

Ars Magica

# Against the Dark

The Transylvanian Tribunal



by Ferguson, Love,  
Ryan & Shirley

## Against the Dark

# Credits

**AUTHORS:** Timothy Ferguson, Richard Love, Matt Ryan, Mark Shirley  
**DEVELOPMENT, EDITING, & PROJECT MANAGEMENT:** David Chart  
**LAYOUT & ART DIRECTION:** Michelle Nephew  
**PROOFREADING & ART DIRECTION ASSISTANCE:** Jessica Banks  
**ADDITIONAL PROOFREADING:** Michelle Nephew  
**PUBLISHER:** John Nephew  
**COVER ILLUSTRATION:** Grey Thornberry  
**CARTOGRAPHY:** Andrew P. Smith  
**INTERIOR ART:** Alan Dyson, Jason Cole, Kelley Hensing, Christian St. Pierre  
**ADDITIONAL ART:** *Dover Castles, Dover Dragons and Wizards, Medieval Life Illustrations, Treasury of Medieval Illustrations*  
**ARS MAGICA FIFTH EDITION TRADE DRESS:** J. Scott Reeves  
**PUBLISHER'S SPECIAL THANKS:** Jerry Corrick & the gang at the Source.

**FIRST ROUND PLAYTESTERS:** Mark Barltrop, Alex Coyne-Turner, Mark Lawford, David Staveley, Simon Turner; Jason Brennan, Justin Brennan, Elisha Campbell, Robert Major; Christian Jensen-Romer, Lloyd Graney, Tom Nowell, Kevin Sides, Luke Price; Donna Giltrap, Malcolm Harbrow, Aaron Hicks; Joan Bauza Soler, Antoni Morey i Pasqual, Melcior Parera Mas, Vincent Palmer Richardson, Guillem Gelabert Perello, Llorenç Nadal Sanso; Pelle Kofod, Christian Rosenkjaer Andersen, Ronni Fich, Sune Johannesson, Rasmus Andreasen, Rasmus Strandgaard Sørensen; Volker Bürkel, Björn Ole Mußmann, Andrew Smith

**SECOND ROUND PLAYTESTERS:** Christian Jensen-Romer, Thomas Nowell, Lloyd Graney, Andrew Oakley; Eirik Bull, Karl

Trygve Kalleberg, Dag-Erling Smørgrav, Karin Lagesen, Heikki Sørum, Torbjørn Stirlor; Donna Giltrap, Malcolm Harbrow, Aaron Hicks; Rasmus Strandgaard Sørensen, Christian Rosenkjaer Andersen, Pelle Kofod

### AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

**Timothy Ferguson** is a librarian, and lives on the Gold Coast, Australia. He'd like to dedicate his part of this book to his wife Linda, and to thank her for repeated trips to local vampire-themed theater restaurants.

**Richard Love** spends many of his days sequestered in a laboratory. He knows for a fact that the world outside his laboratory is full of dark mountains, forests, lightning, thunder, and rain. Richard would like to thank his partner Paula for bravely slaying the terrifying mouse.

**Matt Ryan** lives in the Finger Lakes region of Upstate New York State. He enjoys hiking and camping the many state parks and forests in the area, and fishing the multitude of lakes and streams with his son, who has the better "catch and release" record.

**Mark Shirley** is a computational biologist living in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK. This is his fourth Tribunal book for **Ars Magica** Fifth Edition. He found the research on vampires particularly interesting, even though it raised some eyebrows among the university librarians who knew him to be a biologist. Mark would like to thank the usual suspects for their help and support.



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## Chapter One

# Introduction

The Transylvanian Tribunal is a fantastic setting for sagas. It is all that a reader expects. It is a land of haunted mountains, of dimly lit forests, of ruined castles and moonlit roads. Werewolves and vampires flourish, and folk magicians hunt them with silver and prayer and hawthorn and whips.

It is also a land beyond what the reader expects. Transylvania is unique. It is not like the Western kingdoms, which have so influenced the Order of Hermes. Mundane society is different here, and its differences favor the magi.

Nobles in the Tribunal do not owe fealty for their land or peasants, so magi may be nobles without swearing fealty, or breaking the Code. Magi may use their powers openly since magic is not illegal. Hungarian law allows magi to live by their own Code, with their own courts. The Order in Transylvania does not hide behind petty, puppet noblemen. The Order rules what it owns: no royal tax collector calls, no minor lord makes trivial threats.

The people of Transylvania are a mixture. In Hungary, it is unexceptional to meet merchants from the Low Countries and scholars from Persia; indeed, there are whole villages populated by both groups. Player characters in Transylvania, even simple ones like grogs, can be drawn from a tremendous variety of communities and professions. The interests of the magi weave through society, not limited by the Western need to avoid any possible offense to the powerful. This creates a plethora of story opportunities.

Transylvanian society is constantly under pressure, as it straddles the border between the East and West. The king of Hungary is the richest in Europe, but perhaps the most foolish. To make his country more Western in its armament, he has made his nobles far wealthier and more independent, and invited Crusaders to garrison part of his

kingdom. He is now finding it difficult to control either. The emperor of the Bulgars plays a deadly game with the other claimants to the throne of Constantinople. Lesser leaders see opportunities in the distractions of the great kings. Regional leaders, like the nobles of the Serbs and Slovaks, have begun to consolidate their power. Magi do not officially pick winners in these struggles, but a single spell, perfectly timed, is sometimes enough to win a battle, destroy a nobleman, and shake a kingdom.

The magi of Transylvania differ from Western magi also. They have been welded into a great machine of governance and war by House Tremere. Their life is peaceful but their obligations are far greater than in Western Tribunals. Transylvanian covenants, or what the magi here have instead of covenants, are interdependent. They specialize in a way not seen in the West.

## A Note on History

The history of the many ethnic groups present in the Transylvanian Tribunal has been cobbled together from the folklores of the real world nationalities presented. No historian, holding any of the many competing views, would agree that our history is correct. Further, some readers may find the way we have mangled their national history offensive. We apologize for this.

The competing national histories of the Balkan states simply cannot be resolved, without offense, because so many of them contain material that is false. We choose not to judge which these are, and instead we have selected the pieces of folklore which best suit a game manual. This setting, therefore, includes groups who may not have been in any designated area historically, to allow

players broader scope for their character designs. Similarly, folklore with storytelling potential from nations which make no claim to a 13th-century presence in Transylvania, like the Roma and Turks, has occasionally been allowed to sneak into the work.

## A Note on Tone

Transylvania is synonymous with horror for many readers. The horror stories set there are, however, not really set there at all. The Transylvania of horror stories is a tidy version of England, with German names. To sate readers who bought this book expecting horror, there is chapter about telling stories of fear. This is not, however, a book about the Transylvania of the Western imagination. It's about Transylvania as described by the people who lived there. It has horrific elements, but they are not the focus of this book.

## A Note on Oppida

Transylvanian magi call the legal entities they are members of "covenants," but the physical places where they reside *oppida*, or "camps" (sing. *oppidum*). Many covenants outside Transylvania call the multiple places of residence within a single legal covenant its "chapter houses" but this term is of Jerbiton invention, and is based on a metaphorical similarity to the way monks meet in Western monastic dependencies.

Transylvanian oppida differ from chapter houses in two ways. Chapter houses are usually dependant on a "mother house." This sounds like the Hermetic feudalism of the Tytalus-dominated Normandy Tribunal, which from the Tremere perspective is so po-