

A WINTER TALE



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An Ars Magica™ Saga

WW0502

A WINTER'S TALE

The Saga of a Covenant's Journey from Autumn
to Winter



by Ken Cliffe

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This book is dedicated to Kelly, who
lost much sleep during the creative
process.

A Winter's Tale

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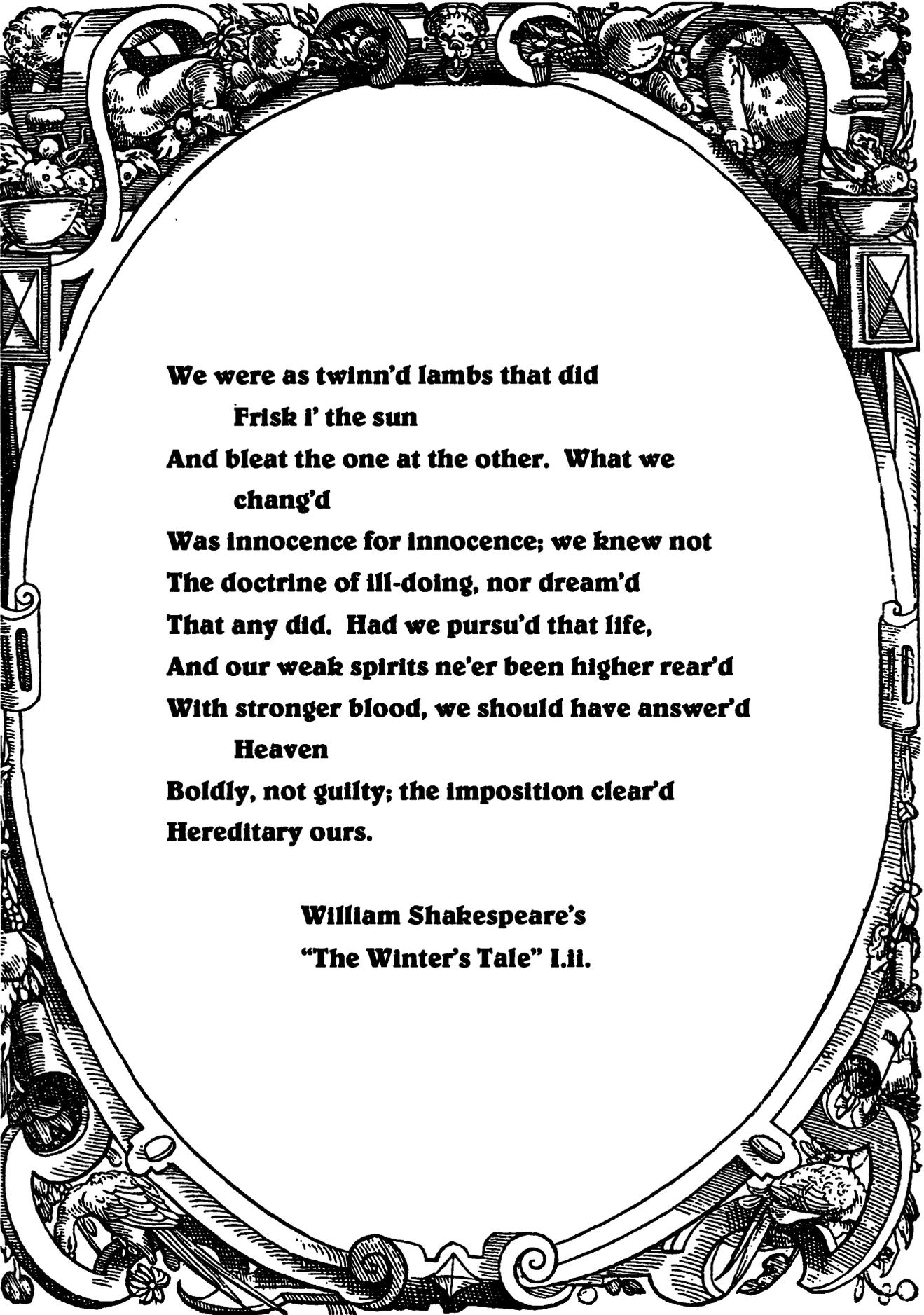
Sam "Yes, I can type 90 words a minute. Why?..." **Chupp**, for helping out at the last minute

Winter's Tale is Volume Three in the Tetralogy called "The Four Seasons." We have already printed Volume Two — titled "The Tempest" and will be releasing Volumes One and Four in the future. Volume One, "A Midsummer's Night Dream," will be released in September 1992. Volume One will chart a covenant's progress from Spring to Summer.

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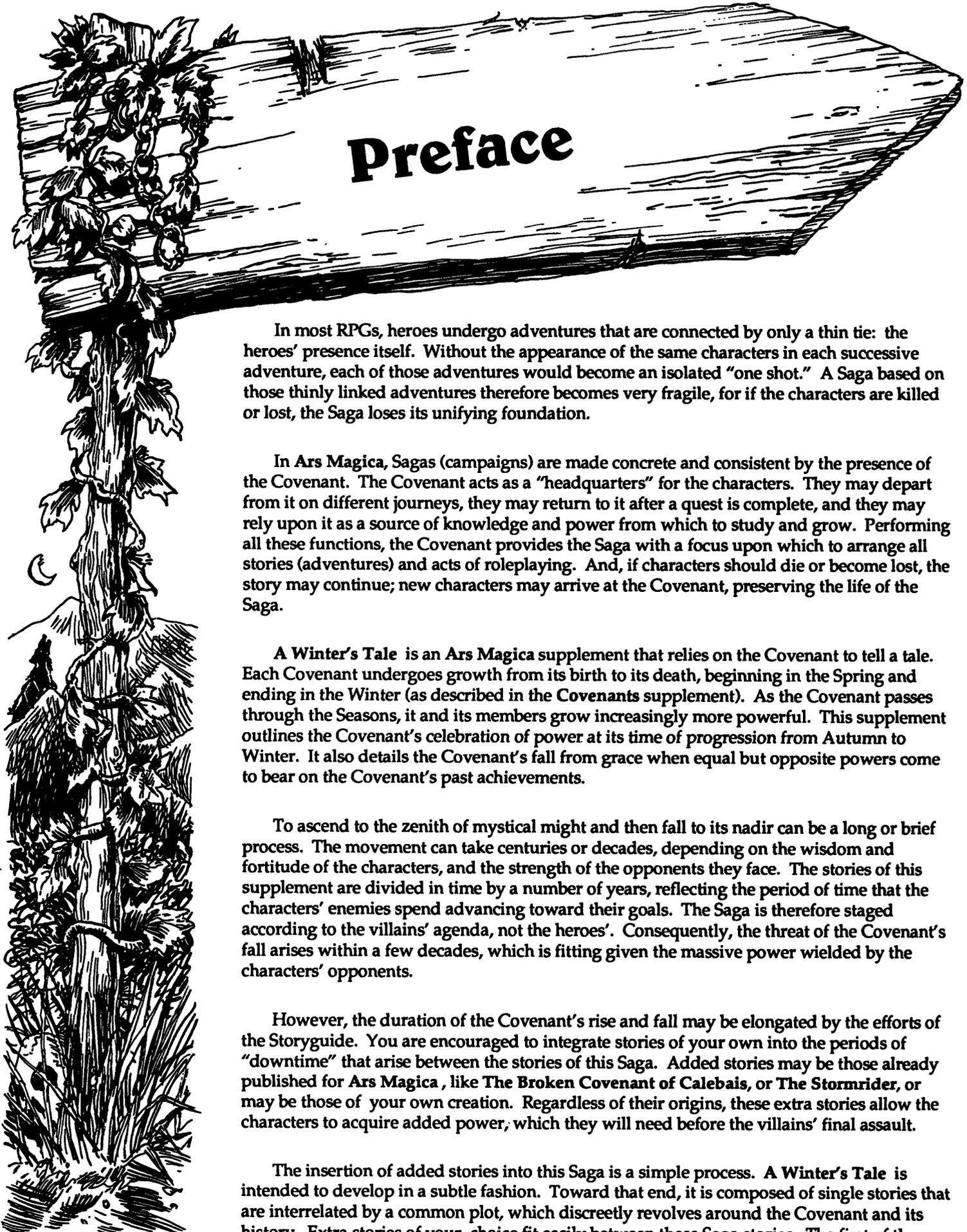
Table of Contents

Preface	5	Ambushes All 'Round	48
The Saga	7	Trapped With the Diabolists	49
Theme	7	Roleplaying the Diabolists	51
The Course of the Saga	8	Tharuum the Mountain Giant	52
The Origins of The Shard	9	Tharuum, Guardian of the Alps	53
The Diabolists	9	Dealing With the Dwarven King	54
Carmella	10	Traveling to the Well	55
Emil	11	The Dwarves' Hostage	55
Lucinda	12	Glorin, Dwarven Guide	55
Mab	14	The Well of Life	56
Honerius	15	Returning to Grimbeard	57
Gizzleren	16	Grimbeard, King of the Dwarves	57
The Earth Bears Fruit (Chapter One)	18	A Common Dwarf	58
Past Touches Present	19	The Seven Signs (Chapter Five)	59
Wickam Today	19	Researching Paradise	59
The Traveling Gypsies	20	The Nature of the Signs	60
The Characters Arrive	20	The Four Riders of the Apocalypse	61-69
The Wickam Tavern	20	War	61-68
Father Miller Arrives	21	Famine	62-68
Wilf Shepherd, Village Elder	21	Plague	62-68
The Villagers	21	Death	63-69
Father Miller, Priest of Wickam	22	The Riders' Mounts	69
The Villagers' Plot	22	The People Within the Riders	69
At The Cemetery	23	The Dead Rise	70
After the Theft	23	The Return of Balaerus	70
The Shard	24	Balaerus's Map	71
The Diabolists' New Plan	24	The Fifth Sign	71
The Curse of The Shard	25	An Angry Mob	71
Plague's Revenge (Chapter Two)	27	The Day After	73
The Peddler	28	Brother Giles, Traveling Jesuit	73
The History of Woodbridge	28	The Undead Horde	74
The Diabolists in Woodbridge	28	Skeletons	74
Woodbridge Today	29	Zombies	74
Town Rumors	29	The Journey to Paradise	74
The Church	30	Recent Events in the Alps	74
The Statue	31	The Sixth Sign	76
The Disease	33	The Gates of Paradise	77
Saint Francis, the Statue	33	Archangels	78
The Rat Attack	33	The Flaming Sword	78
The Gypsy Medallion	34	Giving The Devil His Due (Chapter Six)	79
The Giant Rats	35	Entering Paradise	80
Ordinary Rats	35	The Summoning Ritual	80
Banishing the Rats	35	Stopping the Ritual	81
Thief In The Shadows (Chapter Three)	37	The Demon Arrives	82
The Diabolists Return	38	The Sacrifice	84
The Break-In	39	The Final Chapter (Chapter Seven)	85
Taking Stock	39	Brivelzn, Would-be Destroyer of the World	85
Balaerus's Journal	39	The Fate of the Sacrifice	86
After the Theft	40	The Fate of the Covenant	87
The Beast's Visitation	41	Appendix: Devil's Advocate	88
The Coming of the Beast	41	The Role of the Demon	88
Researching	43	The Nature of the Demon	89
The Race For The Shard (Chapter Four)	45	Demonic Powers	91
Heading into the Mountains	45	Demon Weaknesses	92
The Diabolists' Actions	46	Demon Motivations	92
Approaching the Mines	47	Roleplaying Demons	93
The Dwarven Mines	47	Index	94



**We were as twinn'd lambs that did
Frisk i' the sun
And bleat the one at the other. What we
chang'd
Was innocence for innocence; we knew not
The doctrine of ill-doing, nor dream'd
That any did. Had we pursu'd that life,
And our weak spirits ne'er been higher rear'd
With stronger blood, we should have answer'd
Heaven
Boldly, not guilty; the imposition clear'd
Hereditary ours.**

**William Shakespeare's
"The Winter's Tale" I.ii.**



Preface

In most RPGs, heroes undergo adventures that are connected by only a thin tie: the heroes' presence itself. Without the appearance of the same characters in each successive adventure, each of those adventures would become an isolated "one shot." A Saga based on those thinly linked adventures therefore becomes very fragile, for if the characters are killed or lost, the Saga loses its unifying foundation.

In *Ars Magica*, Sagas (campaigns) are made concrete and consistent by the presence of the Covenant. The Covenant acts as a "headquarters" for the characters. They may depart from it on different journeys, they may return to it after a quest is complete, and they may rely upon it as a source of knowledge and power from which to study and grow. Performing all these functions, the Covenant provides the Saga with a focus upon which to arrange all stories (adventures) and acts of roleplaying. And, if characters should die or become lost, the story may continue; new characters may arrive at the Covenant, preserving the life of the Saga.

A Winter's Tale is an *Ars Magica* supplement that relies on the Covenant to tell a tale. Each Covenant undergoes growth from its birth to its death, beginning in the Spring and ending in the Winter (as described in the *Covenants* supplement). As the Covenant passes through the Seasons, it and its members grow increasingly more powerful. This supplement outlines the Covenant's celebration of power at its time of progression from Autumn to Winter. It also details the Covenant's fall from grace when equal but opposite powers come to bear on the Covenant's past achievements.

To ascend to the zenith of mystical might and then fall to its nadir can be a long or brief process. The movement can take centuries or decades, depending on the wisdom and fortitude of the characters, and the strength of the opponents they face. The stories of this supplement are divided in time by a number of years, reflecting the period of time that the characters' enemies spend advancing toward their goals. The Saga is therefore staged according to the villains' agenda, not the heroes'. Consequently, the threat of the Covenant's fall arises within a few decades, which is fitting given the massive power wielded by the characters' opponents.

However, the duration of the Covenant's rise and fall may be elongated by the efforts of the Storyguide. You are encouraged to integrate stories of your own into the periods of "downtime" that arise between the stories of this Saga. Added stories may be those already published for *Ars Magica*, like *The Broken Covenant of Calebais*, or *The Stormrider*, or may be those of your own creation. Regardless of their origins, these extra stories allow the characters to acquire added power, which they will need before the villains' final assault.

The insertion of added stories into this Saga is a simple process. *A Winter's Tale* is intended to develop in a subtle fashion. Toward that end, it is composed of single stories that are interrelated by a common plot, which discreetly revolves around the Covenant and its history. Extra stories of your choice fit easily between these Saga stories. The first of the

Saga stories introduces the characters to their foes, but does not allow the characters sufficient insight to discern the villains' true intent. In fact, the characters do not immediately recognize the villains as such.

As time passes and more stories are told, the characters learn who their opponents are and discover the horrible truth of their antagonists' plan. By that time, the Covenant has attained the power of Autumn, but has also begun the inconspicuous descent into death that Winter inevitably brings. However, regardless of their characters' fates, the players will grow increasingly fascinated by the game as their characters learn more about the diabolists, and strive to put an end to the villains' evil machinations.

Why create a Saga that leads a Covenant from Autumn to Winter? There are a couple of reasons. First, this supplement follows the precedent set by *The Tempest*, which traces a Covenant's rise from Summer to Autumn. After telling that story and telling a number of stories in between, you may run this supplement and continue the course of the Saga. Combined, *The Tempest* and *A Winter's Tale* outline half a Covenant's lifetime. Or, *A Winter's Tale* may be played without its predecessor and still suit the development of the Saga that the Storyguide has created. This supplement may be applied to any Covenant, in any Saga, that has reached its Autumn.

Second, the rise from Autumn to Winter is fun to play because characters reach the height of their potency. Magi are now able to cast spells that shake the mantle of existence. The Covenant has also acquired so much knowledge that it is an invaluable foundation to the Order as a whole. The Covenant is a force to be reckoned with all over the world.

However, with time, the Covenant also begins to decay. Older magi grow set in their ways and begin to rely on younger magi to perform menial tasks. Before long powerful magi grow reclusive and forget the ways of the world, having lost themselves in passions beyond this world. Younger magi recognize this decay, but are frustrated in their efforts to keep up with the times, so established are Covenant precepts and traditions. Turning inward in this way, the Covenant either dies out slowly, or is taken unawares by powers growing in the world to which the magi are blind.

Who knows what lies beyond the death of a Covenant? The Covenant could disappear forever, or could be reborn and resume growth from the Spring. We only learn by being there.

Ken Cliffe
April 1991

Index

A

Ambushes 48

B

Balaerus

Grave site 19, 23

History of 19

Journal 39

Map 71

Return of 70

Beast 41

Brother Giles 71–73

D

Death. See Four Riders of the Apocalypse

Demons

Brivelzen 85

Motivations of 92

Nature of 89

Power of 91

Role of 88

Roleplaying 93

Weaknesses of 92. **See also Stopping the Demon**

Diabolists 9

and the Dwarves 46

and the Plague 53

and the Summoning Ritual 80

and their Demon 82

and Woodbridge 28

Carmella 10

Emil 11

Gizzleren 16

Honerius 15

Lucinda 12

Mab 14

Plans of 24

Return of 38

Roleplaying 51

Stopping 81

Trapped in the mines 49

Dwarven Mines 47

Ambushes 48

and the Portal to Paradise 75

Dwarves 46–47

and the Well of Life 55

Glorin, the Guide 55

Grimbeard, the King 54, 57

Hostage 55

Stats for Common Dwarf 58

F

Famine. See Four Riders of the Apocalypse

Fate of the Covenant 87

Father Miller 21

Flaming Sword 78

Four Riders of the Apocalypse 61

Death 64, 69

Facing 67

Famine 65, 68

Mounts 69

People within 69

Plague 61, 68

War 62, 68

G

Glorin, Dwarven guide 55

Grimbeard, Dwarven King 57

Gypsies 20

and the Plague 33

as Thieves 23

Medallion 34

Return of 38

H

Holy Beast. See Beast

J

Jesuit

Brother Giles 71–73

M

Medallion

and the Gypsies 34

P

- Paradise 59**
 - Entering 80**
 - Gates of 78**
 - Journey to 75**
 - Portal to 75**
 - Researching 59**
- Peddler 28**
- Plague. See Four Riders of the Apocalypse and the Rats 33**
 - Gypsies and 33**
 - in Woodbridge 29, 33**

R

- Rats 33**
 - Banishing 35**
- Restoring The Tree of Life 85**

S

- Saga**
 - Course of 8**
 - Theme of 7**
- Saint Francis 31-33**
- Seven Signs 60**
 - Dead Rise 70**
 - Fifth Sign 71**
 - Four Riders of the Apocalypse 61**
 - Nature of 60**
 - Sixth Sign 77**
- Shard**
 - and the Dwarves 46, 51**
 - and Woodbridge 28**
 - Curse of 25**
 - Effects on the land 26**
 - Finding 24**
 - History and the Covenant 19**
 - Origins of 9**
 - Researching 43**
- Skeletons 75**

Spells

- Curse of Maggots 69**
- Curse of the Unportended Plague 69**
- Feathers of the Cherubs 78**
- Flames of the Guardian 78**
- Grip of the Choking Hand 69**
- Light of the Heavenly Wrath 78**
- Note of the Piper's Flute 35**
- Sense of Spirit 78**
- Spirit of Valhalla 68**
- Starve Stock 68**
- Thief as of Ink 38**
- Thief of Nourishment 68**
- Weightlessness of the Saints 78**
- Stopping the Demon 84**

T

- Tharuum 52**
- Theft**
 - at the Covenant 39**
 - at the Grave 23**

U

- Undead Horde 74**

W

- War. See Four Riders of the Apocalypse**
- Well of Life 55, 56**
- Wickam 19**
 - Cemetary 22, 23**
 - Relations with Covenant 20**
 - Tavern 20**
 - Wilf, the village Elder 21**
- Wilf Shepherd 21**
- Woodbridge 28, 29**
 - and Diabolists 28**
 - and the Plague 29**
 - Church in 30**
 - History of 28**
 - Statue of St. Francis 31**
 - Town Rumors 29**

Z

- Zombies 75**