

Publish or Perish

Miskatonic Professor Ida Selkirk appears destined for big things in the world of Mayan anthropology. But the secret of her recent successes is a dangerous tool that threatens both the past and the future.

As a specialist on the pictograms of the southwestern Mayan city-states, she is one of a handful of academics who has the capability to translate the Belmopan Codex. Since it is in the custody of the university, she was the obvious choice to examine it. To her surprise, Selkirk has found that the Codex is a magical mirror of reality, with the ability to change the reality of the events it portrays - albeit with a Mythos taint. While she has used it to elevate her status in the insular world of Mayan scholarship, her tampering has attracted the notice of A-Cell.

The Belmopan Codex was found in P-7 (Where P = the present year of the game) during an expedition sponsored by Miskatonic University. Selkirk was there as a senior studying anthropology (subsequently she completed graduate work at Vanderbilt University on the linguistics of Classical Mayan hieroglyphs in P-4). Only a handful of experts has examined it at great length, but none more than her. Almost immediately after starting to translate it, she noticed corrections in the glyphs made some time after its creation. A more thorough scan revealed that nearly half of the document was rewritten almost a century later. She joined a University of Miami expedition to the area in P-2, eager to make her name uncovering a Soviet-style historical redaction.

What she discovered was far stranger – despite concrete geographical descriptions of a holy site on the original codex and in academic literature, the region was scoured clean, with no evidence of prior use. Rather than publish work on an erroneous palimpsest, she decided to test a wild theory with some impromptu vandalism. After discovering a hidden chamber filled with valuable artifacts, the expedition was judged a success – largely attributed to Selkirk's tireless scholarship (if the Keeper uses the Five Bat Sickle option below, this alteration created a Mordiggian cult that may start looking for their exported ritual implements).

Selkirk altered the codex again during a prolonged argument with Professor Emeritus Carlos Oquendo of UCLA over the nature of the Classical Mayan collapse. Knowing she could make any conjecture she wanted come true, her soon-published suspicions were confirmed when the pair verified them in P-1 in the highlands of Belize (earning her the grudgingly respectful nickname "Queen Midas" behind her back). This could throw the state of Mayan anthropology into uproar if anyone compares the new reality with older records.

At the present, Selkirk has translated the first third of the codex. Only a supreme effort of will has kept her from working back from the end – a decision she may reverse if she feels threatened.

Delta Green involvement

The storage halls of the American Museum of Natural History have many Mythos artifacts; when Selkirk modified the Belmopan Codex in P-1, it gained another. A previously mundane jade statuette in the Central American wing was found toppled within its display case, with glyphs on its previously unmarred base. An anthropology professor at Columbia (Curt Bledsoe) was able to translate them as a story of the disastrous arrival of a being called the Fire Walker, which Jensen Wu identified as Cthugha. He became further alarmed that Mayan academia knew nothing of this tale from other sources. Accordingly, he has asked A-Cell to find out if this requires further investigation.

The cell's task is to find out if any new discoveries in Mayan anthropology are grave threats to the world, and deal with anything found. A Keeper is entirely justified in withholding the reason for A-Cell's interest in the case, leaving the investigators further in the dark.

Threads of inquiry

Now that Cthugha is retroactively responsible for the Classical Mayan collapse, paleo-climatologists who have studied it will find disturbing irregularities between their now-inaccurate conclusions and the magically altered data (such as higher levels of ash in soil samples, lower percentages of water in obsidian artifacts from the region, and more tree rings showing evidence of hotter years – all of which now appears to have been overlooked!). The same goes for anthropologists who have studied the few remaining codices and sites for evidence. Even when confronted with the new reality, however, scientists dislike being shown that they are wrong. Only such NPCs failing an Idea roll after an interview will be convinced that something odd is going on which requires thorough reconsideration of the problem. One interviewee will eventually suggest speaking with Selkirk, as she is a recent arrival to the cutting edge of Mayan scholarship.

Examination of the records of UCLA, Miskatonic, and the University of Miami will all show that Selkirk was the only person on all three expeditions of interest.

Other academics who examine the codex have a 33% chance of looking at a section which shows the use of modern materials and recent alterations. Any skill rolls the Keeper makes on their behalf to notice oddities there should suffer penalties equal to the NPC's EDU, as more established experts rely on their accumulated knowledge rather than the new facts before them. Note that Selkirk will pressure university officials to ensure that it remains on campus, preferably in her custody. If she feels truly threatened she may add someone into the codex (using phonetic representation of a name) to create a blackmail opportunity or even a death. Of course, these alterations ultimately make the codex look stranger and stranger....

Problems

Selkirk is a pacifist at heart, and unaware that her self-aggrandizement is so dangerous. A Keeper may consider it unlikely that she will alter the codex in a way that endangers anyone pursuing her even if threatened. Hopefully that makes it difficult for a cell to just kill her. She is imaginative however, and has always thought it a pity that there are no such things as feathered serpents or giant vampire bats, as appear in some Mayan myths.

A more likely occurrence, if she feels that her access to the codex is endangered, is to forge a copy while she retains the original. This decision will add to the evidence against her, as close analysis of the forgery (by someone else, if her objections go unheeded) will show additional modern materials used, and a local taxidermist can identify her as the recent purchaser of a large amount of deerskin. It is only if she is suspected of this step that she will definitely use the codex to protect herself against the investigators.

[optional] A professor on the cell's interview list (Andrew Beckett) suspects that Selkirk has some native helper behind her newfound success. While he lacks the evidence to come forth, his personal records contain his conclusions – not that he will willingly share them with cell members. His office can make a tempting burglary target, and he makes a good murder victim if the Keeper desires a bloodthirsty villain.

[optional] A wealthy collector, Hiram Coates, has offered to purchase the codex. The resultant public interest pressures the trustees to keep events above-board and uncontroversial. This could quickly alter a university employee's helpful attitude to the agents. Things may get ugly too, if Selkirk has created a forgery of the entire codex to keep the real one for herself.

[optional] The erased reality from the Codex foretells the arrival of an even greater threat: Azathoth (a Keeper who wants this to happen in 2012 can run with the idea). This future was averted by a cult of astrologers who wrested control of the codex from its creator (see the following section). If the codex is restored to its original state, a grim future is in store for mankind.

[optional] In another Mythos-tainted possibility, Selkirk is being guided by the spirit of Five Bat Sickle, a Mayan sorcerer who created the codex. His goal is to return to this plane of existence, which requires Selkirk inserting the existence of a powerful undying king into the codex.

The Belmopan Codex

The fact that this is a traditional Mayan Codex does not detract from its value, as there are only four surviving ones in real life. It is written on deerskin that shows evidence of reuse. The ink is composed of soot and other colored minerals such as hematite. The script is Classical Mayan hieroglyphs. Anyone who can translate them finds a general story of Mayan anecdotes, including the depredations of a cult of Mordiggian and Cthugha's destruction of the Classical Mayan civilization (both are recent tales added by Selkirk).

Sanity loss is 0/1D4, but add 1D4 to either total if the book has affected something that a reader has personally experienced. It takes three days to read or translate it, or five to do both simultaneously (for other readers). The codex currently provides +3% to Cthulhu Mythos; subsequent alterations increase this by one percentile as new Mythos activity is added to the world.