

an adventure for

CHAMPIONS

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SHADES OF BLACK

ALLEN THOMAS

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An Adventure For Champions

A Hero Plus Product

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INTRODUCTION



Now, we'll turn it over to Miranda Chen, who's live with the latest concerning the fight between the Champions and the supervillain Talisman. Miranda?"

"Thanks Pamela.

"This evening many folks will be getting home late from work, as downtown was rocked by a battle between our beloved Champions and the self-styled Mistress of Hellfire, Talisman. I'm happy to report that the battle is now over. Office workers are being allowed to exit their buildings and go home.

"As you can see behind me, Talisman was subdued by the Champions just minutes ago, and is now being taken to super-criminal containment facilities...."

Talisman glares into the television cameras before an MCPD officer pushes her head down and shoves her into the back of the police van. She takes a seat on one of the hard benches. The officers slam the doors of the van shut, then lock them with a heavy clunk. The steel restraints chafe her wrists; her tongue probes a throbbing tooth knocked loose by Ironclad's right hook. She mutters an incantation. Flames flicker from her fingertips, but soon die out. She curses: for once, her idiot sister managed to get a spell right. It will be a while before her powers return.

Suddenly, there's a prickling on the back of her neck. Talisman picks up her head, squinting suspiciously. A stench of sulfur and black magic fills the back of the police van.

Dark mists coalesce before her eyes. At their center a menacing figure in armor of black plate appears, the visor on his helm lowered to conceal his features. Speaking in hollow tones, he says, "Good evening, Mademoiselle Talisman. Whilst presumptuous, in the absence of a third party, allow me to introduce myself." He pauses to bow. "I am Sir Giles de Morphant, Knight of the Crow — more often called in this day and time the Black Paladin."

"Pleased to meet you." She struggles to keep her mockery of the speaker's overly formal words from her voice. She has heard of the Black Paladin, and now is not a good time to antagonize him. "How may I be of service, Sir Knight?"

With a brief nod, the Black Paladin acknowledges her courtesy. "If willing to join your power to my will, I would free you of this unseemly captivity."

Eager to be free, she forgets her manners.

"What do you want me to do?"

"I ask of you no soul-damning incantation or mind-shattering summoning. Only a simple task — one performed by witches since the very dawn

of humanity. If you were to agree to my venture, I would ask that you raise the fleshless shade of one who long ago passed beyond the veil of this mortality. Deliver this damned soul from her confinement in the Hells beyond, and return her to these realms of the quick.

"It is equitable barter: one task for a like task. One task simply accomplished for another of similar difficulty. For your own freedom, I ask no more than the freedom of this shade."

FOR LOVE OF EVIL

Near the *Forêt du Chevalier Noir* in France, the locals tell a tragic story about a long-dead witch and her lover. The woman's lover was mortally wounded in battle, and she worked desperate sorceries to preserve his life. But her struggle was in vain. Though she was powerful in magic, healing her lover's wounds was beyond her ability. With no other recourse, she placed him in an enchanted slumber, so he might awaken, restored to his full health and power centuries hence. Filled with despair and grief at the knowledge that she would be long dead when he awakened, she realized death was the only surcease of her sorrow. Rather than live without her lover, she thrust her dagger into her heart and took her own life.

It is a story out of Arthurian Romance, but not Arthur's court. The woman's lover was no pure and devout knight, and she herself no chaste and virtuous maiden. Instead, they were two of the King's greatest enemies: Sir Giles de Morphant, the cruel Black Paladin; and his paramour, the black-hearted witch Chantal.

Although it ends tragically, the tale of Sir Giles and Chantal has never inspired sorrow in those who hear it; instead, listeners feel only relief that so great an evil no longer terrorizes the land. But in recent years, the ending has changed, becoming more ominous. The evil that hung like a shroud over the *Forêt du Chevalier Noir* has lifted, for at long last the Black Paladin has awakened and departed his tomb hidden deep in the forest.

Now the story of the Black Paladin and Chantal ends uncertainly, leaving the listener with questions disturbing to ponder. To what end will love drive an evil man? To what depths will a man, who feels nothing but spite for the laws of nature and God, delve to return his lover to life? And how terrible the powers of a witch, who has resided in the infernal regions and studied sorcery at the feet of demons?

ADVENTURE OVERVIEW

In *Shades Of Black*, the Black Paladin seeks to restore the ghost of his long dead lover, Chantal, to physical form. Chantal's shade uses her magic to aid her lover in his blasphemous quest, guiding him to potential vessels for her incorporeal spirit. Once he locates a victim, the Black Paladin — with the sorcerous aid of the villainess Talisman — performs an evil ritual. If successful, the ritual transforms the victim into the image of Chantal at the time of her death. More terrible still, it allows Chantal to force the victim's soul from her body, so Chantal can claim the body as her own.

Prior to the beginning of Act One, Chantal has deemed all the chosen bodies unsuitable — but given enough time, the two lovers are confident they can find a perfect vessel. Unless the PCs are powerful, clever, and lucky, the Black Paladin succeeds in his quest; and one of the most feared witches of the Arthurian Age returns to life in modern times to wreak evil as she did so long ago.

ACT ONE: MURDERS PASSING STRANGE

A request from the Millennium City Police Department draws the heroes into the adventure. A series of abduction/murders has left MCPD detectives baffled. They have positively identified each victim, but family and friends point out strange cosmetic changes in them, such as different color hair or eyes. As the heroes investigate, they learn each victim underwent a partial transformation of her physical features, and that magic was involved in the transformation.

At the conclusion of Act One, the heroes rush to the rescue of the latest victim and confront the Black Paladin and Talisman, as well as Black Paladin's newly-created retainers, the Gryphon and Lady Crow. The fight takes place on the shore of Lake Erie, in a mansion with a sordid history of evil all its own — a place where black magic, including the Ritual, is most effective.

In the end, the heroes rescue the victim from the Black Paladin's clutches and save the day, though the villain himself likely escapes. Despite the heroes' immediate success, the Black Paladin remains at large, Chantal still yearns for a body, and now the witch has scented the perfect vessel for her spirit.

ACT TWO: A COURSE OF WAR

In Act Two, the heroes have the opportunity to question captured villains, as well as talk with the only individual to survive the Black Paladin's ritual: the woman they rescued in Act One. By means of investigation and research, they learn more of the Black Paladin's dark desire and the blasphemous purpose of his actions.

While the heroes investigate, the Black Paladin does not remain idle. Chantal has discovered the perfect vessel for her spirit, and it is an individual close to the PCs... maybe even a PC herself!

Driven by his dead lover, the Black Paladin plots to obtain the witch's chosen vessel. To aid him, Chantal summons from the infernal regions the Black Paladin's long-dead destrier, Darkling, and returns

to him the Lance Of Unvanquished Pain. The Black Paladin's course of war is simple. First, he attempts to free his captured retainers, then to mislead the heroes with a series of feints and ruses. Finally, once the heroes are distracted, he strikes at his true goal, Chantal's chosen vessel... and woe to those who stand in his way.

ACT THREE: AN UNHOLY REBIRTH

In Act Three, the heroes have a final confrontation with the Black Paladin. The confrontation takes place in the haunted mansion from Act One. The mansion is much changed. Chantal, either enraged at having been thwarted or ecstatic about having a body, has worked the ghosts into a frenzy. The heroes must journey into the mansion and discover its secret passages and chambers, while withstanding ghostly assaults and ambushes by the Black Paladin's retainers. Finally, the heroes track the Black Paladin to his hidden lair, a crypt deep below the mansion, and the climactic battle takes place. The soul of an innocent woman hangs in dire jeopardy, and if the heroes don't defeat the Black Paladin and vanquish Chantal's shade back to the infernal regions, that soul will be lost forever.

BACKGROUND

In 1993, Chantal's prophecy was fulfilled, and "he who is as your brother" awakened the Black Paladin from his enchanted slumber. Since that day, Sir Giles de Morphant has terrorized helpless innocents and tested the mettle of the "knights" of the modern age. He has occupied the days and weeks of his immortality with dark plots and evil deeds. For the most part, he has been satisfied with his new life.

But on occasion, memories came to him unbidden and unwanted. He remembered a lover, long ago dead: Chantal, the witch responsible not only for much of his fell power, but his immortality.

Standing at a crossroad on the night of the new moon, Sir Giles would remember rites in perverse homage to the witch's dark goddess. Hearing the cawing of crows, he would recall walking the battlements of his castle with his lover at his side. And when he remembered Chantal, he was filled with sorrow.

At those times, he sought solace in solitude and retreated from the world of men. When he emerged from his self-imposed isolation, his evil was increased ten-fold. For wasn't that why Chantal gifted him with immortality, that he might perform evil acts for eternity, and desecrate the holy until the end of days?

So passed the years of his new existence, but recently it all changed. The Black Paladin found his dreams haunted.

He dreamed of holding Chantal — he could recall the day perfectly, the scent of her black hair, the feel of her body against his — but in the dream, Chantal pulled away. Hellfire seemed to flicker in her yellow eyes. She spoke in hollow tones: "Why hast thou forsaken me?"

He dreamed of battle with Defender of the Champions. As he fought his armored foe, Chantal

INDEX OF VILLAINS

Here's a list of villains used in *Shades Of Black*, with page references so you can easily track them down.

The Black Paladin

Conquerors, Killers, and Crooks, page 126

Chantal

Shades Of Black, pages 65, 69

Darkling

Shades Of Black, page 72

Demon Hound

HERO System Bestiary, page 62

The Gryphon

Shades Of Black, page 73

Lady Crow

Shades Of Black, page 76

Lesser Demon

HERO System Bestiary, page 54

Talisman

Champions, page 211

whispered chiding words in his ear. “No Lancelot reborn that one,” she admonished. “Only a pale reflection come down through the ages. Thou spend thy days thinking on eternity, whilst thy love suffers the fiery pit. But truly Hell holds no torture for me more terrible than thy disdain.”

He had many other dreams, and always Chantal was there, speaking to him.

The Black Paladin is an initiate of the arcane arts, and his mystical senses knew the truth behind his dreams. These were not mere nightmares: the ghost of Chantal haunted him. She spoke to him in his dreams... and was right to admonish him. He had thought her dead and gone forever, but of all men, he should know that death was not the end.

A black desire kindled in his evil heart. He would deliver Chantal from the infernal regions. He would engineer her return to the flesh. Together, they would carve out a new realm to rule. His dark lady at his side, the Black Paladin would once again be a lord of men.

He needed to raise Chantal's shade and bind it to the world of the living. And a witch is best suited to bring a witch's ghost out of the underworld. The Black Paladin required an ally.

Fortune smiled on him. He watched on television as the Champions battled Talisman in Millennium City. He recognized Talisman's incantations and gestures for what they were: witchery. When she was defeated, he rushed to the scene. By stealth he approached the Mistress of Hellfire. He offered a simple trade: if she would raise the shade of Chantal, he would free her from captivity. She eagerly agreed.

Talisman informed her rescuer she would need some possession of the shade, something important to Chantal when she was alive. It had been long years since Chantal lived, and the centuries had scattered her possessions to the four winds; many were likely destroyed. But still there was hope.

In his persona of John Black, professor of archaeology at Marquette University, the Black Paladin had read an article concerning a dig in the *Forêt du Chevalier Noir*. Scholars had unearthed several relics, and the finds shocked archaeologists and historians. The relics were without a doubt heathen, dedicated to anthropomorphic gods and used in blood sacrifices, but they were not pre-Holy Roman Empire. Instead, they dated to a time when historians considered France wholly Christian. The finds caused a minor stir in academic circles before scholars quickly dismissed them as anomalous. The authorities archived the relics in a local museum of antiquities, and everyone soon forgot them.

But the Black Paladin did not forget the relics. Their existence did not shock him. The dig took place near the site of his abandoned tomb, and unearthed objects he had once possessed and used. He had even played a part in the consecration of one or two. What caused his breath to catch in his throat was a photo of a dagger with a wide, curved blade. He recognized the dagger as Chantal's own — the same she used to take her life.

He told Talisman of the dagger, and she deemed it perfect. The two villains traveled to France, broke into the museum warehouse, and

stole the dagger and two other relics, which Talisman sensed held potent magics.

Dagger in hand, Talisman raised the shade of Chantal, and bound the witch to her former blade. But the Black Paladin's plans were incomplete. Chantal still required a body. The witch could not come into the fullness of her power until returned to the flesh. What man would take a fleshless shade as his lover?

So the adventure begins....

Talisman's Motivation

Talisman became involved with the Black Paladin for a simple reason: she wanted to escape from her impending incarceration, and he offered her freedom. It was a simple trade, tit for tat, and both upheld their end of the bargain. Talisman raised Chantal and bound her to the material plane; as the Black Paladin would say, Talisman has discharged her obligation to him.

But she remains with him, and throughout the adventure is an ally of the Black Paladin and his ghostly lover. The Black Paladin believes Talisman stays because she is attracted to his noble mien, and deeply affected by his dark magnetism.

He couldn't be more wrong.

Talisman sticks around because she knows a doomed love affair when she sees one. She has a sadistic streak a mile wide, and will relish watching whatever ill fate befalls the Black Paladin and Chantal. Depending on the circumstances, she may even decide to help it along to its painful conclusion.

During the adventure, you should keep Talisman's motivation in mind. If an encounter goes badly for the PCs, Talisman can serve as a secret ally. She won't risk the Black Paladin's wrath by helping them openly, since his power dwarfs her own while Chantal's around. But if the opportunity presents itself, and she can get away with it — and most importantly, you find it needful — Talisman might covertly aid the heroes in their quest to thwart de Morphant. If, in the process, she can harm the PCs (or her sister) as well, that's just icing on the cake.

Suffice it to say: Talisman wants the Black Paladin to fail. She wants this story to have a tragic ending — the more tragic, the better. And what ending more tragic than the Black Paladin defeated by the heroes, the modern-day versions of Lancelot and the Knights of the Round Table?

ADVENTURE INFORMATION

The adventure is designed to challenge a group of four to six PCs, built according to the guidelines for Standard Superheroic characters on page 15 of the *HERO System 5th Edition* rulebook. If the PCs fall outside these guidelines, you should adjust the encounters accordingly. The text provides suggestions for tailoring the encounters to challenge the PCs.

The events take place in Millennium City and at an old, haunted mansion on the shore of Lake Erie. The adventure includes detailed descriptions of the encounter locales; for more information about Millennium City and its environs, see the

Millennium City sourcebook. Of course, you can easily relocate the adventure if you want; the only requirement is that the mansion has to be old and in a relatively isolated location.

The adventure has a mystical bent and is intended for a group of traditional superheroes — meaning, heroes primarily motivated by a desire to right wrongs and do good. If the PCs are vigilantes, or “practical heroes” likely to kill captured supervillains to prevent them from causing trouble later, this adventure probably won’t work well for them. Having a Mystic hero in the group (see *Champions*, page 76) helps, but it’s not necessary for the PCs’ success. If the PC team does not include a Mystic, the heroes will probably need the help of a mystical NPC to fully understand the Black Paladin’s motivations and methods. Non-player characters of mystical bent, such as Witchcraft or Alicia Blackmun, can provide assistance if need be.

Gamemaster Preparation

Shades Of Black is an epic adventure spanning the course of several game sessions. In comic book terms, it’s a multiple-issue story arc, requiring three or more issues to untangle the villain’s byzantine plot and thwart his evil plans. To succeed — or, more precisely, to intrigue the players with the events of the adventure, and keep them interested in what the Black Paladin is up to — you need to make preparations and decide a number of things before beginning Act One.

Introducing Talisman

If Talisman, isn’t already a part of the campaign setting, you should introduce her before beginning *Shades Of Black*. First-hand experience of Talisman’s mystical villainy, coupled with clues learned in Act One, should make the PCs believe the Mistress of Hellfire is the mastermind behind the abductions and murders plaguing Millennium City. The conclusion of Act One is much more surprising if the PCs believe Talisman the mastermind, only to discover it’s actually Black Paladin. And keeping the PCs guessing is an important element of a good adventure!

The best way to introduce Talisman is to run a short scenario featuring her. Preferably the scenario takes place several sessions before beginning *Shades Of Black*. Its plot doesn’t need to relate to this adventure, since it’s only intended to bring Talisman into the campaign setting. (Consider it a kind of first date between Talisman and the heroes — a “get to know each other, determine if it’s love at first sight” sort of thing.) Talisman’s plot seeds on page 211 of *Champions* provide some good ideas for the adventure.

Whatever its specifics, the adventure should conclude with Talisman’s capture. Which leads to....

Talisman Escapes

You should arrange for the PCs to hear about Talisman’s rescue from captivity by the Black Paladin. Again, they should learn about this two or three sessions before beginning *Shades Of Black*, since there’s a six week period between her escape and the beginning of Act One. The heroes can learn about Talisman’s escape many different ways: the newspaper or television, a friendly NPC hero, their contact with the MCPD, or any other means appropriate to the campaign.

If you decide not to have the PCs encounter Talisman prior to *Shades Of Black*, it’s still important they know Talisman has escaped captivity, and was aided by the Black Paladin. Otherwise, Act One may seem arbitrary and unrelated to previous episodes in the campaign.

In either event, any efforts the PCs make to track down Talisman prior to the beginning of this adventure should come to naught — or else you’ll have to arrange another breakout. The easiest way to handle this is to keep them so busy with other matters that they don’t have time to hunt her down.

The Murder Victims’ Specs

By Act Two of *Shades Of Black*, Chantal has discovered the perfect vessel for her spirit... but you must decide who the victim is before Act One even begins.

Your decision determines the exact details of the clues discovered in Act One. All the victims (including the one rescued by the heroes) are the same age as the perfect vessel, and have their birthday in the same season. Because of this, you have to choose the perfect vessel, then use her age and birthday for the murder victims in Act One.

The perfect vessel for Chantal’s spirit is a PC, DNPC, or friendly NPC. The only requirements are the perfect vessel be female and somewhat youngish (essentially, younger than 40, and preferably in her twenties). Before making a final decision, you should consider that the chosen victim experiences great peril in Act Three, and the outcome of this adventure could potentially alter the relationship between the victim and the PCs in a significant way.

As A Stand-Alone Adventure

You don’t have to run *Shades Of Black* as part of an existing campaign — it’s just as fun as a stand-alone adventure. To make your job easier, the text includes brief write-ups of NPCs important to the story. The write-ups include the NPC’s name and a brief description of his pertinent skills, history, and personality. For the players’ characters, the Champions (described on pages 181-195 of *Champions*) is an excellent superteam to match wits and skill against the Black Paladin and his cronies; Witchcraft is an ideal candidate for Chantal’s perfect vessel. Begin the adventure with Witchcraft learning from the Trismegistus Council of her sister’s escape, while Nighthawk learns of the abduction/murders from his DNPC, crime reporter Julie Morgan... and from there, let the villainy ensue!

USING SHADES OF BLACK WITH OTHER SETTINGS

Shades Of Black takes place in and around Millennium City, one of the primary sub-settings of the Champions Universe setting. But even if you’re not running a game in Millennium City, you can still use it with a few changes. All you really need is:

- a large city where the villains can find and kidnap victims
- an isolated location not too far from that city for the Delacroix Mansion

Any other aspect of the scenario that relates to Millennium City you can easily change. For example, instead of police records of the Randolphs’ chipped car passing through one of the Gates that leads to Millennium City, you could have police traffic cameras videotape the car as it enters the city you use for your game.



Act One

MURDERS PASSING STRANGE

In a candle-lit room, the Black Paladin stands sentinel over the ritual of summoning. Before him, Talisman kneels at the center of a circle drawn in the blood of black hounds. A single path, drawn in the same blood, leads from where the Black Paladin stands to the circle's center. He reads the sigils writ in dark crimson, searching for treachery on the part of the witch.

The Sign of Zaross drawn through two dashes hides their dark ritual from the eyes of men; the three parallel slashes of the Taunaronion conceals it from the eyes of the infernal. Chantal's sigil, a line with a valley and two peaks which calls to mind a raven in flight, names the summoned; the rune of the Five Thunderbolts lends the summons power; and the Circles of Linking bind the summoned to this place. The sigils repeat, again and again, around the circumference of the circle and along the sides of the path.

"Come to me, Knight of the Crow," Talisman says, interrupting his scrutiny of her work. The witch is deep in her trance, her spirit flitting between this world and

the next. Her eyes flicker with yellowish flames.

The Black Paladin complies. He understands his role in the ritual: the desire in his black heart calls to Chantal's shade across the abyss separating this world from the infernal realm. His blood-red cloak unfurls behind him as he strides down the path and into the circle. His gauntleted hand grips the hilt of his scabbarded sword, *Consammateur des Ombres*. He knows of the danger of demonic interference, and no demon, whether imp or prince, will stand between him and his lover.

Chantal's ancient dagger, its curved blade smeared with the blood of slaughtered hounds, rests in Talisman's open hands. Raising her arms above her bowed head, she offers the blade to him.

He takes the dagger from her hands, gripping its hilt and holding the blade downwards. He raises it level with his eyes, his gaze intent on the pommel of tarnished silver in the shape of a crow's head. He calls to mind his lover and remembers giving her the dagger long ago.

He senses a presence; it swirls around the circle, fluttering his cloak and rustling Talisman's black hair. He hears it gasp, like a suffocating woman allowed to breathe at last, then give out a long sigh of release.

Talisman continues to incant. Shortly, her voice hoarse, she says, "The shade is bound to the dagger."

Though no words are spoken aloud, he hears Chantal's voice say to him: "My love. My heart. At last, thou hast delivered me from the furnaces of the damned."

An icy chill prickles his flesh, as Chantal's shade caresses him. They continue their silent discourse, soul speaking to soul. He tells her, "Robe your spirit in mortal flesh, milady, so that I might embrace you. Take the witch's body. Make it your own. To have you at my side, as you were in ages past, is my heart's sole desire."

He senses Chantal examining Talisman. He glimpses suspicion in Talisman's narrowed eyes. With words inaudible to the Mistress of Hellfire, Chantal answers him, "Fie on this harlot! She is no vessel for me. I would have an untainted body for my rebirth, one which reeks not of corruption and hellfire's stench."

Solemnly, the Black Paladin answers, "So be it, m'lady."

Before the PCs become involved in the adventure, the Black Paladin and his allies have already accomplished several tasks in their quest to raise Chantal and grant her physical form. Here's the sequence of events to help you organize things; you should provide dates and details more specific to your campaign if necessary.

Six weeks ago, the Black Paladin freed Talisman from captivity and enlisted her aid in his quest.

A few days later, the Black Paladin and Talisman traveled to France and broke into a small museum of antiquities located not far from the *Forêt du Chevalier Noir*. There they stole three artifacts of little interest to museum officials and historical researchers, but of great value to themselves. The artifacts were: a helmet of bone shaped like a crow skull; a bottle of ancient wine; and a dagger of excellent workmanship. At the beginning of the adventure, the theft has gone unnoticed by the museum staff, since they stored the artifacts in the museum archives, not in the display cases.

Once back in the States, the two villains raised the shade of Chantal and bound her to the dagger, which she used when alive to perform sacrifices in magical rituals.

A little more than four weeks ago, they took over the Delacroix Mansion — a place to perform the necromantic ritual which will provide Chantal with a body. They chose the site for its secluded location... and because Chantal sensed it was a nexus of evil power not far removed from the infernal regions.

On that same night, the Black Paladin, guided by the spirit of Chantal, transformed Eliot and Linda Randolph, the millionaire owners of the Delacroix Mansion, into his retainers. He forced Eliot Randolph to drink the ancient wine, called the Blood of the Beast, and transformed him into the Gryphon. Linda Randolph he forced to wear the helmet of bone; she became Lady Crow.

Four weeks after the Black Paladin took over the Delacroix Mansion and transformed the Randolphs into his retainers, the adventure begins with the PCs receiving....

TIMELINE

The timeline below should help you organize the events that take place prior to beginning Act One. You should change the dates as necessary to suit your campaign. The events count back from Day 0 when Act One of *Shades of Black* begins and the PCs receive a call from the MCPD.

-43 Days: Talisman escapes from custody with the Black Paladin's help.

-37 Days: The villains travel to France and steal Chantal's dagger along with two other artifacts, a bottle of wine and a helmet of bone, from a museum near Brittany.

-35 Days: The villains return to Millennium City.

-30 Days: The villains take over the Delacroix Mansion. Talisman raises Chantal's shade and binds her to the dagger. Eliot and Linda Randolph transformed into the Gryphon and Lady Crow.

-29 Days: The villains begin to search for the perfect vessel.

-25 Days: Tonya Morris abducted from a nightclub, the Songbird.

-20 Days: Sylvia Blass abducted outside of her West-side apartment.

-19 Days: Sylvia Blass's body found by a roadside crew working on I-75 near Rockwood, Michigan.

-16 Days: Tonya Morris's body found in the Detroit River by boatists.

-14 Days: Jill Heilmann abducted outside of the Majestic Theater.

-7 Days: Hillary O'Connor abducted after leaving a downtown restaurant where she worked after her shift had ended.

-5 Days: Hilary O'Connor's body found by hikers in Lake Erie Metropark, south of Millennium City.

-4 Days: Jill Heilmann's body found by tourists on the shore of Lake Erie, north of Detroit Beach.

0 Days: *Shades of Black* begins.

A REQUEST FOR HELP



The Millennium City Police Department contacts the PCs. The officer contacting them is either an existing NPC, or Detective Ray Marlowe of MCPD Homicide (see the accompanying sidebar) — whichever is more appropriate to the campaign. (From here on, the text uses Detective Marlowe for convenience.)

Detective Marlowe asks for their help in a kidnapping/serial murder investigation. The investigation has been ongoing since the first victim was found almost three weeks ago, and three more victims have been found since then. The police have kept the murders out of the press for fear of warning the killer, creating copycat killers, and causing public panic — and because, to be blunt, the MCPD is baffled.

One thing's for sure, though: several aspects of the case are so out of the ordinary, supervillain involvement is a strong possibility. Because of this, as well as the department's lack of progress, Millennium City's Chief of Police, James Surhoff, has reluctantly decided to seek the help of local superheroes.

Detective Marlowe asks the PCs to meet him in his office as soon as possible so they can review the case file and read the forensic reports for themselves. If pressed, he discusses further details about the case over the phone (or whatever other means he used to contact the PCs), but he'd prefer to brief the PCs in person.

The PCs receive full access to the case file, and Detective Marlowe offers to approve any reasonable request to utilize police resources during their investigation. Before the meeting is over, the GM should make sure Detective Marlowe has a way of getting in touch with the superheroes (phone number, private radio frequency, or the like). If necessary, he issues a beeper to one of the PCs.

Running Act One

The first part of Act One is an investigation into a series of murders. Some gamers enjoy conducting investigations as part of a *Champions* scenario; some do not. No one knows your group of players better than you do, so before beginning this part of *Shades Of Black*, you should consider which camp the players belong to.

If the players love problem solving, and have characters built to do so, let the investigation run its course. The text includes plenty of details about the murders to help you run a challenging investigation, so you should give the players every chance to solve the mystery on their own. Enterprising players might not even require the event, *What's*

Happened To The Randolphs?, to discover that the Delacroix Mansion is the Black Paladin's hideout.

If the players aren't so fond of problem solving, don't force them to spend a lot of time investigating the murders. Let them investigate for a short time, then have *What's Happened To The Randolphs?* occur. That points them in the direction of the Delacroix Mansion. Don't require the PCs to solve the mystery before they get to the fight. As long as you make sure they know the pertinent information in the *What The PCs Should Know* section, you can proceed with the adventure at whatever pace you and your players prefer.

If the players are a mixed bag, you have to find a happy medium. But whatever the case, the opening part is, first and foremost, a hook to get the PCs on the trail of the Black Paladin; don't let it become a stumbling block for them.

The Case File

Here's the information in the file the PCs receive from the MCPD.

THE VICTIMS

The text below provides the names and specific details about each victim, but several facts are the same for all victims:

- All the victims are female
- All the victims were residents of Millennium City
- All the victims were born in the same year (you'll have to make this clear to the players, since it depends on your choice of the perfect vessel)
- All of the victims would be considered physically attractive by the average person
- All the victims were unmarried and had never been married
- None of the victims had a criminal record
- Each of the victims was moved from the scene of the crime following her death

Those are the *simple* facts common to each victim. The investigators find the next two decidedly odd.

First, the cause of death in each case is the same: a single stab wound to the heart. The wound was inflicted with a bladed weapon. The blade has an edge on both sides, is at least six inches long and two inches wide, and is curved at the tip. The wound was made with a single, precise thrust; considerable strength (but not superhuman) was

required. The angle of entry indicates the blade entered the victim's torso directly over the heart and pierced the rib cage without sawing or repeated stabbings. The angle of entry and nature of the wound are the same for all four victims.

Two forensic reports suggest the possibility that the victims were supine at the time of death. Another refutes this, stating that bloodstains on the victims' clothing indicate blood flowed from the wound and down to the navel, so the victim was upright at the time of the stabbing. A final report suggests the wound might have been self-inflicted (weapon held in both hands level with the heart, and thrust forcefully) but goes on to remark it seems unlikely a suicide would possess the strength and determination to self-inflict such a grisly wound.

Second, an aspect of each victim's physical description, in one way only and a different way for each, doesn't match the information listed on her driver's license (see text below). Friends and family of the deceased confirm this discrepancy. Further analysis indicates the changes are not cosmetic or superficial. No one who has worked on the case has any explanation for this phenomenon.

What's Going On

Since taking over the Delacroix Mansion, the Black Paladin and his allies have traveled to Millennium City to search for a vessel for Chantal's spirit. They travel at night in the Randolphs' black luxury sedan, a chipped car (see page 78 of *Champions Universe* or pages 35 and 36 of *Millennium City* for more details on Vehicle Control Chips). Talisman drives, and the Gryphon flies overhead on guard duty — out of sight for the average observer, but not for him, due to his enhanced sight.

When in the city, the villains stay at the Randolphs' townhouse located in downtown Millennium City, not too far from the Renaissance Center. The Black Paladin and Talisman, in their "civilian" identities of John Black and Pamela Duquesne, go to places and events where they can find attractive women of the appropriate age, such as popular clubs, expensive restaurants, concerts, theaters, and so on. They choose fashionable, up-scale places and events, since that suits the villains' taste (both have the Skill *High Society*, after all).

During these searches for a vessel, the Black Paladin carries Chantal's Dagger concealed on his person. Chantal uses her Eye Of Souls power to scrutinize the women present. When she senses a potential vessel, she informs her lover. The two villains shadow the potential vessel, and once she's alone they abduct her. In the case of three victims, Talisman used Mind Control to force the victim to come along without a struggle. The exception is Sylvia Blass.

In the case of Sylvia Blass, the Gryphon performed the abduction. Chantal identified her at a club, but the victim shared a taxi with friends when she left. Rather than risk the friends' interference, the Black Paladin had the Gryphon follow the taxi. Once the victim was alone, the Gryphon swooped

down and grabbed her. The animal hair and blood found on her body are a result of her struggles with him.

Once they capture a potential vessel, the villains take her to the Delacroix Mansion, where they perform the ritual. For a variety of arcane reasons, Chantal has rejected each as unworthy of her spirit at the end of the ritual. However, during the ritual and before rejection, Chantal partially transforms the victim to resemble herself at the time of her death — thus the change in the victim's appearance. Once the ritual fails, Chantal, disgusted at the "inadequacy" of the vessel, forces the victim to kill herself in the manner of the shade's own suicide: a dagger thrust to the heart.

Shortly after each victim dies, Black Paladin commands the Gryphon to dispose of the victim's body; he doesn't keep the bodies on the estate for fear of vengeful ghosts. (As explained later, the Delacroix Mansion has a history of hauntings, and both Talisman and Chantal are aware of the possibility.) The Gryphon flies a distance away from the mansion, traveling in a straight line (though he does not always travel the same distance). From the air, he drops the body; then he returns to the mansion. He has flown a different direction each time, and twice over Lake Erie (the victims dropped into the water, Heilmann and Morris, don't show the same signs of impact as the two dropped onto land, but on the other hand, their bodies show signs of having been in the water). The feather found tangled in Hillary O'Connor's hair is from one of his wings.

So far, four potential vessels have undergone the ritual. The MCPD has found and properly identified all the victims.

Action/Result: The Outcomes Of Potential Character Actions

Action: The PCs attempt a KS: Supervillains roll to determine what they know about the Black Paladin.

Result: With a successful roll, they know he often works as an ally of other mystic villains, and has on occasion served as a "mercenary" for very powerful villains. In addition, provide them a brief survey of his personality as described in *Conquerors, Killers, And Crooks*.

With a roll made by 3 or better, the PCs know (at your discretion) that he has never organized a "plot" more complex than robbing a bank, stealing an artifact from a museum, or attacking a superhero out of sheer spite or thrill-seeking. His general goal is to garner wealth and power.

The PCs cannot gain knowledge of the Black Paladin's origins — specifically the events that occurred during the Arthurian Age — through the use of this Skill. However, success can reveal that he often speaks as if he were a medieval knight, referring to events which occurred during the Arthurian Age (his quote in *Conquerors, Killers, And Crooks* provides a good example). Whether this is true or

DETECTIVE RAY MARLOWE

8	STR	12	DEX
10	CON	10	BODY
13	INT	13	EGO
12	PRE	10	COM
2	PD	2	ED
2	SPD	4	REC
20	END	19	STUN

Abilities: +2 with Pistols; +3 Sight PER; Deduction 12-; Criminology 14-; Forensic Medicine 8-; Interrogation 12-; Shadowing 12-; Streetwise 11-; PS: Homicide Detective 12-; CK: Millennium City 13-; KS: MCPD 11-; KS: The Law Enforcement World 11-; WF: Small Arms.

25+ Disadvantages: Age: 40+; Psychological Limitation: Goes Strictly By The Book.

Notes: Ray Marlowe has been on the force for over twenty years. He worked his way up to detective through effort and determination, and his superiors think highly of him. He works methodically, aided by an intuition developed over many years of investigation. He builds ironclad cases by strictly following police procedure. Despite his detached, professional exterior, he believes passionately in the motto "To serve and protect."

In conversation, Det. Marlowe is impassive and reserved, though always courteous to those he works with, including superheroes. To him, superheroes are the experts on supervillains, and as such, he treats them with respect. Throughout the investigation, he's genuinely helpful to the PCs, but they cannot persuade him to "bend the law."

THE VICTIMS IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER

The victims in chronological order are:

- 1st Tonya Morris
- 2nd Sylvia Blass
- 3rd Jill Heilmann
- 4th Hillary O'Connor

just an affectation, no one knows — although most are likely to believe it an affectation.

Action: The PCs attempt a KS: Supervillains roll to determine what they know about Talisman.

Result: With a successful roll, they know she often works as an ally of other villains, particularly those of mystic bent, but seems to prefer launching her own schemes. If necessary, she summons help from the Infernal Realms — demons, devils, and the like. She knows she can't withstand multiple superheroes, so she prepares accordingly. In addition, provide them a brief survey of her personality as described in *Champions*.

With a roll made by 2 or more, the PCs know Talisman is Witchcraft's sister (if Witchcraft exists in your campaign). Regardless of the roll, they cannot gain knowledge of the twins' precise origin; they must learn of that directly from one of them or some similar source.

Action: The PCs interview friends and family of the victims.

Result: Friends and family have nothing to add to what they previously told the police, but with a successful Conversation roll, someone particularly close to the victim (*i.e.*, a mother or best friend) confides that the victim's features seemed somehow different — nothing specific, and not the obvious

change mentioned in the case file, but a definite feeling that something was different.

Use of Telepathy confirms the veracity of this gut feeling. The PC using Telepathy knows the person is correct, but also can't adequately communicate the difference in words. Looking at photos with the naked eye won't reveal the subtle changes, but computer analysis of the photos (or similar means of detection) does. Such analysis shows subtle changes in the shape of the chin, nose, lips, cheekbones — even frown lines and crow's feet.

Furthermore, if the PCs perform the same analysis on photos of the other victims, a pattern in the subtle changes emerges (a PC can also notice this pattern with a successful Disguise roll): the victims were all changing in appearance to look like the same person.

Action: The PCs perform their own examination of, or autopsy on, one or all of the victims.

Result: Millennium City's coroners have done a thorough job, but maybe a PC possesses a high degree of skill in Criminology and/or Forensic Medicine. If so, allow the PC to discover clues missed by the MCPD if he succeeds with a roll using either Skill (if he has both, let him use the weaker Skill as Complementary to the one with the higher roll). The Forensic Medicine roll suffers a penalty of -3, since this is the second autopsy.

With every full 3 points by which a character succeeds with a Criminology or Forensic Medicine roll, provide him with one clue. Possible clues include (but aren't limited to):

- Fibers found on the victim's slacks or stockings are identifiable as being from an expensive Persian rug.
- Advanced analysis of soil samples found under the victim's fingernails shows she was near the coast at some point during the abduction (possibly after death).
- Some of the cuts on Sylvia Blass's body were made by claws, similar in shape and size to those of a great cat, and were inflicted prior to her death.
- A sliver of metal found in a victim's breastbone is identifiable as an alloy of copper and tin (standard bronze), but it contains slight traces of an unknown non-metallic substance, too (Chantal's mystically transfigured blood).
- Markings on the victim's palms came from a handle wrapped with leather, which may indicate the wound was self-inflicted, or that the victim had obtained a weapon and was fighting back when she was killed.

Action: The PCs use Detect Magic (or the like) on one or all of the victims.

Result: Each of the victims was the subject of the same magic. If the ability has Discriminatory and/or Analyze, the PCs can identify the magic as the same magical Transform.



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Name: Sylvia Blass

Height: 5'6" / Weight: 105 pounds

Hair: Brown / Eyes: Blue

Race: White

Notes: The victim was employed as an accountant. She was last seen getting out of a taxi cab in front of her Westside apartment building around 2:00 AM, returning home from a downtown dance club called Retro Activity. The state police found her body south of Millennium City near Rockwood, Michigan, not far from Interstate 75. The victim was moved from the scene of the crime within two hours of death.

The victim was killed by a single knife wound to the heart. The wound was inflicted with a bladed weapon. The blade has an edge on both sides, is at least six inches long and two inches wide, and is curved at the tip. The wound was made with a single, precise thrust; considerable strength (but not superhuman) was required. The angle of entry indicates the blade entered the victim's torso directly over the heart, and pierced the rib cage without sawing or repeated stabbings. Based on the angle of entry and lack of blood on the body, victim was probably supine when stabbed. Victim's body showed several signs of a struggle. First, animal hair and blood were found under her fingernails. The yellowish-brown hair is from an unknown source, but is definitely not human. The blood defies categorization, but possesses some characteristics of human blood. Second, the victim's body has several broken bones and contusions, consistent with those seen on fall victims; the body was probably dropped from a great height after death. At the time of her autopsy, the victim's eyes were yellow. This conflicts with her driver's license and other records, which indicate blue eyes. Two of victim's friends have also confirmed her eyes were blue, not yellow.

The investigators suspect Blass was the serial killer's second victim. She is the only victim to date whose body shows signs of a struggle.

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Name: Jill Heilmann

Height: 5'6" / **Weight:** 115 pounds

Hair: Blonde / **Eyes:** Blue

Race: White



Notes: The victim was employed as an associate at a law firm. She was last seen attending a play at the Majestic Theater in the Theater District. She stepped out for a cigarette during intermission at approximately 9:30 PM and never returned. A deputy sheriff found her body washed up on the shore of Lake Erie, north of Detroit Beach. The victim was moved from the scene of the crime within two hours of death, and then dropped in the water.

Victim was killed by a single knife wound to the heart. The wound was inflicted with a bladed weapon. The blade has an edge on both sides, is at least six inches long and two inches wide, and is curved at the tip. The wound was made with a single, precise thrust; considerable strength (but not superhuman) was required. The angle of entry indicates the blade entered the victim's torso directly over the heart, and pierced the rib cage without sawing or repeated stabbings. Based on bloodstains on the victim's clothing and skin, blood flowed down the body to the navel, suggesting the victim was standing when stabbed (or was propped up after being stabbed).

At the time of her autopsy, the victim's height was 5'10". However, according to her medical records, she was 5'6" tall. Several other body measurements are likewise dramatically different.

Investigators suspect Heilmann was the third victim.

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Tonya Morris

Height: 5'10" / Weight: 119 pounds

Hair: Black / Eyes: Brown

Race: Black

Notes: The victim was employed as a sales representative for a pharmaceutical company. She was last seen at approximately 11:00 PM leaving a nightclub, the Songbird, located near her apartment in Rivertown. Her body was found floating in the Detroit River by boaters some distance away from Millennium City. The victim was moved from the scene of the crime within two hours of death, and then dropped in the water.

Victim was killed by a single knife wound to the heart. The wound was inflicted with a bladed weapon. The blade has an edge on both sides, is at least six inches long and two inches wide, and is curved at the tip. The wound was made with a single, precise thrust; considerable strength (but not superhuman) was required. The angle of entry indicates the blade entered the victim's torso directly over the heart, and pierced the rib cage without sawing or repeated stabbings. Based on the angle of entry and lack of blood on the body, the victim was probably supine when stabbed.

At the time of her autopsy, the victim's skin was white, and other aspects of her appearance more resembled those of Caucasian than African-American females. Even for a Caucasian, her complexion was unusually pale.

Investigators suspect she was the first victim.

Millennium City Medical Examiner's Office
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Hillary O'Connor

Height: 5'4" / Weight: 125 pounds

Hair: Brown / Eyes: Brown

Race: White



Notes: The victim was employed as a waitress at a downtown restaurant, where she worked nights. She was last seen leaving work around midnight, heading for her apartment in the Plaza district. Her body was found by hikers in the Lake Erie Metropark, south of Millennium City. The victim was moved from the scene of the crime within two hours of death.

Victim was killed by a single knife wound to the heart. The wound was inflicted with a bladed weapon. The blade has an edge on both sides, is at least six inches long and two inches wide, and is curved at the tip. The wound was made with a single, precise thrust; considerable strength (but not superhuman) was required. The angle of entry indicates the blade entered the victim's torso directly over the heart, and pierced the rib cage without sawing or repeated stabbings.

In the opinion of this examiner, it is possible that the wound was self-inflicted. The deceased could have held the weapon in both hands level with the heart, and thrust forcefully. However, it seems unlikely a suicide would possess the strength and determination to self-inflict such a grisly wound; furthermore, the movement of the body postmortem tends to cast doubt on this theory. The victim's body has several broken bones and contusions, consistent with those seen on fall victims; the body was probably dropped from a great height after death. A golden-brown feather was found tangled in the victim's hair. Professor Anne Murdock, an ornithologist at Millennium City University, could not identify the feather, but indicated based on its size that it came from a species of bird much larger than any known to inhabit the Millennium City area.

At the time of her autopsy, the victim's hair was black and waist-length. However, numerous photographs, and statements given by several relatives and friends, indicate that prior to her abduction the victim had shoulder-length brown hair.

Investigators suspect O'Connor was the most recent victim.

Millennium City Police Department
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INVESTIGATORS' CONCLUSIONS

Here's what the investigators have concluded so far:

The murders began nearly four weeks ago. The killer frequents downtown Millennium City, and identifies suitable victims in public places located there. Once he has identified a victim, the killer abducts her when she is alone.

Since only one victim shows signs of struggle (Sylvia Blass), the killer is potentially known to the victims, or possesses considerable superficial personal charisma and charm. As of yet, the police have identified no acquaintance all four victims had in common. Another possibility, one indicating the involvement of a superhuman criminal, is Mind Control or other superpowers allowing the killer to overwhelm the victims easily.

Once he abducts a victim, the killer takes her to an unknown location, likely south of the city, and stabs her to death. He then quickly removes the victim's body from the scene of the crime. Judging by the falls suffered by two of the victims, the killer flies the victims from the crime scene (another possible indicator that the killer has superhuman abilities).

The unusual nature of the murder weapon may indicate cult involvement. None of the victims were known to have any associations with cults or other unusual organizations.

Neither the locations of the abductions, the timing of the abductions, the projected times of death, or the locations where bodies were found suggests any kind of pattern (either separately, or in combination with other elements).

A NOTE ABOUT THE VICTIMS' DESCRIPTIONS

The places where the victims were employed, as well as the locations of their abductions, are left intentionally unnamed. You should make them places pertinent to your campaign. For instance, maybe Sylvia Blass was employed as an accountant at a company owned by a PC; or Jill Heilmann was an associate at the same law firm as one of the PCs; or Tonya Morris was last seen at a bar frequented by one of the PCs in his Secret Identity. That allows you to drop references to the victims, making the impact of their abductions more immediate to the PCs: "Have you seen Sylvia lately? Does she still work here?"

If you intend to emphasize the investigation aspect of *Shades Of Black*, you should fill in the names for the places where the victims worked, as well as where they were abducted and other useful facts. That level of detail lends "realism" to the adventure, and further fleshes out the setting.

Action: The PCs investigate the astrological significance of the victims' birthdays.

Result: The birthdays are between an equinox and a solstice, so the victims were all born in the same season. The PCs can determine this with a successful KS: Arcane And Occult Lore roll.

To Chantal, the importance of the victims' birthdays is that they are in the same season as hers (Chantal doesn't know the precise day of her birth), and the victims are the same age she was when she committed suicide.

However, if there's some astrological significance for the birthday of the perfect vessel chosen before the adventure by you, and the PCs know this information (maybe it's a part of the perfect vessel's background, or was a plot hook in a previous adventure), you need to determine whether it also applies to the victims.

Caveat: On the off chance the victims and the perfect vessel have an astrological phenomena in common, the players are likely to become very, very suspicious. So it's probably best to avoid this situation, either by changing the victims' birthdays or choosing a different perfect vessel.

Action: The PCs use Powers to analyze/identify the feather and animal hair.

Result: The feather resembles that of a golden eagle, but huge in size. The animal hair resembles the fur of a lion or puma. Detect Magic reveals both are the result of the same magical transformation, but a transformation different from the Transform used on the victims. If a Power warrants more specific details, refer to the description of the Gryphon on page 74.

Action: A PC uses Retrocognition or a similar Power.

Result: If possible, it's best to avoid letting the PCs use Retrocognition or like powers; they spoil the fun of solving the mystery. However, if you have no way to stop this, here's what the PC experiences.

Chantal's powerful supernatural presence interferes with the PC's "sight." The PC can view each victim on the night of her death, but only before Chantal identifies her as a potential vessel. While Chantal's spirit is present an inferno consumes the vision, blocking everything else that occurs until the victim's death. At the end, right before the victim dies, the flames subside, and the enraged face of a beautiful woman with a deathly pale complexion, raven black hair, and yellow eyes fills the PC's vision. That apparition fades away to blackness; the next thing the PC's "sight" shows him is the victim plummeting to the ground/water (he cannot see who dropped her).

In the case of Sylvia Blass, the inferno occurs when the victim enters the club, but subsides when she gets into the taxicab with her friends. The PC can see her exiting the cab and walking up to the door of her apartment building. A large, shadowy creature (the Gryphon) swoops down from the sky and grabs her. She struggles briefly. Then flames again consume the vision until the Gryphon drops the body.

Use variations of the results of Retrocognition for other Powers, such as Summon or "psychometric" Mental Powers. For example, if a PC uses Summon to question the spirit of the victim, flames consume the spirit when the PCs ask about moments when Chantal was present. If the PCs ask the spirit about her death, Chantal's face appears, screams in rage, then disappears.

Action: The PCs attempt to locate Talisman with a Mind Scan.

Result: A PC may try to locate Talisman (EGO 21) with a Mind Scan. The success of this action depends on the PC's level of Mind Scan, and the search area. Page 134 of the *HERO System 5th Edition* lists the modifiers involved. Talisman's mind is not so unique, strange, or powerful that it "stands out" and gives the PC a bonus to find her. The smallest area over which a Scan has a chance to succeed is downtown Millennium City (the site of the abductions); the city center equates in population to a Large Town (-10).

Whether Talisman currently resides at the Randolphs' townhouse is up to you. Because they're still searching for the perfect vessel, the villains do spend much of their time in the city.

If the Mind Scan succeeds, you should be careful not to give away too much information, especially if the PCs follow a successful Mind Scan with a successful use of Telepathy. Chantal's spirit protects those working to free her, creating a blanket of "mental fog" and other obstacles the PCs have trouble "perceiving" through:

- Anything specifically concerning Chantal — especially her name and history, as well as Talisman's memories of raising the spirit and performing the rituals on the victims — evokes the same reaction as Retrocognition.
- Knowledge of exactly where the villains are staying (*i.e.*, the address of the Randolphs' townhouse) should be relatively difficult to obtain (consider Talisman to have 15 points of Mental Defense for these purposes — Chantal extends part of her *Ward The Mind* ability to Talisman).
- Obscure the number of minds present with Talisman. If she's with her allies, inform the PC there are three, maybe four, maybe even five other minds present. Lady Crow's mind is strange, and hard for a mentalist to interpret: it seems as much animal as human. Chantal's mind slips in and out of existence — a painful blaze of power one instant, then almost nonexistent the next — and is impossible for a mentalist to identify.

If the PC achieves an EGO +20 result on the Mind Scan dice, Talisman does not have to be at the townhouse. Depending on the time of day, she can be out shopping, having a coffee... or she can be out with the Black Paladin, searching for the next victim.

Talisman is no fool — she's experienced with Mental Powers and has a high EGO. If she realizes

she's being scanned (as she almost certainly will), she attacks back down the link with one of the Mental Powers in her *Foul Sorceries* Multipower... and the Black Paladin provides her with the dagger, so Chantal can aid her in the mental duel.

You can turn a successful Mind Scan to your advantage, and use it to intrigue the players by making the results mysterious. The PCs can confirm that Talisman is downtown, and likely involved in the murders. Surface impressions reveal not only that she delights in the black magic she's performing, and that the magic has not yet succeeded, but also that Talisman has a nagging uncertainty about the final result — as if it might be beyond her ability to deal with.

Action: The PCs attempt to locate the Black Paladin with a Mind Scan.

Result: Assume Chantal is using her Vile Black Magic to shield the Black Paladin from this sort of detection (either with lots of Mental Defense, or Invisibility to the Mental Sense Group). Therefore, this action automatically fails.

Action: The PCs attempt to determine the point where Jill Heilmann and Tonya Morris were dropped in Lake Erie.

Result: Since the corpses were in the water for a week or more, determining their original location by conventional methods is difficult due to tides, currents, and so forth. (Retrocognition can determine where they entered the water easily.)

If the PCs have access to advanced computers (such as an AI at their base), or possess incredible mental capacities, allow them a chance to determine the location. In general, to do so they must obtain weather and tide reports (available from the Great Lakes Environmental Research Laboratory) and study them for an extended period of time. The time required depends on the skills of the PC and the equipment available. For instance, if the PC has SS: Oceanography, he requires less time. If the PC has equipment not suited to the task, such as an ordinary personal computer, then good luck.

After the required time has passed, the PC must succeed with a SS: Mathematics or SS: Statistics roll to construct an accurate statistical model. A penalty of -5 applies, and SS: Oceanography acts as a Complementary Skill.

Even if successful, the PCs can't pinpoint the exact location — only obtain an area where it's *likely* someone dropped one of the corpses. The size of the area depends on the success of the roll, but it's circular, with a radius of no less than one mile. If the roll just barely succeeds, it's a large area; and vice versa. (At your option, an Extraordinary Skill roll — success by 10 or more — may yield the precise location.)

Action: The PCs stake out clubs, bars, and so on in downtown Millennium City.

Result: With a successful High Society roll at a -3 penalty, a PC can compile a list of places the Black Paladin and Talisman may visit in their search for

Chantal's perfect vessel, based on where previous victims were last seen. CK: Millennium City serves as a Complementary Skill.

If the roll fails, the PCs stake out the wrong places. If the roll succeeds, and the PCs decide to stake out these places, you must decide whether the villains show up.

The concern here, of course, is that if the villains show up, you run the risk that the PCs defeat and capture them — and it's much too soon for the Black Paladin's villainy to be stopped if you want the scenario to play out along the lines roughly laid out in this book. You're perfectly justified to *not* have the villains show up. The list of places is lengthy, and the PCs can't be everywhere at once. (Maybe if a PC has Duplication, he can, but still....)

On the other hand, if the PCs have performed some good investigation work and done well with their Skill Rolls, they deserve some reward for their efforts. Otherwise the lesson they learn is that no matter how well they do, you're going to twist the scenario to keep it going the way *you* want — which usually amounts to poor GMing. A confrontation provides the players with a sense of accomplishment — they aren't just flailing around while the Black Paladin works his villainy at will.

A possible compromise is to allow the PCs to make contact with the enemy, but have the villains flee before the PCs can capture them. For example, Black Paladin's Teleportation power allows him to carry Talisman, and perhaps Chantal's spirit temporarily makes it more powerful to boot (allowing him to activate it as if it had the Advantage *Trigger*, for instance, or giving it more inches of effect). Realizing, thanks to his Danger Sense, that he's being watched, he activates his Darkness power, dons his armor, and Teleports away with Talisman.

The stakeout could segue nicely into the next event in Act One, *An Urgent Call*. For example, perhaps the PCs realize the villains are preparing to abduct a woman, but arrive too late. They can only watch as the villains leave with their victim (perhaps in a distant taxi, perhaps by Teleporting away). Then the PCs, desperate to save the latest victim, must guess the location of the ritual based on their investigation — maybe the events of *What's Happened To The Randolphs?* occur the same night, with one or more PCs in attendance — and hope for the best.

A stakeout can provide good roleplaying opportunities. Maybe a PC with High Society has to explain to a less "cultured" PC why jeans, a t-shirt, and sneakers aren't appropriate attire for the opera. Or maybe one of the PCs tries to kill two birds with one stone by taking his DNPC to one of the possible locations. The DNPC has been demanding more of the PC's time, and a night on the town is just what the doctor ordered — and if the PC is on the lookout for a killer too, where's the harm in that?

To successfully stake out a location, the PCs need to be in their civilian identities — if the villains see costumed superheroes present, they immediately leave. The surest method of identifying the villains is by their Distinctive Features:

Mystic Aura (both the Black Paladin and Talisman possess this Disadvantage). Of course, this requires the PCs to have an applicable Sense. A more chancy method is to use the Skill *Shadowing* to determine if anyone is paying unusual attention to a woman at the location. The difficulty depends on the number of people present. A theater would only be -1, since most of the people are seated and looking at the stage. But a dance club would impose a -5 — lots of people move around and check out other people in a club. On the upside, neither of the villains has Shadowing, so if Chantal identifies a potential vessel, they won't be very sneaky about following her. Finally, if the PCs have encountered one or both of the villains previously, maybe — and definitely at your discretion, since both are in their Secret Identities — a PC recognizes one of them with a successful PER Roll.

If the stakeout takes place in a dance club or like location, use the map of Andromeda's from the *HERO System Resource Kit*. Just explain that some of the fixtures aren't quite so futuristic (even in "the City of the Future").

Wrapping Up The Investigation

Sooner or later, the PCs are going to find out as much as they can, or get tired of investigating.

WHAT THE PCs SHOULD KNOW

For purposes of good storytelling, the PCs should know two facts before the adventure moves on. (Of course, they may know, through successful investigation, quite a bit more.)

1. The victims were in the midst of transforming into a single individual: a tall woman with black hair, yellow eyes, and a deathly pale complexion.
2. Magic was involved in the transformation.

WHAT IF THEY DON'T?

If the PCs haven't reached the above conclusions, you can either require successful Deduction rolls to gain the information, or provide two more victims.

1. A woman who has suffered the same change in appearance as one of the previous victims.
2. A woman who has suffered two changes in appearance (*i.e.*, hair and eyes) and has a tattoo on her shoulder blade. The design of the tattoo involves a pentacle, sigils, and crows.

SUMMING UP

The PCs know magic is involved in the transformation of the victims. They also know that Talisman was freed from custody by the Black Paladin a week or two before the murders began. It won't take much of a leap for the players to realize Talisman's involved in what's going on. What the PCs don't know is the where the murders take place. Which brings you to....

WHAT'S HAPPENED TO THE RANDOLPHS?

This event, seemingly unrelated to the investigation, provides the PCs with a lead concerning the location of the murders and the Black Paladin's hideout. Once it takes place, the PCs are going to be in "hot pursuit" of the Black Paladin, so it's best to have it occur as the investigation winds down, and the PCs have begun to exhaust the possibilities. The event is a charity dinner held by the Millennium City Association for the Betterment of Children (the MCABC).

The MCABC calls the event *A Dinner With Genius*. The cost per plate is a thousand dollars, and all proceeds go to the MCABC's scholarship fund. Scholarships are awarded to the children of low-income families in Millennium City who have shown advanced aptitude in a particular subject area, usually music or math, and would benefit from private schooling at prestigious private educational institutions.

The night's entertainment is provided by recipients of past scholarships: a concerto composed for the piano by a twelve year-old virtuoso; a breathtaking laser light display based on algorithms conceived by a nine year-old prodigy; and a dramatic reading from a play written by a fourteen year-old writer.

It's one of the major charity events of the season, and many of Millennium City's wealthiest are expected to attend, including Eliot and Linda Randolph.

Involving The PCs

A PC with the Perk *Wealthy* or *Filthy Rich* should receive an invitation to the event (and may even be able to walk in and attend, if he's well-known), so he has a good reason to attend. If possible, foreshadow the event a scenario or two in advance, so it's not so obvious that it's connected to *Shades Of Black*.

If the PCs used High Society to compile a list of locations and events where the murderer might look for victims, the dinner appears on the list. Through the MCPD, they can get two invitations. (If a PC chooses to attend in his superhero identity and has a positive reputation, he might even be asked to speak.)

Whether the PCs attend, the Black Paladin and Talisman do not show up at the charity dinner. However, the PCs do hear about the disappearance of the Randolphs, and have the opportunity to learn about the millionaire couple. The general conclusion among people who know them was that the couple simply decided to take a vacation at the last minute and didn't bother to tell anyone. Even though they're known for doing this sort of thing, this should immediately make any good gamer suspicious.

An item about the dinner, written by well-known jet-set reporter Andrea Tourelle, appears in the society column the next day (see accompanying

box). Toward the end of the article, it comments on the absence of the Randolphs. You should either read the boxed text aloud, or provide the players with a copy as a handout. If one or more PCs attended in his superheroic identity, the column mentions that as well.

About The Randolphs

1. A successful High Society roll reveals the Randolphs are well-known philanthropists and devout Christians, as well as one of the wealthiest couples in Millennium City.

2. No one's seen either of them in the last month. At the dinner, their uncharacteristic absence is commented upon by many attendees. Since they split their time between their downtown townhouse and country estate (the Delacroix Mansion), and often take vacations, none of their acquaintances are especially concerned. People assume they're at the mansion, or out of the country. If the PCs contact friends of the Randolphs who live near the mansion, those people will say they assume the Randolphs have been staying in the city.

The Randolphs have no immediate family. They have no children (although gossip reveals they recently decided to try to have kids), and the parents of both died in 1992, casualties of the "Battle of Detroit."

3. The Randolphs own a townhouse in an expensive building downtown. They also have a country estate, the Delacroix Mansion, located on the shore of Lake Erie. The PCs can learn this by: making a Conversation roll at the dinner, or by making a High Society roll at -1 if they're familiar with the Millennium City social scene. The Randolphs' phone numbers and addresses are unlisted; the PCs can obtain exact addresses for both places with a Bureaucratics roll, or via Detective Ray Marlowe.

4. Investigation of records kept by the Gates leading to and from Millennium City (for more information, see pages 35 and 36 of *Millennium City*) reveals the Randolphs' car has come and gone from the city through the Livernois Gate five times during the last month. The dates of four departures coincide with the dates of four of the abductions; the last departure was just recently (maybe even just hours ago). Each time, the car entered and exited from the Livernois Gate — not surprising, given that it's the closest to the Delacroix Mansion.

This final piece of information is an obvious lead — so don't reveal it right away. If possible, don't reveal this until you're ready to begin *The Latest Victim*.

Wrapping Up

Once the PCs know of the Randolphs' townhouse and the Delacroix Mansion, they are likely to realize both are close to locations associated with the murders (sites of abduction, places where bodies were found). If the players don't realize this, allow the PCs to uncover these facts with a successful Deduction roll.

The PCs (being PCs) probably jump on this information, quickly guessing that the Randolphs have some connection to the crimes. They'll want to search both residences.

If the PCs request a search warrant and/or ask the police to investigate, the authorities deny their request. Just because the PCs believe a connection exists doesn't translate to probable cause to issue a warrant. Detective Marlowe agrees to "ask around" about the Randolphs, but without more evidence, does not agree to more serious investigation — bringing them in for questioning, forced entry into their homes, or the like. He explains any judge will have doubts about a link between the wealthy, upstanding Randolphs and the heinous murders — nor would a judge risk blemishing the Randolphs' sparkling reputation for such a tenuous connection.

If the PCs investigate themselves, allow them to search the downtown townhouse. There, they find evidence it's been occupied as recently as yesterday (the neighbors saw lights on, the parking attendant saw their car in the garage, and so forth).

But before they begin to investigate the Delacroix Mansion — whether a physical search, or just research into its sordid history — they receive...

A Brilliant Future

By Andrea Tourelle

I attended A Dinner With Genius yesterday evening, and let me say: if these kids are any indication, the future of America is brilliant indeed. A Dinner With Genius is held every year by the Millennium City Association for the Betterment of Children, and all proceeds go to their scholarship fund. The fund provides scholarships to prodigies of lesser means, so the talented children can attend educational institutions where they will realize their full potential.

Performing at the dinner were past recipients of scholarships: Lauren Kay, a future Mozart; Andre Washington, the next Einstein; and Jose Diego, a Shakespeare in the making. All of their performances were both inspired and inspirational, particularly because of the youth of their creators. Take note of their names — these youngsters will someday set the world on fire!

Of course, the food was scrumptious, and the alphabet soup was an especially clever touch.

Fifty of Millennium City's notables attended, and the guest list was a who's who of our most-admired philanthropists. Conspicuously absent were Eliot and Linda Randolph, who have been staunch supporters of the MCABC in the past, but the consensus among the attendees was that they must be on one of their well-known spur-of-the-moment vacations.

AN URGENT CALL



MARJORIE DE WOLF

8 STR	8 DEX
8 CON	8 BODY
11 INT	10 EGO
10 PRE	10 COM
2 PD	2 ED
2 SPD	4 REC
16 END	16 STUN

Abilities: CK: Millennium City 11-; KS: Journalism History & Theory 12-; KS: Photography 11-; PS: Newspaper Editor 11-

0+ Disadvantages:

DNPC: Mrs. Sarah de Wolf (her widowed mother) 8- (Normal)

Notes: Marjorie de Wolf is short with curly brown hair and brown eyes. She works as an assistant editor at a local newspaper. She is cheerful, upbeat, and always good company, though she knows when to put her foot down with a reporter. She is generally liked by others, and well thought of by her co-workers.

Marjorie's mother is a widow, and of failing health; Marjorie often cares for her and supports her financially. Though Marjorie has an apartment in the city, she often spends her weekends with her mother in the suburbs.

In the final part of Act One, the PCs receive a call from Detective Marlowe and learn of a fifth victim. Then, the superheroes have their first confrontation with the Black Paladin and his villainous allies at the Delacroix Mansion, while attempting to save the life of Marjorie de Wolf, the most recent woman detected by Chantal as a potential vessel for her spirit.

The Latest Victim

Detective Marlowe contacts the PCs to tell them that another abduction has occurred — and this time there was a witness. The kidnapping took place late last night, outside a downtown club called the White House.

The victim, Marjorie de Wolf, and the witness, Gayle Rockwell, had just left the club and parted ways. Rockwell claims she forgot to ask de Wolf about plans to go shopping the next day, and went back to ask her what time they were to meet. When Rockwell caught up to de Wolf, she was with two other individuals, a man and woman. De Wolf walked between the other two, and ignored Rockwell's calls to her. The three got into a cab together and left the scene.

Rockwell didn't recognize either of the two strangers, but she did provide the police with a description of their appearance. The man was tall with black hair and a beard. He wore a black suit. The woman was medium height with short, black hair. She wore a black blouse and leather mini-skirt. Both of them seemed sinister and threatening; Rockwell didn't like the look of either of them. They definitely weren't the type of people Marjorie de Wolf normally associated with.

Rockwell contacted the police when she couldn't get in touch with her friend. Police have checked de Wolf's apartment and contacted her mother, but have not located her.

The time of the report depends on the activities of the PCs — remember that shortly after they start to think about heading out to the Delacroix Mansion to search it, they receive the call concerning the latest victim. If it doesn't matter, then it is in the late afternoon of the next day. Also make sure enough time passes between the abduction and when the PCs get involved for the Black Paladin and his cohorts to reach the mansion before the heroes can.

To The Mansion!

At this point, the PCs only have one place to search for the victim — namely, the Delacroix Mansion — and they should go for broke. If they don't, have their contact at the MCPD press them for any leads they might have, asking them to check out any possibilities or hunches, no matter how far-fetched, just on the off-chance it can save an innocent life.

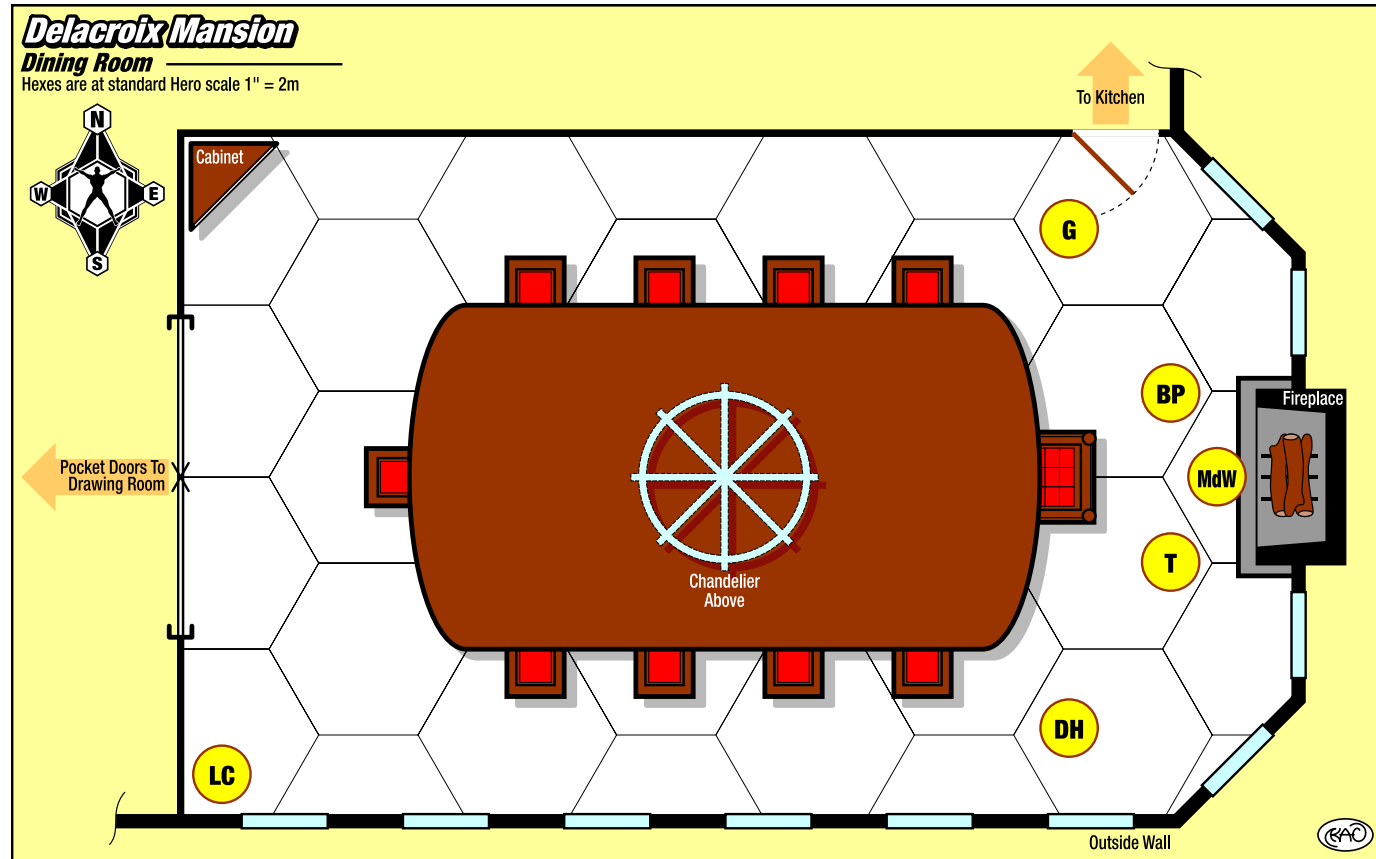
The mansion is located approximately 40 kilometers south of Millennium City. How long it takes them to get there depends on the PCs' mode of transportation, but the ritual doesn't commence until they arrive at the mansion. As they approach, read the following description to the players:

Traveling east, nearing the shore of Lake Erie, you pass through acres of forest. Finally you emerge from the trees. The raucous calls of crows greet your arrival; a large flock of the birds roosts in trees and covers the untended lawn. Beyond the crows, you see the Delacroix Mansion, a two-story house of brick and white limestone. One wing juts from the main house to the north; another to the south. Slate shingles cover the steep roof.

As the driveway comes up to the house, it circles a low, grassy mound. Atop the mound stands a cross of grey, weather-worn stone. A single crow, much larger than the rest, roosts atop the cross, as if he were the lord of the manor. A black sedan is parked near the entrance of the mansion. None of the mansion's windows are lit, but you can see wisps of smoke drifting from a chimney at the back of the main house.

First Fight

After the PCs enter the mansion, a successful Hearing PER Roll allows them to hear a woman chanting; the sound seems to come from the formal dining room. They can make their way through the mansion, toward the source of the chanting, without difficulty. (See the map on page 53.) Once they reach the room, the fight begins. With careful planning and successful Stealth rolls — and if they avoid detection by Lady Crow, who keeps an eye on the grounds via crows, and if the Black Paladin fails his Danger Sense roll — some or all of the PCs can potentially surprise the villains.



THE RITUAL OF REBIRTH

For the Ritual to succeed, Chantal requires a perfect vessel. Chantal cannot determine whether a victim is the perfect vessel until the Transform takes effect. Marjorie de Wolf is *not* the perfect vessel.

Here are the numbers pertinent to the Ritual of Rebirth, and its effects on Marjorie de Wolf. You may want to make a copy of this information and attach it to your GM's Screen for easy reference.

Ritual Of Rebirth: Major Transform 2d6 (human woman into woman resembling Chantal's former body), Continuous (Transform takes effect at the end of each Segment 12 until dagger is removed from victim's hands; +1), Difficult To Dispel (150 Active Points; +½), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½) (90 Active Points); OAF (dagger, which victim must hold at all times; -1), Extra Time (1 Turn; -1¼), Very Limited Target (human woman with specific attributes; -1). Total cost: 21 points.

Thus, you should roll 2d6 at the end of each Turn (or more frequently, if necessary; see text). The total BODY needed is 16 (de Wolf's 8 BODY, times 2).

Before the ritual begins, Chantal paralyzes the victim: Entangle 8d6, 8 DEF (standard effect: 8 BODY), Takes No Damage From Physical Attacks (+¼), Based On EGO Combat Value (+1), Works Against EGO, Not STR(+¼); Susceptibility (Entangle vanishes when Ritual Of Rebirth is disrupted or completed; -1)

Ritual continues until someone removes the dagger from the victim's hands, or the Transform takes effect.

OVERVIEW OF THE FIGHT

During the fight, you should keep several things in mind.

First, the PCs' objective is more than just defeating the villains. Their ultimate goal is to rescue the victim, Marjorie de Wolf, before Talisman completes the Ritual of Rebirth. In truth, the fight is stacked against the Black Paladin and his allies, despite the fact they're unlikely to be surprised; it's only a matter of time before the PCs defeat them.

However, time is against the PCs. At the end of Segment 12 in each Turn following the first Post-Segment 12, roll the dice for the Ritual of Rebirth, described in the accompanying sidebar, and record the result. If you don't think the fight will last several Turns, feel free to make rolls every Phase or two; it's important for the PCs to understand the need to stop what's going on.

The ritual should provide a sense of urgency to the fight, so make a point of rolling the dice loudly and pausing to write down the results. (Maybe you can mumble the total of the dice rolls and shake your head ruefully just to get the players' attention.) At the end of the first full Turn of combat, describe the victim's hair turning black, straightening, and growing long enough to reach her waist. (If necessary, have this happen even earlier, to convey to the PCs what's going on.) Other changes occur in later Turns.

At the end of the Ritual of Rebirth (if it's completed), Chantal rejects the victim as a vessel for her spirit. She uses Mind Control to force de Wolf to plunge the dagger into her heart. So once the fight

RECOMMENDED READING

You might want to read up on the following rules, before running the fight against the Black Paladin and his cronies. All page references are to *HERO System 5th Edition* unless otherwise noted.

Coordinated Attacks on page 249 and Multiple Attackers on page 251. Both the demon hounds, and Talisman and the Black Paladin, may attempt to take advantage of these Combat Modifiers.

Grab (as used by creatures) on page 31 of the *HERO System Bestiary*, and effects of being Grabbed are on pages 256 and 257. The demon hounds may attempt this tactic.

Disarm on page 256, Grab Weapon on page 257 (under the heading for Grab), and Grab By on page 257. The PCs have to perform one of these Maneuvers to remove the dagger from de Wolf's hands.

Block on page 255 and Dive For Cover on page 260, paying particular attention to how to use both Maneuvers to protect another character from attack. The Black Paladin uses both to prevent the PCs from disrupting the Ritual.

begins in earnest, the PCs are on the clock.

Finally, if at all possible, the Black Paladin should escape with the dagger, and hopefully he won't need Chantal's help to do so. If you can keep the PCs in the dark about Chantal's ability to aid the Black Paladin with her VPP while he has the dagger in his possession, you can keep his exact motivation mysterious — as well as make later encounters with him far more shocking, since his power level is effectively higher than the Character Sheet presented in *Conquerors, Killers, And Crooks*.

Here's the description of what the characters see in the dining room. If necessary, adjust the description to suit the circumstances. For example, if Black Paladin's Danger Sense has alerted him to the PCs' presence, he may be waiting near the door to ambush the first PC who approaches it.

You find de Wolf, and several other people, in the formal dining room of the mansion. Crows roost on the furnishings: a large dinner table with ten seats, a crystal chandelier hung over the table; a tall, triangular glass cabinet in the northwest corner, and the mantel of a large fireplace in the east.

Head thrown back and mouth slack, Marjorie de Wolf kneels before the fireplace, where flames burn low in the hearth. With both hands, she holds a dagger with a long, curving blade. Her eyes are open, but out of focus; she stares vacantly into the distance.

Near Marjorie, standing solemn guard, are Talisman and an imposing figure in black plate armor — the Black Paladin. As you watch, the villain's helmeted head turns toward you and he draws his wickedly sharp sword. In a hollow voice, he barks orders to a bestial creature crouched nearby. The creature has the head of an eagle, and tawny fur covers its muscled body. At the Black Paladin's command, it stands, spreads its immense wings, and lets out a blood-curdling shriek.

THE VILLAINS' TACTICS

Unless the PCs successfully sneak through the mansion and the Black Paladin fails his Danger Sense roll, the villains are ready for them. The villains' first goal is to prevent the PCs from interfering with the Ritual or acquiring the dagger; their secondary goal is to retain their freedom; their third goal is to defeat the PCs. If the Ritual fails, escaping with the dagger becomes their main goal. If the Ritual succeeds, defeating the PCs becomes the goal, unless that seems so unlikely that escape is the better option.

However, even though the villains aren't exactly "fighting to win," the fight should still challenge the PCs. If you don't think Black Paladin and his "retainers" can stand up to the PCs, add two or more Demon Hounds to the group (page 62, *HERO System Bestiary*). The demon hounds work as a pack. To represent this, each has the Skill, *Teamwork* 14-,

which they use for Coordinated Attacks. Also, when balancing the fight, keep in mind two of the villains, the Black Paladin and Talisman, fight defensively; this might reduce their combat effectiveness.

The following "tactical briefs," listed in order of the villains' DEX, assume the villains are *not* surprised. Since the *HERO System* allows for infinite variety in the PCs' abilities, the tactical briefs are only advice to you; treat them accordingly and change them to suit the abilities and actions of the PCs while keeping the villains' goals in mind.

Soliloquy

When the PCs enter the room, the Black Paladin speaks the following (unless he's set up an ambush and just attacks outright):

"Begone from here, interlopers! Marjorie de Wolf has made her choice. Of her own free will she has taken up the dagger and begun the rite. To meddle is only to hazard damnation — your poor, pitiful souls tormented in the blazing fires of the inferno 'til the end of days."

This is a Presence Attack, intended to make the PCs pause long enough for the Gryphon to use his Wind Blast. And, of course, the bit about Marjorie de Wolf choosing to participate in the Ritual is a lie... but based on what they know, can the PCs be so sure?

Lady Crow (DEX 26)

Perched near the ceiling in a corner of the room, Lady Crow uses Shadow Lurking to hide from the PCs. On her DEX, she Holds her Action. She takes her Action either when a PC moves toward the Ritual, or on her Murder of Crows' DEX. If attacked before her Action, she Dodges (and now that she knows at least one PC can see her when she's Shadow Lurking, she won't use that power again). If no one sees or attacks her, for her Action she performs a Move By with her talons; her primary target is a PC who's trying to interfere with the Ritual from range. At the end of her Move By, she attempts to disappear back into the shadows.

The Black Paladin (DEX 24)

The Black Paladin currently wields Eater Of Shadows; it's out of the scabbard and in his hand. He shouts orders to the Gryphon and demon hounds. (Speak the orders yourself, or at least let the PCs know he does this — it's a clue he's more than just Talisman's lackey.) Afterward, he Holds his Action. If a PC approaches the Ritual, and Lady Crow and Talisman have already attacked, he moves to intercept. He doesn't move from hexes adjacent to the victim. He uses Block to prevent any attacks on the victim, including Disarm or Grab. He uses Missile Deflection or Dive For Cover to stop any attacks not prevented by Block, or to interpose his body between the victim and a character with high SPD and DEX. (Don't forget that the Black Paladin has the *Adder Position Shift* on his Teleport and can recover from being prone as a Zero-Phase

Action.) Otherwise, he uses his Action at the end Segment 2 of the next Turn, attacking with his Shadow Blast. If possible, he uses Teamwork for Coordinated Attacks with Talisman. His first choice of target is a Mystic hero.

The Gryphon (DEX 23)

The Gryphon flies as close as possible to the PCs and uses Wind Blast on as many as he can catch in the Area Of Effect. He attempts to Knock the PCs Back through the southern windows, moving the fight outside. If he can't get the angle, he just Knocks the PCs toward the western entrance of the room.

Talisman (DEX 20)

Talisman stands beside the Black Paladin. If she can catch multiple opponents without injuring Marjorie de Wolf or herself, she uses Hellfire Gate. She doesn't hesitate if the Gryphon, the demon hounds, or the Murder of Crows are at the edges of the Explosion. If no target presents himself, her tactics are similar to the Black Paladin's. She doesn't move from the hexes adjacent to the victim, and Holds her Action to protect the Ritual. If a PC comes near, she uses a Power from her Foul Sorcery — either Touch of Terror or Domination to cause him to flee, or Mental Illusions to mislead him (often to make him overlook de Wolf). Otherwise, she takes her Action at the end of Segment 2 of the next Turn, attacking with Hellfire. First choice of target is a Mystic hero not already targeted by Black Paladin.

Demon Hounds (DEX 17)

The demon hounds all attack the same PC, to gain the benefits of Coordinated Attacks and the Multiple Attackers bonus. They move into melee with the nearest PC and surround him to hinder his movement. They use their jaws to attempt to Grab the hero. Once a hound has successfully Grabbed the hero, the remaining hounds attack with Fangs, gaining the bonuses appropriate for Multiple Attackers and attacking a Grabbed opponent. If they cannot engage a PC in melee, due to the Gryphon's Wind Blast or otherwise, they make a Half Move toward the nearest PC and use their Fiery Breath attack (still using Coordinated Attacks).

Chantal (DEX 17)

Chantal is wholly occupied with the Ritual of Rebirth, and does nothing until the Ritual concludes or someone disrupts it.

Murder Of Crows (DEX 14)

The Murder Of Crows engulfs a target with Darkness. The first choice of target is a PC attempting to interfere with the Ritual at range. The next choice is an obvious mentalist. The final choice is the least physically intimidating opponent. After blocking the target's Sight and Hearing, the Murder attacks with its Beaks. (If this attack doesn't stand a chance of hurting the PC, don't bother rolling the dice — just describe the effect.)

Subsequent Turns

Only the Gryphon and demon hounds pursue opponents outside the room. The Gryphon continues to use Wind Blast until stopped, or his opponents are outside the mansion. Once outside, he Grabs a PC and flies straight up, squeezing and/or using his Beak to inflict damage. The demon hounds continue to attack the same PC until he's out of the fight, then attack the next nearest PC.

In the room, the Black Paladin has organized three lines of defense for the ritual: Lady Crow, Talisman, then himself.

Lady Crow continues to attack with Move Bys. She focuses on PCs who try to interfere with the Ritual from a distance. She commands her Murder Of Crows to engulf whomever she fights.

Both Talisman and the Black Paladin continue to Hold their Actions until a PC attempts to interfere with the Ritual, or the end of the Segment before their next Phase, whichever comes first.

ENDING THE FIGHT

The fight ends upon the occurrence one of three events: the PCs disrupt the Ritual; the Black Paladin flees; or the Ritual is completed.

Disrupting The Ritual

The PCs can disrupt the Ritual by taking or knocking the dagger out of Marjorie de Wolf's hands. (Moving or attacking her while she still holds the dagger does not disrupt the Ritual.) This requires a successful Disarm, Grab, Grab By, or like Combat Maneuver. The victim actively resists, but is 0 DCV and not very strong, so it shouldn't be much of a problem for the average superhero... if he can get past Talisman and the Black Paladin.

Once Marjorie de Wolf no longer holds the dagger, the Ritual ends. She collapses, unconscious, and the Black Paladin flees. However, he does *not* leave without the dagger.

If a PC holds onto the dagger, he's in for a rude shock. Initially, it's unnaturally cold in his hand, and Chantal keeps her presence hidden. When the Black Paladin gets into position to regain the dagger, he uses Darkness on the area, and then Chantal attacks using her VPP (remember it can affect anyone possessing the dagger). She put all the VPP points into her Ego Attack, *The Burning Glyph of Anguish*. For the attack, the PC is likely Surprised (½ ECV) and Chantal gains +3 ECV for a Surprise Move. She does not have Surprise if the PC can (and does) Detect Souls, or otherwise knows of Chantal's presence. (Detect Magic doesn't do the trick, though — it reveals the dagger as magical, but not the presence of Chantal's shade, unless it has Discriminatory and Analyze.) If the attack Stuns the PC, the Black Paladin seizes the dagger on his next Action and flees. If the PC isn't Stunned, Chantal and the Black Paladin continue to attack him on subsequent Phases.

Since Chantal's primary offensive ability is her VPP, there are many ways for her to attack a PC, but oftentimes the direct way is the most effective. She just wants to get the dagger out of the PC's hands and return it to the tender loving care of the Black Paladin. If you come up with a suitably

ELECTRICITY AND THE BLACK PALADIN

The Black Paladin has the Disadvantage, *Vulnerability: 2 x STUN from Electrical Attacks*. If one of your PCs has an Energy Blast or other attack with an electrical Special Effect, the villain might be in for a hard time... maybe even too hard. Before beginning the battle, compare the DCs of the PC's Attack Power to the Black Paladin's appropriate Defense. If it seems likely the Black Paladin will be Stunned by a successful hit, you may want to adjust his defenses to prevent such an occurrence. One possibility is: Chantal provides him with 25% or 50% Damage Reduction, Only Versus Electricity (-1).

fiendish way to accomplish this (especially something exploiting the PC's Psychological Limitations, which might potentially lead to good roleplaying opportunities later in the adventure), use it.

Finally, the struggle for possession of the dagger ideally takes place in Darkness, so the other PCs won't necessarily witness it. Since Chantal's *Burning Glyph Of Anguish* (page 66), her Ego Attack, has the Advantage *Invisible Power Effects*, the PCs won't know the location of the attacker (though the one attacked will know the attack came from the dagger). Do your best to keep the PCs in the dark about the nature of the dagger.

The Black Paladin Flees

If the PCs reduce the Black Paladin to half his starting STUN or less, and there's no Post-Segment 12 Recovery in his near future, he flees. He knows that if the PCs capture him now, he'll never achieve Chantal's rebirth. Besides, if Chantal still believes Marjorie de Wolf is the perfect vessel, he can always abduct her a second time.

An experienced tactician, he already has his escape route plotted out. (In fact, it's the primary reason he chose the formal dining room for the Ritual.) If he has time, he uses Darkness to cover his escape. Next, he grabs the dagger from Marjorie de Wolf, ending the Ritual. Finally, he Teleports to the secret passage that runs under the room — he has its location memorized. If possible, he takes Talisman with him when he Teleports — but he won't delay his escape to wait for her. Once he's been out of the PCs' sight for a Phase, you should consider the Black Paladin impossible to track or capture if he has the dagger — Chantal aids him with her VPP in any way necessary to thwart attempts by the PCs to find him.

Once the Black Paladin flees, Talisman and Lady Crow follow his lead. Depending on the situation, the Gryphon might also flee. If he sees the other villains running away, he does too. Otherwise, he keeps fighting.

Outside the mansion, the villains split up, escaping in different directions. You should run the pursuit as long as the PCs have a reasonable chance of catching the villains. However, if a single PC pursues the Gryphon or Talisman and outdistances his comrades in the process, either villain may turn and fight.

The demon hounds fight until the bitter end. Use them to interfere with pursuit of the fleeing villains.

The Ritual Is Completed

Uh-oh....

After the Transform is completed, read aloud the following box text:

An awful keening fills the room. For the briefest moment, everyone pauses to glance toward the Ritual. As you watch, Marjorie de Wolf suddenly plunges the dagger toward her chest, but at the last second, stops herself. The terrible strain of the effort is visible on her face, and tears of anguish run down her cheeks. Arms twitching, trying to resist but failing, she readies the dagger to strike again.

Having completed the Ritual, Chantal rejects the vessel as imperfect. In frustration and disgust, she uses Bind Thy Soul to force Marjorie to kill herself by plunging the dagger into her heart. At this point, you can allow the PCs a second chance to rescue the victim.

To force Marjorie de Wolf to kill herself, Chantal requires an EGO +30 result on the Mind Control dice (assume she fails the first time, if necessary). Chantal attempts to control the victim again on each of her subsequent Phases. Remember, unlike the Ritual of Rebirth, there is no *Extra Time Disadvantage* on her Mind Control.

If you want to get nasty, Chantal uses her VPP to create a Drain EGO, which makes the use of her Mind Control in subsequent Phases more likely to succeed. Optionally, if you don't want to kill de Wolf (after all, it might make the PCs feel like numbskulls, and not very heroic) the Black Paladin realizes the Ritual has failed once he hears the keening. He flees, grabbing the dagger from the victim before she can kill herself.

Capturing The Villains

If the PCs capture all the villains, or retain possession of the dagger, the adventure takes a radical twist. Black Paladin must escape, and/or regain control of the dagger, before the events depicted in later chapters can continue. Chantal will remain quiescent in the dagger until Black Paladin "rescues" it; she's waited centuries, and can afford to be patient a while longer.

WRAPPING UP

After the fight, the PCs may search the dining room and the Delacroix Mansion. Here's what they can learn with successful rolls with any of the following Skills:

Concealment: A Concealment roll made by -3 or more reveals the secret passages within the house itself. It does *not* reveal the presence of the secret passage underneath the room unless the PCs achieve an Extraordinary Skill Roll (*i.e.*, make the roll by 10) or the players specifically state they're looking underneath the dining room floor. (It spoils the finale of the adventure if the players learn too much about the mansion at this point.)

Criminology: The PC finds bloodstains indicating

all of the murders took place in the Delacroix Mansion (mostly in the dining room).

Deduction: A cursory investigation of the mansion and townhouse reveals that the Black Paladin's cronies inhabited both places. The PCs find Talisman's clothing strewn about bedrooms, gouges in the woodwork where the Gryphon sharpened his claws, and crow feathers all over both places. They find nothing indicating the Black Paladin also resided in both places. (He did, but was careful not to leave evidence of it.) With a successful Deduction roll, the PC estimates the villains have lived in both places for at least a month.

Disguise: The PC realizes Lady Crow could have been Linda Randolph. Her voice was similar, and, even though gaunt and emaciated, her body was similar too. If the PC isn't acquainted with Linda Randolph (*i.e.*, isn't a part of high society), he can determine this from photographs in the mansion.

KS: Arcane And Occult Lore: The PC has never heard of a magical dagger fitting the description of the one de Wolf was using. A failed roll means the PC thinks he might have heard of such a dagger — he has to perform further research.

KS: Demonology: The PC knows the demon hounds were, in fact, real infernal beings.

Questioning the rescued victim is impossible, since the mental strain of everything that's gone on has rendered her unconscious. A successful Paramedics or SS: Medicine roll reveals there's nothing

physically wrong with Marjorie de Wolf — her unconscious state is just a natural defense mechanism against severe mental strain. However, the Ritual may have partly altered part of her body, as described on page 21.

See Act Two regarding the interrogation of captured supervillains.

CONCLUSION OF ACT ONE

In the wake of the battle, the Delacroix Mansion seems deathly quiet and the surrounding woodlands unnaturally silent, as though experiencing the calm before the storm. If the PCs told the police where they were going, the local authorities arrive — sirens blaring and tires squealing — just minutes after the battle's end. An ambulance takes Marjorie de Wolf, still unconscious, to the nearest hospital. The authorities ask the PCs to keep an eye on any villains they subdued until appropriate restraining devices arrive at the scene.

Once Detective Marlowe learns of the PCs' success, he congratulates them on a job well done. But he also reminds them: though they've won the battle, the Black Paladin remains at large. Likely, the PCs are still in the dark about what, precisely, the Black Paladin wants to accomplish, and more importantly, why he's doing it.

And now, unbeknownst to the heroes, Chantal has scented the perfect vessel for her unholy rebirth....





Act Two

A COURSE OF WAR

At the very edge of his hearing, just the barest whisper in the still air, the Black Paladin listens to his lover incant in a long-forgotten tongue. He feels Chantal's shade swirling around him as she performs the gestures required for a conjuration. The power of her dark sorcery chills his skin.

He thinks on that power, so much greater than when Chantal stood at his side. Though she is only a shade, he can sense her power in the mingled smell of ozone and brimstone. He slept for fifteen hundred years, and awoke little changed. He wonders how much his lover changed over those same years.

Chantal interrupts his reverie, her words breaking into his thoughts. "Two retainers thou hast already. Now I gift thee with a third. 'Tis disgraceful for a knight to go into war unmounted and without a lance, as if he were some load-bearing squire or ill-bred peasant. No such lout can serve as my champion."

A blot of shadow coalesces in the air. At its edges, indigo flames flash and crackle. From out of the inky

depths, a demon emerges.

"Darkling," the Black Paladin murmurs, his hollow tones filled with wonder.

The demonic horse tosses its black mane and paws the rocky ground. Small flames jet from where iron-shod hooves strike the earth; indigo fire drips from its black plate barding, as if the huge stallion were newly foaled.

Astonished by the appearance of his steed of old, de Morphant steps slowly forward. Vicious but faithful, Darkling died screaming, his forelegs shattered by the force of Lancelot's second charge. By the power of Chantal's magic, Darkling now stands before him, far more than the mortal steed he once was.

Sir Giles spots the lance strapped to Darkling's back, behind the saddle. He pulls the lance free and caresses its long shaft of gray wood, its razor-sharp tip. "Pain... unvanquished pain. My Lance repaired and whole again. The knights of this modern world will tremble as their forebears did so long ago. Agony and palsy will take them after but a single blow."

“And the one whose body is mine?” Chantal asks. “When will she finally be mine, my love? I yearn so for a body — too long I have suffered.”

“Soon, m’lady. Soon,” the Black Paladin answers. “Armed and armored, I go into battle. Wrathful and merciless, I bring war to these heroes. Terrible and unyielding, I lay siege to their strongholds and domains. The woman will soon be ours, and in the end, you will again be mine to hold.”

The Black Paladin lays a gauntleted hand on the crimson blaze between Darkling’s eyes. Images flow from the demonic horse’s mind to his own: images of it staving in mortals’ chests with its powerful hooves, tearing chunks from their soft hearts, and lapping thirstily at their blood. Its bloodlust rising, Darkling rolls blood-shot eyes, and nips with sharp fangs at the Black Paladin’s armored wrist.

The Black Paladin laughs with malevolent delight.

The plot of any adventure or story involves six basic questions: Who? What? When? Where? How? Why?

Before you begin Act Two, consider each of these questions, reviewing what the PCs likely know or suspect and how they can learn more. That will prepare you for their likely actions and tell you how best to steer the course of the adventure.

Who?: The PCs know that at least four villains are involved in the murders: Lady Crow, the Gryphon, Talisman, and the Black Paladin. Guessing that the Gryphon and Lady Crow were formerly Eliot and Linda Randolph isn’t too much of a leap. They can learn more about the Randolphs by questioning captured villains and researching the Delacroix Mansion.

By the end of Act One, the PCs probably suspect the truth: Black Paladin, not Talisman, is the mastermind behind this plot. But they should know very little, or nothing at all, about Chantal and her involvement in the affair. They can learn more about the Black Paladin and Chantal by questioning the rescued victim, researching the dagger, and meeting with Professor Alain Clemenceau.

What?: The PCs know the Black Paladin was attempting to transform the victims into a single individual. They also know he has not yet succeeded — although they probably don’t know why he’s failed. (They don’t know for certain the Ritual failed in the case of Marjorie de Wolf — perhaps they interrupted the Ritual before Talisman properly completed it. Do your best not to inform the players the Ritual failed.) The PCs probably realize the transformation is more than just a simple change in appearance, but may not suspect it involves returning the dead to life. The PCs can learn more by questioning captured villains and Marjorie de Wolf.

When?: The PCs find no significance attached to the dates when the Rituals were performed. A successful KS: Arcane And Occult Lore roll confirms that the dates have no mystic significance. As for when the Black Paladin will strike next, the PCs find out soon enough!

Where?: The Delacroix Mansion was the location of the all the murders. The obvious reason behind

the choice is the mansion’s secluded location.

Maybe the Randolphs’ downtown townhouse and chipped car were also reasons for the choice, or just an added bonus. Perhaps the Randolphs were even mixed up with some evil cult or cabal. After taking all of this into consideration, the PCs may suspect there’s more behind the location. After all, the Black Paladin did travel quite a distance to perform the Ritual; he could just as easily have performed it at the Randolph townhouse. The PCs can uncover the more esoteric reasons for the choice by researching the mansion’s sordid history of evil.

How?: The transformation requires a victim — the PCs have seen that with their own eyes. They also know the dagger figures prominently in the Ritual. The PCs can learn more about the dagger by questioning Marjorie de Wolf, or by discovering the article about the theft from the museum in France. (The PCs must understand the importance of the dagger by the end of Act Two, since it’s the only means available to them of sending Chantal’s shade back to the Netherworld.)

Why?: And last — but certainly not least! — why is the Black Paladin going to all this trouble? At the beginning of Act Two, the PCs should still be in the dark about the Black Paladin’s motivations. They can learn something of the Black Paladin’s past by interviewing Professor Alain Clemenceau. Ultimately, the PCs must answer this question; ideally, for the sake of drama, they don’t know all the details until the close of Act Two.

Running Act Two

Act Two contains two sections: *Avenues Of Investigation* and *Engagements With The Enemy*. The structure of Act Two is somewhat freeform, and the sequence of events depends on the actions of the PCs, as well as the decisions made by you. *Avenues Of Investigation* details what the PCs learn via investigation. *Engagements With The Enemy* details what the Black Paladin does while the PCs investigate. The events described in those two sections happen concurrently. You can find advice on how to successfully run the two at the same time at the beginning of the appropriate section.

“You’re Being Watched...”

During Act Two, the Black Paladin spies on the PCs. First and foremost, he wants to learn more about the perfect vessel, whether she’s a PC or just someone associated with them. Second, he needs to essay the PCs’ strengths and weaknesses, and keep track of their movements. He has two means available to him: Lady Crow’s Clairsentience; and two invisible imps.

At certain points during the investigation, ask one of the PCs for a PER Roll. If the roll succeeds, inform the PC he has a feeling he’s being watched. Don’t ask for the PER Roll in the middle of battle, but instead during the PC’s day-to-day routine (such as when he’s conducting an investigation or exploring the Delacroix Mansion). Don’t ask for the roll too often — just enough to keep the PCs on edge, maybe once or twice a session before beginning Act Three.

Diversions

Act Two can take some time to unfold, so you might be tempted to “fast forward” from one important event to the next. While it’s important to keep the action moving, don’t neglect the superheroes’ NPCs (both Dependent and otherwise). Do some roleplaying, and involve the players with their NPCs — even if only for a five or ten minute “snapshot” of the occasion. In particular, if the perfect vessel is an NPC, you should bring her into the game enough that she’s in the forefront of the players’ thoughts.

Involving the NPCs is important for several reasons. First, a DNPC is an important aspect of a character in *Champions*, and no matter what the adventure, shouldn’t be neglected. (Besides, who knows what kind of trouble they get into, if left by themselves for too long....) Second, it provides the players with a sense of the day-to-day, which illustrates the time required to uncover the Black Paladin’s villainy and reveals his plotting, tactical mind. Finally, if the perfect vessel is an NPC, and

all the characters’ DNPCs and NPCs are involved in Act Two, the players will be less suspicious when the Black Paladin seeks to abduct the perfect vessel at the beginning of Act Three.

Another suggestion is to run a short scenario unrelated to the events in *Shades Of Black*. Use villains who are basically super-powered hoodlums and not mystically-oriented. Keep it light and straight-forward, like a bank robbery or armored car heist. Nothing world-shaking, mysterious, or obscure — just superheroes doing their job stopping supervillains.

The short scenario has two purposes. First, it breaks the tension by allowing the players to do some old-fashioned crimefighting without the twists presented in *Shades Of Black*. Second, and more importantly, the scenario provides a foil for the events in *Shades Of Black*. The Black Paladin is evil. Fighting “profit-oriented” villains, more selfish than wicked, provides a comparison that makes his evil all the more apparent.

AVENUES OF INVESTIGATION



The text below details what the PCs can learn about the Black Paladin’s dark desire. The order of events depends on the direction the PCs’ investigation takes. What they learn depends on roleplaying, use of Powers, successful Skill Rolls — and, let’s not forget, your judgment. You need to decide how much they learn, as well as how long it takes them to learn it.

Two pieces of advice:

1. You don’t have to provide the players with all the information given here — especially if the PCs have already determined the basic plot of the adventure. For instance, Professor Clemenceau doesn’t need to know the entire legend of Sir Giles de Morphant and his tragic love affair. Maybe he only knows bits and pieces of the legend. Or maybe conflicting legends exist, and the professor tells the PCs both versions. And maybe some of what he knows is just plain wrong — after all, it was a long time ago.
2. Don’t run *Avenues Of Investigation* and *Engagements With The Enemy* linearly. Don’t let the PCs exhaust all their leads in *Avenues Of Investigation*, then run all the events in *Engagements With The Enemy*. Mix it up. You have complete control over how long it takes the PCs to gain information. Most, some, or none of the research done by the PCs has to lead to immediate results. Continuing the example above: Professor Clemenceau doesn’t have to tell the superheroes everything in a single interview. Perhaps he needs to do some research, and agrees to get back to them when he knows more. That gives you the chance to run part of *Engagements* before the PCs proceed to the next step of their investigation.

Streetwise

Streetwise usually doesn’t help much when it comes to matters mystical; a related Skill, like KS: The Mystic World, works better. However, a successful use of either Skill may lead the PCs to the Sebastian Sarrazene connection (see page 42).

Questioning Captured Villains

It’s likely the PCs captured one or more of the villains at the close of Act One. If so, they probably want to question the villains about what’s going on. You should allow the PCs at least one opportunity to question each captured villain before the Black Paladin frees them from captivity.

In case one or more PCs has Telepathy, the notes below provide sample results for successful use, but those are guidelines (which you can also apply to similar information-gathering powers). Modify them to suit your campaign, the PCs, and the pace you want to establish for the adventure. Furthermore, the use of Telepathy doesn’t necessarily result in simple yes-or-no answers (especially in the case of unhinged minds, like the Gryphon and Lady Crow). A villain’s psychology, powers, and state of mind may all affect the clarity of the information a telepathic PC can obtain. Remember, Telepathy does *not* have the Advantage *Ruins The Adventure*, so you should treat it accordingly. Using it (especially on Talisman) should shed some light on the adventure — not give away the entire plot.

THE GRYPHON

Questioning the Gryphon is an exercise in futility; the PCs gain little except a true measure of their own patience. A successful Persuasion or Interrogation roll only reveals the futility of such tactics. He responds to threats with his own threats, and to questions about his well-being with statements that he's hungry... even after he's eaten. The mention of the name "Eliot Randolph" elicits an angry shriek. (The Gryphon shrieks frequently, but the name elicits a shriek noticeably louder and angrier than the others.)

Telepathy

A quick look at the Gryphon's Disadvantages (page 73) reveals he goes Berserk if attacked with Mental Powers. Use of Telepathy on an unwilling subject qualifies as an attack. Before rage consumes the Gryphon's thoughts, a telepath might discover a few things....

Greater than EGO: The Gryphon is little more than a savage beast. At this level of success, all Telepathy reveals is his bloodlust, rage, and hunger. These intense, savage impulses "bleed" into the telepath's psyche unless the character succeeds with an EGO Roll at a -3. You should decide the exact effects if the roll fails, but they might include a hunger for raw red meat, a tendency to shriek for several moments after contact, going into a berserk rage, and so on.

EGO + 10: Though nigh-uncontrollable by the PCs, the Gryphon is slavishly loyal to the Black Paladin. Such mental fetters only result from long-term conditioning (like that of a dog or other pet), or extensive use of Mind Control and "psychic surgery" (in game terms, a Transform).

EGO + 20: The telepath experiences fragments of memory and emotion, which seem unsuitable to the Gryphon: wanting a new tricycle, uncertainty about the future, ladling soup in a soup kitchen, walking through the Delacroix Mansion.

EGO + 30: The telepath contacts the psyche of Eliot Randolph and witnesses fragmentary scenes from the last moments of Eliot's life: the Black Paladin and Talisman at the door; being forced to drink the wine; drowning in blood. Contact cuts off abruptly, leaving a final thought ringing in the telepath's mind: an urgent, desperate plea for help.

LADY CROW

Removing Lady Crow's bone helmet reveals the features of Linda Randolph — but her face is hollow-cheeked and gaunt, and her glassy, shifty eyes never rest on one object for long. Questioning her is more rewarding than questioning the Gryphon... but not much. A successful Interrogation or Persuasion roll elicits the following response:

"She comes! She comes! Mistress of Crows, Mistress of Ravens... Morrigan! Morrigan! She spreads her wings and flies across gulfs of darkness. Morrigan comes! She flies to her roost!"

Any such statement ends with a murderous caw that curdles the PCs' blood and raises the hackles on the backs of their necks.

Further attempts lead to variations of the same.

Telepathy

The PCs probably won't receive intelligible answers to direct questions they ask via Telepathy. In any case, Lady Crow knows nothing specific about what's going on.

Greater than EGO: Lady Crow fully believes the statement above. Her other thoughts primarily concern fantasies about feasting on the carrion of her tormentors (the PCs).

EGO + 10: At this level, Lady Crow's psyche grows decidedly strange, as much crow as human. Her impulses resemble those of a crow-woman — though couched in vivid images suitable to a carrion-eater, they have a definite human intelligence guiding them. If he searches for an image of "Morrigan," the telepath glimpses a dark haired, pale-skinned woman wearing a white gown and a cloak of black feathers. The face is identical to the one viewed by Retrocognition in Act One.

EGO + 20: Regardless of what the telepath intended, memories stretching back thousands and thousands of years deluge him. He realizes Lady Crow, in some strange way, embodies every evil thing ever said about crows. Share mythological tidbits from her background on page 76 with the PC. At this level, nothing of Linda Randolph's mind exists at all.

EGO + 30: Only at this level of Telepathy can a PC find any trace of Linda Randolph's psyche. To the telepath, it's like the fading scream of a murdered woman drowned out by a cacophony of cawing crows. The telepath can make out only one desperate thought: the Beast has risen from the fiery pit. The thought seems like a diminishing echo from long ago, drifting inexorably into nothingness.

TALISMAN

If the PCs captured Talisman, they should count themselves lucky... at least she's coherent. Of course, questioning Talisman isn't necessarily safe. If given the opportunity, the Mistress of Hellfire uses any and all of her Powers to (a) escape, or (b) attack the PCs. A successful Interrogation roll (Persuasion is a lost cause) elicits the following:

The woman laughs wickedly, her scorn for you apparent. "We seek to bring forth the Anti-Christ. That woman is the vessel — a potential vessel, at least. Her soul will open the way, and her body play host to an evil greater than mortal man has ever known." She laughs again. "And the holy fools in Rome thought the Anti-Christ was a man! A woman would be Christ's opposite... would she not?"

The above information is basically true. (Admittedly, the bit about the "Anti-Christ" is subject to interpretation, but certainly, as a metaphor for Chantal's evil, it's not inappropriate.) Here's how Talisman answers other questions the PCs are likely

PSYCHOANALYSIS

If none of the PCs have Telepathy, you can let a PC gain some insight into the mental states of the Gryphon and Lady Crow via use of SS: Psychology — effectively a sort of "comic book version" of regression therapy.

Of course, this depends on how much you're willing to allow. Realistically, there's a world of difference between Telepathy and the practice and results of psychiatric treatment. That being said, the differences between the two are sometimes overlooked in comics. If a character's SS: Psychology helps you move the adventure along, it's worth considering.

To gain information via SS: Psychology, a character must spend at least an hour talking with the subject, then succeed with a Skill Roll at -5. That means he understands, in general, a vague summary of the results described for Telepathy — and for a brief moment, reaches the psyche of Eliot or Linda Randolph.

Both of the villains have severely damaged psyches, and if the SS: Psychology roll fails, the character shouldn't attempt it again — further efforts might cause permanent harm to the subject's mental health.

SAVING THE RANDOLPHS

Use of Telepathy at a high enough level of effect tells the PCs Eliot and Linda Randolph's personalities remain present in the minds of the Gryphon and Lady Crow — but they're deeply submerged in the psyches of those two villains. If the PCs want to save the Randolphs from their monstrous fate, first they need to determine how Black Paladin transformed them (the crow helmet and the Blood of the Beast), then succeed with a KS: Arcane And Occult Lore roll about the artifacts.

A successful roll tells the PCs that to reverse the effects, they first need to discover the precise details of the magical Rituals used to transform the Randolphs... and the quickest way to discover those details is to capture the Black Paladin himself. (Talisman's role in the rituals was at the Black Paladin's instruction; she doesn't know the spells herself.) Just one more reason to track him down and bring him to justice!

to ask; none of her responses is false, though some split hairs.

Question: What about the other victims?

Answer: "The capacity for great evil exists in many... the ability to actualize that evil is a different question." Furthermore: "They were potential vessels. They were lacking."

Question: Vessels for what?

Answer: "A great evil — an evil risen up from the pits of Hell."

Question: Were they willing victims?

Answer: "We are all slaves to our nature."

Question: What about the changes in their appearance?

Answer: "The Anti-Christ wants to be beautiful when she walks the earth."

Question: What about the dagger?

Answer: "The blade focuses the witchery we do."

Question: Who summoned the demon hounds?

Answer: "The infernal realms aid us in our endeavors."

Question: Do you serve the Black Paladin?

Answer: Talisman answers this question angrily. "We work toward a common goal, that is all."

Question: Why are you telling us this?

Answer: "Why shouldn't I? How have I helped you?" She laughs.

Telepathy

Unlike the Gryphon and Lady Crow, Talisman knows the whole story. Any information concerning Chantal (and any search for information about

the "Anti-Christ" qualifies) should be treated similar to the results of Retrocognition, as described in Act One: flames obscure and consume memories and emotions; or else the angry face of a pale-skinned woman appears, filling the telepath's "sight."

Greater than EGO: The same information as above. None of the information is false — but judging by Talisman's delight in her answers, she feels she's getting the better of the exchange.

EGO + 10: The dagger is more important than Talisman lets on. The Black Paladin calls the shots, but both of them serve a greater "cause." The victims were definitely unwilling.

EGO + 20: The telepath gains glimpses of the backstory of *Shades Of Black*, but only when Chantal was not present, such as: the Black Paladin freeing Talisman from captivity in exchange for her services as a witch; the two of them in an airport in France, then breaking into the museum archives; Talisman mentally controlling Eliot Randolph.

EGO + 30: Talisman has a nagging fear about the result of her magical labors. She wonders if she's expendable, suspects she is, and wants to find some way to protect herself. But a sadistic desire to see the end result of the plot accompanies her fear... as if she were in the audience of some tragedy, and looking forward to the end of the play.

THE BLACK PALADIN

Although you should do your best to prevent the PCs from capturing the Black Paladin (without rigging the events of Act One against them unfairly, of course), under the circumstances they could capture him. If so, assume Chantal uses her Vile Black Magic to provide him with enough Mental Defense

REPEATED USE OF TELEPATHY

Suppose the first attempt to use Telepathy on a captured villain fails to achieve the desired result. The player may shrug and say, "I do it again. What the heck — the villain isn't going anywhere."

This gives you two basic options:

- Allow the player to keep rolling and see what happens
- Allow the player have the maximum possible result, and move on with the adventure

The latter option is easiest, but often the least satisfying. It often makes it too easy for the PCs to gather crucial information and short-circuit the adventure.

The former option is more time-consuming, and may frustrate the players, but it's less likely to give away huge chunks of the plot. If necessary, impose a penalty, such as adding +5 points of effect to the result needed on the Effect Roll, for each successive attempt. That way, eventually the PCs reach a point where they realize they cannot succeed, and stop.

Regardless of which option you choose, you can interpret either procedure as the mental equivalent of beating someone until he talks. The telepath is, in effect, battering or tricking the villain into mental submission. It's possible this could shatter a person's psyche, caus-

ing incurable mental trauma, the same way a physical beating can inflict permanent injuries — not exactly an action permitted by the traditional superhero code of conduct.

If this use of Telepathy frustrates you, tell the player his character is, on a mental level, breaking the villain's kneecaps, and ask him if he feels that's "in character" for his superhero. If it is, so be it, but...

There are possible consequences. These include:

- Treating the Gryphon and Lady Crow this way could destroy whatever remains of Eliot and Linda Randolph's personality, and make their transformation irrevocable.
- This type of telepathic abuse might make the victim start Hunting his tormentor.
- The telepath might violate the villain's civil rights, making any evidence gained or deriving from the interrogation inadmissible in court.
- Inflicting a "telepathic beating" might expose the telepath to liability for assault and battery (either criminally or civilly).
- Civil rights organizations might generate negative publicity for the "mental abuser," causing all sorts of problems for the character.

to protect him against any use of Telepathy. This stretches the definition of “possessor of the dagger” almost to the breaking point, but it’s an acceptable “plot device” in this situation. If the PCs attempt to read his mind, they see only visions of flames and Chantal’s face, similar to what occurs if they use Retrocognition in Act One. The Black Paladin has enough PRE, and enough motivation, to resist other forms of interrogation. All he needs now is a chance to regain the dagger and escape... which you can undoubtedly arrange later, when the PCs aren’t around.

VILLAINS CAPTURED DURING ACT TWO

You can also use the above results if the PCs capture a villain during Act Two. However, the Black Paladin does not tell any of his “retainers” (including Talisman) that Chantal has discovered the perfect vessel. Nor does he reveal to them the specifics of his plans to capture the perfect vessel. Use of Telepathy, at your discretion, might reveal a change in his tactics and attitude since the encounter at the Delacroix Mansion.

Marjorie de Wolf

At the end of Act One, paramedics rush the rescued victim, Marjorie de Wolf, to the nearest hospital. She remains unconscious through the night, and doesn’t revive until the next afternoon. She is physically well, but her once short, curly brown hair has become long, straight, and black as night.

De Wolf gladly answers the PCs’ questions, though she’s still confused about what happened to her. She remembers a man and woman approaching her. Her memories of their appearance are vague, but she recalls the man was overdressed for the club, and had a formal way of speaking, which struck her as odd. She was standing at the curb, waiting for a cab, and the couple stood on the street next to her, also apparently waiting for a cab. The man asked her for the time... and that’s the last thing she remembers.

The hospital keeps her two nights for observation, then releases her the next day. She immediately takes an extended leave of absence from work and moves in with her ailing mother in Oak Park, a suburb of Millennium City. The abduction noticeably changes her personality. Once cheerful and outgoing, she becomes withdrawn and sometimes downright sullen. Nightmares torment her, but she never remembers them when she awakes.

Roleplaying Marjorie de Wolf

When roleplaying Marjorie, remember two things. First, although she wants to help, she honestly doesn’t recall anything. Second, she’s been through a bad experience and does not enjoy being reminded of it — in other words, she’s had a *really* bad day, and once she tells the PCs everything she can, she doesn’t want to talk about it anymore. She’ll tell the PCs that in no uncertain terms if they overstay their welcome. If the PCs ask her repeated questions about her lost memories, she asks them

to leave — politely, the first time; more forcefully, the next. The doctors at the hospital make the characters leave, if necessary.

Of course, this might make the PCs suspicious; they may believe she’s holding out on them. If they become suspicious, the change in her behavior probably only exacerbates their fears. Let them suspect her; it lends tension and suspense to the beginning of Act Three, when the Black Paladin attacks her at her mother’s home.

If the PCs treat Marjorie with understanding and compassion (especially if a PC acts as her therapist), you should develop the relationship between them — either just as friends, or even as a romantic interest. Again, doing so lends tension and drama to the beginning of Act Three.

MARJORIE’S MEMORIES

A combination of mental trauma and Mind Control has buried Marjorie’s memories of the night deep in her subconscious. A successful SS: Psychology roll tells the PCs this.

To help Marjorie recall her suppressed memories, the PCs have three options: Telepathy; a PC with SS: Psychology acting as therapist; or an outside therapist. However the PCs approach the situation, you have total control over *when* they get information from Marjorie de Wolf. Psychology is not a precise science; the time required for successful therapy varies. You can restrict Telepathy by setting a high difficulty for retrieving her memories.

Telepathy

Marjorie de Wolf has suffered severe mental strain, and a telepath battering her psyche with repeated attempts to reach her suppressed memories won’t help matters (even a single attempt may bring down the whole house of cards, so to speak). If you don’t want to give the PCs immediate access to her memories, set the difficulty at EGO +50 — EGO +30 for reaching the subconscious, +20 for being careful and unobtrusive — and don’t allow repeated attempts. Inform the PC the difficulty decreases if Marjorie seeks out and receives counseling. On the other hand, if you prefer to provide the information to the PCs early, success requires an EGO + 30 result.

Therapy

Science Skill: Psychology and therapy can help Marjorie recall her memories of that night. If a PC has the Skill, let him know that, given time, he can help her. The time required depends on how you want the adventure to proceed.

One option: the PC makes a SS: Psychology roll each time he meets with Marjorie. He begins with a -6 penalty (for trying to perform an action which requires at least a month in a day). Sessions take place every couple of days; and for each session after the first, the PC gains a +1 on the attempt. When the roll succeeds, Marjorie regains her memory.

If none of the PCs have SS: Psychology, Marjorie seeks counseling from an NPC therapist. If they keep in touch with her or her therapist, they eventually learn about the suppressed memory. Of

course, if the PCs show a lack of tact and compassion when dealing with Marjorie, they learn none of this. At first, her therapist asks the PCs to stop harassing her. If the PCs continue to pester Marjorie, Detective Marlowe asks them to stop.

The Suppressed Memory

Here's what Marjorie finally recalls (or the PCs learn via Telepathy):

"I was unconscious... or asleep... or something. When I woke up, I was in a strange place. There were torches on the walls. Everything was stone — it was kind of like a cathedral, with a high vaulted ceiling. But it couldn't have been a church. There were these terrible paintings on the walls... like something from Bosch, but more terrible because the paintings seemed more *real*.

"I was kneeling on the cold flagstones, between two stone pedestals. One was empty, but on the other was a coffin. The coffin was closed, but I know there was a man inside. He was dead or sleeping, I'm not sure which. I know it's impossible, but for some reason I think both."

She sobs. "I was sad... and I was holding a dagger. The man must've been dead, because I was so sad. I raised the dagger. I knew I was going to kill myself..."

She stops talking and begins to cry.

In the vision, Marjorie acts out the last moments of Chantal's life. The events take place in the Black Paladin's tomb. The man in the coffin is the Black Paladin, and Chantal has just finished the spell which placed him in an enchanted slumber. The dagger is the same as the one from the Ritual (Marjorie can describe it more clearly if asked).

Chantal's Dagger

The PCs probably want to know about the dagger. Knowledge Skill: Arcane And Occult Lore and similar Knowledge Skills aren't helpful, since the dagger was no more than the mundane possession of a long-dead witch before Black Paladin used it to summon Chantal's shade. Research into the Black Paladin's past encounters with superheroes reveals he's never had a dagger before — at least, not that anyone ever noticed.

The dagger has made two appearances in the "news." The first time was seven years ago in an academic journal, *The North American Journal of Medieval History*. The second time was a little less than week ago in a small French newspaper published near the *Forêt du Chevalier Noir*.

You determine how easily the PCs can discover these articles. If you want it to be easy (or if the PCs have a super-computer that can do the work for them), searching newspapers for references of a dagger turns up the most recent article, and a successful KS: Archaeology or KS: Medieval History roll turns up the older article.

To make it more difficult, require more precise methods of research. A PC who works in journal-

ism or has a journalist Contact has access to news agencies and their resources. Looking for recent articles pertaining to a dagger may not help much, but a search combination of dagger, helmet, and/or Black Paladin (*Chevalier Noir* means "Black Knight" in French) turns up the articles. Also, the PC must specify to include foreign language publications in the search; the newspaper article is in French.

The newspaper article mentions, in brief, the discovery seven years ago of a tomb believed to be that of Sir Giles de Morphant, the fabled "Black Paladin" of Arthurian times now apparently returned to life as a supervillain. Following that lead reveals the article in *The North American Journal of Medieval History*, which the PCs can find in a university library. A successful KS: Archaeology or KS: Medieval History roll narrows the search for the journal article. Without it, the PCs must search through the last decade of many journals.

Page 33 has excerpts from both articles (one translated from the French). You can copy them and hand them out to the players.

The Newspaper Article

The PCs can learn more by contacting the curator of the exhibit, Phillipe Boncour. Arrogant and self-absorbed, he's less than helpful without a successful Conversation or Persuasion roll (unless the PCs speak French, they suffer a penalty of -3 to these rolls). A PC with KS: Medieval History, SS: Archaeology, or a like Skill can use it as a Complementary Roll; Boncour is more likely to open up to someone who shares his interests.

If the roll fails, Boncour refuses to talk to the PCs. If it succeeds, he's helpful, and looks up the descriptions of the dagger and helmet in the catalog of the museum archives. The descriptions (there are no photographs) match the appearance of the Black Paladin's dagger and Lady Crow's helmet. The curator also mentions that after he discovered the "disappearance" about a year ago, he and his staff updated the catalog. One other item turned up missing: a bottle of ancient wine. Finally, he tells the PCs the dig in the *Forêt du Chevalier Noir* was written up in an academic journal several years ago, and was the subject of controversy for a brief time.

The Journal Article

The article in question is several pages long, much too lengthy and academic to include here in its entirety; the excerpt contains pertinent quotes. It was written by Professor Jean Reynaud of the University of Paris. It presents the tomb and its contents as evidence of widespread pagan worship in the early Middle Ages, which is why it was controversial for a short time.

If the PCs attempt to contact Professor Reynaud, they discover someone murdered him approximately a year after the article appeared. Also, the graduate student who assisted him with the dig disappeared during the same period; he remains the prime suspect in the unsolved murder case. (The Black Paladin didn't appreciate "peasant louts" disturbing his lover's coffin, so he murdered both men. He threw the graduate student's body into the Seine. Parisian police suspect the two were

EXCERPTS FROM PAGAN PRACTICES IN CHRISTENDOM

“Such a discovery is astonishing. That a tomb in Western Europe somehow went undiscovered by archaeologists for tens of centuries is almost impossible to believe. Unfortunately, the tomb was violated by grave robbers at some point in the recent past. One of the two coffins discovered had been disturbed, its lid opened, and the body interred within stripped of all artifacts. For some reason, the looters did not disturb the other coffin.”

“No inscriptions name the man and woman interred in the tomb. The architecture — though little more than a crumbling ruin at the time of discovery — indicates they were wealthy, and likely of the nobility. The lid of the disturbed coffin bore an inscription, reminiscent of that of King Arthur’s supposed tomb in Glastonbury, England. However, unlike that legendary king, no good will come of the return of the coffin’s occupant. In fact, just the opposite... Luckily for the world, a skeleton still occupied the coffin.”

“When we opened the other coffin, we found a woman’s intact skeleton inside. The woman was tall for those times, somewhere between 1.7m and 1.8m. Around the skeleton’s pelvis bone was a girdle of some black metal, unidentified at the time of this writing. More interesting was the dagger clutched in her hands, which has defied conventional dating techniques. The hilt itself was crafted some 1,500 years ago, but the date of the blade is uncertain. Though definitely of bronze, analysis shows, in addition to the standard copper and tin, an anomalous material present in the alloy.”

“On the third day of our excavation, we discovered a hidden niche. Inside was a collection of strange artifacts, including a bottle of wine and a helmet in the shape of a crow’s skull, made of some bone-like material — perhaps from the bones of a whale or other large animal. Between this evidence and that of the paintings decorating the walls of the tomb, it is obvious those interred were pagans. That pagans held a position of authority in that part of the world, during that period, contradicts the commonly held belief that Western Europe was wholly Christian, with only fringe groups practicing pagan rites....”

An Exhibit On Lancelot

From Staff Reports

For the next month, the Deschanel Museum will host a special exhibit on the historical Lancelot du Lac. The exhibit showcases both medieval arms and armor as well more domestic arts and artifacts, such as embroidery, household goods, and jewelry. All artifacts on display are finds from France, and Brittany in particular, where some legends claim Lancelot was born and raised.

“While the name of Lancelot certainly draws children and tourists, our main goal is to provide visitors with a sense of the age and history of our region,” said Phillipe Boncour, curator of the exhibit. “Many of the artifacts date back 1,500 years. We also want to provide the visitor with a glimpse of what life was like then — both the similarities and differences.”

He added: “We are slightly disappointed though. We had hoped to have a display devoted to the “dark side” of those times, particularly pagan practices. But two of the artifacts we intended to display — a dagger and strange helmet of bone-like material, both found within the last decade in the *Forêt du Chevalier Noir* — have mysteriously gone missing. A short audio/video exhibit on the construction and possible purpose of dolmens must suffice.”

PROFESSOR ALAIN CLEMENCEAU

7 STR	8 DEX
8 CON	8 BODY
15 INT	12 EGO
15 PRE	12 COM
1 PD	2 ED
2 SPD	3 REC
16 END	16 STUN

Abilities: KS: Medieval History 14-, KS: Arthurian Legends 14-, KS: Arcane And Occult Lore 12-, PS: Professor 12-, Oratory 13-, AK: Medieval Western Europe 14-, Languages: Latin, English, German (all completely fluent; French is native), Fringe Benefit: Tenure.

Disadvantages: Age: 40+, Psychological Limitation: Intellectual Arrogance.

Notes: The son of a professor at the University of Paris, Alain Clemenceau has never lived outside of academia. He has spent the last fifteen years teaching at various American universities. Although he prefers his native France, there's more funding available in the States for his studies. The promise of tenure brought him to Millennium City University two years ago. He takes his field of study seriously; and believes everyone else should, too. Undergraduates who take his classes as electives generally revile him, but more serious undergraduates, and department graduate students like (or at least respect) him. Colleagues who don't agree with his ideas consider him an arrogant boor. Those who do agree consider him somewhat condescending, but incredibly knowledgeable about his subject area, and admire his scholarship. If the PCs agree to help him get an interview with the Black Paladin once the villain's been captured, Professor Clemenceau is charming and friendly.

lovers, and the professor somehow jilted the graduate student. The bones in the other coffin are those of John Black, who awakened the Black Paladin.)

The PCs can discover four other pieces of information via Skills and research.

1. The tomb was located in what the locals call the Forest of the Black Knight. Any PC with even 1 point in Language: French knows this; if none of them speak French, a successful Deduction roll reveals the information.
2. The woman's skeleton bore evidence she was killed with the thrust of a blade to the heart. Discovering this requires patience, numerous inquiries to discover the skeleton's location, and several uses of Persuasion and Bureaucratics, both of which suffer -3 penalties if the PCs don't speak French. After exchanging hands several times, the skeleton ended up in the British Museum in London *without* the girdle of black metal. (The fate and properties of the girdle are left to you; it doesn't factor into *Shades Of Black*.)
3. The skeleton found in the disturbed coffin was not decayed nearly enough to be 1,500 years old. This was never revealed by Professor Reynaud, since it might have resulted in "unnecessary complications" concerning his conclusions about pagan practices in the early Middle Ages. After seven years, the head of the History Department at the University of Paris will share this information, but only if asked about the skeleton with a successful Conversation roll.
4. Photographs of the ruins of the tomb exist. If the PCs show them to Marjorie de Wolf, she tentatively identifies the tomb as the scene of the events in her suppressed memory — it's hard to tell what the tomb looked like when it was new. The PCs can easily obtain the photos through the University of Paris or the Phillipe Boncour.

Professor Alain Clemenceau

Professor Clemenceau, a tenured faculty in the history department at Millennium City University, is an expert on early medieval Europe. Many of his published works concern the historical King Arthur. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Paris, and studied there at the same time as Professor Jean Reynaud. The accompanying sidebar has more information about him.

The PCs can make contact with Professor Clemenceau in several ways. Some possibilities are:

- If they follow the controversy that took place in letters written to *The North American Journal of Medieval History* after the article appeared, they discover that the sole professor to defend the theory of widespread pagan practice during the period was Alain Clemenceau, currently on the faculty at Millennium City University.
- The Black Paladin has never made any secret of "fighting Lancelot" and other events that pertain to the period in question. If the PCs

THE WORDS OF PROFESSOR CLEMENCEAU

There was a saying in France during the early Middle Ages. "*Quand il pleut, la monde pleure pour les méfaits de Morphant.*" Translation: "When it rains, the world is weeping for the de Morphant's deeds."

The de Morphants of the saying were a family of French knights (and some would have it, sorcerers and warlocks too) who were, in the minds of a great many, the embodiment of evil. Each generation seemed more wicked than the previous, and the last generation produced the most evil man of all: Sir Giles de Morphant, who was not only a contemporary of King Arthur, but also among his greatest enemies.

You have heard of the *Forêt du Chevalier Noir*, *oui*? The Forest of the Black Knight? It is named after Sir Giles. He was called the Black Paladin, and long ago his keep stood in that very forest. My colleague, Jean Reynaud, discovered Sir Giles' tomb... although he would not publish such a statement, for he had no supporting evidence. But in my opinion at least (and in Jean's opinion too) it was without a doubt Sir Giles's tomb. As for the second coffin — the one that held the skeleton of a woman?

There is second saying concerning de Morphant. To this day, the elders of a certain village near the *Forêt du Chevalier Noir* still speak it on occasion, instead of the other: "*Quand il pleut, la monde pleure pour l'amour de Morphant.*" Translation: "When it rains, the world is weeping for de Morphant's love." The small village was once the castle town of Sir Giles's keep. When the elders say it, they are commenting on a love affair from which no good can come.

Legend says the reason Sir Giles was more evil than his ancestors is because he had a lover, a witch who matched him in evil. And in their love, perhaps because of their love, the man and woman plumbed depths of wickedness which neither would have achieved alone. I believe the occupant of the second coffin was this lover of Sir Giles, whose name has been lost to time.

There is one last thing I must tell you. It is also said in that same village that Sir Giles never truly died. Instead, his lover placed him in an enchanted slumber, from which someday he would awaken. And I believe your enemy — the "supervillain" known today as the Black Paladin — is Sir Giles de Morphant come out of the past, to terrorize the present.

look more deeply into the matter, and seek an "expert" opinion, someone eventually refers them to Professor Clemenceau.

- The department head at the University of Paris, if he knows the PCs are from Millennium City (or any nearby city), mentions Pro-

fessor Clemenceau in passing.

- If the PCs' rescue of Marjorie de Wolf becomes public knowledge, the professor contacts them to ask about the Black Paladin, who claims to be a contemporary of King Arthur. The professor would certainly love to ask him some questions.

If the PCs haven't discovered the journal article on their own, Professor Clemenceau provides them with a copy. The accompanying box contains the story the professor has to tell the PCs. You can read it to them as-is, or change or abridge it to suit your needs as the scenario has developed. If you think the story gives away too much, you may want to use the alternate ending is provided in the accompanying sidebar.

The Delacroix Mansion

For a physical description of the Delacroix Mansion, its rooms, and the grounds, refer to Act Three, pages 49-59.

If the PCs explore the place, there's nothing out of the ordinary about the mansion (the secret passages are servants' passages, a not uncommon feature of mansions) unless a PC is a "sensitive," or a ghostly manifestation seems particularly apropos a superhero's personality or background. If so, the hero only sees the manifestation out of the corner of his eye, and only he sees it.

After the events in Act One, the local sheriff's department checks on the mansion twice a day (once in the morning, once in the evening). In effect, a deputy drives up to the mansion and does a quick walk-through to make sure the Black Paladin hasn't returned and all is well. Nothing unusual occurs at the mansion during the course of Act Two.

The PCs can obtain maps of the mansion and estate with a successful Bureaucratics roll. These maps do not show any secret doors or passages; but a PC with KS: Architecture can determine their location by studying the maps and identifying inconsistencies with the actual mansion.

TIMELINE

The PCs can learn the information presented below from various sources. The events taking place in the twentieth century are the easiest to learn about, since going through archived newspapers uncovers them. Earlier events are more difficult to unearth, and success depends on the abilities, resources, and methods of the PCs.

You can glean more details of the mansion's history from the "manifestation" section of the room descriptions in Act Three.

Pre-colonial: The grounds of the mansion are a part of the territory occupied by the Eriez Nation, a small Amerind tribe. The folklore of the Eriez contains one tale concerning the locale:

A young warrior led a group on a hunting trip. One night, a magnificent stag appeared in the midst of the hunters. The stag had a black pelt

that glistened darkly in the moonlight. In the morning, the hunters determined to hunt and kill this stag, knowing such a feat would earn them renown. Four months later the leader of the hunters returned to his tribe. He was alone and greatly changed. He informed his tribe he was no longer the man they once knew; his name was now Red Moon Waxing. That night he told his story to the tribe's elders.

For a week, the hunters chased the black stag. During the day, they never saw it, but when they camped for the night, it appeared again in their midst. It was taunting them, and they grew enraged at the insult, swearing they would kill the beast. Finally, having reached the western shore of the lake, they came upon the stag in daylight. They encircled their quarry and readied themselves for the long-awaited kill. But the stag changed. Its body melted away, and it rose high into the air, now a huge antlered serpent with black scales. It welcomed the hunters as guests in its domain, and a great hissing rose up from the ground. Around the hunters' feet, the forest floor was carpeted with crimson and black serpents. But only one hunter was bitten, and he died quickly from the venom.

When he was dead, the Black-Scaled Serpent announced, "You will be my guests until the red moon waxes in the sky. As a proper host, I offer you a meal." And it disappeared.

Realizing they had intruded on the domain of a great and evil spirit, the hunters fled into the night. But no matter which way they ran, they arrived back at the shore of the lake, where their dead fellow still lay. Exhausted, they gave up trying to flee and made camp.

In the morning, they buried the dead hunter and hunted in the forest. But they found no quarry — only the venomous snakes. A day passed, then another, and still no animal was found. Always their wandering in the forest brought them back to the shore of the lake. They wove nets and fished the lake, but their nets captured nothing but snakes. They dug up edible roots, but once free of the ground, the roots squirmed and twisted, slithering from their hands. Starving, they tried to kill a snake. They chopped off its head, but the headless body grew a new head, and the severed head grew a new body, and where there had been one snake there were now two.

Red Moon Waxing paused in his tale. The elders of his tribe looked disgusted and horrified. A red moon had shone in the sky two weeks ago. The elders knew the hunters had been trapped in Black Scaled Serpent's domain for nearly three months — trapped without food. The elders knew what had passed, but one finally worked up the courage to ask aloud if it were true. With a lunatic's grin, Red Moon Waxing admitted that he had eaten the feast provided by his host, Black-Scaled Serpent.

ALTERNATE ENDING

If you feels Clemenceau's story reveals too much about the plot, use this alternate ending — replace the last two paragraphs of the professor's "history lesson" with the following:

"The death of Sir Giles was the result of unrequited love. He fell in love with a nun named Elaine. Elaine was a godly woman, and would have nothing to do with such an evil man. Refusing to accept rejection, Sir Giles abducted her. But the woman had a champion, the legendary Sir Lancelot.

"For the fate of Elaine, the two men met in battle. After a long and terrible single combat, both succumbed to their wounds. Elaine made her choice — she rushed to Lancelot's side. Because of her ministrations and by the grace of God, Lancelot survived.

"Elaine's choice enraged Sir Giles. Driven by an unholy fury, he rose from the ground, despite his wounds, and took the woman to his keep. Knowing Lancelot would soon follow, Sir Giles locked himself and Elaine in his secret tomb. He said to her: 'If not together in life, we shall sleep — close to death, but free of its embrace — and be together in my dreams.' But before he could complete his curse, Elaine snatched a dagger and plunged it into her chest. She took her life rather than spend eternity with the evil Sir Giles. Then the curse took effect, and he fell into an enchanted slumber, where he could only dream of his lost love.

"And I believe your enemy — the 'supervillain' known today as the Black Paladin — is Sir Giles de Morphant, somehow awakened and come out of the past, to terrorize the present."

That night Red Moon Waxing disappeared. Some thought that enraged family members took their revenge. Others said Black-Scaled Serpent took back his servant. None knew the truth, but the location of the terrible deeds became known as cursed ground, avoided by all the Eriez.

1655: The Ojibwa destroy the Eriez Nation, and takes the tribe's land as its own. There is a story from those times, which exactly matches the one told by the Eriez, except Ojibwa hunters were the feast-guests of Black-Scaled Serpent. Whether the story is the same as the one told by the Eriez and simply adopted by the Ojibwa, or a separate incident, remains unknown.

c. 1725: Jesuit monks travel south from Detroit. On the shores of Lake Erie, distant from any settlement, they establish an abbey. In truth, the monks are not Jesuits, but Albigensians, a sect of the Church deemed heretical and thought wiped out during the thirteenth century by the Inquisition. Albigensians believe the spirit is good, and matter evil. The monks seek to retreat from the evil world by establishing an abbey far from civilization, where they can pursue their philosophies in peace, free of persecution.

1760: The British capture Detroit from the French during the French and Indian War. The authorities at Detroit discover the existence of the Jesuit monks. The British feel a great distrust of Catholics in general, and Jesuits in particular, so they dispatch Lieutenant Lawrence Sterling with a troop of calvary to journey to the abbey. He is to inform the monks the British now rule this land, assess the strategic value of the abbey's location, and determine if the monks present a threat.

Sterling returns to Detroit a fortnight later, having sustained heavy casualties. He reports the monks are devil-worshipping heathens who worship the Devil in the form of an antlered beastman; they want to make the Devil manifest on Earth. Lieutenant Sterling further reports that he ordered his men to execute the monks and put their unholy abbey to the torch, but refuses to explain how he lost so many men. Cashiered from military service soon thereafter, Sterling returns to England, committing suicide upon his arrival in London.

c. 1850: The trading ship *Dahlia*, bound for Detroit, runs aground during a storm. Shortly thereafter, authorities in Detroit send a military ship to investigate. The second crew soon locates the wreckage of the *Dahlia*. As the rescue ship nears, its crew sees the crew of the *Dahlia* — spiked to the granite cliff that ran along the shore. A team of five men, led by Captain Benjamin Riggly, disembark to investigate.

Upon his return to Detroit, Captain Riggly reports the forests were strewn with the bodies of tortured animals, and that a man lived alone in the forest. The man, according to the report, looked more like a beast than a person, since he wore untanned hides, and his hair and tangled beard were matted with dirt and dried blood. Captain

Riggly claims he ordered his crewmembers to take the wild man alive, but they disobeyed, killing and mutilating the man.

A tribunal convened to investigate the matter do not believe Riggly's story. All five of the captain's men testify Riggly gave the order to kill the man. They further report that Riggly himself mutilated the man's corpse. They describe the mutilation in gruesome detail; each man, interviewed privately, tells exactly the same story.

The tribunal relieves Captain Riggly of his command, and both he and his men are court-martialed. Judged guilty of conduct unbecoming an officer, Riggly is sentenced accordingly, and his men are discharged from military service.

1902 - 1909: Louis Alessandro Delacroix purchases 200 acres along the lake shore and soon begins work on the mansion that will bear his name. Formerly an official of the *Banque de France*, Delacroix had embezzled a great deal of money several years earlier, converted it into gold bullion, and fled to the Americas.

Despite inclement weather and frequent mishaps, workmen complete the Delacroix Mansion in the spring of 1904. In 1909, American authorities begin an extradition for Delacroix. Days later Delacroix is found dead, having hung himself in the main hall of his mansion. His wife, Marie, and their servants are never found; the authorities assume Marie fled with the couple's money.

1922 - 1931: Daniel Peter FitzDougal, a Detroit organized crime figure, acquires the Delacroix Mansion. Among other illicit purposes, FitzDougal uses the mansion to smuggle alcohol into the country from Canada.

In 1931, rivals slaughter FitzDougal and his gang in a gunfight at the mansion. Dubbed by the press "The Delacroix Butchery," the incident reportedly involved over fifty men. By all reports, the killings are unusually ruthless, with men on both sides being torn limb from limb or having their throats ripped out. The reports hint at other, more heinous, atrocities, but even police records are silent on the matter.

1933 - 1934: Late in 1933, Peter Edward Severson, a wealthy and dissipated socialite, purchases the Delacroix Mansion. While the Great Depression ravages the country, Severson sends out invitations for a New Year's masquerade. The theme is Poe's "Mask of the Red Death," and Severson promises his guests a night of extravagant debauchery. At considerable expense, Severson redecorates the ballroom to resemble the seventh chamber in Prince Prospero's imperial suite, with sable carpets and windows of red stained glass. At 9:00 PM, Severson locks the ballroom doors with the guests inside.

In the morning, servants and valets batter down the doors. They find all the guests dead, each displaying the symptoms of Poe's Red Death: red stains on the body and face, and bleeding from the victim's pores. Severson's body is not present. Investigators conclude Severson poisoned his guests, but never find physical evidence of the poison. No one

ever sees or hears from Severson again.

1946 - 1959: The mansion remains unoccupied for the remainder of the Great Depression as well as the war years. In 1946, Alvin X. Williamson, a wealthy industrialist best known for his cut-throat business practices and incessant philandering, purchases it. He refurbishes and modernizes the mansion.

In 1959, Claire Williamson murders her husband. The trial makes headlines during the following six months, as she testifies to all manner of perverse activities her husband was involved in. In the later parts of the trial, she begins to rave about the horrible and unnatural influence the mansion exerted on her, her husband, and their children. Finally, when the names of other wealthy individuals begin to crop up in her testimony, the authorities quickly conclude the case and judge Claire criminally insane. Sentenced to a state mental facility, she died several years later of natural causes.

Excerpts from Claire Williamson's testimony were published in 1967 in the book *The Psyche Of The Leisure Class*, by one Marcus Jamison, who has no other publishing credits and about whom no other information exists (not even birth or death certificates). The main thesis of the book is that the sanity of the ultra-wealthy cannot be judged by the mores of mainstream society, since the ultra-wealthy are so far removed from everyday lifestyle and culture.

1967 - 1970: In 1967, Jebediah Stowe purchases the mansion. A high-ranking member of VIPER, Stowe uses the mansion as a base of operations for Project Tree of Liberty.

The project begins late in 1967, inspired by the riots which shook Detroit that same year. It comes to fruition in the summer of 1970, when VIPER placed psychotropic ray generators and climate modulation devices in strategic locations, such as inner city neighborhoods, police headquarters, and City Hall. The psychotropic rays encourage violent thoughts and feelings of rage. The climate modulation devices sustain a heat wave worse than any the city had ever experienced by maintaining unbearable levels of humidity. By August, the city stands on the brink of civil catastrophe.

Fortunately, the Scarlet Shield thwarts Stowe's plot. Remembering well the '67 riots, he works ceaselessly to bring civil rights leaders and members of the police together. After much investigation, he discovers a third party manipulating both sides of the conflict. Thanks to the Shield's perseverance, police and civil rights groups forge a temporary alliance, foiling the plot. The Shield traces Stowe back to the Delacroix Mansion, and an unlikely coalition of police officers and Black Panthers, led by the Shield, assault the mansion. While battle between the Scarlet Shield's allies and VIPER agents rages outside, the Scarlet Shield goes into the mansion.

What happened inside the mansion remains unknown, but Stowe's body has never been found. To the day he died, the Scarlet Shield vehemently

denied killing Stowe, but refused to talk more about what went on inside. The authorities never conducted an official investigation.

1975 - 1979: Phoebe Moore-Browning, a wealthy dilettante, buys the mansion. She converts the ballroom into a disco, and the mansion becomes a favorite haunt for the stylish, famous, and wealthy. Her occupancy of the place concludes with the "Garden of Eden" party, a celebration of the death of disco. Moore-Browning is the only survivor of the event. Found in the forest days later, wearing only a slip and raving about having "eaten from the tree of knowledge," she dies of pneumonia shortly thereafter. In response to investigators' questions, she answers only: "The serpent beguiled me."

1980 - 1994: Upon the death of Phoebe Moore-Browning, the mansion passes into the possession of her brother, Vincent Samuel Browning. In 1985, Browning, his wife, and their two sons move into the mansion. Browning redecorates the ballroom, returning it to a more traditional appearance, but keeping some of the additions made by his sister, including the stage and bar.

The Delacroix Mansion becomes notorious during this time as the "lair" for not one, but two serial killers. Both were unusual — one was a woman; the other a wealthy family man and respected member of the community.

The first was Evelyn Neumann. In 1986, the Brownings hired Neumann as a nanny and tutor for their sons. During her time in Browning's employ, she kills eighteen men, though the authorities only found two of the bodies. Beginning in early '87, she kills one man every twenty-eight days for approximately the next year and a half. The authorities discover her crimes when she attempts to make Brownings's oldest son her nineteenth victim. Neumann confesses to the killings, but refuses to disclose the location of the other sixteen bodies. She claims Vincent Browning made her commit the crimes — that he visited her at night, tormented her with descriptions of gruesome scenes, and demanded she re-enact these scenes for his pleasure. The court judges the story a clumsy attempt to manufacture an insanity defense and sentences her to life imprisonment.

In 1993, the authorities charge Vincent Browning with the kidnapping and murder of one of his employees. As the case progresses, investigators uncover twenty other disappearances of individuals employed by Browning's firm, dating back to late 1987. Investigators hypothesize Browning scrutinized personnel files looking for "unattached" employees. When he found one, he would abduct the employee and then murder her. Since the police only find one body, the court only convicts Browning of a single murder. In 1995, fellow inmates kill him during a prison riot.

Following Vincent Browning's conviction, the authorities re-open Evelyn Neumann's case. In a new hearing, the court finds her criminally insane and adjusts her sentence accordingly. She dies of a self-administered drug overdose soon after officials transfer her to a state mental facility.

OTHER MYSTIC VILLAINS

While the Trismegistus Council may take an interest in the events of *Shades Of Black*, so might other mystically-oriented persons and groups in the Champions Universe. This is a good way for you to slow down or sidetrack the PCs if they get too close to the end of the scenario too soon.

The Circle of the Scarlet Moon would like to acquire the Black Paladin's dagger. It would use it to try to raise and bind Chantal's shade, thus gaining a powerful servitor (but a powerful enemy, since the Black Paladin would try to stop them — perhaps even teaming up with the PCs temporarily if necessary!).

DEMON's potential involvement in the scenario is described on page 42.

The Crowns of Krim have no particular interest in Black Paladin's plot; they already have access to demonic power of their own. The Slug doesn't want the dagger or anything else Black Paladin has, since they're not Elder Worm artifacts. Similarly, Anubis has plenty of Egyptian magical relics he can search for, if necessary.

Zorran the Artificer doesn't know about the attempt to resurrect Chantal. If he learned about it, he might take an academic interest, but he probably wouldn't want the dagger — that's not his sort of magic, really.

Takofanes the Undying Lord is currently busy with some long-term spellcasting and enchantment of his own, and can't afford to take the time to pursue the dagger. If he obtained it, he could easily bind Chantal into it to make a weapon such as the one the Circle wants to create.

2000 - Present: Eliot and Linda Randolph purchase and occupy the mansion. During this time they host several parties, none of which involve any unusual occurrence.

WHAT'S GOING ON

The location of the Delacroix Mansion is a nexus point between *Assiah*, the Material World, and *Yetzirah*, the Astral World. Here, the Earth and the Netherworld abut, and the barrier between the two worlds wears thin. Why the metaphysical distance between the two worlds shortens here, no one can truly say, but the nexus point has existed for millennia.

While dimensional "portals" have never appeared, the Netherworld makes its presence felt. Infernal energies emanating from it seep through the weak spot like foulness bubbling up through the earth from a burst septic tank. These energies corrupt the material world and pollute those who stay in the location for long. Evil thoughts and desires, normally constrained by the limits of conscience and physical reality, are actualized and given form here, since will and symbol guide *Yetzirah* as much as physical laws do.

These energies empower the Ritual of Rebirth. The latent mystical power of the last scion of de Morphant, the sorcerous might of Chantal's shade, and their mutual deep-seated desire make possible the blasphemous rebirth of the witch in defiance of the laws of nature.

Other Possibilities

The above sections deal with the most likely and fruitful avenues of investigation, but many other possibilities exist. Players are a clever bunch. If they come up with different, but equally valid, means of discovering the Black Paladin's methods and motivation, you should do your best to incorporate their actions into the adventure, and perhaps reward them with extra Experience Points.

The Trismegistus Council

The Trismegistus Council, discussed on pages 104 and 105 of *Champions Universe*, might play a part in the events of *Shades Of Black* due to the mystic energies and threats involved (not to mention Talisman's participation). If necessary, you can use the Council as a conduit for information and assistance when the PCs are stumped or the players frustrated. *Shades Of Black* might provide the perfect opportunity for you to introduce this group into the campaign, if the PCs have never heard about or had contact with it.

Bringing the PCs and the Council together shouldn't require too much effort. If one of the PCs doesn't already have a Contact with the Council, perhaps Professor Clemenceau can direct them to a scholar who, unknown to him, belongs to the Council. (If the PCs do have a Council Contact,

that person can take Clemenceau's role in the scenario, if you prefer.) Alternately, maybe the Council can approach the PCs, seeking information about what's going on and willing to trade information in exchange. The Council can, for example, provide most of the information in the TIMELINE about the Delacroix Mansion, though Council members differ as to the overall explanation for those events (some suspect dimensional linkage, others attribute the evil to different causes). If necessary, a member of the Council can let the PCs know the dagger is central to the performance of the Ritual.

The Randolphs

If the PCs investigate the Randolphs, they can learn more about them by questioning wealthy Contacts and using the *High Society* Skill. The PCs find abundant evidence that the couple were upright citizens and good Christians. For their financial contributions and unceasing work in the relief effort after the destruction of old Detroit, the mayor awarded them the key to the city. No matter how deep they dig, the PCs find no evidence the Randolphs were involved in anything unseemly, let alone diabolic.

House De Morphant

A successful KS: Arcane And Occult Lore roll reveals that the de Morphants were a family powerful in black magic, as described on page 65 of *Champions Universe*.

The MCPD

Law enforcement mainly wants to find the Black Paladin, and that's where the MCPD focuses its efforts. It helps the PCs any reasonable way it can, but unless the PCs convince Det. Marlowe (or some other police contact) that a request for assistance pertains directly to finding the Black Paladin, MCPD officials will consider it to be of secondary importance.

If the PCs' investigation goes off track, you can use their contacts at MCPD to get them back on the trail. For instance, Det. Marlowe could discover the article concerning the missing dagger and bring it to the PCs' attention. Or perhaps Marjorie's therapist contacts the authorities, tells them about her suppressed memory, and Det. Marlowe passes the information along to the PCs.

Where Is The Black Paladin?

If the PCs try to track down the Black Paladin, they're unlikely to find him. He has rented a cabin under an assumed name in a national park near the shore of Lake Ontario, some distance north of Millennium City. He comes and goes via Teleportation, and takes as much care as possible to hide any traces of his presence.

ENGAGEMENTS WITH THE ENEMY



While the PCs investigate, the Black Paladin sets in motion his own plans to seize the perfect vessel, as detailed below. (One event, “Another DEMON?” concerns Talisman’s actions during Act Two.) Not all of the events require the involvement of the PCs. Some can occur without their direct involvement — and if so, the PCs only hear about them after the fact. Maybe some of the events don’t happen at all, or you add some new ones to those provided here.

Whatever the case, you must decide which events happen during the adventure, when they occur, and whether they involve the PCs. You don’t have to decide before Act Two starts; you can decide on the fly, based on the activities of the PCs and the attitude of the players. If the adventure seems to drag, have the PCs discover the imps spying on them, or have Talisman lead the attack on the Museum of Natural History. Basically, if the game slows down, spice it up a bit!

The Perfect Vessel

The Black Paladin’s intention in Act Two is to confuse the PCs before seizing the perfect vessel in Act Three. But if, at any point during Act Two, the perfect vessel is helpless and ripe for the plucking (e.g., Knocked Out and left alone), the Black Paladin changes his plans. He abducts her and heads directly to the Delacroix Mansion. You should proceed to Act Three, and continue the adventure from there.

The matter may become easier for the Black Paladin if the perfect vessel is not a PC. Unless the PCs maintain a close watch on the vessel, the Black Paladin could assault and kidnap her just about any time you’re ready to proceed to Act Three.

Taking The PCs’ Measure

In addition to confusing the PCs, the Black Paladin also wishes to assess their strengths and weaknesses. At your discretion, he can learn more than just the PCs’ Susceptibilities and Vulnerabilities, if he has the opportunity. For example, if the team has code words for special maneuvers, he could learn those, thus preparing him for those tactics later on. If a PC always begins a fight the same way, he may notice and plan accordingly with help from Chantal. For instance, if a PC always opens with an Energy Blast, Chantal provides the Black Paladin with Missile Reflection or dice of Absorption. If a PC usually Leaps into HTH Combat range, the Black Paladin has the Gryphon attack the PC in mid-air. If a PC uses Find Weakness first thing in a battle, the Black Paladin orders Lady Crow to attack the PC with Darkness from the onset of the fight.

The Black Paladin is a canny opponent, and you should play him as such.

Prison Break

If the PCs captured one or more villains at the end of Act One, the Black Paladin takes steps to free his retainers (and himself, if necessary). First he frees Talisman, then the Gryphon and Lady Crow.

The authorities confine Talisman in Millenium City’s jail, in one of the cells suitable for superhumans (it dampens her powers so she can’t escape). The Black Paladin, riding Darkling and armed with the Lance Of Unvanquished Pain, uses the “direct approach” to free her, preferably attacking while she is in transit. He has a simple plan: get to her any way possible (likely through the use of force), then Teleport away.

The MCPD sends Gryphon and Lady Crow to a maximum-security mental hospital. The lawyers in charge of the Randolph estate wish to determine if any vestige of Eliot and Linda Randolph remain, and if so, what doctors can do to help them. The authorities comply with the attorneys’ request, regardless of any PC protests; the two villains still have civil rights. The Black Paladin sends Talisman to free the two villains if possible. Talisman disguises herself as a nurse, using Mental Illusions and Mind Control to infiltrate the place. Once inside, she frees the two villains. Meanwhile, the Black Paladin lurks nearby in case of trouble. If he can’t use Talisman for this task, the Black Paladin either Teleports in to free them (if possible), or smashes his way in and frees them by force (if not).

If the PCs captured the Black Paladin, he must first free himself (and re-acquire his Foci) before he can free his retainers. If possible, let the *Shades Of Black* story arc simmer on the back burner while you run some other scenarios until the PCs forget about him, so that his breakout doesn’t seem contrived. Alternately, you can have Chantal’s spirit, or perhaps a third party such as DEMON, take a hand.

If the PCs capture a villain during Act Two, you can have the Black Paladin free him using the above scenarios. If the PCs apprehend a villain a second time, the Black Paladin does not attempt to free his retainer again. He assumes the superheroes and authorities improve security due to the previous escape, and won’t run the risk of capture when he’s so close to achieving his goal.

In any case, unless the PCs specifically state they’re spending time staking out the various facilities where the authorities have confined captured villains, the prison breaks should take place off-stage, with the PCs learning about the escape too late to do anything about it. However, if the PCs actively guard the captured villains, feel free to have the prison break occur in-game. Just keep in mind:

OTHER VILLAINOUS RETAINERS

Here are some potential additional retainers for the Black Paladin. The page references are to *Conquerors, Killers, And Crooks*.

Ankylosaur	p. 116
Leech	p. 168
The Monster	p. 181
Morningstar	p. 182
Ogre	p. 187
Shadowdragon	p. 193

KNOCKED OUT DEMONS

In many of the encounters described in Acts Two and Three, Chantal has summoned demons to serve the Black Paladin. As a rule of thumb, reducing one of her conjured demons to -11 STUN banishes it to the Netherworld; it vanishes in a puff of sulphurous yellowish smoke. If you want to speed up combat, have the demons vanish at 0 STUN.

The Black Paladin's demon steed, Darkling, disappears when Knocked Out just like any other demon. In fights including Darkling, assume Chantal summoned him before the beginning of the fight, thus returning him to this world.

the Black Paladin wants to free the villains — not fight the PCs or risk capture. If he frees his retainers, he flees; if he decides attempting to free them poses too many risks, he won't even try. Always keep an escape route open for the Black Paladin in case a prison break takes a turn for the worse.

If he can't free his retainers, the Black Paladin finds other helpers. Act Two continues as presented, and Chantal summons demons to serve her lover, or the Black Paladin recruits new retainers, such as the ones listed in the accompanying sidebar. If the PCs get caught up in the events of *Shades Of Black* and forget about the captured villains, the Black Paladin can free his retainers then.

Those Spying Eyes

Soon after freeing his retainers from confinement (or abandoning the attempt), the Black Paladin sets up to two separate groups to spy on the PCs. First, Lady Crow keeps tabs on the PCs' movements by means of her Murder Of Crows and Clairsentience. Second, Chantal summons two imps from the Netherworld to act as eyes and ears inside the team's base. The spies' task: to learn everything they can about the perfect vessel — where she works, lives, likes to go out, and so on. Secondly, the spies keep tabs on the PCs to make sure they don't find and capture the Black Paladin.

The Imps

The imps, named Post Hoc and Propter Hoc (or at least, that's what their names sound like in English), are unusual specimens well-suited to the mission Chantal gives them. In addition to the Character Sheet on page 50 of the *HERO System Bestiary*, they have the following Powers:

Out Of Sight...: *Invisibility to Sight Group, Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½) (30 Active Points); Only When Not Attacking (-½). Total Cost: 20 points.*

Techno Jinx: *Minor Transform 6d6 (perfectly good piece of technology into malfunctioning piece of technology, heals back with successful Computer Programming, Electronics, or Mechanics roll as appropriate) (60 Active Points); Limited Target (technology; -½), No Range (-½). Total Cost: 30 points.*

Infernally Lucky: *Luck 2d6. Total Cost: 10 points.*

The two imps are identical in appearance, and use this to their advantage if someone discovers them and they need to escape (i.e., one disappears, and at the same time, the other appears across the room). They communicate with Chantal via a Mind Link established by the witch. As a rule of thumb, the imps remain at the PCs' base, occasionally leaving to follow the perfect vessel (or a hero closely associated with her). If the PCs don't have a base, the imps attempt to discover where the perfect vessel resides and then infiltrate the place, where they remain.

While excellent spies, Post Hoc and Propter

Hoc cannot help but cause trouble for the PCs — they are, after all, Utterly Evil. For fear of Chantal, they limit themselves (with great difficulty) to mischievous pranks. However, this still gives the PCs a chance to detect their presence.

While the imps spy on them, the PCs experience various "difficulties" — some just annoying, others a little more deadly. Use your imagination when devising these problems; some possibilities include: strategic rips in a costume, or the insignia from the costume being removed; a PC's shampoo is replaced with green hair dye; the labels on various chemicals in the lab are switched; a PC's pet is trapped in the refrigerator; the Danger Room malfunctions during training; the base's security systems incorrectly identify a PC as Doctor Destroyer; the brake lines of a PC's car are cut; a PC's civilian clothing has a piece of paper taped to the back that reads, "I'm a famous super-hero."

If discovered, Post Hoc and Propter Hoc only want to escape, and do whatever they must to get away. If the PCs capture them, Chantal listens in on the questioning via Mind Link if she can, though she shuts down the Link the instant it's detected. Questioning the imps isn't very helpful — they're far more scared of Chantal than the PCs, and know almost nothing except that they were instructed to watch one person closely. (Using Mental Powers on them may not work well, since the imps don't have Human-class minds.) However, they do taunt the PCs by extolling the power of their mistress (though they don't even know her name).

For the sake of this adventure, the only thing the Black Paladin *needs* to learn from his spies are the whereabouts and habits of the perfect vessel. Any other knowledge he gains is up to you, and should depend on how carefully the PCs hide their identities, disguise their movements, and so on.

The Karathos Orb

The Black Paladin wants to provide the PCs with a red herring to distract them from his true goal, and have a chance to observe the PCs in battle. He sends Talisman, the Gryphon, and two lesser demons summoned by Chantal to stage an attack on the Millennium City Museum of Natural History. You can find character sheets for the lesser demons on pages 54-56 of the *HERO System Bestiary*. To increase their power, provide them with either the *Fire Demon Powers* or *Torment Demon Powers* option.

The attack occurs at closing time for the museum, as many visitors leave. The PCs can learn about the attack via the MCPD or the news. The villains remain outside the museum, terrorizing innocents and destroying property, until the PCs show up. By the time the PCs arrive on the scene, the police have blockaded both ends of the street and cleared all bystanders from the area.

TACTICS

Refer to the accompanying map. At the start of the battle, Talisman stands near the entrance, unleashing blasts of Hellfire at parked cars; the

Gryphon crouches next to her, his beak and claws red with the blood of murdered innocents; and the two demons are 3" in the air, blasting craters in the museum's façade.

When the PCs come within earshot, Talisman says:

"Stop the foolish do-gooders, my minions! I go now to seize the Karathos Orb, which shall increase my power tenfold. Do not let them pass!"

Talisman resents having to take orders from the Black Paladin, and isn't happy about risking capture in a raid whose purpose she doesn't understand. The words she speaks aren't her own; the Black Paladin told her to speak them, and she does her best to imitate him. Basically, she hams it up, so try to get that across to the players. They may realize she doesn't normally speak this way; if necessary, you can give the PCs an INT Roll to figure this out.

The Gryphon (DEX 23)

The Gryphon performs a Wind Blast on as many PCs as he can get in the Area Of Effect. On later Phases, he continues to use Wind Blast if possible in an effort to prevent pursuit of Talisman. Otherwise, he performs Move Bys on earth-bound opponents. He does *not* engage in HTH Combat unless he has no other choice. Unless he goes Berserk, he retreats after fighting for one Turn, regardless of how well the battle goes.

Talisman (DEX 20)

Talisman immediately flies inside the museum, leaving the Gryphon and demons to fight the PCs. She flies through the museum for one or two Turns, then retreats out the back. If no one pursues her, she chooses a random display, breaks the glass, and steals something vaguely resembling an orb (a gem stone, a globe, a bronze censer, a ball from the Native American sport of baggataway) before retreating.

If pursued, she flies directly toward the most convenient back exit (probably a window). If time permits, she uses her Hellfire Gate to commit random acts of destruction. Once outside the museum, she heads straight for the Black Paladin and others. Whether the Black Paladin stays to help Talisman, or leaves to avoid confrontation with the PCs, is up to you — but he won't run the risk of capture.

Lesser Demons (DEX 20)

If one of the PCs has shown himself to be extraordinarily fast (*i.e.*, more than 20" of Flight or Running) in a previous encounter, both demons immediately attack him by activating their Damage Shields and attempting to Grab him. Once they Grab him, one squeezes while the other attacks with its Claws. The demons continue to attack the PC until he's Knocked Out or they're dispatched.

Otherwise, the demons attack flying PCs. If only one PC is airborne, both demons attack that PC. If none are airborne, they attack from the air

with Energy Blast. When the Gryphon flees, the demons cover his escape. If, after one Turn, the Gryphon is restrained or Knocked Out, the demons attempt to free him or wake him up, so he can escape. The demons fight until defeated.

The Black Paladin and Lady Crow

These two villains stand across the street, stealthily watching the fight from atop a nearby building. The Black Paladin, aided by Chantal, uses Teleport to move the group if they risk discovery, or for a better view of the fight. They only participate in the battle if an opportunity to seize the perfect vessel presents itself, or to help Talisman and the Gryphon escape. For example, Lady Crow might order her Murder Of Crows to intercept a pursuer; or the Black Paladin could use his Blind-Fog Spell or attack with his Shadow Blast. If the PCs Knock Out a villain but then leave him alone, the Black Paladin rescues him. If the Gryphon goes Berserk, Lady Crow attempts to calm him with Mind Control.

If the perfect vessel is not a PC, Black Paladin may use this diversion not to observe the PCs, but to kidnap her (assuming he knows her location).

WRAPPING UP

If Talisman takes something, museum officials quickly identify the stolen object and tell the PCs what it is.

A successful KS: Arcane And Occult Lore roll reveals the Karathos Orb is an actual artifact, believed to increase the wielder's mystical prowess. No one (or at least, no one the PCs have access to, including the Trismegistus Council) knows its exact location, origin, and powers. Whatever Talisman stole is an unlikely choice to be the Orb, though; if she didn't take anything, no amount of searching through the museum turns up the artifact.

If a Mystic PC (or NPCs) succeeds with KS: Arcane And Occult Lore and also has CK: Millennium City, he knows the Karathos Orb was not on display at the Museum of Natural History... or else he would have discovered it long ago!

If a PC voices doubts concerning the attack, ask for a Tactics roll. If successful, the PC knows, without a doubt, the attack must have had an objective other than seizing the Karathos Orb. After all:

- The villains obviously delayed until the PCs arrived.
- The Gryphon used Wind Blast and performed Move Bys, so he wouldn't become committed to HTH Combat and could escape.
- The demons were supposed to neutralize possible pursuit by attacking PCs with enhanced movement like speedsters and fliers.

Of course, the PCs won't know *why* the "raid" on the Museum was a feint. There are two possible reasons: observing them; or distracting them so the Black Paladin could accomplish some other goal. If the perfect vessel is not a PC, the heroes may soon learn that the latter reason is correct, when they receive word that the Black Paladin has kidnapped her.

SEBASTIAN SARRAZENE

In addition to the Character Sheet presented in *Champions Universe* for a typical Morbane, Sarrazene has the following Powers and Skills:

Control Undead: *Mind Control* 10d6, *Reduced Endurance* (0 END; +½) (75 Active Points); *Only Undead* (-1), *Incantations* (-¼). *Total Cost:* 33 points.

Create Undead: *Summon* 4 200-point Undead, Any Undead (+½), *Slavishly Devoted* (+1), *Reduced Endurance* (½ END; +¼) (137 Active Points); *Gestures* (-¼), *Incantations* (-¼), *Requires Deceased Bodies* (-½). *Total Cost:* 68 points.

Skills: KS: Necromancy 15-; KS: Millennium City Underworld 13-; Streetwise 13-

Notes: Sarrazene is a middle-aged man, tall and thin, with sallow skin and a pinched face. He speaks quietly, almost totally without emotion, and has no accent. His usually combs his short black hair back, and often wears sunglasses. He disdains the robes usually worn by Morbanes, only donning them for rituals and official functions; he prefers expensive black suits and silk ties. In truth, he looks more like a mobster than a sorcerer — not inappropriate, considering his ties to the criminal underworld. He has greatly enriched himself by investing in arms smuggling (nothing high-tech — mainly submachine guns) and drug dealing (including designer drugs concocted with magic). Since the destruction of old Detroit, Sarrazene has become obsessed with necromancy and the undead. He wonders how many dead bodies remain buried under Millennium City, and seeks a way to use them to his advantage.

Trafficking With DEMON

If a PC successfully uses Streetwise or KS: The Mystic World to try to locate the villains or learn about their activities, he hears that someone wants to arrange a meeting with Talisman. His source tells him the “someone” is a mobster named Sebastian Sarrazene. No one knows Sarrazene’s criminal affiliations, but everyone knows he’s involved in small-time arms smuggling and drug dealing.

Talisman wants to learn more about Chantal by talking to her Contacts. During Act One, she got a message to Sebastian Sarrazene, a Morbane in DEMON, requesting a meeting. The message was purposefully oblique: “Need to ask DEMON about a demon. Get in touch. T.”

Sarrazene wants to arrange a time and place for the meeting. (If the Black Paladin’s activities are public knowledge, Sarrazene is even more curious about what Talisman has gotten herself into.)

What Now?

The PC with Streetwise/KS: The Mystic World has two options.

He can pretend to be Talisman (or someone working for her), and reply to Sarrazene via his street contacts. This requires nothing more than a few well-placed bribes or threats; roleplay the scene out if you like. Assuming the PC’s message doesn’t somehow tip Sarrazene off to the deception, the Morbane sets a time and place for the meeting. Of course, this method does not reveal what exactly Talisman wanted to discuss with Sarrazene. If captured, all Sarrazene knows is the message from Talisman described above. If the PCs reveal what they know, Sarrazene might offer to share his insight into the situation in exchange for his freedom. (Though he won’t admit to any illicit activities. After all, the PCs can’t really arrest him. He was merely checking on his warehouse, and there’s nothing illegal stored in the crates — just rubber vomit, whoopee cushions, and Chinese finger traps.)

Or the PC can wait, hope Talisman gets in touch with Sarrazene, and try to learn the time and place of the meeting. This requires a second successful Streetwise/KS: The Mystic World roll in a Skill Versus Skill Contest against Sarrazene’s Streetwise 13- (he’s trying to keep word of the meeting “off the street”).

THE MEETING

Sarrazene sets the meeting for 2:00 AM in a waterfront warehouse leased to a store located in North Detroit — The Great Zarzinni’s Magical Shoppe, which sells kitsch magic tricks and prank gifts. Zarzinni’s serves as a front for Sarrazene’s criminal activities while DEMON works to create a new local Demonhome. For the location, use the modern warehouse map from the *HERO System Resource Kit*.

Sarrazene wards the warehouse against Desolidification, Mind Scan, and Teleportation. The walls and roof of the warehouse are 6 DEF, 5 BODY with the Advantages *Affects Desolidified* (+½) and

Cannot Be Escaped With Teleportation (+¼). Everyone inside the warehouse benefits from 20 points of Mental Defense, Only Versus Mind Scan (-1), Only Protects Against Exterior Mind Scans (-¼).

One of the crates conceals a secret entrance into the warehouse. The side of the crate swings up and slides back on two tracks (similar to a garage door). You should decide which crate hides the trap door. To find the door, the PC only needs to examine the correct crate and succeed with a Concealment roll.

Inside the fake crate, a trap door is set in the warehouse floor. The trap door opens onto a vertical passage leading down to the sewers. The trap door can be barred from the “sewer side” and is made of steel. It has 9 DEF, 5 BODY, and has the same wards as the warehouse walls.

Sebastian Sarrazene and six DEMON Brothers arrive several minutes early, entering via the trap door. Talisman (if coming to the meeting) arrives several minutes late via the street entrance.

Spying On The Meeting

The PCs learn the most by allowing Talisman to arrange the meeting, and then spying on the proceedings, before breaking it up and carting everyone off to jail.

Talisman wants a way to protect herself if Chantal and the Black Paladin turn against her. She also wants to know how she can send the shade back to Hell, just in case. Sarrazene possesses a better understanding of necromancy than she does, and she wants to ask his opinion.

Talisman briefly explains the ritual she performed, but doesn’t use any names. However, she does tell Sarrazene she summoned the shade of one long dead and bound the shade to a dagger. She also says the shade possesses more power than any ghost has a right to.

Sarrazene states the witchcraft she performed wasn’t powerful enough to have that kind of result — the results should have been more like a B-movie seance (which Talisman already knew). He states confidently the dagger is the key to banishing the shade.

Other than that, he can’t offer much help. He has no idea how to gain control over the shade, and wonders aloud if it isn’t really a demon masquerading as the dead individual. In the end, he promises to do some research, and says if he discovers anything pertinent, he’ll get in touch.

The Fight

Character Sheets for the Morbane and his six DEMON Brothers are on pages 142-144 of *Champions Universe*. The accompanying sidebar contains further information about Sebastian Sarrazene.

To increase the difficulty of the encounter, provide Sarrazene with an entourage of four zombies (described on page 127 of the *HERO System Bestiary*) in addition to the DEMON Brothers. The zombies are most useful if positioned directly in front of the crate that hides the trap door so they can block pursuit when Sarrazene flees.

When the PCs attack, Sarrazene orders the Brothers to stop the PCs; he and Talisman flee. Sar-

razene heads for the crate concealing the trap door. Talisman heads for the nearest exit. If both are blocked, she uses Writhing Hellfire on the ceiling, then fights the PCs. Once she burns a hole through the ceiling, she attempts to escape through it.

(Page 142 of *Champions Universe* describes a plot seed involving the Pentacles of Dispatch. If you are considering this for a future adventure, Sarrazene could use the Pentacles to escape. For example: Sarrazene flees into the sewers, where he's hidden a Pentacle. Just as the PCs turn a corner, he activates the Pentacle and disappears.)

Other Possibilities

The text below describes some other possible events. If you want to use them, flesh them out and insert them into Act Two at the appropriate point. But remember to limit the Black Paladin's exposure to the PCs; having him escape too often frustrates the players, but having him captured spoils Act Three.

BESIEGED BY DEMONS

Chantal summons a large group of demons, and the Black Paladin orders them to assault the PCs' base. He sends eight demon hounds and two lesser demons to conduct a frontal assault. Each lesser demon commands four demon hounds. The imps Post Hoc and Propter Hoc act as a "Fifth Column" inside the base.

The primary objective of the attack is property destruction. If the team has a hangar containing vehicles, it's the demons' first target. Throughout the siege, Chantal maintains a Mind Link with the demons, and informs the Black Paladin of their progress via Telepathy.

VILLAINOUS COLLABORATIONS

The PCs receive word of the Black Paladin's efforts to recruit more retainers to his cause (see the sidebar on page 39 for some suggestions). Through the *Streetwise* Skill, appropriate Contacts, or the like, the PCs learn the location of the potential retainers' hideout. They can either attack the villains (to capture and question them) or set up a

stakeout and wait for the Black Paladin to show up. Whether he appears at the hideout, or if the rumor is even true, is left for you to decide.

Another possibility is that the PCs learn of the Black Paladin's supposed hideout and attack it. But their source was mistaken, and the place is actually the hideout of different mystical villain, such as Dark Seraph, the Slug, or Zorran the Artificer. The villain has come to Millennium City seeking either to discover what the Black Paladin is up to, or for reasons all his own (see the sidebar on page 38 for some suggestions).

MANO A MANO

Depending on the success of his spies, you can choose to have the Black Paladin confront one of the PCs when the hero is alone — even in his Secret Identity. The Black Paladin challenges the PC to a duel. Obviously, the Black Paladin, riding Darkling and armed with the Lance Of Unvanquished Pain, is more than a match for most PCs, so be careful, since the encounter could result in the PC's death. The Black Paladin's intention is to humiliate the PC — he fights until he Knocks Out the PC, then retreats laughing malevolently. Or perhaps, if the PC refuses the Black Paladin's challenge, during the interplay between them the overconfident villain gives away some information about his scheme.

CONCLUSION OF ACT TWO

At the conclusion of Act Two, go over the questions asked at the beginning, and consider what the PCs have discovered.

Most importantly: do the PCs suspect that Chantal's dagger is the key to banishing her shade to the Netherworld? If not, they may have great difficulty with the climactic fight at the end of *Shades Of Black*. In this case, try to find a way for the PCs to learn of the dagger's importance before concluding Act Two. In Act Three, the PCs don't have time for investigation. The Black Paladin has completed his preparations, and moves swiftly and decisively toward his true goal....

USING DEMON

As described in *Millennium City*, DEMON has laid low in the City of the Future since the Champions destroyed the local Demonhome in 2001. Since then, its main concern has been to establish a new home in the area. It won't risk exposing its presence in the city. Therefore, you should not have DEMON get too involved in the events of *Shades Of Black* unless (a) it has already founded a new home, or (b) the destruction of the old home hasn't occurred yet (or at all) in your campaign.



Act Three

UNHOLY REBIRTH

From the air, the Black Paladin looks down on the suburban home of Marjorie de Wolf and her mother. He raises his hand, gesturing for his retainers to stop. Darkling neighs with impatience. The demon steed's hoof lashes out, striking the air and leaving a fiery hoof-print. Flying to the Black Paladin's left, the Gryphon shrieks with bloodthirsty anticipation. To his right, Lady Crow's murder of black-feathered birds caws raucously. Above him, Talisman hovers in silence. He does not need to see her face to know the witch's expression: she questions the purpose of this endeavor, but fear of him and his fell power holds her tongue.

The Black Paladin keeps his hand in the air, savoring the moment. He reflects on his recent past, and beneath his visor, a wicked grin twists his lips. He remembers questioning John Black, the professor of archaeology who awoke him from slumber almost a decade ago, and whose life he took as his

own. He remembers a question he put to John Black — not the first he asked, but still an important one, the answer to which is a cherished thing: “What became of Arthur, his lapdog Lancelot, and his hovel Camelot?”

Bewildered, his voice breaking with fear, the professor answered and told the story as best he could.

Le Morte d'Arthur. The phrase still fills Sir Giles with a dark joy. The High King, betrayed by his beloved wife and most virtuous knight. Betrayed by the two he loved best and held in the highest trust. Such an ignoble end for those righteous knights — an end that well suits Sir Giles's black heart.

He laughs aloud. He still lives — Sir Giles de Morphant, the Knight of the Crow and greatest enemy of Camelot. And soon, Chantal, too, will live again, to stand at his side. It is fitting. Arthur and Lancelot, and the woman whom they both loved, rotting in the earth; the Black Paladin and Chantal, free to work their will on the world.

In his mind, he hears Chantal's laughter. She too revels in the fate of Camelot. She whispers to him: "Soon, m'lord. Soon thy vision of us together will be made flesh. Let the shades of our enemies weep and gnash their teeth and tear at their hair. Let their knowledge of our continued existence torture them in the afterlife."

Sharply, the Black Paladin lowers his hand. Talisman unleashes a blast of hellfire at a nearby house. The Gryphon and Lady Crow descend on those seeking to escape the fire. The Black Paladin puts spurs to Darkling, and his steed speeds toward Marjorie de Wolf's home, leaving a trail of sputtering flames behind.

Act Three, once begun, moves quickly to the conclusion of *Shades Of Black*. Unlike the previ-

ous acts, it involves no investigation; the events are straightforward and linear, moving directly from one to the next. The act opens with a desperate call for help from Marjorie de Wolf, and then battle with the Black Paladin and his retainers in the northern suburbs of Millennium City. The action soon moves to the Delacroix Mansion, where the superheroes must explore the mansion's secret passages and hidden chambers while contending with the ghosts who haunt the place. The act concludes with the discovery of the Black Paladin's lair, a crypt deep under the mansion, and a final confrontation with the villain, where the life of the perfect vessel hangs in the balance. Ideally, to keep the tension and drama high, the events of Act Three occur over the course of one, or at most two, game sessions.

RUSE DE GUERRE



With this attack, the Black Paladin means to break the spirit of the PCs by killing Marjorie de Wolf. More importantly, he intends to set the stage for the abduction of the perfect vessel.

This encounter should be quite difficult, and whether the PCs can defeat the Black Paladin and his cronies should be in doubt at the beginning of the battle. With that in mind, you should provide the Black Paladin with as many demonic allies as necessary. Against all but the weakest PC groups, he should have at least four demon hounds present. To increase the difficulty, add another four; to further increase it, add two lesser demons. But before deciding on an exact number of villains, consider the following:

First, there are several hostage situations which prevent the PCs from attacking the villains initially. You should create enough hostage situations to occupy all of the PCs, but not enough to overwhelm them — they should have a chance of saving everyone. While the PCs save lives, the villains get in an attack or two, and this should weaken the PCs before they can attack the villains in earnest.

Second, the PCs' objective in the fight should *not* be to defeat all the villains. The PCs have ample opportunity to defeat the Black Paladin, as well as any other villains who escape, later in Act Three. The PCs' primary goal is to prevent the murder of Marjorie de Wolf and the other hostages.

Finally, don't make the encounter so difficult the PCs don't have any chance of capturing one or more villains. The number of villains incapacitated here has a definite impact later on, when the PCs attempt to rescue the perfect vessel. After this battle, the Black Paladin does not have time to arrange prison breaks, and villains captured here are not present at the Delacroix Mansion later.

The Perfect Vessel

If the perfect vessel is a PC, and the Black Paladin has not already captured her, he must seize her now. During the fight, the PCs must split up to rescue all the hostages, and this gives the Black Paladin an opening. If the perfect vessel is Knocked Out and alone (or even if she is on her own and overmatched by her opponent), the Black Paladin ignores Marjorie de Wolf and whoever attacks him to capture the vessel. Once he's captured her, he flees, heading directly to the Delacroix Mansion to perform the Ritual of Rebirth.

If the perfect vessel is not a PC, the Black Paladin should already have her in his possession after capturing her sometime during Act Two. He has imprisoned her at the Delacroix Mansion to await his return from this mission. If necessary, he'll abandon the attack on de Wolf to return and perform the ritual.

A PLEA FOR HELP

Act Three begins late in the evening, when the PCs receive a call (via telephone or other means) from Marjorie de Wolf:

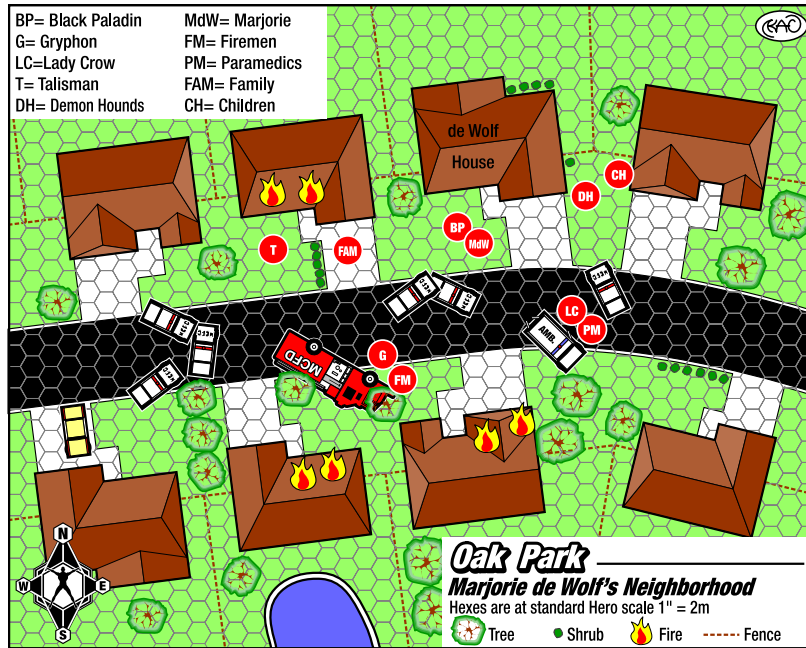
Sobbing, Marjorie says, "He's come for me again... My mom, I think she's... I think... Please. Please, you have to help me —" You hear evil laughter in the background. Then a second voice comes on the line, a male voice, dark and confident. "Yes, Sir Hero, come and save the damsel. You did so once. Will you a second time? Can you a second time?" The connection abruptly cuts off.

This is obviously a trap, but the PCs don't have much choice in the matter. If they try to contact the local authorities, the operator keeps them on hold for several minutes. Finally, a beleaguered voice,

MARJORIE DE WOLF

And what about Marjorie de Wolf? The Black Paladin, cold-blooded and cruel, has used her to lure the PCs into a trap. Marjorie has been attending therapy, and would have soon resumed a normal life. This devastating attack probably sets her therapy back significantly. If the PCs have become close to Marjorie, you should emphasize the traumatic impact the Black Paladin's actions have on her. His actions in *Ruse de Guerre* are, plain and simple, evil.

The fate of Mrs. de Wolf is left up to you. Maybe a hero swoops in and gets her medical attention in time to save her life... or maybe not. If she dies during the attack, Marjorie is even further traumatized by the events of *Shades Of Black*.



sounding on the verge of panic, comes on the line. If asked, the operator explains there's serious trouble in Oak Park, and all units have been dispatched to the location.

A Different Call

If the PCs have alienated Marjorie de Wolf, or she has no means of getting ahold of them, she doesn't call. Instead, the superheroes receive news of the attack from Detective Ray Marlowe, who suggests they move quickly to assist local law enforcement.

Suburban Hell

As the PCs near the scene, read the following:

THE VILLAINS' TACTICS

The accompanying map notes the starting positions of the villains and innocents. If you includes a pair of lesser demons in this encounter, they act as Talisman's entourage, and perform similar acts of destruction.

Soliloquy

At the beginning of the fight, the Black Paladin makes the following speech. He hopes to deceive the PCs into thinking Marjorie de Wolf is the sole reason for this attack.

The Black Paladin gestures toward Marjorie de Wolf. "This peasant has stolen that which is rightfully mine. As in olden times, strength of arms will determine which of us has the right to claim her soul. By craven ambush, you dogs saved her once. But you only postponed the inevitable."

Lady Crow (DEX 26)

Unless stopped, Lady Crow kills the paramedic. She and the paramedic occupy the same hex. If attacked at range, she Dives For Cover by flying straight up 2". She intends for the PC's attack

When you near Marjorie's home, you see plumes of smoke drifting into the night sky, and an orange glow just over the horizon. Coming closer, you see the tops of burning houses and hear the blare of sirens. Judging from the smoldering squad cars and injured officers littering the street, the police have been on the scene for a while.

As you take in the destruction, Talisman, circling above Marjorie's home, causes the roof of a neighbor's house to explode in flames. A family runs out the front door, and then smoldering embers and burning wood crash down on the fleeing residents — a husband, wife, and their teen-age daughter. Sneering, Talisman swoops toward the family, flames flickering from the fingertips of her outstretched hand.

Across the street, a fire engine lays on its side, its front end crumpled by a collision with a large oak tree. The noise of its sirens has ceased, but the lights still spin blue and red. In the churning light, you can see the Gryphon standing over the bodies of wounded firemen. One fireman stands with his back against the oak tree. Armed with an axe, he bravely defends an injured co-worker. The Gryphon shrieks, spreads his wings, and tenses to spring.

Nearby is an ambulance. Around the emergency vehicle, the injured lay moaning in pain and fear. Several of the injured are paramedics, their bodies gouged and scratched. Lady Crow crouches over the last of the paramedics, who begs for his life. She draws back her clawed hand and prepares to strike.

Frightened screams draw your eyes away from Lady Crow. A pack of demon hounds, bloody slaver dripping from their scorched maws, have cornered three children against a wooden fence. One hound howls. Spreading into a half-circle, the hounds approach the children. The oldest — a girl who can't be more than nine years old — stands in front of her siblings. She swings a baseball bat wildly in front of her.

At the center of it all, in front of Marjorie's home, is the Black Paladin. He sits astride a huge demonic stallion, a lance held upright in his hand, as spotlights from squad cars shine on him. Behind him, Marjorie's mother lays motionless in the grass. Kneeling in front of him, Marjorie holds her hands over her eyes, and her shoulders heave.

In a voice loud enough to be heard over the screams, shrieks, and sirens, the Black Paladin commands: "Look behind you, Marjorie de Wolf. Your champions have finally arrived to do battle for your soul."

TACTICS FOR THE BLACK PALADIN AND DARKLING

Below are listed two tactics, used by the Black Paladin while mounted on Darkling.

1. Darkling Holds his Action until the Black Paladin's Phase. On his Phase, the Black Paladin Teleports 3" behind an opponent and Holds his Half Phase Action. This Triggers Darkling's Teleport (a Zero-Phase Action). Darkling performs a Full Move, accelerating to his full movement of 15". At the end of Darkling's move, the Black Paladin takes his Half Phase Action with a Move Through, using the Lance Of Unvanquished Pain. He gains a bonus to his damage based on Darkling's velocity. The entire sequence of Actions takes place on the Black Paladin's DEX of 24, since Darkling has Lightning Reflexes with a Full Move.

2. On the Segment before the Black Paladin's next Phase, Darkling rears up on his back legs, preparing a Haymaker with his Flaming Hooves. The Black Paladin, on his Phase, makes a Half Move Teleport behind an opponent. This Triggers Darkling's Teleport (a Zero-Phase Action) and does not interrupt Darkling's preparation for the Haymaker. The Black Paladin Holds his remaining Half Phase Action until Darkling's Haymaker. They Coordinate Attacks, using Teamwork to try to strike at the same time. At your discretion, the first time they try this they both gain a bonus to OCV for a Surprise Move, as per page 252 of *HERO System Fifth Edition*.

to hit (and likely kill) the paramedic. If she knows there's no chance for the attack to hit the paramedic, she simply Dodges.

If Lady Crow has her Action before any of the PCs, they deserve at least one chance to keep her from murdering the paramedic. Have her pause to savor her victim's terror. In game terms, she Holds her Action so that she acts at the same time as the fastest PC.

The Black Paladin (DEX 24)

The Black Paladin Holds his Action, waiting for Marjorie to flee, so he can run her down from behind. When she does flee, he lowers his Lance, puts spurs to Darkling, and performs a Move Through on her.

If a PC attempts to rescue Marjorie, the Black Paladin attacks that PC instead.

The Black Paladin wears Chantal's dagger sheathed on his hip. It counts as an OIF for purposes of snatching it away. If he knows a PC has a way to get the dagger from him in combat (such as Teleportation, Usable As Attack), the Black Paladin conceals the dagger on his person; otherwise he wears it openly.

The Gryphon (DEX 23)

The Gryphon kills the fireman holding the axe unless a PC gets in the way or attacks him. If so, he attacks the PC by performing a Move Through. (Don't forget to use his Levels with Flight to increase his acceleration if necessary.) If the PC is too distant to attack with a Move Through, the Gry-

phon kills the fireman. If a Mental Attack triggers his Berserk, he kills the fireman.

Once the Gryphon engages a PC, he keeps fighting that PC until he defeats the hero, or the hero defeats him. If he wins, he moves on to another hero.

Talisman (DEX 20)

If attacked, Talisman turns away from the family fleeing the burning house and concentrates on her attacker. If she can catch both her attacker and the fleeing innocents in the Explosion of her Hellfire Gate, she does so.

Darkling (DEX 20)

Darkling Holds his Action. When commanded to by the Black Paladin, he closes the distance between them and Marjorie. You may want to review the rules for mounted movement on pages 241-42 of the *HERO System 5th Edition*. For faster play, you may find it easier to simply think of Darkling as an extension of the Black Paladin (the demon steed moves when the Black Paladin would, its movement replacing his own; riding has no effect on his CV).

Chantal (DEX 17)

Chantal uses her Ward From Harm to protect the Black Paladin. She is probably familiar with the PCs' abilities by now, so she allocates the points in the Force Field to best counter likely attacks from the PCs.

Demon Hounds (DEX 17)

If attacked from behind, all of the demon hounds but one turn to face their attacker. The one demon hound attacks the children (and will make short work of them, basically killing one child a Phase).

If a PC interposes himself between the children and the demon hounds, the infernal canines attack both him and the children, unless he can somehow prevent the demon hounds from getting past him. Two PCs working together have little trouble keeping the demon hounds away from the children.

Murder Of Crows (DEX 14)

If the paramedic still lives, Lady Crow commands her crows to kill him. Otherwise, they engulf Lady Crow's attacker in Darkness.

Marjorie De Wolf (DEX 8)

Marjorie takes a Half Phase to stand up, then moves 3" toward the nearest PC. At which point, Darkling makes a Full Move, and the Black Paladin performs a Move Through on her. Unless a PC acts to save her, Marjorie probably dies at this point. Be sure to make the description of her death gruesome, since the Black Paladin has waited to make her death all the more traumatic for the PCs. A Presence Attack with a modifier of +2d6 is appropriate.

SAVING LIVES

When it comes to saving the lives of innocents, give the PCs the benefit of the doubt. After all, saving lives is what heroes are for! Even if an action seems unlikely, or slightly beyond the scope of a Power or Skill, give the character some leeway. For these kinds of actions, the guidelines established for "Appropriate Unlikely Actions" on page 35 of *Champions* are a good rule of thumb.

That being said, attacking a villain is *not* the same as rescuing a hostage. If, rather than removing an innocent from harm's way, the PC attempts to "remove the harm," all rules apply and let the chips fall where they may.

Depending on the tone and morality of the campaign, you may want to give the PCs several chances to rescue people; or choose to reduce Experience Point awards for hostages killed due to the PCs' negligence.

THE BLACK PALADIN FAILS TO SEIZE THE PERFECT VESSEL

If the Black Paladin fails to seize the perfect vessel before or during *Ruse de Guerre*, he still retreats to the Delacroix Mansion. He has grown weary of feints and ruses. His failure has left him consumed by a dark rage, a rage only increased by Chantal's oft-repeated desire for a body. He swears to vanquish the do-gooders who have thwarted him, once and for all.

The next day the PCs receive a message written on a small piece of vellum in florid script, delivered by a crow. In the message, the Black Paladin demands the PCs meet him at the Delacroix Mansion. Each day they delay, he threatens to kill an innocent at random.

Alternately, if you think you can salvage the situation by having the Black Paladin wait and make another attempt to seize the perfect vessel, do so.

ENDING THE FIGHT

If he slays Marjorie, the Black Paladin turns his attention to either the leader of the PCs, or the perfect vessel. He performs a Move Through with his Lance, then uses Crusher Of Hope in HTH Combat, ordering Darkling to attack with his Flaming Hooves. If possible, they use Coordinated Attacks (see sidebar).

Once he dispatches the team leader, the Black Paladin either attacks the perfect vessel or departs to seize the NPC who is the perfect vessel (if he has not done so already).

As long as he has a chance to capture the perfect vessel, the Black Paladin remains in the fight. Otherwise, he slays Marjorie, the PC rescue her, or the PCs' attacks reduce him to half his starting STUN, he leaves the battle (Darkling goes with him). If the perfect vessel is an NPC and he doesn't have her yet, he goes immediately to seize her while the PCs fight his retainers.

Any other villain not engaged by a PC continues to terrorize innocents or comes to the aid of a fellow villain. Only Talisman retreats if overwhelmed; the others stay to fight, only leaving if all the PCs are Knocked Out, or at your discretion.

More Victims

During the battle, the residents of the normally quiet suburban community stay in their homes, praying for safety. If the PCs leave the villains to their own devices, they begin to go inside the homes, looking for more victims. More police officers eventually arrive on the scene, and they too become victims of the rampage. Finally, more firemen and paramedics arrive on the scene. They can only do their jobs if the PCs protect them. You can use this tactic to give the Black Paladin an opportunity to escape (as well as time to seize the perfect vessel, if she is an NPC not yet in his possession).

Note: Having police, paramedics, and firemen arrive during the course of the battle provides an interesting wrinkle to the encounter, since the PCs not only have to fight the villains, but also help paramedics get the injured out of harm's way, help firemen put out the fires, and so on. But it can complicate your job too, since it adds more elements to the battle. If you don't want to risk slowing down the fight, don't have more NPCs arrive.

Success!

If the Black Paladin abducts the perfect vessel and leaves the field of battle, a woman's fading laughter, full of spite and malevolent satisfaction, marks his departure.

Uh-oh

If the PCs are over-matched, even after the Black Paladin departs, have Talisman and Lady Crow leave. Any villains who depart the battle rendezvous later with the Black Paladin at the Delacroix Mansion. Also, as police officers continue to arrive on the scene during the fight, they can help the superheroes defeat the villains if necessary.

If The Perfect Vessel Is An NPC

If the perfect vessel is an NPC, and the Black Paladin leaves in mid-battle to abduct her, the PCs receive a call after the battle. The call could come from Det. Marlowe or many other people, depending on who the perfect vessel is and whether the PCs have Secret Identities.

The call informs the PCs that the Black Paladin has just abducted another victim... and this victim is well known to them! The true purpose behind the Black Paladin's *ruse de guerre* should now become crystal-clear to the superheroes.

TO THE MANSION!

The Black Paladin, even if he fails to seize the perfect vessel for Chantal's shade, retreats to the Delacroix Mansion. The PCs should learn of his destination immediately after *Ruse de Guerre*, and the action move quickly from the northern suburb to the mansion.

The PCs can learn about the Black Paladin's whereabouts in several ways:

- In Act Two, the PCs might have determined that the Delacroix Mansion is a nexus of evil power. If this is the case, they likely guess the Black Paladin has gone there to complete the Ritual of Rebirth.
- If the PCs capture Talisman during *Ruse de Guerre*, she tells the PCs his whereabouts if questioned, laughing maliciously all the while.
- If the PCs capture and release Gryphon or Lady Crow, the villain flies directly to the mansion. The PCs can follow the villain there. (Depending on the circumstances, they may also be able to follow Black Paladin.)
- If the perfect vessel is an NPC, the PC closest to her receives a visitation from her spirit, which Chantal's shade has driven out of her body. The NPC's spirit is inarticulate with pain and sorrow, but an image of the mansion fills the PC's mind. The ghostly form of Chantal towers over the mansion, laughing wickedly.
- The local sheriff's department has kept an eye on the Delacroix Mansion since the events in Act One. The PCs can receive a call informing them that the Black Paladin has shown up there. Of course, they only get this call just in time to get there to stop the Ritual....

THE DELACROIX MANSION



The mansion and grounds have greatly changed since the PCs' last visit to the place. Ecstatic at being so near her resurrection, Chantal's shade has worked the spirits who haunt the place into a frenzy. The evil of the mansion manifests, becoming a palpable thing.

The trees seem stunted and twisted. From the forest come strange noises never made by mortal beast. The mansion's bricks are the color of dried blood, and the limestone is the stained yellow of old bones. Lights — sometimes from candles, sometimes electric bulbs — flicker on in the mansion's windows, shine briefly, and then go out. Beyond the mansion, angry waters wrack Lake Erie's shallow gray waters.

Inside the mansion, any damage done during Act One has mysteriously been repaired. Ample evidence of hauntings confronts the PCs — they encounter ghosts at every turn. In addition to the manifestations provided with the descriptions of appropriate rooms (which, at this point in *Shades Of Black*, all the PCs can see), the ghosts "interact" with the PCs in three other ways.

Walls And Windows

Ghosts are creatures of habit. They do not appreciate superheroes busting through windows or teleporting through walls — all who enter the mansion must use the doors, as the ghosts themselves did when they were alive.

When a PC is on the verge of going through a wall or window (even in the case of Knockback or other, unintentional movement), gray mists instantly swirl before him, guarding the threatened section of wall. Effectively, the section of wall has the following Power:

Ghostly Protection: *Force Wall* (10 PD/10 ED; 2" long and 2" high), *Affects Desolidified* (+½), *Cannot Be Escaped With Teleportation* (+¼), *Reduced Endurance* (0 END; +½). Total cost: 121 points.

Ghostly Deathtraps

If the PCs attempt to interfere with a ghost as it goes about its haunting, this "show of disrespect" enrages the spirits. In their rage, they inflict a deathtrap on the PCs. Use the traps detailed on pages 121-122 of *Champions*, but adjust the special effects to reflect the "ghostly" nature of the trap. For instance, Sandblaster Of The Gods becomes ghosts using TK to assault the PCs, and the RKA is shards of plates, silverware, and furniture hurled at the group at incredible velocities.

A Hint Of The Black Paladin's Location

While the PCs move through the mansion, they hear an indistinct murmuring, as if an invisible audience is whispering to each other behind raised hands. If the PCs pause to listen, or one of them has Enhanced Perception that applies to the Hearing Group, the conversation becomes intelligible:

"One of us is reborn."

"How can it be? Where? Where has this happened?"

"Deep down. Down below. She is reborn, to haunt the world."

Read the text in your best spooky voice. "Down below" refers to the crypt where the Black Paladin lurks. If Chantal is *not* reborn when the PCs arrive, change "is" to "will be", and "has... happened" to "will... happen" in the dialogue above. Ghosts throughout the mansion repeat the conversation; the words never vary.

The Grounds

The Delacroix estate occupies 80 acres of forested woodland containing mainly beech and oak trees. Underbrush, new growth, and saplings choke the uncultivated woods. Travel in the woodlands is difficult, since the only trails are those made by deer and other large animals.

Manifestation: If the PCs leave the road leading to the mansion and travel in the woodlands, they hear strange noises in the distance. As time passes, the noises grow steadily louder. It sounds like crunching leaves, pained chitters, and tortured howls. No matter where the PCs move in the forest, the noises seem to follow. Finally, the phantoms of animals burst into sight — first rodents and other small beasts, then larger ones, like deer and wolves. All of the phantoms are mutilated: some are flayed, others seem to have every bone in their body broken. The animals run, stumble, and drag themselves around and through the PCs' feet. Once all the phantoms have passed, a man emerges from the forest, chasing after the animals. He has wild black hair and a beard matted with blood. He wears an untanned hide still dripping with blood and fat. He ignores the PCs and continues to chase the animals.

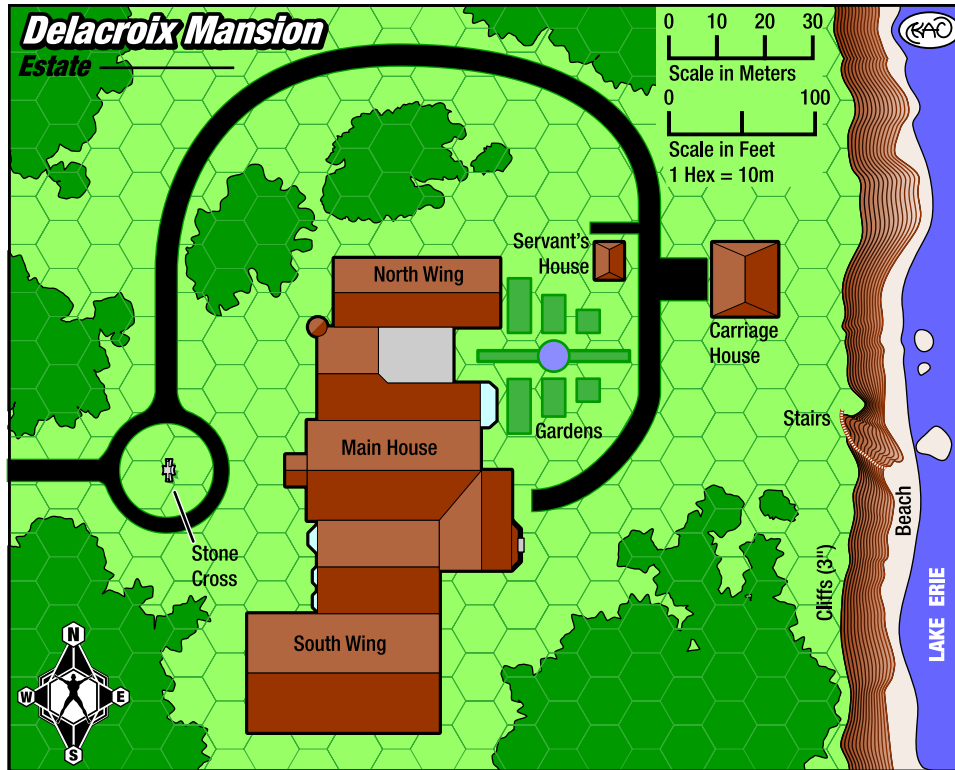
OTHER AMBUSHES

You can stage other ambushes of the PCs as they explore the mansion if you like. Lady Crow knows of the secret passages and can make use of them when attacking the group, or the Black Paladin and Chantal could send demons to make a sneak attack.

If the PCs enter the mansion from some place other than the main hall, the Gryphon and Lady Crow track them down and attack — even if it means attacking the PCs once they've discovered the crypt and are fighting the Black Paladin.

OTHER MANIFESTATIONS

Several of the room descriptions include details about ghosts and their hauntings. If you like, make up your own ghosts and hauntings, and add them to the ones presented here.



The Lakeshore

Much of the 80 acres lies along the shore of Lake Erie. The shore nearest the mansion is bordered by 3" high granite cliffs. Below the cliffs is a narrow strand, strewn with pebbles worn smooth by erosion. A wooden stairway in need of repair leads down from the cliffs to the shore. The water is shallow, and at low tide, mossy boulders emerge from the lake.

To the south, concealed by some tumbled boulders, is a narrow cave. The cave goes back two meters, then makes a sharp turn to the north, traveling for another meter before ending. A steel door is set in the ground at the termination of the cave. The door opens to reveal a passage which runs to the cellar below the main house. Prior to Act Three, sediment and fallen stone cover the steel door.

Daniel FitzDougal constructed the passage in the early 1920s. He used it primarily to transport illicit alcohol from the shore to the house.

Manifestation: Eleven ghosts, dressed in the style of nineteenth century seamen, are spiked side by side to the granite cliff. Iron spikes are driven through the wrists of their outstretched arms. In chilling silence, the men struggle weakly to pull themselves off the spikes, but never succeed.

The Carriage House

Located to the northeast of the mansion, the carriage house is a single story building, approximately 1.5" high. The current carriage house was built in 1922 by FitzDougal, and renovated during the fifties by Alvin Williamson. It has a single entrance, and enough space inside for eight cars, four to either side.

The Servants' House

Located near the carriage house is the servants'

house. The house originally served as a residence for up to three live-in servants. Renovated in 1986, it now has a single bedroom and ample living space for one person. Evelyn Neumann resided here while employed as a nanny and tutor by the Brownings. A secret passage runs from the basement to the study in the main house (Main House, First Floor, Room 4). Vincent Browning used this passage for his nocturnal visits to Neumann.

The house has two stories. The ground floor includes a living room, dining room, and kitchen. Upstairs is an office, sitting room, bedroom, and full bath. An incinerator of corroded black metal — the same one used by Evelyn Neumann to dispose of bodies — squats in one corner of the unfinished basement.

Manifestation: Blood saturates the carpets downstairs, and the PCs can see blood slowly bubbling up from under the baseboard. Pained moans come from upstairs. In the bedroom, the ghost of Evelyn Neumann paces

the room. Seemingly from nowhere, a man's voice speaks. To the ghost, the voice describes gruesome murder scenes in excruciating detail. As the voice speaks, sometimes the flicker of a smile crosses Neumann's face; other times, she lets out a tortured moan.

The Mansion

For some floors, *Shades Of Black* includes two sets of maps. One map is for you, the other for the players. The GM's map shows the location of secret doors and passages; the players' does not. The PCs can obtain the maps in Act Two while investigating the Delacroix Mansion; make a photocopy of the players' maps and provide them to the players as a handout. The PCs *cannot* obtain a map of the basement level from public records.

Unless otherwise noted, the ceilings are approximately 2" high. All of the windows have drapes: both a thin white curtain, and a curtain of heavier fabric. The interior walls are plaster or wood paneling, and have DEF 3, BODY 3. Pocket doors are approximately 1" wide, and have DEF 1, BODY 3.

On the maps, rooms labeled "B" are bathrooms. Unless otherwise noted, a bathroom consists of a sink, mirror, and toilet.

Secret Doors

Discovering the secret doors and hidden panels in the mansion requires a successful Concealment roll made by -3 or more. (If none of the PCs have the Skill *Concealment*, you may want to substitute a PER Roll.) Furthermore, the PC cannot discover the door simply by walking past it. The player must say his character is searching for a secret door and tell you where he is searching.

Enhanced or unusual Senses, like N-Ray Perception or Spatial Awareness, might also help a PC find the secret doors.

MAIN HOUSE, FIRST FLOOR

The first floor of the main house is mainly devoted to living and recreational areas.

1. Foyer

The two outside doors, which serve as the main entrance for the mansion, lead into the foyer. Along the north wall are a table and two closets. On the south wall hangs an oil painting of the mansion as seen from Lake Erie. Hidden behind the south wall is a small room reached by a ladder which leads down to a passage. The passage leads to the study (Main House, First Floor, Room 4). Once a peephole looked out from the room into the foyer, but it's since been plastered over.

2. Main Hall

The ceiling of the main hall is 4" high. The main hall extends over the foyer, and two long windows look out to the west, providing good light in the evening. A crystal chandelier hangs from the ceiling. Two stairs, one against the north wall and one against the south, lead up to a landing and the second floor. The landing is open and looks out onto the main hall. The floor and stairs are marble. The banister, handrail, and other fixtures are cherry. Three sets of double doors — one each to the north, east, and south — lead from the main hall.

From the eastern set of doors, a short hallway runs under the landing. In the north and south walls of the hallway are panels. Each panel opens by pivoting at its center, and is weighted to close on its own. The passage behind the northern panel leads to the butler's room (Main House, First Floor, Room 8). The passage behind the southern panel leads to a hall, which provides access to the drawing room (Main House, First Floor, Room 9), gallery (Main House, 1st floor, Room 10), and the two bathrooms attached to that suite of rooms. The servants' passages were intended to allow servants quick and unobtrusive access to public areas of the house. They're not shown on the players' map. Alvin Williamson bribed officials to replace the original maps with ones that didn't show the servants' passages.

Manifestation: In 1909, Louis Delacroix hung himself from the second floor landing. The PCs can see his ghost in the same position, his feet dangling several inches above the floor, his face distorted from strangulation. Every couple of minutes, the ghost's mouth and jaw begin to work. Finally, the ghost spits out a gold coin. The coin tumbles to the floor, clattering loudly, and then disappears.

Ambush: If the Gryphon and Lady Crow remain free after *Ruse de Guerre*, they ambush the PCs in the main hall. Lady Crow lurks in the space above the foyer, and the Gryphon stands atop the landing. If, during the fight, any character disturbs the ghost of Louis Delacroix in any way (even involuntarily), a ghostly deathtrap affects everyone in the room.

3. Library

The library is open to the second floor, with a 4" high ceiling. Floor-to-ceiling bookshelves line the east, south, and west walls. Each wall has a wheeled ladder that slides from side to side on tracks, providing access to upper shelves. In the north wall, two pocket doors slide back and lead into the study. Above the doors, the second floor library (Main House, Second Floor, Room 1) looks out onto this room.

The Randolphs were not avid readers, and many of the books on the shelves are from previous occupants of the Delacroix Mansion, mainly the collections of Phoebe Moore-Browning and Vincent Browning. The Randolphs were conscientious enough to remove volumes of questionable content.

4. Study

The study is paneled in dark wood. Near the west wall is a large mahogany desk where Eliot Randolph kept track of his extensive finances. On the desk is a computer and phone. Against the west wall, behind the desk, is a mahogany file cabinet with two drawers. The drawers contain financial statements and other documents pertaining to the Randolphs' fortune. In the northeast corner is a chair, divan, and table. In the south wall are pocket doors which open into the first floor library. In the northwest corner, a spiral staircase leads up to the second floor library (Main House, Second Floor, Room 1). At the base of the stair, a concealed door is set in the wall. The door pivots to reveal a staircase leading down (Basement, Room 3). Hidden latches at the top and bottom secure the door. If examined from the outside, the turret containing the stairway has two narrow windows which are not visible from the inside and reveal the existence of the stair leading down.

Manifestation: Vincent Browning sits at the desk. Open in front of him is a copy of *Gray's Anatomy*. A scalpel and a butcher knife rest on the desk beside the book. Calmly, he flips through the pages. After ten minutes or so, he stands, picks up the scalpel and knife, and exits the room through the secret panel leading to the stairs going down.

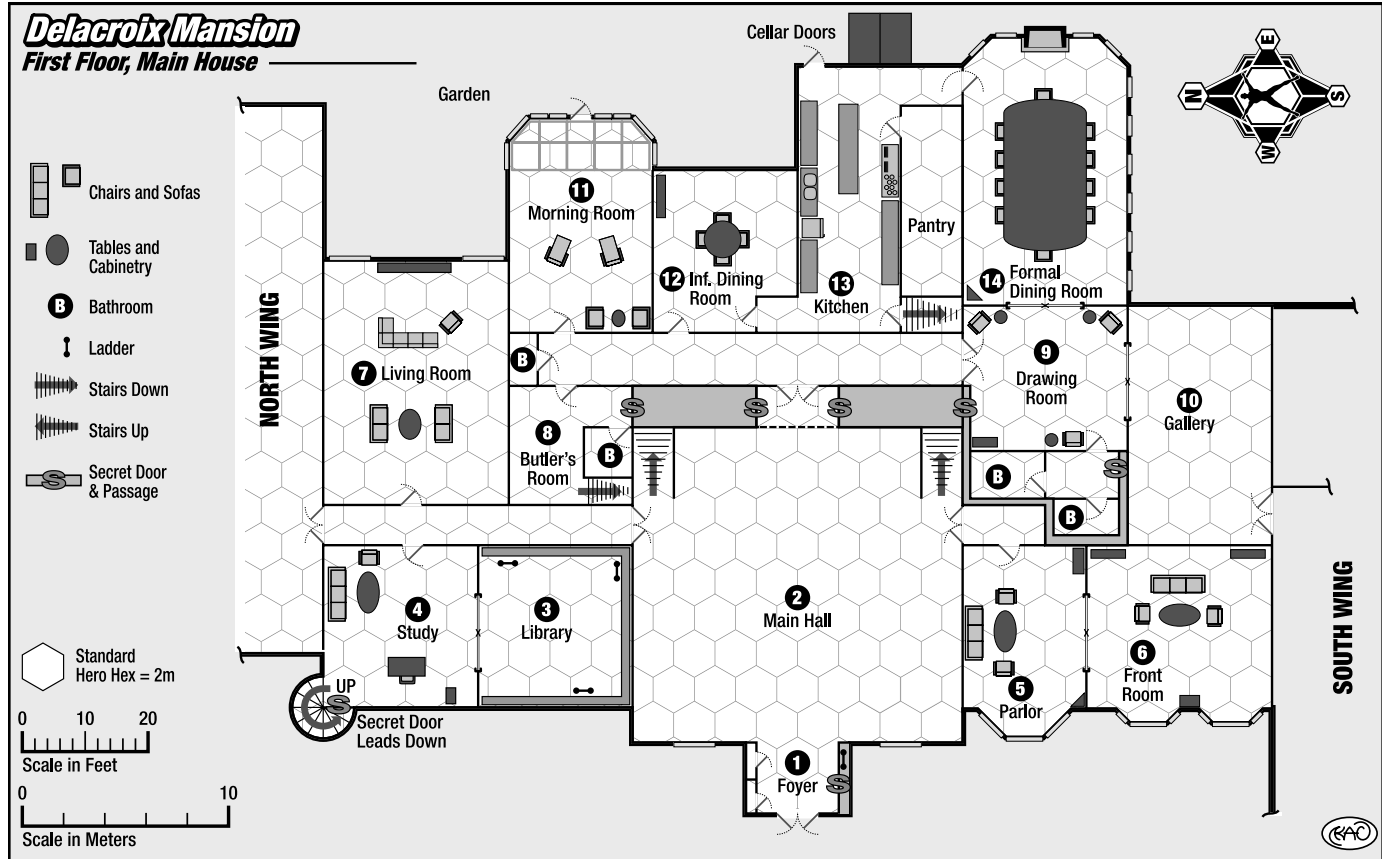
5. Parlor

Used for politely entertaining visitors who are not intimates of the family, this room is decorated and furnished in the Victorian style. The floor is carpeted with a Persian rug, primarily burgundy in color. The wallpaper has an ornate green and white pattern comprised mainly of vertical elements. The room contains two armchairs and a sofa placed around an oval, marble-topped coffee table. In one corner, standing on a triangular table, is a small statue of St. Peter. In the other corner is a bureau containing decorative plates. Two pocket doors lead to the front room (Main House, First Floor, Room 6).

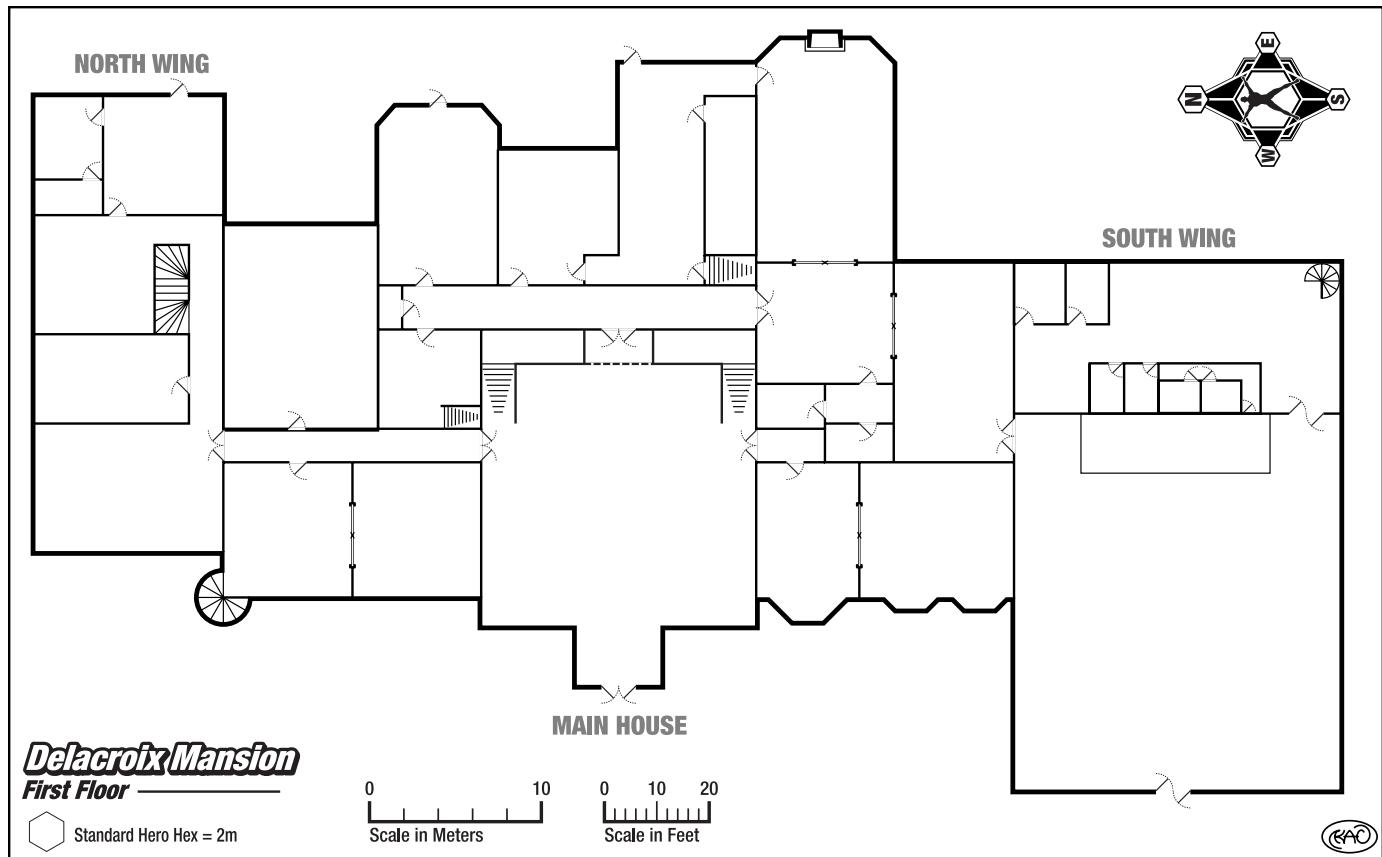
6. Front Room

Like the parlor, this room is also done in the Victorian style. It has the same style of rug and wallpaper. In the center of the room are a sofa and a coffee table set between two armchairs. The sofa faces an ornate cabinet with cursive legs placed

FIRST FLOOR, GM'S MAP



FIRST FLOOR, PLAYER'S MAP



against the wall between the two bay windows. Inside the cabinet is a television. Against the east wall are two bureaus. On the bureaus' shelves are many framed photographs of the Randolphs, their friends, and family. The bureaus' drawers contain correspondence, mainly from religious organizations and friends. The Randolphs kept potted plants in the window seats of the bay windows; by Act Three, the plants have begun to wilt from lack of care. Two pocket doors in the north wall lead to the parlor (Main House, First Floor, Room 5).

7. Living Room

The living room is done in modern décor. The floor is carpeted with an off-white, shortweave material. The walls are paneled in maple. Against the east wall is a large entertainment center with flat screen TV, DVD player, and stereo; the room has surround sound. To either side of the entertainment center are long windows. In front of the entertainment center is a sectional black leather couch and a recliner. In the western half of the room is a glass coffee table set between two love seats. The Randolphs used this part of the room for listening to music or just relaxing. A door in the west wall leads out to the hallway.

8. Butler's Room

For most of the Delacroix Mansion's history, this room has served as quarters for the butler. The Randolphs did not have a live-in servant, and had not decided what to do with this windowless room. The room has its own bathroom with toilet and half-bath. In the southwest corner of the room, behind a narrow door, a stair leads down to the cellar. In the southeast corner, a wall panel provides access to the servants' passage which runs under the second floor landing and into the main hall (Main House, First Floor, Room 2).

9. Drawing Room

Mansion owners used this room for formal dinner parties, or receptions too small for the ballroom. Pocket doors open up into the formal dining room (Main House, First Floor, Room 14) in the east, and the gallery (Main House, First Floor, Room 10) in the south. Either one or both sets of doors are left open as appropriate to the occasion. A third door in the west wall leads to a short hallway and two bathrooms. In three corners of the room are armchairs and small tables. In the northwest corner is a liquor cabinet and bar. The Randolphs didn't drink, so the only liquor in the cabinet is wine (which they kept on hand for guests). Near the double doors leading to the hallway is a pivoting panel used by servants to come and go from the room unobtrusively.

10. Gallery

This room has beige walls and hardwood floors. Pocket doors in the north wall lead into the drawing room (Main House, First Floor, Room 9). Recessed lighting provides appropriate illumination for the paintings hanging on the walls. The Randolphs have hung paintings of landscapes and Christian scenes. Most of the pieces are by local artists; a few are landscapes purchased on the

couple's trips abroad. Double doors in the south wall lead to the ballroom (South Wing).

Manifestation: The nerve center of Jebediah Stowe's plot, Project Tree of Liberty, was located here. It was also the location of the final showdown between Stowe and the Scarlet Shield, so the ghost of Stowe haunts the place. The gallery is filled with strange ghostly machinery that crackles with electricity. If a PC with appropriate Skills examines the machinery, he knows it could not possibly function. Stowe moves from control panel to control panel, twisting dials and cackling insanely.

11. Morning Room

Linda Randolph was an avid gardener, so she converted this room into a small conservatory. The eastern section of the room, which extends out onto the patio, is all glass and filled with plants. Near the center of the room are two chaise lounges. A small white table with two simple wooden chairs also occupies the room. A single door leads to the hallway. A door in the north leads outside to the patio.

12. Informal Dining Room

This room is where residents of the Delacroix Mansion have their day to day meals. A round dinner table and four chairs, all black with gold trim, occupy the center of the room. A cabinet against the north wall holds china. One door leads to the kitchen; the other to the hallway.

13. Kitchen

The kitchen of the Delacroix Mansion, roomy and wholly modern, has a gas stove, large refrigerator, and microwave. There is plenty of counter and storage space; and a long kitchen island fills the center of the room. In the south wall are two doors. The eastern door leads to a walk-in pantry with floor-to-ceiling shelves. The second door opens to a stairway leading down to the cellar. One short hall leads south to a swinging door and the formal dining room (Main House, First Floor, Room 14). The other hall leads north to a swinging door and the informal dining room (Main House, First Floor, Room 13). When originally built both halls had fire doors set at the end of the hall nearer the kitchen; but those doors have since been removed. The door in the east wall leads outside, and traditionally serves as the servant's entrance. It is also used for receiving deliveries.

14. Formal Dining Room

This room, carpeted in burgundy, is used for formal dinners. The oval table is oak, and can seat ten. In the northwest corner is a triangular cabinet with glass doors. Inside the cabinet are ceramic statuettes and plates. The eastern wall extends out from the room, to provide space for the fireplace in a style common to Victorian homes of the time. The fireplace and mantel are brick and limestone like the mansion itself; and the floor in the immediate vicinity of the fireplace is flagstone. Tall windows are set in the wall to either side of the fireplace, and also line the south wall. A small crystal

chandelier hangs from the ceiling of the room.

MAIN HOUSE, SECOND FLOOR

The 2nd floor of the main house is comprised mainly of bedrooms for the family.

1. Library

The southern part of this room ends in balustrade of mahogany, and looks out onto the first floor library. Short bookshelves line the other three walls. Like the first floor library, the books here are holdovers from occupants before the Randolphs. Above the bookshelves are windows. In the middle of the room is a square wooden table with two chairs. The turret stairway leads down to the study (Main House, First Floor, Room 4).

2. Bedroom

This room has a double bed, dresser, and small desk with a chair. The door in the east wall leads to a hallway, and two windows are set in the west wall. The room shares a full bath with the bedroom next door.

3. Bedroom

This bedroom has a double bed, dresser, and small sitting area with two chairs and a low table. The door in the east wall leads to a hallway, and three windows are set in the west wall. The room shares a full bath with the bedroom next door.

4. Balcony

The balcony looks out over the garden in back of the house. The sliding glass doors in the south lead to the sitting room (Main House, Second Floor, Room 8). The glass doors in the north lead to a hallway in the north wing (North Wing, Second Floor). A round metal table with a sunshade and four chairs is near the western wall. Two loungers are set near the eastern balustrade.

5. Bedroom

Furnished with a queen-sized bed, dresser, and armoire, this bedroom also has its own full bath. The door in the east wall opens to a hallway. Traditionally, this room served as the nursery. The wall-paper pattern is composed of red, blue, and green criss-crossing stripes.

6. Bedroom

This bedroom was used for storage by the Randolphs. It's filled with cardboard boxes and some furniture, as well as an unassembled bed, box-spring, and mattress.

7. Playroom

This room was intended as the playroom. The carpet is blue; the wallpaper a pattern composed of red, blue, and green criss-crossing stripes. Two windows are set in the east wall. The door in the north wall leads to the hallway. The room is currently empty.

8. Sitting Room

The sitting room is decorated in a contemporary style. A sofa is located under a large picture window, which looks out to the east. In front of the sofa is a coffee table, with armchairs at either end. In the northwest corner of the room is a writing

table and chair. The door in the south wall leads to the hallway. A glass sliding door in the north leads onto the balcony (Main House, Second Floor, Room 4), and pocket doors in the south open into the master bedroom (Main House, Second Floor, Room 9).

9. Master Bedroom

A king-size, canopied bed, set against the east wall, dominates this room. To either side of the bed are night tables and floor-to-ceiling windows. In each corner of the room, against the west wall, is an armchair. Between the chairs is a console table. On the table is a vase filled with wilted flowers, a framed photograph of the Randolphs on their wedding day, and other photographs of their family. Pocket doors in the north wall lead to the sitting room (Main House, Second Floor, Room 8). Two doors are set in the south wall. The eastern door leads to the lady's dressing room (Main House, Second Floor, Room 11). The western door leads to the husband's dressing room (Main House, Second Floor, Room 10). Against the wall, between the two doors is a wardrobe.

Manifestation: The ghost of Alvin X. Williamson haunts the master bedroom. Williamson stands in a corner, facing the bed. In one hand, he holds a flash bulb. He's bent over, with his head under a black cloth and his eye to a camera on a tripod. He motions with his free hand, making circles, wagging a finger, or gesturing to stop. At his bidding, the sheets and bedspread move and shift, though the bed is seemingly unoccupied.

10. Husband's Dressing Room

A long closet runs along the west wall. Against the east wall is a counter, made of white marble, with a sink and mirror. The sink has gold fixtures. A wall separates the room from the toilet and claw-footed bathtub. In the closet, behind a hidden panel, is a ladder leading down to the basement. The panel is secured by hidden latches at the top and bottom.

11. Lady's Dressing Room

A long closet runs along the east wall. Against the west wall is a counter, made of pink marble, with a sink and mirror. The sink has silver fixtures. A wall separates the room from the toilet and claw-footed bathtub.

12. Closet

The Randolphs used this room as a closet to store cleaning supplies, including a vacuum cleaner and mop. Near the back of the room, a panel is located in the ceiling. The panel pulls down, allowing access to the attic.

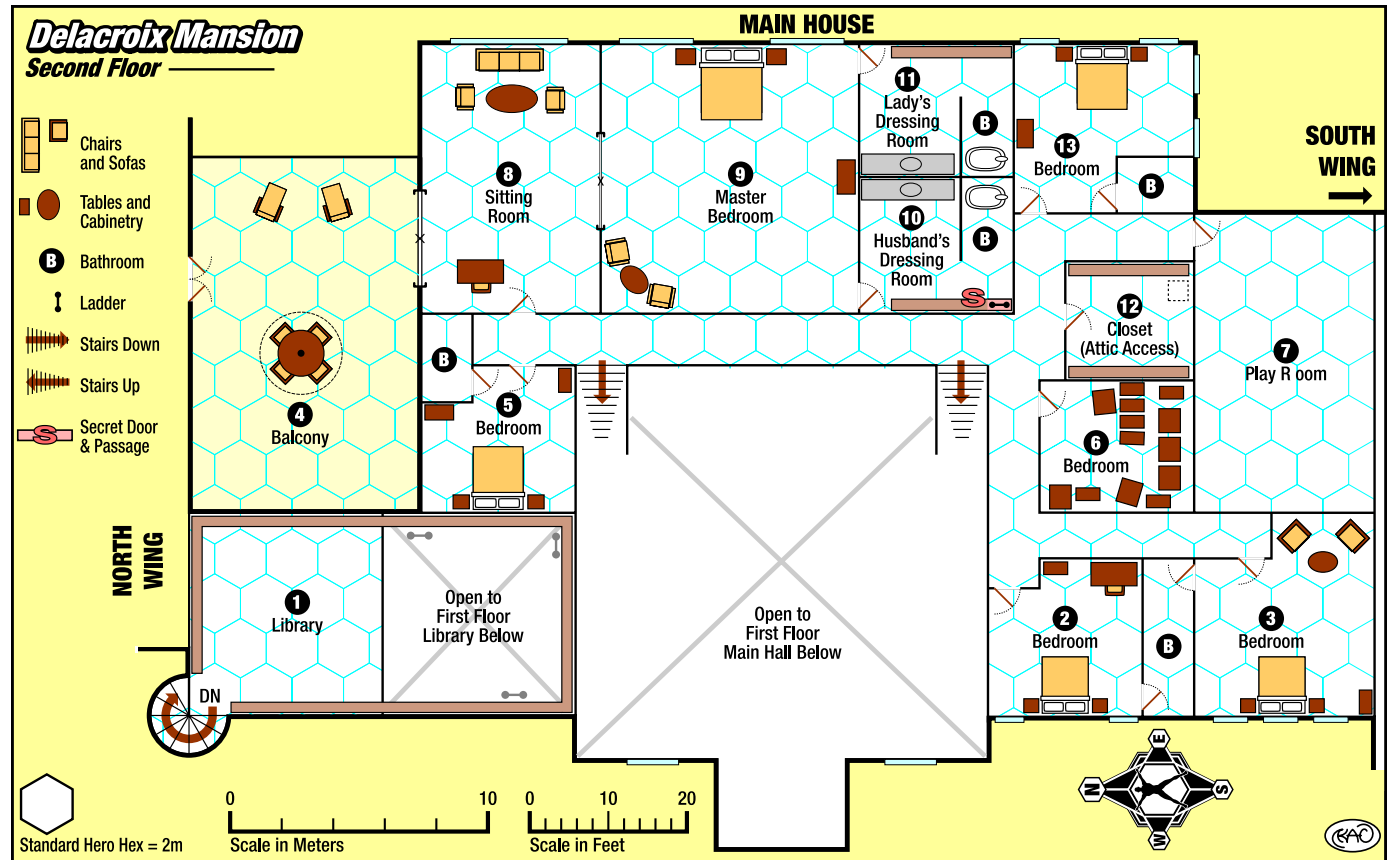
13. Bedroom

This bedroom is furnished with a queen-sized bed, dresser, and armoire. It has its own full bath. Two windows are set in the east and south walls. The door in the west leads to the hallway.

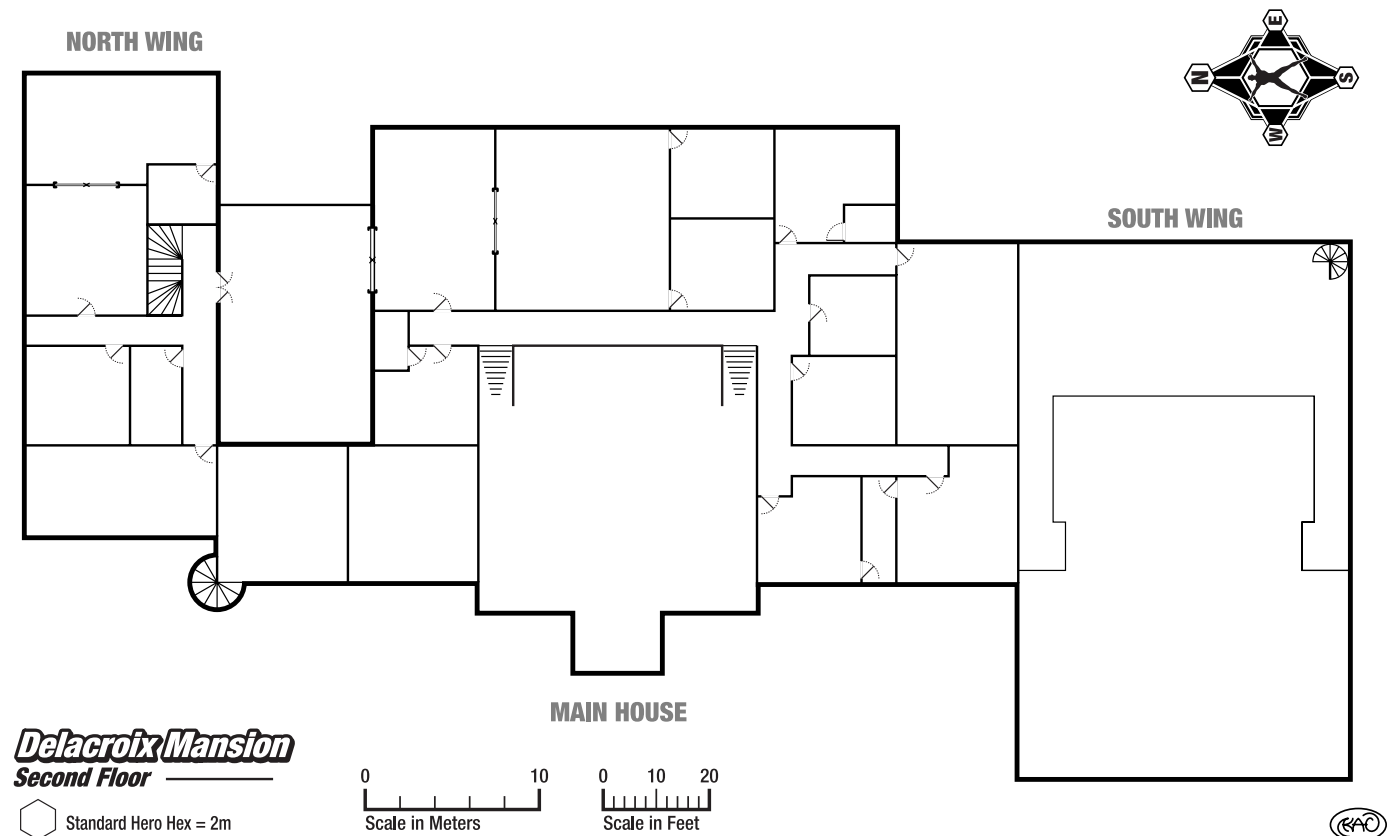
NORTH WING, FIRST FLOOR

The north wing is an apartment of rooms intended for the use of guests making an extended stay at the mansion. The wing is furnished as it

SECOND FLOOR, GM'S MAP



SECOND FLOOR, PLAYER'S MAP



THE PERFECT VESSEL IS A PLAYER CHARACTER

Players don't usually appreciate sudden and arbitrary changes to their characters. If a PC is the perfect vessel, and the Black Paladin has successfully captured that character, you're faced with a difficult situation. Here are two suggestions for handling the situation, and turning it to your advantage:

1. While the rest of the team travels to the Delacroix Mansion and explores the place, allow the PC to resist Chantal's Mind Control and attempt to break free of the Entangle caused by the Ritual of Rebirth (described on page 22). Obviously allowing an attempt every twelve seconds (one Turn) of game time isn't workable, so find a happy medium — maybe once every five or ten minutes of real time, depending on how quickly the rest of the PCs move through the adventure. Try to roleplay at least some of the attempts. Refer to Marjorie de Wolf's suppressed memory in Act Two for the location of the conflict. This is a dramatic moment — the superhero, at the mercy of the villains, bravely fending off the powerful magic of Chantal's shade, while her teammates race to the rescue — so you should make the most of it!

2. If the character, despite her best efforts, is transformed into Chantal, allow the player (if present) to run the witch in the final fight with the Black Paladin. At least this way, the player isn't sitting at the table with nothing to do. This requires some trust on your part. The player might be tempted to

Continued on page 60

was when Vincent Browning owned the mansion, although many of the more portable furnishings have been removed. The furniture in the wing is draped with white clothes. During the Randolph's occupancy, the north wing was cleaned by their maid service once a month, so the dust has been kept to a minimum.

The first floor of the north wing is comprised mainly of living quarters.

1. Front Room

This room has a couch, two easy chairs, and a coffee table. Against the east wall is an empty entertainment center. Two windows are set in the north wall; three are set in the west wall. The double doors lead to a hallway and the main house.

2. Study

This room was furnished so that a guest would have a place to work. It has a large desk, located near the north wall. In front of the desk are two leather couches, with a low coffee table between them. The floors are hardwood, and the walls are paneled. A door in the south wall leads to a hallway.

3. Dining Room

Normally, guests residing in the north wing would take their dinner with the family in the main house; but the wing was still provided with its own kitchen and dining room. This room has a rectangular dining table with six chairs. A door in the north wall leads to the kitchen (North Wing, First Floor, Room 5).

4. Servant's Room

If a guest had a servant who traveled with him, this room served as the servant's living quarters. It is currently unfurnished. It has its own sink, toilet, and half-bath. The door in the south wall leads to the kitchen (North Wing, First Floor, Room 5).

5. Kitchen

The kitchen has appliances modern for 1994. The door in the north leads to the servant's room (North Wing, First Floor, Room 4). The door in the east leads outside. The door in the west leads to the dining room (North Wing, First Floor, Room 3).

The south wall was erected in 1946 by Alvin Williamson. Behind it is a narrow space reached by a ladder from below. In the room is a mirror set at an angle. The mirror allows a person to look into the bedroom above (North Wing, Second Floor, Room 4). Additionally, the acoustics are such that sounds from the bedroom, even mumbled speech, are audible.

Manifestation: In the secret space behind the south wall, the PCs hear sleepy murmurs coming from the bedroom above. Different voices are audible, but they all speak of business matters, which would usually be considered confidential. In the dusty mirror, images flicker. The images show men — sometimes with their wives, sometimes without — tossing and turning in bed. While they sleep, their mouths move and they are obviously the source of the voices.

NORTH WING, SECOND FLOOR

The second floor of the north wing is comprised primarily of bedrooms.

1. Bedroom

This room is currently empty except for a large wardrobe set against the east wall. Three windows are set in the west wall; and two more in the north wall. The door in the east leads to the hallway.

2. Bedroom

This room has a double bed set against the west wall. There is a wardrobe against the south wall, and a dresser against the east one. Two windows look out to the north.

3. Sitting Room

This room has a couch and two chairs set around a coffee table. Hung over the couch is an oil painting done in a style reminiscent of Claude Monet. Pocket doors in the east lead to the bedroom (North Wing, Second Floor, Room 4). Three windows look to the north.

4. Bedroom

This is the largest bedroom in the north wing, intended as a sort of "master bedroom" for long-term guests. There are two windows set in the north wall, and three in the east. A queen-sized, four-poster bed is set against the south wall. A nightstand is set to either side of the bed. Also, there is a dressing table, two dressers, and wardrobe in the

RECOMMENDED READING

You may want to read up on the following rules before running the final fight. All page references are to *HERO System 5th Edition* unless otherwise noted.

Inability To Sense An Opponent on page 283. Chantal, when a shade, is invisible to most Senses.

Combat Skill Levels applied to damage on page 271. A PC, when attacking the shade of Chantal with the dagger, might wish to maximize the BODY damage done through use of CSLs.

Distributing Power Pool Points on page 209. Chantal must follow these guidelines to change the Powers in her VPP during the fight.

Example Powers for the *Vile Black Magic* VPP on pages 66 and 69 of *Shades Of Black*. You should also make up some more spells for Chantal, customized for maximum effectiveness against the PCs based on what she and the Black Paladin have learned during the course of the adventure.

Coordinated Attacks on page 249, and Multiple Attackers on page 251. Both the Demon Hounds, and the Black Paladin and Darkling, attempt to take advantage of these Combat Modifiers.

Grab (as used by creatures) on page 31 of the *HERO System Bestiary*, and the effects of being Grabbed on pages 256 and 257. The Demon Hounds attempt this tactic.

Disarm on page 256, Grab Weapon on page 257 (under the heading for Grab), and Grab By on page 257. The PCs need to perform one of these Maneuvers to remove the dagger from either the victim's hands, or Chantal's if she's reborn.

room. Pocket doors in the west lead to the sitting room (North Wing, Second Floor, Room 3). A door in southwest leads to a bathroom with a toilet, claw-footed tub, and two sinks. A sliding door separates the toilet and bathtub from the sinks.

SOUTH WING

The south wing of the Delacroix Mansion is devoted to the ballroom. When originally constructed, the ballroom was simply a large open space. In 1976, Phoebe Moore-Browning redesigned to the ballroom to make it more like a small club. A wall was erected separating 30 feet of the eastern part of the room from the ballroom proper. In the ballroom, a stage was built. Behind the stage were installed dressing rooms for those performing, as well as storage areas.

In the eastern section of the south wing, a bar was installed. The bar is black with a mahogany top. In the southeast corner of the bar, a wrought-iron spiral stair leads up to the second floor balcony. From the balcony, extending out into the ballroom, are two walkways. Each walkway ends in a box. The boxes provide seating which looks toward the stage.

Manifestation: The ballroom is transformed so that it appears as it did in 1934 during Severson's "Masque of the Red Death" masquerade. The room is carpeted in sable. All of the windows are fitted with panes of red stained glass. An immense ebony clock hangs on the east wall, its silver hands frozen at 11:59, its silver pendulum stopped in mid-swing. All of the guests are dressed in evening wear; and red masks (ranging from simple domino masks to more intricate creations with feathers and silver beading) cover their faces. The guests stand motionless. Severson works his way through the crowd, smiling and talking with his frozen guests. His eyes never leave the glasses of red wine held in their hands. Following behind him, a figure in red rags shambles along in silence.

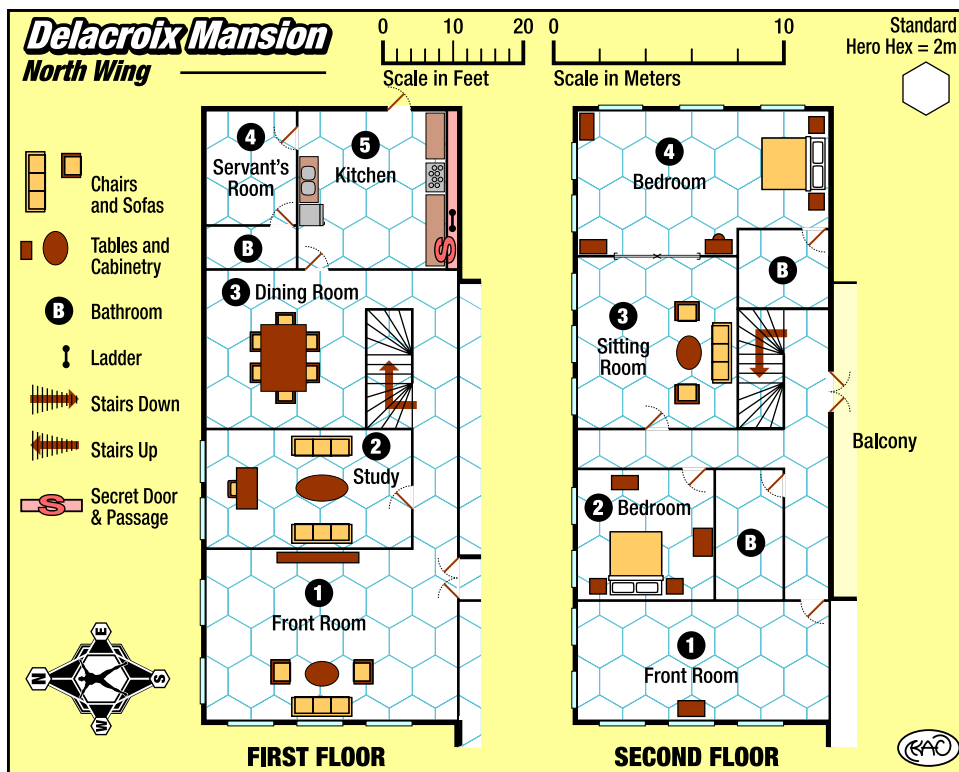
BASEMENT

The basement does not appear in any of the publicly-available maps of the Delacroix Mansion. The only way for the PCs to get one would be to explore it during Act One and draw their own by hand.

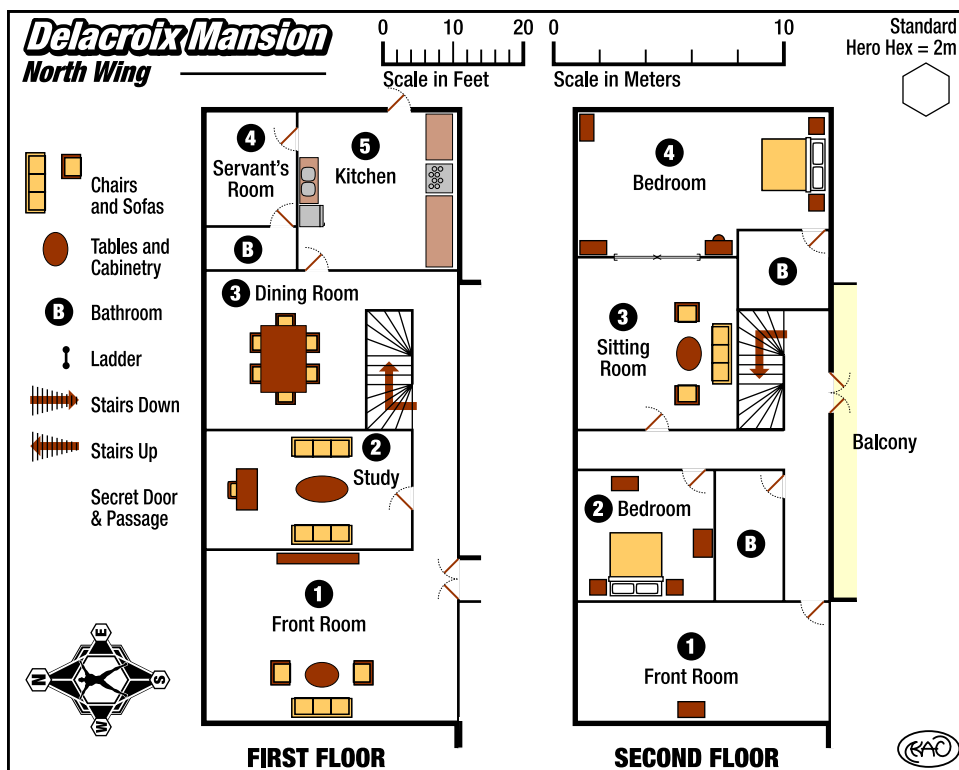
1. Cellar

The cellar is large, unfinished room with cement walls and floor. The ceiling is exposed

NORTH WING, GM'S MAP

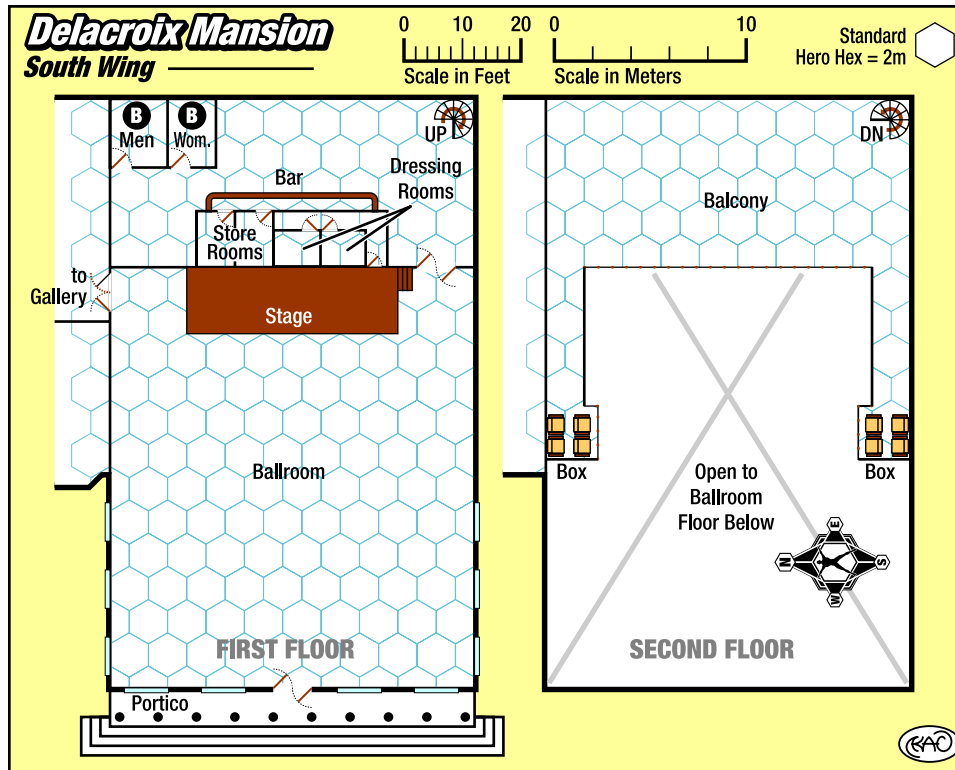


NORTH WING, PLAYER'S MAP

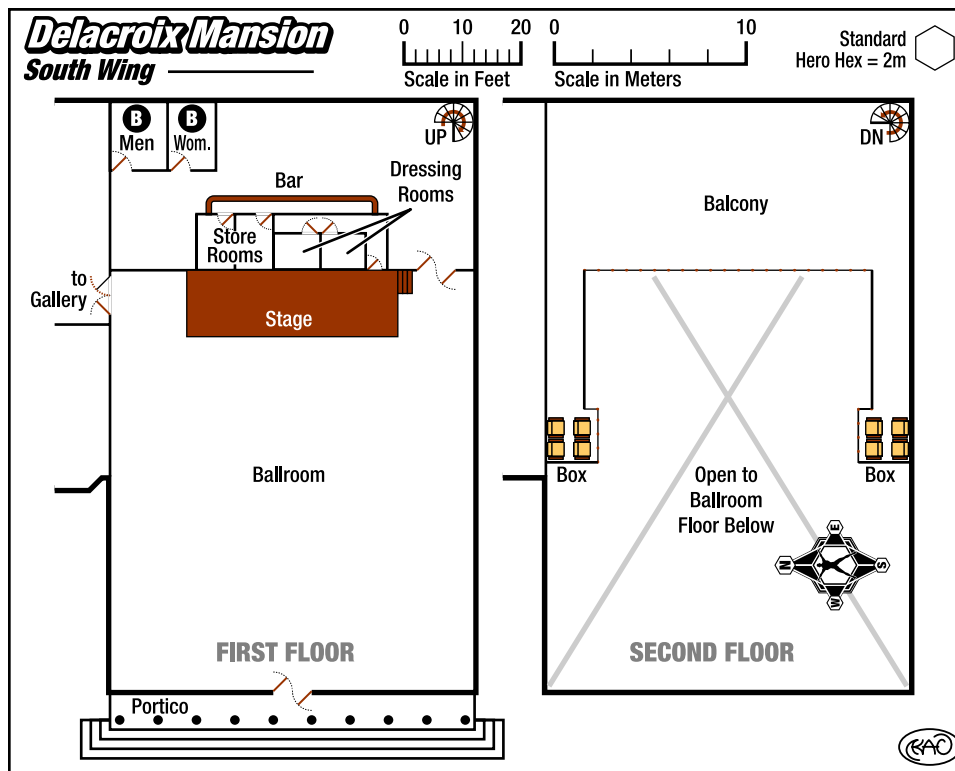


wooden beams. A stairway in the east leads to a double door which opens to the outside. An open doorway in the north leads to the wine cellar (Basement, Room 2). A door in the west opens into a passage, which leads to stairs going up to the butler's room (Main House, First Floor, Room 8).

SOUTH WING, GM'S MAP



SOUTH WING, PLAYER'S MAP



Stairs in the southwest corner of the room lead to the kitchen (Main House, First Floor, Room 13). A secret door in the south wall leads to a passage, which ends in a cave on the shore of Lake Erie.

Manifestation: Black-Scaled Serpent nests in the cellar of the mansion. Around his huge coils,

bowing abjectly to the gigantic snake, are those men and women whom the malign spirit has led to their demise. Among the ghosts are men in Amerind dress, a woman wearing a slip, and many unidentifiable others.

Black-Scaled Serpent is not a demon — he is just a ghost who has haunted the locale so long he has forgotten his original form. Due to his age, he is more aware of his environment than the other ghosts, and can interact with the superheroes. Nothing he tells the PCs is particularly helpful, but he does hint there's more to the "basement" level than just the cellar. If the PCs attack Black-Scaled Serpent, he causes all the doorways and exits from the cellar to "disappear." He then taunts the PCs, asking which of them will be the first to feast on human flesh when they begin to starve. The "disappearing" exits are just Sight Group Images, -6 to PER Rolls.

2. Wine Cellar

This room has four wine racks. The racks are empty for the most part. Eliot Randolph intended to hire someone to choose suitable vintages, but hadn't gotten around to it. An open doorway in the south wall leads to the cellar.

Manifestation: This room is filled with partly eaten corpses. Or at least, they seem to be corpses, until one stirs restlessly and groans piteously.

3. Secret Chamber

This room has three passages leading from it. The east passage leads to 3a and the servants' house. The south passage leads to 3b and 3c.

During Act Three, a pile of broken cement lies piled in the southeast. Through the large hole in the wall, a steel door is visible. Beyond the steel door is a passage, which leads to the crypt... and the Black Paladin!

3a: This ladder leads to the secret cubby behind the wall in the north wing's kitchen (North Wing, First Floor, Room 5).

3b: This ladder leads to the secret cubby which runs up through the servants' passage and into the husband's dressing room (Main House, Second Floor, Room 10).

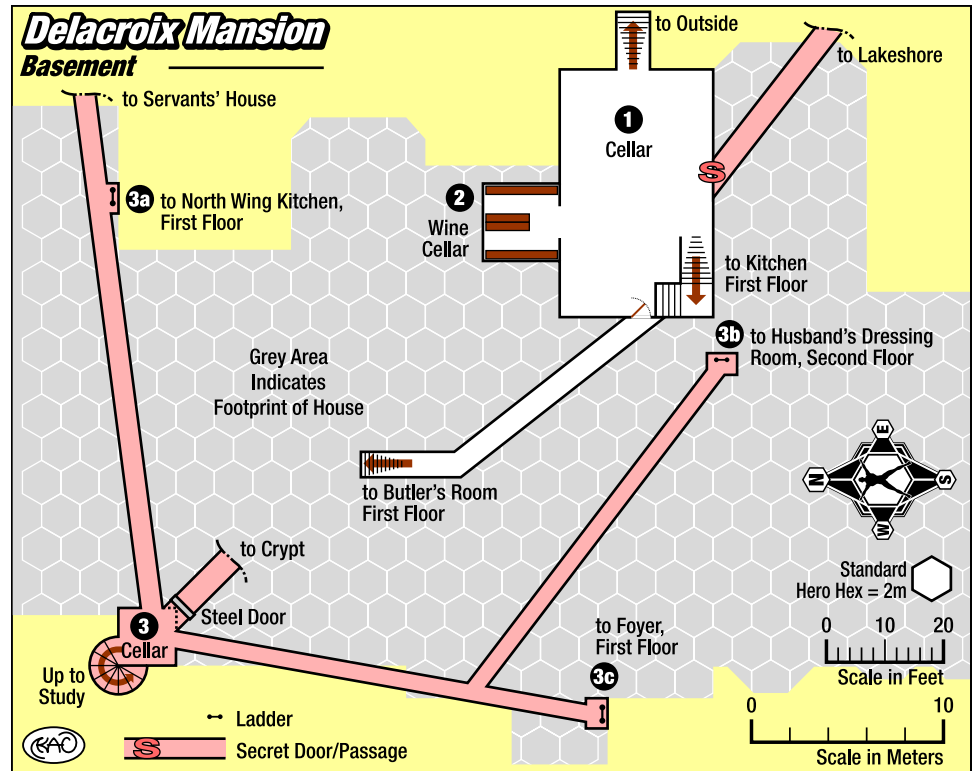
3c: This ladder leads to the secret cubby behind the wall in the foyer (Main House, First Floor, Room 1).

THE CRYPT

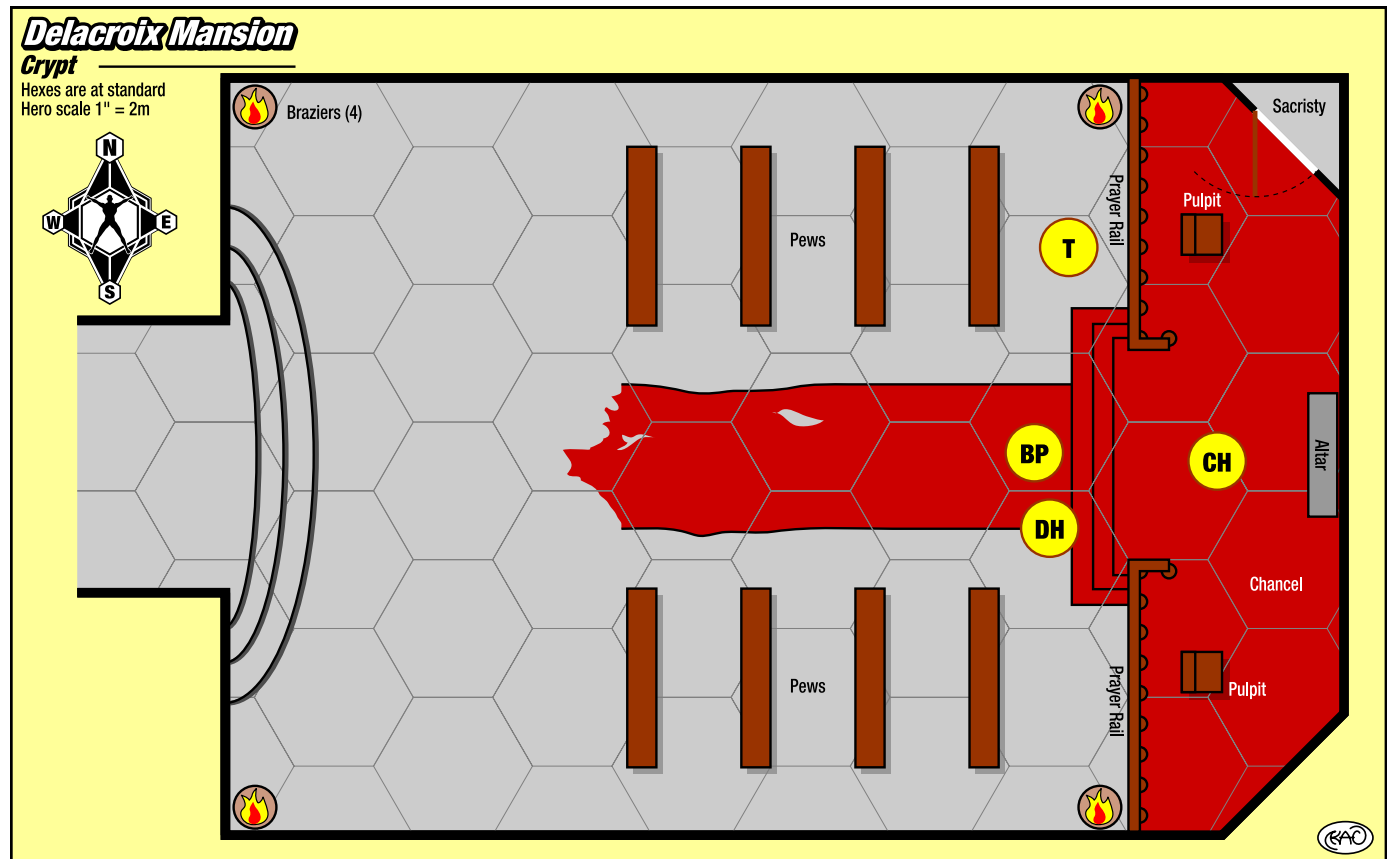
The crypt was dug out almost three hundred years ago by the Albigenians. It served as a burial place for their dead, as well as a location for performing their unholy rites. The entrance was buried under the ruins and ashes of the monks' abbey until 1903, when the mansion was being built. Louis Delacroix had the sloped passage leading down to the crypt extended to the reach the secret chamber under the study in the main house. He then blocked off the passage with a steel door. In the 1950s, Alvin Williamson extended the network of secret tunnels under the mansion. Disturbed by the presence of the crypt, he had cement poured over the steel door. Guided by Chantal, the Black Paladin broke through the cement and re-opened the crypt.

The passage sloping down to the crypt is 15" long and ends on a landing. From the landing a short flight of stairs leads to the crypt proper. The crypt is 8" below the mansion. The ceiling of the crypt is 3" high. The north and south walls are honeycombed with square niches. Inside

BASEMENT



CRYPT



Continued from page 56

not play Chantal to the best of his ability, since the fate of his character depends on the shade returning to the Netherworld. Ultimately, you know your players best, so decide accordingly.

the niches are skeletons. There are eight pews, four to the north and four to the south, facing the chancel in the east. An aisle runs between two sets of decayed wooden pews. Three steps lead between the prayer rails up to the chancel. A doorway leads from the chancel to the sacristy. On the east the monks inlaid a crude mosaic. Many tiles have fallen from it, but the image of an antlered devil remains recognizable.

Manifestation: The ghosts of the Albigenian monks, cowls pulled over their bowed heads, sit in the pews. They mumble a nonsensical chant in Latin. On occasion, a monk bursts into flames. To the living, the flames are chill to the touch. The ghost screams in pain, but remains seated, and his fellows take no notice of his plight. The monk continues to burn until he is reduced to ash. Several moments later, the monk reappears and resumes chanting. If a living person disturbs a monk, he bursts into flame, but does not trip a “ghostly deathtrap.”

THE FINAL FIGHT

This is the climax of *Shades Of Black*, and should be appropriately dramatic. Prior to beginning the fight, you must make one decision: is the Ritual of Rebirth in progress when the PCs enter the crypt and confront the Black Paladin? Or is the ritual completed and Chantal reborn when the PCs arrive?

The Ritual In Progress

If you choose this route, or if this is the only choice because the PCs are close on the heels of the Black Paladin, the fight proceeds similar to that in Act One, when the PCs rescued Marjorie de Wolf (see page 21). During the fight, the Black Paladin and his allies attempt to keep the PCs from interfering with the Ritual of Rebirth. The ritual takes place in the chancel of the crypt.

Of course, if the PCs fail to prevent the Black Paladin from completing the Ritual of Rebirth, Chantal is reborn and joins the fight against the heroes.

The Ritual Completed

In this case, Chantal is already reborn when the PCs arrive on the scene, and they must not only defeat the Black Paladin, but overcome the sorcerous might of his lover, too.

There are two advantages to having Chantal reborn. First, the superheroes can physically confront and overcome the true source of the evil in the adventure, which is always satisfying for the players. Second, you introduce a new villain — and thus, a new twist — into the fight. At this point in the adventure, the PCs have already encountered the Black Paladin several times, and are familiar with his abilities. Chantal is an unknown element. Her presence lends an element of uncertainty to the fight and keeps the action fresh for the players.

The disadvantage is that if Chantal escapes, the PC or NPC who was the perfect vessel is effectively removed from the campaign until the PCs capture Chantal and find a way to make her shade vacate the body.

OVERVIEW OF THE FIGHT

The description of the battle assumes Chantal is reborn when the PCs arrive in the crypt below the Delacroix Mansion.

The witch is reborn, and once again stands at her lover's side. The Black Paladin has achieved his desire, and now the wicked lovers ready themselves to crush the heroes who have sought to thwart them.

The PCs' goal during the fight is simply stated: capture Chantal, force her to leave the perfect vessel's body, and banish her spirit to the Netherworld. But doing so is another matter entirely!

Before beginning the fight, you should look closely at how the dagger affects Chantal's shade. The dagger does a maximum of 12 BODY. Chantal has 10 rPD and 10 BODY. Since Chantal is invisible, Find Weakness won't help the PCs. So, at best, a PC requires five Phases to banish Chantal's shade to the Netherworld. If you feel this is too difficult, increase the dice of the dagger's HKA to shorten the time.

When the PCs arrive in the crypt, the villains are ready for them. Read aloud the following description:

The passage leads into a large chamber smelling of dirt and musty decay. Braziers set in each corner of the room illuminate the place with a ruddy light. The chamber is crudely constructed: the walls are built of sloppily mortared stone, and the ceiling beams bow downward from the weight of the earth above. Narrow niches honeycomb the walls to the north and south; inside each niche you see yellowed bones. Two sets of four pews stand to either side of a central aisle. Spectral figures wearing robes fill the pews, their cowls pulled over their bowed heads as they chant monotonously in a foreign tongue.

Astride his demonic steed, the Black Paladin faces you. He tightens his grip on his shield, and lowers his deadly lance. His steed snorts smoke and dances with impatience, its hooves ringing hollowly against the flagstones. Prowling behind the Black Paladin, a pack of demon hounds growls at you.

Your eyes are drawn beyond this panoply out of the Netherworld to a woman standing in front of an altar at the far end of the room. On the wall behind her, a ruined mosaic, many of its tiles fallen, depicts an antlered devil with a leering face. Tall and preternaturally beautiful, she has pale skin and long, black hair, and wears a long gown of white silk and a cloak of raven feathers. She holds the dagger in her left hand. When her witchy yellow eyes meet yours, he smiles.

THE VILLAINS' TACTICS

The text includes a tactical brief for Talisman, which you should ignore if the PCs already captured her. It likewise assumes the Gryphon and Lady Crow have already been captured; if not, they'll simply make vicious attacks against the best targets available (preferably PCs who hurt them in prior fights).

As in other encounters, you must decide how many demons are present for the final fight. This is the climatic battle, so it shouldn't be easy! You should have at least four demon hounds and one lesser demon. To increase the difficulty, double the number of demons. To reduce it, have only two demon hounds present. To further reduce the difficulty, don't include Darkling among the villains.

Soliloquy

In this fight, Chantal makes the soliloquy. If the players haven't figured out that she — and not the Black Paladin — is the real threat, this should provide a good clue.

Still smiling, the woman spread her arms wide. She says, "This body is beautiful, is it not? Methinks it a fair improvement over its former homely appearance...."

Her smile fades. Her gaze is chilling in its intensity. "This body is mine. I will not surrender it. I will not embrace Death again. I will not return to the fiery furnace, to suffer torment never-ending. No power in Heaven or Earth... nor any power in the cursed pits of Hell... can deny me this new life. And surely, if both the divine and infernal are thwarted by my will, no power of thine can accomplish the deed."

The Black Paladin (DEX 24)

If possible, the Black Paladin (on Darkling) teleports behind the team leader and performs a Move Through. Otherwise, he just performs a Move Through. Thereafter he uses his mace or sword (whichever seems a better choice) to fight in HTH combat against the PCs (though he may use his Energy Blast or spells, if they seem appropriate).

Darkling (DEX 20)

Darkling performs a Full Move on DEX 24. In later Phases he'll make the best attacks he can, Coordinating with the Black Paladin if possible. See page 48 for some ideas on tactics they might use.

Lesser Demons (DEX 20)

Lesser demons act as a bodyguard for Chantal. They stay within 2" of her and Hold their Actions. If a superhero approaches, a demon moves to intercept. If the PCs attack Chantal from range, a demon interposes its body between the attack and the witch by Diving For Cover. If the demons still have an Action at the end of the Segment before their next Phase, they attack with Demonic Blast, favoring PCs attacking Chantal at range as targets.

Talisman (DEX 20)

Talisman Holds her Action. If attacked, she attacks in kind. But you should keep in mind Talisman's motivation (as described in the Introduction). What Talisman wants is a tragedy — not the resurrection of a rival who exceeds her in mystical might. She has no interest in seeing a witch as powerful as Chantal (and certainly more powerful than she!) return to the world of living. At the beginning of the fight, Talisman is confident the PCs can overcome the Black Paladin and his lover. If the fight seems to go against the PCs, she offers to change sides in exchange for her freedom.

Chantal (DEX 17)

Chantal hangs back. She uses her VPP to defend herself, and aids the Black Paladin with Mental Illusions. If threatened by a PC, she attacks him. She currently holds the dagger.

Demon Hounds (DEX 17)

The demon hounds engage a brick or martial artist. They use "pack tactics" against their opponent: one demon hound Grabs a limb, seeking to immobilize the opponent, while the others attack. They use Coordinated Attacks.

ENDING THE FIGHT

The fight ends either when the PCs banish Chantal's shade to the Netherworld (or otherwise "neutralize" her), or Chantal flees. So long as the perfect vessel remains, the Black Paladin does not flee. He is too close to his goal to turn back now; he fights until the bitter end.

Chantal And The Perfect Vessel

By choice, Chantal can cause her spirit to leave the vessel. A successful KS: Arcane And Occult Lore roll tells the PCs this.

Chantal has an irrational, bordering on neurotic, fear of dying. One way to get her to vacate the vessel is to convince her she faces imminent death. (For example: "I've injected you with a lethal poison. You only have 30 seconds to live.") This requires nothing more than good roleplaying, a good plan, and maybe, at your discretion, a successful Persuasion roll.

"GHOSTLY" INTERVENTION

The ghosts who haunt the mansion aren't the only ghosts on the scene: The perfect vessel's disembodied spirit is still around, anxiously awaiting the outcome of the battle. She wants her body back, and is concerned about the welfare of her friends.

If the PCs get in trouble during the fight, you should use the perfect vessel's spirit as a sort of *deus ex machina* to help the superheroes. The spirit can prevent a killing blow from falling, whisper advice in the ear of a PC about how to banish Chantal, heal a fallen superhero, stop Chantal from fleeing for a brief yet crucial moment, or provide any other aid you think the PCs need to defeat Chantal and the Black Paladin. This is particularly appropriate if the perfect vessel is a PC and that character's player is present; it gives him something to do during the battle.

ATTACKING CHANTAL

If the players have little success attacking Chantal with the dagger, you may want to suggest this tactic to them: the PC with the best OCV and most CSLs attacks the shade with the dagger. Meanwhile, any PCs with magical or mental attacks, or Attack Powers with the Advantage *Affects Desolidified*, attack the shade. While these attacks cannot permanently harm the shade, they force Chantal to devote a portion of her VPP to defending herself instead of attacking the dagger-wielding PC all-out. Chantal has a low CON — she's easily Stunned — and attacking her like this leaves her with two options: defend herself, or be Stunned and at the mercy of the hero with the dagger.

Another method is to subdue Chantal, then research the Ritual of Rebirth. At your discretion, the PCs can learn a way to reverse the effects. Or maybe one of the PCs' Contacts (such as a Trismegistus Council member they met in Act Two) knows of a spell to reverse the Ritual of Rebirth.

Once Chantal has vacated the body, the perfect vessel's spirit returns immediately to her rightful body — although she has undergone a dramatic change in appearance and still looks like Chantal.

Banishing Chantal's Shade

The dagger is the key to banishing Chantal's shade. If the PCs reduce the shade to 0 BODY by damage done with the dagger, Chantal's spirit returns to the infernal regions. Any other BODY damage done to her she can regenerate. While magical (or other) attacks might Knock her Out, or even badly injure her, she eventually recovers... and, more importantly, her shade remains bound to the dagger.

If a PC attacks her with the dagger, Chantal does everything in her power to stop him. First, she attempts to seduce the PC and convince him to ally with her; then she attacks him with her Vile Black Magic.

Clever players might think of ways to attack the shade without actually holding the dagger (such as Telekinesis). That's fine, and you should reward them for coming up with a good plan. Of course, such tactics work best if the Black Paladin and his allies are already defeated. The Black Paladin immediately attacks anyone threatening Chantal, even if doing so exposes him to danger.

Remember, no Power created by Chantal's VPP effects the dagger in any way. For example, Ward From Harm does not stop damage done by the dagger.

Any damage done to the vessel's body by the dagger is immediately healed when the vessel's spirit re-enters the body after Chantal vacates it.

Fleeing Villains

If the fight goes against the villains, Chantal flees. Her time in the infernal regions has burned away whatever humanity she once possessed, and without remorse she abandons the Black Paladin to his fate.

But the ghosts who haunt the mansion are petty, spiteful undead creatures. If they are cursed to remain ghosts, why should they allow Chantal to return to the world of the living?

Basically, the ghosts use Ghostly Protection (page 50) to ward the walls of the crypt and mansion. Empowered by the infernal energies which permeate the place, the ward is too powerful for Chantal to overcome with her Vile Black Magic. The witch has to make her way out of the mansion by mundane means — she cannot escape via Desolidification, Teleportation, or Extra-Dimensional Movement. She must physically travel the length of the passage leading from the crypt, and then make her way through the mansion via the doors. Because of this, the PCs have a chance to stop her. (For the PCs, Ghostly Protection is exactly as described on page 50 — its power only increases when it's used against Chantal.)

On the first Phase of Chantal's escape, you should describe her attempting to teleport away and being stopped by the ghosts. When the Force Wall stops her, the ghosts laugh malevolently, and the PCs can hear their laughter.

Once outside the mansion, Chantal is free of the ghosts' power. She disappears from sight, and has likely escaped the PCs.

CONCLUSION OF ACT THREE

Assuming the best, the PCs banish Chantal's shade to the Netherworld to suffer again at the hands of demons. The Black Paladin, for the second time in his immortal existence, is bereaved, his lover taken from him by heroes. And not only have the PCs prevented a great evil from re-entering the world, they have also bravely rescued the perfect vessel from a dire fate.

Just because *Shades Of Black* has ended doesn't mean the adventure has to end here. If nothing else, the Black Paladin won't go quietly into custody — in his black heart burns a lust for vengeance. The PCs have earned his undying hatred, and the Black Paladin is not a foe to take lightly. Surely he will return in future game sessions and attempt to consummate his desire for revenge.

The Conclusion discusses other possible scenarios stemming from the events of the adventure.

"This is Miranda Chen, reporting live for WRJK from the Delacroix Mansion south of Millennium City.

"A series of bizarre murders which has baffled MCPD homicide detectives for over a month came to a dramatic end tonight. A battle, begun earlier this evening in Oak Park, concluded just moments ago inside the mansion, and the authorities have apprehended the supervillain known only as the Black Paladin. According to sources close to the police department, he is a suspect in the murders of four young women.

"The Delacroix Mansion is no stranger to murder. Thanks to the Neumann and Browning trials of the late Eighties and early Nineties, the mansion's history is familiar to many of our viewers. But this latest series of murders has perhaps been the most strange — and is certainly no less tragic.

"WRJK has learned that the murders began over a month ago, when...."

CONCLUSION



Listed below are some plot seeds for scenarios stemming from the events of *Shades Of Black*.

THE DAGGER

So long as Chantal's shade remains bound to the dagger, it is effectively indestructible; but once her shade returns to the Netherworld, the dagger is a mundane weapon with DEF 3, BODY 3.

At the end of *Shades Of Black*, an important question about the dagger remains unanswered: how did it gain the power to summon Chantal's shade and perform the Ritual of Rebirth? Was it Chantal herself who imbued the blade with its powers, by working her magic through Talisman? Or was it a third party who granted the dagger its powers for his (or her or its) own reasons? And if it was a third party, toward what goal would an individual cause Chantal's rebirth? Without a doubt, the individual's intentions are not benign.

Plot Seeds

1. The Demon Prince of Guile is responsible for the powers of the dagger. He wished Chantal reborn so the witch could act as his pawn in the Material World. With her power to summon demons, the Demon Prince would have soon had an army of the infernal present on Earth. And just because he failed once doesn't mean he won't try again!
2. Sebastian Sarrazene and DEMON hear the full story of *Shades Of Black* from Talisman and decide Chantal would be a powerful addition to their organization. Believing the dagger the key to her resurrection, they seek to steal it from the PCs (or whomever they've given it to). Will DEMON succeed? And if so, can it invest the dagger with its former power?
3. The PCs learn a woman matching Chantal's description has been sighted in London, and the woman has somehow taken control of The New Knights of the Round Table, a powerful superhero team. What happened? Is she really Chantal, or just an imposter? Could the girdle of black metal (page 34), which the woman wears around her waist, have something to do with it? How does the Black Paladin react to the possible return of his lover? And where did the PCs put that dagger anyway?

THE PERFECT VESSEL

Chances are the appearance of the perfect vessel remains dramatically changed at the conclusion of *Shades Of Black*. The GM can allow the Transform to heal back normally... or perhaps the PCs must undertake some sort of quest to discover a ritual or object of power that can reverse the effects.

Additionally, what precisely was the connection between the perfect vessel and Chantal? Was it genetic — is the perfect vessel a descendant of the witch? Or was it spiritual, and if so, what does this imply about the perfect vessel's soul? Could she have a previously unknown dark side? Could she have hidden reserves of untapped magical talent? Maybe — for whatever ominous reason — the perfect vessel prefers her new appearance. Whatever the case, her experiences probably have a dramatic impact on her relationship with the PCs, and might have far-reaching consequences for the campaign.

Plot Seeds

1. The perfect vessel begins to have nightmares about Chantal being tormented in Hell. Is it just a guilty conscience, or does some mystical connection still exist between the two women?
2. The perfect vessel discovers that, after the events of *Shades Of Black*, she can perform minor magics. (Give her a 20-point VPP.) Have her experiences awakened her mystical potential... or does a shard of Chantal's soul lay dormant inside her?
3. The perfect vessel begins to have dreams about different lives throughout history. Soon these dreams occur not only when she sleeps, but also when she is awake. In many of these lives, the perfect vessel is not a very nice person. Has the Ritual of Rebirth set her spirit adrift in Time, and why are the perfect vessel's past lives so evil?

THE RANDOLPHS

The Randolph estate is handled by their attorneys. The law firm's first priority is to determine whether anyone can return the Randolphs to normal. If possible and appropriate, they retain the PCs' services toward this purpose. Or maybe the PCs, out of good will, wish to take an active part in returning the Gryphon and Lady Crow to their original forms.

Whatever the case, how can anyone reverse the magical transformation? And what do the PCs have to do to learn how to effect such a reversal?

Plot Seeds

1. Lady Crow shows up on the PCs' doorstep, her helmet thrown to the ground. Crows surround her and peck at her flesh, seeming to have turned against their mistress. She begs the PCs to help her and Eliot. Judging by her voice, it's obvious Linda Randolph has somehow regained possession of her body — until she returns the helmet to her head, lets out with a vicious shriek, and attacks.

IN THE CHAMPIONS UNIVERSE...

In the Champions Universe, Witchcraft is the perfect vessel. Black Paladin captures her in the confrontation at the beginning of Act Three and spirits her away to the mansion. Thanks to her mystical powers and strong will, Witchcraft holds off Chantal until the rest of the Champions make it to the crypt, but then succumbs, and Chantal is reborn. In the final battle, Nighthawk wrests the dagger away from Chantal and stabs her to death with it, thus banishing her spirit and allowing Witchcraft's spirit to return to her body. The defeated Black Paladin and Talisman get sent to Stronghold, and Witchcraft uses her own spells to restore her body to its normal appearance.

2. Talisman frees Lady Crow and the Gryphon from captivity before anyone “cures” them. The Mistress of Hellfire knows enough about the ritual to make the two completely loyal to her, and with her new servants she begins a crime wave throughout Millennium City.

3. A distant relative comes forward, claiming the Randolph estate is now his. Unless the PCs can reverse the effects of the transformation soon, the law firm handling the estate cannot hold it in trust for Eliot and Linda any longer. The distant relative is nothing more than a ne’er-do-well and spend-thrift — certainly not deserving of the Randolph estate. And, more disturbing, the PCs hear rumors

he has ties to ARGENT (or some other villainous organization).

CHANTAL REBORN

If a reborn Chantal escapes from the Delacroix Mansion, the PCs can consider themselves Hunted. They know far too much about her to be allowed to live. The GM should refer to her character sheet on page 70 for further ideas about what she may do in the modern world, and how she acts as a Hunter. Additionally, Chantal reborn means a PC or NPC no longer has a body — can the superheroes live with their failure? And if not, what are they going to do about it? Will they become not just the Hunted, but also the Hunters?

Plot Seeds

1. Reports come in from France: Brittany has somehow returned to medieval times. Witnesses say a mysterious woman with black hair and yellow eyes rules the province. Furthermore, she resides in a castle located in the *Forêt du Chevalier Noir*. Anyone who enters the province is affected by the magic and turned into a medieval equivalent of himself. How has Chantal gained the power to perform such mighty sorcery?

2. A male PC’s best friend has a new girlfriend, and he’s already talking about marriage. The girlfriend is nice enough, but the PC really wishes she’d stop flirting with him. She is gorgeous, but nothing good can come of it... but she sure is gorgeous... her accent is cute too... and she sure is gorgeous....

3. A member of the Circle of the Scarlet Moon approaches the PCs, offering them information about Chantal. The witch has joined the Circle and greatly upset the balance of power between the members. The member, having been on the losing side of a power struggle, wants the PCs to “remove” Chantal. Can the PCs trust someone



VILLAINS



who belongs to the evil sorcerous cabal? Can they afford not to, and pass up this opportunity to capture Chantal?

Here are the new villains you need for *Shades Of Black*, as well as a few other GM aids to make running the scenario easier.

CHANTAL

The Witch As A Shade

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
8	STR	-2	11-	Lift 75 kg; 1½d6 [1]
17	DEX	21	12-	OCV: 6/DCV: 6
10	CON	0	11-	
10	BODY	0	11-	
20	INT	10	13-	PER Roll 13-
27	EGO	34	14-	ECV: 9
25	PRE	15	14-	PRE Attack: 5d6
6	COM	-2	10-	
5	PD	3		Total: 15 PD (10 rPD)
5	ED	3		Total: 15 ED (10 rED)
4	SPD	13		Phases: 3, 6, 9, 12
6	REC	4		
40	END	10		
30	STUN	11		Total Characteristic Cost: 120

Movement: Running: 0"/0"
Leaping: 0"/0"

Cost	Powers	END
60	<i>Ghostly Incorporeality:</i> Desolidification (affected by magic or dagger), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½), Persistent (+½), Inherent (+¼); Always On (-½)	0
60	<i>Ghostly Invisibility:</i> Invisibility to Sight, Hearing, and Smell/Taste Groups, No Fringe, Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½), Persistent (+½), Inherent (+¼); Always On (-½)	0
141	<i>Vile Black Magic:</i> Variable Power Pool, 90 base + 45 control cost, Can Be Changed As A Zero-Phase Action (+1); Only Magic (-¼), Only Affects Possessor Of Dagger, Other "Spirits," And Herself (-½), No Effect On Dagger Itself (-0)	var
90	<i>The Discourse Of Souls:</i> Multipower, 225-point reserve; all slots Only Versus Possessor Of The Dagger (-1½)	
18m	1) <i>Bind Thy Soul:</i> Mind Control 12d6, Telepathic (+¼), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½), Affects Physical World (+2); Only Versus Possessor Of The Dagger (-1½)	0
17m	2) <i>Know Thy Soul:</i> Telepathy 12d6, Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½), Affects Physical World (+2); Only Versus Possessor Of The Dagger (-1½)	0

17m	3) <i>Deceive Thy Soul:</i> Mental Illusions 12d6, Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½), Affects Physical World (+2); Only Versus Possessor Of The Dagger (-1½)	0
146	<i>Boon Of The Infernal:</i> Multipower, 437-point reserve; Gestures (-¼), Incantations (-¼), Extra Time (1 Hour; -1½)	
9u	1) <i>Invoke The Demonic Hunt:</i> Summon 8 250-point Demons, Slavishly Devoted (+1), Any Demon (+¼), Affects Physical World (+2); Gestures (-¼), Incantations (-¼), Extra Time (1 Hour; -1½)	28
15u	2) <i>Call For Infernal Aid:</i> Summon 2 600-point Demons, Friendly (+¼), Any Demon (+¼), Affects Physical World (+2); Gestures (-¼), Incantations (-¼), Extra Time (1 Hour; -1½)	44
80	<i>Banish The Infernal:</i> Dispel Summon 16d6, Cumulative (+½), Increased Cumulative Points (192 points; +¼), Affects Physical World (+2); Only Summoned Demons (-½), Requires A Magic Skill Roll (-½), Incantations (-¼)	18
20	<i>Hidden Reserves Of Magical Might:</i> Endurance Reserve (120 END, 12 REC; applies to Vile Black Magic, Boon Of The Infernal, and Banish The Infernal); Personal REC (-½)	0
30	<i>Ward The Body:</i> Force Field (10 PD/10 ED/10 Power Defense)	3
20	<i>Ward The Mind:</i> Mental Defense (25 points total)	0
47	<i>Undead Vitality:</i> Life Support: Total (except for Diminished Eating; including Longevity: Immortality)	0
51	<i>Undead Vitality:</i> Healing 5d6 (Regeneration; 5 BODY per Turn), Resurrection (must be slain with dagger), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½), Persistent (+½); Self Only (-½), Extra Time (1 Turn; -1¼), Does Not Regenerate Damage Done By Dagger (-0)	0
42	<i>Eye Of Souls:</i> Detect Souls 18- (no Sense Group), Discriminatory, Analyze, Range, Sense, Targeting	0
22	<i>Ghost Sense:</i> Spatial Awareness (no Sense Group)	0
15	<i>Magesense:</i> Detect Magic 16- (Sight Group), Range, Sense	0
-12	<i>Bound To Dagger:</i> Running -6" (0" total)	
-2	<i>Bound To Dagger:</i> Swimming -2" (0" total)	

Skills

9	+3 with <i>The Discourse Of Souls</i> Multipower	
25	Magic Skill 24-	



- 3 Concealment 13-
- 3 Conversation 14-
- 5 Cryptography 15-; Translation Only (-½)
- 3 High Society 14-
- 3 Interrogation 14-
- 3 AK: France 13-
- 5 AK: Infernal Regions 15-
- 3 KS: Arcane And Occult Lore 13-
- 7 KS: Demonology 17-
- 5 KS: Necromancy 15-
- 7 KS: Witchcraft 17-
- 2 Language: English (fluent conversation; Old French is native)
- 3 Language: French (completely fluent)
- 3 Language: Latin (completely fluent)
- 3 Persuasion 14-
- 7 Seduction 16-

Total Powers & Skill Cost: 985

Total Cost: 1,105

200+ Disadvantages

- 15 Enraged: when thwarted (Common), go 11-, recover 14-
- 10 Physical Limitation: Unfamiliar With Modern Society (Frequently, Slightly Impairing)
- 25 Physical Limitation: Must Remain With Dagger, cannot move from the hex occupied by dagger (All The Time, Fully Impairing)
- 25 Psychological Limitation: Utterly Evil (Very Common, Total)
- 15 Psychological Limitation: Fear Of Returning

- To Infernal Regions (Uncommon, Total)
- 25 Psychological Limitation: Hunger For Rebirth (Very Common, Total)
- 15 Psychological Limitation: Vain (Common, Strong)
- 771 Experience Points

Total Disadvantage Points: 1,105

EXAMPLE POWERS FOR VILE BLACK MAGIC VPP

Here are a few uses for Chantal's Variable Power Pool.

Ward From Harm: Chantal often begins combat with her VPP assigned to this power. Once she's confident none of the PCs can effectively attack her, she re-allocates the points.

Force Field (+24 PD/+24 ED/+12 Power Defense), Hardened (+¼), Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼). Total cost: 90 points.

She uses one of the following variations to protect the Black Paladin from harm. The Force Field normally provides Sight Group Flash Defense. However, Chantal can change it to whatever Sense Group she wishes.

Force Field (12 PD/12 ED), Usable By Others (+¼), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½), Affects Physical World (+2). Total cost: 90 points.

Force Field (8 Flash Defense/8 Mental Defense/8 Power Defense), Usable By Others (+¼), Reduced Endurance (0, +½), Affects Physical World (+2). Total cost: 90 points.

The Burning Glyph of Anguish: If someone comes into possession of the dagger without Chantal's approval, but she wants to hide her presence from him, she uses this spell. A stomach-twisting sigil consumes the mind's eye of the target, and agony burns along his nerves.

Ego Attack 2d6, Invisible To Mental Sense Group (+½), Armor Piercing (+½), Affects Physical World (+2). Total cost: 80 points.

The Sinister Speed Of Pazuzu: This spell, which draws upon the power of the Demon Prince of Foul Winds, allowed Chantal to increase the Black Paladin's DEX and SPD.

Aid 2d6, DEX and SPD simultaneously (+½), Delayed Loss (points fade at the rate of 5 per Minute; +¼), Affects Physical World (+2). Total cost: 75 points.

The Baleful Might Of Baphomet: If the Black Paladin is in melee combat, Chantal draws upon the might of the Demon Prince of Strength to aid her lover.

Succor 4d6, STR, CON, PD, and ED simultaneously (+1), Affects Physical World (+2) (standard effect: 12 STR, 6 CON, 6 PD, and 6 ED). Total cost: 80 points.

A Blasphemous Vitality: This spell suffuses the Black Paladin's being with an eldritch energy which

revitalizes him, wiping away pain and exhaustion. Chantal uses one of two variations:

Simplified Healing 3d6, Affects Physical World (+2). Total cost: 90 points.

Healing 2d6, STUN and END simultaneously (+½), Affects Physical World (+2). Total cost: 70 points.

Find The Arcane Pathways: Chantal uses one of two versions of this spell to strengthen the enchantments on the Black Paladin's Armor of Arcane Pathways. The first increases his Noncombat Movement multiplier with Teleport; the second his Combat Movement.

Aid Teleportation 2d6, Apply Adders (+1), Affects Physical World (+2); Others Only (-½). Total cost: 53 points.

Teleport +13", Usable By Others (+¼), Affects Physical World (+2). Total cost: 84 points.

Wither Thy Heart: In the climax of *Shades Of Black*, when the PCs seek to send Chantal back to Hell, the GM can choose to have Chantal attack a possessor of the dagger with this Power, instead of The Discourse Of Souls. (Caveat: Chantal is not likely to miss her target with this power, and it's deadly if the target lacks Power Defense.)

Drain BODY 2d6, Delayed Return Rate (points return at the rate of 5 per Minute; +¼), Affects Physical World (+2). Total cost: 65 points.

Background/History: Is there room for love in an evil heart? Once, for the witch known as Chantal, there was. But that was long ago, before she plunged a dagger into her breast to take her own life and discovered there was no refuge from sorrow in death.

Chantal lived in France during the Arthurian Age, and by its end, her name and deeds were infamous throughout Europe. Born to a mother who died in childbirth, she was given into the care of her aunt, Henriette. All knew the ugly, old crone was a witch, but none were concerned with the fate of a newborn who was already a matricide.

Henriette had a single, sinister purpose in mind for the infant: to make her a tool with which to inflict harm and woe on the world. A child is not an innocent, but an empty vessel; into the vessel that was young Chantal, Henriette poured spite and malice. She spoke harsh words to twist and pervert Chantal's heart, guiding her desires down dark paths; she used her black arts to shape the appearance of the child, giving her an ethereal and haunting beauty.

Henriette knew well the fate of an ugly woman: mistrust, maltreatment, suspicion of witchcraft. For Chantal, it would be different. She would possess beauty enough to send men to war with the slightest smile and sidelong glance. Men — knights, lords, and perhaps even kings, all who ruled during the Arthurian Age — would open their arms to embrace Chantal, and in doing so, open their hearts to her malevolence.

For a weapon, the girl would have more than

just her beauty. She was taught the black arts of witchcraft and proved to be an apt student, soon surpassing her teacher in skill if not knowledge. And when her knowledge, too, was greater, Henriette became the first victim of the evil tool she had worked so hard to craft.

Chantal left her murdered aunt's secluded home and ventured into the world to walk among knights and honorable lords. She lied about her heritage, claiming to be the daughter of a noble family in a far-off land, and none doubted her — for such a beauty could only be of gentle birth.

She was received in the courts of nobles and the homes of landed gentry, and with her came strife. Her aunt had taught her well. Because of her beauty and wiles, men were overwhelmed by a desire to possess her. They came to blows to be near her, and their jealous rages drove them to murder. Even those few who clung to their codes of chivalry and honor despite their desire were driven to bloodshed by Chantal's witchcraft. Chantal looked on the murderous lust of men with evil delight. She reveled in bringing out the worst in other people. In her heart was only cruelty and wickedness... but in time love came to reside there as well.

The man she loved matched her in evil: Sir Giles de Morphant, the Black Paladin. He won her heart as no other could, for he was a kindred soul — he had a black heart to match her own. The two consummated their love with acts of malice and blasphemy. They were a terror to the just and righteous; and sinking ever deeper into depravity, they found a perverse sort of happiness. But there could be no happy ending for two such lovers — Heaven would never allow such a thing.

In battle, Sir Giles met Lancelot, greatest of King Arthur's knights, and was vanquished. Despite her sorcerous might, Chantal could not heal her lover — his wounds were too terrible. She could only preserve him in an enchanted slumber. When he awoke, she would be long dead, and the thought of being without him filled her with despair. There seemed to be only one solace for her sorrow, and that was death. She took up the dagger which her lover had given her and plunged it into her breast.

But even in death, there was no end to her anguish... only a new source of torment.

Her soul fell into the realms of the infernal, and soon enough, she forgot her sorrow for the loss of her lover. She drowned in torment suffered at the taloned hands of demons. Their taunts and torture were unceasing and merciless, but Chantal was a soul of cunning and power. After a time, she crawled free of the fiery pits of the tormented to stand amongst the demons. She learned their ways, but through it all she desired her freedom. No matter her standing in the infernal hierarchy, she would always be the thrall of some demon — such is the fate of a mortal soul, no matter how powerful or wicked, in Hell.

She bided her time, nurturing her power. She suffered the abuse of her demonic masters, taking revenge when she could, learning dark arts when allowed, but never forgetting her desire. Finally, she found her way free. For the briefest moment,

she could bridge the gulfs of outer darkness, and send her soul into the world of flesh. There, she came to her lover — the man she had saved from this torment — and spoke to him in his dreams. She demanded her rescue, and impossibly, he succeeded, bringing her soul out of the Netherworld.

Still, her rebirth was only partly complete. She had escaped Hell, but only as a shade. She could but flit about the edges of the world, insubstantial and invisible, bound to the dagger which took her life, its blade still stained with her blood.

What she has now is not life, but the half-life of a shade. To be free, she must have a body. She must have a vessel for her soul — one not already tainted by corruption, one which she can make as beautiful as she was long ago, for her pride can accept no less. She must be reborn.

Personality/Motivation: Once, though Chantal was evil through and through, there was room enough in her black heart for love. Admittedly, her love made itself known in profane acts and blasphemous deeds, but it was love nonetheless. Now, there is nothing of love in Chantal's heart, and her lover is only a pawn in her quest for rebirth.

She believes that because of love, she committed suicide, and because of love, she fell into the Netherworld to suffer. Perhaps not a rational belief, but Chantal is no longer sane, let alone rational. While in Hell, whatever remained of her humanity (albeit twisted and perverse) was burned from her soul, and she emerged entirely consumed by evil.

She hungers for rebirth, and that hunger eclipses all else. The entirety of her being, all her cunning and power, is bent to this goal. Her vanity and fear only increase her hunger. As a shade, her features are formless and invisible. To one as beautiful in life as Chantal, being unseen is unbearable. Coupled with her vanity is a soul-deep dread of suffering again in the fiery pits. She has been there once, and she does not want to return. Her current existence is tenuous, bound as it is to the dagger — for the same weapon that took her life once can take it again. As long as she lacks a body, the weapon of her undoing remains forever poised over her breast, and she stands far too close to a precipice, at the bottom of which is Hell.

Quote: “My love. My heart. I must have a body — I long to again feel thy embrace. Arms with which to hold thee. Lips with which to kiss thee.”Tis my sole desire.”

Powers/Tactics: In life, Chantal was a powerful witch. Her time in the Netherworld has only increased her power. But she is a witch, not a warrior. Little of her magic relates to battle. She prefers to seduce and corrupt, using her beauty (or, if necessary, her magic) to win men's hearts.

As a shade, her powers are severely curtailed. It requires great effort to affect the physical world, and she cannot move from the dagger's location (in game terms, she must occupy the same hex as the dagger). Typically she uses her power just to defend herself and aid the Black Paladin, but if an enemy gains possession of the dagger, she lashes out at him

with all her might. Note that her Vile Black Magic, Boon Of The Infernal, and Banish The Infernal all draw END from an Endurance Reserve.

If pressed (especially if a hero attacks her with the dagger), she first seeks to seduce her enemy through more mundane means, via Persuasion and Seduction. Using Images, she reveals how she looked when alive, and shows him scenes of the torment she suffered in the Netherworld. She promises to be his faithful lover if he helps her find a vessel for her spirit. Of course, once reborn, she intends to turn on the hapless soul.

Chantal cannot affect the dagger with her VPP. For instance, her Ward From Harm does not prevent damage from the dagger; she cannot move the dagger using Telekinesis; she cannot Heal damage done by the dagger, and so on. In addition, no one can separate her from the dagger — no matter how fast or far it dagger moves, she travels with it.

Campaign Use: For most of *Shades Of Black*, Chantal serves as an enabling device. She increases the power of the Black Paladin so he can engage more than one PC at a time in battle, and she provides him with minions in the forms of demons. Use her powers judiciously. For instance, if the Black Paladin doesn't need demonic minions in an encounter to match the PCs' power levels, don't give them to him.

To increase Chantal's effectiveness, purchase Ward The Body with Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½) and give her Physical Damage Reduction, Resistant, 25% or 50%, STUN Only, to prevent her from being Stunned or Knocked Out. (Don't increase her Resistant PD, since the dagger does a maximum of 12 BODY — if her Resistant PD is 12 or greater, the PCs can't hurt her with the dagger!) If her powers are too much for the PCs to overcome, reduce her EGO to 21 or even 18 (thus lowering her ECV), and get rid of her levels with The Discourse Of Souls. Also, reduce her DEX to 15 or 12 to make her easier to hit. To further decrease her effectiveness, reduce the dice in her Mind Control and Mental Illusions.

Before you adjust her powers, keep in mind the difficulties a PC faces when trying to hit her with the dagger in HTH combat. Chantal is invisible to *all* the usual Sense Groups, and unless the PC has Combat Sense or a suitable Detect, he's at reduced OCV to attack her.

Appearance: As a shade, Chantal is invisible, but she can be “seen” with various Detects and odd Senses. To mental detection, she scans as a powerful mind consumed by an insatiable hunger for life. To Detect Magic, she appears as a blood-red aura emanating from the dagger and pulsing with black magic, but the dagger appears to be source of the aura — Chantal is indistinguishable from the blade. To Detect Souls, she appears as a whorl of angry colors: nauseating purples, electric blues, and deep crimsons twined together. From the whorl, a grasping hand sometimes reaches out, then disappears back into the chaotic swirls; or in its depths, one can see a woman's face with ill-defined features but rageful aspect, who appears briefly but is then consumed in the storm.

CHANTAL

The Witch Reborn

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
8	STR	-2	11-	Lift 75 kg; 1½d6 [1]
17	DEX	21	12-	OCV: 6/DCV: 6
10	CON	0	11-	
10	BODY	0	11-	
20	INT	10	13-	PER Roll 13-
27	EGO	34	14-	ECV: 9
30	PRE	20	15-	PRE Attack: 5d6
28	COM	9	15-	
5	PD	3		Total: 25 PD (20 rPD)
5	ED	3		Total: 25 ED (20 rED)
4	SPD	13		Phases: 3, 6, 9, 12
6	REC	4		
40	END	10		
30	STUN	11		Total Characteristic Cost: 136

Movement: Running: 6"/12"

Cost Powers END

162	<i>Vile Black Magic:</i> Variable Power Pool, 90 base + 45 control cost, Can Be Changed As A Zero-Phase Action (+1); Only Magic (-¼)	var
105	<i>The Discourse Of Souls:</i> Multipower, 105-point reserve	
21m	1) <i>Bind Thy Soul:</i> Mind Control 12d6, Telepathic (+¼), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½)	0
18m	2) <i>Know Thy Soul:</i> Telepathy 12d6, Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½)	0
18m	3) <i>Deceive Thy Soul:</i> Mental Illusions 12d6, Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½)	0
76	<i>Boon Of the Infernal:</i> Multipower, 190-point reserve; Gestures (-¼), Incantations (-¼), Extra Time (5 Minutes; -1)	
6u	1) <i>Invoke The Demonic Hunt:</i> Summon 8 250-point Demons, Slavishly Devoted (+1), Any Demon (+¼); Gestures (-¼), Incantations (-¼), Extra Time (5 Minutes; -1)	15
7u	2) <i>Call For Infernal Aid:</i> Summon 2 600-point Demons, Friendly (+¼), Any Demon (+¼); Gestures (-¼), Incantations (-¼), Extra Time (5 Minutes; -1)	19
7u	3) <i>Entreat A Captain Of Hell:</i> Summon 950-point Greater Demon; Strong Willed (-¼), Gestures (-¼), Incantations (-¼), Extra Time (5 Minutes; -1)	19
37	<i>Banish The Infernal:</i> Dispel Summon 16d6, Cumulative (+½), Increased Cumulative Points (192 points; +¼); Only Summoned Demons (-½), Requires A Magic Skill Roll (-½), Incantations (-¼)	8
20	<i>Hidden Reserves Of Magical Might:</i> Endurance Reserve (120 END, 12 REC; applies to Vile Black Magic, Boon Of The Infernal, and Banish The Infernal); Personal REC (-½)	0

75	<i>Ward The Body:</i> Force Field (20 PD/20 ED/10 Power Defense), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½)	0
20	<i>Ward The Mind:</i> Mental Defense (25 points total)	0
42	<i>Eye Of Souls:</i> Detect Souls 18- (no Sense Group), Discriminatory, Analyze, Ranged, Sense, Targeting	0
15	<i>Magesense:</i> Detect Magic 16- (Sight Group), Range, Sense	0

Skills

9	+3 with <i>The Discourse Of Souls</i> Multipower	
25	Magic Skill 24-	
3	Concealment 13-	
3	Conversation 15-	
5	Cryptography 15-; Translation Only (-½)	
3	High Society 15-	
3	Interrogation 15-	
3	AK: France 13-	
5	AK: Infernal Regions 15-	
3	KS: Arcane And Occult Lore 13-	
7	KS: Demonology 17-	
5	KS: Necromancy 15-	
7	KS: Witchcraft 17-	
2	Language: English (fluent conversation; Old French is native)	
3	Language: French (completely fluent)	
3	Language: Latin (completely fluent)	
3	Persuasion 15-	
7	Seduction 17-	

Total Powers & Skill Cost: 728

Total Cost: 864

200+ Disadvantages

10	Distinctive Features: Mystic Aura (Not Concealable; Always Noticed; Detectable Only With Unusual Senses)	
15	Distinctive Features: Unearthly Beauty (Concealable, Causes Major Reaction)	
15	Enraged: when thwarted (Common), go 11-, recover 14-	
10	Physical Limitation: Unfamiliar With Modern Society (Frequently, Slightly Impairing)	
25	Psychological Limitation: Utterly Evil (Very Common, Total)	
15	Psychological Limitation: Fear Of Returning To Infernal Regions (Uncommon, Total)	
15	Psychological Limitation: Vain (Common, Strong)	
15	Reputation: evil witch returned from Hell, 14- (Extreme, Only To Mystics)	
20	Susceptibility: to holy water and places, takes 2d6 per Phase (Uncommon)	
520	Experience Points	

Total Disadvantage Points: 864



EXAMPLE POWERS FOR VILE BLACK MAGIC VPP

Here are a few uses for Chantal's Variable Power Pool.

Infernal Aid: Chantal often begins combat with her VPP configured for these powers, particularly if she intends to rely primarily on her Mental Powers. It increases her defenses, while at the same time allowing her act more often in a Turn.

+2 SPD. Total cost: 20 points.

Force Field (15 PD/15 ED), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½). Total cost: 45 points.

Knockback Resistance -8". Total cost: 16 points.

Lack of Weakness (-9) for Resistant Defenses. Total cost: 9 points.

An Impish Masque: Chantal sometimes transforms a particularly meddlesome opponent into an imp.

Major Transform 5d6 (human into imp; heals back normally) (75 Active Points); Limited Target (humans; -½). Total cost: 50 points

Aura Of Demonic Fire: Greenish flames limn Chantal. The flames feed off energy, using it to increase their protection, and allowing Chantal to hurl them at her attacker. Chantal uses Aura Of Demonic Fire if she's attacked by multiple energy projectors but doesn't think she's in immediate danger. (She uses a similar spell for Bricks by changing her Absorption to physical and the Force Field to 12 PD.)

Absorption 4d6 (energy, ¾ to EB, ¼ to Force Field), Can Absorb Maximum Of 80 Points' Worth Of Energy. Total cost: 48 points.

Energy Blast 2d6, Armor Piercing (+½). Total cost: 15 points.

Force Field (12 ED), Reduced Endurance (0 END, +½). Total cost: 18 points.

Vitality Leech: Rather than merely Heal herself, Chantal uses this spell, if she has the opportunity.

Transfer 2d6 (target's STUN to her STUN), Delayed Return Rate (points fade at the rate of 5 per Minute; +¼), Area Of Effect (One Hex Accurate; +½), Ranged (+½). Total cost: 67 points.

The Burning Glyph of Anguish: A Power similar to the one she uses as a shade, with the Invisible Power Effect removed. This is her favored attack spell.

Ego Attack 6d6, Reduced Endurance Cost (0 END; +½). Total cost: 90 points.

Walk The Arcane Pathways: Chantal uses this combination of powers to flee combat. For greater distances outside of combat, replace N-Ray Perception with Clairsentience, and add the Advantage *Megascale* to the Teleport.

N-Ray Perception (Sight Group) (not through Force Fields). Total cost: 10 points.

+5 PER with Sight Group. Total cost: 10 points.

Teleportation 35". Total cost: 70 points.

Personality/Motivation: If *Shades Of Black* ends with the witch reborn, woe to the just and righteous. A great evil has entered the world — an evil which should long ago have passed into death, but has instead studied dark arts at the feet of demons, and returned more powerful for it.

At first, Chantal only delights in her stolen body. She performs individual acts of terror on whatever innocents cross her path — the spilling of virgin blood on a moonless night; the rape of a Christian man's soul. She commits blasphemies dreadful in detail but small in scope — Sunday churchgoers inflicted with leprosy; the buried dead caused to rise from consecrated ground. She revels in these small acts of evil which make mortal exis-

tence so dear. But soon her ambitions grow more grandiose.

Her powers are much greater than when she last walked the world of man, and as she comes to fully understand this, she realizes she can accomplish greater evils. Her power only increases her already considerable pride and conceit. It won't be long until she establishes herself as a master manipulator, lurking in the shadows and dominating men with either her beauty or magic.

She was a thrall in Hell; in the world of men, she will be the master. And as a master of men, Chantal will be little different than the demon lords and princes she once served as a thrall.

Quote: “Ahh... the flesh holds such delights. So long it has been, I had forgotten.”

Powers/Tactics: Chantal is not a combatant. Though her powers are considerably greater than when she last lived, due to her time in the Netherworld, fighting — especially the kind that goes on between superheroes and supervillains — is not in her nature. She was raised in a time when a woman, if she had any influence at all, worked behind the scenes, manipulating men with cunning or aiding them however she could. Reborn, she falls back into her old patterns, and avoids physical confrontation whenever possible. To fight her enemies, she strengthens the Black Paladin with her magic, or calls up demons from the Netherworld to fight for her. (She rarely attempts to Entreat A Captain Of Hell, due to the difficulty of controlling such a powerful demon.)

Of course, with her powers, Chantal is more than a match for the average superhero, and even a group should take care when seeking to subdue her. If cornered and alone, she begins battle with her VPP configuration, *Infernal Aid*. Her next Phase, she uses Mind Control on the most “brutish” PC (most likely a Brick) and commands him to attack his teammates. If she can ferret out Psychological Limitations with Telepathy, she exploits them with Mental Illusions or other means. Her use of her Vile Black Magic is likely to be more devious. In general, she avoids “flashy” pyrotechnics, such as those favored by Talisman, considering them gauche and coarse.

Campaign Use: Chantal is a master villainess, and while lacking the world-shattering power of some mystical threats, she is dangerous to an individual hero or group of heroes.

As time goes on, she will become more familiar with the modern world, and as she does, her influence will extend into many different mystical organizations — not to mention the more sordid aspects of the criminal underworld. In addition, her existence attracts the attention of sorcerous cabals and other mystical villains, whom she will exploit to the utmost.

As for the Black Paladin: Chantal keeps him around... at least for awhile. She needs a strong arm to enforce her will when seduction and magic fail. Nonetheless, as time goes on she treats him more like her henchman and less like her lover. Of

course, the Black Paladin is proud and no one's servant. He desired the return of the woman who was his lover and stood faithfully by his side long ago — not the imperious and domineering woman who is Chantal reborn. He won't appreciate her behavior; eventually the two are likely to part ways. And it won't be an amicable parting.

As a Hunter, Chantal is deadly and driven. First, she learns all she can about the Hunted. She sets imps and other demonic creatures to spy on him, and uses Telepathy on his acquaintances, seeking to understand his desires and motivations. Then she starts taking away everything the Hunted holds dear and destroying everything important to him. She seduces and corrupts everyone of even passing importance to him. Those she fails to corrupt she attempts to turn against him through deception, using Mental Illusions or her Vile Black Magic. In the end, if she succeeds, she leaves her victim with nothing and no one — and then Chantal truly begins to take her vengeance by breaking his soul. Her ultimate aim is to turn the Hunted into her servant; but if necessary, reducing the Hunted to the empty shell of a human being satisfies her desire for revenge.

To increase her combat effectiveness, raise her SPD to 5 and STUN to 40. Furthermore, give her an Elemental Control, *Lesser Witcheries*, that includes Ward The Body, as well as Flight 25”, Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½) and Energy Blast 10d6, Armor Piercing (+½). Finally, add to *The Discourse Of Souls* Multipower, *Torment Thy Soul*: Ego Attack 7d6, Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½). These additions not only make her more like a traditional supermage, but also free up VPP points for other Powers.

To decrease her effectiveness, reduce the base points of her VPP to 70 (or even 60). Additionally, reduce the slots in her *The Discourse Of Souls* Multipower to 10d6, and lower her EGO to 24, or even 21. Finally, dramatically reduce, or get rid of entirely, her Boon Of The Infernal.

Appearance: Chantal has raven black hair reaching to her waist, witchy yellow eyes, and a milky white complexion. Her body is slender, but womanly. She dresses appropriate to the occasion — she is not so foolish as to wear archaic garb, and adopts modern fashions, though she never wears pants. Whatever she wears is elegant and of the finest quality, usually white with black trim and accessories. In the privacy of her own domain, she wears a long white gown with flaring sleeves and a black belt; over her shoulders, she wears a cloak of raven feathers. She speaks with a slight accent, and often slips into archaic speech patterns. If someone comments on this, she laughs charmingly and attributes it to being French.

Her beauty is the same as it was 1,500 years ago: haunting and ethereal. Yet a certain feyness has crept into her features — an appropriate look for one who has died and been reborn. Many are deceived by her beauty, but to those who look deeper, evil is apparent in her saturnine expression, predatory stare, and chilling smile.

DARKLING

The Black Paladin's Demon Steed

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
30	STR	20	15-	Lift 1,600 kg; 6d6 [3]
20	DEX	30	13-	OCV: 7/DCV: 7
22	CON	24	13-	
18	BODY	16	13-	
10	INT	0	11-	PER Roll 11-
10	EGO	0	11-	ECV: 3
20	PRE	10	13-	PRE Attack: 4d6
10	COM	0	11-	
12	PD	6		Total: 22 PD (14 rPD)
12	ED	8		Total: 22 ED (14 rED)
4	SPD	10		Phases: 3, 6, 9, 12
12	REC	4		
48	END	2		
48	STUN	4		Total Characteristics Cost: 134

Movement:	Running:	15"/30"
	Leaping:	8"/16"
	Flight:	15"/30"
	Teleport:	15"/60"

Cost	Powers	END
20	<i>Flaming Hooves:</i> HA +6d6; Hand-To-Hand Attack (-½)	3
12	<i>Bite:</i> HKA 1d6 (2d6 with STR); Reduced Penetration (-¼)	1
22	<i>Fiery Snort:</i> RKA 1d6, Penetrating (+½)	2
4	<i>Tough Skin:</i> Damage Resistance (4 PD/4 ED)	0
15	<i>Barding Of The Arcane Pathways:</i> Armor (10 PD/10 ED); OIF (-½), Activation Roll 14- (-½)	0
30	<i>Infernal Shield:</i> Physical and Energy Damage Reduction, Resistant, 25%	0
5	<i>Infernal Form:</i> Life Support (Longevity: Immortality)	0
12	<i>Heavy:</i> Knockback Resistance -6"	0
30	<i>Infernal Horseshoes:</i> Flight 15"; Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼); IIF (enchanted horseshoes; -¼)	2
20	<i>Barding Of The Arcane Pathways:</i> Teleportation 15", x4 Noncombat, Position Shift, Trigger (when Black Paladin Teleports; +¼), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½); OIF (-½), No Conscious Control (only when Black Paladin Teleports, must Teleport to same location; -2)	0
18	<i>Horse's Legs:</i> Running +9" (15" total)	2
2	<i>Horse's Legs:</i> Leaping +2" (8" forward, 4" upwards)	1
10	<i>Mystically Bound:</i> Mind Link, specific individual (Black Paladin), Psychic Bond	0
6	<i>Sharp-Eared and Keen-Nosed:</i> +2 PER with all Sense Groups	0
	Talents	
4	Lightning Reflexes: +4 DEX to act first with Full Move	

Skills

15	+3 Hand-To-Hand
3	Riding 15-; Complementary To Rider's Skill Only (-1)
3	Teamwork 13-

Total Powers & Skills Cost: 231
Total Cost: 365

200+ Disadvantages

5	Physical Limitation: Large (4m; -2 DCV, +2 to PER Rolls to perceive) (Infrequently, Slightly Impairing)
15	Physical Limitation: Very Limited Manipulation (Frequently, Greatly Impairing)
25	Psychological Limitation: Loyal to Black Paladin (Very Common, Total)
25	Psychological Limitation: Utterly Evil (Very Common, Total)
25	Susceptibility: to holy places and objects, takes 2d6 damage per Phase demon is on holy ground, in a holy place, or within 1" of a holy object (Common)
70	Experience Points

Total Disadvantage Points: 365

Powers/Tactics: Darkling uses his Lightning Reflexes to charge (perform a Move Through) on the same DEX as the Black Paladin. Since Darkling has Mind Link, his rider does not need a successful roll with the *Riding* Skill to direct his movements — Darkling moves however and wherever the Black Paladin wishes him to.

Darkling's *Barding Of The Arcane Pathways* is "attuned" to the Black Paladin's armor. Its Teleportation power only activates when the Black Paladin uses his own Teleportation, and unless Darkling is unconscious or otherwise incapacitated, you should consider the Trigger to always be set. Darkling and the Black Paladin re-appear simultaneously, at the same moment and in the same place. If the Black Paladin was mounted when he Teleported, he re-appears in the same position; otherwise, Darkling stands beside him.

In melee, Darkling attacks primarily with his *Flaming Hooves*; he can kick opponents with his rear hooves as well as his front. If surrounded, he often attacks with both (treat as a Sweep). Darkling usually reserves his sharp-toothed *Bite* for tormenting defenseless innocents.

Appearance: Darkling is huge warhorse, standing 19 hands (6' 4") tall. His coat and mane is glossy jet-black, with an unnatural crimson blaze on his muzzle, and crimson stockings at the bottom of his legs. His *Barding Of The Arcane Pathways* is finely-crafted black plate, identical in style to the Black Paladin's own armor. Streams of yellowish smoke drift from Darkling's flaring nostrils; and when he exerts himself, his lather tends to sizzle. His hooves leave flaming marks wherever they strike, including on the air when he flies. The malevolent glint in his rolling, bloodshot eyes makes Darkling's intelligence obvious.

THE GRYPHON

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
50	STR	40	19-	Lift 25 tons; 10d6 [5]
23	DEX	39	14-	OCV: 8/DCV: 8
30	CON	40	15-	
18	BODY	16	13-	
6	INT	-4	10-	PER Roll 10-
8	EGO	-4	11-	ECV: 3
20	PRE	10	13-	PRE Attack: 4d6
6	COM	-2	10-	
25	PD	15		Total: 25 PD (20 rPD)
21	ED	15		Total: 21 ED (20 rED)
5	SPD	17		Phases: 3, 5, 8, 10, 12
20	REC	8		
70	END	5		
60	STUN	2		Total Characteristics Cost: 197

Movement:	Running:	6"/12"
	Leaping:	10"/20"
	Flight:	20"/40"
	Gliding:	12"/24"

Cost	Powers	END
25	<i>Eagle's Beak:</i> HKA 1½d6 (3d6+1 with STR)	2
12	<i>Eagle's Talons:</i> HKA 1d6 (2d6 with STR); Reduced Penetration (-¼)	1
37	<i>Wind Blast:</i> Energy Blast 8d6, Area Of Effect (8" Cone; +1), Double Knockback (+¾); Does No STUN/BODY, Just Knockback (-¾), Restrained (-½), No Range (-½), Reduced By Range (-¼)	11
20	<i>Tough Skin:</i> Damage Resistance (20 PD/20 ED)	0
33	<i>Wings:</i> Multipower, 50-point reserve, all slots Restrained (-½)	
3u	1) <i>Flying:</i> Flight 20", Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼); Restrained (-½)	2
1u	2) <i>Riding The Thermals:</i> Gliding 12"; Restrained (-½)	0
6	<i>Heavy Body:</i> Knockback Resistance -3"	0
10	<i>Eagle's Eyes:</i> +5 PER with Sight Group	0
16	<i>Eagle's Eyes:</i> +16 versus Range for Normal Sight	0
Skills		
12	+4 levels with Grab By, Move By, and Move Through	
6	+3 levels with Flight	
5	Acrobatics 16-; Aerial Only (-½)	
5	Stealth 15-	

Total Powers & Skill Cost: 191**Total Cost: 388****200+ Disadvantages**

30	Enraged: Berserk when attacked with Mental Powers (Common), go 11-, recover 11-
25	Hunted: Randolph Estate 14- (Mo Pow, NCI, Limited Geographical Area, Capture)
15	Physical Limitation: Difficulty Forming Words, hard to speak with a beak (Frequently, Greatly)
25	Psychological Limitation: Slavishly Devoted To Black Paladin (Very Common, Total)
20	Psychological Limitation: Bestial And Savage (Very Common, Strong)

73 Experience Points**Total Disadvantage Points: 388**

Background/History: These were your memories, Eliot Randolph, before you drank the wine.

You had a memory of your first conversation with your father, William Randolph. You asked him for a new tricycle. You had just gotten your old one, but you were already tired of it. Your father answered, "Eliot, you will always have the wealth to buy whatever you want. You must resist the temptation — lock it away. Wealth does not entitle you to a life of luxury, but one of service. Resist the temptation of self-indulgence, Eliot — lock it away."

You were too young to understand much of what your father said. You understood you wanted something, but you had to lock the wanting away. So you did as your father told you. You imagined the new tricycle locked behind a door in a house with many rooms. The imagery was apt; you lived in a house with many rooms and many closed doors. The doors were closed simply because no one ever used the rooms. But to your young mind, the closed doors somehow seemed more important — mysterious and foreboding. Even as you grew older, you hesitated before opening one of them. Even by the time you left for college, there were rooms you had never entered.

You had a memory from your first year in college. You had just gotten off the phone with your father. You had told him you were worried about your future. You couldn't decide what to study. He replied, "Don't worry about what *you* want to study, Eliot. Study what will help you help others. Lock away self-indulgence."

Afterward, you walked to a party. You stayed only a little while, long enough to have a drink and say hello to some friends. Then you left and called Linda Wilson. Your families had been friends for generations, and the two of you had been friends for as long as you could remember. Over coffee, you and Linda talked about your future. Linda thought your father was right.

You graduated with a degree in General Studies. Your father wasn't sure he approved, but after college you dedicated your life to the service of others. Your father, as many of the Randolphs had, devoted himself to a public life. He had been a judge, then a state congressman. That wasn't the life for you. Instead, you filled your days with simple Christian charity. You involved yourself in many worthy causes — not just financially, but with work. Most of the time, Linda worked at your side.

You had a memory of asking Linda Wilson to marry you. Until the moment you asked, you had never considered marrying Linda. You didn't love her. You had known each other all your lives, but never been more than friends. Even years later, you never understood what made you ask that night. But ask her you did, and she seemed satisfied, and both your families were satisfied, so you locked away your self-indulgence. You wanted to marry someone you loved, but you closed the door on that.

Your marriage to Linda was peaceful. You fought once in seven years. It was over the Dela-



croix Mansion. The place sent shivers down your spine. Linda insisted on living there; she wanted to have children and make a home. She said the townhouse in downtown Millennium City was a nice place to live, but not a proper home for a family. Reluctantly, you agreed.

This is the last of your memories, Eliot Randolph, the final one washed away by the wine. You and Linda had lived in the Delacroix Mansion for almost six months. You hadn't settled in. Linda struggled to make it a home, but you never felt comfortable there. It wasn't that it was too big; the house you grew up in was much bigger. You just felt you didn't belong in the place.

There was a knock at the door. Three loud raps. It was strange — no one had ever used the wrought-iron knocker before. You arrived at the door first. Linda was right behind you. The door was old and walnut and didn't have a peephole. You opened it. Linda was asking, "Who could that be?"

A man and woman stood outside the door. He wore a suit of medieval armor, complete with mace, sword, and shield. Her clothes were stylish and racy, a leather mini-skirt, open blouse, and high-heeled boots. Just as horror dawned on you, the woman's mind was in your own, and flames filled your sight.

When the flames faded to merest flicker, you knew time had passed. It was dark outside the open windows. Crows had flown into the room; they were perched on the fireplace's mantle and all the furniture. Another woman had joined the others. This one wore a helmet in the shape of a crow's skull.

Birdlike, she cocked her head and stared at you.

The man in black armor stood in front of you. You recognized him now. He was the Black Paladin, a supervillain and killer. He held a bottle of wine. With a dagger, he cut the wax sealing the bottle. Pressed into the scarlet wax was the shape of a rampant griffin, half-eagle, half-lion. The bottle open, he wrapped inhumanly strong fingers in your hair, and pulled back your head. He spoke, "Falconry is the sport of nobles. The horn blows and the hunt begins, so this falconer of old has need of a peregrine." He poured the wine down your throat. "Let the Blood of Beasts work its ancient magic and answer my need."

The wine was bitter and metallic in your mouth. You choked and sputtered. It burned in your stomach. Then it was flooding your mind. In blood-red torrents, it engulfed the house with many doors where you locked away your self-indulgence. The wine swept through all its rooms, carrying away your memories. It threw open all the closed doors, freeing your temptations and desires, rages and lusts. And somehow it seemed right.

The cawing of crows grated. You were their superior — no carrion-eater, but a savage and fierce predator. You spread your majestic wings, and opened your beak to scream with prideful rage. The crows fell silent. The only sound in the room was the evil laughter of the falconer, your master.

Personality/Motivation: Eliot Randolph was a self-possessed and self-contained man. He never spoke an angry word, nor gave into temptations of the flesh. He never allowed himself to act on the more base emotions or desires. Sadly, he was somewhat lacking in self-awareness and self-determination. Then came the transformation worked by the Blood of the Beast.

The Gryphon is a creature that acts on his impulses, and his impulses are simple: hunger and bloodlust. If someone sets meat before him, he eats it. If something angers him, he rends it with beak and claw.

Submerged in the bestial lust of the Gryphon is the persona of Eliot Randolph. He drowns in blood, but still struggles for the surface and air. When attacked with a Mental Power (basically, any attack that requires an ECV Attack Roll), the Gryphon senses Eliot's struggles growing more frantic, and a berserk rage consumes him.

The Black Paladin exerts total control over the Gryphon, but he understands the master/pet relationship fully. The falconer never tames the falcon — he only keeps it hooded and inactive until the hunt. When he removes its hood, the falcon follows its hunting instincts. The Black Paladin understands he cannot make the Gryphon beg at his feet, or come to heel at his command... but he can make the Gryphon strike at the intended quarry.

Though bestial, the Gryphon understands spoken English. Due to his beak and avian vocal cords, he has great difficulty speaking. When he does speak, he uses single, monosyllabic words, and even those are garbled, broken by screams and shrieks, and difficult to understand.

Quote: “SKREEE-yar!!!”

Powers/Tactics: The Gryphon’s favorite tactic is to take to the air and soar above a flying target; then swoop down, accelerating to full diving velocity (40”) and performing a Move By. With his Movement Levels for Flight, the Gryphon has little difficulty pulling out of the dive.

Against an earth-bound target, the Gryphon attempts to Grab. If the Grab succeeds, he flies straight up in Half Moves, also squeezing the target in his arms for 10d6 Normal Damage or striking with his beak for 3d6+1 Killing Damage. Once his END begins to run low, he lets go of the target, who plummets to the earth.

Against a group of foes, the Gryphon first hovers directly above the group, then performs a Wind Blast. Afterward, he chooses a target, Grabs, and flies into the air. He generates the Wind Blast with several mighty strokes of his immense wings. While not the same as a punch or the impact of a hard object, the gust of wind has enough power to hurl the average man-sized individual back several meters. (Think of it like a tornado lifting a car from the ground — it’s not the lifting that wrecks the car, but the landing.)

If fighting indoors, the Gryphon uses his Wind Blast or performs a Move Through on his opponent, attempting to take the fight outside so he can use his Flight to best effect.

When Berserk, the Gryphon engages the nearest target with a Move Through, then attempts to pin the target to the ground, attacking with his beak HKA.

Campaign Use: The Gryphon makes an excellent henchman for a campaign’s mystical arch-villain. As a flying brick, he serves as muscle and enforcer, or occasionally assassin. He doesn’t really possess the attention span to Hunt a PC, but he might decide a particular flying hero or heroine is his favorite “prey.” His tactics as a Hunter mirror the hunting habits of a raptor: he perches or soars, waiting for his prey to appear; then, lightning-fast, he swoops to attack.

To strengthen the Gryphon, increase his STR to 60, his Flight to 30”, and the number of Levels he has with Flight. Finally, to help prevent his wings from being restrained, provide him with +20 STR, with the Limitation *Only To Escape Grabs And Break Entangles* (-1½).

To weaken the Gryphon, reduce the dice in his Wind Blast to 4d6 (remember to adjust the Area Of Effect accordingly), or get rid of it entirely. Reduce his DEX to 18, and decrease his levels with Grab By, Move By, and Move Through.

Appearance: A huge, menacing figure, the Gryphon stands seven foot tall and weighs 500 kg. Despite his weight, he has no fat on his body — only corded muscle rippling under short, tawny fur. His wings stretch fifteen feet from tip to tip. The plumage of his wings, as well as the tufts of feathers at his wrists and ankles, is lustrous brown. His head is like that of a golden eagle, with a fierce beak, and spiky, golden feathers on the back of his head and neck.

LADY CROW

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
15	STR	5	12-	Lift 200 kg; 3d6 [1]
26	DEX	48	14-	OCV: 9/DCV: 9
18	CON	16	13-	
12	BODY	4	11-	
8	INT	-2	11-	PER Roll 12-
13	EGO	6	12-	ECV: 4
15	PRE	5	12-	PRE Attack: 3d6
8	COM	-1	11-	
15	PD	12		Total: 15 PD (6 rPD)
15	ED	11		Total: 15 ED (6 rED)
6	SPD	24		Phases: 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12
12	REC	10		
42	END	3		
36	STUN	7		Total Characteristics Cost: 148

Movement: Running: 6"/12"
Flight: 9"/18"

Cost	Powers	END
29	<i>A Murder Of Crows:</i> Summon 144-point Flock of Crows, Slavishly Devoted (+1); Crows Must Inhabit Locale (-½), Crows Arrive Under Own Power (-½)	6
37	<i>Power Over Avians:</i> Mind Control 10d6 (Animal class of mind), Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼), Telepathic (+¼); Only Works On Birds (-1)	3
10	<i>Shared Psyche:</i> Mind Link, specific individual (A Murder of Crows), Psychic Bond	0
9	<i>Shared Psyche:</i> N-Ray Perception (stopped by anything other than the Murder Of Crows' Darkness) (no Sense Group), Discriminatory, Range, Sense, Targeting; Only To See Through Murder Of Crows' Darkness (-2), Affected By All Sight Group Sense-Affecting Powers Except Murder Of Crows' Darkness (-½)	0
37	<i>Talons:</i> HKA 3d6 (3½d6 with STR), Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼); Reduced Penetration (-¼), No Knockback (-¼)	2
15	<i>Shadow Lurking:</i> Invisibility to Sight Group, Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½); Requires A Stealth Roll (-½), Only Works In Shadows Or Darkness (-½)	0
6	<i>Tough Skin:</i> Damage Resistance (6 PD/6 ED)	0
10	<i>Exotic Psyche:</i> Mental Defense (13 points total)	0
12	<i>Wings:</i> Flight 9"; Restrained (-½)	2
4	<i>Perching:</i> Clinging (normal STR); Only To Perch (-½), Requires A Climbing Roll (-½), Cannot Resist Knockback (-¼)	0
24	<i>Through The Eyes Of Crows:</i> Multipower, 53-point reserve, all slots Only Through The Senses Of Crows (-¾), Blackout (-½)	0
2u	1) <i>Crows' Eyes I:</i> Clairsentience (Sight Group), 4x Range (600"), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½); Only Through The Senses Of Crows (-¾), Blackout (-½)	0
1u	2) <i>Crows' Eyes II:</i> Clairsentience (Sight Group), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½),	

MegaRange (1" range = 1 km; +¼); Only Through The Senses Of Crows (-¾), Blackout (-½)
6 *Sharp-Eyed:* +3 PER with Sight Group 0

Skills

4	+2 OCV with HKA
10	+2 DCV
4	+2 with Flight
3	Breakfall 14-
7	Climbing 16-
11	Concealment 15-
2	KS: Arcane And Occult Lore 11-
6	KS: Avians 15-
11	Mimicry 15-
7	Shadowing 13-
7	Stealth 16-

Total Powers & Skill Cost: 274**Total Cost: 422****200+ Disadvantages**

20	Accidental Change: always return to body and psyche of Linda Randolph when out of sight of crows for a full cycle of the moon (Uncommon)
15	Distinctive Features: crows gather in her presence (Not Concealable; Noticed And Recognizable)
25	Hunted: Randolph Estate 14- (Mo Pow, NCI, Limited Geographical Area, Capture)
10	Physical Limitation: Talons are no substitute for fingers (-2 on all DEX Rolls involving fine manipulation) (Frequently, Slightly Impairing)
25	Psychological Limitation: Loyal To Black Paladin And Chantal (Very Common, Total)
20	Psychological Limitation: Crow Morality And Mentality (Very Common, Strong)
20	Vulnerability: 2 x Effect from Mind Control (Common)
87	Experience Points

Total Disadvantage Points: 422

Background/History: Linda Wilson always knew she would marry Eliot Randolph.

(Once — before the murderous cawing of crows filled her soul, and she drowned in a raven darkness — she was fond of remembering Eliot's face when he asked her to marry him. He seemed shocked by his own words. He looked around the restaurant, like maybe he was overhearing another man sitting at a nearby table propose to a different Linda. She wasn't shocked. Not at all. She always knew he would ask someday. Never had a doubt.)

Their families had been friends for decades. Linda's father was the attorney for the Randolph family. Her grandfather had held the same position. For their fathers, the relationship was both satisfying on a professional level, and close on a personal level. Linda spent most of her summers with the Randolphs. For many of those years — perhaps all of them — she was Eliot's only playmate. And when Eliot was too old to have a playmate, she was his only friend and confidante.

(To Linda, their marriage was only natural. The men of two generations had been close associates and closer friends; in the third generation, one man had a daughter, the other a son. That both families join in marriage was right. Linda could remember the first time she knew she would marry Eliot. She was five; he was six. They were lying in the grass, guessing at the shapes of clouds. Once, she could remember the day perfectly, but that memory was taken from her. A murder of crows, larger than any cloud, spread across the sky, blotting out the sun. The crows swooped down on her and Eliot. They tore at her hair, flapped wings in her face. She started to run, but turned back to search for Eliot. As she watched, a crow plucked an eyeball from his face, then turned its bloody beak toward her. The anguish of her screams — like her memory of that day — was stolen by the noise of the crows' terrible cawing.)

Linda knew they were perfect for each other. Both of them were born wealthy, but raised differently than their affluent peers. Wealth for the Wilsons and Randolphs did not mean a life of luxury. Wealth was an obligation — it was a responsibility toward less fortunate men and women. It was a responsibility fulfilled not just by donations to charities, but acts of charity as well. Linda and Eliot shared more than just a *noblesse oblige* toward their fellow man. Both possessed a deep and abiding belief in God and His only begotten son, Jesus Christ.

(On *that* night, she prayed for Christ's mercy. She recalled the place of martyred saints in



Heaven, and believed she neared the end of her life. She was wrong. In answer to her prayer, a crow's memory came to roost in her soul. She tore carrion from a dead man, crucified on a hill named Golgotha. In her gullet, the carrion tasted the same as any dead man's flesh.)

Her marriage was more than just common heritage and belief. Eliot needed her. She felt his need as a physical force. Not just in her heart, but in her very being. She couldn't ignore Eliot's need, any more than she could ignore air when choking. Any more than she could ignore the need exuded by the old Delacroix Mansion.

When she first saw the old place, Linda knew she had to make a home there. Something about the estate — the stillness of the wooded grounds, the gentle waves of Lake Erie's cold gray waters — contrasted so strongly with the angry tumult barely contained by the bricks of the old mansion. It jarred her senses. She felt a need to bring peace to the mansion. But she could not — would not, even if able — explain what she really believed: she thought she could feel the angry stirring of ghosts haunting the mansion. In her innocence, because of her Christian soul, she thought she could ease the ghosts' need.

(She came to understand, as the last of her humanity was stripped from her soul by sharp beaks, the futility of her belief. Witnessing the Delacroix Mansion through the eyes of a crow, she finally understood. The mansion dwelt in the underworld more so than the mundane world. Its ghosts wanted to be there, and deserved to be nowhere else.)

Because of the mansion, they came for her and Eliot. There were three of them, although Eliot only ever saw two. The evil ones came to seize the mansion for their own purposes. They found a use for Linda and Eliot too.

There was the black-haired woman, whose leather mini-skirt slithered up her hips and blouse fell open enticingly — the whore of Babylon. There was the man who was as War — armed and armored, yearning for battle. But when he removed his black steel helmet, Linda saw his coal-black hair and burning dark eyes: the Anti-Christ himself. There was one more, who swirled madly around the dark-haired man, whose misty tendrils lashed at him like a whip, whose frightful need caused Linda to vomit. That could only be the Beast come up from Hell.

Eliot stood unmoving, his eyes fixed on the whore of Babylon. Linda was bent over, arms wrapped around her heaving stomach. Neither of them could resist what came next. In one hand, the Anti-Christ held a bottle stoppered with wax; in the other, a helmet of yellowed bone in the shape of a crow's skull. The Anti-Christ placed the helmet on Linda's head, and the crows came to roost in her soul.

She was the crow not telling Apollo, the sun god, of his lover's infidelity. She soared over the snowfields of Russia at a terrible witch's bidding. She whispered news of far-off battlefields in the ear of Odin as the One-Eyed stood in the midst of the

slaughtered. She perched on dying Cuchulainn's shoulder, and mocked his death in the name of Morrigan's vengeance.

More than just her soul changed. The wings sprouting from her back caused her pain, but her fingers growing into steel-sharp talons gave her satisfaction — so much better to rend and tear carrion than flesh-soft fingers. A murder of ebony-plumed crows swooped through the open windows and gathered around her. The crows cawed raucously, and Lady Crow joined her own ragged voice in the cacophony.

Personality/Motivation: Linda Randolph was a giving person. She was devoted to charity, her husband, and the teachings of Christ. She was incredibly empathetic towards the less fortunate.

Lady Crow is none of these things. She cares nothing for others. In fact, she cannot understand the feelings of others. She lacks not just empathy, but also sympathy. She feels neither compassion nor pity. Her mentality is that of crow: cunning, cold-blooded, and completely self-motivated.

Moreover, Lady Crow embodies the mythical archetype of the Bird. She represents every evil thing said about crows in Western folklore and myth: the harbinger of conflict and battle; the carrion-eater that profits from slaughter and death. She comes to battle not as a noble enemy, but to linger above the battlefield, waiting for its end, so she can glut herself on the bloody harvest.

In folklore and myth, the crow often serves a higher power (usually a god or goddess of war, or powerful sorcerer). Because of this, Lady Crow is especially susceptible to the control of others. She usually serves as an occult henchman, slavishly devoted to a master whom she aids with her powers of spying and stealth... until his powers waver, at which point she abandons him. To a crow, all carrion tastes the same, whether torn from the corpse of a hapless innocent or a once-powerful master.

Quote: "It's not a flock of crows, fool — it's a *murder!*"

Powers/Tactics: Lady Crow avoids direct confrontation if she can; she serves her master best as a spy and gatherer of information (tasks for which her Clairsentience and Murder of Crows are especially useful). Unless circumstances dictate otherwise, she always begins a fight with her Murder of Crows already Summoned.

She prefers to lurk unseen in a dark corner of a room, or high on the wall of a building (using her Perching and Shadow Lurking abilities). Before attacking, she telepathically commands her Murder of Crows to engulf the target with Darkness. After the crows surround the target, she swoops down on her enemy, performing a Move By with her Talons and hopefully benefitting from the victim's reduced OCV for lack of perception. At the end of her Move By, she attempts to disappear back into the shadows. She continues this tactic until it's no longer effective.

If forced to move toward an opponent, she cloaks herself in her crows' Darkness. She Holds

her Action so she can move with the Darkness as the crows move. She usually performs a Dodge on Phases when the Murder of Crows doesn't have an action (if she's flying, and she usually prefers to unless low on END, she uses her Movement Levels to improve her DCV).

Lady Crow always tries to coordinate her attacks with her Murder of Crows. She does not impulsively jump into melee combat with an opponent unless she's sure she has a distinct advantage. If her opponent reduces her Murder of Crows to zero BODY, she immediately Summons another.

Regardless of her preferences in combat, she obeys the commands of the Black Paladin (or her current master).

Lady Crow's Mind Control works on the Gryphon, perhaps because of his avian nature, perhaps because some remnant of Linda Randolph's empathic bond with her husband remains. If the Gryphon goes Berserk in combat, she attempts soothe his rage with her Power Over Avians. To do so requires an EGO +30 result on the Mind Control dice.

Campaign Use: Lady Crow works best as a henchman for a powerful mystical villain. She's an unlikely Hunter — she has more interest in self-preservation than vengeance. She is much more likely to be an assassin sent after a hero by his Hunter than the Hunter herself.

To strengthen Lady Crow, increase her PD, ED, and Resistant Defenses. You could also provide her with a means of "healing" the Murder of Crows. Give her a Multipower with her Summon and Healing only for the Murder of Crows (a -1 Limitation). The special effect is that she summons individual crows to join the flock, replacing those killed during battle.

To weaken Lady Crow, decrease the Damage Classes of her HKA. In addition, decrease or take away completely her levels with her HKA and DCV. As a last resort, remove her ability to see through the Darkness created by her Murder of Crows.

Appearance: Lady Crow is creepy to say the least (thus her high PRE and low COM). Black-feathered wings, spreading almost twelve feet from tip to tip when unfurled, emerge from her shoulder blades. Eight-inch long razor-sharp talons have replaced her fingers. She usually goes barefoot; similar (though shorter) talons have replaced her toes.

She wears a black, sleeveless tunic belted around her emaciated waist with a cord of rope. A helmet the color of ancient bones, in the stylized shape of a crow's skull, obscures her features. When she uses her Mental Powers or Summon, a red glimmer fills the empty sockets of the skull. Although she doesn't need to wear the skull to use her powers (it isn't a Focus), she rarely removes it.

Instinctively, crows and other birds of the Corvus genus gather around Lady Crow. If she stays in one place for long, an unusual number of such birds arrive, which often attracts notice (especially from the mystically aware).

A MURDER OF CROWS

Lady Crow's Pets

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
-20	STR	-30	5-	Lift 1.6 kg; 0d6 [1]
14	DEX	12	12-	OCV: 5/DCV: 5
20	CON	20	13-	
15	BODY	10	12-	
10	INT	0	11-	
5	EGO	-10	10-	ECV: 2
13	PRE	3	12-	PRE Attack: 2½d6
8	COM	-1	11-	
2	PD	2	Total: 2 PD (0 rPD)	
2	ED	-2	Total: 2 ED (0 rED)	
3	SPD	6	Phases: 4, 8, 12	
6	REC	4		
40	END	0		
40	STUN	15	Total Characteristics Cost: 29	

Movement: Running 1"/2"
Flight: 9"/18"
Swimming: 0"/0"

Cost	Powers	END
41	<i>Wings Of Ebon Darkness:</i> Darkness to Sight and Hearing Group 1" radius, Usable As Attack (+1), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½), Personal Immunity (+¼); Limited Effect (see text; -0)	0
10	<i>Beaks:</i> 1d6 HKA (1d6 with STR); Reduced Penetration (-¼), No Knockback (-¼)	1
20	<i>Flock:</i> Physical Damage Reduction, Resistant, 50%; Not Versus Area Of Effect/Explosion Attacks (-½)	0
20	<i>Flock:</i> Energy Damage Reduction, Resistant, 50%; Not Versus Area Of Effect/Explosion Attacks (-½)	0
10	<i>Flock:</i> Knockback Resistance -5"	0
5	<i>Flock:</i> Increased Arc Of Perception (360 Degrees) for Normal Sight	
18	<i>Wings:</i> Flight 9"	2
-10	<i>Short Legs:</i> Running -5" (1" total)	1
-2	<i>Nonaquatic:</i> Swimming -2" (0" total)	0

Skills

3 Mimicry 11-

Total Powers & Skill Cost: 119

Total Cost: 144

75+ Disadvantages

- 15 Physical Limitation: Animal Intelligence (Frequently, Greatly Impairing)
- 15 Physical Limitation: Very Limited Manipulation (Frequently, Greatly Impairing)
- 5 Physical Limitation: Large (fills 1 hex; -2 DCV, +2 to PER Rolls to perceive) (Infrequently, Slightly Impairing)
- 34 Experience Points

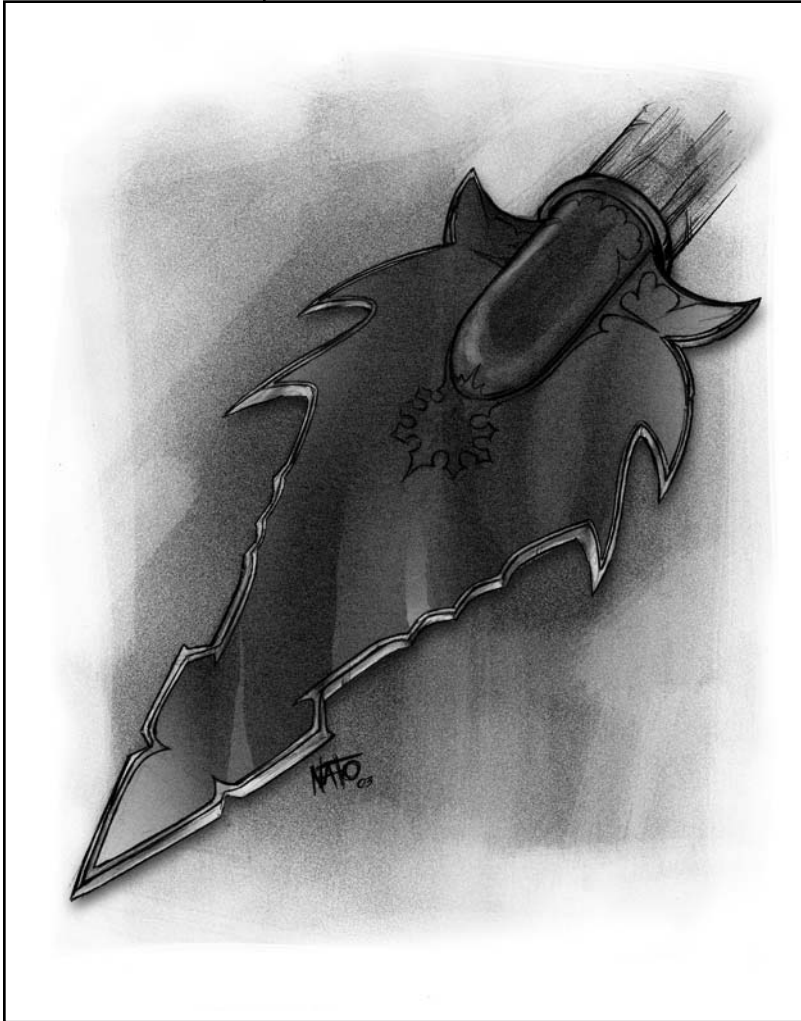
Total Disadvantage Points: 144

Powers/Tactics: The Murder of Crows is a flock of 20 to 30 crows that moves and acts as one in combat (thus the single character sheet for the entire flock; see the rules for Swarms on page 183 of the *HERO System Bestiary*). Their Darkness attack is the flock of crows occupying the same hex as the target, flapping their wings frantically in his

eyes and cawing loudly in his ears. It's bought with the *Usable As Attack* Advantage so that the crows can move it (*i.e.*, fly in a cloud) without having to re-create it — thus, someone who tries to run away from them finds the crows keeping pace and continuing to block his senses.

The Murder of Crows is not protected by its own Darkness. Those outside it can attack it normally; the victim inside it can target the Murder with no OCV penalty (though he still suffers the DCV penalty for inability to perceive if the Murder, or someone else, attacks him).

The Murder of Crows' Damage Reduction and Knockback Resistance represent an attacker's difficulty getting a good, solid hit against a madly flying flock of crows. If an attack Stuns the Murder of Crows, that means the attack dispersed the flock until it can recover. If attacks reduce the murder to zero BODY, it has killed or injured so many crows the murder no longer has any effect in combat.



ENCHANTED WEAPONS

Here's information on Chantal's dagger and the Lance of Unvanquished Pain.

CHANTAL'S DAGGER

Stolen from a museum of antiquities local to the *Forêt du Chevalier Noir* in France, this dagger belonged to Chantal long centuries ago. A gift from her lover, the Black Paladin, the wicked blade was dear to the witch. She used it to perform sacrifices in homage of her dark goddess... and to take her own life.

The hilt is made of two bars of tarnished silver twined together. Each end of the guard terminates in a four-taloned claw which holds a black chalcedony. The pommel has the shape of a crow's head. The ten-inch-long blade has a sharp edge on both sides; the last three inches end in a gradual curve. The blade nearest the hilt is bronze-colored; the rest of it has the murky reddish-brown color of dried blood. When Chantal plunged the dagger into her breast and pierced her heart, the blade drank deep, and the stain of her blood on its surface became indelible.

How the dagger gained its powers — it had none, when Chantal first lived — remains unknown. Perhaps Chantal's gruesome suicide created the agent of her rebirth. Maybe the witch's fathomless hunger for rebirth unconsciously imbued the blade with magic. Or perhaps a third party seeking to further his — or her — own plans granted it powers. Whatever the case, Chantal can only be reborn through the agency of the dagger, and only it can banish her from the mortal realm.

Wickedly Sharp: *HKA 1d6, Affects Desolidified (+½) (22 Active Points); OAF (-1), Independent (-2). Total cost: 5 points.*

Ritual Of Rebirth: *Effects summarized in the sidebar on page 23.*

LANCE OF UNVANQUISHED PAIN

The Lance is primitive in appearance, looking more like a longish spear than a medieval lance. Its seven-foot shaft is made from dull, greyish wood, and much of its lower half is wrapped in rough leather rumored to be the flayed skin of a human being. The blade itself is leaf-shaped, and made from some black, pitted metal. If the Lance successfully draws blood, great pain which lingers for days afflicts the wounded man. Of all those wounded by the Lance, only the great knight Sir Lancelot survived its agonizing touch.

Lance Of Unvanquished Pain: *HKA 2d6 (up to 4d6 with STR), +2 Increased STUN Multiplier (+½) (45 Active Points); OAF (-1) (total cost: 22 points) **plus** Drain DEX 4d6, Delayed Return Rate (points return at the rate of 5 per Day; +1½), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½) (120 Active Points); OAF (-1), Linked (-¼), Only Works If HKA Does BODY (-½) (total cost: 44 points). Total cost: 66 points.*

CHARTS



SHADES OF BLACK NPC SUMMARY TABLE

This table organizes the NPCs appearing in *Shades of Black* alphabetically by last name. It also provides a brief description of the NPC and the page number where his Character Brief (if any) appears.

Name	Description	Page
Boncour, Phillipe	Curator of a French museum, he reports the theft of Chantal's dagger and other artifacts.	
Clemenceau, Alain	Professor of Medieval History at MC University, he knows the legend of the Black Paladin and Chantal's death.	p. 34
de Wolf, Marjorie	Fifth victim abducted by the Black Paladin, she is abducted at the end of Act One and later attacked at the beginning of Act Three.	p. 20
Marlowe, Raymond	Homicide detective with MCPD, he asks the PCs for help with the case and remains their police contract throughout the adventure.	p. 9
Randolph, Eliot	Wealthy man married to Linda Randolph, he is turned into the Gryphon by the Black Paladin. For more details see the Gryphon's Character Sheet.	
Randolph, Linda	Wealthy woman married to Eliot Randolph, he is turned into Lady Crow by the Black Paladin. For more details see Lady Crow's Character Sheet.	
Reynaud, Jean	French archaeologist who discovers the Black Paladin's tomb, he writes an article which describes his findings. At the time of the adventure, he is deceased.	
Rockwell, Gayle	Friend of Marjorie de Wolf, she witnesses the Black Paladin and Talisman (in their Secret IDs) abduct her friend.	
Sarrazene, Sebastian	Morbane in DEMON, he is Talisman's Contact with that organization.	p. 41

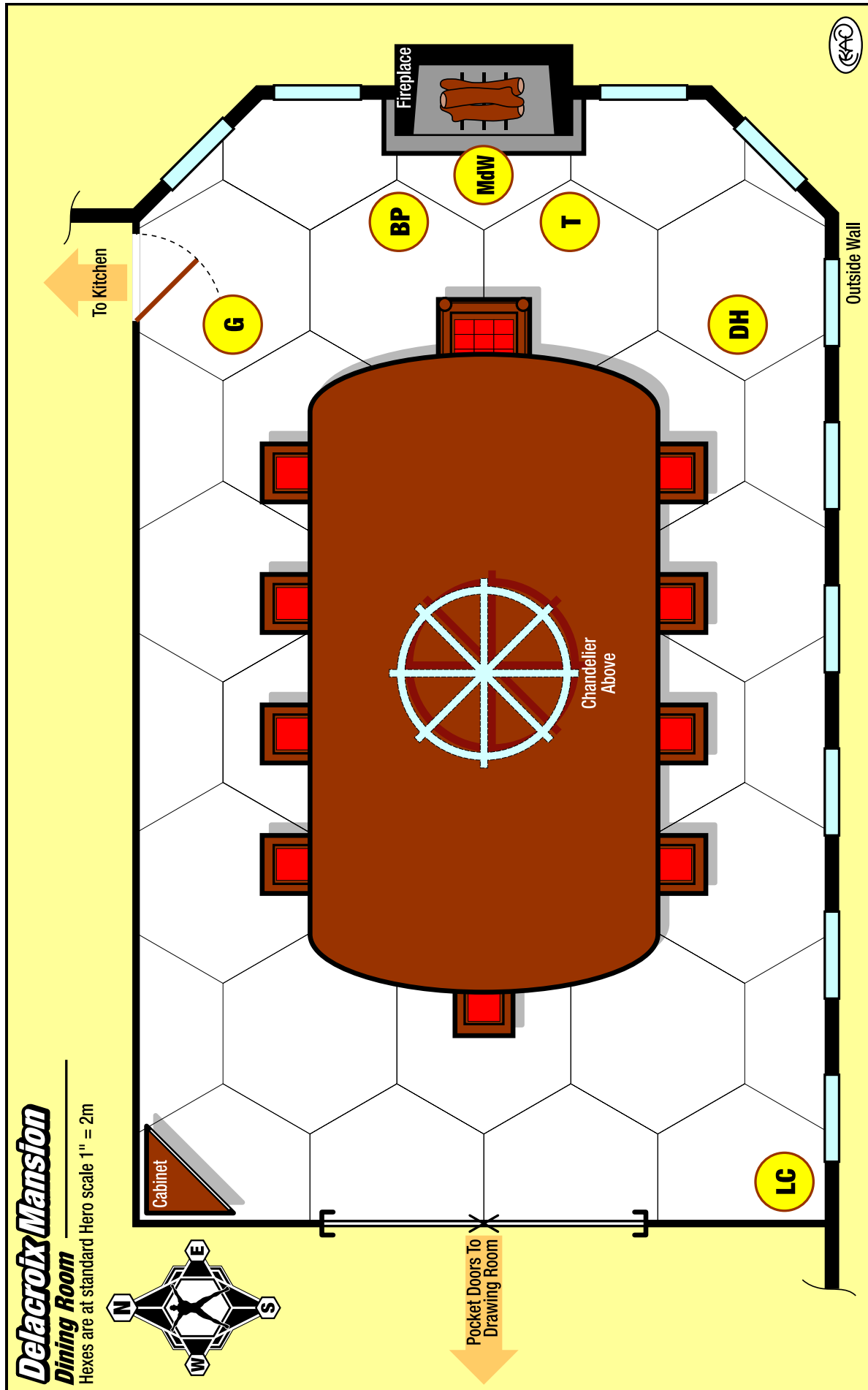
COMBAT RECORD SHEET ■ DOWN IN THE HOLE

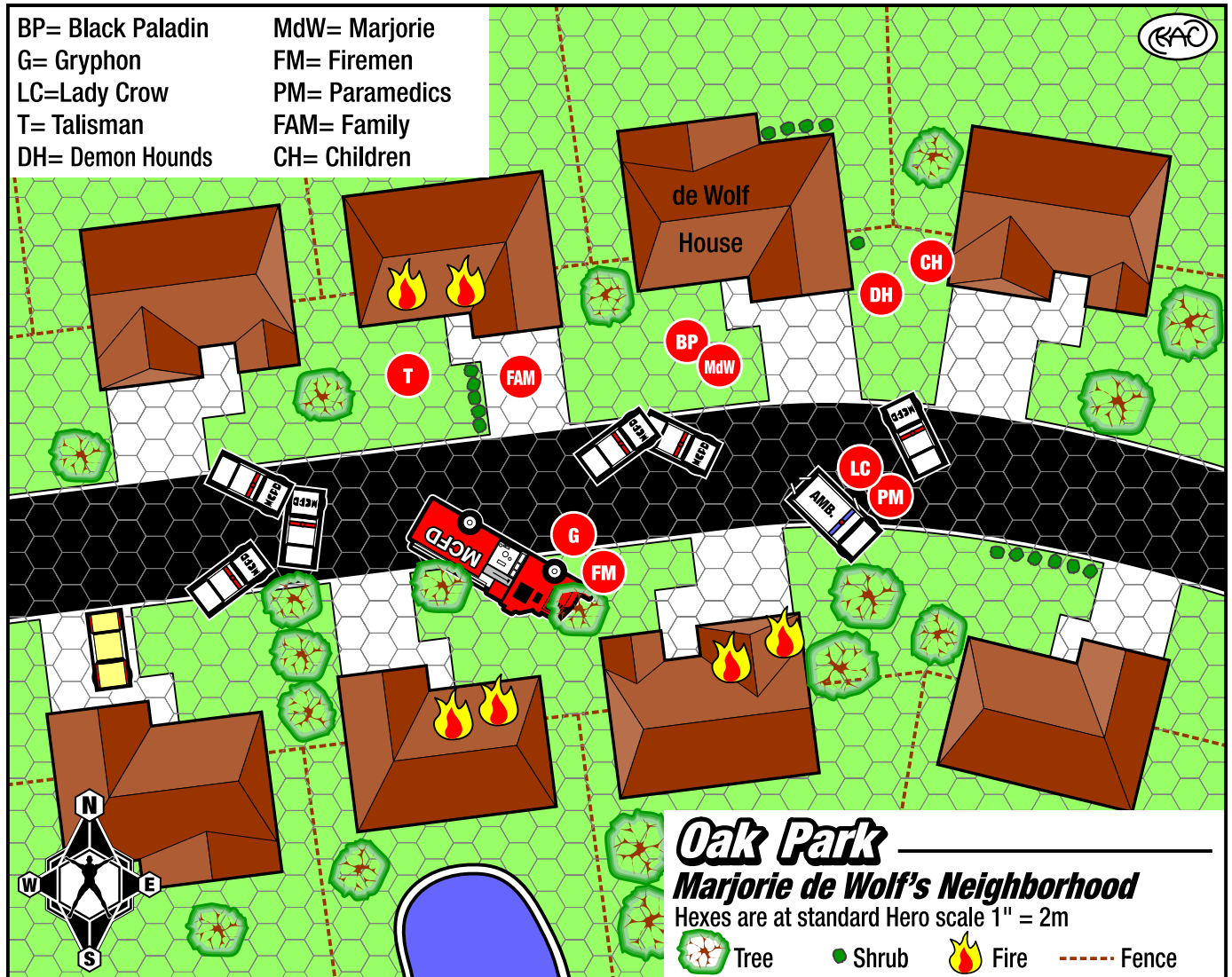
CHARACTER	DEX/ Levels	SPD	PHASES												OCV	DCV	ECV
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12			
			○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○			
			○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○			
			○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○			
Lady Crow	26	6	○	●	○	●	○	●	○	●	○	●	○	●	8	8	4
			○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○			
Black Paladin	24	5	○	○	●	○	●	○	○	●	○	●	○	●	8	8	5
Gryphon	23	5	○	○	●	○	●	○	○	●	○	●	○	●	8	8	3
			○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○			
			○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○			
Darkling	20	4	○	○	●	○	○	●	○	○	●	○	○	●	7	7	3
Talisman	20	5	○	○	●	○	●	○	○	●	○	●	○	●	7	7	7
			○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○			
Lesser Demon	20	4	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	7	7	7
Chantal (Reborn)	17	4	○	○	●	○	○	●	○	○	●	○	○	●	7	7	9
Demon Hound	17	4	○	○	●	○	○	●	○	○	●	○	○	●	6	6	3

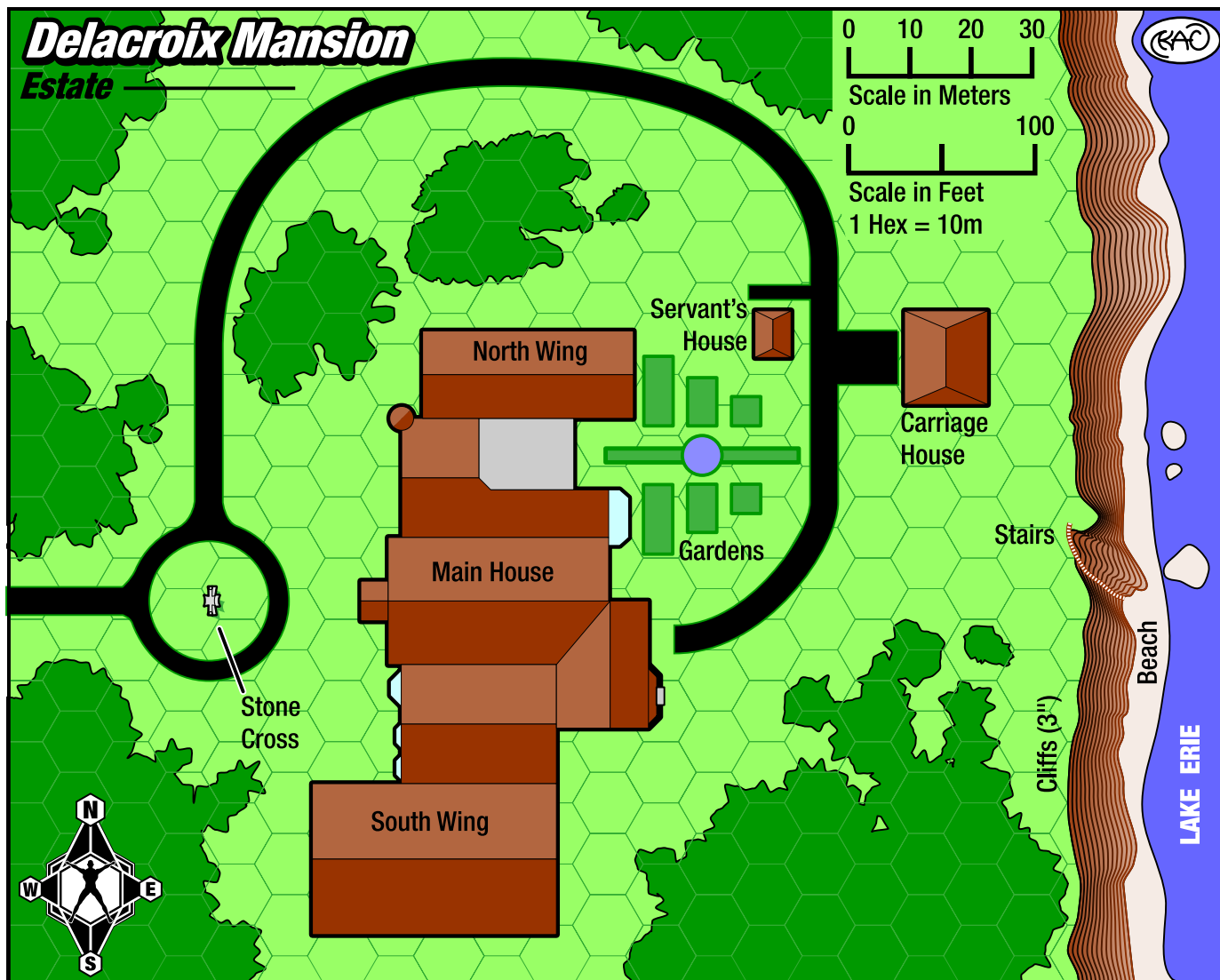
CHARACTER	tPD/rPD	tED/rED	MOVEMENT	PER Roll
	/	/		
	/	/		
	/	/		
Lady Crow	15 / 6	15 / 6	6" Run; 9" Flight	12-
	/	/		
Black Paladin	22 / 14	22 / 14	9" Run; 15" Teleport	12-
Gryphon	25 / 20	25 / 20	6" Run; 20" Flight; 12" Gliding	10-
	/	/		
	/	/		
Darkling	22 / 14	22 / 14	15" Run; 8" Leap; 15" Flight; 15" Tport	11-
Talisman	19 / 14	19 / 14	6" Run; 20" Flight	13-
	/	/		
Lesser Demon	15 / 8	15 / 8	9" Run; 12" Flight	13-
Chantal (Reborn)	25 / 20	25 / 20	6" Run	13-
Demon Hound	10 / 4	10 / 4	11" Run	11-

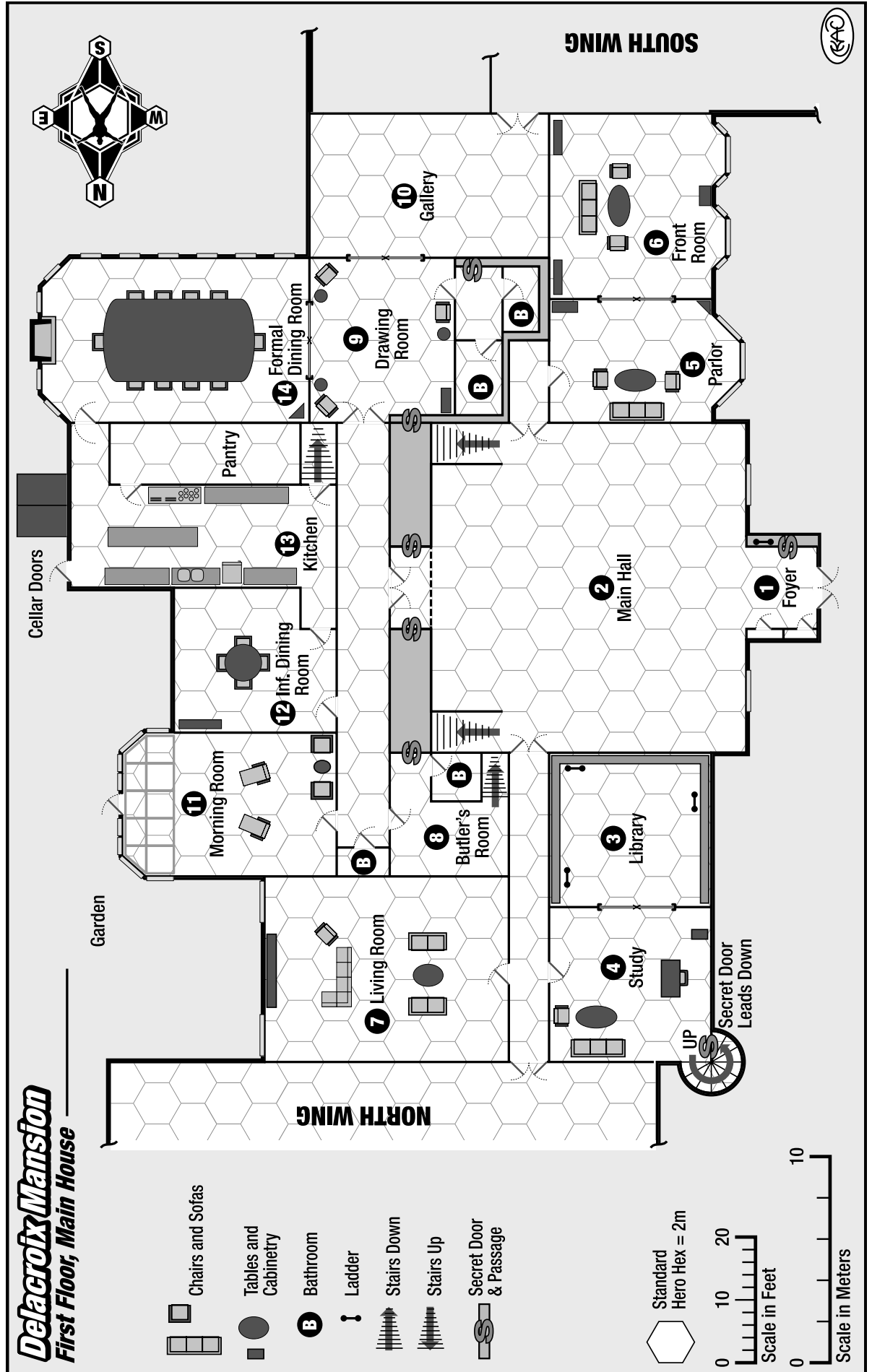
CHARACTER	NOTES
Lady Crow	+2 OCV w/ HKA; +2 DCV all Attacks; +2 w/ Flight; Mental DEF (10)
Black Paladin	+4 w/ HTH; Danger Sense 12-
Gryphon	+4 w/ Grab By, Move By and Move Through; +5 w/ Flight
Darkling	25% PD and ED Damage Reduction (Resistant); Lightning Reflexes +3 w/ Full Move
Talisman	+2 w/ Mastery of Hellfire Multipower
Lesser Demon	+1 Overall; 50% PD and ED Damage Reduction (Resistant); Mental DEF (9); Power DEF (5)
Chantal (Reborn)	+2 w/ MP; +2 ECV; 90-point VPP; Mental DEF (25)
Demon Hound	25% PD and ED Damage Reduction (Resistant)

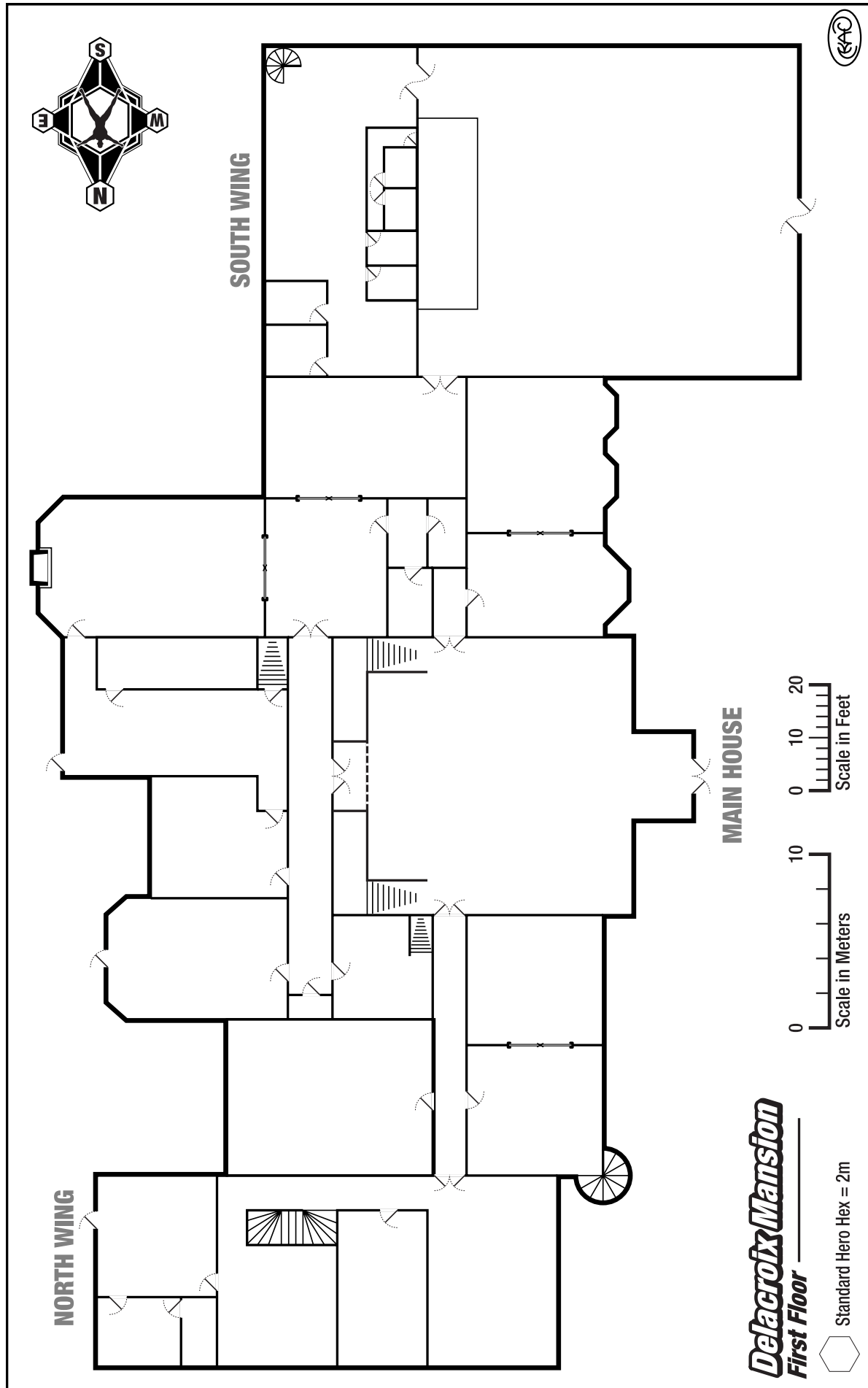


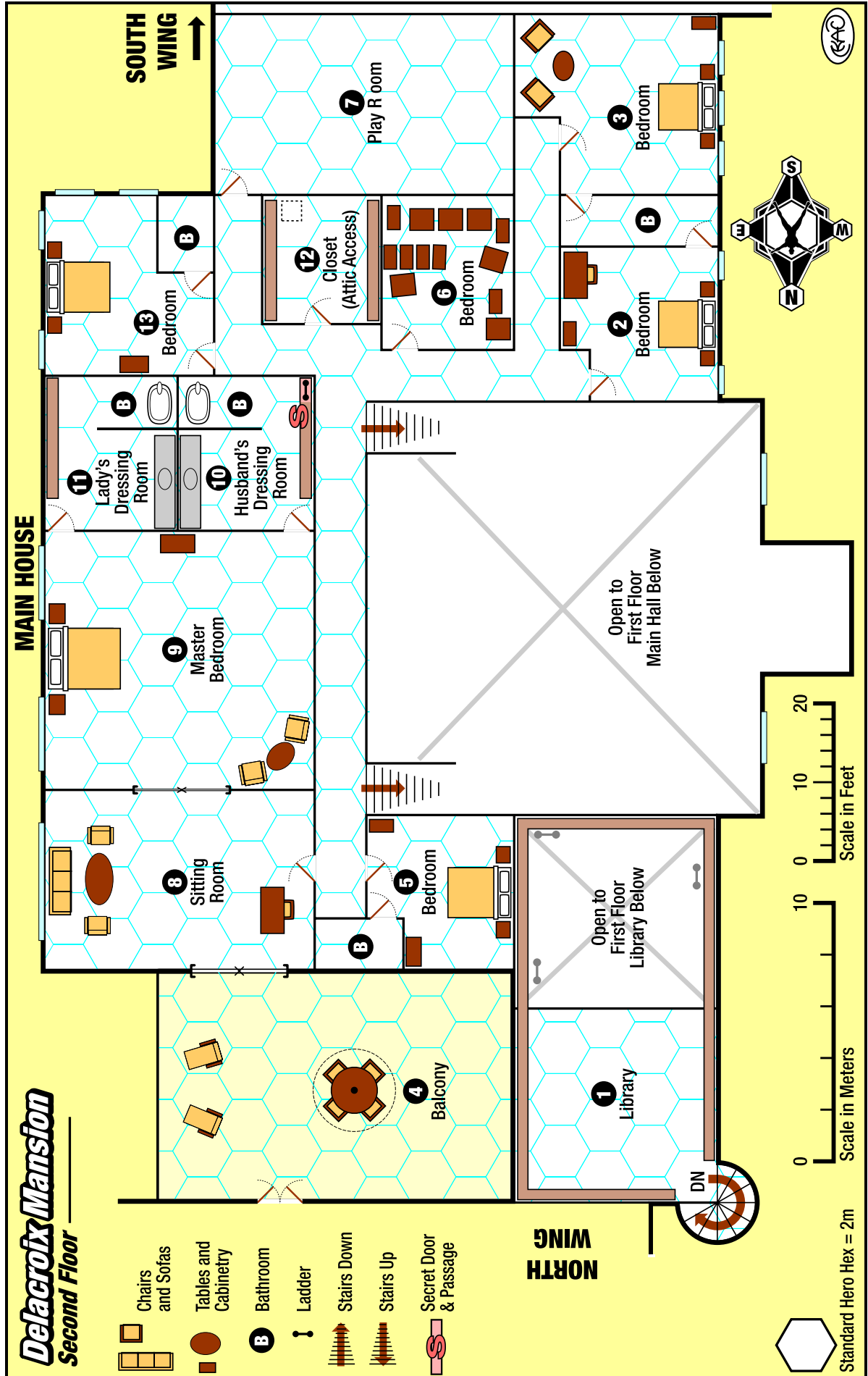


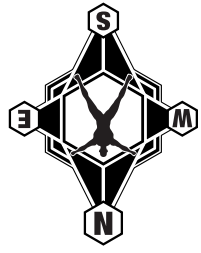












NORTH WING

SOUTH WING

MAIN HOUSE

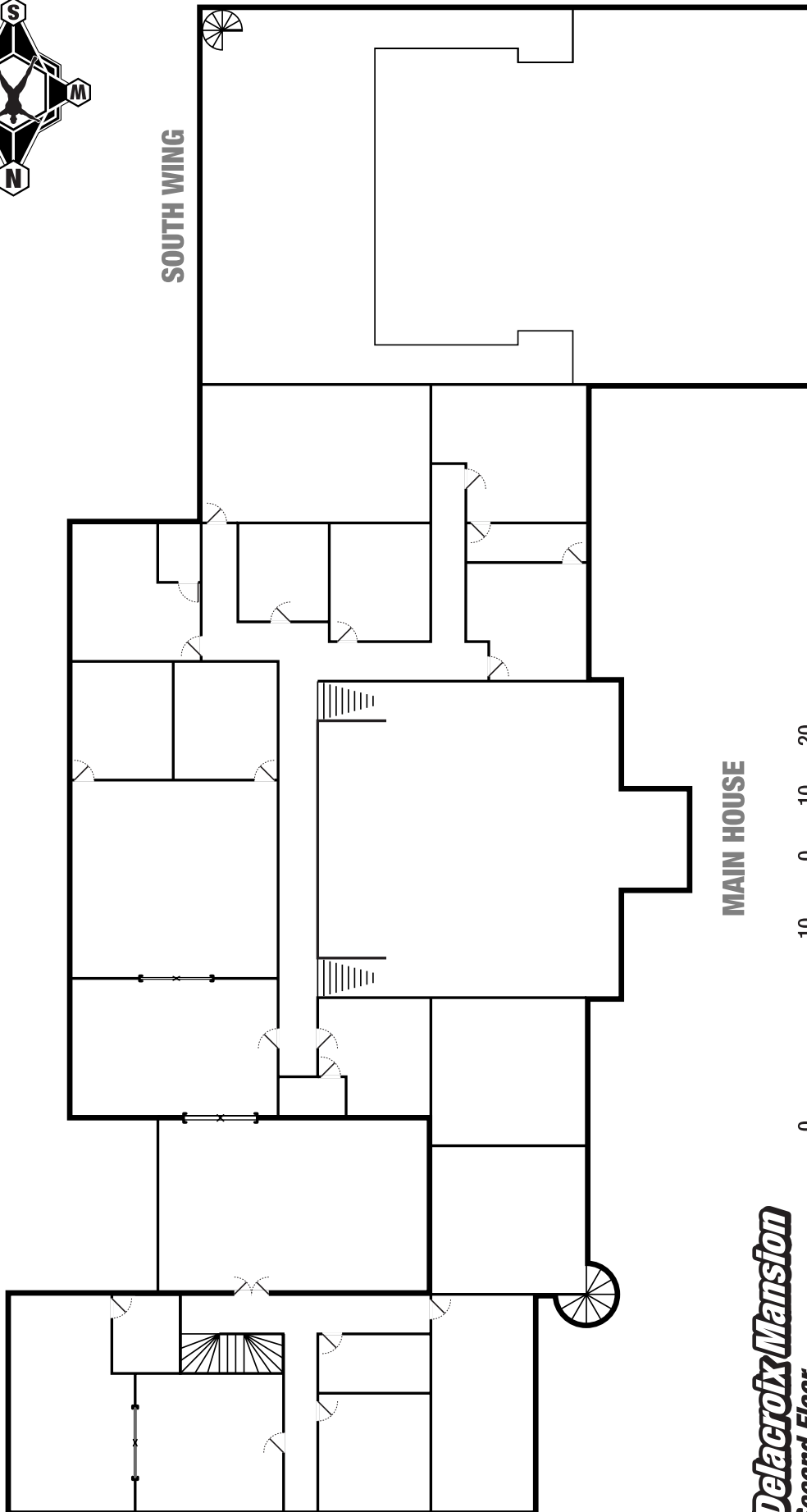
Delacroix Mansion
Second Floor

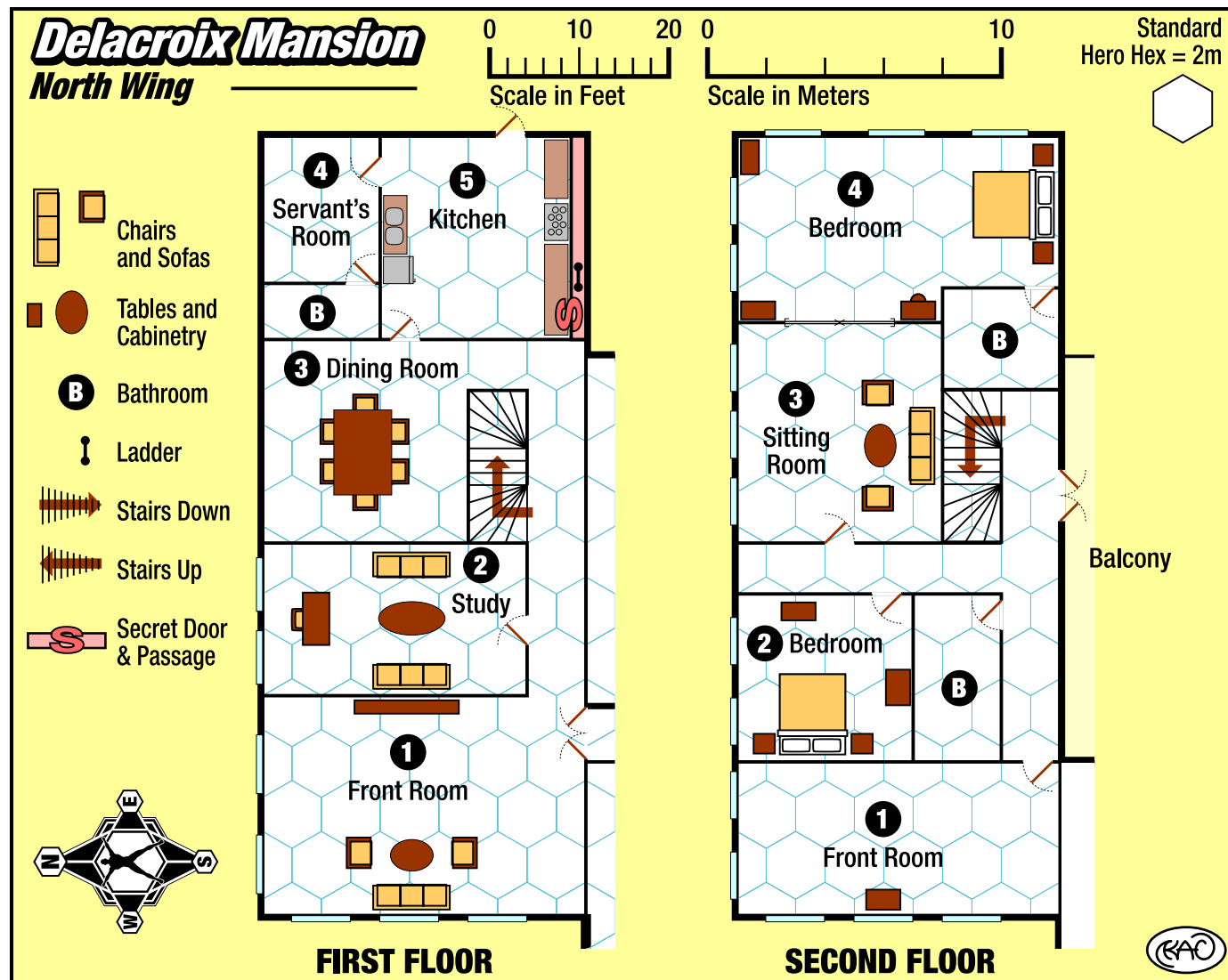
Standard Hero Hex = 2m

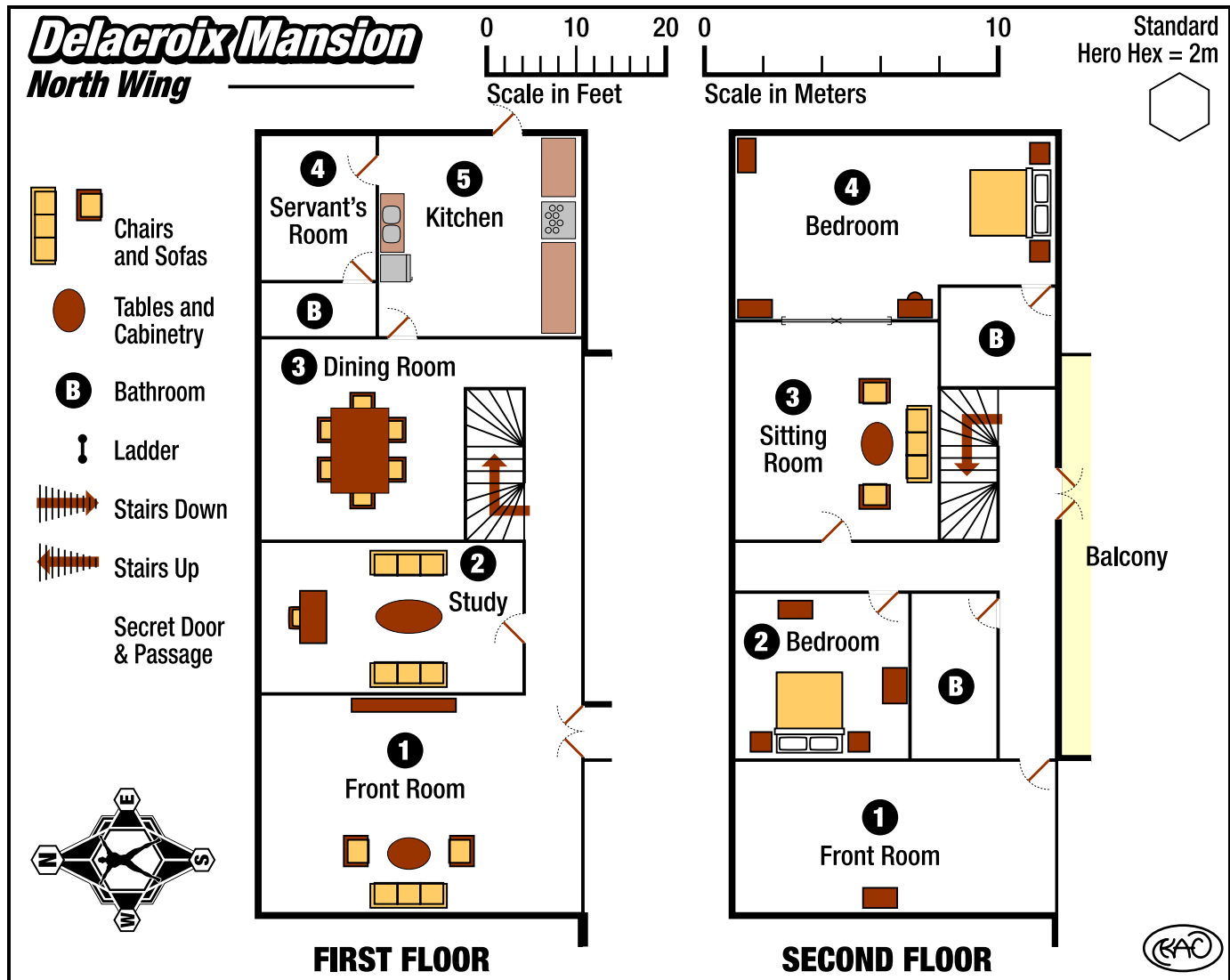


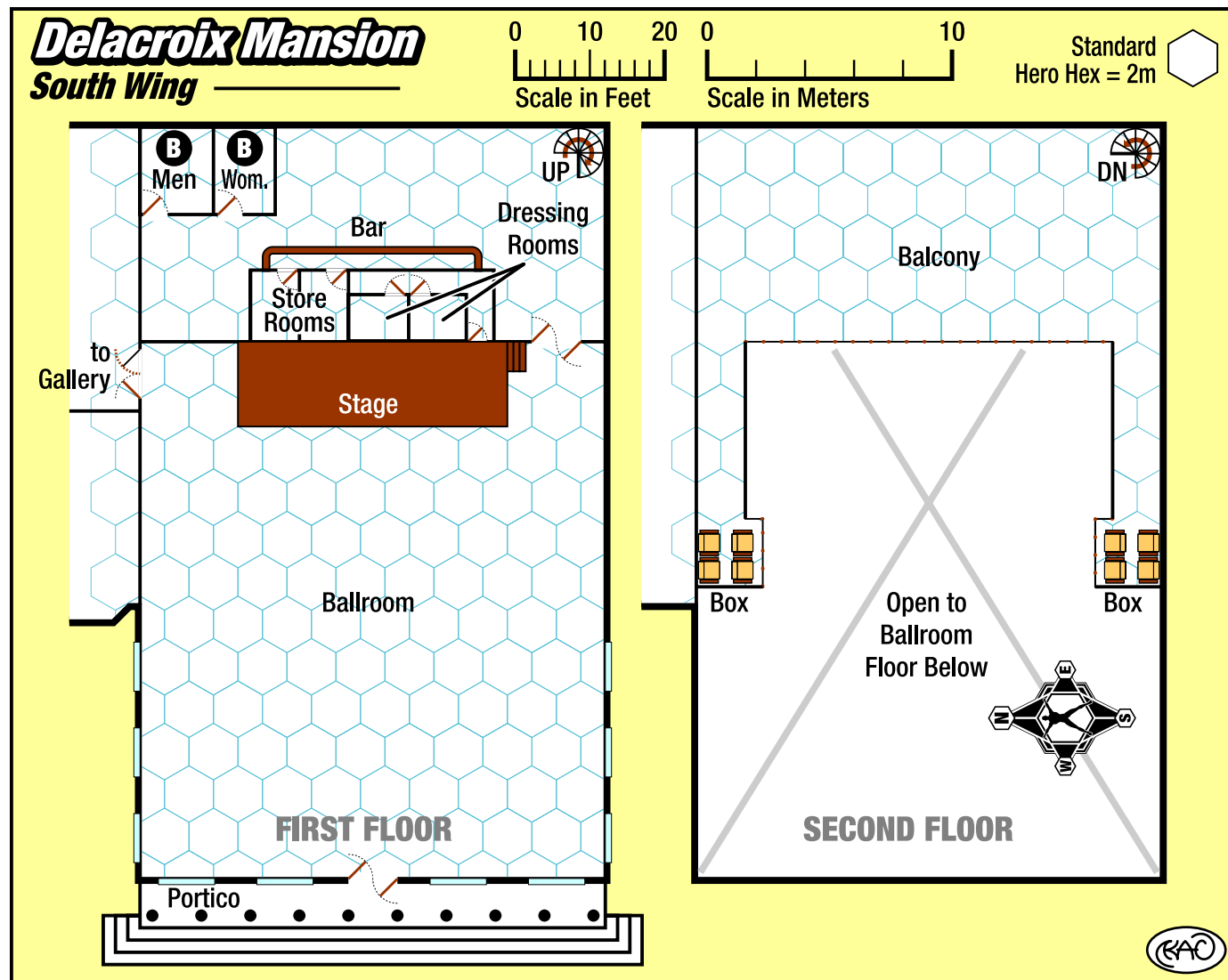
0 10 20
 Scale in Feet

0 10
 Scale in Meters









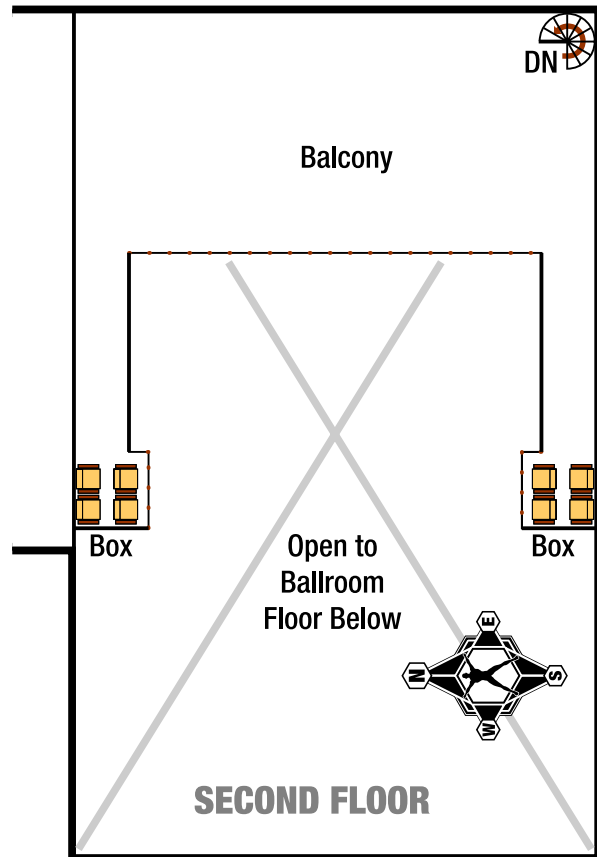
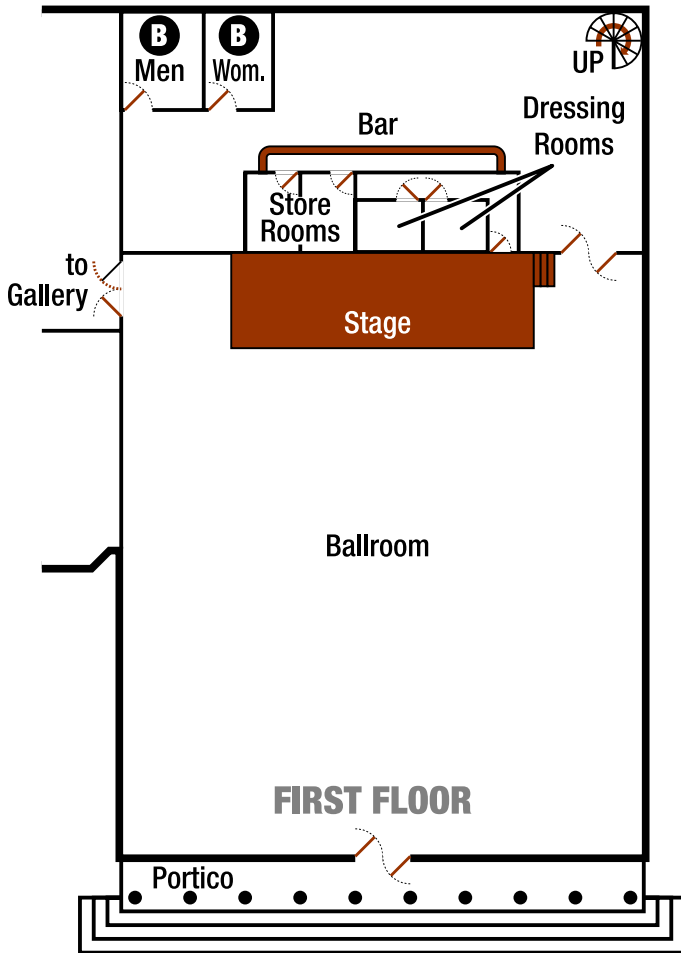
Delacroix Mansion

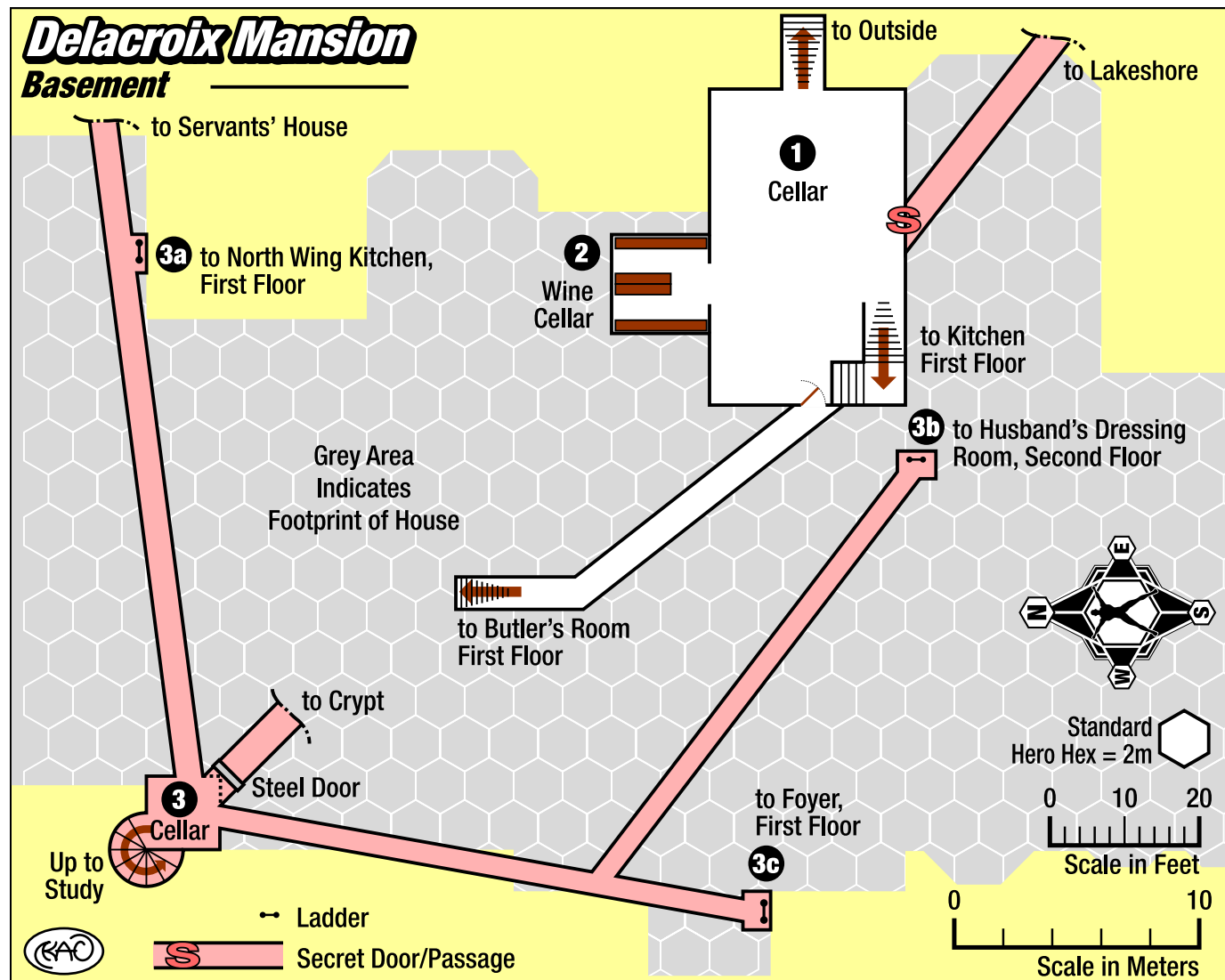
South Wing

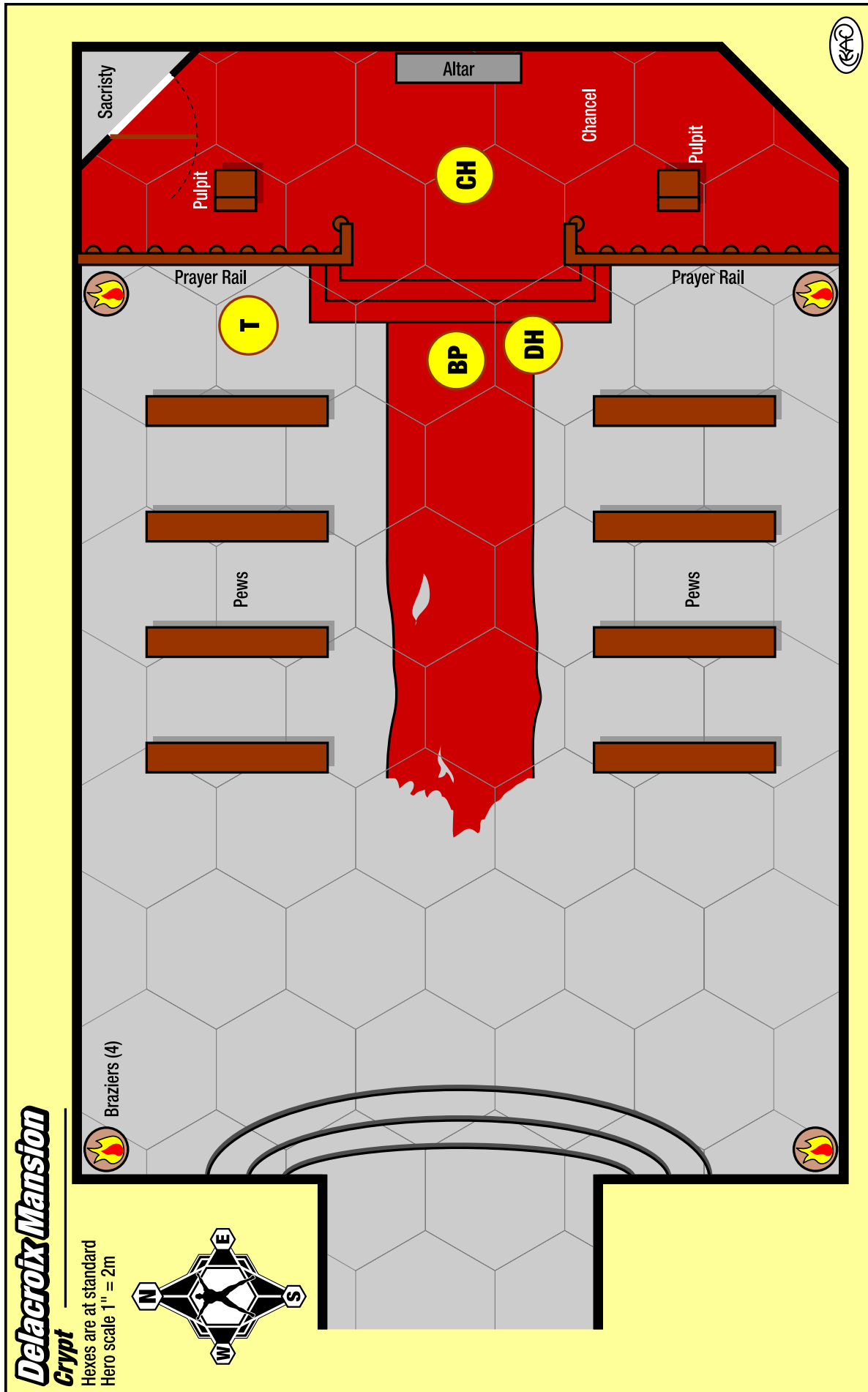
0 10 20
Scale in Feet

0 10
Scale in Meters

Standard
Hero Hex = 2m

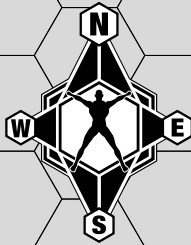






Museum of Natural History

1 hex = 10 meters



Parking Lot

Gate House

Mailbox

Hydrant

Hot Dog Stand

Wells Park

Bus Stop

25 Stories

Employee Parking Lot

15 Stories

2 Stories

9 Stories

Bus Stop

20 Stories

20 Stories

11 Stories

Hydrant

Open-Air Cafe

RAO