

Rite Publishing Presents

Book of Icons



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Presents:

Book of Icons

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Dedication: To Anna & Daniel. Also to you, dear reader.

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Icons: An Overview

An icon is one of the forces shaping the world. It is a thing so legendary that it created its own archetype, gave rise to supporting organizations, and became a part of the cultural heritage. An icon works on such a grand scale that it is unable to involve itself with non-epic things, but at the same time its representatives are always close enough to influence all tiers of play. An icon's influence manifests itself through the actions of its servants, seemingly-random events, or stories told by the most common folk. An icon is nigh eternal. Even when the current holder of the title falls, a new one is likely to rise in its place.

In this book, we re-imagine three Tarot Major Arcana in the form of six icons with nineteen variants. Each icon has its own unique theme and agenda, plus tools you can use to introduce the icons into your games: organizations, story hooks, and sample NPCs.

How Does an Icon Work?

An icon works through proxies, investments, and events that are either introduced by a game master as a part of an adventure, or that appear on stage at the direct request of a player who scored 5 or 6 on an icon relationship roll before a game session. Note that an icon's actions alter the narrative of the game—a new element is introduced to the story, and it is both the game master's and the player's job to adapt to the change. This new narrative element is one of the following:

A proxy is a non-player character (NPC) known to the player characters (PCs). This NPC acts on behalf of the icon, and the PCs can quickly ascertain this proxy's intentions and reliability.

An investment is a gift, an object that provides a

This book provides an expansion for icon rules introduced by the 13th Age Roleplaying Game, to allow for more formal, yet still simple and freeform, use of narrative power by both players and game masters, and also to allow third party publishers to use detailed and specific Icon references in their products by providing a fully open set of Icons.

By “more formal,” we mean a simple set of usage guidelines, with examples supported by stat blocks:

- Players should know how to use results of icon relationship rolls.
- Game masters need ready-to-use tools that make narrative-shaping actions effortless.
- And if someone feels like using our icons in their books, more power to everyone.

The six new icons presented in this book are based on the Tarot Major Arcana, and are presented in a way that explains how the followers of each icon benefit. After all, if an icon brings only calamity and pain to its agents, there would be no agents.

permanent advantage. As the grand scope of icon's activities is beyond simple explanation, you do not need to delve into the reasoning why the icon made this investment. All one needs to know is that it happened and that there may be a deeper meaning behind it. The object can be handed over by an NPC, found in a treasure hoard, stumbled upon, or found in a parcel post. Whatever the origin, the recipient instantly knows that the gift is intended for them (and who sent it).

An event is a seemingly random occurrence that thematically fits an icon's concept. This could be an unnoticed trap, the environment taking an action affecting an encounter (see the sidebar), or fate changing the current situation unexpectedly. The icons are not gods, but their presence acts like a gravity well, pulling thematically appropriate events closer to their agent.

There is one more method to introduce an Icon's presence: a **thematic adjustment**. This is generally reserved for use by the game master, while the other methods can be used by either the GM or players. In game terms, the GM shapes the NPCs, atmospheric descriptions of visited sites, and the flavor of activities in a thematic way appropriate to the icon.

For example, if PCs were to visit a tavern closely associated with an icon, the following random results from thematic adjustment section could inspire these one sentence descriptions:

- (Adventurer/intoxication): "Prancing Pony"—like a tankard filled to the brim, full of hard working men looking for solid meals and liquor to wash it down.
- (Revolutionary/nihilism): "Art and Education"—offers cheap stuff for students looking for low-expenses. The owner saves on everything shamelessly, including lighting. Still, you can get into a good evening dispute with learned academicians on life, the universe, and chaos.
- (The Order/conviction): "Last Mile"—a combination of a plain wooden bunker and a flimsy low-store brothel. Serves the needs of a local garrison and its penal company. However, with gendarmes stationing here on a semi-permanent basis, it seldom sees decent brawls.

Too Many Icons

Regardless of the campaign, limit the number of directly involved icons to no more than two or three on the side of the PCs, and choose just one, possibly two, antagonists. Otherwise, the players may quickly lose track of who is who, or worse, stop caring about icons at all. Select your favorite powers early and stick to them.

Icons and Characters

From an icon's perspective, the characters are important agents, either as allies, adversaries, or

As per the *Breaking of Forstor Nagar* adventure, published by Rite Publishing, the **environment**, in 13th Age game terms, is a participant in combat that takes an action at the -1 count of initiative. The environment's attack stats, if any, are as a mook appropriate to the encounter level. It lacks MD and HP, while AC and PD are optional. Some environment actions can be counteracted by performing attacks, for example, an escape from a room set on fire might require a successful attack vs. a locked window's AC, with the room's attack action being "C: Burn vs. PD." The environment attack action is constructed to behave like a mook since the environment is intended to put pressure on the characters instead of acting as an opponent.

prodigal daughters and sons. It's only natural to involve characters in their quests, major events, and plots.

To PCs, icons are a part of the natural order of things. They are like distant relatives who like to call on them unexpectedly, mess with their lives, and then move on to other grand schemes. While characters have the freedom of choice, and they might do things that damage their relationships with their icons, the players should feel that cooperating with icons is mutually beneficial. A player should not feel mobbed into doing a favor for an icon. It should be more of, "The icon did this for you. Will you reciprocate or turn away from their help?"

If, at any point, the players indicate that they are uncomfortable with the way the game was set up, relax and let them make their decisions. Icons (at least those who want the heroes to be allies) are patient, and they wouldn't spoil things by rushing the characters.

That said, having negative relationships with Villainous icons may cause unwanted consequences, though the GM should never turn a character into the Biblical Job because the player chose a negative relationship with an icon. Ultimately, both negative and conflicted relationships should yield positive, useful results.

Icons: The New Rules

The following is a step-by-step breakdown of how to handle icons in your 13th Age game with tips and tricks to involve players while avoiding certain kinds of conflicts when applying each 5 or 6 result on icon relationship rolls. Note that only one icon intervention is resolved at any time. You cannot pile multiple dice results into a single intervention.

- **Relationship dice rolls:** Have the players roll icon relationship dice around the table clockwise. On a player's turn, if they are out of icon relationship dice to roll, skip them. Otherwise, the player chooses an icon relationship and rolls one die for it, even if that relationship has multiple dice assigned to it. Note the result: a 5 or a 6. Don't record any other results. Then go to the next player.
- Continue through all the players until every icon relationship die has been rolled and its result recorded.

Example:

[A]drienne has 1 die (Positive) with The Adventurer.

[B]rock has 2 dice (Negative) with The Monster.

[C]ecil has 2 dice (Conflicted) with The Revolutionary.

[D]iane has 1 die (Conflicted) with The Tempter.

An example of result list for a party of four (initial roll order is ABCD):

[A]drienne rolls 1d6 for The Adventurer: 6

[B]rock rolls 1d6 for The Monster: 5

[C]ecil rolls 1d6 for The Revolutionary: 5

[D]iane rolls 1d6 for The Tempter: 1 (nothing)

[A]drienne has no dice left. She is skipped.

[B]rock rolls 1d6 for The Monster: another 6

[C]ecil rolls 1d6 for The Revolutionary: 5

No one has any icon dice left, so they stop.

What should you do when accommodating an icon's intervention seems insanely difficult? Or if you suspect that a player is just messing a bit with the game, or worse, using an icon roll for something trivial?

This is your chance to apply 13th Age's **Fail Forward** rule. Embrace this opportunity to break out of the box.

- Announce a short break, 10 minutes or so. This is the real meta-game cost of the intervention.
- During the break, change the story. If the characters were in an empty room, with no opportunity for a third party to join, change the "empty" part. Or retcon a player's inventory to include something required for the intervention to function. Whatever you do, do not be afraid to change the story. After all, the icons exist to let you add your own creative touches. Allow the players (and their characters) to change the direction of the story.

Note that Brock got two results (a 5 and a 6), and Cecil got two results (both 5s).

The GM records the results:

[A]drienne—The Adventurer (Positive)—6

[B]rock—The Monster (Negative)—6

[C]ecil—The Revolutionary (Conflicted)—5

[B]rock—The Monster (Negative)—6

[C]ecil—The Revolutionary (Conflicted)—5

- **Reminder for players:** At the beginning of a session, the GM reminds everyone of the results (carried over from a previous session) by putting a paper record of the results where the players can see it. The results are recorded in the order of the rolls. *The GM may resolve these icon rolls at any time throughout the game as long as their conditions are met.*
- **GM advances the story:** At any time during the session, but not more often than once per real-time

hour, and only if the GM feels that the characters are making no progress, the GM may announce an intent to advance the story. The announcement should also include a real time limit, during which the players are allowed to make this effort on their own (this time is also for the GM to come up with a proper development). If the players do not meet the GM's challenge, the GM notes the topmost result (the icon and the relationship of that icon to the character), crosses it off the result sheet, and narrates an event that moves the action forward. The nature of the event should conform to the icon's theme, the type of relationship (Positive, Negative, or Ambiguous), and the die result (5 or 6).

Folks, you've been stuck trying to find clues for some time now. You have two minutes to surprise me or I'll advance the action for you.

The GM consults the icon results list. The first unused result is "[A]drienne—The Adventurer(Positive)—6." The GM crosses that one out and she narrates a result:

Adrienne, at some point you realize that the amount of effort you've put into your search of the murder scene means that you have uncovered everything. Moreover, you realize that this lack of information is *itself* useful information. Whoever did this knows how to cover their tracks—probably a skilled specialist. And you just happen to know a person who might know everything about highly skilled trackers in your city.

- **The GM saves a character or a situation:** At any time during the session, the GM may announce the intent to save a character about to fall or die, or the intent to salvage a seemingly hopeless situation. The affected player or players may accept the help, refuse it, or request that they narrate the development themselves. Since the GM is more knowledgeable, the GM may impose special conditions on a character or the party if they do not accept the help (the first option). The GM can also choose to convey these special conditions

to the players privately.

Cecil, this is it for you. Your life flashes before your eyes as the blade descends and slips past your defensively raised staff.

Brock, you are the only one who can do something, but this would mean putting yourself in a harm's way. Brock, it's your call.

Brock has three choices: accept the GM's proposal, refuse it and let Cecil go into negative hit points, or propose an alternative. He offers an alternative:

Can I just kick my orc into the path of the blade so it takes the damage instead of Cecil?

Brock does not like the prospect of taking damage for Cecil—not from the boss.

Sure. Cecil, you've failed to notice a low-flying orc. At the last moment, the orc knocks you off your feet and saves your beard from a rough cut. The slightly bad news is that you're prone, splattered with orc gut and ichor. But hey, you're alive.

Brock, on your path to stardom, you gain a green-grey-skinned, monstrous hulk of a "fan," who screams something about younger brothers and launches yourself at you.

The GM crosses the topmost entry from the list.

- **A player uses an ability that requires an icon's intervention:** At any time during the session, a player who still has an entry on the results list (not crossed off) may ask to use an ability that spends a relationship roll. If the player has more than one entry left, they may select one. The GM narrates the specifics.

As the GM prepares to continue with the next action, Cecil's player speaks up:

Brock, I'll repay the favor. I invoke my Allied Cohort to deal with the boss.

Cecil pays with his result, “[C]ecil—The Revolutionary (Ambiguous)—5,” to obtain assistance by using his Allied Cohort feat (from *Rite Publishing*, 101 Feats and Talents).

The GM crosses the result Cecil used off the list, then narrates:

As the hulking humanoid looms over Brock, a crossbow bolt whizzes past Cecil and plunges into the monster's back.

Cecil, you have a distinct feeling that your cousin, whom you've tried to discourage from following in the footsteps of your adventuring career, hasn't been very obedient. Looks like you'll need to do some mentoring again.

- **A player requests an icon's intervention to advance the story or to save another character:** At any time during the session, the player whose (uncrossed) result is at the top of the list may request to use their result in one of the above ways (to advance the action or to save another character). The GM always narrates the details.
- **A player requests an icon's support for a ritual:** At any time during the session, a player may beseech their icon's support while performing a ritual. If the ritual does not require an icon's intervention, this should lower the DC of the ritual casting by one difficulty step (to a minimum of tier-appropriate Normal DC). If the ritual already requires an icon's intervention, the support does not affect the ritual's DC.
- **When to roll again:** Once all the rolls are exhausted, at the end of the same session, or at the beginning of the next one, the GM calls for another set of rolls.

Relationship with an Icon

In the core rules of 13th Age, there are three types of relationships a character may have with an icon:



positive, negative, and conflicted. Since the third one is, well, quite conflicted, it is our advice to initially treat it in the same way as you would a negative one, and then gradually, with the character and icon coming to an understanding, change it to a positive one.

The icons presented in this book are not necessarily cast into a single role. There is room for icon variants within the same campaign. Typically, that would be heroic, ambiguous, and villainous representations, though some assume roles that are harder to quantify.

For example, the Revolutionary may sponsor both rebels and terrifying inquisitors, while heroic adventurers could clash with a group of conquistadors, and both sides could be working for the Adventurer, one faction striving to preserve unique culture, the other looking to plunder a fabled city of gold. If something like this occurs in your game, consider one of the following explanations:

- There is more than one icon bearing the name. The opponents are following different individuals. This background fact could lead to an interesting “There can be only one” contest.
- The icons are beyond good and evil. They recognize potential and personal characteristics, and act on this alone. If so, when two followers of the same icon clash,

perhaps it is not possible to call upon the icon.

- The icons evolve or adjust to circumstances, changing their faces like masks. Allow players to reassess their icon relationship points during a campaign.
- Ask the players to record the type of icon they're associated with (heroic, ambiguous, or villainous). For example, "Adventurer 2 (villainous, negative)" is better than simply "Adventurer 2 (negative)". If your icon is tied to a specific nation, locale, or organization, include this into the description, too. For example, instead of just "Cult of One 3 (positive)," write:

Cult of One, Gold Child—the XII reincarnation of the founder of the Church of Holy Sepulcher 3 (positive)

Heroes & Icons

All players have an access to a resource called **icon points**, used for icon relationship rolls. This is a number of d6 rolled before a session, of which each 6 is a straight advantage, while each 5 is an advantage with a complication or cost. Note that the effect of a 5 is not weaker than that of a 6—it just comes with a complication.

- During a session, a player states that they are spending a 5 or 6 for a given icon. They also should state what kind of advantage they need.
- The GM, in response, decides how the advantage is implemented (through a proxy, an investment, or an event) and when, potentially as early as the same round of combat, and as late as hours later in the same scene.

Improvising a Proxy

Check the relevant icon's Proxies section for options. Choose the option most appropriate for the backgrounds or **One Unique Thing** of the character invoking the icon.

The proxy's level should be appropriate for the character (same level for adventurer tier, one level

higher for champion tier, two levels higher for epic tier). It should share at least one background with the character. The proxy's bonus to a background check should equal its strongest defense (Physical or Mental) minus 8 (that's right, proxies can make background checks, and they are good at it).

The proxy effectively joins the party for one scene and offers help and its resources (and if a 5 was spent, the proxy probably asks for a significant favor). If the GM wants the proxy to join a fight, it should have access to two PC combat abilities.

With regard to game balance, use of a proxy effectively doubles the effectiveness of a PC for one scene or encounter, or the proxy introduces abilities that compensate for PC's weakness for the scene or encounter.

Introducing an Investment

Check the relevant icon's Investments section for options. Pick the option most appropriate to character's class and preferences. Present the Investment to the party in such a way that there is hardly any reason for the invoking character not to use it (a paladin should not be forced to resort to robbing dead to obtain a pair of decent boots... unless the invoked icon has a nasty sense of humor).

The introduction of the investment should work like finding a key to a sturdy dungeon door: it should resolve an immediate problem the heroes are facing. Unlike a proxy, the investment is there to stay (one-shot items are possible, of course). The player is not required to return it; rather, they are expected to keep making good use of it.

As a GM, use investments as a common way to distribute magic items to your players. This ties the accumulation of these important items to the story through the players' choice of icons for their characters.

With regard to game balance, an investment is equivalent to awarding either a level- and class-appropriate true magic item or a magnificently overpowered one-shot MacGuffin. The MacGuffin is good enough to guarantee success on a single task.

Staging an Event

Check the relevant icon's Events section for options. Select the option that helps to resolve the current situation in a way most advantageous for the character.

Keep in mind that the event requires introducing a new element to the scene, an object that has been overlooked until now. This new actor takes an action (for the sake of simplicity, let's say the event is a non-sentient creature), and after resolution of the action, it disappears. As such, it should be stronger than a typical environment action (which in game terms is a level-appropriate mook), and it should target the opposition.

With regard to game balance, an event should not exceed a single action of a double-strength creature, or if it is a non-combat situation, it should not last longer than five minutes.

Thematic Adjustment

When the party enters a locale strongly influenced by an icon, a GM should consult the icon's Themes section for hints on presenting the locale. The theme helps the GM visualize the surroundings on the fly and quickly assemble a cast of suitable characters. The NPCs should exhibit traits that fit the theme.

Thematic empowerment: Upon entering such locale, a GM should inform players of characters who have a relationship with the icon, that the characters feel empowered by their proximity to the icon, and that they can (once per session) add a number of d6es equal to their relationship score, to a single d20 roll of their choice.



New Icons from the Major Arcana

This section presents six new icons. The **Adventurer** is based on the *Fool* from the Major Arcana. The **Revolutionary** is the Reversed form of the *Fool*. The **Order** (and, Reversed, the **Cult of One**) is based on the *Emperor* Arcanum. The **Monster** (and, Reversed, the **Tempter**) is based on the *Devil* Arcanum.

Each of these new icons has three variations, so in

total, there are 18 new icons for you to use in your games.

Glossary

The following is a list of special terms used in this book.

- **level appropriate:** The level of an opposing creature level, based on the PC level, and equal to the PC's level for Adventurer tier, the PC's level + 1 for Champion tier, and the PC's level + 2 for epic tier.
- **easier/harder by one category:** The DCs of all tasks within a tier are divided into three categories (normal, hard and ridiculously hard). If something is easier or harder by one category, then the category of a task should be changed by one step, accordingly. However, normal tasks cannot be made any easier, and ridiculously hard tasks cannot be made any harder.
- **mook/normal/double/triple damage:** Calculate damage as per creature level, then adjust it as described (mooks deal only one fifth damage, double-strength creatures deal double damage, and triple-strength creatures deal triple damage). This happens before any critical hit adjustments.

Icon Presentation Format

Each icon is presented in the following format:

- Tarot icon number, followed by the name of the icon
- Description of the icon. Note the use of the singular "they" here. Icons can be male, female, or non-binary gender. Assign gender to your icons however you want.
- Three or more different icon aspects, loosely corresponding to popular stereotypes. For a few icons, the roles are less clear due to icon-specific circumstances. Note that the role of the icon may change depending on the context of the situation or stay constant throughout a campaign. It is also possible that the setting may include the presence of several icons of the same name, each fulfilling a different role.
- Reversed icon. "Reversed" is used in the tarot sense. It

does not mean negative or opposite, but explores the icon from another angle.

- Icon themes
- Proxies
- Investments
- Events

The last four items (above) contain random sets of in-game elements, suitable for quick inspiration and improvisation. Proxies, Investments, and Events include **positive/, negative, or dangerous spins**, which should help with tuning its importance to the story—for example, a problematic development can be offset by unexpectedly positive side-effect.

0. The Adventurer

Based on the *Fool*, the Adventurer is an individual who always moves forward. The Adventurer is not concerned with long-term planning or far-reaching consequences, only with the things they see and feel. As a patron, they are happy to bestow good fortune, riches, and achievements to anyone strong enough to succeed. They seldom spare a thought or care for those who lost or for those whom they left behind. The future is near, and if looking back brings only regret, then walking forward is the only way to go about things.

A region where the Adventurer is dominant will be rife with challenging opponents, wonder, and riches. The Adventurer is a nomadic icon who wanders in search of self-discovery. To the Adventurer, the journey is the destination, and they always travel in search of things beyond the horizon.

Heroic Adventurer is concerned with good and evil. This icon strives to uphold important causes and often supports their friends or their organizations. Woe to those who cross the Heroic Adventurer, who often has powerful allies.

Ambiguous Adventurer replaces good and evil with calculation of profit and risk. This icon is more down-to-earth and knows that unless they make sure



to earn decent pay, there will be hard times ahead. They are reliable folks who do their job, but who are not going to risk their lives for you.

Villainous Adventurer revels in their superiority over the honor-bound or less fortunate wretches. Believing in survival of the fittest, avenging wrongs, or by working for those with higher pay, they excel as brutally merciless mercenaries, the best kind to hire for discreet and dirty work.

Themes

Admixture with Proxies, Investments, and Events.

Roll d8 or select: (1) folly, (2) mania, (3) extravagance, (4) intoxication, (5) delirium, (6) frenzy, (7) betrayal, (8) challenge.

Start with a bang, then run forward. If you succeed, hold a large celebration and gain recognition. If you fail, your friends should hold a wake over your passing and then avenge you.

Proxies

For conflicted or negative relationships, put a negative spin on the result.

Roll d6 ...and blend the result with the story

- 1 Familiar face:** An idealized uncle, a cousin, a fellow employee from your organization, a childhood friend.

Negative spin: They are entangled in a messy affair. You'll need to deal with it, too.

- 2 Useful service:** A shop or peddler with magic or highly difficult-to-obtain items, a place of power, a sage, a famous craftsman.

Negative spin: The service proves to be untrustworthy, though you still come out ahead.

- 3 Helpful contact:** An insider, an information broker, a party that knows too much, a gossip.

Negative spin: The information is incomplete, or worse, partially misleading.

- 4 Potential patron:** A rich sponsor with a plan, an aristocrat with an ambition, a wronged person with a grudge, a hermit with a vision.

Negative spin: They have an ulterior motive, or their request poses greater risk than expected.

- 5 Unexpected ally:** A knight errant, a turncoat monster, a wannabe adventurer, a professional adventurer, a powerful emissary.

Negative spin: Betrayal and ambush included.

- 6 Valuable example:** A fool that dies an ignoble death, a corpse that provides a valuable clue, a diary or last letter home.

Negative spin: This is just the first of two, or even a series of traps/obstacles/challenges.

Investments

For conflicted or negative relationships, put a negative spin on the result.

Roll d6 ...and blend the result with the story

- 1 **Tools of the trade:** A true magic item, a potent one-use magic item, or a mundane item to provide help during an adventure.

Negative spin: The item costs way too much, is of inferior quality (breaks on 3-), has an obnoxious or challenging quirk, or may be even cursed.

- 2 **Vital information:** A hint, a clue, a book or a helpful nudge in the right direction. Also, a recollection of use bit of intelligence.

Negative spin: The access to the information requires circumventing a lock, solving a riddle, decrypting a cipher, or the information is not sufficient.

- 3 **Support:** An organization pledges to support a character's endeavor. This means that the next encounter should be at lowest possible difficulty (two levels lower, normal DC, or the party should gain help that nullifies half of their opponent's strength).

Negative spin: The support requires fulfillment of an additional task or the support carries a hidden cost.

- 4 **Renown:** Character's reputation improves (treat it as *Respected Member of ...* +2 background, where ... is an organization). This reputation can increase multiple times (by +1 each time). The background is limited to +5 at Adventurer and Champion levels, and to +6 at Epic levels.

Negative spin: The renown earns you an envious adversary, who works against you under certain circumstances (a character who is *Famous for Slaying a Dragon* is likely to be in pretty bad position when dealing with another dragon).

- 5 **Promotion:** An organization the character has been a part of promotes them to the next rank. Alternatively, an organization that considers the character aligned with an icon favorable to them

Roll d6 ...and blend the result with the story

offers the character a position among their ranks. Finally, if the character has the background of *Respected Member of ...*, the background advances by one up to the tier maximum (+5 at Adventurer and Champion tiers, +6 at Epic tier).
Negative spin: The offer comes with a few duties, a minor challenge, or the complication of a mastermind who wants to manipulate a powerful pawn.

- 6 **Grant:** Title of nobility, land, real estate. Or perhaps, an inheritance or adoption.

Negative spin: New responsibilities, skeletons in the closet, or blood feuds that span generations.

Events

For conflicted or negative relationships, put a negative spin on the result.

Roll d6 ...and blend the result with the story

- 1 **Fumble!** Your opponent fumbles in such an exquisitely bad way that, in addition to failing completely at their task (they even fail to score miss damage, if any), they are also at -4 to all actions until the end of their next round.

Negative spin: Another enemy comes to their rescue, or the opponent uses a recovery as a free action (level × d10 hit points recovered).

- 2 **Bullet time!** Everything slows down except you. You gain ample time to think through your actions, and you can take an additional standard action this round.

Negative spin: The next round you lose a move action (or even a standard action).

- 3 **Jinxed!** Machinery fails, a weapon breaks, permanent spells flicker and disappear, traps grind to a halt, and bombs do not go off.

Negative spin: Unfortunately, this also applies to an item in your possession (a weapon, your

Roll d6 ...and blend the result with the story

armor, or something useful). The next time it is used, it works at -4 or, if its function is binary, there is 50% chance that it fails).

- 4 **I never knew I could do this!** For a single roll, you gain a one-time background of +5 (or +2 to the roll if the background is already at +5, or +4 if the roll is not a background check, or you can adjust the effect of the roll by +2).

Negative spin: The task is more complicated than you expected. This is actually the first of the two rolls. You don't get this bonus to the second roll.

- 5 **Respect and Awe!** For some reason, your enemy is overcome with respect. Unless it really jars the flow of the narrative, they are going to leave you alive (or surrender, or stop attacking, or attempt to pack and go away).

Negative spin: They still plan to get back to you, they just postpone the attack until more suitable occasion.

- 6 **Crit!** Your attack scores a critical hit.

Negative spin: And your weapon is stuck in the enemy, requiring a move action (or even a standard action) to be readied again.

0. The Revolutionary

Based on the *Reversed Fool*, the Revolutionary is out there to change the world. Whether it's for the good of the common folk, or whether it's against a wicked tyrant, the Revolutionary is here to take a stand. As a patron, they urge their followers to keep on bringing down their foes step by step, by breaking the systems or just by spreading news among people.

The Revolutionary rises to power where change is due: invention, new social order, fall of authority, or places of learning that grew stale. The Revolutionary



is the spark that starts the fire, and the avalanche that grows. The Revolutionary is a skilled organizer, a builder of a house of cards that falls only to rise again under a secretive hand guiding from shadows. The Revolutionary always disappears before the end of their work, but with a hint of a possible return if the new order is too stagnant.

Heroic Revolutionary found the current order of things in need of change. Not necessarily fond of violence, they prefer to change people's convictions first. To this end, they strive to build a great reputation, and then move on to develop a strong faction to support them.

Ambiguous Revolutionary knows that life seldom forgives mistakes, and that the history books are written by the victors, not those who perished in shadows. Spies, traitors, and powers that hunt in darkness, they tend to settle for the lesser evil in pursuit of their goals.

Villainous Revolutionary believes that their cause justifies the means, including personal sacrifice, underhanded tactics, and terror. Subjugation of the enemy is the most important target, and if it means striking a deal with a devil, handing weapons to

children, undermining their opponent's morale by setting a terrifying example, or implementing a false flag operation, so be it. Only failures are worthy of regret.

Themes

Admixture with Proxies, Investments and Events.

Roll d10 or select: (1) negligence, (2) absence, (3) distribution, (4) carelessness, (5) apathy, (6) nihilism, (7) vanity, (8) oppression, (9) progress, (10) invention.

It all starts with vice, degeneration, depravity, or denial of fundamental rights. Then some folks decide to take matters into their own hands. From conspiracy and public executions, go for the flames of revolution. If you cannot reach your goal, make sure others can use your body and your deeds as a stepping stone.

Proxies

For conflicted or negative relationships, put a negative spin on the result.

Roll d6 ...and blend the result with the story

1 Familiar face: A fellow conspirator, an acquaintance who shares your goals, a friend you've made some time ago.

Negative spin: They are not entirely honest with you, or their help just furthers their own agenda.

2 Useful service: Weapons, hideouts, or black marketers. Alternatively, a group of people who fix things.

Negative spin: They need to be paid. Sometimes they also do not mind a little blackmail. And from time to time, they just fail.

3 Helpful contact: Sleeper agents, spies, sympathizers, or weak-willed individuals pressed into service by their vices.

Negative spin: Unreliable, on the verge of discovery or mental breakdown, inefficient or incompetent.

4 Potential patron: Leaders, movers and shakers

Roll d6 ...and blend the result with the story

who stay in shadows, a power behind the throne. Wealthy people who do not like to dirty their hands.

Negative spin: No witnesses... No chance for failure. Also, sometimes preferring to sacrifice pawns for their goals.

5 Unexpected ally: A foe who changes sides, an honorable enemy, a stranger who's simply a good person.

Negative spin: Weak, panicked, or a part of elaborate ruse.

6 Valuable example: A martyr, an enemy of the state who sets an example, a holy person who defies the tyranny.

Negative spin: They inspire, and at the same time bring chaos, incite authorities to increase repressions.

Investments

For conflicted or negative relationships, put a negative spin on the result.

Roll d6 ...and blend the result with the story

1 Tool of the trade: Something small that packs a hell of a punch (for example: a bomb, d3 hits, one-shot). Alternatively, a true magic item that either exploits a target's weakness or protects from a foe's trump card.

Negative spin: Unreliable (fails on 6-), limited in use (one-shot only or ceases to work on odd roll).

2 Vital information: A secret missive, a document that can be read under specific circumstances, a code. Also, a secret symbol etched on a wall.

Negative spin: Already intercepted or compromised by the enemy, but still allowing some progress.

3 Support: An organization pledges to support a character in a nearest endeavor. This means that

Roll d6 ...and blend the result with the story

the next encounter should be at lowest possible difficulty (two levels lower, normal DC or the party should gain help that nullifies half of the opponent's strength).

Negative spin: The support requires fulfillment of additional task or the support carries a hidden cost.

- 4 **Renown: Character's reputation improves** (treat it as *Respected Member of ...* +2 background, where ... is an organization). This reputation can increase multiple times (by +1 each time). The background is limited to +5 at Adventurer and Champion levels, and to +6 at Epic levels.

Negative spin: A bounty is put on character's head. This results in at least one additional level-appropriate encounter before a heal-up (the default is four level-appropriate encounters). The encounter should take place at least once per level until the character takes an action that nullifies the bounty (traveling to a distant land, calling off the bounty).

- 5 **Promotion:** An organization the character has been a part of promotes them to the next rank. Alternatively, an organization that considers the character aligned with an icon favorable to them offers the character a position among their ranks. **Negative spin:** The offer comes with a few duties, a minor challenge, or a mastermind who wants to manipulate a powerful pawn.

- 6 **The followers in shadow:** There are people who look up to the character and they want to get organized. This does not necessarily mean that a group of people suddenly decides to join—it's more like a faction that attempts to follow and support. They are likely to monitor the character's actions and lend minor help (supplies, funding, lodging) or provide basic and reliable local information.

Roll d6 ...and blend the result with the story

Negative spin: They are fragile, small in number and not very competent. Sometimes their helpful attempts fail, leading to problematic consequences. Roll d20. On 6- their help causes more issues than it resolves.

Events

For ambiguous or negative relationships, put a negative spin on the result.

Roll d6 ...and blend the result with the story

- 1 **Terrain stunt!** Narrate how you have successfully used terrain against the opponent. They are hampered and at -2 to attacks and skill checks until the end of the round.

Negative spin: Afterward, rather anxious to get even, they are at +2 to attacks against you.

- 2 **Disarm!** You outmaneuver your opponent and disarm them (until they spend a standard action retrieving their weapon or regaining balance). This standard action requires also that they succeed at a Disengage check or they become subject to an attack of opportunity.

Negative spin: The opponent gets another weapon, or regains footing, using a move action without need to Disengage first.

- 3 **Riposte!** The next time you're hit, you get an immediate free attack at the attack source.

Negative spin: You also take bleeding damage from the opponent's attack (tier-appropriate bleeding damage, *i.e.*, 5 at Adventurer, 10 at Champion, 20 at Epic; save ends).

- 4 **An enemy of my enemy!** The enemy stumbles into a nest of wasps, gets lodged in a hole, or slips. Either way, they take a single free hit (at your damage) and are stuck for a round.

Negative spin: If you try to land a hit this round, you automatically get miss damage (from the

Roll d6 ...and blend the result with the story

wasps or defending enemy).

- 5 **Blinded by rage!** The enemy launches a flurry of attacks and misses throughout the round with every one of them.

Negative spin: Nevertheless, their anger builds their strength a bit, adding 25% for the next round.

- 6 **Crit!** Your attack is a crit.

Negative spin: Yet the foe miraculously survives (there is 50% chance they will play dead though).

4. The Order

The Order provides. The Order guides. The Order is a foundation of progress, development, and strength through unity. It inspires people to follow its principles. Based on the *Emperor* Major Arcanum, the Order idealizes the organization that rules and represents the will of its nation. The nature of the Order varies by country, culture, and level of development of the society, therefore interpretations of the Order may vary drastically from one place to another.

The prevalence of the Order in a region depends on a strong and capable government, with pests, malcontents and organized opposition tightly controlled. The loyalists of the Order hold key positions, and the government discourages chaotic elements like the adventurers and treats the destitute badly.

That Which Provides cares for its subjects. It shepherds the weak, protects the defenseless, and rewards champions. Prosperity and stability are the hallmarks of this aspect.

The Bearer of Scales defines the duties of citizens, laws, and norms that bind the society. The enforcers, tax collectors, and lawyers—and adventurers and merchants—often represent or interact with this aspect.



The Celestial Harmony defines and relies on a very rigid societal structure reinforced by metaphysical belief, divine mandate, and tradition. In short, the society is stratified, with each group assigned a role and destiny, with incredibly rare changes between groups and ostracism of any individuals who do not conform to the standard. (Ostracism often leads to an individual starving or accidentally being killed—killing a non-person is an accident, not a murder.) The typical strata of a fantasy society are:

- The enlightened, highly educated and spiritual preservers of tradition, knowledge and law. Their role is to teach, advise and adjudicate.
- Feudal lords, whose job is to rule, provide and



maintain shelter, and provide arms.

- Land-holders, essentially vassals who are both farmers and men-at-arms.
- And several less defined groups: farmers, unskilled workers, craftsmen, merchants. This level is broken or bent by a strong military, religious monastic orders, and the emergence of specialists, both arcane and technological.

Under Celestial Harmony, the ruler is usually a member of the ruling clan, with an advisory board composed of the most prominent enlightened and feudal lords.

The Glorious Conqueror subjugates, establishes dominance, and seeks to amass wealth from foreign lands. It projects an overwhelming sense of pride, glory of military power, and rule by armored fist. Note that the Conqueror is not driven by spite or scorn, but rather by its own self-righteousness and belief in its superiority.

Themes

Admixture with Proxies, Investments, and Events.

Roll d10 or select: (1) stability, (2) power,

(3) protection, (4) realization, (5) a great person, (6) aid, (7) reason, (8) conviction, (9) authority, (10) will. The Order is built by many, through actions of all its adherents, and its purpose is achieved through unity.

Proxies

For conflicted or negative relationships, put a negative spin on the result. Note that the Order works through cogs and gears of the society. Celebrities seldom take the spotlight; however, the representatives of the Order are, by and large, highly proficient.

Roll d6 ...and blend the result with the story

- 1 **An off-duty watchman** in late forties is drinking heavily. While drunk, he is happy to share information with younger generation.
Negative spin: He's unlikely to share secrets, but he may point in the right direction.
- 2 **A magistrate clerk** doing chores has access to all of the documents in the archives. It looks like they would not mind earning a little on a side.
Negative spin: Researching is a Hard DC task and

Roll d6 ...and blend the result with the story

the results are not guaranteed to be up-to-date or true.

- 3 **A freelance law advisor with acquaintances in high places** advertises nearby (just read the notice outside the flat). Engage one's services to get a crash course on important officials, laws, and specialists with useful skills.

Negative spin: High prices, low quality, or shady past deals that may affect current business. Pick one, or more.

- 4 **A seemingly minor acolyte with an errand** is actually an important envoy carrying a secret missive to someone who needs to keep a low profile. Since the acolyte is waiting for their contact to appear, they would not mind a little chat. Or help.

Negative spin: If the characters take their sweet time, they may get dragged into the acolyte's agenda.

- 5 **A crusader passing through the district.** They are not necessarily *heavily* armed or armored, they are however armed and accompanied by at least a squire. Regardless of their purpose, they will not mind sparing a little time for a side event.
- Negative spin:** This also means that any brawls the adventurers are taking part in may quickly escalate. The crusader is not pulling punches, and they don't mind getting bloodied if they consider someone in the wrong. They are very confident of their social position that they will be treated lightly by any guards who respond to the conflict.

- 6 **A scheming courtier on their way to an outing,** either carried in a litter or riding a carriage. They would appreciate a hand with beggars or a traffic jam. They also don't mind giving a lift as long as the helpful individual behaves with the proper dignity.

Negative spin: There may be more to their

Roll d6 ...and blend the result with the story

invitation. The courtiers often think quickly and several steps ahead. Anyone who takes their words lightly is likely to be played for a fool.

Investments

For conflicted or negative relationships, put a negative spin on the result. The investments of the Order usually have to do with social maneuvering, preferential treatment, or using someone else to perform a difficult task.

Roll d6 ...and blend the result with the story

- 1 **A transport of workshop implements,** with all the tools and craftsmen one could wish for.

Negative spin: This is going to cost. A lot.

- 2 **An armed patrol appears.** One side in the conflict just received major support. Essentially, this means that a new force appears (worthy of a level-appropriate encounter, as long as the tier limit is observed).

Negative spin: Pick one: the patrol is not on your side, or someone on among your allies is likely to do a lot of explaining, or maybe the patrol is still not enough to handle the threat.

- 3 **A recommendation letter or generous support:** Either granted as a reward for services rendered, or as an investment. This is not just a meal ticket, this is a key that opens prison and court doors alike. It also helps secure support for a major operation.

Negative spin: This is going to create a lot of contacts, attract sycophantic schemers and carrion eaters willing to spoil your fun just to weaken you and your patron.

- 4 **A grant of the land.** As a reward, a PC is granted ownership of an area. In the adventurer tier, the area may include a village. In the champion tier, the area is facing bad times, and may include a minor fort or fortress (or temple, or a small town).

Roll d6 ...and blend the result with the story

In the epic tier, a character is offered a position of power for an entire region, including towns, cities, ports, a minor fortress, along with tumultuous frontier and power-hungry rivals.

Negative spin: This means also quite a lot of responsibility, possibly requiring the character's absence from adventuring. Alternatively, the rest of the party may help, and arrange NPCs to help.

Helpful references:

Treasures of a Past Age – Dominions

by Gareth Ryder-Hanrahan

<http://pelgranepress.com/index.php/treasures-of-a-past-age-dominions/>

Treasures of a Past Age – Strongholds

by Gareth Ryder-Hanrahan

<http://pelgranepress.com/index.php/treasures-of-a-past-age-strongholds/>

- 5 **Recognition: Character's reputation improves** (treat it as *Respected Member of ...* +2 background, where ... is an organization). This reputation can increase multiple times (by +1 each time). The background is limited to +5 at Adventurer and Champion levels, and to +6 at Epic levels.

Negative spin: The cogs work as a team. Better recognition means more work to do. Expect at least one more unusual task that must be accomplished.

- 6 **Promotion:** An organization the character has been a part of promotes them to the next rank. Alternatively, an organization that considers the character aligned with an icon favorable to them offers the character a position among their ranks. If the character has the background of *Respected Member of ...*, the background advances by one up to the tier maximum (+5 at Adventurer and Champion tiers, +6 at Epic tier). Finally, the

Roll d6 ...and blend the result with the story

character's background related to the organization (if different from the one proposed above) should be set to at least +1, reflecting their ability to interact and gain support.

Negative spin: Membership comes with rules, duties, and possibly fees. This means that the character's influence grows, but also that they need to be ready to do additional work. The initial request should come immediately, be fairly easy, and serve as a way to assess the character's overall utility to the organization. The fees should not exceed 10% of the character's income.

Events

For conflicted or negative relationships, put a negative spin on the result. The events introduced by the Order are heavily team-oriented.

Roll d6 ...and blend the result with the story

- 1 **A breather.** For a single round (or a significant part of an encounters) all ongoing fights stop (and social conflicts cease). Everyone gets to take a rally, the character whose relationship was invoked gains a free recovery and rallies as a free action.

The reason for the break comes from the outside. It could be a natural phenomenon, someone important calling for a break from hostilities, an important social occurrence (like someone taking a stage to perform, thus interrupting conversation and negotiations).

Should someone try to break the moment of peace, they fumble. Treat it as a natural one. After all, this is an intervention of an icon.

Negative spin: Everyone gets to take a break, and everyone's free to resume hostilities once the moment passes. Also, the Escalation Die, if any, does not go up during the breather.

- 2 **Strong!** The affected goes on the offensive,

Roll d6 ...and blend the result with the story

gaining +d12 to damage for this round to the first attack (+2d12 at Champion tier and +4d12 at Epic tier). For any tasks with a DC, the character gains one of the following (choose after roll): +5 to the check this round, or the result of the task becomes an amazing success.

Negative spin: Those who fail or abstain from acting this round, find out during their next round that all difficulties are increased (attacks are at -4, and the tasks are one category harder).

- 3 **A free interrupt.** A character is free to intercept and stop any action. This works like a bonus standard action with an added effect of successfully interrupting any other action.

Negative spin: A character still needs to narrate their intercept properly. If they fail to provide a reasonable explanation, their intercept is at -4 for an attack or the task DC is one category harder.

- 4 **A self-empowering realization.** Sometimes it's just a matter of simple "It's now or never." Sometimes it's more profound. Either way, the character breaks from external effects (magical, mental, and physical effects that limit or control actions). In case of last gasp saves, this is an automatic success. The character also becomes immune to this effect until the next full rest.

Negative spin: The character must make a promise to themselves that reflects their new resolve. They must do their utmost to achieve it or suffer from self-doubt and low self-esteem (-2 penalty to tasks and attacks for 1d4 weeks).

- 5 **There are no old heroes.** Someone allied to the characters sacrifices themselves to save the characters or at least give a significant advantage. The sacrifice must be at at least Downed as the result. For social situations, this is about significant loss of face or social standing. As a result, the opponent's actions are thwarted long enough for the character to escape, regroup, or

Roll d6 ...and blend the result with the story

execute a risky attack.

Negative spin: This is all in the spirit of the Order, where the little ants throw themselves into the water to build a bridge for their queen. The negative spin here is the realization that this is something natural for the devoted servants of the Order.

- 6 **The cavalry makes it in time.** If the characters are the cavalry, they manage to arrive in time, despite failing at one of the obstacles. If the characters are in a bad state, reinforcements arrive just in the nick of time.

Negative spin: Still, there should be at least one loss taken to reinforce the seriousness of the situation. If the GM wants to minimize the loss, instead of a death or other important occurrence, one of the characters takes a permanent wound effect. Roll 1d6: (1) lose one or more from the dominant hand (-2 to related tasks), (2) lose an eye (-2 to tasks related to depth perception), (3) scarring in a prominent place (-2 to tasks that rely on good initial impression), (4) nightmares (-2 to tasks executed one hour after waking up), (5) damaged leg (can no longer run or the running is significantly slower; jumping and similar tasks take a -2 penalty), (6) the character needs 1d4 weeks in bed to recover (this effectively removes them from the game for 1d4 weeks of game time).

4. The Cult of One

The Cult of One, sometimes also known as the Cult of Personality. A ruler by divine right or noble bloodline. The unsurpassed ideal of an emperor that towers above their people, and whose overwhelming presence touches all of the people beneath. Based on the *Reversed Emperor* Major Arcanum, the Cult of One represents the rise to power of an extraordinarily

gifted, lucky, or skilled individual. They build a cult-like following around themselves, and either by virtue or by propaganda and strength of its enforcers, they eliminate all opposition.

While the Cult of One is often associated with a theocracy or messianic writings or churches, it most likely appears spontaneously in response to the presence of an extraordinary individual. Therefore, there is a marked tendency toward monuments, large community events, and unified governing bodies working together to spread the glory of the individual and, simultaneously, to oppress minorities and communities that reject the Cult of One.

The Golden Child is a reincarnated individual of great renown, someone who bears the weight of a great and confirmed destiny, or simply a youngster touched by a being from beyond. Regardless of which, since a very young age, they show incredible talent, wisdom, and power. From this, their cult builds around them (or an existing organization recognizes them and accepts them as a leader).

The Inspiring Leader rules through skill, knowledge of a mortal nature, careful and complex political arrangements (that may include purges and terror), and painstakingly built faction support. In time, numerous titles reflect the Inspiring Leader's deeds.

The Ascended One expanded beyond limits imposed by its origins. They are no longer mortal, their thinking twisted (or evolved) too far to understand. However, despite their ascendancy, they still meddle intensely in the affairs of their inferiors, and thus their presence lingers and causes havoc.

Themes

Admixture with Proxies, Investments, and Events.

Roll d8 or select: (1) inferiority, (2) resentment, (3) frustration, (4) dominance, (5) stubbornness, (6) immaturity, (7) obstruction, (8) manipulation, (9) unrest, (10) conflicts.

Proxies

For conflicted or negative relationships, put a negative spin on the result.



Roll d6 ...and blend the result with the story

- 1 Fanatical minions on the prowl.** They have sketchy descriptions of the characters and they want to capture them. All social tasks are impeded (DC one category higher; everyone is afraid to be associated with the characters), stealth and subterfuge tasks should be required during any related encounter.
Positive spin: Any enemies of the regime, or anyone who actively opposes the fanatics, are likely to try to offer help to the characters.
- 2 A highly regarded representative** of the Cult of One offers their support to the characters. The support can be trivial, like just sharing a little insight and nudging the characters in the right direction, or something important, like brokering

Roll d6 ...and blend the result with the story

a contact with important nobles, vendors, or courtiers.

Negative spin: Of course, there is a catch. Either the representative has recently fallen out of favor and desperately needs a success story, or they are trying to offer the characters to their enemies, effectively setting up the heroes for a fall.

- 3 **Lawmen in pursuit of criminals.** They are fanatics, but acting officially as the representatives of the law. They are likely to call upon characters to assist them, or worse, consider the characters to be the criminals they seek.

Positive spin: The issue is quickly resolved, without violence, and the characters are released. Moreover, at least one of the lawmen appears to be sympathetic to the characters' goals and could become a useful contact.

Negative spin to the positive spin: This is the good cop of the "good cop/bad cop" routine. The characters are being played for fools.

- 4 **A foreign aristocrat surrounded by servants visits the same place as the heroes** (a tavern, a market fair, a church, a library, etc.). They are distinctly "foreign" in their behavior, to the point of being unable to operate and talk properly. While funny and jovial, the aristocrat is actually a barely-humanoid *being from beyond* who seeks thrills, spices, food, and unique magic. Roll 1d6 or select the true nature of the aristocrat: (1) a giant insectoid wearing a mask and gloves, (2) a hive operated by metallic ant-like constructs with a porcelain face and speaking apparatus, (3) a slug-like being in a giant amphora, carried by four servants, (4) a shiny metallic ovoid or cylinder, with artificial appendages serving as sensory organs and manipulators, (5) a distinctly devilish being in impeccable clothes, with a highly polished method of speaking, (6) a rabbit on a fine pillow (the rabbit does not speak or move, at

Roll d6 ...and blend the result with the story

all)—the servants convey the rabbit's will, thanks to silvery disks attached to their craniums.

A dangerous spin: The aristocrat is something of an envoy, and is highly dangerous at that, as it has a habit of misunderstanding people, or using excessively brutal force in response to violence. They are also fond of eating things, including the eyes of living beings, books, and coins. They are willing to offer payment in exchange for a new thing to eat.

- 5 **A holy person preaching in the street.** They have a beautiful voice, and their words reach out to people. The holy one can see things as they actually appear, perform minor acts of fortune telling, and share bits of insight. For all this, they are still quite normal, though slightly gifted and a little insane. They are also considered sacred, so any act against the holy one is likely to incite a full-scale uprising.

Negative spin: The holy person is actually capable of planting suggestions that people act on later (C: **Plant a suggestion vs. MD**—Once a specified condition is met within a month, take a standard action to act on the suggestion. The subject can be influenced only by one suggestion at a time). Pick or roll a Secret Agenda for the holy person.

- 6 **Secret police looking for opposition:** No state governed by a Cult of One should be without people, who support the government from the shadows, keep the populace under control, and directly target any opposition. The agents of the secret police often instigate breaches of peace to observe who joins and then apprehend the rebels later.

Positive spin: Having an acquaintance among the secret police can be also a blessing, in case the characters need to make someone "disappear" or bail an ally out of prison.

Investments

For conflicted or negative relationships, put a negative spin on the result.

Roll d6 ...and blend the result with the story

- 1 A mystic mark related to the Cult of One** appears in a prominent place on one's skin or on a piece of equipment. In the case of the latter, if the piece of equipment is discarded, the mark will reappear in a similar place 24 hours later on another piece of equipment. The mark can be recognized by anyone with the icon-related background and means (roll d6 or pick): (1) Honor, (2) Grace, (3) Merit, (4) Proficiency, (5) Devotion, (6) Ascendance. The symbol is permanent and it increases *Respected Member of ...* background by 2. Alternatively, if such background hasn't been bestowed on the character, an alternative background is bestowed, that of *Respected Follower* +2.

Negative spin: This also means that the character is easier to recognize, and may be followed by enemies of the icon. All 5s on icon relationship rolls may bring the complication of becoming a target of the unwelcome attention of such unsavory personages.

- 2 A whisper of advice** is granted to a character. It's either a random scrap of paper with a few words found by accident, or a few words whispered by a passer-by. The advice is related to the character's immediate endeavor. It is worded as helpful advice ("When faced by the three-headed dog, bow and show respect to the master of depths"). If followed properly, it grants +4 to all tasks for one combat round or a whole social scene.

Negative spin: The advice is so cryptic, that the effort required to understand it makes it hard to use.

Roll d6 ...and blend the result with the story

- 3 A favor for a friend in high place.** If this is the first time a character rolls this result, they are granted a favor. If this is the second time, they are called on to return the favor. Either way, the friend is someone one cannot refuse without dire consequences.

Negative spin: The favor comes with the burden of either dirtying one's hands, or something questionable being done for the players. It's a monkey-paw type of support, though maybe not as nasty.

Positive spin: Things get done, and the friend throws a little bonus your way.

- 4 A matter of standing.** A festivity is organized for a hero, or alternatively, a hero receives a formal invitation to one. This is intended to grant two boons to the character—one, to make friends or at least gain acquaintances useful in the future, and two, to relax and exchange information (secrets).

Negative spin: If the hero fails to rise to this social opportunity, they suffer loss of reputation due to being a bore, socially ineptness, or being thought a falling star. The social event is considered a failure if the hero offends a prominent individual, shows lack of social graces, or commits a gross indiscretion. Needless to say, enemies of the hero may attempt to goad the hero into doing these things.

The rules: Here are the rules for the social mini-game. The hero must acquire three successes during the festivity before they suffer three losses. The first two tasks are at a Normal DC and the third and further ones are at a Hard DC. The reward for each task is either a gain of successful connection or a piece of useful information. Losing the event means losing a point from *Respected Member of ...* background. If other heroes participate, their successes add +1 and

Roll d6 ...and blend the result with the story

loses -1 to the next roll made by the main character. Their DCs are all Hard, and if any of the helpers incurs three losses, they are unable to contribute any further.

- 5 **A warning is passed to a character** about an impending and potentially disruptive or dangerous event. Roll d6 or pick: (1) a new edict causes significant problems (loss of rights for a particular ethnic, social or age group; for example: all members of certain minority are to leave a city; all members of one sex are not allowed to walk without masking clothes; certain colors of clothing are forbidden; certain phrases are forbidden; a tax imposes new fees for being an adventurer), (2) a food riot, (3) public execution, flogging, torture, stocks, or other surreal or unusual punishment, (4) military coup or military crowd control (brutal and sudden), (5) potentially dangerous festivity (running of bulls, chasing slaves, stoning infidels), (6) rituals with the public forced to participate and expected to know how to participate, with punishments for those who do not know how.

Negative spin: Too late, the characters need to try to extricate themselves.

- 6 **A treasure map.** Really. Though maybe the treasure is not just about gold and magic. It could be also a city of gold. Either way, this particular item is a legacy of a famous Cult of One icon, and it would be unwise to let such an opportunity pass.

Negative spin: A shark can smell blood from almost half a kilometer away. Treasure hunter senses are keener, their appetite bigger, and their table manners worse.

Events

For conflicted or negative relationships, put a negative spin on the result.

Roll d6 ...and blend the result with the story

- 1 **The glory is mine!** Occurs upon downing an enemy or similar combat achievement. The character pauses for a round, basking in a warm glow of success. At the same time, everyone within a range is subject to Fear (threshold equal to character's level + 1). Additionally, the escalation die increases by 1.

- 2 **The voice of authority.** Regardless of whether they have actual power to do so, a character issues a command that is difficult to resist. **C: Wisdom or Charisma vs. MD. All targets within close range**— Obey a command. The command must seem realistic under the circumstances (“Drop your weapons and surrender” sounds fine on battlefield). The effect lasts until escalation die increases or for one round and then until the targeted parties are subject to harmful effects because of fulfilling the command. (Note that if the command interrupts combat, the escalation die is unlikely to increase.) **Negative spin:** There is no negative effect aside from becoming a prime target of everyone who was under the influence of this ability.

- 3 **Use the force!** All of a sudden, people do not want to plan or scout. They foolishly ignore advice and try to force their way. This means that any ambush (during an ambush round only) against targeted individuals is at +10 initiative and +2 to attack.

Negative spin: This is just for a short ambush.

- 4 **Obstruction!** The terrain acts on initiative count of 0. Trees fall, walls crumble, gates fall in. The enemies close to the PC are subject to the following attack:

C: Environment Attacks! (all enemies within range)—Damage as per Mook of PC-appropriate level, and the hit target is Stuck, hard save ends.

Negative spin: A few PCs are also affected (1d4

Roll d6 ...and blend the result with the story

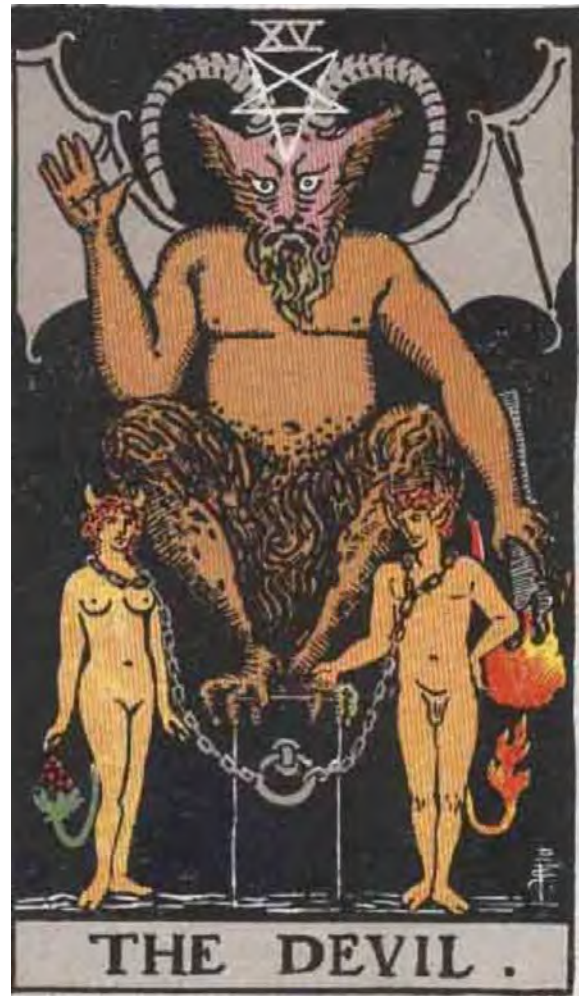
characters selected at random).

- 5 **Confusion!** A smoke bomb, fog spell, or sudden blast of darkness. Confusion reigns, and due to total panic everyone hit by the attack is Confused for one round. If the event takes place on a battlefield, everyone must attack nearest target (as if Confused).

Negative spin: A few PCs are also affected (1d4 characters selected at random). They need to make a Hard DC task not to succumb to panic.

- 6 **Conflict!** A trusted ally of the main enemy decides it is time for the main enemy to leave the scene. They provide immediate and devastating support to the opposing side. In combat, this is simple backstabbing, while in a social situation it is usually about handing incriminating documents to the officers of the law (or PCs).

Negative spin: Unfortunately, the characters profit only a little from this, as the backstabber already has enough supporters and so they also mean to challenge the PCs.



15. The Monster

The archetype of vile opposition, the being that breaks, takes, and destroys. Based on the *Devil* Major Arcanum, this supernatural beast grants strength to those who rampage for the sake of violence and teaches how to shed one's inhibitions in pursuit of bestial urges. As a patron, they empower predators and often sponsor secretive monster cults.

The Monster changes. It grows outside or on the outskirts of civilized areas, then spreads its influence among those who cannot stand up to it. It presents itself as a dark side of nature, a natural predator, or a force that cannot be opposed. It teaches that resistance is futile, and that quiet despair and fatalistic approach are the only options. Where the Monster appears, hope

dies, and the people become terrorized cattle.

The True Monster is a thing beyond redemption. Wholly devoted to ideals of perdition and ruin, it seeks to bring down authorities and oppose agents of order. If left alone, its minions will multiply and conquer. From near-mindless vermin to plague orcs to black-hearted cultists utilizing forbidden magic, the True Monster pursues its dark urges with abandon.

The Ambiguous Monster balances its dark side with a need for higher pursuits. Vampires, liches, and werewolves are beings with agendas, unique perspectives, and abominable hungers. Dangerous yet still trying to blend in within society.

The Redeemed Monster is an ideal that a forsaken creature may strive for. Sadly, this pursuit is nearly



hopeless, and even if somehow achieved, it is easily lost. Moreover, since this is about a dream of overcoming one's own nature, it sometimes leads to The Redeemed Monster is still a monster, and it is always just a step away from reverting back to its nightmarish origins.

Themes

Roll d6 or select: (1) rage, (2) violence, (3) vehemence, (4) extraordinary efforts, (5) force, (6) fatality; that which is predestined but not for this reason evil. Ranges from unfathomable evil to a creature that struggles against its own nature.

Proxies

The default assumption is a negative relationship that leads either to heroes gaining an advantage, or to heroes being subjected to unexpected challenges with potential benefits. The first entry describes the challenge; the positive spin is about exploiting it to the hero's advantage or gaining something.

Roll d6 ...and blend the result with the story

- 1 A dark thing cometh:** A vile member of a monster cult, a wandering monster, or the mate of a monster already vanquished.

Positive spin: They are weakened (or maybe sick), they sport a weakness obvious to a hero, they are afraid and would like to talk, they would like to pay for their life.

Playing by the rules: This warrants either an additional level-appropriate encounter (with additional treasure) or increasing the encounter level by 1.

- 2 Somebody is always watching:** A pair of cat-like eyes, a misshapen figure stalking through shadows. There is *someone* or *something* following, watching, biding their time. Maybe they want to settle an old score, or maybe just watch the heroes fall into a trap.

Positive spin: While the things may be in quite bad shape, the hero should get a chance to take an evasive action or a clue as to the watcher's identity and intentions.

- 3 Those who know... things:** A chance encounter that leads to the dark underbelly. Slave dealers, monster markets, illegal fights, underground communities.

Positive spin: Despite treachery and abominable conditions, these people still play by the rules, and if you pay just enough gold, you get to do your business.

- 4 An enemy of my enemy...:** This is the opportunity of a lifetime. This is a creature (or a vile individual) who instead of taking your life would like to join the forces for the time being (and eat you afterward).

Positive spin: They are a bit dim, or maybe the hero is not to their taste. Either way, they are going to keep their side of the bargain (or maybe just ignore you).

Roll d6 ...and blend the result with the story

- 5 **Not evil, merely misunderstood:** The heroes are mistaken for an ally, and instead of blades and claws, they are treated to joys of being guests of honor. They are even invited to a hunt (raid or an outrageously dark ceremony).

Positive spin: The hero's true identity is not discovered at an inopportune time.

- 6 **They sow the wind and reap...:** Unfinished business from the past haunts the heroes. This can be an avenger, a stalker who knows too much about the party, or someone who considers the PCs too important to let them be.

Positive spin: The party learns about the danger just in time.

Playing by the rules: This warrants either an additional level-appropriate encounter (with additional treasure), or increasing the encounter level by 1, or a good chase scene requiring at least one Hard DC check from everyone.

Investments

The default assumption is a negative relationship that leads to the heroes being plagued by a malign influence and overcoming it for the thrills and/or coin.

Roll d6 ...and blend the result with the story

- 1 **Cursed Treasure:** A treasured item with vile origins, or a sacred relic turned to serve a dark power. Use of the item is limited (1/day), and it incurs a cost, a sort of obeisance ritual that's painful or unpleasant, or both (roll d6: (1) dislocate a joint, (2) eat a bug, (3) regurgitate the contents of the stomach, (4) howl for five minutes, (5) subject oneself to fire until a minor burn appears, (6) scratch the surface of skin until blood flows). The obeisance must be performed with full determination (the subject is not in control of their actions until they perform it). If

Roll d6 ...and blend the result with the story

the subject willingly and repeatedly performs the obeisance, consider inflicting a derangement or making the obeisance worse (a normal save each month determines if the influence of the dark tool increases, with four fails leading to character loss). The power of the tool should match the character's tier, and should improve with the character's level.

Positive spin: Breaking the curse is possible and quite achievable.

- 2 **Bad news:** Someone else's vile actions are ascribed to a character via coincidence or malicious gossip. Either way, the character is framed and must make an effort to restore their reputation (if they have a background that is related to renown or the gossip, they may lose 2 points).

Positive spin: The situation is salvageable. Moreover, it offers an opportunity for an adventurer to shine, possibly gaining a *Hero of ...* +2 new background (replace “...” with a suitable term describing the deed or location). The background can be further improved as normal or via repeated heroic deeds.

- 3 **Forbidden knowledge:** Books or diaries that ooze dark power, and a stranger itching to sell them.

Positive spin: Taking just a sip of the chalice of forbidden knowledge isn't going to hurt. Moreover, this may help a friend who got hooked on this.

- 4 **A debt:** A character (or their protégé or kin) is urged to pay off a debt. The kind of debt that requires an extraordinary effort or significant risk to pay, with potentially horrific consequences if the debtor defaults. Note, that as per the nature of the debt, this is an icky business indeed—a vendetta, a skeleton in the closet that needs to be fed, or something else that comes from the

Roll d6 ...and blend the result with the story

darkness of one's soul.

Positive spin: There is still an opportunity to negotiate or pay it off.

- 5 **Bad habit:** Through malign influence or over-exposure to evil things (introduce a suitable dark item), a character develops a tendency to do one of the following (pick or roll d4; lasts for a single scene, once per day; GM picks the moment; acquired ailment lasts until resolved): (1) suffers from mood swings (inform them that they should act opposite to their current state of emotions), (2) experiences a bout of paranoia (dark things in dark corners, or people whispering behind their back), (3) develops an itch that they need to scratch until blood flows, (4) exhibits obsessive or unusual behavior: sleepwalking, constantly correcting minute details (This should be pretty disturbing, but not dangerous. If the character refrains from dealing with the issue, they should receive a cumulative -1 penalty up to -4 for disconnecting from reality).

Positive spin: The character identifies the source of the influence: a physical item that can be destroyed or damaged.

- 6 **The followers in shadow:** There is a monster cult about, along with a unique creature that they worship. These folks are dangerous—they treat their secrecy with utmost seriousness, and they serve a monster loyally, making them a group of fanatics with a deadly asset.

Positive spin: There is a reason most authorities hunt monster cults. In addition to the law, the player characters have almost everyone on their side. Monster cults are like deadly weeds that most would like to eradicate. Expect little favors and a bit of help from anyone who is not too terrified.

Events

The events presented here are distinctly negative. Depending on the circumstances, use the positive spin to support characters (and make the positive spin easy to notice for the character spent a roll).

Roll d6 ...and blend the result with the story

- 1 **Rage!** The opponent enters a terrifying frenzy that lasts until the end of combat. Heedless of its own safety, it throws itself at a character. Increase the attacker's damage by 25% (add 1 point of damage for every 4 it normally deals).

Positive spin: The attacker is Hampered (attacks deal only initial damage; ignore additional damage and effects and additional abilities that trigger on rolls), and their defenses are reduced: AC -4, PD -4. Additionally, its initiative falls before the initiative of the first character it attacks.

- 2 **Violence!** A heroic character is overcome with bloodlust and desire to do harm. They attack the closest opponent with total disregard for tactics or environment. Until the end of combat, the character cannot willingly disengage or stop attacking. They use the most powerful (or violent) attack they have. Any attempt to bring them to normal is a DC Hard task, with failure resulting in the character becoming Confused for one round (and attacking the person attempting to calm them down).

Positive spin: Each of character's attacks inflicts additional damage (+5 damage for Adventurer tier, +10 damage for Champion tier, +20 for Epic tier) until the end of combat. Unfortunately, this focus on the offense is bad for the defense (AC -4, PD -4). Moreover, after the fight, the character is more likely to look like they bathed in blood (cleanup is going to take a while).

- 3 **Self-Righteousness!** The most important character for the scene (not necessarily a heroic

Roll d6 ...and blend the result with the story

PC) is absolutely blinded by their righteousness. Until the end of the scene, the character is unable to acknowledge different opinions. Any attempt to convince them is a Hard DC task, with two failures leading to an outbreak of violence or at least a hasty departure in hostile spirit.

Positive spin: The character is also extraordinarily prone to manipulation (DC Normal), as long as the manipulation is sufficiently subtle as to seem to follow the character's conviction.

- 4 **Extraordinary effort!** A foe opposing the PCs resists when they should have yielded, moreover, they attempt to turn the tables on the heroes. For armed conflicts, this means that the opponent is fully capable of actions while going into negatives up to half of their maximum hit points (and then they immediately drop dead). For social tasks, this means that the opponent gains allies who support them against the characters.

Positive spin: This effect is temporary (lasts until the end of the encounter or 5 minutes). The foe also suffers from narrow-mindedness: they are unlikely to notice anything beyond their immediate surroundings or goal (all subterfuge checks at DC Normal).

- 5 **Immunity!** The creature is immune to all attacks that it would normally use itself. A werewolf cannot be put down through simple violence. A fire-breathing dragon ignores fire-attacks. A knight brandishing a sword takes no damage from sword-strikes. A rich aristocrat cannot be bribed.
- Positive spin:** The creature also hides a fatal weakness that is not immediately obvious, but turns all attacks against it into double-strength (that is all attacks that exploit this weakness inflict double damage).

- 6 **The Monster lives again!** A monster, thought to be dead, rises again. This can be applied only to

Roll d6 ...and blend the result with the story

significant opponents. Mooks and nameless troops do not qualify. The creature is Double-strength now (if it was already Double-strength, it is Triple-strength now, but Triple-strength creatures do not grow any stronger) and Staggered (adjust current hit points as per Staggered level for Double- or Triple-strength as appropriate).

Positive spin: The creature is Confused for two rounds after rising. Its initial attack is directed at the nearest opponents, and it does not pursue anyone who flees.

15. The Tempter

The one that exerts control through vice and the one who exploits weakness. The Tempter, an icon based on the *Devil Major Arcanum*, binds its victims and servants through chains of debt and dark pacts. As a patron, it offers fleeting moments of power and fulfillment in exchange for eternal servitude and atrocious acts.

The Tempter rules from within. It is a worm that stealthily eats its way out, a sweet and tantalizing corruption that entices people to do little dirty deeds in exchange for more power and more bad deeds. It is all about evil that transforms otherwise nice folks into cold, inhuman rulers, social and spiritual aggressors. And the worst part is that people turn to its rule all on their own.

The Dark Pact Tempter patiently waits for requests and only approaches promising individuals. It encourages and leads its followers through a dark spiral of greed and abandon, until they are ripe for harvest. Despite the folk tales, the Dark Pact Tempter seldom pursues souls. It usually is more interested in simple yet powerful deeds, in spreading its influence, and in amassing treasure.



The Vice King's tactics are even simpler. Instead of granting requests, it just shows a splendid array of addictive pastimes. These addictions, in addition to forming certain habits, require significant material investments or expenditures.

The Collector is the other side of the coin. It calls upon debts incurred by pacts or favors. It also engages in such activities as repossession and soul gambling, sometimes leading its victims even deeper into depravity and debt.

Themes

Roll d8 or select: (1) evil fatality, (2) weakness, (3) pettiness, (4) blindness. Also (5) dark pacts, (6) addiction and (7) toxic dependency. Also, (8) shallow good intentions that lead to disaster.

Proxies

The default assumption is a negative relationship that leads either to the heroes gaining an advantage, or heroes

being subjected to unexpected challenges with potential benefits. The first entry describes the challenge. The positive spin is about exploiting it to the hero's advantage or gaining something. The proxies of the Tempter are usually members of a bigger group, with hidden agendas and wicked goals.

Roll d6 ...and blend the result with the story

- 1 **Something wicked this way comes:** A group of strangers (merchants from afar, traveling acrobats, a delegation from a far-away country) appear in town. Their different customs, looks, or language are a reason for growing tensions.
Positive spin: By accident, the characters obtain a proof of the stranger's dark secret.
Wicked spin: In addition to their inability to fit, the strangers have also a secret and dangerous agenda.
- 2 **Somebody is always watching:** A secret society, a coven of witches, or a crime organization with strong ties to a monster cult. They are lurking beyond windows, doors, and in dark alleys for their chance to pounce on their prey, unleash something unspeakable, or maybe just collect information.
Positive spin: The hero realizes they are being targeted. It's another matter to unravel the dark scheme.
- 3 **Abuse of privilege:** A group of people who consider themselves better than everyone else attempt to vent their anger on convenient victims. Ranging from a drunk lynch mob to racist rabble of masked individuals to a morally corrupt nobility, they seek to dominate and hurt.
Positive spin: Their leaders are many and none. They act chaotically, and are quite easy to disperse.
- 4 **Crime organization:** A monster syndicate, a drug distributor, an organized crime family, or an assassin guild with religious, monstrous bent.

Roll d6 ...and blend the result with the story

They draw their power either from resources that are based on monstrous allies or special ingredients derived from monsters.

Positive spin: The organization itself is not allied or following the Tempter. They are concerned with profit, not with devilish schemes.

- 5 **Not evil, merely misunderstood:** There is a monster cult out in the open, and they are accepted by society. Moreover, despite minor issues, the cult boasts many converts due to unusually good public opinion and the group's philanthropic works. Alternatively, the cult presents itself as a different type of organization. Either way, they are influential among locals.

Positive spin: There are still people who do not believe in such positive change and they are looking for allies.

- 6 **They sow the wind and reap...:** Agents of a monster organization, not necessarily a cult, are up and about, hunting or seeking servants/minions/slaves. Their job is to corrupt the upper strata of society, and they are making great strides towards this goal.

Positive spin: Due to a slip, materials (drugs, bribes, documents) are lost, and the agents of the cult grow increasingly frantic searching for them. By chance, their path crosses that of the party.

Investments

The default assumption is a negative relationship that leads to the heroes being plagued by a malign influence and overcoming it for the thrills and/or coin.

Roll d6 ...and blend the result with the story

- 1 **Cursed Treasure:** Low-price items of convenience with a hidden cost: addictive healing potions, euphoric rush potions (one more move action per 1d4 rounds, become Confused for one round per previous use afterward). In other

Roll d6 ...and blend the result with the story

words, items with limited use and permanent (or highly difficult to remove) after-effects.

Pick a standard item, halve the price and add the cost (roll d6 or pick): (1) crave one more use (save normal to resist), (2) confused after use (one round per use within last 24 hours), (3) heroic stupidity (loss of an ability to assess odds, always press forward for one hour after use), (4) dark thoughts (feeling of depression for one day, halved initiative for the duration of the effect), (5) allergy or nose-bleed (-5 to all rolls for Hard or Ridiculously Hard DCs due to distraction or vertigo, -2 to attacks) for 24 hours, (6) impeded digestion (diarrhea, headaches, the character is Weakened for 24 hours).

Positive spin: The effects can be diminished by taking herbs and healing (shorten time to minutes instead of hours or days).

- 2 **Little dirty deeds:** The PCs (or their allies) find themselves to be an object of persecution or discrimination. They are harassed in public (thieves, beggars, guards, street merchants)—everyone tries to take advantage of them or play a nasty prank. This is not just garden-variety dislike; everyone's attitude noticeably worsens the longer players talk to them. The truth is that a curse affects everyone in close proximity to the PCs. Roll an Easy save every minute (or a Hard one, once per scene). Failure means that at least one non-player character is affected and begins to behave in unfriendly manner.

Positive spin: One of the PCs may recall a weird occurrence that recently took place that led to this situation. It may have been an accidental bump into a powerful stranger *incognito*, taking a toy from a child, or just loitering after hours in a dark alley. Either way, the memory contains enough clues to unravel the mystery. It's a part of the curse.

Roll d6 ...and blend the result with the story

- 3 **The watchers in the dark corners:** Strange people watch the PCs or follow them. Strange—members of unusual races or professions.

All characters' movements are reported and analyzed. It does not necessarily end with an attack... the best mysteries are those that end with revelation, not violence.

Positive spin: The PCs realize this, and in case of a hostile action, have a chance to prepare.

- 4 **Secrets in the wrong hands:** An item of great importance lands on a PC's lap. It contains a clue, directions to a secret so valuable that even the high and mighty will let go of their ideals, to kill or humiliate themselves, to obtain it. These secrets might be (roll d6 or pick): (1) the real version of the last will of a god, (2) a key to immortality, (3) a world binding ritual that allows one to control an icon, (4) a true ascension ritual that allows one to ascend to a higher level of existence, (5) a Pandora's box of a thousand and one calamities and plagues, (6) a list of leaders aiming to overthrow the current ruler along with a sketch of their plan.

Positive spin: The party has some time before their secret reaches the wrong ears. They can hold a conference to try to come up with a plan before the situation gets critical, possibly enough to call upon contacts, friends, icons or do research on their opponents. Or maybe, this is just a fake?

- 5 **Bad habit:** A character is exposed to highly addictive substance. Several times. While the addiction initially should not be a big issue, at some point (at least 2d6 days later), the character realizes that taking any action without the aid of the substance raises the DC to Hard level. Moreover, resisting taking another dose of the substance is a Hard task. Finally, the cost of the substance is high enough to damage the character's personal wealth (about 10% per dose)

Roll d6 ...and blend the result with the story

and health (loss of one recovery per month of using of the substance; at 0 recoveries the character's health is so bad that they cannot move around unaided; at 0 recoveries, a character must make last gasp saves at the end of each week or die). To get better, one is required to go "clean."

Positive spin: A friend notices the problem early and helps the character break the habit.

Going clean: If magic or an icon's or divine powers are not involved, this requires a Hard save, three successes (daily check). In between, the character will do anything to obtain the substance (Ridiculously Hard DC to stop oneself from taking such actions). Additionally, if the character ever encounters the substance, they need to make a Normal Save to avoid going back to bad habits. The results of a successful check are good enough to survive 24 hours of exposure. The GM can make the check automatically successful if an ally helps resisting, or if the character's addiction was milder than the one described above.

Lost recoveries, if any, return at the rate of one per month (no magic or icon intervention), one per week (good medical care) or within 24 hours after magic or icon intervention.

- 6 **Beware of the gift-bearers:** A gift-bearer approaches a character and offers to help the PCs with their endeavors. The help includes offering financing and providing important information. The benefactor requests that their anonymity be respected. The truth is that the opponent faced by PCs controls something that is desired by another group of mystics who worship the Tempter. As soon as the PCs defeat the rival of the mystics, they plan to take over (or capture) their real target, effectively making things worse.

Positive spin: The party gathers enough clues to realize the hidden agenda, and when the time is

Roll d6 ...and blend the result with the story

right, they can handle the second faction.

Events

At some point, the ill will of the Tempter turns things from bad to worse. Fortunately, things are not as bad as they seem. Either things do not work as the Tempter would like them to, or the effect is too weak, or even the opposite of what the Tempter intended.

Roll d6 ...and blend the result with the story

1 Dead end! While running, exploring, or conversing, the characters reach a dead end (or stalemate). It looks like there is no way to move forward.

Positive spin: This is just an illusion, a challenge that requires a different approach. It is quite achievable.

2 Unexpected weakness! A character staggers, affected by an unexpected weakness (yes, Weakness). If appropriate, they recall that once upon a time, they heard words foretelling their doom of the day they would feel such a sudden, overwhelming effect.

Positive spin: The weakness is temporary, and it has been produced by a third party. The doom is just a planted suggestion or a mistaken recollection. Once the character realizes this, they return to their senses, and if hurt, gain one free recovery usable as a free action within the next 24 hours.

3 This is not what I am going to do! A character does something totally opposite what they intended. This works best when they decide to aid an opponent instead of attacking them. This sudden state of confusion lasts only a round.

Positive spin: The opponents are even more surprised, and fail to take advantage of the action.

4 Argh, my eyes! A trap, a cursed item, or a bad

Roll d6 ...and blend the result with the story

roll on an attack causes a character to go blind for a scene (one encounter, five minutes, or the duration of a social event, whichever is longer). They recover in time, but for now they must make do with their remaining senses.

Positive spin: For some reason, the affected character becomes hyper-aware of danger, gaining +4 to all defenses until the blindness passes.

5 Words that bring bad luck! Secretly write down two words. Whenever one is uttered by a player (that's correct – a player), they take a secret -4 penalty to all rolls for five minutes, one battle, or one encounter. The effect is exhausted once both words are used. Otherwise it repeats. Choose two common words.

Positive spin: If a player guesses what a bad luck word is and gets another person (other than the GM or an NPC) to use it, the character transfers the curse to that other person.

6 Wandering monsters! The characters' presence, clash, or other actions lure a group of wandering monsters.

Positive spin: The monsters happily attack everyone indiscriminately, making the original opponent less of a threat.

Adding More Depth

The following supplementary material is intended to add more depth to your icon narratives. If you would like to have an additional player working with or for an icon proxy, or if you need to add a second role to them, or if you would like add another meddler to your story, here is a short list of Organizations and NPCs. On the top of these, just in case you need to invent another mystery, a list of Secret Agendas is there to get you started.

The important thing here is that neither the organizations nor the characters presented below are cast in positive or negative roles. They are supposed to be something that the GM breathes life into, or an anchor point for a player.

NPCs

Note that each NPC is assigned a tier and a background, rather than exact statistics. The reason is that these NPCs are not intended to directly participate in any adventure. Rather, they appear as a representative of an icon, do their job, and disappear. If you need their statistics, use a general creature table and an appropriate tier, and then add the trappings listed. Should you need them to perform a task (for example,

supporting the heroes), use their backgrounds formula.

Since these NPCs are exceptional, their background check modifier is equal to Defense minus 8 (D-8). Defense minus 10 (D-10) is default. Defense minus 6 (D-6) denotes Epic. The number presented represents the total check modifier—the NPCs do not have abilities in their stat blocks. Use PD for physical tasks and MD for mental tasks. “High PD” means is that PD is NPC’s better defense, while “High MD” means that MD is their better defense.

The NPC stat blocks are as follows:

- Name
- Description
- Backgrounds—with a formula denoted like “D-8” (Defense minus 8).
- Trappings—equipment, servants, and resources
- Tier—the tier in which this particular type of NPC is most likely to be met. An NPC’s level is most likely to be within the tier.

Roll d10 or select:

1. **The Op**

The Operative. A nameless agent who changes identities



and names like gloves. His job is always the same: join an organization, learn its secrets and structure, and finally bring it to utter ruin. His achievements include setting gang members against one another (operation "The House"), implementing harsh justice by leading two untouchable government employees into a deadly confrontation (operation "The Mask"), and cleaning a city of two rival crime organizations by instigating a bloody turf war (operation "The Harvest").

Backgrounds: Diligent student of crime (D-8), Man of the world (D-10). High PD.

Abyssal-Born Heritage*—Voice of a Tempter: Whenever you attempt to sway any creature by appealing to their baser instincts (hunger, fear, lust, jealousy, greed, or hate), your DC is one category lower. This ability does not work on the innocent, the loyal, and the pious. Additionally, this ability fails if you're attempting to make someone act against their convictions.

Trappings: Concealed weapons (hand crossbow,

variety of daggers, two bombs). An elegant rapier.
Tier: Champion, party-appropriate level.

* The **Abyssal-Born Heritage** talent appears in *101 Feats and Talents*, by Rite Publishing.

2. Old Man

The acting dispatcher for the Op. Years of dealing with human vice in various shapes have washed away all compassion, mercy, and empathy. This old man can smile politely and discuss weather, assassination, or necessarily brutal means of resolving a conflict. Despite his apparent lack of humanity, he cares for his people, always guiding them from shadows and supporting them when necessary.

Backgrounds: Government employee (D-8), Aristocratic scholar (D-8). High MD.

Companion of Spirit*: The Old Man can freely cast his soul or his mind into the body of his companion, a pet pigeon. The companion's mental abilities are the Old Man's match; it can speak and form its own opinions. Moreover, the Old Man can also "ride" (and direct) the mind of any pigeon he sees, but no more than twice per day, and no longer than for two hours per ride.

Trappings: A devout servant with highly polished assassin skills (Champion tier), an army of goons within reach of his voice (Champion tier mooks). A ring with deadly poison (two doses, ingested, 40 damage per round, hard save). A seal stamp that opens many doors.

Tier: Epic, Non-combatant.

* The **Companion of Spirit** epic feat appears in *101 Feats and Talents* by Rite Publishing.

3. Jersey, of the Canonical Four

A bit shy and romantic, famous for her eagle-like eyesight and utterly precise sharpshooting. An accomplished adventurer who tackles her problems from a distance. A sorcerer fond of the crossbow.

Backgrounds: A sniper and scout for the military (D-8) by day, a poet and accomplished linguist (D-8) by night. High MD.



Trappings: Messenger, a magic staff that works as an implement, and which also can be reconfigured with to become a crossbow (move action). Also, ink, pen and paper, several fashionable suits, and high quality cosmetics.

Tier: Champion or Epic.

4. Carol, of the Canonical Four

An over-the-top armored outfit, with hundreds of tools attached. When surrounded by a large number of opponents, he releases a number of smoke sticks and shrapnel grenades, using his armor to protect himself. Melee-oriented.

Backgrounds: A military sapper and alchemist (D-8), who always carries too much spare gear to run. High PD.

Trappings: Spare gear (a lot of weaponry there). Grenades (shrapnel and smoke). A shield and a collection of sharp swords. His specialty is carpet bombing (throw a number of grenades to hurt and

demoralize his opponents).

Tier: Champion or Epic.

5. Turtle, of the Canonical Four

A formidable tower of plate, with a halberd and heavy holy symbol on a long chain. Along with Carol, he forms the first line of the defense. While strong, he always prefers diplomatic solutions.

Backgrounds: A crusader with anarchistic bend (D-8).

Skilled masseur and dietitian (D-10) with a gift for scholarly stuff (D-10).

Trappings: Plate armor, halberd, a heavy holy symbol on a long chain that can double as a flexible weapon, books on personal hygiene, cook books, and religious pamphlets.

Tier: Champion or Epic.

6. Catty the Witch, of the Canonical Four

A spellcaster who is cursed to switch places with her cat on a daily basis. When the cat persona dominates, Catty is a brilliant but unreliable spellcaster with incredible reflexes and a sixth sense. When the human is in charge, Catty is a mousey note-taker and passive supporter with in-depth knowledge of history and monsters.

Backgrounds: An archeologist (D-8) or a big game hunter (D-8).

Trappings: Light armor, several rather obscure manuscripts, and an obligatory cauldron for potion making.

Tier: Champion or Epic.

7. Conquistador

Arrogant, passionate, well-read, and noble-born, these aristocrats are known for their ability to conquer new lands. Accomplished diplomats and famous for their skill with arms, they are incredibly dangerous opponents, rivals, or allies, because in the end, they care only about spoils, lands and their power. To attain their goals, they will trample over their comrades' bodies as easily as one would walk stairs.

Backgrounds: Military leader and diplomat (D-10), noble-born politician (D-10).

Trappings: An army of followers; maps and



intelligence documents; a devious plan to subjugate natives of a less developed country.

Tier: Champion or Epic.

8. Station Agent

An adventurer who decided to stop taking risks and start making profits off the fools. A local representative of a powerful organization. A merchant skilled in moving goods. And a reliable business partner for all who need to get some weight off their shoulders.

Backgrounds: One of these at D-10: Peddler. Luxurious merchandise store clerk. Mysterious owner of a curio shop. Professional arms dealer.

Trappings: An arsenal of goods with pretty items in front and really expensive stuff in the back, safely tucked away from prying eyes. A wagon or a decent shop. Several assistants including a heavy-built, non-nonsense bloke.

Tier: Any, though Champion and Epic shopkeeper tend to be more exotic in both looks, goods, and shop.

9. Agitator

This is a man with a mission. Armed with pamphlets, a good story, or enough money to bribe or convince people to start listening to him, he is going to share news and opinions with people in hopes to start them talking, to educate them in things, and maybe, just maybe, find among the audience a few like-minded individuals to spread the fire of the new order. All fires start with but a spark.

Backgrounds: Street preacher (D-8). Member of a new order (D-10).

Trappings: Sweets for children, pamphlets for adults, and books for the worthy; secret instructions and diaries.

Tier: Adventurer, possibly Champion.

10. The Vet

A person with a complicated military past. Extremely experienced, though with a few ailments that make him a bit grumpy and a little jealous of the new generation. Extremely reliable, but also stern and prone to using harsh words. Often haunted by his past.

Backgrounds: Decorated military hero (D-8), survivor of dark times (D-8).

Trappings: Access to high quality equipment, extensive network of contacts, often a local celebrity.

Tier: Champion, Epic.

Organizations

The following presents a list of organizations that represent the interests of the **Adventurer** and the **Revolutionary**. An organization may stand for both versions of the icon at the same time depending on the circumstances or the GM's whim. It's important though to remember that all of these organizations care about their reputation—it is not unheard of for them to

support certain causes covertly.

The Organization stat blocks are as follows:

- Name
- Description of the most important characteristic
- Origins and current situation
- Goals
- Key areas of influence
- Structure in broad strokes
- Legal status

Roll d8. If you get an 8, this means that it's either an entirely new organization or a collection of coincidences, or that more than a single organization is involved:

1. Brotherhood of the Equals

Some people are equal. Some people are more equal than others.

Thought to be armchair idealists, this organization promotes equal rights for everyone who "deserves" it. Those who the organization recognizes can expect sponsorship, support, and even silent disappearance of their opponents. The leaders of this organization number wealthy landowners who believe in a bright future, provided that everyone's rights to their property are respected.

Goals: Preservation of the status quo, the good of the state, upholding the law.

Key areas of influence: Politics, the court, education facilities,



wealthy merchants and industrialists, robber barons, philanthropists.

Structure: During numerous meetings during social outings, groups of influential citizens meet in clubs. Each club has their president, treasurer, and initiative leaders. Promising individuals are granted support and formal letters of recommendation to powerful contacts.

The club-like structure often means that there are

inner circles or secret dealings known only to a few.

Status: Legal, often informal or operating under a different name. Always with ties to the current power structure.

2. **Fireworks, Demolishing, and Quarry Blasting (FDQB) Company**

We're here to do our job and collect our pay. We don't mind your presence here as long as you remember to stand aside at the appropriate time.

Originally a tightly-knit Dwarf clan famous for explosive inventions and mining skills, this organization grew beyond racial and geographical boundaries, and spread all over the world. Be it mining, demolition, or warfare, everyone seems to need a highly skilled craftsman with a diploma and large assortment of means to quickly and radically alter the shape of the terrain.

Goals: Profit, growth and expansion, progress.

Key areas of influence: Military (engineering), mining and smelting, ore rich areas. It sponsors its own schools and research facilities. It also made large strides into the metalworking market, flooding the shops with high quality hardware. From nails to bells, from armors to tools and alchemist lab equipment, all can be ordered from the Company, and the stylized FDQB logo can be found practically everywhere.

Structure: Grand Headsman, then Councilor Board composed of respected members of Master status. Factory Masters, Academy Masters, and Trade Masters supervise various regions. The Masters are served by Artisans and Journeymen (Artisans without an assigned post), with the Apprentices being the lowest

grade (while not necessary low skill) workers.

The great fragmentation of functions often leads to organizational paralysis (or generally slow response). Attributed to Dwarven origins and their conservatism, this also means that power plays among factions are commonplace.

Status: Legal, usually allied with trade and transportation guilds. While it has access to numerous resources, it carefully attempts to avoid conflicts, believing that trade and profit are of utmost importance. Invariably, though, the young and impatient journeymen and artisans form small and rebellious factions that oppose the rule of the established order.

3. **Freelance Specialist Society**

Welcomes everyone, judges none. No internal strife allowed, and the will of the inner circle is absolute.

The guild started as a sort of retirement pension and network of contacts for adventurers seeking employment. Then it became something of a bank, sponsoring adventuring parties and discovery expeditions. At the same time, the founders involved themselves heavily in politics, resulting in the banishment of the Freelance Specialist Society in some places, and the Society being a prominent supporter of the government in other places. Due to several assassination attempts and conflicts that rocked the organization, the ruling body keeps its identity secret and has imposed a strict code of conduct on internal interactions.

Goals: There are several factions within the Society. As long as a faction turns their contributory money on time, and as long as they are not violating code of conduct, they are allowed to exist.

- The Progressives attempt to implement all novel social ideas. Abolish slavery, educate the masses, secure better living standards for the poor. Their methods leave much to be desired.
- The Connoisseurs seek experiences, exotic new or rare ancient artifacts, and self-empowerment.
- The Ascended consider themselves above material

needs, as their power and resources are already incredible. They tend to play the Great Game and pursue concepts unfathomable to those beneath them.

- The Conquistadors believe that the life is about chasing the horizon, obtaining power and gold, only to gain more power and more gold.
- The People of the Cities are about politics, law and order. They usually ally themselves with a government of a specific nation, and through web of favors strive to insinuate themselves into positions of power. Despite being ostensibly legal, they often resort to unsportsmanlike methods when bringing down a rival person or nation.

Key areas of influence: The government, frontier cities, exclusive clubs for the worthy, secret cells in the areas where the organization is outlawed.

Structure: The inner circle and their envoys. Recognized factions (the factions are registered with the envoys, and must meet certain tax to be allowed to exist). The unaligned—the members not aligned with a faction or not granted envoy status. The initiates—newly accepted members who need to pass several exams before being allowed to become the unaligned.

All members are taught special secret gestures. In this way, each member can identify the rank and the faction of another.

The code of conduct forbids any kind of overt warfare or infighting, and requires absolute obedience to the envoys. Also, the internal matters of the Society are to be kept secret, while all breaches of conduct must be reported to one of the envoys.

Additionally, each faction must pay certain taxes on a yearly basis or be stricken from organization records. While there is no fixed codex of punishments, the offending individuals are either charged a special tax, exiled, or "disappeared" without a trace.

Status: Legal or outlawed, varies per region. The Society establishes its presence wherever it wants to establish its presence.

4. Great East Company

Here's your application form. Fill it out in triplicate. Alternatively, pay for an express service and one of our

scribes shall fill it out for you.

The Big One. The Mother. One of the first privately owned multinational enterprises in the world, it aims to reach everywhere. Its representatives can, supposedly, arrange any resource, provide market for all kinds of goods and, if one of god-like executives wills it so, transform an entire region to mine natural resources.

Goals: Once upon a time, it was all about profit and expansion. Now, since these two are assumed to be the default for any initiative, it is about market dominance. Mother's strength lies in massive business-to-business operations, like equipping an army, delivering thousands of settlers to a new frontier city, or providing personnel for a fledgling bureaucracy in a newly established country.

Key areas of influence: The Big One is the banker, warden and sponsor of other organizations. It will also gladly back a kingdom about to go to war as long as the king offers appropriate collateral.

Structure: Great East Company management consists of several ruling bodies, with overlapping staff and competencies. Those at the top of such bodies, called the Executive Council, are in charge of accepting initiatives and assigning resources. Needless to say, with numerous treasuries and hundreds of clerks scurrying, this would be absolute chaos, if it were not for Councilors' skills. Treated like gods, they are selected for their incredible prowess for problem solving and their uncanny knack for remembering details. There are rumors circulating that the Councilors' ability to keep up with everything is unnatural, but as long as everything seems to *just work*, the gossip is largely ignored.

Below the ruling bodies and various treasury departments, there are also archives, banking facilities, transport branches, and well-developed internal security backed by deadly mercenary troops. There is also a dreaded repossession department.

Status: Legal and largely unknown to an average person, they are the standard go-to target for many medium businesses and organizations. They are well

respected for their neutrality and discretion. About the respect: the reputation of their repossession department is nothing short of legendary dread.

5. **Gold Flamingo Adventurer Guild**

Life is short, so make the most of it.

An adventurer marketplace more than a proper guild, this association is divided into two tiers, the true adventurers and the supporters. The former are adventurers in need of a job, the latter are the clerks and sponsors, who market adventurer-oriented services, from lawmen and jail bails, to funding expeditions and selling adventurer gear. This organization helps start up all beginners, sells cheap medical care, and provides insurance for those who do not rely only on their luck.

Who would believe that such a small and friendly organization derives most of its profit from looting ancient sites, smuggling arms into war zones, and training ordinary folk into hardened mercenaries. The detachment of the organization that handles the risky jobs is not officially affiliated and denies all ties with the guild. The truth, however, is that money, gear, and skilled personnel are shared.

Goals: Help beginners and amateurs become professional adventurers. Turn a decent profit from low-return loans. Secondary, secret goal is to bring down all forms of centralized government by helping all manners of illegal movements grow, and by selling arms and training soldiers. The tertiary goal focuses on the empowerment of every individual.

Key areas of influence: Frontiers, regions known for many historical sites, countries rife with civil unrest, war zones.

Structure: The President, the Advisers, the Support Staff, and the Guardsmen. The adventurers. The second part of the organization (called the lower branch) has a quasi-military structure: Commander General, followed by Region Overseers and their Secretaries. The order below depends on an Overseer's preference, however it is usually organized into two distinct groups: the regulars and the veterans. The

regulars have been trained but lack combat experience, so they rank below veterans. The veterans either form their own units or act as officers for the regulars. Veteran units are usually split as follows: the leader, the second, the main force, the support.

Status: Legal, respected. Considered to be a small semi-philanthropist organization.

6. **Order of Knights Hospitaller**

This is where you will be recovering. The meditations begin an hour before the dawn at the second tolling of the bell. Your personal caretaker shall attend you afterward until well into the evening. In seven days we promise that your body will be healed. Your mind, your soul, and your conscience shall be taken care of likewise.

Originally a religious order of healers, the organization fell on hard times while supporting a holy crusade. The healers took up arms, but never forsook their original calling. Since then, one compromise lead to another, and today the Knights Hospitaller offer healing, banking, and martial services while holding several enormous fortresses and a strong navy.

Goals: Unknown to anyone outside of the inner circle. For the most part, the Knights appear to be content providing healing, education, knightly



training, naval transport, and banking for high fees and legendary dependability. The wealth acquired through services is reinvested into more land, more structures, and new members of the order. The original purpose of the order's founders was to secure strong military resources for a prophesized end-times scenario. Several generations later, though, it looks like the means to the end (acquisition of power and wealth) became the end itself.

Key areas of influence: Military logistics, areas affected by major disasters, banking.

Structure: Each major center has its grand master. The grand masters communicate via their seconds, constantly transferring obligations or pooling resources to address their needs. From time to time, the grand masters issue a command to create a new order center, followed by enormous transfer of resources to the new place. Below the masters and their seconds, there are several chapters and organizations of laymen that take care of various areas of activity. Care is taken so that each center is self-sufficient; they grow their own food, make their own tools and equipment, and they use their own people to build.

While the basic healing and basic education are free for everyone, and orphans are always accepted, a beneficiary of such services is expected to offer work or a gift in return. There are also whispers that some talented pupils disappear, never to be seen again.

The Knights Hospitaller are the only known organization that, in addition to healing the body, also attempts to heal minds and souls. It's quite common for ex-soldiers and ex-mercenaries to use such services and to eventually become renowned members of the order.

Status: Legal, often granted special legal and tax exemptions. There are rumors of such protection being withdrawn due to persistent rumors of witchcraft, mind-altering experiments, and secret cults. In addition, there seem to be cases where known opponents of the order (or people who just wronged members of the Knights) simply disappear or go mad.

7. The Library

We all cherish the knowledge written on these crumbling pages. Had you read it though, it would have shattered your mind and would have twisted your body into an abomination.

Keepers of secrets that should not be uncovered, much less used. Founded so long ago that people no longer possess the records of the event, it persists in shadows, monitoring progress, books, and discoveries, ready at a moment's notice to step in and erase anything deemed too risky.

The other face of the Library is that it spreads knowledge it deems safe through a multitude of child institutions, museums, schools, and universities. From there it also recruits its new members.

Goals: Judge knowledge. Put away dangerous bits, disseminate safe bits, and keep the watch.

Structure: A surprising fact (maybe not that surprising) is that key members of the Library are extremely long-lived. Some of them simply sleep from one case to another, while some of them seem to be undying or maybe deathless. They create the policies and they pronounce the judgments. Their name is forgotten (or conveniently stricken from records) and they go by service-names: The Gentleman, The Detective, The Inventor, The Chemist, and so on. Just beneath them there are secretaries and liaisons who are more familiar with the current times, and who connect the Old Guard with the rest of the organizations. Known as Jokers, they have various agents at their disposal—regular members ranked from two to ten, Jacks (heavily armed and powerful soldiers), Queens (representatives, fixers, and liaisons), Kings (powerful infiltrators, usually posing as members of other organizations on a permanent basis), and Aces (inhumanly powerful, transformed via use of forbidden knowledge specialists for resolving problems).

The Aces are traditionally of one of two types. The first type are Calligraphers, who use written (or painted) words to subjugate the will of others, animate black letters to strangle, or create a black ant-like army.

The second type, a Papermaster, is rarer. A Papermaster can instantly turn paper into a blade harder than steel or into an animated object the size of a dire beast. If the Library deploys an Ace, it means that something really ugly is about to take place.

Key areas of influence: Universities, governments. It's all about secrets within secrets, and skillfully controlling the distribution of information.

Status: Illegal. Officially, they do not exist.

8. Things are not what they seem to be

For some reason, the encountered individuals are just this: individual people, acting together coincidentally. Either this, or they are not telling the whole truth, and there are more players hiding in the shadows than anyone might expect.

Either there is no organization involved, or there is more than one, and it's making a good job of covering its tracks. For example:

- A monster cult—a unique creature with a group of worshipers.
- A society devoted to an aspect of the Tempter, or an underground court formed around an otherworldly being who serves the Tempter.
- A small rebel movement challenging the authorities.
- A semi-secret group of former associates who help each other increase their influence.
- An organized crime group.
- A group of wealthy citizens sponsoring illegal sports.

Secret Agendas

Sometimes organizations and NPCs have a second, hidden motivation. And if you like conspiracy games, a third and fourth. Here are a few recommendations that should fit servants of the Adventurer, the Revolutionary, the Monster and the Tempter. Use them to create intrigue and wonder, as long as things don't get too confusing.

The Secret Agendas stat blocks are as follows:

- The Name of the secret agenda
- A Description of that agenda
- Key steps that the organization takes, from the beginning until it achieves its purpose. This includes events, milestones of a careful plan, and symptoms noticeable by outsiders.
- The most typical Assets employed by those with the agenda
- A list of conditions that the agenda is Thwarted by

Roll d8 or pick a suitable choice below:

1. Domination

There is a market, a power group, or a physical area that the organization intends to dominate. Requires subtlety and subterfuge.

Key steps: Establish a foothold or a base of operations. Plant loyal servants in key positions. Eliminate rivals. Establish a new order.

Assets: Loyal servants. Funding. A few strongmen. A champion.

Thwarted by: Exhaustion of assets.

2. Plunder

It's all about money. There is an opportunity for a quick and big score (though quick may be a highly relative term). Strength, brutality, and aggression are key factors.

Key steps: Secure rights or a monopoly on the access to the resource. Send in plunderers. Profit. Withdraw when the costs start to rise.

Assets: Loyal servants. Initial investment. Everyone who can be bought or who's greedy and knowledgeable.

Thwarted by: Threat of losses. Threat or removal of the people in charge of the operation.

3. Ruin

Twilight is at hand. The harbingers of the fall are coming. The end of days. The prophets and revelations. Somewhere, someone is taking steps to bring this about.



Key steps: Whispers, gossip, and people who know—circles of the initiated form. Then the knowledge gets out, the street prophets appear, portents of the things to come are seen by common

Assets: Books, words, and teachings. Then secret societies with a usual assortment of minions. When the society needs to be convinced, miracles (of a kind) take place. Finally, on the eve of the change, the heralds (creatures, beings, or chosen people) start taking drastic actions.

Thwarted by: A different faith and holy writings. Heroic exemplars. Outing of heretics.

4. Development and Progress

Discontent leads to need for change. Need for change is good for new ideas. New ideas pave the way for inventions and developments. New things replace the old ones. Change strengthens the desire for stability and predictability. Afterward, the cycle may begin anew.

Key steps: Strong need or preference for change, often caused by great social inequalities. People who can act, do so (invention, revolution, or, in some rare cases, leading by example). A period of change begins and lasts until a minimum level of comfort is achieved.

Assets: Anyone discontent enough. Visionaries.

folk. At the same time, anyone who could oppose the change is targeted for corruption, capture, or assassination. In the end, when the quota of the faithful is met, the heralds descend and *something ends*.

Skilled organization executives who are not afraid of making difficult and risky decisions. Skilled operatives who do not mind getting dirty. Demagogues.

Thwarted by: Stability. Other demagogues. Education. Tyranny. Corruption.

5. Secrets

Knowledge is its own reward. Knowing reasons may allow to alter effects. The pen can be mightier than sword, provided it makes use of knowledge properly. Given all of this, it's obvious why some go to great lengths to secure or capture information, even if it comes with great cost or danger.

Key steps: Basic research that identifies the nature of the information needed or the location it may be hidden. In some cases, the first step is to determine what kind of information is needed to reach a certain goal.

Secondly, a group of select specialists approaches the target and begins the process of acquisition. This operation ranges from archeological site mining, to industrial espionage, to infiltration of a royal court.

Lastly, the organization secures or hides the captured knowledge, and severs remaining ties, or the knowledge is put to use.

Assets: Select specialists, security, enforcers, an—in some cases—"cleaners."

Thwarted by: Security. Counter-espionage. Bribes, blackmail, and infiltration.

6. **Invaders from beyond**

There is a species of a different kind. They exist beyond society and they are organized. Now they stealthily creep into society and assume roles next to normal citizens.

Key steps: Abductions and disappearances. Unexplainable sightings and clues that do not point to typical suspects. Then, changes among public figures, celebrities, and state employees. Finally, a period of relative quiet begins. However, anyone who asks awkward questions, disappears.

Thwarted by: Inquisitive investigators. People with minds open to non-standard explanations. Secret orders devoted to eliminating similar threats.



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