

The MINISTRY of RECALLER OCCURRANCES



NEFARIOUS ADVERSARIES



by Don Bisdorf



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Restricted to Magus and Rex degrees only

Brothers and Sisters,

Although we strive to conceal our activities from Her Majesty's Ministry of Peculiar Occurrences and its sister organizations in other nations, these intelligence agencies are not our only opponents in the game of history. We must remain mindful of the other secret societies and powerful conspirators who walk through the world's shadows.

This list of potential adversaries is ever-changing. Ambitious groups such as the Phoenix Society collapse overnight, while fellowships such as Methuselah's Order have survived the passage of centuries. The documents collected here describe the groups and individuals that could provide the most danger to our operations at the present. We have attempted to list strengths, weaknesses, identifying characteristics and likely associates, so that you will have the information necessary to recognize and react to these threats.

If it becomes necessary to cooperate with the persons described in these documents, be vigilant! These outsiders have not taken our oaths, and owe us no loyalty. Any bargain they offer us will be a ruse or a trap, as should any promises we offer in return.

Finally, remember that just as we share some of the same goals and tactics as these individuals, we also share some of the same enemies. If any of these opponents become troublesome, aiming the attention of the Ministry of Peculiar Occurrences in their direction may be the most expedient means of resolving the issue.

Your faithful servant,

Pythia
Magus Pythia

SPOILER ALERT!

The information here may spoil some of the surprises in the novels, short stories, and podcasts of the Ministry of Peculiar Occurrences.

Nefarious Adversaries presents the world of the Ministry of Peculiar Occurrences from after the end of the novel *Phoenix Rising*, and before the beginning of *The Diamond Conspiracy*. If your game takes place outside this time frame, you may want to adjust some of this information. And if your version of events doesn't match what happened in the novels, don't worry about it. A little rewritten history wouldn't be the strangest thing to happen to the Ministry...

SOPHIA DEL MORTE

PROFILE

The del Morte family is an Italian clan of criminals for hire: thieves, spies, and assassins who have served ambitious patrons for generations. Sophia del Morte is one of several worthy heirs to this unusual family tradition. Although the location of the del Morte clan is well-known, attempts to infiltrate their village for purposes of gathering information or exerting leverage would be unwise. Sophia is not the deadliest of the del Mortes, and the women of her family do not tolerate spies in their home territory.

The proof of her talents lies in the fact that there is no proof. Though we have reason to suspect that she has over a dozen assassinations to her name, as well as a collection of acts of sabotage, burglary, and espionage, the law enforcement organizations of the world have no evidence to tie her to any of these crimes. Through the expert application of the tools of her trade--disguises, false aliases, underworld contacts--she has slipped through the fingers of every agency that has attempted to obstruct or capture her.

Despite her qualifications, a superstitious observer might believe that her services have brought ill fortune to those who hired her. After the House of Usher hired her to abduct an agent of the Ministry of Peculiar Occurrences, the Ministry retaliated by recovering their agent and destroying the House's Antarctic base. The fall of the Phoenix Society followed shortly after del Morte silenced several individuals who were in possession of the Society's secrets. It is worth mentioning, both of these instances directly involved Ministry agents Eliza D. Braun and Wellington Thornhill Books, Esq. We further believe that del Morte is now in the employ of an enigmatic individual who calls himself the Maestro. Only time will tell whether he will enjoy the benefit of her services without suffering the fate of her recent clients, and if Agents Books and Braun are participants of this intrigue.

SCHEMES

Del Morte is a mercenary. She sells her talents to those who give her the financial compensation and professional respect she believes she deserves, though she pre-

fers employers who share her own moral flexibility. She herself has no ambitions of global power or astronomical wealth. She enjoys her work for what it is: an opportunity to demonstrate her skill and cunning in a game with the highest possible stakes.

Her assignments are normally specific and short-term, such as a single assassination, or theft, or kidnapping. She does not concern herself with the overall purpose of her objectives, as she feels she owes no loyalty to those who hire her services. It is not impossible to imagine that she might one day develop a sense of allegiance to an individual, an organization, or a cause, but given her independence and her essentially selfish nature, such a development seems unlikely.

TACTICS

Del Morte is cultured, sophisticated, and charming, and is capable of talking herself into and out of virtually any situation. Though she is proficient with tools of violence ranging from slim stilettos to high explosives, she prefers to approach her target with subtlety and stealth, giving her opponents no warning before the moment of execution arrives. Sophia is not above using her beauty to her own advantage, and she can accomplish as much mischief with a glance or a smile as she can with a Bodeo-Olivetti revolver.

When her job is complete, she vanishes, using disguises and a multiplicity of escape routes to ensure that she eludes capture. She will gladly leave former comrades in peril to save her own skin, as long as she is able to satisfy the goals of her employers. If she finds that a mission is more risky than she bargained for, she'll break a contract rather than sacrifice herself, though she prefers not to take any actions that would damage her reputation as a reliable and effective agent.

WEAKNESSES

Del Morte enjoys the thrill of intrigue and battle somewhat more than is professionally necessary. Since her services are always in demand, this craving for action is never left unsatisfied. However, if she ever found herself

confronted by a lengthy period of inactivity, she would undoubtedly invent dangerous and/or illegal methods for occupying her time.

Despite her disregard of the value of lives other than her own, she will refuse to allow children to come to harm. She regards children as out of the field of play, and will even endanger herself in order to save a young life.

MINIONS

Del Morte prefers to work alone, though she's willing to hire additional muscle if necessary, and if her employer is willing to foot the bill. Though she's adept at manipulating the hearts of men, she's found that soldiers who work for pay are more dependable than those hoping for a share of her affections.

GADGETS

In addition to the knives, pistols, and bulletproof corsets that del Morte habitually employs, she also wears an unusual projectile weapon: a forearm brace that launches spinning cogs at lethal velocity. The special cogs are three inches wide and have razor-sharp edges. The entire apparatus is light enough not to encumber Sophia's movement, and can hide concealed beneath a loose-sleeved garment.

GM'S NOTES

ADVENTURE IDEAS

A TARGET RICH ENVIRONMENT

The Ministry has assigned the PCs to safeguard a group of British inventors during a scientific conference in America. Both the Ministry and the American Office of the Supernatural and Metaphysical have received intelligence indicating that malefactors have hired Sophia del Morte to assassinate one of the conference attendees. This intelligence is incomplete, and the identity of the target is unknown. In addition, the members of the OSM team resent the presence of the Ministry agents, and will obstruct the Ministry agents at every opportunity. Despite this, the PCs must determine del Morte's target and contend with her traps and ruses before she can strike.

THE CHASE

Sophia del Morte has stolen a powerful artifact from a collector in Kabul, mere hours before the PCs were scheduled to collect it. The PCs must pursue her across Afghanistan to recover the artifact before she can deliver it into the hands of a party who intends to use it for unthinkable purposes.

LONDON PARTICULAR

Del Morte approaches the Ministry to warn them of a deranged scientist who has devised a chemical reaction that could produce a toxic gas potent enough to wipe out all life in London. Loss of innocent lives on this scale is more than even Sophia del Morte is willing to tolerate. She's willing to help the PCs track down the murderous scientist—if they're willing to trust her.



SOPHIA DEL MORTE

AGE: 30

ASPECTS

HIGH CONCEPT: *Multi-Talented Mercenary*

TROUBLE: *In Debt to the Maestro*

ADD'L ASPECTS: *I Have A Tool For That; As Deadly as She Is Beautiful; A Friend in Every City*

SKILLS

GREAT (+4): Theft

GOOD (+3): Fight, Stealth

FAIR (+2): Deceive, Fencing, Firearms, Sport

AVERAGE (+1): Contacts, Physique, Pilot, Provoke, Will

STUNTS

CONTRAPTION: You may use Theft rather than Invention if you are engaged in repairing or creating a gadget that can be used to secure an item or group of items from theft, such as developing a secure safe.

FRIEND OF THE SHADOWS: Under the cover of darkness you are especially effective at disappearing. +2 to all Stealth rolls performed under cover of darkness.

KNOW YOUR OWN: You know the tracks of a thief, and you can tell where they've been. You may use Theft rather than Deduction to determine if an object is missing from a scene if it should be there.

YOU'VE GOT TO PICK A POCKET: When it comes to lifting something small out of someone's pocket, you are a master. +2 to any challenges involving pickpocketing.

STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES

Physical Stress:

Mental Stress:

Mild Consequence:

Moderate Consequence:

Severe Consequence:

GADGETS

COG-THROWER: Adds +1 to Firearms, and requires +1 Firearms to use.

FIELD NOTES

Highly Dangerous! Approach with Caution

Refresh:

THE MAESTRO

PROFILE

The Maestro remains a vexing mystery. Our best efforts have not revealed his identity, his origins, or his purpose. We have assembled a file on this individual from an insubstantial fog of rumors, and it would be tempting to conclude that the Maestro is nothing but a modern myth if it not for the wake of bodies. There are also confirmed reports of the abduction of American inventor Thomas Alva Edison. Not a trace of the “Wizard of Menlo Park” nor the Maestro have been seen since the San Francisco Incident. This air of unreality must certainly work in the Maestro’s favor, as it allows him to hide behind the sheer impossibility of his existence.

The reluctant testimonies of a few terrified eyewitnesses present the Maestro as part man, part machine. A brass mask covers his skull, forehead, and jaw, and illuminated lenses conceal his eyes. His voice carries a metallic echo, and the hiss of steam accompanies his breathing, which may mean that his respiration is at least partially mechanical. He wears metal armor, sometimes over his entire body, sometimes only over his torso and arms. The armor mechanically amplifies his strength, allowing him to smash heavy furniture to kindling with his fists, or to toss grown men across a room as if they were made of straw. When the Maestro is expecting combat, he can attach portable Gatling guns to his mechanical arms, giving him enough firepower to challenge an army.

Yet the Maestro is not merely a brute equipped with automatic weapons. He is a criminal genius, a master schemer who is always several steps ahead of anyone who opposes him. His speech demonstrates education, and his plans demonstrate cunning and forethought. His access to sophisticated weaponry and equipment shows that he is well-funded and has access to both criminal and scientific contacts. The few reliable facts surrounding his endeavors prove that he understands the value and practice of secrecy. Combining all of these attributes in a single man produces a foe of singular magnitude.

SCHEMES

Though the Maestro’s ultimate ambition is unclear, it is probable that his crimes are all means to some other end. He seems to be gathering resources--secrets, artifacts, technology, wealth--in preparation for an ambitious secret project.

TACTICS

The sophisticated orchestration of The Maestro’s crimes earns him his nom de guerre. His accomplishments are a broad catalog of unexplained thefts and impossible murders, without a single clue to link these actions either to himself or to each other.

He relies on hired criminals to carry out his work, coordinating them precisely and strategically, like pieces on a chessboard. In the rare occasions where involves himself directly, his preferred weapon is fear. He will use his bizarre appearance, his brute strength, and his cold cruelty to intimidate his enemies into submission and obedience.

WEAKNESSES

Assuming that his behavior is not another form of deception, the Maestro is easily angered, and can launch into a rage without warning. The machines and weapons attached to his body grant a terrible, lethal force to his fury, and in such a state he is dangerous to his enemies and allies alike.

MINIONS

The Maestro prefers servants with enough skill to accomplish his complex schemes without error. Whether he needs airship pilots, engineers, or assassins, he will seek out the best possible candidates, using them as a firm foundation for his elaborate heists.

PEARSON

One would normally not find a valet listed among a noted criminal's more feared accomplices, yet no other occupation seems to describe the imposing figure we identify as Pearson. He is clearly one of the Maestro's trusted assistants, yet he does not oversee any of the Maestro's operations, so we cannot call him a lieutenant. He is rarely far from the Maestro's presence, but since the Maestro seems more than capable of defending himself, we cannot call him a bodyguard. "Valet" seems to best describe him: he is ever-present, respectful, silent, and alert, anticipating his master's needs, prepared to obey any command without hesitation or question.

Pearson has an unusual master, and Pearson himself is an unusual manservant. He is physically imposing, tall, broad, and muscular, and is the most intimidating man in the room when the Maestro himself is not present. By all accounts he is peerless in the art of hand-to-hand combat, and can kill as swiftly and efficiently as he can straighten a cravat.

In all other respects, he is the very model of a gentleman's gentleman. He uses few words, and when he does speak, his accent shows the benefit of a refined British education. When carrying out his master's orders, no matter how violent, he does not gloat, grin, curse or in any other way reveal sentiment other than calm obedience. If he has any vices, he hides them well, and they never interfere with his duties. We do not know how he came into the Maestro's employ, or how the Maestro ensures his allegiance, but surely no one could wish for a more capable companion.

GM'S NOTES

ADVENTURE IDEAS

THE GREAT HYPERSTEAM ROBBERY

The Maestro and his minions seize control of a high-speed hypersteam train while the PCs are on board. He intends to hold the passengers as hostages until the government hands over two million British pounds in gold sovereigns. He announces that until his demands are met, he will detach one car at a time from the rear of the train and destroy the cars with explosives, with the passengers still inside. The PCs are outnumbered and outgunned, but the Maestro doesn't suspect that agents of the Ministry are on board.

ABDUCTED!

The Maestro has been blackmailing a wealthy inventor, forcing her to produce state-of-the-art weaponry and equipment for use in the Maestro's schemes. When the madman's demands became too outrageous, the inventor refused. In response, the Maestro has abducted her

son, and intends to kill him unless she delivers the equipment he requires. The inventor has approached the Ministry for help, and the PCs must now locate her son and rescue him.

THE SKY IS HUNGRY

An invisible force begins hurling innocent Londoners straight up into the empty sky, and the victims are never seen again. While investigating, the PCs discover that the Maestro is testing a weapon that allows him to free a target from the bonds of gravity, flinging the victim off into space. A meteor with unusual properties powers the Maestro's device, and the PCs

must recover the meteor from the Maestro before he can amplify the weapon to affect an entire city.



THE MAESTRO

AGE: *unknown*

ASPECTS

HIGH CONCEPT: *Schemer in the Shadows*

TROUBLE: *Unpredictable Rage*

ADD'L ASPECTS: *Fearful Reputation; Plans within Plans; Mechanical Armor*

SKILLS

FANTASTIC (+6): Provoke

SUPERB (+5): Contacts, Fight

GREAT (+4): Firearms, Notice, Wealth

GOOD (+3): Deduction, Deceive, Physique, Will

FAIR (+2): Empathy, Mythology, Pilot, Sport, Theft

STUNTS

CLANKERTONS ON CALL: The Maestro knows several engineers who will perform work for him at a moment's notice, either willingly or otherwise. If the Maestro can reach his network of contacts and has time to summon assistance, he may spend a fate point to use his Contacts skill to perform any Invention action.

ESCAPE PLAN: When the Maestro is completely unobserved, he may spend a fate point to remove himself from the scene. He will escape via rocket chair, secret passage, electrical teleporter, or some other emergency measure.

MY AGENTS ARE EVERYWHERE: Once per scene, the Maestro may use Contacts to declare that he has an agent in hiding, or that an apparently ordinary NPC in the scene is one of his agents. This is a Create an Advantage action, except that instead of creating an aspect, the action places a new NPC in the scene. On a tie, the revealed agent is an Average nameless NPC. On a success, the agent is a Good nameless NPC. On a success with style, the agent is a full supporting NPC.

STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES

Physical Stress:

Mental Stress:

Mild Consequence:

Mild Consequence:

Moderate Consequence:

Severe Consequence:

GADGETS

STEAM-POWERED ARMOR: +2 to Physique (since this raises his Physique to Superb (+5), he receives an extra mild physical consequence), +2 to Fight, +2 to Firearms when his Gatling guns are attached.

FIELD NOTES

The Maestro's motives and goals are unclear, engage with caution.

Refresh:

PEARSON

AGE: 54

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ASPECTS

HIGH CONCEPT: *Dangerous Valet*

TROUBLE: *I Dare Not Fail the Maestro*

ADD'L ASPECTS: *Imperturbable*

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SKILLS

FANTASTIC (+6): Fight

SUPERB (+5): Sport

GREAT (+4): Physique

GOOD (+3): Firearms

FAIR (+2): Will

AVERAGE (+1): Notice

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STUNTS

STIFF UPPER LIP: Pearson may use Will instead of Deceive to oppose any attempts to judge his intentions or emotional state.

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STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES

Physical Stress:

Mental Stress:

Mild Consequence:

Refresh:

THE PHOENIX SOCIETY

PROFILE

There is historical evidence that several influential and dissatisfied subjects of the Roman Empire formed a conspiracy, with the purpose of destroying the Empire and dividing its territory among themselves. These conspirators exchanged letters written in coded Latin, each marked with a small drawing of a phoenix.

It's unclear how much influence this conspiracy actually had on the fall of the Romans. What is certain is that the Phoenix Society's crest and motto ("From Ashes and Chaos Arises Order and Balance") has reappeared several times throughout history in the shadows of powerful empires. In any century or any nation, the Society's goal is to tear down the current edifices of power and to build a new world.

The Society did not survive throughout the ages as a single coherent organization. Rather, it survived as an idea, a tradition of revolution whose legends inspired the birth of new conspiracies. Each new incarnation has borrowed the mythology of the prior Phoenix Societies for its own purposes. The current Society is composed exclusively of members of British nobility, united in the belief that modern sentiments are destroying the British Empire from within. They hope to seize control of their government and re-establish what they believe is the natural order of power: the supremacy of the nobility over the common citizen, the superiority of "pure" British bloodlines over any foreign peoples, and the God-given authority of the male population over the female.

If not for Doctor Deveraux Havelock, the members of this particular Phoenix Society might never have accomplished anything other than the consumption of a large volume of cigars and brandy. When Havelock saw that the Society required an army to enforce its plans upon Britain, he decided to build one. He constructed an immense subterranean factory beneath his manor house for the purpose of mass-producing hundreds of automated soldiers. These Mechamen would fight with unquestioning obedience, thus satisfying the Society's need for absolute control over those who served beneath them.

None of the Mechamen ever left Havelock Manor. The Ministry of Peculiar Occurrences gained knowl-

edge of the Society's plans, and destroyed Havelock's underground factory. Scotland Yard, acting on evidence provided by the Ministry, arrested many of the Society's members, with the exception of Doctor Havelock, who vanished during the collapse of his factory. Though we have unconfirmed reports that Havelock is no longer among the living, some of the Society's other members remain unidentified and unsuspected by the British government, and those individuals may eventually make another attempt to rise to power.

SCHEMES

The Society hopes to rule Britain, and all of its plans are a means to that end. Due to their extreme opinions about the proper place of women and the lower classes in society, the Society's members know that they cannot achieve power through legitimate political processes. Instead, they will prepare for revolution by stockpiling weapons, placing sympathizers in key positions, establishing alliances and eliminating enemies.

TACTICS

To justify their need to cast themselves in the role of rulers and saviors, the men of the Society have convinced themselves that the collapse of the British Empire is imminent, and that rapid, decisive action is necessary. They will favor any plan that puts the tools of conquest into their own hands immediately, rather than a more prudent plan that might deliver victory to their sons or grandsons.

Although the Society's members consider themselves to be honorable and superior men, they will not hesitate to break promises that prove inconvenient, or to endanger the lives of innocent civilians, or to turn on each other at the slightest hint of weakness or traitorous behavior. These are angry, petty, selfish men who have disguised their greed as patriotism and their cruelty as righteousness.

WEAKNESSES

Doctor Havelock's intellect and will were the driving forces behind the Society, and without his leadership, the disgruntled noblemen who followed him might be content to grumble among themselves and frown at their newspapers. But if a man with vision, talent, and breeding were to step forward to carry the Society's banner, the remnants of the Society would quickly fall in behind him. This could end badly for the Society's members if they later discover that the man they chose to follow did not truly have their interests at heart.

Regardless of how much damage the Society is able to inflict through its efforts, it seems ultimately doomed to fail due to a critical failing in its philosophy. The world the Society hopes to return to—a world where the poor are willing slaves, and women stand quietly in their husbands' shadows—no longer exists, and not even an army of metal warriors can bring it back.

MINIONS

Most of the Society's members, for all their grand talk, avoid directly involving themselves in the tasks of conquest. Whenever possible, the Society will attempt to employ professional soldiers, preferably veterans who defended Britain in the past and who now share the Society's poor opinion of the state of the Empire. When such well-armed gentlemen are unavailable, the Society will hire cheap, disposable labor from the meanest streets and alleys. The blue-bloods of the Society regard such men with contempt, but will gladly send them to die to further the Society's goals.

This is not to say that the men of the Society will never take part in violence themselves. Many of them are eager to satisfy their need for cruelty in rage, but only in controlled conditions, where their victims have no hope of resistance or escape.

GM'S NOTES

ADVERSARIES

ANTHONY WADDINGTON

Anthony Waddington owns the Waddington Railway Company, Britain's foremost producer and operator of hypersteam engines. His high-speed trains are a blessing to passengers and a boon to industry. No other company has been able to produce locomotives that come close to the speed, reliability, and safety of Waddington's engines. This demonstrates either the superiority of Waddington's designs, or his proficiency at hiring skilled and dis-

creet saboteurs.

Waddington is sympathetic to the Phoenix Society's goals, but caution has kept him from supporting the Society in person. Instead, he has donated money, materials, and equipment to the Society through a series of intermediaries, concealing his involvement from all of the Society's members except Havelock himself. Without the tools and steel that Waddington provided, Doctor Havelock's designs might have never been more than ink on paper, and in return, the Doctor was happy to preserve Waddington's anonymity.



After the destruction of Havelock Manor, Waddington dissolved the network of smugglers and shell companies that he had used to provide aid to the Society, and sat back to wait and see whether Her Majesty's servants would uncover any evidence linking him to Havelock. So far, Waddington has escaped suspicion, leaving him free to make plans for the Phoenix Society's rise from its own ashes.

GEOFFREY GRENFELL

The world knows Geoffrey Grenfell as the inventor of the Waddington Railway Company's hypersteam engine--and if Grenfell has his way, no one will ever discover otherwise. The truth is that Grenfell himself, despite working twenty-hour days, conducting hundreds of experiments, and studying notes stolen from rival inventors, was unable to produce an engine meeting the performance characteristics that Waddington demanded.

One late night, a filing clerk named Beryl Allenby looked over Grenfell's designs, and had a sudden inspiration. The next day, she presented Grenfell with a hand-drawn plan for a solution to the compression problems that had defeated Grenfell's efforts. In one glance, he could see that Allenby's solution was correct, and that it would propel Waddington's business far ahead of any other railway company in existence.

He took Allenby's plans, and he paid a few of Waddington's underground contacts to spirit Allenby away and dispose of her. This allowed him to take full credit for the design, and to avoid answering uncomfortable questions about why a filing clerk could solve a problem that he could not.

After the fall of the Phoenix Society and the disappearance of Doctor Havelock, Waddington gave Grenfell a copy of Havelock's Mechamen plans. Unfortunately, Havelock omitted a few critical details from his written designs, possibly as a security measure. Grenfell is once again in a position where his employer has ordered him to solve a problem that is beyond his capacity.

Desperate to remain in Waddington's good graces, Grenfell will go to any lengths to fill in the gaps in Havelock's design. The pressure has begun to affect him mentally, and he has become convinced that Beryl Allenby somehow avoided the fate Grenfell planned for her, and that she may emerge from hiding at any moment to claim her revenge.

ADVENTURE IDEAS

AIRSHIP AMOK!

Before the collapse of the Phoenix Society, Doctor Havelock had directed the construction of a heavily-armed and fully automated airship. This vessel was to be the Society's flagship, a symbol of its scientific prowess and unstoppable might. Now, as the result of a contingency measure prepared by the Doctor, the airship has activated itself and has sailed free of its secret hangar to wreak destruction on the British countryside. To stop this juggernaut, the PCs must shut down the airship's decision engine--but first, they must find a way to slip past the airship's machine-controlled weapons and internal defense systems.

LOFTY AMBITIONS

An agent of the Ministry has disappeared while investigating strange disturbances in the foothills of the Andes, and the PCs travel to Argentina to investigate. They discover a city concealed in the high mountain peaks: a colony of the Phoenix Society, forged in the Society's principles of chauvinism and class superiority. Suspicious of the indigenous culture, the colony's leaders have imported a workforce of European laborers, and are constructing rocket-propelled weapons that they hope to use to subjugate those they see as Britain's enemies, both within the Empire and without.

OUT WITH THE OLD

Anthony Waddington, a wealthy industrialist, had been a secret supporter of Doctor Deveraux Havelock. After the loss of Havelock Manor and the disappearance of Havelock, Waddington intends to resurrect the Phoenix Society himself. In order to eliminate any possible interference from the Ministry, Waddington has begun to eliminate a list of individuals who had knowledge of the Society's secrets. Scotland Yard believes the killings to be unrelated, but the Ministry knows about the victims' former connection to the Society, and sends the PCs to investigate the murders.

ANTHONY WADDINGTON

AGE: 48

ASPECTS

HIGH CONCEPT: *Wealthy Hypersteam Tycoon*

TROUBLE: *Secret Supporter of the Phoenix Society*

ADD'L ASPECTS: *Flawless Public Image; Hidden Resources; Without Me, Britain's Industries Collapse*

SKILLS

FANTASTIC (+6): Wealth

SUPERB (+5): Contacts, Class

GREAT (+4): Deceive, Will, Rapport

GOOD (+3): Empathy, Invention, Provoke, Firearms

FAIR (+2): Deduction, Pilot, Mythology, Notice, Ride

STUNTS

CLEAN PAPER TRAIL: Waddington may use Contacts to actively oppose any attempt to expose his criminal activity through financial or legal records or through newspaper archives.

SMILE FOR THE CAMERA: Waddington gains +2 to Rapport to defend against any attempt to accuse him of any personal or professional wrongdoing.

I KNOW MY TRAINS: Waddington gains +2 to Pilot when operating one of his own hypersteam engines.

STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES

Physical Stress:

Mental Stress:

Mild Consequence:

Moderate Consequence:

Severe Consequence:

Refresh:

GEOFFREY GRENFELL

AGE: 35

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ASPECTS

HIGH CONCEPT: *World-Famous Inventor*

TROUBLE: *More Ambitious Than Clever*

ADD'L ASPECTS: *She Is Out There Somewhere*

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SKILLS

FANTASTIC (+6): Wealth

SUPERB (+5): Will

GREAT (+4): Provoke

GOOD (+3): Deduction

FAIR (+2): Notice

.....
STUNTS

MURDEROUS RAGE: When insulted or humiliated, Grenfell can use his Will to attack instead of Fight.

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STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES

Physical Stress:

Mental Stress:

Mild Consequence:

Refresh:

METHUSELAH'S ORDER

PROFILE

While several conspiracies claim to be the oldest secret societies in existence, Methuselah's Order may have the oldest members. The Order is embodied in its guiding star, Dorian Gray. Breathtakingly handsome, always impeccably dressed, and described as "of an indeterminate age," Gray serves as the director and final voice in all matters concerning its vast, shadowy membership. If the legends about the Order are correct, all of its members have pursued the Order's goals over the course of centuries, using an alchemical elixir to preserve their youth.

Regardless of their true age, the members of the Order intend to rule the world, and as their primary weapon, they have chosen one of the most powerful forces in the universe: compound interest. Over the course of the Order's existence, its members have invested and reinvested their fortunes, accumulating enough wealth that they could certainly buy themselves a large nation. Until recently, they have made little use of their staggering wealth, limiting their expenses to the research of occult topics such as mythology, alchemy, spiritualism, and prophecy.

Over the past twenty years, however, the Order has begun to construct strongholds in the more inaccessible areas of the planet. It has stocked these fortresses with weapons, supplies, and hired soldiers. This gathering of forces has alarmed the Ministry of Peculiar Occurrences, which has destroyed two of the Order's strongholds, but many more remain undiscovered.

We believe this is clear evidence that the Order is approaching its endgame, after centuries of planning and preparing. Once its armies are in place, we can expect it to launch a global offensive, using its economic, military, and supernatural might to destroy the governments of the world and replace them with the Order's rulership.

We expect that neither the success nor the failure of this attack will alter the Illuminati's own goals, though we are keeping close watch and developing appropriate contingency plans.

SCHEMES

The Order's primary focus--the accumulation of wealth--is not only legal, but is actively encouraged by our modern materialistic society. Its practices of avoiding taxes, channeling money through shell companies, manipulating markets and trading on inside information are the tools of industries and businesses around the world. Though the Order's military prowess is still largely untested, on a financial battlefield it is invincible.

The Order's military strongholds present a nightmare of logistics. The Order must scout out suitable locations, excavate and construct facilities, package and ship weapons, recruit soldiers, and administer the payroll of everyone from architects to ditch-diggers. The most hazardous element of this enterprise is avoiding interference from the governments of the nations where these bases are located. The Order normally solves this problem by purchasing the goodwill of the regional officials in charge of the territories where the strongholds will be built. Even then, the Order conceals the purpose of these bases, claiming that they are weapons factories or military academies so that the necessary bureaucrats can accept their bribes with a reasonably clear conscience.

The Order's more tactical operations involve the acquisition of occult artifacts and knowledge. The Order steals rare books, hijacks archaeological shipments, and abducts mythological scholars, seeking supernatural advantages that will allow them to succeed where other world conquerors have failed.

TACTICS

The Order excels at long-term planning. The actions it takes today might have been made possible by preparations undertaken fifty or a hundred years ago. Just the bookkeeping necessary to carry off such plans effectively is a feat worthy of admiration.

The Order's proficiency with occult mechanisms makes its methods unpredictable. When confronted with an enemy, it might poison her with an alchemical mixture that turns her to stone, or drive her mad by psychically amplifying the power of her nightmares, or give her a



necklace that afflicts those who wear it with the curse of lycanthropy.

WEAKNESSES

It is impressive that an organization with less than twenty true members has achieved the power of Methuselah's Order, but such a small governing body will have a difficult time directing a war of global conquest. The Order does not reveal its larger plans or purposes to any of the commanders, engineers, or administrators it employs. Without understanding the overall strategy of their leaders, these underlings can only follow the instructions they are given. When it is necessary to improvise, they may well act against the Order's true interests while attempting to carry out their orders.

MINIONS

Establishing hidden private armies throughout the world is a monumental task by itself. Maintaining the readiness and loyalty of those armies over years of inactivity is another problem entirely. The Order has addressed this by incorporating thaumaturgic elements into the construction of its strongholds. Interlocking patterns of concealed inscriptions and psychically charged foci are hidden within walls and beneath floors, projecting a mild but continuous influence over the minds of the inhabitants. Over time, this psychic field reinforces the obedience of the Order's soldiers, until they are prepared to obey their chain of command without hesitation or question.

This invisible field of mental control is harmless to short-term visitors, and by itself presents no threat to an attacking force. On the other hand, the fanatical dedication of the soldiers affected by the field is sufficient threat on its own.

GM'S NOTES

ADVERSARIES

ISABEL ALVARENGA

Isabel Alvarenga is one of the few women ever allowed to join Methuselah's Order and sample its elixir of youth. Born in Brazil in the early 1700's, Alvarenga was recruited by the Order due to her extensive knowledge of ancient South American culture and myths. Unlike many European scholars, Alvarenga has gained the trust of many of the indigenous tribes of the South American jungles, and they have welcomed her into their territory, told her their legends, and permitted her access to the millennia-old ruins they watch over.

Though the Order has given Alvarenga direct command of their military stronghold hidden in the Amazon rainforest, she has no enthusiasm for warfare, and in fact has no confidence of the Order's ultimate success. The Order is important to her only because it provides her with the funding and political connections she needs to pursue her research freely. She does not seek academic fame or the wealth of lost treasures; instead, she hopes to uncover a miracle that will make the Order's elixir of youth seem like a mere parlor trick in comparison.

Alvarenga believes that the long-dead Tiwanaku empire of the Andes region worked wonders that would defy our modern scientific understanding. In particular, she believes that the Tiwanaku Gateway of the Sun may be an aethergate, similar to those used by the Atlanteans, and if activated, it will lead to the realm of the gods that the Tiwanaku worshipped. When she is not serving the Order's business, Alvarenga devotes her time to the acquisition and study of Tiwanaku relics, in the hopes of unlocking this gate and discovering what lies beyond.

BENJAMIN VINES

In the sixteenth century, the members of Methuselah's Order became so enraptured with the work of a poet named Benjamin Vines that they admitted him into their fellowship, and allowed him to taste the Order's elixir of youth. The elixir extended his life--and took away his sanity.

Vines screamed and raved for a week until apparently returning to his senses, but the damage to his mind was permanent. Having eluded death himself, he became obsessed with observing the deaths of others. When the sick and elderly did not pass away quickly enough to satisfy him, he began to take lives himself. The Order, finding that some of its secrets were now in the hands of an uncontrollable madman, sought to destroy Vines, but he escaped, taking a copy of the formula for the youth serum with him.

Vines has retained his artistic talent and sensibilities, and has used his centuries-long murder spree as the basis for an enormous art project. He stages his killings so that each tells a story. He might slay a cruel and tyrannical business owner to tell a story of poetic justice, or he might lure a pair of lost travelers to their doom as a cautionary tale, or he might induce a pair of lovers to kill each other in a romantic tragedy. He records each story in verse, collects them in books and leaves them on the shelves of bookstores and libraries for unsuspecting readers to find.

There are currently thirty-one volumes of Vines's *Tales from the Tomb* in existence. The modern volumes, produced when Vines had access to printing presses, are easy to find, but the older, hand-written volumes are rare, and the only known copy of Volume One is secure in the Archives of the Ministry of Peculiar Occurrences.

GADGETS

To ensure their command over their armies, the members of the Order wear pendants infused with psychic power, keyed to the metaphysical patterns produced by the mind control fields of the Order's strongholds. When the Order's soldiers receive commands from someone wearing one of these pendants, they will carry out those commands to the utmost of their ability, even at the cost of their own lives.

ADVENTURE IDEAS

THE LUXOR GAMBIT

In a daring airship raid, Methuselah's Order has carried off the Luxor Obelisk, which stood in the Place de la Concorde in Paris. The Order intends to reunite the Obelisk with its original pyramidion, which was stolen from its summit in the 6th century BC, and which the Order has recently recovered. The PCs must intercept the airships that are carrying the Obelisk so that the Order cannot reassemble it and awaken its slumbering power.

THE LONG TOMORROW

The Ministry has learned that agents of the Order are in Scotland, preparing to infiltrate a mystical village that is skipping through time. The village reappears in our timeline only one day out of every hundred years, and its inhabitants have only experienced the passage of a week's worth of time since the village began its journey in the twelfth century. The Order's agents plan to enter the village undercover when it appears and steal the magical tome responsible for the village's condition. The Director of the Ministry has ordered the PCs to prevent the theft, to leave the tome in the hands of the villagers, and above all, to escape the village before midnight, when it will hop forward to the end of the twentieth century.

THE HAUNTED FORTRESS

Ministry intelligence reveals that the Order has hastily abandoned one of their strongholds, leaving an enormous stockpile of deadly weapons behind. This is not a trap prepared by the Order--the mind control inscriptions built into the base were improperly prepared, giving the facility a malevolent and powerful consciousness of its own. This entity's telekinetic power gives it control over the Order's cache of weapons, and its influence grows stronger daily. Left unchecked, it will soon be able to wage its own war against humankind. The base is located deep underground, shielding it from such direct measures as artillery bombardment. The PCs must disassemble the stronghold's psychic foci in order to destroy the possessing entity, while it uses its substantial arsenal to defend itself.

ISABEL ALVARENGA

AGE: 157

ASPECTS

HIGH CONCEPT: *Relic Hunter of Methuselah's Order*

TROUBLE: *My Research Comes First*

ADD'L ASPECTS: *Expert in South American Lore; I've Had Plenty of Practice; At Home in the Wild*

SKILLS

FANTASTIC (+6): Mythology

SUPERB (+5): Contacts, Deduction

GREAT (+4): Class, Notice, Wealth

GOOD (+3): Arts, Rapport, Ride, Will

FAIR (+2): Firearms, Empathy, Pilot, Sport, Theft

STUNTS

SURVIVAL: Gain +2 when using Deduction to find food, water, or the correct path while in the wilderness.

ANTHROPOLOGIST: Gain +2 to create advantages related to indigenous South American cultures when using Mythology.

SIXTH SENSE: Alvarenga may use her Notice skill to detect active supernatural influences nearby.

STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES

Physical Stress:

Mental Stress:

Mild Consequence:

Moderate Consequence:

Severe Consequence:

Refresh:

BENJAMIN VINES

AGE: 238

ASPECTS

HIGH CONCEPT: *Immortal Mass Murderer*

TROUBLE: *Obsessed by Death*

ADD'L ASPECTS: *Hunted by Methuselah's Order; I Must Capture This in Verse; Before I Kill You, Allow Me to Explain...*

SKILLS

FANTASTIC (+6): Arts

SUPERB (+5): Deceive, Provoke

GREAT (+4): Empathy, Fencing, Notice

GOOD (+3): Class, Rapport, Sport, Stealth

FAIR (+2): Firearms, Medicine, Mythology, Theft, Will

STUNTS

THE DEVIL ON YOUR SHOULDER: Vines gains +2 to Provoke when persuading someone to commit an act of murder.

A CLEVER ALIBI: Vines gains +2 to Deceive when convincing someone that he is innocent of any crimes.

UNEXPECTED RECOVERY: Once per scene, Vines can spend a fate point to reduce the severity level of a physical consequence by one step. This removes a mild consequence.

STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES

Physical Stress:

Mental Stress:

Mild Consequence:

Moderate Consequence:

Severe Consequence:

Refresh:

THE RESURRECTION SISTERS

PROFILE

We have all heard of resurrectionists: criminals who exhume corpses and sell them to medical institutions for experimentation. The Resurrection Sisters have taken this practice to a more grisly and ambitious extreme.

The Sisters are attempting to obtain the corpses of 1,613 persons who have died in a state of perfect grace, according to the sisterhood's own criteria. They believe that the act of assembling this collection of the righteous deceased will bring about the Day of Judgment described in the Christian Bible, and that for their part in establishing the Kingdom of God, the Sisters will sit at the right hand of the Almighty in paradise.

This remarkable belief, and the sisterhood itself, was authored by a self-proclaimed prophet named Greta Brunner near the beginning of the nineteenth century. Through a combination of natural charisma, religious fervor, and the usual symptoms of divine inspiration—seizures, visions, speaking in tongues—Brunner attracted a small but dedicated female following. Brunner eventually withdrew from public view, and although reports of her final appearances suggest that her prophecy was slipping into incoherent madness, the sisterhood she left behind will reject any such assertion. In fact, the Sisters will never refer to Brunner as deceased, though she would be close to a hundred years old by now.

Brunner's followers remain exclusively female to this day, and they replenish their membership with women from all social strata, offering hope and purpose to those who feel defeated by the world's cruelty. Through oaths and secret ceremonies, they cultivate fanatical dedication within new recruits, creating an army of women whose mild public faces conceal their fiery commitment.

If the sisterhood was satisfied to locate and exhume the remains of those whose lives satisfied the Sisters' definition of purity, we might regard its activity with little more than morbid curiosity. However, to ensure their eventual success, the Sisters have taken it upon themselves to coach selected persons in the practice of righteous, faithful living. When a subject has purified himself sufficiently, the Sisters will murder him and confiscate his body, adding him to their growing collection.

SCHEMES

The sisterhood's targets are most often young unmarried men who are susceptible to the charms of Sisters' more charming and attractive members. When the Sisters have located a likely subject, they will appoint one of their members to be the subject's patron. The patron will capture the subject's attention and guide the subject down a path of piety, modesty, and charity, sometimes over the course of years. The patron keeps a detailed ledger of the subject's deeds and misdeeds, and when the Sisters judge that the subject's soul is properly prepared, the Sisters will end the subject's life—preferably quickly, painlessly, and without drawing attention to the subject's patron or to the sisterhood in general.

Not all subjects can achieve spiritual perfection, but the Sisters have addressed such potential failures through their doctrine of "amalgamated perfection". Ambiguity in the recorded words of Greta Brunner has led the Sisters to conclude that although they definitely require 1,613 corpses left behind by pure souls, there is no reason they cannot take the organs and limbs from several partially-pure individuals and assemble them into a single perfected corpse. The system for determining what to extract from the remains of any given corpse is complex, using the nature of the subject's spiritual virtues and vices to select specific portions of the subject's anatomy. In this way, if the Sisters can achieve even a small degree of success with a given subject, they can still salvage some benefit from their efforts.

TACTICS

The Sisters prefer to use poison when harvesting the lives of their purified subjects. Poison does not require physical strength, quick reflexes or a tolerance for violence. The correct poison, used properly, can mimic a natural illness and can slay a target while the murderess is nowhere nearby, allowing the Sisters to continue their work without drawing the attention of the police.

When poison cannot be used, the Sisters will arrange the subject's death through apparent accidents. Horse riding mishaps, locomotive collisions, drownings, and defective firearms have all claimed the lives of the sister-

hood's subjects. These require careful handling, and a special committee of experts exists within the sisterhood that is responsible for the planning and execution of these accidents.

Regardless of the method of death, the Sisters will attempt to claim and preserve the body of the subject as soon as possible. They recruit women with medical or embalming experience for this purpose, and these specialists remain ready to travel at a moment's notice, with a bag of necessary equipment always packed.

WEAKNESSES

We caution our brethren not to dismiss the Resurrection Sisters as a tragic collection of misled and deranged women. While the other organizations in these documents pursue worldly power for themselves, the Sisters believe that their work will bring about the ultimate salvation of humanity, and they are willing to pay any price in pursuit of this goal. The Sisters recruit only strong-willed women who are willing to guard the sisterhood's secrets with the last drops of their own blood. They reinforce their oaths with ceremonies and rituals, forging themselves into fearless, remorseless servants of their own faith.

That being said, there is some evidence that the Sisters have begun to abandon their usual caution and secrecy. They may be approaching some critical date given to them by Greta Brunner, and attempting to make up for a shortfall of purified dead before the deadline arrives. Alternately, they may be close to their goal of 1,613 corpses, and may be willing to accept a greater degree of risk now that success is close at hand.

The subject of Greta Brunner's teachings brings us to another possible failing in the sisterhood's plans. Just as a few vague words have allowed the Sisters to improve their efficiency through amalgamated perfection, a close study of Brunner's prophecies shows that there is no certainty that she was foretelling the advent of any Christian paradise. Some of her metaphors and phrases appear in the scriptures of religions that predate Christianity by millennia, and that predict the return of a far darker power to our world. Briefing Package #202 gives further details, and should be sufficient to convince all of our brethren that it would be worthwhile to interfere with the work of the Resurrection Sisters whenever possible.

MINIONS

The Resurrection Sisters avoid employing outsiders to perform the tasks given to them by Greta Brunner. They prefer not to risk the secrecy of their movement by involving anyone who is not a true believer. Furthermore, they believe that their work only has merit when performed by those who have pure and sincere motives. Anyone adding to the Sisters' collection for mere mone-

etary gain would stain the spiritual value of the task.

When outside assistance is unavoidable, the Sisters will never reveal their true motives to their hired help. They will offer false but plausible explanations for the work they require, and they will use their poisons to silence any outsider who learned too much about the sisterhood's secrets.

GM'S NOTES

ADVERSARIES

THE RED LADY

Whether Greta Brunner is alive or not, the Resurrection Sisters currently operate under the day-to-day leadership of the woman they refer to as the Red Lady. She is Austrian, in her fifties, and presents herself as a woman of fine breeding and elevated social position. She travels constantly, using assumed names to disguise her movements, visiting the various gatherings of the sisterhood to supervise and encourage their efforts. She also guides the scattered members of the sisterhood through correspondence, employing a code known only by the Sisters so that their letters appear to be simple exchanges of gossip.

The Red Lady has cultivated powerful friends throughout Europe. These are men and women with strong religious sentiments who may not understand the full truth of the sisterhood's enterprises. When the Sisters require money, information, or protection from police or government agents, the Red Lady calls on these well-placed friends for assistance.

Though she has no formal training in espionage, her natural intelligence has allowed her to master the talents necessary to baffle any intelligence agency. She is fluent in several languages and has some talent for disguise, allowing her to adopt new identities quickly and to blend into the local population anywhere she goes. She is proficient with a pistol, but she prefers to avoid drawing attention to herself through violence.

ANNIE O'FLAHERTY, THE BLACK ANGEL

Annie O'Flaherty possesses all of the skills most desired by the Resurrection Sisters: medical experience, proficiency with the funereal arts, a sympathetic face, and a practical understanding of the hearts of men. She is Irish, in her early thirties, and has served as a nurse in several medical institutions. Her movements have helped her disguise the high rate of mortality among patients in her care, and her apparent sincerity and dedication has diverted the suspicions of anyone in a position to observe her handiwork.

Not even her fellow Sisters suspect that her mask of politeness and professionalism conceals the cruelty of a sadist. She revels in the act of murder itself, caring little for any divine reward that her work might provide.

Her vials of poison and her embalming knives have so far sated her thirst for blood, but the thrill of these acts has already started to fade. She has recently staged the violent, apparently accidental death of a subject when a simple poisoning would have sufficed. This will encourage her to attempt further, more overt acts of violence, and may endanger the sisterhood's secrecy as much as it endangers the patients she supervises.

GADGETS

The most common weapons used by the Sisters are poison-dispensing rings. These rings have small hollow compartments for storing poison in liquid or powder form, usually concealed beneath precious stones or other decorations. Pressing the ring's hidden switch opens the compartment so that the wearer can dispense the poison as needed.

These rings add +2 to Deceive and Stealth when attempting to administer poison without being detected.

ADVENTURE IDEAS

WEAPONS OF MASS SALVATION

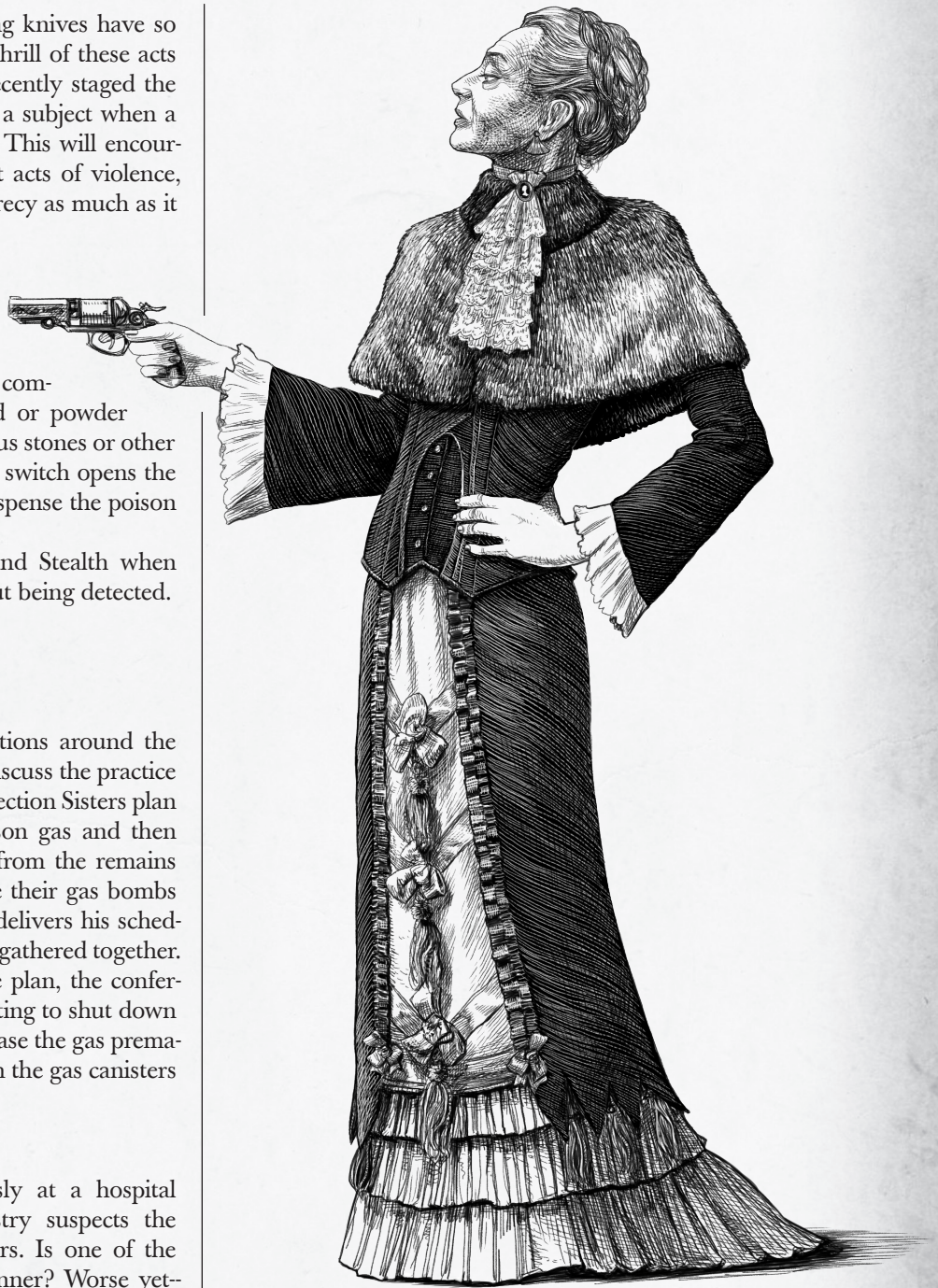
Representatives of charitable organizations around the globe have organized a conference to discuss the practice of performing good works. The Resurrection Sisters plan to flood the conference hall with poison gas and then assemble a few acceptable specimens from the remains of the guests. The Sisters will detonate their gas bombs when the conference's guest of honor delivers his scheduled speech and all of the attendees are gathered together. By the time the Ministry discovers the plan, the conference is already in progress, and attempting to shut down the event might cause the Sisters to release the gas prematurely. The PCs must locate and disarm the gas canisters before the Sisters can act.

SISTERS AMONG THE SISTERS

Patients have been dying mysteriously at a hospital staffed entirely by nuns. The Ministry suspects the involvement of the Resurrection Sisters. Is one of the nuns secretly a follower of Greta Brunner? Worse yet—what if they all are?

WRATH OF THE DEAD

The Resurrection Sisters exhume the body of a man they did not murder: a pious, humble, well-liked gentleman whose public deeds satisfied the Sisters' criteria for purity. In secret, however, this apparently harmless man was a diabolist and sorcerer. Angered at the desecration of his body, the sorcerer's soul has returned to



Earth to animate all of the corpses in the cemetery where his body was stolen. His army of the dead will wreak havoc throughout the city until the PCs can recover and sorcerer's corpse from the Sisters, and restore it to its consecrated grave.

THE RED LADY

AGE: 58

ASPECTS

HIGH CONCEPT: *Leader of the Resurrection Sisters*

TROUBLE: *Greta Brunner's Words Are My Gospel*

ADD'L ASPECTS: *A New Day, a New Identity; I Rely on the Kindness of Strangers; Faith Can Move Mountains*

SKILLS

FANTASTIC (+6): Class

SUPERB (+5): Contacts, Wealth

GREAT (+4): Deceive, Rapport, Will

GOOD (+3): Arts, Empathy, Mythology, Notice

FAIR (+2): Firearms, Medicine, Pilot, Stealth, Theft

STUNTS

FORGERY: Gain +2 to Arts when forging documents.

INSPIRING WORDS: Gain +2 to Rapport when soliciting assistance from someone with strong Christian faith.

FRIENDS EVERYWHERE: Once per session, the Red Lady may spend a fate point to find an old friend

WHERE: or make a new friend, no matter where she is.

STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES

Physical Stress:

Mental Stress:

Mild Consequence:

Moderate Consequence:

Severe Consequence:

Refresh:

ANNIE O'FLAHERTY, THE BLACK ANGEL

AGE: 33

ASPECTS

HIGH CONCEPT: *Murderous Nurse*

TROUBLE: *Sadistic Hunger*

ADD'L ASPECTS: *The Resurrection Sisters Are Watching Me*

SKILLS

FANTASTIC (+6): Medicine

SUPERB (+5): Deceive

GREAT (+4): Rapport

GOOD (+3): Stealth

FAIR (+2): Fencing

AVERAGE (+1) Notice

STUNTS

THE SURGEON'S Once per scene, O'Flaherty can use her Medicine skill to create the aspect **I**

KNIFE: **KNOW WHERE TO HURT YOU** on a living opponent. The opponent may defend with Physique (to show the opponent's resilient physical condition) or Notice (to realize what O'Flaherty is planning). Whenever she invokes this aspect to attack her opponent, she receives +3 to her roll instead of the usual +2.

STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES

Physical Stress:

Mental Stress:

Mild Consequence:

Refresh:

THE HOUSE OF USHER

Those of you who are familiar with the House of Usher's reputation may be shocked to find it included as a mere postscript to this document. Within the encyclopedia of the world's conspiracies, the House of Usher must be the Platonic ideal of a globe-spanning secret society. In the name of honesty, we of the Illuminati must admit that even our own order cannot match the House's scope and influence.

Regretfully, the House's proficiency at keeping its own secrets means that we have almost no reliable information about its structure, membership, and goals. The few facts we have are quickly explained. We know that the House has been in existence for centuries, and that its members claim to serve a single leader, known only as the Lord of the Manor.

We do not understand their goals or motivations, but we know that whatever they hope to achieve, they have chosen to achieve it through chaos, terror and anar-

chy. Their agents have engineered countless disasters and upheavals, including civil wars, industrial accidents, mass murders, plagues, fires, and riots. Where their raven insignia appears, death and catastrophe follow. To accomplish such acts of destruction, both large and small, the House has infiltrated a wide array of businesses, governments, universities, religions, criminal syndicates, and even other secret societies. Readers of this text will surely need no reminder of the House's unsuccessful attempt to seize control of our own society thirty years ago.

Without more detailed information to rely on, we can only caution our brethren to assume that any outside agencies or individuals they encounter may be pawns of the House of Usher, and to report their suspicions immediately through the usual protocols.

GM'S ADVICE

PLAYING THE VILLAINS

 Great heroes require great villains to properly test their mettle. 

Great heroes deserve great villains. Villains commit the crimes the heroes must solve. Villains threaten the innocents that the heroes must defend. Villains knock the heroes down, so that the heroes can grit their teeth, bind their wounds, and stand up to fight again.

When you're preparing to play The Ministry Initiative, consider the following suggestions for using villains to create exciting, dramatic stories.

NEFARIOUS ORIGINS

One way to transform a mere criminal into a memorable arch-nemesis is to connect your villain to your heroes through aspects. You'll need to discuss this with your players during character creation, but if the PCs have aspects that relate to your game's villains, that gives the PCs a personal stake in the battles to come. When a PC has an aspect like **THE MAESTRO WANTS ME DEAD** or **I'LL BRING SOPHIA DEL MORTE TO JUSTICE**, that aspect becomes a source for compels and invokes whenever the villain makes an appearance.

Think beyond the character sheet. Your villains should be more than just lists of skills and stunts. When you're creating your own villain characters, consider the answers to these questions:

- How did this villain get to be where she is today?
- Why is she a villain? What does she hope to accomplish?
- What methods and strategies does she use?
- What resources and allies does she have access to?
- What does she think of herself as? In her own mind, is she a daring rogue? A brave conqueror? A savvy businesswoman?
- Which of her flaws might eventually lead to her defeat?

Deciding what your villain does, and how, and why, helps you decide how the villain will react when the players do something you didn't expect. This can also provide ideas for crimes your villain might commit, or avenues of investigation that the PCs might pursue. You don't need to write a whole book about your villain; a single paragraph or a few bullet points might be enough. You can also include some of this information in the villain's aspects.

The rules of The Ministry Initiative suggest that your more powerful villains should have skill levels higher than those of your PCs. This might seem unfair—and it is. Your main villains should be formidable opponents, capable of outfighting or outsmarting any of the PCs one-on-one. When the PCs finally catch up to the villain for the dramatic conclusion of the story, they'll need to be well prepared, and they'll need to use teamwork and strategy to overcome the villain's advantages.

HISTORICAL VILLAINS

Using real historical figures as villains lets you draw inspiration from actual events, and gives the players the thrill of challenging a well-known foe. Be prepared, though, for the outcome to diverge from established fact. If the villain you're using was never captured in real life, but your PCs brought him to trial and justice instead, they've just changed the course of history. As the GM, you'll need to decide what that means for your PCs future adventures.

Also, when you bring a real historical person into your game, he might bring real-world issues along with him, such as politics, religion, or other, thornier topics. You'll want to discuss potentially uncomfortable material with your players ahead of time, so that you can all agree on what you'd like to see in the game and what you'd rather leave out.

THE BUSINESS OF VILLAINY

To make sure that your PCs are shaking their fists at your villain and cursing his name, have him commit crimes that affects your PCs personally. If a PC has the aspect **SOFT SPOT FOR ORPHANS**, have the villain hold an entire orphanage hostage. If a PC is **ENGAGED TO LORD ARTHUR BAIN**, have the villain kidnap poor Arthur. After the villain has earned the enmity of your PCs, they'll be eager for the final confrontation.

Villains should plan ahead. Remember that the PCs aren't the only ones who can use their skills to create aspects. Villains who are expecting trouble should place aspects on the scene ahead of time such as **LURKING SNIPERS** or **CONCEALED TRAPDOORS**. Don't forget the free invocations the villains would receive for using the Create an Advantage action. When the heroes arrive, these aspects and invocations can help the villains defend themselves and flee the scene.

Remember that in *The Ministry Initiative*, your PCs inhabit a world of wonders: timeless mysteries, stupendous technology, and daredevil adventure. Your villain shouldn't just rob a bank, she should steal the entire bank building with her teleporter beam. She shouldn't threaten a city with explosives when she can use a freeze ray, or an earthquake projector, or a truckload of mind control gas.

THE CHASE

If you're planning to keep your master villain around for several adventures, let the villain send hired assassins or faithful lieutenants against the heroes. The players can triumph against these lesser villains, while the master villain remains safe in the background, plotting his next diabolical deeds.

Don't crowd the stage with too many villains. Powerful opponents whose skill levels match or exceed that of the PCs can put up quite a fight. You may be tempted to throw several powerful NPCs at your heroes all at once for an extra challenge, but this can lead to a fight scene that drags on for too long and loses its excitement, especially if the NPCs all have consequences available to absorb damage. If one or two significant NPCs isn't enough of an obstacle for your players, add a few nameless NPCs as reinforcements. Nameless NPCs are easy to keep track of during a fight and can give the players other things to do besides simply pile on the main villain.

Be careful when your main villain confronts the heroes personally. Players can be clever and determined, and as soon as the PCs catch sight of your master villain, they'll try every trick in the book to keep the villain from escaping. Your players might be willing to accept a concession and allow the villain to escape, or you might declare that the villain escapes in a collapsible helicopter that she just happened to have in her valise, but frequent escapes may be frustrating for your players. It may be better to keep your villain in the shadows and out of reach until you're ready to set up the final, dramatic confrontation.

Finish with a bang. After the PCs have pursued a villain across several game sessions, matching wits, trading taunts, and exchanging gunfire, make sure the final confrontation is a tough one. The villain should use every weapon and ally at her disposal: her death rays, her ancient magic incantations, her armies of steam-powered mechanical bears. The final fight should feel like a desperate gamble in the final moments before the villain's ultimate triumph.

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