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Games From Folktales

December 2016

Yes, I'm practising greyscale



A Robinsonade is a type of story that takes its name from Robinson Crusoe. In the structure of the story a person from a technologically superior area is stranded in an area where they have limited societal support. Robinsonades are interesting as ways of starting Ars Magica sagas, because they force characters to use the spontaneous magic system for something other than combat.

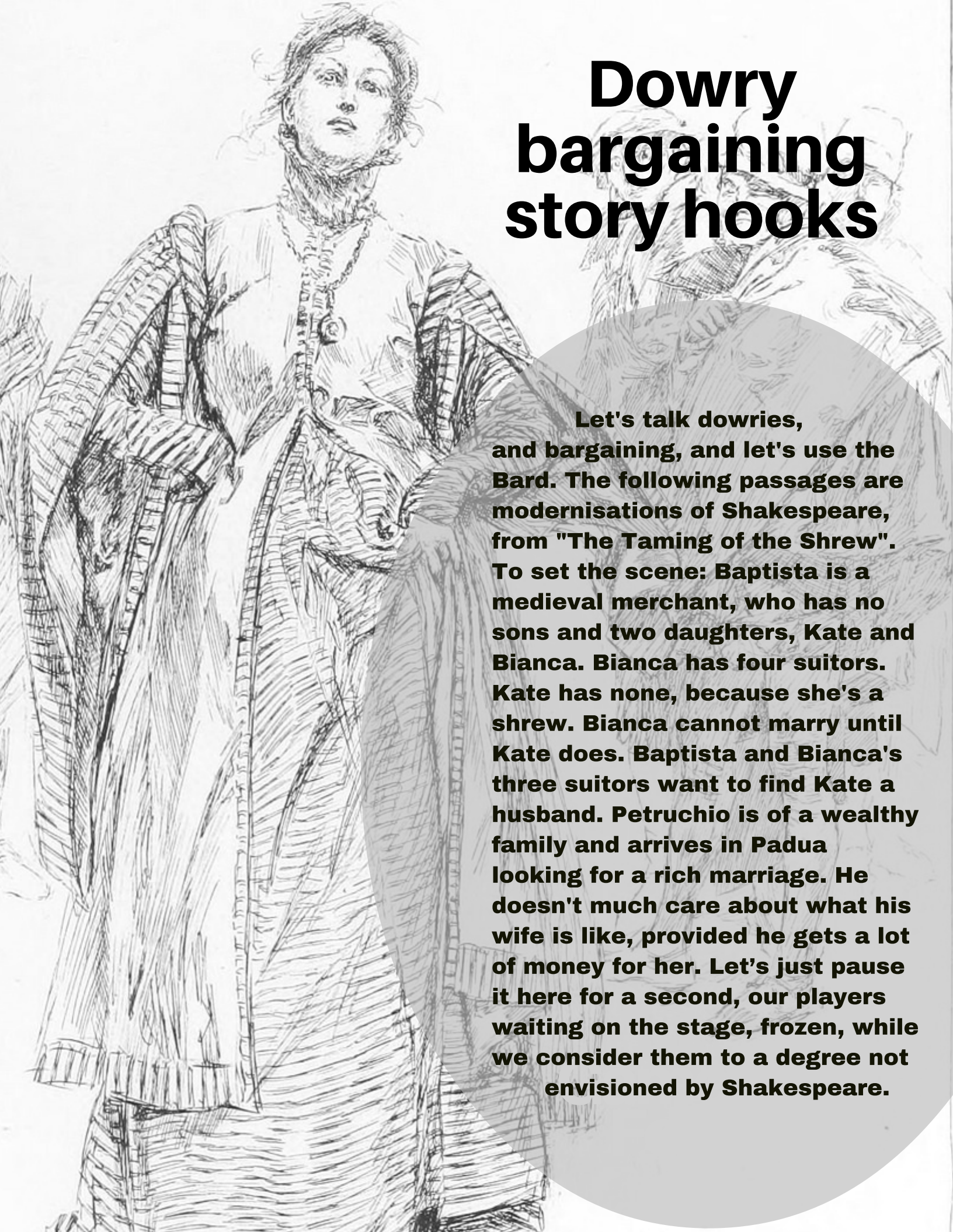
Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is kind of terrible in terms of its social implications. As a person who works with special needs children I find particularly unpleasant his idea that people who don't have their health are incapable of artistic appreciation or spiritual development, but it does lead us to think through some of the basic things characters would need if they suddenly found themselves stranded on an island. What resources can they use their abilities to acquire? How can they then use their skills and magic to meet their requirements for food, water, shelter, communication with the outside world, attempting to leave, and studying their magic Arts? If they do an excellent job of survival the temptation is to place something valuable on the island, so that it becomes the site of the players' covenant. If you think through Shakespeare's "The Tempest" it's a Robinsonade.

Robinsonades make it interesting origin stories for covenants. They, like the covenant design negotiation process, force the characters to prioritise. Players cannot just choose to have one of everything. They need to take their limited resources and expend them, and by expending them, indicate what their characters consider to be the most important priorities.

Imagine a group player characters shipwrecked. They may have the leftover pieces of the ship, the remnants of the cargo, and some of the crew. They need to choose which of these things to rescue/ Is it more important to rescue every last crew member, or to rescue the rations? Is it more important to rescue every last crew member or rescue building materials? From then on I have a series of forced decisions, and they can mitigate the effects of some of those decisions through clever use of spontaneous magic.

In Robinsonades nature is not, generally speaking, bountiful because by having scarce resources characters are forced to act, and that action is the plot of the story. A rich island would transform the characters into lotus eaters who just sit around enjoying themselves, which is fine for a sandbox game. Difficult choices - creative constraints - force players to deepen their characters. Sometimes allowing the players limitless choice freezes character development - freeze in a narrative sense not in an experience gathering sense - because the story just becomes a pastoral where everyone is happy and bucolic. So, consider a Robinsonade for your next saga.

Robinsonades



Dowry bargaining story hooks

Let's talk dowries, and bargaining, and let's use the Bard. The following passages are modernisations of Shakespeare, from "The Taming of the Shrew". To set the scene: Baptista is a medieval merchant, who has no sons and two daughters, Kate and Bianca. Bianca has four suitors. Kate has none, because she's a shrew. Bianca cannot marry until Kate does. Baptista and Bianca's three suitors want to find Kate a husband. Petruchio is of a wealthy family and arrives in Padua looking for a rich marriage. He doesn't much care about what his wife is like, provided he gets a lot of money for her. Let's just pause it here for a second, our players waiting on the stage, frozen, while we consider them to a degree not envisioned by Shakespeare.

Baptista has no heir. Technically, in period this is not correct, there are ways for a merchant family to continue its business in the female line, but even then, the guy has a problem with regard to posterity. Neither daughter is married. So, no grand-children. So, no heir. Oddly, he doesn't seem to have the sorts of hanger-on nephews that people in his situation seemed to attract. He wants to get a daughter married off quickly, and won't marry off the young one before the older one.

The problem is Kate, the elder daughter, who, to use the musical again, hates men. Actually, she hates having to be a wife to them, because its so bloody ghastly, but in her explanation you kind of wonder if she's not laying it on a bit thick, because she talks about the labour of cleaning up after them, and the first thing you ask is "Does she plan to marry a man too poor to have servants?" Obviously she has no intention of it: be damned to love in a cottage, to quote Diana Maturin. She wants her own time, her own space, her own money. And until she marries, its an embarrassment for her younger sister to marry. So, that's the setup: rich guy...daughters...suitors for the youngest.

Petruchio talks to one of Bianca's suitors, and the suitor jests that he might marry Kate. Petruchio hears she's lovely and rich but shrewish, and says "I've braved thunder and canon fire...why not, mate?" The joking guy goes "Are you, like, serious dude?" and Petruchio is all like "Yes, dude. If the bag's full of gold, who cares if it's a bit old?"

and so the suitor introduces him to all of the other suitors, who shout him drinks, and the suitors agree to all be cool with each other, and hang. Rivals in love, but the best of mates. See, that's an adventuring party, right there. Really, it is that teenage boyish, even though one of the suitors is old enough to be Bianca's father.

Now, why, exactly, Kate doesn't just step out of line and join an Italian nunnery is an interesting question. Some Italian nunneries were quite liberal, even by modern standards. Let that go: it seems to be that Baptista genuinely loves his daughters and wants them to be happy. This was less rare than some commentators seem to think.

PETRUCHIO Signior Baptista, my business asketh haste, And every day I cannot come to woo. You knew my father well, and in him me, Left solely heir to all his lands and goods, Which I have better'd rather than decreased: Then tell me, if I get your daughter's love, What dowry shall I have with her to wife?

BAPTISTA After my death the one half of my lands, And in possession twenty thousand crowns.

PETRUCHIO And, for that dowry, I'll assure her of Her widowhood, be it that she survive me, In all my lands and leases whatsoever: Let specialties be therefore drawn between us, That covenants may be kept on either hand. BAPTISTA Ay, when the special thing is well obtain'd, That is, her love; for that is all in all.

So, the deal is done. Let's look at the deal:

Baptista offers half his stuff once he's dead. Well, he has two daughters. That's no big deal. He has offered not to give all his stuff to Bianca's kids if she has sons and Kate daughters, but that's about it. As the spice for the deal, he offers a whole heap of cash: 20 000 crowns.

How much is 20 000 crowns? A crown's five shillings. A crown is a quarter of a pound. That's 5 000 pounds. Now, in Shakespeare's time that's silver not gold, but still, that's about 500 actual pounds of gold in money right there. So why is he willing to drop that down as his opening offer? "Here - have a roomful of gold."

Well, first he is very rich. Very, very, very rich. He wants Petruchio to know he's very, very rich. He wants -everyone- to know, he's very, very rich.

Baptista, you see, isn't making one deal, he's making two. He's looking at the Bianca deal.

His problem isn't his youngest daughter: she is lovely, and loved by many, and would love many if she could. Kate's dad, who knows that time is not on his side, because, among other things, the younger daughter may go boy crazy and get pregnant before things are formalised legally with a husband, decides to go for Petruchio's offer, because it clears the way for the second deal.

Cole Porter gives Bianca "Any Tom, Harry or Dick!" as her signature tune, and it's clever,

but when in the final lines she repeatedly says she'll take any...well, any not Tom or Harry, you can see he's doing the thing he does where he pushes the sex angle as hard as he thinks he can get away with.

Baptista is, however a bit of a softie: he says that Kate needs to consent. Now, legally this is true, but what he means is that he won't threaten her until she consents. He doesn't do this with Bianca.

PETRUCHIO And therefore, setting all this chat aside, Thus in plain terms: your father hath consented That you shall be my wife; your dowry 'greed on; And, Will you, nill you, I will marry you.

Now, this is just wrong in canon law. Kate must give free consent – practicalities often intrude.

PETRUCHIO Give me thy hand, Kate: I will unto Venice, To buy apparel 'gainst the wedding-day. Provide the feast, father, and bid the guests; I will be sure my Katharina shall be fine.

Note that Baptista provides the wedding feast.

So, let's look at the second deal. Baptista gets the two suitors, Gremio and Triano (who is pretending to be a nobleman named Lucentio, who was his foster brother) and he auctions Bianca's future on her behalf.

BAPTISTA Content you, gentlemen: I will compound this strife: 'Tis deeds must win the prize; and he of both That can assure my daughter greatest dower Shall have my Bianca's love. Say, Signior Gremio, What can you assure her?

GREMIO First, as you know, my house within the city Is richly furnished with plate and gold; Basins and ewers to lave her dainty hands; My hangings all of Tyrian tapestry; In ivory coffer I have stuff'd my crowns; In cypress chests my arras counterpoints, Costly apparel, tents, and canopies, Fine linen, Turkey cushions boss'd with pearl, Valance of Venice gold in needlework, Pewter and brass and all things that belong To house or housekeeping: then, at my farm I have a hundred milch-kine to the pail, Sixscore fat oxen standing in my stalls, And all things answerable to this portion. Myself am struck in years, I must confess; And if I die to-morrow, this is hers, If whilst I live she will be only mine.

TRANIO That 'only' came well in. Sir, list to me: I am my father's heir and only son: If I may have your daughter to my wife, I'll leave her houses three or four as good, Within rich Pisa walls, as any one Old Signior Gremio has in Padua; Besides two thousand ducats by the year Of fruitful land, all which shall be her jointure. What, have I pinch'd you, Signior Gremio?

GREMIO Two thousand ducats by the year of land! My land amounts not to so much in all: That she shall have; besides an argosy That now is lying in Marseilles' road. What, have I choked you with an argosy?

TRANIO Gremio, 'tis known my father hath no less Than three great argosies; besides two galliases, And twelve tight galleys: these I will assure her, And twice as much, whate'er thou offer'st next.

GREMIO Nay, I have offer'd all, I have no more; And she can have no more than all I have: If you like me, she shall have me and mine.

TRANIO Why, then the maid is mine from all the world, By your firm promise: Gremio is out-vied. BAPTISTA I must confess your offer is the best; And, let your father make her the assurance, She is your own; else, you must pardon me, if you should die before him, where's her dower?

TRANIO That's but a cavil: he is old, I young.

GREMIO And may not young men die, as well as old?

BAPTISTA Well, gentlemen, I am thus resolved: on Sunday next you know My daughter Katharina is to be married: Now, on the Sunday following, shall Bianca Be bride to you, if you this assurance; If not, Signior Gremio: And so, I take my leave, and thank you both.

GREMIO Adieu, good neighbour. (Exit)

BAPTISTA Now I fear thee not: Sirrah young gamester, your father were a fool To give thee all, and in his waning age Set foot under thy table: tut, a toy! An old Italian fox is not so kind, my boy. Exit

TRANIO A vengeance on your crafty wither'd hide! Yet I have faced it with a card of ten. 'Tis in my head to do my master good: I see no reason but supposed Lucentio Must get a father, call'd 'supposed Vincentio;' And that's a wonder: fathers commonly Do get their children; but in this case of wooing, A child shall get a sire, if I fail not of my cunning.

...

Now, we see here that Baptista is a smooth operator. He has strung up Tranio-as-Lucentio like a goose. Tranio has bid things he, personally, does not have, and because he has gone too far ("My dad has seventeen ships!") Baptista has caught him and said "If you can get your Dad here, and offering all of that, in a

fortnight, then you've got her. Otherwise, she goes to my dear old friend and neighbour here. Yes, she goes to my dear old neighbour who, because he was bidding against you, has just promised my daughter all of his stuff, to the absolute exclusion of the rest of his blood kin. And he's old, and if he dies and she's a widow, then she comes back under my care. Either they have kids and they get his stuff, or I do, and then Kate and her kids get it."

He even -tells- Tranio that he's an idiot. He implies "This is how we roll in Padua: you take my stuff from my cold, dead fingers."

So, Baptista offers no dowry to anyone. He never even promises them the other half of his lands after he dies: he might give it to the Church, or to Kate's kids, or to his mistress or new wife or something. He knows Tranio is a dummy bidder, and uses him to gouge Gremio. Gremio, fortunately, doesn't care - he knows what he wants, and he's willing to go all in to get it, and if he can't have Bianca, then he's going to make sure she gets as much of the other guy's stuff as he can. Bianca does get a dowry of some kind, Petruchio tells her eventual husband's father than she is "well dowered", but that's at Baptista's whim. It's not part of the deal.

Baptista doesn't go for this "and only if she loves you" business, that he pulled with Kate. She's trouble and he needs to sort her out, and he's a bit inclined to the view that she mightn't care which one he chooses. I have to say, I quite like Gremio. I wish he had a happy ending. This play is badly

written, in the sense that minor characters just fade out when the playwright's plot wanders away from them. Eventually, Bianca does what her father worries she might do: she just marries who she likes without asking him. She marries her tutor, who, as happy fortune would have it, is the real version of the guy that Triano was pretending to be. His name's Lucentio.

LUCENTIO Here's Lucentio, Right son to the right Vincentio; That have by marriage made thy daughter mine, While counterfeit supposes bleared thine eyne.

"She's mine. You were distracted by a decoy."

This is perfectly legal. You don't need a father's consent. That being said, there are social consequences if you follow this route. Baptista, who is very, very rich, gets ready with the smiting:

BAPTISTA But do you hear, sir? have you married my daughter without asking my good will?

Fortunately, Lucentio's dad, who is a nobleman, is here by now, and he just says:

VINCENTIO Fear not, Baptista; we will content you...Which, because he's frighteningly rich, and noble, is what he's meant to say. Compare this to Triano's bid. Vincentio's bid is all "I know my game. I know you know your game. We have your daughter. We don't want to annoy you so much you disinherit. We have a lot of money and prestige. We can deal. Privately. I have some revenge to deal with, and so do you. Let's go get some revenge on Triano together, then we'll talk. By the way, my son's noble, so you have to just forgive all

you he's done. That's how it works if you want to step up into the lower upper class. We've offended you, sure, but you'll forgive us as part of the package, and I'll go a tiny bit easier on you than I would usually." He can say this with: "We will content you.", because these guys have big Etiquette and Bargain scores, and they can both do the numbers.

Later, Baptista gives a second dowry to Kate, when she is changed in the final scene. Petruchio also gets a couple of other guys to bet him 200 crowns apiece she'll obey him, and she does. There is one read of the text that indicates that she can see the angles of the thing, and is playing along in his game, but that's a bit forgiving and post-modern. So, Petruchio comes out of this with, in Ars terms, ten thousand and eighty Mythic Pounds. This is atypical, but is a great starting story for a merchant house. He grabs Bianca's suitors, and says...guys, I have a big idea...

And so we come to the end of our lengthy foray into Shakespearean dowries. I admit I was thinking Austen rather than Shakespeare when I first designed that section of City and Guild. She is an excellent source for ideas, because her books are generally about characters of middle class seeking advancement. I hope you can see the sort of story potential I saw there.

Do you know where you are right now?

A better question is: do you know how you know where you are right now?

What's happening is that your body is providing haptic feedback to your brain. That is, you have a sensation of touch from your skin, and your joints are also sending signals to your brain, to tell your brain what configuration they are in. You are within that bundle of sensations.

Except if something's gone wrong which is happening to me today. I woke up this morning with the distinct sensation that I was about two feet behind and one foot above where I physically am. This is due to a pre-existing psychological condition, or because of an inner ear infection.

While I was lying here on my side (not on my back because that gave me the sensation that I was inside mattress which is particularly uncomfortable psychologically) I thought about the tripartite nature of the individual in Ars Magica. In Ars Magica, the person is made out of three parts: the physical body, the soul, and the energy that runs the body under the soul's direction.

Animals don't have souls, but they do have this other energy which is why it's sometimes called the animal spirit. The animal spirit is the part of the self that becomes the ghost when the person dies.

Ruminations on ghosts

So what I'm experiencing at the moment is, from an Ars Magica perspective, a mild out of body experience. That is: I'm experiencing my personhood being separated from my physical body, if only by the couple of feet. This is an unusual sensation. It's quite fun actually. It's been giving me some thoughts about how different things in Ars Magica work.

Spirits have to act through physical objects. All spiritual forces require physical objects: even God. This is why each the Sacraments has a physical object attached to it. You are reconciled with God through the Mass and that involves wine and bread. Actually in the medieval period, it's just bread in many areas, under the doctrine that the blood is within the body. Marriage rings are given and received. Water in baptism. Oil in ultimate unction. A physical object is necessary to carry the spiritual force.

Similarly when an elemental appears, it's not made of magical energy. The body of the elemental is material fire, or earth, or water, or air. Spiritual energy animates it, but it needs a physical sheath to interact with the material world. It doesn't have a soul but it has a mystical spirit, which is taking the place of the animal spirit.

When an elemental emerges in the world it constructs of a body out of nearby elemental matter Demons do the same actually: demons don't bring their bodies with them from Hell. They construct bodies for themselves out of the subtle moisture of the material world. The vis they leave behind - the physical remnant after they are defeated - can't be something they've bought with them. It's something material that they have tainted, or in the case of magical creatures that that have purified and bought closer to that Mystical Realm, by inhabiting it. In a sense it's the presence off the spirit that turns things into vis. Faeries do the same thing when they anchor in matter.

At the moment I'm having trouble touching things in a sort of reflexive or automatic way. I bonked myself in the nose while trying to eat breakfast this morning because my sensation of the spoon's location was somewhat above where the spoon actually was. Usually it's fine so long as I'm getting strong feedback by pushing against objects, or when I can see my hands and feet. This is why I could use my phone to record the podcast, but not my computer.

This is giving me some thoughts about when your characters are using magic to control objects at a distance.

Are they getting haptic feedback? I don't think you are, which must make it difficult to use some skills at a distance. If you are picking a lock, can you feel the tumblers move? (I realise in period we don't have tumblers but it's just an example.) When you're picking pockets using a spell that allows you to touch things at a distance, can you feel the coins? I really don't think you can. Perhaps you could through some sort of Mentem Requisite. What you're doing is a direct imposition of will on the universe by controlling an airy spirit. Spell casting either controls, or create temporary, spirits. I don't think the temporary spirits mind being temporary.

In Ars Magica ghosts have a final business which allows them to rest when complete. What does resting mean? Does the ghost go to Heaven with the soul? I don't think it does. So that would mean that it just goes into the grave to decay with the body. In Chinese folklore that energy can sometimes cause the body to reanimate and become a vampire, or can animate nearby objects. On the Final Day, when the new Earth is made, people believe that the dead reincarnate. They are not pure souls in Heaven. In the medieval interpretation people come back from the dead in physical form, with perfected bodies. Even these bodies need to be controlled by the soul through the mechanism of the animal spirit, so the ghost must persist in the grave. It can't be in Heaven because only the saints are in Heaven before the Judgement.

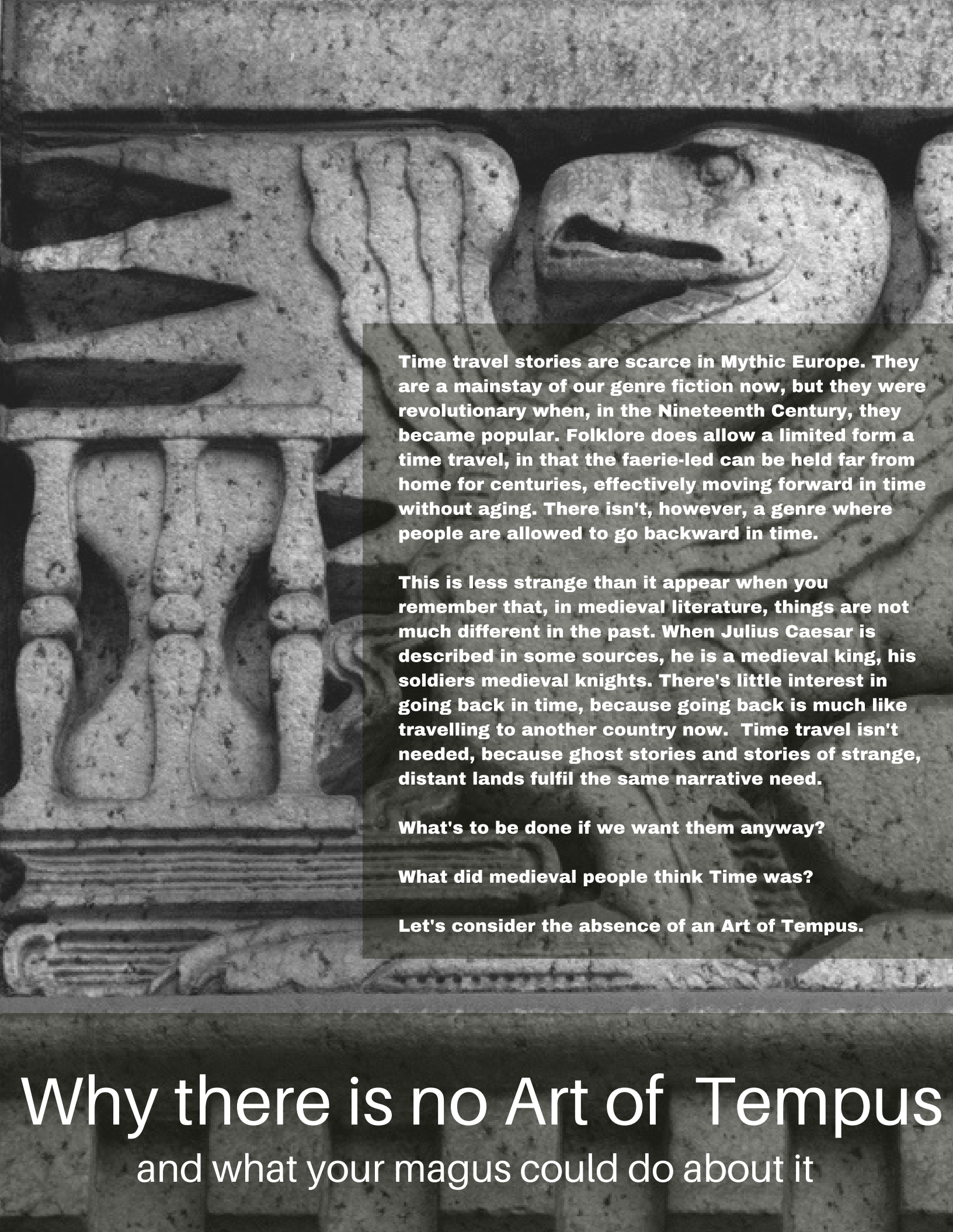
This explains why you can contact the ghosts of those who have not had Church burial. It's still around. This explains one of the odd things in the Ars Magica game about the use of Arcane Connections. Most types of arcane connection stop working after a time, however if you find the bone of a dead person it doesn't really matter how long they've been dead: you can still call up the ghost. Bones don't stop working in the way that, say, fingernails stop working. Ghosts are in some sense special. Ghosts are an eternal thing which are deliberately waiting until the end of time: They are designed by the Creator not to wear out. Necromancers rejoice! God has done you a solid!

Haptic feedback works differently in spells than using a VR gauntlet. Your character when controlling things to distance probably can't feel the surface texture of those things for example. At the moment I'm technically having an out of body experience, so my judgement maybe slightly askew.

There is a cult of Criamon magi who have the ability to extricate themselves from the body, so that the spirit can run around and do things. It requires a physical body when it's actually interacting with the world. This is called the phantasticum and is constructed out of ambient nearby matter. It happens to look like the body off the person, because that's how the ghost imagines itself, however there are cases where it doesn't look like that. One of the explanations of lycanthropes is that the ghost incarnates as the person's totemic animal. At the moment I don't feel like a totemic animal.

So let's summarise. Personhood has three parts in Ars Magica: the body, the spirit, and the soul. Personhood of mystical creatures lacks the soul, because the soul is an imprint specific to humans granted by God. Mystical creatures are a physical embodiments of animal spirits, which is analogous to the human spirit. Even ghosts, when they're interacting with the real world, take on a temporary physicality and by taking on a temporary physicality they draw in material substance.

This matter is drawn closer to their Realm of Power, which remakes the substance and embeds vis in it. Spells which allow you to control things at a distance are done by puppeteering a mystic spirit. You likely don't have haptic feedback, which prevents you using skills at a distance, even with things like Rego magic, although you may be able to work around that.



Time travel stories are scarce in Mythic Europe. They are a mainstay of our genre fiction now, but they were revolutionary when, in the Nineteenth Century, they became popular. Folklore does allow a limited form a time travel, in that the faerie-led can be held far from home for centuries, effectively moving forward in time without aging. There isn't, however, a genre where people are allowed to go backward in time.

This is less strange than it appear when you remember that, in medieval literature, things are not much different in the past. When Julius Caesar is described in some sources, he is a medieval king, his soldiers medieval knights. There's little interest in going back in time, because going back is much like travelling to another country now. Time travel isn't needed, because ghost stories and stories of strange, distant lands fulfil the same narrative need.

What's to be done if we want them anyway?

What did medieval people think Time was?

Let's consider the absence of an Art of Tempus.

Why there is no Art of Tempus and what your magus could do about it

What is time?

In Aristotle's view, which was followed by Aquinas, time is not a thing. Time is what you see when you count the process of things happening one after another. As such, time is perceived. Before humans were around to watch things there was no time according to Aristotle, because there was no-one who acted as the observer. Things happened, but lacking an enumeration, there was no time.

Aquinas, being a Christian, has an omniscient observer available. Time occurs because God does stuff to begin Creation. The first day is literally the first day in Creation. Time is surrounded by eternity, which is effectively timeless. Again, things still happened prior to people, but it doesn't matter, so there's no time.

Time is, then, the observer noticing motion. This means it's perceived, not abstract. In the Fourteenth Century, some thinkers suggest this is mistaken, that there can be time without motion, or without observers, but that's after the game period.

No noun? No Form. No form? No Art. No Art, no spells.

That's no fun...what can we do?

Declare Aquinas wrong?

One way out of this is to say that time does not work in the way suggested by Aristotle. In the Criamon philosophy, for example, Order descends into Chaos, and this creates an energy differential which can be used by magi to fuel spells. The motions in the field of vim that circles the Earth are literally the clockwork of the universe winding down into utter chaos. This means that manipulating time is Vim.

When you misuse the magical field of energy, reality drops you outside, in Twilight, and even alters you, so that you won't keep breaking the underlying structure of the Universe. Twilight Points are, therefore, the perfect penalty for characters who damage time.

As an example, in one of my earliest online games, we got around the slow signalling rate of email games by having the players simultaneously play three stories. The player had the same magus in each story, and if they did things in the chronologically earlier stories which could not fit in continuity with the later stories, the the later characters just earned Twilight Points.

One way travel

Getting to the future is easy. Faeries have the ability to store people for a prolonged period, so that they move forward in time. Similarly, certain regions have dilated time: a person living in one might age very slowly compared to the outside world. Some spells turn a person into an unaging material object, and they can resume their life if the object remains undamaged until the Duration ends. It's returning to the present which is difficult to explain.

Back from the future

To state the obvious: God gets to cheat. This is how things like prophetic Visions occur. God just shows people a bit of what he can see, in his extratemporal position.

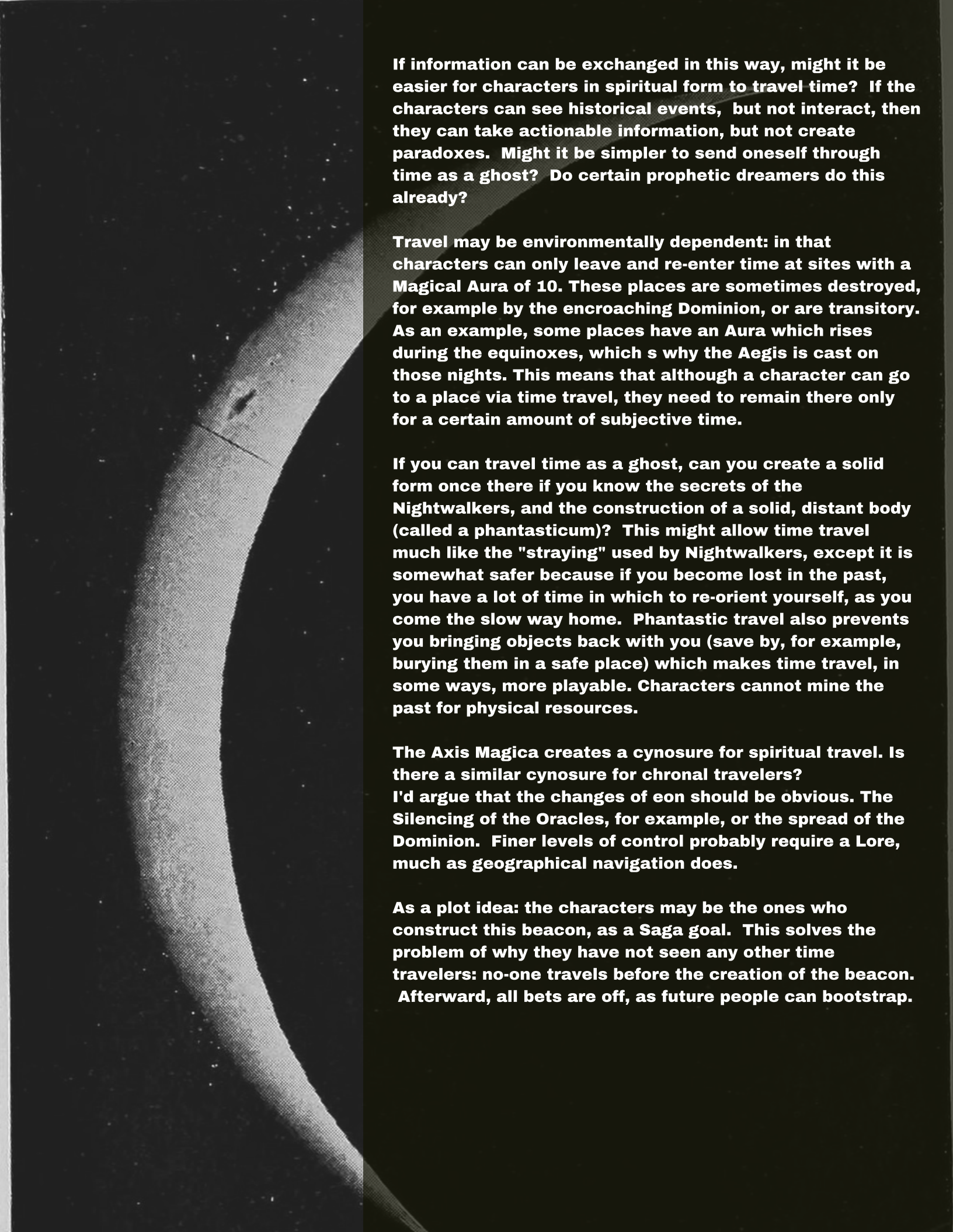
Demons cannot affect the past, because they are unable to plan. As purely reactive creatures they aren't able to decide to travel to the past as part of an elaborate scheme.

Faeries cannot send a character back in time. They can, however, portray flawless imitations of historical times. This means that a character who has gone forward in time by another method might be tricked into thinking they have travelled home.

If Criamon cosmology is correct, and Time is a circle, outside of which is Twilight, then Twilight might be used to traverse time. Some of the earliest mentions of Twilight in Ars Magica state that it is an eternal realm, outside the universe. Further they list reports, by magi who have travelled there, of meetings with the remnants of magi who had not yet fallen into Final Twilight, or even been born. This clearly allows information to be passed backward through time. It makes the Bootstrap Paradox playable.

The Hall of Heroes, where the ascended mortals exist, does not seem to be outside of time in quite the same way as Twilight. The Aspects sent by heroes into the world show no anachronistic knowledge.

So, travel through the Magic Realm allows information to violate strict causality, which is to say, travel in time, but not necessarily through every and any part of the Magic Realm. In much the same way that there is a Depp Faerie where mortals do not go, perhaps there is a Depp Magic, wherein Twilight lies.



If information can be exchanged in this way, might it be easier for characters in spiritual form to travel time? If the characters can see historical events, but not interact, then they can take actionable information, but not create paradoxes. Might it be simpler to send oneself through time as a ghost? Do certain prophetic dreamers do this already?

Travel may be environmentally dependent: in that characters can only leave and re-enter time at sites with a Magical Aura of 10. These places are sometimes destroyed, for example by the encroaching Dominion, or are transitory. As an example, some places have an Aura which rises during the equinoxes, which is why the Aegis is cast on those nights. This means that although a character can go to a place via time travel, they need to remain there only for a certain amount of subjective time.

If you can travel time as a ghost, can you create a solid form once there if you know the secrets of the Nightwalkers, and the construction of a solid, distant body (called a phantasticum)? This might allow time travel much like the "straying" used by Nightwalkers, except it is somewhat safer because if you become lost in the past, you have a lot of time in which to re-orient yourself, as you come the slow way home. Phantastic travel also prevents you bringing objects back with you (save by, for example, burying them in a safe place) which makes time travel, in some ways, more playable. Characters cannot mine the past for physical resources.

The Axis Magica creates a cynosure for spiritual travel. Is there a similar cynosure for chronal travelers? I'd argue that the changes of eon should be obvious. The Silencing of the Oracles, for example, or the spread of the Dominion. Finer levels of control probably require a Lore, much as geographical navigation does.

As a plot idea: the characters may be the ones who construct this beacon, as a Saga goal. This solves the problem of why they have not seen any other time travelers: no-one travels before the creation of the beacon. Afterward, all bets are off, as future people can bootstrap.

What can we change?

That's saga dependent: cosmological arguments can be made for and against people within Time having sufficient agency to change what happens. There are also questions regarding consequences: if you create paradoxes, does the universe care? Does God send an angel to edit you out of the great play of redemption?

Different levels of constraint provide a different feel to the stories, because they provide players with different types of challenge.

Options

History is set: your presence can't really change anything. All attempts have, in a sense, already failed. Players in these sorts of games need to game the historical record. They need to find loopholes in the known facts. This works well for games where the troupe do not want the characters' "present" to change.

History is infinitely malleable at major points. Player characters can save Arthur, or prevent the fall of Constantinople. This rewrites the world they go home to. This allows epic stories where the players get the broadest scope to rewrite the world.

History is trivially malleable. The most famous story of this type is by Ray Bradbury, where the death of a butterfly in the ancient past affects the traveler's present in dramatic ways. In these sorts of sagas, players need some way to know that the effects of their actions, what small adjustments they can make, and some sort of opposition. Terry Pratchett has an order of monks in his stories who curate these little coincidences.

History is unknown. If your characters go to ancient Egypt before the Flood and do virtually anything, then either the narrative or the effect of their actions is lost to history, so it's not simple to tell if history is malleable. One way is by attempting to make a change notable in the far future, and seeing if all attempts fail due to odd circumstances.

Change both happens, and does not happen. In this case, Time contains discontinuities. These are spackled over with a scab of mystical energy, that forms a Twilight scar on the magus.



Each community in Europe has a slightly different story about who brings gifts to children at Christmas time. Let's not review them when David Sedaris has done such a brilliant job. If you haven't listened to "Six to Eight Black Men" go do that now. Seriously. Pause this. Actually, no. Don't. His work's a lot more interesting than this, so it will make this sound terrible. Listen to this first.

Stories have power in Mythic Europe, because they attract faeries. Powerful stories allow faeries to affect whole communities. Being invited in makes communities even more vulnerable to the fae. Dozens of little kiddies leaving out milk for a jolly old elf is a ridiculously bad idea, unless it has been so tied up in a safe story that it can't do any harm.

The problem is that medieval people are **terrible** to their kids. Mythic Europe is full of mystical guys who hurt kids on the naughty list. Some steal naughty children. God Himself has some children torn limb from limb by bears for sassing a bald prophet, in the Bible. So: it's important to have a consistent, safe story. This is the story of Black-Faced Hermes.

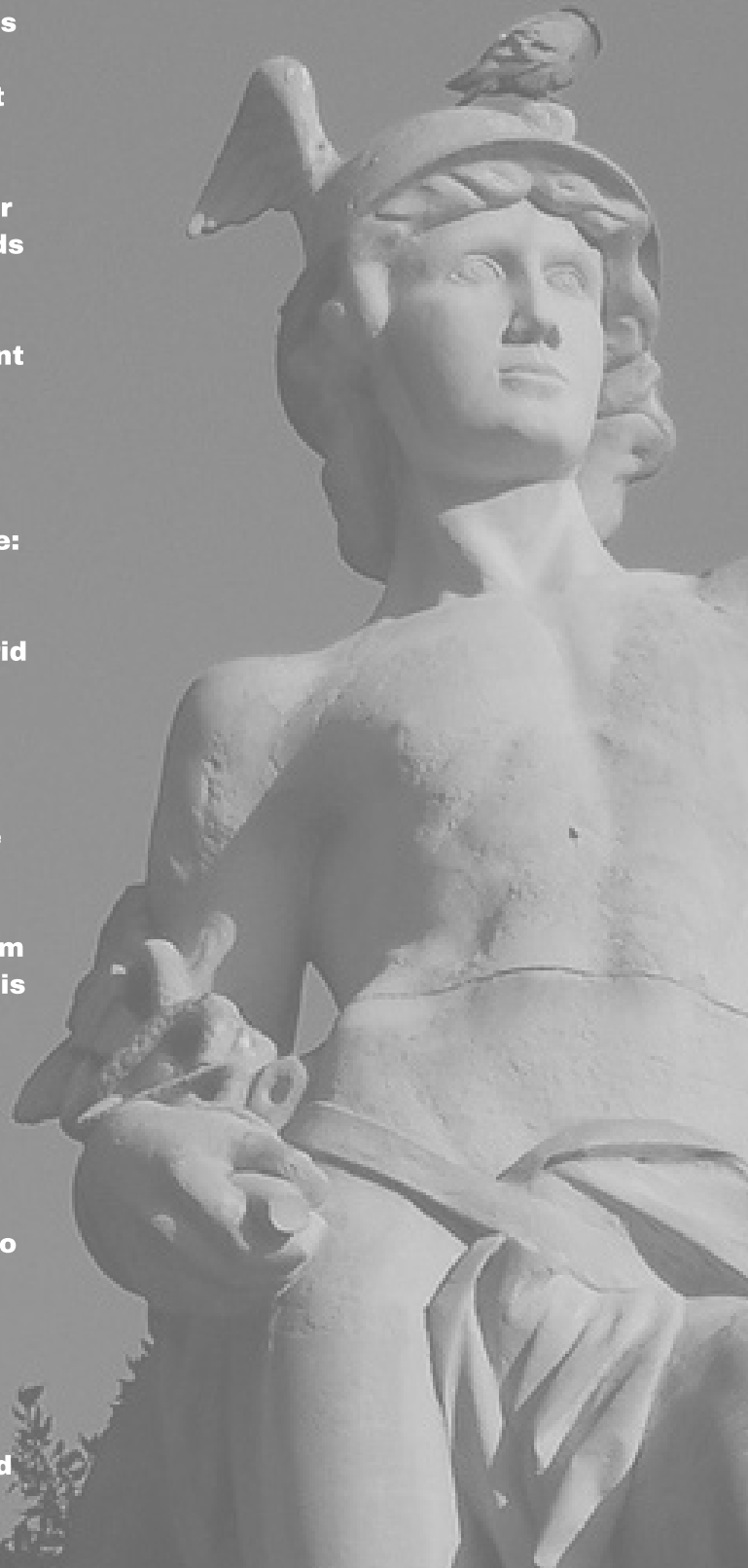
Blackface is, for American gamers, a particularly problematic idea. Black-faced Hermes isn't in blackface: he's the ancient Greek god who steals children, particularly weird, wicked children, often by coming down the chimney and getting covered in soot. To get rid of the problematic term, you might prefer to call him Hermes Harpyios which means "Hermes who snatches away".

So, apprentices leave out items for this faerie: because he is the faerie who steals gifted children and leaves them on the doorstep of covenants. He really likes chicken. They are encouraged to place their gifts for him outside the Aegis. As a patron of games and sports, he is best propitiated in spaces where these are played.

Similarly, children receive whatever is left behind for them outside the covenant's mystical defences. As the spirit of sport, games and mystical initiations, the treasure hunts he leaves may become complex little puzzles, which the apprentices need to work together to complete. As the patron of commerce he can leave valuable gifts.

He's also thoroughly and childishly amoral, and is the patron of thieves. Like all faeries, he feeds on raw emotional expression. His gifts can, therefore, be mixed blessings.

Who brings Christmas gifts to the Order?



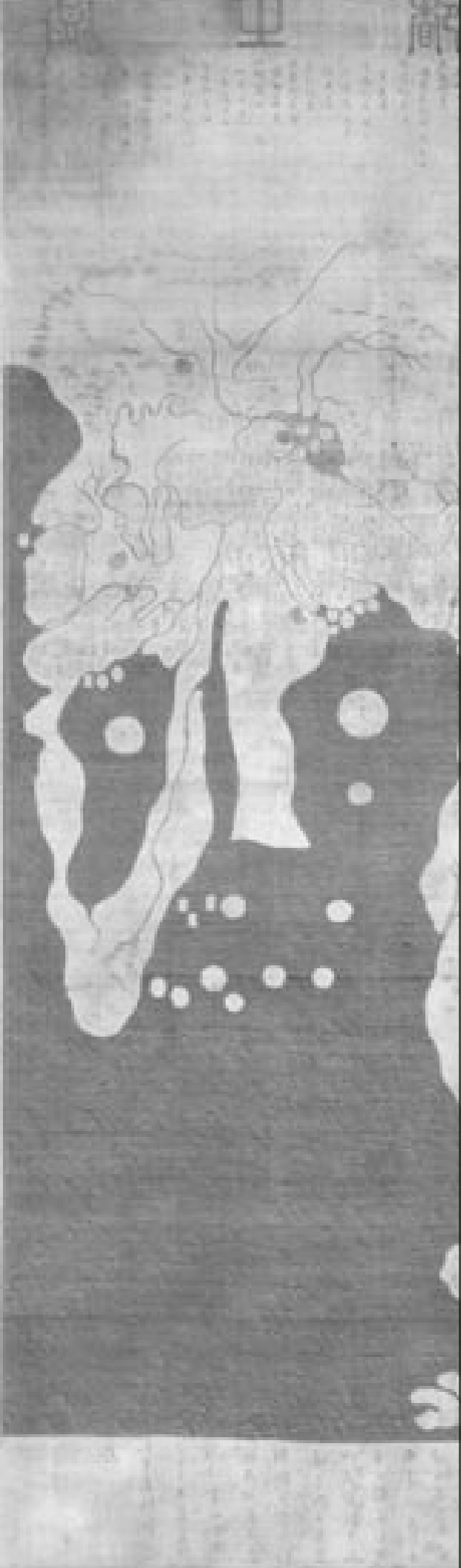


Daqin: China views the West

Medieval Europeans knew that China existed...well, they knew there was a place out there that silk came from, and they called it "Seres" or "Serica", both meaning "silk". There are records of several groups attempting to make contact between the two empires. It might be said fairly that the Chinese had better information about the Romans than the converse, although their information was still derived through intermediaries. In this post we see what the Chinese thought was in the far west. In a later post, we'll look from the perspective of the west, toward the east. It must be noted that being the state that lies between Constantinople and China is a valuable role, and that those who had it took pains to ensure that ambassadors going from one to the other were prevented for achieving success. A Chinese army reached the Caspian Sea in 97 AD, and one of its officers was sent as an ambassador to Daqin (Rome), but turned back at the shore of the Black Sea, due to stories that he had been told about the length of the journey. Excerpts from his report can be found here: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gan_Ying The son of the general also wrote a book called "The Records of the Western Regions". The Chinese general who had marched to the Caspian set up a series of fortresses which remained in Chinese hands for some time. The armies of Trajan, in their westernmost march into Parthian, came within a day of these garrisons. There are also stories, which lack archaeological evidence that is broadly accepted, that Romans were taken prisoner by Parthians at the Battle of Caharre, and were shipped east as warrior-slaves to man the Chinese border.

These men are said to have founded a city, called Lijen ("Alexandria"). Note that this is not the same as any of the the cities of the same name founded by Alexander. Alexander did create a city Alexandria Eschate "Alexandria the Furthest", in Ferghana. The descendants of Alexander's army are found all over northern India, in ancient times, and some even seem to have settled as far away as Sri Lanka.

In Homer H Dubs's History of the Former Han Dynasty we find this story: "Between 110 and 100 B.C., there arrived at the Chinese capital an embassy from the King of Parthia. Among the presents to the Chinese Emperor are stated to have been fine jugglers from Li-jien. The jugglers and dancers, male and female, from Alexandria in Egypt were famous and were exported to foreign countries. Since the King of Parthia obviously esteemed highly the Emperor of China, he naturally sent the best jugglers he could secure. When these persons were asked whence they came, they of course replied "from Alexandria," which word the Chinese who disliked polysyllables and initial vowels and could not pronounce certain Greek sounds, shortened into "Li-jien." When they also learned that this place was different from Parthia, the Chinese naturally used its name for the country of these jugglers. No



Chinese had been to the Roman empire, so they had no reason to distinguish a prominent place in it from the country itself. The Romans moreover had no name for their empire other than orbis terrarum, i.e., "the world," so that these jugglers would have found it difficult to explain the name of the Roman empire! In such a fashion there probably arose the Chinese name Li-jien which, for them, denoted the Roman empire in general." Dubs (1957). Sadly, modern genetic testing does not support Dub's story, but it's good enough for a saga hook.

In 166, a group claiming to be ambassadors from Rome appears in the Chinese court. They came by sea, from the south, which is technically possible because at this time Rome had Egyptian and Red Sea ports which linked to the Indian trade network, which linked to the Chinese one. The goods they offered the Emperor seemed southeast Asian, so there is some question as to their credentials.

The Liangshu notes: "During the 5th year of the Huangwu period of the reign of Sun Quan [= CE 226] a merchant of Da Qin, whose name was Qin Lun came to Jiaozhi [Tongking]; the prefect [taishou] of Jiaozhi, Wu Miao, sent him to Sun Quan [the Wu emperor], who asked him for a report on his native country and its people. Qinlun prepared a statement and replied. At the time Zhuke [nephew to Zhuke Liang, alias Kun Ming] chastised Dan Yang [= Jiang Nan] and they had caught blackish coloured dwarfs. When Qin Lun saw them he said that in Da Qin these men were rarely seen. Sun Quan then sent male and female dwarfs, ten of each, in charge of an officer, Liu Xian of Huiji [a district in Zhejiang], to accompany Qin Lun. Liu Xian died on the road, whereupon Qin Lun returned direct to his native country." This is sourced from the link in the next paragraph. The author notes that Qin Lun means "Leon of Rome".

In the Third Century, there was a book in China about the products that can be found in western countries. A translation is here
<http://depts.washington.edu/silkroad/texts/weilue/weilue.html>

There are at least two embassies that claim to be from Rome that arrive in the Imperial court in the Third Century. Rome collapses in the 5th century, and Chinese power wanes after the seventh. This creates a power vacuum, and the Silk Road declines, which in turn cuts communication ties between each side. As the Mongol Empire expands, it stabilises the Silk Road, which permits Chinese people to reach back out, toward Rome, to see what is there. They are remarkably well informed. For example, look at the Da Ming Hunyi Tu map, which is Chinese from the Thirteenth Century, or the Kandigo Map from Fourteenth Century Korea.