

ALTERNITY[®] Science Fiction Roleplaying Game

DARK•MATTER[™] sourcebook

THE FINAL CHURCH

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Bill Slavicek and Richard Baker.

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Introduction

Welcome to *The Final Church*, a sourcebook for demonic cults in the DARK•MATTER™ campaign setting for the ALTERNITY® science fiction roleplaying game. This book contains information on cult activity in your DARK•MATTER campaign. You will also find a fully-developed adventure, *Web of Evil*, which allows heroes to investigate and damage an arm of the Final Church. To make best use of this book, you'll need the *Alternity Player's Handbook* (TSR2800), the *Alternity Gamemaster Guide* (TSR2801), and the *DARK•MATTER Campaign Setting* (TSR11433). A road atlas of the United States may also be helpful for the adventure.

What is Dark•Matter?

Imagine every story of alien visitors, psychic powers, occult lore, unexplained miracles, strange cults, and secret societies that you've ever heard. Now imagine if they were all true, and your job was to investigate them.

Welcome to the world of DARK•MATTER.

This campaign setting for the ALTERNITY science fiction roleplaying game rips away the comforting veils of ignorance, exposing the world's corruption and rot. Powerful organizations plot world domination, otherworldly forces infiltrate our power structures, and creatures from our nightmares lurk in the shadows. Working for a clandestine organization called the Hoffmann Institute, you explore hidden mysteries while eluding forces—both human and alien—that scheme to control the truth:

All that you see is not all that there is.

What is the Final Church?

In the real world, the existence of a vast network of secret cults is just another urban myth. But in the DARK•MATTER campaign, these cults are real. They are part of the Final Church: an international conspiracy of hundreds of thousands of men and women in the service of demonic entities who seek to create a hell on Earth.

Tales of animal mutilation, human sacrifice, thrill-kills, ritual abuse, cannibalism, and demon summoning can all be traced back to the machinations of the Final Church. Many of their activities are part of complex and subtle magical rituals designed to aid their demonic masters. At other times, they commit atrocities just for fun. The members of the Final Church are thoroughly and abominably evil.

An important part of their conspiracy is the ability to appear and disappear without a trace. No evidence is ever found of their involvement, despite the mountains of corpses they leave strewn throughout history. The Final Church are masters of secrecy. Their members gain influential positions from which they misdirect, inveigle, and deceive for the benefit of their masters and their master plan.

The Final Church embodies the worst fears of modern humanity: an untraceable, immoral organization with the power of life and death over common people. Its members represent the worst elements of humanity: ambitious, unscrupulous individuals who betray their own kind in exchange for wealth, power, and prestige.

Disclaimers

THIS BOOK IS A WORK OF FICTION.

The *DARK•MATTER Campaign Setting* operates under the assumption that all modern myths—alien abductions, Bigfoot, alligators in the sewers, and so on—are true. The information presented herein draws from the various sources listed in the bibliography to provide a foundation for entertainment in the form of roleplaying against a backdrop of a made-up supernatural conspiracy. In no way should the information in this book be mistaken for factual and accurate data on the subjects of alternative religion, cult activity, or demonology.

In fact, the reader must clearly keep in mind that in the fictional world of DARK•MATTER, demons are a villainous narrative tool. No theological message is intended. Demons in DARK•MATTER are storytelling devices. They are villains who oppose the players' heroes.

This book is meant neither to endorse nor decry any known religion, nor any practitioners of said religion. Readers will no more find a blueprint for communing with evil than they will find incontrovertible evidence that members of real-world religions seek to deliver Earth into the clutches of evil entities.

Gamemastering a Cult-Oriented Campaign

As the Gamemaster of a campaign that pits the heroes against a diabolical cult conspiracy, you must make the cult seem threatening. One way to do this is to make it clear to the players that as the heroes become more aware of the cult's activities, the cult becomes more aware of the heroes.

To demonstrate this awareness, introduce a variety of occult horror conventions—brief scenes meant to make a chill run up players' spines. But use them sparingly. The trick to horror is to sprinkle it, not pour it.

Music. Many Gamemasters like to play music during their games, but nothing can spoil horror faster than an upbeat, Top 40 tune. For a feeling of strange rituals and arcane goings-on, try playing the Gyuto Monks, Freedom Chants From The Roof Of The World, a collection of prayers sung by Tibetan monks, with an eerie, unearthly quality.

Darkness and light. The way you describe a scene can make all the difference. Try describing "ordinary" scenes—research, strategy discussions, and so on—in terms of light: a sunny day, brightly-lit rooms, etc. By way of contrast, describe the "evil" settings as dark: a moonless night, a darkened room, a dimly lit corridor. Whether they realize it or not, the players will react differently.

Malfunctioning technology. This is a staple of many occult horror films. It consists of technological devices failing at odd moments—like when the heroes particularly want them. For example, a flashlight could suddenly flicker and go dark as the heroes enter a dark building. Or when they call for backup, all they hear on their cell phones is static that sounds vaguely like breathy chanting. The horror could be even more subtle: a ringing telephone one time (with no one on the line) seems unusual. A series of such calls will seem maddening.

Symbols. No tale of cult horror would be complete without mysterious symbols drawn on walls, floors, and even victims, in salt, flour, blood, or less immediately identifiable

substances. Avoid the obvious. Pentagrams and upside-down crosses are unsubtle and clichéd. Use more general terms: "an intricate symbol formed of a single line of yellow dust," or "a dash and four dots, repeated three times" (Morse code for "666"). When players put pieces together themselves, their realizations fuel the horror.

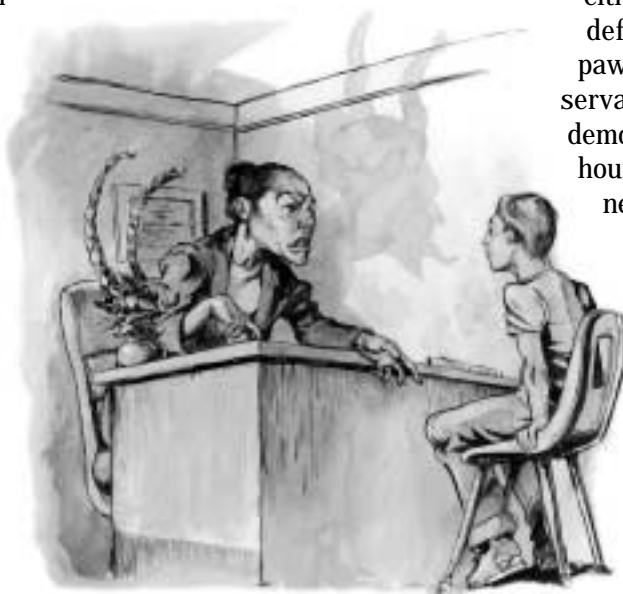
Nightmares. The arcane magic spell *phantasms* (see Chapter 3) is useful for giving heroes nightmares as a plot device. Again, don't overdo it by having every character suffer from night terrors and sleep deprivation. Do use it to keep the hero with the lowest Will score a little edgy.

Animals. Animals are a big part of horror stories, either as victims of cult depravity, defenders of helpless humans, pawns of magical rituals, or outright servants of evil—perhaps even as demons in disguise. While a hellhound makes an intimidating opponent, having the pets at a pet store killing themselves to get at the heroes is unnerving to players. But it also makes them especially eager to take down the fiends who would orchestrate such cruelty.

Prophecies. A chilling moment in the movie *The Exorcist* is when young Linda Blair walks trancelike into her mother's dinner party and announces to one of the guests,

"You're going to die up there." Later, she has no memory of the event. Similarly, in a game of DARK•MATTER, having a complete stranger approach a hero and make some dire prophecy—and afterward have no recollection of the event—will leave the heroes jumping at shadows.

Unnatural behavior. Another scene in *The Exorcist* that causes chills was cut from the final release. After the aforementioned dinner guest has been found dead, Linda Blair appears at the top of a staircase, does a back-bend, and proceeds to walk down the stairs bent over backward. This "spider-walk" (which, again, Blair's character doesn't remember) is particularly effective because no one in their right mind would ever consciously do that. Having nonplayer characters contort, mutilate themselves, or behave like wild animals is an eerie way to reinforce the notion that the heroes are dealing with something not of this earth.



Cultists. Not everyone in every game session should be a cultist, but to your players, it may often feel that way. To increase your players' paranoia, stress how friendly or helpful strangers are. They like to chat about what the heroes are doing, or insist on offering assistance. None of these have to be cultists laying a trap, but pushy people make the players suspicious of everyone. Note that this probably isn't a good gimmick if the plot of your adventure hinges on the characters trusting a supporting cast character.

Traps. When cultists set their sights on heroes, they nearly never give a stand-up fight. Instead, they try to trap the heroes, luring them into hopeless situations with hostages, offers of truce, and so on. They capitalize on the morals and ethics of heroes to trick them into coming willingly to their doom—and thus leaving no scenes of a struggle. Note that this shouldn't be a case of evil cultists trying to beguile and corrupt good heroes. To cultists, heroes are only good for sacrifices.

Moving objects. A particularly eerie event is having something move all by itself, especially if it moves when the hero isn't looking. A book the character was reading a moment before has moved on the desk and closed again when the character turns his back for just a moment. Or when the character reaches for his pistol, it's not there. Be cautioned, though: players hate having important gear vanish without explanation, and the Gamemaster should never explain the mechanism behind these events. So you should rarely, if ever, mysteriously remove the heroes' best tools and weapons.

Shadows. When presenting cult horror, shadows are a glimpse of the true nature of things. If a hero is interviewing a businesswoman, for instance, he might suddenly realize that the shadow she casts appears to have a goat's head, rather than a human one. The impression should only last a few seconds. The hero can quickly find a rational explanation in the way other objects in the room also cast shadows to create the effect. But it should never be obvious; the player should always realize that it was just an optical illusion, rather than clear evidence of diabolical affiliation.

Terror. When the heroes experience fear, it should terrify them. Rather than a sense of lurking dread—which is fine for other horror sub-genres—cult horror scenarios should occasionally remind the players that their heroes could die at any moment. The prospect of character death at the hands or talons or tentacles of something they can barely comprehend—and which shrugs off bullets—will make even the bravest heroes take to their heels. Of course, they'll want to come back for a rematch once they've armed themselves with heavier weaponry, but as

long as they're running for their lives, that thought won't yet be crossing their minds.

Torment. Cultists have no qualms about torture—physical and psychological. When they get their hands on a victim, he or she is in for a world of suffering. The cult occasionally dangles these unfortunates in front of the heroes as a taunt, leaving broken people in their wake. Discovering such a person, especially when the heroes are about to face the cult themselves, helps crumble their resolve. This is, of course, exactly what the cult wants.

Possession. Of course, demonic possession is a standard of cult horror. Just remember that it should happen sparingly, and rarely to the heroes (since that leaves the player with nothing to do—though some players may relish the roleplaying challenge). It is best used as a plot device for supporting cast members, especially in conjunction with the unnatural behavior, prophecies, and moving objects mentioned above. In story terms, think of possession as a hostage situation, and you'll have a good idea of how to present it to your players.

Demons. Finally, demons appear periodically in cult horror stories, but they are never the cult's first line of defense. Seeing a demon is a big event for a hero, and actually fighting one (or more) requires a great deal of preparation, both physical and spiritual. Don't take it lightly.

Remember also to describe demons in terms of their behavior and physical appearance. While an alien or newly-discovered animal species will behave intelligently, demons exhibit unnatural behavior, such as "feeling" things with their tongues, plucking bullets from their flesh, stopping to eat odd things off the ground, or perhaps just never blinking. Of course, this only happens when the demon appears as its true self. Demons using a disguise might display some odd characteristics, but are very careful not to indulge their infernal tastes while there are witnesses.

Chapter 1: The Mark of the Beast

This chapter introduces the history, goals, and modiprandi of the cults that make up the Final Church.

Foreword from the Hoffmann Institute

Among the research materials available from the Department of Documentation is this Rosicrucian handbook on the subject of the international demon-worship conspiracy known as “the Final Church.” Though originally written in 1989, and acquired by the Institute in 1991, it is the most up-to-date reference available. Certainly we could only compile a more complete account of the activities, doctrines, and schemes of the Final Church if a member came forward to do just that. But, as this volume clearly explains, the very nature of the organization makes such an occurrence unlikely.

—Archivist

Legend of the Final Church

In beginning this work for the Ancient and Mystical Order Rosae Crucia, of whom I am the merest initiate, I endeavored to present a fair and reasonable assessment of the goals and doctrines of that body known as the Final Church.

Unfortunately, I cannot remain objective on this subject. I am revolted in equal measure by the manipulative demons, for the way they delude their human followers, and by those selfsame followers, for the way in which they eagerly degrade and destroy their fellow man in the name of demonstrating their willingness to serve their demon masters.

At their best, the Final Church is a motivated and secretive organization dedicated to achieving world domination through demon worship. At their worst, they are a loosely organized collection of demon-beguiled fanatics who practice gruesome rituals and brutally maintain internal security, all while randomly spreading death and despair just because they can.

Those who choose to do battle with the cult must be made aware of the cult’s best weapon: anonymity. Literally, anyone could be a member of the Final Church. Someone could spend her evening mutilating house pets, defiling children, sacrificing babies, and devouring the flesh of her victims—and the next morning baking cookies for the Parent-Teacher Association.

This, then, is a field guide to inhuman nature, a manual for identifying which men and women have traded conscience for worldly power. May it enlighten, forewarn, and forearm.

—Lama Sajag

Researching the Final Church

Sidebar labels “Research” are scattered throughout this book. These are for the Gamemaster to use when heroes attempt Investigate—*research* checks to learn about cults and demons in the world of DARK•MATTER.

As per the rules in the DARK•MATTER Campaign Setting, such tasks should always be complex skill checks. The complexity and number of successes required to gather various information will be listed in the sidebar, along with any related skills that could provide a bonus to the hero’s skill checks.

When a hero only wants simple information—a yes/no answer, for example—the player should check against the character’s Lore—*conspiracy* for information about the cult, or Lore—*occult* for information about demons.

Much of the information gleaned from skills in this book is revealed in stages. Any success reveals some information, but a Good success gives more thorough information than an Ordinary success. In these cases, the player receives all information from lower levels of success in addition to the level achieved. So if a hero gets an Amazing success on a Lore—*occult* check, she also learns everything that she would have gotten from a Good or Ordinary success.

The benefit of assisted actions becomes rapidly apparent. See Assisted Actions in **Chapter 3: Heroes in Action** in the *ALTERNITY Player’s Handbook* for details.

Cult Tactics

The Final Church is able to operate, survive, and grow because its means of recruitment, security, and indoctrination are tied closely together. The same activities that lure in new members can corrupt them, and should that fail, dispose of them.

Recruitment

Cultists spot potential candidates in much the same way a mugger spots a potential victim. They look for behavioral clues that tell them a person is weak-willed, naïve, or for that matter, already corrupt. The Final Church's connection to their demonic masters make the cults particularly interested in recruits with magical or psychic abilities.

Once the cult has chosen a target, the “recruiters” move in to entice the prospect into a low-level indoctrination. This usually involves a social event of some kind organized by the cult.

The purpose of the gathering is to evaluate a candidate's willingness to serve, to overlook or even embrace the cult's practices, and to maintain secrecy. Potential recruits find themselves barraged with offers for drugs, alcohol, sex, violence—whatever would seem to appeal to that particular person.

What the prospect accepts and rejects—and how quickly—gives the cult a clear picture of whether to extend an invitation, commence the indoctrination process, or dispose of the recruit quickly, quietly, and permanently.

Indoctrination

Once the cult determines a recruit's viability, the next step is an introduction to the cult's practices. This process is brutally fast, and frequently occurs on the same occasion as the recruitment.

By the time the candidate has progressed to this stage, he or she has already shown a willingness to engage in physical, sexual, or substance abuse. Now the cult begins pushing the prospect's moral boundaries, seeing just how far the individual will go without encouragement—and just how much encouragement is needed to push him or her even farther.

The cult's aim is to create a dependency on, fear of, and complicity with the cult. The message is simple: “Do what we tell you, or suffer the consequences. Remember that you are just as guilty as we are.” Once the recruit understands the implications, the true corruption can commence.

Practices

All of the various cults with connections to the Final Church have different approaches to promoting moral decay in their membership—far too many to list. Horror stories of the sexual abuse of children and the elderly are the merest tip of the iceberg. Once a recruit has been indoctrinated, he or she is compelled to engage in any and all of the following practices:

- Recruitment and coercion of new members, including enticing or forcing them to ingest or inject near-lethal quantities of drugs and alcohol.
- Psychological and sexual abuse of others, mostly targeted at the cult's victims, but including borderline apostates.
- Abduction and abuse of children, teenagers, the elderly and infirm, and those with the misfortune of having been caught alone by the cult.
- Abduction and enslavement of children and female teenagers or young women (to generate funds for the cult's other activities).
- Torture, mutilation, and sacrifice of victims, including humans and animals.
- Drinking the blood or eating the flesh of sacrifice victims.
- Summoning demonic entities, either to impregnate female cultists or victims (commonly called “demonic marriage”), or to possess cultists or victims of either gender.
- Enforcing the security of the cult by any means necessary.

Security

The security of the Final Church is its highest priority—even more important than serving the whims of the demons. If the cult is compromised and destroyed, no one will remain on Earth to achieve the demons' goals. A single slip of the tongue can bring thousands of years of painstaking scheming to a screeching halt.

The upper echelons of the Final Church—its true masters—are obsessed with security. If they are discovered and captured, legal consequences are nothing compared to the wrath of demons.

Security measures are straightforward and effective: those who betray the cult, threaten it with incompetence, or balk at cult practices are destroyed. There are no appeals, no explanations, no second chances, and no escapes. Each and every cultist is made excruciatingly aware—by the ceremonies in which they themselves participate—that once he or she joins the cult, the only

choice is obedience or death. Once a cultist sees a demon dispense cult justice, betrayal stops being an option.

Each cult member, whether he knows of the Final Church or not, adheres to the following rules of secrecy, on pain of agonizing physical torment:

- Never willingly betray the existence of the cult. Sacrifice your friends, your family, your home, your possessions, and your life to protect the cult.
- Never oppose the will of the cult. Sacrifice everything to fulfill the orders provided for you by the cult.
- Live only for the cult. Sacrifice lesser concerns for the greater goal of power and glory for our masters. Do this and be granted fair reward.

Gamemaster Information

Because so many cultists were recruited specifically for their weak wills, the Final Church has developed a program of terrorizing them into strict obedience. Those with the weakest wills are repeatedly and graphically reminded what happens to apostates. Those with stronger wills are generally left to their own devices.

This negative reinforcement translates to a special resistance modifier bonus. When Investigate–*interrogate*

Research: Demonology

Demonology is, paradoxically, a science open to interpretation. Conclusions about the beings known as demons depend on the researcher's perspective, although some absolute truths do exist. Are demons all evil, as Christianity and Islam teach? Are some demons good, or neutral, as in Chinese mythology? Learning all there is to know requires 5 successes, and checks can be made once per week. Related skills would be Lore–*occult*, or an appropriate Knowledge skill concerning demon legends or mythology.

3 failures: “Demons” are names applied to alien beings, such as Greys or kinori, by people who do not understand what they perceive. Calling them demons may make them fit more readily into the speaker's world view, but these creatures are no more “demonic” than the average human.

1 success: While there may be on this Earth creatures humans have not yet discovered, they are almost certainly entirely natural beasts. Calling them demons is much the same as calling dugongs “mermaids.” At best, so-called “possessions” and “psychomachia” are manifestations of multiple-personality disorder and latent telekinetic ability, respectively, brought on by stress or self-generated hysteria. More likely, eyewitness accounts of demons are the result of poor observation skills or outright hallucinations.

2 successes: The beings we call demons are a lifeform we do not yet understand. They may be hostile to us, as the legends suggest, but they are not truly capable of harming us, except by causing irrational fear. They certainly can do no physical damage. If by some miracle they

do turn out to be physical beings, they are more likely to be aliens of some kind rather than divine or diabolic beings (which has its own interesting ramifications).

3 successes: Demons exist, and are extremely hostile to human life. A large number of them appeared in the Bering Sea in 1953, leading to multiple investigations by multiple intelligence agencies, many of which continue today. In essence, everyone wants to know if these creatures are the same beings spoken of in nearly every mythology in the world. The answer seems to be “yes.” For reasons of their own, demons covet our material world, seeking to take it from us by force, or experience it through our senses by means of demonic possession. (The Gamemaster may select one of the theories from *The Master Plan* in Chapter 1 as the theory the hero encounters which is most logical to him.)

Fortunately, demons are stymied by a combination of their inability to exist inside our physical shells, humanity's inherent free will, and their ancient war with the divine. The first two are often enough to deter demonic activity, but in special cases, divine power must be invoked to drive demons back to their home “dimension.”

5 successes: There are a multitude of theories regarding demons, but only one is correct. The section on Demonic Cosmology (in this chapter) is the foundation of all demonic myths on Earth, and the Gamemaster should either let the player read it, or paraphrase it. The hero can continue to research the subject, but learning more requires separate Investigate–*research* skill checks into specific demons, religions, or theories.

or any Personality-based skill is used against a cultist, the attempt receives an automatic penalty of +1 step for Marginal-quality cultists, +2 steps for Ordinary-quality cultists, +3 steps for Good-quality cultists, and +4 steps for Amazing-quality cultists.

The Master Plan

Most demon worshipers today do not recognize that they are ultimately a small part of the Final Church. In fact, many have no idea that the Final Church exists. Some believe they act alone, others that their cult is the ultimate authority in the organization. Some individuals even believe that they are the ultimate authority. At the lowest levels, the cultists only know to follow the orders of their superiors, and do not think to question the origin of those orders.

This inability to see the big picture is excellent security for the Final Church. Sadly for those who combat these cults, this security muddies the view of the organization's master plan. In fact, no two agree on the ultimate goal of the thousands of cults that comprise the Final Church.

Each possibility presented below provides the basis of a long-term DARK•MATTER campaign focusing on the Bering Demons and the Final Church. Whether any given viewpoint is the absolute truth is subject to the Gamemaster's discretion. Gamemasters might want to combine some or all of the theories into a vast multifactional conspiracy where any given scheme might be only as much of the truth as any one conspirator knows.

Hell on Earth

Analysts within the Order of St. Gregory (who are understandably biased on matters relating to demons) conclude that demons aim at supplanting humanity as the dominant life on Earth. To achieve this, the demons must initiate a sort of "terraforming"—in essence, making Earth a more comfortable environment for themselves. Humanity will, of course, be destroyed in the process.

The Final Church is the instrument of this plan. By insinuating members into positions of power in world governments, the Final Church can influence legislation that allows toxic waste, pollution, ozone depletion, and hazardous levels of radiation to go unchecked. The atmosphere will fester until it is truly fit only for demons and their kind. As conditions worsen, demons will be able to exist for extended periods of time on Earth—something the Order of St. Gregory believes demons cannot currently do.

(The Catholic Church and the

Order's researchers debate over the exact reason for this.)

Obviously, even members of the Final Church would be affected by worsening environmental conditions. The Order of St. Gregory suspects that humans willingly serve despite this because they believe that safe environments will be set aside for devout worshipers once the world is unfit for human life. Since no sane person believes that demons keep promises, the Order concludes that the Final Church's mission is ultimately suicidal.





The Ancient Prison Theory

In the late 18th century, the Knights of Malta overcame the defenses of a cult of Spanish diabolists during a summoning ritual. The Knights captured a hostage: the summoned demon. With utmost caution and secrecy, they conveyed the monster back to a dungeon on their island sanctuary, where a particularly righteous bishop extracted a full account of the nature of demons. The creature was then destroyed, though according to rumor, not before leveling a curse that eventually resulted in the surrender of the Knight's island home to Napoleon in 1798.

The demon's story was recorded, studied, and compared against similar accounts. In their analyses, the Knights feel they have found a kernel of truth. Demons are an alien species, imprisoned in a universe not their own. They were placed there by another species, such as the *elohim*, and they desperately seek escape and vengeance. Our world is their escape route.

The role of the Final Church in this scheme is that of accomplices. For whatever reasons, they sympathize with the demons, and aid their escape by providing access to Earth. From here, the demons seek the ancient interdimensional portals by which many of the Strangers travel from world to world. Ultimately, the demons intend to establish a "pipeline" back to their prison. The Final Church both assists in the escape of demons through summoning rituals, and in securing portals through which the demons can reconnoiter and find the way home.

Despite having some sympathy for the demons' situation, many of the Knights of Malta feel that their vigilance against demonic trespasses fulfills the will of the *elohim*, which is all most Knights need to confirm the righteousness of their actions. If this means they must root out and incinerate every last vestige of Final Church activity, the Knights are prepared to carry out the task.

The Bergman-Moore Theory

With only nominal communication between each other, independent researchers among the Bilderberg Society and the Free and Accepted Order of Masons have arrived at virtually identical conclusions regarding demons and the Final Church. Rikard Ambrosius Bergman of the Bilderbergers and Thomas Moore of the Freemasons each showed evidence to their respective superiors that demons must devour human life energy to survive, and the Final Church acts as their provisioners.

But the time will soon come, both Bergman and Moore agree, when the members of the Final Church will ride herd over the rest of humanity, offering up the most delectable specimens as the main courses of an endless demonic feast. For this service, members of the Final Church will be spared the same fate.

Obviously this plan is counter to both groups' goals. The Freemason vision of a perfect world certainly does not include consumption by demonic entities, and the Bilderbergers' own Carrying Capacity Working Group does not see the reduction of humanity to cattle as a suitable solution to the overpopulation problem. Unfortunately, both organizations have come to realize that some of their methods are similar to the Final Church's methods—leading them to believe that they have been infiltrated, and their plans subverted.

Both groups agree, though, that the members of the Final Church are duped by their so-called "partners." Certainly if demons control the world, all of humanity will become cattle; any overseers will be the demons themselves.

The Dark Tide Theory

Not unsurprisingly, the Analytical Branch of the Hoffmann Institute has acquired a fair amount of research material from non-Institute sources, cobbling it together to further support their worldview. The current prevailing belief in the Institute is that demons are an ephemeral form of life possessing nearly no mass (much like neutrinos). These beings interact with dark matter to produce sentience (which, by some modern theories, would suggest that they are definitely not composed of neutrinos). The Hoffmann theory goes on to say that these beings have probably existed for millions of years in a state of frustration at their immaterial nature.

Through external manipulation of dark matter (by human agencies such as diabolists) the demons can temporarily manifest as solid flesh. In addition to the obvious benefits of physicality, a solid demon would be immune to the dark tide. In other words, when the solar system passed out of the dark matter "cloud," the physical demon would remain physical—whereas before, it would be swept through interstellar space for thousands of years before again encountering sentient life.

The Final Church provides the greatest concentration of diabolists—mystics who use blood sacrifice to manipulate dark matter. By careful direction over multiple visits

Mystery Religions

Mystery religions were secret cults in Greece that later spread throughout the Roman world. There were many different cults, such as the Dionysiac and the Orphic, but all shared some basic features. Each cult had an exclusive membership, sworn to secrecy. Potential members had to undergo a period of initiation, which was said to purify them. When they were considered ready, initiates underwent a mystical experience that revealed the secrets of the cult and allowed communion with the patron god. Each cult was centered around a particular deity or group of deities. A mystery play recounting the god's story was an important part of cult's ceremonies.

With dedicated members and a vow of secrecy, the mystery religions were the perfect vehicle for demonic machinations. That these cults thrived throughout the ancient period is proof of their appeal and power.

Of particular note is the cult of Mithras. Originally a Persian god central to Zoroastrianism, Mithras became a god of soldiers in the Roman world. His worship spread quickly among the military, and shrines dedicated to him could be found in most parts of the empire. His cult featured seven levels of initiation, and only those capable of passing tests of strength, stamina, and faith advanced up the hierarchy.

The mystery of Mithras centered around his slaying of a divine bull, which brought life to the earth. The full story of this warrior god strikes many of the same chords as Christianity, and the two religions competed fiercely during the first several centuries.

No evidence has come to light connecting Mithraism with demons. If the cult was part of the demonic conspiracy, it covered its tracks extraordinarily well.

to Earth, the demons have established a sort of college of diabolism, in which practitioners develop their arcane abilities through repeated acts of violence and sacrifice. The Final Church seeks to nurture the talents of those most gifted in bloodletting, in hopes that they become capable diabolists.

What reward the Hoffmann Institute believes these diabolists expect is unclear, a confusion that the Institute transfers to the Final Church itself. Despite condemning the overall practice of demon worship, however, the Institute conducts extensive experiments in the diabolic

arts, as well as sending members to infiltrate the various cults that constitute the Final Church. Judging from their own fascination with the subject, it is safe to say that the Final Church has infiltrated them.

The Headless Beast

The United States government agency most informed about the Final Church, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, firmly believes the worldwide activity of thousands of cults is the work of isolated, disorganized religious sects. They say there is no "Final Church."

There are two possible reasons for this absurd assertion. First, the FBI and the Department of Justice are not concerned with metaphysics; they investigate crimes. As long as members of the Final Church commit no traceable crimes, the FBI has no jurisdiction, and therefore the existence of the Final Church is inconsequential to their mission.

The second possibility is more likely, and more sinister: the Department of Justice has been thoroughly compromised by the Final Church. This would account for the "lack of evidence" cited by law enforcement officials, and the FBI's extreme lack of interest in investigating allegations of cult activity.

This allows the Final Church to operate unchecked. Members in danger of exposure call for aid from the FBI. Evidence is covered up, suspects are released, and cases are closed. The FBI's failure to police its own ranks against cultists is hardly surprising. After all, if they admit the existence of demon worshiping cults, they begin a war against an adversary thoroughly insinuated in all levels of government and public life. In its simplest terms, the Department of Justice is already outnumbered and outflanked by an untraceable enemy. The only course of action left is to officially deny the existence of the Final Church, while privately hoping that someone else solves the problem.

History

It would be wrong to think of the Final Church as a monolithic conspiracy stretching back to the beginning of human history. The modern Final Church is global, but disparate. This structure is a product of the group's history and leadership. To understand how the Final Church achieved its current shape, one must inspect its development.

Cults of Antiquity

Information on ancient demonic cults is limited. While many myths derive from humanity's interactions with Strangers, it is impossible to know which Strangers inspired which legends, which legends are based on actual contact, and which are complete fancy. Demons appear in many stories, but often these demons are gods of a neighboring people. For instance, ancient Israelites turned Babylonian and Philistine gods such as Bel and Dagon into demons in their own cosmology. Perhaps Bel and Dagon truly were demons masquerading as gods. Regardless, given the duplicitous nature of demons, saying anything meaningful about ancient cults is a difficult proposition.

It is known that demons were active in the ancient world, predominantly between 3000 and 2000 BC. Demons commonly masqueraded as gods, a simple feat for Strangers with occultic powers. While some demons may have attempted to unite far flung cults, none of these efforts bore fruit. Cults tended to remain localized affairs.

At the peak of the Dark Tide (3000 BC) the Egyptians had the only unified and advanced civilization. While others, such as the Mesopotamian and Indus civilizations, joined Egypt over the next thousand years, the Dark Tide was already receding. By the time of the rise of Greece and China, the demons' influence was trifling. Contact with Strangers was difficult, and true shows of power were rare. Although groups like the Witches of Thessaly, who worshiped the goddess Hecate, thrived, their actual powers were limited.

The one real way in which demons affected humanity (from roughly 1500 BC to 500 AD) was intellectually. The Greek word *daimon*, the root of the modern demon, originally meant "genius" or "spirit." This is no coincidence. With the Dark Tide at a low ebb, the few demons who could manifest on Earth were limited to whispering in the

collective ear of humanity. These demons gave knowledge, but only knowledge that served their own purposes. This knowledge was the root of mystery religions in Greece and Rome such as the Eleusinian and Mithraic Mysteries.

They also fueled the mystical speculation centered around Alexandria in the first through third centuries. Alexandria was a magnet for Persian Magi, Neoplatonists, Christian Gnostics, and even Indian Yogi.

The Temple of the Muses provided a common ground where these seekers could debate and theorize, without realizing that key inspirations came from a malevolent source. Much of later magical theory originated in Alexandria, and the corruption of the source would not become apparent for centuries.

More obscure than demonic influence on occult lore is diabolic inspiration of science. Evidence of tampering is scant, but evidence suggests that some scientific breakthroughs owe their genesis to the nefarious whisperings of these Strangers. It may be coincidence that Chinese first used gunpowder in the year 500 AD, the very year the Dark Tide began to rise once again. Then again,

it may not.

The Dark Ages

The Dark Ages are generally dated from the years 500-1000 AD, and the term specifically refers to Europe. This period was characterized by barbarian invasions, the spread of Christianity, and the birth of Islam. During these years, the Final Church dealt with growing monotheism. The days of posing as gods were largely over, but Christian and Islamic theology offered the Strangers a worthy substitute: Satan.

The demons quickly realized that Satan (or Iblis, as the Muslims called him) and his legions provided a new



means to manipulate humanity. The missionary disposition of Christianity proved useful, since it spread belief in Satan along with the news of Christ. The demons happily encouraged the growth of the church, since it meant a rise in their own fortunes as well.

Satanic activity in this period is usually linked to witches. To be sure, some witches were beholden of the demons. Stories of covens that summoned Satan do have basis in reality, though probably hundreds of demons posed as Satan at any given time. The difficulty in researching this period is that surviving members of pagan religions resisted the Christian tide. These groups were often labeled as Satanists and persecuted, whether or not they actually trucked with demons. Many modern groups look on these witches as spiritual ancestors, and do not take kindly to the inference that witches practiced black magic and worshipped actual demons. The evidence is too overwhelming to discount, however. The stamp of demonic influence is all too clear.

Witches were only the most obvious manifestation of the Final Church in the Dark Ages. Many demons cor-

rupted individuals, especially those in positions of power. The idea of Satanic temptation played right into these activities, and many victims proved to have weak wills when confronted with the supernatural. Several prominent religious and political leaders were among the corrupt, including Pope Sylvester II. By the time the Church recognized the need for an institutional response to this threat, the tide of dark matter had passed. The Inquisition arrived too late to help, and spent most of its time persecuting innocents.

Not Quite So Dark

The term “Dark Ages” is a misnomer in world history. This period witnessed important civilizations in other parts of the world. The Teotihuacan and Mayan civilizations thrived in the Americas, while the Tiahuanaco and Huari empires rose in the central Andes. China dominated the Far East; the Tang dynasty particularly ushered in an era of prosperity, stability, and civilization. While Korea and Vietnam suffered under Chinese military advances, the Japanese wholeheartedly embraced Chinese influence, even modeling their two capital cities after the Tang capital of T'ang (the largest and most prosperous city in the world at the time).

The demons did not ignore this growth and prosperity outside Europe. In fact, they tried to use Buddhism in the east the same way they used Christianity and Islam in the west. Buddhism posited many Hells, not just one, with a multiplicity of demons. The social and political fabric of the far east proved less fertile ground for demons, however. Often, in China as well as places like Mesoamerican, demons had to fall back on the cult tactics they'd used in the ancient period. While many of these cults are interesting, they do not add significantly to this study.

The Whispering Campaign

It was eight hundred years until the next Dark Tide washed over earth. During that time, the Final Church was weak, virtually nonexistent. A few demons clawed their way to Earth, but no organized activity occurred. Cults existed of course, but these were the products of charismatic human leaders or other conspiracies.

However, demonic influence continued in the sciences. These years brought the Renaissance to Europe, and a new interest in science. At the very least, these interests

Words of Warning

The History of the Forty Viziers, a 15th century collection of Turkish stories, tells the story of Barsisa and the loss of his soul. Barsisa was a devout scholar who attracted the unwelcome attention of Iblis, the Islamic counterpart to Satan. Iblis vowed to corrupt Barsisa and sent a beautiful virgin to tempt him. The hapless scholar resisted for a while, but soon lost control and consummated with the temptress. He soon regretted his sin and returned to a life of holiness. Just when all seemed well, he discovered that the woman was pregnant with his child. Desperate, Barsisa murdered the girl and buried her body. Luck (or was it Iblis?) was not with him, and the body was discovered. His sins were then revealed and he was sentenced to decapitation.

In this dark hour, Iblis appeared to him. The devil offered to free Barsisa if he agreed to renounce Allah and swear eternal allegiance to Iblis. Barsisa agreed, and blasphemed Allah to prove his new loyalty. Iblis only laughed, and quoted the Koran. Barsisa had failed to “fear Allah, the Lord of the World.” Had he kept his faith, he would have been saved. Instead, Iblis took his soul and dragged him down to Jahannam (Hell) to pay for his sins.



More Words of Warning

The story of Doctor Faust has been popular since the 16th century. Faust was apparently a real person, though his story has probably changed in the telling. The basic story, as told in the German *Faustbook*, concerns Doctor Faust's deal with Mephistopheles for forbidden knowledge. Faust seeks enlightenment through magic, and swears allegiance to a dark power to get it.

Once under the sway of Mephistopheles, Faust continues to fall. He agrees to renounce Christianity and to work to subvert the church. In exchange for an oath signed in blood, the devil grants him 24 years of indulgence. Despite scholarly aspirations, Faust soon degenerates into a hedonist seeking carnal pleasures. As time ticks on, Faust becomes concerned with his future in Hell. Mephistopheles provides Faust with many answers about the nature of Hell, and finally takes the doctor there to show him the real thing. While in Hell, Faust sees demons and talks to the damned. He returns to Earth and tries to back out of the contract.

Mephistopheles tells him it is far too late, and Faust is too proud to seek God's forgiveness. Instead he redoubles his debauchery, determined to enjoy the fruits of his horrendous bargain while he can. On his deathbed, Faust gathers his students about him and warns them to stay away from his path of damnation. Then Lucifer arrives to drag him down to Hell.

Many different versions of the Faust story have appeared over the years, but the general details remain the same. Christopher Marlowe's 1592 play, *Doctor Faustus*, brought the story to an English speaking audience. Perhaps the most famous version of the tale was written by Goethe. His *Faust: A Tragedy* differs from the original in that Faust is saved by the intercession of the Virgin Mary! Despite this happy ending, the message remains: dealing with devils is a losing proposition in the long term.

were encouraged by demonic whispering campaigns. The demons have always been interested in pushing the envelope of science forward for reasons that have become clearer in this century.

Black Masses

Even if contact with actual demons was rare during this period, the desperate and the sacrilegious still dabbled

in the occult. Two cases from the 17th and 18th century typify cult activity in this era.

The first story begins at the court of King Louis XIV of France. Madame de Montespan was one of the King's many mistresses. Worried about her place in the King's affections, the Madame turned to a corrupt priest, who celebrated three "amatory masses" in 1667 designed to increase the Madame's sexual attractiveness. While the supposed sorcery of these masses seemed to work at first, it soon became clear that King Louis dallied with a new mistress. Madame de Montespan, who had hoped to supplant the Queen, instead found her own position in jeopardy. In desperation, she turned to La Voisin.

La Voisin (also known as Catherine Monvoisin) was a notorious practitioner of black magic. La Voisin procured love potions for Madame de Montespan for the better part of six years. These potions were secretly slipped into the King's food (a likely explanation of the King's repeated illnesses during these years, as a prime ingredient of the potions was poisonous). In 1673 Madame de Montespan, worried about the efficiency of the potions, insisted that stronger measures be taken.

La Voisin agreed to a full Black Mass, as long as the Madame herself participated. With the help of a depraved priest named Guibourg, La Voisin organized the horrific event. The Black Mass was celebrated on the naked body of Madame de Montespan. A child's throat was cut and his blood drained into a chalice, as Guibourg and La Voisin recited a prayer to the demons Ashtaroth and Asmodeus.

Five years passed, in which more debauched Black Masses were performed for Madame de Montespan. By 1678, however, the Madame was losing the King's favor to one of the Queen's ladies-in-waiting. The outraged de Montespan ordered Guibourg to prepare a death spell to strike down the King. The aging priest began preparations, but before he could finish, word of the plot leaked out.

In response, Nicolas de la Reynie, the King's Lieutenant-General of Police, sent his officers to arrest all rumored practitioners of black magic. Over two hundred magicians were rounded up by the police. Of these, one hundred and ten were tried and sentenced, even though few were involved with Madame de Montespan's plot.

Ironically, the King ordered the trials to end because he feared that the details of Madame de Montespan's activities would be made public. La Voisin and Guibourg were hung, as were several other sorcerers. Others were



exiled or imprisoned for life. King Louis feigned friendship with Madame de Montespan for several years, but then quietly retired her to the country. The Madame died over thirty years later. She was said to have lived out her final years with great piety and a terrible fear of death.

Hellfire Clubs

Some survivors of the Black Mass scandals found their way to England. They may even have been involved in a brief-lived cult in Dublin called the Hellfire Club. That group operated in the early decades of the 18th century but died out by the time the group commonly known as the Hellfire Club rose to prominence.

The real Hellfire Club was only named such some years after its activities ended. They referred to themselves as the Superior Order or the Medmenham Monks. Centered on the figure of Sir Francis Dashwood, the Hellfire Club was a group of English intellectuals who primarily seemed interested in ridiculing Christianity and mocking its ritual. They proclaimed their allegiance to the devil, and their superiority over the common man.

Each June the “monks” gathered for several weeks at Medmenham Abbey (Dashwood’s home). There they engaged in drunken revelry, mock rituals of their own design, and sexual shenanigans with women they referred to as “nuns.”

Some have seen the Hellfire Clubs and similar groups as hotbeds of Satanism. By and large, its members were

irreverent, but hardly in league with demons (rumors of exceptions still exist, of course). They were mainly rich intellectuals who thumbed their noses at the church. When the members got too old to slip snakes and skulls into each other's beds, the Hellfire Club faded away.

The Age of Imperialism

The Industrial Revolution is generally said to have begun in 1760, during the reign of George III of England. No one knew at the time how the growth of industry would change the world. The demons had some informed guesses, however.

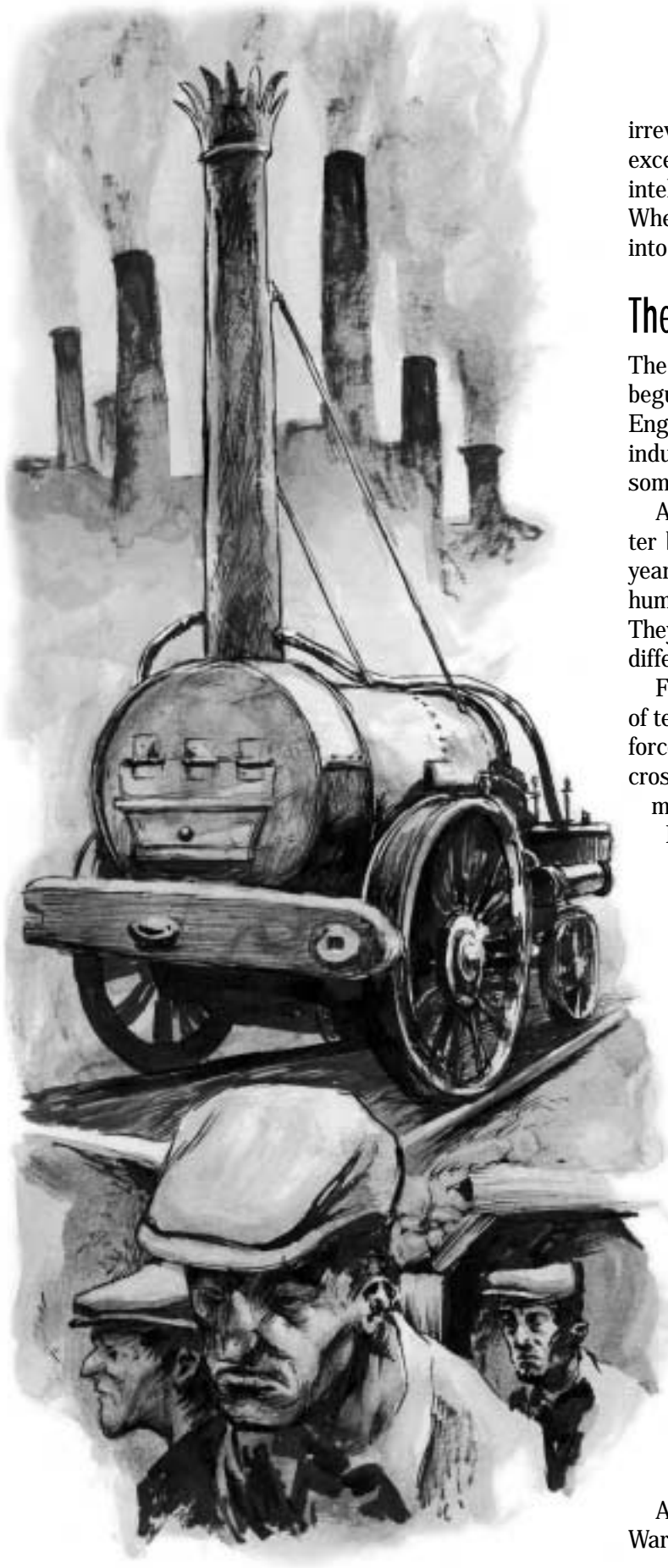
At the dawn of the 19th century, levels of dark matter began to rise again for first time in eight hundred years. Whereas demons' previous attempts to influence humanity had fallen short, this time they had a plan. They had two goals, each designed to shape history in a different way.

First, the demons wanted to directly increase the rate of technological advance. They descended on England and forced industry into overdrive. Railroads soon crisscrossed the country, taking raw materials from deep, dank mines to squalid industrial cities like Manchester and Birmingham. The rest of Europe slowly responded, but England always stayed at the forefront. It proved the ideal location for the demons' program. Not only was it a geographic island, but a religious one as well. Inquisitors and members of the Order of St. Gregory were not welcomed by the Church of England, which drastically reduced the chances of anyone noticing the infestation.

The demons' second goal was to create a truly worldwide organization. Previously, their cults had been too separated by ideology and distance to work together effectively. The new approach created discrete cults across the world, but the cults were linked this time, at the highest levels. While the demons could provide a certain level of communication, they wanted to facilitate use of new technologies. Given this, the demons' solution was imperialism. If the world would not come together on its own, they would force the issue.

Who could better do that than the nations of Europe, armed with the fruits of the Industrial Revolution?

As before, England led the way. Once the Napoleonic Wars ended in 1815, the march of imperialism began.



England had already been active in India, though regrettably it had lost control of the American colonies. With its excellent navy and industrial power, England began grabbing land across the globe.

The first fifty years of this program were fruitful. European nations forced the world open, from Turkey and Egypt (1838) to Persia and China (1841–42) and even to Japan (1858). The perpetrators of these measures were not blood-drenched cultists, but politicians and military men, enticed and cajoled into supporting the program. It was a new form of medieval temptation, but this time occult power stayed in the background. Behind the patriotic cries and the “white man’s burden” an invisible threat smiled.

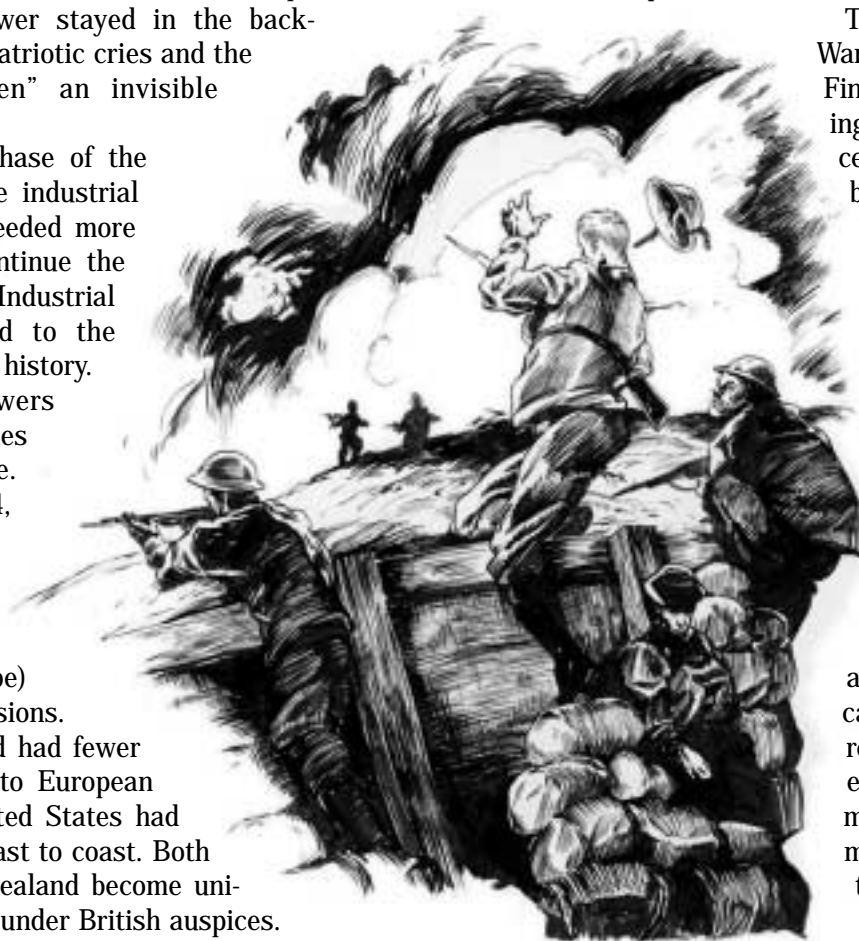
In 1880 a new phase of the operation began. The industrial nations of Europe needed more raw materials to continue the advancements of the Industrial Revolution. This led to the greatest land grab in history. The European powers raced to grab colonies all over the globe. From 1880 to 1914, Europe added 13.7 million square kilometers (over one-fifth of the land mass of the globe) to its colonial possessions.

By 1914 the world had fewer owners. In addition to European imperialism, the United States had consolidated from coast to coast. Both Australia and New Zealand became unified Commonwealths under British auspices. South America was stable, and foreign investment brought an economic upswing. After hundreds of years, the masters of the Final Church acted boldly. In the early part of the 20th century, they switched their efforts from corruption of key individuals to establishment of organized power groups. Their plan was beginning to take shape.

Then the European powder keg exploded, and the world plunged headlong into war.

The Great War

Trench warfare, barbed wire, machine guns, tanks, and poison gas are the legacies of the Great War. The horrific environment of the blood soaked fields of Europe would seem the perfect place for demons. Who better to perch atop a mound of festering skulls than a winged demon from the depths of Hell?



The irony of the Great War, however, is that the Final Church wanted nothing to do with it. After a century of manipulation to bring the world together, the war destroyed their crafted unity in a matter of months. The demonic leadership, like the governments of the warring states, fell into disarray. They took several years to develop a new strategy.

The demons already had a history of tampering with humanity’s rate of technological advancement. To regain control, they decided to continue. If they made even more horrible means of killing available, then the war would end sooner and they could resume their plans.

A new whisper campaign was mounted, leading to mustard gas and flame-throwers. Amazingly, the generals continually ordered their troops over the top, regardless of the slaughter. Even the demons were impressed with the amount of sheer carnage that humans could tolerate.

The Great War finally ended, but the world’s troubles did not. Revolutions began just before the war in China and Mexico, and spread like wild fire. Russia, Germany, and Hungary faced revolution in 1917–1919 and many nations spiraled into civil war. Some of these conflicts ended quickly, while others dragged on for decades. China, for instance, was in turmoil from 1911 until 1949, when Mao’s communists finally won a total victory.



The Final Church found postwar relations too tumultuous. They decided, therefore, to feed off the general societal malaise that descended on Europe like a pall. They noted how occult groups were growing in number, as disillusioned veterans searched for a new meaning. The demons focused their new efforts here.

The Thule Society

In the years before the Great War, a Pan-German cult, known as the *völkisch* movement, became increasingly popular. It preached superiority of the Aryan race and vilified Jews. The *völkisch* movement consisted of many different organizations. Two of the most prominent were Guido von List's Armanen (founded 1908) and Jörg Lanz von Liebenfels' Order of the New Templars (1900). Both groups used the swastika as a symbol.

A young Adolph Hitler ran across Lanz's magazine in Vienna in 1909. The magazine's message struck a chord, and he contacted Lanz, who provided him with further material.

In 1912 a new *völkisch* group called the Germanen Orden was founded by several agents of the Final Church. The founders of the Germanen Orden may have displayed real occult powers to the *völkisch* flock, because Lanz and List joined the group shortly after its founding. The Germanen Orden was more militant than previous groups, but militancy was unattractive in prosperous pre-war Germany.

By the end of 1918, however, Germany was anything but prosperous. The mighty German war machine was beaten, despite victory over the Russians. The punitive Versailles Treaty, with its infamous War Guilt clause and heavy reparations, led to great German bitterness. The Germans also lost their Kaiser, and teetered on the brink of communism. The allied blockade had been ruinous on the Fatherland, and more than two million returning soldiers found their homeland ridden with hunger and unemployment. In this environment, the Germanen Orden began to find fertile ground.

Meanwhile, in Munich, yet another *völkisch* group had sprung up. This one, the Thule Society, was founded by Baron Rudolf von Sebottendorff, a man with dubious claims to royalty but deep occult knowledge. The Thule Society posed as a study group interested in the "ancient German alphabet" and other cultural issues. It was actually an umbrella group for various counter-revolutionary groups.

The Germanen Orden was only too happy to merge with the Thule Society, and make the new group its political

arm. In this way, the Thule Society was quietly integrated into the Final Church. The Germanen Orden must have received the official sanction of the Final Church before the merger, likely when the group began to achieve impressive gains in membership.

The Thule Society kept itself busy in Munich politics. It bought a newspaper, which immediately laid all of Germany's troubles at the feet of the Jews. It also preached of a coming Führer, who would do away with hated democracy and make Germany great again. The Thule Society had gathered men of occult power, trained soldiers, and methods of propaganda. Its membership included future Nazis like Alfred Rosenberg, Rudolph Hess, and Dietrich Eckart. Despite impressive gains, however, the Thule Society still lacked one crucial component: its Führer.

Clash in Munich

The social chaos that allowed the Thule Society to thrive also threatened its existence. The earlier *völkisch* groups had been more prone to infighting than conflict with other secret societies. But the Thule Society had to deal with other conspiracies when a coup sponsored by the Invisible College resulted in communist takeover of the Bavarian government. The new government was led by Kurt Eisner, who, as a communist and a Jew, was the Thule Society's worst nightmare. Rallying behind Sebottendorff, the Thule Society plunged into right wing counter-revolutionary politics. Because they still posed as curious intellectuals, the Communists ignored them while cracking down on overtly political groups. The Thule Society concentrated on bringing all the right wing anti-Semitic groups under its umbrella, and founded yet another organization to push these groups into militancy. On January 18, 1919 the German Workers' Party was founded under Anton Drexler.

By the early months of 1919, anarchy reigned in Munich. No one controlled the city. Left and right wing groups fought in the streets. Perhaps this was the agenda of the Invisible College all along, or perhaps it was just a byproduct of Eisner's revolution. Regardless, the communists finally seized control on April 14. Twelve days later, communist soldiers broke into the Thule Society's rooms and arrested seven members. Sebottendorff fled Munich to join the counter-revolution *frei corps* soldiers while the communists found Thule members guilty of counter-revolution and shot them. The Invisible College victory was short-lived, however. Twenty thousand members of the

frei corps descended on München and kicked the communists out. Eisner's Bavarian government lasted only one hundred days before being drowned in blood.

Even if the Invisible College had been defeated, it was no victory for the Thule Society. The group never officially reconvened. The demons found this acceptable because seed of it lived on in the German Workers' Party. The party would soon find its own Führer.

The Rise of Hitler

On September 12, 1919, Adolph Hitler, a WWI veteran and Iron Cross holder, attended a meeting of the small German Workers' Party. He had been sent by military intelligence to observe the meeting but joined the party soon after. Their racist and nationalist ideas paralleled his own and he knew of the group's ties to the Thule Society. Shortly, Hitler took over the party and renamed it the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP, or Nazis). As an occult adept himself, Hitler rounded up and recruited the remaining Thule Society members.

The story of Hitler's rise to political power is well known and does not bear repeating here. Less commonly known is his occult involvement. Under the influence of Thule Society members and Karl Haushofer, a professor and Final Church member who groomed Hitler for power, the new Führer grew in occult power throughout the 20s and 30s. Hitler followed up the founding of his notorious Stormtroopers (the SA) with that of the SS in 1923. The SA gave Hitler military might, and the SS gave him magical might. Although it started small, the black clad SS grew in numbers and power under Heinrich Himmler. The bookish

Himmler saw the SS as the Teutonic Knights reborn, and only those of the purest German blood were accepted.

Hitler took power in 1933 and things in Germany changed quickly. Until the very last minute, no one realized the kind of threat he and the Nazis posed. The Freemasons used their political muscle to prevent Hitler from becoming Chancellor, but they were far too late. Soon Hitler was the Führer of Germany, and his enemies quickly learned what that meant.

Hitler's hatred of Jews is well-known, but he was equally contemptuous of Freemasons and the Catholic Church. The Masons were hounded out of Germany or sent to concentration camps, along with members of rival occult groups and other enemies. Those who wanted to share the glory played along. Soon, both the money men of Germany and its military swore allegiance to the Führer. With a real military force at his command and increasing trouble heard from the SA, the SA was purged in the bloody Night of the Long Knives in 1933. Throughout the rest of the decade Hitler molded Germany into his ideal fascist state.

The Schism

Throughout these years, the demonic leaders of the Final Church quietly manipulated events to put their man in charge of an entire nation.

It's no coincidence that Germany was one of the most highly industrialized nations in the world. Hitler pushed to develop new tanks and planes, and openly began to build his army. Europe stood by as he reclaimed German territory lost at the end of WWI. The Final Church knew that Hitler planned war, but they expected that it wouldn't





begin until 1945. Hitler's generals and industrialists shared this impression, so everyone was surprised when Hitler pushed for war in 1939.

A schism was born in the Final Church at this point. The demonic leadership wanted the atomic bomb in the bag before war began. Hitler, perhaps encouraged by a splinter group of demons, had a different vision. He wanted to invade the east, smash communism, and sacrifice millions on his bloody altars to create a new Aryan race of supermen. At this crucial moment, the Final Church realized it had done its work too well. Hitler was too pow-

erful to stop. In an eerie repeat of 1914, the world slid into war again.

Birth of the Bomb

Hitler continued believing that he had dark powers at his call. He was convinced that his thousand year Reich would come to pass, and that he would birth the supermen who would dominate the world. Unknown to him, the demonic leadership played a double game. They pushed ahead with German rocket and atomic research, but started similar moves in the next obvious host country: America. At first it seemed like Hitler might make good his claims, as he conquered nearly all of Europe. Eventually though, the tide turned against him and the full might of Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States, with covert help from an array of conspiracies, crushed Nazi Germany.

Of course, the Final Church wouldn't waste German research into atomic weapons. Every German scientist they could round up was taken by the American military, given new identities, and put to work for America.

With or without their help, the United States had an atomic bomb by 1945. Japan was the first and only nation to feel the heat of it. Hiroshima and Nagasaki were both destroyed in seconds, ending WWII. Survivors reported that oni (Japanese demons) stalked out of the mushroom cloud to decimate the countryside, but these stories were dismissed by scientists and other "rational" thinkers.

Cold War

Within ten years of dropping the first bomb, nuclear weapons had become central to the strategy of both the Soviet Union and the United States. The great champions of communism and capitalism stood on the brink of nuclear annihilation. This was what they had waited for. The mass destruction of humanity would not only break open their prison, but make Earth a suitable home for them. They only needed to nudge the powers to war.

As it happened, getting humanity to take that last step was harder than they thought. Despite missile crises, proxy wars gone bad, and spy incidents, the expected nuclear holocaust has not yet come. Greys, Freemasons, and other groups doubtlessly have affected this, but apparently no one realized that a power and an intelligence were behind the Cold War.

Hoffman Field Report #101
The Yezidis: Devout or Devilish?
Filing Agent: Otto Kreuger
Date: 7/13/1999

The Yezidis are a Kurdish sect that traces its founding back to a Sufi brotherhood begun by Sheikh Adib. Musafir (c. 1075-1162 AD). There are roughly two hundred thousand Yezidis, half of whom live in Iraq. Other sect members live in Turkey, Germany, Armenia, and Georgia.

The beliefs of the Yezidis are idiosyncratic, incorporating ideas from Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. They are frequently accused of devil worship, which brought me to Iraq this past October. The origin of these charges is the core belief of the Yezidis: that Lucifer has been pardoned by God and those who offer the redeemed angel worship are the elect of humanity.

I traveled to the tomb of Sheikh Adi, the principal shrine of the Yezidi religion, for a five-day festival held each year. I joined thousands of pilgrims on Mount Lalish for ritual dancing, singing, and feasting. By and large, the Yezidis were friendly, and the German Kurds were especially helpful. I was introduced to Baba Sheikh, the primary religious leader of the Yezidis and the keeper of the shrine. He invited me to one of the secret ceremonies held at the sacred spring of Zemzem, which I could hardly pass up.

My primary mission was to determine if the Yezidis were involved in the summoning or worship of Strangers. With their belief system, it seemed entirely possible. After witnessing the secret ceremony, and other events of the festival, I am convinced the Yezidis are not a demonic cult. In fact, they are forbidden to use the name Satan, instead referring to him as Melek Taus ("Peacock Angel"). Thus I believe that the Yezidis are not part of the Final Church and present no threat.



The Final Church Today

As you know, the Cold War ended quite recently. However, the Final Church has not given up. It pursues other strategies, but the ultimate goal remains the same: destroy humanity and escape from Hell. The nuclear fraternity has grown substantially since 1945. Israel and China have nuclear capability, and they may not continue to be shy about using it. Perhaps the greatest threat is India and Pakistan, two nuclear nations with a long history of adversity. Only one spark is necessary to ignite the final pyre of humanity.

Demonic Cosmology

Like all creatures known as Strangers, demons have a mysterious origin. Unlike the kinori, who have a uniform appearance, demons vary wildly in appearance and ability. It is unclear if the creatures known collectively as demons are members of the same race. Some theorists maintain that demons represent several distinct species cobbled together under a misnomer. Of



course, this theory is based on the testimony of demons, who are notorious liars.

Source material on demons stretches back thousands of years, involving scrolls that survived the burning of the Library of Alexandria, grimoires copied in secret from the Vatican library, interviews with cult survivors, and even demons themselves. The conclusions within this document were drawn only over time, and with much consideration. They may not be entirely true, but are based on the best scholarship and evidence available. Other sources may contradict, or eventually give lie to the contents of this document. On that day, weigh all evidence carefully and proceed with utmost caution, for no better help will be available then.

King Solomon

It is only natural to wonder just where demons come from. Many religions attempt to answer this question, and so underworlds like Hades, Yomi, and Hell have become popular, with characteristics too universal to dismiss. However, the truth is more complex than it appears. The key to understanding the issue is found in the figure of King Solomon.

Occultists of all stripes are familiar with legends of King Solomon. Son of David and King of the Israelites, Solomon is credited with many magical powers, the foremost of which was the ability to bind and cast out demons. His name appears on endless occult grimoires and spells. The Freemasons trace their lineage back to the architect of Solomon's temple, the unfortunate Hiram Abiff. Solomon is, perhaps, the focal point of occultism. He is also the origin of the Strangers we know as demons.

Both Arabs and Persians have a legend concerning a mythical race from the ancient past who were ruled by seventy-two monarchs, each of whom was named Suleiman (the Arabic form of Solomon's name). The last Suleiman is said to have reigned for one thousand years and was the lord of all the djinn and efreets. This Suleiman had power over demons and later became confused with King Solomon of the Israelites.

But what of this mythical race who served under the Suleimans? The legends, though confusing and sometimes contradictory, consistently relate that humanity was not descended from this mythical race. Furthermore, their ultimate fate remains a mystery. The legends do not relate the fall of King Suleiman or the fate of his court. This is because neither Suleiman nor his subjects were from Earth at all.

King of the Devils

Suleiman and his subjects lived elsewhere, whether another planet, another universe, or another dimension, none can say. It is known that the last Suleiman ruled over the demons and they rebelled against him. The legacy of their war haunts us still. King Suleiman was triumphant, and consigned all the demons to eternal imprisonment for their crimes.

In time, some demons escaped and made their way to Earth. These fugitives found allies among primitive humans, and transmitted stories of the dread king with the magical ability to lock them away. Suleiman's agents tracked the demons down, and defeated them in several spectacular battles. These battles are reflected in several myth cycles that deal with a war of the gods. Due to the vagaries of history and mythology, this earlier Suleiman was confused with the Jewish king of later years. This explains the Bible's silence on Solomon's mystical powers, despite the enduring association of his name with magical secrets.

No further word of Suleiman's realm has made it to Earth, though the rising tide of dark matter could bring fresh contact. It is tempting to link Suleiman with the medieval legend of Prester John (a Christian king who supposedly lived in the Far East), but this would be speculation at best. While we know a great deal about the activities of demons since Suleiman locked them away, we still know almost nothing of their jailer.

Demons and Their Prison

Since their imprisonment by King Suleiman, demons have been entirely motivated by their desire to escape. When one thinks of such lurid Hells as those painted by Hieronymus Bosch and Pieter Brueghel, this desire is understandable. But this begs the question: What is the true nature of the demon's prison?

Myth and tradition are filled with underworld stories, but genuine, lucid, observation and fanciful, fearful, imagination are difficult to separate in such matters. Demons themselves say many things about their homeland, but as has been noted, care must be taken in believing their words.

Given the sources available, two main options seem likely. First is the classic idea of Hell as a pit of fire and torment. This image is popular, from Christianity to Buddhism. If for no other reason than its universal prevalence, the notion cannot be entirely discounted. However,

of the identifiable types of demons, only a few have fire-related powers.

The second option is based on myths of great antiquity. The ancient Semitic underworld of Sheol, one such mythic Hell, is a bleak landscape of unending monotony. Spirits there cannot interact with the gods or the living. Similarly, the Aztec underworld of Mictlan was conceived as an endless desert where spirits endured incredible tedium. Interestingly, Mictlan also supposedly housed the bones of an earlier race, a clue that Suleiman's prison may have had previous occupants. Based on these myths, and certain cutting comments from captured demons, Hell may well be a great void in the cosmos. The demons, trapped there long ago by King Suleiman, will do anything to escape the barren nothingness.

Demonic Manifestation

Whether Suleiman intended it or not, however, the demons have found a temporary escape. This escape appears on Earth as demonic manifestation. It is the root of all occult spells and rituals that summon demons.

Demons who escaped Suleiman's initial assaults and fled to Earth discovered that they could communicate with their imprisoned brethren. They passed on the magical rituals that allow communication to their human followers before they were hunted down by the forces of the vengeful King Suleiman. Human agents, with the advice of demons in Hell, later learned how to cast summoning spells to free the demons from their prison. These spells used dark matter as fuel and allowed demons to manifest on Earth.

The generally misunderstood fact about demon summoning is that the demon does not physically travel to Earth. The actual body of the summoned demon remains in its voidlike prison, while a seemingly real manifestation appears on Earth. While here, these demonic manifestations work towards the liberation of their race from Hell. Although any escape is a welcome respite from tedium, real freedom cannot be won through summoning. It is an expedient, although crucial for the furtherance of demonic plots.

The interesting side effect of demonic manifestation is that demons killed on Earth are not truly dead. They are merely banished back to Hell. These demons have a tendency to return and seek vengeance on those who disrupted their plans.

If one has made enemies with a near-unkillable entity, one may wonder how long a demon's vengeance will continue. Do demons have a particular life span? Are they

limited in how often they can be summoned? Is there a statute of limitations on demonic vengeance? Unfortunately, the answer to these questions is vague. Demons may be immortal, or they may achieve this effect because time does not pass in Hell. Certain demons' names reoccur over centuries which could prove the existence of individual, long lived demons or that the names we know are actually titles, and that spells to summon particular demons only summon current title holders. The best answer to the questions above are to choose your enemies carefully and watch your back.

The Great Escape

The demons' original homeland is most likely under the dominion of King Suleiman or his descendents. The demonic plan may be to escape from Hell, return to their home world, and defeat their oppressors. However, they seem to need to travel through our Earth to return to their home. This travel would be unfortunate for humanity however, since the destruction of our race seems a prerequisite for the Great Escape. Some may not even be interested in returning home if they find Earth suitable for habitation.

Thus, a malevolent group of beings from another reality sponsors a worldwide conspiracy whose aim—whether ultimately or as a by-product—is genocide of the human race. Fighting this evil tide seems wearisome at best. It is more likely fatal. Yet failing to fight is an even greater mistake, for if humanity does not act in its own defense, the dark powers will surely triumph.

Famous Figures

Several notable figures have dealt with demons throughout history. Some of these names appear repeatedly in research, while others have had such a monumental influence on the world that they bear further study.

Crazy Chang

c.1900-c.1930

Crazy Chang is proof that even demons make mistakes. His early life is a mystery. He first appeared as a bandit during the 1920s and was no different than the thousands of other bandits plaguing China at the time. One fateful day, however, he met an immortal who told him the secrets of physical invulnerability. The immortal was a demon who urged Chang to start a society to spread his beliefs.



Chang dutifully founded the Fan Society in 1928, operating along the Honan Anhwei border. Although membership was expensive, Chang's followers swelled in numbers. Members received a paper fan and several charms, some of which had to be swallowed to be effective. These charms did indeed protect Chang's followers from bullets and sword blows. After several successful battles against bandit gangs and other martial societies, the Fan Society grew to over three thousand members.

As it turned out, Crazy Chang deserved his nickname. Flush with success, Chang declared himself emperor of China. He then led his followers on several quixotic missions to find an appropriate empress. These provided Chang with an excuse to seize any attractive woman he came across, have his way with her, and then declare that she was "not the true empress."

His messianic aspirations and lechery drove away many of his followers. This prompted a visit from the immortal, who tried to bring Chang into line. When Chang, as emperor, tried to order the immortal to obey him, the demon stripped away the power of Chang's charms.

Without the demon's power behind him, Chang faltered. In 1930 the Fan Society was defeated by a government-sponsored defense corps. Chang was last seen fleeing from the battlefield with a clutch of loyal followers. They are said to have fled into the mountains.

It is assumed that Chang died there shortly thereafter, although the demon's mistakes may have continued. Chang had numerous charms, and may have communicated with more than one immortal. If so, his invulnerability could have kept him alive even until now. Whatever price he paid for such immortality would certainly be keeping him busy in his mountain hold.

Joseph Patrick Kennedy

1888-1969

Special Note: The following information is for internal use only. If this document were to surface in a public forum, the damage to our cause would be inestimable. The Kennedy family has too much of a stranglehold on the American psyche to bear this kind of revelation.

The founder of the Kennedy clan, Joseph, was the son of a saloonkeeper in Boston. From these humble beginnings, Joe built an empire and a dynasty. He became ambassador to England during the crucial years of 1937-1940, and later became chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission. By 1957 his personal fortune was valued at over one hundred million dollars. Only a

few years later, his second son became the first Catholic president of the United States. This was quite an accomplishment for a man who was little more than a bootlegger during Prohibition.

In fact, Joe's secret hides in the Prohibition era. Private interviews in 1953 reveal that three of Joe Kennedy's rum running companions referred to a pact. These men, who insisted on anonymity, swore that Joe made a deal with the devil for his riches and power. While this may sound fanciful, one of the men claimed to have been present at an unorthodox mass held late at night at an Irish church in Boston. The details he gave concerning this mass were too accurate to be fantasy. All three men reported that Joe said he'd give anything to get what he wanted.

Perhaps it is coincidence, but Joe's family has carried heavy burdens along with their great success. Few families have suffered such adversity on the road of prominence. Although most trace the beginning of the Kennedy curse to the assassination of JFK, the misfortune actually began in 1944. In that year the eldest Kennedy son, Joe Jr., was killed over the English Channel when his plane (which was full of explosives) exploded prematurely. Joe Sr. pushed the boy to heroics, which led him to volunteer for this dangerous mission. Four years later, daughter Kathleen died in a plane crash in France. The sixties brought the well-known slayings of JFK and RFK, and the disgrace of Teddy at Chappaquiddick.

This horrible toll left Joe a wreck and he died in 1969. This seemed to end the curse and the seventies passed without a casualty. Then the curse began again in 1984, when Bobby's son David died of a drug overdose. And in 1999 John Kennedy Jr., his wife, and her sister died in a mysterious plane crash off the island of Martha's Vineyard.

Despite Joe Kennedy Sr.'s death some thirty years ago, investigation into the man continues. Evidence points to a pact with a demon or some other type of Stranger. But was he a member of the Final Church? A man with his resources and contacts could have furthered the goals of the Final Church in chilling ways. Investigators who brave the very mouth of Hell become uneasy at the thought of researching the Kennedy family in any depth. Their caution is justified. Conspiracies from wildly different paranormal avenues converge on the Kennedy family—as do the conspiracies' guardians. It would be unwise to rouse the dragon that is the Kennedy family.

Eliphas Lévi

1810-1875 AD

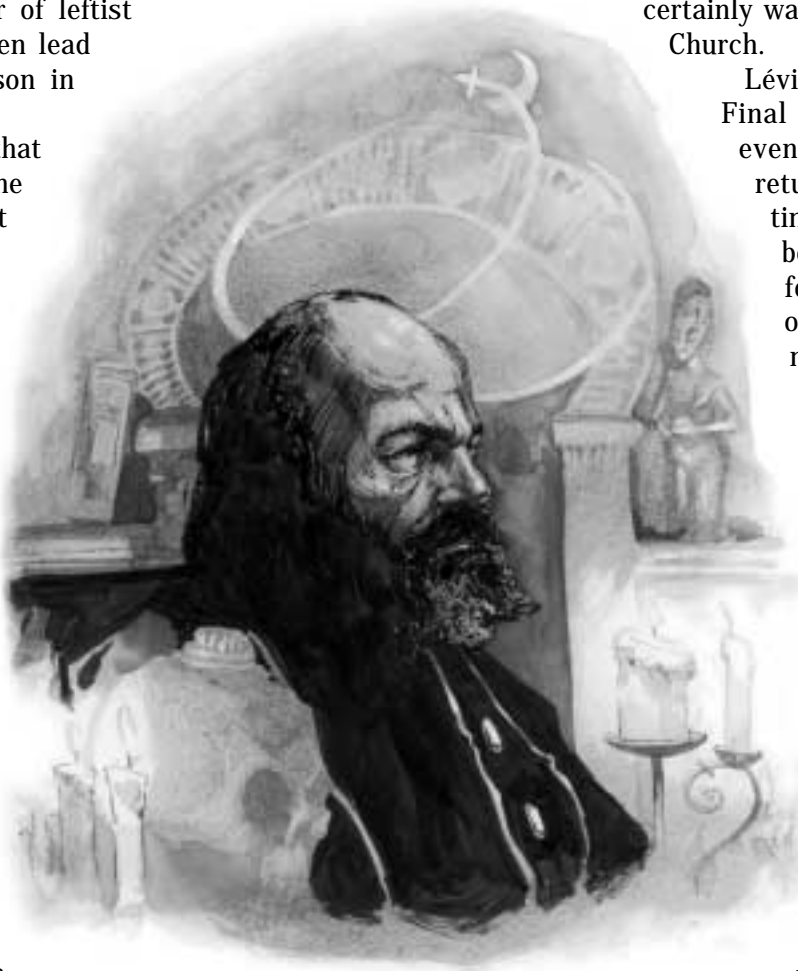
Eliphas Lévi was born Alphonse Louis Constant, son of a Paris shoemaker. The man later known as the “last of the magi” and the father of modern occultism began his life as aspiring priest. He was defrocked early in his career for preaching doctrines contrary to the Catholic church. He then spent many years as an actor, artist, and writer of leftist political tracts. This even led to a short stint in prison in 1839.

It wasn't until 1852 that Constant's interest in the occult manifested. That year he met an eccentric Polish ex-soldier named Hoene Wronski, whose radical theories on the origin of the universe got him expelled from the Institute of Marseilles. Wronski was the creator of messianisme, which he claimed was a synthesis of philosophy, religion, science, and politics. Inspired by Wronski, Constant plunged into occult studies and wrote his first book on the subject in 1854. During the writing of *Dogme de la Haute Magie*, his young wife left him. By the time the book was published, under the pseudonym Eliphas Lévi, Alphonse Constant had reinvented himself as an occult master.

The Final Church noticed Eliphas Lévi quickly. Levi visited London, where he met many top occultists. His most important contact was Edward Bulwer-Lytton, later Lord Lytton, a successful novelist who wove occult themes into his books. Through Lytton, Lévi met a mysterious woman in black, who commissioned the magus to invoke the ghost of Apollonius of Tyana, one of the great magicians of antiquity. This ritual took three weeks to complete and was apparently more suc-

cessful than Lévi had even deemed possible. The magus did not expect the giant figure that appeared before him, and he questioned whether it was really Apollonius of Tyana. From Lévi's shaken testimony, he must have summoned some demon. This was likely the intent of the woman in black, who most certainly was a member of the Final Church.

Lévi may have joined the Final Church after these events. He definitely returned to Paris and continued occult writings; his books are now the basis for much modern occultism. His work, if not the man himself, is indubitably linked to the Final Church. It is worth noting that the man who predicted the year of Lévi's death, Juliano Capella, also told the magus that he was “the man of the pentagram.” No concrete evidence of his involvement in the Final Church or the identity of the woman in black has yet come to light, although given the circumstances, his involvement is considered extremely likely.



Abbé Boullan

1824-1893 AD

Abbé Boullan is another failed priest who followed the occult path. His quick career as a priest ended after his seduction of a nun, Adèle Chevalier. The two lovers then founded the Society for the Reparation of Souls. The society was obsessed with Satan and demonology, though it claimed to specialize in exorcism.

Regardless of the society's original goals, it quickly degenerated into the worst kind of cult. The Vatican



archives hold a document detailing a Black Mass held by Boullan and his mistress on January 8, 1860. The mass culminated with the ritual sacrifice of their bastard child.

In 1875 Abbé Boullan took over the Church of Carmel, a strange Christian sect founded by Eugene Vintras. Boullan, claiming to be the reincarnation of John the Baptist, taught his followers that they could erase original sin by copulating with heavenly beings. Through sexual acts with angels, he asserted, one could climb a spiritual ladder to mystical union with God.

At some point, Boullan and his church were incorporated into the Final Church. For nearly twenty years, Boullan summoned demons posing as angels or famous historical figures to fornicate with his inner circle. These couplings were an attempt to create a new, superior race.

Because Abbé Boullan was a model of piety in public, and his sexual teachings were only shared with the inner circle of the Church of Carmel, his activities remained secret until 1888. In that year, Stanislas de Guaita, a Rosicrucian and poet, learned the truth about the Abbé Boullan. De Guaita publicly denounced Abbé Boullan as “a priest of infamy, a base idol of the mystical Sodom, a magician of the worst type, a wretched criminal and an evil sorcerer.” De Guaita followed this up with a letter to Boullan informing him that he was a “condemned man.” In 1892 de Guaita initiated a magical battle between the two. This continued for some time, with both Boullan and his friend J. K. Huysmans reporting attacks from “fluidic fisticuffs.” On January 3, 1893, de Guaita won the duel; Boullan collapsed and died. His church did not survive after his death, though its members joined other Final Church cults.

Simon Magus

1st Century AD

Simon Magus is a controversial figure. A contemporary of Jesus and the apostles, Simon was a noted sorcerer said to have bewitched the people of Samaria.

His name is the origin of the term simony, due to his legendary encounter with the apostles Peter and John. The two apostles were laying hands on new Christian converts so they could receive the Holy Ghost. Simon offered Peter and John money to gift him with the same power. The stunned Peter rebuked Simon, outraged that he would seek to buy the gifts of God with mere coin.

Interestingly, Simon tried to bargain with the apostles in the same way a cultist would deal with a demon.

Simon, as a sorcerer, offered what he thought the apostles might want in exchange for what he surely saw as a new spell or working of magic.

After this encounter with the apostles, and perhaps after witnessing the power of faith, Simon decided that religion was a preferable means of power. He went on pilgrimages like the apostles, and was worshiped by mobs of adoring followers. He claimed to be the manifestation of the Splendor of God, and that his Greek slave mistress Helena was the Reflection of God. He then traveled to Rome, where a statue was erected in his honor and he became the court magician of the Emperor Nero. According to Christian sources, Peter traveled to Rome to stop Simon and his cult. St. Clement maintains that a prayer from Peter sent the flying Simon plummeting to his death, proving the power of faith over magic.

Simon's cult is said to have survived his death, under his disciple Manander. Several modern day gnostic groups claim descent from this group. They also claim that Simon was a gnostic holy man maligned by the hierarchical Christian church. Simon's secrets were certainly occult in nature rather than religious. Possibly, Simon was duped by a demon and actually believed that he was some kind of savior. Whether Simon is to be respected, reviled, worshiped, or pitied has as much to do with bias as evidence.

Gerbert of Aurillac

c. 940-1003 AD

Better known as Pope Sylvester II, Gerbert of Aurillac was the first pontiff branded as a sorcerer. According to tradition, Gerbert summoned a demon and struck a bargain with the fiend. The demon promised to make Gerbert pope, and further promised that he would not die until he celebrated High Mass in Jerusalem. Skeptics point out that his long association with Emperor Otto I of the Holy Roman Empire had more to do with his ascension to the papacy than demons and compacts, but the accusations dogged Gerbert long after his death.

Gerbert was a learned man with a keen intellect. He invented new teaching methods, expanded the study of logic, and raised mathematics to a new level of importance. However, a cloud of doubt lingered over his loyalties for centuries. He was said to have been trained by a Moorish sorcerer in Spain, and received advice from a magical brazen head. Even his tomb was invested with magical importance; it was said to shed tears when a

pope was about to die. He is also reputed to have founded a school of magic within the walls of the Vatican, a fact the Hidden Order of St. Gregory hotly denies.

All these rumors would be mere speculation were it not for the reappearance of the brazen head. This object was uncovered during an archeological dig in Italy, and secured by two of our Rosicrucian brethren on the scene. A team of specialists validated the charges against Gerbert in spectacular fashion. Using the oracular abilities of the head, a team located a secret archive hidden in the Vatican. The books they found were few, but incredibly valuable. Of particular importance was a book penned by Gerbert himself. This tome details parts of his life, and offers guidelines for dealing with demons. He emphasizes the dangers of dealing with evil spirits, and expresses fears that his own sorcery will lead him a terrible end.

The sorcerous pope was right to know fear. In 1003, only four years after becoming pope, he fell ill while performing a mass. Only then did he realize that he was in the Church of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem. Gerbert died shortly thereafter. Tradition states that he confessed his wrongdoing on his deathbed. If he had founded a school of sorcery, it was suppressed immediately.

(In)Famous Sites

Few famous sites are dedicated to diabolism for obvious reasons. Notorious sites of this type are often targeted by the Knights of Malta or the Hidden Order of St. Gregory, or, like the concentration camps of Nazi Germany, are destroyed by vengeful victors. Thus, even when sites do become dedicated, they do not last long. Individual cults however, tend to have sacred areas where ritual and sacrifice are common. These areas are usually well-hidden and fanatically defended.

The City of Brass

Many Arabic tales tell of the legendary City of Brass. It was said to have been built by demons at the command of King Suleiman. The walls were made of molten brass and ran for four leagues. Few travelers ever found the city, which was often placed near the Pillars of Hercules (Gibraltar). Perhaps this is because the city reportedly had no gates, making it accessible only to sorcerers or jinn.

The City of Brass, made famous in the Thousand and One Nights, may be more than a legend. Like other stories of King Solomon, it may contain hints of an original truth. The City of Brass may not be on Earth at all, but on

whatever world the King Suleiman lived. Before he imprisoned the demons, he may have made them build this magnificent city. Or perhaps the City of Brass is a place in Hell that several mortals visited during the Dark Ages. Little more is known of the place.

The Pit of Vera Cruz

In 1937 a deep shaft was discovered near the Mexican city of Vera Cruz. The pit had been covered with logs and earth, but over the years the wood had rotted and the soil washed away. A misstep by a local teenager uncovered the pit and word of it spread quickly through town. A visiting English archeologist, Dr. Ian Kensington, took an interest and organized a small expedition to check out the find.

After an initial inspection, Dr. Kensington had himself lowered to the bottom. He had only brought 60 meters of rope and needed almost all of it. After setting up several lamps, Kensington saw what he had found. His diary describes the scene:

Once I had proper light, I finally discovered what had been crunching under my boots. It was bones, hundreds and hundreds of bones. I quickly realized that they were not the bones of animals, but human bones. The walls of the shaft were also engraved with Aztec style glyphs. I had uncovered something significant, but what? A mass gravesite of some kind, I expect. Further exploration in the coming days will bear out my supposition.

Kensington hired guards to protect the site and then organized a larger expedition. While waiting for supplies, he researched the area and discovered that Vera Cruz was the starting point of Hernán Cortés' invasion of Mexico. He became convinced that the pit was either a site of Aztec human sacrifice from before the arrival of Cortés, or a place of native resistance after the conquest.

The first day of the second expedition went well. Kensington worked feverishly, uncovering a seemingly endless amount of bones, and a Spanish conquistador helmet. On the second day, the motorized winch over the hole broke and a junior archeologist plunged to his death. On the third day, lightning struck and killed another expedition member. The locals called the pit cursed after that, and stopped working for Kensington. The doctor and his colleagues tried further excavation, but days later, the pit flooded.

Several years after, Kensington returned with a team of divers. Despite draconian safety procedures, two divers drowned within a week. The crew decided that it



wasn't worth the money and agreed to confront Kensington the following morning. That night everyone in camp heard horrible cries. In the morning Dr. Kensington was gone. No expedition has ever gone back to discover the truth about the Pit of Vera Cruz. Locals still remember Kensington, the crazy gringo who was carried off by demons in the night.

The Temple of New Jerusalem

The Temple of New Jerusalem is the armed compound of a millennial cult in Idaho. Considering the number of militia groups and neo-Nazis scattered across Idaho, Temple members do not stand out. They live on top of their mountain, which they call Mt. Zion, and await the Second Coming.

The leader of the Temple is a man named Jonas Theodore. Theodore worked a low-paying job at a third rate magazine until the day that he had a transcendent experience with two "divine beings." These angels told him that the Second Coming was at hand and that he was needed to save a select few from the depredations of "the great dragon."

Theodore immediately quit his job and dedicated himself to his mission. His angels supplied him with money,

which he used to build the Temple of New Jerusalem. Growing his hair long as he imagined Jesus had worn it, Theodore began to preach of the coming of the great dragon and the final days. Today he has a flock of two hundred in his mountaintop temple, counting down to the end times.

Despite Christian trappings, the Temple of New Jerusalem is a demonic cult. The two "angels" are, predictably, demons telling Theodore what he wants to hear. Although neither he nor his followers realizes the truth, the teachings and miracles of the Temple are thoroughly corrupt. As time goes by, the exact tenets of the Temple have blurred. When the angels demanded the death of several "agents of evil," the Temple members did their sacred duty.

The truth to Temple members is simple. They are the elect and the rest of humanity is doomed. Stealing and killing is justifiable as a part of their great work, and history will vindicate them in the sight of God.

Enough deaths have occurred in the area that the local police have called in the FBI to investigate. The FBI has no solid evidence that falls within their jurisdiction yet, so they merely watch the situation now.

The Temple itself is formidable. It is surrounded by a minefield and an electrified fence. The main building is made of concrete and features several internal bunkers and machine gun nests. The remaining buildings provide

Mission of Mercy

Grand Prior,

As you know, I was in charge of the mission to the site of the Chernobyl disaster in the Ukraine. Knowing the lax standards in the Soviet nuclear facilities, we had long prepared for a mission of this type. I brought a team of experienced doctors, nurses, and field personnel into the Soviet Union, whose bureaucrats were only too happy to see us. We set up camp as close to the irradiated area as we dared and began to offer relief to survivors.

The whole mess was abominable. The Soviets were utterly unprepared for a disaster of this magnitude. We worked around the clock for weeks. For further details on the medical aspect of my mission, see the attached files. There is a much more sensitive matter I feel I need to bring to your attention.

As you know, I spent many years among the brethren of our fighting order. In that time I learned my share of lore about our infernal foes. I have seen demons first hand, and most of those encounters have been with single specimens. The Chernobyl disaster has given me cause for concern because I saw more demons there in the Ukraine than I have anywhere else in my travels.

Of course I was prepared to see a few demons. The way they prey on human suffering, they would naturally gravitate to a place like Chernobyl. After several sightings, however, I convinced a friendly Soviet officer to give me a radiation suit and a guide so I could get closer to the facility. I took a two-day tour around the disaster area, and encountered no less than twenty different demons. This can only be considered highly unusual, since I am unfamiliar with any reports that deal with demons in such numbers. What is even more unusual is that the demons did not seem to be taking any aggressive actions. They appeared content to hover in the irradiated zone, almost as if they found it pleasurable.

What could have brought a swarm of demons to Chernobyl? And what could explain their lack of activity in a field of human misery such as that? I cannot even guess the answers to these questions, but I consider it my duty to bring them before you. My official recommendation is that a team of well-armed brethren investigate the case with all alacrity. This could be the beginning of a new and sinister chapter of our war with the infernal.

Yours in Christ,
George Palogopolous
Knight of Malta

housing, storage, and facilities for the Temple members. The cult maintains three humvees and several pickup trucks.

Theodore has been informed by the angels that a time of reckoning may be at hand for the Temple. If he wavers in the Temple's defense, his elect will not survive the Second Coming. He and his followers are prepared to resist government attacks with deadly force.

Wewelsburg

Heinrich Himmler, Hitler's staunch ally and leader of the SS, viewed his organization as a resurrection of the Teutonic Knights. Like his medieval predecessor, Grand Master Herman von Salza, Himmler wanted a stronghold and spiritual center for his beloved SS men.

Long obsessed with an old legend that a Westphalian castle would be the sole survivor of the next Slavonic invasion from the east, Himmler scoured western Germany until he located an old castle near Paderborn named Wewelsburg. The original castle had been a center of Saxon resistance to the Huns, and thus was a perfect fit for Himmler. Himmler bought the castle and brought in an architect to rebuild it in 1934.

It took three years and twelve million marks to finish Wewelsburg, but by 1937, Himmler had his fortress. The entire castle was decorated in medieval style, with marble statues of German heroes as King Heinrich I and Friedrich von Hohenstaufen. The dining room held an enormous round table, where Himmler could hold court with his twelve senior Obergruppenführer in the finest Arthurian style. A circular crypt, known as the "Realm of the Dead," housed twelve granite columns, in which the cremated remains of each Obergruppenführer were to be deposited. Himmler himself had a sumptuous suite and a library of twelve thousand volumes. He also had special rooms prepared for Hitler (though the Führer never visited the castle, much to Himmler's chagrin).

Himmler referred to his inner circle as the Order of the Death's Head, and they performed many occult rituals in Wewelsburg. Once the war began, however, Himmler found he had less and less time to spend in his cult center, especially since many of the Order of the Death's Head were fighting in Russia. Soon Wewelsburg was turned into a staff college for senior SS officers. The most promising students were initiated into the occult, but practical war matters were also taught. As the World War II dragged on, the ranks of



the castle thinned as more men were shipped to the front.

By April 1945 Germany was facing defeat. With a heavy heart, Himmler issued orders to blow up the castle. The destruction of the heart of the SS buried its treasure, including the rings of nine thousand SS men killed in battle that had been in the castle's shrine. By the time Allied troops arrived in Paderborn, Wewelsburg was rubble.

The taint of Wewelsburg could not be erased so easily, however. Too many rituals had been performed, and too much blood had been spilled in sacrifice within those walls. Even today, a dark aura remains around the ruins of Wewelsburg. They are a magnet to neo-Nazis and others fascinated with SS mystique. Several times a year the members of the Novo Ordi Templi, the inheritors of the Order of the Death's Head, secretly converge in the ruins to celebrate blasphemous rituals. They used to celebrate such dates as Himmler's birthday, but ceased this practice after several sharp clashes with the Knights of Malta. Now no one knows when the New Templars may descend on Wewelsburg, and no group can guard the site 365 days a year.

Demons, knowing the psyche of the men drawn to Wewelsburg, often offer to lead diabolists to the buried SS treasure (such as Himmler's books or the SS rings). Rumors, likely started by summoned demons, have also spread around about a secret underground complex still intact beneath the ruins. If such a place exists, no one has found it and lived.

Artifacts

Most artifacts used by the Final Church are made by demons, or by cultists with demonic instruction. These artifacts are created to help advance the demonic agenda. Most are thus books that teach summoning secrets, or other items that help with demonic rituals.

Due to the strange way in which occultism developed, the same names appear over and over again in occult books and spells. If taken at face value, it would seem that all of King Solomon's secrets have been passed down to later generations. Actually, occultists tend to credit their own work to historic sources, in hope that their work will receive more legitimacy. As usual, investigate claims of authenticity based solely on the alleged age of a piece of information.

The Brazen Head

According to legend, Pope Sylvester II possessed a brazen head. Some say the head taught him sorcery, while others say it acted as an oracle. The brazen head supposedly led Sylvester II to a hidden treasure, and performed feats of sorcery.

The Templars were charged with possession of a similar item when their great order fell. They were accused of worshiping the brazen head of the demon Baphomet, and using it in obscene masses. Because the stories' similarities, both were discounted for many years. The brazen head seemed like another convenient charge to bring against those suspected of sorcery.

In 1811 Juan Sebastian, a Jesuit priest among the Spanish guerillas resisting Napoleon, found a hidden cave in the Pyrenees. Within he found several crumbling books and a strange lacquered box. According to Sebastian:

Wondering what this strange box could be, I carefully undid the latch and opened it. As I did so, I heard a sigh of relief echo throughout the cave. Looking about, I saw no one, so I returned my attention to the box. Inside was what looked like a human head, except that it was cast in bronze. The features were strong and its eyes gleamed with intelligence. I picked up the head to examine it more closely but dropped it immediately when it spoke to me!

"You have nothing to fear from me, priest," said the head, "I once served the Pope."

Knowing sorcery when I saw it, I crossed myself and invoked the name of our Savior. The head laughed, mocking me. Before it could speak again, I put it back in the box and slammed the lid shut. Then I left the cave, content to leave this blasphemous monstrosity hidden away from God's flock.

Several occultists of the later 19th century read Sebastian's account and attempted to locate the brazen head. While the cave was located, the head had already been removed. Its current whereabouts are unknown.

The brazen head contains a bound demon. The demon's mission is to corrupt its users and manipulate them into working for the Final Church. When the head is first encountered, it tries to convince its new owner that it can provide a great service. It most certainly retains considerable historic expertise. Any other esoteric knowledge it dispenses is best left unlearned.



The Key of Solomon the King

This is one of many medieval grimoires that claim the pedigree of King Solomon. Supposedly written by the king himself, this treatise was actually written in the late 14th or early 15th century. The book is a mix of folk belief, occultism, and ideas looted from the Kabbalah. Much is made of using the Divine Name, but the secrets revealed mostly involve finding hidden treasure. Such worldly concerns are an unlikely use for the name of God.

While valued by some occultists, the Key of Solomon the King is worse than useless. None of the magical formulas detailed actually work. An especially dangerous spell purports to allow the control of powerful demons. It does nothing of the sort. Many occult tyros have fallen prey to this book, and a mass market edition in 1997 only made the situation worse.

A similar book is the notorious Grand Grimoire. This book was written by man named Antonia del Rabina, who claimed to be translating the original works of King

Solomon. Once again, the information provided is outlandish and mainly concerned with finding lost treasure. Eliphas Levi rightly condemned the Grand Grimoire, and only foolish diabolists rely on the protective rituals found in this treatise.

The Grimoire of Honorius

This magical work was published in Rome in 1629. Despite its title, Pope Honorius was probably uninvolved with it. This particular book attempts to use the sanction of the papacy to justify demonology. The book is filled with Christian ideas, and tries to use scripture to support its advocacy of magic. In fact, the Grimoire of Honorius does not even refer to devils per se. Rather, it provides methods to summon rebellious angels.

Whether or not the reader understands what he or she is really learning, the grimoire contains the basics of diabolist skill and lore. Many have tasted their first taint of diabolism by studying its pages.

The Spear of Destiny

Also known as the Spear of Longinus, the Spear of Destiny is alleged to be the same spear used to stab Jesus Christ in the side as he hung from the cross. From the Roman province of Judea, the spear then went on an amazing two thousand year journey. According to legend, the Roman Emperor Constantine held the spear at the famous Battle of Milvian Bridge. It then passed to such men as Alaric the Bold (who sacked Rome in 410 AD), Theodoric (who turned back the hordes of Attila the Hun), Charles Martel (who defeated the advancing Moors at Poitiers in 732), and Charlemagne, the first Holy Roman Emperor. In the thousand years following the crowning of Charlemagne, stories claim that the spear passed through the hands of forty-five emperors, including Saxons like Otto the Great and Heinrich the Fowler, and the entire Hohenstauffen line.

The Spear of Destiny is said to be a talisman of incredible power. Each new owner is said to hold the fate of the world in his hands, for good or evil. Any theory that claims to tie so many important historical events needs to be treated skeptically. Several extant lances have been declared the Spear of Destiny. One hangs in the Vatican, another in Cracow, a third in Paris, and a fourth in Vienna. The power of any of these spears remains unproven, and most interest in the Spear of Destiny is due to Adolph Hitler.

Research: Demonic Cults

Researching demonic cults in general is a cumbersome task, because there are so many different cults, all of whom are secretive about what they do. Learning all there is to know requires 7 successes, and checks can be made once per day. Related skills include Lore—*conspiracy*, or an appropriate Knowledge skill.

3 failures: “Demonic cults” are a convenient scapegoat for people who cannot face the idea that individuals could be capable of the heinous crimes that are so common on the news. “We know there is a cult conspiracy because they are so good at hiding all the evidence” is a fallacy spouted by people with no capacity for deductive reasoning. If cults that worship demons even exist, they are almost certainly self-styled loonies, and not part of any big conspiracy.

1 success: Cult activity is responsible for between sixty and one hundred and fifty thousand deaths each year, most of which are never solved.

3 successes: Cults practice abduction, enslavement, human sacrifice, vampirism, cannibalism, torture, mutilation, forced breeding, and forced drug use to fulfill their goal of propitiating demons.

5 successes: Cult members have infiltrated a variety of government positions around the world, from which they spread their evil influence. Reports of cult activity frequently gets routed to these individuals, who make a perfunctory investigation, then bury the case. Those unfortunates who make more than one report of cult activity frequently become the targets of it.

7 successes: Demon worship cults have existed since pre-Babylonian times. The only real connections between the cults are the otherworldly masters whom they have all served—which leads to the conclusion that from the earliest cults a single goal, totally unknown outside the cult, has driven them.

Research results on related topics appear later in this book.

Hitler, a lover of German history and an occultist, was fascinated by the legends of the Spear. He is said to have seen the so-called Hofburg Spear in Vienna as a youth, and had a mystical experience there. The Hofburg Spear is part of the Austrian imperial regalia,

and can be traced back to Otto the Great. According to one theory, Hitler became obsessed with the Spear of Destiny and made it a key part of his conquest plans.

After the incorporation of Austria into the German Reich, Hitler went to some length to transfer the imperial regalia to Germany. The Hofburg Spear, among other relics, was transported to Nuremberg, the spiritual center of Nazism, in 1938.

While Hitler’s war of conquest began less than a year later, the Spear’s role is questionable. After all, if the Spear was so powerful and central to Hitler’s plans, why did he keep it so far away? Wouldn’t he have wanted it in hand when he launched the invasion of the Soviet Union, an invasion code named “Barbarossa” in memory of the great German emperor who supposedly wielded this very Spear? Regardless of the Spear’s alleged powers, Hitler lost the war. The Spear now sits in the same spot in the Hapsburg Treasure House where Hitler first saw it, under careful watch by most major secret societies.



Chapter 2: The Numbers of the Beast

In this chapter, Gamemasters will find the information they need to present a myriad of situations, threats, and challenges to players in a cult-oriented DARK•MATTER campaign.

Jasper Sumner, Executive Stockbroker

Level 10 Diplomat/Free Agent

STR	7	[0]	INT	13	[+2]
DEX	7	[0]	WIL	13	[+2]
CON	8		PER	12	

Durability: 8/8/4/4 Action Check: 12+/11/5/2

Move: run 10, walk 4 #Actions: 2

Reaction Score: Ordinary/2 Last Resorts: 2

Perks: Filthy Rich, Great Looks, Networked

Flaws: Obsessed (making money, +4), Phobia (obsolescence, +4), Temper (+2)

Attacks

Unarmed 4/2/1 d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s LI/O

Defenses

Armor: none

Skills

Athletics [7]; Stamina [8]–*endurance* [9]; Modern Ranged Weapons [7]; Vehicle Operation [8]; Business [13]–*corporate* [16], *illicit* [14]; Knowledge [13]–*computer op* [14], *deduce* [14], *language (Italian)* [15], *language (Japanese)* [15]; Law [13]–*corporate* [16]; Administration [13]–*bureaucracy* [15], *management* [15]; Awareness [13]–*intuition* [14]; Investigate [13]–*research* [14]; Lore [13]–*conspiracy* [14], *occult* [16]; Resolve [13]–*mental* [15]; Culture [12]–*diplomacy* [13], *etiquette (Japan)* [13], *etiquette (Italy)* [13]; Deception [12]–*bluff* [15], *bribe* [15], *gamble* [13]; Interaction [12]–*bargain* [16], *charm* [13], *interview* [13], *intimidate* [13], *seduce* [13]; Leadership [12]–*command* [14].

Cult Members

When a number of like-minded individuals form a cult, they may do so for any reason, from monetary gain to religious belief to charitable goals. But inevitably, Final Church agents infiltrate and subvert the group, introducing greater and greater levels of depravity until the cult becomes a tool for the Final Church.

The Final Church understands that they acquire more new members if they let individual cults recruit whomever they please—with a few suggestions. This allows the Final Church to reach a greater demographic, ensuring that the cult continues to grow. It also means that cult members cannot be identified based on a common characteristic, such as lifestyle or mode of dress. A clean-cut college student and a filth-encrusted vagrant could both be members of the Final Church, though members of completely different cults.

Below are a few examples of cultists from wildly different cults. Gamemasters can use these characters to develop the details of individual cults, or adapt them to cults in their own campaigns.

Profit in Evil: The Executive Cult

Businessmen make particularly good servants of the Final Church, because they tend to view bargains with infernal forces as mere business contracts—with the usual provisos, subclauses, and loopholes, all of which they believe they can exploit later. In their zeal to climb the corporate ladder, they usually forget that demons play by the rules only when it suits them, and that a contract is little protection from fangs and claws.

Stockbroker Jasper Sumner founded the Order of Mammon in college, ostensibly as a harmless way to make business connections. On the advice of a particularly shrewd (and twisted) lover, he introduced a certain amount of ritual into the Order's gatherings, followed by loyalty tests that became progressively bloodier. Soon the Order had contacts all over the world, with businessmen all too eager to trade with these motivated young investment bankers.

The Order's activities became more and more secret.



Those who betrayed that secrecy were at first only ejected, then discredited, and finally “silenced.” Sumner and the other cult members came to view human life as another tradable commodity; a person’s worth was judged by his or her usefulness to the cult. The small step between paid assassinations and human sacrifice was made even smaller by Sumner’s desire to see what it felt like to take a life. He discovered that he enjoyed the sensation.

Sumner himself was at the top of the cult and his own corporation. He traveled the world meeting new clients and cultists, networking with both. Allying with an international conspiracy of demonic cults was no different than a corporate merger, and Sumner told himself that one day he would simply buy his way out of the alliance. That day has not yet come.

But as CEO of a major brokerage firm—Sumner & Associates—Sumner is in no hurry to sever his connections. He can buy anything or anyone he wants. When he needs more money, he calls an employee into his office—someone the corporation will not miss—and transfers him or her to the “special division.” Sumner has transferred a great many people to the special division. He keeps a memento of each, floating in formaldehyde in a hidden cabinet behind his desk.

The special division actually exists, though few employees have ever seen it and lived. Sumner keeps a number of diabolic arcanists on staff (one of Good quality,

the rest of Ordinary and Marginal quality), along with a large contingent of security guards loyal to the cult. Anyone who wishes to progress up the Sumner & Associates corporate ladder must join the Order of Mammon or languish in middle management until retirement. This is all off the record, of course.

If Jasper Sumner fears one thing, it is that a more ambitious Final Church member will find a way to “cancel his contract” before he is ready to do it himself. He has seen with his own eyes what becomes of those the Final Church no longer needs, and he bends over backwards to surround himself with a human buffer zone—people he can sacrifice (sometimes literally) to keep his enemies at bay.

Roleplaying Tips: Jasper Sumner swaggers. He is a flamboyant man, who speaks loudly and frankly, and talks down to anyone who expresses a contrary opinion. He occasionally breaks into fits of stress-induced rage over minor inconveniences, but quickly slips back into his smooth demeanor. When he speaks at length to more than one person, he tends to twist a ring on his finger.

Adventure Hook: An employee of Sumner & Associates tells the heroes she has evidence that several employees, supposedly transferred, have actually been murdered. Before they have a chance to meet her, she is committed to a mental hospital. Jasper Sumner himself expresses his sympathy, but can produce every one of the employees the woman named as having been killed. Suddenly the heroes find themselves under surveillance by corporate security—even at home. Is Sumner just being careful? Or have the heroes gotten too close? And is the informant really insane? Or did the heroes just see a carefully orchestrated illusion of the missing employees?

Louder Than Hell: The Rock Music Cult

In the year 2000, a young singer-songwriter named Will Martin released the album “Murmurs in My Head,” using the name Brother Lucifer. The sensual, suggestive lyrics, combined with eerie audio effects and Martin’s electrifying stage presence, made him an overnight success.

Most of Brother Lucifer’s early fans were black-garbed Goths, but the performer’s own endorsement of the style gained the movement a number of converts, much to the horror of parents everywhere. Unfortunately, the moral outcry against Brother Lucifer’s name, lyrics, and lifestyle has, predictably, only made him more popular. His carefully-planned statements to



the press—excerpts of which also appear in his music videos—have ensured that his name is a household word, for better or worse.

Brother Lucifer's detractors cite his frequent parties (supposedly bacchanalian orgies) as evidence of his depravity. Rumors say that the elite of the entertainment world gathers at Brother Lucifer's Hollywood estate, where drinks, drugs, and teenage fans are all offered as refreshments. And though frequent police raids consistently fail to produce evidence, rumors also say that the fans are later ritually sacrificed as the climax of the evening's entertainment, with Brother Lucifer himself wielding the knife.

"Out of character" for reporters' cameras, the aggrieved Martin denies the allegations and explains that he expected such hateful accusations when he invented his on-stage persona. But his entourage of managers, agents, hangers-on, and bodyguards knows the real Will Martin, the one who seduces underage fans and sacrifices infants to his household demon. In exchange he receives inspiration for his music and lyrics, and the fame and glory they bring. Though Martin has never even heard of the Final Church, his cult of personality is in fact a demon-worshipping cult with him as its high priest, and millions of fans as his congregation.

Martin has no idea how little control he really has over his life. His arcane magic skills are not as fine-tuned as he believes, and the demons he contacts play on his ego to trick him into greater and greater excesses. Their ultimate goal is to convince him to summon one or more of them, at which point they will possess him for their own purposes. In the meantime, they are satisfied with the number of converts his music turns to the study of diabolic magic.

Roleplaying Tips: As himself, Will Martin is a polite, soft-spoken young man. As Brother Lucifer, he becomes considerably more sensual, his movements more fluid and sinuous. Though he speaks more forcefully as Brother Lucifer, he still says very little, instead regarding

Will Martin, a.k.a. "Brother Lucifer," Rock Star

Level 6 Free Agent

STR	8	[0]	INT	9	[0]
DEX	9	[0]	WIL	12	[+1]
CON	8		PER	14	

Durability: 8/8/4/4

Action Check: 12+/11/5/2

Move: run 10, walk 4

#Actions: 2

Reaction Score: Ordinary/2

Last Resorts: 4

Perks: Celebrity, Filthy Rich, Great Looks

Flaws: Clueless (Arcane Magic—*tongue of the damned*, +4), Delicate, Illiterate

FX energy points: 5

Attacks

Unarmed 4/2/1 d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s LI/O

Defenses

Armor: none

Skills

Athletics [8]; Stamina [8]; Modern Ranged Weapons [9]; Vehicle Operation [9]; Knowledge [9]—*language (Latin)* [11]; Awareness [12]; Creativity [12]—*songwriting* [15]; Lore [12]—*occult* [14]; Resolve [12]—*mental* [14]; Deception [14]—*bluff* [15]; Entertainment [14]—*instrument* [16], *sing* [18]; Interaction [14]—*charm* [15], *seduce* [15].

FX Skills

Arcane Magic (Diabolism)—*muddle the eye* [13], *tongue of the damned* [15].



Backmasking

Rock music has always been the target of much scrutiny, especially for the alleged practice of “backmasking”—subliminal messages which can only be understood when the album is played backward. Even played forward, the messages still have a subversive effect on the listener.

Brother Lucifer has taken this practice state-of-the-art. Weaving samples of demonic voices into his music, he has created an auditory anesthetic that deadens the perceptions. In effect, Brother Lucifer has put the diabolic magic spell *muddle the eye* to music. Those who hear the music may attempt a *mental resolve* check, at a +1 step penalty, with results as described in the spell description in Chapter 3.

This effect goes unnoticed by authorities for two reasons. First, only in live concerts and on special-offer recordings is the effect more than just transitory euphoria (addictive in its own way, insuring that listeners listen again). And even with the special recordings, the perceptual blurring is harmless if there are no evil activities to misperceive. Second, Brother Lucifer is not a talented musician, despite his following. The cacophony of sound effects and samples make detecting the backmasking extremely difficult (a +2 step penalty to Investigate–*search* checks, and a +4 step penalty to Awareness–*perception* checks).

The danger in Brother Lucifer’s backmasking is that he will learn more dangerous spells, and record them. This could potentially summon millions of demons . . . without binding them.

people with arch looks. If he absolutely must answer questions, he drops back into his normal persona, and congratulates his questioner on being able to “see through” his act. (In game terms, he uses this opportunity to use Interaction–*charm* to soften the questioner’s attitude toward him.)

Adventure Hook: When two young girls sneak onto Brother Lucifer’s estate, they fight one another—with knives—for his attentions. After one kills the other, the performer turns the drug-addled survivor over to the police. The girl’s family, defending her in a sensational murder trial, asks the heroes to prove that Brother Lucifer orchestrated the murder. Unfortunately, Will

Martin actually turns out to be a fairly likeable guy, using his charm to ingratiate himself with the investigators. Did he really convince the girls to fight to the death for him? Or are Brother Lucifer’s detractors using the tragedy to try to discredit him?

Hell on Wheels: The Cycle Gang Cult

A few cults are tied more closely to the Final Church than their members may ever guess. The occasional cultist is actually a member of the inner circle of the Final Church. Some cultists are actually demons, possessing the bodies of mortals.

Ragnarok, Possessed Biker

Level 11 Combat Spec

STR	14	[+2]	INT	8	[0]
DEX	10	[0]	WIL	12	[+1]
CON	14		PER	6	

Durability: 14/14/7/7 Action Check: 13+/12/6/3

Move: run 16, walk 6 #Actions: 3

Reaction Score: Good/3 Last Resorts: 0

Perks: Fortitude, Reputation

Flaws: Illiterate, Possessed (+8), Rebellious

FX energy points: 5

Attacks

Unarmed	18/9/4	d4+2s/d4+3s/d4+4s	LI/O
Shotgun	13/6/3	d4w/d62/d4m	HI/O
Hellfire	16/8/4	d6+1w/d8+1w/d4+1m	En/O

Defenses

Armor: Battle Vest—d6–3 (LI), d6–2 (HI), d4–2 (En)

Skills

Athletics [14]–*throw* [15]; Melee [14]–*blade* [16], *bludgeon* [15]; Unarmed [14]–*brawl* [18]; Stamina [14]–*endurance* [16], *resist pain* [16]; Survival [14]; Modern [10]–*pistol* [12], *rifle* [13], *SMG* [12]; Vehicle Operation [10]–*land (motorcycle)* [12]; Knowledge [8]; Awareness [12]–*intuition* [14]; Lore [12]–*occult* [13]; Resolve [12]–*mental* [13], *physical* [14]; Street Smart [12]; Interaction [6]–*intimidate* [12].

FX Skills

Arcane Magic (Diabolism)–*hellfire* [16].



Such a cultist is “Ragnarok,” the de facto leader of a motorcycle gang that call themselves the Deadly Sinners. Ostensibly a particularly nihilistic and violent biker, Ragnarok—or rather, the demon inhabiting him—is a highly placed Final Church “security advisor.” His job, in the hierarchy of the Final Church, is to travel North America, providing mobile support for cultists in danger of attack by rival organizations (such as the Knights of Malta). The Deadly Sinners are the shock troops of cult security, destroying when deceiving fails.

Ragnarok was not always a demon. Originally, he was Fritz Dawson, a disillusioned Gulf War veteran suffering from delayed stress syndrome and given to violent outbursts. Thrown out by his family after returning home from Saudi Arabia, Dawson fell in with a group of bikers headed for the annual Sturgis motorcycle rally.

But after being harassed by a sheriff’s deputy in a small town, Dawson got into a high-speed chase with the deputy and several state police units. The chase ended at a roadblock, where Dawson hit a state trooper’s car and went over his handlebars, flying end-over-end for almost 30 meters, before slamming into a “Welcome to Texas” sign.

Despite most of his bones being broken, Dawson survived—albeit in a deep coma. Then one night after lightning struck the hospital, he simply woke up. During the ensuing blackout, Dawson walked out, stole a motorcycle from a nearby bar, and vanished.

In actuality, a lesser demon, summoned by cultists in the hospital, took control of Dawson’s body. Dawson is still technically comatose. But the demon inside him, which calls itself Ragnarok, joined a cult consisting of

violence-prone bikers. Flash-frying the previous leader with a bolt of hellfire, it seized control for itself.

Now Ragnarok runs the cult, though he generally allows them to vent their tendencies toward savagery. The cult membership has changed several times since Ragnarok seized control in 1994. Members frequently die in accidents and firefights with the police, but Ragnarok stays at the top. Others are welcome to challenge him for control, but after accidents and firefights, challenging Ragnarok is the third most common way for Deadly Sinners to perish.

Ragnarok is completely illiterate in human languages. When he must read a sign, he asks another cult member to tell him what it said. One could say he is touchy about

Who Leads the Final Church?

For everyone who has ever investigated the cults of the Final Church, one question burns: Who is at the top of the chain of command?

Certainly, demons do not personally issue their instructions to each and every cult. So, logically, a hierarchy of some kind must exist. And if a hierarchy exists, someone—or some group—must be at the top. Whoever these people are, they are adept at hiding their involvement, for no one outside the organization has ever identified them. And very few people inside the organization appear to have any idea who they might be.

Of course, there may be no secret masters to guide the Final Church. Perhaps the demons do issue orders directly to every cult, in one form or another. Possibly, they give instructions to the more important cults, trusting that the general intent of the message will trickle down.

On the other hand, demons being what they are, they may not even care who ultimately controls the Final Church, so long as their will is done. They may maintain the illusion of a nebulous cabal of illuminati, just to keep the myriad cults in line. Investigators must understand that for mere mortals to both traffic with the most powerful demons in the universe and administer an international conspiracy—all while appearing to be completely innocent—would require an extremely potent and dangerous individual. And the investigator must ask: How badly do I want to find that person?



The Liaison

Level 25 Diplomat (Combat Spec)

STR 10 [0] INT 10 [0]
DEX 10 [0] WIL 14 [+2]
CON 10 PER 12

Durability: 10/10/5/5 Action Check: 12+/11/5/2

Move: run 12, walk 4 #Actions: 3

Reaction Score: Good/3 Last Resorts: 2

Perks: Hidden Identity (-6), Networked, Powerful Ally

Flaws: Dilettante

FX energy points: 10

Attacks

Unarmed* 5/2/1 d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s LI/O

* +d4 base die

Defenses

Armor: none

Skills

Athletics [10]; Stamina [10]—*endurance* [12], *resist pain* [11]; Modern [10]—*pistol* [11]; Stealth [10]—*hide* [11]; Vehicle Operation [10]; Business [10]—*corporate* [14]; Knowledge [10]—*computer op* [11], *deduce* [14], *language (Italian)* [12], *language (French)* [12], *language (Spanish)* [12], *language (Russian)* [12]; Law [10]—*court* [12]; Social Science [10]—*history* [14]; Administration [14]—*bureaucracy* [16], *management* [16]; Awareness [14]—*intuition* [15], *perception* [15]; Investigate [14]—*research* [16]; Lore [14]—*conspiracy* [18], *occult* [18]; Resolve [14]—*mental* [18]; Street Smart [14]; Teach [14]—*diplomat* [16]; Culture [12]—*diplomacy* [14]; Deception [12]—*bluff* [16]; Interaction [12]—*bargain* [14], *charm* [16], *interview* [14], *intimidate* [13], *seduce* [15], *taunt* [14]; Leadership [12]—*inspire* [14].

FX Skills

Arcane Magic (Diabolism)—*black warding* [14], *command* [12], *muddle the eye* [14], *tongue of the damned* [15].

the topic—as much as he is about anything—and the cult members have learned to leave him alone about it. (One cult member, realizing Ragnarok couldn't read, sat him down with a copy of *Ann Likes Red* and tried to teach him. Surprisingly, Ragnarok listened patiently. When the

cultist asked Ragnarok to read the first page himself, Ragnarok shot his would-be teacher dead.)

Roleplaying Tips: Ragnarok is anything but subtle. He has no interest in talking; he attacks. When angry, his voice tends to turn to an unearthly growl.

Adventure Hook: After a shootout with some cultists, the Deadly Sinners attack the heroes on the highway. The heroes are losing badly when Ragnarok suddenly looks confused and shouts out, "Help me!" Then he regains his composure and breaks off the attack. Having gotten a good look at him, the heroes can eventually identify him as the missing Fritz Dawson, and deduce that a demon possesses his comatose form. The mortal inside is coming out of the coma. Mapping police reports of Deadly Sinners activity gives the heroes a likely location for their next appearance—Flagstaff, Arizona. The heroes can get there before the bikers, but do they come prepared to wipe out the Deadly Sinners? Or do they try to exorcise Ragnarok?

Hand of the Beast: The Liaison

The investigator who seeks the head of the Final Church may one day encounter an enigmatic man known in cult circles as "the Liaison."

Even the upper echelons of the most powerful demonic cults do not know who this man truly is. He has acted as facilitator, power broker, and agent, coordinating activities of multiple disparate cults, creating new cults, and combining individual cults to form larger and stronger ones. He has also served as mentor to prospective cult leaders, advising them on matters of organization, recruitment, security, and fundraising.

His name within the Final Church accurately describes his role in the organization. He bears messages from cults to someone else, and back again—if he isn't answering correspondence and issuing instructions himself. Final Church operatives who followed the Liaison to a meeting with his contacts have vanished. Considering that his contacts are undoubtedly demons, this is hardly surprising. It's also strong incentive for others to allow him to conduct his business in private.

The Liaison uses a variety of aliases, and rarely uses the same one twice. Longtime cult members claim that they have seen him before, back in their early days (sometimes decades before), and that his appearance has not changed. To the Final Church, the Liaison has

acquired the reputation and status of a kind of infernal Man in Black. Some believe he is Satan himself.

Furthering the mystery, the Liaison is fluent in several languages, and he evinces an unusually detailed knowledge of ancient history. In the face of danger he is preternaturally calm, as though he knows that permanent damage is unlikely, and any harm done to him will be swiftly visited tenfold upon the head of his assailant. When faced with capture, he always surrenders, but rarely remains captive longer than 24 hours. Someone always arrives to free him by legal or other means.

Regardless of the Liaison's identity, he obviously holds an extremely high position in the hierarchy of the Final Church. He may be its secret leader, or he may be that leader's right hand. Most external agencies who know of his existence refuse to commit to a theory, but guess that he is a necessary mortal servant of beings who cannot maintain a permanent presence on Earth—yet.

Roleplaying Tips: The Liaison is soft-spoken and eerily calm. He never raises his voice, and always has a slight smile on his face, even when being interrogated. He is smooth, suave, and entirely composed.

Adventure Hook: While investigating a cult of the Final Church, the heroes are visited by a mysterious "Agent Samuels" of the FBI. Samuels gives the heroes a great deal of the information they need, in return for "cooperation between our two agencies at a later date." His information proves valid, and the heroes quickly solve the case.

Later, Agent Samuels appears again, and asks for confidential information about a case the heroes' organization is investigating. If the heroes refuse, things begin to happen to them which are at first inconvenient (Internal Affairs-style investigations into the heroes' activities), then distressing (illnesses and injuries to their friends and loved ones) until the heroes relent and contact Samuels again.

The heroes can escape their malefactor's grasp only by the most extreme measures, so the Gamemaster should not spring him on the players carelessly. He is probably best used as an ongoing plot thread, to test the strength of the heroes' resolve to do good.

Human Agents

Every cult of the Final Church is operated by otherwise ordinary people. At the lowest levels, members take roles in recruitment, indoctrination, security, and research. At higher levels, members study diabolic magic, arrange cover-ups, or lead the cult itself.

The following templates for cultists are meant to be used in the same fashion as those found in the *Gamemaster's Guide*, Chapter 6: Supporting Cast. The majority of cultists fall into the category of Ordinary-level characters, but the higher one climbs in society, the more skilled and capable a cultist is liable to be.

Remember that more powerful characters have all of the skills listed for the inferior versions. Ordinary characters have Marginal skills, Good characters have Marginal and Ordinary skills, and so on.

Common Cultist

The most numerous cults are those that involve a handful of citizens, perhaps living in the same neighborhood, or the same building. They are also the most insidious, because until their activities are exposed, no one would ever suspect that beneath the façade of the community-spirited taxpayer lies a cold, calculating killer.

Marginal cultists are recent recruits, or those without appreciable skills. Ordinary cultists are professionals and skilled workers. Good cultists include the cult's "security specialists," as well as low-level organizers. Amazing cultists hold a position of authority over a large cult, or several smaller cults. They also command respect in the community, largely for their wealth or administrative abilities. Amazing cultists are rarely encountered. Paradoxically, they get to be influential because they avoid attention.

	M	O	G	A
STR	10	11	12	12
DEX	9	10	11	11
CON	10	11	11	12
INT	8	10	12	14
WIL	8	9	11	13
PER	9	10	11	12
Action check	8	10	11	12
#Actions	2	2	2	3

Marginal Skills: Athletics; Unarmed-*brawl*; Stamina-*endurance*; Stealth; Vehicle Op; Knowledge; Awareness; Deception; Interaction.

Ordinary Skills: Modern-*pistol*; Stealth-*shadow*; Lore; Deception-*bluff*; Interaction-*charm*.

Good Skills: Melee-*bludgeon 2, blade*; Unarmed-*brawl 2*; Modern-*pistol 2*; Stealth-*sneak*; Administration; Lore-*conspiracy*; Resolve-*mental*; Deception-*bluff 2*; Interaction-*seduce*.



Amazing Skills: Unarmed—*brawl* 3; Melee—*blade* 2; Administration—*management* 2; Resolve—*mental* 3; Deception—*bluff* 3; Interaction—*charm* 3, *bargain* 2; Leadership—*inspire* 2.

Equipment: Working clothes, cult vestments, cellular phone, club, dagger, 9mm pistol.

Biker Cultist

The life of a biker cultist is often short and brutal. They are the shock troops of the Final Church, roaming bands of psychopaths whose gaze ordinary bikers are careful to avoid. They rarely bother to lie about what they do. Instead, they rely on the effectiveness of their savagery to quell potential investigation or resistance. Some collect the skulls of reporters, government agents, and small-town sheriffs who have tried to question or detain them.

Marginal biker cultists ride with the gang without realizing the extent of their activities (although they wouldn't necessarily object). Ordinary cultists are seasoned thugs who carry out low-level assignments of harassment and vandalism. Good biker cultists are the ones who enforce discipline—such as it is—within the gang. Amazing biker cultists have the vilest tendencies—serial killers, cannibals, necrophiles, and diabolists all rolled up into one terrifying package.

	M	O	G	A
STR	10	11	12	14
DEX	9	10	11	12
CON	10	11	12	13
INT	8	9	10	11
WIL	9	10	11	12
PER	7	8	9	10
Action check	8	9	10	11
#Actions	2	2	2	3

Marginal Skills: Athletics; Stamina—*endurance*; Melee; Unarmed—*brawl*; Vehicle Op—*land*; Knowledge, Awareness; Street Smart; Interaction.

Ordinary Skills: Athletics—*throw*; Melee—*blade* 2; Unarmed—*brawl* 2; Stamina—*endurance* 2; Modern—*pistol, rifle*; Vehicle Op—*land* 2; Lore; Street Smart—*criminal*; Tactics; Interaction—*intimidate*.

Good Skills: Unarmed—*brawl* 3; Stamina—*endurance* 3, *resist pain*; Modern—*pistol* 2, *rifle* 2, *SMG*; Lore—*conspiracy*; Street Smart—*criminal* 2; Tactics—*infantry*; Interaction—*intimidate* 2; Leadership.

Amazing Skills: Melee—*blade* 3; Unarmed—*brawl* 4; Stamina—*endurance* 4, *resist pain* 2; Modern—*pistol* 3, *rifle* 3,

SMG 2; Lore—*conspiracy* 2; Street Smart—*criminal* 3; Tactics—*infantry* 2; Interaction—*intimidate* 3; Leadership—*command* 2.

Equipment: Motorcycle, leather riding gear, .44 magnum pistol. Ordinary-quality biker cultists also have a shotgun (or sawed-off shotgun—see the *DARK•MATTER Arms & Equipment Guide*). Good-quality biker cultists have a 9mm SMG.

Corporate Cultist

Nowhere does the Final Church find more willing recruits than in the corporate sector. The sheer ambition displayed by so many upwardly mobile professionals translates to ready and willing converts. In gleaming corporate towers the cultists learn just how much a pile of money will buy, in terms of drugs, sex, favors . . . and human dignity. With corporations becoming almost nations unto themselves, conferences behind closed doors are every bit as secret as the most covert government operation.

A Marginal corporate cultist amounts to a clerk, secretary, or data-entry person. Ordinary cultists tend to be low-to mid-level management types, while Good corporate cultists are usually the upper echelons of the corporation—the ones with the money, the lavish offices, and the discreet personal staff. An Amazing corporate cultist is almost certainly the head of a major corporation, with connections to other cults worldwide. They are rarely trained in diabolic magic themselves, but frequently keep a consultant on retainer who specializes in blood and screams.

	M	O	G	A
STR	8	9	10	11
DEX	9	10	11	12
CON	9	10	11	12
INT	10	11	12	13
WIL	11	12	13	14
PER	9	10	11	12
Action check	9	10	11	12
#Actions	2	2	2	3

Marginal Skills: Athletics; Stamina; Vehicle Op; Business—*corporate*; Knowledge—*computer*; Administration; Awareness; Deception—*bluff*; Interaction—*bargain, charm, interview*.

Ordinary Skills: Modern Ranged Weapons; Business—*corporate* 3, *illicit*; Lore; Deception—*bluff* 3, *bribe* 2; Interaction—*bargain* 2, *charm* 2, *interview* 2, *intimidate*; Leadership.

Good Skills: Modern-*pistol*; Business-*corporate* 4, *illicit* 3; Investigate; Lore-*conspiracy*; Resolve-*mental*; Culture-*etiquette (specific)*; Deception-*bluff* 4, *bribe* 3; Interaction-*bargain* 4, *intimidate* 2; Leadership-*command*.

Amazing Skills: Modern-*pistol* 2; Business-*corporate* 8, *illicit* 5; Lore-*conspiracy* 2; Resolve-*mental* 3; Deception-*bluff* 5, *bribe* 4; Interaction-*bargain* 5, *interview* 3, *intimidate* 4; Leadership-*command* 3, *inspire* 2.

Equipment: Suit, car, cellular telephone, notebook computer.

Cult Diabolist

Every cult has a leader who officiates at ceremonies and conducts rituals. Only in some cults does this person

Research: Specific Demons

Heroes can research specific demons rather than demonology in general. Learning everything about a single demon requires 8 successes, but the interval between checks varies, depending on the power of the demon. Investigating a least demon allows skill checks once per hour; lesser demons once per day; and greater demons, once per week. Related skill for study on specific demons would include Lore-*occult*, or Knowledge skills based on a religion that has a history with the demon, or on personal experience with the demon.

3 failures: In the course of the hero's research, he encounters a seemingly innocuous spell. Reading it—aloud or not—has caught the attention of the demon. If the hero ever encounters the demon in question it will concentrate its attention on that character.

1 success: The hero can learn common names of the demon in question, and a vague idea of its spheres of influence (hate, music, the night, and so on).

3 successes: The hero can discover the most famous special ability of the demon (Gamemaster's discretion), and find accounts of its most famous exploits, such as an attempted seduction of a mortal, or what deities it has battled.

6 successes: If the demon has any particular weaknesses, the hero can learn them, and possibly use them against it. The hero also knows pretty much all of the demon's powers, except perhaps its most secret abilities (again, Gamemaster's discretion).

8 successes: The hero knows the demon's true name, if it has one. (Many least demons do not.)

actually get results. A diabolist acts as a cult's liaison to the demonic forces it serves, using arcane knowledge to call up the proper forces and bargain in blood sacrifices for those things the cult wants. Despite the grisly work, the cult diabolist is often the most pragmatic and restrained member of the group. After all, the diabolist has a pragmatic use for all that blood and suffering.

Marginal diabolists are self-styled sorcerers who have learned a trick or two to dazzle their friends. Ordinary cult diabolists may earn an important place in a small group, but are still little more than experienced dabblers. Good diabolists are so conversant with the rituals that they are eagerly recruited by the most active cults, and showered with luxuries. Amazing cult diabolists are the masters of the arcane arts, a force even demons fear to cross.

	M	O	G	A
STR	8	9	10	11
DEX	10	11	12	13
CON	9	10	11	12
INT	10	11	12	13
WIL	11	12	13	14
PER	10	11	12	13
Action Check	10	11	12	13
#Actions	2	2	2	3
FX Points	5	5	10	10

Marginal Skills: Athletics; Stamina-*endurance*; Vehicle Op; Knowledge-*language (Latin or Ancient Greek)*; Awareness; Investigate; Lore-*occult* 2; Interaction; Diabolism-*command* 2.

Ordinary Skills: Knowledge-*language* 2; Investigate-*research*; Lore-*occult* 3; Resolve-*mental*; Interaction-*charm*; Diabolism-*summoning* 2, *tongue* 2.

Good Skills: Knowledge-*language (additional language)*; Investigate-*research* 2; Lore-*occult* 4; Resolve-*mental* 2; Interaction-*charm* 2, *intimidate*; Diabolism-*command* 3, *muddle* 2, *summoning* 3, *rend* 2, *trail* 2.

Amazing Skills: Knowledge-*language* 2 (*additional language*); Lore-*occult* 5; Resolve-*mental* 3; Interaction-*intimidate* 3; Diabolism-*black warding*, *hellfire* 2, *spiritwrack*, *summoning* 4.

Equipment: Occult manuals, ceremonial robes and props (candles, skulls, etc.), street clothes.

Glamour Cultist

If the Final Church were a business, music and movies would be their marketing department. The prospect of



fame, fortune, and easy living proves a compelling lure for those who feel that their looks or talent are unappreciated. In the music or film industries they find an outlet for their skills, and a constant downward spiral into drugs, depravity, and death.

The Marginal “glamour cultist” may be a low-level functionary with a talent agency or a studio, or an aspiring musician or actor seduced by promises of success. The Ordinary cultist is the one who makes those promises, drawing hopeful innocents into the twisted world of naked ambition. Good glamour cultists manage stables of actors, models, and musicians, orchestrating their corruption and parlaying their skills into funding for the cult. At the top is the Amazing cultist, often an industry mogul or world-famous star whose parties draw both new recruits and accusations of depravity. Their lawyers are always on hand to erase stains and allay suspicions.

	M	O	G	A
STR	7	8	9	10
DEX	8	9	10	11
CON	8	9	10	11
INT	9	10	12	13
WIL	10	11	12	13
PER	11	12	13	14
Action check	8	9	11	12
#Actions	2	2	2	2

Marginal Skills: Athletics; Stamina; Vehicle Op; Knowledge; Awareness; Creativity–*composing* (or Entertainment–*act* or *sing*); Street Smart; Deception; Interaction–*charm*, *seduce*.

Ordinary Skills: Creativity–*composing* 2 (or Entertainment–*act* 2 or *sing* 2); Lore; Resolve; Street Smart–*knowledge*; Deception–*bluff*, *bribe*; Interaction–*charm* 2, *interview*, *seduce* 2.

Good Skills: Stamina–*endurance*; Creativity–*composing* 3 (or Entertainment–*act* 3 or *sing* 3); Lore–*conspiracy*; Resolve–*physical*; Street Smart–*criminal*; Culture; Deception–*bluff* 2, *bribe* 2; Interaction–*bargain* 2, *charm* 3, *intimidate*, *seduce* 3.

Amazing Skills: Stamina–*endurance* 2; Creativity–*composing* 4 (or Entertainment–*act* 4 or *sing* 4); Lore–*conspiracy* 2; Resolve–*physical*; Street Smart–*criminal*; Culture–*etiquette* (*specific*); Deception–*bluff* 3, *bribe* 3; Interaction–*bargain* 3, *intimidate* 2.

Equipment: Working clothes, cellular telephone, musical instrument or makeup kit.

Demons

Without demonic backing, the Final Church is just another sham religion—albeit a twisted one. The terrifying evidence of demons convinces cultists that they are not being duped. More importantly, a demon’s presence at ceremonies blatantly reminds cultists of the importance of secrecy.

Demons also duplicate some functions of the cult, such as security, recruitment, and indoctrination—though they do it for their own reasons. Perhaps this indicates who is really in charge of the Final Church.

Demons in the DARK•MATTER setting fall into three categories: least, lesser, and greater demons. These categories describe a demon’s might, rather than its form or appearance. (In fact, many demons can alter their form at will, using Mask—see below). More powerful demons rely on arcane abilities to accomplish their goals, while the less powerful resort to simple violence. Both are disturbingly effective.

Mask

Transform spell [WIL]: 1, 2, or 3 FX points

This skill can’t be used untrained.

Being able to assume a myriad of forms more or less at will enables certain demons to better inveigle and seduce those who would otherwise be terrified—or at least, tipped off—by the demon’s true form. This spell rarely finds its way into the hands of mortal arcanists. Demons prefer not to grant mortals the ability to magically alter their appearance and means of locomotion.

Mask allows the demon to alter its form to any size or shape for 1 FX point, but the demon gains no corresponding benefits from the new form. For instance, the addition of wings does not grant the ability to fly. By expending 2 FX points, the demon can overcome this restriction and fly, swim, burrow, etc., every bit as well as the creature whose form it mimics.

To also gain special physical abilities of the new form—the venomous bite of a serpent, the night vision of a cat, or even just the ability to procreate—costs the demon 3 FX points. Note that these are only physical abilities—magical or psionic abilities cannot be duplicated with this spell.

Once the form has been assumed, the demon merely spends a single FX point each day to maintain it. The disguise remains in place until the demon chooses a new form, stops paying upkeep, or becomes dazed (loses half or more of its stun, wound, or mortal damage points, or loses any

fatigue points). Nothing prevents the demon from reestablishing the disguise, except for the loss of FX points.

Familiar

The inevitable result of novice diabolists practicing their craft is the creation of familiars. The diabolist summons a least demon, then binds it to service, honing his skills for when he tackles a more powerful demon later. The diabolist often repeats this process several times, until he or she has enough familiars to carry out all required menial tasks.

Familiar Game Data

STR 4 (d4+1) INT 5 (d6+1)
DEX 12 (d6+8) WIL 6 (d4+3)
CON 10 (d6+6) PER 7 (d4+4)
Durability: 10/10/5/5 Action Check: 10+/9/4/2
Move: run 10, walk 4, fly 32 #Actions: 2
Reaction Score: Ordinary/2 Last Resorts: 0

Attacks

Claws/Bite 9/4/2 d4s/d4+1s/d4w LI/O

Defenses

-2 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
+1 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
-1 INT resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
-1 WIL resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
Armor: d4 (LI), d4-1 (HI), d4-1 (En)

Skills

Stamina [10]-*endurance* [12]; Acrobatics [12]-*dodge* [14]; Stealth [12]-*hide* [14], *shadow* [14], *sneak* [15]; Knowledge [5]-*language* 6 (*master's language*); Lore [5]-*occult* [6]; Awareness [6]; Resolve [6].

Note: A familiar is likely to possess at least one more broad skill and a related specialty skill related to its form. The following table gives some examples:

Form	Skill
Cat	Acrobatics [12]- <i>daredevil</i> [16]
Rat	Athletics [4]- <i>jump</i> [8]
Raven	Acrobatics [12]- <i>flight</i> [14]
Monkey	Athletics [4]- <i>climb</i> [10]
Snake	Investigate [6]- <i>search</i> [10]
Spider	Awareness [6]- <i>perception</i> [10]

Description: Familiars can take any form their summoner can imagine, but most diabolists who operate in populated areas choose a form that will not arouse suspicion, such as a cat, rat, raven, monkey, snake, or perhaps a spider. Once the demon has been bound into the appropriate form, it appears as an ordinary creature of that species—though it frequently seems far more intelligent than a natural creature would.

Encounter: On Earth, familiars are encountered generally within sight of their human master. But as some are frequently sent on errands or spying missions, mortals can meet them nearly anywhere. If the mission is more sinister in nature, the encounter could be frightening—or even fatal.

When a familiar is slain, it usually merely expires, though there are reports of familiars bursting into flame or even exploding.

Habitat/Society: In the otherdimensional abode of demons, the sorts that become familiars are near the bottom of the literal food chain. They are at best pests, though the yrglings sometimes train them to perform menial tasks. By no means brilliant or even clever, they should not be taken for mindless. They can be unpleasantly cunning, and threatening in sufficient numbers. Only the unwise diabolist summons many of these before he is certain the binding ritual takes.

Story Hook: While investigating a suspected Final Church diabolist, the heroes begin to be plagued by minor odd events: food poisoning, files deleted from their computers, vanishing equipment, and so on. The diabolist also seems to know their every move. Once they set up appropriate security measures, they discover that the diabolist is sending his familiars to harass them and report their plans to him.

Xic

Known by a wide variety of names, a xic (pronounced “HEEKH”) is a sort of minor demon that inflicts pain on mortals, generally at the bidding of other mortals, or more powerful demons. Xic have no other purpose, and as such they are remarkably single-minded horrors. Fortunately for diabolists, a xic’s weak will makes it particularly loyal, once bound.



Xic Game Data

STR 8 (d6+4) INT 4 (d4+1)
 DEX 10 (d6+6) WIL 8 (d4+5)
 CON 12 (d4+9) PER 4 (d4+1)
 Durability: 14/14/7/7 Action Check: 9+/8/4/2
 Move: run 6, walk 1, fly 40 #Actions: 2
 Reaction Score: Ordinary/2 Last Resorts: 0

Attacks

Bite 9/4/2 d4+1s/d4+1w/d4+2w LI/O
 Claws (×2) 10/5/2 d4w/d4+1w/d4m LI/O

Defenses

+1 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
 +2 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
 Armor: d6 (LI), d4–1 (HI), d4–1 (En)

Skills

Acrobatics [10]–*flight* [16]; Stamina [12];
 Knowledge [4]–*language* [5] (*summoner's language*);
 Awareness [8]–*intuition* [10]; Investigate [8]–*track*
 [12]; Lore [8]–*occult* [9]; Resolve [8].

Description: A xic resembles a meter-long mosquito with a condensed abdomen, a mouthful of teeth in place of a proboscis, and razor-sharp claws on its front (and only) legs. Its wings look much like those of an ordinary mosquito, but generally move too fast to observe with the naked eye. The only sounds it makes are the thrumming vibration of its wings, and the wicked *kling-kling* of its bladelike claws.

Encounter: Usually the first indication anyone has of a xic's presence is the hum of its wings as it approaches. A xic alone will attack with its claws in passing, but when more than one xic is involved, they tend to stay close and fight over the kill. (Only half of their number actually attack the victim—the others look for an opening.)

When a xic is destroyed, it dissolves into tiny fragments of insect husk.

Habitat/Society: The xic gather only when feeding, or when forced together by their diabolist master or a more powerful demon (who sometimes collect them in infernal apiaries). The xic have no language of their own, but understand their masters' commands well enough.

Story Hook: The heroes happen into a small southwestern town that appears abandoned. After searching around, they discover the bodies of the townsfolk, virtually shredded by some unknown weapon. Further investigation reveals a small group of xic setting up a kind of nest in an abandoned mineshaft—and evidence that some of the townsfolk might still be alive, and trapped inside the mine. An expedition into the mine turns up the remains of the ritual used to summon the xic.

Irvund

Irvunds, commonly known as hellhounds, are a more powerful familiar, a beast in the form of a frightening and vicious dog. Diabolists use them as personal security; sometimes irvunds serve as enforcers of cult security when set upon someone who has been troublesome. The bite marks left behind are invariably blamed on a stray dog or family pet.

Description: An irvund appears as whatever canine it mimics—a German shepherd, a Doberman pinscher, a rottweiler, or any other dog that seems particularly fearsome. It is dark colored when appropriate, and has a foul

disposition—though at the command of its master, it is completely obedient.

Encounter: Irvunds must be summoned to this world, and only remain if bound to their summoner. They are never encountered stray. In their capacity as guard dogs, they usually guard their master's home or possessions, or accompany him or her, ready to attack at a moment's notice.

Habitat/Society: In the abode of demons, irvunds hunt in wild packs, bringing down lesser demons and ripping them to pieces. Presumably, if a diabolist were to summon several irvunds to Earth and set them loose, they would do the same thing. Any diabolist who may have ever tried this trick probably didn't live to tell the tale.

Story Hook: Returning home from an assignment, the heroes stay in a hotel in a community where everyone is afraid to go outside at night, and businesses close before dusk. The baying of a large hound on the first night explains why. The locals believe that it is a werewolf, and that if they tell outsiders about it, the werewolf—who obviously must be one of them—will punish them for exposing it. (Several locals who have spoken out about the “were-

wolf” appear to have been specifically targeted.) The heroes soon learn that the howling comes instead from an irvund, set loose by a respected member of the community who is secretly a diabolist. She wants to spread vicious terror one last time before she succumbs to cancer.



Irvund Game Data

STR	12	(d4+9)	INT	4	(d4+1)
DEX	10	(d4+7)	WIL	14	(d4+11)
CON	12	(d4+9)	PER	2	(d4)
Durability: 14/14/7/7			Action Check: 13+/12/6/3		
Move: sprint 65, run 38, walk 10			#Actions: 3		
Reaction Score: Good/3			Last Resorts: 0		

Attacks

Bite 16/8/4 d4w/d6w/d6+3w LI/O

Defenses

+2 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
+1 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
Armor: d4+2 (LI), d4+1 (HI), d4+2 (En)

Skills

Athletics [12]–*jump* [14]; Stealth [10]–*sneak* [12], *shadow* [12]; Movement [12]–*race* [14]; Stamina [12]–*endurance* [16]; Awareness [14]–*intuition* [18], *perception* [16]; Investigate [14]–*track* [18]; Resolve [14]–*physical* [16].

Rakshasa

Indian mythology tells the tale of the rakshasa, a demon that can take the form of any man or woman, and then use that form to lure unsuspecting victims to its lair, where it devours them.

Description: Like all shapechanging demons, the true form of the rakshasa is in question. Various legends describe it as an animal-headed man or woman, which could be its true shape, or the shape with which it is most comfortable among mortals. The animal head is frequently that of an ape, tiger, or wolf—essentially, anything that strikes fear in those who see it.

Encounter: Unlike most other demons, the rakshasa makes its way to Earth by trickery. When careless diabolists attempt to summon least demons, the rakshasa disguises itself as the intended creature and appears in



its place. Should the diabolist not realize his or her error before releasing the demon from the summoning circle, the rakshasa is free to roam Earth—once the would-be summoner has been dispatched.

A rakshasa is a serial killer. It carefully and quietly stalks its victim, learning the mortal's habits, acquaintances, and most importantly, weaknesses. Then, when the rakshasa is ready to strike, it uses its *mind reading* ability to determine who the victim would trust most: a friend, a family member, a police officer, or such. Disguising itself as that person, the rakshasa approaches and lures the victim into its lair. The victim who escapes is rare and lucky.

Rakshasas are particularly difficult to dispatch, as reflected by its resistance modifiers. When a rakshasa is slain, it melts into a puddle of reddish-orange goo, which

evaporates within a few hours, even in a sealed container. Freezing slows down the evaporation process so that it takes days, rather than hours, but is still not entirely effective.

Habitat/Society: A rakshasa is a solitary creature. It uses the possessions of its victims to fund the creation of a safe house, a normal-looking place where it can lock up from within. A rakshasa dwells in this place until its activities attract too much attention. Then moves on or changes its identity and returns to the same dwelling. Because rakshasas are so careful about covering their tracks, a single rakshasa may dwell in the same place for several centuries.

Story Hook: The heroes are asked to listen to a taped witness deposition from a young man who narrowly escaped from a suspected serial killer—only to vanish from a police safe house a few days later. The police suspect the killer may have abducted the man somehow right from under their noses, but the detective on the case thinks that the taped interview indicates a supernatural explanation for the disappearance. As the heroes investigate, they discover evidence that the killer is in reality a rakshasa—and may have in fact been the witness, using the story to escape the police.

Rakshasa Game Data

STR 12 (d6+8) INT 10 (d4+7)
DEX 10 (d4+7) WIL 12 (d4+9)
CON 12 (d6+8) PER 12 (d4+9)

Durability: 16/16/8/8 Action Check: 13+/12/6/3

Move: run 12, walk 4 #Actions: 2

Reaction Score: Ordinary/2 Last Resorts: 1

FX energy points: 5

Psionic energy points: 12

Attacks

Bite 14/7/3 d4+1w/d6+2w/d4+1m LI/O

Claws (×2) 16/8/4 d4w/d4+2w/d6+2w LI/O

Defenses

+4 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks

+4 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks

Armor: d4+1 (LI), d4 (HI), d4+1 (En)

Skills

Athletics [12]–*jump* [14]; Stamina [12]–*endurance* [14]; Stealth [10]–*shadow* [14]; Awareness [12]–*intuition* [15]; Investigate [12]–*track* [15]; Resolve [12]–*physical* [14]; Deception [12]–*bluff* [15]; Interaction [12]–*charm* [14]; ESP [10]–*mind reading* [16].

Note that the rakshasa's *mind reading* score grants it the rank benefit of *probe*.

FX Skills

Arcane Magic (Diabolism)–*mask* [18], *trail* [16].

Oni

Legends from Japan tell of warriors unable to control their rage. They transform into oni, terrible ogrelike demons with a taste for human flesh. In present day, the demons once known as oni still roam the world, inciting modern-day warriors to acts of savage violence and cannibalism.

Description: The oni is a huge, ogrelike creature, with large fangs, mighty muscles, and bull horns. Oni skin can be red, blue, or black. Unless disguised as a human, the oni always carries its kanabo, a 2-meter iron rod studded with short spikes. Even when disguised, though, the oni is never far from its favorite weapon.

Encounter: The oni feasts on the flesh of defeated warriors, finding other meat far less palatable. Thus, those most likely to encounter an oni are warriors; peasants have nothing to fear, unless the oni is particularly hungry. (They may live near an oni for their entire lives without realizing it.)

An oni generally chooses to reveal its presence during martial conflicts. It joins whichever side boasts the



fiercest warriors, aiding them in defeating their foes, but also observing their fury, searching for a reflection of its own ferocity. Those with no such rage, the oni considers worthy only of death.

When an oni encounters mortal warriors who display its own brutal combat mentality, it falls into their company as they proceed to their next engagement. From that point on, the mortals are under the scrutiny of the demon: any mortal warrior who fails to exceed his own savagery from one battle to the next will be slaughtered. Those who meet its expectations and remain in the oni's company become every bit as terrible as the demon.

It is exceedingly difficult to kill an oni. An oni begins to regenerate as soon as it suffers wound or mortal damage. It recovers (in the following order of preference) d4-1 mortals, d6-2 wounds, or d6-2 stuns. This costs the demon 1 FX point, which it must spend (even if the oni would prefer to save the points).

If the oni is still injured, the regeneration activates again, continuing until the oni restores its maximum mortal and wound points, or it runs out of FX points. At that point, the demon can be destroyed, whereupon it vanishes spectacularly. (Ball lightning arcing into the clouds is common.)

Habitat/Society: Oni tend to show themselves during violent tempests, such as hurricanes or monsoons. Either through some property of the rain or the demon's inner rage reacting to the fury of the storm, the oni is unable to maintain a disguise. At these times the oni is most dangerous to nonwarriors. It happily slaughters anyone who sees it during a tempest to preserve its secret.

When an oni is disguised as a human, it cannot help but betray a hint of its true nature. This human will be cold and emotionless at best, but more likely vicious and brutal. Mortals who encounter the disguised oni on a regular basis often describe their acquaintance as "quiet, uninteresting—maybe even a little thick," never guessing that the dull exterior hides a horrible monster.

Story Hook: A television reporter exposes a US Navy cover-up of suspected cannibalism at a SEAL training

Oni Game Data

STR	18 (d6+14)	INT	12	(d4+9)
DEX	10 (d4+7)	WIL	12	(d4+9)
CON	18 (d6+14)	PER	3	(d4)
Durability: 20/20/10/10		Action Check: 15+/14/7/3		
Move: run 22, walk 6		#Actions: 3		
Reaction Score: Ordinary/3		Last Resorts: 1		
FX energy points: 10				

Attacks

Unarmed	14/7/3	d4+4w/d4+6w/d4+4m	LI/O
Bite	14/7/3	d6+3w/d8+4w/d4+3m	LI/O
Kanabo	19/9/4	d8+2w/d8+3w/d6+2m	LI/O

Defenses

+4 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
 +1 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
 Armor: d6 (LI), d8-4 (HI), d6-2 (En)

Skills

Athletics [18]—*jump* [20]; Melee Weapons [18]—*kanabo* [19]; Stamina [18]—*endurance* [20], *resist pain* [22]; Awareness [12]—*intuition* [14]; Resolve [12]—*physical* [18]; Interaction [3]—*intimidate* [12].

FX Skills

Arcane Magic (Diabolism)—*mask* [10]; Regeneration (see above).

camp. Navy contacts ask the heroes to prove that the reporter is sensationalizing fatal accidents during training exercises. But as the heroes dig in, they uncover proof that the SEALs involved are becoming more and more savage. Then, just as the heroes are closing in on an oni posing as a Navy officer, the SEAL team is assigned to an operation in a sensitive area overseas. If the heroes do nothing, the oni's influence on the SEALs will likely create an international incident. To intervene, the heroes must load up with weaponry, infiltrate a military hot zone, neutralize the affected men . . . and then deal with the demon.



Chernobog

Ancient pagan myths among the Slavic people tell of Bielbog and Chernobog, beings of good and evil who fought regularly, establishing the balance of day and night, respectively. Though some modern researchers believe Bielbog may have in fact been an elohim, Chernobog was decidedly demonic, and fear of its return fueled Slavic nightmares for centuries.

Although popularly depicted in the Disney movie *Fantasia* as a gigantic, winged gargoyle (and modeled on the features of actor Bela Lugosi), the demon Chernobog initially appeared to mortals as a young, attractive brunette woman in a black dress. However, as times have changed, so has Chernobog's appearance. It now prefers the unsubtle appearance of an ancient hag, reeking of decay and clad in moldering finery of a decade or so past.

Overall, Chernobog is a particularly unsubtle demon lord. It brings bad fortune, affliction, darkness, despair, and death merely by its presence. When it sets its sights on a given mortal, that mortal is doomed, short of a miracle. But Chernobog is otherwise unconcerned with humanity. It has a personal grudge against the elohim who once defeated it, and is focused primarily on regaining its strength to get revenge. Currently its means to that power is the worship of mortals, though it would sacrifice them at a moment's notice to pursue a more attractive scheme.

Cults that worship Chernobog operate primarily in the Ukraine and Serbia. They believe that a god of evil must exist to maintain balance in the world, and that Bielbog cravenly attacked Chernobog before their appointed semi-annual battle (on June 8, 1908, 13 days early), imprisoning his nemesis under the earth in Tunguska. Without the

Under Cover of Darkness

Chernobog's ability to spread darkness and despair is represented by a penalty applied to all checks attempted by those near the demon lord. The effect begins at a +1 step penalty to all checks made within 1 km of Chernobog, but each day this aura increases in size and strength. So the next day, those within 1 km suffer a +2 step penalty, while those between 1–2 km would suffer a +1 step penalty, and so on, to a maximum of +4 steps at 1–5 km, +3 steps at 5–6 km, etc. Chernobog is unaffected by its own despair.

Outwardly, this effect manifests as dull leaden skies during the day and pitch-blackness at night, under which accidents proliferate, arguments erupt, depression sets in, and the infirm weaken and die. Fortunately, Chernobog rarely can remain in this world for more than a day, but a sufficiently powerful diabolist could conceivably bind Chernobog, which would be a major step toward rendering Earth a living hell.

Chernobog

STR 17 [+4] INT 13 [+2]
 DEX 12 [+1] WIL 10 [0]
 CON 18 PER 10

Durability: 24/24/12/12 Action Check: 15+/14/7/3
 Move: run 20, walk 6, fly 36 #Actions: 3
 Reaction Score: Ordinary/3 Last Resorts: 2
 FX energy points: 15

Attacks

Claws 22/11/5 d4+2w/d6+2w/d4+2m LI/O
 Hellfire 18/9/4 d6+1w/d8+1w/d4+1m En/G

Defenses

+4 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
 +1 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
 +2 INT resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
 Armor (Good): d6+3 (LI), d6+1 (HI), d8 (En)

Skills

Athletics [17]–*throw* [19]; Unarmed [17]–*brawl* [22];
 Stamina [18]–*endurance* [21]; Acrobatics [12]–*flight*
 [14]; Knowledge [13]–*language (Russian)* [15], *lan-*
guage (Serbo-Croatian) [15], *language (Ukrainian)* [15];
 Lore [13]–*occult* [18]; Awareness [10]–*perception*
 [12]; Resolve [10]–*physical* [14]; Interaction
 [10]–*intimidate* [18].

FX Skills

Arcane Magic (Diabolism)–*binding* [14], *black warding*
 [16], *command* [15], *hellfire* [18], *rend the weave* [14],
spiritwrack [15], *summoning* [16].

god of evil, they say, there is no check on evil men, and with the indiscriminate spread of life energy by Bielbog, evil men live longer than ever before, spreading their taint over the world.

The cultists believe that if they can free Chernobog—perhaps by setting off another blast in Tunguska, similar to the one in 1908—that the world will return to proper balance. Chernobog, of course, is all too happy to help them, since the release of so much energy might allow the demon to manifest on Earth again. Though their first attempt at Chernobyl was a failure, Chernobog believes that the cultists it spared may still be useful.

Baal-phegor

Originally considered a god by the ancient Moabites, Baal-phegor (“lord of Mount Phegor”) was exposed as a demon by the Companions of Horus. This exposure created an deep enmity between the demon lord and the Rosicrucians. The wealthy men who followed Baal-phegor were cast low by this revelation. For centuries, their descendents have coveted revenge for their deity’s humiliation and their own loss of wealth.

Baal-phegor’s lure to mortals was riches. It promised prosperity and luxury in exchange for sacrifices of things its worshipers considered less valuable: their spouses, their children, and even their own limbs. In return, the demon gave the Moabites foreknowledge of the latest inventions and discoveries, and an opportunity to capitalize.

The tradition continues to this day among Baal-phegor’s adherents. Each new invention is monitored by Baal-phegor’s legion of spies and informants, then shared with the highest authorities in the cult. The information is then passed down to the follower best equipped to take advantage of the situation. The proceeds are divided among the participants. Discoveries that Baal-phegor’s worshipers have taken advantage of include steam power, moveable type, electricity, television, and the Internet—all of which make the demon’s followers wealthier each day.

Baal-phegor is obsessed with employing wealth for evil purposes. Its followers believe that everything has a price, and that anything they purchase is theirs to do with as they please. Their sacrificial victims are usually purchased from slavery rings, and disposed of at black-market organ banks (both of which are Baal-phegor innovations)—often for more than the victim originally cost. Members are elevated to high positions by demonstrating the exploitability of new technologies.

If the demon has a master plan, it is unknown to all but a select few mortals. The logical suspicion is some scheme to return to this dimension and wreak vengeance upon the Rosicrucians, but no evidence supports this conclusion.

Originally, Baal-phegor believed that seduction was the path to success with mortals, and appeared as an attractive young woman. But after the conflict with the Companions of Horus, the demon assumed a more sinister aspect—that of a colossal black spider. This form allows the demon to climb sheer walls, blend into shadows, and attack with its two forelegs simultaneously.



Baal-phegor

STR 16 [+3] INT 16 [+3]
 DEX 14 [+2] WIL 12 [+1]
 CON 14 PER 2
 Durability: 20/20/10/10 Action Check: 18+/17/8/4
 Move: sprint 30, run 20, walk 8 #Actions: 3
 Reaction Score: Good/3 Last Resorts: 2
 FX energy points: 16

Attacks

Talon (x2) 16/8/4 d4w/d4+1w/d4m LI/O
 Bite* 22/11/5 d4+2w/d6+2w/d4+2m LI/O
 Hellfire 18/9/4 d6+1w/d8+1w/d+1m En/G
 * Venom (see text)

Defenses

+3 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
 +2 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
 +3 INT resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
 +1 WIL resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
 Armor (Good): d6+2 (LI), d6+1 (HI), d6 (En)

Skills

Athletics [16]–*climb* [22]; Movement [14]–*race* [16];
 Stamina [14]–*endurance* [16]; Stealth [14]–*hide* [18];
 Business [16]–*corporate* [20], *illicit* [20]; Computer
 Science [16]–*hacking* [20]; Awareness [12]–*intuition*
 [16]; Investigate [12]–*track* [14]; Lore [16]–*occult*
 [21]; Resolve [12]–*mental* [16]; Street Smart [12]–*net*
savvy [16].

FX Skills

Arcane Magic (Diabolism)–*binding* [14], *black warding*
 [18], *hellfire* [18], *phantasms* [16], *rend the weave* [20],
spiritwrack [16], *summoning* [14].

But more dangerous still is the venomous bite of Baal-phegor: the demon drains information and creativity from the victim's mind. This drain is represented by cumulative die step penalties, applied to skill checks and certain feat checks. Unlike ordinary venom, Baal-phegor's effect can be resisted with Resolve–*mental resolve* skill checks, by comparing the result with the following table:

Mental Resolve

Check Result	Effect
Critical Failure	+2 step penalty to INT- & WIL-based checks permanently
Failure	+1 step penalty to INT- & WIL-based checks permanently
Ordinary	+1 step penalty to WIL-based checks permanently
Good	+1 step penalty to WIL-based checks for d12 +12 hours
Amazing	+1 step penalty to Creativity checks for d12+12 hours

Chapter 3: The Hoffmann File

If players and their Gamemaster decide to play a cult-oriented DARK•MATTER campaign, they will need a sense of background. The heroes will have heard of cults, and the very existence of cults may have had some effect on their

lives.

To help, this chapter contains new perks and flaws, new magic items, new diabolic magic spells, and new career packages, all revolving around the Final Church.

Research: The Hoffmann Report on the Final Church

The Hoffmann Institute's archives are full of incident reports involving cultists, as well as ancient and modern studies of the overarching conspiracy. Anyone with access to the Institute's records can learn nearly everything the Hoffmann Institute knows with 7 successes. Checks can be attempted once per week, with a -3 step modifier if the research is conducted in the Archives in Philadelphia. Related skills include Lore-*conspiracy* or *occult*, Social Science-*anthropology*, or Knowledge skills for historical references or appropriate dead languages.

3 failures: The hero is asking questions in all the wrong places, or just not being careful enough; the cult becomes aware of the hero's research. To maintain their secrecy, the cult might try to mislead the hero, sabotage the research, or just kill him or her. At the Gamemaster's discretion, they might even offer their aid, in order to find out how much the Hoffmann Institute knows about them.

1 success: All of the information the Hoffmann Institute has on the origins of cult conspiracies comes from a report appropriated from the Rosicrucians. It refers to an ancient cult that tried to infiltrate the Companions of Horus, and failed. All of the Institute's modern information comes from Hoffmann agents' reports, usually from investigations of cult activity and the occasional demonic possession case. A fair number of these cases have perfectly natural explanations.

3 successes: The Hoffmann Institute has periodically mounted major investigations on the activities of what they call the master cult, which they believe controls the activities of a number of lesser cults, which in turn control the activities of still lesser cults. Unfortunately, these investigations turn up little evidence to support that theory. The Institute's analysts swear that the gaps in the chain of evidence indicate a concerted effort to suppress evidence. Dr. Nakami himself suggests in a memo, dated July 1989, that the "lack of evidence overwhelmingly suggests that either highly-placed government officials are in on the conspiracy, or that no conspiracy exists at this time." His statement suggests that such a conspiracy may have existed previously, if not currently.

5 successes: A number of Hoffmann Institute reports mention Project: Morningstar, which appears to be a code name for a covert operation aimed at finding a postulated inner circle of the master cult. Reports refer to files which do not appear to exist, and may have been deleted. A separate series of reports appears to be interviews with cult escapees, whose stories corroborate the existence of the master cult. The subjects refer to the master cult as The Final Church, though that name was a major secret in their own organization.

7 successes: The "missing reports" in the Hoffmann Institute's files cross-reference to a number of personnel files of agents killed or suspected killed in the line of duty. Some records are marked for Nakami's eyes only, and prompt for a password. A successful Knowledge-*deduce* check indicates that these agents either disappeared while trying to infiltrate the Final Church through an associated cult or that they are still alive, issuing reports that only select operatives of the Institute are allowed to read. (It might further occur to the hero that Dr. Nakami would be interested to know that a few weeks of research turned up a possible connection between these missing agents and the Institute's files on the Final Church—in other words, that a clerical error could endanger several deep-cover agents.)



Perks & Flaws

Players who desire a character background involving cult activity might choose the Final Church as a Powerful Enemy flaw. The more points the flaw is worth, the more eager the Final Church is reach the hero. A DARK•MATTER hero might also have a Reputation as a cult-smashing crusader, or perhaps a Hidden Identity due to past involvement with the Final Church. With the Gamemaster's approval, a hero with the Abduction flaw might have been abducted by a cult rather than aliens, and consequently have an irrational fear of cults.

Enchanted Items

Diabolists use a variety of minor, enchanted items to help them with their magic. To the chagrin of the modern day cultist, there is no common formula for the creation of these items. Each cult seems to have different methods to create enchanted items. Murder cults, for instance, enchant their knives through ritual killings. All item creation rituals are difficult and bloody, however, and sometimes corrupt their users over time.

Mirror of the Soul

These highly decorative bronze mirrors are popular among Chinese cults. The mirrors are designed to expose the true forms of disguised demons. The backs are carved with a short incantation and symbols of power. Those seeking to use a Mirror of the Soul must read the incantation aloud, spend 1 FX point, and make a Diabolism skill roll.

On a Critical Failure the mirror exposes a nearby mortal as a demon. A Failure prevents the mirror from functioning at all. On an Ordinary success, the mirror detects demons using the *mask* ability within line of sight. On a Good success, the mirror negates the *mask* ability (in a manner similar to *rend the weave*) of any demons within the user's line of sight. On an Amazing success, invisible demons are also exposed.

Obsidian Blade

A favored weapon of murder cults, the Obsidian Blade retains its popularity even in the postindustrial age. Made in a variety of shapes and sizes, Obsidian Blades are most commonly daggers. While some sects use them to fight, most confine their use to rituals. When a diabolist uses an

Obsidian Blade to make a sacrifice, he or she receives a -1 step bonus on the die roll for performing the sacrifice.

The Fetish

The usual methods of summoning and binding a demon come from the European tradition. Other cultures have developed their own ways of achieving these effects. The sorcerers of central and southern Africa use a fetish, a small wooden statue carved in the native style. The fetish is a prison for an evil spirit, in this case demons. A sorcerer with a fetish can cast a *binding* spell with a -1 step bonus. Once imprisoned, the demon can be compelled by driving nails into the fetish. This is said to anger the demon and make it more effective at doing evil. In game terms, this is represented by the casting of the *spiritwrack* spell.

Hellrod

Diabolists frequently wish to send avenging demons to tear their enemies limb from limb. In medieval villages with a few dozen inhabitants, this wasn't much trouble for the demon. The dawn of the 21st century, however, has brought with it certain challenges. With the rise in population, the ease and frequency of travel, and the overcrowding of cities, finding a lone enemy can be downright difficult. The Hellrod was invented to make bloody vengeance easy again.

The idea is simple. Enchant a small item that can slipped into your enemy's pockets or luggage. This item emits a magical "homing signal" that allows interested demons to find the individual quickly and easily. The victim of the Hellrod, of course, seldom dies quickly or easily, but such is the nature of demons.

The name Hellrod plays off the idea of the lightning rod. It is worth noting, however, that Hellrods are not necessarily rods. They can take nearly any small, concealable form, from coins to business cards to disposable razors. A *black warding* or a *halo* cast by or on the intended victim neutralizes a Hellrod.

Spells

The following spells can be added to the spell list for the Diabolism schools of arcane magic, as per the rules in the *DARK•MATTER Campaign Setting*, Chapter 4: Arcana.

Muddle the Eye

Cost: 3 skill points

Transform spell: 1 FX point (PER)

This skill can't be used untrained.

This spell allows a character to cloud the minds of others, causing them to see what they expect to see rather than what is truly happening. Cult diabolists use this spell to confuse victims and render them docile, like putting blinders on a horse. What the victim doesn't perceive won't cause panic.

When this spell is cast, the caster designates one or more targets, suffering a +1 step penalty for each target after the first. The spell lasts for the next hour. The targets then attempt a Resolve–*mental resolve* skill check to resist the effects of the spell, with a modifier based on the success of the diabolist caster's skill check (+0, +1, or +3 step penalties for an Ordinary, Good, or Amazing result respectively).

Failing the *mental resolve* check means that subject suffers a +4 step penalty to Awareness checks (including the *perception* and *intuition* specialty skills) while the spell is in effect. This penalty is reduced to +3 steps for an Ordinary success, +2 steps for a Good success, and +1 step for an Amazing success. Since human nature unconsciously inserts details where none are perceived, victims of this spell often later describe what they expected to see, rather than what was actually there. (A victim might describe robed strangers instead of familiar neighbors in normal attire, for example.)

The sacrifice required to cast this spell is a cup full of blood, which costs the caster a single wound point.

Critical Failure: Each target of the spell clearly perceives the events of the next hour, with no need for a mental resolve check.

⊗ **Increased Duration:** At rank 4, the effect lasts for the next 6 hours.

⊗ **Increased Effect:** At rank 8, the caster suffers a +1 step penalty for each three targets after the first, rather than for each one.

Trail of Dust

Cost: 5 skill points

Transform spell: 2 FX point (WIL)

This skill can't be used untrained.

The Final Church has been able to operate for so long because it so assiduously covers its own tracks. Going far beyond merely disposing of the odd corpse, the Final

Church so completely strips a crime scene of clues that forensics experts confidently declare that no crime could have possibly taken place. For while hiding a body is fairly easy, removing the traces of the body's blood is nearly impossible.

The diabolists of the Final Church have developed this spell to allow them to transmute such physical evidence to so much dust. When this spell is cast, all physical residue within 30 meters of diabolical magic activities from up to 12 hours before the casting are destroyed instantly and permanently, including blood, hair, fibers, candle wax, and even footprints and other telltale depressions in the ground. In game terms, this applies a +4 step penalty to Investigate–*search* attempts of the area.

No sacrifice is required for this spell, but diabolists who attempt to use it to clean evidence off of ritual items (blood from a cup, for example), will discover the spell not so discriminating as not to simply destroy the cup. This does not mean that a living being covered in blood will be vaporized, however—only that they are liable to lose a few layers of skin in a painful fashion. Note also that the spell only destroys evidence of diabolic magic. If no diabolic magic took place, the spell does nothing.

Critical Failure: The attempt to destroy the evidence actually makes it more obvious—and more permanent. Blood splatters are burned indelibly into surfaces, fiber becomes fireproof, and so on. Evidence in physical contact with a living creature's skin inflicts d4 stun as a result of the failure, against which armor is ineffective.

Phantasms

Cost: 2 skill points

Transform spell: 1 FX point (WIL)

This spell allows the diabolist to introduce specific images directly into a victim's mind. The intent is to create a temporary dread of a specific image so that when the image appears later, the victim reacts how the diabolist wants. At the least, the victim might have a harder time distinguishing between reality and illusion.

The diabolist begins by establishing a connection to the target, either by stealing some small item, or by leaving a small item with the target. Then, the diabolist conjures a specific image—usually of a spider, snake, or demon, though it can be anything at all—which then appears to the victim in some fashion. The target can be asleep or awake, and will perceive the phantasm as either a nightmare, or a sort of “corner-of-the-eye” optical illusion, respectively.

The phantasm continues for 1 minute on an Ordinary success, 1 hour on a Good success, or all day on an Amazing result. The illusion isn't necessarily constant over longer periods; it haunts the victim intermittently, depending on conditions set by the diabolist. For example, an image may come when the victim is alone, in the dark, asleep, or some other weakened position.

The victim is allowed to attempt a *Resolve-mental resolve* skill check whenever the phantasm appears, gaining a -1 step bonus for each previous successful mental resolve check against the spell, and a +1 step penalty for each previous failure. This modifier only applies to iterations of the same spell effect, and can never be greater than +3 or -3 steps (though other modifiers still apply as normal).

The effects of the *mental resolve* check are as described in the skill listing in Chapter 4: Skills of the *Player's Handbook*—except that the results do not apply immediately. Instead, when a hero encounters the same image again—illusion or not—then he or she reacts as determined by the mental resolve check.

The illusion is best used to depict something the victim is likely to encounter—for example, snakes, when the victim is on the trail of worshipers of a demon that manifests as a serpent.

Critical Failure: If the diabolist suffers a critical failure in casting this spell, the image haunts the diabolist, instead of appearing to the victim.

Career Packages

Gamemasters who wish to center their DARK•MATTER campaign around cult activity and the Final Church may allow players to choose from the following career packages.

Reformed Cultist (Combat Spec)

Having joined a cult for some reason earlier in her life, the hero quickly realized the tremendous mistake she was making and fled for her life. The cult objected. Now the hero fights both to protect herself, and to liberate other cultist recruits before they are forever lost.

The reformed cultist learns one way to fight the cult, and sticks with it. Rarely will she pick up new skills, instead increasing her combat skills. The notable exceptions are Investigate and Stealth,

which allow the hero to track down cult activity, and quietly move in to deal with it in the customary loud fashion. Eventually *conspiracy lore* will come in handy,

as will *mental resolve*, but for now, the hero is all about the most direct and permanent way of dealing with the Final Church: violence.

Signature

Equipment: 9mm pistol, shotgun, battle vest, flashlight.

Skill Package:

Melee—*blade*; Unarmed—*brawl*; Modern—*pistol, rifle*; Survival; Interaction—*intimidate*. Cost: 31

points.

Suggested Perks: Cult Abuse Survivor, Danger Sense, Willpower.

Suggested Flaws: Criminal Record, Obsessed, Temper.

Exorcist (Diplomat-Free Agent)

Every major religion that believes in the existence of demons understands that sometimes those demons get inside mortals, inflicting untold suffering. When that occurs, someone with knowledge like a sword and faith like a shield must step in to perform an exorcism.

While Stamina—*endurance* and Knowledge—*first aid* are necessary to such a hero, he will also find that Investigate—*research* is vital to understand the nature of his opponent. Similarly, Medical Science—*psychology*



could help the hero detect real cases of demonic possession, as opposed to simple mental illness. And a rank or two in Leadership–*inspire* couldn't hurt to reassure the victim's family that victory is just around the corner.

But the exorcist's true strength lies in his knowledge of Faith FX. The exorcist will want to acquire *blessing* and *demon ward* as soon as possible, and *guidance* is always useful for seeing the real causes behind apparent problems.

Signature Equipment: Religious vestments and paraphernalia, book of prayers.

Skill Package: Knowledge–*language* (*Latin, Hebrew, or similar*); Lore–*occult*; Resolve–*mental*; Monotheism–*exorcism*. Cost: 33 points.

Suggested Perks: Faith, Networked, Powerful Ally.

Suggested Flaws: Code of Honor, Slow.

Survivor (Free Agent)

Sometime in his youth, this hero was victimized by a cult, though never fully indoctrinated. Armed now with first-hand knowledge of how cults recruit and abuse members, the hero dedicates her life to giving other victims the same chance she got: escape.

Cult survivor heroes should quickly acquire *mental resolve* and *pistol* skills to round out their starting skill package. Afterward, Deception and Street Smart will prove useful when the hero begins liberating other cult victims. Finally, *first aid* will help the hero protect not only herself, but also those she rescues. Having Survival will enable the hero to exist for extended periods without leaving a paper trail the cult might follow.

Signature Equipment: .38 pistol, binoculars, safe house.

Skill Package: Modern Ranged Weapons; Stamina–*resist pain*; Law; Investigate–*track*; Lore; Resolve. Cost: 33 points.

Suggested Perks: Cult Abuse Survivor, Hidden Identity, Observant.

Suggested Flaws: Abductee, Phobia, Powerful Enemy, Rebellious.

Harrower (Free Agent)

Not everyone who knows the secrets of diabolic magic turns to evil. Some use their knowledge to fight the influence of demons—or to protect dabblers who learn more than they truly understand.

A harrower keeps a constant vigil for demonic activity, and must be ready to deal with it at a moment's notice.

Acquiring Investigate–*research* and *interrogate* should be high priorities, as should increasing ranks in *mental resolve*. But the harrower will be most useful if he acquires more diabolic magic spells, particularly *rend the weave* and *binding*. Stamina–*endurance* is a good place to spend extra skill points at character creation. And if the hero relies on wits and contacts, Street Smart and Deception might also be good starting choices.

Signature Equipment: Trench coat, business suit, suitcase full of paraphernalia, volumes of occult lore, packet of silk-cut cigarettes.

Skill Package: Knowledge–*language* (*Latin or Greek*); Lore–*occult*; Resolve–*mental*; Diabolism–*spiritwrack*. Cost: 32 points.

Suggested Perks: Second Sight, Reputation, Well Traveled.

Suggested Flaws: Criminal Record, Dilettante, Rebellious.

Cult Cop (Free Agent)

As police begin investigating possible cult crimes, they begin to learn of the vast network of evil looming on all sides. Many choose to live in denial of this menace, but a few begin the arduous process of educating as many other people as possible.

The cult cop has learned of the existence of the big conspiracy, and now she seeks to prove that it truly exists. By the time she is done, she will need to pick up more specialty skills, including Knowledge–*deduce*, Investigate–*interrogate* and *track*, Lore–*occult*, and Interaction–*intimide*. But certainly ranks in Modern–*pistol* and *rifle* will serve the hero well when she finally confronts her nemeses, as will Stamina–*endurance* and Knowledge–*first aid*.

Signature Equipment: .38 pistol, badge, unmarked police car, volumes of cult activity research.

Skill Package: Modern Ranged Weapon; Law–*enforcement*; Investigate–*research*; Lore–*conspiracy*; Street Smart; Interaction–*interview*. Cost: 34 points.

Suggested Perks: Celebrity, Networked, Powerful Ally.

Suggested Flaws: Code of Honor, Powerful Enemy, Rampant Paranoia.



Chapter 4: Web of Evil

Adventure Requirements

As Gamemaster, you need a copy of the *DARK•MATTER Campaign Book* and the *ALTERNITY Player's Handbook* to run this adventure. This should not be the first adventure the heroes have together, though they don't need to be terribly experienced. The adventure is written for 6–8 heroes between third and fifth level. If you run the entire adventure for a few hours once a week, it will probably take between six and eight weeks to complete.

Background

Over the last half-century, the Hoffmann Institute has become increasingly aware of the existence of the Final Church. At first, they only recognized that various cults had nebulous connections. Then, they realized that some cults were subordinate to others. Finally, the Institute's analysts theorized that there might be a single "master" cult.

The Institute decided to try to infiltrate this cult, but the progress has been glacially slow. Some Hoffmann deep cover agents have turned up dead. Others have simply vanished, eventually declared dead by the Institute. Contact with remaining agents is rare for security reasons, and the Institute uses a series of codes to keep their personnel files from falling into the wrong hands.

Plot Overview

The heroes receive a desperate telephone call from Ben Hearst, a Hoffmann Institute agent missing and presumed dead for several years. When they pick him up, they find that he's in a state resembling shock. The Hoffmann Institute tells the heroes that Hearst had been investigating a demonic cult called the "Temple of Ashes" when they lost contact with him years ago. Now they want the heroes to find out what he was working on.

The heroes trace Hearst's movements backward, eventually arriving at a chemical waste storage facility, where they discover a bivouac of cultists. After this encounter, they discover that the cultists had several children held

hostage in a truck nearby, and that the truck got away, heading north.

Tracking the truck to Macon, Georgia, the heroes begin to uncover evidence of a child-abduction ring orchestrated by the Temple of Ashes cult. The trail leads to an abandoned wing of a children's hospital, where the heroes have a chance to stop the sacrifice of several children.

Interviewing the children tells the heroes that the ritual involved computers. When the heroes investigate, they learn that the cultists switched targets, taking several hostages at a daycare center. The heroes have one last chance to stop them before the cultists force the children into completing a complex ritual that will unleash the greater demon Baal-phegor on the world.

Getting the Heroes Started

The heroes need to know each other before the adventure begins. Perhaps they have undertaken a mission or two together. They also need to be reasonably certain they can trust each other, since they will meet many people on this mission who they cannot trust.

This adventure assumes that the heroes are agents of the Hoffmann Institute, but this need not be the case. In most situations, the Gamemaster can substitute the appropriate organization name if the heroes work outside the Institute.

Or, if the heroes are a mix of Hoffmann agents and members of another organization, the Hoffmann heroes could be consultants or advisors for the non-Hoffmann heroes, who ask their associates for help in the situation.

Keeping the Heroes Going

Hoffmann Institute agents (or agents of any organization) have a wonderful resource in their superiors—for example, Hoffmann Field Director Calvin Jones, and Department Chief John Randall. In addition to supplying background information, additional equipment, and personnel, these two men also offer advice to the heroes on what leads to follow, and what steps to take next.

Discourage the players from letting Jones and Randall become the remote controls for their characters. Their

superiors take a dim view of the agents who don't at least try to think for themselves. To keep the players from letting the supporting cast do all the work, follow these guidelines:

Jones and Randall only call the heroes if the heroes have been out of touch for more than 24 hours. Otherwise, the heroes must call them.

Jones and Randall ask the heroes what their leads are, and what the heroes think they should do next, rather than suggesting a course of action.

Jones and Randall only dissuade the heroes from an unproductive lead (one that's only tangential to the actual adventure) if it seems time-consuming or dangerous.

If the heroes are completely stuck, Jones and Randall talk through the situation with them, making sure the players didn't miss any important clues. In this fashion, they might suggest taking another look at a crime scene, or interviewing a witness again in order to look for specific clues. Jones and Randall need not always be right about these clues, though! They are the voice of experience, but they are just as much in the dark on this case as the heroes.

Most importantly, Jones and Randall always congratulate and compliment the heroes for good work—especially good detective work. If the Gamemaster delivers this praise without breaking character, the players can feel that they personally are doing a good job. Positive reinforcement works wonders.

Setting the Adventure

While this adventure uses the southeastern United States as a setting, these events can be placed anywhere. The description of each location gives an idea how large any given community will be, and the Gamemaster can use this information to make substitutions appropriate to his or her own campaign.

Supporting Cast

Ben Hearst

Hoffmann Institute Deep-Cover Agent

Level 10 human Free Agent

STR	11	[+1]	INT	9	[0]
DEX	11	[+1]	WIL	10	[0]
CON	10		PER	9	

Durability: 10/10/5/5 Action Check: 13+/12/6/3
Move: sprint 22, run 14, walk 4 #Actions: 2
Reaction Score: Ordinary/2 Last Resorts: 2
Perks: Great Looks, Hidden Identity, Networked
Flaws: Divided Loyalty (Hoffmann Institute/Temple of Ashes)

Attacks

Unarmed 13/6/3 d6+1s/d6+3s/d4+1w LI/O

Defenses

Armor: none

Skills

Athletics [11]–*climb* [12], *jump* [12]; Melee [11]–*blade* [13]; Unarmed [11]–*power martial arts* [13]; Stamina [10]–*endurance* [12]; Modern [11]–*pistol* [12]; Stealth [11]; Vehicle Op [11]–*land (motorcycle)* [12]; Knowledge [9]; Tactics [9]; Awareness [10]–*intuition* [11]; Investigate [10]–*search* [11]; Lore [11]–*conspiracy* [13], *occult* [12]; Resolve [10]–*mental* [14]; Street Smart [10]–*criminal* [12]; Deception [9]–*bluff* [12]; Interaction [9]–*charm* [11], *intimidate* [11].

Assigned to infiltrate a cult of diabolic murderers, Hoffmann Institute agent Ben Hearst is in too deep with his assignment. He is now a loyal member of the cult, a major figure in the Temple of Ashes.

Hearst lost contact with the Hoffmann Institute eight years ago, and was presumed dead six years ago. In reality, he was so deeply enmeshed in the cult that he couldn't report to the Hoffmann Institute without blowing his cover.

Over the years, the cult became Hearst's life. He partook in the kidnappings, murders, and sacrifices like any other member. If he pursued his infiltration goals at all, it was out of habit, rather than purpose.

Eventually, Ben Hearst met Janet Fisher, the diabolist behind the plot to summon the greater demon Baal-phegor and set him loose upon the Internet. For reasons known only to him, Hearst confided in Fisher that he had joined the cult as a Hoffmann deep-cover agent. But rather than executing him—as would be standard procedure—Fisher made him part of her plans.

Hearst's job was to bring more Hoffmann agents to the cult, to feed the investigators' knowledge about the Hoffmann Institute to Baal-phegor. Fisher worked with Hearst to build up his mental defenses—after all, the plan would fall apart if a Hoffmann Institute psi agent read his mind and discovered what he had planned. Then



Hearst created a trail designed to lead agents right to the final ceremony—but without letting them know they were being led.

Telephoning the nearest Hoffmann Institute branch office sets the plan in motion.

John Randall

Hoffmann Institute Field Director

Level 14 human Diplomat (Free Agent)

STR	7	[0]	INT	13	[+2]
DEX	9	[0]	WIL	11	[+1]
CON	10		PER	11	

Durability: 10/10/5/5 Action Check: 13+/12/6/3
 Move: sprint 16, run 10, walk 4 #Actions: 2
 Reaction Score: Ordinary/2 Last Resorts: 2
 Perks: Networked, Photo Memory, Well Traveled
 Flaws: Code of Honor (never betray an agent), Powerful Enemy (Final Church, +6)

Attacks

Unarmed	3/1/0	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI/O
9mm pistol	10/5/2	d4+1w/d4+2w/d4m	HI/O

Defenses

+2 INT resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
 +1 WIL resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
 Armor: none

Skills

Athletics [7]; Stamina [10]—*endurance* [11], *resist pain* [11]; Modern [9]—*pistol* [10]; Vehicle Op [9]; Business [13]; Knowledge [13]—*computer op* [14], *deduce* [16], *first aid* [14], *language (Latin)* [16]; Law [13]; Medical Science [13]; Navigation [13]; Security [13]—*protocols* [15]; Social Science [13]—*history* [14]; Systems Operation [13]—*communications* [14], *sensors* [14]; Tactics [13]; Technical Science [13]; Administration [11]—*management* [12]; Awareness [11]—*intuition* [12], *perception* [12]; Investigate [11]—*research* [13], *track* [14]; Lore [11]—*conspiracy* [15], *occult* [14]; Resolve [11]—*mental* [13], *physical* [12]; Street Smart [11]; Teach [11]—*free agent* [14]; Deception [11]—*bluff* [13], *bribe* [12]; Interaction [11]—*bargain* [12], *interview* [12]; Leadership [11].

Gear

9mm pistol, scrambled cellular telephone, notebook computer, car

Contacts

Computer hacker
 Mob boss
 Rosicrucian scholar

Intelligence Department Chief John Randall feels personally responsible for all of his deep cover agents—his “kids.” When he learns that Ben Hearst is still alive, he is thrilled. But he’s not so thrilled that he takes an undercover agent’s miraculous return for granted.

Randall is slightly more interested in gathering intelligence than he is in the welfare of his agents. He rationalizes this by telling himself that if the information weren’t more important than any single agent’s life, then the Institute wouldn’t use human beings to gather intelligence. But Randall has seen so many of his kids turn up dead over the years—or worse, simply disappear—that he holds himself personally responsible when an agent dies (which explains why it takes him so long to declare missing agents dead).

Randall pursued demonic cults even before he became a field director for the Intelligence Division, and his devotion to the safety of his agents helped win him his current position as Department Chief. He is one of the Institute’s leading authorities on the Final Church, and he wrote a great deal of the Institute’s file.

Janet Fisher

Cult Diabolist

Level 17 human Free Agent

STR	7	[0]	INT	11	[+1]
DEX	11	[+1]	WIL	13	[+2]
CON	8		PER	11	

Durability: 8/8/4/4 Action Check: 14+/13/6/3
 Move: sprint 18, run 12, walk 4 #Actions: 2
 Reaction Score: Ordinary/2 Last Resorts: 2
 Perks: Faith, Hidden Identity, Well Traveled
 Flaws: Delicate, Obsessed (completing equation, +4)
 FX Energy Points: 10

Attacks

Unarmed	3/1/0	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI/O
Hellfire	14/7/3	d4+1w/d6+1w/d4m	En/O

Defenses

+1 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
 +2 INT resistance modifier vs. encounter skills

+1 WIL resistance modifier vs. encounter skills

Armor: none

Skills

Stamina [8]–*endurance* [9]; Vehicle Op [11]; Computer Science [11]–*programming* [17]; Knowledge [11]–*deduce* [12], *first aid* [12], *language (Farsi)* [14]; Social Science [11]–*anthropology* [13], *history* [12], *linguistics* [13]; Awareness [13]–*perception* [14]; Investigate [13]–*interrogate* [14], *research* [15]; Lore [13]–*conspiracy* [16], *occult* [16]; Deception [11]–*bluff* [13]; Interaction [11]–*bargain* [12], *intimidate* [12]; Leadership [11]–*command* [13], *inspire* [12].

FX Skills

Arcane Magic (Diabolism)–*binding* [13], *command* [13], *hellfire* [14], *muddle* [12], *phantasms* [14], *summoning* [14], *tongue of the damned* [12], *trail of dust* [14].

Gear

Cult paraphernalia, computer equipment

Abducted by cultists as a child, Janet Fisher is still carrying out the programming they inflicted on her over twenty years ago, half a world away. In some ways, she is thoroughly insane. In others, she is chillingly malevolent. A terrible mix of the two describes her true personality.

Janet Fisher was originally named Saffiyyah, and she grew up in an orphanage in Iran. Just before the Shah fell in 1978, Saffiyyah and a number of her fellow orphans were abducted late at night by members of a radical Sunni splinter group, and taken far out into the desert to a hidden cave. There, she and the other orphans were given mathematical equations to solve. Before they could finish, an anti-terrorist commando group (members of the Hoffmann Institute's enigmatic White Section) rescued the children, and destroyed the cave—with the kidnappers still inside.

Saffiyyah was taken to another orphanage, where she came to the attention of an American couple, Mike and Carol Carter. The Carters adopted young Saffiyyah, taking her home to the United States mere days before the Ayatollah Khomeini seized power in Iran.

Saffiyyah arrived in the U.S. just in time to jump into the computer revolution. Her foster parents were amazed and delighted at how she took to mathematics and programming, and Saffiyyah's grades gave her a choice of the best universities. If the Carters noticed that her interest was more of an obsession, they never spoke to anyone of it.

As a graduation present, the Carters gave Saffiyyah a vacation to Iran. Saffiyyah jumped at the chance to see

her homeland again. But shortly after she returned, her foster parents were brutally murdered. Saffiyyah's shock at the sight was almost certainly an act—though of course she had an airtight alibi—because it wasn't long after her parents died that Saffiyyah took her inheritance and vanished.

A few years later she resurfaced as computer programmer Janet Wilson, fiancée to trucking company owner Ken Fisher. During that time, Janet had joined the Temple of Ashes cult, and with the arcane knowledge she brought back from her homeland—specifically, from the mysterious cave where she had been held as a child—she quickly rose to control the cult.

By the time of her sham marriage to Ken Fisher, Janet was already well into designing the occult ritual program that would let her finish the equation she began as a child in Iran. Meeting Ben Hearst was a fortunate coincidence, as part of the bargain she had struck with Baal-phegor involved revenge on the Hoffmann Institute for its interference in the greater demon's last attempt at physical manifestation. Hearst would bring Hoffmann agents just in time for the completion of the ritual, and Baal-phegor would feast upon their minds, using their knowledge to engineer the downfall of Dr. Nakami's organization.

Of course, the plan is for the Hoffmann Institute to arrive too late to stop the ritual, but just in time to die. To Janet Fisher's mind, the heroes arriving too early is the only risk in an otherwise airtight plan.

Act I: The Spider Waits

Read this aloud to the players:

It's the end of the day, and everyone is preparing to leave the office to go home, or to his or her mundane job. Some of you are standing around discussing dinner plans, others checking their e-mail or logging reports. As this is going on, the office telephone rings.

Is anyone going to pick it up? Or will you let the answering machine take it?



Scene 1: In From the Cold

LOCATION: Hoffmann Institute Branch Office, Miami, Florida.

When someone answers the telephone, even if it's only the machine, a man's voice says frantically, *"Hello? Listen, this is Hearst! Red Baron eight one eight! I need extraction—now!"* In the background, a truck can be heard passing by, implying that the caller is somewhere near a highway.

Someone should definitely pick up the telephone now. The obvious question the heroes should have for this person is who he is, and what kind of trouble he's in. Regardless what they ask, he responds. *"I'm Hearst! Benjamin D. ! Look, just punch it into your computer! Red Baron eight one eight! Come on, hurry! I'm in Picnic!"* No matter what the characters say next, Hearst's next words are, *"Oh, please don't tell me I got the wrong num—"* Then there's a click, and the telephone goes dead.

The conversation and the noises in the background give the heroes a great deal of information about Hearst, and where he is—if the heroes know where to look. The clues are listed below:

Hearst, Benjamin D.: Entering this name into the Hoffmann Institute personnel database brings up a blank record, with no picture where the photo ID should be. The middle of the "History" section is a blank data field with a blinking cursor; it's waiting for the heroes to enter a password. The heroes realize instantly that this is unusual for the Institute, since none of their own personnel records require a password to read (beyond the usual system access password). If anyone thinks to enter (REDBARON818) in the data field, Hearst's official record comes up, along with a photo. Give the players handout we-1.

The two case files referenced under the Five-Pointed Star Cult and the Temple of Ashes cult are classified "Top Secret," and require passcodes and retinal scans to access. The heroes do not have the passcode.

The Hoffmann Institute: If the heroes contact their superiors in the Hoffmann Institute, they speak to their Field Director, Calvin Jones. Jones first determines that the line is secure (which it is, unless the characters are calling on a cellular phone). Then he wants to know exactly what Hearst said, where he was, and if he sounded strange. If they like, the heroes can replay the conversation for Jones, since it's standard practice to record all calls coming into the office.

"As soon as you know where Hearst is, go get him," Jones says. "I'll try to arrange backup for you, but this is a priori-

ty situation. He may be in danger. In fact, I suggest going armed to the teeth."

If the heroes ask for more information, Jones promises to give them more after they verify that it's really Hearst. *"This is 'eyes-only' material," he says. "Try to get him into custody and call me back after you have him. I'll have his former case operator on the line."*

If the heroes point out that they're not sure where Hearst is, Jones suggests following some of the clues listed here.

Picnic: Hearst mentioned "Picnic" on the telephone. If the heroes think to check this as a place name, they can find a "Picnic, Florida" on the map, about half an hour southeast of Tampa.

Caller ID: Since the Hoffmann Institute is keen on knowing who calls their offices, and from where, the heroes' telephone has a "Caller ID" feature, which tells them that the call came from a pay phone, and the number of that telephone, though not the location. That can be obtained from the telephone company by hacking the phone company's computer system, employing an appropriate PER-based skill with the telephone company—or just by asking the operator. The information from the telephone company is that the pay phone booth is located in Picnic, Florida, near a filling station.

Highway: Whoever spoke to Hearst definitely heard a large truck passing by, close to the telephone at the other end. This fact isn't immediately useful, though the heroes might later use it to verify that Hearst actually used the pay phone in question.

Background Noises: Since the Hoffmann Institute tends to record incoming calls on public lines, the heroes can attempt an Awareness-*perception* check to listen for background noises. If the check is successful, he or she will realize that they heard the sound of a filling station bell (*"ding-ding"*) just before Hearst's last sentence.

For the Gamemaster Only: Hoffmann Institute deep-cover agent Ben Hearst has seemingly broken his cover to contact the Institute again. But when the heroes arrive to bring him safely home, they discover that his mind appears to have been effectively erased. The Hoffmann Institute wants the heroes to try to find out what happened to him, and what happened that caused him to break his cover.

HANDOUT WE-1 — RED BARON 818

Hoffmann Institute Personnel File

CLASSIFIED — SECRET

Hearst, Benjamin Donald

DOB: 3-14-1969

Caucasian male, 6'1", 195 lbs., Hair: Brn, Eyes: Brn

Asset No. 91-HEA0317-M

1991: Graduated Olivet Nazarene University,
Bourbonnais, IL (History)

1992: Postgraduate Studies Program (Political Science)

1992: September—First Contact—Five-Pointed Star Cult
Case File OI-18A25-11217

1993: January—First Contact—Hoffmann Institute—
Investigation into disappearance/abduction-murder
of classmate

1993: February—Indoctrination—Chicago

1993: March—Orientation Course completed

1993: April—Assigned to deep cover operation: Temple
of Ashes Cult

Case File OI-18A25-20090

1994: June—Final Report

1996: January—Missing, Presumed Dead



HANDOUT WE-2

Dossier: Temple of Ashes—Summary

Formed in December 1961 as an alternative religion center, the "Temple Ashram" promoted "free love" and "expanded perceptions." The cult was apparently subverted by diabolist elements in the early 70s. Their activities took on a darker tone in 1971, when several key members were arrested for the kidnapping, torture, and murder of a high school cheerleader.

The cult seemed to vanish, but its remaining members surfaced in 1978 as the founders of the "Temple of Ashes." The Temple remains highly mobile, establishing temporary centers in various cities before being forced out by law enforcement. The Hoffmann Institute has extensive files on crimes linked to the cult, including animal mutilation, arson, kidnapping, murder, rape, spree killing, and white slavery operations. They have no standard modus operandi.

The cult's membership has changed multiple times since the Institute investigation began in 1990. No consistent list of members is available, but a list of suspected associates is attached.

Case File OI-18A25-20090

Deep-Cover Operation: Temple of Ashes—Summary

Benjamin Hearst already had experience with cult crime from a college encounter with the "Five-Pointed Star" cult. His own investigation of the death of a friend brought him into contact with Hoffmann agents, who invited him to join the Institute. Hearst agreed, and after his orientation period, he was assigned to the Intelligence Division, where he immediately began investigating cult activity.

Working undercover, Hearst joined the Temple of Ashes. His reports make up the bulk of the Institute's intelligence on the cult. In late 1993, Department Chief Randall gave Hearst permission to explore a possible connection to a ring of cults operating in the United States. The Institute lost contact with Hearst in July of 1994, and declared him dead in early 1996. Case File OI-12A25-20090

Picking Up Hearst

LOCATION: Picnic, Florida

Once the heroes have deduced where to look for Hearst, they have a bit of a drive ahead of them. He's roughly 250 km away, in the small town of Picnic—about a three-hour drive from Miami. They can use this time to do more research—speaking with contacts, or using cellular modems to look up records on the Internet.

When the heroes arrive, Hearst isn't difficult to spot: flashing emergency lights lead the heroes right to an ambulance and a sheriff's patrol car. Two paramedics are examining an athletic bald man (Hearst), who is rocking back and forth rapidly, apparently catatonic. The town sheriff looks on, occasionally speaking to someone on his car radio. He casually intercepts the heroes as they approach.

The sheriff, Glenn Miller, isn't particularly suspicious of the heroes unless they are behaving suspiciously, in which case he will simply ask, "Can I help you with something, there?" He doesn't like to draw his pistol, and would frankly like to just go back home and finish his dinner. If the heroes ask about the bald man, Sheriff Miller tells them that he answered a report of a prowler, and found this nearly naked man huddled in a kid's treehouse. Though he was rocking back and forth crooning to himself, and didn't respond to questions, he came down from the treehouse easily enough. The sheriff found "assorted junk" in the man's pockets, but no identification.

Sheriff Miller is actually quite pleased with the heroes if they can identify Hearst—which they can, if they have his photo from the Institute's files. The paramedics, Karen and Curtis, are willing to let the heroes try to talk to Hearst, but his health is their concern, and they won't let the heroes attempt any medical procedures—unless the hero has a license to practice medicine in the state of Florida. They have already dressed a number of small cuts and scrapes (Hearst looks like he's been skateboarding in gravel), and are planning to take him on to the hospital at Sun City Center, about 50 km away, at the sheriff's request. Sheriff Miller doesn't want to lock Hearst up in the sheriff's office, since he'd then have to stay all night to make sure Hearst didn't hurt himself.

Karen and Curtis aren't particularly required to take Hearst to the hospital, but they won't just hand him over to the heroes. The heroes need to use encounter skills to convince Karen and Curtis to release Hearst, but their checks receive a +2 step penalty if the heroes are behaving strangely. (Note that showing Sheriff Miller, Karen, or

Curtis a printout of Hearst's personnel file is a violation of Institute policy.)

The Hoffmann Institute's advice, if the heroes check, is to let the paramedics take Hearst to the hospital—but make sure they can trust the paramedics, first. In any event, Field Director Jones wants one of the heroes armed and riding in the ambulance with Hearst. He doesn't care if the paramedics object, and the heroes are authorized to make up whatever story they like to ensure their cooperation.

Gathering Information

The heroes might try several possible avenues to gather information. The Gamemaster can also use these as a guide for other tactics the heroes might try.

Interviewing Hearst: Hearst rocks back and forth, moans softly, and is basically unresponsive. However, persistent or indelicate attempts to ask him where he's been for the last seven years, and what happened to him, cause him to curl up into a ball and scream helplessly until he is sedated.

Examining Hearst: Aside from simple medical treatment, the heroes might want to know more about Hearst's physical condition. Other than cuts and scrapes,



Hearst is in fine physical shape, with no sign of physical trauma, drugs, or alcohol. There is no medical reason why his mind would have snapped.

Evidence: One of the first things Sheriff Miller did was frisk Hearst, and the contents of his pockets are in a small plastic bag on the sheriff's front seat. If the heroes don't think to ask about such things, they'll see the stuff when Miller hands it over to the paramedics.

Hearst had the following items in his pockets: a silver "inverted cross" pendant, two dimes, three pennies, and a cocktail napkin with a doodle of a parrot from "Happy's Place," in Berry, Florida. Miller tells the heroes that the change was wrapped up in the napkin, apparently in lieu of a wallet.

Psionics and FX: These abilities can tell the heroes a little about Hearst—especially his recent past. Most FX auguries are designed to peek into the future, however, and the Gamemaster must decide what the heroes learn based on which spell they use. Attempts to read Hearst's mind pick up only a single thought, repeated endlessly: "Keep going . . . keep going"

Using ESP-*postcognition* in the vicinity of the treehouse will show Hearst climbing into the treehouse in a panic, and huddling in a corner (where Sheriff Miller eventually appears). If the heroes find the telephone booth from which Hearst called their office, the most that postcognition can show them is his side of the call: his furtive approach, his urgent demeanor during the conversation, his reaction to the sound of the filling station's bell, and his sudden departure at the end of the call. Though postcognition can show the heroes which direction Hearst went, it cannot show them where to try postcognition again; that must be a trial and error process, if the heroes wish to spend the psionic energy points.

The Hoffmann Institute: Once the heroes either have Hearst or at least know where he is, they may want to call the Institute. Field Director Jones introduces them to Intelligence Department Chief John Randall, the man to whom Hearst last reported seven years ago. Randall tells the heroes, "*Ben got us pretty far inside the Temple of Ashes, but he suspected there was another cult calling the shots. He was going to look for the connection when we lost him. If he found it, we need to know what he knows.*"

Randall regrets that the sensitive nature of the deep-cover investigations into cult activities means that he cannot give the heroes full dossiers of the agents involved. He does e-mail a number of file summaries to the heroes, or, if they don't have a computer, he gives

them the highlights over the telephone. In the former case, give the players Handout we-2; in the latter, you might want to only read it to them.

Where to Go From Here?

The Institute is extremely interested in getting Hearst back, and considers that a high priority—but they don't need the heroes to personally deliver Hearst. They'll send agents to pick him up (though they do want the heroes to provide security until the agents arrive).

More importantly, they want to know why Hearst suddenly reappeared and contacted the Institute. What was so urgent that he broke a seven-year silence to tell the Institute? Was he in danger of being discovered? Or did he learn something the Institute needed to know right away?

Randall and Jones tell the heroes to follow up on their leads (pointing out any listed above that the heroes might have missed). "*It all might be a dead end, but we need to know for certain,*" Randall says. "*If you think you'll need any special gear, now's the time to say so. If any of you don't have scrambled cell phones, start there. Remember, this is a sensitive case. We still have agents on the inside, and some of them may have been compromised. Don't get any of my people killed.*"

If the heroes have looked at all the evidence and still don't know where to go, Randall suggests that they check out the bar where the napkin came from.

Scene 2: Trail of Blood

LOCATION: Happy's Place. Berry, Florida.

For the Gamemaster Only: About a month ago, members of the Temple of Ashes cult—including Ben Hearst—visited Berry, Florida in order to spread mayhem. When they left, they took a young waitress with them, and sacrificed her shortly thereafter.

By this point, the heroes should be reasonably convinced that the investigation isn't in Picnic. The logical lead is the cocktail napkin from Happy's Place, in Berry, Florida.

Berry has a population of roughly four thousand people. It is located about 65 kilometers from Walt Disney World, and most of the town's teenagers work at the theme park. Everyone else either makes their living in



nearby factories, or in the swamp that mostly surrounds the town. The town is so small that it has no sheriff of its own, instead sharing a deputy (Ed Locke) with the nearby town of Eva.

Showing Hearst's picture around town makes a few people raise their eyebrows, especially if the heroes say that Hearst is a friend. Everyone in town remembers him (*Him and those damn bikers!*) from about a month before, and how Lorene, the waitress at the local tavern (Happy's Place), ran off with him when the bikers left.

The heroes can learn about the bikers piecemeal, picking up one rumor (listed under "The Bikers") from each person they interview, or they can go directly to Happy's Place to get the full story (and a dissenting opinion).

Happy's Place

Heroes who want more information eventually have must talk to Earl Smiley, since everyone recognizes him as the authority on the bikers' behavior; they were in his tavern every night, after all. Happy's Place is actually little more than a converted filling station, just big enough for a short bar, a few tables, a battered pinball machine, and a beer-stained billiard table.

The restrooms around the back have flimsy doors and flimsier locks, and are frequently haunted by rats. The men's room currently hosts a huge brown recluse spider, sitting on the toilet plumbing. It scuttles into a crack in the wall behind the toilet when anyone moves toward it.

There is a single customer in Happy's Place when the heroes arrive: Jack Foster, Lorene's father. Jack is in his mid-50s, though he looks much older. He wears his salt-and-pepper hair in an unkempt ducktail, and his bushy mustache is long and full of crumbs. He is a little drunk, lamenting the loss of both his daughter and his job at the nearby canning factory.

Earl Smiley (*"It's called Happy's because I don't really smile."*) is currently the only employee of the tavern. While about the same age as Jack Foster, Earl is a man who's seen a lot of hard times, and has only gotten tougher. He is muscular with a significant paunch hanging over his filthy bartender's apron. He wears his hair in a military crew cut. He sizes up the heroes as soon as they walk in the door, and adjusts the sawed-off shotgun he keeps under the bar. He's kept it there since the bikers arrived, though he's loathe to shoot anyone with it. Mostly, it's meant to get attention when things get out of hand.

Smiley is actually happy to talk about Hearst, the bikers, or Lorene Foster. But if the heroes claim to be friends of Hearst or the bikers, or just annoy Smiley, his attitude

becomes Neutral, and the heroes must use an encounter skill to shift his attitude back to Friendly or better before he will answer any more questions.

On the other hand, any talk of Lorene or the bikers, will get Jack talking about how they drugged his little girl (she was 20 years old) and sacrificed her and dumped her body in the swamp. He's more bitter than upset, however. He and his daughter never particularly got along, and since she packed a suitcase when she left, he's not entirely sure she didn't just leave to get away from him. Blaming the bikers, for Foster, is a way of denying that his daughter was unhappy with him.

Interviewing Jack Foster is actually a good way to get Smiley to open up, if he hasn't already, because he irritably pokes holes in Foster's drunken ramblings about the bikers and his daughter. In response to Foster's answers, Smiley offers a counter-explanation (as described below).

The Bikers

Everyone in town knows that a motorcycle gang of about forty men and women (*"Dirty, smelly, and foul-mouthed—even the women"*) started showing up in town about six weeks ago. Mostly, they wore biker leathers with no particular gang colors, and called each other by a variety of lewd or meaningless names (*"Red," "Grunt-face," "Skinny,"* and so on). A few had curious tattoos (some that Smiley will say were prison tattoos) but nothing that would particularly stand out.

Nobody knows where they stayed, but everyone assumes they were camped out in the swamp somewhere. Shortly after they arrived, all manner of strange goings-on started up. When they left, Lorene Foster, the waitress at Happy's Place, went with them, apparently headed north.

The best source of real answers about the bikers is Earl Smiley, the owner of Happy's Place. He knows all the rumors circulating through Berry (whereas the other residents of Berry know only one or two). The rumors are listed below. Each bullet point has three parts. The common rumor comes first, Smiley's version is in italics, and the truth is in brackets.

- The bikers were Satanists. *They were definitely criminals, but I don't know anything about any cult connections.* [They were demon worshipers, but not actual Satanists.]
- The bald guy was the leader. *Hearst was the "spokesman" for the bikers, but he pretty much let them do whatever they wanted.* [Hearst was in charge of the bikers.]

- The bikers were making human sacrifices at their camp, then dumping the bodies in the swamp. *I guess they could have been doing that stuff. Anything could go on in the swamp, and no one would ever know.* [The bikers murdered an elderly couple and their teenage grandchildren at their camp, and tossed the remains into the swamp. They never actually abducted anyone from Berry though.]
- Pets started disappearing, or were found cruelly mutilated. People remember some of the bikers wearing the fur of cats and dogs on their clothing, or attached to their motorcycles. *What? Nobody can prove any of that hooey. Name one pet that came up missing while they were here.* [The bikers never touched any pets. The only fur on their gear was the fur of wild animals.]
- A couple of local kids saw the bikers put a young boy from Eva in a van, and drive off with him. Parents in both towns afterward remembered seeing the bikers talking to kids, or watching them at the grocery store, or at school. *I've got lot of customers from Eva, and if a little boy had disappeared, I would have heard about it.* [The bikers were checking out the local kids, but never actually abducted any.]
- The sheriff's deputy never arrested any of the bikers, despite all of their crimes, because he's a Satanist himself. *Deputy Locke is not a Satanist! Where do people get these ideas? He arrested a few of the bikers for vandalizing a Coke machine in Eva.* [The deputy never arrested any of the bikers, because there was no evidence of a serious crime.]
- After Lorene Foster disappeared, the FBI found her eyes in a Coke bottle in a convenience store in Orlando. *That's ridiculous. (Smiley actually does believe that Lorene might be dead, but he doesn't say this in front of Lorene's father.)* [Lorene's body has been found in Alabama, but it hasn't been identified yet.]

Lorene Foster

When the subject of Lorene Foster comes up, Smiley looks sadly at a Polaroid photo pinned to the mirror behind the bar. *"Best waitress I ever had. I told her to steer clear of that bald guy."* The story is straightforward: every night the bikers would come in, and the bald guy, Hearst, would hit on Lorene. He would doodle pictures of her, whisper in her ear, and so on. *"The night before they rolled out of town, she took off with him somewhere, right in the middle of her shift. Next day, she packed up and left when he did. No notice, no note, no nothing."*

Actually, when Lorene left the tavern, she went to her place with Hearst, where he finally convinced her to pack

her things and come with him. She was only with the bikers for a few days before she was murdered by the cult.

If the heroes ask to see the photo behind the bar, Smiley hands it to them. Anyone who looks at the photo—and has seen the cocktail napkin with the parrot drawing—may attempt an Awareness-*perception* check with a -2 step bonus to notice that the sketch matches a tattoo on Lorene Foster's shoulder. (Smiley will let the heroes take the picture with them if he currently has a positive attitude toward them.)

Before the heroes leave the tavern, Jack Foster approaches them one last time. *"If you can find my daughter, tell her I'm sorry. Tell her to come home. I promise I'll make things alright again."*

He keeps up in this vein until Smiley steers him back to his table. Smiley quietly asks the heroes, *"Tell me the truth. Do you really think she's still alive? Or is she just some Jane Doe body somewhere?"* Smiley is convinced that the local police will never find Lorene, because Deputy Locke is content with the "she left town" solution. But Smiley would like a better answer than that, and will be grateful if the heroes can find out what happened to his best waitress.

Following Leads in Berry

The heroes may wish to poke around Berry some more, but investigations there rapidly prove fruitless. The locals have a number of theories (based on loosely-interpreted "facts"), urging the heroes to dredge the swamp, dig up the playground of the local elementary school, arrest Jack Foster, and so on. These are all dead ends (though dredging the swamp would, after several days, turn up some human bones, none of which would be immediately identifiable, and have no direct connection to Lorene Foster).

The heroes' best lead is Smiley's offhand comment about Jane Doe bodies. With a successful Law-*enforcement* or Medical-*forensics* skill check, the heroes realize that if an unidentified corpse has been discovered, there will be reports on file, perhaps even in the newspapers. On a Good result, they'll know that the police check missing persons reports for possible identification (but, of course, there is no missing person report on Lorene Foster, since everyone believes she left of her own accord). On an Amazing result, the heroes know that authorities check a corpse's fingerprints, dental records, and distinguishing marks—such as a tattoo.



Finding Jane Doe

Once the heroes decide to start looking for Jane Doe bodies, they have several resources, including newspaper, police, and coroner reports, FBI records, and so forth. Finding a Jane Doe with a tattoo that matches Lorene Foster's is an Investigate—*research* complex skill check, but a fairly easy one, since she's only been missing for about a month. Only 4 successes are required, and the investigator receives a -1 step bonus for each appropriate contact (law enforcement officers, medical examiners, journalists, and so on). Checks can be attempted once per day, with a +2 step penalty if the heroes don't have a computer with an Internet connection. Related skills for these checks include Law—*enforcement* and Medical—*forensics*.

3 failures: The hero's research comes to the attention of a cult, who are about three days' travel away. For each additional attempt the hero makes at this task, the cultists get another day closer, slowly homing in on the hero's location. When they arrive, they send five Ordinary-quality cultists, posing as FBI agents, who attempt to arrest the heroes for unauthorized access to an FBI database. If the heroes don't spot the deception, and go along with the arrest, the cultists take them to an isolated warehouse, where they attempt to execute them.

2 successes: The hero obtains a list of 17 currently unidentified female corpses, scattered around North America.

3 successes: Of those 17, three have tattoos—one in Colorado, one in Michigan, and one in Alabama.

4 successes: The Jane Doe found in Pell City, Alabama, has a parrot tattoo on her left shoulder, just like Lorene Foster. The body is unidentified because it has been dismembered and decapitated. It was found stuffed in a 55-gallon drum.

If the heroes contact the Pell City coroner's office, they can speak with Henry Thibodeaux, the coroner's assistant. Henry is stereotypically creepy, talking about the Jane Doe body as though it were a guest at a bed-and-breakfast hotel. Henry is extremely helpful, offering to fax photos of the parrot tattoo, which is a perfect match for the tattoo in the photo of Lorene that Earl Smiley had. The Jane Doe is definitely Lorene Foster.

"They did us a big favor when they killed her," Henry says. "I mean, putting her in the barrel like that. She stayed pretty well preserved. Made her check-in a lot easier." If asked for more details, Henry says that the autopsy report should tell them all they need to know. If the players can receive a fax, Give the players handout WE-3.

Henry knows more of the story, if the heroes ask. The Jane Doe was found by an off-duty Army reservist who was fishing in nearby Logan Martin Lake. The barrel had apparently drifted into the shallow water, and the fisherman pulled it out of the water in hopes that he could use it to burn some construction supplies from his house remodeling.

If the heroes ask what Flunitrazepam is, Henry tells them that it's commonly called Rohypnol—the so-called "date-rape drug." It produces lack of inhibition and amnesia. *"Poor girl," Henry says. "She probably came to her senses just in time to realize what was happening to her."*

Henry can also answer questions about the barrel—including the serial number—since it's still at the morgue. Heroes on the telephone with Henry have a painfully long wait before he returns with the information. *"Under the serial number it says 'Eagle Storage,' something, '—ade City, FL.' And there's a partial number: —5-0414."*

A quick telephone call to directory information will tell the heroes that Eagle Storage Company is a chemical-waste storage facility in Dade City, Florida. The last five digits of its phone number matches the number on the barrel.

Dade City is about 65 km north of Berry, where Lorene Foster disappeared. If the heroes call Eagle Storage, they reach an answering machine asking them to leave their name and telephone number. Tracking the serial number also leads to Eagle Storage.

As a side note, woe betide the heroes if they should give Henry their telephone number. Henry will periodically call them (whenever the action gets slow), having suddenly remembered trivial details. (*"The medical examiner said she might have been wearing a blue shirt. Is that helpful?"*) He continues to call until the heroes either tell him off, or change their telephone number.

Of course, if the players are paranoid enough, they might get the idea that Henry is spying on them—and start spying on him. Their superiors will quash this surveillance after 24 hours if it turns up nothing suspicious.

Hanging Around Berry

The heroes might be in Berry for a few days, especially if they take time to do research on Lorene Foster. If so, they quickly acquire a reputation as "undercover FBI agents" among the locals, who frequently accost them with tales of cult activities and "possible leads." This should convince the heroes not to hang around Berry, Florida for long.

HANDOUT WE-3 — AUTOPSY REPORT: JANE DOE

Immediate Cause of Death: Blood loss from dismemberment, beginning with arms (left, right), and proceeding to legs (right, left). Approximate interval: 6.5 minutes from initial incision.

Conditions & Causes: Decapitation occurred post-mortem. Trace amounts of Flunitrazepam indicate that the victim may have been insensate until commencement of dismemberment. Indications of manual restraint on shoulders.

Manner of Death: Homicide

Conclusion(s): Victim was drugged prior to being restrained, probably at the wrists and ankles, and regained consciousness as her murderer(s) began the dismemberment process. We know the order of incision from the condition of the cuts and the placement of bruises indicated restraint by multiple pairs of hands. Victim was placed post-mortem into blue 55-gallon drum, serial number H77091-CA41874

At the same time, though, the Gamemaster might wish to throw a few frights into the heroes, using some of the storytelling tools mentioned in “Gamemastering a Cult-Oriented Campaign” in the Introduction of this book. Strange animal behavior would be appropriate, as would symbols, nightmares, moving objects, and mysterious shadows. But the Gamemaster shouldn’t use more than one or two of these, to prevent the players from getting too interested in Berry (which is, after all, a dead end).

Scene 3: Eagle Chemical Waste Storage

LOCATION: Eagle Storage, Dade City, Florida.

For the Gamemaster Only: A fairly large cell of the Temple of Ashes cult has been using a chemical waste storage facility as a bivouac while they foment chaos in the surrounding area. They keep the place meticulously clear of evidence, and have arranged a way to torch the entire place should they be discovered.

The next logical move is to check out Eagle Storage. If the heroes don’t think of it, Field Director Jones suggests it. Also, if the heroes have not wasted time on fruitless side investigations, Jones compliments them on their progress on this case. *“We need a quick resolution on this, and that’s*

what you people are giving us. Well done!” Jones and Department Chief Randall tell the heroes to contact them again when they know more about the storage facility.

Research on Eagle Storage: Checks may be attempted every hour. Related skills include Business-*small business* and Lore-*conspiracy theories*.

1 success: Eagle Storage is owned by Wendell and Hiram Platt, though Hiram’s son Melvin operates it with his friend, Brian Sharpe. Wendell and Hiram own a string of such businesses all over the southeast, but they rarely visit any of them.

3 successes: Eagle Storage has had trouble with the Internal Revenue Service on four occasions, when Melvin Platt and Brian Sharpe made “under-the-counter” deals to store or transport chemical waste. Curiously, they have never had trouble with the Environmental Protection Agency, despite the clear violations such deals would indicate.

Finding Eagle Storage isn’t difficult, though it is in an isolated location. Surrounded on all sides by flat land with fairly dense woods of oak and pine, the facility covers several acres—most of which is taken up by stacks of barrels, up to three high in a few places.

A single building sits just inside the front gate, with a small parking lot between the building and the 3-meter chain-link fence that runs all the way around the compound. The gate is locked with a Good-quality padlock (+2 step penalty to pick), and unless the heroes come at night (see below), there doesn’t appear to be anyone around. Rusted and disused emergency chemical showers are

spaced more or less evenly around the perimeter of the fence.

If the heroes look around without going inside, they can attempt Awareness–*perception* checks to notice details. On an Ordinary result, the hero sees the roofs of four RVs (recreational vehicles) poking above the stacks of barrels toward the rear of the compound. On a Good result, the hero can tell that the facility appears abandoned, with no movement in either the office building or around the RVs. On an Amazing result, the hero notices that the fence around the compound seems newer in a few places. Investigating those sections more closely allows an Investigate–*search* check to notice that the new sections are only held in place by plastic tie-wraps.

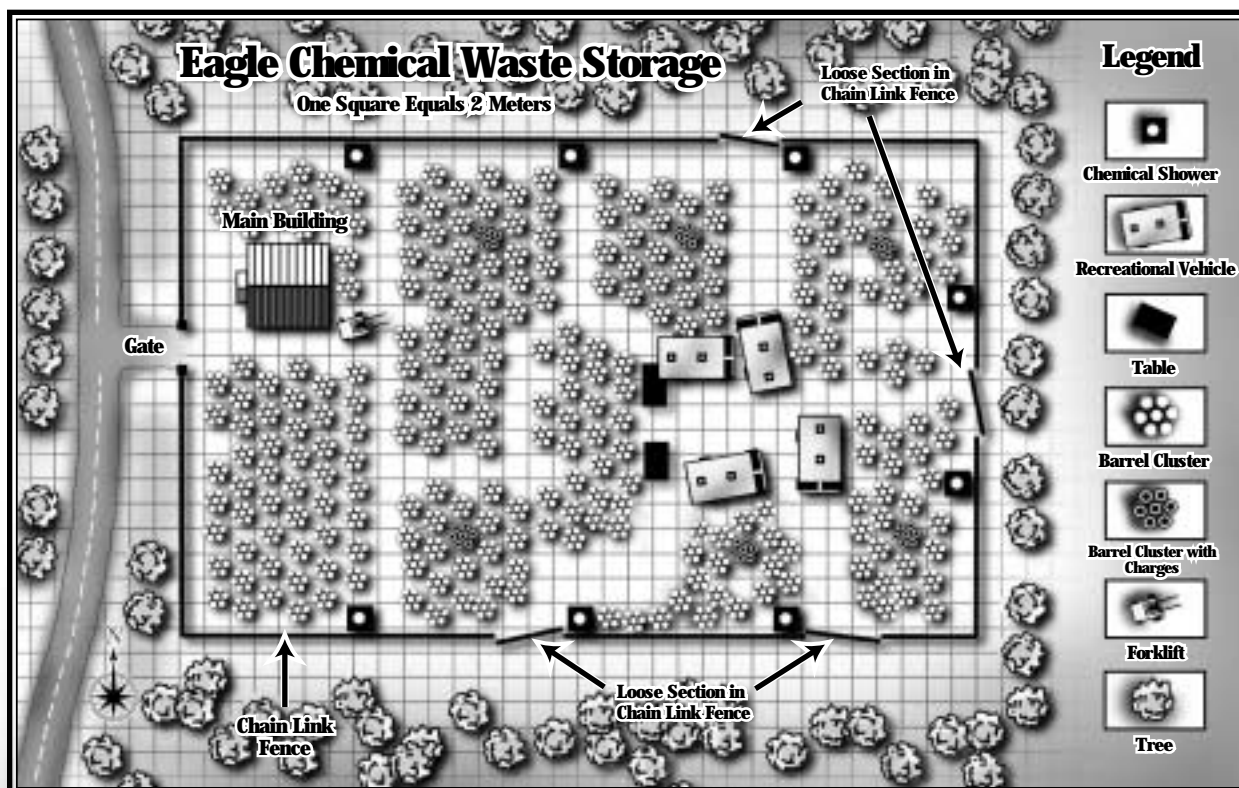
Should they go inside, the heroes can check out the building, the barrels, or the RVs. If they search outside, they can watch the facility, or search the woods.

Office Building. The doors of this building are also locked with Good-quality locks (+2 step penalty to pick). Although there is plenty of evidence here that would convict the operators of Eagle Storage for a large number of chemical-waste storage violations, nothing particularly says “cult activity,” or even “Ben Hearst was here.” On an Ordinary Investigate–*search* result, the heroes find a loaded 9mm pistol in a desk drawer. On a Good result, they find a sawed-off shotgun wired to the underside of a

desk, and pointed at the front door. On an Amazing result, the heroes find a rough map of the facility, with a big blank spot where the RVs are, and red Xs scattered around the facility.

Psionics or FX powers used in here might reveal a meeting between Melvin Platt, Brian Sharpe, and Ben Hearst, in which Hearst asks Platt and Sharpe to make sure the compound is secure, and Sharpe suggests incendiary charges among the barrels. Another conversation, later, between Platt and Sharpe, describes how they were unwilling to set up a plate at the front entrance that would trigger the incendiary charges if anyone drove inside. The conversation ends with Platt and Sharpe deciding to abandon the facility until the cultists are long gone.

Barrels. The barrels are in a variety of colors and states of deterioration. There are places where barrels have ruptured and spilled noxious chemicals onto the ground, and some barrels are precariously close to tipping over. An Ordinary success on an Investigate–*search* attempt turns up that most of the barrels have warning labels indicating that the contents are toxic. A Good success shows the hero that the barrels are stacked in little



“towers” in a few places (where the Xs on the map are, if the heroes found that). An Amazing success uncovers thin wires, camouflaged under a layer of dirt, leading into one barrel tower. (Further checks for such wires receive a -2 step bonus.)

A successful Technical Science-*knowledge* skill check reveals that there is no current running through the wires. If the heroes trace the wires, one end leads into the barrel tower, where it is connected to a small, homemade incendiary device taped to the side of a barrel of flammable chemicals. The other end leads toward the RVs (as do all of these wires). If the heroes follow a wire into the RV encampment, they discover that the wires all lead to the starter of one of the RVs. With another successful Technical Science-*knowledge* check, or a Demolitions-*set explosives* check, either at -2 steps for the simplicity of the device, the hero can determine that starting that RV will torch the whole facility in about 5 minutes.

Psionics and FX powers used among the barrels could lead the heroes directly to the incendiary devices, or even show them a barrel or two (located near the devices) containing assorted trash—and some human remains. (The cultists use the barrels as waste receptacles until they’re ready to dispose of them.)

Recreational Vehicles. These four vehicles are badly in need of a wash. (Each RV has stolen license plates, should the heroes check.) They are situated in a rough semicircle around a sort of clearing in the middle of the compound. In the clearing are a number of makeshift benches, stools, and tables, some of which have automotive tools, oil cans, and such lying on them. The overall impression is that someone has been repairing or maintaining vehicles here. This is further borne out by the large numbers of tire tracks that clearly do not belong to the RVs.

An Ordinary Investigate-*track* result lets a hero notice large numbers of footprints around the RV doors and engines, as well as similar groupings around the various benches and tables. A Good result shows the hero that the tire tracks belong to a number of different automobiles and motorcycles. And on an Amazing result, the hero realizes that despite the signs that this area is being used as a sort of campground, there is no trash in the area.

Inside the RVs, the heroes discover that each is crammed with different styles and sizes of clothes, in no particular order or system. Each RV also seems to have another specific function: one appears to be used for cooking, another for making new clothes or adjusting existing clothing. The one wired to the incendiary devices contains what appears to be a false-identity operation. The heroes find an instant camera aimed at the wall with

pull-down backgrounds in every color used in the United States; a laminating kit, a portable, hand-operated printing-press with a stock of blank business cards; wallets, billfolds, money clips, and purses in a number of styles; and a number of cellular telephones in a small forest of chargers.

The final RV contains the most damning evidence. In a closet locked with an Amazing-quality padlock (+3 step penalty to pick), rests the paraphernalia of a demon-worship cult: candles, a pair of vicious sacrificial knives, goblets, bowls, and a variety of powders.

There is also a human skull. If the heroes examine it without picking it up, they can attempt an Awareness-*intuition* or *perception* check to notice that it is attached to a thin piece of fishing line, which is attached to the pin of an incendiary grenade. Should the heroes fail to notice this before they set it off, the grenade will explode in one phase. Heroes who do not immediately state they are exiting the RV must attempt an Athletics check to exit the RV before it explodes, with a cumulative +1 step penalty for each other character attempting the same check. (The door is only so big.)

Anyone still inside the RV when the grenade explodes suffers Amazing damage (d4+3w). See the sidebar “Starting a Fire.”

Should the heroes actually obtain the skull intact, a dental record check will show that it is the skull of Lorene Foster.

If the heroes use psionics or FX powers to investigate the camp, they could discover a strange paradox. Though the cultists use the area for ceremonies and general revelry, they also take extreme care to dispose of all evidence of their presence. There are no telltale spots of blood, no obvious weapons, and no trash. The cultists painstakingly clean up after themselves, leaving out only the things which could be taken as perfectly innocent (the tools and such mentioned above). Still, they have killed a half-dozen people here (including Lorene Foster), and the psychic impressions left by those sacrifices still linger.

Outside the Facility: While the obvious thing to do here is watch the front gate, heroes might decide to search the thick woods. A full search would take hours (by which time the cultists will have returned; see below), but the heroes can make a fast investigation (a +3 step penalty) in an hour, or a moderate investigation (+1 step penalty) in two hours.

On an Ordinary result, the hero notices a dirt road about 500 meters away from the storage facility through the woods. On a Good result, the hero realizes that the dirt

road runs parallel to the storage facility, but leads to the highway (I-75), rather than the back road that faces Eagle Storage. On an Amazing result, the hero sees a semi-trailer rig parked in the woods at the end of the dirt road.

If the heroes move to investigate the semi, they discover a man apparently sleeping in the cab of the truck. If they wake him up, he explains that he pulled off the road to get some sleep (without being hassled by police, who are always looking for truckers smuggling drugs up from Miami).

If the heroes check out the rear of the trailer, they discover it padlocked. While inspecting the padlock, though, a police officer approaches them (from the woods opposite Eagle Storage) *“Is this your truck?” he asks.*

The police officer (“Officer Kinney”) and the truck driver (“Abel Hanley”) are both cultists, acting as sentries at the semi. Their goal is to prevent anyone from opening the back of the truck, gently if possible, but with as much force as the situation warrants. Four more cultists wait in the trailer (all of whom are holding the children inside hostage). Whether the plan works or not, the ultimate goal is to move the truck if anyone discovers it, so the heroes can’t examine the truck unless they kill both cultists first. If the fight actually gets into the trailer, the cultists there use the twelve children inside for cover.

All of the cultists here are Good-quality Common Cultists. The four cultists in the trailer each have a 9mm SMG with 2 clips, a stun prod, and a cellular telephone. “Officer Kinney” has a 9mm pistol, a pepper spray can (see below) and a nightstick (club). “Abel” has a 12-gauge shotgun in the cab of the truck, and wears a vest of 6 fragmentation grenades, which he can detonate by pulling a string concealed in his left sleeve.

If the heroes defeat “Kinney” and “Abel”, they can drive the truck to the authorities. If the cultists inside have reason to believe that the heroes have defeated their sentries and are taking the whole truck somewhere, they kill the children and themselves. If the heroes check out the truck, skip to Act II, Scene I under the *Research Opportunities* heading.

When the truck doesn’t show up, the cultists must scramble to find more suitable children to continue their plan. The Fishers stall for time by missing appointments with the heroes or giving misleading information. Overall, the cultists will be particularly angry with the heroes for waylaying their sacrifices.

Pepper spray: Mod-*pistol*; -1; F; 1/2/4; En/O; Special; 3; 4; 15; -2; <1kg; Com; \$30

Anyone caught in the spray must make a Constitution feat check. A Critical Failure on this check imposes a +3 step penalty to all actions and action checks, a Failure gives a +2 step penalty, and an Ordinary a +1 step penalty. Good or Amazing successes mean that the target is unaffected. These penalties last d6+1 rounds. A successful Resolve-*physical resolve* check reduces the duration of the effects by 1, 2, or 3 rounds, depending on the degree of success—Ordinary, Good, or Amazing.

The Cultists Return

If the characters investigate Eagle Storage during the day, the place is abandoned. The cultists are all in Dade City, disguised as ordinary citizens, to spread rumors, scout for recruits (and sacrifices), and otherwise work evil. Unfortunately, they may return to the facility while the heroes are investigating.

Assume that it takes an hour to search any given area of the facility (the office building, the barrels, the RVs, and also the fence and the woods). The cultists return to their camp after three hours. If the heroes are inside the fence, they will have to hide (unless they just want to start shooting).

The heroes should make Awareness checks to see if they notice the arrival of several vehicles at the facility’s front gate (with bonuses if the heroes are near the gate, or specifically watching it). Heroes who notice the cultists returning may act in the surprise phase. Unless the heroes have left a vehicle parked in an obvious place, or left the gate open or unlocked, the cultists are not yet aware of them.

If the heroes do nothing to stop them, the cultists pull into the compound, driving a variety of cars, trucks, and vans (thirty Marginal-quality Common Cultists in all), and several motorcycles (ten Ordinary-quality Biker Cultists). They move slowly to the RV encampment, where they disembark their vehicles and settle in. Some unload portable stoves from the vehicles and begin setting them up; others break out food and drink. Several, mostly women, move directly toward the RVs.

Assuming the heroes don't confront the cultists at some point, they can now get a fairly clear look at the group—and a motley crew it is. There are roughly equal numbers of men and women, dressed in a variety of outfits, from biker leathers to business suits. Some are filthy, others are spotless. The truly incongruous thing, though, is that they mingle readily, like a troupe of actors caught out of character.

But a successful Awareness–*perception* check indicates that these people are also observing some kind of predetermined, almost militaristic, discipline. The atmosphere is more one of a bivouac than a party; these people have a purpose.

If heroes inside the fence haven't deliberately revealed themselves by the time the cultists begin cooking, one of the cultists abruptly stands and begins scanning the area. All activity ceases in the camp within moments as all the cultists begin doing the same. The heroes have two rounds to react, before the lead cultist quietly says, "Go," and the camp erupts into action. (See "Breaking Camp.")

Approaching at Night

If the heroes approach the compound at night—assuming they haven't already been discovered by the cultists—they find approximately forty assorted cultists (bikers, housewives, businessmen, and college students). The cultists are preparing for the next day's activity, and some of them are trying on articles of clothing, cutting their hair, taking turns showering in one of the RVs, and so on. If the heroes watch for more than three hours, they actually see one of the bikers gradually transform, through a haircut, a shower, and new suit, into an ordinary-looking businessman.

There are also sentries—some among the barrels, and some in the woods. Proceeding clockwise around the perimeter of the storage facility, four Ordinary-quality cultists take approximately 40 minutes to make the entire circuit, ensuring that a new sentry shows up approximately every 10 minutes at any given location. The sentries among the barrels each patrol one group of barrels. Both groups are relieved every 4 hours.

The sentries all have instructions not to shoot unless attacked, so if they notice someone watching the cultist camp, they pretend to be oblivious and subtly signal the camp with flashlights. The camp then clears as described above under "Breaking Camp," with the sentries heading off into the woods for pickup down the road later.

If the heroes manage to watch the camp all night without being detected, they see the cultists go to sleep shortly after midnight, then awaken early in the morning to

slowly empty out the camp, heading off on their various assignments.

Breaking Camp

When the cultists realize the camp has been compromised, they have four goals: set off the incendiary charges, get out, keep the intruders inside (where toxic smoke will probably kill them), and alert the sentries at the semi-trailer. The heroes can try to intercept or otherwise hinder the cultists as they go about these activities, but considering the chemical fire that will soon flare up, they will most likely prefer to flee the area.

Detonating the charges. Two cultists immediately move to the RV that acts as the detonator for the incendiary charges, and after one of them has started the RV (detonating the charges), the other clips the wires with a pair of hedge trimmers. The two then drive the RV toward the nearest "false fence" section.

Exodus. Cultists not otherwise engaged with the charges or the heroes grab the closest vehicles and make for the false fence sections. Outside, they split up and head in different directions, to help deter pursuit. They only stop to fight if the heroes give them no choice.

Dealing with the heroes. Eight of the biker cultists produce gas masks from saddlebags, and donning them, begin chasing the heroes on their motorcycles. Their goal is not to kill the heroes, but to drive them deep into the smoke from the chemical fire, then depart. If four or more of them are incapacitated, the rest depart through the nearest open fence section. They dump the masks later.

Warning the semi. As if exploding charges aren't enough to indicate trouble, one of the vehicles stops long enough to drop off one of the cultists, who runs to the clearing in the woods to ensure that the semi has gotten away.

Aftermath

If the heroes stick around after the fire—or more likely return later, since they probably don't have the proper gear to survive a raging chemical fire—they encounter the fire department and the police. The fire department arrives within 15 minutes of the first explosion, and takes several hours to extinguish the blaze. The police arrive about the same time, and block the roads leading to the facility. They also detain anyone who attempts to leave from inside the closed-off area. (They suspect arson.)

Starting a Fire

Whenever any fire starts in the compound, or even within the tree line, the nearest cluster of barrels (see the map) begin to heat up, and will eventually explode. The Gamemaster should check each round to determine exactly when a barrel cluster finally explodes. Note that it is not necessary to check for each individual barrel; one check will do for the entire cluster.

Barrel clusters are considered Durability 4 (effectively, Stamina 8), Good Toughness, and fireproof (–4 step bonus to durability checks against fire). However, the presence of flammable vapors in the compound cancel out the bonus for its fireproof ability.

At the end of each round, make a durability check for each barrel cluster within range of a fire, assigning a modifier based on how large and how close the fire is. (Note that this check is unnecessary for the incendiary devices attached to the barrel stacks. The explosion is automatic.)

On an Amazing result, the barrel cluster suffers no damage. On a Good result, the barrel cluster suffers d4s damage, and on an Ordinary result, it suffers d6s damage. A failure means it suffers 2d6s damage, and on a Critical Failure, it suffers 2d6s damage and catches fire.

If at any point the object suffers wound damage (and remember that stun damage in excess of 8 points converts to 1 point of wound damage for every 2 stun points), the barrel cluster catches fire, and immediately explodes.

Once a barrel cluster explodes, two things happen. First, the air in a d6+6 meter radius fills with toxic smoke. Treat this as an inhaled irritant in this case (+2 step penalty to CON feat check if inhaled; onset time 1 round, duration 10 minutes after leaving the area of smoke).

Second, nearby barrels heat up more quickly. Check for all of the clusters in the same group with the burning barrel cluster, treating them as though they were on fire. On an Amazing durability check, the barrel cluster is safe. On a Good result, the barrel cluster suffers d4s damage. On an Ordinary, failure, or Critical Failure result, the barrel cluster suffers wound damage, and immediately explodes. (Note that if no characters are in the area, feel free to simply decide when the barrel cluster explodes.)



Once the fire is under control, and the area is safe again (about 14 hours) the investigation begins, and the fire marshal discovers the remains of the incendiary devices. The police will be very interested in what the heroes know about the fire (and may be accused of starting the fire, if their stories sound suspicious).

The police also discover the tracks of the semi-trailer, in the clearing north of the compound. As long as the heroes haven't been arrested, they are free to visit the area. The police make plaster molds of the tire tracks, and take photographs of a prominent oil spot where the truck was parked. The heroes can look around on their own if they don't interfere with the crime-scene investigators.

The oil spot is the obvious clue. With a successful Tech Science–*knowledge* check (at a –3 step bonus), a hero realizes that a semi leaking that much oil will leave a puddle wherever it so much as pauses. It also must make frequent stops to refill the oil. Using that information, the heroes can track the truck, and perhaps get a description of it.

Although the police have already tramped through the dirt, some faint footprints remain near where the back of the trailer was. A successful Investigation–*track* check (with a +2 step penalty) reveals that most of the tracks are of booted adults, but some belong to children.

Act II: The Spider Watches

Having learned of the truck, the heroes have a slightly better idea how to find the cultists: follow the oil trail. If they need medical assistance after their encounter with the cult at Eagle Storage, the Hoffmann Institute arranges it, or pays their bills if the heroes have already seen to it.

Field Director Jones and Department Chief Randall expect a progress report, and ask if the heroes need any more equipment, money, or backup. (This might be particularly helpful if the heroes are lacking vital skills.) *“As soon as you know where you’re going to be, we’ll send you what you need,” Jones tells them. “It should arrive about half a day later.”*

If the heroes didn’t find the children’s footprints at the clearing, Jones and Randall are both interested to know what was in the back of the truck. They feel that it’s the only thing in the investigation so far that might have been important enough for Hearst to break his cover. *“Find out what’s in the truck,” Randall says. “And if it’s not still there, find out where it went.”* If pressed, Randall says that cults have used trucks as rolling temples before—which could mean that the leader of the cult was in the truck. *“If you can find the leader,” Randall says, “we can probably stop whatever they’ve got planned.”*

Scene 1: Tracking the Truck

LOCATION: Highway I-75, Dade City to Macon

For the Gamemaster Only: The Temple of Ashes cultists drive northward in a truck loaded with abducted children, trying to reach Macon, Georgia, where their ritual is set to take place. Though their truck is leaking oil, they make no real effort to disguise their passage. They want the heroes to follow them.

The heroes can try two different methods of tracking the truck. First, they can use Investigate–*track* to drive up I-75, searching each exit for oil puddles. Because the leak is so obvious, the heroes gain a –2 step bonus on their tracking attempts. A total of six successful checks are required to follow the truck from Dade City to its eventual destination of Macon, Georgia. On a Critical Failure (or three failures), the heroes lose an entire day trying to pick up the trail again.

The second method is considerably slower. The heroes can check every filling station and truck stop along the highway, asking about a semi-trailer rig that purchased a lot of oil. Doing so eventually brings the heroes to the All-Star Truck Stop, outside Ocala, Florida, where Dave Reynolds, the day cashier, remembers a dirty green rig that purchased six gallons of diesel oil the day after the truck left Dade City.

Dave remembers the truck because, aside from its excessive oil drip, he believes it was hauling illegal immigrants. *“I saw three guys—real hard cases—climb out of the back of the trailer. They bought a lot of food over at the McDonald’s—more than the three of them and the driver could eat—and climbed into the back of the truck again with it.”* Unfortunately, while Dave can supply a description of the three men (*“military fatigues, mostly, with biker jackets and boots”*), no one at the busy restaurant remembers them well enough to describe them any better, or what they ordered.

Other methods of finding the truck include psycholocation (if a hero has a particularly high rank) or FX abilities, such as the Faith abilities *guidance* or *legba rides*. The Gamemaster must adjudicate how much information the heroes learn from such methods.

The Empty Lot

LOCATION: Macon, Georgia

Eventually, the heroes should reach Macon, Georgia, where the oil trail ends. With a successful Investigate–*track* check, the heroes can locate the truck within half a day. Otherwise, they have to canvas the city, which takes a couple of days. Of course, knowing that the truck is somewhere in Macon will make finding it with psionics or FX much easier.

The truck is parked in a large, empty lot on the city’s west side, near a cluster of abandoned warehouses. The truck appears intact, but it is curiously parked about 300 meters from the nearest cover. If the characters want to take a closer look, they have to find some way to approach it. Using binoculars and similar instruments, they can tell that the truck seems abandoned.

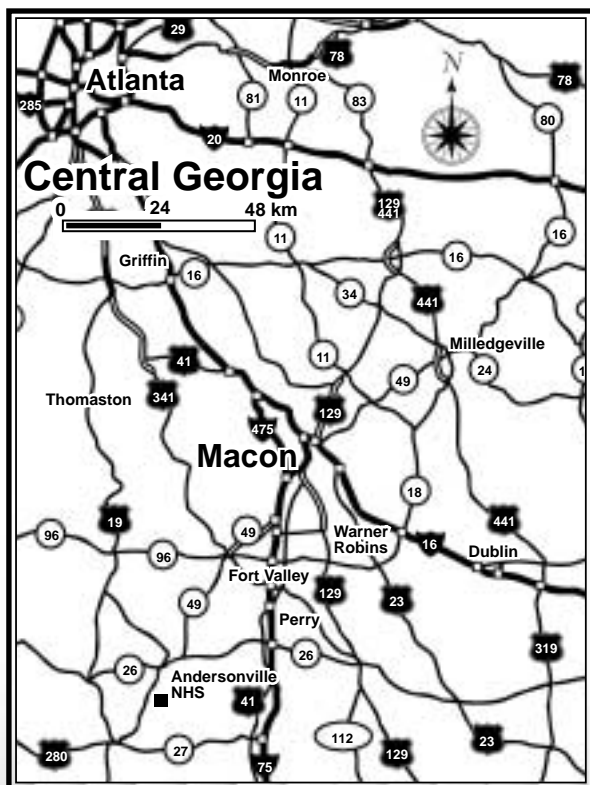
Approaching the truck and opening the doors is a good moment of tension. Play up this feeling by asking the players to give their heroes’ Awareness–*intuition* scores, checking their character sheets, and rolling lots of dice. Just before they open the rear door, have the players roll action checks, and proceed in phases to ask them what the heroes do, where they are stand, and so on. Of course, the truck is empty, but the players will enjoy the suspense for a round or two.

The trailer's doors are locked with a Good-quality padlock (+2 step penalty to pick, Durability 4, Toughness Ordinary). Once the heroes get the door open, they are greeted by an awful stench reminiscent of a public restroom. No one is inside. On an Ordinary success with the Investigate-*search* skill, the heroes find a significant amount of trash. On a Good result, they notice that it is mostly children's meals and coloring books. On an Amazing result, the heroes can determine that there were approximately a dozen children in the trailer over the last two weeks, probably all at the same time. On a Failure or Critical Failure, the stuff looks like just so much trash.

Research Opportunities

Probably the most important clue here is the truck's identification. Although the trailer has no corporate logo, the truck can be traced by an ID number on the cab. The truck is registered to Fisher Shipping & Transit, owned by Kenneth K. Fisher. Fisher Shipping & Transit is a local company, according to the registration. (If the characters perform a thorough search of the cab, they eventually turn up the registration, which has the same information.)

This scene has yielded several more research possibilities, the results of which are outlined below. Again, if the heroes don't think to do this research, Field Director Jones suggests them.



Fisher Shipping & Transit:

Checks may be attempted every hour. Related skills include Business-*small* and Administration-*management*.

3 failures: The hero's research alerts Ken Fisher that someone has found the truck and is checking out the connection between his company and the contents of the truck. He goes into hiding.

1 success: The company started eight years ago, and they now have a string of a couple dozen trucks. Most of their shipping is in the southeast United States, and it's all short-term contract stuff—they aren't tied to any particular companies or corporations.

3 successes: Fisher Shipping & Transit has never filed an insurance claim for the truck, indicating that Fisher didn't consider it stolen.

Ken Fisher:

Checks may be attempted every hour. Related skills include Interaction-*interview* and Business-*small*.

3 failures: Ken Fisher realizes that someone is investigating him, and goes into hiding alone. (His wife needs to keep working at the hospital.)

1 success: Kenneth Fisher is a local businessman in good standing with the IRS, Better Business Bureau, and the Chamber of Commerce. He donates a couple thousand dollars every year to children's charities.

2 successes: Fisher's wife, Janet, is a nurse and midwife. She works the night shift at the Medical Center of Central Georgia, in downtown Macon.

3 successes: Fisher moved to Macon twenty years ago at age 12, after he spent two years institutionalized in Atlanta for a pathological cruelty to animals. (He had mutilated his pets.)

Stolen Trucks:

Checks may be attempted every hour. Related skills include *Law-enforcement* and *Street Smart-criminal knowledge*.

3 failures: Local police become curious as to why the heroes are so interested in stolen trucks, and a pair of detectives begin surveilling the heroes. They don't approach the heroes, but every time the heroes leave a location, they are allowed an Awareness-*intuition* check to notice Detectives Faulkner and Greeley watching them. (Both are Good-quality Law Enforcers, as detailed in the *Gamemaster Guide*, Chapter 6: The Supporting Cast.) If the heroes do something illegal, the detectives at least make note, and possibly attempt to arrest them.

They might also serve as a distraction (or rescue) should the heroes get in hot water.

1 success: Fisher's truck was reported stolen about 3 months ago.

2 successes: No other semi-trailers have been stolen during that time.

3 successes: The investigation into the missing truck only began about a week ago. Apparently, the paperwork was lost. The detective on the case is Sergeant John Watts.

Missing Children:

Checks may be attempted every day. Related skills include *Law-enforcement* and *Interaction-interview*.

3 failures: The hero speaks to a couple whose child has been abducted, and the couple becomes suspicious. They summon the police, who detain and question the hero for d6+6 hours.

1 success: The hero learns that over a million children are reported missing every year.

2 successes: Five children between the ages of five and twelve have disappeared from Macon in the last three days. Three disappeared from daycare centers, and two vanished from a private school playground.

3 successes: All of the children who disappeared from Macon have been in special education programs for gifted children, generally involving private tutors, personal computers, and regular field trips to universities.

4 successes: About thirty of the children who have disappeared around the country in the last six months have been involved in similar programs.

Interviewing the Fishers

Investigating these leads assumes that the heroes have at least a brief opportunity to speak with the people involved (Ken Fisher, his wife, the police, the parents of the missing children), but not full interviews. In order to arrange a longer interview—to ask more specific questions than those answered here—the heroes must successfully use an encounter skill with the selected individual.

In the case of Ken and Janet Fisher, this attempt receives a +2 step penalty. The Fishers are “extremely busy people,” and don't have time to talk about police business with strangers. Whether the heroes manage to see them or not, the Fishers continue in a semblance of normal life, taking it for granted that they are under surveillance. Going on with a normal life actually works quite well for them, since part of Janet's normal life is going to work at the very hospital where she needs to be, and Ken can go to his office without doing anything that arouses

suspicion all day. (If the heroes accost either of them, they report the heroes to the police at their first opportunity.)

Scene 2: Horrible Visitations

LOCATION: The Heroes' Lodgings, Macon, GA

For the Gamemaster Only: Although the Temple of Ashes cultists want the heroes to eventually find them, they don't want the heroes having them at a disadvantage. They use diabolic magic to send nightmares to the heroes—nightmares that will hinder the heroes during the final ceremony.

All of this research is liable to take the better part of a day, and the heroes will no doubt want to grab some sleep before they carry on. When they do, ask everyone to attempt an *Awareness-intuition* check (with heroes who had previously stated they were staying awake receiving a -1 step bonus). Characters separate from the other heroes are exempt.

Each character who succeeds at this check becomes aware of a sudden, odd stillness: The air seems stifling, the crickets have stopped chirping, and very faintly an intermittent pattering noise can be heard—vaguely reminiscent of a cat running across the floor. (To demonstrate, drum the pads of your fingers—of both hands—on the tabletop for a second, pause, then do it again.)

If a hero goes to investigate, he or she discovers that the noise is coming from outside somewhere—the roof, the patio, the air-vents, or what-have-you (depending on where the heroes are staying). It is also more persistent now, and with a successful *Awareness-perception* skill check, the hero notices a fleeting shadow out of the corner of his or her eye.

Picking up the telephone, or otherwise trying to contact the outside world, results in the character hearing the same noise again—though this time, more regular. Similarly, starting a car, or otherwise attempting to use a conveyance to escape, results in a shower of sparks from the engine, which suddenly goes dead. Looking under the hood reveals spiders. (The idea is to keep the heroes all in more or less one place—where the spiders are.)

If a hero decides to look out a window at this point, he or she should attempt another *Awareness-intuition* skill check. If the check succeeds, the character notices another

brief shadow, though this time, it is recognizable as a large, hairy spider. It is approximately the size of a grown man's hands, with the thumbs held together and the fingers outstretched (which makes a good visual aid for the Gamemaster to demonstrate to the players).

If the check fails, the hero is suddenly confronted with such a spider, mere centimeters from his or her face, trying to attack the hero through the glass—or crawl through a window left open. Either way, the hero realizes that this is not the only spider present; several more all make for the same opening—or search for other weaknesses in the heroes' defenses.

Call for action checks at this point, making one check for all of the spiders together. The statistics of the spiders are given below:

To reach the heroes, the spiders clamber over every available exterior surface, seeking ingress wherever they find it. If the heroes took time to carefully seal up external accesses, the spiders instead begin to pile up against a window, or if a window is not available, the roof. Over

the course of the next $d4+2$ rounds, they slowly begin to overburden the window or roof, so that it eventually collapses, spilling spiders in among the heroes.

Regardless of how the spiders get in, if they get in they go for the heroes immediately. The goal of the spiders is to get at the heroes and bite them. They have a paralytic poison (insinuating, no modifier, onset time 1 round, duration 1 hour). Once a victim stops moving, available spiders swarm over him or her, seeking soft bits to chew.

The attack continues until one of the heroes is thus swarmed—at which point, everyone simultaneously awakens, victims of a disturbing nightmare (the result of a *phantasm* spell—see Chapter 3.). Everything is as they left it, and the night seems normal once again. Still, each hero should immediately attempt a *Resolve-mental* skill check. Record the result of each hero's check



Oversized Spider Game Data

STR 3 (d4+1) INT 1 (Animal 3 or d4+1)
DEX 10 (d4+7) WIL 8 (d4+5)
CON 2 (d4) PER 1 (Animal 3 or d4+1)
Durability: 2/2/1/1 Action Check: 13+/12/6/3
Move: run 30, walk 8 #Actions: 1
Reaction Score: Ordinary/1

Attacks

Bite* 8/4/2 d4-2s/d4-1s/d4-1w LI/O
* Poison (see text)

Defenses

+1 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
+3 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
Armor: d4-1 (LI), d4-2 (HI), d4-3 (En)

Skills

Athletics [3]–*climb* [12]; Unarmed [3]; Stealth [10]–*hide* [13], *sneak* [11]; Stamina [4]; Awareness [8]–*intuition* [10].

for use in Act III. This check determines how the heroes react when next they see a larger-than-normal spider.

As the heroes gather their wits, they notice flashing lights, as though an emergency vehicle had pulled up outside. When the heroes look, they see an ambulance about 50 meters away, crouched atop which is the familiar figure of Hoffmann Institute agent Ben Hearst (or someone who looks just like him).

The figure looks directly at the heroes. At the same time as they realize who he is, he suddenly scuttles to the rear door of the ambulance, and—*clinging upside-down to the roof*—crawls inside. The door closes behind him. The ambulance then drives away, though the heroes clearly see the writing on the side of the vehicle: “MCCG”—Medical Center of Central Georgia.

Even if the heroes manage to give pursuit, when the ambulance eventually stops at the hospital, there is no one in the back (except perhaps a dozing paramedic, who insists the ambulance hasn’t moved for over an hour). Checking in with the Hoffmann Institute reveals that Hearst is still safely in the custody of the two agents who were sent to take him off the heroes’ hands.

If the heroes search their sleeping quarters at some point, they find (on a successful Investigate–*search* skill check) a dead brown recluse spider among their bedding.

(The Gamemaster shouldn’t explain how those spiders got there, though.)

Scene 3: The Ritual

LOCATION: Medical Center of Central Georgia, Macon, GA

For the Gamemaster Only: The cultists have nearly completed their computer ritual—only to learn that their Internet connection won’t handle the load. They hurriedly begin relocating to a site with a better Internet connection. Although they manage to get their computers transferred to a new location, they must leave the children behind—though they fight tooth and nail to keep them.

Seeing Agent Hearst clamber into the ambulance spider-style should lead the heroes directly to the Medical Center of Central Georgia, if they haven’t made the connection already. The hospital is located at 777 Hemlock Street, in downtown Macon. Not coincidentally, this is also where Janet Fisher works, in the children’s ward.

Should the heroes go to the hospital during the day, there isn’t much to see. It’s an ordinary hospital, bustling with activity from 6 A.M. until about 9 P.M. every day. The heroes can move around more or less freely, but only for a short time. After d6+10 minutes, a nurse will ask them their business. If they don’t attempt an encounter skill check, the nurse asks them to leave. If the heroes’ check fails, she summons orderlies (three Marginal-quality Laborers, as per the *Gamemaster Guide*, Chapter 6: The Supporting Cast) to help herd them back outside. On a Critical Failure, she sends for hospital security (two Ordinary-quality Law Enforcers).

After wandering the halls of the hospital for a few minutes, the heroes wander onto the scene of an argument between a nurse, a pair of doctors, four orderlies, and an elderly woman. The woman, ninety-year-old Mrs. Agnes Rutherford, is busily haranguing the hospital staff—a lecture the heroes can hear quite clearly:

"I have an irregular heartbeat," shouts the elderly woman, "There's nothing wrong with my mind!"

"She'll be okay," a nearby desk nurse assures you. "She's just old."

"Old I may be, but there's nothing wrong with my hearing!" the old woman shouts at the desk nurse, before turning back to the doctors. "I heard chanting!"

The Feisty Widow

Mrs. Rutherford is a sharp old lady, and has a clear sense that something bad is afoot. She gladly speaks with the heroes—especially if they take her seriously. She's also impressed if they evince a "take-charge" attitude with the hospital staff, who, as far as Mrs. Rutherford is concerned, *"are a bunch of soft-headed nin-nies!"* Though caustic, Mrs. Rutherford respects people who don't back down when she yells.

The ninety-year-old widow tells the heroes that she's been here for the last two nights undergoing observation, and has been awakened both nights by the eerie sound of people chanting somewhere nearby. And the same thing has just happened again. Each night, she's gotten painfully out of bed and moved out into the hall, where she tried to track the noise. Unfortunately, she always runs afoul of the night nurse, who makes her go back to bed.

"Blamed fools! Your heartbeat's off a tick after ninety years, they test you for days! You tell them you hear something, they don't even humor you!"

Mrs. Rutherford is happy to show the heroes back to her room, and even tells the doctors and nurses to *"Get out of the blasted way, if you're not going to do anything useful!"* If the heroes search Mrs. Rutherford's room, an Investigate–search check (with a –2 step bonus) lets them discover a distant thrumming noise coming from the air vent.

A character with the *technical knowledge* skill can automatically identify this sound as an air handler (basically, a giant air-conditioning unit), probably on the roof. If a hero makes a successful Technical Science–*technical knowledge* check, he or she realizes that such a unit would handle several floors of a building, or even multiple buildings, and that when it was not pumping air, loud sounds would carry through the vents. All in all, it seems likely that someone, somewhere in the hospital, is chanting.

Locating the air handler is not difficult, but it's not actually on the roof. It sits in a service alley just outside

the hospital, where it apparently connects to three buildings: the general ward (where Mrs. Rutherford's room is), a children's ward (where the heroes might remember Janet Fisher works), and an abandoned wing.

The Children's Ward

Getting into the children's ward unescorted requires the heroes to either succeed at an encounter check with the desk nurse, or a Stealth–*sneak* skill check. Even with a success though, the heroes have only a few minutes before the nurse checks in on the room. They must work fast or distract her somehow.

There are currently twenty-seven children in the ward, with thirteen empty beds. Of the empty beds, three appear to have been slept in recently, which the heroes can gather with a successful Awareness–*perception* skill check. As they look around, a young boy about seven years old wearing a bandage over one eye approaches them. He looks at them carefully with his good eye, then demands, *"Are you supposed to be here?"*

The boy tells the heroes, *"I'm Wesley Hunter, and I live in Macon, Georgia!"* He's in the children's ward recovering from a cornea transplant—and he's doing well, despite not being able to see clearly, even out of his good eye. He tells the heroes that he's patrolling the ward, because "the funny people" keep taking children home before they're ready to go. If asked what he means, Wesley explains:

"They're the people who talk weird all the time. And they're bad to kids, but kids haveta go with 'em, 'cause they're grown-ups. But they're not aunts or uncles." (Wesley means that the missing children were taken away by strangers who spoke Latin.)

If asked where the strangers take the children, Wesley says, *"To the dirty place. But we're not supposed to talk about it, or the Elf-a-go won't let us go home."* Unfortunately, Wesley isn't clear himself on what the "Elf-a-go" is, except that it's something very bad, and that it eats children (that's Wesley's conjecture, anyway). He is, however, absolutely certain that the "dirty place" is in the abandoned hospital wing, across the alley from the children's center.

The Abandoned Wing

Once the heroes home in on the abandoned wing of the Medical Center as the likely place to find Temple of Ashes cultists, they may want to do reconnaissance first.

The building itself is a single story, attached to the main building. Originally, it served as the emergency center, then as a sort of loading dock. Now, it is used as storage for junk the hospital collects, including a great deal of trash.

Windows: The windows are barred (Durability 4, Toughness Good), and filthy. Attempts to look into a window receive a +3 step penalty, though attempts to look out only suffer a +1 step penalty (assuming the light outside is good). The cultists use this to their advantage, with lookouts at some windows.

Doors: Four doors lead into the abandoned wing: one from the main building on the east, one from the access road on the west, a rollup door in the alley on the north, and a double door across the alley to the south (leading toward the West Tower of the hospital). The east and west doors are secured with Good-quality padlocks and chains (+2 step penalty to pick or break). The rollup door also features a Good-quality padlock (no chain), but the padlock is secured to the door by only an Ordinary-quality hasp (+1 step penalty to break). The south door has no padlock, but is secured by a Good-quality door lock (+2 step penalty to pick). Note that attempting to break any of the locks will alert cultist sentries unless done with extreme care. Attempting to pick or break the padlock on the east door alerts the hospital staff, who will first question the heroes, then summon the police.

Rooftop & Ducts: Heroes can get rooftop access from the main building, but there is no access into the abandoned wing through its roof. Heroes who attempt to enter through the ductwork from the air handler may attempt an Acrobatics skill check. If successful, the hero can get as far as Area J before the ducts become too small.

Lighting: The electricity in the abandoned wing is controlled through a junction box in Area C. The cultists have shut off all the power and removed the fuses except to Areas C, S, and T.

Interior Doors: None of the interior doors are locked unless noted in the text. Most of the interior doors consist of a pebbled-glass window set in a wooden door. The pebbled glass is difficult to see through, conferring a +1 step penalty for general Awareness checks, and a +3 step penalty for making out details.

Double doors in the interior are ordinarily closed, though they have stops on the bottom that can be used to prop them open. Each door has a circle of clear glass. These doors can be locked, but no one has seen the keys in years.

Cultist Tactics: The cultists are only interested in delaying the heroes until their van returns and they can

transport the children to a new location. Their strategy is to position themselves throughout the building, try to take the heroes unawares as they pass, and keep them occupied for as long as possible. Once these cultists start fighting, they don't stop until they're dead.

If a hero makes a successful Tactics-*infantry* skill check, he or she will realize that the cultists are practicing delaying tactics. On an Amazing success, the hero realizes that the cultists appear to be guarding the southwest quadrant of the building.

The cultists are good at playing their roles because they are who they appear to be. A policeman cultist can recite his badge number without looking, a doctor cultist can name nearly anyone on the hospital staff (within reason), and so on.

Hospital Response: As soon as any gunfire or explosions sound from the abandoned wing, the hospital staff calls the police, then clears out the nearby areas, including rooms with windows that face the abandoned wing. When the police arrive, they cordon off the area, then send in a SWAT team (six Ordinary-quality Law Enforcers). Only use this option if the heroes are getting the stuffing kicked out of them.

The Opposition

The cultists are thick as flies here, so it might be helpful for the Gamemaster to have a roster to keep track of them. This table might also come in handy if the players wonder about the cultists' appearance, or names (should the heroes have a chance to ask).

Location	Name	Quality	Appearance
B	Evan	Ordinary	Security guard
	Hendricks	cultist	
B	Mike	Ordinary	Security guard
	Burnett	cultist	
B	Montel	Ordinary	Orderly
	White	cultist	
B	Duane	Ordinary	Orderly
	Hatcher	cultist	
C	Chuck	Ordinary	Street clothes
	Houston	cultist	
D	Roger	Ordinary	Doctor
	Simmons	cultist	
D	Vanna	Marginal	Nurse
	Templeton	cultist	
F	Randy	Marginal	Orderly
	Mayfield	cultist	



Location	Name	Quality	Appearance
G	Beau Hopper	Ordinary cultist	Street clothes
H	Kyle Martin	Ordinary cultist	Police officer
H	Dan Coffee	Ordinary cultist	Police officer
I	Cyndi Watts	See text	Childlike woman in sweater
K	Anthony Ashford	Marginal cultist	Escaped mental patient
P	"Spider"	See text	Physical double for Ben Hearst
Q	Eileen Castle	Marginal cultist	Doctor
Q	"Frank"	Marginal cultist	Street clothes
S	Sam Vinton	Ordinary cultist	Doctor
S	Edna McCormick	Marginal cultist	Nurse
T	Ken Fisher	See text	Wearing a suit

handle it (meaning either the police or the hospital staff).

If the heroes don't leave, the cultist produces a radio and calls for "assistance," still sticking to the cover story. (He's actually notifying the cultists in Area S.) If the heroes try to force their way past, the cultist draws his weapon (a 9mm pistol in each case) and opens fire on the largest or most threatening hero.

Cultist sentries who somehow survive an encounter with the heroes move toward the next nearest cultist by the most direct route.

C. Loading Dock. Read this aloud to the players:

This area appears to be a loading dock. It is a large room, with thick columns supporting the ceiling, and a large grate set in the cement floor. In the northwest corner there is a huge stack of Styrofoam packing material and cardboard boxes, and a small handcart nearby. There are two other exits.

Key to the Abandoned Wing

The following section details what the heroes will find as they explore each area of the hospital's abandoned wing.

A. First Look. Read this aloud to the players:

Inside the door, the area is dark, but you can see that it is littered with old hospital equipment, boxes both overstuffed and empty, cigarette butts, and assorted trash. As you look in, you notice someone coming toward you with a flashlight. "What are you people doing in here?" the figure demands. "This area is off-limits."

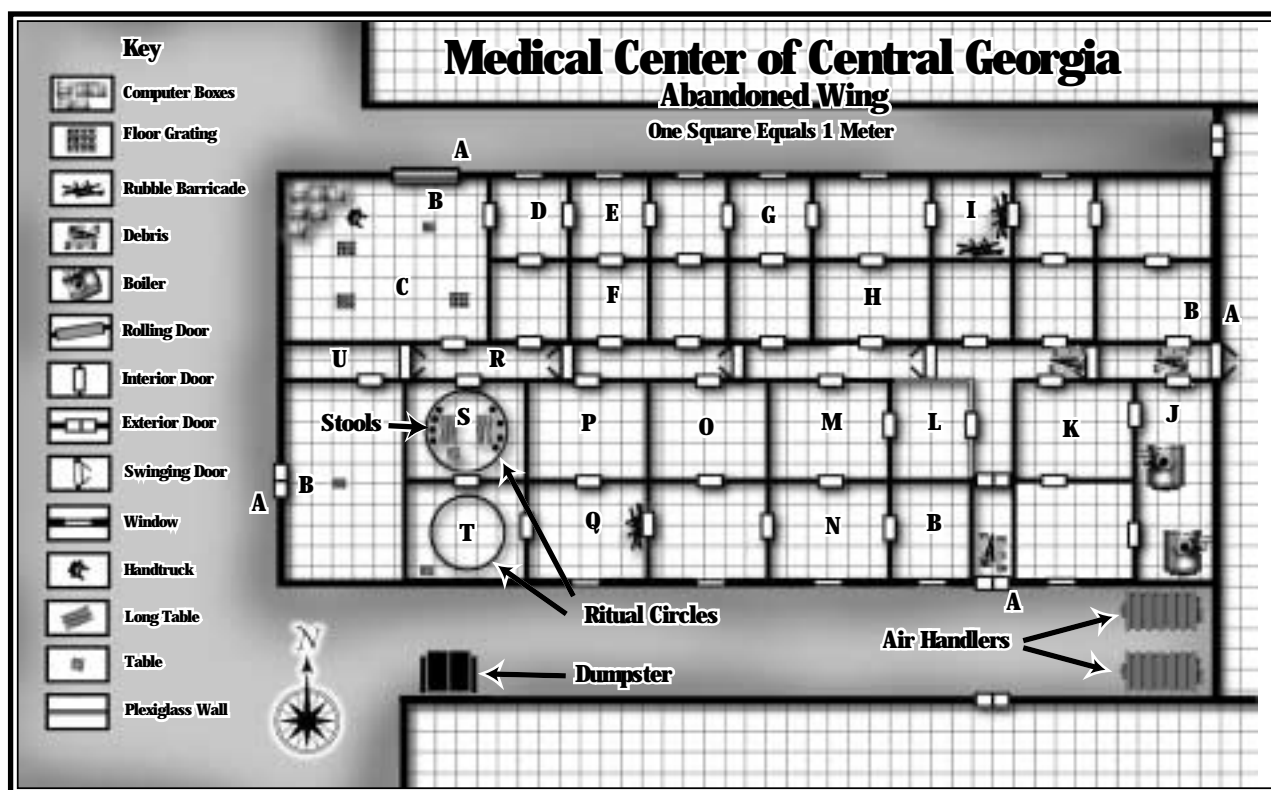
B. Sentry. The figure approaching the heroes is an Ordinary-quality cultist: security guard Evan Hendricks (at the rollup door to the north), security guard Mike Burnett (at the double doors to the west), hospital orderly Montel White (at the south door), or hospital orderly Duane Hatcher (at the east doors). The cultist attempts to convince the heroes that, regardless of what they think might be going on in the abandoned wing, the heroes should let the "proper authorities"

The loading dock is one of the few well-lit areas in the abandoned wing, but the heroes must make Awareness-*perception* checks to notice the lone Ordinary-quality cultist, Chuck Houston, lurking behind the pillar nearest the south door. If the heroes do not immediately deal with him, he waits until the heroes have passed him, and shoots at the last hero in the group. He is armed with a 9mm pistol.

D. Office. This small room was originally the maintenance office, and is littered with old-style steel furniture (desk, chairs, filing cabinet). The room also has two cultists, a doctor and a nurse, both wearing MCCG ID badges. The doctor is Roger Simmons (an Ordinary-quality cultist); the nurse is Vanna Templeton (a Marginal-quality cultist). Both are armed with 9mm pistols.

As soon as even a single hero enters from the south or east, the Doctor Simmons grabs the hero and tries to pull him inside, while Nurse Templeton pushes the desk in front of the door.

If heroes enter from the west (Area C), Doctor Simmons pretends to be holding Nurse Templeton hostage, and tells the heroes he wants to "negotiate" for his safe release. The nurse only drops the hostage act if the heroes see through her deception. Otherwise,



she leads the heroes to Area R, where she makes a sudden break for Area U, screaming her head off. She then helps the two cultists in that area fight the heroes.

E. Office. Read this aloud to the players:

This room was obviously an office at some point, and it has a large amount of steel furniture piled up in the northeast corner. The dust in here is greatly disturbed.

The cultists originally moved the furniture in this room to one side, intending to keep the children in here, but Janet Fisher wanted them closer to where the ritual would be held. If the heroes look around in here, they can attempt an Investigate–search check. On a successful result, they find a set of car keys, with a plastic tag that reads “Noble Village Daycare.” (Cyndi Watts dropped her keys in here while helping move the furniture, but never found them.)

F. Examination Room. Read this aloud to the players:

The battered examination table and broken cabinets clearly mark this room as a disused examination room. An orderly crouched behind the table quickly puts his finger to his lips and whispers, “Ssh! Quick, get in here!”

This is, again, a Marginal-quality cultist, trying to trick the heroes into dropping their guard long enough for him to shoot one of them. (He has a .38 revolver strapped to his ankle.) He tells them his name is Randy Mayfield, and that he came in here to smoke a cigarette when he stumbled on the cultists by accident. “*I’m trying to hide until they leave,*” he says. “*But I think they got a bunch of kids locked in the old admitting area.*” (The southwest corner of the building.)

Randy offers to go for help if the heroes want to try to rescue the children. If they let him go, he heads straight for the nearest sentry, and tells the sentry to warn the cultists in Area R. Otherwise, he sticks to his story until the heroes attack him, or give him an opening too good to pass up.



G. Supply Room. Read this aloud to the players:

Metal shelving reaches nearly to the ceiling in this room, and most of the shelves are still loaded with boxes of useless and outdated hospital equipment. Just as you look in, you hear a light *tink!* from the far side of the room, somewhere among the shelves.

The Ordinary-quality cultist in here (Beau Hopper) has climbed up atop the shelves. As the heroes entered, he threw a penny across the room as a diversion. If the heroes fall for it, he jumps down behind them, shrieking like a maniac, flailing about with a pair of daggers. (He has no firearms.) Otherwise, he remains quietly atop the shelves until he sees an opening, then attacks.

H. Operating Room. Read this aloud to the players:

Though the room is almost bare, the distinctive light fixture above the distinctive table marks it as an old operating room. Two policemen stand on opposite sides of the operating table. Each points his pistol at the other's head. As you look in, both cops together shout, "Go get help!"

The two Ordinary-quality cultists in the operating room—Officers Kyle Martin and Dan Coffee—are trying to delay the heroes by pretending to be under some strange diabolic compulsion to shoot each other. They claim that they came in here when they heard the sound of a child crying, but got lost trying to locate the sound. When they came in here, a bald man wearing a red silk robe splattered them with blood from a dead cat, and told them to shoot each other. They've been standing here for over an hour, fighting the urge to pull the trigger. They beg the heroes to help them, saying they don't want to die this way, or that they want to see their families one more time, or whatever it takes to get the heroes to buy their story.

If the heroes carefully try to take their guns away, the cultists slowly start to squeeze the triggers—but not enough for the hammer to actually fall on a round. If the heroes ease up, so do the cultists. If the heroes try to disarm the cops quickly, they pull the trigger—the first chamber is empty, anyway. Then they open fire on the heroes. They also attack if the heroes decide to just leave them there. Both men have 9mm pistols.

Cyndi Watts

Cult Schoolteacher

Human nonprofessional

STR 8 [0] INT 9 [0]
DEX 10 [0] WIL 11 [+1]
CON 14 PER 8

Durability: 14/14/7/7 Action Check: 10+/9/4/2
Move: sprint 18, run 12, walk 4 #Actions: 3
Reaction Score: Marginal/3 Last Resorts: 1
Perks: Tough as Nails
Flaws: Criminal Record, Temper (+6)

Attacks

Unarmed 9/4/2 d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s LI/O

Defenses

Armor: none

Skills

Athletics [8]; Unarmed [8]–*brawl* [9]; Stamina [14]–*endurance* [15], *resist pain* [15]; Vehicle Op [10]; Knowledge [9]; Social Science [9]; Awareness [11]; Lore [11]–*occult* [12]; Teach [11]; Deception [8]–*bluff* [9]; Interaction [8]–*intimidate* [9]

Gear

Noble Village ID card, spare van keys

Cyndi Watts is a dangerous lunatic, a sociopath posing as a schoolteacher for disabled children. She received her post at the Noble Village Day Care Center through the machinations of the cult. Their agents already employed at the center forged her credentials, leaving out her history of physical and psychological abuse of children. Her primary job at the center is as a physical therapist; her role in the cult is as security.

I. Body Storage. Read this aloud to the players:

The stench of death is in this room, and the reason is obvious. The bloody bodies of several dead children lie in a heap in the middle of the room. They don't appear to have been dead long. It's difficult to tell how many bodies are in here, but you would guess it's probably five.

This is where the cultists have stashed the corpses of children who either failed to complete the computer equations in Area S, or who caused trouble. There are four, in total. Hidden among their remains is the diminutive Cyndi Watts, a Temple of Ashes cultist who works at the Noble Village Day Care Center for Challenged Children. She has doused herself in blood to blend in and is sprawled in the back of the pile, playing dead.

If the heroes move any of the bodies, Watts jumps up with a piercing shriek and hurls herself at the nearest hero. The heroes receive a +2 step penalty to their Awareness–*intuition* skill checks because her appearance and battle cry are so startling.

Watts fights without weapons, except her sharp fingernails. If the heroes overcome her, they find a Noble Village Day Care patch on her sweater.

J. Equipment Room. Read this aloud to the players:

This long room holds disused equipment: a generator, a boiler, and similar machinery to support the once-active hospital wing. About halfway along the west wall, something makes a faint scratching noise from inside the boiler.

The equipment room is actually clear of cultists. The scratching noise is coming from a stray cat using the non-functional boiler as a litter box. (If the heroes throw open the boiler door, the cat leaps out hissing, and scurries to new cover.)



K. Operating Room. Read this aloud to the players:

The distinctive table and overhead light fixture mark this room as an operating theater, now being used as a storage room. Piles of boxes and obsolete equipment are scattered around the room. From somewhere, a male voice mutters rhythmically.

An unarmed Marginal-quality cultist (Anthony Ashford) dressed as a hospital patient, sits beneath the operating table, rocking rapidly back and forth, repeating the phrase, “Keep going, keep going” over and over. He is unresponsive, though he follows the heroes if they lead him by the hand.

If the heroes use psionics to find out what Anthony knows, they can discover: that he is a cultist (Ordinary result); that he has been to some kind of daycare center for disabled children several times (Good result); and that he suffers from his current condition because Janet Fisher performed some kind of magical experiment on him (Amazing result). Anthony was actually the test for the spell that Janet Fisher used on Ben Hearst. Anthony

doesn’t know that, though. He believes Janet did this as some kind of punishment.

L. Nurses’ Station. Read this aloud to the players:

The north and east walls of this room contain sliding Plexiglas windows, with counters inside and out. This was probably a nurse’s station in the hospital’s early days. Something’s not right, here, though. The layout of this room would make it an excellent guard post. Someone with a firearm could cover three approaches from here.

The heroes should make Awareness–*perception* checks. On an Ordinary success, the hero glimpses what looks like a face in the darkness of the room, but can’t quite locate it. On a Good success, the hero sees a huddled human shape reflected on the door of a metal cabinet, indicating that someone is hiding under the counter. On an Amazing success, the hero recognizes the shape as a “Resuscitation Annie” mannequin.

There’s actually nothing dangerous in the room, though the cultists did put the mannequin under the counter after realizing that it wouldn’t make a good decoy. Ironically, it makes a better decoy sitting under the counter than anywhere else in the room, since it delays intruders while they try to determine what it is.

M. Ward. Read this aloud to the players:

The scattered metal-frame beds in this large room indicate that it once served as a ward. As you look in this room, you catch a brief glimpse of a shadow through the pebbled-glass window in the south door—something just moved in the room beyond the ward.

The shadow was “Spider,” the possessed cultist from Area P, moving from room to room as he walks his “patrol.” He moves from Area N to Area O, then to Area P.

N. Ward. Read this aloud to the players:

Scattered metal-frame beds in this large room, along with a pile of mattresses under the window, indicate that it used to be a ward room. Dust drifts gently through the air, and a door in the east wall stands slightly ajar.

If the heroes haven't already dispatched Montel White, the sentry from the room to the east, he waits here to attack them. He hides behind the pile of mattresses, and will open fire with his 9mm pistol as the heroes try to cross the room.

His makeshift cover provides a +1 step penalty to ranged attacks directed against him. If the heroes came

during the day, the light from the window behind Montel provides another +1 step penalty, as he becomes harder to see in the darkness under the window.

O. Ward. Read this aloud to the players:

As you look into this room, someone suddenly stands up from behind the door, pointing a gun at you through the pebbled-glass window in the door.

There is actually no one in this room, but a shadow behind the door looks like a person holding a weapon. The heroes

Ken Fisher

Cult Financier

Level 5 human Diplomat (Free Agent)

STR	7	[0]	INT	14	[+2]
DEX	6	[-1]	WIL	14	[+2]
CON	8		PER	11	

Durability: 8/8/4/4 Action Check: 12+/11/5/2
Move: sprint 12, run 8, walk 2 #Actions: 2
Reaction Score: Ordinary/2 Last Resorts: 2
Perks: Filthy Rich, Powerful Ally (Temple of Ashes, -4), Well Traveled
Flaws: Clueless (Business-corporate, +4), Criminal Record, Obsessed (serving cult, +4)

Attacks

Unarmed	3/1/0	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI/O
9mm pistol	6/3/1	d4+1w/d4+2w/d4m	HI/O

Defenses

+2 INT resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
+2 WIL resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
Armor: none

Skills

Athletics [7]; Stamina [8]-endurance [9]; Modern [6]; Vehicle Op [6]; Business [14]-corporate [15], small [16]; Knowledge [14]-computer op [15]; trucking [16]; Law [14]-interstate shipping [15]; Security [14]; Administration [14]-management [15]; Awareness [14]-perception [15]; Investigate [14]-research [15]; Lore [14]-conspiracy [16], occult [15];

Resolve [14]-mental [15]; Deception [11]-bluff [14]; Interaction [11]-bargain [15]; Leadership [11]

Gear

9mm pistol, cellular telephone

Contacts:

Police detective (Sergeant John Watts)

Ken Fisher uses his trucking company to provide funds for the Temple of Ashes. When he's not diverting cash and materiel to the cult, he provides free shipping for cult members, abductees, and incriminating evidence.

Fisher became involved with the cult when his fledgling company—two broken-down semi rigs and a van for an office—began transporting drugs, hidden in orange crates, for some smugglers in Miami. Within a few weeks, Fisher was caught by a policeman named John Watts.

Watts was a member of the Temple of Ashes cult, a police detective using his cult ties to advance his career, and his police ties to cover up cult activities. He let Fisher off the hook for the drug-smuggling, and introduced him to "Janet Wilson," the diabolist of the Temple of Ashes.

Janet admired Fisher's ingenuity in disguising large packages of cocaine as orange crates—then selling the cocaine-dusted oranges to juice companies—and invited Fisher into the Temple of Ashes. Fisher agreed, and the cult has since made him a rich man at the mere cost of pretending to be Janet's husband. Things could be worse.



"Spider"

Possessed Cultist

Level 6 human Combat Spec

STR	14	[+2]	INT	6	[-1]
DEX	10	[0]	WIL	12	[+1]
CON	14		PER	4	

Durability: 14/14/7/7
12+/11/5/2

Action Check:

Move: sprint 24, run 16, walk 6

#Actions: 3

Reaction Score: Ordinary/3

Last

Resorts: 0

Perks: Fortitude, Reflexes, Tough as Nails

Flaws: Criminal Record, Forgetful, Possessed (+4)

Attacks

Unarmed 17/8/4 d4+2s/d4+3s/d4+4s LI/O

Bite* 17/8/4 d4+2s/d4+3s/d4+4s LI/O

* Poison (see text)

Defenses

+2 resistance modifier to melee attacks

Armor: none

Skills

Athletics [14]–*climb* [17], *cling* [15], *jump* [16];
Unarmed [14]–*brawl* [17]; Stealth [10]–*hide* [12];
Stamina [14]–*endurance* [16], *resist pain* [16];
Awareness [12]–*intuition* [14]; Lore [12]–*occult* [13];
Resolve [12]–*mental* [13], *physical* [14]

None of the cult members can recall what this man's real name is. For as long as they have known him, he has been 'Spider.' The cultists believe that he might have been an early attempt at demon summoning gone wrong. Very little is left of Spider's mind. The cult uses him as an enforcer, a threat to keep neophytes in line.

Spider's possession gives him two special abilities. First, he can cling to any solid surface, even a sheer or inverted one, as long as the surface is not entirely smooth. Second, Spider's bite injects a potent necrotoxin (insinuating, +1 step penalty, onset time 15 minutes, duration 12 hours). Though technically the presence of this venom in his system should kill Spider, the demon that grants him the ability also grants him immunity to it.

should attempt Awareness–*intuition* checks (with a +1 step penalty because of the pebbled glass). Those who fail mistake the shadow for a real person—at least, until they have a chance to identify it.

P. Lab. Read this aloud to the players when they enter this room:

As you step into the room—apparently an old medical laboratory—you see a drop of water fall beside you, leaving a little wisp of smoke behind. You abruptly realize that a grimacing man with no hair clings to the wall above the door.

The first hero to step through the doorway can attempt an Awareness–*intuition* check. The heroes outside can attempt the check at +1 step for each person between them and the door.

The cultist here is the same one the heroes saw on the ambulance the other night, and he bears an uncanny resemblance to Ben Hearst. He is possessed by a demon, which is subservient to Baal-phegor. The possession grants him uncanny superhuman abilities.

Q. Emergency Ward. Read this aloud to the players:

In this room, a bizarre sight greets you: a female doctor in surgical scrubs stands a short distance from a man pointing a gun at her. As the armed man becomes aware of you, he levels his weapon more firmly at the doctor and shouts, "Are you trying to trick me?"

The doctor motions for you to stay back. "Please," she says, "don't come any closer. Let me handle this." She looks at the armed man again. "It's okay; they're not going to do anything. Just let me take the children out of here before someone gets hurt."

Both the armed man and the doctor are Marginal cultists playing out a negotiation drama in a last-ditch effort to stall the heroes and prevent them from getting into Area T. The doctor, Eileen Castle, is a pediatric surgeon at the hospital, and has actually been arranging the abductions from the children's ward.

Dr. Castle tries to delay the heroes as long as possible by telling them to come inside, but not to point their

weapons at the armed man, or try to interfere. She also asks them not to leave the room once they've entered. The gunman, Frank, emphasizes the doctor's requests by acting more aggressive when the heroes do anything, and more calm when the doctor is talking.

Castle's story, if the heroes ask, is that she followed a suspicious-looking orderly into the abandoned wing a few hours ago, and suddenly found herself surrounded by people with guns. They forced her into this room, leaving Frank as a guard. She has been trying to convince him to come over to the right side.

Adjudicate the success of Castle's deception by making a Will feat check on the players' behalf whenever they decide to do anything other than follow Dr. Castle's instructions. If the ruse falls through, both Frank and Dr. Castle turn weapons on the heroes and shoot it out.

R. Ambush Zone. The stretch of corridor between the last two sets of doors on the west end of the abandoned wing is the cult's "killing ground" for intruders. Whenever possible, the cultists will try to lure or force their enemies into this area, then catch them in a cross-fire between Areas C, F, S, and U.

S. Cultists' Headquarters. Read this aloud to the players:

This must be the nerve center for the cultists' operation. A doctor and a nurse, their clothing stained with blood, crouch behind the steel furniture, pointing their guns at the door.

Until very recently, this room is where the cultists had the children using computers to try to complete their mathematical ritual. Though the formula was nearly finished, the cultists learned to their chagrin that the wiring in the abandoned wing was not sufficient to carry the necessary amount of data to the Internet afterward (at least, not quickly enough). So the cultists moved the computers to a new location, and stashed the children in Area T until Janet Fisher returns with the van.

The cultists here are not interested in negotiating. When their ammunition runs out, they charge to fight hand-to-hand. The doctor (Sam Vinton) is an Ordinary-quality cultist, and the nurse (Edna McCormick) is a Marginal-quality cultist.

If the heroes stop to frisk the cultists after defeating them, they find that each has a two-way radio. But

unless the heroes missed one or more of the sentries, there is no communication going on.

Janet Fisher also has a radio. If the heroes try to contact the cultists, she responds. She doesn't say where she is, or where she is going, but (even without an Awareness-*perception* check) the heroes can hear a jackhammer suddenly start up in the background at one point. (The heroes might later be able to use that sound to get a rough direction from the hospital, by checking with the Department of Public Works to find out where streets or sidewalks are being demolished. Mostly this information is useful to identify that Janet Fisher is heading toward the Noble Village Day Care Center for Challenged Children.)

T. Children's Quarters. Read this aloud to the players:

A horrifying sight greets you as you look inside this darkened room. At least a dozen children—malnourished, half-naked, and petrified with fear—huddle in the center of a large red circle painted on the floor. The room is filthy; you judge that they've been here for a few days.

In the midst of the children stands a man who you recognize as Ken Fisher. He has a pistol, but throws it to you when you enter. He holds up his hands.

"You can't believe how glad I am you're here," he says. "Jolly Roger three-one-seven. Did Hearst send you? I need extraction."

Ken Fisher is making one last effort to mess with the heroes' minds—and to delay them long enough for his wife to set up the computers at an alternate location and find more children to finish the ritual. He is fairly certain that the heroes won't kill him—at least, not right away. He wants them to waste time trying to verify his identity before making a decision about him. Of course, he has only the complexity of his lies to back up his story, but he hopes that untangling the whole mess buys time.

The children, on the other hand, are terrified of leaving the circle. The cultists repeatedly told them that the only way they can leave is with Janet Fisher or Cyndi Watts. Otherwise, their parents will be shot to death. For more information on getting the children out, see "The Circle," below.

Fisher's story is that he is actually Hoffmann Institute agent Joshua Ramsey, and that he was assigned to a



deep-cover operation about 12 years ago to infiltrate a cult called the “Rising Tide.” (In fact, a Josh Ramsey was assigned to that very task 12 years ago. He was killed in 1995. Hearst supplied Fisher with the appropriate code words and knowledge to fake the Ramsey cover though.)

“They set up a fake marriage for me with ‘Janet’—if that really is her name—and gave me a bunch of money to beef up my trucking company. They use my trucks to move cultists and abductees and ordnance all over the country. And they use the profits to buy more gear and do it all over again.”

Fisher says that the Rising Tide was later subsumed into a bigger cult—the Temple of Ashes. *“We all got reasigned, and it was like joining all over again. They watched me day and night. That’s when I lost contact with the Institute.”*

He also claims to have been working with Hearst to escape back to Hoffmann. *“When Hearst joined, he recognized me from the files, and we started working on a plan to get out. He managed to get clear down in Florida. The last I heard from him, he was going to send someone to extract me. I’m guessing that’s you? Is Hearst okay?”*

On the subject of the children, Fisher says that his “wife” trusts him enough to let him guard them. If the heroes have already tried to get the kids to leave the circle (and observed their reaction) Fisher explains that the cult has performed some kind of diabolic ritual that will have dire consequences for the children’s parents if the kids leave the circle. Fisher doesn’t know how to undo it.

The heroes don’t actually have to make a decision about Fisher at this point; they can just bundle him up until they verify his story. But Fisher tries to remain in the room for any reason he can quickly concoct, because he wants the children to know that he’s still watching them—which will influence how much they trust the heroes to set them free of the circle.

The Circle

When the heroes turn their attention to the children inside the circle, they realize immediately that the kids are terrified—apparently of them. If the heroes ask the kids to come out of the circle, they tearfully refuse. If the heroes try to carry a child out of the circle, the child screams hysterically and fights with all of his or her strength. Once outside, unless the heroes gained the trust of the child in question, the child continues to fight, shrieking, “I hate you! I hate you!” at the heroes.

The abducted children have been herded into the center of the circle ever since they first came to the abandoned wing of the hospital. They have been told that if

they leave the circle without “Miss Janet” or “Miss Cyndi,” their parents will be shot to death—by men disguised as police. (The cultists wanted to ensure that if the police staged a rescue, the children would be difficult to extract.) The cultists have gone so far as to show the children pictures of dead bodies to convince them they aren’t lying. Of course, none of the children’s parents have actually been killed.

Understandably, then, getting the children to safety will be extremely difficult. The heroes must use a “soft” encounter skill—such as Deception–*bluff*, Interaction–*charm*, or Leadership–*inspire* to lure the children out (that is, if being clawed by fourteen hysterical children isn’t acceptable). The insidious lie the children have been told gives each such attempt a +2 step penalty. But because of the situation, several other modifiers might apply:

Ken Fisher is still in the room	+1
Heroes used violence in front of the children	+2
Heroes used firearms in Areas P, Q, or S	+1
Heroes used force to take a child out of the circle	+1
	per child
Heroes “removed the curse”	–1 to Deception– <i>bluff</i>
Heroes physically erased the line	–2
Heroes showed no weapons	–1
For each previous failed encounter attempt	+1
For each child who voluntarily left	–2

Once the heroes convince the children to leave the circle, it’s simply a matter of taking them to safety.

Act III: The Spider Strikes

After the heroes have dealt with the cultists and rescued the children, they may need to rest and recuperate. Fortunately, the heroes are at a hospital, so treatment isn’t far away. Note however, that the cultists are rushing to complete their Plan B, so the clock is ticking. If the heroes want to take their time, remind them that the ritual was close to completion. All the cultists need at this point is more children.

Jones and Randall are extremely pleased with the heroes if they managed to rescue the children, but they also want to know why the cult hadn’t already sacrificed the children. *“Something’s not right, here,” Randall says. “It’s unusual for a cult to keep captives alive that long. And*

why the computers?” Jones and Randall want the heroes to find out what the children might have heard or seen while they were held captive, and what role the computers played in the ceremonies of the cult, if any.

As most of the children are being treated for minor wounds and malnutrition while the authorities notify their parents, the heroes still have access. The police are also considerably more willing to let the heroes talk to the children, especially if the heroes personally rescued them (as opposed to simply telling rescue personnel where to find them). In fact, the parents of the local children are extremely eager to meet the heroes—as are the media. The Hoffmann Institute prefers its agents to maintain a low profile, so the heroes must do some fancy dodging to avoid being photographed by the media. But an even remotely convincing story allows them to enlist the aid of the police.

Scene 1: A Pattern Forms

LOCATION: Medical Center of Central Georgia, Macon, GA

For the Gamemaster Only: While the heroes interview the children and investigate the last few threads of the cultists’ plot, the cultists secure a new location—and several new children—to finish their diabolic ritual.

Meanwhile, deep-cover agent Ben Hearst “awakens” from his catatonic state, kills the agents guarding him, and departs for Macon.

Interrogating Fisher

If the heroes brought Ken Fisher out of the abandoned wing, they might want to get information from him about where his wife might be going. Assuming they discovered that he is not really a Hoffmann Institute agent, they must interrogate him. During this interrogation, Fisher denies that there even *is* a cult, let alone what it—or his wife—is up to.

Interrogating Fisher over the course of a single hour would be considered a fast investigation (+3 step penalty). Taking 2-3 hours would be a moderate investigation (+1 step penalty). Taking longer would be a careful investigation (–2 step bonus). Other modifiers from the table in Chapter 4: Skills, in the *Player’s Handbook* could also apply.

On a Critical Failure, Fisher sticks to his story that he is being “framed” by the heroes, and asks to speak to a lawyer. On a Failure, Fisher says that he’s not entirely

sure what’s been happening over the last several hours, because the kidnappers drugged him.

On an Ordinary success, Fisher points out that if he were with the kidnappers, wasting time interrogating him would just be letting the other kidnappers escape. On a Good success, Fisher admits that his wife will go someplace where she can get more children: *“She knows plenty of places where she can get another group of kids.”* On an Amazing success, Fisher lets slip that the vital clue to finding the kids can be found on Miss Watts: *“You found the ones the kidnappers already killed, right? I’m surprised you’re still standing here talking to me.”*

Interviewing the Children

The heroes can interview the children whenever they’re ready, though some children are unavailable because of their poor health, combined with the mental trauma of their ordeal. The chief physician on the case, Dr. Angela Harper, tells the heroes: *“It may be a long time before some of these children recover. In some cases, their symptoms are the same as Gulf War soldiers with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. I shudder to imagine what this is going to do to them later in their development. Some of them will have to be institutionalized.”*

Discussing ritual abuse with children is always a delicate process, as Dr. Harper immediately points out. *“Finding out exactly what happened to them will take weeks or months, if not years,” she says. “But if you don’t press them too hard about the abuse, they should be able to give you enough information to form a fairly clear picture of what those sickos were doing with them.”*

Dr. Harper insists on being involved with each interview, in the interest of the children. The players do not need to play out individual interviews of the children. Assume that each interview (resulting in an Interaction–*interview* skill check) requires roughly a half-hour, after which Dr. Harper suggests that the heroes let the child rest. If the heroes have earned Dr. Harper’s trust, she assists their interviews, providing a –1 step bonus to their skill check. (If the heroes manage to maintain friendly professional relations with Dr. Harper, she could become a good Contact for further adventures.)

The information the children can provide depends on the degree of success:

Critical Failure: The child becomes extremely frightened and refuses to answer any more questions. This prompts Dr. Harper to decide that the heroes are too pushy with the children, and her “assistance” now actually provides a +1 step penalty, instead of a –1 step bonus.



Failure: The child's answers are meaningless bits of information, such as, "I want my mommy," and "My puppy's name is Sandy."

Ordinary: The child remembers that there were "good doctors" and "bad doctors," and that the "good doctors" let the kids play on the computers. But if the kids did something wrong (with the computers), the bad doctors took that child away to the operator room. Those children never came back. The doctors sometimes would make everybody pray to the "Elf-a-go," and nobody wanted to do that because it made them afraid.

Good: The doctors called the computers the "spider web," and said that's where the Elf-a-go lived. The doctors said that if the kids couldn't find the Elf-a-go in the spider web, then *"all the kids' mommies and daddies would die."* But if they could find the Elf-a-go, then they could *"all go back home and live happily ever after."*

Amazing: Looking for the Elf-a-go was very disturbing. *"You had to look at all these bad pictures. Pictures of people doing nasty stuff."* The children can't be much more specific than that, though they do remember that the bad doctors—or people dressed like them—were in some of the pictures.

The World Wide Web

The heroes may decide to explore on the Internet if they spoke to the children. They might also want to see what they can find out about the word "Elf-a-go."

"The Spider Web": The hero can attempt Investigate–research skill checks every hour, with Knowledge–computer op and Street Smart–net savvy acting as related skills.

3 failures: Other net denizens mistake the hero for a government snoop, and steer him or her to a "sting" site set up by the FBI. The character is now under surveillance by the FBI as a possible child pornographer—though they'll certainly be interested in any other covert activities the hero undertakes.

2 successes: Rumors on various newsgroups say that a site on the World Wide Web offers free X-rated graphics, video clips, and shareware involving the most tasteless pornography and "snuff clips" (videos of people being murdered). The website is only a rumor though, because it reportedly comes and goes at random—a phantom site. Most who know about it consider it a net myth, or at best a hoax.

4 successes: The hero learns the web address of the phantom site: "www.phegor.com." Trying the address only gives an error message, though, stating that the server could not be found.

The Elf-a-go: Searching for the name "Elf-a-go" receives a +3 step penalty, because it isn't the correct word (though the heroes aren't likely to know that). The hero can attempt Investigate–research skill checks every hour, with Lore–occult and Social Science–linguistics as related skills.

3 failures: The hero suddenly receives an e-mail, from "webmaster@phegor.com." It reads: *"I sent my children to bring you to me, and you spurned my invitation. Now you seek me, but your insult can only be redressed in the blood of innocents."* By the time the character has finished reading the message, the domain "phegor.com" has vanished from the Internet.

1 success: "Elf-a-go" appears to be a nonsense word, though the search engine suggests that the word might be misspelled.

3 successes: The correct spelling for at least part of the word is "phegor."

5 successes: "Phegor" is the name of a mountain in an ancient Moabite myth. The lord of Mount Phegor was "Baal-phegor," from which the demon name "Belphegor" comes. "Baal-phegor" is the demon of wealth and ingenious inventions. It appeared to the Moabites as an attractive woman clad all in black. The demon rewarded its followers with great wealth in exchange for human sacrifices.

7 successes: Baal-phegor posed as a god until it was exposed as a demon by "forerunners of the Order of the Rosy Cross." They reportedly banished Baal-phegor to a formless void, from which it sends evil spirits to wreak vengeance.

8 successes: The demon possesses the ability to spit a soul-searing poison, and to drink the minds of its prey.

9 successes: In the late 1970s, a "spider-cult" sprang up in Iran, said to worship "Bel ap' Aguor, the spirit of desert spiders." The cult was discovered when they kidnapped several children and forced them to attempt to solve mathematical problems. A counter-terrorist squad rescued the children after they had only solved a few equations. None of the cultists are known to have survived.

Hearst Vanishes

As the heroes are sorting out their various leads, they receive a telephone call from Field Director Jones. He tells them that Ben Hearst has vanished. *"Chief Randall went to pick up Hearst from the two agents who were babysitting him, but he found them dead. He says it wasn't pretty. Hearst is gone, though. Randall thinks the cult may have*

taken him back. If so, they may be headed your way."

Hearst actually overpowered his guards and escaped, according to the plan he worked out with Janet Fisher. But the final scene will have a bit less impact if the players made it impossible for Hearst to escape. For example, they might have set a hero to guard Hearst, or locked him in a high-security vault somewhere despite Randall and Jones telling them to hand Hearst over to other agents.

If this happens, consider running the final scene without Hearst, or changing the circumstances of his escape a bit, so that the hero guarding him was only beaten senseless rather than killed. However, do not play out the combat. It will ruin the final effect somewhat if the heroes know that Hearst freed himself.

Jones tells the heroes that Randall is on his way out to supervise the follow-up investigation and look for Hearst. *"He should be arriving there soon, after he's cleaned up the mess at the safe house. He asked me to tell you to wait, but if you've got a good lead, I'm authorizing you to follow it up. If you do go anywhere, call him and let him know where to find you. Here's his number."*

Scene 2: The Ritual Resumes

LOCATION: Noble Village Day Care Center, Macon, GA

For the Gamemaster Only: The cultists barricade themselves in the Noble Village Day Care Center for Challenged Children, and try desperately to finish their ceremony with the children there.

The heroes probably now know that the cultists have gone to the Noble Village Day Care Center for Challenged Children to finish their ritual. The center takes care of special needs children with higher than normal IQs, giving them an environment to explore their intellect without having to deal with the harsh attitudes that other school children often have. Some of the children at Noble Village are quite gifted.

While the heroes home in on Janet Fisher, she and the remaining Temple of Ashes cultists have already reached the Noble Village and are fortifying the building against an attack. The cultists now include a number of bikers (some of whom the heroes might have seen at Eagle Storage, in Dade City) and some of the staff of the day care center, who are themselves members of the cult. The other staff members have been rounded up and locked in

a storeroom. The students of Noble Village are taking turns at the computer workstations, trying to solve the equation that will summon Baal-phegor into the network.

How Much Time Has Passed?

Unless the heroes have done excellent detective work, it takes them a while to figure out where Janet Fisher and the cultists have gone. Fortunately, Janet Fisher has also had to do a lot of work setting up the computers at Noble Village, and checking the Internet connection to ensure that it can handle the traffic.

The heroes have 4 hours from the time that Janet Fisher realizes that the children at the hospital are out of her reach, and when she finishes setting up the network at Noble Center. If the heroes immediately realize that they need to go there, they arrive before the ritual even begins (though they still have to rescue the hostages).

If the heroes take longer than 4 hours to find Janet Fisher, the children are already working on the equation. For each additional 2 hours that the heroes delay, the formula is one step closer to completion. See the table under The Heroes Accept below to find the formula's state of completion when the heroes arrive.

If the heroes take as many as 10 hours, or the players seem stumped, have a policeman (one of the real ones who showed up after the shooting) approach them with Cyndi Watts' lost keys. Before the police take it away as evidence, they want to make sure none of the heroes themselves lost their keys in a fight. *"I didn't think so, because of this daycare tag. Same place as where that Watts nutbar worked. I'm surprised they didn't get their kids from there."*

If this blatant clue doesn't work, and the heroes go more than 12 hours without catching on, skip to the consequences of Outcome 3: The Demon Escapes below.

Approaching Noble Village

The Noble Village Day Care Center is in a fairly wealthy neighborhood on Macon's northwest side. The building is a single story (except for one two-story section for the gymnasium), with a small parking lot in front and a small playground behind.

As the heroes approach the building, they notice several cars in the parking lot, a special-access minivan (with the Noble Center logo on the side) pulled up to the front door, and several motorcycles parked on the playground. If the heroes arrived fairly soon, there are only six motorcycles. For every extra 2 hours it takes the heroes to



they discover that the doors have been padlocked from within with a Good-quality padlock and chain (+2 step penalty to pick or break). These doors are both Durability 6, Toughness Good. The main door at Area C is only Durability 2, Ordinary Toughness, and is not locked. There is actually a sensor that opens the door when anyone approaches within 1 meter of the door from either side.

Rooftop. A ladder outside the teacher's lounge (Area N) leads to the roof of the main section, where another ladder leads to the roof of the gymnasium. Access to the lower ladder requires opening a metal-mesh cage over the lower rungs. The cage is locked with an Ordinary-quality padlock (+1 step penalty to pick or break). A single access hatch in the roof the gymnasium opens into the support beams in the ceiling of Area J.

Lighting. The lights in all of the rooms are on and functional, with the exception of Area P.

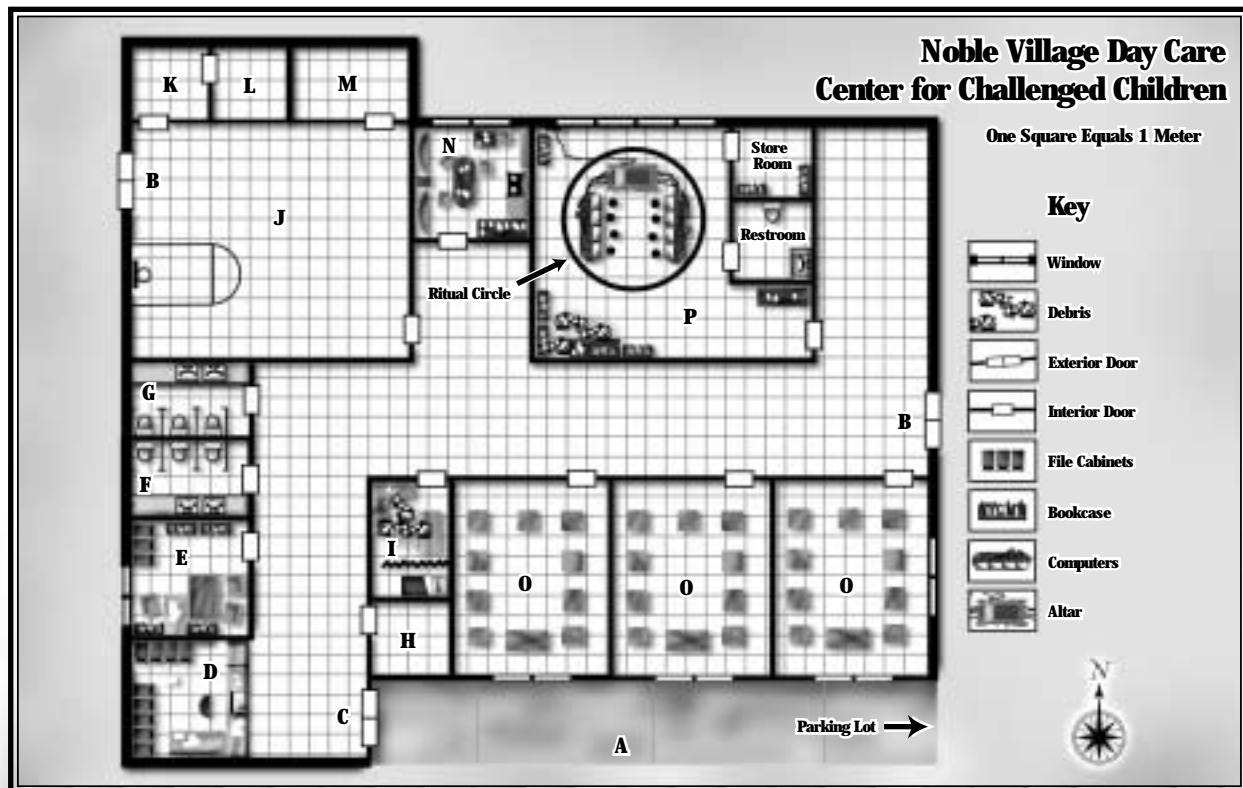
Interior Doors. All of the interior doors are Durability 4, Toughness Ordinary, and have a 20cm-wide strip of reinforced glass that runs lengthwise down the door. Each of these doors is unlocked, and has a large metal button beside it that reads "OPEN."

Cultist Tactics. The cultists are tired of playing with the heroes. They do whatever it takes to keep the heroes

reach Noble Village, there are three more cycles.

Windows. Looking through the windows into the corridors gives the clear impression that no one is here; the hallways are empty. The blinds are drawn on Areas E, N, and O—which is in itself suspicious.

Doors. The exterior doors at Area B are emergency exits. If the heroes manage to open them from the outside,



from reaching Area P before the ritual is complete.

Neighborhood Response. The moment a single shot is fired in the vicinity of the daycare center, the neighboring residents and offices call the police. When the police arrive, they surround the building, but do not enter. A SWAT team eventually approaches the building if no one inside has responds to telephone calls or hails from an officer with a megaphone. These police (Ordinary-quality Law Enforcers) can bail the heroes out if they get stuck, but otherwise, the heroes should get to have all the fun.

The Opposition

Once again, the Gamemaster might need reference for the cultists the heroes are likely to face. The following table should make keeping track of the opposition a bit easier.

Location	Name	Quality	Appearance
A	"Treads"	Ordinary biker	Biker
A	"Bull"	Ordinary biker	Biker
D	John Randall	See text	Business suit
H	"Candy"	Ordinary biker	Biker
J	"Krunch"	Ordinary biker	Biker
J	"Pig"	Ordinary biker	Biker
N	Xic	Demon	Monster mosquito
O	"Shrapnel"	Ordinary biker	Biker
O	"Tramp"	Ordinary biker	Biker
O	Jennilee Walker	Marginal cultist	Daycare staffer
P	Ben Hearst	See text	Cutoff jeans
P	Janet Fisher	See text	Street clothes

Key to the Day Care Center

The following section details what the heroes find as they explore each area of the Noble Center Day Care Center.

A. Parking Lot. Read this aloud to the players:

As you pull into the parking lot, you hear the sudden roar of motorcycles behind you. Two men, dressed in biking leathers, pull into the parking lot, and open fire with submachine guns!

These two Ordinary-quality biker cultists have been given instructions to kill any group of more than three people who pull into the parking lot. (Knowing that the heroes are after her, Janet Fisher doesn't want them interrupting her last chance at completing the equation.)

The cultists simply ride up and start shooting at the heroes with 9mm SMGs. They would be happy if the heroes just left, but they don't expect that to happen, and so they are prepared to fight to the death.

B. Emergency Doors. Each of the building's emergency doors is chained shut and padlocked from the inside. Details on how to bypass this defense is listed above under "Doors."

C. Main Door. Read this aloud to the players:

Through the glass doors of the main entrance, you see a receptionist's desk, and a corridor lined with doors. Numerous homemade decorations line the walls, and hang from the ceiling in the lobby area. You don't see anyone inside.

As mentioned above, the main doors open automatically if anyone steps within 1.5 meters in front of them.

D. Reception. If the heroes look behind the receptionist's desk, read this aloud:



At the very same moment you notice a pair of shoes poking out from under the counter, a man in a business suit rolls out and points a 9mm pistol up at you. In a moment, you recognize him as Intelligence Department Chief John Randall.

“Thank God it’s you!” Randall says, lowering his weapon. “They’re down the hall, in the rec room! We’ve got to stop them!”

Randall had arrived in Macon and was on his way to the Medical Center of Central Georgia when he passed Janet Fisher on the road. Recognizing her from Intelligence Department files, he followed her. He tried to telephone the heroes, but discovered that all his cell phone did was crackle with static. When Fisher went inside the day care center, Randall followed, but had to take cover behind the receptionist’s desk when more cultists showed up. He’s been waiting for the heroes to find Noble Village ever since.

Department Chief Randall is actually telling the truth. Unfortunately, the heroes—having been exposed to the various ruses of the cultists at the hospital, and getting a similar story from Ken Fisher—may be inclined not to believe him. Depending on their mood, they may even shoot him.

Play this out as long as possible, with Randall asking to use a hero’s cell phone to call for backup, urging the heroes to go to the rec room, and otherwise sticking to his story. The consequences of not trusting Randall depend on how the heroes express their distrust.

E. Office. Read this aloud to the players:

This room is obviously the office for the center, with a well-appointed desk and chairs, and cabinets loaded with a variety of books. Sitting at the desk is a middle-aged woman, leering at you. She has a dark red dot in the middle of her forehead.

This is Martha Winter, the director of the Noble Village Day Care Center. Janet Fisher shot her when she came in. Rifling through her desk or purse will turn up keys to various doors throughout the building, including the roof access outside Area N, but little else. Her telephone has speed dials set up for various emergency numbers, but

the cultists have cut all telephone service except the data line in Area P.

F. Women’s Restroom. This is a women’s restroom, though obviously designed to be accessible to children with disabilities.

G. Men’s Restroom. Read this aloud to the players:

The water is running in this room, and you see a young man in a wheelchair slumped over the sink, face-down in the overflowing, pinkish water.

The cultists killed this poor boy because he ignored their instructions to assemble in the rec room. He insisted on washing his hands—part of his personal habit for going to the rec room—and a cultist shot him in the head for disobeying.

H. Nurse’s Station. Read this aloud to the players:

The nurse’s station has been ransacked, with boxes of bandages and medicine scattered all over the room. As you look in, a woman in a dirty leather jacket and cutoffs suddenly kicks down a privacy screen and fires a shotgun at you!

The heroes can attempt Awareness–*intuition* checks to see if the Ordinary-quality biker cultist gets the drop on them. The cultist was in here trying to find the prescription medicines for the kids working on the computers, on Janet Fisher’s advice. Incidentally, the heroes do not find the center’s nurse anywhere around. Fortunately for her, she called in sick today.

I. Custodian’s Closet. There is no one in this room, though heroes with Physical Science–*chemistry* or Demolitions–*scratch-built* who wish to cook up a quick chemical surprise for the cultists can find plenty of raw materials in here.

J. Gymnasium. Read this aloud to the players:

This huge, high-ceilinged room is obviously a gymnasium and physical therapy room. Ominously, the center of the room holds a 4-meter-wide puddle of blood, in which you can make out the bodies of three teenagers, a younger child, and an older woman.

The cultists have been using this room as an execution floor for children who didn't perform in the rec room, and for one of the teachers who stood up to the cultists. They were all brought here, forced to kneel, and then had their throats cut. The cultists have not left a trail of bloody footprints because they stood behind the victims when they killed them, and left

before the puddle got too large. But they are on their way back. Read the following aloud to the players:

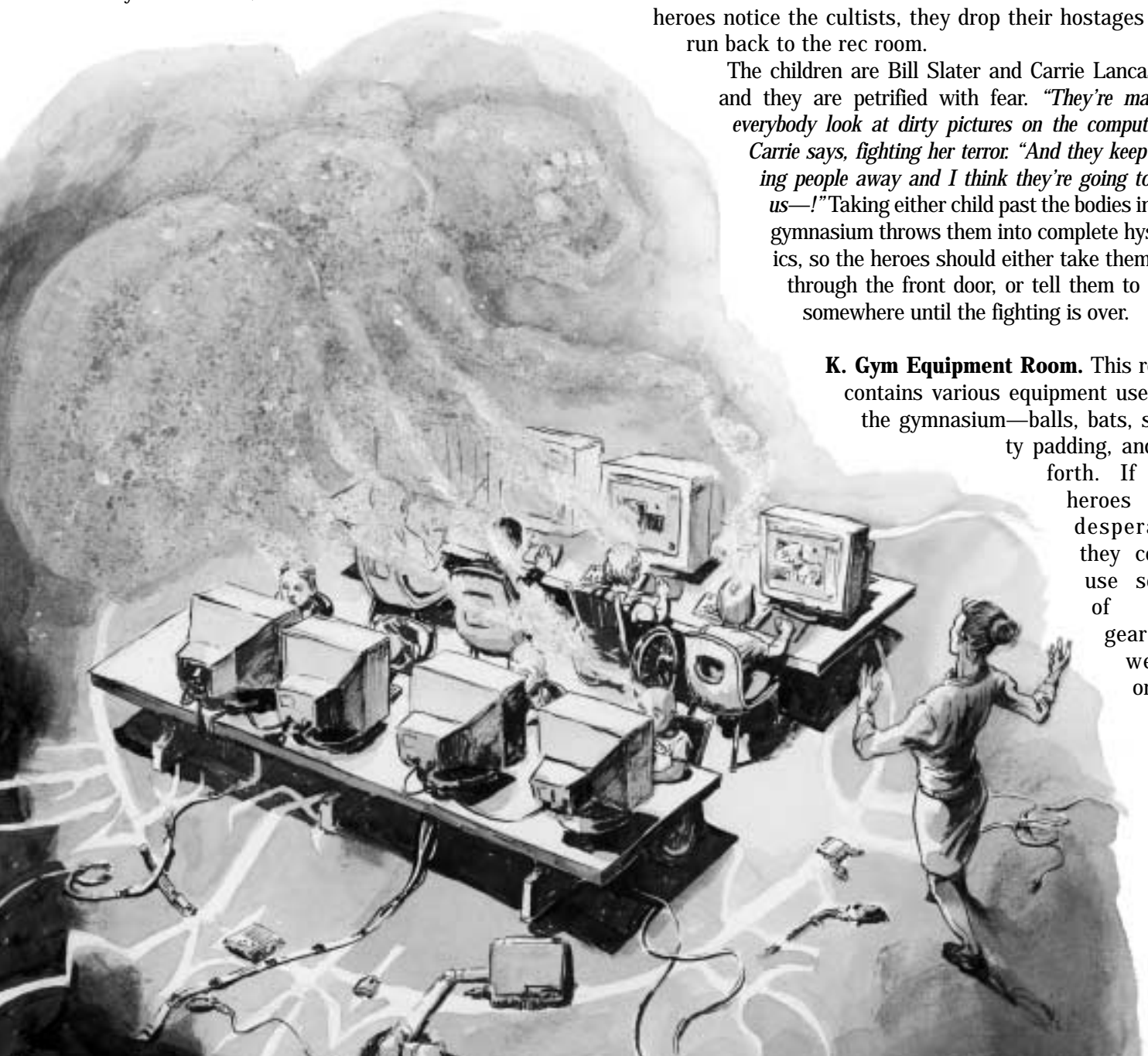
As you look at the pitiful remains of these innocent victims, you hear halting footsteps coming down the hallway, and angry voices.

Two Ordinary-quality biker cultists are bringing two more children to the gymnasium for execution. If heroes are still in the hallway, they receive a -1 step bonus on their Awareness-*intuition* skill checks, but so do the cultists. If the cultists notice the heroes before the heroes notice the cultists, they drop their hostages and run back to the rec room.

The children are Bill Slater and Carrie Lancaster, and they are petrified with fear. *"They're making everybody look at dirty pictures on the computers!"*

Carrie says, fighting her terror. *"And they keep taking people away and I think they're going to kill us—!"* Taking either child past the bodies in the gymnasium throws them into complete hysterics, so the heroes should either take them out through the front door, or tell them to hide somewhere until the fighting is over.

K. Gym Equipment Room. This room contains various equipment used in the gymnasium—balls, bats, safety padding, and so forth. If the heroes are desperate, they could use some of this gear as weapons.





L. General Storage. The center uses this room to store reusable decorations, desks in need of repair, chairs, cabinets, and so on.

M. Equipment Room. With the noise in this room from the machinery, this would make a good place for children to hide if the heroes decide not to send them outside. Anyone trying to notice someone being quiet in here would have a +2 step penalty to his or her Awareness check.

N. Teacher's Lounge. Read this aloud to the players:

This room is a combination of kitchen and lounge for the teachers. You would guess that ordinarily some of the staff prepares lunch for the children in here. Right now, it looks as though the room has been looted for food—the refrigerator door is open, several empty food packages lie around, and the place is a mess. A droning hum comes from the oven.

The cultists grabbed all the food they could from this room when they showed up, but they ate it themselves. (Some of the children suffer from low blood sugar as a result. This makes it harder for them to complete the equation before the cultists decide to execute them.) When the cultists finished, they left a special surprise for the Hoffmann agents (or anyone else foolish enough to interfere).

The oven contains a xic, a form of least demon summoned by Janet Fisher to provide a distraction. (The game data for the xic can be found in Chapter 2: Numbers of the Beast.) If the oven door is opened, the xic hurls itself out and begins flying about the room, attacking the heroes as it passes. It fights until it is destroyed, at which point it crumbles into fragments of insect husk.

O. Classrooms These classrooms are designed with special needs children in mind. They contain wide doors, comfortable seating, and everything is within easy reach. The classrooms are all ominously empty except the last, which contains three cultists (two Ordinary-quality bikers and one Marginal-quality cultist) armed with .44 magnum pistols. They open fire whenever anyone tries to come into the room—either through the door, or through the windows.

P. Recreation Room. Read this aloud to the players:

The door to this room is closed, but as you approach, it opens. Ben Hearst emerges, looking much the same as you remember him back in Picnic. He holds before him a little girl with leg braces. Hearst points a Hoffmann-issue 9mm pistol to the girl's temple.

But rather than fire at you or the girl, he merely steps aside. "Keep going," he says, grinning. "Keep going."

The heroes can try to get the girl away from Hearst now if they like, but Hearst gets a free shot at her first, with a -5 step bonus (because of the extreme closeness of the range, and the fact that she isn't currently capable of resisting). If a hero specifically states that he or she grabs Hearst's gun or arm, the bonus is only -2 steps. Once Hearst has lost control of the girl, he retreats back into the main room, still fighting, if necessary.

If the heroes move into the room to get a better look at the situation, read this aloud:

The scene is straight out of a nightmare. Most of the furniture has been thrown aside blocking the other exit, except for two tables in the center of the room.

At these two tables, eight children sit back-to-back, working at computer terminals. Their faces are illuminated by the eerie glow of the monitors as they click furiously through screen after screen of depraved photos no child should ever have to see. They appear to be playing some sick computer game.

Above the scene floats a cloud of pale smoke, lit to a ghastly luminescence by the monitors. Tendrils of mist reach down from the central mass and wrap around the heads of the children as they work, oblivious to all else. You are instantly struck by the similarity of this cloud to the image of a giant, monstrous spider.

And it's looking at you.

Each hero who was involved in the spider nightmare (the *phantasm* spell from Act II, Scene II) now feels the

effects. The result of his or her *mental resolve* check now applies. As the heroes deal with this, read the following:

Janet Fisher steps out from the darkness and into the midst of the children directly beneath the giant spider. "So glad you could join us," she says, smiling. "Our master, Baal-phegor, has been most eager to meet you." She reaches up and strokes the underside of the cloud-spider, which shivers slightly.

"I can see that you're concerned about these little ones," Fisher says, glancing at the spellbound children. "Don't worry. Even children without computer skills can be blood donors.." She laughs musically.

Assuming the heroes haven't launched an attack yet, she continues:

"But perhaps I'm not being fair to you," she says. "You probably want a chance to be heroic." She puts her hands on the shoulders of the two nearest children. "Are any of you skilled with computers? If so, we can reach an arrangement: for each of you that takes over at one of the consoles, I will set that child free. "Do we have a bargain?"

Fisher is giving the heroes a chance to rescue some of the children by finishing the equation themselves. The heroes don't have to accept; the choice is up to the players.

The Heroes Accept

If the heroes accept Fisher's offer, she lets each of them take the place of any child at the computers. If Hearst is still alive, he leads the child into the washroom. Otherwise, Fisher makes the child stand in the corner.

At the computer, each hero is presented with a kind of web-based computer game involving scenes of depravity and evil. The hero is expected to use the mouse to select appropriate images, to answer simple riddles, and so on. Each correct answer completes another step in a ritual to summon the greater demon Baal-phegor.

The ritual is effectively a complex skill check, requiring 10 successes. The participants are allowed to check every hour, with one acting as the lead character, and the others as assistants. The assistants roll their skill checks in *Knowledge-computer operation* (or *Computer Science-*

hacking), and the results of those seven rolls determine the modifier to the lead character's check: Critical Failure, +2 step penalty; Failure, +1 step penalty; Ordinary, -1 step bonus; Good, -2 step bonus; Amazing, -3 step bonus.

The lead character may then attempt the skill check. If the lead character suffers a Critical Failure, the system halts, and the process starts all over again at zero successes. Note that when this happens, the cultists remove the lead character, taking him or her "to the gym."

The number of successes required depends on how long the heroes have delayed getting here. Compare the elapsed time to the table below:

Time Elapsed	# of Successes Needed
4 hours	10 successes
6 hours	d6+3 successes
8 hours	d4+2 successes
10 hours	d4 successes
12 hours	1 success

The heroes can of course attempt to sabotage the results by deliberately failing their skill checks. Once a hero has failed two checks, however—intentionally or not—the cultists decide to replace the hero. If the heroes object to one of their number being "taken to the gym," go to *The Heroes Decline*.

If the heroes are working on the equation complete the ritual, go to *Scene 3: Baal-phegor Appears*.

The Heroes Decline

Most likely, the heroes will refuse to assist demon-worshippers in summoning a greater demon. Or they might put up a fight when the cultists try to punish one of them for failing to complete the formula. It's also possible that the heroes will simply attack Fisher and the rest of the cultists before Fisher even makes her offer. If so, they may die—but they will die heroes.

At this point, the whole thing become a stand-up fight, and the heroes can do everything in their power to stop the cultists from summoning Baal-phegor. Likely tactics are discussed below:

Destroying computers: Destroying one of the computer terminals prevents that user from being able to assist in the complex skill check. A computer has Durability 1, and Ordinary Toughness.

Destroying the server: This is actually the heroes' best option, since it not only ends the ritual immediately, but completely derails the cultists' plan. Like the desktop



computers, the server has Durability 1, and Ordinary Toughness.

Destroying the Internet connection: The heroes can leave the server intact and go straight for cutting the cable to the Internet. Doing so requires only that the hero inflict 1 or more points of wound or mortal damage to the cable. The ritual can go on, but if it succeeds, the demon is trapped in the server.

Introducing a virus into the system: If a computer-oriented hero has computer viruses on hand, he or she can try introducing a virus into one of the computer terminals. (The cultists make stopping the hero a priority, however, as soon as they realize what's up.) Some PL5 computer viruses are described in the *DARK•MATTER Arms & Equipment Guide*, but a successful Computer Science-*hacking* skill check confers a +1 or +3 step penalty (Good or Amazing success) to all further checks on the system. (An Ordinary result will take longer than the ritual to have an effect on the network.)

Killing Fisher: Fisher is the diabolist who devised the spell, and the lynchpin to the whole ritual. If she is killed, the ritual can be completed, but the demon can't manifest directly into the Internet.

Attacking Baal-phegor: While Baal-phegor is still immaterial, attacking it only attracts its attention. This is very bad though, because Baal-phegor can still use its nonphysical arcane magic (*phantasms*, *rend the weave*, and *spiritwrack*) to attack heroes. If none of these work, Baal-phegor makes the character in question a preferred target if it manages to become physical.

Killing the children: Real heroes will never try this, but a desperate hero might. If so, the effect is much the same as destroying a computer, but an inferior choice, given that the cultists can replace the user in 2 rounds from their "stock" of children in the restroom and store-room. Not only is this tactic ineffectual, but the cultists seem to appreciate the cruelty of it, and taunt the hero who did it, calling him or her a kindred spirit.

Scene 3: Baal-phegor Appears

LOCATION: Noble Village Day Care Center, Macon, GA

For the Gamemaster Only: The demon Baal-phegor finally manifests—but in a sort of electronic form. The heroes have one last chance to send it back where it belongs.

The summoning ritual can end one of three ways:

1. The heroes stop the ritual, in which case Baal-phegor manifests only briefly before vanishing altogether.
2. The heroes destroy the network's connection to the Internet, in which case they may still have to deal with an angry greater demon.
3. They fail to stop Baal-phegor altogether, in which case it slips into the Internet to wreak havoc upon the world.

All three outcomes are discussed below:

Outcome 1: The Ritual Fails

This is the best possible outcome for the heroes, since it completely prevents the demon's plans. However, the heroes still face Baal-phegor's wrath.

If the heroes destroy the network server, Baal-phegor is undone. Read the following aloud to the players:

With an awful shriek that hurts your ears, the cloudy spider figure suddenly solidifies. Computer and children alike are flung aside as it thrashes its gigantic, hairy limbs, turning to face you.

"Foolish monkey," rumbles a ghostly voice from everywhere at once. *"You have sealed your doom. Return with me now to my hell."*

Baal-phegor begins attacking the heroes, starting with any who were responsible for destroying the server. However, the demon has only a short time left on this world, and the heroes can see it grow smaller as they fight. The following table describes how this affects the demon's combat abilities:

Round 2

Strength:	14		
Talon: (× 2)	14/7/3	d4-1w/d4w/d4-1m	LI/O
Bite:	16/8/4	d4+1w/d6+1w/d4+1m	LI/G
Armor:		d6 (LI), d6-1 (HI), d6-1 (En)	

Round 3

Strength:	10		
Talon: (× 1)	10/5/3	d4s/d4-1w/d4w	LI/O
Bite:	12/6/3	d4+1s/d4+1w/d4+2w	LI/G
Armor:		d4 (LI), d4-1 (HI), d4-1 (En)	

Round 4

Strength: 6

Talon: not available

Bite: 8/4/2 d4s/d4+1s/d4w LI/G

Armor: d4-1 (LI), d4-2 (HI), d4-2 (En)

Note that if Baal-phegor's bite inflicts wound damage, it injects poison as described in Chapter 2.

After the fourth round of combat, Baal-phegor is gone, and in its place is a mere spider. If the heroes haven't actually managed to kill it yet, they can do so now by stepping on it.

Outcome 2: The Demon is Trapped

If the heroes have not destroyed the network server, but cut the data line to the wall socket and/or disabled Janet Fisher, Baal-phegor cannot escape into the Internet. It can, however, still manifest in a slightly different form than it had planned. If the complex skill check to solve the computer equation is completed, read the following aloud to the players:

Each computer screen suddenly flashes a series of complex arcane formulae, flickering faster and faster until the entire screen is solid static. With an unholy howl that seems to tear you apart from the inside out, the massive form of the cloudy spider transforms, bit by bit, into a creature of solid flesh.

But its flesh is not what you expected. Like the monitor screens, the spider that stands before you now is made of static—electrical energy bound into a coherent form. It lifts one leg with a sharp *crack!* and a smell of ozone. A wisp of smoke arises from the blackened husk of the hapless child the static-spider just touched. A low rumble emerges from the spider—what might be construed as sardonic laughter.

It extends another leg—toward you.

Baal-phegor manifests as electrical energy in preparation for its transference to the Internet—but it has no way into the 'Net without the physical connection. It can only move about as sentient electricity. It is displeased by this.

The demon attacks the heroes, starting with anyone who disconnected the data line. Its statistics remain unchanged, except for the following:

- Baal-phegor's damage is now considered Energy (En) damage;

- Any character wearing or carrying electronic equipment (cellular telephones, for example) receives no armor against Baal-phegor's first successful attack against him or her;
- Its poison effect is resisted with a CON feat check, just like ordinary poison; and
- Its armor changes to d4+2 (LI), d4 (HI), d6+2 (En).

In this form, Baal-phegor is more difficult to damage, but if the characters douse it with water—from, say, the fire extinguisher sprinkler system—there is a thunderous explosion (d6+2s to everyone in the room; armor is not effective), and a brilliant flash. When everyone can see again, Baal-phegor is gone.

If the heroes do not think of using water, and at least half of them are out of the fight, Baal-phegor realizes that it can slip into the data outlet in the wall. The heroes have 4 rounds to finish Baal-phegor off at this point or it escapes into the Internet as planned. (See *Outcome 3: The Demon Escapes*.)

Outcome 3: The Demon Escapes

If Baal-phegor is summoned by the completion of the complex skill check, and Janet Fisher carries on the rest of the ritual, the demon can escape into the Internet. If these conditions are met, read the following to the heroes:

Each of the computer screens suddenly flashes a series of complex arcane formulae, flickering faster and faster until the entire screen is solid static. As you watch, a sudden power surge lights up the room, and the cloudy spider-form suddenly appears to coalesce into solidity—a spider made of static.

A deep rumbling erupts from everywhere at once—the sound of a demon laughing at you. An instant later, it jerks downward, diving into the computer terminals. Each explodes as the immense energy of the demon courses through it, showering the children with tiny fragments of glass. As you watch, hazy blue halos of electricity travel out the back of each computer, moving toward the central computer at the back of the room.

"Go, my master!" Janet Fisher shrieks. "Loose yourself upon the world!"



The heroes have one action each to stop Baal-phegor from escaping into the Internet—and therefore, the world. If any of them get to the data cable and pull it loose, or manage to kill Janet Fisher in the one remaining action, Baal-phegor's progress stops at the server box. Otherwise, Baal-phegor escapes into the Internet where it can control communication, commerce, and possibly even the nuclear arsenals of some nations. The heroes have failed.

If the heroes disconnect the server from the data line, Baal-phegor is temporarily trapped in the server. After one round, it realizes its predicament, and begins traveling back up the cables to the computer terminals. The heroes have one action each to disconnect the terminals from the server. Should they fail, Baal-phegor manifests as described under *Outcome 2: The Demon is Trapped*.

If the heroes manage to disconnect all external cables from the server while Baal-phegor is still inside, the demon is trapped. If they shut off the power to the server, the demon becomes completely dormant. (One can only imagine, though, what would happen should someone restart the machine)

As long as the heroes prevent Baal-phegor from escaping to the Internet, they have won.

Untangling the Web

Once the smoke clears, the heroes may have a few tasks still facing them.

Extant Cultists: There might be a few Temple of Ashes cultists still alive in the Noble Village Day Care Center, including Fisher, Hearst, and assorted bikers. The heroes can let them go or round them up at their discretion. Regardless, they are all that remains of the Temple of Ashes. The heroes can rest assured that they have dealt a crippling blow to the Final Church.

Janet Fisher, if she is captured alive, denies any and all involvement with the Temple of Ashes, the Final Church, or anything called Baal-phegor. If the heroes take her into custody for the Hoffmann Institute, Field Director Jones eventually shows them a report of her confession—though he doesn't mention how it was obtained. If the heroes turn her over to the police, she might resurface at some point, seeking revenge.

Ben Hearst is a slightly different matter. If he is captured alive, he apparently reverts to his catatonic state, as though everything in the last 24 hours never happened. Using psychic abilities eventually gets to the truth, though. Like Fisher, Hearst could make an interesting future plot thread, a sleeper agent awaiting secret orders from the

Final Church to once again betray the Hoffmann Institute.

The rest of the cultists firmly deny involvement with the cult. If they are turned over to the police, they try to bring charges against the heroes for aggravated assault.

The Victims: The heroes should at least take a stab at helping out the children and staff of the day care center. Like the children at the Medical Center, these poor people will be traumatized for life—especially if they actually saw Baal-phegor manifest. In any event, the heroes should probably let them out of the restroom and storage closet, and see to it that they get medical aid.

Some of these people could become Hoffmann Institute agents. (After all, a brush with the supernatural was how the heroes probably got involved.) Or, some of them could suffer from the same mania that afflicted Janet Fisher so many years ago. The victims could one day return as villains.

Randall: Assuming the heroes didn't kill Department Chief Randall or buy his story and let him help, they may need to get him some medical aid. At the very least, they need to let him loose from any restraints they inflicted on him.

On returning to the Institute, Randall submits to a battery of tests to determine that he is who he says, that he was never under the influence of the cult, and that he told the heroes the truth. If the heroes were unkind to him, however, he doesn't take it well, and could easily become a recurring thorn in the heroes' collective side.

Filing a Report

When the heroes finally report to Field Director Calvin, he evaluates their performance based on the final outcome—whether they foiled Baal-phegor or not. To Calvin, any incidental mistakes (including harming Randall, though not including killing him) are forgivable, and Calvin is prepared to ignore such trivialities on his own report.

If any heroes did particularly well, Calvin sends a commendation in that hero's name up the chain of command to Director Nakami. The director of the Hoffmann Institute will watch that hero's career with interest.

One disturbing question that Field Director Calvin asks during the debriefing: Do the heroes think that, while the "phegor.com" server was connected to the

World Wide Web, could someone have downloaded a copy of the code? The heroes may not know the answer, but the question sets up possible further adventures with the Final Church.

Achievements

The Gamemaster should award achievement points to the heroes as follows:

For finishing the adventure	3 points
For particularly good roleplaying	1 point
For thinking for themselves	1 point
For letting NPCs do the thinking	-1 point
For rescuing the children at the hospital	1 point
For rescuing the children at the day care	1 point
For <i>not</i> killing Department Chief Randall	1 point
For killing Department Chief Randall	-1 point
For killing any children	-1 point