as Drexus ran forward and kissed his wife, handling her with great care as though afraid she might break - and indeed she looked unbelievably delicate, fragile to the point of brittleness. And pale, thought Galania in horror, so fearfully pale - almost - could it be? - green, even. Galania shook herself. No, she couldn't be green - perhaps it was merely the contrast between the fever flush and Imogen's own delicate fairness. But her eyes - they were glazed over, vacant, expressionless, even as Drexus wept over her. Galania knew the Queen to be a vigorous, merry-hearted soul; even in her sickness she had been cheerful, when the pain permitted. Yet now, when she

was well, she seemed to have lost all her cheer, all her strength.

Saloma was made a duchess by Drexus, but took the reward dispassionately, saying, "I live only to serve my goddess, she who has aided me in restoring health to Her Majesty."

"Who is your Goddess?" asked Drexus at once. "I must pay her homage. And so shall everyone in Bretunia!"

"Her name," smiled Saloma, "is Asherah."

Drexus was as good as his word - as Saloma went forth into the stricken lands of Bretunia to heal others as she had healed the Queen, temples were built, altars erected, rites held. All hailed and worshipped the goddess Asherah, and prayed to her for deliverance from the plague. Saloma was welcomed as a saint; but all whom she healed became like Queen Imogen - pale, lifeless, with green-tinged skin. No-one could nurse them back to health, but they were alive, and this was enough for everyone to praise Saloma as a saviour. All except for Galania - she hated Asherah and hated Saloma, hated the shrines and temples, hated the throngs of black-robed people chanting things they didn't understand, things that sounded unclean and unwholesome. Frightened, desperate, knowing something was terribly wrong and unable to do anything about it, Galania retreated from everything, and prayed for guidance - not to Asherah, but

to the God of her childhood - Rophe (a High Bretunic name for Elohim).

All seemed well for the moment - then, one day, Queen Imogen fell inexplicably into a swoon from which she could not be roused. The symptoms of the Yellow Plague re-appeared; others in the city cured by Saloma began to suffer similarly. Drexus sent a missive to Saloma, begging her to return; Saloma wrote back and instructed the King and his people to re-double their efforts towards their worship of Asherah. "I suspect my Goddess is displeased," she wrote. "One among you has turned from her. Find the girl, the one called Galania." Galania was located in an Rophian convent - the furious King burned the convent down and threw Galania into the dungeon. If she had been any older, Drexus would no doubt have executed her. Alaron, of course, would not stand for it; he made the mistake of demanding to the King,

"Has it not occurred to you that it is perhaps Saloma who it the evil one?" Alaron was no child - King Drexus promptly ordered him executed.

Alone now and fearful, Galania, in the dank dungeons, prayed all the more fervently. Weakened by distress and hunger, she presently fell into a swoon. It was then that she heard the voice, and saw the dim outline of a shining face against the darkness - it whispered to her, and informed her that all she had suspected was true. Asherah was no goddess, but a demoness - and Saloma,

her priestess, was the one who had sent the plague, as part of a scheme on her part to convert everyone in Bretunia to Asheraism. Furthermore, Saloma had no intention of lifting the plague from Bretunia - all whom she had 'cured' would be ill again and die just the same.

“Thou hast been gifted, even at thy birth, with great power, child Galania,” it informed her. “Find that power now - use it as thou was meant to, to aid the sick and heal the ailing.”

When Galania finally awoke again, she was aware that something had changed inside her - there was a strength sustaining her that had not been there before - or rather, that had lain dormant. When King Drexus came to see her, looking grim and stern, to warn her against further paganism, Galania stood tall and proud before him and said quietly,

“Rophe has empowered me to rid the land of this plague. Take me to the Queen.” And Drexus, urged by a force he could not understand, obeyed. Galania touched the ailing Queen's face in sympathy. “Poor child,” she murmured in a voice that, though still young, had inexplicably aged, “you have suffered much.” She then bent and kissed the Queen's burning face.

Drexus gasped. The sores on Imogen's face were gone; the heavy, laboured wheezing had eased; the flush receded into Imogen's usual regal fairness - not paleness. Her eyelids fluttered; she woke, asked, “What happened?”

in her old, crisp voice - and Drexus knew then that Galania was no ordinary girl, that she had been blessed with a supernatural gift, given her by the God he had forsaken. Drexus stared, unbelieving, at his wife, now completely, undeniably cured. Then he fell to his knees and genuflected, in reverent awe, to Galania.

“The duchess,” Galania said to him with quiet ferocity. “The duchess is the agent of this evil.”

Her inborn gift awoken now, Galania rid Bretunia of the plague which the demoness Asherah had sent. The religion itself was wiped out in one fell swoop by a furious King Drexus, altars and shrines burned, purified in cleansing flame, smoke mingling with the smell of sulphur as sickrooms were purged of contamination along with the souls of the people. Drexus ordered a search for Saloma, placing a hefty price on her head, but Saloma had marshalled her own forces - the barbarian hordes of Gerroch, the descendants of the Vikings. Drexus eventually drove them back, but Saloma herself was never found again.

As she grew, Galania took on disciples, training them in the healing magic she herself had been naturally blessed with, combining it with her knowledge of herblore. She never married, for all her love went into her work. Galania was later canonised as a saint in Bretunia; the Galan Order which she founded thrives on till today.

## **Nature of Galanic Healing**

Galanic art is different from other forms of magic in that, instead of acting as a medium through which atmospherical magic is channelled, Galans draw from a source of magical energy within themselves - their lifeforce. St. Galania had a natural talent that enabled her to do this, but others less gifted must be taught.

The first thing a Galan must learn to do is build up her life-forces. Women, for some reason, are able to build up a far stronger force than men, thus the Galanic Order is restricted to women; men, however, can also be trained as Galanic Knights. The Knights are subordinate to the female Galans because of their inferior healing skills.

Once the Galan has built up a strong enough lifeforce, she must learn to control it and channel it into another's body. Because the force flows directly from the Galan's own source of spiritual and physical energy, she is quite literally giving away part of her life to her patient, thus she must be strong both in body and in mind to be able to regenerate the energy she has sacrificed. Once this is mastered, the force can be manipulated into two main kinds of healing magic - time and purification. Time magic is used to speed up the healing process, perhaps for a broken bone that has been set or a cut that has been stitched. Purification is used to combat disease, usually in conjunction with herbs and medicine. In purification magic,

foreign and harmful bodies are searched out and destroyed, much in the same way as the human immune system, only with a greatly amplified effectiveness. These two kinds of magic can be combined to form a magical gestalt that can heal almost anything, sometimes even resurrect the dead. St. Galania had a natural ability to utilise all three forms of magic, as do many Galanic artifacts wrought specifically for that purpose, but other Galans are unable to use the gestalt magic without the aid of these same magical artifacts. Galanic magic is also sometimes aided with the use of spells and incantations discovered over the years by the Galanic Knights.

## **The Galanic Knights**

At first all Galan missionaries were High Priestesses. This later proved impractical, however, for missions and quests, as the High Priestesses were too involved with tending to the ailing to bother with searching for new herbs of magical artifacts. A new order was thus formed - the Galanic Knights, the only section of the Order that accepts men. These men are trained in herblore and rudimentary healing magic and sent out to discover items that would aid the Galan cause. They are also taught combat skills - the first of them were trained by knights and warriors hired by the Galanic Council for this purpose. The order is kept small, and most of the knights are really wanderers at heart. High Priestesses are still sent out on

missions for specific items, though they are more often than not accompanied by knights.

## **Galan Hierarchy**

The Galan robe consists of a caftan with a pleated skirt, white or pastel-coloured, with a sash or over-mantle. For High Priestesses, who do a great deal of travelling, the skirt is only a concession to common notions of decency - underneath they wear high boots, hose and often even pants to facilitate movement.

The lowest rung of the Galan hierarchy consists of the initiates, those who have just begun their training. Initiates do not need to be educated within a Galan Chapterhouse of temple - they can be trained by High Priestesses on the field, as nurses and assistants. Once they are ready, they are sent to the nearest Galan Chapterhouse or to the Motherhouse itself to begin formal training. This is when they don the official robes and begin to develop their skills of faith further. They are then known as Rophicians - those with especially strong potential go through an interrogative process at a Galan Temple and, if found worthy of the honour, are made Holy Maidens of the Temple, tending to the rites of the Galanic faith. These must be virgins - after they have lost their virginity they are required to relinquish the title.

Rophicians rise through several ranks till finally, they are promoted to Tutelary, in which they are apprenticed to the Priestesses. They then take the Priestess' Trials - field assignments in areas of war, disease or natural disaster, assisting the High Priestesses. If they are found capable they are promoted to Priestess, after which they dedicate themselves full-time to the task of healing the sick and of educating the next generation of Rophicians/Galans.

The title of High Priestess is conferred only upon those who wish it and are able to bear it. High Priestesses are missionaries of the Galan cause and must leave their training houses and work in areas of war or sickness. They are also sent out on dangerous quests and missions.

Priestesses who remain in the Galanic Houses can, if they work hard enough, be eventually promoted to the post of Matron of that particular House, and perhaps even Head Matron of the entire Galan Order. The Matrons and the Head Matron make up the Higher Galans, or the Galanic Council.

## **The Emerald Orb**

The Emerald Orb is one of the most powerful Galanic artifact in the world. The Orb is kept in the Chamber of Sacrifice, so called because the only time the Orb is ever taken from it is during war or disaster - thus

lives are always sacrificed every time the Orb is disturbed. The Chamber is in the room of the Matron of the Motherhouse, who is expected to protect it with her life if necessary. Only those ranked High Priestess and above are allowed to touch it - using it is a privilege only the approval of the Galanic Council can grant.

The Emerald Orb cannot be carried for life except by one person - the Archpriestess. Archpriestess is a step higher than High Priestess - as much higher as a human is from the amoeba the human evolved from. The Archpriestess outranks even the Head Matron - in fact, she outranks every other head of every other Order, save the Royal Family itself. It is not a regular position because of the great power and responsibility it entails - the last Archpriestess died nearly a hundred years ago. Since then none has proven herself worthy of succeeding her.

## **4. Knights of Bretunia**

### **by Sir Gabriel of the Knights of the Round Table**

After the death of Arthur, David of Cador - the present King Constantine's father - was the one who reunited Bretunia and rehabilitated it from its trials. As a result, King David was extremely popular, and men flocked to his support, asking to serve him as knights. So large were their numbers - all of them warriors of varying

degrees of skill - that King David was able to form a full Order of them. He persuaded Arthur's surviving knights into serving him as teachers and weapon masters to his new loyal defenders, and hired several scholars as Mentors to educate the knights properly (for, to put it frankly, he had discovered that many of these men were frightfully stupid. It was not their fault - the years of war had taken its toll on the state of education). These veterans put together a course of study and physical training that has been expanded upon with each new generation of knights. The King himself headed this order, and called them the Knights of Camelot. He also kept up the tradition of the Round Table, designating a hundred and forty-nine (the last seat was of course filled by the King himself) of the best knights as the Knight's Assembly, an equivalent of the Guild Councils of the other Orders.

The knights later divided themselves into four different sub-Orders, still under the banner of the Knights of Camelot, but each with their own distinctive combat skills and methods of instruction, and their own crests on their shields. After a period of basic training, students are drafted into whichever Order most suits their abilities. The Knights of the Round Table became a common term used to describe the knights who still followed the original dictates of the Order of Camelot, though the Knights of the Round Table technically are really the members of the Knight's Assembly. The other Orders are the Crowned Shield, the Broken Spear (Splitspar), and the Dolorous

Blade. Each one came into being as an offshoot of the original Knights of Camelot.

## **Knights of the Round Table**

Round Table Knights are graduated only in Camelot, in the one and only training house in the outskirts of the city, a huge fortress of a building that housed the original Camelot Knights when they began their training. Boys who wish to join the Round Table Knights are sent to training camps scattered around the country. The Round Table Knights wear white steel plate armour with a red cross on their shields.

## **Knights of the Dolorous Blade - by Sir Devon of Camelot**

The first sub-Order formed was the Dolorous Blade. It gained its unique name through a famous quote from its very first leader, Sir Lucas. Sir Lucas was a quiet, meditative man, a favourite with King David, who attempted to appoint him to the Round Table - Sir Lucas, however, disliked politics even of this fairly mild genre, and refused him. He was an extremely religious knight, and was often mocked by his classmates, and later by his students (boys, after all, will be boys). Upset and disillusioned, Sir Lucas decided to leave the knighthood, and King David, though disappointed, did not stop him. When he announced his resignation to his students,

however, a surprising number of them objected vehemently, and professed to share his beliefs. These flocked to his support, declaring that if Sir Lucas were forced to leave, they would leave along with him. Their numbers were so large that King David was quite alarmed - seeking a solution, King David hit upon the idea of having Sir Lucas forming his own branch of the Knights of Camelot.

Sir Lucas' loyal students were enthusiastic about the idea, so Sir Lucas agreed, bringing over with him several other weapon masters and Mentors. The sub-Order was at first merely called the Lucasian. Later, Sir Lucas met a man - an old friend of his, apparently, who had gone over to bad ways. The friend apparently challenged him to battle over some scruple - upon defeating him, Sir Lucas said sadly,

"I shall not mourn thee, for my sword already weeps thy blood." Sir Lucas' young squire reported this to the student body, whereupon they began calling their order the Knights of the Dolorous Blade. The Knights of the Dolorous Blade are the most pious of the Knights of Camelot, and make religious studies a part of their curriculum. They place great emphasis on the benefits of a sound mind and a pure heart in battle - never is a Knight of the Dolorous Blade ruffled, no matter what happens to him; never does he give in to moments of impulsiveness. Knights of this order are calm and methodical in everything, including combat, drawing strength from their

faith. We wear silver steel armour; our crest is the most artistic among the four orders, depicting the Herald of Elohim holding a sword, blade pointing down, in clasped hands. Today the Dolorous Blade is the second most prestigious warrior order in Bretunia, apart from that of the 150 High Knights of the Round Table. Student knights who make it into the Dolorous Blade are considered among the best instinctive fighters in the world.

### **Knights of the Broken Spear (Splitspar) - by Sir Frederic of Camelot**

The Knights of the Broken Spear are the strongest and fiercest of all the Knights of Camelot. The Order came about when one of the weapon masters commented that some of the students were much more powerful than their peers and should be given different training to take advantage of their natural strength. The Knight's Council agreed to this, but were unable to decide on exactly how strong the student had to be to join this new Order, until King David suggested that any student able to break a standard-issue spear in two with his bare hands ought to qualify as a member.

A standard-issue soldier's spear in those days consisted of a length of thick, highly-varnished wood, capped with a polished spearhead. The spears were not easy to break, for the wood was old and tough as metal, and would only snap under very extreme pressure. Many

of the knights themselves were unable to break the spears, and were dubious about the capability of the students to accomplish such a feat.

But when the challenge was issued to the students, King David proved his method of qualification sound - a goodly number of youths were indeed able to break the spears, albeit amid much grunting and straining. A few snapped the hard wood as though they were twigs. When the list of students for the new Order was finalised, such a collection of swarthy, beefy brutes was never before seen. They were all good-natured young fellows, however, and worked with a will, till the Order of the Broken Spear, or Splitspar, as they prefer to be called, became renown far and wide for producing the strongest, most astoundingly powerful knights ever known. The Splitspar knights are almost inevitably intimidating-ly huge, and ride equally gigantic warhorses. Their strength means that they are able to work with the heaviest and most devastating weapons, such as battle-axes and morning stars. Splitspar knights wear black burnished armour, and our insignia is, of course, a broken spear.

## **Knights of the Crowned Shield**

The Order of the Crowned Shield was the last sub-Order to be founded, after the death of King David's wife, Queen Jeanette - in fact, during the death of the Queen. Queen Jeanette was not a typical Queen; before becoming Queen, she had been a Makidon, and although she was often weighed down by political duties, she was never too busy to pay a visit to the practice field and watch the student knights in training. At one point she was even heading the Knight's Council, but the Royal Chaplain objected vehemently at having a woman involved in such matters of violence, and Queen Jeanette decorously removed herself from office.

Queen Jeanette had a soft spot for the smaller, weaker student knights, who could not hit as hard as their larger, stronger counterparts, and took it upon herself to form another class out of them, formulating a course of training with the other knights, drawing from her training as a Makidon. The new course was based on speed rather than strength, just as a Makidon's training is, and on combat tactics and complex manoeuvring designed to outwit rather than outfight an opponent. An emphasis was also placed on war tactics and the handling of sieges and large-scale battles - in effect, these knights were being trained to become generals rather than soldiers.

This new Order was at first called the Queen's Order, but later changed its name to commemorate a gesture from Queen Jeannette. The iron-willed Queen had many enemies, and had always been a target for assassination attempts, just as much as the King himself. One day, one of those attempts succeeded; the Queen was struck down by poison, and was quickly confined to bed - but not quickly enough to save her life. She lay there ailing for many days; King David, upon discovering the source of the assassin, promptly went to war, battling a young Duke who had coveted the throne since the beginning. While he was engaged in battle, the Queen was living out her last moments, and would have none beside her in the end save her infant son and a young boy from the Queen's Order, who wept unabashedly as he watched her die.

Queen Jeanette knew that she was speaking her last words when she beckoned the boy to lay his newly-earned shield on her bed before her, and then lifted her crown from the cushion beside her and placed it, with the last of her strength, on that shining shield. "Take it to the King," she whispered to him with her dying breath, "and remember that I love you all." So saying, she died. The boy, bearing his precious charge on the shield still, ran all the way out into the battlefield, miraculously escaping mishap in the midst of the chaos (some say the Queen's spirit watched over him), found King David, and, with fierce, angry pride, presented Queen Jeannette's empty crown to him. King David knew at once what it meant; the battle

was fought with a vengeance by the sorrowing knights, and the treasonous Duke was defeated and killed. Henceforth the Queen's Order was called the Order of the Crowned Shield.

The Knights of the Crowned Shield are the only knights which can match the Makidons in combat speed and agility. They are also the most well-versed in war strategies and, as Queen Jeanette planned, make the best war generals of all the knights. Crowned Shield Knights wear burnished steel scale armour (plate armour is not flexible enough and weighs us down too much) and proudly bear the crest of a golden crown upon our shields.

## **The Bretunic Coat-of-Arms**

All knights of Camelot are required to have the Bretunic Coat-of-Arms engraved on the hilt of their swords. The Coat-of-Arms has origins that predate the Briton monarchy; it is a combination of the battle crests of the warring kingdoms that used to make up the British Isles, when they were finally unified. It consists of a lion on the right-hand side and a dragon on the left, holding between them a red beribboned badge with a wreathed sword bisecting the open pages of a bible. A gold banner above is emblazoned with the words 'For Honour and Valour'; a second banner below declares 'For Peace and For God'. This is also the first part of the Knight's Oath of the Knights of Camelot.

## The Crest of the Knights of Camelot

All the orders wear the battle-crest of the Knights of Camelot on their cuirasses, a speared Dragon. This badge, first designed by King Chevalis, only came into use during his son King Larenor's (Uther Pendragon's father) reign. Chevalis did not mean the crest to be used as a badge for the Knights of Camelot; his original intention was to commission a *painting* that depicted the knights slaying a dragon. This was inspired by an incident that occurred in the forests one day while Prince Larenor was out hunting; Larenor had gone in pursuit of a hare that had escaped into the marshes, several knights following him. While they were in the swamp, Larenor's knights saw a great reptilian creature in the distance, apparently stalking the young prince - at once the nearest knight let fly his spear. The creature shrieked, and Larenor whirled around to see it disappearing into the foliage, a spear-end sticking out of its chest.

Prince Larenor was convinced the knights had saved him from a dragon, though the knights themselves surmised - and said so to the King - that it was merely some large swamp lizard. Nevertheless, Chevalis was grateful enough sketch out a drawing and commission someone to paint it. But political matters got in the way, and everyone forgot about it till Larenor himself was King. Upon discovering the sketch again, Larenor decided to use

it as a battle-crest, and had it suitably re-designed into a speared dragon; King David finally adapted it as the mark of the Order of Camelot. Thus did the crest of the Knights of Camelot come about.

## **The Knight's Oath (The Knights of Camelot)**

*For Honour and Valour*

*For Peace and For God*

*My soul I deliver*

*My arm and my blood*

*Eternal allegiance*

*I pledge to my King*

*My country, my people*

*My life shall redeem*

Plainly spoken, it means 'I give my life to my people and my country; I will fight for them and bleed for them, and if need be sacrifice my life to defend them.'