

The Arcane College

History

Draíod has always attracted those with a keen interest in the arcane and magical arts, and the Vartach have a long and proud tradition of magical mastery. For most of its history the study and teaching of magic was organised around various competing schools. Each one tended to be led by a single particularly brilliant or particularly charismatic scholar whose theories and practises the members of the school studied and emulated. Fierce rivalries often developed between different schools and there are stories of schools being violently wiped out over differences of opinion on magical theory. Much of their work was duplicated by others and many of their unique insights were secretively hoarded. There are legends of schools that had made wondrous breakthroughs, only to be lost to Gwyllt attacks, tunnel collapses, or outbreaks of disease.

The Arcane College as an institution wasn't founded until more than a century after the death of the First Réig. Initially a project of the Order of Teachers, the founders of the Arcane College wished to centralise and organise the study of magic in order to make it more useful and accessible to all the people of Tirneach, to prevent duplication of effort, and to ensure that important discoveries weren't so easily lost. Some schools joined the project at its inception while others banded together with like minded scholars and formed colleges of their own in response. A few kept to the old ways of doing things. Eventually most of these were absorbed into the Arcane College, others disbanded upon the death of their founders, but a very few have continued on in the shadow of the Arcane College to this day.

The Teacher's project wasn't without its teething problems however; those most qualified to lead and teach at the College were almost invariably members of, or closely connected with the Saoi and they found it difficult to set aside Draíodach and Vartach priorities. Records remain of the letters sent from Corroch, at first attempting to gently dissuade, and later outright condemning the practice of accepting Sunspear Vartach freely while requiring scrutiny of, and contributions from, all other students.

As the College developed, a more serious division grew. The Prelate of the Teachers and their inner circle believed that practical, useful magic was the appropriate focus of the College. They pressured their members on the ground in Crag Oscionn to devote their efforts to learning that could be readily applied to improve the

lives of people all across Tirneach. Increasingly however, the interests of the Teachers at work in the College were drawn towards the theoretical, the conceptual, and the potential.

This dichotomy came to a head in 274TR, when a Fathach named Iarracht (*eer-ukt*) gave a lecture describing their theory that the Shaper was not a unique entity but one of a species of similar creatures that must themselves have been created in some way. When transcripts of the lecture and the debates it had provoked reached Corroch, the entire Prelates Council was enraged. Not only was this conjecture that could never be of any practical use to anyone but it was outright heresy as well. The Prelate of the Teachers demanded that Iarracht be ejected from the College and that deep changes be made to how it was organised and where its efforts be directed. A period of intense internal debate in the College followed, recorded as reaching the point of violence on at least one occasion. When the dust settled, the last of the conservative Teachers were ejected from the institution and the Arcane College announced its total independence from the order.

Iarracht's theories have long been considered debunked but the impact of their announcement was irreversible. In the years following 'Iarracht's Schism' (also known as 'Iarracht's Folly'), the Church made many attempts to regain control or to suppress the Arcane College. They discovered, however, that the College had developed many influential defenders, first and foremost amongst them, the Saoi of Draíod. As years turned into decades, the Church was forced to accept defeat and the independent Arcane College was established as a fixture of Crag Osciann.

Over the centuries, conflict with the Church has become rare as the two institutions have settled into a comfortable discomfort with one another. On a personal level, almost all within the college are devoted followers of the Shaper and many Teachers spend their time there gathering knowledge to bring out into the world at large. Many professors take pride in the College's cultivation of virtue, most notably the virtues of Ambition, Perseverance, Clarity, and of course, Wisdom. In any case, so long as they avoid criminal dealings with the Gwyllt or the Undead, professors at the Arcane College are free to pursue and promote whatever theories they see fit, while watchful eyes within the College administration see to it that pointless controversies are deftly kept away from the public eye.

The Modern College

The College is led by the Council of the Four Masters. The council requires a majority to enact decisions and appoints its own members as and when they need to be replaced. The current Masters are:

Aodh Granitehome (*ay*), a Sunspear Vartach known to lament how little time his duties leave for arcane crafting. Reputed to be the youngest ever Master when he was appointed but spotty record keeping makes it impossible to confirm.

Orla Ón Clochdomhain (*own cluck-dow-win*), a human who's appointment 7 years ago caused significant consternation. Since then she has proven to be cautious to the point of stifling in her decision making.

Fiona Darkhallow, an aged Sunspear Vartach famed for her extraordinary insights into meta-magical effects. Rumours of her impending retirement have cropped up annually since before either Aodh or Orla joined the council.

Seasmhacht (*shass-vukt*), a Fathach who professes that their purpose is to ensure the lasting prosperity of the College. Currently the longest serving member of the council at 197 years and sometimes referred to as "the memory of the College".

Reporting directly to the Masters is a small army of clerks who make up the practical, and administrative backbone of the College. The idiosyncratic umbrella of "clerk" covers everything from administrator to cook and from tunnel maintenance to teaching assistant. These workers are primarily Fathach and Hook Vartach, though other species are not uncommon (particularly humans attempting to prove their reliability to the Masters). Clerks do not research or teach and cannot be students during their employment. However, they are given almost unfettered access to the facilities of the College, and so for a determined individual a position as a clerk can be a path to learning that would otherwise not be available to them. Just so long as they don't mind the lack of formal recognition.

Professors at the Arcane College are appointed by the Masters. At a minimum, all professors are provided with room and board by the College and given the basic necessities of academic work. Long service and prestigious works improve the quantity and quality of these provisions. All professors are expected to engage

actively in research and may request additional resources and staff from the Masters to support their efforts. It has been noted on a number of occasions that there's a tendency for the projects of Sunspears to be viewed more favourably than everyone else's when it comes time for divvying up resources.

All professors are also required to teach, however they are given significant latitude in how they go about this. At any given time there is usually a small core of dutiful professors providing scheduled lectures in fundamental theories and procedures, enough to ensure that fresh students are given what they need to engage with more intensive topics and avoid blowing themselves or anyone else up. Beyond that some others seem to enjoy lecturing and regularly present on their areas of expertise. Many professors lecture only when they feel they have something important to say (often without much prior announcement), while some prefer only to issue instructional texts without making public appearances. Some professors are known to take on apprentices and others insist that if a student really wants to know something they can find them and ask.

All professors are considered to be equals and are not formally grouped or organised by field or method of study. This lack of delineation and hierarchy is considered by many to be one of the College's great advantages. Researchers are free to pursue whatever line of questioning they wish, using whatever methods best suit the inquiry. They are judged only on the quality of their research and their arguments, and not stifled by needing to appease a superior. In practice however, even dedicated scholars are not free from fads and the power of personality. Few like to admit how many collective years of effort have been wasted pursuing the flawed pet theories of particularly charismatic professors, or how often experts in niche topics must look on as enthusiastic generalists duplicate work thoroughly completed in decades past.

Sunspear Vartach are always freely accepted as students at the Arcane College. Everyone else however must present themselves to the Masters to be interviewed and demonstrate their contribution to the College. In principle this ideally takes the form of some unique talent, personal discovery, or significant addition to the library. In practice however, it most commonly takes the form of a sack of pingin. Once accepted, students are permitted to live within the college tunnels but unlike professors, they are considered responsible for their own sustenance. They are also granted unrestricted access to the Library of the Arcane College and the use of College equipment and facilities so long as they don't interfere with the work of researchers. Due to the peculiar and varied habits of the professors, a good amount of initiative is required of Arcane College students in tracking down and extracting the education they desire. Students who lack a strong impulse of self-direction often spend years listlessly attending the College without much to show for their time.

At any time a student may ask for their accomplishments to be recognised. They must declare to an appropriate clerk which sphere of study they believe they have mastered, who will then assemble an appropriate panel of professors to test the claim. The claim may be as broad or as narrow as the student wishes and the challenge will be set appropriately. Trivial or farcical claims of mastery are treated harshly. Occasionally a student will claim mastery of a sphere for which no appropriate panel can be assembled, the student allegedly having broached some entirely new body of work. These students must prove the validity of their work before the Masters and those few who are successful are often immediately offered professorships.

Once a student has proven themselves before the panel they may be satisfied with their academic achievements and choose to leave the Arcane College or they may rededicate themselves to a new area of study.

The College Library

It is said that there is no greater repository of knowledge in all of Tirneach, possibly in all the world, and (much to the consternation of the people of Uaircinn), it may well be true. The Library of the Arcane College has been collecting books, scrolls, manuscripts, codices, pamphlets, and all other examples of the written word for over five hundred years. Clerks from the College roam Tirneach, and beyond, looking for new texts to add to the collection. The writings of all the College's professors past and present are assembled here, visiting dignitaries and hopeful applicants wishing to impress the Masters make donations of texts, scholars from remote towns and villages send copies of their essays to be preserved here. The Library's main topic is magical lore but the history of Draíod, Tirneach, and the College itself are also well represented and in truth no text is turned away, regardless of the topic. Tunnels have been dug and expanded many times over to contain the library's ever-growing collection. No-one can say for certain just how many texts it now holds, and there begin its problems.

No-one can argue with the vast depth of the Library's collection; however, its cataloguing and curation leave something to be desired. Researching in the Library has been compared to going digging in a darkened mine or fishing in the deep ocean. In the shallows, near the entrances, the most recent and oft referenced texts are easy to come by, but the knowledge contained within is pedestrian and could just as easily be discovered in

conversation with any attentive student. For deeper lore one must venture further in amongst the shelves, the vaults, and the piles of withering papers. In the depths of the library it is easy to become lost or disoriented. Amongst competing systems of organisation (doomed efforts by various clerks at various times to impose order and usefulness upon the collection), it is often more helpful to have a vague idea of when the Library may have acquired a text than to know its title, author, or topic. Of course, applying that useful tidbit requires an understanding of the Library's peculiar acquisitional strata, a thing students and professors alike must spend months coming to grips with.

The Library does not know what it knows and many real gems of insight and discovery are best found not in the pages of its intentionally collected texts but in marginalia made by generations of scholars, on loose sheets slipped within a tome, in bundles of notes accidentally left behind and claimed by the collection forever. One famous example of this is the formulation of the ritual 'Sever the Unbreakable Bond', which was discovered on a sheet of parchment nestled inside an outdated atlas of Draíod's lower tunnels. It is not known how long it had languished there but it was noted that the language in the formulation seemed dated to those who uncovered it. Who originally developed the ritual and why they never made it public remain mysterious, though the answers could yet lie within the Library.

Disorder is not the only peril in the Library, despite the best efforts of the Library clerks, destruction also rears its head. Texts that are now considered rare and valuable may at another time have been utterly unremarkable. Researchers are often frustrated to discover that a tome they've hunted for for days has been mutilated by some prior visitor. Its vellum scrapped clean and reused, its bindings repurposed and its pages set loose, its text vandalised by an incensed rival. Even today dust, damp, and spilled ink continue to claim their victims. Recently, many texts were lost or damaged by the flooding during the Uncertainty. Some clerks also mutter that a good number were stolen by thieves hoping no-one would notice in the chaos.

Great discoveries and terrible secrets alike are lost within the library, uncovered by enquiring minds years ago and swallowed up just as quickly in the shifting seas of knowledge.