

reliquary

the World of Darkness





reliquary

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At his sentencing, Manny Romito said that he was sorry for killing Bob Jesten, Albert Wilson, and Peter Sochowsky. Manny lied, and the judge knew it. The judge sentenced him to death by lethal injection.

Manny died because of love. If anyone had asked him during his trial why he'd killed those three men, he'd have told them it was because they'd hurt the woman that he loved. But he hadn't even told his lawyer that, so bringing it up himself during the trial, starched shirts, borrowed ties and all, seemed out of place. Besides, it wasn't like they'd raped her, or beat her up, or anything that a jury of 12 honest (white) people would have understood. They tried to steal something from her that didn't technically belong to her in the first place, but that she owned anyway.

The more Manny thought about it, as he was led away in handcuffs with his mother and sister wailing and his father turning away from him, the more he reckoned it was a good idea he'd never brought up the gold apple after all.

— ● ● ● —

Manny met Gail at a block party. At first he thought she was lost, and then that she was slumming, but then he had to admit that other than the fact that she wasn't Italian, she fit right in. Maybe she was just light-skinned and bleach-blonde? He walked over to her to ask. He was already drunk.

Manny was what his mother called "good-hearted." That is, he was honest and hard-working, but not terribly bright. Manny recognized that, but didn't figure being smart was too big of a deal. His cousin was smart. He'd been in college for years, and was living in a crappy apartment while he worked on a degree that would let him call himself "Doctor" even though he wasn't a "real" doctor. Meanwhile, Manny was a welder and made good money, had a good retirement plan, and didn't have to spend every waking minute reading boring, thick books about art and metal and stuff. Although even Manny admitted it was kind of neat to hear about how people worked metal a hundred years ago, without torches or galvanization or anything.

So Manny saw Gail, and while some of his brothers or cousins might have thought about how to get such a good-looking girl in the sack, Manny just figured it'd be nice to bring her a drink. So he did, and they got to talking. Manny fell in love.

Gail danced, but not very well. She wasn't Italian and hadn't been going to these block parties all her life, like Manny had. Manny never did get around to asking why she was there, and later, in his cell awaiting the needles, he wondered if asking that might have spared him some trouble later. The thoughts were painful, because if he'd asked, she probably would have found someone else to help her with her problem, and that meant she'd never have loved him. That thought nearly made him cry. But everybody cries on death row, sometimes, no matter what they want you to believe.

— ● ● ● —

After the party, Manny and Gail went for a walk around the block. Manny was still a little buzzed, but he'd cut back once he and Gail had met because he wanted to feel at his best while talking to her. She told him about the apple. He couldn't remember later how she had brought it up, but then Manny didn't have a great memory for that kind of thing.

"It's about the size of your fist," she said. "I think it's made of gold, but I need to know what it's worth and I don't trust gold dealers." Manny nodded, even though he didn't know any gold dealers. "You don't know anyone who knows about this stuff, do you?"

Manny shook his head, and they moved on to other things. They talked about their work. Mostly Manny talked about his work and Gail nodded, because she wasn't working just then. They had walked all the way around the block when Manny remembered his cousin Al. "Hey, my cousin knows about art and metal and stuff."

"Oh, yeah?" Gail had just stepped under the streetlight, on the corner across from St. Jude's. Manny was watching the way the fake light caught in her hair. "Manny," she laughed, "what are you looking at?"

"You," he said, and then he kissed her. She seemed surprised, but she kissed him back. Later, when Manny was waiting to die, his traitorous mind sometimes thought that she'd used him somehow. But, he told himself, if Gail had meant for him to do all of this, wouldn't she have seemed more interested in the apple that first night?

— ● ● ● —

The day Manny Romito died, he said something very strange before they put the needle in his arm. He said, "I never got to see that apple." Most of the people at the execution figured he was just being poetic. Some of his family figured they'd slipped him a pill before they brought him out, just to keep him calm,

and that he was just drunk-talking. Only one person present knew that "the apple" was significant, and he waited for Manny to die and then scanned the room for ghosts. He didn't see any, so he left, resolving to look into the matter when he had time. That might be a while, though, because this particular person was a busy man. The only reason he was there at all was because Manny had killed a friend of his.

If Manny's family had known about the vagaries of life and death, and how it all "works," they wouldn't have been surprised to find that Manny didn't leave a ghost behind. Manny didn't hold grudges or remember slights. If he had something to say to you, he said it. If he felt like he needed to hit you, well, he'd do that, too. That was why they felt, perhaps as a coping strategy and perhaps with some logic, that if Manny had killed those men, he must have felt he needed to.

They were right about that. Manny hated those people with more passion than he'd ever hated anybody. He hated them because of what they did to Gail. But by the time he came to die, he'd had his revenge and spent his anger. All that was left was love, and over the years that he waited to die, his lawyer half-heartedly going through the appeals, even that turned into memory and regret.

The man who knew that Manny's last words were significant, but that he didn't leave a ghost behind, didn't care about some blue-collar thug under the drip. He didn't care about Manny's family and their confusion, and he certainly didn't doubt that Manny was guilty, because in his experience people were just crazy and who knew why they did anything anyway. But he was concerned about how said thug snuck up on his friend Bob and shot him in the head. The man got out to his car before he decided that he did have time to look into it, after all, and went to a dingy office downtown.

The man's door had the letters "L Y GRAND" stenciled on it. "PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR" would have cost too much, and "PI" just looked silly. Besides, while Lyle was a private investigator, most of what he did fell more under the "hired thief" category than actual investigation, and if he advertised his PI license, he was sure he'd be investigating cheating husbands within the week. Lyle couldn't abide the notion of snooping on some fat white guy with a hooker. The thought made him queasy.

Lyle pulled out a scrapbook and looked over photos of his friend. Bob had been in the military, and while he wasn't a SEAL or Army Ranger or anything like that, he had kept in shape and stayed alert. It was Bob, actually, who'd taught Lyle about having "street eyes" - watching shadows, reflections, looking down alleys, that kind of thing. So how did Bob wind up getting shot by a guy like Manny?

Everybody has an off day, mused Lyle. Wonder if Bob left a ghost?

— • • • —

Manny had never killed anyone before. He'd been in fights before, even a knife fight once, but it had never escalated too far. A few stitches in his arm, and that was it. He'd never considered killing anyone, let alone planned how to do it. Never until Gail...

Gail had told him that Bob had the apple originally. But he'd stolen it (Gail never said where it had come from), and Gail wanted to give it back, but she couldn't while Bob was still out there free. Manny had suggested turning him in for stealing it, but Gail said he had friends on the force and wouldn't get arrested. She didn't suggest killing him; she just cried in Manny's arms and said how scared she was that Bob would come find her. Manny was pretty sure he had just meant to scare Bob.

He found Bob in his car outside Gail's apartment building. He walked up, put his hand on his gun, and put it to Bob's head. And then he felt something. He couldn't place the feeling then and was never able to express it later, but he knew that Bob was *doing something* without moving, and he pulled the trigger. And he saw the hole appear from the other side of Bob's head and spray brains and blood all over the window. Manny ran, and he got all the way home before he threw up.

Gail was waiting for him. When he told her what happened, she held him close and told him that it was okay. Bob was dangerous and if Manny hadn't shot him, he'd probably be dead. Bob never went anywhere without a gun. It was self-defense, in a way.

Manny wouldn't have accepted that coming from anyone else. Truth be told, he had almost run to find a cop rather than coming home. But from Gail, it made just enough sense that he could accept it, and put what he'd done behind him.

It had only been a week after Bob died when Gail asked Al to look at the apple. Then she came home with a black eye, crying to Manny that Al had hit her and tried to take the apple. Manny had been incensed. He went straight over to his cousin's apartment, and when Al opened the door, he'd punched him in the face.

Al stumbled backwards and fell over his couch. Manny heard breaking glass and then a gurgling sound. He walked around the couch and saw that Al had fallen through a glass coffee table. Thick blood oozed from a gash in his throat. He reached up for Manny, and then went limp. Manny learned before the trial that a chunk of glass had punctured his windpipe just above the Adam's apple and he'd choked on his own blood.

Manny had never meant to kill Al, but as Al lay dying, Manny had thought *Shouldn't have hit her*. Then he left. He went straight home. This time he didn't throw up. He told Gail what had happened and asked if maybe they should call the police, but she just asked him for more ice to put on her eye. Manny got her the ice, and then they made love, and he fell asleep feeling like he'd done right by her. It didn't occur to him to ask why Al hadn't taken the apple, or what Al had told her about what it was worth. Manny didn't ask questions like that, not of Gail.

— • • • —

By the time Lyle got to the apartment, Al had been dead five years. It takes a long time for the legal system to execute a man, and Lyle just hoped that Al hadn't moved on when Manny had died.

No one was renting the apartment. Lyle broke in and looked around. Walls painted, furniture moved out, bare bones. Cold, even in spring. He tapped on the wall and called out softly; he saw a flicker of movement from the next room.

"Al?" Lyle walked a little ways toward the movement, but kept his hand on the door frame. "Albert Wilson?" *Hope he remembers his name.*

The movement stopped, and then drifted closer. Lyle never saw ghosts as full-bodied apparitions, though Bob had claimed to. Lyle only saw them as tiny wisps of movement out of the corners of his eyes. Lyle wished ruefully that Bob *had* left a ghost; maybe he could've answered some questions and contacting Al wouldn't have been necessary.

"I'm Lyle Grand. I want to talk to you." No response. "About Manny Romito." That brought a reaction. The room got even colder. Lyle decided to press his luck. "And an apple."

Lyle flew back against the wall. The ghost was here in full force now, although Lyle still couldn't see it. "I'm here to put things right!" The ghost lifted him up and pinned him against the wall. Lyle grabbed at a straw. "I'll get you the apple!"

The ghost dropped him. Lyle could still see it (sort of), but it was calmer now. "I'll get it for you," he said, "but I need to know what happened." He felt the ghost acquiesce.

Not all ghosts can communicate with the living, but those that do have various ways of going about it. Some ghosts send their voices through electronics. Some invade dreams. Some just make pictures in the air, and the ghost that Al Wilson left behind was one of those. Lyle watched those pictures for an hour, and when he left, he knew the truth.

He had to find Gail and get that apple. But he knew he couldn't touch it, or look at it, or he'd end up like Al and Bob...or worse, like Manny.

He went back to the office to think it through. He had a feeling he was missing something: something that had to do with Gail.

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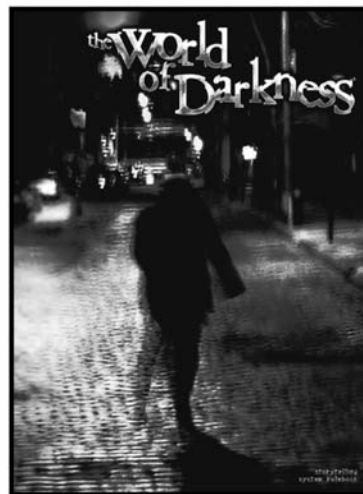
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Table of Contents

Prologue 1

Introduction 8

Chapter One: In Dark Corners 12

Chapter Two: A Million Little Things 38

Chapter Three: Powers and Prices 82

Chapter Four: Tales of the MacGuffin 118

Epilogue 140

Welcome to the Reliquary

An Introduction to Relics

The term “relic” can mean many different things, depending on the context. A museum may define a relic as an item of interest because of its age or historic import. A treasure hunter may think of a relic as a valuable artifact, saleable to the highest bidder. To the religious community, a relic is a body or body part of a venerated individual (often a saint). These definitions are diverse, and yet there is a common theme running through them. For whatever reason - emotional, spiritual, economic or historic - a relic is a precious item. Relics may be many things, but whatever form they take, whatever powers they possess, and no matter how old or new, relics are valuable and desired.

Relics in the World of Darkness

Within the World of Darkness, there seem to be exceptions to every rule. Every “always” likely has an “other than”, every “must” has at least one corresponding “unless”. These supernatural creatures are a certain way, except when they are not. These legendary places are just like this, other than when they are different. These people behave this way, except when they do not. Likewise, magical items are exactly what they are described as in the various other game books — unless they are relics.

Relics are, as a group, anomalies. Unlike standard magical items (klaives, imbued items, Artifacts, fetishes or the like) crafted by mages, werewolves or any other supernatural group with such abilities, relics as a whole have very little in common with each other. They are not identifiable by any particular singular quality. Some are very powerful, others inert. Some are ancient, others all but brand new. Some are legendary, known even to those who know nothing else about the supernatural world; others are treasured only by a select few or even a single individual.

Some relics are ancient artifacts, timeless creations which transcend the memory of modern man, and have value as much for their lost origins and what they may teach about long-forgotten times as for any supernatural power they may possess. Others are the stuff of legends, perhaps powerful at their creation, but most significant because of the millennia of meaning bestowed upon them in myths and folklore. Still other relics are heirlooms, memorabilia or legacies, given meaning (and sometimes power) not by the virtue of having been crafted by powerful supernatural individuals, but because of their ties to a single dynamic moment, or long-term exposure to circumstances fraught with emotion, danger, or energy.

In truth, the term “relic” in the World of Darkness is more a broad label for things which do not fit neatly into other categories, rather than a specific category itself.

Rather than waste pages of text attempting to define the minutia of how and why relics are what they are or how they *should* be used in game, we will give readers the tools they need to use relics in their stories in whatever way *they* see fit. We will offer a broad sampling of relics great and small, mundane and powerful, precious

“Thou shalt dance!” he said.
“Dance in thy red shoes till thou art pale and cold, and till thy body shrivels to a skeleton. Thou shalt dance from door to door; and where proud, haughty children dwell shalt thou knock, that they may hear thee and be afraid of thee!”
“Mercy!” cried the girl. But she did not hear what the Angel answered, for the shoes carried her away — carried her through the door on to the field, over stock and stone, and she was always obliged to dance.

— The Red Shoes,
Hans Christian
Anderson



and disposable, which can be utilized as-is or customized with the wide variety of powers, costs and curses available in this book. Perhaps more importantly, we will give players and Storytellers the tools with which to create their own relics, and offer essays, chronicle ideas and specific game scenarios to help implement relics into any World of Darkness game in an entertaining, exciting and enriching fashion.

Theme: Things Have Power

In human society, a great deal of emphasis is placed on possessions. We judge ourselves and each other based on our houses, our cars, our jewelry, our “toys”, and our clothing. The things we own, however, also own us. Possessions are more than tools or toys: they are symbols and labels which we and others use to define ourselves.

We invest money, time, energy and emotion into items, and sometimes those investments pay off in ways we might have never suspected they would. Things can become tangible symbols of ideas.

- A childhood toy becomes a symbol of our youth, whether that means it is an icon of simpler times, a reminder of otherwise forgotten dreams and desires or a receptacle of childhood pain and sorrow.
- A wedding ring serves as a form of armor against unwanted attentions, a symbol of acceptance into adulthood and normalcy, or an unbreakable shackle to an abusive spouse.

- A gun symbolizes freedom to the man who uses it to escape his captors (or the law), wealth to the one who feeds his family with his hunting, or hopelessness as he sees its barrel swinging towards his children, whether in his hands or those of an enemy.

Humans are also fickle in regards to our “things”. We lust after something, crave it, *need* it, do anything to obtain it... until the next “thing” comes along. And then we forget the old item. We discard it, store it, stick it away - out of sight and out of mind. These things don’t just disappear, however; they remain where we leave them, gathering dust and, sometimes, power.

And sometimes, they don’t forget us as quickly as we forget them.

Mood: Lost lore. Discovery. Peril.

Relics are more than “power up” items or curses incarnate — at least if they’re handled well. With proper attention paid to background and dramatic atmosphere, they can serve as icons for the spirit and theme of a game. A well-introduced relic can add more to a game than back-up healing or a few extra dice on a combat roll; it can serve as an icon that reinforces the thematic elements of the chronicle as a whole, or a counterpoint to help balance a game which has become too light, dark, depressing or one-dimensional.

Relics can represent forgotten secrets. They can give players the sense of leaving the lit path and venturing into

the dusty cracks of the world, of touching something that has gone untouched for a thousand years.

Relics can remind us of the value of keeping secrets, and the alienation it can bring. The power of hidden knowledge and the agony of possessing an item of importance or value and being afraid to tell anyone about it. The fear of discovery.

Owning a relic and trying to go about every day life can be like going to work with a loaded gun in your pocket and trying to keep it to yourself.

Even relics without astronomical supernatural powers can bring their own challenges. The discovery of a letter that reveals a truth undreamed of by the populace at large. The knowing of the impossible. The light-headed, heavy-stomach, steaming-skin feeling that comes over you in waves as you gradually make sense of what you see and realize that it changes *everything*.

Relics can add that to a game. The thrill of discovery. The triumph of reclaiming lost knowledge. The wonder of realizing the truth beneath layers of fiction and falsehood. And the heavy weight of the implications thereof.

How to Use This Book

The chapters of this book are laid out in such a way as to facilitate the introduction of relics into any World of Darkness chronicle.

Chapter One: In Dark Corners provides a selection of essays designed to aid players and Storytellers in using relics and relic-focused plotlines to enrich their games.

Chapter Two: A Million Little Things offers sample relics, complete with backgrounds, Powers, costs and storytelling hints. These can be incorporated “as-is” into a chronicle, or serve as inspiration for creating new relics which can be owned by players or serve as plot devices (or both).

Chapter Three: Powers and Prices gives details and mechanics for dozens of relic Powers which can be mixed and matched to create an endless supply of unique artifacts, treasures and heirlooms. As well, new Merits relating to relics and those who use them are found here.

Chapter Four: Tales of the MacGuffin provides a plethora of sample scenarios specifically taken from relic-focused games. Each not only offers an example of the types of challenges that may face characters (and Storytellers) in a game that includes relics and artifacts, but can be stripped down and reloaded with details to allow it to be dropped into any game incorporating relics.

Sources and Inspirations

Relics are not unique to the World of Darkness. Throughout history, storytellers have been utilizing

unique magical items of this sort to provide motivation, symbolism or conflict to their tales.

Books

Beowulf - The poem is absolutely obsessed with the stuff that people have, especially the stuff that Beowulf gets over the course of his adventures. The stuff that World of Darkness characters get should be just as precious to them, just as valuable, just as detailed and just as nebulously magical.

The Lord of the Rings - Besides having one of the most famous relics ever (the One Ring), Tolkien's books (and the movies inspired by them) are filled to the brim with objects made unique and prestigious through background details, lineages, past usage, famous owners and familial ties. A **World of Darkness** chronicle probably won't have this kind of volume of relics, but might well blend profound, frightening objects like the One Ring with less powerful but no-less-individualized objects like Sting and Glamdring.

The Necronomicon - This book, while itself a fictional creation of H.P. Lovecraft, has spread across so many different media, stories, genres and eras that it must be considered is one of the superstars of occult relics. Sometimes it's a catalyst, sometimes a MacGuffin, sometimes a simple prop, sometimes a joke, but it never seems to completely lose its luster.

Constantine - Notice that the Spear of Destiny is actually not a MacGuffin in this movie. Rather, it is the dramatic deadline (unknown to the protagonists); when the Spear reaches Los Angeles, the shit will hit the fan. Also, notice how the Spear of Destiny does not define the visual elements and thematic territory for the film. Even if the Spear of Destiny wasn't in the movie, it'd still be set in Los Angeles and would still have a strong Catholic atmosphere. On top of all this Spear of Destiny stuff, the movie is littered with important (and pretty cool) artifacts: talismans, fiery wands, holy water, haunted chairs, blessed bullets, arcane tattoos and more.

Television Shows

Alias - This show's use of artifacts and MacGuffins is a pretty standard example of a chain style - one MacGuffin leads to another, which leads to yet another - with a surprisingly drawn out lifespan for a larger MacGuffin: the truth about Rambaldi himself, the great MacGuffin maker.

The Dresden Files - While many of Harry's magical items might be seen as Artifacts or imbued items (being crafted by a “wizard”/Mage), others lean more towards relics, taking their power less from “magic” and more from their sympathetic connection with a situation, person or event.

The Lost Room - This Sci Fi Channel miniseries centered around a mysterious room and the dozens of once-mundane items from within it which have now taken on

supernatural powers. While the Objects are all the result of a single cataclysmic Event, any one of them might be given a unique background and serve perfectly well as a relic for a World of Darkness campaign. As well, The Collectors, The Legion and The Order of Reunification are intriguing examples of how mysterious and powerful relics can affect those around them, both as individuals and groups.

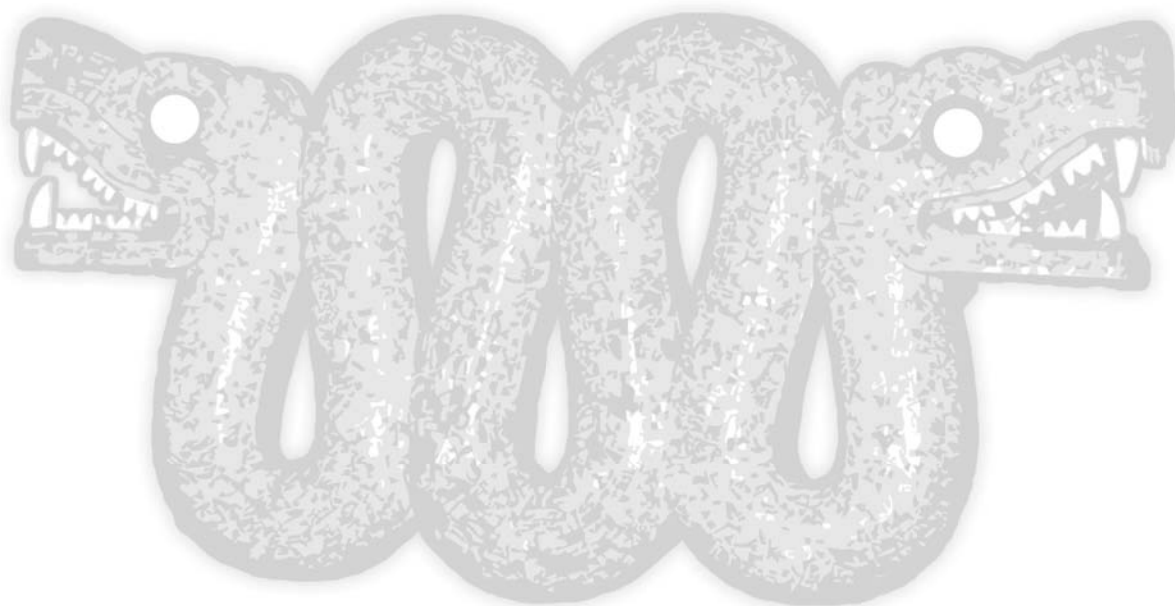
Movies

Indiana Jones - Each of the Indiana Jones movies centers on an antique, mystical MacGuffin that doesn't just drive the action but implies the settings, enemies and visual vocabulary for the film. The MacGuffin certainly isn't the

only role that an artifact can fill in a story, of course, but it's an important one that's easy to use.

A Simple Plan - This movie's about money, rather than a mystic artifact, but the moral dilemma and the suspense are all spot on for relic adventures. Bill Paxton's character slides right down the Morality scale as this movie goes on and you can see how it affects his psyche.

Frailty - This, however, is the movie where Bill Paxton's eroding morality really makes him nuts (or vice versa). He thinks that axe has supernatural powers. Does it? Or do his words simply give it such dramatic weight that, without any magic powers, the presence of the axe is effective enough to warrant modeling in the game mechanics?





Gail Wagner

Night falls over Boston.

If you listen, you can hear the machinery of the Big Dig in the background.

I love the Big Dig. Ever since it started, I've been sneaking into the tunnels and taking pictures. I sell the pictures to the Globe sometimes, when there's something juicy going on, but mostly it's about the art. The imagery of the ground that people walk on getting torn up, making caves underneath the city. Wherever there's a deep, dark place, people gotta fill it. Get Freudian with that if you want, but it's true. They're starting to tell stories about some monster that lives in the Dig now, strong enough to lift bulldozers and all wild-haired and covered in mud.

Anyway, yesterday I saw two guys talking in hushed tones.

Not uncommon.

I figure them for Irish mob 'cause they sure aren't wops, but then I get closer and they're talking too free to be mob. These are amateurs, people who aren't used to thinking that someone might be listening.

One guy's white with dreadlocks, the other I can't see well enough (and he didn't come out in the photos, damn it). The dreadlocks guy says, "I haven't found it yet."

Other guy says, "She's still got it, and she's not in the city anymore."

"Maybe you should just let it go."

"What's this? You're turning down gold booty?"

"Ha-ha," says Dreadlocks, and I get the distinct feeling there's a joke I'm not getting. But they're talking about stealing, that's sure enough. "You know where she is?"

"Yeah," says the other guy, "she's in Buffalo."

"Out of my territory," says Dreadlocks, "and yours, too."

"Let me worry about that. Just give me what you've got." Dreadlocks hands over an envelope, and I look through the telephoto lens. The words "GAIL WAGNER" are written on it. "You mind if I bring it here once I get it, Davey? For appraisal?"

Davey tosses his dreads and glares at the guy. "You bring that thing to Boston, Enoch," he says, "and I'll turn Annie on your ass."

Enoch nods. "Duly noted." He walks off, away from me. What the hell kind of name is "Enoch" anyway?

I'm shaking. This is a big deal. Buffalo's my hometown. I knew a Gail Wagner back in high school. If she's involved in something, I could shoot it from the ground up – "Anatomy of Grand Larceny" or something. Don't know if it'd be worth a Pulitzer or not, but it'd sure get my name around.

Although "Peter Sochowsky, Pulitzer Prize Winner" sure has a nice ring to it.

Chapter One: In Dark Corners

"The world
does not judge us
by who we are and
what we know; it
judges us by what
we have."

- Joyce Brothers

Relics have a lot to offer to a **World of Darkness** chronicle. They can provide characters with food for thought, enlightenment, power and challenge. They also can be challenging for players and Storytellers, however. This series of essays is designed to aid those who would incorporate relics into their **World of Darkness** games.

- **Value and Symbolism** offers reflection on making relics a valuable part of a chronicle, whether they're little known or legendary.
- **One in a Million or a Dime a Dozen?** deals with the pros and cons of rare or plentiful relics in a game.
- **50 Details Implying a Relic's History** offers a list of interesting sensory clues that Storytellers can use to give relics more flavor and depth.
- **Location, Location, Location** covers the common places where relics might be found and the challenges of seeking them there.
- **Adding Life to Dry Subjects** talks about how to cover research, hard sciences and other potentially dry topics in game without allowing them to become boring.
- **Finders, Keepers: Treasure Hunting and the Law** raises some of the myriad issues that relic hunters may encounter when going about their risky business.
- **Relic-Focused Chronicles** goes into depth on some of the types of story lines that might revolve around relics, and what they each offer to players and Storytellers.

Value and Symbolism

By Wood Ingham

Everything means something else. It's the way the human psyche works. Things have importance and meaning to us. We look at an object and see all sorts of things, make all sorts of connections. They can be simple things. One slightly chipped coffee mug has, for the man who has owned it ever since college, associations that go beyond simply being a receptacle for beverages. A teddy bear that belonged to a murdered child carries the baggage of innocence and grief.

In literature, physical paraphernalia has always carried a heavy weight of meaning. In **World of Darkness** stories, choosing objects that have associations can help to add a sense of depth and drama, and, if done correctly, help to drive a story that players and Storytellers alike will value and remember.

Making it Significant

It's easy to attach meaning to mythical and religious relics. They're *about* meaning, after all. Perhaps the most well-used (or, if you look at it another way, hackneyed) relic is the Arthurian Holy Grail. It was a chalice; Christ drank from it at the Last Supper. His friend Joseph of Arimathea took it to Britain and placed it in a hidden cathedral, the Chapel Perilous. The chalice brings healing, and not just to those who drink from it, frequently the Fisher King (or sometimes Arthur himself), but to the land itself, which blooms and experiences a new Spring. The Grail brings grace. The Grail restores. The cup symbolizes restoration. The Arthurian story makes it explicit by tying it to the Christian myth of death and resurrection: *this is my blood*.

In Christian mysticism, the blood heals. The blood creates communities and kingdoms. The blood transcends death. It goes further: an older Arthurian story, *The Spoils of Annwn*, has the knights descending to the Welsh Hell to retrieve a cauldron that can raise the dead. The symbols change slightly, but the associations are the same — death (a descent to Hell in one, the Crucifixion in the other), resurrection, and healing — and so, the meaning is the same.

In a story based around the finding of some relic that could heal or resurrect someone, recurring images of cups and chalices of various kinds could be pointers to the direction of the quest. Consider that humble coffee mug and the house in which it resides. It could represent the secret history of a life, the one piece of evidence that remains from some terrible or wonderful (but probably terrible) past event, or the one memento that reminds a formerly human monster of his past life. A vampire who once owned it fixates on it and begins to believe that through it, he could perhaps become human again. (He might — it could be the final ingredient in the magical ritual that returns him to life). In a **Promethean** game, a lonely Frankenstein monster finds that obtaining a piece of human paraphernalia, keeping and loving this object which was once so precious to a now-dead owner, is the final step he needs to complete his quest for humanity.


Now consider an apple. An apple tossed by Eris, the personification of trouble, into a clique of jealous goddesses, started the Trojan War. The fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, the eating of which brought death and sin to mankind, is an apple in most re-tellings of the story. An apple nearly killed Snow White. In short: apples are trouble. Or at least they're symbols of trouble. An apple could be injected with a disease that will unleash a plague of zombies upon the world. An apple could be the logo of a company (like an electronics company, just to pull an example out of nowhere) which is the front of some smug, over-confident villain. The bloody shrine to ter-



rible, unknowable gods, a place of peril and pain, has over its gate, carved in moldering relief, an apple tree.

Not all symbolic references are ancient or legendary. Modern literature can provide symbols, too. The “bow of burning gold” and “arrows of desire” that William Blake created as symbols of a call to revolution and social change could become real items that symbolize the same thing: the arms of a new revolutionary leader, given the power to inspire by his holy weapons. A simple glass of milk is usually a symbol of health, but in Anthony Burgess’ novel *A Clockwork Orange*, the milk takes on a sinister meaning as the drug-laced milk the protagonist Alex drinks inspires him to create chaos and violence wherever he goes. The eponymous painting in Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is a pretty direct representation for sin.

Historical events have their symbols as well. Nazi memorabilia is kind of obvious; Nazis are, after all, the bad guys you don’t have to think about beating up. But even though it’s a bit played out, the wake of World War II can still evoke horrors above and beyond the imaginations of most people. A cap badge from one of the Death’s Head divisions could carry all kinds of curses, all manner of dreams



of ice-bound battles, slaughtered innocents, betrayal, hate, pride and fear. Similarly, a wrought-iron gate, its arch bearing the words “Arbeit macht frei” (“work makes you free”) has a terrible, terrible meaning that few fictional or mythological symbols can match. What could be a piece of scrap metal becomes instead a gateway to a hell beyond any purely religious imagining, the kind of hell that can only be created by banal, empty, human evil.

A clever Storyteller can also use the ominous fascination we have with fascism and its brothers to say things other than the obvious, however. A copy of the 1938 edition of *Time* magazine featuring Adolf Hitler as Man of the Year has a few spots of dark brown dried blood on its cover. Still worth a lot of money, it has other value too, as it grants wellbeing and psychic strength to its owner every time he aggrandizes himself at others’ expense and still finds a way to make out he’s the good guy. What’s happening here is that the object — the magazine — is both symbol and MacGuffin, a material extension of the man’s hypocrisy. It doesn’t have to be magical at all. The power the magazine holds could just be psychological. Or it could be left open. These things don’t really need to be explained. It’s enough that the story has the possibility of there being a mysterious power.

Pop culture has created its own myths. Popular music brought us saints of Beautiful Doomed Youth who blazed brightly and ended their lives. Consider what a guitar pick owned by Nick Drake (or for that matter, by Ian Curtis or Kurt Cobain) might represent: talent married to disillusionment, a sense of failure. It’s the kind of relic that might have a terrible price (see pgs.113-116 for Cursed relic powers). Marilyn Monroe’s lipstick, a pair of classic sunglasses that once belonged to James Dean or a rhinestone suit worn by the King in Vegas all carry their own associations: glamour, success, exploitation, death.

Subverting Symbols

Symbols don’t have to have the meanings they’re supposed to have. Let’s go back to that Holy Grail. Resurrection can be the foundation of a message of hope, but in a horror game, it’s not just the good guys who get resurrected. A chalice that, when the stars come to the right configuration, fills with real blood (as opposed to wine, or blood that looks, tastes and smells like wine), is creepy enough. Perhaps, if fed to the crumbling bones of a vampire, flesh begins to clothe it and the evil one rises again. This worked for Dracula. A lot. Or maybe, if a human drinks from it, she’s not the one healed or resurrected: her mind is annihilated, and her body is inhabited by the soul of something ancient, terrible and alien. Everyone who drinks from this Unholy Grail becomes another shard of the Dark God, until the blood runs out. They’re harbingers of a Second Coming—the Second Coming of “a rough beast, its hour come at last.” Each former human becomes a step towards the apocalypse.

A subverted symbol should really be recognizable as subversion. It’s one thing to cast a coffee mug as the Holy Grail, but an Unholy Grail should really look a bit like a Grail, otherwise, there’s a chance that your players might not get the significance and miss a clue.

Getting It, Not Getting It, and Getting the Wrong Thing Completely

Sometimes it doesn’t matter if the players get it or not. Symbolism is fine and dandy, and yeah, it can add a level of inspiration and emotional involvement to a game session that might not be there. But if everybody’s having thrills, chills and laughs around the table, what does it matter if the players don’t pick up on every clever mythical or literary reference the Storyteller inserts into a game?

On the other hand, sometimes a plot depends on the players grasping the significance of the symbol — for many Storytellers, there wouldn’t be any point in having the symbols at all if that wasn’t the case. Let’s go back to that old, chipped coffee mug once again. A character knows he needs to find a Grail, imbued with a shard of a soul belonging to someone whose life the character failed to save. Finding it brings hope, of a sort, and perhaps rest to the man’s ghost. There’s a coffee mug on the table and a Kurt Cobain poster on the wall, and the player says his character takes... the poster. Oops.

The Storyteller could just go along with that and reveal that the player chose wrongly. That’s legitimate. In a horror game, where the characters don’t know whether their choices mean triumph or doom, discovering they took the wrong fork in the narrative road can be powerful, if played right and the players are prepared to take the consequences of a wrong choice.

On the other hand, it can make everyone miserable. It can be really disheartening for a Storyteller when players don’t get all the symbolic associations she labored over. It can be just as disheartening for a player who doesn’t think he’s done anything wrong to find he’s screwed up because he didn’t pick up on the clues.

It’s possible to avoid this situation: the Storyteller could add other clues into the mix. Repeated, prophetic descriptions of a “Grail” and a “chalice” could underline the importance of the object. The ghost talks of the “cup of grace” and the like. The character dreams of a chalice.

Still, even with the Storyteller doing everything short of saying “it’s the cup, stupid,” some players don’t get the hint. Sometimes, they just don’t pick it up. Sometimes, a symbol doesn’t resonate with everyone in the game. For example, Christian imagery is only going to have an effect if the players know something about Christian imagery. If players don’t care about Greek mythology, pivoting an entire chronicle on them recognizing a painted leather jacket as a kind of analogue to the Shield of Achilles and

drawing the appropriate conclusions (it's worn by a hero, but he's doomed; it confers a kind of limited invulnerability) may well fall completely flat.

In the end, it might be better for the Storyteller to just scrap the symbol, and think up a new idea on the fly as to why the poster's significant and why the character was right. That's just as legitimate. In fact, this is often the best policy. Symbols are only ever as good as the people interpreting them. The only meanings these objects hold are the meanings we ascribe to them. If the players (and by extension, their characters) attach a meaning to an object that the Storyteller didn't intend to be important, who's to say they're wrong? The Storyteller is well within her rights to call a time-out and change her plans. If it's more fun for the players to think they were right, and if it provides a more powerful and enjoyable experience for the players to go with that object as the symbol of the story, letting them is the most rewarding option. The players have more fun; the Storyteller gets the satisfaction of helping the players have more fun.

Which is, after all, the point.

One in a Million or a Dime a Dozen?

by Matthew McFarland

One of the most important questions to consider when including magical or enhanced relics in a game is, "How common are they?" Answering that question requires considering how such objects can be created, how long enchantments and enhancements last and how easy these objects are to destroy, among other things. For our purposes, though, the most important consideration that the dichotomy of "one in a million vs. a dime a dozen" requires is what it means to the chronicle as a whole.

The World of Darkness works on the assumption that the supernatural is common enough to be found anywhere, but rare enough that normal people don't stumble over it on a daily basis. Part of the reason that normal people don't see the supernatural, of course, is that the supernatural takes pains to hide itself. Another factor is that people, for the most part, don't *want* to know the truth and are happier in their ignorance. These reasons for the success that the supernatural enjoys in its secrecy extend to relics, as well. The creators and the owners keep them out of the public eye, or at least don't openly display their strange abilities. Likewise, logical human researchers who find mystical relics often begin their research *knowing* that, for instance, waving the strange wand they've just discovered won't stir up a whirlwind, or that wearing a plain but oddly compelling ring and turning it clockwise won't change them into monsters, and so they don't attempt such actions. A curious layman who discovers such an object, however, might perform either of those actions innocently, thereby triggering the object's magic.

Story Hook — Humbug and Hokum

The characters hear of a magical relic in the hands of a powerful sorcerer, but are not given specifics as to the sorcerer's true nature. That is, even in a Mage chronicle, the characters do not know if this being is another mage, a vampire or even a werewolf with an especially mystical bent. The story that they hear mentions the fantastic power that the sorcerer wields, but the context of the story makes it seem that the item is responsible for a great deal of this power.

When the characters arrive to steal (or perhaps just examine) the item, they discover that the sorcerer, whatever he truly is, does not own any mystical object. All of the power he possesses is his own, or is, perhaps, just clever parlor tricks. Will the sorcerer be willing to let the characters leave with his secret? How does he feel about the notion that the characters were coming to rob him, anyway?

So, a relevant question when deciding on the scarcity of magic objects is, "How often, in your chronicle, do you wish such objects to be discovered?" The more common they are, the more often they will come to light and, perhaps, cause strange occurrences. Those occurrences can easily propel stories, and that can be a big help for players creating back-stories for their characters and Storytellers needing to come up with a plot for a story in a pinch. They can, however, also cause an equal number of complications for players, characters and Storytellers.

A final consideration, before we tackle the specifics of "one in a million" chronicles versus "dime a dozen" chronicles is the Merits found in Chapter Three of this book. In a chronicle in which such objects are commonplace, Merits dealing with them become more valuable. If the objects are scarce, then Merits dealing with them come into play less often. That doesn't mean, though, that you need to adjust the cost of the Merits based on how frequently they come into play, just that you need to be aware of this issue (which, again, is discussed further anon).

One in a Million

In a chronicle where magical items are very rare, characters might hear rumors about mystical objects, and even chase down a few of them, but for the most part they turn out to be hoaxes (though that in itself can lead to stories; see the Humbug and Hokum sidebar for ideas). Supernatural characters,

especially mages and werewolves, can craft mystical items, but such work is time consuming and difficult. Any magical item that the group discovers should be truly treasured, even if the effect it has on game mechanics is minimal.

Chronicles like this test the patience of the characters (and the players). Just learning about a magical item should be a feat in itself, perhaps even requiring a story's worth of investigation. Actually finding the item might require two or three stories in total, as the characters follow false leads, red herrings, deal with rivals going for the same goal, unrelated setbacks and personal issues. When the characters finally break through the last barrier, literal or metaphorical, and wrap their hands around the object of their quest, it should feel like a true accomplishment.

Once the characters have the relic, of course, they must keep it. In a world where magic items are extremely rare, waiting until other people find objects and then stealing them becomes a viable option for obtaining them (whereas in a "dime a dozen," chronicle, it might not be worth the would-be thief's while to make enemies, especially not when many more such items exist). That means that the character's quest isn't over once they find the relic. They need to get back to a safe place, and even then, they can look forward to guarding the object for the rest of their lives.

Motivation

With those considerations in mind, in a "one in a million" chronicle the would-be owners of a magical relic need a very strong reason to go hunting for the artifact. "Power" is a possibility, but it needs to be more specific, as there are many paths to power. For a group of characters to undertake months of research and investigation, break the law, risk their lives and still face the possibility that the whole thing's a myth, a better motivation than "power" is needed.

"Knowledge," for the right sort of character,

works very well. Plenty of cinematic examples (some of which can be found in the Introduction to this book) feature characters who undertake archaeological or historical exploration with no greater impetus than advancing the knowledge of mankind. Note, though, that few knowledge-seekers are willing to put themselves at unnecessary risk for their prizes. That is, when they reach the ancient temple guarded by fiendish traps, they're more than happy to let the whole thing sit for a few months while they bring in specialized equipment or personnel to deal with the problem. This approach makes perfect sense, of course, but it doesn't do much for dramatic tension, so motivations besides (or in addition to) the quest for knowledge are necessary.

Wealth is just another form of power, but the desire for wealth can be a little more complicated. Again, in the world of cinema (and literature, for that matter), some truly foolish or ill-advised expeditions have been undertaken because the protagonists needed the money to fund their own endeavors. Some people, too, are just greedy, and are willing to take suicidal (or homicidal) risks on the off chance that the payoff will fulfill their wildest dreams. Such people are fundamentally self-centered, of course, which is an important consideration when the time comes for someone to grab and attempt to use the magical item.

Along the same lines, it's possible to seek out a magical item as part of an obligation, either personal or professional.

Perhaps a character's ailing friend can only be cured by the Holy Grail (or some relic with similar healing properties). Perhaps a dying father wants to hear a few lines from Shakespeare's lost play before he passes on. Maybe a villain is holding a character's lover hostage so that he will use his skills and expertise to retrieve a fantastic treasure. And, of course, sometimes it's just a job: Some rich explorer hires on assistants (less kindly called "henchmen") to obtain the item.

Motivation to obtain a mystical relic should be a dynamic element of the story. A character might start off the story enamored of the object and the knowledge it can bestow, but indifferent to its monetary value. As



costs of research rise, the character realizes that he'd *better* find it, or he'll spend the rest of his life in debt. As the expedition nears its end, and other members die or become badly injured, the character who once wanted only knowledge now soldiers on out of sheer obsession.

Reverence

Magical items in “one in a million” chronicles don't necessarily need to be fragile, but they should engender a greater sense of care than those in “dime a dozen” chronicles. After all, that rapier might only grant a +1 die bonus, and the player knows that, but the character only knows that the blade strikes true and is the *only one of its kind*. In a “one in a million” chronicle, of course, the effects of relics are likely to be much more dramatic and awe-inspiring.

Of course, that helps to define the reactions that people have to such objects. Objects of sufficient power might attract worshippers, who believe (possibly correctly) their deity speaks to them through it. Such devotees probably have strict rules about who is allowed access to the object, or might even believe that it should never be touched by human hands at all. A charismatic figure might begin a cult centered around the object (or around the person who wields the object). Characters who wish to obtain and use the object for their own purposes run the risk of not only stealing from the cult, but also offending religious sensibilities, which is always dangerous.

Such chronicles also make the Merits found on pp. 84-86 much less useful, or at least, useful less often. As mentioned above, though, that doesn't mean that the costs should change. Instead, consider increasing the effectiveness of the Merits. For instance, if the Merit normally requires a roll to gauge its effectiveness, forego the dice and assume that the character succeeds — this is his moment, after all. Likewise, the powers of the object itself shouldn't be left to the vagaries of the dice, at least not in dramatically appropriate situations. When the casket opens and the character, bleeding from bullet wounds from the temple guardians and poisoned by the dart traps, pulls the dry scroll from its case and gasps out the incantation, this is not the time to take the risk that the player fails the roll to translate its runes or activate its magic. If the characters manage to retrieve the relic without taking many losses, using the dice becomes more appropriate, but if the bulk of the drama has come in finding and obtaining the artifact, then don't cheat the players of the payoff.

Chronicles that include very few mystical relics grant a good deal of power to mages and werewolves (and, to a lesser extent, changelings), all of whom are capable of creating such items. Even if you, as Storyteller, have decided that mystical objects are rare in the chronicle, you shouldn't restrict capable characters from creating them, though you might consider making the requirements in terms of time and expense greater. The quest to *create* a magical item, with regards to the themes of this book, is not the same as the quest to find one. A relic is a piece of living history, and a great deal of the thematic resonance in a story about finding such

an object comes from discovering the history behind it, the bodies it has left in its wake, what parts of human history it may have influenced and so on.

A Dime a Dozen


In a setting where mystical objects are more common, the players will naturally treat them a bit more cavalierly. They can find such objects without too much hassle because, for whatever reason, magic clings to objects fairly readily. In such a setting, many characters, both player-controlled and Storyteller-controlled, carry mystical objects. Losing them isn't too great a problem, although sentimental value certainly plays a role, and stealing them often isn't worth the risk, since the would-be thief can usually find something similar if he spends some effort looking.

“Dime a dozen” settings don't test patience and research the way “one in a million settings” do, but they present a unique issue: The right tool for the right job. After all, a monster hunter might carry several different trinkets, relics and tinctures for dealing with various creatures of the night, but if he chooses the wrong one at a critical moment, he could wind up dead. Instead of testing research, experimentation, and perseverance, a “dime a dozen” chronicle tests quick thinking, confidence, and recall.

One of the advantages of the “dime a dozen” chronicle is that characters can have a steady supply of new relics to employ. They might even develop the Relic Creator Merit and create their own rather than spend the time chasing down existing ones. This only makes sense; obtaining new powers and benefits for characters is fun for the players, ensures that the characters' abilities and advantages grow and change as the chronicle progresses, and it means (hopefully) that the Storyteller can present different kinds of challenges to the players and know that they will be met with different tactics.

The disadvantage to this approach, of course, is that magical objects lose some of what makes them impressive. A sword might have been handed down from father to son for 10 generations, passed on to a character with the promise that it would never dull, and have three drops of his familial enemy's blood inked onto the blade, but if all the sword does in game terms is provide two extra dice in combat, the player might feel tempted to give it up when he finds a better weapon. If relics are regarded as nothing but dice in various forms, a great deal of the atmosphere of the game is lost.

One way to combat this is to make *permanent* magical objects rare, but objects that only retain their magic for short periods or limited numbers of uses more common. The above-mentioned sword, for instance, never loses its magic, and so even if the character finds another blade that provides a bigger bonus in game terms, he might well choose to keep the dependable blade over the one that might fail him at any moment. By the same token, objects that keep their magic might be, on the whole, more powerful than temporary relics.



This sets up a useful divide between relics that the characters should feel a sense of reverence for, and those that they can justifiably regard as simply tools.

Handle With Care

In a “dime a dozen” chronicle, if a relic breaks, the character can probably replace it, or at least shouldn’t feel like she has lost something priceless. Such artifacts might be inherently more fragile than those of “one in a million” chronicles. The Storyteller could call for rolls to avoid breakage after a character has fallen or during a fight where the character sustains damage that could break his relics. In a chronicle in which an artifact is truly irreplaceable, the player might well feel cheated if random bad luck breaks the object — the character (and the player) have already gone through a great deal to obtain it. If such objects are common, though, the effort is in maintaining, rather than obtaining, them. The player must then take care to avoid breakage, and the Storyteller is quite within his rights to set up situations in which this kind of care is difficult.

This brings up an important point about relics: What is worthless to the player might be priceless to the character. This issue is probably more prevalent in “dime a dozen” chronicles, so let’s discuss it here.

To the character, that saint’s finger bone is a priceless relic, probably worth thousands. To the player, it’s worth an extra die on abjurations (see p. 213, **World of Darkness Rulebook**). This kind of disparity is just a fact of role-playing games, and manifests itself in many ways, but the bottom line is that the player sees the mechanics of the chronicle and can make decisions based on them. It’s easy to feel strange about this; yes, the *player* knows the bone isn’t really all that helpful in the long run, but the *character* certainly doesn’t. Should the player make in-character decisions tactically, even if doing so results in actions that the character might not otherwise take?

There is no easy answer, here. If a player thinks tactically and approaches role-playing as a problem-solving exercise with some dramatics thrown in, that’s not wrong. If the player approaches the scenario from the perspective of really getting into his character’s head and considering any given stimulus the way his character would, that’s not wrong, either. In both cases, the player should remember that he’s part of a troupe and that sometimes facilitating a group game means taking the group’s wishes into consideration, but the player should still be able to come to a decision that is both fun for him and takes the character’s mindset into account. For instance, the player knows that the finger bone has more value as a bargaining chip than as a tool, since ghosts haven’t heretofore been a big problem. If the character’s Vice is Greed, the player can pick up a point of Willpower in addition to whatever the going rate is for a holy finger bone, and has made a sound tactical choice. If the character’s Virtue is Faith, the character can hold on to the finger bone, regain *all* his Willpower, and let the Storyteller know that having some

call to use the finger bone would be enjoyable. In either case, the decision makes sense from both the character’s perspective and the player’s.

Hoaxes and Curses

If mystical objects are more common, then so are the fakes. Yes, a skilled character can probably pick out an obvious forgery, but some are crafted with enough skill to fool even conscientious investigators (and sometimes the character just doesn’t have the time or the focus to notice). Even worse than a fake is an object that *does* have some magic, but has a function completely unsuited to what the character has in mind. If the character finds a new relic and manages to identify it as having mystical properties, the Storyteller is under no compulsion to reveal the game mechanics to the player. The Storyteller might describe the “feel” of the object’s magic, should the character have a way to discern it, but unless the character performs research or experimentation or calls in an expert, the only way to know what the object does is to use it in the field. This, of course, can be a dangerous undertaking.

50 Details Implying a Relic’s History

By Jess Hartley

Despite the fact that relics can be just about anything, they are not just any item. Relics are special, unique, and almost inevitably, they have a history which weighs heavily upon them. A brand new baseball fresh from the factory is not a relic. The mud-splattered trophy from the only game a boy who would grow up to be a justice-seeking vigilante was allowed to play in as a child, however, just might be. Its leather surface, worn smooth by hundreds of hours of solitary games of catch, is not what makes it a relic. Neither is the gleaming air-tight glass display which protects it or specks of dried mud painstakingly preserved from that special game. They are, however, clues that may indicate to the observant that there is more to this particular item than a simple child’s toy.

These subtle details might offer an observant character hints as to the item’s history (and thus its import). For the player, however, who is denied the character’s opportunity to hold the item in her hands, to smell the aged leather kept fresh by its protective display case, to crumble the silty dried mud between her fingertips, many layers of perceptive significance are lost. While it would be simple for a Storyteller to just state that the ball is obviously from when its owner was a child and he’s obviously cared for it like a treasured memento of the game, allowing characters the chance to build that impression through sensory details is more fulfilling for

the players and enriches their perception of the world their characters are living within.

Some examples of the types of physical details which might suggest particular aspects of a relic's history include:

- A blistered and peeling veneer (It has been in a fire).
- Stiff, wrinkled edges (It has been waterlogged and dried out).
- Half of a yellow handwritten price tag reading "\$299.00" (It has been mis-appraised and maybe sold at an antique store).
- Musty, stale smell (It has been stored or disused).
- Rough, flaky metallic layers (Its iron-rich metal has been exposed or weathered for years).
- Fabric with stains or decay in precise lines (The cloth has been folded for decades).
- Hand wrought iron nails (It likely dates back to pre-1800).
- Cloth that is brittle (It has been stored for a long time in a very dry climate).
- Cracked leather covered with tiny white crystals (It has been used against a person or animal that was sweating hard.)
- Dark patches of brass show through the precious metal at the edges and high spots (It has been well cared for, but used for a long period of time, until the plating has worn through).
- Uneven gouges lead to an empty gem setting (It has been the victim of thieves).
- Multi-colored crayon markings (It has been accessible to young children).
- Silky white cocoons are attached to the cloth (Moths have infested the fabric).
- Mud splatters (It has been exposed to wet/dirty outdoor conditions).
- Small holes riddle the wood (It has been ravaged by termites).
- The colors have spread or bled between layers (It has become saturated with water).
- Curled edges (It has been stored rolled into a tube or scroll).
- Brittle and frayed silk ("Weighting", due to tin salt content in processed silk from the 19th and 20th centuries).
- A layer of viscous dusty oil (It has been stored in a kitchen or workshop for years).
- Powdery, greasy or waxy green to blue-green coating (The copper has been exposed to the elements).
- Dust lines every channel of the filigree (It has been only haphazardly cared for).
- Harsh bleach or ammonia fumes (Someone has tried to disinfect or decontaminate it).
- Black, grey or green "cloudy" staining (It has been exposed to prolonged moist conditions and developed mold or mildew).
- The pages are still bound together in places (It was hand-bound, has not yet been fully read).
- Cloudy crystalline forms (Saline or other chemical liquid has evaporated).
- The porcelain is stained light brown inside (It was used to hold coffee or tea on a regular basis).
- Yellowed, hand-crocheted lace (It dates back at least 50 years).
- Black pellets the size of grains of rice (Mice have infested it).
- Swollen wood grain (It has been stored in or around moisture).
- Waxy stains on the surface (Lit candles have dripped upon it).
- Abrasions and deep scratches (It has been mishandled or involved in an accident).
- Multiple layers of garishly colored sticky-tags (It was discounted several times and sold on clearance).
- The velvet's pile is bare and smooth at the cuffs and hem (It was worn repeatedly, possibly by several generations).
- Many of the page corners are dog-eared (It was read by someone with little respect for books).
- Dark striped sediment layers below, with nearly clear liquid above (The solution has not been disturbed for some time and has settled out).
- Moist soil clings to the surface and crevices (It has only recently been excavated).
- The stitches are less than completely uniform (It was sewn by hand).
- The colors are faded on the surface and deeper inside or in crevices (It has been exposed to sunlight for a long period of time).
- Brown rings mar the flat surface (Coffee or tea mugs have rested upon it).
- The cloying scent of rose perfume (It has been given as a love-token or stored among cosmetics).
- Multiple ribbon or paper bookmarks (It has been read and re-read extensively).
- Missing chips with sealed-up cracks (It has been broken and repaired).
- An edge nick with patina similar to that on the rest of the weapon (It has sustained battle damage early in its "career").
- A seam or pair of seams are evident at the bottom of the ring (It has been resized — one seam to shrink it, two to add girth).
- Creaking hinges or parts which are reluctant to move (It has been long neglected).
- Rust-colored stains (It has been splattered with blood).
- The smell of ozone (The electric mechanisms are very old).
- Glass has turned purple (Antique glass containing manganese has been exposed to the sun for extended periods).
- Bone split into pieces (Something has broken it open to feast on the marrow).

Location, Location, Location

By Wood Ingham

Having faced an army of terrifying creatures, our heroes fight their way through to the deepest cellar of the ruined temple to find the treasure they've been looking for. Ahead of them, a chest stands on a stone dais. They check it for booby traps, and then they open it, and... No, wait. Sorry. Wrong game.

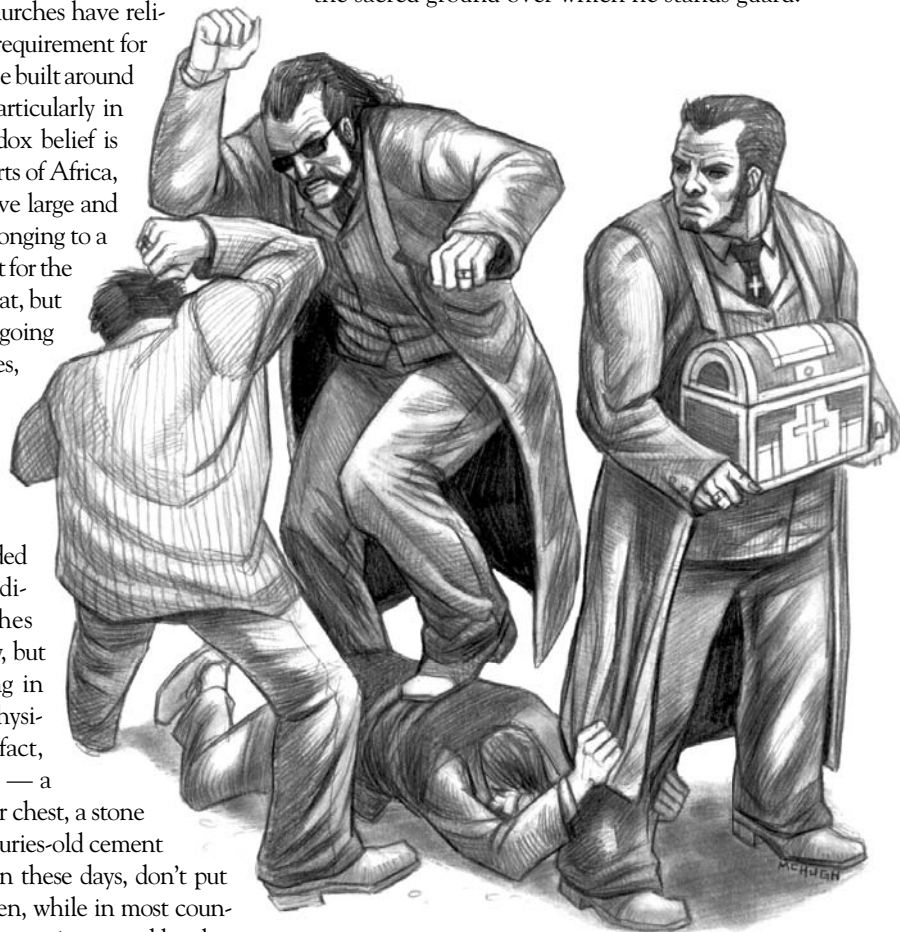
Sure, Harrison Ford and Lara Croft may get to do the dungeon-delving, tomb-raiding thing, but how many molding, monster-packed, trap-filled dungeons can the world support? And, more importantly, how many characters are gun-toting heroic (and/or heroically endowed) archaeologists? Having said that, a story centered around an ancient treasure needs a place for that ancient treasure to be found. Ancient tombs of horror are a pretty good standard, but they're not the only option, by any means. And for many relics, they're simply not appropriate. A relic should have the setting it deserves.

A Matter of Faith

Religious relics are a case in point. Even today, many Catholic and Orthodox churches have reliquaries — in fact, it used to be a requirement for consecration that an altar had to be built around a saint's relic. These churches, particularly in places where Catholic or Orthodox belief is still strong — South America, parts of Africa, rural Italy and Spain — often have large and devout congregations. A relic belonging to a saint may be a necessary ingredient for the destruction of an apocalyptic threat, but it's unlikely that the faithful are going to see it that way. In some places, a constant flow of pilgrims come to such churches. On the saint's feast day (coincidentally, the very day the characters turn up, if they haven't done their research), the church is surrounded by crowds seeking healing and direction. Most Catholic churches are open through most of the day, but unattended at night, and getting in isn't hard. Chances are that the physical protection afforded the artifact, although ornate, is easy to break — a delicate gold tumbler lock, a silver chest, a stone vault sealed with crumbling, centuries-old cement — and many of the faithful, even these days, don't put 24-hour guards on things. But then, while in most countries, desecration is not still a crime, a riot caused by clergy

and believers who find their sanctuary looted of the most holy object they own is never going to be safe for the thieves. In fact, while kung-fu albino monks are the province of badly-written blockbuster novels, old churches may very well have individuals with connections. Many members of the Mafia, for example, are devoutly Catholic, and while their actions may not exactly be sanctioned by the Church, the village priest isn't going to ask any questions if a shady man in sunglasses returned the recently stolen ossuary of Saint Thais, regardless of news headlines about a group of murdered American tourists in the nearby hotel.

A religious artifact doesn't necessarily have to be a *real* religious relic, by the way. Those altars can contain all sorts of stuff. The local priest, the villagers and the godfather all think that the box contains the bones of the saint, brought to Sicily after her death in AD355, and to be honest, it doesn't matter if that's nonsense. Their reaction is going to be the same if it's stolen, whatever's in the box or under the altar. In fact, opening the box and revealing the truth might not even convince anyone. Yes, the withered hand in the reliquary is actually the hand of an 8,000-year-old magician — but are the faithful going to believe that? Secret messages left by the builders point the treasure hunter to the true contents of the chapel — but the problem with cryptic clues is that they can mean a lot of things, and a plausible interpretation of those clues isn't going to wash with a priest who is used to deterring nosy foreigners from desecrating the sacred ground over which he stands guard.



On Show

Given that reliquaries, ossuaries and altars are sometimes closed-up affairs, it's possible for a character get his grubby mitts on the contents without anyone being the wiser. It's a lot more difficult when the object of our heroes' search is on show in the middle of a museum or art gallery. It's not that taking it away is necessarily much more difficult. Even if a gallery *could* afford dozens of flesh-eating guard dogs, a room full of trip-lasers, a bulletproof glass case and a pressure-sensitive pedestal, there are very few artifacts that really warrant that much attention. For one thing, protection like that costs millions, and there are only a few dozen items in the world worth that much. Many of the largest galleries in the world are publicly owned or maintained by charitable trusts, particularly in Western Europe. It's a waste of tax-money to go that overboard. Those galleries and museums owned by private trusts, corporate interests and bequests — like the Getty Center in LA, for example — have better security, on the whole, but still, it isn't on the level that the movies would have us believe.

Most well-informed players have a good idea of how to lift something from a gallery or museum. But unless they've somehow managed to score a flawless counterfeit to put in the object's place, it's impossible to take something out of a museum without someone noticing. It *will* hit the news. The headlines put the heat on: from "priceless Egyptian necklace stolen from museum" to "bizarre burglary in museum — obscure artifacts taken, valuables left untouched". Stealing from a public gallery gets the attention of the police more than a domestic burglary does. Admittedly, some countries are more concerned about their antiquities than others (Egypt, Italy, Greece and Israel are particularly touchy about their old stuff), but in most countries, the constabulary do get a bit excited when objects of value, even if it's just historical value, get taken out from under the noses of the general public.

Museums don't tend to spend as much money on security as they do on conservation. It's an ongoing process for many objects: the museum staff constantly cleans and maintains old things, trying to make sure that they don't deteriorate any further than they have already. Museums spend frighteningly large proportions of their budgets on paying conservators and supplying their equipment. That part doesn't always affect the aspiring relic-thief, although it can be really frustrating for a burglar to make it past the security guards and the CCTV cameras, only to find that it's been taken down from display for the night for the next round of conservation. The museum spends the rest of the money on the containment of the object.

All Things Pass

In most modern museums, it's really hard to see the effort that's gone into creating atmospheric and lighting conditions that stop objects from crumbling away. The air is kept at a certain level of humidity, which can range from

really dry to very wet indeed, depending on the exhibit. The wreck of the Mary Rose, for example, on display in Portsmouth, is constantly sprayed with water to keep the wooden beams from crumbling. The Book of Kells, in Trinity College, Dublin, lies under glass in very low light. Once a day, conservators carefully turn a single page. That's all the book can take.

The book of ancient magic that the characters are after isn't doing its job sitting in a glass case, but it's not decaying, either. When they finally get their hands on it, the kind of use they're prepared to give it will destroy it in a matter of days, or even hours. A character turns a page that includes a vital bit of information; it comes off in her hand and crumbles in her fingers. The old knife corrodes at a frightening rate. Trying to sharpen it just makes it break into a dozen pieces. A medieval belt with uncanny powers, once lost on a boggy battlefield and now on display in a major provincial museum, cracks and breaks if it isn't kept damp.

Some items of power, however, *aren't* all that fragile. Whether it's a thousand-year-old book that's still as crisp and legible as it was when the old magician wrote it or a shirt that belonged to Saint Anthony that hasn't rotted away, supernaturally powered relics can and do have the power to remain unbreakable, inviolate after centuries and millennia. Having said that, that old book might crumble to dust the moment its power has been used, but no one knows that until it's been used, and no one's going to get to use it because of all the conservators and professors examining it to try to figure out why it's still in such good condition.

This is the problem: an object in a museum that steadfastly refuses to decay after thousands of years *will* attract attention. It's going to be more valued, easier to spot, better known, and probably disappears every so often for people to do experiments on it. Likewise, an "incorruptible" religious relic gets the devotion of many more people than the common-or-garden variety, which creates its own set of problems.

A Private Matter

Many of the richest people in the world keep private collections of art treasures and archaeological finds. Some keep them in private galleries; others keep them in climate-controlled vaults, attended by privately hired conservation staff that has no other job than to keep these objects safe. To the owner, it might be just a possession, an investment. It might be a precious thing he wants for himself. However, a private collector isn't guaranteed to be any more careful than anyone else, and, in fact, might take more risks with his property than the curator of a national museum. Take the case of Las Vegas casino owner Steve Wynn: in 2006, he was showing a Picasso painting he owned to his friends one last time — he'd just sold it for \$139 million — only to put his elbow through it, which is not a mistake a museum curator would make.

The stupidly rich might be more likely to resort to extreme security measures; many of them are quite prepared



reliqua

go to more extreme measures than public bodies to get their property back. There are probably a few billionaires out there who know some very bad men and they, even if they're no match for the characters, could make things very messy.

Just Lying There

Going further back, there's no reason why an object couldn't just be put in its place simply because that's where its previous owner left it. The windswept archaeological dig, a wide, muddy pit populated by methodical individuals working with trowels and brushes, is a place of hard graft, of thankless, dirty labor. It can also be host to drama. An archaeologist has a vague idea of what kind of thing he's going to find on a dig. If he didn't, he wouldn't be digging there. On the other hand, he doesn't know exactly *what* he's going to find. Archaeology holds a constant tension between excitement and disappointment.

Archaeologists are reasonable people. Even if local Indian folklore suggests that the pre-Columbian mound is cursed, the sensible delver into the ancient world knows that such things don't really exist. When he and his colleagues end up dead, killed instantly when an intern accidentally unleashes the power in that tiny jar she just found, it's as much a surprise to them as it is to anyone else. To a friend or professional contact, who, visiting the site, finds everyone there dead and their only find a small clay jar lying in the center of the corpses, this is likely to be as inexplicable as it is terrifying.

The place in which an object is found matters. It matters because it gives a clue to the source of an object (the lead-lined chamber in which the strangely-glowing breastplate

lies isn't just for decoration; the faded writing on the door of the tomb tells a story that makes no sense on first reading, but which holds the key to the relic's use).

It matters because it creates complication and drama in the act of obtaining a relic (the museum curator doesn't believe that the newly-acquired funerary mask will steal the souls of anyone who looks into its eyes and has it put out on display; the characters are kept from acquiring a knife which reputedly belonged to Saint John the Divine by the Catholic investigator who has set up camp in the sanctuary where the object resides). Most of all, it matters because giving an object a sense of place makes the game richer and more satisfying for everyone.

Adding Life to Dry Subjects

By Matthew McFarland

Research, as any graduate student or scientist can tell you, isn't exactly edge-of-your-seat activity. When the "eureka" moment comes, then it's exciting, but very often it takes hours, weeks or even years of reading, cross-referencing, experimentation, fact-checking, interviews and note-taking to get to that moment. A story that involves finding a long-lost relic probably includes scenes of breaking into libraries, fighting with guardians or rivals, and circumventing fiendish traps, but the research needs to happen, too, so that the characters know where and how to find these libraries, guardians and traps. It can be tempting for the Storyteller to just have the players make some extended Research rolls, tally up how long it takes to achieve the requisite number of successes, and be done with it.

That approach isn't *wrong*, but it also isn't very interesting. Following are some suggestions on how to bring some drama to in-game research. These suggestions can also be applied to other activities that characters might undertake, but that, at first glance, seem dull or dry. Examples of this kind of activity include: mechanical repair, art restoration, data analysis, computer research, many kinds of Crafts rolls (creating works of art might be very stimulating for artists, but the players are still left rolling dice), and any other activity that is represented in-game by an extended action.

Slow Reveal

The extended action rules presented in the **World of Darkness Rulebook** might make it appear that at the moment the player achieves the necessary number of successes, the character is immediately blessed with success on the endeavor. For activities such as lock-picking, that might be true; the lock isn't picked until the last tumbler moves, after all. But research doesn't work that way. A character performing research exhausts one avenue of approach, takes what she learned there, and applies it in a new direction. She finds where the intersections are between sources and sifts out bias, falsity and "common knowledge" (which, especially in the *World of Darkness*, isn't necessarily factual). That means that at any stage of the process, the researching character has a body of knowledge to draw on, she just hasn't achieved her target.

The character, of course, has no way to know what the target number of successes is, and thus has no way to know how close she is to her goal. If the target number of successes is 50, and each Research roll takes a day, the character might spend a week on the task (during which time the player accumulates 25 successes) and feel exhausted, but realize that she isn't done. Victory might be just around the corner, though, perhaps in the next book she'll pick up, and so she continues. On the other side of the character sheet, as it were, the player knows that she hasn't rolled enough successes yet because the Storyteller hasn't told her what she needs to know.

If the Storyteller does nothing but continually tell the player "keep going," the whole exercise loses much of its value. If the player will succeed in any event, why have her roll at all? Just decide how long it takes to find the information and give it to her.

But a better strategy, and one that demands more of the Storyteller, is to parcel the information out, little by little. The ultimate goal might be the location of the Chamfort Letters (see p. 50-52). The Storyteller decides that 50 successes on an extended Intelligence + Academics roll are necessary to track down the address of the Baltimore warehouse in which they currently reside. But at 10 successes, perhaps the character discovers that the last known exchange of letters ended in Washington, D.C. when a parcel delivery truck veered off the road, losing most of its cargo in the Potomac. At 20 successes, the character learns that the Letters were kept at the Library of Congress for a time, but were subsequently purchased for an astronomical sum by a private citizen. At 30 successes, the character learns the citizen's name and some relevant (or at least juicy) history. At 40 successes, the character finds conclusive evidence that the Letters are in Baltimore, and finally, at 50, she finds the warehouse.

But, the Storyteller might note, if the player is constantly receiving information, might she not decide to take the investigation in a different direction at any point? At 30 successes, for instance, what if the player decides to track down this citizen or his surviving family and arrange some interviews? If that happens, wonderful! The player

has taken an active role in the investigation, and made it more dramatic by dint of playing through actual scenes, rather than letting the dice do all the work.

This kind of approach means that a character might start off performing research in a library or at a computer, and progress to more "in the field" type of work. That's fine, and the Storyteller should accept successes made through other endeavors toward the total. If the investigation is played out as a scene between characters rather than simulated with dice, the Storyteller should decide how many successes the scene is worth and add them to the total. For instance, the character searching for the Chamfort Letters made a good start with pure research (the player rolled 30 successes), but then decided to find the person who bought the Letters and interview him. Over the course of a chapter, the character meets with this person and his family and learns a bit about the Letters. The Storyteller decides that since the character didn't learn the Letters' current location, the interviews amount to 8 successes. The character is on the verge of learning where the Letters are, but just needs a bit more information.

Teamwork is Good

The rules for teamwork, found on p. 134 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, provide a way for all of the characters in a group to be involved during research or investigation. The "lead" investigator makes the rolls whose successes count toward the total (meaning that he is directing the investigation, deciding what information to follow up and what to discard) while the other members are doing much of the legwork.

The teamwork system is still a game mechanic, of course, and doesn't have much in the way of descriptive drama, but it still means that all of the players are involved, and that's a good idea in any event.

Description

After the characters spend 18 hours in the same library poring over the same books, they should know every inch of that room. It should be familiar to them, comforting even as they grow to resent it. However, that means that the Storyteller needs to supply the room with details. What kind of wall decorations are there? What does the room smell like? Does one particular light bulb continually blow out? Who lives nearby, if anyone? What are the persistent sounds?

The reason to go into such detail is twofold. For one thing, even if the players are just rolling dice, they'll feel much more engaged if they can picture the space and their characters' places within it. For another, the better the players know the space in which their characters are working, the better they will be able to notice when something has changed or gone awry. The characters may have been working in a mentor's living room and listening to his neighbor's dogs bark constantly every night for the past month, and then one night realize that, when they stop and listen, they hear nothing from outside.

Or they might notice that the walls in the research library look off for some reason, and discover that the framed pictures have been taken down and re-hung in the wrong order. In a **World of Darkness** chronicle, such changes might mean nothing, but more likely they are clues or foreshadowing.

Balance Dice with Action

Research can potentially last for weeks or months. Even in venues more interesting than a library or a research desk, such as an archaeological dig, the work is slow and painstaking. Break up the long stretches of downtime with vignettes and let the characters interact. Use Storyteller characters to get the players talking as the characters, let them relate anecdotes from their pasts or advance theories on the current situation — the kinds of things that researchers do.

These scenes don't have to be long; set a cut-off of 10 minutes and award an extra experience point for the player who does the best job of portraying her character (but be careful not to reward extravagance or scene-hogging; a character who doesn't speak much but reveals a great deal through actions is often more compelling than a chatterbox).

The Storyteller can also break up research or investigation scenes with more intense events, of course. If the area is haunted, maybe the ghost comes calling. If the characters have enemies, maybe they attack. If the ancient temple in which the characters are digging has guardians, maybe they appear and warn the characters. When using these kinds of scenes, though, keep in mind that the action should be grounded in the story (no “wandering monsters,” unless such beasts *are* part of the story and have a reason to be there). Also keep in mind that the players may decide that such events need to be followed up immediately, so be prepared for the story to veer off course as the players chase a tangent. Naturally, that means you should rearrange the story so that following the tangent is remaining on course.

Let the Players Solve the Riddle

This technique is tricky, because the players must have good problem-solving skills. One method of making research an important part of the story is to present the *data*, but let



the players draw the *conclusions*. When running a Storytelling game, there can be a very great impetus to explain, to make sure that the players understand what's really going on so that their characters can respond appropriately (and — let's be honest — so that the players can recognize how clever the Storyteller was in arranging the whole scenario). But explanations don't add much to the drama of a situation. They often feel preachy and one-sided, and the players have to cope with a sudden influx of information.

Instead, let the characters discover the history of an area or an object. Let them talk to witnesses and learn a few possible explanations for what happened (and make sure that the witnesses present their own subjective versions, rather than all telling the exact same story — when people tell the same story, it's generally because it's been rehearsed). Let them discover clues, search for context, and piece together *what* happened but not *why*. If they can develop theories as to what's going on and test those theories, you are free to pick which explanation you like better — theirs or yours.

A role-playing game derives much of its drama and fun from collaboration. If you present the entire story as something to be discovered, read and lived through, it's more presentation than collaboration. If you let the players decide how to approach the story, even such aspects as research and other “dry” subjects, you're allowing them to make important decisions about what they will discover — adding life to the story.

Finders, Keepers: Treasure Hunting and the Law

By Wood Ingham

During the 17th century, the Ottoman Turks, the then-rulers of Greece, were using the Parthenon as an ammunition dump. The Venetians laid siege to the city. A stray cannonball found the Acropolis, and in a single stroke the Parthenon was gone in smoke and fire. The rubble of Athens' 2,000-year heritage lay there on the hill for more than a century until Thomas Bruce, the 7th Lord Elgin, got permission from the Turks to ship most of the best parts of the ruined temple to England, at vast personal expense. Finding that much of the rubble was in impractically large pieces, his men sawed it up into segments. The Ottomans were fine with this. Most of the local Greeks didn't even know it had happened. He had them put on display in London. The British Museum bought them from Elgin in 1816 and put them on display.

A lot of Lord Elgin's countrymen weren't impressed, among them Lord Byron, who wrote, *"Dull is the eye that will not weep to see / Thy walls defaced, thy moldering shrines removed / By British hands."* As time has gone on, the people and government of Greece have been inclined to agree with Byron. They've been trying to get the "Elgin Marbles" as they're often called back for decades now, claiming, with some justification, that Elgin stole them. The British Museum isn't budging. Part of this is because the British Museum Act means that the British Museum is prevented by British law from ever giving back any of its collection, no matter whether or not it has a moral obligation to do so.

That last part is significant. If archaeology were really about digging stuff up and taking it away, it'd be a whole lot easier than it actually is. The laws of virtually every nation with any kind of past have something to say on the finding and keeping of antiquities — often including artifacts from other nations. Finding the leftovers of the ancients is hard enough; keeping them can often be harder. The law doesn't just make the whole deal difficult — it makes it really complicated as well. A lot of the time, finding something old and interesting is just the beginning of the treasure hunter's problems.

Digging It Up

The generally accepted common law in Britain and North America has for centuries been that "Treasure Trove" objects, which were lost and whose owners were long gone (weapons dropped on ancient battlefields, for example, or handfuls of coins), were fair game for anyone: finders,





It Doesn't Always Matter if They Don't Care

Not all governments necessarily care about the preservation of their heritage. Still, even if a nation's government doesn't actually give a flying one about its antiquities, it doesn't mean that it is going to let archaeologists get their grubby hands on its artifacts.

Take the case of the Buddhas of Bamiyan, the two colossal statues carved into the side of a cliff in central Afghanistan. In 2001, some European archaeologists came into the region with a great deal of money, which was intended for the conservation of the Buddhas. The local Taliban officials, taken aback as to why anyone would care about the Buddhas, asked if they could have the money for famine relief instead. The archaeologists said no—the money, they said, was for the statues. The Taliban leaders were outraged by the idea that money that could be used for food and medical aid would instead be dedicated to statues, and more than that, to statues which were, through the lens of their extremist take on Islam, an idolatrous offense to Allah. They ordered their men to blast these huge, ancient, precious colossi into rubble.

Different cultural groups hold different priorities. Characters would do well to remember this simple rule when dealing with people in non-Western nations: just because they don't want it, it doesn't mean that you can get your hands on it, even if all you want to do is give it a bit of a clean.

keepers. On the other hand, in the United Kingdom, goods which someone had buried for later, like tomb hoards, count under the same category as monies left behind by someone who died without a will or any family. They belong to the Crown (that is, Her Majesty's government). This got further complicated with the 1996 Treasure Act, which says that any treasure — which the government defines as archaeological finds with monetary worth, pretty much anything made of metal — must be reported within 14 days to the appropriate government office, which will then decide whether or not it's the Crown's property. Not doing so is a criminal offense. If the object is found on private land, the landowner gets first claim to anything found on her property.

Consider a character, a university lecturer, who finds a relic of power on a common in Southern England. It's a chalice that, under certain circumstances, fills with human blood and which carries the power of healing. He comes out of the cave, blinking, grasping the portentous cup. He's examining the vessel in his office when a colleague walks in. She demands to know where he found the chalice. Realizing that he hasn't reported the object yet (because the university department would all know about it) and perhaps motivated by the kind of petty rivalries that seem to drive so many academic departments, the colleague reports the find herself. Suddenly, the lecturer doesn't just have a brood of vampires and a cabal of magicians following him around. Now the police are on his back as well.

In the US, the common law of Treasure Trove has become harder and harder to prove in recent years because so much more of the land is actually owned. Several law courts have found in favor not of the person who found treasure, but the owner of the land where the treasure lay. A character who finds a stash of cursed pirate gold on American soil isn't in any real danger of getting it confiscated by the

government and suffering a hefty fine. On the other hand, if he gets sued for it by the owner of the land, he's probably going to lose unless he's got an amazing lawyer.

Most countries, which aren't currently war zones (and several which are), have laws covering this sort of thing. Some are pretty draconian. In Europe, finding an antiquity that belongs to the nation could mean a fine. In the US, it could get you sued. In Egypt, you could end up in jail.

By extension, buying an artifact from someone who found it illegally counts, in the laws of most countries, as trafficking in stolen goods. Consider the case of Hanan Eshel, the Israeli theology professor who, a few years ago, encountered a Bedouin who sold him a first century BC scroll for \$3,000. The professor immediately informed his university and the Israel Antiquities Authority — and for his trouble, he ended up in court on a charge of handling looted artifacts and was banned from leaving the country. Nobody found the Bedouin.

Money

A lot of archaeologists find themselves learning what Hanan Eshel discovered the hard way: it doesn't matter how good the intention is, buying things on the black market is sometimes a direct ticket to jail — do not pass go, do not collect two hundred dollars. But the fact is that many archaeologists don't have a choice. Knowing how much to pay for an object of historical value is often as important as knowing where to find it, but when money comes into the equation, the law can make things really complicated.

Part of Eshel's trouble came from coming clean about how he obtained the scroll. But many people who find themselves in trouble for trafficking looted antiquities don't actually know that's what they're doing. In many countries, particularly in the Middle East, ignorance is no defense.

On the other hand, if the government is corrupt enough, a small amount of cash can get anyone out of most scrapes. Often, particularly in Africa, India, parts of South America and some countries in the Middle East, permissions and documentation, even the legal stuff, cost money. The wheels of bureaucracy are painfully slow. Often, an injection of cash is the oil necessary to get those wheels running more quickly and more smoothly. The faster things need to move, the more money it's going to cost. The hard part is knowing how to put it. Bribery is a pretty exact science, and a clumsy bribe ("A hundred bucks if you'll do this faster") can be deeply offensive and is guaranteed to make things much worse. A subtly worded bribe ("Well, surely, if I pay the fee right here and now instead of posting it to the central administration office, it'll be easier for everyone. How much did you say it was again?") can save the day. Remember that bribery is a risky, subtle etiquette. An article many times the size of this couldn't fully do its intricacies justice.

Obviously, in nations with more efficient bureaucracies and less corruptible officials, it might be harder to deal with the consequences of handling or looting antiquities, in which case, the black market may be the only chance of getting one's hands on that enchanted *kouros* head. The problem with that is, of course, that our intrepid investigators now have to deal with criminals, who are, by definition, rarely trustworthy people. This isn't to say that when the Professor gets the *Krasnaya Mafiya* to give him a hand, they're always going to betray him, but the chances of his mutilated body ending up dumped in a Moscow back alley are much better than average.

Let's Get Out of This Country

Travelers who venture far afield to find their ancient booty often need to get it back home. Leaving aside for a moment the issue of objects that are too large and fragile to slip into a suitcase, smuggling archaeological treasures is a serious crime. In Egypt, Israel, and much of the Mediterranean, stealing artifacts is deemed a crime akin to smuggling drugs. The sentences may be more lenient, but when time is of the essence, spending three days in a sauna-hot prison cell with a bunch of refugees, politicals and drug dealers could be as disastrous as spending six months in there.

Since the beginning of the so-called "War on Terror," airport authorities have been a lot more assiduous about checking luggage — for example, in 2004, the writer found himself in New Delhi airport, being closely questioned as to why he had a ball of string in his pocket. A ball of string is pretty easy to justify. But few characters are going to have an easy time explaining to the customs man in Cairo where that *shabti* figurine in the suitcase came from, and few officials are going to believe (or care) that it is the key to a prophecy or the only object that's going to keep its ancient owner from re-awakening and wreaking havoc on the world. The sale of illegally looted archaeological finds is just one of the many things which supposedly fund world terrorism,

making security procedures as great a challenge to characters as supernatural foes may be, in certain situations.

Even if a heroic relic hunter has managed not only to escape alive from the temple, but to get all the necessary documentation and permission, this won't necessarily stop a customs official from keeping her detained all night. Again, a bribe might work—a "spontaneous gift" of a carton of Marlboro Lights can, in some countries, work miracles—but it might not.

Any archaeologist with any experience knows that the law gets in the way of even the most above-board of digs. The further afield you get, and the more unusual the artifact in question is, the more complicated dealings with the law become. In the *World of Darkness*, law-enforcement organizations are even more monolithic, faceless and sinister than they are in the real world, and the discoverer of a centuries-old legacy might find that his efforts to use, destroy, move or hide it face their greatest threat not from supernatural agencies or heinous traps containing pits, boulders and poisoned darts, but from the vast Kafkaesque bureaucracies of ordinary human governments.

Relic-Focused Chronicles

By Justin Achilli

While the relics in *World of Darkness: Reliquary* and in the greater *World of Darkness* can be thrilling, potent items, sometimes the artifact itself is secondary to the story that surrounds it. From the Knights of the Round Table's grail quest to the rollicking adventure of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, the tale of a relic's acquisition sometimes eclipses the importance of the artifact in question. What happens when the protagonists (or antagonists...) acquire the relic pales in comparison to the fabled efforts to claim it. Chronicles of this type may see a great number of artifacts pass through the characters' possession, in fact.

That doesn't mean each individual relic is utterly unimportant. Far from it! Both the Holy Grail and the Ark of the Covenant, to use the examples above, are certainly significant finds. What characters in a storytelling game might do with them will affect the course of a chronicle without a doubt.

For the Storyteller who wants to add a component of drama and excitement to a story or chronicle focused on a relic, though, consider making the quest to find and retrieve the item prominent. Indeed, if the act of claiming a relic is significant, it will encourage the players and their characters to treat that item with more reverence, since they've spent their own blood, sweat, and tears to possess it.

Relic-focused chronicles come in a variety of styles, to suit the tastes of numerous troupes. What follows are a few examples of these chronicle types, to help Storytellers integrate the search for storied artifacts into their games. These are simply surveys of a spread of ideas and themes — you'll no doubt come up with several specific ideas for your own troupe as you tailor the details of these chronicles to your players' characters.

The Archaeology Chronicle

The hallmark of the archaeology chronicle is the archetypal unearthing of the long-lost artifact in question. Archeology chronicles may have a variety of external challenges that characters must overcome, but the most common antagonist in a story like this is the passage of time itself. Somewhere, an object of cultural, religious, or other ethnographic significance lies buried, and it's up to the characters to reclaim it from the forgotten recesses of modern awareness.

The motives for characters in an archaeological chronicle often run toward the public interest if not the altruistic. Characters may operate with the patronage of a museum or humanities society, or they may have a wealthy benefactor who seeks the relic for display among the other treasures of his private collection. Indeed, they themselves might be that wealthy party who wants the artifact for its prestige or for its reputed power. Alternatively, more sinister motives may be behind an archaeological endeavor. A tomb may hold a mummy, the dust from which may empower a baneful curse, for example, or an ancient soldier's sword might have mystical puissance against the descendents of his enemy.

Not all archaeological chronicles need to involve jet lag on the other side of the world. The ancient Indian burial mound is a staple of the genre, as viable a setting as an Egyptian necropolis or Malaysian jungle temple. As well, modern, urban ruin can put a fresh spin on "archaeology"—imagine a chronicle in which a cursed electroshock chair in an abandoned asylum is the relic in question, or one in which the archaeological dig occurs at a real-estate developer's construction site.

Whatever the case, the relic lies buried and the thrust of the chronicle is first finding the artifact, which has slipped from the cognizance of the world, and then retrieving it from its anachronistic protections.

Themes and Moods

The obvious, pop-culture mood for archaeological chronicles is one of pulp adventure. While the World of Darkness isn't expressly designed for such two-fisted action, its themes are nonetheless appropriate here. (Additionally, if the Storyteller genu-

inely wants a pulp story or chronicle, he can treat certain low-threat foes as "extras" with only three or four health points to provide for no end of Nazis, cultists, scheming Templars, and flagellant monks.)

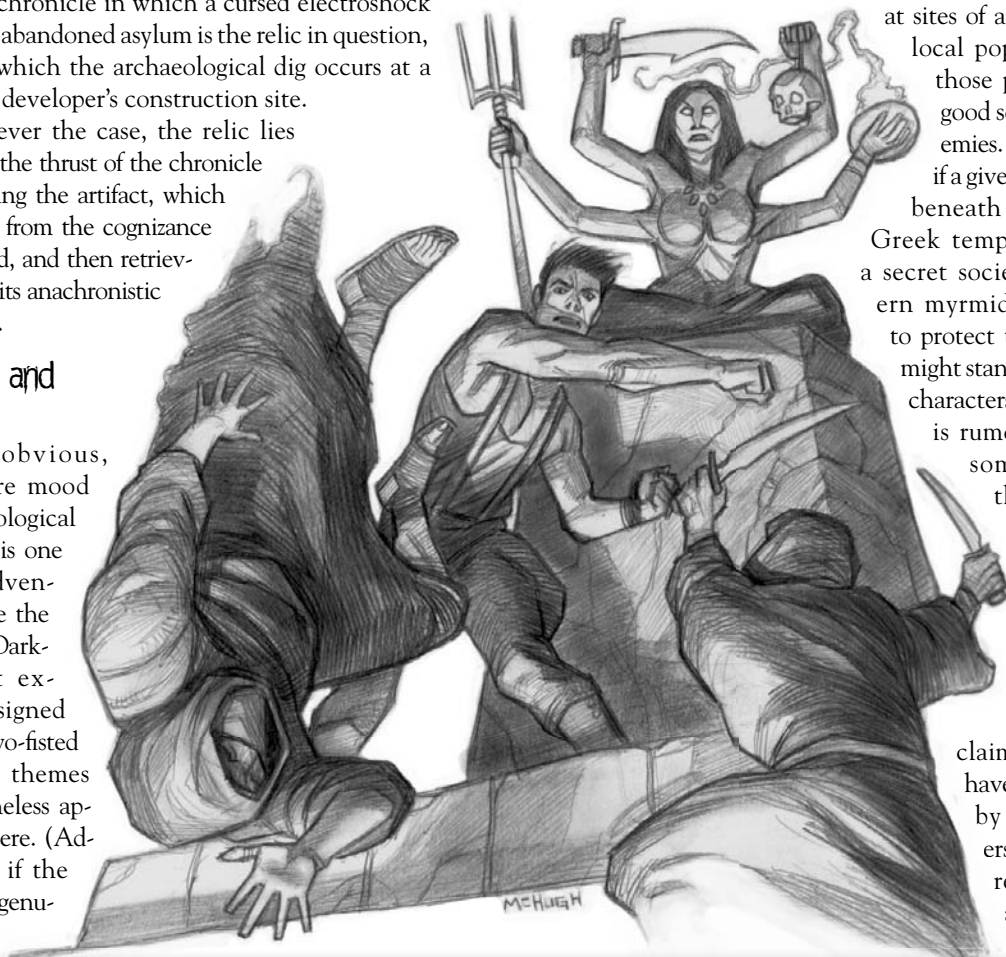
For darker or more serious chronicles, themes of knowledge or majesty lost are certainly appropriate, as are moods of exoticism (as characters trek across the globe to foreign lands) or ancient grandeur (as the characters discover the wealth of lost civilizations). For an even darker turn, the theme of "knowledge lost" can easily transmute into one of "there are things men should not know," which suggests that perhaps this relic has been *consciously* placed out of mankind's reach for some horrific reason. Perhaps the power it bestows on its wielder comes at a terrible blood-price, or perhaps it's the subject of some legendary curse. Whatever the case, those agents of antiquity who last held the relic deliberately obfuscated its location to ensure the wellbeing of mankind.

Challenges

Numerous difficulties come into play during an archaeological chronicle, of course, or anyone who happened to stumble across a reference to the death-shroud of Pharaoh Akhtoy would already have retrieved it.

Cultural antagonists make great overt challenges to align against the characters in archaeological chronicles. Since many relics in these sorts of chronicles lie buried

at sites of antiquity, the local populations of those places make good sources of enemies. For example, if a given artifact lies beneath an ancient Greek temple, perhaps a secret society of modern myrmidons, sworn to protect the treasure, might stand against the characters. If the relic is rumored to rest somewhere in the Himalayas, a Sherpa guide might secretly work to keep the artifact unclaimed, or may have been bribed by rival powers to lead the relic-hunters astray.



In the same idiom, cultural differences can provide interesting challenges to overcome. Everything from the language barrier (“Oh, *don’t* toss the week’s rations into the river...”) to local custom can provide challenges that may result in mere embarrassment or actual risk of life and limb.

Architectural challenges serve as another way to keep characters on their toes, especially if they’re used to physical threats coming in the form of combat with enemies. Challenges of this nature can be anything from ancient booby traps designed to kill intruders to ruined building features such as crumbled staircases or cave-ins that isolate treasure chambers. Be careful when populating your chronicle with threats of this nature: Booby traps are often designed to kill, so remain true to the trap’s function, but give the characters a chance to think around or circumvent such traps. The archaeological chronicle should be thrilling and potentially deadly, but too much body count will cost the players’ interest.

Environmental challenges are similar to architectural traps, but are the result of forces of nature rather than engines of human (or other...) construction. For example, the bridge collapsed long ago and the characters have to find some way to traverse the gorge, or the monastery where the monk’s diary resides is located at the top of a sheer mountain.

Complications

The chronicle doesn’t always end once the characters are safely at home and the relic is in the warm hands of the patron, on display at the museum or even in the characters’ own shrine. What if the artifact is cursed and museum guests have been falling ill after the curator was strangled in his own home by a mysterious attacker of immense strength? What if the customs bureau refuses to allow the relic back into the country? What if the local government of the country in which the item was found makes a claim to the item? What if the characters were duped into retrieving the relic for an individual who seeks to use it for the wrong ends?

Introducing the Supernatural

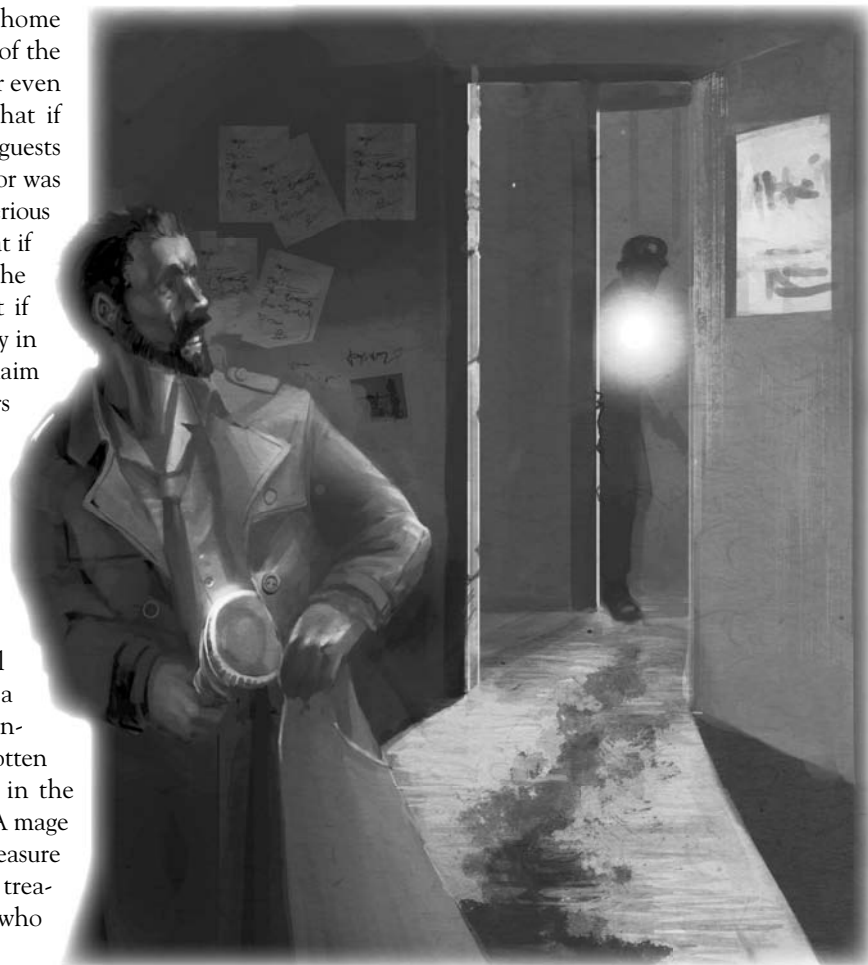
Bringing **World of Darkness**-style horror into an archaeological chronicle is like shooting fish in a barrel. Who knows what sorts of ancient horrors, protective spirits, forgotten gods, or venerable guardians lurk in the hidden niches where treasures lie? A mage might have laid a ward upon the treasure or temple in times long past, or the treasure might literally belong to one who


still walks among men — as a member of the undead. In the **World of Darkness**, archaeology rarely comes without its consequences, and any would-be Indiana Joneses are likely to find themselves facing a genuine mummy’s curse, deathless samurai, or vizier-summoned demon *on its own turf*. “Be prepared” should be the motto of more than just the Boy Scouts.

The Art Thief Chronicle

In the art thief chronicle, someone’s already done the hard work of finding and recovering the relic that lies at the center of the story. In this case, though, the characters will need to undertake the hard work of liberating it from its rightful (or perhaps wrongful) current owner.

The art thief chronicle can have many flavors. Characters might be noble freelancers keeping the treasures of history out of the hands of vain fat cats, or they might be scoundrels who work the black market and specialize in authentic antiquities. They might be government agents who swipe the world’s wonders from dictators and demagogues, or they might work for a morally dubious private employer who wants to bolster his own collection.





Characters of this ilk move in different circles than the archaeologists who originally unearthed the relics in question. Let those pith-helmeted fellows do all the digging and dusting. The art thief moves among high society, finding out who has what and then planning a delicate heist to “relocate” it. He hobnobs with heads of state, the wealthy elite, patrons of the arts, eminent lawmakers, celebrity collectors, and religious hierarchs. Anyone who might have access to an artifact could earn a call from a member of an art thief’s ring.

A chronicle like this offers a good opportunity for specialist characters. For example, one character might excel at stealth and the actual snatching of the relics while another smooth-talks or vamps her way into parties where the object is held and yet another has the mechanical know-how to circumvent the security devices that protect the artifact from lesser thieves. Indeed, the reverence others have for the characters’ skill at obtaining the unobtainable pales only in comparison to the wonder of the items they steal.

Themes and Moods

Tension, the thrill of discovery, and an almost espionage-like experience are the moods common to art thief chronicles. There’s a bit of the voyeuristic about them, but then the thief acts on that voyeurism and swoops in, stealing the object of desire and spiriting it away to his own cache or that of his patron.

That feeling intensifies over the course of the chronicle, making for a theme of paranoia and trustworthiness that pervades each story. For whom does the ring of thieves steal? If they steal for their own interests, how long before one of them decides to keep the glory — or the mystical potency of a given relic — for himself? If they steal for an agency, will they be sold out? If they steal for the black market, how long before they’re inevitably set up and sent to jail?

Moreover, what if a specific relic activates a powerful curse if it falls into “the wrong hands,” like those of a ring of thieves? No matter how rich, powerful, or famous the people are with whom the thieves rub elbows, it’s a safe bet that none of them have the power to negate an ancient curse.

...Or do they? And can they be trusted...?

At face value, an art thief chronicle thrives on irreverence, daring, and an almost modern-swashbuckling sensibility. Too much wise-cracking attitude, though, and too little attention to the details of making the heist work can end a would-be thief’s career as fast as stumbling into a camp of local nomads who suddenly grow nine feet in height and sprout gnashing fangs.

Challenges

The art thief chronicle abounds with challenges to be met and overcome. The nature of those challenges depends on the specific story type the Storyteller wishes to present.

Naturally, the most common challenges a ring of art thieves will face are stealth-based. How to get into that mansion/ warehouse/ museum/ sub-Vatican vault? How to defeat any local security once you’re inside? How to get back out?

And that’s only the beginning of the difficulty. Characters must then protect their contraband from the true owner’s agents (jackbooted or otherwise), from the authorities, or even from other thieves seeking to rip *them* off after they’ve done the dirty work.

Next, how do the thieves transport the artifact from their possession to their buyers or benefactors? It’s one thing to sneak the Key of Nineveh onto the plane in your carry-on, but how are you going to get Simon Magus’ sarcophagus back to Chicago? FedEx? No, you’re going to have to hire a truck to carry it to your chartered plane. Someone’s going to have to guard that truck and that plane, and the van that meets you at Chicago Midway airport (because there’s too much attention at O’Hare...). Can you trust any and all of those guards?

What about your next score? Who’s going to do the smooth-talking at the soiree? Who’s going to stake out the Capitol Building to see what time the guards change shifts? And who’s doing all the research to find out about these relics in the area anyway?

Complications

Any of the complications associated with the archaeological chronicle can certainly apply to an art thief chronicle, with the additional difficulties engendered by the fact that the characters are effectively operating outside the law. It’s one thing for customs to refuse to allow this case of “foreign property” into the country; it’s another altogether to be caught trying to sneak the rightful property of the last Shah of Iran in through Miami. Other thieves can represent external complications (and competition) as well. Or, if the thief characters have a patron and get a taste of the power contained in a given relic, what if they decide that they don’t want to turn it over? That’s an interesting twist on the theme of paranoia running through the chronicle: having the players’ characters be the first ones to breach the fragile trust that sustains their longevity and freedom.

Introducing the Supernatural

The beauty of criminal chronicles, especially those built upon a theme of paranoia, is that anyone located anywhere can turn out to be a monster or otherwise tainted by the supernatural. The characters’ patron might be a vampire. The victim from whom the characters steal might be a mage. The security force under whose noses the characters initially slip might be a mercenary pack of werewolves.

Beyond those cornerstones of the **World of Darkness** games, any number of other supernatural taints might affect the thieves. The characters might acquire a powerful relic, sure, but they also acquire the ghost anchored to it. They may obtain the Eye of the Elder Gods for their benefactor or the highest bidder, but they don’t get rid of it before the eye *looks at them with its sight out of time*. Indeed, the methods by which roguish characters might come into contact with the supernatural are almost infinite — from the moment they step into forbidden territory to the very artifacts they abscond with.

The Treasure Hunt Chronicle

In the treasure hunt chronicle, characters pursue rumors of relics and the vanishing trails of artifacts for their own sake. This differs from the archaeology chronicle and the art thief chronicle because the end goal is different. These characters don't necessarily want to preserve the knowledge represented by relics for all of mankind, nor are they black marketers specializing in rare antiquities. No, in the treasure hunt chronicle, the characters seek the power inherent in the relics themselves.

Depending on the Storyteller's scope and the players' commitment and ambition, a treasure hunt chronicle might be a single story, or it might be a year's worth of bi-weekly gaming sessions. It may involve the discovery and use of a single relic, or it might result in a veritable trove of artifacts to be used at the characters' whim.

The treasure hunt chronicle is a good model for casual and veteran roleplayers alike because it appeals to the basic principle of role-playing games (and, by extension, Storytelling games): the urge to acquire stuff. Treasure hunt chronicles can offer a niche to an immense diversity of character types, from the power-hungry occultist to the soldier of fortune to the dilettante who has no real appreciation for the power of relics but enjoys them because they're rare and society esteems him for owning them.

Themes and Moods


Competition is a popular theme in treasure hunt chronicles. Competition almost certainly occurs between the players' treasure hunters and other groups out to claim the same relics, whether they're rival treasure hunters, rightful authorities, supernatural arcanists, legitimate archaeologists or art thieves. Competition is also a good thematic element for mature troupes to

incorporate between players' characters. Whether the competition is over leadership, shares of legendary treasure, the ability to wield power or the respect of the outside world, rivalries among characters can make for very memorable roleplaying sessions.

The price of power is another popular theme for treasure hunt chronicles, and one that dovetails nicely with the Morality mechanics central to the **World of Darkness** rules. Is a character willing to actively harm others or inflict significant property damage to obtain the power a relic represents? Is he willing to steal? Would he kill? Might he make a Faustian deal if confronted with some supernatural patron?

The mood of such chronicles is often frenzied, fast-paced, and able to turn dark the moment one of those moral quandaries boils to the surface. Treasure hunt chronicles can easily accommodate high adventure, tense cliffhangers, breezy action, or harrowing horror, whatever the tastes of the troupe. Since the acquisition





of thrilling artifacts is the focus of the chronicle, any flavor might be appropriate, and the best treasure hunt chronicles have a mix of moods that satisfies the players' desire for variety.

Challenges

Challenges in a treasure hunt chronicle are fun for Storytellers to plan because they're often laid out in a cause-and-effect, episodic manner. Characters must first hear about a specific treasure, then research it, then plan their recovery, then perform the recovery, then return safely home. Only after this whole line of prerequisites is completed can the characters actually achieve the genuine benefits of owning a given relic.

Of course, each objective in that sequence is a chance for the Storyteller to place very specific obstacles in the story for the characters to overcome. There's practically no limit on who or what might stand against the characters in a given situations: The location and nature of the artifact do more to determine what's appropriate than the chronicle type here. Over the course of a treasure hunting character's career, he may face hurricanes, fanatical monks, corrupt police, femmes fatale, poisonous spiders, Filipino pirates, Bantu tribesmen, Cold War spies, Sunni agents provocateur, flooding rivers, desert dehydration, and a hellish construct formed from the sewn-together pieces of innumerable corpses. All in a day's work for the treasure hunter.

Once the characters have their relics safe in their homes (or apartments, or secret stronghold, or... you get the idea), then the story can take on a distinctly different "second act." Rightful owners might want to reclaim the artifact, jealous rivals may wish to steal it, subversive members of the group may want exclusive use of it, etc. Having the relic and being able to use it, ironically, often opens a whole new host of problems for the treasure hunters. Since conflict is the stuff good stories are made of, however, what's a hassle, threat, or deathtrap for the characters is entertainment for the players and Storyteller.

Complications

Challenges and complications in treasure hunt chronicles often overlap, as an ally in one scene might well be a liability or a victim in the next. Indeed, the savvy Storyteller can make great use of shifting allegiances to muddle an otherwise straightforward story. The indignant Muslim nationalists who opposed the characters' recovery of a relic in one scene might turn out to be unexpected allies in a second scene, in which the consortium of criminal Russian "industrialists" wants to take the artifact for themselves — only to become enemies again once the common threat has been neutralized. Fellow characters can certainly also fall into the category of complications, as described above.

Of course, somewhere in the flow of the chronicle, the characters will need an opportunity to make use of their artifacts and relics, since the collection and use of relics is the whole point of this type of chronicle. Concomitant with that principle is the fact that some of those relics may well be cursed, or may have powers entirely other than what the characters thought they were. In a treasure hunt chronicle, the characters should always be on their toes, even when they're on their home territory.

Introducing the Supernatural

Supernatural presence in a treasure hunt chronicle varies by the tone the Storyteller has in mind. Some might have no supernatural element other than the power of the relics themselves. Some might even have artifacts with no inherent supernatural potency, and the only power present in the story is the power of legend or superstition. Other chronicles might feature intrepid bands of monster hunters, who augment their opposition to the fiends of the night with powerful relics harvested from the vaults of fallen enemies. In short, a treasure hunt chronicle might be anything from an antiquity-themed *Bourne Conspiracy* to a straight-faced *Ghostbusters* to *The Third Man* with vampires lurking in the shadows and forgotten Viking treasure instead of drug money.

The Higher Calling Chronicle

Not every chronicle needs to focus exclusively on finding relics, nor turning them over to benefactors or other individuals. In the higher calling chronicle, the focus shifts from the artifact itself or the collection thereof to the responsibilities possessing the relic entails.

In these chronicles, the characters take on the role of protectors or active agents. They may find themselves in a position guarding the sacred tome from those "impure of heart," or the relic spear of an angel might lead them on a quest to smite the unholy. If the artifact imparts its own set of priorities on the characters, or serves as the vessel by which some greater power selects its paladins on earth, you've got the makings of a higher calling chronicle.

A higher calling chronicle doesn't always have to imply that the characters have no free will. The best higher callings are the ones that mesh with extant character moralities and philosophies. It's jarring to have an utterly mercenary team of explorers suddenly take up the Hajj and protect all Mecca-bound pilgrims they encounter after discovering the lost journals of Mohammed, for example. It's not as out of character to have a group of ghost-hunters become avatars of a long-dead daimyo's samurai on their way to collect the Five Swords of the Lotus Song, however.



Themes and Moods


As you might expect, the most powerful theme in a higher calling chronicle is, "With great power comes great responsibility." In finding the relic they sought after, the characters inherit not only the item itself but some aspect of its mystical function. This theme and chronicle type naturally work best for artifacts involving some spiritual or religious origin, and the characters thereby become agents of that ethic or spiritual outlook.

To that end, moods of holiness (or profaneness) suit such chronicles, as do moods of prophecy fulfilled. The overtones of chivalry that accompanied the knights' grail quest in Arthurian lore highlighted the greatness of the grail, for example. These need not be heavy handed or

Christian, of course, and any number of vital religions or ancient mythologies can come into play in such a chronicle.

Perhaps the characters guard an artifact that carries the living into the realm of the dead, for example, in a chronicle with a mood and theme resonant with ancient Greece or Rome.

Other moods and themes need not be so grandiose. In all likelihood, the theme and mood of the chronicle will owe much to the relic in question. Those Five Swords of the Lotus Song mentioned earlier might im-



part the personality of a ghostly samurai on each character, or at least overlay a character with the personality of the samurai most like him. The characters then find themselves in situations that parallel the lives of the samurai while they recover the swords and fragments of the Lotus Song. For chronicles in which you design custom relics with key histories and mythologies, let your creativity run wild.

Challenges

Most of the challenges in chronicles like these are situational, and defined by the geas or duty the relic establishes for the players' characters. Many of these will be external forces acting upon the characters — enemies who want the artifact for themselves, storied foes from the relic's history, or shadowy parties whose true purposes and motivations are unknown for the time being.

Some of the challenges can be environmental, as well. Remember the challenges Indiana Jones faced when seeking the grail in *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*. If taken from the perspective of the knight-protector instead of Dr. Jones, those environmental threats had to be overcome at some point. Likewise, consider the epic woes faced by Frodo over the course of the *Lord of the Rings* saga, from sneaking through monstrous strongholds to climbing the only mountain in which the One Ring might be destroyed. Not every chronicle need be that epic — “Save the world!” can be overwrought or hackneyed if overused — but the significance of the very environment aligning against the characters with the higher calling can test their mettle and commitment.

As a word of warning, one of the “meta challenges” a Storyteller will face while concocting a higher calling chronicle is presenting the events of the plot in a manner that allows the players to retain their sense of free will. Unless you design a chronicle in which the players plainly understand that their characters are going to feel some magnificent directive take over their ability to make key choices, they may well feel railroaded in an awkwardly assembled higher calling chronicle.

Complications

One of the intriguing ways to set a higher calling chronicle apart from other chronicle types is to make it reactive rather than proactive. In many **World of Darkness** stories, the players' characters find themselves beset by some mystery or threat, which they then actively pursue in the hopes of finding a resolution. Consider the opposite for a higher calling chronicle: Once the characters discover their desired relic, they become its guardians, and must protect the item from those who would claim it for their own use. That's a pretty straightforward (if difficult) charge in most cases, and

the characters will probably spend a lot of time defending the relic from nefarious individuals with malice on their minds, but this type of chronicle can acquire a gray scale of morality if one of those interlopers seeking the artifact in fact seeks to use it for a wholesome or altruistic purpose. Will the characters allow her to do so? If they do, will that dispel their charge and make the interloper the new protector of the relic? What, exactly, qualifies as a “justified” cause? Are the players the ones to make that decision, or are they bound by the morality imposed by the higher calling that set them to guardianship to begin with? Moreover, how will the characters *know* if they're the ones who are supposed to make that decision?

The focus on a single object and the location where that relic might be found typically ties the higher calling chronicle into a one-shot or a short story arc. Obviously, the restrictions the characters will probably face regarding movement of an unwieldy relic or an artifact that's otherwise fated to remain in a location prevents the setting from having too much scope. Still, the intensity of interactions vast responsibility will foster in the characters and the significance of the duty they've been given can make for some memorable storytelling.

Introducing the Supernatural

Higher calling chronicles typically have three distinct supernatural forces at work over their course. Not all three are required for a compelling story or chronicle, but bear them in mind when planning such a chronicle.

The first, obviously, is the relic itself. By the definition established in this book, the relic is almost certain to have some mystical, magical, inexplicable, or just plain weird properties of its own. This doesn't always have to be the case, and a powerful enough mystique for a MacGuffin can supersede the need for said MacGuffin to have inherent qualities, but in most cases, the supernatural duty to which it holds the characters is the source of one mystically mysterious element.

Another chance for supernatural intrusion comes from those who might seek to use the relic or claim it for themselves. Birds of a feather flock together, and the call of mystical potency to creatures that are supernaturally gifted (or cursed) themselves can certainly lend itself to spawning a ready-made host of antagonists who probably see the characters as obstacles.

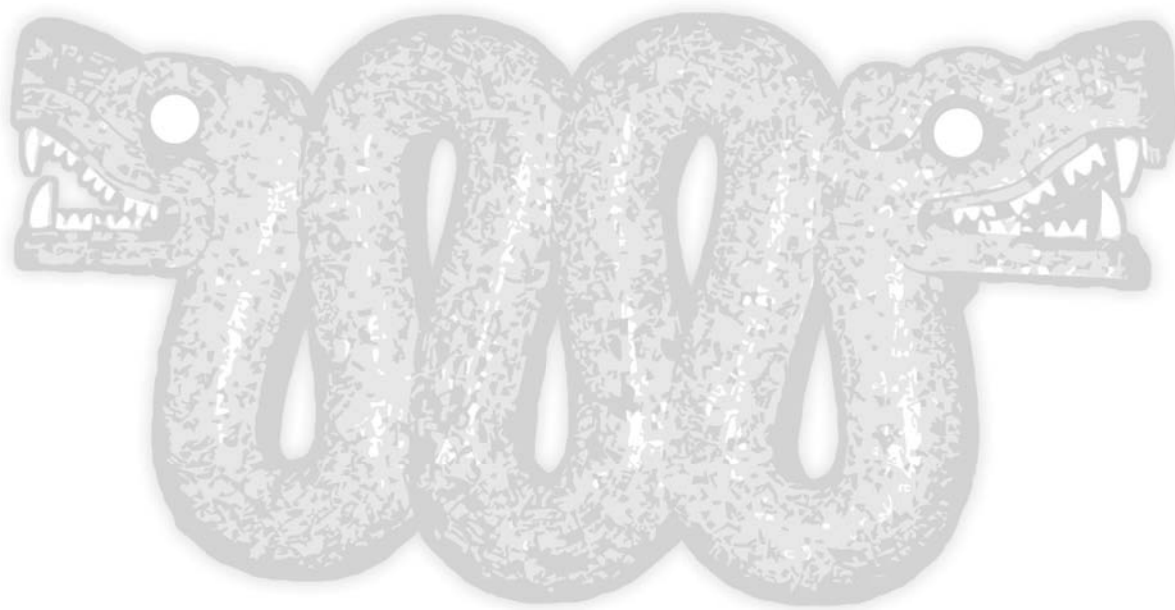
The third type of supernatural influence is that of peripheral strangeness that occurs in the vicinity of the relic. Often in the *World of Darkness*, a supernatural item or occurrence acts as a beacon to other supernatural presences. In a higher calling chronicle, this may be simple eerie set dressing, such as a rain of frogs. Alternatively, it might be a portent of change or disaster to come. A rain of frogs followed by a plague of locusts sounds suspiciously like the onset of the ten calami-

ties of Egypt, for example, and might not bode well for the characters who witness the coming storm.

An Ensemble

With all that in mind, the thing to remember about relic-focused chronicles is that they shine the limelight a bit

differently on the players' characters. Such being the case, a relic-focused chronicle can provide a refreshing change of pace or even short story arc for a chronicle that needs it, or they can justify their own existence. In every case, though, they're not your standard **World of Darkness** story, as the relic itself shares top billing with the characters that possess it.





"So where's Manny tonight?" Al poured Gail a glass of wine.

She was a hottie; he had to give his cousin that.

"Tonight's trivia at the bar," she said.

Al nodded. He thought Manny had quit doing that, but evidently not. "Well, let's have a look."

Gail produced a small leather bag and unwrapped the apple.

Al stood, staring, for a minute. "It's..."

"I know," she said. She sounded almost sad.

He picked it up. It was only about four inches around and maybe three inches high, but it felt like it was solid gold. Al tried to figure what it would be worth and then stopped.

How could anyone ever sell this?

"How long have you had this?"

"Since I was thirteen. My aunt gave it to me."

Al frowned. Manny had said something about her taking it from somebody else, but then, Manny wasn't very bright and might have gotten his facts wrong. Al put the apple on the table and pulled out a magnifying glass. "You know there's writing here, carved into the top of the apple?"

"Oh, really? Can you read it?"

"It's Greek. I can't translate all of it...hang on." Al dug out a book from the back of a shelf. "It says something like, 'Doubt is the greatest weapon, Envy is the worst of sins.'" He turned back to Gail, who was standing by the couch with the strangest look on her face. The look was almost resigned, as if she knew something bad was about to happen but had no way to stop it. "What do you think that means?"

Gail shrugged and walked toward the desk to get the apple. Al gripped it tighter. Gail opened the bag and nodded to him.

Al lashed out his fist and struck her. She stumbled back, but remained standing. She looked up at him, the mark on her cheek already starting to swell.

Al gasped and dropped the apple. Gail grabbed it and dropped it into the bag. He tried to apologize, but Gail was already running out. Al thought about calling Manny, but what would he say?

What the hell came over me?

Al picked up Gail's wine glass. *It's just a stupid apple.*

He looked down at his hand and thought about how perfect the apple had felt there. He wondered where Gail kept it.

A Million Little Things

What is a Relic?

If anything defines a relic, it is being valuable. In some cases, this translates to monetary value or barterable trade. A relic may be the world's largest cursed gemstone, or a mysterious lost roomful of ornately carved amber panels. It may be the half-finished last painting of a long-dead master, or some other artifact which could be auctioned for millions were its owner willing to part with it. Relics can be made of precious metal, encrusted with diamonds or other invaluable materials. However, monetary worth alone does not a relic make.

Relics may also be valuable simply based on the supernatural powers they possess or the abilities they bestow upon their wielder. A simple stick, if blessed with the ability to animate a room full of furniture into mindless servants, may well be a relic, as might be a poultice that heals even the most grievous wounds in moments. Relics may grant otherwise mundane individuals superhuman luck or grant wishes, or allow them to see the future; with relics, all manner of impossibilities may suddenly become possible. There is no direct correlation, however, between being valued and the mystic powers described later in this book. Many relics may possess one or more of these supernatural abilities, but a relic might just as easily be magically inert, or possess powers which those who covet it are unaware of, and instead be sought for other reasons.

A relic can also be a letter, or a stone, or a piece of bone, without any inherent material value or supernatural power whatsoever. Being valuable sometimes means simply being valued. A child's long-beloved doll might be a relic, or a snippet of cloth which devout believers credit with having come from the shroud of a divine spirit. A ballplayer's lucky bat can be a relic, as can a shard of sculpture which was once worshiped as an idol of some long forgotten god.

While a relic may be powerful or powerless, gold or clay, old or very new, one thing does hold true. Relics are valuable because people want them. It doesn't matter whether it is for the power they may hold, for their religious significance, for their value to others, for personal sentiment or for the simple reputation possessing a relic may bring. Relics are valuable because they are valued.

Some relics are famous, their value in their fame and widespread meaning. People hunt for them, sometimes spending their entire lives in an effort to track down a lost artifact. This is part of the nature of relics: the power to fill people who hear of them with desire, a covetousness that grips more tightly than a miser does coin. How many treasure hunters over the centuries have tried and failed to find the Holy Grail? The Grail is an ideal example of one sort of relic this book presents: it is famous, it has mystical relevance, and, at least according to legend, it performs holy miracles.

Not all relics are burdened by fame or infamy, however. An artifact of power does not depend on popular consensus for its magic; it can be charged by a single event — a birth, a death, a love lost or gained — and remain empowered forever or until it meets its fate. The people who seek out relics such as these are often those for whom they have particular meaning — a descendent of those involved, or someone who has heard their tale and been touched by the event — or else those who make relics of all sorts their business. An old blanket dating from the American Civil War may only be important to its current owner. He may never be able to sell it (even if he was willing to) but it isn't worthless, not if it

**"Any relic of the dead
is precious, if they
were valued living."**

- Emily Bronte



saved his great-great-grandfather's life (and maybe his own, whether he realizes its potential to do so or not). Personal relics like this also have power. They receive less attention than famous relics, at least from the public at large. But they are valuable, and often they eventually attract the attention of relic hunters, even if they never call hordes of treasure seekers and anthropologists to their owner's door.

Legendary and Personal

From a Storytelling perspective, both famous and personal relics have strengths and weaknesses. Each is more suitable for a different kind of story. Putting the Holy Grail in a chronicle instantly suggests a grand scope – thousands of people want this thing and *millions* have heard of it. There are movies about it. Even if there are no active antagonists in the game who want to take it from the characters, the sheer presence of such a relic asks big questions. How has it remained hidden (and yet famous) for so long? Is it so different from what people expected that no one knew where to look for it? Why has it come to light at this time and this place? Are the characters the only ones left who believed it was real? The answers to these questions (or just being forced to ask them) changes how the characters who encounter legendary relics look at the world around them. A story with the Holy Grail doesn't *have* to be world-shaking, but even explaining why it isn't may well forever change the character's reality.


A personal relic brings the Storytelling to a more personal level. This blanket once belonged to a character's

ancestor. It saved his life *before* he had any children, making it important to the character to whom the blanket (and its story) descended. Such relics may not topple anyone's belief system or change their world view, but a character's attachment means that stories revolving around this type of relic can be more poignant to a player than her character's desire to possess the Grail. As well, while legendary relics may reveal secrets and mysteries about the world at large, personal ones have the potential to reveal disturbing skeletons in the character's past (or that of their ancestors), a different, but no less interesting, potential story direction.

Origin Stories

Some relics are crafted intentionally, through sacred or blasphemous means unavailable to the majority of the world's population. Characters with the Merit "Relic Creator" can craft some types of relics, while the knowledge of how to create others has been lost or destroyed. Those who do try to create something of greater mystical power often succeed only in unexpected ways, if that. The author of the Voynich Manuscript intended to craft an object of power, one of knowledge and enlightenment, but the text became something else instead, confounding philosophers and scientists for centuries.

Other relics, however, form spontaneously and unpredictably, born of climactic situations or the build up of dramatic emotional or mystical significance. The helmet which stopped a near-fatal bullet might become a relic by



drawing power from a soldier's fear and his unexpected survival. A doll might become one based on decades of adoration bestowed upon it by a particularly obsessive child, or, if given as a bribe for a molested child's silence, because of the intense pain, guilt and anger it comes to embody for its owner. A piece of wreckage from the accident in which someone died might become a relic, whether the individual lost was a legendary rock star, a powerful supernatural creature or a beloved spouse.

There is no formula for what will turn a trinket, memento or other mundane item into a relic. With the exception of those which are intentionally crafted (see pg. 85 for details on the Relic Creator Merit), the fickle finger of fate spawns one item as a relic while ignoring another in a nearly identical situation. Relics are unique. They cannot be replicated reliably. There is no guarantee that even the most precise duplication of one relic's creation process will spawn another. Each is a product of the precise equation of circumstances, influences, interactions and emotions which surrounded and contributed to its own creation.

Tools and Inspirations

The relics in this chapter are designed to serve as both a selection of relics which can be used "as is" in chronicles, as well as guidelines and inspirations for customizing new relics. Each one is ready for use in your game, with a history to tantalize players' characters and powers that make it worth having despite the costs. But, each is also easy to adjust to your own specifications. The backgrounds and item types are not written in stone, just on feeble paper. If you find an item you like which is not quite right, rip it out (figuratively, please) and replace it with something that better suits your chronicle. And if the powers written under "Effects" aren't to your taste, take a tour through Chapter Three and go shopping for replacements. It doesn't hurt to surprise your players by giving a famous or infamous artifact unexpected powers, or by changing up the powers on a relic they might have read in this book. It's easy to put together your ideal relic with a little mixing and matching, and the authors won't mind.

What Relics Are Not

Some magical treasures from other aspects of the World of Darkness might appear to be relics but are not. The differences are subtle in some cases; a relic may easily be mistaken for an imbued item, talen or token at first glance, and both may infer upon their wielders very similar powers. The difference between relics and other supernatural items, however, comes not from the effect or appearance, but the origin.

Most non-relic supernatural items draw their powers from some unique source of the unnatural world (the Supernal Realms, the Spirit Wylds, the Hedge or the like) and are created by or for a certain sort of supernatural be-

ing. Relics, on the other hand, do not seem to take their power from any of these supernatural realms, nor are they, as a whole, tied to any supernatural group. The power of relics defies classification; it is unknown and non-formulaic. Some relics have no supernatural power whatsoever, and even when they do, the power is not tied to the same mythic sources of power which fuel other items.

Neither the fetishes of werewolves nor the enhanced or imbued items of mages are relics; they are too strongly tied to the Shadow Realm or the Supernal Realms. While relics can contain spirits, they are not crafted in the same manner, and in most cases the spirit within is less a battery than a prisoner. Relics do resemble **Mage: The Awakening's** Artifacts, but their power is not Supernal – it is simply unexplainable. As well, relics are useable by unAwakened mortals, whereas Artifacts and imbued items are most often limited to use by mages.

The hedgefruit and tokens of changelings are superficially more similar to relics, since anyone can use them with the proper sacrifice. However, relics are not tied to oaths or the Hedge as changeling items are.

Relics are very similar to cursed items as explored in the **Book of Spirits**, which offer a benefit and drawback to anyone willing to risk them; the only real difference between these and relics is the certain bad luck that follows using a cursed item.

These items are not relics, but that doesn't mean they're useless to players or Storytellers who are interested in using relics in the story. They can all serve as inspiration for relics not presented in this book: steal shamelessly!

One last note: none of the relics here are immobile. They're all designed to be objects a character can pick up and take with her, even if it's not easy. Stonehenge or the Coliseum of Rome may have mystical powers in your game, but that makes it a Mysterious Place, not a relic. That said, no one's going to complain if you use inspiration or rules from this book to design a place as a relic. Any of the powers, curses and costs here can be easily transferable to an immobile location, be it a cave, a house, a ruin or an entire forest. Feel free to utilize them as such to create what you need for your chronicle.

Contents of the Reliquary

Antikythera Mechanism

Durability 2, Size 2, Structure 4

Description: This resembles nothing so much as a few hunks of wood and several bits of craggy stone with embedded gears. Whether it is found in a glass case deep in a museum's archives, forgotten in a dusty attic, or at the bottom of a half-finished archeology dig, it seems weightier than its surroundings – it feels more true, more correct, even to the average person who can't recognize it for what

it is. In truth, it is a degraded bronze machine encrusted with centuries of sediment and tarnish. It is rough to the touch and its gears look completely locked up. Logic wars with instinct in those who look at it: reason dictates that any use the mechanism once had is *clearly* gone, while the subconscious mind insists that the device still has some sort of purpose or, curiously, wisdom.

Background: Posidonius was a widely traveled Greek, highly renowned for his philosophical wisdom and research. He traveled the world, learning and teaching for much of his adult life, and was widely acclaimed both for the depth and breadth of his knowledge in a wide variety of fields. When he returned from Hispania to his home in Rhodes in 79 B.C.E., however, he had changed. Posidonius ignored other research, focusing entirely upon the nature of the moon and the planets. Famous metallurgists and skilled metalworkers visited his school and stayed for many months. By the end of 78 B.C.E., Posidonius' solitary obsession came to an end, and he began taking students once more. Those who had been sent away returned, but when they asked about the disturbance, their teacher claimed to have spent the time creating a mechanical device of unprecedented complexity and accuracy. More shockingly, he claimed that with it he could predict the future.

Despite the unlikelihood of his claims, something changed for the better for Posidonius after his invention was created. The lot of Posidonius, his school, its students, and even Rhodes itself, seemed to blossom in the coming years.

Posidonius was active in politics as well as philosophical research, and his life seemed charmed. At length, word of his astronomical mechanism spread. Even Caesar himself came to seek Posidonius' advice, under the guise of a visit to Apollonius Molon. The answers he received reportedly saw Caesar through the troubles that immediately followed, and the leader was most grateful to Posidonius for his insights, although whether he truly believed they came from the device or not is a matter of conjecture.

Gratitude from Caesar served Posidonius well – something Posidonius had (with the assistance of the machine, of course) anticipated. Word spread which, at first, benefited his research and reputation. It also, however, brought about

the mechanism's downfall. After Caesar's assassination, his successor chose to claim the device for himself. Believing the rumors of the machine's ineffability, he sacked Rhodes in 43 B.C.E. and removed the mechanism, along with many other treasures. To its new owner's dismay, on the return to Rome the machine sank, along with the cargo ship that carried it, and it was not seen again for almost two thousand years.

In 1900, a sponge diver discovered the shipwreck near the island of Antikythera. The island lent its name to the mysterious device, one of the first artifacts from the wreck brought up to the surface. Scientists eventually figured out that it was part of an analog computer that could calculate astronomical positions and tied it loosely to Rhodes and Posidonius. In the ensuing years, many other pieces of the mechanism have also been discovered.

Most of what was reclaimed now rests in the National Archaeological Museum of Athens, but strange rumors surround the original device, claiming that the primary Antikythera Device is not part of the collection.

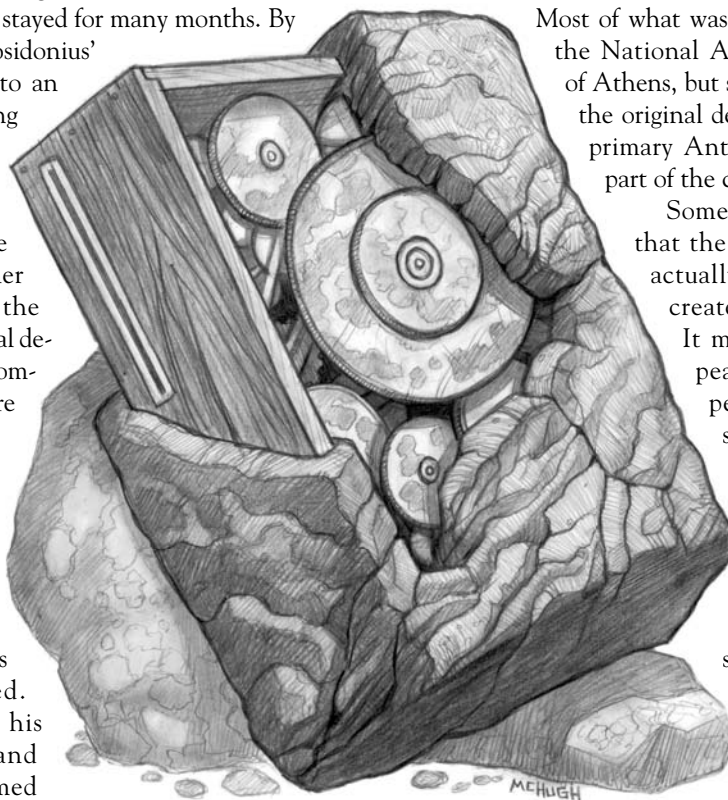
Some of these stories claim that the artifacts displayed are actually duplicates originally created as a display replica.


It mirrors the device's appearance, but lacks its supernatural abilities. The same rumors suggest that the original may have been stolen in the early 20th century by rival anthropologists or other factions with an interest in the supernatural mysteries of the Greco-Roman era.

Other rumors claim the original diver absconded with

several parts of the machine (including the primary Antikythera device) before reporting the shipwreck to the authorities. These stories claim that the displayed pieces are simply some of the remaining pieces, the rest having been removed before and during the recovery process by locals who hoped to later sell the missing pieces to the museum to complete its collection.

The Museum officially ignores such claims and certainly behaves as if the pieces in their possession are not only the genuine article, but also the only significant portions of the machine ever recovered. It is very possible that current museum staff, including the security force detailed below, believe their collection includes the original item(s), whether it does or not. It is also possible that at least part of the collection is





a fraud and that the museum is aware that the original is not on display. If so, questions would still remain as to whether it was stolen decades ago and is no longer in the organization's possession, or whether it was simply deemed too valuable or dangerous to display openly.

Characters interested in strange machines, clockwork and the history of such probably know a little about the device's history and deciphered purpose, and students of science history likely know of Posidonius and Rhodes. Students of Greek history may well know more about the relationship between Caesar and Rhodes and that era's legends about the prophetic device.

- There is a security team in the National Archaeological Museum of Athens whose *only* responsibility is to watch over the Antikythera Mechanism. All are ex-military with combat experience. Their standing orders include protecting the mechanism at all costs and ignoring threats to any other exhibits. While this may seem extreme if the item is, in truth, a duplicate, it is likely that the team and those who hired them are unaware of the possibility that the treasure they are guarding is a fake.
- A rare text dating back 50 years before the Common Era, writes in ancient Greek: "Julius fears Posidonius as much as he values him; though Posidonius has no great ambition to bring to pass, what he does desire may bring harm enough in the having." This tome, apparently a journal, is commonly attributed to Diodorus Siculus, and is one of the primary texts describing not the device itself, but the effects of its prophetic abilities on the society of Rhodes, and to a lesser extent, the world.
- Some nights, cowed figures visit the Bronze Collection and spend most of the museum's closed hours there. The visitors are circumspect, but a few janitors and locals have caught a glimpse of them arriving or departing. Those who have seen them have been encouraged, be it through money or threats, to be silent about their presence.

Storytelling Hints: The Antikythera Mechanism is a mystery first and a tool second. In one aspect, it is the quintessential forbidden relic of the past, carefully preserved and withheld from public access. In most games, it should be accessible but not something a character can possess – characters view it to fuel their hunger for the answer, and then seek those answers within the sprawling conspiracy that inevitably surrounds the device. Characters who want to learn more about the mechanism must seek out hidden avenues of information, talk to the quacks who believe it's something more than a simple calculator and avoid the mysterious cult that wants to keep the device's secrets at any costs.

The mechanism can be sought out for its predictive abilities, on the trail to something larger or more personally important. Or a troupe can make a mission of reassembling the entirety of the machine, retrieving the pieces that have been stolen and sold over the years in order to learn the mechanism's mystical greater purpose.

Effects

(Unique) Gear-Tooth Prophecy (•••): The only usable power left to the Antikythera Mechanism, which once predicted the death of an empire, is prophecy of what will come in the next few days. A person who feeds the mechanism a question (written in a Greek-based code) activates the device, even though it has no apparent power source. Feeding blank paper into another slot delivers an answer to the sound of soft whirring and the occasional grinding, printed with holes in the same code. This is a ritual cost, requiring a successful Intelligence + Academics roll to properly phrase the question in the ancient code and create the encoded card. The machine is not as accurate as it used to be, no longer capable of predicting the course of far off or momentous events. And, like other prophetic predictions, when a character is aware of a prediction that involves him, that knowledge often can skew the prediction's results.

The mechanism's curse has also diminished. Where its predictions once brought eventual disaster to their subjects, they now simply bring some small harm to the one who asks for them. Some aspect of that person's changed destiny causes the injury, by being in a different place at the wrong time or paying attention to the stranger across the street instead of the car tearing up the road. This is a form of the Danger Magnet curse (p. 14). The final tally of damage is rarely greater than two or three lethal wounds – a vampire who targets the character only needs a sip rather than being in dire need of blood, or the bank robber he stumbles across turns his attention elsewhere quickly. Frequent use of the mechanism or repeated uses on a single target, however, invite worse tragedy.

Baghdad Battery

Durability 1, Size 1, Structure 2

Description: At first glance, this looks like a small ceramic jar or vase, about five inches tall with an outward bulge in the center. The terracotta container is too heavy to be empty, and inside is a cylinder made of a rolled-up copper sheet with an iron rod stuck through the center. The copper and iron are kept apart by some asphalt between them. Picking it up sends a tingling feeling across the palms and makes one's hairs stand on end.

Background: Baghdad batteries are one of the great mysteries of archaeology. Discovered in Khuyut Rabbou'a, Iraq in 1936, they seem to be galvanic cells. They are capable of producing low levels of electricity when flooded with an electrolyte. In the case of a rudimentary battery such as this, lemon juice or vinegar will do, though more modern electrolytic fluids are considerably more efficient. Either of the following backgrounds may be accurate.

Religious: Sharpur II of the Sassanid Empire was a powerful and pious ruler. His influence strengthened Zoroastrianism in his territory and weakened Christianity. After the Christianization of the Roman Empire, Sharpur II acted to unify his peoples under Zoroastrianism. Under Sharpur

II, holy men took up the use of “the cracking flame.” Fire being a powerful symbol in the sect, these priests created what are now called the Baghdad batteries, and used them for rituals all over the Empire: A priest called forth sparks from the device and used it to light otherwise noncombustible objects, citing both “miracles” as examples of “calling the holy fire”. These rituals were used as proof that the holy fire of Ahura Mazda (the religion’s version of the Creator) existed on Earth, even where it was not evident.

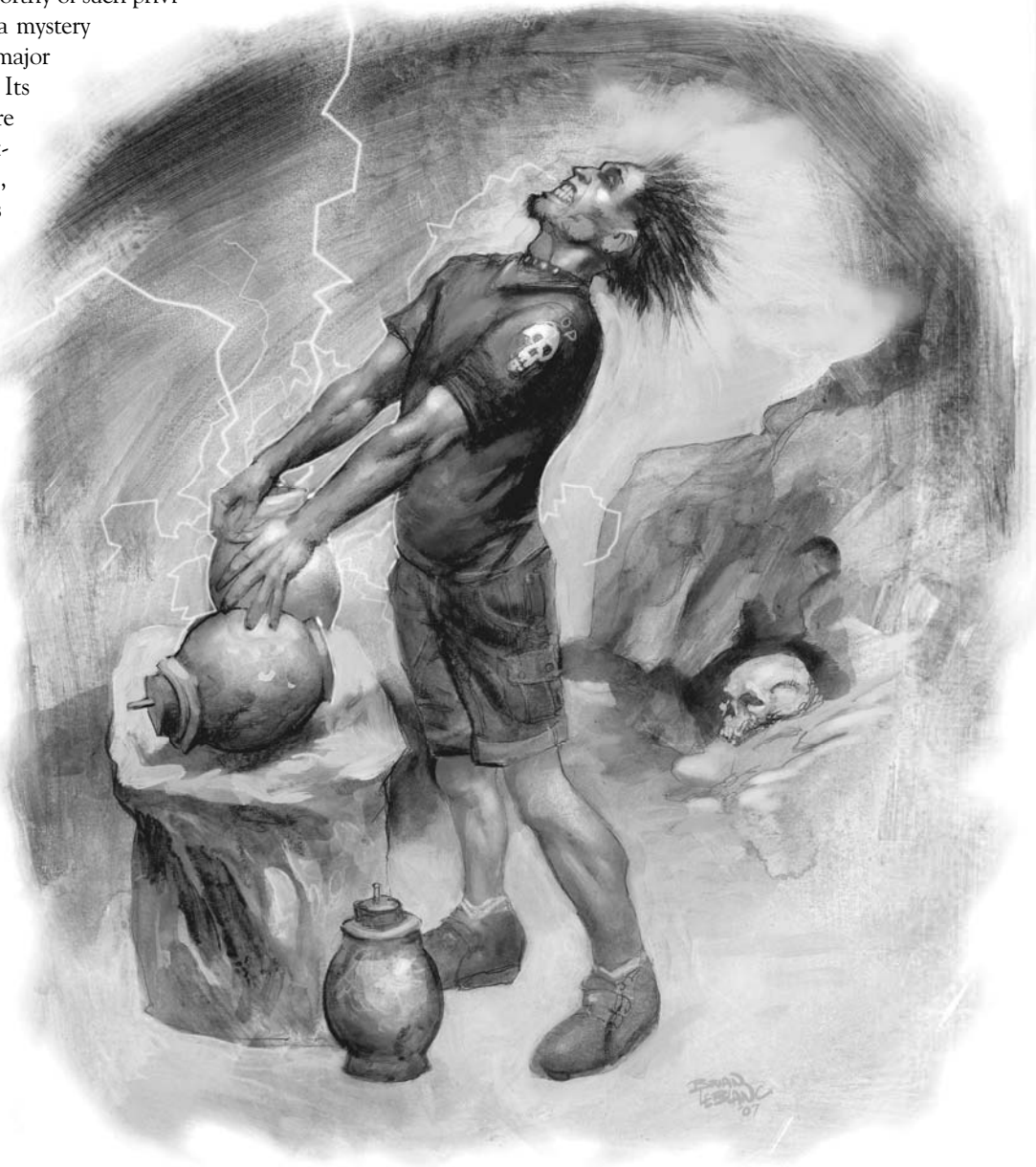
While these public demonstrations were the only official uses of the batteries in the Sassanid Empire, the devices were too powerful (and useful) to be limited to their intended purposes for long. Some priests, discontent with the sect’s traditions, began using them in rituals that did not outwardly display fire (and thus espouse the existence of Ahura Mazda) but instead demonstrated “the secret fire coursing within.” The priests who used them in this way formed their own sub-sect, and they performed the rituals only for certain individuals whom they deemed worthy of such privilege.

Over the time, a mystery cult grew within the major Zoroastrian religion. Its foremost members were most often these battery-wielding priests, but not all members were priests, and certainly not all priests were members. Initiates into the cult experienced the holy sensation of small currents running through them, believing they were channeling holy energy and light. Through intention or circumstance, the batteries used in their secret rituals became imbued with a measure of mystic power.

One of Bahram IV’s last acts, only a short time before his son would begin enforcing religious tolerance in the Empire, was to ruthlessly dismantle the mystery cult within his forebear’s treasured

Zoroastrianism. The cult’s secret leaders organized the ruler’s assassination, but acted too late to save their religion. Survivors of the persecution were too scattered to continue the specialized worship. The batteries recovered at Khuyut Rabbou’a were a clutch buried by a member of the cult only a short time before soldiers took her. Since their recovery in the modern day, the batteries have sought out similar circumstances to the one that eventually led to the cult’s downfall.

Scientific: The Parthians ruled in Persia before the Sassanid Dynasty took hold, but much less of their culture survived into the present. Their mastery of electricity allowed their rapid rise to power in the region: stronger and lighter metals created through the use of electroplating and electrically created alloys gave them heavy cavalry that was faster and could travel longer than their enemies, advanced medical knowledge that prolonged lives and the creation of batteries that powered most of their scientific advancements.





The Baghdad batteries were the basis of the Parthians' power. Every significantly sized town kept a battery in a defensible place of honor, and many major cities had several. Their keepers guided their use, whether for advancements in the medical field, making art (through electroplating, in some cases), crafting tools and weapons or heating entire cities. Electrical advancements were not uniform across the empire: electric lights debuted in west Persia and were later lost, though knowledge of them (along with one of the batteries) may have migrated into the Hathor Temple at Dendera (see Dendera Lights or Dendera Reliefs on pp. 56-58).

Wherever inequality of wealth or technology exists, however, rebellion is rarely far behind. The Parthian vassal states revolted and brought the Parthians down. With the civilization went their knowledge of electricity and batteries. Ctesiphon, one of Parthia's capitals, is where the batteries were recovered from a vault that was secured long ago against the Parthian's enemies.

Students of ancient Persia and characters interested in unsolved mysteries, obscure religious cults or scientific mysteries have heard of the Baghdad batteries. Characters with higher ranks in Science certainly understand the physical principles behind the Baghdad batteries, whether or not they've heard of the relics.

- Some modern Zoroastrian congregations conceal inner circles of "the enlightened" – sub-sects that trace their heritage all the way back to the days of Sharpur II. They share none of their secrets with outsiders and few with other Zoroastrians. Under these inner circles' influence, some Zoroastrian congregations become involved with electrical concerns (more than one indirectly owns a power plant); others are heavily connected to various pseudo-spiritual consortiums of philosophy and/or cutting edge technology, most often in areas considered borderline unethical by mainstream scientists.
- In 2003, an enormous blackout left over 50 million people in North America without power. Official findings on the cause are largely inconclusive. Internal National Guard records in the area indicate the epicenter was in or around one of the major city centers affected by the black out, roughly the same area and time as a museum housing one of the Baghdad batteries was broken into and the relic stolen.
- Rumors suggest that Wilhelm König, the German director of the National Museum of Iraq at the time of the objects' discovery, sought them on Hitler's behalf. That his appointment to the position had political motive is difficult to refute. Proponents of König, however, claim that he hid his beliefs and used his position to slow Hitler's search for occult objects. Either way, König fell ill and left the museum shortly before his death. Some believe that he was poisoned by enemies of Nazi Germany or people suspecting his betrayal. Others claim he completed his duties and his death was faked — that the real König was whisked away before his involvement could come to light. Regardless of the museum developer's loyalties, the fact remains that four of the museum's half dozen

Baghdad batteries disappeared in the years following König's departure.

Storytelling Hints: A character that has a Baghdad battery holds an ancient culture's unexplained remnants in her hands. It could be part of a religious ritual, a method for creating art that the culture is not expected to know or evidence of a culture more technologically advanced than archaeologists believe. Whether one of these is true, or something else entirely, the battery represents the vast amount of information about the past that remains unknown. It is proof that there are more answers out there (which in turn, of course, unearth more questions), and that aspect should come out in games involving one of the batteries. One character may very well use it only for its powers, without caring about its meaning, but others in the game (player and Storyteller driven characters alike) may very well be drawn in by the mysteries surrounding it and the promise of potential secrets revealed. After all, almost everyone wants answers.

In some games, the scientific nature of the first Power will be out-of-theme with the second set of Powers. Storytellers may want to choose either one or the other for the batteries. Choosing the Ancient Source of Energy for some batteries and the Religious Powers for others introduces more mysteries. Why are some batteries scientific marvels and others connections to the divine? Could their creators reliably design tools of super-science and super-religion? Were they created by two like but competing peoples, one devoted to pure reason and one to worship? The questions raised may lead to even more mysteries for characters to explore.

Effects

(Unique) Ancient Source of Energy (••): When filled with any simple electrolyte fluid, the Baghdad battery becomes a weak source of power (capable of powering a flashlight or other simple electrical device for an hour per filling). A modern electrolyte (created with a successful Intelligence + Science roll) increases the power, effectively doubling the battery's efficiency. Similarly, multiple batteries can be aligned in parallel to increase the power (add 100% to the power level for each battery beyond the first) or duration (add an additional hour in duration for each additional battery). There is a lost recipe for a more efficient fluid electrolyte, used by the culture that created the batteries, which vastly increases the amount of energy released by the Baghdad battery. With that fluid, the batteries become strong sources of power. The recipe may be recoverable in Iraq – or perhaps someone has it now. To use a Baghdad battery as anything more powerful than a novelty, electricity-wise, a character must first recover or recreate the recipe. One who knows it must still follow the recipe's exacting instructions (an extended Intelligence + Science roll with each roll equating to an hour dedicated to the process. Thirty successes are needed.) and the electrolyte must be replaced on a weekly basis, regardless of how much or little it is used. This process acts as a ritual cost for the power. With this fuel source, a battery produces a strong

and persistent electrical current, capable of providing for the electrical needs of a small home for the week.

Religious Powers: The batteries' creators used them to generate weak voltages that they interpreted as religious sensations. Activating the battery and channeling the current through one's chest provides a feeling of closeness to the divine. This provides a benefit that manifests as one of the following powers (or others as deemed appropriate). At the Storyteller's discretion, using modern electrolyte fuels or multiple Baghdad batteries in series may open up more of the following powers; a power may become available when using a number of batteries equal to its dot value. Thus one weak battery gives access to Ephemeral Revelation, two in junction to Battery of Will, and three to Exchange of Power (or Battery of Will *and* Ephemeral Revelation). Six batteries in combination are needed to fuel all three powers simultaneously. Using a strong electrolyte fuel doubles the power, while the lost recipe effectively quadruples any battery's power, allowing up to four dots of powers for each battery thus fueled.

Ephemeral Revelation (•): Any religion that allows its followers to see the divine is hard to refute. This power suggests something about what the battery's creators considered holy. When the character touches leads from an active Baghdad battery to her chest (providing the classic tightening sensation of electrically-induced muscle spasm) and then briefly to her temples, she is gifted with supernatural sight. When she opens her eyes again, she is able to see creatures in Twilight. This power lasts for one scene.

Battery of Will (••): The sensation of holiness replenishes the character's resolve. After activating a Baghdad battery, the character may spend 2 Willpower points to save a single point in the battery for later use. In order to draw upon the stored Willpower, the character must hold the battery or its container with fervor to recall the elating spiritual contact she experienced earlier when using the device. Fueling the battery with Willpower requires a one hour ritual for every two points spent, during which time the character activates the battery with a fluid electrolyte and touches leads to her chest. Using the battery more than once in a single scene distracts the character with memories of the religious revelation. For every point beyond the first removed from the battery in a given scene, the character suffers a -1 cumulative penalty to all actions until she is able to get eight hours of sleep (maximum -4 penalty.)

Exchange of Power (•••): By touching leads from the battery to her head, the character fuels herself with mystic energy. Running the current through an eye increases Wits, running it over the top of her skull improves her Intelligence and running current through the back of the head fuels Resolve. The process is painful (and debilitating), but it is often described as a "holy" agony. A character can only increase one Attribute at any given time; the battery's power increases the Attribute by one dot. Using the battery in this way requires great fortitude to withstand the pain without removing the leads: any activation of this power requires a point of Willpower in addition to standard costs. This power lasts for one scene.

The Book of Dead Names

Durability 1, Size 1, Structure 2

Description: The Book of Dead Names is a tome about the size of an abridged dictionary, perhaps four inches thick, nine inches long and eleven inches wide. It is bound in black, flaking leather and the spine cracks perilously when the book opens. The cracks in the leather seem to form pictures or patterns if one stares at them too long, and those who fall victim to the book's madness (see below) often think they see the faces or names of dead loved ones there. On the spine of the book, a Roman numeral ("I") is inscribed in gold ink.

Inside, the pages are covered with writing in black ink. The handwriting varies, as many different authors contributed to the book over the years, but the script is always shaky, as though the writer was terrified or hurried. The earliest entries in the Book of Dead Names are written in Latin, while later entries are in German, French and finally English.

Background: The Book of Dead Names is something of a boogeyman to rare book collectors. Most enthusiasts, scholars and especially thieves who deal in rare or ancient texts have heard stories about a black book that drives anyone who reads it insane, but clearer heads see it as a fable, or at best, a cautionary tale (since some versions of the story say that the book is "alive" and only drives mad those who mistreat it). People who, for whatever reason, are aware of the supernatural treat these tales with a bit more respect.

The Book of Dead Names dates to the late 16th century. Assembled by a Jesuit priest (his name has been lost to time, though he is known to have been born in Naples), the Book was originally designed in conjunction with a decision by Pope Benedict XIV. Benedict, concerned with the fate of the souls of the Chinese who had never been baptized, and who still venerated their ancestors in a manner that made the Church uncomfortable, decided that the names of those who died unsaved should be written in a special book. After special prayers and other intercessions, the Pope would declare these people true Christians, and their names would be removed. The Church never officially began this practice, but the unnamed priest did create the Book of Dead Names at the behest of Benedict XIV. The introductory passages in the Book describe, in Latin, the purpose for which it was originally intended, and a few names, some Italian, some Chinese, are written on the next few pages.

During the suppression of the Jesuit order, the Book of Dead Names was transported to Brussels and then into Germany. Scholars in the Church added names, often of close friends or family members whose souls they feared might not reach Heaven, for whatever reason. It was during this period that stories about the book's corruptive influence started to emerge. Writings from priests of the time suggested that once a dead person's name was entered into the Book, that spirit could possess the body of someone close to the book and force that unfortunate person to write messages into it. Indeed, interspersed with the short lists of names are passages supposedly written by ghosts possessing living writers (usually priests). Further, those who used (or were subjected to) this

strange power of the book reported nightmares, hallucinations and knowledge of demons and evil spirits.

The book traveled from country to country and finally arrived in Dresden, Germany. It remained there in the hands of a private collector until 1945, when the Allied forces bombed the city. An American soldier named Timothy Grasso found the book lying in the street. He knew enough Latin to translate a few sentences from the first pages of the book, and decided to bring it home to see if it was worth anything. Grasso never read the book, but sold it upon returning to the United States.

In modern times, rare books collectors, Church scholars, and students of the occult might have heard of the Book of Dead Names. Spiritualist writings from the 1920s mention the Book, and one author identifies it as “the single greatest resource for contacting the spirits of the departed that the world has ever lost.”

- The Catholic Church is quietly trying to reacquire the Book of Dead Names.
- The Jesuit priest who first assembled the Book of Dead Names worked previously at the order’s Sinology school in Naples, and studied with Chinese converts and teachers. It is possible that the Book of Dead Names has a Chinese counterpart.

- Writing the name of a still-living person in the Book of Dead Names has a very different effect than writing the name of a dead person. That effect is described in a passage in the Book, written in French — the writer immediately “comes to know, in intimate and painful detail, the circumstances of the person’s death.” If this has ever been attempted, there are no recorded instances of it in the Book.

Storytelling Hints: The Book of Dead Names is a tome of forbidden knowledge, tempting those who read it to try and contact the Beyond. The problem is, of course, that once someone has contacted the Beyond, he might not be able to look away. A character that uses the Book to contact a dead person might be able to gain all kinds of knowledge, both historical and practical, but the lingering effects of this contact (see below) can be damning.

Even without actually using the Book’s powers, it can be a fantastic source of information, since it contains passages written by the dead (by proxy, of course) over the past 300 years. Characters might search for the Book of Dead Names simply because they’ve heard it contains a description of an undead creature that they have angered, and then realize that they can call up the spirit of a person who *fought* that creature decades or centuries previously.

A significant question concerning the Book is: Does it call up the spirits of the dead, or does it *hold* these unfortunate souls? Is the book fulfilling the purpose that Benedict XIV intended for it, keeping the unsaved souls in stasis until they are ready to enter the hereafter?

If so, does calling them back for information harm them or help them? Would burning the book free them or destroy them?

Effects

(Cursed) Addictive: Once a person has used the Book of Dead Names, he feels compelled to do so again.



Entrap Entity (••): The Book of Dead Names was designed to hold the souls of the dead in limbo, which, coincidentally, allows a person to write the words of those held souls into the Book.

(Unique) Eye-Opener (•••••): Mortals who use the book more times than their Resolve + Composure ratings automatically gain the Unseen Sense Merit. The Merit always manifests as feelings of terror and dread, moments of dizziness and uncertainty, and even visual hallucinations. All normal prerequisites of the Unseen Sense Merit apply (see p. 109 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**).

The Bronze Wheel

Durability 3, Size 4, Structure 7

Description: It lies in the midst of the wreckage of a warehouse destroyed by war, packed in a half-smashed crate. Or in the basement of a New Orleans manor house, caught among the waterlogged debris. It's dragged from the rubble of a Pakistani palace that was knocked to the ground by an earthquake; its former owner's blood smears the only evidence he ever existed. Or pulled from the charred remains of a tenement fire in an over-inhabited, under-maintained apartment, where no one will ever be sure of the true body count. It's made of ancient brass, which carries no patina but which gives the impression of immense age. It's composed of what seem to be two spoked wheels intersecting at 90 degrees around a spherical central hub.

The hub and the outer rims of both wheels are covered with what looks like some kind of writing. The crate has no label; there is no record in the warehouse of who owns it (whoever they were, they probably died in the disaster that hit the warehouse).

Background: Someone who found this odd contraption once had a dream, and in that dream, it was one of the wheels of the chariot of God. There are four, and when the chariot is complete, each flies around a throne made of fire, and is accompanied by a four-headed, multi-limbed angel. Here on Earth, however, it's just a wheel.

In dreams, people know things instinctively, and it was the same in this same vision. The dreamer knew that God had lost it and that He wants it back.

Whether it's the wheel of God's chariot or not, it fell from wherever its home was, and reality changed to accommodate it,

ensuring that it would be found by *someone*, although who didn't matter. What matters is that someone has it, so that when the angels (or spirits, or demons, or agents of whatever power really owns it) come for it, they will have someone to find.


Storytelling Hints: Whoever possesses the wheel dreams, and becomes the quarry of the angels. There are several books of ancient lore (not just the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel) that describe it and show its significance. There's no shortage of religious factions who want the wheel the moment they see it. Maybe they think that owning a wheel of God's chariot will give them some power over the divine conveyance. Of course it doesn't—it's just a wheel—but they don't know that.

Meanwhile, strange "agents," men in black, men in white, men in red and men in green, begin to ask questions after the character or characters that have possession of the object, gradually closing in. To be caught by them means annihilation. But these messengers are strangely inept. Whatever power sent them is somehow less than flawless.

Perhaps they're angels, the different colors representing different levels in the hierarchy or even opposing factions in some war in Heaven. Or perhaps they're human representatives of some shadowy conspiracy. Perhaps they're demons or spirits, taking on material form. Maybe they're humans possessed by spirits or demons. In a **Mage** game, they could be the representatives of some hitherto unknown cabal of magicians. In a **Promethean** game, they could be *qashmallim*, or clones sent by a hyper-technological organization, sent to retrieve another product of their creator's uncanny science.

Either way, whatever they are, two things are true of the agency or power that sent them: it's awesomely powerful and not all that competent.





Sorry, did you say “God”?

Yes, God. The question of whether God exists or not in the real world is rightly beyond a game supplement; however, in the World of Darkness, God might well exist. But then, He might not. Even if He does, this isn't to say that “God” is the benevolent loving creator described by several world religions. Hell, if He was, He probably wouldn't have been inept enough to lose His wheel.

This God might be the savage God represented in the worst Old Testament stories. He might toy with humans and destroy them like a sadistic kid with a magnifying glass let loose on an anthill on a sunny day. He might be completely mad, and might even have had nothing to do with creating the world (or if He did it, He did it by accident). He might be entirely uncaring, a monstrous, near-mindless nuclear chaos who doesn't think of humans as anything more than microbes, sometimes worthy of mild interest but ultimately devoid of any worth. Fans of HP Lovecraft and his followers will be familiar with this kind of God (along with the conception of God as some alien tentacled entity).

Owners of **Promethean: The Created** and its supplements might consider “God” to be identical with the bizarre, inconsistent Principle that sends the mysterious *qashmallim* to harry and torment humans and Prometheans alike. No statistics are given for angels. The Storyteller should feel free to treat them as ghosts or spirits and to give them any powers she sees fit.

Effects

The wheel has many other powers, just waiting to be unlocked by those lucky (or unlucky) enough to stumble upon the key. Perhaps it wipes or controls minds; perhaps it evolves or devolves humans, making them closer or further from the angels; maybe it can bring down quasi-divine, all-consuming fire; maybe it allows travel of a sort. The Storyteller's imagination is the only limit.

(Unique)Dream: Any person or group of persons who keep the wheel in their possession for more than 24 hours begins to experience weird, prophetic dreams. Every night a character owns the wheel, the player must roll Wits + Resolve. If the player fails, the character dreams of many-headed angels, statues made of many kinds of material, of writing on the wall, fire from heaven, dire horsemen and other Biblical staples. The following

morning, the character wakes up with one less Willpower than usual. If the roll succeeds, the character has bad dreams, but doesn't suffer any ill effects. If the player rolls an exceptional success, he gains a premonition of something about to happen in the next week, usually something terrible.

(Unique)Beacon: As long as a character owns the wheel, the “agents” know where he is. Maybe they have a device that can track down the device's emanations. Maybe once per game day, the Storyteller rolls Power + Finesse or Wits + Investigation (whichever is applicable) for one of the agents who seek the wheel. If the roll succeeds, the agents know where it is, within a mile or so. The Storyteller has to roll once for each game day; if the roll fails, the agents lose the scent and buy the characters more time. If supernatural agents see the characters who possess the wheel, they may, at the Storyteller's discretion, instantly know who they are, including names, dates of birth — everything. Although they still have to roll to find them again the next day, having a face and a name makes it a whole lot easier for them.

The Chamfort Letters

Durability 0, Size 1, Structure 1

Description: The Chamfort Letters are a bundle of papers, bound together with a leather cord. The Letters are thin and frail, dry as bone, and threaten to disintegrate if handled too roughly. There are forty-three individual letters in the bundle, each one addressed either to or from Luc Chamfort or William Haverhill, covering a period of two years (1898 to 1901). Some of the later letters still bear remnants of wax from either the Haverhill or Chamfort seal.

Inside, the letters are written either in Chamfort's flowing, stylish script or Haverhill's blocky, formal hand. The ink flakes with age, and sections of some of the older letters have become illegible (though a talented restorer could perhaps repair the damage). Even after more than 100 years, Chamfort's letters retain a slight smell of perfume, while a bit of sawdust sometimes falls from the creases in Haverhill's.

Background: Luc Chamfort and William Haverhill never met in person. Chamfort, the dilettante son of a wealthy French doctor, arrived in New York City as a young man and promptly immersed himself in every form of decadence he could. Haverhill, on the other hand, was a hard-working man born of English immigrants, who built up a successful logging business. The two had very little in common, and if they ever *had* met, they probably would have despised each other. But in 1897, something happened to unite them.

Luc Chamfort stumbled home from an opium den on July 23, 1897 and found something clinging to his roof. The creature was obviously wounded — brackish, gray blood oozed from a gash on its side and it breathed unevenly. The creature was humanoid, but Chamfort could not make out any facial features. As he started, trying to

clear his vision, the creature leaped down from the roof and landed on Chamfort's unfortunate driver, crushing the man's skull and killing him. The creature then bounded off into the night.

Three weeks later, in West Virginia, William Haverhill was doing his weekly accounting, balancing his books and paying his debts. His home was situated on a hill overlooking his logging operation, so that even if illness or injury prevented him from working on a given day he could still oversee the procedures. As a full moon shone down on the forest, Haverhill saw what looked like a man leaping across the fallen trees and equipment. Loading his rifle, he left his house and started down the hill, yelling at the trespasser. The "man" turned to him and snarled, and Haverhill saw that the creature had huge fangs that glistened in the moonlight. It raced off into the forest, and Haverhill was unable to find its spoor the next day.

Haverhill never told his story to anyone. He had, in fact, convinced himself that the "creature" was simply a man and the fangs had been a trick of the light when a letter arrived from a Monsieur Chamfort of New York. Chamfort, it seemed, had seen a similar creature outside his home and, tracking stories and legends south from New York, had calculated that the creature might have come through Haverhill's land. Haverhill, recognizing the creature he'd seen from Chamfort's description, wrote back. The correspondence between the two men would last for two years.

The Letters (known in some circles as the Chamfort Letters, largely because Chamfort discussed his correspondence with his friends, often reading letters aloud at salons and luncheons in New York, while Haverhill was understandably more close mouthed about his correspondence) came to include information on the supernatural that modern scholars would kill for. Neither Chamfort nor Haverhill were especially learned men, but they were intelligent, incisive and strong-willed. Neither of them had a driving need to unearth or punish the supernatural, but they were both curious about the strange being they'd seen and wondered where else legend and fact might intersect. The Letters, written in flowery prose (Chamfort) and abrupt, factual passages (Haverhill) tell a story about the supernatural in the United States during the last years of the 19th century, including references to vampires, ghosts, werewolves and stranger things still.

Modern scholars of the occult might have heard of the Chamfort Letters, as might students of Victorian America. The last of the letters, written to Haverhill following the assassination of President McKinley in September, 1901, reveals that Chamfort's opium habit was killing him, but also that he believed he had found something of great import. The letter, however, is muddled and incoherent and speaks of grief for the President's demise but also fear for the fate of Leon Czolgosz, his assassin. "They will burn his letters and burn him with lye," writes Chamfort, and indeed, after his execution Czolgosz' body was indeed defaced and his personal writings destroyed.

At some point during the early 20th century, the Chamfort Letters were collected and taken to an undisclosed location. Luc Chamfort died in an opium den in 1902 at the age of 38. William Haverhill died of natural causes at his home in West Virginia at the age of 69, in 1937.

Characters researching the Chamfort Letters might discover the following:

- Chamfort engaged in correspondence with other friends and colleagues about the nature of the supernatural, some of whom are remembered as scholars and scientists today (and therefore have letters from Chamfort in their archives or museums).
- Haverhill's home still stands and is now a bed-and-breakfast in West Virginia. The mill which formed the centerpiece of his logging operation has been torn down, but trespassers are occasionally discovered and ejected from the area.
- Some of the Letters contain descriptions and names of supernatural beings, though these beings are never (or very rarely) identified specifically. That is, one letter might discuss Lord Walsh, an Englishman visiting New York, who never appears during the day and seems to leave the whores he favors somewhat anemic, but the word "vampire" never appears.
- Chamfort's letters from Haverhill were collected by an unknown third party after his death in 1902, but Haverhill's letters from Chamfort weren't removed from Haverhill's possession until sometime in the 1920s. The identity of the person who collected them, and the sum he paid Haverhill (if any), are unknown.

Storytelling Hints: The Chamfort Letters are inspired by the writings of H. P. Lovecraft as well as by the novel *Dracula*, using the format of letters exchanged by learned colleagues to tell a story. The Letters are not, in and of themselves, supernatural and do not have any intrinsic powers. But, because Chamfort and Haverhill did not focus on any one aspect of the supernatural, the Letters might contain enough information to keep a modern scholar (or group of scholars) busy for years. An entire chronicle could be built around researching the oblique and dated references in the Chamfort Letters, and since the Letters refer to vampires and other beings that can cheat the effects of time, there's no telling what such investigators might run into during their travels.

One of the main advantages of the Letters is that they can contain any kind of information that the Storyteller needs. They might hint at the location of an Atlantean temple, the site of an ancient and powerful locus, a haunted house, political (and vampirically induced) corruption among old-money Americans, a family of shape-shifters, a blood cult or anything else that the Storyteller might wish to include. This information might not even speak directly to the characters' current activities, but might simply provide perspective — the supernatural has been here, alongside humanity, for a long time, and even those who try to study and understand

Dear M. Chamfort,

Pleased to receive your letter yesterday. Sorry that your cough has grown worse. Humbly advise you reduce your unsavory habits, get out to country, and take some fresh air. My children are well, thank you, and my wife bides fine.

Heard a most curious story today from a colleague traveling north from Mississippi. He tells of a creature — his word, not mine — that dwells on the banks of the mighty river, but sometimes ranges inland to hunt. The creature, which apparently wears the shape of a man, hunts people, but solely people of a particular type. At this my colleague broke into a language that I have never heard before. Not idea what language it was — not French, nor German, Latin, nor any of the native tongues I have heard. When he saw I did not understand, he changed the subject quickly.

Occurs to me now that after he realized I did not understand, he took on an air of superiority, but also his bearing toward me changed, as though he knew I was no longer in danger. Seems now that he might fear the “creature” haunting the banks of the Mississippi, and initially thought I should fear it, too, but now feels I do not fit the description of the creature’s chosen prey. Again, no idea what language the man spoke, and I shy from attempting to represent it here, but saw him inscribe a symbol on my horse’s saddle when he thought I wasn’t looking. Have reproduced symbol below — perhaps your cosmopolitan friends in New York can identify?

I await your next letter eagerly, as always.

Yours sincerely,

William Haverhill

it just uncover more questions. But on the other hand, the Letters might provide hope, if the characters can solve some of the riddles that Chamfort and Haverhill put forth, using modern methods of detection.

Finally, it’s possible that Chamfort or Haverhill — or both — were supernatural beings of some kind. They never met, and so it’s possible that one was a vampire and the other a mage (for instance). They both had agendas for supernatural discovery, but were leery about letting too much specific information out, and so spoke in vague terms and never used the specialized language of their respective peoples. If this is the case, might either or both of them still be extant in some form? For that matter, what if the Letters are a shared anchor, linking the ghosts of Luc Chamfort and William Haverhill together? What do these unquiet shades want, after so much time?

Effects

The Chamfort Letters have no special powers or effects. The information they contain is more than enough to motivate others to extreme measures in order to obtain them.

Crystal Skull

Durability 2, Size 1, Structure 3

Description: This relic appears to be a perfect replica of a human skull carved from a solid piece of quartz. It is slightly warm to the touch and, although heavy, can be held in one palm. While several skulls sculpted from crystal have been found in various places by archeologists, most

Story Hook — Glimpses of the Past

One rather ambitious chronicle idea would be to begin the game with modern scholars reading some of the letters aloud, and then “flash back” to the late 19th and early 20th century, playing through the stories that led Chamfort or Haverhill to write the letter in question. The players might even create three sets of characters (one for New York, one for West Virginia and one for the modern scholars), taking the roles of colleagues or employees of the two writers, delivering information for the Letters. A historical chronicle requires additional research, of course, but the Victorian era in American makes for a superb backdrop for **World of Darkness** stories, especially when alternating between the untamed forests of West Virginia and the gaslight streets of New York.

are simple, unarticulated replicas, hardly more than vaguely spherical shapes with rough eye-holes ground into their surface. The Crystal Skull, on the other hand, is lifelike to the point of including minute flaws in the teeth and skull such as any human might have, and the jaw detaches.

Animals dislike being near the Crystal Skull and struggle to escape its presence. Humans feel discomfort in its presence as well, as if it is somehow a threat even just sitting there – this sense disappears completely, however, when actually touching the skull.

Background: Many great relics take a long time to craft, but none quite so long as the Crystal Skull. It began as an enormous deposit of pure crystalline quartz discovered near where the Mayan city of Nakbe was then forming, circa 1400 BCE. A priest of their underworld claimed the deposit and shaped the crystal into a rough shape like that of a man's head, but 1/3 again as large. He gave it over to a craftsman to refine the shape into something more like skull and perfect the carving. That responsibility fell to the craftsman's bloodline: the family's responsibility was to chisel away more of the quartz with diamonds and rub the forming skull with sand to smooth its surface to perfection. The work was painstakingly arduous and took nearly two centuries to discharge fully.

When the task was complete, the priesthood reclaimed the Crystal Skull and sacrificed the last members of the willing family over it. It entered its blood-soaked service as a tool that had consumed the lives of the last eight generations of a single family in the name of the community. The skull's power was evident. At the high priest's command, people would die for the good of the Maya. Sometimes these deaths would cause bountiful harvests, other times they would end a despotic reign. Priests used the skull to ensure the advancement of their people; it worked for centuries.

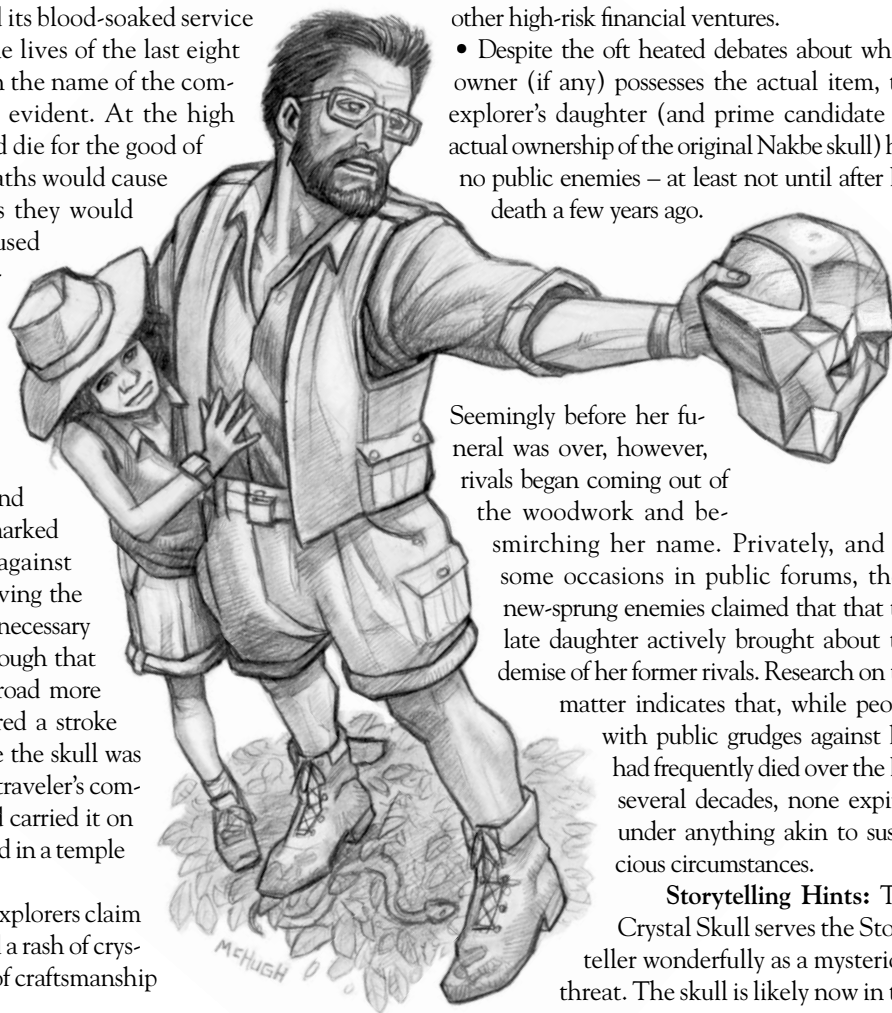
As the Maya civilization entered a decline, malcontents ambushed a small group of priests carrying the skull from one city to another. The priests were killed and buried with the skull in an unmarked grave. Defending themselves against the assault killed an attacker, giving the last surviving priest the sacrifice necessary to invoke the skull's power. Through that power, a traveler on the same road more than three centuries later suffered a stroke and died on the very spot where the skull was buried. In burying the dead, the traveler's companions discovered the skull and carried it on to Lubaantun, where it was placed in a temple and left unused.

In the early 1920s, several explorers claim to have discovered this skull and a rash of crystalline skulls of varying degrees of craftsmanship

made the rounds of art auctions, public museum displays and private collection showings. Which, if any, of these purported authentic items is the Crystal Skull of Nakbe is a matter of great conjecture among their owners and authorities on the topic.

Some jewelers have heard of the skull, rumored among those with an interest in crystal skulls in general, to be the piece de resistance of craftsmanship of this sort. Those with a History specialization in Academics, especially with an emphasis on Mayan culture, may well have heard of the ill-fated tribe from which the skull came, and the fate of its dedicated craftsmen.


- One owner, who claims to be the child of one of the original explorers who discovered the Crystal Skull almost a century ago, brought in authorities in the mid-1990s to verify her claims about the skull's authenticity. The scientists' report described the item in detail, including photographic, ultraviolet and infrared filming. According to the reports, the scientist was unable to date the relic's age, but documented that it is solid quartz fashioned in an unknown manner and exhibits unique properties, such as constantly being at 70 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Although untrained in economics or other applicable skills, the same daughter of the once-penniless explorer managed to amass several million dollars in holdings over the course of her lifetime, predominantly through the stock market and other high-risk financial ventures.
- Despite the oft heated debates about which owner (if any) possesses the actual item, the explorer's daughter (and prime candidate for actual ownership of the original Nakbe skull) had no public enemies – at least not until after her death a few years ago.



Seemingly before her funeral was over, however, rivals began coming out of the woodwork and be-

smirching her name. Privately, and on some occasions in public forums, these new-sprung enemies claimed that that the late daughter actively brought about the demise of her former rivals. Research on the matter indicates that, while people with public grudges against her had frequently died over the last several decades, none expired under anything akin to suspicious circumstances.

Storytelling Hints: The Crystal Skull serves the Storyteller wonderfully as a mysterious threat. The skull is likely now in the



hands of someone more ambitious than its previous owner, and chances are he is carving a swath of natural-seeming deaths through his opposition. When one of the players' characters' contacts or allies dies but the police can find nothing, it's up to the characters to dig up the truth. The Crystal Skull can be absolutely terrifying in players' characters' hands — if they are willing to use it. Many will try to resist, although the pervasive power of potential is obvious to any who touch its seamless and perfect surface.

Regardless of who controls the skull, rumors of its presence attract the attention of occult “authorities” and other believers who are scared enough to put their lives on the line to get the skull out of a madman’s hands.

Effects

Potent Success, Any (•••••): The magic of the Crystal Skull allows a character to virtually assure himself of success in a given endeavor — but at quite a cost. The skull can only ensure success by causing deaths. A rival competing for the promotion the Skull’s owner wants might be distraught by his beloved pet’s death and loses the boss’ favor — or the rival himself might die outright. An unknown relative might leave the relic’s owner an inheritance — or the bequeathment may come from a beloved parent who is struck with an unexpected heart attack. A friend might rush to the owner’s side, anxious to share the first news of her winning lottery ticket, only to drop dead on the owner’s doorstep, winning ticket clutched conveniently where the owner can access it.

It can aid any Skill: A member of the review committee might mourn a recent loss at the university and accept the character’s less-than-perfect thesis without argument (Academics), or one’s opponent in the boxing ring might have been up all night consoling a friend’s widow (Brawl). Deaths always seem natural or entirely accidental. An animal might die in its sleep and turn out to have a weak heart or undiscovered cancer; a human slips on spilled coffee and fall down the stairs. A vehicle malfunctions at exactly the wrong moment.

The character must sacrifice a living creature and place his hand, wet with warm blood, on the crown of the skull to announce the endeavor. The skull’s eyes glow softly, and a person looking into them feels cold; the glow remains until the skull has expended its power or the goal is reached, and no new goal can be declared until this occurs. A minor sacrifice (of a fowl or small mammal) provides enough power for the death of a few animals. Sacrificing a larger animal, such as a large dog, a bull, a goat or a horse, gives the skull enough power to cause the death of many animals or one human. Finally, spilling a human’s blood over the skull empowers it to kill anything in order to see the named endeavor successful. This is a severe ritual cost.

A minor sacrifice empowers the skull to provide the 9-again quality in a number of scenes equal to successes rolled on Resolve + Occult during the sacrifice. Sacrifice of a larger animal enables the 9-again quality in twice that number of scenes, or the 8-again quality in one scene. A human sacrifice enables the 8-again quality in any number of

scenes until the named goal is met. The benefit applies only to one Skill in any given scene; the character gains these benefits only in scenes where a death caused by the Crystal Skull can benefit him, which occur no more or less than once per chapter. What Skill the skull’s power enhances, and what scenes are affected are up to the Storyteller.

Deaths caused by the skull do not normally occur in the scenes they benefit the skull’s owner. They are most often off-screen deaths, not perceived as connected to the owner’s success — except to the character who invoked them. He experiences each death caused by the skull through the victim’s senses as it happens, feeling the same physical sensations and emotions as the doomed creature. Each human death involved in using the Crystal Skull causes a degeneration roll as “casual/callous crime.” No one could confuse the skull, which requires death to activate, with something clearly beneficial. Experiencing the skull’s murders makes it impossible for the owner to deny his responsibility, as he might by simply pretending that no death had occurred. Narcissism (and eventually Megalomania) and Fixation (and eventually Obsessive Compulsion) are the most common derangements earned from using this deadly relic.

Daniel’s Slide Rule

Durability 1, Size 1, Structure 2

Description: This is a standard Hemmi slide rule, a bamboo core faced with white celluloid and worn smooth by years of use. It feels like an old and beloved employee, skilled at its task but now happily retired with a story to tell. The feeling is strong enough that one can almost see the elderly owner, satisfied with his term of employment, giving up his keys to the store after coming to terms with his transition from cutting edge to obsolete. The slide rule is still in excellent condition and very legible. There is a small chip on one outside edge that harms its value as an antique, but not its usefulness.

Background: Daniel’s slide rule is a relic completely out of the public eye. No cults worship it, no collector seeks it and no one fears it. But someone does love it. Daniel Vinson paid for it out of his own pocket on the day he received his acceptance to MIT. He still had it when he joined the Army as an engineer, turning down the standard military-issue slide rule. (Daniel used specialty rules when necessary, of course, but his Hemmi was always at hand.)

Daniel’s work in the military was not top secret or revolutionary; it did not turn the course of the World War II, which America joined during Daniel’s employment. He (and his slide rule) helped design the M101 Howitzer that America fielded in the war. Daniel was a small cog in a large machine, but he found the work rewarding.

Even though he was satisfied with his mundane life, Daniel earned honors in one exciting moment. Military police cornered a German spy in the workshop Daniel and his team occupied. In one preternaturally slow moment, he saw the traitor draw a hidden semi-automatic pistol from its holster and pull the slide. Before he could think,

Daniel's slide rule was in his hand and jammed into the gun's mechanism, preventing the slide from closing and the gun from firing upon the American MPs, who then were able to apprehend their target without casualty. Daniel was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal for his decisive actions which potentially saved the lives of his team and the MPs present.

The end of the war saw the end of Daniel's employment by the United States Military. He joined the flourishing IBM Company and worked on some of the projects contracted out by the government. His work for the company was excellent but not noteworthy, and he retired in 1969 at the age of 59. His slide rule occupied a place of honor over the mantle for a short time before Daniel bequeathed it to his grandson, preferring to see it in use. Although Daniel's grandson soon replaced it with an electronic calculator, he kept it near him as he followed in his grandfather's footsteps through MIT. He says he worked faster keeping his grandfather near, and it made him feel safe. He was always happy to tell the story of how his grandfather disarmed a spy.

Few outside of Vinson's family line (or those who have heard Daniel's stories over the years) know anything about this specific item or its history. A person of Science certainly knows what a slide rule is; likewise a person involved in Crafts, especially any which require precision. Older characters, especially those studying math, physics or engineering before the '70s, know how to use one, as might a younger character that has had some reason to study the tools of previous eras. Those who take a particular interest in the development of calculators or computing, in the history of engineering or in science applied to military pursuits will also know a thing or two about them, and those with an interest in obscure anecdotes from World War II may have even heard of an engineer capturing a dangerous spy with nothing but a slide rule.

- A distant relative of Vinson was nominated for the Nobel Prize for physics, and carried the slide rule with him to the ceremony.
- In the late 1960s, the ruler's current owner reportedly used the slide rule to disarm a looter who was trying to pillage the store he was working at, protecting the store owner's family from looting and possible racially-targeted violence.


- No word of the ruler's whereabouts has surfaced since the late 1990s.

Storytelling Hints: This is a family relic – no one's likely to recognize it outside of the Vinson family, if any of them are still around. Daniel's descendants valued it for its history, and one might still be carrying it around for good luck, especially if she works as a scientist or engineer. Someone who does so may well attract attention from the players' characters for the slight supernatural edges it brings, especially if using it repeatedly. A character that is Daniel's descendant and possesses the slide rule might also bear the motivation to seek out her family history in an effort to discover exactly why the slide rule is special. Daniel's slide rule is an example of a relic a player might build for her character using the creation rules for the Relic Merit in Chapter 3.

Effects

Potent Success, Engineering (•••••): Even after years of distinguished service, Daniel's slide rule doesn't really want to retire. A character that uses the slide rule to calculate at least one value for a project gets the feeling that things are going to go well – and they do. This requires a few turns to activate unless the character has a lot of experience with slide rules; the necessary calculation takes no less than one instant action.





This power functions for both Craft and Science as they apply to mechanical engineering. A character cannot use it to create an amazing violin or understand biology, but most tasks that involve applied physics calculations, complicated numerical formulas or mathematic functions for Science or complex interacting parts for Craft qualify.

(Unique) Surprising Weapon (•): Disarming the German spy is the one moment Daniel was most proud of in his life, and his relatives have told the story hundreds of times since then. Some of that pride remains in the slide rule, making it accurate for an improvised weapon (+2 equipment bonus after improvised weapon penalty). Attacks with the slide rule easily disarm opponents but never inflict more than superficial damage. It's also just damn fast: a character who has the slide rule at hand gains a +3 Initiative bonus as long as he uses it.

Function: A slide rule allows someone versed in its use to calculate various mathematical results faster than it could be done without any tool. Digital calculators are faster and more accurate today for flat out number crunching, but a slide rule is still often better than nothing.

Dendera Lights

Durability 0, Size 2, Structure 2

Description: A golden base the size of a dinner plate opens into a golden lotus flower, the petals holding an eggplant-shaped bulb of rosy glass. A steel snake sculpture is frozen mid-writhe, emerging from the lotus and nibbling at its own tail after looping around inside the bulb. The end of the bulb is broken, missing about a palm's worth of glass and very sharp around the edges. Fragility suffuses the light, making all but the most careless individual nervous at the thought of touching it or picking it up.

Background: This is one of the Dendera Lights depicted in the famous Dendera Reliefs (see p. 57-58). The Hathor Temple where the reliefs reside was constructed in the last 2nd century B.C.E. at the behest of one of the Ptolemaic kings. Attempting to claim past Egyptian glory for their own era, the Ptolemy had images of a lost wonder carved into the walls.

The legend of the lights came from height of the Old Kingdom. Under the direction of Khufu, Egyptian philosophers focused their accumulated wisdom on communicating with and understanding their gods. Pharaoh-sponsored philosophers ventured into the lands of the dead, spoke with gods' voices and sacrificed much of their own lives — health, power and wealth — for knowledge. Not all such journeys were selfless, however. Hateful rumors of the time describe several philosophers accused of binding a god's servant and torturing it for knowledge and power. Many discoveries sprung from this period of philosophical, spiritual and religious exploration; the fruits of man's effort during this time were often deemed to have been given by the gods or learned by studying them. Among these were the earliest attempts at glassblowing (wrongly believed to have developed over 1500 years later), complex metallurgy and electricity.

The apex of these advanced philosophies expressed itself in the Dendera Lights. Not only were they cutting edge for their time, they completed Khufu's search for true contact with the gods. A light was built with an understanding of the gods as well as of science, and allowed the gods' emissaries to be welcomed officially to the pharaoh's court. The god Ihy first became known to the Egyptians at the first activation of the first completed light; for this reason, the accompanying reliefs show an image of him.

For hundreds of years, the Egyptians used the lights to communicate with the gods. Their tenure ended in the New Kingdom, however, when Akhenaten came into power and forbade worship of any god but Aten. Their power to make evident and accessible other gods was too divisive to his new religion. At his command, priests broke all the lights. Even Akhenaten's power, however, could not completely erase the lights from history. Unbeknownst to him, the last of the dissident philosophers could not bring themselves to destroy them completely, realizing that they represented a majesty and mastery of knowledge that had been fading from Egypt for ages. Already irreplaceable, the last of these lights were sealed away in hidden vaults in hopes that they would escape Akhenaten's scourge and preserve proof of the Egyptian people's superiority for ages to come.

Some of the Dendera Lights have been recovered from locations across Egypt and its outlying regions. Information leaked from these secret discoveries birthed the oft-discounted theories about the Dendera Reliefs.

Characters who study Egypt or science, especially the history or unexplained phenomena of either, have heard the oddball theories about the reliefs, although mention of the lights is much rarer. Those with strong ties to organizations or religions that put stock in contacting the gods — Vodoun, for example — may have heard rumors about a device like one of these.

- Some alien abductees have described the experience as being caught in a circle of dim red light that revealed hidden inhuman beings surrounding them. These "aliens" spoke, often in a tongue which was unrecognizable but sometimes understandable, but did not touch the "abductee". The victim's memories vary widely from there. Some describe a loss of motor control, the feeling of watching helplessly while their body was being controlled by the "aliens", a phenomenon which closely resembles spirit possession; others were taught strange supernatural powers by their "abductors", or were offered otherwise unknowable wisdom.
- Tests reveal that the steel snake is actually tungsten, the lotus flower is a low-resistance conductor that keeps the two ends of the snake insulated from each other and the glass contains rare silicates that give it its particular hue. Tests also age the device to the 2nd millennium B.C.E., but who'd believe that's real?

Storytelling Hints: The Dendera Lights can have direct uses; one possible set of powers is below. But more

important is the proof this represents regarding the reliefs in the Dendera Temple and Egypt's technological achievements. Any character with an interest in truth or accurate (but hidden) history has a stake in proving this thing's origin. Even a character who doesn't care about enlightening the public may still want to open others' eyes to what she possesses – having a multitude of scientists working from correct assumptions is a better way of getting the answers she wants than working all by herself. And, of course, some characters may just want recognition and fame for the discovery.

This relic therefore presents a challenge. The Dendera Reliefs are a mystery of Egyptology, but few actually believe that they indicate Egyptian electric lights. Convincing the skeptics (who far outnumber the willing believers) that the device is not a hoax constructed using modern techniques is an uphill battle. And what happens if the dating tests reveal that the character is wrong?

Effects

(Unique) Spotlight on the Gods (•••): The device casts a red light; it isn't intense, but it is strong: it reaches more than a mile before fading away. People caught in its glow feel a warmth and spiritual lightness, as if their afterlife were assured. Motions made under the spotlight look just a little slower than they ought to be, somewhat reminiscent of a strobe effect, although the light does not flicker. The beam illuminates creatures in Twilight, casting them in a rosy glow. They become visible to all onlookers and can speak to material creatures without using other powers.

Defend (•••): Dendera Lights allowed ancient Egyptians to meet and communicate with their gods. It was not intended as a defensive or offensive tool. But not every creature in Twilight was one of the Egyptians' gods, and few Twilight wanderers are friendly by default. Twilight creatures, while caught in the spotlight, suffer this power's penalty if they take any offensive action. Possession remains an offensive action only if the target chooses to resist. The power has no cost and cannot be activated voluntarily.

Dendera Reliefs

Durability 3, Size 6, Structure 9

Description: The limestone relief reaches perhaps two feet high, and on it Egyptian figures gesture toward a beam of some sort. The beam seems to come from an open flower and contains what appears to be a twisted snake doubling back on itself, coming from the flower's center. Many scratches testify to the long years the relief has endured. The relief's images draw the eye toward the end of the beam cast by the flower and the snakehead, and then inevitably back toward the petals.

Background: This is one of the famous Dendera Reliefs, originally displayed in a tomb within the Hathor Temple at the Dendera Temple complex in Egypt. Contemporary archaeologists agree that the temple was built in the Ptolemaic period,

and they're right. But the reliefs weren't. Hathor Temple was built upon a temple which was originally built during the Middle Kingdom, approximately 1500 years before. Construction incorporated elements of the earlier temple's ruins, including the entire crypt containing the reliefs.

Sensu III ordered the first temple on that location built as a monument to the gods and Egypt's wisdom. He was renowned as a warrior, but he recognized the signs of decline in his people's mastery over their science and magic and fought it. The temple recorded their knowledge so that their children could study and relearn it, even if a cataclysm wiped out all Egypt's priests and philosophers. Each set of two-sided instructional reliefs had dense writing in Classical Egyptian on the back. The side facing outward displayed a scene that would identify what wisdom the reverse side contained.

Natural wear and time destroyed most of the large educational temple. Only the crypt, now part of the Hathor Temple, survived – though other parts of the temple may be intact, either buried beneath the Dendera Temple complex, where Egyptians of the Ptolemaic period could not find them, or already removed from the location by some crafty scavenger and sequestered elsewhere in the world.

Five people in the world know that one of the three publicly known Dendera Reliefs has been stolen. Three of them are the head of the Museum of Egyptian Antiquities, the Secretary General of the Supreme Council of Antiquities and the President of Egypt; the other two are the thief and the collector who bought the relief. It disappeared overnight in 1988. Authorities sealed off the temple, claiming they were examining artifacts for damage after an intruder broke into the site. They actually used the time to craft a near-perfect replica and conceal the disappearance.

Characters with a focus in Egyptology know about the controversial Dendera Light Reliefs, and high Investigation may aid in figuring out the secret's patterns. Characters with Specialties in Biology or Physics are better equipped to decipher what secrets the reliefs may hold.

- A small network of museum directors and political appointees in charge of national culture pays surprisingly well for verifiable information on extant reliefs of any kind. Though they pay for clues to reliefs from any culture or era, freelancers who work for them regularly know that they pay more for reliefs that appear Egyptian, and even more that have certain specific attributes (such as size or imagery).
- There are two companies pioneering research into ambitious fields of applied biology. Their mission statements seem like the realm of science fantasy and few investors take them seriously. Why then do they have more than enough money to keep afloat? Research traces them back through holding companies and dummy corporations to a single rich investor, who happens to be a collector of Egyptian artifacts and employ a private team of linguists for some unknown purpose.
- Gang activities in a major western city are growing out of control. They steal and rob without compunction,

and their enemies end up dead of an unknown poison. When the thugs get in a fight, with cops or another gang, they exhibit superhuman strength and ignore deadly wounds. Word on the street is that they “got mojo now.” Where’s the power coming from? Probably the same place the money is going.

Storytelling Hints: The discovery of the hidden writing in the reliefs is a revelation of phenomenal import. If made public, it could well send the archaeological world into an uproar and, if the writing reveals anything momentous, the scientific or occult worlds as well. This is a relic that guarantees an adventure for access to the rest of the mystery – after all, there are at least three of these controversial reliefs; why would one contain all the answers? Should the secret of the relief’s hidden message become public, characters must deal with resident archaeologists getting to the reliefs and, horror of horrors, tearing them out of the walls. Or if the reliefs (or just one or two of them) have already been removed (legally for a museum or stolen, possibly still for a museum), the characters must get access to them or steal them from the thieves, if they hope to garner the knowledge they hold.

Finally, the knowledge the reliefs contain may already be known by a small secret group. They either want to maintain their monopoly on the information or protect it for the good of humankind – a classic occult conspiracy story.

Effects

(Unique) Revelation (•••): There is nothing mystical about the inscriptions on the reliefs’ reverse sides. The Classical Egyptian isn’t easy to decipher and requires interpretation before the knowledge becomes useful, but the relief is not magical. Instead, the text contains information, expressed from a now-lost perspective. Studying it gives a character new ways to think about the disciplines it discusses and opens new avenues of thinking to the character.

Studying a relief thoroughly (for a minimum of one uninterrupted month of regular examination and research) adds one die to all Occult or Science rolls the character makes in the future as he incorporates the relief’s revelations into what he already understands and can reach previously inaccessible conclusions. Each relief has complementary information, and each provides its own +1 bonus. The Storyteller decides if the reliefs reveal lost principles of Science or the Occult, and the bonuses apply only to that one Skill.

The inscriptions may reference other reliefs in the lost temple or records kept elsewhere, prompting additional excavation (which must probably be done in secret) or exploration. Additionally, a Storyteller may wish to give the inscriptions specific occult/scientific powers for players (or their enemies) to learn and use. Building extra powers into the reliefs increases their ratings as relics.

Here are some occult rituals appropriate to the Egyptian culture and the reliefs’ images: The transformation of lotus

The Dendera Reliefs and the Supernatural

For games with supernatural characters, Storytellers may decide that the information on the back of the reliefs offers certain mystical advantages to the characters who study them.

In **Vampire** games, for example, the information may provide protection from the debilitating effects of sunlight, reducing the effects from aggravated to lethal damage.

In **Mage** chronicles, Storytellers may choose to have the Dendera Reliefs reveal advanced understandings of the Mysteries. Should it suit their game, they may declare that the imagery is actually about changing the lotus flowering into a snake and physically manipulating beams of light rather than the Revelation power above. In such games, referencing the instructions on the back might decrease the experience points necessary to increase the Life or Forces Arcana from •• to ••• by three.

Similar supernatural benefits might easily be developed for each supernatural type, as the Storyteller sees fit to suit her individual game.

juice into a potent snake venom through the application of a concoction of human blood, blood from the proper sort of snake and aged beer made from specific grains; the change of a mix of water and blood into rich beer, which is doubly suitable for the previous ritual; and a third ritual that enriches the ritualist’s blood, strengthening her against poison and disease and providing a burst of energy, and making her blood even more potent for use in the other rituals.

The Frantic Flick Knife

Damage 1(L); Size 1/P; Durability 3

Description: The four-inch, black handle has several scratches, but it still operates perfectly. Pressing a small button in the back of the handle flicks a sharp and thin four-inch blade out the end of the handle. The blade is in good condition except for one sizable nick in the middle of its length. Knife-fighters and others used to fighting with weapons recognize that the knife has good balance and craftsmen know it’s made with good steel. Holding it makes a person feel more certain that their friends are safe with them. This switchblade’s style marks it as a product of the 50s or early 60s. The style was common enough that it could have been made by any producer, and the maker’s mark has been worn to obscurity.

Background: When the frantic flick knife was new, its first owner used it in a tragic bank robbery in Britain. He was not cruel nor greedy, just desperate—and hopelessly in love with one of his three co-conspirators. The night before the crew went in, the man secretly cut his palm with the knife and swore on his spilled blood that he'd make sure he and his lover got out safely and could go on to a peaceful life somewhere else.

He couldn't keep that promise. The job went wrong, thanks to pure bad luck: a cop was called into the area because of a chance mugging right in front of the bank and intervened in the heist. When he saw the police officer about to nab the target of his affection, the love-struck robber stabbed him in the chest. The cop survived, the girl escaped and the robber died in jail after more than a decade of incarceration. The fickle object of his affection never visited him.

The knife went missing sometime after the trial, not that anybody cared. It's passed through dozens of hands since then, roaming the streets with a gang of skinheads or stuck in a pocket as the last-ditch weapon of a professional bodyguard. It traveled to the Middle East and back during the Gulf War; the soldier who carried it saved his squad from an ambush with the weapon. Today, its whereabouts are unknown.

Any character with a decent Weaponry score knows the basics on switchblades. Even when no one has that information, a background in law reminds characters that switchblades are often illegal. Specific information about this knife's history can only be uncovered by accident, fate or exceptional detective work, possibly by tracing the knife backward through its owners.

- Those who have owned the Frantic Flick Knife remember it as something that bound them to their friends: the ex-skinhead remembers feeling like he could protect his gang all by himself, the bodyguard always felt more capable with it on him and the soldier felt somehow freed of all worry or hesitation when the time came to strike.
- The fickle object of affection of the knife's original owner passed it down to her son when he was of suitable age. The young man was unaware of the knife's origins, however.
- One of the knife's later owners used the weapon to stab her abusive husband when he turned his attention on their young daughter.

Storytelling Hints: Half the fun of relics of this type is digging up its personal history to figure out the theme to its powers, and then figuring out how to put those powers to their best use. If


you still want the knife's history to come out, a person involved in the original bank robbery (or another of the situations where the knife was used in action) may see the blade in action, remember the event and share the story. In the players' characters' hands, the knife makes great sense in the hands of a bodyguard or anyone dedicated to the protection of another.

Effects

Never Surprise (•): The Frantic Flick Knife functions only when it's bearer is near a person who he feels strongly about protecting or keeping safe, whether out of duty, love or another, less selfless emotion. In such cases, the relic's owner feels a heightened sense of awareness and protection over the subject (or subjects). He notices the slightest movement that could be an enemy or attack, and every potential threat moves his hand instinctively toward the knife. The character gains the Never Surprise power only in regard to dangers that threaten the person or people whom he wants to protect, and only when the objects of his protective instincts are within 10 yards of him (and the knife). A character who has no Willpower to activate this power acquires red bruises on his hand as though he had been forcibly smacking the blade against his palm.

Gift of Swiftness (•): This Power activates automatically if a subject of the character's protection is in danger, either because she has been attacked or is obviously in danger





of an attack. When the power activates, the character may reflexively draw the switchblade as though he possessed the Quick Draw Merit; if he chooses not to, this power's other benefits do not manifest. The Frantic Flick Knife draws its point toward those who threaten the subject, negating the -1 penalty to Physical rolls for attacks with the relic. The Power's cost is one Willpower.

Protection Charm, Grapple (•••): Those wounded by the knife find it impossible to grasp their victim. This relic makes it impossible for anyone cut by the knife to grapple the person or people considered under the character's guard. It breaks existing grapples. The Power is voluntary (so the character need not spend a point of Willpower if nobody is trying to grapple) but reflexive after a successful attack.

Glass Mansion Blueprints

Durability: 1, Size 1, Structure 1

Description: At the edge of an overgrown field on the southern coast of the Isle of Wight stands a large wrought-iron gate, leading nowhere. A half-hour's investigation under the knotweed and grass reveals a hundred yards of narrow-gauge railway track, one end of which goes over the cliff, the other across the field and into a hedge. Around the corners of a rough, rocky, vaguely rectangular depression in the middle of the field stand four steel girders, blackened and slightly bent. That's all there is left. The architectural blueprints survive.

The hand-drawn papers, aged and yellow but still crisp, present to the trained eye what must have been a triumph of Victorian engineering, a neo-Gothic fantasia, halfway between cathedral and greenhouse, built all of steel and glass, its thick, perfectly transparent walls standing on ground-glass floors. Supplemental papers and account sheets give an impression of its interior. The only curtains surrounded the guest rooms in the east wing. The inventories and accounts betray rooms that were filled with heavy Victorian furniture of every kind, Beardsley-esque statues in bronze and gilded curlicues across ceilings and around dado rails, wrought-iron banisters, solid glass doors on heavy steel hinges, ornate gas lamps, vast open bottle-green fireplaces, bookshelves and billiard tables, the paraphernalia of a Victorian kitchen and its associated servants' quarters.

Notes written in a tight, controlled hand at the edges of the drawings reveal that by design, the walls reflected and refracted sunlight and moonlight across the Victorian paraphernalia within, casting images throughout the building, creating a dozen or more phantom images of every room.

It must have been easy to get lost there.

Gas pipes and water ran visibly through floors and walls. The designs for them are beautiful in their own right; they were decorated with inlaid polished brass scroll work and cast into the thick translucent floors of the mansion. A railway platform and a small private steam engine, the walls of its one carriage made of multi-colored glass, would have originally connected with a railway line that ran from Ventnor.

Background: In 1882, Major Raymond Hitchcock returned from India with an imperial fortune and no companion with whom to spend it. His wife had died in childbirth. With no family to speak of, he returned to his childhood home on the Isle of Wight. After three years spent as a recluse, Hitchcock re-entered society a changed man. Although he maintained his reputation for impeccable dress, accounts of the time tell of the missionary zeal with which he approached the Royal Institute of British Architects. The vast sums of money he gained from the liquidation of looted Mughal gold went to the demolition of the Hitchcock ancestral seat and the design of an enormous folly: a Glass Mansion that he had seen in a dream. Hitchcock enlisted a young architect named Morris Windsor, who had a strong interest in the theosophical movement and who, as the project advanced, gained something of Hitchcock's wild fervor. It took another two years for the project to be completed. Meanwhile, Hitchcock's adventures in society revolved around the plethora of theosophists, mediums and visionaries who populated the late-Victorian world. By the time his remarkable edifice was built, he had hired an entire staff — his butler, his cook, his ancillary staff — composed of psychics and magicians. It was just as well. No one without an extreme tolerance for strangeness could work in the Glass Mansion for long.

Guests found the place difficult to stay in for more than a night. The layout of the building and the peculiarly refracted light made the place hugely unsettling. By day, the place could be blinding and blazing hot. Neither the light nor the heat ever seemed to worry Hitchcock and his staff. By night, the moonlight played tricks on the eye; on one notable occasion, a gentleman guest went mad after getting lost in the West Wing for some six hours while looking for the drawing room. Some guests swore that at night, the building *sang*, producing a strange, resonant sound like a hundred fingers running around the moistened rims of a hundred half-full wine glasses. Prominent members of the European and American esoteric community visited Hitchcock with increasing frequency, and by 1890 it had become rare for Hitchcock to dine alone. On the night of August 23rd 1901, Hitchcock held an impromptu conference occasioned by the entirely coincidental visits of no less than seven prominent psychics. This was the night on which that the Glass Mansion disappeared.

The alarm was raised after villagers in nearby Ventnor were awoken by what sounded like an explosion. A few brave souls took the journey two miles west to the source. They found Hitchcock's mansion gone, torn from its foundations, with only the four steel corner supports remaining behind. In one corner of the field, some of the villagers found Hitchcock's chambermaid and suspected lover, Adeline Belleville, hunched in a ball, sobbing. She came to herself in the Sanitarium in Newport three days later. She said that she had left the building in order to get some blackberries from the brambles at the edge of

the ground (apparently, the cook's blackberry jam tasted better if the berries were harvested at night). A sudden, ear-splitting sound bore her off her feet. On her knees, she turned around and saw, so she said, the Glass Mansion, bathed partly in moonlight, partly in another light whose source came from somewhere within the building. It was rising into the sky.

Mlle. Belleville never saw freedom again, ending up in an insane asylum in London. She died three years later of typhoid fever. Most of the locals said that the Mansion's boiler must have exploded; some said that it never would have happened if Hitchcock had hired good, honest, local craftsmen. The authorities accepted the explosion explanation. No one seemed to want to ask why there were no traces of glass anywhere, or why there was no sign of a fire. No trace of Hitchcock, the rest of his staff, and his seven guests was ever found.

One of Hitchcock's more eccentric associates suggested that the spiritual vibrations coursing through the house—designed from a dream, populated by souls, attractive to the spirits—had caused it to resonate out of step with the material realm and into a higher frequency, moving it into a higher state of being. Another said that the spirits had come and taken it away. A third suggested that Hitchcock had harnessed some forbidden source and, unable to control it, had annihilated the mansion — and himself.

In the intervening century, the Glass

Mansion has become a staple of trashy magazines and cable TV shows dealing with the inexplicable. It's become a piece of modern folklore, a sort of Victorian fantasia that no one really believes in. There are variations in the stories told by magazines and cheaply published books with titles like *The Uncanny World of the Unexplained*. Tawdry magazine articles tell of the mansion appearing in out-of-the-

way places, all over the world. An astrologer or psychic who wanted to make a quick buck on the occult scene could do worse than make a prediction as to where the Mansion would next appear. None of these predictions have turned out to be true — yet. One widely-told version of the story says that Hitchcock and his guests and staff are still there in the Mansion, alive, mad and maybe even possessed by entities from outside time and space. Another version claims that the Glass Mansion is behind most twentieth-century UFO sightings. Yet another tells of how it reappeared somewhere under the Pacific Ocean, and how it can be sometimes seen floating incongruously beneath the waves, still glowing. And there's one version of the story that says it appears whenever two people fall in love in impossible circumstances.

The Blueprints

One copy of Morris Windsor's original design drawings for the Glass Mansion currently reside in the British Architectural Library, in the headquarters of the Royal Institute of British Architects, in Portland Place, London. Visitors who aren't members of RIBA can buy a day ticket to get in, and can ask for items of interest from the curators of the collection. Although it's easy to see Hitchcock's architectural blueprints, visitors aren't permitted to take them away or make copies of them.

There are other copies of the blueprints.

Windsor and Hitchcock got around, and had contacts among the Theosophical Society in the USA, and

dealt with various groups in Paris and St. Petersburg

on their travels. Memoirs from the period sometimes mention

Hitchcock and Windsor showing

copies of the blueprints

to their colleagues and

friends. There's one in an old

Soviet archive, unordered and

untended due to post-Soviet

budget crunches.

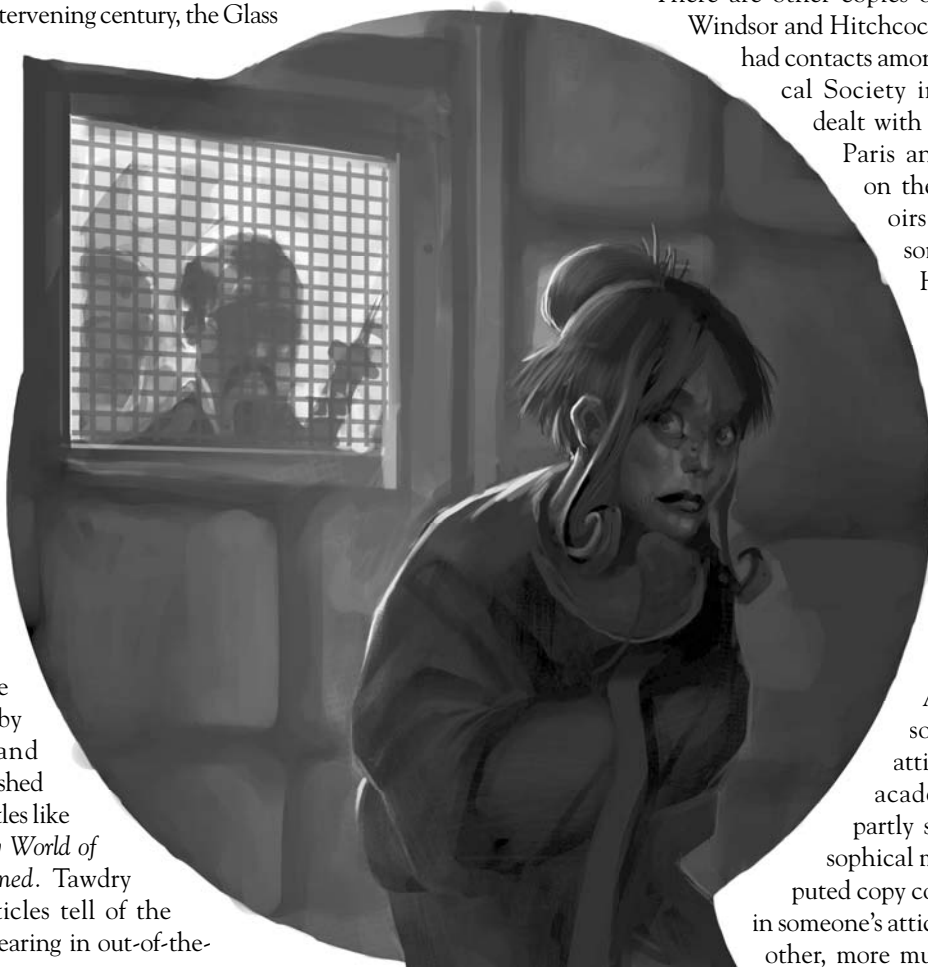
Another waits somewhere in the


attic of an American academic institution

partly set up with theosophical money. A third reputed

copy could be anywhere: in someone's attic, or buried among

other, more mundane papers, or





in the clutches of some still active individual who met Hitchcock and Windsor the first time around.

The chances of anyone ever actually rebuilding the Glass Mansion are pretty slim. Many of the skills necessary to create the panels and frames of the building have died out. The costs involved in manufacturing, working and constructing such a vast, delicate edifice were astronomical in 1887; now they're insane. Only a madman would even think of rebuilding it, and an astronomically rich madman at that. Still, in the World of Darkness, there is no shortage of madmen.

The Glass Mansion straddles the line between magical relic and surreal location. It could contain anything; it could appear anywhere. Any of the stories could be the truth.

- The original Glass Mansion is gone; it's never going to appear in this universe again. Hitchcock and his friends found a way—encoded in the blueprints—to make the building exist out of time and space. In its design, there's a key to the universe, if the building is subjected to the right psychic resonances. When the moment came, the edifice folded itself away from the material realm and into Heaven, or Nirvana, or Satori. All within the building left this world, and they experienced perfection and oneness with all things, and complete annihilation of their selves as individuals. Moldering transcripts of interviews with Mlle. Belleville hidden in the archives of the old psychiatric hospital give hints that she knew the plan. She went mad because she missed her chance to achieve bliss. Several societies of an esoteric nature are seeking a means to obtain a copy of Windsor's architectural plans, or to steal them from the RIBA. Maybe they've found out that the plans are in the hands of an ancient vampire, or some other creature who remembered Hitchcock and Windsor the first time. Or maybe one of these groups has a copy of the plans already, and is working to steal vast amounts of money to finance a new mansion's construction. Storytellers using **Mage: the Awakening** might want to make at least one of these factions a group of mages. A runaway group of Seers of the Throne, for example, might want to construct a new Glass Mansion with the vast resources of their order, wishing to become one with their Exarch masters. Maybe they've already started, leaving characters who don't know what's going on to stumble upon their work.
- The mansion is still out there; it reappears periodically. It always seems to choose wild, remote places, staying somewhere for a few days and nights before disappearing for a year or more at a time. Hitchcock, Windsor and the others are still there, but they're somehow *wrong*. When the building entered the spirit realm, a horde of spirits consumed the humans from within. They appear to be exactly as they were, but they're more spirit than flesh now and seek to consume spirits and humans alike. Human investigators who enter the mansion are in danger of complete destruction in both body and soul. **Werewolf** Storytellers could use the appearance of the mansion (or its predicted appearance) to cause a massive shake-up of the spirit world. The building appears and creates an enormous rip in the barrier between the dif-

ferent realms. Spirits swarm across the divide, surrounding the mansion and filling it. Meanwhile, the building sucks in and consumes the spirits which normally inhabit the region. Drawn to the site by the agonized screams of the world's fabric, a pack of werewolves risks being trapped in the mansion forever, lost in its eternally refracting corridors.

- The “reappearance” of the Glass Mansion — the conjunction of the stars, the generation of omens, the birth of an impossible love — are the prophetic markers that predict the building of a new edifice, with all the powers of the old: a singing, glowing wonder. A Storyteller playing **Vampire** could use the glass mansion as part of a story of redemption. A vampire discovers true love. By all rights, he can't — the dead cannot feel true emotions — but he really has fallen impossibly in love, maybe with a mortal. In the background, the Glass Mansion is built anew and the lovers are drawn to it. Stories of a key to heaven — or a key to ultimate power, or a key to regaining one's humanity — hidden within the building of a Glass Mansion inspire the eldest and richest of the hungry dead to begin to use their fortunes to make it anew. But does the obsession that seizes them come from within or from another source? And does the mansion hold redemption, or does the light that will arise at the center of the glass library hold only destruction? Do the lovers hold the key, or is their true love a ploy, engineered by the elders to create the necessary conditions to make their vast supernatural folly? Perhaps the mansion means something else: a sign of the apocalypse, of Armageddon, of the final unraveling of all reality at the end of time.

Storytelling Hints:

Depending on the nature of the chronicle, Storytellers could set the creation of a new Glass Mansion as a goal for characters, or spin the situation so that they are actively working to prevent an antagonist from creating such an item. Either way, the task is difficult and the end result has the potential of having a dynamic impact on any chronicle. This is not a task to be accomplished with ease.

Effects

The blueprints don't have any magical powers in and of themselves; but if character spends at least a day reading them, the player can roll Intelligence + Occult. If the roll results in an exceptional success, the character understands that the plans are deliberately designed to make something magical.

The original Glass Mansion had the following powers. A new mansion might also have other powers.

Pulse (•••••): The weird resonance of the mansion works as a constant EMP within the building, meaning that electrical devices, particularly communication devices such as mobile phones, simply don't work here. The power doesn't work in quite the same way as the usual version of this power (see p. 104). It's always in effect. The Storyteller should roll 10 dice whenever someone carrying any kind of electronic device comes inside. If the roll succeeds, all devices carried

by the individual fail until she leaves the mansion. If it's an exceptional success, none of them ever work again.

Unnatural Travel (•••••): The mansion moves randomly across physical space and spiritual dimensions. The people inside have no control over where it ends up. It can go anywhere in the world. Although the people inside don't notice it—to them travel appears to be instant—a month passes between each landing. If using **Mage: The Awakening**, **Werewolf: The Forsaken**, or **World of Darkness: Book of Spirits**, the Storyteller can rule that if any of the characters fail a Resolve + Composure roll, the mansion ends up in the spirit world.

Honjō Masamune

Damage 3 (L); Size 2/L; Durability 4

Description: The Honjō Masamune has the curved handle and blade common to katana. The sword's long blade is chipped and etched after many battles, but is still razor sharp. Though it feels like plain cold steel to the touch, the blade always carries the faint smell of old blood – more than one owner has reported a sense of regret or disappointment when holding the weapon. Its grip is the only new and unsullied part of it, and appears to have been recently replaced with a replica of the original.

Background: Legendary Japanese weapons smith Masamune forged this blade in 1321, though no official records of the creation exist. He worked on it only at night when there was no moon in the sky – he infused the weapon with the calm wisdom of the secret moon and avoided Amaterasu's fiery passion, which he believed so often moved men to kill unnecessarily. The Honjō Masamune was to be a weapon of defense, killing only to protect others.

Its wielders, however, perverted the well-meant sword. A craftsman has no rule over how others use his creations, and for almost three centuries, the blade tasted blood and ended lives with little judgment. This period seems likely to be the time when the blade truly became a relic, as its owners gained a reputation for being both charmed on the battlefield and cursed off of it. Samurai after samurai wielded the blade to victory in combat and left the battlefield to find themselves poisoned by rivals, slain by lovers in their sleep or politically ruined by seemingly circumstantial turns of events.

In 1570, Honjō Shigenaga became the blade's owner. Through some twist of fate, he defeated its owner in a battle, although the aggressive warrior had already split the general's helmet with the blade. Shigenaga carried the weapon for far longer than most – more than two decades – wielding it with honor as Masamune had intended and binding his name to the blade with his deeds. It is said that a tear of sorrow for the necessity of killing fell from his eye every time he unsheathed the weapon. Some conjecture that Masamune's impeccable honor was what allowed him to use the blade for so long before falling victim to its curse.

Even Shigenaga's honor, however, could not cleanse the weapon of its bloodstained past entirely. Financial misfortune befell him and, in order to pay his debts, Shigenaga sold the

Honjō Masamune for a pittance of its true worth. He was the first to rid himself of the blade and its curse voluntarily, but far from the last. It passed through the hands of numerous owners (many posthumously), eventually finding its way into the Tokugawa family in the 1600s, where it continued to shift hands until Tokugawa Ietsuna chose to keep the blade but stay as far from it as possible. It became the symbol of the Tokugawa shogunate, but was not again used in battle until World War II.

Members of the Tokugawa family carried the blade in battle during the war. All died off the battlefield, often in violent and tragic circumstances, and each time the blade returned to the family. In grief at the loss of so many cousins, Tokugawa Iemasa rid himself of the blade by donating it, along with several other swords, to a police station in Mejiro. Less than a month later, the Mejiro police gave the weapons to a member of the U.S. Military, by some reports an Army infantryman named Coldy Bimore. History loses track of the weapon there, but the blade's story continues.

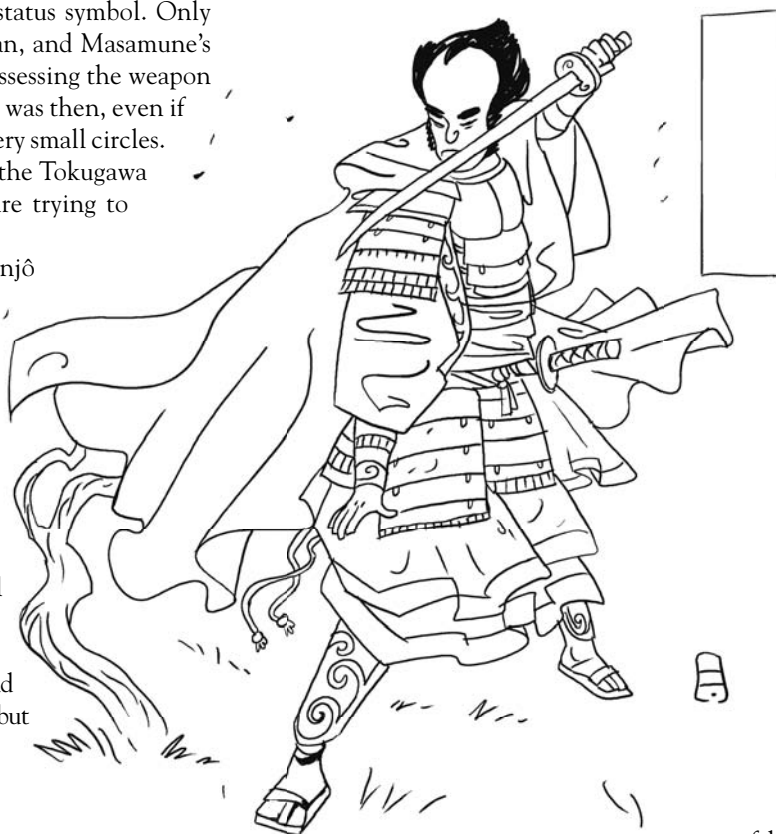
Coldy turned the weapons over to his superior officer, a Japanophile named Hugh Kimbell, who, unaware of their value or the curse surrounding one of the items, kept the swords as a memento of his time overseas. Upon returning to the States, Kimbell joined a martial arts school to learn how to use his new weapons. He disappeared one night after practice. His wife inherited the weapons and immediately sold them to a dozen different collectors without tracking who bought which weapon. Up until recently, the Honjō Masamune remained on private display in a collector's home. When it disappeared, the collector reported no theft and has been pursuing investigation of the break-in privately – while Kimbell might have been unaware of the weapon's value, their last owner knows he would be forced to give or sell the weapon back to Japan if the authorities realized it was in his possession.

Characters who study historical weaponry and Japanophiles are most likely to know something about this particular weapon. Then again, the katana is a popular weapon in modern fiction – because of this, a wide variety of readers know something about Masamune Okazaki and his legendary blades, although their knowledge may be based more on fiction than fact.

- There was originally some suspicion about the circumstances surrounding Kimbell's disappearance, but as no evidence of foul play was ever found, no arrests were made. His wife was originally the chief suspect.
- A wealthy and very private New Yorker has put feelers out in the market of antique weapons, looking for any katana that have recently hit the market. He does not name the weapon, but his descriptions are extremely specific, describing a blade with marks precise lengths from the hilt or tip.
- Kimbell's friends remember that he had gloated about using the ancient weapon – sheathed, of course – when sparring with other students or his teacher. His wife, now remarried, doesn't want to talk about Kimbell. If pressed, she mentions that she never liked that sword; it “felt wrong.” Of course, she also refers to her ex husband as an abusive jerk who deserved whatever he got, so her opinions are far from unbiased.

Storytelling Hints: The Honjō Masamune is a weapon, true, but it's also a potent status symbol. Only the elite bore katana in ancient Japan, and Masamune's blades were known to be the best. Possessing the weapon today is as much a boost to status as it was then, even if its owner remains unknown outside very small circles. Collectors want it, as do members of the Tokugawa family who, unaware of the curse, are trying to reclaim their heritage.

A character who wields the Honjō Masamune in combat gains an advantage over other melee combatants, but this advantage brings with it risks beyond the supernatural curse the weapon bears. He can try to ignore its reputation, but others won't: when whispers spread about the weapon's whereabouts, people who want it will flock to its owner. They will try to buy it or steal it, making keeping this weapon almost as dangerous as getting into a fight with it. It may be that the wise man lets it go and makes a profit before losing everything—but not many men are wise.



Effects

Protection Charm (•••••): Masamune's craftsmanship was flawless, and the katana is as potent a weapon now as it was when he forged it. When the blade's wielder activates this relic's power, the weapon guides its owner, interposing between him and any lethal attacks. Nothing escapes Honjō Masamune's impenetrable defense, not even attacks that ignore Defense (like gunfire). This power is activated with a Strength + Weaponry roll but is otherwise normal. The character may *choose* to activate the defense for an entire scene. This costs no Willpower, making it possible to use even when the character has no other options, but it activates the weapon's curse: an Insidious Bargain (p. 115).

(Curse) Insidious Bargain: For centuries after its creation, the blade was a tool of unscrupulous men – and it eventually began to punish them. Now, it cannot distinguish between good and evil, duty and dishonor, and anyone who activates its ultimate power suffers some great ill fate, from an ignominious death to complete ruin.

Ica Stones

Durability 2, Size 1-4, Structure 3-6

Description: Though naturally smooth, the intricate engravings that cover most of each Ica stone's surface make it rough to the touch. Each depicts some bizarre pairing of human form and prehistoric creature: a tyrannosaurus-like creature standing beside the image of a man, a child being attacked by what appears to be a pterodactyl or a group

of hunters stalking a herd of triceratops.

Looking too long at the stone evokes an ideological vertigo – beliefs begin to spin and skew. The sensation fades minutes after looking away or, with prolonged exposure, may persist for as much as an hour. Ica stones vary in size from fist-sized to pillow-sized or larger and depict all manner of apparently mythical or anachronistic imagery.

Background: Allegedly discovered near Ica, Peru, the Ica stones have been collected by Dr. Javier Cabrera, who founded the Engraved Stones Museum to display them. There are over 15,000 Ica stones in Cabrera's collection. They display myriad scenes thought impossible for the period the stones are supposed to be from: advanced surgical procedures, creatures extinct before the rise of man and technological marvels. His study of the stones led him to develop his theory of Gliptolithic Man – a race of men or extraterrestrials who lived long before the supposed rise of man and who were familiar with interstellar flight and other incredible technology. According to Cabrera's theories, these early-but-advanced peoples may have guided modern man's evolution and then departed for another planet.

The Ica stones have been sources of controversy from the moment they became publicly known. One major supplier of Dr. Cabrera's stones was accused by Peruvian authorities of selling archaeological discoveries; his defense was to admit forging them. He later both claimed that the Ica stones are real and described in detail how he faked them in different documentaries, making him an unreliable

information source at best. This adds fuel to the academic fire surrounding the stones. Some scientists follow the external evidence that there were no man-shaped creatures before a certain period, others insist that one cannot prove a negative. Patina on some of the stones suggests that while the stones are old, the engravings are much younger. Other examinations show equally old patina on the engravings. Some skeptics blow off the Gliptolithic theories because of their apparent connections to various mystic or new age beliefs; others are more likely to accept them for that very reason. One investigator claims to have found traces of sandpaper and modern paint on the stones. No one, however, is absolutely certain of the truth.

The debate polarizes everyone who hears of it. Even those who originally choose not to take sides in it or have no particular stake in the argument end up on one side or the other after learning of the stones' existence. Those who are drawn in eventually decide that the stones are a hoax or that they are real, coming to believe the "evidence" of this scientist over that one. Once involved, people tend to take and promote one view about the stones passionately. Even if future research conclusively proves the Ica stones' nature, the debate seems unlikely to end.

Academics or Occult Specialties in South America, or possibly in Aliens, provide basic knowledge about the Ica stones. Likewise, those with a strong interest in potentially

prehistoric artifacts or the upsurge in interest in archeology in the mid-1960s may also be aware of Cabrera's collection.

- Just after Dr. Cabrera's death in 2001, one of his children found an uncatalogued Ica stone in Cabrera's office. This stone displays a stylized image of a person flying above the Nazca lines leaving infants, probably prehistoric man, behind on Earth. The stone has since become a prized part of the collection.
- Dr. Cabrera was known to spend hours alone with his massive collection of Ica stones, examining them for knowledge and categorizing them for later studies. Some visitors to the museum mentioned hearing him talking to himself while doing it. Now, one of Cabrera's sons seems to have acquired the habit; he says it makes him feel closer to his father.

Storytelling Hints: While many relics may be clearly identified by characters as either blatant hoaxes or archaeological marvels, the Ica stones should be recognizable as neither. A Storytelling game involving Ica stones should ricochet back and forth between concrete proof that they are manufactured and contradictory, but equally conclusive, evidence that ties them to a time before the dawn of man. Scientists of equal renown disagree over which facts are true; better still, they argue over what established facts do or do not *mean*. The truth remains eternally debatable and, honestly, the truth doesn't matter when a rich bastard





who *believes* that Ica stones hold the key to knowledge or power and is willing to do *anything* to get his hands on them. It doesn't matter when a science terrorist blows up Cabrera's museum to eliminate the controversy – or cover up the hole in scientists' cover story. And it doesn't matter when a mysterious cult is willing to sacrifice themselves, or others, because of the sacred message they believe they've garnered from the stone's pictographs. Actions like these surround the stones, serving to illustrate that the truth isn't always a factor when people *believe* strongly enough.

Effects

Soul Inheritance (•••••): Ica stones' markings are *inspiring*. There's simply no other word that fits. People who examine them find their thoughts filled with possibilities: about what the sigils could mean, what they could symbolize, what lessons they could teach. This is just a feather-light brush of the stone's true power, however.

A character who bonds with the stones discerns entire stories, world-shaking theories, from the carvings. Bonding with an Ica stone reveals magnificent truths, volumes of information that require a lifetime of study to digest. This is how the souls captured in the stones communicate – not in speech or communicated thought, but through inspiration. Every person who bonds to the Ica stones is inspired differently. Cabrera created his theory about prehistory aliens because of the Ica stone's inspiration. Another bonded individual believes the stones signify the cyclic nature of the universe and indicate that ancient creatures will one day walk again alongside man. Yet another sees only falsehood in the stone's carvings, recognizing them as true proof of the inherently deceptive and manipulative nature of mankind.

This power differs from the core description on p. 108-109. A character that has bonded with one of the Ica stones ignores unskilled penalties as long as she is in the same building as it. Once bonded, she can draw Willpower from the collection (at the normal rate and cost for this power) or boost the particular power's Skill (most often one related to the bonded individual's particular "inspiration" in regards to the stone) regardless of distance. The associated derangement acquired is always Fixation. Regardless of whether the stone inspires belief in its own veracity or falsehood, the Ica stones still draw in souls. A person connected to the Ica stones may believe they gain their power and knowledge from the souls of countless thousands who have gone before, or simply from righteous and unwavering belief in the reality of modern scientific method, but the unwavering strength of that belief is fueled by the bond between the stone and its owner's soul, whether the relic is actually a prehistoric artifact or a modern hoax.

Bonding with the Ica stones neither confirms great age or fakery. The stones tell a thousand stories, depending on their audience, all or none of which may be true.

The Lady of Salt

Durability 1, Size 5, Structure 6

Description: This strange figure is part of a private collection of Middle-Eastern artifacts, a slightly-damaged statue of a woman in early middle-age, wrapped closely in a cloak. What makes it unusual is that it appears to be carved entirely from rock salt.

The sculpture is utterly realistic, far beyond the capabilities of any known ancient sculptor. In shape it has more in common with the petrified corpses of Pompeii than any classical portrait. The body twists around, the face looking over the shoulder, and the right arm (now missing its hand) raised as if to shield its eyes. Its expression of shock and surprise gives the figure a disturbing aspect, as if it was instantly caught at some horrible moment and frozen forever. The statue was apparently found in Jordan, back in the nineteenth century, close to the remains of a small town which had apparently suffered some kind of disaster and which had simply died in the space of a night. The Lady of Salt, which was reportedly discovered buried upright under the sand a good half-mile away, seems to bear no relation to the human remains and statuary found in the town. Those who have studied the statue claim that if it was made of hollow volcanic rock, perhaps it could be a petrified woman, caught in the effects of whatever destroyed the village. But it's made of solid rock salt, and so that explanation doesn't have many takers. Whatever its source, it's anomalous.

Archaeologists who have studied the Lady believe it to be a hoax, carved from a large deposit of hard, ancient rock salt by some talented modern craftsman. This is the reason why the Lady of Salt hasn't received any press, and isn't widely known outside of a few academics in the field. Most respectable scholars mostly consider it to be just another fake artifact from a region where they are ten a penny.

Background: The one explanation for the Lady of Salt that no academic has yet been able to stomach is that it's Lot's wife. The story goes that the towns of Sodom and Gomorrah died in fire in the space of a single night. The Good Book has it that only Lot, a cousin of the patriarch Abraham, escaped from Sodom, along with his wife and daughters—the same daughters, incidentally, with whose bodies he had, only hours before, tried to bribe the evil men of his town. His wife, a native of the region, regretted leaving the town and looked back. In punishment for her longing, the story goes that God transformed her instantly into a "pillar of salt".

It's impossible to tell if that's true. Most ancient historians hold that it isn't.

The Lady of Salt rewards and strengthens those who sin. The look of longing in the blank crystalline eyes changes to approval in the eyes of an owner who indulges his vices repeatedly.

Disaster comes to those who own the Lady, sooner or later. They're in for a fall. Often, the Lady is the direct reason, as people will kill to own her.

The Sin of Sodom

The reason God destroyed Sodom was because its men were gay, right? Wrong. This is what the good book says, courtesy of the prophet Ezekiel:

"Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom: pride, fullness of bread, and abundance of idleness in her and her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty and committed abominations before me: therefore I took them away as I saw good."

The Lady of Salt is, to some, the living proof of one of the most savage stories of the Bible. Regardless of its true origin, it has the power to make people want it; this can be enough to cause chaos.

Occasionally, groups of Christian or Islamic fundamentalists make attempts to get hold of it, sometimes violent, sometimes not. The Catholic Church has investigated it more than once, and three Popes have visited it. None has said *ex cathedra* that it's real or not.

- A few members of some small, extreme religious cult found the Lady of Salt. Then they killed each other to possess it. The last of them starved to death rather than leave the Lady for an instant.
- The next of kin of the final ill-fated cultist took possession of the weird salt statue after her death. Having no interest in such "cult" paraphernalia, he auctioned the item off, and the proceedings were attended by representatives of a dozen religious groups — Catholic Protestant, Mormon, Islamic and otherwise — all determined (to the owner's surprise) to lay hands on the relic.
- A vampire faction known as the Sacred Spear is rumored to seek the Lady as the apotheosis of human sin, intending to use it as the ingredient in some ritual of power.

Storytelling Hints: The Lady of Salt causes chaos wherever she is taken, for the simple reason that nearly everyone who sees her wants to possess her.

Effects

Reward Temptation (••): As long as the owner of the Lady of Salt visits the statue and gazes upon her once a day, he gains the benefit of this power (p. 105). The Lady of Salt only rewards those whose vices are Greed, Pride and Envy, however.

(Cursed) Addictive: Anyone who sees the Lady of Salt for the first time must roll Resolve + Composure, or fall prey to the Curse: Addictive (p. 113-114). If the roll fails, the character dreams of the statue that night, and desires to see her again the following day. If he doesn't manage to see her in the next 24 hours, he suffers the penalties until such time as he can see her again. If the player makes an exceptional

success on a Resolve + Composure roll (the roll can be attempted once every game day), the effect passes, and the character wonders what drove him to be so obsessed.

The Little Black Book

Durability: 0, Size: 1, Structure: 1

Description: The Little Black Book is exactly that: a black book that would fit in the palm of a man's hand. The mere mention of it, though, incites a kind of voyeuristic glee in many people, and the sight of someone writing down a name or number in the Black Book brings a knowing smile. The Black Book always feels warm, as though it's just come out of someone's pocket.

History: Modern society unquestionably puts different standards on men than women. Women are meant to remain pure and non-sexual until marriage (and in some circles, strange double standards even exist about what a wife should or shouldn't enjoy, sexually speaking), but men are given much more leave to sow their wild oats. In more cosmopolitan settings, women are able to take lovers without so much reproach, but a woman who enjoys and seeks out sex still receives a different reception than a man who does so.

Perhaps the Little Black Book was created in response to this double standard. A sorcerer might have made it and enchanted it solely for the purposes of pointing out that anyone might succumb to the charms of a desirable mate, or even out of simple spite. Then again, perhaps the Book took on its enchantment spontaneously, left in the back pocket of some rogue's trousers after a successful conquest.

Whatever its origins, the Black Book has been around at least since 1974, when it was mentioned in a magazine article about San Francisco's nightlife. "With his little black book in hand," the article says, "the swinger enters the club looking to fill one more page. After tonight, he'll probably never look at that page again, but tonight, that blank page fills him with hunger, desire and purpose. The blank page is a challenge, a taunt, and he must answer it."

There are many such black books, but one in particular grants its user a measure of power that no one should be allowed. Once a woman's name is entered in the Black Book, the owner of the Book holds sway over her sexual desires. The Black Book has nothing to do with love, friendship, respect or anything of that nature. The Black Book commands lust, pure and simple. Once a woman's name and identifying information (in the 1970s, a phone number was sufficient, nowadays an email address works, too) are in the Book, the Book's owner can demand sex any time he wishes. The choice of pronoun here is deliberate — the Black Book does not work on men, regardless of the sexual orientation of the owner. It would seem, then, that the Book was created strictly to victimize women.

A few provisos on the book's use exist, of course. They are spelled out, in very tiny lettering, on the inside cover, thus:

- 1) *They have to give you their info. You can't just look it up, or ask their friend, or whatever.*
- 2) *They have to dig you at least a little.*
- 3) *Only works on chicks, sorry homos!*
- 4) *You can't ever call them by name. Call them "baby" or "honey" or whatever, but **DON'T USE THEIR NAME AFTER YOU FUCK THEM.***

Although crude, the rules are correct. Put simply, a would-be suitor cannot simply find out a woman's name by asking her companions or rummaging through her desk or mail. He must ask *her*, directly, and he must make it clear that he is attracted to her (though he can do so subtly). Context doesn't matter; a man working as a store clerk or even as a policeman who takes a woman's information can put the woman under the spell of the Black Book if he makes his attraction clear and if she feels at least some attraction to him (see Effects, below). She must willingly give him her name and one piece of identifying information, and that information must be valid (that is, if she gives him a dummy phone number, the magic won't work). If the woman does so, the power of the Black Book is activated, and the woman feels an undeniable and purely sexual attraction for the man, which she will act on given even the slightest opportunity.

Once the deed has been done, though, the baleful magic of the Book comes into play. The man loses desire for the woman, although he can use the Book on her again if he chooses to do so. If he calls her by her name (defined as "the name written in the Book"), the Book ceases to work for him.



What's more, he loses all feelings of physical desire — for sex, for food, for drugs of any kind. He keeps any addictions he had, but can derive no satisfaction or pleasure from anything physical for the rest of his life. Such men often go mad and take their own lives within a few months, but some live out the rest of their days as cold, hollow shells of their former selves.

- The magazine article quoted above is available online as part of a 70s retrospective in a webzine. In the

She Was Asking For It

Rapists use many different defenses for their actions, all of them repulsive, but none so much as “she was asking for it.” This is usually a comment on a woman’s dress or manner, and is, unfortunately, an effective defense (that is, one that works, not one that’s valid) often enough to be cliché.

When considering the Book, it might seem that the fact that the victim has to offer up a piece of identifying information willingly mitigates the effects of the object. Certainly, users of the Book have tried to say so — “It wouldn’t have worked if she hadn’t wanted it to.” But this is, frankly, nonsense. The woman gave out her name and a phone number, nothing more. This isn’t permission for other liberties; the Book simply strips her of her free will. Would she have still chosen to have sex with the Book’s owner without the magic? The question is academic. She wasn’t given that choice.

comments section, someone named “imsorrysarah” comments “That fucking Book ruined my life.”

- A news story tells the tale of a woman in Detroit who was arrested for stalking and assault. She waited for her former lover outside his place of business and beat him with a tire iron, all the while screaming that she just wanted him to “tear her page out.” She is currently incarcerated in an institution for the criminally insane.
- A web site devoted to “meat markets” (bars where casual sex is easy to find) has a picture of a man holding a little black book. The picture is entitled “our hero,” and the page beneath is devoted to tales of his exploits.

Storytelling Hints: The reader might well be thinking that the Black Book is a cursed item, doing no one, neither the user nor the victims, any good. It enables a sort of rape, after all, forcing its victims into sex with someone they might not otherwise have chosen to be with.

The reader is absolutely right. The Black Book is a product of spite, misogyny and bitterness. Using it for its intended purpose requires a check for degeneration at Morality 3 or more (roll two dice). It is a violation of Humanity, Wisdom and Clarity at the same levels, and is a violation of Harmony 4 (roll three dice).

Stories involving the Little Black Book probably revolve around finding someone who is using it and delivering his comeuppance. Of course, that type of story can tread some fine moral lines — what if the user of the book doesn’t *know* what he’s doing? What if he’s read the “rules” in the beginning of the book, but doesn’t really believe them? No supernatural knowledge is required

to use the book, after all, and it’s entirely conceivable that a man might write down a woman’s information, ask for sex at some later date (especially since the woman’s desire appears immediately after the information is in the Book), and simply agrees when she says yes.

“Rape,” after all, implies a deliberate act, but it’s possible to use the Book, at least initially, without that deliberation. Is a man who does so guilty? If you’d prefer not to address this topic, simply assume that the man using the Book is aware of his actions (or just skip the Book altogether). But if you wish to examine sexual politics, the implications on a moral level of using the book without knowing its true effects, and the possibility of repentance (what *does* happen if a page is ripped out, after all?), the Little Black Book can provide a way to do so.

Effects

• **Hypnotic Effect (••):** The Book’s primary effect, of course, is to compel feelings of sexual desire. This works like the power described on p. 97, with a few changes. First, the Book cannot compel a woman to feel desire for a man that she has no interest in whatsoever. Even the slightest bit of physical or emotional attraction is enough, though. Second, the woman has to volunteer her name and one piece of identifying information, as described above. Third, the Book compels sexual desire, nothing more or less. It does not make a woman fall in love or, indeed, even *trust* the man. Fourth, the Book does not work on vampires, werewolves, Prometheans, changelings or other supernatural beings that are not completely human. It *does* work on mages, but a Mental Shield protects the mage completely. Finally, the power does not require a roll or an expenditure of Willpower on the part of the user.

Mother of Vinegar

Durability 0, Size 2, Structure 2

Description: This looks like nothing so much as a translucent reddish slime kept in a crock or container of some kind. It is slippery to the touch, much like mucus, and it smells strongly of sharp vinegar. Even though the mass looks kind of disgusting, its smell is redolent of fertility. It reminds characters with long memories of their mothers, or even of the womb.

Background: A mother of vinegar is a gelatinous mass of bacteria, especially *mycoderma aceti*, used to hasten the development of wine into vinegar. The process of making vinegar consumes some of the mother but deposits more bacteria onto it, allowing one mother to remain active across generations and create thousands of gallons of vinegar. A mother can be broken up and sent to other aspiring vinegar brewers, and each mother lends the vinegar it makes certain flavors or qualities.

This particular mother has had a very long life and is particularly well-traveled. It was first “born” in a monastery deep in the French Pyrenees in the 16th century. The monks living and working there spent two centuries using and replenishing the mother, integrating flavor from the period’s finest and most potent wines. They would give their vinegar to local villagers, who appreciated the flavor and lived long, healthy lives.

The monastery supported an 18th century expansion of its order by donating their valued mother of vinegar to a fledgling monastery being founded in Bremen. Since then, the mother (or parts of it) has traveled far: the monks in Bremen made part of the mother a gift to a nunnery in Manchester, and the nuns shared it with a church on the Isle of Kerry. A very small monastery in New York City requested and received a portion of the mother from the Irish, and has since sold small parts of it to vinegar makers in Detroit and San Francisco.

None of the mother’s newer owners treat it with the reverence its creators did (and their ecclesiastical inheritors still do). They use the Mother to make excellent vinegar, but without the monks’ respect and dedication the vinegar has only minor mystic effects at best.

Vinegar is something familiar to characters with decent Medicine ratings, as well as any who put effort into cooking. Anyone with a Cooking Specialty in either Academics or Science (especially the latter) knows what a mother of vinegar is and may have the resources or contacts to track down this particular mother.

- There are contacts enough in the small-scale food industry for a connected individual to track this mother back along its complex path, but it’s not easy. It takes a good deal of time to follow the trail out of the United States, and the religious institutions are so old that a character must dig into their ancient records to track the mother.
- Everyone on the trail suggests that there is something special about the vinegar made from this mother. The vinegar is vigorous and healthy-tasting, noticeable even by people not connoisseurs. People who frequent the farmers’ markets or the local food stores that sell this vinegar are almost uniformly vigorously healthy.

Storytelling Hints: Players tend to treat sources of “potions” like the vinegar made from this mother as resources to be expended, not minor wonders in themselves. This is fine for some games and counter to the theme for others. You can combat this by emphasizing how the provider of the vinegar respects the creation process. If the players’ characters are making the vinegar, it may serve the theme of the relic well for a Storyteller to decide that to mass produce the vinegar will degrade the mother and make it less effective over time.

As a mysterious lead in to this relic, a character may notice something special or odd about a popular vinegar at a farmers’ market. In addition to its full-bodied, complex flavor, the vinegar invigorates those who consume it in quantity, giving them the feeling of well being and seemingly improving their health. Following the vinegar back to its source and discovering the cause of this minor mystic power is an adventure in itself.

Effects

Protection Charm (••+):

This ancient mother of vinegar turns wine into a strong and rich-flavored vinegar. From a culinary perspective, this vinegar is superior and makes excellent meals. There’s more to the story, however: the vinegar has a mystic quality to it that encourages health. People who drink it straight or regularly flavor their food with it in significant quantities find themselves more resistant to disease. People unaware of the vinegar’s magic gain the benefit by eating it often; others treat it like a spot cure, chugging a bottle when necessary. This mother is still a “descendant” of the original mother from the Pyrenees and has weakened over time. By tracking it backwards and adding portions of



source mothers, a character can make it potent enough to also protect against drugs, poisons and toxins.

A ritual cost replaces the Willpower point for this power. Making vinegar with the mother requires attention and devotion to the process, or the vinegar will not be of proper quality. A character who wishes to make properly potent vinegar must control the vinegar's temperature and taste the product regularly to determine when it is finished and when to remove the mother. The process requires at least one hour of attention every day for two months and some capital (available to those with Resources 2 or greater) for investment in the initial materials. Square the number of dots of Resources spent financing the process to determine the final number of "doses." It is difficult to produce this vinegar in quantity enough to strike it rich without sacrificing the quality, but with sufficient attention, enough can be produced to turn a moderate profit, especially for those who market the product as a revitalizing elixir or "miracle cure".

Prayer to Saint Benedict

Durability 1, Size 1, Structure 2

Description: Copies of Prayers to Saint Benedict are easily obtainable by anyone with a library or an Internet connection, but this particular version is inscribed upon a black stole made of silk. The Prayer is stitched into the fabric of the stole in silver thread, and despite the age of the garment the silver of the thread still shimmers in sunlight.

History: Saint Benedict of Nursia was probably best known for writing the Benedictine Rule, a code of conduct for monks that, at one point, was the guiding principle for 40,000 monasteries (according to Catholic history). Saint Benedict himself was reported to have been so strict as the leader of the monastery at Monte Cassino that the other monks tried to poison him, but he blessed the cup and rendered the poison harmless (one of the saint's symbols is a broken cup).

Like most saints, Benedict has many areas of patronage. They include schoolchildren, poison, spelunkers, and, perhaps most important, protection from witchcraft and sorcery. Medieval Christians would sometimes pray to Saint Benedict (among others) to protect them from the evil creatures of the night. According to one story, he answered at least one of them.

The story goes that in the year 1230 AD, supernatural creatures attacked a group of monks living under the Benedictine Rule. These creatures were hideous blends of men and beasts, which leapt out of trees and from the shadows themselves, hungry for the blood of innocent Christians. The monks fled in fear, but the creatures cornered them. As they advanced, the monks lifted their voices in prayer to Saint Benedict.

According to legend, the good saint appeared to them and made the sign of the cross at the creatures, banishing them to Hell in a blast of fire and foul-smelling smoke. He then turned to his faithful followers and told them that should they need his protection, he would always grant it. He recited the following prayer:

Heavenly Father, bless me and protect me. Send your servant Benedict to turn back the forces of Hell, to counter the evil words of witches and blunt the fangs of the beasts. Guard us against poisoning of the body as well as of mind and soul, and thus be truly a "Blessed" one for us. Amen.

With that, the saint disappeared, but left behind a silk stole. One of the monks quickly stitched the prayer into the stole. From that point on, all members of that monastery were taught the Prayer of Saint Benedict. The knowledge did not spread beyond the immediate area, however, and in the year 1299 AD, the monastery was destroyed in a terrible fire.

The stole, however, survived the conflagration, though the knowledge of the Prayer's effects did not. The stole has since been passed along to various churches as part of a collection of holy relics from the 13th century, and no one, mundane or supernatural, knows the power that it contains.

- Church records, including *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, tell the tale of the monks and their miraculous escape from the supernatural. Most of these records refer to the creatures as "demons" or "servants of Hell," but one work dating from 1902 (thus predating the *Catholic Encyclopedia*) refers to them as "hunters from the darkness, speaking the tongue of the unclean spirits."
- A BBS post from the mid 1980s mentions the Benedictine Prayer. The user, identified only as "penitent_1," states that during an intense session of prayer the saint came to him and told him both the Prayer and where to find the stole. The user does not mention the stole's location in the post, nor does he recount the Prayer in its entirety. If investigating characters manage to track down this poster (a difficult feat, but not impossible), they find that he died in a fire in Italy two years after the post was made. His death was ruled an accident.
- A Catholic church in northern Italy was robbed of several important artifacts in 1994. The thief and most of the artifacts were recovered in London four weeks after the theft — the thief had been shot at close range by an unknown assailant and expired at the hospital after 12 hours in surgery. Before dying, he demanded confession, and while he was speaking to the priest, a nurse overheard him say "I threw it into the river, Father. It's in a sealed wooden box. You must get it before they do."
- A cargo ship arrived in New York harbor recently. Most of the crew was missing, and the rest were laid out in the mess hall with various wounds (gunshot, knife, axe, blunt objects) on their bodies. The lone survivor was quite insane, and could only repeat fragments of what seemed to be a prayer in his native French. He is currently institutionalized. All of the cargo on the ship was accounted for except for Lot 67, which was described in the manifest as "wooden box contained fabric, org. from London."



Storytelling Hints: The stole, of course, is simply a vessel. The important thing is the Prayer to Saint Benedict, which, when recited, grants a great deal of protection from the supernatural. Over the centuries, various factions of supernatural creatures have attempt to destroy (or capture) the stole and stamp out (or control) the Prayer, but apparently the good saint watches out for it.

Because of the power that the Prayer places in the hands of characters who know it (and would think to recite it at the appropriate moment), the Storyteller needs to be very careful about how he uses the Prayer in the chronicle. Of course, even posting it on the Internet with a notice that says “this will protect you from the supernatural” isn’t going to change the World of Darkness very much, because so few people would see it and believe compared to the overall population. But even so, the vampires, werewolves and mages of the world can’t afford to let the Prayer leak into common knowledge. As such, the stole works well for stories involving finding it and preventing it from falling into mortal hands (or keeping it in mortal hands, if the characters are normal human beings).

Quite apart from this kind of story, though, the characters might have pause when they consider that the Prayer *works*. Does that mean that God exists and that Saint Bene-

dict really did appear to those monks to save them? Or is the Prayer useless unless the user actually learns it from the stole, meaning that it’s the stole that confers the power to protect the user, not the Prayer? Or, perhaps the Prayer does do the work, but contained in those syllables is a coded failsafe, a spell of sorts that repels anything non-human. The characters might never know the truth, but scientifically minded ones might take great joy in experimenting (especially by giving the Prayer to humans likely to run afoul of the characters’ enemies).

Effects

Defend (•••••):

When the Prayer is recited (and the Willpower cost paid), any supernatural being attacking the praying character suffers a -5 to the attempt. The supernatural being feels a profound sense of shame and penitence, as though a higher power looks down on her actions and disapproves.

The Seal of Sekhmet

Durability 2, Size 1, Structure 3

Description: The seal is a bronze cylinder mounted to rotate on a yellowed ivory handle; the outer surface of the cylinder shows Egyptian-looking figures with a few standing and several kneeling in lapis lazuli. In front of the supplicating figures stands the regal form of a woman with the head of a lion. This figure matches common depictions of the war goddess, Sekhmet, known for her ferocity and blood-thirst.

The seal has a surprising amount of heft for its size; the handle is similar in size to a modern screwdriver, while the seal itself is little larger than a film canister in shape. Its weight, however, is disproportionately heavy, indicating that the bronze cylinder is likely solid.

Background: Cylindrical seals were once common in ancient Egypt and the Near East. Their mundane use was to imprint wax used to seal a message or end official letters and images. Most, however, were simple barrel shaped pieces of marble, stone or ivory, carved around the middle

to allow their owners to roll them across wax or clay to mark it as being done by their hand. *This* seal was one of a small number mounted to an ivory handle, transforming the simple cylinder into an elegant tool. These were reportedly created only for the highest priests of Sekhmet and Egypt's best doctors – occupations which sometimes overlapped. The greatest of them carried seals like these, bearing images of the lion-headed Sekhmet standing over and tending the ill and wounded, and used them in their craft. Before the seal acquired the mystic powers it has now, it had to be blessed by a priest of Sekhmet and touched to the blood and bile of those whom mundane medicine saved.

This cylindrical seal was discovered at the Karnak Temple in Egypt. Coincidence revealed some of its power when a shifted stone fell – it broke a worker's leg and knocked over the woman holding the seal, where it rolled over the bloody wound and, miraculously, repaired it. The seal disappeared that night, despite it being under guard. It hasn't been (officially) seen since.

Characters with high Craft ratings, especially those who focus on art, penmanship, or calligraphy, will recognize a cylindrical seal and be familiar with its use. Art Specialties in Academics also make this knowledge easier to dredge up. Those with a focus on Egypt will recognize the lion-headed representation of Sekhmet on the seal's surface, and those with knowledge of mythology and medicine may well know about the goddess' purported healing skill.

- British archaeologist Arthur Wendham recorded a detailed account of his viewing of an Egyptian relief uncovered in a dig that disappeared soon after its discovery and has never been seen again. His account mentions images of Egyptian men with hieroglyphic tattoos on their bodies otherwise unknown in Egyptian art. The description of those markings resembles the design on the seal.

- Modern rumors variously place a curiously engraved bronze-and-ivory roller-tool at Cromwell Hospital in London, with the Israel Defense Forces in the Western Asian Levant, with a sect of Kemetic Reconstructionists, neo-adherents of the ancient Egyptian religion and in the private collection of an aging British rock star.

Storytelling Hints: While simple mundane examples of Egyptian seals are not unheard of in museum collections, these relics are both more complex and well crafted than those currently held in public displays. Egyptologists who have heard of these seals covet them for their own collections, even when all supernatural properties are left out of their description. Those who are aware of the relic's supernatural powers, however, would be hard pressed to allow this particular seal to languish in idleness behind glass in their own displays, let alone any others.

Despite its obvious beneficial qualities, this relic is most interesting for the questions it raises about mankind's ancient past. It would be a valuable part of any museum collection, but any truth it has to tell will not come from within a glass case. It is the relic's mystical use that poses questions, and only through exploring its mystical properties can they be examined, let alone answered. Egyptian doctors and priests are thought to have commonly carried seals like these. Since this one can mystically heal people, is it possible that all of them could do so? Was the Egyptian culture strengthened by predictable and repeatable magic? Were supernatural tools like these common, in medicine or elsewhere? And what does it say about that society if it fell despite these supernatural advantages?

Effects

Gift of Vitality/Protection Charm (Disease) (•••, ••):

The cylindrical seal of Sekhmet repairs lethal wounds without a scratch and heals diseases. Healing a wound requires the seal to be inked in blood from the wound and then rolled over the injury; the injury seals perfectly under its touch and leaves only a rust-red marking of the image on the seal. Curing disease acts as a Protection Charm but eliminates an existing disease rather than preventing a patient from acquiring it.

Using the Protection Charm power requires the patient to cough up bile or mucus onto the





War Goddess and Healing

Sekhmet, noted Egyptian goddess of war, may seem an unlikely candidate to be associated with doctors and healing. Her name, however, became synonymous with physicians and medicine not despite her blood-lust, but because of it. Known as The Avenger of Wrongs, Lady of Slaughter, One Before Whom Evil Trembles and Scarlet Lady (because of her association with blood), priests in ancient Egypt believed that it was necessary to make sacrifices before a different statue of the goddess every day of the year in order to placate her wrath, meaning hundreds of statues of her were erected all over Egypt.

To protect these icons against theft or vandalism (since even the blood-goddess's ire wasn't a certain deterrent from such acts), her clergy reportedly coated the statues with anthrax, leading the war goddess to also come to be associated with disease as well as combat. Her followers thus would pray to her for protection against these same illnesses, leading to her association with health, healing and physicians.

seal, which is then rolled over the relevant part of the body. The disease fades instantly and the seal leaves a bile-black marking. These marks are as permanent as tattoos except when overlapped by another use of the seal's mystic power – a later mark removes previous ones where the new marking touches, ensuring that it is always recognizable. Healing people in this way leaves the character weak and tired – the Protection Charm effect temporarily costs a dot of a physical Attribute, as per Gift of Vitality, rather than a point of Willpower.

Shakespeare's Lost Play

Durability 0, Size 1, Structure 1

Description: A sheaf of old, dry papers, the ink smudged and faded with age. The Lost Play is written in several different styles (prompting the few Shakespearean scholars who have heard of it to question its authenticity). The pages were bound in leather long after being written and the binding doesn't quite fit the pages, leaving the manuscript looking overstuffed and ragged.

History: Every Shakespearean scholar dreams of discovering a "lost play," complete (or complete enough for publication) and verifiable as Shakespeare's work. It hasn't happened yet, despite many potential contenders, some of which Shakespeare may actually have collaborated on or edited. Hoaxes appear from time to time as well. Most Shakespearean scholars

recognize two plays, *Love's Labours Won* and *Cardenio*, as the only true lost works of the Bard (and nothing survives of those plays but the names and references to them as Shakespeare's work from independent sources).

But one other play that few scholars have even heard of came from the pen of William Shakespeare. Entitled *The Witches*, it was performed once, and only once, in summer of 1603, for a limited audience. (It would be fair, in fact, to call the performance a dress rehearsal). The play focused on the tragedy of three sisters, all devout, chaste and pure, who become enthralled with a character simply called "the Dark Man." By the end of the play, every major character is not only dead but seen burning in Hell – except for the youngest sister, who takes her place as the Dark Man's bride.

The play calls to mind the Greek myth of Hades and Persephone, but obviously introduces several Judeo-Christian aspects as well. Why it was never performed for a public audience is a matter of speculation, but one reason might be that the subject matter was simply too troublesome. Given the sheer amount of rape, blood and murder that Shakespeare's other plays contained, however, this theory is hard to support. Whatever the case, though, something prompted Shakespeare himself to forbid performance of the play and destroy the copies he had made, although certain aspects of the story wound up in his next tragedy, *Macbeth* (whether this similarity has anything to do with the long-standing theater superstition of not mentioning the name of "the Scottish Play" is unknown).

The other actors in the production, working from memory, composed a copy of *The Witches*, possibly in an attempt to sell it to a competing theatrical company. They failed to do so, however, and the manuscript was lost for centuries.

The reason that Shakespeare forbade the further performance of *The Witches* was that while sitting in the audience watching the play, he saw Hell. At the end of the play, when the youngest sister (named Nell) joins her lover at center stage, the audience saw the fires of Hell behind the Dark Man. The actors, facing forward, could not see it, but the rest of the audience (all friends of the cast or other people associated with the production) could. Shakespeare gathered them together after the production and made them swear that they would not reveal what they had seen, even to the actors. The assembled audience members, 26 in all, swore on their eternal souls, placing their hands on the manuscript, which the Bard then burned. They each slept fitfully that night, but those few weak souls who tried to speak of what they had seen afterwards found they could not.

After the actors in the production assembled their makeshift copy, though, this prohibition (apparently for everyone present, but certainly for the actors) was lifted. As such, references to *The Witches* do occasionally show up in memoirs, other plays, and writings from the 17th century, but since anyone who knew about it was sworn to secrecy, it's rarely mentioned in conjunction with Shakespeare. A dedicated scholar, though, might be able to dig deeply enough to uncover

the connection, perhaps finding a personal diary describing the events of that night.

- A moderately famous English stage actor named William Pafford died during a rehearsal of *Macbeth* in 1963. Pafford, playing the title role, showed up drunk for rehearsal one day and launched into a monologue that, while it contained similar language to *Macbeth*, was clearly not from the play. He then collapsed, clutching his chest, and before expiring gasped, "I can't get those damned lines out of my head." Pafford was known to dabble in the occult, and was a firm believer in the superstition of the *Macbeth* curse.
- Some of the witches' dialog in *Macbeth* is taken directly from *The Witches*. In his *Bocke of Plaies* (Book of Plays), the English herbalist and occultist Simon Forman remarks that he has "heard these words [speaking of the witches' dialog in *Macbeth* after a performance in 1611] before, but from what source I dare not say, lest I see Hell once more." The *Bocke of Plaies* is sometimes considered to be a later forgery, but it's not inconceivable that Forman would have been among the few witnesses to *The Witches* debut.
- Every building in which the manuscript has been kept for any length of time has burned. The Globe Theater burned in 1613, and while no one realized it at the time, the manuscript of *The Witches* was stashed in a disused room when it happened. Rare books collections, university libraries and other locales have all housed the manuscript (which is itself completely impervious to fire), but if left alone and unread too long, the flames come. The book seems to be trying, unsuccessfully, to draw notice to itself.

Storytelling Hints:

Shakespeare's life and times have some mystery to them, as any Shakespearean scholar knows, and the notion of hunting for clues for the whereabouts and details of *The Witches* in the Bard's later works might be of supreme interest to some troupe. Others, of course, might find Shakespeare dull as dishwater, and for those troupes, the Lost Play can still be useful as a McGuffin, since, if its authorship could be verified, it would be worth millions.

But beyond any question of money, the play, when performed, apparently opens at least a window, if not a full gateway, to some

place that Shakespeare took for Hell. What is this place? Some mages speak of Pandemonium, the Abode of Demons — might this play have hit on exactly the right combination of words to open a physical gateway here? Or does the gateway lead someplace else, someplace that no occultist has ever conceived? Since the play has only been performed once, it's impossible to say, but this is the sort of experiment that could easily involve a troupe's characters, either as investigators, document collectors, actors, producers or, perhaps, members of a secret society working to *stop* the show from going on.

Effects

- **Resist Fire (•):** The Lost Play will not burn, nor will any copy made of it. It is susceptible to destruction by any other means, though. Unlike other relics with this power, the Lost Play will not protect those who are carrying it from the effects of fire.

- **Manufacture Verge (•••••):** The Verge opens only when the play is performed. Since the play is the focus of the Verge, not the object, the manuscript is not destroyed when the Verge opens (see p. 100-101). The Verge only opens during the final scene, and only if the entire play is performed. The actors themselves cannot see the Verge (though audience members, stagehands and other people backstage can). Note that most Verges open gateways into the Shadow Realm, but this Verge might, at the Storyteller's discretion, open a portal to somewhere much more sinister.



Terracotta Warrior

Durability 1, Size 5, Structure 6

Description: A man stands silently, brown with dust and armored in an ancient style. Ever vigilant, he holds his position of attention without moving a muscle. His clothing is archaic, Chinese in style, and his weapons are ancient, and yet give the impression of being held at the ready, a mere breath from being ready to spring into action.

It's only after a second look that the truth becomes clear: he is made of clay, terracotta formed almost impossibly into a lifelike statue by some long forgotten but inarguably skilled craftsman. The statue's surface appears to have the rough texture of fired clay, and yet, when touched, feels more like real skin than would be expected. When touching a wrist, throat or chest, it sometimes feels like there's a light pulse, a wavering heartbeat just below the surface. Diagnostic equipment, however, reveal nothing of the sort. Still, those who have gazed upon the Terracotta Warriors often report that they cannot spend time around the statues without having the unmistakable feeling of being watched.

Background: The First Emperor of Qin ordered thousands of these warriors created in preparation for his death. More than one million workers and craftsmen labored for half a century to complete the emperor's massive crypt and his ten thousand guardians (though only just over eight thousand still survive). It was a project of such grand scope that it continued for more than a decade after the First Emperor's death and interment before it was declared complete

and the last of the statues were placed in an elaborate crypt surrounding their leader's tomb.

Each Terracotta Warrior is made in the likeness of a particular individual and is recognizable from every other one. Their faces have characteristics that make them appear not just lifelike, but natural – it is the flaws that make them look real. They are also dressed and styled properly for their rank and status. All this detail was necessary because, according to the astrologers, sorcerers and philosophers of the Emperor's court, the army *had* to be real in order to follow the First Emperor into the afterlife, where his forces would march before him and make him the First Emperor of death, the underworld, the afterlife and so on. They would fight for him and they would defend him against all dangers. To seal their power, each Terracotta Warrior was made with a piece of the soldier or officer it mimicked: a bit of flesh, a knot of hair, a broken tooth or so on. Their connection to still-living warriors would wake the statues after the First Emperor's death, and the soldiers' subsequent deaths would empower them further still.

The First Emperor's fate in the afterlife is largely unknown, but the soldiers' fates are not. Various records from around 200 B.C.E. describe thousands of warriors who were plagued with a mysterious ailment. Almost to a man, those who had donated their flesh to the Terracotta Army found themselves unable to sleep, channeling malevolent spirits and speaking in tongues. Most died early, some in battle or on duty, but many others killed themselves, unable to deal with the effects of their illness. Within 20 years after the First Emperor's death, not a single member of the ten



thousand soldiers who gave their likeness (and their flesh) to the Terracotta Army were still alive — but the emperor got his honor guard. After that, of course, there is no official word on the fate of the project. No one can truly know whether the First Emperor's plans worked or not — though some of China's masters of the occult reported, through séances and communing with the spirits of those who had gone before, that a period of mysterious order and calm overtook the realm of the afterlife little more than ten years past the First Emperor's death.

Chinese farmers discovered the crypt of the Terracotta Army in 1974, and the government immediately cordoned off the area, restricting access almost entirely for the first few years and then eventually allowing archeologists, scientists and finally tourists to visit the soldier-statues. The Terracotta Army is a monument to the nation's heritage, and one they will not allow to be damaged or sullied. Even to this day, the Chinese government lets the terracotta warriors out of the country only rarely: they exhibited four at the 1982 World's Fair, a few were part of the Imperial Tombs of China exhibit which toured American museums in the 1990s, and twelve are currently being allowed to visit various European museums in a similar traveling exhibit.

After a few of the Terracotta Warriors were displayed as part of a short American tour of museums in the early 1990s, many with an interest in artifacts have at least heard of the army. An Academics Specialty in China or Chinese History gives characters access to many of the legends (modern or historic, respectively) about the Terracotta Army. Anyone with a decent Crafts skill and a Specialty related to sculpture, ceramics or clay has heard of the excruciating scope of their creation, at least in passing. Likewise, those familiar with China's history immediately before the Common Era, or who have done research in the burial rites of the wealthy or powerful throughout history are probably aware of the Army's existence and the reason for their original creation.

- One of the four displayed at the World's Fair was replaced with a replica. Two of the twelve lent to museums are fakes. In most accounts, China does not know of the replacements, though conspiracy theorists argue that their loss is part of some complex plan.
- There is a little bit of human flesh in every terracotta warrior. Some say it is a bit of brain or eyes, others say it is the heart or any piece of flesh at all. Legends claim that this "sacrifice" had to be willingly given, but that many soldiers, after falling sick while their likeness was being crafted, attempted to sabotage the creation of the Army in an attempt to regain their "souls".
- One accounting from a medium who purported to have channeled an ancestor spirit from the period claims that the First Emperor lost control of his army not long after his death. Finding themselves (for the most part) prematurely on the non-living side of existence, the medium claims, the soldiers turned on the leader who was responsible for their fates and subjected him to the

kinds of torture which only those who are already dead can devise or endure.


Storytelling Hints: A Terracotta Warrior is a powerful tool for protecting an area. Those who possess one have a strong defense against spiritual or material assailants. As well, while many reproductions have been created throughout history, owning an authentic Terracotta Warrior is a mark of status and may be seen by others as a symbol of the owner's strength and power — and a warning when that ally dies anyway. An enemy with a terracotta warrior has the same protection, which the characters are likely to discover at the worst possible time.

On a more public note, China most certainly wants its cultural treasures back, so anyone who possesses a Terracotta Warrior, but who does not hide it, is making a statement. For an ally who reveals his possession to the characters, it says that he trusts them with his secrets; an enemy who lets it be known may well be saying that she can take the heat or is laying a trap for anyone foolish enough to turn her in. Players' characters have a harder time using terracotta warriors, since they are hard to safely (or discretely) move from place to place.

Effects

Bolster Territory (••): The Terracotta Warrior contains a dormant warrior ghost, ready to fight beyond its death for its master. Every Terracotta Warrior would leap to the ready were the spirit of the First Emperor threatened within their range of senses (or at least that is what the First Emperor would have liked to believe), but the First Emperor's ghost is nowhere to be seen. By smearing a small amount of her blood on a warrior's lips, a character can attune the statue to herself. It does not leap to defend her as it was designed to do for its emperor, but it does strengthen her against her enemies. When she is threatened in the terracotta warrior's presence, the effects of Bolster Territory automatically activate (without the lethal wound cost). The character also feels empowered, as though she had effective backup in the situation, and her enemies feel the vague discomfort that comes with suspecting they might be outnumbered or outgunned despite the apparent odds of the situation. The character must ritually attune the warrior every week to maintain its vigil; attunement also costs four Willpower points each week. She may instead attune it permanently by spending one permanent Willpower dot. Attuned warriors (using either method) give the character access to their Smite powers. Each additional attuned terracotta warrior within the power's range increases the Bolster Territory benefits by +1; a maximum honor guard of 10 terracotta warriors can combine in one area for this effect.

Smite (•••): The warriors were the First Emperor's sword in the afterlife as well as his shield — he could not hope to conquer death, the afterlife and the realms of Heaven without strong soldiers. At his command, the spirits of these warriors would strike out against his enemies and destroy them. Ghostly spears, swords and arrows attack victims. This Power functions as Smite with these changes: Only one enemy of the character suffers the damage; the character can name the target



(and must do so for inanimate targets) or simply allow the warrior to assault someone the character considers an enemy who is within range. The character need not be holding the statue, and the power's "flare" is only obvious within about a city block. The power's cost activates any terracotta warriors in the area attuned to her; each attacks a designated target or someone considered an enemy. The attack's damage doubles against targets in Twilight.

The Turk

Durability 1, Size 7, Structure 8

Description: The Turk is a closed cabinet, about three and a half feet long, two feet wide and two and a half feet high with an attached facsimile of a sitting man wearing a turban, made up in the popular western idea of an East Indian sorcerer. The cabinet's many doors give the impression that they conceal great wonders, answers to not just a mystery, but potentially to *all* mysteries. The mannequin's creased face and alert but hooded eyes convey the weary wisdom of someone who has seen too much and lived too long. On the cabinet's top is a chess board, and opening the cabinet doors reveals a complex arrangement of cogs and wheels. One door reveals a shallow drawer within which rest a full set of chess pieces, half black and half white.

Background: Wolfgang von Kempelen created the Turk in 1770 and introduced it to the court at Schönbrunn Palace. It played chess games against hundreds of people and usually won, often in less than a half-hour. Von Kempelen publicized the Turk as a chess-playing automaton and calculated his boasts to attract incredulous and ambitious challengers. It defeated some of the era's most famous and intelligent people, including Napoleon Bonaparte and Benjamin Franklin. The Turk traveled Europe and earned Kempelen a great deal of money until its creator's death.

Johann Mälzel purchased the contraption after Kempelen's death and continued touring with it for profit. He thereby met famous personalities (such as Charles Carroll, one of the original signers of the Declaration of Independence) and many excellent chess players. His time with the Turk was profitable, but Mälzel fell into debt and sought better luck in America. After his death, the Turk ended up in a Philadelphia museum and eventually burned in a great fire.

Or so it is said.

According to many books and legends, the secret to the Turk's power was deception. Many skeptics have detailed a possible method for the Turk's deception: all the gears were a distraction, some claim, and the cabinet's interior had space for a small person inside, whose seat set on rails moved to avoid detection when one set of cabinet doors is open. From there, he directed the Turk's plays and won through his own skill. Others claim that the individual (a young boy or very small adult) actually sat within the Turk figure itself and from there directed the games. Inevitably, these stories claim that the "true" secret of the Turk was revealed

to the author after the Turk's destruction by someone who had gained one of its previous owner's confidences before or after the fire.

Such tales, however, are as much as misdirection as the trick they describe. The Turk did not burn in a fire; it had already been removed from the museum and replaced with a replica. Neither was it operated by a human from within; it was a true automaton with specific uses.

Educated con men and students of European history have heard of this famous hoax. Computer experts, also, know of the Turk as the faked predecessor of Deep Blue, a modern computer-driven chess program. People with rarefied connections are more likely to hear about its current whereabouts, although they may still believe it to be a hoax, even if they do encounter the original Turk.

- A European prince with public interest in mechanical devices and board games of skill was once the owner of the Turk. While he has never made public claims about his possession, he is known for jokes that are not quite jokes that make reference to intelligent machines and life as a game. He may, however, no longer possess the Turk: his jests have turned sour and he complains about "losing the game that is life."
- Some of that prince's acquaintances and servants remark that they occasionally feel as if he's predicted their decisions and actions. The sensation of being a piece in a game (many say pawn, others refuse to admit feeling so lowly) is common in those who make such claims; they also say his attitude towards them is demeaning. Apart from this sensation, the prince is known as a savvy (if dislikable) player in European politics.
- Certain books on the occult describe sympathetic magic with a focus on using smaller models of interaction to shape or describe life itself; some reference tactical maneuvers in general, or chess specifically. One of these was first published in 1755; several more were published in the years following Mälzel's purchase of the device.

Storytelling Hints: Characters should feel the Turk's influence before they discover the relic itself. They may well get the feeling of being pawns in a game – someone out there is predicting their every move and acting to stymie them while suffering as little damage himself as possible. Alternatively, they may witness or hear reports of others being expertly manipulated by some unknown individual or force.

The Turk, before or after it becomes known, is a tool manipulating the characters from afar, and that's a feeling that nobody enjoys. Thus, even if wielded with the best intentions, it and its owner are inevitably perceived as the enemies.

Should it fall into the characters' hands, the Turk should still remain an enigma. Even the most brilliant engineer, computer scientist or programmer cannot be sure of how the device functions. Working with an intelligence that comes from an unknown source is upsetting enough, but never being sure if it is smarter than it lets on is worse.

Even those who petition the Turk for its wisdom should always fear a secret agenda on the machine's part, even while being drawn to the advantage of its accuracy. That the Turk employs its prophecy through the metaphor of a chess game may appear sinister in the hands of a villain, but even in the hands of the characters, its prophecies may still be suspect.

Effects

A character may activate the Turk by describing a situation to the machine and playing a game of chess with it. Benefits come from analysis of where the pieces move during play and final placements when it comes to check. The character relates given pieces to people, organizations or influences involved in the described situation once the game is over; they are often thematically relevant to the piece in question. (The queen represents someone with much power or influence, the rook indicates someone with significant straightforward power and the pawn suggests a lesser individual, servant, assistant or contact, for example.) Games provide insights into the character's best actions.

Investigatory Charm (•••): If the character describes a short-term situation – basically a scene that he expects to encounter in the future – his observations of the game reveal valuable information about the events in that scene. By activating this power and playing the game (which never takes more than a half-hour), the character gains the power's benefits when he participates in that scene in the future. Alternately, the character can give the machine a rough sketch of his worldly situation and play out a less specific game. The game describes a situation that will soon come to pass, which the character may study for advance knowledge. Activating the power this way requires a successful Intelligence + Academics roll; for each success, the power's benefit can be held in reserve for one day.

With the Turk, this power doesn't represent exceptional perception but forewarning. A character is not eagle-eyed or of acute hearing; he anticipates actions and influences and is thus perfectly aware of them. When the character tries for an exceptional success rather than accepting automatic success, he is attempting to take a shortcut through the machine's prediction for an immediate advantage. It can do great things, but it is a risk. This power does not have the usual cost; the half-hour game is a ritual cost, and when used it shares the same curse as the other power, described there.

Potent Success, Politics (•••): The more complex way to use the Turk is to describe a long-term political conflict and begin a game that will last weeks, maybe months. The Turk makes no more than one move a day, sometimes no more than one move per relevant change in the situation. Every move the character makes represents positioning of his (or his side's) forces in the conflict; the Turk's moves are predictions of the opposing side's forces. Successful interpreting these actions gives the character an edge over his enemies, providing the power's bonus; each

move is an activation of the power. The Turk better predicts the actions of people it has personally met and judged. If a use of this power principally involves people the Turk has played in chess (something it can do without invocation of any power), the character gains the benefit of the five-dot version of this power. Using the Turk this way precludes its activation for the Investigatory Charm for the duration of the extended game.

Rather than the power's normal cost, the character gains the Megalomania derangement for the duration of a Politics-improving game. The other power gives Megalomania for only one day, beginning in the affected scene. Characters suffering this derangement feel like the ultimate puppet-masters – after all, they're the ones moving pieces around the board. Others tend to see them as arrogant and aloof.

Writ of Safe Haven

Durability: Varies, Size: Usually 1, Structure: Varies

Description: A Writ of Safe Haven can take many forms. It might be a child's drawing of the monster haunting his bedroom and the angel that protects him. It might be a lover's written vow to protect his paramour and make sure she doesn't come to harm. It might be a "Wrong Way" sign that a teenager stole one night with his friends and hung in his room as a memento of their time together. People have been creating these Writs for as long as they have had territories to defend. Because the form of the Writ varies, the Size, Durability and Structure of the object varies as well.

History: Who was the first person to create a Writ of Safe Haven? The world will never know. The Writ is as old as the written word, and so it might be that in the far-flung past, when mankind first discovered the power of writing to cement meaning and language, that some ancient sorcerer also realized that the monsters of the darkness would respect a written declaration of sovereignty. Over the centuries, priests of all faiths were sometimes taught how to create such Writs, but faith is not necessary. Love, however, seems to be.

In order to create a Writ of Safe Haven, the creator must truly love the people or place he is trying to protect. This "love" doesn't have to be of the romantic or even familial sort, however. A priest might love his congregation, a warlord might love his soldiers, and an old man might love the tree where he first met his wife. In some cases, it's enough to love oneself, but not in a narcissistic sense. If a person is honestly convinced that the world is better for his presence (perhaps because he is a good father, teacher, scholar, etc.), he can create a Writ of Safe Haven to protect himself.

The second step in creating a Writ of Safe Haven is to write (or less commonly, draw) some representation of protection or admonition. The captain trying to protect his soldiers as they hold a strategic location writes a letter to his enemies, damning them should they ever try to harm his boys. The mother whose child is beset with nightmares

writes a poem declaring that no monsters are allowed in the little boy's room. The priest whose congregation has told him of unholy creatures feeding on their blood while they lay helpless tears a page from his Bible and underlines some appropriate passages. Any of these things might become Writs.

Writs of Safe Haven are powerful, but they do not hold their magic indefinitely. Once they are activated, they function from the time of activation until the next sunrise, at which point they lose their magic. The person who empowered the Writ can do so again at that point, subject to the rules presented under the Relic Creator Merit (see p. 85).

- In searching the wreckage of a burned house, the characters (who might be police, firemen, insurance investigators, friends of the residents, or just nosy) find an envelope with the seal unbroken, charred but intact. In it is a Writ of Safe Haven from brother to brother, promising that “Nothing bad’s going to happen to you tonight.”
- An old monastery, long out of use, is excavated before being destroyed to build new housing. Investigators find that the support structure of the building has long, Latin phrases carved into it, all of them prayers against evil. The entire building is a Writ of Safe Haven, but unlike most such Writs, it has not lost its magic. What is it protecting — or holding captive?

Storytelling Hints:

Characters are likely to encounter Writs of Safe Haven in one of three situations. First, they might create them, provided a character has the Relic Creator Merit. Second, a character might make use of a Writ in trying to protect himself or someone close to him. The Writ might, in this instance, provide the “second

wind” that the character requires to turn back the forces of darkness. Finally, the characters might *be* the forces of darkness, trying to capture, kill or simply get close to a target protected by the Writ.

In any story involving the Writ, though, the theme of love and protection should loom large. Anyone who creates a Writ *has* to be able to love, and as such, being able to create one says something about a person’s moral fiber. This isn’t to suggest that a character needs a particular Morality rating in order to create a Writ of Safe Haven. It’s a staple of the horror genre that even evil creatures can occasionally feel love, even if the expression of that love is truly twisted. But if the characters are attacking a place or person protected by a Writ, they should know, somehow, that they are encroaching upon something that is very dear to someone else. Whether or not that gives the characters pause depends upon the characters and the players controlling them, of course, but in a story involving the Writ, it is entirely appropriate for the person who created (or at least activated) the Writ to die in defense of her loved one.

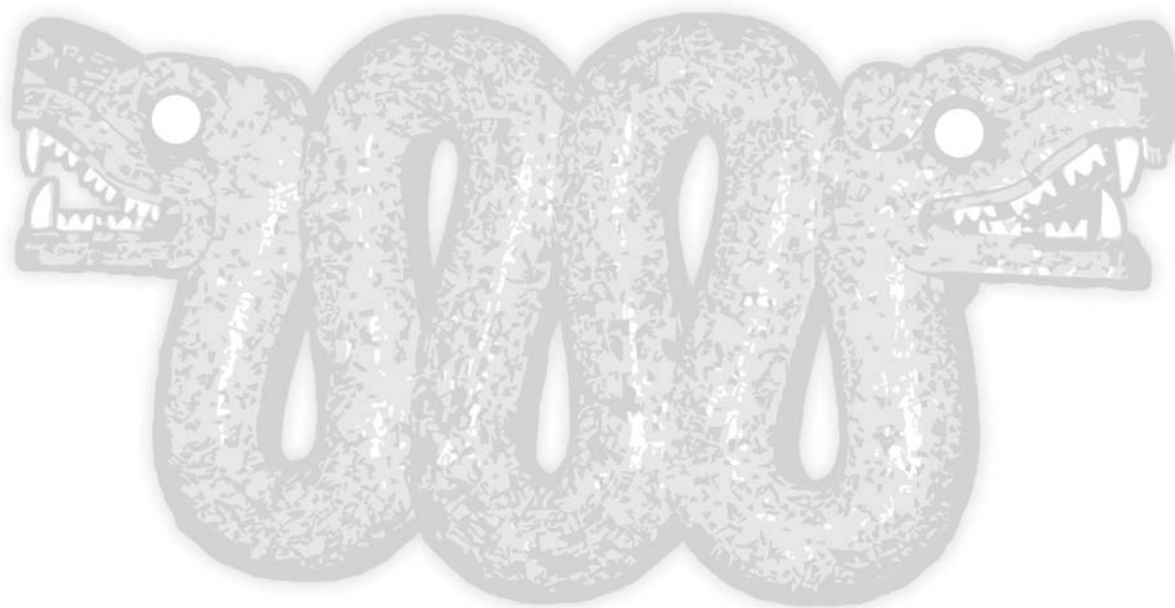


Effects

- **Bolster Territory:** The Writ of Safe Haven protects the specified person *and* any person named as his protectors. For instance, a man scratches the words “I will protect you” into the door frame in his son’s room. If he activates this Writ, both he and his son enjoy the benefits of this power. The usual cost of activation for this power does not apply; the character must instead spend a Willpower point. These powers only apply, though, as long as the protector and his

charges are within line of sight of each other, and within five yards of the Writ. Writs of Safe Haven do *not* require the blood cost that usually accompanies the Bolster Territory power; love takes the place of blood.

- **Bulwark of Sanity (•••••):** This benefit only applies to the protector. It goes into effect when the Writ is activated. The protector doesn’t have to keep the Writ on him for the Bulwark to function (indeed, depending on the form of the Writ this may be impossible), but he must stay within that Writ’s area of effect.





"What's your name, sir?"

The cop looked bored.

He'd clearly been working the beat long enough not to get rattled at the sight of blood. Enoch, for similar reasons, wasn't upset, but he was a bit confused.

"Marvin Cornett."

Enoch figured he might as well use his real name.

No one knew him here anyway.

"And you found the body?"

Just ask what you want to know, jackass, thought Enoch.

"Yeah. I was coming to visit Al. We met once in Europe."

"Was he expecting you?"

"No." Enoch looked at the body on the floor. He knew *how* Al had died – terminal bad luck. Someone had knocked him into a glass table and he'd got his throat slit. *How* was obvious. *Why* was another matter. "We haven't spoken in a few years, and I figured I'd drop in while I was in town."

The cop turned away to talk to his sergeant, and Enoch scanned the room again. Destiny. The room stank of it. Old, fetid destiny, rotting like a body on a pirate's gallows. Al hadn't died because of his own bad luck. He'd died because of someone else's.

Something else's, Enoch realized. That's why the destiny was so potent. It was old, riding around on an object. But which one? Al had discovered several important relics in his time, but knew nothing of their significance. Which one had someone grabbed and fled with into the night, while Al's body lay cooling on the floor?

Or was that the way of it? Enoch sniffed the room again, this time looking for gold. He found it in Al's hand, but not now.

A few hours ago, Al had held the apple.

No wonder he's dead, thought Enoch. Someone walked over his grave, and he shivered. *Maybe Davey was right.*

Chapter Three: Powers and Prices

This chapter includes descriptions of the relic Powers and effects mentioned in the previous chapter, along with several new Merits related to the ownership, discovery, maintenance and creations of mystical objects.

New Merits

The Merits presented here fall into one of two general categories. The first set of Merits deals with research, investigation and detective work, and as such are appropriate for many different kinds of characters, not just those involved in relic hunting. Some of these Merits appear in other **World of Darkness** books with slightly different descriptions, though the game mechanics and the names remain the same.

The second category involves the relics themselves. These Merits *might*, at Storyteller's discretion, be available only at character creation, or they might be attainable during play as the character discovers his own destiny or trains himself in the art of creating mystical objects.

Research and Investigation Merits

In addition to the Merits below, the following Merits from the **World of Darkness Rulebook** are highly appropriate for characters who regularly engage in intense research: Contacts, Eidetic Memory, Encyclopedic Knowledge, Iron Stamina (to stay awake longer), Languages, Meditative Mind.

A Little Knowledge (●)

Prerequisite: Mortal (non-supernatural)

Effect: Your character has either had a brush with the supernatural or been in a field that has regular casual contact with the supernatural (like medicine or law enforcement) for long enough to know that something else is out there. While he doesn't know anything specific (i.e., this Merit doesn't give any automatic bonus to Occult rolls or offer any specific frame of reference), your character doesn't suffer negative penalties when investigating events or historical oddities for which there is no rational antecedent.

For instance, a scholar with this Merit finds an anachronism in a text supposedly from the 17th century. Rather than immediately dismissing the text as a fraud, the character digs deeper and discovers other references to future events, along with the author's descriptions of his horrible visions of things to come.

This Merit also offers a +1 to any roll made to recognize a strange or otherworldly situation. If the character ever becomes a supernatural being, including a ghoul or a Sleepwalker, he loses this Merit.

Good Time Management (●●)

Prerequisite: Academics, Medicine or Science ●●

Effect: Years of late nights poring over books and trying to get research done before the library closes have served the character well. She can make effective use of her time, provided that she's not relying on anyone else who might slow her

"Suleiman-bin-Daoud was strong. Upon the third finger of the right hand he wore a ring. When he turned it once, Afrits and Djinn came Out of the earth to do whatever he told them."

— Rudyard Kipling, "The Butterfly That Stamped"

down. Each roll in an extended action has the time requirement reduced by one quarter. For instance, if the character is translating a text and each roll would normally require one hour, a character with this Merit only requires 45 minutes for each roll. Characters using teamwork (see p. 134 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**) cannot benefit from this Merit, nor can characters relying on machines (such as lab equipment).

Good Time Management only applies to mundane actions. It does *not* apply to magical rituals of any kind, though it does apply to researching such rituals. The Knowledge Seeker Power (p. 98) supersedes this Merit if the two are combined.

Multi-Lingual (● to ●●●●●)

Effect: The character either has knack for languages or grew up in a culture that teaches several different tongues. In addition to the character's native language, the player may choose two languages for every dot in this Merit that the character speaks conversationally.

Note that the character cannot speak effortlessly in these languages. Communicating quickly or over the telephone requires an Intelligence + Wits roll, and talking about anything esoteric (including humor, politics and certainly occult matters) imposes a penalty of -1 to -3 dice. Reading the language requires an Intelligence + Academics or Wits roll (depending on how the character learned the language; study or immersion, respectively), and writing something coherent in the language requires a roll of Wits + Academics or Intelligence (again, study or immersion). Even if these rolls succeed, the character's utterances or writings obviously come from a non-native, unless the player rolls an exceptional success, in which case the character manages to sound like a native-born speaker of the language for a few moments.

The player can spend one experience point for the character to become fluent in one of languages covered by this Merit.

Well-Traveled (●)

Effect: The character has either made a study of customs and practices in cultures other than his own or, as the name suggests, traveled extensively enough to know such customs. The character receives the 9-again benefit on any Social roll involving dealing with a foreign culture, or Mental roll for remembering the practices and mores of such a culture. This knowledge is purely practical; the character might remember that it's rude to show one's bare head in a given country, but not why.

Relic Merits

The Merits below all tie in with mystical objects and relics somehow. If a character possessing such a Merit loses the object to which it refers (where applicable), the Merit dots are lost.

Relic Creator (●●●●●)

Prerequisites: Occult 2, Crafts 2

Effect: The character can create limited-use mystical items, such as a Hand of Glory or the Writ of Safe Haven (see p. 79-81). Doing so is a time-consuming and sometimes expensive or dangerous process, and not even the most talented and prolific craftsman can churn out such objects quickly.

To create a relic, the character must first have suitable materials. This might require the character to procure components or ingredients. If any preparation is required (carving a statue or writing a poem, for instance), the player makes the appropriate rolls to make the vessel ready for magic (typically Dexterity + Crafts or Manipulation + Expression).

Once the object is ready, the character performs a ritual appropriate to her style of magic and the type of enchantment she is trying to lay upon the object. The player makes an extended Resolve + Occult roll. The target number of successes is equal to five times the relic's rating, based on the formula presented under the Relic Merit, below. Every roll takes one hour of work, prayer, chanting, dancing or whatever activity is appropriate to the ritual. The player may only make a number of rolls equal to the character's Resolve + Occult dice pool.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The object has taken on the appropriate magical properties, as far as the creator can tell, but in fact the object has become tainted by faulty enchantment. It takes on a curse (see p. 113-116), which becomes activated when the object's magic would normally take effect.

Failure: The character accumulates no successes. If the number of rolls surpasses the character's Resolve + Occult pool before the target is reached, the magic doesn't "take." The item must be ritually cleansed and re-enchanted.

Success: The character makes progress toward the goal. If she reaches the target number of successes, the relic is complete and functions as described in Chapter Two.

Exceptional Success: Significant progress is made toward the goal. No other effect.

Relic (● to ●●●●●)

Effect: The character owns a mystical object or relic. How the character came to own the object is up to the player. The character might have inherited the object, stolen it, purchased it or just found it by sheer luck. Note that this Merit only represents an object that a character begins play with; if your character finds a relic during a story, you don't need to pay the experience points for it.

Relics have a variable point cost, determined as follows:

Condition	Cost in Merit Dots
Powers	+1 per Power dot
Durability	+1 per dot
Equipment Bonus	+1 per dot (maximum of +5 above what such an item would normally confer)
Bonded (the item only works for this character)	+1
Cost	-1 per dot of Cost (see p. 116-117)
Curses/Drawbacks	-2 per Curse (see p. 113-116)

Example: Matt, in creating a new character for Chuck's chronicle, decides to put some Merit points into a relic. He has visions of a ring that looks plain, but in fact contains a deep and abiding power.

Right off the bat, Matt decides he doesn't want to deal with anyone stealing the ring and using it on him. The ring is Bonded to his character (1 dot). He decides against raising its Durability, and a ring doesn't normally confer an equipment bonus anyway, so he doesn't spend points in those areas. For Powers (see p. 87-113 for a full list of Relic Powers), Matt chooses Hypnotic Suggestion and Reward Temptation — the ring allows the wielder greater benefit from indulging his Vice and great opportunity to do so. These are both two-dot Powers, which raises the total to five; a little more than Matt was hoping to spend. Fortunately, there are ways to lower the cost.

Matt decides that the ring is Cursed (see p. 113). Yes, using it can grant the character untold amounts of pleasure and mental fortitude, but it saps his physical well-being. The ring has the Leech curse, sapping the character's Health away every time he uses it. Matt decides that this Health loss manifests as a wracking cough, sometimes with a bit of blood. This drops the total cost to 3 Merit dots, which both Matt and Chuck feel is fair. All that remains is for Matt to figure out where he got the ring, what it looks like and how he discovered its powers, all details that he will work into his character's prelude.

Note: The reduction in price for taking Costs is only applicable if these costs are taken in conjunction with the specified cost of the chosen Power(s), not as a replacement for the costs listed. If the relic only works at night, and its Power still costs the specified Willpower to activate, the builder can subtract the appropriate 1-dot Cost value for a Temporal Cost. If the relic only works at night, and the builder takes this limitation in place of its Willpower cost, it does not lower the relic's overall cost.)

Relic Analyst (•)

Effect: The character has an instinctive understanding of how relics work, what their capabilities are, and how

to make use of them. This understanding is by no means complete, nor does it grant prescience about curses or other pitfalls of the relic. This Merit grants a +1 to any attempts to figure out an item's "trigger" condition or activation, detect curses and any other roll that involves figuring out *practical* (not historical) uses for a mystical object (see p. 132 of Chapter 4 for a sample scenario).

Relic Powers

The relics within these pages bring a plethora of new Powers to the World of Darkness. Some are similar to those possessed by other supernatural creatures or items detailed in other **World of Darkness** books. Others are unique to **Reliquary**. In general, however, there are two types of Powers which relics may have, and it behooves Storytellers and players who will be using and creating relics to recognize the difference between them.

Supernatural Powers

These are the mystical and magical effects that players assume occult objects have. Lovecraftian relics have powers that are modeled in the game world the same way bullets are modeled in the game world: they are a tangible force present in the reality of the game world and so given mechanical force in the game. A sword is supernaturally well balanced or sharp. A ring turns its wearer invisible. A cup negates any poison it touches.

This is the common use of mechanical effects in most role playing games, and many relics possess such supernatural powers. They are not, however, the only type of powers a relic can have.

Dramatic Powers

These are the personal and psychological effects that an object can provoke from characters in the game world without any supernatural power being involved. For example, the Maltese Falcon motivated people to kill, and that was a key thematic part of the story, but the actual object had no supernatural power that magically compelled people to murder. Rather, *The Maltese Falcon* is a story about motivated people, and the Maltese Falcon is a simple tool for motive. Similarly, a relic treasure map may have no supernatural powers, and yet, because it is linked to the fabled Fountain of Youth, or the legendary city of El Dorado, it may motivate those who possess it to acts of violence, greed or treachery that they might never otherwise contemplate.

While dramatic powers such as these are less tangible than supernatural powers, they can contribute depth and conflict to a story.

Powers and Mechanics

The key difference between supernatural and dramatic powers is normally that supernatural powers are systemized, whereas dramatic ones are left to the player's reaction. With some items, this is a fine solution. With relics, however, the

power of the object is potent enough to warrant being modeled with game mechanics.

To put it another way, we model guns and bullets using game mechanics because they undeniably have the ability to ruin a character, or at least change the circumstances of the choices he makes. A suitcase full of cash or a faith-shaking relic is just as capable of ruining characters, of blowing holes through the ideas that make them who they are, so they deserve special rules, too.

For the purposes of creating relics, we have designed effects that provoke tough choices and give them teeth, so that a player can't just blow off the question of whether his character is tempted or not, whether encountering this object has an effect on him or whether he walks away unscathed.

Instead, now it's a feature of the relic that the character will suffer a derangement if he listens to the seductive whispers of the cursed voodoo doll, or change his Vice if he spends too much time reading the sacrilegious text, or lose Willpower (or worse) if he doesn't do something about the gun that killed his father.

These are individual mechanisms because they are only meant to be used to dramatize select, important objects. They say, implicitly, that the effect is only present in the game for as long as it takes players to deal with the dramatic questions raised by a particular object. These are not mandates that, in the World of Darkness, any sum of money greater than one million dollars requires a Resolve + Composure roll (or whatever) to resist mucking around with it, or that any murder weapon carries with it the ill-fortune of its former owner.

Powers

The following are a selection of Powers, both supernatural and dramatic, which can be assigned to relics as both plot devices or, with the Storyteller's permission, bought by players through the Relic Merit to create unique objects which their characters' possess.

Each includes a point value in dots, which, along with Durability, Bonded and other positive (or mostly positive) qualities, adds to the cost of the Merit. These dots can be reduced or balanced out with Costs or Curses, as explained in the Relic Merit on p. 85-86.



Always Returns (•••)

This ability gives an object what some call a “boomerang effect,” wherein it finds a way to return to its keeper no matter how far away it ends up. The object's master can command the object to return to him, even if the object is far out of his hands. The object may not come with great speed – if its owner is in New York, and the object is in San Francisco, calling it home assumes that it takes a relatively circuitous path to come back to its owner. It travels by seemingly mundane means: picked up as a trinket by a Fed-Ex driver, left at a highway diner where a child absconds with it secretly, driven across country to the point where the parents discover the stolen object and toss it out the window of their car... right onto the user's front lawn as he's standing there picking up the morning newspaper. Note that the object still had to travel nearly 3,000 miles and travel for 2-3 days, but it does get to its destination.

Cost: No cost to use this Power, but at the time of the object's purchase or creation, a character must invest 4 Willpower points to “bond” with the device. This is a one-time expenditure. The owner needn't be fully cogent of the bond forming; it can happen spontaneously (though a player should always have the choice, even when the character does not).

Dice Pool: Resolve + Crafts

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The object, wherever it is, is either destroyed or picked up by someone who invests the proper Willpower to make it their own, thus severing the bond with the object's prior keeper. The severance of the bond fills him with emptiness and may leave a character irritable for a time, incurring a -1 to Social rolls.

Failure: The object does not return home as commanded. The owner may try again in an hour at no penalty.

Success: The object travels to its keeper in whatever way it can. It takes a journey that often comprises what seems like a series of random events to arrive at its destination.

Exceptional Success: As with success, but the travel time is halved. Perhaps it ends up on a plane or as part of a literal Fed-Ex next-day delivery.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+1	The user knows exactly where the item is and can visualize it.

Battery of Will (●●●●)

An object possessing this Power can "store" Willpower points beyond a user's capacity, thus creating a battery of sorts from which Willpower can be drawn in a time of need.

Cost: 2 Willpower per 1 Willpower stored

Dice Pool: No roll necessary. Once per day, the character can spend two Willpower points to store one Willpower point in the object. Up to five Willpower posts (net cost will be 10 Willpower) can be stored in this way.

A character can withdraw these stored-up points at any time. He cannot draw more points in a scene than his Resolve score, however.

Action: Reflexive

Bolster Territory (● to ●●●●●)

Whether trapped in a house assailed by the lumbering undead or walking the block held under the sway of your gang's influence, it's important to mark one's domain and keep it safe, even if only temporarily. A character with a relic empowered with Bolster Territory can give himself a bit of an edge when within the range of this item. He simply sets it down and, upon activation, gains a number of minor bonuses that, when added together, make him more effective at protecting himself and his chosen domain. (See below for these bonuses.)

Relics with Bolster Territory might indicate protection in some way, be it a simple 'No Trespassing' sign hung askew on a chain-link fence or a defunct gun emplacement that now provides a different kind of defense. Some are simply favored objects: a beloved

jukebox, a street sign from one's hometown, a collection of fingers stolen from defeated enemies.

The higher number of dots a relic has in this Power, the larger the radius of its protective benefit. Each dot is equal to a ten yard radius. Thus, one-dot is about a room, while five dots protects a much larger space, equivalent to a large house or part of a city block.

The object cannot move during the Power's activation. If it moves by more than an inch, the relic loses "touch" with the territory and user it bolsters, and it must be reactivated to provide the benefit.

Cost: The device must be rubbed down in the blood of the user. This blood must come from a lethal wound. This Power demands that at least one point of lethal damage be taken in letting that blood. (However, the user needn't necessarily do this to himself – if he's already in the middle of a fracas and finds that his enemy has opened a slice under his ribs, he can use that blood in service to the relic.)

Dice Pool: Wits + Survival

Action: Instant (requires the smearing of blood on object)

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The territory rejects the user. While within the object's radius of power, the subject suffers from a halved Speed and Defense (round up).

Failure: The relic fails to bolster the territory or the user.

Success: Within the object's radius of power, the user gains a number of benefits. He gains a +2 to his Defense, +3 to his Initiative modifier, and +4 to Speed. He is the only one who receives this Power *unless* he incurs an additional lethal level of damage per individual protected. He must mark that person's forehead with his own blood caused from that lethal wound. Unlike the initial cost paid, this additional wound can be paid at any point during the scene, but the wound *must* be caused by the user's own hand. Wounds incurred from attackers will not work for this extra cost, and he must harm himself to protect others. This ability lasts for the remainder of the scene and only within the radius of the Power.

Exceptional Success: As above, except the user's clothing – no matter how sturdy or flimsy it might be – provides a 1/1 armor bonus for the duration of the Power.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
-2	User has never been in this area before
+1	Power activated in the user's normal territory or home (or in a place the user strongly identifies with, such as a priest in a church, or an archivist in her library)

Bulwark of Sanity (•••)

The World of Darkness is not a safe or sane place, and characters often find that it's just too much to bear. An item possessing this ability gives a character a bit of resistance against already-possessed derangements. It allows the character to hold off from giving in to those deleterious mental effects, such as avoiding the grief-struck drag of Depression or the panicked unease brought on by Anxiety. (Derangements are found on pp. 96-100 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**.)

There is one drawback to this Power, however: it requires the user keep the item on his person at all times, or its benefit fails. Worse, when a character doesn't have the object with him, he suffers a -3 to all rolls made to resist the effects of his derangement. He comes to rely on it, almost like an addiction.

Examples of objects that might include this Power include a rosary made of pearls, a family member's picture in a locket, or a small antique music box which plays a soothing tune.

Cost: No cost is necessary to resist the effects of derangements. If the possessing character fails a roll to resist a derangement, the roll doesn't actually fail but is instead considered a complete success.

Dice Pool: None

Action: Instant

Buoyancy (• or ••••)

The wielder possessing an object with Buoyancy finds himself able to drop from heights that would harm or kill mortal men. The one-dot version of this Power doubles the distance once falls before taking particular damage (i.e. one bashing damage per six yards fallen, and the damage doesn't turn lethal until the 60 yard mark). The three-dot version actually allows the user not to suffer *any* damage until the 60 yard mark, at which point he *begins* taking lethal damage at a rate of one point per 10 yards above the 60 yard mark (so, if he falls 100 yards, he would assume four points of lethal damage).

Objects that possess this preternatural gift are often indicative of flight or airiness: a fossilized archaeopteryx feather, a paper umbrella from a murdered woman's Mai-Tai, a piece of scrap from a downed jetliner.

(For rules on falling, see "Falling" on p. 179 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**.)

Cost: 2 Willpower

Dice Pool: No roll is necessary. The bonus is active for the remainder of the scene following the expenditure of Willpower.

Action: Reflexive

Confer Equipment Bonus (• to ••••••)

This Powers an object that has the power to "fix" or "bless" another object, thus affecting the second object with a dice bonus equal to this Power's rating in dots.

Examples might include an oil-soaked cloth that, when rubbed on a blade, grants the weapon a bonus to its attack; a medieval aspergillum that confers an equipment bonus to any simple machine when its holy water is sprinkled upon the item; a Queen-of-Hearts playing card that gives a bonus to any vehicle when placed under the driver's seat.

Assume that the Power has a restriction on one type of object, chosen at the time of the object's purchase or creation. Types can include (but are not limited to): weapons, vehicles, simple machines, complex machines, electronic equipment, and demolition gear.

Cost: 2 Willpower

Dice Pool: Wits + Crafts

Action: Instant

Roll Results

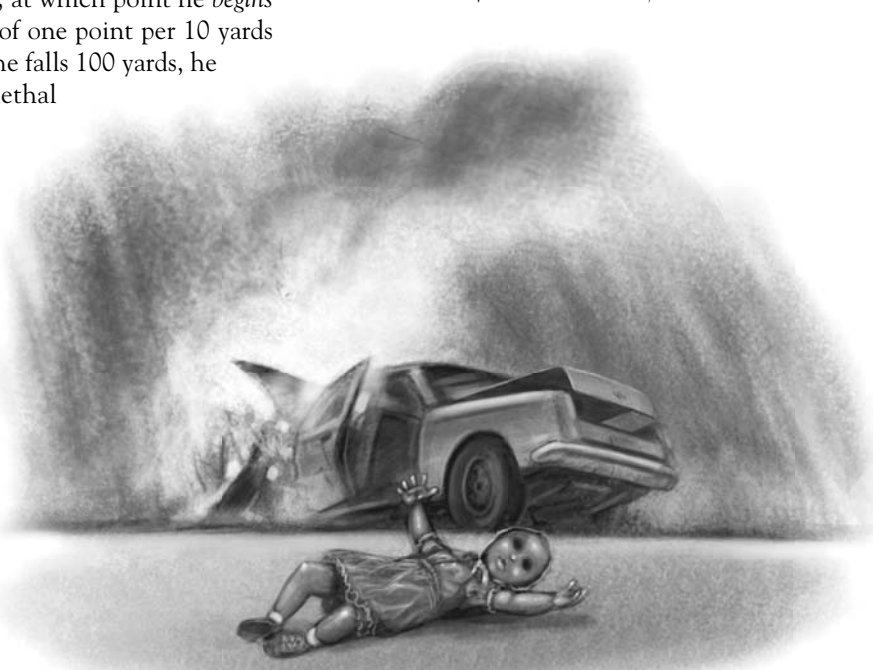
Dramatic Failure: The targeted item gains no bonus. The next time anyone attempts to use that device, they have only a chance die as a roll. (This is a one-time drawback. Once the chance die drawback is exhausted, the object and any future users gain the normal dice pool.)

Failure: No effect on the targeted item.

Success: The item gains an equipment bonus equal to the dots in this Power. Only one success is necessary to gain the bonus. The bonus lasts for the rest of the scene.

Exceptional Success: The bonus extends to two scenes instead of one.

Confer Equipment Penalty



/(• to •••••)

This Power works like Confer Equipment Bonus, except it causes a penalty to use the device instead of an equipment bonus. Examples include: a cup of teeth that, when rattled over an electronic device, curses it with potential malfunction; a white dove's feather that hampers the use of a firearm when brushed against the steel; an eyeless porcelain doll that, if hidden somewhere in a car, damages one's ability to drive it.

Assume that the Power has a restriction on one type of object, chosen at the time of the object's purchase or creation. Types include (but are not limited to): weapons, vehicles, simple machines, complex machines, electronic equipment, and demolition gear.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Crafts

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The targeted item to-be-cursed gains a +3 equipment bonus during its next use (a one-time bonus).

Failure: No effect on the targeted item.

Success: The item's user suffers an equipment penalty equal to the dots in this Power. Only one success is necessary to invoke this penalty. The penalty lasts until the next sunrise or sundown, whichever happens first.

Exceptional Success: The penalty extends to a full 24 hours.

Defend /(• to •••••)

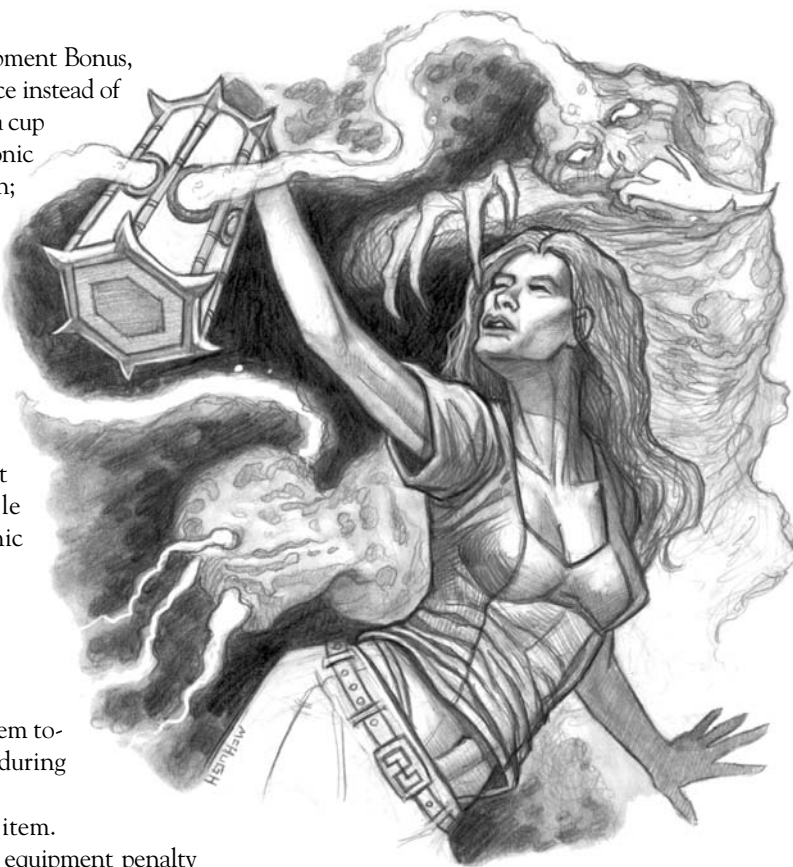
The item radiates a pale white light, eerie and indistinct, which dizzies and confuses the fiends and monsters of the World of Darkness. This helps protect the object's wielder from such entities.

Cost: 2 Willpower

Dice Pool: This Power involves no roll. The expenditure of Willpower is enough to activate it.

This Power impedes a monster's attack. The number of dots in this Power is equal to the dice penalty conferred to a monster's attack. This applies to *any* kind of attack a monster makes, be it physical or mystical (in other words, it would hamper a vampire's Weaponry attack in the same way it would harm its mind-altering attack). This Power only protects the user from *inhuman* creatures, i.e. those that follow a code of behavior different from Morality. This protection applies to creatures close to the wielder; they must be within a number of yards equal to the user's Wits + Resolve pool. Once active, this Power lasts for the remainder of the scene.

As an added benefit, the wielder may expend a Willpower *dot* to extend this protection to up to



three other individuals within the yard range. These individuals gain the same bonus as the wielder; monsters find their attacks hampered against these characters, as well. If the Willpower dot is not spent, only the wielder gains the protection. Protecting oneself is easy. Protecting others requires sacrifice.

Action: Reflexive

Entrap Entity /(•••••)

This ability gives an object the power to ensnare either a ghost or a spirit within itself. This Power only works on a ghost *or* a spirit, and the type of entity must be chosen at the time of the object's purchase or creation (though an object *could* possess the Power twice at the cost of four total dots, and thus be able to entrap both ghosts and spirits).

Once the object has drawn an entity and trapped it, the spirit can be made to communicate with the object's user. How it communicates is tied to the nature of the object. An old television might – even when unplugged – show bursts of static that occasionally resolve into a voice. A rotary phone might ring and let the user to talk over the receiver, while a book or pen might allow for automatic writing. Objects that have no obvious means of communication (a fire ax, for instance) simply “pulse” a voice into the world for all to hear; this voice is distorted, though still decipherable.

Cost: 2 Willpower

Dice Pool: Wits + Occult versus entity's Power + Resistance (if an entity is willing, however, no dice roll is necessary on behalf of that ghost or spirit). Other characters aside from the user may each contribute one Willpower point toward this, and each Willpower point spent in this way grants a +1 bonus to the Wits + Occult roll, to a maximum of +5 dice.

Action: Contested

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The ghost or spirit suddenly possesses the object's user. No roll is required on behalf of the entity; this occurs automatically. For the effects of possession, see "Possession," p. 212, **World of Darkness Rulebook**. The duration is one scene.

Failure: The entity achieves more successes, and is not ensnared.

Success: The character wins the contest, achieving more successes. The entity is drawn into the object for the duration of one scene. It must communicate, answering all questions. It does not, however, compel the spirit to honesty or friendliness. However, the character *can* make appropriate Social rolls to try to calm, persuade, or intimidate the entity into some manner of compliance.

Exceptional Success: As with success, except the character achieves five or more successes above what the entity achieved. Any Social rolls the character makes upon the spirit to force its compliance are done with a +2 bonus.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
-2	User has been possessed by a spirit or ghost in the past.
+2	User has a blessed item on his person (p. 214, World of Darkness Rulebook)

Ephemeral Attack (•••)

Things dwell in this world that cannot be seen by the mortal eye: ghosts, spirits, hidden fiends and other alien entities bent on harming mankind. An item imbued with this Power can harm any creature hiding in this world (i.e. existing in a state of Twilight) as if it was a physical creature. In most cases, the relic is a weapon of sorts: a dead Mafioso's snubnose, or a *katar* punch-dagger blessed by a Hindu exorcist. A weapon's damage potential is slightly different than what it possesses against physical targets, instead doing a persistent 2(L) against ephemeral entities. A knife that normally does 1(L) or a shotgun that normally does 4(L) continue to have that same damage modifier *when used against physical opponents*. When drawn against a Twilight entity in an Ephemeral Attack, however, the damage is always 2(L). The attack roll is whatever the Storyteller deems appropriate for a weapon of that type (Firearms for guns,

Weaponry for most melee weapons, Brawl if it's a weapon that encompasses the hand such as brass knuckles).

This is true for relics that aren't necessarily weapons, but still possess this Power. Such items needn't be wielded like weapons, but instead provide their own "damage" capabilities that extend only to Twilight entities. A paper lantern filled with ghostly fireflies, for instance, doesn't work as a melee weapon. A character doesn't swing it at the head of an invisible entity. Instead, the character makes a Dexterity + Wits roll with a +2 bonus from the 2(L) damage modifier. Success indicates that the lantern shines a bright and damaging light to Twilight entities – or perhaps a green mist suddenly forms sinuous tendrils that lash against the hidden creature. Said light or tentacles would not attack non-Twilight creatures, and the Power does not increase the lantern's ability as a mundane weapon; if swung against a foe, it is, at best, an improvised weapon.

If a character is uncertain as to the creature's location (and he may not be certain, given that Twilight creatures are invisible), assume the Fighting Blind rules (pp. 166-167, **World of Darkness Rulebook**) apply.

This Power harms ghosts or spirits hidden in Twilight, as well as any creatures concealed in a state of Twilight. Some creatures turn invisible but do not enter Twilight – any weapon can hurt such creatures (such as an Obfuscated vampire), and do not require this Power to bring them harm. Its supernatural attack affects only creatures in Twilight.

If this Power imbues an object such as a gun or bow, it is the weapon that is blessed, not the ammunition. Any bullet appropriate for the gun can harm an ephemeral entity when fired from this relic weapon.

This Power lasts for one scene.

Cost: 1 Willpower, but it also requires the user to smear blood or saliva on the blade (it needn't be his own)

Dice Pool: No roll necessary

Action: Instant

Ephemeral Revelation (•)

Some objects grant their users the ability to see entities hidden in a state of Twilight, revealing ghosts, spirits, or other veiled creatures. The object might be a pair of glasses or goggles, a vial of eye drops, or a pouch of bone dust that scatters on the wind and frames an ephemeral creature in a chalky film of osseous powder.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Wits + Occult

Action: Reflexive

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character's eyes suddenly sting and burn. He suffers -2 to any Perception rolls made for the remainder of the scene.

Failure: The character fails to gain sight of Twilight-enshrouded beings.

Success: The character can see entities concealed in a state of Twilight. While they may still be opaque or have a form that shifts and warps like a hallucination, the

character sees them clearly enough to make un-penalized attacks upon them (when appropriate, such as with the above Power, “Ephemeral Attack”). The entity does not necessarily know that it can be seen (though a Storyteller may require a Presence + Subterfuge roll for the character to physically “fool” the entity with body language, thus convincing the creature that it remains unseen). This Power lasts for one scene.

Exceptional Success: The Power’s duration extends until the next sunrise or sunset – whichever comes first.

Suggested Modifiers

-2	Character has one eye (flaw)
-1	Character has poor eyesight (flaw)
+1	Character suffers from the Fixation derangement
+2	Character possesses the Unseen Sense Merit

Exchange of Power (••••)

The item allows a user to trade his own health for power. The cost of the object is high: it demands pain from the wielder in exchange for enhancing them in some manner. Some objects may have the method of pain delivery intrinsic to it: a knife cuts, a candle burns, a jawbone bites. Others appear wholesome or mundane (a featureless idol, a flashlight, a class ring), but simply *draw* the suffering into themselves like a hungry leech.

This Power works with a single Attribute. This Attribute must be chosen at the time of the object’s purchase or creation. This Power can only be used once per chapter (game session).

Cost: One point of bashing damage equates to +1 to the given Attribute; one point of lethal damage equates to +2 to the given Attribute. The user cannot spend a mix of bashing and lethal; the cost is either *all* bashing, or *all* lethal.

Dice Pool: No dice pool necessary. The expenditure of one’s own Health is enough to stir the Power and confer the benefit.

This exchange only works for a single action, and that action must take place within five minutes of the object’s activation or the damage suffered is taken with no benefit gained. Once the Attribute bonus is used one time (or at the end of five minutes, whichever comes first), to regain it the exchange must be made again, with new pain and injury suffered atop the prior damage.

Example: Frank has a cigar cutter found in the pocket of a corpse he discovered when digging up the foundation of his house. The cigar cutter grants him a bonus to his Strength. He needs Strength to lift a fallen I-Beam off a friend, so he uses the cigar-cutter to clip off the tip of a finger, purposefully assuming two lethal points of damage in exchange for a one-time +4 bonus to his Strength. The

bonus isn’t enough to help him lift the beam, and so he must decide whether he wants to hurt himself again for another bonus. Maybe he could do it with a +6 bonus. But that’s 3 more points of lethal damage. Will he suffer the loss for his fallen friend? The cutter blade glitters red and silver in the moonlight, awaiting his answer.

Action: Instant

Façade (•)

This Power allows an object to appear as a wholly different object of equivalent Size. The user defines the object’s false appearance. A knife stuck in a table can be made to appear as a half-burned candle, or an ornate book of curses could instead appear to be a simple and unexceptional shoebox. Again, an object cannot change its Size – any false impression given cannot go beyond this Size restriction (in other words, a Size 1 revolver could not be made to appear as a Size 5 door or even a Size 2 sword). The illusion only extends to sight. A jewel-encrusted cup made to appear like a pile of animal waste will not give off the scent one expects from a pile of offal, nor will a bottle made to look like a lit candle give off light. Moreover, other sensory input that the object gives off originally cannot be masked: a flame’s heat cannot be masked, nor can an actively running fan’s breeze. Note, too, that the illusion doesn’t extend to touch – an object “feels” like what it really is, which can be jarring (and may allow that individual a Wits + Investigation roll to see through the illusion).

The user must touch the object to invoke the change. He cannot do it at a distance. This Power in no way mimics any living thing. It cannot, for instance, give the false impression of a living potted plant.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Wits + Crafts

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The item rejects its façade: any attempts to use the object for any purpose (mundane or supernatural) incur a -2 penalty for the next 12 hours.

Failure: The object fails to assume an illusory façade.

Success: The object successfully takes on the appearance of an object of equivalent Size as determined by the user. This lasts for a number of hours equal to the character’s Resolve score. Any attempts, magical or mundane, to scrutinize the object for flaws in its façade suffer a penalty equal to the character’s successes on the Wits + Crafts roll.

Exceptional Success: Same as success, except the duration is doubled: two hours per dot of Resolve.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+1	Very similar object (ex: revolver into automatic pistol)

Feral Blessing (●●●●)

This supernatural “blessing” often empowers relics that once came from an animal, or are in some way representative of a beast: an idol carved to look like a predatory cat, the paw from a coyote, a mask stitched from many skins.

The feral blessing provides three benefits to the user:

- Like with an animal, the character now uses the *higher* of Wits and Dexterity to determine his Defense.
- The user gains keen perceptions. Any Perception-based Wits + Composure or Wits + Survival rolls gain +3 dice.
- The character gains a bestial attack granting him 2(L). This attack is either a bite or claw attack (though the claws could be on hands or feet). Biting does not first require a grapple while this is active.

Cost: The relic does not require anyone to bond with it. Its blessing is conferred the moment a character touches it (requiring contact with that individual’s skin), and the blessing goes away the moment the character *stops* touching it. The blessing is technically free – no Willpower points are necessary to achieve these benefits. The Power comes with two downsides, however. During the time in which the character is under the thrall of the blessing, both his Intelligence and Manipulation scores drop to 1 dot apiece. (His mind devolves into something more bestial, thinking and communicating more as a beast than as a man.) The second downside is that the character must succeed on a Resolve + Composure roll to relinquish his touch, and thus, relinquish the blessing. The animalistic puissance is not necessarily addictive, but it is pleasurable and powerful while active. To purposefully let go of that feeling, success on the roll is necessary. (This does not apply, however, if the item is somehow knocked from his grip or torn from around his neck or whatever.) Upon relinquishing the blessing, the character’s Intelligence and Manipulation scores return to normal after one turn has passed.

Fool’s Gold (●)

Is the love of money the root of all evil, as the saying goes? Does an object with this Power – which produces money out of nothing, withdrawn from the ether and made from

fly wings and strips of dried skin – help a character release himself from a love of money, or only bind himself to it further? Perhaps it doesn’t matter.

An object empowered with Fool’s Gold doesn’t *appear* to manufacture money out of thin air. It requires some physical action – reaching into a cursed wallet, dipping into the pockets of a pair of “lucky jeans,” peeling off bills from a gilded money clip once owned by a notoriously merciless gangster — to “create” the cash. (Though, one such object was said to be a simple credit card, gray and nearly featureless.)

Of course, the money that the relic manufactures isn’t real. It initially appears as such: it passes all tests of authenticity, or if drawn from a credit card, the process completes without a hitch. But the money has a time limit. Eventually, the bills break down, turning into random useless debris: dried leaves, clotting blood, dead ants. So too with credit card receipts (and, moreover, when the money breaks down the credit card companies notice the “error” and alert the merchant).

More notable is the fact that any objects purchased with this money break down, too. Over time they degrade – some are given over to a swiftly-deepening rust, while food-stuffs grow fungus or machines start to fail with some regularity.



If one purchases services with any or all of this fake money, the results of those services start to break down. A room cleaned by a maid turns swiftly again to filth and chaos. Services rendered by a prostitute fail to be remembered as giving any pleasure, and can only be recalled as a depressing failure.

Food purchased and consumed gives the eater a stomachache when its time is up, providing no nourishment and leaving them both hungry and nauseated.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Resolve + Larceny

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character, when attempting to grab for the money or credit/debit card, feels a sharp prick on his finger as if poked by a needle. One point of bashing damage is caused as one of his fingers bleed. Curiously, while the damage is minimal, the blood caused from this little wound is profuse, leaking blood like a much larger wound for a longer period of time (remainder of the scene).

Failure: The money fails to manifest.

Success: Successes on the roll equal the number of Resource points the character can draw in “fake money” for this instance. This is used to gauge what kind of item or service a character can buy (if he wants to buy the Nightvision Goggles from p. 140 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, he needs two successes to do so because the item’s listed Cost is two dots of Resources). This is a one-time expenditure. This money is only available in the turn after the Power is made active. The character can use the Power again and again during a day, but each use requires an increasing amount of Willpower points (+1 per use, so using it three times in a row requires 1 Willpower for the first, 2 for the second, and 3 for the third) to do so. The cost “resets” upon sunrise or sunset, whichever comes first (by “resetting” the cost reverts to 1 Willpower point).

As noted, the Power has a time limit, however. This time limit is equal to the character’s Composure in hours. At the end of this time, both the money paid and the objects or services break down in some fashion. The money, as noted, falls apart on the merchant’s end. The character, however, suffers differently.

Once the time limit is up, any items purchased break down at a rate of 1 Structure per turn. It turns to rust, dust, or just a jumble of pieces.

If the character purchased some kind of service, however, the service reverts at the end of the time limit almost like it never happened. Pleasure gained is forgotten. A washed car grows oddly filthy again by a sudden dust storm or muddy rain. Pruned hedges gnarl up and show swift growth.

If any character eats food purchased by this Power, that character suffers a -1 penalty to all rolls until eight

hours of sleep is gained. This is negated if the character possessed the Iron Stomach Merit – the food still causes a stomachache, but the Merit allows the character to ignore it. Others who consume food or services purchased with this money suffer similarly.

No matter what the character purchased, upon the fading of objects or services a character tends to feel suddenly unfulfilled and empty. The character gains the Depression derangement (mild) for the rest of the chapter (game session). If the character already possesses this at mild, he takes on the Melancholia (severe) version.

Exceptional Success: As with a success, except the character gains an extra hour of use out of the object or the service provided.

Forgettable (•••)

An object with this Power is always worn upon the person – a locket filled with diaphanous strands of a spider’s web, a pair of boots pulled off a dead hermit, or a sewing needle stuck just under the skin. Upon activation, the object makes its wielder utterly forgettable at that very instant. He does not fade from view, but he might as well. Even in mid-conversation, the other person will just... forget that she was talking to the character, and wander off, slightly confused. Video cameras catch footage of him, but those viewing and reviewing that footage fail to notice the character, even if the character is doing something obvious, such as stealing food right off a grocery store’s shelves.

Of course, being so forgettable is not without repercussions. Being socially invisible is valuable for a while... until the time comes to turn the Power off. (See below for more information.)

Cost: None

Dice Pool: Wits + Stealth

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character draws the ire of those around him. Any individuals within eyesight of him suddenly notice him and act angry toward him for reasons they cannot grasp. This doesn’t guarantee violence, but if he cannot defuse the situation or at least move away from it, it may lead to that.

Failure: The character fails to become socially invisible.

Success: The character vanishes not from sight, but from the minds of everybody. They forget he was present and most fail to look for him. Only those with supernatural senses are allowed an attempt to pierce this social illusion (the Unseen Sense Merit, a vampire’s Auspex, Mage Sight, or a werewolf’s senses, for instance).

The character does not inadvertently reveal himself, as the world accounts for his presence but not his appearance – crowds move subconsciously out of his way, automatic doors still open when he steps on their sensor plates, even animals fail to notice him most of the time (though like werewolves they are allowed a

Intrinsic Drawbacks

Some of the Powers contained within this chapter – like the two immediately above, Fool's Gold and Forgettable – have curses or drawbacks intrinsic to their use. Some Powers are insidious and demand more from the relic and its wielder than a character might prefer. That said, if you prefer to extricate a drawback from a Power, assume that in doing so you add two dots to the Power's existing cost. (So, in removing the memory loss drawback from Forgettable, above, you might increase the Power's actual cost by two, thus raising it to ••••). This should only be done with Storyteller approval.

Wits + Survival roll to detect him through their bestial senses). For the most part, actions the character takes go by unnoticed, as well. He can steal items smaller than his own Size. He can talk all he wants. Only a few things jostle the world's memory enough to once again include him. If he steals something larger than his Size, like a car, people notice. If he brings violence against another, people notice. Truly loud noises (firing a gun in the air, shattering glass) bring him back to the world. However, this is only temporary. He is noticeable for four turns. Once those turns are up again, he fades from view once more (unless he continues to make overt gestures or actively turns off this Power).

The problem is that turning off the Power is more difficult than turning it on. The character must make another roll to turn the Power off: Wits + Presence. For every ten minutes the character spends "invisible," that roll is penalized by a -1 dice penalty (to a maximum of -5 dice after 50 minutes). A dramatic failure on the Wits + Presence roll means the character cannot attempt to return to memory again for another eight hours. An exceptional success means that he gains a +1 bonus to the next time he attempts to turn off the object's Power.

After one day of being invisible, the world starts forgetting details about the character, too. These are small details, but valuable (and, as true with most curses, it's never the bad things the world forgets, only the good things). A loved one might remember an argument, but forget the apology. A bank's computer might forget all the money in the character's checking account. A beloved pet might forget his master, and growl the next time he walks in the door.

After one *week* of being invisible, the character himself starts to forget his own details. He might forget what country club he belongs to, or his pet's name, or even his own middle name.

After one day, the character also suffers from what amounts to the opposite of Eidetic Memory: he suffers a -2 penalty on any Mental roll used to recall a detail or piece of information.

At the Storyteller's discretion, for each day spent invisible, the character may forget more and more of himself, and the details lost become more severe. He may forget how to tie his own shoes, his phone number, where he lives, even his whole name. After about a week, full amnesia takes hold.

Even after returning to the world's memory by turning this Power off, the details remain lost until the character re-learns them. They do not simply reappear in his head. To relearn his child's middle name, for instance, he must ask the child or see it written on a piece of paper to "jog" his memory.

Exceptional Success: As above, but the character gains a bit more control over his own condition. The Wits + Presence roll made to eventually return to the world gains a +2 bonus.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
-3	Possesses the Fame Merit
-1	Possesses the Striking Looks Merit
+1	Has no points in Allies, Contacts, Mentor or Retainer
+3	Is a total hermit

Gift of Swiftmess (••••)

With this Power, an object grants its user an alarmingly accelerated swiftness. Whether this adjusts time around the user or simply grants his body a supernatural alacrity is left up to the Storyteller's discretion – the fact is: the character appears to move with unearthly speed.

Most objects granting this Power are in some way indicative of swiftness – a pair of blood-spattered running shoes, a necklace made from a cheetah's teeth and claws, a bronze medallion bearing the face of swift-footed Hermes. It must be worn on the body or carried in the hand.

When active, this Power grants its user a number of abilities for the remainder of the scene:

- The character's Initiative score increases by +2
- The character's Defense increases by +1
- The character's Speed triples (if his Speed is normally 11, it's now 33)

That being said, the object does confer one drawback upon its user. Moving so swiftly is difficult to manage, and it's easy to overshoot when attempting anything physical such as leaping across a chasm or swinging a bat at an enemy's head. Assume that Physical rolls (other than running) are made at a -1 penalty.

Cost: 2 Willpower

Dice Pool: No roll necessary



Giver of Breath / (●)

By having an object with this Power on his person and touching his chest, a character can hold his breath for a full scene without rolling Stamina. He simply doesn't need to breathe, whether he's trapped in an airtight container or swimming underwater without any kind of equipment. Because it needs to touch the chest, most of the time the object is something dangling from a string or chain and acting as a necklace – though, some speak of objects that are literally imbedded in one's chest, like a scarab with needled legs that clings to the flesh.

Cost: The character spends nothing up front, as this Power is automatic — provided that the relic is touching the skin of his chest. However, after this item provides its ability (i.e. when the character goes beyond his normal “breath-holding” duration, which is found on p. 49 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**), it saps the character's body. Until the character can get eight hours of uninterrupted sleep, he suffers a -1 to all Physical rolls. If during this time the Giver of Breath Power is enacted once again, the penalty increases by one die each time.

Dice Pool: No roll necessary

Action: Reflexive

Glimpse / (●●●)

The presence of this object allows a single user to glimpse the past in a given area. Some objects are

keyed to such vision: a pair of eyeglasses, a lantern that casts images instead of shadows, a cracked mirror. Others are eerily incongruous with the Power, such as a rusty knife that must be stuck in the ground or a musty board game dotted with spatters of someone's blood.

The Power allows a user to look back by a factor of years (see below under Success).

A character can delve into the past by limiting her search via a particular time-frame (“What happened here three months and two days ago?”), by person or object (“Show me what Iron John did when he was here”) or by a particular event (“I want to see how the fire started”). The glimpse is tied to the location in which the object is used – it does not allow for any glimpses beyond this corporeal location (for that, the object must be moved to the

new location and its Power used again).

Cost: 2 Willpower

Dice Pool: Wits + Resolve

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The user receives a glimpse of the past, but it arrives in a mad flash or deafening roar and is indecipherable. The user suffers a -2 dice pool on all actions for the next hour due to the resulting headache and confusion.

Failure: No glimpse of past events is available.

Success: The user chooses a single sense with which she will view the scene – sight, sound, taste, touch, smell. Each success is equal to a number of years; this period of time represents how far back the character can glimpse. If what she seeks to glimpse (“Show me the murder of Tremain Robicheaux”) happened five years ago, and she only gains three successes on her two-dot object, no vision is received (the Willpower points are not still spent, however, and return to her in a rush). What she glimpses lasts no longer than a single scene. If she wishes to continue past that (or view what occurred before it), she must reattempt the Power.

Exceptional Success: As per the success, except the user can choose *two* senses with which she will view the scene.

Suggested Modifiers	
Modifier	Situation
-1	Distractions (temperature, sound, darkness)
+1	Location user is familiar with (her house, for instance)
+3	User was present at event she wishes to glimpse

Gift of Vitality (••••)

An object empowered with Gift of Vitality allows the wielder to heal himself or another at the cost of his own vital energies. Both characters must touch the object (should the user be healing himself, only he needs to touch it). Some objects possessing this Power evoke some kind of physical reaction during the transfer of vitality to health – it might shudder, smolder, even emit a high-pitched whine.

Cost: The user must spend his own Physical Attributes to heal damage to himself or another. One dot from his Physical Attributes will eradicate all bashing damage. One dot can also heal one point of lethal damage. Two dots spent can heal one point of aggravated damage. It takes one full turn per Physical Attribute dot spent (so, if the character wants to heal one point of aggravated damage, he must spend two dots of his own Physical Attributes, which represents two turns of concentration). The Attribute dots “heal” and return at the rate of one dot per 24-hour period. Note, too, that by reducing one’s Physical Attributes, other scores (Defense, Initiative, Health, Speed) may be affected.

Dice Pool: No roll necessary

Action: Instant or extended

Hypnotic Effect (••)

The item suddenly draws the attention of a target chosen by the user. Once the item has caught the target’s attention, the object’s wielder can plant a hypnotic suggestion in the target’s brain. This suggestion *must* be spoken aloud so that the target can hear. This false thought or suggestion can be simple (“Give me all your money”) or complex (“Take all of your money out of your wallet, count it, sort the bills in descending order, then leave them on the table and walk away”). It can also represent protracted programming, setting off a triggered event (“When Marisa enters the room, compliment her on her necklace”) or something based purely on time (“For the next hour, I want you to use a pair of binoculars to watch the bank across the street. Call me and tell me if you see a man in a white suit enter the premises”). The instructions must be of a single “set” (it cannot involve two wildly unrelated tasks: “Jump up in the air and then, in twenty minutes, throw this vase against the wall”) and must be able to be performed in a reasonable amount of time (within an hour). The target cannot be made to do

something physically harmful to himself (“Jump in front of a speeding taxi”), nor can he be made to embark on a likely impossible task (“Climb that skyscraper”).

Many objects empowered in this way often have a dizzying visual flair: a pocket watch whose clockwork innards gleam with odd sparks of light, or a brooch whose multi-faceted jewel draws eyes inexorably toward it. Some though, are almost painfully mundane: a tarnished cufflink, a pair of cracked glasses, or a white and featureless mask.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Expression versus Resolve + Composure

Action: Contested; resistance is reflexive

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The target’s trance is broken and gains a +1 Social bonus to any appropriate actions taken against the object’s user.

Failure: The character ties or loses the contested roll; the suggestion fails to implant.

Success: The character wins the contested roll. The victim obeys to the best of his ability. Note, however, that if the suggested task *becomes* threatening for the target (say he’s commanded to walk across the street, but while doing so sees a police shootout near his destination), he may make another Resolve + Composure roll. Any success on this roll breaks the suggestion.

Exceptional Success: The character wins the roll with five or more successes above the target’s. Future attempts to implant suggestions on this individual using this Power are made at a +1 bonus.

Intoxicating Aura (••••)

Those in the presence of this object feel moderately (and pleasantly) intoxicated. The item might be a Cubist painting, an aromatic flower, even a beguiling melody. This inhibits some Mental and Physical rolls, but enhances Social rolls.

Cost: 2 Willpower

Dice Pool: Presence + Expression


Action: Reflexive

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The object suddenly gives off a wretched, gall-inducing aura. Everyone within sensory-range of the object suffers terrible headaches (-1 dice penalty) and feels irritable. Some might even give into their Vices more easily. The negative aura fades once the object is out of a character’s senses.

Failure: The object fails to radiate its aura.

Success: Any characters within the object’s radius of power suffer a -1 penalty to any dice pool involving Dexterity, Intelligence, and Wits. However, all Presence and Manipulation rolls gain a +3 bonus. The radius of power is equal to five yards per success gained on the activation roll (thus, three successes would be equivalent to 15 yards of effect). The character who activates the Power suffers the penalties and gains the bonuses, as well. The character must touch the



object to empower it (she “removes a speck of dust” from a painting’s canvas, she mists her perfume in the air, she adjusts the volume on the radio or straightens a speaker), but she needn’t remain in the area of effect. She can leave the object behind, and it will continue exuding its aura.

The area of effect lingers (with or without the character’s presence) for one scene.

Exceptional Success: Successes gained go toward increasing the radius, but an exceptional success also allows the user to ignore the -1 penalty to Dexterity, Intelligence, and Wits.

Investigatory Charm (●●●)

In the World of Darkness, it is often crucial to possess a keen eye and mind – one’s surroundings may well hide clues that could shine some light on the horrid mysteries at hand. A drop of blood on a doorknob. A blonde hair twined around a corpse’s finger. The petals of a red dahlia stuffed in the mouth of a stillborn infant. But sometimes it’s all too easy to miss these crucial details that could tell a character what happened... or what’s going to happen to her soon.

An item possessing this Power enhances one’s ability to see such clues. How it does so is often the provenance of the object itself. The faintly-tinted monocle used by a famous detective might cause clues to stand out as glowing red, pulsing with a dull throbbing heartbeat. A small handheld radio might emit higher and louder bursts of static as it gets closer and closer to a significant clue, only going dead when all appropriate traces have been uncovered. A pair of pearl earrings might literally whisper hints and directions in a character’s ear. Some relics don’t really *do* anything: merely by possessing and using them, they allow a character to automatically *know* what she needs to find.

Assume that, when active, for the remainder of the scene a character has two options when it comes to investigatory rolls (depending on the context, either a Wits + Investigation or a Wits + Composure roll). The first option is that the character eschews making a roll in favor of taking one automatic success. This is a complete success, but is not considered exceptional. The second option is that the player still rolls for the character, thus offering her up to the possibility of failing the action... however, an exceptional success is achieved when the roll shows *three* successes instead of the normal *five*.

Note that this Power *will* work on off-the-cuff on Perception-based Wits + Composure rolls made to notice something out of the ordinary. The trick is, these generally happen reflexively, required at moments when the player may not have this object active. Because this Power is instant (requiring a moment to concentrate to “turn it on”), it doesn’t allow such a Perception roll to be modified after-the-fact. However, should a character enter into a darkened room and decide to activate this object in the anticipation of catching something bizarre out of the corner of his eye (a flitting shadow, a pair of yellow eyes in the corner, a rat with a silver ring clamped in his mouth), then this object could still confer its benefit.

Cost: The object features no cost to activate, but it does extract an insidious price from the user. Once the scene is over in which the relic has provided this benefit, the user begins to suffer one of the following flaws (chosen by the Storyteller): Hard of Hearing, Mute, or Poor Sight. (These can be found on p. 219 in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**.) The character possesses this flaw until he is able to get eight hours of uninterrupted sleep (though if he possesses the Meditative Mind Merit, he only requires six hours). Note that possessing the flaw temporarily as a side effect of this Power does not earn the character experience points as with the normal system for having and roleplaying flaws.

Dice Pool: No roll is necessary. The character only needs to concentrate for one turn.

Action: Instant

Knowledge Seeker (●)

Some charms or relics grant good fortune with money, love, even violence. An object possessing this Power grants a bit of luck in a far subtler arena: Research.

Activating this item allows for a drastic reduction in the time it takes to research a subject. Assume that each Research roll performed during the extended action represents only 5 minutes of time instead of the normal 30 minutes. (If the time for a roll is listed as being different than 30 minutes, you can approximate. If the roll would normally take 15 minutes, assume it takes about three, instead. If each roll is an hour, it’s now equal to about 10 minutes.)

Objects possessing this Power are often ones tied to knowledge in some fashion: a bookmark made of skin, a cracked magnifying glass, even a Bible inked in what is reportedly some kind of angel’s blood. Others might just be charms or amulets hung around the wrist or the neck.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: No roll is necessary. Upon spending the Willpower point, the relic’s Power is active for the next extended Research roll the player makes for the character.

Action: Reflexive

Luck Taken (● to ●●●)

For some, luck is a nebulous thing, an invisible and unproven force said to grant aid in certain situations. For characters with an artifact possessing this Power, luck is far less a matter of faith and more about proof. Relics with this Power are often charms of some sort – the traditional rabbit’s foot, a bezoar hung on a silver chain, or simply a “lucky” keychain given by a long-dead favorite uncle (who, according to family legend, “dabbled” in the occult). Others might be objects that require some kind of almost obsessive mechanical action to activate – the opening and closing of a Zippo lighter, or the shuffling of a worn-out deck of cards (playing or Tarot).

The number of dots in this Power is equal to how many times it can be used in a single chapter (game session). It may not, however, be used more than once on the same roll.

Cost: 1 Willpower per use

Dice Pool: No roll is necessary. When a player makes a roll for her character, she may, upon discovering the results of that roll, spend a Willpower point to activate Luck Token and “upgrade” the level of success. The level of success moves up only by one rank – a Dramatic Failure becomes a Failure, a Failure becomes a complete Success, or a Success becomes an Exceptional Success.

Note that this only works for instant or reflexive actions, not for extended rolls. An extended roll does not take place in a single moment of time. And luck is purely the provenance of that single moment, fleeting and certainly temporary.

In describing how it manifests, make it clear that some element of luck is in play. In avoiding a dramatic failure, the stone jamming the gun’s barrel jostles free at the last second – yes, the shot goes astray, but at least it didn’t blow up in the character’s hand. In avoiding a failure, such as when jumping a fence, maybe the character *would’ve* failed had he not been lucky enough to catch air off a trash can rolling by. In changing a success to an exceptional success, maybe in the “jumping the fence” scenario a raccoon jumps off a nearby fire escape, sending the ladder down just in time for the character to catch it – a rare and momentous piece of luck, to be sure, affording him the chance to escape his pursuers handily.

Action: Reflexive

Machine Bond (●●●●)

A device with this Power allows a user to connect with a complex machine (computer, automobile, cell phone) and “merge” his mind with it for a time. Whatever the machine experiences, so does the character. The character can even delve back into the machine’s “memory,” recalling events that may have happened to it or around it. When using this Power, a character’s consciousness literally leaves his body. The body, left behind, appears comatose for all medical purposes.

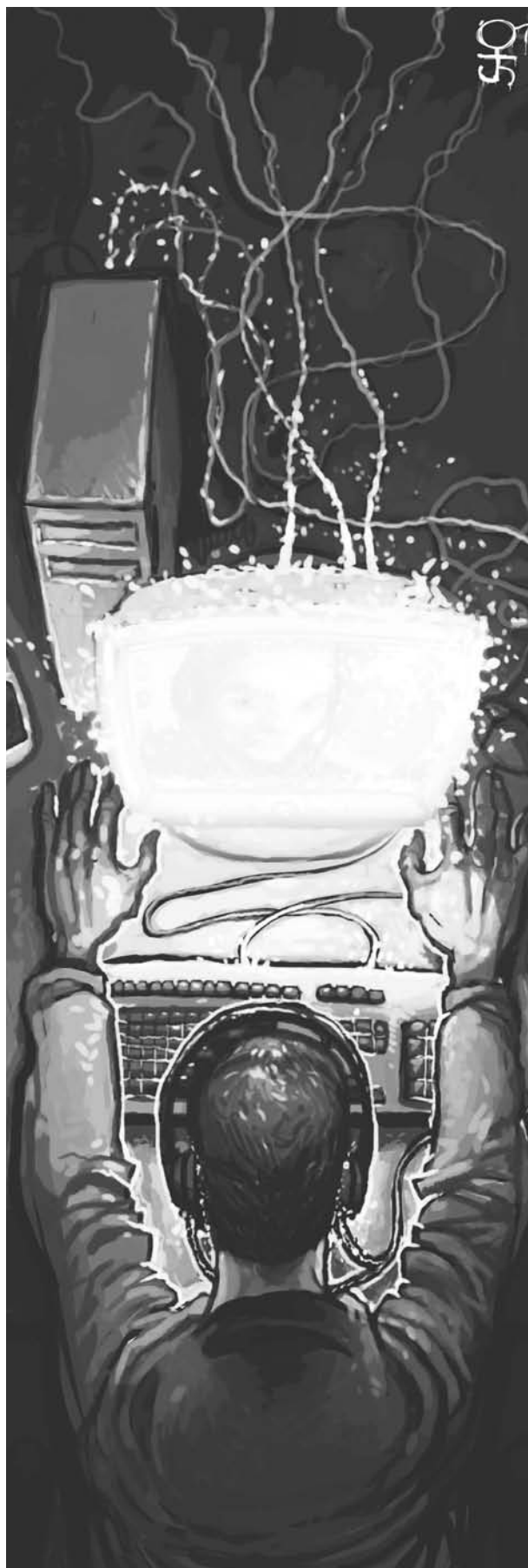
Relics featuring this Power are often tied to machines in their origin: a brass key, a USB drive filled with blasphemous text files, a pair of handcuffs which one uses to shackle himself to the machine. The user must be holding the relic, which in turn must be touching some part of the machine the character wishes to mentally inhabit.

Note that a machine needn’t be on or active for this ability to work – but the machine cannot be broken. If the machine is non-functional, it must be made functional before this object can work its power upon it.

Cost: 1 Willpower, and the character also gains the Irrationality derangement (or Multiple Personality if he already possesses the mild version) for the next eight hours.

Dice Pool: Presence + Computer

Action: Extended (10 to 20 successes required, with each roll equal to one minute. Simpler machines like a chainsaw or motorbike might require 10 successes. A



home computer or car might demand 15, while a very powerful server or high-tech military vehicle might necessitate 20 successes)

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The attempt fails, burning the hand of the user. He takes one lethal point of damage as a result (and, doing anything that might require use of that hand may incur a -1 die penalty at the Storyteller's discretion).

Failure: The character fails to connect with the machine.

Success: The character's consciousness enters the machine. His body is left behind while his mind travels within the machine. He cannot perceive the world around him except in whatever way the machine can – inhabiting a car means feeling the road and seeing through the headlights or mirrors, while possessing a computer means seeing through the monitor screen and feeling fingers across a keyboard.

In having his consciousness within the machine, the character “knows” anything that the machine does. Merging with a cell-phone allows the character to know who was called, what conversations transpired, what voicemails were listened to and deleted, and so forth. Generally speaking, the more complex the machine, the longer “memory” the device has. Simpler machines without computerized electronics tend to only have a day or two's worth of memory. Computers, however, store information for considerable amounts of time: weeks, even months. This isn't always true, however – consider an elaborate clock from 200 years past whose ornate mechanical innards still buzz and tick away the minutes. A clock keeps time, and so the Storyteller might rule that a clock also keeps the memories associated with each second that it ticks.

The user remains bound for a single scene. If he wants to end his bond early, he is able to do so but *only* by expending another Willpower point. If the object takes any Structure damage during the time of the character's transfer-of-consciousness, the user suffers burns equal to two points of lethal damage.

Exceptional Success: As above, but the character also gains a +1 equipment bonus when using a similar machine in the future. (If he entered a computer, then a roll to use a similar PC would gain that bonus.) This bonus lasts for the rest of the chapter (game session).

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+1	The character has used this particular machine more than five times in the past.

Manufacture Verge (●●●●●)

A Verge is a place where the boundary between worlds – called the Gauntlet – disappears entirely. Creatures on both sides of the Gauntlet, be they humans in the physical world

or spirits in the Shadow Realm, can cross over freely while a Verge is active and open.

An object possessing this potent Power literally marks an area as a Verge, thus establishing the conditions for the Gauntlet's disappearance. The area marked must be a doorway or gateway of some kind: a door frame, a manhole, a stone arch, etc. Upon the creation of the Verge, the object's wielder must supply a condition upon which the Verge will appear. This condition can be as vague (“upon nightfall”) or as convoluted (“only when a pregnant woman carrying twins crosses the threshold”) as the character likes. The Verge, once “opened,” remains open for one hour and then closes, and will not open again for one month no matter how many times its condition is met.

The opening of a Verge literally consumes the object, destroying it utterly – turning it to embers, a pile of rust, or even a wind-whipped sirocco of dust. With enough concentration, the character *can* stop the object from disappearing, but it requires intense power-of-mind to do so, including a fairly strong sacrifice on the part of the character. The character can expend a single Mental Attribute point, removing it entirely, to stop the annihilation of the Verge-creating object. If this occurs and the character attempts to open another Verge elsewhere at another time, the *last* Verge created dissipates and fails to manifest thereafter. In other words, an object empowered thusly can only create and help maintain a single Verge at any given time. (Be aware that a Mental Attribute must be spent any time the character stops the object from destroying itself – a rather exacting cost over time.)

Note that Verges are incredibly dangerous. Anything can cross between worlds. People can easily get lost in the Shadow Realm, as can objects. And the entities that cross over from that otherworldly place are rarely friendly or forgiving (though they might *appear* to be as a ruse).

Most objects possessing this Power demand the user do some kind of ritualized action to achieve the effect. For instance, a dowsing rod might require its user to sweep the stick in the dirt over and over, drawing a pattern over the course of several hours. A paper lantern might demand its wielder walk to the four compass points of the area again and again, igniting and dousing the flame within. A mirror might simply need its user to stare into its depths without turning away for however long it requires to open the Verge.

Permanently closing a Verge isn't easy, and often requires some kind of blessing or cleansing of the area. This might be done with the holy tools of a priest, yogi or sorcerer, or may instead take a “cleansing” blast of C4 explosive. Closing one temporarily is largely impossible (they close after an hour all on their own), but some rumors suggest that a verge might be “convinced” to close through sacrifice – whether this is a sacrifice of a beloved object (a love-letter from a soldier to his wife) or a blood sacrifice (the family pet, a child), remains unclear (and is left to the Storyteller's discretion).

Cost: None, or 1 Mental Attribute dot (see above)

Dice Pool: Presence + Occult

Action: Extended (5 – 15+ successes required, depending on how densely populated the region is where the attempt is made; wilderness areas require five successes, suburbs require 10, the urban metropolis would demand 15 successes; each roll is equivalent to one hour's worth of time)

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Nothing happens, but the character becomes vulnerable to possession by spirits over the next week. If at any point a spirit makes an attempt to possess the character, the roll to possess gains a +3 bonus. (See "Possession," p. 212, *World of Darkness Rulebook*.)

Failure: The Verge fails to manifest. The object is not destroyed.

Success: The object is destroyed unless the character expends one of his Mental Attributes at the moment of complete success. A Verge is created upon success, given over to whatever condition the character established before beginning the ritual.

Exceptional Success: For a time he becomes fortified by his brush with the Spirit World, and gains a +2 bonus on any rolls made to resist possession attempts by spirits (p. 212, *World of Darkness Rulebook*). Achieving an exceptional success on an extended roll is described on p. 131 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*.

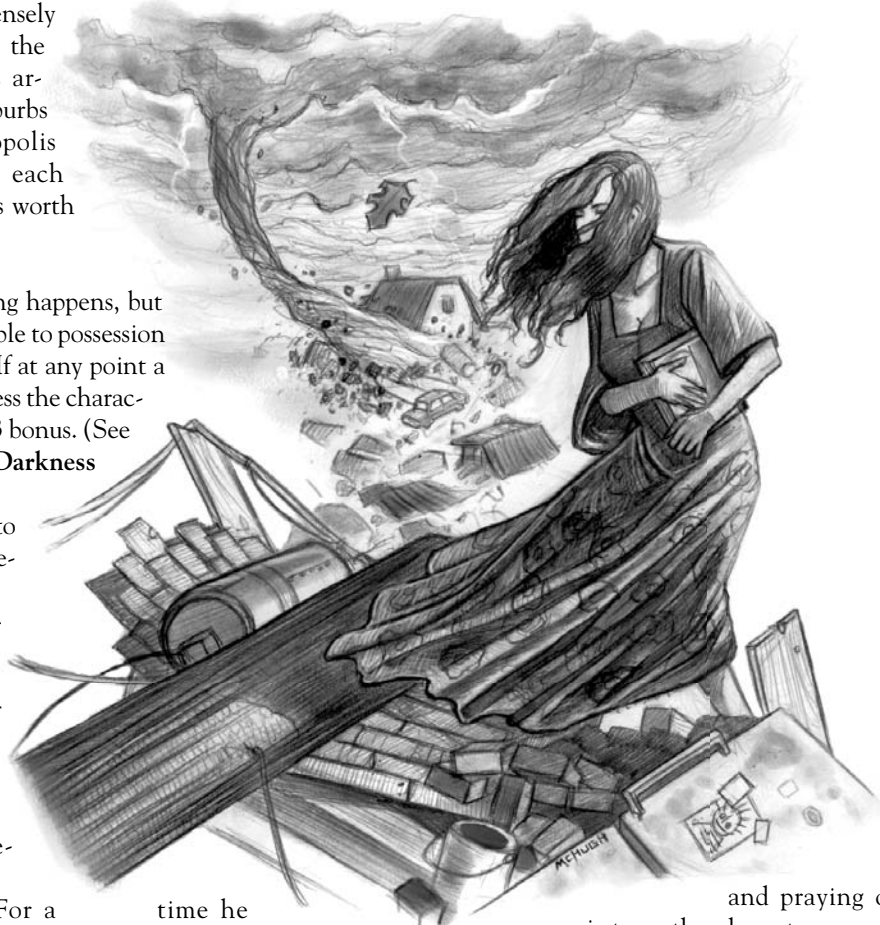
Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
-2	Distractions
+1	Character possesses Meditative Mind Merit
+2	Performed within one mile of another Verge

Nature's Wrath (●●●●●)

Some objects are intimately tied to the natural world: a branch broken from a sacred tree or the hand from a mummy sunken in peat (thus bound to the swamp by sacrifice). Some of these relics aren't just linked to the natural world, however; they are inexorably fettered to Mother Nature's fury.

This type of object can bring this elemental wrath to bear on the world around it. By placing it on the ground



and praying over it, the character summons some kind of natural event – not a horrific disaster, exactly, but a potent occurrence of nature's fury: a mild but persistent hurricane, a moderate earthquake with several aftershocks, a bad blizzard, a debilitating sandstorm. These events aren't record breaking in severity, but they still show off Mother Nature's might.

Cost: 5 Willpower points and the character must sacrifice a beloved inorganic object by destroying it. Some have suggested that Mother Nature is pleased by the annihilation of things that are clearly not her own (plastics, crafted metals, electronics).

Dice Pool: Presence + Expression

Action: Extended (10 successes are required; each roll is equal to one minute's worth of praying to, cursing or pleading with Mother Nature)

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Mother Nature sends a message to the user, rebuffing him. He takes one lethal point of damage from this "message" – a sharp icicle drops from a gutter and sticks in his shoulder, a hard wind shatters glass and sends the shrapnel against the character, or perhaps a sudden cloud of sand distracts a driver and he clips the character with his front bumper. Somehow, Nature delivers her message.

Failure: The character fails to stir Nature's fury.

Success: The fires of Nature's anger are successfully stoked. Some event appropriate to the season and geo-

graphic location stirs over the next hour. A hurricane blows in from the gulf, seismologists start to see the signs of a coming earthquake, a rough Nor'easter blows in with the promise of a lot of precipitation.

Once it hits, the event itself lasts for a single 12-hour period. During this time, the event takes over: gale winds blow, the snow comes down in whiteout conditions, the earthquake and its aftershocks continue to rise and fall, etc.

After the event is complete, particularly damaging effects remain for a number of days equal to the character's own Stamina score regardless of efforts to resolve them. Some weather events might leave behind ice, floods, or downed power lines. Earthquakes leave behind rubble, aftershocks, and sparking wires. Only after three days can the area truly begin to clean up after this event.

The range of the storm and the aftereffects are equal to two times the character's Morality score in miles (some suggest that Mother Nature appreciates the pure of heart, even though the use of this Power suggests a sin against Morality at level 5, as the storm is sure to cause mass property damage at the very least).

During the 12-hour period of the storm, all within the region affected suffer -5 dice to any actions taken out in the storm (driving through the blizzard, picking locks in the hurricane, trying to see through a sandstorm, etc.).

During the aftereffects (as determined by Stamina), all within the region suffer a -3 penalty to any actions taken in areas clearly effected by the event (driving through a rubble-filled street, running down an icy sidewalk, brawling in a flooded basement, etc.).

Note that effects are not limited to these dice penalties. A natural event disrupts infrastructure, so it could harm or kill people (someone in a hurricane might drown or be hit by a flying stop sign), and there will certainly be damage to the Structure of many objects (from trees to cars to houses). The Storyteller determines such effects.

The character who caused the natural event suffers no penalties during the event and its aftereffects. He also suffers no injuries as a direct result of the storm: if a tree falls near him, it just misses (though it doesn't stop ancillary damage such as if a man driven mad in the storm decides to shoot "looters" and takes a shot at the character, the bullet isn't miraculously deflected).

Exceptional Success: If the character is able to achieve an exceptional success on the extended roll, the duration of the event's aftereffects are doubled.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier

Situation

+1

Power used in inclement weather conditions.

Never Surprised (●)

This ability allows an object to alert its keeper to a potential ambush. It might grow instantly warm, hiss and twitch like a fat roach, or it may just invoke a starburst of light behind the character's eyes to warn him of an impending attack. By having this object, the character automatically succeeds on any Wits + Composure rolls meant to detect a surprise attack, and he can respond normally (i.e. roll Initiative) while still applying his full Defense against incoming attacks.

Cost: A user does not activate this object; it activates *itself*. By having this object somewhere on his person (it must be touching the skin to work), the object detects the ambush and actively withdraws one Willpower point from the user's pool. The user does not have to willingly spend it – the object takes it even if the character resists the expenditure. If the character possesses no Willpower, the object extracts its price in blood by incurring one bashing point of damage (which appears as a grisly odd-shaped bruise somewhere on the body near the object).

Dice Pool: No roll necessary

Action: Reflexive



Object Killer (••••)

This supernatural effect likely powers a hand-held weapon or tool of some ilk, be it the Sword of Saint Agnes or the Sledgehammer of Iron John Jackson. This particular weapon ignores Durability when making an attack on a mundane object, doing damage immediately to that item's Structure. If attacking supernaturally-enhanced objects, this Power allows the weapon to ignore two points of that object's Durability.

This ability *can* empower an item not usually considered a weapon – a ring on the hand may allow Brawl attacks to do damage directly to the item's Structure, for instance. Some items might be weapons only in an improvised sense: an umbrella, perhaps, or the skull of a serial killer. Using these items as weapons demands the improvised (-1) penalty during any attack.

Cost: None

Dice Pool: No roll necessary. This Power is always active.

Potent Success Attribute (•••• or ••••••)

Some objects allow their users to take their successes and potentially refine them into something more potent. At the time of the object's purchase or creation, the character determines one Skill that this object supports. The object is usually tied to the Skill in some way – a pair of fuzzy dice might modify Drive rolls, a bile-stained lab-coat might aid in Medicine rolls, or a golden tongue ring might help with Persuasion.

The three-dot Power grants that Skill the 9-Again roll. The five-dot Power grants that Skill the 8-Again roll. Each has a duration of one scene, and can only be used once per 24-hour period.

Cost: 2 Willpower, except for items which support Brawl, Weaponry or Firearms rolls – these require 3 Willpower to activate.

Dice Pool: No roll necessary

Protection Charm (• to ••••••; special)

A man clutches prayer beads made from the knuckles of his enemies and he is protected from sickness. A woman finds a two-skulled infant skeleton in the floorboards beneath her home and she finds that it grants her shelter against the venomous snakes handled at her Pentecostal church. A young boy knows that the long shadows come for him when he sleeps, and so he clutches a frayed blanket to his chest; with it, he never again needs to slumber.

Some objects protect their keepers against harm caused by certain effects. Such objects or "charms" must be kept on the body, touching the skin. Below are a number of these effects, which are determined by the cost of dots in this Power. An object might possess only one of these charms, though it could also possess several (if a single amulet protects against bashing damage, fatigue and grapple, it would cost a total of seven dots).

Bashing Damage (•••): The character is capable of shrugging off points of bashing damage: whether by fists or by sledgehammer, the points don't even make it to the character sheet. The charm is active for a number of turns equal to successes gained.

Deprivation (•): The character can ignore the deleterious effects caused by hunger and thirst. He suffers no penalties to rolls, nor does he assume any of the damage normally associated with deprivation. The charm is active for a number of days equal to successes gained. These days are added onto the character's normal limits (pp.175-176, **World of Darkness Rulebook**) for determining deprivation.

Disease (••): This charm can be used in two ways. One, it can be used to protect the user from catching any kind of bacterial or viral sickness. The charm is active for a number of weeks equal to successes gained. Alternately, if the character is already under the effects of a particular disease, the charm can be activated to give the character days of solace where he is free from the depredations of the illness. He takes no damage from the disease during the period of time the charm is active. In this case, the charm is active for a number of days equal to successes gained. The character cannot use the first ability (resisting disease) if he is already possessed by some sickness; in that case, he must choose the second option until that sickness is healed. (This does not work on supernatural sickness, whose persistence within the human body is too strong to be trumped by the relic.)

Electrocution (••): Electricity fails to cause damage to the character. His body still conducts it, but he takes none of the damage as noted on pp. 177-178 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**. Note, however, that the rule to escape a source of electrocution (Strength to pull away as a reflexive action) is still in play.

Fatigue (•): The charm's keeper can remain awake for abnormal lengths of time with no harmful effects (at least initially). The charm is active for a number of days equal to successes rolled; these days are added to the normal 24-hour limit (so three successes means an additional 72-hours, or three days, on top of the usual 24-hour limit, thus the character can go for a total of *four* days without penalties from fatigue). As noted, during the extra days awake the character assumes no penalties from lack of sleep. This also allows the user to surpass the Stamina/Resolve limit imposed on "days awake" (p. 180, **World of Darkness Rulebook**). The catch to this charm is that, once the days are up, the character *does* immediately pass out for a full eight hours, acting as if comatose during this time.

Grapple (•••): The character becomes in some way impossible to hold. His skin may feel slippery, or his bones may appear to collapse and shift so that he can easily squirm free from an enemy's grip. The character is immune to any grappling attempts (they fail automatically) for a number of turns equal to successes rolled.

Lethal Damage (•••••): Deadly damage doesn't affect the character. Bullets hit him and drop to the ground below,

pass right through him, or fail to hit him even at point-blank range. A blade fails to cut his skin. A car crushed in an accident shudders and shakes as the character extracts himself from the tangled mess – with nary a scratch on him. The character is immune to normal bashing, and in the process all lethal damage is downgraded to bashing damage (which the character takes, for he is not immune to this lessened damage, though it heals as normal). This charm is active for a number of turns equal to successes gained.

Poisons/Toxins/Drugs (•••): The character could drink a martini laced with a thimble full of cyanide, and not even feel the effects. Hell, he could guzzle a beer stein full of Windex and antifreeze, and his body would process it like water. Drugs, too, fail to have any effect on him, whether it's a cigarette, ten shots of tequila, or a suppository of trailer-park methamphetamines. The charm is active for a number of hours equal to successes rolled.

Stun/Knockout (•): The character cannot be stunned or knocked out (pp. 167-168, **World of Darkness Rulebook**) through damage. This charm is active for a number of turns equal to successes gained.

Temperature Extremes (•): Weather and temperature have zero effect on a character while this charm is active. Walking across the Sahara desert or the icy tundra doesn't bother him, nor do the winds from a hurricane or the stinging dust of a sandstorm. No damage or penalties occur as a result of extreme weather or temperatures. Successes gained on this roll add one hour per success to the character's normal period of resistance (Stamina + Resolve). During this time, the extreme temperature is only moderately uncomfortable. While unpleasant, the character is largely numb to the pain and misery normally caused by extreme heat or cold.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Wits + Survival

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The charm backfires. The character suffers a sudden migraine headache, and for the remainder of the scene suffers a -2 penalty to all Physical and Mental rolls.

Failure: The charm fails to provide its protection.

Success: As described above. Note that each charm can provide its benefit only once per chapter (game session).

Exceptional Success: As above, but the charm also transfers an extra hardness to the character, granting him +1 Health for the remainder of the scene.

Pulse (• to •••••)

Upon activation, an object with the Pulse Power emits an electromagnetic pulse that disrupts all electronic equipment within a given range. Many objects require an action, albeit a minor one, to achieve this effect: perhaps the character must thrust a knife blade into the earth, flick an old haunted Zippo lighter, or pitch

the Queen of Spades from a cursed deck of playing cards to the ground. Some, however, simply demand their user hold them and concentrate. Higher dots in this ability increase its range (see below).

Cost: 2 Willpower

Dice Pool: Resolve + Crafts

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The object pulses, but the only thing disrupted is the character's own biorhythm. For the remainder of the scene, the character feels dizzy and fatigued, suffering a -2 penalty to all dice pools.

Failure: No electromagnetic pulse occurs.

Success: All equipment relying on electronics (computers, cars, watches), rather than pure mechanics, either power down or malfunction for a number of turns equal to the character's Resolve + Composure score. Lights go out or flicker wildly. Any captured images or media on erasable or magnetic media (hard drives, for instance) jumbled and unreadable for the same number of turns.

The Power has a radius equal to five yards per dot purchased in this Power (one dot is equal to five yards, whereas five dots would be equal to 25 yards).

Exceptional Success: As with a success, but the objects stay dead until fixed (each object will require an extended Wits + Crafts roll, with each roll equal to five minutes' worth of tinkering, and a number of successes equal to the successes gained on the activation's roll must be achieved)

Resist Fire (• or •••)

Some objects grant their user immunity to particular conditions that would otherwise cause great pain or detriment. In this case, a relic with this Power protects its user from fire, preventing burns and blisters for a time. The one-dot version doesn't actually prevent the damage entirely, but instead downgrades the normally-lethal damage to bashing (or, for vampires, it downgrades aggravated to lethal). The three-dot version prevents the damage entirely while active. Many objects possessing this Power are items of clothing: a hooded sweatshirt that miraculously survived an arson attempt (though perhaps its owner was not so lucky), a wedding ring that melted down into a seared lump of gold, or a singed garter worn by one of the country's most prolific female arsonists. A relic with this ability also has the side-effect that the relic itself cannot be harmed by fire.

Cost: 2 Willpower

Dice Pool: Stamina + Survival

Action: Reflexive

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The object's protection fails utterly. Damage from fire is now aggravated for the remainder of the scene. (If possessed by a vampire, the damage is already aggravated, but now suffers a +1 to the fire's damage modifier.)

Failure: The relic fails to confer its protection upon the user.

Success: The user is protected from fire (it's either downgraded to bashing or prevented utterly) for a number of turns equal to the successes gained. Note that it only protects the user's flesh and body, as well as itself. All other objects are subject to damage – clothes catch fire and burn away, shoelaces melt, and if the heat is intense enough, weapons begin to melt.

Exceptional Success: As above, except the user is now protected for the whole scene.

Revitalizing Aura (•••••)

A bond is formed between an object and the object's keeper. Because of this bond, the object quickens the healing process in the wielder: bruises fade with alarming speed, ruptures of the flesh mend without the aid of a doctor, and broken bones shift and set themselves. Many items that possess this ability are related to the medical profession in some way: a rusty scalpel, a severed head in a jar of formaldehyde, a jaundiced bandage. Some instead represent life-giving energies: a succulent plant that seems unkillable, a holy mandala that appears to twist and throb in one's peripheral vision, a sacred cup from before the time of Christ.

Healing times are approximately halved for one who possesses this item and bonds with it. Bashing disappears at the rate of one point per seven minutes. Points of lethal damage take one day, not two, to heal. Aggravated damage heals at the rate of one point per four days.

Cost: This item costs nothing to use on a regular basis, but the user must bond with the item at the time of purchase or creation. This "bond" requires the character to expend either one dot from his Physical Attributes, or two Willpower dots. Moreover, the character cannot regain these invested traits by spending experience points until a week has passed in-game. If a second individual successfully bonds with the relic, the first bond is broken. The relic may not be bonded with more than one individual at any given time.

Note: This Power only amplifies a natural healing rate. If used by supernatural creatures for whom healing is inherently accelerated, it will double their normal healing rate, but will not increase rates already boosted by Gifts, Disciplines or other supernatural powers.

Reward Temptation (••)

Relics can be insidious things: a crucifixion nail that whispers blasphemies to its keeper, a jabbering head preserved in brine and amniotic fluid, a deck of diabolical Tarot hand-painted with scenes of history's atrocities. Such an object might reward its keeper for performing terrible acts. With this Power, it certainly will.

Cost: The user pays no direct cost, but that doesn't mean the object doesn't extract some kind of price from its keeper. While active, the user cannot regain Willpower points through acts in accordance with his Virtue. Also, while active, rolls to resist degeneration are made at -1 dice as the user's heart grows callused to sin and evil.

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Subterfuge

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The user's past sins, both real and imagined, suddenly swarm him. They flood his mind in a staccato burst. The user now suffers one of the following mild derangements for the next 24 hours: Depression, Fixation, Inferiority Complex, or Phobia, as seems most appropriate for the situation.

Failure: The user fails to accept the temptation of the object.

Success: For a number of days equal to successes gained on the activation roll, the user regains Willpower dice more easily through the expression of Vice. First, he regains those points normally in a scene when his actions reflect his Vice. Second, he can regain *all* his lost Willpower at the end of a chapter (game session) by having acted in accordance with his Vice (not Virtue). Finally, the character is *also* rewarded whenever he commits any act that demands a degeneration roll. Performing such acts feel good, and even better, they feel *right*. The character gains 1 experience point upon performing such an act of potential degeneration. It doesn't matter if the character *actually* loses a dot of Morality, only that his action requires the roll. (Worth noting, however, is that once active, the character cannot prematurely end this Power. It continues unabated to the end of its duration.)

Exceptional Success: As above, except the character can gain 2 experience points if performing an action that warrants a degeneration roll.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier Situation

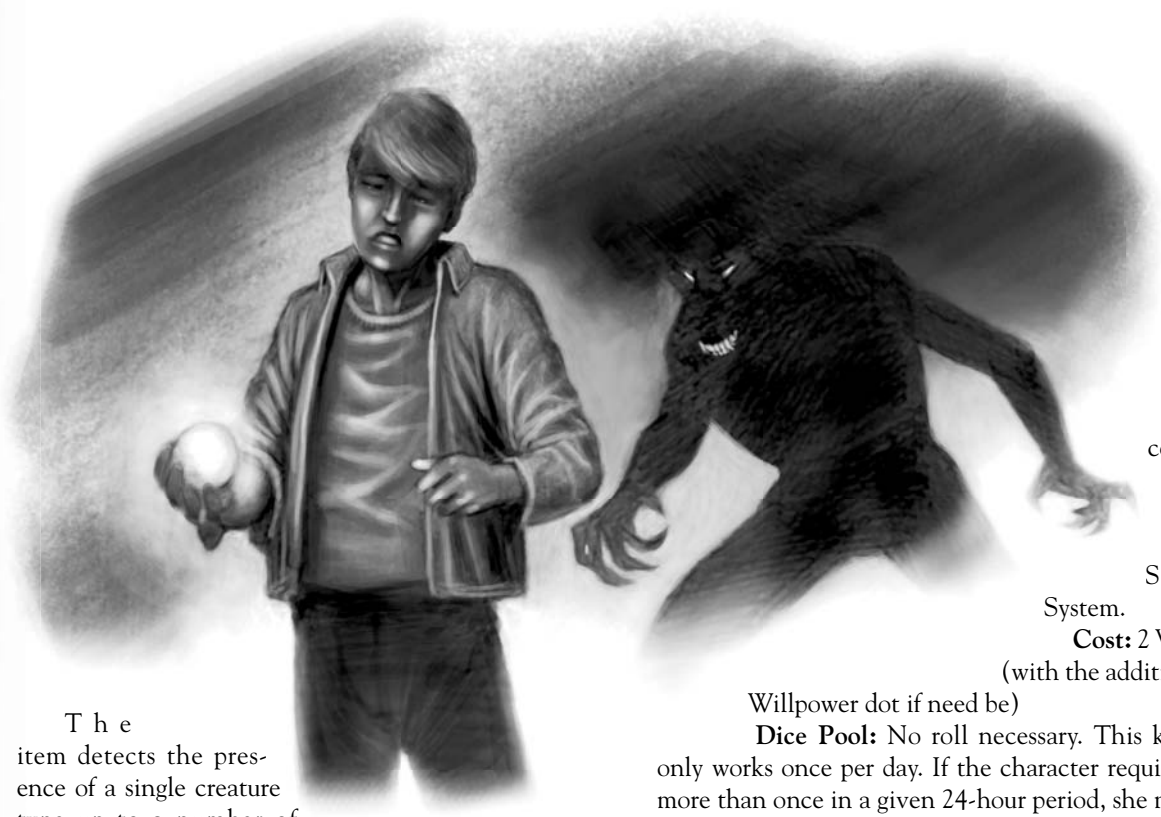
-3 Character gained Willpower points through his Virtue during the last chapter (game session)

Sense Creature (••)

This object helps a user detect the presence of a particular type of monster. This type must be chosen at the time of purchase or object creation; once determined, it will not change. (Potential monster types include but are not limited to: changelings, ghosts, mages, Prometheans, psychics, spirits, vampires, and werewolves.) The item alerts its user to the presence of that particular monster type. Different items warn of such a presence in different ways: emitting a high-pitch whine, vibrating, screaming, glowing a particular color, becoming ice-cold or abnormally warm. Some items alert the wielder in a way already built into the device (a cell phone rings, a pen leaks its ink, a saint's finger twitches and bleeds). This manner of warning is chosen at the time of purchase or creation and will not change once determined.

Cost: None

Dice Pool: This Power involves no roll.



The item detects the presence of a single creature type up to a number of yards equal to 100 yards around itself. It does not identify the creature. For instance, on a crowded subway platform, it would not distinguish a noted creature from the rest of the crowd. Moreover, it does not make hidden creatures visible. It simply denotes their presence in that given radius. Worth noting is that the object does not necessarily need to be activated or held by a user. A silk rose may turn real in the presence of a changeling whether or not its owner is touching it or even somewhere nearby.

Action: Reflexive

Skeleton Key (•• or •••)

This “key” works in any lock. The two-dot version functions toward Lockpicking rolls. The three-dot aids in both Lockpicking and Bypassing Security Systems (both actions found on pp. 74-75 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**). The key automatically opens any lock or shuts down any security system that requires less than 7 successes on the extended Dexterity + Larceny roll; this may void the need to roll at all. If the roll requires more than 7 successes, then the player must still make the roll for the character, but now the Larceny roll gains the 9-Again rule.

Note that a “key” needn’t be a literal key. It could just as easily be a switch of willow inserted into a lock or waved over a security system, a sacred athame whose symbolic swiping of the blade “removes all obstacles,” or an old demonic mask whose grim visage “frightens” the lock into opening or the system into shutting down. Even if the key isn’t a literal key, the character is still allowed the Dexterity + Lar-

ceny roll to Lockpick or Bypass the Security

System.

Cost: 2 Willpower (with the addition of one

Willpower dot if need be)

Dice Pool: No roll necessary. This key Power only works once per day. If the character requires its use more than once in a given 24-hour period, she may spend an additional Willpower dot per use.

Action: Instant or Extended

Smite (•••••)

Some objects are said to bear the wrath of God or the fury of devils contained within them. This Power is perhaps an indication of that: when made active, the object erupts in some kind of explosion. It needn’t be a literal “fire and heat” explosion, though that’s certainly possible. Some emit light, the screams of infants, a flurry of bats and insects, an acrid odor, even a deafening roar like that from a tornado. However the eruption manifests, it’s dizzying and deadly.

Most such objects are religious and ancient: the Ark of the Covenant is said to have this Power, as are the various obsidian blocks that are rumored to be the construction materials for the Devil’s palace (Pandemonium) in Hell. Some Smite-empowered relics, though, are frighteningly mundane: a hand-held tape recorder, a deck of cards, a ballpoint pen. One must wonder how such simple objects are blessed and cursed with this mighty wrath.

This Power is intense and certainly not subtle. It can only be used once per day, and it easily draws attention. Any individuals within a mile radius can make a Wits + Composure roll to notice the overt effects spawned by this Power, whether it’s a pulsing light or the shrieking wail of a banshee’s rage.

The character must be holding the item in both hands when activating this Power.

Cost: 2 Willpower, and the item extracts an additional price as well. While the character isn’t physically harmed by the Power (though his clothing and any equipment he



carries are), he does suffer two side effects immediately after enacting Smite. The first is that he assumes the Narcissism derangement that lasts for the next seven days (or Megalomania, if Narcissism is already possessed), as the character feels swollen with divine or infernal might. The second effect is that the Power is dizzying, leaving a character feeling either drunk or hung-over. Assume that until the character can sleep for an uninterrupted eight hours, he suffers a -3 roll on all Physical and Mental rolls. Possessing the Iron Stamina Merit at any level lowers this penalty to -2, but cannot reduce it any further.

Dice Pool: Strength + Presence

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The object destroys itself. It literally implodes, folding into itself until it's little more than a pile of silt.

Failure: The object fails to detonate its Power.

Success: Everybody within the Power's range take a number of lethal points of damage equal to the successes rolled when activating Smite. All objects also suffer damage, except they suffer *twice* the damage caused in successes; this damage ignores Durability entirely and does the damage straight to Structure. The Power has a range equal to twice the character's Resolve + Composure score in yards.

Exceptional Success: Successes equal damage, as above. However, if the character achieves an exceptional success, some of the divine or infernal might within this Power seems to give the character an imperceptible glow of authority. Assume that for the next day the character has +1 dice to any dice pools requiring Presence.

Social Lubrication (•)

An item with this Power grants the user a small boon during social situations, turning the advantage slightly in her direction. This generally empowers an object that one wears (someone else's engagement ring, a pair of delicate spectacles, lipstick from a dead starlet's makeup kit), but that isn't universal.

Cost: For the duration of the item's effect (one scene), the user willingly suffers a -1 penalty to all Physical rolls.

Dice Pool: Resolve + Composure

Action: Reflexive

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The user suddenly appears wretched and strange to others, and it likely draws their scorn. She suffers a -2 penalty to all Social rolls for the rest of the scene, and all others gain a +2 Social bonus on all appropriate rolls made against her.

Failure: The user gains nothing from this Power.

Success: The user gains a +1 bonus to all Social rolls for one scene. During this time, all others suffer a -1 penalty on their Social rolls made in her presence (within eyesight).

Exceptional Success: The bonus gained increases to +2, and the penalty suffered by others is now -2 dice.



Suggested Modifiers	
Modifier	Situation
-1	User possesses some kind of physical flaw or deformity
-1	Foreign and/or unexpected social situation
+1	User possesses Striking Looks Merit

Soul Inheritance (●●●●●)

Objects with this Power literally consume the souls of its wielders. The souls linger in the object, forming a nebulous mass of knowledge and power accessible to the item's current keeper. Upon a keeper's death, even if he's half-a-world away from the object, his soul – promised to the relic – bypasses any final reward and enters the item.

The current keeper gains a number of benefits from a relic with this Power. The first is that, by simply having the object on him, he is able to ignore any Unskilled penalties associated with rolls (Mental, Physical, and Social). The second is that he can draw up to two Willpower points from the item per week. He can draw more, but every Willpower point drawn beyond the third incurs one lethal point of damage (the item draws out life energy and converts it to sheer will for its keeper).

The third benefit is that, with success on a roll (see below), the keeper can pick a Skill from a particular category (Mental, Physical, Social) and give it a number of bonus dice. Note, however, that this category is chosen at the time of the character's bonding with the object. At that point, he *must* pick one category from the three that he can draw from in the future. If the character chooses Physical, he can never draw Skill bonuses for Mental or Social rolls. (This Power represents the many souls within the object contributing their knowledge. The fact that only one category is chosen indicates that the keeper "bonds" particularly with the handful of souls that favored that category as a primary Skill category.)

Most objects possessing this Power are old, even ancient: a Roman centurion's Gladius sword, a splinter from the Holy Cross, a fossil of an infant from Pompeii. One side effect of having an object

with this Power is that the many souls within the relic tend to whisper to the user – sometimes just an incomprehensible susurrant of voices, other times a cogent but often foreign or bizarre babble of ideas. At the time of bonding with this item, a character must therefore take one of the following mild derangements: Fixation, Irrationality, or Vocalization.

Because use of a relic with this ability requires the wielder to have a soul (that will eventually be swallowed by the object), this Power becomes inaccessible to some creatures such as unRedeemed Prometheans, Tremere Liches, or any other soulless creature. (However, rumors exist that such monsters may have found ways to promise other people's souls to such relics.)

When the wielder dies, his soul is wrenched from his body and drawn into the object no matter where it is. (Some unnatural senses can perceive this, but the soul seems immutable to attempts to "catch" it in an effort to prevent its entry into the item. The oath to the relic, it seems, is dire and unbreakable.) The wielder cannot become a ghost, nor will he ever be Embraced as a vampire. That said, one *could* use his parts to construct a Promethean.

Cost: 1 Willpower dot and 1 Attribute dot sacrificed to "bond" with the item. This is a one-time expenditure. All other advantages of this Power cost nothing, unless a character decides to take more than 2 Willpower points per week (at which point, lethal damage occurs as noted above).



Dice Pool: Composure + Empathy

Action: Reflexive (note that this action only needs to be taken if a character is attempting to draw from his chosen Skill category; the other benefits that comprise this Power require no roll to achieve)

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: One of the character's Skills in the chosen category disappears until he is able to achieve eight hours of uninterrupted sleep. The Skill literally leaves his memory; if Science, he can really remember *nothing* about his scientific learning, from the chart of elements up. The Storyteller chooses which Skill fades.

Failure: The character fails to draw the desired Skill.

Success: The character, having picked a Skill from his chosen category that he wishes to "upgrade," gains a bonus to that Skill equal to the successes rolled. This bonus lasts until the next sunrise or sunset, whichever comes first. Maximum bonus available is +5 dice. (In story terms, the information and knowledge desired comes flooding into the character's brain in a rush of frenetic whispers. This may aggravate whatever derangement the character accepted upon bonding with this item.)

Exceptional Success: As with success, the user gains a +5 bonus, but now it lasts for a full 24-hours.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
-3	The item is less than 100 years old
+2	The keeper personally knew one of the people whose souls are contained with the item

Spring-Heeled (●)

The user possessing a relic with this Power finds that he is able to jump higher and cross greater distances when leaping. Utilizing this Power approximately doubles the distance rate a character is capable of reaching for both vertical and broad jumps. The item allows the wielder to jump two feet vertically per success on the Athletics roll, and four feet per success for a standing broad jump. For a running jump, the character can jump a distance equal to her Size, plus an additional eight feet per success rolled. (See "Jumping," pp. 66-67, *World of Darkness Rulebook*.)

Many objects possessing this are objects a character wears: a pair of dusty boots from WWII, a toe ring from a suicide victim ("He plummeted 18 floors to his death."), a cultist's hooded robe.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: No roll is necessary to activate the Power, but a Jumping roll is necessary to reflect its bonus. This Power only works on a single jump. It can be used multiple times in a scene, but each use requires the Willpower expenditure.

Action: Reflexive

Steal Skill (●●●● or ●●●●●)

An item possessing this ability helps its user literally leech Skill dots away from another character, "borrowing" it temporarily. The target loses them. The user gains them.

The four-dot Power includes objects that first require a successful attack (be it a touch attack, or damage done through Firearms or Weaponry): a straight razor that "bleeds" a Skill away, for instance. The five-dot version only requires line-of-sight (and some items actually reflect this reliance on vision, such as a cracked monocle or a glass eye).

To have one's Skill stolen is a strange and jarring affair. One often feels light-headed, airy, both oddly free and yet possessing the nagging feeling of missing something (as if one has forgotten an important anniversary or where he set his keys).

The character responsible for claiming the stolen Skill simply feels the rush of knowledge enter his head in the span of a single second (think Neo in *The Matrix*, "I know kung-fu.")

Cost: 3 Willpower

Dice Pool: Presence + Larceny

Action: Reflexive

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The user suddenly suffers a deficit in whatever Attribute he last used (if his last roll was a Wits + Composure roll, then the Wits Attribute takes the penalty). This Attribute suffers a -2 penalty for the next hour.

Failure: The user steals no Skill dots.

Success: The user is able to steal away one Skill dot per success and temporarily use it herself. These Skill dots must be possessed by the target (a character can't leech away dots in Academics if the target doesn't have them). A maximum of five dots can be stolen in this way, but note that the item's wielder cannot go above five dots in a single Skill (thus, if she already possesses Athletics 2, she can only steal three dots from that particular Skill). This Power allows the user to steal *one* Skill; she cannot mix and match the dots (taking, say, five dots in total from three different Skills is not permissible). This can only be used on a given target once per calendar year (though multiple targets are no problem). The "theft" lasts for a single 24-hour period. However, the Power's user can extend that by spending another three Willpower points, which grant her an additional day beyond the first.

Exceptional Success: The thief can also steal a Specialty in the chosen stolen Skill, if one is possessed by the target.

Modifier	Suggested Modifiers Situation
-2	User has never met target before
-1	User doesn't know target's name (or knows target by a false name)

Stop Time (●●●●●)

Time is not meant to be trifled with. It's dangerous. It has deleterious effects on the world. And yet, a relic with this ability can do just that.

Use of this Power allows an object to literally stop time. The earth stops turning. Birds pause in mid-flight, as do flies or raindrops. All processes stop. Time fails to move forward. The only exception to this is the relic and the character using the relic.

This relic's Power can only be used once per chapter (game session).

Cost: 3 Willpower, and the character gains one of the following severe derangements: Anxiety, Obsessive-Compulsion, or Schizophrenia. The derangement is a result of one's control over, and out-of-sync feeling with, time itself. The severe version lasts for 12 hours. After that, the derangement downgrades to the mild version, which disappears after *another* 12 hours pass.

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Resolve

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Time does not stop, and the character feels sluggish and strange, as if he himself is moving slow or out-of-sync with time. He suffers a -3 to Speed, -2 to Initiative, and -1 to Defense for the scene.

Failure: Time continues on, unabated.

Success: Time stops for a number of turns equal to successes gained on the Intelligence + Resolve roll. During this time, a character is free to move as far as he can, steal money from someone, drag a heavy trashcan in front of a speeding (but currently frozen) getaway car. He can make rolls as per normal. The only exception to this rule is incurring violence against someone. The character gets one free shot subject to the Killing Blow rules (found on p. 168 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**). However, the act of sudden violence for some reason jars time back into place, where it continues as if it had never stopped. Note, too, that such a Killing Blow is subject to a degeneration roll (either Morality 4, "an impassioned crime" or Morality 2, "casual/callous crime," depending on the character's motives).

Exceptional Success: As above, but the character now gains one additional turn beyond his successes.

Swollen Might (●●●)

Swollen Might allows an object to modify the lethality of a character's attacks. Any strikes the character makes are delivered with potent force, incurring lethal damage instead of bashing. Many items empowered with this augmentation are something related to the act of hand-to-hand violence: a mouth guard worn by a champ killed in the ring, the leather gloves of an infamous "strangler" killer, the class ring of a brutal high school bully.

The Power also grants the object some bonus when attacking objects, as well. Assume that an object possesses -1 Durability when attacked by someone wielding this supernaturally-enhanced relic (of course, only when its Power is active).

Cost: 2 Willpower

Dice Pool: No roll is necessary. The Power lasts for one scene.

Action: Reflexive

Touch of Madness (●●● or ●●●●●)

Some objects cause madness. Many incur insanity because the object is incomprehensible, cursed, or otherwise saturated with some kind of negative resonance born as a byproduct of some other vicious power. Other objects possess this ability as their only power, causing madness as their sole purpose. Such relics are generally wretched and strange: a shrunk head with metal teeth, a Nazi jackboot spattered with blood that never washes away, a Kali-Yuga mandala that seems to shift and warp in front of the eyes.

The three-dot version of this Power requires a successful touch attack to deliver its effects. The five-dot version can do it simply by having its user in eyesight range of the target.

Cost: 2 Willpower for a mild derangement, 4 for a severe derangement

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Empathy versus target's Resolve + Composure

Action: Contested; resistance is reflexive

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The user is subject to the chosen derangement for the remainder of the scene; if he already possesses that derangement, he either gains a more severe version of it or another mild derangement of the Storyteller's choosing.

Failure: The target achieves more successes and suffers no effects.

Success: The character gains more successes than the target. The target suffers the derangement of the character's choosing. The target is under the potential sway of that derangement for a period of one week's time. However, the character can lengthen this to one *year* by investing a full Willpower *dot* at the time of the Power's successful use. Note that just because the target gains the derangement, it doesn't mean he's automatically given over to its effects; like anyone with a derangement, he's afforded the chance to stave off the mad effects with an appropriate Resolve + Composure roll.

Exceptional Success: As with a success, except the target suffers a -2 penalty to any Resolve + Composure rolls meant to resist the derangement. This penalty remains as long as the derangement is possessed.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+1	The user suffers from the derangement he hopes to cause in the target.

Unbreakable (●●●)

While a relic with this Power isn't actually unbreakable, it certainly seems to be: it resists all damage done by mundane attacks. The item could be as delicate as a desiccated rose, and even slamming a sledgehammer against it won't harm it if the rose possesses this ability. (Assume



that its Durability cannot be bypassed by mundane attacks or items.) Attacks by items possessing some kind of magic (such as the relics found in this book, or any of the supernatural objects found in books like **Werewolf: The Forsaken**, **Mage: The Awakening**, or **Changeling: The Lost**) are unaffected by this Power. Attacks made with such items occur normally, and are capable of bypassing Durability and doing Structure damage.

Cost: None

Dice Pool: No roll necessary. This ability is endemic to the object and does not need to be activated.

Unnatural Travel (•••••)

Some supernatural objects allow for a user to cross great distances in a matter of moments. Traveling in this manner, however, requires a bit of work on the part of the object's user – he cannot simply walk into a mirror and appear magically wherever he wishes. This Power demands that he “mark” his destination before-hand, which is why many such empowered objects come in pairs: two mirrors, two lanterns, a key-and-doorknob, a pen-and-inkwell. To travel between two places, the user must anchor one object at one location, and the other complementary object at another location. At which point he can expend the effort to shift his body between *only* these two locations. (For instance, he has a pair of steamer trunks. He places one trunk in his cellar, and another in a garden shed belonging to his ex-lover. From that point forward, he's able to crawl into the trunk placed in his cellar and appear out of the trunk he secretly placed in the shed, even though it's a hundred miles away.) Distance is irrelevant – the character could travel between Alaska and Morocco, or Rio de Janeiro and a 747 airliner, provided that both sides are appropriately marked or anchored.

Note that not *all* objects necessarily come in pairs. A piece of chalk, for instance, or a sacred knife, could be used to draw or etch a “doorway” in both locations. The traveler can therefore move between both locations, using these drawn doorways as anchor points. If someone were to erase the chalk or repair the knife-marks, however, an attempt to travel automatically fails. Also worth noting is that while many objects possessing this Power *do* come in pairs, that does not demand the Power be purchased twice. The four dots put toward this ability count toward the pairing of objects, not each individual object. (So, two connected mirrors count as one relic for the purposes of point expenditure.)

Some have speculated that it might be possible to use these objects to travel between worlds, seeing as how distance really doesn't matter. If one of the objects were somehow anchored in another world (one of the aforementioned steamer trunks somehow ends up in the Spirit World, for instance), it is possible (assuming Storyteller permission, of course). Doing so, however, is not easy for a user, and demands twice the cost (below) be spent to achieve this.

One further distinction: only one “pairing” of doorways per relic can be open at any given time. If a character attempts to use the device to create a second “path,” he’s certainly able to do so – but, in doing so, he closes the other door to this Power.

Cost: 2 Willpower (or 4 points if traveling between worlds)

Dice Pool: Wits + Manipulation

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Something happens in the space between worlds, in the stretch of nothingness found between anchor points. The user, failing to travel to the other object, reappears at his point of origin one hour later covered in scratches and bruises (equivalent to four points of bashing damage).

Failure: The user concentrates, but fails to manifest the will necessary to carry him between object anchor points.

Success: The user travels successfully between anchor points. He enters one object or door and appears at the other. This takes one minute of travel time regardless of the distance between anchor points.

Exceptional Success: As with a success, but it only takes one turn of travel time instead of a full minute.

Voice of the Relic (• to •••••)

The sword that whispers. The monkey’s skull that gibbers. The old TRS-80 computer that offers ancient secrets in orange monochrome across its screen. Whether the voice comes across telepathically, out-loud, or in a physical form (such as words flashed across the blade of a knife or the aforementioned computer text), relics with this Power are capable of communication with their keeper.

Of course, here’s the rub: only the keeper who has bonded with the relic can hear or see the messages. So, when someone sees the character holding a Noh mask up to his face and asking it questions, an assumption regarding that character’s insanity comes easily.

The cost of this Power is equal to the number of dots spent for the relic in either Mental Skills or Mental Merits. These dots can be utilized in any combination (so, a sacrificial knife might have Occult 3 and Danger Sense 2).

The Skill dots are accessible to the character not as bonuses, but as something the player literally rolls for his character’s relic. If the relic possesses Occult 3 and the character wishes to ask the knife about, say, a strange configuration of glyphs written on a subway map, the player can roll three dice for the knife’s Occult pool (as for what an object can perceive, assume it can perceive the world in all five senses, and it does so in a radius of space equal to 10 yards).

Merit dots, however, can be handled a little differently, with each offering a slightly different bonus to the relic’s keeper:

- **Common Sense:** Assume that the relic has four dice (equal to the dots in the Merit) to roll once per chapter to determine whether or not the character may be embarking on a disastrous course of action. The relic can warn the character.

- **Danger Sense:** The relic has two dice, equal to Merit dots, to roll at the same time that the player rolls the character’s Wits + Composure to detect an ambush. These are rolled separately, not together. If the relic succeeds, it offers some kind of physical or vocal alarm: a knife’s hilt grows icy cold, an amulet screams out in a voice only the wielder can hear, a necktie tightens slightly around the character’s neck.

- **Eidetic Memory:** In cases of remembering information, the relic gains +2 dice to any Skill-based rolls necessary for the relic to recall something it has witnessed. This only applies to Skill dots it already possesses.

- **Encyclopedic Knowledge:** The relic has four dice to roll for this Merit. Success allows for one detail or fact about a situation, providing a less complete knowledge than four dots in one Skill would provide, but being broad enough to cover all topics.



• **Holistic Awareness:** The relic gets three dice. Any successes on this roll can be added in the subsequent turn to any Medicine roll made by the character's player. (It whispers important medical information or diagnoses to the character.)

• **Language:** The relic can translate for the character. It isn't always perfect, but it works well enough. Dots are equal to the level of fluency in that language. (It is important to note is that the relic always initially speaks the language of the keeper as a result of the bonding process. Meaning, it does not need this to speak whatever language the user already speaks.)

• **Meditative Mind:** The relic offers some kind of soothing sound, or some kind of words of wisdom to the character. The character can add +1 to any Meditation rolls (p. 51, *World of Darkness Rulebook*).

• **Unseen Sense:** The relic knows when something isn't right, and it can warn the character when the supernatural is present. Like with Danger Sense, it offers some kind of physical or auditory clue: a monkey's paw shifts and twitches, or the Queen on a playing card opens her mouth and keens an unearthly song.

Cost: No cost is necessary to access the relic's Skills or Merits, though it's worth noting that a relic with this Power is a character in its own right, and it can be moody or dismissive of the character's needs. If it feels the character did not listen to it last time, it may grow hesitant to offer its "wisdom" so easily the next time, demanding some kind of repayment or action as proof of the character's commitment. There remains, however, an *initial* cost to bond with the relic. The character must spend some combination of his own life force and will equal to the dots taken in this Power. The health is equivalent to points of lethal damage, and must be caused by the relic itself (a knife may cut, a stone idol can be used to smash bones, etc.). The will is equal to dots, not points, of Willpower. If the dots in this Power are equal to five, the character could assume four points of lethal damage and one dot of Willpower, or do the reverse if need be. As with other bonded relics, if a second individual bonds with an item with this Power, the first bond is broken.

Cursed Items

An item can be cursed just as easily as it can be blessed. A pint of a devil's blood spilled across the flat of a blade, an ill-word from a powerful sinner or potent saint, or an object present at seven separate suicides – all of these might contribute to a negative resonance possessed by an object. But it isn't always so clear cut. Some objects are bathed in powerful emotion: striking grief, murderous rage, a lunatic's ebullience. It might leave the relic with a bit of a blessing... as well as an unholy contamination.

There are three ways of utilizing a curse or a drawback in a given object-of-power.

The first is that the drawback occurs whenever the item's supernatural ability is used. When Nergal's Jawbone is

used to summon a storm, it also levies some kind of punishment upon the wielder. Why is this? It doesn't much matter, but if you need a reason, you can easily assume that mortal man wasn't meant to touch such powers easily. He can manage it, but it takes more than the investment of effort to achieve such effects. Another way of putting it is that every action has an equal and opposite reaction. Note that if you choose this route, it's recommended that the cost of the item's Power is reduced by one in dots (to a minimum of one). This isn't strictly necessary, but a player shouldn't be punished without conceivable reason.

The second way is that the curse supplants cost, either through the wielder's choice or by the simple fact of the curse's presence. In other words, if the Lantern of the Valley's Djinn normally requires three Willpower points to use, you can either run it where the wielder can purposefully neglect to spend those points and *instead* suffer the three-point curse, or you can alternately have it where the Willpower cost is permanently replaced with the "cost" of the drawback's invocation.

The third way is that the item has no blessing at all. Maybe the character thinks it does. But the reality is that the damn thing is just cursed, tainted with bad voodoo, contaminated with damaging resonance. For Storytellers, please don't let players spend points on Powers only to have them end up as cursed items. If you want to make them *believe* they spent the points (until the time comes when the curse is revealed and their points come back to them), that's doable provided you've earned the trust of your players.

Below are a number of possible curses and drawbacks an item might possess. Each curse has a point value which can be used to counterbalance the cost of a relic's Power (a five-dot relic with a two-point curse would then cost less – only three dots total).

Most curses are two dots, though some listed below exceed that due to their particularly potent price.

Note too that some of the Powers located above already have in-built drawbacks (Fool's Gold, for instance). While it may be tempting to stack another curse on top of that, for the most part that's not recommended (and ultimately can imbalance the object so much that it becomes nearly useless in play).

Curses

Addictive (•••)

The item and its Power are, in some way, addictive. This addiction manifests in one of two ways (choose one at the time of the object's creation):

One way is that the user depends dearly upon the mere presence of the item. He must have it with him at all times, or he begins to feel...shaky. Out-of-sorts. Irritable. (In short, he's going through withdrawal.) The first 24-hour period without the object in his presence, he suffers a -1 penalty to all rolls. This penalty increases by one die per day, to a maximum of

-5 by the fifth day. On the sixth day, the addiction is shaken and the penalty removed. However, if the character ever touches the item again, the process begins anew.

The second manner of addiction is a compulsion to use the Power. Whenever confronted by a situation in which the Power could *theoretically* help the character, the player must roll a Resolve + Composure roll to resist giving in. Failure on this roll indicates that he uses the item's supernatural ability regardless of the situation. Dramatic failure indicates a loss of a Willpower point (in addition to any spent on the object's activation). Any time the character fails this Resolve + Composure roll, the next instance of resistance is marked with a cumulative -1 penalty. Hence, it becomes harder and harder to resist using the object's Power the more the character gives into it. To remove this addiction, the character must spend five days without using the object's supernatural blessing.

Danger Magnet (••)

This is more a story-based drawback than a systems-based one, but assume that the use of the object draws danger to the character. For a period of time after the item's use (more dots in

a Power likely indicates a longer period of alarm, assume one hour per dot of Power accessed), the character is *far* likelier to run into danger. It seems attracted to her. Maybe some gang toughs try to steal her cell phone. Maybe a pack of wild dogs stalks her. Maybe at a club one of the undead tries to seduce her. Danger, in whatever form, seems to track her down above all others (and, in combat, most assailants direct their initial attentions toward her, not other characters).

Debilitating Loss, Attribute or Skill (•• or ••••)

Some relics leave a user foggy of mind or weak of body, literally drawing away his fundamental traits. Perhaps it uses these traits to power itself, or perhaps the relic's dark energies simply taint a character, eating away at the memories his mind and body possess. Perhaps he forgets how to pick a lock (Larceny), or loses muscle tone (Strength). Maybe he's now more prone to snapping at people (Composure) or feels unable to access all the knowledge he gained in school about chemistry (Science). The more potent the ability, the higher the loss. Loss of traits usually last for a day or two depending on what the Storyteller deems appropriate.

This loss is represented by a dice penalty equal to the dots in the Power used (-1 for a one-dot Power, to -5 for a five dot Power).

Skill loss is a two-dot curse. Attribute loss is far more damaging, and is a four-dot curse. (Remember that lowering certain Attributes may affect others, such as Willpower, Health or Speed.)

Derangement (•• or ••••)

Use of the object is damning to the character's mental state, cursing her with a temporary derangement. Usually, the derangement is mild, and lasts either for the next day or until she gets eight hours of sleep. Severe derangements might be the result of more potent relics, or as an escalation of an existing mild one. Note that a derangement should be somehow



tied to the item's effects: a relic that fills its user with power might confer Narcissism or Megalomania. An object that allows a user to see little details at a crime scene might cause a kind of Fixation or Vocalization. A horrid power might incur a Phobia or an Avoidance derangement. Derangements are found on pp. 96-100 in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**.

Mild derangement curses are two-dot, whereas severe derangements caused by a curse are worth three dots.

III Effects (● to ●●●●●)

Some relics contain Powers that are in some way poisonous to the mind and body. They might leave a character sick to his stomach, or with a dizzying headache, or simply confused. Assume that for a period of time (rest of the scene, most likely), the character suffers a -1 to -5 penalty depending on the severity of the Power used. It makes it hard for the character to do anything, be it recall an important detail about the Spanish Civil War or run a mile.

The number of dots in this curse is equal to the resultant dice penalty.

Insidious Bargain (● to ●●●)

Sometimes, the user of a relic isn't so clear on just what he's getting out of the deal. It seems an easy thing – exert one's will, gain a supernatural benefit. But these relics don't have contracts that one can read before using them. A magical Djinn does not appear and explain the ramifications of use. Sometimes, the object extracts a price from the character's life, though not necessarily from the character himself: his child dies, a house-fire claims the ancestral home, cancer afflicts an ally, the tax bureau audits the character's mother and takes all her assets (and he was counting on her for some cash), etc. Note that such awful drawbacks are only par for the course when it comes to truly powerful objects. Below are examples and costs, though Storytellers are encouraged to get creative with this curse.

One-dot bargains tend to affect a character very peripherally. His bank gets robbed (even though his money is safe). One of his Contacts comes down with a bad flu. His car gets a flat. Someone breaks into his house and steals something valuable but replaceable.

Two-dot bargains incur notable effects, often harming Allies or friends with illnesses or accidents (or they may be attacked by a robber or drunken lunatic). Alternately, a character's car may not just suffer a flat, but blow a tire while driving down the road or simply stop working all together. Maybe his place of business is flooded and has to cease its operations for a week or a month.

Three-dot bargains are huge, generally irreparable. They often result in death or destruction. A loved one perishes or contracts an incurable disease. A close

Normal Objects and Curses

Can normal objects – that is to say, items that do not possess any kind of supernatural benefit such as a rifle or pair of binoculars – be cursed? Sure. Bad energy from a dark situation (murder, suicide, depression, genocide) can leave a resonant spiritual stain on otherwise normal objects. How does such a curse become invoked, then? Assume that any time an object is used successfully for its purpose (a gun is fired, a pair of shoes help a user run or jump, a lockpick busts a lock), the curse occurs.

Also, the dots in a particular curse may go toward reducing the item's Resources cost, thus making some "out of reach" items suddenly accessible. Think of a Porsche that the owner wants to sell "real cheap!" Why is it such a steal? Well, the owner's wife shot herself in the passenger side on their honeymoon, and from that point forward the car's been cursed. Pawn shops are, in fact, great places for a character to pick up a cursed item as a "great deal, priced to sell"...

friend loses a limb. The character's house burns to the ground while he's out.

This curse goes off any time the character uses the item's Power, regardless of how meager or potent that object's Power is (in most cases, minor Powers are tied to one-dot bargains, with the curse going up in dots only when the relic's Power increases).

Note that, by and large, this curse does not *directly* affect the character. He doesn't suffer direct harm, though the pain brought to others or damage caused to his property may harm him indirectly.

Leech of Life (●● or ●●●●)

Some items drain a character's vital energies – they are insidious and drink one's Health. Mild Powers might cause bashing, whereas higher level relics might cause lethal injuries. Feel free to play with the effects of such injuries: does the character appear jaundiced and sweaty, with all his injuries being internal? Does his flesh bear the configurations of odd-shaped bruises? Or do ritualistic cuts and scrapes simply *appear* upon using the object's strange abilities?

The two-dot curse causes a number of bashing levels equal to the dots of the Power invoked. The four-dot version causes lethal damage (one point per dot in the Power accessed).

Reversed Luck (••)

Sometimes, the universe desires balance, and a relic may force that balance back upon the character who demands its use. In gaining its benefit, he also must suffer its curse – bad luck given for good luck bought.

After successfully using the artifact, the character's next failed roll is automatically downgraded to a dramatic failure. (If the character's next failure is already a dramatic failure, it doesn't count – this curse only affects a roll that is failed normally, not dramatically.) He fires a weapon and instead of missing his target he shoots out a nearby window and gets pelted with glass, or in failing to convince another of a lie he becomes so flustered that he damns himself with a dubious, stammered confession.

Vulnerable (••)

Toying with magic isn't smart, and some relics remind their users of that in a dangerous way. For up to a number of days equal to the dots in the Power used, the character becomes vulnerable to any kind of supernatural effect (a vampire's Disciplines, a werewolf's Gifts, magic from a mage, a changeling's Contracts, a Promethean's transmutations, the effects of other relics, and so on).

This vulnerability manifests as a +2 bonus on any rolls made to influence or harm the character with a magical or supernatural effect.

Alternate Activation Costs

As noted above, some of the curses and drawbacks can be taken as “alternate costs” to whatever is listed under the Powers given in this chapter. What follows are more of the same – except these costs don't so much count as “curses.” They are, instead, kind of like recipes: one must perform certain acts or ensure the happenstance of particular details, to achieve the Power of a relic.

Costs are ranked by a range of points that define just how specific and difficult that cost is to complete. For every dot possessed by an object in Powers, choose an equivalent number of dots toward the item's cost.

Note that you can mix and match costs. For example, the Mother's Urn has five total dots toward its supernatural Powers. Perhaps three dots go toward Locational, suggesting that to use the item's Power the character must be standing on a mountain, somewhere. One dot goes toward Ritual (keep eyes closed during the item's activation), and another dot goes toward Conditional (demanding that the user be alone).

Feel free to think of these costs like spells: one must complete the ritual before the object's ability is

unlocked. This elaborate cost must be paid each time the item is used unless the Storyteller declares otherwise (some items might just declare the ritual when the time comes to “bond” with the relic, thus relegating the normal activation use to Willpower points).

Conditional

Some items demand that certain environmental conditions be met before releasing their Power to the wielder. The higher the cost in dots, the more specific – and difficult to replicate – these conditions become. One- or two-dot costs might demand that it be “dark” or “hot” or that the user be in a crowd. It's a condition that happens easily and often and is therefore simple to fulfill. A three-dot cost is more specific, and might ask for a “full moon” or a “temperature above 100 degrees outside.” Four- and five-dot conditional costs indicate rare conditions: a solar eclipse, beneath the sky in which a comet is clearly visible, or during a hurricane.

Locational

A locational cost requires the item to be present at a specific location for it to work. Low one- or two-dot costs are fairly broad in location: northern hemisphere, in South America, somewhere in the ocean. A three-dot cost hones it down further: in Pennsylvania, on the coast of the Indian Ocean, in a skyscraper. Costs higher than that can be fairly specific, requiring the wielder to be “At the peak of the mountain” or “Atop Father Shine's grave at the old church up on Old Dibney's Hill.”

Ritual

A relic may demand unusual actions – ritualistic acts – to unlock Powers. Lower costs (one- or two-dot) are fairly straightforward: hum a song, speak a “magical word,” open a window. Three-dot costs are often more complex, performing tasks that might be either convoluted or require success on a roll (run a mile in ten minutes, steal a ring from somebody's finger, frighten a child). Four- and five-dot costs, however, are either very hard to perform or involve something that may end up as damaging to the character (win a fight against three men, drink a poisonous brew, survive a bite from a venomous snake).

Sacrificial

The item requires sacrifice – something destroyed for its use. It might require the wielder to spill three drops of his own blood, cut off the head of a dove, or burn a beloved and irreplaceable photograph. Lesser costs (one or two dots) don't require physical harm to anybody or any living thing, but instead demand the destruction of objects. Higher levels, three and above, require the wielder to harm himself or another living thing (at five-dots, this harm is severe – the user might need to cut off several of his fingers or behead an ally to serve the object's callous whims).

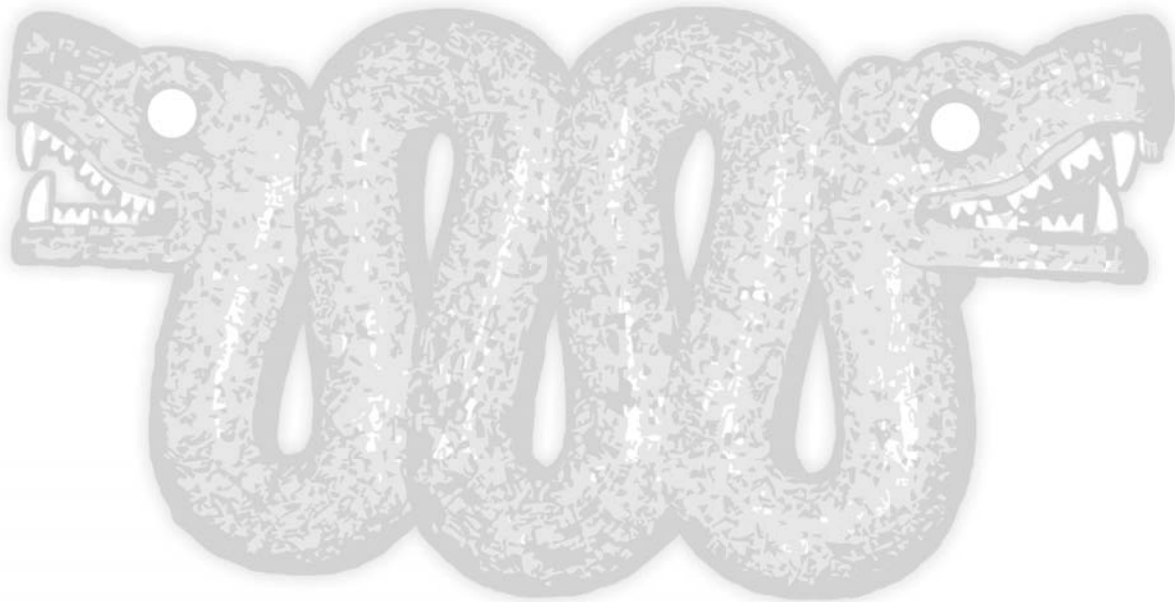
Monster Costs

Many of the Powers use Willpower to activate. However, many of the fiends and creatures within the World of Darkness have alternate sources of power: the Vitae of vampires, the Essence of werewolves, the Glamour of changelings, the Mana of mages, or the Pyros of Prometheans. Feel free to replace Willpower costs with the appropriate monster costs (1 Willpower may become 1 Vitae, for instance, if used by a vampire, or one permanent Willpower dot might translate to one Primal Urge for a werewolf).

Temporal

A temporal cost demands that the item be used in a given time frame or at a very specific moment. Lower costs tend to have a fairly broad timeframe – day, night, Tuesday, winter. The higher the cost in dots, however, the more specific it gets.

A five-dot cost might demand that the item be used exactly at the stroke of the eleventh hour or at the very moment the sun crests the horizon on the Winter Solstice. The higher the cost, the smaller the window. A one-dot cost is fairly wide-open, eight or more hours. Three dots might only be an hour, whereas five dots only leaves 60 seconds *maximum*.





Peter Sochowsky's heart was pounding.

He had pictures of two crime scenes.

Cops were already on scene, but that just meant that he didn't have to be the one to call them.

That always looked bad.

The principal at his old high school was retired and living out his days in a nursing home, and he'd been quite happy to share what he knew of the alumni.

Gail Wagner?

Yeah, she was still in town. Went to school in Syracuse, traveled abroad, now she's back in town and dating some Italian fella. One of the nurses at the home was the Italian guy's second cousin, once removed.

Funny how people know each other.

Pete had followed the leads and found himself with pictures of a parking lot surrounded by police tape where a guy named Bob Jesten had been shot dead. He had pictures of an apartment where a guy named Al Wilson had his throat cut. And he had pictures of that dude from Boston (*still* not clear – it was like the guy was always standing in a shadow) named Enoch.

Something was going down, here,

and Pete was going to unravel it.

His next step was to get pictures of Gail and her new beau. They might be the next victims, after all. Pete stood outside the movie theater, waiting for them, and when they came out, he took their picture.

Gail turned and saw him. She shook her head, almost sadly.

Opening her purse, she held up...something gold.

Pete felt himself walking toward it. Gail put it back in her purse. Her boyfriend joined her; he'd been talking on a cell phone.

Pete stood in front of her.

"Let me see that." *See what? Looked like a gold ball...*

Gail shrank back. "Manny?"

Manny stepped in front of Pete. "Fuck off, dude."

Pete tried to shove him aside, wanting to just see it again, maybe to touch it, and then he was on the ground. His camera shattered.

"Stupid fucking wop! You broke my camera!" Pete stopped when he saw Manny pull out a gun. He tried to stand. He saw Gail squeeze Manny's hand, and then there was a bright flash and a loud noise.

Pete noticed Enoch standing across the street. He saw Enoch shrug, almost helplessly, and then vanish into the city.

Pete heard sirens and his last thought was to hope the cops didn't take that gold ball away because he'd like to be buried with it.

Chapter Four: Tales of the MacGuffin

**"For an occurrence
to become an
adventure, it is
necessary and
sufficient for one to
recount it."**

- Jean-Paul Sartre

This chapter presents a collection of short scenes all involving relics in some way - finding them, using them, losing them, or learning about them. Although the artifacts themselves might not be present in each scene, each scene has something to do with an relic in some capacity, some connection that relates the action to the treasury of mythic goodies evident all throughout **Reliquary**.

These scenes, then, are like note cards or clip art to be used by Storytellers. This isn't a linear story that progresses from scene to scene; these are discrete vignettes that can serve as the basis for scenes of a Storyteller's own creation. They can also be dropped into any relic-related chronicle, but Storytellers should take note: These scenes are very specific, for the purposes of illustrating the action and consequences of each. You'll want to change the names, at least, and any other specifics that would otherwise cause the seams to show. With those simple caveats in mind, though, you can read some of the situations' description straight from this book to your players, if you'd like.

Speaking logistically, a chronicle that involves relics is going to have more than a single action spent on details like research, recovery, the solving of puzzles, and the comparison of clues. It does a disservice to the whole idea of seeking out these holy or supernal items to have the whole process be resolved by a simple, coldly mechanical dice roll. That's why we've built these scenes - to create a sense of plot importance, and to show that every part of the quest to recover a relic can be as dramatic as the act of taking possession the item itself. The intent is to create some sample situations that illustrate the drama or versatility of these parts of the hunt for lost artifacts. In a sense, they're situation-specific applications of the Attributes and Skills systems from the **World of Darkness** rulebook.

You'll notice that we specifically exclude combat encounters from the scenes in this chapter. You don't need our help for that. You no doubt have ready antagonists, waiting in the wings to deal a drubbing to any "saucy charlatans who have the audacity to abscond with their ancient heirlooms", or who will bring a cudgel down hard on anyone "that's not the boss what sticks his head in this here vault". While some of these scenes might *result* in combat, we're working from the more general context of scenes that don't hinge upon a combat to affect the outcome. Consider the chapter, then, as a collection of obstacles. These aren't overt antagonists; they're a sampling of some of the other types of challenges that stand between the characters and the hallowed relics they seek.

You'll notice also that most of these are more than just scene-specific applications of the rules set as written. Many of these situations have synergy built into them, with different parts of the scene directly affecting one another. For example, some scenes have specialty bonuses that affect dice pools other than those associated with the ability the specialty normally augments. Other dice pools have modifiers that are dictated by the success or failure of previous dice-pool actions. It's non-traditional, but it works within the system. Just as you get creative with your storylines, so too should you allow for a little creativity in your interpretation and application of the rules when it enriches the game. If Jim's actions can offer a benefit to Lisa's rolls, both players have an investment in the actions of the other.

Other scenes take advantage of the relic-hunting theme to impose specific environmental factors on their situations. These aren't broad changes to the rules, but suggestions on how Storytellers may embroider on the base rules to

enhance a relic-based story line. In other words, these aren't generic rules for Swimming In Shark-Infested Waters - they're a specific scene and rules for Swimming In *These Particular* Shark-Infested Waters After Your Partner Drops His Harpoon In *These Particular* Shark-Infested Waters.

Again, feel free to change these in any way to suit your own chronicles, from character names to enemy factions to locations - what have you. The specifics of these scenes exist solely for the purpose of establishing context. Don't hesitate to make them your own.

The First Clue

This brief scene illustrates an example of stumbling across a significant clue regarding a relic, seemingly by blind luck. It's such a trope, though, that it requires a bit of careful consideration. It's not a plot hammer by any means - it's a great way to encourage the character to discuss the clue's possible importance with other players' characters, even if the player fails the roll for the characters to immediately understand the its significance,. As well, it's the first step of a story or potentially even its own chronicle because it engenders far more questions than it answers.

Description: *Dani flips idly through the National Geographic magazine in the dentist's waiting room. Two hours to pull her wisdom teeth, they told her, and they still can't get her into the chair within half an hour of her appointment.*

Then she sees a two-page photograph splash of the temple in Borneo, with pot-bellied natives holding up an enormous snake they'd caught. Something resonates in Dani's mind. Snake. Borneo. Temple. Something elusive, but something that won't leave her mind.

"Ms. Miller?"

"Just a minute. Let me finish this article," Dani says, her eyes wide.

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Investigation

Action: Instant

This is a straightforward roll representing Dani's ability to remember a reference she recently encountered that mentioned Borneo, as well as the context in which she recalls the mention.

Dani saw a note about Borneo scrawled in Dr. Gaster's notebook before he spoke at the symposium on the indigenous wildlife of Southeast Asia. The note mentioned a "serpent cult" that was thought to be extinct since before the time of the Dutch colonial period. The snake the natives in the picture are holding has the same pattern as the cult's symbol, which is a serpent surrounding a temple - in the exact same shape as the temple in front of which the natives in the photograph are standing. The photograph, in fact, is almost a real-world depiction of the serpent-cult symbol.

Supporting details include the following bits of information:



- Dr. Gaster mentioned the snake in question, the Kapuas mud snake, but not the cult. The snake itself can change its skin color on demand, much like a chameleon.
- To that end, Dr. Gaster may have suspected someone in the audience of wanting his expertise but without his knowledge, and eliminated the mention of the cult to keep that mysterious party from obtaining vital information.
- The cult was a doomsday cult, a debased sect of nature-worshippers that believed a great serpent surrounded the island of Borneo by swallowing its own tail, and would one day swallow the island, too.
- The world-devouring serpent is a staple of multiple mythologies, from Norse to Egyptian, but none of those mythologies have direct relationships to the jungles of Borneo. Is it just a coincidence, or did a member of an outside culture affect the cult? And if so, to what end? How much of the cult's doomsday prophecy related to the outside visitor? If no visitor was involved, how did the cult's eschatology arise on its own?
- The cult supposedly maintained a powerful relic that could rouse the serpent from its cannibalistic fugue and turn its attention to the island proper.

Obstacles/Penalties: If Dani spent a point of Willpower in the last scene, she suffers a -1 penalty to remember the details, as she's still emotionally invested in whatever it was that caused her to spend the Willpower. If Dani's Vice is Wrath, she's so bent out of shape at waiting so long in the dentist's lobby that she's distracted to the tune of a -1 penalty.

Equipment/Bonuses: If Dani has Academics ••• or higher, or an Academics specialty in primitive religions or biology, she gains a +1 bonus because her education provides her with enough clues to stimulate the connections she makes. If she fails in the roll and takes the magazine to someone else who saw Dr. Gaster's notes, that individual gains a +1 bonus on his roll to remember the connection.

Consequences: This scene is a touchstone for the beginning of a new story. If Dani or someone she knows makes the connection with the snake cult and Borneo, they can get in touch with the magazine or photographer to find out where in Borneo the temple actually was. If the relic still resides there - if it truly exists at all - finding the temple would satisfy the first step in studying whatever the relic truly is.

Of course, if a rival party works for the magazine and lacks the information Dani has, his attention may be piqued by someone calling and asking questions about a very specific temple in Borneo.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Dani completely misinterprets the significance of Borneo and doesn't remember anything about the snake at all. She believes that her parents were planning to take a sightseeing tour of Southeast Asia, starting in Brunei and making its way across the rest of the island.

Failure: Dani doesn't remember what the exact significance is, but she knows it's something important. She should probably take the picture and show it to someone

else (in which case, that other party will have a chance to make the roll to remember).

Success: Dani remembers where she first saw the reference, in Dr. Gaster's notes. Each success beyond the first reveals one of the information bullet-points listed above.

Extraordinary Success: Not only does Dani recall where she saw the original reference, she recalls all of the information bullet-pointed above. As well, she had the good fortune to get one of Dr. Gaster's business cards, and knows how to contact him directly and forthwith.

Meeting the Contact

Sometimes factors aside from the characters affect whether or not the relic-hunters will be able to obtain a particular piece of information or helpful piece of equipment. Since the information in this scene is vital to the characters' pursuit of the relic, if the characters don't obtain it here, they're going to have to come up with another way to retrieve it. Either that, or they'll have an amazingly difficult time even finding the relic.

Description: Linklater raises his eyebrows as states as plainly as he can, his voice free of inflection, "I can assure you that the bones of ibn Khatim will be treated with all due respect and reverence if you help us find them."

Closing his one good eye, the man known only as the Horseman replies quietly, "I don't care what you do with the bones. I just don't want the shah to find them."

Linklater tilts his head, turning "But Iran hasn't had a shah since 1979" into a question.

The Horseman opens his eye and smiles. "Welcome to Iran, Mr. Linklater, where what you think you know isn't necessarily the truth."

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Persuasion - the Horseman's Composure

Action: Instant

This roll would normally be an extended, contested dialogue between Linklater and the Horseman, but the Horseman knows he simply must divulge the location of ibn Khatim's bones before the vampiric "shah" and his minions discover them. It's an instant action to see if Linklater can persuade the Horseman to give the information to *him*. If he can't, the Horseman has a few other interested parties to meet over the next two days, and if no one duly impresses him in that time, he can just turn the secret over to his last contact and wash his hands of the situation.

Linklater's player doesn't know this, however, so convey the point by portraying the Horseman as withdrawn and impartial. The player should have a sense that the Horseman's allowing Linklater to make his case. The Horseman's not arguing whether or not to reveal the information, he's simply deciding internally whether or not Linklater's the one who should learn the secrets of the bones.

Obstacles/Penalties: The shah's confederates have threatened the Horseman's wellbeing. That normally wouldn't bother him, but they threatened his family, too. That doesn't usually matter to the Horseman, either, but the vampires know the Horseman's own name, the names of his family, and where they live. In most cases, "I'll kill your whole family" is empty bluster, but the shah's minions really put the fear into the Horseman. The threat, unknown to Linklater, nonetheless imposes an additional -2 penalty to the dice pool of his attempt. The Horseman plans to move his family to a hiding place over the next two days, so if no one manages to convince him to give up his information before then, he can turn it over to his final contact after his family has gone into hiding.

Equipment/Bonuses: If Linklater reveals his US Army credentials and offers the Horseman protection, that piques the Horseman's interest enough to earn a +1 bonus. As well, if Linklater mentions the deal he worked out six years ago with the Threads of the Prophet's Shawl outside Sabzawar, that's worth an additional +2 bonus, since the Horseman belonged to that secret society.

Consequences: Quite simply, without the Horseman's information on the bones of ibn Khatim, the characters will have no idea where to turn.

This may necessitate shadowing the Horseman, finding out who he turns the satchel over to, and working with that individual or seizing the satchel itself. To that end, abducting the Horseman before he makes the decision is reasonable as well, though it will certainly alienate him from the group and discourage him from sharing any additional information with them.

Of course, if Linklater does manage to impress the Horseman enough to earn the satchel and its secret maps, the characters will soon find themselves dealing with the agents of the Kindred shah, if not the shah himself.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Horseman is unimpressed and offended. Not only does he cut off negotiations with Linklater, he refuses to take Linklater's calls or otherwise respond to Linklater's attempts at communication. Additionally, he'll turn over the characters' identities to the shah's minions next time he comes in contact with them, hoping to buy himself some time by turning the shah's attention to Linklater and his companions.

Failure: The Horseman has no interest in turning over the satchel and its contents over to Linklater. He excuses himself, thanks Linklater for his time, and leaves the café.

Success: Looking furtively over either shoulder, the Horseman agrees to hand the satchel over to Linklater. It can't be done here, though - he suggests a nondescript hotel off Zand Avenue, later this evening.

Extraordinary Success: The Horseman nods sagely, handing the satchel to Linklater under the table with a brief but significant pause of uncertainty. He also offers to meet Linklater and his associates later, at a nondescript hotel off Zand Avenue, to discuss this "shah" and everything he knows about him.

Finding the Dig Site

Particularly if the characters aren't part of a formal or institutional artifact-finding effort, they might not know exactly where a relic's purported resting place might be. Of course, most cases like this can be solved with a little research, but it's also possible - and sometimes faster - to just go where the dig is already taking place and then try to sneak onto the site for their own freelance relic recovery. In such a situation, it's important to get to the site as quickly as they can.

Description: *Standing atop the dune, Gray takes out his binoculars and peers into the sprawling desert around him. He tells Jake, "Many sets of tire tracks headed north, but one or two sets of tire tracks and a bunch of camel tracks headed west-northwest."*

Jake puffs up his cheeks and exhales. "Let's follow the camel tracks. I think there's a trade oasis due north, and I think a few jeeps and several camels would probably be enough to carry the tools for an excavation of this size."

Gray says, "You're the boss" as he puts away his binoculars and starts the jeep.

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Investigation

Action: Extended (5 successes; each roll represents four hours of travel and scouting)

Extended dice rolls by their nature succeed if given enough time. In this scenario, though, time is of the essence, as Gray and Jake race to the dig site in hopes of being able to intercept Pta's Amphora before the Sudanese military can find it.

That's actually not a worry. The military has a head start on them, but it's moving so slowly and without the knowledge that they have tomb-robbers following them that Gray and Jake will definitely get there before they even enter the Creation Mound. Bureaucracy and military procedure will have the Sudanese operation moving so slowly that it'll be a week before they finish staking out the whole area and discover the amphora in the Creation Mound. Of course, Gray and Jake don't know that.

However, Gray and Jake know exactly where Pta's Amphora is (or at least is supposed to be). They want to get in and get out, which will be easier for them during the early stages of the Sudanese army's camp setup and Dr. Bashir's cataloguing of the site and its features. See the Consequences section below for more information.

Obstacles/Penalties: If the characters left without their maps of the desert, they're not going to know where they're headed or where they've been, which imposes a -3 penalty to each roll. If they didn't properly supply for the trip with food and water, they'll be at an additional -2 penalty. Finally, the heat is an omnipresent and oppressive entity, inflicting a -1 penalty to the attempts to find the dig site. If they travel by night, they'll avoid the heat penalty of the day, but low visibility will inflict its own -1 penalty.

Equipment/Bonuses: If the characters have the detailed maps from the Ministry of Antiquities, they gain a +2 bonus, since Dr. Bashir's proposed site is clearly noted. If they brought Gray's full suite of surveying gear from the warehouse, they'll gain a +1 bonus to find the site, though it's likely they didn't return to the warehouse in their hurry to find the site before the army recovers the amphora. Also, the old man's medallion works as a sort of mystical proximity sensor to the amphora (though Gray and Jake have no reason to know this yet); if they pay attention to it as the search continues, this feature becomes evident, and the medallion offers a +1 bonus for each roll after the first four-hour search.

Consequences: The characters initially have the benefit of time, even though they don't know this. Dr. Bashir and the Sudanese army plan to survey the area completely, and they don't know that Gray and Jake are after Ptah's Amphora. Unless something terrible happens to the characters, such as becoming hopelessly lost in the desert, they'll almost certainly find the dig site before Bashir claims the amphora. It'll take about a week before the army even enters the Creation Mound, so Jake and Gray will have enough time to plan whatever sort of entry to the mound and recovery of the amphora they wish.

With the high likelihood that the characters claim the relic before Dr. Bashir, though, Bashir will have every reason to suspect the two Americans who his assistant caught snaking around his office at the ministry. This is doubly true if the characters actually took his annotated maps. With the strength of the army at his command, Dr. Bashir will spare no effort to pursue the characters from the moment he discovers Ptah's Amphora missing. If they're innocent, well, he can imprison them for questioning, but he'll doubt their innocence. And remember, Dr. Bashir isn't above using torture to obtain testimony.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The dunes all look alike and the characters end up going in circles several times before losing their bearings entirely. A dramatic failure resets the number of required successes back to five, and also imposes an additional -2 frustration penalty on future rolls. Two consecutive dramatic failures indicate that the characters are entirely lost, probably somewhere near the Egyptian border (though they won't necessarily know that), and should probably shift their attention to a Survival dice pool rather than finding the elusive dig site. It truly can become a downward spiral if the characters don't make some early progress.

Failure: The characters spend four hours combing the desert dunes before realizing that they're now too far west or north from where the dig could possibly be.

Success: The characters make progress in finding the site, and have been keeping good scouting notes on their maps or in their journals. If the characters have accumulated three successes by the time of the current roll, they can see some smoke and dust on the horizon from the dig site, which acts as a beacon to guide them there, offering an additional +1 bonus.

Extraordinary Success: Fortune smiles upon the characters as they make their way literally to the edge of the dig site. In fact, they've found it before the Sudanese army has finished establishing its base camp, which is good for a +2 bonus to all Stealth rolls to enter the Creation Mound in the next day, since it's not properly catalogued or guarded yet.

Canvassing the Socialite

It sometimes occurs that a specific relic isn't buried beneath eons of stone or perched high atop a mythical mountain. In some cases, someone's already found the artifact and is keeping it safe in his own collection. To the wise relic hunter, the details are different, but the situation's the same. The artifact still needs recovery, but the challenges posed by a forgotten tomb aren't the same ones that the wealthy collector has protecting his home.

Description: *The mayor's black-tie fundraiser is an ostentatious affair, starting with the thousand-dollar-a-plate invitations and proceeding into the five-figure jewelry all of the women are wearing. The men wear designer tuxedos and expensive watches. The most common car at the valet is a Jaguar sedan.*

Undaunted, Marcia leaves her taxi dressed to the nines. She wastes no time mingling with the crowd until she finds her mark, Mr. Joseph Beckman. She takes an extra flute of champagne and pretends to be lost, catching the eye of the billionaire philanderer. He comes over to her, peering at her luridly and asking, "Who are you looking for? Please say it's me."

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Persuasion versus Beckman's Wits + Composure

Action: Contested (the roll represents 20 minutes of small talk and shameless innuendo)

Marcia attempts to learn the details of Beckham's home security suite in this conversation, since she and her allies already know he currently possesses the last queen's jewelry, including the Ubangi necklace. The roll represents Marcia's efforts to casually introduce the topic and glean details, while Beckham's roll represents his ability to still his urge to brag and keep a secret a secret.

Beckman has the potential to reveal the following pieces of information.

- He keeps the queen's jewels in a vault in his office on the first floor. The vault also contains a small amount of cash, "other jewelry" (which actually belongs to his wife), and several five-year treasury notes.
- The house has two dogs. They're not guard dogs, but they're big and imposing nevertheless, and they always bark at strangers or when they hear the doorbell ring.
- In addition to a standard remote security agency, the Beckmans' neighborhood hires a private security guard who makes a circuit of the neighborhood, pass-

ing by the Beckmans' house every twenty minutes or so, once dark has fallen.

- The office is right next to the suite of three rooms their servants use when they stay overnight at the house. Two of the servants are always present at any given time.
- Beckman has noticed that there's been a white construction van down the street for the past two weeks. He suspects it's some kind of organized crime sting that's targeting his neighbor, "that Greek Liadelis," who he thinks is a drug smuggler. In truth, the van really is a contractor's van, because the Hammonds down the street are having a new kitchen installed. This is a red herring fostered by Beckman's imagination, but he treats it as a fact and it can certainly affect how carefully the characters plan to infiltrate his home.

Obstacles/Penalties: If Beckman's wife attended the party, she'll put a damper on his libidinous advances, imposing a -3 penalty on Marcia's roll. Note also that Beckman doesn't just spout off the bullet points above as casual conversation. It's assumed that Marcia works in a few leading questions. If her player specifically steers Beckman toward details about his security, it makes him nervous and inflicts a -3 penalty to Marcia's attempt to glean information.

Equipment/Bonuses: Gentlemen prefer blondes, and so does Beckman. The fact that Marcia's a brunette and thus "not really his type" yields Beckman a +1 bonus die to his pool, since he's mostly flirting for its own sake. Marcia did bring a flute of champagne to the conversation, though, which earns her a +1 bonus to the roll. Unknown to Marcia and her compatriots, Beckman's got a foot fetish, so the fact that he keeps looking down at her strappy heels offers her an additional +1 bonus.

Consequences: If Marcia's unable to come up with the information her group of "freelance treasure hunters" needs, they're going to face significant difficulties in their attempts to recover the queen's jewels. They know Beckman has some security - he'd be fool not to - but they don't have any idea what it is or how elaborate.

If Marcia makes a fool of herself (say, by aggravating Mrs. Beckman), she'll be at a personal disadvantage because the Flynn County sheriff has a warrant out for her arrest after the incident at the diner. That is, if she has to be escorted out of the party by the police working security, they're going to find the warrant if they run a background check on her. Since she doesn't have a real invitation to the dinner, that's a distinct possibility.

As well, there are at least a dozen other people here who are potential marks for her and her fellow thieves. If they see her face when she's brought out in a spectacle, she'll be less able to ply some of them with seduction in the future, as they'll remember her as "Beckman's tramp from the mayor's dinner."

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Marcia comes across not only as a gold-digger, but as a con woman who's obviously trying to work Beckman on some kind of angle. He doesn't make a big loud deal of it, though he does tell the head of security to "throw



that hooker out - I don't even know who she's here with." If Beckman's wife is present, though, she makes a grand show of things, calling Marcia a slut and demanding that security get rid of her. She also berates Joseph for his nonstop infidelities, being so disrespectful of her as to try to chat up some whore while his wife is right next to him, and other melodramatics. Either way, Marcia's going to be accosted and may well go to jail once the warrants surface.

Failure: Beckman is too evasive with his answers to give any information of real worth to Marcia. He's definitely interested in any trysts she proposes, though, which might be an opportunity for her to obtain information via pillow talk. If Beckman's wife is present, she throws a drink in her husband's face, calls Marcia a whore, and stomps off to the dinner table, where she gives Joseph the silent treatment for the rest of the night.

Success: His tongue loosened by alcohol, Joseph Beckman offers up the above information at a rate of one piece of information per success obtained on the roll. Storytellers, be careful of giving out the false information - though Beckman believes this to be true, it actually isn't, and in a meta-game sense, the player has earned successes, which means she's entitled to some accurate information. You can ply this off if the players are the kind to have their characters check out the van beforehand (in which case, it'll provide them with some relief that the contractors are just contractors), but in most cases, "earning" a red herring is a backhanded success.

Extraordinary Success: Beckham spills the details he has at hand. In addition, he lets slip what he thinks is a cute fact, that the vault's security code is his son's birth date backward. Beckham and his wife have three sons, though. The vault will accept one incorrect code entry; if it receives two, it sends an alert signal to the security provider. While Beckham certainly isn't so stupid as to give out his sons' birth dates, especially after revealing that they're his security code, they are a matter of public record, so a little bit of research in hospital files or at the county records building can turn up those specific details.

Sniffing Out the Double-Cross

Those who search for lost treasures and legendary relics have a notoriously difficult time finding people they can trust in their line of work. Like as not, someone who seems at first like a helpful contact is really working for someone or some group that wants to find the artifact for itself or keep it hidden and consistently untouched by the hand of man. This scene represents a mechanical revelation of finding a double deal in progress. Oftimes, Storytellers prefer to put the clues in front of the players' characters and let them sort out who's trustworthy and who's not. In the case of many stories spent in search of relics, characters won't have had the time to discover who's honest through a chronicle-long

pattern of interaction, so the Storyteller might offer their characters a few nudges in the interests of keeping them on their toes while simultaneously giving them a chance at fair warning before an ambush.

Description: *Angela has the money in the briefcase at her side at the patio table outside the hotel. She sips a glass of water and looks at her mobile phone every now and then, worried that Diez y Diez is going to be late or, worse, skip out entirely. Steph sits beside her, rooting through her travel bag, making sure everything's there: passport, revolver, GPS beacon, rosary beads.*

Eight minutes after the hour - 23 minutes late for their appointment - Steph sees Diez y Diez coming around the bend into the Plaza de las Tres Culturas, his grimy jacket flapping like a discarded trash bag.

Angela's phone rings. Marcel.

Marcel never has anything good to say when he calls.

Dice Pool: Wits + Politics

Action: Instant

Diez y Diez, a smuggler and probable cartel proxy, is supposed to meet Angela and Steph to turn over the sketchbooks of Antonio Lopez, who, according to local legend, saw the lair of the *Quetzalcoatl* and scrawled a hasty map revealing the location. He came into contact with Angela through a friend of a friend, who admitted that Diez y Diez was a talented fixer, but that he never did anything without considering what was in it for himself. With that in mind, eager to see if the eggs the delirious soldier was talking about were truly those of the mythical Aztec feather-serpent, Angela agreed to a meeting, bringing Steph along as backup.

Marcel stayed at the hotel. He'd had a bad feeling about it all, and eventually they told him to shut up and stay put. But Marcel just couldn't get his mind off it, so he looked out the window into the Plaza. Based on whether or not he makes the roll, he might see more than the church and the foreign ministry.

Obstacles/Penalties: Marcel's just killing time, really, so his lack of attention manifests itself as a -1 penalty. If he's hung-over (possibly from his Gluttony Vice), that will inflict another -1 penalty.

Equipment/Bonuses: Because Marcel had a "bad feeling," he's going to be looking for something to justify himself in that regard. Although he's distracted, he's suspicious, and that suspicion earns him a +1 bonus to the roll to notice something's amiss.

Consequences: The results of the roll are fairly cut and dried. If Marcel notices Diez y Diez walking away from his goon squad, he'll be able to tip off Angela and Steph to the ambush. If he doesn't, he's probably going to have to figure out a way to rescue them once the crooked contact has his gang abduct the women but before Diez y Diez turns them over to the cartel.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: With nothing to do, Marcel takes a nap. It turns out he was pretty tired, and not only did he miss seeing anything outside, he also missed the frantic

phone call from Angela when she rounded the corner to realize that Diez y Diez had his thugs waiting for her and Steph. Where are they now? It's anyone's guess, but the call came over an hour ago.

Failure: There's nothing outside but a few lazy birds and some smog. Marcel can see a guy with long hair walking toward the plaza who looks like the picture Steph showed him of Diez y Diez, but he doesn't seem to be doing anything strange. At least he's by himself.

Success: Marcel sees Diez y Diez walk away from a suspicious group of ragged, armed men. Afterward, the men pile into three shabby vans, each of which belches a plume of black exhaust. None of the vans go anywhere, though, as if they're waiting for a signal or a call to action.

Extraordinary Success: As per the regular success, but Marcel witnesses that situation a little sooner. In fact, before Diez y Diez leaves his men and their idling vans, Marcel sees the contact engaged in a conversation with what appears to be a *federale* or police officer. Sure enough, the man in uniform goes back to his own parked car, makes a "turnaround" gesture to another unmarked car down the road, and then both the unmarked car and the officer's car drive away. It appears that more than just Diez y Diez and the cartels are involved in this betrayal....

Accessing the Submerged Vault

This scene takes into account some of the external environmental factors that might occasionally contribute to the danger or difficulty of tracking down an relic. In particular, this scene deals with an underwater environment, and some of the risks that indelicate research and recovery can inflict on hapless relic-hunters. "Be prepared," the Boys Scouts of America motto, is good advice.

Description: David swims to the surface and shakes his head, pulling off his breathing apparatus. "It's going to take more than me and a crowbar to get that valve open."

Charlie nods. "We've got enough amatol to do the trick, but it's going to be a finesse issue. Too much will open the vault, but might damage the upper chamber. And if we flood that, we're screwed."

"You don't have to tell me twice." David disappears back under the water to take another look at the valve, leaving only the reflection of the moonlight on black waves in his wake.

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Science

Action: Instant

The vault the treasure-hunters need to access is submerged. The actual treasure chamber is above the vault they're trying to penetrate, but they know that. David's research turned up a map with the vault's layout, and

Charlie reasoned that if they blew their way into the lower chamber, they'd buy themselves some time before the water level filled up the lower and then the upper chamber.

The plan involves David placing Charlie's bomb so that the explosion breaches the wall of the lower chamber. Then, David will swim in, climb to the meditation chamber, retrieve the Apuse stone, wrap it in its protective covering, and (hopefully) get out before the water explodes the high-sodium-content idol.

Obstacles/Penalties: David and Charlie have amatol as their explosive agent, which absorbs water more readily than TNT. ("It's cheaper anyway and all I could find on three hours notice," Charlie said.) Working with the hygroscopic explosive inflicts a -2 penalty on their underwater demolitions work.

The underwater conditions are also less than optimal, as David's used to operating at a normal, dry atmosphere where he's not "weightless." The unfamiliar environment imposes an additional -2 penalty.

Equipment/Bonuses: David's done his homework, using his research to come up with a good representation of the vault area. Charlie was able to build the bomb with the vault's specifics in mind. His advice and David's good schematic offers a +1 bonus to the attempt. As well, amatol is stable and reliable, offering a +1 bonus itself. (If only they'd been able to get their hands on something more resistant to water....)

Consequences: The pair of relic-hunters have the benefit of working at night on a remote site without anyone yet being keen to

their



presence. The cultists themselves haven't yet been able to make their way into the submerged temple, so hopefully, by the time they do, David and Charlie will be long gone. If anything goes wrong with the bomb, though, it might alert some of the cultists on the plateau above their anchor point.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Everything seems to go well - David places the bomb, Charlie ignites the detonator, they hear the muffled *whump* of an underwater explosion - but when David goes back down, he sees they've either used too much explosive or the stone exterior was already weakened. There's a huge gash in the treasure chamber itself, which is taking on water at an alarming rate. David will have only five turns (or fewer, if he spends undue time getting back to the vault) to get the Apuse stone out of there before it comes in contact with water. As well, the cultists will have felt the shock waves at their camp, and will gather at the cliff ledge to see what's going on in 10 turns.

Failure: The amatol took on too much water in the time between its placement and detonation. The bomb fails to explode, keeping David and Charlie on the outside.

Success: The bomb goes off as planned and opens a small breach in the vault, which takes on water slowly but surely. David will have 20 turns to get in, protect the Apuse stone, and get back out before the water reaches a troublesome level in the meditation chamber. The cultists in their camp will have heard or felt the subterranean explosion, and will mill about for a while before checking out the cliff side. David and Charlie will have 25 turns before anyone at the cultists' camp has the presence of mind to look down the cliff face into the cove.

Extraordinary Success: As per a standard success, but the cultists are too busy reveling, sleeping, or fornicating to be alerted to the explosion in the submerged temple. Assuming they ever find a way into the inverted ziggurat itself, they'll have no indication that Charlie and David stole the Apuse idol, or even that the idol was ever actually there.

Disarming the Tomb Trap

In this scene, the characters are well inside the supposed resting place of the relic they seek. Of course, it's not as easy as just dashing in, grabbing the relic, and heading home. This particular artifact rests in a tomb, and the forgotten king who once owned the treasure took great pains to ensure that he'd be able to enjoy his relic in the afterlife, and that no enemy of his legacy would be able to turn his potent treasure against his descendants. It's a primitive trap, to be sure, but it's effective in its grand-scale capacity for damage and finality.

Description: Craig rifles through his field sketches of what the actual engine behind the obvious trap might be. He has a few ideas: a lever, a counter-weight, a mass-

displacement scale. Whatever the method, the thing is designed to dump tons and tons of stone on top of the tomb if anyone's so daring as to try to take the king's crown off the podium. The question remains how to get the crown but not upset the quarried bricks on top of Marshall when he nicks the crown.

"If it's run by a counter-weight, I think I can keep the axle from pivoting," Craig says. "If it's on a lever, though, you're going to be crushed like a bug."

"If I'm crushed like a bug, you'll never make it out of here past all the rubble anyway," Marshall shouts as he prepares to make the dash-and-grab.

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Crafts

Action: Extended (10 successes; each roll represents one hour of disabling contact points and cramming spikes into mortises)

The tomb trap is designed to dump enormous blocks of quarried stone on top of the king's sepulcher, throughout the tomb room, and even into the hallway. The king's reasoning on his deathbed must have been, "If I can't keep my crown, no one can have it," so he was obviously willing to defile his own resting place in order to keep the crown out of the hands of rivals or robbers.

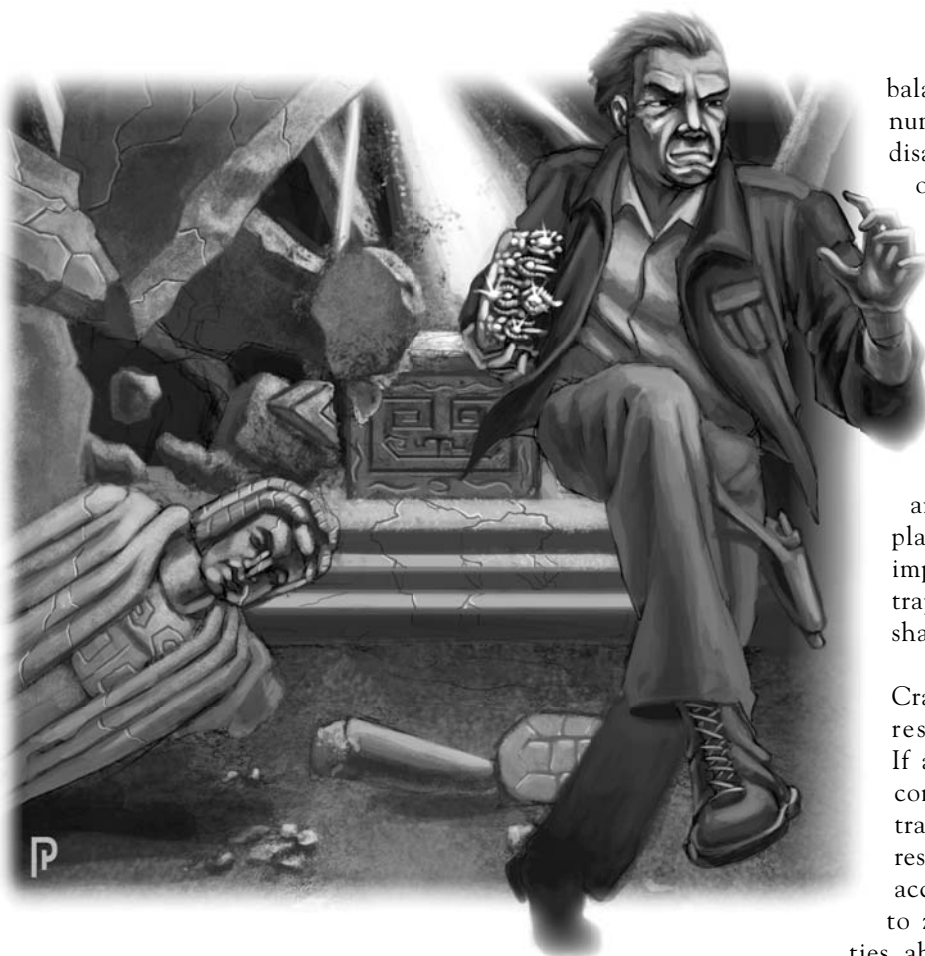
Built on a counter-weight, the trap relies on the removal of the crown to spring. At that point, the crown podium will weigh less than the counter-weight below it. The counter-weight will sink, and with it will sink the gate retaining the 20-plus stone blocks built into the ceiling. At the point, the blocks will fall and it'll be just like an avalanche in the tomb.

The counter-weight and retaining gate are built into the infrastructure of the tomb, however, and are inaccessible.

Obstacles/Penalties: The precarious placement of weights on the tomb trap is actually fairly ingenious for its otherwise rudimentary design. Each roll after the first imposes a cumulative -1 penalty on the attempt to disarm the trap, as the carefully balanced weights wobble and teeter ever more dangerously while preventing the cave-in.

Equipment/Bonuses: There's a lot of friction and inertia preventing the rocks from falling, so by specifically working with the counter-weight mechanism, Craig gains a +1 bonus to the first roll of the disarming attempt. Craig's carefully considered schematics also offer him a +1 bonus on each roll, as they show him the most likely way the mechanism will function. A good collection of spelunking tools, construction tools, or similar implements will grant an additional +1 bonus.

Consequences: Aside from the immediate consequences of failure, even if Craig and Marshall do make it out of the tomb alive, setting off the trap will cause the mausoleum to crumble, which will be immediately evident to the handful of guards on patrol at the archeological site. If Craig and Marshall are captured by guards or otherwise linked to the tomb's potential ruin, Colonel al-Mansur will have them arrested if he can catch them, or at least placed on the Algerian no-fly list and have them detained if they attempt to leave by commercial airlines.



If Craig and Marshal do manage to escape with the crown, they'll have to evade the guard patrols at the site, but will otherwise be able to make it back to their hotel without difficulty. The next day when Nasir enters the tomb, though, he'll obviously notice that the crown is missing and he'll alert either Colonel al-Mansur or his contact among the King's Immortals.

Time is also a concern. Depending on when Craig and Marshall manage to sneak into the tomb, they might not be able to disarm the device before Nasir return to the site in the morning. Remember, each roll to disarm takes an hour. Nasir returns around six the next morning. He's not mechanically savvy enough to notice any tinkering that may have taken place, but he'll certainly recognize Craig and Marshall as people who aren't supposed to be there if they're still at the site.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The attempt to hold the counter-weight in balance fails even before the crown can be grabbed. The characters will have two turns to escape unharmed. There's no penalty to acting on the first turn after the ceiling begins to collapse. On the second turn, anyone still in the room (say, those who spent their last turn grabbing the crown anyway) will have to make a Dexterity + Athletics roll to escape or else suffer 10L damage from collapsing ceiling blocks. By the third turn, the tomb has collapsed upon itself utterly.

Failure: The attempt to restrain the counter-weight looks to hold for a moment, but then over-

balances. This adds three to the number of successes required to disarm the trap. If two failures occur consecutively, treat the attempt as a dramatic failure, above.

Success: Craig manages to place an impediment in the way of the counter-weight mechanism. If this success equals or exceeds the number of successes required to disarm the trap, he's managed to place the final counter-weight impediment in place, and the trap will not spring when Marshall grabs the crown.

Extraordinary Success: Craig makes significant progress in disarming the trap. If another roll is required to complete the disarming of the trap, this extraordinary success resets any cumulative penalties accrued by multiple attempts to zero (see Obstacles/Penalties, above).

Sneaking Past the Stone Guardians

It's entirely possible that the assumed final resting place of an artifact is protected by some sort of guardian presence employing the same sort of supernatural forces that suffuse individual relics. Those guardians might not resort to the same sorts of stimuli that normal, living sentries would be aware of. As such, they might require different sorts of wariness to avoid. This can make for odd dice pools, but that's to the Storyteller's advantage - it feels like something odd and otherworldly, an environment where conventional human sensory perception might not be the norm.

Description: The three treasure-hunters lower themselves through the trap door into a recessed part of the castle that doesn't show up on any map. As they make their way forward, their torchlight reveals a pair of stone colossi flanking a gaping portal with a pediment.

As they move closer, the stone colossi grate into stony motion, turning their heads and unseeing eyes toward what they somehow sense is there.

"They don't quite... see us, do they?" Alexis asks.

"It doesn't seem like it. It doesn't seem like they hear us either," Grant says through pursed lips, looking at Alexis



from the corners of his eyes. "How are we going to get past them?"

"Do what the monk said," Sergeant Reynolds says, stepping tenuously forward with false bravado. "Just pretend you're not here."

Dice Pool: Occult + Stealth

Action: Instant

The colossi respond to the presence of the living. While that's not the sort of thing that most normal people are adept at masking, the order of debased monks that tend to the reliquary needed to find some way to prevent the guardian statues from slaughtering them when they descended into the treasure chamber. Most of them bore mystical sigils, but they also became practiced in the discipline of emptying their minds and masking their spiritual vitality.

Needless to say, it's going to be a difficult task for a person not versed in that sort of esoteric behavior. For this reason, the task requires a combination of two relevant Skills for the dice pool, not an Attribute and a Skill. Everyone has Attributes - they're the inborn potential of human beings. Something like this is so unconventional, though, that it doesn't rely on inherent aptitudes, it relies on mystical mindsets and the subversion of the will.

Obstacles/Penalties: Anyone spending Willpower on this roll is in for an ugly surprise: It actually subtracts three dice from the dice pool, as opposed to adding three dice. When a character devotes Willpower to this roll, he's manifesting the strength of his ego. Thus, he's calling upon the same higher sense of self that the colossi sense to hide himself. It's sort of like wearing white for the purposes of hiding in the dark.

Equipment/Bonuses: If anyone has recovered one of the protective sigils from the monks in the monastery or at the town, they're very useful here, granting a +5 bonus to the roll. They're almost always effective, but if an individual who's not prepared for this sort of rigor tries to sneak by, they may still perceive him.

Consequences: The stone colossi are utterly unsubtle. If they perceive the intruders, they attack. As well, if the monks somehow become aware that it's the players' characters down here plundering their reliquary, all social interactions with them in the future will occur at a -2 penalty, as they've violated the monks' trust.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character's attempt to mask his presence fails utterly. The colossi respond immediately and viciously, attacking the character, who is caught entirely by surprise for the first turn of combat. The only Defense he gains the benefit of for the first round is armor, as he's too shocked to take advantage of his active defenses.

Failure: The colossi sense the character and lurch into motion to prevent outsiders from entering the reliquary. It's an unnatural sight to see, their stony forms moving with seemingly impossible fluidity, silent but for the grind of stone against stone. Roll for initiative and adjudicate the combat as normal.

Success: The character manages to creep past the colossi without attracting any of their supernal attention. Assume this moves the character far enough into the reliquary hallway to evade their notice for the remainder of the scene, unless the character returns to the doorway, in which case, the player will need to make another roll.

Extraordinary Success: As with the standard success, except the colossi won't sense the character even if she returns at some later point during the scene. If the character visits the room of the colossi during some later scene, the player will need to roll again, however.

Coping With the Incomprehensible

When dealing with mysteries from the forgotten world, vestiges of legendary time, or alien things men's minds simply cannot know, it's possible that characters may lose their grip on sanity. Whether for a short period of time or indefinitely, the supernatural world can leave scars in the minds of those unprepared for its true form. Where natural law ceases to apply, where common understandings become uncommon, lesser creatures like men quiver at the heels of the greater beings that exist outside the justifications of human experience.

Description: *Everett and Rajiv follow the silent footman down the staircase deep beneath the foundations of the castle. They find him an unsettling picture, holding the candle that gives feeble light to the darkness, pointing them through a rough-hewn opening in the subterranean stone, his eyes closed.*

As they step through, they understand why, but it's the last rational thought that goes through their heads. Through the stone opening, an underground sky opens up, malignantly indigo over a queasy green sea that laps at the shore where no body of water could possibly be. A single rough, stone column rises out of the sea, horrid winged shapes reeling around it. The impossibility of it all, the sky beneath the earth and the sea that bleeds out of it, is too much for either of them to handle.

Dice Pool: Resolve + Composure

Action: Instant

The initial exposure to the world beneath the castle drives men mad with its open, flagrant violation of how things should be. They're unprepared for such a revelation, and even the most stalwart grow nauseated at the sudden evidence that the world doesn't necessarily operate as they believe it does. This fundamental challenge to natural law spawns an immediate and possibly even infinite despair in men's minds, crippling them with the wonder that anything else they've seen or trusted might be a lie - even the humanity of the person beside them.

Obstacles/Penalties: The sudden, shocking vision of what might heretofore have been believed impossible

catches everyone off guard the first time they witness it, imposing a hellish -5 penalty on the roll. As well, it's impossible to spend Willpower on this roll, as a person's self is such a small thing in comparison to the vast lie that reality is revealed to be, that belief in that self provides no purchase against the universal injustice before him.

Equipment/Bonuses: If any of the characters have read the mad Arab's blasphemous book, they might have some inkling of what to expect in the depths of the castle. This knowledge might earn the character a +1 bonus to the roll, but only if the Storyteller believes that the character might have some reason to suspect that she's descending into a firsthand example of the nihilistic universe.

Consequences: This is a significant roll, and one that certainly makes the characters understand their largely irrelevant place in the world. This is not a situation to be entered lightly, and we speak more to the Storyteller here than to the possibilities of the players. Even succeeding in this roll affects characters negatively, and failing the roll makes those negatives almost unalterable.

Be sure the characters understand the importance of what they're about to see. As well, remind the players that they're participating in a horror story, and that they're not going to emerge from it unscathed, even if they do manage to achieve the quantifiable goals of the plot and their characters.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The vision of the amoral universe drives the character debilitatingly insane. If the character has a minor derangement, that derangement immediately upgrades to its major counterpart. If the character has a major derangement, that derangement immediately manifests, and hereafter the character may not spend Willpower to keep it in check when it arises. If the character has no derangements, she collapses into a fetal position, unresponsive to the stimuli of the fatalistic nature of the world, returning to functionality when the Storyteller deems it dramatically appropriate. In any case, the character acquires a new minor derangement or upgrades to a major derangement suitable to witnessing the horror of the environment, as chosen by the Storyteller.

Failure: The character's mind is shocked into a state of catatonia. He is unable to move or think, even to defend himself or flee from the horror of seeing the seams between reality. The character can take no action at all for a number of turns equal to (20 - the character's Willpower). Even then, any derangement he has immediately manifests. The character also acquires a new minor derangement or upgrades to a major derangement suitable to witnessing the horror of the environment, as chosen by the Storyteller.

Success: The character's mind "turns off" in order to deny the damage incurred by trying to understand the alien spectacle. He may take no actions at all for a number of turns equal to (10 - the character's Willpower).

Extraordinary Success: Amazingly, the character's mind remains unbroken by the impossibility of the subterranean sky

and the other unnatural vistas he sees. He may act normally after a single turn of abject, frozen terror, but his conscious desire is almost certainly to flee from this horrible place.

Puzzling Out the Function

In many cases, simple possession of an artifact isn't enough. If it's a relic that has to be used in a certain way or woken from its timeless slumber, figuring out how to use it is of equal importance with actually using it. Often such methods of activation are hidden, encrypted, couched in riddles, or otherwise made obscure so that not every tomb-robber with the fortune to find the artifact can turn it loose on an unsuspecting world. Indeed, finding out what makes the item work can be as grand an adventure as recovering the relic itself.

Description: *"It's got something to do with the emperor's name. It's the Sash of the First Emperor, and the Kujiki says the emperor introduced himself and the oni trembled," Michelle insists, growing frustrated, talking to herself and the sash as much as her companions. It's almost as if she expects the relic to speak its own history.*

"Jimmu was the first emperor of Japan, right?" Andrew suggests.

Professor Graves corrects him, though. "Jimmu was the first emperor of Japan in legend. The first emperor accepted by history is Ojin."

"Fine. Let's start there," Michelle says, sparing no one her perturbed glance.

Dice Pool: Wits + Academics

Action: Extended (5 successes; each roll represents one hour of research and trial)

The roll to determine the activation ritual for the Sash of the First Emperor relies on Wits rather than Intelligence, because it's a riddle based on the emperor's name. Puzzling out the riddle is an issue of mental finesse, not raw power. The professor's on the right track, evidenced by his knowledge of the first historical emperor (represented by Intelligence), but the knowledge of the first emperor's true Japanese name (Ojin is the traditional Chinese-style name attributed to him after his death) is Honda-awake. Using that true name with a customary, ritual Japanese greeting to the oni is what the sash requires to function.

Obstacles/Penalties: If none of the characters knows Japanese, it's really going to stymie their efforts to speak key words or recognize important concepts, thereby inflicting a -4 penalty on the roll. If the characters don't have access to a library and must instead rely on Professor Graves' memory, they're going to be at a -4 penalty as well. If Michelle makes the roll, her Vice of Wrath inflicts a -1 penalty on the roll because she becomes so easily frustrated. This penalty increases to -2 if she's forced to rely on Professor Graves in the absence of a research facility.

Equipment/Bonuses: A specialty of history in either Academics or Investigation earns an additional +1 bonus to the roll. (That is, a character with the history specialty of Academics actually earns a +2 bonus to the roll, while the history specialty of Investigation earns only a +1, because Investigation isn't actually used for this roll.) If the characters have access to a copy of the Kujiki or the Kojiki, that likewise offers a +1 bonus to the roll, or a +2 bonus for both. (Note also that having either or both of these references also negates the penalty for not having a library available.)

Consequences: The consequences aren't complicated. If the characters can't figure out how to make the Sash of the First Emperor function, they simply won't be able to use it. If they're unable to discern the invocation ritual, they can always sell the artifact to their rival Eluère, but it'll be a cold comfort knowing that they had to turn to him to offset their losses in the face of their inability to fully understand the relic.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The characters become convinced that they've been focused on the wrong line of research, and pursue an utterly incorrect tangent. Any successes the characters have accumulated so far reset to zero, and future rolls to discover the activation ritual suffer an additional and cumulative -1 penalty due to this incorrect line of reasoning.

Failure: The characters make no progress in unraveling the mystery, instead wasting an hour going back and checking the veracity of minor facts they're already discerned to be true.

Success: The characters make a minor breakthrough that reveals the emperor's true name or the ritual greeting of the oni. With just a few more of the details to uncover, the way to activate the sash should become evident soon.

Extraordinary Success: The characters discern the proper method to activate the sash by speaking the emperor's true name and the salutation. In fact, the characters' understanding of the ritual is so insightful that it completely abates the normally necessary expenditure of a point of Willpower on the attempt to activate the relic itself for the first time.

Activating the Relic

As savvy relic-hunters know, you can't just pick up any given relic and wield its mystic potency like some hero of yore. Activating an artifact might be a challenge in and of itself. Indeed, some relics respond to seemingly unknown stimuli from their wielders - the character can feel some spiritual puissance resonating through her, but the player doesn't necessarily know that it's Manipulation + Occult doing the job.

This scene, like the rest of the scene in this chapter, is very specific in what it describes. For more information on the function of relics and their game systems, see Chapters Two and Three.

Description: The implements and supplements are all in place: the hammered-silver mirror, the splinters of ash, and the oil of Antipas. A greasy knot of incense rests in the brazier - this vaunted brazier, which had cost Trillby her life - that has been shaped with primitive expertise like a bull.

"How does this work, exactly?" Father Morton asks Zalumma.

"I don't know," Zalumma responds. "It just does."

Dice Pool: Resolve + Composure

Action: Instant

When an individual uses the Bull of Domitian, it wards off all spirits, demons, and other supernatural entities in twilight who are within the area of its cloud of incense (about a 30-foot radius).

Obstacles/Penalties: If any of the requisite trappings are absent (the mirror, the ash splinters, or the oil of the saint), each missing implement imposes a cumulative -2 penalty on the roll to use the relic. If all the implements are absent, the ritual of banishment simply can't be attempted - the spirits and "demons" will ignore the Bull of Domitian's compulsion.

Equipment/Bonuses: If the exorcist speaks the liturgy in Ancient Greek, the roll gains a +1 bonus. If a character spends a point of Willpower on the roll to activate the relic, it actually becomes more effective, granting a +4 bonus to the roll instead of +3. (Note that the roll to activate the Bull of Domitian uses the same dice pool that determines Willpower pool, which is why using Willpower on the roll is especially effective.)

Consequences: Using the Bull of Domitian has no inherent consequences. Dramatic failures on attempts to use the bull, in particular, though, can have frightening effects.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Instead of banishing the undesired spirit, the clumsy attempt to use the Bull of Domitian instead enrages it. For the remainder of the scene, the spirit, ghost, demon, or whatever uses whatever means are at its disposal to harm the people present at its attempted banishment. Its highest Attribute increases by one for the remainder of the scene, as well.

Failure: The Bull proves powerless to repel the spirit or spirits in question. At the Storyteller's discretion, sophisticated spirits (or demons, or ghosts, etc.) might recognize that an attempt has been made to compel them to leave, to which they can react in whatever manner is appropriate to their demeanor.



Success: The Bull of Domitian works, forcing spirits in the presence of the relic (again, about a 30-foot radius) to flee. The number of successes achieved on the roll indicates the Power of spirits affected. That is, if a spirit's Power is less than or equal to the number of successes achieved on the roll, it must flee from the site where the Bull of Domitian has been activated.

Extraordinary Success: As with a standard success, though the Bull proves so repellent to the spirit, that spirit cannot use any of its Numina for the duration of the scene, as well.

Spotting the Fake

If the relic in question turns out to be something other than the genuine article, it's often back to the drawing board for the relic-hunters. Was their information flawed? Was the fake part of a greater ruse to keep the true treasure safe? Is the whole thing a hoax? If there's a real relic out there somewhere, who has it? Any or all of the questions might arise - but only after the characters realize they're holding a complete phony.

Description: Reciting the chant that Dr. Redfern derived from the equation scrawled on the wall at the university, Lynn raises her arms, holding the ankh before her and...

...nothing. Not even a flicker of the lights. Not so much as a tingle of otherworldly power.

"Goddammit. Where'd we get this thing? Wal-Mart?" Lynn screams over the intercom.

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Occult

Action: Extended (6 successes; each roll represents four hours of study and experimentation)

The ankh is a fake. It's a well-made fake, but it's a fake nonetheless. This scene represents a chemical analysis of the substance from which the ankh has been crafted. The steel of the fake has far too much carbon to be the authentic ankh, and the dimensions of the icon are just a little bit too concise for a cold-wrought artifact.

Obstacles/Penalties: None explicit. The quality of the fake is evident in the fact that it takes six successes to discern reliably.

However, if a character has suspicions "in the field," he can try to establish the ankh's legitimacy or falsehood before the characters go through the effort of bringing it back to their laboratory. Without the proper tools or environment to study the relic, though, the examiner will suffer a significant -4 penalty. Again, it's well made, a good physical likeness of the true ankh, but not one that matches the metallic makeup of its counterpart.

Equipment/Bonuses: A character with the metallurgy specialty of Academics may apply that specialty die to the Intelligence + Occult roll. If the characters still have access to the original equation from which Dr. Redfern derived the mathematical chant, that aids the roll with a +1 bonus, because the equation contains the proper dimensions of the ankh (from which the false ankh deviates).

Consequences: What's worse than going through all the effort to retrieve the ankh from the Cavern of Time's Still Sands, sneaking it past the hourglass-ghosts and sailing the long way back around the coast of Australia to throw off the Guardians of the Veil? Finding out the ankh is false, that's what's worse.

On the other hand, being utterly unprepared to stop the Temporal Singularity is also worse. So, in a way, it's a good thing that the characters have discovered the unsuitability of their false relic at this time.

Sure, it means a lot more hassle in finding out the actual location of the actual ankh, assuming the actual ankh still exists, but that's the peril of the relic hunter. Not every expedition can pan out perfectly. All the extra effort is still better than trying to avert the Temporal Singularity with what amounts to a trinket.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: There's nothing discernibly wrong with the ankh. Maybe Dr. Redfern made a mistake in completing the equation to yield the chant. Maybe it's too light in the room where the ritual was taking place. It's not the ankh. The ankh is fine.

Failure: Test results have been inconclusive. Perhaps the next test will be more informative, but right now nothing indicates that there's anything wrong with the ankh.

Success: Something's not right. There's something coming up on the chemical analysis that bears further investigations, but it's too soon to say one way or the other. It might just be detritus that's accumulated on the ankh over the three thousand years it's been lost.

Extraordinary Success: The ankh is a fake. It might be too soon to define exactly what it is that makes this ankh a false one, but the carbon content in this ankh is a lot higher than what should normally be expected from wrought iron, and the fine threads of slag that are to be expected in wrought iron are absent. Definitively saying that it's a fake might not be possible yet, but it's certainly looking that way, and it also gives a warning as to what to look for when the relic-hunters find the next ankh. (Obtaining an extraordinary success, in addition to its own benefits in contributing to the six necessary successes, offers a mechanical benefit as well. When verifying the next ankh they find, characters receive a +1 bonus to the roll because they know what sort of telltale signs betray a false ankh.)

Outrunning the Furious Mob

It may transpire that the characters, finding themselves in possession of a storied relic, earn the enmity of a large group of that artifact's protectors. As well, they might have roused the locals who, oblivious to the presence or value of a given relic, nonetheless resent the characters' intrusion on tribal lands, sacred grounds, or political borders.

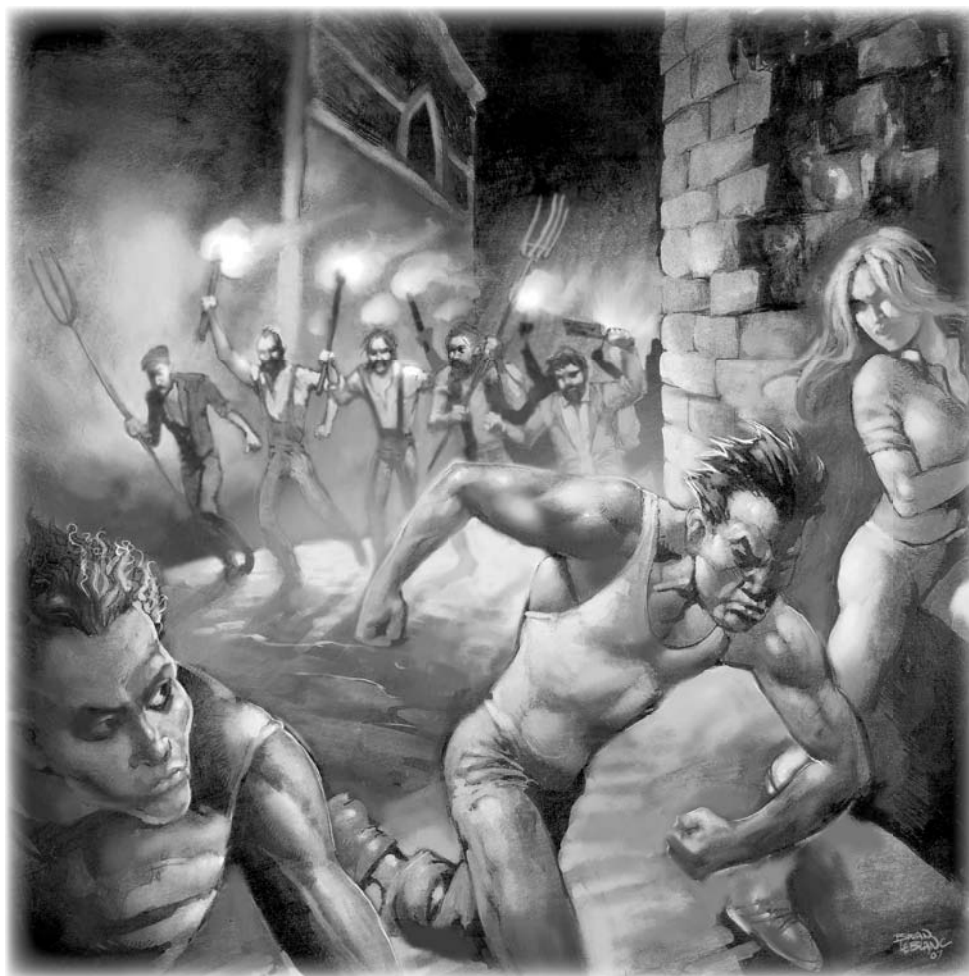
The mechanics for this scene are adapted from those presented for a standard foot chase as presented on pp. 65-66 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**. Rather than making individual rolls for each of the players' characters and every single member of the pursuing throng, this scene considers both sides as single entities with their relevant dice pools determined with an inclination toward the dramatic.

Description: As the relic hunters emerge from the barrow of Cúchulainn, they hear a fearsome, roiling din. It seems that the outsiders have gone too far in breaking into the tomb of the ancient hero. The villagers, in the throes of the warp-spasm, are closing in on them, swarming up the hill from the dour village below. They wield farm implements and homemade weapons in addition to modern firearms, the very image of the peasantry taking up arms against Frankenstein's monster, frenzied and gnashing their teeth in a decidedly inhuman manner.

The skiff still floats in the river, tethered to the rock on the riverbank. It's about a hundred yards away. To the other side, the villagers are about half that far from the mouth of the barrow. It's time to run!

Dice Pool: The players' characters' lowest Stamina + Athletics versus the mob's highest Stamina + Athletics

The key traits need not be from the same character. That is, take the lowest Stamina from any character and add it to the lowest Athletics of any character to achieve the dice pool. Assume the villagers have a base Stamina + Athletics pool of four dice, before any bonuses or penalties apply.



Action: Extended, contested (each roll represents one turn of running)

Run the chase as per the foot chase rules on pp. 65-66 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, counting each side as a single entity, whether pursuer or pursued. Assume the villagers' mob has a Speed of 8.

Obstacles/Penalties: The villagers' mob has to top the hill first, so their first three turns of pursuit incur a -1 penalty.

Equipment/Bonuses: The players' characters have a significant head start from their position at the top of the hill, granting them three automatic successes initially. As well, their entire run occurs downhill, granting them a +1 bonus to each roll. The mob is running under the effects of the warp-spasm, the fury of which grants them a +1 bonus to their relentless pursuit. After the third turn of pursuit, the villagers will gain the +1 bonus for the downhill run, as well.

Consequences: If the characters manage to achieve the requisite number of successes to outpace the mob (eight, as dictated by their collective Speed), they'll be able to pile into the skiff in time to push off and avoid the raging villagers. Rifle shots will whiz dangerously but inaccurately past them as they pant in exhausted

relief. If the characters are overcome by the villagers, they'll be beaten mercilessly before being equally mercilessly dragged back to the village lockup. If the characters are overtaken, don't bother adjudicating combat - the villagers are too many and in the throes of Cúchulainn's frenzy. Simply assume each character suffers two points of lethal damage and two points of bashing damage. If that knocks a character unconscious, so be it, as he'll regain consciousness in jail. If it kills a character, scale the damage back so the character is lingering at death's door. She'll likewise have a chance to begin recovery in jail.

Regardless of the chase's outcome, either one of the villagers will tell the witch that they've found the characters or she'll find out herself the next time she visits the village.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: During the scramble down (or up) the hill, the characters cause a rock slide and tumble along with the rubble. Subtract any successes the group has accumulated by two (dangerous for the pursued characters), and assume everyone in question suffers two points of bashing damage from twisted ankles and barked shins. Future rolls in the pursuit occur at a -1 penalty for all of the splayed rocks and debris.

Failure: The group wastes time and gains little ground in dodging rocky terrain, muddy shores, slick grass, or other hazards of the barrow-hill and the season.

Success: The group runs like all get out, making much-needed progress either in the pursuit or toward the sanctuary of the skiff.

Extraordinary Success: The group makes excellent progress and finds a stable pathway through the debris. The next roll the characters or villager (whichever is appropriate) makes occurs with a +1 bonus for the relatively unobstructed pathway.

Sneaking the Relic Across the Border

For this scene, the characters have recovered their relic and seek to remove it from the country where they found it. Once they're in Switzerland, they'll no doubt have a host of new worries to attend to, but for the time being, they need to get the hell out of France with their treasure intact. This exchange is particularly dynamic because it gives everyone involved something to do that directly affects the outcome of the scene.

Description: *The traffic has slowed to a crawl and Jennifer can see why: There's a pair of big, black Mercedes with Interpol logos on the side of the road next to a handful of Armée de Terre jeeps funneling all the traffic into a single-lane inspection point. With a serious look at Zane, she rifles through the glove compartment for their passports.*

Zane strangles a gasp of anxiety and resist the urge to bite his thumbnail. If these soldier and Interpol agents are up to snuff, they're going to recognize the passports as having faked visas. The last thing he wants to do is explain to Jennifer why he couldn't get the real visas and knocked them out himself while they're both awaiting extradition at the French consulate under police guard.

Somewhat nervous himself, Lord Marchmont sits in the back seat, his arms folded, one hand at his temple. If it comes to it, he can hopefully use his rank to force these two headstrong Americans across the border, possibly without international incident. As to his reputation, well, it certainly isn't going to be helped by Interpol finding him in the back seat of an unlicensed Citroën C6 and pleading the case for a pair of internationally known antiquities thieves.

Jennifer's Dice Pool: Presence + Socialize.

Zane's Dice Pool: Wits + Larceny (pre-existing) versus the soldier's Intelligence + Investigation.

Lord Marchmont's Dice Pool: Manipulation + Politics + Status versus the Interpol agent's Composure + Subterfuge.

Jennifer's Action: Instant

Jennifer's just trying to make a personable impression. She doesn't know the visas have been falsified, so she's trying to suborn her nervousness and hopefully just be waved through on simple charisma.

Zane's Action: Instant, contested

Zane made the passport visas weeks ago, and they're only now being scrutinized. When Zane first made the passports, he achieved a certain number of successes on the (then) extended roll to create the forgeries. He's hoping they now stand up to the soldier's examination.

Lord Marchmont's Action: Extended, contested (4 successes; each roll represents five minutes of explanation)

If it comes to Lord Marchmont actually talking to

soldiers or Interpol, he's going to bluster and act grievously importuned. At that point, it's a question of whether the agent wants to comply with the lord's position of superiority, or risk his job and reputation by making a potentially false arrest of an international figure.

Obstacles/Penalties: The Armée de Terre and Interpol both have descriptions of Jennifer and Zane, who are under suspicion for removing "an item of undetermined origin and unspecified description" from the Ministry of the Interior. This imposes a -2 to rolls made by either Jennifer or Zane's players in this situation. (Lord Marchmont will be exempt from this penalty if he ends up needing to make a roll, as his immediate presence will trump the department bulletin regarding the two Americans.) If the soldiers or Interpol agents actually search the car and find the Côte-d'Or Anomaly in Zane's luggage, that damning evidence will impose a -5 penalty on all of their rolls in this situation, Lord Marchmont's included (since his noble origins don't supersede the physical presence of the stolen relic).

Equipment/Bonuses: The postcards Jennifer sent to herself "from Aunt Tina" to various hotels in France help corroborate the lie that she and Zane are just tourists, earning her a +1 bonus to her roll. If Zane's player ends up with the quality of his forged visas in question, he'll impose a -1 penalty on the soldier's roll to scrutinize the passports if Jennifer's roll was a success (since the soldier would have liked Jennifer). If Lord Marchmont's input becomes necessary, he'll gain a +1 bonus if Jennifer's roll was successful (again, since Jennifer was charismatic) and an additional +1 bonus if the soldier approved Zane's forged passports (since they look authentic). For more specific details of these circumstances, see the roll results sections, below.

Consequences: Failures here could be dire, resulting in the arrest of all the characters. If the characters are, they might foolishly pull a gun on the soldiers and Interpol agents, which is almost certainly going to result in someone's death, if not multiple people's.

The delay if the characters are arrested also guarantees the confiscation of the Côte-d'Or Anomaly. Whether that means it remains in the possession of the Department of the Interior or gives the werewolves from Nuits-Saint-Georges a chance to steal it back for themselves depends upon what happens later.

In the long term, assuming everyone survives, Lord Marchmont would probably face disgrace and the potential loss of his noble title.

Jennifer's Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Jennifer's demeanor offends the soldier to whom she hands her papers. He recognizes the fugitives for what they are and immediately arrests her, Zane, and Lord Marchmont.

Failure: The soldier doesn't care how friendly Jennifer seems. He looks over the (forged) passports belonging to her and Zane.

Success: The soldier likes Jennifer. He checks the passports because he's got to do his job, after all, but he's

inclined to view everyone in the car favorably. With this result, subtract one from the dice pool for the soldier to determine the passports are forgeries.

Extraordinary Success: The soldier is convinced that these nice people (in particular, this extremely attractive American tourist) couldn't possibly be the international antiquities thieves. "Have a nice day, mademoiselle," and he waves them past the checkpoint into Switzerland with a wink and a smile.

Unless Jennifer's player achieved an extraordinary success, continue on to the soldier's roll to determine whether the passports are forgeries or not.

Zane's Roll Results

Note: This roll is actually made by the Storyteller to determine whether the soldier distinguishes the visa forgeries. Zane previously accumulated seven successes on his extended attempt to forge the visas for his and Jennifer's passports. That was more than the required five, so the Storyteller requires three successes for the soldier to notice the forgery: One for the successful attempt, and two for the margin of success.

Dramatic Failure: The soldier believes the passports to be entirely in order and waves the characters through the checkpoint with an apology for the delay.

Failure: The soldier accepts the passports, but there's something uncommon about these visas that one of the Interpol agents should probably see, even though it's probably a clerical error on the part of the Ministry. Continue on the roll for Lord Marchmont to persuade the agents that everything's fine and this is all a big mistake, and grant Marchmont's player a +1 bonus die to his roll to attempt diplomacy.

Success: The soldier suspects the forgery and calls an Interpol agent over to see the passport and handle the arrests.

Extraordinary Success: Stupid American! "République Française" is how we French spell the name of our country, not "Republic of France!" You're all under arrest!

Unless the soldier achieved a dramatic failure, continue on to Lord Marchmont's roll to smooth-talk himself and his companions out of the difficult situation.

Lord Marchmont's Roll Results

Note: Each roll on this extended, opposed action represents five minutes of diplomatic conversation between Lord Marchmont and the Interpol agent. The results described below detail the results of Lord Marchmont's actions. The results of the Interpol agent's rolls will be less immediately visible to the players, and serve primarily as a counterpoint to the aristocrat's attempts. If the agent achieves four successes before Lord Marchmont, the noble and the Americans are going to jail.

Dramatic Failure: Lord Marchmont speaks too condescendingly, offending the Interpol agent. The agent goes on a tirade about how the lord's status doesn't mean he can consort with known international criminals and expect to get away with it. The agent then arrests Lord Marchmont, Jennifer, and Zane on the spot.

Failure: The agent remains suspicious, seizing upon the sketchy passports and the matching descriptions of Jennifer and Zane. He's as yet unconvinced that he's mistaken.

Success: Lord Marchmont pleads a convincing case that it's all a matter of circumstance, and why would two internationally suspected antiquities thieves be traveling in the company of an esteemed individual such as himself?

Extraordinary Success: Lord Marchmont convinces the Interpol agent and Armée de Terre so completely that everything's on the up-and-up that the agent provides a notice of verification to both the passports' visas before blushing hurriedly the three across the border into Switzerland with an Interpol escort.

Smuggling the Relic onto the Ship

It goes without saying that many artifacts invite trouble, if not of their own accord, then because of the notoriety that sometimes surrounds them. From items that are under government, military, or private sanction to relics that have their own infamy, sometimes people in the World of Darkness simply don't want anything to do with them. Most notable among these are the people who lead otherwise normal lives, isolated from the taint of the supernatural.

This scene represents such a situation: that of an outwardly mundane ship's captain who has no desire to let a disreputable item on board. Perhaps it's a bit superstitious, but in the World of Darkness, superstition is almost rational.

Description: Randall defiantly begins to walk up the gangplank, but the captain places his hand on Randall's shoulder.

"You're not bringing that thing on board this vessel, sir."

Randall responds a bit caustically. "Don't be so provincial. It's just an opal. It's a bloody rock."

"Bloody rock is right," the captain responds. "The last dozen people to come into contact with it have all ended up dead. It's all over the Tribune that you have it. And it's not coming on board this ship."

Randall's teeth grind audibly.

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Persuasion versus the captain's Presence + Resolve

Action: Instant, contested

With the ship about to set sail, Randall has one chance to make his case, as the captain's not about to hold up the rest of the passengers for some shady "ad-

venturer” and his ill-gotten gains. Indeed, the captain’s already made his decision, but the Storyteller may allow one last desperate plea in an attempt to pluck the chords of his human compassion.

Obstacles/Penalties: These depend largely on Randall’s choice of negotiating tactics. If Randall tries to bully his way on board, he suffers a -3 penalty to his roll, as the captain’s not about to let himself be pushed around by a dodgy fellow like this. If Randall attempts to bribe his way on board, the captain’s insulted, inflicting a -2 penalty on the roll. If Randall describes his eagerness to get out of this savage country, the captain is likewise put off by Randall’s coarseness, and Randall suffers a -1 to his dice pool.

The captain himself is weary from the all-night preparations required to get the ship ready to leave port. His exhaustion manifests not only in the fact that he’s willing to lend Randall an ear at all (however brief), but with a -1 penalty to his own Presence + Resolve roll.

Equipment/Bonuses: If Randall makes a case for his own exhaustion and desperation to leave, he gains a +1 bonus to the roll, as the captain feels sorry for *him*, though he still fears the presence of the “cursed” opal. Likewise, Randall earns a +1 bonus if he takes a purely rational approach, such as by suggesting that the ship’s voyage will take just as long with or without the opal on board, or that it’s in *his* possession, so the only person who might suffer any difficulty is him. (Randall’s player must be careful with this last approach, though; if Randall seems condescending instead of rational, such as by suggesting the folly of such superstition, he won’t gain the bonus at all.)

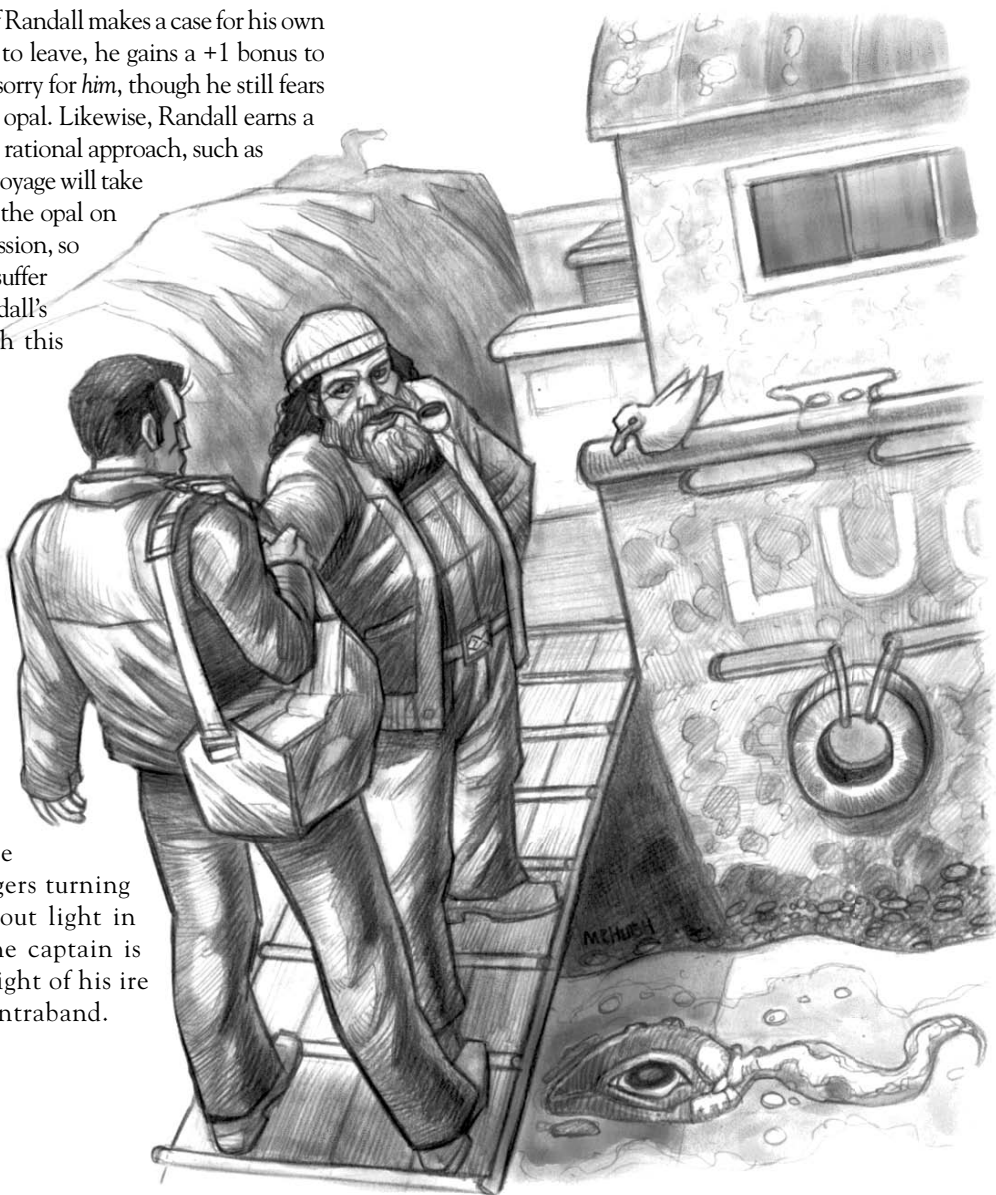
Consequences: Even assuming Randall makes it on board the *Queen’s Bounty*, that certainly doesn’t prevent the opal from working its cursed magic. If anything untoward happens on the trip, whether it’s passengers turning up dead or just a burnt-out light in one of the ballrooms, the captain is going to turn the full weight of his ire upon Randall and his contraband.

If the captain refuses to allow Randall aboard, he might be able to stow away. That would require a different roll based on Randall’s method to do so.

Of course, there’s the potential for worse consequences if Randall doesn’t make it on board. He’ll have to find other passage eventually, but his immediate threat is the trio of Garibaldi cutthroats who are searching the docks for anyone matching Randall’s description. Especially if the captain socks him one (see below), he’s going to face taking a beating and losing the opal.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The captain not only refuses to let Randall on board, but he physically strikes Randall before heading up the gangplank. It’s a bit anachronistically Dickensian, but the captain’s an old-fashioned aristocrat and a former officer in Her



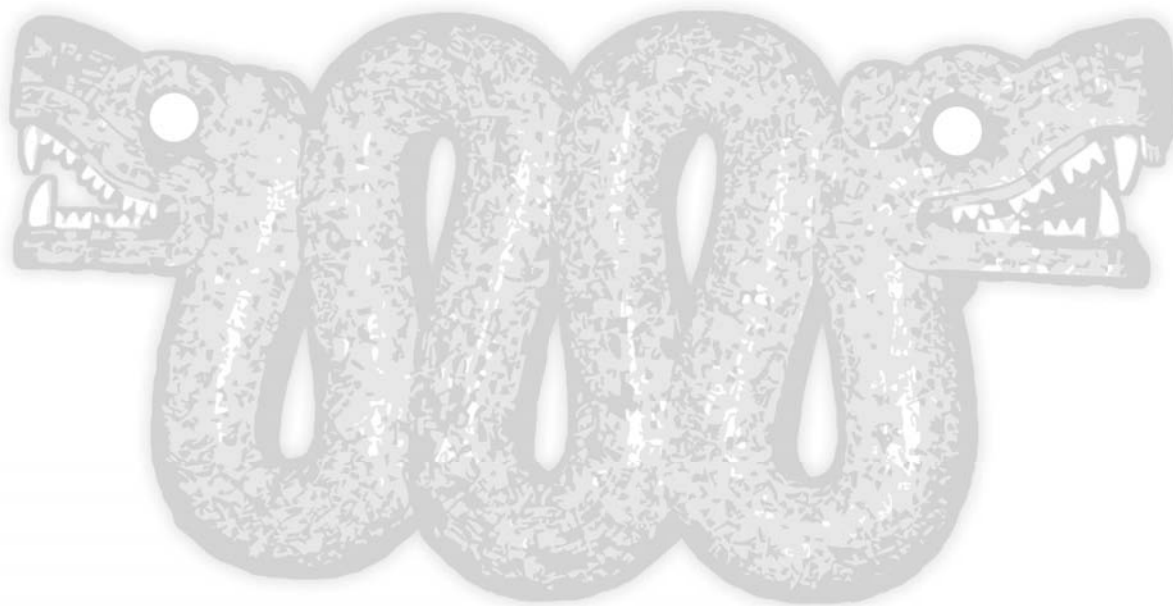
Majesty's navy, and obnoxiousness like this brooks no suffering. (The captain's dice pool to jack Randall's jaw is 6B.)

Failure: The captain curtly denies Randall passage aboard the ship. The mate ties off the gangplank and the captain disappears onto the ship, which presently pulls away from the harbor.

Success: With a sigh, the captain waves Randall aboard, with the stern admonition that he needs to stay in his room for the duration of the trip, and not even

think about bringing that damned opal out where other passengers might be harmed by it.

Extraordinary Success: An idea dawns on the captain. He'll keep the opal in his own safe, where Randall can visit to check on the security of it any time he wants. Although this may make Randall nervous, it's actually an achievement on his part, as the captain would normally want nothing to do with the haunted treasure. Randall may choose to refuse, in which case, consider the result the same as a normal success.





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B
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Lyle got his hands on the last photos that Pete Sochowsky took. It took some convincing, but his family didn't have much use for them anyway. He looked over the pictures and put a few more of the pieces together.

Obviously, Gail had been using Manny – but why? Using him as a hit man was chancy, because as far as Lyle could tell the only reason that the police had never gone after Gail was that Manny hadn't rolled over on her. That decision had probably cost him his life. Possibly, Lyle thought, he just loved her. It was amazing what a man would do for the woman he loved, even if doing it made him a complete idiot.

Manny had never seen the apple – that much was obvious from his last words. Bob hadn't, either, but he had known something about it. He'd mentioned to Lyle a week before he died that he was onto something important. Bob had another life, though, another name and another calling, something that Lyle wasn't privy to. Did the apple have something to do with that?

Lyle flipped through the photos again. The parking lot where Bob had died. The apartment where Al had died. The movie theater where Peter Sochowsky himself had died, probably about thirty seconds after he'd taken the picture. It was pretty clear that Sochowsky, a shutterbug originally from Buffalo, was just following Manny (and maybe Gail) around, looking for the story. But why did that induce Manny to shoot him dead in full view of fifty people? His lawyer's argument was self-defense, but nobody bought that (especially after other evidence linked him to Bob and Al).

Look deeper, Lyle told himself. Manny was a pawn. Gail had been moving him, but Lyle was at a dead end there because he didn't feel comfortable getting close to her just yet. He peered at the pictures again.

There was a man in each of them, someone he hadn't seen before. He could barely see the guy as it was, but years of watching for ghosts in dark corners had taught him well. The guy obviously wasn't a ghost (ghosts didn't photograph, as much as Lyle had tried), but something was clearly up. Lyle's eyes just slid off him.

Lyle checked the rest of the roll. He was in every single picture, starting back in Boston, where Sochowsky had been working before coming back home to Buffalo. Same stance, same look, same weird blurring of the photo. Lyle felt his heart beat faster. Was this guy who he was really looking for? Some kind of puppet master?

Maybe it was time to get involved in Bob's other world.

— ● ● ● —

"Mmph."

"Enoch? That you?"

"Whozat?" Enoch blinked until his vision cleared and looked at the clock. Six in the morning. Must be someone on the East Coast.

"It's Davey."

"What do you want?" Enoch thought it was ironic that Davey didn't seem to be able to keep time zones straight, given his other talents with time.

"You remember that thing in Buffalo, about five years back? With the apple?"

Enoch woke up a bit more. He didn't scare easy, and that business had actually rattled him enough to make him walk away from the whole situation. "Yeah. I read that the guy was executed, right?"

"Yeah, just last month. But listen – there's a PI from Buffalo who's looking into it. Turns out that one of the people killed was one of us."

Enoch rolled over and put his feet on the floor. No sense trying to get back to sleep. "Not to sound cold-hearted, but how's that my problem? Or yours, for that matter?"

"It's not, necessarily." Enoch heard the sound of the wharf in the background and found himself missing Boston. "It's just that this guy's a medium. He's just trying to get some justice for his friend."

"You don't get justice by digging deeper—"

"I know, I know. Look, you want the info, or not?"

Enoch tapped his teeth. Too many variables. Too many pieces to the puzzle. He couldn't even decide to walk away right now. "Yeah. Email me." He hung up, and smirked. *That'll teach the bastard to call this early*, he thought. Davey hated computers.

— ● ● ● —

"Bob Jesten, Al Wilson, Peter Sochowsky." Lyle and Enoch were sitting at a booth in an all-night diner. Lyle was pointing to the pictures. "Someone's in all of these pictures—"

"Me," said Enoch. "I don't photograph well."

Lyle furrowed his brow. "My sister doesn't photograph well, but she just looks fat in pictures. What's the deal?"

Enoch sipped his coffee. "If you ask, I'll have to tell you. You really want that? Or are ghosts enough?"

Lyle shook his head. "Forget I asked."

"But you're still looking for this apple?"

"Fuck, no." A young woman with a baby turned around to glare at him; he gave her an apologetic look and lowered his voice. "I'm looking for Gail. I just want to know what happened, why three good people died over this."

"You know, a good friend of mine used to say, 'You don't get justice by digging deeper - you just get dirty hands.'" He added more sweetener to his drink. The coffee there was awful. "Three good people died over this because of what this apple is, and what it does. Sure, there are a lot of questions I have, too, but I quit asking them because I didn't want to know. You've already shown that you're smart enough to quit asking when you're too deep - you sure you want to know any more?"

Lyle speared the last bit of steak on his plate and chomped it viciously. "It's not that I want to know," he said. "I just think three good people is enough."

"Shit." Enoch stared out the window.

"What?"

"You're right."

— • • • —

Lyle jogged up to Enoch. The music from the club was loud enough that they had to speak up, even in the parking lot. "She's inside with a guy. They look pretty tight." Lyle shrugged. "Anyway, he doesn't take her eyes off her."

Enoch groaned. "Another Manny?"

"Probably. This is her car. Let's just wait."

"Okay, remember, we just want the purse. If the apple's there, you don't touch it and you don't look at it. You just hand it to me and I disappear. We've got alibis for tonight, so just don't get caught on camera and we should be fine."

"Who's our alibi?"

Enoch didn't answer. He didn't feel like explaining it, and he didn't want to lie. Lyle would actually make a good recruit, under the right circumstances.

"Here we go." Lyle rounded the car to wait. Enoch stood back in the shadows to watch.

Gail was pretty; there was no doubt about that. Blond hair, fair skin, and something distinctive, something that set her above the other clubber girls. Most people would be hard-pressed to define it, but Enoch knew it was Destiny. *Same as the apple's?* No, hers was newer, but just as dire. Intertwined with the apple's, but...Enoch reached out, searching her fate for some inkling of what made her so appealing. He found it just as she and her boyfriend - like Manny, big, dumb and nondescript - reached the car.

It was hope. Whatever else she was, Gail was hopeful. She was looking for something, something that would make her complete, but Enoch didn't get a chance to look deeper because Lyle jumped out and grabbed for the purse.

Gail pulled back. *Of course she'll fight for it*, thought Enoch, *it's not like it's just money she's protecting*. He grabbed luck and twisted a bit,

and the heel of Gail's shoe broke, sending her sprawling. Her boyfriend pulled a gun and waved it at Lyle.

"Hey, you cocksu—" Enoch didn't give him a chance to finish. He stepped forward and shouldered the guy over the hood of a nearby car.

Lyle grabbed the purse strap. Gail pulled. The strap broke.

Destiny hit the ground like a lead safe. Enoch felt it — smelled it — as it hit.

The golden apple rolled out of the purse. Enoch turned away. He heard it rolling on the gravel, *heard* it, and that was bad enough. Just the sound of it was music, and he had to wonder what it would sound like to tap his fingers against it, to—

Gunshots. Breaking glass. A triumphant gasp. Apparently the others had seen it, too.

Enoch chanced a look. He saw Lyle and Gail lying on the ground, both bleeding from bullet wounds. Lyle's was in his temple, and his body was still and growing cold. Gail's wound was in her chest, and she gasped as her new beau sat near her, cradling something in his arms. Enoch crouched down next to Gail. Her destiny was running out of her like cream through a sieve. "What is it? What are you?"

"I just..." She was gasping. The bullet was in her lung, and it was filling her insides up with blood. Enoch debated trying to save her, but he knew what his senses were telling him. She was already dead, her fate spent. "I just wanted to...share it."

Enoch pulled a sap from his pocket and hit the man over the head, then averted his eyes. He heard that beautiful, musical sound as the apple bounced across the gravel. He heard Gail start to cry, a horrid, wet, bloody sound, but Enoch didn't have time for pity for her. He smelled for gold, felt around on the ground, and wrapped the apple in a cloth from his pocket. He put the cloth in a bag, and tucked the bag into a pouch in his coat. He walked across the street, already blending into the crowd. He spared a pained thought for Lyle and looked back to check for ghosts, but saw nothing. *Good, he thought. At least he's moved on. Most mediums don't.*

He jogged off into the night, wondering where on Earth the apple could be safely kept. He opened his phone and dialed a Boston number.

"Davey? Enoch. When are you setting sail?"

— ● ● ● —

"What does 'benefit of the doubt' mean?" Manny Romito had heard the phrase before, but his lawyer had gone on at length about it during his opening statement.

"It means that if there's any doubt about the way something went, you get the benefit," his lawyer said, not looking up. When Manny didn't respond, he closed his legal pad and looked him in the eye. "It means they have to be on your side. If there's any doubt."

Manny nodded. "So you have to make them doubt."

The lawyer gave him a forced smile. "I have to make them see that you're aren't guilty beyond reasonable doubt. I have to make them see that you had your reasons for what you did to Peter Sochowsky."

"I did," said Manny. "He was going to steal from Gail."

The lawyer smirked. "Benefit of the doubt," he said. "I think you understand it just fine."

Manny wasn't listening.

He was wondering why Gail hadn't called.

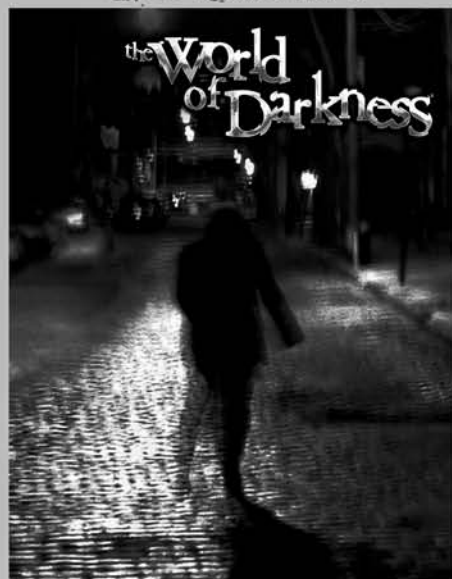


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