

MORTAL MAGIC



The
Whispering
Vault



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ABOUT THIS PDF

The following pages of this PDF are exactly as they were created many years ago. The decision was made to release the contents of this product in their original form, a gesture to show our respect for the creators of this product. It was tempting to replace some artwork and rewrite some sections of the book but in the end we decided it better to release this (and the other existing *The Whispering Vault* products) in its original form.

In the future we will create and release a new edition of *The Whispering Vault*. That time is not near.

For now, enjoy this and other products in **The Whispering Vault** universe. We hope you grow to love the setting as much as we have.

– Philip Reed and Christopher Shy

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MORTAL MAGIC

A Supplement For The Whispering Vault Role-playing Game.



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Table of Contents:

CHAPTER ONE: THE POWER AND THE TRUTH.	1
CHAPTER TWO: MAGIC IN PLAY.	15
CHAPTER THREE: MOLDING THE DREAM.	23
CHAPTER FOUR: MOLDING THE FLESH.	45
CHAPTER FIVE: MOLDING THE ESSENCE.	67
CHAPTER SIX: MAGICIANS.	87
Adventure Hooks.	105
The Divine Spark.	111

Credits.

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Thank you for your interest in our product, but before purchasing it we recommend you first read our all-purpose industrial strength disclaimer.

What is *magic*?

Magic \maj-ik\ *n.* 1: the use of means (as in charms or spells) believed to have supernatural power over natural forces. 2: the art of producing an illusion by sleight of hand.

The book you are about to read details the magic of a fantasy world, in which—like the preceding first definition of magic—magic exists. But, it should also be clearly understood that—like the preceding second definition of magic—nothing in this book is real. So, if you are currently experiencing or have ever experienced trouble identifying the difference between the two definitions given above (fantasy and reality), then we suggest you stop reading here and perhaps seek professional counseling. For all those who grok the idea of role-playing being but a game and not an alternative lifestyle, we encourage you to proceed. But be warned, this is a hardcore look at the darker elements of raw magic; the manipulation of Essence—life itself.

-THE Management



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What role does magic play inside The Whispering Vault universe? A dark one to be sure. Magic is neither good nor evil, it is an anomaly; a perversion of the nature, of the Dream. At its most wholesome moment, it is still utterly unwholesome. Magic is a living force. As it works, it twists and corrupts the stability of reality, stretching and sometimes tearing the fabric of the Dream in order to fulfill foolish ambitions.

There are many theories on how magic was initially introduced into the Dream. Some feel it was an Unbidden who desired to teach its “children” the powers of the dreaming. Others say that the secrets of magic were stolen long ago, by a group of Stalkers desiring the Dream to be free of the Aesthetics’ control. Still yet, others argue that logic, certain sounds, and math are all possible secret “keys” which may unlock the stability of the Dream; allowing it to be molded.

Whatever the case may be, within the great vastness of the Dream, there is only one creature intelligent enough to even begin to understand the complex secrets of magic, but unfortunately that creature is also ignorant enough to try and claim those powers for their own. That would be man; slave to passion, craver of power, wielder of arcana, creator of Enigmas.

Fortunately, there are immortal guardians to watch over the Dream; our last unknown line of defense from oblivion. Our protectors, Stalkers, do not forget their mortal roots and so they labor tirelessly to mend a reality that constantly threatens to be torn asunder. Until now, even the Stalkers may not have fully understood the terrible threat mortals have brought to the Dream. And if they thought their job was tough before, Mortal Magic now gives them a lot more to think about...



Thank you for choosing to purchase this product. As a small publisher we value each and every one of our customers, because it is you who keep us alive and kicking. We at Ronin Publishing are fellow gamers and we are quite passionate about what we do (we hope it shows). Our supplements are intended to enhance the games they support and increase the amount of fun you have playing them. So, it is our greatest wish that you enjoy Mortal Magic and derive many fun-filled hours of play from it.

Mortal Magic was originally conceived a few years ago by Mike Nystul, the creator of The Whispering Vault role-playing game. The intentions of Mortal Magic’s author, Kevin Hassal, was to create a magic system which could capture the flavor of the game and yet be like no other. The fact that much of the game is interwoven with a fictional element known as “Essence”—the stuff of life in The Whispering Vault game—gave Kevin the perfect vehicle to create a convincingly disturbing vision of magic. He goes on to make characters aware that magic is neither compassionate nor pure; it is an entity unto itself and it cannot be mastered. It is made plainly evident that those fools who possess the desire to manipulate the natural, beyond all natural means, will, in the end become entirely corrupt and eventually they will be consumed by their own ignorance. Kevin has introduced the characters of The Whispering Vault to a new threat to contend with and a major twist in the setting of the game.

With the addition of Mortal Magic into The Whispering Vault game setting, a whole new way of structuring the Hunt becomes available. Players can no longer can expect that all paths will lead to the Unbidden and that all Enigmas are a snap to find. Stalkers now have a chance to develop into multidimensional characters and have greater reason to interact between Circle members.

Happy gaming.



CHAPTER ONE: THE POWER AND THE TRUTH.

To perform magic is to change the Dream.

This can only be done by sculpting and manipulating Essence—for Essence is power; it is growth, change, and strength; it is life. Usually, mortal magic is performed by imbuing mundane objects with Essence, though rarer types of magic are known. All magics, however, begin and end with Essence, for only it can give mortals the power to over-ride the vision of the Aesthetics.

All living things in the Realm of Flesh have a small amount of Essence woven into them. Without this Essence they would be as lifeless and static as earth or stone. This is what gives them their marvelous abilities to react, to reproduce, and even (in the species with the greatest concentrations of Essence) to think.

Many mortals know that all living things have Essence in them (though they usually speak in terms of spirits). More “advanced” humans have tended to assume that only they have this spark of power—what they call a “soul”. Power, spirit, soul, Essence—whatever name it is given, this is the stuff that allows objects and beings of the Flesh to act and react. And so, in order to empower an object, it must have Essence invested in it.

Magic requires Essence. Essence is life. So, magic is itself alive. The more powerful an enchantment, the more Essence it requires—and so, the more alive it is. The mightiest enchantments are more alive than (and often more intelligent than) their creators.

THE NATURE OF MAGIC.

Mortals are creatures of Flesh. Essence belongs to a foreign Realm. When mortals create enchantments, they take powers beyond their control and comprehension, and mis-shape them into new forms, creating magics which warp the Dream.

There is nothing pleasant, comforting or innocent about this magic. To power their invocations, the most amoral sorcerers often resort to killing (they call it sacrifice) or tormenting other beings.

*Magic requires
Essence. Essence is life.
So, magic is itself alive.*

Magics pervert the Dream, spreading suffering and pain, creating and enlarging Enigmas. And then the enchantments frequently run out of control, destroying their creators and sometimes many others along the way.

Sorcerers may begin their arcane careers full of greed and lust for power, or they may be inspired by a love of humanity and a desire to protect the world from the darker creatures of the Unseen. But whatever their motives, most end the same dark way—twisted and broken, prematurely senile; just the dupes of more potent creatures.

POWERING MAGICS.

When an enchantment is cast, a mortal must imbue a physical object with Essence.

Essence is measured in points—one point being sufficient for a very minor enchantment, and only the most potent requiring more than 20 points.





For years I labored under the misapprehension that I was a craftsman, fashioning and creating magics—like a watchmaker, tampering with unseen mechanisms. But I could not have been more wrong. My creations were not dumb objects, neither predictable nor static. I did not craft. I gave birth—I breathed life. I been a better parent. All children return to claim their inheritance.



The most obvious way to get Essence is for a sorcerer to take it from within himself, and place that within an object. Each human's personal, inherent Essence is measured by his Resolve score. This is the maximum amount of Essence which the mortal may have within him, and most mortals go through life with this full amount. If any Essence is poured or drained out, by casting magics for example, it is later regained, absorbed from the other living things of the Dream.

Rather than weakening himself, however, a mortal sorcerer may choose to draw Essence from other living things.

In general, a large, relatively complex animal (like a cow or sheep) provides 2 points of Essence. A chicken, rabbit, toad or other small creature provides one point. The greatest animals in the Dream—whales, dolphins, chimps and gorillas—may provide up to ten points of Essence, while sacrificing a human provides at least eight points (equal to the human's Resolve rating). Individu-

Drawing a point of Essence from himself temporarily reduces the sorcerer's Resolve by One.

ally, plants usually have only a trace of Essence, though in some cases they have enough to power an enchantment: an ancient tree or grove might contain

one or two points, or a sorcerer might draw Essence from a broad area, like an entire forest.

The most obvious way to take Essence from another creature is through sacrifice; when an object is enchanted, living creatures may be killed as part of the magical ritual; their Essence being taken to fuel the magic. The sacrificial victim must be carefully selected, however, and killed with ritual precision.

Another option, more rare, and more difficult to accomplish; is for the sorcerer to draw Essence from captive creatures. Complex mechanical, magical or technological apparatus is required, which inevitably requires the captives to be restrained and usually drugged, mutilated, subjected to considerable pain, or otherwise tormented.

Large groups of sorcerers, as in Enlightened Organizations, might band together to create an enchantment, each contributing only a fraction of the necessary Essence.

The most audacious and powerful sorcerers might even try to ensnare or sacrifice creatures of Essence or Shadows to draw power from. Some might even call Stalkers, with false rumors of an Enigma, in order to capture them. Shadows, like mortals, provide Essence equal to their Resolve (though they usually have higher Resolve ratings). Stalkers provide Essence equal to their Willpower multiplied by their Karma.

It is extremely rare, however, for a sorcerer to be able to power an enchantment entirely from outside of himself. Almost every enchantment





known to mortals requires some Essence to be drawn direct from the sorcerer. This creates a personal link between the sorcerer and his creation that is vital for the proper shaping and control of the enchantment.

Meditation provides the safest method of enchantment for highly self-disciplined sorcerers. Usually, such mortals go into a deep trance, and begin by channeling one point of their Essence into the enchantment. Then the Essence that they begin to absorb from the surrounding Dream flows direct into the enchantment. Consequently it can take days or even months to complete an enchantment through meditation, but the process has few risks or inconveniences. At the end of the meditation the sorcerer has only lost one point of Resolve, and there is no need to assemble large groups of mortals or sacrificial victims to power a potent enchantment.

CASTING MAGICS.

Weaving magic is no swift, simple process. To make magic, to sculpt Essence, takes hours, or days, or even years in some cases. Complex rituals and ceremonies must be performed, or long hours spent in deep meditation.

For these rites, rare components and ingredients must be gathered. Props must be assembled. Appropriate sacrificial victims may need to be produced. Sorcerers must perfect the words and gestures of a ritual before it can be safely cast. Timing is often vital. And the object to be imbued with Essence must be carefully selected.

Why such elaborate preparations are necessary is a subject of much debate amongst sorcerers, especially those who are Enlightened. While many believe that they are placating the gods or discovering the underlying laws of the universe, the more savvy magicians wonder who such rituals serve. Some have come to believe that sorcery is indeed part of the vision of the Aesthetics and that the rituals are the keys to unlocking a power denied to most mortals. Others believe that the rituals are for the protection of the sorcerer himself, to prevent him from channeling too much Essence at once or attempting feats that would raise the ire of the gods. Most

sorcerers resign themselves to the fact that they will never really know the answer to this question and only the fools amongst them attempt to power magic through will alone.

REGAINING ESSENCE.

Each mortal naturally regains Essence at a rate of one point (equal to one Resolve) per day. This is simply absorbed from other living things around the mortal, which may become obvious. Animals around the mortal may fall ill, or plants might wither; other nearby humans might be weakened or disorientated; illnesses or blights might spread quickly through the area.

In a modern city, where there are millions of people from whom to draw fresh Essence, the effects are likely to go unnoticed. In isolated, rural or wild areas, where there may only be a few people, some animals and plants around the sorcerer, the effects are likely to be more obvious, and many





magicians—blighting crops or harming neighbors as they recover Essence—have been accused of “witchcraft”, of deliberately causing such damage by magical means.

It is possible, however, to replenish Essence more swiftly in some areas. In places Corrupted by an Enigma, a sorcerer may recover two points of Resolve per day. Within some Enigmas, especially those which are Temporally Isolated, three, four or even more points might be recovered in one day. In naturally magical sites—often revered as sacred places by mortals—sorcerers might regain two or more points per day.

Areas may be enchanted to allow Essence to be more swiftly reabsorbed, and sorcerers may strike deals with Shadows or other creatures whereby these beings replenish the mortals’ Essence in return for certain services. Some creatures may even take the initiative and supply a mortal with their own Essence without being asked.

There are dangers in seeking to swiftly absorb fresh Essence, however. If Essence is taken from within an Enigma, the mortal becomes Corrupted (though if he or she then leaves the area this Corruption may quickly fade).

If Essence is supplied by a Shadow or Unbidden, then the creature gains some link to and perhaps influence over the individual. How long this influence lasts is largely up to the GM’s discretion, but as a rule of thumb it will usually last until the full number of points are expended.

For example, if a creature donates seven points of Essence to replenish a sorcerer’s Resolve, then the creature still has influence over the mortal until he or she pours out at least seven points of Essence in a single enchantment.

MANIFESTATIONS.

Since magic is alive, it often manifests certain signs of life. Secretions are common signs of magic. Ectoplasm (a pale plasma) is a typical secretion, a sure sign that there is too much Essence contained within a vessel of the Flesh.





Example: Rating Magics.

Every enchantment has a Resolve rating. This rating equals the amount of Essence which must be poured into it, and reflects both the difficulty of creating the enchantment and the strength of its magic. And of course, the stronger the magic, the more alive it is.

When a sorcerer creates an enchantment, he must invest a quantity of Essence equal to the magic's intended Resolve rating. So, a ritual to create a Resolve 10 magic requires 10 points of Essence: e.g. the sorcerer's Resolve is temporarily reduced by 10, or sufficient animals must be sacrificed (five cattle would do), etc.

Blood, too, often forms around enchanted objects, as does mucus or sweat. Many enchanted items are warm to the touch, and often clammy. Some throb or pulsate. Some inanimate objects even grow skin, scales or hair, or bleed if cut. Some powerful items display even more highly-evolved signs of life. Some may be heard or felt breathing. Some even feed, physically, often displaying a particular penchant for fresh, warm meat.

MAGICAL DISASTERS.

Properly releasing the power to alter the Dream is tricky to say the least. Even sorcerers who have spent years studying the magical arts face the very real possibility of failure. There are literally dozens of things which might go wrong when magicians try to create an enchantment. They may be trying to cast a magic which is simply unworkable (perhaps they were not knowledgeable enough to successfully weave the magic, or perhaps they were working from incorrect, ambiguous or incomplete instructions).

Their ritual may be interrupted, physically, or their efforts might be confounded by counter-magic cast by another sorcerer. Or perhaps they were using materials which were unsuitable (an enchantment may require a flower that has never seen the light of day, for example, but how could a sorcerer be sure that his bloom is suitable?). Or the

sorcerer might mispronounce part of a chant (a high History rating may be required to properly enunciate certain archaic invocations).

Often, magics must be cast in certain places (caves, hilltops, etc.) or at specific times (e.g. midnight, or dusk), and an enchantment woven in the wrong place or at the wrong time is certain to be flawed.

The intervention of a powerful force or creature might foul up an enchantment. An Unbidden Life Linked to its Enigma has power to confound the effects of magics woven in the area Corrupted by the Enigma, for example.

Rituals may cause unsettling side effects (thunder, lightning, the sky turning blood red, mucus dribbling from the surrounding earth, etc., etc.) and if a sorcerer lost his nerve and fled, paused or even fumbled a phrase; the result could be disastrous. And if an enchantment is not properly woven, that does not mean that it simply fails. On the contrary, if a sorcerer or a group of sorcerers have concentrated and unleashed a large amount of Essence, and failed to control it, then there is a powerful force at large.

Failed enchantments may simply fizzle away, the invested Essence dissipating, but more likely the magic will have some unpredictable, uncontrolled effect. The magic may work largely as intended, but is out of the control of its



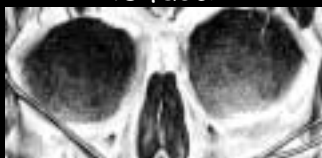


My magics are my children, and oh how prodigal. Do not think that I am being poetical if I tell you that my every careless chant or mis-wrought ritual pursues me through my nightmares and stalks me through each day.

I was never a mechanic. I only wish that I had

known then what I know now. Perhaps then I would never have gone so far. As it is, I shall know peace only after my vengful prodigies have finally caught up with their creator.

Oh, what a poor father I make, dreading that day when at last I meet my children face to face.



creator. (e.g. An enchantment designed to kill a specific mortal may now kill at random.) Or the enchantment may have a diminished duration, unknown to its master.

The magic may work at a reduced efficiency (e.g. an enchantment meant to revive a corpse causes it to rise without intelligence or personality), or with an unfortunate side effect (e.g. unknown to the sorcerer the corpse is occupied, as a husk, by a Shadow Awakened by the ceremony). An enchantment might even work too well (e.g. a spell designed to heal a gashed arm causes far too much flesh to be reformed, causing the limb to swell and sprout hundreds of fleshy tendrils).

Magics intended to reveal information, or to contact Shadows or creatures of Essence may reveal incomplete, inappropriate or simply incorrect information, or contact the wrong Shadow or creature of Essence. (e.g. A sorcerer trying to Awaken a timid Bogey Man, might actually call up a murderous Hangman. Or a dupe trying to contact his master in the Whispering Vault might have his message "overheard" by a Stalker.)

Many mis-cast magics create Enigmas. This is especially true of enchantments which were intended to have fairly blatant or destructive effects: out of control, these magics pull at the Dream and may in themselves require the attentions of a Circle of Stalkers.

Sentient Magics.

Essence is magic. Essence is life. The more powerful magics, therefore, with great amounts of Essence invested in them, often gain autonomous lives of their own.

Any enchantment with a Resolve of 5 or more may become Sentient over time. This is far from automatic. If it spends a few years in an area of high magical activity it might become Sentient. If it is used very frequently over several years, this too might awaken it.

It might also gain the "imprint" of a mortal who owns it for many years, if the mortal has a strong enough personality (a Resolve 14 or more is usually required), copying the mortal's aims and attitudes.

The majority of enchantments with a rating of 10 or more are Sentient, though this, too requires time, constant use, exposure to other magics, the *guidance* of a powerful creature (like an Unbidden), a strong emotion in its presence, or some similar impulse to make it Sentient.

Almost every enchantment with a Resolve above 20 is Sentient, most taking no more than a few days to become Sentient, or even coming into existence with some faculties. Only the most powerful Sentient enchantments have real personalities—in the sense that they have desires and prejudices, decent





memories and some ability to reason things out. Such enchantments may be able to communicate (through an ability akin to Whisper, for example), and may become tough villains in their own rights, even masterminding plots for their own ends.

The bulk of Sentient enchantments, however, have simpler characters. They may display an obsessive devotion to a goal or cause (usually whatever end they were created for), or may embody some element of their creator's personality. Most are capable of loyalty, but might betray or influence "unsuitable" mortal owners. They may have a strong instinct for self-preservation, or may be prepared to destroy themselves in their cause.

A Sentient magic can be a boon to its owner: it can act without the mortal's instructions, and might continue to obey a sorcerer's wishes long after the mortal has fled or been destroyed. A Sentient artifact which is lost or stolen might try to find its way back to its master.

On the other hand, Sentient magics might betray their creators or owners, or place conditions upon their service. A mindless magic will always obey its master's commands, if it possibly can; Sentient magics might refuse to obey.

PRODIGAL MAGICS.

The most dangerous magics are those which rebel against their mortal masters. These Prodigal Magics are almost always Sentient—enchantments which have decided to pursue their own goals. The most dangerous of these are magics which have learned to alter their own powers, and even to learn Focus Skills or gather information, for these can show more cunning than most human sorcerers and a wide range of powers. Some, however, are simply bored.

They have accomplished their objectives, but still live on, and so use their powers randomly or seek out some new way to affect the world.

THE SORCERER.

A true sorcerer must first understand that the Unseen exists. Having come to terms with this, and becoming Awakened in the process, the sorcerer then learns to channel and mold Essence to suit his will.

Sorcerers may learn to deal with Essence in a vast number of ways, dependent upon their personalities, cultural settings, and so on. Some perform magics through deep meditation. Some prefer elaborate ceremonies, often with a quasi-religious element. Others favor wild, ecstatic gatherings. Some use bloody sacrifice to provide the bulk of the Essence for their magics, while others draw the

Essence out from their own bodies.

Sorcerers need not be Enlightened. They need not understand the true nature of the Dream, nor the actual functions of the beings of Essence whom they often deal with. In fact, the majority of sorcerers are not Enlightened: Awakened shamans may think that Shadows or Stalkers are the spirits of the ancestors or the land; Awakened Roman or medieval conjurers may believe that they are demons; an Arabic sorcerer might think that they are djinn; a voodoo Bokor would think of them as gods and spirits of the voodoo pantheon.





OCCULTISM SCORES.

In addition to the usual mortal scores (Fortitude, Vitality, Initiative, Defend, Perceive, Resolve, Attack and Strength), magicians must have an Occultism Skill Score. This represents their understanding of the magical process of shaping Essence, and is useful for determining how powerful a magic they might devise or learn, how well they understand the history of their magical traditions, how likely they are to identify or deduce the powers of a given Shadow, etceteras.

In any situation when the mortal must make a Occultism Skill Challenge, then the GM has three or four options: he can compare the magician's Occultism Skill stat with the Difficulty of the Challenge (if the Skill exceeds the Difficulty, then the mortal is successful), or for added uncertainty the roll of one die can be added to both the Skill and the Difficulty; or the GM can use the system for resolving NPC Challenges described in the main rule-book (page 26); or he can just ad lib the outcome of the magician's efforts—just make it up.

SKILL RATINGS.

A magician with an Occultism Skill of less than 8 (the Difficulty for a Routine Challenge) is going to be a pretty poor sorcerer—though his blunders might add interest to a Hunt. Usually a mortal magician should have an Occultism Skill of 8 to 15.

Reliably creating a magic or enchantment requires an Occultism Skill greater than the magic's Resolve (or double its Resolve if the magician is inventing a new magic).

The greatest mortal magicians may have ratings as high as 20, or even higher. (See the description of Lin So, in chapter six of this book, as an example of a magician with a Skill of 20. Shriekblack, described on page 113 of the main rulebook has a Skill of 18.) But these are exceptional and extremely rare individuals.

SAMPLE CHALLENGES.

As some examples of what a magician can do with any specific Occultism Rating:

Deducing the probable powers and desires of a Shadow (just by watching its behavior, noting its scent, etc.) is Easy through Hard, depending upon the rarity of the Shadow. Of course, magicians who are not Enlightened may not know that these creatures are Shadows, as such—they may call them demons, djinn, or whatever—but they have heard, seen or read enough to recognize the creature's hallmarks and recall stories of its kind.

Deciphering the notes of another sorcerer ranges from Routine (if the notes deal with simple, petty magics, and are written by a sorcerer from the same tradition as the reader) to Very Hard (e.g. if the writings are produced by a mad or confused magician, working from different assumptions from the reader, and detail very powerful magics). Some magicians may be very specialized, and should find it easier to deal with or understand magics within their own areas of study and harder to deal with unfamiliar types of magic.





For example, a magician might have spent her life collating and notating texts (maintaining an occult library, perhaps) and would therefore find it easier to decipher or reconstruct obscure or damaged texts. These rule mechanics are just guidelines. Don't feel shackled by them. Improvise. Have fun, and remember that creating a compelling story is more important than following the letter of the law.

PERSONAL DANGERS.

All sorcerers must use their own Essence to fuel their magics. Some sorcerers only use their own Essence. In this case, they are pouring away their spiritual strengths, their souls, to fuel the spells, and later revitalizing themselves by absorbing Essence from their surroundings.

This is a dangerous process. The unlucky, careless, or overly-ambitious sorcerer might accidentally lose his soul (losing intelligence, personality, desires

and memory), and come to be controlled by a Shadow, Unbidden or other Unseen power.

Controlling the flow of Essence is never easy. In casting magics, the danger is that, by using their souls, sorcerers might lose parts of their personalities: when they pour out their souls, they might also let slip some of their memories, some degree of their intellect (reducing their Perceive score) or some aspect of their personality (e.g.



their bravery or compassion). Then, the process of reabsorbing Essence has its perils.

Usually, such Essence is safely absorbed from the Realm of Flesh—weakening the Dream, but not directly endangering the sorcerer. But in some cases, and especially if

There is a power that I draw on, though I cannot tell you what it is. Perhaps I deal with souls. Perhaps I invoke spirits. Or would you be more comfortable if I told you that I weave Manna, or Essence, or Divine Power? All names are masks, formed to hide the truth, to simplify the incomprehensible. Give something a name, and you can believe that you understand it; nothing more than a fool's lie.





sorcerers rush to reinvigorate themselves as fast as possible, the Essence can come from other sources. Regaining Essence from areas affected by an Enigma Corrupts a sorcerer, for example.

Shadows or Unbidden lurking nearby might supply the Essence in order to control a magician. Having supplied a point of Essence, the creature can then see and hear through the mortal's eyes and ears. Increasing the amount of Essence invested in a mortal allows the creature to implant dreams into his sleeping mind (2 points), speak into his mind (3 points), give subconscious orders (4 points), or even take control of the person completely.

The sorcerer's Essence, after all, is his spark of life—the soul—and if an immortal creature has supplied half of the mortal's Essence, it effectively controls the mortal (though the mortal will believe that he or she still acts freely).

Sorcerers who channel more than half of their Essence into a single enchantment have, in effect, lost their original souls. The effects of this can vary, but are inevitably unpleasant. Some sorcerers are reduced to senile wrecks by the experience, losing their memories or large chunks of their personalities. Some become listless, or lose specific desires. Others become paranoid or deluded.

Sorcerers who lose relatively unimportant aspects of their personality (ambition, sex drive, etc.) are the fortunate few: most lose more important parts of themselves, like their capacities for affection or trust, or their entire lives' memories.

LOST SOULS.

In the most extreme cases, when nearly all of the sorcerer's Essence is drained out, sorcerers are reduced to mere "echoes" of their former selves: they seem to keep their memories and personalities, their attitudes and desires, but in fact they can no longer learn anything new nor formulate plans, and will not remember anything that happens to them from the day after their soul is lost. In these cases the



most important parts of the sorcerers have gone lost: the aspects which can learn, remember and think have been poured out, and are permanently lost unless that Essence can somehow be reunited with the sorcerer's body. However, if a sorcerer pours too much Essence into an enchantment, losing his soul, all is not lost. The Essence may be recoverable.

If an enchantment had only a temporary effect, then when the spell expires the Essence is released. Destroying the enchantment has the same effect. In these cases, the Essence may congeal, containing a fraction of the sorcerer's personality, including, usually, the lost aspects of his attitudes, memory, etc. These lost souls, now free, may try to track down the sorcerer, or the sorcerer may try to find them. The Dream is a big place, though, and reuniting sorcerer and soul is not easy. The sorcerer might have to





journey across the Realm of Flesh, and perhaps through time itself, to get to the lost soul, or must dispatch servants to recover it.

IMMORTAL SORCERERS.

It is not only mortals who can weave magics. Some Shadows and Unbidden also learn the art. The main problem for these immortal magicians is the problem of regaining Resolve. While creatures of the Flesh can absorb Essence from the Realm of Flesh, and so recover lost Essence, these outsiders are usually unable to do so. So, for most immortal sorcerers, Resolve lost through magic is lost permanently—or at least until (in the case of Shadows) they return to the Rift.

Such magicians are therefore eager to seek out the rare enchantments that do not require them to pour out their own Essence. Some seek out powerful patrons (such as Aesthetics) who will supply them with fresh Essence in return for their services—though most swiftly come to be controlled by their patrons. Others avoid casting magics themselves, but set themselves up as master magicians, teaching human “apprentices” to weave their magics on their behalf.

A few of these immortal magicians do eventually gain the ability to absorb Essence from the Realm of Flesh. Shadows who grow used to life within the Dream (like the renowned Shriekblack) may regenerate Resolve as if they were natives. Unbidden who establish Life Links may also absorb Essence for so long as they are within the area Corrupted by the Enigma.

HEDGE-MAGICS.

Medieval women brewing herbal potions. Tarot readers turning cards. Azande priests sacrificing chickens. Modern “occult” groups rehashing ceremonies. These are not true magics. These are hedge-magics.





Hedge-magics are the petty sorceries practiced by the Unawakened mortal “magicians”. Often they are based upon true magical techniques, but they have become flawed over the years and are practiced by people who—as they are not Awakened—cannot mold Essence. This is not to say that hedge-magic is completely ineffectual. A diviner might glean occasional truths. A malign witch might occasionally cast an effective curse.

A would-be sorcerer, or a group of kids playing with a Ouija Board, might actually make contact with some creature.

But this hedge-magic is much less powerful and much less reliable than true magic. Its effects are fleeting (no Essence is invested to make them endure), and it is largely unable to affect Stalkers,

Shadows or other creatures of the Unseen. Such trickeries will most likely come into a Hunt when they go wrong.

Very occasionally, hedge-magicians might manage to create a genuine magical effect. Unfortunately, the effects are inevitably outside of their control, and usually not at all what they expected.

For example, a nineteenth century diabolist might come across an old ritual to summon “the devil”, and, experimenting with it, might manage to summon forth an Unbidden from the Vault. A pagan priest, sacrificing



a beast before a dormant magical statue, might manage to breath new life into the figurine.

Real magicians and leaders of Enlightened Organizations may join or monitor groups of hedge-magicians, watching out for Sensitive mortals (prospective recruits) and ensuring that the would-be magicians don't cause too much harm with their ignorant fumbling.

WHAT STALKERS KNOW.

Stalkers have a wide understanding of the mysteries of the Occult, and may be able to surmise what effects an enchantment will have by examining the object that it is formed within.

An Occultism roll may be made when inspecting any enchantment, and some common items, specifically related to a single period in history, may be identified with a History roll.

Objects which are relatively common and carry distinctive symbols or markings, are Easy to identify (difficulty 10). Unique and unadorned artifacts can be Very Hard (18) or even impossible to identify. Unless Stalkers make stunningly successful rolls, they cannot tell exactly what an enchantment does, but should get a general idea of its purpose, rough power, its origins, etc.

Ultimately, the difficulty of each roll, and how much information can be gleaned, is determined by the GM.





PERFECT UNDERSTANDING.

It is possible—though unlikely—that a Stalker might know enough of Occultism to actually instruct mortal allies in the correct techniques for creating a specific enchantment.

Stalkers who began play as mortal magicians still know any rituals that they knew in life, though they can no longer channel Essence into the Flesh to form these enchantments. Some Stalkers, due to the natures of their Domains or their other allies, may have extensive libraries which they can consult.

In general, however, it should be a Hard or Very Hard Occultism Challenge (at least) for a Stalker to know or concoct a specific enchantment. (And if the Stalker *nearly* succeeds in the roll, but actually *fails*, then the magician *thinks* that he knows the procedure well enough, but actually recalls only a dangerously flawed version of the ritual.)

Stalkers are bizarre and aloof creatures—not glorified tutors for mortal magicians—and magic is a dangerous and uncertain practice. And since Stalkers themselves are forbidden by the Primal Powers from practicing magic, a Stalker would need a very compelling reason to be bestowing this knowledge on mortals in any case.

COUNTERING MAGIC

Magics are not meant to be. They are perversions of the Dream, and often the causes of full-blown Enigmas. Consequently, Stalkers may destroy most enchantments by returning the Dream to its proper state using the Mending Skill. The only magics which they cannot destroy with Mending are Affirmation—magics which consolidate the Dream and prevent perversions.

Stalkers attempting to Mend an enchantment and effectively destroy it may have to first learn the nature of the magic they are addressing. So, a Stalker may also learn that the enchantment will take extensive research, or a particular item or artifact to be able to eliminate it.

Destroying an enchantment is usually Hard. If the enchantment is based in an artifact or inhabits a person, the Stalker must usually touch that item or person. If the enchantment is loose—just wandering around the Dream invisibly—then a Sensitivity roll is required to pinpoint its location first (assuming that it is within sight) or it must be lured into an object, person or known area.

Mending these little twists of reality, however, is usually a swift process, requiring only one round of concentration. GMs might want to make some enchantments Very Hard to destroy, either because they are extremely powerful or because the plot of a Hunt requires that the Stalkers not be able to destroy the magic too soon.

I have never understood my “magics”. I have learned the chants and perfected the gestures, studied the signs and symbols, learned to listen to hidden voices. But, to be candid, in the end I do not know how my enchantments work. I know nothing. I only feel the power flowing through me, and pray—to gods whom I no longer believe in—that I can control it.





GMs may also rule that some larger or more complex enchantments take longer to destroy or time and effort to subdue (ranging from minutes to hours), or he may discover that a particular mighty magic is impossible to Mend at that time: certain special conditions would have to apply before the enchantment could be destroyed. On the other hand, petty magics may only be Average or Easy Challenges to destroy with Mending. Generally, these are the lower Resolve magics which pose little threat to the Stalkers.

Players may want to use Mending to destroy a magic at a distance. A GM might permit such an attempt (especially if done with flare and a good sense of drama), but the Difficulty of the Challenge should be increased.

A Stalker may also want to negotiate with or control a Sentient enchantment. Whisper could be used to speak to an enchantment, though most magics have no way to reply.

An Inspiration (using the Dominate Discipline) would be required to control most Sentient enchantments, though low Resolve magics and those which are confused or uncertain could be manipulated with Charm, Intimidate or Dominate, and really powerful or self-willed enchantments could not be Dominated, even with an Inspiration.



We all have power; all of us.
All that I have learned is
how to pour out my Es-
sence, to take it and to
twist it into the forms that
I desire, and to replenish
my strength by absorbing
more from other sources. I
have poured out and
exhausted my power—my
soul—a hundred times over.
I am not the woman that I
used to be. But then who
am I, whose thoughts are
these, and whose voices
do I hear sniggering behind
my eyes? I have not sold my
soul. Rather I have poured
it away. I needed no
genteel devil to tempt me.
My soul is not my own,
though sometimes we hear
it calling to us.





CHAPTER TWO: MAGIC IN PLAY.

Enchantments in *The Whispering Vault* are not like magic in other roleplaying games: these are not just supernatural weapons for magic users to wield, easily defined “power ups”. Many can become the foci of individual Hunts, or important personalities; their grimness adds atmosphere to the game, and their unpredictability can lead to bizarre plot twists.

Whereas in some games, magics are simply limited to a list of “spells” which the GM need only assign to a magician, *Whispering Vault* GMs must tailor the magics carefully to fit the settings and story-lines of their Hunts. This chapter gives GMs a few ideas on adapting enchantments to fit into different settings, on designing their own magics, and on the possibility of mortal player characters. It also gives a number of suggestions for Hunts revolving around mortal magics and mortal magicians.

MAGICS AND PERIOD.

A Hunt might take the Stalkers to any place and any period in mortal history, into the past or into the future. One of the advantages of this is that GMs can pick the settings that best suit the stories that they want to tell, rather than being confined to one era and location.

Each historical period has its own distinctive beliefs, its own customs, its own assumptions. It is these differences that give each period its distinctive feel. And of course these differences extend into all parts of human life. Just as each society has its own sense of justice and morality, its own attitude to gender, race, religion, science, so each has its own view of magic.

A society’s hedge-magic and (sometimes) religion will reflect the types of magics which its sorcerers have dabbled in. On the other hand, the sorcerers will share the culture and assumptions of their societies, which will determine (or at least influence) their style of making magic.

NATIVE AFRICAN MAGIC.

African magicians are particularly adept at magics which contact the Unseen or deal with curses, and many are experts at Awakening Shadows, Calling Stalkers, and so on. Their magic makes constant use of animal sacrifice, predominantly the slaughter of cattle. As magics may require the deaths of a dozen cattle or more, such practices are found mostly amongst the herding tribes, and usually only amongst the richer peoples who can afford to massacre their livestock.

The sacrifices are usually loud, informal events, with drumming or dancing, and passionate invocations. The Essence created by the sacrifice is exalted and cajoled, the magicians imploring it to fulfil certain functions, shaping it with their emotional energy rather than through disciplined willpower.

The result is that very many of their longer lasting magics are Sentient, and are often Prodigious, forming into enchantments which the sorcerers did not necessarily want. By speaking to the forming magics as if they were independent and self-willed, the sorcerers often create enchantments with distinctive and often unfriendly personalities.

CHINESE MAGIC.

Just as Chinese culture heavily influenced many surrounding civilizations, so too were adopted the Chinese methods of sorcery by neighbouring magicians, notably the Japanese.

Chinese magic combines rigid mental discipline with detailed ritual. Simple enchantments may be woven with a few carefully pronounced words and elegant gestures, but most magics are crafted through extremely long ceremonies (hours, at least, and often weeks long), involving lengthy





meditation and trances. Sorcerers typically specialize in controlling Unseen creatures; they also animate inanimate objects, and are experts in divination. Often, they experiment recklessly, deliberately tinkering with magics beyond their understanding; creating Prodigal enchantments. To protect themselves from these wild magics, sorcerers usually fortify themselves with Essence-controlling rituals and Affirmations which keep them safe from their creations.



The sorcerers' use of meditation allows them to fuel powerful magics without risking their souls or (except in the greatest sorceries) requiring sacrifices. Most Chinese magicians live far from human settlements (on mountain

tops, in deep caves, etc.), but these areas come to be plagued by Prodigal enchantments, and are usually lethal for any other mortal who might wander in without the protection of Affirmations or powerful enchantments.

Due to the complexity and precision of Chinese magics, they can be quite dangerous, as it may take decades of study to perfect these rituals. So the uninitiated are likely to make mistakes with the gestures or pronunciations, leading to tragic accidents.

CONTEMPLATIVE MAGIC.

The tradition of contemplative magic, where the magician relies upon lengthy meditation instead of ritual or sacrifice, is often found in countries where Buddhism and similar doctrines have held sway—from northern India across east Asia and into Indones.

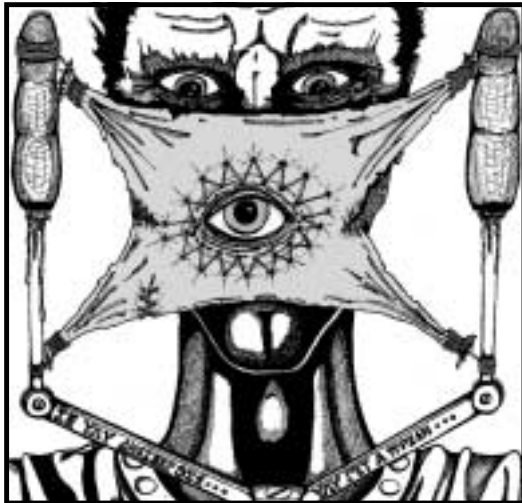
The Contemplative magician requires a placid environment, with few noises or distractions, where he or she settles into a deep trance. Though still conscious of the outside world, and able to break the trance at any time, the magician slowly sculpts Essence to create the desired enchantment. Sometimes ritual elements creep into this magic (hand bells, incense, etc.), but usually the sorcerer just relies on sheer force of will.

The great advantages of this magic are that the adept does not require complex props, and that they never have their Resolve reduced by more than one point. On the other hand, magics take a long time to cast through meditation, usually one day per Resolve of the enchantment.

CLASSICAL MAGIC.

Early classical magic, began with the sorceresses of Thessaly, who concentrated on divinations, and on magics affecting the Flesh—many used herbal compounds to great effect. The Roman sorcerers formalized magic into a disciplined study by experimenting with complex rituals and formulas, and committing many of their rituals to parch-





ment. Most of the ancient magics which survive into the twentieth-century were first recorded by Roman practitioners.

The formalized and ritualized magic of Rome was handed on to the Arab sorcerers, who added these wisdoms to their own enchantments which already dealt successfully with creatures of the Unseen. Brought back to the West in the middle-ages, these magics came to dominate both European magic and hedge-magic into the twenty first century and beyond.

The detail of a Roman or post-Roman ritual makes them comparatively safe to cast (though because sacrifices are rare, a magician's Resolve can be dangerously drained). But the fact is that many texts are wrongly translated or copied, so that many later versions have potentially disastrous inaccuracies.

ANCIENT EGYPTIAN MAGIC.

Ancient Egyptian magic focused upon Words of Power—arcane syllables which could mould Essence and even draw it from the Realm of Flesh to fuel magics. This gave the Egyptian sorcerers a great advantage; complex rituals were

unnecessary since magics could be formed through speech alone, and the practitioner's Resolve was less drained than it might have been. (Typically, Egyptian magics draw one point of Essence from the Realm of Flesh itself, usually causing land to turn to barren desert and fragile plants to die off.)

However, by the Roman era the Egyptian language was dead, and no one knew *how* to properly pronounce Egyptian Words of Power. Later magicians strove to rediscover the words, but tended to make fatal mistakes in their pronunciations.

NORTH AMERICAN MAGIC.

Few North American magicians were Enlightened, though there were many Awakened practitioners amongst them. They believed that the Essence they dealt with was the power of various spirits, whom they implored, to create their enchantments.

One result of this magic was that pools of excess or spent Essence, collecting in places where magics were often created, formed into Sentient masses of power. This power would take on the personality of the "spirits" whom the sorcerers imagined fuelled their magics.

These "spirits" were merely Prodigal enchantments, with whatever capabilities their unwitting creators imagined them to have—pursuing their own ends and aiding or hindering magicians as it suited them. Sometimes the Prodigal magics did become useful allies, lending aid or supplying Essence to magicians' enchantments. But, they could also be deadly foes; frustrating rituals and even creating their own minor enchantments to serve their own schemes and attack their enemies.

CENTRAL AND SOUTH AMERICAN MAGIC.

Central and South American magicians (especially the Maya and Aztecs) made copious amounts of human sacrifices to fuel their magics, which specialized in affecting the Realm of Flesh.





This resulted in many overly powerful magics: what other cultures would create with a Resolve 5 magic, a Central or South American magician created as a Resolve 10 magic, using all of the Essence of their sacrificial victim. And so most of their enchantments were Sentient, and often Prodigal—difficult to destroy and posed far more danger to the surrounding people than need be.

WEST INDIAN MAGIC.

Echoing African techniques, this style of magic is found throughout the Caribbean from the eighteenth-century until well beyond the end of the millennium. Most sorcerers are Awakened or Enlightened Voodoo priests and bokors; hailing from Voodoo's heartland in Haiti, but they can be found as far afield as Brazil and the southern US—most notably St. Louis.

West Indian magic uses elaborate ritual and sacrifice (usually animals). They concentrate upon magics which directly affect human flesh and creatures of the Essence. Like the African magic from which it stems, it also includes many curses and counter-magics.

Most West Indian sorcerers have an array of rituals designed to kill and maim fellow mortals, making them fearsome adversaries. On the other hand, because they unleash vast numbers of destructive Sentient and Prodigal magics, their lives are rarely

secure, as they often eventually become the unintended victims of their own curses.

HI-TECH MAGICS.

In the twentieth century and beyond there are plenty of opportunities for magicians to make use of hi-tech innovations.

Scrying can take place via TVs or computers, rather than via old fashioned pools and mirrors. Faxes and modems might be used to communicate with other times or even beyond the Realm of Flesh. Shadows could be ensnared by computer programs; a modified TV remote control might be able to affect the Unseen. Photocopiers may reproduce more than mere images (Shadows, etc.). Life could be breathed into a machine, like a car—which can decide where it wants to go, ignoring the driver and obviating the need for a chauffeur, or providing an excellent method of kidnapping or even killing a person.

Magicians might also be able to base magics around the principles of the modern industrialized world by harnessing methods of mass production or modern rationality. For example: the mechanized slaughter of humanity—in death camps or on battle-fields—could provide the sorcerer with a ready source of Essence. A university philosophy or physics department, where the world is subjected to rational inquiry, would be an ideal place to create powerful Affirmations.





A sorcerer might also be able to pervert a scientist's laboratory or hi-tech installation into a magical area—using a chemistry lab to produce magical potions, or a nuclear reactor to condense or produce Essence, for example.

Modern magicians also tend to conduct research into areas which reflect modern obsessions, such as in the pursuit of money (e.g. creating a currency which can literally buy anything); the pursuit of information and understanding (e.g. attempting to measure and quantify concentrations of magic or Essence); or the personal freedom of the individual (enchanting a person so that he or she cannot be affected by any mortal force, or Unseen force in other instances).

CREATING NEW MAGICS.

The enchantments presented later in this book are sample magics. Mortal sorcerers could adapt these rituals, or formulate new magics to create an endless variety of effects. GMs should feel free to create new enchantments as they wish, but remembering that this is a horror game, magics best suited to pulp fantasy (balls of fire, traditional “illusions”, etc.) should be avoided. Sorcery should never be obvious or epic (brooding, menacing magics are better), and it should certainly *never* be safe or predictable.

In general, more powerful magics require more Essence, and therefore have correspondingly higher Resolve scores, than simpler effects. However, this need not always be the case. A magician might invent more or less efficient ways of achieving any given effect, and so magics of similar potency may have wildly differing Resolve scores.

Other factors important factors should also be considered. Some rituals may require lengthy preparation, rare props or ingredients, or special sacrifices. Still yet, other types of magics may only be performed at specific times or in certain places. Special conditions may be more important than the magic's Resolve in determining how easy it is to cast or how often the sorcerer has the opportunity to do so.

Lastly, the more thought that goes into inventing an enchantment, the better it will work in play. Rather than simply working out Resolve cost and effect, GMs should





think about things like what could go wrong in the magic's creation? What happens when it becomes Sentient? Are there any unexpected consequences or side-effects? Is the magic strong enough to tear the Dream and cause an Enigma, and if so what is the Enigma like? Magics which add to the feel of the game and create interesting plot or role-playing opportunities are better than those which just make mortal magicians more powerful.

One excellent way to use a mortal magician player character is in a campaign setting, where the Stalkers are based as Watchers in one place, or where they return again and again to the same period and region. In this case the mortal provides the Stalkers with local contacts, legitimate sources of information, and perhaps with magically fortified bolt-holes in case of trouble.



MAGICIANS AS PLAYER CHARACTERS.

Some groups of players might want to experiment with having magicians as player characters. That's fine (with a few provisos).

The Whispering Vault is a game about supernatural creatures—Stalkers—not about mortals. Mortal player characters should appear infrequently, and in small numbers, and should not dominate the game. They should *always* be less powerful than the Stalkers.

Mortal magician player characters may be useful in much the same way as magician NPCs—as local guides, uneasy allies, Supplicants, etc. They should always have similar goals to the Stalkers, but are unlikely to completely share their objectives.

Mortal Magician Character Statistics:

Attributes:
*Awareness, Insight, Presence,
Dexterity, Fortitude, and
Strength.*

Attribute Pool:
18 points.

Skills:
*Perception, Deduction,
History, Occultism, Charm,
Intimidate, Attack, Defend,
Stealth and any Focus Skills.*

**One Primary Skill at +4 and 5
points to be divided among
the rest of the skills.**

**Vitality equals Fortitude +
Presence.**

**Resolve equals Insight +
Presence multiplied by two.**





Another option is to introduce a new player to the campaign by having him play a mortal magician for the first Hunt. Explaining the mortal's few skills, Attributes and magical abilities is easier for a GM and less intimidating for a new player than explaining all of the metaphysics of the game along with all of a Stalker's Disciplines and Servitors. When the Hunt is over then (if the new player wants to continue in the gaming group) the mortal might be selected to become a Stalker. In this case, the player will have a good idea of the Stalker's background and can create a new character sheet.

MORTAL CHARACTER CREATION.

Mortal characters have six Attributes: Awareness, Insight, Presence, Dexterity, Fortitude, and Strength. They have a pool of 18 points to allocate to these Attributes—none of which may have a score above 6 (which is itself superhuman). The average score for a human is 2 or 3, making these characters marginally superior to normal folk. Vitality is equal to Fortitude plus Presence. So, an average human's Vitality is 4 to 6.

Mortal magician player characters also have a Resolve score (which indicates the quantity of Essence stored within the individual) equal to double the total of the character's Insight and Presence.



I watched as the mortal worked some strange manipulations in the air about her. None of us were able to penetrate the protective circle in which she stood. Suddenly a spark formed and hovered in the space before the mortal. The familiar buzzing in my being told me it was raw Essence. As she pulled at the pin-hole of light, it burned the fabric of her Realm. When her eyes grew wide with fright I knew at that moment it was beyond her control.

Soultaker saw this too, and in desperation he tried to Mend the swiftly spreading tear, but it was too late. Before I could whisper a warning to my good friend, both he and the foolish sorceress were consumed by that which had to happen; the Forbiddance.

—BoneJester, of the Lost Circle.





The average human's score is 10, so these characters (who might have scores as high as 24) are clearly above average.

Mortal characters' Skills are: Perception, Deduction, History, Occultism, Charm, Intimidate, Attack, Defend, Stealth and any Focus Skills. Each character may choose ONE Primary Skill (at +4), and may then divide a pool of 5 points amongst the other Skills. No single skill should rise above +4.

Mortal characters need not be Enlightened. (It is often more interesting if they do not really understand the nature of the creatures whom they deal with.) But mortal magicians must be, at least, Awakened.

The GM should decide how many enchantments and rituals are known to the character (as it suits the story-line), and in consultation with the player should determine exactly which these are. Players may want lots of powerful magics, but in fact these are often of little use. Their rituals are usually too complex to be arranged and completed within one Hunt, and once created they can be dangerously uncontrollable.

BECOMING STALKERS.

When mortal magicians become Stalkers, they lose their ability to cast mortal magic, though they keep relevant Skills (such as Occultism).

The Stalker is essentially anew being; the mortal having been quite transformed. Attributes, Disciplines and Servitors should all be determined from scratch, as per Stalker character generation rules.

All Skills from the Stalker's mortal life are retained, and the full list of Skills are now available to the character (including Mending, Mask, etc.). The character gains two extra Primary Skills at (+4) and may divide a pool of points equal to the Stalker's

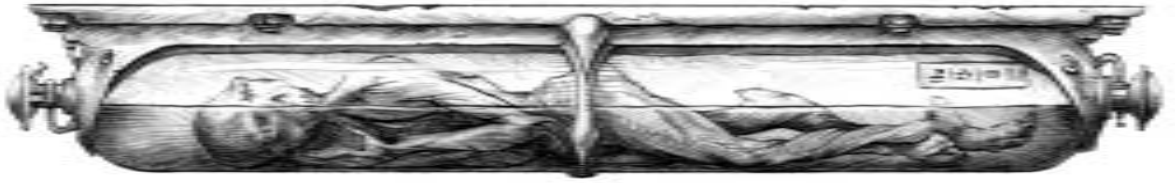


Insight among the skills. This should bring the character up to about the level of any other new Stalker.

Normal folk are so sure that there is one past, and one future, linear. The past seems fixed for them, only the future remains uncertain. Myself, I know that the past is no less uncertain than the future, and even the present is not fixed.

The nature of time was explained to me once by a man, who I can't be sure was real. This man told me that every possibility, past, present and future all exist simultaneously; and that this is known as the Chronosphere. Before he left, the man told me he was from my distant future; but that would mean I didn't die in a year as I had foreseen...Or was he just a possibility.





CHAPTER THREE: MOLDING THE DREAM.

Many mortal magics are arrogant or hopeful attempts to change the basic nature of the mortal's perception of the Dream; to make the Realm of Flesh conform to the magician's will.

Magicians might attempt to make extravagant changes, either laudable (such as eliminating violence, sickness or greed, or preventing natural disasters), or less admirable (like erasing a race or species from the Dream). But these efforts rarely affect more than the most localized areas, and the reformed Dream is not necessarily to the magician's liking. Examples of these efforts, called Deliberate Enigmas, are detailed later in this chapter. Some remove themselves so thoroughly from the Dream that the corrupted areas become Shadowlands.

Ordinarily, the Dream is maintained by the continuous efforts of powerful, external entities; the Aesthetics. When mortals (or anyone else) warp the Dream, they brutally override the Aesthetics' constant, gentle manipulation. This allows mortals to redefine reality, but the Enigmas that they create are largely outside of their control. They determine the basic changes, but by warping the Dream they inevitably create other, unintended changes. And as time passes the Enigma grows, becoming more and more detached from the Dream, until it reaches a state of Temporal Isolation.

Sometimes an Enlightened magician will deliberately try to stretch the Dream too far, hoping to create an Enigma so crass that it will be rejected from the Dream and become a Shadowland. The sorcerers involved usually do not understand the implications of their actions; they only see the desired result. Few really know what's in store for them. Other magics simply aim to redefine small areas of reality, sometimes only affecting one person. Or they may be used to peer into distant parts of the Dream—to other places and other times.

Alternatively, magicians might try to strengthen the Dream, affirming the nature of reality rather than changing it. In this case, magic reinforces the order of the Dream—to the disadvantage of Unseen creatures, including Stalkers.

Because these magics do not pervert the Dream, they may not be countered by Mending skills, and so Stalkers may be powerless to overcome their effects.

Simple effects (e.g. viewing hazy images of another part of the Dream) require only one or two points of Essence. Looking through the Veil, and similar effects, require two or three points of Essence. Magics which hope to damage Stalkers or deprive them of their powers must be more powerful.

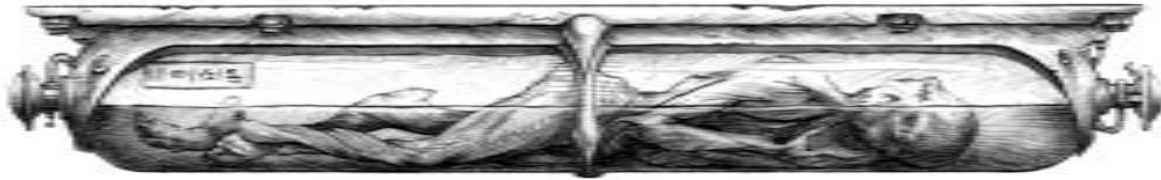
One problem that sorcerers have is in reliably predicting the future. Enlightened mortals understand that the future is as real as the present or past, and yet they often glimpse futures which do not come to pass, or which seem inconsistent with the present. At best they can only glimpse possible or probable futures, and sometimes they even see pasts which have never been. The Dream is not as simple as it might seem. There are several pasts and several futures which magicians may see when they look into the Chronosphere; their predictions are simply based on one of these possibilities.

ENCHANTMENTS.

ECHOES THROUGH THE DREAM (Resolve 1).

This simple enchantment requires no complex ceremony, but simply an act of will (and the temporary loss of one Resolve).





Through this magic a sorcerer may cause any past event to “echo” in the consciousness of any one mortal. For example, the magician might cause certain words to be constantly repeated through a person’s dreams; he might cause someone to repeatedly catch glimpses of a face in reflective surfaces; or the target may keep hearing snatches of conversation whispered through the trees by the wind.

The magician may determine roughly what past events or images recur (though they must be simple echoes, such as a face or a sentence), and may specify roughly how these echoes will be manifested. The events or images must have once been real, however, and the sorcerer cannot create false conversations of the images of imaginary creatures to torment a person with—though he can speak words himself and have them echo. The images are never bold and obvious (they are not “illusions”) they are always half-heard, half-glimpsed, uncertainties.

As examples, this magic may be used to torment a mortal (e.g. plaguing him with images or the words of a dead spouse), to communicate information to a distant person (the sorcerer speaking the words to be communicated and then creating the magic and concentrating on the person), or to glimpse into the past (specifying something like “the last words of the woman who died here last night” and creating the enchantment so that the words echo around his reality). The enchantment may also be used to project echoes forwards to future times and people as yet unborn, if the magician wishes to manipulate or inform some future person.

The magician cannot specify when the echoes occur. They happen spontaneously, randomly, once every few hours at first, fading over the decades to once every few years as the power of the magic fades. Only the target of the magic and other Awakened characters in the area can see or hear these echoes. Other than the target, no normal mortals can sense them.

THE SINGLE ORACLE (Resolve 1).

One simple, common aim of sorcerers is to discern the truth of future or past events. Some make their livings by

divining answers to their client’s questions. Other sorcerers use these methods to further their own schemes; to determine how another would react in certain circumstances; to locate hidden treasure; or to discover whether or not a certain ritual will yield the desired results, etc.

A number of techniques have been developed by mortal sorcerers to determine much sought-after answers. Ancient Chinese sorcerers used a lengthy ritual whereby random piles of yarrow stalks gave a positive or negative response to a fixed question (hedge magicians later developed this into the I-Ching).

African magicians sacrifice a specially prepared chicken, and divine answers from its dying twitches. Gazing into enchanted fires, mirrors or crystals, casting straws or leaves, or examining the entrails of a specially selected sacrificial animals, are other methods of divination.

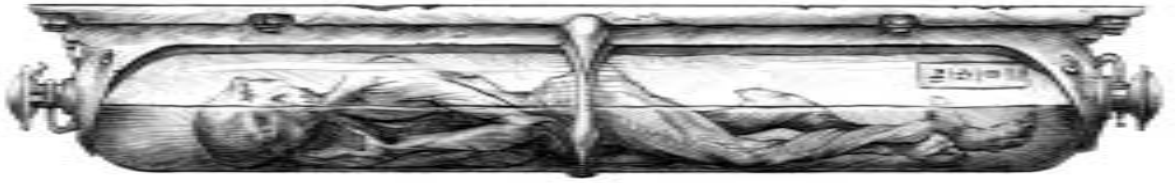
These methods give only yes/no answers, and are vague and unreliable concerning the future. Precise information may be gleaned by divining the answers to repeated questions, but this takes considerable time and Essence.

Each of these rituals requires lengthy preparation, and takes some time to perform. Sacrificial animals must be carefully selected (an imperfect specimen yields misleading results) and must be fed a restricted diet and confined over several days. Twigs or leaves must be collected or properly prepared, etc. The ritual itself may appear simple, but it still usually takes about an hour or so in order to examine a creature’s guts, cast and recast lots, gaze into a mirror, etc. Each question also reduces the diviner’s Resolve by one.

GLIMPSING THROUGH THE VEIL (Resolve 3).

This enchantment may be created by any magician, but may only be used by a sorcerer who is blind. The objective is to take a specially prepared metal ring which is invested with Essence—a band formed from coffin nails is common, or an unbroken circle of quartz may be used.





If the ring's wearer is fully sighted or is not Sensitive the ring confers no benefits. If he is Sensitive and blind (at least in one eye) the ring allows his blind eye(s) to peer through the Veil after a couple of seconds' concentration—an Insignificant action. Looking through the Veil allows the mortal to immediately recognize Stalkers (regardless of Mask skills), and to perceive other evidence of the Unseen (revealing Behemoths disguised in bloated Husks, for example).

Some sorcerers deliberately blind themselves in one eye in order to make use of such a ring, or create for themselves extra blind eyes about their bodies. The rings are obviously unusual: often growing a layer of skin, or having hairs sprout from them.

RELIVING THE PAST (Resolve 4).

A Babylonian scroll tells of this magic, whereby an individual may experience part of another person's past.



Under precise astrological conditions, the magician must sacrifice an owl, and make a paste from its brains. Speaking certain syllables, he must mix into it the tears of dead mortals, and must then keep it safe from the touch of any other mortal. (The magician's Resolve drops by 4; the owl's death provides the remaining Essence.)

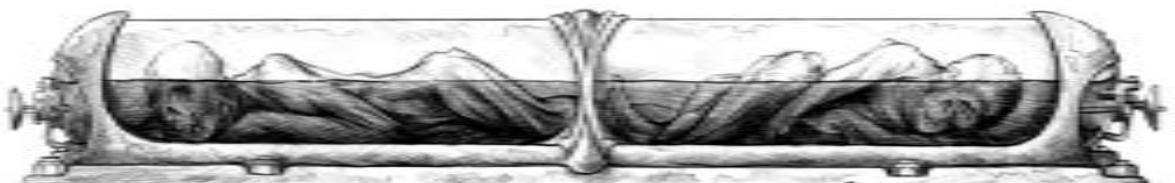
The warm, clammy paste may then be applied to the forehead of any Sensitive person (or Unseen creature). When the anointed target next sleeps, he has vivid dreams, reliving the past experiences of another individual from that individual's perspective. The sorcerer determines at the time when the paste is first created, what episodes from whose past will be experienced, and the magic may then only allow those particular episodes to be glimpsed. A measure of paste will provide up to one day's worth of experiences.

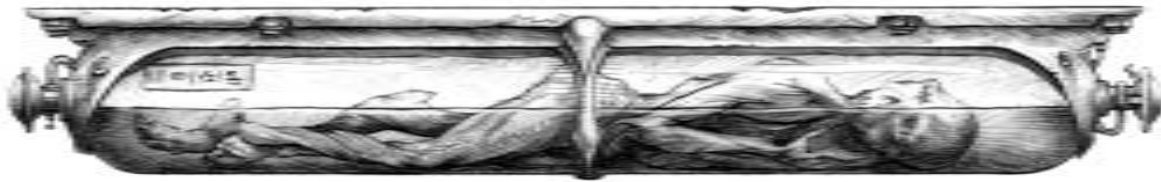
The dreams remain entirely subjective. The target senses the past from the subject's perspective, thinking his thoughts, feeling his feelings. This can be extremely enlightening, but also deeply unsettling—especially if the person's perceptions, thoughts or emotions are particularly warped. Most targets who undergo this ordeal consider it hellish.

The magician may use this enchantment to relive parts of his own life. Otherwise a sorcerer's attempt to affect himself with this paste is doomed to failure, simply casting them back into their own past or into a random individual's past—though some think that these are past incarnations.

If the stars are not right when the enchantment is created, then the paste will give incorrect revelations, causing the target to relive possible but incorrect pasts. If other mortals besides the sorcerer or target touch the paste prior to its application, then they are likely to experience the intended episodes in their dreams, but in vague, fragmentary form; while the anointed target fails to dream of the past at all.

Some magicians have experimented with using variations of this magic to look into their own or other people's futures. Most have found that the only way to do this is to substitute the tears of the dead for the tears of the yet unborn (which requires the aid of Stalkers or others who can travel to and return from the future), and still they often glimpse only possible futures. Worst of all, targets who are anointed to share the experiences of a person who has since died, tend not to recover (remaining in a catatonic state. Those forced to share the experiences of Unseen creatures are inevitably driven mad.





GRANTING SECOND SIGHT (Resolve 5).

This ancient Celtic rite requires that the subject undergo a three day period of solitary fasting and self-flagellation, at the end of which time he is delirious and exhausted. The presiding magician sacrifices a raven and anoints the subject's eyes and ears with its fat. When the subject recovers (usually after several days of care and supervision) he should then have the Gift of Second Sight. The presiding magician loses 4 Resolve, and the raven provides the additional point of Essence.

Second Sight is the ability to see things that were, will be, or might be. It can be as much a curse as a gift. Where a normal mortal sees a small family and hears their conversation, a mortal with Second Sight sees throngs of people (relatives, all dead, or yet unborn, or those who might-be-born) engaged in a plethora of tasks and all talking at once. The subject can see and hear the past and future, but cannot choose which episodes to watch: random snatches of interaction play themselves out constantly before him. Focusing on any single sequence requires high Resolve and Perceive scores. Bearers of the Second Sight also have difficulty maintaining conversations because they are never really sure at what point in time anything they hear is taking place.

The subject is never alone and therefore can never know peace. Life in a city for one with Second Sight is a terrifying, cacophonous, confusing ordeal—especially since past and future and present all seem equally real (making simple tasks, like safely crossing a road, impossible). Even in the most isolated spots there will be visions of people who have been there in the past or yet might one day be there.

Second Sight can be illuminating. Many Celtic sorcerers keep a “Seer” (one with the Sight) as a servant. But maintaining a seer is no easy task. Many swiftly go mad (they can

never be alone, and many cannot even get to sleep for the constant inane chatter) and must spend their days shackled or tied down. Most who receive the Sight are eager to get rid of it. Some even kill the magicians who afflicted them, in the vain hopes that that would “cure” them. Others rip out their eyes and destroy their ears just to gain peace.

Moreover, Sensitive characters with Second Sight become hypersensitive. They see the reflections of the Unseen in

every pool or pane of glass; they see Shadows everywhere.

Sensitive seers always pierce the Veil. They see the dead from the past as they throng everywhere about them, and the sounds that echo in their ears are deafening.

Those who survive for some time can become very knowledgeable about the past and future, but they face the problem of the enchantment

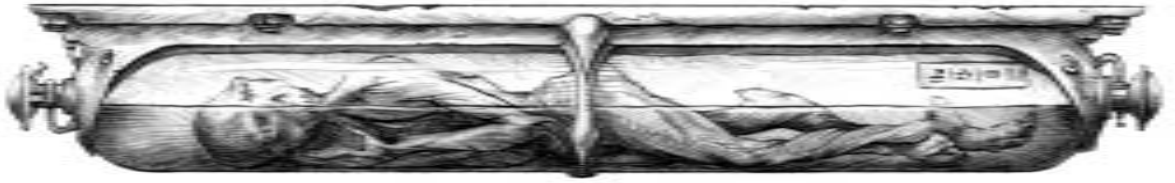
possibly becoming Sentient. When this happens the eyes and ears gain their own personality—their own interests and priorities. They cease to obey the mortal, but focus on visions and conversations of no interest to him. Even as the mortal sleeps, his eyes remain open, watching.

STRIPPING AWAY THE VEIL (Resolve 6).

This ritual requires the powdered bones of dead men and crushed glass, which must be mixed as a dying dog howls at the first light of dawn.

This mixture may then be stored for any period of time. (The magician loses 4 Resolve while creating it; the slaughtered dog provides 2 Essence.) It is used by casting the mixture over an area (each measure covers up to 100 square yards), and as it flies through the air it shreds the Veil around it. The Veil shatters and falls away like a pane of glass broken in slow motion so that the Unseen is made clear for any mortal to see; possibly invoking the Forbiddance. The Veil reforms in roughly three rounds.





THE IMMORTAL' S POISON (Resolve 17).

This enchantment requires that a mortal victim be ritualistically fed a mixture of fifty-five rare poisons on the site of some great human tragedy. After the victim dies, the sorcerer must then eat all of his flesh. (The slain mortal provides Essence equal to its Resolve for the magic. The sorcerer provides the balance.)

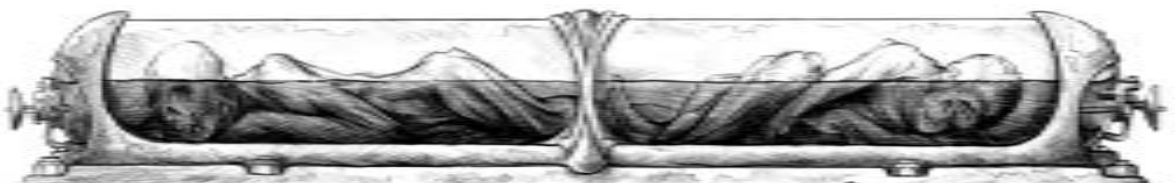
The effect upon the sorcerer is severe. His skin turns pallid and wrinkles; teeth and hair fall out; black blotches appear all over the skin; sometimes the sorcerer goes blind or deaf. His fingers also grow, becoming longer and stronger, with claw-like finger nails that drip a dark and poisonous bile. The sorcerer's blood also become highly poisonous. A gash from the claw or a taste of the blood kills a mortal instantly, and even Unseen creatures can be permanently affected by it. Everywhere the magician goes, plague spreads.

Stalkers who are successfully attacked by the magician, or cause wounds to the sorcerer by physical contact (e.g. lashing with a claw, or using a Rend attack), immediately takes 8D Damage, and has its Willpower halved. (Shadows and Unbidden take the same damage and lose half of their Resolve.) Each time the creature wounds the sorcerer or is struck by him, the applicable statistic of the creature's current Willpower or Resolve score is halved. If the creature's Willpower or Resolve falls below one as a result of this, it is destroyed. Attacking the

It was my master's habit to paint my eyes with a rough chrism, so that I might see distant places through other's eyes. It was not that he cared to broaden my horizons, he just found it convenient to use me to look upon other times on his behalf. This way, he was spared the danger, the distress, and the confusion.



sorcerer with mortal weapons or by indirect means does not damage the Stalker, nor drain its Willpower. Most of the Willpower lost in this way may be recovered once the wounded Stalker or Unseen creature leaves the Realm of Flesh. Each Karma point expended allows the regeneration of one point of Willpower. However, one





An old rival of mine
lived here towards
the end of his life.
Fear caused him to
place a great
Affirmation on the
home. So here,
neither my magics,
nor anyone else's
will work. Here I
am powerless. I am
normal. It is here
that I am safe
from myself, and
from all those
things that I have
so arrogantly
done in my many
pasts.



point of Willpower is lost permanently for each time that the Stalker was wounded by or wounded the sorcerer. Example: Three attacks caused the Stalker to lose seven points of Willpower. Since one point is permanently lost per attack, only four points may be recovered.

THE WIDOWER' S PLEA (Resolve 18).

This enchantment can be created without a formal ritual or an occult ceremony and the caster need not be a magician. In fact, any Sensitive person can weave this magic—often quite unconsciously—so long as they are driven by grief (or guilt) and a longing for the return of some lost person. The mortal's own passion channels his Essence into the magic.

The subject must simply undertake actions which "encourage" the lost person to return by rearranging reality into a form which the target person would be delighted with or unable to resist. A couple mourning the death of a young daughter might organize their lives as if she still lived; buying all the things that she ever wanted and doing the things that she wanted them to do. A man devastated by his parent's death might change his lifestyle and career to satisfy the parent's hopes for him or he might revert to a childish mentality in hopes that it will "force" the parent to return to care for him.

A woman whose husband has left her might "remove" all of the people around her whom she believes drove the man away. The mortal's actions do

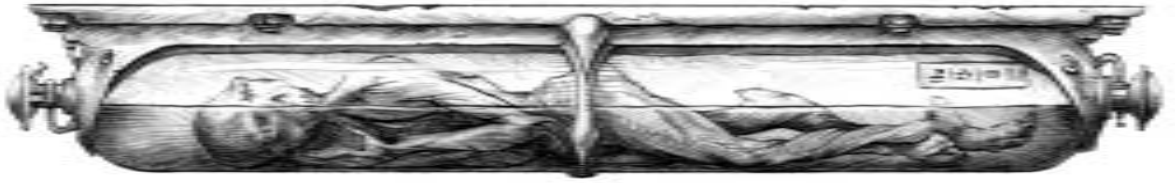
not have to be reasonable or sensible—just heartfelt. As the subject rearranges their life, Essence leaks out of them (one or two points at a time). Usually the Resolve lost is regained normally over time, but occasionally (for the subject unlearned in magic) the person's Resolve is permanently lowered (even as low as 3 or 4), leaving the subject weak-willed and confused. When 18 points of Essence have accrued (and the world is just as the wretch believes their lost love would have wanted it) the person seems to reappear. Of course, the real person in fact, does not return. Rather, the enchantment takes on the desired person's form, looking and behaving as the mortal hopes and expects. The enchantment also forms an Enigma, Focused on some area especially important to the mortal and the lost love (a child's room, a marital bed, etc.).

The mortal who created the enchantment is inevitably Corrupted by it. Others in the area, and those who may have also wanted to see the lost person return, may become Corrupted. As a result, Corrupted mortals cannot see the flaws in their enchantment's appearance or behavior.

For example: The enchantment may appear to have a physical body, but non-Corrupted Sensitive characters can see the enchantment as it really exists (made from base materials from around the mortal's vicinity (refuse, clods of earth, chunks of meat, etc.).

Likewise, the enchantment has no memories or personality beyond those given to it by its creator. The





enchantment's physical form may be destroyed (Fortitude 4, Vitality 10, Initiative 10, Defend 14, Perceive 14, Resolve 18, Attack 14, Strength 3), but unless the Enigma is Mended it reforms within a few hours.

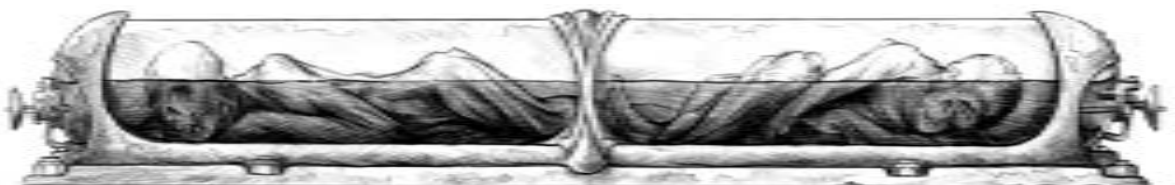
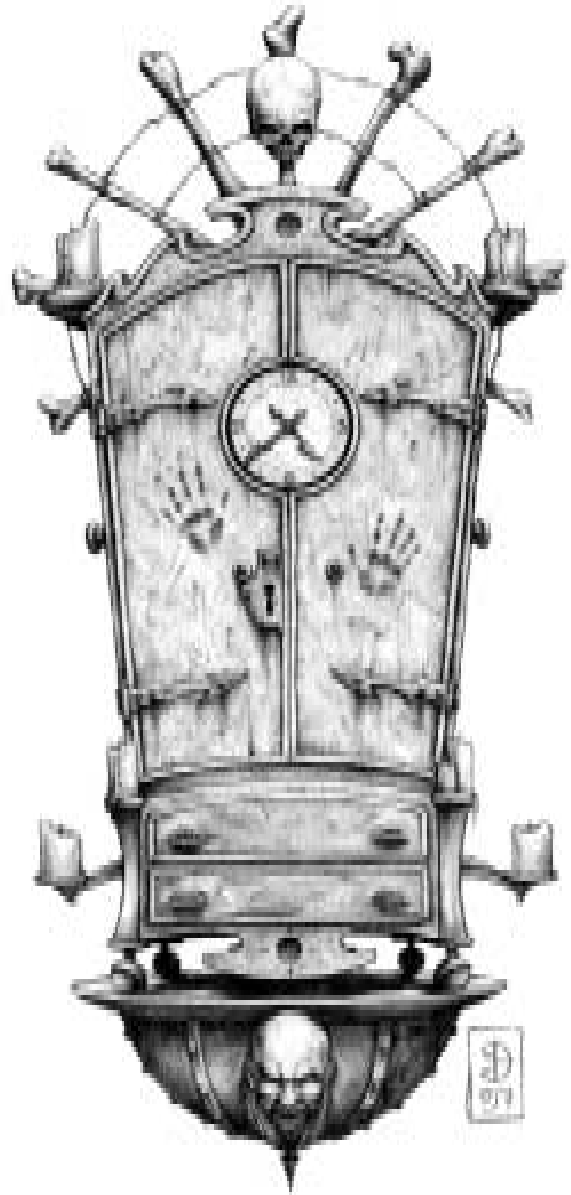
In time, the enchantment becomes Sentient and then turns Prodigal. The mortal has given it a life (passably human) and it inevitably decides to make the most of itself without remaining its creator's slave. It may discard the mortal entirely, or exploit the fool's devotion for its own ends. Most such enchantments become egocentric and hedonistic, sampling all the delights and sensations that their new bodies can provide. No trained sorcerer, unless Driven, may weave this enchantment. Occult learning is no substitute for raw passion.

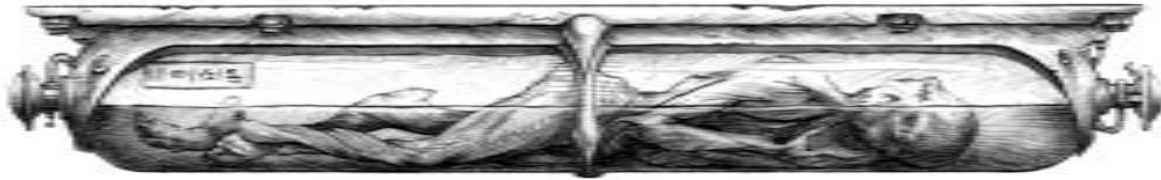
Another version of this enchantment—most common in the Caribbean Islands, mid-western and west coast areas of the United States—is when it chooses to possess the corpse of a dead loved one. The caster “sees” their beloved as they remember, not the desiccated bundle of flesh before them. The side effects of a mishap while casting this enchantment can be quite devastating once it becomes Prodigal. The defective enchantment may find that it lacks an inability to keep its Essence (its life-source) intact. As Essence slowly seeps away, the enchantment will actively seek to replenish its life the only way it can; through the consummation of the living flesh of others. During this process, there is a chance that the enchantment can “infect” its victim and cause the freshly killed corpse to become another dysfunctional enchantment with its own need to “feed” itself. Uncommon events such as this have led to stories of the walking dead that feed on brains, etc.

THE GREAT PORTAL (Resolve 26).

From the first Ages of Man, mortal magicians sought to escape from present difficulties by stepping through into a future where they hoped to be free from their foes and able to start afresh.

One way of doing this is to build a Great Portal, but it requires a great price to be paid. It is usually an ornate





The feelings of spending half of my youth staring from behind others' eyes; defies description. I cannot begin to distinguish what mine own eyes have actually seen, versus that sight granted to me through others. It breeds an uncertainty. Most people rely upon their memories to tell them who they are; what their obligations are; who their enemies might be. But it is not merely my own memories that I recall. No doubt I have spent half my life running from the enemies of others, and fulfilling obligations which were not my own.



doorway (though it could be two adjacent menhirs, the mouth of a cave, or even a wardrobe or chest). The Portal must be built over the bodies of two mortal victims, both killed on the night of the new moon with weapons that had never before shed blood. When the structure is complete, a third sacrifice is made through the slaying of the murderously corrupt sorcerer's offspring.

This final sacrifice completes the enchantment and "opens" the gateway into a future time. The sorcerer might try to specify the time which he wishes the portal to lead to, but the mortal's control is loose and the gateway (being Sentient) usually just connects with a future time which seems best suited to its (and the sorcerer's) temperament. Violent casters tend to open portals to violent eras, creative enchanters often forge links to times when the arts flourish, etc. The magic always leads to roughly the same location, just in a different time.

The sorcerer need not step through the portal immediately. The enchantment has no fixed duration, and it makes a useful emergency escape rout for the magician. But on the other hand, the enchantment creates an Enigma (which may attract Shadows, or provoke Stalkers to visit), and over time the enchantment may become Prodigal (e.g. refusing to let certain people, even the caster, pass through).

The most dangerous Prodigal Portals are not merely content to wait until someone decides to step through them; they "swallow" mortals and surrounding objects, hurling them

forward through time. If this goes on for long enough, the Enigma manifests a Shadowland, representing an imagined future into which large chunks of the Dream might be absorbed.

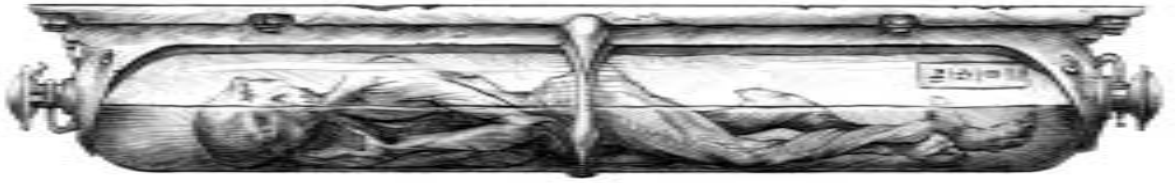
Any number of people may step through a Portal, at any time. So, the sorcerer might intend to travel through it alone, or might want to lead a whole community through (perhaps to a fabled "promised land" in the future).

In any case, mortals might stray through inadvertently, or a fleeing sorcerer's enemies might step through in pursuit. Nor can the magician close down the Portal or destroy the magic after using it. The Great Portal exists only as a one-way path from the past and does not exist at all in the future. Wise sorcerers often take pains to ensure that after they have used the Portal the enchantment or the structure will be destroyed.

The Portal itself becomes the Focus of an Enigma, which cannot be Mended until the magic has first been destroyed. (Wrecking the structure of the Portal prevents it from functioning, but leaves the enchantment and Enigma intact, so that the gate could be rebuilt later.)

This Enigma distorts the effects and progress of time. People within its area might become younger or age suddenly. Anachronistic objects (usually from the period that the gate leads to) might appear briefly around it, and time might run slower or faster in the Corrupted area.





People who pass through a Great Portal also become the foci of similar Enigmas in their future parts of the Dream: time behaves strangely and objects from their original time might suddenly appear about them. Such Enigmas are extremely minor if only one mortal passed through, but if a large number used the magic then the Enigma can be severe, sometimes even forming a Shadowland where the mortals live in their imagined future. Mending such Enigmas necessarily destroys the unfortunate mortals.

THE PRIVATE PARADISE (Resolve 60).

This Chinese enchantment was created to allow a magician's wealthy patrons to have their own heavenly gardens or palaces. The ritual requires that a dozen servants voluntarily be sacrificed by their master's own hand. As a result, a "Private Paradise" comes into being within a state of Temporal Isolation and reflects the innermost desires of that person. A Paradise may be of any appearance or nature (caves, gardens, castle, etc.), though most reflect the place where they are created in size and form. They may also have any number of inhabitants (most have twelve servants resembling the twelve who were sacrificed).

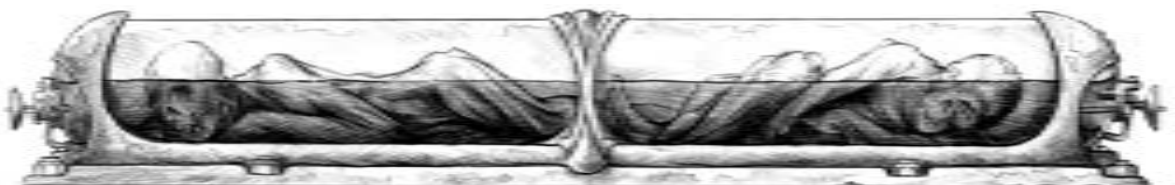
Many people's inner-most desires are quite unpleasant, and sometimes depraved or downright hellish. There is no guarantee that their Paradise will be at all pleasant. Many of those who have sacrificed to gain reward, are surprised to find their Paradise is

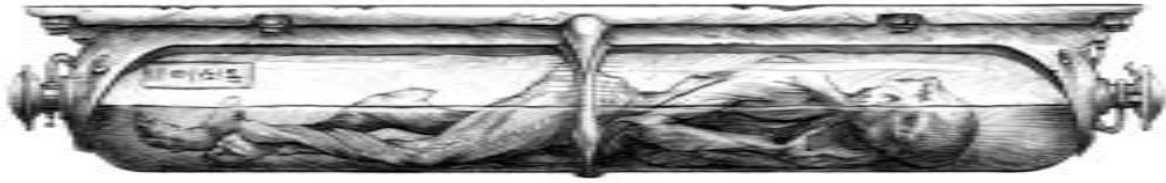
inhabited by nightmare creatures—embodiments of emotions or desires that they didn't even know they had. And because the enchantment is inevitably Sentient, they may even find that they are unwelcome in their own Paradise. Most people have rather unrealistic opinions of themselves, and hate in others those faults which they cannot bare to admit that they themselves posses. So, a cowardly bully's innermost feelings, for example, might create a Paradise full of demonic creatures who hunt the weak and intimidated. And he might then arrive in the Paradise to find that its denizens consider him their prey.

The presiding magician and the mortal who makes the sacrifice must each contribute 3 points of Essence; the remainder is drawn from the sacrifices. Thereafter, these two individuals may gain access to the Paradise, via one particular entry-point (e.g. by stepping through a doorway or *into* a painting) and by expending one further point of Resolve each time. They may take other people in or out with them whenever they travel between the Paradise and the Realm of Flesh, but otherwise only Awakened mortals and Unseen creatures may attempt to enter or leave, and these interlopers must make a Strenuous Sensitivity Challenge. Such attempts are Very Hard (Stalkers would probably do better to trick one of the two mortals into guiding them in.

Some magicians create Paradises for themselves, either for recreation or as secret places to work or just to hide away in. Others create them as training grounds, hidden barracks or

There is a small house on the hill, overlooking the blasted moor and peat bogs. It is a hard climb (especially at my age) and the view there is stark; unfriendly at best. The furnishings are primitive. Rotting walls fill the hovel with cold drafts and the rich smell of earthen decay. It is loneliness. It is death. It is a bitter peace. It is the most beautiful place I have ever known.





paradises to reward their mortal underlings. Still yet, others help mortal rivals to create Paradises, hoping that the foe will be so delighted that he will abandon the Dream. And of course, because most mortals may neither leave nor enter the Paradise without one of its creators, it also makes an excellent prison.

The Paradise has many dangers, however. It constitutes a giant Enigma, to which many Shadows may be drawn. The Paradise is itself Sentient, and through its servants and inhabitants it may negotiate with any visitor; seeking to promote its own vision of perfection through the mortal world. The enchantment may become Prodigal and try to recruit such visitors to help it, and may see its creators as mere tools in its own schemes. The Paradise may come to regard its creators as traitors, or as unworthy, and might conspire to destroy them. The entrance to a Paradise is often precarious, too. If it must be entered through a certain doorway, for example, the destruction of that portal would seal it off from the Dream.

UNIQUE ARTIFACTS.

ALT.POWERFORU (Resolve 4).

alt.powerforu is a newsgroup on Internet, which always seems to be empty. Normal mortals accessing the newsgroup find that there are never any articles there, and any messages which they post to it just seem to vanish.

Only Awakened computer users and certain enchanted computers and software can access the news files from the newsgroup. The AO-DOS program, for example, can receive and display files from this group. Normally, files received by a computer are invisible—the computer just can't be made to display anything—unless an Awakened mortal (or creature) is operating it.

Alt.powerforu is actually a notice board for Awakened mortals (mostly magicians) to communicate with one and other. Magicians post messages asking for information or copies of ancient texts. Rumors of Enigmas, uncontrolled enchantments and Unseen creatures are circulated via this

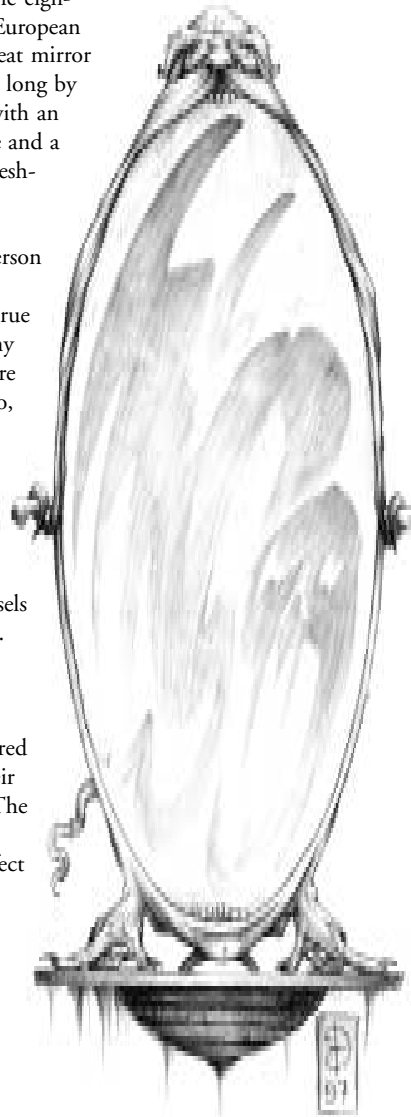
group. And someone (or several people) is obviously using it to recruit young, ambitious magicians to aid them in their plots.

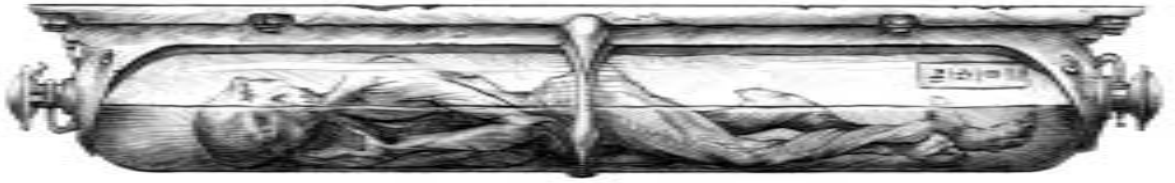
THE TRUE MIRROR (Resolve 5).

Bois-Couteau, the eighteenth century European hunter, had a great mirror made, seven feet long by four feet high, with an ornate gilt frame and a slight scent of fresh-spilt blood.

Any Sensitive person looking into the mirror sees the true appearance of any person or creature reflected in it. So, Stalker and Unbidden reflections show their Avatars, without the Veil or their Vessels to obscure them. Shadows are shown without their husks; disguised or altered magicians in their original forms. The scent of blood is merely a side effect of the enchantment.

The mirror originally hung in the hunter's study, so





that from behind his desk he could scrutinize any person who came in through the door or sat in any of the chairs. But the mirror disappeared, presumed stolen, around the time of his death.

LIN SO' S MARVELOUS SILK PAINTING (Resolve 6).

The Chinese master Lin So had a large sheet of "silk" woven from human hair and entrails; on it he painted an aerial view of his own mountain stronghold.

Whenever he looked at the painting, it showed not only the stronghold as it was at that time (the painting changing as the stronghold expanded), but also the positions of any people or magics within it. So, the magician immediately knew if anyone intruded upon his domain, or if his artifacts were taken or new enchantments appeared.

The painting was looted from his stronghold after his death, and passed through many magicians' hands, slowly wending its way through Europe to the Americas. And throughout its existence, the painting (Sentient but

slavishly loyal to its many owners) has reliably shown the domicile of its current owner, complete with people and enchantments marked clearly upon it.

SILVER BULLETS (Resolve 8).

The famed eighteenth century wolf hunter Bois-Couteau also had a pendant for hunting other more savage creatures, and for this he had a series of silver bullets made. Each is a solid silver musket ball, engraved with runes and encrusted in dried blood. Re-smelting them into modern ammunition seems to destroy the enchantment.



Any creature not of the Flesh struck by such a bullet takes double normal Damage (e.g. 10D instead of 5D from a wheel-lock pistol). Any Shadow struck is immediately banished from the Realm of Flesh unless its Resolve is more than 16.

Stalkers struck may also be Banished back to their Domains

unless they make a Hard Willpower Challenge. Unbidden cannot be banished by these bullets.

The bullets can only be fired from old-style muzzle loading rifles or pistols and, because they squash on impact, can only be used once each. By the twentieth century only a dozen survive.

THE HEAD OF KESSELIACH (Resolve 8).

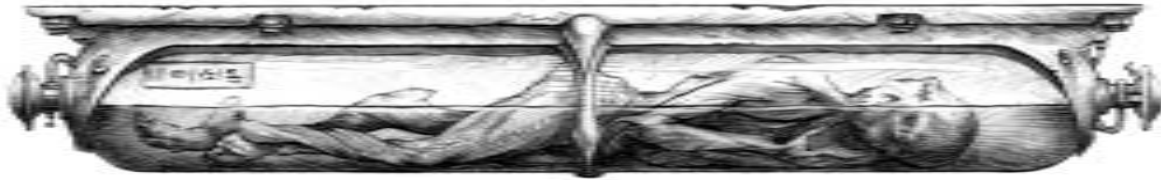
About the size of a basketball, the head seems to most mortals to be a peculiar looking sack, stuffed with warm meat and having large nails driven through it. The sack stinks like a month-old corpse. Sensitive mortals can see it for what it really is—part of an Unseen creature. It looks like the head of a grotesque rag-doll, with rusty iron spines protruding all over, and blood oozing from the seams. The head was clearly hacked violently from the creature's shoulders, and seems to be stuffed with a sort of writhing meat (some of which still drips fresh blood from the gash at its base). It also has reptilian eyes, which move about slowly, and several rows of gnarled teeth.

Kesseliach was in fact an Unbidden, whose Avatar was shredded by an over zealous Circle. The Stalkers recovered enough of the Avatar to Bind the creature, but they never found its head. This was recovered by an anonymous magician who found that it still had a trace of the creature's Essence within it. He enchanted the head to sell to other practitioners.

The head functions as a detector of the Unseen. Although usually it is quite listless, gazing around moodily but doing little, it becomes more alert in the presence of Unseen creatures, the eyes flitting from side to side and the iron quills twitching. In the presence of Stalkers, the head becomes quite animated, the flesh within it thrashing about wildly, the eyes staring from side to side, and the mouth forming exaggerated threats should the hated creatures come within sight.

The enchantment in the head is Sentient, and mistakenly believes itself to be the real Kesseliach. It shares the Unbidden's memories, and is puzzled by the loss of "its"





powers. It still wishes to avenge itself on the Stalkers who dismembered Kesseliach, and may try to enlist the aid of its owners. With great effort it may Whisper for up to one minute per day, and might make all sorts of extravagant promises—which it cannot keep—to any mortal who would help it. It can still see, hear and smell perfectly well.

The true Kesseliach, languishing in the Vault, can see and hear through its Head, but has no influence over the enchantment's thoughts or actions.

THE SERPENT ORACLES (Resolve 11).

Minoan sorceresses kept serpents which they considered divine, asking questions of them and receiving amazingly accurate responses in return. Crete's first magicians had created the animals, granting them a kind of omniscience by making them both creatures of Flesh and Essence (not unlike Stalkers) but who see all times and places throughout the entire Chronosphere simultaneously.

This gives the animals the ability to answer questions on any subject, although, like their creators, they seem particularly knowledgeable on subjects of the occult and the uses of herbs. Seeing all things simultaneously, however, makes the animals aloof and disinterested in changing circumstances, so that although they are Sentient they rarely have goals or ambitions.

These snakes can answer any simple question (only one word answers, usually). In order to ask a question of a snake, a mortal must cut out a portion of his other own flesh, and channel a point of Essence into it, casting it to the snake as she or he asks the question. The animal usually accepts the gift and eats it (although greedy snakes, or those asked to answer important questions, might demand more than just a few ounces of muscle, requiring a finger or hand, for example). It then communicates the answer, instinctively, to the questioner, without any obvious speech or magical effect detectable to outside observers; the questioner just knows the answer.

ANOTHRECE' S CAULDRON (Resolve 13).

Anothrece was a Pain Mother, who Awakened in Thessaly around 1200 BC. She practiced sorcery with a band of enchantresses in the hills of the region, and after experimenting with many unsatisfactory lovers, she at last found another who shared her perverse lusts. But this lover, Cessenda, was a woman, and Anothrece would have preferred her as a man. So, the Pain Mother devised and enacted a ritual to slay the woman, and to recreate her as a man.

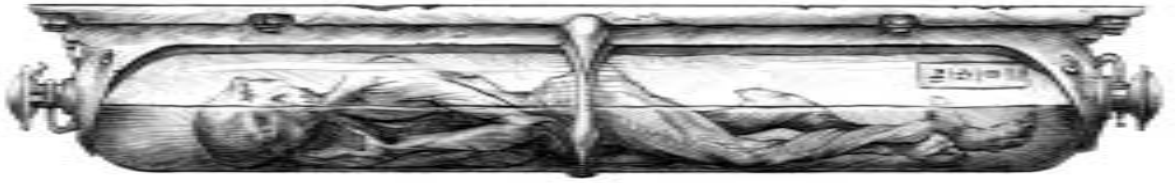
The ritual proved to be flawed, however, and Cessenda's Essence did not reform as Anothrece had expected. After much research and experimentation, the Pain Mother concluded that the Essence probably had reformed, but at another point in the Chronosphere. Her task then became to locate her lover, and travel to (or summon) him or her. Her obsessive efforts depleted Anothrece's Essence and destroyed her, but much of her Essence remained in her greatest creation—her heavy bronze Cauldron.

This Sentient enchantment continues Anothrece's fanatical quest for the reformed Cessenda; though it cannot remember exactly why. It has the power to look into any place and time, and it slowly scours the Chronosphere in an attempt to find the dead Pain Mother's lost love.

Whatever the Cauldron is looking at appears in the surface of whatever liquid it contains and is visible to any Sensitive or creature of the Unseen who might look in. Because it can look at any place or time the Cauldron would prove to be invaluable to some mortal magicians. It can also create and display scenes from its own imagination, in order to mislead or manipulate mortals who have learned to trust its insights. The enchantment can also form letters, words or pictures to communicate with such mortals. Its images of other places are mute, but it can always hear sounds and speech in its presence, allowing it to hear mortal requests and offers.

It takes the Cauldron two thousand years of searching to locate the reformed Cessenda. Around AD 800 it locates a man (a Chaldean by birth) living in the first century BC. He has all of Cessenda's distinctive features—her long thin fingers, her cruel laugh, her gift for sorcery, her delight in





cutting flesh... The problem for the Cauldron is how to bring this man to it, or at least to figure some way to go back through time to meet with him.

So, the Cauldron helps any Sensitive mortals who might stumble upon it. Through images, it teaches them

some sorcery and shows them what parts of the past, present or future might interest them. In return, it demands that they seek out other magicians and magical texts, and that they indulge in research on its behalf, hoping to find some way to bring this man, Finderius, forward from the Roman era.

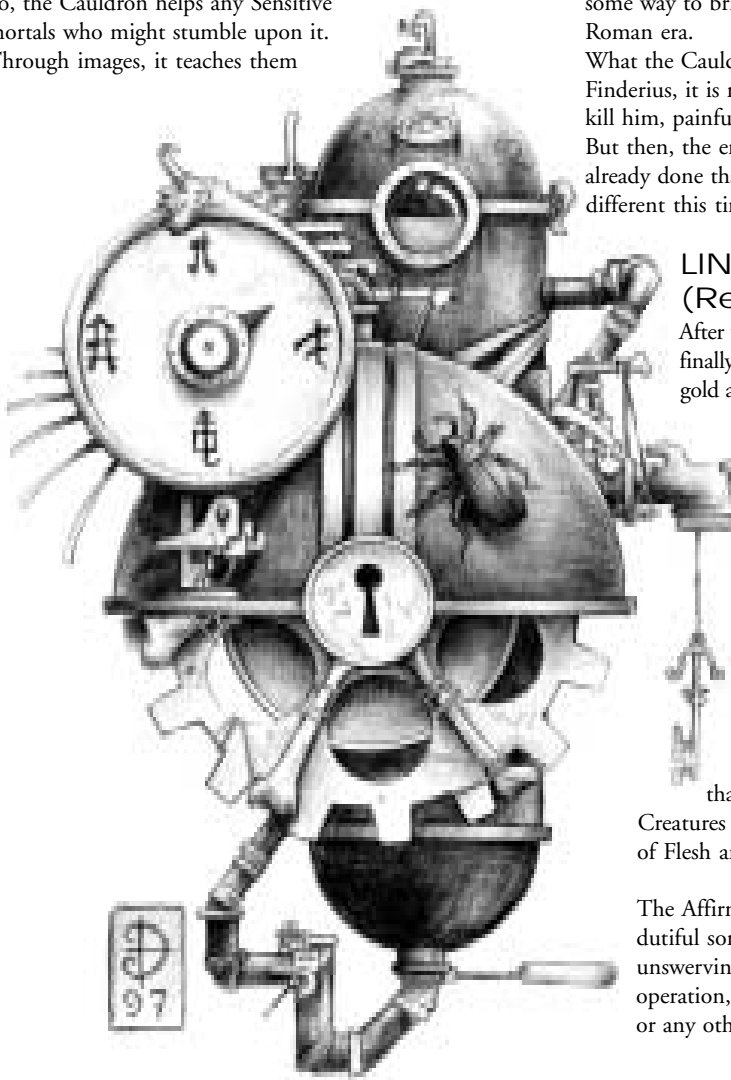
What the Cauldron will do if it ever meets up with Finderius, it is not too sure. It sometimes thinks that it will kill him, painfully, feeling somehow that he would like that. But then, the enchantment feels that, somehow, it has already done that, and that maybe it ought to try something different this time.

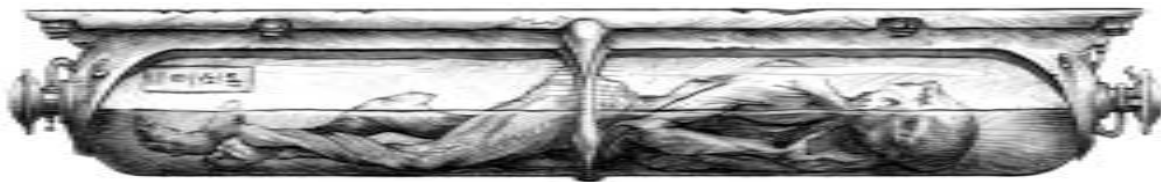
LIN SO' S ETERNAL LOCK (Resolve 21).

After years of work, the Chinese sorcerer Lin So finally created this great lock. It is made of iron and gold and set into the solid rock of his mountain-top sanctuary. The lock measures three yards across, and a great golden key protrudes from its center. No brute force can turn this key. Only Sensitives or Unseen creatures may open the lock. And in theory, the enchantment could itself turn the key.

When the key is in the "locked" position, this device blocks out creatures of the Unseen for a radius of 100 miles. No Shadow may be Awakened within that area, and no Navigator may break through into it; no Servitor may be Summoned into that area, and no Unbidden may appear there. Creatures of the Unseen already present in the Realm of Flesh are unaffected, however.

The Affirmation is Sentient. It regards itself as Lin So's dutiful son, obeying it's "father's" commands with unswerving loyalty. It could take control of its own operation, but refuses, insisting on serving its "father", or any other sorcerer who might have possession of it.





AFFIRMATIONS.

THE WARDING STAVE (Resolve 1).

Many magicians have discovered the advantages of placing warding runes on a tree or stave, around which they can huddle to protect themselves. Some African magicians placed these marks of Affirmation into sacred trees in the center of their villages. Some North American tribes once carved them onto totem poles. Medieval magicians carved staves which they thrust into the ground.

Any Sensitive character may carve the proper symbols into a stave or pole (any upright piece of wood). The process is long and involved, often taking hours, days or even weeks, depending on the skill of the carver, and the marks must be made perfectly or else the staff will be useless. A functioning staff takes on a cold blue sheen, visible to any Sensitive. This unsettles creatures of Essence, and any Unseen creature approaching within 20 yards of it loses one Vitality per round unless clothed in Flesh. (i.e. only Shadows and Unbidden without Husks or Vessels are affected.)

Stalkers, due to their mortal origins, do not lose this Vitality. However, any creature of Essence in any form touching such a stave takes 5D Damage and no Unseen effect may harm the stave (including Rend, Disintegrate, Devourers, etc.). Further,

any mortal within ten yards of the stave is considered to have double their natural Resolve for purposes of resisting Dominate, Delve, Terrify, Dreadwyrms, and similar Disciplines and Servitors. Stalker, Shadow, and Unbidden powers may all be frustrated by this, but mortal magics are unaffected.

Some magicians have found more imaginative uses for these markings, including placing them on doors (which the Unseen are therefore loathe to open), on the shafts of weapons, etc. Multiple staves do not have cumulative effects on the Unseen (e.g. even if within twenty yards of a dozen staves, a Shadow would still only lose one Vitality per round). Broken or defaced staves are rendered useless.

THE MILLIONS' GAZE (Resolve 1).

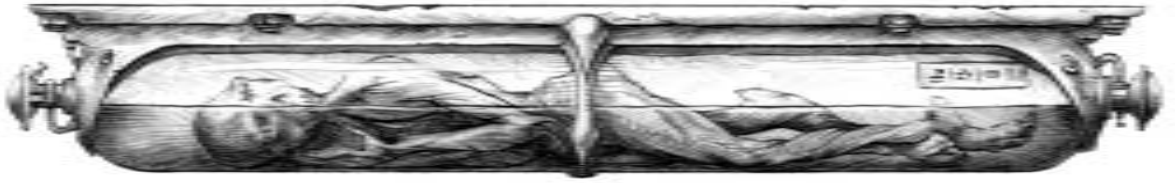
Simple but effective, this Affirmation is an excellent protective enchantment against the Unseen. By turning on and concentrating on any single camera (a normal photographic camera, video or TV camera, even a closed-circuit security camera) the magician causes it to broadcast all that it sees to a million TV sets around the world. Across the globe, half-dazed couch potatoes just flick channels to look at the scene viewed through the specified camera. They aren't particularly aware of what they are seeing, but displays of magic or supernatural powers certainly attract their attentions (and invoke the Forbiddance). The magician must pour in one point of Essence per minute to maintain the Affirmation; so prolonged use dangerously reduces the sorcerer's Resolve.



Creatures of the Unseen, Sentient magics and Sensitive characters can feel the eyes of a million people watching them while this Affirmation is in operation, and Sentient magics inevitably refrain from using their powers in this instance. Stalkers ignore this sensation at their peril. The Forbiddance deals harshly with those who break the Veil before one million viewers.

Unbidden react differently, since they are not affected by the Forbiddance. However, since the Millions' Gaze strongly reinforces the Dream, Unseen creatures under such scrutiny have their Resolves lowered by 2. This





Affirmation was first created in the US during the 1960s. By the twenty first century many magicians have mastered it, and the leaders of the Enlightened Organization known as *The Order* all know it.

BARRING THE GATES OF THE REALM (Resolve 2).

This common Affirmation affects an area of any size. The only restriction is that the boundary of the zone must be marked out as a single, unbroken line (whether painted, carved, or laid out). Should that line be broken the Affirmation ceases. A fifteen-minute ceremony (or two day meditation in other versions) with a ritual fire at the center and silver dust scattered across the ground; activates the Affirmation. The area becomes "shut off" from the Realm of Essence and the Rift, so that Servitors may not be called into it and Navigators may not open into it. Unseen creatures already manifested in the Realm of Flesh are unaffected. So for example: Servitors may still be summoned outside the area and ordered in.

THE MAGICIAN' S BAG (Resolve 3).

A magician's bag is made from any kind of hide (leather, crocodile skin, etc.) with a clasp or drawstring of the same material. It may be of any shape or size, from huge formless leather sacks to petite designer purses. The process by which they are made is painstaking (in the earliest, eastern variants of the Affirmation taking four days of meditation), the magician

pouring four points of Essence into the bag as he sews it.

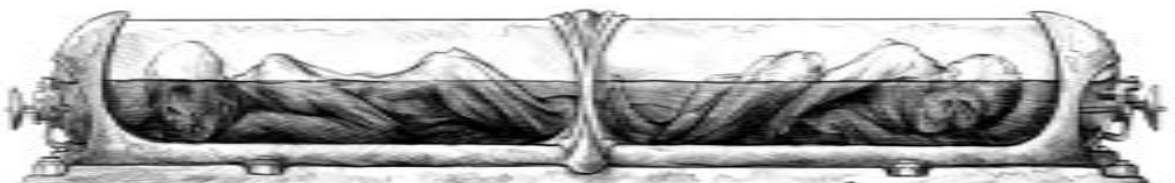
A bag is cold to the touch, and is designed so that no creature of the Unseen may open or in any way affect it. If a Stalker, Shadow, etc. tries to open such a bag, its catch holds firm or its drawstring will not loosen (as appropriate). The bag and its contents are completely immune from the powers of Essence.

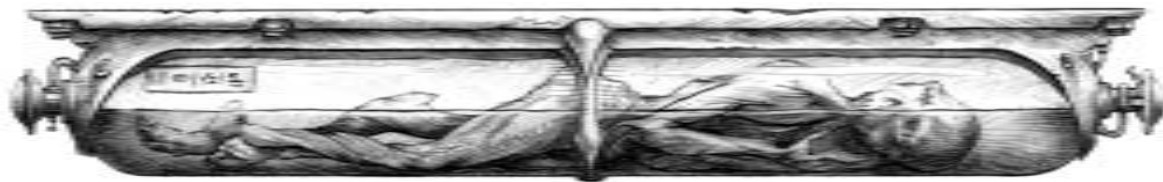
Each bag is always very strong; the hide is tough, the claps or drawstring almost impossible to sever. Brute force will eventually allow a Stalker to get into the bag, but will probably also damage the contents physically, and will render the bag unusable. Mortals may open the bags without difficulty.

DENYING THE UNNATURAL POWERS (Resolve 8).

To thwart the Disciplines of Stalkers, mortal magics and the powers of the Unbidden, this ritual requires a granite sphere, engraved with a map of the world (as the magician understands it to be). The magician must meditate upon the sphere for six successive nights, spreading pure water over its surface and pouring one point of Essence into it each night.

The enchanted globe is often damp, as if with dew, and is always the same temperature as the surrounding air. It creates an Affirmation,





I actually died over thirty years ago. No, not in my true past, but in some other, alternative, past I watched the slow agonizing death. In another vision I foresaw that I would die next year at the hands of a man whom I think I have already killed. It does all seem so comical. But I am in no position to appreciate the joke.



spreading out one hundred yards in all directions, which prevents any Unseen or magical power from functioning. This includes any Stalker Discipline, Unseen special ability, Shadow power, or mortal magic (other than other Affirmations); Servitors which affect the fabric or appearance of the Dream (such as Gremlins, Rotlings, Nightwings) may also not use their powers, though those which operate invisibly (Martyrs, Dreadwyrms, etc.) are unaffected.

In other words, it preserves the world roughly as it was intended by the Aesthetics. Though powerless over the Dream, creatures of the Essence can still enter the area of effect without harm. Unseen creatures and Sensitive mortals passing into the area of the Affirmation may attempt a Hard Perception Challenge (or must have a Perceive of 15 or more) to notice the Dream hardening around them. Everything in the area seems a little better defined angles harder, the air crisper, sounds sharper.

The globe need not be on view to spread its Affirmation, and its owners may hide it in any way they wish. However, if it is defaced or physically destroyed (e.g. if the Globes' Fortitude of 15 is overcome), the Affirmation is ended.

BANISHING THE UNINTENDED (Resolve 10+).

This ritual, created by an Enlightened Arabic sorcerer, is designed to both protect the sorcerer from the powers of

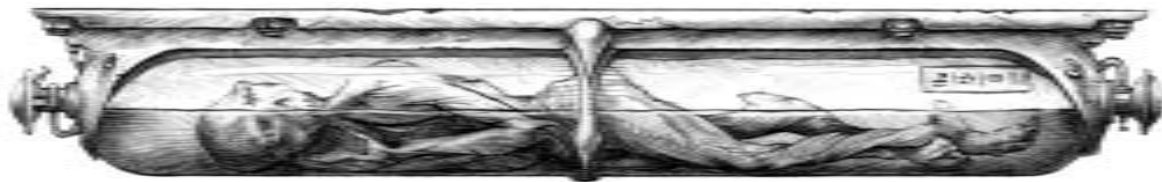
the Unseen and to banish such creatures as might approach.

A circle is marked firmly in the floor (usually engraved into it), with lines radiating from its center out to the rim like spokes on a wheel, and Arabic letters and phrases inscribed about it. The magician then supplies as much Essence as he desires, by any means available (personally, by sacrifice, or through meditation), though the ceremony must be completed within three hours of its beginning and at least 10 points of Essence must be invested. Each point of Essence spent equals one point of Resolve for the entire circle. The circle thereafter hums with a low moan, audible to any Sensitive character, and glows dimly with a cold light. Sweat condenses on surfaces nearby.

No power of the Unseen may affect the circle or anything within it. Moreover, any Unseen creature entering the circle, unless its Resolve exceeds the enchantment's (Stalkers make a Willpower Challenge against the circle's Resolve), is immediately cast from the Realm of Flesh to return to their own dwellings. Shadows are cast into the Rift, and Stalkers return to their Domains. Unbidden are sent back to the Realm of Essence, where they are harshly dealt with unless they can find their way back to the Flesh. Unbidden and Shadows in Vessels or Husks are at no advantage against this Affirmation—they do not belong in the realm, however they are clad.

The circle may Banish any number of Shadows without being weakened by





the effort. Each time it Banishes a Stalker, however, its Resolve is halved as Essence is used up, and if it casts out an Unbidden the enchantment is entirely exhausted.

Ordinarily the enchantment has no effect upon mortal magic. However, if it becomes Sentient it might become too eager in its quest to expunge abnormalities. Sentient circles may elect to destroy other magics which come within their bounds, losing Resolve equal to the Resolve of the magic destroyed. Stalkers may also be able to reason with such enchantments, for the magic will not willingly help anyone who can be shown to be defiling the Dream. The Stalkers might persuade it, for example, to cease its functioning long enough to let them kill a sorcerer sheltering within it.

Ironically, powerful Banishing circles cause Enigmas of their own, which may attract more Shadows and cause great stress to the Dream. (Really devious Stalkers, with fine role-playing and impressive Charm rolls, might actually persuade a Sentient enchantment, posing a threat to the Dream, to destroy itself.) The Anomalies caused by such Enigmas include Exaggeration, but also include effects which make it more difficult to make balanced deductions (evidence just vanishes, swirling fogs obscure view and make allies mistake one and other for foes) and mortals corrupted by them become increasingly opinionated, prejudiced and insular, ready to destroy those they consider threats or outsiders with little provocation.

THE SEAL OF THE CELESTIAL COURT (Resolve 20).

Developed in ancient China, this is one of the first rituals learned by most Chinese sorcerers. The Seal is formed over ten months of repeated ritual and lengthy meditation. It is a complex figure, resembling a Chinese character but impossible to copy or remember accurately.

The Seal is put onto a single thing, or person. Most Chinese sorcerers wear it on their torsos or their robes. The seal is always striking, and usually large (covering most of the surface of a sorcerer's robes, for example), and once marked on it cannot be erased.

If a Sealed object is damaged the Seal still works, and reappears in full when the item is repaired. If placed on flesh it functions despite wounds or disfigurement, reforming over scars or lacerations.

The Seal protects its object or person from the effects of any magic with a Resolve of 20 or less. Anything within the marked object (e.g. an item inside a Sealed chest, or a person wearing robes emblazoned with the character) is equally protected. The creator of a Seal may over-ride this Affirmation, allowing them to cast further Affirmations or enchantments upon themselves or their possessions. They may also permit certain effects to pass through the Seal (typically magics which heal).

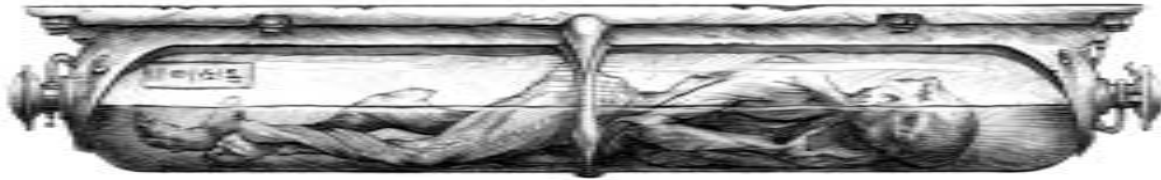
THE CHAMBER OF THE FOUR WINDS (Resolve 46).

This rare Chinese Affirmation allows a magician to create a chamber in which all Unseen creatures may be hurled from the Realm of Flesh.

The sorcerer must spend four years working on the room, which must be made from certain types of stone, quarried under certain astrological conditions. Each year a virgin male must be sacrificed, and his blood daubed to form an ever-shifting symbol on one wall. Thus complete, the enchantment causes the room to growl and breathe, as if it were the mouth of some great beast; warm air, sweet as a lion's breath, gusting around it. Such an enchantment is always Sentient, but with the mentality of a hungry predator which cannot be reasoned with.

If any Unseen creature (or creatures) walk into the room, huge jets of blood explode from the sigils on the walls, the floor opens up to expose a black abyss, and the creature(s) tumble down into the Realm of Essence or the Rift as appropriate. GMs may permit Stalkers to make an Average, Difficult or Very Difficult Initiative Challenge to leap or Translocate out of the room before they tumble out of the Realm of Flesh, but if the ritual were performed perfectly they would not have the chance.





The magic's effect may be postponed by covering up the sigils on the walls (e.g. with thick curtains or paneling), but as soon as all four were revealed the enchantment would take effect. This would allow the sorcerer to lure a number of creatures (e.g. a whole Circle of Stalkers) into the room before triggering the magic. The enchantment only works once, in any case, its own Essence being blasted out of the Dream with its victims.

The magic is not triggered by a mortal or enchantments entering the room, but anyone and anything in the room when it does take effect is also hurled from the Dream and so, presumably, destroyed. Unseen creatures hurled out by this magic may end up in any part of the Realm of Essence, though all arrive in the same place. If they are lucky they will arrive somewhere harmless, from where they may return safely to their Domains, but their destination is entirely random.

DELIBERATE ENIGMAS.

MAYFLOWER, NEBRASKA.

Power 17

The town of Mayflower cannot be found on any maps—at least none made after 1920. It cannot be seen from the air or even photographed from orbit. Only if people are looking for Mayflower, and are Sensitive, can they find the town, and only then if they are using archaic methods of transport. A Sensitive mortal (or creature of the Unseen) can



RATING ENIGMAS.

This book introduces a new way to rate Enigmas. Each of the Deliberate Enigmas below refers to its Power. For instance, Mayflower, Nebraska's Enigma is listed as Power 17. This is simply a short hand way of saying that the Difficulty of the Mending Challenge is 17.

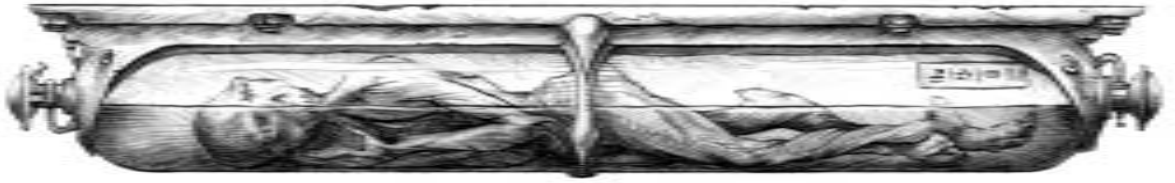
walk or ride into the town simply by traveling along the farm tracks and roads around where the town used to be.

Motor vehicles cannot enter the Enigma around Mayflower. Electrical appliances, computers, and other modern inventions simply refuse to work there. This whole area is a paranoid anachronism, desperately trying to remain part of an American idyll that never was.

The town of Mayflower has only one dusty street, with one village store and nowhere to buy alcohol. Around the town are whitewashed farmhouses with names like Good Hope House and Faith Bridge Farm. The people all have names like Nathaniel, Ruben, Luke and Zeek, or Elizabeth, Mary, Mercy and Abigail. There is no electricity or mechanical equipment. Instead of elaborate irrigation systems, the people here just use hand pumps and open wells. The women all wear long skirts and high-necked blouses, and all women and children humbly obey the men who dominate their families. In the week everyone works cheerfully and industriously, the men in the fields and the women in their homes. On Sundays everyone dresses in their finest, and troops eagerly to the church to hear Reverend Flail's fire-and-brimstone sermons.

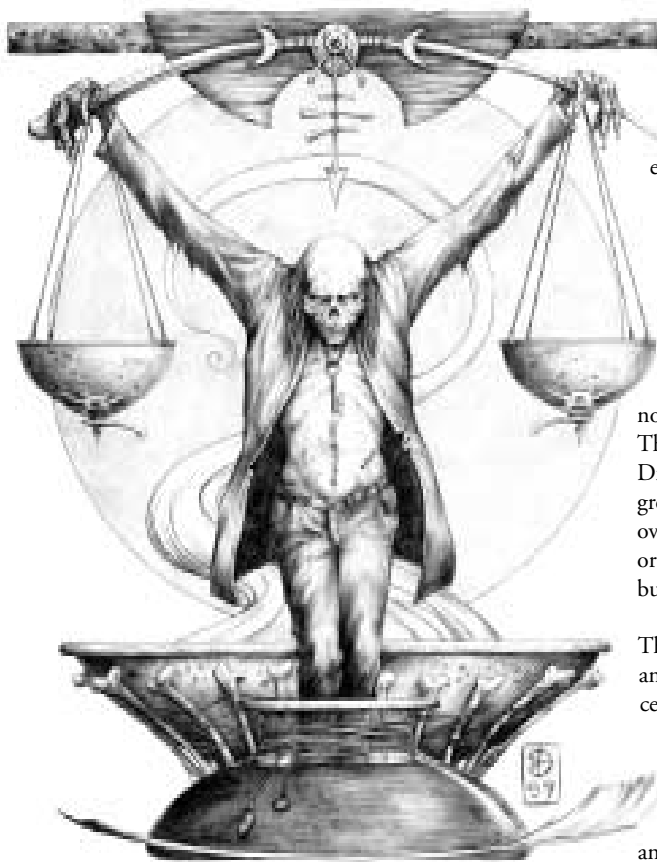
But the town is not the paradise that some might think. The pretty pink "Home Sweet Home" signs on the farm gates are peeling. The wells are stagnant, and the crops are moldering in the fields. Each evening the folk cheerfully sit down to eat roast stray dog or rat with rotting vegetables or wood shavings. Everyone looks half-starved, but none would





complain. In each household the fathers dole out violence and abuse to their unresisting families, and though all march dutifully to church each Sunday none can remember why they go or what faith they celebrate there.

Reverend Flail himself has trouble preaching: it is in the nature of the town that it must have a priest, but since no replacement has arrived (no one ever arrives) he has continued his ministry even through death; it's hard to deliver a booming sermon with dried flesh tight around his throat and tattered lungs wheezing in his chest.



It is Reverend Flail who must take the credit (or blame) for the town's condition. Sickened by the hedonism of the '20s and fearful of the advance of Godless technology, he conducted a very special Easter service in the church in the field near the town in 1921, in which every household in the town sacrificed their first-born child to God in penance for their supposed sins. Ever since then, the first-born of each family has been sacrificed, and it is the children's Essence which has maintained and strengthened the Enigma.

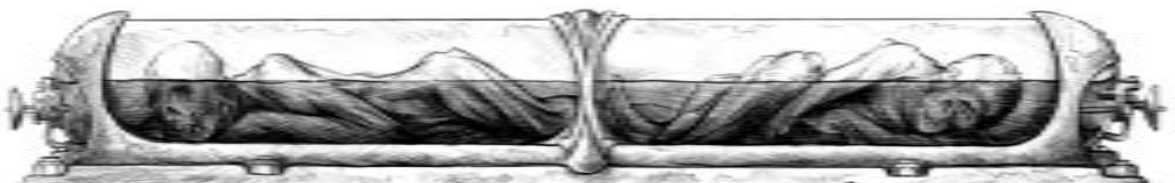
The Focus of the Enigma is a map, kept in the town Mayor's office, which seems to be a chart used by the Pilgrim Fathers to sail to America. The mayor, Silas Mathers, seems to be the town's primary leader (Flail manipulating him quietly) and will attempt to deal with (drive off or have sacrificed) any newcomers to the town. The Pilgrim Fathers' chart, suitably enough, is a fake.

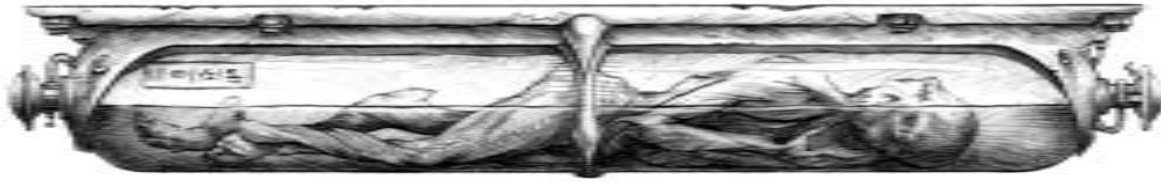
THE LAST NATIONAL BANK OF BROKENRIDGE.

Power 15

There is a bank which appears sometimes beside dusty highways, or in vacant lots in run-down cities. Only Sensitives ever seem to notice it, though normal mortals can see it if it is pointed out to them. The bank is its own Enigma, and it shifts through the Dream of its own accord, arriving anywhere where greed and poverty are found in equal measure—in the over-farmed fields of a drought-ridden 1920's Midwest, or possibly in the slums bordering a 21st century city's business district.

This is an old wooden building, with a buckled roof and banging shutters, built in the style of the mid 19th century and seemingly never updated. It resembles, in every detail, the First National Bank of Brokenridge (a silver mining town, now a ghost town). The bank was founded in 1858 by Henry Goodbody, who truly believed money could buy anything and spent his life trying to prove it; only to die in poverty. Goodbody wanted a source of cash that would never run dry, and when a magician offered to build him a bank with limitless resources he jumped at the





chance. He gave the magician every dollar he owned, and never wondered why the sorcerer hadn't already created such a marvelous bank for himself.

Inside, light seeps through grimy windows and from weak oil lamps. Behind the counter an aged man busies himself shuffling blank papers, scouring blank ledgers and rummaging through an empty safe. The man is old and hunched, bald headed and milky-eyed. His skin is a lifeless gray, and when he moves flakes of his skin drift away in clouds of fine dust. This gray dust covers every surface in the bank. The unfortunate individual being described is the corpse of Henry Goodbody himself, now reduced to slaving as a clerk in his own bank. If he ever left the building or if the Enigma were Mended then he would crumble away. Henry is in fact, the Focus of the Enigma.

The bank primarily makes loans, though it demands that collateral be handed over to it as security. Loans may be of almost any sort: money (available in copious quantities), health, physical strength, magic power (Essence which permanently increases Resolve, but grants the bank influence over the recipient), intelligence, and almost anything else.

Whatever is loaned must be returned two-fold in five years, or the Collateral is forfeit. So, if a woman borrows five years of health, she must then suffer ten years of miserable illness; if a man borrows five years of athletic success, he must then spend ten as a cripple.

Collateral may be almost anything, but always something personal—like health, years of life, the ability to dream, or family.

The bank may pay out in dollars and it will never accept mere wealth as security. The clerk can always tell if a customer tries to give as security something that they don't have. Unseen creatures would have to give something like Strength or health (Vitality).

For any transaction, the clerk writes out a Deed (with flowery script and gold leaf, but written predominantly in his own blood) specifying what is to be loaned and left as security. The clerk and the customer simply sign the paper, each using their own blood (which costs the mortal signatory 1 Vitality), and the deal is thus enacted. On signing, the mortal loses whatever was promised as security, and gains whatever the bank promised.

The Bank (like any bank) seeks only profit. Not only is its interest rate steep, but it may also conspire to stop debtors from repaying what they have borrowed. In order to repay, they need only return to the bank and countersign the original Deed, but the bank moves around and may decide to deliberately avoid debtors so that it can keep their collateral.

THE FREE TOWN. Power 18

Cesare Sforza was an ambitious cloth merchant in fourteenth century Acqui, in northern Italy. He did all the things that the overly ambitious and unscrupulous usually do (defraud, cheat, withhold taxes, blackmail and deceive) but

he also had two less common characteristics. First, he used sorcery as a method of acquiring wealth to foretell if ships would be wrecked at sea or seek buried treasure, etc. Originally these were petty hedge-magics but later they became real enchantments. Second, he not only shared the usual merchant's dislike of legal regulations, but he actually came to resent all laws and all lawmakers.

So, he set about his masterwork, sweeping aside all legal obstacles which might stand in the way of any unscrupulous merchant. With an enchanted knife, his servants killed the leaders of the city's council, plus its judges, several lawyers and a few of Sforza's competitors besides.

The sorcerer believed that, having killed the lawmakers and judges, his enchantment would ensure that no one took their places on the Council and nobody could thus pass or enforce any laws. But his magics worked too well.

Powered by the Essence of the brutally slain victims, his sorcery created an area where no one would obey or care for laws, and where nobody would attempt to restrict another person's behavior. And so, the whole city of Acqui was plunged into an orgy of violent crime. No individual had any concern for authority, nor sense of loyalty, nor obligation to others. The twisted town and its inhabitants detached itself from reality, and disappeared into the Rift as a Shadowland. Now all that remains of it within the Dream is a ghost-town, from which all of the people seem simply to have vanished.





In Sforza's warehouse are the remains of his great rituals where the knife was enchanted, and this area is the touchstone into the Shadowland.

In the Shadowland Acqui, gangs roam the street—led by warlords who are quickly deposed by their disloyal underlings, while weaker folk hide or barricade themselves into their homes.

Around half of the city has been reduced to rubble or ashes, and corpses litter the streets. Nothing may be built here. Only destruction is possible. Nothing can unite the people, nor make them loyal to any cause or leader (not reason, not even Dominate). Chaos reigns. Cesare Sforza has barricaded himself into his treasury, alone and starving with his money. All of his servants have deserted him, one of them taking the enchanted knife.

The knife is the Focus of the Enigma, and also a Sentient enchantment. It maintains the Shadowland and can control any Corrupted mortal who holds it; in addition the knife can sense everything that happens within the city.

DAR AL ISLAM.

Power 19

Isa al-Din offered to Allah only what seemed fitting for a mere man to offer his creator. He prayed five times each day; he had made the hajj to Mecca four times before he was twenty; his whole body was placed in the service of Allah and of Islam as a soldier. What less would do?

Others disapproved of Isa's piety. They called him a fanatic. He would pull out their tongues with his bare hands if they were unwise enough to say it to his face. It appalled him that anyone could mock what was merely necessary piety. It also appalled him that many of his neighbors were so lax in their faith.

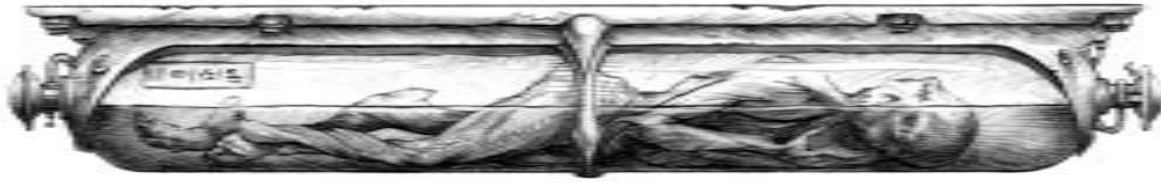
Isa al-Din left his hometown, almost voluntarily, and hired himself out as a soldier to various Moslem rulers. All quickly disappointed him. And so, at the age of 24, he established his own principality by seizing a town and castle from neighboring Christian rulers and expelling all non-Moslems from the surrounding lands.

Isa's obsession was to enforce "proper" levels of piety. He tried imposing fines upon lax Moslems. He even tried executing them. At length, he consulted with various holy men and magicians, who helped him devise a ritual to transform the region into the perfect Moslem state.

In the town's great mosque, the magicians ritualistically executed any unorthodox Moslems and stray Jews or Christians who wandered into their territory, and following the slaughter Isa delivered a speech outlining his vision of a perfect Moslem realm—the ideal Dar al Islam.

Isa's entire principality was rejected by the Dream. All that remains of it is a jumble of rubble (the Touchstone) on the boundary of the two states which it once lay between. The principality now exists as a Shadowland. The Enigma is quite powerful and its Focus is the Mosque's Qibla (the niche in the inside of the wall farthest from the





entrance, indicating the direction of prayer).

The Shadowland's inhabitants are all slavishly pious, the men zealous, the women veiled from head to foot, and the children devoted to religious study; every citizen can recite the entire Koran from memory. The Mosque is constantly full of people, praying or studying or listening to orthodox speeches. Yet, for some reason there are always a small minority of unbelievers to persecute, and the region is beset on all sides by bestial foes whose ferocious raids must constantly be repulsed (in both cases, the unbelievers and the bestial foes are Shadows).

Isa, as a soldier, is delighted by this. He has a pious nation with plenty of enemies to stand against. His people (corrupted by the Enigma) are also very happy with the situation. (Dominate, Intimidate, etc., cannot break the loyalty of Corrupted mortals.) Any mortal who enters the realm swiftly becomes Corrupted, becoming slavishly loyal to Isa. Unbelievers who do not convert quickly enough are killed as an example to others.

MOORE, INC. Power 18

Moore, Inc. is a late twentieth century corporation which manufactures televisions, video recorders, books and magazines, glasses, and optical lenses. Though, it also holds company stock in many manufacturers and producers of luxury items such as fashion clothes and flashy cars; to skateboard makers and role-playing game publishers.

Moore, Inc.'s corporate mission is to promote needless expenditure. "You got a car? Then buy a bigger one! You got the Fifth Edition Mindless Egotrip RPG? Hey, here are ten more games exactly the same!"

All of Moore, Inc.'s products deal with creating a perception of how mortals view the world. Every goody that mortals see through their Moore, Inc. sunglasses; on their Moore, Inc. TVs; in their Moore, Inc. magazines; all seem doubly alluring and even necessary. With the slogan, "Buy Moore, Buy More!", the firm conspires to delude mortals into believing that they just MUST HAVE the latest pointless consumer expendable, that they just MUST buy MORE.

Moore, Inc. was established by Joe Moore—a man who technically doesn't even exist. He is real, physically, but there is no record of his birth, nor of his corporation's foundation. He just appeared one day, along with a successful manufacturing firm. He is the archetypal corrupt modern businessman—young and square jawed, charming and personable, greedy, hard-working, insensitive and completely untrustworthy. One person who does actually exist is Moore's wife, Francisca Duran. She is a person who absorbed the media's fantasies, and swallowed whole the lies of the Western dream. She yearned for big houses, swimming pools, designer wardrobes, etc., etc. What she lacked in imagination she made up for with Resolve and persistent occult experimentation. So, after many failed

attempts, Duran created Mr. Moore and his firm.

Moore, Inc.'s head offices occupy the building where Francisca Duran once worked as a filing clerk and is the center of a powerful Enigma. All through the Enigma, mortals are Corrupted into sharing Duran and Moore's obsessive fantasies. They lust after wealth and status, betraying family and friends while making their lives a desperate struggle for success that they will never have. All of the Corrupted people are slaves to fashion, with no originality to their tastes and no hobbies and no interests outside of accumulating luxuries. A horde of Cameramen have settled in the area.

The Focus of this Enigma (the source of this uniform devotion) is an oversized photocopier in a room adjoining Moore's hi-tech (and very secure) office. This is the machine at which Duran worked as she dreamed her dreams of wealth and power. Now it works constantly, humming and clanking loudly, smoldering and hot to the touch, though it has no paper in it. What it copies are not just documents, but attitudes. If the Enigma were Mended, then Joe Moore and Moore, Inc., would vanish. Duran would return to being a lowly filing clerk. And the people of the area would pursue the Western dream with slightly less zeal, and slightly more diverse tastes and aims.





CHAPTER FOUR: MOLDING THE FLESH.

A common aim for mortal magicians is to try to mold, alter and “improve” the living stuff of the Dream. This can range from tinkering with petty magics (encouraging plants to grow, etc.), to Frankenstein-like attempts to “play God” and create new varieties of life.

This gives rise to some really grisly magics, with the potential for horrible side-effects and disasters. This ability to recreate and manipulate the Flesh is far more profound than the puppet-mastery of hedge-magicians like the Voodoo bokors. Awakened sorcerers do not just turn people into listless and drugged zombies, recently risen from a false death. Much worse, they can turn people into anything that they want, and can try to control them absolutely. Of course, magic is unpredictable and often self-willed; many magicians having been slain (or worse) by their “slaves.”

Magicians need not pervert the Flesh. Another use for magics is to persuade the Realm of Flesh to do whatever it would have done anyway, but faster or in a slightly different way. For example: people grow old and die, so a magic might simply “encourage” them to grow old more rapidly (e.g. aging fifty years over night). Dead flesh rots: magic might “encourage” a corpse to waste away in a few minutes. Yet another option is to “hold” the Flesh by keeping the Dream static in order to make sure that natural and intended changes do not take place (or at least occur much more slowly than they should). This process could be used to slow a body’s aging; to prevent plant growth; to stop dead flesh from decaying; etc.

Petty effects require only 1 or 2 points of Essence (causing meat to decay, for example). More notable effects, like giving someone a fatal disease or gaining an additional eye, cost 3 or 4 points. Significant, swift effects (like striking

someone blind) cost 5 or 6, and major effects (like gaining complete control of someone or regenerating lost limbs) require 10 or more points of Essence.

ENCHANTMENTS.

PETTY CURSES.

Magicians through the ages have devised a number of “curses,” which are magics that adversely affect a target’s body in order to cause death; brain dysfunction; illness; etc. Especially common in Africa and early Eastern Europe (gypsy magicians excel at this craft), most of these curses require 1 or 2 points of Essence, drawn from the sorcerer and/or from a blood sacrifice.

Each individual curse has only one function, though this is not always precise. Many curses work through apparently natural means, and are not obviously magical. A curse might strike a woman barren or render a man impotent; ensure that all of a couple’s children are female (which is considered a disaster in many societies); cause a person to become vague to neurotic; cause an injury; etc. Some have a one-time effect (e.g. ensuring that a baby will be born blind). Others have a continuous or repeated effect (persistent migraines, etc.). But the caster cannot always determine exactly when a curse will take effect. For example: a curse to break a person’s leg would take effect at the next plausible opportunity (e.g. the next time the person jumps from any height, trips over, etc.) and if the target learned of the spell cast against them, they could find a way to postpone the effect indefinitely by avoiding opportunities for it to take effect.





Sorcerers might forthrightly threaten to curse any who disobey them, or they might disguise their magics in some fashion—labeling them as “divine punishment” for the target’s behavior, for example. Through curses, the magicians are provided a simple means by which they can frighten or trick a mortal population into obedience.

sion of Essence takes place. For each point of Resolve expended, one subject gains a point of Vitality and the other subject loses one point. Note that the subject gaining Vitality may not exceed his usual maximum, and the subject

CLOTHING THE UNSEEN (Resolve 1).

Clothing Awakened Shadows in mortal Husks is a relatively straight-forward procedure. The magician need only find a suitable fleshly form and perform a simple ceremony to allow the Shadow to squeeze into it. The ritual is usually an unpleasant sight, being both agonizing and fatal for the mortal or animal who becomes the Husk.

The standard rituals usually involve placing the Husk-to-be in the center of a “magic” circle. The victim has been washed in herbal waters, bathed in scented smokes, and finally encircled with candles. A brief charm is spoken as the Shadow pushes its way into the flesh. Many variations of this ritual exists, including an African ritual which involves much shouting and dancing but fewer props. Another modern technique was created by a sorcerer who works in a hospital, whereby the Shadow is surgically implanted into the anaesthetized victim.

THE DRAUGHT OF LIFE AND DEATH (Resolve 1).

Sorcerers have often found an crucial need to heal their allies, but the process is always difficult. Magic tends to find it easier to destroy or contort than to reform the fabric of the Dream. One unique method of healing is known as the Draught of Life and Death.

The sorcerer brews a potion of poisonous herbs and animal venom, mixed with milk and blood, powdered bones, and various other ingredients (antibiotics often appear in modern mixtures, for example, while medieval mixtures include mandrake root). The sorcerer then administers this to two subjects (mortals or creatures of the Unseen), and speaks a few words over each. Over the next hour a transfu-





supplying the Vitality can only supply as much as he has. It is a straight trade of Vitality between the two, effected through the magician's manipulation of Essence.

The two subjects must be close to each other when they drink the draught and for the whole of the next hour. If they wander more than fifty yards apart the magic fails. In this case, the Vitality "donor" still loses his Vitality, but the other will not benefit at all.

WORDS OF WASTING (Resolve 1).

These few "words of power", usually of Egyptian or Chinese origin, should be spoken above a corpse or other mound of flesh, with a few tears of mourning scattered across the target. The body or meat will then rapidly waste away, vanishing completely in 1D hours. Nothing but a few patches of blood will be left behind.

This is a standard method by which Enlightened magicians dispose of evidence of the Unseen (Shadows' discarded Husks, etc.) and the unscrupulous dispose of their victims and sacrifices. It cannot affect living flesh, nor the Vessels of Stalkers. This spell will, however, destroy a Shadow's Husk.

REFORMING THE FLESH (Resolve 1).

With a minimum of ritual or preparation, this enchantment allows a magician to reshape a lump of flesh into any other fleshy object of similar size and weight. The process takes about half an hour, involving the kneading, thumping, or cutting of the flesh and reduces the sorcerer's Resolve by one. The only limitation is that the flesh must be dead, and cannot be brought to life by this sorcery.

Examples: A leg of lamb could be reshaped into a human head; or one human body could be made to look like another person's corpse, or like a side of beef. An imaginative magician can always find a use for this. The magic can be used to disguise a corpse, or change the apparent identity of a victim, or to fake one's own death, or even to procure evidence of another person's murder.

As side effects of this enchantment, the transformed meat rots only very slowly; it is warmer than usual; and fresh blood may seep from it.

CYBERNETICS (Resolve 2).

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, various technophile sorcerers tried to "augment" the human body mechanically by hacking out lumps of flesh and replacing them with electronic or cybernetic gizmos. Some tried implanting hi-tech devices. Others just replaced the flesh with old hydraulic pumps, coils of wire, rubber hoses, and anything else that came to hand. Though the latter method may seem by some to have been a terrific waste of time, both approaches were equally effective (or not).





By pouring two points of Essence into an “implant”, a magician can breathe life into it, allowing them to mildly enhance their own or another person’s body. A “cybernetic” eye might be able to see in the dark; an augmented arm might have a Strength Value one higher than the rest of the body. So, in the short term, the replacement is beneficial.

But after a short while (sometimes after just a few days), the enchanted machinery (now alive) begins to grow, as living things often do. Tendrils of wire snake out from the implant insinuating themselves into the flesh, and from these pathways other electronic or mechanical components grow, painfully displacing the person’s flesh. A day or two later, most of the person’s body has been “replaced” by a mass of wires, tubes, shafts, pumps and other miscellaneous bits of hardware.

The expanding cybernetics still obey the mortal on whom they grow, but are not Sentient or able to reason independently. Their growth, however, is inevitable, and is eventually fatal for the target—which dies when his heart or brain is destroyed by the spreading cybernetics. And as the hardware’s growth becomes more and more advanced, it becomes harder to remove the cybernetics without killing what remains of the victim’s body.

TIME’ S CURSE (Resolve 3).

This ritual requires that a clay or wax figurine depict the target with the unfortunate’s name inscribed into it, or a lock of his hair, or a scrap of clothing tied around it. The sorcerer must take this figurine, and go to a place within sight of wherever the target is (a hill overlooking the target’s house would be ideal). There, in the light of the moon, the magician must pour a pint of his own fresh blood over the statuette, and repeat a curse to rot the victim’s flesh. (The sorcerer loses a point of Vitality from the blood loss, but regains it in 1D days, and must supply all three points of Essence to fuel the magic).

If properly performed, the enchantment begins to corrupt the victim’s flesh. A single ritual turns flesh pallid or makes it appear leprous. A second casting makes the flesh begin to rot, turn a greenish shade, and ooze puss. A third causes the flesh to decompose horribly, giving the target the appearance of a living corpse. A fourth casting actually causes the flesh to begin to fall away in chunks, so that the target thereafter loses one point of Vitality each day.

Four rituals are required to slay a person with this magic, though two or three might have the person lynched by frightened locals. In many civilizations one casting is sufficient enough to have the person cast out of society as a leper. Magic linger around the target’s body, often causing incidental corruption to plants and creatures found around the unfortunate victim (plants wither, foodstuffs spoil, etc.). The flesh and any corrupted elements can be restored to normal by dispelling or countering the magic.

Note that after four castings, there are 12 points of Essence fueling the decay of the target’s body, and so this magic may well become Sentient. Driven by a hunger to consume flesh, the magic might spread its influence to affect anyone around the target. After the victim’s death, the magic may linger and attach themselves to a random person; or else it may return to inhabit its creator or the current owner of the figurine used in its creations.

FERTILITY CHARMS.

Many magicians, throughout the Ages of Man, have tried to develop magics to encourage natural growth and fertility for their lands, mainly through animal sacrifice or by otherwise drawing Essence from animals. From Celts burning animals in wicker effigies, to African tribesmen pouring out libations of milk or blood; the more successful rites were adopted in various forms by hedge magicians and religions.

These magics create situations where animals and humans are more fertile than usual, and hunts and harvests more abundant; leading to Enigmas. Usually the magics themselves are relatively petty, and the resulting Enigmas are of little consequence. If half a dozen points of Essence are used to “bless” a valley or region, it will make little difference.





However, if sorcerers over-stretch themselves, by say, marshaling dozens of points of Essence from massed sacrifices; a powerful, Sentient enchantment might be created. And where these rituals are directed to only small areas (such as a single field or building) the effect can be extreme. Animals (including pests, like rats and insects) may multiply rapidly and grow to grotesque proportions; plant life may grow to man-size over night and (if Sentient) perhaps conspiring to extinguish the animal life in the area and to spread outwards to extend its domain.

THE LIVING GRAFTS (Resolve 3).

This set of rituals, discovered and rediscovered since the earliest times, allows magicians to heal themselves or others by taking tissue from another living mortal in order to replace lost or damaged flesh. It not only enables them to graft on skin, but also allows them to replace lost organs and limbs. Hands, eyes, even internal organs may be grafted with no extra difficulty for the magician (though usually with much more pain for the donor).

The original, Eastern versions of this ritual allow the magician to perform the operation as part of a three-day meditation, during which he expends one point of Essence per day and the new flesh grows painlessly onto his body.

Western variants are usually bloodier. A typical Western Living Graft ritual begins with the sacrifice of a pure

white chicken, the entrails of which are used to stitch the new flesh on to the appropriate part of the recipient's body. The process takes only an hour, but is extremely painful. The sorcerer must also supply two points of Essence, the third coming from the chicken.

Perverse magicians may use these rituals to "improve" upon anatomy by deliberately replacing limbs or adding extra organs (two extra arms, or an extra eyeball). Some magicians even hope to graft on organs from Unseen creatures which are usually taken from the bodies of Awakened Shadows. (The arms of physically powerful Shadows, for example, may be attached to mortal bodyguards.) Others try to attach animal flesh to enhance their subject's abilities (lions' claws add 1D Damage; wolves' eyes grant excellent night vision; a dog's ear massively improves human hearing; a serpent's or spider's teeth and poison sacks may be implanted (not necessarily in the mouth) to allow the mortal to inflict a poisonous bite.

The ritual does have its disadvantages, of course. The grafted flesh may not match the person's real flesh. Mismatched skin complexions, eye colors, or limbs can give the recipients unsettling appearances. Moreover, this enchantment is stored up within the body of the graft's recipient. If the enchantment is destroyed or suspended (e.g. via an Affirmation) the grafted flesh dies and begins to rot, and any grafted limb or organ immediately ceases to function (this can be extremely painful and quite fatal). And if several grafts are all applied to the

It is a strange thing, flesh. For years I marveled at it, nurtured it, cringed at it. Like all children, I feared the sight of blood, the sting of pain, the dumb uselessness of an injured limb. But as I have aged, I have learned that blood is just liquid, pain just a sensation. Flesh is just clay, made alive through Essence. If I poured enough Essence into the rock at my feet then veins might well form and muscles twitch inside the ground. Yes, the definition of life is a subjective topic at best





same person, the cumulative Essence of the enchantments may cause them to become Sentient.

Sentient grafts usually have the aims and objectives of their original donors, and while the person sleeps or during lapses of concentration they may act of their own volition. Numerous Sentient grafts may work together to control the body of their sleeping host, and grafts taken from unwilling donors may conspire to kill their host or anyone else involved in the ceremony.

CURSE OF INSATIABLE HUNGER (Resolve 4).

This Haitian enchantment transforms any human being into a depraved cannibal, with uncontrollable urges to kill and feed on specific types of flesh.

The magician must first enchant a secure chamber (usually a hut or cellar), performing a brief ritual involving the sacrifice of a chicken and the immolation of certain foodstuffs (bread, meat, etc.). The target is then confined in the room, and is starved for days, weeks or even months, being fed only a little water and scraps of the properly desired flesh. Slowly, the magic in the chamber clings to and molds itself around the gut of its occupant.

When the captive is released, he is no longer interested in normal food. It seems tasteless, unappealing and does not satisfy the victim's growing hunger. What he craves, however, is flesh—flesh of the particular sorts with which they have been fed. The strong willed (Resolve 15 or more) may be able to suppress their new lusts. Many people can control themselves most (but not all) of the time. The weak willed (Resolve 9 or less) are at the mercy of their cravings.

The exact nature of the person's hunger is determined by the type of flesh on which they were fed while in captivity. If fed only young men's flesh, they seek to consume only young men. If fed only rancid meat, they seek the flesh of putrefying corpses. If they ate a random mix of human flesh, then they have no prejudice for any one sort.

The more specific the target's craving the longer the period of confinement must have been. A few days in the enchanted room, eating human meat, is enough to give the victim a hunger for human flesh in general. Months of feeding are required to compel a person to hunger only for very specific sorts of people (octogenarian Asian females; red-haired aristocrats; or similar).

Magicians may use this magic to torment the enchantment's target (most people plagued by these cravings end up pursued by law enforcement groups, are lynched by their neighbors, or just kill themselves). Or the tormented targets may be used to terrorize a specific community; to destroy a certain family or social group; or even (though it's a bit hit-and-miss) assassinate a particular individual.

THE ETERNAL GUARD DOG (Resolve 5).

This ancient Germanic enchantment is created by the sacrifice of a dog under the supervision of a sorcerer. The dog is strangled by its owners, and then ritually buried at the site that the enchantment is to guard. Usually, the





Eternal Guard Dog

Fortitude 8 Vitality 3
Initiative 15 Defend 12
Perceive 15 Resolve 5

Combat:

Bite and claw (2 Attacks per round, Attack 15, 4D Damage); in place of one Attack it may choose to knock a target to the ground (Attack 18, Attacks against prone targets at -5 Difficulty).

Special Abilities:

Resistant to mortal weapons (Fortitude 15 for such), excepting enchanted weapons. The creature's gaze can briefly mesmerize and terrify any mortal with a Resolve less than 12 (that mortal may not act for one round, and has Defense reduced by 8 for that round).

leaving descendants, then it often attempts to hunt down and destroy its creators' killers. The enchantment can create and control a physical form, which is always a large dog.

Usually such a hound is a great black creature, the size and build of a big wolf, with red eyes and huge teeth (giving rise to the shuck and padfoot of European legend). The manifestation may be killed, physically, or it may be dispelled magically, but this does not destroy the enchantment. After just a few minutes the enchantment may manifest another form. Only by locating the enchantment (at the sacrificial dog's grave) and by countering it there (by an Affirmation or Essence-related magic) may the magic be permanently destroyed.

THE DARK TATTOOS (Resolve 7).

Created by a medieval Japanese sorcerer, there exists a lengthy ritual by which magical tattoos may inscribed onto a mortal's body.

The ritual takes seven days of meditation and detailed work, using specially prepared needles and rare inks, during which time both the sorcerer and the recipient may eat nothing and speak to no one. Should these conditions not be met; or the inks or needles be improperly prepared; or the magician's meditations be interrupted; then the tattoo created may be uncontrollable. Each day the sorcerer supplies one point of Essence.

dog is placed to guard a family home, temple, or sorcerer's retreat. Two points of Essence are provided by the sacrifice, and the magician provides the remaining 3. The enchantment thereafter guards the designated place and also the family that created it, manifesting a physical form if anyone approaches with hostile intent. Note that the only mortals that it seeks to defend are its creators and their descendants; it makes no attempt to protect anyone else. Should the enchantment's creators all be destroyed, without

Dark Tattoos always resemble predatory animals (snakes, spiders, birds, cats) and are inscribed as life-sized images in great detail. The inks are never colored. The work is always done in blacks and grays.

If the ritual is properly conducted, the animal depicted will thenceforth obey the person on whose flesh it lives. At his command, the animal will slip from the flesh onto an adjacent surface, where it appears as the shadow of the animal it represents. This living shadow then moves along





the floors and surfaces with the natural speed of the animal that it represents and will attempt to “feed from” any person stipulated by its owner.

The tattoos feed by sliding onto their target, and over about one hour draining one point of Vitality from them. Each tattoo may drain one point of Vitality per night, with the result that the target’s flesh withers, as if he had been the victim of a Unbidden’s feeding.



The tattoos do not have to feed. However, after a dozen meals they acquire a taste for human Vitality, and become Sentient—insisting upon hunting almost every night. If

their owner instructs them who to feed from, they follow his orders loyally. If given no orders, they hunt at random, with all the predatory cunning of the animals that they resemble.

The tattoos “die” if their owner dies. If the tattoo is damaged beyond recognition, the enchantment is destroyed. Away from the flesh, in shadow form, the tattoos are invulnerable to any weapon or Discipline. However, bright light completely destroys them (reflected daylight or a 100 Watt bulb would suffice), and they recoil from any light source. If a tattoo is destroyed while as a shadow, the skin on which it was drawn becomes burnt and blisters (1D Damage).

As many unscrupulous magicians have realized, a Dark Tattoo may easily be “stolen” by using the Living Graft ritual, and transferred from one mortal to another.

DOCTOR BALE’ S FATAL HEALING (Resolve 9).

No one seems to know exactly who Doctor Bale was (or even whether he was mortal). But from nineteenth century Edinburgh come a number of artifacts created by his process, and even, in secret collections, manuscripts which describes the ceremony.

The ritual requires a measure of silver, stored for five nights in a fresh human corpse, to be forged beneath the moon on the grave of a still-born child. Certain herbs must be burned as the metal is worked, and an “Ancient Spirit” named Hammaghr invoked. The metal is usually formed into an arrow—head, a bullet or knife, and the procedure is extremely draining for the sorcerer. He must provide all 9 points of Essence for the magic. But, strangely—as the manuscripts are at pains to point out—if the sorcerer returns to the grave where the ritual was performed on five consecutive midnights after the ceremony, he will be fully refreshed.





The weapon formed during the ritual actually causes flesh to grow. If lodged in mortal Flesh (or the Vessel of an Unbidden) it causes copious amounts of muscle, fat and bone to sprout all around it. An arrow or knife may be embedded in the target's flesh with any successful Attack (+2 difficulty), or if the enchanted metal is a bullet it will remain lodged in the target if successfully shot from a low-velocity gun.

Once embedded, the weapon causes the area which it touches to sprout useless growths, fleshy tendrils, swellings, etc., inflicting an extra 3D Damage to the unfortunate victim each round. Nor does this effect cease when the target dies. It also causes fresh flesh to grow from recently dead tissue. If not extracted from the wound, such a weapon therefore turns a normal human body into several thousand kilos of unrecognizable fat and muscle.

As soon as the weapon is withdrawn from a wound—taken out of contact with the mortal flesh—this effect ceases. (Arrows and knives may usually be pulled out; bullets are more difficult to extract.) Simply being cut or grazed by such a weapon, or touching it with bare flesh, causes one point of Damage. Each ritual may create only one weapon (bullet, arrow, knife, sword, etc.), however small.

The ritual was actually spread by agents of an Unbidden, which sought release from the Vault. It's casting deliberately requires the sorcerer to risk losing his soul, and the Unbidden (called Hammaghr) is invoked so that if the caster returns to the site on successive midnights, it may supply their lost Essence, thus gaining control of any but the most powerful sorcerer. The Unbidden can then direct them to work to free it from the Vault, with the added benefit that they will be armed with the weapons that they created when they lost their souls.

CRUEL AWAKENING (Resolve 11).

This ritual must be performed on the grave of the intended target, within five nights of his death. The ceremony involves the formal slaying of the departed's closest kin, using a blade or weapon which once harmed the target

while he was alive. The sacrificial victim provides the Essence for the enchantment; if he had a Resolve below 11, the sorcerer must supply the balance.

The effect of this ritual sacrifice is to reawaken the occupant of the grave. The corpse cannot move or talk, but it can think, feel, hear, etc. The only thing that the corpse can actually do is to utter a low wail or moan, audible to Sensitive characters but usually mistaken for the sounds of the wind or animal calls.

The sole purpose of this vindictive enchantment is to torment the helpless corpse. The dead man or woman can smell, feel and even hear their flesh rotting and slowly being consumed, until there is nothing left but bare bones, all the while trapped in a lifeless body. This is particularly unpleasant for corpses buried in lead coffins (where decomposition can take centuries) or trapped in ice or cryogenics.

Inevitably, however, the pain and resentment of the victim renders the enchantment Sentient, and spurred on by this the magic returns to the caster to reap revenge (making the vindictive sorcerer its next victim). If they are lucky, the magic's creators might have some warning that the enchantment will return (such as the victim's voice laughing and threatening "you next!" in the back of their minds). This would allow them the chance to try to undo the enchantment, or to cheat it by ordering their own bodies cremated. But most mortals don't get the warning, or can't make sense of the hints that they do receive.

THE FINAL SACRIFICE (Resolve 12).

Sorcerers who know that they are doomed to die have used this magic to avenge themselves on those who have betrayed or doomed them. The sorcerer hereby ritualistically kills himself to guarantee the death of an enemy or enemies.

The first written version of the magic comes from early feudal Japan, where the Samurai sorcerer Tagaya Ryoshi created a version while awaiting execution for treason.





When he had devised the ritual, he bribed the guards to bring him his sword, so that he might commit Seppuku (ritual suicide) rather than face execution.

Hiding the details of the magic beneath the grip of the sword, knowing that it would be passed on to his heirs, he cut his own belly open.... And a year later the man who had betrayed Ryoshi also lay slain.

The sorcerer's death fuels the enchantment, which then seeks out the enemy (or enemies) cursed by the sorcerer's dying breath. If the sorcerer only has a Resolve of 12, the enchantment may seek out only one enemy; each additional point of Resolve allows it to seek out one additional foe after the first is slain. (It could hunt down 5 people if the sorcerer had a Resolve of 16.)

On the anniversary of the sorcerer's death, the enchantment manifests itself in the guise of the deceased, with whatever clothing and weapons he would have carried. This revenant that does its utmost to kill the enemy. Note that only one may appear each year, so that an enchantment charged to slay several foes could only appear to one each year.

The enchantment's scores are identical to the sorcerer's except that it has only a Fortitude of 1. On close examination its corpse is clearly inhuman—just a fleshy sack full of blood and blubber, with no internal organs. If the revenant is “killed” or prevented from killing its quarry, it will return the next year; and the next; and the next... Even attempts to destroy the enchantment, while it is manifest, may only be temporarily successful.

In the time between manifestations, the enchantment lies dormant within a single object (usually the same weapon that its creator used to take his life), Sentient and conscious but inactive. If this object is destroyed, the enchantment seeks out a new home, usually an object intimately associated with the sorcerer or the target. The magic may be destroyed only if all traces of it are dispelled from the object in which it rests. This can be achieved through the use of an Affirmation, Essence-molding magics, or Mending.

The enchantment is always Sentient, embodying the resentment, hatred, and vague memories of the sorcerer. Some enchantments, however, can become over-zealous. If a target “cheats” its revenge (e.g. dies of natural causes) it may hunt down his sons or daughters. If frustrated by a magician, guard or ally of the target, it might decide to return to kill them as well. Really eager enchantments can spend centuries hunting down the heirs of those who they were meant to kill, the heirs of anyone who ever got in their way, and anyone unlucky enough to resemble their original targets. The most dangerous, created by those with very high Resolves (17 or higher) may even retain some of the magical knowledge of the sorcerer, casting magics by reducing its own Resolve and regenerating the Essence over the next year.

An enchantment could theoretically be set to slay a Stalker or other Unseen creature, though they cannot go beyond the bounds of the Realm of Flesh. Killing a Stalker, however, would be difficult, as they would rarely be present on the one day when the enchantment could don the Flesh (and because the Stalker would be much tougher than the enchantment). These magics can be extremely devious, however, and could set a trap for a Stalker.

For Example: Such an enchantment might kidnap and kill the kin of a mortal magician who is allied to the Stalker and arrange for the body to remain hidden for about 360 days. The magician would no doubt contact the Stalker when he discovered the supernatural killing, and the Stalker would answer the Call. The enchantment could then leave false clues (letters, e-mail, etc.) to lure the Stalkers to a particular place on the night of its next manifestation. It would then wait at the appointed place, having first invited some other enemies of the Stalker to form a reception committee...

THE LOYAL GUARDIAN (Resolve 13).

This ritual creates a tough guard beast to serve the magician loyally and mindlessly at first, but increasingly intelligently as the enchantment becomes Sentient.





The magician takes the corpse of some predatory or scavenging beast (hyena, wolf, leopard, lynx, fox, etc.), skins it, and stuffs its hide with the hair of killers, dirt from a graveyard, the links of a chain, and various other similar ingredients. He then sacrifices five cattle (or similar), pouring their blood onto the stuffed skin and bidding it rise up and obey—which it usually does. Incorrectly cast magics

can result in creatures which rise up but refuse to obey, rise up later and seek out the sorcerer, or which rise up as the Husks of inadvertently Awakened Shadows.

Obviously, smaller Guardians are much easier to create than larger versions, for although they require as much Essence less of the obscure stuffing need be collected. The sacrificed cattle provide 10 points of Essence. The sorcerer must supply the other 3.

The enchantment's body, though in fact merely a stuffed hide, appears to most mortals as a normal animal. Only Sensitive mortals and creatures of the Unseen can see it for what it really is.

The enchantment obeys the commands of its creator, though at first it is unintelligent and can only follow simple orders. Its personality, however, is determined by its form. So those enchantments created with fox skins are excellent scouts but poor fighters; whereas bear skins make for hardy killers but lack subtlety.

Sentient enchantments inevitably have the instincts of the creatures that they appear as, and soon become Prodigal. At this point the enchantment is likely to become less responsive to commands and more than a few sorcerers have been torn apart by their own Sentient Guardians. A wiser magician knows that he must kill the creature as soon as it becomes Sentient. Tales of supernatural predators terrorizing towns and villages (such wolves roaming the New York City sewer system) can sometimes be attributed to rogue Prodigal Guardians.

Originally African, this ritual was imported to the Arabic and Christian worlds after the initial waves of trading, colonization and missionary activity. By the eighteenth century such enchantments may be found as far afield as southern Africa (where lions are favored beasts), northern Europe (usually wolves) and India (often as tigers). South American sorcerers used an almost identical magic to animate stuffed human skins to create mindless but (initially) loyal servants.

The Loyal Guardian

Fortitude 1-10	Vitality 10,
Initiative 13	Defend 11,
Perceive 12	Resolve 13.

Combat: The Guardian has an Attack of 15, inflicting damage according to its size (e.g. 1D Damage for a fox, 3D for a wolf, 4D for a lion).

Fortitude depends upon the Guardian's form. The smallest (e.g. snakes and rats) have a Fortitude of 1. Foxes and hyenas have a Fortitude Value of 2. The largest predators (lions and tigers) have a Fortitude of 6. Higher Fortitude is only found in abnormally huge Guardians such as those formed around elephant or Rhino hides.

If the skin is "killed" (reduced to zero Vitality), the enchantment is destroyed and the Essence dissipates.





WONDER' S MOST WONDERFUL PUPPETS (Resolve 13).

The early twentieth century magician and entertainer, Ebenezer Wonder, created and mastered many dark magics to work with his puppets; but his "Most Wonderful" puppets were those which allowed him to take direct control of a mortal.

Wonder never revealed the secret of creating these marionettes, but a sorcerer named Ben Cavan once spied on him as he worked and took excellent notes from which the ritual might be reinvested.

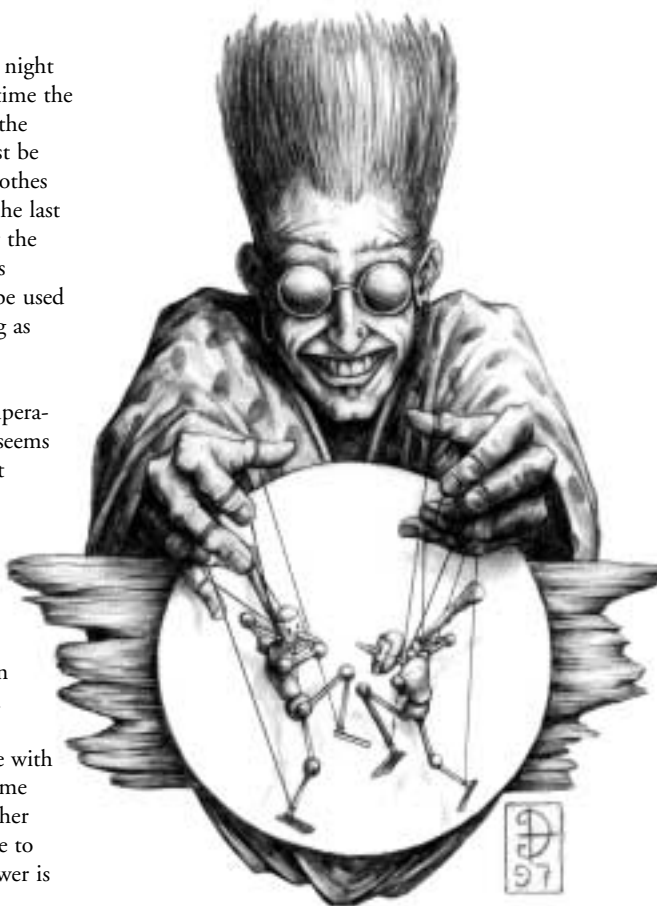
The ritual takes seven nights to complete, (with the magician supplying one point of Essence on the first night and two points each night thereafter), and over this time the sorcerer must craft the marionette, speaking to it all the time as if it were the person that it represents. It must be carved from green wood, and should be dressed in clothes made from the actual person's garments. Finally, on the last night some of the caster's blood must be poured over the figurine (reducing his Vitality by 1 for two days) thus completing the enchantment. The puppet can then be used to control the one person whom it represents, so long as they live.

The finished puppet is warm to the touch (body temperature) and the wood always stays green. Otherwise it seems unremarkable. However, by manipulating the puppet a sorcerer may try to control the person's actions. (Any sorcerer who gets hold of the puppet may do this.) The puppeteer goes into a trance and sees and hears what the real person sees and hears. He makes the puppet move to make the person move, and speaks any words which the person is to speak. For every hour that the person is controlled, the magician controlling the puppet expends one point of Resolve.

But not everyone can be controlled easily. Only those with a Resolve of 8 or lower may be manipulated at any time through their puppet representation. Those with higher Resolves may be controlled in their sleep (being made to sleep-walk, talk in their sleep, etc.), or if their willpower is

temporarily weakened (e.g. while they are drunk or stoned). Driven mortals, Unbidden, Stalkers and Awakened Shadows may not be manipulated via such puppets.

Puppets which are used a great deal become Sentient, and may then manipulate the targets themselves, without a mortal magician pulling their strings. Moreover, if a Sentient puppet's Resolve exceeds the current Resolve of the sorcerer manipulating it, the sorcerer may lose control—the puppet itself determining the mortal's actions. Sentient puppets may have personalities and ambitions which reflect their creator (or owner), but more often they seek what they think would be best for the people whom they represent.





The mortal's death renders the puppet useless and causes the enchantment to dissipate: Sentient puppets instinctively know this, and often strive to keep the mortal alive as long as possible.

Destroying the puppet, however, does not necessarily destroy the magic. If the puppet is ruined, the enchantment merely drifts into another representational figure (e.g. another puppet, a child's action-figure or teddy bear, a radio controlled car) from which it may either continue to control the same mortal, or it may come to control people and things which resemble its new physical form. A Sentient enchantment which has moved into a child's doll, for example, may be able to control the actions of nearby infants or babies.

THE RITE OF YOUTH (Resolve 14).

Created by the German sorceress Ida Hels in the eighteenth century, the Rite of Youth provides unscrupulous magicians with a way to preserve their youth and cheat death.

This ceremony is simple enough to be performed in ten minutes. The magician must kill a young mortal with a silver knife. The victim must be the same sex as the sorceress and no older than she would like to appear. Having marked out a circle around the corpse (the deceased's intestines suffice for this) the magician utters a few words over the body and then begins to anoint herself with the victim's blood. Wherever the blood touches,

the flesh becomes young again, restoring the sorceress' youth. Any area of the flesh not touched by the victim's blood is not affected.

The ritual must be performed in the rays of the full moon, and should ideally be repeated once per year. If the rite is not performed within one year, the body begins to revert to its true state. Within two years the enchantment is exhausted and the full effects of the person's true age are apparent, so that very old magicians are likely to die if the ritual is not performed within two years.

The enchantment itself requires 1 point of Essence from the magician. The remainder is assumed to be provided by the victim, but if the sacrifice's Resolve is below 13 the balance must be provided by the sorceress.

THE MARK OF THE DAMNED (Resolve 15).

There is a ritual, first invented by Chinese sorcerers in the time of the Han dynasty, which creates a Sentient enchantment to "possess" and control mortals. It is known by many names, but The Secret Masters, who learned of it in the 16th century, have dubbed it The Ritual of The Mark of The Damned.

The initial ritual requires the sacrifice of one Enlightened mortal (the Secret Masters often use their own disobedient or disgraced apprentices), and the supply of additional Essence by the

Flesh mends. I cut myself. I concentrate. I pour out Essence in a certain way and then there is no more blood. The wound is gone. It's easy. To be a good sorcerer one must unlearn the silly fear of torn flesh. There are other things more deserving of our fear, and most of them are not of this world, not are they of flesh itself.



magician who weaves the magic. Usually the sacrifice provides about 14 points of Essence, and so the presiding magician need usually supply only a single point of Resolve to complete the enchantment. This ritual creates an enchantment which settles over the area where it is created, waiting for a suitable victim to possess.

Only individuals who have the Mark of the Damned inscribed into their flesh may be controlled by the enchantment. The Mark may be cut in a





couple of minutes with any sharp knife or razor, and requires only a few simple hand signals and invocations, and the provision of one point of Essence (from the sorcerer inscribing the Mark or from a sacrificial animal). Often a suitable candidate is present when the Ritual of the Mark is performed, allowing the enchantment to settle immediately within the unfortunate victim. The *Secret Masters* often carve the marks into their less promising lower-level members, on the pretext that these are “protective charms” or initiation marks, in order to provide a ready group of potential hosts.

Mortals controlled by the enchantment appear perfectly normal (except, perhaps, for occasional blood stains on their lips, ears, nostrils, etc.), and their Attributes remain unchanged.

The enchantment is always Sentient, embodying its creator’s attitudes and slavishly loyal to them (at least at first), and it has access to its host’s memories, Focus Skills, etc. However, the enchantment has no feelings (not as any human would understand the term), and so cannot perfectly mimic human behavior. Its hosts will always seem unfeeling, intense, and slightly unstable.

If a host is killed, the enchantment is not destroyed, it simply lurks in the place where the host died and waits for another victim with The Mark to come by. The enchantment may also transfer itself from one host to another at will (assuming that the two mortals are in roughly the same place at the same time, and provided that both have had The Mark cut into their



flesh). Hosts are left with complete memories of all the things that happened while the enchantments controlled them, but are seldom able to explain why they behaved as they did.

These enchantments are initially loyal to their creators, obeying their instructions unquestioningly. However, they can become set in their ways, and after years pursuing a single goal might not accept orders to cease. They can also become over enthusiastic, and those set to assassinate enemies may kill dozens of people in the process (e.g. an enemy’s family, friends, neighbors, anyone resembling him, etc.). By interpreting their orders loosely or too literally, the enchantments might also imperil their creators. If given the order to “kill everyone who has ever owned my dagger”, the enchantment might eventually conspire to kill the dagger’s present owner—even if that is its creator. Finally, because these enchantments are autonomous and immortal, able to wander far away from their creators and to long outlive them, many of them lose contact with their creators and may still be following outdated or impossible orders centuries after their creators’ deaths.

THE TREE OF LIFE (Resolve 16).

This ancient European enchantment allows a magician to imbue an elder tree with human Essence, which may then be “harvested” to increase mortals’ Fortitude. A human must be sacrificed to breathe life into the tree.





(The sorcerer providing enough Essence to make up for any difference between the victim's and the magic's.) The enchantment is always Sentient, and believes itself to be the "ghost" of the victim (sharing his attitudes, personality, memories, etc.)

The enchanted tree does not have sap. It has blood. So, when the tree is cut it bleeds, and the secretion may be drunk to increase any human's Fortitude by one point. Fortitude is increased for one day only, and for each point gained the tree's Resolve is temporarily reduced by one (Resolve being regained at the rate of one point per day). If the tree's Resolve falls to zero, then the enchantment is destroyed, and the tree withers and dies. If the tree is cut down, then this too ends the enchantment.

Fortitude may theoretically be raised to any number by this magic, but if the human takes so much of the secretion that the Fortitude increase exceeds his Resolve (i.e. the tree's Resolve/Essence in the mortal exceeds his own natural Resolve/Essence) then the enchantment may take control of the person. Mortals bleeding smaller measures of Essence from the tree may still be subtly, subconsciously influenced by the magic.

The tree also has other, incidental powers. It may determine and influence the dreams of anyone sleeping beneath its boughs, or anyone who breathes in the smoke from its burning wood (giving rise to legends of "prophetic" trees where, long after the tree's true powers are forgotten, mortals sleep beneath its boughs in

order to gain "inspired dreams", and so become the tree's dupes). It may also inflict minor curses on anyone who loiters beneath it (Resolve 1 curses, above), expending Resolve in order to do so. And it retains control over any wood cut from it (e.g. it controls the powers of any enchanted stave or staff made from its wood; if a bed were made from its wood it could control the occupants' dreams).

The tree's goals and objectives are largely determined by the personality of the person sacrificed to create it. Ancient Enlightened sorcerers knew this, and were careful to pick a suitable subject, usually using a willing victim; later magicians were less careful. The enchantment may therefore seek to pursue mortal family feuds, even long after the feud is forgotten by humanity. It may work for the good of its tribe or community. It may conspire against certain outside "invaders" (even if such immigrants are welcomed by the local mortals after the tree's creation). It may seek revenge against the magician or community that brought it to "life." It might even just seek its own destruction. Unlike a living mortal, the tree's attitudes cannot change over time, so that many older enchantments perpetually wage outdated vendettas against undeserving foes.

THE FLESH-PIT (Resolve 19).

This ritual creates an area up to twenty yards across which can turn into a mass of grasping hands, struggling to pull people and objects down into a

I have a game that
I play, when I get
bored. I take a
bow and a set of
arrows, and I wait
by a rabbit warren.
I have become quite
a good shot I
shoot a rabbit, and
watch it twitch,
and then I shoot
another, and I
watch that Death
is as various as life,
and it is wonder-
fully fascinating. My
death, of course,
would not be won-
derful, but that is
not the point Or
perhaps it is. It
entertains me for
hours, death.





bottomless mass of blood and fat. Usually a piece of ground or floor is enchanted in this way.

The ritual is elaborate, requiring the area to be marked out with a circle, cloaked in a mist of incense smoke and illuminated by black candles. Ninety nine human corpses must be present, and enough animal sacrifices must be offered that the blood of the animals forms a thick layer over the enchanted area. The sorcerer then casts the ninety nine bodies onto the bloody surface, which they sink into and disappear. He may then give the enchantment instructions, concerning the conditions under which it will activate. The enchantment is always murderously Sentient, and may be given complex instructions (e.g. “prevent anyone from reaching this altar;” “grasp at anyone who touches this statue;” “seize any creature of the Unseen;” etc.).

Normally the enchantment may only “feel” the presence of mortals or creatures within its own area, but sorcerers may choose to give the enchantment the power of sight by ringing the area with preserved eyeballs or skulls. The ritual itself drains 6 points of Essence from the sorcerer. The remaining Essence is drawn from the sacrificed animals.

When not active, the enchanted area appears perfectly normal (although it always carries a slight scent of decay, and seems a dark, foreboding place to any Sensitive). However, when the enchantment activates, hundreds of human hands burst through the surface of the enchanted area (such as erupting from an enchanted floor) and struggle to seize anyone (other than the caster) within reach. The arms may be recognizable as the limbs of the bodies which vanished during the ritual, plus any victims that the enchantment has already claimed. They can reach only two feet from the enchanted surface.

The grasping hands have Initiative 18 and Attack 14, and may attack each target within the enchanted area once per round. On a successful attack they hold the target firm, preventing him from moving. A held character may attempt to break free, rolling Strength against a Difficulty of 12. If still held the following round (at Initiative 18), the hands

attempt to pull the target down through the enchanted surface. The target must roll Strength against a Difficulty of 10 to avoid being dragged through.

Once through the surface, the target is “inside” the enchantment’s body, a mass of mucus, fat and blood which exists outside of normal time and space. This endless expanse of gore has no volume and takes up no space in the Realm of Flesh (it is much like a Shadow Realm). Clambering out of the body, back through the enchantment’s surface and into the Dream, requires a Strength Challenge against Difficulty 14 (or 16 if trying to drag another character out at the same time). Characters may not Translocate or Dissipate into, out of, or through the enchantment’s body. Any character pulled into this bloody mass is smothered and crushed, losing one point of Vitality every round.

The enchantment is entirely free to decide when to activate; its creator cannot force it to activate or to stay dormant against its will. At first, a Flesh-Pit loyally obeys its creator’s instructions, and dutifully accepts any new or amended orders which he might give. But over time it inevitably becomes Prodigal. It hungers for fresh, live flesh, and may take occasional unauthorized morsels (a single hand grasping a passing animal), then progressing on to larger beings. Eventually, the Pit may even swallow its own creator.

The very existence of this enchantment, with its bloody body existing outside of the geometry of the Dream, is in itself an Enigma (Power 14), even if it is dormant. Every time that the enchantment manifests, and every time that its impossibility grates against the continuity of the Dream; it grows stronger and larger. A well established Flesh-Pit might be several hundred yards wide (big enough to swallow a small village if it should choose) and would form a powerful Enigma (Power 18 to 20).

Although the ritual is usually cast on a floor or piece of ground, it might also be used to enchant walls, ceilings, cliffs (“grasp any who try to climb”), doors (“seize any who do not knock thrice before turning the handle”), stairs, large pieces of furniture, or every surface of a passageway.





THE INSECT RATTLE (Resolve 24).

Originally from Africa, Insect Rattles are created from wood and bone, and are filled with the dried husks of a dozen different sorts of insects—termites, locusts, killer bees and others. Gaining these components was originally taxing, but by the twentieth century some of the insects are becoming scarce, and by the twenty-second century most only survive in laboratories.

Creating the rattle requires the sacrifice of twelve pure black cattle to provide the Essence. Once created, a sorcerer shaking the rattle and repeating the correct invocation may cause a small number of insects to multiply at a vast rate, creating a swarm of millions of insects within a single round. The effort of this requires four points of Essence, which must all be supplied by the sorcerer. Even a single insect may be “multiplied” by this effect, and there is no limit to the swarm’s size (a swarm of million preying mantises will demoralize almost any mortal foe, for example). The magician may not simply create a swarm from thin air: at least one specimen must be present and within sight, and this forms the center of the swarm’s initial spread. Non-magicians, who have not learned to channel their Essence, cannot use a Rattle.

A magician has no control over the swarms created by using an Insect Rattle. The insects behave entirely as is natural to them. The effect can be



deadly, however. Mortals trapped in these swarms inevitably panic (unless they are Driven or have an impressive Resolve, at least of 12).

A swarm of wasps or bees can kill (1D6 Damage per round, the Damage taking effect over the following hour) and any cloud of biting or stinging insects can cause intense pain. In pre-modern societies, where many people have head lice, the spell can be used to kill if it is cast on a person’s lice, the unfortunate mortal being devoured in 1D6 minutes by the mass that emerges from his own hair.

Termites and locusts can also be used to destroy wooden buildings or crops, making the rattle a potent weapon to terrorize rather than destroy a mortal population.

FINDERIUS’ BODYGUARD (Resolve 26).

In the first century AD, the Chaldean magician, Finderius the Just, created for his stronghold a mighty guardian, formed from the living bodies of six fellow mortals whom he had deemed in need of severe punishment.

The ritual required a surgeon’s knife, thread made from the hair of executed criminals, and a very quiet, secluded location. There, he spliced the six bodies together into one composite creature under his command. With six faces and twenty three limbs, this monstrosity had sharpened shards of bones set into its flesh; some hands were sewn into fists; other hands and





Bodyguard

Fortitude 6 Vitality 24
Initiative 10 Defend 10
Perceive 12 Resolve 26

Combat:

Attack 14, Damage 5D. May attack up to 8 times per round, but only twice against any one opponent, stabbing or lashing out.

legs were removed and the forearm and shin bones carved into spikes. The six bodies comprising the guardian remained perfectly alive and conscious, and in excruciating pain. The faces screamed and moaned constantly.

The process whereby the creature was made was set down by Finderius the Just, and may be discovered by later magicians. The sorcerer must provide six points of Essence, and the remainder comes from the living mortals sewn into the beast. The enchantment is always Sentient and is loyal to the sorcerer (at least at first); but it feels the bodies' pain, and the only release it can get is to pass on its suffering to others: these beasts are indescribably cruel.

Such is the horrific perersion of Finderius' Bodyguard, that only the most stout of heart can look upon the creature without succumbing to insanity. Typically, those Sensitive

mortals with true sight are not affected, due to their exposure to the Unseen.

When the creator dies, or leaves the guardian unattended for a long while, it gains its independence, and prowls the area looking for living things to mutilate and torture. If the newly independent enchantment has any preference as to who it kills, it would usually prefer its creator's next of kin or (if he still lives) its creator.

ARTIFACTS.

MAD MICHELE' S
SCULPTING
HAMMERS
(Resolve 7).

Michele di Apolia was a young sculptor in sixteenth century Italy, tormented by grief over the death of his beautiful mistress, Lucrezia. For a while he sought to immortalize her in

I have found old manuscripts and dusty tomes where past magicians have set down disgusting magics. I have read of methods by which I might twist my body or pervert the forms of others that they may better serve my schemes.

There are many degraded, agony-riddled procedures whereby I might make myself or others less than human.

But it is important to know where to stop, to understand that some obscenities cannot be justified even if performed for the most noble of causes. A magician must always keep a sense of perspective, and subject her arts to iron-like standards. And so, though often tempted, I have not indulged in these foul crafts. At least not often.





marble (from her death he sculpted only female figures, and all had the same face, her face), but his grief and loneliness could not be so easily consoled.

And so Michele began to re-sculpt flesh. At first he killed poor women and runaways, re-arranging their features to resemble Lucrezia's. His first attempts were crude and messy. But after his friend, the Bishop, lent him the forbidden books from the Cathedral's library he learned to sculpt flesh as easily as stone.

Then Michele realized that he need not limit himself to dead flesh, and he began to "sculpt" the features of live women. The transformations were perfect, physically (though horrifically painful). Unfortunately, the women were not eager to play the role of Lucrezia. So Michele killed each and began to work again. And slowly, after repeated attempts, the women's personalities began to be warped by the sculpting, their characters coming to more closely resemble the dead Lucrezia's.

Michele never recreated his lost love, at least, not in his lifetime. He died young, stricken by disease (or, as some said, by poison or sorcery). Michele's wealthy friends and patrons kept him from ever being tried for his crimes, but he gained many enemies.

The artist's sculpting tools (his chisels and hammers) had over the years become Sentient, and they vanished around the time of his death. Ever since, the tools have conspired to finish the work that the sculptor started—to recreate Lucrezia.

Michele's tools can be used (by anyone with any artistic talent or training) to re-sculpt living human flesh. The victim may be sculpted to appear as any other human, real or imagined, though the tools cannot alter height or build. They can, however, change the victim's sex, skin, hair and eye color, etc. Unfortunately, the changes are unstable. A sculptor might be able to recreate a mortal as he wishes, but sooner or later (sometimes years, sometimes months, sometimes hours later) the victim begins to change, slowly transforming into Michele's lost

Lucrezia, adopting her appearance, answering to her name, and eventually gaining her personality and hazy memories.

THE PERFECT HEART (Resolve 8).

In the days of Egypt's Fatimid Caliphate (around AD 1100), a General named Murad al-Athir approached an aged sorcerer named Aziz Dhikr. He sought one thing: perfect courage. He desired that nothing should ever cause his sword arm to pause, nor his footstep to falter. Aziz Dhikr agreed to grant the General with the courage that he so wanted, in exchange for permission to marry the General's fairest daughter, and so he crafted for him a perfect heart—a heart which could know no fear—a clockwork heart made of iron and bronze.

In his cave, Aziz Dhikr tore out the General's heart, and replaced it with this cold metal machine. And from then on, al-Athir knew no fear. He also knew no love, nor guilt, pity, joy, nor sorrow. All of the General's feelings were taken from him. And without these scruples, the General began to plot, and brutally claw his way to power in Egypt through the use of bribes, threats and worse; in hopes of becoming the next Caliph.

During this time, the Heart became Sentient, and it absorbed the General's lust for power, along with many of his attitudes (his belief in the superiority of nobles over the common mortals, for example, and his dislike of Christianity). But al-Athir never became Caliph. He was slain by a band of hedge-magicians, so that they might take his heart and grant it to one of their own political allies. The Heart begrudged the killing, and directing the thoughts and beliefs of its next host it ensured that all the hedge-wizards were themselves slain. It still believes that Aziz Dhikr must have arranged for the General's murder (none but al-Athir and the sorcerer knew of the heart's existence), and thereafter has always hoped to avenge itself on Dhikr, or his descendants.





In the centuries after its creation, the Heart became something of a legend amongst magicians of the near East. They vied to own the heart in order to fortify their pawns, but in the 13th Century the artifact was carried off by the Mongols. Since then it has reappeared sporadically; being discovered at the Imperial Court in eighteenth century China and then again in the chest of a Royal Torturer in Iran in the late 1960s.

If placed in the chest cavity of a recently slain mortal, he is revived, with full memory and faculties, but with a trebled Fortitude and no emotions or scruples. (The only conditions are that the body be in basically good condition, and that it must still be warm.) The host also gains a driving lust for power, and can be subconsciously influenced by the Heart (persuaded to trust or distrust individuals, inspired to hate Aziz Dhikr's descendants, etc.). This mechanical heart, of course, does not beat, and does not pump blood. The mortal should be dead, and so magics of Affirmation can kill him.

Destroying the mechanism, physically, does not destroy the enchantment: it just frees it from the confines of the Heart. In this case, the enchantment can no longer animate a corpse or increase a person's Fortitude, but the Essence is free to insinuate itself into any heart, seeking out a new host each time a current body is slain.

THE DEVIL' S FIDDLE (Resolve 20).

In eleventh century Spain, there appeared an Unbidden calling itself the Dancemaster. Among other things, this Stranger wrote songs and music, and made itself a range of musical instruments, including this medieval viol. When a Circle of Stalkers managed to corner the creature, they used a Greater Binding to trap it within its own fiddle, considering this just punishment for its crimes. Unfortunately, the fiddle later fell into the hands of a group of mortal magicians, who sensed its inherent power and wove a great magic around it.

Now whenever the fiddle is played by an Awakened musician, he can will any corpse within range of its sound to rise from the dead and dance before the fiddle. (Six feet of earth will prevent a corpse from climbing from its grave, but corpses which are unburied, lie in shallow graves or in crypts, etc., will respond.) The assembled corpses act as one group, following one simple order mentally projected to them by the musician via the sounds of the viol. If the musician stops playing for more than one round, then the corpses will immediately turn and head back to their resting places.

However, the fiddle is Sentient, having the personality, aims and grudges of the Unbidden bound within it. It desires revenge against Stalkers (any Stalkers) and ulti-





mately the freedom of The Dancemaster. If the fiddle is dropped, then the magic can make a nearby corpse stoop to pick it up and to begin playing it. Played by a corpse that it controls, the fiddle can then give whatever orders it wishes to the other bodies.

The viol is a bulky instrument, made of dark wood and stained a bloody brown. It cannot be properly tuned, but always makes a discordant screeching sound—more like an animal's scream than any instrument's noise—and as it is played sweat begins to form on its strings.

EBENEZER WONDER' S WONDROUS THEATER OF FUTURE WONDERS (Resolve 30).

It started with training animals as a child. As a youth he toyed with manipulating his friends. And when he ran out of friends, he took the name Ebenezer Wonder and hit the road with a traveling fair.

From 1887 to 1894, Ebenezer worked as an animal trainer, side-show fortune teller, pimp and puppet-master. Then he discovered that the circus's old side-show magician knew a few very real magics. So, he blackmailed the old conjurer into teaching him all that she knew.

Over the next decades Ebenezer created a number of magics, mainly involving puppets and designed to control other people. His greatest creation was his Puppet Theater made

of a large wooden chest with a curtain across the open front and painted in gaudy shades of gold and red. He called his little theater, the Theater of Future Wonders. For years he worked, pumping his own Essence into the theater, sacrificing animals over it, and even dedicating two killings to it. His aimed to create a puppet-stage upon which he could play out dramas which would then come true in reality. And by 1906 his plan had come to fruition.

For nearly fifty years Ebenezer Wonder traveled the world with his puppet shows, alone or attached to traveling fairs and carnivals. He never became wealthy, nor famous. Maybe his public performances weren't very good. But he caused havoc wherever he went, and loved it. Wherever he paused in his wanderings he created puppets to resemble the local people, and at night when his sideshow tent was empty he created dramas with the puppets which came true for the real people over the following days. He never left a town without having broken a couple of marriages, destroyed some friendships or gotten some people killed.

Then, one night in 1953, Ebenezer woke to hear strange noises from the tent where his theater was stored. Peering into the tent, he saw the Theater, all set up, with the puppets dancing on their own and with no one pulling their strings. He burst in and the puppets fell lifeless. He rummaged around the crates, and found puppets depicting all of the people he had dealt with in the last weeks. Then he found the puppet of himself. He realized that the theater had been controlling him, perhaps for years. His whole life he

You might think me
perverse, but I don't
care, for you have no
power over me. And
anyway, flesh is just
another clay. It cuts,
it tears, and it bleeds
and yet I know it will
always heal; never my
death or my flesh
beyond repair.

I face death that I
may deny it It is like
an exorcism. I am not
afraid. I am not
afraid. Empty refrain.
I have seen too much,
and yet, I understand
too little. And while I
know that flesh is
only another clay, I
also know that it is
all I have.





had schemed to manipulate others, and now he found that he had become a slave himself.

Furious, and desperate to confound the Theater's plans for him, he seized a sword swallower's saber from a rack, and plunged it into his own belly. Only then did he notice the little bloodstained cardboard sword on the Theater's stage. The Theater had intended all along for Wonder to kill himself.

Free of the only person who understood its power, the Theater was sold and leant and passed down from one puppeteer to another, all the while the Prodigal artifact manipulated the people around it. The Theater can Conjure small innocuous objects (usually puppets) and manipulate small items (up to 5 lb., or 2 kg, in weight) within 100 yards of itself, though not with enough force to inflict Damage.

Usually it uses these powers to play out dramas with the puppets when no one else is around, though it can also manipulate the figures to act as spies and thieves for it. Note, however, that these powers are very weak. The continuity of the Dream prevents it from Conjuring or manipulating objects within sight of any mortal.

The Theater is deviously Sentient, and though it can sense much that happens around it (it can see and hear through the puppets) it cares nothing for the harm that it causes. It's sole desire is to play out interesting dramas, usually full of misery, bloodshed and betrayal. And like Ebenezer it is obsessed by the need to stay in control. It would not tolerate an owner who knew of its powers and actually tried to exploit them; that would mean that someone else shared and manipulated its power.





CHAPTER 5: MOLDING THE ESSENCE.

While many mortal magics use Essence to mold the world of the Flesh, there are other (sometimes dangerous and unpredictable) magics which attempt to deal directly with Essence and creatures of Essence. These enchantments may be used to affect or interfere with other magics (including wards, counter-magics, and rituals enabling sorcerers to regain Essence at an accelerated rate, and invocations to control other enchantments), and to reach beyond the Realm of Flesh. Through such magics, mortals have Awakened Shadows, communicated with Unbidden locked inside the Whispering Vault, and had dealings with Stalkers and Aesthetics.

Usually a magic can overcome a Shadow or another enchantment if its Resolve is higher than its target. (For a greater degree of uncertainty, GMs may wish to compare the target's Resolve plus 1 Die against the magic's Resolve plus 1 Die.) Enchantments with lower Resolve scores may be able to inconvenience or damage such creatures or magics, but cannot completely defeat them. More powerful beings (Unbidden, etc.) are extremely difficult to affect.

Magics may also be used to counter other Essence effects—such as the Corruption caused by proximity to an Enigma, or a Stalker's Dominate ability. If the magic is to counteract a Dominate Discipline, the enchantment must have a resolve of at least double the Stalker's Willpower. If it seeks to cleanse the Corruption caused by an Enigma, the enchantment's Resolve rating must be at least one quarter of the power of the Enigma (e.g. usually one quarter of the Resolve of the Unbidden whose arrival created it, if it is associated with an Unbidden). Note: A resourceful Unbidden Architect may try to employ a magician to maintain control over the Corruption it has caused, thus lessening the likelihood of intercession by a Circle of Stalkers.

There are rituals and invocations through which a magician may attempt to oppose the spells of a rival, or wrestle with their own uncontrolled enchantments. Such magics include wards (which try to exclude other magical effects from an area or form a barrier to magical effects), counter-magics (which attempt to dispel other sorceries), protective amulets, and so on.

The simplest effects cost only one point of Essence to weave (such as creating an object to allow a mortal to sense magic or Essence in another object by touching it). Gaining the ability to sense, by touch, whether a mortal body housed an Unbidden or a Shadow would also require one point of Essence.

Two or three Resolve point enchantments could empower objects to allow the caster to see concentrations of Essence, to detect Enigmas or Shadows, Unbidden or Stalkers, or to sense the lingering trace of past enchantments in an area.

More potent magics are much more taxing to create. These include enchantments to allow Essence to be absorbed more swiftly, creating wards and amulets against magics or Unseen creatures, detecting the location of a particular Unbidden or Stalker, Awakening Shadows, and so on.

It is important to remember that while though even some of these enchantments use very little resolve, the personal risk with all of them is still quite high. A careless magician or an enchantment gone awry may provoke a Shadow or earn the wrath of an Unbidden, placing the sorcerer in grave personal danger. Rituals designed to repel other enchantments may in fact attract them or warp them in an unintended way. A spell which is meant to lessen the effects of a Corrupted area may multiply the power of the Enigma. Such are the risks when dealing directly with the elements of Essence.





Naturally Magic Sites.

Throughout the Realm of Flesh there are certain areas which seem to attract a higher concentration of Essence than others. Whether they are minor imperfections of the Dream or areas of which less Aesthetics actively dream, or sections where Enigmas have broken off from reality to form Shadowrealms, it cannot be said. The names of these sites vary by culture but they are always referred to as being *naturally magical* due to the fact that within its borders enchantments and rituals often require smaller contributions of Essence.

Such sites are highly sought after by magicians and can many times be located through Essence molding enchantments. Once an area has been identified though, magicians must learn to re-adjust the amount of power they pour into their spells within the area or risk imminent disaster—taking years and can only be achieved through trial and error. Each area requires its own special understanding and training, so most sorcerers are loathe to use their powers at an unfamiliar site.

Most naturally magical sites have been located by the end of the eighteenth-century. Many of them *belong* to Enlightened Organizations, hedge-magicians and their villages, or by several sorcerers who share the site rather than constantly battle each other over it. Often there will be found special temples, altars, cairns, or monolithic stones set upon them in an effort to help *focus* the natural energies. More than one bloody conflict has taken place between rival Organizations seeking to control a particular site. And some sites have been abandoned altogether at different times for various reasons (Enigmas, Sentient enchantments, attracts too many Shadows, etc.).

The longer the area has been used as a place for spell casting, the more dangerous it becomes for unprotected people to enter; dozens of Sentient enchantments may roam a single site. For example: A site in which a villager participates in a ceremony by becoming “possessed” by a spirit, is more than likely in actuality under the influence of a Sentient enchantment. Also, over time, the integrity of the Realm of Flesh at the location can give way to form powerful Enigmas.



RITUALS AND ENCHANTMENTS.

THE MASTER' S VOICE (Resolve 1).

The most powerful Sentient enchantments have full intellects and personalities. In theory it is therefore possible to reason with and negotiate with them—except that most lack the ability to speak. This ritual allows communication with the enchantments of one single magician.

The ritual originated in prehistoric France, and requires mistletoe, water from a certain “holy” spring, and invocations in a lost Celtic tongue. The sorcerer must provide the point of Essence himself. The object to be enchanted must be the head or skull of the sorcerer who created the Sentient magic with which this enchantment is intended to communicate. No other head or skull will suffice.

Thus empowered, the enchantment may be used to communicate with any Sentient magic which the subject magician initially created. All that is required is for the head to be in the same place as (within a few yards of) the target enchantment. The Sentient enchantment speaks through the head (only Sensitive mortals and Unseen creatures may hear if it speaks through a skull; anyone may hear its words if the flesh is still intact) and also hears through it.





Some Celtic priests prepared and stored vast numbers of sorcerers' heads, so that they might use them to speak with their enchantments if ever the need arose.

BREATHING STONES (Resolve 1).

A simple ritual, common amongst Enlightened sorcerers, describes how a stone from an inherently magical site might be brought to "life" by being bathed in a small measure of the magician's blood. The brief ritual requires the caster to supply one point of Essence, and requires enough blood to temporarily weaken him (reduce Vitality by 1 for a day afterwards).

A properly enchanted stone is thereafter slightly warm to the touch, and when it is in the presence of a natural area of magic or a weak enchantment or an Enigma; then any Sensitive person can hear it very quietly begin to breathe. In an area affected by a more powerful enchantment the stone begins to breathe louder, and may ooze a couple of drops of blood.

Usually these stones are worn as heavy earrings, so as to be conveniently close to the magician's ear. Some prefer to set the stone in a ring or bracelet, or to carry it a small pouch, which must be then be held up to the ear if the owner wishes to listen for its breathing. The stones' breathe cannot be heard more than a few inches away, and if the sorcerer who created a stone dies then that stone ceases to function.

Many magicians have suffered because of choosing stones from unfortunate

sites for this enchantment. The sorcerer should ideally take a chipping from the ground, or from a long-present monument (like a cromlech or menhir) at a naturally magical site. Some, however, mistakenly take stones from an area Corrupted by an Enigma: prolonged exposure to such stones may corrupt the magician, and if the Enigma were Life Linked to an Unbidden, then that creature will always know where the stone is, can influence the wearer's dreams and can prevent the stone from working. Using stones which are already affected by other enchantments can have more complicated but equally inconvenient effects.

HUGINN' S SWORDS (Resolve 2).

Created by Norse magicians to speak with beings whom they considered divine, this quick enchantment allows magicians to send brief messages to creatures in the Realm of Essence.

In the original version of the enchantment, the sorcerer writes a letter or message in Norse runes, using his own blood as ink. The magician then takes a live raven to a high place, and breaks it open with his hands. The bird's insides are scooped out, the letter is placed inside the cavity, the bird's wounds healed, and the reformed creature sent flying off into the sky with the letter within.

The enchantment costs 2 points of Essence. One is supplied by the bird's death. The other comes from the magician.





The definition of life has changed over the years, the reality of it is nothing less than a cold, hard slap. Flesh is now grown in vats by mortals who can conceive of such things and yet through some cosmic irony, they fail to comprehend the true nature of stuffs with which they play. Test tubes and electrodes replace the warm comfort of a mother's womb. It takes but a brief, stinging second for a newborn to understand the frigid hostility of life as they screech and kick against their rude awakenings, but that moment quickly fades. With age comes familiarity, and willful ignorance; a selective blindness.



The raven then enters the Realm of Essence and delivers the message to the entrance of any Domain specified by the magician, or to the entrance of any Domain where the intended recipient is resident. The bird cannot enter the Vault, or any other Domain sealed by the Powers. The owner of a Domain may refuse to accept the message.

If permitted into the Domain, the letter appears as appropriate to the surroundings: in a "modern" Domain, the message arrives as a fax or as electronic mail; in a Domain resembling a feudal castle, a servant carries the letter to its recipient.

Later magicians have developed variations of this ritual, using carrier pigeons or other birds instead of ravens, or writing the messages in more modern languages. Some even send computer disks instead of written messages.

In theory, the messenger birds do not return from the Realm of Essence. The enchantment only permits one-way communication. In practice, however, the ravens often return to plague the magician—not pleased at having been slain. Most of the time they appear in frightening nightmares and the most persistent return to the world of Flesh to avenge their deaths. (A raven may not be a fearsome opponent, but by attacking a magician at key moments—during a fight or magic casting, while driving a car at high speed, etc.—can doom the mortal.)

THE SALT RITUAL (Resolve 2).

This simple (10 minute) procedure allows a sorcerer to enchant a small bag of salt to form a barrier against Shadows and Stalkers. The ritual requires the caster to fumigate the salt over a fire (usually of oak and elder woods, though local variants prescribe other woods) while reciting a simple chant. The magician loses 2 points of Resolve to fuel the enchantment.

Once prepared, the salt seems largely unaltered, though flecks of blood may occasionally appear inside larger salt crystals. Sensitive characters, including Creatures of Essence and Shadows, can sense that the Salt is somehow "alive" or enchanted if they approach within a few yards of it.

One bag of this salt may be used to create a single line 14 yards long (sufficient for a circle just over two yards across), or a number of smaller lines (e.g. across doorways or windowsills). Any Shadow or Stalker physically crossing the line loses two points of Vitality. Any Stalker or Shadow touching the salt (or struck by a shower of it) loses 1D Vitality.

CALLS (Resolve varies).

There is a single ritual which may be used to Call a specific Stalker. Each Stalker's ritual is unique, and reflects both the creature's mortal origins and temperaments.

So, a cruel but disciplined Stalker, who lived in a time when animal sacrifices were common, might be called be a





formal ritual in which a sacrificial animal is slowly tortured to death. A Calling ritual for a kind, humane Stalker, from humble origins, might be an unostentatious ceremony in a place such as a derelict building or an orphanage. A calm, reflective Stalker, from a religious background, may be called by lengthy meditation in a quiet temple.

This ritual call is no different from any other supplication. As the magic is created, the sorcerer must petition the Stalker, explaining why the creature should come to the Realm of Flesh. The called Stalker hears the magician's distant voice, and may choose whether or not to respond. The Stalker cannot tell, without attending, whether or not the Call is justified, or whether or not the Supplicant is lying.

Calling a Stalker by magic usually requires a 2 or 3 point enchantment (higher for Stalkers with lower Insight scores). In some cases, one point of Essence is provided by the sorcerer, and one by a sacrificial beast. In other instances the magician may meditate to provide the Essence over 2 or 3 days, or else must supply all of the Essence at once.

An Aesthetic Called by such a spell is aware of the Call, but must travel to the magician by normal, physical means if it wishes to respond.

THE SOLOMON RINGS (Resolve 2).

An ancient process, falsely attributed to the sorcerer-king Solomon, describes how a bronze ring, set with black stones, should be forged at dusk and inscribed before dawn with symbols which no mortal understands. This, it is said, grants protection from the power of "demons and ghosts".

The Solomon Rings are typical of the protective talismans forged by mortal magicians to protect them from the powers of the Unseen. They are easy to make, requiring only 2 points of Essence from the caster, and increase the wearer's Resolve by 4 for the purposes of resisting Unseen attempts to influence them (Dominate, Intimidate, Terrify, Dreadwyrms, etc.).

RITUALS OF AWAKENING (Resolve varies).

Most Shadows awaken "naturally", or through the will of powerful creatures like the Unbidden. Some may be Awakened by chants and simple offerings (such as Hangmen). A few may be Awakened by magical rituals: the Pain Mother is one such example, being awakened by the ritual scarification and meditation of a sorcerer.

The Pain Mother's Awakening ceremony requires 2 points of Essence (plus 2 points of Vitality), in an agonizing forty-eight hour ritual of self-mutilation. Most other Rituals of Awakening are similarly strenuous, if less painful, requiring 2 or 3 points of Essence.

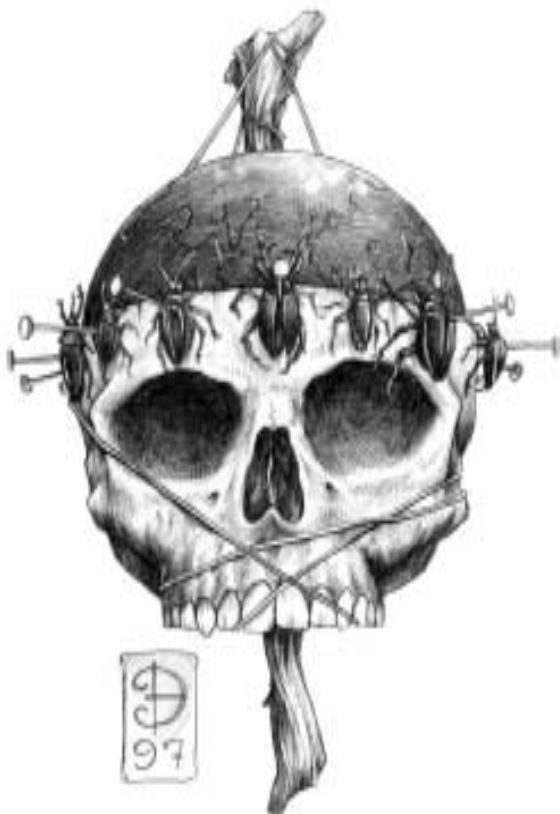




THE DRIVING OUT (Resolve 3).

This Polynesian sorcery allows a magician to take an enchantment which is afflicting a place, creature or person, and to transfer it onto another creature. The ritual takes a full 24 hours to perform, including animal sacrifice and much dancing, with the sorcerer clad in rare feathered robes and speaking through a succession of ceremonial masks. The ceremony is exhausting, physically and spiritually, as the sorcerer must provide all 4 points of Essence personally.

Properly created, the enchantment will drive out any enchantment which is controlling, harming or otherwise affecting any being present at the ceremony, or the area of land upon which it is performed.



The enchantment (which is likely to bear a grudge for such ill-treatment, if it is Sentient) may be put instead into a small animal (if it is only a Resolve 1 magic) or larger animal (Resolve 2), or into a human being (so long as the magic's Resolve is less than the human's). The sorcerer may even choose to take the magic into himself.

If the magic had affected a human or animal, the new host (animal or human) is thereafter fully affected by the enchantment which he now carries. If the enchantment had been acting upon a stretch of land, it will start to affect any area where the host settles.

The usual Polynesian practice, after transferring the enchantment, is to set the new host adrift at sea in a raft. When the host dies, a Sentient enchantment might try to return to its original victim, or to the sorcerer who transferred it, but if it has drifted far enough away it should be unable to find its way back.

BEHOLDING THE INFINITE MIRROR (Resolve 4).

In ancient Persia many magicians experimented with gleaning secrets by gazing into mirrors or into enchanted pools, and some of them developed this method for peering into the Realm of Essence.

The magician must first have a circular pool or bowl, at least three feet across and lined with pure marble. The pool must be in a dimly lit area. It should be filled with rare oils, and the air scented by incense. The magician (who must have fasted and have abstained from any contact with other mortals for three days) then places a silver mirror in the bottom of the pool or bowl, and stares intently into it.

Peering into the mirror, magicians and other Sensitives present may look through into anyone part of the Realm of Essence. The only restrictions are that they must know either the name of the place they seek to view, or the name of the creature who rules the place. This allows them to look into the Domains of Stalkers, the Whispering Vault, or anywhere else in the Realm. They may watch





and listen to anything happening there, and by speaking into the pool may communicate with the inhabitants of that Domain.

Just as an image of the Domain appears in the pool, so an image of the magician (and any others present) appears in some surface in the Domain (in a mirror, a pool, a picture frame, etc.), and those viewing this image may also hear what is said around the enchanted pool. Magicians seeking aid or patronage, or trying to bargain with or blackmail creatures of Essence find this a handy way to communicate with the Unseen. Unfortunately, Stalkers with a high Sensitivity (successful roll against a difficulty of 15 required) may be able to zero-in on the pool, and can then call a Navigator to arrive at the site to confront arrogant magicians.

When the sorcerer breaks concentration, the ritual is ended and the four points of Essence provided by him to fuel the enchantment is released. These enchantments never last for long, and so never become Sentient in themselves, but if they are frequently performed in the same place Essence can build up in the area, with unusual side-effects. The pool or bowl may come to display images of random places in the Realms of Flesh and Essence; the Essence may gain a Sentience—usually exhibiting a curious but secretive character, taking command of the pool or bowl, and watching over it or determining what Domains it may be used to peer into. If the pool is always used to look into the same Domain, a permanent “window” might be established, and some Shadows and creatures of

Essence (e.g. Unbidden) may be able to enter the Realm of Flesh at this point.

HONORIUS' S WARD AGAINST LESSER FIENDS (Resolve 4).

This ward is a simple circle, traced on the ground and inscribed with various symbols, sprinkled with the blood of a sacrificed cat and encircled by five candles made from mortal fat.

The enchantment creates an area up to four yards across which no Servitor may enter. Three points of Essence are provided by the magician, and one by the sacrificed cat. The effect is dispelled by the light of the sun, when the Essence dissolves into the surrounding Dream.

THE RITUAL OF WASHING AND BURNING (Resolve 5).

This ceremony, originating in the Indus Valley around 3,000 BC, purifies the subject of any and all enchantments affecting him with a Resolve 4 or less. It also washes away the corruption caused by exposure to an Enigma, or the Domination of a Stalker.

The ritual involves alternately bathing and burning the subject with water and burning oil, thereby cleansing him of any minor magical taint. The process is extremely uncomfortable, and inflicts 1D Damage on the subject.

Myself, I still see. I have brushed shoulders with life, called it down, molded it and cast it out I have felt the dreadful heartlessness of creatures in whom the forces of life flow pure, “Stalkers” in their own words, “Demons” to most mortals. And I have held life, unadulterated, at my command, a brutal force to do with as I please, though rarely is it as obedient as I might wish, and never is it kind or pleasant





The ceremony itself takes less than an hour, though the preparation of the water and oil requires an additional two hours of ritual. The victim must also lose 2 points of Resolve, as 2 points of Essence are drawn from him to help fuel the enchantment; the remaining 3 Essence must be provided by any sorcerers presiding.

(This is typical of many magics which force an enchantment out of a person. Four thousand years later, Arabic magicians used a similar enchantment to “beat devils” out of people with “blessed” wooden rods, and Mongol sorcerers used horses to drag afflicted comrades over stony terrain until the enchantments “fell” from them, or the unfortunate victim died—which ever came first.)

SPIRIT POTS (Resolve 5).

Sorcerers from many times and places have sought to hold “spirits” (Shadows) in captivity, and many chose pots, bottles, lamps and chests as containers.

A typical ritual requires that the sorcerer make the container (pot, chest, etc.) without the assistance of any other mortals, and inscribe it with certain symbols or phrases. He then performs the ritual of Awakening to summon the required spirit, pouring out five points of Essence to force the creature into the receptacle and sealing it tightly as soon as the creature is present.

The Awakened Shadow is not physically present in the container, so the pot or chest may be much smaller than the Shadow would usually be. A gigantic behemoth could be bound into a pill box. But the creature’s Essence is held firm within, and it cannot escape until the enchantment is destroyed or suppressed, or the container is somehow opened. Once freed, the Shadow manifests in its usual physical form (often in a foul temper and out for its jailer’s blood) and will not voluntarily return to its prison.

In order that they might communicate to their captive Shadows, some magicians use the “Master’s Voice” enchantment and place embalmed or dried heads inside the containers, allowing the occupant to speak to

Sensitives via the head, and hear what is said outside of the pot. Some sorcerers have captured Shadows simply to talk with them, hoping that the Shadows will reveal occult or metaphysical secrets in return for promises of freedom.

Other magicians find nastier uses for these Pots (or chests, or bottles, etc.). For example: Some sorcerers bind dangerous or destructive Shadows into pots, and after tormenting them for months send the receptacles as gifts to their enemies, knowing that when the recipients open their parcels the creatures will most likely destroy them.

THE BLIGHT-MOUND (Resolve 6).

Intended as a method of more swiftly regaining Resolve, the first Blight-Mound was created by an African magician, long before the coming of the white man. Though the name was not of his choosing: it was the local villagers who came to call his “shrine” the Blight-Mound, as it slowly destroyed their livestock, their children and their fertile valley.

The Mound is created by a ritual which requires a carefully selected ox (which must have certain features and auspicious markings, and must be kept in a cave and fed on a controlled diet for one month before the ceremony). The ox is sacrificed and “given” to the clearing in which the killing takes place. Its head is buried and a mound of earth is raised over it. The sacrifice provides 2 points of Essence, and the sorcerer’s Resolve drops by 4 to provide the balance.

Thereafter, any magician may sacrifice cattle at the Blight-Mound to regain Essence. A proper sacrifice takes about an hour, with the magician abjuring the mound to “give power” to him, and ending when the slain animal’s head is lain on top of the mound. Each sacrifice allows the Blight-Mound to draw Essence from the surrounding area and from any person or place within ten miles. For each beast slain before the Blight-Mound, the sorcerer regains 1 point of Resolve, but the mound itself also draws a point of Essence from the surroundings.





So, as the mound is used repeatedly, and as the pile of maggot-ridden skulls above it grows, it becomes more powerful, with its Resolve increasing. The surrounding vegetation withers and blackens, diseases spread amongst the local mortals, children die and animals sicken. If used frequently, the vegetation for miles around becomes twisted and barely alive; diseases develop into epidemics; crops fail; cows stop producing milk. And inevitably the Blight-Mound becomes Sentient.

Sentient mounds swiftly become Prodigal. The rituals which create and draw Essence through the mound address it as if it were alive and independent; when it becomes Sentient, it feels no compulsion to obey the magicians.

A Prodigal Blight-Mound seeks only one thing: more life—more power. It may require several animal sacrifices, or even human sacrifices, before it provides Essence to mortals, keeping for itself all the Essence that the sacrifices generate. It may provide weakened magicians with its own Essence, rather than Essence from the surroundings, in order to gain influence or control over them. It may even resort to a kind of blackmail, drawing Essence from nearby mortal settlements who do not offer sacrifice to it.

Prodigal mounds may also learn to affect events immediately around them. For example: They may learn to control the decay and disease caused by the Essence they draw, and focus it on a single individual; or it might be able to use their own Essence to achieve certain affects (e.g. creating minor curses, or losing one point of Resolve to take a point of Vitality from a nearby mortal). Frightened mortals may come to venerate the Mound, sacrificing their best animals to it, or fighting to defend it or steal sacrifices for it - if only it will afflict others with its diseases and blights.

Powerful mounds may contain up to 60 points of Essence, which they inevitably learn to use for destructive ends in order to ensure that the locals continue to serve and protect them. Powerful Blight-Mounds always cause Enigmas, attracting Shadows, twisting the surrounding plant life into blackened, poisonous forms, and though such Enigmas are simple to Mend (Power 10), the mound often has scores of frightened defenders and more potent lieutenants, like Shadows and magicians.

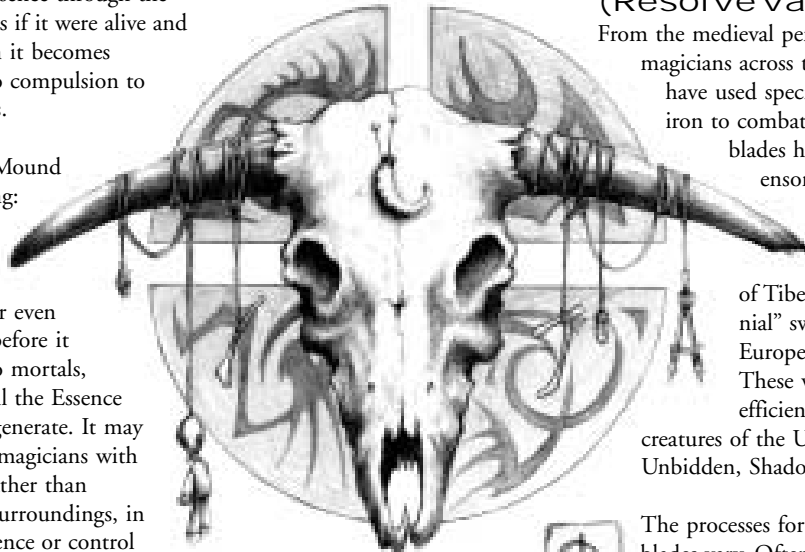
EXORCISTS' BLADES (Resolve varies).

From the medieval periods onwards, magicians across the mortal world have used specially enchanted iron to combat the Unseen. Such blades have ranged from ensorcered Japanese Katanas, to the triangular-bladed Exorcists' daggers of Tibet, to the "ceremonial" swords carried by European magicians. These work equally efficiently against all creatures of the Unseen - including Unbidden, Shadows and Stalkers.

The processes for enchanting the blades vary. Often the iron must have been mined, smelted and forged at particular times or by certain types of people (e.g. the blind, or by virgin boys). Sometimes

it is necessary that the iron never see the light of day until the enchantment is complete, or that when it is forged it be quenched in milk or blood.

Each blade's Resolve rating determines the amount of extra Damage which the blade inflicts. For each point of Essence in the blade, it inflicts an extra 2 points of Damage. (So, a Resolve 2 weapon does +4 points of Damage, per successful Attack, to any creature of the Unseen; a Resolve 12 weapon





does an additional 24 points of Damage each time it strikes a creature of the Unseen.) In addition, however, the creature struck by the blade is stunned and unable to Attack for one round if its Resolve (or Willpower roll, for Stalkers) is lower than the weapon's Resolve.

In making the blades, however, a single presiding magician must supply all of the Essence at one time, so that weapons with a Resolve above 6 are rare. Unbidden and callous Stalkers, however, have been known to encourage mortal dupes into creating weapons as powerful as Resolve 15—losing the mortal's soul in the process, of course.

Often there are stipulations concerning the use of such a blade. Some must draw blood whenever they are drawn, or must never be touched by the sun's rays. Some may only be wielded by Sensitive mortals, or may never be used to wound a mortal. Should such restrictions be violated, the sword may cease to work, or may become unpredictable, or may become Sentient.

A Sentient blade may develop its own ideas about who or what it should be used to combat, usually based upon the prejudices of its original creator. It may conspire against owners who use it against beings which it does not wish to fight (reducing the wielder's Attack by up to 4 points, and refusing to inflict any additional damage), but it might particularly exert itself to harm its hated foes (permanently sacrificing one point of its own Resolve to inflict an extra 1D Damage against that foe for one successful Attack) even to the extent that it might voluntarily destroy itself.

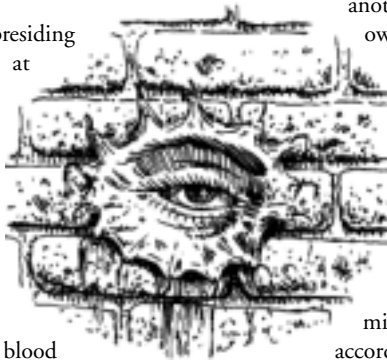
GRANTING FRESH FLESH TO THE DAMNED (Resolve 7).

In order to contact an Unbidden incarcerated within the Vault, a mortal magician may perform this ritual—though usually only those who are Driven are able to follow it through.

First a statue or model head is created, using a frame of stolen weaponry (usually swords) with the treated skin of a

wrongfully executed man stretched over it. Then the presiding magician bathes the idol in several pints of his own freshly drawn blood (losing 2 points of Vitality in the process) and calling upon the Unbidden by name, pledging his service to the creature. Then, the magician (losing

another point of Vitality) must cut off his own ear and attach it to the idol's head, rip out his tongue and place it in it's mouth, and gouge out one eye, placing it in one of the figure's eye sockets.



The Unbidden in the Vault is then able to speak, hear and see through this idol. Should the idol fall into disuse, then after several decades the enchantment might become Sentient, and might begin to speak again of its own accord, preventing the Unbidden from influencing its words. It would then pursue its own goals such as acquiring working limbs, or perhaps the other eye and ear, or it might continue to pursue it's creator's aims, as the enchantment understands them.

THE BLASTING ROD (Resolve 12).

From Babylonian times to modern days sorcerers have fashioned Blasting Rods to overcome the powers of "demons". The true Blasting Rods are wooden staffs, around four feet long, inlaid with silver and fragments of bone, with a dark iron tip. They grow warm and clammy in the presence of the Unseen, but usually feel abnormally cold.

Each Rod takes one year to fashion and enchant, with one point of Essence supplied by the sorcerer each month. The components are rare (bones from the Husk stripped from a Shadow, a wand of wood never touched by mortal hands, silver mined and smelted under a full moon, iron tempered in blood) and the sorcerer must make the entire rod himself (requiring Focus Skills dealing with woodwork and metalwork). Medieval hedge magicians circulated dozens of spurious descriptions of the process of creating such rods, so that by the eighteenth century it is almost impossible to find a workable description of the ritual.





A Rod may be used to drive away or threaten Awakened Shadows. If a Shadow in the presence of a Rod disobeys the wielder's instructions, that Shadow loses one point of Vitality. ("Flee from here" is a usual demand, and is normally complied with.) Any Shadow touching the Rod is badly burned, and loses three points of Vitality.

A Rod cannot control or compel Shadows to act against their will, and cannot affect them once they are out of sight of it and out of range of the wielder's voice. But many Shadows naturally fear the wielders of such staff and may obey their commands; or else conspire to have them killed, or the Rod destroyed.

SPRIT LAMPS (Resolve 15).

First devised by Semitic sorcerers around 1,000 BC, each set of Spirit Lamps is comprised of four oil-burning clay lamps. A human is first ceremonially sacrificed, and his flesh is then used to make the oil for the lamps. The sacrifice provides the Essence for the enchantment; if his Resolve was lower than 15, the magician presiding over the sacrifice loses Resolve to cover the shortfall.

Once inscribed with the proper symbols, these lamps are lit and are buried at the four corners of the house or area to be protected. Thereafter, a dull glow is visible to any Sensitive characters around the places where the lamps are buried, and Shadows and creatures of Essence can feel a dangerous barrier of energy around the area.

The lamps may protect any area, up to fifty yards across, forming a ward around it which Shadows and creatures of Essence cannot easily cross. No Shadow with a Resolve of less than 15 may pass through the ward. Any more potent Shadow, or any Stalker or Unbidden crossing the barrier takes 15 points of Damage.

Although designed to keep the Unseen out of an area, the barrier also affects creatures trying to leave (and creatures trying to dig up or interfere with the actual lamps), making it an effective prison. As a side-effect, the lamps also trap memories, dreams and fears, so that when people sleep in a warded area they often have the same dreams as previous occupants, or experience the same feelings and desires; those who die within the ward may also seem to haunt the area, their words and memories audible to Sensitive characters and occasionally to others.

Most Spirit Lamp enchantments are Sentient. They often take their role as guardians too seriously, and may be able to cause small "accidental" fires in and around the area. They may even come to resent any intrusion, or any mortal's attempt to leave the area by jamming doors and locks, and (if the target mortal has a Resolve below 10) even causing spontaneous human combustion.

After their initial invention, Spirit Lamps became infamous throughout the Near East, from Persia to the Red Sea, and many hedge magicians tried to create their own versions of them. Most of the Lamps produced—and

In my study I have a glass case. I built it myself. It is hellishly heavy, and for good measure I have bolted it to the floor. The glass is thick. The locks are strong. And behind the glass my earthen jars stand in silent rows. I thought that I might throw them away, but at least here I can keep an eye on them. I often sit gazing at them. And they gaze back. Some, I think, even smile, or curse. Sometimes I catch them Whispering to each other. All are waiting.





most of those unearthed by later archaeologists—are thus pale copies at best with a Resolve rating of 1, and often completely useless.

THE INSISTENT CALL (Resolve 16).

This European ritual was created by a group of Awakened (but not Enlightened) diabolists, who sought to summon the Devil, but instead called forth a Stalker. It is simply one of many rituals to summon a Stalker against its will.

The ritual must take place at night when there is no moon in the sky, and requires five magicians to cooperate in its casting. Complicated props and tools are required, including several knives and staffs (all made at certain times and by carefully controlled processes), and the whole ceremony takes place within a ten-yard wide circle, marked out in chalk on the ground. The magician presiding over the ritual sacrifices a sheep in the center of the circle, and stands back; all five magicians chant; the chalk circle turns to blood; clouds coil and thunder over head; and after several minutes of chanting the Stalker appears above the slaughtered sheep in the center of the circle.

The process costs each magician 3 Resolve, except for the leader, who loses only 1 Resolve. Most written descriptions of the ritual claim that the summoned “devil” is obliged to obey the leading magician, but in fact, and to the sorcerers’ dismay, the Stalker is quite free to act as he pleases. Moreover, any imperfection in the ritual’s performance creates further dangers. Some such risk are that the ceremony might merely Call the Stalker, allowing it to assemble its Circle before arriving; or the creature may be able to appear outside of the circle, where it is not expected, or it may arrive hours or days later; or the wrong Stalker or some other creature (an Unbidden or Shadow, for example) might arrive instead.

Ordinarily, the Essence invested in the ritual is consumed at the Stalker’s arrival. But if the ritual is interrupted or abandoned half way through, then the Essence remains and might create a permanent, unstable portal for Unseen creatures to pass into the world, or might form an Enigma warping time and space around itself.

Sorcerers who want the cooperation of a Stalker usually use less impertinent magics (like a regular Call). Ripping a Stalker from their Domain is both painful for them and insulting. Magicians willing to incite their wrath are usually either desperate or have some darker purpose.

BREACHING THE BLACK ABBOT’S GATE (Resolve 22).

Mortals duped into serving the Unbidden often try to extract their masters from the Whispering Vault after they have been taken away, and have concocted several rituals to “pick the lock” at its gate. Most of these rituals are disastrous, ending with the Unbidden being summoned from the Vault straight into the sorcerer’s body, in some instances, or arriving at a random point in time, or to a random place. “Breaching the Black Abbot’s Gate” is a medieval European version of the magic which allows the sorcerer to control when and where the creature manifests.



The ceremony must be performed in an abbey (or the ruins of an abbey) or in some similar religious institution. The presiding magician must sacrifice an Awakened mortal and a creature not of the Dream (a Stalker or Shadow), and





must light a fire built from elder wood and the fat of an executed criminal. The Essence of the mortal powers the enchantment (any difference between the magic's Resolve and the sacrifice's Resolve must be made up by the presiding magician), the fire acts as a beacon to the creature, and the sacrificed Shadow or Stalker is flung into the Vault in exchange for the release the Unbidden.

The Unbidden arrives in the Dream when the last embers of the fire die out, appearing in the center of the ashes. This allows the wise magician to determine where and when the creature will appear, to postpone the fatal moment by feeding the fire (or to provoke its appearance by quenching the flames) and to get a safe distance away before the Unbidden manifests. Unwise magicians usually become the Unbidden's first Vessel—a fitting punishment for those who tamper with the Vault.

Unbidden summoned by this magic appear as Beasts (if they were Beasts or Strangers when bound) or Strangers (if they were bound as Architects). The site of the ritual becomes the center of an Enigma tied to the Unbidden and defined by its personality. The remains of the fire, or its exact location, is its Focus.

INVOKING THE POWER OF THE EARTH (Resolve 24).

This Native American ritual requires a group of magicians to dance and chant for three days without pause. They pour

Essence into the area in which they dance (24 points, split equally amongst all of the dancers), thereby "awakening" the area to aid them in their future magics—much like a "naturally magic" site.

The enchanted area is thereafter used as a magic-casting place and as a place where magicians can pause to refresh themselves after casting grueling magics, and is often considered sacred.



The enchantment itself supplies Essence to aid magicians in casting magics at the site. The enchantment provides two points of Essence (or half of the Essence for the magic, whichever is less), so that a magician's Resolve is not so badly reduced. Further, any magician staying at the site for a whole day recovers 2 Resolve, instead of the usual 1.

The enchantment itself does not lose Resolve as a result of this. Rather, it constantly draws Essence from the surrounding area, with the result that while the site itself may be fertile (clear springs and lush vegetation are common, and interestingly, human corpses left at

the site do not decay and wounded mortals pausing there heal swiftly), the surrounding lands are often reduced to barren desert.

The enchantment itself is Sentient, absorbing the personalities and memories of the magicians who danced to create it. If there were severe differences in the personalities of those who danced, then the magic usually develops a split personality - often with "day time" and "night time"





They fought against their captivities, and have had a long time to think on what I have done to them, these magics which I have imprisoned. Fresh meat, left untended, turns rank and seethes with maggots. The finest fruits turn black and bitter with age. These old adversaries were vile before they were incarcerated, and I doubt that age has mellowed them. I only pray that I am long dead before any of these, my children, escape.



personas, or randomly shifting attitudes. Magicians who come to be controlled by the enchantment are affected by these personality shifts, compelled to do different things as the enchantment's attitudes change. Naturally, the enchantment may refuse to aid a magician or magic of which it disapproves, so that he must provide all Essence for magics created in the area and cannot recover lost Resolve at the accelerated rate.

Because the enchantment absorbs the memories and the knowledge of its creators, later generations may be keen to learn their ancestors' knowledge from the enchantment, and may come to believe that the place is the home of the spirits of the ancestors or of the magicians who wove the enchantment (who are thus often considered demigods).

Keen to learn from these "ancestors", later magicians, prophets and priests may go to sleep in the area (allowing the enchantment to Whisper to them) or may go there to take peyote or some similar hallucinogen (allowing them to converse with the enchantment). By spending months or years at the site, reactionary magicians—whose attitudes please the enchantment—may learn many of the magics known by the enchantment's creators.

THE WARD OF THE FOUR DYING BREATHS (Resolve 30).

This powerful ward was created by a brotherhood of Enlightened magicians located in ancient Burma, in south east

Asia, to protect their stronghold.

The ritual is begun as the first foundation of a building is laid. The building may be of any size, from a hut to a castle, but must adhere to certain bizarre architectural principles prescribed by the spell (usually with buckled floors, twisted walls, asymmetrical quadrangles, walls which join at acute angles, etc.), and its four outermost corners must face the four points of the compass.

The ritual continues throughout the construction of the building, and during this period, an Awakened mortal is buried alive within the walls at each of the four corners—standing up as if they were sentries on guard. The ritual is complete only when the building is finished. It requires the presiding magicians to contribute 10 points of Essence to the enchantment. Each of the four sacrificial victims also loses 5 points of Resolve, and are held on the edge of their deaths, trapped within the walls—not quite dead. When the enchantment is destroyed, the four mortals will finally die.

A *Ward of the Four Dying Breaths* is inevitably Sentient, but it is usually eager to serve its *masters*—the magicians who created it and their heirs. Its personality is an amalgam of the sorcerers' who wove the magic and the four victims who are buried in the walls, and it will share their prejudices, assumptions and aims. It may develop other goals, however, or become critical of its masters. Often, as time passes, its mortal masters develop new aims and beliefs of which this stubborn enchantment does not approve.





The ward has several powers. It may see and hear all that happens within its buildings, and it could even *hear* a mortal's thoughts. The enchantment can destroy Servitors at will within the building that it wards. (It acts on an Initiative of 10, and if a Stalker summons Servitors on a later initiative the enchantment may destroy them before they can act.) It may prevent any enchantment or magical effect with a lower Resolve from functioning within its building (though such enchantments are merely neutralized, not destroyed, and work as usual outside of the buildings). It may sense the approach—within one mile—of any Unseen creatures (Shadows, Stalkers, Unbidden, etc.), and may Banish Shadows, automatically, for the permanent loss of one point of Resolve. Moreover, the enchantment's masters may each regain one point of Vitality per Round, by draining the enchantment's Resolve by 1. And lastly, its masters may regain Resolve at twice the normal rate within the buildings.

Note, however, that the enchantment itself may decide who it does and does not recognize as "masters", and may withhold its favors from those of whom it disapproves. It is not under anyone's control. Further, Essence reabsorbed within the building is contaminated by the enchantment, and mortals recharging themselves from this may come to be controlled by the enchantment. With time, the enchantment itself may come to control the order of magicians whom it was initially intended to serve.

Note also that the enchantment cannot naturally regain Resolve itself. So, the enchantment may be weakened over time. Some of its powers (as listed) can drain Resolve from it, and each time one of the four sentries that have been buried in the walls is slain, the enchantment loses 10 points

of Resolve. Lost Resolve may be regained by burying replacement Awakened humans, but if all four bodies are slain the enchantment is destroyed.

UNIQUE ARTIFACTS.

THE TRUE BOOKS OF HONORIUS.

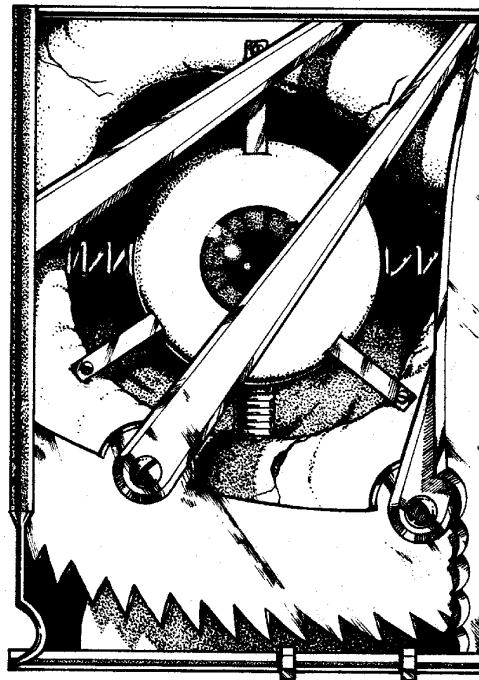
In fifth century Rome, as the city faced destruction at the hands of the barbarians, a sorcerer named Honorius decided to set down his greatest enchantments so that, should he be killed, future magicians would still profit from his knowledge. He created five books, and dictated the text to his five apprentices, who wrote down all that he said.

The books contain instructions for the creation of a Blasting Rod, and rituals of Calling (to summon several Stalkers) and to Awaken various Shadows.

The books are so enchanted that in any age they resemble ordinary, recently written tomes. So, in the early centuries after their creation they appear as hand-written Latin

manuscripts; from the seventeenth century they seem to be leather-bound books which have been printed in various European languages; in the twentieth century they seem to be cheap American paperbacks; by the twenty-first century they appear as data storing CDs or computer disks.

The books are clearly of an Occult nature, but seem to detail absurd hedge magics (ceremonies for divination or to find hidden treasure, etc.). Only after close scrutiny can a Sensitive character or a creature of the Unseen discern the *true* text hidden beneath the obvious text.





DE BRACY' S BRAND (Resolve 8).

De Bracy's Brand originated in 17th century Scotland. It resembles a large cattle brand, being about three feet long and made of rusting iron. The brand at its end is no simple cattle mark, however, but a complex arcane design.

The purpose of the Brand was to control Shadows. Any Awakened Shadow whose form or Husk was stamped with this heated iron was compelled to obey Thomas De Bracy—provided that its Resolve was not more than double the Brand's.

When Thomas De Bracy died, the Brand passed on to his descendants—who were also sorcerers—but eventually passed from his line. After De Bracy's death, Shadows marked by the Brand obeyed his heirs. In the absence of any relation to De Bracy, the creatures obey whoever holds the Brand. Uncertain of the iron's powers, most of the Brand's later owners did not realize that the branded Shadows would obey a De Bracy in preference to them, nor that if they let go of the Brand the Shadows would no longer be compelled to obey them. Furthermore, if it is the Husk and not the Shadow which is marked, then the Shadow is free of the Brand's control as soon as its Husk is stripped away.

Branding a Shadow requires that the iron be heated until it glows, and then be pressed into the Shadow's or Husk's physical form. The target must either be unresisting—usually tied down securely—or must be struck with a successful Attack (+5 Difficulty). The marks seared into the Shadow by the Brand are a collection of swirls and Arabic letters, all of which seem slightly different each time anyone looks at them, and they occasionally ooze a few drops of blood.

FINDERIUS' S BOOK OF AMPUTATIONS.

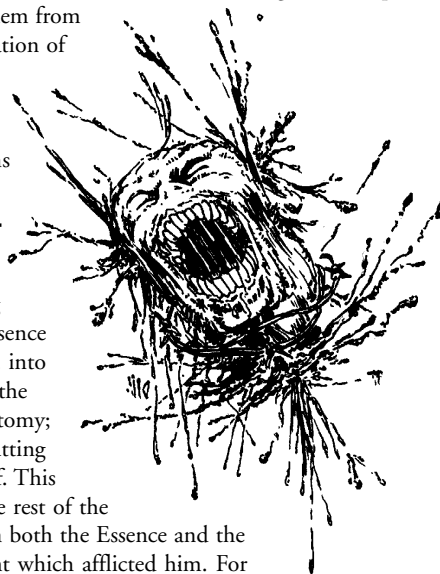
The Book of Amputations, compiled in the first century AD by an Enlightened Chaldean magician calling himself "Finderius the Just," describes dozens of rituals designed to dispel an enchantment from a mortal victim. The rituals, however, are much older than Finderius, and were first discovered long before the beginning of written history.

These rituals counter any magic which affects a mortal non-physically, including enchantments which control, induce sleep in, monitor, or affect the emotions of the target. They may also be used to rid mortals of an Enigma's corruption, or to free them from the Domination of a Stalker.

The Amputations work by concentrating an enchantment, along with the Essence that fuels it, into one part of the victim's anatomy; and then cutting that part off. This separates the rest of the

mortal from both the Essence and the enchantment which afflicted him. For minor enchantments (where only one or two points of Essence fuel the offending enchantment) the magic can be concentrated into a finger or toe, which can then be amputated. If the enchantment has a Resolve of 3 to 8, it can be concentrated into a hand or foot, which is then removed. Major enchantments and corruptions (Resolve 9 to 15) require that the magic be concentrated in a major organ (usually the heart, liver or head), which is then removed and destroyed. The separated parts are usually burnt: of course, this extreme amputation kills the target, but in some cases this is considered an unfortunate necessity (see, for example, *The Mark Of The Damned*).

The types of Amputations detailed in the book require 1 to 15 points of Essence (i.e. equal to the Resolve of the enchantment to be countered).





AO-DOS (Resolve 8).

The Alpha and Omega Software Corporation, of Los Angeles, has produced a number of unusual software products which defy normal programming logic. One of their less-known projects is the Alpha and Omega Daemon Organization System (AO-DOS), which is advertised only by word of mouth and is never sold for mere cash alone.

AO-DOS is available on CD-ROM, and although it cannot be copied by any means it runs on absolutely any computer. It is chock full of obscure files and utilities, none of which take up any memory in a computer, and most of which don't seem to do anything. The whole system, however, warps the computer so that its actions are no longer logically comprehensible, and so that it forms a link between the Realms of Flesh and Essence.

The two most useful parts of the system are the communications files (which allow the computer's user to communicate with any Stalker's Domain in the Realm of Essence, much like the *Beholding The Infinite Mirror* enchantment, but using a VDU instead of a pool and mirror) and a program which stores Essence (up to 8 points) which the user can absorb in a matter of minutes and which the computer replenishes at a rate of two points per day. Another file on the AO-DOS disk seems to be a warped logic game - a giant number puzzle called *Jailbreak*. Users are assured that if they can complete the puzzle, they could win a *substantial* but unspecified reward.

Using AO-DOS has its dangers, however. First of all, it stretches the Dream to create an Enigma (Power 8) Focused on the computer: logic becomes warped in the area (two plus two never equals four), time runs slower or faster; other associated Anomalies include strange electrical buzzes and unexpected shocks. Second of all, opening up a link between the Realms of Essence and Flesh is an open invitation for unpleasant creatures to slip into the Dream to perhaps possess the computer or appear near-by.

Furthermore, each AO-DOS package attracts a Rethrett to occupy the computer's monitor—one of the indecipherable files draws the creature in; passing on its reports to a higher power. Users may also find inexplicable messages appearing on the screen for them (advice, hints, predictions about the future, and instructions to be obeyed if the computer user wants to keep benefiting from such messages).

Finally, the Essence stored by the machine comes from a single creature, which may eventually come to control any magician who absorbs too much of it.

THE GATE OF FIVE LOCKS (Resolve 12).

This is a wrought-iron door, five feet tall by two feet wide, from which flakes of dry skin occasionally fall. It once stood at the entrance to the workshop of the Chinese master Lin So, though after his death it had many owners and guarded many portals.





Though five large iron locks hang from it, the gate is only fastened by a simple latch, which may be lifted from either side. From the shape of the key holes in the locks, it seems that one key would open them all, but none of the locks actually seem to serve any purpose. They are not connected to any sort of bolt, and don't seem to hold the gate shut. In fact the gate can be opened just by lifting the latch and pushing....

The gate contains two enchantments. The first is a simple but powerful Affirmation which protects the structure of the gate itself, including the latch and hinges. This Affirmation ensures that no Unseen power may affect the gate.

The second enchantment (concentrated in the five locks) is designed to Awaken and control a Hangman—always the same Hangman. If anyone attacks any part of the gate or its locks; or opens the gate without first turning all five locks (Lin So held the sole key), then the enchantment calls forth the Hangman to protect it.

The Shadow is firmly under the enchantment's control, and the enchantment is designed to kill anyone or anything which tries to pass through the gate without first turning the locks. However, the gate is Sentient, and over the years it has become a little *erratic*. At first, the gate would summon up the Hangman for purposes other than intended, or it would allow certain people to open the gate without Awakening the Hangman—if it were made a *suitable* offer. Unfortunately, by the late 21st century, the gate's erratic state prevented any degree of certainty of what the enchantment would actually desire from a mortal or creature in return for its favors; and it seems to never desire the same thing twice.

If the Awakened Hangman is killed, it may be Awakened again within an hour unless the enchantment on the locks is first destroyed. If the locks are damaged, the enchantment does not necessarily dissipate (though it might become impossible to turn the locks if this were to happen).

THE AO-AO (Resolve 16).

Some corporations are named after their founder. The Alpha and Omega Software Corporation is named after its computer.

Alpha and Omega's Alpha and Omega computer was built in the 1980s, but looks more like something from a science fiction movie. It is a long, white, lozenge-shaped machine, eight feet long by four feet high, and completely smooth. It has no apparent disk drives, display or controls—only a single output lead to connect it to another computer terminal.

The machine refuses to accept commands or any sort of input from any outside source. It has no apparent external power source. It is almost indestructible (Fortitude 40, Vitality 10). It just sits and hums, throbbing gently with a sound like a heart beating—creating whatever software it wishes without human intervention.

The magicians who run Alpha and Omega Software are intrigued by their computer, but quite content to let it work away on its own. So far, its creations have included software which allows them to glimpse the future, and databases listing thousands of magical grimoires and their current locations and owners; in addition to the apparently innocuous software that generates the corporation's revenue and the bizarre AO-DOS. It is currently writing a game, which the corporation intends to market worldwide: called *World Dictatorship*. Advertised as “a game that could really change the world,” players are given the role of lieutenants of a crazed dictator called Kheremas, helping him to gain secret control over the nations of the world.

It is no coincidence that Kheremas was the name of this computer's designer and builder, nor is it by accident that it is run by a Sentient enchantment loyal to him. An Architect on the run from a Circle of Stalkers, Kheremas designed the AO-AO to ensure that if captured he would soon after be able to return to the Realm of Flesh. Having completed the computer he passed it on to a group of power-hungry magicians—now the directors of the AO Software Corporation.





From the late 1980s onwards, Kheremas wallows in the Whispering Vault; waiting. AO-DOS allows him to communicate with and channel Essence to computer users in the Realm of Flesh (including the directors of the AO Software). He hopes that soon, when someone solves the Jailbreak puzzle and unknowingly picks the locks on the Black Abbot's Gate, he will be able to return to the Realm of Flesh through one of the AO-DOS using computers.

ABANAR' S WANTON HEART (Resolve 17).

In Ancient Egypt a sorcerer named Abanar amassed great power through his long and bloody lifetime, but though he feared death greatly, even he could not keep his frail body alive forever. When at last he died, his apprentice took the opportunity to ransack his study, and found a ritual detailed there which promised great power. Following the instructions there, the apprentice hacked out Abanar's heart and poured Essence into it, speaking the words that Abanar had devised, and so creating this talisman. The apprentice carried the Heart with him thereafter, and within a month people said that he was a changed man.

Suspended like a necklace upon a silver chain is Abanar's warm, blood-soaked human heart, apparently quite fresh. Wearing the heart, a magician may absorb one point of Resolve from it each hour to replenish expended Essence. The Heart loses one Resolve for every one gained by the owner, and then absorbs Essence from the surrounding area at the usual rate to replenish its own Resolve.

The Heart is Sentient, however, and does not allow its own Resolve to drop below 5. Moreover, if the mortal owner uses it only sparingly—never absorbing more than a couple of points from it—then the Heart may cease to work reliably, hoping to persuade the magician to pass it on to another



less careful sorcerer. The Heart's hope, of course, is that mortal owners will recklessly absorb vast quantities of Essence from it, thus allowing it to take control of them. For the Heart is Abanar; its personality is his. This is his method of gaining immortality, and the apprentice who "found" the ritual to create the talisman was merely the first in a long line of its dupes and victims.

THE WOLF' S-HEART MEDICINE BAG (Resolve 18).

Created in a month-long ritual by a North American native sorcerer, this talisman contains the dried remains of a wolf's heart wrapped in the skin of a murdered Stalker's Vessel. Suspended from a leather thong and decorated with the bones of the tribe's braves, it is a charm against the powers of the Stalkers.

Any mortal wearing or carrying this Medicine Bag is immune to the effects of any Stalker's Discipline. Dominate and Terrify have no effect, and the mortal can choose to shut out a Stalker's attempts to Delve or Whisper into his





mind, and can refuse to let a Stalker Translocate with him.

Unfortunately the Bag is Sentient, and is far from friendly. The wolf's heart gives the bag a predatory personality, while the Stalker's skin allows it to Whisper. The bag also plots to bring about the downfall of its owners. Because of its magics, the bag attracts wolves and other large predators (who may pose a threat to the bearer), and repulses smaller creatures (who see the bearer as a wolf-like predator). It can also sense the presence of Stalkers and other Unseen creatures, and other Sentient enchantments, and Whispers to them, spreading lies about its owner—which it thinks might turn the creature or enchantment against its bearer.

THE BLACK CAGE (Resolve 50).

The Black Cage is a mass of iron bars from prison cells and wooden beams which were once gallows poles. It measures twenty feet across each side and is, roughly, square—in an asymmetrical sort of way. None of its sides are entirely straight, and none of its corners are right angles. Sensitive characters may notice (Easy Perceive Challenge) that the whole structure is covered in a thin mucus membrane which moves slowly around the bars and beams.

The cage was created in nineteenth century Boston by a group of Secret Masters, in an elaborate ceremony involving the potent sacrifice of an Unbidden which had been cursed with mortality. Three of the Masters involved died during the ritual, and the remainder lost their minds or souls or both. None ever reported back to their superiors and they were thought to have gone rogue.

The Secret Masters spent decades trying to track down these renegades, but they never found out where the cage had gone. In fact, five of the sorcerers who survived the ritual to create the cage became its loyal servants, and moved it around the United States for decades, hiding it in disused mines and warehouses.

The Cage was intended to trap and destroy Stalkers, but it proved more powerful and more self-willed than its creators had anticipated. The Cage's main power is to sap Vitality. Any being in the cage loses one point of Vitality per hour. For every Vitality absorbed by the cage, its Resolve rises by one (though the total may never exceed 50). And when the victim finally dies, the cage also absorbs their memories and

knowledge, giving it several Focus Skills rated around 10 and a broad understanding of the Dream and its victims' lives.

It may also imbue its occupants with Vitality, losing one Resolve for each point granted to a mortal. This allows the cage to heal its servants, or to bolster their Vitality, or simply to counter the ill effects of their advancing age. By the twentieth century, many of its slavish servants are well over 100 years old, but although they look aged they are still hale and hearty.

The enchantment may also create and animate a mortal-looking "thrall" from various debris. It may control one thrall at a time (similar to the way an Unbidden uses the Puppeteer power to control Minions), or it may choose to take control of any of its five servants by the same means. The false-corpses (thralls) created by the Cage may resemble any of the people or creatures from which it has drained Vitality. However, each of its creations is weak, with only 1 Fortitude and 1 Vitality, and the cage loses 1 Resolve each time a thrall is made.

The cage is almost impossible to damage (Fortitude 35), and has only one doorway. The door has a chunky lock, but no key hole. The Cage just locks and unlocks itself as it desires. The enchantment may also Conjure and Disintegrate small objects (losing one Resolve for each), and Whisper to any Sensitive character or creature of the Unseen within 100 yards. Stalkers' Disciplines do not work against the Cage, and they cannot use Dissipate, Translocate or similar means to enter or leave it.

Over the years the enchantment develops its own firm aims. Ultimately it aims to find some way to increase its own power (Resolve), in the hopes that it will then be able to create autonomous human servants. Then, it aims to establish itself as the leader of the Dream's magicians, so that it may lead them in wresting control of the Dream from the Aesthetics. The plan is insanely ambitious, and also potentially very dangerous. The Dream is too great for the cage to comprehend or maintain, and magicians' attempts to control it would simply cause it to slowly fragment into a myriad of Enigmas.

The Cage is, itself, the center of an Enigma, simply because of its sheer power. Throughout the Corrupted area, the world seems dark and bleak, filled with echoes and words long since spoken, and people Corrupted by it seem forgetful and cruel.





CHAPTER SIX: MAGICIANS

Mortal magicians are fairly rare. Though there are many hedge-magicians, no more than twenty or thirty accomplished or notable Enlightened magicians are active in the Dream at any given moment, and most of those do not merit the attentions of Stalkers. Truly remarkable enchanted artifacts are similarly uncommon.

For this reason, several of the magicians detailed in this chapter are involved with one and other, and artifacts are listed as being possessed by more than one magician as they pass from one owner to another through the years. The Dream is a vast place, but mortal magicians and artifacts, being rarer, can reappear repeatedly to give a sense of continuity and coherence to Whispering Vault campaigns.

For example, the Stalkers might first meet Ida Hels as an incidental character early in her career, and then again as a major protagonist two hundred years later. Or they might come across the True Mirror when it belongs to Jean De Bois-Couteau, and then again in the twentieth century if they cross paths with Tzusiki Ikiro.

Because time is non-linear outside the Dream and Stalkers have the ability to travel throughout the Chronosphere, continuity can also be established in REVERSE. (e.g. Stalkers, arriving in any part of the Dream, might hear of a magician long after his death, and then later they may actually meet the

mortal during a subsequent Hunt which takes place before that magician died.)

It isn't necessary to slavishly follow this book's dictates when creating this kind of continuity. For example: If the Stalkers destroy the True Mirror when they meet Bois-Couteau, then that just means that Tzusiki won't own it in his era, regardless of what this book says: that isn't a problem.

Jean De Bois-Couteau.

For titude 4
 Vitality 12
 Initiative 13
 Defend 15
 Per ceive 16
 Resolve 14
 Attack 14
 Str ength 3
 Occultism 15

Combat: Usually car r ies a flintlock musket (7D Damage), and a pair of wheel-lock pistols (5D Damage, one always kept loaded), any of which can fir e silver bullets. He also always car r ies his enchanted knife. De Bois-Couteau takes a boar - spear and swor d (4D Damage each) when he hunts.





Jean De Bois-Couteau is a nobleman in 18th century France, a man with a passion for hunting. (He is so obsessed, in fact, that he should be considered to be Driven.) For want of anything better to do, he usually contents himself with hunting down wolves—the most dangerous prey he can normally find in Europe. But he would much rather pursue more unusual creatures. Ever since his Awakening, when he first encountered the Unseen, he has sought them out and hunted them down at every opportunity.

Bois-Couteau isn't interested in whether or not his hunts are justified. If pressed, he can toss in some platitudes about it being in Man's nature to hunt, or about the Church teaching that it isn't a "sin" to kill non-humans. But really he doesn't care. He loves the hunt. The rush of adrenaline, the constant danger of death, the exhilaration of the kill; he lives for all that. And the bigger the prey, the better he likes it.

But of course, he doesn't want his Hunts to be fair fights. He wants to win, he wants to hold all the aces. And so the nobleman has squandered his family fortune on occult research, mastering rituals and chasing down rumors of the Unseen. He is an accomplished magician, and having learned when to hunt and when to flee, he is more or less, Enlightened. The nobleman doesn't care about the Stalker's role as guardian of the Dream; he doesn't care how vile the Unbidden can be; he'll hunt any of them down. De Bois-Couteau can be both a valuable ally to a Circle of Stalkers (if they can hide their natures from him) or a deadly adversary (if he realizes what they are and feels that he can get the upper hand or catch them off guard).

The Sire De Bois-Couteau lives on his run down estate in the wooded hills of France, in a once magnificent chateau. But the only valuables still remaining in the castle are the hunter's magic trinkets, his collection of occult books, and his kennel of wolfhounds from which he selects the dogs for his hunting pack (twelve Loyal Guardians formed from wolfhound skins).

In the early 19th century, an aging De Bois-Couteau became friendly with a young Swedish explorer by the name of Gustaff Malm. (Malm went on to infamy as one of the most notorious Shadow hunters and founder of *The Brotherhood*—see *Enlightened Organizations*). Seeing promise in this young hunter, the magician taught him the enchantment for making shadow-slaying bullets. Malm was with De Bois-Couteau at the time of the magician's tragic death and only he knows the full tale.

ENCHANTMENTS.

Bois-Couteau knows the secret of the creation of his TRUE MIRROR and SILVER BULLETS, plus the enchantments THE SINGLE ORACLE, THE LOYAL GUARDIAN, and STRIPPING AWAY THE VEIL

Also owns a supply of SILVER BULLETS, an EXORCIST'S BLADE (a dagger, inflicting 3D+14 Damage), and THE TRUE MIRROR. He is accompanied by twelve (non Sentient) LOYAL GUARDIANS (Fortitude 4, 3D Damage).





Francesca Duran.

Fortitude 3
Vitality 5
Initiative 8
Defend 11
Perceive 14
Resolve 16
Attack 8
Strength 1
Occultism 12

Combat: Duran carries a light revolver wherever she goes (6D Damage), but she hasn't the stomach to kill anyone and only panic would push her into using it.

Francesca Duran is a plain, unremarkable-looking Hispanic woman in her early thirties, just another office worker with no prospects, no education, and nothing better to do in the evenings that watch glitzy soap operas and dream of a better life. But she is a self-taught sorceress, Awakened by her constant experimentation.

Through persistence and luck she sifted through a mass of cheap "occult" paperbacks and pamphlets to work out enough real magic to reform the Dream as she desired it. Doomed to a life of tedious drudgery as an insignificant cog in the daily grind, and presumably one day, becoming someone's bored wife, she yearned for the rich and glamorous lifestyle that she saw on TV.

Her first magics sought to create her "ideal man", or a dream-home for herself, but all that she managed to do was to rip a few Enigmas in the Dream and create a few less-than-perfect lovers—mostly brutal or caddish. At last she managed to create both Joe Moore and his firm, Moore, Inc., and was able to convince Moore that his continued existence was dependent on her—she has married the man.

Duran is now obscenely rich, but still she is not entirely satisfied. She never has enough. She always wants something extra. This unquenchable wanting infected the Enigma that she had created while forming Moore and his firm; it now infects all of the town's mortals.

So, she was almost pleased to discover that she is in danger; fending off the threats gives her something to do besides spend, consume and want more. She has discovered that many of the "dream men" whom she created are still "alive" and (because they are just as greedy as she is, and usually much nastier) they are keen to get their hands on her new found wealth: extortion, burglary, fraud and murder are just some of their plots. And, more dangerously, Joe Moore is coming to realize that he would still exist if his wife were to die.

Duran is therefore desperately trying to research or invent enchantments or find supernatural allies to protect her, and is discovering a new and unexpected emotion—constant fear. She is just an unimaginative young woman, who chased the dream that the media fed her, and now she is beginning to wish that she hadn't bothered.





She is basically a frivolous, light-hearted person, not at all cut out for dealing with the dangers that she has created.

ENCHANTMENTS.

Duran's success was more by luck than judgment. The only real magics that she knows are THE SALT RITUAL and several PETTY CURSES.

Finderius the Chaldean (referred by many as Finderius the Just to his face and Finderius the Butcher behind his back), is a broad shouldered man with a mop of black hair, long feminine fingers and uneven yellow teeth, and with bloody sockets where his eyes once were. Finderius has torn out his own eyes, claiming that through them he saw only lies. This does not seem to hamper him, since he can still "see" as well as any sighted person, even in pitch dark. Now that he is blind, he says, the world is clear to him.

Finderius the Just.

Fortitude 3
 Vitality 10
 Initiative 14
 Defend 13
 Perceive 14
 Resolve 14
 Attack 13
 Strength 2
 Occultism 16

Combat: Finderius carries an enchanted (Resolve 5) knife which inflicts double normal Damage (3D, doubled).





Finderius roves the Mediterranean in the first century AD, seeking out the “impure” and “degenerate” in order to cleanse the world of their depravities. He maintains a small house at his birthplace on the east edge of the Aegean, and travels the Roman world upon the boats of various merchants and sea-captains whom he calls friends. They just call him “sir” since they know that his victims just vanish, and that nothing is ever proved against him; they dread his arrival and never dare ask him to pay for his passage on their boats.

It is unclear exactly what “impure” means in Finderius’ terms. He kills many beggars and lepers, prostitutes and peddlers, charlatan fortune tellers and tavern keepers; many of whose only apparent crimes are poverty and want. He also brutally hunts down murderers and rapists, cruelly torturing them to death without ever thinking that his crimes are far worse than most of theirs. And increasingly as he gets older, Finderius begins to target other sorcerers—particularly those who work with Stalkers or against the Unbidden. As the self-styled vigilante works more and more magics, various creatures of the Unseen gain influence over him, manipulating him to eradicate their foes.

He says that he can “see” impurity, like a stain, and that his mission in life is to cleanse the world of this taint. Finderius is Driven on his random mission, convinced of his righteousness. To pursue his crusade is all that he desires... Well, nearly all. He sometimes has a nagging doubt that he should be somewhere else, that there is someone waiting for him... But he can never remember where or with whom he should be.

ENCHANTMENTS.

Finderius specializes in magics dealing directly with the Flesh, his enchantments including WORDS OF WASTING, TIME’S CURSE, several AMPUTATIONS and THE FINAL SACRIFICE, and he has created FINDERIUS’ BODYGUARD.

Also owns a SOLOMON RING, and his knife.

Ida Hels.

Fortitude 3
Vitality 10
Initiative 12
Defend 13
Perceive 15
Resolve 17
Attack 11
Strength 2
Occultism 19

Combat: Ida always carries a weapon appropriate to the period—a flintlock pistol and dagger at first, and then later a heavy revolver.





Ida Hels was born in eighteenth century Kiel (in northern Germany), where she married a successful merchant named Albrecht, who wanted an heir. The years passed, and as no heir was born the merchant became bitter, cursing and beating his young wife. It was at this time that Ida found the old book, hidden away in a chest full of junk that her husband had bought. Realizing that the book told of dark magics, she looked first for some charm to give the man a son. What she found was Time's Curse—a far more reliable method of ending her beatings and humiliations.

Studying the book, Ida eventually learned to channel Essence, and managed to curse her hus-

band. In 1754 Albrecht Hels was driven from the city as a leper, never to be seen again. Ida was intoxicated by the power she had found. All her life she had been told to be humble and submissive, to obey men. She had never considered standing up to them. But now she had power that few men could match, and by the 1780s she had established a coven of sorcerers and hedge magicians with which she terrorized and controlled Kiel.

In 1786, Ida concocted the Rite of Youth, and from then on saw no limit to her powers. She traveled the world, establishing a new identity for herself every decade or two, and setting up a coven to follow her in each place. In the 1880s she ran "The Mortuary Club" in Berlin; in the 1930s she resurrected that coven in German East Africa; by the 1990s she had Emigrated to the English speaking world and established "The Cult of Isis" under the pseudonym of Aileen Hemmingsly.

Ida's sole desire is power. Deprived of it during her youth, it is now a drug to her. She loves the money and respect that it brings, but it is power itself that she craves.

Albrecht Hels died in the 1760s. But infected by his bitterness, the curse that plagued him became Sentient and long outlived him. The curse *knew* that Ida was its creator and thus responsible for its eternal suffering. So, every few years a beggar or





leper somewhere in the world takes the name *Albrecht Hels*, and starts looking for “beloved Ida”, seeking to repay her love in kind.

ENCHANTMENTS.

By the twentieth century, she has learned DENYING THE UNNATURAL POWERS, ECHOES THROUGH THE DREAM, THE SINGLE ORACLE, the secret of creating EXORCISTS’ BLADES (to Resolve 7), RELIVING THE PAST, THE MASTER’ S VOICE, BREATHING STONES, THE RITUAL OF WASHING AND BURNING (Arabic version), TIME’ S CURSE, various PETTY CURSES, HUGINN’ S WORDS, BEHOLDING THE INFINITE MIRROR, SPIRIT POTS, CLOTHING THE UNSEEN, THE RITE OF YOUTH, and several RITUALS OF AWAKENING.

She also owns a SOLOMON RING, a BREATHING STONE, a sphere of DENYING THE POWERS OF THE UNSEEN, FINDERIUS’ S BOOK OF AMPUTATIONS and DE BRACY’ S BRAND.



Kenwig of Hecham.

Fortitude 4
 Vitality 10
 Initiative 11
 Defend 13
 Perceive 14
 Resolve 13
 Attack 11
 Strength 2
 Occultism 7

Combat: He is unarmed, but prepared to improvise (his farm contains pitchforks, butcher s’ knives, and various other 3D Damage implements).





Kenwig of Hecham is a medieval peasant farmer, struggling to feed himself and his two small children on the meager proceeds of his over-taxed, small holding. His wife, Gyldan, died in child birth two years ago, and Kenwig, an unusually highly-strung individual, never really got over it.

Kenwig was having trouble bringing up the children on his own, and still missed his wife dreadfully. This was made worse, however, when he and another man dredged up an old bronze cauldron while they were reclaiming a stretch of marsh land. Kenwig kept the pot (good cooking pots being very expensive), but soon began to catch glimpses of Gyldan in the watery surface of the thin pottages and stews that he cooked. It was not long after, that he found he was talking to his wife's image in the water, and she seemed to respond to his words. He felt that she was trying to tell him how to get her back again.

Following the Cauldron's instructions, Kenwig has spent the last two years fashioning tools and occult implements, and experimenting with various minor magics. Now he is building a complex altar out in the woods, along with an effigy of a blind man which he has clumsily carved on the Cauldron's instructions. He believes that the sorcery will bring his wife back, and hasn't worked out why the Cauldron wants him to build an altar or fashion a special knife. The Cauldron is hoping that this time the ritual will work properly, and hopes that when Kenwig sacrifices his son, Finderius will be brought through time to the place.

Kenwig also doesn't know that ninety years ago a magician tried to conjure "the devil" on the same ground upon which the present altar has been erected. All manner of horrors had invaded the region from the Rift resulting in the magician being burned at the stake. Terrified peasants had cast all of his tools (including the Cauldron, which had directed him) into the nearby marsh.

ENCHANTMENTS.

THE SALT RITUAL and various PETTY CURSES.

Also owns ANOTHRECE' S CAULDRON.

Angelica " Astr id"
Lawrence.

Fortitude 2
Vitality 5
Initiative 8
Defend 11
Perceive 15
Resolve 11
Attack 8
Strength 1





Angelica is just dying to be someone special. She's bored with her small-town life, her small-minded family, and her "small" (six bedroom) middle-class home. So, at the age of 15, she has begun to experiment with "the occult", buying overpriced Aleister Crowley paperbacks from pretentious book stores. She has asked all her friends to call her *Astrid* (which she thinks sounds "pagan") rather than Angelica. She has dyed all her clothes black, and her hair, and in a fit of confident rebellion even shaved a bit off her hair at the sides (though not enough that anyone will notice). In the evenings she goes to "alternative" clubs with her friends, or sits and drinks beer with them in a local graveyard. She is especially excited to have found a tape of (fake) "Satanic Chants" in an occult book-shop, which she plays really loud (well, fairly loud) to annoy her parents.

Recently, Angelica has started sneaking out on Friday nights (despite, or because of, her parents forbidding her), going to meetings of a local occult group, "The Cult of Isis". Inspired by them, she has taken to drawing ritual circles on her bedroom floor (she stole the chalk from school, and still feels guilty about it), but she hasn't managed to summon anything, yet.

The "High Priestess" who runs the Cult of Isis has picked her out for "special tutoring." This woman is a sorcerer (Ida Hels, under the pseudonym of Aileen Hemmingsly) and has become aware that Angelica is naturally Sensitive. She has offered to teach the girl some "rare ancient rituals".

The High Priestess plans to use Angelica to perform the rituals on her behalf that she is unwilling

to risk casting herself; rituals that require direct contact with the Unseen or the loss of a great deal of Resolve. If Angelica can't be so easily manipulated, then she figures she can always use the young woman as a sacrifice in her Rite of Youth. In any case, if Angelica continues to play around with *summonings* in her bedroom, then she might come face to face with something even more murderous than Ida Hels.

ENCHANTMENTS.

Sever al hedge-magics, including danger ously incor rect Calling and Awakening rituals (which she thinks ar e " Demon" Summonings). No tr ue magics, yet.

Lin So.

For titude 4
Vitality 6
Initiative 11
Defend 12
Per ceive 14
Resolve 18
Attack 8
Str ength 1
Occultism 20





Living in China at the time of the Tang Empire (around the seventh century AD), Lin So is the greatest sorcerer of his time. He is a cold-hearted scholar who pursues arcane knowledge with a dispassionate fanaticism.

Lin So's success derives from his considerable personal talent and outstanding self-discipline. Everything in the sorcerer's life is done with meticulous care, and his whole existence has become one huge ritual. From the moment he awakes to the time he retires to bed at night, his routine is carefully rehearsed and never changes.

His home is fanatically neat and perfectly tidy, with not even the smallest ornament or utensil an inch out of place. His speech is slow, deliberate, and his every movement is carefully considered.

Lin So's mountain-top stronghold is a day's travel from the nearest settlement. It is not guarded, physically at least. He expects that most mortals will be put off venturing up to his peak by either the difficulty of the journey, or the region's reputation for being haunted. Should any be foolish enough to approach, they might well fall victim to the enchantments which prowl the area.

Magically, the area is protected by Lin So's Eternal Lock (which discourages Stalkers and such from entering the area) and his Silk Painting. The magician himself bars entry to his innermost chambers with his Gate of Five Locks, a Warding Stave, a sphere formed from Denying the Unnatural Powers, and a Chamber of the Four Winds. He also has a Seal of the Celestial Court branded onto his back and emblazoned upon the great chest in which he keeps his ritual equipment.

Prodigal enchantments roam the halls of his stronghold and the surrounding lands, unable to affect him; for Lin So is old (some say he has lived for more than 100 years) and he has had a long time to *make* enemies, including Marks of the Damned and such.

This master-magician believes that he owes no homage to any mortal, but would obediently serve the "powers of heaven". He would rather be left alone, but if Stalkers did approach and request his aid he would dutifully comply. He is merely mortal and they, he knows, serve higher powers. Nic Molench has always dreamed. In an age where

ENCHANTMENTS.

By the age of 100, Lin So knows dozens of enchantments, including THE SINGLE ORACLE, STRIPPING AWAY THE VEIL, THE MASTER' S VOICE, BREATHING STONES, THE DRAUGHT OF LIFE AND DEATH, REFORMING THE FLESH, TIME' S CURSE, THE MARK OF THE DAMNED, THE BLASTING ROD, CHAMBER OF THE FOUR WINDS, SEAL OF THE CELESTIAL COURT, WARDING STAVE, MAGICIAN' S BAG, THE PRIVATE PARADISE.

Also owns several MAGICIANS' BAGS and WARDING STAVES, a sphere of DENYING THE UNNATURAL POWERS, a BLASTING ROD, THE GATE OF FIVE LOCKS, LIN SO' S MARVELOUS SILK PAINTING, and LIN SO' S ETERNAL LOCK.





NIC MOLENCH.

For titude 2
Vitality 4
Initiative 9
Defend 10
Per ceive 14
Resolve 14
Attack 9
Str ength 1
Occultism 5

most people buy dream-inducing drugs, he has let his imagination run free, and he has even experimented with “hobbies”. Everyone told him that this was a dumb idea. They told him to take the drugs, to watch more hologram-movies, to start up a couple of small businesses to keep himself happy. But he just went ahead and used his mind anyway.

No wonder he got bored. No wonder he got sick of the movies and the holo-games. He looked out of his bedroom window, 200 feet below sea-level in the Disney Memorial Floating City off the coast of Indonesia, and wondered if the sea looked different when it still had fish in it.

Often unemployed, he has plenty of time. He began to wonder what the past had been like. The city government (who thought that psychological disorders like *Historical Interest* were a thing of the past) considered certifying him as insane. He began to sift through old public access information and data stores, looking for any hints about what the earth had been like. But his most intriguing discovery was an old computer program from a long since defunct software firm: AO-DOS.

Molench’s AO-DOS has had time to become Sentient, and it has become his tutor. The fact that this man is one of the earth’s few remaining Sensitives, it sees the value in teaching him sorcery, in the hopes of manipulating him for its own ends. Nic is really only interested in using magic to delve back into the past, or to view alternative presents, which he does by using his computer to perform “virtual” rituals and the VDU screens to display the revealed images. The AO-DOS, however, is certain that it can persuade him to perform other magics, though.



ENCHANTMENTS.

updated
“Infor mation Age”
ver sions of ECHOES
THROUGH THE
DREAM (he calls it a
“data retrieval
system”), THE SINGLE
ORACLE, and
RELIVING THE PAST
(which he “casts”
upon a hologr am-
r ecor der which is
slowly building up
Essence and
becoming Sentient
and recor ds the
r esults to watch
them later).He also
owns a Sentient
ver sion of AO-DOS.





Mur u.

For titude 2
Vitality 5
Initiative 9
Defend 12
Per ceive 17
Resolve 16
Attack 9
Str ength 1
Occul tism 10

A thin, graying man, often clad in nothing but the blood of sacrificed cattle, Muru is an Akan sorcerer and priest, not Enlightened but certainly Awakened, who lives in west Africa in the sixteenth century. He acts as diviner to his chieftain, and though he has limited sorcerous power he is an able and influential politician.

Through rigging his fortune telling he can manipulate many who come to him for advice, and because of his wisdom and the accuracy of his forecasts he is always listened to at the meetings of the Elders.



beyond his actual powers. He is aware of the dangers of the magics with which he proposes to experiment, but believes that the risks are necessary. His reasoning is based upon the preceding decades, which have brought the Portuguese, and though trade is enriching the Akan Muru does not like the futures that he foresees.

In the long run, Muru knows that the only way to keep the Akan safe from the oppressions that the whites will bring is to limit or prevent their settling in Africa. And so he hatches desperate plots, not only speaking out and conspiring against the increasing contacts with the Portuguese, but also planning to weave some great magic to annihilate the newcomers or to render the Akan's lands inaccessible to them. If successful such magic could transport the Akan to a Shadowland; if unsuccessful a wild Prodigal enchantment and a crass Enigma might be created.

ENCHANTMENTS.

THE WARDING STAVE, THE SINGLE ORACLE (by sacr ifice), var ious PETTY CURSES and FERTILITY CHARMS, THE RITUAL OF WASHING AND BURNING (a ver sion requir ing animal sacr ifice), THE LOYAL GUARDIAN, and sever al CALLS.

Also owns an INSECT RATTLE.

Muru has magical ambitions, however, which go





Volante Di Pietro.

Fortitude 3
 Vitality 11
 Initiative 14
 Defend 15
 Perceive 16
 Resolve 14
 Attack 16
 Strength 4
 Occultism 13

Combat: carries two heavy
 revolvers (7D). The Wander
 Spider's bite inflicts 8D
 Damage, taking affect
 gradually over two hours.



Volante Di Pietro wanted a part of the family business. Unfortunately, her family's syndicate was firmly male dominated, and women were only accepted as wives, mistresses, or tools. Denied legitimate access to the family's power, she looked for her own way to gain influence.

She toyed with a few of the family's familiar tactics—some murders, a little blackmail—and found new and unusual allies; but soon she fled the city with half of the family's Capos baying for her blood. Her own father ordered her murdered. And so she turned to the only allies that she knew the Mafia had no power over—a group calling themselves the Secret Masters.

In return for her (not inconsiderable) skills and

powers, she asked the Masters for a new face, and a new life. They took her under their wing. She learned a little magic from them, but only a very little, and soon realized that they too sought only to use her for their own ends by tempting her with mere tokens of power. And so, with a stack of their oldest books in the trunk of her four wheel drive she disappeared into the hinterland of Canada to study on her own. Today, Di Pietro has a new, androgynous appear-





ance. She has Grafted on powerful arms in the place of her weak limbs, the teeth and venom sacks of a Wandering Spider in her left palm, and a wolf's eye in her left eye-socket (usually covered by a patch). She also has two Living Tattoos (a cobra coiled around her torso and a scorpion on her right forearm) and an arsenal of enchanted weaponry.

She has very many enemies (the Mafia and the Secret Masters both have considerable influence), and her own brother still hunts for her. But through magical and martial training she has learned to defend herself, and she has also found a valuable patron: Tzusiki Ikiro (q.v.). She works as a "freelance" troubleshooter (assassin, investigator, enforcer), but predominantly for Tzusiki, and she hopes that as his ally she will one day wield consid-

erable power. She does not intend to let any creature—of Flesh or Essence—frustrate her ambition.

VIKTOR STANOV.

For titude 4
Vitality 10
Initiative 12
Defend 14
Per ceive 14
Resolve 15
Attack 12
Str ength 3
Occultism 14

Combat: Usually unarm ed, he can get hold of any common fir ear ms at a few hour s notice.

ENCHANTMENTS.

WORDS OF WASTING, DRAUGHT OF LIFE AND DEATH, CURSE OF INSATIABLE HUNGER, LIVING GRAFT, DARK TATTOO, THE MARK OF THE DAMNED, THE IMMORTAL' S POISON, HONORIUS' S WARD AGAINST LESSER FIENDS, THE MAGICIAN' S BAG

She also owns a BLASTING ROD, a laptop computer r unning AO-DOS, six bullets of DOCTOR BALE' S FATAL HEALING (r eady in one revolver at all times), a MAGICIAN' S BAG (her briefcase), a SOLOMON RING, a SERPENT ORACLE, two DARK TATTOOS and four LIVING GRAFTS.

At first Stanov wanted to be a priest, to save souls and to praise the world's creator. But at the age of eighteen he joined a group of clergy ministering to the poor of one of the nineteenth century's hellish inner cities. Having spent his life pampered by well-off middle class parents, Stanov was horrified by what he saw around him. He became devoted to raising money and distributing alms, soon forgetting the irrelevantly metaphysical questions of saving souls and coming to concentrate on relieving the suffering he found immediately around him. He fell out with the other clergy, and





left their group, after which his methods only became more extreme.

He began to organize the people into “self-help” groups, intimidating exploitative landlords and forming trade unions, demonstrating and rioting in the streets. It was at the age of twenty that he was Awakened, and soon after that he stumbled across one of the True Books of Honorius and began to experiment with magic. By and large his magic is typical 19th century *diabolism* which deals primarily with *spirits* and divinations, but his studies have recently become more diverse.

Now in his thirties, Stanov uses his wits, his brawn and his magic to fight for the down-trodden and dispossessed. He will oppose any brutal exploiter whom he might find; from greedy factory owners to Unbidden. Although naturally an ally of any Circle of Stalkers, he would oppose any blood-thirsty Circle just as he would fight any other arrogant group of outsiders who terrorized the city people.

Recently, however, Stanov has found a new *mentor*. This man (actually an Unbidden) came to



the young sorcerer after he had completed a tiring ritual, and offered to share his secrets with the mortal, and to reinvigorate him: pouring three points of Essence into, the Unbidden gained some small control over his actions. It offered him further aid, and even hinted that it might teach him further magic. Since then he has felt a new sense of purpose, and has begun to have “prophetic” dreams.

And so Stanov, though usually opposing the darker powers of the Unseen, is being influenced by and tricked into serving an Unbidden.

ENCHANTMENTS.

THE BLASTING ROD,
THE SALT RITUAL,
THE SINGLE
ORACLE, and
several
AWAKENINGS and
CALLS.

Also owns a
BLASTING ROD and
a TRUE BOOK OF
HONORIUS.





Tzusiki Ikir o.

For titude 3
Vitality 8
Initiative 10
Defend 12
Per ceive 14
Resolve 14
Attack 11
Str ength 2
Occul tism 12

Combat: Owns an enchanted Katana, but does not usually carry it.

Mr. Tzusiki's business empire started in Japan, but soon shifted its headquarters to the US. It made no sense to his fellows. Japan was the dynamic, up-and-coming nation; it was where the money was. America was just a slowly dying superpower. Tzusiki knew that. But he also knew that America was still the center of political power and diplomacy. He had money. Now he wanted something more.

He tried to play the game the Americans' way. He adopted American habits. He exploited American politicians. He even bought a ranch in Texas. But the nation's politicians and established businessmen still treated him as an outsider, still denied him the power and influence that he sought.

So, Tzusiki Ikir o returned to studies that he had long since abandoned; to old family lore which he had once thought a poor substitute for a career in business. He took up his childhood pursuit of magic, and used that to give himself the edge in his quest for money and for political pull.



Tzusiki does not see magic as anything special. To him, it is just another tool to be exploited. The practice of magic, to him, is just the pursuit of money and of power by alternative means. Instead of bribing politicians, he uses magic to blackmail or control them. If his rivals won't deal, he uses magic to remove them. If he is denied some profitable information, he uses magic to discover it.





His own magical talents are not so broad as this, but as a businessman he has learned the value of exploiting others' abilities for his own ends. And so he has recruited a network of other magicians to serve him (some more powerful than he, but lacking his organizational genius).

Tzusiki is behind most of the large-scale magical conspiracies in late twentieth century America.

ENCHANTMENTS.

THE WARDING STAVE, BARRING THE GATES OF THE REALM, BANISHING THE UNINTENDED, THE SINGLE ORACLE, BREATHING STONES, BEHOLDING THE INFINITE MIRROR.

Also owns a controlling share in ALPHA AND OMEGA SOFTWARE INC. (though he has been careful to keep clear of the AO and its software, and is not under its master's influence), owns THE HAUSSMAN MEMORIAL SLAUGHTERHOUSE, and has established the ALT.POWER FORU newsgroup. Also owns an EXORCIST'S BLADE (Katana, +10 Damage), THE TRUE MIRROR, a SOLOMON RING, a BREATHING STONE, and a sphere of DENYING THE UNNATURAL POWERS. His home and office are both protected by WARDING STAVES and BANISHING circles, while his home also contains a set of four SPIRIT LAMPS and LIN SO'S MARVELOUS SILK PAINTING.

The Nameless Mage.

For titude 3
Vitality 6
Initiative 10
Defend 11
Per ceive 8 (was 16)
Resolve 15 (was 17)
Attack 10
Str ength 1
Occult 12 (was 16)

Until recently, the Nameless Mage was a competent Enlightened sorceress, operating undiscovered and in secret to root out evidence of the Unbidden or of Enigmas. Her husband's death at the hands of an Unbidden drove her to make a stand against the creatures.

But recently she pushed herself too hard, and lost her soul. She no longer remembers who she is, or what she was trying to do; although she has a vague memory that she used to hunt down *unnatural things*, and she still recalls many of her rituals. She is vaguely aware of the politics and customs of the two Kingdoms of Egypt, and knows that somewhere here she has a home. She also has an inkling that she has a husband.

For the present she just wanders the streets of Egypt's towns and cities subsisting on charity, blindly hoping that she will find herself—or that her self will stumble across her. At night she sleeps out in the desert amongst the tombs of the dead.





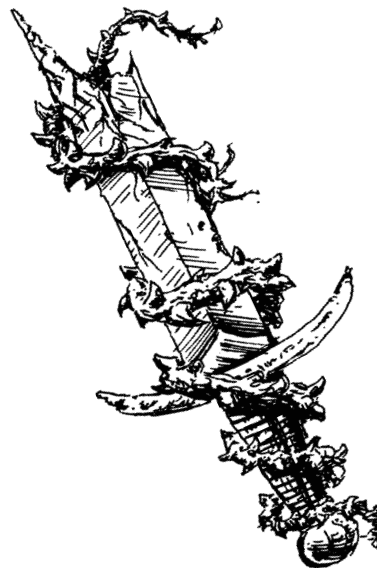
If asked for her name, she simply retorts: *What's your name?* She then asserts that that is her name, too. Questions of preference or taste (like: *What would you like...? What do you want...?*) she answers in the same way (*Well, what do YOU like...? What do YOU want...?*).



Uncertain who she is or what she should be doing, the Nameless Mage could easily be manipulated by unscrupulous mortals, by Stalkers or devious Shadows, or by Architects. All she wants to know is who she is and what she should be doing. Anyone who can give her a plausible identity and purpose can easily win her loyalty. For now she just copies the behavior of those around her, constructing an identity by mimicking whoever she meets.

ENCHANTMENTS.

She r emember s sever al of her r ituals, casting each using Words of Power that r educe the Essence r equir ed by 1 point per enchantment. These include WORDS OF WASTING, SPIRIT POTS, and sever al CALLS and AWAKENINGS. She also owns a BREATHING STONE and a BLASTING ROD.





Adventure Hooks.

And plot ideas.



For those times when a GM is stuck for an idea for a Hunt, the following list of plot hooks and possible stories should provide some inspiration.

THE WIDOWER' S PLEA.

A divorced man, pining for his ex-wife, creates an enchantment version of her through the Widower's Plea. The enchantment becomes Sentient, and strikes a deal with an Unbidden or magician, manipulating the man (*If you love me you'll do this for me...*) to serve them. Unfortunately, the man's ex-wife returns to the area, and the enchantment—in order to protect itself from the possibility of the woman contacting the man again—murders her.

The ex-wife's dying prayer (*Oh dear God, help me! She's me! This isn't possible! Noooo....!*) is heard by one of the Stalkers. Responding to the Call, the Circle find the corpse, and the only witnesses describe the woman herself fleeing from the scene. The Stalkers must solve the conundrum, and Mend the Enigma. They must deal with the wretched man (whose only defensive action is to grovel around the Focus of the Enigma pleading, *Don't take her away from me again, I love her, I love her!* etc.), and more importantly with the enchantment itself and its allies.





THE DRAUGHT OF LIFE AND DEATH.

An unorthodox doctor has established a private clinic, where for extortionate sums of money the wealthy may take her *miracle drug* to cure their incurable illness (e.g. cancer, or Aids). And the miracle does actually work. The doctor claims that the drug is a rare herb from the Amazon, but in fact she is a sorcerer, using Draughts of Life and Death.

With some of the vast proceeds, the doctor maintains a squalid hospice for the terminally ill and appallingly poor—people who no one cares about, who will die anyway. The *treatment room* in the clinic is immediately above the hospice's main ward. So, the doctor can feed the Draught to a dying pauper and the soon-to-be-cured patient without either of them seeing the other or being aware of their connection. So the poor die, the rich recover, and the doctor becomes very wealthy (and is praised for her *charity* to the poor). However, the daily casting of magics in the clinic and hospice causes a build-up of loose Essence, which creates an Enigma where comfort and pain, luxury and squalor are all exaggerated.

The Enigma attracts Shadows (e.g. a Phantasm), and both the Unseen and the Enigma itself are noted by a Sensitive patient who Calls the Stalkers.

The Stalkers must work out what is going on, find the Focus of the Enigma (probably the laboratory where the draught is made), and decide what to do with the doctor. She could be as tough or as weak an opponent as the GM wishes, perhaps

having enlisted the aid of several Shadows as guards.

THE FINAL SACRIFICE.

The Stalkers receive (and respond to) a sorcerer's Call, only to discover that the Call told of a non-existent Enigma and was simply a trap. The sorcerer has assembled a group of guards (e.g. hi-tech mercenaries with big lasers, or Behemoths) which are powerful enough to exterminate the Stalkers. The Circle will have to flee.



In fact, the sorcerer believes the Circle to be demons, and he is trying to kill them for some mythical stone which he believes that they have in





place of hearts, thinking that this stone will give him some great power. The sorcerer has been misled by the lies of an enchantment formed by a Final Sacrifice. The enchantment wants to destroy the Stalkers and has tricked the sorcerer into helping it. The Circle have the rest of the night to work out what is going on, evade the sorcerer's army, negotiate with or destroy him, and then deal with the enchantment.

The enchantment itself seeks vengeance on the Circle for the murder of the son of the magician who made the Sacrifice. They don't remember killing him, and the enchantment isn't interested in giving them full details. In fact, though the Circle killed the man a century before in Time, they have not yet experienced those events. Remember: The Stalkers ordinarily exist outside of time and this is just the sort of weird complication which can arise from this.

All that the GM need do is to subsequently run another Hunt, set about a century before this, in which the Stalkers (perhaps inadvertently) kill a young man and find on his body or around his possessions some clue (e.g. a photo, or family coat of arms) of his father's identity. For an added surreal twist, the sorcerer might already have made the Sacrifice before his son's death, having foreseen that the Stalkers would inevitably kill him.

THE GREAT PORTAL.

The Stalkers are Called to an era of brutal dictatorship (e.g. Pol Pot's Cambodia, Communist Albania, Pinochet's Chile, Cromwell's England) by the ritual of an Enlightened magician. The sorcerer has discovered a group of strange mortals (having

been collected in a mental hospital, or sheltered by a priest) who seem rather out of place; they claim to come from a time several hundred years before. If this were set in Tsarist Russia, the magician might be Viktor Stanov.

The Stalkers discover that each of the individuals is the Focus of a minor Enigma, and must be killed to Mend these. (Stanov would not be impressed, but there seems no alternative.) From their testimonies, however, it is clear that they are not responsible. They were cast through some sort of gate (a GreatPortal) in their own time, by a man who considered them impure or criminal, and believed that by casting them through the gate he was consigning them to Hell. From what they say it also seems that a significant Enigma exists around the gate in their own time.





There is no easy way back to these peoples' era. One of the Circle might try an Inspiration using Translocate (to move in time, but not in space). Or they might call a Navigator; though it would not be easy to persuade it to move them around within the Dream—this is an unusual request and very difficult for it. The hard part of the Hunt should be dealing with the past magician and his henchmen, and Mending the Enigma around the Portal.

JEAN DE BOIS-COUTEAU.

The Sire De Bois-Couteau's eager killings have Awakened a Hangman within his own home. In dress and attitude the Hangman is the exact reflection of the zealous hunter; delighting in murder and dedicated to pursuing its prey. The creature is also a parody of him, feigning gentility and learning. GMs might also use this to reflect upon the nature and role of the Stalkers, contrasting their Hunts with those of the magician and the Shadow. The Hangman's prey, naturally, is the greatest beast in all of France: Jean De Bois-Couteau.

The two hunters, mortal and Shadow, stalk each other around De Bois-Couteau's estates, terrifying and sometimes inadvertently killing the peasants. Desperate for help—believing the Hangman to be a *devil*—the peasants' prayers reach the Stalkers, who should wish to investigate the Call.

Destroying or Banishing the Hangman does not solve the problem. It is re-Awakened within minutes. An Enigma has formed in De Bois-Couteau's study, where all of his trophies and enchantments are stored (the mirror, the silver bullets, etc.), formed by his bloody imagination

and the concentrations of Essence. The manor's Corrupted servants, have become quite murderous, attacking strangers (e.g. Stalkers) on sight, and seeing the Hangman and mortal both as their same master. Blood forms like dew all around, and everyone in the Corrupted area seems to wear mourning clothes.

In the mortal's study, the focus of the Enigma is an as of yet empty wall-mounting, hanging amongst the other trophies. The Shadow has put this up, with a plaque underneath reading "The head of the most foul predator, Jean De B-C." The Hangman does not want the Enigma Mended until it has killed Bois-Couteau and mounted his head on this plaque, since it can keep coming back for him as long as the Enigma remains. Once it has killed Bois-Couteau it doesn't care what happens to the Enigma.

THE RITE OF YOUTH.

The Circle is Called by a sorcerer who has discovered a ritualized killing, and suspects that an Unbidden is involved. The situation in which the murder occurred suggests that the killer must have had some supernatural power.

In reality, the murderer is a magician, and the killing was performed for the Rite of Youth. The magician who Called the Stalkers knows this full well, and also knows who the killer is, but won't admit this. By Calling in the Stalkers the Suppliant hopes to have this rival eliminated.

The Stalkers, however, find no evidence of an Enigma (none exists) and are under no obligation to punish the killer. The Stalkers may simply leave





the Flesh without taking any action, or might decide to punish the murderous sorcerer, or might discover that they are being manipulated and punish the Supplicant.

Ida Hels and Volante Di Pietro might be the mortal protagonists in this story, with Di Pietro conspiring against the elder magician in order to take over her "Cult" or salvage her artifacts after her death.

THE DEVIL' S FIDDLE.

The Stalkers are called by the prayers of a desperate congregation, sheltering in a church or mosque in the Balkans during the middle ages. All around them the dead are climbing from their graves, ravaging the area, and killing any mortals whom they find—who then rise again to join the march of the dead. When the Stalkers arrive the congregation has been besieged for several days. Avoiding or fighting the hordes of the dead, the Stalkers must seek out the source of the infestation.

The Stalkers happen across an hysterical old man barricaded into his home. The man had been sold a viol (the Devil's Fiddle), by a peddler who claimed that if he played it would call back the spirit of his dead friends. The lonely old man had experimented with the viol, but instead of his kind friends' spirits returning, he was approached by a horde of rotting corpses. Shocked, he dropped the viol, and one of the bodies picked it up and began to play....

The Viol has directed the dead to prepare a ritual to free the Unbidden bound within the enchanted instrument. The Stalkers must wrestle the Viol

from the corpse which holds it (always well guarded by a throng of dead guards), or at least stop the ritual. There may be too many dead for the Circle to defeat without great danger, but local mortals (e.g. a nearby castle, etc.) may be persuaded to provide the necessary muscle.



The peddler may then be hunted down, or he might have escaped to return in another Hunt. He may be sorcerer who is conspiring to free the Unbidden, and tricked the old man into playing the viol while he has retreated to a safe distance, far from the returning, hungry Beast, or he may just be merely the servant of a greater mortal or creature.





Deep into that darkness
peer ing, long I stood there,
wonder ing, fear ing,
Doubting, dream ing dreams
no mor tal dared to dream
before e...

Raven, Edgar Allen Poe.





The Divine Spar k.

A Whisper ing Vault t Hunt.

Pressing back the hungry darkness, the soft glow of a single candle danced reflectively off the shaved pate of a holy-man. Weary with fatigue, the small man sat hunched over an ancient writing desk and surrounded by dozens of haphazardly stacked tomes and manuscripts. Each of the venerable works, written by long dead hands and priceless in their own right, held a precious kernel of truth.

Little did the holy-man know that the answers which he unwittingly sought, complete and unabridged, had remained elusive to even the greatest authors of all. Historians, scribes, and chroniclers alike had written what they thought to be facts; but as they created their rationales they also molded their lies; they buried bits of truth deep within legends and reshaped facts through their shallow mortal fears. Quite accidentally, the writers had protected the mundane from the bitterness of an unbelievable reality. In an act of quixotic simplicity they managed to conceal the secret fine strings attached to the flesh puppets known as man.

If Chief Inquisitor Fra Marco de Toledo actually knew of the secrets woven throughout those books he read, oblivion would surely have swept him away. Fortunately, this day, as it has always been, the Veil (or perhaps the eternal folly of man—ever the pompous contrarian in his reckless drive toward self-enlightenment) once again kept esoteric absoluteness safe for another time.

Silence lay heavy upon the room, save for the occasional crackle of a fragile vellum page as it is gingerly turned or the hiss and snap of burning fat from the candle's quivering flame. Fra Marco, near desperation, was searching for a clue, any clue that might shed the slightest light on what has been happening here in the abbey.





It was hard to believe a fortnight had past since he and a small army of fellow inquisitors, nobles, demonologists, and scribes arrived in Monte Verde. And it was still yet harder to believe that in an even shorter time-frame so many people had died—the wrong people. Naturally, Fra Marco did not count among the deaths those several unrepentant heretics who had met their fate with his holy blessing.

Rather, it was the demise of his people which terrified him so. Seven men, each a judge for the local hearings, were slain with a brutality that defied mortal comprehension. In fact, the bodies were so badly mutilated they were only identifiable through bits of clothing and personal effects. After the first death, four days ago, Fra Marco had taken every conceivable precaution to ensure the safety of those who served him. He doubled the guards, held an extra daily mass, and ordered everyone to spend additional time fasting and praying; but it has all been to no avail.

Originally, the inquisitor thought the murders to be acts of vengeance for certain condemned heretics or other mortal enemies of the church, but if that were so they would have been discovered. The abbey was so heavily guarded not even a rat could move without note. The mystery behind these acts has lead Fra Marco to the terrifying conclusion that the gruesome killings could only be the work of the supernatural; a demon or perhaps even the devil himself. These were wicked times after all...

Driven by current events, the holy-man has resigned himself to a life and death struggle with an as yet unseen and unnamed evil. Now the inquisitor, possessed by his own self-constructed inner-demons, labored constantly. By day, red-hot brands, sharp knives, and the many machinations of torture, twist, turn, crank, pull, and cut in a fervent attempt to purge the wickedness which infests the people of Monte Verde like a vile plague. While by night, Fra Marco surrounds himself with great piles of books, pouring through obscure writings; seeking for any way to save what is left of his court.

The painstaking detail of the illuminated letters melted together as Fra Marco's eyes blurred and stung from the strain. His failing vision was replaced by a heavy, comfortable darkness. With a sudden jerk of his head, the inquisitor leapt up, as he made a symbolic gesture and prayed for guidance.

Reaching for the cat-o-nine-tails, moist with drying blood, which lay in front of him. With a sharp flick of his wrist and a spiteful crack, the dozen or so leather thongs tore once again through the inquisitor's black cloth hassock, to bite into the well-scarred flesh on his back. A moan escaped the holy-man's lips. "Fool!" he shouted through teeth clenched in anger. "Sleep means death." But still, with the weight of his weariness and even pain no longer able to keep him awake, his head slowly sank, coming to rest on the desk.

Marco thought he dreamed when he heard the echo of approaching footsteps racing up the stairway and ending just outside the room. "Eminence! Fra Marco!!" The frantic voice of a young boy pleaded, as small fists ineffectually beat on the two-hundred year old oak door. With a sudden start, the inquisitor snapped himself out of a sleepy haze for the second time. "Eminence! Fra Marco! Come quick!" Marco now recognized the cries as those of his young acolyte. "Enter Pietro! Enter!" crackled the voice of the inquisitor, obviously by his tone, angry for being disturbed. Rising from his seat, he strode across the room to meet the distraught boy. The door opened cautiously as a boney youth of no more than twelve years, poked his head into the room.

At the sight of his master, the boy rushed the holy-man, quickly grabbing his master's sleeve as he dropped to his knees. "Fra Marco! Forgive me for disturbing you, but its down in the wine cellar! I saw it myself!!" A steely look of dispassion clouded over the inquisitor's face as he narrowed his dark eyes. Then, in one swift movement, an open hand was brought it down across the child's face. "Calm down!" seethed Fra Marco, displaying his contempt for the sniveling youth before him who had failed to control his fears with proper dignity. "Now, what is it you are trying to say?" The cruel holy-man made no attempt to hide his impatience. Pietro scuttled backwards like a wounded animal and after a moment, composed himself. Swallowing the terror in his voice he once again spoke. "Forgive me your eminence. I saw another man dead. It was lord Ruffo! Dead! All broken up like the rest!" The boy's composure crumbled. Tears rolled down his face, as mind-numbing shock from having witnessed the sheer brutality of this latest of murders gave way to a soul jerking awareness of the carnage he had seen.

Upon hearing Pietro's claim, Fra Marco turned his back on the boy; as hiss of air escaped from between his teeth, betraying the





pang of his own realizations. The inquisitor knew Lord Ruffo was perhaps the most able bodied man in the abbey; being both a pious man and deadly with the sword. The distraught holy-man thought: "If Ruffo has fallen to this devil, then it is a fact no man here will survive for long." His gaze shifted from each of the dark corners of the room as if searching for an unseen foe. A long despairing moment passed before the inquisitor finally chose to speak, his back still to the boy. He closed his eyes as he spoke in a soft tone, calmed by a certain resignation to his fate. "Take me to the body Pietro, so I may see how I am to die."

Introduction.

The Divine Spark is a hunt for the Whispering Vault that explores an obscure historical society known as the Benendanti and their troubles with the Inquisition. Groups such as the Benendanti, with their strange Christo-pagan beliefs and magical rituals, provide great source material for the Whispering Vault. This hunt shows how such a group can become embroiled in magic that is too dangerous for the Dream and provides a handy avenue to display the merits of magic in a Vault scenario.

As you may have noted, this hunt is rather long and contains a good amount of reference material. It is recommended that you read it in its entirety at least once before running it. The players have a certain amount of freedom, which means information crucial to the resolution can be found in a number of places. *The Divine Spark* is organized as follows:

1. First, there is historical information about the Inquisition and the Benendanti, supplemented by some notes on Benendanti magic use in the Whispering Vault.
2. This is followed by the Backstory, which explains the background events leading up to the hunt proper.
3. The hunt begins with the Stalkers near the town of Monte Verde. There is a description of the town and then some events that may occur there.
4. Soon enough, the Stalkers will head to the abbey itself. The abbey is described section by section, with notes on what you might find there at various times.

5. The descriptions lead up to a presentation of the corrupted area, a Shadowland, and strategies for mending the Enigma.

6. The hunt proper closes with more events scheduled to happen in the abbey as the hunt progresses. Depending on what the Stalkers accomplish, some of these may be rendered moot. If you understand the general structure of the hunt, you should be able to pace it correctly and use the events at the appropriate moment.

7. Lastly, there are the stats and descriptions for all the NPCs.

Historical Background.

The Inquisition.

The *Episcopal*, the *Papal*, the *Aragonese*, and the *Modenese*, are but a few of the many Inquisitions often times lumped together under the rightly ominous title of *THE Inquisition*. The Papal Bull of 1252 officially authorized torture as a means to extract confessions of heresy and diabolism, and soon after an age settled upon Europe where political and theological differences were used as excuses to purge entire countries of the enemies of both the church and the ruling class. It became a time of unforgiving hardship and cruelty brought against the innocent—all iniquitously guised in the name of God.

Each province and each country throughout Europe has its own tale to tell regarding the rationales, actions, and the severity of the regional Inquisitors. Most notorious of all was the *Spanish Inquisition*—infamous for their extreme cruelty and their abhorrent practices of torture under the authority of the Dominican Order. On the other hand, the *Italian Inquisition*, though brutal at times, was rather tame in comparison—relegating it to the back pages of history. However, for the victims of the *Italian Inquisition*, obscurity would offer no comfort.





The Benendanti.

By the late 1500's, the *Italian Inquisition* had already spent over one hundred years torturing, burning, and maiming, deludedly in the name of the Almighty. In 1575 rumors of a christo-pagan secret society, which performed various fertility rituals to protect their crops, reached the ears of a regional inquisitor. One ritual in particular—reportedly involving acts of witchcraft—drew his attention. An interview between a local priest and a native villager (conducted at the monastery of San Francesco di Cividale, in the largely agricultural Friuli region of Northeastern, Italy), revealed that there was in fact truth to these rumors; prompting the holy man to summarize that a full investigation by an authority no less than the Inquisitor General himself was duly warranted. Shortly after, inquisitors, scholars, and theologians flocked from Venice and Rome to the Friuli with hopes of purging the evils which had infested the country-side.

Specifically under investigation were individuals who called themselves “Benendanti”—a Friulian word meaning *doers of good*. The Benendanti were made up of men and women, each who had been born with a caul—a thin fetal membrane covering a newborn child's head at birth, thought by some people to symbolize the gift of mystical powers. The caul, preserved at birth, was worn tied around their necks throughout their lives and symbolized that individual's power.

The same witch hysteria which swept through other parts of Europe and eventually across the Atlantic, quickly permeated the Friuli region, and lead to many unjust accusations and subsequent painful “interviews” conducted upon suspected practitioners of the dark arts. Once the inquisitors had discovered the correlation between cauls and Benendanti, any person born with a caul was immediately suspect of being a witch and treated as such.

According to various confessions, the most sacred duty of a Benendanti was to participate in an event referred to as the *Nightbattles Ritual*. This ritual took place each evening for one week during a period in each of the four seasons known as the Ember Days. During the ritual the Benendanti placed

themselves in a deep state of catatonia with the aid of various secret salves, oils, and ointments—now assumed to have been narcotic in nature. During their slumber, the Benendanti believed their spirits would leave their bodies; going forth in their dreams to do battle against those creatures who would threaten both the crops and the welfare of others—witches in league with the devil. Traveling great distances to these battles by transforming into smoke or an animal, the Benendanti were joined by a captain who would appear in their dreams and personally lead them. Upon reaching adulthood, new recruits would answer their first call to battle by hearkening to the beating of a drum.

Considering Friuli's agrarian character, it was not surprising that fertility rituals took place there, but the bizarre claims about the Nightbattles Ritual convinced interrogators and scholars of the day that the ancient rite was in actuality the witches' sabbat and that the Benendanti (who claimed to battle witches) were in fact witches themselves. As the inquisition sought to firmly establish itself, more frequent and more elaborate confessions were heard by the vehement inquisitors seeking to uncover all there was to know about the Benendanti. In an effort to stave off further torturer, victims made wild claims of being magical healers possessing the ability to see the dead. They would say anything to stop the pain. Confessions of Benendanti casting beneficial spells to counter the effects of evil—perpetuated upon the innocent—were common tales heard by the sanctimonious judges.

From 1575 until the late 1600's (the time when the inquisitors departed Friuli), confessed Benendanti did not deny their casting of spells, but persistently maintained their innocence of being a witch; adding that they acted in the name of God—presumably to appease their accusers. Demonologists across Italy expressed incredulity over the Benendanti's open admission of their use of magic in conjunction with the All Mighty; though it is not hard to imagine that the inquisitors chose to subscribe to an altogether different version of the truth from which the “heretics” had offered.

Persistent condemnation and persecution for almost one hundred years eventually destroyed the Benendanti—at least





to the inquisition's satisfaction—and provided the folklore-rich region with just another fire-side story. A major point of frustration for the inquisitors was the fact that through the entire process they were never able to find any indication that the Benendanti were organized in any way outside of their dreams. This they knew was quite different from the way witches “normally” acted. As a final note, it should be mentioned that although only one actual death sentence was ever handed down to a convicted Benendanti, many lives were destroyed through the process of re-sanctifying the Friuli. It should also be noted that given the day and age, the frequent sentencing of many grueling months in prison was often no less severe, and in fact, nothing short of a sentence of death.

Benendanti Magics in The Whispering Vault.

The Dream, woven with such complex subtlety, far beyond the understanding of the most gifted mortal, is destined to be misunderstood by those who dare contemplate it. Sensitives endowed with the ability to pierce the Veil often—in an effort to give a sense of comprehension to their true sight—misconceive elements of the Dream in order to fit them neatly into their own perceived reality. Truth be known, the Benendanti are just such an example. The fact is most of the Benendanti do not possess a single magical power; most are not even Sensitive. In the Nightbattles Ritual, the combination of narcotics used to induce sleep also creates hallucinations, wild dreams, and a free-floating, out-of-body feeling. The Nightbattles are nothing more than a product of a kind of mass hypnosis usually woven together by the captain's limited innate abilities; solidified by ritual, belief, tradition, and the occasional encounter with the Unseen.

All Benendanti know the various spell rituals of their order and the required components, but only a Sensitive Benendanti can manipulate Essence—the key to all magic. Sensitive Benendanti unconsciously draw

Essence from themselves, their brethren, and their surroundings in order to power their rituals. Simple props such as secret oils and salves, jars of water, and the caul itself all work to help the magicians focus whatever amount of Essence is needed to complete the spell.

The Nightbattles Ritual.

The Benendanti perform this drug-laced rite every night for a week during the Ember Days but most participants only succeed in achieving a stupefied state. In their dreams their brethren meet together in places with names like, the “field of Josephat” or the “field of Santa Caterina” where, always opposite them, witches dance and perform acts of perversion. The forces appear to be considerable in number on either side (sometimes numbering in the hundreds). On the field of battle the two groups struggle to decide the success or failure of the crops in the fields, the milk of the livestock, and the fruit on the trees. The outcome, famine or prosperity, depends on which side wins. After the battle, the survivors return to their bodies.

Nightbattles experiences are usually shared via a focal point—a person assumed to be their leader; a captain. The captain is always a true Sensitive who works his powers as a dream-weaver—unconsciously manipulating the dreams of the others, so they all awake believing to have fought together in the ritual. This is a dangerous process with a moderate mortality rate—occasional deaths occur due to the trauma of mental manipulation. Deaths are perceived by others as a fallen comrade.

Although it is rare, their fervent belief system sometimes leads a Benendanti Sensitive to Awaken around the age of twenty. An Unenlightened Sensitive, the young magician assumes all Benendanti have the ability to perform magic and that it is a divine. These true Sensitives tend to gravitate toward positions of leadership as they unconsciously impose subtle influences upon non-sensitive members. Eventually, they may become captains.





In all of the history of the Benendanti, only a few of the most very powerful Sensitives have ever been able to gain the ability to actually cause their Essence—making up what is better known as the spirit—to leave its physical confines;

a thin trail of Essence tethers the spirit to the body (referred to in folklore as a silver-chord). In this state a Sensitive Benendanti magician is able to travel as the Unseen (and in extremely rare cases, they are able to allow the followers to do the same). It is even rumored that some of these Sensitive Benendanti magicians, tricked by Shadows, have actually crossed into the Rift.

The components of this ritual are an assortment of medicinal herbs specially brewed into salves, ointments, and oils for topical application; a comfortable bed; a caul from the individual's birth; the hours of the night and many potential sources of Essence from which to draw.

Though this hunt only utilizes the Nightbattles Ritual, highlights of other spells and rites, as described by the Benendanti during their confessions, have been provided for those GMs who would like to develop the Benendanti in future Hunts or create a Watcher campaign.

The Procession of the Dead.

Benendanti claimed to have the power to both see and communicate with the deceased. They also witnessed ghosts walk the streets during the "Procession of the Dead" on the Christian holiday of All Souls Day.

Fortune Telling.

Having your future told usually has more adverse affects than positive ones, and it is for that reason that most Benendanti

refused to perform this spell. Many times people have made a decision in attempt to avoid a foreseen fate, only to find that those actions ironically caused the unwanted events to unfold.

Cure for the Withering.

It is believed that witches living in the region used their wicked powers to cause destruction, famine, and—perhaps most evil of all—to work their sorcery on children. Of course this was merely the rationale of a superstitious people in order to account for the many childhood maladies which were abound at the time. This spell was used by the Benendanti to rebound a witch's child withering spell back at the caster.

Backstory.

Over the past two weeks since his arrival in Monte Verde, Chief Inquisitor Fra Marco de Toledo managed to round up and detain over two dozen of the townsfolk for interrogation and testimony. Originally, he felt excellent progress was being made toward removing the blight of evil which stains Monte Verde, but...

Each morning, for the past four mornings, the remains of at least one corpse has been discovered within the old monastery. In all, three inquisitors, two nobles, two scholars, and a handful of bodyguards have been slain. Pools of bile, creating a terrible stench, were found surrounding each of the victims. The mutilated bodies also appear to have been partially eaten, and the fact that they were all (aside from the guards) judges, has sent the entire Inquisitorial commission at Monte Verde into chaos. Rumors abound. Talk of a great demon or even the devil himself walking the earth at night have made their way into the nearby town (also known as Monte Verde). Even the locals have taken to locking themselves in their homes for the evenings.

Fra Marco is now of the opinion that he is in a battle of biblical proportions with a malevolence so pure it could only be caused by the devil. Convinced that Monte Verde has been taken over by the damned, he has stepped up his local reign of terror in the name of righteousness. Those accused who refuse to confess their guilt are burned at the





stake within a day of their arrest. Obsessed with a drive to uncover the source of this wickedness, Fra Marco is willing to burn the entire town to the ground and salt the earth where it stood, if that is what it takes.

Realizing his need for additional aid, Fra Marco has sent a dispatch to Rome, seeking the toughest, most righteous inquisitors they may have. Meanwhile, in an attempt to keep his own soul purified through this ordeal, each night before sleeping, Fra Marco flagellates himself until bloody; while praying and petitioning for divine intervention. The help that the inquisitor expects is over a week away, but when the Stalkers arrive he believes them to be the answer to his prayers.

The story behind the slayings begins centuries ago. In that time a monastery run by an obscure order of monks—since forgotten by the Dream—stood on the very spot of the current monastery of Monte Verde. The monks, while constructing the original abbey, unearthed a rare find: a tomb of Etruscan origin. Within this tomb they found two small chambers which contained hundreds of clay tablets bearing an early pictographic form of writing. Taking advantage of an opportunity to discover lost knowledge, the monks brought the tablets up from their resting place. As they finished building the abbey, they incorporated one of the rooms in the tomb into their wine cellar. The second room of the tomb, located below the first, was quickly forgotten.

Shortly after their discovery, the monks began deciphering the tablets and they found that the ancient pieces contained very powerful arcane knowledge. In an extremely rare turn of events, the writings Awakened several Sensitive monks. For them, using the magics proved too much to resist and they soon became Corrupted. The *Sorcerer-monks* systematically slew all their non-Sensitive brethren and used their Essence to power spells. Earlier ideologies now completely abandoned, the monks practiced the dark arts with a ferocity that utterly consumed their beings, leaving them but empty shells.

Eventually, the Dream was no longer able to bear the strain of such mortal manipulation and a massive Enigma formed. As the Corruption spread, more and more dreadful incantations

were performed until, in the end, the sorcerers all became Lost Souls and were possessed by Sentient magics of their own creation. Now engulfing the entire abbey, the Corruption was cast from the Dream into the Rift to form a frightful Shadowland. All that remained of the old monastery in the Realm of Flesh was the original Etruscan tomb, upon which the current abbey was built.

It was the fate of Brother Vincenzo, a current monk of Monte Verde, to find that forgotten part of the old Etruscan tomb, hidden beneath the wine cellar. But he chose not to tell anyone of his discovery, because the old monk holds secrets himself. Not only is he Sensitive but he is the captain of the local Benendenti, and the chamber proved the perfect place to practice his rituals. What Brother Vincenzo does not realize is that the tomb is home to a Touchstone to the Shadowland of the sorcerer-monks.

When Vincenzo performs the Nightbattles Ritual in the tomb, his Essence is drawn through the portal into the Shadowland. Vincenzo believes the Shadowland is one of the mystical fields where the battles are fought. Each evening during the Ember days, the old monk uses his powers to lead the tethered souls of his dwindling group of Benendenti into the Shadowland. There they battle the sentient corpses of the ancient Sorcerer-monks and their minions—who Vincenzo has mistaken for his witch foes. Despite all of this, the murders in the abbey are neither the results of the Sorcerer-monks nor of the Benendenti.

A Unique Shadow, calling itself Aculpin, was trapped in the Shadowland long ago by the manipulative magic of the Sorcerer-monks. When Vincenzo uses the Touchstone, it allows Aculpin to temporarily escape from its ancient prison, only to be drawn back through the portal when the Touchstone is “de-activated.” Through its investigation of the abbey, Aculpin has learned of the Benendenti’s persecution and knows that if they are eliminated the Shadow will lose its brief respites from captivity. Slaying the judges has been the Shadow’s reaction to the situation. Much like a cornered animal, it has taken to lashing out at those who threaten its freedom.





Time and Place.

Location.

The town and abbey of Monte Verde, Friuli Region, Northeastern Italy.

Time:

Early Fall, circa late 1500's.

Veiled Perceptions.

In the village.

Depending upon the situation the commoners may consider the Stalkers to be merchant travelers, beggars, inquisitors, scholars, or possibly even witches.

In the abbey:

The Stalkers are seen for the most part as scholars, or inquisitors of the Dominican order, but they might also be seen as witches, villagers, or other guards.

Servitor Effects.

Servitors act as normal in this Hunt with one noted exception. If Trackers are used at any point, figure out whether they track down the Nightmare (in the town), the Pain Mother (in the Torture Chamber), a random Shadow, or Aculpin. If Aculpin is the target, then the Stalkers are in for a surprise, because not only do the Trackers screams of alarm abruptly stop, but the Stalkers may eventually find the creatures—dead.

Aculpin is able to cast itself like a net over the Trackers and kill them. Your Players may be incredulous over this event, believing Servitors to be all powerful, but that is far from the truth.

Disciplines and the Veil.

Benendanti NPCs are *Driven* and their *Resolve* scores are higher than the average (use major character template WV pg. 118 and add +2 to Resolve). This means that these characters are not so easy to influence with Disciplines. Players may decide to use their powers as a crutch at the first chance. To ensure proper game balance, it is suggested that the GM carefully enforce the Forbiddance. This is not to say that the PCs never get to use their powers, they just have to be both careful and clever when doing so. It is up to the GM to decide what is too much (keep in mind there are a lot of mortals around and only a relatively weak Corruption), but the players can be subtly discouraged from using some of the more blatant Disciplines without making them feel oppressed or controlled by mixing it up and keeping the players interested.

For example, don't let the players ever assume that throughout the Hunt NPC's are all seeing the Stalkers the same way via the Veil. Get players used to having to probe a little to learn their own immediate identities (if it is a concern). There are also Sensitives in the area of this Hunt and they can pierce the Veil, seeing the Stalkers as they really appear and may mistake





them for demons or murdering beasts. Logic can also play an important part, should Stalkers place themselves in a situation where the guards have found a couple “extra” prisoners in a jail cell. After all, the Veil may conceal the Avatar, but it does not make them invisible.

Another way to keep players on their toes is by following through with the consequences of a Stalker using their Disciplines at the wrong time. Say a player wants free run of the abbey during the evening while everyone should be asleep and decides to use Dissipate or Translocate to travel unnoticed. The GM can allow this, but the abbey is very crowded due to the trials, so let them suddenly appear in a room with a few people who are quite startled and let the player explain to the summoned guards, how and why he is in someone else’s room, not to mention the Forbiddance may be invoked. Or if a player consistently *abuses* the use of Dominate on the NPCs, give an NPC a protective charm which negates such effects. The NPC will most likely be really curious as to why the Stalker had just laid hands on them.

The whole purpose is to keep the game fresh by disallowing a routine to be established and regardless of the use of their Disciplines, there should be enough clues available in the various encounters and locations to piece together the entire puzzle.

Answering the Call.

The Call comes in the form of a formal petition by Chief Inquisitor, Fra Marco de Toledo, who prostrates himself at the foot of an altar. The Stalkers hear the end of his prayers:

“...and I beg of thee my Lord, for thine help and thine strength; to defeat the evil that dwelleth among us. For only the devil himself could possess such wickedness to defile thy sacred house. Grant thine humble servants protection and keep them in the palm of thy hand...”

The Town.

Description.

The Circle appears on a cart path on the outskirts of a small town lying in a deep valley surrounded by snow-capped peaks. Beyond the town and built into the side of a mountain high above the valley floor, can be seen a walled complex of some sort. It is the late-afternoon and the sun will soon be setting.

Notes.

Though there is much activity taking place (it is market day), the Stalkers find out that a local branch of the inquisition has set up shop recently and has the town in the grips of an underlying terror. Some townsfolk, perceiving the Stalkers to be inquisitors, close doors and windows, or scurry away from the Circle while failing to conceal their obvious panic; and only when called directly do they speak with the Stalkers, professing their piety and innocence, or dropping to their knees and begging for the pardon of their loved ones. If they have not yet been to the abbey, the Stalkers learn that the trials are being held there and are presided over by a certain Fra Marco de Toledo, a man said to have enough ambition and political power to duel with the devil.

The Stalkers can gather enough information to know that the inquisition began a short while ago because of a belief that there were witches in the area. Many townsfolk have been arrested, and many of those recently arrested have been swiftly condemned to death. (It should be noted that none of the townspeople know about the judges’ murders taking place in the abbey.)

If the Stalkers decide to start the Hunt in the town they should be exposed to different events as described below. They may also notice the caul of either the dead woman or the blacksmith—when he is arrested. In any event, it should not take too long for them to conclude that their investigation should move to the abbey.

If the Stalkers decide to forego the town and head straight to the abbey, they should still witness at least Events #1 and #4 (even if they choose not to get involved).





Town Events.

1. Vesper the Lecher

A monk is seen swiftly walking toward a woman who obviously tries to avoid him. He abruptly moves to intercept her. Grabbing her by the arm and whispering into her ear, he cocks his head and smiles at her. The woman shakes herself free from the monk's grip, upon which she runs away, crying hysterically. The monk smiles and feigns chase. If any Stalker's try to interfere, Vesper (seeing the Stalker's as peasants) identifies himself as a man of the cloth and warns them not to be hostile, or they may find themselves being tried as heretics. He makes a fast getaway at the first chance. When he later meets them at the abbey he has no idea that he has met them before.

The woman she perceives the Stalkers as merchant travelers. Her name is Antonia and her husband was burned at the stake five days ago (the day before the first murder). Vesper had accused him of being a witch, because he covets the man's wife.

While Antonia is so upset, she accidentally exclaims that she will get even with those wicked men who unjustly condemned her husband, and realizing too late what she said, the woman runs off.

2. The One-sided Argument

The Stalkers notice two men, one a rotund monk (see Brother Vincenzo's stats) and the other a tall blacksmith (see blacksmith stats). They seem to be arguing (their arms are flailing excitedly about) outside a smithy, near a forge. The clanging of hammers on anvils drown out the men's conversation, since the smiths are busy forging manacles and leg irons for the abbey. If the Stalkers approach the men, they head off in opposite directions. Do not allow the Stalker's to get near Vincenzo, but if the blacksmith is Delved, he reveals along with daily chores, a vision of a great battle upon a vast field, involving men and women fighting side-by-side against tall gray-haired men. (It is the same vision as that of the dead woman in event #3.)

3. Dead Benendanti Woman

The body of a young woman is being carried from a small house, while a priest walks beside it offering prayers. If asked, he tells the Circle that the woman, died in her sleep and was another victim of "demons in the night." If the Stalkers enter her house they find inside the woman's bedroom, strong smelling salves and oils beside her bed (she was a Benendanti who has died during the Nightbattles ritual). Inspection of the woman's body shows that it has been coated with these ointments. On the bed lays a torn piece of soft thin leather the size of a handkerchief (her caul). A Sensitivity check reveals the room radiates Essence. Delving reveals a raging battle upon a vast field involving men and women against tall gray-haired men (the Sorcerer-monks). She has no idea where the field is located. Also, the purple sky above the field is a swirl of colors the Stalkers have never seen within the Dream.

4. "Take him away!"

As the Stalkers leave the town, a group of men-at-arms rushes into the smithy and drags a man (the same blacksmith as in event #2) accused of being a witch onto a horse-drawn cart. While the man tries to resist one of the soldiers rips something from the prisoner's neck. If the Stalkers investigate they find it is a torn piece of soft leather—though the Stalkers probably still won't know yet that it is a caul.

Optional Encounter .

If things are progressing too quickly you could slow the pace by allowing the Stalkers to run across a Nightmare (*Dangerous Prey* pg. 83) which has Awakened through the collective fears of the townsfolk. Using the images of those fears, the Nightmare has assumed the role of what it perceives to be a "witch". It occupies a root-cellar under one of the town shops. There it conducts heinous acts of brutality (in the guise of bogus "magic" rituals) against kidnapped victims for the purpose of perpetuating the same mortal fears that originally Awakened the creature.





On the Way to the Abbey.

The Stalkers meet an old woman leading a cow along the road. (If they go through the town, they meet her at the outskirts, after the last *event*. Otherwise, they meet her as they are headed toward the abbey.) The woman nervously looks around before identifying herself in a whisper as Paulina and says that she has been expecting them for quite some time. Paulina invites the Stalkers back to her home, set in a dell outside of the town, so she might speak with them in private. The woman is a sorcerer (a true witch) and under the mistaken impression that the Stalkers—she has never seen a Stalker before—are the “demons” that she has tried to summon.

Paulina

Fortitude 4
Vitality 10
Initiative 12
Defend 14
Perceive 14
Resolve 15
Attack 12
Strength 3
Occultism 14

Enchantments: Time's Curse,
The Salt Ritual, Loyal Guardian,
Ritual of Awakening.

Artifacts: Solomon Ring, Insect
Rattle, and the gods-eyes (which
allow her to perform rituals
with a reduction in required
Essence).

If the Stalkers follow her, upon entering her home, they are greeted by an enormous dog (*loyal guardian*) which sniffs at the Stalkers and growls until the woman sends the animal away. She sits in a chair near a fire and produces a small bag

from which she sprinkles its contents (a white granular substance) in a circle around her (*the salt ritual*). An easy occultism skill roll allows the Stalker to realize that the old lady may have just performed some sort of magic. Essence seems to be in larger amounts in this home than normal. Suspended from the ceiling are hundreds of blue, diamond-shaped, Greek spirit wards (created by winding yarn around two crossed sticks, forming the pattern) called *gods eyes*.

Paulina is a conniving and somewhat offensive woman, but she is well-protected from any single Stalker with her spells and artifacts and loyal guardian. It becomes evident that she can see the Stalkers in their true form (she is Sensitive) and their appearance does not disturb her a bit. She proceeds to try striking a bargain with the Stalkers for them to go up to the abbey and slay the entire inquisition, in particular: Lord Teppo and Fra Marco. Paulina does not want the inquisition around here for obvious reasons, though she does derive humor from the fact that the Benendenti are the ones being persecuted while she has yet to be discovered.

It is up to the Stalkers how they want to handle Paulina's deal making attempts; those Stalkers relishing dark humor might enjoy the negotiations. If they do not agree to help Paulina, she tells them to return back to hell; fully expecting the floor to open up and swallow them (and may be somewhat perplexed when instead, they walk out the front door). If they agree to help they are in no way bound to do so, but Paulina smiles satisfied and bids them good-bye. Though Paulina does know of the Benendenti she can not give much information about them other than they are meddlesome and not what she considers true sorcerers.

GM Note: The Stalkers may initially think Paulina to be the Suppliant and so they may follow her. Keep in mind though, that the Stalkers are governed by the Forbiddance and must take care when dealing with Paulina in her home, and if they do try anything, they will find out she is not your average mortal.

Loyal Guardian

Fortitude 5, Vitality 10, Initiative 13, Defend 11, Perceive 12, Resolve 13. Combat: Attack 15, 4D damage.





The Abbey of Monte Verde.

GM Note: Depending on how long the PC's were in the town and at Paulina's home, the time of day will range from sunset to dark.

Description:

The abbey sits watch like a brooding titanic gargoyle upon the rock-faced slope of a mountain over-looking the town below. What was once a white-washed beacon of hope has turned a muddy gray and suitably reflects the general atmosphere. The abbey has been the focal point for the town and surrounding area for generations. Inside the sick were cured, the hungry were fed, and the illiterate were taught to read. Now, dark times have forced the doors of hope to close. Guards patrol the narrow walls and the only reason commoners are allowed into the abbey is to watch the trials and the burnings.

Investigating the Abbey.

Upon arriving at the abbey gates, guards believe the Stalkers to be the inquisitors they have been expecting and if the Stalkers play along they are quickly admitted. The Circle is lead by the guards directly to the chambers of Fra Marco di Civald, the Chief Inquisitor. There, Fra Marco introduces himself and explains that he is on a short break from the trial and must first return to pass sentences (guilty—that's what the new posts in the abbey yard are for) on a few defendants. Afterwards he must finish with his daily duties before he can sit and talk at length about *"the great evil at hand."*

The Inquisitor invites the Stalkers to dine with him this evening, where conversation is better suited (see Dinner with Marco). Fra Marco also introduces the Stalkers to

Brother Vesper (from the town encounter), and has him show the Stalkers to their rooms. Vesper does not realize that he has met the Stalkers before (since he now sees them as inquisitors) and feigns piety in their presence. The monk offers to give the Stalkers a tour of the abbey (which, if they agree, is interrupted by the dinner bell after seeing a couple locations).

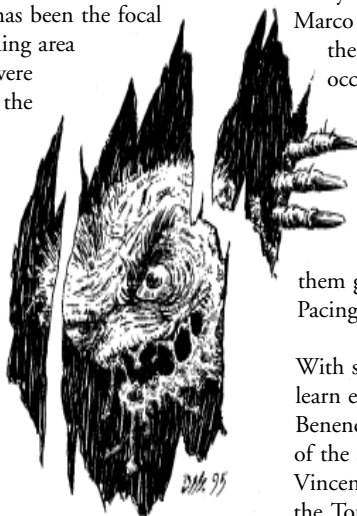
During the evening, and especially after Raddiccio's death (see *Cries in the Dark*), the Stalkers may try to explore the abbey in secret. They find that this is difficult because Fra Marco insists upon judges having an armed guard with them at all times after dark. Since the murders only occur at night, the guards are not required during daylight hours.

On the following day, after Vesper's death (See *Brother Vesper's Demise*), the Stalkers may get side-tracked from the main plot by this "red-herring."

Be careful. Let the Players investigate, but don't let them get bogged down here, help them along if necessary. Pacing is very important.

With some careful sleuthing, the Stalkers should be able to learn enough clues and secrets to find out: who the Benendanti are; the location of the Corruption; the legend of the ancient abbey and its Secret Tomb; that Brother Vincenzo is the Benendanti Captain; and the existence of the Touchstone.

The toughest part for the Players is probably figuring out how to Mend the Focus (see *Mending the Enigma*), which does not Mend as normal (due to the fact that the Enchantments—Sorcerer Monks—have reinforced the Focus with their magics in order to bridge the way to the Realm of Flesh). It is up to the Stalkers to figure out that they must work with the Benendanti to destroy the Focus. Once the Lurker has been separated from the Enigma, the full power of the Corruption spreads rapidly, so time is of the essence.





The Abbey Complex (see map #1).

The layout of the grounds is quite simple (See Map). Directly inside the tall walls is large open area known as the abbey yard. Scattered throughout the yard are several gardens and small buildings; a stable, a granary, a smoke house, a root cellar, and a kitchen. A large scorched area of ground marks where condemned witches are burned at the stake (three new posts are being planted). A sizable three story library, used as a place of research and writing, also graces the yard. All of these buildings are dominated by the abbey itself, an immense four-story building with its dingy thatched roof.

1. The Stable

This small wood building has a loft and several stables containing horses which belong to several judges—the monks do not own such beasts of burden.

2. The Library

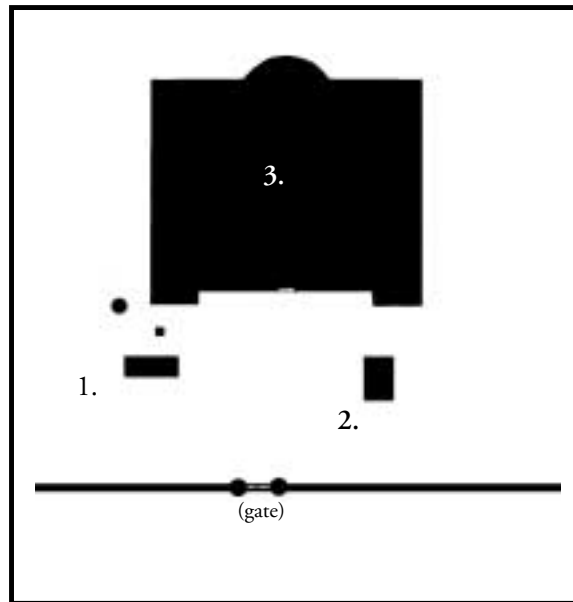
Description:

This is a three-story, square-shaped, stone building containing many rare manuscripts illuminated by brethren over the centuries. It is the wealth of the monastery. The library is a vast open chamber with several smaller private rooms for study attached. Shelves lining the walls contain many hundreds of books, tomes, manuscripts, and scrolls. A scholar could literally spend a lifetime studying the knowledge contained within these walls.

Notes:

Here on the top floor, in a study, the Stalkers can find Fra Marco's records and notes on his investigation. A *Moderate* Occultism Skill roll reveals that several written works reference magic spells—one even details the Nightbattles Ritual. (If the Stalkers have used Delve on Vincenzo, the blacksmith, or the dead Benendanti woman, they recognize the tome's description of the battle to be identical to those visions shared by each of the people.) Also of importance are the notes that Marco has left on the desk. They mention an old legend detailing another brotherhood which supposedly lived near Monte Verde long ago. According to the legend the "Wrath of God" was brought upon the monks for

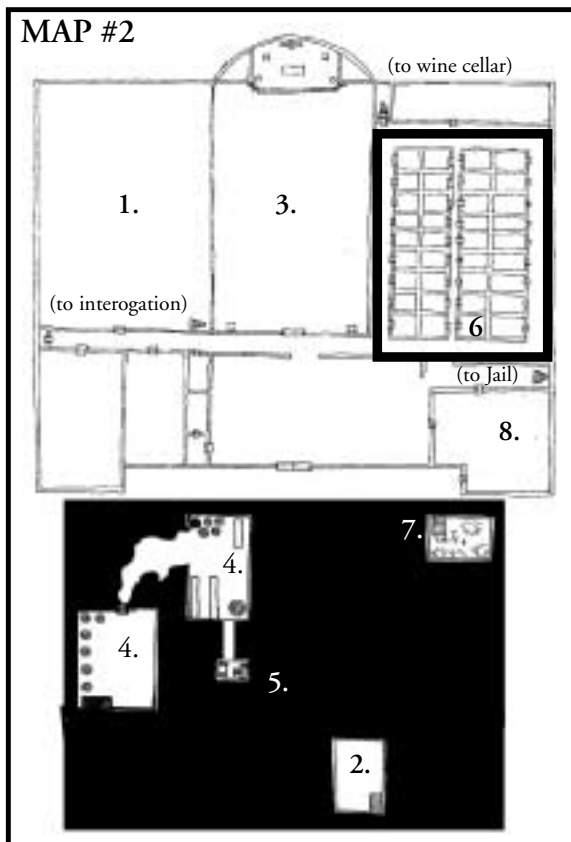
straying far from the Lord's ways. Details are vague, but they are said to have embraced the darkest of evils before their blight was purged.



If Fra Marco is asked about his library research, he admits to being aware of the Nightbattles ritual, but dismisses it as nothing more than a wives' tale. But he begrudgingly speaks—if pressed—of the legend of the lost Brotherhood. He has been able to confirm from holy records in Rome that a brotherhood of monks lived in this region centuries ago, but no other details were available. He has no idea what the "Wrath of God" reference in the legend is about, but he believes that the murders may have some sort of connection with the abbey being built on unholy ground. The Inquisitor has theorized that the earth below the abbey is tainted with an evil and may need to be consecrated.

The Stalkers may decide to take those tomes, deemed arcane in nature, for safe-keeping or destroy them to prevent future Enigmas.





3. The Main Abbey Building (see map #2 for interior).

Description:

This enormous building is practically a town within a town containing scores of rooms which were used to fulfill the needs of everyday life. Room after room, and hall after hall, were once crowded with monks and initiates, scholars and common-folk; scribing, studying, healing, praying, and conducting a hundred other activities. Over the years, isolation of the region, and a dwindling population has caused much of the main abbey building to fall into disuse (but not neglect). Until recently, many of its dust-coated

rooms had not seen the light of day for some decades, now most of them house guests of the inquisition (nobles, scholars, witnesses, scribes, etc.).

Notes:

PCs are free to explore those few uninhabited areas of the abbey but will find nothing except the random Awakened Shadow or two.

The Corruption.

There are five areas in the abbey which have come under the influence of the Corruption to varying degrees. They are: *the Common Hall, the Chapel, the Interrogation Room, the Wine Cellar, and the Secret Tomb*. The Spreading of the Corruption has been slowed by an Awakened Strangler in the wine cellar which has been suckling upon the Enigma. Details of the effects are listed in each room description.

Mortals are effected only while they are within the areas of influence. Because the Corruption is weak it takes hours for them to succumb to its power. When mortals fall under its grip, rationality is eclipsed and bizarre reactions replace normal ones. (e.g. Cheering at the death sentence of a loved one. Or allowing a confessed witch to walk away.) Once having left the area of effect, everything is—and always was in their minds—as it should be. “Irregular” events within the Corruption are forgotten. It is important to emphasize that even if anarchy reigns in the Corruption, Fra Marco and the judges are still viewed as the authority over the masses and all orders are followed as usual.

1. The Common Hall (Corrupted Area).

Description:

A rough-hewn, timber-beam frame braces the stone walls and wood ceiling of this enormous area. Long benches fill the length and breadth of the damp hall for spectators—except for an area set aside for the accused to plead their case and a tall, wood dais inwardly bowed and semi-circular in shape; upon which are seated the twelve judges.





This largest of the abbey's many halls has also become the most feared place within these holy confines. Here each day, individuals accused of witchcraft stand before the judges and make futile attempts at defending themselves against the mass hysteria which has gripped the region. Fra Marco presides over the daily hearings with a harsh intolerance.

Notes:

At first glance, everything seems to be quite normal here, but it soon becomes apparent that things are very much askew. Though the Corruption is small, it encompasses the entire common hall and those mortals who occupy it begin to succumb to its effects by late afternoon each day. While in the make-shift court-room, the judges become more and more interested in the punishment as the day progresses and less interested in innocence or guilt. Regardless of their disposition, those accused who stand trial in the latter part of the day are most certainly doomed.

The trials begin with minor signs of disruption from the Corruption like: forgetfulness, repetitiveness, and off-the-wall remarks or questions by the judges (e.g. *How many pairs of pants do you have?*). As the daily trial goes on, actions become more irrational and extreme.

Examples: Fra Marco holds a frog in his hand as proof of the man being a witch. Judges and even friends of the accused shout, hoot and carry-on, with cries for death. They toss items at the poor prisoner and as Marco passes sentence, and everyone laughs hysterically at the condemned individual. The chaos is

quickly hushed when a guard points out the fact that the man is already dead—tortured to death earlier. Marco slams the dais with his hand in anger and looking at the guard says: "Then you will have to do." The crowd erupts again in wild cheers as other guards lead the befuddled man away.

Needless to say, because of the Corruption, this area is not a good place to have a conversation with a mortal. Also, anyone who deliberately tries to stop the proceedings is quickly incarcerated, possibly tortured (for the fun of it), and made to stand trial as a heretic and witch; unless they can prove to the judges that they had a good reason for the disturbance (which is highly unlikely).

Once the courtroom has been vacated for the day, no one remembers how they conducted themselves. In fact, sometimes they forget to have even judged an individual and re-judge them the following day—not always coming up with the same verdict to the accused's delight or horror.

2. The Interrogation Chambers (Corrupted Area).

GM note: *On the day of the Stalkers' arrival this room is empty, the prisoners having been locked up for the evening.*

Description:

This chamber is only accessible from a set of stairs leading beneath the Common Hall and out of all the other areas, it is under the strongest grips of





the Corruption. The stink permeating the air is debilitating enough without the sounds of erratic laughter and screams of intense suffering. Located here are the various implements of interrogation. Hot pokers, bizarre shaped cutting tools, a make-shift stretching rack, and a rock press are all either being utilized or they exhibit the grotesque signs of recent use. If the Stalkers have already been in town they may recognize that one of the victims is the blacksmith (see blacksmith stats) who argued with Vincenzo in town. Unfortunately, he has died on the rack.

Notes:

The two men who are conducting the interrogations of several people at once—more than one victim has long expired—smile at the Stalkers when they enter. One of the interrogators exclaims, “*Tough bastard,*” referring to a prisoner who, unbeknownst to him, is a Pain Mother (WV pg. 109—fairly common to this point of time within the Dream). She Awakened with the hope of experiencing the pleasures of pain first hand, but has so far only been made frustrated by the “unskilled” mortals. Turning to one of the Stalkers, she frowns and asks him if he could do better than her current attendant. If the Stalkers ignore her she does nothing to provoke them. But her patience with the interrogators is not eternal and eventually the student shall become the teacher and the teacher, her student. Their deaths will be thought to be linked with the other killings.

Also in the chambers is a scribe taking notes of everything that is said during the interrogations. The man has copied down every moan, gasp, and scream. If the Stalkers read the confession book they find mentions of the word *Benendanti*; an explanation of the Nightbattles; along with mention that an unnamed captain leads the Benendanti. There is no mention of who the captain would be and Delving any individual does not reveal who the captain is other than being a mighty warrior.

3. The Chapel (Corrupted Area).

Description:

A combination of burning wood, incense, and the mustiness of age permeate the air in this place of worship. As large as any major church, its wood benches are able to seat over three hundred people. During more prosperous years the abbey was visited by many famous artisans, who left their mark of approval in the form of frescoes, paintings, and statues; found here in abundance. The intricately

carved rafters high above the floor are practically concealed by all the smoke and dust of burning wood piled high on a large pyre, in a vain attempt to drive the damp chill from the area.

Notes:

Recently, due to the Corruption, the statues have begun to weep tears of blood. The monks believe the tears to be a miracle—heavenly tears for all the blood that has been recently shed. There are always several monks and guards who can be found kneeling in prayer or lying prostrate before the crying figures.

The Corruption is still weak here and takes many hours of constant exposure to influence the average mortal. A mortal does however, get a sense of profound grief after spending several minutes in the chapel.



4. The Wine Cellar (Corrupted Area).

Description:

This ancient wine cellar was carved into solid bedrock hundreds of years ago. A moldy vinegar-like scent taints the cool damp air. Aged wooden casks filled with a local

vintage line the walls. If a light source is brought with them, the twinkling of scores of rats’ eyes reflect back from the blackness.





Notes:

The Stalkers can use Sensitivity checks to target in on the spot where the Essence is focused most: the area beneath a huge wine barrel. If the Stalkers move the cask aside, they hear from within a squishing and slithering sound. A rubbery tentacle leads from a small hole in the side of the barrel through a trap door covered by the barrel. Inside the cask sits an Awakened Strangler (Dangerous Prey pg. 69) which has been feeding upon the Enigma; keeping it from rapidly spreading. It will not attack unless the barrel is opened, or the Circle tries Mending the Enigma—cutting off the Shadow's food supply.

Special Note: Take care not to let the Stalkers take too much damage fighting the Strangler, or it may become impossible to Mend the Enigma. Also, if the Strangler is killed, the Corruption begins to grow swiftly.

Secret Tomb (Corrupted Area).

Description:

Beneath the trap door lies the secret tomb, the last of the Corrupted areas in the abbey. A blast of humid air laced with a strong odor of herbs hits anyone who opens the trap door. A dim flickering light illuminates a ladder leading down into some sort of room.

In the tomb, against a wall is a bench covered with various earthenware jars and bunches of dried herbs. there is also a large straw mattress, a chair, and some empty wine bottles. An ancient tile mosaic is inlaid into one wall

Notes:

The Mosaic:

Essence radiates from the artwork. The tiles look as if they lie under water—they ripple when touched. Stalkers may hear sounds of a raging storm and many human voices (recognized as Latin on an Easy History roll) emanating from somewhere within the picture. This is the both the Focus and the Touchstone to the Shadowland of the sorcerers (see *Shadowland* and *Mending the Enigma*).

The Bench:

The earthen jars are filled with salves (Stalkers may recognize it as the same salve on the dead woman in the town). A hard Occult Role identifies the herbs as vital ingredients for a narcotic. Lying on the bench is a prayer book (Brother Vincenzo's name is written inside the front cover) and secret correspondences to Brother Vincenzo from other Benendanti. The letters show concern about the recent rash of Benendanti deaths during the Nightbattles and some request ceasing the ritual for a while.

Brother Vincenzo may be sleeping within the tomb if the Stalkers enter it at night; his silver-chord extending into the mosaic. After Teppos' death scream, the old monk wakes and may be caught rushing to leave his hiding area. Otherwise, when the Stalkers find the tomb, Vincenzo is nowhere to be found.

6. The Stalker's Quarters.

Description:

Stalkers are placed two to a guest-room. The rooms are furnished like all the others: two beds, bare walls, a simple wash basin, and a few wood pegs to hang clothes upon.

Notes:

The Stalkers are in the dormitory section on the third level of the main abbey building. On either side are rooms occupied by other guests. Above them is yet another occupied room, while below them is the dining hall. Care must be taken if they plan to sneak about. It is likely that they are easily spotted exiting the rooms through walls, floor, or ceiling; and there is a danger that they may invoke the Forbiddance. The windows may be a conventional alternative...

The first night the Stalkers hear the death scream of Raddiccio. If the Stalkers are in their quarters in the morning, they hear the alarm bells signaling Brother Vesper's death. They also hear the screams of Teppo as he is murdered the second night.





7. The Prisoners' Cell.

Description:

The accused spend their time, while not on trial or being tortured, in nothing more than a large cellar previously used for storage and converted into a makeshift jail. The place stinks of human waste contained in small oak buckets. Filthy straw lines the floor while the prisoners line the walls shackled in chains. They are a sad lot, with many of them on death's door. Moans and soft cries are all that breaks the silence. One of the monks, Brother Matteo (see Brother Matteo's description), can be found here caring for the sick and injured prisoners.

Notes:

Most of the prisoners are not able to talk at length or intelligently because of their extreme weariness (they may also fear the Stalkers who they view as torturers or inquisitors). Matteo is obviously not happy about the Stalkers' presence and boldly shouts something like; "*Even the condemned should know some peace!*" He asks the Circle to leave and save their torment for the trials.

Delve on most individuals reveals nothing of importance; but a successful roll (Hard) against Guiseppi, an old Benendanti (one of the three prisoners sentenced to die tomorrow) reveals visions of the Nightbattles ritual. In this battle the blacksmith (seen both in the town and in the interrogation chamber) is clearly visible.

8. The Dining Hall.

Description:

This large rectangular hall is where the occupants of the abbey take their daily meal. Several extra or the long wood tables and low benches have added to accommodate the abbey's population explosion, making the hall quite congested.

The monks' diet is rather plain, consisting mostly of a thin lentil soup and bread. But usually more exotic foods can be found on the judges' tables.

Notes:

It is here that the two meals with Fra Marco take place (see *Dinner with Fra Marco* and *A Dinner of Disputes*).

The Shadowland.

Torn from the Realm of Flesh, the Shadowland of the Sorcerer-monks is a grim and twisted place indeed. Passing through the portal deposits the Stalkers on a vast barren plateau. Fire-blackened earth, dry and cracked like fractured glass, is obscured by wisps of steam venting from large fissures. Stagnant pools layered with a brown froth dot the landscape. The pale glow of a harvest moon is the only light available—aside from brief flashes of lightning—in this land of eternal night. In the distance, the silhouette of the sorcerer-monks' abbey can be seen perched upon a steep hillside. Below the hill, there appears to be a small forest of broken trees.

If Brother Vincenzo happens to be in the Shadowland, a skirmish of some sort can be seen taking place by the thicket. This is the Nightbattle and it is obvious that the Benendanti do not stand a chance alone against their foes. Vincenzo can be seen holding his own against a sorcerer but the other Benendanti are being swept aside like stalks of wheat. If Stalkers near the battle, they notice that the thicket is in reality scores of impaled corpses in various stages of decay. This is the fate of those who have chosen to league themselves with Brother Vincenzo. The corpses are a monument to decades of superstition and folly which have led to nothing more than a bloody slaughter.

This is truly a dangerous place even for a Stalker. The Circle may decide to aid the Benendanti or not, but keep in mind that the outcome of this battle may determine whether the Enigma will be able to be Mended at this time or not (see *Mending the Enigma*). If the Stalkers decided to venture to the Sorcerer-monks' abbey they find it an identical replica of the present abbey except for a large tower. The tower houses the ancient Etruscan tablets (Resolve 7) which can be destroyed with Mend.





Mending the Enigma.

During any Mend attempt of the Enigma, the Sorcerer-monks appear in the painting. They try to resist the attempt to Mend the Enigma through magic, because they know if the Stalkers are successful they may destroy the entire Shadowland. The outcome of this struggle can be determined by combining the Resolve scores of five sorcerer-monks to the combined Awareness rolls of those Stalkers attempting to Mend. (This represents the Sorcerer-monks' attempt to hold the Portal open with their powers while the Stalkers try to close it.) The GM should let the Stalkers know that while Mending they feel an active resistance unlike anything they have felt before. An easy Occult Skill Roll tells the Stalkers that they are struggling against magic.

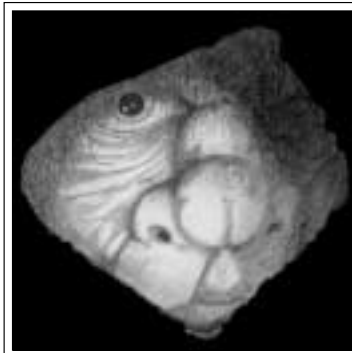
If the Circle is small, the Stalkers may not be able to successfully Mend without first crossing into the Shadowland to battle the sorcerer-monks. For each sorcerer that is slain, their combined Resolve score is proportionately reduced. If in the Shadowland, Aculpin aligns himself with the Sorcerer-monks to protect the portal. Aside from physical attacks, the Unique Shadow has no power to keep the portal open. Though, if Aculpin is in the Realm of Flesh, he does not defend the portal because its destruction means his freedom. This may mean it is better to attempt the Mend when the Benendenti are in the Shadowland battling the sorcerer-monks.

Another option for the Stalkers is to try to enlist the aid of the Benendenti. They may discover that the Nightbattles visions involve the Benendenti battling the sorcerer-monks. If the Benendenti are in (or can be convinced to go back into) the Shadowland, they can attempt to tie up the Sorcerers while the Stalkers try to close the portal. This reduces the number of sorcerer-monks defending the portal by 1-3 (D3) of them. Naturally some of the sorcerers still try to hold the portal if they can. The downside to this plan is that the Benendenti most likely become trapped in the

Shadowland forever or worse. On the other hand, once they enter the Shadowland, Aculpin exits the portal into the Realm of Flesh.

If the Stalkers have a chance to rescue the doomed Benendenti from the sorcerer-monks and hurry the survivors back into the Realm of Flesh, Brother Vincenzo and his followers now perceive the Circle to be angels and praise them as such. It is then up to the PC's to decide if they should turn in the Benendenti to the inquisition or not.

There are other possible conclusions to this scenario and they will vary depending upon each group of players. Stalkers may choose to sacrifice one or two of their group to take on the sorcerer-monks while the others try to Mend the portal. They may all enter the Shadowland and hunt down the Etruscan tablets and Mend them (destroying the Sorcerer-monks). In the unlikely event that the Stalkers immediately find the Enigma at the beginning of the Hunt, then deflect them away with one of the events or an encounter of your own invention. Try to make sure the Stalkers understand what's going on at the abbey before forcing them to make hard decisions.



Events.

Day 1 Dinner with Fra Marco (Event).

Description:

Stalkers who chose to accept Fra Marco's dinner invitation find, upon arriving at the dining hall, the others are already seated. Fra Marco breaks off from a conversation and stands, smiling at the Stalkers. He has reserved for them a place of honor at the table and motions to several chairs at his side. Positioned around the rest of the table are several monks including (see *the Players*): Brother Niccolo, the Abbott; Brother Vesper; Brother Vincenzo; and Brother Matteo. Also present are Lord Teppo, one of the judges (see Teppo's description); and Raddiccio, a demonologist.





Other monks bring plates to the table laden with meats and cheeses, bowls of fruit, pastas, and fresh breads; and the wine flows. It is noticeable that the monks at the other tables are only eating a thin lentil soup.

At The Dinner:

Brother Niccolo acts refined, articulate, genuine, and concerned with the impact of the inquisition on the town.

Brother Vesper sides with Fra Marco on every issue discussed, adding foolish and generally offensive commentary.

Brother Vincenzo smiles and remains quiet. If asked any questions, he nods and smiles. Brother Niccolo explains he is not able to speak because he is mute.

Brother Matteo insists upon partaking in only the lentil soup. Vesper and he argue about the moral implications of the inquisition's right to torture people in the name of God. Matteo ends the debate by asking Fra Marco:

"How one can tell the difference between God's work and the Devil's work if the work of the self-proclaimed righteous is based on inflicting pain upon others?" Brother Niccolo quickly changes the subject.

Lord Teppo, is rude, condescending and sarcastic toward the Stalkers. Don't forget, he is a Lord and has social ranking over the Stalkers, though he still backs down if confronted by the Stalkers which he perceives to be inquisitors. If the Circle's reaction toward Teppo becomes less than cordial Fra Marco diplomatically puts an end to things.

Raddiccio, boring and one-track minded, considers himself the preeminent expert on demons and spends the meal telling anyone willing to listen, how to spot a demon. Such clues are: a person who speaks with other unseen demons, floats on water while bound with rope, has a black heart, speaks any language (but pretends not to understand), can withstand enormous weights of crushing rock before confessing their identity, is capable of senseless violence, etc.

If this is the first time for conversation with Fra Marco, he speaks quietly if questioned about the murders and he refers to the extensive research he has been doing on this matter in the library. *"My brothers, we are involved in nothing less than a battle with the most diabolical of all evils...and I must confess, we are losing."*

He tells the Stalkers he has found some rather interesting passages concerning a dark past to Monte Verde—but this is neither the time nor place to speak of such evils. He shrugs off further questions by saying: *"Let me worry about the murders my brethren. Though, you may pray for me."*

Note:

This should be a time for the Stalkers to get acquainted with the people who they have yet to meet.

If the players have been having a hard time trying to figure out what is going on, use the conversation with Fra Marco to provide only as much information as needed to get them back on track. After dinner the guards arrive to escort all the members of the inquisition back to their rooms.

Cries in the Dark.

Description:

Not long into the evening, the Stalkers (wherever they are) hear a scream seeming to come from the fourth floor. If they get their bodyguards to allow them to the fourth floor, they find people gathered in a hallway. The door at the end is closed and has two guards standing outside of it. Fra Marco, enters the hall from that room and tells everyone to go back to their chambers. Raddiccio has had a nightmare caused by one of the witches he was interrogating earlier today.

Notes:

Yes, Raddiccio is in fact dead. He has become the latest victim of Aculpin, but Fra Marco feels that if the occupants of the abbey discover this latest death, it may finally be enough to destroy the support of Monte Verde's inquisition. The guards remain at the door all night and are under orders not to let anyone but Fra Marco pass.





If the Stalkers manage to get inside the room (easily done with a little bit of creativity), they find a burlap sack stained with blood and full of chunks of meat (Raddiccio's remains). Among the demonologist's personal items are two books on demonology (from the abbey library), a small purse containing copper and silver coins, various religious items (crosses, holy-water, bible), and a personal journal.

Delve is impossible because there is no body to work with. The meat radiates an aura of Essence. And if the Stalkers search the journal, it contains many boring and fictitious entries (to make up for a shortage of real demons), but there is one entry worth noting. Raddiccio watched a light burning in the library every night and suspected that it was Fra Marco. He also thought the inquisitor knew more about the murders than he was telling anyone.

Day 2

Brother Vesper's Demise.

Description:

Around dawn of the second day of the Hunt, the Stalkers hear bells begin to ring, signaling an alarm. Monks, guests, and men-at-arms are all crowding around the stable. Inside, dangling at the end of a rope, is the horribly mutilated corpse of Brother Vesper. Many of the monks drop to their knees at the sight of their dead brother and offer prayers; some openly weep. Brother Niccolo, the head abbot, enters the stable and instructs the guards to take down the body and

bring it to the chapel for sanctification. As he leaves, he turns to the Stalkers and says: *"Do you really know what you have gotten yourself into? Heaven help us all."* It is quite plain for the Stalkers to see that carved in Vesper's forehead, in Latin, are the words: *Vengeance is Mine.*

Fra Marco, who arrives presently, does not seem distressed by Vesper's death and with relief in his voice he says, *"That is that."* He then turns toward the Stalkers and lets them know that they are to again be the guests of honor at dinner this evening (see *A Dinner of Disputes*). It shall be a *"feast to celebrate the end of darkness"* and he walks toward the abbey to conduct the daily trials.

Notes:

Sensitivity checks around Vesper's body reveal strong traces of Essence (much like Teppo's corpse). Delving provides the Stalker with an image of a woman refusing the advances of Vesper, then weeping over the dead body of a man, and finally, wide-eyed and laughing maniacally over a cauldron. The image is of Antonia, the woman who Vesper harassed in the town and who's husband he had condemned to death.

Antonia is *not* a witch or a sorceress of any kind. The spell which she worked was a variant of *Times Curse*. As Vesper's body rotted off his bones through the evening, the curse forced him to take his own life.

Special Note: The words in Vesper's forehead were carved by Antonia into a bar of wax as she cast her spell, but





they are magical and concealed by the Veil. If the Stalkers mention them to any mortal the reactions may vary from people considering the comment to be a joke in bad taste, to murmurs of witchcraft and unholy visions. The Stalkers have to tread lightly here. After Vesper's body is placed in the Chapel, talk of witchcraft may come to mind again as suddenly the carved words spoken by the Stalkers are plainly visible for all to see (due to the weakening of the Veil by the Corruption).

Antonia's Home.

Description:

If the Stalkers go back to Antonia's home, they find the cauldron (as seen through Delving), a piece of wax with *Vengeance is Mine* carved upon it and various spell components. Sadly, Antonia was not a sorcerer and had no clue about how to control the awesome powers she channeled through her body. Only an Essence-infused lump of flesh remains. The flesh writhes and churns obscenely due to the fact that Sentient magics now possess it.

Notes:

Stalker's can use a Mend spell to destroy the Sentient enchantment. A careful inspection of the area turns up a small Greek spirit ward (like the gods eyes in Paulina's home). Since it served her purpose, Paulina, the witch, had shown Antonia how to cast the spell but never warned her of the dangers.

Special Note: This event should only provide a minor diversion to the Stalkers' investigation. It is best not to let the Players stray too far from the original plot-line.

A Dinner of Disputes.

The diners are again waiting for the Stalkers when they show up. The table is covered in various dishes and a wonderful assortment of foods (the other tables are again feasting upon lentil soup). Present are: Brother Niccolo, Brother Matteo, Lord Teppo, and Fra Marco—the PC's may notice that Brother Vincenzo is missing and no one knows where he is.

During the meal, Fra Marco stands, raising his cup of wine and offers a toast: *"Fellow Judges and Brothers of Monte Verde I propose we toast the brighter days ahead. Here is to the end of the killings. May the damnation of Brother Vesper's soul bring solace to his victims."*

The others raise their cups in response, except Brother Matteo, who also stands, but now chastises everyone for assuming Vesper to be the murderer without proof. He then criticizes Fra Marco for making the toast (despite Brother Niccolo's attempt to quell matters) and suggests (before swiftly walking from the hall) that the inquisitor and all his twisted truths is in fact no better than a murderer himself.

Fra Marco, embarrassed, apologizes and suggests that Matteo has been keeping company with heretics for too long. Lord Teppo bursts out in laughter. The rest of the meal is dominated by whispered debates—and loud ridicule of Vesper by Teppo—over whether Vesper is guilty of the crimes he has been accused. After dinner everyone makes their excuses to go conduct their private affairs. Before leaving, Fra Marco asks the Circle if any of them can help preside over tomorrow's trials. He is very persistent and becomes puzzled if fellow inquisitors fail to jump at the chance to judge a trial.

Notes:

Stalkers may notice that Brother Vincenzo is absent from the meal. This is due to the fact that he is in the secret tomb conducting the Nightbattles ritual.

Something Wicked This Way Comes...

Description:

Not long after the dinner hour, a scream, which rouses most people in the abbey, pierces the night. Lord Teppo is found very dead; mutilated in his room along with one of his guards. This time Fra Marco shows up late and cannot hide the death from the others...

Notes:

Fra Marco makes a half-hearted attempt to tell people that the body guard and Teppo killed each other, but





when he looks into the room, he realizes that even the village idiot wouldn't believe that story.

There is no sign of forced entry and the room has no windows. A search turns up a small bag of powder, an pipe, and a book containing perverse sketches and poems. The guard's body is too damaged for Delve to work, though with Teppo it is possible.

Delve is a *Hard Roll*—because of the body's mutilated state—but success reveals Teppo's last moments...

The Stalker sees: The minor noble set down his pipe and look toward the ceiling from his bed. He imagines that the wall tapestry depicting a multi-headed monster growls and then falls off the wall above him. As it lands on him he sees several mouths open, baring razor-like teeth. His last thoughts are of a drug-laced confusion over being eaten by what feels like a blanket.

Strong traces of Essence can be detected in the room and leading into the hallway, but after that the traces fade away. If the Stalkers use Trackers at this point, they howl for a brief second and then stop. The Stalkers can easily detect the direction of the howls, but after some searching, they are found dead at the top of the stair leading down into the wine cellar. A trail of Essence can be detected leading into the dark cellar (*see the Wine Cellar and Secret Tomb under Corrupted Areas*).

The Player s.

Regional Chief Inquisitor ,
Fr a Mar co de Toledo.
(Pr imar y Char acter Template.)

Description:

Fra Marco is a tall man in his forties with a shaved pate ringed by a circlet of jet black hair, and an oiled beard. His dark eyes are piercing and full of malice. The inquisitor dons the elaborately decorated religious medals and colorful crimson and black cassock and skullcap of his order.

Notes:

Unlike most of those holy-men in Italy, Fra Marco took his holy orders in his homeland of Spain. And he knows that there is only one way to purify the transgression of the flesh, only one way to cleanse the soul—through absolute repentance. Unfortunately for his subjects, the inquisitor has been trained by the bloodiest masters in the art of "confession." So brutal is his reputation, even among his peers, that his travels throughout Italy are referred to as "the crimson trail".

The inquisitor wants to get to the bottom of the killings, but his ego and pride dictate that it is he who must be the successful sleuth. So, every night Fra Marco searches in the library for some hidden clue...

He is generally happy to see the arrival of the Stalkers, though he is quick to show his rage if he feels they are hampering his efforts in any way. Fra Marco does not want to see any more members of the inquisition hurt so he is adamant about the body guards being with them in the evenings.

Keep in mind, Fra Marco is used to asking questions, not answering them and he lacks patience with people busying themselves with his affairs. Consumed mentally with the problems at hand, the inquisitor is not at the Stalkers beck and call. Initially, he only takes a moment to greet the PC's and is not again available until dinner-time. Fra Marco should however be the most obvious of the characters. He commands the inquisition with an iron first. He is loud, demanding, egotistical, and quick to anger; enjoying his rank and power along with all the privilege that comes with it.

Fr a Mar co' s Bodyguar d.
(Secondary char acter template)

Description:

Traveling the roads during such dark times was done so at great risk to personal safety. Fra Marco has brought a small yet fanatically loyal contingent of roughly two score soldiers as his personal guard. They are experienced with matters of the Inquisition and have witnessed "diabolism" first hand. Therefore they are more level-headed when dealing with "demonic" displays of the supernatural. At least four of the





guards (dressed in crimson and armed with flintlock rifles and poignards) who make up Fra Marco's entourage at all times.

One way to use the guards is to reign in your players if they are overly zealous with their Stalker powers. The guards can also be used throughout the Hunt to create confrontation or dilemma for the Stalkers. Remember the Veil does not always portray them as members of the inquisition. They may be peasants or even prisoners. Mishandling these encounters can lead to a Stalker being accused of being a witch or demon. That would prove interesting...

Brother Vincenzo's Spells:

Nightbattles Ritual, Fortune Telling, The Procession of the Dead, Cure for the Withering, Deny the Spirit Powers (adds +10 Resolve against Unseen powers), Hand of the Righteous (rebounds failed non-mortal attacks).

Enchanted items:

His cross is imbued with Deny the Spirit Powers.

Description:

Brother Vincenzo is an old man of average, height and wide girth. What is left of his hair grows in soft white tufts. He smiles and nods when spoken to and he is kind.

Brother Vincenzo.

Fortitude 3
Vitality 10
Initiative 14
Defend 13
Perceive 14
Resolve 14
Attack 13
Strength 2
Occultism 16



Brother Vincenzo joined the brotherhood when he was only 10 years old, after an unfortunate accident left him tongueless and mute. His impairment kept him from being able to communicate normally with others, limiting him to hand gestures and notes. Mistakenly, some people have associated Vincenzo's silence with a lack of intelligence—Fra Marco is of this opinion.

Notes:

Brother Vincenzo is in fact a brilliant man, holding perhaps the greatest secret within the walls of the abbey, for none of his brethren know that he was born with a caul and not only is he a true Sensitive, he is the regional Benendanti Captain. Around his neck he wears, the cured caul of his birth, carefully hidden under

his tattered, brown cassock. If his caul is discovered, he denies any connection to the Benendanti; explaining that it is merely a keepsake given to him, when he was a child, by his mother. The monk would choose death over betraying his people.

When Vincenzo was twenty-two years of age, he received in a dream, the call to join the Benendanti. The old monk has since become a very powerful captain and magician over the years. He is effectively a divining rod for the souls of the local Benendanti. It was Vincenzo's considerable power which enabled him to find a long lost Touchstone in the abbey. Believing it to be a passage way to the Nightbattles Ritual he now leads the Benendanti's souls, via the Touchstone, into a Shadowland where they battle ancient sorcerers.

The arrival of the Inquisition has made Vincenzo quite nervous, but it has yet to stop him from practicing his craft within a secret chamber below the very wine cellar where





Lord Ruffo was recently found murdered. Vincenzo sees the Stalkers in their true form and believes them to be divine intervention—if given a chance to be alone with them, he tries to offer any help he can provide. He has no knowledge of the Shadow, Aculpin, nor does he know its intentions. But he is suspicious of Fra Marco and feels he has brought his own demons with him to Monte Verde.

GM Special Note:

Vincenzo is one of two primary characters in the Hunt (the other being Fra Marco). Vincenzo actively works on remaining as obscure as possible to the inquisition, so his actions through the Hunt should remain subtle and not bring any more attention than any of the minor characters. He spends much time in town and helping Matteo tend to sick prisoners.

If a Stalker tries to Delve Vincenzo without his permission: “GET OUT OF MY HEAD!” echoes in the Stalker’s head and is then “thrown” out of the Benendanti’s mind without gaining a bit of information; additionally the Stalker is *stunned* for a round (see Vincenzo’s enchanted cross).

Vincenzo can see the Stalkers in their true form and believes them to be angels come to help him, though he says nothing to any of the others. If they ask to Delve his mind, he agrees, and they see visions of the old monk leading the Benendanti into the Nightbattles, along with a view of the hideous corpse-like beings (sorcerer-monks) they battle against.

Brother Vesper .

(Secondary Character Template.)

Description:

Brother Vesper is a short thin man. He walks with his nose high in the air and speaks with a whining nasal voice. He will not think twice about betraying another to save his own hide. Blind to his own transparency, he fancies himself a master of subterfuge. Insecure, envious, and coveting, just begin to cover Brother Vesper’s flaws. He was the only monk to openly praise the Inquisition’s arrival, and he has been Fra Marco’s lap dog since. When around the Stalkers, his disingenuous personality and inept qualities are quite apparent.

Notes:

Vesper’s lowliness has gone so far as to falsely accuse a man of witch-craft because he desired his wife, Antonia. That man died at the hands of Fra Marco. Since then, the monk has been making unwanted advances toward the dead man’s spouse feigning concern over her loss. The fact is that the woman knows it was he who had her husband condemned and she is planning to exact revenge.

Though he is a poor source for information, Vesper can be used to help get the Stalkers acquainted with the setting; and being the victim of witchcraft may provide a brief diversion during the Hunt.

Antonia.

(Secondary Character Template.)

Description:

Antonia is a stunningly beautiful young woman with soft pale skin, long dark hair, and deep brown eyes. Her black dresses denote her period of mourning for her departed husband, and she exudes an air of profound sadness for her lost love.

Notes:

In despair Antonia has sought out Paulina, the witch, who sold her a powerful sorcery in order for her to reap revenge on her husband’s tormentor. Slowly, she has been manipulating Vesper’s dreams, gaining more and more power over his sub-consciousness and causing a strange rash to spread over his body. It’s only a matter of time before he gets his just desserts. Vesper radiates a minute amount of Essence because of the spell which—unbeknownst to the monk—is being worked upon him.

Brother Niccolo.

(Secondary Character Template.)

Description:

Brother Niccolo is a middle-aged, bald man of average height who usually wears a scratchy, wool cassock. Keeping loyal to his vow of poverty, he wears a large, plain, wood crucifix without any of the precious metals others of his rank possess. Niccolo is level-headed and a rational thinker.





Notes:

Brother Niccolo is the head abbot and "chief defender of the faith" for Monte Verde. Niccolo dislikes Fra Marco, though he hides this emotion and has accepted the inquisitor's authority without question. He is a good leader for the most part; stern but fair; not expecting anything from others that he would not do himself. Brother Niccolo sits reluctantly on the panel of Judges and while the others become more nervous about their fate as each day passes, he remains noticeably calm, having placed his fate in his beliefs. Brother Niccolo is not a good ally for the Stalkers, since he sees them as from the same order as Fra Marco. He is both distrustful and cool in any dealings with them.

Raddiccio, the diabolist.
(Secondary Character Template.)

Description:

Raddiccio is shorter than average height, with mousy-brown hair. Due to an unhealthy aversion to the sun, his pale skin is blotchy and flaky. Though he has not taken any religious vows, he dons the thick, brown, hooded cassock of the monks to hide from the sunlight.

Notes:

Raddiccio loves to hear himself talk, though if any Stalker bothers to listen he might find it interesting that the diabolist describes several common Shadows and names them as various types of demons.

Lord Teppo.
(Secondary Character Template.)

Description:

Lord Teppo is an unkempt, heavy-set man with jaundiced skin and pock marks covering his body. His addiction to narcotics has made the length of the daily hearings near unbearable, but it has also provided him with an escape from the horror of the slayings.

Nervously sitting on the dais, he waits for the day to end so he can seek the relief the drugs will bring. If he is encountered outside of the proceedings he is sluggish and irrational under the influence of the drug. Often the petty lord can be

found in the interrogation chambers deriving much pleasure from others' pain.

Notes:

The man is a petty noble, of a less than noble lineage, who has claim to much of the land within the Friuli region. Teppo is vain, conniving, self-centered, and careless of the lives of any not of equal or superior social status. He considers the Stalkers to be beneath him and treats them with sarcasm and contempt. During any confrontations the corrupt noble, being an opportunist, sides himself with which ever faction makes the best political sense. He has voted to condemn each and every person placed on trial because it suits him.

Constantly feigning ill health and dramatically coughing into a handkerchief, Teppo is quite an act to watch. Needless to say, he does not have the respect of any of his peers. The noble is somewhat aware of this fact and in an unavailing attempt to hide his many insecurities and shortcomings, he is forever berating his servants and guards. Teppo is terrified that he will be ripped to pieces like Lord Ruffo and he now keeps two guards at his chamber door along with one guard in the room with him.
Lord Teppo is the last victim of Aculpin.

Brother Matteo.
(Secondary Character Template.)

Matteo spends most of his time caring for the prisoners. He is a rash, but kind man, and is dangerously open about his criticism of the inquisition. He and Fra Marco do not get along at all. Matteo acts with contempt toward any Stalkers that come nosing around the jail, thinking them to be of the inquisition.

The Blacksmith.
(Secondary Character Template.)

Tall, brawny, bald, with a mustache and beard, this man is a friend of Brother Vincenzo and a fellow Benendanti. If Delve is used on him, the Stalker witnesses the Nightbattles taking place. Also through Delve, the Stalker sees Brother Vincenzo next to the blacksmith on the battlefield and





several other men and woman locked in a struggle with ancient looking beings (sorcerer-monks).

The Sorcerer-Monks.

The mortal monks have died long ago; their desiccating corpses are now imbued with extremely powerful *Sentient Enchantments*. They have in fact become what mortals refer to as "the living dead". The Sorcerer-monks have been battling with the Benendanti for some time now inside their Shadowland, though they do not share the same reasons for the violent clashes.

The Sorcerer-monks use the Essence they gather from the Benendanti they slay to power their arcane rituals. They seek to keep the Touchstone active to ensure their own survival, and to reap the power a connection to the Realm of Flesh offers. The Sorcerer-monks know that if Stalkers Mend the Enigma, the Shadowland could be destroyed; and that is why they devote such energy to protecting the portal.

The Sorcerer-monks are not able to venture far from the Etruscan tablets kept in their abbey (which allow them to channel Essence) and for that reason they cannot enter the Realm of Flesh.

Aculpin.

Description:

Aculpin truly deserves the designation of Unique Shadow. It is two-dimensional, resembling nothing more than a wall tapestry. The scene depicted is that of a mythical monster with several heads and a dozen glowing yellow eyes, baring row after row of razor sharp teeth in its mouths.

Trapped in a Shadowland, Aculpin is able to escape while Vincenzo performs the Nighbattles Ritual. The Shadow knows that Vincenzo is the primary power behind its ability to cross from the Rift. It has felt and imprinted the monk's Essence upon itself much the same way as an animal would identify the scent of its off-spring, and it knows the monk is in trouble.



The Sorcerer Monks. (Five Monks)

Fortitude 5
Vitality 15
Initiative 19
Defend 20
Perceive 16
Resolve 20
Occult 12

Combat: Vampiric touch
(Attack 14, 6D Damage, two attacks/sorcerer)

Special Abilities: Can use combined Resolve scores to fend off any Mend attempts on the portal.





Aculpin.

Fortitude 5

Vitality 18

Initiative 15

Defend 16

Perceive 10

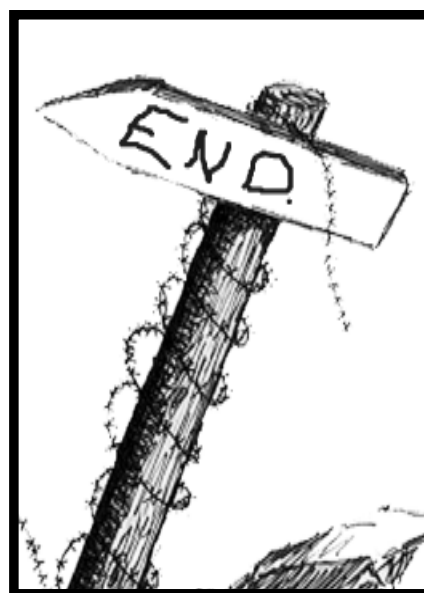
Resolve 16

Combat: Aculpin fights with the sharp teeth of its four heads (Attack 16, 4D Damage each). If it hits the same target with more than one head he can Rip for an extra 3 Dice per additional head after the first.

Special Abilities: Aculpin can attempt to smother its attacker. If successful the attacker loses 2 dice in his attack and defend rolls.

Vulnerabilities: Being two-dimensional it needs a surface to move along and so if removed from contact with such a surface, he is helpless.

If Vincenzo's sleeping form is attacked in the Realm of Flesh, Aculpin fights until death trying to defend the monk. If the Stalkers Mend the Touchstone while Aculpin is in the Realm of Flesh, the Shadow finds a place to sit back and enjoy its freedom on an abbey wall. And it does not harm anyone again.



Each night over the past several nights the Shadow has crossed to the Realm of Flesh with the intention of hunting. Its prey are those inquisitors who threaten Vincenzo and his people. By day Aculpin hovers around the other side of the portal waiting to be freed. Though sometimes at night the Shadow acts as a "watch-dog" for the Vincenzo (unknownst to the old monk) as he dreams—otherwise it is off hunting another victim.

