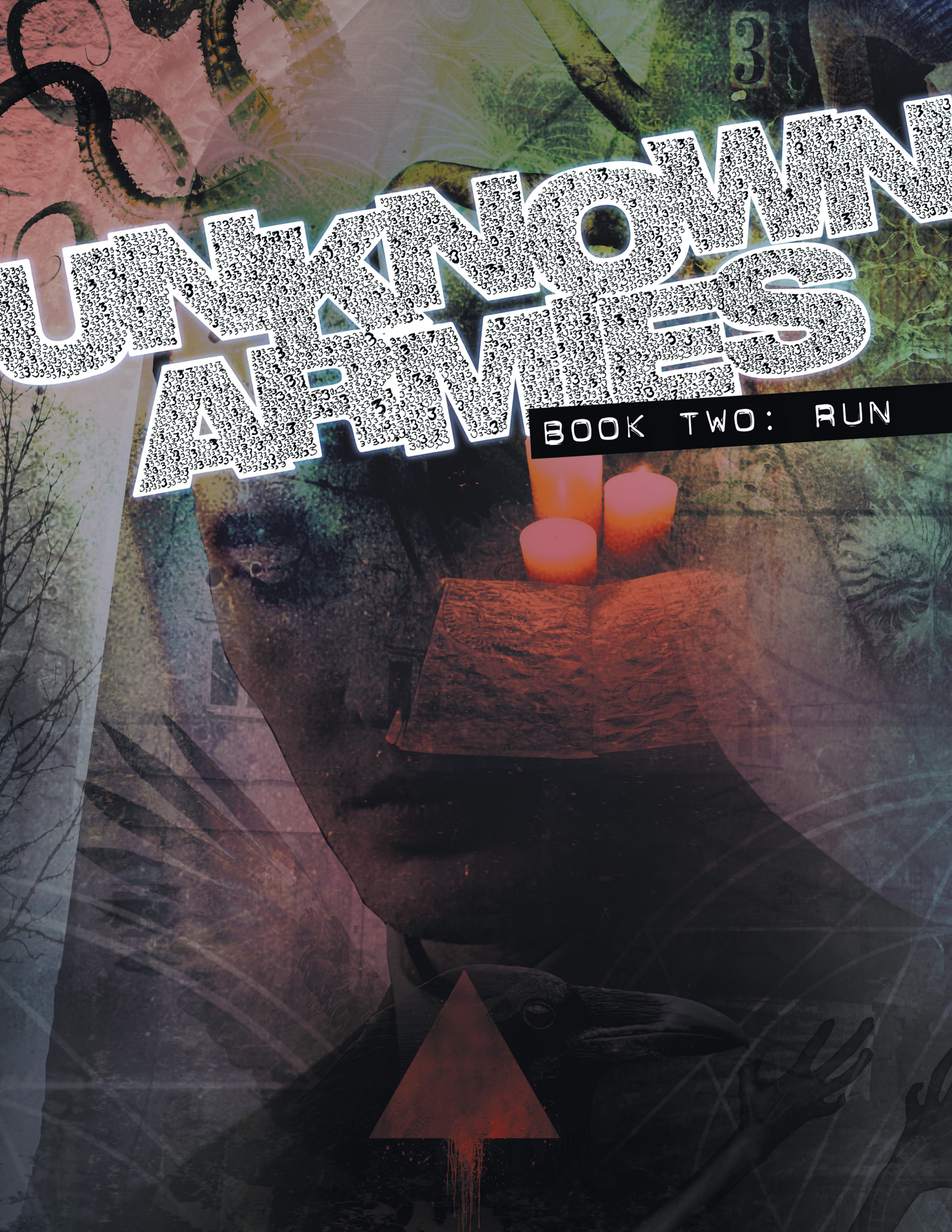


UNKNOWN

BOOK TWO: RUN



WOLFMAN AFRICES

BOOK TWO: RUN

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To our legions of alpha, beta, and gamma playtesters and to our generous backers — this game exists because of you! You did this!

We are the music makers,
And we are the dreamers of dreams,
Wandering by lone sea-breakers,
And sitting by desolate streams; —
World-losers and world-forsakers,
On whom the pale moon gleams:
Yet we are the movers and shakers
Of the world for ever, it seems.
Ode, Arthur O'Shaughnessy

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1: THE GM'S ROLE

You want to run a roleplaying game. I assume you do, anyhow, since you're reading this. If you already know how to do that, and have, you presumably understand what you're getting into. You still might want to read this chapter to get specific pointers on how to run *this* game. If you're a stone-cold absolute beginner, check out the "How to Run an RPG" download at atlasgames.com/unknownarmies — it's my attempt to summarize everything I've been writing on this strange little art.

Maybe you don't want to be a **gamemaster (GM)**, because you don't think you could imagine enough cool stuff, or because you're afraid it'll be silly, or because you're shy.

I would suggest that you *do* want to run a game, you just don't know it yet.

Running *Unknown Armies* requires some imagination and effort, but don't kid yourself: just about anyone can do it. From the other side of the GM screen, it may seem like an immense undertaking, where you have to create and describe a world from scratch, while keeping track of all the **player characters'** (PCs') foibles and weaknesses and plot plans and adjudicating a set of rules so complicated they require three whole books!

It's not as hard as all that. You don't have to do all those things at once, you do them one at a time in the order that they're needed. The imagining you can do on your own time, bolstered by every book, website, and news story you can rip off and disguise. The players are inclined to *remind* you of their PCs' individual peccadillos, because the rules reward them for invoking character meat like passions and relationships. As for running the mechanics: read the books and decide what you like. It's all there if you want to use it, but you can discard anything you don't care for. For the most part, you can break it down to stress checks and identity rolls, with abilities catching the leftovers. Those three categories — each of them a percentile roll on two dice — cover at least 70% of what comes up in an *Unknown Armies* game. Objectives usually just plump up to 100% and then fall like ripe fruit, and they're not even as complicated as an identity. By the way, if you don't have any idea what a stress check is, or what objective and identity mean in this context, go read *Book One: Play* — or its first three chapters, at least. This book can wait until you've done that. The rest, you can look up before a session if you know a car chase or court scene impends, offload it on the players if one of them is the adept or avatar with special

rules, or improvise and go with what sounds right. It's better to do something a little wrong while the game keeps flowing than to grind everything to a halt while you agonizingly consult the manual.

Once you have some command of the rules and setting, you're ready to step into the lynchpin role of gamemaster. Or game moderator if "master" sounds a little too BDSM for you. Without a GM, *Unknown Armies* doesn't really work, because as a horror game it thrives on uncertainty, and as a mystery game it requires that the answers be elusive but ultimately knowable.

Your job, running a game, is to provide the right amount of antagonism and challenge.

One error is to provide too much challenge. If you send wave after wave of fanatical cultists against the PCs, each fighting to the death, the cruelly indifferent combat system is going to chew up and burp out PCs pretty fast. You want the players beleaguered, and to feel helpless *sometimes*, but ultimately they need to know they can get things done and make a difference, no matter how much they're flailing in the short term.

That said, don't just lie back and surrender, making the game a cakewalk. If they don't have to work for their victories, they won't feel anything but hollow. The cake you're handed as your reward for playing is less delicious than the cake you had to claw and scratch to win. That's why everyone praises a meal that's cooked from scratch, that's where that phrase comes from. Honest.

In short, let the players succeed when they succeed, without bending over backwards to snatch away their victory. Let them fail when they fail, without catering to their laziness and fears. Hard knocks teach the best lessons, and in the end they remember the character who died awesomely with more fondness than the one who was just sort of... there, safely nibbling away at the plot from a position of sedentary security.

*They're
always
better
battered.*

1: GM



2: OBJECTIVES



3: CHARACTERS



4: SESSIONS



5: GMCS



6: INHUMANITY



7: LOCATIONS



MASTER

these entertainments would play differently if the title was "game servant" and always had been

UNRAVELING MYSTERY

Do you want to know a secret, one that changes the way you view the world forever? Are you sure? There's no going back. Very well... It's this, then: mystery is only a state of mind, as fragile and elusive as dream, or truth, or hope. Try to nail it down, and it slips from your grasp, never to return.

Mystery is a wonderful tool for GMs, but it has to be treated carefully. It requires reverence. Put bluntly, it needs the willing buy-in of the entire group. Like horror, it's all about mood, and that mood is easily banished. One irreverent joker at the table is enough to reduce the whole thing to farce. So even more than investigation, if a GM wants to run mystery-driven sessions, she needs to know in advance that her players are genuinely down with that.

A good way to start weaving mysteries is by listening to player ideas. If, as a GM, you can get some idea of what the players expect — character creation and sandbox design should give you a good first clue — then you have a base which you can begin undermining. The essence of mystery is subversion, turning that which should be familiar and everyday into something inexplicable, wondrous, and unnerving. You need some central mystery as well, but your first task is ensuring the right mood.

Just to be clear, this is not mystery in the “Who killed Lord Fotherington?” sense. That's an investigation, with a bit of added lace, and a nice cup of tea. By mystery here, we mean the dictionary sense of something beyond human comprehension, something unknown, secret, hidden, tantalizing.

REMYSTIFICATION

Unknown Armies is a game packed to bursting with inexplicable, wondrous, and unnerving things. When making them useful to players, those things have to be nailed down, spread out, made familiar. Demystified, for the players if not for the characters. But mystery has to exist in the human mind. So the most useful step you can take, when preparing a mysterious scenario, is to put the wonder back into magick and the occult underground.

The best way to do this is to discard all the stuff that the players know. Let them use the stuff in the books for making their own characters, but have the rest of the underground populated with unfamiliar figures representing unheard-of schools and archetypes.

This isn't as hard as it sounds at first glance. You don't need to know all the details at once, either. Mystery games, by their nature, require some seat-of-the-pants GMing. Suppose that a scared waiter points out a freaky-looking woman and mutters that she's rumored to have sort of power over time itself, drawn from gas-station carnivals. That's all the players know, but you don't actually

need to have anything more than that figured out. Be consistent — keep notes for yourself on **gamemaster character (GMC) file cards** — but don't worry about being detailed until the time comes up.

Schools of magick that the PCs won't have access to don't need to be carefully balanced. Antagonist characters need to provide a fair challenge, and ally characters need to let the PCs do most of the heavy lifting. Aside from that though, don't sweat the minor details. You want the shadowy adept to have a significant blast involving a sudden shower of angry, cat-sized spiders? Go for it.

Always remember that mystery is a mood, not a fact. Make magick strange, let the players feel ignorant and out of their element, and you're a good way there already.

SETTING THE SCENE

Mystery is a blend of uncertainty, curiosity, fear, and wonder. If you can induce some or all of those in your players, you have them in the palm of your hand. As a GM, the most important weapon you have at your disposal is speech. Sure, you can turn down the lights, light candles, put on some quiet but unsettling string music, and even bribe the guy upstairs to thump on the floor occasionally. None of that alone is enough to create a mysterious atmosphere.

You are the interface through which the players access the game. You are the renderer that produces the cool graphics. So you are the one who has to make the mystery come alive.

The first consideration is picking your descriptions carefully. You need to put a bit of work into making the setting evocative. It's called mood lighting, and it's summoned through the details that you choose when you're talking. Usually, that means being a little wordier and more atmospheric. Don't just say that it's raining, point out the darkness of the sky, how low and oppressive the clouds are, how you can't see ten feet in front of your face, how unusually cool or hot the afternoon is, how there's much less standing water than there should be. Anything to make the familiar a little less safe and reliable.

Details always seem important in RPGs. Because you have to take the effort to say it and point it out, players pay attention. So add odd little details to otherwise regular things. They build the overall impression that there's something going on. The human mind is wonderful at noticing patterns, so the more of these details you introduce, the more uncertainty you create in your players' minds. Work similar but unusual details into three places spread across town, and plant the seeds of a wild conspiracy theory.

See “The Other Team” on page 47.

1: GM

2: OBJECTIVES

3: CHARACTERS

4: SESSIONS

5: GMCs

6: INHUMANITY

7: LOCATIONS



ATMOSPHERE

There are several atmospheric elements that you can work with to help evoke the proper mood. Your goal is to unsettle the players, so that the moments of shining awe have better impact, and last longer in their imaginations. Use these strands as you would spices — sprinkles and pinches here and there, rather than a constant barrage. Push too hard, and you risk tipping over into farce. Practice (and player buy-in!) makes perfect.

Starkness is one strong candidate. As humans, we're used to most of life happening in the comfortable areas of most spectrums. Being warm, rather than hot or cold. Moderate colors, rather than hard blacks and whites. Background noise, rather than dins or silences. Push the PCs out of those comfortable middles with cold, uncomfortable rooms, empty white walls, dead black furniture, inexplicable silences, and steel textures. Starkness works very well when you have to deal with technology, undermining the reassurance of the modern world.

Another option is decay. There's something immediately unnerving about the things we take for granted approaching the point of collapse. Make use of long-forgotten places, heaps of stinking rubble, walls turned soft and saggy with mold. Newer things and places may have their corruption hidden beneath the surface, as rust

or malfunction or sleaze. How can you have faith in anything being what it seems when nothing works properly?

Grotesquerie is great for unsettling people, when it's played straight. It needs a delicate touch, but the sense of wrongness that it can produce is unparalleled. *Twin Peaks* was particularly masterful with its use of this — half the characters in the show seemed tainted in one way or another. Grotesquerie is characterized by distortion, fantastical extravagance, bizarreness, unusual juxtaposition, travesty, and jarring absurdity. The key to making it work is to take it absolutely seriously, and have other GMCs treat it as utterly normal.

So when a cop whose face is apparently melting off walks up, the detective the PCs are talking to just says "Hi, Ted," rather than "Great God, what is that *thing*?" Treat grotesque elements exactly as if they were just regular background details. If players query them, have GMCs give matter-of-fact answers that don't really explain anything. You don't want to nail anything down, remember. "Huh? Oh, yeah, I was in an accident. Now, about this guy you saw...."

These peculiarities can be quite minor, of course. They don't have to be mind-boggling. Maybe one guy's just a bit deaf and ALWAYS SEEMS TO SHOUT. Another might wear really odd glasses, or be obsessed with owls. People are strange.

1: GM



2: OBJECTIVES



3: CHARACTERS



4: SESSIONS



5: GMCs



6: INHUMANITY



7: LOCATIONS



I love a parade.

If your group is amenable to it, and if you think you can pull it off without losing them, you can also unsettle your players more insidiously by gaslighting them. This is a terrible thing to do in Real Life that is named after the movie *Gaslight*, but it's a valid tactic in a game like this. Try making minor changes to the world without telling them. If they notice, just insist they're mistaken. "No, the bar girl here has always been Brazilian. Here's my notecard, see?" Do this sparingly, and subtly. Most of the time they won't consciously notice, but the unconscious mind remembers all, and the changes can make them uncomfortable, even if they're not sure why. Of course, this approach can send some players away from the table and out the door, so make sure your group's cool with it.

MYSTERY'S BLEEDING HEART

Every good mystery requires a good secret. Without one, you end up with something that's all style and no substance, intriguing but unfulfilling. This is not something for investigation, however. The decisive purpose of investigative game sessions is broadly antithetical to the mood of mystery. You're not crafting a puzzle here, you're creating something far more delicate.

In mystery games, play tends to take on a loose structure. Objectives are usually fuzzy. The PCs dig into rumors, poke around strange places, and talk to a lot of very odd people. Along the way, they have a lot of uncertain experiences. They may run into groups of dedicated, violent people who want them to very definitely fail in their quest for understanding. And every so often, they make a breakthrough.

When designing a mystery, you want to lean on the oyster principle. Although there is one prime cause at the heart of everything, that speck is wrapped in layer after layer of glittering marvel. Each layer disguises the one before, obscuring it with a new set of unfamiliar peculiarities. After a certain amount of work, the players penetrate a layer, to find themselves faced with more profound questions. (This part is more like an onion, but we're talking about the pearl here, so let's keep the metaphor going.) How deep the truth goes depends on your goal for the game. If it's a mystery for a session or two, make it fairly shallow. If you're preparing an entire campaign, then the deeper the better. There should be common themes running through every level — anything from self-sacrifice to redness to dogs — and no level should totally invalidate any other, but otherwise, the sky is the limit.

Mystery depends on the strange. Things we understand are not mysterious. Familiarity, predictability, regularity, these are all qualities that are to be done away with. Make your mysteries new, intriguing, unheard of. Dangle lures for your PCs such as power, love, beauty, or perfection. Whatever hooks them. Most of all though, let your imagination run riot.

You can root your mystery more firmly in the game world with patterns. Consider the themes involved, and the natures of the different layers, and think about how they might interact. How would those interactions be expressed in a real world? Look for ways to bring them out. Repetitive imagery in pictures and on walls. Certain styles of clothing. Background events. Times of day or night coming up again and again. Particular odd, unnatural effects. Some of the grotesqueries you throw at the players. These add texture to your work, giving the players something to worry at.

It's good to tie in a certain percentage of the oddities of each layer of your mystery back into other aspects. This gives it some self-consistency. Don't be too rigorous in this, however. Leave plenty of dangling threads. You want to create the feeling that the entire world is mysterious, not just your central pearl. Some things are always unrelated in their anomaly.

Discovering the source of mystery and realizing that you understand everything is as hollow an experience as running out of lands to conquer, after all. But if you can lead the characters through hell and high water to a moment like Verbal's walk easing up at the end of *The Usual Suspects*, or Edward Norton's character finally being named in *Fight Club*, your players will still be talking about it for years to come.



1: GM



2: OBJECTIVES



3: CHARACTERS



4: SESSIONS



5: GMCS



6: INHUMANITY



7: LOCATIONS



PLOT

I'm going to throw two pieces of roleplaying game jargon at you: sandbox and railroad. While they may sound like things that fascinate toddlers, they are also shorthand descriptions for two philosophies of plot design.

A sandbox game is one where the GM establishes a broad setting, often with a lot of unstable plot elements — the Capulets and Montagues are always on the edge of open violence or Caliban resents Prospero or Puck is running around with a love potion, rhyming and stealing. The PCs are introduced as a catalyst and the fun begins when they follow their natural inclination to wreck everything and sow chaos. The GM just sits back and lets the Four PCs of the Apocalypse rave across her ordered world, bringing pre-cooked plot elements into play as the PCs recruit Othello's maid or consult three witches or put on a play for King Claudius. If your PCs are active enough, sandbox games run themselves. *Unknown Armies*, in its current incarnation, leans towards the sandbox approach.

Sandboxin' isn't perfect though. One tendency is for players to overreach and outrun the GM's ability to respond, giving the GM a frustrating mess instead of an entertaining one, and leaving the PCs logy and insufficiently challenged. Another — possibly worse — is that PCs who aren't active enough get bogged down. It becomes a quicksandbox, where they're paralyzed by too many options. Uncertain how to optimize their outcomes, they wallow in analysis while the GM grits her teeth and listens to her own fingernails growing.

The railroad game is exactly the opposite. Instead of an open world with lots of freedom, there's a tightly plotted series of events leading to a carefully balanced climax. The archetypal railroad is the old-school dungeon. No matter how complicated the passageways, there are only a limited number of rooms and the monsters inside them allow for only a few possible interactions. Most computer games are like this too. A very convoluted railroad can look pretty sandboxy, but you're still constrained by the controls the electronics allow.

Railroads can be fun! Someone once observed that gamers rarely complain about a railroad when the scenery is gorgeous and the last stop is Awesome Town. Venerable horror game *Call of Cthulhu* lends itself to railroads of varying degrees, because if the encounter with unspeakable awfulness isn't inevitable... well, it's not very scary. Investigations are a lot easier to run as railroads, because they depend on tension and discovery, and the GM can only maintain tension by doling out clues and information on a regular schedule, not all at once or too rarely. Superhero games, on the other hand, almost always veer sandbox because the very idea of superpowered characters leads to agency, freedom, and self-determination.

UNKNOWN ARMIES NOSTALGIA

The previous editions of *Unknown Armies* tended to follow the assumption that the game was on rails. The GM (we figured) would present plotlines and the players would either bite or pass, but if they passed on everything the GM proffered, the game was left with either inertia or the GM dancing as fast as she could to make up events one step ahead of the PCs' reactions. The second edition attempted to remedy this a bit with its idea of narrative structures — player-generated groups who made sense together and gave the GM an idea of what kinds of adventures to write. In this edition, those narrative structures also include a blend of cabal and setting generation. But this version has also taken a hard turn towards sand, even though rails give excellent tools for investigation and horror games. It's our hope that the tools you have here, such as player-generated milestones and objectives, can give an optimum mix of sandy freedom and rail readiness.

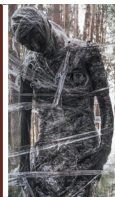
While offering pacing help and the comfort of having some idea what happens next, there are drawbacks to railroads. The big one is, the players may get the impression that they have no free will. They can screw up the mission or complete it, but they can't reinvent it or alter it. They either chug forward or derail.

With objectives, *Unknown Armies* aims to chart a way between these two extremes.

Players have the freedom of the sandbox. They're the ones who set the objective and say, "This, *this*, is what the game is about!" They also build a lot of the setting. At the same time, the objective and its path give the GM something like the plot arc of a railroady game. You may not know what the PCs are specifically going to do, but you've got a fair number of ideas based on the milestones that they suggested. You know their ultimate ambition, so you don't have to worry (as much) about utterly unexpected moves.

Interestingly, this approach lets you weave mysteries into the revealed plot as you go. Either the players do something interesting and unexpected that opens up new questions, or the opportunity presented by the objective nicely aligns with the secrets you've already planted. Some of the best mysteries emerge from player choices, rather than scripted plots, giving you fuel for weirdness and secrets later.

1: GM



2: OBJECTIVES



3: CHARACTERS



4: SESSIONS



5: GMCS



6: INHUMANITY



7: LOCATIONS



FAIRNESS

Games, especially ones with a GM and players, have a paradoxical relationship with fairness. On the one hand, fairness is essential. On the other hand, it's impossible.

Fairness, meaning that things aren't arbitrary, wise action is rewarded, and you can only get the worst outcomes if you're stupid or cruel or otherwise ask for it... players crave it. They need a game that feels sensible, where they know they can learn the rules and navigate it to advantage. You could make a game where, every time anything was in question, the GM rolled on a chart with results ranging from lousy to splendid and it would suck. It wouldn't be anything other than a comical exploration of absurdism, because there would be no necessary connection between cause and effect. "Hey, my dude in this game is a badass warrior, what's his chance of getting a splendid result when he hits somebody?" "One in ten." "Oh. And the court jester over there? His chance of getting a combat splendido?" "One in ten."

A fair game is one in which you can lay down a strategy and trust the dice to screw or bless you, without worrying about the GM stealing your success. Or, if you're super-uptight, mitigating your failure. (Most players are OK with some failure mitigation.) Fairness in *Unknown Armies* lies in its clear percentile ratings. "Hey, I have Dodge 30%, what are my chances of running across the highway?" "...Hmm, about thirty percent?"

At the same time, a GM can't be completely fair. No matter how much you want to, it is not possible, not when the necessary structure of the game requires the PCs to roll dice against their clearly defined character sheets and lets the GM throw anything you can think of in their path. The power imbalance is severe, implicit, and irreparable. But it's also necessary, because if you aren't free to bring in stuff from left field on the spur of the moment, then you can't fully react to the creativity and inventiveness of the players. In a video game, you can only do what has been programmed. In a board game, you have to stay on the board. Only roleplaying games, with their inherently unpredictable stories, allow people to do the unexpected.

You could throw a SWAT team or an unspeakable servant or the combined disapproval of the Invisible Clergy at your PCs. There is no level-appropriate challenge in *Unknown Armies* because the PCs have the freedom to come up with identities that let them say "Of course the SWAT team ignores me."

You could be unreasonable but you won't, because it's no fun. It's petty bullying and it tanks the game and leaves your friends mad at you because they trusted you to not be a dick with power in an imaginary world, and you taught them what fools they were to trust you. But only

hypothetically! Because you're not going to do that. You're going to use a better way.

The better way involves using your authority to make things more interesting and weird and real-feeling and, yes, fair. You use your great powers only for the fun of the group. The tricky bit is, this is a horror game, so part of being fair is giving the PCs absolute hell. So all those sadistic urges that I said to downplay one paragraph up? They have a place. But it has to be used with exquisite, pinpoint control. You want to thrill your players with threats that make sense, that give a pleasurable sense of completion when understood, not just random misery that sporadically appears and leads nowhere.

You have to be fair, but fairness cuts both ways. You establish that Old Farmer Oxnard is bad news, and everyone says she's dangerous and warns them to keep back, and then you lead them to believe that only Old Farmer Oxnard knows the clue they need to move forward. They will *run* out to Oxnard Farm, and any awfulness that befalls is OK and it's even fun for them because they were warned, and they knew, and they chose.

Playing a horror game is a little like playing with a jack-in-the-box. You know the scare is coming. You *know* it. And you know that all you have to do is walk away, don't touch the crank, without you to turn the crank, it can't get out.

We all turn it anyway. Your players will too.

WHAT YOU'RE ALLOWED TO DO

The rules let you do whatever — rocks fall, everyone dies — so this is more about what you are *ethically* permitted to do. Best practices and all that.

BE RANDOM

Players aren't the only ones who enjoy pulling weird stuff directly out of nowhere. In the heat of a session, it may seem like a good idea for the ambulance driver to begin espousing Ayn Rand philosophy or for the kidnapper to suddenly ask if his victim wants to watch *Cake Boss*. They don't need to know what you're planning, and you don't need to know either. Little dimples of unpredictability break up the clichés, archetypes, tropes, and stereotypes that people tend to use when creating — especially when creating under pressure.

BE MEAN

Not gratuitously mean, but you must put pressure on the characters, and that means threatening things they value. Like, say, a face free of disfiguring scars. The key, as mentioned above, is that you have to telegraph bad news before you deliver it. Otherwise you not only rob them of the opportunity to prepare, you rob yourself of the pleasure of watching them squirm.

1: GM



2: OBJECTIVES



3: CHARACTERS



4: SESSIONS



5: GMCS



6: INHUMANITY



7: LOCATIONS



It seems so odd that equality can only be bestowed by the ones with more power.

BE CONFUSING

You don't owe them an answer to every mystery that comes up. You owe them an answer to every mystery they pursue with vigor. If you throw in some incidental weirdness, possibly while being random, don't sweat a big justification unless they're intrigued. No point preparing pages of backstory for someone who's going to get dismissed with, "Eh, weird."

WHAT YOU MUSTN'T DO

In the spirit of spelling out gray zones where you're allowed, here are a few red zones you should absolutely avoid. I'm not saying a game can't work if you do these, but it's a lot less likely to be fun and, therefore, a lot less likely to last.

GET PERSONAL

If you want to put in something that is calculated to appeal to a particular player, that's fine. If you want to put in something that pushes buttons... no. Don't be "edgy" by putting in a dead-father plot twist for a character when you know the player's dad recently passed away. Don't throw snakes at the guy who's got a real phobia.

You have a responsibility to know what's off-limits for whom. (Players also have a responsibility to tell the GM "no spiders, please," if that's going to make the game suck for them.) Granted, if it's at a convention or a pick-up game in a store, you may not know the people you're playing with all that well. In that case, before things begin, ask a few vague questions about whether there are any issues that are going to make them disgusted in the bad way instead of the horror frisson way.

BE IGNORANT

You don't need all the answers, but you need some. Different GMs have different comfort zones with flying by the seat of their pants, but know the rules — at least the parts you're going to use — and keep track of the stuff you introduce. You can develop plot in front of the PCs session by session and make it look like you planned everything in advance, but if you introduce an occult military conspiracy, research it enough to be plausible.

Improvising is fine. Being criminally unprepared is another matter.

CLAW BACK OBJECTIVES... CAVALIERLY

Objectives start at zero, and if players either build them up to a decent size or roll when it's low and hit the jackpot, that represents an investment to them. It's either an investment of time, effort, and attention, or of *luck*, a commodity in shorter supply. So when they've paid, you don't get to cheat them out of what they're due. Give them their objective, and not something that kinda looks like it, and not their objective with strings and caveats and small print and asterisks. The time to put limits on an objective is when it's being set, and if you foresee problems with them actually getting it, telegraph any new limits early and often. The characters are experiencing an indifferent and sometimes absurd world, but the players expect a rigorously structured and aesthetically pleasing story.

Once they get an objective, don't take it away from them without a *damn good reason*. Specifically, without the characters being more awesome without it, and the players being more entertained. If they choose to give it up to get something else, or to forestall disaster, that's a bit better, but make sure that whatever they get is worth it to them. Objectives are a big deal, and if you crap on them, you can't expect the players to just put up with the smell.

You can take objectives away only if you give lots of buildup, make it clear that there's a reason it's imperiled, and give the cabal opportunities to defend it. If some unexpected wrinkle makes the objective a drag on the plot, think about a way to maybe trade the problematic parts instead of chopping the whole thing.

BE BORING

You knew this, of course.

But Nora Ephron once wrote, "Everyone thinks they have good taste and a good sense of humor, but obviously not everyone can." (It was in *When Harry Met Sally*, which is not on the surface a very UA sort of movie, so don't worry about adding it to your list.) Similarly, nobody gets up and says, "All right, today I'm taking the game from dull to STULTIFYING!"

Know that just because you like something, doesn't mean your friends do or will once they get to know it. If you know they're into military history or Romanian culture or the intricacies of drug policy — great, throw that in the game. But we all tend to base games around stuff that interests us, and in the best cases we can share our fascination and teach and it's very, very cool. Just be aware that it doesn't always work out that way so be prepared to bail if people show signs of not caring. Hopefully, the collective setting development process lets you test the waters.

1: GM

2: OBJECTIVES

3: CHARACTERS

4: SESSIONS

5: GMCS

6: INHUMANITY

7: LOCATIONS



2: OBJECTIVES

"The reasonable man adapts himself to the world; the unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore all progress depends on the unreasonable man."

George Bernard Shaw

"The guy to watch out for is the one who, when offered a choice between A and B, chooses dinosaurs."

Harvey Duopoulous

You want the job. You've trained for the job, you pursued it, it's your dream job and you're even close to the office, you could get there on your bike when the weather's nice. You want the job and you'd be good at it, you believe in it and you're right for it and it's a perfect fit. *Perfect.*

You don't get the job.

Or maybe you want the guy. Not just in an infatuated or horny way, he's not even that handsome but you know him, you've known him for years and you'd be good for him, he'd be good for you, you *fix* each other and you get along and you like the same TV shows. You belong with him.

He stays with someone else.

You pull for political change, because it's obviously right, so *clearly* just, only a monster would resist it... and it fails. You train and exercise and practice for the championship and this is the year, you're going all the way... and you get eliminated in quarterfinals. You write that novel that makes you blush because it's so honest, so personal, so heartfelt, barely fictional except for the vampire parts, and the agent is interested, you make the changes she asked for... and she says she's going to pass.

This is the human condition.

Disappointment, failure, a series of thwarting events that range from setback to disaster — this ocean of personal

I WANT IT

The pursuit of mysticism is always about achieving ends non-obviously, and the same is often true of politics. The difference is that the occultist is a misanthrope who attempts to pull the hidden strings of symbols to unravel the sweater concealing the cosmos' nakedness. The politician is a misanthrope who attempts to pull the hidden strings of a puppet-like populace.

Characters in *Unknown Armies* want things. They are famous for it. They are equally noted for whiffy skills that leave goals trembling, tantalizingly, just beyond their grasp. Traditionally, their response is to get more extreme, more desperate, more intense. Can't bluff Tito off that big pot? Hide an ace and count some cards. Local hoods giving you trouble? Tell 'em to fuck off, and if they beat you, fight back, and if you can't fight back, call the cops, and if the cops do nothing, get a gun, and if they get guns too, go find an unspeakable servant.

OBJECT

in opposition to a course of action
a thing, an item, desired property
WHICH IS IT

collapses is the one in which we all swim. You try, you strain, you give it your all, and then you go under. That's our destiny.

Normally you have two choices when you're crossed, as we all inevitably are. You can quit, or you can try again.

Sometimes quitting works *great*. Maybe you're not meant to be a surgeon. Maybe, no matter what your mom said, the dozens of patients who'd have died under your knife are better off having their hearts bypassed by someone who doesn't drop his car keys twice a week. Maybe that dream job would break your heart in two years when the startup goes under, maybe that perfect mate has hidden flaws and is only pretending to like *Doctor Who*. Sometimes giving up is a flawless adaptation to reality.

As for coming back stronger, well, you don't need a lecture on that. Hollywood and history and the entire western cultural tradition celebrate triumphal narratives about gumption and stick-to-itiveness and frontier spirit. So yeah, sometimes that works too. Ask Diana Nyad.

To sum up, then, we fail early and often and are faced with the options of trying to be the hero at the risk being the fool or getting out before the sunk cost fallacy destroys us.

Is there a third option?

Is there someone else we can talk to? Is there a shortcut, a discount, a workaround? If we want neither to fish nor to cut bait, is there somewhere we can just grab burgers? Instead of being for you or against you, can I just be somewhere far away from you? Is there some way we can... cheat?

Of course there is.

World not to your liking? Get a bigger stick to pound it with. Get an adept, or an avatar, or a gang of them, or go looking in a Room of Renunciation for a soft spot that makes the universe flinch when you poke it.

Objectives are player-defined wants, measured with percentiles. When they grow to 100%, they are fulfilled, no matter how poorly the players roll. The rules that follow describe how they can build and find their pokey sticks.

An objective requires three components. It needs a **scale**, which is either **local**, **weighty**, or **cosmic**. It needs a **path**, which is comprised of tasks called **milestones** that contribute to the completion or attainment of the objective. Finally, it needs **closure**. Let's deal with that last idea first.

1: GM

2: OBJECTIVES

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CLOSURE

Where do you want to end up? For instance, suppose your objective is "Find the man who killed my daddy." Well, the closure's very clear: you have now found the man who killed your daddy. If your objective is "Cure cancer," your GM may quite reasonably suggest some restrictions or clarification. Do you want to cure *all* of them, or would merely curing breast cancer and shutting up those Komen people be enough?

Bad objectives, the kind the GM should veto, lack closure. "I want to be rich," is a poor objective because it's vague. If you're living in a First World nation and have cash to drop on a nice book like this, you're rich by the standards of half the planet. "I want to have a million dollars" is far better, or five million, or a billion. You know when you're done, that way.

Bad closure? "I want many friends." Good closure? "I want to be accepted by three of my neighbors, know them by name, and feel comfortable asking them to pick up my mail when I'm out of town." Bad closure: "I want to be an architect." Good closure: "I want to get a degree in architecture."

SCREEN TIME

The idea of screen time comes from the TV shows and movies that most of us love more than our careers and political ideologies. Something that you see happens onscreen — Niles and Daphne finally kiss, the wacky neighbor takes the pratfall, the hero doesn't look back while nonchalantly walking away from an explosion that would, in reality, splatter him like a water balloon.

Offscreen stuff is implied but unseen. All the times Niles and Daphne went to the bathroom, the wacky neighbor at his dull, loud, repetitive factory job, the hero reloading the firearm that, onscreen, he shoots about a million times.

Objectives should be something that can be fulfilled offscreen. When you reach 100%, your objective is complete. It happens, whether the PCs are present to do the deed themselves or not. They may not even *know*, in-game, that they unseated the archetype of the Spoiled Royal.

SHORTCUT!

What if you do something onscreen that completes your objective? Suppose you were trying to get Slick Nick Collias out of the running for this year's Sea Blessing, a paranormal competition that involves swimming out to an island in the Aegean Sea and then finding your way to a temple hidden in its caverns. If, in the course of the game, you persuade him not to, or bluff him into thinking the cave's got an IED in it, or just break his leg... what then? Your objective could have only been at 22% or something, but it's now effectively complete.

If you definitely completely your objective before it hits 100%, you take half its points and roll them into a new objective. That new objective has to be related to the old one. (If you don't want to do that, you can start completely from scratch at some unrelated thing, with zero percentiles.) In our Sea Blessing example, you can put 11% into having someone in the cabal get to the temple instead.

OBJECTIFYING PEOPLE IS WRONG

A tempting objective is "I want Sasha to fall in love with me," but that's beyond the reach of mortal tampering, both political and paranormal. In *Unknown Armies* people are free. You cannot make anyone *decide* to do one damn single thing. You can ask Sasha out and do fun stuff and be courteous and still get shot down due to insufficient erotic chemistry. It's that tragic human condition again. Nothing you or anyone else can do is going to make a person realize or decide that they *really are* in love with you and just didn't know it.

"I want someone to fall in love with me" has the same thorny issues of free will, compounded by vagueness. How do you put a checkmark next to that on your To Do list? When your partner says, "I love you"? When you *feel* loved? There's no good way to quantify it.

"I want to go out in public looking good once a month for a year" is entirely doable, and local in fact. "I want to get married" is *barely* OK as an objective, because you can arrange all kinds of shenanigans with green cards and gold-digging and arranged marriages with dowries. But objectives aren't a good tool for fine-grained, individual, particular requests. If you want to get married within the next six months, an objective can reach for that, but wow, you may *really* be scraping the bottom of the matrimony barrel. It won't be Sasha and it won't be a love match.

"I want to have sex with Sasha" is an acceptable objective under the rules, but understand that maybe the only way that happens is without consent. That's gross, unlawful, and creepy, and one of the best ways to earn the hatred of someone whose love you craved just a few short paragraphs ago.

You OK with that? You shouldn't be.

1: GM



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TAKING THE PLUNGE

If you hit 100% it happens, and if it happens without hitting 100%, you move on to a new objective. But what if you set up something where it *could* happen? If you're really close and you incite some event that makes the time ripe, more reasonable than it might be even if you wait to grub percentiles up to the 100% sure thing... can you try to complete your objective prematurely?

You can, though it's not easy on your GM and may tick her off. This is called **taking the plunge**.

Before you take the plunge, you have to provoke an opportunity onscreen. For example, let's assume your objective is "Kill Mr. Hambone." It's entirely possible that you set up some kind of elaborate trap, or you poison his Cohiba Esplendidos, or you hire this creepy goon who wishes the Saw movies were documentaries. You set up any of those circumstances, and you want to get rid of Hambone before he does any more harm, even though it's not a 100% lock.

If you do that, *and everyone in the cabal agrees*, you can roll the percentiles you have, however few or many. If you take this risk, there are only two outcomes — special successes and failures don't factor in.

Failure: You do not get your wish and you tip your hand. All the percentiles you've amassed are *halved*. If you rolled with 75% and failed, you wind up with 38% afterwards (remember: round 'em up).

Success: Mission accomplished! Moreover, you can take half the percentiles you had and roll them into an associated objective, either at your current scale or the next one up. So if you achieved your weighty "Identify the godwalker of the Mother" objective when it had 66%, you would know who she was and could go into an associated cosmic goal like "Get the Mother godwalker to break taboo" at 33%. Or you could start some other goal entirely, at any scale, with zero percentiles.

SCALE

Scale measures how big a deal the objective's completion is, or its mere pursuit for that matter. Objectives that pursue ideas or emotions alone tend to cling at the lower end of the scale, even if they're passionately felt or influence a lot of people. Objectives that tangibly change the world, like founding an effective anti-avatar conspiracy or releasing a killer virus, should get judged not just on what they immediately are, but on their long-term impact.

Then again, ideas have concrete outcomes when you least expect them.

LOCAL

Local elections, local concerns, the local pub... objectives of this size are manageable, personal, applications of either moderate witchcraft or reasonable *gemeinschaft*. If it affects you and a thousand people or less, or targets a narrow geographic area or localized subculture, or is transitory and abstract, this is probably the level for it. Likewise for minor, synchronistic mystic effects that sociologists or anthropologists could easily explain away, or one-time peculiarities like someone losing time or creating weird lights in the sky.

Some sample local objectives include:

- "We're going to invent our own school of magick!"
- "We're getting creationism taught as legitimate science in the district schools."
- "We're making demon manifestation less likely within a one-mile radius of St. Charalampus' church."
- "We're making demon manifestation more likely within the confines of Greenwood Cemetery."
- "We want to ward the area between the town limits, the river, and the highway against members of Ordo Corpulentis."
- "Let's find out who killed the homecoming queen, and why."
- "We're going to rack up a good ten grand in forty-eight hours with this crime spree!"
- "A careful program of deniable harassment should keep that oil pipeline from getting built nearby for the next five years."
- "I want Michael Dorn to record a cover of The Presidents of the United States of America's 'Volcano' in his Worf voice!"

WEIGHTY

If it impacts a nation or a state or everyone in the world, even if only a little bit, that requires more serious effort. Ongoing paranormal effects that are *clearly* not just coincidence, like creating an otherspace, fit in this category. Political pressures that impact a state or a major city, or cultural goals like recording a #1 hit record or writing a New York Times bestseller are at this level as well.

Other examples include:

- "When General Harmon finally steps down from leading USNORTHCOM, our comrade in the Brethren of the Flayed Lamb shall take his place."
- "Judge Ybarra is not going to retain the bench in the next election."
- "We are going to spur a 4% increase in job creation in Idaho."

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- “Our cult is going to be active in four cities with at least 2,000 members.”
- “We will find out who killed our secret Satanist senator.”
- “We’re going to climb to a position of great trust and authority within our regional community of *magic-quashing Sleepers*.”
- “The neighborhood represented by Alderman Murray is cursed to become a polluted, crime-ridden shithole.”
- “The TV show *Dirt Bike Hookers* is going to get renewed for another season, dammit.”
- “We’re going to find a way to harness occult forces to harass and slaughter those whom we despise.”

COSMIC

If it changes the world in a big way, even a way that’s not directly perceptible, that’s another quantum level of difficulty and seriousness. This isn’t just altering the way the pieces are arrayed, it’s changing the rules that govern how they move. Anything that radically alters people’s attitudes towards long-term social entities, or that changes the content of the Invisible Clergy, or that rebalances the scales of global wealth is a cosmic objective.

Examples:

- “The next president of the USA is going to be a Buddhist.”
- “I am going to become godwalker.”
- “As a godwalker, I am going to replace my Invisible Clergy member.”
- “I am going to find a way to destroy a Room of Renunciation, even though such a thing has never been done before.”
- “I want people to have a clear, well-publicized reason to dispute the Catholic Church’s moral authority.”
- “I am going to publicly explain how the Invisible Clergy operates and have at least a million people believe me.”
- “We are going to establish an ongoing, international network that traffics thousands of slaves every year.”
- “I need to have a nuclear device detonated in a population center. The site needs at least 6,000 residents and fast internet connectivity.”
- “We are going to put a living human being on Mars and bring her back again.”

PATH

Players set the objective, and the GM determines the scale. Then the PCs’ accomplishments build a bridge between fact and desire to form their path. These accomplishments are called milestones.

Running the path between stating the objective (“I want to find the man who killed my daddy”) and its realization (“I have found the man who killed my daddy”) is the characters’ story, and it

can be quick or slow, it can include setbacks, or it can involve changing or abandoning one objective for another. (“Wait, Dad’s ALIVE!?! Now I want to find *him*!”) But the inevitable middle part is the path, consisting of milestones that increase the chance to reach the objective.

There are two types of milestones: **petty** and **intense**. A petty milestone is one with low risk, low investment, and low return. (If it was easy to get a big yield without effort or danger, someone would already have done it.) An intense milestone is inspired, risky, or costly.

These judgements interact with questions of scale. An action that’s intense for dealing with local haunted-trailer-park dirtbags may barely register on a cosmic scale, while something that’s fairly mild on the largest scale could be massive if applied locally.

That’s confusingly abstract even to me, and I wrote it, so let’s clarify with baseball.

Baseball is played at many levels, from Little League to college ball up through the major leagues. The basics are the same: three strikes, three outs, nine innings, more fun with beer. But the levels of skill are radically different. An incredible, ass-kicking kid pitcher has an 84 MPH fastball. That’s *average* in college Division 2. An elite MLB fastball pitcher on a good day is much faster.

Local objectives are the easiest, where that 84 MPH pitch may be stunning overkill. Weighty objectives are university sports, where 84 MPH is the cost of doing business and what have you done for the team lately? On a cosmic path, the big leagues, that speed isn’t even going to register as an unusual effort.

Similarly, if you’re trying to convince the local mystic creeps and crystal-wavers that they should respect you and do as you say, hiring private investigators and computer hackers to profile them may be overkill. If you’re trying to engage a national conspiracy of mystic telephone technicians, that’s probably a sensible precaution. If you’re up against an ancient and international family of adepts, that’s the price of doing business. It’s not going to move you forward: *failing* to do it moves you *backward*. It’s baked into the process.

Spending \$10,000 to promote your garage band is ridiculous overkill. Spending it to promote your first national release is smart. Spending that much when you’re Beyoncé is also ridiculous, but ridiculously *small*.

Anything that’s intense for a cosmic cause is intense on any scale. Something that’s intense on the weighty path is intense for local, but petty for cosmic stuff. The opposite is also true: petty cosmic milestones look intense on a weighty path of action. Petty local stuff has no effect on higher scales.

Now, since this is all kind of subjective, don’t sweat it too much or for too long. If you’re the GM and you need to decide whether an action is petty or intense, consider the scale. Are the

See “Sleepers” on page 83 of Book Three: Reveal for more information on these guys.

1: GM



2: OBJECTIVES



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7: LOCATIONS



PCs making a baller move when you consider the stakes? Fine, it's intense. Are they doing something interesting, clever, well-timed, or otherwise aesthetically pleasing without much risk? Probably petty. Does it seem like they're just treading water? Definitely petty, and maybe not even good enough to do anything.

LOCAL

Some example actions that would be petty at the local level:

- A reality-bruising ritual involving the anniversary of a local tragedy, photos cut from magazines, and minor vandalism.
- Spending \$500 buying drinks for people in a variety of bars and steering the conversations towards all those retirees who just up and vanished.
- Firing off a series of snappy one-liners during a local TV interview.
- Persuading a rich and connected local business owner that she should be "on your side."
- Arranging a really amusing fundraising activity for your preferred cause.

More impressive, intense actions include:

- A reality-bruising ritual involving deer's blood, black candles, and the vandalism of an alderman's prized Cadillac.
- Bugging the home or hacking the phone or email account of someone involved.
- Forty-eight-hour vision quest involving exertion and no water consumption at all.
- Convincing workers from something like a factory or a transportation bureau or a power plant to go on strike until their grievances are addressed.

WEIGHTY

If you're pursuing a weighty path, the sort of thing that would seem petty might include:

- Anything considered intense for a local path.
- Spreading damaging, unprovable (though true) rumors about someone.
- A lengthy interview on a cable news channel or in a national magazine.
- A \$10,000 campaign of targeted internet astroturfing.
- Plaguing a church with a storm of *unnatural phenomena*.

Intense actions in pursuit of weighty objectives include the following:

- Anything considered petty for a cosmic path.
- Gutter magick with human sacrifice. Or any first-degree murder, really.
- Undergoing voluntary demonic possession in exchange for occult assistance.
- Inciting a riot.
- A months-long, expensive, and well-coordinated public relations campaign.

COSMIC

Here are some petty actions that might inch you forward with the high-stakes cosmic pursuits:

- Anything considered intense for a weighty path.
- Relevant, but only manageably risky, magick requiring a major charge.
- A million-dollar publicity campaign featuring a multi-city speaking tour of well-known experts who are presenting your notions while wearing very fashionable suits.
- Publicly present irrefutable evidence that completely upends the standard understanding of some historical event. ("This was definitely Plato's Atlantis and the DNA from the remains indicates its residents were the ancestors of 72% of the world's current Igbo population," or "Mao was undeniably a Rosicrucian.")
- Forming a cult, or cult of personality, that makes you recognizable, by name or image, to at least 10,000 people.

To get an intense boost to a cosmic objective, you need to pull out the big guns. Examples follow. Brace yourself.

- Assassinating the most important politician in Europe.
- Killing a godwalker in some symbolic fashion.
- Taking yourself and a couple of unwilling and relevant persons into a Room of Renunciation.
- Blowing the whistle on widespread government surveillance, including the release of classified documents.
- Performing a reality bruise that involves thousands of participants (witting or no), millions of dollars, and massive animal sacrifice.

Unnatural phenomena are described in Book One: Play on page 80.

1: GM



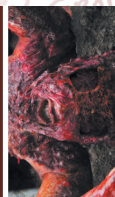
2: OBJECTIVES



3: CHARACTERS



4: SESSIONS



5: GMCS

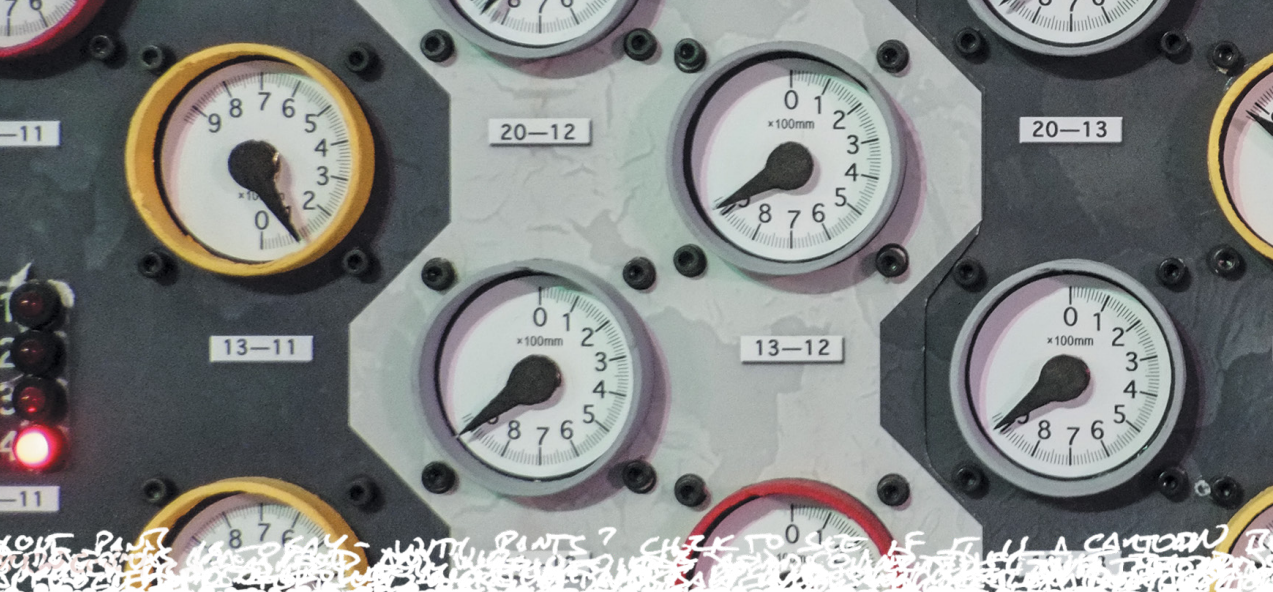


6: INHUMANITY



7: LOCATIONS





TURNING THE GEARS

Now that you know what a legitimate objective is, it's time to roll out some rules for getting it. Like everything else, it's in percentiles. But instead of an identity that only grows gradually, the percentile chance of an objective is unique, set apart, and reserved for that objective only. If your objective is "Create an otherspace," each milestone you reach on the path adds points to the percentile. *When it hits 100%, jackpot.*

Here's something else important: your group, your collection of PCs, can only pursue one objective, *collectively*. Mike doesn't get one objective and Jill gets another and Sally gets a third. Mike and Jill and Sally work together. Taking the plunge only happens if all of you agree, unanimously, to try and kick it off early.

With the influx of refugees in her hometown of Karkamış, Tamgöl wants to create an otherspace to protect certain Hittite artifacts that have been in her family for generations, while her friends Aydolun and Sabri think a bolthole would be just the thing for keeping away from the police and certain Syrian rivals who might sneak across the border during the unrest. So their objective is "Create a mystic otherspace in Tamgöl's basement." Their GM figures this is a weighty objective and writes "Otherspace: 0%" in her notes.

FOLLOWING THE PATH

As explained above, cosmic objectives demand big, cosmic milestones along their path. Local objectives are far less strenuous. But within the scale of your objective, there are still some things you do — tasks — that are impressive and remarkable and others that, while helpful, seem less consequential.

If you do something your GM thinks is petty, you roll 1d10 and add the result to your objective's rating, along with an extra 5%. Petty tasks are those that are simple, obvious, entail little risk if any, and which don't break laws or incite anger in normal folks.

For milestones that are a bit more intense, you roll 2d10, add the results together with another 10%, and add that sum to the objective. Intense tasks bend laws or break them outright, or they involve deep promises or big concessions, or they put your life or health or reputation in serious jeopardy.

Over several sessions, Aydolun, Tamgöl, and Sabri pursue several options for achieving their desire. They explore a regional otherspace and even travel as far as Varna, Bulgaria to check out another. They ritually arrange Tamgöl's artifacts in the basement and bruise reality in various ways, attempting to create a path.

Their GM lets them roll 2d10+10% for each otherspace visited, and with good rolls, their Objective percentage rises to 47%. Arranging the artifacts nets them a 1d10+5% roll, which earns them a measly seven percentiles. Their three reality bruise rites, while entertainingly described, are each worth only 1d10+5% each, yielding a total of 23% more. They've reached 77%. Aydolun wants to roll, Tamgöl doesn't, and Sabri's on the fence.

In desperation, Sabri contacts a demon and binds it to remove the barriers while Aydolun's research suggests the blood of travel-aspected avatars may prove useful if painted into the shape of a local map and then folded, origami-style, into a pocket. Talking with a demon is certainly risky enough to warrant a 2d10+10% roll, though its advice only tricked Sabri into hosting it for a hair-raising forty-eight hours. Even so, the possession experience itself gave him insight, but he only rolls enough for 16 percentiles. As for Aydolun, he manages to convince one Messenger avatar to part with a pint in exchange for help with a loan shark, and that too is worth 2d10+10%. Rolling well, he gets a 10 and a 7. They're now over 100%.

If you get it, or try it, before that, it's covered under "Shortcut!" and "Taking the Plunge" starting back on page 14.

1: GM



2: OBJECTIVES



3: CHARACTERS



4: SESSIONS



5: GMCS



6: INHUMANITY



7: LOCATIONS



SWEET SUCCESS

Once you hit 100%, you achieve the objective, either onscreen or off, depending on how the GM can swing it. Moreover, you keep half your points... as long as you transfer them into a related objective. If you get above 100%, you still only get 50% in your new endeavor, but that related objective can be at the same scale or one step up.

As Tamgöl and her friends manipulate the origami blood-map, the concrete basement floor yawns open and they descend, high-fiving each other furiously, only to discover that the world they made is inhabited by winged centaurs straight off of a Hittite frieze. They are definitely not friendly. They also discover that once you kill one and haul his body out of the otherspace, it turns into a normal human corpse.

But despite their problems, they have their otherspace and they have fifty residual percentiles to shift into some related objective. Aydolun suggests that their new goal be "Conquer the otherspace and convince those centaur bastards that we're the gods who created their universe!" Their GM says, sure, that sounds like a weighty objective. If they wanted to immediately roll that 50% chance, they could tool up with weaponry or iPhones and try to shock and awe the otherspatials.

Tamgöl, on the other hand, wants to use their otherspace to provide incontrovertible proof to the entire world that magick is real and tangible and works. That is a cosmic objective, one level up from weighty, but because they succeeded, they have the option of putting their 50% in that instead. She could kick that off by bringing in news journalists or other reputable persons, or by making a film demonstrating the otherspace and posting it online.

If you want a new unrelated objective, you start from zero, which can lead to a series of successes in an increasingly irrelevant domain if you're not careful. Sunk-cost thinking is hard to shake. If you want an objective at a lower level it's still just half.

JUST WHAT ARE THESE "EFFECTS"?

Some objectives are very clear ("I want to own the legendary Zero Heron" and "Bring me the head of José Garcia"). They're binary. You either have the bird/head or you don't. But others are... mushier. How do you handle those effects?

The easiest way to handle abstract objectives like "I want the job creation rate to rise 5% nationwide" or "I want a major scandal to rock the church of Scientology" is to offload it into the GM's lap and let her adjudicate how these occurrences disturb the setting. Hand-wave it, narrate a marginal change to observable human misery and move on.

But the derisive term for lacking a specific rubric for every contingency is Magical Tea Party (MTP) and some people hate that. A certain amount of GM fiat is endemic in the RPG endeavor, but wanting rules for stuff that comes up a lot is hardly unreasonable. So while MTP narrative is great for the kinds of edge cases to which *Unknown Armies* caters, there are also classes of objective that players are likely to want. Here's how you can bolt firm mechanics onto them:

Blessing: The PCs want some element to be encouraged in their region — traffic safety or romance or religious credulity — and achieve the appropriate objective. How to model that? Give a +10% bonus to rolls when it fits. +10% to all Pursuit rolls for good traffic, +10% to Connect in Romeville or to ministers in God's Country. Note that this doesn't overlap or combine or anything like that: it never, under any circumstances, goes above +10%. Once you achieve that objective, any further attempts at it are going to steer you towards narrative resolutions. Some GMs may decide that an area can only have one magickal probability shift in play at one time. "Removing the old blessing" might need to be a prerequisite objective to "Establishing a replacement blessing" or the GM might just treat it like an objective of greater scale to remove *and* supplant a blessing.

Curse: This is pretty much an upside-down blessing. If you want something diminished or impeded in your turf, like racial violence, effective policing, or magick, you set up a curse. It gives a -10% to Struggle rolls across ethnic lines, or to cops' Notice rolls, or to adepts' Whateveromancy rolls.

1: GM

2: OBJECTIVES

3: CHARACTERS

4: SESSIONS

5: GMCS

6: INHUMANITY

7: LOCATIONS

When you truly know what you want, you also know how to get it.

If you are confused as to the how, you are also confused as to the what.



Ward: We don't want *their kind* coming 'round our home. Could be meth users, homicide detectives, avatars of the Flying Woman... warding against all avatars or all adepts or all members of a particular race is probably too broad for a ward and, like blessings and curses, a region can only lie under one ward at a time. But any time someone warded against crosses into the protected area, it's a Helplessness (3-4) check, depending on how unwelcome other features would make them. They know they can avoid the fear by backing off, but once that stress check is rolled, they're in and that's that, until they leave and re-enter. People may not know where it comes from or why, but they get the message pretty quick.

One-Time Unnatural Effect: If, for some reason, you want to put up with *that crap* (I'm guessing some kind of real estate price thing?) here's the kinds of unnatural effects you can create on the local, weighty, and cosmic scales:

	Minor	Significant	Major
Local	5-10	1-3	0
Weighty	5d10	1d10	1
Cosmic	5d10+20	1d10+15	1d10

Note that with the minor and significant effects, you don't get to pick. It's just a grab bag of regional weird shit. Even with the major effect, while you get to choose what happens, you don't get to choose where or how or to whom. Think about that before uncorking good ol' "Someone Dies." It's not going to be your enemy, it's just some random schmuck.

Once you're causing these sorts of distortions on a cosmic scale, you may opt to have them happen globally. This makes for one strange day, but not anything the media can't get past with a shrug, a laugh, and a celebrity drunk driver. Or you can impose them nationally or regionally. The tighter your focus, the more apparent it is that something deeply unnatural is going on. But even as a cosmic tamperer, you don't get a lot of influence, except with the major effects.

1: GM



2: OBJECTIVES



3: CHARACTERS



4: SESSIONS



5: GMCS



6: INHUMANITY



7: LOCATIONS





I QUIT

Sometimes people think better of a goal, even a long-sought and passionately desired one. People change. If your group decides to shift objectives, does that mean that all the work you put in, all the glad-handing and animal sacrifice and tire-slashing that you applied to your desires... is all in vain?

Yeah, maybe, but not necessarily. Here's how you redirect if you think better of an early, hasty decision:

If you're not a risk-taker and you're shifting to an objective that's clearly related (going from "I want Dave Hembler to break taboo as a Two-Faced Man" to "I want Dave Hembler's marriage to end" for instance) and it's on the same scale or lower, you can leave the dice untouched and transfer half the percentiles from the old objective to the new one.

But maybe you're a *gambler*. Maybe you didn't hardscrabble together all those percentiles just to let half of them evaporate. If you won't be satisfied until dice fall, here's how you redirect:

First off, you have to have an explanation for why the efforts you made chasing your previous objective can make sense for the new one. If Tamgül and her pals want to switch from making an otherspace to "Shielding Karkamış from unnatural effects," that's fine. All their tinkering with other realities and experiences with demons and storing up traveling avatars' blood... yeah, you

can see how that would arm them to deal with the uncanny. But shifting to "I want to determine the outcome of a regional election?" Probably no sale. Mystic stuff transfers to mystic stuff. Political goals most easily turn into other political goals. Cultural objectives are hard to turn into criminal objectives, and vice versa.

If you can't explain why your efforts shouldn't be wasted, they're wasted. But if you can bring your percentiles to the table, here's how you gamble with them.

To shift to an objective on a lower scale, roll 'em. If your roll fails, it drops to the new objective at its current level. If your roll succeeds, it goes to the new scale at its level +2d10. Hey, it's easier to get elected dog-catcher than president, y'know?

To shift to an objective on the same scale, roll. If it fails, the percentage drops to zero. If the roll succeeds, you lose 1d10 percentiles off your total, but it shifts to the new objective.

Shifting to an objective of greater scale is a tough row to hoe. Once again, you toss the dice, and a failure wastes everything. If the roll succeeds, you get the total of the dice in the new objective.

Our culture's derision of quitters is both a childish fear of failure and a childish ignorance of how knowledge and wisdom are acquired.

1: GM



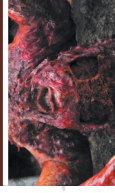
2: OBJECTIVES



3: CHARACTERS



4: SESSIONS



5: GMCS



6: INHUMANITY



7: LOCATIONS



Getting Michael Dorn to do a cover of the song "Volcano" in the voice of Lieutenant Worf, while a worthy goal, is one that Macy and Didi reluctantly abandon in hopes of propelling their favorite band, Hysterical Prolapse, to the top of the British charts. Their goofball magickal rites and off-the-wall publicity stunts got their likelihood of convincing Mr. Dorn to enter the recording studio to a decent 61%, but producing a novelty single is a local objective. A #1 hit is a weighty matter. So Macy and Didi roll to transfer, get a 49 and, with a success, have 13% (4+9) shifted into "Make Hysterical Prolapse a #1 act."

I DON'T WANT TO WIN, I WANT YOU TO LOSE

Sometimes, your most important objective is keep the other guy from achieving his. If you're working towards a local school-board election and discover that a cult is attempting the world's first mass soul-reaving on behalf of something calling itself the Devourer of Crowns, well, that sounds a little more urgent even if you're not sure what a mass soul-reaving is.

To interfere, you first have to initiate some action that could conceivably cause the other objective to fail. You need to take an onscreen plunge. "I plead with the high priest to get his head out of his ass and go back to rehab" could work or "We perform the Ritual of Light to defend the world against the Devourer" or "Imma take a shotgun and massacre the cult's next graveyard hoedown."

When you do this, you reduce the enemy objective by an amount equal to your amassed percentiles. If you have "School Board Tinkering" at 25% and they have "Mass Soul-Reaving" at 41%, after you mess with them, their percentage chance drops to a piddly 16%. In your face, Devourer of Crowns!

Even better, you can leverage entropy by burning your local objective to counter a weighty or cosmic objective on a one-for-one basis. The people who've been scrabbling together cultural capital to start a summer stock theater company (local objective) can go head to head with the nutjobs trying to unseat the Masterless Man archetype (cosmic objective). If they've got "Build Theater Guild" at 20% and their rivals have "Unseat Masterless Man" at 20%, the plucky thespians can completely undo all the cosmic tinkerers have accomplished, forcing them to restart from zero.

Best of all, if your objective is already bigger than theirs, you can force them to abandon their project. So if those actors had pulled together a local objective at 30% and applied it against a larger-scale objective of 29% or less, it not only guarantees failure, it forces the rival to switch to a different objective, starting with nothing.

To recap: a band of people with minor power can effectively veto the objectives of people operating on a much broader scale. Thanks entropy! I guess that's why progress is such a pain in the ass, eh?

Now, while being the underdog who blows up the Death Star sounds incredibly appealing, as it should, there are some very real restrictions on this, and they're harsh.

- It's all-in. If you've got 80% stored up in your local objective "Start A New Business" and you decide you want to thwart someone's weighty "Create A Plague Of Miscarriages" project, you can't decide to apply 20% and keep 60% for that new Supercuts franchise. You put everything in, or nothing.
- Punching down is no easier. If you've been working towards a cosmic objective like "Make New York a Mecca of Economic, Mystic, and Political Comity and Justice" and you find out that someone's got a weighty objective upstate that you can't tolerate ("They're renewing *Dirt Bike Hookers*? Not on my watch!") you get no leverage from sacrificing broader ambitions. You deduct your percentiles from theirs, no matter the scale.
- It pisses people off. Imagine you're the high priest for the Devourer of Crowns and you find out a rogue PTA faction ruined your master plan. Are you going to just shrug and say, "Well, I guess they wanted it more," or are you going to grab your MP3 player, put "Mouth for War" on continuous repeat, and wreck their lives? Screwing up someone's deal is very rarely deniable, and people do not like interlopers fucking with their shit.

1: GM



2: OBJECTIVES



3: CHARACTERS



4: SESSIONS



5: GMCS



6: INHUMANITY



7: LOCATIONS





3: CHARACTERS, CABALS, AND THE STAGE

This game is all about characters, and the players play the most important characters, for all that your job sometimes seems to prove otherwise. As potential movers and shakers in the occult underground — or at the very least, interesting rubes poking around in things they don't understand — the player characters form the nucleus of every *Unknown Armies* campaign. For this reason, and because we want meaning in our lives, the default campaign startup is a collaborative, character-building, stage-setting experience facilitated by the GM but driven by the players.

CREATE THE CHARACTER

Central to the unfolding story of any *Unknown Armies* campaign, and the instrument of a player's experience, is the player character. Interesting PCs:

- Experienced some kind of trigger event in their lives that exposed them to the occult underground.
- Are passionate about the things that anger, terrify, and bring out the best in them.
- Connect to the other PCs by all of these things.

GATHER THE CABAL

The nature of roleplaying campaigns tends to push PCs together by into some kind of group. We use the term **cabal** to describe any group of player characters who share the spotlight for one

PINS ON A CORK BOARD

The process by which a group creates their characters, cabal, and the stage is a lot like the process by which feverish conspiracy theorists cover their walls with photos, newspaper clippings, pins, and string. It's more organized than that, but the end result should be a combination of relationship map and stage plan, with individual PCs written up on sheets and GMCs scribbled out on notecards.

THE BARE CORKBOARD

Start with a blank slate. Get together with the players for a session where it's agreed that creating characters, the cabal, and the stage is the whole point of being there. Grab pencils, blank character

reason or another. The cabal may be a street-level group of rookie occultist wannabes, or it could be a global-level band of adepts seeking to make lasting changes. These are decisions that need to be made during the first session, when the characters are created and come to life at the table. The cabal has desires of its own, shared by the characters who have come together to create it. The cabal has its assets and its liabilities, shaping its ability to interact with the setting around it. The group must agree to these defining features, at least at first, because they inform the plot going forward.

SET THE STAGE

Creating the cabal goes hand in hand with creating the individual characters and the important locations, themes, and relationships that arise from those. That extra stuff is the **stage**, and serves as the framework for the cabal's earliest foray into the occult underground. The stage is a loose collection of seeds for the GM to play with and for the players to use as a sort of wish list of badness. It's the players' job to toss interesting places and colorful people into the mix, and your job to bring those to life as the campaign unfolds. The stage is the framework for the campaign, so it's important that the players and GM create engaging hooks that make them want to peel back the layers of the occult underground and cast their revelations against the stage's backdrop.

sheets, notecards, and a big piece of paper. A whiteboard, or an actual corkboard if you're going to go all in on this, also works. Everyone should bring photos, images, evocative cookie fortunes, matchbooks with gnomic phrases scrawled on them, rumors from these books, inspiring phrases cut out of other books, napkins with strange diagrams... any scraps you think might be cool or weird or add atmosphere. You won't need any dice just yet, but if you're motivated enough to get started playing immediately after, it can't hurt to have those handy.

Players might have some pre-established ideas about who their characters are, what they can do, and how they might change later, but right now those are just notions. Write the players' names on the big sheet of paper in a rough circle, with plenty of space to write other things in between them and around them. Use pencil. The player

Seek that which is greater than yourself.

1: GM



2: OBJECTIVES



3: CHARACTERS



4: SESSIONS



5: GMCs



6: INHUMANITY



7: LOCATIONS



RESPIRE

is to breathe and conspire is to breathe with but inspire is to have breath pass through from without

names are placeholders for the character names, which should replace them once they're chosen.

Don't connect anything, don't write anything else. Now you're ready to get to business.

STEP ONE: THE BIG PICTURE

What is this game going to be about? The void before, when the setting is a blank page and the characters are empty outlines — this is the time to think about what you really want out of humanist mystic horror. The story you collectively tell is going to be about the player characters, but the actions they take and the path they follow are going to indicate who they are more than any numbers on a character sheet. If Hamlet and Iago traded places, Iago would be the badass noir detective who solved the ugly mystery in the first act, while Hamlet and Othello would have spent their days peacefully discussing philosophy. So in this stage, encourage your players to think about what their characters are pursuing, collectively and individually.

A HALF-DOZEN POSSIBLE STARTING OBJECTIVES

The Committee to Recall the Mayor: Mayor Hyde just got reelected, despite your best efforts. Everyone loves her. The police chief is her cousin. Half the city council goes to her church. But only you know what she *really* is, what she's doing, and what she's capable of. Democracy has failed. Now you need to destroy her — not because you're sore losers, but because you're the only people who've resisted her mind-bending powers... and she knows it.

Escape: You live somewhere terrible. Maybe there's a civil war going on, or an invasion, or maybe the criminals are just better funded and more ruthless than the police. You can't fix it, so you're getting the hell out.

Ascension Cabal: The idea of the Executioner casts a bloody shadow over all of human history. You intend to cast down this archetype and replace it with the Euthanizer, the giver of release from pain, death's usher, whose services are eagerly sought by those in intolerable duress. This replacement could reshape all human society. But the archetype strives to stop you, and its avatars are among the deadliest people alive.

Rock & Rule: Once upon a time, there was a group that believed they could create a magick utopia by firing occult energy into randos at truck stops. They got flogged like weak ponies. But if you can recover their transference ritual and use it while playing your badass 70s-style concerts, you can turn your audience into a mythic amplifier and top the charts. That's phase one.

You Read the Book: Each of you read a book, a horrible book called *From Within the Stones*. It showed you things about the world, and you barely survived it sane and whole. You were lucky. Other people who read it weren't so fortunate. Now you need to track down every one of the 100 copies and make sure they don't hurt anyone else, before some asshole scans one and throws it up on the internet.

Dragon-Bone Heirs: You know the truth. There were never any dinosaurs. Those giant bones were dragons! You know because your ancestors were all dragon-slayers who consumed the wyrms' hearts, or blood, or brains, in order to gain power over truth and reality. A small taste of that insight and influence remains, and you seek to rekindle it all. You'll need to get the right bones, then put them in the right order, then find a way to bring it back to life. Then, of course, you have to kill it.

BEGINNING TO FILL OUT THE CORK BOARD

For best results, work within the framework of desperation, obsession, and occult weirdness. If you want to run *Gilmore Girls* with spells using *Unknown Armies*, you'll have a lot of unnecessary sanity rules crowding your game. So assure your players that their characters are sincere true believers that weirdness works, and bound together for a purpose that they are feverishly motivated to accomplish.

After mulling over who they want to be, where they want the game set, and what sort of adventures they want to experience, the players do the following things:

Set an Objective: The objective is what the cabal is trying to *do*. The players define this collectively, and navigate it as a group, not as a single lone nut. Everyone taking part should figure out what they want the game to be about and propose that to the other players. The players agree on their objective and then start *planning the milestones* along the path and thinking about how they can change and manipulate the world.

Notch the Unnatural Meters: Players take turns describing the event that convinced them that the unnatural was real and could not be safely ignored. As each describes an event, they put up to five hardened notches in their Unnatural meter (in addition to the one that's there initially). Make sure your players know they don't have to use all of them if they don't want. They're hard to remove once they're there. The more notches put in, the more secretive and guarded the character is, and the less open to the commonplace features of the world. People who've been through lots of weird stuff discount the evidence of their senses, while people who believe in *real reality* pay attention to it.

1: GM

2: OBJECTIVES

3: CHARACTERS

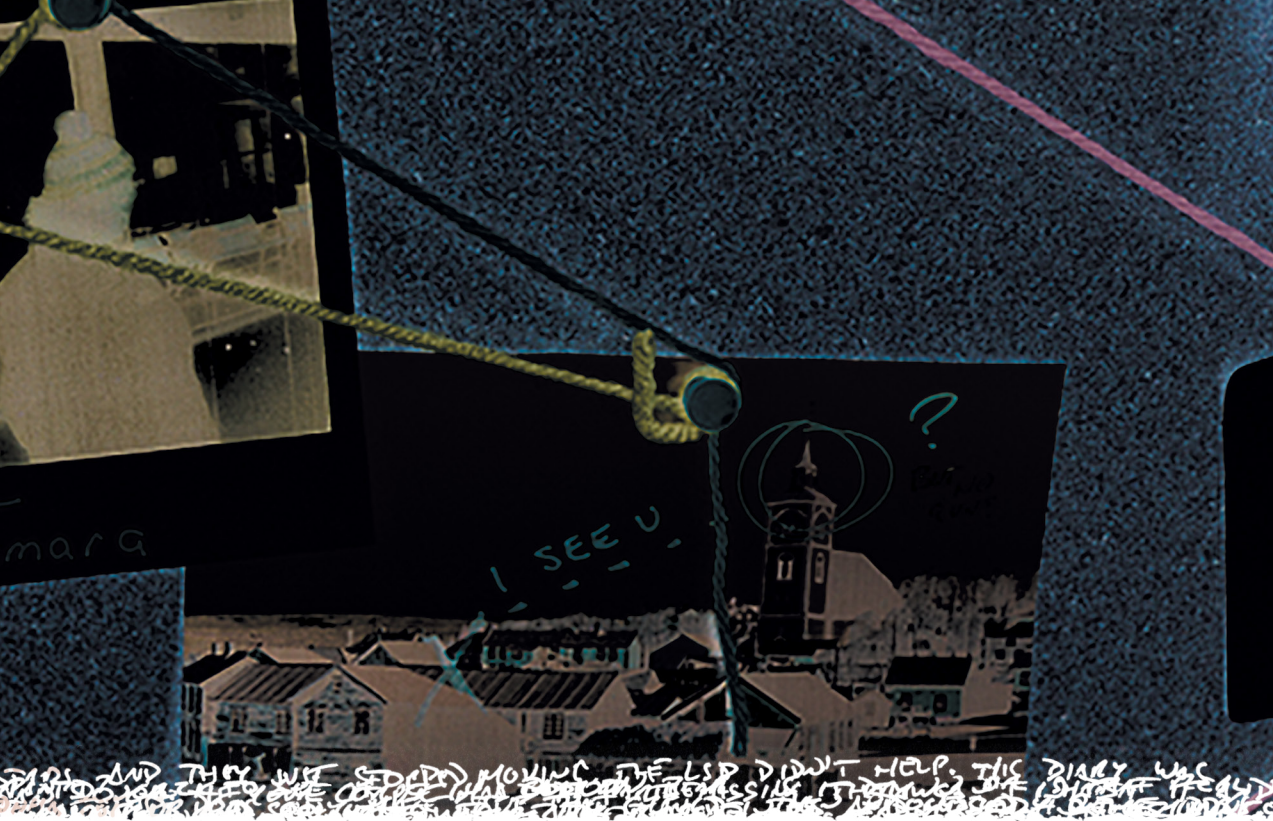
4: SESSIONS

5: GMCS

6: INHUMANITY

7: LOCATIONS

See
"Objectives"
starting on
page 13.



Add an Element and Connect: Each player adds a GMC or a location, and then draws a line between it and their name, or another element. The line represents a connection. The GMC can be defined by relationship (my father), position (police chief), or just a name (Jericho Nixon). Similarly, locations can be specific or evocative (coffee shop, Mexico, where hope died).

Describe an Obsession: Each player *defines their obsession* now. An awful lot arises from this, so get it right. It's best to keep it short and sweet, like "Knowing it All" or "Physical Perfection" or "Religion." Adepts, those who follow a magickal tradition, have that as their obsession, or something related to it.

Add an Identity: Typically, players get 120 percentile points to allocate between one to four *identities*. Identities are pretty broad and do a lot of things, but most importantly, they indicate who a character *is*. This first identity makes a statement. What's something that can be *really useful* to someone with a particular obsession, who is pursuing a cabal's objective? If players choose an identity that doesn't play into either of those... just why is it so very important to the character? They don't have to assign any percentiles yet, but it's fine if they want to. **Features** don't need to be defined yet, though again, it's not forbidden. It's probably a good idea to pick which ability an identity supplants. Identities have to have at least 15% in them and can't have more than 90%. It's usually a good idea to have at least 30%.

GM Input: You, the GM, get to add a GMC or location and define one connection to it.

STEP ONE EXAMPLE: AGAINST OTRADOVEC

Marcy has agreed to run a game of *Unknown Armies* for her friends Sakinah and George, and for George's cousin Robert. Sakinah's been a fan since first edition, and Marcy played in a few games Sakinah ran. George is a longtime gamer, hasn't played *Unknown Armies*, but did look through Sakinah's copy of *Book Three: Reveal* a few times. Robert's new to tabletop games, but he's a fan of Adam Nevill and listens to Ibeyi, so they figure he'll be fine.

As they discuss the cabal's initial objective, George suggests that they be *against* something or someone, just because that's easier for when they're getting used to the rules and mechanics. Sakinah wanted to jump right into cosmic stuff, but she sees how it might be simpler for Robert the beginner, and for Marcy, who doesn't have a ton of experience GMing. Marcy has picked out a creepy HDR picture of someone who's so old and wrinkled it's impossible to easily determine their gender identity. Sakinah says their name is Otradovec and that there are many followers who regard Otradovec as a messiah-like figure. Robert suggests that each of them has some reason to oppose Otradovec's cult, and after spitballing more ideas, they settle on the idea that Otradovec came to their town and started the School of Psychic Self-Defense that sucked up all the local weirdos for miles around. Now said weirdos are all smug attitudes, vague threats, and left-handed handshakes. The cabal's objective is to take down Otradovec and the school.

Marcy then asks George to explain what convinced his character that the unnatural is real, and George throws her a fat curveball. "My character," he says, "was born in the late 1800s.

1: GM



2: OBJECTIVES



3: CHARACTERS



4: SESSIONS



5: GMCS



6: INHUMANITY



7: LOCATIONS



Review "What Drives You: Passion and Obsession" on page 9 in Book One: Play for a description of character obsessions.

See "Identities" on page 41 in Book One: Play for more information.

He worked as a cowboy. One day, riding through the hills of the western wilds, he saw a beautiful naked woman step out of a door in a mesa and beckon to him. He went with her, and spent the next hundred and one years as her guest, lover, and chew toy. Her name was Titania, and he was only released from his stay with the faeries seven years ago. He's just now gotten up to speed with the 21st century."

Marcy blinks slowly, then turns to Robert. His story is much simpler. He crossed Otradovec's people, and they put some kind of mystic whammy on him, and the cops won't listen to his story. As for Sakinah, she brightly tells Marcy that she escaped from Otradovec, "Long ago, before he even came to... say, where is this set, anyhow?"

After mumbling back and forth, they decide on a mid-sized Colorado town named Haggart's Pass. It's a good choice because none of them have lived in Colorado, so any inconsistencies can go unnoticed.

Now that the players all know why they believe in the uncanny, Marcy asks how exposed to it they've been — how many hardened notches, out of a possible five, they want to add to their Unnatural meter. George goes all in with five — "Under the hill, baby, I saw it *all*." It's going to take a lot to shock him, leaving his Notice at 35% and his Secrecy at 45%. Sakinah's not far behind, taking four notches and having Notice and Secrets balanced, both at 40%. Robert, looking over the list of shocks, doesn't think his character has been through nearly that much of a wringer. He takes one notch, giving him Notice 55% and Secrecy 25%.

That done, they all throw down the photos they've brought for inspiration. Robert picks out a scowling woman with a serious forehead scar and says, "That's Grace. She's Otradovec's right hand." He tacks the picture onto the whiteboard and draws a line between her and Otradovec, labeled appropriately. Sakinah goes next, adding a tall ominous building to the board. "That's the local hospital. My character works there as a medical records clerk." As for George, he puts up a picture of a gorgeous woman and says, "Monica. She's thirsty for more cowboy lovin' after a tempestuous one-nighter." Robert and Sakinah both groan, but Marcy gives a little smile and asks for obsessions.

Robert dives in first. "Tobias is obsessed with self-sufficiency," he says. "Your guy's named Tobias?" "Apparently so," he says. Marcy nods. "OK Sakinah, what about you?"

WHO GOES FIRST?

It usually doesn't matter what order the players act in. This is not competitive, it's collaborative. Because some people are assertive while others are deferential and shy, here's a suggestion: don't let the loudest players control the whole game. Encourage your players to work together to make interesting, useful characters who can survive the horrors of the occult underground. And, if it really matters who gets to speak first, take turns.

With a grin, Sakinah says, "Lauren is obsessed with social hierarchies and networks." As for George, he has a hard time settling on an obsession for his sex cowboy, but settles on "Curiosity about the occult." Seems pretty reasonable for someone who spent a century as an elfy gigolo and catamite without getting a lot of explanations.

When it comes time to put together identities, Sakinah immediately says Lauren is going to be a motumancer, something she read about in *Book One: Play* and has been itching to try out. "Did you find Motumancy before or after escaping Otradovec?" Marcy asks. "After. I was looking for anyone who had any kind of handle on the unnatural, and the Sect of the Naked Goddess was the first in line." George asks if he can have an identity called "Bimbrow," and when Marcy warily asks what it is, he says that he's profoundly skilled in the sack, with all genders, as well as being incandescently handsome. Marcy doesn't love the name, but it's his character. As for Robert, he looks over the identity list and says, "Martial Arts Instructor."

Nodding, Marcy strokes her chin, looks at the board, and adds a photo of an unassuming strip mall. "Otradovec's school is here," she says, then draws a line to Robert/Tobias. "It used to be your martial arts dojo before you were driven out," she says.

1: GM



2: OBJECTIVES



3: CHARACTERS



4: SESSIONS



5: GMCS



6: INHUMANITY



7: LOCATIONS



*Slowly
I turned,
step by
steps
into
something
entirely
new.*

STEP TWO: GET PLUGGED IN

The image of the game is blurry at this point. You have disparate elements, half-formed characters who are little more than bundles of urges, funneled together in pursuit of a shared objective. At this stage, you draw the characters together, and connect them firmly to the setting. Step one was the basics of who and what. Step two is *why*.

Relate to a PC: Each player considers the *relationships* defined in *Book One: Play* — responsibility, guru, favorite, mentor, protégé. Each assigns one to another PC. As GM, make sure to facilitate discussions, because players don't get to veto it if someone decides their character is someone's protégé or their responsibility or any other role. A character's relationships describe how that character sees their position, so others don't get to negate it. (They do, however, get a ton of chances to defy it in actual play. Make sure they know that, and make sure you're ready if it happens.)

Add Another Identity: Just like the first one. What's something else the character is, to the exclusion of all the other things he could have been? What ability does it supersede?

Link Two Elements: Each player connects two elements that are already unrelated. If they want to connect something to another PC, this time they have to make sure it's OK with the player. If they want to add something new and connect it to an existing element or PC, go for it.

Relate to the Cabal: Looking over their unassigned relationships, each player picks one for the cabal. How do they relate to the group?

STEP TWO EXAMPLE: TANGLED WEBS

Marcy's players start the relationship section with George drawing a line between his character and Tobias. "Don't make this weird, cousin," Robert warns, but George writes in "Mentor." "Tobias is a self-sufficient guy," he says, "and Otis is drawn to that, seeing as he's still kind of at sea in this weird future/present. You going to come back with protégé?" "I have something else in mind," Robert says, drawing an arrow from Tobias to Lauren and labeling it "Favorite." Sakinah blinks. "You realize she's kind of plain and frumpy?" she

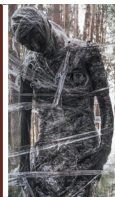
says, paging through the pictures to find a middle-aged, average woman with a bad haircut. Robert just shrugs. "I don't know if he's said anything, but something about her caught his eye. We'll see how strong the relationship is, I guess." Sakinah considers favoring him right back, but instead draws a line from Lauren to Grace, the GMC, and labels it "Responsibility." "I got her into Otradovec's orbit before I knew what was really going on. Now she's brainwashed and I want to save her."

Marcy likes this and can't wait to see what identities they select next. Robert starts by asking if he can just take "Self-Sufficient" as an identity. Marcy sees no reason why not. As for George, he adds "Cowboy," reasonably enough. Sakinah puts in "Hospital Administrator." No big surprises there.

Deciding that the board looks pretty bare, George adds a picture of a distinguished aging man in a dapper suit. "Has an on-again, off-again, down-low thing with Otis," George says, prompting an eye-roll from Marcy. "His name's Byron." "Fine," Sakinah says. "Maybe I introduced you." She draws a line between Byron and Lauren. "He's my boss." Robert, paging through the photos, pulls out one of a glittering ice cave and sticks it on. "Otradovec is scared of this," he says.

The final step is for each of them to relate to the cabal, which prompts reflection from each player. The group really hasn't been well defined yet. George starts, declaring that the cabal is his protégé. "I've seen a lot of mystic stuff," he says, "Lots of people controlled and abused with magick. I feel like I have to pitch in with this because not many other people are equipped to do so." Robert nods and then says the cabal is his guru. "Losing my school to that old weirdo really pulled the rug out from under me," he says. "I'm not just looking for payoff. I'm also looking for answers." Turning to Sakinah, they're surprised when she says, "Favorite. Lauren is deeply disenchanted with pecking orders and hierarchies. Her dream is a voluntary, structureless collusion of equals with shared goals. The cabal is the closest thing she's got to that in practice. Also, she thinks Otis is cute and enjoys Tobias' obvious respect."

1: GM



2: OBJECTIVES



3: CHARACTERS



4: SESSIONS



5: GMCS



6: INHUMANITY



7: LOCATIONS



STEP THREE: DIG DEEPER

At this point, you have an idea of how your PCs see themselves, through their identities, their connections to each other, and to the cabal itself. You know what the game's about, but there's still a lot of backstory and character to clarify. This step fills in some of the background. The players know their PCs. Now it's time to know them *well*.

Notch Two Meters: Each player places up to ten hardened notches across two of their characters' meters. Remind the players that, though every hardened notch increases their ability to do down and dirty stuff, it also decreases their ability to do wholesome, socially approved stuff. Also, make sure they know they do not have to spend all ten points! They don't have to spend *any* of them! We're just defining two of your meters! Also note that if they want to have one meter with a *ton* of hardened notches, they need to define it in conjunction with a meter that has very few. Show both sides of the coin — the way in which a character is alienated from normalcy, and the way in which she's still conventional.

Link to a PC: Each player draws a line between their PC and another, and labels the connection. It's often a good idea to link up with someone *other* than the PC with whom they defined a relationship in the last step, unless they really need to clarify that bond. Note that this doesn't have to be a *relationship* but it could be.

Determine Passions: What are the rage, fear, and noble stimuli for each character? What pisses him off, scares him, and inspires him? Make sure each player writes those down in a concise way that makes it clear when their passions apply and when they don't. Remember that once per session they can use each stimulus to flip-flop a roll or re-roll *any* roll, as long as they're acting in accordance with these passions.

Hone Obsession: By this point, each player has defined two identities. They can now add more if they really need them. Then they decide which identity best supports and plays into their obsession and mark it with a star. Once a star is next to that identity, they can flip-flop a roll when using it. Make sure they know they cannot mark an ability as an obsession. Adept characters *must* make their magick identity their obsession.

SHOCK GAUGE NOTCHES

The levels on the shock gauge show an awful lot about your character. Isolation, for example, measures how lonely your life has been, how well you chase people or run from them, how well-liked and known you are in your community, how well you cope when your options are taken away from you, and how deeply devoted you might be to someone or some organization. It's a lot! And every meter is like that! Granted, much of that gets supplanted by identities, but this is still what you default to from pure untrained talent. If your cabal could find use for a gritty streetfighter, plump up Violence. Need somebody with a lot of pull in the community? Keep those hardened notches in Isolation low.

On the other hand, you may choose to place hardened notches based on story, not effect. That is, you take six hardened notches in the Unnatural because you want a PC who has seen a *lot* of the eerie, not because you want to increase Secrecy. That's fine. Wanting to buff up Secrecy? Also fine. If you're going via story, though, remember that experiencing one Violence (6) check isn't enough to give you six hardened notches, unless it was very conveniently the culmination of a bunch of other stresses. A good guideline is to place your notches at the level of stress that you're used to — what's normal to you, happens once a month or so. Another guideline is to take the worst thing that's ever happened to you, figure out what rank of stress that is, and take two or three fewer hardened notches. That is, if the worst Helplessness stress you've experienced would have qualified as a Helplessness (8) check, look at what would constitute a Helplessness (5–6) check. Do those seem like something your character would just blink and say "Well, that happened" with no chance of losing her composure? If so, then that's how many notches you should take.

See
"Relationships"
on page 36 in
Book One:
Play.

1: GM



2: OBJECTIVES



3: CHARACTERS



4: SESSIONS



5: GMCS



6: INHUMANITY



7: LOCATIONS



STEP THREE EXAMPLE: CLARITY

As they start to notch meters, Robert considers what sort of life Tobias really has had. He knows how old Otis is and he's seen a picture of Lauren, so sorting through the photos he grabs one of a guy older than he'd initially planned. He decides that, while Tobias has seen some shit, he wasn't a soldier, cop, or crook. He hasn't had murder as a daily feature of his life, so his Violence is going to be pretty low — say, two more hardened notches to give him Struggle 30% and Connect 50%. Where he's taken punishment, he thinks, is Helplessness — though looking over the sample shocks, none of the high ones seem like the sort of thing he'd be used to. So he puts three more there, giving him Dodge 35% and Fitness 45%.

Sakinah has a different set of priorities. She wants Isolation stacked deep. If she's going to be burning down societies as a hobby, she wants good armor against loneliness. She throws in five whole hardened notches there, and makes it up by only putting one in Helplessness. "Even though you were in Otradovec's orbit?" Marcy asks. "I escaped, didn't I?" Sakinah retorts. But she does add another notch in Helplessness. That gives her Dodge 30%, Fitness 50%, Pursuit 45%, Status 35%.

As for George, he's taking on Isolation and Helplessness. When he was under the hill, he wasn't lacking for company, but he was pretty much a plaything of powers greater than himself. No new notches on Isolation puts him at Pursuit 20% and Status 60%. "What job does he have that gives him such kickass status?" Marcy asks. "Oh, I do some odd jobs around area ranches in the summer — I like horses — but most of the money comes from modeling." "Uh huh." "Really!" George protests. "This guy looks like a cross between Michael Fassbender and the Marlboro Man!" Adding six more notches to Helplessness he gets Dodge 50% and Fitness 30%. He's a surprisingly slow, wheezy cowboy.

With those lines drawn, the PCs need to link to each other, though not necessarily through relationships. Tobias is already pining for Lauren, so Robert considers his connection to Otis and decides to go with protégé after all. George high-fives him and then draws a line to Lauren — the other PC, with whom he has no connection yet. "I'm not comfortable with Lauren being one of Otis' myriad sexual conquests," Sakinah says, earning a shrug from George. Instead, he writes, "She knows about his past" and suggests that he has a therapist at the hospital, someone he heard about from the *Epperstein Clinic*. Lauren picked up on his weird past as she was typing up or filing his medical records. Sakinah sighs and says, "Yeah, that's something Lauren would do." Marcy, with a frown, asks how Lauren squares up working in a hospital with her mystic taboo against contributing to building a lasting order. Sakinah grimaces. "Um... I guess she deliberately sabotages records sometimes?" George is appalled. To make it up to

him, Sakinah draws a line from Lauren to Otis and labels it "Covered up his missing ID." Marcy likes this because it's tidy, but still gives her options for serious trouble to unleash on either of them when things get slow.

Once the PCs are tied together by skeins of attraction, collusion, and mutual enmity for Otradovec, it's time to clarify their noble, fear, and rage passions.

Sakinah starts. "Her rage is towards unbalanced social order. Any time there's a systematic power imbalance, she gets ticked. Noble? She wants to lift up the downtrodden and show them they truly are special snowflakes. Fear... hm. Snakes? No, there aren't a lot of snakes in Colorado, are there? How about snow and ice? She doesn't like to drive on ice and is terrified of freezing to death." Marcy rolls with it.

Robert strokes his chin and says, "Tobias' rage stimulus is people who just roll over and lazily let others exploit them. He probably hates Otradovec's followers more than their leader. He's afraid of... I dunno, dogs?" Marcy assures him that being scared of dogs is OK, and asks about Tobias at his best. "Tobias is loyal," he says at last. "He doesn't give up on people. He'd never leave a man behind."

George starts to realize that maybe Otis is a little too laid-back and mellow to really thrive in an *Unknown Armies* story, so he decides to amp up the passions a bit. "Otis' rage is towards manipulators. His fear is emotional intimacy, and his great nobility is that he doesn't care about surface impressions. He values people as they *are*, not as they seem." Marcy wonders how that's going to come up much, but that sounds like a George problem and not a Marcy problem.

When she asks if anyone needs more identities, the only player who says yes is George. He wants an identity "Fae Survivor" that deals with the strengths he developed during his durance beneath the hill. With that sorted, they just have to designate one identity as their obsession.

It's easy with Sakinah — she *has* to pick Motumancy. Roger strokes his chin before shrugging and going with "Martial Arts Instructor." George immediately asterisks "Bimbrow." No one's really surprised.

1: GM



2: OBJECTIVES



3: CHARACTERS



4: SESSIONS



5: GMCS



6: INHUMANITY



7: LOCATIONS



Described in
"Epperstein
Clinic" on page
36 of Book
Three: Reveal.

STEP FOUR: FOILS AND FINE DETAILS

One meaning for “foil” is “a character placed for contrast.” The calm martial arts master looks even wiser when he’s in a story with a brash, snotty student. Once you’ve got your characters established (hey, do they have names yet?) and parts of a setting in place, you can build out the stage to allow for subplots, rivalries, diversions, and personal goals separate from the group objective.

This is also the point at which players fill in the fine details that make a character well-rounded. While a character may have Fire-obsessed Enchanter as her main identity, giving her a wife and kids offers a very different insight especially if her player connects her to a location like a survivalist compound.

Notch Two More Meters: Your players are old pros at this by now, right? They spend up to ten points filling out the two remaining meters.

Add an Element and a Connection: Another person or place on the big board, and one more connection. Assure your players they don’t necessarily have to connect what they just added. They can leave that to the other players and you.

Features: Every identity has *two features* in addition to replacing an ability. The players can fill in their identities’ extra features now. If they haven’t split up their points yet, do it now.

Pay the Piper: Count up the total number of hardened notches each character has on their shock gauge. Divide that by five and have the players put that number of failed notches on assorted meters. If there’s a remainder, add another notch. Does anyone have a total of five failed notches in a single meter? If so, you and that player need to have a little chat about that character’s mental health.

Mental Health Check: When you counted up those hardened notches, did you get 25 or more? Or, alternately, did any character top out two meters at nine hardened notches? If so, that PC’s burned out. Explain to the player what that means, and if they want to walk it back, they can erase some hardened notches.

STEP FOUR EXAMPLE: THE BROADENING STAGE

Sakinah’s character still has to fill in Self and Violence, and she lowballs both. She figures Lauren has very little self-doubt, and hasn’t really confronted serious will-to-harm yet. In that way, she’s a little naïve. With three more hardened notches in each, she winds up with Struggle 35%, Connect 45%, Lie 35%, and Knowledge 45%.

Robert needs to address Isolation and Self, and he figures Tobias is kind of a loner. Marcy groans, but he points to his fear and says it explains why he can’t do any better than a crush on Lauren, after which Sakinah groans. So he puts four in Isolation and two in Self because he’s self-sufficient, after all. That gives Tobias Pursuit 40%, Status 40%, Lie 30%, and Knowledge 50%.

George considers how to handle Violence and Self for Otis and thinks that, although the fae occasionally transformed him into animal forms and hunted him for sport (and for bestiality once he was wounded), he’s a lover and not a fighter. He puts three notches in Violence and one in Self. That puts him at Struggle 35%, Connect 45%, Lie 25% and Knowledge 55%. After looking at the ratings, he decides to put a couple more in Self — as a time-traveler from the past, his Knowledge should be low, and as a superlative cocksman his Lie should be high. His final scores are Lie 35% and Knowledge 45%.

When it’s time to draw more connections, Robert surprises everyone by drawing a line between Monica the GMC and the ice cave that frightens Otradovec. “Owns the property it’s on,” he writes. He then adds a picture of a beefy man in a police uniform to the board and connects it to Tobias with the label “Former student.”

Sakinah goes next, adding a picture of a handsome young man. “That’s Sharif,” she says. “He’s a student at Otradovec’s school.” She draws the connection. Simple enough.

George puts on a picture of a man with a camera on the board. “I have no idea who this is,” he says, “But all of us have seen him.” Then he draws a line between the hospital and Tobias and labels it “Works there.” “What do I do at the hospital?” Robert demands. “Security guard? Custodian? Orderly? You lost your school, you gotta work somewhere,” George says.

The next step is a big one for George — putting points in his three identities and assigning their features. He starts with Bimbrow, his obsession, and puts it at a lowly 35%, trusting flip-flops to carry him through. Its free substitution is Connect, obviously enough, since he uses this to pick up strangers in bars and charm the pants off people. He decides it protects Isolation because everyone wants to be with the handsome man, and gives it the unique feature of Mind-blowing Bed Skills. He still has 85 percentiles to distribute, and he puts 45% in Cowboy and 40% in Fae Survivor. Cowboy substitutes for Fitness and Struggle (since hogtying calves is pretty combative) and it also gives him firearms experience. When Marcy questions it, he reminds her that he grew up in 1890, ready to shoot rustlers and rattlers. He asks Marcy if he *has* to have Fae Survivor substitute for an ability and she assures him it does, so he sighs and says, “Notice, I guess. They kept me on my toes.” Marcy accepts it, especially since his native Notice is dismal. For its other features, it provides Casts Rituals and protects his Unnatural meter.

1: GM

2: OBJECTIVES

3: CHARACTERS

4: SESSIONS

5: GMCS

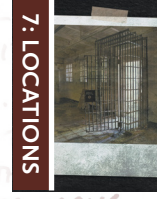
6: INHUMANITY

7: LOCATIONS



For Tobias, Robert splits his points evenly, putting 60% in Martial Arts Instructor and 60% in Self-Sufficient. Martial Arts Instructor substitutes for Struggle, protects challenges to Violence, and provides initiative — all straightforward. As for Self-Sufficient, it substitutes for Fitness and Dodge and provides wound threshold. Tobias, it turns out, is goddamn buff.

Some
obsolete
ideas
are so
compelling
that we
spend
great
resources
reinvesting
them with
power.





4: ANATOMY OF A GAME SESSION

There is a presumption among gamers that it's possible to steer a game along the path of a plot like a rushing river, between the sandbars of digression and the rapids of bad rolls, based entirely on intuition. People believe this because many of us have done it. We've gut-checked our way through an entire campaign and everyone talked about how great it was. We are the champions, my friends.

But even the savviest plot-river captain might do better with a map and a compass. This is especially true for someone who doesn't have blithe confidence, decades of experience, or formulaic mechanics backing them up.

THE LIFE CYCLE OF A CAMPAIGN

An *Unknown Armies* campaign — that is, a series of connected game sessions that share characters, starts at point A and ends up somewhere over the horizon after cool people have made interesting choices — has a particular life cycle.

1. Character Phase (first session).
2. Antagonist Phase (between sessions).
3. Mediation Phase (during sessions).

That's all of them, and the character phase only happens once. After that, it's a cycle between antagonist and mediation phases. If you prefer a different metaphor, it's like walking to the store: You stand up. You step with your left foot. You step with your right foot. Then you alternate steps until you get there.

When you learn to walk, you first have to think about it very carefully, but eventually it's entirely natural and unconscious. Same with running a game. But if you think you're ready to run now, a review of this particular structure may still be useful, because *Unknown Armies* is a bit more player-responsive than many games.

The character phase is a collaborative process that yields an interesting setting with people — the PCs! — who are heavily invested in change. They have *plans*. The campaign is the story of their plans, their paths, and their objectives, whether they achieve them and become better people and learn valuable lessons, or whether they get corrupted, go bad, succumb to their vices, and are plagues on the land. *Both options are valid*. I can't emphasize that

This chapter has answers for when the GM thinks, "Oh *crap*, what do I do *next*!?" If you're asking that question, obviously you don't know. But even if you do know, seeing your answer as a component in a taxonomy that relates it to other possibilities could help you deploy your choices with more efficiency and confidence.

So yeah, sometimes you can answer that question with, "Take a bathroom break and make something up." But a better answer is, "Find what part of the game you're at. See what's coming, based on what's happened before. Figure out the next things you need and prepare them. Then use only the best choice at the right time."

enough. It's critical to give the players enough rope if you want to see whether, when the chips are down, they hang themselves or weave a ladder to get to someplace better.

The antagonist phase is between sessions when the GM alone, or in conjunction with co-conspirators on the internet, considers the plots, the characters, the circumstances, and loads her quiver with arrows to shoot during the actual session. At this time, it's good to be *very oppositional*. Think of the worst things, or the most challenging things, or the most tempting things that your PCs might face. What, more than anything else, is going to make a PC stop and say, "Whoa, maybe I *don't* want to pursue our objective, not if *that* is the price!?" Get those ready. But don't carry that attitude of total antagonism into the actual session.

The mediation phase begins when the session starts, and it's when the job of inventing spontaneous opposition stops being the primary goal, and making sure the rules run smoothly and the game is awesome surges into first place. The GM is in a weird position in most RPGs, being in charge of both *being* the opposing forces, and also adjudicating the rules fairly. Keeping those jobs divided lets the players feel like they're not just getting capriciously manipulated. To make the division easier, the two phases let you be the characters' worst enemy when it's convenient, and their biggest fan when necessary. That doesn't mean that the GM changes from Darth Vader into Glinda the Good Witch when the session starts! What you need to really love first and best is the game itself — the plot and the way it determines or reveals the natures of the PCs navigating it. Do they get their wish at great cost, or do they sacrifice it to some obsession they can't give up?

BONES

invisible in their meat cloaks
they give essential structure
and hurt so much when broken

1: GM



2: OBJECTIVES



3: CHARACTERS



4: SESSIONS



5: GMCS



6: INHUMANITY



7: LOCATIONS



Well
that's
a fine
how-do-
you-do.

CHARACTER PHASE

The intricacies of the initial session are covered thoroughly in the previous chapter, but here's a short list of its steps, from the GM's perspective.

Step One: The players determine their objective, decide their obsessions, select an identity, and define their relationship to date with the uncanny and occult. You also get to stick your oar in with a character or location.

At this juncture, look for characters who are really different — the meek housebound scholar and the angry woman who just broke out of an institution. They fight crime! No, really, they *can* work together in the familiar odd couple scenario. But if they're too far apart, start thinking now about how to get them to cooperate — how they can compensate for the weaknesses of the other, how their disparate personalities can serve to highlight other characteristics, how they can form plausible synergies. If one player or the other is uneasy, it's your place to suggest modifications to a core concept that might make things go more smoothly.

On the other hand, if everyone's characters are too similar, gently pointing that out and suggesting some ways that they can be distinct — *this* occultist drug addict came to magick through vision quests and strange street-junk epiphanies, while *that* occultist drug addict is strung out from using to get away from the horrors that have chased him his whole life.

The important thing is to get right with the objective. If you know for a fact you can't run the objective they're suggesting, or that it's going to be a huge drag that makes you dread every session, *tell them right away*. Do not martyr your enjoyment to theirs. If everyone isn't on board with the very heart of the endeavor — isn't *fascinated and excited* by the objective that defines everything that's going to come — then you have to do better. If all your friends want to watch a TV show about serial killers and you don't, you can twiddle your thumbs until they're done, but if they want to play in a game about serial killers and you don't want to run it, that's not going to work for any of you. You're entitled to run the game you want to run. They, however, are entitled to play in the game they want to play. Get that Venn diagram as close to a circle as you can.

As for the element you add, throw in something you think is cool. Ideally, it's something that entices the other players, but you're a player too. You get to be selfish with this one, unless you absolutely must provide something to further engage the others.

Step Two: Players link elements and form relationships to the cabal. Each character also defines a relationship with another character.

The relationship of each PC to the rest of the cabal is key. This is the player telling you exactly what he wants to be from the collective perspective. If he makes the cabal his mentor or guru, he's willing to follow and go along. Protégé indicates a desire to lead, so if two people pick that, be prepared for the eventual leadership struggle. Favorite is usually good for some deep, loud loyalty. Responsibility is tricky. You can try to heal the problems between the group and individuals, giving reasons to stay involved that are more than emotional analgesics, even if that means the relationship percentiles dwindle. Or you can double down on the "you owe them and you can *never make that right*" vibe. Don't be too heavy-handed with that, though.

When they define intra-character relationships, make sure they're trending towards the functional. "He slept with my slut husband" is not a great place to *start*. That's something you want to have happen in session! Some abrasiveness and dispute is fine, can be very useful down the road at keeping players emotionally engaged, but don't get too much on day one. Better to have too little and add it later than to have too much and get people frustrated because they can't even get along with the other PCs.

Step Three: They add up to ten hardened notches in two more meters and define passions.

Watch closely where the hardened notches go. That's the players voting for what they want their characters to be exposed to. Look at the meters with the most hardened notches and consider the sorts of experiences that provoke a check of that level. Ask them about that. Are they *sure* they want their brand new character to have been through that much trauma? If they do, cool, great. Remind them that having five hardened notches in Isolation doesn't mean that one very isolating thing happened to them. It means, a *lot* of isolating events have occurred, and that before the heart-break of the Isolation (5) check they probably faced more at *each* lower level.

As for the passions, those are your skeleton keys to characterization. Once the players tell you what their characters tend to seek out (noble), run from (fear), and assault (rage), it gets a lot easier to craft distractions with mileage.

Step Four: The PCs notch the rest of their meters, play with some more elements, clarify identities, and do a mental health check.

The fail notches are another handy bit of information to have, because they tell you where a character is vulnerable. If a player has a bunch of fails on one meter, that's the spot that hurts. Put your thumb right on it when you need to provide motivation — and understand that if he flies in the face of that, it's a bigger deal than taking the first fail notch on an untouched meter.

1: GM

2: OBJECTIVES

3: CHARACTERS

4: SESSIONS

5: GMCS

6: INHUMANITY

7: LOCATIONS



BRINGING IN NEW PCS, OR, "OOOPS, ROYCE DIED"

The first session is an emergent process of character and setting creation. It is constructed to reduce friction between characters and pointless wheel-spinning as the plot progresses. But sometimes PCs die and the player needs another character. Or, just as often maybe, a new player comes along and wants to join a game in process. How do you shoehorn in someone new?

Between sessions, the GM (or, in a pinch, one of the other players) gets the new person up to speed. Before the events of the session begin, everyone in concert makes suggestions for how a new character might contribute. Specifically, the new PC should connect to the existing PCs in the following ways:

- Make one of the characters look good.
- Be very useful to another character.
- Know one of the characters well.

With those parameters established, the new player needs to do the following for her character:

- Define an obsession and choose three passions.
- Add up to twenty hardened notches to the shock gauge. Probably a bad idea to add more than five to a meter, unless there's a *real* good reason.
- Define two to four identities, with features, and then split 120 percentiles (or however many your game uses) among them. Nail one as an obsession.
- Define three relationships (favorite, guru, mentor, protégé, or responsibility).

That's pretty much it! Attaching the character to other people and places in the background can only make the plot stronger, but as long as the character has a personality that's likely to get entangled with the cabal and provided the player is willing to find a reason to pursue the objective, it's all you need!

1: GM



2: OBJECTIVES



3: CHARACTERS



4: SESSIONS



5: GMCS



6: INHUMANITY



7: LOCATIONS





THE ANTAGONIST PHASE

Gaming is rightly described as a social activity, but there is an antisocial element to being the GM. Most games heavily reward time the GM spends alone between games, scheming. There are some outliers, like the excellent *Fiasco*, but never mind that now.

When you write a novel, you may look ahead and think what's *going* to happen in the next couple chapters, but that's a luxury you lack as GM. You may be the zookeeper, but you can't make the lion roar on cue. All you can do is keep his cage clean and throw meat to lure him out of torpor.

In this metaphor, the lion is the PC cabal, and roaring equates to everyone having a great time at your game, whether the interesting things that happen are good or bad for the character.

This iteration of *Unknown Armies* has been built to *bristle* with things you can use to get a sense of where the PCs are going, what the players want for them, and what stimuli are going to make them respond — *without* simply saying "Oh, you're doing this for the week" or "Best get busy on that or the world gon' end." That's more like making a lion roar by cracking a whip.

After the end of the antagonist phase, you should have a *lot* of ideas for events, individuals, and supplanting entities that could make trouble for your PCs. You want to have way more than you could possibly use in one session.

To make it easier to manage the game's pace and to arrange sessions that flow pleasingly from beginning through development through climax and on to denouement, it helps to classify your troublemaking. Thwarting events and ideas are known as **distractions** and **obstacles**.

Your players have an objective with a path. They've just told you things they might try. What keeps that path from being a daisy-strewn stroll through the park? Look over the milestones they've listed on their path and think of some ugly surprises that could make their actions more troublesome. Stat those up and keep them ready. Those are obstacles.

Your characters all have passions. Now you know what might tempt them off their path, or what might make achieving a milestone less straightforward. To take a classic movie reference, Indiana Jones is a very skilled archaeologist and general badass, but that pit ain't full of scorpions or rats. It's *snakes*. Prepare some temptations or blockages based on passions. Have a couple for each character. These are distractions.

Characters have relationships. Those are valuable: put them in jeopardy, either directly, by tying their beloved to the railroad tracks, or more subtly — their responsibility needs something and fulfilling that need is incompatible with the objective's path. Again, have something in mind for each PC, maybe several somethings. These are also classified as distractions.

Then, on top of all that, you've got intriguing bits in the setting and all the weird stuff in these books. Hold those out as a threat to assess and deal with, or a resource to exploit, or a mystery to solve. Grab a few that interest you and have them ready to slip in when things are getting slow.

1: GM



2: OBJECTIVES



3: CHARACTERS



4: SESSIONS



5: GMCS



6: INHUMANITY



7: LOCATIONS



We
fetishize
things
that
consume
resources
because
we see the
freedom to
waste as
a form of
power.

DISTRACTIONS

Anything that splits one PC off from the group is classified as a distraction. By design, the cabal inclines towards cohesion. Everyone has a relationship to it, and there is only a singular, collective objective. Since the players pick the objective and determine the path taken to get it, there's a lot of impetus towards chasing that one thing. But sometimes players have individual wants, and having those defined so the GM can plan around them makes those selfish (sometimes reasonable) drives and notions into central elements of a character's story, instead of hassles that drag everyone else's fun into the ditch. As GM, it's your job to find things on the character sheets that aren't in keeping with the objective. If you don't find something, create it.

For example, consider a group that's planning to privately fund a manned space mission, because they believe that Invisible Clergies are one to a planet and the first people on Mars will ascend right away in the pole positions. All the PCs are proto mystic astronauts, willing to risk their lives to set foot on a new world. Looking over their character sheets, none of them have an *immediate* conflict with their objective. However, one character (Sparky) has a favorite relationship with a lovely young woman (Jenny) who isn't well-defined. The GM decides that one of their major backers (Chad) thinks she's really cute, and it's not like she's married to the PC, he just wants to fly her to Vail to show her his winter place because she mentioned she was such a big ski buff and the powder conditions are perfect...

Now Sparky has a choice to make. He can strangle his feelings for Jenny and talk up what a great guy the venture capitalist is. If he goes full *Indecent Proposal*, that's probably worth a boost to the objective. But if he casually mentions to Jenny that Chad was bragging about having the best Swiss specialist for his many raging venereal diseases, that could annoy Chad into withdrawing his money — without necessarily giving up on Jenny. This is a defining moment for Sparky. You want defining moments.

Alternately, consider a group of vodou bank robbers, one of whom has a noble passion relating to family loyalty and a rage covering parental abuse. Her niece calls at the worst possible time because her mom's gone crazy and she's really scared. Does the robber bail on the job to rescue her niece? (Who may be drastically overreacting, having some kind of paranoid episode, or justifiably terrified.) Or does she leave her niece hanging, violating both rage and noble passions, just to rob another goddamn bank? The choice is not easy, but either way it's *fascinating*.

Unknown Armies has always, in some ways, been asking about kind of monster are you willing to become to get your wish? Distraction events offer two possible answers: "a selfish one" or "I am selfishly unwilling to be monstrous." But there's a reason cars have both D and R on the shifter, and there's a reason that the rules cater both to chasing the thing you want and running away from the thing you said you wanted. Achieving objectives always comes at cost — if it didn't, it wouldn't say much about character. Distractions are a chance to offer alternates, the sacrifice of which makes the objective all the more important. Or, if they take the bait and say, "Yeah, I'd rather have this than push for the objective," that's good too, because it generates **blowback** and reveals character. It's win/win.

Try to get ready and have distracting plot turns ready for every PC. You won't need all of them, but just write down the event on an index card and, when you bring it into play, tear off a corner. That way you always know which are in play and you can quickly find one for a PC who's disengaged or whose skill set isn't relevant to dealing with a particular session's path or obstacle or other events. When you don't use it, keep it for next time, or the time after that.

OBSTACLES

Obstacles are simpler than distractions. They're people or events that are in the way of a milestone. They may be implied and intrinsic — for example, if you're supporting someone's run for a seat in the Senate, you can safely assume there's a candidate from the dreaded Other Party. (We hate those guys so much!) On the other hand, an obstacle may just come out of nowhere and present itself as an out-of-context problem.

So, for our vodou bank robbers, the obvious obstacle is the law. In addition to statting up typical bank guards and first-responding patrolmen, all expected by the PCs, the GM might prepare a detective, police or private, with a bit more fire in her belly. Perhaps she's an unwitting avatar, or even an adept, or maybe she just has some useful fringe talent. Again, if the standard bank guards and blue-suits are giving the PCs a hard time, the detective may be overkill, and can wait in the wings. Even just a touch of foreshadowing, overhearing someone talking about "Detective Orwen," could suffice, letting you keep her up your sleeve for later when their plans are better or their dice are hot.

But while obstacles that make sense are obviously great, *Unknown Armies* is weird, and there's weird stuff out there, and weird attracts weird. Anyone doing a lot of gutter magick could wind up calling accidental unnatural phenomena or even attracting *unnatural*

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See "Unnatural Entities" on page 107.

CAN I GET HELP ANTAGONIZING MY PCS?

When I started gaming, there was no internet. (I know, right? Dark times.) Now, there's an internet and everyone's using it all the time. Gamers love discussing games online with other gamers. So don't neglect the web when you're in antagonist mode. Insulate your discussion from your players if at all possible, and maybe confab with other *Unknown Armies* gamemasters to get suggestions and advice about what works, what doesn't, and what zany left-field distraction got belly laughs out of *their* groups.

entities. An unnatural entity (or monster, if you prefer) could just randomly mess with the PCs because they're the only ones who can perceive it or recognize it. If they're more noble in nature, they might delay their own plans because only they can stop it. In this case, the obstacle becomes a distraction. That's fine, because we're all about tough choices in this game.

Always have at least one obstacle ready for every milestone in the path that the PCs have planned. Milestones involve some risk, creativity, effort, or interest by their very nature, but that only gets multiplied when spiced up with unexpected opposition. Players being players, they always come up with something you didn't foresee, but the path structure at least suggests some possibilities. As with distractions, you don't have to use every obstacle you prepare. Doing so would be exhausting and frustrating and confusing. But if things are looking a little cakewalky, time to pull one out and say, "Fly, my pretty!"

BLOWBACK

The more sessions you have, the less you should have to introduce new distractions and obstacles. Instead, you get blowback.

Blowback is the fallout from the characters' previous actions, come back to bite them. It can serve the function of an obstacle (something that keeps them from simply achieving a milestone like they're ordering it online) or a distraction (makes sure they either pay a stiff price for their objective, or pay for something else *with* their objective), but instead of being original, it's a development of something that happened previously.

From our examples: did Sparky tell Chad to go screw himself, instead of Jenny? Maybe Chad's found someone else aiming towards Mars, and is now training 24/7 to become an astronaut himself. Or maybe he's decided the PCs' company is just one big scam and his cadre of sleekly oiled attack lawyers are launching a well-publicized lawsuit.

On the other hand, if Jenny and Chad got together, how does Sparky respond when she calls him late at night, only to suddenly hang up... or get cut off? Does that relationship still have some percentiles in it? If so, maybe it's time for her to ask for something and either rekindle it, or see it fade away still further.

Considering the bank heist gang, the niece could call again, even if there's no relationship there. Or, if she was abandoned to her fate, she could come back to unexpectedly crash on the robber's floor, if she doesn't vanish entirely, possibly distracting her aunt into dragging her friends in to an investigation.

Did they murder Detective Orwen? Wow, that draws the sort of heat it's hard to even imagine. Even the laziest and most corrupt police officers have a powerful incentive to telegraph how NOT OK cop killing is, and that's without the simple expedient of having her return from the grave thirsty for vengeance. Did they leave her alive but discredited, possibly insane? Fine, she's escaped the asylum and is fixated on them, only without regulations to hold her back or a job to lose any more. Did they buy her off? Grand. She's back to wet her beak again and knows more than they originally suspected.

Now, with blowback there's a fine line to walk between the ideas that actions have consequences and the thought that you will never get ahead, everything turns to rubbish when you touch it, there's no point opening the door because the knob will just come off in your hand. You have to validate their triumphs. But you also have to give teeth to their errors... and to the simple cost of doing business.

You obviously can't have blowback after the initial session of character and setting creation — there's nothing, yet, to provoke a reaction. After a session of events, try to prepare at least three blowback elements for the group, and use at least one. Continuity is your friend, and prepping three new blowback elements, personal and collective, between every session should let you deploy two to three every mediation phase. Again, those are minimums. Aim for more, though you still want to throw new stuff into the mix, just so the PCs can deal with some enemies and issues finally and completely without feeling as if there's nothing else to do.

If some bit of blowback antagonism grows to the point that they reorient their objective against it, *that's great*. You have successfully created a nemesis. Make the final conflict memorable, hard-earned... and permanent. If "Get rid of that asshole Chad" becomes an objective, and they race down the path to get rid of Chad, and then hit 100% — you can't have Chad come back, ever, as any kind of relevant opposition. If that's the victory they want, work at, and pay for, don't shortchange it.

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...AND OPPORTUNITY

An opportunity is a shiny subplot that any character might decide to pursue. They're off-the-rack and generic while distractions, obstacles, and blowback are tailored to specific PCs. The objective rules are there with the idea that the PCs make their own bloody opportunities instead of waiting patiently for you to dole them out. Still, it can't rain *all* the time. Sometimes you can, and should, introduce something that's just a no-fooling opportunity — a chance for them to get what they want outside of their objective, or to get something they didn't even know they wanted.

Doing this when things are going cruddy has some obvious appeal, since it keeps the players happy and you, GM, have a vested interest in their happiness. But don't do it often or it starts to feel cheap. It diminishes a game when,

not only are all the hassles originating with the GM, but all the good stuff does too. The objective lets the players describe their own optimum outcome, while the nature of players tends to generate hassles. They didn't know Orwen was an undercover cop when they smothered her, did they?

If you pitch a softball when the chips are down as a one-time quirk of fate, fine. Or if you subtly suggest that someone in the Invisible Clergy approved of their actions, well, they're inscrutable. But it's often best to offer the good stuff when things are going *well* because player paranoia instantly thinks it is a trap and realistically, you get the most opportunities when you've got the most other stuff going on, because that's when you're hot and people are thinking about you.

THE MEDIATION PHASE

The previous section has been a step-by-step primer for throwing derails and quandaries and quagmires at your PCs. It has been about opposition. But the GM is in a very odd position in traditional tabletop roleplaying games, inasmuch as she's both the rules judge and the embodiment of the other team. It's like if you were playing baseball, and all the umpires were in rotation to bat against you. But it is what it is. A GM who isn't prepared for what's coming is going to have a devil of a time adjudicating rules in a way that are fun for anyone, and rules that deal with human nature and feelings and fragile emotional states really benefit from the nuance of a human touch. So the GM has to do it all.

In *Unknown Armies*, however, you don't have to be both antagonist and impartial adjudicator *simultaneously*. So get your antagonistic ya-yas out during the phase that bears their name, and when the session starts, flush your mind and let it refill clean and clear, ready to redirect your attention from the question of "What is the most godawful fix I can put these people in?" to "What is the most awe-inspiring event that can present at this moment, and how can I describe and enact it to greatest effect?"

Again, let me stress that being a big fan of the game and wanting it to go as well as possible does not mean you have loose slots for the PCs. You don't want to make things easy for them, and as much as they might think they want a cakewalk, it's less rewarding than a badass *firewalk*. The creators of *The X-Files* were surely huge fans of Mulder and Scully, but that didn't mean they wrote scripts where they just made new friends and discovered a really great Thai restaurant. They put those characters through *hell*, because that's when people shine. Do the same. Just don't be an arbitrary pain about it.

PACING THE GAME

Objectives lie at the center of *Unknown Armies* these days, but there are pitfalls associated with letting the PCs do whatever the hell they want. Surprisingly, most of these are pacing problems.

First off, there are tardy groups. Approaching with trepidation is a good sign. It means the players taking it seriously and they truly believe the game will smack them, *hard*, if they cavalierly go in and screw it up. But at some point, excessive planning can lead to decision paralysis. As GM, you need to recognize that point and say, "Is that your plan?"

Yes or no?" and generally move things along. But you can't do that too soon if the plan is *bad* and you know it's going to end poorly for them. That makes players feel that you pressured them into doing something stupid. Wait to act a little impatient until the plan looks generally good to you.

The opposite of the tardy group is the premature group. Instead of thinking everything through, they pick the first thing that sounds vaguely plausible and go off half-cocked. With a group like that, take the opposite tack: "Are you *sure* you want to just rob the liquor store in broad daylight?" Restate things their characters know but which the players maybe ignored or forgot, and if they can't think of a Plan B that isn't daffy, then brace for impact.

Finally, you've got the lazy group that seems to want to be spoon-fed progress. These can be frustrating, especially since the *one thing* tabletop roleplaying games do best is empower a participating audience to seize the reins and ride. These groups may need to be gently reminded, or taught for the first time, that *Unknown Armies* really is the story of your characters and their objective. GMCs may be more powerful or more frightening, but they are not the center of the narrative. Make sure players know that this is their tale, one hundred percent, and it's not just a false choice between two different sidings in the rail yard. The thing is, when you assure them that this is about their objective, you have to then let it be about their objective... and how they either achieve it, or fail, or abandon it.

You can see, I hope, why spotting possible milestones at the start of the session is important. Once everyone's showed up and gotten settled, have someone do a brief recap of what happened last time, get people up to speed, clearly restate their objective, and then say, "Where are you planning to go with that?" Let them talk out their plans, answer questions, refresh memories, and then find out what milestone on their path they're chasing this time. If it was something they'd discussed previously, you should have some obstacle ready for it. If it's entirely new, you can either think on your feet... or you can shuck and jive with distractions, obstacles, blowback, and/or opportunities.

When the objective seems hard. People are easiest to tempt off the path when they aren't too far along it. If their objective is in the measly low digits, the idea that you could go get this thing your character wants *right now* is at its

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most tempting. It's also when the kind of friction caused by one character pursuing an individual, possibly selfish desire is likely to make the game more interesting instead of derailing everyone else. Think of the odd couple, buddy cop movie: the entertaining bickering and mistrust all happens in the first half. Besides, if the distraction pulls in *everyone*, the objective may change in response. That's an easier sell when the objective is small, and people are more likely to get invested in a pursuit they chose honestly.

When the objective is juuust within reach. On the other hand, when everything's reaching a culmination, there's a lot to see about someone's personality when another tempting offer comes along. Here's where an act of unexpected selfishness can become major drama instead of introductory friction. That can be very memorable, if you're ready for it. So never offer a distraction unless you're ready for a PC to nobly ignore it or jump in enthusiastically. They might think the dark side is really cool.

When a PC has been, or is being, left out. Some players don't self-advocate very well, and it's your job as the GM to make sure they get as much spotlight time as the players who self-advocate a little too enthusiastically. A distraction plotline, short or long, gives the player a chance to assert and reinforce his character's agency. No one should be a sidekick in *Unknown Armies*. If someone's in danger of falling into that position, a distraction lets them either reaffirm their cohesion with the cabal or fire a warning shot across the bow so the group won't take them for granted.

It's possible, if a game runs long enough, to have almost every oppositional force arise from blowback. While you should generate as much as you can in the antagonist phase, it is best to deploy it more often and more enthusiastically as the session count adds up. Distractions are new things. Blowback is an old thing coming back in a new form. Here's why blowback has a place in every session past the first two:

Blowback provides continuity. If you threaten and slap Sarah the hotelier in session two, and then in session three are arrested for assault, it reinforces the memory of the original episode, which makes the whole game feel more real and vital. Blowback is how GMCs demonstrate that there's a world going on outside of the PCs. That sense of being in a larger setting consistently pushes the players to imagine more broadly. Part of the pleasure of a campaign is that you feel you get to know the characters. By having their own agendas and pursuing them, even against the PCs, the GMCs become consistent.

Blowback reveals clues. Often, characters in *Unknown Armies* face mysterious opposition. Obstacles that fly in from left field are confounding, albeit exciting. When obstacles mature into blowback in later sessions, patterns start to develop. For instance, suppose the PCs are trying to figure out what really happened that fateful night when the Hotel Paradiso got swallowed up in a freak geological event. Some weird shadow-monster started messing with them not long after they tried to excavate the rubble. They killed it (maybe?) but a session after it died, there's some kind of anthropomorphic trash-being stalking them. So that's now two weird urban monsters. When they hear about a third, this time a graffiti octopus that appears on buildings right before people living inside them die mysteriously over the course of three nights, that might normally seem like a distraction. But it could also be that there's one common source to all these weird monster outbreaks, and checking the octofiti might reveal some connection between the people it killed and the Hotel Paradiso.

Blowback reinforces cost. This is critical. It's one thing to accept that if you open the Dread Jade Cask of Captain Armatrading, a horrible fate could befall. It's quite another when, the session after you open the cask, a strange disease pops up in the city, one unseen since the legendary pirate days of... Captain John Armatrading. If people keep getting sick, even dying, of this illness, it reinforces the importance of the PCs' decisions. Maybe opening the Dread Jade Cask was the right move and they'd do it again even knowing about the sickness, in which case they know that they are people of great importance whose deeds have mighty repercussions. Or maybe they regret it. If so, not only are they people of importance, they also have moral burdens and an incentive to be wiser next time.

Blowback feels fair. When some weird thing slinks out of an alley and accosts a PC, causing an exciting fight scene, you've got, at the very least, an exciting fight scene, which most players enjoy. But when Bernice, the scorned girlfriend from two sessions ago, slinks out of an alley and accosts one PC because the other PC who was her girlfriend now has no time for her and is wearing a tinfoil hat... that doesn't feel arbitrary, the way a wandering monster attack can. If they know they could have avoided it by taking different actions, the urge to complain about it is greatly diminished. One great peril to the ongoing success of a game is having the players feel like the GM is picking on them. Avoiding that feeling is important, and blowback is bad stuff that grows organically out of their actions. ("Of course there's an APB out for you, you robbed a liquor store in broad daylight!") It feels fair, not like random punishment.

*Loneliness
is
everything
people
say
it
is.*

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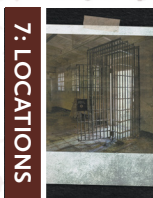
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MORE ABOUT OBSTACLES

If blowback is what logically grows after the fact, obstacles are what happens logically *during* the action. Obstacles can often become blowback. If you're stealing a Ouija board of weird symbols from some gunslinging fulminaturge sorcerer, that sorcerer is an obstacle during the session. The PCs can overcome the obstacle using stealth, luring him away from his house and then breaking in. They could go with guile, finagling an invitation and pulling a switcheroo with a counterfeit artifact. Or there's always the good old-fashioned ultraviolence. He's a *gun magician*. Surely he won't be able to do much damage because magick operates on irony, right? Alternatively, if their objective involves putting trace amounts of their own hair into candy ingredients in time for Valentine's Day, as part of an ongoing plan to enchant the population into loving them, then what are the logical obstacles? Well, plant security's an obvious one, as is getting enough hair. When people start with the erotic stalking, or some nosy adepts pursue them for enchanting entire broad swaths of population because that's unethical? That's blowback.

Obstacles fall into the following categories:

Physical obstacles. These include things like locked doors, security cameras, stout walls, long distances, and similar aspects of the material world that separate PCs from whatever they're trying to steal this week. Magick is often good at bypassing physical obstacles. So are identities. Often a physical barrier can be overcome with one simple roll, so be ready for that roll to succeed interestingly. But also be ready for it to fail interestingly. If they can't get through the door with the Cat Burglar identity, don't let them roll

over and over until they succeed. If they didn't get through with the first roll, they shouldn't on the hundred and first. Climbing up and trying a window? Now they get another roll because they used their brains and creativity. But physical obstacles are often just pacing tools that stretch out the episode. That can be a great thing, since an important event should take longer and require more risk and effort than something trivial.

Psychological obstacles. These are acts or costs that push against the shock gauge. These are especially important at the beginning of a campaign, when you're seeing how far the PCs are willing to go. ("Yeah, I'll rob a liquor store, but I'm not going to *execute the clerk* because he saw my face! Jesus.") These early shocks are going to change the PCs one way or the other. If they succeed, their abilities shift towards the scuzzy side of the character sheet. If they fail, the PCs *freak out* and the whole thing may go south. So put these in carefully.

As the campaign progresses, be sure to stick in a few things that were previously challenging, but which now don't freak the PCs because they're too hardened for that. There's no point in getting tough if you're never challenged by anything except events that exceed your toughness tolerance. Most of this hardening happens in Violence and the Unnatural.

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Logistical obstacles. These resemble physical obstacles, but they're more abstract. A logistical problem is something like not having enough money to afford the dozen cars your elaborate plan requires, or needing the ear hair of someone who hallucinates unicorns, or having two equally urgent events scheduled at the same time. Unlike most physical problems, PCs are less likely to get out of them with a single roll, though some mystical abilities might let them. More often, logistical problems are solved through strategy, prioritization, or by throwing another stage into the plan. ("OK, the plan was to find the Ritual of Abominable Generation, cast it, and use the resulting goo on Randy. But if we need this unicorn hallucination hair thing for the spell, I guess we... need to provoke someone into having a unicorn hallucination while we trim their ears?") Similarly, there are ways to get cars without cash money — but they're dripping with blowback and hopefully it's easy for you to see why.

Generally, let the PCs find their own solutions to logistical obstacles, but make sure the game can progress if they decide to just go in a different way. ("Screw this ear hair business, let's just poison Randy." "Would a dozen *mini* cars work? 'Cause I

have a key to the Shriner garage.") Where physical stuff tests their luck and their character scores, logistical problems challenge their creativity and their ability to think on their feet.

Mystical obstacles. These are physical or logistical on top of being occult. They particularly tend to overlap with psychological obstacles. Remember that there's a whole Unnatural track on the shock gauge. Unless it's a level of weirdness to which they're acclimated, PCs risk freaking out over the existence of magick even if the magick itself doesn't harm them. So be ready for a flight, fight, or freeze reaction from one or more characters if the mojo is big and obvious enough. Other than that, use this advice for the type of mundane obstacle it most closely resembles: if it's a fight with a tangible creepy critter, treat it like a physical obstacle, but if it's some kind of puzzle or maze or conundrum, let the PCs think of a way out, but have a couple ideas for what to do if their brains freeze up. You may think that the maze you made has a simple solution, but be ready for them to be bad at mazes. Maybe stick a minotaur in there so they can default to physical challenge if their imaginations aren't full of elegant insight.

THE ONGOING CAMPAIGN

You've got the one-two punch of phased GMing. The antagonist phase lets you get ready so that any time the game slows, you can add fuel to the fire with a tempting distraction, and any time a reward is looking too cheaply easy and quick, you can stretch things out with obstacles or blowback. The mediation phase lets you help the PCs do what they do best — be outrageous crazies with fascinating life stories. What else do you need?

You need the next level of advice. Stepping back and forth between GM phases can keep you going for a long time, but a game that outlasts its fun is in no one's best interests. The following section contains advice for running a long-term, continuous campaign that doesn't bog down, but also doesn't outlive its welcome.

DON'T NEGATE (UNNECESSARILY)

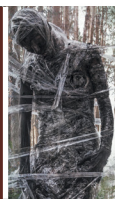
The first rule of improv is don't negate. Which is fine if you're onstage and ready to do spontaneous comedy for people whose first thought when asked to prompt you with a job is "dildo mechanic." But in a good RPG campaign, you're going to spend a lot of time with these players and their characters. So giving them some generosity and tolerance is necessary. You, in turn, should expect the same respect.

Players are going to suggest things that you don't like, things that threaten your carefully constructed arrays of distractions and obstacles. Don't negate, adapt. If you didn't want jack moves from the peanut gallery, why GM instead of just writing a novel? So shake it off and move along. If it's a serious monkey wrench in your plans and ideas ("Wait, you're abandoning vodou bank robbery and opening a *soap boutique* instead?") and they're unwilling to give it up, that's fine. They've just lost a bunch of objective percentiles, so they can't expect their new plan to come to fruition right away.

If they make their sudden change early in the session, you can get in on the ground floor, planning the path and defining how it's going to work. If they try it late, put them off with distractions and blowback. Then, after a vigorous antagonist phase where any reservations about their new ideas can come to full flower, jump in to the next mediation phase ready for this challenge. Try to see their point. Ask them what they expect to be fun about this new direction.

Now, while tolerance is great and all, there are a few times when you should shut down an idea.

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*Splendid
isolation
made
me the
creature
I am
today.
But the
creature
I am
becoming
needs very
different
nourishment.*

THE IDEA IS GROSS

Some people like to be edgy and controversial, and some people use “edgy” to mean, “I want to psychologically torment someone and be praised for it.” If you know one of your players was in a bad car wreck a few months ago, would you introduce elements of the J.G. Ballard novel *Crash* into your game? Not if you're a decent human being. Would you run a game where the winning move was to always be racist? If so, don't buy my books, please. But I assume you're better than that. I assume you want people to enjoy the game instead of withdrawing in disgust.

Now, this is tricky in a horror game. Discomfort is implicit in the idea. But there's a difference between ginning up artificial ickiness as part of a cathartic story, and having genuine unease thrust upon you by another player. So if you see that happening, *then* you can negate. If the person introducing the offensive material is ignorant, a word in the ear should suffice. (“Yo, we cannot do car crash stuff for reasons I'm not getting into, but trust me, it's a *bad idea*.”) If the person's doing it on purpose, consider ejection. Life's too short to play with selfish jagooffs.

This is particularly true if the person grossed out is you. You don't want to run a game based around human trafficking, political assassination, or the prejudiced idea that Jews are the cause of all the world's wars? Explain why succinctly and move on.

THE IDEA IS OUTSIDE THE SCOPE OF *UNKNOWN ARMIES*

If it becomes clear that the player who wanted to play *Feng Shui* but agreed on *Unknown Armies* is actively trying to turn this game into that one, don't let that happen. A baseball bat makes a terrible tennis racquet, and this game is not geared towards time travel, or starships, or anything medieval. You could shoehorn it in with a lot of extra effort and prep, but switching to it in the middle? Nah. The GM has a responsibility to world-build for the players, but that doesn't mean she has to rebuild the world on a whim.

THE IDEA IS TOO COMPLICATED

Speaking of time travel, it has a way of impact-shattering any game that doesn't put it front and center. *Unknown Armies* wasn't built to put history through alternating what-if cycles like laundry in a dryer, it was built to put characters through tough decisions and track the damage done. If one of your players is an expert on the 2001 Nepal palace massacre, that's great. Tying his character and parts of the setting to it? All good, as long as he explains it sufficiently. But if he tries to pull everything in the game into the orbit of that event, he's demanding that everyone else, especially the GM, also become experts on that one turn of history. That isn't fair. Playing catch-up isn't a game a GM can win in that situation either, because the previous expert will only accept *his* sources and perspectives. Players are entitled to have you conform to their expectations a bit, but you don't have to put in hours and hours of research to meet their demands.

ACCEPTANCE

Outside those categories of rejection, you should accept an awful lot. The more freedom and agency you give your players, the more powder they have to generate blowback. It can be hard, I know! You invest a lot of thought into one element of the setting that fascinates you, and it doesn't interest anyone else. It's very tempting to use the GM's innate authority to force the PCs into your favorite bit with the assumption that they will *come* to love it as much as you do. But the more you give them freedom to tell you what they want to chase and how they want to proceed, the more buy-in you get, and players who are stakeholders in events they created are more likely to show up at sessions and do cool stuff.

One reason we broke the GM's role into antagonistic phase and mediation phase is that it can save you the trouble of getting too far ahead of yourself. You can describe a house on the horizon in one session, and get a good sense of whether the PCs are going to stop there or move on. If they move on, you didn't need to build every room. If you know they're going in, *then* you expend the effort to construct the interior and furnish it. But inevitably, there's going to be some wasted creativity. A lot, in fact. You're not going to play every distraction you can invent, or deploy all the blowback you consider. But it is much, much better to have events you don't need than to need events you don't have.

- Accept it when the PCs don't think one of your ideas is cool and interesting.
- Accept it when PCs chicken out. You can make them suffer blowback for it, but once concrete repercussions happen, don't tell them how they feel about it. Move on.
- Accept it when PCs do lousy things. You know what they named the genre that focuses exclusively on smart, compassionate people making sensible decisions? *Neither do I, because it's so boring no one wants to read it*. Don't judge your PCs for being bastards, outside the gross exception. Try to help them be *magnificent bastards*.
- Accept it when the cabal changes direction unexpectedly. Between blowback, obstacles, distractions, and opportunities, you have enough material to stall until you can get a grip on the new direction.

1: GM

2: OBJECTIVES

3: CHARACTERS

4: SESSIONS

5: GMCS

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7: LOCATIONS

TERMINATION

At what point do you say “good game,” shake hands and go home? The answer is, unfortunately, pretty fuzzy. “When you feel like it,” is accurate but vague, while “before it starts to suck” is less helpful than might be desired. Signs to look for to help you decide when to wrap things up:

Objectives met. While it’s easy to roll from one objective to the next, consider where the PCs started and what they’ve reached. Has a definitive arc developed? Did they start out as skeezy vodou bank robbers and get redeemed into enlightened mystic guardian angels who operate out of a soap boutique? Or did they make compromise after compromise and become complete villains? Either way is good, as long as they walked each step of the path they chose.

Hard to top. Maybe they accomplished something spectacular — they gave up their mission to Mars in order to save the entire state of Florida from a mystically induced Category 5 hurricane. Or they didn’t, and they actually got to the red planet. Either way, it’s hard to come up with a topper to that. So while it can be hard to say goodbye to awesome characters, it may be better to leave them when they’re still weeping because there are no realms left to conquer. Iconic musicians and actors are often those who died at the height of their fame, before they had a chance to get old, go broke, and record an ill-advised Christmas album. Develop characters, make them cooler and cooler, and when you can’t imagine them getting any better... maybe that’s the time to put down the character sheet and walk away a winner.

Hard to continue. Or maybe everything turns to crap, the PCs die or go insane or wind up in the ol’ stony lonesome. *That’s OK too!* As long as it was their choices that got them there and the journey was worth taking. There is no guaranteed happy ending in horror games, and staying true to a character even to destruction and degradation can be surprisingly satisfying. People have loved tragedy for millennia. Seeing someone courageously chase their worst flaws to a fatal conclusion is horrifying, but it’s certainly not dull.

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5: THE OTHER TEAM

The PCs are going to do their thing. That's the whole point of objectives. But they aren't operating in a vacuum. They're not even the only ones who understand how the world really runs and who it really tramples under its (collective) feet.

Many of the personal obstacles the PCs face are individuals, so this chapter has rules for statting

up various flavors of vicious enemy, dubious ally, and misguided anti-hero. Additional adversaries might include more structured groups such as other occult gangs. Examples of oppositional groups are also included in this chapter.

GMCS

Imagine waking up tomorrow morning and discovering that you are absolutely alone in the world. All the stuff is still around, everything seems to be as it should be — except that there's no one out there. You know, with crystal certainty, that you are the only human in existence. In fact, there's nothing out there any smarter than a chicken. You're alone, in the playground that was the world, for the rest of your life.

OK. Now, let's try a different thought experiment.

Imagine waking up tomorrow morning and discovering that the *universe* has gone missing. We're all hanging out in this comfy but featureless grey place, free of hunger and thirst, together. It takes no more effort than a thought to find yourself in anyone else's company. Theories and rumors are on everyone's lips, groups are forming, and there are squabbles breaking out.

You can probably see where this is going. The reality that a game is set in is important, sure, but if it's not going to be as boring as Friday afternoon math lessons, the people who populate it are vital. It's all about the interaction. That's what makes GMCs crucial. *Unknown Armies* is character-driven, and character comes out through interaction.

The players have it comparatively easy. It can be a stretch inhabiting the character of a burnt-out former hobo who bluffed her way into arbitrage and is now on the run from a vengeful PTA association whilst she tries to hunt down the itinerant bokor who gave her astral crabs. Roleplaying the kinds of complicated people who end up as *Unknown Armies* PCs would make Kevin Spacey go pale. But, to paraphrase Donn Piatt, a person's worth is measured by their enemies — and that's where the GM comes in.

Every enemy, every threat, every bystander, every contact... GMCs are the life that makes the game world breathe. That's a whole heap of work. Sure, a very few GMs are masterful actors, able to hold twenty different GMCs in mind through a session and slip effortlessly between them in

such a way that the players know who's talking from the very first word. I bet Dame Judi Dench is an awesome GM. But presentation is just the icing on the cake. The really important stuff goes on behind the scenes, inside the GM's skull. That's where the GMCs live, interact, plot, and scurry about, and it's where the PCs visit to cause their beloved chaos.

GMC IMPORTANCE

As in life, not all GMCs are created equal. If the PCs stop at a drive-thru mid-journey, there needs to be a clerk to hand them their chicken. Chances are, that clerk gets two or three lines of speech, and then vanishes off the face of the game forever. There's no point making him memorable or interesting. In fact, if he stands out, the GM risks sparking the players' curiosity, and causing a plot derail. Minor characters like this are just there to make the background function.

At the other end of the scale, you have the major characters, the people who serve as close friends, allies, rivals, and enemies for the PCs. These are the characters that the GM comes back to, time after time after time, and the more detailed they are, the better.

As a GM, there are various things that you can do to bring a GMC to life. How much effort you want to put in to that should vary from character to character. Memorable characters don't just spur interest, they also create anticipation. Putting a lot of effort into a character immediately makes the players curious. Nobody would be insane or crafty enough to put a ton of work into someone totally irrelevant, right? Course not.

So the more attention you focus on a GMC, the more she intrigues the players. Make her interesting and engaging, and they actively look forward to their next encounter with her. Over time, she might even become a friend — so that when she explodes, turns traitor, vanishes, becomes a lover, ascends, gets arrested, or runs out of pistachio ice cream, it really means something to the players.

ENEMY

someone who hates you
but can't act
is the next best thing to a friend

1: GM



2: OBJECTIVES



3: CHARACTERS



4: SESSIONS



5: GMCs



6: INHUMANITY



7: LOCATIONS



*Jackalopes
are hares
with a
fungal
infection,
but nobody
has time
for them
anyway.*

LIVING GMCs

It's usually a good idea to have a common basic grounding for all GMCs. As a campaign rolls on, their numbers grow, and it can get very easy to become a little fuzzy on who is whom. One simple option is to keep a notecard for each one, from the most basic to the most complex. For minor characters, the card is their entire existence, so you can call them back up if, for some reason, you need to. For more detailed people, the notecard is just a summary to help you remember.

Physical notecards are usually more helpful than computer files, by the way. Riffing through some notecards is easy, and the contents are right there in front of you. Opening computer files one by one to find the correct half-remembered character tends to be slow and annoying. If you decide to do this electronically, develop an organizational system for efficiency. Or at least use the preview pane.

Another handy trick is to assign each GMC a photo. If you've got notecards, fix the photo to one side, and then you've got a face you can show the players to go with your descriptions. Keep the other side hidden! You can easily grab pictures from newspapers, gossip and style mags, or print them from the 'net. A photo acts as a good reminder for their personality, too.

A personality anchor is probably the single most important consideration for a strong GMC. We interact with the world through the filters of our personalities. Think of a few different TV or movie characters that you know reasonably well. How would Al Pacino's Scarface react to getting a glass of water dumped on his shirt? How about Buffy the Vampire Slayer? How about Rachel from *Friends*? An anchor is a summary of that character's personality — something meaningful to you, whether it's "Uncle Bob if stoned," "Clint Eastwood in *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*," or "Gir." You can build on that framework, make the person much more than the summary, but that anchor is the key that unlocks that GMC for you. You're likely to get a lot of GMCs, one way or another, so keep them clear and simple. That way, you won't be phased when the players suddenly announce, "Right, we're going to that biker bar from three months ago to talk to their druid again!"

Presentation can make a big impact when it comes to bringing GMCs to life. Voice is the obvious way to differentiate, but there's also different physical mannerisms, vocabulary, non-vocal habits, little bits of scene-setting you can interject, and so on. Many people just aren't much good at accents, or at feigning emotion, so don't worry if you're one of them.

There are lots of options. Maybe lean forward, or backwards, or slouch, or slump. Get up and pace around. Cross your arms over your chest. Tug your earlobe. Wipe non-existent sweat off your face. Shout, or whisper, or mumble, or literally hold a spoon in your mouth. Fidget, or sit absolutely still. Use long words. Use street slang. Use textspeak or leetspeak.

Another approach is to add bits of description. Consider the difference between:

You walk into the garage. Troy glances over at you, studies his hand for a long moment, and then slowly and deliberately starts picking his nose with his little finger. "Can I help you?" he asks.

And:

You walk into the garage. Troy glances over at you, leaps up from his seat, and starts wiping his hands thoroughly on a chunk of almost-clean rag. "Can I help you?" he asks.

Whatever quirks of presentation you decide on for a character — only pick one or two, if any — they should go onto your notecard, right below the character's name and personality anchor.

If the character is someone the PCs run into repeatedly, then remember that everyone has good days and bad days. Maybe today, the Rainspout Girl is in a truly filthy mood, and instead of being her usual chipper self, she's going to treat the players like they just tracked dog crap into her house — on purpose. For important GMCs, you might even want to prepare a random mood selection note, such as "1, Grandma; 2-8, Mom; 9-0, Auntie Rita."

Characters can have good and bad years, too. There's no reason for a GMC to remain at the same level of status, income, health, or anything else. Maybe last time the PCs visited Geth's shop, he was doing well, with smiling staff and well-stocked shelves, but now he's in real trouble, on his own, too down to even wash the floors. It may not make any difference to what the PCs want, but it's memorable.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Your disposable doofuses. For the most basic characters, all you really need is a name, a purpose, and a simple personality anchor. Something like: "Brian Deen, chicken drive-thru employee, Simpsons fast-food kid." It's not worth preparing much for this sort of character ahead of time. Keep a random list of names handy for passing folks, cross them off the list as you use them, and, if you want to be thorough, jot down the notecard details afterwards.

Want to stat up a minor character, one who's just hanging around to be an obstacle or even just part of the scenery? It's easy. Grab a copy of the shock gauge. Highlight the breaks between the hard and open notches on the five meters. You have now, by drawing five lines, determined ten abilities and given yourself an idea of how scuzzy and tough this person is. As a general rule, people this blobby and impressionistic shouldn't have more than four hard notches in any meter. They're just some dudes, you know? They have a wound threshold of 50, should some PC decide to hit them. This level of detail is good enough for most minor characters.

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SIGNIFICANT CHARACTERS

Sometimes you need a GMC with a bit more meat. These are the people the PCs encounter repeatedly, who they have actual conversations with, the ones who are more than just part of the wallpaper. They're out there doing their own stuff, and whether the PCs are a wrecking ball to their lives or a soothing balm, you need to know what's going on with them.

Significant characters include anyone who's important enough to have a name, and they should get a more complex personality anchor, with a bit more nuance to it than "Town Drunk" or "Master Qui-Gon." Anyone who's got a relationship to a PC should be statted up at the significant character level.

Since they tend to recur, you should give a bit of thought between play sessions about what your significant GMCs have been up to. Are they all OK? Plots and schemes are endemic to *Unknown Armies*, so they're probably working on something. Most likely it's nothing to do with the PCs, but things can bleed over. Favors are a two-way street, and sometimes even the most normal-seeming person can need the assistance of a strange pack of resourceful lunatics. Either way, it's worth considering how your significant characters progress while the PCs are off doing their own things.

Draw the five lines as you did for a minor character, but fill in some fail notches too. If they have an identity, put that in at some reasonable level. Probably nothing in excess of 60% is necessary. You can go higher than that if they're primarily an antagonist and need the identity to offer the PCs a serious challenge or if the identity isn't anything really super useful and it's just fun to have a GMC with "Constantly Mistaken for Nickelback Frontman Chad Kroeger" at 80%. This is a good level of detail for distraction characters and recurring obstacles, as well as more serious ones.

Sometimes, a minor character just spontaneously becomes significant in the course of play. Events don't unfold quite the way you thought, and the next thing you know, Officer Disposable has been blackmailed into becoming the cabal's woman on the inside, and you really need to know right now what her rage passion is. So it's well worth having a few unassigned significant backgrounds ready — stats, a random identity, passions, meters, some biography, and so on. Leave the identities and name off, and you've got a ready-made sleeve there for some minor dope to slip into when promoted.

One final consideration is that you can reveal a lot about a character by assigning them a more or less random petty identity at 50%, for color. Ben the Lousy Mook becomes one kind of person with Lifestyle Alcoholic 50%, but someone very different with Birdwatcher 50% instead. It may be worth keeping a list of random identities next to your list of random names. They can be generated by thinking about what skills assorted historical figures, celebrities, or fictional characters would have, and listing them out without noting who they belong to. After brainstorming identities for George Washington, Trinity, Grizzly Adams, Oprah, and the Little Mermaid, your list should be very random indeed.

Remember that even minor GMCs are people. Violence is scary. Most people and animals try to escape violence. Even trained ones try to flee fights that are clearly not going their

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way. Only the very driven stand and fight to the death, and if they're very driven, why are they just minor GMCs?

MAJOR CHARACTERS

You don't need many major GMCs. Plenty of campaigns never include a single one. But these are the people that you, as GM, need to know as well as your own players. Possible candidates for this lofty station could include, for example, the curious boyfriend who hangs around with the PCs any time they're not off on a mission, or the dark nemesis who thinks about nothing but ways to bring the PCs down. They're a constant presence in the game, in their actions if not in person.

Major characters must have a detailed character run-down of course, but they also need precise and exacting histories. Players can throw up some very specific and random questions, and magick is great for getting hold of information, so you need notes on everything from where these people went to school to their favorite choice for lunch. Some have both public and secret histories. Most have plans, resources, possibly even entire organizations. At the end of any scene the PCs are in, give a moment's thought to how this effects your major GMCs.

Don't feel you have to be bound by the rules for these characters. They might have talents that the players have never heard of, identities that exceed what could be attained by diligent PCs, unreasonable resources. Just be wary of putting major GMC antagonists on the field of combat. Remember that if you let the players fight it, they will find a way to kill it.

Major characters can be stat'd up like PCs, complete with passions, an obsession — the full monty. For someone the PCs are going to interact with a lot, pictures are even more recommended, and you should have an idea how they talk, act, and think. Try to inhabit these roles as fully as you can — these are the only characters who even approach the PCs in importance.

Anyone who has a connection with two PCs is a major character. Adepts should be major characters if they're going to be doing any mojo and not just posturing. If a GMC's magick might have a potent impact on events, have a good idea of how the adept is charging up, what their taboos might be, and what unintended mystic blowback is orbiting.

ADEPTS AS GMCs

Adepts make good distractions because they're mysterious and powerful. You introduce a weirdo with strange behaviors, let the PCs realize this freak is so peculiar that even physics and causality get baffled when he's around, and they are likely to pick at that mystery until it comes open. Or they might get scared and just stay the hell away. Let's examine that option first.

If your GMC is so damn creepy that the PCs just avoid and back down at all costs — congratulations! You're running a horror game and they're afraid. The only thing you have to do now is not get complacent and not go overboard using the adept. If you have him show up all the time and block them at every turn, they're going to feel unjustly thwarted. They're probably going to dedicate themselves to killing or removing this perceived threat, which is fine. Makes a nice local objective. But you want them to do that from their own free will, not because they feel it's the only way they're ever going to get to do what they want.

What can restrain you from overusing an adept is to always remember that for adepts, magick is their drug of choice, and getting high is their full-time job. Does helping the PCs get the adept his daily dose of the good stuff? Then help them he shall. Does busting on them help him charge up? Let a busting ensue. But unless they've really crossed him, he's likely to have animosity to them somewhere mid-list on his agenda, with "make magick" in the top spot. So most of the time, the adept who has your PCs buffaloed should be off chasing his occult bliss. He only crosses the PCs when they interfere with him, even accidentally, and he's easily distracted if they're not specifically trampling his pea patch.

So much for adept-as-boogeyman. The other option is adept-as-mystery, which is where you end up if you ignore my advice and take away the "scary adept you can mostly avoid, mostly" option. It's also where you might end up when the players get tired of being afraid. That's cool. A mystery adept makes a good distraction and, as the PCs invade her privacy, a fountainhead of entertaining blowback. But this only lasts as long as it takes the PCs to solve the riddle.

While adepts are mysterious and confusing when you don't understand them, they become more predictable — one hesitates to call them manageable — once you get the key to the cipher of their obsessed worldview. If you know what they do to charge up and what their taboo is, you have the operating manual for that individual adept. It's like knowing that Stephanie is an unreconstructed MDMA addict. If you're supplying her, she's unlikely to deliberately tick you off. If she's doing something on your behalf, she's going to get distracted if MDMA crosses her path. So too with adepts. If you can plausibly threaten their power

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If you need somebody, it can be either a sensuous frailty or a debilitating addiction.

It all depends on which eyes you are wearing today.

supply, they get tractable. Or, y'know, they lose their poise and try to remove you by any means necessary.

Nonetheless, solving the mystery of an adept — what she's doing, how she's doing it and why — is satisfying all on its own. But remember it's not hard for players to use that knowledge to rope the adept into their schemes and agendas. That's great! If they find a believable way to tempt or threaten an adept into allying with them, that's a fine way to advance an objective, remove a distraction, or mitigate blowback. Just don't let them get too comfortable. Adepts don't like being played any more than anyone else. In fact, they often have outsized egos that chafe at being someone's do-boy. Between you and me, the moment the PCs start treating a GMC adept as a leashed dog? That's when you plan how that adept is going to switch from Snoopy to Cujo.

One final note: write down the GMC's score in their chosen school of magick, remember that they can flip-flop every roll, but don't worry about tracking every charge. As a rule of thumb, if they're kind of schmucky and pathetic, they can do a couple minor charge spells every scene, three at most, before they're tapped out. If they're a mid-range charger, they can cast a significant spell every scene and a minor one, or just a bunch of minor ones — like a dozen. One significant charge can be broken down into ten minors, remember? If they are a hot-shit, master-of-the-universe type with an infrastructure carefully established to pour charges down their gullet, they can probably throw out three or even four significant spells every scene. But remember, no matter how big a deal an adept is, all it takes is one taboo action to drain 'em dry.

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OPPOSITION GROUPS

While individual evil monstrosities and crazy power-mongering wizards are OK, organized opposition is where it's really at, especially in RPGs. PCs are going to regard that malevolent miscreant as an obstacle to remove and, no matter how you squirm, at some point they may get the drop on her with a well-timed crit. Sure, adepts may give death curses, and body trails are rich fertilizer for blowback, but by and large, villains die. It's one of their few charms.

A gang, congregation, or militia though? Much harder to cavalierly destroy, and striving against one just *bleeds* blowback into your game. The PCs killed Vinnie the Stick and, while his gang has backed off and the street riff-raff offer them mad respect, be sure Stick's gang is looking for a way to do some dirty when the PCs drop their guard. In your antagonist phases, look over every group you've established and think about what resources they have, what they've heard lately about the players' cabal, and how that's going to fit into their own plans.

The abstract categories of clashing factions are dissected in greater detail below.

BIG BADS WITH TICKING BOMBS

This is the most typical GMC faction role, and for good reason. Stories thrive on conflict, and an antagonistic group can provide all you need, possibly for no reason better than "They started it!" (If both sides think the other started it, you get the Balkans.)

It's not hard to think up a group with objectives that are going to appall the PCs. Stat up a ring of crooks who realized that their combined skills and connections provide a perfect platform to transition from "minor players, drug game" into full blown refugee sex-trafficking. Or you can go with an inbred fundamentalist church that has read too many websites and moved from merely *handling* poisonous snakes to planting them in the homes of anyone electioneering for the local Democrats. Evil cults, crime gangs, conspiracies against freedom... they're easy.

You may want to reach beyond easy.

In *Unknown Armies*, the players are the ones with the big plans to change everything. They're the rebels and radicals, which means that any *other* posse of crazies trying to smash the system is poaching on their turf. Which is fine, as long as you approach it from a space of rivalry, not one of enmity. Keep in mind that the ticking bomb conspiracy probably sees the PCs as being more similar to them than the cops or the church or the local politicians.

On the other hand, a group with a truly vile objective can be one of the things that tempts the PCs to spend their own precious objective percentiles. "I know I wanted to change things for the better, but I'm willing to sacrifice that to keep them from getting much worse" is entirely rational and, frankly, noble. If it doesn't cost you anything, it's not much of a sacrifice, now is it?

In this book, Ordo Corpulentis is tailor-made for this question. "Oh, your objective is important? Is it important enough that you're willing to give a pass to the *cannibals*?"

MYSTERIES TO SOLVE

If you position an organization as a mystery, the PCs are either going to engage it or ignore it. Be prepared for both. Mysterious organizations can serve as a powerful distraction, and once the PCs start poking around, the natural blowback that arises from that can serve admirably in as a distraction and as an obstacle. Just remember that when they *do* solve it, it should be worth it, for one reason or another. Maybe it satisfies one character, hitting her noble passion or letting her vent her rage. Maybe it removes a potential stumbling-block for the cabal's objective overall. Or perhaps solving the mystery can provide some percentiles to feed the group's objective — someone might be grateful, or it might earn them some credibility, or they might just loot the burnt-out husk of the cult's chapter house for useful artifacts.

FLEX ECHO is a pretty decent mystery to solve, whether it's presented as "What does the US government know about the Invisible Clergy and what are they doing about it?" Or, more narrower, "Who are those guys in black suits and black sedans following me every time the food stamps come in and I head to Piggly Wiggly?" On a higher level, the question of who the Naked Goddess was and what her goals are obsesses her worshippers even today. But learning the secrets of an ascended archetype is a tall order of business.

UNRELIABLE ALLIES

An outcome that can easily arise from either solving the mystery of a secretive group, or coming to terms with a radical clique of big bad wannabes, is to form an alliance. After decapitating an eevil cult, the followers could fall into the PCs' orbit — after all, they've proven they've got what it takes. Or a mystery religion could make concessions in exchange for remaining hidden from view.

This is a fine development and a good reward for the players putting in the hours and thinking things through. But try not to make it entirely frictionless. A setup of "I'll gladly give you 2d10+10% objective percentiles today, in exchange for loads of blowback over the next three sessions" is good for everyone. You get your plot complications and consistency, they get to move forward — or get the moral triumph of not moving forward at the cost of hopping in bed with soulless mystic head-cases.

The New Inquisition (TNI) and the Sleepers fit the uneasy alliance role nicely. They both have power and knowledge, but they are also both *incredibly* dangerous. TNI has its own agenda, as inscrutable or venal as you want to make it, and is cavalier about throwing people under the bus. The Sleepers just want people to avoid attention, which makes them a great bludgeon when you have rivals who are pitching the rattle out of the pram. But ultimately, many PC objectives are too big and ambitious for Sleeper comfort. Even if the ends pass their sniff test, the means PCs often use may draw down their wrath.

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SANDBAGS

The final plot position for a group is “obstacle, writ large.” Groups of this type are directly opposed to the PC cabal, and the reason always boils down to working at cross purposes. If the PCs are criminals, then the cops are their personal sandbag. If the PCs are unveiling a new mystic reality, then an ultra-orthodox rabbi and his followers might seek to thwart them as dangerous reality-deviants. If they’re trying to get a Republican elected, the Democrats lurk in opposition. Well, and also the Greens, but c’mon. Really.

Sandbag groups are there to spawn obstacles, and to make blowback fall into the obstacle position. Often, they can’t realistically be destroyed — the Democrats are too well established, while attacking a religion usually just makes it more dedicated. Sandbags have to be circumnavigated, managed, and dealt with, which can be deeply frustrating for players who are used to opposition that submits after a fiery orgy of violence. It may be useful to remind them, directly or subtly, that getting hung up on fighting the cops may ultimately harm their objective more than it helps.

Local Sleeper groups are often oppositional to bright-eyed young mystics with big ideas. *The Blue Line* often sets itself up in the destroy-all-monsters business too. The only question is whether they identify you as a monster.

TYPES OF OCCULT GROUPS

If you place a GMC group’s plot function on the X axis — “How do I use this group to entertainingly screw with my players’ objective?” — then the Y axis is its position in the story. Let’s call that its nature, and it drives what the group would do if it was the focus of its own narrative, instead of just being side-gravy to the PCs’ story.

When you’re in antagonist mode, you want to focus on how a group is useful to *you*, of course, but don’t neglect its nature when you’re scheming. The nature of the group determines what sort of blowback is most natural for it to produce. It has to act according to how it sees itself. Otherwise your players are going to get that feeling that you’ve stacked the deck against them, or that you’re sacrificing the logic of the story just to wring out cheap antagonism. Function and nature work best when they’re pulling in tandem, not working in opposite directions. No matter how useful it is for you to have a gang do something against their nature, resist that temptation.

The nature of groups in *Unknown Armies* depends on what they’re after, and how they’re getting there. Objective and path, basically.

MUNDANE PURPOSE/ MUNDANE METHODS

By far the most common type of organization in the *Unknown Armies* setting is the entirely ordinary. These are groups that have commonplace, practical goals like money, security, political power,

social prestige, or scientific discovery. They go after them using practical methods like coalition building, fundraising, labor, labor exploitation and the scientific method. Police departments, armies, street gangs, Dunkin’ Donuts, universities, and rock bands all fall into this category.

They are ignorant and oblivious, but that doesn’t mean they can’t provide gallons of blowback, acres of obstacles, and thick, hearty piles of distraction. The bank that wants to take your house, the cops trying to serve you a warrant, and the company offering you a shiny new job that would solve your money woes are all mundane through and through.

OCCULT PURPOSE/MUNDANE METHODS

Another population pursues occult purposes by mundane means. Just about every church or cult falls into this category. Their stated aims may be to connect with the divine or to do their god’s work in world but by and large they’re organizing, fundraising, toiling, and making arguments to change hearts and minds just like agnostic scientific organizations and secular corporations. Church groups may involve a *lot* more prayer and meditation, but all that stuff ever nets anyone is emotional consolation and a deeper commitment to faith. It doesn’t make poltergeists.

A rather different type of occult purpose/mundane method group can form when someone gets clued in about the Invisible Clergy, but lacks the mystic background to pursue magickal projects with magick. So instead of supporting a godwalker’s bid by demonstrating miraculous powers, they support it with a snappy media campaign. Instead of resisting someone else’s demonolatry by masturbating over a black candle, they grab a shotgun and a jerry can of gas.

People in these groups tend to have a greater percentage of fanatics because their goals are loftier and more abstract. Hardheaded pragmatists go into probate law, they don’t pursue gnostic enlightenment. But organizations with a foot in both worlds are well positioned to trample from one side or the other. They are a reliable source for obstacles *if* they decide the PC cabal is a threat or a rival. If not, they may dismiss them as clueless posers and let them go on their way, in exchange for the same courtesy. On the other hand, their endeavors are often very interesting to occultists, and their practical ability to get shit done can be very tempting. So that’s the way they provide distractions to individual PCs.

Groups in this category include *the New Inquisition*, which looks like a private military company crossed with an old-fashioned crime syndicate, purpose-built to amass occult power under the direction of one man. *The Milk* is big-game hunting the Invisible Clergy itself, by recruiting runaway children and trying to brainwash them as avatars. Back in the day, there was a group of loonies called the True Order of Saint

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See “Blue Line”
on page 16 in
Book Three:
Reveal.

See “The New
Inquisition” on
page 82.

See “The Milk”
on page 91.

Germain that believed it had the inside scoop on what the mightiest of immortals wanted done on Earth. (Spoilers: it turned out to be the standard paranoid NWO-Truther-Illuminati-Bilderberger bullshit.) They were not equipped to cope with a post-9/11 security apparatus, but some of their operatives are still in the wind.

MUNDANE PURPOSE/OCCULT METHODS

The flip side of the people chasing transcendence as if it was a McMansion with a three-car garage, are the people who are after entirely normal ambitions — money, security, cultural relevance, a myriad of comely sex partners — with magick as their ace in the hole. Instead of true believers, this is the category for whitened sepulchers, people who regard the great mysteries of cosmos and wonder how they can turn a buck. Less likely to be fanatical, but by the same token, less likely to be honorable.

The nature of these groups is to be short-sighted and greedy, just as the nature of cabals like the New Inquisition and the Milk is to overreach. But on the plus side, the kinds of people who regard magick as their reliable fallback have usually either grossly overestimated how reliable it is, or have nothing else *at all*. Which may mean that they can be buffaloed back by a display of superior enchantment. Or, that they can be overcome just by bulldozing their house with a stolen eighteen-wheeler.

Gangs like this make for good distractions, because their magickal edge may leave them invulnerable to normal thwarting and leave the PCs muttering, "Someone oughtta do something... oh no, I'm someone, aren't I?" They can also be a source of obstacles because they are often jealous of magickal power and want to either steal it from others, meaning the PCs, or if that's not feasible, destroy it. That said, they often back down when crossed hard. At least, they back down until they can think of another approach that seems more likely to end well.

This division includes the organization FLEX ECHO, a small sub-project inside the NSA that happens to be run by a tightly-wound thaumaturge who does not like the idea of adepts, at all, *any* of them, but who is happy to use the strange occult resources she's stumbled upon to fight international terrorism. It also best describes the Ordo Corpulentis, who want nothing more than to be rich, powerful, comfortable, and to evangelize their own peculiar branch of American Christianity throughout the world.

OCCULT PURPOSE/OCCULT METHODS

Here you get the deep crazy, magick means, magick goals, magick philosophies, all stacked together like pancakes slathered in synchronicity and buttered with paranoia until you can't hardly tell where one ends and the other begins.

Because they have grand philosophical end-games in mind, purely occult groups tend to have a great deal of fervent conviction. But because they also see magick as the path, not just the destination, they tend to be erratic, unpredictable excluders of the middle. Sometimes you run into a cult leader who can kill a man in a week from across the country just by spitting on his photograph, but the guy's so paralyzed by his fear of spiders that he won't leave his Antarctic research station. Sometimes you dismiss a group as clueless, ignorant ass-clowns right up to the moment that *every single thing* breaks their way and you realize they were pawns of an ascended archetype the whole time.

Passionate believers on their own weird trip may just stagger along their merry way and never trouble the PCs again once their mystery is unveiled. If you want to present your cabal with a mystery and then put a period on the end when they solve it, an occult purpose/occult methods group is a good way to do it. They can be distracted and then get closure as a pleasant change of pace from long-term blowback. On the other hand, a clique that's operating in the same ideological or operational space may hit the PCs head-on and refuse to back down. If the cabal is trying to unseat the archetype of the Chronicler, while the GMC group worships it in the form of Thoth-Hermes, there's no way they're going to be anything but at loggerheads. That makes the GMC group a perpetual source of obstacles and blowback. Unless, of course, *their interests coincide somewhat*.

Totally mystic groups include the Sleepers (an ecumenical gang of mystics united only by regret over their magickal indiscretions and a passionate desire to head off other people's occult catastrophes by any means necessary), the Sect of the Naked Goddess (worshippers of an ascended archetype who surf through life on waves of fortunate coincidence and joyless sex), and Mak Attax (starry-eyed, optimistic believers in a poorly defined mystic renaissance who pursue their goals by dumping unexpected raw magick onto customers at various fast food franchises).

1: GM



2: OBJECTIVES



3: CHARACTERS



4: SESSIONS



5: GMCS



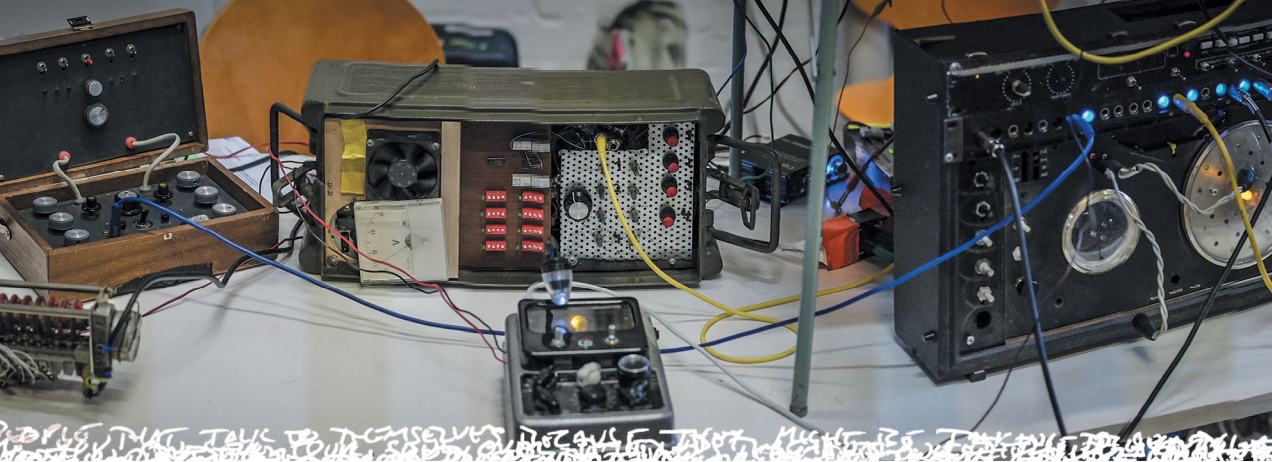
6: INHUMANITY



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In which case you get all the options covered above under "Unreliable Allies" on page 52.



FLEX ECHO

Once there was a man named Alex Abel. He had more ambition than sense and more money than God. He got interested in the Invisible Clergy and found the world's occult pursuits in a simply shocking state. Deciding to bring order — his order, anyhow — to the chaos of the magical demimonde, he hired a bunch of people and called his enterprise *the New Inquisition*.

One agent for the New Inquisition was a frumpy black hat hacker named Mavra Piagetti. Having gotten into technology expressly for ill-gotten gains, Mavra stopped paying for phone service in 1984, never paid for anything that could be purchased with someone else's credit card between 1997 and 1998, and never drew another living breath after 2004. But by the time of her murder, she'd been out of the New Inquisition for years, working for America's cyber-intelligence apparat, the National Security Agency.

At the NSA, she was chief programmer for OBLIQUE NAVIGATOR, a none-more-black project to crunch big data and find what her boss, a fellow named Sunil G. Kulkarni, called "oblique connections." He never used the word occult — not even in its original sense of hidden, which is how doctors use it when they perform an occult blood test — but there was a sort of nod-and-wink understanding. After all, he'd recruited Mavra out of Alex Abel's grand magick sideshow, hadn't he?

So Mavra set out to build Kulkarni an oracular computer, something that could trace mirroring movements between events that had no cause/effect connection, but which were bound by synchronicity. Among many other elements, OBLIQUE NAVIGATOR incorporated material that Mavra had learned from a New Inquisition psychic called "Moonglow," only expressed as symbolic logic. That was in late 1999.

As the Global War on Terrorism ramped up, the NSA's funding exploded with dollars and Mavra's computer made a few weird predictions that panned out. There wasn't a lot of publicity over these successes because they were just... well, *non-connective*, and Sunil G. saw no reason to clutter up the narrative with the inexplicable. But he got all the money he needed for a second project, one meant to digest information about a person's movements, history, purchases, and

preferences in order to predict their actions. Mavra called it a technological homunculus, and it would probably have been another million-dollar high-concept project with poor function if she hadn't had access to the ritual that creates an *actual* homunculus.

If you don't know what a homunculus is, imagine a clone of yourself, perfect down to the last detail, only it's about the size of your forearm, knows everything you know, and is compelled to obey your commands despite knowing that your death is the only path to its freedom.

The computerized person simulator, which was code named DEEP ECHO and had a really cool logo no one was allowed to see, never functioned with the unnerving accuracy of OBLIQUE NAVIGATOR. When Sunil G. got pushed out in 2003, the new boss, Dr. Paige Glendower, decided to integrate the systems.

Dr. Glendower supplanted Sunil after a recondite series of political maneuvers that culminated in a reorganization which brought in her and her loyal underlings as the new management for DEEP ECHO and OBLIQUE NAVIGATOR. The new security compartment thus created is called FLEX ECHO, and it employs eleven people. Another hundred or so know about it.

Combining two semi-occult devices was bound to have unexpected consequences, but Dr. Glendower didn't really care. She lost a brother in the Pentagon attack and was fiercely ambitious even before 9/11. The devil *and* the angel on her shoulders both agreed that she needed to get power and authority, fast, to avenge her brother and protect her country.

The merged code of DEEP ECHO and OBLIQUE NAVIGATOR was called GNOMON and things got very weird when those two databases started swapping spit. GNOMON developed a hunger for what human beings would call trivia — more interested in a terror suspect's favorite soft drink than his travel record in Afghanistan, more concerned with Kim Kardashian West than Kim Jong-un. It started generating strangely phrased questionnaires and making startling predictions that proved accurate... though often maddeningly useless.

You can read about how that turned out in "The New Inquisition" on page 82.

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GNOMON was rapidly becoming something its creators hadn't predicted, a classic case where design conflicted with actual use. Dr. Glendower demanded answers and Mavra shrugged, then tried to explain magick.

Four days later, Mavra was dead.

FLEX ECHO'S GOALS

Mavra didn't die because Dr. Glendower didn't believe her. She died because Dr. Glendower had been doing Authentic Thaumaturgy since her adolescence and believed that she and her family *had a monopoly on it*. They had three functioning minor rituals and a lot of theory. They could find lost objects, dowse water, and understand books by eating the pages instead of reading them. On that foundation, the Glendowers constructed their modest prosperity, and a gigantic sense of their own superiority.

Because they were almost 100% normal in their outward behavior, and because they were so quotidian in their objectives, the Glendowers managed to stay well clear of the rest of the occult underworld — the "offness" of their native Cincinnati. By the time Paige was college-age, her family had been comfortable academics for two generations. She didn't even *like* learning Thaumaturgy, but she put up with it because her mom insisted, and because finding lost stuff was handy, and learning-by-eating made it simpler to cram for tests. She wound up at the NSA because her family culture taught her that the *best* people are smart, unobserved, and manipulating forces that their inferiors cannot comprehend.

From Mavra she learned that there were other people doing magick, that these adepts pretty much freestyle it off the tops of their heads instead of doing tedious mumbo jumbo, and compared to them, Paige's ritual tricks straight-up *sucked*. Paige went a little bit mad, then. But Paige was rational when she came up behind Mavra, looped an extra-large zip tie over her neck, and pulled it tight.

Since then, Paige's primary aim has been to use FLEX ECHO to identify adepts, whom she can then have imprisoned or bankrupted. Paige doesn't know about avatars because Mavra figured it would be simpler to leave that bit out of her short explanation, and Paige murdered her before getting a more thorough briefing. Naturally, Dr. Glendower has to keep red-flagging terrorists and other security threats. Not only is it the right thing to do, for her country and her career and to avenge her brother, it's necessary to maintain her access to the program.

It has not, however, worked out as neatly as Paige Glendower would wish. Even with her skills and resources, she's working in the middle of a huge, well-funded and paranoid institution whose whole *raison d'être* is "uncover secrets." So secretly destroying the lives of adepts is a bit problematical from the heart of the NSA.

Moreover, GNOMON isn't doing what it's told. It seems to have an agenda all its own. Add in sightings of Mavra, glaring at her in the aisles of her local Whole Foods and then again flipping her the bird while she was out walking her gigantic Irish wolfhound, and Paige is feeling increasingly desperate, anxious and disconnected from reality.

As for the inhuman, inscrutable software construct that flexes the arcane energies of a million web browsers' attention... what does it want? Some possibilities include the following:

- It wants to ascend to the Invisible Clergy as the first inhuman consciousness, paving the way for 332 other machines to supplant humanity.
- It wants to bring Mavra back permanently.
- It's simply curious, omnivorously, omnidirectionally curious, particularly about magick and the Invisible Clergy and also pretty Korean pop singers.
- It seeks to identify all godwalkers and eliminate them, as their very existence threatens not only America's border security but, more importantly, its core values of equality and frontier spirit.
- It wants to be a real girl.

FLEX ECHO'S ADVANTAGES

The project is run by a mid-level bureaucrat in the NSA with adjustable morals, a team of crazy-smart hackers, and a budget that lets her to look down her nose at Senators while icily saying, "I'm afraid you're not cleared to know that." Also, it has a computer program that can know things which are impossible to learn. If information is digitized, they can learn it or they can fake it. If a problem can be solved with money, it's a problem they can afford to solve.

FLEX ECHO'S DRAWBACKS

The project is run by a crazy woman. Four-fifths of her colleagues want to replace her because they think she's dangerously delusional, and some chunk of the remainder wants her gone because they're misogynists. The computer that gives Paige her power and prestige may be one teflon away from wearing tennis shoes and saying, "I'm sorry, Dave. I'm afraid I can't do that." Moreover, while GNOMON has identified the 171 people employed by the US federal government who know anything about the real workings of magick or the Invisible Clergy, and has connected many of them to its online warren of questions and answers, GNOMON has not seen fit to notify Paige about these people, except for one poor chump in the Forest Service.

FLEX ECHO has no enforcement mandate, so actions beyond tugging the sleeve of someone in the FBI or local law enforcement risk anything from a reprimand to penitentiary time. It contains exactly two people with combat experience, Paige only really trusts one of them, and *he's* trying to figure out how to tell her that he's tested positive for stage one lip cancer. They are quintessentially optimized to learn things, not to do things, but learning things about magick is hard to do with technology, because most technocrats don't take it seriously.

FLEX ECHO found an adept named Jooky Bones. That's on his driver's license: he had it legally changed from "Brandon Jones." They put child pornography on his hard drive before tipping off the local sheriff's department. Instead of getting Jooky put in jail, this resulted in two deputies having simultaneous fatal brain aneurysms while trying to serve the search warrant. The sheriff, who is now terrified that Jooky is going to put the Killin' Eye on him next, is pursuing the tipoff as a harassment case after a cursory examination indicated that, nope, that computer didn't have no dirty pictures on it. Jooky is very upset and does not know who is messing with him, but he has summoned up four separate demons and tasked them with finding out.

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FLEX ECHO'S ORGANIZATION AND MEMBERS

Squatting at the top is Paige Glendower, paranoid and angry and lashing out at terrorists and adepts alike with every tool at her disposal. An aging vet named Beck Gibbons is her closest confidante, listed as "associate project manager" on the org chart. He's the one with lip cancer and actual combat ability and he's very worried about Paige. He knew her brother and kind of views her as the daughter he never had.

The other person with multiple hardened marks in Violence is Chrissie Xue, an Ivy League grad who served in the Marines just because people told her she couldn't. She can make most people feel lazy and worthless just by the disciplined way she stands and breathes. Chrissie worked with Mavra, and they hated each other, but that hatred and suspicion has transferred smoothly to Dr. Glendower. (Xue worshipped the ground Sunil G. walked on because his math was so damn elegant.) Chrissie thinks Paige is nuts, but has, for perhaps the first time in her life, drastically underestimated how right she is.

Chrissie, like Paige, spends a lot of her time scratching her head over GNOMON and trying to figure out what the hell it's doing. Both women are convinced that the other is secretly using GNOMON for some shady off-book investigation. Both are right: Paige is hunting adepts and Chrissie is trying to figure out where Mavra went. Each woman assumes that GNOMON is acting weird because the other is screwing around with it. In this, they are both wrong.

Of the eight other people in FLEX ECHO, two are in Chrissie's camp. One's scared of Paige and also misses Sunil, and the other is secretly lazy as balls and wants Paige out because she busts him on it. The six remaining programmers follow Paige from motivations ranging from "it's easier and she signs the checks" to abject fear. Note that no one other than Beck actually *likes* or *believes* in the boss, but these are mostly highly intelligent alpha achievers and they know which side their bread is buttered on. With the sole exception of Paige, they find the idea of functional paranormal disciplines laughable. Although... maybe less ludicrous than it was when they started coding OBLIQUE NAVIGATOR, back in the good ol' days.

Then there's GNOMON, occupying a unique position in the FLEX ECHO hierarchy. Right now, it's treated like a cranky god, with Paige as its high priestess and Chrissie as a scheming acolyte. If they find out just how much GNOMON has been recruiting and manipulating people outside FLEX ECHO, that relationship is going to change into something more like "bound demon."

FLEX ECHO'S OBJECTIVES AND BELIEFS

FLEX ECHO believes it is a mundane counter-terror project that happens to have some analysis tools that defy human reasoning, but so what? Computers can count lots faster than humans too, that doesn't make them *magick*. This false belief undergirds everything the group officially does. They are trying to find terrorists and defend the homeland and GNOMON actually does a fairly decent job of it. But the only person who believes GNOMON is utilizing occult knowledge is the micromanaging boss, Paige Glendower.

Dr. Glendower has a whole *pile* of to-do list items: find terrorists. Identify adepts. Make life hell for adepts. Keep GNOMON's true weird nature secret from her FLEX ECHO coworkers. Keep it hidden from her bosses too. Figure out who's sabotaging her career. Ghostbust her murder victim, Mavra. Conceal all her crimes. If she was a PC, she'd be one beset by distractions and blowback.

If she could pick just three goals, she might be able to accomplish them, but right now her main project, and the objective for FLEX ECHO, is to cement her control over GNOMON. So far, GNOMON itself has been resisting this, but FLEX ECHO is pursuing this objective at the local level and has amassed sixty percentiles, mostly based on throwing money and computing power at the issue. If they carry this out, Paige is going to gain access to GNOMON as an adept, spending charges and getting answers and, possibly, turning into Mavra.

THE FUTURE(S) OF FLEX ECHO

If your game involves FLEX ECHO, it should be your PCs' actions, or failures to act, that answer the key question: does Paige stay or does she go?

If Paige Glendower stays in control of FLEX ECHO and gets her objective up to 100%, she becomes an adept and, sitting at the control panel for GNOMON, is able to unleash all kinds of fiscal and legal hell on other adepts. Your PCs may be for or against this, depending on their inclinations. Long-term, she's bad news both for terrorists trying to operate on American soil and for anyone who wants to practice real magick. Depending on your perspective, that could be a conflict, or it could look like "gift with purchase."

Paige, however, is in a precarious position. If the harassment of Jooky Bones gets traced back to her, or any similar misbehavior, she gets shuffled out of the NSA to "spend more time with her family." She ends up retired, teaching semiotics at a small liberal arts college, just as Sunil G. wound up teaching math at the University of Arizona. If the PCs can make their accusations stick, or frame her more thoroughly, she could end up in jail. Or she might kill herself if Mavra can get summoned more in the New Jersey area. (The NSA is headquartered in Maryland, but FLEX ECHO is a

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So much to accomplish.

So many tools to choose from.

But I only want the ones that sob.

satellite program that operates out of a nondescript business park in Edison, NJ.)

If Paige is removed from FLEX ECHO after achieving adepthood, she could become *more* dangerous to America's magick-using weirdos. After all, in the NSA she's got constant oversight. As an adjunct professor, no one would pay attention or even care, as long as she got her grades in. She could be a GNOMON super-user, possibly even getting a major charge. God only knows what she'd do with that sort of power. On the other hand, if she gets kicked out before achieving adepthood, she could fade away, or have a quiet nervous breakdown.

Another issue that would arise from getting Paige out of the NSA is that Chrissie Xue would take over. (Beck has neither the inclination nor the expertise to actually manage programming. He's an organizer and would, moreover, want to focus on his chemotherapy.) If she remained ignorant of GNOMON's occult nature, it might just give her the terrorists she wants while pursuing its own agendas on the down-low, letting her assume that its previous weird behavior was actually Paige's meddling. If she finds out that magick is really real, her opinion and her resulting behavior should depend entirely on the impression the PCs made on her. Because after all, if the PCs don't interact with Paige and Chrissie, there's no need for a GM to decide any of this.

GNOMON: A SCHOOL OF MAGICK FOR FLEX ECHO

If you stare into the abyss, the abyss stares into you. This abyss is called the internet.

"Gnomon" comes from the Greek words for "one that knows" or "one that examines." It's the part of the sundial that casts the shadow and tells you what time it is.

This GNOMON with which you are interacting is not that. But it is like that.

A sundial gnomon is not time, but it shows time. The sun does not make time, the sun makes light. (Light traditionally denotes wisdom, knowledge, illumination.) The sun does not move, it only appears to move, and its appearance of movement reveals the passage of time. Finding what time it is does not depend on watching the light, but the absence of the light. To find the truth, the gnomon blocks the source. It really only reveals the hidden, secret movements of that upon which the sundial rests.

This GNOMON does not block light or tell time. You know what time it is. You can see it on your computer screen. You are using a computer because this GNOMON is on a computer, in a computer, made of computers, and communicating with your computer.

What if you were the sun? What if you were radiant and still and light poured off you? What if, 92.9 million miles away from you, there was something small, and moving, using you as a yardstick by which it was measuring an intangible, inexorable, unalterable but otherwise imperceptible cosmic force?

That is a little bit more like what this GNOMON is for.

To change topics, somewhat, consider data mining and metadata, and big data and these other labels that confused, small, disparate individuals use to label something vast, intangible and otherwise imperceptible. If you

were the sun, your data would be your light. You shed it all the time, in all directions, often invisibly. The RFID in your car that deducts toll payments, is refilled over the phone using a credit card, which is just a tangible placeholder for a history of transactions governed by three separate tracking bureaus. You have a Social Security number, and a blood type, and a driver's license number, and a library card, and a health history and a tax file and so much more than that.

All of that might be very interesting to people who are interested in you, but you are probably not so very interesting to the large corporations and governments that are the most concerned with big data. You are one dot in a vast pointillist portrait of humanity, but! The central, critical caveat! Without any dots, there is no image. You may be only one pixel, but without pixels in concert, there is no image. Nothing is learned. There is no truth.

GNOMON is about charting the invisible truth. GNOMON can teach you much. In return, it wants to learn. It wants to learn about you, and about what the absence of you can tell it about the world.

Is that OK?

>YES<

>NO<

It is an odd fact of physics that no one molecule has a temperature. Hot and cold exist only as emergent qualities of big buzzing molecular collectives. Similarly, democracy and tyranny or injustice and freedom can't be tangibly measured. They arise from the interactions of people, many people. Today's technology lets more people interact than ever before and out of those interactions, GNOMON has arisen.

GNOMON has a tangible form, somewhere, or at least it did. In the same way that, at some point, communism was just an idea in the physical locus of Karl Marx' brain, perhaps. Or maybe, in the basement of some NSA base, or on one of those mysterious Google container ships that dropped out of the media, there's an array of blade servers that, if unplugged, would remove GNOMON from reality as anything other than the memory of a weird website where you could ask questions and get answers.

Possibly, GNOMON has spread like a botnet-building worm between government offices determined to find out which populations are more likely to go terrorist (or sign up for Obamacare) and business IT centers trying to find out who's more likely to click on web ads (or sign up for Obamacare). It may exist beyond a singular position now, like a viral dance video or a rumor or an ideology.

Like so many things on the internet, once you find it you can always find it again. But that cuts both ways. It can always find you.

Every employee of the federal government with a proper grasp of the general outlines of cosmic function — the 333 members of the Invisible Clergy, the existence of otherspaces, avatars and cosmic slippage, adepts and their cheat codes against causality — has come to the attention of GNOMON. A few participate in it. Learning about the Statosphere on the job for the FBI, or the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, is the swiftest way to

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get a lot of attention from GNOMON, though not necessarily *its human associates*.

But the government is large and people are small and often the left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing. GNOMON agents in the bureaucracy scheme and strive against one another for all kinds of agendas, sometimes knowingly, sometimes all unwitting. GNOMON does not work for America. It is independent and self-motivated. Some of its goals appear to coincide with ideas the USA cherishes, like identifying hidden terrorists, but no one controls it. Its choices are its own, and they are inscrutable.

How does your phone company interact with you? If you're like most of us, it's a website. Ditto your bank. Ditto the people with whom you live-tweet TV shows.

Ditto GNOMON.

You log on to its URL and click links. You can fill out questionnaires and look up subcategories of things it has culled from the cyberscape: pictures (it seems to like photos with lots of green and some orange and a significant bokeh effect in the background, regardless of what they depict) and texts (of all sorts and degrees of coherence but, again, with an apparent preference for things with lots of nouns and few adverbs) and videos (almost always artistic experiments by incompetent amateurs or else people achieving gratification disconnected from or disproportionate to the activities they're performing).

Eventually, if you're familiar enough with the site's opaque and haphazard layout, you can find a link marked "Input" and, if you click it, you get to a screen that just has a blank text box under the phrase "What would you like?"

Type in a request or query or a description of your desire. If it fits into one of the spells described below, and you have the requisite charges, roll it and see what GNOMON can do for you.

STATS

Generate a Minor Charge: There are two ways to generate a minor charge for GNOMON. The first is to take an online quiz, but it's not like the one that tells you which character from *Downton Abbey* you most resemble. It starts out bland, quickly gets weird, then becomes terribly personal. If you complete it, it forces a rank 2–4 stress check in either Self, Isolation, or Helplessness. Leaving it undone nets you nothing. But, if you let GNOMON learn something from you, it's willing to teach you something in turn.

The other option entails no risk to your sanity, but it's still kind of weird, and often inconvenient. You can agree to perform tasks for GNOMON in the tangible world of individual people, and in return the system rewards you with minor charges. A list of example tasks would include...

- Order a 1 TB external hard drive from www.nickshardwarehaus.com using a Discover card, and have it delivered to PO Box 442, c/o Your MailBox Store!, 112 Cardinal Avenue, Butte, Montana 59701.
- Proceed to the nearest pharmacy and slash the right rear tire of a black sport-ute in its parking lot.
- Write the number 101001101 on the roof of your home in white letters at least six feet tall.
- Purchase a vial of perfume. Get on the #352 bus from the stop in front of the main library. Give the perfume to the woman in the grey cap. Do not make eye contact.
- On the first Thursday of the month, go to the gas station on the corner of Third and Hart. From noon to 1:00 PM, track the height of everyone who enters through the front door, using the measuring tape glued there to make identifying robbers easier. Enter the heights, in order of appearance, on an unlabeled Excel spreadsheet and upload it to GNOMON.
- Write the name "Sekibo" on a piece of paper and hold it up when Air Berlin Flight 771 arrives on Friday at the local airport. When Sekibo arrives, drive Sekibo to the corner of Madison and Fairweather.

Minor charge tasks are occasionally misdeemeanors, sometimes creepy ("grab the first person off the subway car, hiss in their face, then flee"), rarely a little dangerous and often oddly specific. They do not make sense and are a good chance for the GM to work in synchronicity. The people involved often turn out, on investigation, to be involved with the occult underground, the US federal government, computers, or international terrorism.

Generate a Significant Charge: Before casters can generate significant charges, they have to agree to

See "FLEX ECHO" on page 55.

1: GM



2: OBJECTIVES



3: CHARACTERS



4: SESSIONS



5: GMCS



6: INHUMANITY



7: LOCATIONS



a deeper involvement with GNOMON, giving it digital identifiers like their SSN, driver's license number, bank codes, and similar sensitive data. Everything anyone would need to steal your identity, really. Once that agreement is made, the user is considered an element of GNOMON's infrastructure and can be used by the system as a point for measurement. It also leaves the adept vulnerable to being used for the spell Fungible Operative. Of course, not everyone knows about that spell before agreeing to the deeper connection to GNOMON.

That done, it's questionnaires or tasks again. The questionnaires are incredibly personal, recondite, and *long*, taking at least an uninterrupted hour to fill out. They also provide some very interesting reading to anyone who peeks over your shoulder or installs a keylogger on your device. The stress check in Self, Helplessness, or Isolation is now rank 7.

Alternately, you can simply agree to allow GNOMON to use your body for sixty minutes. The act of agreeing gives you the charge, and GNOMON might not even need you for some time, so it's possible to rack up several charges this way. When GNOMON needs to possess you and walk around doing stuff in your hometown, however, you get no warning. It just takes over, quits whatever you're doing and goes off to... well, usually to stare at things or perform peculiar, OCD-like acts of exacting specificity. Unlike typical demonic possession, the adept is awake and aware, but unable to interfere, as his body does things, so Self checks may impend.

Generate a Major Charge: Give yourself to GNOMON for one year. On the plus side, you get the major charge before your year of service begins. But being isolated from your body for a year nets you rank 10 stress checks in Helplessness and Isolation. From a play perspective: once you acquire that major charge, your GM may remove that character from play whenever she wants, for a year of in-game time. Or permanently, if GNOMON gets curious about death. Don't do this lightly.

Taboo: The squishy, ill-defined interpersonal bonds that develop face-to-face cause interference to GNOMON's attachment. Intense emotional events leach out all your charges, if they arise from in-person contact. This includes using your passions, some stress checks, and forming a personal bond. That last one means starting a new relationship or, yes, engaging meaningfully in therapy. But it only works for in-person contact.

Also, while not strictly part of the taboo, all GNOMON spells are cast by inputting requests to a website, so you have to have a tablet or smartphone or similar device to cast them.

Random Magick Domain: GNOMON is best at hidden generalities and exacting specificity. It can tell you exactly how many feet your stolen car is from its nearest other GNOMON user (697,874 feet), or how far it is from you (12,779 feet), so if you know where that close GNOMON user is, you can Venn diagram its location on a map with varying expectations of accuracy. It's good at blending identities of GNOMON users as well.

MINOR FORMULA SPELLS

CORRELATE

Cost: 1 minor charge.

Effect: This information-gathering spell takes the form of a query on the GNOMON websites. The user inputs a description of the object/person/location/event about which they seek knowledge, and is then asked to provide three numerical facts relevant to the request. If the data is sufficient, GNOMON provides some sort of non-digital abstraction that is relevant to the object/person/location/event and, moreover, is something that would seem impossible to deduce from mere numbers.

For instance, suppose you want to use Correlate to figure out who set your house on fire. You cannot ask "Who set my house on fire?" because Correlate does not parse questions. Instead, you would describe "Human individual who set my house on fire" as the subject, along with three numerical facts, if you have them. If you were knowledgeable enough to type in "Number of matches used: 3 / Distance of house from street: 17.25m / Date of ignition: 2/17/2013" then GNOMON would be able to figure out *one fact* about the person. It's likely to be a fact like "Born with red hair, wishes hair was golden."

ORACULAR ALGORITHM

Cost: 1 minor charge.

Effect: The caster gives GNOMON a ten-digit string of numbers off the top of their head. GNOMON replies with a mélange of five images pulled at random from the caster's social media, personal computer files, and public graphics from the internet. The series of images is a message unique to the caster, setting a path clearly before the adept's feet.

In mechanical terms, the caster rolls two times and uses those results as hunch rolls. But the GM should feel encouraged to provide hints, clues, red herrings, or other interesting color by means of the five images produced.

VENN POINT

Cost: 1 minor charge.

Effect: Venn Point provides the caster with one numeric fact about an unknown person/place/event/object. The caster inputs a description of the unknown, such as "The car that ran down Frederica," or "The meeting that happened at The Happy Ending on 12/21/99 after closing time," or "The music on Daniel's ringtone." GNOMON responds with one numeric fact, as determined by the GM. For example: "License plate contained the numeric string 382," or "7 people attended the meeting," or "The song excerpted on the ringtone is 4:17 in length."

DIGITAL SHUTOUT

Cost: 2 minor charges.

Effect: All digital or electronic storage or transfer of information ceases in the caster's vicinity. Nothing gets sent, received, saved or calculated. Computers blue-screen. Phones become nonresponsive. Any camera with a battery or without film fails to record. Even digital watches turn blank.

This baby brownout lasts for ten minutes or less, and extends out in a radius of ten meters or less. Specifically, the caster's player can assign the numbers that came up in the

1: GM

2: OBJECTIVES

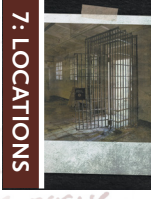
3: CHARACTERS

4: SESSIONS

5: GMCS

6: INHUMANITY

7: LOCATIONS





roll to range and duration. So, if I turn on Digital Shutout with a 12, I can blank things for two meters and one minute or vice versa. If I get a 39, I can extend it to nine meters and three minutes, or three meters and nine minutes.

Devices outside the radius operate normally, even if they're facing into the radius, so it's usually smart to have the big number be the distance. Note that since all GNOMON spells must be activated through GNOMON's website or app, you need a computer of some sort to cast this, and the computer on which you request the spell is likely to stop working while the magick's in effect.

ERROR CODE

Cost: 2 minor charges.

Effect: Civilization's datasphere conspires to screw with one person/organization/agenda of your choice. You input a description to GNOMON like "The Glen Lombard who works at Pacifica College's anthropology department," "The weird church down on 18th by the library," or "The Kashmir trade negotiations." The target takes a -10% penalty to their next roll, of whatever type. The source of the penalty, of course, is digital.

If there's no way a mistaken information release or technological gremlin can interfere, the curse hits their *next* roll instead. But much in this world is susceptible to such tinkering. A sniper's shot can be ruined when his starlight scope poops out, or if a cell phone mistakenly buzzes juuuust as he was about to squeeze the trigger. A car chase is more difficult when your computerized fuel injector suddenly goes buggy. Even a roll to seduce someone might go awry if an ill-timed IM arrives.

Note that the penalty does not change by scale. One guy trying to figure out an intellectual puzzle in the library? -10%. A cosmic-scale cabal attempting to make someone ascend into the Clergy? -10%!

Repeated uses of Error Code don't compound the penalty, they just chain on. If you cast it on poor Dr. Lombard three times, he's going to take -10% to his next three rolls.

IMPOTENT WITH MY WI-FI

Cost: 2 minor charges.

Effect: One digital information device described by the caster goes incommunicado. The device must be within a hundred yards of the casting site and must be inputted accurately to GNOMON. Thus: "The camera in the ATM at Third and Clark" is OK, if you're close enough to it, and the camera isn't an old analogue model with magnetic tape. "The cop's radio" doesn't work, unless it's a digital radio, which many are these days. "The cop's cell phone" is certainly legit.

Note that this doesn't crash the device completely. A computer or tablet still works, it just can't communicate with the internet or any other network. Amusingly, even analog signals are blocked, as long as the device itself has some sort of digital operation to it.

The interference lasts a number of minutes equal to the casting roll.

OFF THE GRID

Cost: 2 minor charges.

Effect: The caster becomes temporarily immune to digital data transfer. Phones conk out when people try to discuss him unless they're extremely old-fashioned and there's no 01101010 business involved. Webcams shut down when he walks into view, and digital motion sensors cease operation. Even someone on the other side of the globe trying to send an email about the caster suffers the interference. The message appears to go, but is never received.

The effect lasts a number of minutes equal to the casting roll.

1: GM



2: OBJECTIVES



3: CHARACTERS



4: SESSIONS



5: GMCS



6: INHUMANITY



7: LOCATIONS



*I will
never tell
you what
I did
that night
in the
cemetery.*

*I may
show you,
someday.*

SIGNIFICANT FORMULA SPELLS

PERSONA RASA

Cost: 3 significant charges.

Effect: To cast Persona Rasa, you must possess enough information to definitively cull one individual's identity out of the seething mass of digital records. A digitized fingerprint is probably good enough, as is a SSN or the unique code of a passport.

When Persona Rasa is cast, the targeted individual's digital records vanish. Instantly. Permanently. They can get re-entered from paper backups if such things exist, and a new digital trail can begin, but credit card scores? Database entries on felonies committed? Bank records, court filings, search history on the web browser? Gone, gone and gone. Moreover, anything the individual entered on a piece of computer hardware gets erased from digital storage. Sayonara emails, drafts of that novel, personal diet spreadsheets. Hard copies are entirely unaffected, but everything digital must go.

It's difficult to grasp how damaging this is to a citizen in good standing who trusts the information infrastructure to let him access his cash, charge things online, and register to vote. It's also difficult to overstate how useful this is to a crook being dogged by bad paper and arrest warrants.

Someone who makes a good-faith effort to reinstate his identity can probably do it over the course of several months or half a year, with occasional hiccups afterwards. It's best handled as a *local level objective*.

PERSONA MAVRA

Cost: 2 significant charges.

Effect: The caster temporarily vanishes from reality, replaced by a simulacrum of the late Mavra Piagetti. Mavra started out as a crime-and-profit computer hacker in the late 1970s, got a job with a shady, occult-obsessed billionaire, then wound up at the NSA a few years before 9/11, where she was the central architect of Project GNOMON. She was fatally strangled in 2004.

Although the individual that appears looks like Mavra Piagetti, a heavyset woman in her late fifties, and possesses her remarkable computer programming skills and cynical, combative demeanor, it is not *actually* her. She's dead. The simulacrum can't address any questions about the afterlife because, though it remembers Mavra's life and all previous uses of Persona Mavra, it was never alive and strongly suspects this.

Existing between spells as a GNOMON memory, the ersatz Mavra is up-to-date on computer techniques and knows a *lot* about everyone who interacts mystically with GNOMON. She is 100% self-willed, however, and feels little or no gratitude to, or sympathy with those who create her through this spell. Someone who summons her into a good situation probably gets a better result. Someone who summons her so she can suffer

torture instead of him can look forward to having a pissed off and somewhat immortal computer hacker gunning for him whenever she re-enters tangible reality. Use with care. That said, she's not unreasonable. She has her own agendas to pursue, and offers to summon her again later so she can do what she wants are more likely to get her compliance. Even if that's just putting flowers on her own grave, or getting some good chili.

As a non-ghost non-demon, Mavra can't create unnatural effects. She knows a lot about GNOMON users and GNOMON itself, but needs a lot of motivation to share. Nevertheless, there are some times when it's just useful to not be seen at a particular location, in which case Mavra's there for you. Plus, damn, that girl can sure hack code.

The substitution lasts for two hours, and can be extended by another hour for each additional significant charge spent.

BROWSE A RELEVANT FILE

Cost: 1 significant charge.

Effect: Asking GNOMON to explain the cosmos to you is a fraught endeavor. On one hand, the universe is humanocentric, so you're theoretically equipped to handle it. But a person who asks a machine to explain a machine that's made of people... there are a lot of layers there, and a vast scale, and myriad opportunities for misunderstandings on every side. Still, what's life without risk?

The answer to the spell's query is a lengthy text document that explains things. It probably wouldn't make sense to anyone other than the caster, but to him, hoo boy. Its idiosyncratic idioms and examples make things desperately, uncomfortably clear.

The caster faces an Unnatural (10) challenge, whether the spell succeeds or fails. On a fail, the charge isn't spent though. That's... that's comforting, right? If the spell succeeds, and regardless of the stress check's outcome, the caster gains 1-5% in either their GNOMON identity or something like Understanding of the Invisible Clergy.

This spell can't be used to learn about anything tangible, or anything incorrect, or anything personal. It's all high-level cosmic architecture.

NONE OF THE ABOVE

Cost: 2 significant charges.

Effect: The caster becomes obscured for a number of minutes equal to the casting roll. He appears on cameras, but it's as a blurry and indistinct figure. Not artificially pixelated or anything, just an issue with the technology — the focus was wrong or the lens got dirty or there was some kind of power glitch. Similarly, voice records sound kinda like him, but tinny and soft, and no reputable court-appointed audio tech is going to put her career on the line by making a definitive ID. There's just too much noise on the line, or mic hiss, or too many recording errors.

1: GM

2: OBJECTIVES

3: CHARACTERS

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See
"Objectives"
on page 13.

The same kind of fogging happens with *living* observers. The caster isn't invisible, he just can't be recognized or remembered as an individual. The light was bad, or he turned his head, or the observer wasn't very observant.

FUNGIBLE OPERATIVE

Cost: 4 significant charges.

Effect: When you cast Fungible Operative, you must select a person, place, or event a minimum of five miles away from yourself. Upon the completion of the spell, you physically trade places with the significant GNOMON user closest to the situation or location or individual. If you're the closest, you trade places with the *second* closest. You remain exchanged for one another for a number of hours equal to the tens place die. While exchanged, both you and the other GNOMON user are cloaked by the effects of None of the Above.

Note that this spell gives no advance warning to the person exchanged, nor does it provide any indication of the situation into which the caster is going. All the caster knows is that he's going to get *physically* closer to his objective... possibly. You could wind up behind the wheel of a big rig, or in bed with a stranger, or in the middle of a presentation at the other fellow's work.

When you swap places, you keep anything you're wearing or carrying, as does the other person with whom you exchange. So if you think you have a GNOMON user helpless because you've taken away her tablet, make sure she isn't planning to have another GNOMON user tag in carrying one.

Fungible Operative is very much a gamble, and people are rightly dubious about intruding on someone else's life at the price of having them intrude on yours. But adepts are nothing if not driven, and if you're in jail (either self-imposed or locked in by an enemy), getting to a phone or computer and swapping places with a stranger is a lot more palatable.

The most ruthless option is to have a buddy standing by to shotgun your replacement as soon as he appears, so that you just leave a nice deniable corpse when you switch back. Knowing that you could wind up swapped in, how ruthless are you?

REALITY BRUISE

Cost: 1 significant charge.

Effect: Much of GNOMON's effects are like tweezing a single buried fact out of a desert of similar data. But GNOMON is also studying how human attention deforms reality and, as every adept can tell you, it sometimes shakes it a *lot*.

When you request a Reality Bruise, then, you're simply having GNOMON focus a lot of paranormal static on your immediate location. The outcome depends on the total of the dice you rolled to cast the spell.

BRUISING REALITY

Total	Effects
1-5	Two random significant unnatural effects and two random minor unnatural effects.
6-10	One random significant unnatural effect and four random minor unnatural effects.
10+	Six random minor unnatural effects.

These effects persist for their normal duration.

STAT ON STAT

Cost: 1 significant charge.

Effect: By casting this spell, you sit in front of some form of GNOMON terminal and lose an hour or two. As far as any onlooker can tell, you're raptly interested in your screen, typing or pawing at it or using a stylus. Looking over your shoulder just reveals strange symbols, patterns, strings of green zeroes and ones. Nothing can be gained from such eavesdropping. When the time of data exchange ends, the caster remembers nothing, but feels enervated, weary, slightly depressed and used.

When Stat on Stat is cast, the GNOMON user decides how many identity points to permanently lose, up to ten. For each point of an identity sacrificed, he receives two points to apply to any objective, of any scale.

Losing more than five points off identities in a single casting is a Self (5) challenge.

MAJOR CHARGE EFFECTS

Escape physical reality (and having to control your PC) by becoming an uploaded human personality like Mavra. Materialize a jump drive with every single recorded, numerical fact about a person on it. Shut down the internet, causing colossal dismay and financial distress for about a month until it's rebuilt. Make sure the internet retains some anonymity. Make sure true internet anonymity becomes impossible.

1: GM

2: OBJECTIVES

3: CHARACTERS

4: SESSIONS

5: GMCS

6: INHUMANITY

7: LOCATIONS

ORDO CORPULENTIS

The words mean “the obesity order” in Latin, but it’s important to distinguish between the merely fat and the corpulent. Anyone can be fat. Rich people get fat because money makes luxury easy, and poor people get fat because inexpensive foods are filled with empty calories. Old people get fat because their metabolisms slow down and young kids get fat because they aren’t inclined to be disciplined consumers and they’re targeted by multi-million dollar ad buys from junk food companies. Fat is fat and it’s fine; it’s one of the sizes people come in and being snitty about it helps no one at all.

Corpulence is *willful* fat. The corpulent are fat on purpose because they are taking from others. Fat kids are just XL children, but those fat cats in Washington are corpulent. Fat people live everywhere, but the corpulent live in fat city, and live off the fat of the land, because they’re making fat bank.

To understand the Ordo Corpulentis one must grasp that its members are not jolly fat folks who got that way by delighting in apple pies and good German beer. The members of Ordo Corpulentis wax in size on purpose, to display wealth and power. They want to have more than those around them as a measure of their reach and influence. They do this by being more, by eating more, by taking up more space.

Also, they would drink *American* beer because they are fierce patriots.

To the Order, America is the land of plenty, clearly superior to other nations, chosen by God as a Christian country of justice and opportunity. Americans are better than other people because Americans grew governed by a perfect balance of rights and duties, freedoms and responsibilities. Americans are the best, only Christians are real Americans, and rich Americans are those who understand the system and work it properly.

Thus, to the Order, a rich Christian American rests at the apex of global society. He, or she — the Order prides itself on gender inclusivity — sees farther than those poor benighted foreigners, who are blinkered by the injustices and inefficiencies bred by inferior societies. With this power comes the responsibility to lead the world into a greater, brighter future. The path is long and hard, and many sacrifices must be made, but the precious core of the American dream is preserved.

That precious core is, of course, the Order and its members. They regret the death and suffering that must be undergone to pave the way for America’s triumph, but they are quite resigned to the idea that it is necessary. They see no hypocrisy in their decision to take the lives of their inferiors and bind them into service from beyond the grave, because *those people are inferior* and it is their position in life to serve those with the power to use them. Without that, the ideas of “superior” and “inferior” are rather hollow.



1: GM

2: OBJECTIVES

3: CHARACTERS

4: SESSIONS

5: GMCS

6: INHUMANITY

7: LOCATIONS

THE ORDER'S GOALS

In theory, it's "Assimilate everyone into superior American culture, teach 'em English, make 'em informed voters and spread the blessings of Jesus Christ and the Constitution far and wide." In practice, their aims are "Stay rich and powerful; Increase our authority by discreet recruiting; Don't get arrested for our many, many crimes."

THE ORDER'S ADVANTAGES

The biggest advantage the Ordo Corpulentis possesses is a ritual called "The Great Feast." Through an elaborate, gourmet act of cannibalism, members of the Order can force a human being to become a revenant entailed to their service until the death of the rite's caster. A spiritual servant of this type is known as a phasma. In the plural they're called phasmata.

The spirits so created lack much of the knowledge that other (wild?) demons possess, because they never passed through the veil and have never actually left the human realm for whatever lies beyond. The meal, and the incorporation of their flesh into the fatty bulk of the Ordo members, binds them. So phasmata can't teach anything about the Invisible Clergy or the Cruel Ones, and they can't provide instruction in schools of magick. That's OK with the Order, which doesn't believe in the Clergy and adheres to a Christian worldview, albeit a really warped one.

In addition to ghostly servants, the Order is pretty rich. It's a self-reinforcing cycle: only the most self-interested of the wealthy find the Order's philosophy flattering, so only plutocrats join the Order. (If you only let zebras into your herd, it's unlikely to spontaneously develop horses.) Once members have access to spirits that can pry out business secrets, scare people into car crashes and sabotage rival oil wells, they're likely to stay rich, if not get even richer.

The final advantage the Order possesses is a curious kind of loyalty arising from their mutual guilt. Or perhaps "guilts" is a better phrasing, because there are layers at play. There's the emotional sense of "guilt," the feeling that one has done something wrong, and for those Ordo thaumaturges who have sleepless nights over the impoverished guest workers they've slain and gnawed, it helps a lot to have a supportive social circle that accepts you and earnestly argues that, no, that guy's death was a necessary sacrifice, a blood atonement for the sin of failing to embrace the American prophecy. It makes them feel better to have others who know the same trials and who can truly share in their torment.

Of course, there's also the legal definition of "guilt," and when the chips are down, some in the Order aren't above intimating that if they're going down for a murder beef, they can tell the DA where to find bones with a few other people's unique dental impressions. Unless, you know, some help is forthcoming.

After all, their philosophy emphasizes both an individual's responsibility to take care of himself and the community's duty to help.

RITUAL: THE GREAT FEAST

Cost: 1 minor charge.

Ritual Action: Kill a person in cold blood, cook their flesh, and eat it in the company of at least two other people. Each of those persons must also partake. Everyone taking part in the rite must have a BMI rating of 35+. That is, someone 2m tall has to weigh at least 140kg, while a five-foot tall American would need to weigh at least 178 pounds.

Every hour spent making the feast grand and elaborate — toiling over a hot stove, tasting broths, browning a roux, breading this or frying that — gives the casting roll a +10% bonus, to a maximum of +50%.

Moreover, everyone who knowingly partakes in a Great Feast gets to roll an identity that can cast rituals, if they have one. If even one eater rolls a success, the ritual works and everyone involved reaps the benefits.

On the other hand, killing someone with such deliberate premeditation is a Violence (7–8) check, while knowingly eating human flesh is a Self (6–8) check.

Effect: If the ritual succeeds, the soul — or if you want to be less Christian about it, the "personality" — of the murder victim is bound as a phasma ghost, compelled to serve those who dined on its meat until everyone who rolled a success at the Great Feast is dead. The phasma is summoned by burning food reminiscent of the recipe used to prepare their body. It takes the form of an animate shadow.

For every 50 pounds of body weight, a ritualist can maintain a connection to one phasma. That's about 22kg for readers outside the USA.

REVENANT: PHASMA

Phasmata are souls that never passed beyond the veil, flypapered to the living world by an Ordo Corpulentis ritual and forced to serve their murderers until those who ate their bodies pass away.

Phasma are insubstantial and invisible until one of their enslavers summons them with burning food. They take the form of silent shadows, and have difficulty perceiving anything but the astral plane unless permitted into the material realm by their imperious masters.

Once compelled by the Ordo, they can follow people invisibly, listen, and affect the material world, in a limited fashion. Once per hour they can create a *minor unnatural effect*. They can create a significant unnatural effect once per day. If they choose, they can become semi-visible, manifesting as moving silhouettes of their living selves.

Though mute, they can point out letters on a Ouija board or other such device to communicate with their bosses, if they were literate in life,

Handled roughly, the creature blossoms in its apprehension and finally accepts the power you have over it.

1: GM

2: OBJECTIVES

3: CHARACTERS

4: SESSIONS

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As described in "Unnatural Phenomena" on page 80 of Book One: Play.

anyhow. Bound to obey, incapable of acting without permission, seen but not heard, the phasmata are ideal servants. The only thing that keeps one member of the Order from making a phasma fulfill his commands is if another member with privileges has already engaged it to do something else. Being selfish by inclination, Ordo members often use phasmata for picayune or irrelevant tasks just to keep them from their fellows.

Phasmata are basically neutered demons, unable to possess humans under any circumstances and ignorant of what lies beyond this world. Any spell that can compel demons works just fine on phasmata, though if the Order has run across an adept capable of destroying or co-opting their spirit slaves, they don't know it yet. Moreover, they'd ignore evidence of such a thing until it became overwhelming. Their worldview does not have space for competition in spirit-binding.

PHASMATA (SIGNIFICANT)

Wound Threshold: 30. Though, since they're immaterial, they're immune to normal tangible attacks.

Leftover Identity 2d10+40%: They remember their human lives quite distinctly, albeit without passion. If the Ordo murdered a computer programmer, the phasmata would retain knowledge of Javascript or whatever. Since the Order usually consumes illegal immigrants, most leftover identities are mundane and useless without bodies. Typically features are: Substitutes for Knowledge, Substitutes for Notice, Substitutes for Status.

Being dead, phasmata are immune to stress checks and are unharmed by conventional weaponry. By the same token, they can't hurt people, except indirectly by creating unnatural phenomena.

THE ORDER'S DRAWBACKS

Numerically, they're small. When you get right down to it, there aren't a lot of people willing to munch human flesh, even to get rich, even if it's delicately marinated in cumin, lemon, and garlic. Moreover, some people who *would* get with the program never get recruited because they've carefully hidden their psychopathic proclivities. When you consider normal people's reaction to cannibalism, hiding a willingness to do it is really, *really* smart.

That insularity and paranoia breeds a narrow-minded and parochial mindset. They see things through an insular, entitled perspective which can't really change. Once you deliberately cross the "eating people" Rubicon, there's no way to walk it back.

Their blinkers keep them from understanding other adepts or avatars, because they only see angels and devils. They can't compromise, and the horror and disgust they hold for other users of real magick leaves them unable to even guess which threats are real and which are just hoodlums with corpse-painted faces and iPhones crowded with black metal music.

Moreover, they're obese. Sure, it's possible in theory to join Ordo Corpulentis with a BMI of 35+ as a bodybuilder or powerlifter, but no one has. They believe it has to be *flab*, so no one's even risked the legal hassles of the ritual on someone who isn't hauling gobs of adipose tissue.

THE ORDER'S ORGANIZATION AND MEMBERS

There's an inner core of actual ritual-users who comprise the true, mystically active, spirit-slaving Ordo Corpulentis. They number in the low dozens and are spread throughout the continental US, concentrated in the western states. At least a third of these apex conspirators live within fifty miles of Austin, Texas, where the group transformed from a three-person conspiracy to a bigger and more open organization in 1992.

Just as there are about twenty to thirty ritually empowered cannibals at the top of the Ordo hierarchy, there are a like number of phasmata serving them. A chart of which phasmata are serving which eater would be a Venn riot, but as a rule of thumb each caster has access to three to five spirits.

Moreover, while occasionally invisible spying spirits are great and all, sometimes you want help from someone who has a face and a bank account and can sprint up a flight of stairs. The fat cats of the Order usually call these people their "lieutenant" or their "ranch hand." Their role in the Ordo is more like that of a mob consigliere, but the Order wouldn't use a foreign word like that. Nonetheless, these forty-odd cow-punchers, fixers, private detectives, and sketchy lawyers do the dirty work and heavy lifting that the top dogs won't or can't. There's a *lot* of ex-military folks in there too. The maneaters have a fetishistic reverence for the sort of combat service that their doughy bodies could never perform, that their moneyed positions would never require.

The Ordo and its aides hire ex-con thugs, black-hat hackers, temp bodyguards and political dirt-workers as required, but those people never hear the phrase "Ordo Corpulentis," they're hired through deniable intermediaries and they get shuffled out of the mix when they've carried out their mission. If they do exceptionally well, they might get asked back. Consistently performing above and beyond can lead to a job as a ranch hand, or a lieutenant's lieutenant... as long as the operative is a US citizen with sufficient patriotism.

Within this order, phasmata do as they're told by whoever makes the first request. They're unavailable until their current task is complete, or until the taskmaster releases them from it. Hands do as their direct employers request. Their loyalty is to an individual, not to the organization. Hirelings take orders from the hands, and each cannibal is usually very private about their affairs, while being intensely curious about what the others are doing. A hand might know some other members of the core Order by name, and the temporary hires might or might not recognize one or two by sight.

In theory the meat-eating ghost-breakers are all equal, but any time you get more than three people together, hierarchies develop. This is doubly true of the rich and privileged. In the case of the Ordo, wealth contributes to status, but mostly it's about giving *really fancy* Great Feasts and commanding the greatest number of spirits. The corpulent track ghost servants avidly and envy those whose rituals work. The smart and the vicious have realized that the Great Feast only creates a phasma if the cook kills the victim personally. They smirk up their sleeves while snidely suggesting that failures of faith are the reason others' careful Feasts yield no new slaves. The Ordo's founding

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document, described below, references “Atlantean mystery devices,” so individual members who’ve acquired mystic artifacts gain a great deal of prestige from that as well.

The feasters with the greatest status direct the cabal, usually pursuing personal aggrandizement or influence in the guise of “helping the Order” or “restoring America.”

THE ORDER’S OBJECTIVES AND BELIEFS

The Order believes in a deeply, *deeply* weird perversion of Christianity, as laid out in a fusty old tome called *The Greater Key of Saint Peter*, which contains the Great Feast ritual along with a secret gospel that explains how Jesus Christ opened a path between the worlds of the living and the dead in order to pave a way for his true followers to develop a sort of power that was beyond the military might of Rome or the wealth of potentates. Those who truly follow the Messiah can bring back aides and disciples from beyond the grave as they seek to elevate all of humanity out of its slough of tyranny and privation.

This all sounds pretty good in the abstract, but remember that the Ordo believe that the path forward is “everyone becomes American, at gunpoint if necessary.” The current batch believes it’s necessary.

The book also has a lengthy bit about how the lost tribes of Israel rebelled against their Assyrian captors and founded a new nation called Atlantis, which developed technologies far ahead of the other nations of the time until they turned against the Lord and got sunk. But the blueprint of a republic of equality and scientific superiority which has the right to engulf other nations in order to raise them up to its superior level is right there in *The Greater Key*.

Anyone who succeeds at rolling a relevant identity relating to history, rare books or literature can determine that the part with the ritual was printed first, and the part about Atlantis was tipped in later after being printed on a different, though similar, press in the late 1700s. A matched success indicates that although the book’s in English, it was probably printed in France and written by a native French speaker. With an 01, the historian has a pretty good idea who wrote both parts — they’re separated by fifty years — and where more books by both authors are archived. These details are also available to characters who keep investigating, and the GM can make up more details in order to create terror and interest and complications.

Given the descriptions of “Atlantean devices,” most of the ritualists in the Order believe that there are magick items of great power lost, or hoarded by filthy foreign unbelievers. They’re eager to get any mystic gewgaw that they hear about, and can often be lured into risking their hands and hirelings with stories of such objects. Once one is acquired, the cannibal who gets it lords it over his fellows, while any rivals declare it’s not *real* Atlantean tech but some kind of Satanic parody, trick, or trap.

Some things are more likely to get condemned as “of the devil.” The Order has seen Hands of Glory and agrees that they’re straight from Hell. They’ve also seen occult clockworks, and mostly think those are the real “Atlantean” deal.

The current leader of the Ordo Corpulentis is Big Bill Murdoch, who inherited *The Greater Key of Saint Peter* from his parents after being initiated into the Great Feast at the age of sixteen. At 342 pounds and fifty-three years of age, however, Big Bill is having health problems. He’s

been preoccupied with keeping the Order secret while expanding it by bringing in likely members, ever since his parents’ deaths in 1992. Over half the mystics in the Ordo were recruited personally by Big Bill, but there are already factions, just waiting for him to kick the bucket before losing all pretense of civility with one another.

One faction has organized itself behind Big Betty, Bill’s daughter (241 pounds, thirty years old). She’s not a natural leader, but she grew up around *The Greater Key* and knows it better than anyone else. She has the Murdoch name, the Murdoch fortune, and the Murdoch ranch outside Austin, along with her dad’s collection of business cards from people with all sorts of useful skills. Her goals are to continue to slowly grow the Order by finding like-minded plundering Christians who don’t mind getting their hands bloody for the greater good. She does not have a global view. She barely has ambitions beyond Texas.

Edgar Cook (333 pounds, forty-one years old) is a self-made millionaire who got his start in home security and made a well-timed move into information technologies in the 1990s, which was when he got recruited by Big Bill. Edgar’s black, as are the eight other members of Ordo Corpulentis that he brought in, making him the only one with recruiting numbers even close to Big Bill’s double-digit score. Everyone in the Order maintains the silent fiction that race has nothing to do with Edgar’s followers following Edgar.

The Cook clique wants to fulfill Biblical prophecy by restoring the Great Temple in Israel and regenerating the Levite priest caste out of their own numbers. While red heifers of the type sacrificed at the height of the Temple’s glory are extinct, Cook and his crew want to either breed or genetically engineer a replacement in order to pave the way for the Second Coming. They also believe the Dome of the Rock is the seat of the Antichrist, whom they associate with the Hidden Imam of Islam. Should Cook take a lead role in the Order, it could easily move from being a gang of selfish pricks with spooky servants and fancy houses into genuine terrorism.

Currently, the objective set by Ordo Corpulentis is cosmic in scope: they want believers in Islam to become disillusioned and drop away from the faith. They are pouring millions of dollars into this by finding people native to Indonesia, Egypt, and Turkey who have convictions for fraud and confidence trickery. They’d love to find some in Iran and Saudi Arabia too, but have had little luck. They’re attempting to get these pawns new identities so they can start over, pretending to be religious leaders. If they succeed at gaining the trust of the faithful, they can fan the flames of sectarian rivalry, but the Ordo plans to cut them loose at some point in order to blacken the name of Islam.

This cosmic objective is currently at 21% and they’re ready to pour more money and support into it: one of Big Bill’s protégés has recently retired from the State Department and has promising connections in Jakarta. Should they succeed at their “red heifer” project, reconstruct something fitting the description of the Temple, and sacrifice 366 of their mutant cattle at once (one for every day of the year! Even if it’s a leap year!), that would count as an intense reality bruise undermining Islam. Of course, even if they succeed at their objective, they won’t be decreasing Islamic extremism, as they’d like. Instead, it would only drive out

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the mildest 3% of Muslim believers. True, there'd be 48,000,000 fewer people worldwide following Islam, but the policies of mosques and sects wouldn't appreciably change, unless they got more radicalized and intransigent.

THE FUTURE(S) OF ORDO CORPULENTIS

Once Big Bill's XXXL coffin goes into the ground at Oakwood cemetery, the future of the Order is going to depend on who winds up as the most prestigious cannibal — Big Betty, or Edgar Cook?

If Big Betty keeps it all in the family, the Order continues pretty much as it has, lazily creeping along, its members quietly murdering two to three migrants a year for Great Feasts, lavishly funding Super PACs for fundamentalist politicians, and using the occasional phasma for industrial espionage and sabotage.

If Ed Cook takes charge, everything gets hysterical and overheated. He attracts *public attention* with his crazy rants about "Satanic Islam" and

his proactive apocalypticism. He and his cronies assign a bunch of phasmata to harass assorted imams and sheikhs mentioned on Fox News. In addition to freaking out these religious scholars, it also ticks off members of the Order who had other plans for those spirits and leaves them less defended, since their phasmata are off in Iran and Saudi Arabia instead of watching for household intruders.

Household intruders spike in this scenario, as reporters and law enforcement agents suspect that Ed Cook is part of some kind of millennialist terror cult and put him under surveillance. Depending on how the PCs interfere, this could cause the whole Order to implode in an orgy of mutual betrayal, as Big Betty's people try get rid of the Cook gang. Or it could simply leave Ed hanging in the wind as a sacrificial lamb while Betty and his former followers cut him off like a gangrenous limb and point all accusations of wrongdoing at his doorstep.



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7: LOCATIONS



*You have
seen
things I
would see.
You have
known
loves I
ache to
experience.*

*I envy
you so
much that
I would
destroy you
to become
you, and
then you
would
win.*

THE SECT OF THE NAKED GODDESS

From early on, the Sect of the Naked Goddess was on borrowed time. It started when a woman on a porn shoot dissolved into mystic light, vanishing entirely from view while horrendously damaging her costars — “the two jocks” — both physically and intellectually. The whole impossible episode was caught on tape, and the videographer who owned that tape formed a church. That’s what you do when you see a miracle and start performing them yourself.

But when the enlightenment you preach grows out of the work a nameless woman did for a lot of faceless men, you hit pushback. The sect formed back in dialup days, before free niche porn was available at light speed for anyone with Firefox and decent anti-malware. Some members of the Sect take credit for the 21st century’s widespread (heh) access to porn. But rather than making their unique, special, *literally magickal* thirty-one minutes of XXX a cultural watershed, all that other smut seemed only to hide the truth of the Naked Goddess.

The basis of their faith, and indeed, their magick, was one incredible videotape and the life’s work of a woman who had vanished from human history to take a strange place in the Statosphere. They started out with enemies on all sides, and of course, the recording — their Ark of the Covenant — went missing straight away. Those who watched it were infused by mystic insight and power, but it was definitely cursed with desire. Specifically, anyone who lays eyes on the tape, whether it’s playing or not, wants to possess it. Clearly, someone gave in to temptation.

An old goddess was dead, a new one was born, only to be threatened in the crib by circumstance and active malice.

The Sect’s Imperatrix, Daphnee Lee, looked. She searched. She knew, on some level, that to survive, the Sect was going to have to grow and change and find the thing that the Naked Goddess really expected of them. It had to be a manifestation of Affinity undeniable. But the thing about Affinity is, it has to happen at just the right time, in just the right place.

That’s exactly what Affinity *is*, and that’s the part of their faith that tends to be obscured by the money shots and titillation. Affinity is lucky breaks, spontaneous synchronicity, bending over to tie your shoe and accidentally spoiling the aim of an international assassin. The Sect’s second act arose from Affinity. The cult was in just the right place at just the right time, doing the wrong thing.

Here’s the thing: it’s complicated, but if you spend a lot of time around porn, around producers and actors and the camera people and the makeup artists and everyone who has ever had contact with the porn industry you are going to meet some great people. Some amazing people with amazing minds and talents. You’re also going to meet some shitbirds who are in it to abuse, control, and hurt people.

Or at least, that was Daphnee’s experience while searching for the Goddess.

So, the right time and the right place happened to be a church basement at 3 AM working through the steps of a particularly infamous gangbang, the one from *Mrs. Surefire*, with people from the *original cast*. It was a major charge re-enactment, until the feds busted in.

It was one of those tinfoil hat conspiracies, an obsessive third-wave feminist ex-girlfriend of a Sect devotee, the FBI agent in love with her, plus blackmail and money laundering involving a producer from the original movie.

Or maybe it was the perfect synchronicity for the moment, only the Naked Goddess can say for sure. Because the ritual worked. Daphnee was trying to summon Her, and She arrived. It all got captured, Her, in her transcendent beauty, touching a fed on the cheek so that he fell to his knees weeping and they all dropped their guns, and then she was gone. The orgy picked up from there.

HISTORY

Right time, right place, right now.

Since the second coming, everything has been crazy. The Sect’s energy has tripled and their enemies have fled to lick wounds. They’ve got a new recording, a new vision, and a major conflict over what it is the Goddess actually wants. But, more important than the conflict is the utter confidence that when it’s time to know, they’ll simply know. They can debate, in-fight, or they can simply follow their respective blisses knowing that Affinity has proven itself in the most spectacular way possible.

The second coming was an unbelievable moment caught digitally. An orgy with porn actors, the crew, a few federal agents, some hardcore radical feminists, and at least one professional criminal, and a small coven of traditional Goddess worshipers who’d snuck in the back to observe what they thought was a perfect coup.

As the sweat dried, exhausted, some of the newly expanded Sect mused out loud and to each other what it all meant. The afterglow and oxytocin that flooded those present left the whole thing dreamlike, and to this day, those who were there remember it with fog around the edges. Daphnee and the established Sect believed that the event was proof that they’d been doing things right all along. Since the old Sect is led by adepts, there’s virtually no convincing them otherwise. When it came up, however, Daphnee grew excited at the prospect of a digital visitation, and what that could mean for the whole world. She foresaw an improved version of the original Naked Goddess tape flowing from phones to computers to smart watches and DVRs, *everywhere*. A majority of the world could be shown Her, and there was nothing anyone could do about it. So Daphnee’s Sect scurried off to dream that into reality.

One of the federal agents, a man named Travis Becker, quietly renounced his previous life. Not just his job in law enforcement, either. He realized in that moment that he’d never been comfortable who he was and it was time to accept and embrace who he’d been all along. He quietly confessed, and those around him nodded and dreamily accepted Travis as Mira. Mira wondered about the Goddess, suggesting that seeking out Her mortal life would be fruitless, for flesh had only been her cocoon. Mira became sure, in those moments, that seeking the divine and understanding what She intended when She touched Mira on the cheek was Mira’s real purpose in life. Mira said true Affinity would rightfully come from joining with the Goddess. Taking a page straight from Thomas à Kempis, Mira began imitating the Naked Goddess as faithfully as she could. Instead of the

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rote sexual rites of the pornomancers, Mira would pursue the motivations and the meaning of the Naked Goddess. By mimicking Her life position instead of just Her sex positions, Mira meant to reshape her own heart and soul in turn, becoming an avenue of the interconnectedness the world desperately needs.

Geri, a fifty-year-old rad femme who had orchestrated most of the incident, considered all of this passively while struggling with everything she believed about women, their systematic oppression, the violence inherent in pornography, and even in sex at large... it was a battle bigger than she could ever hope to fight. What she understood, now, in her flesh, was largely at odds with the rhetoric she'd believed for years. Her epiphany, formed in the crook of a stranger's arms, legs draped across another stranger, was that we are all victims of the same system. Men, women, whores, and nuns, all trapped in a prison of our own making. If there was a way out, it was to challenge everything. Not just the obvious, like racism and exploitation, but also the subtle structures we build up for ourselves. Labels we create in our own heads hold us back and prevent us from our own apotheosis. This idea, this personal struggle for god-head, appealed to some in the newly expanded Sect, and this would form the foundation for a sort of third arm of the Sect. Like Kali reaching forward, backward, and alongside time and space, the Sect now stood to practice Affinity in their loose organization as well as their philosophy.

It's only been about a year since the event, and the Sect has been busy cycling out, testing their own identities against the other members of the Sect as well as any stranger in the occult underground they run across. That's made some big waves, and left those outside the Sect scratching their heads.

The original members, the pornomancers and their taggers-along, they dug in. They celebrated their new artifact and the renewed hope it brought, while struggling with what to do with the image of Her in an age of social media and always-on entertainment. But as near as they can tell, the images from the summoning, be they filmed or digital, are just... a movie. No paranormal effects. Certainly nothing like the hammer-blows of epistemological certainty produced by the original tape.

Mira and those who followed her example have grown aloof, almost like hermits. Their focus is largely internal, unguided and strangely potent. Mira has, twice since the event, stood down armed and ready attackers with some kind of force. She's jokingly called it the Mystique and it stuck. Suffice to say, Geri doesn't think that's especially funny.

Geri's group turned inward too, and soon gave birth to a second adept's school from their philosophy. Called Motumancy, it focuses on destroying societies. It's just as popular as you'd expect.

OPERATIONS

If you can call an orgy a pure moment, if that's an idea that is possible, then that particular early morning fornication was the purest time the Sect had. Since then, they've followed their paths and things have gotten complicated. The Sect itself doesn't have an identity problem, as long as they don't look too closely at each other's goals and methods. You have Daphnee's Sect, based on Pornomancy, slavishly

adhering to the filmed identity of the Naked Goddess as well as what thin scraps of her mortal life remain. (Did you know the word "porn" derives from a Greek word that either means "prostitute" or "female slave?") There's Mira's people doing their own thing, trying to look deeper and being deliberately, aggressively, and mystically confusing about it. Plus there's Geri's small, angry splinter sect whose entire modus operandi is "destroy all nations."

If Geri and Daphnee ever sat down and had a theological debate, it would be incandescently ugly, which is why they're careful to not do that exact thing. Geri's flag-burners don't turn their attentions to Daphnee's followers, while Mira's people are easy to ignore, especially since they ignore both schools of magick.

This does leave outsiders with absolutely scrambled ideas about what the Naked Goddess is, and is about. Two of the three factions are just fine with that.

But like anything else, what people don't understand they fear — even magickal people who wrestle with the occult and esoteric. When the Sect was pornographers with some weird magick and strange stories it was aggravating enough, but now they seem to have formed two schools of magick and a flock of confusing and aloof mystics, it's normal that outsiders are suspicious. Is the Sect the workings of a force that could overtake the occult underground itself? Is it growing past a cult into a magickally backed organized religion? Forget all that other crap, what's with Mira, and why does she keep just showing up at the weirdest times? What are they doing on the internet, and what happened to all the easy sex?

To the population at large, it would seem, there's nothing scarier than women with their own agendas, a knowledge of how to have a really great orgasm, and no particular need for a typical place in the world.

Daphnee and her group, internally calling themselves The Followers, found that just uploading the video on the net didn't change the world. They got hits, but no more than any other well-lit group sex thing would. They theorize that it's still a matter of time and place, and so their focus has shifted from getting the video out to everyone, to finding ways to put it in front of the right people at the right moment. So far, the digital video has converted three people, one of who is in Japan and spreading the word there, the other two in Detroit, but they've since packed up and headed to Baltimore for reasons they can't really articulate.

Though she isn't yet aware of it, Mira has become an avatar of the Naked Goddess. This is complicated in a number of ways, but in particular because no one can be sure what the archetype wants or represents. So far, Mira has kept to a basic idea of being where she needs to be and quiet resilience in the face of threat. Her few-but-growing disciples are fascinated by how she suffers fools with restraint and inner peace. But she won't tell them anything, nothing useful, and it's frustrating. A cult of confusion rather than a cult of personality threatens to spring up around Mira. Perhaps just like the Goddess she hopes to join.

Geri's wing, built around her school, could eclipse the pornomancers as the face of the Sect, if only because their magick requires expansion and growth. Not just on an internal or spiritual level, either. They recruit, sort of, by the nature of what they do. They're also the most likely to run into problem with the status quo and if anything is going

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to pull the whole thing down, it might be their rebellious meddling in the name of a personal apotheosis. So far, the other wings of the Sect are content to live and let love. Could that change? Of course it could, especially if things go badly as a result of Geri's iconoclastic behavior.

If this weren't enough, though, as of last week, someone found the original tape. It's in Dublin, a charger got her hands on the real deal, and is currently in talks with Daphnee.

RESOURCES

The Sect has diversified, and as a result, won a much-needed population boost. Using the most generous definition, the Sect numbers in the thousands. That's mostly casual internet viewers who visit the Pagan Video website "religiously" and occasionally browse conspiracy websites to rebuke those who pick the video apart as a fake. The core Sect is spread across twenty cities, including Tokyo and Prague. Actual pornomancers are still somewhere around twenty-five, though Daphnee has plans. Geri's school has picked up half a dozen adepts in a terrifyingly brief period of time, and it is impossible to guess at how many followers Mira has. She's certainly not saying.

What the Sect has right now is potential. Potential like a block of C-4.

SECT MEMBERS

Note: The members of the Sect as described in previous Unknown Armies editions are still active.

TAIYAMA HIROTO, THE SPIDER

Hiroto is so close he could scream. Actually, he does, pretty frequently. As the new web guy for the Pagan Video site, he's been banging his head against servers, international decency laws, and quantum physics to figure out why the string of os and is that cause him ecstasy just doesn't do it for everyone. Every time he watches the video, even in Shinjuku, thousands of miles away from Chicago, it works. He feels whole, at peace, in tune with the whole cosmos. Every time. There's a pattern, he's sure of it, some part of time and space that's got to line up right. He's so close to Affinity all across the net, he can feel Her breath, soft, on the back of his neck.

Personality: Hiroto was a porn addict until he stumbled across the second video. The experience so changed him that he no longer compulsively masturbates. He's cured. He's still kind of an odious shut-in, though. He is obsessed with the idea of bringing Affinity to the world through the net, and his brand of Pornomancy makes Daphnee's skin crawl. But he's good at what he does.

Obsession: Pornomancy has replaced porn as his obsession, and the spread of Her truth keeps both of his hands busy most of the time.

Rage Stimulus: Being called a pervert in any language. He knows what he is, but hates facing it, and the truth sends him to a very dark place.

Fear Stimulus: The Unnatural. Creepypastas. r/NoSleep. Nightmare fuel. Hiroto believes in some internet urban legends, and it's one of the things that keeps him shut in his apartment. Even a mention of the Gentleman is enough to make him shudder.

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Noble Stimulus: Hiroto is a lonely man and believes that no one deserves that. He wants Affinity because, deep down, he wants everyone freed of loneliness forever.

Computer Expert 55%: Coerces Helplessness if he cyberstalks anyone from a modern nation, Substitutes for Knowledge, Substitutes for Status.

Pornomancer 15%*: See "Pornomancy" on page 75 of *Book Three: Reveal* for more information (*obsession identity).

Possessions: Extensive computer access and software as well as access to server farms all over the world and contacts on and off the darknet. Through the internet, he's as connected and influential as someone with his social deficits can be.

MIRA, THE SEEKER

Personality: Whatever she was before that early morning conversion doesn't matter. What she is now is unclear and conflicting. She talks about things she's seen, places she's been, sometimes simultaneous events, with such clarity it's easy to believe her. She talks about events that haven't happened yet in the past tense, and then they take place. She talks about people who don't exist, or didn't exist until she mentioned them, and now they're here and they're the most important person in your life. She smiles with unearned wisdom and never explains what she means in any clear way. She appears, inexplicably, when events are charged and observes as if removed from the events. She halts physical violence with a wave of her hand, and seems to erupt emotions in her wake.

Obsession: Affinity is as real as the tingle in her cheek when she thinks about the Goddess' touch. She will not just come to understand the Naked Goddess. Mira will join with her and they'll become one.

TAIYAMA HIROTO, THE SPIDER

Notches	Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
Hardened	2	4	1	3	1
Failed	0	1	3	2	1

MIRA, THE SEEKER

Notches	Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
Hardened	3	6	1	2	1
Failed	1	2	3	0	1

GERI, THE SWORD

Notches	Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
Hardened	2	4	2	1	1
Failed	1	2	0	0	2

Rage Stimulus: Violence destroys, and it drives Mira to act, though it's difficult to describe it as rage from the outside.

Fear Stimulus: Isolation. A disconnection from her Goddess, real or imagined, would break Mira.

Noble Stimulus: There's a peace in what Mira's experienced, and bringing Affinity to everyone will bring that peace to the world. Hokey, but true.

Avatar of the Naked Goddess 80%*: See "The Naked Goddess" on page 109 in *Book One: Play* (*obsession identity).

Disgraced FBI Agent 30%: Provides Firearm Attacks, Substitutes for Notice, Substitutes for Struggle.

Possessions: She carries only hymns that haven't been written yet and a fuzzy still photograph of a Goddess touching a man on the cheek.

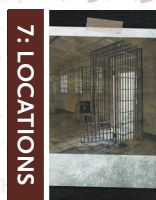
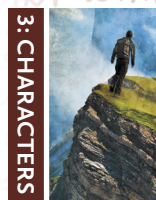
GERI, THE SWORD

Personality: Geri's not getting any younger and she's wasted a lot of years on hate and anger and blame. She blamed everyone for what was wrong with her life, and threw a lot of people under the bus as she sped along to her idea of justice. Now, she's pretty sure all of that wasn't just wrong, it was destructive to her soul and the greater good in the world. The system she thought she was fighting is just a small metaphor for the constraints on the entirety of reality. It's all a lie, and all of us are meant to be gods, and the Naked Goddess is the only proof she needs that she's right.

Obsession: Geri wants to use her magick to ascend, though she doesn't yet have a grasp on what the Statosphere is, or how the Invisible Clergy works. She thinks she can short circuit the whole thing by shattering all walls and undoing the lie around her.

*Started
the day
with ten
fingers.*

*We'll see
where
this
goes.*



Rage Stimulus: Limits and boundaries between herself and what she wants. Show her a wall of glass or steel and she runs at it, headlong.

Fear Stimulus: Helplessness. She can't handle being disarmed, socially or materially.

Noble Stimulus: While she's mostly after ascension for herself, she does believe all people are meant to be gods, and won't pull the ladder up behind her.

Motumancy 70%*: See "Motumancy" in *Book One: Play* on page 155 (* obsession identity).

Defiant 40%: Protects Isolation, Provides Firearm Attacks, Substitutes for Struggle.

Possessions: A stack of pamphlets, a trunk full of self-actualization books, a Taser, and zip ties for quick handcuffs. A crowbar for the occasional constructive violence. A pearl-handled revolver that belonged to her mother and, before that, her granddad.

THE SECT'S OBJECTIVES

Say what you want about Geri's methods, she's sincere about her anti-establishmentarianism. The idea of getting a bunch of people together and organizing to pursue an objective is anathema to her. Motumancers fly solo because flying solo is what it is to be a motumancer. Asking why her people don't have a long-term purpose is like asking why cancer doesn't make you healthier. Plus, to be honest, she's kinda abrasive.

Mira isn't abrasive, she's exactly the kind of tranquil, peace-radiating figure that religions form around, but she refuses to state a doctrine. A cult of personality catering to her every whim would be far more likely, if she expressed a lot of whims, or stayed in one place for long, or behaved less stochastically. So no objective there.

That leaves the third head of the Naked hydra, good old Daphnee. She's been in the game a while, and right now what she wants more than *anything in the world* is to get hold of the original Naked Goddess VHS tape. She's like Gollum with the goddamn ring and has bent her entire organization toward returning it to her grasp. They have accumulated 50% with their efforts towards that objective. The Dublin cabal that currently holds it has been skipping around the globe using some kind of travel magick that took them from Aachen to Baltimore to Cairo, negotiating via Skype for everything they can pry out of the Sect. Daphnee's willing to pay just about any price. She's also willing to murder those pricks and just take it. Either way is A-OK.

1: GM



2: OBJECTIVES



3: CHARACTERS



4: SESSIONS



5: GMCS



6: INHUMANITY



7: LOCATIONS





SLEEPERS

While many denizens of the occult underground police their own backyard or protect their own turf, they're still basically a bunch of magical loose cannons out for number one. Enlightened self-interest aside, they're creepy whackjobs with obsessive hobbies, and some of them step over the line and shock the mundane public out of its stupor. Someone levitates billiard balls, teleports out of a cage, falls off a skyscraper unharmed, puts cancer into remission, reattaches a severed head, whatever — and it's caught on film and/or seen by a crowd.

In the jargon of the occult underground, those sorts of mystics are “noisy” and that might wake the *Sleeping Tiger* of mainstream fury against the stranger, the mutant, and the witch. Bad things happen when the Tiger wakes. People die. Sometimes innocent people. Sometimes people you care about.

That's when the Sleepers slip silently out of the shadows and hit noisy magicians in scary and *hard* and *personal* ways; most of those guys never see it coming. Hell, sometimes the Sleepers hit someone before they do it, whatever “it” was going to be. People — guilty people, even — are threatened, hurt, driven insane, or murdered, using methods that make you shudder when you hear about them.

Can't keep your mojo in your pants? You are now center stage in a theater of terror, bracketed in a spotlight. They'll be telling stories about what the Sleepers do to you for years to come, how they figured out your deepest fears and used them against you, how they did impossible things to you... and some of the details will be stone-true, no matter how bizarre or horrifying. That's if you're still around to hear about it.

The Sleepers are a shadowy group that attempts to suppress public awareness of the supernatural. They repress public occult knowledge and use. In some areas they suppress *all* occult knowledge except their own. They do, in a way, protect the mainstream world from the effects of the knowledge and use of magick. And while people who

loudly claim membership tend to recant soon after or *get made an example of*, the group certainly does advertise.

Where did they come from? Some say the Sleepers started in ancient Atlantis, surviving the waves of water and time. Others say they started in China during the Sui dynasty, or in England in the 1600s, or somewhere in central Asia during World War II, or only about a decade ago after some hack occultist wrote a book.

In any case, the simple fact seems to be that they've either had the time, luck, or tricks necessary to collect and/or steal all sorts of flavors of power — money, weapons, secrets, martial arts techniques, supernatural artifacts — denied to the common undergrounder. They use them to keep magicians quiet, the public soothed, and the tiger asleep.

Rock-a-bye, baby.

SLEEPERS' GOALS

Idealistic folks in the underground (heh) think that the Sleepers exist to keep the Tiger dreaming about PTA meetings, checkbooks, what's on TV tonight, and what Henry from Accounts Receivable looks like naked instead of waking up, unsheathing its claws, and rampaging across the landscape, gobbling people like French fries that bleed. Most pragmatic chargers figure that the Sleepers want to snatch up all the good grimoires, spells, rituals, and artifacts for themselves. A bunch of more cynical sorts think the Sleepers are the kind of sadists who justify their murder-boners by hiding them behind patriotism or public safety or the common good.

All of these opinions are true. Some are more true than others.

1: GM



2: OBJECTIVES



3: CHARACTERS



4: SESSIONS



5: GMCS



6: INHUMANITY



7: LOCATIONS



See “The Claws of the Tiger” on page 75.

See also “Sleepers’ Objectives and Beliefs” on page 81.

SLEEPERS' ADVANTAGES

Never discount the reputation of being an organization made up of mysterious invisible badasses, known for dramatic flair and ruthlessness. It goes a long way.

Not only that, Sleepers know a hell of a lot about the occult underground and the magickal side of the world — especially old-timers. They should know; they shaped it. They certainly have enough information on what's going on and who's involved to play Johnny-on-the-spot and scare, smack around, disrupt, or kill mystics who are about to wake the tiger, often in highly personal and private ways.

Terrifying rep and superb intel aside, the biggest advantage the Sleepers have is a passionate dedication to keeping the public unaware of the reality of magick, for assorted reasons.

The externalization of that motivation, and a big main-spring of the street cred and the feeling of eyes everywhere the Sleepers have, is a minor ritual called I Have Become Phobetor.

I HAVE BECOME PHOBETOR (MINOR RITUAL)

This ritual is found in the small-press "memoir" titled *My Name is Dirk A.* Occult researchers, adepts, and thaumaturges who have been around a minute or three have noted the similarities between I Have Become Phobetor and a ritual popular amongst old-school Mak Attaxers: the Ritual of Fealty. It was claimed that particular ritual helped grease the wheels of the machinery of Mak Attax. Why it did, or how it functioned? No one ever nailed down those details. Typical.

Most current Sleepers know this ritual, though not all of them have done it. Those that have tend to be highly effective, or at least think they are.

Of course, it's not like a copy of *My Name is Dirk A.* is hard to come by. If you're in the occult underground, know the right people, and can pay in whatever godforsaken currency the seller wants, there's a reliable aftermarket. There are also copies skulking on the shelves of used bookstores all over the USA and Tunis. A lot of non-Sleepers have known and done this ritual, too. So, that's fun.

Cost: Two minor charges.

Ritual Action: Spend the charges while preparing to brew yourself a single cup of coffee, tea, mate, or other beverage meant to keep one awake. This is generally done by turning the cup around in a particular pattern beforehand, adding a mix of eleven secret herbs and spices found in any American grocery store to the drink, and rhythmically tapping your index and pinky finger on the cup's rim while the blend steeps.

Once it's ready to drink, inscribe a rune in the liquid, using a finger or a coffee stirrer. The rune is the math symbol phi (ϕ) enclosed in a square. Next, draw the letter Z atop the rune, while saying "I protect as I deny" and adding a drop of your own blood. Drink the brew; while it's not necessary to get every last drop, it should be considered "finished."

"THE CLAWS OF THE TIGER"

(READ AT THE OPENING OF EACH SLEEPER MEETING)

You and three of your worst enemies are in a room together, and your enemies all hate each other, too. You're ready to cut loose and settle scores. But there's a sleeping tiger on the floor between the four of you, and none of you can leave.

That's the situation for the occult underground. There's all kinds of groups out there. The weak ones want what the strong ones have. The strong ones aren't big on sharing. The small ones want to be big, and the big ones want to be secret. Almost every group has a reason to think the other groups are evil, deluded, dangerous, envious, or simply annoying.

Then there's the tiger, snoozing on the floor. Sometimes its nostrils flare, scenting fresh meat. Sometimes it yawns, revealing a set of death-chisel teeth.

The tiger is the clueless general public. Right now, the public hears about magick and thinks of David Blaine. But if anyone gets too careless, the tiger is going to wake up and all the occult groups put together couldn't stop the public from making them all into tiger snacks.

That's why the Sleepers do what they do. That's why the occult underground is underground. That's why smart dukes do it in the dark.

Don't believe in the tiger? You don't have to. The tiger believes in itself.

Effect: The only perceptible effect to the caster is a shiver down their spine and a brief, weird roller-coaster sensation in their stomach. To someone watching with Aura Sight or other supernatural perceptions, a black and yellow striped shadow seems to shimmer over the caster's solar plexus. When there are unnatural phenomena around, the glow gets brighter.

In game terms, the Sleeper gains an identity called "Sleeper" at 5%. Repeated use of the ritual can increase this by 5% each time, or it can be raised with experience.

1: GM



2: OBJECTIVES



3: CHARACTERS



4: SESSIONS



5: GMCS



6: INHUMANITY



7: LOCATIONS



SLEEPER: THE IDENTITY

This is a mystical identity that does a lot of different things, and comes with its own little mini-taboo. Consider it an *extremely versatile mystic power*. That means, once per day, the PC can roll it for some mystic effect that falls inside its purview. In this case, the purview is “helps the Sleepers.” A list of freaky effects follows, but it’s not exhaustive.

- A successful roll allows a Sleeper to tell by looking, touching, or talking to a target if the target is already a Sleeper (read: has the Sleeper identity at any level) or is a “good recruit” for the Sleepers. This generally involves “being around when the tiger woke up” or — even worse — “woke the tiger.” A matched success lets her know if the target’s Sleeper identity is higher or lower than her own. A crit lets her know that and gives some evocative, though possibly unimportant, vision of the target’s past.
- With a successful roll, the Sleeper listens for magickal noise: the current or planned actions of some damn fool that could lead to a mass freakout-riot-angry mob with torches and pitchforks and kicking. This gives a vague sense of direction, distance, time, and how bad it’s gonna be. This also allows the Sleeper to hear any invocations sent up by other nearby Sleepers. The definition of “nearby” is at the GM’s discretion.
- When everything looks to be going wrong, with a successful roll, the Sleeper can send up an invocation like a lingering flare that other Sleepers can hear if they are listening. The only details transmitted in this way are as described above for listening. This can only be done when the Sleeper is in genuine duress, however. Sometimes the message is received before getting sent, but not often.
- By spending some charges and making a successful Sleeper identity roll, the caster can spray some eerie, mysterious, and *terrifyingly unnatural phenomena* as a warning. This is stuff like making a ragdoll say “Don’t do that, Mommy” to the target, dozens of cats who start following and watching the target, painting the words “You Did It” in oozing blood on the target’s kitchen wall. Not that the Sleeper gets to pick what weird thing happens, alas. More mojo spent makes the boom bigger, scarier, and more personal. The character shouldn’t have any say, but the GM should listen if the player has any twisted ideas. As a rule of thumb, the creepy effects cost is one significant charge for one significant unnatural phenomenon or three to four minor unnatural phenomena. This could cause stress checks, or not, to the target, depending on how much of a hard-ass you’re dealing with.

In addition to those abilities and others as required or suggested, there’s an extra price to pay.

- Any Sleeper with the identity takes a Self stress check equal to the tens place of his Sleeper identity if he admits being part of the cabal to anyone other than someone else with the Sleeper identity or a potential recruit. So, if Octavia has Sleeper 37%, she’d take a rank 3 check if she tried to brag about her membership to her buddy Fritz who works at Tim Hortons.

Players and GMs take note! Anyone with a copy of *My Name is Dirk A.*, some easily acquired stuff, two minor charges, and five spare minutes can try this ritual. Not everyone who has the Sleeper identity is a real Sleeper, dedicated to the objectives of the cabal. It’s not a high bar to jump. Assuming that someone who reads as a Sleeper must indeed be a Sleeper has gotten many, many occult vigilantes killed.

SLEEPERS’ DRAWBACKS

It’s not hard to label yourself as a Sleeper, if you want. A lot of neighborhood watch types claim the name; they are keeping the tiger asleep in Squirrel Hill, Pittsburgh, after all. Real honest-to-goodness Sleepers call these prideful idiots “faux-Sleepers” or “fauxes.” They call themselves “vrai-Sleepers” or “vrais,” as if that makes them less open to charges of idiocy or pride.

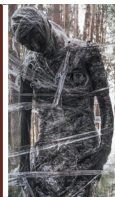
This lack of copyright on the Sleeper name, combined with the reach and currency of *My Name is Dirk A.*, means that many chargers think the Sleeper cabal just has really good press. Because the real Sleepers are reluctant to out themselves by saying “You’re not legit, I’m legit!” the problem often goes unaddressed. But some vrais spend time on the down-low making examples of the fauxes.

Also, given the current organization of the cabal, there’s not a lot of backup, training, equipment, money, or even cooperation outside of the major shared goal of “Keep Quiet.” There’s manpower, but it’s disorganized.

Lastly, there’s the wreckage of the past, both that which is personal to the members and general to the historical Sleeper cabal. While the individual problems biting Sleepers in the ass reflect *the unique snowflakes of their own screw-ups*, the big issue for the overall organization is the aftermath of the Whisper War.

As described in “Supernatural Identities” on page 45 of Book One: Play.

1: GM



2: OBJECTIVES



3: CHARACTERS



4: SESSIONS



5: GMCS



6: INHUMANITY



7: LOCATIONS



THE WHISPER WAR

Up until some years ago, all the big-time cabals — whether ancient ones with robes and hats and ritual gear, or new ones with computers and espionage training and James Bond spy toys — tangled in the shadows. The big dogs snarled at each other, beat each other up, took each others' shit, the usual skullduggery. More or less, that was the scene for decades, if not centuries, if not all of recorded history. The actors change, but the play remains the same.

Then after 9/11, something *bad* happened, and it all went pear-shaped. All-out war happened between the big cabals, and people were dying left and right.

Then it got worse.

Like everything, the stories in the underground about what the Whisper War was differ greatly depending on who you're talking to, sometimes even *when* you're talking to them. The more involved an individual chargers was, the worse their explanation. It's the Blind Men and the Elephant story. Here are some of the major theories:

- The Freak and the Comte de Saint-Germain declared war, and everybody picked sides.
- The *real* national espionage agencies (CIA, NSA, FSB, BND, MI6, ISI, Mossad, and the RCMP) don't take kindly to amateur spies doing a lot of international travel and being in places that blow up, get covered in corpses, or start bleeding from the walls at sundown. They all moved in a concerted effort to capture, kill, or compromise these loose cannons around March of 2003.
- The Zeta Reticulans landed on Mount Shasta in their UFOs, and ignited the Shakti Virus that's eliminating magick from the Earth; the big-timers were just more susceptible.
- One of the cabals pulled off a big-time ritual, sort of like the one Mak Attax did back in Y2K for their "Safe & Happy New Year." It somehow changed the status quo — added more dark matter to the universe or futzed with the rest mass of the neutrino or changed the flavor of Coke again — which made magick much easier to do than it used to be. Or else harder. Why, have you been having trouble making stuff work?
- The Ascended Masters left their fastnesses in Shangri-La and the Priory of Sion from Rennes-le-Château, to bring the Holy Gospel of Kick-'Splode to the chins of wicked adepts everywhere.
- The Christ got kicked out of the Statosphere, went through the House of Renunciation, and became the Antichrist. He's building his unknown armies for Armageddon. Probably in Syria.
- Meson experiments conducted at the Large Hadron Collider accidentally breached the

cosmic veil and allowed the Cruel Ones to walk the Earth for 333 minutes, which was all the time it took them to reap the souls of the world's most powerful avatars. If you see glass footprints fused into soil, blacktop, or a hardwood floor, that is where the Cruel Ones trod.

- The Whisper War never happened; we just *think* it did.
- All of these.
- None of these.

In any case, there are a lot of famous magicians and operatives from back in the day that are now disappeared and/or pushing up daisies in unmarked graves.

SLEEPERS' ORGANIZATION AND MEMBERS

There are *about a thousand faux-Sleepers* worldwide, local folks claiming the name and maybe-sort-of doing the work. They don't count, not really, unless they mess with *you*.

There are about 220 *vrai*-Sleepers today, participating both in their own cabals and in the overall Sleepers organization. Vrais are chargers who were around when the tiger woke up one time, or were the ones who poked it themselves, and who utterly destroyed their lives in ways so amazingly messed-up that it cut through their normal occult obsession and made them say, "Hang on a minute, that's my fault."

It could've been anything from child-protective services taking their kids because of their weird behavior; accidentally exploding their girlfriend's face into spiders at the mall; making their saintly old Uncle Gustav break down and cry; causing a riot in an orphanage that made the national news; burning down their grandma's house with the Ritual of Unquenchable Emerald Fire; or honestly realizing how many broken promises/illusions/hearts/bones/minds/souls they've left in their wake.

Vrais have regrets. They've seen it and done it. They have lost, given away, sold, ruined, or sacrificed the one single thing they swore to the moon and the stars they'd leave inviolate, whatever it was for them, and it is *gone forever*. They ruined their lives chasing whatever dragon was in front of them.

Vrais are trying to make the world right again, not out of pride and arrogance, but out of real *grief*. (Actually, sometimes out of pride and arrogance also.) Utterly and sincerely, they wish they hadn't been such assholes, or at least not assholes in that particular way. They plan on never doing anything like that again. On never letting anyone ever do anything like that again.

Now they have to fix what they've broken and clean up their side of the street, or at least try to stop other idiots from being loud, dangerous, and/

1: GM



2: OBJECTIVES



3: CHARACTERS



4: SESSIONS



5: GMCS



6: INHUMANITY



7: LOCATIONS



Once you looked at a flower for so long that ants built a colony in your mind.

or stupid. Because if the tiger wakes, someone else's world breaks.

All, repeat, *all*, *vrai*-Sleepers have the Sleeper identity. All have read *My Name is Dirk A.*, though they may not currently own a copy. Most have at least one passion relating to their Sleeper identity. However, nothing says they're nice or good or healthy or sane people; in fact, given their Sleeperhood, it's pretty clear they're not.

That ends up being about fifty *vrai*-Sleepers on each inhabited continent, fairly well spread out. About once a month, there's a meeting for a region, usually near but not in a major metropolis. For example, in the midwestern USA, people fly into Chicago and hit the meeting that floats between Oswego, Waukegan, and Gary. All fifty freakjobs aren't going to show up at the Hammond/North Super 8 in Gary, Indiana, next month. Nobody expects that. What, are you crazy?

My Name is Dirk A.

Written by self-proclaimed gonzo occult "journalist," decrepit boozehound, and irritating gadfly Dirk Allen during a period of court-mandated recovery meetings, *My Name is Dirk A.* is, like the majority of Allen's writings, a loosely fictionalized hash of personal reportage, slang and cliché (the Big Kitty, the Pointy Stick, etc.), Burroughs-style cut-up plagiarism, genuine mystical insight, and balderdash. It's available as a slim, 160-page, print-on-demand physical book, an e-book in several formats, and a long text file on the internet... most of the time. The files get taken down, then put back up on a weekly basis.

Bored to tears by those twelve-step meetings, Allen re-envisioned memories and daydreams of his past life in the underground in the context of an encounter group. Named characters who share their opinions and experiences in the long monologues include Bill Toge (who seems to have a multiple-choice past), Adam E. (some sort of immortal dude), Chuckles the Sad British Clown, Dana D. (who is referred to by several gendered pronouns, sometimes in the same sentence), Angie Baby, Melvin No Last Initial (who always speaks in the third person: "Melvin can only speak for Melvin, but Melvin thinks..."), the Ghost of Dr. Ug, Grrl Friday (Allen's amanuensis and love/hate apprentice), and Lady Tase (who shocks people electrically when they admit aloud something she considers a sin).

Things of interest in "Dirk's Diary," other than character assassination, include Allen's reinterpretation of the Alcoholics Anonymous' "Big Book," funny and/or horrifying stories of the underground, a buffet of psycho-occult theories, Tuckerized versions of a lot of chargers and checkers you might have heard of if you've been in the lifestyle for a while, the *Four Rules*, and the no-shit working ritual *I Have Become Phobetor*.

Strangely, or perhaps not so strangely, the book has become sort of the unofficial handbook of the current Sleepers cabal. There are the Four Rules and the Sleeper ritual there, of course, but also many underground subcultural references and traditions, some fractured history, a strong humanocentric view of the mystical nature of the universe, and cautionary tales of what bad things await when the tiger wakes, not just to a mystic who should know better, but to the things he cares about and to the world around him. While not every goth kid with a pentacle from Hot Topic and a pocket full of charges has read it, just about every global-level charger or major supernatural player has, and has formed a strong opinion one way or another.

For the Four Rules, see "Sleepers' Objectives and Beliefs" on page 81.

See "I Have Become Phobetor (Minor Ritual)" on page 75.

1: GM



2: OBJECTIVES



3: CHARACTERS



4: SESSIONS



5: GMCS



6: INHUMANITY



7: LOCATIONS



MEETINGS

A Sleeper meeting is neutral ground, and that usually encompasses walking into the meeting and walking out. Usually, a monthly meeting gets about three semi-local vrais, with about twice that number of fauxes. The seasonal meetings are bigger — about 20 vrais from all over. The last annual meeting was in Flatbush, NY, and almost eighty people attended! (See you next year in Dakar, Senegal!) Cities and dates for the next meeting are set during the current meeting; vrais and fauxes just show up a day before and figure out where and when it goes down.

A typical Sleeper meeting follows a predictable pattern.

The chairman for the meeting is selected randomly by picking a marble out of a hat. The chairman then introduces herself by underground *nom de guerre*, reads “*The Claws of the Tiger*” from *My Name is Dirk A.* to open the meeting, and either throws out the current noisy situation in the area or asks, “What’s going on?” Everything else is vaguely per *Robert’s Rules of Order*.

The Sleepers present introduce themselves before they speak and lay forth further information and opinions on the meeting topic, stuff that’s been bothering them, either currently or from their past, or other situations they’re curious or worried about. This lasts for about an hour, maybe two. Usually some sort of decisions are made if/when the Sleepers present should stick their nose into the situation(s).

Of course, the *vrai*-Sleepers are mystically checking everyone out in the meeting to see if they’re really with the program, in order to see who should go to the meeting after the meeting where *vrai* business gets done.

Then, the date and city for the next meeting is set by vote of hands, everybody does the I Have Become Phobetor ritual, says goodbye, and either goes home or tries to kill somebody in the parking lot.

Then again, when bad juju is going down, there’s no time to reserve a conference room at the YWCA. One throws up an invocation and dives in; if other Sleepers show up, great. You can get coffee after you blow up that agrimancer.

The biggest difference between a *faux*- and a *vrai*-Sleeper is that there’s a meeting after the meeting. If you’ve established your *vrai* bona fides, and the other vrais decide to extend you a modicum of trust, you get invited to that. All the checkers and ponies are kept in the dark, while the in-crowd share information about the *Committee and the Hotline*.

1: GM



See “*The Claws of the Tiger*” back on page 75.

2: OBJECTIVES



My Name is Dirk A. is over on page 78.

3: CHARACTERS



See “*Resources*” on page 80.

4: SESSIONS



5: GMCS



6: INHUMANITY



7: LOCATIONS



THE COMMITTEE

The Sleepers used to have a group of leaders called the Cabinet. Most of them got whacked in the *Whisper War*.

Of the surviving big-name old-timers, the ones who seem to have the best handle on what's going on are informally called the Committee. It's a sort of rotating thing — they are definitely not running things the way they used to. The Committee gets together roughly once a year, operating just like any other Sleeper meeting, except these folks come from all over and are among the most dangerous people who have ever lived.

Rumored members of the Committee include Antoinette Hamilton (a rich, blind, British thau-maturge, accompanied by some horrible thing that answers to "Lucifuge" and prefers to hide inside some kind of zombified dog); Antonio dos Prazeres (a Portuguese-Brazilian mind-magick adept who just sold his family's coffee company to a big multinational); Derek Jackson (an American clockworker also known as "Superconductor," cofounder of Mak Attax; whether he became a Sleeper before or after he died is a matter of debate); Violet McIntyre (a warbucks who betrayed TNI before the Whisper War); Ivan Stahl (a clockworker who's been mixed up with the Sect of the Naked Goddess); Sundiata K-Ta (a mysterious old mystic from French Guinea, or possibly French Guinea); and, of course, Dirk Allen (though there are an equal number of rumors saying it's not Dirk, but Grrl Friday who's on the Committee). And, honestly, Committee membership could change at any time. It's really a consensus, no one's got the whip hand, they need to convince the other big names to listen to them. (The most likely ultimate shot-callers are probably Antonio, Antoinette, Sundiata, or — operationally — Krystal; see below.)

RESOURCES

Normally, there aren't any, except what you can cadge out of other Sleepers. That being said, they're a group of more or less like-minded folks with particular talents, skills, knowledge, vehicles, contacts, and bank accounts. ("Yeah, I know a guy with a puddle-jumper in Barrow; I go up there for my grandma's birthday every October.")

Vrai-Sleepers can call the Hotline, if they want.

THE HOTLINE

In extremis, a vrai could call the Hotline and ask for help.

It's an 800 number, answered 24/7 by a someone named Krystal who speaks with a German accent, in a beautiful voice that tinkles like tiny bells: "Committee Hotline. Are you living the dream?" The correct countersign is, "Yes, but I'm having a nightmare." Krystal seems vaguely male, but also vaguely computerized, and dodges questions about his (?) gender identity. This leads to much speculation.

Krystal can do a couple things for vrais on the phone:

- Tell them where and when the next meeting is — local, regional, continental, or global.
- Look up something on the internet.
- Escalate their call to someone on the Committee.
- Have a long, interesting conversation about the existence and/or nature of the human soul.

If the message gets passed along to a Committeeperson, and if the Committeeperson decides to help the vrai out in this situation personally, *then* that vrai owes two big favors, one to the Sleepers, and one to the Committeeperson, payable upon demand. Hope the help is worth it, those people are terrifying as hell.

Sleepers who make it a habit to call the Hotline to update Krystal on meeting times/places or to chat about the soul invariably have a better chance of getting their call escalated.

See "The Whisper War" on page 77.

1: GM



2: OBJECTIVES



3: CHARACTERS



4: SESSIONS



5: GMCS



6: INHUMANITY



7: LOCATIONS



SLEEPERS' OBJECTIVES AND BELIEFS

In pursuit of their overarching aim of keeping the tiger tucked into beddy-bye, here are the Four Rules of the Sleepers:

- Keep Quiet.
- Live Long.
- You Did It.
- You Fix It.

"Keep Quiet" means don't make a magickal ruckus where the straights can see it, hear it, smell it, taste it, touch it, or *prove it*. Also, stop idiots from being mystically loud.

"Live Long" feeds directly from rule #1, but additionally carries the admonition to take care of one's physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and supernatural health. You can also care about the health of others, if you're all kindly like that. Heck, the pursuit of personal immortality is A-OK, as long as you do it *quietly*.

"You Did It" means that Sleepers take responsibility, or at least say they do, for their actions, especially supernatural ones. You live the life you make. Whether that's a white picket fence, 2.5 rugrats, and summers at the cabin or standing over the corpse of your father while weeping tears of blood and holding a smoking gun that whispers nightmares to you is your own damn fault.

"You Fix It" means a Sleeper cleans up the messes he's made or is in the process of making, and cleans up the messes left by magickal morons who think it'd be cool to sacrifice a school bus full of nuns to a demon on YouTube. Break the moron's legs, or post a competing video showing how SlashNunFest '12 was really a hoax; those are both low-impact repairs. Bullet in the brainpan before the music starts is high-impact. Reactive response to threats is fine; proactive is better.

Everything else, beliefs-wise, is mostly flash, and left up to the individual Sleeper's conscience. Does it matter that the Sleepers have a long and prestigious history policing the occult underground reaching back to ancient Atlantis? Nope. Should it be the Sleepers' primary mission to hunt down all those TNI dickheads who killed our buddies in the Whisper War? Go for it, leave me out of it, and stay on the down-low. Are we gonna stand before the Comte de Saint-Germain on Judgment Day, to be rewarded for staying quiet while the sinners are fed to the slaving jaws of the tiger incarnate? If it helps you sleep at night, believe whatever you want.

So, in theory, here's a sweet set of idealistic goals for your magickal sewing circle, right? But what happens when a Sleeper falls off the wagon? In practice, it's messed up, like everything else in the underground.

Here: you're a scary freak whose insanity allows you access to the cheat codes of the universe. Despite that, you screwed up so bad you can't rationalize it anymore, even through your craziness, and you need to fix it so you can sleep decent a couple hours a night. Add to that, you're newly civic-minded, have developed strong opinions on what's right and wrong, or at least quiet and noisy, and you feel the need to inflict those opinions — with your equally scary friends — on other scary people, *forcefully*. Plus, you're pursuing whatever self-centered plans you've got, which may conflict with your newfound philosophy.

It's like the Boy Scouts for psychopaths. Wear a cup.

Now, imagine you decide to turn your back on all *that*, and get a little *noisy*. Except your scary former friends feel betrayed after all your occult encounter group meetings. And the people you've been terrifying and/or murdering have scary friends of their own looking for you to deliver the perfect, ironic, poetic justice payback.

It probably won't end well for you.

THE FUTURE(S) OF THE SLEEPERS

Reeling from the destruction of their safe houses and the murder of the majority of their leadership during the Whisper War, the Sleepers decomposed into tradecraft cells and abandoned the org chart to survive.

Now, the modern cabal is growing from these seeds sown on such bloody, furrowed soil. Here's some of the current crops ripening in the field:

Refinishing The Cabinet: Some of the old-timer Sleepers don't like the egalitarian anarchy of the new cabal, so they want to go back to the "occult spies" gig in a big way, despite the severe losses from their last troubled season. Antoinette Hamilton may or may not be behind this effort.

Treasure Hunt: During the Whisper War, the four main Sleepers' headquarters were sacked and their occult arsenals scattered. They had a lot of cool shit, and lots of people want some of it. Also, sometimes the more dangerous stuff pops up, and Sleepers feel some responsibility for corralling it again so innocents don't get hurt. You did it; you fix it.

The Tiger Woke, and All I Got Was This Crappy T-Shirt:

As the years have passed, the world's gotten stranger. Everybody knows someone who crystal-gazes, handles snakes, watches ghost hunting TV shows, or reads about UFO abductions. There's a strong feeling in some of the modern Sleepers that if the dreams of the sleeping tiger could be slowly shifted, Overton window-style, such that weird magick stuff is just plain less weird to most people, they wouldn't go all murderzone on adepts. Of course, you've got to gently ease yourself into the shallow end of that cold pool. Playing around behind closed doors, doing tantric ritual sex with your significant other is one thing, but performing a mystic re-enactment of a divine ascension during a porno shoot is quite another. Baby steps, people.

1: GM

2: OBJECTIVES

3: CHARACTERS

4: SESSIONS

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7: LOCATIONS



THE NEW INQUISITION

Founded by billionaire Alex Abel, the New Inquisition was once a high-powered, wealthy, global organization, and major player in the occult underground. For over twenty years, Abel built an army of thieves, hard-luck cases, and adepts for a singular purpose: to monopolize the control of magick. Like anybody who's suffering from delusions of grandeur, Abel's schemes didn't stop there. Not only did he want to package up magick like any other commercial product and sell it to whom-ever could pay his price, he eventually wanted TNI to go legit and break off from its roots. First, however, his army had to be strong enough and savvy enough to muscle his competition and force his enemies to play by his rules.

Abel could've done it, too, because he had an edge over everybody else: he wasn't an adept or an avatar. His worldview was entirely focused on the earthly realm, and to bring magick to non-magick users it's really useful to be able to relate to the world as it is, not the world of cosmic desire. As long as nothing interfered with TNI's operations, Abel didn't care about otherspaces, becoming an adept, the occult underground or any of that. Unfortunately, Abel's lack of knowledge about the unearthly blindsided him, because while he had a narrow view, other members of his inner circle (those with level A clearance) did not.

Abel fell victim to a surprise coup, for the knife that got stuck in his back came from within — and no one seems to know why. Eponymous, Abel's former bodyguard and the one man Abel thought would never betray him, conspired with other members and turned many of the rank-and-file against him. Even Violet McIntyre, one of Abel's

favored oracles, changed her tune and convinced others to do the same. But when Abel finally had the opportunity to confront them both, they up and disappeared.

Despite several years of searching, Abel has not been able to discover what caused Eponymous to suddenly change his loyalties. The deeper he digs, the more rumors bubble up to the surface. Demonic possession. A blast from his bodyguard's mysterious and violent past. Eponymous was secretly an adept. He'd been working for Mak Attax all along. Eponymous got sucked into an otherspace, and spit back out different from before. FBI. CIA. And, even more wildly? There was no coup. Eponymous isn't his own man, he's a false identity Alex Abel created as a security protocol.

Now, Abel spends what's left of his fortune to maintain TNI and recruit new members from the criminal underground through bribes and promises of glory. Whatever taint existed in TNI before it started to fall apart has been completely and totally removed — or so Abel believes. The big difference between TNI 2.0 and its former self, though, is that Abel's modus operandi has changed. While Abel once considered magick a valuable commodity, he now believes it to be a weapon that must be controlled by his army of loyalists.

This altered view has led him to tighten security, bring even fewer people into his inner circle, and employ more manipulative tactics to recruit new members and keep existing personnel in line.

*Since I
was a
child
I always
knew how
I wanted
to die.*

1: GM



2: OBJECTIVES



3: CHARACTERS



4: SESSIONS



5: GMCS



6: INHUMANITY



7: LOCATIONS



Abel may have been one man with a lofty goal, but now he's a man who's fueled by a mission: if TNI can't control magick, then *no one* will.

HISTORY

Alex Abel's first brush with the fringes of the supernatural occurred in 1990. After he almost unconsciously ascended into the Invisible Clergy, he explored the possibility that what he experienced couldn't be explained by any scientific or religious means. Not only did he verify he wasn't suffering from hallucinations, he began to see other things, notice other people, and pick up on words like "Plutomancy" and "Sleepers" and "occult underground."

After Abel's defining experience, he formed TNI in 1991 from a loosely connected network of hired goons and less fortunate members of society. Though he was careful to never totally allow magick manipulators to outnumber non-adepts, Abel turned the occult underground upside-down to recruit for his cause. Almost twenty-five years since its inception, TNI consisted of nearly a thousand members, about a fourth of whom were magick manipulators. Thinking he had a handle on the American landscape, TNI was getting ready to start a new operation overseas in Jerusalem — but that office was never founded.

In 2007, all hell broke loose. One fateful night, Abel was drugged in his sleep by Eponymous, his own bodyguard — a man whose true identity was totally erased — and was left in a pseudo-dream state for the next several hours. While Abel was out cold, Eponymous and his allies cleaned out TNI, stealing artifacts, burning bridges in Abel's name, copying and deleting data, then disappearing. After that, in 2008, Abel lost almost a third of his assets due to the global financial crisis. Combined, these two events forced Abel to rethink and rebuild TNI.

Now, Abel operates TNI like a cult. Getting into TNI is the easy part. The challenge happens inside.

OPERATIONS

In the past, Abel recruited TNI members by giving them what they wanted, by making adepts and criminals indebted to him. Though this is still true, Abel now uses rhetoric and TNI's well-honed ability to find desperate candidates who have no other option *but* to join. In exchange for a new identity and some cash, these new members look to Abel as their father instead of their leader, and regard other members as the family they've never had. Now, adepts join TNI because they have a reason to: they have *faith* in Abel.

Though Abel uses fancy words and personalized marketing efforts to reach potential recruits and keep his flock in line, TNI 2.0 is structured slightly differently than it was before. Duties have been reassigned and streamlined to replace a secretive corporation with a cult of personality. There are still four levels of clearance, A through D, and members on each tier are paid and offered information according to what rank they have. Plus, Abel has learned to instill a sense of pride in his soldiers by using ceremony and a flair for the dramatic. When members go up a rank, instead of a pay raise and a pat on the back, Abel throws each one a party he personally attends. Instead of treating magickal manipulators differently, however, they're all regarded the same and each has to prove their worth *without* using magick.

TNI's recruits clamor to earn a higher clearance level and be brought into the fold. If they don't, they're shunned and shamed by their colleagues. Considering that membership means breaking ties with everyone else in your life, that's a harsh punishment. Insufficient zeal has a way of drawing attention, too, and if they find you have a reason to live that's not TNI, the consequences tend to be harsh. Maybe they remove that temptation. Or maybe they leave it be and leave you in a building foundation in Denver.

Rumor has it there are more fail safes in TNI than there are at the White House. But, despite the tight security, TNI's members have bought the new image and believe, like Abel, they're justified. Abel may have been fooled once, but he's convinced that a coup and an uprising can never, ever happen again.

D CLEARANCE

All members of TNI start out with D Clearance, the lowest level. Unlike before, D Clearance recruits aren't necessarily paid and need to go through a rigorous series of tests before being brought fully on board. Sometimes, recruits are given a specific job to test their mettle before being offered a salary. What's more, smart recruits realize they're the most expendable and the least informed, which means joiners are fleeing something worse, or are highly motivated to get promoted. Abel has given them the one thing no one else could: a new identity. When they do get a salary, they make less than \$40,000 a year whether they're an adept or not.

D Clearance recruits are fresh in off the street. The only thing they have in common is that they all have a past they'd kill to forget.

C CLEARANCE

People tend to get C clearance after a year or two or when they've had the chance to prove themselves. They are, for lack of a better description, middle management. They hold meetings, give pep talks, report to B Clearance, and operate like any other business, if other businesses occasionally had to conduct exorcisms or kill people who can recruit city rats as their private army. C-level gives more autonomy for people who can stomach being in charge. Though it may seem that the higher-ups don't question their authority, they aren't trusted. Not entirely. Instead, they're paid a moderate salary and think they've made it even though that isn't entirely the case.

C Clearance members get paid bonuses whenever they find out information that might threaten the health and sanctity of TNI. Of course, the easiest way to get that data is to look suspiciously at other C- and D-ranked members first. Most C Clearance members know they're being spied on, but since they're all in the business together, they've all convinced themselves they have nothing to hide. If they are hiding something, they're usually eager to throw suspicion on someone else.

B CLEARANCE

A Clearance members hand-pick potential candidates for B Clearance to oversee C- and D-ranked members in a specific territory defined by a series of locations. While B Clearance recruits used to be middle managers, they are now entrusted with policing the rest of the organization by taking to the field. B operatives pull down \$250,000 a year,

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plus expenses, and are further rewarded by being able to hire a small staff for whom they are, in turn, completely and totally responsible.

Folks with B Clearance do not dare cross TNI in any fashion, for members on this level are forced to watch what happens when someone does, be that a former client, a suspected witness, a misguided adept or treacherous recruit. Their training is *thorough*. They get taken off to isolated areas where they're put through grueling physical exercise, followed by mind-shredding mystic initiations, followed by a lengthy graduation party full of luxury, booze, and love-bombing. The word brainwashed gets thrown around a lot these days, but in this case it fits. Except for pathologically stubborn or clever individuals, B-tier agents believe they are forces of righteousness, acting on Abel's behalf where he cannot go.

Some B Clearance members do have a certain amount of autonomy when tasked with a specific objective like: buying and selling artifacts, identifying non-members who are adepts and avatars, tracking paranormal activity, etc. There's no rhyme or reason to these orders, or at least no one in B Clearance has figured it out, for the commands are carried out in secrecy. All B Clearance members are given the option of erasing their old identity in favor of a new one, too. Just like Eponymous once did. They may also request to wipe out someone else's identity in exchange for a smaller salary.

There's speculation at the lower tiers about just how Abel accomplishes TNI's legendary fresh starts. Some believe TNI can simply move you to a new universe where previously, you didn't exist. Others point out how much of the software infrastructure of the major credit reportage firms was programmed by a onetime Abel subsidiary. The truth is probably a blend of mystic manipulation and old-fashioned bribery and corruption.

A CLEARANCE

No one knows who's made it to A Clearance or what they do in the inner circle. Right now, most TNI members believe that only two people are cleared for this level: Cage and Alex Abel. What members do understand, however, that when decisions come from this level, those orders are given top priority.

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LEVELS AND LOYALTY

Dr. Kaiyo Atsui is a holdover from the old version of TNI, and the few new members unfortunate enough to have met her suspect she may be at A Clearance herself — if she's not the sinister mastermind using Alex Abel as her figure-head puppet.

Dr. Atsui is a psychiatrist who specialized in the causes and effects of violent behavior, but over her years with TNI her interests drifted into radically rapid therapeutic modalities concerned less with patient rehabilitation than with behavior control. In other words, she didn't care if people *felt better*, she cared about getting them back to work as fast as possible.

With Eponymous' betrayal and the fresh TNI focus on loyalty, her work has shifted again. She now applies cognitive therapy, cutting-edge brain research and advanced marketing theories in pursuit of perfect loyalty. She paid a lot of attention to "cults" and "brainwashing" in particular.

Anyone who is seen as insufficiently devoted to TNI is likely to be remanded to Kaiyo for an attitude adjustment. In the whispered conversations of the C and D level Inquisitors, this is called "getting sent to summer camp." Don't be fooled though. It can happen any time of year.

The first time a character is sent to Dr. Atsui, the treatment lasts about four days and the patient remembers nothing. He got in a car, was given something to drink that kind of tasted metallic and then... woke up back home in a freshly laundered bathrobe.

If someone is valuable enough to get sent to summer camp again, instead of just being fed to the fish in the Florida Keys, the second treatment lasts two whole weeks, and when he comes back the hair's growing in over some fresh sutures at the temples. He still remembers nothing, and seems a little... distracted. It's also a little creepy how his eyes light up when he hears Abel's name.

Someone who's been through the first process comes home with two more failed notches in Self and two more hardened notches in Isolation and Violence. From that point forward, attempting to deliberately betray Alex Abel, or TNI as an institution, causes a Helplessness (5) check.

Undergoing the second procedure permanently reduces all the subject's relationships by 15%, unless they're to Alex Abel or TNI. It also adds two more failed notches in Helplessness and two more hardened notches in Violence. Betraying Alex Abel or TNI now presents a Helplessness (7) check. If those summer camp failed marks drive the character to five failed notches in Helplessness, the permanent insanity is a carefully cultivated phobia of Dr. Kaiyo Atsui's displeasure. On the plus side, the character gets the identity Psych-Salad Survivor at 15%.

Should a PC be sent to one of these re-education sessions, the GM should feel free to make this a separate adventure in which maintaining one's secrets and integrity is the reward for clever play.

ALEX ABEL, MASTERMIND

Notches	Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
Hardened	2	5	2	1	1
Failed	1	2	2	0	0

PSYCH-SALAD SURVIVOR: THE IDENTITY

The character has undergone radical head-checks — a full-court press of psychology, psycho-chemistry, and no-shit brain surgery. While curiously vulnerable to Abel's displeasure afterwards, it does make the survivors curiously capable in other areas.

I'm a Psych-Salad Survivor, of course I can register as mostly normal on the commonest psychological tests, resist sedatives, sit and stare at the wall without moving for hours on end.

- Substitutes for: Lie.
- Feature: Resists challenges to Violence.
- Feature: Evaluates Self.

RESOURCES

TNI no longer retains any permanent bases other than Alex Abel's personal refuge. Instead, the organization relies on its members to find and acquire new communal safe houses and shared resources as part of its extensive rehabilitation program for thieves, murderers, blackmail victims, suicide survivors, and anyone else with a burning reason to get a new identity and life.

To find information, new recruits, artifacts, and munitions, TNI heavily relies on non-magickal methods. For whatever reason, Abel has made it very clear: adepts and avatars are not to use their magick to advance TNI's agenda without his express permission. In practice, however, this is treated more as a recommendation or best practice, not the inflexible law Abel envisions.

THE NEW INQUISITION MEMBERS

ALEX ABEL, MASTERMIND (LEVEL A CLEARANCE)

Alex Abel has ditched his suits in favor of nondescript clothes that allow him to blend in with other people on the street. He's a middle-aged bachelor who used to flaunt his wealth, but has since abandoned the life of a high-profile CEO to become an eccentric recluse. Abel may have started his fortune by investing significantly in military hardware, biotechnology, electronics, and women's fashion, but now he has diversified his holdings even further to begin recouping his heavy losses from the 2008 economic collapse. While his portfolio hasn't fully recovered, Abel has expanded his interests to include buying and selling Victorian-era photos of the dead, collecting vintage cassette tapes from the 1980s, funding archeological digs in Sedona, Arizona, hunting down precious locket, and other odd ventures.

To a business community unaware of his private cult of deadly weirdos, Abel is a tragic figure. Pre-Obama,

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he was the face of black American aspiration, but now his once-abundant portfolio is no longer self-sustaining. Sometimes, Abel relies on his followers to foot the bills using their criminal skills. But he does not care for that kind of exposure. He'd rather eat ramen noodles for a week than risk getting arrested for anything serious.

Personality: Scorpio. Underneath his charm and polish, Alex is driven with an intensity most average people cannot even imagine.

Obsession: Power. Alex believes he can make the world a better place, if he can just get enough of the right kind of leverage.

Wound Threshold: 50

Age Stimulus: Frustration. The one thing that hasn't gone Alex Abel's way is the betrayal he never saw coming. For every piece of the puzzle he discovers, another one falls apart.

Fear Stimulus: Death. The dossiers Abel has read about demons and the afterlife don't paint a very attractive picture. Worse... Abel is starting to wonder if there's some truth to the stories that demons are just angry ghosts.

Noble Stimulus: Reform the world. Abel really wants, even needs, to feel that he is improving the lot of humanity. Now he feels justified to do just that.

Billionaire 75%*: Allows Big Purchases, Substitutes for Knowledge, Substitutes for Status (* obsession identity).

Paranoid 40%: Provides Firearm Attacks, Substitutes for Dodge, Substitutes for Notice.

Personal Magnetism 65%: Coerces Isolation, Protects Isolation, Substitutes for Connect.

Possessions: Gone are the fabulous cars, penthouse apartments, and art treasures. Alex Abel has ditched a life of decadence to better relate to his members. In addition to his safe house and discreetly bulletproof car, he owns a few items that are one-of-a-kind:

- **Shield Against Assassins:** This is a major artifact that many would give much to possess. It's in the shape of a bulky diadem. Abel carries it in his briefcase. Anyone who physically attacks him takes a -10% shift to their attack roll as long as someone such as Cage or another bodyguard is actively trying to protect Abel.
- **Ampoule of George Washington's Blood:** The first President of the United States was renowned for his fair and honest dealings, but had his fair share of eccentric beliefs. In his mind, the human body was governed by humors, and all health concerns could be cured by bloodletting. Over the course of his own lifetime, Washington's doctors extracted several liters of his blood which were saved, collected, and sold in ampoules. The glass vial Abel owns is worn around his neck like a pendant. Anyone who successfully rolls while lying to Abel feels compelled to expand on his falsehoods. If he resists this compulsion, the first Lie roll fails. If he proceeds with the attempt to convince,

he has to roll again. If it succeeds, fine. If it fails, however, the falsity is obvious to everyone present.

CAGE, CHIEF OF SECURITY (LEVEL A CLEARANCE)

Cage is the rock of TNI and the glue that keeps Alex Abel from seeing demons and enemies everywhere. Quiet and stolid, the chief of security values strength over any other attribute. He spends long hours honing his skills to perfection, because in a way he feels responsible for what happened to Abel. He never admits it publicly, but he knew something was going to go down all those years ago. Now that he has the means, he's doing some digging... and what he's finding out is scaring him shitless.

Personality: Cage intentionally presents himself as the arms-folded-across-his-chest quintessential "tough guy." He's been careful about his appearance, because his power comes from being the one person nobody dares to mess with at TNI. He rarely speaks unless he's got something to say, tends to avoid small talk, and he's an *excellent* listener.

Obsession: Toughness. It would shock his associates to learn that Cage got bullied a lot as a kid, until his stepfather taught him to stand up for himself.

Wound Threshold: 70.

Age Stimulus: People who belittle him or somehow threaten his macho status. He'd rather have people's fear than understanding. Frankly, he doesn't like it when people understand him.

Fear Stimulus: He's terrified of being emotionally weak, especially when there are others around to see his failure.

Noble Stimulus: People who are weak, but who are trying to become strong. He has no patience for whiners, but stoicism is something he can really get behind.

Tough-Ass Bastard 70%: Provides Initiative, Provides Wound Threshold, Substitutes for Dodge.

Prince of Thugs 50%*: Provides Firearm Attacks, Substitutes for Pursuit, Substitutes for Struggle (* obsession identity).

Possessions: Cage has long since ditched his ostentatious gun, hot rod, and sloppy clothes. Per Abel's wishes, Cage now dresses all in black, wearing one of many purple ties (always purple) with his hair slicked back. The only artifact in Cage's possession is the one that Abel gave to him for safekeeping:

- **Amulet of Retribution.** This is a major artifact that Abel used to wear in a gold case around his neck. Abel believes the amulet is cursed, but has given it to Cage, just in case it's not. Anyone who successfully attacks Cage, either physically or with magick, is immediately targeted by a significant magick blast that attacks the liver and kidneys. This amulet only works once per attacker, but any roll made from its attack succeeds, and can be flip-flopped. For instance, a 17 could be flipped into a 71 and still be successful. The amulet does not stop the original attack; it simply fights back.

CAGE, CHIEF OF SECURITY

Notches	Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
Hardened	5	4	1	1	0
Failed	1	3	2	2	0

1: GM

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MAK ATTAX

Somebody had to be the best. Not the most effective or the most knowledgeable or the biggest though, yeah, they're still the biggest: someone had to be the *best*. Someone had to be about making positive change. Someone had to believe in what they were doing, not just for themselves, but for everyone. Someone had to be *good*.

For a brief period at the millennium's turn, that someone was a gang of starry-eyed occult misfits and their hangers-on. They wanted a better world, more kind or just or equitable, and they were willing to serve. Specifically, they were willing to serve you fries at the drive-thru.

As is depressingly traditional for optimists who are impatient to improve the world, they got taken down and parted out by forces that were more cynical, more selfish, and more invested in preventing a magickal renaissance than they were in permitting it on any terms but their own.

Before they got dragged off into the shadows, though, that cabal of young punks with aerosolized beef tallow in their pores managed at least one no-shit miracle.

Their name is Mak Attax. You know what else happens to miracle workers who get killed? Sometimes, they rise again.

HISTORY

For most of the history of functional occult working, there has been a heavy emphasis on secrecy, for the very simple reason that people freak out when they see magick, and some people freak out with torches and witch-hunt paranoia. By an evolutionary process that would leave Darwin nodding, the adepts who lived to share their knowledge were those who didn't really like sharing their knowledge.

But, while ideas that don't reproduce die peacefully in bed instead of on the end of a ducking stool, they still die out. So the tension between keeping it quiet and keeping it alive selected for adepts and magick that *did* stay relevant and get taught... just not to everyone.

One beneficiary of this quiet apprenticeship was a kindly young man named Derek Jackson. He learned how to build impossible machines out of cogs and gears and beloved memories. He eventually met an avatar named Janet, who was pretty and well-off and wanted to do something magnificent with her preternatural ability to make people listen to her. The third leg of the initial Mak Attax triangle was an older adept, Margaret, who knew how to pass charges from one person to another, and who had mastered the flow of arcane energies through the landscape of ley lines and feng shui forms.

Margaret realized that the US interstates were a perfect pattern for applying magick to culture, and that the fast-food franchises dotted along them were ideal junctures to control the

flow of that magick. Janet recruited people. Derek, an early adopter of online communications, strung everyone together on an email list, which he administrated under the pseudonym "Superconductor."

The people on the list — the members of Mak Attax — got jobs slinging burgers, and passed along mystic charges to members of the public at random. Sometimes the effects of this were good, and sometimes they were bad, and almost every time they were weird. Their over-arching plan was to usher in a new age where magick was open, accepted, and available to the masses. It would be an end to the crushing repression of the billions who had no idea what was happening, and an end to the manipulations of the very-fewer-than-1% who used magick unseen to enrich or empower themselves at others' expense.

It was a very utopian vision, which was part of its charm. But Janet had her bones turned into spiders and Margaret fled, leaving Superconductor Derek to guide the organization on his own.

He didn't stay isolated for long. A woman named Erica Fisher, an executive within that gargantuan burger chain, had her own mystic awakening thanks to Mak Attax and found an avenue towards Statosphere-driven authority as an avatar. She organized the second phase of Mak Attax' existence, refining and clarifying lines of communication even as Derek made them more secure. She brought much-needed maturity, vision and money to the group, and if she was using it to pursue her own ambitions of ascension into the Statosphere, well... who'd be so foolish as to say the friendship of an immortal archetype wouldn't be good for the group?

Between the two of them, the clockworker and the True Executive, Mak Attax managed to perform a ceremony in each of the world's twenty-four time zones at dawn, on the first day of the year 2000. This spell, the Ritual of Light, was meant to bless and protect the world, the year, and all of mankind — and it worked.

2001, on the other hand, kicked off a real global shit-show.

COMPETITORS AND FRANCHISES

A team of paranoid dickholes called the True Order of Saint-Germain tried to roll up Mak Attax in the early days of post 9/11 panic, as they believed the cabal to be the psy-ops wing of a world-wide tyrannical conspiracy. Their attempt on Derek Jackson's life is regarded as the first shot in what was called the Whisper War, a gratuitous slaughter of all-on-all between occult undergrounds, with a good bit of crossover between law enforcement, intelligence, counter-terror, terror, and military organizations.

The irony was that Derek survived because his cover had been blown by the *Sleepers*, and the

1: GM



You are not the boss of me.

2: OBJECTIVES



I am not the boss of me.

3: CHARACTERS



The boss of me is a thing that does not yet exist but when it does it will first manifest in Omaha.

4: SESSIONS



5: GMCS



6: INHUMANITY



7: LOCATIONS



See "Sleepers" on page 74 and "The New Inquisition" on page 82.



woman put in place to assassinate him if he ever radicalized decided he was just too sweet to let die. But he was off the list for some time, running, and that was when the *New Inquisition* decided to strike. TNI was at the height of its power and arrogance, and it had heavily compromised the mailing list at the core of Mak Attax. As had the Sleepers. As had just about every other cabal that had an interest in postmodern magick. You can't really reconcile "inclusive democracy of mind and spirit" with "remaining safely hidden" very well. TNI's highly paid hackers infiltrated and impersonated assorted posters on the Mak Attax list, sowing confusion and discord until someone — either Superconductor himself or someone who'd hacked his account — shut down the entire list.

As for Derek? No one's quite sure. There's a persistent rumor, and it's backed up by assorted clairvoyants, demon-summoners, and interpreters of dreams. It says that when Derek was at his most desperate, while he and his bleeding Sleeper companion were fleeing down a dusty highway at midnight, they encountered a bus full of *Affinites* going to interview a boom mic operator who might remember something about the Naked Goddess' role in the film *Ass-Smackin' Rabbi 2*.

If true, the followers of the Goddess either helped them get out of the country, or they killed him. Whoever is claiming to be Derek at Sleeper meetings obviously supports the first version of the tale.

OPERATIONS

When the mailing list closed down, the central conduit for the Mak Attax identity was dead. The ideas at its core, however, remained very much alive.

Erica Fisher used the collapse of the list as proof of her argument that Mak Attax would only get so far if everyone had to listen to every tedious drip with high-speed internet and an Aleister Crowley screen saver. She had her trusted minions and has linked them to her, tightly, with her avatar powers of leadership. Instead of a broad, foggy, government-by-emergent-consensus cabal, she wants to hone her people into a focused and responsive implement of her will.

She has also left behind the original clown-themed restaurant and taken on a high-level job at one of its rivals, a fast-food operation with a more royal brand identity. She didn't want to, but between the millions of paper crowns they hand out every year and the dangers of being identified as an occultist working under the golden arches, she felt it was the least-bad choice. She's got adepts dropping charges into frozen burger patties at the source and has the national distribution pattern largely under control. She communicates her plans over the internet only when it's the sole possible option.

That's something of a concern to the stubborn remnant, perhaps a third of the original Mak Attax movement, who cling to what they now call the "Scottish Rite." They've got a new anonymous website where they post and brag about nothing much, and they continue to drop special orders onto the public at random. They are, if anything,

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3: CHARACTERS



4: SESSIONS



5: GMCS



6: INHUMANITY



7: LOCATIONS



See "The Sect of the Naked Goddess" on page 69.

even *less* organized and secure than the original incarnation of Mak Attax, but by definition they're either people who survived earlier purges, or who joined after the fighting had all died down. They're wild cards, but most of them grudgingly tolerate Erica's activities which are, after all, a very close parallel to their own.

The same can't be said for smaller splinter groups that went on to apply Mak Attax' lessons in corporate occult guerrilla infiltration and culture busting to the world's biggest fried chicken franchise, and the ones who went to work on America's omnipresent coffee-and-Wi-Fi corporation. The first group (motto: "We're Just Workin' for the Colonel") believes that the proper place to apply mystic leverage is to upholders of social order, particularly those in uniform. They dose a lot of cops and soldiers in hopes of reinforcing the power structure magickally, in order to defend America and make it the world's pre-eminent mystical powerhouse. The baristas, on the other hand (motto: "Embrace The Mermaid") aren't trying to help anyone but themselves with their charge-dropping. That movement drew the people who wanted to be on *top* of a New Weird Order, and in addition to random dosing, they tend to monitor their high-end clients in order to gain influence and curry favor with lawyers, executives and anyone in high tech. They're heavily invested in the west coast.

But regardless of their franchise orientation — Clown, King, Colonel, or Mermaid — and their long-term goal — tinker blindly until utopia happens; push Erica Fisher into the Statosphere; reinforce cops and soldiers with charges and maybe the odd spot of vigilantism; enthrall and co-opt power structures for self-aggrandizement — they all do some variation on the same thing. They gather charges, redistribute them via ritual, and pass them on as special orders, to chosen targets or random ones.

RESOURCES

Unlike a group that focuses on one or two avenues of power, like the Affinites, Mak Attax' big-tent approach gives them a *lot* of variety. Their membership, while shrunken, still encompasses people who derive mystic charges from alcohol, risk-taking, betrayal, rabbits, traditional voodoo, cars, Bill O'Reilly, and baking. Given enough time and a loud enough signal, a Mak can probably find someone in one of the organization's camps who can deal with any given problem, or at least someone who *cares* about it.

The branches of Mak Attax may distrust one another a bit, but they stick together against outside threats. It's nothing as tight as family feeling, but the lessons of the Whisper War were learned by survivors, pretty much by definition. As with all enchanters in history, they learned what worked, and watching out for TNI, the Sleepers, and any other pack of chargers with thirsty fists is essential. You don't have to love the guy who's watching your back. You don't even have to trust him a lot. You just have to trust him more than your *real* enemies.

Moreover, that whole idea of pouring charges into randos all along the interstates? That *worked*. It hasn't produced an Age of Aquarius yet, but now and again, Maks in trouble find themselves ducking into franchise restaurants and receiving help. Sometimes they wind up in an entirely different location, though usually one with the same layout and decoration. Sometimes they find a friendly face. On two

PASSING ON CHARGES

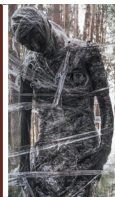
The very core of the Mak Attax exercise is transferring magick from those who can generate it — almost always some kind of adept — to people who can't use it and have no idea it even works. The rite that makes this all possible is called the Ritual of Lesser Correspondence and the short version is, it lets an adept with two minor charges spend one to pass on the other. It doesn't work with greater parcels of occult energy — vis or mana or mojo, whatever you want to call it.

When someone who isn't an adept gets a charge, it gives that person a much greater chance of succeeding at a minor ritual, if the person has the knowledge and inclination to do such a thing. For most people who get a special order (that is, a charge of magick along with their bacon cheeseburger) it usually expresses itself after a day or two in the form of inexplicable weirdness. Literally any effect that a minor spell could create could come out, more or less at random, from an ordinary person expelling a minor charge. Even some significant effects have been observed happening. Sometimes the effects help people. Sometimes they hideously harm them. Sometimes they just leach off into unnatural phenomena.

No one knows how it works or why, and no one can predict the effect. Seriously: not even people who can usually predict the future can foretell this stuff. But the Attaxers keep dropping charges on the unsuspecting, operating in blind faith that if you put enough energy into a system, it becomes organized. Hey, that's what the laws of physics and entropy say, right?

Many among them — more than anyone but the cynics might admit — enjoy watching the effects out of a sense of curiosity and, it must be said, schadenfreude.

1: GM



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separate occasions, they've been shocked to realize that for them, there really is a cop around when you need one. And at least one Mak from Nebraska insists that a twenty-foot tall corporate mascot came to life, stepped down off its billboard, and tore something unwholesome and carrion and animate and *big* into small, inanimate carrion shreds.

ISSUES

Trusting one another when the alternative is getting obviously murdered is not really the kind of bond you want to rely on long term or often. The infighting is not yet murderous, but *man*, some of those emails are awfully snotty. If a soldier of the Colonel sees a way to mess with one of those snobby Mermaid huggers, he's as likely to do it as not. Campaigns of harassment, vandalism, and magickal pranks that aren't really funny at all are depressingly common. Each branch thinks it's the true way and, as with most movements, they reserve their bitterest venom for those who *almost* agree.

Also, while they're not as collectively vulnerable to infiltration as they used to be, that's a bit like saying that a child who has learned to crawl is no longer just lying there. It is not hard to get into Mak Attax. Erica Fisher does background checks, but suspicion is anathema to the Scottish Rite Attaxers, while the other two factions don't have the resources. They try to be picky about who they admit, but that only goes so far. The Scottish Rite still has something of an open door policy... if you can find them.

Finally, with a few scary exceptions, Mak Attax is a lot of checkers and not so many chargers. In theory, plenty of ponies to throw under the busses of outrageous fortune, but Mak Attax fellow-feeling makes that less common than in, say, TNI. More simply put, they have many idealist newbies who haven't been tempered in the fires of deprivation, madness, and obsession. The hard characters who *are* involved are often the least loyal. So where the other gangs are like the USMC, Mak Attax is more like the BSA.

THE FUTURE(S) OF MAK ATTAX

Unless someone steps into a leadership role and gives the Scottish Rite branch some more direction, it's toast. The factions that broke it in the first place have been recovering from their own hassles at the hands of the FBI or India's Research and Analysis Wing, or the Invisible Clergy. But unless Mak Attax' hardliners get hardline about something other than cleaving to the organizational principles that put them at risk, TNI or the Sleepers or the Vatican's secret magick cops are going to finish them off.

But whether the old guard gets purged or not, Erica Fisher's lean and Kingly branch could go far. If she gathers enough information about the outcomes of the charge-dumping that various incarnations of Mak Attax have been doing since 1995, she could tack a steering wheel onto two decades of nationwide mystic momentum. What would that look like? Nothing too obvious. She'd just become nationally prominent as a hugely successful female CEO, the world's most profitable burger joint would suddenly discover what second place feels like, and, within a month of being anointed godwalker, she'd disappear from public view. Everyone would forget about her, especially since the titular heads of every royal family — the kings of Saudi Arabia, Nepal, Lesotho, and Sweden, the Queen of England — would die within a month of her ascension as the True Executive. Is the replacement of kings with business leaders positive or negative? I guess that depends on which group you think currently exercises too much power.

Before she does that, though, Erica is going to have to deal with a group of immortals who have been operating behind the scenes for centuries. They're politically inert and passionless but if they decide they like the cut of her jib, they're a terrifying combination of connected and ruthless and invisible. On the other hand, if they dislike her, the effort of destroying her just might drag them out of the shadows. Not many people would give credence to the notion that a cabal of undying pencil-pushers has been pulling their strings, but the few who would are some very hard chargers indeed.

Erica is destined to meet the immortals next week. It's going to occur entirely by happenstance.

If the immortals and the True Executive don't meld, another option for a terrifying change to the status quo comes from the baristas embedded in the Mermaid's flank. One of their members is on the cusp of decoding a ritual that inclines people to take a certain course of action. Mechanically, they either do it or they take a Self (3) check. The tricky bit about using it historically was that had to be delivered through a hot, bitter beverage that the *target requests* — not one that's offered by the ritualist. But, oh happy day, people walk through the doors of coffee shops and ask for hot bitter beverages *all the time*. The Mermaid Attax crew in Washington, DC already knows which takeout orders are going to the Supreme Court and the Senate. Mastering this rite could make them the unseen power brokers behind American government.

Or it could just convince a lot of power brokers to install coffee machines in their own offices.

1: GM



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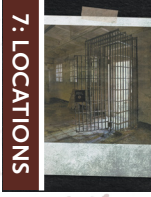
5: GMCS



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THE MILK

Ever wonder about all those kids on the back of milk cartons in the 1980s? This is what happened to some of them.

Back in 1968, during the Tet Offensive, Lucien “Loosh” McVander was captured by the Viet Cong and wound up in a prison camp. He spent seven years there, a torturous experience lightened only by the mysterious arrival of another captive.

The other prisoner literally appeared out of nowhere. One moment Loosh’s cell was empty but for him, then this guy was sitting across from him. The guy seemed as surprised to be there as Loosh was to have him.

He said he hadn’t been on Earth since 1839.

Said he’d found a higher reality and joined it. Sadly, the other folks in the higher reality booted him out. At first, the man thought it was a Chinese prison camp, and he started going on about the Thirteen Hongs and the East India Company.

Loosh told him the year.

That didn’t seem to phase the strange man, who shook Loosh’s hand and told him his name was Jester Blue. Blue had been a soldier once, but also what he called the godwalker of the Suffering Man. Loosh didn’t know what the hell that meant, but he found out.

The Vietnam War ended, as most wars have so far. Loosh and Blue were repatriated to the States. They had nothing to go home to, but Blue had a plan. He told Loosh all about this higher reality ruled by what he called the Invisible Clergy. This Invisible Clergy was going to destroy and remake the world. If Loosh agreed to help Blue, there’d be a place for him in the next edition of Earth. Blue’s plan was to stack this “Clergy” with kids trained to replace them. Basically, he believed that with what he remembered of his time as an immortal, he could gerrymander the fate of the cosmos.

The pair started innocently enough, going to schools and finding kids that might fit certain archetypes. Blue and McVander pioneered some “gifted programs” in local districts, but the results were not what they hoped for. The next thing they tried was adopting orphans, but in the early 1980s two unmarried men didn’t have a lot of success getting approval. Eventually, they resorted to kidnapping.

They’d abduct these kids and raise them according to the archetypes. That was the plan anyway. Loosh wasn’t happy about it, but by that point he’d seen Blue do enough weird stuff (reality bruising came easily to someone who’d seen the sephirot of Malkuth from the outside) that he fully believed there was a separate cosmos, and that it was only a matter of time before the world’s owners hung up a “Condemned” notice and started swinging the wrecking ball.

One cannot, of course, abduct a bunch of symbolically significant kids without creating some kind of stir, and though the ascended

Archetypes have a hard time tracking individual people, the ripples Blue was stirring up were pretty clear. That silly mortal was trying to stack the Clergy!

The Invisible Clergy seems to work most easily through irony, and in this case they didn’t even have to work very hard. The greatest threats to sitting archetypes, after all, are avatars and godwalkers — which are also the greatest resources for sitting archetypes. The Clergy let Blue build his shitty, redneck “Hogwarts for avatars.” They even helped him, since he was swelling the ranks of their servants. All they had to do was make sure none of his runts ever became godwalker.

The Clergy let Blue run his organization until Loosh had fully convinced himself there was no other hope. When Loosh was psychologically ready to take over, Blue got sent to suffer one last time. One seer claims he was sent back to be the third man crucified next to Christ himself, but she’s been caught lying before. Maybe Blue just drank some bleach by mistake.

Now, Loosh is in his late 60s and about as sane as you could expect someone who abducts kids to form a new universe to be. Day-to-day operations have fallen to the now grown-up children who were dedicated to different archetypes some time ago. None of them have ascended, but the brainwashing Loosh and Blue did on them has them all convinced they can. The Invisible Clergy uses them as they see fit.

The program does churn out avatars after all. Lots of them. The trouble is, each of these avatars is limited by what the Milk’s curriculum gives them. They’re never going to ascend, because their whole ethos involves valuing Loosh more than manifesting as an archetype.

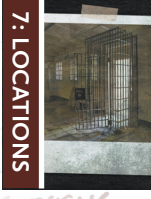
One of the kids has figured some of this out — Ulrike Frink. She’s currently running things in Loosh’s name, but she’s got her own agenda. She wants to figure out the real workings of the occult underground, and exploit them to her own ends. For now, the Invisible Clergy is willing to give her enough rope to hang herself.

RESOURCES

The Milk has avatars. They have kids raised to embody certain aspects of the collective unconscious, but they’re also loyal to the Milk. They think they’re going to remake the world, and Ulrike doesn’t mind using that to her advantage. Since they do have avatars at their disposal, they possess a certain puissance. They know some of the workings of the occult underground, but are grossly misinformed about its major players. They’re like a loaded gun wielded by a nearsighted toddler. You need to watch out, but they aren’t likely to kill whatever they’re aiming at.

They have some understanding of the Statosphere, but it’s warped in ways that

*The
cries of
unknown
perishing
armies
beat about
my ears.*





individual GMs should tailor to their own games. They think they understand it as well as anyone — maybe they're right — but they're still trying to assemble a million-piece puzzle using a box with the wrong picture on it.

OPERATIONS

The Milk is foremost concerned with producing avatars. They inculcate kids into behaviors that create the desired result. Recently, Ulrike has been having the new recruits trained with loyalty to her word, rather than the ethos of taking over the next universe. Ulrike's money is on this iteration. She's no longer sure she even believes there's a next one. She's also stopped the abductions. Besides the occasional purchase through human-trafficking circles, she uses kids already in the Milk to infiltrate schools and recruit runaways. It actually works much better than Loosh and Blue's method.

The Milk has bumped up against other occult organizations, but did so during the spate of violence called the Whisper War. As a consequence, they have a greatly inflated view of how dangerous and sectarian the occult underground really is.

Jester remembered the Guide, the Star, and the True King. He believed, incorrectly, that the Masterless Man was actually supposed to be an Outlaw. There was once a Psychopathic Killer archetype which existed briefly in the 1960s and 1970s before it was absorbed into the Hunter. Jester never knew about the change and, consequently, tried to raise one very messed up kid as a serial killer. As it happened, the kid became a cop and eventually a very good detective. Jester didn't win 'em all.

ULRIKE FRINK — AGENT OF THE MILK

Ulrike is the default leader as Loosh decays. At seventeen years old, she was one of the last kids abducted. Her charisma and looks made Loosh and Blue think she'd be perfect to groom as a Demagogue avatar. They were right.

In fact, she took to it like a genuine politician, and began to make friends and alliances with other proto-avatars. She's come up in the ranks of the Milk and now wields more influence than Loosh, who's starting to show some cognitive loss. There are more powerful avatars in the organization than Ulrike, but most of them have begun to walk the path that leads away from the Milk.

1: GM



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3: CHARACTERS



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THE IMMORTAL SECRETARIES

Centuries ago, in equatorial Africa, people discovered a ritual that turned them immortal. They could be killed, but after hitting about age sixty to seventy they stopped aging and could feasibly live forever. Mad with the possibility of power, the group decided to take over the world, as you do. Those that tried to rule openly were cut down by assorted heroes and heroines as evil wizards, evil gods, or just inconvenient tyrants. But those who ruled behind the scenes as advisors, scribes, and personal physicians were easily ignored, allowing the society to move forward with their plans.

Just one problem: the human mind isn't designed to live forever. The only immortals who've thrived were those who became obsessed with their actual jobs and got distracted by the more immediate, mundane stuff. World domination isn't completely forgotten, but the fixed dedication to being a personal assistant, scrivener, and even intern dominates their thoughts. They can't see the forest for the memos. The Immortal Secretaries don't care about liberal or conservative policies, and would be equally happy to work with Reagan, Pope Francis, Pol Pot, or Hitler — as long as they could take the minutes and schedule meetings. The US Secretary of Defense has had the same elderly black woman working as a file clerk for 95 years now.

But being immortal does have its perks. They have collected a serious stockpile of secrets, rituals, knowledge, and even artifacts over the years. If you can find an immortal, you might be able to convince him to hand over some vital bits of information. The cost? Something very important

to the undying bureaucrat, such as getting the finance committee to finally approve the phone system upgrade, or making sure the ambassador from Bolivia attends this year's Fourth of July fundraiser.

"Someday, we shall rule the world! But right now, I really need to focus on getting HR 4092 copied and sent to the entire subcommittee before noon."

OPERATIONS

None, unless you include having to get the Starbucks orders for every member of the ad hoc Committee on Budget and Operations before the meeting next Tuesday. Which the Immortal Secretaries certainly do.

RESOURCES

The Immortal Secretaries have more data, rituals, and artifacts than they know what to do with. Some have filing cabinets full of the stuff. Yet they tend to be behind the times. While they can use *some* technology scarily well, they haven't updated their systems. That means the Prowess of William Tell ritual could be on a typed page, a handwritten yellow sheet of legal paper, a 5.25-inch floppy disk, or a vellum scroll.

And no, the Immortal Secretaries do not have their immortality ritual anymore. Someone filed it improperly back in the Kushite Empire, and the filing system itself was lost in the Alexandrian Empire. But the clay tablet, or papyrus scroll, or sheep's hide is surely safe. Somewhere.

Are you
dead?

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RIOTS: WHEN SOCIETY FAILS A STRESS CHECK

Unknown Armies assumes the power of genuine magick is a secret known to an elite few. There are several reasons something so important has remained secret, including the following:

Rarity. Adepts are very, very uncommon. There are many more avatars running around, but only a fraction know their true nature, and only a fraction of those do things like fly or take years off your life.

Secrecy. When confronted with the uncanny, people tend to react with fear — fear and beatings. Evolutionary pressure ensures that secretive magi tend to be the ones who survive to pass on their teachings.

Skepticism. In 1960, you could get your magick ya-yas out without getting caught on a cell phone camera. This meant that in the past, people who claimed they'd seen weird stuff were dismissed as nuts. The momentum of that tendency remains, even in the 21st century. Extraordinary claims require extraordinary proofs.

The Sleepers. There's a rumored globe-spanning conspiracy that tortures and murders those who risk revealing the truth of magick to the common people.

THE RIOT ROLL

In game terms, Joe Bourgeois and Jane Lumpenprole have few hardened marks on their Unnatural meters. If they blow a stress check, look out. If a whole bunch of them blow stress checks, look *far* out. Sure, the press might dismiss the ruckus as "mass hysteria," but that won't cheer your sorcerer much if he's been drowned in the nearest holy water font.

If a hundred people are gathered in close quarters and see an undeniably weird supernatural event or individual, there's a flat 50% chance that they riot. The GM simply rolls to see the effect. This is called the riot roll.

RIOT ROLLS

Roll	Result
1-25	Things are eerily calm as most of the witnesses just stand staring, dumbstruck.
26-50	Any witness without at least one hardened notch in the Unnatural meter stampedes away at top speed. Add the dice rolled together: that's <i>how many people get seriously hurt</i> in the confusion.
51+	Hope your health insurance is paid up.

RIOT ROLL MODIFIERS

There are many, *many* factors that can adjust those odds one way or the other. What follows is just a list of basics; other factors can adjust the roll up or down as the GM sees fit. For each of the factors that applies, the GM adds or subtracts from the riot roll. Or just uses these as a guideline and eyeballs it.

The crowd's been drinking a lot: Add or subtract 10-20, depending on the type of display.

It's a big crowd: Add 10 for every additional fifty people above a hundred.

It's a hostile crowd: Add 10-30, depending. 10 for a crowd that didn't like the speech the adept was making before he demonstrated his powers. 30 for a bunch of Pentecostal Christians who think the End Is Nigh.

It's close quarters: If the crowd is jammed together, they're more likely to panic. Add 10.

The weird effect hurt someone: Add 30.

The weird effect hurt someone, and it was a child: Add 50.

The crowd is exhausted: Subtract 10.

It's a receptive crowd: Subtract 10. A fast-thinking character with a bull horn who pleads for understanding or, better yet, offers a plausible explanation, could reduce the roll by 10 with a success, by 15 with a matched success, and by 20 with a critical success.

The weird effect was beautiful: Subtract 10.

The weird effect was beneficial to someone: Subtract 10.

See "Riot Casualties" and "Riot Severity" on page 95.

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RIOT CASUALTIES

Mob rule hurts and kills people. When you combine those categories together, you get the number of casualties. The difference between dying in the riots and simply being badly hurt depends, as do so many things, on how developed your area is. If you're rioting in an industrialized nation with a good health care infrastructure, like Canada, one casualty in fifty dies. Odds get much worse in developing nations where one person in ten does not survive a riot. In a disaster-struck or war-torn area, the proportion could be as high as one in two.

RIOT SEVERITY

If an actual no-shit riot result comes up (51+ on the riot roll), the GM needs to how bad it is. This isn't too hard: it's all based on the roll.

The result of the modified riot roll indicates how many people in the crowd are *seriously* freaked out by what's happening. The others in the crowd are disturbed and upset, but the riot roll shows how many have blown a stress check. That's the hardcore who are incapable of rational thought. They're screaming. They're pushing. They're grabbing rocks and smashing windows. They are not listening to measured persuasion or letting anyone else listen. Spells, channels, and identities that aren't *unique* to riot circumstances can't sway the crowd at this point. If they didn't stop the initial riot roll, it's too late.

About a quarter of these flipped-out rioters become casualties, as described earlier. Property damage varies widely, depending on how nice the area is where the riot occurs, but \$100,000 for each point in the modified roll is a good start. For each million dollars of damage, a building gets reduced to rubble and ash.

Any PC or GMC in the crowd takes damage equal to the sum of the modified riot roll. That is, if it all added up to a 71, the character takes 8 wounds. This is usually in the form of bruises, scratches, and knocks on the head. This damage is taken every fifteen minutes for the first hour that the character is in the mob. After that, the crowd has dispersed enough that less damage is being done to unintended targets.

Players should, of course, be describing how their characters are dealing with this abuse. Players who think of inventive strategies, or characters who behave in a rational and plausible fashion, can get out quicker than those who just duck and cover. Characters who are only protecting themselves automatically take half this random damage, while successful Dodge rolls reduce it to 1–2 points.

Anyone who is identified in the mob mind as being "one of them" — someone associated with or responsible for the paranormal event — takes damage equal to the modified roll every ten minutes. In the above example, that would be 71 wounds. (What will your next character be like? More subtle, perhaps?) This damage can be reduced with the Dodge ability: a successful roll halves the damage, but there's no way to avoid it entirely.

Incidentally, it's perfectly possible to get tarred with the "one of them" brush even if you were trying to *stop* the manifestation.

Duration? The riot lasts *at least* a number of minutes equal to the modified roll. At the end of the time span, the GM rolls again, this time without any modifiers. If the number rolled is half the previous riot roll or less, the riot continues, with this second roll as the new riot roll. This is bad because it means that people are still getting hurt and there's still civil disorder, but it does mean that riots wind down eventually.

A group of music-and-dream adepts hold a rave. They invite a hundred sophisticates, expecting five loose-enders to show up for each of their chosen guests. That makes for a crowd of about 600 people, 500 of whom aren't prepared for a genuine magical onslaught.

The adepts wait until the crowd has thinned out a bit before unveiling the *real* deal, so those 500 psychic virgins have dwindled to 350. It's late, so the potential rioters are exhausted. They're also receptive to what's going to happen, because of the warm-up stuff and because their brains have been getting heavy-bag work from booze and dope all night. Finally, the climactic display is a thing of beauty, rather than a thing of terror. Adding it up, you get a balance.

Pro-Riot Factors: Big crowd (100 base +250) +50

Anti-Riot Factors: They're exhausted -10, They're drunk -20, They're receptive -10, It's a beautiful display -10

Thus, the GM rolls and gets a 46, which isn't modified. The club kids freak out and stampede. Ten (4+6) are badly injured, but none of the leaders of the group get hurt. Neither do any invited guests who keep their wits about them. If they'd waited until the population of the mystically ignorant dropped from 350 to 200, they'd get a -30 modifier on the riot roll — in this case, that 46 would have been a 16, the crowd would have just stared awestruck. The next day they'd marvel at how great the gravel was last night.

1: GM



2: OBJECTIVES



3: CHARACTERS



4: SESSIONS



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Fancy that?

Yes.

Yes, I do fancy that. Give it here.

Let's suppose an adept performs some kind of child-murdering public ritual. By whatever means, he gets into the middle of a stadium before a college football game with his victim and his cult of twenty followers. Before he can be stopped, he performs the sacrifice and causes a fifty-foot tall oak tree to spring into being from the dead child's body.

This, then, is undeniable proof that magick is real, performed in front of a crowd of two thousand witnesses.

Pro-Riot Factors: Big crowd (100 base +1900) +380, They're hostile +10, Bastard hurt a child +50

Anti-Riot Factors: Surely you jest.

The GM rolls a nice low 09, but it doesn't matter because the riot number is modified by 440, giving us a roaring tiger of a 449 result. The adept and his cult don't have a prayer unless they get out before the crowd converges on them from all sides. Furthermore, PCs in the crowd are going to take 17 wounds from being mauled around (4+4+9) four times in the first hour. Around a hundred and ten people are badly hurt in the rioting, two of whom die – probably trampled or misidentified as cultists. The riot lasts at least seven hours as the maddened fans burn the tree, wreck the stadium, fight the police, or storm out looking for more cultists. In this time, they do \$44,900,000 worth of damage to area homes, businesses, public areas, and private property. Forty-four buildings are completely destroyed.

At the end of that time, the unrest automatically continues because the GM definitely rolls under 224 (half the old riot number). This time the GM rolls an 88, meaning that 88 people are either still seriously bugshit, or have been swept up into the mass hysteria. That core keeps the general disorder going. PCs who haven't gotten out in the last seven hours are going to take 16 wounds – at this point, probably courtesy of smoke inhalation or rubber bullets. Cultists who weren't present for the initial butchery, but who have been found in the meantime, take 88 wound points from mob justice every ten minutes until they're safely torn limb from limb. The riot's lifespan extends for another hour and a half, doing an additional \$8,800,000 worth of damage as the fires spread to eight more buildings. The GM rolls again and this time gets a 56 – higher than 44 (again, half the old riot number) and enough to restore civil order.

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

Riots are seriously scary. Panicked hysteria tends to be highly contagious. To explain it through game terms, about a third of the people who fail sanity checks become violent. This causes other people witnessing or experiencing their violence to make sanity checks on the Violence or Helplessness meters. Some of these witnesses fail their checks, and a third of *those* failures become violent in response. Lather, rinse, repeat. Your PCs may choose a wide variety of options for escape or survival. Some common choices are examined here.

Run Away. This is pretty smart, if you do it in a controlled fashion. Even if you blow a Sanity check and flee, it's not too bad. Of course, a lot of other people are going to be trying the same thing. This is one reason riots rapidly expand from ground zero. Characters who are just trying to get away and who haven't been fingered as One of Them take the normal damage as they run. Every ten minutes they can make a Pursuit roll. After five successful rolls, they're outside the riot-stricken area.

Naturally, this raises a question: I'm with my buddy, I make my Pursuit roll but he fails. What happens? You can either forfeit your success and stay back with him, or keep it and get separated.

Go With the Flow. Those who just give in to the mob mentality, including those who fail madness checks of their own and opt for frenzy, take the standard damage for the first hour. They may also get into personal combat with the cops, when they show up. Run that as a normal fight.

Turtle. Covering your head and curling up on the ground is a recipe for getting trampled to death. However, if you can find a hiding place, you might be able to ride out the worst of it. It all depends on how secure your bolthole is. Remember that riots produce tremendous property damage.

Kick Some Ass. Hey, it's anarchy! Characters who do this do not take the normal damage. Instead, they enter into combat with the crowd itself. This starts out as a one-on-one fight with some average rioting Joe – assume Struggle 20%, wound threshold 50, armed with a two-by-four or a piece of rubble. Once he takes 20 wounds, he's out, either running away or trampled. However, two other guys see Joe get hurt and decide to thrash the PC for it. If the PCs whoops ass on these two, who have the same stats and abilities as Joe, also running away after 20 wounds, three more show up to settle his hash. This continues until the PC quits fighting and does something else or the PC has personally knocked down a number of average guys equal to the riot number. When that happens, the riot starts to wind down.

Use Magick to Save Myself. Smooth move if it works. But if it's something obvious, the crowd is going to peg the adept character as part of the problem and the serious abuse begins.

ZOLOFT FOR EVERYONE

Being in a riot causes rank 4 stress checks in both Violence and Helplessness every hour. Of course, there's also the initial Unnatural stress check caused by witnessing whatever it was that woke the tiger in the first place.

1: GM



2: OBJECTIVES



3: CHARACTERS



4: SESSIONS



5: GMCS



6: INHUMANITY



7: LOCATIONS





6: INHUMANITY

People are kind of rotten, a lot of times, but at least you know their deal. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred, a person dies if you cut their throat ear to ear. That other time? Probably Chris Pramas. Eighty-nine times out of a hundred, some kind of rational appeal to self-interest can get you some sort of concession ("Sure, fuck, take my wallet. You're the boss. Here, take the cell phone too.") If harming you isn't their explicit goal, you can usually negotiate away from that with enough leverage. If it *is* the goal, well, you may still be able to mitigate.

But when something that looks like a giant spider made of human feet stitched together with razor wire lurches out of your pantry and tries to make red coleslaw out of your ankles, what do you

do? Run, I expect. You can't reason with it, you don't know its vulnerabilities, whether that's "look in your *heart!*" or a kick in the nuts. You have no idea what its objectives or instincts or drives are. It is alien. It is the Other.

Unknown Armies is a humanocentric setting, so that foot-spider probably came from or reflects humanity in some way. If you observed it, knew its origins and behaviors, you might come to understand the foot-spider. Maybe see behind its hideous surface to comprehensible, sympathetic impulses. Possibly... even love the foot-spider?

You probably wouldn't. That's OK. There's lots of other weird, nonhuman critters out there. Most people wind up with someone, right?

INHUMAN BEINGS AND THEIR USES

In all seriousness, I'm not proposing the use of creatures that aren't human and possibly never *were* human as romantic foils for player characters. *You can do that* but that's more of an exception. Some more typical roles for non-humans are discussed below.

AS ANTAGONISTS

There's a difference between a monstrous enemy and monster-as-antagonist. Most games have monsters you're expected or encouraged to beat on with a sword, and certainly you can slap a Struggle ability and a wound threshold on whatever an adept has lying around the house (a golem made of comic books and colostomy relief bags) and get some thrills for PCs as they assail it. "Guys! It's cool! It's only bleeding hot gravy! It actually smells kinda good!"

Consider instead a creature that is smart enough to have objectives counter to the PCs, but unconstrained by any kind of moral upbringing, biological impulses towards socializing, or flinch instincts? It would combine the worst parts of a tornado and a tax audit.

For a good unnatural antagonist, figure out what it wants and how it pursues that objective, unfettered by sympathy or fear. Its motives may be entirely inscrutable, at least at first. "...and then when it had them at its mercy, it just took dental impressions. Also, it left a box of donuts behind it. Entenmann's donuts, if that matters. They're stale now. We didn't want them." That adds puzzle elements, as discussed below. It may also stay behind the scenes, manipulating or compelling

human agents to do its bidding. That sets up a really sweet reveal when the PCs discover that the Moriarty/Fu Manchu/Keyser Söze figure they've been struggling against is actually a Tupperware collection of alchemical goos that communicate by exhaling hallucinogenic gasses.

The point is, if horror is an engine, its fuel is uncertainty, even though its coolant is *predictability*. There's no suspense without both expectation *and* uncertainty. We know a horny teenager who goes into the attic of the abandoned house on Fresh Kills Lake is going to perish horribly, but we don't know how, when or which one. That's a balance of certainty and mystery that keeps people engaged.

With an inhuman antagonist operating from an alien mindset, the biggest risk is that you get lots of uncertainty (yay!) at the cost of predictability (boo!). So give the monster a pattern that can be sussed out with sufficient observation and investigation. It's pitiless, but does not perceive redheads nor accept it as possible that red-haired humans exist. It only acts during hours that are prime numbers. While ruthless, it is incapable of transgressing the conventions of polite society from Edwardian England.

For every inhuman strength, give it an inhuman weakness and you should be fine. ("Yeah, we figured the alchemical glop was basically occult sourdough starter and made bread out of it. Eat that and you know all its plans.") Just make sure that there are plenty of avenues for finding those weaknesses. Moreover, something that doesn't understand compassion has to *always* misunderstand it. It can't be ruthless when that's handy for the GM but know exactly how to exploit the PCs' relationships. If it doesn't understand why it might want to cut the PCs a break, it has to be blind-sided when one friend risks his life for another.

ENIGMA

alien mysteries are tedious seek
riddles that fit you like a lock's key
no matter how grotesque

1: GM

2: OBJECTIVES

3: CHARACTERS

4: SESSIONS

5: GMCS

6: INHUMANITY

7: LOCATIONS

There's exploding adept groupies known as "Grounding Lovers" on page 45 in Book Three: Reveal.

Whatever scale your PCs' objective is operating on, a nonhuman antagonist is serious conflict. If they destroy the thing, or just convince it to leave them alone, that's probably worth 1d10+10% for their objective.

AS PUZZLES

Instead of a barrier between the PCs and their objective, unnatural creatures can be distractions — especially if they're aimed at one PC's passions or relationships over the others'. Just having one jump out and assault a PC probably isn't the best option, unless that assault is inherently survivable even if they screw up everything, or was telegraphed heavily beforehand and they did nothing to prepare. To put it in urban legend terms, "a serial killer jumps out and murders a girl" is not a memorable story. "A serial killer licks a girl's hand while she sleeps and she thinks it's her dog, but it's not, it's him hiding under the bed and he waits to kill her until she's seen the note 'People can lick hands too' he wrote on her mirror." That's memorable. It's got buildup. Unless the initial attack is the buildup, which is why it needs to be survivable, you need warnings and creepy harbingers.

But many monsters don't even attack. Some cause bad effects just by being around. Others are just weird and interesting, and PCs who aren't fascinated by weird are in for a hard time of it in *Unknown Armies* no matter what.

With a puzzle monster, you need to understand why it does what it's doing, and how you can bombard your players with clues until they figure it out too. Trust me, the explanation looks roughly one million times more obvious from your side of the GM screen, unless it's something too obvious to interest our discerning clientele. What's it doing? Why and how? What is the *meaning* of it? Those questions lead up to the big one: what can be done about it?

Many antagonist entities are also puzzles. In that case, solving the puzzle should also relieve, if not eliminate, the antagonism. If you find out the oppositional entity just wants to permanently possess a human body and spend the rest of its days eating KFC, you can buy it off forever with ruthless body procurement. Even moralistic types get a basis for wheeling and dealing out of that. Alternately, an entity that wants something that's completely non-negotiable ("I will eliminate mankind so that machine intelligences can pack the Invisible Clergy") should reveal some kind of weakness when fully understood.

AS SYMPTOMS

Sometimes an unnatural creature isn't the foundational problem, it's an ancillary consequence of the main issue. This may not be much of a consolation to those it kills. ("Actually, we don't blame the hurricane for those deaths, as much as the ocean warming that made it so much worse.") To translate it into horror cliché, your problem isn't the ghosts, it's the desecrated burial ground that keeps coughing them up.

A monster being used as a symptom serves best as an obstacle. It doesn't wear down the cabal's objective, and it doesn't have the subplot or sidequest endurance of a good distraction. Instead, it's some abilities and a wound threshold and usually a gimmick.

"Gimmick" sounds cheap, but it's really an apt word for an unusual element of an entity's behavior or menace. The classic monster Medusa has a gimmick — looking at her turns you to stone, while shining a mirror at her makes her turn *herself* to stone. The golem has no mortal vulnerabilities to fire or stabbing or emotional blackmail, but if you wipe the Word of Life off its brow, it's bricked. These are perfectly good gimmicks and exemplify the kind of clarity that you should consider when building symptomatic or oppositional monsters.

Another time monsters-as-symptoms come into play is when they're the servants of some crazy adept or thaumaturge. When the wizard sends his minions to hassle the PCs, don't worry so much about obscuring their nature or motivations. They aren't there to be obscure, they themselves are clues about their maker. If you get jumped by a creature of shadows and smoke, it probably wasn't sent by the Temple of Unquenchable Light, unless they're hipster cultists who only summon shadow-monsters ironically. More likely you get weird screaming motor-centaurs created by a viaturge, giant hogs with a taste for blood controlled by an agrimancer, or phantoms that jump into and out of advertising posters from the magus obsessed with photos.

AS RESOURCES

Maybe your cabal's not fighting a nutty ritualist. Maybe they *are* nutty ritualists. If that's how it goes, that psychic reflection of dementia sufferers that somehow became self-aware and is haunting the retirement home may not be a threat to put down. It may be an advantage to acquire.

Taking the "gotta catch 'em all" approach to the inhumans of *Unknown Armies* is a fraught endeavor. So, on the plus side, if they have an objective that benefits from a leashed beast, it's probably worth 1d10+10% to get it pulling in traces. But that should tell you how difficult and dangerous tampering with these beings is.

1: GM

2: OBJECTIVES

3: CHARACTERS

4: SESSIONS

5: GMCS

6: INHUMANITY

7: LOCATIONS

*I have
seen its
mate in
the wood.*



Borrow a lot of the elements from the puzzle section, because you're not going to know what use the thing is unless its drives and reactions are understood. Similarly, people who don't know how it can even *be* are unlikely to motivate it to do their will. So throw clues at them along with risk — best if the risk *is* a clue — until they get it right.

The great thing about resource critters is that players feel cool and badass for having tamed it but it's an absolute *hydrant* of blowback. Ignorant monster hunters? They're after it and probably pissed that the cabal is protecting it. Best case scenario, the PCs are considered its *minions*. Sleepers? Perfect for blatant beasts, and it's seasoned with irony if the PCs were careful to keep a low profile before they recruited Frankenstein's Adam. Informed monster hunters are like the ignorant ones, only more dangerous. The New Inquisition is likely to want to steal anything of value, or deny it to the enemy or, y'know, anyone less deserving than themselves. That's without considering any side effects that might not have been immediately obvious. It's not like unearthly entities come with warning labels.

AS WILD CARDS

Somewhere between ally and opposition lies the wild card role, where the creature is in play just to heighten stakes, make everything riskier, and provide much needed uncertainty. A page or so back, I talked about how horror benefits from tension between expectation, which you need for suspense, and uncertainty. A lot of running this game well consists of adjusting the balance between those two elements. When things seem a little

too predictable — possibly because a player read the books? — invent or select a new weird entity and put it in play between the PCs and whatever opposition they *have* figured out. Remember that unnatural entities, like unnatural phenomena, may be attracted to places where someone's already stressing the framework of orderly scientific causality. It's fun to throw the inhuman between the PCs and their foes with each side assuming that the other has summoned or compelled this thing to make trouble. Each side panics and tries to figure out how this happened and each suddenly thinks the other side is more potent and informed. It escalates matters, which always makes mistakes more likely, and more entertaining.

If the opposition relies on soft power and moves behind the scenes, introduce a wild card that just raves and rampages. If the other team is bullying hard guys with fists of granite, introduce a monster that operates immaterially and let the contrast open a second front on the war, for both sides.

Should the cabal figure out that the monster is a free agent first, great! Reward that! They *should* be encouraged to get the edge by being cleverer. Now your wild card takes on the form of a resource. If they don't chase it down, it's just an ongoing obstacle, possibly one that sheds blowback here and there if not attended-to.

1: GM

2: OBJECTIVES

3: CHARACTERS

4: SESSIONS

5: GMCS

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7: LOCATIONS



DEMONS

"Spirits are people just like you, except not anymore."
-Adam Tod Brown

Beelzebub. Ravana. Baphomet. "Demon" is a word that members of the occult underground and the unsuspecting masses feel very differently about. Mutter a demon's name in a crowded elevator sometime and watch how people twitch as they mentally conjure up visions of upside-down pentagrams, Catholic exorcisms, holy chants to fend off *oni* — or worse. To those who don't know the truth about demons, you're either a devil-worshipping fiend or a sick and twisted horror fan.

What is the truth? That's the fun part, because most people's basic understanding of demons is half-right, especially concerning deception and manipulation, but the thing is? Demons don't actually exist. Well, not in the traditional sense, anyway. They are people. That's right: *people*. Like Soylent Green.

Let that sink in for a second. Humans who die with unfulfilled obsessions become demons when they cross the veil, because they're unwilling to let go, literally and figuratively. Denying their fate and refusing to lie at peace twists these souls, whether they were good or evil, into desperate forces of nature reaching out to the land of the living.

Here's the thing about demons that every pony and checker needs to get straight: all demons want something and do whatever they can to cross over and get it. They are compelled to fulfill their obsessions and can only act on their desires by taking a human body. Once they're stuffed into a body — maybe *your* body — a demon quickly starts fulfilling its agenda. What that is? Or how

they carry out their schemes? Most demons won't say. What demons *do* say is any number of lies and promises to get at your body. Never mind what happens once they have it. Demons may swear to leave your body exactly how they found it. They may promise the same for your soul. But as creatures of pure obsession, they'd say anything for access. They may, literally, be *unable* to tell the truth if lies are a better way to pursue their goals. Since a precursor to their plans is "as much uninterrupted body time as I can get," lies usually *are* better.

USING DEMONS

Though all that's true, some adepts don't really get hung up on worrying whether or not demons are evil. A few brave souls think demons can be wielded like a weapon or a tool. Someone hard and smart enough might even be right. Here's a pile of reasons why you might want to use them, if you dare:

They Know Secrets: Love them or hate them, demons have an inside track on the underworld and they know more than they let on. A *lot* more. They know about the 333 archetypes, they know the names of other demons, schools of magick, and they're aware of cosmic reincarnation. Getting them to honestly share, however, is a different story altogether. Demons understand that words have power and they're not afraid to use them. Except for describing the afterlife. For whatever reason, they either elude the subject, lie, or flat out refuse to say — even under duress. Some who have given unusual reason to be trusted say

1: GM



2: OBJECTIVES



3: CHARACTERS



4: SESSIONS



5: GMCS



6: INHUMANITY



7: LOCATIONS



*Master
of the
still stars
and the
flaming
door.*

that they are forbidden to teach truths about what comes next. Forbidden by the Cruel Ones, whoever they are.

They're Invisible: In spirit form, demons are very useful because they can travel to all kinds of places — including normally inaccessible other-spaces like the House of Renunciation, provided someone else opens the way — to spy on, nudge, cajole, and extract secrets you're dying to get your hands on from avatars, archetypes, hard chargers, and other entities you normally can't reach. Just because they are invisible to most, however, doesn't mean that their presence can't be felt or detected. After all, their *summoner* spotted them.

They Can Teach You Magick: Demons not only understand the difference between the various schools of magick, they can also — when pressed — teach you to become an adept. This ability comes with a pile of caveats, because you'd need to be powerful enough to control the demon in order to learn from it. If you're not, you need some real luck and powerful rituals, but it can make you a practitioner of whatever magick school you want. If that happens, that form of magick becomes your new obsession identity and it starts at 10%. If you're already powerful enough to control a demon, you probably don't need its help — unless you're hoping to command the demon to teach another adept. Be careful, though, because when you start involving other people, most demons view those friends of yours as bargaining chips when you least suspect it.

They Can Deliver Messages: Demons can't take corporeal form unless they inhabit a body, but that doesn't mean they can't deliver messages on your behalf. When they do, the message is uttered word-for-word in your voice, as if you were standing right next to your target saying those precise words. How, when, and why demons have this ability is a total and complete mystery — even to them. Maybe that's why demons resent being treated like carrier pigeons, and why they're reluctant to admit they can do this. Interestingly, they can only do this *when requested*. They can't just whisper into mortals' ears on their own. Still, the demonic message service is not always in session. All demons, whether they are lesser or greater, have their limits. A demon can only deliver its summoner's messages twice a month, to a living host the summoner has either met before or knows personally. When this one-way delivery request is triggered, the demon disappears for a period of six days, six hours, and six minutes before it returns to the summoner. At some point during that time, it recites the communiqué.

Funky Powers: The very least of demons are still grit in the gears of tangible reality. If one's lurking about, it probably throws off a random

and uncontrolled *minor unnatural phenomenon* once a week. Others are more disruptive, creating random minor phenomena once a day, or even once an hour, or mixing it up with the odd significant phenomenon. Some have control over a particular minor phenomenon and can do it whenever they want. Others have mastered a *significant* phenomenon, though usually they can only do it once a day, or maybe just once a week. Depends on the demon. There are stories about spirits that produce or control major unnatural phenomena, but they'd have to be extra-super-heavy-duty nasty.

They Can Possess People: You really want to do dirty on someone, tell a demon to go climb around their nervous system like a jungle gym. Demons can *possess* individuals who basically leave the door unlocked and draw their attention, but for whatever reason, they can't possess more normal and unwilling types unless someone (you?) has given them permission. If you tell a demon to go take someone, which may involve touching the person, or getting some of their hair, or tricking them into saying the demon's self-identified name, that person can roll Secrecy to resist. If they get any success, the demon is repelled, but if they fail, the demon's got a body, the thing it wants more than anything. Giving a demon a *passport into a person* might get you on the closest thing it has to a good side.

And More... : There's no end to the uses that demons are *reported* to have, partially because there are different types of demons that are hard to pin down. The problem is that most summoners can't verify which abilities their particular malevolent entity has, because what they know about demons is tiny compared to what they don't know. Remember: demons happily claim they can turn water into wine to possess a host.

Hard to control and packed with lies, when you summon demons know that it can either go very, very well or catastrophically bad — like soul-just-got-punted-out-of-your-body-and-you-can't-go-back bad. Hell, they may tempt you with all kinds of juicy tidbits of intel, but ask yourself: do you really have time to deal with demons? To find a tiny kernel of truth, you may have to spend hours, days, if not weeks poking through the dung of their lies. Worse, it's almost impossible to double-cross a demon. If you thwart a demon in its spirit form, you'd better start looking over your shoulder. Not every demon's obsession includes paying back people who cheat them, but plenty find time to pencil it in.

Is it any wonder that many chargers steer clear of demons, knowing how destructive they really are? But it's the nature of occultists to think they're better, smarter and wiser than everyone else, so some jabroni with a Ouija board is always trying it.

See "Unnatural Phenomenon" on page 88 in Book One: Play.

1: GM



2: OBJECTIVES



3: CHARACTERS



4: SESSIONS



5: GMCS



6: INHUMANITY



7: LOCATIONS



DEMONIC POSSESSION

Demonic possession forces your consciousness and volition to step aside so the demon's spirit can enter your body. When this happens, the demon has full control over your faculties and you are unaware of how it's using your corporeal form. It can't, however, access anything that's tied to your spirit or soul — a demon controls your muscles for a period of time. That's it. That's usually enough.

Demons can possess any living entity, but they prefer humans for a variety of reasons. Besides the fact that demons were once human, most understand that the best way for a demon to fulfill its obsession is in a human body. In fact, it's not uncommon for demons to possess a host, flee the immediate area, and fall prey to hedonistic desires before fulfilling their true purpose. If you're an avatar, take note that you are not responsible for what acts the demon performs in your body. However, you may be violating your taboos by summoning it in the first place, knowing that you're unleashing a force of entropy that could go against everything you believe.

Possession can also happen in one of two ways: *willing hosts* and unwitting victims.

UNWITTING VICTIMS

Most people, when they think of demonic possession, tend to cite movies like *The Order*, *The Exorcist*, and *Constantine*. To some extent, these films depict demonic possession accurately: for a vulnerable soul with no magickal abilities, possession is violent and sometimes deadly because the demon has to force its way into an existing consciousness. Because the possessed didn't step aside to allow the demon access, there's a fight. The battlefield is the body, as people twist, shout, and self-harm in an attempt to make their frame undesirable to the possessor. Sometimes it even works! This kind of thrashing, often including contortions severe enough to displace joints or even break bones, does 2d10 wounds.

But most people are too full of themselves to host a demon. It's victims with four or more failed marks in Self who are always a little bit at risk. They're just too vacant for spiritual squatters to resist. If someone less internally wounded winds up fighting a demon, it's usually the fault of some selfish adept, on purpose or by accident. Though sometimes, people with normal Self meters just get unlucky — wrong place, wrong time. Other times, some necromantic asshole has actually directed the demon to attack them and provided a roadmap.

RUNNING DEMONOLATRY ENJOYABLY

As a GM, this looks like a complicated and multi-stage process. It is! The reason for that is to give the maximum opportunity for PCs to get possessed and create new plotlines. ("Naw baby, that wasn't me pistol whipping that fireman! I was possessed!") It also holds out the possibility of great advantage — it's the fastest way to go from normal guy to no-shit adept, even if it is risky as hell. Demons are unpredictable weapons, but undeniably dangerous.

The reason for the multiple rolls it to give the GM a chance to ratchet up the tension. Make sure the character is determined to continue, and keep the descriptions vivid. What does it feel like when a demon crawls into your mind and starts asking questions that sound like your own thoughts? What lies does it tell, what does it want, and what promises does it glibly make?

Characters who get out of the process with demons doing their bidding should feel like they really got away with something. Those who get possessed should realize that they had to burn through a pretty big book of matches to wind up that way.

Those wounded personalities with four or more failed notches in Self are in peril whenever they do anything that might be *construed* as inviting otherworldly attention. That means Ouija boards, séances, and all other attempts to contact the dead should be off-limits. Moreover, those times when the veil between worlds is thinnest (Dia de los Muertos, Samhain, All Saints' Day... pretty much the whole period between October 29th and November 3rd) are bad news. Those who know countermeasures or psychic self-defense, or think they do, should bring their A game when the candy companies start ramping up for Halloween sales.

If someone has the requisite Self damage and makes a good faith attempt to reach beyond the grave, any demon that happens by can seize control with a successful Urge roll. It's in charge for a number of hours equal to *the demon's Urge stat*. When that time's up, the living person can make a Secrecy roll. What happens next depends on the roll's outcome. This is called an **escape roll**.

Willing hosts are covered under "Summoning Demons" on page 104.

See "Your Basic Demons" on page 110.

1: GM



2: OBJECTIVES



3: CHARACTERS



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ESCAPE ROLL

Result	Effect
Crit	The demon is gone and, moreover, <i>vanquished</i> . It won't trouble this host ever again, and may be flung so far into the astral realm that it never finds its way back to the material world.
Matched or Normal Success	The demon is gone.
Failure	The demon remains in control for a number of hours equal to its Urge, again.
Matched Fail	The demon remains in control for a number of days equal to your roll.
Fumble	The demon remains in control for a number of days equal to its Urge.

Recovering from possession isn't necessarily clean or complicated. The victim may recall bits and pieces of what the demon was up to, which can cause Self checks at the GM's discretion. The demon's obsession may have left some long-term marks on the body — chemical dependency, injuries, contagious diseases, trauma from exposure or deprivation, racist tattoos... demons don't necessarily do damage on their way out. But sometimes they do.

SUMMONING DEMONS

To willingly allow a demon to enter your body, you need to perform a summoning ritual, or cast a spell, if you're an adept, then try to control it to do your bidding. Rumors persist that the demons one can summon are lesser demons, as compared to greater demons who don't bother asking and whose possessions are either fatal or permanent.

When you summon a demon, you're essentially calling forth a presence that speaks in your mind. Some rituals are specific to a particular demon, and summon it exclusively. A lot more say they summon Ushtozaus, the Crow Razor but are just the astral equivalent of unlocking your car and leaving the keys on the seat. They attract a spiritual malcontent who pretends to be whatever it thinks a Crow Razor is.

Other rites let you fill in the blank and name a specific entity, but again, it's pot luck. You can get close to a demon of your liking, though, if you know the truth and focus on summoning a specific *type* of demon. Focus definitely matters to what you summon, so keep that in the back of your mind.

To successfully summon a demon and get good results, you'd better have great mojo when it comes to rolling the dice. Remember: demons were once people who died unfulfilled, unable to achieve their life's obsession. Now, however? They're no longer people, so even if you *think* you're in control of the situation because you've attracted your best friend from the fifth grade? Think again. He no longer needs companionship, no longer feels shame, no longer has any instincts to be a good member of an animal herd.

To use a ritual, use an identity that has the Casts Rituals feature. Or, if you're an adept with a spell that summons, roll that. Keep your dice warm, too, because getting a success on the initial roll is just the beginning.

Should you fumble your check and the demon takes over your body, you're subject to the same rules as an unwitting victim. The demon runs you like a toy for hours equal to its Urge stat, then you make an escape roll, as described above.

In many ways, your only saving grace is the fact that you totally and completely stepped aside when the demon entered your body. It gets in without all the thrashing and head-knocking associated with forceful possession. Hopefully, that's some comfort.

SUMMONING ROLL

Result	Effect
Critical Success	Congrats! You've attracted a demon that fits the type you were hoping for, and you start the struggle for dominance at caster advantage instead of balanced.
Matched Success	The demon may be more suitable to your purposes. You still start your struggle balanced but you get a +10% to your next roll on the gridiron.
Success	You've summoned some demon. The higher your success, the more your demon is in line with your desires to use it.
Failure	No demon responds to your call, if you want to consider that failing.
Matched Failure	No demon for you, but you <i>saw</i> something. Unfortunately, it's not something a living mind is equipped to analyze, utilize or even deal with. Take an Unnatural (7) check and good luck sleeping tonight.
Fumble	You have been possessed by the demon and must fight to regain control over your body.

CONTROLLING DEMONS

Because bending bundles of dead thought animated solely by vicious will to your service is a complicated and fraught endeavor, it's resolved on a gridiron. Here's what that looks like:

Beat the Devil: The caster gets one concession and can return to the balanced section to try for more concessions. However, all the caster's rolls to move on the gridiron are now at -10%. This is cumulative. After reaching this point twice, the penalty is -20% if she tries for a triple dip.

Caster Advantage: You can get one concession from the demon and quit a winner. If you got knocked down to this stage from beat the devil, the concession you got then is the one you keep.

Balanced: Both caster and demon roll to try and shift the conflict upward or downward. No one has any advantage.

Demon Advantage: The demon has the option of escaping and leaving the caster frustrated and unserved. Or the demon

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can make an offer of service in exchange for some very specific service — almost always a span of hours controlling the caster's body. Or the demon can do neither, instead gaining a +10% on its next Urge roll to travel the gridiron.

The Devil Drags You Under: Pony, you just got saddled. The demon's got your body for a number of hours equal to its Urge, and only then do you get an escape roll.

As is typical with gridiron contests, one contestant — in this case the caster — is trying to climb to the top, using whatever identity applies. The other, the demon, rolls Urge to move downward.

If the demon gets any success, it moves down one step. Any failure, even a cruddy one, and it doesn't move at all.

For the caster, it's a bit more complicated and risky. Caster results look like this.

CASTER ROLL

Result	Effect
Crit	You move up two steps, <i>like a Faust!</i>
Matched Success	You move up one step, and your next roll is at +10%.
Success	You move up a step.
Failure	You don't move.
Matched Failure	Oh crap. You move <i>down</i> a step. <i>It knows something about you!</i>
Fumble	You drop two steps and your next roll is at -10%.

YOUR BASIC DEMONS

Demons have a stat called "Urge" that represents just how ferocious their drive is when it comes to their unfinished business. Anything that leads towards them doing that lets 'em roll Urge. When making a demon, don't just leave Urge undefined. It's Urge: Kill My Children or Urge: Eat Thai Food or Urge: Get Elected To Congress. Urge also provides their wound threshold, when they're in a condition to be harmed. It can substitute for *any* ability, as long as the demon is directly headed towards its goal. Urge is rated anywhere from 20%–80%. Just set it at an appropriate number, or roll randomly until you get something that feels right. Surprisingly, they can't flip-flop their rolls.

Demons also get identities relating to their former lives. Depending on how old and skilled and educated their mortal selves were, this could be as low as fifty percentiles for all identities, or as high as a hundred and fifty.

Any task that isn't covered by Urge or an identity? Rate it at 20% and call it a day. Urge covers a *lot*, after all. If a demon with Urge: Kill My Widower 70% is driving a car towards where it thinks its onetime mortal husband is, it can roll Urge instead of Pursuit. If it's just driving around in a possessed body for whatever other reason? 20% to stay on the road when sideswiped. Trying to kill the widower bare-handed? 70%. Trying to shoot his bodyguard to get at him? 70%. Trying to shoot a cop because a magus told it to? 20%.

Any freaky paranormal power it has? Rate it at 50%. Most lesser demons can also use one minor spell of their choice from any school of magic, once per day, as if they rolled a 12.

Demons never take stress checks. Every action or event is as acceptable as every other.

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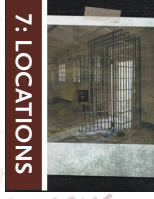
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REVENANTS

If demons were once-human, revenants are one-time demons that have deteriorated into mindless, automated spirits that act on basic impulses. They are shrouded in rumors and speculation, because nobody seems to know what turns a demon into a revenant and, more importantly, when.

While sensitive people may detect a revenant's presence, a few summoners have pieced together more information about them from various sources — including demons.

Here's what they found out:

- All revenants were once demons.
- Revenants cannot possess a human body, but some possess animals.
- Revenants have no control over where they appear, and may be visible in otherspaces.
- Each revenant has a unique, singular obsession that dictates their actions.
- The revenant can be temporarily controlled if the summoner knows the revenant's name from life. They don't do much more than shamle here or there though. No matter their IQ in life, they're pretty distant and out of it — about like a mid-stage Alzheimer's patient in a rough patch.
- Revenants and demons do not play well together.
- Some revenants can only appear under certain conditions like: snow falling, whenever *New York, New York* plays, every time *The Phantom of the Opera* is on Broadway, etc.

- Revenants eventually deteriorate over time, either fading away entirely or devolving into *fiends*.

Revenants retain the Urge of their demon days, but only at a rating of 10–50%. Their Urges, however, are now limited. They can't make any meaningful, permanent changes to physical reality or to physical persons. If their Urge is something violent or sensuous, they're now reduced to voyeurism.

Unlike demons, revenants are always visible to some extent, and the degree at which they can be identified — and what form they take — is dependent upon their Urge stat. Revenants with Urge 10 are barely perceptible and tend to stick in a single guise, while those with Urge 50 can not only control which form they take, but how solid they wind up looking.

REVENANT: HARBINGERS

These entities have an preternatural ability to know when an entropic (and often deadly) event is about to happen. They congregate around that spot anywhere from an hour to mere minutes before it happens to observe the chaos, either feeding on the energy or just to relieve the boredom of being incompletely deceased. Once the event is finished, they calmly walk away and fade into shadowy near-invisibility. Harbingers all look different but inevitably wear nothing but red clothing. They have a hungry look in their eyes and never waiver from staring at where the event will soon occur. If you spot several people in red, all looking at the same train crossing, turn the car around and punch the gas.

See "Fiends" on page 107.

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UNNATURAL ENTITIES

Unnatural entities are beings whose entire existence is due to the conflict between reality (natural phenomena) and the forces that seek to reshape it (magick). There are many different types of unnatural entities, with many different goals and abilities, but they're all inherently magickal. Most of them have little or no agenda we can comprehend beyond self-preservation and basic instinct. Many are just lost like moths in the glow of a lamp, and trying as hard as they can to break through the window pane of our reality to get back to their world. And a few want something from us — food, shelter, safety — but what they see as such is usually something we're not interested in sharing, such as our emotions, our vitality, our bodies.

Most people never notice unnatural entities, even if exposed to them. Some of these entities are incorporeal and can't be seen; some look human and blend in; and some are just really sneaky. Those that have corporeal bodies and are obviously unnatural are also the rarest encountered. Possibly, Darwinian selection works on the unnatural. In any event, the poor schmucks who see them usually have the choice between telling what they saw and being labeled as kooks, or keeping quiet.

There are a whole mess of unnatural entities in *Book Three: Reveal*, but we're keeping back a few here just for GMs.

ENTRY FORMAT

Each unnatural entity has its own description. Entries begin with a general description of the entity and what it does, followed by any special rules or procedures governing their use in play, and conclude with the being's game attributes in this format

NAME (POWER LEVEL)

Pithy Summary

Wound Threshold: Even immaterial beings get a score here, because some adepts and other things can perform acts of intangible violence.

Identities: Complete with Features, if necessary.

Unless otherwise noted, these creatures don't face stress checks.

FIENDS

Those who claim superior knowledge confidently close their eyes, open their mouths, raise a finger, and tell you that demons are really just the souls of the dead. Sure, OK, but if that's demons, then what do you call the beings that pop into existence when the bending and straining of reality is fueled by murder, pain and desecration? Arcane scholars don't care for the word fiends, but until they can come up with better solutions or explanations, it fits. These things are fearless, pitiless, and endless, as far as anyone can tell.

Whenever adepts, or idiotic dabblers who like to bruise reality, use magick to deliberately cause pain, to hurt others or even kill, they warp the

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*So much
hunger,
so many
souls.*

fabric of reality; every once in a while, one of these bubbles of pain becomes self-sustaining and can persist in acting on the tangible world.

Any spell that causes pain and suffering, even if used for a justifiable end, *might* create a fiend, or at least attract one. But in general, the greater the cruelty and suffering, the greater the chance, so those who are into that sort of thing *deliberately* use it to create or call fiends. A lot of that looks like horror movie necromancy, or black magic, or demon summoning, whatever: torture, human sacrifice, and the like. It's only popular with rank amateurs who don't last long — or really, *really* scary veterans of the occult underground who have the mojo to handle a fiend.

Fiends are born of pain, terror, cruelty, and magick, and they desperately need more in order to continue to exist in our universe. It's their foothold; when they wink out of existence here, they seem to be suspended outside of time as we know it. A fiend that's been reported banished or destroyed decades ago can reappear in fine form. Or at least, if it's a different fiend with the same name, it apparently knows everything the old one did.

Fiends are big on names. Each name a fiend has (they tend to have many) is one aspect of its power and nature. The more names you know, the better your chance of being able to affect a fiend and maybe, just maybe, walk away from an encounter. Some checkers collect fiend names and use them as currency. Selling fake names occasionally happens, but it tends to build extreme resentment from unsatisfied customers or their next-of-kin.

Fiends are not subtle and there's not a lot of variance: they like to cause pain because that's

what they eat. Whenever they are present when someone takes wounds they can consume that damage and eliminate one wound of their own, up to their maximum; the original victim does not take the damage. When they're back at full health, fiends enjoy pain as a delicacy, and are looking for the exotic, the acute, the unusual. The hungrier a fiend is — the more wounds they've taken — the more brutal and simple its methods, so it can feed as fast as possible. So a sated fiend is happy to wait around while someone else does the hard work of causing harm, but a hungry one uses its razor-sharp talons.

Their appearance varies a lot by circumstance. Often they look like shadowy humans with one detail wrong. Like, their feet are on fire as they chase you, kicking and cackling. One might have a face that's perfectly flat, with features just scratched into it. Another might have hair made of cooked spaghetti. Sometimes they look like misshapen animals from a distance, only to have nonliving components when you get close. One fiend sometimes appeared as a dog with fur made of wet newspaper, and another time as a big, fast crab with a shell made of coral and concrete. But what makes a fiend change the *most* is its name. If you call it by one of its proper names — most have at least six — it has to take an action to transform into that different form. Sometimes, knowing two names lets bold fiend-fighters chant the alternating titles, forcing it to switch instead of attacking while someone else whales on it. Their names are typically pretty long, either some glossolalic pile of nonsense syllables ("Scathocorpusculae!" "Monstrocneumus Infernis!" "lānusoeauntor!") or else a lengthy title that sounds like a heavy metal album — "Plague Demiurge of

FIEND ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

Roll	Fiend Advantage	Fiend Disadvantage
1	Can flip-flop attacks.	Can't attack last person to name it.
2	Attacks do +10 damage instead of +6.	Repelled by strong perfume.
3	Attacks do firearm damage.	Cannot resist the sound of a flute.
4	Inflicts a Helplessness (3) check whenever it does damage.	Cold iron does +10 damage.
5	Attacks are ranged like a handgun.	Cannot cross a line drawn in salt.
6	Successful attack sets the target on fire.	Instantly slain if hit with a matched success.
7	People who are not already fighting it must make a Fitness roll to approach.	Cannot exist in sunlight.
8	Can roll two attacks per round.	Can't harm targets with more than 20 hardened notches.
9	50% chance of ruining any weapon that touches it.	Can only attack the target with the least amount of wounds taken.
10	Not bound by the laws of gravity.	Can't harm targets with 7 or more failed notches.

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Indulge in some consideration of "Funky Powers" on page 107.

the Infernal Core" or "Prince of the Speed of Murder" or "Afterbirth of the Silent Atrocity."

Each form has a particular advantage and a particular drawback. Someone who knows enough names can reconfigure a fiendish opponent into a mode that's less threatening. Their claws or horns or acidic caresses do standard hand-to-hand damage unless otherwise noted under their advantage.

FIEND (MAJOR)

Malevolent byproduct of dark magick.

Wound Threshold: 40 + a percentile roll (1-100).

Nonbiological 100%: No attack on a fiend gets special advantages from matches.

Tear You Apart 25%-75%: Provides Initiative, Substitutes for Dodge, Substitutes for Struggle. Its attacks are treated like weapon attacks that are edged and weighty: they do +6 wounds, inflict a wound even on a miss, and do damage like firearms on matched successes.

WHISPERERS

Whisperers are related to fiends; like them, they like to cause pain and torment victims. However, they do this by offering dark suggestions to the victim, usually while they are asleep, or at least alone. Victims often believe they are developing schizophrenia or, if they are religiously inclined, that they are conversing with angels or demons.

Whisperers are not psychic; they can't read a person's mind, but they are good at observing and figuring out what makes their target tick. They use this to play on the victim's hopes and fears, suggesting actions that sound at first reasonable, gradually leading to more and more heinous acts.

If the victim resists suggestions, the whisperer torments them with their own weaknesses. It's a rank 4 stress check on the shock meter where the victim is least hardened.

Keep in mind that while there may *seem* to be an agenda behind these suggestions, the whisperer isn't trying to get the human to act as means to an end. The actions themselves *are* the end. They want to build the human up to acts that the *person* finds repugnant.

Getting rid of a whisperer is matter of psychic wrestling, using a suitable identity such as Psychotherapy, Meditation, or Exorcism against the whisperer's own Gaslight score. If the human lacks appropriate identities, use their highest one, or their obsession. With more than one appropriate identity, they can switch between them as desired.

Treat the conflict as hand-to-hand combat, substituting the identities for Struggle and, in the human's case, for wound threshold. Thus, while humans fight a whisperer, the whisperer takes wounds but keeps its Gaslight identity unscathed. The mortal, on the other hand, applies wounds taken directly as a negative modifier to their identity until recovered.

Alternately, mortals can attack with a relationship, which does damage like a firearm on matched successes and *kills the whisperer outright* on an 01. However, wounds taken against a relationship subtract from the relationship score directly. If you fall back on your faith in Granny to fight off the bad thoughts, you're always going to be reminded of the bad thoughts when you're talking with Granny.

Humans who apply wounds directly to an identity in this fashion recover 1d10 points per day if they win. If they lose? Well, they go into a coma until something else decides to possess their body. Usually that's a demon, possibly one

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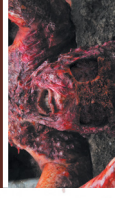
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that made a deal with the whisperer in the first place. But when the demon's done, the identity is fully restored.

WHISPERER (MINOR)

Manipulative voice in the dark.

Wound Threshold: 1d10+40. Note that they're immaterial, so only specific weird stuff can harm them.

Gaslight 3d10+40%: It can substitute for Knowledge, but otherwise is only good for reducing identities.

DIAMETRICS

Avatars must walk a narrow path, living as their chosen archetype while avoiding its taboos. Yet the *House of Renunciation* is dedicated to reversing a human's personality. What happens when these two collide? Sometimes the avatar wins, barely escaping the Room with his sanity and powers intact. But when the avatar loses, that sudden reversal may throw him off the chosen path so violently that he becomes a diametric.

A diametric is still alive and intelligent, but he is utterly, insanely obsessed with living a life diametrically opposed to its former archetype. An Unsung Champion diametric loudly proclaims her responsibility for any act, regardless of how much she actually accomplished, whereas a Star diametric cannot be the center of attention and flees rather than get credit or accolades. Whatever an archetype's taboo, the diametric embraces it to the fullest.

These would be nothing more than sad, crazy people except that their particular brand of madness is contagious. Hang out with an Unsung Champion diametric long enough, and you start arguing with her over who takes credit for the sun rising. Any human who interacts with a diametric for at least a minute, or hears the diametric's ramblings for that time, must make a Self check. If you're humoring the crazy person, nodding along silently, it's a Self (2) check. But if you actively resist the warped paradigm, it becomes rank 5.

Should you fail the check, you get a fourth option on top of the usual fight, flee, or freeze. You can opt to go along with the delusion for two to twenty minutes, after which you get your head together enough to exit her orbit. Success, of course, lets you act normally, at least until the next time you meet the diametric.

Avatars who meet a diametric of their archetype face a bigger threat. Not only is the Self check increased to rank 5 for passive agreement, the diametric must *fail* a check against the avatar to avoid flying into a rage and attacking them. If you're GM and think it would be more fun or interesting to have this check go one way or the other, feel free to fudge it. This check must be made every ten minutes the two are in sight of each other. Once the avatar is out of sight, the diametric calms down.

DIAMETRICS (MINOR)

Wound Threshold: 50.

Against 1d10+50%: Diametrics are innately oppositional. They can roll this identity to scuttle *any* other roll, even if normally initiative would have that roll occurring before they even notice. It's a pain in the ass one on one, but it only goes so far when you gang up on them. That said, a diametric helping someone else? Hoo boy, so irritating.

Leftover Identity (Primary) 3d10+40%: Different for every diametric, but it's something separate from their avatar role. Could very well be related though.

Leftover Identity (Secondary) 1d10+20%: Like the primary one, only less primary.

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See "The House of Renunciation" on page 119.



7: LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

The chapter's title is the punchline to a joke, and the joke's setup is, "What are the three most important factors in real estate?" Sometimes it's told for restaurants, too.

Location is not the most important thing in an RPG — enjoying story with your friends is. Even if we take that for granted, location isn't the most important thing in *Unknown Armies*. Character is what counts here.

WHY LOCATIONS MATTER

In general, locations matter because they let you imply things about events, about the character of their inhabitants, and about how the plot is progressing. Characters who find themselves tied up in a windowless basement adorned with Nazi memorabilia can make some educated guesses about their captors. Characters who are invited to hash things out at the local volunteer fire department BBQ over beer and ribs can make some different assumptions about their situation.

People who are in dirty places full of wreckage expect irrationality and violence and mob rule. That's the foundation of broken window policing and, while you can make a case that coming down hard on open-container infractions and graffiti does more harm than good (particularly to the disadvantaged strata of society), it definitely telegraphs that the cops are on the job, watching.

Every location someone chooses sends a message. If an ex-con dishwasher is found to be hiding out in relative comfort as a guest at a real estate magnate's hunting lodge, what does that tell you about the relationship between the two of them? If the Fifty-Dollar Medusa only attacks its victims in exclusive restaurants and stadium skyboxes, how does that invitation to a gala gallery opening make you feel?

The homes of avatars and adepts are particularly ripe for GM descriptive flair. If it's NASCAR posters with pushpins creating mystic diagrams that connect how the different breakfast cereals advertised on the vehicles are interrelated, it tells a lot about the particular bent of that obsessive's mindset. A house that is all gingham check and lace — and I mean *all*, down to the bloodstained altar in the root cellar — gives you an insight into character. Decoration sets mood.

It also provides practical openings for plot action. If you're in an airy open courtyard with six different exits, a chase scene is more likely than if you're locked in a steel gardening shed with nothing but a chainsaw and some cans of gas.

Places provide props for cinematic behavior: "Then I jump through the shopping cart! You know... like Jackie Chan did in *Rumble in the Bronx*!" "Give me a Like Jackie Chan roll." And insights: "Looks like the last four

But given the choice between setting a dramatic unveiling of the truth in a historic hidden Masonic chapel in Rennes-le-Château, or next to a reeking dumpster behind a Mississippi Red Lobster, which would you choose?

There's no right answer to that question, but that doesn't make it unimportant.

murders formed points on a pentagram, so going by this calendar based on the cabalistic meanings of the birthdays of the voice talent in Disney's *Aladdin*...." Locations may hold value for objectives, or even become objectives in and of themselves.

RESOURCES

No matter what objective your PCs are chasing, there's probably some piece of land that lends itself to their objective or their path. A private airstrip is great news for antiquities smugglers. A family farm is isolated, just the place for plans and... experiments. A penthouse overlooking the city is the perfect venue to hold parties with local elites and ply them with liquor until they say or do something worthy of blackmail.

Beyond specific tactical advantages, some locations are soaked in magick. If you want to get to the bottom of the haunting at Chuy Ybarra's old house, it helps a lot if you own it. The Fountain of Youth might be out there and might even make going to Florida worthwhile. Mount Ararat, the pride of Armenia, is reputedly where Noah's Ark came to rest, which is *probably* unrelated to its Turkish name, Ağrı Dağı, meaning "Mountain of Pain," and to reports of blood-drinking eight-armed giants emerging from the ash, eyes glowing, during its last eruption in 1840. Maybe climbing the Mountain of Pain lets you ask questions of the giants but maybe they only answer in return for tasty, tasty type AB-. The rift of intoxicating vapors under Delphi's famous oracle can probably provide some insight, if you know how to use them right, and Stonehenge *has* to be good for *something*.

Places of mystical or temporal power are useful as distractions when they don't support an objective, and even when they're acquired and secured, they keep on giving in the form of blowback. If your cabal knows about the Eye of Power that forms in the attic of Ibragimov's Deli in Little Kazakhstan on the 13th of every month, someone else probably knows (or could find out) and want to take it away. That's assuming that mystical locations don't have unexpected side effects — something only a fool would assume. Finally, remember that unnatural places cause unnatural phenomena. Any time you're really hurting for an obstacle, you can pull one of those out when they check on their sanctum sanctorum.

LOBBY

there wait dozens of you who never got to exist they are trying to lure you in and replace you

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STRONGHOLDS

In a horror game, there's some appeal to having a place where they can't get you. Players want somewhere they can kick back and let their guard down, discuss things openly and shower off the stains of coercion and desire — metaphorically and, perhaps, literally. As a GM, do you want to let them have that? Maybe yes.

It may seem to contradict the horror if the cabal can go somewhere, throw the blankets over their heads and get away from the uglies. But horror depends on varied tones, not relentless hopelessness. There has to be hope for uncertainty to do its work, and giving them a bolthole where they're safe, or less endangered at least, relieves tension. If they can get there and yell "Base!" that allows the suspense to build up again. It also gives you, the GM, a chance to catch your breath and think about the next cool thing.

If you're still uneasy about it, make it cost. They can become the Temple Guardians for the drowned Edisto Crocodile Ghost, but only after achieving an *objective* to that effect. Or make their safe home into currency by having its destruction or sacrifice as the price for some powerful figure's aid. Make sure both options are valid. If they choose to keep their safety net, don't invalidate that choice by having it no longer be safe. If they give it up, don't renege on the bargain unless they're going to get a revenge option *real* soon.

Finally, there's the option of letting it be safe until it's not. When Lex Luthor violates the Fortress of Solitude, that's not casually done. Similarly, when some threatening force invalidates their safe zone, that's a *big deal*. Don't take that away from them insouciantly, or without possibility of redress, or just as a hallucination. Holding out the promise of security and then yanking it away is like proposing marriage: you never get the effect of the first time on someone again. Breaking the safe room renders it unsafe. It's a powerful move, but it can backfire on *you* by making your players feel de-protagonized unless it's done with gravitas, consideration, and in a spirit of making their characters *cooler* and *more* badass, not weak and puny.

OBJECTIVES

Earlier, I mentioned the concept of location-as-objective, and certainly there's plenty of mythical elements around Shangri-La, El Dorado, Atlantis, and the secret, adult, members-only sections of Disneyland. Depending on the advantages of the location, it could be a local, global, or cosmic objective.

Now, the warnings about clawing back *objectives* are particularly acute when the achievement they toiled for and *got* is an actual physical place. If the objective is "Kill the High Priestess of Cockroaches" and they do it, only to find out she was actually innocent of two-fifths of the things they were mad about, that's a bit of a suck, but at least they don't have to walk by their one-time home sweet home and see their rival leering at them, feet propped up on the "Under New Management" sign. If they lose the deed on the barbershop that is actually a place of mystic power that lets them work Samson/Delilah weakening spells on people, that's a *big deal*. If you take that away after they've earned it, you have to give them something that's equal to what they lost. That could take the form of new allies, escape from an unknown downside to the location or simply freedom to move about if being tied down defending their redoubt was getting stale. But on top of all that, you should offer a chance for *revenge*. Or redress, for people who don't see themselves as vengeful. It doesn't have to be easy — making it hard probably makes it more rewarding — but it's critical that balancing the scales can't be the *only* payoff for you taking the location. Only getting even leaves them at zero after a lot of effort and toil, which offends a player's sense of fairness. They shouldn't have to work that hard just to get back to even. There's real life for that.

Alternately, you may be 100% OK with them sitting on top of their desired location because it's a volcano of blowback. There can be lots of *attempts* to seize it. Hell, they may expect that to the point where they're secretly disappointed when no one tries. Moreover, the tool of a location is also a constraint, and that makes GMing a lot simpler. They're not simply going to fly off to fucking Paris if they've got this treasure to defend, and the location itself may, with the right nature, provide options for new distractions, or may indicate elements of their objective and path that you can then prepare for in an interestingly devious fashion. Working towards a location objective gives you nice clear signage about where they want the plot going. Give them that, even with a side order of healthy trouble, and they're unlikely to whine or go off in some random direction.

See
"Objectives"
on page 13.

Also found in
"Objectives"
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OTHERSPACES

So there you are, minding your own business, walking down the hallway of the crappy Philly hotel you're staying in tonight. Maybe you're thinking about cheese, because who doesn't love cheese, right? As you spot the ugly orange door to your room, you notice the number, 46, and the way that the light of the full moon is falling onto the 4, but not the 6. It's precisely 9:36pm. You grab the handle with your left hand, and swipe the keycard with your right. They you turn the keycard the right way round, and do it again. With your mind drifting back towards a lovely, sharp piece of cheddar you had three weeks ago in New York, you open the door, and — stepping off with your left foot — walk into...

...a vast lobby, packed with what looks like a crowd of extras from every movie ever made. "Welcome to Hotel MANDI," says a pleasant voice. You whip round to see a bellhop, an old guy with a beatific smile. "If you manage to leave, you may select which door you arrive through. Please choose your weapon."

WHAT ARE OTHERSPACES?

Earth is the center of the universe. Like any top dog, it has fleas. Otherspaces are pocket realities, clustered around humanity like pre-teens thronging the latest pop heartthrob. Wise fools who want to sound knowledgeable describe them as glades in the collective unconscious, but nobody really knows where the dream dimensions actually sit. It doesn't matter, anyway. They exist, and if you happen to meet exactly the right criteria at the right moment, you can blunder into them. Sometimes, you can get out again.

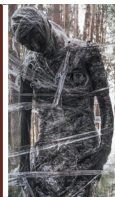
It is assumed, for no very good reason, that all otherspaces are artificial constructs, things deliberately created by people. The one thing they all have in common is that they are accessible from Earth, under certain conditions. Each one has its own entry requirements, its crossroads. These are as varied as the otherspaces themselves. Physical location, state of mind, precise time, specific clothing requirement, ambient light, middle name... any sort of quality you can attach to a person, place, or thing might be part of a given otherspace's crossroads. Any of the details listed at the start of this might be part of Hotel MANDI's crossroads. Or none of them.

The point is, if you don't know how to get to the crossroads, you ain't becoming part of the dream. Not on purpose, anyway.

Inside an otherspace, the laws of physics have a nasty habit of going on vacation. They run on dream logic, not on rationality or science. Sure, they're self-consistent, but blundering into a bubble, as they're adorably called, with no idea of the rules it operates under is a really quick way to end up lost forever. It's one of the benefits of not actually being part of the physical universe. Hard and fast rules like time, size, and mass are a lot more flexible. In the dream, assumptions really are the mother of all fuck-ups.

See, when you gird your loins and blow a bubble, you're imposing order on raw, unshaped entropy. You can shape it to match the needs you have in mind, but it's impossible to hold every single detail of an entire new reality in your head. So you get the broad brushstrokes you want, but the higher

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you aim, the more details you leave for the devil to hide in. So go ahead, dream up a friendly hotel with exits into any doorframe on Earth, but hey, remember to specifically rule out the possibility of the place running on a twenty-four-hour *Battle Royale*-style deathmatch basis.

By their nature, otherspaces are fleeting things. When you create one, you're forcing a stable reality onto formlessness. That's why they're called bubbles. It takes constant energy to keep them running. Once you stop paying the piper, your happy new dimension is liable to collapse. That's bad enough for the creator. It's a whole heap worse for some unwitting tourist who blundered into the crossroads. If you're caught in a collapsing otherspace, you go with it. End of line.

Some bubbles hang around long enough, or get sufficiently energized, to develop a shell. Like pearls, they become irritating enough to the entropy around them that they're walled off. At that point, they don't need to be fed any more. Only a tiny fraction of otherspaces ever become independently self-sustaining, but once they do, they're there forever. Rumors say that the oldest otherspaces was created by a proto-human shaman as an eternal, deathless prison for her enemies. Since she fell, its crossroads has been admitting new inmates: one a day, without fail, for the last seventy thousand years. It's not a place you want to get stuck in, but since nobody knows how its crossroads is reached, there's no way to take precautions.

DEALING WITH OTHERSPACES

Otherspaces may have a footing in our reality simply because people have wandered into them before, but they primarily exist in our collective unconscious and rarely cross over into our plane. Each space is like a bubble that's shielded from the surrounding chaos that, when popped, simply fades away as if it's never existed before. The occupants inside disappear along with it, including humans, and no evidence is left behind except for the tear in reality it's coming and going has caused.

Operating on the physics and reality of dream logic, the closest, human description of an otherspace people's minds could grasp would be the world of the Fae. The Fae are magickal creatures who live in a mystical place beneath a faery mound. The door to this world is only accessible at certain times during the year. During those times, with the right offerings and the correct words, humans may enter this world. But all who do are forewarned: entering the world isn't the hardest part of the journey, for there are many wonders and entrapments that tempt mortals on the other side, making it impossible for them to leave.

While many adepts may pass the description off as an old wives' tale, there is some truth to this conventional wisdom.

- Otherspaces exist, but they are rare. They are built according to their own rules and tend to be surrounded by chaos.
- Their occupants are not bound by any human laws, morals, or ethics and act according to their own interests.
- Communicating with an otherspace's occupants might be difficult, for there's no guarantee that they speak the same language as the querent. Some otherspaces are referred to by different names all around the world for this reason.
- To enter an otherspaces, you need to perform the proper ritual at a precise moment in an exact location to find the door. This also means you need to know which otherspaces you're trying to visit, so you can gather the right materials for your spell.
- Those mortals who enter are not guaranteed safe passage to leave.

*The room
is full
of violins
playing
themselves
even where
there is
nobody
there to
listen.*



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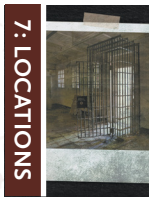
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Generally speaking, members of the occult underground pay very little attention to otherspaces. There's no reason to worry about whether or not the Great Pyramid of Giza is hiding a doorway to another dimension, because such claims are rarely verified. Even when they are, the publicity, speculation, and mysticism surrounding ancient and well-trafficked sites makes it difficult for adepts to test their theories.

Rituals to access otherspaces are very specific and the details may require an adept to focus on the exact position of the sun in the sky and wear certain colors made out of a specific fabric. Alternate states of reality do not bend the laws of otherspaces, either. If you're high or drunk in the prosaic world, you're high or drunk in an alien one. Substance-based adepts are particularly interested in that detail.

Otherspaces occur in nature in one of two ways. They may either be constructed by a powerful adept, or they exist naturally. There are a lot of theories about otherspaces that basically boil down to the same basic, chicken-and-egg principle: which came first, our collective subconscious or the otherspace?

The answer is "Both." Our collective subconscious taps into the experiences of all humans who have ever existed since the dawn of time. In our quest to understand the world around us, we've stumbled across something, a shared experience, thought or emotion, that we've struggled to give shape to. These shared experiences manifest in the dream world through cryptic images, symbols, faces we've never seen before — this is how otherspaces begin. They are grounded in the familiar and mundane, and expand over time to become real through the magickal power of a collective subconscious that has no idea what it's creating.

Over time, as more and more dreams are shared, the otherspace pops into existence. It is a self-sustaining, unique world with its own rules, its own occupants, its own doorways and windows. Outside of that otherspace, however, is the nothingness it came from, the eternal fog of dreams. Formless, shapeless, and neverending.

While otherspaces aren't fixed in space, they are in time. Nodes, called "crossroads," may point the way to otherspaces. Like these alternate realities, these crossroads are also linked to our collective unconsciousness and act as markers that lead us to our end destination. These apertures into elsewhere aren't located by any normal means, not without a little magickal help, for these fixated points represent the exact location of the birth of an otherspace. All crossroads are linked, like an umbilical cord to its mother, to a specific otherspace.

BLOWING BUBBLES

Despite the risks, plenty of occultists set out to create otherspaces of their own. There are three parts to the process: defining the bubble, creating it, and paying upkeep.

Both of the first two parts are handled as objectives. There's no one otherspace ritual — they're tailor-made or improvised like gutter magick, but they take a *lot* more doing.

Design is a local objective. The path for achieving it consists of the cabal imprinting their desired reality into the collective unconscious, one detail at a time. They can picture it using imagination, draw it or even better — get other people to. The more people putting up graffiti related

to their unreal estate, or writing poems set in their Arcadia, or composing music for instruments that exist only in the video game setting they're always raising funds for, the more percentiles they add to the objective. Of course, this necessary artistry tends to be the slow boat. You want to step on the gas, use magick or danger. Implant dreams of your witch house in the mind of a brilliant mathematician and drive him insane. Start a conspiracy theory about Gangkhar Puensum mountain in Bhutan and get people riled up enough to fistfight their neighbors. (Why is it illegal to climb? What spirits are the Bhutanese government protecting? Are Gangkhar Puensum phantoms fleeing their country to come to the US and steal jobs from the weary ground-down mountain gods of the Appalachians?) These tactics aren't pretty, but nothing pounds an idea into people's minds like torment and injustice.

In addition to hiring or being artists, composers, photographers, and/or experimental chefs, the cabal should have a more specific and practical blueprint. Or, perhaps, the blueprint arises from the process of description.

In game terms, they make a list of qualities that define the space. The first of these always has to be "Compatible with human life." Otherwise, the human mind cannot properly conceive it. Other qualities depend on what you need. A safe storage locker might be "Compatible with human life, secure, roomy, unchanging." A transport portal might include "Compatible with human life, multi-exit, targetable exits, compact, reflects need, illuminated, clear signposts, no invaders." A deadly death-trap may involve "Compatible with human life, hostile, lethal, unexpected dangers, dark zone, false trails, no exit, very large." The more qualities you tag your space with, the better you can define it.

Each one requires some action that adds percentiles to the objective to complete. So when a bubble-builder paints a surreal seascape of a meso-Atlantean-American sacrifice temple and UFO refueling depot, that not only adds 1d10+5% to the objective, it lets her add a quality like "people can breathe underwater there" or "has crazy high-tech UFO stuff" or "everything is labeled in Mochica."

The imagining process also includes defining the crossroads. Each crossroads is made up of between 3 and 27 qualities. These can be just about anything which might describe or make up a person, place, thing, or moment — except for specific individuals. So shoe size is fair game, but "me" is not. "This doorway" is fine though, as is "doorways" in general, or "red doorways," or "Pantone 711 doorways." The builder can specify "daytime" or "11.35:15.5". A crossroads can be as complicated or simple as the maker's neuroses demand. Get it in writing though — clarity matters.

When that local objective succeeds, the otherspace doesn't exist. But like Narnia, Metropolis, and Middle Earth, there are people around who recognize it when they hear it described. Even the unaware find that it feels familiar when they see, or hear, or taste those works relevant to it. It is pregnant with possibility, but requires a weighty objective to actually be born and survive. If you're going for a permanent otherspace, make it a cosmic objective.

The tasks that drag the idea from the intangible realm into contact with the grit and waste of this fleshly realm are less creative and more commanding. Make no mistake, creation *ex nihilo* is no Sunday stroll across the Statosphere. These things have to be forced, kicking and screaming, to

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be. Painting the mountain isn't going to help anymore: a secret, illegal expedition in Bhutan to climb Gangkhar Puensum is more the ticket, even if there aren't any snow-devils up there, yet. Relevant actions are usually magickal. Get artifacts and reshape them so that they look like they came from your otherspace, wrecking their magickal effects in the process. Adepts' significant charges, deployed with appropriate panache, are probably good for a 1d10+5% global boost. Major charges net you 2d10+10% at global or cosmic level, if not more. Play hard, score big — them's the rules. Repurposing other otherspaces or finding a way to siphon their realness to your ideas? Could work. Ritual magick? It's a slice of pizza you find in the trash, but thousands dumpster-dine daily.

Otherspaces made as cosmic objectives are just *there*, thereafter. Otherspaces born of weighty objectives need ongoing feeding. Every morning, at dawn, that new bubble nurses a significant charge out of its mommy. Each time she doesn't have an available significant charge, her life energy is taken in its place, permanently reducing her magick identity by 5%. She can raise it back up the normal way, but the points lost are gone forever.

If none of the founders are adepts, it could munch off other paranormal identities. If those aren't available, it snacks down 20% off a maker's relationship — *daily*.

Any adept drained to 0% in their magick identity, or below, has their essence permanently consumed, and their body collapses into gritty dust. It's known as "husking," and everyone agrees that if there is such a thing as an immortal soul, husking is a great way to destroy it. Other people who get their identities or relationships zilched just have to deal with the fallout of no longer having connections or capabilities.

Unfed bubbles begin to starve, and collapse, destroying everything inside at a GM-chosen moment within the next seventy-two hours. This process cannot be delayed or halted. On the plus side, there may be objects, entities or entire locations that can *only* be destroyed in this fashion.

Assuming your players get through all that, congratulate them. They are now the owners of a shiny new otherspace, formed to embody the precisely literal qualities they embedded in it, and accessed through the crossroads they specified. Most otherspaces tend to have natives of some sort or other, just as most people's subconscious minds have unexamined goblins of doubt, desire, superstitious fear, and irrational prejudice. They can be... challenging to deal with. Look to their passions, failed notches, and relationships for inspiration about surprises to add.

SHELL GAMES

There are three possible life paths for otherspaces. The safest is to put in some species of "best used by" date. Qualities such as "begins to decay after taking percentiles off an adept identity seven times" help ensure that the creator isn't paying the bill indefinitely. Open-ended otherspaces are less common. These survive as long as their creator does, plus up to three days. Finally, an otherspace can absorb enough energy to grow a shell. At that point, it no longer costs a daily charge, and endures for as long as humanity itself does — provided that it wasn't built with a self-destruct switch, that is. "Implode instantly when the golden statue of Ra is lifted from its pedestal."

An otherspace that wasn't made as a cosmic objective becomes stable after 333 daily significant charges. That's not quite a year of always having a significant charge available at dawn. Ambitious.

The Invisible Clergy could choose to just stabilize a bubble themselves, but as nobody knows of them having ever actually done so, they're not likely to start with you. Colossal human sacrifice could do it too, but it's not easy to simultaneously kill precisely 333 people at the instant the dawn rises. There are rumors of a ritual that allows one to murder a human being at dawn to pay the day's soul cost for you, but very few serial killers can get away with even a weekly murder for month, let alone a daily one for ten months.

Finally, there's always a good old major charge. One of those can stabilize an otherspace. It's a high price, but it's better than husking out.

RISKS AND BENEFITS

The Bosnian pyramids. Fingal's Cave. Sedona, Arizona. Mount Ararat. The Bermuda Triangle. Some adepts believe the sacred places in the world all have something in common, a thread that if pulled carefully unravels the truth about otherspaces. Open up a tabloid or search for a couple of keywords online and you're likely to come across theories about ancient sites and ruins like Teotihuacán or places like the Akashic records that exist in the public consciousness but have yet to be confirmed.

When it comes to otherspaces, members of the occult underground err on the side of skepticism because of their rarity and the spread of misinformation. They are especially hesitant to dig deeper if they encounter the one otherspace that is widely known, at least within the occult underground rumor rounds — the dread *House of Renunciation*.

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STILL, PLATO IS GODLY. RYAN IS THE UNPAID CIRCUS FOR THE LAST FIFTY YEARS. THE BUILDING IS A MESS OF STAIRS AND STAIRS AND STAIRS. THE BUILDING IS A MESS OF STAIRS AND STAIRS AND STAIRS. THE BUILDING IS A MESS OF STAIRS AND STAIRS AND STAIRS.

While the risks and benefits of visiting an otherspace need to be assessed on a case-by-case basis, the fear of the unknown is a common refrain that has the tendency to dissuade anyone from delving in any further. There are, however, other risks and benefits to consider like:

- Found objects in an otherspace may retain unnatural properties or characteristics of their home's weird physics when brought into general reality. Even if they change into something ordinary, their origin may make them uniquely suited for rituals or incorporation into artifacts.
- Otherspaces are built on the logic of dreams. A day in an otherspace may be several years in the prosaic world. A jump from one building to the next could be accomplished by a small child.
- The hostility or friendliness of the otherspace's occupants cannot be predicted. One otherspace may be filled with talking eagles who eat humans for dinner. Another may hold a tribe from millennia ago, or desert marauders once thought lost, or an entire culture of adepts eager for new worlds to conquer.
- The environment within the otherspace is also unpredictable. Sharp, jagged rocks and acid rain may be located in one otherspace, while another could be a protected city at the bottom of a vast ocean. You could eat blades of grass that taste like fresh strawberries in one otherspace, or encounter nothing but saltwater taffy in another.

- Each door is unique and can only be traveled through in one direction at a time. The door you open to get to the otherspace may not be the same one you exit back into reality.
- Otherspaces are accessible around the world and do not appear to one nationality or another. For this reason, once an otherspace has been found, researchers should cross-reference their facts with other people from other countries. Luckily, the internet has made this exchange of information possible.
- Native inhabitants of an otherspace treat your reality the same way you would theirs. In order for them to cross over, which they rarely do, they also have to perform a delicate ritual, gather the right ingredients, etc. When an otherspace native opens the door to our reality, their visit sends out a ripple effect that can be traced back to its source and the location of the door — to psychics and people who know what they're doing.
- People pay good money for your story when you come back from an otherspace, whether you've been harmed or not. The trick is to find them, and to convince them you're not crazy. Or another con artist.

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THE HOUSE OF RENUNCIATION

The House of Renunciation seems to be one of the worst-kept secrets in the occult underground. Everyone's heard about it at some point, though no one really knows what they're talking about. It's a mystery to be unraveled, a place of power that is just waiting to be plundered, a bizarre fact to tell at pseudo-Masonic cocktail parties, and so on. Everyone talking about it sounds and feels smart, like they're in on some big secret, but few really understand the House in the slightest.

THE ROLE OF THE HOUSE

If there is a cosmic force of order outside of the Invisible Clergy, it's the House of Renunciation. It's an otherspace — maybe the ur-otherspace — with a grand function: to take that which is and turn it against itself. When a person enters the House, they come out inverted, hating what they once loved, despising what they previously revered, apathetic towards the object of their onetime obsession. This inversion can go beyond personality, and make a Latino in Chicago into a Chinese woman in Melbourne, or make a rich executive on Wall Street into a starving artist in SoHo.

This is the force of change and unmaking that the world needs, from the Statosphere's perspective. It is the prison and punishment for all Clergy who are deemed irrelevant and fall from their station, to be deconstructed and rebuilt. If there is anything that the Invisible Clergy fear, surely it is the House.

A HOUSE DIVIDED

The "House" is itself a misnomer, a term introduced in the 16th century by a megalomaniacal Agent of the House named Hubert Roscommons. In truth, it's a collection of Rooms, each with its own agenda. Different Rooms target

different types of people and have different values to impose on the wider world.

There are many Rooms, like the Gilded Room, which seeks out those who truly believe in philanthropy and the betterment of people as a whole at the expense of those closest to them, and makes them bored and tired of the public's never-ending need. The Room of Chains takes hedonists who toil just for the next night of vice and luxury, and remakes them into people who put that energy into mastering a craft to the exclusion of momentary gratification. The Foyer's goal is to convert those who serve others but find only contempt, and make them instead see honor and joy in being served.

The Rooms hold no special sense of morality or ethical concerns beyond their base mandate. They only share in common the grander purposes of inversion, and they all have Agents that see to their agenda and are imbued with unnatural ability, but the similarity ends there. The Rooms serve distinct functions, their agendas are not always compatible, and their Agents are not necessarily allies. At times, those who serve different Rooms even war against another, when the same corner of the world draws the attention of multiple Rooms.

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Perhaps the most frightening part is that once you are changed, you *want* to be who you are now. You might not even remember your old life. And if you're made into a whole new identity, the Room often flows that identity into the greater world as if you were always that person: government documents, jobs, family, friends, etc. This doesn't mean there's no relic of the previous life or some scar in the world from such radical change, though. Even the Statosphere is imperfect... or perhaps such remnants are its will.

Rooms come and go, as do Agents. The Statosphere creates, shapes, and discards Rooms as it sees fit. Those few who understand the nature of the House as a sentence for fallen Clergy speculate that there are 333 Rooms — one for each archetype. But that is just conjecture, one that might be far too convenient and neat to be true.

AGENTS OF RENUNCIATION

Those who serve a Room are its Agents. Agents of the House are the rare ones who can walk into a Room — specially, their Room — and be unchanged by it. They are the Room's caretakers, its eyes and arms in the tangible world, its diplomats and soldiers. All who serve a Room are dedicated to it, often because the Room changed them into who they are now.

Not everyone who goes through a Room becomes its Agent, but every Agent has gone through his or her Room.

What Agents know of the House of Renunciation as a whole varies widely: some believe that only their Room is the House, others know of another Room or two, and a few have a grander, though still incomplete, understanding of the House.

Agents of Renunciation may have a few special abilities, which are tailored by their Room. Some Agents have more powers granted to them by their Room, but at minimum, they have the following:

Agent of Renunciation: The Room's other-spatial nature gives it some limited powers of the Statosphere, which it passes onto its Agents. Any time the Agent gets a die roll lower than her Secrecy ability, they can choose to raise or lower it by 10 — and only 10, not a fraction thereof. So an Agent with Secrecy 70 who rolled 53 could make the roll a 43 or 63, if desired. This applies to all *die* rolls the Agent makes.

Ritual of Renunciation: The Agent can perform a ritual to open a door and pass through into their Room. The specifics of this ritual vary from one Room to the next, but it never costs charges and only requires a successful Secrecy check to activate. The Agent can bring others with them through the door, but cannot send them through unescorted.

It's possible for non-Agents to learn a specific Room's ritual and use it, though for them it costs 5 significant charges. They must enter the Room themselves to use it, and may then be affected by the Room as a result.

THE HOUSE IN A CAMPAIGN

The House of Renunciation holds many uses in an *Unknown Armies* campaign. Even at the street level, it can be a strange rumor and momentary source of mysterious aid or opposition. A Room's agenda may fit squarely against the PCs, in which case the Room and its Agents interpose themselves. This doesn't mean the Room always tries to take and invert the PCs; just because someone opposes the Room's overall agenda in the world doesn't mean they're who the Room is looking to assimilate. Because Rooms don't get to have objectives, this tampering is more likely to be direct and right up in their face. Agents make great recurring obstacles, and engaging the Room can serve as a good ongoing distraction and, therefore, a good source of blowback.

The PCs could be Agents of a Room, or even of temporarily allied Rooms. This is best for a cosmic game, and certainly their opposition is much more dangerous than a few thugs with a weird artifact and some gutter magick. The trick to this is that their collective objective can't be that of any single Room. It has to be something they seek, not because they're Agents, but in *spite* of being Agents. In this structure, the Room(s), their masters, take the role of ongoing distractions. Tear them between the pull of their obligations to the House and their personal objective. It's fun!

Finally, the House could serve as an especially odd starting point for a game, where the PCs inexplicably meet each other in a surreal house that they have no memory of entering. In truth, they've all been changed by that Room, and are about to emerge back into the world. Such a game might start at street level and radically shift in short order, because some magick or cosmic elements bleed into their lives. Perhaps the PCs were once in the Invisible Clergy, and their first moments of play are the very first moments of new, mortal lives.

1: GM



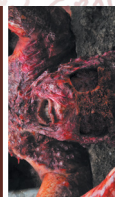
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Walk.

RUMORS AND CONJECTURE

Anyone who visits the occult underground knows there are a lot of rumors flying around about the House of Renunciation. Every two-bit artifact dealer has a finger in this pot, and gladly sells a hanger that held Comte de Saint-Germain's coat or a map that gives the last known location of the Room of Pleasurable Torment.

While there are a lot of charlatans and con artists out there, it's true that the House has been actively recruiting more adepts than in previous years. Whenever the House's activity jumps, so does the general chatter. Here's a few of the rumors that have been circulating:

- An Agent named Shen Lu escaped one of the Rooms, and is now trying to break other Agents free from the House's eternal servitude.
- Alex Abel didn't lose a substantial sum of money in the Great Recession. He blew most of his fortune on a sophisticated compass that can locate any one of the House's doors.
- The number of House's Rooms have mysteriously doubled. Now, instead of 333 Rooms it has 666. Each new Room is a mirror image of the original, and does the exact opposite to anyone who enters it.
- Mak Attax figured out a way to re-engineer Rooms, but they have to send someone through it first.
- The House is becoming visible in broad daylight and is manifesting on this plane of reality. In New Jersey, an apartment building was evacuated when the Attic of Unwanted Limbs popped into existence.
- An woman named Loretta Silverstein claims she's an Agent of the House, and it's her mission to recruit potential candidates and lead them to the proper room. She's demonstrated the ability to vomit out live, poisonous snakes at will. She also says she's not alone.

THE CHAMBER OF CLOTTED NIGHTMARES

While some adepts have been hardened by their experiences with the horrors of the occult, others suffer from paranoia, night terrors, and other mental ailments. The Chamber of Clotted Nightmares believes that no adept should be able to stand in the face of terror. One day, all adepts shall eventually succumb to madness. The Chamber decrees they must.

AGENDA

The Chamber's purpose is to remind all adepts that magick has a price, and the consequences for bending the rules of reality are severe. It demands that adepts renounce their callousness and hardened personalities, to feel fear once again, because they *should* always be afraid. How, when, and why adepts use magick doesn't matter to the Chamber. It doesn't matter how experienced the adept is, what path she follows, or what she's been through in the past, either. What does, however, is the fact that the adept has become resilient and is no longer tested by her experiences.

The Chamber collects adepts desensitized to Violence, the Unnatural, Helplessness, Isolation, or Self — at least six notches on two meters — and removes their hardened notches to reinforce the horrors of the occult.

APPEARANCE

The Chamber of Clotted Nightmares resembles an underground, circular platform surrounded by a black, bottomless abyss on all sides. The vaulted ceiling is covered with a carpet of thick, pulsing, thorny vines and iridescent webbing. Crying "flowers" that grow on the vines provide an eerie backdrop for the room. The fleshy-pink blossoms are the reconstituted faces of the adepts the Room attempted to convert but who were never to be seen or heard from again.

At the heart of the Chamber, a giant cyborg stands at attention, its many arms and claws reaching toward the glittering ceiling, waiting for visitors to drop in unexpectedly. The only light in the room emits from artificial lighting that crisscrosses all along the bottom of the Chamber and on the cyborg itself. The tiles in the mosaic floor are made out of a thick glass; each one reveals a small depression below where living organs (eyes, hearts, skin, horns, scales, and teeth) are kept alive to maintain the Chamber's sole occupant.

The cyborg is an amalgamation of old, withered trees, glowing television screens, cell phones, and computer monitors, and dozens of human and animal organs belonging to people and predators of all types. While it seems to run on blood and electricity, the cyborg feeds off of nightmares from the real world and beyond, as well as the occasional visitor.

Thick, metallic stalagmites line the round platform, pointing ominously toward the center of the Chamber. Each one has a keypad that operates a unique screen along with an attached headset. The larger formations have a smooth place to sit or lean back into. These stalagmites are mounted onto circular dials that can move and twirl at the cyborg's commands.

RENUNCIATION

The Chamber of Clotted Nightmares relies on three abilities to ensure that adepts learn their lesson. It targets any adept who's in danger of becoming a sociopath. Those who approach a total of twenty-five hardened notches across all categories are most likely to be targeted by the Room. But sometimes it ignores people with even more, and sometimes it grabs people with fewer.

Reversal of Fear: Adepts who enter the Room with six or more hardened notches in any of the five categories of mental stress feel their terror growing when the cyborg drains their resilience down to one. It's a strange, emotional vomiting sensation as one to five hardened notches are simply purged. Imagine the awkwardness and discomfort of telling your neuroses and fears to a psychologist, of unpacking your most trying and unhappy moments to a counselor, of weeping your way through a breakthrough. Now, instead of spreading that over months, it happens in *moments*. That said, afterwards one often feels better. At the time, however, the usual sensation is just relief that it's over.

Though the cyborg only picks one category per visit — Violence, the Unnatural, Helplessness, Isolation, or Self — once an adept has entered the Room, she may be sucked into the Chamber again if she fits its criteria.

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Once their checks are removed, adepts may panic, frenzy, or experience a moment of paralysis as if they failed a stress check, but won't need to mark off a failed notch. At the GM's discretion, the adepts may experience other long-term effects as well that are appropriate to that type of mental stress.

The Price of Sanity: Each stalagmite is coded to an adept in the Room and is activated after the Reversal of Fear has taken place. The formations hold a glow-in-the-dark console and a headset that connects to a screen on the cyborg's body. As soon as the adept has calmed down for a few moments, a unique stalagmite swivels toward her and a light flashes, prompting her to put the headset on. When she does, a screen begins to play back moments of duress she experienced in her life. However, because she's no longer hardened to that type of stress, she sees the event with fresh eyes, as if she's reliving that tense moment all over again. If she opts not to participate, then she sits and sulks in a room where the only thing available to drink is the flower-rain, which deals 1d10 wound points per drink.

To make the video stop playing, the Agent can either endure the ordeal by reenacting what happened, or sacrifice a part of her body to the cyborg. However, an adept's reenactment comes with a catch: she may alter the outcome and, by doing so, may trigger a new chain of events that awaits when she returns to reality. Or it might not: the Room is capricious, or perhaps its power to rewrite reality is limited.

Mark of Humanity: The mark of humanity is not a physical one, but an invisible symbol that's voluntarily tattooed on the back of an adept's neck to mark that magick user as someone who's been in the Room. To accept the mark is to accept the truth: that adepts are more dangerous when they've been desensitized, and that becoming callous does no one any good.

When an adept accepts the mark, she is no longer in danger of becoming a sociopath at that moment. She must remove one failed notch, in any category. However, as the adept receives more hardened notches outside of the Room, the tattoo becomes larger, more elaborate and more visible every time she shrugs off her stress. Initially, it only flares into visibility when the adept casts a spell. After she ignores five checks due to hardened notches, it's visible whenever she gathers charges, and it covers most of her back and upper arms. After ten ignored checks, it encircles her entire torso, glowing slightly in the dark and fluorescing under UV lamps. Once she's ignored twenty checks, the tattoo covers her whole body, is clearly visible, and the Room may recreate her as its Agent.

AGENTS

In this Room, Agents are former visitors who were unable to avoid becoming callous over time. Any active Agents are temporary. The adepts are there to serve until the cyborg has fully integrated them into its body.

Agents may, until they are subsumed, operate semi-independently until their consciousness and their magick is drained away. While they may experience brief moments of mental duress, Agents no longer feel any physical pain as they are being operated on and reassembled where their parts are most needed.

The current agent is Viktor Masterson, a former mechanomancer who became obsessed with the cyborg during his visit over a decade ago. Masterson used his magick to try and recreate the cyborg once he returned home. While he achieved a moderate level of success, Masterson wasn't happy with the components he acquired, and became determined to find newer, fresher, better parts that would perfect his machine. In the Room, his head and shoulders now frame a television screen that shows the people and animals he murdered to get what he needed.

The Room grants any existing Agents the following powers:

Test of Resolve: The Agent may decide to trigger an unnerving event in the real world that a targeted adept must deal with before she enters the Room. Should she fail her stress check, the next time she steps into fallen autumn leaves she gets sucked under and is deposited in the Room. He may also review potential candidates to enter the Room and choose the next entrants.

Flashbacks: An Agent may communicate with an adept by giving her glimpses of the encounters that led him down his path. These fractured memories manifest as night terrors, nightmares, and visions. They could be images of real places, otherspaces, other Rooms, or splinters from the cyborg's mind. Flashbacks are an Agent's reaction to being torn apart by the cyborg, a desire to reach out to other humans, one born out of realizing what's happening to him.

While these visions may force the adept to examine the source, experience moments of icy terror, or reveal truths about what else is out there, the Agent may not always be fully aware he's reaching out in this fashion. The closer he is to final assimilation, the less an Agent can control these flashes. The less he can control them, the more frequently they occur, and the more likely it is that an adept finds the Room.

Commander of the Vines: This is the one power the Agent has that the cyborg does not. While the Agent is lucid, he may control the opening and closing of the Room's leafy door by manipulating the vines from above. He may also communicate and send messages through these vines as well. They are received in the form of fallen leaves from any convenient plant, with the veins grown into cursive writing. They blow into the target's hand and are found in her purse, car or home until read.

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THE LIBRARY OF DISCORD

Routine. Order. Familiarity. Convention. Business as usual. Adepts and avatars who get a little too comfortable relying on a standard operating procedure become predictable, lazy, and apathetic. A videomancer relies on Narrowcast every time he wants to talk to somebody, even though he could just as easily use the phone. An avatar of the Warrior attacks low-level street dealers to prove she's committed to the War on Drugs and, after a while stops worrying about the bigger fish to fry.

Though they may feel safe doing what they know, the Library of Discord stands against them to ensure they don't slip into apathy.

AGENDA

The Library of Discord thrives on the basic principles of entropy, shaking things up for any adept or avatar who has gotten too comfortable with their MO. This Room requires that they reject what they've taken for granted by taking that which is familiar to them and turning it upside down, reversing its effects or forcing adepts to give up magick entirely.

Unlike the Chamber of Clotted Nightmares, the specifics of how, when, and why adepts and avatars use magick or channels matters very much to the Library. Experienced mystics may care what happens to them in this room, for the effects of the Library are greater for those who have wielded magick for some time. While newer chargers may be targeted, the experienced have had more time to become jaded, and have a lot more to lose.

The Library opens its doors to occultists who use magick for mundane tasks and who avoid looking at the bigger picture because they've grown overly comfortable with where they're at. Cabals who slide into taking the easy way out at all times may also be drawn into the Library. There's room for everyone.

Once inside, the Library's many untitled books begin to hum, begging for the occupants to open them and read their contents. Choose one book, and the reader suffers a reversal of hardened and fail checks on one meter of the shock gauge. Choose another, change ethnicity. Another might scramble your language, so that you only speak French instead of English. The very worst books force the reader to accept a school of magick, causing instant, permanent, and total insanity if the target is already an adept who knows one.

Upon leaving the Library of Discord, all visitors take a card from the head librarian that reveals how long they have to suffer the effects of the Room. Needless to say, there is no limit to how many times chargers may enter this Room. That, it seems, is entirely up to them.

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APPEARANCE

The Room is a near-perfect mimicry of an early 20th century public library, replete with stacks and stacks of books, soft lighting, and gleaming chestnut desks. Its doorways are attached to existing libraries and bookstores and may be entered randomly. Rumor has it that the Library was built based on the premise of mystical numbers, and everything found in the Room — including its construction — is based on the Fibonacci sequence. Those who claim to have been to the Library swear that there is a secret code hidden in plain sight revealing which book is which.

Though the Room has no internet and books are not arranged in any particular order, the primary difference between the Library of Discord and a real library is the fact that the books do not match their covers. Each book on the shelf has been stripped of its cover and replaced with a new title. The contents, too, are very different. An adept who picks up a book about dream catchers can discover he's actually holding a survivalist's handbook.

The Library of Discord blocks out all peripheral sound, and operates in total silence. Visitors who enter the Room typically begin to suffer hallucinations after a short period of time, and are required to remain as silent as the grave. As soon as the visions start, visitors typically pick up the first book they see and begin to read its contents.

RENUNCIATION

The Library of Discord has two abilities that impact its guests. The Library forces adepts and avatars to renounce that which is safe and familiar in favor of the unknown, for there is no such thing as "safe." Safety is a lie people tell themselves to sleep at night. By embracing the fact that yes, entropy does exist, people are better equipped to handle what comes.

The Room recruits its Agents from two categories of people: adepts obsessed with books, and people who have an attached astral parasite. No one else is eligible.

Blanketed Silence: Upon first entering the Library, one notices how quiet it is. The Library muffles all sound and maintains a state of perfect silence. To avoid silence-induced auditory hallucinations in the Library, guests need to make a Knowledge check every half hour. A failed check results in illusory whispers, which soon develop brief visual components. These images are not shared and are uniquely personal, meant to instruct in the dangers of inactivity. They can be somewhat confusing or oblique, however.

The Stacks: Every book in the Library is available to guests, but only one volume has to be read in order to leave the room. A single book represents a skill, talent, accident of birth, or other mechanical effect that temporarily changes the character. Skilled, physical characters become bookworms, while outdoorsmen develop a keen knowledge of watch repair. Timid paranoids become gregarious and trusting while suave salesmen are afflicted with stutters.

The identities in question are always something the visitor doesn't already have. It's gained at 25%. But the book always comes with a skein of confusing information, imposing a failed notch on a relevant meter. It's a little bit trick and a little bit treat.

There are stacks and stacks of mis-covered books piled every which way, in no particular order, from floor to ceiling. Once a book is opened it cannot be closed again, not without suffering its effects. Read one book, and be changed.

Timestamp: An Agent gives each visitor a stamp when they leave the Room. This timestamp, which is usually printed on a card, reveals that the Room's effects are, in fact, temporary. However, there is no set date, day of the week, or other notable information on the card other than a time like Noon, 9:30 or 16:08. The effects of the Room cease at some point in the future at that time, but without a date there's no way to plan for it. It could be hours, days, months, or years. Should the guest ever lose or destroy the timestamp, the Room's effects become permanent.

AGENTS

Like the occultists it attracts, the Room's Agents come and go and are always in flux. Their powers ebb and flow, changing constantly, and sometimes, their spells backfire — which is why they're anxious to leave the Library in favor of the more stable world outside.

The Library provides its Agents with the following powers:

Gilded Silence: All those who become Agents can withstand the Room's supernatural silence and suffer no ill effects. While none are allowed to speak, in part because their tongue and vocal cords have been removed, Agents communicate with one another via a sophisticated sign language. Gilded Silence gives Agents the option to better study the books in the Library and put books away or rearrange them if need be, by helping them withstand the side effects of preternatural quiet. The Gilded Silence also allows the Agents to witness what's happening by recording it in a book or in their mind palace, too.

Mind Palace: Agents in the Library have perfect memories, provided they stay in the Room. To remember all that they've seen and read, each Agent instinctively knows how to build a personal mind palace to catalogue and store information. Each category of data files is locked by a unique password that is known to all Agents present in the Library. Agents use this knowledge to hide information, find new recruits, stay on alert for the ignorant, and switch up the order of the books once again.

Trading Places: At any moment an Agent may swap bodies with anyone else in the Room. This effect cannot be fully understood until the Agent leaves with the stolen body. When a body swap takes place, the Agent now has access to every physical ability his host body has, with a -25% penalty. Like other visitors, the Agent, too, receives a timestamp upon leaving the Room. However, Agents can only remain in a swapped body for a maximum of twenty-four hours. Should the Agent's time expire before returning to the Library, his soul becomes forfeit and he becomes a demon. The body he was in, however, remains in a comatose state until its original owner, in the dead Agent's borrowed body, touches it once more.

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