
Player information

To ease the players into this campaign, it is suggested that one character is an exorcist-priest or at least a respected member of the clergy. The Dean of Canterbury Aethelnoth has this character sent to Guthlac Abbey (near present-day Maidstone, Kent, England) to investigate the mysterious condition of Brother Jens. Other characters may be companions of the priest, or pilgrims stopping at the abbey to view the relics of Guthlac, or merely noble travelers seeking shelter at the abbey.

Whatever the rationale, it is October 31st in the Year of our Lord 1020, and the adventurers, following a forest trail, are nearing Guthlac Abbey...

Historical background

Both keeper and players can read the following. For more information, we refer the keeper to the Utilities chapter of Cthulhu Dark Ages.

The Land and the People

In 1020 AD, the West Saxon kingdom – England – is one of the wealthiest and most civilized kingdoms of the Occident. The land is divided up into *shires*, each named after their principal town (e.g. *Hantunscir* is the shire of Southampton). A shire or groups of shires falls under the authority of an *earl*, holder of the royal office. Each shire has a court of justice presided by the bishop and the *sheriff*, a royal officer responsible for the levy of taxes. A shire is in turn administratively divided into *hundreds* (*wapentakes* in Danish areas - more about Danes below). The court of a hundred has to meet every month to enforce local justice and regulate trade affairs and taxation matters. The name “hundred” relates to the number of *hides* it consists of, a hide corresponding more or less to the land necessary to support one peasant family. This administrative subdivision of the land is recorded into *charters*, the main purpose of which is to control the volume of royal taxation (at a fixed amount for each hide). About nine-tenth of the population (roughly one and a half to two million souls) lives off the land. These peasants are for the most part “free” men, although their actual condition varies greatly. Roughly half of the peasants are *villeins* who owe heavy labor obligations and dues in kind to their masters. The other half either has to pay money rent or owes periodic labor service on their masters’ domain. Slaves represent a few percent of the population. There are hereditary slaves, but slavery can also result from war, a judiciary sentence, or the inability to pay back a debt. The most well to do landowners are the *thegns* (king’s “servants” who own five or more hides), a hereditary position that gives them authority over lesser free men, but also subjects them to kingly obligations. The thegns are involved in local courts, are responsible for maintaining bridged road, fortifications, and for providing trained soldiers – one man for every five hides - for the king’s army (or equivalent money to hire mercenaries). Interestingly, the Anglo-Saxon society is not yet transformed into a feudal one like on the continent. Instead it is built around the Germanic notion of kindred, of

“blood”. Unsurprisingly, villages have not much evolved since the Germanic migration six hundred years back, and usually consist of a loose aggregation of settlements, often located on ancient Roman estates. The main diet is made of bread and vegetable broth, beef and sometimes pork if one can afford it, and thick ale.

Note that there were neither bears nor rabbits on the isles around 1000 AD.

Of Boroughs and Danes

Around 1020 AD, England counts roughly 80 market towns of economic importance. Most of them are located on the coast or along rivers, and concentrate trading activities, industries, penny and half-penny minting, and about one tenth of the population. An average town has two to three thousand inhabitants and covers an area of 30 to 40 acres. A number of towns - boroughs – have grown around the site of defensive forts. Before 1016 AD, the Roman walls of old boroughs were restored to ward off aggressors, and the earth and timber walls of newer boroughs were replaced with stone ones. Fortifications are garrisoned with militias from surrounding villages, one man per hide. Newer boroughs are characterized by a dense regular layout of streets, meeting halls, and distinct areas of industry and trade. Most boroughs hold a fortified mint supervised by a *monever*.

By medieval standards, and thanks to its export of wool (English wool and woolen cloth was renowned even in the far reaches of Asia), England is a rich and prosperous kingdom. This prosperity attracted Viking raiders (and settlers) in the ninth century. The Vikings’ targets were the liturgical treasures of monasteries, the coin treasures kept in boroughs, and slaves (the Vikings of Dublin run the largest slave market in the Occident). In 991 AD, the Danes devastated Kent and defeated the army of the earl of Essex. In 1002 AD, King Aethelred the “Unready”, protector of the Church, bought peace with the Danes with a heavy war tribute, the infamous *Danegeld*. In November he married Emma, daughter of the Duke of Normandy, and ordered the extermination of all Danes – some escaped and the raids began anew. In 1013 AD, Sven Fork-Beard and his son Cnut attacked England; Aethelred fled to Normandy and put himself under Norman protection. He returned in 1014 AD with a fresh army after Sven’s death. In 1016 AD, Aethelred died and London fell into the hands of Cnut. Edmund son of Aethelred became king, only to conveniently die seven months after his father. *Anno Domini 1016, November 30th, Cnut the Dane is crowned king of England!*

Monks

Under Aethelstan’s reign, the thirty-odd monasteries of England were only a shadow of the past – they had suffered Viking raids and fallen prey to the greed of local thegns. In the tenth century however, the reformers Dunstan, Aethelwold, and Oswald prompted a monastic revival with the king’s support. Land was granted, old monasteries were revived and new ones were founded, all under the same Benedictine rule (re-) written by Aethelwold. Very soon, the illuminated manuscripts of the English monks became as famous as English cloth.

Suggested Reading

Hereunder, the keeper will find a list of short stories by Arthur Machen and Robert E. Howard, which may help him or her set the right mood for the Pagan Call campaign. Indeed, the stories share a number of themes developed further in the campaign: the British Isles, ancient history, the intermingled Celtic and Mythos connections, non-human reptilian races, transition to other worlds or other times, etc.

The Great God Pan, *Arthur Machen*.
The Shining Pyramid, *Arthur Machen*.
The Three Impostors, *Arthur Machen*.
Worms of the Earth, *Robert E. Howard*.
The Little People, *Robert E. Howard*.
People of the Dark, *Robert E. Howard*.
The Children of the Night, *Robert E. Howard*.
The Shadow Kingdom, *Robert E. Howard*.

The above “Mythos” fiction is conveniently gathered in the Chaosium books “Nameless Cults” (2001) and “The Three Impostors and other stories” (2000).

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Select Bibliography

The Cambridge Historical Encyclopedia of Great Britain and Ireland, ed. C. Haigh, Cambridge University Press (1990).
The Year 1000: what life was like at the turn of the first millennium, R. Lacey and D. Danziger, Little, Brown and Company (1999).
The Celts, T.G.E. Powell, Thames and Hudson (1980).
The Holy Bible, new revised standard ed., Oxford (1989).