

Religious Orders

The Arm of Thor

Also known as: The Hammers, Hammer, Hammerites

Symbol: A Thor's Hammer (particularly decorating a shield)

The Arm of Thor is a male-only martial order, charged with defending the faithful of the Western Shores from external threats. The Arm has relatively few temples, but an extensive 'lay' brotherhood of acolyte-knights, who may or may not eventually take orders (known as "taking up the hammer". Full brothers always have a war hammer amongst their weaponry, and many Hammers (both full and acolyte) take pride in using a hammer as their primary weapon, hoping that Thor will favour them. Hammers are instantly recognisable on a battlefield by their distinctive white tabards and shields bearing a red Thors' Hammer.

When a knight takes his oaths to become a full member of any martial order, all his (or her, for the Shields) possessions become the property of the order. This leads to many elderly knights bestowing much of their lands on their sons just prior to taking orders.

The Arm of Thor are known to occasionally be at odds with the Hand of Odin over some issues, and there are persistent rumours that Thor himself is far more direct in his control of the Arm than other gods. While Thor is obviously the patron god of this order, they also venerate Baldr and Tyr.

The Hammers are generally the most popular of the martial orders amongst the common people. They just plain look like the good guys!

The Brotherhood of Cunradus

Also known as: Cunradan, Cunradans

Symbol: A needle and a bowl

Originally an offshoot of the Children of Geofon. Cunradus of Steyerberg founded a new monastery in 3014, nestled in the hills near Neußen. An outbreak of plague in Neußen in 3076 brought a priest of Eir to the town, and he decided to settle in the Cunradan Monastery. This led to a change in focus for the Cunradans, and the brotherhood now follows Eir, Geofon and Eastre combined. Cunradans have since taken to travelling extensively. All Cunradan Monks spend several years on pilgrimage, with no set goal, other than to take their healing skills wherever they may be needed. There are now a handful of Cunradan Monasteries, which provide medical services to the nearby populace, mostly the commoner/peasant end of society. Wealthy households are more likely to avail themselves of the services of a Sister of Eir.

Cunradan brothers take an oath of poverty and spend six years as a novitiate, training in healing magic and medicine. After their initial training, they start a regular cycle of pilgrimage and re-training, spending five years on the road, followed by two years in a monastery, during which they exchange knowledge with other monks while helping to maintain the monasteries and providing medical

services to the local populace.

Cunradans officially take no money for the healing and other religious offices they provide (weddings, name-givings, etc), but there is a general understanding that a donation relative to the wealth and prosperity of the patient should be forthcoming in recognition of their services.

Given their structure, the majority of Cunradans at any one time are wandering Friars, with less than a quarter of the entire brotherhood actually resident in monasteries.

The Children of Geofon

Also known as: Children, Geofonites, Goody-goodys

Symbol: A bowl, marked with the rune [Gebo](#) ([Small_Rune_Gebo.gif](#) meaning “gift” or “generosity”)

One of the oldest monastic orders, The Children of Geofon are widespread across the Western Shores, with small monasteries to be found wherever there is poverty and suffering. The Children devote their lives to helping the poor, providing minimal food and temporary accomodation for the most needy in society.

Geofonit monasteries are always small, and lacking in ostentatious decoration. The Geofonites serve their god by growing and preparing food, sharing all extra food with anyone who asks. They concentrate on quantity over quality, so the fare a traveller can expect from a Geofonite monastery is not much better than basic trail rations. Abuse of the Geofonites' hospitality is likely to earn the displeasure of Geofon, who is popular amongst the gods, and misfortune has been known to occur as a result. As a further disincentive to the undeserving, Geofonite soup kitchens usually feature a monk reading scripture and exhorting on the values of faithfulness and compassion to others.

The Children maintain close ties with the Brotherhood of Cunradus, providing food and lodgings for travelling Cunradans, who return the favour with medical services and training in basic nursing skills.

The Eddas Skalds

Also known as: Skalds, Librarians, Saga's Quills

Symbol: a scroll with the rune [Wunjo](#) ([Small_Rune_Wunjo.gif](#) meaning “joy”)

The Eddas Skalds are the official historians and lorekeepers of the Western Shores' church. Another mixed order, the Skalds are quite a small sect, mostly centred around the great libraries they maintain in each capital city. Skalds also go on pilgrimage, attaching themselves to great leaders in times of war or invasion, in order to ensure that accurate records are kept.

Elder Skalds are often slightly distrusted by other orders, especially the Hand of Odin. No one can spend so much time among so many books without becoming a little fey, after all. The patron gods of the Skalds are Saga, Brego and Mímir, but there are rumours that Skalds also venerate Hegl.

The top echelons of the Skalds have the greatest understanding of the Gods and their magic.

The Hand of Loki

Also known as: The Hand, Loki's Servants, Loki's Priests, The Demon's Jokers, Order's Enemies

Symbol: A hand with a spiral

Created by Loki partly as a response to Odin's creation of the Inquisition, the Hand are both feared and hated by the Inquisition, and often by the general populace-though some do respect the Hand and understand the role they play in the wider scheme of things.

Members of the Hand are actually Priests of Loki. They talk to the god himself and administer his ceremonies, though often surreptitiously, given the eagerness of Odin's Hand to wipe out those they consider 'demons on earth'. While the names of the more famous members are often known among the populace, many members keep their identities well hidden, sometimes even from other members of the Hand. Safety is, after all, in anonymity. However, this does not mean members of the Hand do not trust each other. When required to work together for the sake of Loki, they do as willingly and as fervently as any Priest of Odin would for his god. Moreover, the Hand are a family unto themselves, always prepared to help out a member in trouble.

The Priests of the Hand walk as part of the general population. Their power lies in the fact that no-one really knows who they are. They are the famous, the nobodies, the rich, the poor, the masters, the servants. Anyone could be a member-and they often are. Famously, Count Otho of Irolo, a rich, respected man and personal friend of the great, was, after his death some 100 years ago, discovered to be a member. No-one had suspected. This of course led to a number of intense trials by the Inquisition, leading to much angst and confusion among the mighty-which was exactly why the Hand had leaked the information about their famous member in the first place.

The Priests of Loki have many missions and aims, from counteracting the spread of order, to promoting anarchy to simply getting people to take life a little less seriously. Their acts range from light-hearted, harmless jokes to vicious assaults on order and law-often by the same member. Their moods are as changeable as those of their god, but their purpose is always clear-at least to themselves.

No-one is entirely certain how one becomes a member of the Hand. What is known for certain is that the Hand do not have open training schools or monasteries, as many religious orders do. It is thought that members join by invitation. A member of the Hand sees a potential recruit and recruits them. It is as simple as that. There are rumours that a member who recruits another takes on the role of mentor and master, teaching them of the ways of Loki and the Hand for as long as they need such training and until have proven themselves to be trustworthy. Though these are mere rumours, as every member is effectively a Priest of Loki, they could well be true.

Though the Hand are generally considered 'evil', a more enlightened view recognises them as a vital segment of universal strength. The philosophy of the Hand is as follows: chaos is as important as order; harmony between them ensures the universe keeps moving. Too much of one gums up the works, and everything stops. While chaos can bring destruction, it also supplies the chance for growth and rebirth; while order brings safety and calm, permanent order brings only stultification. So the Hand consider their more noble purpose as trying to keep balance in the universe. Thus, in many respects, they could be considered 'good'-or, at the very least, neutral. Indeed, it is known that, should order fail and the world turn to total chaos, many of the Hand would immediately set out to bring order to the world. After all, in a world of pure chaos, the only way to truly rebel is to champion law.

A few current famous members of the Hand abroad in the world include:

- **Ethelred the Anarchic**, a vicious warrior extraordinaire, responsible for turning the tide against numerous 'certain outcome' battles.
- **Yvonne the Prankster**, a woman known for her odd sense of humour and willingness to inflict it on others-the Priests of Bornhold now know better than to go to the lavatory at night without a light source.
- **Elgan, Master of the Gloom**, the most daring thief in the world; said to have stolen the Eyepatch of Odin from his greatest temple-something denied hotly by the Inquisition.
- **Varin, the Serpent of Loki**, an honourable though ruthless spy, thief and assassin; known for his ability to get into seemingly inaccessible places-much to the regret of many.
- **Ceolwulf the Manic**, an assassin, joker and foolhard, known for his love of wine, women and song; the Harem of Rufus the Mighty still sigh over him.
- **Herogar, Loki's Eye**, a man who people believe can be everywhere and anywhere, often at the same time; possibly the leader of the Hand, if there is such a man.

Whilst the famous members of the Hand are anonymous in identity outside their activities, they are known to leave calling cards, or symbols scratched/drawn or arranged at the scenes of their "crimes" as a form of identification. Possibly as a way of keeping score between each other. Ethelred always leaves a gutted corpse, whose intestines are arranged to form his name. Yvonne leaves sprigs of parsley in the ears of someone sleeping nearby. Elgan replaces stolen items with glue covered fakes, sometimes filled with itching powder. Varin leaves cards depicting a serpent entwined about a hand. Ceolwulf, a particularly fine wine of an unusual colour and a blue rose. Herogar, a lapse in memory - "witnesses" to an act of Herogar, if there are any, if he has actually done any, all seem to be missing memories of the same period of time.

The Hand of Odin

Also known as: The Inquisition, Magehunters, Witchhunters, Odin's Crows, The Noose

Symbol: A hand with an eye

A cross-order group. Composed of mostly clerical, but occasionally also secular individuals from all walks of life. Primarily this group is composed of followers of Odin. Those in the Hand of Odin fall outside of the usual rank structure and diocese rules for the clergy. The Inquisition is one of the few orders that is more united in policy and ideals across the Western Shores and frequently have better organisation than the nations in which they live. From Brondheim to Irolo, The Noose stretches.

However, this is not to say that every nation's government fully supports The Inquisition in everything it does. Very few rulers will let the order go about their business with no questions asked. Honour must be upheld and the proper defferences should be made. No ruler, however, would ever blatantly defy The Inquisition. There is nothing more appealing to them, than An Example - especially an example in a position of power.

There are two main branches to The Hand of Odin (Mage Finders and Monster Hunters), and a minor branch responsible for licensing of Alchemists and hedge mages (The Order). Each has a minor variation added to the symbol for the Order.

- **Mage Finders** include those specialising locating disciples of Loki, Helia (also known as Hecate) - Witch Finders (**Symbol:** A snake with a crow pecking out its eye) , and those

specialising locating Mages, Necromancers, Sorcerers, Elves and other humanoid shaped spell users - Mage Hunters (**Symbol**: two crows sharing one eye).

- **Monster Hunters** are occasionally called on by Mage Finders for particularly recalcitrant heretics, or if creatures are discovered in the course of their investigations. This branch specialises in anti-magic and physical prowess. Their titles include Paladin, and Church Knight. (**Symbol**: A shield)
- **The Order** polices secular magic. Minor magic users that are in common demand (and would cause an outcry if they were ever stopped) such as Alchemists, and hedge mages - those with minor skills that are useful to their professions. The Order has been known to hunt down and impound powerful magical artifacts, as well. (**Symbol**: A hand)

The Hand of Odin is feared only by those that have come in contact with it. Many of the population praise their efforts in keeping peace - the people remember the dark times when powerful sorcerers walked the land causing chaos with large armies of undead.

The Shields of Freyr

Also known as: Shields, Freyr's Shieldmaidens, Builders, Wreckers

Symbol: a yellow tower on a green field, or the rune [Eihwaz](#) ([Small_Rune_Eihwaz.gif](#) meaning "defence")

The Shields are a unique martial order. For a start, they accept female members as well as male, and their best actual fighters are all female (Freyr's Shieldmaidens, a sub-group within the order). They also have no lay members, and their emphasis is on the art and science of warfare rather than the practice. (though Freyr's shieldmaidens are remarkably good at the practice)

The greatest defensive works in the Western Shores were designed by Shields, and any noble embarking on an extended military campaign will welcome any Shields who choose to accompany them, and likely pay whatever fee they can afford.

A substantial segment of this order find their calling in less martial directions, and many revolutions in civil engineering have a Shield or two at their heart.

Freyr is the patron diety of this order, but Hretha and Hana are also highly venerated.

The Sisters of Eir

Also known as: Sister, The Sisters

Symbol: A grapevine leaf and a goblet

A female only order that has established cloistered nunneries throughout the Western Shores, Sisters are also retained by some noble families as nurses or on-call healers. The sisters of Eir charge fairly high prices for their services, which are far beyond those available from any secular doctors, for obvious reasons. This does put their services outside the reach of most commoners. The Sisters' nunneries always have an attached hospice, where recovering patients are nursed by acolytes and lay assistants.

The Swords of Saexneat

Also known as: The Swords, Sword

Symbol: a sword, point up, marked with the rune [Teiwaz](#) ([Small_Rune_Teiwaz.gif](#) meaning "warrior")

The Swords formed originally in Daria, though they have since spread across most of the Western Shores. Swords are quite distinct from Hammers on the field, with blue tabards and shields emblazoned with a white sword and Teiwaz rune (in black). The shields are very similar to the Hammers, though they lack a lot of the popularity the Hammers enjoy amongst commoners, and they tend to be far more responsive to direction by the Hand of Odin and Yggdrasil.

While Saexneat is the official patron diety of the Swords, in practice they venerate Tyr over Saexneat, and Baldr is also highly venerated

Yggdrasil

Also known as: The Church, Buds, Leaves, Wands, Branches, Trunks, parchment-scrappers

Symbol: A willow tree

Yggdrasil is the main administrative body of the church. Where the Hand of Odin is often more visible in their actions, Yggdrasil is more pervasive. Taking its name from the World Tree, Yggdrasil venerates no particular god or goddess (although Njordhr, Snotra and Freyja are quite popular amongst its members), and both male and females form its ranks. Yggdrasil is a strict hierarchy, forming a vast bureaucracy. Members of other orders sometimes move to Yggdrasil if they find they aren't completely suited to their original order. Sometimes this is less than entirely voluntary on their part.

Members have the ability, with power drawn from a conglomeration of the gods, to communicate with each other over vast distances. Unfortunately, this highly specialised ability can only be performed in certain rare locations, where the power of sufficient gods is powerful enough to call upon them. There is, naturally, an Yggdrasil temple erected at each such location.

Yggdrasil acolytes are known as Buds, with monks called Leaves, and so on through Wands and Branches. At the head of Yggdrasil in each country is a Trunk, and all the Trunks of Yggdrasil, along with leaders of several other sects, come together once every ten years in conclave to discuss church policy and elect a supreme High Priest of the church, known as The Yggdrasil. The Yggdrasil is charged with the duty of being the ultimate arbiter, in any case where the gods have declined to make a direct commandment.

(Note: while The Yggdrasil holds a similar position to our world's pope, he has in effect less power, due to active involvement of the gods)

All other orders officially come under Yggdrasil's control, although members of the Hand of Odin and the Arm of Thor are notoriously reticent to follow Yggdrasil's lead where they disagree.

Yggdrasil maintain shrines to any gods not having their own orders (even small, tucked-away-in-an-alley ones to Loki), so that members of the public can leave offerings to whichever gods they need to

appease.

Secular Orders

Ordo Custodes Ars Magnum

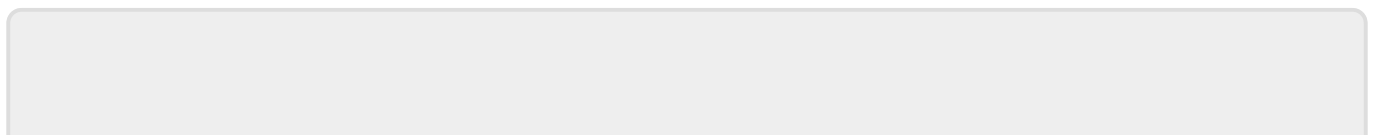
Also known as: [unknown]

Symbol: A triangle containing a stylised "O", "C" and "L"

The Order of the Keepers of the Great Art (Ordo Custodes Ars Magnum) began as an attempt to reign in some of the depredations of magicians who believed their powers placed them above the moral constraints of "lesser" beings. The founders of the group, among the foremost wizards of their era, established a school of magic ostensibly to train others in the art. Many were drawn to the school by the wizards' collective reputations. However, in addition to magical instruction the wizards also inculcated their students in a code of honor, ethical conduct and responsibility to others, not unlike the code of chivalry. The new-made mages went forth to use their knowledge and skills to help and protect their fellow men.

However, under mounting persecution from the Church (ironically caused in no small part by acts of the unscrupulous mages that the school opposed), the school was forced to disband and its members flee or go into hiding - at least that was the public perception. In fact the founders and graduates of the school simply changed their tactics. Concealing any display of or association with magic, the members of the group assumed the guises of other roles and professions, some prominent and influential, others innocuous: noblemen, merchants, scholars, wandering healers or peddlars. Each member would be aware of the identities of only a few others, to prevent the Church from discovering and dismantling the entire group. Members are able to identify each other by special rings that they wear; the rings can be of any style, plain or elaborate, but all are carved on the inside of the band with distinctive runes which only members can read. This was the origin of the group's name.

The Order of the Keepers of the Great Art has two major divisions. Actual members, who are fully aware of the Order's purpose and have access to its knowledge and resources, are called the Order of the Keepers of the Lantern of Truth (Ordo Custodes Laterna Veritas) and they are tasked with the duty of maintaining order amongst wizard and policing magical problems. The rest of the Order is made up of people with useful skills and abilities, and the proper ideals and motivations, who have been contacted by Laterna Veritas members to act as their agents. Those in outside of Laternae Veritas have no knowledge of their existence and never hear the term "Laterna Veritas". One of the Laterna Veritas approaches them under the guise of an employer or patron to undertake specific tasks, or is approached by them as a useful contact. The Laterna Veritas is constantly on the lookout for such people. Only those of the Order who have proven their quality repeatedly may be told of the Laternae Veritas, and if they have talent with magic may be invited to join the Laterna Veritas and learn deeper lore from the Order's masters.



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